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Central European University in part fulfilment of the
Degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

Stolen Futures: Place-making at the Periphery of Global Capitalism

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November, 2021
Budapest**

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ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION submitted by:

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Aiming to understand the ways in which people in a small town in southeastern Serbia imagine, negotiate and create their futures, this dissertation traverses both time and space, while moving across scales, in order to uncover those conditions that enable and, more importantly, constrain their capacities to decide on their own fortunes. Investigating ‘futures’, both within the lifeworlds of my individual subjects, as well as how they are engaged by different institutions and enacted through different processes that stretch far beyond the locality, I conceptually link time and space only to uncover, in the last instance, their material separation and an unequal distribution of time across space.

I demonstrate how Serbia’s peripheral positionality within the global capitalist system not only structures the national economy and development prospects, which results in reproduction and deepening of socioeconomic inequalities between Serbia and countries of the capitalist cores, but how it also, and most critically, results in an uneven geography of embodied time itself. Following the capital and material flows through, into, from and within the town of Aleksinac and Serbia at large, I uncover how these capital and material flows also carry time, in its embodied form, with them. I thus reveal how the past - embodied in waste, used goods and outdated polluting technologies, increasingly flows into Serbia (and other peripheries of global capitalism alike), while the future - embodied in profits, resources and produced goods is increasingly dislocated out of the country and accumulated in the global capitalist cores.

These flows of embodied time, as this dissertation shows, take away the conditions for local landscapes in Serbia and other peripheries of global capitalism to be reproduced in the future (through social reproduction and environmental regeneration) and instead turn them into landscapes of social and environmental destruction and degeneration. Yet local citizens continue to exhibit endurance in their attempts to reclaim a sense of say in deciding on their own futures and to continue producing locality on their own terms.

Keywords: place-making, future-making, embodied time, globalization, core, periphery, environmental movements, Serbia, Aleksinac,

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List of Abbreviations

AD	<i>Anno Domini</i>
BCE	Before the Common Era
BIRN	Balkan Investigative Reporting Network
BW	Belgrade Waterfront
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
CEU	Central European University
CHF	<i>Confoederatio Helvetica Franc</i> (Swiss Franc)
CINS	<i>Centar za istraživačko novinarstvo Srbije</i> (Center for Investigative Journalism of Serbia)
CME	Coordinated Market Economy
CSO	Civil Society Organization
CTHI	Corporate Tax Haven Index
DEIK	<i>Dış Ekonomik İlişkiler Kurulu</i> (Foreign Economic Relations Board of Turkey)
DME	Dependent Market Economy
DRSP	Defend the Rivers of <i>Stara Planina</i> (Balkan Mountains)
DS	<i>Demokratska stranka</i> (Democratic Party)
EIA	Environmental Impact Assessment
EMPA	<i>Eletroindustrijsko i montažno proizvodno preduzeće</i> (Light Electrical Engineering and Installation Service Enterprise)
EPA	<i>Ekološki pokret Aleksinac</i> (Environmental Movement Aleksinac)
EU	European Union
FAHOP	<i>Fabrika hladno oblikovanih profila</i> (The Steel tubes factory)
FDI	Foreign Direct Investment

FRAD	<i>Fabrika rezervnih auto-delova</i> (Automotive spare parts factory)
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GIZ	<i>Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit</i> (German Development Agency)
GMP	Gross Material Product
HPP	Hydropower plant
IBA	Internationally Important Bird Area
ICPDR	International Commission for the Protection of the Danube River
ILO	International Labor Organization
IDP	Internally Displaced Person
IFI	International Financing Institution
IMF	International Monetary Fund
JNA	<i>Jugoslovenska narodna armija</i> (Yugoslav People's Army)
KORS	<i>Koalicija za održivo rudarstvo u Srbiji</i> (Coalition for Sustainable Mining in Serbia)
LCY	League of Communists of Yugoslavia
LDR	Less Developed Republics
LED	Light Emitting Diode
LME	Liberal Market Economy
MDR	More Developed Republics
MoAFWM	Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Management
MoEP	Ministry of Environmental Protection
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NGO	Non-governmental Organization
NOB	<i>Narodnooslobodilačka borba</i> (National Liberation War)
OBOR	One Belt One Road

OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
ORA	<i>Omladinske radne akcije</i> (Youth work actions)
OSF	Open Society Foundation
PhD	Doctor of Philosophy
PIK	<i>Poljoprivredno-industrijski kombinat</i> (Agricultural Industrial Combine)
RERI	Renewables and Environment Regulatory Institute
RSD	Republic of Serbia Dinar
RTB	<i>Rudarsko-topioničarski basen</i> (Mining and Smelting Combine)
RTS	<i>Radio Televizija Srbije</i> (Radio Television of Serbia)
SEA	Strategic Environmental Assessment
SEPA	Serbian Environmental Protection Agency
SHPP	Small Hydropower Plant
SNS	<i>Srpska napredna stranka</i> (Serbian Progressive Party)
SPS	<i>Socijalistička partija Srbije</i> (Socialist Party of Serbia)
SRS	<i>Srpska radikalna stranka</i> (Serbian Radical Party)
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
VIN	Vehicle Identification Number
VoC	Varieties of Capitalism
WB	World Bank
WHO	World Health Organization
WWII	World War II

Notes on Transliteration and Translation

Every translation in this dissertation, whether of quotes from my interlocutors, or citations from the literature published in Serbian or Serbo-Croatian language, is mine. When writing Serbian words, I use the Latin alphabet and diacritical signs throughout the dissertation. This includes the names of people and toponyms, such as *Aleksinački rudnici*. Where anglicized forms of place names are in common usage (such as Belgrade instead of the Serbian name *Beograd*), I use those anglicized forms.

Introduction

“Our plan is to exploit around 5 million tons of oil shale annually and from that we would produce between 500 and 600 thousand tons of oil, 100 megawatts of electricity, and heat energy which would be used to provide central heating for Aleksinac and surrounding villages. If we manage to do all this, we will also employ around 2.000 new people and I am certain that we would make this region economically prosperous while also providing our country with 10-15% of oil needs. All this because of what God and Nature have provided us with and that we can see all around us now.”

These were the words spoken by Oliver Dulić, the Serbian Minister of Environment, Mining and Spatial Planning, when on January 11, 2012 in Aleksinac, Serbia, he announced that the Ministry made a decision to initiate the public procurement process for the selection of a strategic partner for exploitation, preparation, processing and production of petroleum and petroleum products from oil shale using the open tender procedure (Ministry of Environment, 2012).

News sections of the Serbian press were soon filled with stories about Aleksinac, a small town in southeastern Serbia which was once home to one of the largest coal mines in Yugoslavia, now potentially returning to its ‘past glory’ marked by a strong local economy and well-developed industry powered by the mining sector. Namely, after the closure of the local coal mines in 1989 and the subsequent collapse of most local social enterprises during the 1990s, Aleksinac municipality became one of the Serbian municipalities with the highest unemployment rates. In February, 2013 for example, 8.276 unemployed people were registered with the Serbian National Employment Service, which makes a staggering 56,81 percent of the local working population (National Employment Service, 2013).

Yet not everyone shared the enthusiasm of Minister Oliver Dulić, or of the many news articles that filled the print and online media in the weeks and months following the

Minister's announcement. Many readers expressed concerns in the comments section of online media, saying for example:

“And after that the entire eastern Serbia¹ will become one giant landfill for mining tailings, from the copper mining in Bor, coal in Sokobanja, uranium in Knjaževac and oil shale in Aleksinac. The people can move to Niš, Belgrade or the EU. Thank you Serbian government(s) for caring for your people” (Figure 1)

Posle će istočni Srbistan biti deponija jalovine, od eksploatacije bakra u Boru, uglja u Sokobanji, uranijuma u Knjaževcu, škriljaca u Aleksincu. A stanovništvo može da se iseli, ka Nišu, Beogradu, ili EU. Hvala vladama Srbije na brizi o ljudima.



(Miroslav Ivić, 11. avgust 2012 16:58) # Link komentara

Preporučujem (+66)

Ne preporučujem (-4)

Figure 1. Miroslav Ivić, reader comment on B92 news portal (Source: B92 comment section2)

According to Minister Dulić, the initial pre-feasibility studies have shown that a local river Moravica would have to be diverted in the total length of at least 1.300 meters while the displacement of a nearby village Subotinac with a population of around 1.000 was also expected but remained unconfirmed (Milenković, 2012). This issue has managed to find its way into the Serbian media coverage of the shale oil venture, and has sparked local conflicts and given rise to an anti-shale movement in Aleksinac and surrounding villages. A non-governmental organization “*Ekološki pokret Aleksinac*” (Environmental Movement Aleksinac) was founded already on February 19, 2012 and according to their statute, their primary goal was to disseminate information regarding oil shale extraction and to raise the awareness of local and national audiences regarding the environmental dangers of this project (AleksinacNews, 2012).

¹ The original comment in fact used the term “Srbistan” (Serbistan), an eastern/Turkish name for Serbia, which is locally used as a derogatory term meant to highlight the “backward”, and “underdeveloped” nature of the country

² https://www.b92.net/biz/komentari.php?nav_id=633964#k7532879

When developing and starting my research, I originally set out to investigate how this state-announced plan to initiate shale mining and processing in Aleksinac is met with diverse interpretations, future-imaginaries and enduring efforts by local populations to continue producing locality on their own terms. I was interested in how the state's "discursive realization" of the mine penetrates and shapes local imaginaries, encountering both support and contestation, and how through these processes it already produces certain effects (both material and immaterial) before the mine even becomes a material reality. This means that I approached the announcement of the shale-mining project in the Aleksinac basin, rather than commencement of mining activities, as a "liminal moment" when the shale-mining future enters the social imaginary gaining support within the population but also giving rise to resistances through which other 'alternative futures' become articulated and enacted.

Yet, as often is the case with grounded ethnographic research, my field site had other plans for me. In a symbolic turn of events, my questions about the shale-mining futures in Aleksinac and their discursive and material realizations in the present became illustrative of the speculative nature of 'the future' and the all-too-common non-realization of expected futures. Not only was the announced shale mine which I originally set out to investigate unrealized as a material reality in these eight years since I started my research, but it turned out to be strikingly missing from people's anticipations and imaginations as well – the very locus where I intended to study it. In other words, failing to even penetrate the local social imaginaries, the state's shale-mining-plan also failed to produce the kinds of effects in the present that I originally set out to investigate. Thus, while Aleksinac remained my main case study and 'the future(s)' my main lens through which I interrogated the local and national landscapes, the shale-mine-to-be gradually slipped away from my focus as it gave way to broader questions of how the local 'futures' are made and imagined, and how they already come to shape realities in the present.

Problem statement

Going into the field site, it was not right away that I became aware of how my questions about the shale mine as an imagined and anticipated future were not as pertinent (or rather - not as central) as I originally thought they would be. In fact, questions about the shale mine remained an important part of my interviews with the locals, throughout my stay in Aleksinac, where I investigated their understandings of their own and the town's present, past and future and how the shale mine figured in them. Most of my interlocutors were familiar with the shale mining plan and even had some thoughts and opinions about it, so the interviews usually flowed well and did not show signs that I might be 'on the wrong track' with my questions about the mine. And indeed, I was not on the wrong track, for even the "absence" of the mine from my interlocutors' imagination and anticipation, although unexpected, turned out to be an important finding that challenged some of my preconceived expectations and led me to recenter my research question and refocus my analysis, as detailed in Chapter 5.

As the shale-mining future slowly slipped away from my focus, other 'futures' came in to occupy its place. My interviews and conversations with the people in Aleksinac, about the town's and their own futures revealed that although the state's mining plan does not figure greatly (or at all) in their own plans, ideas, imaginings and anticipations of the future, other ideas, feelings, events and processes do. "The futures" (or lack thereof) truly turned out to be a particularly productive topic and lens through which I conducted my ethnographic study in Aleksinac. Investigating them also often required me to understand the past better and led me away from the town and the municipality, towards different places within and outside the country, in order to fully grasp them. This was completely in line with Archibald's (1914, p. 409) suggestion that studying "time" and "space" in isolation from one another may not be realistic.

While I abandoned ‘the shale mining future’ as the central ‘object’ of my inquiry, I stayed true to the idea that the way in which we imagine the future(s) impacts on present-day realities. A case in point was the very research proposal which I wrote and defended prior to commencing my ethnographic research – itself a material manifestation of an imagined future, that is, my research as I *expected* it to unfold in the future, now proven somewhat unprophetic.

Accepting my finding that the particular shale-mining-future does not come to shape local imaginations, fears, hopes and anticipations of the future as much as I anticipated that it would, I took a more grounded approach and allowed my interlocutors and observations in the town to inform me of the futures that do figure prominently in shaping local realities and people’s lives and actions. Such futures were multiple, and they were varyingly imagined, planned and enacted by individuals, collectives and institutions, often embedded in and reflecting larger (national and global) social structures but sometimes also articulated as re-imaginings of the future that counter these structures. This embeddedness of local futures in wider national and global structures/contexts meant that my analysis could not be confined to the locality in which I conducted my ethnographic study, but required a thorough investigation of these wider contexts and a critical engagement with wider processes of globalization and neoliberal restructuring which critically shape local and national realities. As I discuss throughout this dissertation, the (relatively) recent transformation of the national and regional socialist political economy into a (dependent) capitalist economy, via the application of the neoliberal prescription of privatization, liberalization and de-regulation, critically shapes the local/national/regional realities, contexts, state-citizen relations and possible trajectories into the future as imagined, feared, desired, afforded, anticipated or opposed by individual citizens, groups/collectives and institutions.

Opening up the questions of time and temporality within the production of locality, I approach the “material impacts” of imagined futures, which I uncover throughout this

dissertation, not as ends in themselves, but rather as novel “moments in a general technology (and teleology) of localization” (Appadurai, 1996, p. 180). In other words, the deliberate practices which I explore throughout the different chapters and that are informed by different notions and imaginings of ‘future(s)’ also serve to socialize and localize time and space themselves, in ways that can be both transformative and reproductive. I argue that the extent to which these practices can be seen as transformative or reproductive is also a question of social power and the particular scales of organization and control within which the Aleksinac region (and Serbia at large) and its inhabitants are embedded. In other words, both the dominant ‘visions of the future’ as asserted by (or rather through, as I will show in this dissertation) the Serbian state, and those other visions articulated and enacted by different local social actors, are not only re-imaginings of economic, environmental, political, material and other ‘realities’, but are also (and perhaps above all) re-imaginings of social power and reproduction. Besides the political and democratizing aspect of my research in which I uncover and amplify marginal voices and alternative visions of ‘the future’, I also explore the complex dynamics between these different futures and how they are ‘negotiated’ between different social actors and institutions.

By focusing on and exploring the ‘future(s)’ and how they are perceived, projected, enacted, politicized, theorized, planned, manipulated etc. by individuals, communities and various institutions, this dissertation fits within the broader field of interdisciplinary inquiry into ‘futures’ that aims to make them more ethnographically thinkable (eg. Appadurai, 2013; Guyer, 2007; Adam, 1998). Countering the ‘timeless’ ethnographic representations and associated ‘grand theories’, I do more than simply ‘historicize’ my subjects and deconstruct tradition (Bunzl, 2002), and, critically, open the ‘futures’ up for investigation both within the lifeworlds of my individual subjects, as well as how they are engaged by different institutions and enacted through different processes that stretch far beyond the locality and that bring the world to Aleksinac and Aleksinac to the world.

The phenomenologically grounded ‘landscape perspective’³ that I employ in my study allows me to bring in these different futures, as they are articulated by various social actors or through various social structures and processes, and explore the ways in which they are implicated in the present landscape as both affected and affecting. In doing so, I unearth the productive character of ‘futures’ as social imaginaries, and heed Marcus’ call to explore ‘local fragments’, and new, ‘emergent’ objects and formations by “*traverse[ing] and work[ing] through systems and lifeworlds in the very same frame, needing to keep eyes on both institutions and everyday worlds*” (1998, p 240). Throughout this, I show that changes in social and socio-environmental relations, and the various ‘impacts’ that arise out of these changes, are not only related to concrete activities bounded spatially and temporally and confined to the “here” and “now”, but are tied to social power and material and discursive realizations of place-making and future-making projects that stretch out far across time and space. By ‘place-making’ and ‘future-making’ I am referring to the dynamic and dialectical construction of places and futures across geographic and social scales, while also emphasizing their mutual dialectic construction (see Chapter 1.3).

By investigating place-making and future-making processes in the particular context of a Serbian “transitioning economy” in an increasingly globalized world, and accompanying transforming relationships between the state, citizens, multinational corporations, and national and global markets, this dissertation also ethnographically illuminates the wider processes of neoliberal globalization, and how they played out and continue to play out in everyday lives of Aleksinac residents and Serbian citizens at large.

With this in mind, this dissertation demonstrates how contemporary neoliberal capitalist globalization, itself a spatiotemporal process as argued by many before me (cf. Harvey, 1989; Jessop, 2002), does not only result in an uneven geography of socio-economic development, but an uneven geography of time itself. I am not referring here to the ways in

³ I take “landscape” to be the totality of social, environmental and socio-environmental relations and itself a process with a temporal dimension which I stress throughout the dissertation – see Chapter 1.1

which globalization is locally fixed and enables local speeding-up (Sheppard, 2002) or slowing-down (Simpson, 2019) of time for the sake of increased or enhanced capital accumulation. Instead, I am referring to time in its embodied form, whereby the past - embodied in waste, used goods, outdated polluting technologies and so on; and the future - embodied in profits, resources, consumable goods, and modern, “green” technologies; flow in opposite directions, concentrating the embodied pasts in Serbia and other peripheries of global capitalism, while the embodied futures are dislocated from the same peripheries and accumulated in the global capitalist cores.

These flows of embodied time, as this dissertation shows, take away the conditions for local landscapes in Serbia and other peripheries of global capitalism to be reproduced in the future (through social reproduction and environmental regeneration) and instead turn them into landscapes of social and environmental destruction and degeneration.

Aim and research question

The aim of this dissertation is to investigate and analyze the ways in which present day realities in Aleksinac, and Serbia at large, are shaped by the complex dynamics between different visions of the future, as they are imagined, articulated, planned and enacted by different social actors and institutions. More specifically, I look at how local citizens understand and ‘govern’ themselves, how they understand the historical and present realities of the place(s) they inhabit and their positionality vis-à-vis the state and how, in turn, they negotiate their individual and collective futures in relation to those articulated by state institutions and those afforded by the local, national and global realities. And while I conducted my ethnographic study in Aleksinac, the multi-scalar approach which I take in my research expands my field site far beyond the confines of the town itself and produces insights across different scales.

The following overarching research question guides this dissertation:

How are different visions of the future negotiated and manifested in Serbia and implicated in place-making across local, national and global scales?

As already explicated earlier in this introduction, “the futures” do not lend themselves to be easily circumscribed neither temporally, nor spatially. Rather they most often conjure and subsume different times (such as the past(s) which inform them) and different places. They are relational, dynamic, internally multiple as well as constituted by linkages to ‘outside’. Thus, while answering the overarching question, I pay particular attention to the following:

What forces, both cultural (historical, economic, institutional or ideological) and scalar (local, national and global), are at play in shaping and delimiting the possible and imagined futures by Aleksinac residents and Serbian citizens at large?

It is important to note that “imagined futures” are practically infinite, both in quality and in quantity. Neither was my intent to study every imagined future which I encountered, nor would it be practical or even possible, for that matter. Rather, I explored those futures which figured prominently in my research and impacted on local and national realities in significant ways, producing observable effects in the present and thus already implicated in the production of locality, or place-making.

Throughout the different chapters of this dissertation, I engage “futures” in different ways paying particular attention to how they are shaped and delimited by historical (Chapter 3) and ideological factors (Chapter 4), institutional and cultural (Chapter 5) and mediated by local, national and global forces to varying degrees (Chapters 6, 7 and 8). I rely on my ethnographic data from Aleksinac whenever possible but also jump scales and use secondary data to capture certain processes that are sometimes not as visible in the town itself but critically implicated in shaping national (and thus local) futures and present-day realities.

Chapter overview

The content of this dissertation is organized in eight chapters. Chapter 1 discusses the theoretical background and conceptual framework that underpins the research, exploring the literature on time and temporality, space and place, and particularly the concept of “landscape” which I use not only as a geographical and static concept but rather as “the congealed form” of social practices (Ingold, 2000, p. 199), emphasizing its relational and processual (temporal) aspects. Establishing locality (place, landscape) as essentially unboundable both spatially and temporally in this way, I move on to discuss the ways in which contemporary capitalist globalization continually restructures both space and time, creating asymmetrical rifts in the compound ‘spacetime’ and (changing) conditions for the

(re)production of uneven geographies by way of (re)producing the topography of power (spatiotemporal positionalities). Drawing on all this, I end with an expanded discussion and my application of the two main concepts in this dissertation – place-making and future-making.

Chapter 2 details the methodological considerations of the research, discussing the methods of data collection that I used, such as semi-structured interviewing, participant observation, walking tours and photography, and archival research and document analysis. It also offers reflections about my positionality as a researcher in the field and considers the limitations of my research stemming from my very methods and positionality.

Chapter 3 then goes on to situate the town and region of Aleksinac in a historical context, starting with a discussion on the environmental/natural characteristics of the locality which allowed for millennia-long human activity in the region. It then details the political and economic circumstances which allowed for the establishment of the town of Aleksinac itself and surrounding villages, the industrial development in the region including opening of the first coal mines, the town's transformation under the Yugoslav socialist state, and the most recent socioeconomic and political transformations that lead to its' current "post-socialist" condition. Rather than detailing the town's history in a temporally linear fashion, I tell some of the histories asynchronously in order to show how some of the local present realities (and future prospects) are historically structured. The chapter serves as a background and contextual chapter that also informs some of my analyses in the following chapters.

Chapters 4 through 8 form the crux of the dissertation's analytical work exploring different analytical themes. Chapter 4, entitled "*A Crisis of Times*" engages the broad topic of temporality by analyzing the temporal politics of the Yugoslav socialist state and the effects of these temporal politics on everyday lives of Yugoslav citizens. The analysis is presented through the lens of three different planes of temporality: the day-to-day, the lifetime, and the *longue-durée* and specifically looks at how these 'planes' were aligned and experienced by

Yugoslav citizens. It offers a novel framework for understanding both the successes and the final demise of the Yugoslav socialist state project as it frames the Yugoslav state crisis precisely as a crisis of temporality. It also provides insights into the effects of the shift from socialist to capitalist temporalities.

Chapter 5, entitled “*A Future We (Do Not) Believe in*” builds on these insights as it grounds the topic of temporality in Aleksinac and further explores the contemporary temporal reasonings of Aleksinac and Serbian citizens living in “post-socialist times”. I tease out the differences between my ‘older’ and ‘younger’ interlocutors through the ways in which they diagnose the present as either “not-normal” (Greenberg, 2011; Jansen, 2014a, 2014b) or “a crisis” (Roitman, 2014; Vigh, 2008). These differences reflect the different subjectivities my interlocutors hold in relation to the state, with those socialized in (socialist) Yugoslavia exhibiting ‘endurance’ while waiting for the state to return and solve mounting problems, while the younger generations embrace the capitalist ‘presentism’ more directly and see themselves, rather than the state, as necessary agents of change. I further show how the Serbian state has largely lost its ability and capacity to “successfully” plan the future(s), as trust towards it, being a necessary precondition for planning, has largely been lost on the side of the citizens. Along these lines, I argue that it is exactly by not trusting the state’s shale-mining-plan and consequently not engaging in negotiations with the state about it, that most of the local citizens in Aleksinac in fact resisted being the subjects of state planning. Finally, I also show how the NGO “Environmental Movement Aleksinac” was faced with similar distrust from local citizens, which resulted not only in their failure to plan an organized articulation of resistance to the shale mine, but potentially even resulted in silencing, rather than mobilizing, some of the people who did oppose the mine but did not want to be associated with ‘the NGO’.

Chapter 6, entitled “*Futures in The Making*” explores the present-day realities and future prospects of Aleksinac residents and Serbian citizens at large. Throughout the chapter, I

show how these realities and future prospects are largely shaped by Serbia's positionality within the global capitalist economy, and the growing reliance (and dependence) of the national economy on Foreign Direct Investments (FDIs). I argue that this dependence forces the Serbian state to engage in the "race-to-the-bottom", whereby in order to attract more foreign investments Serbia continues to actively subvert labor protection standards and enforcement of environmental protection standards. Starting in Aleksinac and using my ethnographic data to discuss the FDI-driven production regimes, labor conditions and labor relations in the town, I also show that Aleksinac is no exception but rather stands as a case-in-point that illustrates labor relations and conditions across the country and even the wider region. I then zoom out of Aleksinac to capture some of the global flows of capital, technologies, waste and 'foreign investments' that are not as visible in the town itself but are crucial in shaping the national and even wider regional landscapes. I suggest that these flows present analytically productive sites for exploring the future-making and place-making processes in Aleksinac and across Serbia (but also the wider post-Yugoslav or even post-socialist region). Analyzing the different ways in which the Serbian state caters to the needs of foreign investors in attempts to attract more FDIs, I suggest that the negotiations about the future in Serbia have been 'scaled up' and are no longer enacted between the state and local citizens, but increasingly between the state and international/global companies that act as foreign investors. The local citizens, rather than active participants in such negotiations, are increasingly constituted as mere recipients of negotiation decisions made at higher scales, and are left to succumb to the futures that such decisions bring.

Chapter 7, entitled "*Futures of The Weak*" looks more closely at the futures imagined, desired, feared and planned by my interlocutors in the Aleksinac municipality. Taking a more active interest in the life stories of several of my interlocutors, I examine the ways in which they understand themselves in relation to the town/region and the state, and how they imagine and plan their futures. Faced with increasingly limited options to negotiate the local and

national futures with the state, these people are opting to make their own futures, regardless or even despite of the state. They do so by relocating or planning to relocate abroad, mostly towards countries of the capitalist cores (Western and Central Europe or the USA), where they see the possibility of enjoying better and more secure futures. Alternatively, they break the contract with the state and relocate outside of the law where higher incomes are available and with them better personal futures attainable, although these futures come at the high price of risking incarceration and their own freedom. Often on the fringes of legality, or even illegal at times, the actions of my interlocutors (and Serbian citizens at large, where applicable), I suggest, present creative efforts to escape the realities of local (and global) social and class relations and quietly resist, to the best of their abilities, repression and exploitation by their affluent local, national and international counterparts. They also represent attempts to denounce their subordination to the supraordinate futures imposed by the national government and foreign investors, and build their own, lateral futures.

Chapter 8, entitled “*Contested Futures*” again zooms out of Aleksinac in order to capture the growing national articulation of resistances to the rise of FDI-driven environmentally extractive and destructive industries and practices, and the futures that they bring. Unlike the previous generations of Yugoslav citizens who drew much of their power to engage in place-making and future-making from their working-class status and employment in the Yugoslav social enterprises, today’s Serbian citizens find that their workplace is in fact the main context through which futures are imposed upon them. In spite of this, I show how local citizens continue to carve new paths and create new conditions that would allow them to be more equal partners in negotiations about their futures. I show how the burgeoning environmental movements have recently found two distinct ways through which they were able to successfully rescale their struggles and more directly challenge the development model employed by the state. One way in which they achieved this is by scaling-up their efforts, or “scale jumping”, by building trans-local and even trans-national alliances between

previously dispersed local environmental movements, but also by increasingly ‘jumping over’ the state and directly turning to supra- and inter- national institutions in their attempts to exert pressure from ‘above’ and so regain a sense of say in deciding their futures. The other way is related to the civil disobedience tactics which they increasingly employ by blocking disputed sites with their bodies until the relevant state institutions meet or answer their claims. Essentially breaking the social contract with the state in this way, this tactic proves effective in ‘scaling-down’ the negotiations with the state by bringing its very legitimacy under question and ‘forcing’ the state to recognize their claims and engage in negotiations. And while the new tactics employed by environmental movements in Serbia have enabled them to more directly challenge the state’s development model, the alternative futures which they advocate are also gaining increasing support from citizens across the country. This results in the transformation of these movements from dispersed resistances to localized environmentally destructive development projects into one of the strongest national political forces, as these movements themselves increasingly consolidate and transform into a political platform which plans to run at the next elections and so directly challenge the political parties currently making up the Serbian government.

The Conclusion section summarizes my findings and reflects on their implications. It shows that the FDI-based development model practiced in Serbia is nothing but a local expression of the global core-periphery relations. I further show how it works to put the national economy in a progressively dependent condition, solidifying its peripheral positionality in the global economy, dispossessing local citizens from their capacity to engage in active place-making and future-making, and leading to further socio-economic and environmental divergence with developed countries of the capitalist core(s). I also demonstrate how this divergence is not only economic and socio-spatial, as often proposed by authors who study national and regional inequalities resulting from global neoliberal capitalist development and core-periphery relations – but that it also, and most critically, includes

growing temporal inequalities experienced by Serbian citizens and other people from across the peripheries of global capitalism. In other words, I demonstrate how the end result is not only an uneven geography of socio-economic development, but an uneven geography of embodied time itself, in which the past - embodied in waste, used goods, outdated polluting industries etc.- becomes concentrated in Serbia (and other peripheries of global capitalism), as the future - embodied in resources, consumable goods and profits – is dislocated out of the peripheries and accumulated in the cores.

Chapter 1. Theoretical Framework

In this chapter, I provide details on the ontological foundations of this dissertation, and the theoretical and conceptual scaffolding which I use to build my analysis and arguments in the subsequent chapters.

The ontological foundations of this dissertation are laid in the bedrock of phenomenology, and in particular the relational and processual ontology advanced by phenomenologists who reject the Cartesian logic of division between static subjects and objects (mind and matter, nature and culture, and so on) and instead insist on their dialectical (relational) construction and temporal (processual) dimension (see section 1.2 for a more detailed discussion). More than a denial of the nature/culture dualism, the relational and processual ontology also shifts our focus from “the environment” as an external container to humans and human cultures, and towards environment-making as an always-ongoing dialectical process. Environment-making, as Moore points out “is a story of how power and re/production in its quotidian, civilizational, and commercial forms are, already, environmental history. Power and production—and so much more—are ‘environmental.’ This allows us to move from environmental histories of modernity to modernity’s projects and processes as environmental history—as environment-making processes.” (2015, p.22)

This dissertation is also critically premised on what Edmund Husserl, the founder of the school of phenomenology, called “protention” – referring to the fact that our experience of the world and our actions with(in) it, are not only shaped by “retention” of what is happening and what has happened, but also our anticipation of the what is to come, which “bites into the future with its protentions” (Merleau-Ponty, 2005:484).

The phenomenological approach which I employ enables an understanding of the interrelatedness of cultural forms and environmental practices, but also of political economy, structural inequalities and (unjust) environmental change. It does so by emphasizing the dualistic (dialectic) nature of the human-place relationships where “people make places and [...] places make people” (Gruenewald, 2003, p. 621). Through social practice places become ‘holders’ of meaning, while simultaneously places shape human experience of the world and are thus implicated in the construction of identities, statuses and power relations (Feld & Basso, 1996; Low & Lawrence-Zúñiga, 2003). However, this relationship is not a closed loop, as neither places nor identities are bounded in any absolute sense, but are rather both internally multiple as well as constituted by linkages to ‘the outside’ (Massey, 1994, 2004).

Viewing locality as “primarily relational and contextual” (Appadurai, 1996, p. 178), I thus interrogate the processes and politics of place-making and future-making in Aleksinac and across Serbia through a multi-scalar analysis which pays critical attention to larger, macrosocial political and economic processes and structures, and questions how the very perceptions of locality are constructed. In other words, throughout this dissertation I am attempting to fill the ‘collapsed’ space between what Marcus (1998), drawing on Husserl, called “lifeworlds” (phenomenology of the daily life) and “systems” (institutions/political economies) in which lifeworlds were previously held to be embedded. Indeed, Marcus (ibid., p. 240) insisted that *“single projects must traverse and work through systems and lifeworlds in the very same frame, needing to keep eyes on both institutions and everyday worlds in transcultural space.”*

In order to conduct such multi-scalar analysis, in the second section of this chapter I turn to the questions of scale itself and discuss contemporary (capitalist) globalization as a process that challenges and restructures the hierarchy of geographical scales and the dominance or primacy of particular scales (namely the national scale) in shaping local economic, political, social and environmental relations. These so-called “re-scaling”

processes, resulting from/through ongoing capitalist globalization, critically alter connections between different sub-national and supra-national territorial units, and challenge previously established - both personal/individual and spatial - identities, statuses and power relations.

Power, once again, here appears as crucial in shaping both personal and spatial identities and the relations between (and across) them, so I engage the question of power through the concept of “positionality”. Stemming from feminist theory, positionality was originally applied to understand the asymmetric power relations between individuals in society by focusing on different elements of their identity such as class, gender, age, sexuality, nationality and so on. However, drawing on the work of Eric Sheppard (2002; 2016), I discuss how positionality is applicable to geographical space itself, highlighting the asymmetrical relations between territorial units (places, countries, regions etc.) and their construction and reconstruction in the context of capitalist globalization. Paying attention to positionality, as Sheppard notes, can tell us much about the future possibilities of/in particular places (2016).

As positionality between different territorial units is not measured by their geographical proximity, but by the nature and intensity of their interconnections, I turn to the core-periphery model of Wallerstein’s world-systems theory (1979) as a good approach and a starting point from which to account for the nature and intensity of (inter)connections between different territorial units. I further compliment it with the compatible “Varieties of capitalism” (VoC) approach which similarly looks at how different national/regional political economies are “inserted” into, or related to the global economy. I use these frameworks to ‘position’ my site of investigation -at once both Aleksinac, Serbia and even the wider region – in relation to the global economy, and conduct my analysis on these grounds in the subsequent chapters.

1.1. Investigating “Landscapes”

The long history and multiplicity of meanings and connotations of ‘landscape’ make it a particularly mobile concept today. This could be seen as a conceptual conundrum, but also a potential that allows for different understandings and connections to be made between ecology, culture and economy.

In the following section I present the historical ‘evolution’ of the landscape concept and argue for a phenomenologically informed conception of ‘landscape’, which promises to transcend many of the contemporary disciplinary disputes. Reviewing the literature on ‘landscape’ serves not only to define how I understand and apply the concept of landscape, but even more importantly to explicate the relational and processual ontology that underpins my entire research effort. By ontologically privileging processes and relations over pre-existing entities, landscape emerges from specific interactions that allow it to come into view as a result of a “dynamic on-goingness” rather than a static object or idea which is precoded and prevalued (Hayles, 1999, 2002). In other words, landscape rather than being ‘a container’ for various forms of activity, becomes “a lively actor” that shifts and turns “in the interplay of human and nonhuman practices” (Tsing, 2005, p. 29).

Translating these theoretical dialectics into practical research and a sustained and conceptually clear argument is no easy task. I am sure that the reader, just as myself while writing this dissertation, will often find themselves slipping back into the logic of ontological dualisms and static understandings of reality. This of course is to be expected, as it reflects the power of the centuries-long hegemonic discourse of modernity’s scientific representation of the world which profoundly affects the way we perceive reality. For this reason, I remind the reader, whenever possible, of the ontological and conceptual holism at the base of my argument. Also, in odd cases where my writing portrays humans, nature, environment, landscapes, etc. as ontologically separate and static entities, please know that this is only due

to the lack of a better conceptual language and as an attempt to bridge our pre-conceptualizations and the relational and processual ontology which I am advancing in this dissertation.

1.1.1. Between Culture and Nature: Genealogy of Landscape

“...neither is the landscape identical to nature, nor is it on the side of humanity against nature . . . it is with us not against us.”
(Ingold, 2000, p. 191)

In the broadest sense, Fischer states that the historical understanding of landscape (in Europe at least) is “characterized by the different perspectives of natural and cultural sciences” (Fischer, 2012, p. 322). Namely, he claims that from the perspective of natural sciences landscapes result from physical interactions between man and nature, or as he puts it - from the “human work on nature” (ibid., p. 322). Agricultural economic activity and industrialization are obvious examples of these interactions. Conversely, from the standpoint of cultural sciences, according to Fischer, landscape is dominated by a “subjective-aestheticized perception” of particular areas that are themselves seen as uniform and mostly formed by nature (ibid., p. 322). This is landscape as ‘Arcadian nature’ or ‘beautiful countryside’.

Of course, Fischer’s distinction between the two perspectives is in many ways an oversimplification, and both ‘natural’ and ‘cultural sciences’ have had different approaches to landscape often merging the two perspectives that Fischer outlined. Yet there are two issues evident in both of these ‘dominant perspectives’ outlined by Fischer, that I find particularly important and want to engage in a broader discussion. Firstly, both perspectives rest on a binary nature/culture distinction and this distinction is indeed present in most, even the contemporary approaches to landscape. Drawing on some of the more recent works in

human/critical geography and anthropology, I will discuss below why I find it unhelpful to think about landscape in these terms.

Secondly, both perspectives also invoke the ‘representational character’ of landscape. Malpas writes how the representational character underpinning its ideological character is tied to “the way in which landscape “objectifies”, and even “commodifies” that which it presents” (2011, p. 7). The separation required for ‘observation’ of landscape thus creates another dichotomy – that between the subject and object. In other words, landscape becomes “an object made amenable to human purposes and interests” and available for production, development, enjoyment or contemplation (ibid., p. 7). Landscape in this way, whether seen as ‘pure nature’ or a result of ‘human work on nature’, appears as separate from, though still available to, the viewer. Again, I will later in this chapter discuss how phenomenologically informed conceptions of landscape are able to transcend the subject/object binary distinction.

The rise of landscape painting, and subsequently landscape gardening, architecture and literary works on landscape, as many have argued, was one of the main catalysts for the European aesthetization (and separation) of nature (or “Nature” with capital “N”) from the sixteenth century onwards (Fischer, 2012). Malpas (2011) takes this argument further, and drawing on the work by Ann Bermingham (1986), ties the rise of landscape (and landscape painting) not only to separation and glorification of ‘Nature’, but also to the rise of the enclosure movement in England, and the general shift from a primarily rural mode of life in Europe as a whole. It is precisely the representational character in general, and the visual-representational in particular in the case of landscape art, that Malpas sees as being tied to objectification and commodification of landscape on the one hand, but also the changing economic and social conditions through new forms of land ownership and economic usage that soon followed (Figure 2).



Figure 2. “The Harvest”, Vincent Van Gogh, 1888 (Source: www.vangoghmuseum.nl)

Indeed, industrialization and the enclosure movement meant new forms of land ownership and economic usage, and these, as many have argued, were based on the “exploitation of the nonpropertied classes or on the dispossession and oppression of indigenous populations” (Malpas, 2011, p. 8). Such an understanding necessarily brings out the political character of landscape as already embodying certain relations of power and production that come before its purely visual appearance.

1.1.2. Between Place and Space: Phenomenology of Landscape

“In the encounter with landscape, and with place through landscape, we do not merely encounter something apart from ourselves, but rather we come into contact with the place in and through which we ourselves come into being.”
(Malpas, 2011, p. 20)

That landscape is more than the ‘visual’ aspect of it alone, and regardless whether the ‘image’ is seen as ‘cultural’ or ‘natural’, was perhaps best argued by the British anthropologist Tim Ingold. Instead of a spectatorial, Ingold (2000), whose work finds a firm grounding in phenomenology, asserts a view of landscape as embodying a set of elements and interactions. He rejects the notion of restricting the experience of landscape to the visual alone and instead asserts that landscape is also experienced through sound, smell, movement and a

‘sense of place’. But more than that, Ingold also rejects the culturalist-spectatorial notion of landscape. To Cosgrove and Daniels’ conception of landscape as a “cultural image” (1988, p. 1), Ingold replies with:

“I do not share this view. To the contrary I reject the division between inner and outer worlds—respectively of mind and matter, meaning and substance—upon which such distinction rests. The landscape is not, I hold, a picture in the imagination, surveyed by the mind’s eye; nor however is it an alien and formless substrate awaiting the imposition of a human order . . . neither is the landscape identical to nature, nor is it on the side of humanity against nature . . . it is with us not against us.” (Ingold, 2000, p. 191)

Ingold’s conception of landscape clearly takes issue with both the nature/culture binary distinction as well as that of subject/object which still characterizes the dominant perspectives working within the Cartesian tradition.

It was precisely phenomenology that offered one of the most coherent and fundamental ways of overcoming Descartes’ Cartesian dualism (body-mind, mental-material) and the notion of a Cartesian subject (cogito ergo sum). What in the Cartesian tradition would be conceptually understood as ‘two’ (subject-object or person-world) is within phenomenology realized as existentially ‘one’, that is “person-intertwined-with-world” (Seamon, 2013). The argument is made in different ways by different phenomenologists, so Husserl, for example, (1970) developed his “lifeworld” concept to explicate this ‘oneness’ or ‘lived wholeness’; Heidegger used ‘Dasein’⁴; Merleau-Ponty theorized the “lived body”; yet they all pointed towards the same conclusion - the relational construction of the mind, body and ‘the world’. Despite their differences, all of the abovementioned phenomenologists employ what is often termed ‘relational thinking’ (ontology) and foreground the interactional and dynamic character of the production of subjects and objects.

Relational thinking disrupts more than the Cartesian distinction between body and mind or subject and object and has profound implications on the people-environment (culture-nature) binary as well. As David Seamon (2013) notes: “from a phenomenological

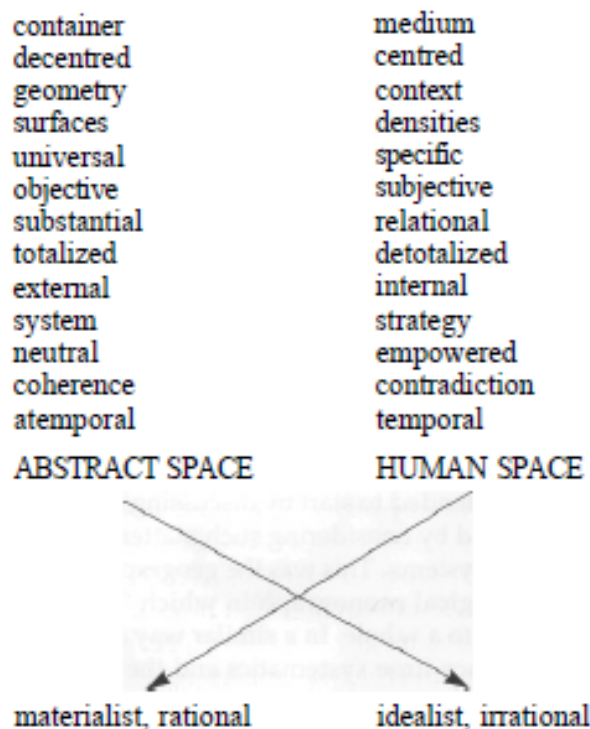
⁴ Meaning “being there”, “presence” or “being-in-the-world” as reinterpreted by Dreyfus (1991)

perspective, there is no dualistic person/world or people/environment relationship”. In other words, from a phenomenological position, neither ‘people’ (person) nor ‘environment’ (‘the world’) can be studied from an ontological position in which they are viewed as individually generated phenomena that exist separately from their contexts and relational dynamics.

But it wasn’t until the 1970s that phenomenology was able to break the confines of psychology and philosophy and start truly informing approaches in other disciplines. Among the first was geography with its so-called ‘humanistic turn’ in the 70s, when it started repeatedly calling into question the usefulness of abstract notions of ‘space’ and ‘place’ and articulating a new ‘humanistic perspective’ on both these concepts (Gregory & Urry, 1985; Harvey, 1990; 1992; Tilley, 1994; Tuan, 1979)

Until the 1970’s, space was considered an abstract dimension that was ‘neutral’ and ‘objective’ and as such “provided a coherent and unitary backdrop for any analysis, since it was always the same” (Tilley, 1994, p. 9). As Escobar notes, Western philosophy has long seen space as the absolute, universal, unlimited and homogenous, while treating place as the local, limited, bound and a “momentary subdivision of space” (2001, p. 143). Space was ‘a container’ in which human affairs took place yet at the same time it was external and indifferent to those affairs. It is this disassociation of space and the bodies that occupy it, that Foucault claims was the very basis on which rests the Cartesian Project of Descartes’ and Leibniz’ “mathesis universalis” and mathematization of nature (2000; see also Tuan, 1979, for a similar discussion). As Casey (1996, p. 14) notes, this idea of space as a neutral, pre-given “*tabula rasa onto which the particularities of culture and history come to be inscribed, with place as the presumed result*” was for the longest time the dominant view that extended way beyond the confines of geography and was present even in cultural disciplines such as anthropology. Landscape, often understood as a spatial ‘entity’, was from this perspective of space often similarly understood as a biophysical ‘container’ – a spatially delineated ‘backdrop’ to human activity, divorced from that same activity.

The differences between the ‘humanistic’ and ‘abstract’ conceptions of space were beautifully summarized by Tilley in his “A Phenomenology of Landscape” published in 1994:



(Tilley, 1994, p. 8)

The cross-over that Tilley added to the bottom of the list was meant to signal that what was once considered a rational and materialist approach (‘abstract space’) became, in light of contemporary arguments, an irrational idealism and vice-versa (ibid., p. 8). Or as Tuan has argued:

“It is common to assume that geometrical space is the objective reality, and that personal and cultural spaces are distortions. In fact we know only that geographical space is a cultural space, a sophisticated human construct the adoption of which has enabled us to control nature to a degree hitherto impossible” (Tuan, 1979, p. 389)

As can be inferred from Tilley’s graph, the new approach offered by humanistic geography regards space as a ‘medium’, rather than a ‘container’ and this means that it is inseparable from, rather than indifferent to, human action. Space, in this view, is socially produced and only exists in relation to activities with which it is implicated (ibid., p. 10). It further means that there is no ‘unitary’ space but that different individuals, groups and societies inhabit different spaces which are centered in relation to human agency (Tuan,

1979). Such contextually centered spaces provide specific settings for involvement and creation of meanings and comprise particular sets of linkages between the mental spaces of cognition, somatic states of the body and the physical space in which movement and interaction takes place between humans and the non-human environment (Tilley, 1994).

Spaces, finally, have no substantial essence in themselves, but their meanings involve a subjective dimension and their significance is relational – fashioned through relations between people and places. The relational construction of space means that it is detotalized and understood differently by different actors which in turn makes space a “*contradictory and conflict-ridden medium through which individuals act and are acted upon*” (ibid., p. 11).

Place too was considerably retheorized by cultural and humanistic geography but also by other disciplines such as anthropology. Rather than being a mere “functional node in space”, humanistic understanding sees place as a symbol and a “*unique and complex ensemble – rooted in past and growing into the future*” (Tuan, 1979, p. 388). Space provides a situational context for place but space derives its meaning from particular places (Relph, 1976, p. 8), or in other words, places “*constitute space as centres of human meaning, their singularity being manifested and expressed in the day-to-day experiences and consciousness of people within particular lifeworlds*” (Tilley, 1994, p. 14). Spaces, when conceived in this way, do not exist without places, as it is places that have “*ontological priority in the generation of life and the real*” (Escobar, 2001, p. 143). Or as Casey has argued “*To live is to live locally, and to know is first of all to know the places one is in...*” (1996, p. 18). Thus instead of being posterior to space, ‘a product’ of space, place in this view becomes primary and it is space that is posterior and derives its meaning from place⁵ (Casey, 2009).

Humanity is wrapped up in a world of places that act as medims for human experience and are thus bound up with personal and cultural identity. “Emplacement of all cultural practices” is often highlighted by anthropologists who see this emplacement as stemming

⁵ See Massey, 2004 for an excellent discussion on why ‘posteriorizing’ space might be politically problematic

from the fact that “culture is carried into places by bodies” and that “place, body and environment integrate with each other” (Escobar, 2001, p. 143). This argument too draws from phenomenology and the idea that it is “corporeal intentionality” that allows the lived body to integrate itself with its immediate environment and become “the natural subject of perception” (Merlau-Ponty, 1962, p. 208). Following the same line of argument, Penelope Harvey (2001) claimed that places and identities, persons and their environments, are mutually constituted.

This ‘rethinking’ of space and place has other conceptual, as well as political implications. Some of these will be discussed in further subsections of this chapter, dedicated to power and positionality, and the re-scaling processes arising through neoliberal globalization.

1.1.3. Process-ontology: Temporality of Landscape

“As a profoundly tacit dimension of temporality, the future is both an imaginary and a materiality; it is produced and envisioned along the contours of expectations, desires and fears.”

(Lertzman, 2004, p. 2)

Processual thinking is the other ontological position that characterizes phenomenology and the differing approaches arising out of this tradition. The basic premise of process-ontology is that ‘being’ is dynamic, and so the main focus of any comprehensive philosophical (or otherwise) account of reality should exactly be on this dynamic nature of ‘being’. Heidegger contributed greatly to process philosophy, not least with his previously mentioned concept of ‘Dasein’, meaning “being there”, or “being-in-the-world” (Dreyfus, 1991). Not only does ‘Dasein’ semantically imply an active component (*being*), just like Merleau-Ponty’s “lived body” and Lefebvre’s “lived space”, but it also stresses the temporal aspect of phenomena. What is denied by this approach is the longstanding tendency of Western science to describe reality as timeless or at a temporal instant, and what is proposed instead is that reality, and all within and about it, is continuously going on and coming about.

In other words, places, landscapes, identities, environment(s) etc. are not static things but rather continuous processes. This is why Casey insisted that “places not only are, *they happen*” [1997, p.27, author emphasis]. A phenomenological(ly informed) conception of landscape likewise sees it as an “event” (Tilley, 1994, p. 26) or “process” (Massey, 1994, p. 155).

Thus, for a phenomenon, such as landscape, to be better understood, we need to pay specific attention to its dynamics – both relational/interactional and temporal. With such a perspective, the indissoluble relationship between people and their environment(s) is asserted by emphasizing the dialectical process by which people appropriate their environment (which, for better or worse, then becomes a “human environment”), while at the same time people are “continuously constituted as environmental beings” (Graumann, 2002, p. 109). And while an emphasis on the processual nature of phenomena points to the question of temporality, ‘time’ itself must be understood here not as an overly-rational and universal scientific noumenon, but precisely an ‘intersubjective’ category, a ‘sensed’, socialized and localized phenomenon.

Differently ‘remembered’ pasts, experienced presents and anticipated (projected, feared, desired etc.) futures do not only point towards different experiences of ‘time’, but are inextricably linked to different socio-spatial positionalities that people and places experience (see section 1.2.2.)

Again, it was Ingold⁶ (2000) who presented one of the best discussions on the topic of landscape’s temporality. Through what he terms a “dwelling perspective”, Ingold developed his concept of ‘taskscape’ which comprises the entire ensemble of mutually interlocked ‘tasks’ (activities, practices “in their concrete particulars”) and is so analogous to ‘landscape’ itself: “Just as the landscape is an array of related features, so [...] the taskscape is an array of related activities” (ibid., 195). Opposing the Durkheimian understanding that equates between social and chronological time, Ingold (ibid., p. 196) goes on to discuss how the temporality of

⁶ See also Casey (1996)

taskscape is essentially social “not because society provides an external frame against which particular tasks find independent measure, but because people, in the performance of their tasks, *also attend to one another*” (emphasis in the original). This means that ‘taskscape’ is not restricted to the domain of ‘activity’ but rather exists as “*interactivity*”.

Landscape, Ingold argues, is never ‘pregiven’, and like taskscape it is also never-ending. Its temporality unfolds with that of the taskscape, as “forms of the landscape arise alongside those of the taskscape, within the same current of activity” (ibid., p. 198-199). Navigating between archeology and anthropology, he makes an important distinction and argues that landscape takes on its forms through processes of incorporation, and not inscription as argued by many before him. Thus landscape, as asserted before, is not a (preexisting) ‘tabula rasa’, a ‘material’ onto which forms are then transcribed, “but movement wherein forms themselves are generated” (ibid. 193).

Ingold often hints at the importance of (the) ‘future’ in the process of social life, insisting that ‘the present’ within the temporality of taskscape/landscape is not marked off, but constituted by ‘the past’ and ‘the future’. The present, Ingold claims, “gathers the past and future into itself, like refractions in a crystal ball” (ibid., 196). Yet he continues to reiterate the standard archeological approach which views landscape as “the most solid appearance in which a history can declare itself” [Inglis, (1977), quoted in (Ingold 2000, 198)] and fails to elucidate (that is, if he attempted to do so) the ways in which ‘futures’ are likewise ‘congealed’ in the medium that is landscape – both shaping and shaped by it. This dissertation attempts to fill this gap by investigating how futures, both structured and defying, are already present as they are enacted by different individuals, groups and institutions.

In his posthumously published book “The Promise of Phenomenology”, American philosopher John Daniel Wild noted, “if I am to respond adequately to the independent things and persons around me in this life-space, I must develop habits of anticipation which will enable me to prepare for what they will do in the future. This future is what I face ahead of me

– before me” (2006, p. 16). The connection between expectations of future (outcomes) and anticipatory action and agency was also recently established within the field of Science and Technology Studies (STS) (cf. Brown et al., 2005; Brown & Michael, 2003; Brown, Rappert, & Webster, 2000).

Thus, if we are to follow Ingold in that landscape is “the congealed form of the taskscape” (2000, p. 199) and further accept that ‘tasks’ are themselves shaped by an ‘anticipation of the future’ – we can easily see that landscape indeed ‘solidifies’ not only the past but also the different futures anticipated (imagined, desired, feared, opposed etc.) by people and non-humans with(in) it.

Futures, whether ‘sensed’ in the form of an upcoming earthquake, harsh winter or extreme weather patterns – as they often are by our non-human fellow denizens; or cognized, desired, feared, planned etc. as they often are by humans – are always present. They fundamentally shape the ‘taskscape’ and are with it congealed in the landscape.

1.2. Globalization as a spatiotemporal process

The relationship between space and time became a major topic in sociocultural anthropology since the 1980s. These works have increasingly emphasized a wide range of issues that are related to what David Harvey referred to as “time-space compression” (1989; 1990) or what other authors have articulated in the language of globalization, cultural flows, diasporas, transnational processes and the like. Previous conceptions about the autonomy of local cultural worlds were increasingly undermined and replaced with a focus on changes as movements of culture, people, technologies, finance capital, ideas (ideologies) etc. Instead of stability, permanency, coherence, order and structure, this so called ‘postmodern turn’ in

anthropology shifted attention to partiality, fragmentation, multiplicity, contingency, ambiguity and indeterminacy, insisting that ‘cultures’ and ‘societies’ are not (and were never really) easily circumscribed units, thus transforming the boundaries of any object of study (Ohnuki-Tierney, 2001).

Not only are places and identities unboundable, internally multiple and constituted by linkages to ‘the outside’ as posited by Massey (1994, 2004), but the asymmetric consequences of the rifts in spacetime caused by political-economic processes of globalization result in that “a large proportion of those relations, experiences and understandings are constructed on a far larger scale” (Massey, 1994, p.5).

It has been a common assertion by many theorists that under capitalist globalization ‘time trumps space’ or that space is ‘collapsing’ and becoming less important, while time is becoming more and more critical. From Harvey’s “time-space compression” inspired by Marx’s “annihilation of space by time”, Lefebvre’s observation that capital does not just occupy space, but produces it (1991), Jessop’s writing on “spatio-temporal logics of capital’s globalization” (2002), they all point towards the dominance of time and speed under contemporary globalization and the different ways in which space, or particular places are restructured under capitalist globalization through local “fixing” of globalization based on certain place-based attributes (Sheppard, 2002). Attention is usually paid to place-based attributes that enable speeding-up of capital circulation, but recent and more nuanced work has also shown how certain places can act as a spatial fix that allows intentional slowing-down of the circulation of certain commodities and thus allowing additional accumulation of capital based on speculation, such as in Michael Simpson’s (2019) work on oil tank farms through which he exposed the pluri-temporal strategies of capitalist circulation.

1.2.1. Re-scaling

And while some social theorists show how neoliberal globalization has resulted, and indeed continues to result, in a thorough restructuring of social, economic and territorial space, others insist that such changes require a thorough reexamining of the fixed hierarchies between local, national and global scales themselves. Questioning the taken-for-granted hierarchy of scales, from the individual bodies all the way to the globe, as well as the associations of certain activities with specific scales (such as house and care work with the body, law-making and labor unions with the nation state and trade with the globe), the so-called theorists of scale argued that all scales are socially constructed and produced in relation with one another (Smith, 1992, 1996; Delaney and Leitner, 1997; Swyngedouw 1997a, 1997b; Brenner, 1999). Questioning how events and changes at one particular scale are affected and shaped by changes at other scales, and their mutual relationships, these theorists were able to analyze and show how contemporary globalization is restructuring and reordering the previously established dominance of particular scales in shaping social, political and economic relations. They were also able to account for similar changes in the past such as, for example, when the dominant supra-national scale of colonial empires was dissolved under the Bretton Woods agreement (Sheppard et. al., 2009), passing on its dominance to the national scale under the Fordist regulatory regime between 1946 and early 1970s (Swyngedouw, 1997b; Brenner, 1999). Contemporary globalization, they further argued, has brought yet another reconstruction and reordering of scales.

Jessop (2002), among others, posited that the national scale, seen as being dominant in social, economic and political relations in the past, has lost that primacy under conditions of contemporary capitalist globalization. Instead, he asserts that:

“There is no new privileged scale around which other levels are now being organized to ensure structured coherence within and across scales. Instead, there are continuing struggles over which spatial scale should become primary and how scales should be

articulated, and this is reflected in a more complex nesting and interweaving of different scales as they become articulated.” (Jessop, 2002, p.179)

The many ways in which space is being restructured under conditions of (neoliberal) globalization are here captured in the joint concept of “rescaling”. ‘Rescaling’ has been observed and analyzed in several different ways, paying particular attention to territorial rescaling and rescaling of citizenship (within the EU for example, or more recently in the case of Serbia and Kosovo potentially negotiating an exchange of territories in an attempt to redraw political boundaries, or in the case of Hungary extending citizenship and passports to kin-minorities in Serbia, Romania and other neighboring countries) or the rescaling of governance and the state (again, much attention was placed on the EU but also on processes of decentralization or the rise sub-national or cross-border ‘city-regions’ and urban agglomerates, or the so-called “free trade zones” also referred to as export processing zones or special economic zones). As Sassen (2002, p.13) notes:

“We see a re-scaling of the strategic territories that articulate the new system. With the partial unbundling or at least weakening of the national as a spatial unit come conditions for the ascendance of other spatial units and scales. Among these are the sub-national, notably cities and regions: cross-border regions encompassing two or more sub-national identities and supra-national identities, i.e. globalized digital markets and free trade blocs”

The rescaling processes arising under capitalist globalization thus occur simultaneously “above” and “below” the previously dominant scale of the nation state, effectively relativizing the significance of the national scale and of the nation state itself. This simultaneity is also well captured by Swyngedouw’s concept of “glocalization” (1997b), which denotes the way in which political and economic processes are both localizing and globalizing at the same time.

These processes of glocalization, it is important to note, occur unevenly not only across different places, but even within places but across different spheres of production and

consumption. One could think of, for example, the ways in which the more recent rise of global Airbnb tourism is drastically reshaping space and lives in cities, such as Belgrade, where global capital, through speculative work, remakes the downtown from a place where locals live and work into a place intended for global tourism consumption. Alternatively, we can also think of how global oil prices can enable (or not) local fixing of global capital and the dislocation of entire villages in the Aleksinac municipality, the transformation of the local landscape⁷ from an agricultural to that of mining and oil production and the ensuing repositioning of Aleksinac in the local, national and global networks of production and consumption of food and energy, among others. Such ‘repositioning of Aleksinac’ within different networks of production and consumption would subsume critical alterations of the connections between the town/municipality and other sub-national and supra-national territorial units, but also challenges to the previously established identities, statuses and power relations.

To reflect on how power shapes both personal and spatial identities and the relations between (and across) them, in the following section I turn to the concept of “socio-spatial positionality”, proposed by Eric Sheppard (2016;2002), as an appropriate lens through which to account for the power imbalances and inequalities experienced by individuals and places they inhabit.

1.2.2. Power and Positionality

Positionality appeared in feminist theory as a way to socially situate the subject “in terms of gender, race, class, sexuality and other axes of social difference” (Nagar and Geiger, 2007: 267), and to reflect on how these differences shape the way we perceive the world or

⁷ Not only in its visual form, but as encompassing the complex social, political, economic and environmental relations that are tied to agricultural production on the one hand, or the mining and energy production on the other hand, and with such relations spreading beyond the locality to include relations to ‘the outside’.

are perceived by others. As such, positionality is a relational concept that crucially highlights power relations and asymmetries within society.

In the following chapter of this dissertation, where I detail my methodology, I discuss how my positionality as a researcher, influences, shapes, and delimits my study by foregrounding certain aspects of my identity related to my nationality, mother-tongue, skin color, gender, sexual orientation, institutional affiliation and many other things, which in turn can shape how my interlocutors perceive me and behave with me, the information they decide to disclose or not, and so on. Similarly, across the dissertation I highlight how the positionality of different people I engaged with in Aleksinac shapes their fortunes, such as in the case of undocumented Roma people in Aleksinac and their positionality of vis-à-vis the state determining their (dis)ability to engage in formal work (see section 2.3.4), or the positionality of dual Serbian and Montenegrin citizens from Aleksinac vis-à-vis the Schengen space enabling them to overcome legal obstacles imposed on single-state citizens of either of these countries (see section 6.2.1). It is important to note that these are not fixed identities and power-relations but are constantly negotiated and different aspects of one's identity come to the fore in different situations and settings (eg. even the dual-citizens who are privileged in relation to those citizens who hold a single passport when it comes to their legal options of visiting and residing in the Schengen space, once there, they experience marginalized positionality in relation to EU citizens and can only engage in undocumented informal work).

In his seminal paper “The Spaces and Times of Globalization: Place, Scale, Networks, and Positionality”, Sheppard (2002) applied the concept of positionality to geographical space itself, merging questions of space, scale and power to show how connections between places are both produced and reproduced in the context of capitalist globalization and how they further result in re/production of geographic inequalities. As he noted “the evolution and influence of any place depend on the details of its positionality” (2002, p.320).

The concept of positionality, once again, is relational and contextual – so just as citizens or residents of Aleksinac can experience either privileged or marginalized positionality as a result of their citizenship status, age, education and gender, among other things – so too do places experience different positionalities depending on the context and particular scale of analysis. Thus Belgrade (and its inhabitants) can appear as privileged in Serbia or even the Balkans in terms of political and economic power and influence, but marginalized in the European or global contexts/scales. Similarly, Aleksinac and its residents can appear privileged by affordances of their physical geography characterized by natural wealth such as the fertile soil, abundant water sources, ore deposits, and physical connectivity (see section 3.1), yet its marginalized positionality within the national and global economy continually (re)constructs it as a peripheral source of cheap labor instead, as I show across the dissertation.

Paying attention to positionality, as Sheppard notes, can tell us **much about the future possibilities** of/in particular places because “**Core regions** are advantaged relative to **peripheral ones**: the uneven economic geographies of connectivity that reflect such power hierarchies also reproduce them” (2016, p.19). Measuring positionality not by physical distance, but by the nature and intensity of (inter)connections, the multi-scalar perspective on positionality, which I employ in this dissertation, reveals the conditions and consequences of asymmetric power-relations between and across Aleksinac, Serbia and around the world.

