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ANTIFASCIST CULTURE AMONG SARAJEVO'S YOUTH IN THE CONTEXT OF DAYTON BOSNIA

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Eurasian Studies

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Declaration

I declare that the research contained in this thesis, unless otherwise formally indicated within the text, is the author's original work. The thesis has not been previously submitted to this or any other university for a degree and does not incorporate any material already submitted for a degree.

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Abstract

This thesis explores the culture of antifascism among youth in Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH). Based on a two-month fieldwork in Sarajevo, I demonstrate how the participants in this study navigate Dayton Bosnia—which they describe as a nationalized, dysfunctional, corrupt, and unaccountable state that cannot be easily challenged—through antifascism. When one looks at the question of hope in BiH, 'all roads lead to Dayton'—the city where the peace agreement was finalized and has been shaping ordinary lives of people since then. The Constitution of BiH, contained in Annex 4 of the Dayton Peace Agreement that ended the Bosnian War in 1995, mandates equal representation of the three major ethnic groups at all levels of government. This requirement accounts for the existence of a three-member presidency representing Bosnian Muslims, Croats, and Serbs. While the Dayton Agreement aimed to end ethnic conflict, it ironically contributed to the entrenchment of a political system based on ethnic divisions. The Western-backed neoliberal modernity—expected to bring prosperity, democracy, and eventual accession to the EU—has instead left many young people feeling alienated and powerless. Despite never having lived in Yugoslavia, these youth view its antifascist legacy as a period when their predecessors had more agency, dignity, and freedom than they do today. During a two-month period in the field, I collected 26 in-depth ethnographic interviews, with most participants being young antifascist activists whom I primarily encountered at *Društveno-kulturni centar* (*DKC*). The building, formerly a house of writers in Yugoslavia and later abandoned, was eventually reclaimed by young antifascists as a space for gatherings and cultural activities. I also sought to immerse myself in my participants' lifestyle by actively engaging in events organized by DKC. This included helping with repairs and cleaning the center—since it was still in the process of reclaiming the abandoned space—as well as attending events such as dance courses, lectures on graffiti, flea market, cultural gatherings, punk concerts, and many others. A focus on antifascism helps to illuminate how young Sarajevans navigate the unequally distributed societal hope in Dayton Bosnia and attempt to generate it themselves through their daily activities at DKC. This thesis focuses on what my antifascist interlocutors hope for, how they hope, why they hope in particular ways, and how they navigate a situation of unequally distributed societal hope in Dayton Bosnia. I explore this by examining how they understand and perceive the Yugoslav and antifascist past, how they juxtapose it with present-day Dayton Bosnia, and how they consequently envision a desirable and dignified future. Antifascism is a significant collective element of Bosnian culture that proved effective in the past and remains relevant today. It provides my interlocutors with a moral framework for opposing what they perceive as the immoral politics of Dayton Bosnia—through daily adherence to antifascist values. According to them, this

immoral politics consists of the nationalization of political discourse and the revisionism of the antifascist and Yugoslav past, which in turn sustains the power of political elites and obstructs alternative forms of political engagement. Participants oppose this revisionism and nationalization of the past, viewing such memory manipulation as a continuation of the war. A prevailing belief is that the war never truly ended; consequently, the Dayton post-socialist era is seen as a failed modernity—one not worth pursuing. I demonstrate how an antifascist stance in opposition to Dayton Bosnia functions as an alternative to nationalized politics in the private lives of my participants, allowing them to live in truth and pursue genuine freedom despite the oppressive system imposed by the Dayton Peace Agreement.

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Introduction

Entering the field: my introduction to Sarajevo's antifascist youth

In 2020, I completed an M.A. thesis discussing the role of humor during the siege of Sarajevo. The participants in my study, who were born in Yugoslavia and witnessed the Bosnian War and the siege of their city, unanimously described pre-war Sarajevo as a center of multiculturalism and a flourishing artistic culture, with cinema, comedy, and music being exported to the broader region from Sarajevo. At the same time, some of the younger people born after the war whom I encountered often expressed annoyance with the older generation's nostalgic views of the past and Sarajevo's designation as a capital of multiculturalism. Since then, I have been planning a study to elaborate on the generational shift and the potential ethnicization of the youth. With the intention of examining identity formation in Sarajevo, and assuming a trend toward the nationalization of the younger generation, I arrived in Sarajevo on June 24, 2023. However, I did not expect that the day of my arrival would immediately lead to a radical shift in the study: instead of focusing on young Sarajevans strongly identifying with ethno-religious categories, I became immersed in a culture of people who do the opposite and identify themselves as antifascists.

Having left my luggage at my apartment in the Old City near Baščaršija, I headed to a tiny alleyway between the always-crowded Maršala Tito and Branilaca Sarajeva streets, where two well-known local pubs—Jazzbina and Balkan Express—are located. I expected to meet some of my acquaintances from previous fieldworks, as these two venues attract Sarajevans of all ages and from diverse socio-cultural backgrounds. It was early in the evening, and at Jazzbina, I found myself surrounded by very young people only, probably between the ages of 14 and 18. Five or six small groups, cumulatively amounting to around 25 people, were sitting at the tables scattered around the bar. They were hugging each other and having fun, so it was clear that most of them

knew each other well, smoking cigarettes, and some even had beers. The bartender, with whom I spent hours discussing contemporary Sarajevan youth culture over the next two months, confirmed my assumption about their age. What attracted my attention the most was their physical appearance. It felt as if I had traveled back in time to the 1980s. They were all dressed like rock stars and punks from that era—wearing leather jackets, unconventional countercultural clothing, and long hair, with some having mullets or perms. In a few hours, I was leaving the pub with dozens of questions rotating in my mind, such as: What drives their behavior and clothing style? Is it Yugonostalgia? Does the war play any role in explaining it? Is it due to the intergenerational transmission of memory? Is it a new movement? What kind of music do they listen to, local or foreign? Does ethno-religious identification matter to them? Most importantly, why didn't I recognize this during my earlier stays in Sarajevo in 2019 and 2020, even though I was a regular at this place? Having reached my place, I contacted my acquaintance from earlier stays, a local radio host, who might have had firsthand experience with this group of young people and thus could provide answers to these questions. Instead, he shared with me the contact information of Dejan, the frontman of a new popular Sarajevan punk band, who became an entry point to the current study, as he introduced me to both my primary ethnographic site and the culture of antifascism in Sarajevo.

Following the confusion, which I experienced on the day of my arrival with the youth at Jazzbina, Dejan and I initially talked predominantly about the music scene in Sarajevo, specifically the continued dominance of the prominent 80s rock bands' influence in the present and the preference given to older-generation musicians at festivals and on the radio, which leaves no room for younger music collectives such as Dejan's band. As such, he claimed, the younger generations

are pushed to the margins of the cultural scene and must invent and claim spaces for themselves in alternative ways:

> Now it's time that we, the new generation, make spaces for ourselves. We have troubles now because of the older generations and these managers, they don't care about new scene. So we decided that if we cannot get these official spaces we should make our own. We are trying to make this like a movement and organization where we can really find a way in this system and we will not stop looking for the ways to make our festivals, our spaces, and our gigs. We are doing it with DKC, it's called the Društveno Kulturni Centar. It is abandoned building where we are having gigs and everything is free there. You know how it is like in Europe – it's normal. However, it is not only about gigs. It is a kind of neo-communism, we are like a communa and we are doing it not for money. We want to make this society culturally rich and we are doing it together. We are using this little space for the best of society and everyone can contribute. It's all on a volunteer basis and not to earn anything but just to make things for the society because we believe in it. With DKC, we are doing different projects, sometimes like clothing bazaar, workshops, sometimes gigs, and many more, and it's full of people. Last time when we did the gig it was around 200 people. Believe me, it's the best place in the city. When you go inside, it's like you are home. What is also good is that young people are always there, I see the new generation is really involved in this and this is what is for me really good. We are trying to kill, let's say it metaphorically, kill this conservatism and culture of shame because we cannot move forward as we are stuck now. The society is suffering, we cannot move on, we cannot be progressive society (Anonymous interview 1, July 2, 2023).

Some of the topics mentioned in this extract, such as seeking normality, feelings of stuckedness, lack of opportunities for upward social mobility, dominance of conservatism, and the existence of an oppressive system, were later raised by almost all of the antifascist participants in the study. These topics became central to the discussions of this study and will be further explored in the chapters of this dissertation. In the meantime, the mentioned *Društveno Kulturni Centar* (*DKC*) became my primary ethnographic site, specifically with regard to its main pillar – antifascism – shared by the members of the community attending this reclaimed cultural space, which was also mentioned for the first time in my study by Dejan later in the interview. In order to contrast the current sense of abnormality and stuckedness, Dejan brought up antifascism in the context of Tito's Yugoslavia:

> Yugoslavia was good. Because in the time of Tito it was bratstvo and jedinstvo. It means brotherhood and unity. It means all religions, all nations are one. He was an antifascist and he was bringing this antifascist mindset into the political sphere. After his death, all these nationalist guys, I call them fascists, they came to power, and then what they did was war. You are Muslim, you are this and that… I don't need to tell you the history. In Yugoslavia it was really like everybody was a brother. It's normal because Tito was fighting against Nazis. His mindset was really antifascist. He was really into this 100%. In terms of political philosophy, I don't want to move away from Yugoslavia, this philosophy that we are one and we are antifascists is what I do too (Anonymous interview 1, July 2, 2023).

Less than a week into the field, after having conducted my first interview with Dejan, I was able to narrow down my intention to study identities in Sarajevo to a single category – Sarajevo's youth antifascism – with a focus on their gathering site, *Društveno Kulturni Centar*. In just a few days, I found myself wearing construction gloves and helping to clean the center for the upcoming cultural event they were planning to hold.

Primary ethnographic site: Društveno Kulturni Centar

In preparation for the concert by two punk bands from Mostar (BiH) and Bogotá (Colombia), scheduled for July 14th, a small group of DKC activists gathered at the center around midday over the weekend. They came together on a volunteer basis, devoting their free time to ready the space for the enjoyment of their community — clearing out construction waste, cleaning the building, and setting up areas for installations, musical equipment, and more. After a brief chat with one of them over a cigarette, he said, 'Okay, I have to get back to work. I mean, I don't have to — but I want to.' Another activist, whose contact Dejan had shared with me to introduce me to DKC, stayed with me. We sat on cozy sofas and armchairs that the members had brought into the abandoned building, surrounded by pieces of art they had created, and chatted about the space called *Društveno Kulturni Centar* (*DKC*), which can be translated as Social Cultural Center. Commenting on the earlier-mentioned statement by the fellow DKC member, he shared with me that voluntary participation is one of the core values of the community, along with solidarity, activism, self-organization, non-commercialism, tolerance, feminism, inclusion and diversity, direct horizontal democracy — and, central to all of it, as he said, is antifascism. Anyone who shares these values is welcomed at DKC. Even the upcoming punk concert falls within the framework of antifascism, he said, as it is a countercultural genre that challenges authority and dominant dogmas that may oppress society. Indeed, punk rock music has historically been

instrumental to antifascism. For example, the punk band Oi! and the skinhead culture they produced — which, ironically, is today often associated with Nazism — originally placed antifascism among their core values and promoted them to wider audience (Bray 2017, 47). Summarizing the conversation with my interlocutor, a collective self-designation of the community — shared across numerous social platforms associated with DKC — states the following:

> Social-cultural center Sarajevo is a socially engaged collective that revives and adapts public spaces through the promotion of countercultural practices and art. We are a self-organized informal group which operates on the principles of non-commercialism, solidarity and anti-fascism, insisting on reviving cultural spaces and returning public space to citizens. Our center serves as a meeting point of ideas based on the principle "from everyone, by everyone" where activities of wider social and cultural significance are held (DKC Sarajevo).

While the idea of reclaiming public spaces, a concept currently popular and widely discussed in urban anthropology, is not the focus of this thesis, the antifascist culture I am interested in was strengthened by a related cross-border initiative that led to the emergence of DKC:

> The initiative for the socio-cultural center in Sarajevo actually grew out of an international volunteer project involving collectives from Belgium (Toestand), Kosovo (Termokiss), Macedonia (Social Cultural Space Tetovo - SCST), and Albania (Uzina). Volunteers from these countries spent ten days in Sarajevo, helping local activists and youth build a skate park in Ilidža and clean up an abandoned building on the UNSA campus, where the first SCC was located. We now form a network of independent socio-cultural centers through which we share knowledge and experience and exchange best practices" **(**Kukić 2022).

This highlights the transnational nature of the antifascist movement, as its values are often shared among geographically distant groups (García 2016). Antifascists, Hugo García argues, believe that their duty to oppose fascism can extend even to faraway countries (ibid.). Towards the end of my fieldwork, for example, around 20 members of Sarajevo's DKC community traveled to Montenegro to collaborate with similar organizations from other countries in establishing a cultural center there. Upon their return to Sarajevo, they told me that in the charter written for Podgorica's cultural center, antifascism was listed as a core value as well. In Sarajevo, DKC moved from a mentioned above abandoned building at the UNSA campus to the Marijin Dvor area and

can now be found in the former Writers' Home building, which was abandoned after the break-up of Yugoslavia and later reclaimed by the antifascists and participants in my study.

Photographs by David Orlov

In the left-hand photo, to the right of the entrance to DKC in Marijin Dvor, a hand-written list of upcoming activities can be seen, which is posted at the beginning of every month and can be amended by the members as needed. Through events such as dance classes, workshops, gigs, concerts, fundraising via flea markets, the organization of the annual Sarajevo Pride parade, poetry evenings, movie screenings, art exhibitions, and numerous other cultural activities, members of the community provide a space for artistic self-expression among youth, foster solidarity among

like-minded individuals, attract attention to marginalized groups, and raise awareness about social issues such as immigration, workers' rights, nationalism, corruption, and more. My interaction with the members of the DKC community and with the focus on the antifascist nature of their activism helped to illuminate how young Sarajevans navigate the unequally distributed societal hope in Dayton Bosnia and attempt to generate it themselves through their daily activities at DKC and beyond.

This thesis contributes to the study of Bosnia and Herzegovina in the post-war context, commonly referred to as Dayton Bosnia, named after the city where the peace agreement was finalized. Scholarship on Dayton Bosnia generally focuses on three major aspects: the persistence of divisions along ethno-religious lines despite the Dayton Agreement's intention to end perceived inherent ethnic hatreds (Robinson, Engelstoft, and Pobrić 2001; Sumantra 2002; Bougarel and Helms 2007; Guzina 2007; Chivvis 2010); the failure of neoliberal modernity and the unfulfilled promises of democracy and capitalism (Razsa 2015; Hofman 2021); and the dysfunctional state produced by the Dayton Peace Agreement, accompanied by a widespread sense of hopelessness regarding socio-economic and political improvement in the country (Jansen 2015; Kurtović and Hromadžić 2017; Banović, Gavrić, and Mariño 2021). Within the framework of these issues, antifascism is largely discussed in the context of historical revisionism (Trbovc and Trošt 2017), as political elites representing their respective ethno-religious groups employ competing narratives of the antifascist past to legitimize their rule and exacerbate artificial ethnic tensions, thereby sustaining the nationalized politics of Dayton Bosnia. The culture of contemporary antifascism itself, particularly among youth, receives relatively little attention in the existing scholarship. Antifascism is primarily discussed in the context of Yugonostalgia and memory politics (Hromadžić 2015; Kurtović and

Hromadžić 2017; Cole 2022). While this focus is not inherently problematic, there is a notable lack of in-depth studies on contemporary antifascist activists. This gap is perhaps unsurprising, given that, according to participants in my study, organized antifascist activism has emerged in Sarajevo only within the past decade. I argue that the focus on antifascist youth in Sarajevo has a potential to add to our understanding of the three mentioned issues discussed in the scholarship on Dayton Bosnia, as it allows to see how new generations on the ground are affected by the institutional framework that was put in place three decades ago. While this thesis offers a micro-level anthropological study of a relatively small community of young antifascist activists in Sarajevo, it also treats antifascism as a heuristic to discuss larger issues within the Dayton Bosnia context, such as hopelessness, revisionism, nationalism, corruption, dysfunctional and accountable state, perception of the failed promises of democracy and capitalism following the end of war and how they respond to it, and more. This thesis focuses on what my antifascist interlocutors hope for, how they hope, why they hope in particular ways, and how they navigate a situation of unequally distributed societal hope in Dayton Bosnia. I explore this by examining how they understand and perceive the Yugoslav and antifascist past, how they juxtapose it with present-day Dayton Bosnia, and how they consequently envision a desirable and dignified future. Antifascism is a significant collective element of Bosnian culture that proved effective in the past and remains relevant today. It provides my interlocutors with a moral framework for opposing what they perceive as the immoral politics of Dayton Bosnia—through daily adherence to antifascist values. According to them, this immoral politics consists of the nationalization of political discourse and the revisionism of the antifascist and Yugoslav past, which in turn sustains the power of political elites and obstructs alternative forms of political engagement. Participants oppose this revisionism and nationalization of the past, viewing such memory manipulation as a continuation of the war.

A prevailing belief is that the war never truly ended; consequently, the Dayton post-socialist era is seen as a failed modernity—one not worth pursuing. I demonstrate how an antifascist stance in opposition to Dayton Bosnia functions as an alternative to nationalized politics in the private lives of my participants, allowing them to live in truth and pursue genuine freedom despite the oppressive system imposed by the Dayton Peace Agreement. In response to my interest in their active membership at DKC, some of the respondents shared what DKC means to them and why antifascism is important both personally and for the organization:

> Because it aligns with my values. It's a safe space for me, a place where I can be myself and share my values. First, it was interesting for me because of this concept of revitalizing abandoned spaces. That's the first thing that attracted my attention. There are not many spaces for alternative culture in Sarajevo. Here you can come and do it for free with any resources that you have. There are not many, actually there are no spaces like this at all in Sarajevo – where you can feel safe regardless of your background. What I love about the place is, for example, during the pride month, which we organized at DKC, we drew poster, signs, we invited mental health assistants, LGBT people and everyone else were sitting together and making something positive, it is because they share the concept of antifascism (Anonymous interview 9, July 20, 2023).

> You don't have the need to explain yourself, explain what God you believe in, or don't, or whatever. You just are a person. I think, for me, antifascism, in a way of how I understand it today, is just having the person as he or she is, and not looking at them through sort of a facade of nationality, a facade of race, a facade of anything. If they're part of LGBTQ or not, it's completely unimportant here. And I think that's what DKC is. It's a group of people who accept people for who they are (Anonymous interview 5, July 12, 2023).

After hearing such explanations, and especially in the context of the descriptions of DKC's values mentioned above – voluntary cooperation, decentralization, direct horizontal democracy, solidarity, and non-commercialism – one might assume that they are anarchists. I certainly had this impression at first. Often, the line between the two is blurred, as one does not exclude the other; for example, Felix Ringel (2012) conducted a similar study in Germany, where he studied a countercultural group of antifascist anarchists in Hoyerswerda town. However, in my study, the participants are exclusively antifascists and do not self-identify as anarchists. Among the people I interacted with, only two identified as such, but even they stated that they were anarcho-syndicalists, which is more commonly associated with communism. In fact, I was hoping to identify anarchism among my participants, as following my earlier study on Bosnian humor, I

published an article discussing anarchist humor (2021, 2024). I had hoped and envisioned connecting it all within the framework of my Ph.D. dissertation, expecting certain answers regarding the ideological framework of antifascism in Sarajevo. However, despite extensive similarities, antifascism in Sarajevo is not related to anarchism. This brief discussion highlights the complex nature of the task to define antifascism, either based on my respondents' answers or secondary literature. This leads me to a section discussing the definition of antifascism in Sarajevo, providing a historical framework rooted in the Yugoslav experience and juxtaposed to the current state of affairs in the context of post-war and post-socialist Bosnia and Herzegovina, sometimes referred to as Dayton Bosnia, after the city where the peace agreement for the Bosnian War was finalized.

Defining antifascism in Sarajevo: historical context and present date

Antifascism is inherently a reactionary phenomenon. It is no surprise that defining the concept proves difficult, both among scholars and participants in my study, as it primarily positions itself in opposition to fascism—however that may be defined. Antifascism initially emerged in pre-WWII Europe as a response to the spread of Mussolini's fascist ideology, particularly in Italy, the Weimar Republic, Spain, Portugal, Great Britain, and France (García et al. 2016). Following the defeat of the Axis powers, antifascism became less visible for a time, as many believed fascism had been conclusively defeated. However, antifascist ideas regained prominence when figures like Oswald Mosley, through his far-right political party Union Movement, blamed Jews for post-war economic hardship in Great Britain, or with the rise of Jean-Marie Le Pen's nationalist party in France in the wake of the Algerian War and resulting immigration crisis. Similarly, after the fall of the Berlin Wall, the resurgence of Nazism across Europe led antifascists to radicalize once again in response. A comparable pattern can be observed in the 21st century, as antifascist groups have

mobilized in response to the rise of neo-Nazism in Sweden and Greece—often linked to economic hardship and immigration—and in the United States, particularly following the election of Donald Trump and the radicalization of the far right.

This reactionary trend of antifascism implies that it can be defined in opposition to what is perceived as fascism at a specific historical moment. At the same time, such an explanation invites criticism, as what is defined as fascism can be easily manipulated—for instance, opposition to immigration can be framed as fascism by proponents of antifascism (Gottfried 2021). Thus, conceptualization has always been an issue with regards to antifascism. Once again, antifascism is primarily against whatever fascism constitutes, and even it may sound morally unappealing, we need fascism as it is what helps us define antifascism (Rabinbach 1996). Although fascism has manifested in various forms into the present—and this has been the case throughout the late 20th century, even after the war—it was fundamentally defeated by antifascism in the 1940s. Nevertheless, it is fascism that dominates scholarly discourse, while antifascism remains comparatively marginal within the social sciences (García et al. 2016). For example, a WorldCat keyword search for *fascism* returned 57,000 titles, whereas *antifascism* yielded only 1,300 (Seidman 2016). However, it is not counterintuitive considering that antifascism is a reaction to fascism and it is essential to define the latter to promote and understand the former. At the same time, there are definitional complexities with regards to fascism as well. Umberto Eco (1995), for instance, states that fascism has become an all-purpose term; philosopher himself identifies 14 features of fascism, where presence of any, as he argues, may be sufficient for the rise of fascism. According to Robert Paxton fascism constitutes:

> A form of political behavior marked by obsessive pre-occupation with community decline, humiliation, or victimhood and by compensatory cults of unity, energy, and purity, in which a mass-based party of committed nationalist militants, working in uneasy but effective collaboration with traditional elites, abandons democratic liberties and pursues with redemptive violence and without ethical or legal restraints goals of internal cleansing and external expansion (2004, 2018).

This, and similar broad definitions of fascism, as I argue, do not allow for a precise definition of antifascism either. In general, scholarly attempts tend to result in similarly broad definitions, ultimately stressing that the most important and sole goal is to defeat fascism, such as the following one by Nigel Copsey and Samuel Merrill:

> Yet today's "Antifa" groups have no direct historical lineage to this Communist-sponsored organization. In fact, there is no political party affiliation, no central organization, no central leadership, and no prescribed doctrine beyond a shared belief that "fascism" must be defeated. Antifa is thus reactive (in the sense of reacting to a perceived "fascist" threat) and might be best understood as "essentially an ad hoc sociopolitical movement designed to address a specific problem" (2020, 125)

So, in terms of its ideological background, antifascism can be associated with a wide range of cultural, political, and ideological movements, including socialism, communism, anarchism, liberalism, Catholicism, Freemasonry, Marxist-Leninism, feminism, anti-imperialism, LGBTQ+ activism, anti-immigration stances, and more (García 2016, García et al. 2016, Gottfried 2021). Similarly, among my participants, the majority identified as Marxist communists; some were anarchists, others identified simply as punks. There were also practicing religious members, feminists, and LGBTQ+ activists, while some did not express any strong ideological or belief-based predisposition. As one of my respondents put it, in Sarajevo, antifascism is like a mosaic. Some said I would need a Venn diagram in my attempt to define it, as antifascism here includes so many overlapping identity categories—some of which may even be fundamentally contradictory. For instance, nationalists, including members of nationalist political elites, may also identify as antifascists. For example, some defined it as an antinationalist stance:

> Generally it's just sort of going against hate, for me at least it's just about not hating anyone in any way, shape, or form. Not willing to harm someone or wanting them to be harmed in any way especially because of their nationality. I think people here live in an episode of black mirror where everyone has their little code, score and description implied. I had that experience in middle school, when I was asked about my nationality and what God do I believe in. Since I am from a mixed marriage, my mother is Catholic and my father is Muslim, I didn't know, but I was constantly asked these questions in my childhood even before I turned 10. It is because that is how people in this country are raised (Anonymous interview 6, July 13, 2023).

Others pointed out it as an instrument to oppose hate in cyberspace, as according to them, fascism can evolve and thus it is required to make certain relevant adjustments when opposing it:

> To define the present antifascism, you need to define the present fascism. There is fascism in a new form. It's not only military and violence, but it's also cyberbullying and mostly things that happen in the cyberspace on a daily basis, prejudices, racism and so on. So when we define those things, like the new ways of fascism, then you can also define the new ways of antifascism (Anonymous interview 3, July 7, 2023).

Definitions grounded in culture—such as those found in rock and roll and punk music genres—were also present:

> The best way to describe it is that we come from rock and roll families. Antifascism is kind of an essence of rock and roll. These are people who do not care about somebody else's color, religion or political stance. You just care about what the person is like inside. As some philosopher said, 'I don't know if my friend was a bad person yesterday and I don't know what kind of person he will be tomorrow. But I know what he is today.' I kind of live with that in mind. Most of us, when we started playing together in the band, we were punks, and punk style is generally associated with antifascism. It is definitely a stance that we all agree upon. We have pretty strong views on how to and how not to treat people (Anonymous interview 10, July 22, 2023).

For many DKC members, antifascism is closely linked to LGBTQ+ rights, workers' rights, and feminism, as illustrated in the following excerpts:

> Antifascism for me, as an activist here, it's a fight against fascism. Against any form of oppression. Preventing any violation of human rights. As an LGBT activist, antifascism for me is being an LGBT activist. I consider myself an antifascist. Also for antifascism workers' rights are important. It is connected to Yugoslavia because people who lived in Yugoslavia felt antifascism very much. For me, antifascism is important as a term, as something that I relate to. This is something that I would like to spread further to younger generations. Antifascism is one of the core values of LGBT movement in Bosnia (Anonymous interview 5, July 12, 2023).

> Very simple answer is fighting against everything that is fascism, everything that restricts basic human freedoms. For me, antifascism is also feminism. For me, antifascism is also activism. This is the kind of activism that I'm doing. Anything against ultra-right philosophy that prevents people from what I imagine a normal life, being equal, being free. Because these are all the areas fascism is against. Fascists were against LGBT people, fascists were against communism fascism, socialism, against values of feminism. It was an extremely patriarchal society (Anonymous interview 8, July 19, 2023).

Although these values may contradict certain religious dogmas, practicing religious individuals have indicated that being religious does not preclude them from adopting an antifascist stance.

> You should follow the God. Antifascists are mostly connected with atheism, but for me religion is personal. For our antifascism it is not a problem if someone believes in God. So what? What is important is that the state should be secular, in your life you can believe whatever you want to, that's also about antifascism (Anonymous interview 13, July 28, 2023).

Despite antifascism may hold different meanings for various participants, depending on their personal interests or experiences, the most important characteristic that was almost unanimously shared—and which connected all definitions—was a shared belief in a single value system that unites all antifascists. This was well summarized by one of the participants in my study:

> I think it's a way of living. Because it encompasses a lot of things. When you say antifascism usually there are a lot of things implied and so it like an umbrella term. Here, when you say antifascism, we pride our history with the battles and fights won against the Nazis during the Second World War. I think it's really specific because I think antifascism for the Balkan people was a founding stone when Yugoslavia was created. Then, I guess, the most easy way to define it is as a value. Just a value in terms of society and individually. I think it's a value a way to identify. If you and I are speaking about antifascism then there is a bond. That's why people at DKC bond with each other so well because we share this value (Anonymous interview 9, July 20, 2023).

This extract from the interview is fundamental to the current dissertation in two key ways: first, it highlights the most important feature of antifascism shared by both my participants and the scholarly literature—a belief in shared values, that unite them; and second, it references Yugoslavia and World War II, which are central to both Bosnian and Sarajevan antifascism.

To begin with, Hobsbawm (1994, 160) did not consider antifascism a specific ideology, but rather an "ethos, a way of being in the world." Similarly, Anson Rabinbach (1996, 7) argues that antifascists fighting in Spain were not united by any ideology, party, or specific movement, but instead collectively considered themselves members of a "common humanity whose adherents all spoke the same spare language, shared the same sacrifices, and were engaged in the same redemption of the world." As such, antifascism served as a lingua franca for those who arrived to combat fascism in Spain, and they "lived, slept, and ate antifascism" (ibid.). A similar definition of original antifascism is provided by García et al. (2016, 6): "They shared a culture that blended concepts and symbols from all over the world and recognized one another as part of a 'common humanity.'" At present, these sensibilities can be described as what Mark Bray (2017, 205) conceptualizes as 'everyday antifascism.' Yet, this definition may still seem problematic, as it can encompass almost anything interpreted as opposition to fascism. However, the idea of a shared

belief in common humanity, expressed daily through the lifestyles and actions of antifascists, helped me realize the essence of antifascism. While speaking with the participants in my study, I continuously reflected on the fact that I share all of their values—I am against homophobia, nationalism, misogyny, and all forms of prejudice. Yet I found myself wondering: why, then, have I never thought of myself as an antifascist? Despite sharing these beliefs, they are not part of my daily agenda; it is not something I often reflect on in my everyday life. In a way, I am not constantly or consciously aware of my beliefs, whereas, for my participants and antifascists more broadly, these beliefs are central to their identity. As mentioned, they "live and sleep" antifascism.

The second significant point raised in the interview extract above is the role of Yugoslavia, World War II, and the Partisans in the daily antifascism of my participants, as well as their perception of it and the reasons behind the persistence of the antifascist legacy in Sarajevo across generations. Above, numerous interview extracts have highlighted various values with which my participants associate antifascism. However, one of the most significant constitutive elements of their understanding of antifascism revolves around the nationalist and divisive narratives of political elites, who reinterpret the memories of World War II and antifascism, linking them to the Bosnian War through revisions that serve their own advantage and further promote divisions along national lines to preserve political power. This will be discussed in Chapter 3. In the meantime, the role of Yugoslavia, Tito, and the Partisans in the current antifascism needs to be briefly mentioned, as these memories play a significant role in my participants' opposition to the current state of affairs. They juxtapose it with a perceived positive and more prosperous Yugoslavia, with antifascism being one of the cornerstones of its success.