1.2.3. Core-periphery model

The core-periphery model, stemming from Wallerstein’s “world-systems” theory (1979), is useful here in beginning to unravel how positionality (in the global economy) produces and reproduces spatial inequalities and imbalances. Sometimes also articulated

through the language of the “Global North” and the “Global South”, it seeks to explain the uneven socioeconomic development across space by highlighting the vertical and horizontal relations between different spatial entities and the international division of labor. And while it has historically most commonly been applied by looking at how individual nation states fit into the global flows of capital⁸, more recent work has also exposed how the same model is applicable to smaller scales of analysis, thus revealing the same/similar relations within continents, regions or state territories for example.

Such re-scaling of the core-periphery relations thus comes closer to capturing the complex positionalities experienced by different places across and within different scales of analysis. It also results in the rise of the concept of “double peripheralization” and “double periphery” used to signify how some places experience peripheral positionality across different scales – such as denoting central and eastern (post-socialist) Europe as a double periphery, first in the context of the European economy and then in the context of the global economy (Sombati and Gábriš, 2020). One could easily extend this framework further and talk about triple- or multiple- peripheralization whilst moving up and down geographic scales of analysis. I could, for example, put forward a claim that Aleksinac experiences multiple peripheralization across national, regional, continental and global scales, but I find this designation to be unhelpful because while it does add complexity to analysis of positionality, it simultaneously fails to capture the true complexity and nuance of the horizontal and vertical relations between Aleksinac (and its residents) and other places across national, supranational and global scales, which I expose and discuss in this dissertation.

⁸ One could add – people, technology, ideas/ideologies and media to reflect the five scapes of globalization as proposed by Arjun Appadurai (1996)

1.2.4. Dependent capitalism

The “Varieties of capitalism” (VoC) approach to political economy (Hall and Soskice, 2001), popular among scholars working in economics, comparative politics, international relations and other (inter)disciplinary fields, has also been useful in thinking through the inner workings of different national/regional economies and how they are positioned in relation to each other and within the global economy. In this ‘firm-centered’ approach, Hall and Soskice, looking primarily at developed capitalist economies, identified two types of political economies in relation to the ways in which firms coordinate their activities and resolve problems that they face. The liberal market economies (LMEs) and coordinated market economies (CMEs), as two ideal types proposed by Hall and Soskice were later expanded by other authors who sought to better describe and account for non-western economies. Looking specifically at the post-socialist countries, Nölke and Vliegenthart (2009) proposed a third type of political economy which they named dependent market economies (DMEs), characterized by an alternative type of insertion into the global economy. As they point out, the DMEs are fundamentally characterized by “institutional complementarities between skilled, but cheap, labor; the transfer of technological innovations within transnational enterprises; and the provision of capital via foreign direct investment (FDI)” (2009, p.672).

Although Nölke and Vliegenthart proposed DMEs as a specific type of political economy that applies to the Visegrad countries in the first place, it equally holds true for Serbia and the rest of Western Balkans. FDIs, primarily based on exploitation of low-cost labor, have been Serbia’s central developmental pillar since the country’s (re)entry into the global neoliberal system of political and economic interdependence (Radenkovic, 2016). If anything, Serbia’s belated transition, relative to most other central and eastern European post-socialist countries, has only resulted in a more extreme application of the cheap-labor FDI-based development model. That is, with other central and eastern European countries already applying FDI-attracting strategies years before Serbia initiated its transition, Serbia had to

compete for its share of FDI's by providing additional benefits to foreign corporations looking to invest their capital.

This meant providing even cheaper or more “flexible” labor (by adjusting labor laws to the interest of employers) on the one hand, while also providing both direct and indirect subsidies to foreign investors who commit to opening their production facilities in the country and employing a certain number of people. With other countries increasingly resorting to the same tactics in a competition to attract more investments, this FDI-driven development model in fact re-produced (and continues to reproduce) the core-periphery relations in which “established labor” in the core(s) of the global economy continues to enjoy relatively stable employment through permanent work contracts and prospects for career advancement, while “non-established labor” in the peripheries “have insecure employment, have no prospect of career advancement, are relatively less skilled, and confront great obstacles in developing effective trade unions” (Cox, 1981, p.148). This FDI-driven development model also did not result in a process of “unconditional convergence to the income levels of rich countries” as proposed by a host of neo-classical economists (Kant, 2019), but quite the opposite – growing international wage gaps and the so-called “race to the bottom”.

1.2.5. Race to the bottom

“Race to the bottom” refers to the many ways in which countries alter domestic regulations in the global competition for trade and investment. Richer countries usually compete on the basis of lowering corporate taxes or facilitating tax-avoidance schemes in order to attract companies to open (one of) their headquarters or subsidiaries in these countries. Among these, according to the Corporate Tax Haven Index (CTHI) as calculated by Ates et. al. (2021) are countries such as the Netherlands, Ireland, Cyprus, Switzerland, United

Kingdom, Luxembourg, Hong Kong, Singapore, United Arab Emirates, but also small island countries such as the British Virgin Islands, Cayman Islands, Bermuda and Mauritius, among others. The tax schemes set up by these countries lead to “an aggressive dispossession of low income countries’ tax rights” (Ates et. al., 2021, p:106) and a “new global geography of profit shifting” (ibid.).

On the other hand, poorer countries usually compete on the basis of lowering regulation standards, most often regarding labor rights or those pertaining to environmental protection. Research by Olney (2013) has shown that empirical results are consistent with both implicit assumptions in the “race to the bottom” hypothesis related to labor regulations. In other words, his work shows that “employment protection rules have a significant negative impact on FDI ...[and]... that multinationals increase FDI in response to reductions in employment protection rules in the foreign host country”, as well as that “countries are competitively undercutting each other's labor standards in order to attract foreign investment” (Olney, 2013, p. 203). Furthermore, work by Davies and Vadlamannati, using data for 135 countries over the period of 17 years, has shown “that the labor standards in one country are positively correlated with those elsewhere (i.e. a cut in labor standards in other countries reduces labor standards in the country in question)” and that evidence of such competition “is strongest among developing countries with weak standards” (2013, p. 1). Critically, they also pointed out that this competition is even more evident when we look at how laws are enforced, and that many countries might have “labor-friendly” laws in place, but are more than willing to turn a blind eye towards violations of those laws, with such willingness constituting their competitive advantage in attracting FDIs.

As I show in Chapter 6, Serbia is resorting to both of these tactics when it comes to labor laws: reducing labor standards on the one hand, as well as turning a blind eye to their violations on the other. When it comes to environmental regulations, as I discuss in Chapters 6 and 8, Serbia may not be reducing protection standards (but also not enhancing them as

necessitated by the EU accession negotiations), but is increasingly willing to turn a blind eye to violations of current environmental protection laws, with such violations often also perpetrated by the very institutions of the state. I thus argue in these chapters that Serbia's construction as a (hyper-) dependent capitalist economy with the inflow of vertical FDIs facilitated by dwindling labor regulation and increasingly weakened enforcement of both labor and environmental protection laws, is not only an externally imposed, but critically a state-enhanced process. While capitalist globalization and the associated and previously discussed re-scaling processes have indeed 'weakened' the (nation) state in its ability to shape social, political and economic relations, they have not eliminated it altogether, and specific state forms continue to be crucially instrumental in creating local conditions for the expansion and multiplication of transnational capital (Bieler and Morton, 2018).

1.3. Place-making and Future-making

To wrap up this theoretical chapter, I will turn to the two main concepts in this dissertation – place-making and future-making, and discuss what they mean in light of the ontological and theoretical discussions presented in the previous pages.

Place-making is a concept that arose in anthropology as an attempt to challenge the spatially territorialized notions of culture and establish new links between the 'local' and that which lies beyond it, be it regional, national, international or global (Gupta and Ferguson, 1997). Rather than taking 'the local' as a given, place-making points to the ways in which locality is historically and discursively constructed through practices that also shape identities and enable resistances (Massey, 1994). Reflecting on the relational construction of places and identities, Massey (1994,2004) also addressed the question of 'boundaries' and insisted that both personal and spatial identities (place, landscape, region, nation and so forth) are essentially unboundable in any absolute sense. Meanings and identities are not

negotiated/forged in a ‘bounded’ place but rather “through interactions at all levels, from the (so-called) local to the (so-called) global” (Massey, 2004, p.1). A place is as much internally multiple, as it is a product of relations that spread out way beyond it (2004, p.4). This ‘destabilizing’ notion of place, as rightly put forward by Massey, posits places as locations of negotiation in the widest sense of the term, pointing both inwards, towards internal multiplicities and fragmentations of identity, and outwards, towards the ‘global’ constitution of places and identities. Place-making, we may also say, refers to the constant and shifting tensions between continued re-production of a place by local actors and the shifting positionality and re-making of places under global neoliberal capitalism.

The “making” in “place-making” also points to the processual nature of the concept. Places are not only unboundable in Euclidian space, but they are unboundable in time as well. Beyond their relational construction across space and scales, “place-making” points to their temporal construction as well. Again, as Casey noted, “places not only are, *they happen*” (author emphasis). Rather than static objects, they are dynamic processes. Critically, I add, beyond their “historical” construction, highlighted by Harvey (1996) and Massey (1994) among others, they are also constructed through other dimensions (or directions) of time – namely the future, as imagined, anticipated, desired, politicized, projected and itself relationally fashioned through prevailing political, social, economic and environmental processes and relations. Such future, or rather – such futures, are not out there waiting to come into being, but are already here – in-the-making themselves.

This brings me to the second concept in this dissertation’s title – future-making. Future-making is not (yet) a widely used concept in any scientific discipline, although my review of recent literature has uncovered several works which do use this concept, which I will describe below. In my own research, the concept arose organically, as my attempt to come up with an analogous term to that of place-making and transfer the previously described insights about places and place-making (relational construction, processual nature) to that of

futures. That is, my aim was to argue that futures are neither determined nor completely “open” but constantly negotiated in different ways between different social actors and across different scales. Hence my very research question that guides this dissertation and aims to uncover *how* the different visions of the future are negotiated in Serbia and implicated in place-making across different scales.

In recent literature, Ramella (2020) uses “lateral future-making” in her photo-ethnography of Kenyan informal labor practices around Lake Naivasha, to denote how these workers, operating between the dominant structure and defiant practice, co-produce their own and local futures. Cook (2021), on the other hand, looks at home renovations as “material future-making practices”. Finally, MacKenzie (2021) locates “future-making forces” both in individuals and collectives, but focuses mostly on the role of public power and the role of politics in shaping collective futures.

My own use of “future-making” is compatible with all three of these views. I see future-making in individual practices, such as Cook (2021), in group practices (whether “collective” or not) as does Ramella (2020), and at the higher scales of national, international and global political and economic processes, like MacKenzie (2021). Indeed, in different chapters of this dissertation I attend to different scales (both individual/collective and geographical) of future-making processes, highlighting the complementarities or tensions between them. I attend to individual future-makings in Chapter 7 where I engage the life-stories of my interlocutors in Aleksinac and expose the ways in which they navigate and resist their structured possibilities and shape their individual futures through defiant practices. I show how some of these practices are part of larger group/collective efforts to make alternative futures, but I also engage collective future-makings in Chapter 8 where I discuss how the growing mobilization of people across Serbia in support of proliferating environmental movement(s) is contesting state narratives of ‘future development’ and asserting different ideas of what the future should look like, within specific places threatened

by immediate environmentally-destructive development, and across the country or even region as a whole. Finally, in Chapter 6, I also engage future-making within the context of global political and economic processes and expose how Serbia's (and the wider region's) marginal/peripheral positionality within the global economy is not only continually reproduced, but reinforced and intensified through growing environmental and temporal inequalities experienced by its citizens.

All these futures in-the-making, and their material and discursive realizations and negotiations, constitute the very analytical lens through which I interrogate place-making processes in Aleksinac, across Serbia, and beyond.

Chapter 2. Methodology

In this chapter I explain the methodological approaches that I employed in my research. I start with brief descriptions of my research context and field site(s). I then continue with detailed descriptions of how I collected data and analyzed it in order to come up with meaningful answers to my research question. Finally, I provide some fieldwork reflections, including those concerning issues of positionality and power relations as well as ethical considerations related to my research.

2.1. Research context and field site(s)

My research, as originally envisioned, was centered on a changing landscape in the Aleksinac basin and in relation to a state-planned mining and oil production development project. The proposed location of the mines and their wider area thus constituted my primary field site where I conducted my ethnographic study. Figure 4, on the following page, shows the geographical location of Serbia on the map of Europe, and the location of the Aleksinac municipality within Serbia.

According to the official website of the Aleksinac municipality (Aleksinac Municipality, 2020), the municipality covers 706 km² of land, the majority of which is used for agriculture (453 km² or 64% of the entire territory) and still a large portion is covered with forests (203 km² or 29%). Aleksinac is the administrative center and the only town in the municipality, alongside 71 other villages (ibid.). Industrial activity, though growing from the 1960s onwards, withered away after the local coal mines were closed in 1989 and Yugoslav wars and the political and economic transition ensued soon after. What remains of the local industry today is mostly located within the town of Aleksinac (ibid.).



Location of Serbia on a map of Europe

Source: "Location map:Serbia" by Bosonic Dressing is licenced under CC-BY-SA-3.0, Last accessed on October 12, 2020 at:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Location_Serbia_Europe.png

Location of Aleksinac municipality on a map of Serbia

Source: "Municipal location in Serbia" by Dr. Blofeld is licenced under CC-BY-SA-3.0, adapted by the author; Last accessed on October 12, 2020 at

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Location_Serbia_Europe.png



Figure 3. Geographical location of the Aleksinac municipality

The Aleksinac municipality had a steady increase in population which peaked in the 1980s when the local coal mines and associated industry were booming. After the mines were closed in 1989, a significant population decline occurred and persists to this day. The main reason for this decline is out-migration caused by the region's poor economic conditions and

prospects (Aleksinac Municipality, 2020). The table below (Table 1) depicts population change in the Aleksinac municipality between 1948 and 2011.

1948.	1953.	1961.	1971.	1981.	1991.	2002.	2011.
61002	64344	67200	66082	67286	63844	57749	51863

Table 1. Population in the Aleksinac municipality 1948-2011 (Source: Aleksinac Municipality)

The proposed location(s) for shale mining is located some 8 km north of the Aleksinac town, in and around the village Subotinac (displacement of Subotinac residents was planned as part of the mining project). (Figure 4).

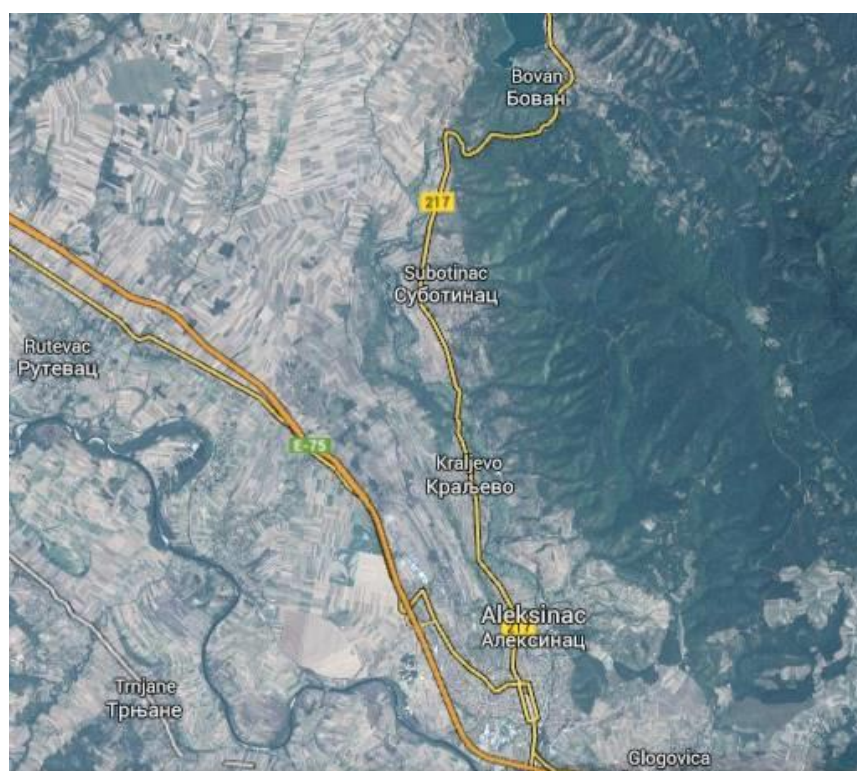


Figure 4. Village Subotinac and its surroundings (Source: maps.google.com)

The majority of my fieldwork was conducted in the town of Aleksinac. Aleksinac is the largest (only) town and the administrative center of the municipality. It holds about one third of the total population within the municipality and is home to all relevant institutions of the state. Besides Aleksinac, I also spent several days in the village of Subotinac, where I talked to and interviewed several local residents. I also took day trips to other nearby villages

such as Žitkovac, Prćilovica, Kraljevo, Mozgovo, Tešica, Glogovica, Vakup, Lužane, Nozrina, Stublina, Moravac, Donji Adrovac and Bovan.

However, already during my field study, but particularly after I concluded my stay in Aleksinac and began to analyze my data and write parts of this dissertation, I increasingly expanded my ‘field site’ to include the wider national and regional geography. I did this in order to capture and reflect the wider contexts and processes at larger scales that, as I show in this dissertation, critically shape local realities and future possibilities. Themes such as labor conditions, labor migrations, and environmental extraction and contestation may all have arisen in my ethnographic research in Aleksinac, but they were all part of much larger – national, regional and even global contexts and required to be analyzed as such.

In this ‘expanded field site’ I relied on secondary data in the form of media texts, and academic and other publications where those were available. As I regularly follow the news in Serbia and the region, I was quickly able to make connections between the processes I observed in Aleksinac and the life-stories of my interlocutors who were, for example, moving to Germany as medical workers, or to Slovakia as semi-skilled manual laborers, with larger such labor migration trends discussed in national and regional media analyses. Similarly, the local labor conditions in Grammer, however horrific, were not completely unheard of for me, as stories of worker exploitations and labor law violations often appear in the media and public discourse in Serbia and are most often tied to large FDI-driven and labor-intensive production facilities. Finally, although the theme of environmental extraction and contestation turned out to be less locally prominent than I originally expected it to be, because the shale-mining plan was abandoned/unrealized as of yet due to plummeting global oil prices, the development of extractive and polluting industries across the country and the region has been on the rise in recent years, as have local contestations that challenge such developments. Again, regularly following the news, and particularly interested in ‘environment-themed’

topics, I was able to observe such trends and collect additional data from the country and the region through desk research, and I present and analyze this data in Chapters 6 and 8.

2.2. Data collection and analysis

In the following pages of this chapter, I describe in detail the main methods I used to collect data during my research. This section is organized so to reflect the four main methods I used: participant observation, interviewing, walking tours and photography, and analysis of secondary data and historical/archival documents. While some of the methods, such as interviewing or walking tours, were clearly delimited by the time I spent in the field, others, like document analysis, spanned months and years both prior to and after my stay in Aleksinac. Participant observation proved to be ‘somewhere in between’, as digital and communication technologies and the connections with people in Aleksinac that I had made, allowed me to stay ‘virtually’ present, to some extent, even when I physically left the town.

To capture the widest possible variety of local discourses and understandings, I interviewed and talked to an array of different local “stakeholders” – such as representatives of the state/municipality, leaders of the “Environmental Movement Aleksinac” (*EPA*), former and current miners, farmers and ‘the general population’. Within that last category I again aimed to achieve high diversity between my interviewees and interlocutors when it comes to their age, gender, occupation, educational background, employment status etc. In other words, I spoke to high school and university students, pensioners, unemployed or seasonal workers, self-employed individuals and entrepreneurs, people who used to work for former Yugoslav social enterprises, several people who worked for Grammer (the largest factory and employer in the municipality), people who worked in local shops and cafes, and people who worked abroad. This allowed me to capture a variety of discourses and future imaginaries, and to analyze my data against categories of age/generation, gender, employment status and so on.

2.2.1. Participant observation

Since people's experience of social and geographic conditions is very subjective, it requires an extensive engagement with the 'studied community' (Sigaud, 2008). I spent around 10 months in total conducting ethnographic fieldwork in the town of Aleksinac and surrounding villages. In the summer of 2014, I went for a preliminary field visit and a short study which helped me to get to get a 'sense of the place', which I had never before visited, and greatly aided me in better formulating my research and writing my prospectus which I defended in December of the same year. Before going to the field I attempted to find a 'local connection', that is, someone I could get introduced to and who then could also introduce me to other people in the region. I did so by spreading the word, through my circle of friends and acquaintances, that I plan on moving to Aleksinac or Subotinac to do my research there and that I was looking for an acquaintance that would help me 'settle in'. As Serbia is a relatively small country, I was lucky enough to get introduced to Mileva, a distant cousin of a high school friend of mine, who lives in the village of Subotinac - exactly the village that was expected to be displaced because of the mining project and where I initially thought I would spend most of my time in the field.

During this preliminary study, I stayed both with Mileva in Subotinac, and in a hotel in Aleksinac and conducted several interviews while I was there. This preliminary study also helped me realize that, although only 8 kilometers apart, Aleksinac and Subotinac are not well connected by public transport and that locals rely either on private cars or "line taxis"⁹ with irregular and unpredictable working hours, which makes commuting between the two places quite difficult. For this reason, I decided to spend the rest of my field work living in the town

⁹ Taxis that drive multiple people from and to fixed points in Aleksinac and Subotinac. These are usually unregistered 'businesses' that locals take up in their free time, and connect Aleksinac with many other nearby villages besides Subotinac.

of Aleksinac, while organizing day trips to Subotinac as needed, rather than the other way around, since most of the people I wanted to interview (state/municipal officials, environmental movement activists etc.) were located in the town, and even the Subotinac residents which held any employment, usually worked in the town of Aleksinac as well.

I returned to Aleksinac in late January of 2015, rented an apartment in the town and stayed there until early December of the same year. Midway through this time, I left the field site for a month to attend two academic conferences, and used this opportunity to switch apartments when I returned, as I wanted to experience a different part of town and get to know new neighbors, landlords, local shops and businesses and enrich my experience and study in this way¹⁰.

Although the recorded interviews I conducted with people in Aleksinac were indispensable in identifying key themes and frames, conducting an analysis across conversations with different people in later stages of my writing, and extracting quotes from my interlocutors' talks that serve as direct illustrations of the points I make in different analytical chapters of this dissertation, I would argue that participant observation played a key role in my research. More than just a method of collecting data in predefined and pre-delimited research foci, I approached participant observation as a tool that would drive my research, constantly opening up new avenues of interest and new directions my research could take. While I always kept the general research question which brought me to Aleksinac in the back of my head, I did not allow it to delimit my interactions with the people and the place, but rather remained open for my experiences and interactions in the field to tell me what my research question(s) should be, aside or perhaps even instead of the one(s) I came to ask.

This resulted in both moments of happiness, when I discovered unexpected questions and narratives that, even if only tangentially, aligned with my original questions and thinking, as well as in moments of frustration, when I felt overwhelmed by the number of different

¹⁰ I had also hoped that the second apartment will not be plagued by a cockroach infestation, but I was not as lucky and instead had to find ways to overcome my katsaridaphobia (fear of roaches)

directions my research could take and the associated feelings of losing ground and focus. In the latter case, I would usually take a short break to take a step back and have a conversation with myself about the newly discovered possible avenues of research, where they could take me, if they could in any way or (re)formulation work with my original research questions and should as such be explored further, or alternatively just jotted down on a piece of paper and left for some other ‘imagined future research’, whether my own or someone else’s. My fieldnotes captured very well these moments of re-aligning my research as well as some of the changes in my perception of different issues throughout the course of my fieldwork.

My engagement with the local community in Aleksinac was extensive and mostly organic/spontaneous. While I did move to Aleksinac with relatively clear ideas about what I want to study and even a list of some people that I knew I wanted to talk to (and eventually did, with most of them), I did not rush to independently contact these people and set up interviews. Just like I reached out through my network of friends and acquaintances and managed to meet Mileva when I visited Subotinac the previous year, I once again did the same before moving to Aleksinac. Through my circle of friends, I was put in touch with Zorica, from Aleksinac, prior to moving there in late January of 2015. Zorica, whom I spoke with over the phone in early January, even offered to help me find an apartment to rent. While I conducted the search online by myself, I did accept Zorica’s offer to help by asking her to visit the apartment I ended up renting, to make sure that it is in decent condition, since the online advertisement for the apartment did not include photographs.

As soon as I settled in my new apartment in Aleksinac, I started exploring the town, behaving as its new resident. I invited Zorica for drinks so we could finally meet in person and I could properly introduce myself. Zorica immediately introduced me to a few of her friends in the café where we had drinks. I quickly befriended Dragana, the café-owner’s daughter who worked at the bar, and kept coming back to the café, where I easily met many other people and several of my informants, throughout the rest of my stay in Aleksinac. I

visited local shops, bakeries, the farmer's market, and even decided to go to a hairdresser, despite the fact that I have been cutting my own hair for the past 10 years. I used these opportunities to chat with people, observe life in Aleksinac and expand my social circle. I went to *kafana(s)*¹¹ for dinners and fast-food places for snacks and other meals, again easily making new acquaintances. Zorica also soon introduced me to Dušan, a local dentist and freelance journalist, whom she recommended that I interview for my research as "he knows everyone and everything in town". I conducted my first formal interview with Dušan, and he truly did become a very valuable contact, himself very knowledgeable about both the current news and happenings in the town as well as its history. More importantly, he was personally familiar with most people in town, recommended other people that he thought I should talk to and was eager to put me in touch with anyone I wanted to get in touch with.

Through these initial contacts, I was able to quickly expand my social circle in Aleksinac and gain access to other people in town, including those people I originally planned to approach for interviews, such as the leaders of EPA, state employees working in the municipality, social services office, individuals who used to work in the local coal mines as well as those who continued working as miners in other nearby mines, and so on. I accepted invitations that I received to attend birthday celebrations, *krsna slava(s)*¹², picnics by the river, walks through nearby villages where some of my informants lived, and even a business presentation by insurance policy agents (detailed in Chapter 7). I attended the town's annual fair, two meetings of the local commune (*mesna zajednica*) where I listened to lengthy discussions about local and national politics and mounting problems related to crime in the town, and went to see a theater show put on by the local high school's theatrical group in the

¹¹ Traditional Serbian taverns/restaurants that serve local and traditional food and drinks

¹² Krsna Slava is a Serbian Orthodox Christian tradition of glorification and celebration of the family's patron saint. Families celebrate Slava annually, on the religious holiday of their patron saint who is considered to be the family's protector. The tradition is passed on from father to son, and the celebration includes a feast and a symbolic reaffirmation of the family's ties to their patron saint and the Serbian Orthodox Church.

local Cultural Center (*dom kulture*¹³). I mostly participated in these various events as “an ordinary citizen”, sometimes accompanied by some of my informants and other times alone.

After spending four months in Aleksinac and greatly expanding my social circle, I started receiving invitations to attend birthday celebrations, religious celebrations (*slava*), house parties and other large social gatherings. In one of these gatherings, where marijuana was smoked, I engaged in a conversation about marijuana and met the person who brought it to the party and offered to supply me with some, should I want any. I continued chatting with this person throughout the rest of the evening about my research and background, their personal life and many other topics. We agreed to meet again for drinks and chats, and quickly became friends as we were of similar age and shared many interests. Over the next few months of my stay in Aleksinac, I met many other people through this friend and gained access to a whole new ‘underground layer’ of the town, where drugs-related and other criminal activities form part of much larger national and international networks. Some of these findings are presented in Chapter 7 of this dissertation.

Throughout my time in Aleksinac, I have established close relationships with several of my interviewees and interlocutors. We kept meeting again and again, spending many hours engaging in personal, emotional and intellectual exchange. These relationships allowed me to gain a much deeper perspective and understanding of their personal lives as well as well as the social, economic, political and historical realities in Aleksinac. These life stories and oral histories inform most of my analysis in Chapters 5, 6 and 7.

2.2.2. Interviewing

Interviewing was another important method of data collection that I used to enrich my participant observation data and allow for deeper analysis of themes and frames. As Barribal

¹³ A municipal, state-run institution that organizes various cultural activities such as theater shows, movie screenings, recitals, art exhibitions, dance/folklore performances etc.

and While (1994) noted, semi-structured interviews are particularly suited for grasping people's perceptions, and are flexible enough to allow for a variety of identities and subjectivities to be expressed. I conducted in-depth semi structured interviews with 40 interviewees while I lived in Aleksinac. Each interview usually lasted between 40 and 90 minutes and covered several main themes that I wanted to explore. The themes which I explored with each of my interviewees were:

- 1) Their perceptions of the current state-of-affairs within the town/region
- 2) Their perceptions of the past (what was different and how?)
- 3) Their perceptions and expectations about the future
- 4) Their thoughts about the announced shale mine

Within each of these themes I usually allowed my interviewees to take the discussion in the direction that they thought was important. Sometimes the conversation about the present situation in town turned to broad topics related to national politics, and other times it was about very specific local issues. The same is true about the conversations about the past and the future. Likewise, some of my interviewees shared very personal stories from their lives, while others left their personal stories and experiences aside and attempted to give me "objective" answers. I always allowed the interviewees to set the tone of the conversation and to some extent even the direction in which our conversation went (while only trying to cover the broad themes outlined above). I saw the interviews as an emotional exchange rather than just a method of 'extracting data' from my interviewees. There were just a few instances in which my interviewees kept giving me very brief answers, forcing me to constantly intervene and follow up with additional questions, which resulted in a fully structured conversation.

With the majority of my interviewees, however, the conversation flowed quite easily. My interventions were most often related to additional details I asked for regarding particularly interesting themes/topics and making sure that we cover all of the themes during the conversation. There were also a few cases where I asked my interviewees to present 'the

other side of the coin’, such as, for example, asking interviewees who solely diagnosed the present situation in town in negative terms, to tell me something good or positive about Aleksinac and life there. Similarly, I asked a couple of my older interviewees who painted the past with only bright colors to specifically tell me what some of the problems were in that same past. These interventions usually resulted in more reflexive answers not only to those particular questions, but throughout the rest of the interview.

While still covering the main themes outlined above, I also somewhat adapted the interviews depending on who my interviewees were. For example, when I talked to the leaders of the Environmental Movement Aleksinac (EPA), the theme related to the announced shale mine was explored through their particular perspective. After a lengthy discussion about the potential environmental dangers of shale mining, I asked them how they got involved with the movement, about the activities that they organized, how they felt the mining and related environmental issues were understood and discussed among the general population in town, as well as how they felt their initiative to oppose the mine was received by other local citizens. On the other hand, when I spoke to ‘regular citizens’ who were usually much less informed about the potential social and environmental issues arising from potential shale mining and processing in the region, our discussion often centered on the activists of EPA members themselves and particularly the distrust that many ‘regular citizens’ felt towards the EPA activists. These discussions are detailed in Chapter 5.

As noted earlier in this chapter, I mostly relied on the snowball sampling method – where the people I interviewed or met otherwise kept recommending the next person I should talk to. Even when I had particular people in mind that I wanted to interview, such as the leaders of EPA – I didn’t approach them independently but waited until I met someone who could introduce me to these people. I did, however, interview a few people that were not recommended to me but that I met on my own – such as my landlord, or the girl who worked

in a shop near my apartment. I did this as an attempt to potentially capture different narratives, and ‘snowflakes’ outside of my ‘snowball’.

I wanted my interviewees to feel as comfortable as possible, which is why I always attempted to be introduced to them by a mutual acquaintance or even in the few cases where I approached my interviewees myself I did so only after meeting them a few times and building some trust between us. I always told my interviews that I need to record our conversation and explained the reasons for doing this, asking for their consent prior to the interview. I told them the themes that we would cover during the interview and gave them an option to be anonymized in my research. While I said that I could give them a pseudonym in later stages of my writing should they decide that way, I also gave them an option to give a pseudonym for themselves during the introductory part of the interview when I asked them for their name, age and occupation. Two of my interviewees used this opportunity and gave made-up names already during the interview. While writing this dissertation, I made a decision to use pseudonyms for all of my informants, except those speaking as a public person such as municipality employees and employees of other state institutions, or Dušan, the local journalist.

During the interviews I took notes, jotting down the main themes of our conversation, a particularly interesting detail or a follow-up question that I intended to ask, but tried to do this less often so I could remain ‘present’ in the conversation. After completing the interview and parting with my interviewees, I took more extensive notes about the interview – writing the main topics of our conversation and particularly interesting themes that arose during the interview. This proved very helpful when in September, 2015 I had the misfortune of my memory card, where I recorded the interviews, malfunctioning. Despite efforts to recover my recorded interviews in two different companies that specialize in data recovery, the data from my memory card could not be recovered. I lost a total of 14 interview recordings that I conducted in the period between July and September and failed to backup

prior to the card malfunctioning. My notes from these interviews proved crucial in reconstructing the main themes and findings.

I transcribed most of the remaining 26 interviews during and after my stay in Aleksinac. Re-listening to the interviews, using my notes and going through transcripts, I identified some of the main themes across interviews and commenced my analysis. I repeated this process several times, making links across all the interviews as well as my notes and building categories and concepts. At this stage I also analyzed my data in relation to my interviewees' age, gender, occupation, background and tested my concepts against initial results. I continued going back to my notes, transcripts and recordings throughout the process of writing the analytical chapters of this dissertation, which were also informed by the document and historical analysis I have been conducting in parallel. In these later iterations of revisiting the notes and transcripts and relistening to the recorded interviews, I conducted further axial and selective analysis, making connections between different themes and categories and identifying specific quotes that gave my conceptualizations explanatory power.

2.2.3. Walking tours

Inspired by Irving's (2005) notion of the "walking fieldwork", I also conducted numerous walking tours across the town of Aleksinac as well as some of the nearby villages. Irving (2005) defines walking fieldwork as:

"an ethnographic tactic whereby I accompanied people moving between places and witnessed those moments when their bodies – or the surrounding world – became 'present'", and further notes that (it)

"attempts to reveal the temporality and specificity of walking practices by accompanying people on their journeys and asking them to narrate their experiences".

While I stayed true to Irving's definition of the walking fieldwork and asked 6 of my acquaintances/informants in Aleksinac to take me on their desired tours in and around the town, telling me about the places we visited and their personal stories along the way (which I quickly wrote in my notes after coming back from the walk), I also expanded this method/tactic by including two other types of 'walks'. Namely, when I first moved to Aleksinac in January 2015, I immediately started 'discovering' the town by going on daily long walks to different parts of the town, taking photographs and notes about what I saw and how the built environment around me made me feel. In other words, I attempted to interpret the landscape as a complete outsider – although I did hold some previous knowledge from what I read about the town, the coal mines and other industry that exists/existed in the municipality. This made it interesting to compare, after I revisited some of the places with my informants and heard their stories, how my initial interpretations and feelings changed.

I finally added a third layer to this tactic when I started inviting friends to visit me while I stayed in Aleksinac and taking them on walks around the town, this time as a tour guide myself. A total of nine friends came to visit me during the spring and summer of 2015 when I was in the field, five from abroad, and four from Belgrade. This gave me an opportunity to once again reflect on impressions my friends had of the place as complete outsiders, and my own which have by that time been drastically changed as I became attached to the place due to the time I spent there and, more importantly, the meanings and feelings I adopted as they were conveyed to me by my own tour guides.

The "walking fieldwork" that I conducted strengthened my research in several ways. Namely, the physical presence of certain buildings and places in town allowed my informants to express feelings and thought that otherwise would be difficult to capture or would simply not arise in a sedentary interview setting. Conversations during these walks were also much more organic and allowed for certain details, inspired by what we saw in the moment, to come to light. Finally, the power relation was often shifted as my informants suddenly became

knowledgeable tour guides and I was transformed from a “researcher” to someone/a friend who is unfamiliar with ‘their’ town. This is also the reason why I did not want to record the conversations or take notes during the walks, but rather wrote my notes after I returned from the walks.

While I purposefully asked six of my friends/informants to take me on these tours during my fieldwork, there were quite a few other instances when similar tours happened spontaneously, while I was on the street or walking with some of my acquaintances in Aleksinac, Žitkovac, and Subotinac, but also while I was in the car with a few locals that I befriended. Much of Chapter 3 (particularly 3.3) of this dissertation would not be possible had I not engaged in this ethnographic tactic.

2.2.4. Document and historical analysis

Document and historical analyses were another important part of my research, conducted both during and after my stay in Aleksinac. In these analyses I focused on contemporary local, national and regional media, and various historical books and documents that I was able to attain.

As Aleksinac does not have local print media, but does have two online news portals, I focused my analysis on these. Aleksinac.biz is an online news portal that focuses mostly on news and stories related to the local economy and business, but while the website was regularly updated before I commenced my research, new content was only sporadically added over the last years. Furthermore, the content present on the website largely overlaps with the content on the other, and much larger news portal Aleksinac.net. Therefore, while I did explore the content of Aleksinac.biz, my analysis of local media focused mostly on Aleksinac.net.

Aleksinac news (*Aleksinačke vesti*), or simply Aleksinac.net, is “an unofficial and independent news portal of Aleksinac residents” (*nezvanični i nezavisni portal Aleksinčana*), as stated on the portal’s homepage. It was created in early 2006 by several local enthusiasts who wanted to create a digital space where locals could exchange relevant information as well as to communicate “a different image of Aleksinac” to wider national audiences. Over the years the portal has grown into the most active public space in the municipality. Several both professional and amateur local journalist report on local news and events on a regular basis, contributing to the portal’s different sections such as politics, society, economy, agriculture, science and technology, culture, entertainment, sports, and so on. Aside from these, the portal also has a classifieds section, where locals offer or look for services or various goods and products.

Dušan, one of my interviewees and main informants in town, was one of the founders and main contributors to the portal, but stopped writing in 2019 when his car was set on fire due to his writing, as Dušan claimed (Stojanović, 2019). The police arrested a 25-year-old male who admitted to setting Dušan’s car on fire, but his motifs remained unclear (D.K., 2019).

I studied all the different sections of the portal, including even the classifieds section, from 2006, when first news and articles were uploaded to 2015, when I started the study and analysis of the portal content. I also investigated national media coverage, available online, of stories related to Aleksinac. I continued visiting the Aleksinac.net portal and reading the local news to date. It was particularly interesting to read the comments section in the news, which sometimes (depending on the news/topic) turned into lively debates on the topic and gave a clearer image of the contested nature of the topic at hand. The digital nature of the content also made my study and analysis much easier as it allowed me to use keywords to conduct searches across the portal’s content. The portal was also very useful during my fieldwork as it

contained an “announcement” section, where local cultural, political, sports and other types of events were announced prior to taking place.

Aside from studying contemporary media coverage of stories related to Aleksinac, I also conducted a study of historical materials. In the town’s library, located within the municipal Cultural Center (*dom kulture*) I gained access to several publications on the history of Aleksinac and the wider region. Particularly useful was Dr. Branko Peruničić’s monograph entitled “Aleksinac and its surroundings” (*“Aleksinac i okolina”*) (1978), which includes almost 1700 pages of historical documents that his study was based upon. Another important historical and ethnographic study was conducted by Miodrag Spirić, who wrote three books on Aleksinac – each covering a different time period during the town’s development. I studied these books extensively. In the library, I was also able to find other publications – such as “Subotinac”, an ethnographic study of the village Subotinac written by Ljubinko Mikić (2003) and published by the Historical Archives of the city of Niš, and “Aleksinac lest we forget” (*“Aleksinac za nezaborav”*), a photo journal of the town’s development throughout the 19th and 20th centuries put together by the famous local photographer Hadži Miodrag Miladinović and academic Miodrag Spirić (2006).

Several other publications which were not available in the library, I managed to find in the private home libraries of my local informants. Such were the two “communist” publications, “Aleksinac municipality in the National Liberation War and Socialist Revolution” (*“Opština Aleksinac u NOB i socijalističkoj revoluciji”*) written by Dragoljub Mirčetić and Miroslav Milovanović (1982) and “10 years of workers’ self-management” (*“10 godina radničkog samoupravljanja”*), an Aleksinac coal mines publication edited by Brana Vučković (1960), which detailed the history of the coal mines and the successes achieved within the first 10 years (1950-1960) of workers’ self-management in the coal mines. Additionally, through my informants employed by the state/municipality, I was able to attain the Municipal General Urban Plan for Aleksinac developed in 1982.

I studied these publications both during the time I spent in Aleksinac as well as in the following years. I made photocopies of some of the mentioned publications, while some I also managed to find and buy as used books online and keep in my own home library. While conducting the historical analysis I included many other publications that did not directly concern Aleksinac but were related to the larger themes and time periods that I identified and wanted to explore in more depth.

My document and historical analyses both informed and were informed by my analyses of field observations, notes and interviews. Identifying themes and concepts in one meant revisiting the other and ‘testing’ the identified themes and concepts there, aiming for analytical coherence. Through such iterative steps in data analysis my different sources of data were put in constant conversation with each other. And while the following chapters of this dissertation are structured in a way that each reflects certain methods of data collection more than the others, they also heavily rely on each other and only together do they form an analytical whole that leads to the final discussion and conclusions made in the dissertation.

As I increasingly expanded my ‘field site’ to include the wider national and regional geography, for reasons explained earlier in this chapter, I also expanded my data collection methods through additional desk research and analysis of secondary data in the form of national and regional media texts, and academic and other publications where those were available, for those themes that arose in my ethnographic study in Aleksinac but required wider analytical contexts.

2.3. Reflections on the fieldwork

2.3.1. *Age and gender*

During my time in Aleksinac, I tried to meet, talk to, and interview people from across the spectrum of age and gender, as well as employment type and status, as I was particularly interested to see whether and how these factors played a role in people's perceptions and experiences, temporal reasonings and imaginaries of the future. My youngest informants were high school students born in late 1990s, while the oldest I spoke to were pensioners born in 1940s. I also engaged people of all generations in-between, from university students in their twenties, unemployed or seasonal workers, self-employed individuals and entrepreneurs, state (municipality) employees, miners both retired and active, EPA activists, farmers, people who used to work for former Yugoslav social enterprises, several people working for Grammer, people who worked in local shops and cafes, and people who worked abroad¹⁴.

Generational differences did indeed play a significant role in how my informants perceived themselves, the role of the state, and how they imagined the future. I discuss these differences in Chapter 5.

2.3.2. *Positionality and power relations*

Issues related to my positionality and the power relations between myself as a researcher and my informants and people I met and befriended during my fieldwork, were something that I often reflected on prior to, during and even after I concluded my fieldwork.

Conducting research in "one's own culture or country", or what is often termed "anthropology at home" (Peirano, 1998), already raises some questions. Although I am a native Serbian, I had never visited Aleksinac and its surroundings prior to this research.

¹⁴ Several of my informants were "in-between" jobs abroad – see Chapter 7 for details

Coming from the country's capital Belgrade, I was in some ways both an 'insider' and an 'outsider' to this region. While my 'Serbian identity' made it easier for locals to identify with me, there is also a tendency within smaller towns and villages in Serbia that do not receive many visitors from other places, to view any 'newcomers' as 'outsiders'. I indeed experienced a little bit of both and was particularly delighted in situations where some locals saw me as a 'friendly outsider' and so wanted to take time to show me what Aleksinac "is really like". The fact that I was born and lived in Serbia (Yugoslavia) almost my entire life also made me an "insider" as I was able to relate to the same shared experiences such as the political and economic crises during the 90s, hyperinflation, NATO bombing, economic transition and corruption, national politics and so on. These topics were a natural and easy common ground on which I was able to quickly build meaningful conversations and relationships with people in Aleksinac.

Further than this, notions of identity in terms of age, gender, social and economic status, institutional affiliation, appearance and language (among other things) necessarily take this discussion further. Coming from the country's capital I not only spoke with a different accent but was often perceived by the locals as being privileged in terms of education, employment and opportunities related to social and cultural life, or simply the "cultural capital" that life in Belgrade allowed me to acquire. There were, however, those locals who also perceived my life in Belgrade a disadvantage as Belgrade is "dirty and overcrowded, and full of rude and impolite people" and nothing like Aleksinac where "life is slower and much more peaceful". It was also puzzling for many of my interlocutors, but also some of my friends from Belgrade, why after moving from Belgrade to Budapest, which they saw as a "step up on the ladder" I would choose to go to Aleksinac for my research, which they saw as two steps down. This confusion would sometimes be verbalized, and at other times just present in people's facial expressions after they asked me if this research "was given to me" to which I answered that it was not, but that I formulated and chose it instead.

My identity as a researcher/student coming from a ‘foreign’ and ‘western’ university is also something I often reflected on and was careful when sharing this information. Although the Central European University (CEU) is not commonly known in Serbia, there is a fair number of ‘politically active’ people who are to some extent familiar with CEU. What is troubling is that those who operate within the ‘right’ spectrum of politics, frequently hold negative attitudes towards CEU, and particularly the Serbian students who study there. They often describe CEU as “an anti-Serbian institution”, while the Serbian students who study there are depicted as “national traitors”¹⁵. For this reason, I was cautious when introducing myself to some of the people I met, and in several occasions omitted my institutional affiliation while fully disclosing my (PhD) researcher identity and the topic and aims of my research.

Another issue was related to the inequalities in income and economic status. While my CEU stipend surely did not make me rich, it did make my economic position significantly better when compared to some of my interlocutors who lived in complete poverty. I lived very modestly in Aleksinac, much below the means afforded by my income, which obscured and made these differences much less apparent. But I also often struggled feeling the need to help some of my interlocutors but restraining to do so because of ethical considerations related to my research. On several occasions I compromised by inviting some of interlocutors for a home cooked dinner in my apartment or paying for coffee we had in a local café, which is very common (if not a ‘cultural norm’) in Serbia among friends.

In a small town such as Aleksinac, where most people know at least of each other if not knowing each other personally, I also had to deal with how the locals positioned me in relation to the people they saw me with. This was particularly the case during the first months of my fieldwork when my social circle was relatively small and people were quick to “align” me politically, culturally, or in other ways with those who they saw me talking to. During

¹⁵ Quotes taken from an online “Serbian Nationalists” forum, and the subtopic dedicated to the Central European University (Source: <http://forum.srpskinacionalisti.com/viewtopic.php?f=3&t=2058>)

these first months I also experienced the ‘anthropological staple’ of hearing rumors that I am a spy. After spending more time in Aleksinac and meeting more people, this got better and I started to be perceived more as “nobody’s”, but indeed an independent researcher who talks and hangs out with very different people in town.

As noted in previous sections of this chapter, I employed various tactics to counter the power relations inherent in the positionalities of myself as a researcher and my interlocutors as “research subjects”, and the different methods I used during my research. I slowly expanded my social circle being introduced to my interlocutors and interviewees by mutual friends, often positioning myself as a friend who happens to be a researcher, rather than a researcher who happens to be a friend. With many of my interviewees I only conducted the interviews after seeing them several times and establishing a closer connection to them, eventually asking them to *help me* with my research. Likewise, during the walking tours, I didn’t record the conversations with my guides and even refrained from taking notes during the walks, instead only casually taking photographs. This allowed for a much more ‘natural’ and authentic conversation among friends, unburdened by other power relations of sound recorders which would make my tour guides careful with their words. I only took notes after the walking tour was over.

2.3.3 Ethical considerations

It is important here to also reflect on certain ethical issues, seeing that my research involved direct contact with people and hearing many personal details from their life stories. Aleksinac is a small town, where locals can relatively easily identify each other based on even the most basic biographical data. As stated earlier, for this reason I always offered my interviewees to remain ‘anonymous’ by using a pseudonym and offered them an option to ‘pseudonymize’ themselves already during the interview by giving me a false name (or even age) in the introductory part of the interview when I asked them for their name, age and

occupation. I also told them that I can use pseudonyms for them at a later stage, should they change their mind and wish to remain ‘anonymous’.

Although only two people took the option to ‘pseudonymize’ themselves during the interview, while writing the different chapters of this dissertation I felt it important to protect the identity of several other interviewees I spoke with. This is particularly the case when I talk about illicit and criminal activities in Chapter 7, where I decided not only to use pseudonyms but to obfuscate the identities of my informants in other ways too. As the number of interviewees for which I used pseudonyms grew, I finally decided to use pseudonyms for all my interviewees and interlocutors, except those speaking as a public person such as municipality employees and employees of other state institutions, or Dušan, the local journalist.

Before conducting the recorded interviews, I always informed my interviewees about the general aim of my research and the general topics that I would like to cover during the interview. I sometimes did this even days before conducting the interview so that my interviewees would feel more at ease. I also always asked for permission to record the interview and explained the purposes of recording, assuring them that no one else will listen to the recordings. On two occasions my interviewees were clearly uncomfortable with the recording, even though they previously gave me permission to record. In these situations, I asked them if they wanted me to stop recording and on one occasion managed to conduct and record the interview at a later date when they felt more comfortable, while in the other I conducted an informal talk instead, and took notes without recording.

As part of my research, I also took photographs of the natural and built environment in the region. I refrained from taking photos of people, and the few photos that I did take with people in them remain in my private collection. In the dissertation I only use one photograph where a person is visible, but I made the effort to hide their face and other identifiable markings (such as the license plate on the vehicle).

2.3.4 Limitations

Besides methodological limitations that stem from issues related to positionality and power relations, that I previously discussed, my research faced a few other limitations. These were, above all, related to time and the ambitious scale(s) at which I performed my analysis. As one of my colleagues at the department rightfully observed, the fact that I took longer to write this dissertation (longer than writing a PhD dissertation is “supposed” to take) in fact really benefited my analysis, because as she noted “it takes time to study time”. Indeed, many events and processes related to the rapid spread of extractive and polluting industries in Serbia as well as the growing opposition to such development, which I discuss and analyze in Chapters 6 and 8, only happened in the last couple of years – much after I was “supposed” to submit this dissertation, should I have been a “model student”. The fact that these developments only happened recently, or rather – are ongoing, also meant that I was not able to collect and analyze additional data in the form of interviews with representatives of the burgeoning environmental movements expressing opposition to the spread of extractive and polluting industries and the state’s willingness to turn a blind eye to, or even actively participate in, the growing violations of environmental protection laws. I also could not conduct interviews with the government representatives who frame the inflow of FDIs in extractive and polluting industries in Serbia as “bringing future” rather than “taking it away” as argued by the environmental movements, which I would have liked. Instead, in my analysis of these recent developments and contested futures I had to rely on secondary data in the form of texts, whether media or academic where those were available, and my own observations.

One other limitation was related to accessibility of a particular site – namely the Roma settlement and community in Aleksinac, which I attempted but failed to fully access. As many members of the Roma community are in fact undocumented, I believed that my research would truly benefit from exploring the perspectives of these “non-citizens” whose relation to

the state is quite different to begin with. Many members of this community also make a living by working in the informal economy of waste (secondary raw materials) picking, and as such are in fact materially threatened by potential establishment and improvement of primary waste selection schemes in Serbia or the formalization of the waste picking industry. Accounting for such perspectives as well would have additionally strengthened my research. However, the Roma community was very distrustful towards outsiders, for understandable reasons, and even physical access to the settlement at the edge of the town was difficult. And while I did manage to physically access the settlement with a friend who worked in the recycling industry in the past and was trusted by the local Roma community, I only managed to stroll through the settlement and meet a few people but my attempts to conduct an interview, whether formal or informal, recorded or not, were unsuccessful.

Of course, the limitations I presented above are those I am able to reflect upon – what I would call the “known unknowns” using the language of former US Secretary of State for Defense, Donald Rumsfeld. In the same language, my socialization and positionality would constitute the “unknown known” limitations, while many other limitations remain in the realm of “unknown unknowns”.

Chapter 3. On socio-political and historical context: The case of Aleksinac

Introduction

Steps away from the main pedestrian street in the center of Aleksinac, on the left bank of the river Moravica which flows through the city, lies an abandoned factory complex which the locals still to this day call “The brewery” (*pivara*), despite the fact that the last bottle of beer was produced there almost a hundred years ago (Figure 5).



Figure 5. “The brewery” (Milićević, 2015)

Unique in its central location within the town, the decaying brewery building complex is no exception to this region. Abandoned factories and ruined industrial sites in and around Aleksinac are a common sight to be seen, and probably one of the most striking features of its landscape. For a visitor or a passing spectator, the crumbling buildings are among the first sights that capture their attention and gaze. They are eerie, and invoke a sense of fear in the

observer. They seem out-of-place, especially when surrounded by occupied residential buildings where people live their lives just like in any other place on Earth. Yet for the more inquisitive minds they also spark imagination and make one think and envision the time when they stood tall, freshly painted, churring smoke through the chimneys, and filling trucks with goods produced there. When instead of the spooky silence they were filled with chatter, laughter, buzzing of machines, and people running around, working and earning their wages. When instead of feeling out-of-place, they gave the very meaning to the place where they were built and gave rise to those very same apartment buildings that now awkwardly surround them.

This chapter highlights some of the main historic moments in the development of Aleksinac and its social and economic geography, tracing the rise and decline of the city and region through its landscape- the natural and built environment, the abandoned and decaying “post-industrial” sites, and the human stories uncovered during my ethnographic research. Further drawing on my archival research and field notes, I argue that despite “looking the part” in some aspects (namely: visual), this region departs from the “post-industrial” norm where the decline in industrial/manufacturing activity is to be replaced by a growth in knowledge and accompanying information, creative and service industries. Rather, the town and region find themselves in a state of protracted decline in which the ‘glorious past’ and its embedded ‘hope for the future’ have gone without a ‘new future’ occupying the horizon. As I will argue in subsequent chapters, this now long-standing lack of direction in the town and region’s (re)development and the resulting absence of a coherent imagined future, has had profound implications in the ways that people who now live there imagine their personal and collective futures and recognize their own agentive capacities.

3.1. Historical development of the town and municipality: The Origins

Traces of human activity and settlements in the Aleksinac region, mainly surrounding the Južna Morava river, lead back to prehistoric times. Though still largely unexplored, numerous archeological findings have been discovered in the region and systematically recorded by a Serbian historian, ethnologist and archeologist Tihomir Đorđević in the late 19th century. Most of the archeological findings were discovered by accident, either by local farmers working the land or when infrastructural works, such as road building or laying telephone and electricity cables, were done in this region. The majority of these sites are yet to be thoroughly examined.

Several archeological sites surrounding today's villages of Moravac and Lužane (Figure 6) are classified as belonging to the Neolithic Starčevo culture (also known as Starčevo–Körös–Criș culture, dating between 6200 and 4500 BCE), while traces of the Neolithic Vinča culture (also known as Turdaș–Vinča culture, dating between 5700 and 4500 BCE) were discovered in and around the villages of Katun, Kraljevo, Vrćenovica, Vitkovac, Mozgovo and the town of Aleksinac. Additionally, the archeological locality “Jelenac” within the town of Aleksinac, also shows traces of the Bubanj-Hum group and the Baden-Kostolac group, while a necropolis discovered near Žitkovac testifies of the presence of the middle bronze age Paraćin cultural group. The relative location of these sites is presented in Figure 6.



Figure 6. Aleksinac Municipality with names of all the villages (Source: Aleksinac Waterworks – adapted by the author)

This rich paleoanthropological legacy is not surprising when we take into consideration the local geography of this region. Namely, all of these places and the entire contemporary Aleksinac municipality, are located in the valley surrounding the river Južna Morava, or the so-called Južna Morava valley (Figure 7).



Figure 7. Aleksinac valley (Milićević, 2015)

The Južna Morava valley is particularly wide in the Aleksinac municipality, and the soil particularly fertile there, making it ideal for agricultural production which to this day remains one of the main economic activities with two thirds of the land in the municipality being classified as agricultural. The wider geography also provides protection in the form of the mountains that surround this wide plain – Ozren in the North and East, with its peak at 1.174 meters, and Great and Small Jastrebac in the west with the highest peak at 1.491 meters above sea level.

Most importantly, Južna Morava river, itself 300km long and covering a drainage area of almost 16.000 km² with its 157 tributaries, forms a part of the wider river system which connects the Aegean basin in the south and the Pannonian basin in the north where it joins the Black Sea drainage basin. As such it is the natural route that connects Central and Western Europe with the Southern Balkans and Western Asia (modern-day Turkey). As I discuss in the following section, it is this transitory nature of the local geography that has predominantly

shaped the city of Aleksinac and its surrounding villages in the past, and still continues to inform the region's present and views of the future.

3.2. Crossroads of Empires

Besides the prehistoric archeological sites belonging to Neolithic, bronze and iron age cultures, Aleksinac valley is also home to numerous archeological sites belonging to the Roman era. The Romans started conquering the territory of today's Serbia during the 2nd century BC, and immediately started building a network of roads across the conquered territories (Krleža, 1988). One of the most important roads was completed in the 1st century AD connecting Belgrade (called *Singidunum* during Roman times) and Constantinople (Jireček, 1959). The road was approximately 670 roman miles¹⁶ long, 9 steps (6 meters) wide, and is known as *Via Militaris* (Figure 8), although other names were also used for the same road or parts of it, such as *Via Diagonalis*, *Via Publica* or *Agger Publicus* (Zirojević, 1970). Along the road, there were 31 fortified settlements that served as resting stops with facilities to stay the night (*mansiones*), and 43 fortified stations (*mutationes*) where horses and carriages could be exchanged (Jireček, 1959).

¹⁶ One Roman mile is equal to 1.482 meters



Figure 8. Via Militaris going through Serbia (Source: Holzner, 2014)

On the way from Belgrade to Constantinople, Via Militaris passed through the Južna Morava valley, and records show that one Roman fortified settlement and one station for horses and carriages were located in today's Aleksinac municipality. The settlement was named *Praesidium Pompei*, and is one of the just few settlements (*mansiones*) in this part of Via Militaris for which the exact location is known today (Rašković, 2001; Crnčević et al. 2013). The settlement is located between the villages Ćićina and Rutevac, some 6 kilometers north-west from the town of Aleksinac (Figure 8). It is believed to have been destroyed in the 5th century AD, when the Huns lead by Attila invaded and pillaged the Balkans (Spirić, 1995).

People working the fields in villages surrounding Aleksinac still occasionally and accidentally discover various artefacts from the Roman era, such as coins, pottery, lamps, fibulae, jewelry and so on.

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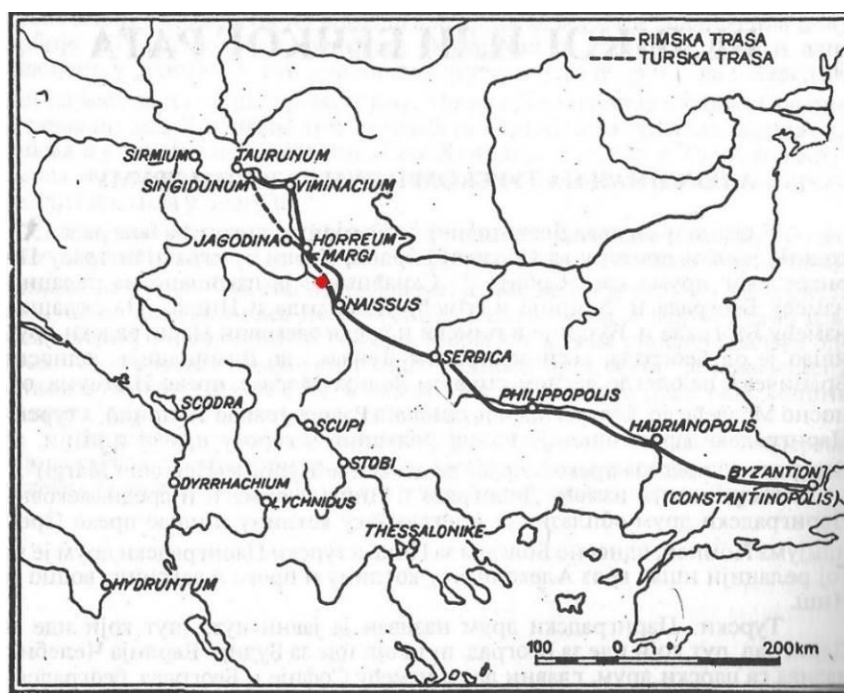


Figure 9. Via Militaris (full line) and Constantinople Road (dotted line) with Aleksinac marked in red. (Source: Spirić, 1995, adapted by the author)

Finally, after the second World War Yugoslavia initiated its highway building efforts with the Brotherhood and Unity Highway project that was to connect the capitals of four constituent republics – Slovenia, Croatia, Serbia and Macedonia. The highway would also further connect Yugoslavia with Austria to the north-west and Greece to the south-east. The Brotherhood and Unity highway was finally completed in 1963 (Pozharliev, 2016). The highway from Belgrade to Niš, where it divides into two tracks – one to the east towards Sofia (Bulgaria) and one to the south to Skopje (North Macedonia) and further towards Greece, once again took the most natural route avoiding significant changes in elevation and making the road as short as possible at the same time. In other words, the highway followed the same route laid almost two millennia ago by the Roman armies, and reestablished some 500 years ago by the Ottoman Turks.

When the eastern track of the highway (E-80) from Niš to the Bulgarian border started being built in 2010, workers excavated extremely well-preserved remains of Via Militaris near the town of Dimitrovgrad (Figure 10). In fact, some 28 archeological sites were

threatened during the construction of this eastern track of the highway going from Niš towards Sofia (Panić, 2010), but with archeological supervision the majority of these sites were successfully preserved.



Figure 10. Excavating works on a part of Via Militaris discovered while laying ground for the new highway in 2010 (Source: Panić, 2010)

3.3. Inveterate Pasts – Eternal Recurrence

In the following section I will engage the historical data on the town origins and development and combine it with my ethnographic data from the present, in order to show how some of the local present realities (and future prospects) are historically structured. I will tell these stories asynchronously. In the first section I will draw parallels between the Turkish origins and present-day developments in the town. In the second section I will draw parallels between the town's development after the liberation from the Ottoman Empire and once again – the current realities in Aleksinac.

3.3.1. *The Birth of the Town*

The first recorded mention of Aleksinac, under that name and at the current location, can be traced back to the Middle Ages, during the Ottoman occupation of Serbia. Namely, Peruničić (1978) traces the first written mention of Aleksinac to 1567 when the Italian scholar and explorer Marco Antonio Pigafetta travelled from Vienna to Constantinople on a diplomatic mission from Emperor Maximilian II to Sultan Selim II. An account of this voyage was later published under the name “*Itinerario di Marc'Antonio Pigafetta gentil'huomo Vicentino*” and this is where Peruničić (1978) finds the first recorded mention of Aleksinac, concluding that the Turks established the town sometime between 1459, when Serbia fell completely under the rule of the Ottoman Empire, and 1567, when the first record of the town appears in literature.

While conducting my research in Aleksinac and talking to the local residents about the origins of the town, several people told me a myth that they heard about how Aleksinac came to be. Later I also found the same myth recorded in Perunicic's (1978) seminal work on the history of Aleksinac. The myth states that a Turkish feudal lord (*Ayan*) Hussain Aga owned much of the land in the Aleksinac valley and himself lived where today's village Kraljevo lies, just north of Aleksinac, where he also had a tavern and a guesthouse (*meyhane* in Turkish, or *mehana* in Serbian). He would spend most of his days sitting in front of his tavern, but every night he would hear slurs directed at him coming from a haiduk¹⁷ (*hajduk*) hiding in a nearby forest. Once Hussain Aga decided he had had enough of the haiduk's insults, he hired an army captain (*bölükbaşı* in Turkish, or *buljubaš* in Serbian) named Aleksa to capture the hiding haiduk. Indeed, Aleksa captured the haiduk hiding in the forest and handed him over to Hussain Aga who then impaled him in front of his tavern and left the body there as a

¹⁷ A Balkan outlaw opposed to Turkish rule

warning sign to any other haiduks hiding in this region. As a reward for his work, Aleksa received a large plot of land south of Hussain Aga's tavern, where river Moravica flows into the river Morava – the land where Aleksinac lays today.

Regardless of whether the myth about Hussain Aga and Aleksa was based on true events, what the myth does reveal, just as the historical documents do, is that the settlements in the Aleksinac region indeed appeared around the Constantinople Road and formed around taverns and guesthouses that served the travelling Ottoman army and tradesmen. Much like the older Roman fortified settlements, the remains of which are found along the Roman Via Militaris including in the Aleksinac valley, the settlements that appeared during the Ottoman rule, including Aleksinac itself, were places where the travelling Ottoman army and tradesmen would have a chance to rest, eat and drink, and stay the night and recuperate before continuing their journey from Constantinople to Belgrade or vice-versa.

The local Serbian population usually had one of several options. One was to join the Ottoman forces, pledge allegiance to the Sultan and accept him as their leader, thus securing a safer and better livelihood for themselves¹⁸. Others could serve local feudal lords, work on their estates producing food or other goods for the lord and the travelling army and tradesmen. The third option was to join the haiduk rebel forces and oppose the Ottoman rule, hiding in the hills and forests and attacking and robbing the tradesmen travelling along the Constantinople Road, which haiduks were known for (Figure 11).

¹⁸ This could have been the story of Aleksa from the myth, as Aleksa is a Serbian name and *buljubaš* (army captain) was a lower-level infantry army rank attainable by Serbs who agreed to serve the Sultan.



Figure 11. Haiduks hiding in the forest, 19th century illustration from an unknown author
(Source: Kovačević, 2019¹⁹)

Serving the Ottoman army, tradesmen and feudal lords was thus a local reality for the majority of local residents in the Aleksinac region for centuries to come and most of the town's existence, all the way until this region gained independence and became part of newly (*de facto*) independent Serbia in 1833²⁰.

3.3.2. *From Ottoman Occupation to Turkish Investments*

After the collapse of Yugoslavia, and with it the socialist dream of self-management and determination, Serbia once again reappeared at the periphery of global capitalism and more widely opened its doors to the global flows of capital and finance by way of the “shock therapy doctrine” marked by deregulation, liberalization and privatization processes.

¹⁹ Kovačević, P. 2019. Zašto se Vučko odmetnuo u hajduke? (Why did Vučko join the haiduks?). Available at <https://uzicanstveno.rs/uzicanstveno/zasto-se-vucko-odmetnuo-u-hajduke/>

²⁰ *De jure* independence only came after the 1878 Treaty of Berlin when the Principality of Serbia gained international recognition and was soon elevated (in 1882) to the status of Kingdom.

Corruption and clientelism resulted in the destruction of the majority of former Yugoslav enterprises in Aleksinac as well as across the country. Only a few of the privatized companies in Aleksinac were considered “successful privatizations”, meaning that the new private owners further invested in these companies and continue to run these businesses and offer employment to local residents. Most of the local residents I spoke with specifically name two such “successful privatizations” one of which is the former Hotel Morava, along with a separate restaurant and snack bar, located at the town’s entrance right next to the highway.

After several failed attempts to sell the hotel since bankruptcy was declared in 2011, the hotel was finally sold in 2013 for just 17 million dinars (around € 150.000) to a company named Fevfki, which at the time owned a small textile production facility in Trstenik, some 90 kilometers west of Aleksinac. The owner of the company is a Turkish entrepreneur Fevzi Şilik, who was born in Prizren, Kosovo in 1955, started his private import-export business there during the 1980s, but then moved to Turkey when war broke out in Yugoslavia in the early 1990s. He developed his textile production and export business in Turkey and re-entered the Serbian market with a small textile production facility and textile import company Fevfki (the name of his eldest son) in Trstenik after the fall of Slobodan Milošević.

Although the Hotel, together with the restaurant and snack bar and 6,5 hectares of land, was sold for only €150.000, it required significant investment to be brought back to life. A total of € 6 million was supposedly invested in the reconstruction of the restaurant, hotel, newly built spa and wellness center, swimming pool, and with further announced but unrealized as of yet plans to build an outlet center next to the hotel.

The separate restaurant, located right next to the hotel, was reconstructed first and opened its doors to the public already in 2014, when reconstruction of the hotel also commenced. The newly refurbished restaurant opened under the name “Istanbul” (Figure 12) and it offers a wide range of traditional Turkish dishes made by Turkish chefs, alongside a few of the local specialties.



Figure 12. Restaurant Istanbul (Source: Restaurant Istanbul facebook page²¹)

The reconstruction of the hotel was completed already the following year. In March 2015, the hotel also opened its doors to guests, changing the name from Morava (the name of the river flowing behind the hotel) to “Bosphorus” (Figure 13) – the famous narrow which divides the European and Asian continents and around which Istanbul stretches.

Finally, in March of the following year, 2016, a Spa and Wellness center was completed within the grounds of the hotel complex offering a Turkish bath and sauna, as well as various types of massage services to hotel guests as well as locals and travelers passing by but not staying in the hotel.

²¹ <https://www.facebook.com/Restaurant-Istanbul-328277997346745>



Figure 13. Hotel Bosphorus (Milićević, 2015)

The entire business visibly targets Turkish customers, which the owner himself confirmed in an interview given to a Turkish financial magazine *Turcomoney* in November 2015. According to Fevzi, there are between 2,5 and 3 million Turkish people traveling up and down this highway, which represents the shortest route between Turkey and Turkish diaspora centers in Europe (eg. Germany), annually and “these people need to rest” (*Turcomoney*, 2015). In fact, Fevzi claims that it was a traffic accident that happened between Belgrade and Niš involving a tragically killed Turkish family that inspired him to buy and restore the hotel in Aleksinac, offering Turkish travelers a place to rest, before continuing their “long journey from Turkey to Europe or vice versa” (*Turcomoney*, 2015)²². This location, as Fevzi puts it, is “exactly half way between Turkey and Europe”.

²² Turkish travelers and truckdrivers were always among the most numerous users of Serbian highways, and accidents involving Turkish citizens occur every year, often with fatal consequences and because the Turkish drivers drive for too long without resting. For this reason, even the famous Yugoslav (Serbian) comedy film from the 1980s “*Tesna koža*” (A Tight Spot) dealt with this topic. Namely, in the first of 4 sequels to the movie

Fevzi welcomes the Turkish travelers not only with a familiar name and feel of the place, the Turkish dishes, sweets, baths and massages, but he also brought some of the hotel and restaurant employees from Turkey, allowing guests to conduct all communication with the staff and use all services exclusively in Turkish. The hotel's website (www.bosphorushotel.rs), although registered in Serbia, only has a Turkish and English version of the website, and the hotel's Facebook page is entirely in Turkish, including promotional videos for the hotel and restaurant. The Facebook page also features videos about the hotel aired at Turkish language German television channel Kanal Avrupa that targets the large Turkish diaspora living in Germany (www.facebook.com/bosphorushotel/) which in fact represents the Hotel's largest target audience, alongside Turks traveling to Europe and to a lesser degree Turkish truckdrivers transporting goods from Turkey to Europe and vice-versa, who mostly visit the restaurant but rarely stay the night.

By now, the parallel between the time Aleksinac was founded in the 16th century and the current developments in the town and region should be evident. What was once the Constantinople Road has since become the Serbian Corridor X highway, part of the pan-European E75 highway, which for the most part follows the same route as the former Constantinople Road, just as the Constantinople Road followed the route of the old Roman Via Militaris before it. And while it was the Ottoman army and tradesmen stopping here to eat and rest in the taverns and guesthouses (*meyhane*) of the Ottoman feudal lords, it is now the Turkish diaspora, travelers and truckdrivers stopping to eat and rest in the restaurant and hotel owned by the Turkish businessman.

published in 1987, the main character Dimitrije Pantić, who is a clerk at a failing Yugoslav enterprise led by a corrupt and incompetent director, suffers a car accident caused by a sleepy Turkish citizen. After talking to Mustafa, the Turk who caused the accident, Dimitrije comes up with a brilliant business idea that could save the failing company he works for and proposes to the director that the company builds a Motel by the highway, just outside of Belgrade, that would specifically target Turkish travelers. Dimitrije suggests that the motel should offer everything possible that would make the Turkish travelers feel at home, including traditional Turkish dishes and sweets, hookahs (nargile), belly dancers and so on. Even though they manage to convince investors from Slovenia to invest in the motel, the motel never gets built, the director embezzles the company money and both the characters end up in jail.

In fact, the owner of the Bosphorus Hotel, Fevzi Silik, satisfied with the occupancy rate of his Hotel in Aleksinac and his investment in general, quickly decided to expand his business and open other hotels along the highway, probably in Niš and Belgrade, as he said in the interview (Turcomoney, 2015). Indeed, in 2019 Fevzi bought a part of the assets (land and building) of another bankrupt Yugoslav enterprise “Niš Auto” in the city of Niš, where he plans to invest €10 million and build a new hotel (Alihodžić, 2019). Fevzi also decided to make the Aleksinac municipality his home, and bought a house in the village Nozrina, not far from his hotel, where he now lives with his wife (Vukosavljević, 2016). His business development in Serbia has also earned him the title of a DEIK representative (*Dış Ekonomik İlişkiler Kurulu* – Foreign Economic Relations Board of Turkey) and the Vice-President at the Turkish-Serbian Business Association, established in Belgrade by the Turkish Ministry of Foreign affairs (Stevanović, 2016).

3.3.3. From Feudal to Capitalist Exploitation

Although the Bosphorus hotel complex, with all its amenities, does target mostly Turkish travelers passing by on the highway, it is also technically open to local residents. The majority of them, however, are unable to afford the food at the restaurant or the services offered by the Spa and Wellness center because the prices are set significantly above the local standards and adjusted to the pockets of its main target audience which is the Turkish diaspora (making a) living in western Europe. Only a handful of local small business owners or otherwise relatively wealthy citizens are able to afford an occasional meal at the restaurant, a massage at the wellness center or a daily pass at the swimming pool. Others can only hope to visit the hotel complex by finding employment within it. Yet, unlike in most other respects in which this hotel complex is completely divorced from the place it is physically situated in, including its services, menu items, prices and the very customers it targets, the only aspect of

its business that is firmly grounded in local realities is the material base of local labor conditions and salaries that it pays to its local employees.

I spent most of 2015 in Aleksinac, witnessing both the (re)construction of the hotel and the first few months upon its opening. The marble built in during the reconstruction, along with high quality furniture brought to decorate the rooms and common areas of the hotel, suggested that the new hotel will indeed be luxurious and unlike anything previously seen in Aleksinac. Many of the local residents I spoke with expressed high hopes that the new hotel will not only bring new jobs to the town that desperately needs them, but that these jobs would finally offer decent salaries that would reflect the expensive look of the new hotel and the total investment made in it. Already during the reconstruction several people told me that they were preparing their resumes and waiting to apply for jobs at the soon-to-be-opened hotel. The salaries at the previously opened restaurant, which were on par with salaries in other restaurants in the area, did not dissuade them. The restaurant did not look nearly as luxurious after all.

The reconstruction phase, however, already offered glimpses into the future. I had heard from several of my interlocutors that people employed as physical laborers during the reconstruction were not satisfied with their employer. Many, as I was told, did not hold proper work contracts but were rather employed off the books. A salary of 18.000 RSD²³ (around €150) a month, which was below the legal minimum of around 21.000 RSD (€180) at the time, was mentioned multiple times by several people I spoke with. I also kept hearing that the same construction workers were required to work 10 hours a day, without any additional compensation. When the hotel was finally ready to be opened in March of 2015, any remaining hopes for better remuneration and working conditions withered away. The owner announced that they will be hiring 40 people to work at various positions in the hotel

²³ RSD stands for (Republic of) Serbia dinars

complex, and that the starting salary will be between 20.000 and 25.000 RSD (€170 to €220) a month, depending on the job and previous work experience (Stevanović, 2015).

Despite shattered hopes for a decent pay, and due to chronic joblessness in the town, many people still sent their resumes and waited to be invited for a job interview. Even after the hotel opened, I kept hearing that a part of the employees continued working off the books, meaning not only that they can be paid less than the legal minimum (and the amount of 18.000 RSD again kept coming up in conversations), but more importantly that the employer did not pay salary taxes and mandatory social security contributions (including health insurance, unemployment insurance and disability and pension insurance) leaving such employees in an extremely precarious situation.

For the current residents of Aleksinac the hotel owned by their new Turkish neighbor and employer, who also brings daily experiences of Turkish culture (language, music, cuisine and so on) and encounters with thousands of Turks who now stop in their town daily, represents a novel experience in their lifetime. On the surface, the hotel's existence lacks a relational and identity-building (both individual and social) virtue not only for its visitors, but for the current residents of the town as well. Yet, as shown in previous pages, the "Turkish hotel" did not come into existence out of nowhere. It deeply relates to both history and local identity in a wider timeframe.

In other words, the hotel both destabilizes the local residents' "national ontology"²⁴, as Derrida would call it, when looking at the timeframe of their lifetimes, but simultaneously stabilizes it by offering connections to a more distant, ancestral past. These connections to a more distant past do not necessarily require knowledge of history from the local residents, but can also arise more organically – through novel realizations of shared cultural elements, as I have learned from some of the people I spoke with. While most Serbians are aware that some

²⁴ Ontology refers to the linking between identity and territory, nation and state through a particular account of history. In Derrida's own words, it is the connection of the "ontological value of present-being to its situation, to the stable and presentable determination of a locality, the topos of territory, native soil, city, body in general" (Derrida, 1994, p.82).

Serbian words come from the Turkish language, as a result of centuries long occupation by the Ottoman Empire, they usually are not aware of the amount of such “Turkish words” (*turcizmi*)²⁵ and cannot name but a few. Thus, when actually confronted with the Turkish language they are surprised with the number of words they are able to recognize, as several people in Aleksinac told me. The same can be said about the cuisine – with the majority of “traditional Turkish dishes” offered at the Istanbul restaurant being not only familiar to the locals, but considered by many as “traditional Serbian dishes”. Even the popular Turkish music played in the restaurant often sounds oddly familiar to the locals, with a recognizable rhythm, beat and instrument selection²⁶.

The connections to a more distant past are, however, also made evident in the working conditions faced by Aleksinac residents working at the “Bosphorus” hotel. What was once feudal relations and exchanging labor for food and shelter, is now revived as capitalist exploitation of labor in exchange for pay that is below the legal minimum, barely covering ‘food and shelter’, and without properly paid taxes and mandatory social security contributions.

In 2019, another relatively large privatization occurred in Aleksinac when 142 hectares of arable land that previously belonged to the Agricultural Industrial Combine Aleksinac (*poljoprivredno-industrijski kombinat Aleksinac*) was auctioned off to the sole bidder – a company named Misbell, registered in Belgrade, Serbia (AleksinacNet, 2019). As the company’s website states, Misbell was registered in 2017 in Serbia as a local branch of the Turkish company Misbell, which specializes in distribution and production of walnut saplings grown in the Bandırma region of Turkey (www.misbell.net). Misbell bought the land in

²⁵ There are over 8000 words in the Serbian language that come from the Turkish language, although many are not used today and some have changed meaning over time (Talović, 2011)

²⁶ The presence of the Ottoman empire on the Balkan peninsula has led to the mixing of cultures and folklore that has since mostly been reinterpreted as authentically “national” (whether Serbian, Bulgarian, North Macedonian, Greek, Bosnian, Montenegrin and so on). This was beautifully captured by the Bulgarian writer, director and producer Adela Peeva in her documentary “Whose is this song?” where she travels across Turkey, Bulgaria, Greece, Serbia, North Macedonia, Albania and Bosnia talking to locals about an old song that each of these nations consider part of their own authentic folklore, despite the fact that the same song exists across these countries (Peeva, 2003).

Aleksinac with the intent of growing walnuts and expanding their production of walnut saplings. Here too we see a re-establishment of former imperial and feudal relations in the form of contemporary capitalist relations. While the local population was once forced to serve the Ottoman feudal lords and worked the local land that was dispossessed through military intervention, the local population today can serve a Turkish agricultural company and work the local land that it dispossessed through capitalist privatization.

3.3.4. From A European Periphery...

When Serbia gained independence, after the liberation from the Ottoman Empire in the first half of the 19th century, industry slowly started to develop in the country, including in the Aleksinac region. Yet the impoverished citizens of a newly independent and predominantly agricultural country at the periphery of European capitalism, had neither the experience, the knowledge (the “know-how”) nor the financial capital to invest in large-scale industrial production. It was thus mostly western (European) foreigners who initiated industrial production in Serbia, including Aleksinac where the first large factory (“the Brewery” in 1865) and the coal mines (1883) were started by the Austro-Hungarian businessmen Johan Apel, who settled in Aleksinac in 1863, converted to Orthodox Christianity and changed his name from Johan to Jovan (Spirić, 2004).

Historical records show that the brewery remained in ownership of Jovan Apel, and later his sons Josif and Hubert, until they finally sold it to a local agricultural cooperative (*zemljoradnička vinogradarsko-voćarsko-reparska zadruga*) in 1940 (Marković, 2015) which after the WW2 became part of a large Yugoslav state-owned agricultural Holding company named Agricultural Industrial Combine (*poljoprivredno-industrijski kombinat*, or PIK for short). The brewery also remained the largest industrial factory in town, and the second

largest employer after the Aleksinac coal mines, all the way until the end of WW2 (Figure 14).



Figure 14. “The Brewery” and “Brewer’s bridge” in Aleksinac during the occupation in WW2
(Source: Spirić and Miladinović, 2006)

Around the same time when Apel was developing his brewery in Aleksinac, people working the fields in villages Kraljevo and Subotinac, just north of Aleksinac, started stumbling upon coal while plowing the land (Vučković, 1960). It was again Jovan Apel, the founder of the brewery in Aleksinac, who saw great potential in this newly discovered coal and envisioned it powering his brewery which relied on manual production at the time. On May 28 1883, Jovan Apel together with Đorđe Dimitrijević, an affluent doctor from Aleksinac, received State permits (*Povlastica*) known as “Kraljevac”, to explore and exploit coal on 950 hectares of land around villages of Kraljevo and Subotinac (Peruničić, 1978;

Spirić, 2004). Indeed, the first tons of coal dug here were used to power the brewery in Aleksinac, and from 1884 onwards the new and much larger brewery in Niš as well.

In 1902, Jovan's sons, Josif and Hubert, who inherited the coal mines, together with Đorđe Dimitrijević decided to sell the coal mines and all mining permits in Aleksinac. The mines and permits were sold to Emil Forman, a Belgian engineer who already owned the Majdanpek mines in Serbia and mines in Sambre-Meuse valley in Belgium (Spirić and Miladinović, 2006; Vučković, 1960).

Immediately after the purchase of the Alekinac mines and mining permits, Forman hired "a German expert" (Vučković, 1960:16) to conduct further exploratory works. The exploratory wells uncovered vast new reserves of coal, so already in May 1903 Forman managed to attract 66 new investors from western Europe who became shareholders in the newly founded "Nameless society for exploitation of Aleksinac mines" (*"Bezimeno društvo za eksploataciju Aleksinackih rudnika"*), headquartered in Brussels, Belgium (ibid.). The Ministry of Forestry and Mining of Kingdom of Serbia, signed off a 40-year long concession to the "Nameless society", with rights to explore and exploit coal, shale²⁷ and any other ore found in the area, and included the rights to use 800 hectares of nearby forests for the construction of mining shafts (ibid.).

The Belgian "Nameless Society" indeed managed the coal mines for the next 40 years, when the end of the concession period coincided with the liberation of Aleksinac and the mines from German military forces (1944) and soon after that the end of World War II and the nationalization of the Aleksinac mines by the newly formed Yugoslav State (Figure 15).

²⁷ Exploratory works conducted at the beginning of the century recognized the oil-rich shale as a significant resource, even though the technology for efficient exploitation of this shale was lacking at the time. The concession however specifically mentions rights to exploit "bituminous shale", along with coal and any other ore to be discovered during exploitation and further exploration (Vučković, 1960)



Figure 15. Share of the “Nameless Society” (*Société Anonyme*) in liquidation (Source: Collection Daniel Stevens, CC BY-SA 4.0²⁸)

²⁸ https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:PS_Charbonnages_d%27Alexinatzz.jpg

Vučković (1960) notes that the 40-year long concession under the Belgian “Nameless Society” was marked by extremely difficult working conditions. A worker’s union was formed in 1905, just a year after the new private owners took over the mines, but the union-organized strike in 1906 failed at improving the working conditions, and instead 40 miners were laid off by the new management (ibid., p.19). 12 to 16 hour working shifts, child labor²⁹, lack of safety and proper work equipment, and a pay that barely covered the basic living costs marked the following decade and a half of mining operations. It was only after the end of First World War that the political situation started changing in Serbia, which in 1918 merged with the newly liberated territories of the former Austro-Hungarian Empire to form the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, later (in 1929) renamed to the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. In this new state, workers’ unions started forming once again on a much greater scale across the country. In April, 1920 the miners organized a large strike in solidarity with the railroad workers who were striking at the time, and finally pressured the management of Aleksinac mines to adopt the 8-hour workday policy and raise wages (Vučković, 1960). The “outside workers” (short-term employment without a contract), however, continued to work 12-hour shifts (ibid.).

Vučković writes that in late 1930s, when coal production reached its peak under the management of the mining director Prim Arnold, the management made plans to start exploiting oil shale as well, because additional profits made from shale would “allow the director Prim Arnold to fly to Brussels each night and spend it with his family and fly back to Aleksinac in the morning” (1960, p.28). The economic crisis followed by the onset of World War 2, however, resulted in these plans never being realized.

²⁹ Boys aged 14 to 18 were often employed as “outside workers” (*spoljni radnici*) for various positions within the mining company (Vuckovic, 1960)

3.3.5. ...to A Global Periphery

After some five decades of Yugoslav socialism, marked by rapid industrialization, strong economic development, waning poverty rates, rising living standards, social ownership of the means of production and the Yugoslav self-management system, Serbia once again re-appeared at the periphery of global capitalism at the turn of the century. Aleksinac residents, impoverished by the collapse of Yugoslavia's economy and the subsequent wars, sanctions and hyperinflation, once again had no capital to restart the local economy, while their socialist experience and know-how became relatively "outdated" in light of the transformed global economy. It was thus once again mostly 'foreigners', now in the form of large multinational companies headquartered in capitalist cores, that bought some of the old Yugoslav enterprises and restarted production in Aleksinac, just like across the country, employing the local citizens and re-shaping the local economic, social and political relations.

The second "successful" privatization in Aleksinac that my interlocutors always named (besides hotel "Bosphorus") was that of clothing confection "Morava" ("*Konfekcija Morava*"), a former large socialist clothing factory at the town's entrance. "Morava" was bought in 2007 by "Grammer" – a German company with more than 50 production, distribution and logistics sites in 20 countries, spread across 4 continents (www.grammer.com). In Aleksinac, Grammer produces covers for automotive driver and passenger seats, and with almost 2.000 employees (during peak production periods) is by far the largest employer in the municipality.

Although salaries paid by Grammer were not among the common complaints I heard from my interlocutors, poor (and worsening) labor conditions were. As I discuss in Chapter 6 of this dissertation, Grammer is part of a growing industry in Serbia that is structured around poorly paid and labor-intensive work and marked by frequent violations of workers' rights and increasingly inhumane working conditions. Suppression of unionization, harassment and mobbing at the workplace, short or denied breaks and production norms that are impossible to

meet have led one of my interlocutors to compare such working conditions to concentration camps (see Chapter 6), but are also eerily reminiscent of the working conditions in the Aleksinac mines when the Belgian “Nameless society for *exploitation* of Aleksinac mines” used to run them a century ago.

3.4. The Rise of the town – Aleksinac during Yugoslavia

After the second World War and the renewal of Yugoslavia, now as a federation led by the Communist Party of Yugoslavia, the political and economic system started rapidly changing, and these changes were tied to dynamic social changes. The state socialism of “second Yugoslavia”³⁰ was built on the rubbles, both literally and figuratively, of the previous sociopolitical and economic structures, changing the historical context from that of the European capitalist periphery to constructing a whole new socialist order. In constructing this new state socialism, Yugoslavia initially followed Soviet formulas, but soon started building its own version of socialist self-management, which also evolved and suffered internal transformations throughout the course of socialist Yugoslavia’s existence. Throughout these different phases of building state socialism, the main goal was the same – modernization of the Yugoslav society by means of mass education, rapid industrialization and approximation to other European countries in terms of technical and technological achievements and living standards, while simultaneously building more humane and just social relations (Milošević, 2017).

The Yugoslav socialist revolution could not achieve its goal of constructing the new socialist citizen by the mere revolutionary regime change. Thus, the speed of building this new society became determined by its internal obstacles – existing class structure and (the

³⁰ Federal People’s Republic of Yugoslavia from 1945 to 1963 and Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia from 1963 until its dissolution in 1992

lack of) class consciousness and extremely limited economic power to effect significant and rapid changes.

Immediately after the second World War and the constitution of second Yugoslavia, industrialization became the main imperative and goal put forward by the communist regime. Youth work actions (*Omladinske radne akcije* – ORA) and work actions (*radne akcije*) as voluntary labor activities by work brigades (*radničke brigade*) were organized across the country³¹ (Figure 16; Figure 17), first to rebuild the public infrastructure that was destroyed during the war, such as roads, railways, electrical facilities, mines and public buildings, and then also to construct new factories that would become the backbone of the modernized Yugoslav economy (Latifić, 1997).

Construction of factories, mostly those operating within heavy industry, initiated a rapid movement of people from rural to urban settlements. By 1953 the share of working population who worked in agriculture fell by 14 percent when compared to the pre-war census from 1938 (Milošević, 2017) and was now at 68,3 percent (Lazić, 1999). This trend continued in the following years, with the share falling under 50% in the 1971 census, and by 1981 the share of people working in agriculture plummeted to just 26,6 percent (Lazić, 1999; Srećković, 2015).

³¹ The first work brigades and (youth) work actions were in fact organized already during the occupation in 1942 and 1943 as evidenced by Figure 18 and Figure 24



Figure 16. ORA near Aleksinac with the mining cable car in the background (Source: Aleksinac Večiti Grad)



Figure 17. Work brigade in Aleksinac while building the water supply system in 1943 (Source: Aleksinac Večiti Grad)

Immediately after the end of WW2, Youth Work Actions were organized in Aleksinac to rebuild the infrastructure that was destroyed during the war, and restarting and increasing

the production in the coal mines was a top priority. Although the Belgian “Nameless Society” remained the formal owner and Prim Arnold the formal director of the mines, the reconstruction and operation of the mines was managed by the local engineer Bora Miladinović (Vučković, 1960). The “Nameless Society” was charged and convicted in court for war profiteering and collaboration with the German military forces in early 1946 and the mines were finally nationalized in December of the same year when the Law on Nationalization was adopted (ibid.).

Coal was one of the main resources needed to rebuild the war-torn country, so from 1946 to 1950, the coal mines were directly managed by the Ministry of Mining (ibid.). From September 1950 onwards, when Yugoslavia pioneered its “workers’ self-management” system, the coal mines were given to the workers’ collective to manage (ibid.). Production quickly reached pre-war numbers, and with further exploratory works and investments, it continued to rise (Table 2)

Year	Production (tons)	Year	Production (tons)
1946	141.414	1953	278.397
1947	238.836	1954	286.167
1948	280.563	1955	330.032
1949	251.284	1956	367.331
1950	273.885	1957	367.939
1951	256.179	1958	365.484
1952	261.704	1959	405.753

Table 2. Coal extraction in the Aleksinac coal mines from 1946 to 1959 (Source: Vučković, 1960)

3.4.1 Development of Yugoslav industry

From the 1950s onwards rapid industrialization took place in Aleksinac, as it did across the entire Yugoslavia. While Aleksinac remained known for the coal mines as the biggest company in the town and the region, from 1950 onwards it also became home to some 30 factories and other industrial companies, both small and large, including some notable Yugoslav enterprises such as FAHOP, FRAD, EMPA, PIK Holding, FBS Betonjerka, Konfekcija Morava, Progres and others (Stojanović, 2015).

3.4.1.1. PIK Holding

The Agricultural Industrial Combine (*poljoprivredno industrijski kombinat*) or PIK, for short, as it is most often called, was the second largest company in the Aleksinac Municipality and the second pillar of the local economy. PIK was a holding company working in the agriculture and food and beverage sectors, with several smaller companies operating within the holding. It was a regional representative of a number of such companies set up by the Yugoslav Communist regime across the entire country, and one of the largest of its kind in Yugoslavia. While setting up these large state/publicly owned agricultural companies, Yugoslavia departed from the soviet model of land ownership and agricultural production in the late 1940s in that it maintained private ownership of land while only capping the amount of land that could be privately owned to 30 hectares in 1945 and finally 10 hectares in 1953 (Milošević, 2017). As a result, Milošević (2017) notes that as much as 82% of agricultural land remained in private property in Yugoslavia according to the data from 1981.

Agricultural companies such as PIK were obligated to buy any surplus produced by the private farmers at guaranteed state-fixed prices, in effect indirectly employing a much larger number of people than those formally working for the company, as often mentioned by

my interlocutors. So while PIK formally employed between 1.000 and 1.500 people, as many as 16.000 individual farmers in the Aleksinac municipality, or “cooperants” (*kooperanti*) as they were called, would also earn their living or supplement their earnings by selling their agricultural goods (grain, fruits, vegetables) to the company, as I was told by Dušan, my interlocutor. This is why several of my interlocutors name PIK, rather than the coal mines, as being the largest employer in the municipality in the past. To make the purchase of agricultural goods from individual farmers easier and more streamlined, PIK set up a number of purchasing stations (*otkupne stanice*) across the villages in the Aleksinac municipality.

While also producing agricultural goods on the hundreds of hectares of land that PIK owned, which enabled stable and targeted production, albeit much smaller quantities than those provided by thousands of individual farmers, the main work of PIK was in fact the processing of raw agricultural goods in the many companies/units operating within the holding company. Wine and fruit juices were produced in The Cellar (*podrum*) which owned the facilities of the famous Brewery (*pivara*). The cellar (*podrum*) would also store wine and juices in the 5.000 square meters of underground storage facilities where a constant temperature of 12 ° Celsius was maintained without the use of cooling or heating equipment. This made the PIK cellar one of just a few of such large passive storage facilities in the world as my interlocutor Dušan claimed. Vegetables were dried in the Drying Facility (*sušara*) and then transported to the “Podravka” factory in Koprivnica, Croatia where they would become part of the world-famous “Vegeta” condiment/flavor enhancer. “Alkoop” Cooperation (*kooperacija*) worked in poultry farming, while the Slaughterhouse (*klanica*) produced and processed meat. “Al Produkt” cold storage (*hladnjača*) packaged and stored frozen vegetables and fruit. Economy (*ekonomija*) grew grains, sugar cane, fruits and vegetables on the hundreds of hectares of agricultural land that it owned across the municipality, while Selection (*selekcija*) worked on improving the yield of various crops through selective

breeding processes, and specialized in sugar cane. These were some of the main individual companies operating within the PIK Holding.

3.4.1.2. FRAD

“FRAD Filters” (“FRAD filteri”³²), was another renowned factory in Aleksinac working in the automotive industry which Yugoslavia developed during the 1950s. FRAD was founded in 1958 and produced a vast array of air, oil and gas filters for cars, buses, trucks, ships, agricultural and construction machines etc. It employed up to 450 people and while initially set up to supply the national “Zastava” car producer (known globally for the Yugo car) and other national factories working in the motor industry (such as IMT, GOSA, SEVER and others), FRAD also exported much of its products both to the Soviet Union and across Europe to brands such as Mercedes, Morris and Fiat (Stojanović, 2011).

3.4.1.3 FBS Betonjerka

The concrete poles factory (fabrika betonskih stubova – FBS) “Betonjerka” was founded in 1965 and as the name suggests, the factory produced concrete poles for electrical and other installations with an installed capacity of up to 32.000 concrete poles annually. It also produced concrete prefabricated housings for electrical substations with a capacity of 500 such substations a year. The poles and substation housings produced here were installed across Serbia as well as other Yugoslav republics. Betonjerka employed around 200 workers year-round and dozens of seasonal workers during the construction season (Stojanović, 2015b).

³² FRAD stands for *Fabrika za proizvodnju Rezervnih Auto Delova* – Factory for production of spare car parts

3.4.1.4. FAHOP

The Steel tubes factory “FAHOP” (*fabrika hladno oblikovanih profila*) was established in 1976 with the intent to further process and treat the steel strips coming from the Smederevo³³-based Iron Mills. It operated as part of the Ferrous Metallurgy Concern “SARTID 1913” of Smederevo. FAHOP had a large installed manufacturing capacity that surpassed the needs of the national market so it quickly oriented its production towards exports. Mastering the production process and adapting the products to the needs of foreign markets, FAHOP quickly reached exports that accounted for 70 percent of its annual outputs. The cold bent steel tubes from FAHOP found their way to markets in China, USSR, Hungary, Italy, Germany, France, Poland, United Kingdom, Sweden and many other countries. The factory employed around 500 people in Aleksinac, and many of them in fact came from the coal mines, as production in the mines decreased in the late 1970s when some of the mining pits were abandoned for safety reasons.

3.4.1.5. EMPA

Light Electrical Engineering and Installation Service Enterprise “EMPA” (*elektroindustrijsko i montažno proizvodno preduzeće*) was another prominent industrial brand operating in the town of Aleksinac, producing equipment for distribution of electricity, electrical substations, electrical measuring instruments and lighting fixtures. EMPA employed over 200 workers from Aleksinac and also exported a significant amount of its production outputs.

³³ Smederevo is a town located 50km south-east of Belgrade and some 150km north of Aleksinac, with the pan-European highway E75 connecting all three towns

3.4.1.6. Mehanika

“*Mehanika*” (Mechanics) was a spin-off company of the coal mines. What used to be a workshop for maintaining and fixing mining equipment within the Aleksinac coal mines, became a separate and independent company in 1976. Building on the long tradition and knowledge in mining equipment technology, “*Mehanika*” started not only repairing but also producing its own mining equipment as well as equipment for the construction industry. It specialized in crushing and separation facilities. “*Mehanika*” produced and repaired equipment for mines, quarries and construction companies across the Yugoslav republics.

3.4.1.7. Konfekcija Morava

Clothing confection “*Morava*” (*konfekcija Morava*) was a large clothing factory at the town’s entrance, which employed around 800 people, (Stojanović, 2011). Unlike the other companies operating within heavy industry, “*Morava*” employed mostly women who worked as seamstresses. Bought by Grammer in 2007, “*Morava*” is considered a rare example of a “successful” privatization in Aleksinac.

Other notable companies working in and around the town of Aleksinac were Social Enterprise “*Jelka Radulovic*” (*društveno preduzece “Jelka Radulovic”*) which produced furniture, Industry of Construction Materials “*Morava*” (*industrija gradjevinskog materijala “Morava”*) which produced roof tiles, and many other smaller companies and workshops.

The establishment of all of these companies and factories in the years following the WW2 drastically changed the local economy. As industrial production took off and surpassed agriculture as the main driver of the local economy, the local earnings and living standards were significantly raised. Already in 1970s local industry in Aleksinac employed over 10.000

people (Stojanović, 2015a). Aleksinac was considered one of the most developed municipalities in the Nišava region (south-east Serbia), with average local incomes being the third highest in the region (Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, 1979).

3.4.2. Socialist development

The growth of the local economy through rising industrial production and job market also brought about significant social changes in the town and municipality. While the total population within the municipality did not see significant changes in Yugoslavia's lifetime (Table 3), the population within the town of Aleksinac saw a dramatic rise from the end of WW2 and the creation of Communist Yugoslavia until the dissolution of the country in 1992 (Table 4). As the data in the tables below show, the municipality experienced significant urbanization in this period, further strengthened by the fact, which the statistical data obscures, that several nearby villages have practically merged with the town as it expanded in all directions.

<u>Population of the Aleksinac municipality</u>	
<i>Year</i>	<i>Population</i>
1948	61.002
1953	64.344
1961	67.200
1971	66.082
1981	67.286
1991	63.844
2002	57.749
2011	51.863
2016 ³⁴	47.562

Table 3. Historical population of the Aleksinac municipality (Source: Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, 2014)

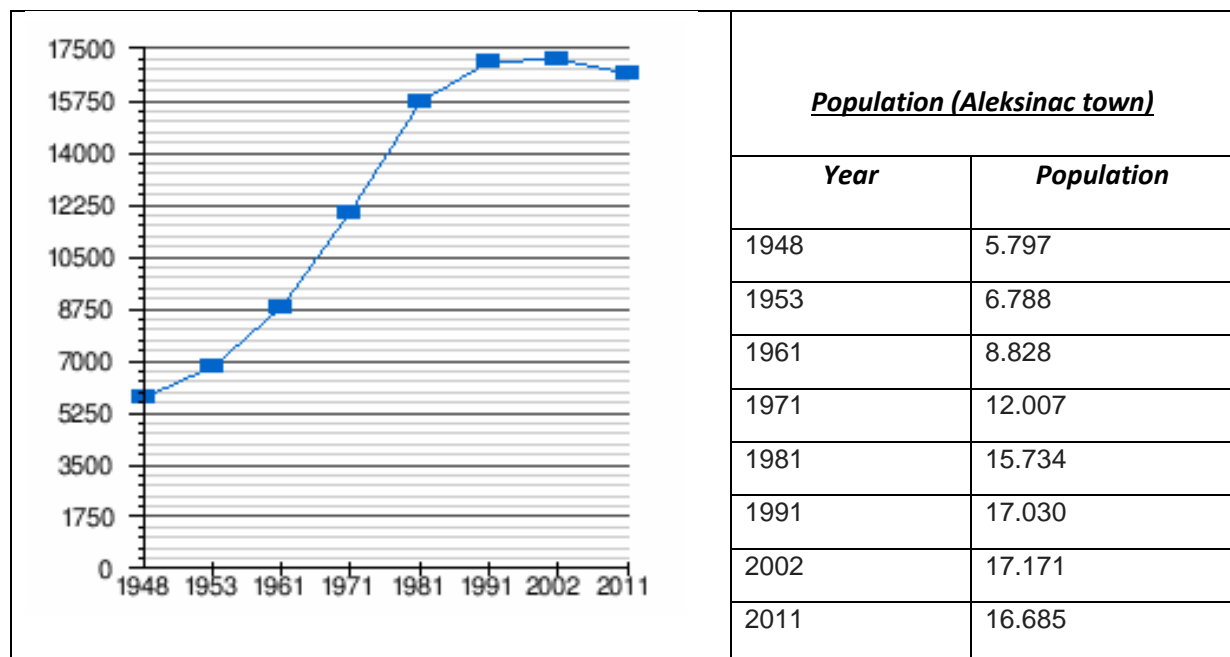


Table 4. Population of Aleksinac town 1948-2011 (Source: Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, 2014)

³⁴ Estimate (Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, 2019)

Although official data shows that the population within the municipality remained relatively stable, this does not mean that both in- and out- migrations were not common. Aleksinac coal mines were one of the largest and most important mines in Yugoslavia and as such attracted large numbers of migrant workers from all parts of the country and even some from abroad. Locals say that at one point there were 23 different ethnicities (*narodnosti*) working in the mines (Mijušković, 2019).

Outmigration was common too, with locals moving to larger towns and university centers in the country (mostly Niš and Belgrade), but also abroad. A significant number of people migrated from former Yugoslavia to the western European countries for both economic and political reasons from the 1950s onwards (peaking in early 1970s), as Yugoslavia was the only communist country that not only consented to these migrations but even encouraged them (Daniel, 2007). Across the former Yugoslav states, the term *gastarbajteri* is used for people who migrated to western European countries, originating from the German word *Gastarbeiter* meaning “guest worker”. Entire villages in the Aleksinac municipality such as Mozgovo and Tešica are often referred to as “Gastarbeiter villages” (*gastarbajterska sela*) because a significant part of the village population migrated to western European countries from 1950s onwards. These past migrations will prove to be significant in shaping the realities of today’s Aleksinac municipality and as such they will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 7.

The growing industry and rising living standards lead to the “golden age” of the 1970s and 1980s in Aleksinac, and Yugoslavia as a whole, which was by then already considered an industrial society. By 1981, the industrial and service sectors in Yugoslavia had grown to 35 and 36 percent respectively (Čalić, 2018). Half of the country’s population lived in cities, while 20 percent of the population owned television sets and 10 percent owned a telephone and an automobile (*ibid.*). People also got used to vacation trips, with 22 million visits abroad just in 1979 (*ibid.*).

My interlocutors without exception sharply contrast this past with the realities of the present (and more recent past) as they reminisce and tell me about the “good life” (*dobar život*) or “decent life” (*pristojan život*) that citizens of Aleksinac enjoyed in the 1970s and 1980s, whether remembering these times themselves or retelling me the stories that they had heard from their parents and other older family members, as was the case with the younger people that I spoke with. It is not only economy that was better, as the people I spoke with often pointed out, but also “the general social atmosphere” (*opšta društvena atmosfera*). “People were better” (*ljudi su bili bolji*), “people knew how to be friends” (*znali su da se druže*) and “there was a sense of togetherness” (*postojao je osećaj zajedništva*) were among the most common sentences I heard from the older residents I talked to.

But the “golden age” didn’t last much longer. Already in the 1980s, after Tito’s death, the Yugoslav economy started showing cracks as did the “brotherhood and unity” spirit of the Yugoslav identity. The large mining accident in the Aleksinac mines in 1989, which resulted in the death of 90 people and the closure of the mines, was followed by the dissolution of Yugoslavia, through bloody wars and in the case of Serbia – international sanctions and one of the world’s worst cases of hyperinflation. Wars, sanctions and hyperinflation decimated the local and national industry, but it was corruption through political and economic mischief that hammered the final nails in the coffin of Aleksinac’s and Serbia’s economy and ideas of “good life”, as I will discuss in the following chapter.

Chapter 4. A Crisis Of Times: Yugoslavia's Rise And Fall As Seen Through The Lens Of Its Temporal Politics

Introduction

The dissolution of Yugoslavia during the 1990s has received and continues to receive a great deal of scholarly attention coming both from within the former Yugoslav republics and from “outside”. The relevance and contemporaneity of Yugoslavia's disintegration is evidenced not only by the attention it continues to attract among social scientists, but also by the fact that issues pertaining to the country's collapse continue to noticeably haunt the daily politics across former Yugoslav republics where ethnic tensions are continually resurfacing and are constantly mobilized in political campaigns. Additionally, particular calendar dates regularly bring back controversies in different post-Yugoslav countries (primarily Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia and Serbia) about whether and how to acknowledge and apologize for past war crimes.

Reviewing the existing literature on the disintegration of Yugoslavia, Jasna Dragović-Soso (2007) identified 5 most common analytical frameworks and their accompanying categories of explanation for Yugoslavia's disintegration. They are:

- 1) Explanations that emphasize the long standing “ancient hatreds” between the Yugoslav republics, and legacies of former imperial rule in the region;
- 2) Explanations that focus on the 19th century national ideologies and the first (Kingdom of) Yugoslavia in the interwar period (1918-1941);
- 3) Explanations that focus on the ideological, economic, and constitutional development and legacy of (2nd) Yugoslavia's socialist system;

- 4) Explanations that specifically focus on the political and intellectual agency in the second half of the 1980s;
- 5) Explanations that focus on impacts of external factors.

These different analytical frameworks and their accompanying explanations reflect different attention and emphases placed on historical contingency (1,2), structural (3,5) or factors pertaining to agency (4,5). Clearly, the complex historical events that unfolded and resulted in Yugoslavia's breakup cannot and should not be reduced to a single interpretative method and accompanying explanation. Rather than seeing the different frameworks and explanations as competing, we should see them as complementary while scrutinizing each endeavor and drawing useful conclusions and implications from all.

Drawing from these different approaches to, and explanations of, both Yugoslavia's successes and its final demise, I would like to add my own perspective that neither falls neatly into one of the above-mentioned categories of analysis and explanations, nor is it completely outside of them.

Rather, in line with my general preoccupation with temporality in this dissertation, I offer a brief analysis of Yugoslavia's rise and fall as seen through the lens of its temporal politics. My intent is not to offer a final "verdict" or provide conclusive answers to Yugoslavia's breakup, but to discuss the evolution of its temporal politics from the very inception of 2nd Yugoslavia after the WW2 to its dissolution in the 1990s. This reading is both compatible with and draws from across the different analytical frameworks and categories of explanation offered by other scholars, as it pays attention to issues of structure, agency and historical contingency.

This chapter thus serves a double purpose of further setting the stage and providing context for my study by looking into the more recent political history of the region, while also unpacking the practical workings of temporal politics and the effects that state-censored

temporalities have on people's ways of thinking, meaning-makings, interpreting and understanding of selves and the world around them. Finally, it offers insights into the current political, social and economic circumstances in Serbia, as well as other former Yugoslav republics, and the temporal reasonings shaped by the post-socialist condition.

4.1. Temporalities of/by the State

In his seminal work on the modern state and temporality, David Gross (1985) discussed how the 19th century nation states shifted, or expanded at the very least, their political focus from controlling space to controlling time, as a novel and efficient way of exercising power. Noting how “[t]he rulers of modern nation-states began to realize that controlling a population's sense of time was not only a source of power but one of the most important ways of exercising power”, Gross (1985:65) concluded that this new focus on temporal politics was intimately related to the greater process of re-thinking the state-citizen relations at the time. By the beginning of the 19th century, the nation states were already unrivaled in the realm of social and political power, as they completely subordinated the competing ecclesiastical and traditional institutions which had previously shaped the social realm through religious behaviors or conducts based on folk customs.

While Gross (1985:53) did clearly differentiate between three different ‘planes of temporality’, echoing the three temporalities simultaneously proposed by Anthony Giddens (1984), namely the:

- 1) temporality of day-to-day existence,
- 2) temporality of one's biological lifetime, and
- 3) temporality of la longue durée³⁵

³⁵ A term borrowed from Ferdinand Braudel (1958) who used it to refer to the ‘timeless’ history of the human-natural environment relationship

his analysis focused mostly on this third temporality – the *longue durée*– which Gross considered the most important and in which he saw the greatest potential for state’s exercise of power, as it “*provides the decisive framework within which the other two temporalities operate*” (1985:54). He argued how the *longue durée*, only amenable to state control and not that of individual citizens, structures the very grid of intelligibility for citizens who acquire meaning, ways of thinking, interpreting and understanding of selves and the world around them, from this supra-individual, almost “all-encompassing” temporal sense.

Giddens considered the day-to-day and *longue durée* temporalities “reversible” (borrowing the term from Levi-Strauss), meaning that daily events and routines, as well as *longue durée* historical narratives, do not have a one-way flow to them, or an end to the flow for that matter, but can rather be altered (1984:35-36). To that he contrasted the lifetime temporality which he considered “irreversible” because it is tied to the time of the biological body and so “passes away” as it leads towards inevitable end/death.

It is on this reversibility of the *longue durée* that Gross centered his analysis, as he discussed how the managers of modern nation states in the 19th century took a more active and ideological interest in the populations’ temporal orientations. It wasn’t that the state had actual interests in temporality and continuity in and of themselves, but rather that the state endorsed particular temporalities that had the effect of strengthening its own legitimacy. By promulgating specific senses of time and past temporalities, and with them - specific symbolic structures, values and frames of meaning, the state could ensure desired behaviors through psychological motivation and winning people’s allegiance, rather than by using brute force and commanding obedience. Thus, the nation states started formulating a ‘pastness’ beneficial to the state, manipulating ‘temporal schemata’ and pushing new forms of periodization and modern political chronologies based on remembrance of civil-historical occurrences by which we still to this day interpret the past and progression of historical time (Gross, 1985).

And while Gross mostly focused on this *longue durée* temporality and the ways in which the state (can) take command of it and produce desired relations and behaviors in society at large, other authors picked up where he left off and showed how the other temporal planes, the day-to-day and mid-range/lifetime, can be just as amenable to state control and important in shaping desired identities, relations and behaviors. In her seminal work on socialist Romania, American anthropologist Katherine Verdery sharply contrasted the Cold Era capitalist and socialist time³⁶, with capitalism(s) constantly pushing for time-space compression and socialism(s) placing “no premium on increasing turnover time and capital circulation” (1996:35). In her nuanced account of the daily livelihoods in 1980s Romania, Verdery (1996) also showed how the daily rhythms and cycles of socialist industrial production were part of a strong state presence and its temporal politics which had the effect of “standardizing” time, relations and behaviors.

In the following sections of this chapter, I will utilize the frameworks offered by Gross, Verdery and others, to discuss the changing temporal schemata and politics during and after the 2nd Yugoslavia, drawing useful insights about Yugoslavia’s creation and dissolution and, more importantly, the present circumstances and temporal reasonings in contemporary Serbia (and other post-Yugoslav republics). I will use the three planes of temporality put forward by Gross and Giddens as an organizing structure for my analysis in the following pages.

³⁶ ‘Capitalist time’ and ‘socialist time’ should not be viewed as binaries here, but rather mutually co-constructive phenomena, or as Susan Buck Morris (2000) suggested – different variants of the utopian project of modernity

4.2. Yugoslavia's "etatization" and remaking of time

Borrowing the term "etatization" (the process of statizing) from Katherine Verdery (which she herself borrowed from the Romanian writer Norman Manea), in the following sections of this chapter I will look into the processes through which the Yugoslav state, both intentionally and unintentionally, took control of citizens' senses of time, from the *longue durée* all the way to their lived day-to-day existence. Like Verdery (1996:40), I prefer to use "etatization", rather than "nationalization" to emphasize the fact that "nation" and "state" have not been isomorphic in Yugoslavia.

While I will use the three planes of temporality put forward by Gross (1985) and Giddens (1984) as an organizing structure for my analysis, I also want to emphasize that the division made between State practices that structure particular temporal reasonings are not as clear-cut. Rather, they are mutually supportive and co-constructive and as such could be discussed at 'other levels' of longevity, or 'different planes of temporality'. I will also stress this argument and expand on it at various points in the following discussion.

4.2.1. *(Re)Writing the Past and the Future: Structuring the longue durée*

"History is written by the victors" goes the famous saying often credited to Winston Churchill who, in popular culture at least, seems to have "won" the historical rights to this quote despite evidence suggesting that the sentence was used by numerous authors an entire century before Churchill's time (see Phelan, 2019).

The constitution of Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia in 1946 was nothing short of a revolutionary transformation of the constituent states. As Gross (1985:74) points out, one of the first things that happen in such circumstances is "a thorough re-ordering of the temporal index in light of the new situation". The 'victors', in other words, get to decide what

temporality should look like, rewriting histories, creating new calendars and transfiguring or repressing old temporalities.

Much like in other communist/socialist states at the time, the teleological ideological framework of Yugoslav Marxism-Leninism was built around the idea that the development towards the communist future was a historical inevitability. Or as Watson (1994:1) put it “*Under state socialism, Marxism-Leninism was not one ideology or political economy among many, but rather was the inevitable and glorious outcome of a discernible historical process*”. Such a notion of world history, as Deema Kaneff (2004:9) points out “*took on the status of a ‘meta-narrative’ – or should I say meta-temporality? – controlled by a political administration which was itself legitimated by the very same meta-narrative [...and] which provided the canopy under which other seemingly fragmented times were subsumed*”.

The history of the world, in other words, was according to (Yugoslav) Marxism-Leninism a history of class struggles, a revolutionary crescendo and a communist future. And it was precisely in the name of the working class, whose revolutionary struggle it represented, that the Communist party of Yugoslavia (later renamed to The League of Communists of Yugoslavia – LCY) appropriated time under Yugoslav state socialism. The 1958 Programme of the LCY, which remained valid until LCY’s dissolution in 1990, meticulously explained the history before the WWII, contemporary socialist present and expected future of the Yugoslav society (Program Saveza komunista Jugoslavije, 1965). As stated in the Programme, the ‘dictatorship of the proletariat’ was the essence of people’s power and it was to be based on the alliance of the working class (*radnička klasa*) and other working people (*radni ljudi*) (Program Saveza komunista Jugoslavije, 1965:109).

The ethnic, national, religious and other historical differences between the ‘Yugoslav peoples’ took a back seat, as their shared class consciousness and historical class struggles, along with their shared socialist future came to the fore. These shared class struggles and future were embodied in Yugoslavia’s “brotherhood and unity” principle (*bratstvo i*

jedinstvo), a Yugoslav version of *E Pluribus Unum*, and represented in the Yugoslav emblem which featured six torches, representing the six Yugoslav republics³⁷, burning together in a single flame, surrounded by wheat (which signified the agrarian past and class belonging) and topped by a red star, which signified the shared communist future (Figure 18). Underneath the torches, wrapped around the wheat, was a blue scroll with the inscribed date November 29th, 1943 when the Partisan resistance movement first proclaimed (Democratic Federal) Yugoslavia during the second session of the Anti-Fascist Council of the People's Liberation of Yugoslavia (AVNOJ) in Jajce, Bosnia and Herzegovina (Mikula, 2003). In popular culture, Yugoslavia was often described as a country with six republics, five nationalities, four languages, three religions, two alphabets – to which I would add – one future!



Figure 18. Yugoslav emblem signifying the “brotherhood and unity” principle (Source: Archives of Yugoslavia)

Mundane temporal life was connected to the realm of eternity through the synthesis of the charismatic and rational-legal procedural characteristics of Marxist-Leninist polity and

³⁷ The first emblem, used between 1943 and 1963 contained 5 torches, representing the 5 nations of Croatia, Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Slovenia, while the 6th torch which represented Bosnia and Herzegovina as the 6th constituent “nation” of Yugoslavia was only officially used after 1963, 2 years after Bosniak “Ethnic Muslims” were recognized as a fully-fledged nation (Dyker, 2013)

economic institutions set up in the immediate years after WWII (Hanson, 1997). Such a synthesis was reflective of Marx's very own conception of time that was an amalgam of rational and charismatic elements (Jowitt, 1992), thus defying the dichotomy between "utopia" and "development" (Hanson, 1997:19; Lowenthal, 1970) and instead merging them within, among others, the institution of the centralized Five-Year plans (*petoletka*) which Yugoslavia implemented already in 1947.

This new revolutionary order was embodied by Josip Broz Tito, a charismatic leader and the country's 'father figure' who reordered time and shifted focus from the historical past to the "utopian" communist future, not only by means of socioeconomic institutions such as the five-year plans, but in various other ways as well (Hanson, 1997). Namely, Tito and the Communist Party were aware that the common Yugo- identity should not be solely based on a shared past and cultural heritage, particularly in light of the 'failed experiment' of the previous Kingdom of Yugoslavia, but would be better off emphasizing a "*common and unique socialist future, centered on modern life and advanced technologies, ensuring equality to all citizens and ethnic groups*" (Pozharliev, 2016:196).

Like in most other east European socialist states, Yugoslavia's youth, as a socially resonant category of citizenship linked to progress and vanguardism, was an important representational and discursive element used to represent the state's very own revolutionary project (Greenberg, 2014; Taylor, 2006) and orientation towards the future. Tito in particular often utilized representations of youth, and associated imagery of youthful regeneration of community and socialist modernity, in gaining popular support (Greenberg, 2014).

Right after WWII Tito started receiving birthday wishes from Yugoslavia's youth, symbolically wrapped in a baton and carried by thousands of Yugoslavia's youth across the country in what came to be known as the famous Relay of Youth (*Štafeta mladosti*) race (Figure 19). The race usually started in Tito's birth town of Kumrovec, Croatia, and then went through major cities and towns, including Aleksinac (Figure 20), across Yugoslavia (Mikula,

2003). All along this journey, the participants would carry the baton (*štafeta*) with a birthday message for Tito from the country's youth, and the event would culminate on his official birthday, May 25th, at the Yugoslav army stadium (*stadion JNA*) in Belgrade where Tito would personally receive the baton during a grandiose ceremony (*slet*) with displays of gymnastics and choirs (Figure 21) (Mikula, 2003). From 1957 onwards, May 25th, Tito's official birthday and the culmination of the Relay of Youth race started to be celebrated as the Youth Day (*Dan mladosti*) in Yugoslavia.



Figure 19. The Relay of Youth race in Slovenia in 1960 (Source: Joze Gal³⁸)

³⁸ Joze Gal, Wikimedia Commons

https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Republi%C5%A1ka_%C5%A1tafeta_mladosti_je_krenila_iz_%C5%A0entilja,_mimo_Pesnice_in_skozi_Ko%C5%A1ake_do_Maribora_1960.jpg



Figure 20. The Relay of Youth passing through Aleksinac n.d. (Source: Aleksinac Večiti Grad)



Figure 21. The Youth day celebration (*slet*) at the JNA stadium in Belgrade (Source: Museum of Yugoslavia³⁹)

³⁹ <https://www.muzej-jugoslavije.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/13-slet.jpg>

Yet another way in which the link between the youth, representing the future, and Tito, representing the state and its revolutionary project, was established was through the institution of “Tito’s pioneers”. Founded already during the WWII, in 1942, by the National Liberation Movement⁴⁰, the Pioneer Alliance of Yugoslavia’s (*Savez pionira Jugoslavije*) role was to include children, who have not yet been ‘touched’ by other ideologies, into the socialist system of education and create a ‘new socialist (wo)man’ out of them (Duda, 2015).

Besides the ceremonial aspect of admission of all 1st grade Yugoslav children into the Pioneer Alliance, and thus their transition from “ideologically undecided” into “ideologically decided” children (Erdei, 2004), the goal of the Alliance was “*to contribute to the socialist upbringing of children of primary school age [...and] foster continuity of the revolution among the youngest generations*” (Duda, 2013:90-91). The Pioneer Alliance also sought to develop certain desirable qualities in children, represented by the acronym PIONIR (Serbo-Croatian word for pioneer): *pošten* (honest), *iskren* (sincere), *odvažan* (brave), *napredan* (progressive), *istrajan* (persistent) and *radišan* (hardworking) (Duda, 2015:59).

During the very ceremony of admission to the Pioneer Alliance, the pioneers, wearing a red scarf around their neck and a blue hat called *titovka* (Tito hat) took an oath to signify their rite of passage. Although the text of the oath went through several changes during the course of Yugoslavia’s existence, the same basic principles remained, reflecting the values of Yugoslav “brotherhood and unity”, and the ‘desirable qualities’ of the ‘new socialist (wo)man’. An English translation of the most commonly used oath is given below:

*“Today, as I become a Pioneer,
I give my Pioneer's word of honor -
That I shall study hard and work diligently,
respect parents and my seniors,*

⁴⁰ The Pioneer Alliance of Yugoslavia was founded at the 1st Congress of the United Alliance of Anti-Fascist Youth of Yugoslavia in Bihać, Bosnia and Herzegovina on December 27th, 1942 – the date which will from 1972 onwards be celebrated as The Day of The Pioneers (Duda, 2015)

and be a loyal and honest comrade/friend⁴¹.

That I shall love our homeland, self-managed

socialist federal republic of Yugoslavia.

That I shall spread the spirit of brotherhood and unity

and the principles for which our comrade Tito fought.

And that I shall value all peoples of the world who respect freedom and peace!”

(Author’s translation)

School curriculums were also made to nurture the same personal qualities, as well as ideological stances. Ogrizović (1972:117) notes how even before the WWII ended, classroom walls across Yugoslavia started to be filled with placards declaring *“Our school will not and must not create enslaved souls! Schools must not be only for the gifted and the children of the rich! All schools – to all peoples!”* (Author translation)

At the 7th congress of the League of Communists of Yugoslavia (LCY) in Ljubljana in 1958, a new LCY Program was adopted which further elaborated and defined the educational goals for the rest of Yugoslavia’s existence (Duda, 2015). The program stated that the goals of socialist upbringing and education are:

“Developing a creative approach amongst the youth towards their future calling and work as such; Developing [a socialist] social consciousness and enabling youth to take an active part in society, within institutions of management and self-management; Developing awareness and knowledge about our peoples’ and entire humanity’s achievements in the fields of social, scientific, technological, cultural, artistic and other creative domains; Nurturing the spirit of brotherhood and unity amongst the Yugoslav peoples; Nurturing internationalism, the spirit of international solidarity amongst the working people and principles of equality and international cooperation in the interest of world peace and

⁴¹ The word “drug” in Serbo-Croatian means both “comrade” and “friend”

progress; Developing scientific, materialistic world-views; Developing multifaceted, activist personalities with intellectual and moral qualities of citizens of socialist communities; Enhancing physical health and wellbeing, particularly by developing physical culture and upbringing as a prerequisite for a normal creative life” (Program Saveza komunista Jugoslavije, 1965, Author’s translation)

These stated educational and upbringing goals for the Yugoslav children and youth once again testify that Yugoslavia’s temporal politics were deeply future oriented, insofar as they regularly brought in charismatic notions of time envisioning a revolutionary transformation and a new social order (Hanson, 1997). Together with other socioeconomic institutions such as the five-year development plans (*petoletka*), and the rational conceptions of time that they carried, they worked towards achieving the promised socialist future inhabited by ‘new socialist (wo)men’ as model citizens of the Yugoslav socialist society.

The past too was (made to) aligned with this future. Looking into the study of history and the processes of production of primary and secondary school history textbooks in Yugoslavia between 1945 and 1960, Snježana Koren (2012) demonstrates how important, as well as contentious, these processes were. This is well captured in the following quote from the 1946 Guidelines for the study of History, which states that:

“The most important thing to understand is that circumstances have drastically changed and it is now the responsibility of social sciences/humanities to explain this social evolution in light of the majority’s interests” (Makek, 1946, Author’s translation)

Immediately after the end of WWII efforts were invested in assuring that primary school children and high school youth from across the 6 Yugoslav republics study ‘the same history’. As Koren (2012) notes, a uniform version of history across the Yugoslav spaces was deemed crucial in developing a shared identity, so the history programs and textbooks from the late 1940s onward conveyed an official state-controlled version of history that had a teleological and pragmatic nature to it. Besides studying the history of the world, children

from across Yugoslavia studied ‘a new version’ of national history that emphasized the shared Yugoslav elements, as well as the most important ‘local’ histories of their own as well as all the other Yugoslav republics (Koren, 2012).

The study of history and history textbooks for primary and secondary schools became a commonly debated topic at various conferences and meetings of historians as well as meetings of the Communist Party/LCY. A common, though rarely directly verbalized critique coming from historians, particularly those working at universities, was that history textbooks for primary and secondary schools chose topics that “fit” materialistic interpretations of history, which resulted in that some of the traditional historical topics either completely lost their place in school curriculums or became newly reinterpreted (Koren, 2012: 108).

By advancing historical materialism as the main (if not only) interpretation of history, not only in school textbooks but across all official communication channels, and further shifting the focus of its temporal politics towards the unifying and utopian future, the Yugoslav state was able to promulgate specific senses of time and past temporalities, and with them - specific symbolic structures, values and frames of meaning. Manipulating the “longue durée” temporality in this way allowed the Yugoslav state to develop and strengthen a shared Yugoslav identity and shape ‘the new socialist (wo)men’ as model citizens of the Yugoslav socialist society.