While origins of antifascism across the West and globally are viewed through an opposition of allies to Hitler’s Fascist Germany, and it is similar in the case of ex-Yugoslavia, it has its

distinctive origins and features that shape uniqueness of Yugoslav and Bosnian antifascism. This will be discussed throughout the chapters of the dissertation. In the meantime, as this dissertation is an anthropology of current antifascism rather than a historical inquiry, Misha Glenny's (2012, 485-486) summary of this historical period is sufficient:

> Nothing on the Balkan peninsula was as shocking during the war as the fate of Yugoslavia and its peoples after the Germans and Italians sent in their troops to prise open the route to the Aegean in April 1941. What had been a single country was now chopped up into at least nine units (although few of these were stable). Slovenia was split in two; Italy annexing the south-west, including Ljubljana, and Germany grabbing the plum industrial areas in the north-east. As part of the deal which saw the Ustaše come to power in Croatia with Italian help, Italy seized Dalmatia, the Adriatic islands and a large part of Istria. The Independent State of Croatia (*Nezavisna država Hrvatska – NDH*) included all of Croatia, Slavonia, Bosnia and Hercegovina, but it was also divided into Italian and German military zones. Montenegro lost part of its territory to Albania and became an 'independent' province under Italian protection. The Italians also used the Albanians to annex part of Kosovo and western Macedonia. The Germans occupied the Banat; the Hungarians took Vojvodina while Bulgaria reclaimed Macedonia and small areas of southern Serbia. Serbia itself was under direct German military rule, although in August 1941 a puppet government under General Milan Nedić was established, which drew support from Serbia's fascist movement, the Zbor.
>
> In almost every part of the country, the establishment of a new authority was accompanied by the settling of old accounts and the opening of new ones. Governance was replaced by state terror on a horrifying scale. The Ustaše turned their territory into one great slaughterhouse. The Germans in Belgrade lost no time in drawing up their lists of Jews, Gypsies and subversives while in northern Macedonia, Bulgarian soldiers and secret policemen were torturing suspected Serb sympathizers and hanging their mutilated bodies from street lamps. Those who found themselves in Italian occupied zones were the least unfortunate.
>
> At their headquarters in Belgrade, a rival resistance inspired by a very different ideology was taking shape. Members of the Politburo of the Yugoslav Communist Party (KPJ) under the leadership of the energetic Josip Broz Tito decided to spread out across the country. Their task was to activate the KPJ's highly disciplined underground network (a fortunate by-product of many years of illegality) and develop a strategy for guerrilla warfare. These men and women were the first Partisans.

This historical period remains the most important aspect of political discourse in present-day nationalized Dayton Bosnia. It is still debated who was a fascist and who was antifascist. Each side accuses the other of collaborationism, which is plausible because it was present in the case of each ethnic group, such as the Ustaše in the case of Croats, the Četniks in the case of Serbs, and the Handžar Division in the case of Bosnian Muslims. This discourse is also relevant within the framework of the Bosnian War in the 1990s, as it constitutes the political revisionism of political elites today, who partially aspire to legitimize their rule through nationalization of the antifascist legacy, which in turn is perceived as an act of fascism by my participants. It is widely believed

among them that the socio-political and economic issues of the present day in post-Dayton BiH are rooted in the nationalization of the state and nationalization of the memory about WWII, antifascism, and Partisans. They juxtapose this dysfunctional state, which is devoid of hope for normality and prosperity, with Tito's Yugoslavia, whose Partisans defeated fascism and established a prosperous, strong state, as it is largely perceived by the participants, although they are aware of negative aspects of that state—unlike today's BiH. As such, although there are various ways to frame current antifascism in Sarajevo today, as was demonstrated, most of the participants drew an explicit link to Yugoslavia, the Partisans, and World War II memories in their attempts to define the term, as the following extracts from the interviews demonstrate:

> I should stress that a strong antifa sentiment arouse with Tito's Partisans and the fight for liberation against the fascists on our own soil, so that it is deep in our historical memory. Unlike most other Eastern nations it was not the Soviet Union that liberated us but our people themselves, our Partisans, and that was really intrinsic to the ideology that further shaped Yugoslavia. Antifascism as a historical memory that is also transmitted to younger people (Anonymous interview 9, July 19, 2023).

> Antifascism is part of my identity, I was born in late Yugoslavia and still feel like Yugoslavian. My grandfather was killed by Četniks in 1943. When we see how right wing parties rise to power and people are filled with radical opinions, we need to be loud about it. I often wear a red star. Here in this area we are still very connected to WWII and antifascist history (Anonymous interview 23, August 13, 2023).

> I realized it [feminism] all started with the Second World War because Tito needed women to be part of the defense in the antifascist struggle in order to win the war. Basically, there are some historians who say that without the participation of women in Yugoslav National Army, the war wouldn't be won. It was like the largest number of women participating in antifascist struggle in whole Europe was in Yugoslavia. Like, I don't know how is it measured by percentage or whatever, but it was 100,000 women directly participating in the battlefield, which was a lot. There were two million women in the antifascist front organization, which was the largest female organization ever in the history of Europe. It was the only emancipatory thing that happened to women here. So it was very, very important. That's why antifascism is important to me (Anonymous interview 8, July 19, 2023).

Sampling and methodology

Disciplinarily, this thesis is situated at the intersection of anthropology and political theory. I offer a micro-level anthropological study of a small group of young antifascist activists in Sarajevo, which I further apply and generalize to broader political issues: decolonization in the first chapter, the distribution of hope across society in the second chapter, the question of freedom in the context

of the nationalized state in the third chapter, and a comparative study of the ideological foundations of antifascism in the final chapter. While existing scholarship does address these issues in relation to Dayton Bosnia, my account presents a unique interpretation grounded in the perspectives of the participants in my study. Following Clifford Geertz's interpretive methodological approach to the study of cultural groups, I focus not on the factual accuracy of my participants' understandings of the antifascist or Yugoslav past—though I recognize these sometimes contradict historical facts—but rather on their perspectives as such. Regardless of their factual validity, these views shape participants' behavior, choices, and beliefs. Although the effects of Dayton Bosnia on social and political life in BiH have been extensively studied, I contribute a distinctive perspective by highlighting how young antifascist activists engage with various socio-economic and political issues rooted in the Dayton Peace Agreement. My interpretation of the participants' perspectives is itself an interpretation. The dissertation thus becomes a dialogue between my participants and myself, reflected in its ethnographic writing style, which includes in-depth summaries of our conversations. For example, I offer a thick description of a tattoo one participant considered getting but hesitated over—an anecdote that laid the foundation for a broader discussion on the question of freedom in Dayton Bosnia in Chapter 3.

As my earlier fieldwork in Sarajevo focused on the older generation, I did not have many acquaintances among the younger strata of the city's population, especially those who openly identify as antifascists. Thus, I relied on the snowball sampling method, starting with Dejan as my first interviewee. Dejan then introduced me to key members of the DKC, who further connected me with more people in the community. During a two-month period in the field, I collected 26 in-depth ethnographic interviews, each lasting on average about an hour. For ethical reasons, with the goal to protect my participants' identities, real names have been replaced with made-up ones

throughout the text, including Dejan. However, the made-up names were not chosen arbitrarily; they correspond to the participants' ethno-religious backgrounds, even though the participants themselves may not necessarily self-identify with these categories. In some cases, this correspondence was particularly relevant to the content of the discussions. Accordingly, Serb participants were assigned traditional Serbian names, and the same principle was applied to Croatian and Bosnian Muslim participants. Most of the participants in the study belonged to active members of the DKC community aged between 18 and 30 years. In addition to them, I also interviewed scholars, researchers, journalists, museum directors, walking tour curators, and some party members. Along with members of the DKC, they were well acquainted with the ideas of antifascism and its history in Yugoslavia. Even in daily conversations with the general public in Sarajevo during my stay, I was always astonished by how strongly opinionated people were regarding antifascism in Sarajevo, BiH, and the broader region. Whenever I mentioned to new acquaintances the reason for my stay in Sarajevo and the topic of my study, I consistently encountered well-informed individuals on the subject irrespective of their age, job occupation, ethnicity or religion, and other possible categories. As such, my interviews were not structured and were conducted in a conversational style, as everyone I talked to had a lot to share, allowing my participants the freedom to discuss anything they felt was relevant to antifascism. However, the main themes included general information about antifascism, my participants' perceptions of it in both Yugoslavia and the present day, as well as the reasons behind their self-identification as antifascists and how this identity shapes their lives and behavior. I relied on purposeful sampling because, in these conversations, new kinds of information occasionally emerged without my initial intent or prior knowledge. For example, I initially assumed that most antifascists would come from non-religious backgrounds. However, when I heard that religion might not play a significant role

in one's antifascist self-positioning, I sought out practicing religious individuals who were also antifascist activists to learn about their understanding of antifascism and how they navigate the seemingly contradictory elements of being both religious and antifascist, such as their perception of the role of religion in Tito's Yugoslavia. Also, after conducting my first few interviews, I realized the importance of party politics in relation to antifascism. As a result, I interviewed young members of various political parties with different stances on antifascism. This strategy allowed me to discover important topics for consideration that I might not have been aware of in advance. Although interviews are my primary source for analyzing antifascist culture among youth in Sarajevo, I also sought to immerse myself in my participants' lifestyle by directly engaging in events organized by DKC. This included helping with repairs and cleaning the center, as it was still in the process of reclaiming an abandoned space, as well as attending events such as dance courses, lectures on graffiti, cultural gatherings, and concerts. For example, a punk band from Colombia was brought to Sarajevo to perform at DKC, attracting a few hundred attendees. As such, participant observation was also an important data collection strategy.

To analyze the collected interviews, I used the data analysis strategy suggested by Ritchie et al. (2014). The initial step was transcribing the interviews, a time-consuming process that has been recently facilitated by advances in AI technologies. I personally used the MyMeet AI assistant for research, which transcribed the data almost perfectly. While familiarizing myself with the transcribed interviews, I only had to make minor corrections to the AI-generated text. The familiarization stage involves identifying potential themes, topics, and categories that will be used during the data analysis. It is then helpful to organize these potential themes and categories, a process labeled by the authors as the 'construction of an initial thematic framework'. The researcher then works with the written interview texts and begins the coding process, which

involves writing codes and labels line by line next to the text. This is known as open coding. Next, these codes and labels are classified into themes or categories, which refer to clusters of codes. This stage is called axial coding. Finally, during the selective coding stage, once categories are identified, the researcher establishes the relationships between them. So, while answering the question, 'What are people saying that is relevant to the research topic?', I used a process of open coding to break down the text into smaller units and assign codes to them. For example, from one of the interviews, the following small textual units—'I can't take living here', 'It's never going to change', 'I want to live in my own country like any normal human being', 'I don't see any possibilities', 'Young people are leaving', 'You start to lose hope for what can be done', 'We want to have clean streets and a good education system', 'It's shit here', 'In Yugoslavia they believed in the future, young people had a future', 'In Yugoslavia they didn't need to leave the country', 'They lived in a country where they were certain about their future', 'I am finishing college now and I have no future here', 'We want to leave but we also want to fix the country', 'At some point, you give up and leave', 'Then you live in some f#!*&ing Paris with nice public transport, money to buy expensive stuff, and you get praised for your work. You have normal standards of living, but you are in someone else's country', 'My brother left me to have a normal life somewhere else because he had no future here'—were labeled with the codes 'normality' and 'hopelessness'. Further, through selective coding, I grouped labels and codes into common thematic groups. For example, 'normality' and 'hopelessness' ended up in the theme of 'hope,' which became the central theme of the second chapter of the dissertation, discussing the anthropology of hope in Bosnia and Herzegovina. In the end, four main themes were identified, each discussed in a separate chapter, analyzing youth antifascism in Sarajevo within the context of these themes. The themes identified are postcolonialism, hope, revisionism, and the peaceful nature of antifascism in BiH.

The first three chapters of the dissertation can also be framed within a single unifying category: Dayton Bosnia, as the discussion of each theme leads to similar conclusions rooted in the nature of Dayton Bosnia. The last chapter, however, departs from this category and shifts the local framework as I discuss antifascism in Sarajevo within the context of global trends. Below is a summary of each chapter.

Outline of the dissertation

Chapter 1 serves as my entry point into the writing process, as it emerged from my need to make initial clarifications for myself, while also outlining some of the key concepts and topics that will be discussed further in later chapters. During my earlier fieldwork in Sarajevo in 2018, I mainly encountered an older generation of citizens who had witnessed the siege of the city in the 1990s. As a result, I initially overlooked the growing popularity of antifascism among the younger population. However, when I returned to the field five years later, this trend had become impossible to miss, as I encountered it on the very first day of my fieldwork, despite not having planned to observe this phenomenon or even being aware of it beforehand. This came as a surprise to me not because antifascism is a ubiquitous phenomenon that young people constantly talk about, but because of its near absence in my home country, Kazakhstan. Culturally and historically, the two countries have much in common, including their antifascist struggle during the war, which led me to question: "Why has antifascism been preserved in the collective memory in BiH, playing an important role in the daily lives of the participants in my study, while in my home country—despite its significant role in the antifascist struggle during WWII—this memory is almost non-existent?" In general, it appears that WWII is getting less visible in collective memory in Kazakhstan, the Victory Day has not been celebrated for the past five years, and the President rarely attends the celebrations held in Moscow. The significance of the war appears to be diminishing, with a

growing alternative narrative suggesting that for Kazakhstan, it was a conflict fought on the side of one colonizer against a potential other colonizer. This emerging perspective has led me to consider the differences between the studied cases regarding the significance attributed to the memory of antifascism from a decolonial perspective. Until the breakup of the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia, for centuries, both Kazakhstan and BiH have been subjected to rulers based in distant metropoles. Both cases share an imperial legacy, with Kazakhstan having been ruled by the Russian Empire, and BiH by the Ottoman Empire and later the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Additionally, both share a socialist legacy, as they became constituent and minor subjects within the larger communist federations following the collapse of their respective empires. As a result, both states acquired the opportunity to realize modern statehood only in the 1990s. Thus, I decided to employ a decolonial perspective to analyze how historical narratives related to antifascism in Kazakhstan and BiH are constructed differently due to their distinct post-colonial and post-socialist contexts. This approach reveals the underlying interests and positionalities that shape subjective interpretations of antifascism or its disappearance from collective memory and, ultimately, demonstrates why the collective memory of antifascism differs so greatly and why it is once again gaining momentum, becoming an important element of youth identity in Sarajevo. Specifically, it is argued that despite the fact that Russia's influence persists, Kazakhstan has room to legitimize its statehood by nationalizing aspects of the World War II past, excluding antifascism, which remains closely tied to the Soviet and thus Russian legacy. A decolonial approach explains why Kazakhstan selectively preserves historical narratives while avoiding direct confrontation with Russia's memory politics. Instead, it reinterprets Soviet war heroes to serve national identity, while antifascism—seen as an imposed Soviet ideology—falls outside the scope of state-sanctioned memory. In this process of selective remembrance, antifascism is erased—unlike in

BiH, where the lack of a clear future due to its neocolonial condition ensures its persistence. The young antifascists in my study turn to the past as a source of normality and modernity, revising antifascism as a viable framework in comparison to their current hopeless reality. For my participants, antifascism in BiH represents a time of greater economic stability, personal freedoms, and state autonomy and capacity—elements missing in present-day Dayton Bosnia. Instead of promoting peace and prosperity, the Dayton framework has led to a neocolonial state devoid of hope, where political elites manipulate historical revisions and narratives to preserve the political status quo implemented through the Dayton Agreement.

In Chapter 2, within the framework of anthropology of hope I demonstrate how the participants in this study navigate Dayton Bosnia—a nationalized, dysfunctional, corrupt, and unaccountable state that cannot be easily challenged—through antifascism. Due to their inability to live normal and dignified lives in the present situation, my respondents turn to the memory of antifascism in Yugoslavia, which they largely consider the best period in BiH's history. Antifascism is a significant collective element of Bosnian culture that has proven useful and successful in the past and remains relevant today. It provides my interlocutors with a moral framework to oppose the immoral politics of Dayton Bosnia on a daily basis through adherence to its values and consequently lets them hope for normal and dignified lives. 'Hope,' in its various forms and synonyms, was one of the most frequently mentioned words in my interviews with them. My respondents hoped for normal and dignified life and explained the existing abnormality and hopelessness through the divisions imposed by the Dayton Peace Agreement, which are central to anti-nationalist sentiment of my participants, while antifascism per se is a source of hope for them. A dysfunctional state caused by the Dayton constitution and the resulting abnormality of life in all possible spheres are thus the main factors behind the feeling of hopelessness among my

interlocutors. Due to inability to live normal and dignified lives in the present situation my respondents refer to the past memory of antifascism in Yugoslavia, which they largely consider as the best period in BiH's history. According to them, Dayton Agreement created a status quo where the rule of nationalist and corrupted elites cannot be challenged and the political elites lack accountability, as election outcomes are largely predetermined what contributed to a loss of hope with respect to any political change. The theoretical framework of this chapter is grounded in the works of major contributors to the anthropology of hope, including Arjun Appadurai and Ghassan Hage, as well as Stef Jansen, an expert in this field who has specifically studied hope in relation to BiH. Similar to Jansen's conclusion, I demonstrate how antifascist participants of the study hope for normal lives but in addition to that they hope for what Hage calls "meaningful life and dignified social life" and what Appadurai frames as "good life". I illustrate this through my participants' negative perception of meritocracy and upward mobility in Dayton Bosnia, contrasting it with the more positive view during the Yugoslav period, when antifascism was a core value. The juxtaposition was rationalized by the belief widely shared among my participants that socialist Yugoslavia was a more just regime in terms of respecting people upon their merit and as such anyone who deserved it could live a normal life, having a job, apartment and travel both within Yugoslavia and across Europe. To an extent, from a historical perspective, this could be disputed. However, what matters for the current study of hope among antifascists in Sarajevo today is how they collectively perceive the past and juxtapose it with the present, rather than how it actually was. The current system, as it was unanimously stated by my interlocutors, requires conformism and compliance with the rules of the game imposed by Dayton. According to my participants, an upward mobility is guaranteed if you follow the system's rules by joining one of the nationalist parties. This consensus on the immoral nature of politics and the Dayton party system holds that

joining it implies a loss of face and dignity. This study of hope, with its focus on the future—contrasting with the dominant approach of viewing the country exclusively through the lens of the past—allows for the de-ethnicization of anthropological studies of BiH. This is evident in my participants' reluctance to associate themselves with the ethnic and religious political parties of Dayton Bosnia, which, as they almost unanimously believe, guarantee upward social mobility and economic benefits. However, they reject this path to mobility, as it lacks dignity and contradicts their values—a point further elaborated in the following chapter.

In Chapter 3, I demonstrate how an antifascist stance in opposition to Dayton Bosnia functions as an alternative to nationalized politics in the private lives of my participants and how it allows them to live within the truth and pursue actual freedom despite the oppressive system imposed by the Dayton Peace Agreement. Revisionism in Bosnia and Herzegovina is ubiquitous and together with hope and normality related topics, the issue of revisionism was another central topic raised by my participants in the study. In this chapter, my goal is to discuss revisionism and how it is employed by various political elites in the framework of Dayton Bosnia from the perspective of my antifascist participants. The study of antifascism often goes hand in hand with the study of revisionism. The disputes between rehabilitators of fascism, anti-antifascists or anti-communists, and antifascists are never-ending and can still be observed today across Europe. Despite the defeat of fascism and acknowledgment of its inhumane totalitarian nature, attempts to revise and rehabilitate it while at the same time attributing blame to antifascism have started in the mid 20th century and are widespread even today. Former Yugoslavia, and specifically Bosnia and Herzegovina, can be considered a case *par excellence* within the study of revisionism in relation to antifascism. One can examine the history textbooks across the six former Yugoslav republics and find completely different and often conflicting interpretations of antifascism and the Partisans,

consequently, my antifascist respondents have expressed frustration with widespread revisionism. As discussed in the previous chapter, the divisions imposed by the Dayton Peace Agreement are central to the anti-nationalist sentiment of antifascists. In contrast, for the Dayton elites, these divisions are a source of legitimacy, and their continuation is an existential concern shared by nationalist elites to ensure the prolongation of the Dayton system. It is believed that nationalist elites continually use various revisionist narratives to distract society from pressing socio-economic issues. While many believe that BiH is an ethnically divided country incapable of achieving fully peaceful cohabitation, my antifascist participants argue that this division is artificially promoted by nationalist elites. These elites are primarily concerned with retaining power within the perfectly structured Dayton system, which allows three ethnic political groups to maintain their dominance simultaneously. This tactic ensures that the general population remains preoccupied with infighting and consequently standing by their national representatives in the government, diverting attention from the elites' corruption and nepotism. Critical revisionism within this system is likely to be impossible and thus any degree of consensus regarding historical events such as WWII or the Yugoslav wars and the role of antifascism within both may not be achievable. It is because each side continues to engage in moral revisionism of the past for its own benefit, which partially explains the shared sense of hopelessness about the possibility of change in Dayton Bosnia, as discussed in the previous chapter. It is expected from citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina to navigate within this system by choosing certain revisionist narratives and consequently ethnic and political sides. Nevertheless, my antifascist participants in the study choose to fight against this system by staying outside of the Dayton matrix. I will discuss this position of my participants within the theoretical frameworks suggested by Slavoj Žižek and Václav Havel. This choice of alternative politics on the periphery of the Dayton political system,

implemented through the antifascist stance, implies nonconformity and a rejection of making choices within the imposed *system of coordinates* (Žižek) or *ideological power structures* (Havel). Respectively, this choice represents what Žižek, in his article *What Can Lenin Tell Us about Freedom Today?* (2001), calls "actual freedom" or "politics of truth," and what Havel refers to as "living within the truth" in *The Power of the Powerless* (2018). Both theoretical frameworks, while implementing different concepts, discuss a similar attitude toward oppressive regimes, which parallels the attitude of my participants in relation to Dayton Bosnia. However, as I will demonstrate, there is a significant difference. Žižek and Havel advocate for a radical stance in opposition to imposed oppressive structures by completely changing the system of coordinates or power structures across the body of politics. In the case of young antifascists in Sarajevo, they choose to live outside the dominant political structure but do not directly challenge it on a political or state level. Some of them refer to their community as to a bubble within which they live and stay outside the larger political system. They choose an alternative system of coordinates, as suggested by Žižek, but only within their private lives. This can be seen in their decision to remain anonymous in this study, as well as in their demonstrated lack of desire to directly participate in the political life of the country. They largely abstain from voting in elections but do not consider participating in them such as for example starting a political movement, as Havel would suggest. This tendency could be explained by a low capacity for aspiration and hope in relation to changing the political system, as discussed in the previous chapter.

Concluding the dissertation, Chapter 4 departs from the context of Dayton Bosnia elaborated in the first three chapters and places youth antifascism in Sarajevo within the recent global trends and attempts to demonstrate why antifascism remains peaceful in Bosnia and Herzegovina while across the West throughout the last two decades the militant trend among antifascists has become

significant. Even when a Mass commemorating Bleiburg victims and Nazi-allied soldiers was held in Sarajevo in 2020, the protests remained entirely peaceful. The event, traditionally held in Bleiburg, Austria, was affected by the restrictions. Although it is questionable whether Covid-19 restrictions were the primary reason for the event's cancellation, as authorities and NGOs in Austria had already been concerned for several years about Ustaša symbols present at the commemorations and their association with fascism. Controversially, an alternative commemoration was scheduled to take place in Sarajevo's Sacred Heart Cathedral. Taking into consideration the horrors carried out by the Ustaše in BiH there is no surprise that this event sparked mass protest in Sarajevo, nevertheless, it was peaceful and there were no reports of violence. The nonviolent nature of antifascism in Sarajevo distinguishes it from the more radical approaches adopted by antifascists across Europe or North America. Whatever fascism aims to destroy antifascism strives to protect, the values that the former defends the latter aspires to demolish. At the same time, there is an incongruity associated with antifascism, which is addressed in the related literature criticizing its illiberal nature. The opponents highlight that there is a slippery slope issue directing antifascism towards illiberalism, others even more critically equate it to fascism and Nazism. Using the example of the Enlightenment's intolerance, this chapter will examine how transformative ideologies that seek to morally reshape societies according to specific dogmas—such as antifascism, which explicitly aims at the moral transformation of societies across borders—tend to become illiberal despite initially embracing liberal values. For example, instances of street violence directed at perceived fascists and general militarization of antifascists in places like Sweden, Greece and the U.S. gave notoriety to antifascists across the West. Nevertheless, antifascism in BiH does not follow this militant form of resistance, on the contrary, it remains peaceful. Through a comparative analysis it will be illustrated why militant form of

antifascism is not emerging in the case of BiH compared to three cases mentioned. It is concluded that the absence of a militant form of antifascism in BiH is conditioned by two factors: first, it is not reactionary but rather a persistent tradition; second, it is ideologically rooted in the communist tradition rather than the anarchist one, which is more inclined toward violence and militarization.

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Chapter 1

Antifascism through a decolonial lens: a comparative study of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kazakhstan

Introduction

In this chapter I look from a decolonial perspective at the question "Why has antifascism been preserved in the collective memory in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), playing an important role in the daily lives of the participants of my study, while in my home country—despite its significant role in the antifascist struggle during WWII—this memory is almost non-existent?" This question explains why I became interested in this topic in the first place. Both Kazakhstan and BiH were subjected to imperial rulers based in distant metropoles for centuries and later remained constituent and minor subjects within larger communist federations, only gaining the opportunity to establish modern statehood in the 1990s. I begin by introducing the conceptual and theoretical framework of postcolonial studies to further assess whether a decolonial approach can be applied to the cases under study. After establishing this foundation, I apply a decolonial lens to demonstrate how the knowledge of antifascism in both countries is constructed differently due to their distinct post-colonial and post-socialist contexts. It is argued here that Kazakhstan selectively preserves historical narratives while avoiding direct confrontation with Russia's memory politics. Instead, it reinterprets Soviet war heroes to serve national identity, while antifascism—seen as an imposed Soviet ideology—falls outside the scope of state-sanctioned memory. In this process of selective remembrance, antifascism is erased—unlike in BiH, where the lack of a clear future due to its neocolonial condition ensures its persistence. In BiH, antifascism is not only an anti-nationalist ideology but also a symbol of a time marked by greater economic stability, personal freedoms, and state autonomy—elements that are now absent. Rather than fostering peace and prosperity, the

Dayton Agreement has led to a neocolonial state devoid of hope. In this context, antifascism persists in BiH as a response to the constraints imposed by Dayton Bosnia.

At my ethnographic site, *Društveno-kulturni centar* (*DKC*), I was able to delve into discussions of antifascism with the participants of my study as they self-identify as such. However, the ubiquitousness of this term spans beyond the walls of the formerly abandoned house of writers. Whenever I mentioned to anyone in Sarajevo that I was conducting research on the culture of antifascism in this city, I consistently received responses that reflected their deep knowledge of the topic, as well as the general public tends to have strong opinions on the subject. In addition, antifascism is visibly imprinted on the city's landscape through 'antifa' graffiti on buildings and spaces identified with antifascist legacy, for instance, cafes and bars named after Walter—a fictional character from the 1972 movie about a Yugoslav partisan leader defending Sarajevo. Official rhetoric about antifascism is widespread and ongoing, often becoming a source of disputes and revisionism among political leaders from each ethnic group at the highest levels.

Photographs by David Orlov

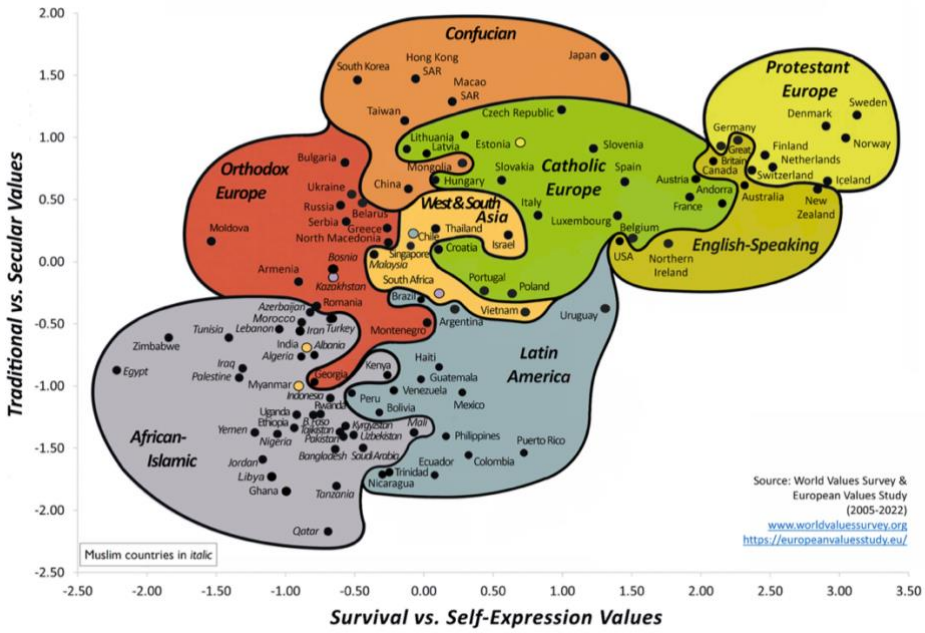
Traumas and glories are the fundamental historical events that shape a society's perceptions and interpretations of political reality, as well as understanding of what constitutes the pride, shame, fear, or revenge of the group (Zheng 2017, 1-12). It is no surprise that the antifascist legacy, along with the memory of the Yugoslav Partisans and World War II, still play a significant role in BiH, as it represents both trauma and glory—the Nazi occupation and the subsequent victory, respectively. Why, then, is this not the case in Kazakhstan, where encountering the concept of antifascism is nearly impossible, whether in official discourse or daily life? A Google search on antifascism in Kazakhstan reveals its near absence, with only four minor events over the past decade such as *The White Rose* exhibition, devoted to the antifascist struggle of German students against Hitler, held in Astana in 2013 (KazTAG 2013). In 2015, Nursultan Nazarbayev and Xi Jinping met in China during the commemoration of the 70th anniversary of the World Anti-fascist War (MFA China 2015). In 2019, reporter of Zona.kz newspaper interviewed Bkhytzhan Kopbayev whom the publication identified as an unofficial leader of the antifascists of Kazakhstan who, as it is claimed, are active in social networks and attract interest in society, which was factually untrue in 2019 and remains so at present (Yergaliyev 2019). Finally, in 2019, Laila Akhmetova, Chairman of the Eurasian People's Assembly, visited the Kumrovec village where Tito was born to meet with the Chairman of the Union of Anti-Fascist Fighters and Anti-Fascists and discuss potential cooperation (Eurasian People's Assembly 2023).

A possible explanation could be that BiH was directly affected by the war, having been occupied by the fascist forces and subjected to immediate violence by both the Nazis and their puppet state, the Independent State of Croatia. Although the territory of Kazakhstan was not directly occupied, the country made a significant contribution to the fight against fascism, with 1.2 million Kazakhstanis—around 20% of the republic's population, including 450,000 ethnic

Kazakhs—mobilized for the war effort, resulting in the loss of 601,939 lives, or about 12% of the population, including 125,500 ethnic Kazakhs (Rees 2020, 4). In addition to the lives lost on the battlefields, those who remained behind produced ammunition and exported resources for the army while starving themselves, as collectivization prioritized demands beyond the needs of the local population. My grandmother lost her father and two brothers in the war, and her remaining seven siblings died at home in Kyzylorda city due to malnutrition and minor illnesses as a result of Soviet collectivization and industrialization policies; by the end of the war, only my grandmother and her mother remained from a family of twelve. In my childhood we often talked with her about the war and antifascism while passing by the memorials or attending annual parades commemorating the Victory Day. As a child in the 1990s, I remember that the shooting games often involved mutual accusations such as 'fascist,' as well as triumphantly yelling war associated phrases in German like 'hände hoch' (hands up) or 'Hitler kaput' (Hitler is over). This memory and narratives are not there anymore. Kazakhstan has not celebrated Victory Day for the past five years, and our president rarely attends the celebrations held in Moscow. The significance of the war appears to be diminishing, with a growing alternative narrative suggesting that for Kazakhstan, it was a conflict fought on the side of one colonizer against a potential other colonizer.

This emerging perspective has led me to consider the differences between the studied cases regarding the significance attributed to the memory of antifascism from a decolonial perspective. Both Kazakhstan and BiH can claim premodern forms of statehood and independence. However, until the breakup of the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia, for centuries, both have been subjected to rulers based in distant metropoles. As a result, both states acquired the opportunity to realize modern statehood only in the 1990s. Both cases share an imperial legacy, with Kazakhstan having been ruled by the Russian Empire, and BiH by the Ottoman Empire and later the Austro-Hungarian

Empire. Additionally, both share a socialist legacy, as they became constituent and minor subjects within the larger communist federations following the collapse of their respective empires: the Soviet Union for Kazakhstan and Yugoslavia for BiH. This common both imperial and socialist legacy as well as Islamic heritage create similar habitus in the studied cases. For instance, the Inglehart-Welzel Cultural Map, which demonstrates cultural values across the globe, shows that, despite their geographic remoteness, the dots identifying Kazakhstan and BiH overlap more than any other pair of countries. Why, then, the collective memory of antifascism is so different, and how can a decolonial perspective shed light on this difference? I employ a decolonial perspective to analyze how historical narratives in relation to antifascism in Kazakhstan and BiH are constructed, revealing the underlying interests and positionalities that shape these subjective realities. Decoloniality shifts the focus to the ways historical processes are described and interpreted rather than to what they actually are or might be. By applying a decolonial lens my goal is to demonstrate how the knowledge of antifascism in both countries is constructed differently due to their distinct post-colonial and post-socialist contexts.