In the following section, I will look more closely at how the mid-range or lifetime temporality was also put in state’s custody through various socioeconomic and political institutions and advancement of new forms of periodization and modern political chronologies.

4.2.2. Structuring the lifetime

While advancing historical materialism and putting emphasis on the ‘utopian future’ allowed the Yugoslav state to (re)structure the *longue durée* temporality and so the very grid of intelligibility that allows citizens to acquire meaning, ways of thinking, interpreting and understanding of selves and the world around them, other aspects of its temporal politics and socioeconomic and political institutions that it set up allowed the state to also take command of the mid-range or lifetime temporality.

The institution of Tito’s pioneers (*Titovi pioniri*) and the Pioneer Alliance described in the previous pages certainly had the effect of linking Tito, who represented the revolutionary State, and children and youth, as socially resonant categories of citizenship linked to progress and the future. But more than that, the Pioneer Alliance was an institution that structured the lifetime temporalities of citizens from a very early age. Initiation into the Pioneer Alliance at the age of 6 or 7 was a symbolical rite of passage for the Yugoslav children (and their parents) for whom this was just the first step in becoming a model socialist Yugoslav citizen.

Once admitted into the Pioneer Alliance, children would start spending time participating in the various social and educational activities organized by the Alliance. Local chapters of the Pioneer Alliance were in charge of organizing a variety of extracurricular activities for the pioneers, and these varied depending on local conditions but also changed during the course of Yugoslavia’s existence (Duda, 2015). Activities ranged from learning how to carry a (wooden) rifle and assist in military activities in the immediate post-war years, to scouting, sports activities, recitals, art groups, organized field-trips, visits to cultural institutions, organized play-times and so on (ibid.). Throughout these activities the pioneers would learn about and acquire the desired personal characteristics of a ‘good citizen’.

The Pioneer Alliance was involved with school work as well (Duda, 2015). In schools for example, the Pioneer Alliance replicated the Yugoslav self-management system by designating certain roles to children of each class (*odeljene*) – where classmates would pick

(usually through voting) the best peer representatives in their class who would then become ‘the class president’ (*predsednik odeljenske zajednice*), ‘class vice-president’ (*zamenik predsednika odeljenske zajednice*) ‘class secretary’ (*sekretar odeljenske zajednice*), ‘class monitor’ (*redar*), ‘class treasurer’ (*blagajnik odeljenske zajednice*) and ‘class hygienist’ (*higijeničar odeljenske zajednice*) - who made sure that all children had clean hands and hair and neatly trimmed and clean fingernails (*ibid.*). These roles came with certain tasks and activities that children had to invest time to accomplish, all the while learning to take responsibility for their collectives and becoming active participants in Yugoslav (self)management structures. The young pioneers also took on active governing roles in the Pioneer Alliance itself, acting at various hierarchical levels as ‘unit leaders’ (*vođe odreda*), ‘section leaders’ (*vođe sekcija*), ‘group leaders’ (*vođe grupa*) and so on (Duda, 2015:75-76).

Joining the Pioneer Alliance in the 1st grade, children would remain members until the 7th grade (age 13 or 14). From the 8th grade onwards, children would cease to be members of the Pioneer Alliance and become members of the Alliance of Socialist Youth (*ibid.*) thus continuing their active participation in Yugoslav self-management structures and institutionalized activities that effectively structured both their day-to-day as well as their lifetime.

The Yugoslav youth took part in, among other things, the famous Youth Worker Brigades (*omladinske radne brigade*). The youth worker brigades participated in Youth work actions (*omladinske radne akcije – ORA*) and work actions (*radne akcije*) through which they were “materially and ideologically integrated into postwar building efforts” (Greenberg, 2014:26). Even before the WWII was over, during the National Liberation War (*Narodnooslobodilačka borba – NOB*) led by the Communist party of Yugoslavia and Josip Broz Tito as its formal leader, youth worker brigades and work actions started to be organized across Yugoslavia in efforts to aid the Liberation war, produce food and to rebuild the destroyed as well as build new infrastructure (Ristanović, 2014).

Having lost much of its young and middle-aged able-bodied male population in the war, the country had to rely on its women and youth to produce enough food and start rebuilding the destroyed infrastructure. With farmers either already having lost their lives or continuing to participate in the Liberation war, many fertile fields were left uncultivated or there simply were not enough people to pick and collect agricultural goods from the fields. Thus, already in 1944/1945 more than 10.000 youth brigadiers participated in the work actions of picking corn (Figure 22) in the field of the Srem region in Vojvodina (Ristanović, 2014).



Figure 22. Poster inviting Yugoslavia's youth to pick corn. The text reads "(Dear) Youth! Do not allow the corn in Srem to rot while other parts of the country are starving" (Source: Ristanovic, 2014)

In Aleksinac for example, the water supply system started to be built already in 1942 by work brigades organized by the Communist Party of Yugoslavia during the National Liberation War (Figure 23).



Figure 23. Work brigade in Aleksinac while building the water supply system in 1942
(Source: Aleksinac Večiti grad)

Youth worker brigades and their work actions were particularly common after the end of WWII and the constitution of the Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia in 1946. Between 1946 and 1952, "large work actions" or "federal work actions" (*savezne radne akcije*) were organized across Yugoslavia to build priority infrastructure such as railroads, roads, hydropower plants, mines, factories, student housing, even entire settlements (Ristanović, 2014). According to the report from the 4th congress of the League of Communist

Youth of Yugoslavia in 1948, 80% of the country's youth took part in work actions during 1947 (Mihailović, 1985).

While youth brigadiers were not paid for their labor provided during work actions, their participation was motivated through a number of benefits and opportunities offered during and after the work actions. Accommodation and food were provided for participating brigadiers which in itself was enough to attract large numbers of volunteers in the impoverished post-war years. Temporary accommodation (usually barracks) was constructed on site for the brigadiers, as well as worker canteens and designated spaces for social activities (Ristanović, 2014). Perhaps even more importantly, after working hours brigadiers had an active social life and opportunities to study: from reading and writing (literacy was still low in the post-war years, particularly amongst the youth from rural parts of the country) to various courses organized as part of the “technical education” (*tehničko obrazovanje*) in the worker settlements. Depending on the location and available local resources, within the frame of technical education brigadiers could learn about, among others: construction (masonry, construction modeling, operating construction machinery, electrical installations), agriculture (farming and animal husbandry, pomiculture, agricultural machinery...) cooking and home economics, photography and cinematography, radio equipment, driving (bicycles, mopeds, cars or agricultural tractors and harvesters), sports (to become licensed instructors) and more (ibid.).

Upon completion of the courses, the brigadiers would receive certificates which greatly aided them in finding future employment, sometimes even in the very factories they helped to build (Mihailović, 1985). They would also receive certificates stating that they participated in the work actions, which too helped in finding future employment, particularly in the social sector. Participation in youth worker brigades was thus, as Mihailović (1985) notes, an important element in social mobility, especially for youth coming from rural areas or “peasantry” (*seljaštvo*) and “other poor strata” (*siromašni slojevi*), as the 1958 LCY

programme called the post-war 'socio-economic powers' that existed aside from the working class (Program Saveza komunista Jugoslavije, 1965).

Finally, the work actions were also known for a particularly lively social life which was yet another important aspect to them (Ristanović, 2014). They represented an opportunity for the country's youth to have fun, while working and learning, socializing with their peers from other parts of the country and embodying the „brotherhood and unity” spirit along the way (Figure 24). “Sense of togetherness” and “feeling of community” were indeed very common tropes that appeared in my conversations with older people in Aleksinac when I asked them about the past and how things used to be. Although naming economic hardships as their main problems in the present, when reminiscing about the past they often stated that it is this “sense of togetherness” (*duh zajedništva*) that they miss even more than the higher living standards.



Figure 24. Social life at one of the youth workers actions (ORA) (Source: Ristanović, 2014)

Mihailović (1985:10) estimates that Yugoslav youth volunteered a total of 80 million work days between WW2 and the early 1980s. They produced material labor, which in turn produced them as social(ist) subjects and “embodied examples of triumph of labor over time” (Greenberg, 2014:27). Much of what even today remains as the crucial infrastructure across the Yugoslav spaces was built precisely in the first decades following the WW2 with the help of youth worker brigades, as well as Yugoslav People’s Army (JNA) - itself partially serving similar functions as the youth worker brigades (i.e., physical labor and community building), albeit participation in JNA was not voluntary and excluded women.

Such was the first highway, aptly named “Brotherhood and Unity Highway” built between 1948 and 1963 (Ristanović, 2014) that connected four of the 6 Yugoslav republics, passing directly by Aleksinac. As Pozharliev (2016) notes, the highway, as one of the first large scale federal development projects envisioned in the first five-year development plan of 1947, was a symbolic project that intertwined nation building and road building. With this symbolism captured by the very name “Brotherhood and Unity”, the highway would connect Yugoslav republics both physically through transport infrastructure, and metaphorically by strengthening the shared identity and spirit of ‘brotherhood and unity’. Over 250.000 youth brigadiers participated in the highway’s construction, while Aleksinac municipality itself housed several temporary youth brigadier settlements during the construction of this part of the highway which took place in 1959 and 1960 (Ristanović, 2014).

By the 1960s, the living standards in Yugoslavia have risen significantly, and numerous both large and small factories and production facilities have been constructed across the country, signaling Yugoslavia’s transition from a predominantly agrarian economy to an industrial one (Milošević, 2017). The country’s youth which volunteered its time and labor in (re)building efforts after WW2 have since found employment in the burgeoning industrial sector, transitioning from the ‘socialist youth’ to the actual working class and the ‘new Yugoslav socialist (wo)man’ who actively participates in self-management structures

and enjoys the fruits of their labor. And as one generation moved on with the passage of modern/rational time, another took its place, allowing for continued progress and “*renewed triumph of particular individuals over material conditions and of generational epochs over the future itself*” (Greenberg, 2014:27). Thus, for decades to come, the lifetimes of the post-war generations were structured through these intricate socioeconomic and political institutions that Yugoslavia set up immediately after WW2.

The rising living standards in Yugoslavia also meant that by the 1960s Yugoslavia reached levels that allowed for extensive growth of consumer and leisure economies, just like across western Europe (Duda, 2005; 2010). However, the specificities of the Yugoslav “market socialism” from the 1960s onward, or “Coca-Cola Socialism” as it is sometimes called (Vučetić, 2018), meant that these newly emergent economies were also phenomena that structured time for the Yugoslav citizens. Travelling and spending vacation time at the seaside during summer, or mountain resorts during winter were not reserved for the wealthy few, but were indeed intended for the masses. Even the 1958 Programme of the LCY stated that the Yugoslav self-management system promises the fulfillment of all citizens’ needs, including needs for rest and fun, sports and leisure, and securing daily, weekly and yearly vacation time (Program Saveza komunista Jugoslavije, 1958, pp. 202, 228).

Vacation days and particularly traveling during that time was seen not as a private affair but a social need and part of the ‘work process’ (Duda, 2010:297), so ‘social tourism’ developed relatively quickly in Yugoslavia (Krstić, 2018). The Yugoslav People’s Army, police, various federal and republic/state institutions as well as workers unions and self-managing structures of the many social enterprises in Yugoslavia started building “workers’ holiday resorts” (*radnička odmarališta*) across the country and particularly at the Croatian Adriatic coast (Duda, 2010). These resorts offered opportunities for employees to spend their vacation time with their family in these resorts at affordable, significantly subsidized prices (Krstić, 2018). Additionally, “youth holiday resorts” (*omladinska odmarališta*) were also built

for the country's youth (ibid.), while the Yugoslav state healthcare system also built a network of "health/balneological resorts" (*banje*) as secondary healthcare provision institutions across the country. The balneological resorts (*banje*) were constructed along the Adriatic coast, as well as on mountaintops, around thermal springs, lakes and elsewhere – usually specializing in specific recovery treatments (orthopedic, vascular...) or general wellbeing (particularly for pensioners), and also offered completely free (covered by the state healthcare plan) extended stays in these resorts.

The collective accommodation offered by workers' and youth holiday resorts was anything but luxurious and could hardly compare with the commercial hotels built on the Adriatic coast from the 1960s onwards that catered to international guests (Duda, 2010), but it did bring domestic (social) tourism to the masses. Traveling for vacation, extended holidays, youth excursions, and even 'vacations' for health and wellbeing became a reality for a large portion of the Yugoslav population. Duda (2010) notes how during the 1970s there were even clashes between workers who did not want to travel but rather stay at home during their vacation time (usually to work the private land that they owned), and the workers' union or company's (self)management who would 'force' these workers to travel and spend their vacation in the workers' resorts. Though such cases were not common, they testify to the importance and attention paid to travel and 'social tourism' during this time.

Yearly summer vacations on the Adriatic coast, and/or winter getaways to Yugoslavia's mountain-resorts thus structured the year(s) and lives for many Yugoslav families, including the majority of my 'older' (around or above 40 years of age) interlocutors in Aleksinac. Travelling for vacation appeared as a theme in my conversations with these Aleksinac residents on several occasions, when I asked them about the past and how life used to be in this region. Sharply contrasting today's "value system" (*sistem vrednosti*) with that from their childhood or youth days, and the "spirit of togetherness" (*duh zajedništva*) which then existed but does not today, my interlocutors would often continue to name "certainty"

(*sigurnost*) as something they felt during Yugoslavia but do not any more. That “certainty” often referred to the regular yearly vacations they would go to, or as one of my interlocutors Ana put it:

“It wasn’t that we were rich or anything like that, but we could afford what we needed, and we knew that we would go on vacation to the seaside every year...now, I don’t even remember the last time I went to the seaside...you need at least €400-500 to go to Greece for 10 days, and even Montenegro is not cheaper, unless you have relatives or friends that you can stay with there, which I don’t...so how can I go when my [monthly] salary is €250?”.

Tamara similarly recollects *“I used to go to the seaside with my parents every year when I was a kid...now, my son is 8 years old and he’s never even seen the sea. My husband and I are really trying to save as much as we can so we can maybe take him next year...but it’s really hard with our salaries”.*

Thus, even the ‘social(ist) tourism’ that Yugoslavia developed in the decades following WW2 became a socioeconomic ‘institution’ that structured the year, and the lifetime for many Yugoslav citizens. Myself born in 1983, I too remember the regular summer family vacations on the Croatian or Montenegrin seaside in the JNA workers’ resorts⁴², or “army holiday resorts” (*vojna odmarališta*) as they were called, and even winter vacations on the Kopaonik mountain in Serbia, where the JNA also had collective accommodation.

Since the early 1990s, social tourism practically disappeared as collective accommodation in ‘other Yugoslav republics’ was no longer accessible⁴³ to newly emerging war-torn countries while ‘domestic’ collective accommodation was largely used for accommodation of the refugees of war (Krstić, 2018). Still, for many generations of Yugoslavs born until the early 1980s, the memory of regular summer vacations at the seaside continues to structure their idea of “normalcy” and “good life”. While some have managed to regain that feeling of normalcy by regularly consuming commercial holiday arrangements, the

⁴² My father worked for the Yugoslav National Army (JNA)

⁴³ The majority of workers’ resorts built by Serbian and Bosnian social enterprises, workers’ unions etc. on the Croatian coast remain abandoned and their ownership disputed to this day (Krstić, 2018)

majority of impoverished citizens are left behind not only unable to afford to travel, but feeling that their lives are ‘not normal’ because of it.

In the following section I will briefly discuss some of the ways in which the Yugoslav citizens’ day-to-day temporality was also structured by various state institutions and practices.

4.2.3. Structuring the productive present

Much of what has been described in the previous pages as state policies, institutions and practices that structured the lifetime and *longue durée* temporalities of Yugoslav citizens, has also in effect structured their day-to-day lives, or their ‘productive present’. Being a member of the Pioneer Alliance, the Yugoslav Alliance of Socialist Youth, the LCY, self-management structures of Yugoslav social enterprises, workers’ unions and so on, was more than ideological integration of Yugoslav citizens into the state’s socioeconomic and political structures which served to reaffirm the state’s revolutionary project and *longue durée* temporality it projected. It also meant taking time to participate, often on a daily basis, in the activities related to these structures, whether that be the daily extracurricular or activities of the Pioneers within schools, weeks or months spent in youth work actions, regular LCY meetings or meetings of workers’ unions and self-management structures of Yugoslav social enterprises etc.

During my conversations with Aleksinac residents another daily rhythm often appeared as a theme in our talks. Whilst talking about the past and how life used to be in Aleksinac, several of my interlocutors mentioned “the 3pm siren” which signaled the end of the work day or change in the work shifts for those enterprises, such as the coal mines, which had double or triple work-shifts. As Slavica notes:

“You can’t imagine what the town used to look like at 3pm when the siren rang and everybody got off work...thousands of people walking down the main street, shops full of

people...they had money to spend, cheerful atmosphere everywhere...not like now when the same few people sit in cafes everyday all day long, no one is talking to each other, everyone has their own problems...it was completely different then”

Vesna similarly recollects:

“I remember when I used to go to work at 6am, and everyone is going at the same time, it was a mass of people there [at the town’s entrance where the majority of factories are located]...or at 3pm when, as I like to say - “a mob” of people leaves work...it was all full of people”

The 48 hour and 6-day work week practiced in Yugoslavia after WWII was shortened to 42 hours with the adoption of the 1963 Constitution of SFRY. Working hours across state institutions⁴⁴ as well as social enterprises, where majority of the population worked, were the same – from 7am to 3pm, with only some enterprises having double or even triple work-shifts, such as the Aleksinac coal mines during periods of peak production. This indeed meant, as my interlocutors suggest, that citizens were ‘in sync’ both going to work, as well as leaving work at 3pm when they would start their free time simultaneously going home, conducting essential provisioning, picking their children up from nurseries and kindergartens, socializing and so on.

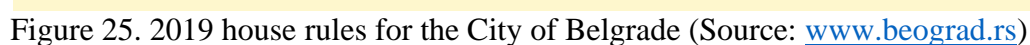
Hearing about the 3pm siren also made me think back to my own childhood when both of my parents worked for the Yugoslav People’s Army. Although there were no factories nearby the apartment building where I grew up, so I could not hear the factory “sirens” that signaled the end of the work shift at 3pm, my family’s daily rhythm, just like the daily rhythms of most families in the town and across the country, followed the same pattern. Since both my parents worked 5 minutes away from our apartment, we had lunch already at 3:15pm after either my mother or my older sister picked me up from the nearby kindergarten. After lunch, my parents, again just like the parents of most of my childhood friends, would take an

⁴⁴ Except schools

afternoon nap that lasted an hour or two and enabled them to ‘reenergize’ for the rest of the day which had started already between 5am and 6am for them. Meanwhile the neighborhood children, including myself, would (when the weather conditions permitted) play outside in the playgrounds and sports fields constructed inside the block of apartment buildings and usually overlooked by one or two parents from the neighborhood who would give up their afternoon nap that day. Once the parents would wake up from their afternoon nap between 5pm and 6pm, the rest of the day would resume filled with family time, doing homework and housework, going out and socializing, having dinner, watching television and so on.

Sharing these memories later on with some of the people I met in Aleksinac, we concluded that it was indeed the same experience, with minor differences depending on how far the parents’ workplace was from the place of residence which for some people ‘delayed’ lunch and the rest of the day by half an hour or so. That such structured daily rhythm was ‘the norm’ across towns and cities in Yugoslavia is also confirmed by the “house rules” (*kućni red*) that existed in apartment buildings that mushroomed across Yugoslavia in post WW2 years and decades. The “house rules” determined quiet hours or “rest time” (*vreme odmora*) during the day, when tenants were prohibited from making loud noises, and these were usually set between 1pm and 5pm as well as 10pm and 7am. Additionally the house rules also detailed rights and responsibilities related to the usage and maintenance of common areas such as basements, attics or roof spaces, hallways, laundry rooms, elevators etc. They were typically adopted by the city or municipality assembly, but additional rules could also be adopted by the “housing community” (*stambena zajednica*) of a particular apartment building. Despite changes in working hours and lifestyles that occurred in Serbia already during the 1990s, the old Yugoslav house rules officially remained in power for another two decades. It wasn’t until the 2010s that changes to house rules started to be adopted across cities and municipalities in Serbia, with the city of Belgrade officially adopting new house rules only in 2019 (Figure 25) and setting the new ‘rest time’ between 4pm and 6pm in order to

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The working shifts and the “3pm siren” mentioned by interlocutors had the effect of making the town look “full of people”, alive and bustling, but then again it also structured not only the citizens’ individual day-to-day but also their abilities to socialize. The majority of the population was “in sync” with each other’s daily rhythms and shared their working hours on the one hand, as well as their free time on the other.

In his book “Keeping Together in Time” (1995), William McNeil explored the power that “muscular bonding” has on community building. He coined the term “muscular bonding” to refer to the synchronized bodily movements of soldiers during army drills, dancers in folk dance performances, the cheering of sports fans, the singing of choir members, and so on. Feelings, McNeil maintained, are inseparable from their muscular and gestural expression, and through this common kinesthetic undergirding, humans cement their bonds and become members of human communities “that give guidance and meaning to their lives” (1995:152). From the daily activities of the Pioneers, the work actions by the youth brigadeers, the JNA army drills, the carrying of the baton during the Relay of Youth race and the intricate synchronized gymnastics displays and choir performances at the *Slet*, all these activities encompassed the kind of “muscular bonding” that McNeil talked about and enabled the participating Yugoslav citizens to become members of various “imagined communities”. Through their bodily inclusion in these practices, the Yugoslav citizens became members of the Pioneer community, the Yugoslav socialist youth community, all the way to the ultimate “imagined community”, as defined by Benedict Anderson (2006), namely - the Yugoslav nation.

The daily rhythms of walking together to and from work and school also arguably fostered feelings of community and equality, or “spirit of togetherness” as several of my interlocutors phrased it. This is sharply contrasted by the grievances expressed by Aleksinac residents about their present. One complaint that I kept hearing from many of the people I spoke with was that they find it hard to find time to see family and friends and spend time

with them. Namely, by far the largest employer in town – Grammer, organizes its’ production in three working shifts thus achieving maximum productivity and efficiency in utilizing their production facilities, equipment and labor. Employees rarely get to choose their shifts however, but rather get their rosters a week in advance so they are unable to plan much ahead. And while Grammer management aims to arrange shifts so that employees have 16-hour breaks between working two shifts, it is not uncommon that employees only get 8 hours of rest between shifts, as Milica told me:

“The worst is when I work the second shift on Sunday for example, and then they give me the first shift on Monday...and then you go there and the manager asks you ‘What’s wrong? Why aren’t you smiling?’ ...and I’m thinking to myself ‘I’d like to see you smile after you worked shifts like me’ ...or maybe I would smile if my salary was 2000 euros... I mean, I would for sure, I’d smile and sing if I had that salary”.

Similar sentiments were also observed by Bonfiglioli (2019) in her ethnography on textile workers in Leskovac (Serbia) and Shtip (North Macedonia), suggesting that the present-day labor relations and conditions in Aleksinac are no exception but rather exemplary of the post-Yugoslav space, and particularly the small-town peripheries of the new states.

Such working conditions negatively affect not only the circadian rhythms of Grammer employees but also severely limit their opportunities to spend time with family and friends, particularly if friends or family members also happen to work for Grammer but work different shifts. Sandra, for example, who works as a seamstress for Grammer and is a single mother of a 17-year-old daughter, told me that sometimes she does not even see her daughter for days at a time because her shifts at Grammer and her daughter’s high school hours completely diverge.

Thus, the Yugoslav daily rhythms with structured and synchronized working hours, rest time, family time, house work and so on, that my interlocutors variously bring up through themes of “togetherness”, “certainty”, or the “3pm siren” and the town being “full of people”

are sharply contrasted by today's unregular rhythms of triple-shift capitalist production which tears families, friends and communities apart and enables the illusion of the town being "emptier" than before despite the fact that the population size of the town of Aleksinac has not changed significantly.

In her seminal book "What was socialism, and what comes next", Katherine Verdery meticulously described the ways in which the Romanian state "seized" the productive present from the Romanian citizens during the 1980s. Through a number of examples Verdery (1996:46) discussed how different state policies and practices in Ceausescu's Romania had the, sometimes intended and sometimes unintended, effect of "immobilizing" citizens and seizing their productive present by filling their time with, for example, queues that they had to wait in in order to get food or gasoline (which would also "immobilize" them in case they could not get it) and conduct other essential provisioning. Other austerity measures implemented by the Romanian state in 1980s, such as cuts in electricity or water provision, also had the effect of structuring the productive present for the citizens by determining when they could conduct housework, take showers, cook or do laundry.

While the same can be said to be true for 1980s Yugoslavia, to one extent or another, I take these effects on the citizens' day-to-day temporality to be a departure from the decades long Yugoslav temporal politics described in the previous pages, and some of the first telltale signs of Yugoslavia's disintegration. As such I will discuss them in the following section of this chapter, which frames the Yugoslav State crisis precisely as a crisis of temporality.

4.3. The Yugoslav crisis as a crisis of temporality

Gross (1985:54) was right to claim that the *longue durée* temporality "*provides the decisive framework within which the other two temporalities operate*" and so operationalizing State temporal politics that (re)structure the *longue durée* in effect also (re)structures the

citizens' day-to-day and lifetime temporalities. Yet, it is important to understand that these processes of (re)structuring the different planes of temporality are not unidirectional but rather co-emergent and mutually co-constructive. In other words, we can also follow the opposite direction and see that the lived day-to-day temporalities of citizens co-create those of their lifetimes which in turn can reaffirm or possibly challenge the *longue durée*. Thus, the three planes of temporality are in constant tension and in need of realignment. It is in the crevices and possible misalignments of the different planes of temporality that agency can find ground to question and challenge the temporal politics of the state and its institutions. Or, as Bourdieu (2013) has argued, when people start paying attention to their actual social practices (which drastically changed for Yugoslav citizens during the 1980s as detailed below) rather than the objective structures conferred from above/without, they become able to reconceptualize and rework that which has been imposed upon them.

Up until the 1980s the Yugoslav State censored *longue durée* temporality was, to the greatest extent possible, aligned with the lived day-to-day and lifetime temporalities of its citizens. Promises of a better and brighter future, marked by socioeconomic progress, industrialization, rapidly rising living standards and so on, were fulfilled for decades on after WW2 and as such managed to overpower and immobilize any disruptive forces that would challenge the state's revolutionary project. The 1980s, however, brought a series of both internal and external shocks to the country, that directly impacted its ability to maintain its temporal politics. In other words, the lived day-to-day temporalities of Yugoslav citizens in the 1980s started to significantly diverge from the State censored *longue durée*, bringing the very teleological history and promissory future under question.

By the 1980s, the gap in productivity between capitalist economies which constantly pushed for increased efficiency and "time-space compression" and socialist economies which placed "*no premium on increasing turnover time and capital circulation*" (Verdery, 1996:35) has become considerable. In Yugoslavia's case for example, this meant that Yugoslavia in the

early 1980s was using between two and three times more energy per unit of output when compared to OECD countries (Dyker, 2013). This made Yugoslavia, much like other socialist countries to one degree or another, particularly vulnerable to energy shocks. Thus, already in 1979, when the Iranian revolution broke out and rattled the global energy markets, Yugoslavia swiftly acted to circumvent both the shortage and significantly higher prices of oil by implementing the “odd-even system” (*sistem par-nepar*) for passenger vehicles which meant that only cars with license plates that end with odd numbers were allowed to drive one day, and those ending with even numbers the following day⁴⁵ (Figure 26).



Figure 26. 1979 newspaper clipping with the section headline “Traffic” and the text below saying “Oil shortages and its consequences – “odd-even” system, uncertainty about our future” (Source: Yugopapir)

The vulnerability of Yugoslavia’s economy at this time was further compounded by its external debt. Namely, after the economic reforms of the 1960s which opened Yugoslavia’s borders and increased international cooperation, and in order to maintain the high growth rates in the 1970s, Yugoslavia took out considerable loans during this decade when capital in global financial markets was cheap and abundant (Dyker, 2013). These loans drove Yugoslavia’s external debt to rise nearly eight times (Dyker, 2013). With the 1979 oil crisis causing a global economic crisis and driving inflation up across the world, the creditor nations increased interest rates on their loans which in turn significantly increased Yugoslavia’s debt-servicing costs (Kukić, 2018). This meant that already in the early 1980s Yugoslavia entered a debt-crisis which forced her to implement strict austerity measures as part of the “economic

⁴⁵ This system was in the 1980s replaced with oil allowances and coupons distributed to citizens.

stabilization program”, limiting imports, investment and spending and maximizing exports which in the second half of the 70s covered only about 50% of the imports (Uvalić, 1993).

Another major shock also came on February 10, 1979, when Edvard Kerdelj, one of the main leaders of the LCY, the creator of the Yugoslav workers’ self-management system and the nonalignment policy, passed away. Only a year later, on May 4, 1980, Josip Broz Tito, the country’s leader and the embodiment of the “brotherhood and unity” spirit, the country’s revolutionary project and the very future itself, also passed away bringing yet another form of uncertainty about the future. And while Tito’s and Kerdelj’s deaths were immense shocks in and of themselves, they signaled the irreversible generational shift, with the WW2 veterans either retiring or passing away, and the ascendance of post-WW2 generation of politicians and managers who had no direct experiences and memory of the war but were entirely socialized in Socialist Yugoslavia.

Thus, the very onset of the 1980s decade brought about drastic changes in everyday lives of Yugoslav citizens. The debt-crisis drove inflation up to 45 percent in 1981, which in the following years fluctuated but remained high, and then reached a staggering 1000 percent in 1989 when Yugoslavia entered a short period of hyperinflation (Uvalić, 1993). This significantly lowered the living standards of Yugoslav citizens throughout the 1980s. Furthermore, the implemented austerity measures quickly resulted in shortages of many products on the market, including the most basic staple foods and household items. Much like the citizens of Ceausescu’s Romania in this time, as described by Verdery (1996), Yugoslav citizens in early 1980s also started receiving coupons and monthly allowances for gas, coffee, cooking oil, laundry detergent, sugar, and so on (Figure 27). Again, echoing Verdery’s examples, Yugoslav citizens started spending their “productive presents” waiting in queues to conduct essential provision (Figure 28), while electricity cuts, which were also common during the 1980s in Yugoslavia, structured their days by determining when they could cook, conduct housework, take showers and so on. Additionally, the unemployment rate rose

rapidly reaching an average of around 17% across the republics towards the end of the decade and resulting in drastic changes in the lived day-to-day and lifetime temporalities of Yugoslav citizens.



Figure 27. Coupons for purchasing cooking oil, laundry detergent, coffee and “reserves” issued by the city of Belgrade (local community “Sava”) in 1983 (Source: Avalić, 2015)



Figure 28. Citizens queuing in front of a store in Belgrade to buy staple foods and household items (Source: Avalić, 2015)

As Dušan, one of my interlocutors, explained – Aleksinac too saw significant changes in the lived day-to-day temporality during this decade. The combination of austerity measures

and increasingly strong competition on the international markets lead to significantly reduced production in the many industrial factories that Aleksinac housed in the 1980s. This in turn meant that many workers would sit idle at their workplace for extended periods of time, whether waiting for the raw materials to arrive or new orders to be made – much like the Romanian factory workers during the same decade, as detailed by Verdery (1996). It became common practice for these workers to take extended sick leaves in order to do other work, which the management tolerated as there was not much work in the factories anyway. In the case of Aleksinac, the other work mostly involved working on the farms, usually owned by family members, in the villages surrounding the town. This meant bringing back the seasonal agricultural temporalities to the lives of urban industrial workers. Additional daily work (*rad na dnevnicu*) in construction, or the service sector was also common for factory workers taking fictive sick leaves. By providing additional income, this type of additional work also helped alleviate the falling living standards during the 1980s.

And while the urban working class in Aleksinac “cheated the system” in this way, Dušan also mentioned how the farmers too found a way to raise their falling incomes. Namely, to compensate for the reduced amounts that PIK was paying individual farmers for their agricultural products, they too found the way to “cheat the system” as Dušan said, insisting that it was these “cheating practices” by the workers that finally led to the collapse of PIK and other industrial companies in town. The two examples that he provided involved beans and bell peppers. Namely, the farmers would soak the beans in water for some time before taking them to one of PIK’s purchasing stations to sell them, effectively raising their weight and increasing profits. The same approach was used with bell peppers, except the farmers would use a syringe to inject water inside the peppers, thus making them heavier and their profits higher.

Even though Yugoslavia managed to somewhat loosen austerity measures in the second half of the 1980s, Yugoslav citizens had already been faced with novel temporalities

that altered their day-to-day and, more importantly, showed cracks in the state's promissory future. After 40 years, the state was no longer able to keep its promise of a future marked by social and economic progress and rising living standards. The outdated technology across Yugoslav industrial sectors also became apparent as domestic products had an increasingly difficult task of competing on the international markets. With the country's charismatic leader, who personified the revolutionary struggle and the 'utopian' future, gone as well, the entire temporal politics of the Yugoslav state started to crumble. Doors were opened for dissenting voices to articulate different versions of the future and interpretations of the past.

4.3.1 Diverging futures

While Yugoslavia relatively quickly after its inception managed to do away with class differences and associated large economic disparities among the population⁴⁶, the same was not true for regional differences. Namely, disparities between the different republics and autonomous provinces were considerable, particularly between Slovenia, being the richest, and Kosovo as the poorest. In 1952, Slovenia was four times as rich as Kosovo (Kukić, 2018). Despite efforts to achieve convergence between the different regions and republics, mainly through the Federal Fund for the Development of Less Developed Republics and Regions⁴⁷ (Uvalić, 1993), these differences in fact continued to grow – with Slovenia finally being 8 times as rich as Kosovo in 1990 (Kukić, 2018).

These regional differences became a long-standing debate about “who was ‘exploiting’ whom” (Uvalić, 1993:274). Much like the controversies and debates within the EU after the 2008 recession and the debt crises in the southern, so called “PIGS”⁴⁸ countries, the richer Yugoslav republics felt exploited because of their payments to the Federal Fund for

⁴⁶ At least when it comes to official salaries. Class differences were still evident in non-monetary benefits, such as access to subsidized housing which was available to managers but less so to workers (Archer, 2015)

⁴⁷ More Developed Republics (MDRs) paid a percentage of their GMP (Gross Material Product, Yugoslav version of GDP which excluded the 'non-productive' sectors such as defense, health, education, banking etc.) into the Fund which then allocated them to Less Developed Republics (LDRs) as grants, or obligatory cheap credit from 1971 onwards (Uvalić, 1993)

⁴⁸ PIGS stands for Portugal, Italy, Greece and Spain

Development, while the poorer republics and regions felt exploited because the structure of their economies resulted in unfavorable trade terms (Uvalić, 1993).

This ‘economic nationalism’ finally culminated in 1990 when the Yugoslav republics expressed different visions about the future and continuation of the federal stabilization program. Namely, the stabilization program implied a fixed exchange rate, which richer/export driven republics felt was adversely affecting them, and monetary restrictions, for which the poorer republics felt was hurting them (Uvalić, 1993). By the end of that same year, practically all republics adopted laws that were not in conformity with the federal legislation, which already in the first months of 1991 resulted in the disintegration of the federal fiscal system (ibid.). Last attempts to reach a compromise in spring 1991 had failed, and by June the war had broken out.

And while the Yugoslav republics diverged on how they saw their futures, the war that ensued was ultimately about how and where to draw the political borders between new states with different visions rationalized and legitimized through different historical narratives, narratives of past and present ethnic and religious composition of local populations and so on. In other words, the war was about territories, whereby “territory” itself here appears precisely as a concept that links physical geography and society, nature and culture, through time and space as different states rely on different historical narratives and mobilize armies in order to assert their power and legitimize future control over specific physical and human geographies.

4.4. Post-Yugoslav temporalities

"When the past no longer sheds light on the future, the mind walks in darkness."

Alexis de Tocqueville

"What history should we write today? What past, for what present?" wrote the French historian Francois Hartog in a 1994 piece entitled "An End and a Beginning" published in the UNESCO Courier (May 1994), reflecting on our world after the fall of communism. Noting how the events surrounding the fall of the Berlin wall brought about uncertainty not only about the future, but the past as well, Hartog (1994:9) claimed that it is now up to historians, from both the East and the West, to "rewrite" history, aiming for "accuracy" and avoiding, as much as possible, new "distortions".

Although on the other side of the Iron Curtain, Yugoslavia too had disintegrated and its state socialism collapsed, while several of its republics (Serbia, Montenegro⁴⁹, Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina) were in the midst of war at the time. The successor states were facing the same problem of writing new histories that would inform their new presents and allow for new futures. This, however, proved to be a more difficult task for some former Republics, than it was for others.

Namely, Slovenia, Croatia, Macedonia, Montenegro and Kosovo all emerged 'victorious' from the violent conflicts (Croatia, Kosovo⁵⁰) or non-violent processes of secession (Slovenia, Macedonia, Montenegro), securing national sovereignty and independence not only in terms of space, but more importantly –time. In other words, to one degree or another, these countries gained a future of self-determination which could be aligned with the temporalities of the new-old national identities. Already in early 1990s

⁴⁹ Montenegro was still united with Serbia in the successor "minor Yugoslavia" known as Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SR Jugoslavija)

⁵⁰ Kosovo's independence and future of self-determination remains hindered, however, by limited international recognition and yet unattained full member status at the United Nations

communist monuments started to be demolished or taken down across Yugoslavia, Tito's pictures taken out of classrooms, offices of state institutions and people's homes (Figure 29), and "forbidden memories" repressed by the communist regime quickly erupted bringing back old monuments removed by the communist regime as well as erecting new ones (see Kuljic, 2019 for a more in-depth analysis of the "monument politics" in post-Yugoslav states). Street names started to be changed, and even names of entire towns such as Titograd (now *Podgorica*) and Titovo Užice (now just *Užice*), in order to erase the Communist and Tito's legacy and bring old histories back or construct new ones. Calendars changed as well, leaving old Yugoslav public and state holidays in the past and marking different national events, whether historical or historical-in-the-making.



Figure 29. Tito's portrait in the dumpster (Source: Beran Jan⁵¹)

⁵¹ Jan, B. "The person in the frame is Josip Broz Tito. The thing in the trashcan is the state". Facebook, November 22, 2020. Available at <https://www.facebook.com/zoonbiee1992/posts/4682719268465223>

Serbia, on the other hand, while certainly re-building the Serbian national identity through mounting nationalist narratives during the late 80s and 90s, did not see the outcome of the wars and Yugoslavia's disintegration as its 'victory' or as 'gaining independence'. On the contrary, it continued to carry the Yugoslav legacy keeping the name Federal Republic of Yugoslavia together with Montenegro for another 11 years, until 2003 when the country finally changed its name to Serbia and Montenegro. Only three years later, in 2006, Montenegro held a referendum which resulted in Montenegro's declaration of independence.

The main reason why Serbia resisted building a nation state⁵², like other ex-Yugoslav republics, arguably lies in the fact that Serbia's territoriality, unlike the territoriality of other former Yugoslav republics, was not ethnically ("nationally") homogeneous. Namely, Serbia was the only Yugoslav republic whose territory included two autonomous provinces – Kosovo and Metohija with an Albanian majority, and Vojvodina with a large Hungarian minority. Thus, building a state along the lines of ethno-national identity would potentially compromise Serbia's territoriality, resulting in further secession of these provinces. Attempts of ethnic cleansing in Kosovo in the late 90's were obvious examples of an attempt to 'circumvent this problem' and move towards the establishment of a Serbian nation state. Indeed, only two years after Montenegro proclaimed independence in 2006 and Serbia was 'forced' to become an 'independent nation state' – Kosovo proclaimed its own independence.

For these reasons, Serbia was, for the longest time after the breakup of Yugoslavia, trapped between the two irreconcilable projects of 'safeguarding' its territory, by way of harnessing the remnants of Yugoslav legitimacy, and building an ethnic nation state. A telling example here was the 2006 reform of the Serbian constitution, initiated after Montenegro's secession, which in the draft version stated that [the] "Republic of Serbia is a state of Serbian people" but was soon amended to "Republic of Serbia is a state of Serbian people and all citizens who live in it" – a dubious compromise which satisfied nationalist appetites by

⁵² Although the Milosevic regime certainly did work on building the national(ist) narrative during the 1990s, it formally carried on the Yugoslav name and legacy, thus simultaneously appealing to the Yugo-oriented sentiment – essentially tapping into both 'Serbian nationalist' and "Yugoslav' constituencies

putting “Serbian people” first while also including “other citizens”. It is also with this reform of the constitution that Serbia finally dealt away with the ‘ghosts of the socialist past’ erasing all mentions of “social ownership” or “social property” (*društvena svojina*) from the constitution (Milošević, 2016).

So, while Slovenia and Croatia, for example, were able to quickly move ahead after their secession from Yugoslavia, “rewriting” their pasts and “reforming” their futures as young, democratic and capitalist nation states that have achieved victory and fulfilled their promise of securing sovereignty, independence and democracy for their citizens – Serbian citizens remained “trapped” in a mixture of old and new temporalities unable to align their lived day-to-day, lifetime and *longue durée*. The promise of Milošević’s regime to “rally all Serbs in one Serbian State” (Bassiouni and Manikas, 1992) remained unfulfilled as Serbia lost the wars in Croatia and Bosnia and the “Serbian territories” it was fighting for, and the wars instead resulted in over half a million of Serbian refugees fleeing Croatia and Bosnia and finding new homes in ‘Serbia proper’. When the wars in Croatia and Bosnia were finally over in 1995 with the signing of the Dayton Agreement, they were soon replaced with armed conflicts in Kosovo which marked the second half of the 1990s and culminated with the NATO bombing of Serbia in 1999. After the NATO bombing and withdrawal of the Serbian army and police forces from Kosovo in the same year, an additional 200.000 refugees or “internally displaced persons” (IDPs) fled Kosovo, bringing the number of refugees and IDPs in Serbia to over 700.000 (BBC, 2000). All the while, Serbian citizens were still living in “Yugoslavia” ruled by the same Milosevic’s Socialist Party of Serbia, in what was no longer a socialist country, but also not yet a ‘fully realized’ democracy or a capitalist economy. The past no longer informed the present and the future was uncertain at best, without a clear direction in which the country is headed and with waves of international sanctions and high inflation rates which continued to lower living standards.

Out of all the former Yugoslav republics, Serbia (together with Montenegro) took by far the worst hit in living standards and continues to be the slowest to recover (Figure 30). In fact, Serbia to date remains the only former Yugoslav republic that still has not reached its 1986 peak in GDP per capita purchasing power parity according to the latest 2019 estimate from the World Bank (2020). Unlike the other former Yugoslav republics, Serbia also hasn't fully paid off its' Yugoslav-era debt, with some 1.9 billion euros of such debt remaining (Živanović, 2020).

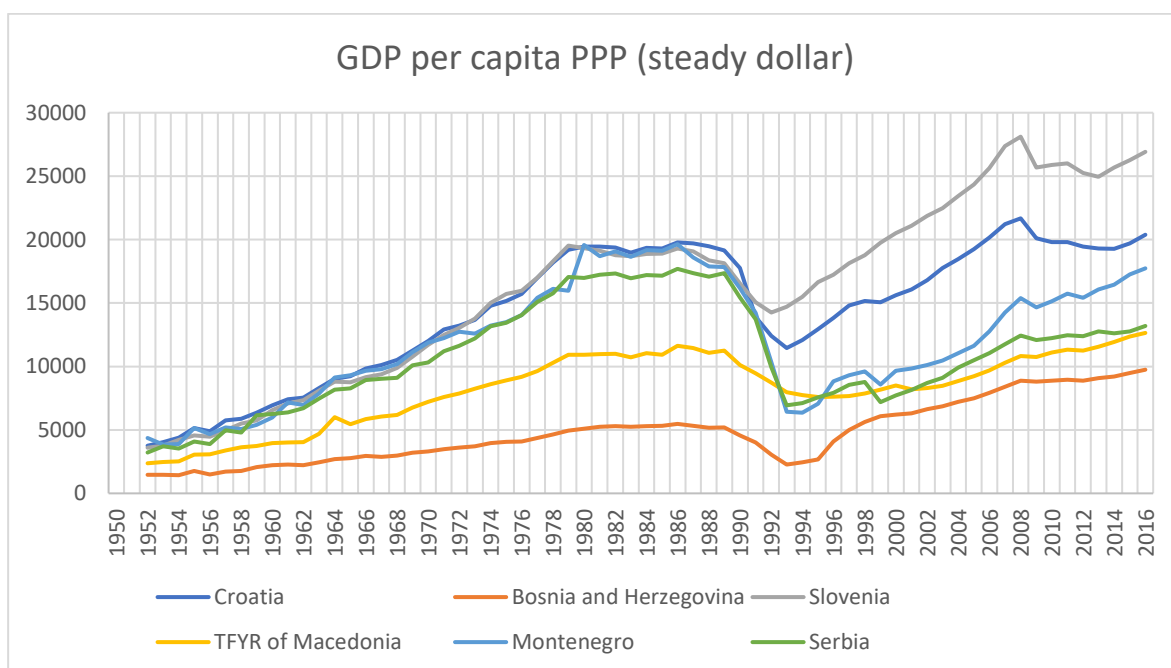


Figure 30. GDP per capita for the region of Yugoslavia between 1952 and 2016 (Source: data from Maddison project database (<https://www.rug.nl/ggdc/historicaldevelopment/maddison/original-maddison>); graph created by the author)

While all-round expectations from the political changes that took place in year 2000 with the fall of Slobodan Milošević were high, people's hopes did not last long. The economic reforms that followed initiated a large wave of privatizations of public enterprises in early 2000s, marked by extreme corruption and provoking mass unemployment as the new liberal democratic capitalist government could no longer 'buy social peace' (*kupovina socijalnog mira*) through unproductive mass employment in public enterprises. Politically the country remained relatively unstable with the assassination of the 'first democratic Prime

Minister' Zoran Djindjic in 2003, Montenegro's declaration of independence and secession in 2006 and Kosovo's declaration of independence in 2008, which remains unrecognized by Serbia and practically a daily topic in Serbian political life.

The rewriting of history and constructing a complementary future, or implementing comprehensive temporal politics in other words, was thus a much slower and difficult process in Serbia, which only seems to have picked up pace in the recent years.

Namely, as I write these lines in September 2020 in Belgrade, Serbia there are several construction and reconstruction projects taking place downtown. The most interesting and illustrative, pictured below (Figure 31) is the reconstruction of the Savski square (*Savski trg*) in front of the first and oldest train station in Belgrade, built in 1884. As part of the reconstruction, the city of Belgrade commissioned a 28-meter-tall monument dedicated to Stefan Nemanja to be cast in bronze and placed on the square (Bjelotomić, 2020). Stefan Nemanja was the Grand Prince (*veliki župan*) of the 12th century Serbian Grand Principality and the founder of the Nemanjić dynasty – considered the founders of Serbian medieval statehood and the Serbian Orthodox Church.



Figure 31. Savski square after the reconstruction, with the Stefan Nemanja monument in the center, train station (museum of Nikola Tesla) behind it, and the Belgrade Waterfront development in the background (Source: Goran Vesić⁵³)

⁵³ Vesić, G. New panorama of our Belgrade. Facebook, January 30, 2021. Available at https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=4203512289676645&id=1704843222876910

Two years earlier, the last train had left the Belgrade's iconic and almost a century and a half old train station so that the prime real-estate development land behind it, once occupied by rail tracks, could give way to new high rise residential and commercial buildings to be built as part of the Belgrade Waterfront (BW) development project (three of these buildings, as well as construction cranes, are visible in the background of the picture). The BW project was part of the Serbian Progressive Party's 2014 election campaign, ran under the slogan "The future we believe in" (see Chapter 5.1), which secured them a majority in the parliament. It is a controversial development project supposedly backed by over three billion dollars of investment through the implementing real-estate developer "Eagle Hills" from the United Arab Emirates. Its high-rise buildings are meant to symbolically represent the modern and affluent future of Serbia promised by the Serbian Progressive Party.

The central train station building, which had lost its purpose in the meantime, is also undergoing reconstruction. After months of debates whether the building should house the new Museum of Medieval Serbia, or perhaps the Museum of Science and Technology, or in other words – whether it should represent the past embodied by the Stefan Nemanja monument in front of it, or the future embodied by the Belgrade Waterfront behind it, the deputy mayor finally announced in late August of 2020, that the building will in fact house the new Museum of Nikola Tesla (Ćatić, 2020). This is indeed an interesting compromise, as Nikola Tesla is both an important Serbian historical figure as well as representation of scientific genius and progress.

Thus, the Savski square becomes the *locus suspectus* where the current Serbian state reconstructs both space and time. Unsurprisingly, and in line with other former Yugoslav republics, the historical past it projects is distant and relates to the ethnic-national origins, while the recent communist and Yugoslav past continues to be "erased".

Again, as I write these lines, there is an active petition ongoing in Belgrade to halt the City's decision to rename a number of streets that carry the names of Yugoslav toponyms. Namely, in July, 2020, the City of Belgrade announced that it plans to change the names of some two dozen streets in Belgrade that are named after cities, towns, islands and other geographical toponyms from other former Yugoslav republics. Explaining the decision in an interview, the deputy mayor of Belgrade said that it is “not normal” for Belgrade to keep these street names while these [other former Yugoslav] countries have erased Belgrade from their streets, concluding that it is a matter of reciprocity (Matović, 2020).

Whether reactionary, as Belgrade's deputy mayor claims, or simply delayed because of local circumstances, the renaming of street names and with them parts of national history, erecting of new (old) monuments and new land development projects in Belgrade and across Serbia follow the same pattern of temporal politics implemented across other former Yugoslav republics after its dissolution.

In the following chapter I will delve deeper into the temporal reasonings of contemporary Serbian citizens, and in particular Aleksinac residents, and explore how they deal with the reordered temporalities constructed by the post-socialist state.

Chapter 5. A Future We (Do Not) Believe in

“The most painful state of being is remembering the future, particularly the one you’ll
never have”

Søren Aabye Kierkegaard

Introduction

The previous chapter engaged the broad topic of temporality by analyzing the temporal politics of the Socialist Yugoslav State and their effects on temporal reasonings and everyday life of Yugoslav citizens. Through the lens of its temporal politics, I gave an account of Yugoslavia’s rise and final demise, while also hinting to, if not fully explicating, the effects that the broken continuity of its temporal politics has had on Serbian citizens. Namely, the transition from socialist temporalities to capitalist temporalities that accompanied the political and economic transition of the Yugoslav/Serbian State has resulted in profound experiences of disorientation for its citizens for whom the present remains situated amid two chasms of two eras. In the words of the French poet Paul Valéry (1962:28-29), on one side “there is the past that can neither be abolished nor forgotten, but from which we can derive almost nothing that will orient us in the present or help us to imagine the future”, and on the other “there is the future without the least shape”.

In this chapter I further ground the issue of (broken) temporalities in Aleksinac and explore the effects of the ‘transition’ from socialism to capitalism as I investigate and analyze how the local citizens view and think about the ‘shale mining future’ and the future in general, how they narrate the past, but also how they view the opposition to the mine as it is expressed through the work of locally formed NGO “Environmental Movement Aleksinac” (*Ekološki Pokret Aleksinac - EPA*).

Discussing distrust towards the shale-mining plan and the state, as well as general distrust which permeated my experiences in town and conversations with local citizens, I tease out the differences between my younger and older interlocutors through the ways in which they diagnose the present as either “not-normal” (Greenberg, 2011; Jansen, 2014a, 2014b) or “a crisis” (Roitman, 2014; Vigh, 2008), which in turn reveals their subjectivities vis-à-vis the state and their understandings of what the state is and what functions it is supposed to perform.

The chapter will present these findings from my conversations about the past, present and future, including the ‘future mine’, with my interlocutors and explore their implications, raising new questions for my research and setting the ground for my analysis in the following chapters of this dissertation. I draw from my interview data, my conversations with the people in and around Aleksinac, their oral histories, relevant literature and my own desk research.

5.1. The Future We Believe In

On May 6, 2012, only 6 months after the Serbian government led by the Democratic Party (*Demokratska Stranka –DS*) announced the plan to initiate the shale mining project in Aleksinac, local, parliamentary and presidential elections were held in Serbia. For the first time since the fall of Slobodan Milošević and his Socialist Party of Serbia (*Socijalistička Partija Srbije – SPS*) in 2000, the Democratic Party (*Demokratska Stranka - DS*) was not able to form a parliamentary majority together with its coalition partners and other supporting political parties in the National Assembly. Instead, the relatively newly formed (2008) Serbian Progressive Party (*Srpska Napredna Stranka – SNS*), a moderate and (declaratively) pro-EU spinoff from the far-right Serbian Radical Party (*Srpska Radikalna Stranka – SRS*), managed to build a wide coalition that formed the new majority in the National Assembly. The coalition’s candidate, and at the time the President of the Serbian Progressive Party,

Tomislav Nikolić, also won the presidential election and became the new President of Serbia that same year.

Yet, the resultant majority bloc centered around the Serbian Progressive Party (SNS) was a weak parliamentary majority which has seen some internal squabbles and frictions in the following two years. These internal problems together with the growing popular support that the Serbian Progressive Party (SNS) has itself seen in these two years, have resulted in Deputy Prime Minister Aleksandar Vučić calling for early parliamentary elections which were held on March 16, 2014. The electoral coalition led by the SNS and its new president Aleksandar Vučić won the legislative elections by a landslide, securing 158 (63.2 percent) of the seats in the Assembly. The coalition was comprised of the Serbian Progressive Party (SNS), Social Democratic Party (*Socijaldemokratska Partija Srbije -SDPS*), Socialist Movement (*Pokret Socijalista -PS*), the Serbian Renewal Movement (*Srpski Pokret Obnove - SPO*) and New Serbia (*Nova Srbija - NS*).

The coalition's name and main slogan used in the campaign for the 2014 elections (Figure 32) was “The future we believe in” (*Budućnost u koju verujemo*).



Figure 32. “The future we believe in”; campaign poster for the 2014 parliamentary elections

At the time of these election and the months long political campaign that preceded them, I was in Budapest developing my research proposal for this dissertation. I was reviewing literature from across the disciplinary spectrum and pondering myself about the future – the central theme of my research. I was searching for news from Aleksinac and thinking about all the different ways in which the people there thought about their future and the future of their town and region. What did they think about the shale mine that was supposed to be opened in their municipality? Did they approve of it, or did they oppose it, and why? What explanations could they offer about the ways they think and feel about the prospect of this mine opening? How did they imagine the future and what kinds of effects of this mine were they anticipating? Were they acting based on these expectations or anticipations, and if so – how?

‘The future’ was also (and continues to be) a constant personal topic that I would think about. What does my own future look like? What will I do after I finish my research and write this dissertation? What kinds of jobs would be available to me and where? Would I be able to move back to Serbia and build a life there? Or would I be doomed to replicate the present of my many friends who obtained their PhD degrees abroad only to realize that they are practically unemployable in Serbia and that their only option is to continue endlessly applying for precarious short-term post-doc positions, uprooting their lives every year or two to move to whichever other country to work at whatever other University is willing to offer them a new short-term contract. Similar kinds of fears and anxieties about the future were also widely shared by many of my friends back in Belgrade who work outside of academia, and who felt that their jobs and futures were constantly hanging by a thread, because of which they often questioned if they should move abroad where they thought prospects are better and the future more certain.

Many of my friends and extended family members also often commented (and continue to do so) that my acceptance into the graduate study program was a great success,

not because of my pursuits in science however, but specifically because my University was ‘abroad’. Such comments would almost without exception be followed up by well-meaning advice that I should stay ‘there’ and not come back to Serbia. Overwhelmingly, these comments and feelings (that I too often felt) conveyed a sentiment, and sometimes an explicit message, that there is no future in Serbia, at least not for ‘regular folks’ who are not part of the political elites. At the same time, these comments expressed hope that the future still is, or might be, available somewhere else – namely ‘abroad’, and in particular -the developed ‘western’ countries.

Detailed in the previous chapter, as a result of the temporal rupture brought about by the dissolution of socialist Yugoslavia along with its unifying temporal horizons stretching both into the past and the future, “the future” as something tangible and believable has indeed disappeared from the lives of most Serbia’s citizens. Hopes that people had that the political changes taking place in the year 2000 with the fall of Slobodan Milošević will bring about a new era of certainty and a clear future towards which the country is headed, were soon crushed. The economic reforms that followed initiated a large wave of privatizations of public enterprises in early 2000s, marked by extreme corruption and provoking mass unemployment. Instead of certainty, the new era brought about by the economic and political transition ushered in new uncertainties about the future, with mass unemployment and the Yugoslav lifetime employment model left behind to be replaced by increasingly precarious and uncertain work contracts and worsening worker’s rights introduced by each new labor law since. Compounded by the continued political instability in Serbia, unresolved border issues with Kosovo, and the slowest rates of economic recovery among all former Yugoslav republics (see Chapter 4, Figure 30), the “revolution of rising expectations” in Serbia gave way to the “revolution of rising disappointment and frustration”⁵⁴ (Ocić, 1998:8).

⁵⁴ Ocić (1998) used these terms to describe the situation in the Less Developed Republics and Regions (LDRs) in Yugoslavia prior to the breakup, but I find his wording to also accurately depict the situation in Serbia during and after the political and economic transition of early 2000s

Losing their “futures” was perhaps, for most people in Serbia, the greatest loss out of many losses brought about by the events and processes that led to, and followed Yugoslavia’s disintegration. This was particularly visible in Aleksinac where people lost not only the social enterprises to corrupt privatization processes and their jobs along the way, but also family members to the big mining accident of 1989, and then the very coal mines which were the main engine of the local economy since the late 19th century. “The future”, I realized soon after starting my fieldwork, was the most coveted idea and ‘commodity’ in Aleksinac (see also Chapter 7), as well as across the country. This was both the case among the relatively older citizens who could still remember the times in which they had ‘a future they believed in’, as well as among the younger generations who had their lives ahead of them, but no clear idea ‘where’ their futures are or what they might look like.

As it turned out, I was not alone in the realization of how strikingly missing and badly needed “the future” was for Serbia’s citizens across the country. The Serbian Progressive Party (SNS) and their campaign managers came to the same conclusion before me, and offered exactly “a future to believe in” to the electorate in the 2014 elections which they won. In fact, it was the discursive shift towards “the future” that was perhaps the main difference that separated SNS from the Serbian Radical Party (SRS) from which they split, with the SRS continuing to indulge in discourses of the past. SNS on the other hand recognized that addressing ‘the future’ in their political campaigns would find much better traction among the constituencies and continued to regularly invoke “the future” in their political campaigns in the following years as well.

In 2019, as part of their political campaign entitled “The future of Serbia” (*Budućnost Srbije*), SNS released a series of promotional videos in which they promised a “digital future” for all citizens. The videos featured prominent party representatives using a teleportation device, a flying car and a futuristic cooking device that preps a meal with a single push of a button (still used by a female party member, of course, because the ‘digital future’ and

advanced technologies do not necessarily imply advanced social and gender relations). Their 2020 electoral slogan “For our children” (*Za našu decu*) also invoked an even more distant future inhabited by the next generation of Serbia’s citizens (Figure 33). Whether coincidentally or not, it also drew from the past where the slogan „Future for our children“ (*Unseren Kindern die Zukunft durch*) was used on Nazi propaganda posters produced for the 1936 Reichstag election and plebiscite on the remilitarization of the Rhineland - a time when „the future“ across Europe was similarly uncertain (Figure 34).



Figure 33. “For our children”, the SNS electoral poster/slogan used for the 2020 parliamentary elections (Source: SNS promotonal video still⁵⁵)

⁵⁵ <https://youtu.be/AERZd3IRzb4>



Figure 34. “Future for our children” Nazi propaganda poster produced for the 1936 Reichstag election and plebiscite on the remilitarization of the Rhineland (Source: US Holocaust Memorial Museum⁵⁶)

Having established that “the future” is indeed an extremely important temporal horizon and topic for Serbia’s citizens (and voters), I was excited to explore the ‘shale mining future’ in Aleksinac during my stay there. Going into the field site, the main question I wanted to answer was how the different stakeholders tied to the mining project imagine, understand, narrate and react to the announced mine. I had already known from previous desk research that there was a local nongovernmental organization (NGO) that firmly opposes the project, and I also knew from my desk research and a short pilot study I conducted in 2014, that the government announced mining project also found many supporters within the local populace. My main goal was to capture these different narratives and the various social, political, economic and environmental dynamics that arise out of these anticipations of and contestations around the mining future. I had hoped that I would be able to document and

⁵⁶ <https://collections.ushmm.org/search/catalog/irn37663>

explain the various material manifestations of these different anticipations people had of this ‘future mine’.

Yet, as often is the case with grounded ethnographic research, my field site had other plans for me. In a symbolic turn of events, my questions about the shale mining futures in Aleksinac and their discursive and material realizations in the present became illustrative of the speculative nature of ‘the future’ and the all-too-common non-realization of expected futures. And while Aleksinac remained my main case study and the future my main topic, the shale-mine-to-be gradually slipped away from my focus for reasons that will be described further in this chapter.

5.2. The mine will not be built

While developing my research I was cautioned by several colleagues, including some of my committee members, that my research faces the problem of the mine potentially never being opened, or at least not in the near future when I am supposed to do my research and write my dissertation. I would brush these comments aside with a “you don’t understand my research” smirk, insisting that it is not the mine that interests me, nor its’ “actual” effects. It is precisely the **announcement** of the mine, and consequently its’ imagination in the future that I am interested in. If anything, I wished that the mining project doesn’t go ahead before I at least conduct most of my fieldwork. I wanted the mine to remain in the realm of possibility and imagination for as long as possible so I could capture some of the social, political, economic and environmental dynamics in this phase, before the materialization and realization of the mine forecloses some options and possibilities and makes others more certain. It was this truly unknown landscape, where anything is possible, that drew my attention.

And while my wish for the mine to remain a future possibility was (and still is) granted, after doing my fieldwork I realized that there was another “danger”, or rather – an unexpected and previously unexamined scenario related to the question “but what if the mine is not realized?”. This danger was not in the material realization of the mine, as a geophysical (and associated social, economic, political etc.) reality, but specifically in its’ “realization” at the level of anticipation and imagination. And this precisely was one of my first main findings during my fieldwork.

Not only was the mine not ‘present’ as a material manifestation, but it was also strikingly missing from people’s anticipations and to a somewhat lesser degree - imagination. This is not to say that people I spoke with were unfamiliar with the state-announced plan to initiate shale mining in this region. Most, though not all, of the people that I interviewed and talked to while residing in Aleksinac have heard about the ‘future shale mine’ and to varying degrees were even familiar with some of the details such as where the mine was to be located, what is to be mined and how, which companies could be involved, what some of the risks and challenges associated to mining and processing oil-shale are, or what some of the potential and advertised benefits for the community could be. The people I spoke with ranged from those who were completely unfamiliar with the mining project, those who have heard about the mine but had no interest in or opinions about it, to those who are well familiar and/or strongly opinionated about the prospect of shale mining in the Aleksinac basin, such as the people from the Environmental Movement Aleksinac (*Ekološki Pokret Aleksinac -EPA*), a few municipal/state employees, a local geologist who teaches at the Technical University in Bor, and a journalist I spoke with.

Yet, regardless of how well informed my interlocutors were about the planned shale mine in their region, and furthermore – regardless of their opinions about the mine, its potential environmental, economic, social or otherwise impacts, and ultimately whether they supported or opposed the mine’s opening, the vast majority of them expressed firm disbelief

that the mine will actually open any time soon or even at all. This skepticism was never based upon knowledge about the global oil prices which have indeed more than halved since the announcement of the mine in 2012 (Figure 35) thus making the financial feasibility of the mine questionable. Rather, it almost uniformly conveyed a firm distrust towards the state, its institutions, political parties, and their intentions in the whole matter. Most of the people I spoke with were convinced that the announcement of the mine was merely a pre-election campaign ‘scam’ aimed at pleasing/buying the voters and getting them to reelect the same local and national government. Jana, one of my interviewees, even went so far as to express doubt in the existence of shale as such, and thought that that too was part of the scam.

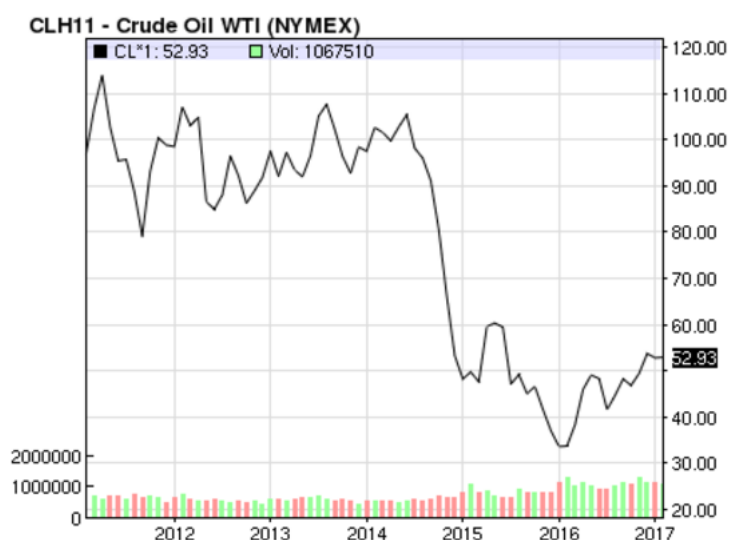


Figure 35. End of day Commodity Futures Price Quotes for Crude Oil WTI (NYMEX).
Source: www.nasdaq.com

Many of my interlocutors also pointed out that this was not the first time that the “shale story” has been circling around Aleksinac and that it in fact “always resurfaces just before the elections”. Indeed, explorations of shale in this region date as far back as the 1960s (Vitorovic & Pfendt, 1967), and plans to exploit the oil-shale in this region are just as old. Yet despite the fact that these plans were for the first time formalized in 2012 when the government of Serbia officially announced a feasibility study and a public procurement process for consultancy services for the selection of a strategic partner for shale exploitation,

this “formality” and nation-wide coverage of the story didn’t seem to raise its credibility for the local residents. They were just as skeptical as in the past when such stories were shared through town-gossip and initiated by the local ruling elites.

The announcement truly came only months before the local and parliamentary elections in 2012, but although the Democratic Party (DS) led National Assembly was replaced with that led by the coalition centered around the Serbian Progressive Party (SNS), officials of the newly formed government stated on several occasions that the new government intends to continue with the shale mining project in Aleksinac. Still the skepticism remained.

When on March 8, 2017, a month before the presidential elections in Serbia, the oldest Serbian newspaper *Politika* published a story under the headline “Petroleum Industry of Serbia will soon start exploiting oil shale [in Aleksinac]” (*NIS (Naftna Industrija Srbije) uskoro kreće u eksploataciju uljnih škriljaca*), the locals started sharing the news and reacting both with anger and humor. Dušan Ostojić, a local news reporter and one of my most valued interlocutors, shared the news on Facebook prefacing it with a comment that read:

“A lie that is ready before every election. They lied under Milošević, they lied with Minister Dulić, and now they are lying under prime minister Vučić” (Figure 37).

Comments by other people ranged from laughter to “*The famous pre-election shale*” (*Čuveni predizborni škriljac*), and the most liked comment which said:

“The shale discussion only happens before the elections. After the elections nobody remembers shale. So please, show us a new trick up your sleeve (if you have one), and promise something more realistic, a lie that people will find easier to swallow” (Figure 36).

This, along with other findings which I will discuss further in this chapter suggests a deep-seated crisis of the Serbian state, which is increasingly losing its ability and “capacity to order and regulate people and things” (Dunn, 2008:244).

Dusan Ostojic with Dusan Ostojic.
23 hrs · 🌐

Pred svake izbore uvek spremna laz.
Lagali u doba Milosevica, pa u doba ministra Dulica sad u vlasti Vucica.



NIS uskoro kreće u eksploataciju uljnih škriljaca

Naftna industrija Srbije ozbiljno je zainteresovana za početak eksploatacije uljnih škriljaca iz aleksinačkog basena za šta je samo u prvoj fazi projekta spremna da uloži oko 300 miliona evra. Ceo projekat koji značajno povećava zalihe nafte i...

POLITIKARS | BY POLITIKA

👍 Like 💬 Comment ➦ Share

👍 😂 🤔 Jelena Jelena and 18 others

Milan Maric Svi su oni zainteresova i za eksploataciju uljnih skriljaca PRED IZBORE. OGULILI SU ALEKSINAC. NEDAO BOG DA GRAMER ODE BILI BISMO GORI I OD RAZANJ - sada MALI gradic PEJTON.

Like · Reply · 🗨️ 2 · March 8 at 9:45pm

Dragan Pešić Oko tih škriljaca se vodi polemika samo pred izbore. Kad prođu izbori, više ih se niko i ne seća. Zato, izvadite nekog novog keca iz rukava (ako ga imate), obećajte nešto realnije, neku laž koju će narod lakše da proguta.

Like · Reply · 🗨️ 5 · March 8 at 9:51pm

Jelena Jelena Samo se plasim da ne bude kao u priči "Cobanin i vuk" 🤔

Like · Reply · 🗨️ 1 · March 8 at 10:03pm

Sasa Jonic "cija je to, snajka, cija..."

Like · Reply · 🗨️ 1 · March 8 at 10:05pm

Write a reply...

Dusan Jakovljevic Jafok tako su i Dinkićevi u Boru osvojili vlast sa "najmodernijom fabrikom sumporne kiseline na svetu". A ono ispalo ekološka katastrofa. Ako, ovaj kriminal, nedaj Bože, zaživi pozdravite se sa decom, zemljom, Moravom i zakupite i njima i sebi parcelu na vreme. Vaše će biti samo da umrete...

Like · Reply · 🗨️ 1 · March 8 at 10:41pm

Sasa Miladinovic Cuveni predizborni skriljac

Like · Reply · 🗨️ 3 · March 8 at 11:42pm

Dragan Toza Zivkovic Ahahahaha...

Like · Reply · 🗨️ 1 · Yesterday at 12:18am

Figure 36. Petroleum Industry of Serbia (NIS) will soon start exploiting oil shale [in Aleksinac]. (Source: Dušan Ostojić's facebook page, screenshot)

5.3. The “Plan” as “A promise”

The strong distrust expressed towards the state regarding the shale-mining plan, but also general distrust towards the state and its institutions which emerged in my interviews and conversations with local residents led me to reconceptualize the state shale-mining “plan” as a “promise” – where “promise” is understood as something which formalizes the contract between the state and citizens. This reconceptualization, in turn, shifts focus on trust/belief as the other counterpart and necessary condition for a promise to fulfill its function. Approaching the future shale-mine in this way opened up a whole new pathway for my analysis and shed new light on my data, not only when talking about the ‘future’ shale mine, or ‘the future’ in general, but also when my interlocutors were reminiscing about the past and telling me how ‘things used to be different’. It also led me to center my analysis around the state-citizen (promisor-promisee) relationship, and the historical transformations of social contexts and institutional structures which define this relationship. And while the previous chapter served exactly to discuss the historical transformations of social contexts and institutional structures through the analysis and discussion of the transforming temporal politics of the Yugoslav and successor states, further in this chapter I discuss the contemporary state-citizen relationships drawing from my conversations with people in Aleksinac and insights from the field site.

The transformation of the socialist Yugoslav state into the successor capitalist state(s) did not end with the retreat of the state from the sphere of economic regulation, withdrawal from social ownership of the means of production and the introduction of “democracy” through a multi-party election system. Rather, this new (or these new) capitalist state(s) continues to suffer transformations related to neoliberal globalization and the ensuing rescaling processes discussed in Chapter 1 (see section 1.2) of this dissertation. In this view, the state continues to be “hollowed out” (Jessop, 2002) as it transfers its functions down to

subnational, up to supranational and, critically, outwards to markets, non-governmental and private authorities. Such transformations of the state also critically alter the ‘social contract’ between the state and citizens, from which the state draws its legitimacy.

According to public administrations scholars, citizens’ trust in the state (in this case synonymous with ‘government’) is primarily determined by the so-called “performance theory”, by which the government’s macro performances (economic growth, employment, inflation etc.) and micro-performances (policing, education, maintenance of infrastructure etc.) are ‘judged’ by citizens who then confer, or not, their trust in the state (Yang and Holzer, 2006). However, in light of the sweeping transformations brought about by Serbia’s transition from a socialist to a capitalist state and the still ongoing “hollowing out” of the ‘new’ state and transfer of its functions to “non-state” actors, the question is which performances are the Serbian citizens measuring and which functions do they expect the state to perform?

It is not only the explicit promises that the state makes such as the “promise” to initiate the shale mining and processing project (and bring jobs, income and so on to Aleksinac), but also the implicit promises that are related to the question of what the state **IS** and hence what roles and functions it is supposed to perform. As I will discuss further in this chapter, many of my interlocutors (particularly ‘older’ ones) in fact feel that the state has also broken these implicit promises subsumed in the social contract that they signed decades ago when the state indeed was a different thing.

5.3.1. *(Dis)Trust*

As noted earlier in this chapter, my conversations with people in Aleksinac revealed that the state's "promise" to initiate shale mining in this municipality failed to fulfill its' function as it was met with complete and utter distrust from the local citizens. Regardless of their opinions about the mine and whether they supported or opposed it, the people in Aleksinac that I spoke with shared an opinion that the state's announcement of the mine was made with short-term political gains in mind, and that the mine will not actually be opened soon, if at all. But this distrust, as it turns out, was not reserved solely for the state, its institutions or political parties, but was present all around. Distrust in fact colored and shaped my whole experience in Aleksinac in various ways. From my very first day in Aleksinac I started receiving well-intentioned advice from the people that I met and who told me that (as an 'outsider') I should be very careful with people in this town and that I should not trust people there.

I had arranged to rent an apartment in Aleksinac over the telephone, prior to moving there, and although I agreed to everything my (future) landlord had asked for (to pay a deposit and one month's rent in advance, and to pay the bills directly to him) he still insisted that we will only finalize our agreement once I arrive to Aleksinac and we meet in person. When I arrived on a cold and snowy day on January 31, 2015, he waited for me on the street and took me to the apartment. We left my luggage in the apartment, which he briefly showed me around and then invited me to go to his home, in the apartment building next-door. Over some coffee and home-made brandy, we had a good 2-hour conversation. He wanted to know 'all' about me, beyond the basics of who I am, what I do and why I am moving to Aleksinac - which I previously shared over the telephone. He wanted to know about my family, where I was born and where my parents had worked. It was not so much of an interrogation but rather

a friendly conversation, in which he also shared his life-story and introduced me to his wife and children.

He apologized for asking me “all these questions” and “making me” pay the deposit and rent in advance (which is not very common in Serbia, outside of Belgrade) and went on to explain that this is necessary because “you can’t trust anyone these days”. He shared with me the negative experiences he had with some of the previous tenants who had vandalized the apartment and/or left him with unpaid electricity and other bills. He then went on to advise me to be very careful with people in Aleksinac, because as he said “bad times have made bad people out of many folks here”.

He said I should not trust just anyone because many people might want to take advantage of me being an ‘outsider’ (not knowing who’s who in town) and also coming from Belgrade - which for most locals translates to being well-off. He also specifically told me that *when* someone asks me to lend money to them (implying that it is not a question of “if” but “when”), I should never do this even if I think that person is a friend, because “*people in Aleksinac always ask for loans but never repay them*”⁵⁷. He concluded by saying that we had an excellent conversation and that he now feels that he can trust me, and that he hopes I feel the same about him. It is very important that we can trust each other, he said, and if that was not the case, he would not have agreed to rent the apartment to me.

In the following days and weeks, I kept hearing similar advice from many of the people that I met. “Nobody is to be trusted” and “everyone here wants to take advantage of other people” were the most common ‘guidelines’ I would get from people that I met and befriended. Distrust is also something that I have directly experienced in this region. While walking around Subotinac, trying to get to know the village, and taking photographs of the village I was twice approached by concerned men who asked me who I am and why I am taking photographs. The first, an older man, told me that I should not take photographs of

⁵⁷ During my stay in Aleksinac I did end up lending some money to two of the friends that I made there. One has repaid the loan but several months after the agreed date, and only when I insisted that she finds a way to repay me. The other loan was never repaid.

houses and he was particularly concerned that I took a photograph of what turned out to be his house. Once I committed to not taking more photographs, he decided to leave me to continue my stroll around the village.

Shortly after, another younger man in his late 30s caught up with me in his car and started asking similar questions. He was much more hostile so I felt the need to ‘ground myself’ in the village and evoke my connection to Mileva who lives there and who I had met earlier while doing my pilot study. This indeed calmed him down after which he explained that there are many house break-ins lately and that people are worried that someone taking photographs of the houses might be planning break-ins. I had a similar experience in another nearby village when a woman yelled at me for taking a photograph of her house. As I started interviewing people in Aleksinac, I also heard from some friends there that there is a rumor circling the town that I am spy working for a foreign government.

Tropes of ‘distrust’ also appeared throughout the interviews which I conducted later. After the initial grievances expressed by my interlocutors about the general unemployment and poverty in the town and municipality at large, they would often turn to the question of human relations and matters of trust, respect and decency in the following section of the interview when I asked them to tell me if and how things used to be different in the past. While virtually all of my interlocutors told me how life was better in the past when it comes to personal or family incomes, employment and other (i.e., culture and leisure) opportunities in town, many of them also talked about how human relationships were also different. Marija for example noted that:

“We lived differently in the past, we spent time with our friends in the park and on the streets...we didn’t have cell phones, but we were somehow more connected, we spent time better and more efficient than they do now. We were much more relaxed and secure, whereas now, for example, I am afraid to let my child go to school on his own”

Vesna similarly told me:

“We knew how to make friends, how to organize and spend our time with friends...there was a stronger sense of ‘togetherness’ back then, among both boys and girls [...] Now I look at my son and his friends and I think that they don’t even know how to be friends [...] it’s a different time now...I don’t know..”

The sense of ‘togetherness’, and feelings of security that my interlocutors tie to ‘the past’ are thus sharply contrasted by the insecurity, lack of friendships and social isolation with which they diagnose the present day. Suzana, another one of my interlocutors from the *Aleksinački rudnici* neighborhood, also confirmed this by saying:

“It was very different back then. There were no computers, internet or cell phones, so we spent more time with friends, going out and playing together. People spent more time with friends and they had more time to spend...today people have no time for friends, everyone has some obligations, their own problems [...] mostly financial, and then they retreat to their own world of problems and don’t spend time with friends. I don’t agree with this...I think this is precisely the time [when you have problems] that you need to be with friends...It makes it easier, at least for me”

And while Marina, a student who just turned 26 when I interviewed her, was too young to remember this past herself, she drew from her grandparents’ stories and pointed more directly towards the issue of trust. She said:

“[My grandmother and grandfather say that] in the past, people respected each other more, and their word stood for something [...] today it doesn’t stand for anything”.

When Slaviša, a local municipal employee, mentioned during our interview that “people have lost trust in everything and everyone”, I took the opportunity to ask him about his opinion as to why and when this had happened, to which he replied: *“I think it started during the 90s, and then people had high hopes and expectations in the 2000s and when that failed...now I don’t know if anyone trusts anything anymore”.*

Similarly, but in some more detail, Gordana told me: *“I honestly think that I don’t believe in anything this State does any more. Whoever is in power...whether it’s the democrats or these people now [SNS], it’s all the same...’the more things change the more they stay the same’⁵⁸...I simply don’t believe in this State”*

And to my follow-up question if she ever did trust the State and when she stopped trusting, she replied:

“I did trust...briefly... between 2000 and 2003. I was part of Otpor⁵⁹ and adored Djindjić⁶⁰...you know, you thought about the future then, there was some perspective that things will be better...we believed...and then as time goes by you start cracking more and more...and I was just disappointed by everyone”

Thus, both Gordana and Slaviša see the origins of their own and the general distrust expressed by people in town as originating in the 1990s, when the Yugoslav state itself was dissolving, along with its’ promissory future, as well as institutions and values, such as the ‘brotherhood and unity’. And while *“expectations were high”* in the early 2000s, as Slaviša said, and *“you thought about the future then, there was some perspective that things will be better”*, as Gordana phrased it, they both agreed that that these hopes and expectations were quickly crushed, resulting in even higher levels of distrust. This is particularly the case with relatively older people who could still remember the time in which the future was imbued with hope, the state was strong and nurtured collective identities, and the values of ‘brotherhood and unity’ nurtured trust and respect between people.

Namely, while the general insecurities resulting from the retreat of the (welfare) state, and private, individualist culture that ensued after Serbia’s political and economic transition since the 2000s are typical of capitalist economies, and as such would be neither ‘surprising’ nor disappointing for people accustomed to them (including the younger Serbian generations),

⁵⁸ Gordana used the Serbian idiom “Sjaši Kurta da uzjaše Murta”, which literally translates to „Kurta gets off the horse so that Murta can get on“. The English idiom „the more things change the more they stay the same“ is the closest in meaning.

⁵⁹ The political movement credited for bringing the Milosevic regime down

⁶⁰ The Prime Minister of Serbia assassinated in 2003

for those true ‘post-socialist’ citizens who were socialized in Yugoslavia they represent a drastic departure from their earlier lived experience and a huge disappointment with ‘the new state’.

In the following section I will further explore this difference between my ‘older’ interlocutors (the ‘true post-socialist’ citizens) and their younger counterparts.

5.3.2. *Crisis vs. “not normal”*

As these experiences and conversations that I had with the local residents show - distrust is indeed omnipresent in the region of Aleksinac. It is widely shown towards the State and its institutions, but also exhibited towards outsiders such as myself, and among the local residents themselves. My interlocutors rationalize this distrust through a diagnosis of a series of “crises” from which it stems, sometimes explicitly and in other cases more implicitly.

Thus the ‘**crisis of the state**’ is narrated through experiences and stories of corruption, nepotism, particracy, failed institutions, broken (pre-election) promises, state and the like. The local ‘**economic crisis**’ is also often evoked by my interlocutors and tied to the period starting with the closing of the old coal mines in 1989/1990, followed by the collapse of the Yugoslav state and international sanctions when virtually all other local companies and factories lost their markets and business, and finally cemented with the failed/corrupt privatization processes since the year 2000.

A ‘**crisis of morals**’ was also often diagnosed by my interlocutors and explained through a lack of ‘discipline’ both at the state level (what led Jessica Greenberg (2011:90) to call Serbia a ‘postdisciplinary state’) and at the level of the family and/or community through ‘failed’ or ‘bad’ upbringing and parenting techniques. This was well captured by Milica, one of my interlocutors from the village of Subotinac, who said that:

“When we were kids, it was much better than now. We would go sledding or playing outside, but I knew that I had to be home by 3pm...nowadays... God forbid...they [kids] come and tell you to eat shit and curse at you...they are abandoned...they think they can do whatever they want...it’s their parents’ fault. [...] If we were out in public and I said something which I shouldn’t, she [mother] would slap me...she’d beat me. They [kids nowadays] go around and break into people’s houses, they bully the elderly and God knows what else they do”

The ‘crisis of morals’ is closely linked and compounded by the ‘**crisis of culture**’ (*kriza kulture*) which my interlocutors explain through the hyperproduction of reality TV shows and tabloid journalism as ‘cultural products’ which promote ‘people with questionable morals’ as role models at the national level, but also the local disinvestment from and thus decline or closure of local folk ensembles and cultural and art associations. It is also often tied to and ‘justified’ with the state of the local economy, particularly the high unemployment rate which pushes many people into poverty, addiction (notably alcohol and heroin) and crime. Taken together, my interlocutors mostly refer to this as a broken or “**upside-down value system**” (*naopak sistem vrednosti*).

For example, Slaviša {Nov 6 121116} notes that

“People have changed. In the past, people knew how to listen and respect others, institutions did what they are supposed to do [...] the value system has changed now. I now have a problem, for example, with my kids who are adolescents... I can’t teach them right from wrong. He [my son] says to me ‘How is that good, when this guy has € 30.000, and you don’t even have a dime...so how is that good?’ And I don’t know what to tell him. That’s the thing.”

These narratives echo what other anthropologists working in the post-Yugoslav space have identified as a wider discourse about “normality” (Jansen, 2014a, 2014b) or “normal life” (Greenberg, 2011). Much like the students and student activists in Serbia that Jessica

Greenberg (2011, 2013) spoke with, virtually all of my interlocutors diagnose the present situation in the town and country as ‘abnormal’, something which it should not be, or a series of above mentioned political, economic and social (cultural, ‘moral’ ...) ‘crises’.

“(Not) normal”, as Greenberg (2011:89) writes, “*points to the gap between how people see themselves and how they must conform to conditions and realities not of their choosing...[It] serves as a diagnostic category for shifting social, political, and economic relations and the kind of agentic possibilities that emerge in those contexts*”. Janet Roitman (2014:11), on the other hand, noted that calling something a crisis “*signifies a purportedly observable chasm between “the real,” on the one hand, and [...] fictitious, erroneous, or an illogical departure from the real, on the other*”. Thus both Greenberg’s “(not) normal” and Roitman’s “crisis” serve as conceptual devices and interpretative frameworks for the dissonance between ‘how things are’ and ‘how they should be’. In other words, they incorporate a *normative* judgment of reality and the world.

A few of my interlocutors, while narrating similar problems (poverty, unemployment, distrust, lack of respect, widespread crime, addiction and so on), and diagnosing the contexts surrounding some of these problems as ‘abnormal’, interestingly lacked the ‘crisis’ or indeed ‘crises’ discourse that my other interlocutors continuously brought to the discussion, pointing to the crucial difference between Greenberg’s “(not) normal” and Roitman’s “crisis”. Vigh (2008) and Roitman (2014) remind us that ‘crisis’ is necessarily a temporal concept, whose normativity is historical rather than philosophical. Crisis is seen as a rupture, a momentary collapse of social, economic, political or other processes, but one that is followed by their restauration once the crisis has ended (Vigh, 2008:8). As such, embedded within a ‘crisis’ is an idea of the past *and* the future against which the present (crisis) is judged. “(Not) normal”, on the other hand, follows a different chronicity. Its normativity can be derived from history, as was the case for most of the students in Serbia that Greenberg spoke with, but it can also cut across space or be wholly philosophical. In other words, ideas about what constitutes

‘normal’ can come from a different time (past) but also a different place, or even a different (philosophically imagined) world. More importantly, while the ‘origins’ or ‘beginnings’ of “(not) normal” might be linked to specific moments in the past, its futurity is undetermined. Unlike a ‘crisis’ which needs to be temporally confined to a certain period of time in order to be ‘a crisis’, “(not) normal” is a judgement of the present that does not simultaneously diagnose the future.

I emphasize these ‘semantic differences’ because it was not always the explicit use of these words/concepts that allowed me to differentiate between my interlocutors and their judgements about the present state of affairs in their town and region. It is precisely the way they talked about the past, future and their “agentive capacities” (Greenberg, 2011) in the present. Namely, in the interview section in which I discussed the future with my interlocutors, asking them how they see the future of the town and the region, what they think needs to change and how they see these changes happening (or not), the ‘semantic differences’ described above again came to the fore.

When talking about the local future and what could and should be done to make it better, Stanko, who was in his late 50s identifies agriculture as one of the main potential drivers for the future of the Aleksinac region. When asked how he sees the local agriculture developing in the future, he states that:

“Well, the state would have to come up with some sort of a strategy if it wants agriculture to succeed [...] It [the state] could, for example, rent the land from owners and then give it to those people that are capable and committed to agricultural production, but give them larger plots, like 50 or 100 hectares, because we have 44.000 hectares in this municipality. Otherwise, this situation where people in their 80s work on small plots in villages...that will never work.”

Conversely, Marina, a 26-year-old student and part-time programmer, though diagnosing the present much like my other interlocutors and naming unemployment, poverty,

corruption and crime as the main problems in the town and region, had a different vision of the future and how it could be made better for the people in Aleksinac. She notes:

“We need to strengthen the small economy [SMEs], to be entrepreneurs, to use our own ideas and make life better here. There are many educated people here, with higher education...they need to stop sitting at home... every one of them could think of something they could do, and then there are some programs, subsidies for young entrepreneurs...but initiative is very important. [...] Maybe the formula for a brighter future is for us young people here to become more active, to have initiative and invest ourselves in what we do...not live off [our grandparents’] pensions and sit at home and play [computer] games. The state is not going to knock on your door and give you a job...you need to think of something you want to do and then, if the state wants - it will help you with subsidies or benefits or whatever...but you need to start something on your own, because if everything stands still...I don’t know where salvation will come from”

While virtually all of the people in Aleksinac that I spoke with had similar narratives about and diagnosis of the present situation in the town and region, diagnosing it as along the lines of Greenberg’s “not normal”, the differences were made apparent in the way that they spoke about the future. My interlocutors broadly fell within the two approaches illustrated with the above examples: 1) those who see the ‘returning’ State as the only possible ‘savior’ and 2) those who see themselves and their fellow citizens as possible (and ‘necessary’) agents of change. Not surprisingly, it was mostly the older people that I spoke with, those who were able from their personal experiences to recall ‘a different time’ and ‘a different state’ from the past in which ‘life was better’, that belonged to the first group. They were most often simultaneously the fiercest critics of the state, showing higher degrees of distrust towards it, while also ascribing the same state with the ‘only possible savior’ role in the future. This tendency to evoke ‘a return of the (‘good’) state’ in the future is what leads me to claim that these people diagnose the present predicament, even when not explicitly using the word, as a

‘crisis’ – a temporally bounded period in time, which will end with the restauration of the state and life as it was before.

The higher levels of distrust that they expressed towards the state are precisely related to the broken promises of the state that go beyond the pre-election or specific development projects, and are critically related to the question of what the state IS and the implicit functions (promises) that it is supposed to perform (keep). In their view, the state is supposed to provide jobs and continued economic development that benefits the entire population and is translated into higher living standards, but also continued social reproduction through investments in healthcare, as well as investments in (and regulation of) culture, including physical culture, and hence reproduction of “morals”, “discipline” and “value systems”, themselves also serving a function of safety-nets that protect against poverty, crime and addiction – all the different “crises” with which they diagnose the present.

Conversely, those who saw themselves and their fellow citizens as the ‘necessary’ agents of change and improvement of the local conditions tended to belong to the younger generations, unable to personally recall the ‘golden past’, or rather ‘the socialist state’. Entirely socialized in the post-socialist Serbia/FR Yugoslavia, their understandings and expectations of what the state IS and what it is supposed to do were quite different. Though their stories about the present situation in the town and region did not differ from those of their older fellow citizens, their ideas about and hopes for the future did. Rather than a restauration of the past (social, economic, political), signaling an end of a crisis, their future was more open and determined by their own decisions and actions, rather than those of the state. The state, in their view, is “*not going to knock on your door and give you a job*”, as Marina phrased it, but the state is there to support private initiative and entrepreneurialism (and only “*if it [the state] wants*” I would again quote Marina), through subsidies and other monetary or non-monetary benefits. Poverty, crime and addiction, in their narrative also appeared as private problems resulting from private choices, and issues that the state should

only engage after the fact (through incarceration, or support and rehabilitation programs), but had no role or control in producing them.

5.4. The struggle against a mine that does not exist

As noted earlier, the vast majority of the people I spoke with in Aleksinac, whether formally interviewing them or just chatting away in local cafés, expressed doubts towards the possibility of the shale mine being opened in their municipality, and saw it as a “pre-election promise” (*predizborno obećanje*), -one that is meant to be broken.

This meant that I was unable to find the kinds of ‘materializations of the future’ that I originally set out to discover – namely, the different discourses as well as practices that would be unleashed by the state’s announcement of the mine. Most of the people did not react to the mine’s announcement simply because they did not believe in it. Yet one notable exception were the people behind the Environmental Movement Aleksinac (*Ekološki pokret Aleksinac – EPA*). These people, unlike the others in town that I spoke with, did react to the State’s announcement of the mine – by founding EPA.

EPA was formally founded on February 19, 2012, just a month after the Serbian Ministry of Environment, Mining and Spatial Planning officially announced the mining project and made a decision to initiate the process of public procurement of consultancy services in order to find a strategic partner for the mining endeavor. The founding statute of EPA stated that their primary goal was to disseminate information regarding oil shale extraction and processing, and raise awareness of local and national audiences about the environmental dangers of this project. Shortly after it was founded, EPA held a few meetings in which they shared information about the dangers and potential environmental impacts of the shale mine and wrote a statement against the announced mining project detailing all the potential environmental hazards and the reasons why they opposed the project. They also

created a Facebook page where they shared this information as well as other local environmental issues and news to a wider audience. Yet, besides these initial meetings and lively Facebook discussions in the first few months after the registration, the movement was almost completely inactive since, both on the web and on the ground.

The “core” of the movement is comprised of a married couple – Vladimir and Nevena; another married couple- Gordana and Milan; and Marko, a local veterinarian who acted as the NGO’s Head of the Governing Board, but was already disinterested in the movement and unavailable for an interview when I did my fieldwork in 2015. Vladimir, who is a trained ecologist, works at the local municipality as a senior associate for environmental affairs. His education and employment with the local government make him the movements’ expert on the ‘future shale mine’ and indeed he was my most knowledgeable interlocutor when it comes to the potential environmental dangers of shale mining and processing, but also details about the Aleksinac shale mining project such as the exact locations of the shale deposits, the available and proposed technologies for extraction and processing and so on. Vladimir was the most vocal opponent of the ‘future shale mine’, and it was his online writings as reactions to the news about the ‘future shale mine’ that mobilized other people who later, with Vladimir’s help, founded EPA. Yet just like other Aleksinac residents that I spoke with, Vladimir too did not believe that the shale mine would become a reality any time soon. In fact, Vladimir went even further in justifying his disbelief by saying that the whole ‘shale mine project’ lacked credibility because:

“...what’s more, the State documents that were published in the previous years never once mentioned shale. Neither the Republic of Serbia’s Spatial plan, nor the [Oil] reserve balance sheets which even included reserves in Kosovo, but never once mentioned shale on the entire territory of Serbia”

Despite this skepticism towards the possibility of the mine really opening soon, Vladimir decided to support the rest of the group which ended up founding the NGO. In my

conversation with Vladimir about EPA he complained that it is more of a burden now than anything. “*We have to pay a yearly tax for the organization and that just goes straight out of our pockets*”, said Vladimir. A look at the organization’s Facebook page tells the same story – almost all administrator posts in the last several years are simply pleas for donations or “membership fees” so that tax and other expenses related to “keeping the organization alive” can be covered.

What is more, the organization also did not find much traction among the local population. The vast majority of my interlocutors knew about EPA, but showed little or no interest in joining ‘the movement’, including those who did firmly oppose the mining project. Many of the people I spoke with expressed strong distrust towards EPA and the people who founded the organization, while several of my interlocutors even expressed quite negative attitudes towards them, labeling them as “noise-makers” (*bundžije*) or “self-interested individuals”.

Thus, distrust once again resurfaced as the main theme when talking about the resistance to the shale mine embodied in the EPA. To unpack the story further and tackle the question of why EPA was received by the locals in this way, as well as raising the question of other effects that might have been produced by EPA’s foundation, in the next section I will turn to the recent history of NGOs in Serbia.

5.4.1. NGOization of resistance

In my conversation with Vladimir and Nevena they revealed that EPA is not the first NGO that they were involved with. In fact, both Vladimir and Nevena have had an extensive history with different NGOs as supporters but also founders and employees. Vladimir was already a founder of an environmental NGO “*Eko-logika*” (Eco-Logic) back in 2000, in a nearby village in which he lived at the time, while Nevena and Vladimir along with a few

other friends also participated in founding of another NGO “LIA” (*Lokalna inicijativa Aleksinac* - Local Initiative Aleksinac) in late 2000s. At the time of my interview Nevena, who is a psychologist, worked with children with mental disability, on a project implemented by another regional NGO. Their income, both at the time of the interview as well as in the past, has thus largely depended on the work they did for different NGOs.

Like other post-socialist countries, Serbia has seen a proliferation of NGOs in the ‘transitioning years’. Though delayed by the Yugoslav wars, the local political situation and the ‘militarized humanitarian intervention’ during the 1999 NATO bombing of FR Yugoslavia, what followed was rather similar to the development-based humanitarianism that was seen in other central and eastern European post-socialist contexts. Yet this militarized humanitarianism, or ‘temporary imperialism’ as Micheal Ignatieff (2003) called the Yugoslav/Balkan humanitarian military incursion which later shaped the trajectory of similar interventions in Iraq, Afghanistan and Libya, was not without its consequences. Namely, the NATO bombing of Serbia has itself caused brutal violence and ‘collateral damage’, and significantly impacted on the local reception and perception of the development-based humanitarianism which followed.

Aleksinac was particularly hit during the NATO airstrikes in 1999. Twice during the Noble Anvil NATO intervention, due to ‘technical errors’ the bombs fell in the town’s center, killing 14 people and injuring over 50, while also destroying or damaging over a hundred buildings (Figure 37) (Todorović, 2008).



Figure 37. Aleksinac town center in the aftermath of the April 5, 1999 NATO airstrikes
(Source: Bjeletić, 2015)

The houses destroyed in the April 5, 1999 airstrikes (Figure 38) have been cleared and a new apartment building complex was built instead, along with a park that the locals now ironically call “NATO park”. And while this has visually masked the scars from the NATO bombings, the trauma still lives on in the minds and lives of the local residents who still commemorate the day each year, and often bring up the subject in various conversations.

My interlocutors often talked about the rising cancer incidence in the region as a direct consequence of the 1999 NATO airstrikes. They would also often bring the subject up during conversations about Serbia’s future – and particularly EU accession. Namely, the anti-EU sentiment is particularly strong in Aleksinac where local residents see the EU/Western governments as the same powers who bombed the town and the country in 1999. In other words, distrust appears in relation to the EU because the promise of EU to be Serbia’s friend was broken by the 1999 bombing of the country.

Much like the rest of post-socialist Europe (Kalb, 2002; Verdery, 1996, 2002; Wedel 1998), Serbia in the late 1990s and particularly the 2000s was also subjected to the development-based humanitarian intervention that relied on development aid and ‘democracy promotion’ through building and strengthening the local civil society (Mikuš, 2013; Vetta,

2009, 2012; Vukov, 2013). This is usually described as a process of “NGOization” in which foreign donors assist in building and financing local nonprofit and nongovernmental organizations, considered par excellence representatives of a ‘vibrant civil society’ and vital elements to (a liberal) democracy (Mikuš, 2013, Vetta 2009).

The first NGOs in Serbia emerged in the late 1980s and early 1990s (Vetta, 2009:29), at the same time when ‘economic shock therapy’ was applied throughout post-socialist Europe (Klein, 2007). Yet, due to the local political situation – namely, Slobodan Milošević’s regime which was certainly repressive towards NGOs, labeling the people who worked there as “foreign mercenaries, domestic/national betrayers” (*strani plaćenici, domaći izdajnici*), but also Yugoslavia’s “resistance to the broader trends of political and economic reforms” (Talbot, in Klein, 2007:415) the NGOs that operated in Serbia until the fall of the Milošević regime in 2000 were mostly focused on political opposition and ‘the struggle against the Milošević regime’ (Vetta 2009; Vukov 2013). It was technically illegal for Serbian opposition parties to receive foreign funding in the 1990s, but the same did not apply for NGOs, so many of the NGOs founded during this time were in fact ‘extensions’ of the oppositional political parties through which foreign funding could be channeled (Vetta, 2009:29). Other NGOs, that had a more grassroots character, opposed the rising nationalism and ethnic war in Yugoslavia, and/or focused on the welfare of the resulting and massive influx of refugees and internally displaced persons (Vetta 2009; Mikuš, 2015).

Thus, in the decade between 1990 and 2000, ‘only’ 2,000 NGOs were registered in Serbia (Vetta 2009:29) while the real ‘mushrooming’ of NGOs in Serbia, which had already taken place in other post-socialist countries, occurred after the fall of Slobodan Milošević in 2000. Paunović (2006:49) notes that already between the years 2000 and 2006 the number of registered NGOs was 8,500, and at this time the focus of newly registered NGOs has shifted from political opposition to the more ‘typical’ advancement of liberal democracy, human and minority rights advocacy, decentralization and economic and social liberalization (Mikuš,

2013). The 2000s were also the period when Serbia started the full-scale neoliberal economic reform by applying the IMF and World Bank recipes of ‘privatization, deregulation and liberalization’ under the ‘structural adjustment loans’ which were to put Serbia ‘back on the path of prosperity’ and on the “road to eventual European union membership” (Vukov, 2013).

This synchronization of NGOization and neoliberal reforms in Serbia, much like it happened in other post-socialist countries a decade earlier, fits well with Arundhati Roy’s (2014) thesis that NGOs are an “indicator species” for the devastation caused by neoliberalism in non-western countries. Roy (2004) points out that as non-western States applying the IMF and World Bank led ‘structural adjustment programs’ cut their public spending and retreat from their traditional role, NGOs move in to fill this vacuum and defuse political anger. Yet, in the long run, the cuts in public spending far surpass the funds available to NGOs, particularly when the international aid and development agencies that act as main funders of NGOs (and are themselves part of the same loose political formation that demands the cuts in government spending in the first place) start cutting the funds for NGOs and slowly retreating from the country in question (Roy, 2014). This gradual retreat of foreign donors, usually referred to as ‘donor flight’ or ‘donor exit’, started happening in Serbia after 2008 (Mikuš, 2013; Vetta, 2009).

5.4.2. The “Comprador Elite”

Critical and ethnographically informed anthropological analyses of the ‘NGOization’ processes in post-socialist countries often discuss another effect produced by these processes – that of the emerging ‘new class’ of the so-called ‘NGO elite’ or the ‘(neo)comprador elite’ (Petras and Veltmeyer, 2001; Kalb, 2002; Sampson, 2004). Serbia is no exception here as numerous authors studying the political economy of the Serbian ‘third sector’ emphasized the class-(re)formation processes that accompanied the widespread emergence of NGOs in the

1990s and particularly the 2000s (Vetta 2009, 2012; Mikuš, 2013, 2015; Vukov, 2013). What these and other authors have repeatedly shown is that the typical Serbian NGO workers tend to be relatively younger, Anglophone, well-educated and loyal to Western or cosmopolitan values and ideas (Vetta, 2009, 2012; Mikuš, 2013, 2015; Vukov 2013). Research conducted by the Belgrade based NGO “Civil Initiatives” (*Građanske inicijative*) has shown that 28 percent of NGO employees and 42.5 percent of contract workers had university degrees, as opposed to 9 percent of the general population in the same year when their research was conducted (2011:45). These numbers are in reality even higher when we consider the fact that many of the NGO employees and contract workers are young and actively enrolled in universities working towards their degrees, as noted by Mikuš (2015). Cvetičanin and Popescu (2011) also highlight that their taste in music, literature and visual arts are of the “global urban” type that they associate with the Serbian “upper classes”.

A class-divide is also evident when we look at the broader category of “active membership in civic organizations”. Namely, according to research conducted by the Institute for Sociology of the Faculty of Philosophy in Belgrade in 2012, the vast majority of active members of civic associations are those from higher social strata (46%) and middle classes (21%) (Vuković, 2015).

Yet, more problematic and indeed often problematized is the economic position of people working in the ‘third sector’. The foreign donor funded NGO’s that started appearing in Serbia in the 1990s and early 2000s paid their employees significantly higher salaries than those received by the average Serbian working people (Vetta, 2009). Though these salaries were not necessarily high enough to classify NGO workers as an ‘economic elite’ (Mikuš 2015), they did come with many extra ‘perks’ such as paid travel expenses, trainings and seminars often including travel within the country and abroad, more-than-occasional paid ‘business’ lunches, dinners and other benefits that certainly were not available to people working in the business sector or most of the state employees.

Having myself briefly worked on an anti-corruption project implemented by a student NGO in 2006 and 2007 I became familiar with the inner workings of the Serbian NGO ‘project world’. The Open Society Foundation (OSF), which funded the project that I worked on, did try to keep the salaries low and so counter the by-then well-established perception of NGO workers as an ‘economic elite’ far removed from the ‘general population’ for whose interest and benefit they supposedly work. Yet there were multiple other, ironically one could say “corrupt”, ways for people employed on this and other projects to receive additional finances and live well above the means that the official salary would itself provide.

Namely, while the project budgets were deliberately kept low for employee salaries, this was not the case for transportation and other project expenses. Thus, using taxi services multiple times a day, both work-related but also for personal needs was, and still is for many of my friends and acquaintances in the ‘third sector’, a commonplace. Eating out in restaurants, again regardless of whether it is work-related or not, was also a common practice. Not only would all of these expenses be reimbursed and filed under the project’s transportation or other expenses, but it was also common for people working ‘on projects’ to reimburse fictive or expenses that were not their own. They would, for example, ask their friends or relatives to save receipts from restaurants, taxis or other transportation services used, or even those for office supplies. The taxi receipt reimbursement was, and still is, so common that once you ask for a receipt the taxi drivers in Belgrade would often ask you if you need it “for a project” and then offer one or more ‘blank receipts’ (where you can write whatever amount you want), for which they would usually get a higher tip. These informal practices, unlike the outright embezzlement cases that were also documented (Mikuš, 2015), are considered ‘normal’ in the Serbian civil society circles and are well-known and tolerated by the donors, so long as they are kept ‘reasonable’.

Several authors have questioned the ‘economic elite’ status of the civil society in Serbia and other post-socialist countries (Sampson, 2002; Mikuš, 2015) and pointed out that if

they ever were members of the ‘economic elite’ this is certainly no longer the case due to ‘donor-flight’-induced decreasing of salaries and increasing insecuritization and precarization (Mikuš, 2015). Yet, an undeniable ‘elite’ status ascribed to the civil society in Serbia (and other post-socialist countries) is the one relating to ‘social and cultural capital’ (Sampson, 2002; Vetta, 2009, 2012; Vukov, 2013; Mikuš, 2013, 2015; Vuković, 2015).

Beyond the already mentioned higher levels of education and abundant opportunities for further education through various trainings and ‘capacity building seminars’, travel and networking, the ‘project society’, as Sampson (1998) called it, acquired significant social capital through connections amongst themselves as well as those with foreign donors and officials, and the Serbian political elites (Vetta, 2012; Vukov 2013; Mikuš 2015). These, and other authors, have all pointed out the apparent anomaly of the Serbian civil sector having not only close ties to the Serbian government but being intimately intertwined with it, often blurring the boundaries between the state and NGOs. Namely, several Serbian NGOs in fact transformed into political parties after 2000, some of which even took key positions in the government after 2001 (Vetta, 2012). At the same time, a great number of prominent NGO activists have individually transferred to high, ‘expert’ positions in various state bodies, while transfers in the opposite direction have also been common after 2003 (Vetta, 2009). Finally, it was also very common for political parties and/or people occupying top positions in different political parties to ‘have their own NGOs’ (Vetta, 2009).

These migrations back and forth between the government bodies and nongovernmental organizations have together challenged the traditional idea of the civil society/NGO sector being a politically neutral sphere occupied by mission-driven individuals fighting for social change. More importantly, it has also severely impacted on how the Serbian citizens perceive the civil sector, already burdened by the “foreign mercenaries, domestic betrayers” (*strani plaćenici, domaći izdajnici*) labels and the relatively high living standard enjoyed by the members of ‘civil society’.

5.4.3. *Unintended consequences*

Taken together, the various issues described above surrounding the Serbian civil sector have resulted in widespread distrust towards NGOs and the people who work in them across Serbia. The EPA founders in many ways reflect the general issues discussed above. Namely, all of the EPA founders that I spoke with are holders of higher education degrees, and enjoy above-average living standards in Aleksinac. Vladimir, who despite his attempts to stay in the movement's background is still perceived as its leader, also holds a 'state job' with the local municipality, blurring the line between government and non-government. Finally, Vladimir and Nevena have over the years founded and worked for a number of different NGOs.

With this in mind, it is not so surprising that many of my interlocutors expressed distrust towards EPA even when they also opposed shale mining in the region. When I asked Marija, a social worker employed in the local Social Services office (*Centar za socijalni rad*), about the movement that opposes the shale mine, she said:

"I think these people are doing this to gain some points for other things... not to actually help people here. It's for political reasons. I think the people behind this movement are doing all this for their own self-promotion. That's my opinion."

I have heard similar responses from a number of people that I interviewed and spoke with.

It is also interesting to note that EPA members that I spoke with actively tried to avoid calling the organization an NGO (*nevladina organizacija*) and instead insisted on calling it a "civil association" or "citizens association" (*udruženje građana*), even though legally speaking there is no distinction between the two. Mikuš (2015) observed similar maneuvers by several NGOs in the country that were in this way attempting to avoid the negative

connotations that accompany an “NGO” in Serbia. The maneuver however did not seem to work for EPA as most of the people I spoke with treated them with the same skepticism and distrust as they do with other NGOs. Distancing themselves from the “NGO” label will, however, prove to be important for the rising number of environmental movements in Serbia in recent years, as detailed in Chapter 8 of this dissertation.

What is more, most of my interlocutors felt the need to distance themselves from EPA, even when they shared EPA’s position that the mine should not be opened because of its potential environmental impacts. Some of the people I spoke with said that they would join protests if the mining project were to go ahead, yet they were also explicit in that they would not join EPA.

Thus, somewhat paradoxically, although the goal of EPA was to mobilize people against the shale mining project, they might have in fact produced a quite different effect – silencing people who do oppose the mine but do not want to be associated with ‘the NGO’.

5.5. Conclusion

Every distrust starts with a (broken) promise. And every promise requires trust as its necessary counterpart in order to fulfill its function, otherwise it is nothing more than an empty utterance spoken into the void. As both the previous and this chapter have shown, the citizens of Aleksinac, and Serbia as a whole, have been witnessing (or were victims to) a series of broken promises for decades now. From Yugoslavia’s promissory future which slowly disintegrated since the early 1980s, the broken promises of the Milošević regime “to rally all Serbs in one Serbian State” (Bassiouni and Manikas, 1992) and resist “the broader trends of political and economic reforms” (Talbot, in Klein, 2007:415) during the 1990s, to

the broken promises of the post-2000 democratic capitalist governments to usher in a new future marked by security, rising living standards, justice and the rule of law.

All along, promises were also broken by the oppositional political parties who promised drastic changes should they come to power, but when they did – “the more things change the more they stay the same”, as my interlocutor Gordana put it. Promises by the Serbian civil sector to constitute a politically neutral sphere occupied by mission-driven individuals fighting for social change and common interests were similarly broken, or at least perceived so. Promises by western countries, and the EU in particular, to be good allies and part of the same ‘European family’ were also seen as broken due to the NATO military intervention in Serbia. In Aleksinac, even the promises of fellow citizens to be good neighbors and friends, to repay their debts, not break into other people’s homes and steal from them, were also often broken.

The result is a local landscape colored by all shades of distrust – towards the state and its institutions, towards (all) political parties, towards nongovernmental organizations and the ‘civil sector’ at large, towards neighbors and fellow citizens, outsiders, the EU and so on. This, on the other hand, has serious implications on the state-citizen relations and the Serbian state’s ability and “capacity to order and regulate people and things” (Dunn, 2008:244).

Namely, planning, as a deeply promissory and future-oriented form of conceptualizing space and time, represents the way through which the state governs and organizes the relationships between institutions, citizens and other entities, and through which it exercises its most basic forms of power (Mitchell, 1991). Through a wide range of institutions, tactics and technologies, the state operationalizes planning as a way to manage the present and control the passage into the future (Abram and Wieszkalnys, 2013). Yet, as a deeply promissory set of activities, planning also requires trust between the promisor and the promisee (state and citizens) if it is to achieve the desired outcomes it aimed for - not just

producing the future as it was imagined in the plan, but also managing the present relationships between the promisor and the promisee (the state, citizens and other entities).

So how does the Serbian state engage in planning activities if its citizens are as distrustful towards the State as they are shown to be throughout this chapter? The shale-mining plan put forward by the state back in 2012 failed not only because the mine was never realized, but also because this plan never managed to convince the local publics in its (and the promisor's) trustworthiness and so produce desired relations between the state and citizens in the present. Somewhat counterintuitively, it is by not trusting the plan and consequently not engaging in negotiations with the state about the local future that most of the local citizens in Aleksinac in fact resisted being the subjects of state planning.

The handful of citizens merged around the local NGO EPA, who did attempt to 'negotiate' the future with the state (even when some of them were equally distrustful towards the possibility of the shale-mining plan becoming a reality) were met with similar reception by the local population. Themselves distrusted by the local citizens, EPA too failed in planning a joint and organized articulation of a resistance to the state's shale-mining plan. Due to the form in which they organized their movement (a nongovernmental organization) and the way in which some of its members are locally perceived, EPA was met with particular distrust among the local citizens, which might have resulted in silencing, rather than mobilizing, some of the people who do oppose the mine but do not want to be associated with 'the NGO'.

Trust is indeed an integral component and a necessary precondition for any planning and future-negotiating activity, whether it is planning a trip with a friend, having a kid with a partner, investing in state bonds, signing an international loan agreement or signing the UNFCCC Paris Agreement. After taking the train in Aleksinac just twice, I refrained from further planning to travel by train, because I learned that the local train schedule is not to be trusted at all.

But with so much distrust in the town (and the country) how does any planning take place? How is the collective future imagined, negotiated and worked towards? As I will show in the following chapter, the negotiations around local and national futures have in fact been scaled up and are enacted not between the local citizens and the state, but increasingly between the state and foreign/global investors. The local citizens, both in Aleksinac and across the country, while certainly subjects of this planning and negotiating, are faced with severely and progressively limited options to participate in these future-planning and negotiating activities. Rather than active participants in these negotiations, they are increasingly finding themselves to be mere recipients of negotiation decisions made at higher scales. This is why the majority of my interlocutors, whose ‘planned futures’ I explore in Chapter 7, in fact refrain from collective planning and negotiating with the state. Instead, they plan and make their futures individually, often leaving or planning to leave abroad, but almost always negotiating their futures not with the state, as much as despite or regardless of it.

Those citizens who do remain in the country and wish to attempt to take part in negotiations around local and national futures are increasingly realizing that they too need to ‘jump scales’ in order to become more equal partners in these negotiations. Focusing on the burgeoning environmental movements in Serbia which challenge the national economic development that increasingly relies on environmental exploitation, extraction and degradation, in Chapter 8 I show some of the ways in which they engage in such ‘scale jumping’ - making translocal and even transnational alliances on the one hand, but also increasingly ‘jumping over’ the state and turning towards inter- and supra-national institutions on the other hand. They are also increasingly engaging in civil disobedience tactics, effectively breaking the social contract with the state and attempting to scale the state and negotiations with it ‘down’ in this way, thus simultaneously challenging it across different scales.

Chapter 6. Futures in The Making



Introduction

In this chapter I discuss the economic development model practiced in Serbia since its transition from socialism and re-integration into the periphery of the global capitalist economy. I suggest that the capital and material flows that underpin this development, and the labor and environmental conditions and relations that result from it, present analytically productive sites for exploring the future-making and place-making processes in Aleksinac and across Serbia.

I look more closely at the present-day realities of my interlocutors in Aleksinac, seeing these realities as embodiments of the future brought about by the local and national development models practiced since 2000, but also seeing them as structures that further work to determine the future prospects of Aleksinac residents and Serbian citizens at large. I use my ethnographic data from Aleksinac to reveal the local labor conditions and relations in town, while I also show how Aleksinac is no exception in this regard, but rather stands as a case in point that illustrates similar conditions and relations across the country and even the wider region. I argue that it is precisely the competitive FDI-based development model that Serbia is applying, as per ‘advice’ by the IMF and the WB, that leads to a ‘race to the bottom’ (see Chapter 1.2.5), whereby in order to attract more foreign investments Serbia continues to actively reduce labor protection standards as well as ignore violations of such already weakened standards.

In the second part of the chapter, I also zoom out of Aleksinac to capture some of the global flows of capital, technologies, and ‘foreign investments’ that are not as visible in the town itself, but are crucial in shaping the national and even wider regional landscapes which embody these flows and future prospects brought (and taken) with them. Through a series of case studies from across the country, I suggest that Serbia’s participation in the ‘race to the bottom’ is not reserved only for labor standards and regulations, but that it is also observable in an increasingly weakened enforcement of environmental protection standards. Rather than

actively changing environmental legislation and reducing environmental protection standards, I show how the Serbian government is finding ways to exempt foreign investors from adhering to environmental protection laws, as well as increasingly turning a blind eye to investors' violations of these laws and even participating in such violations. Exposing the disastrous environmental effects of such practices, I argue that the natural environment is the second main sacrifice, along with the worsening labor conditions, that the Serbian state is making in order to appease foreign investors, promising them a future of enhanced profit maximization at the expense of environmental conditions and future job and financial security of its very citizens.

Analyzing these different ways in which the Serbian state caters to the needs of 'foreign investors', I suggest that the negotiations about the future in Serbia have been 'scaled up' and are no longer enacted between the state and local citizens, but increasingly between the state and international/global companies that act as foreign investors. The local citizens, rather than active participants in such negotiations, are increasingly constituted as mere recipients of negotiation decisions made at higher scales and left to succumb to the futures that such decisions bring or find new ways to resist them, as I will discuss in the remaining chapters.

6.1. Extracted Futures

In this section I look at two types of 'extracting industries' that have been on the rise in Serbia since it reappeared at the periphery of global capitalism some two decades ago. The first refers to 'extraction' and exploitation of labor achieved through poor working conditions and relatively low pay that characterize the majority of new jobs 'created' by the inflow of Foreign Direct Investments (FDIs) into the country. I start in Aleksinac and use my ethnographic data to discuss the production regimes, labor conditions and labor relations in

the town, but also show that Aleksinac is no exception but rather stands as a case-in-point that illustrates labor relations and conditions across the country and even the wider region.

I then turn to the more typical understanding of ‘extractive industries’ as I discuss the more recent developments of the mining sector in Serbia. As the shale mine in Aleksinac was not realized (as of yet), I zoom out and draw from my secondary data in order to discuss mining developments across the country. Just like in the case of ‘labor extraction’, I show that the recent developments in the mining sector are characterized by increasing concessions that the state makes towards foreign investors and its willingness to suspend the rule of law, or even tailor it to suit the needs of investors, sacrificing ‘the natural environment’ along the way and putting natural resources (just like the ‘human’ ones) up for sale.

6.1.1. Labor extraction

The political and economic reforms initiated after 2000 in Serbia and led by International Financing Institutions (IFIs) such as the World Bank (WB) and International Monetary Fund (IMF), followed a path-dependent trajectory of neoliberal restructuring and resulted in significant increases in unemployment in the initial years of the reforms, despite the fact that unemployment was already high in years prior to these reforms (Novaković, 2017; Upchurch and Marinković, 2016). To deal with the increasing unemployment, the Serbian state adopted a strategy of promoting labor-intensive rather than capital-intensive production regimes which provided more jobs in Serbia, but also provided better profit maximization for western-based transnational capital expanding eastwards, as observed by Shields in his Gramscian study of Poland’s transition (2008).

Since 2006, Serbia also engaged in subsidizing Foreign Direct Investments (FDIs) in order to attract more of them, ‘create’ more jobs and further decrease unemployment in the country (Vukajlović et. al., 2020). And while this strategy has succeeded in decreasing

unemployment from 20.9 percent in 2006 (Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, 2006) to 9.7 percent in early 2020 (Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, 2020), it also resulted in the fact that the majority of these newly created jobs were precisely of the labor intensive and poorly paid kind. Focusing on the manufacturing sector, Onaran (2008) shows that the productivity growth (GDP/employee) has not been accompanied by an equal growth in wages across the wider post-socialist region, further pointing to the conclusion that the expansion of western (European) capital to the wider central and eastern European post-socialist region, including Serbia itself, was predicated exactly on exploitation of cheap(er) labor.

As I will show further in this chapter, providing cheap labor and direct subsidies to foreign investors are not the only concessions made to accommodate foreign investors in Serbia. Rather, the Serbian state constitutes its ‘competitive advantage’ in the global race to attract foreign capital by also actively reducing labor protection standards, ignoring violations of labor laws and thus trading the future job and financial security of its citizens for the future of profit-security that it offers to foreign investors.

6.1.1.1. Grammer

By far the largest employer in the Aleksinac municipality, Grammer is often touted as “the town’s savior” by local and national politicians, an opinion shared by some of the local residents but fiercely opposed by others. Without a doubt, the company has played a huge role in lowering the unemployment rate in the municipality and bringing income to over a thousand families, but its reputation is not without controversies.

Grammer is a German company “*specialized in developing and manufacturing components and systems for car interiors as well as driver and passenger seats for offroad vehicles, trucks, buses, and trains*”, as stated on the company website. A “true global player” as they call themselves, the company has more than 50 production, distribution and logistics

sites in 20 countries, spread across 4 continents (www.grammer.com). In Aleksinac, Grammer bought the production hall of the former clothing factory “Morava” in 2007, and initiated the production of covers for automotive driver and passenger seats for which it received financial assistance of € 1.018.000 from the Serbian Investment and Export Promotion Agency (SIEPA), or € 2000 per employee (RTS, 2011). Since then, Grammer has expanded the production in Aleksinac several times, each time receiving financial assistance from the Serbian state. In 2011, the company received an additional € 4.000 per new employee, totaling € 844.000 for the new 211 employees (ibid.). In 2013 the company opened a new production hall in Aleksinac and agreed to employ an additional 520 employees, for which it received a new state subsidy of € 7.000 per new employee, totaling at €3.640.000. Finally, in 2017, Grammer once again applied for state subsidies and promised to employ an additional 450 people, for which it received an additional €3.500.000 in state subsidies (Aleksinac.net, 2017a; 2017b).

My first visit to Aleksinac was in 2014, some half a year after Grammer opened its second factory in town. It was an old factory “Sirikos” in the *Aleksinački rudnici* neighborhood, that Grammer had bought and repurposed for their production of covers for driver and passenger seats. Despite receiving state subsidies of €3.640.000, Grammer did not invest much in the production hall which looked rather rundown, but swiftly brought the equipment in and started production in November of 2013. Already that winter, the newly formed workers’ union in the factory, and part of the nation-wide worker’s union “*Sloga*” (“Unity”) addressed the public complaining about inhumane working conditions in the new factory (Sloga, 2014). As the union claimed, the rundown production hall was poorly insulated, and the provided heating inside could not keep up with the freezing temperatures outside and the strong winds that would penetrate the building (Sloga, 2014). Rather than invest in better insulation and increase the heating, the production managers provided plastic

paravanes to shield the employees from the gushing wind and told them to “dress better”. The union’s claims were also backed up with photographs from the factory (Figure 38)



Figure 38. Grammer employees battling the freezing temperatures in the new factory (Source: Sloga, 2014)

The heating controversy was indeed an extreme example of violation of workers’ rights, and an issue that was fixed by the following winter, which I spent in Aleksinac. But during my time in the town, I have heard numerous other complaints about the company and accusations of worker exploitation. Although the base salary for seamstresses is relatively low at around net 30.000 dinars (€250) a month, the majority of people I spoke with and who worked for Grammer did not complain much about the salary – after all, there are not many better paid jobs in town, and the salary is always on time, with properly paid medical and pension insurance contributions, which is not the case with many other employers in town (e.g., the Bosphorus hotel, see Chapter 3). With paid overtime and performance bonuses, the monthly net salary can reach up to €400 for seamstresses to over €500 for shift managers and controllers, which most people in the town consider to be a decent, if not a high salary.

The complaints I often heard though, were about the working conditions, including long hours with short and monitored breaks, working norms that are impossible to meet for

most, mistreatment and harassment by the management and “forced” overtime working hours. Namely, as Tanja, who has worked for Grammer for several years, told me – the regular work week includes five 8-hour work days, but most people sign-up for a “voluntary 6th day of work”, which is properly paid, but isn’t as “voluntary” as the name suggests. Tanja, who is a single mom, says she does not mind working 6 days a week, and does need the extra money – but she is annoyed that *“they call it voluntary when everyone knows that you’ll get fired if you don’t sign up”*.

Gordana, who is also among the founders and most active members of the Environmental Movement Aleksinac (EPA), also used to work as a seamstress for Grammer, where she also took an active role in the workers’ union. She describes herself as someone “who can’t keep quiet” (*ne ume da ćuti*), an attribute echoed by many Aleksinac residents I spoke to, and proudly states that she cannot look away from injustices and has to speak out in such situations. She describes the working condition in Grammer as “pure exploitation” (*čisto izrabljivanje*), and says that she tried to mobilize the workers many times to fight for better working conditions. But each time she failed because, as she says *“you can’t help people who don’t want to help themselves”*. She explained that most of the workers were just too afraid to lose the jobs they had, so they did not want to speak out and demand better working conditions, although they were aware that they were not treated correctly by the company’s management. She proceeded to say:

“Grammer fully functions based on fear. Literally. As a kid, I used to read books about Auschwitz and all those other concentration camps, and I can tell you that they function in an absolutely identical way. The only difference is that the people in those camps who harassed you were called ‘kapo’⁶¹ and in Grammer they are called a ‘team leader’...it’s mostly these tattletale types, they’re the only ones who succeed. The worse kind of human you

⁶¹ The term ‘kapo’ is used to designate prisoner functionaries in Nazi camps who were assigned by the SS guards to supervise forced labor or carry out administrative tasks

are – the better position you have there. There's not a single good person there in higher positions – I fully stand behind that!"

A year before I met her, and after working there for 6 years, Gordana stopped working for Grammer and started receiving an invalidity pension because of a problem she had with her hips. Laughing about it, she said that she only got the invalidity pension because the company was too eager to get rid of her, on account of her activities within the workers' union. In fact, as she revealed to me during our interview, it was her who released the photographs of the workers freezing in the new production hall the previous year (Figure 44). However, Gordana was also satisfied with the invalidity pension arrangement in which she now receives a state pension, earns an additional income by painting and selling icons of orthodox Christian saints together with her husband who works as an art teacher in one of the local primary schools, and does not have to deal with the company management and harassment by the 'team leaders' on a daily basis.

To explain both how Grammer expedited her paperwork for the invalidity pension, but also one of the ways in which the company secures productivity and profits, sometimes at the expense of the workers, she told me about the (corrupt) cooperation that Grammer had established with the local community Health Center (*Dom Zdravlja*) in Aleksinac. Stressing that the director of the local community Health Center is married to one of the main managers in Grammer, she said that a few years back Grammer donated "some medical equipment" to the community Health Center, but 'in return' the Health Center made a decision to open a small infirmary (*ambulanta*) on the factory grounds. The infirmary, with two doctors employed by the Health Center, was to serve and treat specifically Grammer employees, but as Gordana explained, this was mostly for the company's and not necessarily employees' benefit.