The Inglehart-Welzel World Cultural Map - World Values Survey 7 (2023)

In fact, numerous East European, Balkan, and Central Asian states share these historical trajectories, as former imperial and later socialist peripheral subjects within larger political constituents, whether directly colonized or as satellite states. Thus, any could be chosen for a comparative analysis to demonstrate why and how antifascist legacy is preserved or dismissed in postcolonial and post-socialist scenarios. Besides my positionality as a citizen of Kazakhstan and thus having firsthand knowledge of it, what are the other reasons for specifically choosing this case for a comparative study in this chapter? Firstly, the experiences of the former Yugoslav states will be discussed further, with the focus on Croatian and Serbian interpretation of the antifascist memory, as these are the two other major ethnic groups within BiH, in a separate chapter devoted to the question of revisionism of antifascism among ethnic elites in the country. Secondly, unlike in BiH where largely positive image of the communist period is preserved, most East European states that were part of the Eastern Bloc have, to varying degrees, embraced a radical memory policy regarding the socialist and antifascist past, known as the "two totalitarianisms" narrative. This implies that both the Nazi occupation and communist regimes constitute a totalitarian past that must be overcome. As a result, antifascist memory has largely been eliminated. Concerning this point, Kazakhstan retains a more complex relationship with its Soviet legacy due to a continued dependence on Russian memory politics because of the geopolitical situation and proximity to Russia. Thus, despite successful legitimization of independent statehood, Kazakhstan offers a case where postcolonial ambitions have led to the adaptation, rather than complete erasure, of communist and WWII legacies. Thus, the inability of Kazakhstan to promote a narrative of two totalitarianisms, unlike in Poland, the Baltic states, or Ukraine, enables a more nuanced exploration of how a case such as BiH, which is found in a neocolonial position under the post-Dayton structure, continuously promotes antifascist history and younger generation of antifascists

positively interpret the Yugoslav and antifascist past in response to a current situation with no clear new national paradigm. Finally, with regards to other Central Asian states sharing similar colonial and socialist past, Kazakhstan's involvement in WWII was comparatively more significant as well as it was culturally more colonized than any other state in the region by both Tsarist and Soviet regimes. Thus, the choice of Kazakhstan for a comparative study about antifascism from a decolonial perspective is the most reasonable.

Conceptualization and theoretical framework

This chapter took shape in May 2024 after I attended a conference in Rijeka titled 'Postcolonial, Decolonial, Postimperial, Deimperial.' The title initially seemed pretentious to me due to its use of ubiquitous academic jargon, but more importantly, because I was a layperson in this field of study unable to fully comprehend its terminology. At the conference, I had the valuable opportunity to learn about the importance of conceptualization from two of the most influential scholars in Oriental, decolonial, and post-socialist studies—Maria Todorova and Madina Tlostanova—both keynote speakers who focus on regions relevant to my case studies. After attending the conference and further exploring their works, along with incorporating insights from the local context provided by Alima Bissenova, a postcolonial scholar from Nazarbayev University, I concluded that a decolonial lens is the most effective approach to understanding the differences in the historical memory of antifascism in Kazakhstan and BiH.

Maria Todorova (2024) began her lecture with a warning: "Not every form of subjugation and power hegemony can be termed colonial, not every resistance is decolonization. There are consequences to careless attitude to concepts. Imprecision makes the concepts unworkable. This leads to misidentification, misconceptions and errors." For instance, decoloniality is not the same as decolonization, and the latter is not a synonym of anticolonialism as both belong to varying

historical and political moments despite the contextual similarities (Tlostanova 2024). Colonialism is associated with a specific historical phenomenon meaning it took place in a certain geographic location within a definite period of time while coloniality refers to its long-term consequences that we may witness at present (Tlostanova 2019, 166; Bissenova 2022, 162). In comparison with the condition of coloniality, postcoloniality implies a pre- and post-independence scenario, where societies that were once colonies or parts of empires seek to redefine themselves through self-reflection and investigation of their colonial pasts (Bissenova 2022, 162). Coloniality may take place even in communities that have not experienced colonialism (ibid.). Decolonization implies achievement of tangible results as it refers to specific processes to overcome this state of coloniality while decoloniality refuses the practical possibility of achieving such results (Tlostanova 2024).

Postcolonial thought focused on the British colonial experience and scholars associated with it assumed its universal applicability while it was later illustrated that the experiences in Central Asia or Latin America were different in many ways (Tlostanova 2019, 165). Decolonial though was developing in opposition to this dominant approach but more importantly it offered a step further. Tlostanova (ibid.) suggests that postcoloniality implies a *condition* – "a certain human existential situation which we have often no power of choosing", decoloniality is the next step as it is an *option* – "consciously chosen as a political, ethical, and epistemic positionality and an entry point into agency." However, despite definitional similarity, it is not decolonization. Decoloniality came into being following the collapse of the socialist system and at the same time with the establishment of the "neoliberal global capitalism as the only legitimate narrative on the planet" (Tlostanova 2024). This situation creates impossibility of decolonization and democratization of the state as due to the collapse of the former there is no way for a Marxist revolution and we have

to navigate in the 'wonderful' neoliberal modernity without a choice to escape (ibid.). Indeed, it is questionable whether Kazakhstan's attempts at decolonization truly lead to decolonization, or if the country finds itself in a state of hybrid coloniality. We have not sufficiently reflected on our earlier colonial experiences and now face new global challenges. In the Soviet Union, our 'abnormality' and 'backwardness' were attributed to our traditional nomadic and 'uncivilized' ways (Bissenova 2022, 165). Today, we are perceived as such due to poor ecology, low democracy indexes, and human rights violations (ibid.). Consequently, we strive to achieve normality under the new neoliberal canons of modernity which indicates our continued struggle under colonialism in its new contemporary forms.

Due to the impossibility of democratization and decolonization of state, decolonialists suggest an ideational interpretation of modernity and shifting the focus to the ways historical processes are described and interpreted rather than to what they actually are or might be. For decolonialists there is no objective knowledge as knowledge(s) are constructed by people and their interests, from a "particular spatial, historical and corporeal positionality" (Tlostanova 2024). A decolonial approach to my study allows to reveal these interests and positionalities and thus to understand how and why the memory of antifascism is shaped in certain ways in each case. So, I employ a decolonial perspective to analyze how historical narratives in relation to antifascism in Kazakhstan and BiH are constructed, revealing the underlying interests and positionalities that shape these subjective realities. Consequently, this approach is intuitively appealing because, throughout the dissertation, I do not attempt to reconstruct what life in Yugoslavia was actually like by examining historical sources. Instead, I focus solely on my participants' subjective interpretations of the Yugoslav, WWII and antifascist past. In that sense, a brief clarification of how memory and nostalgia are treated here might be required. According to Maurice Halbwachs

(1992, 224, cited in Wang 2018, 13), one the pioneers of memory studies, "collective memory reconstructs its various recollections to accord with contemporary ideas and preoccupations." Following this, with respect to my participants' memory of antifascism and communism is on what they choose to remember or forget, as it allows to reveal their "current values, perceptions, and future objectives" (Wang 2018, 6). Yugonostalgia has attracted wide interest in academia and has been extensively explored by scholars across various social science disciplines. As such, in the current dissertation, I do not seek to elaborate on this concept. However, it is important to note that it is often approached from a negative and normative perspective, as demonstrated by Tanja Petrović (2016, 509): "Positive memories of life and work in socialism are dismissed as nostalgia, while the memories of those who testify about crimes and violence conducted by the communist authorities prevail in media discourses and are taken as objective testimonies with the legitimacy of historiographical sources." In my case, I do not provide a normative assessment of Yugoslavia or antifascism specifically but rather treat it as a site of memory—in Pierre Nora's (1989, 7) words, 'a *lieu de mémoire* where memory crystallizes and secretes itself'—and examine how it shapes the lives of my participants, their behavior, and their beliefs.

Before proceeding further, and in light of the aforementioned warning by Todorova about the importance of proper conceptualization in postcolonial studies, the first significant question to consider is whether decolonial thinking can be applied to the cases discussed in this chapter. What Madina Tlostanova (2024) frames as a decolonial vogue refers to a tendency in contemporary academia when scholars try to decolonize everything from nature, fashion and diet to university, and decolonization of many of such subjects is practically impossible because you would have to reinvent them completely as decolonizing them would lead to their collapse. Maria Todorova (2024) similarly warns scholars about the importance of careful conceptualization, cautioning

against the indiscriminate application of terms like ‘colonial’ or ‘postcolonial’. In her view, the Balkans do not represent a case of colonization, at least not in a modern sense. So, for a decolonial approach to take place there has to be a postcolonial situation. Thus, to avoid this critique highlighted by both renowned scholars in the field of colonial and post-socialist studies, for an application of decolonial thought to our cases we need to figure out if BiH and Kazakhstan indeed have been colonized at any point of their respective histories and consequently if there is a situation of coloniality present. Answer to this question implies consideration of multiple sub-questions such as can Ottoman and Austro-Hungarian empires be considered as colonial powers in relation to the former case? Was acquisition of Central Asian territories in the 19th century a form of colonization in relation to the latter one? How can we interpret the socialist regimes to which both BiH and Kazakhstan were subjected throughout the 20th century? What is the answer to a commonly asked question whether Soviet Union was an empire, and if it was, was it a colonial empire? A superficial response to these questions could be an assumption that without a doubt both BiH and Kazakhstan have been colonies as neither the former nor the latter had a history of statehood in a modern sense before the collapse of socialist regimes in the 1990s and have been governed from far away metropoles for centuries. Nevertheless, there is no consensus in academia. While there is arguably more or less of an agreement among scholars that Kazakhstan can be considered as a formerly colonized region, the situation with conceptualizing BiH in this fashion is more ambiguous. Thus, an evaluation of histories of both cases under the Ottoman, Austro-Hungarian, and Russian empires and under the socialist regimes of Yugoslavia and Soviet Union would further be considered with a purpose to establish whether BiH and Kazakhstan are former colonies or can be positioned in a state of coloniality at present. Only a positive answer to all of the questions above would let us proceeding to application of decolonial thinking in order to

answer the research question of the present chapter: Why has antifascism been preserved in the collective memory of BiH, playing an important role in the daily lives of the participants of my study, while in my home country—despite its significant role in the antifascist struggle during WWII—this memory is almost non-existent?

The case of Kazakhstan: assessing its colonial past

The history of the institution of statehood in a modern sense, in relation to Kazakhstan, may be questionable due to its centuries-long period of being governed from Saint Petersburg or Moscow. This narrative is often used by Russian propagandists as the controversial statement belittling Kazakhstan's history and statehood was made at the highest level in 2014 when Putin stated "The Kazakhs never had any statehood" (Najibullah 2014, cited in Rees 2020, 8). In response, following the idea introduced by Nursultan Nazarbayev, a decree was issued on December 31 of the same year, declaring 2015 as the year to celebrate 550 years of Kazakh Khanate (Masimov 2014). Although some history textbooks draw a lineage between Kazakhs and Scythians or Huns, a more agreed period of ethnogenesis is the mid-15th century. In the 1450s Kazakh khans Zhanibek and Kerei established the Kazakh Khanate when they arrived at the territory of current Southern Kazakhstan after they rebelled against Uzbek khan (Carmack 2019, 2). For almost three centuries Kazakhs governed themselves through a system of three *zhuz* (hordes) – the Little Zhuz in the territory of contemporary Western Kazakhstan, the Middle in Central Kazakhstan, and the Great Zhuz in Southern Kazakhstan. The period of accession to Russian Empire began in 1730 when Abulkhair Khan of the Little Zhuz, seeking patronage and protection, pledged loyalty to Empress Anna Ioanovna (Bodger 1980, 40). Full control over the Kazakh Hordes was realized by the Tsarist Russia in 1854 (Carmack 2019, 2). Towards the fall of tsarism there was an attempt at rebellion against the imperial government but it did not make any difference as immediately after the end of World War I the communist regime took control over the territory of Central Asia. Thus,

Kazakhstan, same as BiH, was able to realize independence and build a modern nation state only after the fall of socialism in the 1990s.

Despite the seemingly intuitive conclusion that Kazakhstan was a colony for several centuries—having lost autonomy in the first half of the 18th century and being governed by Russians during both the Tsarist and socialist periods—there is a lack of consensus in academia regarding whether either of these can actually be considered as colonial regimes in relation to the Kazakhs. Despite the certainty expressed by influential scholars such as Todorova (2024) regarding the presence of colonialism in Central Asia—"There is no question that not only in Ukraine today, but also in the Baltics, Central Asia, the Northern Caucasus, and Eastern Europe, from Poland to Bulgaria, the period of Soviet dominance is represented as colonialism, and now it is time to decolonize from this legacy"—the scholarly debate remains ongoing. Whether Russian imperial rule in Central Asia was colonial in nature is questioned on the same grounds as Ottoman and Austro-Hungarian rule in relation to BiH as it is argued that the Russian Empire was not a modern colonial empire. The same argument, however, is made in relation to the Soviet Union. While it is largely agreed that it was an empire, it is also argued that it was not colonial. Such as Yuri Slezkine (2000, 227) questions this ambiguity and makes a similar claim to Todorova's conclusion: "The Soviet Union was an empire-in the sense of being very big, bad, asymmetrical, hierarchical, heterogeneous, and doomed. But was it a modern colonial empire? Does it belong on the same trash heap as the Dutch, French, and British imperial states that consisted of a national core and overseas dependencies?" This perception is also strengthened by the Russian scholarship that predominately portrays both historical periods as non-colonial and additionally assumes that the perception of Russian Empire or Soviet Union as either colonial or not depends on whether current relations with Russia are negative or positive (Gorshenina 2021, 190-202). This tendency

is not new. During the Cold War, geopolitical rivals of the Soviet Union—many of whom had only recently shed their own colonies after World War II—used similar rhetoric against the USSR, particularly regarding its Central Asian territories with Muslim populations (Abashin 2016, 28–29). Consequently, Western academia has historically regarded the Soviet Union as a colonial empire. While debates persist about the colonial nature of Soviet rule in certain regions, there is little doubt when it comes to Central Asia (Heathershaw 2016, 90). In response, ideologically driven Soviet scholars sought to portray Soviet–Central Asian relations as non-colonial (Abashin 2016, 29).

Dittmar Schorkowitz (2019, 126) argues that Russian historians exploited the language in order to euphemize the colonial nature of the imperial conquests. So instead of such words as *pokorenie* (subjugation) or *zavoevanie* (conquest) a preference was given to more neutral terminology such as *prisoedinenie* (annexation) or *osvoenie* (assimilation), as well as even positive vocabulary such as *dobrovol'noe vkhozhdenie* which has a meaning of voluntary entry (ibid.). The goal was to distinguish itself from Western colonial empires by presenting a contrastingly positive attitude toward newly acquired subject populations (ibid.). This narrative persists in Kazakhstan and is even reflected in history textbooks (Burkhanov and Sharipova 2023, 1201). It asserts that Abulkhair Khan of the Little Zhuz sought protection from the Russian Empire—and thus voluntarily joined it—due to economic hardships and threats from multiple regional powers, rather than as a result of immediate colonization by the Russian Empire itself (ibid.). From a decolonial perspective, the presence of such a narrative in the USSR can be explained by the state's need to legitimize former imperial conquests. This version of history is seen as benign, explaining why the colonization of Kazakhstan by the Tsarist regime was preferable to the potential acquisition of these territories by the capitalist empires despite a 'hypocritical' Soviet attempt to decolonize

former colonies. For the current political regime in Kazakhstan, this narrative avoids the humiliating notion that the country's lands were forcibly taken. Instead, the argument that Abulkhair Khan had to choose between two evils is preferred, as it preserves national pride despite the difficult circumstances. The neutral or positive vocabulary used by Russian scholars obscures the deaths of millions of people during centuries of imperial expansion (Schorkowitz 2019, 126). According to David C. Moore (2001, 116, as cited in Kudaibergenova 2016, 919–920), in response to the violence and atrocities committed—including "the mass and arbitrary relocation of entire non-Russian peoples; the ironic Soviet national fixing of countless formerly less-defined identities; the related tortured intertwining of the Uzbek–Kyrgyz–Tajik border to guarantee ethnic strife; the genocidal settlement of millions of Kazakh nomads from 1929 to 1934; the forced monoculture across Central Asia and the consequent ecological disaster of the Aral Sea"—a counterargument defending the noncolonial nature of the Russian Empire suggests that Russian subjects, in both the Tsarist and Soviet periods, were equally affected.

Another explanation for noncolonial nature of both Russian and Soviet rule in Central Asia is what Madina Tlostanova (2019) calls "external imperial differences." This perspective is similar to the below mentioned concept of *nesting orientalisms*, in the case of BiH. According to Tlostanova (ibid., 170), in the post-enlightenment Europe there are imperial hierarchies and the ones that are closer to 'proper' Europe are primary and legitimate empires while more distant ones are of secondary class and in this respect are considered as colonies rather than colonial powers constantly catching up with Great Britain, France, or the U.S. at present – both the Ottoman Empire and Russian Empire were founded on principally different conditions and considered as backward and never able to catch up with modernity. These empires are aware of this status quo and respond aggressively to both more advanced colonial powers and their own colonized subjects – what

arguably explains Russia's current invasion of Ukraine – and grounds the foundation for an argument that Russia is a subaltern Empire (Morozov 2015). In this respect, Russian colonial settlers in the region, as Willard Sunderland (2003, 114) argues, did not consider themselves as colonizers or superior in comparison with the local communities in terms of national, religious, or civilization values. However, whether actual European Empires considered Russia as an equal Empire or not, or even if the Tsarist Empire had an imperial inferiority complex or not, does not change the reality of its colonial attitudes towards Central Asian communities. Gorshenina (2021, 191-192), based on primary sources from the Tsarist generals and administrators sent to the region, demonstrates that they regarded occupation of the lands as colonization and conquest and the discussed differences with European colonization were not about the nature of occupation but about its normative aspects only, such as if it was "'better,' 'less destructive' and 'more humane' than the Western ones" (ibid.). Which also points out to a presence of colonial civilizational mission of the Tsarist Empire that it ascribed to itself. Additionally, despite a presence of a narrative of voluntary accession of Kazakhs to the Russian Empire mentioned earlier, Aziz Burkhanov and Dina Sharipova (2023) illustrate how this narrative is groundless because of the constant uprisings by Kazakh clans throughout the whole period of Russian rule up until the breakup of the Empire. Henry F. Carey and Rafal Raciborski (2004, 200) also argue that despite a general disagreement regarding the colonial nature of the Russian Empire there can be no doubt that Central Asian Muslim communities were brutally colonized what may be demonstrated by numerous sources:

> In 1917 Central Asia was a typical colonial society, autocratically governed by aliens, with a growing settler population, a vast cultural and linguistic gap between Central Asians and immigrants, and a dependent primary economy (Fieldhouse 1966, 339, cited in Carey and Raciborski 2004, 210).
>
> Middle Asia became the perfect example of a classical colony on account of the deliberate encouragement of the cultivation of cotton. With the growing migration of Russian peasants the colonial settlements expanded and led to the further displacement of nomadic herdsmen, mountain peoples and hunters, and to an even greater dependence on the center. Thus the Asiatic areas of Russia can be described unreservedly

> as colonies, not only on account of their role as suppliers of raw materials and markets for finished products, but also on account of their relatively low socio-economic and socio-cultural level of development, and the exclusion of their indigenous population in legal terms (Kappeler 2001, 321, cited in Carey and Raciborski 2004, 210).

In this respect, the Soviet Union presented itself as an anticolonial liberator—at least, that was how it was portrayed. Its postcoloniality was grounded in the policies of *korenizatsiya*, a form of affirmative action implemented during the first two decades of socialist rule, which aimed to grant cultural and territorial autonomy to indigenous communities such as the Kazakhs (Heathershaw 2016, 91; Bissenova 2022, 163). Due to the presence of korenizatsiya policies, Adeeb Khalid (2006, 238, cited in Heathershow 2016, 91) questioned Soviet colonialism and instead suggested it was a "modern mobilizational state." Arguably, this anticolonial struggle was initiated to legitimize the state in opposition to the former Tsarist evil rule. Within Marxist thought Central Asian struggles under the Russian Empire were presented as a class struggle which was eventually possible to be overcome with the help of the Soviets (Gorshenina 2021, 191). Indeed, the differential attitudes toward former imperial subjects began to shift, as indigenous populations and Russian settlers were increasingly homogenized, while local communities retained a degree of autonomy until the late 1930s. However, the initial promises and ambitions were not fulfilled. Eventually, the Kazakh intelligentsia, which had been promoted to executive positions as part of the korenizatsiya initiative, was exterminated by the end of 1930s. While the administration in Moscow continued to consider Central Asians full citizens of the state—unlike in Tsarist Russia—the initial successes of korenizatsiya were later reevaluated. The egalitarian Friendship Doctrine was replaced by the idea that the so-called backward subjects needed to be enlightened and modernized under Russian patronage (Carmack 2019, 3). Despite an initial anticolonial intent, as Walter Kolarz stated "Soviet nationalities policy, instead of destroying Russian imperialism, has in reality tried to preserve and to consolidate it" (1952, 303, cited in Schorkowitz 2019, 130). The

degree of cultural destruction and ethnic particularism under the Soviet rule is incomparable with the earlier colonial period as the Tsarist administration did not intervene to the same extent as its successor. As Alima Bissenova (2022, 163) demonstrates, cultural and economic modernization that followed korenizatsiya with the goal to overcome presumed cultural backwardness of the Muslim communities in Central Asia has contributed to a postcolonial complex of inferiority that remains evident even at present. For example, speaking Russian with an accent is often seen as a sign of backwardness and rural origins. Francine Hirsch (2005) summarizes this process—beginning with korenizatsiya and later leading to the destruction of indigenous cultures—as a policy of "state evolutionism." It maintained that indigenous communities first needed to develop into culturally advanced nationalities, and then evolve into a unified Soviet people (ibid., 86-88). This situation created a perception that eventually there was no racism in the USSR. Tlostanova (2018, 19), for instance, provides the example of an American traveler in Tashkent who is surprised to see both 'whites' and indigenous people riding the same trams and sitting together—something still uncommon in the U.S. at the time. As a result, the traveler assumes that there were no political repressions or ethnic divisions in the USSR. This assumption, however, does not take into consideration the potential for racism to thrive without the concept of race. In the USSR, modernity and backwardness were centered around the ideas of industrialization, urbanism, and language. Passengers on a tram were considered backward and inferior if they came from a rural background, were uneducated, or could not speak Russian without an accent. The white passengers applied racial stigma to those they presumed to be backward, despite traveling together. On propagandist banners demonstrating friendship and equality of people coming from different cultural and national backgrounds of the USSR it was always a Russian who was in the center with other

‘white’ individuals on the sides while Central Asian or Northern Caucasian representatives would be behind or below them (ibid., 10).

In conclusion, there is no doubt that both Tsarist and Soviet rule in Central Asia were not only imperial but also colonial. A postcolonial condition persists, and thus a decolonial lens is justified in approaching the question of antifascism. Additionally, the certainty of this concluding statement is reinforced by an event that took place in Kazakhstan after I had submitted the first draft of this chapter. The Institute for International Studies at MGIMO, under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Russia, conducted a roundtable at Kazakh National University, where Kazakhstan’s colonial past was discussed. Participants argued that Western-supported organizations promote provocative and scientifically unfounded narratives about Kazakhstan’s past within the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union (Kiikov 2024). It was stated that there is no need to “get stuck in the past” but rather to promote a common discourse of decolonization for both Russia and Kazakhstan (ibid.). This event exemplifies the persistence of Kazakhstan’s colonial past and its ongoing state of coloniality, as Russia continues to impose specific narratives on independent Kazakhstan, particularly regarding sensitive historical topics. In doing so, it attempts to limit Kazakhstan’s ability to independently assess its own history.

The case of Bosnia and Herzegovina: assessing its colonial past

In scholarly literature on the Balkans, it is highly contested whether the region was ever colonized. Following Edward Said’s (1978) conceptualization of Orientalism, Pleiades of scholars have commented on the subject and in the process of either confronting Said or applying his finding to the Balkan conditions produced ideas of ‘balkanism’, ‘nesting orientalisms’, ‘the invention of Eastern Europe’ and other (Karkov and Valiavicharska 2019, 38-39). In many ways similar but at the same time fundamentally conflicting, these ideas need to be discussed to clarify whether there

is a postcolonial situation in the Balkans so that a decolonial approach could be applied to the study of antifascism in BiH. Despite the contestation on behalf of some influential scholars regarding the state of coloniality in the Balkans, postcolonial thinking in relation to the region is a common tendency in academia (Majstorović and Vučkovac 2016, 150). The previewed inherited vices attributed to the region juxtaposed to the civilized and normal Europe facilitate such approaches (ibid.). This tendency may be explained because of the Balkan's peripherality which I believe is a sufficient factor to claim postcolonial conditionality as well as the fact the region has lacked autonomy and has been governed by different empires over centuries and later by a socialist state. In addition, the period of Austro-Hungarian rule in BiH, which is the focus of the study, is arguably a unique case of modern colonialism in the Balkans. Additionally, orientalism and Balkanism provide grounds for decolonial methodology. Finally, BiH may be considered as one of the Orients within the Orient. Cumulatively, these factors provide enough grounds to claim that there is a postcolonial situation in BiH and thus a decolonial approach of my study may be legitimized.

To begin with, a brief historical overview of BiH needs to be provided. As Francine Friedman (1996, 10) argues "hard facts to clarify early Bosnian history are decidedly lacking", nevertheless, historical origins of Bosnians as a separate group of people, who were neither Serbs nor Croats, at least in terms of religious self-identification, cannot be rejected. From the middle of the twelfth until the late fourteenth century, Bosnia had its kingdom and lived separately due to a mountainous landscape (Tracy 2016). Religiously, the church of Bogomils on the territory of Bosnian Kingdom stood firmly against the attempts of being baptized by either Catholic or Orthodox churches (Tomasevic 2001). The process of occupation of the territory by the Ottoman Empire that culminated in the second half of the fifteenth century (Glenny 2012) ended autonomy

of this territory and it remained so until the outbreak of the Yugoslav Wars, following which BiH has become independent for the first time in its modern history, similar to Kazakhstan. The end of the centuries long Ottoman rule came following the Russo-Turkish War. In 1878, according to the decisions of the Berlin Congress, the Austro-Hungarian Empire occupied Bosnia (Babuna 1999; Glenny 2012). Benjamin Kállay from the Habsburg Joint Minister of Finance was appointed to rule the territory, however, Kállay's policies failed to hinder the unification of the South Slavs, which was one of his major political goals. Following WWI, the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes was established – BiH became its constitutive element. In 1941, BiH became a subject of the Independent State of Croatia that mimicked European fascist regimes. During the Socialist period, BiH has achieved a relative degree of autonomy within Yugoslavia but still was not an autonomous actor even within the federation. So, despite a short-lived period of pre-modern autonomous statehood in the Middle Ages, the current Bosnian territory has been historically governed by distant metropolises. Thus, an intuitive guess would suggest that BiH was a colony, having been colonized by several empires, nevertheless, there is no consensus among scholars regarding whether BiH's past constitutes a case of colonialism.

The starting point in this scholarly dispute is undoubtedly Maria Todorova, one of the most influential contemporary scholars in Balkan studies. Since the publication of her magnum opus *Imagining the Balkans* (1997), Todorova has consistently argued that the Balkans have never been colonized in the modern sense and that Balkanism is not a subcategory of Orientalism, a concept central to postcolonial studies. According to Todorova (2024), early-modern and modern European overseas empires were characterized by mercantilism, industry and capitalism. In that sense, neither the Ottoman Empire nor the Austro-Hungarian Empire in the Balkans can be

conceptualized as colonial empires. Todorova (ibid.) provides four essential features of modern colonial empires that were not present in the Ottoman empire:

- There was no profound institutional legal distinction between the metropole and its dependencies;
- The Ottoman Empire was not a previous stable entity that colonized others, rather, it evolved into an elaborate state machine and empire as it shaped itself into an expanding polity that functioned as a unified whole across all its territories;
- There was no "amelioration complex" or civilizing mission comparable to that of the French or English empires;
- There was no lasting cultural hegemonic residue from the Ottoman Empire akin to the linguistic and cultural dominance of the English, French, or even Russian empires.

According to the author, these features can also be applied to the Austro-Hungarian Empire. However, an important clarification relevant to my study is Todorova's argument that there is one exception: BiH, which was arguably a colony or quasi-colony under the Habsburg Empire during the rule of Benjamin von Kállay.

Todorova (ibid.) claims that none of the contemporaries in the Balkans under the Ottoman rule felt that they were in a colonial positionality. While conducting fieldwork, I similarly questioned whether BiH was colonized, a doubt influenced by my own positionality as a post-socialist and postcolonial subject from Kazakhstan. Although I was born after collapse of the Soviet Union, I have always been aware that even decades of independence have not fully liberated us from the 'dark side of modernity.' The inferiority complex caused by colonialism, which is prevalent among people in Kazakhstan, including myself—a topic I will discuss further below in the context of approaching Kazakhstan from a decolonial perspective—is hardly recognizable in BiH, certainly not to the same extent as in Kazakhstan. One of the participants in my study commented on this issue:

> I don't feel that Bosnians and Herzegovnians carry any sort of post imperial inferiority complex in that sense. A lot of it has to do with culture I think and the fact that neither the Ottomans nor the Austrians were like the British or the French in terms of oppression. The Ottomans ruled during a pre-industrial period and the empire was falling apart for decades before it finally collapsed while the Austrians did not stick long enough to really create a deep disruption or extreme change, especially culturally, for instance. BiH has

> always kept its language, way of life, customs. So under Austro-Hungarians there was never this seismic shift in terms of the tissues and deeper layers of society (Anonymous interview 9, July 19, 2023).

At this point, the respondent fully confirms Todorova's thesis and makes a strong case demonstrating that there is no history of colonialism, however, as the interviewee continued, the situation became less unambiguous:

> However, with that said, I think there is a different issue at stake which I cannot find a proper word for. In my opinion, having had so many others deciding for people who lived here, today the common folk in BiH, its citizens, still expect the international community, whatever that may mean, the High Representative (a political position in BiH responsible for overseeing the civilian implementation of the Dayton Agreement), the EU, the American embassy, an ambassador from any other powerful country, Erdogan (president of Turkey Recep Tayyip Erdoğan) or any other "big" politician to solve their problems (ibid.).

Although the respondent confirmed my understanding that there is no inferiority complex among Bosnian and Herzegovinians, as citizens of the country have been denominated by the participant, which potentially confirms Todorova's thesis. However, there is an inconsistency in a sense that in respondent's opinion because BiH has been lacking autonomy over the centuries of being ruled by others, citizens of the country and became accustomed to it and as a consequence some sort of postcolonial impotence can be witnessed in a form of subalterns' inability to speak for themselves due to a lack of autonomy which points to coloniality.

Another interviewee, in the context of our discussion about the abundancy of the Arab and Turkish tourists in Sarajevo and the attitudes of the local population to this demographic group, replied in a manner that is very indicative of the presence of postcolonial situation in BiH:

> But like this part of us being Europeans means that we also are a bit racist. So somebody who's a different skin color, especially coming from the Orient. We tend to have this racist tendency. And then, from the other side, because we have been colonized in our history by Austro-Hungary, and then we have that element of adoration towards Westerners, like, ah... You know, it's like 'we are such a small country, but we are still so complex in our identity and viewpoints and everything.' It's so pretentious. Also, you can hate Serbs, but you will never want your daughter, for example, to marry an Arab or a black man. For her to marry a Serb, it's messed up, but it is better (Anonymous interview 13, July 28, 2023).