Namely, when employees wanted to take a sick leave, they now had to visit the doctor at the infirmary instead of their chosen family doctor at the community Health Center. And

while the chosen family doctors, having their patients' wellbeing in mind, were happy to approve a day or few of sick leave for their patients who were feeling under the weather or were having a difficult time otherwise, the doctors at the factory infirmary required proof of serious illness in order to approve sick leaves. In other words, while the chosen family doctors were protective of their patients' health and wellbeing, the doctors at the ambulance within factory grounds had the company's interest and productivity in mind. Additionally, should a Grammer employee suffer an injury at work, they first had to visit the infirmary where the doctor would write an injury report. As Gordana told me, reports written by the doctors at the infirmary usually described the injuries as being less serious than they sometimes are, which in effect protected Grammer from legal liability and potential compensation that the company would have to pay out to injured employees.

6.1.1.2. Precarization of work

Another way in which Grammer manages to increase its productivity, avoid legal liabilities, and remain competitive on the global capitalist market which demands ever increasing 'flexibility' from producers, is through the type of employment that it practices. This too, of course, is at the expense of the employees that it contracts. Namely, while doing my research in Aleksinac I had heard from several people that Grammer is no longer employing people directly but started using the services of a staffing agency which subcontracts the new employees to Grammer. And while I tried to double-check these rumors with the people that I knew worked for Grammer, none of them could confirm this as they all worked for the company for two or more years and were never themselves employed through a staffing agency. Finally, a few weeks before I concluded my research stay in Aleksinac, I ran into Jana, one of my interlocutors, who shared with me that she had just signed a contract and will soon start working for Grammer herself. Previously unemployed, Jana was very

happy to share this news with me. I was happy too for Jana, knowing what this employment meant for her, and wholeheartedly congratulated her despite the simultaneous churning in my stomach that I felt, also knowing what employment in Grammer carried with itself.

I also used the opportunity to ask Jana about the details of the contract that she signed, hoping to also find the answer as to whether the rumors about the staffing agency that Grammer started using are true. And indeed, they were, for as it turned out Jana did not sign a contract with Grammer but with Adecco Outsourcing d.o.o., the Serbian branch of the multinational staffing agency Adecco, headquartered in Zurich, Switzerland. Her contract was for three months, considered probation work, after which she could get a new contract but she herself was not sure whether that new contract would be with Grammer or Adecco Outsourcing again. According to Adecco's Serbian website (www.adecco.rs), both options are possible as the company offers complete "outstaffing" where the employee always remains employed by Adecco, or a "Try and Hire" service where the client (Grammer in this case) has the option to directly contract the employee after the initial contract with Adecco has ended.

In 2013, Serbia ratified the International Labor Organization (ILO) Convention on Private Employment Agencies (Convention 181) which opened the doors for staffing and employment agencies, such as Adecco, to flood the Serbian market. And while the ratification of this convention was supposed to be followed up with the adoption of new laws that would regulate the work of such agencies and the practice of so-called "staff leasing", this was not the case. Serbia kept announcing and postponing the new Staff Leasing Law (*Zakon o agencijskom zapošljavanju*) for almost 7 years, with the Law finally coming into effect only on March 1, 2020 (Bukvić, 2020). In the meantime, the ensuing legal vacuum left these new forms of employment unregulated, which resulted in unfavorable employment conditions for Serbian workers finding employment through such staffing agencies.

Without the legal framework in place, it remained unclear whether and where⁶² the “leased” employees could enjoy their rights to unionize or sign collective agreements. It also remained unclear who would, among other things, be legally liable for any injuries occurring at the workplace. Employees leased through employment agencies also often received lower salaries than those employed directly by the company that they were leased to, with the intermediary employment agencies taking a part of their earnings. Finally, unlike in the cases of direct employment where the employer would be legally obligated to offer an indefinite work contract after two years of fixed-term work, if they wished to keep the employee, the staffing agencies were able to avoid these legal provisions by utilizing contracts on “temporary and occasional work” (*ugovor o privremenim i povremenim poslovinama*), changing the job descriptions in subsequent contracts, or ‘restarting the clock’ by making short breaks between two fixed-term contracts, thus keeping employees on precarious fixed-term or “temporary and occasional work” contracts practically indefinitely (Baković Jadžić, 2017). Even after the new Staff Leasing Law came into force in 2020, there were reports of staffing agencies using legal loopholes and leasing workers to client companies through other newly-formed intermediary companies which again allowed them to pay workers less than what the salaries in the companies where they effectively work are, or to keep moving workers between different intermediary companies without offering indefinite work contracts, despite the fact that in reality they worked for the same client company the whole time (Bukvić, 2020)

And while the ratification of Convention 181 was justified with responding to the ‘needs of modern economy’ by lowering administration costs and hiring new workforce quickly to be able to respond to the fast changes on the market, it is clear that these benefits, including lowered costs and risk management, are defined according to the needs of the employers. The employees, on the other hand, are left in even more precarious circumstances,

⁶² The staffing agency which is formally their employer, or the company to which they are leased and where they perform work

unable to plan their futures due to short-term and uncertain work contracts that they hold which also work to actively keep the labor price/wages down.

6.1.1.3. An economy based on fear

In 2020, another brownfield investment came to Aleksinac when the Canadian company “Magna” rented a newly constructed production hall in Aleksinac (Figure 39). Magna started its first phase of production here, employing some 300 locals, but as the Serbian Prime minister Ana Brnabić said during her visit to the company’s new production hall in Aleksinac in June 2020, in the second phase of investment Magna plans to construct an entire new factory in Aleksinac and employ around 1000 people (Tasić, 2020). Indeed, in October 2020 the Aleksinac Municipal Assembly held a session during which they made a decision to give Magna 3,1 hectares of construction land free of charge for the construction of the new factory, which the Serbian Commission for State Aid Control quickly approved (Aleksinac Municipality, 2020).



Figure 39. Magna production hall in Aleksinac (Source: RAS,2020)

Magna is a “leading global automotive supplier”, as the company’s website claims, with over 158.000 employees in 27 different countries (www.magna.com). In Serbia, “Magna Seating” owned by the Austrian company “Magna Metalforming GMBH” which itself is part of the Canadian “Magna International”, opened its first factory in the town of Odžaci in northern Serbia in 2013, where it employed 444 people to produce car seat covers (Ćurčija, 2017). In 2017, the company expanded its production in Odžaci, building a new production hall and raising the number of employees to 1.200 for which it received a state subsidy in the amount of € 4,5 million (ibid.). Finally, in the spring of 2020 the company opened the small production hall in Aleksinac, announcing that they intend to build a new factory in Aleksinac, for production of car seat covers, and employ 1.000 people in the new factory. The new factory was indeed opened in October 2021 and immediately employed 800 new workers (Tasić, 2021).

Not only is Magna in the identical line of business as the other largest employer in town – Grammer, but its reputation as an employer in Serbia is equally controversial, with numerous incidents between Magna employees and company management filling the news sections of the Serbian press. In late 2019 and early 2020, dozens of Magna employees in Odžaci started reporting severe health problems, initially seen as allergic reactions resulting in skin rashes and redness as well as respiratory issues. It is estimated that around 50 employees were affected, although the exact number remains unknown because the local community Health Center in Odžaci refused to disclose this information because their client⁶³ – Magna Seating declined the request for access to information (Vlaović, 2020). At the same time, tensions between Magna employees and the company management were growing due to the fact that the management kept postponing the signing of a collective agreement which has been in the works for over a year, while also repressing the union organization in the company

⁶³ Signaling similar relations between Magna and the community Health Center in Odžaci, as that of Grammer and the community Health Center in Aleksinac

and attempting to fire the union leader in the factory (ibid.). A few months later, in August 2020, tensions were high again when employees organized a short strike demanding better safety measures during the coronavirus pandemic (Rajić, 2020). Two Magna workers have previously died of Covid19, and many others were infected, but the agreed mass testing of employees was quickly stopped by the company's management after 51 out of the initial 104 tested workers turned out to be positive (ISS, 2020).

And while Grammer and Magna predominantly shape the labor conditions and relations in Aleksinac, they are just two examples and representatives of a growing industry that functions in the same way across the country and beyond. News sections of Serbian media are regularly filled with stories of violations of workers' rights and inhumane working conditions – from workers being forbidden to take toilet breaks and even forced to wear diapers instead; forced 12-hour work shifts or working all 7 days in a week; lack of proper safety equipment; to physical and mental harassment of employees and cases of mobbing which have become so common that they barely attract any attention anymore. These stories most often involve the large FDI-driven labor-intensive manufacturing companies which opened their factories across Serbia with the help of state subsidies, from the South Korean “Yura Corporation”, Italian multinationals “Leoni”, “Geox” and “Benneton”, the British “Aptiv” and many others (Srećković, 2015; Protić, 2017; Tamindžija et. al. 2017). Research in other countries in the region, such as North Macedonia, shows that similar working conditions and relations are present throughout the region (Bonfiglioli, 2019), particularly in smaller towns which experience “double peripheralization”.

Zoran Stojiljković, the president of the largest workers' union in the country “*Nezavisnost*” (“Independence”) claims that one third of employees in Serbia are denied full labor rights or social security rights while a quarter of them are financially and materially endangered (Kojić, 2021). In such circumstances, it is fear that comes to shape the labor conditions and relations in the country, where people working in increasingly precarious

situations characterized by insecurity, uncertainty and unpredictability of employment, most often opt to stay quiet and endure even the most inhumane working conditions due to fears that they might lose what they have - the low but steady wages provided by their current employment.

This is fully in line with Burawoy's suggestion that it is not only the fear of being fired, but the collective "fear of capital flight, plant closure, the transfer of operations, and disinvestment" (1983, p.603) that enables this "new despotism" under globalized capitalism where "the point of reference is no longer primarily the success of the firm from one year to the next but rates of profit that might be earned elsewhere" (ibid.). That such fears are far from irrational was exemplified by the Italian company Geox which in August 2021 suddenly decided to close its shoe factory in Vranje, known for horrific violations of labor laws (Tamindžija et. al. 2017) and leave all 1.200 workers unemployed (Ristić, 2021). In the five years that Geox operated its production in Vranje, the company received almost € 14 million in subsidies from the Serbian state, which is around double the amount that the company effectively paid in taxes during the same time (Obradović, 2021). Unofficial reports say that the company will in fact move its production to Albania, where better conditions (state subsidies and even lower salaries) were negotiated between the company and Albanian authorities (Ibid.).

Just two weeks after Geox closed its factory in Vranje, 90 Grammer employees from Aleksinac were also suddenly fired from their jobs (Dejanović, 2021). And while the company was quick to assure the public that the layoffs were temporary and due to current and shifting demands on the market, the discussion that developed in the comments sections of the news outlets that shared the information about fired Grammer employees, revealed a deep-seated fear that these layoffs could signal a complete closure or relocation of the factory, like that of Geox in Vranje. It also reveals the "bottom" in "the race to the bottom" (see

Chapter 1.2.3), in which workers are forced to choose between a future of unemployment and a future of enduring terrible (and potentially worsening) work conditions.

6.1.2. Extraction of natural resources

Although talks of opening the shale mine in Aleksinac have withered away, along with the high oil prices that made the potential mine attractive in 2011 and 2012 when it was announced (Figure 35), several other mining projects have since been realized or are currently underway in Serbia.

On the one hand, this includes privatization and renewed production in old state-owned mines such as Rudnik, Veliki Majdan and Bosilegrad which were bought by the British company Mineco, or the Mining and Smelting Complex Bor (*Rudarsko Topioničarski Basen Bor*- or *RTB Bor*, for short)⁶⁴ for which the Chinese mining giant Zijin⁶⁵ became the state's strategic partner with 63% ownership in the company since 2018 (Janković, 2018; Cvetković and Ćosić, 2019).

6.1.2.1. The Bor Copper Mines

RTB Bor, attracted particular public attention, since the local copper reserves estimated at more than 15Mt are among the highest reserves of copper in Europe (Monthel et. al., 2002), yet instead of making profits - RTB Bor was heavily subsidized by the Serbian

⁶⁴ RTB Bor was one of the 10 biggest companies in Socialist Yugoslavia, owning several mines located in and near the town of Bor, metallurgic facilities and 19 industrial companies across Yugoslavia (Jovanović, 2016). After the breakup of the country and the subsequent economic transition, RTB Bor lost much of these assets, some being sold off, others going bankrupt, but it remained the owner of the four copper mines in and around the town of Bor, and the large copper smelter in the same town (Jovanovic, 2016). Besides copper, RTB Bor also produces precious metals from its' mines, such as gold, silver and platinum (ibid.)

⁶⁵ In 2017, a year before it came to Bor, Serbia, Zijin was the 22nd largest mining company in the world by market capitalization, as well as the largest gold producer and second largest copper producer in China (Janković, 2018). Besides the Bor mines in Serbia, Zijin acquired several other mines in Africa (DRC), South America (Colombia, Guyana) in recent years, and their overseas operations already "exceeded or approached 50% of the total size of our business, in terms of resource reserves, output and profits" according to their 2020 Annual Report (Zijin Mining, 2021)

state in years prior to the signing of the strategic partnership with Zijin (Jovanović, 2016). With the \$ 350 million that Zijin paid in 2018 for the 63% of ownership in the company, and an additional \$ 1,26 billion of planned investments over the following six years going into technical and technological modernization of the mining and smelting processes, as well as expansion of mining activities and copper production, the state's strategic partnership with Zijin was touted as a breakthrough deal that would end state subsidies while also providing new jobs and increased income for the entire region of eastern Serbia (Vasilić, 2018, Janković, 2018).

The new management indeed quickly increased production, invested in new equipment, opened a new mine “*Novo Cerovo*” (also known as “*Cerovo 2*”) in 2020 (Vasilić, 2020; Georgievski, 2020a) and initiated opening of a yet another new mine called *Čukaru Peki*⁶⁶ (Cvetković and Ćosić, 2019; Georgievski, 2020a). Just two years after the signing of the strategic agreement, RTB Bor, now named Serbia Zijin Copper, went from making huge losses to becoming profitable in 2020 (Vasilić, 2021). But the profits made by Zijin in Bor came at a price for the local population. While air pollution as such is not new to the locals of this mining region, the increased production in the mines and the smelter, after Zijin took over the company management, has resulted in increased air pollution levels as well, with SO₂ levels reaching record highs of over 2000 micrograms, several times higher than the allowed

⁶⁶ The Čukaru Peki is a prospective (soon-to-be opened) copper-gold mine near Bor, where the company “Rakita Exploration” held concession and mining rights after years of exploratory drilling finally confirmed vast new reserves of copper and gold at this location. Rakita Exploration, registered in Serbia, was in fact owned by the American mining giant Freeport McMoRan from Phoenix, Arizona, along with Nevsun Resources from Vancouver, Canada, through a company “Rakita Exploration BVI” registered in the British Virgin Islands (Business Registers Agency of Serbia, 2021). Freeport McMoRan and Nevsun Resources were planning to open the Čukaru Peki mine themselves, but just 10 days after Zijin took over the Serbian RTB Bor, they also acquired the Canadian Nevsun Resources for a whopping US \$1.41 billion (Sanderson, 2018). The acquisition of Nevson Resources transferred the mining rights in upper Čukaru Peki and 60,4 % of the lower part of Čukaru Peki to Zijin. For the remaining 39,6 % of the lower part of the Čukaru Peki mine, for which Freeport McMoRan still held rights, Zijin agreed to pay \$390 million directly to Freeport McMoRan (Cvetković and Ćosić, 2019) and so become the sole owner of rights to exploit the Čukaru Peki mine. The “Rakita Exploration” (now renamed to Zijin Mining) documentation available from the Serbian Business Registers Agency, shows that the ownership transfers were conducted through companies registered in the British Virgin Islands and Amsterdam, The Netherlands – suggesting that no tax was paid in Serbia for these transactions. It also remains unclear if the mining itself in Čukaru Peki will be conducted via the parent company Serbia Zijin Copper, or Zijin Mining which remains in sole ownership of the company registered in Amsterdam raising further doubts about taxation of the future Čukaru Peki mining operations.

350 micrograms per cubic meter (Spasić, 2020). Responding to the hazardous air pollution levels, the citizens of Bor staged several protests in 2019 and 2020 (Figure 40) demanding that the responsible state institutions take action against the polluter and force the company to bring the pollution levels down to allowed levels (Jovanović, 2019).



Figure 40. Air pollution protest in Bor, September 2020 (Source: Novaković D. Ist Media⁶⁷)

In response to the growing protests, in 2020 the Serbian Ministry of Environmental Protection launched a proceeding against the company and the deputy manager of the Smelter and Copper Refinery branch which caused the releasing of hazardous substances in the air (Đorđević, 2020a). Several months later, just after the biggest protest took place on the streets of Bor, the town's Mayor also filed suit against the company for releasing toxic substances in the air (Spasić, 2020). However, as RERI (2021a) pointed out, despite the fact that that SO₂ levels in Bor were much above the allowed 350mg per cubic meter for an extended period of

⁶⁷ <https://istmedia.rs/najmasovniji-ekoloski-protest-u-boru-uz-poruku-mi-smo-borani-najjaci-smo-najjaci1/>

time, which corresponds to the criminal offense prescribed by article 260 of the Criminal Code of Serbia (polluting the environment *to a greater extent*), the Ministry of Environmental Protection filed suit for an economic crime, due to the violation of the Law on Air Protection, which provides for far milder sanctions for responsible persons than those in criminal proceedings. As a result, the Economic Court in Zaječar ruled in September 2020 that Zijin needs to pay a fine of only 450.000 dinars (around €3.900), to which both parties appealed and the final verdict is yet to be made by the Economic Court of Appeals in Belgrade (Đorđević, 2020b). At the same time, despite the fact that Zijin reached record production and profits in 2020, the Serbian state approved a \$2 million subsidy to the company under the guise of “covid relief” (Beta, 2021)

Meanwhile, Zijin continues to conduct business-as-usual, emitting hazardous levels of air pollution, but also causing other environmental problems in the region. Namely, the preparatory works around the Čukaru Peki mine that Zijin commenced in 2020 have resulted in drying out of water wells and damage to private houses (Figure 41) for residents of several nearby villages (Georgievski, 2020a). The people living there, working mostly in agriculture and animal husbandry, are thus left with no water to sustain their cattle and vegetable gardens, while also fearing that their homes may collapse because of nearby underground mine blasting (ibid.).

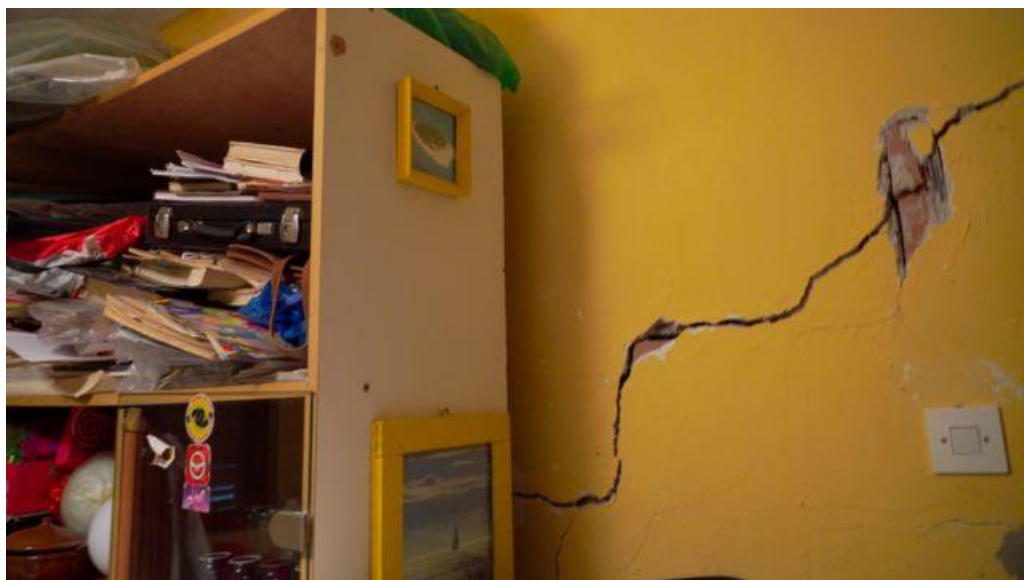


Figure 41. Cracked walls in a house near the Čukaru Peki mine (Source: BBC/Stefan Veselinović; in Georgievski, 2020a)

In early 2021, Nebojša Joksić, an environmental activist and founder of the initiative “Save the river Pek” (*Sačuvajmo reku Pek*), also raised public awareness of the increased pollution in the local river Pek, near Zijin’s Majdanpek copper mine (Mitrović, 2021). Photographs of dead fish and the river which has changed in color (Figure 42) were quickly shared through social media, prompting the Požarevac Institute of Public Health to conduct analyses of the water in the river Pek. The analyses confirmed high concentrations of heavy metals, and particularly manganese and iron for which the concentrations were between 11 and 12 times higher than those allowed, as well as copper and sulphates for which the concentrations were around double that of the allowed (Lojanica, 2021). Nebojša Joksić, along with other local environmental activists, blame Zijin and the tailings of the nearby Majdanpek copper mine (Figure 43) as the sources of this pollution (Mitrović, 2021; Lojanica, 2021). Namely, just a few months earlier Zijin increased the Majdanpek copper mine’s flotation capacities from 6 million tons to 11 million tons per year, after the Ministry of Environmental Protection approved this increase without requiring an Environmental Impact Assessment (RERI, 2020). The Renewables and Environmental Regulatory Institute

(RERI) and the Association of Young Researchers from Bor already filed a complaint with the Government of Serbia against this decision in November 2020.



Figure 42. River Pek in March 2021 (Source: Nebojša Joksić; in Milovanović, 2021)



Figure 43. The Majdanpek copper mine (Source: diSTRUKTURA, 2015)

6.1.2.2. The Jadar Mining Project

And as the citizens living near the river Pek, which has turned red because of the leakage of tailings from the Zijin Majdanpek copper mine, are fearing for their health and lives, on the other side of the country – in western Serbia, local citizens are trying to protect their land and future from another “red river”. Namely, the British-Australian mining giant Rio Tinto (trans. - Red River) which has been conducting exploratory works in the Jadar valley for over a decade and confirmed one of the world’s largest deposits of lithium⁶⁸, is planning to open a lithium and boron mine here and start production by 2023 (Brooks, 2020).

The Jadar lithium mining project, for which an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) and Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) is yet to be conducted, has already received full support from the Serbian government which included it in its strategic program “Serbia 2025”, where it recognized Rio Tinto’s lithium mining project as a great potential for “*sustainable development and renewable energy*” (The Government of the Republic of Serbia, 2019; 2020a). Ana Brnabić, the Prime Minister of Serbia, stated on several occasions that the realization of the Jadar mining project is “of utmost importance for Serbia” (Anđelković, 2021). For this reason, a special “Working Group for the implementation of the “Jadar” project” (*Radna grupa za implementaciju projekta „Jadar“*), consisting of representatives of relevant Ministries and state institutions and those from the company Rio Tinto, was formed in November of 2020 (Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia, 140/2020, 144/2020 and 36/2021). Yet, many locals of this region, as well as a growing number of experts and nation-wide citizens, do not seem to be as excited about the prospective lithium mine.

⁶⁸ The lithium in the Jadar Valley is found in a unique mineral rock deposit (LiNaSiB3O7(OH)) discovered in 2004 and recognized in 2006 under the name “Jadarite” by the International Mineralogical Association (Anđelković, 2021)

In line with the general trend of neoliberal and market driven marginalization of national, regional and local planning in favor of planning of ‘special purpose areas’, as observed by Dorđević et. al. (2020), in February of 2020 the government of Serbia adopted the “Spatial Plan for Special-Purpose Area For The Realization Of Exploitation And Processing Of The Mineral Jadarite “Jadar”” (The Government of the Republic of Serbia, 2020b). The plan includes detailed regulations for the special purpose complex – a total area of 2030,64 hectares, with details on locations for conducting mining activities, processing, production, depositing materials and wastes, establishing protection zones, and development of accompanying corridors of traffic and infrastructure systems (Stefanović et. al., 2019). Both the local citizens and civil society representatives claimed that the Aarhus convention was violated in the process of adopting this spatial plan, because the public was not properly informed about the public hearing held before the plan’s adoption (Helac, 2020).

In fact, most of the locals in the affected area only found out about the Spatial Plan after it was adopted and the Loznica Municipality consequently reclassified their plots of land from ‘agricultural’, ‘pasture’, ‘forest’ etc. to ‘building land’ (*građevinsko zemljište*) without their consent – which resulted in huge increases on their taxes (Helac, 2020). Reacting to these changes, and the anticipation of the lithium mine, the local citizens of the region formed a citizens’ association called “Protect Jadar and Radjevina” (*Zaštitimo Jadar i Rađevinu*) in May 2020, with the aim to oppose the lithium mining project while raising awareness about, and transparency of this project and the environmental dangers that it poses not just to the local citizens, but also those of the wider region (Sokić, 2020). For the locals, however, the dangers of the project are manifold, and include damage to the local economy which is heavily based on high-quality agriculture, beekeeping and rural tourism (Krstić, 2020), as well as impacts on local cultural heritage, with the bronze-age archeological site „Paulje“ and the 315 year old church of St. George (*crkva Svetog Georgija*) now finding themselves within the mine’s special purpose complex area (Sokić, 2020).

And while the government of Serbia remained silent to the questions and demands made by the citizens' association „Protect Jadar and Radjevina“ and KORS⁶⁹, Rio Sava⁷⁰ responded to the rising public pressure and held several meetings with interested locals and civil society organizations since the summer of 2020 (Sokić, 2020; Kalmar, 2021). However, instead of easing tensions and skepticism towards this mining project, the meetings only confirmed the publics' concerns since Rio Sava refused to answer any technical questions about the amount and sources of water to be used by the mine; types and quantities of chemicals that are to be used in processing of the ore; quantities, composition and management of waste and tailings etc., declaring all such information a trade/commercial secret (Sokić, 2020; Krstić, 2020; Kalmar, 2021). As a result, the local citizens staged several protests in Loznica and Brezjak (Figure 44) as well as Belgrade, in front of the company's headquarters (Figure 45).



Figure 44. Protest in Brezjak against the Rio Tinto Lithium mine (Source: Protect Jadar and Radjevina facebook page⁷¹)

⁶⁹ KORS -Koalicija za održivo rudarstvo u Srbiji – Coalition for Sustainable Mining in Serbia

⁷⁰ Rio Sava is Rio Tinto's daughter company in Serbia implementing the Jadar mining project

⁷¹ <https://www.facebook.com/groups/584849888902129>



Figure 45. Protest against the Rio Tinto Lithium mine in front of the company's headquarters in Belgrade (Source: N1⁷²)

Following the rising protests against Rio Tinto's mine, the president of Serbia Aleksandar Vučić, attempting to ease public discontent, announced in June, 2021 that the mining permits will not be issued to Rio Tinto until the citizens of Serbia give their consent on a referendum (Đurić, 2021). He stated that once all the necessary documentation for the mine is available to public, the government will initiate a referendum and ask the public if they want the mine to be opened or not, but that it is yet to be decided if the referendum should be held on a national, municipal or district level (ibid.).

Just a few months later, on November 9, 2021 the Serbian Parliament proposed a new Draft Law on Referendum and Civil Initiative, and sent it to the National Assembly for adoption. The new Draft Law introduced a number of changes, such as the abolishment of the 50 percent (plus one) census for a referendum to be valid (Mandić, 2021), as well as the introduction of a possibility to hold "a regional referendum" that would take place across several different municipalities (Valtner, 2021). In line with the president's announcement that it is yet to be decided if the referendum should be held on a national, municipal or district

⁷² <https://rs.n1info.com/english/news/rio-tinto-rebuffs-serbias-environmental-groups-accusations-of-river-pollution/>

level, the newly introduced “regional referendum” effectively enables careful manipulation of electoral boundaries, or gerrymandering, in order to establish an unfair political advantage and skewing of referendum results in the desired direction.

The new Draft Law also, against the recommendations made by the Venice Commission of the Council of Europe, binds the referendum decision only to a period of one year, enabling the government to practically repeat the referendum each year until it achieves the desired referendum results (Mandić, 2021). Finally, the Draft Law in Article 39 envisions „special rules“ (*posebna pravila*) on polling stations, voting, handling election materials and determining results in situations when voting at specific polling stations can not be conducted in accordance with the rules of the law due to natural disasters, epidemics or other such causes (ibid.). With no end of the coronavirus epidemic in sight, this Article also enables the government to practically suspend the rule of law and propose „special rules“ for referendums to be held in the near future. All of these proposed changes have led a number of legal experts and political oppositionaries to state that the new Law looks like it was made with Rio Tinto in mind (Valtner, 2021)

The Draft Law was sent to the National Assembly, despite complaints from Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) about both the contents of the proposed Law and the inadequate procedures through which it was created. For example, as noted by a group of CSOs, the public hearing for the first draft of this law was inadequately advertised, and the email address to which written complaints were supposed to be sent turned out to be non-existent (BCHR, 2021). Yet, even before the new Law is adopted by the National Assembly, and despite criticism from the Venice Commission and Serbian civil society, as well as an ongoing public petition against the adoption of the new law, the president of the National Assembly, Ilica Dačić, already announced the adoption of the new Law by the end of

November, while also announcing a referendum on Constitutional amendments for January of next year (FoNet, 2021⁷³).

6.1.2.3. Mining El Dorado

While the Zijin copper mines and the Rio Tinto lithium mine represent the largest and, either actually or potentially, environmentally most destructive mining projects – they are far from the only mining projects currently unravelling in Serbia. Dozens of mining prospecting and exploration projects have received permits across Serbia in the last decade, with some of the ongoing explorations active in 2018 depicted in Figure 46 below.

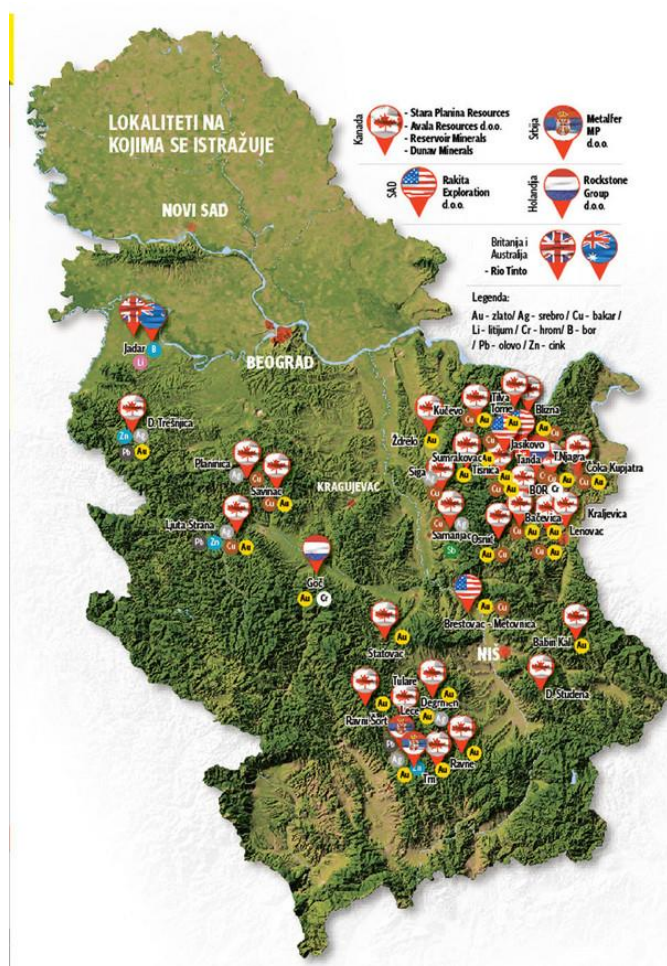


Figure 46. Ongoing mining prospecting and exploration projects in Serbia in 2018 (Source: Development Agency of Serbia (RAS), in Govoruša, 2018)

⁷³ <https://fonet.rs/politika/36051992/referendum-u-januaru.html>

In 2019, there were 72 companies conducting mining prospecting and exploration works at 148 different locations across the country (Vranjković, 2019). In an interview given to CorD magazine, the Serbian Minister of Mining and Energy, Zorana Mihajlovic, said that the value of Serbia's mineral wealth is estimated at over US \$200 billion, and that "mining is a sector that has been stalled for a long time" (CorD, 2021). She proceeded to claim that one of the aims of the current government, and herself as the responsible Minister, is to raise the share of mining in the country's GDP from the current 1,9% to 4% in the next three years (ibid.). To make this happen, the Government of Serbia adopted four new laws that regulate mining and energy in March and April of 2021, introducing "e-mining" as a "more efficient" way to issue all the necessary permits and shorten the time needed to obtain mining permits from the current 150 days to around 15 to 20 days (Spasić, 2021).

Critically, the newly adopted amendments to the Law on Mining and Geological Explorations also envision other provisions aimed at "expediting" geological exploration and mining projects, that the Renewables and Environmental Regulatory Institute (RERI) deems unconstitutional and has already announced that they intend to challenge the new Law in front of the Serbian Constitutional Court (RERI, 2021b). Namely, the new Law envisions the possibility for the State to conclude so-called "investment agreements" with companies conducting mining and exploration activities, which would regulate "relations regarding the construction of the missing infrastructure, environmental protection, pre-emption rights for domestic producers or processors, fiscal and legal benefits related to the project..." (RERI, 2021b). This makes it possible, as RERI (2021b) points out, for the state to practically suspend its rule of law and regulate mining investment projects solely according to these "investment agreements", potentially exempting investors from obtaining consent for an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) study, or providing lower taxation rates for mining companies.

Developments like these have led Zvezdan Kalmar, an environmental activist from the Center for Ecology and Sustainable Development (CEKOR) to call modern-day Serbia “a mining El Dorado” (Pavić, 2020). In the same interview Kalmar also discussed how the vast majority of permits for exploratory works in recent years were issued by the responsible Ministries without any prior consultations with relevant stakeholders or even without informing the interested local publics (ibid.), as was the case with the “Jadar” lithium mining project and the adoption of the spatial plan for the “special purpose area”.

6.2. Polluted Futures

The extractive industries described in the previous pages are certainly extremely polluting on their own, but it is worth noting that other industries causing severe pollution and environmental damage in Serbia have also been on the rise in recent years. And while examples abound and could easily warrant a chapter on their own, in the following pages I will try to present just a few examples, showing the common threads across them. As with the recent developments in the mining industry, these common threads point to a weakened rule of law, with the state either adopting special regulations aimed at exempting companies from environmental protection laws, or simply not enforcing the laws despite their obvious violations by foreign investors, and allowing them to continue business-as-usual at the expense of local citizens’ health and lives. Another commonality arising from the cases presented below is that local citizens and environmental movements are increasingly “jumping over” the state in their attempts to access justice. Namely, faced with a state that progressively turns a blind eye to local protests and foreign investors’ violations of domestic laws, protecting their business rather than the health and lives of its citizens, the local citizens and environmental movements are increasingly turning to inter- and supra-national

institutions in attempts to exert pressure on the state from ‘above’, after years of protests showed that pressure from ‘below’ remains ineffective.

6.2.1. Lafarge

One of the first ‘big’ privatizations in Serbia after the toppling of the Milošević regime happened in 2002 when the famous French company Lafarge bought the cement factory in Beočin, Serbia. Yet, instead of higher salaries, better working conditions, cleaner production and better protection of the environment, over the years Lafarge has turned Beočin into one of the most polluted towns in the country, where the local citizens are now trapped between trying to protect their health and trying to keep their jobs.

The environmental decline in Beočin was a gradual process. A year after the cement factory was bought by Lafarge, the company decided to switch from burning natural gas to using the much cheaper, but more polluting, petcoke (Ivanović, 2021). The real problems, however, only started happening in the last 10 years. In 2011, the company received permits to co-incinerate communal waste in its kilns, while in 2018 the company received an integrated permit which allowed them to also incinerate medical waste, automobile tires, waste oils and plastics (ibid.). When the same permit was issued to the Lafarge cement factory in Trbovlje, Slovenia back in 2009, Uroš Macerl, a local farmer and environmental activist began a long legal battle with Lafarge that even took Slovenia to the European Court of Justice for its failure to enforce EU pollution standards (Kešanski, 2017). The long battle ended in 2015 with Slovenia ordering Lafarge to halt its operations in Trbovlje, which in 2017 won Uroš Macerl the prestigious Goldman Environmental Prize (ibid.).

Yet in Serbia, Lafarge continues the same practice with the locals in Beočin fearing for their health and lives, but also fearing to speak up because they do not want to lose their jobs (Ivanović, 2021). When after months of repeated media pressure, the Provincial Environmental Inspection of Vojvodina decided to conduct unannounced monitoring of air

quality in Beočin in the period between September and November 2019, they confirmed that the mean half-hour values of HCI were three or more times higher than allowed in over 60 occasions, while particulate matter, SO₂, HF, NH₃, and NO_x were three or more times above the allowed values in over 1100 occasions (Kovačević, 2020). The results confirmed what the local citizens in Beočin were fearing, but also brought hope because the Provincial Inspection announced that it will file suit against Lafarge. Today, almost two years later, the judicial proceeding is nowhere near in sight, while it also remains unclear if the Provincial Inspection ever really did file suit against the company as it announced (Ivanović, 2021).

6.2.2. *Gierlinger*

Just 40 kilometers to the north of Beočin, in the Temerin municipality, local citizens have for years been fighting a local intensive pig farming company “Temerin Agrar” in sole ownership of an Austrian company Gierlinger (Kragulj, 2021). The farm in question is in multiple violations of national laws and municipal planning acts – it is located within the municipal “construction area” (*gradjevinski rejon*), and in close proximity to residential houses, where animal farms are not allowed; the waste waters from the farm were improperly dumped in a so-called lagoon located on the land owned by the state and without necessary permits, as was determined by the Provincial Agricultural Inspection in 2020 (Kragulj, 2021); the company did not hold an integrated waste management permit, which intensive pig farming companies holding more than 10.000 pigs⁷⁴ are required to have and because of which the Ministry of Environmental Protection ordered the company to apply for such a permit in 2019. Two years later, the company continues to conduct business-as-usual despite the fact that it still has not obtained the necessary permit due to the fact that the documentation it submitted to the Ministry in 2020 was incomplete (*ibid.*).

⁷⁴ In July 2021, “Temerin Agrar” held 36,000 pigs on their farm (Pavkov, 2021)

Tired from the years of legal battles and inaction by the responsible state institutions, the local citizens decided to move their protests in front of the Austrian Embassy in Belgrade in July, 2021 (Rajić, 2021), scaling-up their protests and attempting to protect their rights and access justice by raising the international visibility of their plight.

6.2.3. HBIS *Železara*

In recent years, the public attention in Serbia has also turned to the growing Chinese investments in the country as part of China's One Belt One Road (OBOR) initiative. Namely, besides providing loans for infrastructure development projects in Serbia, including highway and high-speed rail construction, Chinese companies have also made strategic partnership deals with Serbian state-owned companies such as in the case of Zijin's investments into RTB Bor, or have privatized state-owned companies such as the Smederevo based Steel Mill (*Železara*).

Namely, in April 2016, the Chinese iron and steel producer HBIS group, second largest steel producer in the world, bought the Smederevo Steel Mill for € 46 million, while pledging to invest at least € 300 million to replay *Železara*'s debt and increase production (Nikolić, 2016). And while HBIS has managed to increase the production of steel several times over, reaching up to 160.000 tonnes of steel a month and making *Železara* the largest exporter in Serbia in 2019 and 2020 (Hopkins, 2021), what has also increased was levels of air pollution, with estimates that up to 700 tonnes of dust are emitted annually (Filipović, 2020). The annual air quality report published by the Serbian Environmental Protection Agency (SEPA) in October 2020, also revealed that in 2019 the air in Smederevo was categorized as "category III", meaning 'excessively polluted' (Knežević et. al., 2020).

When HBIS bought the Smederevo *Železara* back in 2016, a special "Law on acquisition of ownership rights on land, facilities and lines of the company for production and

processing of steel, Železara Smederevo d.o.o. Smederevo” was adopted by the National Assembly of Serbia, which in Article 11 specifically states that The Law on Waste Management will not apply to slag created in the operation of the Steel Mill (Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia 15/2016; 85/2016). As a result, the company has been piling the residue slag near the villages of Vranovo and Radinac, creating hills up to 15 meters tall in the open (Filipović, 2020). Because of this, the Smederevo-based environmental movement *Tvrđava* (Fortress), which has been raising public awareness about the pollution in Smederevo and trying to force the state institutions to enforce the environmental protection laws in Smederevo for years, decided in 2021 to file a complaint to the International Commission for the Protection of the Danube River (ICPDR) in Vienna, due to the fact that these slag piles are less than 100 meters away from the river Danube (Milošević, 2021). The village Radinac also became known as “the red village” in recent years due to the amount of red dust emitted from the HBIS Iron Mills that daily falls on the village (Figure 47)



Figure 47. The red dust in the village Radinac, next to Smederevo Iron Mills (Source: CINS, in Đorđević, 2020d)

6.2.4. Linglong

The growing cooperation between Serbia and China in recent years resulted in some greenfield investments as well. The largest such is the construction of the Linglong tire factory currently underway on the outskirts of the city of Zrenjanin. Namely, in September 2018, during president Vučić's visit to Beijing, and 4 months after the European Commission imposed anti-dumping duties and introduced tariffs on Chinese tires (Commission Regulation (EU) 2018/683), an agreement was signed between the Government of Serbia and the Chinese company "Shangdong Linglong", announcing a greenfield investment by the company and the construction of their "first tire factory in Europe", in Zrenjanin, Serbia (Karásková et. al., 2020).

The cornerstone for the factory was laid already on March 30, 2019 and since then numerous violations of laws and regulations have been observed. In a comprehensive case study entitled "O tempora, o mores!⁷⁵", Vojvodić and Popović (2021) detailed the numerous cases of violations of laws and regulations, abuse of public authority, blatant disregard of civil rights and unprecedented leniency of public authorities towards this foreign investor. From the enormous subsidies given by the Serbian State to the investor, which were not in accordance with the State Aid Control Act and the Regulation on Rules for Granting State Aid; lack of transparency and refusal of several state institutions to publicly disclose information regarding the project; commencement of the construction before obtaining proper construction permits; to the so called 'salami-slicing' of the factory construction into at least 9 separate construction projects, in direct violation of Article 137 of the Law on Planning and Construction⁷⁶, which allowed the investor to avoid the need for a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) or an integrated Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA); the construction

⁷⁵ A famous latin phrase attributed to Cicero, that literally translates to „Oh what times! Oh what customs!“ and corresponds to the English idiom "Shame on this age and on its lost principles!"

⁷⁶ Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia 72/2009, 81/2009, 64/2010, 24/2011, 121/2012, 42/2013, 50/2013, 98/201, 132/2014, 145/2014, 83/2018, 31/2019, 37/2019, 9/2020 and 52/2021

of the Linglong tire factory in Zrenjanin continues to raise controversies on a regular basis (see Vojvodić and Popović(2021) for a detailed analysis).

Furthermore, during the public hearings held in September 2020 and February 2021, when Environmental Impact Assessments (EIAs) were presented for two of the (at least) nine construction projects into which the factory was artificially divided, the police did not allow the interested publics to attend the hearings citing the regulations regarding the coronavirus pandemic as the reason (ibid.). In other words, instead of postponing the public hearings, local authorities decided to prevent participation of the interested publics, thus directly violating Article 9 of the Law on Environmental Protection⁷⁷.

Vehicle tires pose tremendous risks to the environment, with impacts related to ecotoxicity, radiation and emission of carcinogens, among others, being almost exclusively tied to the production phase (Piotrowska et. al. 2019). Even with the strictest adherence to environmental protection laws, the expected environmental impacts of the Linglong tire factory in Zrenjanin, with planned production of over 13 million tires annually, are considerable. Yet particularly worrying is the degree to which the Serbian state institutions are willing to suspend the rule of law and ‘look the other way’ already during the construction of the factory. If this is any indicator of the way in which the state will treat the company once production starts, the scale of potential environmental impacts may well be inconceivable.

6.3. Waste(d) Futures

Reducing and/or simply not enforcing labor and environmental protection standards, as described in previous pages, allows the Serbian state to be comparatively more ‘successful’ in attracting foreign direct investments (Figure 48).

⁷⁷ Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia 135/2004, 36/2009, 36/2009, 72/2009, 43/2011, 14/2016, 76/2018 and 95/2018

Serbia maintained its global number one spot as country that creates most FDI jobs per million inhabitants, according to “IBM Global Location Trends 2020”.

“Serbia continued to show strong results for the fourth year in a row, as the next wave of preferred locations for companies in Europe.”

IBM Global Locations Trends 2020 report

Figure 48. Quotes proudly displayed on the Serbian Development Agency’s (RAS) website (Source: RAS, 2021⁷⁸)

These investments, as I have shown in previous pages, while bringing capital into the country, rely on local hyper-extraction and exploitation of labor, natural resources and externalization of costs in the form of environmental pollution and degradation, only to then flow out of the country as profits, resources and produced consumer products intended for future global consumption. In other words, they locally extract the future embodied in profits, resources and goods, while leaving behind social and environmental havoc. The same principles of reducing and not enforcing environmental standards, however, also enable the past, embodied in internationally created waste, to flow in the other direction, transforming Serbia and other landscapes of the capitalist periphery into global landfills and dumping grounds for the world’s past.

Due to its geo-political and economic situation, the Balkans have long served as a convenient dumping ground for western European countries’ wastes (Brown, 1999). Numerous cases of exporting waste to the Balkans were recorded during the 1990s and among them the most notable were two cases in which hazardous waste was shipped to the Balkans under the “humanitarian aid” label. Namely, in 1991 and 1992 Germany exported about 500 metric tons of hazardous pesticides⁷⁹ to Albania labeled as “humanitarian aid” (Brown, 1999), most of which it reimported back after two years and mounting pressure from the public and

⁷⁸ <https://ras.gov.rs/en/invest-in-serbia/why-serbia/join-the-pool-of-the-successful>

⁷⁹ Such as toxaphene which contains more than 670 chemicals that are toxic to humans and can cause birth defects and organ damage (Brown, 1999)

Greenpeace which originally tracked the shipment and uncovered the story (Edwards, 1995). In 1993, Germany also reimported 450 tonnes of its own old pesticides packed in leaky drums from Romania (Edwards, 1995). Similarly, during and after the Yugoslav wars in the early 1990s, Bosnia received vast amounts of ‘humanitarian aid’ from various countries, and many of these shipments, as it turned out, contained medicine past its expiration date – or dangerous medical waste, in other words (Brown, 1999).

The Basel Convention, which the majority of developed nations⁸⁰ signed and ratified in the first half of the 1990s, aimed precisely to halt this kind of transboundary movements of hazardous and other⁸¹ wastes, particularly from the developed to less developed countries. Yet, although the implementation did bring stricter regulations and oversight of transboundary movement of wastes, it certainly did not stop such movements. On the one hand, problems occurred because of differences in national definitions of “hazardous waste”, waste classifications and different methods of data collection and reporting (Likmeta, 2012). These differences, for example, allowed France to report the export of 588 tons of hazardous waste to Albania in 2004, while Albania never recorded the import/entrance of this waste (as hazardous waste) to the country (Likmeta, 2012). On the other hand, with the global waste management market being valued at \$ 410 billion a year (UNEP, 2011), opportunities for illegal earnings are considerable, and illegal shipments have been increasing in Europe, with the Balkans being one of the export destinations (Rucevska et. al. 2015:55).

Bulgarian cultural anthropologist Ivaylo Dichev (2020) wrote about the illicit industry of waste management in Bulgaria and Romania, the EUs poorest member countries which for years now have been importing growing amounts of waste from their richer EU counterparts and improperly incinerating it in their cement factories and coal fired power plants, which resulted in increased air pollution, or illegally dumping it across the country. Forti et. al.

⁸⁰ except for the United States of America, which to date remains one of just two countries in the world that have not ratified the Convention

⁸¹ Solid waste and municipal incinerator ash

(2020) have also noted increased shipments of e-waste from western and northern Europe to Eastern Europe.

In other words, the increasingly globalized waste market reveals that while capital accumulates in wealthy parts of the world, waste accumulates in the poorer regions. Within Europe, these flows of capital and waste reflect the east-west divide (Ditchev, 2020).

The issue with waste transfers into poorer Balkan countries has particularly become apparent in recent years, after China banned the import of most solid wastes⁸² in 2018 which in turn forced many EU countries to find alternative locations to offload their refuse (ibid.). Although much of this waste is classified as “recyclable” and as such imported into different Balkan countries, this does not mean that the waste actually gets recycled. In Bulgaria, where waste imports since 2010 have risen twentyfold, much of the waste imported for recycling ended up on illegal landfills because the companies that imported the waste for recycling “failed to live up to their side of the bargain” (Ditchev, 2020). In early 2020, the Bulgarian environment minister Neno Dimov resigned after illegal waste imports from Italy were discovered, while a few months later the deputy environment minister Krassimir Zhivkov was arrested and charged for his alleged role in the importing of Italian harmful waste (Prince, 2020).

In May 2021, Greenpeace also released a report detailing the results of their investigation that revealed how Europe is still dumping plastic waste on other countries. Namely, their investigation followed the hundreds of truckloads that daily carry plastic waste from Europe to Turkey, where instead of being recycled much of this waste ended up on illegal landfills or simply burned by the roadside (Greenpeace, 2021a; 2021b; Laville, 2021;). In other words, plastic waste that was carefully sorted by people in the United Kingdom (Crawford, 2021) and Germany (Greenpeace, 2021b), with the promise of local British and German waste management companies to recycle it, instead ended up burned or fly tipped

⁸² 24 kinds of solid waste were banned for import, including plastics, paper products, textiles etc. Prior to the ban, China handled nearly half of the world’s recyclable waste (Katz, 2019)

thousands of kilometers away in Turkey. In response to the Greenpeace report and the media coverage that followed it, Turkey also made a decision to implement a ban on most imports of plastic waste that became effective on July 2, 2021 (Crawford, 2021). This means that the UK, which produces far more plastic waste than their domestic recycling capacities can handle (Greenpeace, 2021a), now has to find new export destinations where their plastic waste would get “recycled”, whether actually or fictitiously like it was in Turkey.

Similarly, large shipments containing 414 tons of textile waste were imported from Italy into Bosnia and Herzegovina in spring 2020 by the company “Krom reciklaza” (Krom recycling) registered as a waste management company in Drvar, Bosnia and Herzegovina (Sandić-Hadžihasanović, 2020). Yet the recycling facility and equipment registered in Drvar, and based on which the company received permits for waste imports and management, do not actually exist (Milojević, 2020). Instead, the 414 tons of waste ended up at several dump sites (Figure 49) spread across 5 different municipalities in Bosnia and Herzegovina (Sandić-Hadžihasanović, 2020).



Figure 49. A part of the textile waste imported from Italy, dumped in the city of Bihac, Bosnia and Herzegovina (Source: Duraković, Dz. RFE/RL in Sandić-Hadžihasanović, 2020)

Like Bulgaria and Romania, which recycle less than 10% of their national waste (Ditchev, 2020), both Bosnia and Herzegovina (Katavić, 2019) and Serbia (Gligorović, 2019) also recycle around 10% of their nationally generated waste. Yet imports of “recyclable waste” (now banned in China and Turkey) into all these Balkan countries have been growing rapidly in recent years (Ditchev, 2020, Gligorović, 2019; Surlan, 2020). Mihail Mateski, CEO of the recycling company “Greentech” in Serbia says it is absolutely absurd that the company has to import PET plastics while Serbian landfills, both legal and illegal, are full of plastic waste due to the fact that no primary selection of waste exists in the country (Gligorović, 2019). In 2020 and early 2021, photographs of the Potpečko lake in western Serbia (Figure 50) started circling on social networks, as well as national and international media which covered the story of the local rivers washing away unsanitary landfills and concentrating the waste in the Potpečko lake (Rudgard, 2021; Bjelić, 2021).



Figure 50. Waste-clogged Potpečko lake in Western Serbia (Source: Bjelić, 2021)

The Slovenian NGO “*Ekologi brez meja*” (Ecologists without borders) also tracked the Slovenian waste imports and exports and discovered that almost 70 percent of the exported waste declarations in 2019 had Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina as the countries of destination (Malovrh, 2021). Ongoing waste management projects in Serbia further point towards similar trends in the future. Namely, despite the fact that no effort is put into developing primary waste selection in the country, private investments into recycling facilities are growing. According to the data from the Serbian Environmental Protection Agency (SEPA, 2021), in April 2021 there were 2413 valid permits for waste management issued to companies in Serbia, 886 of which included permits for waste treatment.

On the other hand, in 2017 the City of Belgrade signed a 25 year long private-public-partnership (PPP) contract with the French-Japanese Suez-Itochu consortium for the provision of municipal waste treatment and disposal. Contrary to the strategic⁸³ and planning⁸⁴ documents of the City of Belgrade, and despite the city’s long-term needs and country’s obligations towards the European Union’s circular economy goals that are defined in Chapter 27 of EU accession negotiations, the contract includes the construction of a waste-to-energy incinerator with an annual capacity of 340.000 tons of waste (Radovanović, 2019).

Aside from the procedural issues which point towards potential corruption and putting private interests over public needs, which resulted in the European Investment Bank (EIB) withdrawing from financing of the project in 2019 (see Radovanović, 2019 for details), the PPP contract also presents a significant challenge for Belgrade and Serbia to improve their waste prevention, separate collection and recycling schemes (Todorović, 2020). Namely, as part of the contract, the City of Belgrade guarantees the private operator of the incinerator that it will deliver the 340.000 tons of waste annually for incineration, which accounts for around two thirds of all the waste currently generated in the city (Itochu, 2017). This means

⁸³ Local Waste Management Plan of the City of Belgrade 2011 - 2020, Official Gazette of the City of Belgrade no. 28/11.

⁸⁴ Detailed Regulation Plan for the Sanitary Landfill Vinča, City Municipality of Grocka, Official Gazette of the City of Belgrade, no. 17/15.

that if Belgrade is to abide by the contractual obligations, it will either not be able to meet the municipal waste recycling targets set by EU legislation (the transposition of which into domestic legislation is foreseen in the near future), or produce significantly more of it - which again goes against waste prevention goals, or - that it will have to import waste to meet both the demands of the burgeoning recycling sector and the soon-to-be-constructed incinerator. Finally, the incinerator is also expected to increase levels of air pollution, an issue that Belgrade and Serbia are already facing, with estimates that current exposure to fine particulate matter measuring $\leq 2.5 \mu\text{m}$ (PM_{2.5}) in 11 studied cities in Serbia is a cause of nearly 3.600 premature deaths every year (WHO, 2019).

6.4. Conclusion

The political and economic reforms initiated after 2000 in Serbia and led by International Financing Institutions (IFIs) such as the World Bank (WB) and International Monetary Fund (IMF), followed a path-dependent trajectory of neoliberal restructuring marked by the “shock doctrine” prescription of privatization, deregulation and liberalization. And as the national economy was ‘liberalized’, resources and means of production privatized, and the country ‘opened’ to the global flows of capital, what has gradually been ‘(en)closed’ is not only the commons and shared wealth, but also the ability and capacity of citizens and workers to participate in decision-making procedures with (and through) the state and so shape both place-making and future-making processes at the local and national levels.

In the (socialist) past, Yugoslav citizens and workers were themselves owners and managers of Yugoslav social enterprises, and thus also employers as well as investors in future development – which empowered them to deliberate and actively participate in decision-making on what the local and national futures should look like. In contrast, the majority of today’s Serbian citizens are increasingly constituted as precarious laboring

classes, divorced from ownership and management in their workplaces, as well as profits, future investments and development of the companies that they work for and towns that they live in. They are thus also divorced from the power to negotiate the local and national futures. Rather, this power to negotiate as well as the negotiations themselves have been scaled-up and now take place between the foreign investors as owners of capital and means of production, and the state itself as a regulator that determines the rules under which foreign capital can operate on Serbian soil.

Shifting the scale of my analysis upwards ('jumping scales') and focusing on Serbia's positionality within the European and global political economy, I showed how Serbia's peripheral status within the global economy works to delimit the very parameters of such negotiations in which Serbia is forced to compete for foreign investments with other peripheral states by offering ever more concessions to foreign investors and ways for them to maximize their profits by lowering or externalizing their costs of operations. The sacrifices made by the Serbian state in this regard, as I have detailed in this chapter, are most visible in lowered labor standards and regulations which enable investors to lower the costs and risk of their operations in the country, as well as (non)enforcement of environmental protection standards which allows investors to externalize their costs to the local natural environment. The effects, on the other hand, are revealed in the national/regional landscape which is increasingly constituted as a source of future resources, profits, and consumer goods intended for 'the world' while also serving as dumping grounds for the same world's past, embodied in the waste that flows in the other direction.

Critically, I have also argued that another sacrifice made, not as visible at first sight, is that of the local citizens' very own future which is taken out of their hands, decided upon at higher scales, and increasingly made insecure - in order to make the profits earned by investors more secure. This insecurity is expressed financially through the low wages that they earn, as limitations imposed on their future-planning due to the insecure work contracts

that they hold as well as lack of career advancement options, but also as threats to their future health and livelihoods due to the growing expansion of polluting and extracting industries across the country.

This is evidenced by the weakened rule of law and the state's inactions, such as in the case of leaving a legal vacuum in labor regulations on employee leasing that directly benefited 'foreign investors' at the expense of domestic workers, or the many examples discussed throughout the chapter where the state decided not to enforce its environmental protection laws despite their obvious violations by foreign investors. It is also evidenced in concrete state's actions such as adopting special regulations aimed at exempting companies from environmental protection laws (i.e. HBIS Železara), decisions to declare investment projects to be of 'national significance' thus sidestepping national laws and regulations (i.e. Belgrade Waterfront and Gazprom South Stream pipeline) or decisions to by-pass national, regional and local planning in favor of planning of "special purpose areas", and so severely limit options for public participation, such as in the case of Rio Tinto's Jadar mining project.



Figure 51. A caricature of the President of Serbia throwing pieces of the Serbian territory to hyenas that represent environmentally destructive industries (Source: Dušan Petričić/NIN, 2021)

The caricature above (Figure 51), made by the famous Serbian caricaturist Dušan Petričić, captures well the recent developments in Serbia discussed throughout this chapter. Depicted on the caricature is Serbia's President, Aleksandar Vučić, who states "Long live Serbia!" as he rips pieces of the country's map and feeds them to hungry hyenas which represent some of the most environmentally destructive 'investors' in the country such as Rio Tinto, Zijin and the multitude of derivative small hydropower plants (SHPPs, or *MHE* in Serbian) which will also be discussed in Chapter 8, in the context of local opposition to environmentally destructive industries and the recent rise of environmental movements in the country. The local citizens, rather than owners of their own destinies and creators of their futures and futures of the places which they inhabit, appear only as sacrificial objects (fodder)

in the relationship between the state (represented by the President) and hungry investors (represented by hyenas).

Faced with such increasingly limited options to participate in negotiations about and creation of ‘the future’, Serbian citizens are attempting to resist their positionality and change their fortunes in two main ways. One is to resist local and national social structures and class relations and escape these realities by relocating out of the country or out of the law, thus engaging in making their own, individual lateral futures, which I will discuss in the following chapter. The other way is to collectively contest the futures proposed by the government and foreign investors and articulate different visions of the future, as does the rapidly growing number of social and environmental movements that I discuss in Chapter 8. In order to challenge the negotiations and decisions made at higher scales, these movements are increasingly ‘jumping scales’ themselves, transforming from dispersed local oppositional movements into translocal and even transnational alliances and increasingly turning towards international institutions in attempts to access justice. Critically, they are also ‘scaling down’ the state and negotiations with it by increasingly engaging in civil disobedience tactics and so challenging the state’s legitimacy and forcing it to renegotiate the very social contract with the citizens.

Chapter 7. Futures of The Weak

Introduction

Attuning my senses to discover the “mining futures” in Aleksinac when I moved there, I was disappointed to not find them as apparent and manifested as I expected them to be (see Chapter 5). However, despite the absence of “shale mining futures”, multiple other futures were indeed present and everywhere around me – from the town’s built environment to my casual conversations with its people. Even a short stroll down the main pedestrian street of Aleksinac reveals “the future” as a central theme. Namely, the street is lined with a few, very particular types of businesses that reappear with every few steps that you take - a bank, right next to it a betting shop, a pharmacy, a café....and then again, a betting shop, a bank, a pharmacy and a café... The few shops selling groceries and other household goods are slowly running out of business or simply moving away from the main pedestrian street due to relatively high rent prices in this ‘exclusive’ street, with two such shops closed during my time in the field, one left empty, the other replaced by a new betting shop.

The banks advertise “cheap” cash loans to those with good credit scores (read: those with any legal employment) so they can meet their current needs and ‘push’ their financial problems into the terrain of the future. Betting shops offer a pastime (that literally ‘fills time’) and an imaginary of future winnings that could potentially solve current and mounting financial problems and usher in a future without financial worries. Pharmacies sell hope for the sick and elderly – a future imaginary of good health and a prolonged life. And finally, the cafés serve multiple purposes offering a space where time can be ‘spent’ and perhaps altered through consumption of both legal (alcohol, coffee) and illegal (drugs) substances, and where friends can discuss their present realities, worries and plans for the future. In other words,

what all of these businesses offer is both an escape from the realities of the present and some form of hope for the future⁸⁵.

In the following pages of this chapter, I will uncover the different ways in which the local Aleksinac residents traverse time and space in their everyday lives in order to secure incomes, make the present more manageable and the future more hopeful and secure. The chapter's title "Futures of The Weak" is meant to associate to and invoke the writings of James C. Scott, who in his seminal 1985 book "Weapons of the Weak" uncovered the multiple ways in which people (in a small village in Malaysia) express resistance even when their actions are cloaked in conformity, or when no conscious organization and coordination of resistance is present. Tax evasion, theft, gossip, other "petty acts of noncompliance" and even poverty itself were reinterpreted by Scott (2008) as ways in which people drop out of society/culture and resist the prevailing social structures, class relations, societal norms and desired behaviors placed upon them. Although they do not constitute a revolution in itself, Scott saw such actions and behavior as reflecting "a spirit and practice that prevents the worst and promises something better" (Scott, 2008:350).

Exactly such are the stories and actions of my many interlocutors presented in this chapter. Often on the fringes of legality, though mostly not illegal, the actions of my interlocutors (and Serbian citizens at large, where applicable) present creative efforts to escape the realities of local social and class relations and quietly resist, to the best of their abilities, repression and exploitation by their affluent local, national and international counterparts. They also represent attempts to denounce their subordination to the supraordinate futures imposed by the national government and foreign investors, as discussed in the previous chapter, and engage in individual making of their own lateral futures.

⁸⁵ They also all provide a way (thru over-consumption, gambling, medication, coffee and alcohol) to self-medicate an addiction to socially driven expectations and validations: being rich, healthy and productive.

7.1. The Future is Now

With an average age of 44 years old and 29% of the total population above 60 years of age (Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, 2019), the Aleksinac municipality is among the ‘older’ municipalities in Serbia. As such, it comes as no surprise that the number of pension holders in the municipality is almost identical to the number of employed citizens (12.349 and 12.909 respectfully), making the state pensions one of the main sources of income in the municipality (ibid.).