In this extract multiple features pointing out colonial history are identifiable. Firstly, the respondent sarcastically mentions the complexity of Bosnian identity despite the country being so small. This attempt to come out on top of hierarchy by acknowledging own negative quality such

as one's geographical or geopolitical 'smallness' and providing an alternatively perceived positive and more important quality such as 'complexity' may be indicative of the postcolonial inferiority complex. In addition, the complex identity mentioned itself signifies colonial hybridity. Communities that have experienced colonialism often develop hybrid identities due to the blending of cultures and ideologies during the colonial period. In this sense, Tlostanova (2019, 2024) acknowledges her own hybrid positionality, shaped by her postcolonial and post-socialist condition. She was born in Uzbekistan to Circassian and Uzbek parents and later became a Russian citizen after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Similarly, I was born into a family with a Russian-Ukrainian father and Kazakh-Tatar mother in Kyrgyzstan but as a citizen of Kazakhstan. Culturally I identify as a Kazakh and I am Muslim, though I have a Slavic appearance. Also, an internalized racism resulted by an imposed Eurocentric worldview is evident when the participant mentions that Bosnian Muslims would prefer women to marry Serbs rather than Arabs despite the history of wars with the former. This issue highlights colonial history both in terms of the imposed hierarchy and dichotomy between the 'civilized' West and the 'backward' Orient, as discussed by Edward Said (1978), and in terms of the preference for white skin as cleaner and more dignified than dark skin, a concept explored by Frantz Fanon in *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952). What is also openly stated by the participant when adoration towards Westerners is mentioned. Finally, the sarcastic tone of this extract indicates the annoyance of the participant with postcolonial inferiority complexes that he mentions and thus his awareness of the existence of postcolonial situation and the desire to overcome it.

In this section there is no goal to challenge Todorova's argument on absence of colonialism in the Balkans but to demonstrate that despite the potential factual significance of this assertion there may be a postcolonial condition in the region, and more importantly it is present in BiH

without a doubt. Danijela Majstorović and Zoran Vučkovac (2016, 150), similarly, agree that BiH might not be a classic example of colonial experience due the absence of necessary conditions identified by Todorova. However, they claim that despite this, the case for a postcolonial analysis of the country can be made based on the "*longue durée* of its peripherality, including present-day metonymic attributions such as a "laggard" or "the backyard of Europe" (ibid.). A prominent Slovene scholar Rastko Močnik continues Todorova's idea that Balkanism is different from Orientalism because in his opinion it represents a more radical mechanism of domination:

> Contrary to Orientalism, where the logic of domination is imposed by colonial rule, in Balkanism, it is the immanent logic of self-constitution itself that generates the incapacity to conceive of oneself in other terms than from the point of view of the dominating other (2002, 95).

Luthar and Pušnik (2010, 3) also point out the ex-Yugoslav region as a non-western periphery upon which the "Western gaze" imposed hegemony due to its assumed backwardness and ideological inferiority. Vesna Goldsworthy (1998), in *Inventing Ruritania*, similarly, argues that the presumed backwardness and inferiority of the Balkans is not rooted in reality but is a product of Western imagination and exoticization of the region with the goal of legitimizing intervention and control. However, is orientalism enough to claim a postcolonial condition? Alima Bissenova (2022, 167) argues that orientalism is one of the significant conceptions within postcolonial studies. In her opinion (ibid.), the cultural dominance that is created through the imposition of Eurocentric view in relation to the Orient and its objectivization is central to both colonial and postcolonial domination of the West over Orient as the latter loses its subjectivity and self-representation.

Additionally, the concern of my dissertation is not the Balkan region as a whole but the specific case of BiH. In this respect the concept of 'nesting orientalisms' developed by Milica Bakić-Hayden and Robert M. Hayden (1992, 1995, 2002) is particularly useful. The authors demonstrate that the Balkans and specifically the territories that were occupied by the Ottoman

Empire constitute the Orient within Europe (Bakić-Hayden and Hayden 1992, 3). This is evident in how Balkan mentality, Byzantine culture, and Orthodoxy are perceived as backward, primitive, or violent in comparison to 'proper' Europe—an attitude shaped by established hierarchies through the orientalization of the region (ibid.). What is interesting is that it also applies to the Balkan region itself as these dichotomies also exist within the region. There is the Orient within the Orient, and this gradation of 'Orients' is defined as *nesting orientalisms*: "Asia is more "East" or "other" than eastern Europe; within eastern Europe itself this gradation is reproduced with the Balkans perceived as most "eastern"; within the Balkans there are similarly constructed hierarchies" (Bakić-Hayden 1995, 918). In this sense, Croatia and Slovenia that have been occupied by the Habsburgs are more European and advanced than the territories occupied by the Ottomans; similarly, Islam and Orthodoxy are presumably more backward and violent compared to Catholicism; the Latin script is superior to Cyrillic, etc. In all these respects, BiH is the Orient and periphery in the Balkan region. This conception of nesting orientalisms also provides an answer to critique that there can be colonialism without domination of one race over another as it demonstrates how the hierarchy can be artificially created within the same race.

The question of whether the Balkans were colonized remains highly contested in scholarly literature. While some influential scholars reject the notion of coloniality in the region, postcolonial perspectives are prevalent. Concepts like 'balkanism' and 'nesting orientalism' reflect the Balkans' positioning as Europe's periphery, reinforcing inherited stereotypes of backwardness. BiH, particularly under Austro-Hungarian rule, presents a unique case of modern colonialism. Given its historical subjugation under various empires and socialist rule, alongside Orientalist narratives, BiH exhibits a postcolonial condition. These factors justify applying a decolonial approach to studying antifascism in BiH.

Nationalization of World War II memory in Kazakhstan

Antifascism has been a significant constitutive element of post-WWII political ideology in ex-communist states. The narrative of victory over fascism has been central to legitimacy of socialism in the Eastern bloc. This narrative was imposed from above, directly from Moscow, leaving no room for interpretation of the war or the antifascist legacy. With the decolonial break after the fall of the Berlin Wall and breakup of the Soviet Union formerly dependent nations achieved autonomy and an opportunity to shape the memory of these events. The opportunity, however, was limited by the interests and positionalities of the newly established states, leading to significant variations in subjective interpretations of the past across the former Socialist bloc. Some, such as the Baltic states and Poland, were able to achieve a full decolonial break with the communist past, in part by subjectively shaping and interpreting its central ideological doctrine of a common antifascist struggle. Tomasz Rawski (2019), for instance, analyzes the post-1989 shift in Polish memory of WWII and the state-socialist period from antifascist to anticommunist. Through parliamentary debates over Victory Day anniversaries (1995, 2005, 2015), Rawski (ibid., 921) shows how the right-wing post-Solidarity camp replaced the antifascist narrative with an anticommunist focus on "two totalitarianisms," referring to the 1939 occupation of Poland by two totalitarian regimes—the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany. Such recasting of history with the goal of decolonization and departure from Moscow's sphere of influence was possible in Poland because of its certain positionalities such as joining NATO in 1999 and EU in 2004 as well as remoteness from Russia and in general not being directly subject to its rule earlier in the 20th century. Most of the post-Soviet republics, with the exception of the Baltic states, cannot afford it due to multiple reasons, such as the likelihood of aggression on behalf of Russia as an open decolonial shift may lead to it, as is demonstrated by the case of Ukraine. This is why decolonial aspirations in Kazakhstan are complex, taking into account the large proportion of ethnic Russians, the world's longest overland

border with Russia, and the big neighbor's broader geopolitical interests in the region, which explains the particular interpretation of WWII and thus the antifascist legacy.

The transition from colonial to postcolonial states highlights the unique challenges faced by societies like Kazakhstan, which reflect upon their colonial histories while striving for decolonization. In comparison with the condition of coloniality, postcoloniality implies a pre- and post-independence scenario, where societies that were once colonies or parts of empires seek to redefine themselves through self-reflection and investigation of their colonial pasts (Bissenova 2022, 162). Kazakhstan gained independence from the Soviet Union, having previously been a colony of the Russian Empire. Following its independence, the country initiated a nation-building process that emphasized promotion of the Kazakh language and culture, particularly after Kazakhs became the majority in 1989. This effort is similar to the early Soviet indigenization strategies but was undoubtedly postcolonial, representing a step toward decolonization as Kazakhstan strengthened its national identity and language policies in response to its colonial historical context (ibid., 164). In this sense, one of the major aspects of history, apart from identity and language, that needs to be reevaluated and reflected upon form a decolonial perspective and which is often left out from the wider academic discussion is the case of Kazakhstan in relation to the history and memory of WWII, which was among the instruments of colonization of Central Asia and Kazakhstan specifically.

From the perspective of global tendencies this may seem incongruous because European colonies in Africa and Asia received independence after World War II and began the process of decolonization (Carmack 2019, 8). In Central Asia, by contrast, when the aforementioned korenizatsiya policies were abandoned in the late 1930s and full-scale colonization began, the process was further accelerated by the war. Unlike BiH, in Kazakhstan,

antifascism was not a grassroot movement, on the contrary, the war was used as a tool to colonize from above. As Roberto Carmack (ibid., 7) argues, Soviet administrators viewed modernization and mobilization as two sides of the same coin, believing that modern values could be imparted to the indigenous people of the region through conscription into the army. Thus, by the end of the war, the colonization of the region was finalized:

> Instead of weakening Soviet colonial power, World War II consolidated Soviet rule and solidified local Soviet identities. During the war, thousands of Kazakh soldiers assimilated Soviet values, prescribed Kazakh identity was "Sovietized," and local institutions were thoroughly integrated into the all-Union economy. The war, in other words, greatly accelerated processes of Sovietization that began during the 1930s—after the war, Kazakhstan was more visibly Soviet than ever before (ibid., 8).

In addition, this colonial narrative of modernization brought to 'backward' indigenous people was interpreted by Soviet propagandists as a debt that Kazakhs had to pay back with their lives at the battlefields (Carmack 2014, 102). The need for a decolonial reevaluation of the war in Kazakhstan and the way its memory is being recast is, however, partly shaped by how historical memory of the war and antifascism is constructed in post-socialist Russia. This already illustrates that full-scale decolonization in the country is still unlikely to occur in the near future.

As José María Faraldo (2016, 208) argues, the Soviet regime shaped its identity and legitimacy around the cult of war and victory over fascism and antifascist Red Army veterans became a symbol of this self-portrayed ideological image. This tendency is now continued by Putin and specifically shapes his civilizational opposition to the West and NATO. Olga Malinova (2017, 55–57), based on an analysis of Putin's speeches, illustrates a shift in Russia's memory politics from the Yeltsin-era emphasis on a new historical trajectory and democratization to a later celebration of a strong state and a prideful revisionism of the Soviet legacy under Putin. Russia's president's portrayal of the USSR's collapse as the most significant "geopolitical catastrophe" of the preceding century and his emphasis on the myth of the Great Patriotic War as a unifying historical event accentuates Russia's foreign policy agenda of Eurasian integration (ibid.).

Consequently, Victory Day commemorations, which promote a shared war memory among post-Soviet states, are instrumentalized to reinforce Russia's neo-imperial influence. Given the significance of the myth of a commonly fought war—with Russia portrayed as playing a decisive role in the victory—Putin's Russia shapes its relationships with neighboring states based on their adherence to this narrative.

For instance, a demolition of a war-related monument would immediately lead to an official response from the Kremlin, or if a former Soviet republic chooses to change the name of a street that was named after a war hero, Russian propagandists immediately begin accusations of Russophobia. What could be observed in Ukraine before the Crimea's annexation. Also, it is a constant scenario in Kazakhstan whenever street or city names are changed, what sometimes leads to Putin pacifying the propagandists. Conversely, manipulation of antifascist memory in a positive manner may lead to beneficial relationships with Russia, as demonstrated by the shifting attitudes toward the memory of antifascism in Serbia (McGlynn and Đureinović 2023). After 2000, following the overthrow of Slobodan Milošević, in its memory politics, Serbia joined a dominant anti-communist narrative that was prevalent across Eastern Europe after the fall of the Berlin Wall. Similar to the case of Poland, but not as radically, new elites in Belgrade framed end of WWII as the beginning of the communist occupation contrasting earlier perception of the Partisans' victory as liberation from fascism, and the Partisans themselves were criminalized, additionally, the new narrative downgraded contribution of the Red Army (ibid., 232). However, due to the threat of Kosovo's secession, Serbian elites once again revised its memory politics and embraced grand celebrations of antifascism to align with Russia and to get its support (ibid.). As Kosovo's independence was supported by most significant international actors, in need of external support, Serbia highlighted the historical Russo-Serbian alliance in struggle against fascism through

commemorations that were attended by high ranked Russian politicians such as Sergei Lavrov (ibid., 233). Similarly, bordering Russia, Kazakhstan's challenge lies in balancing decolonial aspirations with geopolitical realities, as seen in President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev's attendance at Victory Day celebrations in Moscow and inability of completely decolonizing WWII memory. This lack of autonomy regarding interpretation of WWII and continued dependence on Russia's memory politics is discussed by Aziz Burkhanov and Dina Sharipova (2023, 1203) who investigate Kazakhstan's post-independence historical narratives and the possibility of decolonization of the Soviet past. Using postcolonial theory, authors analyze whether or not Kazakhstani history textbooks have moved away from the Soviet historical narratives and conclude that, due to continued close political and economic cooperation with Russia and presence of the Soviet nomenclature in the government, a complete revision of these narratives is impossible (ibid.). For instance, the case of 28 Panfilov Guardsmen, a regiment that was formed primarily in Kazakhstan, who are known for their heroic defense of Moscow – when they ran out of ammunition and most soldiers died, the remaining 28 soldiers defended the capital by standing in front of the enemy with arms spread wide and chest open, as it is portrayed by famous monument in Almaty in the park named after the regiment's commander. While the myth about this event has largely been debunked, due to the fact that WWII remains highly politicized and thus continued persistence of the Soviet narratives, such Soviet symbols of war related heroism and sacrifices are still promoted and can be found on the pages of history textbooks (ibid.). However, it should be mentioned that despite the fact that Panfilov was neither Kazakh nor born in Kazakhstan, the continued valorization of his division's presumed act of bravery is portrayed as national pride and devoted to heroism of Kazakh soldiers rather than related to Soviet Army per se.

Photograph by David Orlov

This illustrates a situation of nationalization of war-time heroes and portraying them us "our rather than Soviet heroes," a tendency that is well demonstrated by Michael Rees (2020) whose analysis of monument to Aliya Moldagulova and Manshuk Mametova monument serves as the main argument for this section. In 1997, President Nursultan Nazarbayev unveiled a new statue in Almaty on the sixth anniversary of Kazakhstan's declaration of independence. This new monument, replacing a Lenin statue that stood there until that year, commemorated Aliya Moldagulova, a sniper, and Manshuk Mametova, a machine gunner—the only two female Heroines of the Soviet Union from Kazakhstan. As the author demonstrates (ibid., 5), the heroines' legacy is used by the state to recast Kazakhstan's World War II history within a nationalistic

framework. Aliya Moldagulova's story, in particular, is indicative of colonial discourse as in the period of Soviet colonization she symbolized the success of Soviet nationalities policy and the success of the socialist amelioration mission. Her journey from a small 'backward' village in Kazakhstan to living in 'advanced' Leningrad and then protecting the city during the war reflects the ideological strength of Soviet patriotism (ibid.). A shift in the way heroines' legacy is being manipulated for political usage took place after Kazakhstan's independence. Rees (ibid., 6) argues that their legacy was adapted to suit post-Soviet narratives in an attempt to decolonize the WWII experience. By using Kazakh spellings of their names, avoiding Soviet inscriptions, and omitting references to the war or the Red Army, Kazakhstan recast these Soviet heroines as symbols of Kazakhstani values and independence. This reframing served the state's ideological project, implicitly conveying the message that they are simply *our* heroes rather than Soviet or war heroes. At the same time, the fact that Moldagulova's story is celebrated in both Kazakhstan and Russia—for example, with the erection of a new monument dedicated to the heroine in Saint Petersburg in 2019—illustrates the balancing act and cooperation in the realm of shared memory politics. While she is now celebrated as a national hero in Kazakhstan, her Soviet identity is not completely wiped out, which reflects the impossibility of a full decolonial break, due to the historical and political ties with Russia. Kazakhstan's commemoration strategy thus can be described as a careful recasting of Soviet heroes into symbols of Kazakhstani statehood in the framework of state legitimization, advancing a national narrative while maintaining diplomatic relations and avoiding direct confrontation with Russia's memory politics. This reveals a broader approach of pursuing modernity through nation-building, while navigating the complexities of post-Soviet identity. Kazakhstan's remembrance of World War II through figures like Aliya Moldagulova illustrates a complex dialogue between decolonial aspirations and the geopolitical realities of its proximity to

Russia. This includes the necessity of acknowledging Russia's memory politics, particularly given that, under Putin, World War II remains central to Russian identity and foreign policy.

In Kazakhstan, where the past is viewed as a period of colonization and oppression, independence—achieved for the first time in modern history—has led elites to seek legitimization by nationalizing the state (Smith et al. 1998). This includes renaming cities and streets, reviving religion, and emphasizing historical figures (ibid.). It also involves nationalizing the war and its heroes as 'our heroes.' However, antifascism cannot be part of this nationalization strategy, as it is exclusively associated with Russia, particularly given Putin's current emphasis on this memory following the annexation of Crimea and his proclaimed struggle against perceived Nazism in Ukraine. Consequently, in Kazakh official discourse and history textbooks, the war is remembered as the Great Patriotic War rather than World War II or a struggle against fascism. As a result, antifascism is being excluded from collective memory. However, a full decolonial break—such as framing the war period as an occupation by two totalitarian regimes, fascism and communism, as seen in Poland or the Baltic states—is not feasible due to Kazakhstan's proximity to Russia—although it would be a well-grounded attempt to recast history considering the nature of Soviet rule in Kazakhstan. Whenever the Victory Day parade is canceled, the reasons are carefully explained, as if justifying the decision to Russian leadership. Over the past five years, explanations have included COVID-19 and economic concerns, while President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev occasionally attends celebrations in Moscow.

The extent to which Kazakhstan is unable to fully take a decolonial turn and break away from Russian memory politics is evident in Putin's recent official visit to Astana, which took place after I had already submitted the first draft of this chapter. The presidents exchanged diplomatic remarks, praising the deep friendship and cooperation between their countries in all spheres of

bilateral relations. Although it was not officially on the agenda, the topics of World War II and Nazism were emphasized to an unprecedented degree in recent history. As expected, Putin invited Tokayev to attend the upcoming 80th anniversary Victory Day parade in Moscow. Additionally, and most importantly, articles by both presidents were published—Putin's in a Kazakh newspaper and Tokayev's in a Russian one—highlighting their shared victory over fascism, despite this not being an intended focal point of the meeting. Below are translated statements from each president, provided by ChatGPT.

> In the 20th century, our peoples endured a severe trial together, defeating fascism in the course of the most terrible war in human history. Kazakhstanis fought selflessly on the front lines. Kazakhstan became a reliable strategic rear, supplying the army with essential military products and food. Hundreds of thousands of families found refuge on Kazakh soil during the evacuation. The words "No one is forgotten, nothing is forgotten" are not just a beautiful slogan for Kazakhstanis but a profound reflection of the eternal collective memory of the unparalleled heroism of war participants and home front workers (Tokayev 2024)

> I would like to especially emphasize that next year, the peoples of our countries will celebrate the 80th anniversary of Victory in the Great Patriotic War. We look forward to welcoming President Tokayev and other Kazakh friends to the anniversary celebrations in Moscow on May 9. Both in Russia and Kazakhstan, the heroic deeds of our fathers and grandfathers, who fought shoulder to shoulder against Nazism, are remembered and deeply honored. We must undoubtedly do everything to ensure that future generations remember the price paid to defend peace and freedom. This is particularly significant now, as a more just multipolar world order is taking shape—one based on equal cooperation and opening new opportunities for sovereign development (Putin 2024).

Once again, this exchange demonstrates how antifascism, however it is interpreted, remains significant for Putin's Russia's memory politics, as well as Kazakhstan's inability to depart from it. On the contrary, Kazakhstan must demonstrate support when required to avoid potential confrontation with its larger neighbor. Meanwhile, Putin uses the memory of the war as a unifying historical myth that reinforces Russia's foreign policy agenda of Eurasian integration, as evident in his statement about fighting shoulder to shoulder against Nazism. Such claims by Kazakhstani officials, however, are not aimed at reinventing the antifascist legacy or promoting it to wider society but are made solely to align with Putin's narratives when expected, highlighting the lack of full autonomy.

This section demonstrates why a decolonization strategy aimed at practical goals, such as in Poland, is both unlikely and undesirable given Kazakhstan's current postcolonial condition. The decolonial approach explains why less radical approaches to history and selective memory preservation are employed. In the realm of realpolitik, openly decolonizing the World War II narrative would be detrimental for Kazakhstan. However, without direct confrontation with Russia's memory politics, as seen in Ukraine or Poland, Kazakhstan nationalizes its formerly Soviet war heroes and subjectively interprets the war's memory to serve state legitimization. Antifascism, in this context, cannot be nationalized, as it was imposed from above and ideologically tied to the Soviet regime. As a result, it falls outside the realm of memory politics. In the process of selective remembrance, antifascism has been forgotten and rendered invisible—unlike in BiH.

Antifascism as a response to neocolonialism in Dayton Bosnia

Antifascism in BiH holds a distinctive place in the historical, cultural, and political consciousness of its people. In comparison with most post-socialist nations, where antifascism became associated with the legacies of totalitarianism and repression as demonstrated above, in BiH, antifascism is primarily considered as a period of pride and agency. Unlike Kazakhstan, where it was imposed from above, here it was a grassroots movement that symbolizes a collective resistance to fascism. Drawing from interviews conducted in Sarajevo, I will explore the subjective positive representation of antifascism in BiH, particularly among youth in Sarajevo, who increasingly identify antifascism as a core part of their identity. I also conducted online interviews with participants from other cities, and this trend is evident in numerous other regions. In some cities, such as Tuzla, antifascism may be even more prominently present. I argue that this reflects their disillusionment with the unfulfilled promises of neoliberalism and the bleak political reality

imposed by the Dayton Agreement, which ended the war in BiH but transformed the country into a quasi-protectorate, depriving it of true autonomy. The Western-backed neoliberal modernity, which was expected to bring prosperity and democracy, has instead left many young people feeling alienated and powerless. Despite never having lived in Yugoslavia, they view the antifascist legacy as a time when their predecessors had more agency, pride, and freedom compared to the present. This may seem incongruous as Yugoslavia is known as an authoritarian regime; however, a common response of some of my participants is, "If Yugoslavia was a dictatorship, why then do we still have Marshal Tito street?" The youth in BiH seek modernity and normality in this historical period as a counter-narrative to the failed promises of the present. They observe how the elites interpret the past and manipulate the antifascist legacy to their own advantage—selecting narratives based on their ethnic affiliations—and oppose this revisionism, viewing these memory manipulations as a continuation of the war. There is a prevailing belief that the war never truly ended, and as a result, the Dayton post-socialist era is seen as a failed modernity not worth pursuing. In contrast to Kazakhstan, where at least partial autonomy has been achieved and the past—including World War II—has been reinterpreted to serve new political goals oriented toward the future, BiH's political stagnation offers little hope. Consequently, the Yugoslav past is largely viewed in a positive light, and youth in Sarajevo see antifascism as a more desirable and meaningful reality compared to the present.

Alima Bissenova (2022, 165) argues that post socialist countries such as Kazakhstan did not have enough time to reflect upon their colonial pasts and found themselves simultaneously in a new form of colonialism. Thus, although independent, Kazakhstan finds itself in a state of hybrid dependency—both on Russia and its Soviet past, as colonial structures persist, and on new external Western standards of modernity, including cultural, intellectual, and political dependence (ibid.).

In case of the older colonial framework, our presumed 'abnormality' was imposed due to feudal remnants or traditional culture, lack of industrialization, and 'backward' language (ibid.). Under the new conditions of global colonization, we remain 'backward' because of authoritarianism, technological backwardness, and lack of 'civilized' laws resulting in 'low' human rights and environmental standards (ibid.). This situation may be characterized as *hybrid colonialism*. Bissenova's argument may still be relevant in Kazakhstan, but the situation is rapidly evolving, a fact the author also acknowledges. By 2025, despite some degree of dependency, Kazakhstan's autonomy is hardly in question. The country is emerging as a significant regional actor, with Astana becoming an important economic and political hub. BiH, however, fits the description of this hybrid colonialism even more. While in Kazakhstan the pursuance of modern standards is at least deliberately chosen by the elites as a part of the state ideology through economic and political programs designed to become one of the top 50 or 30 most developed nations in the world. These new standards of modernity are imposed on BiH by foreign states and international institutions. State-building after the Dayton Peace Accords (DPA) was led by international actors, making BiH resemble a protectorate rather than a fully sovereign state. The Office of the High Representative (OHR), overseeing the Dayton implementation, became the most powerful institution, imposing numerous laws and removing local officials: "Between 1998 and 2005 inclusive, successive High Representatives issued 757 decisions, removing 119 people from public office and imposing 286 laws or amendments to laws, with a gross lack of due process in exercising these powers" (Majstorović and Vučkovac 2016, 151). Europeanization in BiH remains ambivalent, with the European Union depicted as a *locus amoenus*, offering safety and prosperity but demanding extensive reforms, and thus BiH became permanent candidate which "never quite there yet" (ibid., 148 and 153). This status quo prolongs BiH's dependence and reinforces its centuries-long colonial

status as a European semi-periphery. Europeanization, with its assumed modern values—such as democratic institutions, progress, and stability—is framed as a journey toward 'normality,' reinforcing the narrative that the country is inherently backward (ibid., 150). A normal life under the conditions of Dayton Bosnia and the potential for the future are widely questioned by the study participants. Commenting on the situation, one interviewee stated:

> We are formally a semi-protectorate. For me, that's one of the biggest problems here. You cannot be a semi-protectorate. It's crazy. Potential in Bosnia? There is no potential for that. There is no potential for anything at the moment. First of all, we have the semi-protectorate that we cannot get rid of by ourselves. It has to be something that the international community will do, because they imposed it. So, I mean, I cannot kick them out. We need the politicians who will be ready to admit the situation. Here, there is no potential (Anonymous interview 21, August 10, 2023).

While in BiH, there is a widespread sense of hopelessness due to its neocolonial condition and lack of autonomy, international observers continue to orientalize the country, advocating for the need to bring it to modernity using colonialist rhetoric in the 21st century. For instance, Jasmin Hasanović (2021,99) mentions journalist Julian Borger who emphasized the colonial perception of BiH and the Balkans in general, when he suggested that the persistent chaos in the region is the result of the lack of a powerful overseer. Emphasizing the perceived immaturity of the region and the necessity of a civilizing mission, Borger argues that a 'benign colonial regime' is essential for democratic development in BiH (ibid.). Commenting on the tendency of such statements, Hasanović concludes that even at present date there is this colonial perception of BiH as "a paradigmatic example of a divided society, a case study for eternal hatred and conflicts, as well as a scientific safari for post-conflict research, ethnical tensions, political, institutional or social transition and state building" (2021, 90). A prominent journalist I interviewed in Sarajevo expressed her disgust with such a situation claiming that "all of these *parachute journalists* and so-called experts" come to BiH for a month or two with a civilizational ambition to heal the country and bring it out war and backwardness based on their superficial research and then go back to their comfortable lives back home.

The current situation in BiH does not seem promising, as mentioned in the interview extract above, there is a shared belief that there is no potential for the country and for the young people the post-Dayton imposed modernity is seen as a form of neocolonialism. Thus, young Sarajevans look back to the period of Socialist Yugoslavia—with its antifascist ideology at its core—which they subjectively interpret as advanced and dignified compared to present conditions. Participants mentioned that Yugoslavia was a founding member of the Non-Aligned Movement, that people could travel and purchase goods in both the East and the West, attend concerts of rock bands in Britain and then bring new music genres and tendencies to the highly acclaimed Sarajevo music scene, and that there was pride that the country was globally recognized and respected. As Majstorović and Vučkovac (2016, 150) demonstrate, it was the most flourishing period for the citizens of BiH and the only time they were not orientalized. Instead of being assigned a backward status, they were able to claim modernity and normality:

> As a former Turkish and Austro-Hungarian colony and the poorest part of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, BiH until WWII was mostly rural and feudal. Its Otherness/Balkanness was briefly interrupted by the fifty years of socialism and Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY) as a modern socialist project and the leader among the Non-Aligned states fifty years after WWII.

Following this, antifascist period in Yugoslavia is juxtaposed to the current neocolonial situation as a period when people had agency and freedom as demonstrated in the following extract from the interviews:

> The Dayton peace agreement which was cooked and served by the international community - someone else decided how the country should be split up and administered and now people have to follow along. Antifascism, on the contrary, came in Yugoslavian terms like a national movement from the people, by the people. So it's something that you can be proud about. That was the first time when people in Yugoslavia had freedom. And that's why people have such a big nostalgia about Yugoslavia, and we think that was because of communism and antifascism. Because that was the first time in almost 300 to 400 years that all of the people here weren't under the iron fist of somebody else but they were under the iron fist of somebody who was theirs. We were ruled so long by others so that people wanted to feel that Yugoslav pride. That's why most young people here and more generally people here feel that kind of nostalgia and that everything would be better if it was the same again (Anonymous interview 9, July 19, 2023).

The perceived inability to establish a self-administered autonomous state, expressed through a pessimistic and hopeless attitude, leads young antifascists to revisit a past they see as more

promising. They take pride in that period, as both interviewees mentioned, with Partisans and antifascism central to Yugoslavia's successes—preserved in memory through parental transmission or the educational system. The positive image of antifascism that is often grounded in the perception of Partisans is demonstrated by Jovana Mihailović Trbovc and Tamara Pavasović Trošt (2017). Based on the analysis of history textbooks in the region of former Yugoslavia, the authors illustrate that the most favorable and often romanticized image of Partisans and antifascism can be found in Bosnian-language textbooks (ibid., 176). The Partisans' military successes are discussed with enthusiasm, much like in Tito-era textbooks. Which is also evident in my interviews, such as:

> Of course, the Soviet Union was helping, there were allies in this sense, but it really came from the people. Antifascism came from brave men and women, and it was grassroots, it came from the ground. It was the people who won this war (Anonymous interview 18, August 8, 2023).

> It's a very black and white story. You know? We have the partisans who fought the fascists and the partisans won. End of story. I don't know any other war including the last one where the victory was so clear and it was so clear who the bad guys were and who the good guys were. If you ask me throughout all of Bosnian history, let's say it goes back a thousand of years, this antifascist period is the only period I would say I really feel proud about, like who I am and where I am coming from (Anonymous interview 19, August 8, 2023).

Trbovc and Trošt state that in the Bosnian-language textbooks the Partisans are presented as the only genuine antifascist military force, what can be disputed across the Balkans as well as within BiH itself, and described as "the largest antifascist movement in enslaved Europe" (ibid.). The Partisans are depicted as brave guerilla fighters, capable of enduring extreme hardships and as the authors demonstrate, some textbooks even recommend Yugoslav state-produced films as historical sources (ibid., 182). What is criticized by Trbovc and Trošt is that any mention of post-war political oppression by the Communist regime are absent from these textbooks (ibid., 185). Instead, the Communist state-building project is praised for creating equality among nations and establishing BiH as a balanced multi-ethnic state – a small and ideal Yugoslavia within Yugoslavia – laying the foundation for the contemporary Bosnian state. A popular across the European ex-socialist

countries syllogism which holds “antifascism equals communism and communism equals totalitarianism; and consequently, antifascism equals totalitarianism” (Traverso 2016, 328) is thus not present in BiH.

What is interesting, however, is that the antifascist legacy is not only associated with pride due to victory in the war but also because, as the respondents claim, it was also a period when people in this country could have realized their freedom and autonomy for the first time in their history which they lack under the current post-Dayton state. In response to my question about whether this perspective is incongruous, given that Yugoslavia is known as an authoritarian regime, the answers were almost exclusively negative. While acknowledging that communism might not be associated with freedoms, there was a general consensus that the state was largely unoppressive.

Some of the most significant issues on the agenda for contemporary antifascists in BiH are LGBTQ+ and women's rights. Coming from a post-Soviet region, I could hardly imagine activists fighting for these rights referencing the communist period as a time when such rights were respected. However, in BiH, the perspective is different.

Images by BiH Pride March

On the first image above, a photo taken at the pride parade in Sarajevo, there is a banner in the back saying "Antifašizam je naš izbor," which means "antifascism is our choice". On the second one, from the official website of Bosnian Pride March, there is a logo symbolizing the circuit of the country's territory on the map with the rainbow colors and the star in in the middle – which references Partisans' main symbol. LGBTQ+ activists I interviewed in Sarajevo strongly self-identify as antifascists and point out that homosexuality was decriminalized by the state in the 1970s and highlight that the situation today might be worse in respect to gay rights. Similarly, women's rights activists argue that the rights women in BiH have today originate from the successes achieved by the *Antifašistički front žena* (the Women's Antifascist Front), which was established in 1942. One of the study participants showed me her tattoo—"AFŽ 1942" encircled by a heart—which replicates the tattoos worn by men in the Yugoslav National Army. As she explained, she did it as a joke because Partisan women did not have such symbols, unlike men, but also to highlight that women's rights in Yugoslavia advanced significantly during the war due to Partisan efforts.

Contemporary antifascist activities are largely focused on resisting nationalist revisionism of Yugoslav, antifascist, and Partisan memory, which is rooted in the system imposed by the Dayton Agreement where political elites establish barriers across the ethno-religious lines. It is

true that the electorate of the nationalist parties in BiH are largely religious people. However, it does not mean there are no religious people in the ranks of antifascists. I interviewed several practicing Muslims who also identify as antifascists and who claim that there was no oppression towards religious people, as demonstrated in the following extract:

> My grandfather was an imam. We have this narrative, a popular revisionist story, that you couldn't be religious in Yugoslavia. My grandfather earned his pension as imam! He could study in mekteb, it is like a Sunday religious school, where kids go to mosque on Saturdays and Sundays to learn about Quran and stuff like that. So it was possible. However, as a religious person, you couldn't be somewhere in a high position in the communist party. You could not play for both sides. But ideologies aside, people just wanted to live good. They were young, they were healthy, they had jobs. All of their memories are really, really positive. My grandfather was imam and he didn't have any political issues, problems, he didn't go to prison because he was imam. And I remember a story when Tito died everybody cried. And my mom told me that her mother, my grandmother, who was an old Muslim lady, a lady who rarely showed emotions, she cried when Tito died. And she wasn't even nearly a communist. So yeah, yeah, they are quite nostalgic. I can understand that (Anonymous interview 13, July 28, 2023).

This positive interpretation of the Yugoslav past reflects selective memory—what we choose to remember and forget. Clearly, Yugoslavia was not an entirely unoppressive state. While homosexuality was decriminalized, women's rights improved with the help of the AFŽ during the war, and religiosity was not grounds for imprisonment, all these groups faced some level of oppression under various circumstances. Despite its decriminalization in the late 1970s, homosexuality remained socially unwelcome. After the war, women were largely pushed back into traditional roles. While religious practice was possible in private life, party membership required atheism. However, participants tend to emphasize positive memories rather than openly acknowledging the presence of oppression and discrimination. Although not as severe as in the Soviet Union, these issues still existed in Yugoslavia. I argue that this selective memory occurs because, as respondents unanimously declare, the present Dayton situation is worse, making the past seem like a more pleasant and egalitarian period. While one had to be an atheist to achieve success in Yugoslavia, today, according to respondents, it is necessary to identify as a member of one of the three religious-national communities. Otherwise, it is nearly impossible to become a

successful politician, lawyer, doctor, or professional in any other field in Dayton Bosnia. I had a conversation with a historian living in Sarajevo since the early 2000s, who shared his conversation with a young antifascist:

> Once, I asked one guy and he told me that antifascism is the only thing they have because actually if you are against nationalism, it seems to be the only ideology or value which you can identify with. And it's true, for example, I spoke with some friends in Bosnia. When they tell me what is the specific good thing about socialist Yugoslavia, and especially people from Bosnia and from Sarajevo, tell me it was multinationalism and antifascism. Antifascism here very much implies that Muslims, Croats and Serbs are together. So it's an anti-nationalist ideology. And as since the war nationalism is absolutely dominating ideology, not one nationalism but three nationalisms at the same time, for many, this antifascism remains the only refuge or the logical thing to say no to this nationalism. Because antifascism already exists here and it is something they can identify with, there is already this tradition. The problem is of course that it leads often to a very uncritical view (Anonymous interview 2, July 2, 2023).

The last point about the uncritical evaluation of antifascism is well-founded. Rarely have I heard discussions about post-war atrocities committed by the Partisans, such as the Bleiburg case, where, according to various estimates, between 20,000 and 70,000 former Nazi collaborators and their families were killed by the Partisans. However, nationalism and revisionism by national elites, as well as the antifascist response to this revisionism, will be discussed in a separate chapter. An important point highlighted by Moll is that antifascism appears to be the only viable option for people in BiH in response to the status quo, which entails a dysfunctional state divided along national lines by the Dayton Peace Agreement. As one interviewee mentioned, during the war, it was clear who the bad guys were and who the good ones were—the Nazis and the antifascist Partisans—and this perspective remains prevalent today:

> Why is it still important even decades after the actual war? It's a battle between evil and good. It is a fight for good economy, it is also antifascism. We lived without any roads, electricity, infrastructure, and Tito built it all. Of course, he didn't make it himself but he was the image of that prosperity so he decided every town every village must have roads. Today this nationalist parties sit in the buildings that were built in Yugoslavia and criticize that period, but cannot do anything themselves to actually improve our country (Anonymous interview 12, July 23, 2023).

This phrase echoes a well-known saying in Sarajevo: today's politicians cannot even repaint the buildings that Tito built. It is true that, as Moll mentioned, antifascism in BiH is primarily an anti-nationalist ideology, but also it is popular because for young people it symbolizes a more efficient

period when economy was strong, when people had more freedoms and could realize their potential, as well as the state itself was had more autonomy and capacity, something that they are missing today. So in their search for modernity and normality they look back to that period. The authors of Dayton seemed to assume that nation was the only possible identity and compelled everyone to take a side, even though it was the absence of strong national affiliation that kept the peace in Sarajevo for so long. The post-Dayton country instead of leading to peace and prosperity, as it was believed, has led to a neocolonial condition that leaves no room for hope for the future and thus the past became a point of reference for normality, peace, modernity.

Conclusion

Postcolonial nations, even after gaining sovereignty, often remain on the margins of modernity, trapped by imposed narratives of backwardness as well as may lack autonomy due to new forms of colonialism. This dynamic is evident in both Kazakhstan and BiH. Kazakhstan, however, looks toward the future, striving to become a regional power, as its sovereignty is largely consolidated. Thus, despite Russia's influence persists, Kazakhstan has room to legitimize its statehood by nationalizing aspects of the World War II past, excluding antifascism, which remains closely tied to the Soviet and thus Russian legacy. This chapter has shown why a radical decolonization strategy, such as Poland's, is neither feasible nor desirable for Kazakhstan. A decolonial approach explains why Kazakhstan selectively preserves historical narratives while avoiding direct confrontation with Russia's memory politics. Instead, it reinterprets Soviet war heroes to serve national identity, while antifascism—seen as an imposed Soviet ideology—falls outside the scope of state-sanctioned memory. In this process of selective remembrance, antifascism is erased—unlike in BiH, where the lack of a clear future due to its neocolonial condition ensures its persistence. The young antifascists in my study turn to the past as a source of normality and

modernity, revising antifascism as a viable framework in comparison to their current hopeless reality. This echoes a well-known saying in Sarajevo: today's politicians cannot even repaint the buildings that Tito built. Antifascism in BiH is primarily an anti-nationalist ideology, but it also represents a time of greater economic stability, personal freedoms, and state autonomy and capacity—elements missing today. Dayton Agreement, instead of fostering peace and prosperity, led to a neocolonial state devoid of hope. In this context, antifascism persists in BiH as a response to its constrained reality under Dayton Bosnia. The following two chapters will further explore Dayton Bosnia while examining the two most frequently recalled concepts in the collected interviews—hope and revisionism.

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Chapter 2
Hoping for dignity in Dayton Bosnia

Introduction

Hope is ubiquitous, and potentially, anyone is capable of hoping for something or being generally hopeful. Even a state of hopelessness reflects a condition where hope has been withdrawn. Hope is often attributed positive and morally significant connotations, as reflected in the English idiom "light at the end of the tunnel." Similarly, in my native Russian language, an equivalent phrase is "hope is the last to die." Nevertheless, until relatively recently, symbolic anthropologists have scarcely addressed the nature of hope. Anthropologists often give insufficient attention to future-oriented concepts because the centrality given in scholarship to the studies of the past and tradition overshadow potentiality of the studies of the future. Thus, the anthropology of hope may be regarded as a relatively new and understudied field, offering significant potential for future studies. Over the past decades, this situation has changed, and hope-related studies have gained more attention due to an increased sense of crisis and a lack of political and ideological direction. This shift has been driven by pivotal and sometimes pernicious historical events, such as the fall of the Berlin Wall and fall of communism, humanitarian crises in Yugoslavia, Rwanda, and the Middle East, the September 11 attacks and the subsequent war on terrorism, the global economic crisis, and recent Covid-19 pandemic. In this regard, Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) represents a case with a great potential for the development of anthropology of hope, due to its specific positionality in the context of major global events that have recently heightened interest in studies of hope.

'Hope,' in its various forms and synonyms, was one of the most frequently mentioned words in the interviews with my interlocutors. My respondents hoped for normal and dignified life and explained the existing abnormality and hopelessness through the divisions imposed by the Dayton

Peace Agreement, which are central to anti-nationalist sentiment of my antifascist participants, while antifascism per se is a source of hope for them. The dysfunctional state caused by the Dayton constitution and the resulting abnormality of life in all possible spheres are thus the main factors behind the feeling of hopelessness among my participants. Due to inability to live normal and dignified lives in the present situation my respondents refer to the past memory of antifascism in Yugoslavia, which they largely consider as the best period in BiH's history. As one of my interlocutors stated, if your constitution, which should be the foundation of a country, is the main reason for a dysfunctional state, and you are living in a situation where you cannot look forward due to the Dayton Agreement, it is only natural to look back to a time when things were better.

The Constitution of BiH is Annex 4 of the Dayton Peace Agreement, which mandates that all three major ethnic groups be equally represented at all levels of government. This requirement explains the existence of a three-member presidency representing Bosnian Muslims, Croats, and Serbs. The Dayton Agreement had a goal to bring an end to the ethnic conflict but ironically contributed to flourishing political system based on ethnic divisions. It created a status quo where the rule of nationalist and corrupted elites cannot be challenged what contributed to a loss of hope with respect to any political change. My participants believe that the elites are well aware of this situation. However, the main nationalist parties representing Bosnian Muslims (*Stranka demokratske akcije* – SDA), Croats (*Hrvatska demokratska zajednica Bosne i Hercegovine* – HDZ BiH and *Demokratska fronta* – DF), and Serbs (*Srpska demokratska stranka* – SDS and *Savez nezavisnih socijaldemokrata* – SNSD) strive to preserve the existing status quo. This is because, due to nationalist narratives and revisionism—topics that will be discussed in the following chapter—a substantial proportion of the population consistently votes for the parties representing their ethnicity. As a result, the political elites lack accountability, as election outcomes are largely

predetermined. While my current study focuses primarily on my participants' perceptions of this situation, the dysfunctional nature of the state of BiH under the Dayton Constitution—its abuse by nationalist elites to their advantage, the lack of potential for democratization or EU accession, and the perpetuation of divisions due to a poor institutional framework—has been extensively discussed in the literature (Bose 2002; Keil and Perry 2016; Banović, Gavrić, and Mariño 2021). In this situation, my participants hope for normal and dignified lives while simultaneously feeling hopeless, as they believe that Dayton Bosnia cannot be challenged. However, through antifascism, they are able to remain hopeful about the future. The current study of hope with the focus on the future, contested to dominant approach of looking at the country exclusively from the perspective of pastness, allows to de-ethnicize anthropological studies of BiH, which can be seen in reluctance of my participants to associate themselves with ethnic and religious political parties.

Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework of my study is grounded in the works of major contributors to the anthropology of hope, including Arjun Appadurai and Ghassan Hage, as well as Stef Jansen, an expert in this field who has specifically studied hope in relation to BiH. Stef Jansen has conducted numerous long-term ethnographic studies in BiH since 2000 and now lives and works in Sarajevo. I first met him as an M.A. student at an old coffee shop in Baščaršija, Sarajevo's cultural center, in 2018, when he impressed me with his intricate understanding of the city's culture, which is actually not surprising, considering that he is one of the most significant contemporary ethnographers of BiH. Adding to that, Jansen's invaluable contributions (2006, 2015, 2016, 2021) to the studies of anthropology of hope makes his work an obvious foundation for my current chapter on hopelessness among young antifascists in Sarajevo. Jansen's inquiry into anthropology of hope based on ethnographic studies carried out across ex-Yugoslavia, substantially the one

conducted between 2008 and 2010 in the Dobrinja neighborhood of Sarajevo, culminated in his book *Yearnings in the Meantime: 'Normal Lives' and the State in a Sarajevo Apartment Complex* (2018). Towards the end of Chapter One, Jansen expresses his concern regarding the choice of theoretical framework, briefly summarized by the author as follows: "Focusing on yearnings for 'normal lives', then, a key aim of this book is to provide insight into prevailing regimes of temporal-political reasoning at a particular historical conjuncture, in a particular location: Dobrinja, Dayton BiH, 2008–10" (ibid., 55). As the author himself acknowledges, this approach implies two lines of criticism – questions of periodization and generalization – both of which Jansen immediately rejects:

> Yet, trawling through my ethnographic observations, through interviews, media reporting and documents – and through my ongoing everyday engagements in Sarajevo – I cannot help but be struck by strong regularities, common denominators, shared patterns and dynamics, similar experiences and dispositions around yearnings for 'normal lives' (ibid.).

This self-reflection briefly discussed within a span of one paragraph is significant for my case because I was as struck during my fieldwork in Sarajevo by the ubiquitousness of sense of hopelessness and hopes for normality and dignity by the participants of my study. Jansen explains the use of word 'yearning' instead of 'hope' or its derivatives and synonyms because as the author states, his participants did not hope for 'normal lives', instead, they 'desperately longed to hope for them' and thus the word 'yearning' is more suitable as it designates persistent longing (ibid.). More than ten years separate Jansen's and my fieldwork – when he conducted his study in Dobrinja most of my participants were not even ten years old. Since then, however, not much has changed. At the current historical conjuncture in Sarajevo the state of hope is even less promising than it was between 2008 and 2010 and thus the longing for hope is still present. Although a sense of hopelessness, despair and disbelief in any possibility for a change in Dayton Bosnia is widely shared, my participants were able to articulate what they hoped for.

My study of young antifascist Sarajevans at *Društveno-kulturni centar* (*DKC*) during summer of 2023 largely replicates Jansen's findings with regards to residents of Dobrinja neighborhood between 2008 and 2010. However, it holds academic value in itself considering that I neither had such an intention nor was I aware of Jansen's study on anthropology of hope in Dayton Bosnia while in the field or even when I was analyzing collected data. Further, the choice of participants in the study is major difference which is significant for the research on anthropology of hope. While Jansen's Dobrinja residents were regular citizens of a Sarajevo suburb, and the study focused on the ordinary lives of people and their daily practices, such as waiting for a bus at the station, my participants are political activists. My study offers a perspective on a specific category of people in Sarajevo – young antifascist activists – which is specifically useful for the anthropology of hope within the theoretical framework offered by Appadurai and Hage as activism under conditions of poverty or unequal distribution of hope and its limited capacity is specifically revealing about perceptions of hope among the disadvantaged. It is significant as it establishes a certain entanglement for our understanding of hope – why people who openly express hopelessness with regards to the situation in Dayton Bosnia choose to become activists, strive to make a difference, and remain in Sarajevo while most of their peers and friends leave the country? In this respect, Arjun Appadurai's conception of the 'capacity to aspire' is particularly useful (2007, 59). In his essay on culture and poverty, inspired by Albert Hirschman, Appadurai argues (ibid., 63) that there are three forms of cultural affiliations "loyalty," "exit," and "voice," with the latter being the most important as it has the potential to change the conjuncture and promote hopefulness among the impoverished classes – which implies the widening of horizon for possible aspirations. While Appadurai is concerned with the ways we could strengthen the capacity of the poor to aspire and to cultivate their voice, I do not aspire to look for solutions to accumulation of hope among

my participants or Sarajevans and Bosnians in general in a seemingly hopeless situation. On the contrary, I will argue that it is the flaw in the literature discussing hope related to activism and protest culture. Scholars who study antifascism or anarchism are often activists themselves and thus focus on finding solutions to presumably hopeless situations in order to promote certain kind of good life according to their own beliefs. However, hope is not inherently good or moral, as, for example, sexists, racists, and fascists also have certain hopes. My goal is to observe the capacity for hope my participants have neutrally, and thus I focus on what they hope for under the existing conditions and why is there a strong "voice" among participants despite expressed sense of hopelessness.

Ghassan Hage's studies of neoliberal-capitalist Australia are helpful in this respect as he discusses how the capacity to aspire is shaped by an uneven distribution of hope, where distribution is carried out by the state. Through creation of possibilities for upward social mobility, which is unequally distributed in all societies, state provides hope for giving meaning and dignity to life (Hage 2003, 15). My antifascist participants do not enjoy this upward mobility and constitute a category of people to whom hope in Dayton Bosnia is distributed in a lesser proportion, if distributed at all. Nevertheless, as I will argue, despite this situation my antifascist participants still have a capacity to aspire for meaningful and dignified lives, which is constituted in being antifascists per se. This is precisely my contribution to Jansen's study. While he argues that residents of Dobrinja neighborhood yearn for normal lives, my participants share this longing but in addition to that they hope for living dignified lives and ground it in an antifascist struggle and opposition to abnormality imposed by the Dayton Agreement. This chapter focuses on what my antifascist interlocutors hope for, how they hope, why they hope in particular ways, and how they navigate in a situation of unequally distributed societal hope in Dayton Bosnia. I will do so by

looking at the ways they understand and perceive the Yugoslav and antifascist past, juxtapose it to the present Dayton Bosnia, and consequently form the perspective of desirable and dignified future that they hope for.

All roads lead to Dayton

Anja and I agreed to meet late in the evening at Valter Pub, named after a legendary fictional character from a Yugoslav Partisan-themed movie *Valter Brani Sarajevo* (1972). The pub is located in the Marijin Dvor neighborhood, just a few minutes' walk from the place of gathering of young antifascists at DKC. Anja is a senior student at the Academy of Fine Arts at the University of Sarajevo and one of the active antifascist members at DKC. She was in a rush because she planned to leave with her boyfriend early the next morning for a music festival outside the city.

Sarajevo is known as a center for Yugoslav rock music. The city produced such legendary Yugoslav bands as Bijelo Dugme, Indexi, Zabranjeno Pušenje, and Crvena Jabuka. Even today, if you enter a coffee shop or bar in Sarajevo, you may hear their music playing in the background as well as they continue giving concerts across the country. I realized that Anja was planning to attend the concert by one of these bands but for some reason she was hesitant to tell me which one exactly was going to perform at the festival. Instead, she began by telling me that the situation people find themselves in BiH now is a 'shit show', as she said, and continued with a story about her relationships: "I have a boyfriend, Boban. He's also from a mixed family. I don't know if it brought us together, probably because we were raised similarly, in the way we think as children of mixed-marriage couples, it is often easier to come to consensus. There are still things we don't agree upon. Such as this concert. I initially did not want to attend it, but Boban persuaded me to leave the politics aside and to enjoy music instead." Names are significant in BiH because they are telling about the backgrounds of people and often lead to assumptions, something antifascists are not satisfied with, what will be discussed in the next chapter. I knew that Anja was half Croatian and

half Bosniak, and from the name of her boyfriend, I could tell that he had a Serbian background. This immediately led me to a question whether it was Nele Karajlić who was supposed to perform at the festival and the answer was positive.

Nele was one of the founders of Zabranjeno Pušenje band alongside Sejo Sexon. The band was founded in the 1980s and was one of the key artistic collectives of the New Primitivism subcultural movement in Sarajevo, which became famous across whole Yugoslavia. When the war broke out, it drew boundaries across nations, cities, and even rock bands were not left aside. Nele, ethnically Serb, left Sarajevo and started Zabranjeno Pušenje in a new format in Belgrade. Emir Kusturica did the same with his No Smoking Orchestra, referencing Zabranjeno Pušenje, which translates as 'no smoking' from Serbo-Croatian. Meanwhile, Sejo, from a Bosnian Muslim family, remained in Sarajevo with the original band resembling the Ship of Theseus.

The significance of Zabranjeno Pušenje for Sarajevo's cultural and music scene was as high as it led to continuous public debates along ethnic lines that are still present what is well demonstrated by Anja's dispute with her boyfriend. She told me that the concert was to be held outside the city, in Republika Srpska, because in Sarajevo he would not be welcomed as he is regarded by many as traitor. As my M.A. thesis discussed the comedy scene of war-time Sarajevo and New Primitivism movement was central to it, I came across this debate about Zabranjeno Pušenje and its members numerous times. Following this anecdote, Anja questioned me about the possibility of 'normal life' in a 'functional state' and thus being hopeful for desirable future when even with her boyfriend they have disagreements about something unimportant as an old Yugoslav rock band. This story about Nele and his concert epitomizes the issue of post-war divisions in BiH instituted by Dayton Agreement and the resulting situation around the questions of hope, such as how it is accumulated or dispersed, and what do people hope for under such conditions.

Another participant in the study, during the interview, pointed at the pack of cigarettes at the table and asked me to read the tobacco packaging warning message. There were three statements: 'pušenje ubija,' 'pušenje ubija,' and 'пушење убија.' The interviewee commented indignantly:

> You have like smoking kills, smoking kills, and smoking kills written in three languages. It is the law to represent each group. But it's all the same! Same words, just one is in Cyrillic. It's totally stupid. So they have all these rules about three languages, three people, three ethnicities, differences, but the differences are non-existing, you know, definitely (Anonymous interview 8, July 19, 2023).

The authors of Dayton, following the war, assumed that nation was the only possible identity and compelled everyone to take a side, even though it was the absence of strong national affiliation that kept the peace in Sarajevo for so long. The divisions imposed by the Dayton Peace Agreement are central to anti-nationalist sentiment of antifascists. It was a recurrent topic in almost each interview as participants mentioned the impossibility of normal life in a country which has three presidents because there can be no consensus and thus no decision to improve lives of people on the ground can be carried out because one of the three ethnic sides would always use its veto power. Dysfunctional state and the resulting abnormality of life are the main factors behind the feeling of hopelessness among my participants. Anja's concern about whether to attend Nele's concert or not, and another participant's discontent with the use of three identical statements on a pack of cigarettes, characterize the post-war political situation in BiH that was imposed following the peace agreement reached on 21 November 1995. Citing Stef Jansen, when one looks at the question of hope in BiH, 'all roads lead to Dayton'—the city where the peace agreement was finalized and has been shaping ordinary lives of people since then.

While conducting fieldwork I often found myself exhausted following the interviews due to the depth of despair expressed by my interlocutors. Returning back to my conversation with Anja, it was supposed to be short and quick due to her need to depart early next morning, but turned into more than an hour-long deep and emotional interview. Before proceeding further, I would like to

use here an extract from the interview with her. Firstly, for someone who is unfamiliar with the despair of post-war and post-socialist BiH this is a good introduction. Secondly, Anja here outlines most of what will be discussed next, as this section exemplifies what Jansen described as 'strong regularities, common denominators, shared patterns and dynamics, similar experiences and dispositions' (2015, 55). These patterns, which were also widely shared by my interviewees, are present in this extract, highlighted in bold, and include beliefs such as that the war never truly ended, perceptions of Dayton Bosnia as a dysfunctional and divided state, comparisons of current injustices to perceived Yugoslavia's successes, low expectations for the future in the job market and subsequent temptations to emigrate because of absence of meritocracy due to corrupted system, a desire for normal lives such as having clean streets, and a mix of resilience with expressions of despair and hopelessness. This demonstrates how my participants navigate the tension between hopelessness and political action and the role antifascism plays in the process of aspiring for dignified lives.

> **I think the war is not over**. In other countries they have a sense of belonging like 'I am French and I am proud to be French, I support my country'. We don't have that. Young people like me and like those from DKC who don't want to hate, we **can't take living in a country that's so divided**. We can't even have a consensus about antifascism. **I don't know if it's ever going to change**. I want to be in my own country **like any normal human being**. I want to be proud of my country and grow old here but **I don't see a possibility** for that. I read the news today. The article discussed a job offer for engineers but there was no one to take the job because our brightest **young people are leaving**. I'm going to leave one day. My friends want to leave. At some point **you start to lose hope for what can be done**. You just get tired of it and you want to go to Switzerland where you will have **clean streets and good education system** but you're not even in your own country. At the end of the day, we all want to live here. This is my country, my home, **even though it's shit**. Here I am talking to you and I told you earlier that I don't want my name to be mentioned in your research because **it can affect my future**. As an artist, I want to devote my work and make things that will draw attention to what's going on in this country and **what a shit show it is**. My father watches concerts from Yugoslavia and he tears up. He once said 'you know we had *that*' and then added '**you don't, and you'll probably never have *that***'. A lot of young people feel **Yugonostalgia** because we believe that was the time when people hated less. We had Tito, **we believed in future**, **young people had future**, they didn't need to leave the country. Why did it have to fall apart? Now we have **three presidents**. That's not a democracy. **It's a corrupted system**. In Yugoslavia, just after finishing college **my father had a job** with a good salary and an apartment. My grandfather had three apartments. They lived in a country where they were **certain about their future**. Now I am finishing college in so much fear of what I'm going to do afterwards and I know that I have to leave. Here, **I have no future**, especially as an artist. **You don't want to be here as an antifascist.** My brother didn't want to leave as he believed that he could make a difference. He finished law and wanted to go into politics. However, my parents and everyone else told him 'please don't do that' because people who run this country are so far from antifascism. People who truly want to make a change here are pushed to the side. You will get trampled by people who run the country

> and who are fascists. I believe that while we have three presidents and our **country is divided** we cannot live as one. I'm completely drained. And so are my friends. **We want to get away from it but we also want to fix it**. At some point you give up and leave. And then you live in some f#!*&ing Paris and you have nice public transport, money to buy expensive staff and you get praised for your work and you have **normal standards of living** but you are in someone else's country. My brother, my best friend, left me in order to have a better life because he had **no future here**. Having to say goodbye to him struck me so hard that I cried for weeks. Why couldn't he stay here? Annually I have to say goodbye to my friends who leave. Why we cannot live in a **normal country**? **That's why I try so hard to explain to people what antifascism is** and try to change people's opinions but at **some point you give up** and then you work another person's country, you make their country better and **let yours go to shit** (Anonymous interview 6, July 13, 2023).

Literature review: anthropology of hope

As mentioned earlier, the anthropology of hope is a relatively new and understudied field, offering significant potential for future studies. With the exception of Ernst Bloch's *The Principle of Hope* and Pierre Bourdieu's *Algeria 1960*, originally published in 1954 and 1963, respectively, the major contributors to the anthropology of hope are contemporary scholars. Among these, only a few began elaborating on the topic in the 1990s, while the majority approached it after the 2000s. This is, however, not only related to the study of hope but to futural conceptions in general. For example, decades after Bloch and Bourdieu's groundbreaking studies of hope, Arjun Appadurai (2004, 60) observed that anthropologists often give insufficient attention to future-oriented concepts. Similarly, Rebecca Bryant and Daniel Knight, in their book *The Anthropology of the Future* (2019), which immediately attracted significant scholarly attention—demonstrating the scarcity and necessity of relevant studies—explore concepts such as anticipation, expectation, speculation, potentiality, hope, and destiny; and attempt to address why, even to this day, anthropologists have given limited attention to people's engagement with the future. Authors conclude that the centrality given by anthropologists to the studies of the past and tradition overshadowed potentiality of the studies of the future (ibid., 3). Appadurai explains this tendency by contrasting the disciplines of economics and anthropology. The author notes that the former is associated with developmental terminology, including plans, hopes, goals, and targets, while the latter, due to a certain perception of culture as rooted in the past, focuses on habit, custom, heritage,

and tradition: “In a word, the cultural actor is a person of and from the past, and the economic actor a person of the future. Thus, from the start, culture is opposed to development, as tradition is opposed to newness, and habit to calculation” (2004, 60). Briefly, there was an implicit consensus that hopes and similar constitute the field of expertise of scholars from other disciplines.

This implicit bias is especially applicable to the study of Balkans and Bosnia specifically, what also explains why study of hope and its application to this geographic region is a useful contribution. The region has been historically exoticized for its presumed backwardness, primitivism, and inherent conflicts, which can be seen in a negative denomination as Powder Keg of Europe. The tendency to explain everything occurring in the region through the lens of pastness and ethnic tensions is exemplified in Robert D. Kaplan’s *Balkan Ghosts: A Journey Through History* (1993). Kaplan argued that ancient hatreds in the Balkans are deeply embedded and out of control, a perspective that reportedly influenced the Clinton administration’s understanding of the Yugoslav Wars. This view is largely shared by the residents of Sarajevo. During each of my arrivals I am constantly notified by Sarajevans that their city is filled with history, for example, they will point at the Latin Bridge telling me that the World War I started there when Gavrilo Princip assassinated Archduke Franz Ferdinand. Dayton Agreement had a goal to bring an end to these ethnicized perspectives on the country but ironically contributed to flourishing political system based on ethnic divisions.

Additionally, BiH represents a rare case with a great potential for the development of anthropology of hope, due to its specific positionality in the context of major global events that have recently heightened interest in studies of hope. While elaborating on this tendency, Kleist and Jansen (2016, 374) state: “We suggest two overall dimensions of why hope has recently gained such resonance in academic debates: a widespread sense of crisis and a heightened sense of lack

of political and ideological direction in this situation." Both dimensions, as Kleist and Jansen argue, are conditioned by unfulfilled post-Cold War promise of peace. Instead, after the demise of the socialist block, Europe has faced its first war on its territory with the outbreak of Yugoslav Wars, by which BiH has been hit the hardest. Also, humanitarian crisis such as Rwanda genocide, September 11 attacks, war on terrorism, among others, resulted in a sense of global uncertainty. Thus, a new wave of scholars interested in investigation of hope ground their studies in the context of post-socialist and post-war societies, where hope has been severely challenged by extraordinary conditions. BiH presents both a post-socialist and post-war scenario. Similar to the end of the Cold War, the conclusion of the war in BiH through the Dayton Peace Agreement did not fulfill the promise of peace, even three decades later. There is no surprise in that futural concepts such as hope, potential, imagination, aspiration were constantly repeated by participants of my study. These concepts are used interchangeably in the scholarship of hope which is primarily shaped by Ernst Bloch, Hirokazu Miyazaki, Pierre Bourdieu, Ghassan Hage, Arjun Appadurai, and Stef Jansen, while the current chapter on anthropology of hope in Sarajevo is primarily based on the studies of the latter three.