Many people that I met in Aleksinac and the surrounding villages live in multi-generational households, as is the case across smaller towns and villages in Serbia. This is particularly the case in southern and eastern parts of the country which have historically been poorer than northern and western parts. This tradition, born out of the historical necessity of larger families staying together due to poverty, was not abandoned even during the “golden age” of the 1970s and 1980s when large multi-story houses were constructed to allow families to ‘live separately while staying together’. Yet the last two decades saw this necessity come to the fore once again, with several people telling me that they had to move back in with their parents and/or grandparents as they could not afford to live independently anymore. This was either because they had lost their jobs, or their salaries could simply not cover the raising living expenses, forcing them to join incomes and share living expenses with older and/or extended family members.

With many jobs in the municipality being either seasonal, such as those in agriculture or construction, or simply unsecure such as the jobs with big employers like Grammer which practice “flexible production” (and with it “flexible employment”) to meet changing demands, the state pension is in fact one of the most stable and secure incomes around. Thus, the state pension – a future project from the past materialized/monetized in the present, is what makes that present manageable and the future more or less secure, not just for the pension holders

but for entire multigenerational families - for as long as the pension-holder is alive. For this reason, the ‘future imaginary of better health and a prolonged life’ sold by the many pharmacies in the main pedestrian street and across the town represents not only a “selfish” desire by the sick or elderly, but often also hope and security for entire multi-generational families which commonly have this pension as their most secure, if not the only or highest source of income.

With an almost identical number of pensioners and actively employed citizens, Aleksinac is above the national average pension system dependency ratio (PSDR - number of pensioners relative to contributors), though not by much. This ratio has been steadily rising in Serbia in the last two decades, from 1:1,8 in the year 2000 to 1:1,3 in 2018 (Malešević, 2019). Considering that the Pension and Disability Insurance Fund of the Republic of Serbia (“*PIO Fond*”), despite what the name suggests, does not manage financial investments but is rather set up as a pay-as-you-go system, this means that the current pension contributions are not enough to cover the current pensions which instead heavily rely on the state budget (Pavlović et al. 2015). With the demographic trends in Serbia characterized by an aging population, low birth rates, and growing out-migration, particularly among younger generations (and thus further contributing to negative population growth), this means that the state pension system will continue to be increasingly unsustainable and contribute to ever growing deficits in the state budget. For this reason, discussions about the “collapse” or “bankruptcy” of the state pension fund are becoming more and more prominent across the country. This is particularly the case amongst the younger generations who worry that their mandatory pension contributions will “go to waste” because by the time they reach the retirement age the state pension fund will either have completely gone bankrupt or would at best be able to pay out “worthless” pensions that cannot cover even the most basic living expenses.

So, while the state pension on the one hand represents security in the present and near future, its imaginary in a more distant future is a cause of significant anxieties and

insecurities. In such circumstances, it comes as no surprise that one growing business in Aleksinac is selling life and non-life insurance policies, with several insurance policy agents approaching me during my time in the field, whether while I was sitting in a café talking to friends I had made in the town, or through some of my acquaintances who invited me to attend presentations. I accepted one such invitation and with five other people went to the company's office to attend a group presentation of their insurance policies. It was a small branch office of a large Austrian insurance corporation "Grawe".

After briefly introducing the company itself, the two agents went on to introduce the insurance policies, telling us about the importance of saving for the future, the instability and unsustainability of the Serbian state pension system and the benefits of their own insurance policies – specifically tailored for low-income families or individuals. We received handouts with examples of different insurance policies and detailed projections of potential earnings based on different monthly/yearly payment options. The insurance would offer "total security" (*potpuna sigurnost*) as we were told, because you could collect the money at any point should you need it, or if you continue to put money into the account you can collect monthly payments (a "pension" of sorts) after a certain period of time – usually between 10 and 20 years, depending on the policy. The handouts detailed several examples of different insurance rates and the monthly payments ("pension") that you could collect based on those rates – giving us, the potential buyers, a sense of security and certainty that not only will we collect this money, but we would know exactly how much we would collect. The sums looked attractive, particularly to uncritical eyes that would not think of adjusting these sums to inflation that adds up significantly over a period of two decades – a topic that was interestingly not mentioned by our presenters. Finally, the insurance also included a life and disability component, so if some sort of illness or accident were to happen to you in the future, either you or your family would be entitled to large premiums that would allow you to receive the best possible care, or your family to "be taken care of in your absence". Both

options were illustrated to us through anecdotal stories about clients from nearby villages who got injured or died in an accident and the way the insurance policy allowed them to recover or their family, which had no other source of income, to continue living.

We were encouraged to ask questions after the presentation and raise any doubt or worries that we had, which the two agents would then address and once again assure us that the insurance policies are “full proof” and that the only responsible thing to do is to buy the policy and start saving for the future. Two of the people in the group immediately expressed firm intent on signing the policy⁸⁶, while the rest of us said that we would need to think more about the different options, our ability to commit to regular payments and so on.

What these growing insurance businesses confirm, along with the other businesses in the main street of Aleksinac is that “hope” and “security”, as integral components of the future, are the most coveted “commodities” in the town and region where the realities of the present are increasingly difficult to manage and the future increasingly uncertain, insecure and for the majority of the population - hopeless.

In the following section I will turn to my conversations with the locals and discuss the myriad of other ways in which they carve their individual futures, finding ways to imbue them with as much hope and security as their lifeworlds and circumstances allow for.

⁸⁶ It is entirely plausible that the two people were “inside agents” meant to “motivate” other people into also signing a contract, but this is something that I cannot confirm or deny as I wasn’t familiar with any of the other people attending the presentation

7.2. The Future is Elsewhere

*(Together) we will find a place
(To settle) where there's so much space
(Without rush) and the pace back east
(The hustling) rustling just to feed
(I know I'm) ready to leave too
(So that's what) we are gonna do
...
(Go west) there in the open air
(Go west) where the skies are blue
(Go west) this is what we're gonna do*

(Pet Shop Boys – Go West 1993)

As noted in Chapter 3, the Aleksinac municipality saw large numbers of people who moved as ‘guest workers’ (Gastarbeiter(s)) to Germany, Austria, Switzerland and other western European countries in the years following the WW2, and particularly the 1960s and 1970s.

After the mines were closed in 1989 and the local economy devastated during the wars, international sanctions and hyperinflation in the 1990s, the municipality saw another significant wave of population drain with many people moving out of Aleksinac and the surrounding villages. While many moved to Niš, Belgrade and other larger cities in Serbia in search for employment, those who had family members or good friends abroad (‘Gastarbeiter’ connections) mostly decided to leave the country – whether legally through ‘family reunification schemes’, illegally, or somewhere in-between.

As of 2009, Serbia also made it to the so-called “White Schengen list”⁸⁷ which allowed Serbian citizens to travel visa-free to Schengen countries and stay there legally for up to three months at a time (90 days within 180 days). This opened up a whole new range of possibilities for people from Aleksinac to reconnect with their family and friends in western Europe and make ‘mutually beneficial business deals’, summoning different temporal and spatial connections. The ‘mutually beneficial business deals’, as I will discuss in the

⁸⁷ The list of so-called “Annex II countries” whose nationals do not need visas to enter the Schengen area

following pages, usually involve a three-month visit/stay during which the guest from Aleksinac is (illegally) employed in jobs such as construction, babysitting, caregiving, accounting and other back-office jobs.

The magnitude of these connections is perhaps best portrayed by the existence of several bus lines that connect Aleksinac and various towns and cities in Switzerland, Austria and Germany, departing almost daily from the local bus station. Additionally, the nearby airport “Constantine the Great”, located some 20 kilometers from Aleksinac, which reopened in 2015, initially offered only two commercial flights – to Basel, Switzerland, twice a week, and to Malmo, Sweden also twice a week. The following year, regular low-cost flights were introduced to Bratislava, Milan, Berlin, Dusseldorf, Munich, Dortmund and Eindhoven.

7.2.1. Gastarbeiter networks – working on the fringes of legality

Nela was one of the first locals I met and informally interviewed during my first visit to Aleksinac in 2014. When we met, she was in her late 20s and had just come back from Zurich, Switzerland, where she stayed for a year with her ‘Gastarbeiter’ cousins who live there. Her cousins own a small business in Zurich, and Nela in fact worked for them the whole time, helping out in their office in any way she could with her limited knowledge of Italian and German. As she told me, this mostly included basic accounting and office management work, but she also helped out around the house with cleaning, grocery shopping and running various other errands for her cousins. Both Nela’s cousins and Nela herself were very happy with this arrangement in which Nela received 1.000 CHF (close to €1.000) a month, a fraction of the cost her cousins would have to pay if they legally employed an office assistant. On the other hand, the same amount was more than Nela could ever dream of earning back in Serbia, and she was in fact able to save most of her earnings as she did not need to pay for accommodation, bills, food etc. which were all provided by her cousins. She

was thus able to return to Aleksinac with thousands of Swiss francs in her pocket and easily live off these savings for two or more years, depending on her lifestyle and spending habits.

Nela's "employment" at her cousins' company was kept off the books, as she was not legally allowed to work in Switzerland on her visa-free tourist visit. She was able to stay for a whole year because she is a dual citizen and holds both a Serbian and a Montenegrin passport. Namely, Montenegro is also an Annex II country and thus visa-free travel is allowed for holders of Montenegrin passports for 90 days within a 180 days period. On the edges of legality, this allowed Nela to stay in Switzerland for as long as she wanted, but it did require some creative effort to do so. Every 90 days, Nela would have to exit Switzerland, have her passport stamped, and reenter the country with the other passport she holds for the following 90 days. In other words, Nela would exit the country a Serbian citizen, and reenter the same day as a Montenegrin. 90 days later, she would exit a Montenegrin and reenter a Serbian, and so on.

After the breakup of Yugoslavia, many Yugoslavs became dual citizens of two successor states based on the ethnic citizenship criterion. Thus, it is very common for e.g. Bosnian and Montenegrin citizens to also have a Serbian citizenship, since a large part of Bosnia's and Montenegro's population consider themselves ethnic Serbs (and are recognized as such by the Serbian state). Still, dual citizens are a small fraction of the total population and they are not too common in Aleksinac, which is geographically closer to Bulgaria than any other of the former Yugoslav Republics. So unlike Nela, most other locals from Aleksinac are faced with the 90-day limit to their stay in Schengen countries, if they wish to remain legal.

Such was the case with Anabela, who I met the following year when I returned to Aleksinac for my fieldwork and stayed there for most of 2015. Anabela too had recently returned from Switzerland when we met and she was 24 at the time. She spent three months (90 days) in Lucerne, a town in central Switzerland, where she worked as a live-in nanny for a Serbian-Bosnian family with two kids. The host family paid for her trip, provided

accommodation and food within their apartment and gave Anabela 400 CHF (close to €400) cash each month. Although her earnings were considerably lower than Nela's, Anabela was still very happy with her job and experience. After all, before going to Switzerland Anabela used to work in a local clothes-shop (boutique) in Aleksinac where she earned around 20.000 dinars (€170) a month, the legal minimum-pay in Serbia at the time. As she told me, even this salary was rarely paid out in full, because the owner of the boutique would charge her the value of any missing or damaged items from the store, and even when no items were missing or damaged the owner would still find other reasons to lower her salary. With this amount, Anabela would also have to pay her bills and food, unlike in Lucerne where these were provided free of charge during her stay.

While these kinds of jobs are occasionally advertised in the classifieds sections of Serbian (and other former Yugoslav) local newspapers or online media, they are more often disseminated through word of mouth and obtained through personal recommendations. Anabela, for example, was recommended to her host-family by her friend who previously worked as their stay-in nanny. I have heard both from Anabela and other people I talked to in Aleksinac, that there are several women in town who have worked in similar jobs in Switzerland and Austria, and some of which have been doing it for years, going back and forth and spending 3 months in Switzerland/Austria and three months in Aleksinac. Such was also the case with Anabel's friend who recommended her – she both preceded and succeeded Anabela, working as a stay-in nanny with the Serbian-Bosnian family in Lucerne.

Even though Lucerne is a relatively small town, Anabela was able to quickly befriend three other young girls, two from North Macedonia and one from Bosnia, who also worked there as stay-in nannies with other Yugoslav ('Gastarbeiter') families, and whose stay partly or fully overlapped with Anabela's. The Yugoslav diaspora website "dijaspora.online" (Figure 52) hosts daily updated classifieds in which various former-Yugoslav families in Switzerland, Austria, Germany and other western European countries seek people from

former Yugoslav republics to care for their children or elderly family members. The majority of these ads state that the pay is subject to agreement (*plata po dogovoru*) but some do clearly state the salary as well, which mostly ranges from €500 to €800 (or CHF). The fact that the majority of such jobs are advertised through word of mouth and not on public websites, as I was told by Anabela, further hints at the scale of this type of employment and (temporary) migration.

The screenshot shows the homepage of 'Dijaspora Oglasi', a website for diaspora job listings. The header includes a logo with a globe and the text 'Dijaspora Oglasi'. Below the header is a navigation bar with categories: 'Najpopularnije', 'Posao', 'Usluge', 'Nekretnine', 'Razno', 'Lični kontakti', 'Automobili i vozila', 'Turizam', and 'Postavite vaš oglas vrlo lako'. A search bar is also present. The main content area is titled 'Čuvanje dece i starih, nega' and lists several job postings. Each posting includes a title, a brief description, and a 'Postavite vaš oglas vrlo lako' button. The right sidebar contains 'Popularni oglasi' (Popular ads) and 'Lokacije' (Locations).

Čuvanje dece i starih, nega

Čuvanje dece ili briga o starim licima
Ozbiljna i odgovorna žena iz Bijeljine (BiH) traži posao (čuvanje dece ili briga o starim licima) u Nemačkoj, Austriji, Sloveniji ili BiH. Molim samo ...
Čuvanje dece i starih, nega ① danas

Čuvanje dece CH
Nalazim se u Švajcarskoj i tražim posao čuvanja dece. Imam iskustva u inostranstvu i preporuke. Nudim korektan i fer odnos, a isto to očekujem i od vas. ...
Čuvanje dece i starih, nega ① juče

Dadijla - Austrija
Pozdrav, tražim posao dadijle u Austriji, ako Vam je potrebna dadijla javite se. Imam iskustva u čuvanju djece u inostranstvu. Živim u BiH.
Čuvanje dece i starih, nega ① juče

Tražim dadijlu od kraj februara (SA EU Papire)
Tražim odgovornu, fleksibilnu i vrijednu ženu (nepusac) za čuvanje 2 djece i pomoć u kući u Švajcarskoj. Osnovno znanje engleskog/francuskog ili njemackog ...
Čuvanje dece i starih, nega ① juče

Pomoć Vašoj djeci - usluge čuvanja, učenja
Kako smo se našli u ovom ludom vremenu, teškom periodu, odlučila sam se vratiti svojoj prvoj ljubavi, a to su djeca i rad sa djecom. Nudim usluge ...
Čuvanje dece i starih, nega ① juče

Čuvanje dece ili briga o starim licima
Ozbiljna i odgovorna žena iz Bijeljine (BiH) traži posao (čuvanje dece ili briga o starijim licima) u Nemačkoj, Austriji, Sloveniji ili BiH. Molim samo ...
Čuvanje dece i starih, nega ① 04.02.2021

Za čuvanje dece i pomoć u kući
Dobardam tražim jednu vitalnu i iskrenu zdravu ženu da čuva djecu. Za više informaciju javite se +436765982929.
Čuvanje dece i starih, nega ① 04.02.2021

Popularni oglasi
Tražim muškarca #Katarina
Tamara #Tamara
Zahtijevam ozbiljnu predanost #gallagher
Razvedena sam #Poznanstvo
Gaga #Gaga
Mamak za ozbiljnu vezu #SerbianSwissGirl
Tražim #Meda
Tražim gospodina iz Sarajeva, #marisa
Za ozbiljne #A.
Minaaa #Minaaaa

Lokacije
Afrika Hrvatska
Amerika & Kanada Makedonija
Austrija Nemačka
Azija & Okeanija Rusija
Bosna i Hercegovina Slovenija
Crna Gora Srbija
Evropa Švajcarska

Novosti na dijaspori
Novo - Beć oglasi

Figure 52. Classified section of the dijaspora.online website (Source: dijaspora.online)

Although Anabela was happy with her earnings and experience in Switzerland and was invited by her host family to return once again after spending the three months in Aleksinac, she decided not to. This is because, as she explained, the job was too intense with

very little time off even during the weekends, and more importantly - because it offered no long-term perspective. Although she was able to save most of the money she earned in Switzerland, these savings could not cover much more than what she needed to live off during the following three months that she needed to spend in Aleksinac. Finding a job in Aleksinac is difficult as it is, but finding one for such a short period in-between her jobs in Switzerland would be practically impossible. She was thus looking for a more stable and long-term solution, much like her brother was able to find a couple of years earlier.

Anabela's brother Nemanja, she tells me, lives in northern Italy where he works in construction and transportation. He initially moved to Slovenia where they have relatives who own a small construction company. The relatives helped him get started by legally hiring him for a while so that he could get a residence permit in Slovenia. They could not afford to keep him on the payroll indefinitely, as the company was rather small and their business seasonal, but Nemanja was able to relatively quickly get a job with an Italian transportation company that his relatives worked with. With the new job, he was able to get a temporary residence permit (*Permesso di Soggiorno*) in Italy and has since lived there, changing a few jobs but always legally extending his residence permit. His plan, Anabela told me, was to continue working in Italy for another three to four years, after which he would be able to apply for long-term residency. The long-term residency, in turn, would enable him to escape the temporary futures offered by his temporary residence permits and allow him to finally secure a long-term future in the European Union without fears that losing a job would also mean losing the right to stay in the country and continue building a better life and a career there.

7.2.2. Manual labor in central Europe

Just before I left Aleksinac in December 2015, Anabela mentioned to me that she is looking into jobs in Slovakia. The following spring, which I spent in Belgrade, I had heard

from a mutual friend that Anabela, together with Ivana, another one of my interlocutors, and a few other people from Aleksinac, went to Sala (*Šaľa*) in Slovakia to work in an electronics factory for three months. Anabela's and Ivana's posts and photographs on their Facebook profiles soon confirmed this.

Slovakia indeed became a popular employment destination for Serbian citizens in 2015 and growing numbers of Serbs, particularly from southern cities such as Niš, Aleksinac and Leskovac (Ćosin, 2017) were moving to Slovakia for temporary work. The number of employment agencies offering jobs in Slovakia mushroomed over the next couple of years, but so did stories of worker-exploitation, maltreatment, threats and fraud (Dragojlo, 2017;2018). According to the Slovak Ministry of Labor, 12.259 Serbian citizens worked in Slovakia in 2017, but this number only refers to those who were officially registered by their employers, while many in fact remain unregistered and illegally employed (Dragojlo, 2018).

Stories of fraudulent employment agencies who offer work placements in Slovakia flooded online discussion forums and social media in 2017 and 2018. They received national coverage by the Serbian media only in October 2017 when 23 Serbian citizens were arrested in Sala (the same town where Anabela and Ivana had worked) and deported from Slovakia because of illegal work (Dragojlo 2017). The employment agency "Max" through which they found employment at the South Korean "Shin Heung Precision Slovakia s.r.o" in Sala, turned out to be unregistered and did not provide the Serbian workers with the promised work permits (Dragojlo, 2017). But more than that, the workers were severely mistreated, forced to sign contracts in Slovakian which they did not understand, placed in abominable collective accommodation (Figure 53) in which 8 workers had to share a room and 16 had to share a bathroom with no hot water, while also being charged €5 a day for this accommodation despite the agency previously promising free accommodation (Dragojlo, 2017).



Figure 53. Serbian workers in one of the collective accommodation facilities in Slovakia
(Source: Dragojlo, 2018)

Although this incident in Sala resulted in the Serbian and Slovakian Ministries of Labor signing a cooperation protocol a few weeks later with the aim of preventing such illegal employment, similar cases were often reported and another arrest of 24 Serbian citizens working without permits was made a few months later in Nitra, a town in western Slovakia (Dragojlo, 2018).

In December 2019, Serbian media once again reported on an incident involving Serbian temporary workers in Slovakia, except this time the story was not about illegal work and fraudulent employment agencies but a fight in Bratislava that ended fatally for a 22-year-old Nikola from Sopot, Serbia. The headlines of most newspapers in Serbia were filled with stories of two young men (aged 21 and 26) from Aleksinac who were arrested by the Hungarian police three days after Nikola was murdered, when they attempted to flee the country and return to Serbia (D.I., 2019; J.A., 2019). Alongside two other Serbian citizens, and one from North Macedonia, who were yet to be arrested, Slavko and Jovan from Aleksinac were identified as accomplices in the murder based on camera footage of the fight (D.I., 2019). In the following days more details emerged about the two young men who were

both football players in Aleksinac, but went to Slovakia for temporary work, and not for the first time (D.I, 2019). Nikola, the 22-year-old student whose life ended on that fatal night, was also in Slovakia working in a factory and trying to make some money (D.I.,2019; J.A., 2019).

I have not been in touch with Anabela since I left Aleksinac, but through online social media I was able to occasionally get updates on her life, when she posted photos or wrote on her Facebook wall. Based on her online presence I was able to see that she returned to Slovakia at least twice since she first worked there in 2016. Her latest posts include photographs from Bratislava in January 2021, which suggest that she indeed may have found that long-term solution she was looking for.

7.2.3. (Health)Care work in Germany

Suzana was another young girl I met and interviewed in Aleksinac in 2015. She was 26 when we met and had graduated from a College of Sports and Health the previous year, where she specialized in physiotherapy, after having completed a medical high school. At the time, she was “*part of a project*”, as she called it, in which an employment agency was providing her with German language lessons and further medical professional trainings for her future job in Germany. She seemed quite happy about this and was looking forward to moving to Germany. When I asked her why she wants to move to Germany she replied with “*Because I don’t think there’s any perspective (about the future) here*”. When I asked her what “here” refers to she quickly replied with “*the whole country*”.

Suzana was determined to move to Germany and said that she would not stay in Aleksinac or Serbia even if she could get a decent job as a physiotherapist. Explaining why she does not want to work in Serbia, she said “*I think I could earn much more doing the same job abroad...but I also don’t like the way people work here and the working conditions in which they have to work...for example, here at the hospital in Aleksinac they often don’t even*

have the basic equipment and supplies so patients have to buy stuff and bring it with them...bandages for surgery, or gel for the ultrasound at the gynecologist...and the medical gloves, for example, which are supposed to be for single use, our medical workers always try to use multiple times...I don't think that happens in Germany “.

Fully focused on her language courses, and subsequent relocation to Germany, Suzana also did not pay much attention to what was happening in Aleksinac or the country. She was one of only two people I met and spoke with who knew nothing about the shale mining plan. She said that she is “actively avoiding all political topics” and to my question if there is any sort of news or content that she likes to follow she said “*Honestly, my father buys newspapers every single morning and the only thing I look at in those newspapers is the horoscope section, that's it*”. Her future, both in Germany and in “the stars” (horoscope) was indeed her only focus.

A few days before I left Aleksinac in December 2015, I was invited by Dušan for farewell drinks in a local café. I accepted the invitation and when I arrived to the café, I saw Dušan sitting in a group with five other people. They were all in their late 20s or early 30s, and Dušan introduced them as his friends who just finished their group German lesson nearby and came for drinks afterwards. I joined them at the big table, introduced myself, and we started casually chatting. I soon realized that they were all medical workers, two of them doctors while the other three were qualified nurses or technicians. They were all studying German language together and, like Suzana, planning to move and work in Germany.

Dušan's friends, and Suzana, were not unique in their plans for the future. In fact, according to a study carried out by Healthgrouper in 2015, over 70% of doctors in Serbia have considered or are still planning on leaving the country (Rujević, 2017). This does not refer only to the young medical professionals starting their career as was observed in the study conducted by Lazarevik et. al. (2016), but increasingly also mid- or late-career health workers who have worked in Serbia for over a decade or two.

In January 2013, the German Federal Employment Agency (*Bundesagentur für Arbeit*) and the National Employment Service of Serbia (*Nacionalna služba za zapošljavanje*) signed an agreement⁸⁸ aimed to facilitate “temporary employment” of Serbian workers in Germany (National Employment Service, 2013). Medical staff was particularly targeted by the agreement, with the German Development Agency (GIZ) immediately initiating a supplementary project to support these workers both prior to and after moving to Germany (National Employment Service, 2013). Already during the signing of the agreement, Dejan Jovanović, the director of the National Employment Service of Serbia, stated that the first group of 250 medical workers will leave for Germany in April (three months after the signing) and that this will benefit all parties involved - Germany because it lacks healthcare professionals and the 12.000 registered unemployed healthcare professionals in Serbia at the time, who will now be able to find employment in Germany (National Employment Service, 2013).

Yet, while the agreement opened the doors for unemployed medical workers in Serbia to find employment in Germany through the National Employment Service of Serbia, it also allowed those who were already employed to relocate to Germany through private intermediary employment agencies. According to the data from The New Union of Health Workers of Serbia (*Novi sindikat zdravstva Srbije*), around 6.000 doctors and nurses have left Serbia between 2014 and 2017 (Rogač, 2020). Živorad Mrkić, the union’s representative, states that the vast majority of these doctors and nurses have gone to Germany, “*through private German agencies for recruitment of medical staff*” which not only offer job placements, but also cover relocation costs and offer paid language courses (ibid.). In 2016, The Serbian Medical Chamber which issues “certificates of good reputation” for healthcare professionals intending to work abroad also stated that the number of requests for such

⁸⁸ Germany signed identical agreements with Bosnia and Herzegovina, Tunisia and the Philippines (Kljajić et. al., 2019)

certificates has been doubling every year since 2013, with more than 1.000 certificates issued in 2015 (Dragojlo, 2016).

As was the case with the employment agencies that recruit Serbian manual laborers for factories in Slovakia, the business of recruiting Serbian medical workers for German hospitals, clinics and nursing homes thrived in recent years with such agencies making large profits. Various sources state that these intermediary agencies receive up to EUR 15.000 for each female caregiver that they bring from Serbia to Germany (Rujević et al, 2020). This is why such agencies are able to offer “free” language courses as well as professional trainings (Figure 54) needed for German accreditation of Serbian caregivers.



Figure 54. Caregiver training at a branch office of the renowned German training institution “Dekra Akademie” in Kragujevac, Serbia (Source: Ajdin Kamber, in Kljajic et al, 2019)

Fraudulent agencies, much like in the Slovakian case, appeared here as well. The Belgrade-based lawyer Mario Reljanović, who often works with fraudulent cases involving employment of Serbian medical workers in Germany, says that some of the employment contracts often place hidden costs on applicants, but also involve working conditions which violate both Serbian and German labor laws – such as working 12-hour shifts, 7 days a week

(Rujević et. al., 2020). Such cases, as well as those from Slovakia, look more like human trafficking than labor migration.

Figure 55 shows the number of Serbian healthcare professionals working in Germany, as well as those from other Western Balkan countries, according to the data of the German Federal Employment Agency from March 2019. The annual increase shown in brackets suggests the rapid rate at which these numbers are increasing.

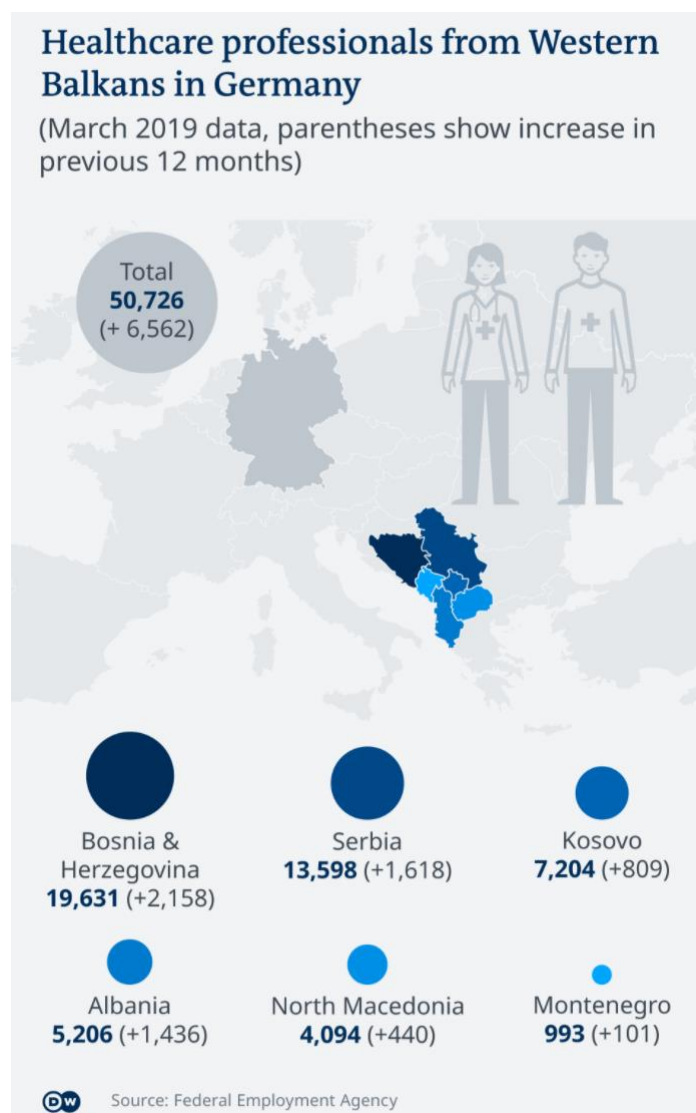


Figure 55. Healthcare professionals from Western Balkans working in Germany (Source: Rujević et al, 2020, based on data from the German Federal Employment Agency)

The large and growing numbers of Serbian healthcare professionals moving to Germany has recently caused the Serbian President and Ministers of Health and Labor to start

openly criticizing the state agreement previously made with Germany, and announcing the nullification of this agreement (Đurić, 2019; Skenderija, 2020). The issues resulting from the mass emigration of Serbian healthcare professionals became particularly visible during the onset of the 2020 global coronavirus pandemic, when the Serbian Ministry of Foreign Affairs together with the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) in Serbia initiated a “Point of Return” (*Tačka povratka*) program through which they started inviting Serbian healthcare professionals working abroad to return to Serbia and help battle the pandemic in the country (Miletić, 2020).

Emigration of Serbian healthcare professionals to Germany has received the most public attention as the consequences were quickly revealed in the time of a health crisis, but it is important to note that healthcare professionals, together with social workers, made up only 11 percent of all (temporary) immigrants from the Western Balkans who started working in Germany in 2016 and 2017, according to a study by the Institute for Employment Research (*Institut für Arbeitsmarkt- und Berufsforschung*) based in Nurnberg, Germany (Dedović, 2020). According to the same study, the largest number of immigrants from the Western Balkans worked in construction (44%) and the service industries, including hotels and restaurants (13%) and cleaning (10%) (Dedović, 2020).

With this in mind we can begin to see the scale of the total emigration from Serbia. A 2019 country report by the IMF estimates that some 400.000 people have emigrated from Serbia to OECD countries between 2008 and 2016 (IMF, 2019). According to data from Eurostat (2020), in 2018 alone, 52.049 first residence permits were issued within EU-28 for Serbian citizens, with 31% of these permits issued by Germany. Unlike most other EU enlargement countries (except Bosnia and Herzegovina), employment is the leading reason for issuing these residence permits to Serbian citizens (Figure 56)

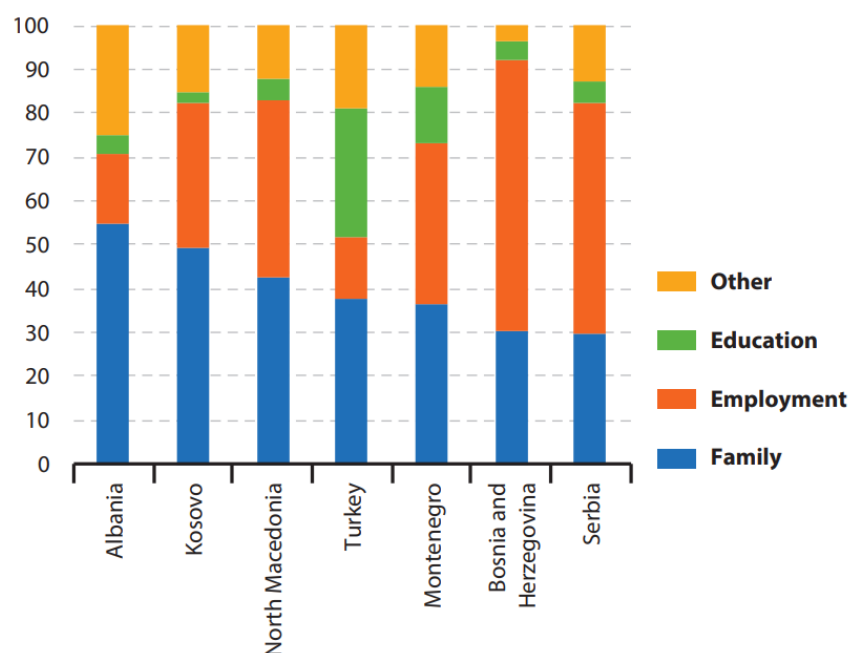


Figure 56. Reason for issuing first residence permits to citizens of enlargement countries in 2018 (Source: Eurostat, 2020)

Finally, research by Popadić et. al. (2019) shows that a staggering 75% of young people (aged 14 to 29) in Serbia plans to, or would like to, emigrate out of the country, which puts Serbia at the top of 10 SEE countries included in the research⁸⁹. In other words, the vast majority of Serbian youth do not see their future (or a future as such) in the country, but rather in Western European countries and the United States of America which are the most desired destination countries according to the same research (ibid.) The main reason why most of the surveyed young people would like to emigrate is “to improve their standard of living” (ibid.) – further showing that they do not see such improvement and such futures being likely or even possible at all in Serbia, but that they need to physically relocate to one of the countries of the capitalist cores in order to change their circumstances and possible futures.

⁸⁹ Research includes all 7 former Yugoslav countries (Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia and Slovenia) as well as Albania, Bulgaria and Romania

7.3. Criminal Futures

And while those with the needed qualifications, skills, experience, or simply willingness to offer manual labor to employers in central and western Europe, are imagining and working towards their futures abroad, others are left to find their own ways of making the present more livable and the future more hopeful.

Like most ‘post-mining’ and ‘post-industrial’ towns across the globe, characterized by a sharp increase in unemployment due to the closure of the local mines and/or industry, Aleksinac too saw a significant rise in crime on its territory in the past two decades. Robberies and muggings are becoming more and more common (see Chapter 5), but stories of prostitution, drug trade, loan-sharking and extortion, and even mafia killings are all mentioned in the news story entitled “Aleksinac – little Colombia” published in the daily newspaper “Novosti” (V.N, 2014). These were also stories that I kept hearing from many people I met in Aleksinac.

The growing poverty and hopelessness in town made some people turn to drugs – both drug use as an escape from the bleak realities of their present, but also drug trade as a way to earn money that instead of requiring particular qualifications, experience or ‘personal connections’ (*veze*) that are ‘a prerequisite’ for most jobs in town, only asks for willingness to take risks. During my time in Aleksinac I have met both users and dealers of drugs who trusted me enough to share their stories and experiences with me. The most common drugs involved, both in terms of local consumption and trading, were marijuana and heroin, but other synthetic drugs such as amphetamines and methamphetamines were also ‘available on the market’. And while some of the marijuana was grown locally, in the villages near Aleksinac as I was told by one of the dealers, the majority of drugs came from elsewhere and were part of the global drug-trade business involving larger national and international organized criminal groups.

As with other kinds of ‘work’ described on the previous pages, the ‘drug-work’ stories from my interlocutors once again lead across the Serbian borders. The local market in Aleksinac is both small and poor, so to really make money the locals in the drug-business once again have to either work with(in) larger cities like Belgrade and Niš, or cities in other countries, mostly in western Europe. Three of my interlocutors shared their experience of working in a marijuana production facility on the outskirts of Geneva, Switzerland a couple of years before I met them.

The production facility, as they described, was located in a closed warehouse near the city of Geneva. Inside the warehouse was a large marijuana plantation, equipped with high-tech hydroponics, LED grow lights and automated systems that keep the temperature and humidity at desired levels. The whole operation was run by a criminal group of people from the Balkans, the so-called “Balkan mafia”, comprised mostly of former Yugoslav “Gastarbeiter” people who live in Switzerland. The production in this particular warehouse, however, was run by several people from Aleksinac who were ‘employed’ by the Balkan mafia for this particular purpose.

The lifecycle of the production was around 6 months, from seed to harvest, and was managed by one of my interlocutors and one other person from Aleksinac who each stayed in Geneva for three months at a time. At the end of the production cycle, three persons from Aleksinac, including two of my interlocutors, were employed to harvest the plants. The persons had their travel and accommodation expenses covered, and also received a payment of 500 CHF (close to €500) for what is essentially a two days’ work. The reasons behind ‘employing’ Serbian citizens (or Aleksinac residents in this particular case) were of a legal and risk-management nature, as I was told by my interlocutors. Namely, if these people from Aleksinac were to get caught by the Swiss police the most likely legal consequence for them would be a 6 year-ban on entering Switzerland and deportation to Serbia where they should, but “most likely wouldn’t face criminal charges” as I was told by my interlocutors. At the

same time, all communication between my interlocutors working in the marijuana production and the “Balkan mafia” – their employer, was kept private (face-to-face, disposable pre-paid sim cards etc.) and any traces of the connection between them ‘erased’ or made hard/impossible to trace. Thus, the risk of people actually running the whole operation getting discovered was kept minimal.

The same story, as it was told to me by one of the ‘harvesters’, pointed towards other criminal activities in Geneva and ways in which some Aleksinac residents are involved in these. Namely, while one of these persons was in Geneva harvesting marijuana, they also visited a local bar that was run by the same ‘Balkan mafia’ where high-stakes gambling and prostitution takes place in the back of the ‘bar’. There they ran into one of their high-school friends from Aleksinac who, as they told me, was a “trophy girlfriend” for one of the mobsters who runs the bar. I have also heard numerous rumors from other Aleksinac residents about girls/women from Aleksinac being involved with sex-work in Switzerland.

Still other types of criminal connections enabled by the ‘Gastarbeiter’ pasts, and materialized in the present, are related to theft. And here I would differentiate between two types of theft – one is theft of small appliances (mostly cell phones) which are brought into Serbia and sold cheaply, and the other is car theft.

Many people in Aleksinac, including several of my acquaintances, owned high-end cell phones that they would proudly display on the tables of local café’s while they sit and drink coffee with friends. This is something that I quickly noticed when I moved to Aleksinac, not because I hold particular interest in cell phones, but because these devices were at complete odds with the local earnings and living standards. After a few months I decided to ask some of the people I befriended about this, and was told that in most cases these are stolen cell phones from Italy, Switzerland and Austria that are regularly brought to Aleksinac and sold at a fraction of their market value. During one of these conversations, my acquaintance also said they could help me get an iPhone from an upcoming ‘delivery’ from

Italy, priced at half the market value at the time. I politely declined the offer saying that I am quite happy with the (much cheaper) phone I had at the time.

The other type of theft, as noted earlier, is car theft. Here things get a bit more complicated, include other activities besides theft and trade, and rely on complex well-established networks of people spanning many cities in Serbia and abroad. One of my interlocutors in Aleksinac was a part of this network in which they worked as a master-counterfeiter who essentially built their own equipment for VIN (*Vehicle Identification Number*) and serial number cloning/counterfeiting. While one (most common) way to sell a stolen car is to chop it into pieces and sell the parts, forging the VIN and serial numbers is not only more secure (in terms of tracing the stolen car/parts back to the thief) but can also yield a higher price. The counterfeiting done by my interlocutor very rarely takes place in Aleksinac itself, but rather “on location”, as they described. In other words, they will travel to the location of the car, which could be anywhere in Serbia, and do their job on the spot - usually a garage or service shop. And while some of these cars are stolen in Serbia itself, others make their way to Serbia through the criminal networks that include people in the region and the western European countries.

A research report entitled “Transnational Tentacles: Global Hotspots of Western Balkan Organized Crime” was published in 2020 by the Geneva-based Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime. The report details how the 1990s wars, and particularly international sanctions in the case of Serbia, served as a catalyst for flourishing of organized crime in the Western Balkans and led to “a symbiotic relationship between politics and crime” which in many ways persists to this day (Kemp, 2020:13). The report concludes that:

“the region has a history and socioeconomic conditions that have created push factors that have exported criminal activity. And it has a political economy, in some cases even criminal

governance, that create pull factors for some individuals and groups to seek or offer protection, develop networks, and to launder dirty money.” (Kemp, 2020:70)⁹⁰

7.3.1. When the going gets rough, the rough get going

“Distress due to poverty gives the worker only the choice of starving slowly, killing himself quickly, or taking what he needs where he finds it — in plain English, stealing. And it is not surprising that the majority prefer to steal rather than starve to death or commit suicide.”

Friedrich Engels, The Condition of the Working Class in England, 1845

While Kemp’s conclusion cited above offers some insights into why and how criminal activity emerged, transformed and continues to grow in the region of Western Balkans on a larger scale it fails to capture how similar processes drive it locally. As I was able witness in Aleksinac, several of my interlocutors who did participate in some of the above-described

⁹⁰ The connections between politics and organized crime have once again surfaced and caught public attention in Serbia when in November 2019 a simple traffic violation led the police to discover “the largest marijuana plantation in Europe” some 40 kilometres away from Belgrade. The plantation was discovered in the greenhouses and underground facilities of a company named “Jovanjica” which manufactures and distributes organic produce and food products. The owner of the company, Predrag Koluvija, was born and raised in Germany but decided to move back to Serbia and start his business there in 2011 (Dojčinović and Smolović, 2020). His company received at least three loans/credits from the Serbian Export Credit and Insurance Agency, totalling € 3.9 million, while also often receiving official visits from Serbian Ministers and other government officials (Insajder, 2019). Aside from Koluvija, eight other people are currently under trail, including members of the police, the Serbian Security Intelligence Agency and the Military Intelligence Agency, while the high government officials often seen on his estate and in his company remain excluded from the indictments (Veljković, 2020).

criminal activities did not do so as result of personal choice (or “character flaws”), but were themselves pushed into these activities due to their own socioeconomic condition. Their participation in criminalized activities was not a “career choice” but a last resort and temporary solution to their mounting financial problems themselves exacerbated by the criminal (but not criminalized) exploitation of cheap and precarious labor that shapes the local economy.

Two of my interlocutors in Aleksinac lived for months without electricity (in “energy poverty”) which was cut due to their repeated inability to pay the bills. Further faced with the possibility of being evicted from their homes and having them sold by public executors in order to service the debt, both of them were “pushed” into participating in illegal activities which provided them with enough money to service the debt and continue living with a roof over their heads and electricity to run their lights and home appliances. As I left Aleksinac, I later found out that one of these interlocutors and friends decided to sell their family house and move into a rented apartment which allowed them more financial stability, at least for a while until the money gained from selling their property runs out. But critically, it also allowed them to avoid the anxiety of executors knocking on their door in the future and selling their home for a fraction of its market price in order to cover a much smaller debt that they were unable to pay. If they did not own anything, nothing could be repossessed from them. Thus, selling their family home in which they spent their entire life became an ultimate act of resistance to this future of dispossession and the socio-economic relations which enable it.

Clearly, not all locals who engage in criminal activities share the same story of crime being their last and temporary resort to fix current financial problems. But what I do want to argue is that they share the same underlying story of crime constituting their effort to escape the realities of local social and economic relations and resist repression and exploitation by their affluent local, national and international counterparts. Just like many Aleksinac (and

Serbian) residents relocate outside of the country in search of better and more secure futures (privileging “secure”) and so resist the supraordinate futures imposed locally by the government and foreign investors, so too do the local “criminals” relocate outside of the law resisting the same social and economic relations and attempting to find better (even if less secure) futures.

7.4. Upcycled temporalities: One man’s past is another man’s future

While many people in Aleksinac imagine and work towards their futures abroad, mostly in western and central European countries, Zoran is a rare example of someone who made the move in the other direction. I met Zoran while accompanying Jasmina, a local photographer who I befriended, on her job that Zoran hired her for. Jasmina’s job was to take photographs of one of the horses that Zoran kept and was planning to sell, so he needed professional photographs for his ads and to show to potential buyers. This was not a regular work horse like the ones owned by other people in nearby villages, but a thoroughbred stallion with “proper papers”. Zoran explained that he had bought the horse in bad shape but nursed him back to health and could now sell him for high profits because of his pedigree. He said he had done the same with several other horses, but that although the profits can be very high (particularly because Zoran sells the horses in Germany, more often than in Serbia), so are the expenses of keeping them, and there is always risk as to what the outcome will be. He was doing this out of love for horses, he said, just as much as for the profits (Figure 57).



Figure 57. Zoran and his horse (Source: Milićević, 2015)

Zoran grew up in a Gastarbeiter family in Germany and only moved to Moravac, a village right next to Aleksinac, a few years before I met him, after inheriting a house and some land from his grandparents. He also bought the plot of land right next to his, with an old run-down house on it. He ‘allowed’ a local Roma family to move in the old house on the adjacent plot, and also paid them a small amount of money each month, and in return the family took care of his land, vegetable garden, horses, helped with cleaning, cooking and anything else that Zoran needed on his estate. When I visited his estate with Jasmina, the Roma woman was cooking *ajvar*⁹¹ in the yard and her son was in the stables with the horses.

On the estate, near the house, was another small building with big windows facing the street. It looked like it used to be a store, but now it was full of old computers and various home appliances, big and small. These electronics, in fact, were Zoran’s main business and source of income. Namely, Zoran travels to Germany once or twice a month in his big van taking with him some ‘domestic food’ and products from Serbia that the Serbian diaspora in Germany likes to buy. This does not bring much profits but it does cover some or most of his

⁹¹ A traditional Serbian/Balkan spread made from paprika

expenses related to the trip. On the way back to Serbia, however, Zoran brings with him electronics from Germany. These are mostly broken, or outdated devices that Zoran gets for free or for extremely low/symbolic prices. In other words, they would be considered ‘trash’ in Germany, but Zoran is able to fix them, clean them up and sell them in Serbia for regular prices that used appliances and electronics go by. Like the horses which he buys, “fixes” (nurses) in Serbia and upsells in Germany, he does the same with electronics, in both cases relying on cheap local labor (for nursing and fixing) in order to make a profit.

He sells these devices both to the locals in and around Aleksinac, but also advertises them online and ships to buyers in other parts of the country. During the one hour or so that I spent with Jasmina on Zoran’s estate, he received a phone call and then a visit by a man from the neighboring village who needed a stove and indeed bought one from Zoran for €90, a price which he negotiated down from the initial €100.

Thus, while Zoran did move from Germany to Aleksinac and lives his life on the estate just outside of town, he still very much depends on his connections to/with Germany for his income. Zoran is in fact just one of many people in Serbia who import used products from western Europe and resell them in Serbia. These businesses include import and resale of used cars, furniture, various household items and so on. These businesses also give rise to the development of other local businesses offering transportation services; they often employ local mechanics and electricians to fix appliances and cars, carpenters to fix furniture and so on. They also often rely on corrupt customs officers to ‘help’ with the importing of goods. But most of all, they rely on the discarded, outdated and unwanted ‘waste’ from western European countries, which still has a future in Serbia and other western Balkan countries.

Cars are perhaps the best example of western European ‘waste’ finding another life in Serbia. Almost 130.000 used cars were imported into Serbia in 2018 (Komazec, 2019), 153.000 in 2017 (Ferenkote, 2018), and 142.000 in 2019 (Živanović, 2020). The majority of these cars come from Germany, and over 80% of them are older than 10 years (Ferenkote,

2018). Not only is the number of imported used cars four to five times higher than the number of imported new cars (Komazec, 2019), but the majority of used cars that are imported into Serbia only meet the EURO 3 emission standards (Komazec, 2019; Živanović, 2020). In other words, these are cars that have long been banned from the streets of most western European cities or at the very least their use severely discouraged by additional eco-taxes that the owners have to pay in order to register them or drive them inside cities. Or as the *Večernje Novosti* report concludes “Those are cars that end up in EU junkyards or are being sold to us” (Živanović, 2020)

Serbia remains the only country in the region that still has not banned the import of used cars with EURO 3 engines, despite announcing and then postponing this ban several times (Živanović, 2020). Commenting on the car market in Serbia and constant postponing of stricter regulations regarding emissions, Miloš Petrović, the head of the Serbian Association of Importers of Vehicles and Vehicle Parts, says that “Serbia, and this may sound awful but it is true, has become a graveyard for cars” (Ferenkote, 2018).

Although the imported cars, as well as the appliances imported by Zoran, furniture and other second-hand, broken and discarded goods imported and locally fixed and sold by thousands of other Serbian citizens, are not administratively classified as waste during their importation into Serbia, they are, practically speaking⁹², considered waste in their countries of origin. These flows of “second-hand” goods from western Europe into Serbia thus compliment the flows of waste described in the previous chapter although they are not captured by waste import/export statistics. Through legal and regulatory loopholes (such as the constant postponing of the ban on EURO 3 car imports in Serbia), the western European countries are able to get rid of their waste and dislocate it to the periphery without classifying these flows as export/import of waste. Even though many of these goods indeed find a second life in Serbia, and do not end up on landfills immediately, the span of their second life will

⁹² Even legally speaking in the case of cars with EURO3 engines

arguably be very short, particularly in the case of cars and electronic goods. In other words, they are, at best, waste-in-becoming with impoverished Serbian citizens squeezing the last days, months, or years of their life before they do indeed end up on Serbian landfills and junkyards.

7.5. Conclusion

This chapter drew on lifestories of my Aleksinac interlocutors, showing the different ways in which the local residents traverse time and space in their everyday lives in order to secure incomes, make their present more manageable and the future more hopeful and secure. Much like Scott's (2008) informants in Malaysia, my interlocutors and acquaintances in Aleksinac often engage in "petty acts of noncompliance" on the edges of legality through which they resist the prevailing social structures, class relations, societal norms and desired behaviors placed upon them. Critically, I argued that the 'noncompliance' exhibited by my interlocutors and many other Serbian citizens are also attempts to resist the futures imposed upon them and negotiated on higher scales where global capital meets disempowered and dependent peripheral states, as discussed in the previous chapter.

Faced with increasingly limited options to negotiate the local and national futures with the state, these citizens are opting to make their own futures, regardless or even despite of the state. They do so by relocating or planning to relocate abroad, mostly towards countries of the capitalist cores (Western and Central Europe or the USA), where they see the possibility of enjoying better and more secure futures. Alternatively, they break the contract with the state and relocate outside of the law where higher incomes are available and with them better personal futures attainable, although these futures come at the high price of risking incarceration and their own freedom⁹³.

⁹³ to live in poverty and suffer harassment and exploitation at the "legal workplace"

And while each of the stories, experiences and lives of my interlocutors are unique, they are also embedded in larger social structures and trends that characterize not only the town of Aleksinac, but the country of Serbia and even the wider region of Western Balkans. I have tried to make these connections between individual stories and their embeddedness in larger social structures and flows more apparent, by discussing the wider contexts in which my interlocutors live their lives and plan their futures.

What all of these stories show is that the current (and future) local financial system heavily depends on networks and relations that cut across time and space. A large part of the income spent in Aleksinac is generated elsewhere or elsewhen. State pensions, earned in the past, are the most secure and often the highest source of income for many of the Aleksinac residents today, and this too holds true for many other places in Serbia. The money orders coming in from family members who moved abroad decades ago, along with the various ‘business deals’ described throughout the chapter, that arise out of the past and conjure different places, networks and times – is what gives some appearance of stability and security to a significant part of the local populace.

On the other hand, a large part of the surplus value created by present-day workers in Aleksinac is transformed into profits that are likewise spent elsewhere and elsewhen (in the future). Forced to succumb to, rather than actively negotiate and shape the local and national labor conditions and relations, the thousands of laborers in Aleksinac are finding themselves increasingly trapped in precarity, insecurity and endless debt-cycles, in which they become willing to endure any risks and injustices, including harassment, hyper-exploitation at work and environmental pollution, just to survive in the (extended) present. Their futures, determined by those same labor conditions, including job security, living-wages and surplus value that they create, are in fact increasingly taken away and transformed into higher private profits that their ‘foreign employers’ export out of the town and country and offer as dividends to the companies’ global shareholders, or transform them into further “foreign

investments” that will exploit someone else’s labor and future in other (or the same) peripheries of global capitalism.

And while most of my interlocutors’ stories in this chapter lead away from Aleksinac, towards western and central Europe where they migrate in search of (better) futures, the story of Zoran serves as a counterbalance to remind us that flows exist in the opposite direction too. But rather than people and their futures, what flows in the other direction is second-hand goods, like the home appliances and electronics that Zoran imports and sells, and which embody in them the past consumed and enjoyed by western European citizens.

Taken together, these flows of profits, products, people, used goods, resources, waste and so on, should not only be seen as material and capital flows. Rather, as I have shown in this and the previous chapter, they also constitute “temporal flows” in which the future - embodied in profits, resources and people - is increasingly dislocated out of the local landscape, while the past - embodied in waste, used goods and outdated technologies - is increasingly imported into the country and itself embodied in the local landscape.

Chapter 8. Contested Futures

Introduction

Relocating abroad or outside of law, as discussed in the previous chapter, is certainly one way for Serbian citizens to resist the futures imposed upon them and negotiated between the state and foreign investors. Still, many other citizens who stay in the country continue with attempts to partake in these negotiations and actively participate in deciding on their local and national futures.

In this chapter I examine such attempts by local citizens, discussing how the very conditions which once enabled Yugoslav citizens' active participation in local and national future-making have been 'erased' with the country's 'transition from socialism to capitalism' and how in spite of this, local citizens continue to carve new paths and create new conditions that would allow them to be more equal partners in negotiations about their futures. Through social movements, local citizens are increasingly challenging the state's development model and the futures that it brings, but as I suggest and will show in the following pages, movements advocating environmental causes have been particularly successful in mobilizing citizens and employing new tactics that alter their positionality vis-à-vis the state with which they are trying to negotiate the future.

The growth of such movements has been exponential, as indeed was the growth of development projects that threaten specific localities, environments, and ways of living, but also the willingness of state institutions to turn a blind eye to, or even aid in the violations of environmental regulations by various investors in such development projects (see Chapter 6). Faced with a state, both in its local and national manifestations, that largely ignored the protests, petitions, lawsuits against investors in violation of environmental regulation, and other democratic tactics employed by these movements, they are increasingly altering their

activist toolkit and modes of operation in attempts to find new ways to challenge the state and the development model that it practices and which increasingly relies on industries that exploit and degrade the natural environment.

I argue that it is precisely the recent rise of “green” or “environmental” movements and the struggles which they represent that offers the greatest potential in bringing the many local, national and even international left movements and struggles together in contesting the growing economic, socio-spatial and environmental inequalities experienced by people of this region and other peripheries alike. This potential is precisely enabled by the two advancements made by environmental movements in the region which I describe in this chapter – realizing shared connections and common associations within higher scales (scale jumping) and breaking the social contract through civil disobedience tactics and refusing to be subjects of state planning and development projects.

8.1. Struggles over local futures

The power of Yugoslav citizens to negotiate local and national futures was largely tied to their employment in the Yugoslav social sector and derived from the Yugoslav social ownership and workers’ self-management model⁹⁴. Departing from the Soviet model of central planning and centralized management of the economy, since 1950 Yugoslavia transferred the ownership of the means of production from the state to the entire social body (‘social ownership’), and the management of enterprises to the workers themselves (Uvalić, 2018). While initially keeping a strong grip over the social enterprises mainly through centralized planning of the economy, monopoly over foreign trade and setting production targets and investment projects for enterprises, over the years this grip was loosened and more

⁹⁴ Yugoslavia’s unique combination of socialist economy and market mechanisms representing the so-called “third-way” between the East and the West (Uvalić, 1964)

autonomy in planning and decision-making transferred to workers' collectives themselves, as managers of the enterprises they worked for (ibid.).

Already in the 1960s the Yugoslav citizens, as workers in the social sector, had a large degree of autonomy and power in deciding the future of their companies and the places where they lived. With greatly reduced fiscal burdens on companies, a large share of profits was left at their disposal and workers' collectives could decide on how to invest them (Uvalić, 1992), effectively also making decisions about the future of their companies, the local economy and the towns in which they lived. Many companies often decided to invest their profits into local public spaces such as parks, sports facilities, cultural institutions, even workers' holiday resorts as detailed in Chapter 4⁹⁵. The Aleksinac mines, for example, built a hotel, a movie theater, local infirmary (*ambulanta*), cultural center (*Dom kulture*) and a library in the *Aleksinački rudnici* neighborhood (Mijušković, 2019) but also invested in local sports clubs and facilities and green public spaces. In other words, the mine workers, through the workers' collective, actively engaged in local place-making, community-building and enabling continued social reproduction in the future.

Thus, once again, most of the power to negotiate and decide on 'the future' was for Yugoslav citizens tied precisely to their employment and their working-class status. It was also further complimented by other self-management structures, such as the local communes (*mesne zajednice*) in which local citizens, simultaneously being workers and managers of local enterprises, could deliberate on present-day local problems and the different ways to tackle them in the future, ensuring continued local social reproduction and reproduction of their towns and landscapes on their own terms.

The transformation of the national political economy ("transition to capitalism"), and further transformations shaped by increasing globalization and insertion of the Serbian national economy into the (dependent) periphery of global capitalism have drastically altered

⁹⁵ This is akin to the "corporate social responsibility" (CSR) projects practiced by today's private companies but with these decisions being made by the very workers/local citizens, rather than the (disembodied) company management and marketing/PR departments

the very conditions which previously endowed Yugoslav citizens with the power to negotiate and shape their futures. While privatization took away their (social) ownership of the means of production, liberalization and deregulation, in the context of increasing globalization, allowed for this ownership to be transferred into ‘foreign’ hands. This transaction of ownership was also accompanied by the transformation of management which is no longer made up locally and from below – by local citizens themselves through workers’ collectives, but globally and from above – by ‘foreign investors’ sitting thousands of kilometers away in corporate headquarters.

Further compounded by the continued reduction of labor protection standards, job insecuritization and active suppression of labor unionization (in complete contrast to the unionized, and secure “lifetime” employment of workers in Yugoslavia), this has resulted in the transformation of the workplace from the main context from which local citizens drew power to negotiate and shape the future, to the workplace constituting the main context through which futures are imposed upon them. Any attempts to challenge these futures at the workplace are today thwarted by workers’ fears of being fired as well as the collective “fear of capital flight, plant closure, the transfer of operations, and disinvestment” (Burawoy, 1983, p.603) that would take away even the (extended) present in which these workers live (see also Chapter 6).

No longer able to negotiate their futures in (through) the workplace, Serbian citizens are thus left to find new avenues through which to challenge the supraordinate futures imposed upon them by foreign investors and the (dependent) state, and articulate their own, different visions of what the local and national futures should look like. And while many attempt to escape the imposed futures and negotiate their own by physically relocating abroad or outside of the law, as discussed in the previous chapter, others are increasingly gathering around a growing number of local initiatives and various social movements emerging across

the country (and the wider region) through which they attempt to challenge the state's development model and the futures that it brings.

Yet, faced with a state that has itself been “hollowed out” through globalization-induced rescaling processes in which it transferred its functions down to subnational, up to supranational and, critically, outwards to markets, non-governmental and private authorities, these movements are finding that they too need to rescale their struggles in order to challenge the state at the different scales at which it operates.

As I will show further in this chapter, the burgeoning social movements, and particularly those advocating “environmental” claims and concerns, have recently found two distinct ways through which they were able to successfully rescale their struggles and more directly challenge the development model employed by the state. One way in which they achieved this is by scaling-up their efforts or “scale jumping” by building trans-local and even trans-national alliances between previously dispersed local movements advocating similar causes, but also by increasingly ‘jumping over’ the state and directly turning to supra- and inter-national institutions in their attempts to exert pressure from ‘above’ and regain a sense of say in deciding their futures. The other way is related to the civil disobedience tactics which they increasingly employ by blocking disputed sites with their bodies until the relevant state institutions meet or answer their claims. Essentially breaking the social contract with the state in this way, this tactic has proven effective in ‘scaling-down’ the negotiations with the state by bringing its very legitimacy under question and ‘forcing’ the state to recognize their claims and engage in negotiations.

8.2. Scaling-up local struggles

In recent years a great number of local initiatives were founded in Serbia in order to raise environmental awareness and/or oppose environmentally destructive industries and new investment projects across the country. Hundreds of local environmental protests were organized with demands for curbing air pollution (in Bor, Smederevo and Belgrade for example), demands to halt new mining projects and quarries (in Loznica, Radjevina, Gornja Dobrinja, Aleksandrovac) demands to protect local rivers from construction of derivative SHPPs (on the Stara Planina, Kopaonik and Golija mountains, Kraljevo, Užice, Bosilegrad, Bor), demands to save parks, forests, and other green public spaces from various construction projects (in Belgrade, Novi Sad, Pančevo, Čačak and many other cities), to name just some examples.

In Belgrade alone, over a dozen local initiatives were formed with the intent to fight property development projects that threaten the Košutnjak forest (*Odbranim Košutnjak* – Defend Košutnjak), and other public parks and public spaces across the city (*Sačuvajmo naš parkić* – Save our park, *Sačuvajmo Miljakovački izvor*– Save the Miljakovac springs, *Sačuvajmo Gardoš i Zemun*– Save Gardoš and Zemun, *Za Naš Kej* – For our quay, *Sačuvajmo zelenu Zvezdaru* – Save the green Zvezdara, *UG Topolska* – Citizens’ association Topolska, *Savski Nasip*– The Sava embankment, and many others). The list of similar initiatives across the country goes on and on, but perhaps the most important such initiative that appeared in recent years is *Odbranim Reke Stare Planine* (Defend the rivers of Stara Planina (Balkan Mountains)).

As I will discuss below, Defend the Rivers of Stara Planina (DRSP) was the first environmental movement that managed to successfully raise the visibility of their local plight to the national and even international stage, and scale-up their struggle by building trans-local and trans-national alliances. They were also the first movement to successfully engage civil

disobedience tactics that have since inspired many other local initiatives (both ‘environmental’ and ‘non-environmental’) to engage the same tactics in their local struggles.

8.2.1. Defend the Rivers of Stara Planina

Defend the Rivers of Stara Planina (DRSP) was founded in early 2018 with the aim to halt the construction of the many planned small derivative hydropower plants (SHPPs) on the rivers of Stara Planina mountain in eastern Serbia (DRSP, 2021). At the time, Serbia along with most of the neighboring Balkan countries, was experiencing a wave of hydropower projects, with almost half of them planned in protected areas, such as the Stara Planina mountain (Schwarz, 2020; Sikorova and Gallop, 2015). With dozens of such projects previously completed across Serbia at the time, the environmental damage caused by these derivative SHPPs was already evident - images of dried-up riverbeds and destroyed local ecosystems were filling news articles and social media (Figure 58). Scientific research conducted in the following years only confirmed what the images were suggesting – the amount and flow of water in these rivers was drastically reduced (Mitrović and Simović, 2020) and the complex dynamics of local aquatic food webs as well as their interactions with neighboring terrestrial food webs were severely disrupted, resulting in complete disappearance, or greatly reduced numbers, of many aquatic and terrestrial species (Mitrović and Simović, 2020; Crnobrnja-Isailović et. al., 2021).