Despite Bloch' *The Principle of Hope* (1954) is widely accepted as German Marxist philosopher's magnum opus, it has little potential for contemporary anthropology of hope due to its exclusively utopian and normative approach to hope, what can be evidenced from the following introductory statement:

> Hope, superior to fear, is neither passive like the latter, nor locked into nothingness. The emotion of hope goes out of itself, makes people broad instead of confining them, cannot know nearly enough of what it is that makes them inwardly aimed, of what may be allied to them outwardly. The work of this emotion requires people who throw themselves actively into what is becoming, to which they themselves belong. It will not tolerate a dog's life which feels itself only passively thrown into What Is, which is not seen through, even wretchedly recognized (Bloch 1986, 3).

The current study does not attempt to argue in favor of moral significance of hope or of being hopeful about the future, here, I am trying to provide an objective study of hope and what it

signifies for my antifascist participants in their daily lives, what they hope for, how the hopes are manifested, produced, or vanish, and how it shapes their choices and beliefs. Bloch, on the contrary, dreamed-of and advocated for classless society and elaborated on utopian hope (Aronson 1991, 220). Jansen (2015, 45) criticizes Bloch's voluminous contribution for its unsystematic encyclopedic style and overoptimistic conceptualization of hope: "Bloch seeks to let a thousand flowers bloom to uncover hope from under the mere 'ideological'". Nevertheless, one of the most influential contemporary anthropologists of hope, Hirokazu Miyazaki, found Bloch's contribution as one of the major sources of inspiration. In *The Method of Hope: Anthropology, Philosophy, and Fijian Knowledge* (2004), Miyazaki, based on his fieldwork in Fiji among urban indigenous population, advocates for hope as method of knowledge development rather than considering it simply as an anthropological phenomenon. Similar to Bloch, this constitutes a normative approach, which is not being pursued here, to understanding of hope as Miyazaki states "I hope to generate a hopeful moment" (2004, 7). Indeed, antifascists' activism could be interpreted as an attempt to create hope where it is absent and thus create some sort of utopian projection of the future, however, this has not been claimed by my participants. Bryant and Knight (2019, 139) criticize Miyazaki's as he "forcefully argues for hope as an indeterminate future orientation and method of living." What is going to be discussed in the concluding part of this section, hope is not inherently good and moral. As anthropologists we should not be optimistic whenever we observe instance of expression of hope because it does not necessarily hold a positive connotation. When army of Republika Srpska besieged Sarajevo and subjugated its residents to horrors and sufferings for 1425 days, there was also a hopeful moment of winning the war. People expressing certain hopes usually if not always consider them as desirable and potentially moral, however, it does not imply that their hopes are either desirable or moral from an outsider's perspective.

Instead of a normative approach, as argued by Jansen (2021, 2), an anthropological one should be constituted in the political economy of hope, which could be conducted in the framework of the following questions: “In which circumstances, in which times and places, does hopefulness flourish more or less? Who hopes? Who hopes for what? How are intensities of hopefulness and hopes for particular objects distributed among categories of people?” Jansen appoints Bourdieu as one of the pioneers of this approach: “Foreshadowing his later conceptualization of habitus, Bourdieu addressed the relative attunement of “subjective hopes” to “objective probabilities” and thus contrasted the fatalistic dispositions of “subproletarian” Kabyle newcomers to the city to the more calculating ones of established workers in the “modern sector”” (ibid.). Analyzing Bourdieu’s study, together with contributions by Appadurai and Hage, Jansen (ibid., 3) illustrates how all of them come to a similar conclusion which holds that external formations establish prerequisites for potential of hopes and hopefulness to accumulate or disperse, rather than viewing it as an ‘autonomous disposition, springing entirely from within persons’ (ibid). Once again, this shared conclusion points at what was earlier described as ‘all roads lead to Dayton’ and will further be discussed in the following section.

Drawing inspiration from Albert Hirschman (1970) and Amartya Sen (1984), Arjun Appadurai (2004, 59) seeks to provide an answer to the question of culture’s significance in general and specifically in its relation to development and alleviation of poverty. By demonstrating how perceptions of the future and the past originate and are shaped in culture, Appadurai (ibid.) introduces one of the central concepts within the anthropology of hope: the capacity to aspire. It is a cultural and navigational capacity that is unevenly distributed in all societies (ibid., 68-69). Your ability to be conscious of your both immediate and distant aspirations depend on whether or not you are successful in terms of ‘power, dignity, and material resources’. Thus, poor people tend to

have low levels of capacity to aspire. This, however, may be applicable not only to poor but to disadvantaged people within society because of multiple reasons such as due to gender discrimination or political marginalization. For instance, one of the antifascist participants of my study, who held a well-paid job in an international organization, told me that in BiH there is no room for political imagination, which is a substitute word for capacity to aspire. The degree to which horizon for aspiration is wide or narrow determines behavior of individuals within a given society across the spectrum of three possible choices which Appadurai derives from Hirschman: "loyalty," "exit," and "voice". Appadurai (59) states that cultural affiliations are almost exclusively seen in terms of loyalty, while the remaining two have been given scarce attention, and it explains significance of Appadurai's study for the following chapter as my antifascist interlocutors tend to choose precisely between exist and voice. As mentioned above in the extract from interview with Anja, there is a continuous self-reflection with regards to these two choices – she was constantly repeating that she wants to leave but at the same time she has not left yet and demonstrated the willingness to raise voice and challenge the status quo – in this sense, Appadurai's capacity to aspire or the degree of hope young antifascists have determine their life choices. That is why it is important to understand the conditions leading to accumulation or disperse of hope. As Anja mentioned, at some point she would leave, and that would be the moment when, in Appadurai's words, her capacity to aspire would shrink to its minimum, however, under certain conditions hopefulness may be reinstituted. While Appadurai (ibid., 63) is concerned with the question of 'how can we strengthen the capability of the poor to have and to cultivate "voice,"' his normative approach may be justified due to the specific scope of his study, which focuses on identifying the potential for alleviating poverty, specifically in India among the 'untouchables'. Which is good in itself, unlike hope, which may be related to both noble and evil aspirations.

Ghassan Hage (2001, 2003, 2009, 2015) is another significant contributor to the study of hope and particularly is a major inspiration for the current chapter. On the basis of his study of neoliberal-capitalist Australia, similarly as Appadurai, he draws attention to an uneven distribution of hope, what implies a non-autonomous nature of hope such as embedded in individuals themselves who express hope and to which he refers as the 'ability to give meaning to life' (Hage 2003, 15). The promise of capitalism and neoliberalism establishes a societal hope which holds that there is an opportunity for an upward social mobility (ibid.). This point is significant for the current study because post-Dayton Bosnia was promised to become a post-socialist neoliberal capitalist modern state that will soon be accepted into the European Union and people would live prosperously and peacefully – the promise that, at least in the perspective of my participants, has not been kept. All of my antifascist participants ideologically position themselves as anti-capitalist Marxists, communists, anarchists, or anarcho-syndicalists and oppose neoliberalism. According to Hage (2009, 97), because state unevenly distributes societal hope there are two categories of people: those who are "going somewhere" and those who find themselves in a situation of "stuckedness". The former, are able to enjoy upward social mobility and have meaningful lives and thus are more hopeful in general and have, in Appadurai's words, greater capacity to aspire. The latter, on the contrary, do not feel that they are going anywhere, feel entrapped and thus express less hope about their future. While this scenario is applicable to almost any society, probably with the exception of rare cases where equality is widespread and middle class constitutes an abundant majority but still there would be categories of people experiencing stuckedness, it is particularly observable in post-Dayton BiH. As my participants mention, the only way to have a successful career in the country is to join the party or declare yourself as one of the three ethnic groups, and thus upward social mobility would be guaranteed, which would further be

demonstrated in the concluding section. Anyone, such as antifascists, unwilling to play along the Dayton rules would find themselves in a situation of stuckedness because societal hope under the Dayton Peace Agreement is not distributed to them. Hage argues that the former situation does not only provide economic benefits but also allows to have a dignified life, however, as I will further argue, antifascists find a sense of dignity in opposing the state and implicit Dayton rules for upward mobility despite realizing that they take a position that holds no hope. For example, some of my participants unable to find job refused to join the party when invited because they value their dignity over potential accumulation of material benefits – joining the party would imply becoming a conformist and losing one's dignity. Additionally, my participants demonstrated awareness that they are in the camp to which state does not distribute societal hope. Sometimes, for example, when I asked who is on the other side, it is the case especially with the youngest participants in the study, they would point at a shisha bar on the other side of the street where people would have leisure time presumably unbothered by the political situation in the country. A derogatory term, *papak*, was often assigned to these people, implying that they are uncivilized, apolitical materialists without high moral standards. They enjoy the societal hope distributed by the state and take advantage of the situation that antifascists oppose.

Stef Jansen's theoretical framework lies at the intersection and as a response and continuation of Appadurai and Hage's conceptualization of hope. Jansen shares Appadurai's interest in how certain understandings of a 'good life' shape and contribute to aspirations, however, the author refuses to ground his study of anthropology of hope within the domain of culture, as Appadurai does, because, as it was mentioned, centrality of culture in anthropology perpetuates the disciplines inclination towards pastness (2015, 48). While opposing a mainstream approach to study everything happening in BiH from a culturalist perspective of Balkan violence embedded in

ethnic politics or post-socialist turbulence, Jansen is concerned with the future (ibid). Following Hage's interest in 'current historical conjuncture in Australia', Jansen is concerned with how the movement ('going somewhere') and stuckedness, and consequently the capacity to hope, are related to a prevailing regime of temporal reasoning and how the historical conjuncture shapes horizon of expectations: "I thus conceptualize my research around concerns with the future explicitly conceived of as embedded in a geopolitical conjuncture. I investigate how aspirations in the Dayton BiH Meantime shape up on the intersection of both histories of hope (i.e., futures one once had, both thwarted and fulfilled) and projected normative future paths" (ibid., 48-49). Jansen connects it to the question of normality, something to what my participants have constantly referred to as well, in the context of a dysfunctional state, which is considered as a necessary precondition for normal lives (ibid., 52). Thus, Jansen puts the state, an actor that is responsible for distribution of societal hope, at the center of his study, and demonstrates how his interviewees refuse to normalize the abnormality of Dayton Bosnia (ibid., 53) – something that I could vividly observe in my study. The dissatisfaction with the dysfunctional state coupled with the unkept promises of the Dayton Agreement is what conditions the production, accumulation and distribution of hope, specifically with respect to normal lives. While Jansen's interlocutors are regular residents of the apartment building in Dobrinja neighborhood, my study offers a perspective on a specific category of people in Sarajevo – young antifascist activists – which is specifically useful for the anthropology of hope within the theoretical framework offered by Appadurai and Hage as activism under conditions of poverty or unequal distribution of hope and its limited capacity is specifically revealing about perceptions of hope among the disadvantaged. Consequently, a focus on antifascism helps to understand how young Sarajevans navigate in a situation of unequally distributed societal hope in Dayton Bosnia and attempt to produce it

themselves by engaging in their daily endeavors at DKC while at the same time lacking the possibilities of upward social mobility and being aware of this situation represented by their loss of hope in state and its future. Additionally, this approach offers de-ethnicization of studies of BiH. It is true that the state is politically and ethnically divided, thanks to Dayton it is hard to change it, however, it does not mean that we should approach investigation of everything going on here from ethicized perspectives. Recently, Chiara Milan, whose book *Social Mobilization Beyond Ethnicity* (2020) immediately attracted wide interest among scholars from various disciplines, noted that contemporary protesters in BiH have overcome ethnic divisions, and the mobilization of protests is no longer rooted in this social construct. Nevertheless, the centrality given to ethnicity as determining factor of social life in BiH is still dominant and more studies should challenge it because everyday life of people in this country is shaped by different complex phenomena and this simplistic view may be misleading. Additionally, in her study, Milan overlooked antifascism as a form of daily struggle against the Dayton Bosnia as the author focused instances of more obvious expression of discontent through protesting in the streets.

Before proceeding to this discussion, I would like briefly to come back to the issue of normative approaches to hope studies, which has been slightly mentioned earlier, as it is a common trend presented in the literature discussing political activism under conditions of presumed hopelessness. The reason behind this trend may be explained by the fact that scholars conducting studies of hope with the focus on political activism often turn out to be supportive of the cause or even openly position themselves as activists, such as in the case of studies of anarchists or antifascists. Consequently, their focus is not on the causes of hope production or diminution, what interests me as an anthropologist, but on finding solutions to production and accumulation of hope

among the populations they study. For instance, it is evident in the following extract from David Graeber's article *Hope in Common* (2008):

> The first question we should be asking is: How did this happen? Is it normal for human beings to be unable to imagine what a better world would even be like? Hopelessness isn't natural. It needs to be produced. If we really want to understand this situation, we have to begin by understanding that the last thirty years have seen the construction of a vast bureaucratic apparatus for the creation and maintenance of hopelessness, a kind of giant machine that is designed, first and foremost, to destroy any sense of possible alternative futures. At root is a veritable obsession on the part of the rulers of the world with ensuring that social movements cannot be seen to grow, to flourish, to propose alternatives; that those who challenge existing power arrangements can never, under any circumstances, be perceived to win.

Graeber, who recently passed away during the Covid-19 pandemic, was one of the leading left-wing anthropologists and public thinkers. At the same time, he was an activist and advocate of anarchism which can be seen in the extract above where he emotionally postulates that hope has to be produced to combat oppressive state structures causing hopelessness. Similarly, other notable scholars studying antifascism and who can be considered as activists focus not on the study of hope per se but on the need to produce hope in order to oppose the adversaries of their believes. Mark Bray, in the introduction to his *Anti-Fascist Handbook* (2017, xxiv), expresses his personal hopes: "I hope *Antifa* will aid and inspire those who will take up the fight against fascism in the years to come so that someday there will be no need for this book." Maple Razsa is another influential antifascist scholar, filmmaker, and activist who preaches for the necessity of increasing political hope. In *Bastards of Utopia* (2015, 7), he asserts the following: "I was not specifically nostalgic for the object of Yugoslav socialists' political hopes—the socialist state and economy—but for political hope itself." It has to be noted that I am not advocating against political activism or that I am not compassionate with the feelings of hopelessness expressed by my participants, however, for the intellectual study of anthropology of hope activism involves a prejudiced position with respect to the nature of hope per se.

The belief in inherent morality and virtue of hope and as a consequence to normative approach to anthropology of hope may be traced to the earlier mentioned studies of Bloch and

Miyazaki. For example, Peter Thompson (2013, 3), in his attempt to frame hope in the existing neoliberal context praises Bloch's ability to preserve his 'commitment to hope in the darkest of hours' despite being a 'Jew, Marxist, and atheist intellectual in exile from Nazi Germany'. However, as Bryant and Knight (2019, 142) justly point out, neo-Nazis also have certain hopes that they are aspiring to realize, and thus hope is not necessarily about what Bloch conceptualizes as 'good society'. Bloch's belief in the relationship between hopes and good society may be explained by the fact that hope usually manifests itself when people experience traumas and frustration and thus hope's inclination on challenging this condition is seen as moral (ibid.). The confusion about hopes in scholarly debates may be explained by the fact that hopes, as Baillergeau and Duyvendak (2017, 263) argue, involve projection of one's future in a desirable way. Drawing on Appadurai, the authors contrast expectations and aspirations, where the former constitutes a more rational perception of what is coming while the latter implies something that is desired and thus constitute a presumed 'good life' (ibid.). Here the focus is on what people hope for and this object is perceived as a form of good life from the perspective of the agent who is hoping, however, this perception of good life may be incongruous with others' perspectives, such as assumed good life of neo-Nazis is incompatible with the good life of asylum seekers and immigrants. Similarly, hopes for a more inclusive society of antifascists in Sarajevo may contradict the hopes of conservative population of the city for preservation of what they perceive as traditional life – something that I observed among the people angrily discussing the Pride parade in Sarajevo that took place on the day of my arrival to the field. Jansen extensively criticizes scholars, Miyazaki in particular, who seek hope in presumably hopeless situations rather than studying the hopes themselves. This approach, as Jansen argues, is flawed because such scholars focus on the hopes that they themselves consider as good, which implies bias, and additionally, they are not really

concerned about what people hope for but on the people's capacity to hope in general – the more hope there is the better the world we live in (2021, 11-12). What implies that the capacity to hope is good per se, an assumption Jansen criticizes by mentioning the hopes expressed by racists and sexists (ibid., 14). This is specifically applicable to scholars who are simultaneously activists, which is why my current chapter has a potential to anthropology of hope among activists as I approach it as neutral, who seek to provide the grounds for accumulation of hopes among studied societies to improve the world and make it better in 'particular ways' (Kleist and Jansen 2016, 378). In the following section I am not going to advocate for the hopes antifascists have, or to look for the solutions for them to become more hopeful. Instead, I am going to focus on what my antifascist contacts hope for, how they hope, why they hope in particular ways, and how they navigate in a situation of unequally distributed societal hope in Dayton Bosnia. I will do so by looking at the ways they understand and perceive the past, juxtapose it to the present, and form the perspective of desirable future that they hope for.

Antifascism as a source of good and dignified life in Dayton Bosnia

To begin with, to what extent Dayton Bosnia is a troubled state, or does my sample only present the subjective perception of artists and a politically active young (and dissatisfied) urban population? According to Transparency International's (TI) latest Corruption Perception Index (2023), BiH has demonstrated the biggest downfall in the region of Eastern Europe and Central Asia and ranks third lowest in Europe, with only Russia and Ukraine, which are at war, showing worse figures. In terms of emigration, BiH ranks sixteenth worst out of 214 studied cases, with the total emigration stock from the country close to 45%. Analysts predict that the trend will deteriorate further as the younger and more educated labor force continues to leave (Efendic et al., 2023). This data is not surprising, considering that more than 30% of young people between 15

and 24 in BiH are unemployed and the proportion of them not in NEET has almost reached 20% (ILO 2024). Srđan Blagovčanin (TI 2023), the Chairman of the Management Board of TI BiH, while commenting on the most recent unpromising data openly drew connection between corruption and the existing state institutions and equated the state to organized criminal organization:

> Not only there is no strategy, policy or activity of state institutions to prevent corruption, but state institutions, completely captured by political control, focus their activities almost entirely on causing corruption. Unfortunately, corruption has become the primary reason for the existence of institutions. A special danger for the state is the complete symbiosis of organized crime and state institutions, which will lead to further destabilization of the country and the collapse of security.

Similarly, in scholarly literature there is a wide consensus that Dayton Agreement contributed to nationalization of political discourse which in turn cemented corruption and related socio-economic issues (Jansen 2006 and 2015, Larisa Kurtović 2012, Hromadžić 2015, Majstorović and Vučkovac 2016, Kurtović and Hromadžić 2017, Hofman 2021). There are three points of agreement in literature that help to understand how Dayton system was implemented, cemented and why does it have such a negative impact on daily lives of people, unequally distributes hope, and promotes low levels of capacity to aspire for the majority of people and specifically for my antifascist interlocutors. These interconnected factors include: (1) top-down implementation of a new post-war political model and establishment of protectorate by foreign actors; (2) nationalization of political discourse what perpetuated the rule of political elites and absence of alternatives for political engagement; (3) and exclusion of the Yugoslav and socialist past from political discourse and its erasure form the promised future. Due to these three factors, the participants in my study ground their hopes for the future in the past by juxtaposing the present Dayton system with what they perceive as a more just socialist Yugoslavia through antifascist culture.

Imposed Dayton System

The Dayton Agreement and its Annex 4, which established a constitution for BiH, did not end the war by finalizing the state-building process in the form of a fully sovereign state. Instead, it resembled an international protectorate imposed through a top-down approach (Majstorović and Vučkovac 2016, 147). The Office of High Representative (OHR) which is composed of foreign observers became central authority and over a period of seven years after the war "issued 757 decisions, removing 119 people from public office and imposing 286 laws or amendments to laws" (ibid., 151). The main issue, however, is not that international actors took a significant role in Bosnia's internal affairs, but rather the system that the Dayton Agreement put in place. While pursuing the goal to bring an end to 'inherent ethnic hatreds' it was assumed that the best way would be to give equal representation to each ethnic group such as by dividing the territory across ethnic lines, having three presidents representing each, as well as dozens of ministries with equal proportion of each ethnic group (Bose 2002; Keil and Perry 2016; Banović, Gavrić, and Mariño 2021). As a consequence, the noble goal created a dysfunctional state. As my respondents claim, the state cannot function because there always has to be a consensus for any decision to be proceeded but it is impossible in such a complex and divided political system with, for example, fourteen ministries of education only. As such, all alternative political discourses have been eliminated as the political life in the country became monopolized by nationalism through Dayton, and, as Jansen (2006, 178) claims, the national perspective "remained the only legitimate one to discuss all things Bosnian." This led to disillusionment in relation to democratization and capitalism among Bosnians who feel that they are trapped in their ethnic identities and dysfunctional nationalized state, instead of living a more prosperous and free life after the end of the war (Hromadžic 2015, 85).

Nationalization of political life

Most importantly, the situation contributed to a loss of hope with respect to any political change because the Dayton Agreement created a status quo where the rule of nationalist and corrupted elites cannot be challenged, as Jansen stated (2006, 178): "the early 1990s had seen a colonization of hope by competing nationalist projects." In her Ph.D. dissertation (2012), Larisa Kurtović attempted to answer the incongruity concerning the mass dissatisfaction with the state but at the same time lack of mobilization to challenge it. The answer to this conundrum is the Dayton Agreement. Under normal conditions, while competing for the positions in power, such as in elections, political campaigners try to win over electorate and attract voters by distributing collective hope and providing a sense of futural momentum (Bryant and Knight 2019, 143 and 145). They need to make promises appealing to their electorate and take responsibility for keeping their promises to a certain extent. In BiH such incentives are unappealing to the elites because they are certain of winning any electoral cycle. Due to this status quo, we can observe the perpetuation of the Dayton Bosnia and the continuation of the rule of existing national elites unbothered by giving or keeping political promises, as summarized by Jansen (2015, 193): "How do we square this with the fact that the most commonly offered explanations for the longevity of the Dayton ruling caste in outside commentary on BiH revolve around nationalism? The idea here is that three nationalist elites secured ideological consent from their target populations by appealing to their sense of national belonging" (2015, 193). One of my interlocutors commenting on the impossibility to challenge the existing system stated the following:

> You can't really change the constitution as long as the national parties are ruling and they are going to rule because of the constitution. It is a perpetual model of bullshit and you cannot do anything about it. What they did in Dayton is horrible because there are no mechanisms of change. Once we were at the High Representative Office, and this foreign observer says something like "now we ain't gonna meddle anymore in your politics, we're gonna let the people change it." So, what does he expect? And I said, how do you expect from an old woman from Srebrenica whose husband or sons have been murdered in genocide to vote for a non-nationalist party? And they will keep on voting for the nationalist shitty tribes (Anonymous interview 8, July 19, 2023).

The elites are well aware of this fact and thus the main nationalist parties representing Bosnian Muslims, Croats or Serbs are confident that their respective populations to a larger extent would keep on voting along nationalist lines within the Dayton framework while alternative politics would remain demobilized (Jansen 2015, 10 and 193). Such status quo critically affects the situation with respect to the question of hope as it is distributed by the state. Those who are satisfied by the situation and benefit from it are the ones to whom the hope is well-distributed, while the others, such as my antifascist participants, are lacking it and consequently cannot enjoy the upward mobility offered by the nationalist party politics and these are the social circumstances that forge the structure of hope among antifascists.

Exclusion of socialist Yugoslav legacy

Not surprisingly, those on the margins did not accept the exclusion of the Yugoslav legacy from the political discourse and it became a point of reference for hope for many of those to whom it is not distributed in Dayton Bosnia. Due to the disillusionment with the promised democratization and widespread corruption that the system produced, it is believed that corruption was a lot more controllable as well as legible during the Yugoslav period (Hromadžić 2015, 159). As such, the Yugoslav state is juxtaposed to the current one as a more just and arguably with higher potential for a dignified life. The exclusion of Yugoslav legacy has eliminated any alternative to "the dictatorship of cultural fundamentalisms legitimized and cemented by 'Dayton'" (Majstorović and Vučkovac 2016), however, the nation-wide protest in 2014 demonstrated that this past remains appealing to many people across the country and not only to my antifascist participants. The 2014 protests gave rise to people assemblies that were named as *plenums*, and as Tanja Petrović (2016, 510) claims, this choice of Yugoslav terminology "directly refer to the collectivity and collective agency experienced in socialist times and lost in transition." Additionally, during these protests a rebranding of the most famous antifascist and Partisan slogan *Smrt fašizmu, sloboda narodu!*

(Death to fascism, freedom to the people) was reimagined as "Death to capitalism, freedom to the people!" (Hofman 2021, 157). Vanja Čelebičić (2013) claims that in comparison to the existing institutionalized unpredictability there was more prospect for hope in post-WWII Yugoslavia as the system was more predictable and thus there was a largely shared feeling that people had a clear understanding of what they could expect from the state. Personally, I was struck by abundant references to Yugoslavia as a more just society, the feeling that was extensively expressed by my participants, as it seemed to me incongruous – how can antifascists seeking for justice and freedoms can approve communism – my assumption was based on my own positionality as a post-Soviet subject aware of the injustices of a murderous totalitarian regime in relation to my home country. It was also grounded in an extensive literature that focuses on the negative aspects of Yugoslavia and which considers any attempt to shed a light on the positive aspects of life under socialism as engagement in delirious Yugonostalgia. However, there was no incongruity for my participants. Stef Jansen during his fieldwork experienced similar responses when his participants 'sought to liberate him as a Western European' of any attempt to assume that life in Yugoslavia was anyhow similar to what people in the Soviet Bloc could experience (2015, 39). Both of our participants similarly mentioned that Yugoslavia was a founding member of the Non-Aligned Movement, that people could travel and purchase goods in both the East and the West, attend concerts of rock bands in Britain and then bring new music genres and tendencies to the highly acclaimed Sarajevo music scene, and that there was pride that the country was globally recognized and respected. In other words, they had a normal life. While now, as one of my interlocutors stated, if your constitution, which should be a foundation of a country, is the main reason of dysfunctional state and when you are living in this situation when you cannot look forward, naturally you are going to look back to something when things were better.

Hoping for the future by looking into the past

As my respondents claimed, the Yugoslav predictability implied that as an expert in any professional field you would be respected, fairly paid, the state would provide you with an apartment and pension upon your retirement. My participants of the study have constantly pointed it out while demonstrating that the past was more just in comparison with the present regime. The difference in terms of justice, as my interlocutors stated, concerns the question of religion. If you were a practicing Muslim, Orthodox, or Catholic there was no room for participating in political life of socialist Yugoslavia and if attempted you could have ended up in Goli Otok, a political prison during the Tito regime and broadly metaphor for political repression. This may be an exaggeration, however, here I am not relying on factual representation of the past but discussing the collective memory of the past as delivered by my participants in the study. Despite the restrictions posed on the public role of religion, it was possible to practice religion in one's private life, as my respondents claimed, and even receive a pension as a religious priest of any confession, as did grandfather of one of my interlocutors. Now, conversely, it is believed, that your professional expertise does not matter and in the existing corrupt system you have to align with one of the three ethno-religious political groups which would guarantee you successful career. In the words of Ghassan Hage, the primary concern of my participants in Dayton Bosnia is the way societal hope is being distributed through an unjust system for upward social mobility. Drawing on Slavoj Žižek's lecture presented in London, Hage (2001) demonstrates how hope is being distributed. In Žižek and Hage's opinion Margaret Thatcher was able to appeal to general public and consequently became popular across all levels of society by distributing hope through the following message: "if you 'possessed' the 'British character', you possessed the capacity to experience upward social mobility even if, in the present, you are at the bottom of the heap" (ibid.). Similarly, Donald Trump's recent successful campaign promised hope of success to the working

class of America. Such messages imply that citizens of the nation, irrespective of what they have and where they currently are on the social scale, are guaranteed to be respected upon their merit and have a just and fair chance for a dignified life. As mentioned above, there is no incentive for such messages and promises in Dayton Bosnia, as the electorate votes along national lines. Consequently, there is no need to guarantee merit-based rewards to all citizens, but only to those upon whom the elites rely. This situation has led to widespread corruption and clientelism as believed by my participants, but also supported in the literature as demonstrated below. My participants constantly mentioned that there is no one they could vote for in elections and none of the parties represent their concerns. It does not mean that for my participants in this seemingly hopeless situation there is nothing they hope for. As in Jansen's conclusion, they hope for normal lives but in addition to that they hope for what Hage calls "meaningful life and dignified social life" and what Appadurai frames as "good life", which I will demonstrate through my participants' perception of meritocracy and upward mobility.

During my fieldwork, an incident took place in the small town of Jablanica, which has 10,000 inhabitants, located south of Sarajevo. Enisa Klepo, a receptionist at a local establishment, was severely beaten and insulted by the owner after declaring that she was willing to quit her job due to the poor conditions and asking for her salary for the past month (Sarajevo Times 2023). The incident immediately produced public resonance and mass protests across the nation, which eventually led to a 10-month imprisonment for the accused, Amir Džafić (Radio Slobodna Evropa 2023). A few days after the incident I had an interview with a famous Sarajevan journalist Džejla and naturally our conversation brought us to discussing what happened to Klepo to which Džejla stated the following:

> That is a women's rights issue, but that's also about workers' rights, and that's also about corruption because that man is close to some important people. If you stay only on the level that it was just an incident when a woman was beaten that's a very superficial picture. Let's go deep. You can ask a million questions about it.

> Why did he not pay her? What are conditions of other workers? But first of all, how is it possible that a law graduate would work in such a small town as a receptionist for such a small salary of 350 Euro? Where we are if we live in that kind of situation? (Anonymous interview 21, August 10, 2023).

In a post on Facebook page of the Bosnian Antifascist group "Antifašisti BiH – Антифашисти БиХ" in addition to the photo of Klepo depicting her injuries the text stated:

> Here is how a worker who demanded her salary looks like after Amir Džafić, the owner of the hotel in Jablanica, has beaten her because of her rightful request. Capitalism brought us revival of the oppression of the workers. The bosses use support of politicians and judicial system to defeat us (August 4, 2023).

While both this Facebook post and Džejla's comment do not belittle the crime committed by the employer, the central issues highlighted are corruption and unfair employment options both constituting structural problems. In a meritocratic society, if you find yourself in low position in society in socio-economic terms, a fair self-evaluation would hold that it is your personal failure, however, in a corrupt state, absence of faith in meritocracy leads to a loss of hope among high-skilled population (Baillergeau and Duyvendak 2017, 263-264). As a consequence, those who are unjustly deprived of opportunities for upward mobility lose hope and face the situation when they need to choose between loyalty, exit or voice. Exit in BiH takes place when hope is completely withdrawn and eventually people choose to emigrate, a choice that has been taken by the majority as the data above demonstrates. Also, it may lead to a political apathy due to a loss of hope for immediate needs such as job. For example, Jansen (2015, 189) mentions a case in which his friend, who has usually been politically conscious and often engaged in protests, chose not to attend one of the upcoming demonstrations after being rejected from yet another job application and feeling pessimistic about her chances of getting employed. It reflects a situation when horizon of what people hope for, such as producing political change through activism, shrinks due to the fact that even the most immediate short-term hopes are not being realized. For example, one of the participants, who is the frontman of a popular young Sarajevan rock band, after having a deep discussion on political theory and potential for future in BiH, towards the end of the interview

sadly said that after all what really concerns him and his peers is who among them would be able to buy cigarettes and drinks. Nevertheless, despite such down to earth hopes as a result of general socio-economic situation and unequally distributed societal hope, my participants choose voice and they often express it not only by protesting but by demonstrating a position against loyalty and compliance with the politicized and ethicized Dayton job market, as it is described by one of the participants:

> During Tito's time there was corruption and nepotism and unemployment but if you were good at something you would definitely get a job even if you were not associated with party or even did not like Tito. Now, even if you are the best, you have to be in the party. And that is the main reason why people are leaving. Because this is so mentally toxic, this nationalism is so mentally toxic (Anonymous interview 24, August 13, 2023).