Figure 58. One of two SHPPs on the river Rzav where most of the water is directed to turbines through pipes several kilometers long, leaving the riverbed dry (Source: Marković, 2021)

What made DRSP different than most other environmental movements in the country was their communicative efforts and ability to garner nation-wide support. Although like other similar movements and initiatives, DRSP started off by organizing small scale protests at the disputed locations on Stara Planina mountain, they quickly took advantage of online social networks where they shared information, their insights and experiences, and reached out to the wider publics. DRSP was also quick to reach out to experts, academics, and public figures both from the country as well as the region and beyond, and gain their public support (Figure 59). Finally, they also made strategic alliances with other local environmental and justice-based initiatives across the country, mutually supporting the causes they were fighting for.



Figure 59. Public figures who support DRSP – promotional video still (Source: DRSP, 2021)

By 2019, the DRSP Facebook group already had over 85.000 members (DRSP, 2021), and today (July 2021) the group has over 150.000 members. Since its founding, the movement has organized over 100 “actions” (protests, sit-ins, performances, round table discussions and other types of events), which resulted in over 60 lawsuits against the movement or its individual members (DRSP, 2021). Undoubtedly, the most prominent actions by the movement were about two specific SHPPs, on the Toplodolska river in the village Topli Do (Figure 60) and the Rakitska river near the village Rakita (Figure 61), where the movement’s activists decided to engage in civil disobedience tactics and ‘take matters into their own hands’.



Figure 60. DRSP activists standing guard with the Spanish musician Manu Chao and the residents of Topli Do at the entrance to the village (Source: Milan Simonović, in Filipov, 2020b)



Figure 61. DRSP supporters from across the country gather to manually remove the SHPP pipes from the Rakitska river (Source: Đukic-Pejić, 2020)

Both of these cases involved months of protests, sit-ins, clashes with the investors, construction personnel and the police, as well as legal battles with the investors and the responsible state institutions (Georgievski, 2020b). More importantly, both of them ended with DRSP's victory. After months of clashes with the local citizens and DRSP activists who vigilantly stood guard at the bridge leading into the Topli Do village preventing construction machines to enter the site, the private investor finally decided to abandon the construction of the planned SHPP on the Toplodolska river in September 2019 (Georgievski, 2020b). Topli Do, otherwise a remote village with only 108 residents, mostly pensioners, became a symbol of environmental activism, and in 2020 it hosted the first 3-day "Festival of free rivers" (Filipov, 2020).

The case of Rakitska river SHPP "Zvonce" was important because it exposed another prominent issue with the SHPPs being built across the country – that of corruption. As the Center for Investigative Journalism of Serbia (CINS) revealed, many of the private companies building SHPPs across the country were owned by people closely related to the ruling party, including close friends of the president of Serbia (Đorđević, 2018). The Renewables and Environmental Regulatory Institute (RERI, 2019a) further observed numerous cases of abuse of public authority, non-compliance with planning documentation, construction of SHPP facilities without a construction permit or without appropriate conditions of the competent authorities. The Balkan Investigative Reporting Network (BIRN) further revealed that at least 20 percent of the constructed SHPPs were built without the necessary approvals from the Institute for Nature Protection (Đorđević, 2020c).

Such was the case with "Zvonce" SHPP being built on the Rakitska river, where construction started without an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) and contrary to the recommendations of the Ministry of Environmental Protection (RERI, 2019b). The clashes between the locals and the construction company, as well as the protests organized by DRSP made the whole story public and resulted in a decision by the Ministry of Environmental

Protection (MoEP) that prohibited the investor to continue construction. Instead, MoEP ordered the investor to ‘rehabilitate’ the terrain already covered by the construction (i.e. to remove pipes from the riverbed in the length of 300-350 meters), due to the fact that these works were performed contrary to conditions issued by the Institute for Nature Protection (RERI, 2019b).

The investor appealed to this decision and continued construction works even before a decision on the appeal was made. And while the state institutions remained silent to this and numerous other violations of the law by the investor in this SHPP, they were quick to process and fine the local citizens who kept getting sued by the investor for obstructing construction (RERI, 2019b). When the investor ignored the second decision made in 2020 by MoEP that ordered the removal of the pipes from the riverbed, and the state remained silent to the investor’s inaction, DRSP activists and their supporters from across the country decided to take matters into their own hands. Hundreds of citizens came from across the country on August 15, 2020 to this remote village and, although they lacked the heavy machinery needed to remove the pipes, damaged them enough to render them unusable (Figure 62).



Figure 62. Citizens trying to manually remove the pipes from the Rakitska river (Source: Đukić-Pejić, 2020)

The victories of DRSP did not end at the Rakitska and Toplodolska rivers however. DRSP continued fighting in many other disputed locations, but also fighting for a complete ban on the construction of SHPPs on Serbia's wild rivers in protected areas. The first larger victory came in July 2020, when the Municipal Assembly of the Pirot Municipality (to which Topli Do belongs) adopted a new municipal Spatial Plan in which it completely erased all 84 planned locations for construction of SHPPs (Georgievski, 2020b). Finally, in April 2021, the Serbian Parliament adopted a new Law on the Use of Renewable Energy Sources (*Zakon o korišćenju obnovljivih izvora energije*)⁹⁶ which in Article 5 explicitly forbids construction of all hydropower plants in protected areas (of 1st, 2nd and 3rd degree of protection) in the country. Such a ban was one of the main aims of DRSP, although it is worth noting that the ban excludes previously built SHPPs and those currently under construction – in effect leaving at least 33 SHPPs in protected areas (Vlaović, 2021).

Indeed, such exclusions to the ban were quick to appear. Just a month after the law was adopted, local citizens from the Kovači village on the slopes of Kopaonik mountain clashed with the investor of a new derivative SHPP the construction of which had just started on Planska river. Although Planska river flows through the protected landscape of outstanding features “Željin” and is home to the protected species of brown trout (*Salmo trutta morpha fario*) and stone crayfish (*Austropotamobius torrentium*), the construction was made possible by the fact that all necessary permits were issued before the new Law was adopted (Božović, 2021b).

DRSP activists have also warned that although Article 5 of the new Law forbids the construction of hydropower plants in protected areas, it also states that such a ban can be lifted in cases where the government declares hydropower construction projects to be ‘of national importance’ (Vlaović, 2021). Having in mind that the current government of Serbia was quick to declare several investment and construction projects in recent years to be ‘of

⁹⁶ Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia, 40/2021

national importance’, including the private construction development project “Belgrade Waterfront” (see Chapter 4), DRSP and other environmental movements and legal experts expressed concerns that this exemption from the ban defined in the Law will be readily abused by the government, since no criteria is set as to what constitutes “national importance”.

8.2.2. The protest for harmless air

Although the number of environmental protests and local initiatives expressing environmental concerns and demands kept growing in recent years, for the longest time they remained dispersed and hence their visibility and impact rather limited. In 2021 however, many of these movements finally started joining arms and jointly articulating environmental concerns and demands. In early January, the Belgrade based informal group of citizens called “Eco Watch” (*Eko straža*) invited citizens from across the country to jointly express their concerns about the air quality issues which have been plaguing not just the cities with heavy industry and mining such as Bor, Smederevo, Beočin, Pančevo and Kostolac, but most larger towns and cities in the country.

A 2019 report by the Global Alliance on Health and Pollution (GAHP) put Serbia on the top of the list of European countries when it comes to pollution related premature deaths (Figure 63) relative to population (Fuller et. al., 2019). The report also noted that the vast majority of such deaths are a direct result of air pollution (Fuller et. al., 2019:29). In the last few years, particularly in winter months, Belgrade also often found itself on the list of most polluted capitals in the world according to real-time air pollution monitoring apps such as Air Visual (Pantović and Harris, 2021).

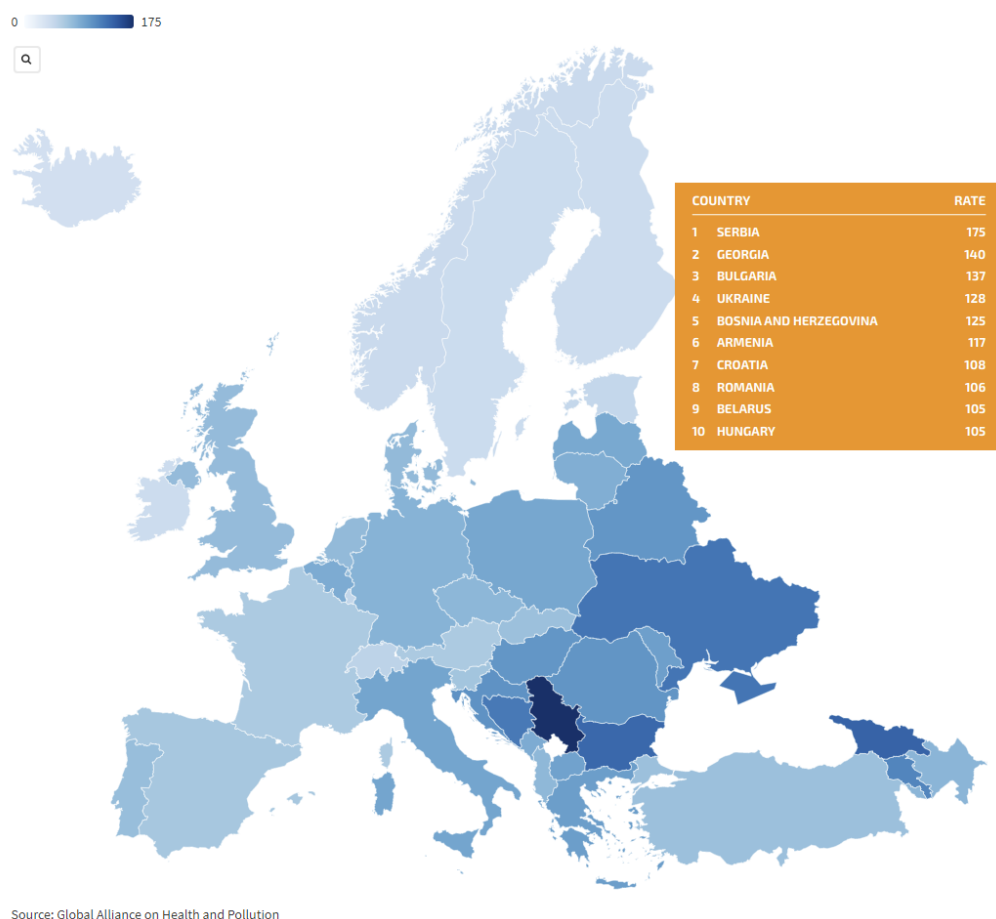


Figure 63. Pollution deaths per 100,000 population (Source: Fuller et al, 2019; edited by author)

“The protest for harmless air” (*Protest za bezopasan vazduh*) was held on January 10, 2021 in Belgrade, and although “Eco Watch” initiated the protest, other environmental movements, such as DRSP, invited their activists and followers to join the protest. Several thousands of people took to the streets of the capital demanding that the government take action to prevent the rising air pollution levels (Figure 64). Another demand made at the protest, and one of the sparks that initiated it, was that Milenko Jovanović, a longtime head of Serbian Environmental Protection Agency’s (SEPA) Air Protection department, be reinstated to his position. Namely, some two weeks before the protest, SEPA fired Milenko Jovanović from his job, after he objected to the Agency’s decision to raise the threshold of PM 2.5

pollution in their air quality classification scheme, effectively reclassifying what used to be considered ‘poor air quality’ to ‘adequate air quality’ ⁹⁷(Pantović and Harris, 2021).



Figure 64. Protest for harmless air, Belgrade, January 10, 2021 (Source: Eko Straža)

Among the speakers at the protest was also Aleksandar Jovanović “Ćuta“, the informal leader of DRSP, who said during his speech that all elements of life, including air, water and soil, are under attack in Serbia and that because of this „Serbia is on the brink of an environmental uprising“. His speech in fact announced what will be the largest environmental protest held in Serbia to date. The formal announcement came soon after “The protest for harmless air” ended – when DRSP invited all citizens and other environmental movements in the country to join an “Environmental uprising” protest scheduled for April 10, 2021 in front of the National Assembly in Belgrade (Figure 65).

⁹⁷ Two months later, the High Court in Belgrade ordered SEPA to return Milenko Jovanović to his job – temporarily at least, until the lawsuit initiated by Milenko with the legal help from a Serbian NGO “Whistle” (Pištaljka), against SEPA is brought to a close (Tankosic, 2021).

8.2.3. *Environmental Uprising*



Figure 65. “Environmental uprising” protest in front of the National Assembly building in Belgrade, Serbia (Source: Al Jazeera, video still⁹⁸)

Although DRSP was the formal organizer of the “Environmental uprising” protest, 65 other environmental organizations and citizens’ associations from Serbia as well as neighboring countries, such as Bosnia and Herzegovina, supported the protest and co-signed the list of 13 demands read out during the protest (Anđelković and Vujić, 2021). Thousands of people joined the protest, despite the fears of the ongoing coronavirus pandemic. The list of speakers who addressed the public in front of the National Assembly building was long, and included environmental activists, academics, artists and other public figures, but also citizens of villages threatened by SHPP and mining construction.

After the speeches, the organizers invited the protesters to join them for a walk (Figure 66) during which they made two stops: in front of the Parliament building, where the list of demands was read, and in front of the Radio Television of Serbia (RTS), the Serbian public broadcasting corporation, where the organizers demanded from the public broadcaster to invite environmental activists to a televised public discussion with the relevant government

⁹⁸ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jTCe-u1wKLI&ab_channel=AlJazeeraBalkans

representatives so that Serbian citizens can know more about all the environmental problems in the country and what the government is (not) doing about them (Anđelković and Vujić, 2021). During the walk, the protestors also passed by one of the offices of Rio Tinto in Belgrade and briefly stopped to show their discontent with the company's operations in Serbia.



Figure 66. Environmental uprising – protesters walking down Kneza Miloša street, from the National Assembly building to the Serbian Parliament building (Source: Marija Janković, in Čubrilo Filipović, 2021)

8.2.4. *Let's Defend the Balkan Rivers*

With over 60 environmental movements and organizations coming together and co-signing the list of demands read during the “Environmental uprising” protest, it enabled and solidified the solidarity and cooperation between previously dispersed local environmental movements in country and scaling-up of their struggles. But with the presence of several

Bosnian movements at the protest as well, it also signaled that the consolidation of environmental movements and initiatives is slowly crossing national borders and bringing movements from across former Yugoslav republics together. Indeed, as repeatedly asserted in this and previous chapters, the many problems faced by Serbian citizens and related to hyper-exploitation of natural resources, human labor, and associated issues of corruption and state clientelism, are similarly experienced and faced by citizens from across the former-Yugoslav, Balkan, or even post-socialist region to varying degrees.

One particular issue shared by the entire Balkan region is that related to the mass construction of hydropower plants (HPPs). Over a thousand HPPs have been completed across the Balkan region thus far, while the number of planned HPPs includes more than 3600 new ones (Mubondo and Bezuidenhout, 2020). Figure 67 below depicts the number of planned, completed and HPPs currently under construction across the different Balkan countries, according to data collected by Schwartz in 2019.

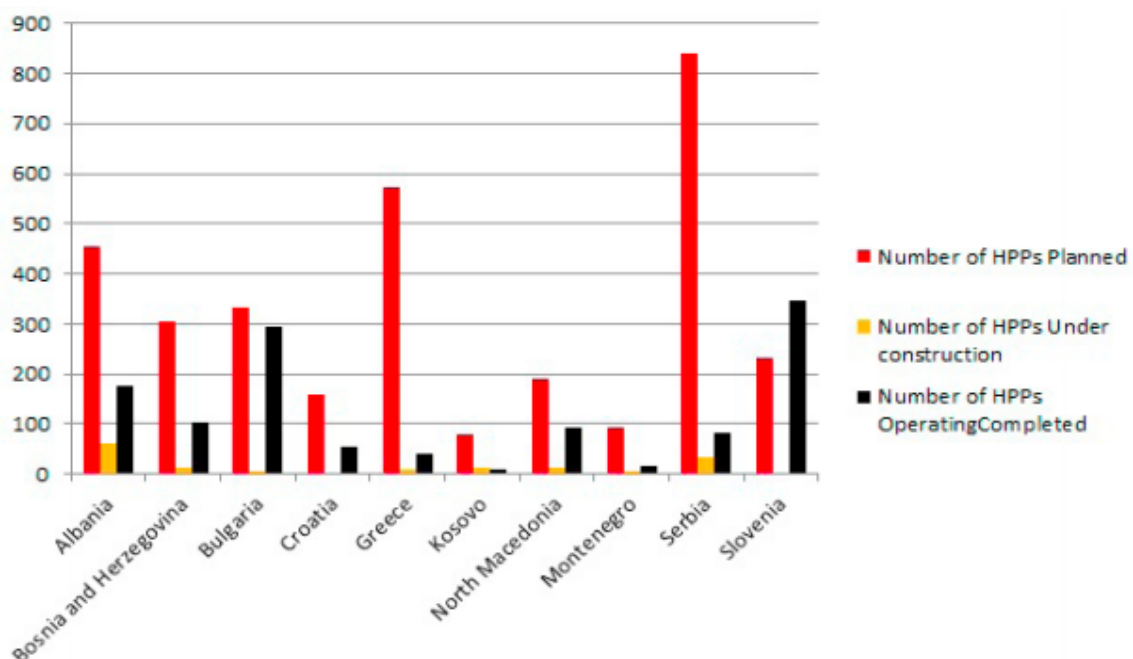


Figure 67. Number of hydropower plants according to their project status (Source: Schwarz, 2019, in Mubondo and Bezuidenhout, 2020)

Analyses conducted by CALTUS Institute indicate that at least 470.000 people are already affected by the currently operating HPPs, while the number of affected people goes up to 4.6 million (11% of the region's total population) should all planned HPPs be built in the future and the impact distance calculated at the highest modelled value of 5.000 meters (Mubondo and Bezuidenhoudt, 2020). These impacts are assessed through alterations in hydrological regimes and ecosystem conditions which variously affect the surrounding agricultural (34%), forest (36%), grassland (20%) and human settlement (4%) landscapes (ibid.)

And while DRSP became a symbol of the opposition to (S)HPP construction in Serbia, analogous movements appeared in all other countries across the Balkan region as well. Realizing that although in different countries, these movements share the same struggles and are fighting for a common cause, over 20 local movements and initiatives from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Kosovo, Montenegro and Serbia came together in Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina on July 3, 2021 (Figure 68) and formed a pan-Balkan alliance for the protection of rivers in the region, under the name "Let's Defend the Balkan Rivers!" (*Odbranimo r(ij)eke Balkana!*)



Figure 68. The founding of “Let’s Defend the Balkan rivers!” in Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina (Source: Krstić, 2021)

During the meeting, Lejla Kusturica, the director of “Atelier for social change” foundation (*Atelje za društvene promjene*) which initiated the meeting, said that “*Investors, together with our politicians, are treating water as a commodity and putting it on the market, but we are here to say that water is the right of every human being that must be protected*” (Krstić, 2021). With this, she hinted that at the very core of the problem is precisely the neoliberal capitalist logic, put forward by private investors colluding with political elites, which exploits nature and puts profits above people’s rights and common interests.

8.3. Civil disobedience: Scaling-down negotiations with the state

One other key message heard during founding meeting of “Let’s defend the Balkan rivers!” was that unless the “river fighters” (*borci za reke*) use all available means, including legal battles, instigating wide media coverage and putting barricades at disputed locations –

we all may well be the last generation that remembers the wild Balkan rivers in their natural glory (Krstić, 2021).

Legal battles and media coverage are part of the standard activist toolkit and have regularly been employed by environmental and other movements across the region, but the effects of these means proved rather limited in the context where the majority of Balkan countries are characterized by a deteriorating state of democracy, weekend rule of law and increasing challenges to media freedoms. Serbia in particular has seen a significant decline in rule of law and democracy since 2012, resulting in downgrading from a ‘semi-consolidated democracy’ to a ‘hybrid regime’ according to the 2020 Freedom House Index (Csaky, 2020). The World Press Freedom Index also depicts the situation in Serbia as “a worrying state”, and shows a sharp decline in ranking from the 63rd place the country held in 2013 to 93rd in 2021 (Reporters Without Borders, 2021). And while the Clingendael Policy Brief by Maartin Lemstra (2020) takes Serbia as a prime example of state capture in the Balkans, which results in backsliding of rule of law and democracy, the same policy brief also shows how similar processes are found across all six Western Balkan countries including Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro and North Macedonia.

In this context, the third tactic mentioned by the founders of “Let’s defend the Balkan rivers!” – that of putting barricades at disputed locations, is proving to be increasingly important in attempts to access justice and achieve the goals set by various social movements in Serbia and the region. Successfully employed by DRSP in their fights against the SHPPs at Toplodolska and Rakitska river, as detailed earlier in this chapter, civil disobedience tactics have since been increasingly employed by many other social movements across Serbia, as I will show in the following pages. I argue that this tactic has the effect of ‘scaling-down’ the negotiations with the state by bringing its very legitimacy under question and ‘forcing’ it to recognize the claims made by these movements and to engage in negotiations with them.

In the following pages, I present several examples of local contestations that show both the rise of civil disobedience as a go-to tactic employed by increasing numbers of social movements, but also show how these tactics can prove successful in achieving desired outcomes. All of the cases presented below occurred within a short span of two months in the summer of 2021.

8.3.1. Reva Pond

In late May, 2021, a new environmental threat emerged on the outskirts of Belgrade. Namely, local citizens of northern parts of Belgrade raised the public's attention to the fact that the city's public utility company in charge of waste management (*Komunalno preduzeće "Gradska čistoća"*) is offloading construction waste in the Reva Pond (*Bara Reva*), a forested wetland just five kilometers away from the city center, on the left bank of the Danube (Nikoletić, 2021a).

The Reva Pond is home to over 300 plant and animal species, including several protected ones, such as the white-tailed eagle (*Haliaeetus albicilla*), the presence of which has put Reva Pond on the list of Internationally Important Bird Areas (IBAs) (Puzović et. al., 2009). This, however, did not stop the city of Belgrade to issue a temporary permit for the public utility company in charge of waste management to use this location as a temporary landfill for construction waste, with plans to also construct a treatment facility for construction waste at the same location in the near future (Nikoletić, 2021a).

After several complaints to public authorities which produced no real effects, the citizens living near Reva Pond decided to turn to environmental organizations and the media in an attempt to halt the destruction of this pristine forested wetland. The swift reaction by many environmental movements and individual citizens indeed proved that inter-movement solidarity is increasingly shaping environmental contestations in the country, but it also

showed that civil disobedience tactics, previously employed by DRSP, are now becoming part of a standard toolkit used by other movements and citizens contesting various development projects. Within days, activists from more than a dozen local environmental movements from Belgrade, as well as other cities and towns in the country, came to Reva Pond, organized public discussions that were live-streamed through social media, and set up camp obstructing the public utility company trucks from offloading more waste at the location (Figure 69). Aleksandar Jovanović, the informal leader of DRSP who was among the people who camped at the Reva Pond, said on May 21st, 2021 that *“We have blocked access to this site and are stopping trucks from coming here. As of today, Reva Pond is under protection by citizens of this country”* (Savić, 2021).



Figure 69. Citizens and environmental organizations gathering at the Reva Pond to prevent further offloading of construction waste (Source: Svetlana Dojčinović/Betaphoto)

After 10 days of clashes between the workers of the public utility company and environmental activists daily joined by increasing numbers of citizens, including some public

figures who further raised the visibility of the issue, the deputy mayor of Belgrade finally announced that the city will no longer use the Reva Pond for disposing construction waste and is now looking for a new and adequate location for this purpose (Lukić, 2021).

And just as local citizens and environmental activists were celebrating their victory in protecting the Reva Pond from construction waste, two other confrontations between local citizens and investment projects threatening green infrastructure in Belgrade already erupted. By now, citizens and environmental activists have learned that signing petitions and appealing to responsible state institutions produces no real effects and instead started engaging in civil disobedience tactics, physically obstructing investors and construction companies from conducting planned works.

8.3.2. Solunska Street

In the historic Belgrade neighborhood Dorćol, in early June 2021, citizens learned that the local government intends to reconstruct and widen the Solunska street, transforming it from a one-way into a two-way street at the expense of a 50-year old tree line with over 20 trees, and a number of public parking spaces (Jakšić, 2021). The locals were revolted because they were never consulted about this plan and only found out about it when the local government initiated a public procurement process for the street's reconstruction (ibid). Additionally, citizens were angered by the fact that the reconstruction would only really benefit the recently constructed hotel "Mona" owned by the Serbian Minister of Construction, Transport and Infrastructure, Tomislav Momirović, which further raised their doubts that the reconstruction is a result of a shady and corrupt decision-making process.

They quickly took to the streets and announced that they will stand guard and not allow the construction machines to cut the trees and commence works on the street (Figure 70). Just several days later, the president of the Belgrade's municipality Stari Grad held a

meeting with the local citizens after which he announced that the municipality will abandon plans for the reconstruction of Solunska street.



Figure 70. Local citizens gather to protest the planned reconstruction of the Solunska street
(Source: Filip Krainčić in Milovanović, 2021)

8.3.3. Block 37

At the same time, but on the other side of the city, residents of New Belgrade's Block 37 found out that the green patch of land in their block has been sold to a private investor who now plans to build a large commercial building there. They also only found out about this plan when construction machines appeared on the land in question and started digging and fencing off the construction site, without placing the legally required construction information board (Nikolić and Savatović, 2021). The block's residents started staging daily protests, which kept growing in numbers as other local movements and initiatives from across the city started joining the protests in solidarity with the Block 37 residents (Figure 71)



Figure 71. Protest in New Belgrade's Block 37 (Source: Vesna Lalić in Lisinac, 2021)

After several days of protests, the deputy Mayor of Belgrade announced that the construction will be halted and that the city started negotiations with the private investor, trying to find a solution to the problem (Nikolić, 2021a). However, some 10 days later construction machines reappeared at the site, now backed up with private security guards (Nikolić, 2021b). The residents of Block 37, supported by other local movements and citizens from across the city, quickly reorganized and started standing guard and forming a human chain around the construction site (Figure 72), effectively blocking trucks and machines from entering and leaving the area (Lisinac, 2021).



Figure 72. Citizens form a human chain around the construction site in Block 37 (Source: Vesna Lalic in Lisinac, 2021)

The clashes between citizens and the investor and construction company lasted for another month, and were marked by physical altercations with the private security guards, threats by the investor to sue the citizens who were obstructing construction, and intimidation by the police which on several occasions came and ID'ed the protesters blocking the entrances to the construction site (Nastevski, 2021). None of this, however, stopped the citizens from vigilantly keeping guard and preventing the construction trucks and machines from entering or exiting the site. Finally, on July 29, construction machines left the site as Belgrade's deputy Mayor announced that the city of Belgrade offered two alternative locations to the private investor and that construction in Block 37 will not continue (Savatović, 2021). The local residents, while expressing hope that this will indeed put a stop to their troubles, also stated that they will continue to stay alert and ready to return to the streets until the promises made by the deputy Mayor are presented in written and signed form (Ibid.)

8.3.4. Justice for Stefan

The victories in Reva Pond, Solunska street and Block 37 were a direct result of solidarity shown between local citizens and various movements and individual citizens from across the city of Belgrade who came to support the local citizens in these struggles against development projects that threatened natural environments and green infrastructure at these locations. Critically, they were also a result of the citizens' willingness to stand guard 24/7 and use their bodies to physically obstruct planned works. Hundreds of similar cases from across Belgrade and Serbia in previous years did not yield such results because they lacked both the solidarity from other movements and citizens, and because the protests were staged as a one-time event, or several short protests at best. The victories achieved by DRSP, and now local citizens and movements at the Reva Pond, Solunska street and Block 37 quickly worked to inspire other local movements, including those not advocating 'environmental' causes, to resort to similar tactics.

Already in late July, 2021, while protests in Block 37 were still ongoing, another group of local citizens decided to resort to civil disobedience tactics in an attempt to pressure the state into action. On July 18, in the Karaburma neighborhood of Belgrade, a drunk driver hit a local father and his two sons with his car as they were crossing the street on a designated street crossing, and fled the crime scene. Both the children sustained serious injuries, with the older, Stefan (aged 9), succumbing to his injuries a few days later in the intensive care (Nikoletić, 2021b). The driver was identified and arrested soon after the incident, but despite the seriousness of his crime and the fact that he was already twice convicted for criminal traffic offences, the appointed judge denied the prosecutor's demand that he be put in custody and released him instead to await the legal proceedings a free man (ibid.).

When the local citizens and neighbors of the affected family found out about the judge's decisions they spontaneously gathered on the scene of the crime and started blocking the street. Hundreds of citizens soon joined them, both locals and those from other parts of the city, blocking the street for the next several days (Figure 73) in what came to be known as the “Justice for Stefan” protests (Komazec, 2021; Nikoletić, 2021b).



Figure 73. “Justice for Stefan” protest in the Karaburma neighborhood (Source: N1/Komazec, 2021)

The citizens were outraged by the judge's decision. They demanded for the driver to be arrested and put in custody while awaiting the legal proceedings, but also for the judge who released him to be subjected to a disciplinary procedure to determine if the decision to release him was made in accordance with law and good conscience. And while the court quickly reacted to the appeal made by the public prosecutor and ordered that the charged driver be arrested and put into custody, this did not satisfy the protesters who still demanded concrete actions against the judge who released him (Komazec, 2021). They continued blocking the street day and night, collecting petition signatures and organizing performative actions for another several days, until the Ministry of Justice finally announced on July 26 that it initiated the procedure of determining the disciplinary responsibility of the judge in question (Nikoletić, 2021b).

8.4. Transforming struggles

Tired of the bipartisan "big politics" and disappointed in all the well-established political parties, the citizens of former Yugoslav states are increasingly looking towards these bottom-up local initiatives as viable alternatives to the well-established big political parties. In Croatia, the political platform "*Možemo!*" (We Can!), which gathers many local green and leftist movements and initiatives and stands for a "ecological and solidary Croatia", to the surprise of many, achieved excellent results at the 2021 parliamentary and local elections, despite only being formed less than two years prior to these elections. The political platform gained seven seats in the National Parliament, while in Zagreb, the capital city, *Možemo!* became a winner taking 23 of the 47 seats in the City Assembly and winning the Mayoral election in the second round, with Tomislav Tomašević, the platform's candidate, becoming the new Mayor of Zagreb.

In Serbia, in June 2021, Aleksandar Jovanović "Ćuta" from the DRSP movement and the initiator of the "Environmental uprising" protest also rattled the Serbian political scene when he announced that the dozens of local environmental movements and initiatives which participated in the "Environmental uprising" protest are also transforming into a political platform named "Environmental uprising". In November, 2021, they announced that they are joining hands with the Belgrade based left-green local initiative "Don't let Belgrade d(r)own" (*Ne da(vi)mo Beograd*) which has also been gaining popularity in recent years and is considered one of the greatest threats to the SNS-led city Assembly in Belgrade. Along with a local Šabac-based center-left political party "Together for Serbia" (*Zajedno za Srbiju*), they announced that they will run at the local, parliamentary and presidential elections that are to be held in the spring of 2022.

By transforming into a political platform and running at the elections, these movements are once again scaling-up their struggle and attempting to even more directly

challenge the political parties currently in power and their politics of development. Transmuting the wide support from citizens into votes at the next elections, they are attempting to gain seats in local and national government assemblies and so actively partake in decision-making and prevent future undemocratic Laws to be passed and destructive development projects approved, rather than constantly contesting such decisions on the streets.

8.5. Conclusion

In this chapter I examined the different ways in which local citizens in Serbia attempt to partake in deciding on their local and national futures, contesting the development model employed by the state and foreign investors and the supraordinate futures that it imposes.

In contrast to the previous generations of Yugoslav citizens who drew much of their power to engage in place-making and future-making from their working-class status and employment in the Yugoslav social enterprises, today's Serbian citizens find that their workplace is in fact the main context through which futures are imposed upon them. Through changes in ownership (privatization), and continued reduction of labor protection standards, job insecuritization and active suppression of labor unionization, Serbian workers have been transformed from active makers of their own futures into precarious laboring classes whose any attempt to challenge the futures afforded at/by their workplace are today thwarted by fears of being fired as well as the collective "fear of capital flight, plant closure, the transfer of operations, and disinvestment" (Burawoy, 1983, p.603) that would take away even the (extended) present in which they live.

In spite of this, local citizens continue to carve news paths and create new conditions that would allow them to be more equal partners in negotiations about their futures. Through social movements, they are increasingly challenging the state's development model and the

futures that it brings, yet, faced with a state that has itself been “hollowed out” and rescaled through processes of globalization, these movements are finding that they too need to rescale their struggles in order to challenge the state at the different scales at which it operates.

As I have shown in this chapter, movements advocating environmental causes have been particularly successful in mobilizing citizens and employing new tactics that alter their positionality vis-à-vis the state with which they are attempting to negotiate the future. Challenging the national economic development model that increasingly relies on environmental exploitation, extraction and degradation, these movements have recently found two distinct ways through which they were able to successfully rescale their struggles and more directly challenge the development model employed by the state.

One way in which they achieved this is by scaling-up their efforts or “scale jumping” by building trans-local and even trans-national alliances between previously dispersed local environmental movements, but also by increasingly ‘jumping over’ the state and directly turning to supra- and inter- national institutions in their attempts to exert pressure from ‘above’ and regain a sense of say in deciding their futures. The other way is related to the civil disobedience tactics which they increasingly employ by blocking disputed sites with their bodies until the relevant state institutions meet or answer their claims. Essentially breaking the social contract with the state in this way, this tactic has proven effective in ‘scaling-down’ the negotiations with the state by bringing its very legitimacy under question and ‘forcing’ the state to recognize their claims and engage in negotiations. And with each new victory that these movements and initiatives achieved, they became stronger, showing the wider public that it indeed is possible to effect change through solidarity and persistence.



Figure 74. Citizens block the road to stop the construction of an HPP on Neretvica river in Bosnia and Herzegovina (Source: Al Jazeera, Video still⁹⁹)

Indeed, these tactics recently pioneered by environmental movements in Serbia are increasingly employed by a rising number of social movements across the country and even the wider region (Figure 74). Recently, even these tactics themselves have been scaled-up by social movements in Serbia.

Namely, on November 25, 2021 the Serbian National Assembly adopted a controversial new Law on Referendum and Civil Initiative (see section 6.1.2.2) while also adopting a similarly controversial new Law on Expropriation the following day. Within 24 hours, environmental movements, along with a host of other social movements and CSOs, invited citizens to block the main infrastructural arteries across the country. Indeed, on November 27, 2021 citizens gathered for one hour to block the highways, bridges and other main roads in all major cities and towns across the country, with demands for the new laws to be repealed. They also announced that they will continue with blockades, radicalizing them if necessary, every Saturday until the demands are met. The next blockade is scheduled for December 3, 2021, with the movements inviting citizens to use their cars this time and so more effectively block the country's transport infrastructure.

⁹⁹ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jrMg2cmo6jk&ab_channel=AlJazeeraBalkans

And while growing solidarity between the many local social movements, along with the civil disobedience tactics that they increasingly employ, has proven effective in forcing the government into negotiations about the future, it is through the transformation of these movements into political platforms running in elections that they attempt to further alter their positionality and actively participate in decision-making. By gaining seats in local and national assemblies, these movements aim at preventing undemocratic Laws to be passed and destructive development projects approved in the future, rather than continuing to reactively contest them on the streets and disputed sites.

Conclusion

In October 2021, Rio Tinto made a television commercial that aired on the National Broadcasting Service of Serbia (RTS) as part of its PR campaign aimed at convincing Serbian citizens of the global importance of the Jadar lithium mining project (see Chapter 6). Stating how the world is facing one of the greatest environmental challenges today, and that lithium is one of the most important elements to tackle this challenge, the commercial goes on to construct Serbian citizens as global citizens whose soil and mineral deposits in the Jadar valley have an important role to play in solving our global climate and CO₂ crisis. The advertisement further assures viewers that the company deeply cares about the environment and that the environmental effects of the planned mine will be minimal¹⁰⁰ - but a necessary sacrifice for a global cause. “Together, we have a chance to save the planet” concludes the television advertisement.

Yet, the “rewards” offered by Rio Tinto in the form mining and land tax to be paid to the state, and the wages for local citizens who are supposed to commit to these sacrifices and pledge their mineral wealth, labor and health for a “planetary future” do not reflect the “global status” that Rio Tinto ascribed to Serbian citizens in the television advertisement. Rather, the projected average salary to be paid out by Rio Tinto, amounting to \$1.222 a month (Savković, 2021)¹⁰¹, is firmly grounded in the local economy and local labor conditions and relations.

¹⁰⁰ Although an environmental impact assessment is yet to be performed

¹⁰¹ The average salary was calculated for the 1.170 directly employed workers (including 30 percent of foreign workforce) with the exact salaries ranging between \$868 and \$4.086, which indicates that the majority of salaries will in fact be closer to the lower end of this spectrum, and the average only increased by the high salaries earned by upper management. This data was presented as part of the “Study of economic impacts” of Rio Tinto’s Jadar mine published in October 2021 (Savković, 2021). The results of the study were presented during a press conference by the study’s main author Dragan Lončar, announced as a professor at the Faculty of Economics, University of Belgrade. “The professor” did not, however, perform the study in this function, but as the owner of a private company Peterhof Consulting contracted by Rio Tinto for this purpose (ibid.). The study also only looked at ‘positive’ economic impacts of the mine, focusing on directly created jobs and indirect positive impacts on the local and national economy, but ignoring the negative economic impacts of the mine such as, for example, jobs and income lost due to the conversion of agricultural land into mining land, among other things.

Thus, the locally extracted mineral resources, along with high profits enabled precisely by this disjuncture between the global market at which the company sells its products and the local market at which it pays labor and land and mining taxes, would flow out of Serbia as “green futures” offered to the world and “high profit futures” offered to Rio Tinto’s global shareholders. Conversely, the inflow of Rio Tinto’s investments into Serbia would offer a local and national future of environmental extraction and degradation and salaries for local citizens that would not even allow them to buy into that same “global future” of green, hi-tech, emissions-free electric vehicles once that future is commodified and re-imported back into the country – at global prices. In other words, the future that Rio Tinto promises to “the world” is not the same as the future that it offers to Serbian citizens, despite this global future supposedly hinging upon mineral, labor and environmental sacrifices required by Serbian citizens and claims that “we will save the planet together”.

In this dissertation I have shown how this growing disjuncture between increasingly globalized capital and product markets on the one hand, and localized labor and tax markets on the other, structures the very development paths and future possibilities and prospects in peripheral states, and specifically in contemporary Serbia – as the locus and focus of my study. Precisely this disjuncture, as it were, reveals the core-periphery relations within global neoliberal capitalism, as continued reproduction of uneven socioeconomic development across geographical space.

The same relations are nothing else but novel expressions of the Empire-Colony relations in a neo-colonial global system of exploitation. Reflecting the same disjuncture between global(ized) capital and product markets and local(ized) labor markets, the ‘new Colonies’ remain largely tied to political geography and geographically localized in peripheral states, while the ‘new Empires’ successfully ‘jump scales’ and are increasingly constructed as ‘placeless’ global capital expressed through multinational corporations made by global capitalist elites as their shareholders. This also means that within this neo-colonial system,

new colonies are no longer exploited by a single, geographically-bounded Empire, but are opened up for simultaneous exploitation by multiple Empires from across the globe that send their colonial ships in the form of Foreign Direct Investments.

Rather than leading to a socio-economic convergence with developed countries, as proposed by the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and a host of neo-classical economists, I have shown in this dissertation how Serbia's strong reliance on FDIs, as the main source of (external) development, effectively results in further divergence with developed countries and solidification of Serbia's peripheral positionality within the global economy. This is because the increasing foreign ownership of the local means of production puts the national economy in a progressively dependent condition - constructing it as a Dependent Market Economy (DME) within the Varieties of Capitalism framework. This dependence, in turn, forces the Serbian state to engage in the so-called "race-to-the-bottom" and to continue to subvert labor and environmental protection standards and find other ways to keep current and attract new foreign investments, in a global competition between peripheral states to maintain their development reliant on FDIs and structured by foreign ownership of their means of production.

As I argued in this dissertation, this has several important implications for place-making and future-making in Serbia (and other peripheries alike) as I will summarize below, but also for "the world", as I will further discuss in this conclusion. This summary and discussion also more directly answer the main research question which guided this dissertation and which was formulated in the following way: *How are different visions of the future negotiated and manifested in Serbia and implicated in place-making across local, national and global scales?*

Stealing futures: place-making and future-making at the periphery of global capitalism

“The future is already here – it’s just not very evenly distributed”

William Gibson, 1999¹⁰²

With the temporal lens through which I conducted my analysis, I demonstrated that the increasing divergence between Serbia and the developed countries of the capitalist cores is not only economic and socio-spatial, as often proposed by authors who study national and regional inequalities resulting from global neoliberal capitalist development and core-periphery relations – but that it also, and most critically I would add, includes growing temporal inequalities experienced by Serbian citizens and other people from across the peripheries of global capitalism.

Within the different chapters of this dissertation, I revealed these temporal inequalities across different temporal scales. At the day-to-day level, they are revealed through the triple-shift, poorly-paid and labor-intensive production which characterizes most jobs in Serbia created through the FDI-based development. Such jobs make many Serbian citizens unable to plan their days and enjoy the coherent temporal rhythms experienced by the majority of their western European counterparts who work 9 to 5 jobs, or even the previous generations of Yugoslav workers who similarly enjoyed synchronized working hours, as detailed in Chapter 4.

Compounded by low wages, lack of career advancement options, and increasingly insecure employment contracts, this also leads to temporal inequalities experienced within the frame of the lifetime. Within this frame, the majority of workers in Serbia find it difficult to plan both their short-term and long-term futures, and are instead increasingly trapped in surviving in the present (see Chapter 6). Additionally, with progressively weakened

¹⁰² “The Science in Science Fiction”, on Talk of the Nation, NPR, November 30, 1999, available at <https://www.npr.org/2018/10/22/1067220/the-science-in-science-fiction> (timestamp: 11:20)

enforcement of environmental protection standards, the same citizens are increasingly faced with environmental pollution which, through consequent adverse health impacts, directly makes their life expectancy and the very lifetime frame shorter, and their future marked by expectation or realization of pollution-induced illnesses and devastation of the landscapes that constitute their everyday worlds.

Finally, and most importantly, I have also revealed how the temporal inequalities experienced by Serbian citizens are tied to the *longue durée* temporality as well. Namely, as foreign investments flow into the country to “create” jobs which rely on extraction and exploitation of local labor and resources, the raw materials, produced goods and profits - embodying the future itself - leave the country and flow in the opposite direction, towards the countries of the capitalist cores where they will be spent and consumed in the future.

In other words, the local citizens’ future in the form of job security and capacity to hope and make plans is increasingly traded by the state and transformed into higher profits earned by foreign investors as local employers. These higher profits, along with extracted resources and produced goods – constituting the embodied forms of the future itself, are then taken away and exported out of the country to be sold, consumed or spent on the global market. Additionally, as I discussed in chapters 6 and 7, Serbia is seeing a steady rise of imported pasts embodied in waste and used goods (cars, appliances, furniture and so on) from western Europe. Taken together, these material and capital flows expose not just a geography of profit shifting as proposed by many authors before me, but also a geography of time shifting, whereby the past itself in its embodied form as waste, used goods, polluting and outdated technologies of production etc. becomes concentrated and congealed in Serbia and other landscapes of peripheral capitalism, while the future embodied in extracted profits, resources, raw materials, and produced goods for future consumption is taken out and exported for consumption and use by countries of the capitalist cores.

For Serbian (Yugoslav) citizen this is in stark contrast with the past in which development was internal and served to enable local and national *re*production. The internal capital investments and sacrifices made by Yugoslav citizens in the form of hard labor and environmental (and associated health) impacts of production were made meaningful by the fact that these inputs into production came back around as domestic products, profits and resources that then enabled continued local and national social reproduction in the future (Figure 75).

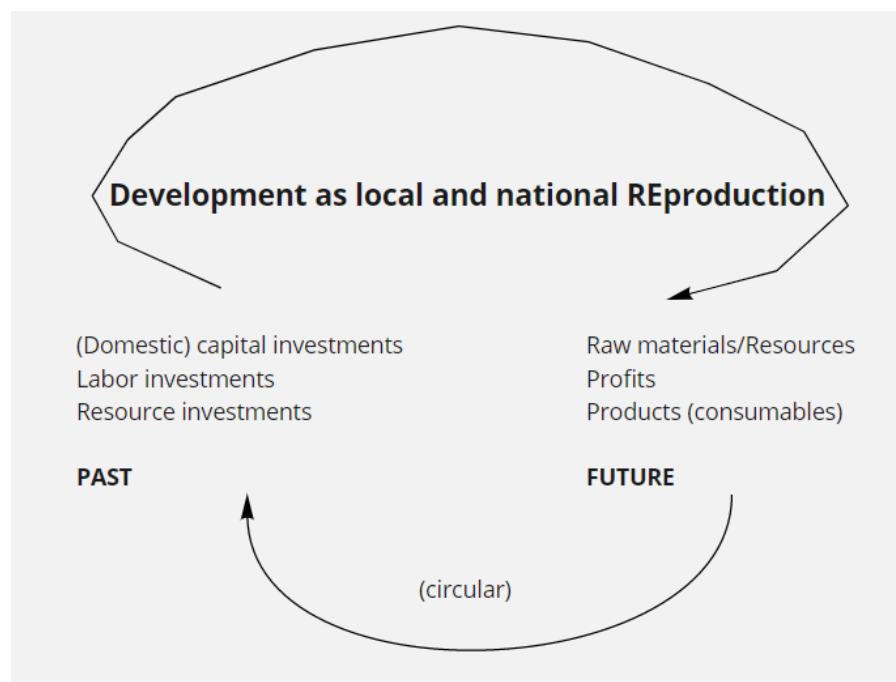


Figure 75. Yugoslav development as *re*production

Workers, owners, managers and local citizens were one and the same in Yugoslavia which meant that the environment, as well as labor relations and conditions, were internalized in local and national social (re)production. They were seen as both sources of profits as well as life-support systems and determinants of the quality of life. As such they were opened up for negotiation between local citizens themselves (through workers' collectives, local communes (*mesne zajednice*) and other Yugoslav self-management structures) in terms of the specific trade-offs regarding environmental and health impacts and quality of life that they are willing to make for the sake of local and national economic development and increased

profits. Through these negotiations the local citizens actively engaged in local and national place-making and future-making.

Those people and places which did suffer higher environmental, labor, and health costs in the name of local and national economic development (namely, the periphery of Yugoslav socialism - mining and heavy-industry towns such as Aleksinac), were recognized as such, and rewarded for their sacrifices both materially and immaterially. Workers in the mining and heavy-industry sectors were paid comparatively higher salaries¹⁰³ and rewarded with benefited length of service which allowed them to retire early. They also enjoyed a respected status in the society which celebrated them in everyday discourse as exemplified by, for example, the fact that a miner (Alija Sirotanović) and a smelter (Arif Heralić), rather than historical or contemporary state officials or „national heroes”, were put on Yugoslav banknotes (Figure 76). In other words, it was precisely the working class (Figure 77), and in particular the workers who made great personal sacrifices, who were constructed and celebrated as - national heroes.



Figure 76. Arif Heralić (up) and Alija Sirotanović (down) on Yugoslav banknotes first printed in 1955 (up) and 1987 (down) (Source: Wikimedia Commons¹⁰⁴)

¹⁰³ The salaries of miners in Aleksinac were two times higher than a “professor’s salary” (Adamović, 2019)

¹⁰⁴ <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:1000din-1963.jpg> ,
<https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:20000-Dinara-1987.jpg>



Figure 77. A working-class woman employed in agriculture; 1000-dinar banknote first printed in 1974 (Source: Wikimedia Commons¹⁰⁵)

On an individual level, the sacrifices made by workers at the periphery of Yugoslav socialism were also accompanied by mobility opportunities. On the one hand, the local citizens living and working in the periphery of Yugoslav socialism could freely physically relocate to other parts of the country, or even abroad (see Chapter 3). More importantly, the rewards of comparatively higher salaries and early retirement extended to workers in mining and heavy industry enabled a (intergenerational) future of upwards social mobility. With the higher salaries, the mining and heavy industry workers, who mostly came from poorer social strata, were not only able to build better lives for themselves but were also able to send their children to university towns and put them up through school, enabling a better future for them and the family's future generations.

In today's Serbia, with the entire country increasingly constituted as a peripheral place in the global space of flows, none of these things hold true. The external development model (Figure 78), as currently practiced, is linear (constituted as flow) rather than circular. The capital inputs into production flow into the country in the form of FDIs, rely on hyper-exploitation of labor and natural resources (embodied past), and then flow out of the country in the form of profits, resources/raw materials and produced goods (embodied future). In contrast to the past, it thus renders the labor and environmental sacrifices made by local workers and citizens meaningful only in the present in which wages provide survival at best.

¹⁰⁵ https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:YUD_1000_1981_obverse.jpg

Conversely, it renders them meaningless in the long term and collective future where profits, resources and products (embodying the future itself), rather than coming back around to enable continued development and local reproduction, are exported out to sustain reproduction and wealth accumulation in the capitalist cores.

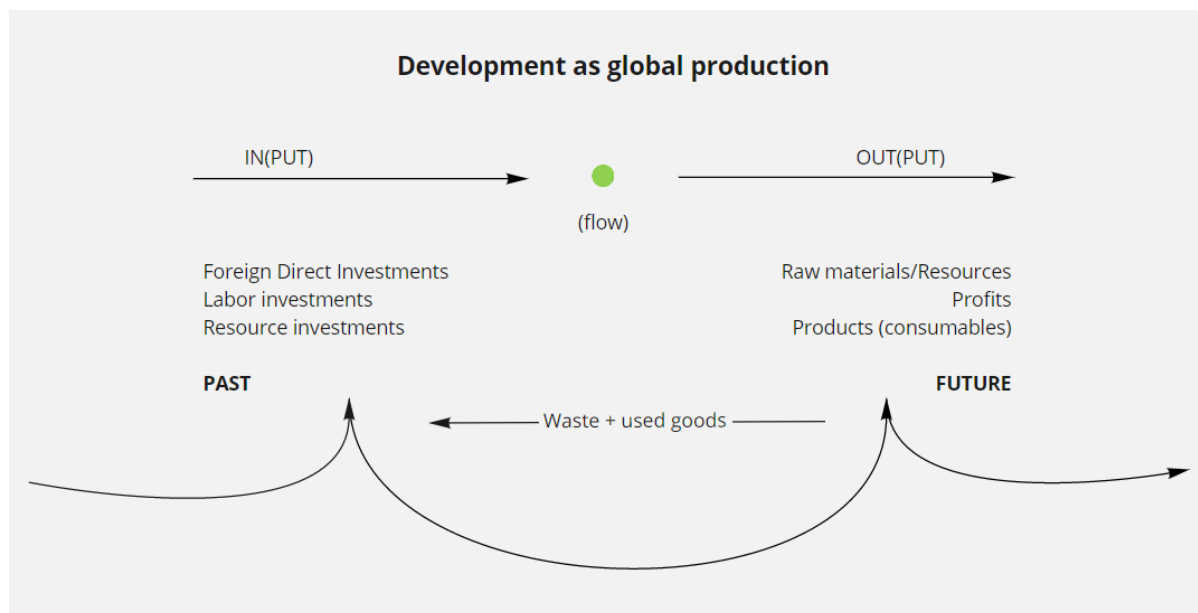


Figure 78. Development in Serbia as part of the global production flows

The environmental and labor conditions, while still determinants of the quality of life for local citizens in Serbia, are external to foreign capital owners and managers and seen only as a base for profit maximization. Thus, negotiations around these conditions, once localized due to the fact that local citizens and workers were themselves capital/production owners and self-managers, are now scaled up and enacted as trade-offs that the national government is willing to make for the sake of foreign capital owners looking to place their investments. The local workers and citizens are no longer active participants in these negotiations but rather mere recipients of the negotiation decisions, made by the national government and foreign investors, supposedly in their name and for their own good.

And while economic and material flows, along with decision-making/negotiating are scaled upwards in this way, dissolving national borders as obstacles to the free movement of capital, resources, products and even governance regimes, the same borders stand firm in

culturally and materially encapsulating local citizens in place-based labor and environmental conditions and relations. Unlike the citizens at the periphery of Yugoslav socialism who were guaranteed both free physical movement and attainable social mobility that allowed them, and/or their children to negotiate their peripheral positionality in both the present and the future, the contemporary Serbian citizens, whose entire country is constituted as a global periphery, face numerous administrative, cultural (language etc.) and bureaucratic hurdles that constrain their physical movement out of that periphery, as well as material obstacles that prevent their social mobility in a globalized world.

Again, unlike the Yugoslav enterprises which rewarded workers at the periphery of Yugoslav socialism with comparatively higher salaries, the global/international companies that now exploit the labor and natural resources of Serbian citizens do not reward them with globally/internationally competitive salaries. Rather, they precisely rely on this widening gap between the global markets on which they sell their products, and the local labor markets and environmental conditions and regulations which enable them to ‘steal’ local citizens’ labor, resources, and very futures, transforming them into profits and dislocating out of the local landscape. It is important to note here, that this gap between the global product markets and local labor markets is not a result of some ‘invisible hand of the market’ that is ‘external’ to multinational corporations who exploit it, but rather that these same corporations are able to actively maintain this gap. This is because they often simultaneously appear as an oligopoly¹⁰⁶ on the global product market, which enables them to keep the prices of their products up, while appearing as an oligopsony¹⁰⁷ on the local labor markets in the periphery, which in turn enables them to keep the price of labor down.

¹⁰⁶ A market dominated by a small number of companies selling the same product/service, which gives them significant power in enhancing profits by negotiating higher pricing of the products/services that they sell with other companies in the same market

¹⁰⁷ A market dominated by a small number of companies buying the same product/service, which gives them significant power in enhancing profits by negotiating lower pricing of the products/services that they buy with other companies in the same market

The same gap, as previously explained, also allows for the past embodied in waste and second-hand goods, to be imported into the country and congealed in the local landscape. The end result thus, is not only an uneven geography of socio-economic development, but an uneven geography of embodied time itself, in which the past becomes concentrated in the peripheries of global capitalism, as the future is accumulated in its cores.

World-making and global future-making

Place-making and future-making point to the processes in which we see that all of our actions (or inactions for that matter) have the effect of ‘producing’ the places we live in and our individual and collective futures, through our relations with one-another and our relations to the places and environments we are a part of, across different scales. However, our capacity to actively shape places and futures is not equally distributed. This, of course, is for a number of reasons, not least of which are cultural and tied to our identities that shape our positionality within society – be it our gender, age, ethnicity, sexuality, religious beliefs and so on. Critically, as I have argued in Chapter 8 while discussing the transformation of Yugoslav/Serbian worker’s capacity for place-making and future-making in the context of the transformation of the country’s political economy, this capacity is also directly tied to ownership and management of the means of production.

Yugoslav workers’ and local citizens’ capacity to actively engage in local place-making and future-making was precisely taken away and transferred to private ‘foreign’ hands by dispossessing them of the means of production through privatization, and excluding them from the management of the companies that they work(ed) for. Yugoslav social ownership and self-management once enabled them to negotiate their own futures, deciding on salaries, benefits, investment of earned profits etc., always balancing between the maximization of profits on the one hand and investments in continued local social

reproduction and regeneration of their places and environments on the other. Today, divorced from that same ownership and management, local citizens and workers find themselves as mere recipients of management decision made thousands of kilometers away in corporate headquarters by people for whom local social reproduction and environmental regeneration constitute ‘externalities’ of their business ventures, and investments in them unnecessary costs.

It is thus this separation, both physical and in the mind, between ownership, management, production, local environment, place and the workplace, that enables the conditions for the kind of unsustainable hyper-exploitation that occurs in Serbia and other peripheries of global capitalism alike. It is this separation that takes away the conditions for local landscapes to be reproduced in the future (through social reproduction and environmental regeneration) and instead turn them into landscapes of social and environmental destruction and degeneration. This is because, as Derek Sayer (1987: 25) long ago stated, “the connection between people’s productive relations with nature, or labour process, and their productive relations between themselves, or social relations of production, is internal and necessary, not external and contingent.”

As I have shown in this dissertation, the social and environmental devastation and destruction caused in Serbia and other peripheries alike, are not local problems caused by corrupt and incompetent governments (although I also do not absolve these governments of their fair share of responsibility), but rather local expressions of the global neo-colonial system inbuilt into global neoliberal capitalism. As this system works to extract and exploit the last iotas of future from present-day peripheries, pushing them beyond the tip of possible regeneration and recovery, it moves on to find or create new peripheries and frontiers for further capital accumulation. In this way, the geography of periphery expands over time, while the geography of the core, where reproduction and regeneration are still possible, keeps shrinking.

Indeed, we are able to witness that colonization and exploitation within this neo-colonial system is increasingly happening within countries of the capitalist cores themselves. This is precisely enabled by the fact that the ‘new Empire’ is not geographically bounded, but a placeless agglomeration of capitalist elites simultaneously situated everywhere (in the penthouses of Singapore, New York and Rio de Janeiro, villas of Aspen, luxury homes in the Maldives, and yachts docked in Bora Bora) and nowhere (in the Swiss bank accounts, stocks and ‘futures’ at the New York stock exchange, offshore accounts at the British Virgin Islands and digital crypto-currency wallets). In other words, this placelessness of the ‘new Empire’ opens up the entire world for colonization and exploitation.

That colonization and exploitation is happening almost ubiquitously is evidenced by skyrocketing inequality across the countries of the world, including the capitalist cores (Milovanović, 2016; UN DESA, 2020), and the fact that increasing numbers of workers even in the ‘richest of nations’ can no longer afford to pay rent, afford health care and lead dignified lives with the salaries that they earn, while the number of multi-millionaires and billionaires continues to grow. The ‘American Dream’ of buying a house is for the vast majority of today’s millennials in America nothing more than a dream (Clark, 2019), and one which they do not get to dream often since the two or three jobs that they work to pay the rent are depriving them of sleep. Indeed, similar futures, marked by increasing dispossession, labor precarization and economies of fear (Chapter 6), are also in the making even in the core countries themselves, although not as pronounced there (yet).

This is why Belgrade, for example, has in recent years seen a significant rise in the number of ‘digital nomads’ who move here from the United States of America, Canada and other ‘wealthy nations’ in order to lower their costs of living. Unlike my interlocutors from Aleksinac who move west in search of jobs and better salaries and futures, these ‘digital nomads’ move to Belgrade while keeping their jobs in the US and Canada, and which they are able to perform online. Like the multinational corporations, they are thus able to take

advantage of the disjuncture between the global and local markets, stretching their dollars further in Belgrade and improving their quality of life thanks to the much lower property and labor (services) prices in Serbia. In this way, they too resist the prevailing local socio-economic relations in their home countries, which are increasingly making a decent life and future financially unaffordable to them, as they relocate abroad to build their own, lateral futures.

We can thus see, that it is not only the futures of Serbian citizens and other people at the peripheries of global capitalism that are ‘stolen’, transformed into high private profits and deposited in private bank accounts, but that futures are slowly being stolen across the world, almost indiscriminately, from all capital-less classes of people. Ultimately, the environmental destruction currently occurring in peripheries of capitalism does not know our political borders and expresses itself through global environmental impacts, such as climate change, which further limits the capacities of future global generations to lead ‘normal’ lives and steals their futures too. This ubiquity and global reach of future-stealing, enabled by the very placelessness of the new global Empire has, in turn, important implications on any and all attempts to contest it.

Another world is possible

In Chapter 8, I have detailed the important advancements recently (and currently being) made by the burgeoning social movements in Serbia, and particularly those making environmental claims. Contesting the state’s development model which relies on increasing environmental destruction for economic development, the environmental movements in Serbia have made two major advancements which proved successful in altering their positionality vis-à-vis the state and reclaiming the citizens’ sense of say in deciding on local and national place-making and future-making. These are: 1) realizing shared connections and

common associations within higher scales and building trans-local alliances between previously dispersed local environmental movements (scale jumping); and 2) breaking the social contract through civil disobedience tactics and refusing to be subjects of state planning and development projects.

Yet, I have also argued in this dissertation that the type of development practiced in Serbia (and other peripheries alike), while certainly being enabled by the state, is merely a local expression of the global neo-colonial system inbuilt into global neoliberal capitalism. Thus, any attempts and even successes in challenging the state and even changing the government will not suffice on their own to contest the global conditions in which the (any) state operates. This is indeed why all the changes in government since Serbia's transition to capitalism failed to bring about any significant changes in the past, as reflected in the statement of my interlocutor Gordana (see Chapter 5) who commented on previous changes in government by saying that "the more things change(d), the more they stay(ed) the same" (*"sjaši Kurta, da uzjaše Murta"*)¹⁰⁸.

Still, I maintain that the advancements made by Serbian social and environmental movements are indeed significant, if only in showing us the way in which this contestation needs to further evolve. Namely, to truly challenge the global conditions imposed by the global neo-colonial system, we need to see the same kind of scale-jumping employed by local environmental movements in Serbia, but on an even greater international/global scale. Just as local citizens in Serbia were able to build alliances and so jump to the national scale where they could more successfully challenge the state itself, it is only by states engaging the same tactic and building trans-national alliances in order to jump to the international/global scale that true contestation of the global neo-colonial system can occur.

Similarly, it is through disobedience and refusal to be subjects of planning on higher scales, that the system (be it state or the global neo-colonial system) can be successfully

¹⁰⁸ Gordana used the Serbian idiom "Sjaši Kurta da uzjaše Murta", which literally translates to "Kurta gets off the horse so that Murta can get on". The English idiom "the more things change the more they stay the same" is the closest in meaning.

‘scaled-down’ and forced into negotiations, as exemplified by the Serbian environmental movements. By refusing to play the capitalist game of competition and to participate in the “race-to-the-bottom”, but instead building alliances and collectivizing their struggles, peripheral states could consolidate their power and more successfully engage in collective negotiations with foreign investors. Other ‘refusals’ are possible too, of course, not least of which is the refusal to make national economies dependent by giving-up ownership of local and national means of production and transferring it to ‘foreign’ hands. The recent promise of Mexico’s current president to nationalize the country’s lithium resources is exactly one such example (Hackbarth, 2021). But again, without collectivizing and coordinating such efforts across countries, the move proposed by the president of Mexico promises little change on the global scale. In fact, if Mexico remains the only country to commit to this move, it risks coordinated pressures by foreign investors and core states, perhaps even international sanctions, that would work to force the country back into ‘obedience’.

Whether and when we will start to see this kind of scaling-up of local and national struggles against the global neo-colonial system, and refusals to be subjected to it, remains to be seen. Until then, one thing is certain – left as it is, the neo-colonial exploitation under untrammelled global capitalism will continue to steal futures both from the global peripheries and increasingly from working-class people in its cores as well, while simultaneously ravaging the Earth and stealing futures from all human and non-human generations yet to come.

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