Compliance with the system is the source of capacity to aspire. Those who go along are the receivers of societal hope through opportunities for upward mobility distributed to them by the ruling elites. Self-preservation of moral image among my participants was demonstrated through the opposition to taking the possibilities for upward mobility provided by the state despite their current economic situation. In Bosnian society there is a wide agreement that *politika* ("politics") is an immoral sphere (Jansen 2015, 192). In addition, as perceived by participants in the study, there is no actual competition between the parties because the divisions imposed by Dayton benefit them all and they are ready to preserve the status quo and even cooperate to do so. The following extracts from the interviews demonstrate the lack of trust towards political parties among my participants and their consensus on the immoral nature of parties and political elites:

> The parties do not actually hate each other. Liberals, SDA, SDS, everybody. They all cooperate. They don't have any issues with that. That's why I'm saying they're not even nationalists. I mean, they just use nationalism to achieve their goals (Anonymous interview 21, August 10, 2023).

> No political party can ever hold a majority or even come close to it. So political parties are dependent on each other and on coalitions which are always fragile but persistent because being in power also means resolving very practical issues such as preserving opportunities for personal gains and offering employment to members and supporters (Anonymous interview 13, July 28, 2023).

> Every party is connected to some business. Such as during COVID with the equipment and any kind of procurement, it was all carried through political parties and their clientelist channels. So our political parties

> tend to form unions and cooperate when it's good for their businesses and interests. Oftentimes they don't even try to mask their intents and crimes because they're so strong. What we have is a mafia system (Anonymous interview 18, August 8, 2023).

While my participants have constantly juxtaposed the existing political regime with socialist Yugoslavia, it has never been a blind nostalgia. Even the ones who declared themselves as Marxists were able to critically evaluate Tito's rule and pointed out the issues that existed, such as in the last extract above. The juxtaposition was rationalized by the belief widely shared among my participants that socialist Yugoslavia was a more just regime in terms of respecting people upon their merit and as such anyone who deserved it could live a normal life, having a job, apartment and travel both within Yugoslavia and across Europe. To an extent, from a historical perspective, this could be disputed. However, what matters for the study of hopes among antifascists in Sarajevo today is how they collectively perceive the past and juxtapose it with the present, rather than how it actually was. The current system, as it was unanimously stated by my interlocutors, requires conformism and compliance with the rules of the game imposed by Dayton. According to my participants, an upward mobility is guaranteed if you join the system. This consensus on the immoral nature of politics and the Dayton party system holds that joining it implies a loss of face and dignity.

Emina, an award-winning artist from Sarajevo and antifascist activist, shared with me her story which perfectly highlights this situation. The Dayton Agreement, she stated, created a system where political elites cannot be challenged and due to this scenario, the elites are not accountable. What matters to them is whether you are with them or not and in the former case you would be fine in terms of opportunities. According to Emina, anyone willing to become rich and successful in Bosnia only needs to join the party while alternatives are non-existent. She juxtaposed it to the past which she believes was more just as Tito's Yugoslavia was a meritocratic regime and despite religion being officially disallowed, religious people were

accepted to job force due to their qualifications although they were forced to keep their beliefs in privacy and were not able to join the party. Now, as she says, it is the other way around and it is worse because the qualifications you have are not important, the only path for upward mobility is compliance. Emina herself was invited to join some parties multiple times, but she refused due to the following reasons she provided:

> You ain't gonna be positioned high in this society if you do not join one of them. This is why people refer to antifascism. If you want to have a good job there is little chance you can get it unless you are a member of the Nationalist Party. That is where every idiot sees the opportunity. It's a #^%ked up system! They called me several times. My father died in war. So I could easily go into this democratic SDA party as I'm a child of a warrior who died defending Sarajevo. Also, I have masters in human rights and democracy, and I am a good public speaker. I would be a great SDA party member or SDP or whatever. I could easily join any of these parties and immediately get a great job, I could be rich. Instead, I'm living at the edge of poverty this whole time because I don't want to be part of any of this. I have 200 exhibitions across the globe behind my back, so many awards but then I try to get a job at the art school and it's impossible for me. You have to have connections in these parties. The only way for me to get any kind of state job and even in education is to just join the #^%king party. It's so easy. I was invited by two parties several times and they asked me to join them because they need people like me for their political agenda but I would not join them (Anonymous interview 8, July 19, 2023).

Emina's opinion, widely shared by other participants, implies there is an awareness about disproportional distribution of hope and opportunities in society as well as there is an understanding of what needs to be done to move from an unpleasurable economic position to a more advanced one in terms of material success. However, as she makes it clear, living at the edge of poverty is more preferable than becoming rich by joining immoral politics. Thus, there is no hope for upward social mobility under the existing political regime but what people hope for is a dignified life even at the cost of low living standards. That is what antifascist position grants them, as stated by Emina. Staying outside political system is what constitutes, in words of Appadurai and Hage, good or dignified lives. What is interesting is that corruption also existed in Yugoslavia but it was not considered as morally impermissible as the current one. Azra Hromadžić (2015, 169), after having witnessed excessive corruption, asked her friend to elaborate on it and compare it to the situation under socialism. To which he replied that in the past regime it existed but to a smaller extent and when exercised it was done to promote those who have the necessary qualities

and in secrecy while now professional expertise does not matter at all as well as people exercising corruption would brag about it as it implies you have connections and high social capital (ibid., 170). When Hromadžić asked her respondent about the recent incident when he bribed an official to help his niece with university examination, he gave a reply similar to Emina's comment implying that it is not bribery per se which constitutes immorality as under the existing conditions it is often necessary to go through the systemic injustices but the system itself is immoral:

> You do not understand. Things have changed. I have high moral standards. Everyone in this town knows that— you cannot buy Husein, I am transparent. You know my story—I lost several jobs because I refused to join SDA [the leading Bosniak nationalist party] and play their dirty game. I even, for a while, left the public life altogether (Hromadžić 2015, 171).

In this situation, in order to have a high capacity to aspire or to be a recipient of societal hope it is required to consider what Hromadžić (ibid., 173) calls 'post-Dayton spaces of hope and political and economic agency' which are rooted primarily not in intellectual capabilities but in shadow economies and consequently 'corrupt behavior and informal networks became a contemporary skill that made one's survival more probable' (ibid., 169). People like Emina or Hromadžić's respondent in this respect are on the margins and even when have to engage in corruption do so in order to correct injustices, such as when you have to pay the bribe to pass the exam even though you are qualified, or to get a good treatment at the medical facility. Those who are ready to take active role in these shadow economies and to take advantage are the ones against whom my antifascist interlocutors position themselves. This position constitutes dignified life – there is no hope in system but at least they hope for preserving their moral character in an immoral Dayton Bosnia – what can be seen in derogatory term *papak* used to describe their opposition. Hromadžić (2015, 170) provides a similar example of a high school teacher belittling corrupt elites in Mostar who received the fortunes through illegal channels:

> In her lecture on Mostar landscape, the teacher introduced the rise of a new type of local elites and their dangerous, kitschy, and huge homes: ''due to the type of soil on which the homes in the Strmina neighborhood [where many new elites construct their homes] in Mostar are built, if there is an earthquake

> or a big flood, all those houses with their big fake lions [one of the main symbols of kitsch and ‘‘bad’’ taste] are going to start sliding and they will push narod into the Neretva [River].’’

The elites are pictured as uneducated as they are incompetent about the dangers of building their homes on inappropriate soil, and as uncultured because of their materialistic and out of taste aspirations. Also, negligence of the general public is what is characteristic of elites, according to my participants, when infrastructure is considered.

“They cannot even paint the buildings that Tito built” is a famous phrase in the region and in particular in Sarajevo, often mentioned by my participants, when they wanted to show the difference between the current regime and the past. Look around, they would tell, almost everything with the exception of the Ottoman and Habsburg legacy was built under Tito in Yugoslavia. Infrastructure may define societal hope in both positive and negatives ways depending on the material conditions such as whether roads and buildings are in good conditions or are dilapidating (Street 2012, 54, and Reeves 2017, cited in Jansen 2021, 5). Such as, for example, in the beginning of this chapter Asja explained her desire to leave Sarajevo because she hopes that in Switzerland or Germany she would enjoy normal infrastructure and public transportation. In Sarajevo, according to respondents there is no infrastructural hope, meaning that due to the conditions of infrastructure there is consensus that government does not care about public and as a consequence there is no hope in government and that is what explains mobilization of antifascists. While having a coffee in the city center my respondent pointed at the hole in asphalt and stated the following:

> There is nothing here to hope for. Because we have so many levels of government we have no idea who is responsible for this hole here. Literally I have no idea who to approach so that it will be fixed tomorrow, nobody knows. You don't know who to address when you have an issue with an old tree that has falling down on the road. You have no idea who to call. People have to find a way to deal with such issues by themselves, they need to start believing in themselves, to create solidarity. That is what I believe in. There is no state to help us. If we have a problem like this hole we should say ‘okay, let's five of us find a way to deal with that’. Then, hopefully, maybe we can build something different. The problem is that people here, at the moment, and I belong as well, have no hope. I mean, my only reason why I'm still here is because I

> have old parents, otherwise, oh, I would leave immediately, I will not even take my bags (Anonymous interview 21, August 10, 2023).

At the time I was not even aware that I would be writing a chapter on anthropology of hope but this extract demonstrates it well why this concept is central to my study of antifascism in Sarajevo. The mixture of feelings, such as desire to improve the situation but at the same time the desire to leave for a better life somewhere else at the intersection of hope for hopefulness and absence of it, was widespread among my participants. Despite the desire to live in Sarajevo and fight for a better country expressed by my antifascist respondents, no one has ever said to me that they would stay no matter what, which demonstrates how hope fluctuates, under certain conditions anyone could leave, there is a threshold and it is individual for each person – when there is no more hope left, people look for it somewhere else and eventually leave as it is believed that 'hope lies elsewhere' (Jansen 2021, 3). For those who chose 'voice' and stay, antifascism gives this opportunity to hope for hopefulness in a hopeless situation.

All of the participants in my study can be classified as intellectuals, well-educated, cultured, know multiple languages; meaning that they have a high capacity to hope for a successful or at least more decent life elsewhere. Such as one of my interlocutors stated that he has so many opportunities to go outside and live economically more sustainable life because he has MA degree in arts, knows English and German, he is the frontman (another one) of currently the most popular young rock-band in Sarajevo but yet he chooses to stay despite low living standards. As he said, it is because he wants "to do a change, in his own society and this is what is the most important goal for me and my friends at DKC who they are still here." Through their activities at DKC they demonstrate their 'voice' and discontent with the current situation. Felix Ringel (2012, 173) while studying a similar case of anarchist activism in the framework of hope studies in a dilapidating East German city of Hoyerswerda frames it as 'creative presentism' used to reclaim present and

past in a city without future. I however, similar to Hofman (2021, 167), argue that daily activism of my participants constitutes an ethical potential of antifascism to pursue their hopes for good and dignified lives. Antifascism is a culture that is already in place that people can relate to and through it aspire for a better future, as demonstrated in the following extracts from the interviews:

> Antifascism is a very good way to say that you are aware that there are things that you need to address. Because ignorance and being apolitical is very dangerous. For example, to show how people use it here, there was a recent attack on LGBT population in Banja Luka and on their cultural center. It was a fascist attack. Us and many cultural centers from all over the country reacted, offered solidarity messages and similar. So it's that kind of a situation when you are able to realize that you do have community that will respond to such issues. That comes from historic experience of our ancestors that was transmitted to us through literature and iconography and everything. I'm glad that this spirit is alive and can easily be used to address our everyday struggles (Anonymous interview 14, August 1, 2023).

> When I say I am proud about antifascist period, I think intrinsically it is because I feel that at this particular moment people in this region were really able to bring their imagination to life, meaning that they were able to, at least for a little while to imagine a different world (Anonymous interview 9, July 19, 2023).

> Antifascism for me is not my entire political identity. It's the one that gives me a very specific day-to-day purpose of defending the few things that are still good in this country and fighting against the really shitty stuff in this country (Anonymous interview 18, August 8, 2023).

It is implied here that antifascism is a significant collective element of the Bosnian culture that has proven to be useful and successful in the past and to which people can refer to at present. It provides my interlocutors with a moral framework to oppose immoral politics of Dayton Bosnia on a daily basis. It is not necessarily about a direct opposition to the state through protests and demonstrations but mere adherence to the values of antifascism position my interviewees against injustices and places them in a more dignified superior position. In order to develop capacity to aspire, although it is primarily distributed by institutions, young people such as my antifascist participants, need to create a repository of resources that allow them to build hopes and aspirations about the future (Baillergeau and Duyvendak 2022, 207). For the disadvantaged people with low share of societal hope in order to start aspiring and hoping, or to increase this capacity, as Appadurai (2004, 67) argues, there is a need for a certain cultural framework. Aspirations are not individual but take shape and resonate within social life and culture (ibid.). Thus, understanding of good and dignified

life despite existing inequalities and injustices takes place in a cultural framework. In the case of my participants in Sarajevo, understanding of moral life is constituted in the framework of the antifascist culture.

Conclusion

At first glance, it may seem that hopelessness is widespread in BiH. I had a similar feeling while in the field, speaking with my participants. As demonstrated by Ghassan Hage, a lack of hope is conditioned by the state's inability, or lack of desire, to distribute societal hope through opportunities for upward social mobility. Under such conditions, in the words of Arjun Appadurai, people have a low capacity for aspiration. These circumstances are present in BiH, and as a result, a widespread sense of hopelessness can be observed. However, this does not mean that people cease hoping for something positive and desirable. In this chapter, I demonstrate how the participants in this study navigate Dayton Bosnia—a nationalized, dysfunctional, corrupt, and unaccountable state that cannot be easily challenged—through antifascism. Due to their inability to live normal and dignified lives in the present situation, my respondents turn to the memory of antifascism in Yugoslavia, which they largely consider the best period in BiH's history. Antifascism is a significant collective element of Bosnian culture that has proven useful and successful in the past and remains relevant today. It provides my interlocutors with a moral framework to oppose the immoral politics of Dayton Bosnia on a daily basis through adherence to its values and consequently lets them hope for normal and dignified lives. In the following chapter, I demonstrate how an antifascist stance in opposition to Dayton Bosnia functions as an alternative to nationalized politics in the private lives of my participants and how it allows them to live within the truth and pursue actual freedom despite the oppressive system imposed by the Dayton Peace Agreement.

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Chapter 3
Challenging revisionism in Dayton Bosnia

Trip to Srebrenica on Genocide anniversary

On July 11, 2023, at six in the morning, with a group of foreigners working in various local think tanks and human rights organizations, I stood in front of the Hotel Europe, waiting for a bus to travel to the Srebrenica Genocide Memorial located in the village of Potočari in Republika Srpska. The events that took place in the town of Srebrenica between July 11 and July 22 were described by the United Nations as "the worst crime on European soil since the Second World War" (Guterres 2020). On July 11, 1995, the Army of Republika Srpska, led by Ratko Mladić, occupied the town that had been declared a UN Safe Area. In the following days, they deported women and the elderly and exterminated approximately 8,000 Bosnian Muslim men and children. The tragedy was recognized as genocide by the International Criminal Tribunal and the International Court of Justice. Additionally, in May 2024, the UN General Assembly designated July 11 as the "International Day of Reflection and Commemoration of the 1995 Genocide in Srebrenica" (UN Press Release 2024). However, the exact number of victims of what became known as the Srebrenica Massacre is still debated and remains subject to revisionism on both sides; some even deny that genocide occurred.

In 2023, I attended the 28th annual commemoration of this humanitarian tragedy. Despite the 36-degree heat, thousands of people attended the ceremony, seeking shelter under the shade of trees.

Photograph by Tesnim Karisik

The annual commemoration involves not only expressing grief and sorrow for the victims but also mass funerals, as new victims are identified each year and newly discovered remains require burial. On the 28th anniversary, 71 graves were reopened to bury additional remains, and thirty more victims were buried, raising the number of graves in the memorial park to 6,751 (Kurtic, 2023). The remains of around 1,000 more victims are still waiting to be discovered, identified, and buried alongside their fellow villagers and family members (ibid).

When I first came to Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) as an MA student in 2019, my first interlocutor and entry point to the field was Jelena Grujić, a human rights activist and journalist from Belgrade. Although it may sound as exoticization or exaggeration, she pointed to the peanuts on our table and told me that when you arrive in Sarajevo and start a conversation—even about something as irrelevant as peanuts—in ten minutes, you may end up talking about the war, with

every side having its own perspective. Indeed, revisionism in BiH is ubiquitous and together with hope and normality related topics, the issue of revisionism was another central topic raised by my participants in the study. I decided to begin this chapter with my travel to Srebrenica because, on that day, I was able to witness revisionism on two occasions. In fact, it was far more than two, which is not surprising given that it is one of the most politicized events of the last war, with statements from politicians on each side being abundant that day. However, here I am referring specifically to revisionism from ordinary people that I could observe myself in the morning upon arrival to Potočari and later in the evening while conducting an interview with one of the participants. Revisionism is an important topic to consider when studying antifascism, as the study of antifascism often goes hand in hand with the study of revisionism, as will be further demonstrated in the following section.

Around nine in the morning, we had almost reached the Memorial Center. A narrow road was filled with buses, cars, and bikes coming from across the country and Europe to attend the ceremony. When there were about 30 minutes of travel left, we were stopped by a local Republika Srpska police officer. After a brief conversation with the bus driver, we took a different route. The driver turned to us and explained that it was the wrong road, which would add an extra 30 minutes to our journey. He accused the police officer of deliberately forcing us to take the wrong road to make our trip more complicated and keep us on the bus longer. Indeed, all of us in the bus had a feeling of unease as we were approaching Srebrenica because of unwelcoming gazes from the local Serb community. Possibly, we overreacted, and our feelings were shaped by certain expectations, as we knew that in this area, genocide denial is widespread and we might not be welcomed warmly. However, whether we can accept the driver's interpretation of the incident at face value is questionable. Perhaps the police officer was trying to relieve the packed road and distribute the

incoming buses and cars evenly across alternative routes to avoid the traffic jam that was already in place. While we cannot determine intentions of the police officer, our bus driver's interpretation is a form of revisionism in itself within a broader context of revisionism with regards to the events that took place in Srebrenica in 1995.

What happened later in the evening was less ambiguous and rather a factual representation of revisionism in the form of genocide denial or glorification of war criminals. I was having a conversation with one of the active members of the DKC community, and since it was the 11th of July, we obviously discussed Srebrenica. Amina was quite emotional about the question of whether she would be able to visit Republika Srpska or not, because a few days before our interview, a trans teen was murdered in Belgrade. Also, earlier in the summer, she and other LGBTQ activists from Sarajevo had organized an event in Banja Luka, located in Republika Srpska, where they were physically attacked by local nationalists. Since then, she had been worried about nationalist sentiments in Republika Srpska: "I don't feel safe there at all. For example, even when if I go there, I would not stop there and everyone would recommend you that. If you are thirsty or need to go to toilet don't stop in the villages around Srebrenica. People there would recognize that you are not local." As the conversation proceeded, she received a message and read it to me. It said that locals in bars and cafes around Srebrenica were singing Četnik songs. The rumor quickly spread throughout Sarajevo, and everywhere people were discussing how Četnik songs were heard during the day when people commemorated the victims of genocide. It was a manifestation of genocide denial. Amina told me "you see, how can I go there?" Arguably, singing Četnik songs does not necessarily imply genocide denial; however, in this particular case, the connection between the two is evident, as the songs were performed on the day commemorating the victims of the Srebrenica genocide.

The songs drew a connection between WWII and the Bosnian War, something that each side of the conflict does while engaging in revisionist rhetoric. Bosnian Muslims accuse Serbs of genocide denial. Serbs may point out the fact that Naser Orić, commander of the Bosnian Army in Srebrenica, who arguably committed war crimes against Serbs and for which he was cleared by a court in Sarajevo. Croats may bring up the crimes committed against them during the Siege of Mostar and in the nearby village of Potoci. What is significant is that all of these selectively remembered facts that can be employed in a revisionist interpretation are connected by nationalists on each side to the events of WWII, Partisans, and antifascism.

At times, it seems that there can be no consensus at all and this cycle of recriminations has no solution. For example, one year later, I was organizing the ValEUs conference at Nazarbayev University. One of the attendees was a scholar from BiH, specifically from the Republika Srpska. I was glad that I could talk about my dissertation with her. However, when I mentioned that I was conducting research on antifascism in Sarajevo, she abruptly questioned me: "Why would anyone conduct a study about antifascism in Sarajevo if they were the fascists? There was the Handžar Division." The 13th Waffen Mountain Division of the SS Handschar, commonly referred to as the Handžar Division, was mainly composed of Bosnian Muslims who collaborated with the Nazi regime. While Četniks and Ustaša are well known for collaborationism on Serb and Croat sides respectively, the Handžar Division is less famous in this respect but it is mentioned by the nationalists in the revisionist discourse to make it clear that Muslims were not innocent and there were fascists among them as well. Obviously, I was well aware of it, however, the incident reminded me of the defeating and deterministic nature of revisionism in BiH – how then can we talk about the past at all? Here I do not have a goal to determine who committed more crimes, who has lost more lives in either conflict, or to establish historical truth, if it is at all possible. My goal

is to discuss revisionism and how it is employed by various political elites in the framework of Dayton Bosnia from the perspective of my antifascist participants.

Revisionism of antifascism

As Enzo Traverso (2016, 324) noted, "With respect to 'revisionism', antifascism is a case study par excellence." The disputes between rehabilitators of fascism, anti-antifascists or anti-communists, and antifascists are never-ending and can still be observed today across Europe. Despite the defeat of fascism and acknowledgment of its inhumane totalitarian nature, attempts to revise and rehabilitate it while at the same time attributing blame to antifascism have started in the mid-20th century and are widespread even today such as in Italy (Traverso 2016, Prezioso 2016, Focardi 2016), Spain (Soro 2016), Portugal (Loff and Soutelo 2016), Poland (Rawski 2019), Ukraine and Russia (Faraldo 2016).

Former Yugoslavia, and specifically BiH, could also be considered a case *par excellence* within the study of revisionism in relation to antifascism. One can examine the history textbooks across the six former Yugoslav republics and find completely different and often conflicting interpretations of antifascism and the Partisans. In BiH alone, there is one Serbian-language history textbook, five Croatian, and four Bosnian, each offering competing narratives (Trbovc and Trošt 2017, 174). It would not seem strange when one considers that there are fourteen ministries of education in Dayton Bosnia. Consequently, there is no surprise in that my antifascist respondents have expressed frustration with widespread revisionism. Such as once, late in the evening we were sitting at our local pub. With frustration one of us exclaimed – "Alright, we cannot talk about politics, everyone has a position. Let's leave it aside and talk about what we can fix, what we can do better for our future. Can we at least have an agreement about roads?" – it was a rhetorical question. The example of roads, meaning poor infrastructural conditions, was an ironic hyperbolization which, however, was used to illustrate a surreal situation. An implied message

held that the nationalist discourse embedded in Dayton Bosnia leaves no room for certainty or agreement, the belief shared among my interlocutors, even in seemingly irrelevant issues such as bad roads. In Dayton Bosnia anything can be interpreted in certain ways according to varying perspectives and interests, in this sense, revisionism of antifascism is one of the central issues.

Revisionism, per se, is not a negative phenomenon and should not be perceived merely as an opportunistic manipulation of the past events to serve present-day political goals. It is natural to examine the past from the perspective of our current knowledge, sensibilities, ethical concerns, and moral views. Our contemporary understanding of major historical events, such as the French and Russian revolutions, may differ significantly from how these events were viewed by scholars in the early and mid-twentieth century (Traverso 2016, 322). Nevertheless, it is the political rather than historical dimension of revisionism that attracts more scholarly attention, especially in the field of antifascism studies. For example, in the recent edited volume *Rethinking Antifascism: History, Memory, and Politics, 1922 to the Present (2016)*, most contributors focused on the manipulation of historical events for political goals when defining revisionism. Enzo Traverso (2016, 321) argued that although revisionism is a historiographical concept, its ethical orientation makes it a political phenomenon. Similarly, Stéfanie Prezioso (2016, 241) highlighted the moral-historical aspect of revisionism and demonstrated how political actors employ it to critique dominant orthodoxy with the goal of succeeding in their political battles. Manuel Loff and Luciana Soutelo (2016, 300) illustrated how historical revisionism can function almost entirely without actual historical context in order to 'rehabilitate Nazi-fascist regimes,' 'redistribute historical responsibility for war,' and 'reinterpret political and social revolutions and upheavals in order to depict them as criminal.' Similarly, within the divisions institutionalized by the Dayton Peace Agreement, each political group legitimizes itself and continuity of the status quo by narrating the

past in favorable ways, each attempting to portray their ancestors as innocent while attributing guilt to the other two camps, and transcend these revisions into the present day politics.

Theoretical framework for analysis of revisionism in Dayton Bosnia

As discussed in the previous chapter, the divisions imposed by the Dayton Peace Agreement are central to the anti-nationalist sentiment of antifascists. In contrast, for the Dayton elites, these divisions are a source of legitimacy, and their continuation is an existential concern shared by nationalist elites to ensure the prolongation of the Dayton system. As one of the participants stated:

> Our corrupted politicians are more than happy to use nationalism to cover their affairs. We are pretty much aware that they know what they are doing, they cooperate between each other and when they need they throw a bone in the public space so people fight again over these ethnic questions instead of fighting against corruption and nepotism (Anonymous interview 13, July 28, 2023).

The "bone" mentioned in this extract is a metaphor for the various revisionist narratives that nationalist elites continually use to distract society from pressing socio-economic issues. While many believe that BiH is an ethnically divided country incapable of achieving fully peaceful cohabitation, my antifascist participants argue that this division is artificially promoted by nationalist elites. These elites are primarily concerned with retaining power within the perfectly structured Dayton system, which allows three ethnic political groups to maintain their dominance simultaneously. Many of my participants in the study doubt that these elites are genuinely driven by nationalist sentiments, seeing the revisionist narratives that they use instead as a mere "bone" thrown to the public over which people continue fighting. This tactic ensures that the general population remains preoccupied with infighting and consequently standing by their national representatives in the government, diverting attention from the elites' corruption and nepotism. When referring to the country they live in, they may not explicitly mention Dayton, but many of my participants describe it as a system or matrix imposed from above—one they did not voluntarily

choose. This system contributes to the preservation of the status quo and protects the interests of those within it, as demonstrated in the following extracts:

> You have to understand that nationalism is not simply an ideology here. It is a system where nationalism is used as an ideology but it is also about corruption and preservation of their positions. Why are some schools divided? Because you have 'different' histories, 'different' languages, divided this and that. It's bullshit. You don't have two histories. You don't have two languages. You don't have to, I don't know, teach geography or math differently. Of course, it's all about money and positions. There are people who work in these schools and who otherwise would not have jobs if there were not so many divided institutions and then of course they vote for these nationalist parties to keep their jobs you know. You have like, I don't know, 500 organizations where employees remember the last war, talk about it. That's their living, how they earn money (Anonymous interview 13, July 28, 2023).

> The constitution, Annex 4 of the peace agreement, was created so badly that we have more ministers than any country in Europe. And we're so small and we're so poor. They eat the budget. So you have like federal ministers, continental ministers, city ministers. Then they have deputies and secretaries and shits. And then there are three of them because there have to be all three versions of all three ethnicities. The only thing that they create with the Constitution is that the political system eats the budget of anyways fucked up economic system. That is where every idiot sees the opportunity to get into the politics. Of course they would stick to each other and continue living within these ethnic tribes (Anonymous interview 8, July 19, 2023).

Critical revisionism within this system is likely to be impossible and thus any degree of consensus regarding historical events such as WWII or the Yugoslav wars and the role of antifascism within both may not be achievable. It is because each side continues to engage in moral revisionism of the past for its own benefit, which partially explains the shared sense of hopelessness about the possibility of change in Dayton Bosnia, as discussed in the previous chapter. It is expected from citizens of BiH to navigate within this system by choosing certain revisionist narratives and consequently ethnic and political sides. Nevertheless, my antifascist participants in the study choose to fight against this system by staying outside of the Dayton matrix. I will discuss this position of my participants within the theoretical frameworks suggested by Slavoj Žižek and Václav Havel. This choice of alternative politics on the periphery of the Dayton political system, implemented through the antifascist stance, implies nonconformity and a rejection of making choices within the imposed *system of coordinates* (Žižek) or *ideological power structures* (Havel). Respectively, this choice represents what Žižek, in his article *What Can Lenin Tell Us about*

Freedom Today? (2001), calls "actual freedom" or "politics of truth," and what Havel refers to as "living within the truth" in *The Power of the Powerless* (2018). Both theoretical frameworks, while implementing different concepts, discuss a similar attitude toward oppressive regimes, which parallels the attitude of my participants in relation to Dayton Bosnia. However, as I will demonstrate, there is a significant difference. Žižek and Havel advocate for a radical stance in opposition to imposed oppressive structures by completely changing the system of coordinates or power structures across the body of politics. A few sentences above in this paragraph, I used the phrase "on the periphery of the Dayton political system" because, in the case of young antifascists in Sarajevo, they choose to live outside the dominant political structure but do not directly challenge it on a political or state level. Some of them refer to their community as to a bubble within which they live and stay outside the larger political system. They choose an alternative system of coordinates, as suggested by Žižek, but only within their private lives. This can be seen in their decision to remain anonymous in this study, as well as in their demonstrated lack of desire to directly participate in the political life of the country. They largely abstain from voting in elections but do not consider participating in them such as for example starting a political movement, as Havel would suggest. This tendency could be explained by a low capacity for aspiration and hope in relation to changing the political system, as discussed in the previous chapter.

In the following section, I will introduce an ethnographic case study from the field as an example of the effects of revisionism on the daily lives of my participants and analyze it within the frameworks offered by Žižek and Havel to demonstrate their usefulness and applicability to the case of revisionism in Dayton Bosnia, which will be discussed in greater depth in the concluding section. These frameworks will help illustrate how freedom, in opposition to

revisionism and as an anti-nationalist stance, is expressed by young antifascists in Sarajevo within the imposed Dayton system.

Am I free to get a tattoo?

With Anka, one of my participants, I once had a discussion about Branimir Štulić, the frontman of the Yugoslav rock band Azra. This conversation eventually led us to explore the question of freedom in a divided post-Dayton BiH. Johnny, the stage name by which Štulić is known, was described by Anka as a cult figure who was respected and loved across Yugoslavia. According to her, he was not simply a musician but also a poet who conveyed meaningful ideas through his songs. When Yugoslavia began to fall apart, he decided to move to the Netherlands and has since, with exception of only a few instances, refused to return, claiming that his home country no longer exists. Johnny was born in Yugoslavia, in Macedonia, to a Croatian family, however, he repeatedly referred to himself as either Yugoslav or Balkan. Despite this, Anka said, people in the newly formed republics try to claim him as their own, and thus assigning him nationality. The same applies to other famous figures from the former Yugoslavia, such as football players, actors, and writers. Commenting on the situation Anka said:

> How can we be one if we fight over stuff like that? We fight over everything. I wanted to get a tattoo recently, actually still thinking about it. In the middle-age Bosnia there was a tradition among women to have tattoos on their hands. Because when the Ottoman Empire occupied this territory there was conversion to Islam and Catholic women would tattoo their hands to fight back and preserve their identity. I wanted to get that such tattoo as well (Anonymous interview 7, July 14, 2023).

Anka was referring to *sicanje*, also known as *bocanje* or *križićanje*, a tradition of tattooing hands, and sometimes the chest and forehead, practiced largely among Catholic women and in rare cases by men in Ottoman-period BiH (Krivošić 2022). *Sicanje* means to prick. The most common tattoo designs included crosses, often surrounded by a circle or dots (ibid.).

Photograph by Matija Krivošić.

It is true, as Anka said, that *sicanje* was used in opposition to Islamization during the Ottoman period, however, physical evidence suggests that the tradition of tattooing takes its roots in a more distant history. In the 1920s, British anthropologist Edith Durham claimed that the tradition of *sicanje* in the Balkan region originated around four millennia ago (West 2022). Similarly, Marija Maracic, one of the authors of the recent *The Sicanje Project*, points out that ancient Greeks depicted people from the Balkans with tattoos, as demonstrated on artwork such as ancient vases (ibid.). With the conquest of the Balkan peninsula by the Ottomans the tradition acquired a more sensitive and political flavor. The tattoos were made to provide symbolic protection and to point out belonging as well as for practical reasons such as to avoid forced marriages and consequent conversion as permanent tattoos are forbidden in Islam (Krivošić 2022, West 2022). During the Yugoslav period, *sicanje* almost disappeared, and today, fading traditional

tattoos can usually be seen only on the hands of elderly Catholic women in rural areas of Herzegovina. Nevertheless, the tradition of *sicanje* is slowly returning back among younger generation, as it is being rediscovered by artists and anthropologists, as well as through individuals like Anka, who expressed a desire to have this tattoo. However, she also expressed concern whether she should get it or not, which brings us back to the issue of revisionism in Dayton Bosnia:

> I do not want to say that I'm Catholic or to show my nationality, because I am neither Catholic and not even fully Croatian. I want to sort of pay respect to those women and our culture, the culture of this country and our history. Then, from a lot of people, including my parents, I began to receive warnings. Everyone told me that I should be careful about this decision as my desire to express respect for the culture of women in Bosnia can be read in so many different ways and that's so sad. It's sad that I can't get a tattoo that's from my own country, from my ancestors. Because someone will read it wrong. It's sad that I am asking you not to mention my name in your study because someone else can read it and use it against me (Anonymous interview 7, July 14, 2023).

While the previous chapter primarily focused on how aligning with political parties is essential for a successful professional career and fostering a high capacity to hope and aspire, this example illustrates how seemingly banal and apolitical daily life choices can also reflect one's political or ideological stance and affect one's life if the choices go against the dominant doxa. Anka's story may be interpreted as an over exaggeration of a teenager's perspective or as an individual case with limited potential for generalization to the wider population. It is also possible to question the relevancy of this anecdote in a chapter discussing issues of revisionism and antifascism. In fact, however, this simple anecdote perfectly reflects how the rules of the game implied in Dayton Bosnia affect people on the ground, limit their freedoms, and force them to make certain choices. This is precisely why my antifascist participants take a strong stance against revisionism and nationalized narratives, as they are instrumentalized to perpetuate the Dayton Bosnia framework that enforces certain behavior. In addition, this anecdote is useful in demonstrating the explanatory power of Žižek's and Havel's theoretical frameworks in analyzing the attitudes of young antifascists in Sarajevo in relation to revisionism in Dayton Bosnia.

Žižek's response: choose the impossible, i.e. actual freedom

In his article *What Can Lenin Tell Us about Freedom Today (2001)* Slavoj Žižek attempted to reassert the *politics of truth* through a discussion of Marxist-Leninist opposition of "formal" and "actual" freedoms. The starting point of the Slovene philosopher's discussion is Lenin's political pamphlet *What Is to Be Done? (1902)*, in which the revolutionary advocated for an intervention that would change the coordinates of the situation within which people are forced to operate. For Žižek (2001, 5), this implies demonstrating the totalitarian nature of liberalism and opposing it to the possibility of true freedom, which he approaches by reasserting the mentioned juxtaposition of "formal" and "actual" freedoms. With this goal in mind, Žižek turns to Jean-Léon Beauvois' psychological experiment (1994) on the nature of freedom of choice:

> if, *after* getting agreement from two groups of volunteers to participate in an experiment, one informs them that the experiment will involve something unpleasant, against their ethics even, and if one then reminds the first group (but not the second) that they have free choice to say no, Beauvois finds that in *both* groups the *same* (very high) percentage will agree to continue their participation in the experiment (Žižek 2001, 5).

I.e., those who are formally given freedom to choose (to quit the experiment) continue doing something unpleasant as those who are deprived of this freedom. In terms of the formal freedom, Anka has a right to get a tattoo in a sense that there are no legal constraints for her to exercise freedom over her body. Why, then, did she express concern, and despite her willingness to get the tattoo, why did she choose to forsake her freedom—or at least decide to postpone the decision for a later time? There is an incongruity that results in cognitive dissonance: despite having the freedom to act as one wishes, one chooses to forsake this freedom and act in a way one may find unpleasant. According to Beauvois and Žižek, this dissonance is resolved through rationalization of the incongruous decision, as demonstrated in Žižek (ibid.) example:

> Let us say that an individual is first asked to participate in an experiment that entails changing their eating habits in order to fight against famine. Then, after agreeing to do it, he is asked to swallow a living worm, with the explicit reminder that if he finds this act repulsive he can say no, since he has full freedom to choose. In most cases he will do it, but then rationalize it.

Beauvois suggests three modes participants in his study use to rationalize their repulsive decisions and compliance: authoritarian - “You should do it because I say so, without questioning it!”; totalitarian - “You should do it because even if it is unpleasant, it serves our Nation, Party, Humanity!”; liberal - “What is asked of you may appear repulsive, but look deep into yourself and you will discover that it is in your true nature to do it; you will find it attractive; you will become aware of new, unexpected, dimensions of your personality!” (ibid., 5-6). Žižek immediately rejects the first mode, as even in the most authoritarian regimes, it is unlikely that those in power simply force their subjects to act accordingly. In cases like Nazi Germany or Stalin’s USSR, a common ideology has always driven people to act in accordance for the sake of common higher goal such as glory of the nation or communism. Thus, the first two modes discussed by Beauvois may be united. In the case of eating the worm despite unwillingness, a subject of the study may rationalize it by telling himself that it is important to do so for the sake of scientific discovery, which could ultimately improve eating habits and contribute to the health and well-being of the population. In accordance with the liberal mode of justification, the subject might tell himself that he is probably not aware of the usefulness of eating worms; he may assume that he is unjustly prejudiced against such eating habits, but upon trying, he would discover that it was a worthy experience.

In Anka’s case the unpleasant thing to do is not getting a tattoo which she wants to have in order to honor her culture and pay respect to brave women from her country. However, she is fluctuating and may rationalize not getting a tattoo, thus subjecting herself to something unpleasant despite having the freedom to express her desire in accordance with the modes discussed. She may tell herself that she does not want to be a source of contradiction in an already divided society, she does not want her parents to bear the consequences of her decision, she might also consider not being able to take care of her future family as she potentially may have issues with employment

due to having the tattoos, she may also be concerned about her own security as she may be targeted by the nationalists. In reality, what forces her to do an unpleasant thing (not to get a tattoo despite willingness and freedom to have one) is the power of revisionism in Dayton Bosnia. She is well aware of the unjust consequences and of the fact that probably she should not practice her freedom in this case. In Žižek's words, revisionism in Dayton Bosnia constitutes symbolic efficiency—despite having formal freedom, people often have to act in unpleasant ways that contradict their beliefs—the modes of rationalization allow them to obscure reality where they have no actual freedom as a form of relief. My antifascist participants have often expressed the disgust in relation to their parents to vote according to the ethnic lines without even caring about actual policies and promises made by the parties. Within Žižek's framework, such behavior can be explained by the totalitarian mode of rationalization: 'I have to vote for the party representing my ethnic group; it is for our common good. If I don't, the other sides will benefit.' Thus, such voters are willing to give up rational policies, proper infrastructure, quality education, and healthcare, as these are of secondary importance. It may be unpleasant to live in an economically decaying, corrupt country, but they continue voting for nationalist parties that remain unaccountable under such conditions. As discussed in the previous chapter, this is how Dayton system is perpetuated and why nationalist elites continue engaging in revisionism further promoting divisions and prolonging the existing rules of the game that benefit them.

Thus, revisionism is the crucial issue for my antifascist participants not only because due to their anti-nationalist sentiment but also because it limits people's freedom and perpetuate dysfunctional Dayton system. Their position against revisionism can be described by Žižek's conception of "actual freedom". Formal freedom provides people with the possibility of choosing within a set of coordinates, while actual freedom implies breaking the "seductive power of

symbolic efficiency" and choosing the impossible—the system of coordinates itself: "the truly free choice is a choice in which I do not merely choose between two or more options *within* a pregiven set of coordinates, but one in which I choose to change this set of coordinates itself" (ibid., 7). For the people in post-war BiH the imposed set of coordinates is Dayton Bosnia and the constitution that they did not choose and cannot change because there are no actual mechanisms of change. My antifascist participants choose to stay outside this system and for Anka to do the impossible would imply getting the tattoo despite the seductive power of rationalizing modes. According to Žižek, that is where resides the moment of truth.

Havel's response: change the rules of the game, i.e. live within the truth

Challenging the communist regime, Václav Havel began *The Power of the Powerless*, originally published in 1978, with an ironic statement: "A specter is haunting Eastern Europe—the specter of what in the West is called 'dissent' (2018, 355)." Whether my antifascist participants can be considered a dissent haunting Dayton Bosnia to the same extent as Havel's dissent in 1970s and 1980s Czechoslovakia is questionable. However, Havel's framework—explaining how power structures are established, maintain continuity through ideology, and can be challenged—parallels Dayton Bosnia's perpetual rule through revisionism and divisions, as well as the ways in which my participants choose antifascism as a form of alternative politics in their private lives to challenge and escape the rules of the game. Similar to seductive power of symbolic efficiency discussed by Žižek, Havel argues that ideology has a hypnotic charm (ibid., 357). Ideology within what Žižek calls a "system of coordinates" and what Havel refers to as the "system" or "rules of the game" provides clarity and meaning to life. Adherence to it guarantees one's position in society and livelihood; however, this comes at the cost of "living outside the truth." In order to demonstrate this, Havel provides an example similar to Anka's dilemma whether to get a tattoo or not:

> The manager of a fruit-and-vegetable shop places in his window, among the onions and carrots, the slogan: "Workers of the world, unite!" Why does he do it? What is he trying to communicate to the world? Is he genuinely enthusiastic about the idea of unity among the workers of the world? (ibid., 359).

Havel argues that the greengrocer does not genuinely consider the meaning of the saying on the poster or the meaning of placing the poster along his vegetables, he does it simply because it is the way things have been done since he became a greengrocer. However, he also realizes that not putting the poster near the onions and carrots would attract attention to him, and eventually, he would get into trouble because such behavior might be perceived as a manifestation of disloyalty (ibid.). Even if he does not have a desire to express disloyalty. What parallels Anka's situation as she has no intent to demonstrate her political position or loyalty to a specific ethnic or religious group. However, her getting a tattoo and the greengrocer not placing the poster are ideological signs that have meanings, despite what the person actually has in mind. As Anka said, it can be read in so many wrong ways. Compliance with the rules of the game in a form of banal act of placing a poster means the following: "I, the greengrocer XY, live here and I know what I must do. I behave in the manner expected of me. I can be depended upon and am beyond reproach. I am obedient and therefore I have the right to be left in peace (ibid.)." Similarly, Anka's compliance, manifested through not getting a tattoo—at least at the current moment of her life—is dictated by her fear of not getting a job after graduation. Her request not to be mentioned in the study was explained by her as stemming from her fear that if someone reads my dissertation, the information about her could be used against her. In Havel words, she chooses to be left in peace.

Further, similar to Žižek, Havel suggests that greengrocer is able to justify his compliance because he is not forced to place a slogan with a clear meaning stating his subjugation to the regime such as "I am afraid and therefore unquestioningly obedient," and in the end there is nothing wrong with claiming solidarity to workers of the world (ibid.). Similarly, Anka is not asked to make a tattoo that would state something like "I support Dayton Peace Agreement, it is a constitution that

greatly benefits our society," but she is just expected not get tattoos that would state the contrary, or could be read as such. Behind the veil of this justification, Havel argues, is ideology that perpetuates the totalitarian regime: "It offers human beings the illusion of an identity, of dignity, and of morality while making it easier for them to part with them" (ibid.). As discussed in the previous chapter, according to my participants, those who live in accordance with the Dayton rules of the game are not concerned with the issues that are important to antifascists. They are able to enjoy their lives and benefit from adhering to the party system instituted by the Dayton Peace Agreement. Some used the derogatory term *papak* in relation to those they considered uneducated, uncultured, and apolitical segments of society who are ready to live in the illusions of Dayton Bosnia. Havel states that as long as the greengrocer continues placing the sign in his store he would contribute to strengthening of the rituals implicitly implied by the rules of the game and so the game would go on (ibid., 361-362). Anka's tattoo is this kind of ritual, as it is a source of various potential revisions that are at the core of Dayton's ideology—divisions across national lines are central to the preservation of power by the three ethnic political elites. As stated by one of the participants in the study above, they throw a bone in the form of a nationalist narrative or revisionism so that the general public continues fighting over it instead of challenging the corrupted system, which exploits nationalism not genuinely, but as a tool to continue the game favoring their interests. Havel argues that the foundation of repressive ideologies are lies and the system continues only as long as people are ready to live in accordance with the lies. For my antifascist participants, this situation is represented by revisionism, which they oppose. Is the past an objective reality, such that we could name all the perpetrators of violence, every Nazi collaborator, and all victims of both WWII and the Yugoslav wars? In BiH, it is not. Every side has its own "truth" and data to claim victimhood and innocence, or make accusations against

others. A neutral and objective revision of antifascism or fascism is thus unattainable. That is why it is so easy for the elites to perpetuate the divisions. My antifascist participants aware of this reality and do not try to provide an objective revision but want to move away from engaging in nationalist narratives and revisions because otherwise the game would go on. In Žižek words, they want to choose the system of coordinates rather than to choose revisions within it.

To achieve this goal, Havel argues, the greengrocer has to reject placing the sign among his vegetables and fruits and doing so he would reject the imposed ritual and revolt against the rules of the game (ibid., 367). This would be a beginning of living within the truth. It would cost his "hopes for a holiday in Bulgaria" as well as other numerous benefits implied by going along the rules. Most of the participants in my study have accepted it, as it was earlier mentioned in the previous chapter by one of the participants "I would rather live in poverty than I would join their party." Then, Havel argues, fellow greengrocers who choose to live within the truth would start an organization to protect their rights, and eventually, the power structures would collapse while the greengrocers would live. Although Anka has not gotten the tattoo yet, she joined other antifascists at DKC, where they live outside Dayton Bosnia. However, they do so in a bubble and choose not to challenge the system further, which I believe can be explained by a narrow capacity to aspire—a lack of hope in terms of fundamentally challenging the existing status quo. Havel was able to realize it, as he stated, that most expressions of opposition would remain minor revolts, but in the end, "you simply straighten your backbone and live with greater dignity as an individual" (ibid., 385). Similarly, antifascism, as a form of alternative politics, allows my participants to live with greater dignity, although in their small bubble.

Challenging revisionism in Dayton Bosnia

Both Václav Havel and Slavoj Žižek suggest that in systems that restrict their subjects' freedom, a certain implication of choice is imposed, and any deviation from it constitutes opposition to the system. While choice per se implies presence of freedom, in the frameworks discussed by Havel and Žižek, subjects are forced to make choices. Enforcement may not always be visibly negative but, as demonstrated, the choices that are being enforced can even be perceived as a moral duty. As Havel (2018, 36) argues, the system expects 'conformity, uniformity, and discipline' from its subjects, while anyone who chooses to abstain from their assigned roles is perceived as a threat to the system and may therefore be punished, excluded, or deprived of potential benefits. Here it should be mentioned that many people within the system are willing to act in accordance with the roles, however, they also often act as police within the system observing the compliance form their fellow citizens, as it will further be demonstrated. In order to oppose the system, one does not need to make a physical commitment, such as attending protests, but simply living within truth by refusing to do what the system expects you to do (ibid., 385). In Havel's article, this is demonstrated by the greengrocer's decision to stop placing a sign among his vegetables. In Dayton Bosnia, for my antifascist participants, living within the truth is constituted in rejection of revisionist discourses and nationalist narratives. While Dayton Bosnia is not a police state and those who refuse to identify themselves as affiliated with a certain ethnic party or active members of their national community, there is an expectation that they need to make a choice, and even if they don't it may be assigned to them externally. With regard to BiH, Žižek (2001, 9) claims that during the last war, people were forced to choose their ethnic identity and thereby demonstrate which side they were on: "When a militia stopped a person, asking him/her threateningly, "Are you a Serb or a Muslim?" the question did not refer to the person's inherited ethnic belonging. There was always an echo of "Which side did you choose?" Žižek argues that within the imposed

system of coordinates we live in, we are constantly bombarded with the need to choose. Three decades after the war, the need to make a choice is still present and may have even intensified in Dayton Bosnia.

Johnny Štulić's story, mentioned by Anka, is a good example of how ethnicity can be assigned in the Balkans. This is also ubiquitous in BiH. While it may not be surprising that famous figures like Johnny Štulić or Ivo Andrić become subjects of ethnicity-related disputes, in Bosnia, ordinary people experience this in their daily lives. As one of my respondents stated, people in Bosnia care deeply about others' national identities: "They care about your name, and when you tell it, they build a whole story about you. For them, your name carries implications about your nationality and religion." Indeed it is possible to make assumptions about people's ethnic roots based on their names in Bosnia because Bosnian Muslims have distinctive names, and there are easily identifiable Serbian and Croatian names as well. However, my participants expressed their dislike for having their identities and beliefs assumed based on their names. For example, one participant with an obviously Muslim name told me that he dislikes it when people greet him with "Assalam ualeykum" simply because of his name. After telling me about instances of Muslim collaboration with the Nazis during World War II and expressing discomfort with the fact that a school in Sarajevo is named after Mustafa Busuladžić, who was known as an antisemite and collaborator, the participant reminded me that it was important for his name not to be mentioned in my study. This reminder reflects his awareness of the official nationalist narratives and the expectation that people in Sarajevo must conform to them. This parallels the greengrocer's understanding of the true meaning of the sign—it is not about a genuine desire for the workers of the world to unite, but rather about staying in line with the rules of the game. Antifascists I interviewed are not a homogeneous group in this sense, some prefer to keep it to their private lives

others are more explicit about their position despite the consequences such as in the case of my antifascist participant who is also a practicing Muslim:

> I live in Old Town. In this part of the city we all know each other. I have a lot of friends who are from SDA [the leading Bosniak nationalist party]. Obviosity, I'm not SDA supporter but we go to the same mosques. It baffles them sometimes that I am also antifascist and do not go along the party line. They ask me 'how can you go to mosque and, you know, speak like this?' Although they all portray themselves as 'antifascists' as well, when we initiated a program Antifa 2.0, a newspaper affiliated with SDA compared it to ISIS 2.0 (Anonymous interview 13, July 28, 2023).

The interviewee stated that being antifascist and opposing the official nationalist narratives has never caused him any serious problems. However, his ability to speak freely, even publicly, against the ruling parties and revisionist narratives may be influenced by his employment at an international organization, which makes him less dependent on a corrupt job market in Dayton Bosnia, something that affects many of my participants. My interviewee acknowledged it and agreed that openly demonstrating such position often leads to response because, as he said, Bosnia is not a country for people but an ideological state expecting subjects to follow the rules. The rules, however, in terms of retribution are also drawn along the ethnic lines. As a Bosnian Muslim you can openly criticize Serbs and Croats for the atrocities they have committed, however, you are expected to abstain from such criticism to your own side, and the same applies to Serbs and Croats. An investigative journalist I interviewed told me that she has never received any threats from either Serbs or Croats when making public the crimes they committed in wars of the 1990s, however, whenever she investigated crimes committed by Muslims, she received threats:

> I was subjected to online threats. That's what they do. I have colleagues from Banja Luka (a majority-Serb city) who write for Serbs and about Serb crimes, and the same applies to colleagues from Mostar (a majority-Croat city). They receive threats from their own ethnic groups as I do here in Sarajevo. But I don't have nationality! I mean, that's the way how they deal with the 'dissidents'. We are kind of traitors. I mean, they believe we are. Like in my case, they believe I am belonging to one of the nationalities (Anonymous interview 21, August 10, 2023).

This respondent has a Muslim name, and thus her identity is assumed by all ethnic groups, not just Muslims. Serbian and Croatian elites have no interest in threatening her when she investigates their crimes because they assume her ethno-religious identity based on her name, despite her not

feeling a sense of belonging to it, and therefore have no expectations of her. Bosnian Muslim elites, on the other hand, are similarly unconcerned with what she actually believes or how she identifies—her Muslim name alone is enough for them to claim her as one of their own. As a result, they impose certain expectations on her and attempt to enforce her compliance with the rules of the game in Dayton Bosnia through threats. This situation parallels Žižek's claim that Bosnians are forced to choose their identity—and even if they refuse, the choice may still be assigned to them. It also mirrors Havel's greengrocer's sign, in the form of a name or a tattoo, as in Anka's case. For the Dayton elites, these are not merely personal identifiers; they carry ideological implications and serve as forms of dissent if not portrayed in expected fashion. While in the field, I once had a discussion about it with an Italian law student who conducted research about Srebrenica genocide denial. As belonging to a nation that fought the WWII on a fascist side she commented on the situation in Bosnia from her own experience:

> I think that we start understanding that fascism is more about how things are being told and about narrations rather than about something like direct discrimination. In Bosnia, those who actually have a typical rhetoric that is related to fascism, they say that they are antifascists. Consequently, on the ground, the thing is that the new generations don't deal with history in an objective way. So, for instance, I can say I deal with fascism in Italy in an objective way, so I don't feel like Mussolini's actions define me and I don't think that I'm fascist just because I'm Italian. I think that it's something that happened in the past and I'm able to acknowledge it without it having to define me at the current moment. In Bosnia the past defines the present too much. So new generations are born in families in which the father is gonna say, you never have to talk to Croats because during WWII their Ustašas killed our people or to Serbs because they committed genocide in Srebrenica (Anonymous interview 11, July 22, 2023).

The official rhetoric of each nationalist party in Bosnia perpetuates the situation described by my Italian friend from Sarajevo. The narratives and historical revisions used by elites to sustain Dayton Bosnia draw a connection between World War II and the events of the Yugoslav wars. As a result, all sides interpret antifascism and fascism in their own favor, with no more objective or neutral rhetoric presented by any. As noted in the literature, antifascism serves as a means to challenge this paradigm (Kurtović and Hromadžić 2017; Hofman 2021) and to resist the revision,

nationalization, and ethnicization of World War II, the Partisans, and antifascism itself—processes that serve the interests of elites and help preserve the favorable status quo of Dayton Bosnia.

The revisionism of antifascism is a particularly sensitive issue for young antifascists in Sarajevo. As previously demonstrated, my participants view the Yugoslav period—specifically the antifascist and Partisan resistance during World War II—as potentially the most dignified period in Bosnia's history. This perspective is also evident in Bosnian history textbooks, where antifascism and Partisanship are presented in an overly positive manner without mention of any controversies. This may also be explained by the fact that under Tito Bosnian Muslims were recognized as an ethnic group, and the federal unity of BiH was ensured through balanced and equal representation (Trbovc and Trošt 2017, 185). However, each nationalist elite group continues the dispute over who was a true antifascist in war and who fought for the fascist occupiers, accusing each other and legitimizing the actions of their compatriots (ibid., 173). This dispute materializes in a form of changing the official antifascist memory dates, changing names of the streets, repurposing of monuments, and similar (Pavlaković 2012, Kurtović and Hromadžić 2017, Hofman 2021, Vladisavljevic 2019, McGlynn & Đureinović 2023). This is not only the case in BiH but also across post-socialist Europe, particularly in the former Yugoslav states. Antifascism often serves as a tool to fight against these forms of revisionism. Ana Hofman (2021, 161), for example, demonstrates how antifascist choirs across the Balkans sing Partisan songs in order to demonstrate their "disagreement with the changes to the state holidays, which discarded the dates related to the PLS or replaced them with new holidays, and seek to shape an alternative commemorative landscape in the post-Yugoslav space." Hofman argues that Yugoslav past, including Partisan and antifascist memory, have been nationalized and ethicized with a purpose to serve the interests of present date elites, so that this new official antifascism has nothing in common with the antifascism

of Yugoslav Partisans; to which antifascist choirs are opposed and express disagreement through popular Partisan songs. Similarly, Kurtović and Hromadžić (2017, 262) demonstrate how antifascism-related socialist-era imaginaries shaped protests in BiH in 2014. Hofman and Kurtović and Hromadžić come to a same conclusion that antifascism serves as a foundation for alternative politics under conditions of imposed and unshaking post-socialist single neoliberal nationalist model, to which the latter refer as the prison of Dayton nationalism.

For participants in this study, revisionism of antifascism on behalf of nationalist elites is something that they strongly oppose because none of them trust that the elites are indeed governed by the principles of antifascism but throw this term in public discourse simply in order to portray themselves as belonging to people, who support this ideology. An example that was given to me numerous times involved a politician who unintentionally stated that he is anti-antifascist. My respondents consider this a Freudian slip: "We all laughed a lot when some stupid politician said that he is anti-antifascist. He obviously made a mistake. It wasn't on purpose, but he just acknowledged that he is a fascist," and "Antifascism is quite popular here and it is difficult to be totally against it and this politician said 'I'm also against antifascism', so he wanted to say 'I'm against fascism' but he said what he said and it translated his real feelings." Another participant, who works at one of the museums of Sarajevo where antifascist history is represented asked me: "If all these politicians are actually antifascist as they claim, why then none of them, Muslim, Croatian, or Serbian elites, support us? We don't belong anywhere, we never receive funding. None of the Dayton authorities recognize us a state museum. In reality antifascism is an unwanted heritage." The belief that official statements by politicians praising the antifascist past are merely a tool to manipulate the public is widely shared among my participants. As a response to the perceived hypocrisy of politicians, one of my participants started a clothing brand featuring

antifascist and Partisan symbols. As he stated in the interview, his goal was not economic profit but rather to raise awareness among youth about antifascism and to encourage critical reflection on this past in response to its nationalization by political elites in Dayton Bosnia.

An interesting interpretation of antifascist symbols and their use by youth in Sarajevo was suggested to me by an antifascist couple, Slobodan and Anna. Rather than a formal interview, our discussion was more of a brainstorming session about antifascism. They concluded—similar to Havel's interpretation of the greengrocer's sign—that not everyone who uses Yugoslav or Partisan symbols, such as the red star, is necessarily a genuine antifascist, it is not what the sign actually says but how it is used and to demonstrate what specifically:

> Just because people will defend antifascist symbols, will use the Yugoslav flag, does not necessarily mean that they are actually supporters of all of that or that they have actual nostalgia for those time. That they want kind of return to Yugoslavia. I would never use the model of the communist party of Yugoslavia. Many use the symbology because it's a poking in the eye of the nationalists you know and things like this. You cannot assume that this means people are uncritically supporters of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia. Some are [ha-ha]. For instance, nationalists in Sarajevo will sometimes say that the Serb aggression was a fascist aggression. Which okay, maybe be interpreted as such. Then they might use anti-fascism for very nationalist purposes like essentially to create a sense that all Serbs are fascists, and everyone does similar here, all sides engage in such accusations and then claim they are antifascists. Essentially they are fascists. So when they use antifascism to hide their nationalism we just use these symbols as an anti-dialogue, to ridicule them, to poke in the eye, that we actually know that they are not antifascists as they claim to be (Anonymous interview 18, August 8, 2023).

Antifascism, in this sense, is a position against Dayton Bosnia; it is a manifestation of choosing an alternative system of coordinates or choosing to live within the truth, contrary to the revisionisms imposed on them by nationalist elites. A response of my antifascist to this paradigm is "let's keep past in the past and move forward", they do not want to establish historical truth, such as who killed the most, who suffered the most losses, and similar. Revisionism per se is considered an obstacle to the progress of BiH. My participants see it as a tool used by elites to mislead society and maintain the Dayton status quo by dividing people along ethnic lines through the evocation of emotional attachment to past conflicts.

In the existing literature, it is well discussed how contemporary elites in BiH manipulate past conflicts to fit present-day needs, thus connecting past wars and the antifascist struggle to the last Yugoslav war. I once had a conversation with a young SDA party member and he told me that Alija Izetbegović, the first president of BiH, in the 1990s was fighting against fascism. Similarly, antifascism is appropriated by all nationalist elites in BiH, such as discussed by one of the participants in the study:

> Dodik [the longest serving president of Republika Srpska] gave a speech a couple of weeks ago in Kozara. It is a mountain and the region in Republika Srpska around the Krajina area between Derventa and Banja Luka. He gave a speech there. I'm pretty sure it was to commemorate the battle because there was a famous battle there where the Partisans won against the fascists, but he used it to talk about Republika Srpska and nationalism and all of these things. So that our antifascist legacy is being turned around and it's becoming much more symbolic and you know it's being taken advantage of by the nationalists. He used Kozara to promote nationalism but these things don't go together! On the political level, antifascism is just a word that's being thrown around. We promote antifascism because it's really important in Bosnia nowadays, with all of this nationalist rhetoric and all of the divisions that exist. When you speak about antifascism, if we're talking about it and we understand each other, then it tells a lot about the possibilities to co-exist again. If we understand this term in the same way and we're agreeing on it, then I think it goes against all of this nationalist rhetoric. Politicians should not have a spot to speak in Srebrenica. That's my opinion. It should be the families. It should be the religious leaders. That's fine. But not people form the politics. It's not a place for that. Srebrenica doesn't have anything to do with daily politics. If you go there you go as a human being you don't go there as a representative of any political party (Anonymous interview 9, July 20, 2023).

Lydia Cole (2022, 6), for example, argues that monuments to Serb heroes, victims, and even figures widely regarded as war criminals of the Bosnian War, such as Ratko Mladić, are deliberately placed in the vicinity of Partisan and antifascist monuments. A plaque dedicated to Mladić, who was a mastermind of the Srebrenica genocide, was placed near the Vraca Memorial Park in Sarajevo, which is dedicated to the victims of WWII (ibid.). Cole argues that this illustrates how Bosnian Serb revisionism rehabilitate Četniks and war criminals by appropriating antifascist legacy. The Bleiburg massacre at the end of the war, when Tito's Partisans killed arguably between 50 to 70 thousand Nazi collaborators, is a particularly exemplary case of how Bosnian Muslims, Croats, and Serbs in BiH, as well as in Croatia and Serbia, engage in revisionism to draw a link between WWII and the Yugoslav wars to suit current identities and political needs (Pavlaković

2012, Pavlaković et al. 2018, Đureinović 2018, Čusto 2018). As summarized by Čusto (2018, 114):

> In the public discourse, discussions about Bleiburg are a reflection of the overall position towards the Second World War, fascism and antifascism, communism and anticommunism, the Partisans, Ustaše and Četniks, as well as a reflection of the contemporary three-fold political and national relations among the Croats, Bosniaks, and Serbs in Bosnia-Herzegovina.

Sometimes the connection between the present and the past is drawn in relation even to more distant past events such World War I and the image of Gavrilo Princip, for example, is also a matter of controversy in Sarajevo (Slijepcevic 2016). Whether Princip is a hero and fighter for liberation against imperialism, Serbian nationalist, or murderer is an unresolved dispute (Lazarevic 2016). Halilovich and Phipps (2015, 29) argue that this dispute is not simply a matter of historical revisionism but reflects the unresolved issues of the recent Bosnian war. One of the participants in my study was furious about the fact that, in the area where we were sitting, Princip is considered a traitor and a criminal, while just a few kilometers away, he is regarded as a hero. This is not only a matter of public discourse but also reflects how history is taught differently in Sarajevo's schools, which are separated by just a few kilometers—and sometimes even under the same roof in divided schools. For him personally, Princip is a hero and he was not mad about the fact that some people may think differently but the problem is that this opinions and divisions are deliberately cultivated in people's minds:

> Antifascism for us, for our generation is probably just like 'Let us live our lives', man. We don't want to come home and watch our parents and our family members getting brainwashed by television. The biggest problem with people here is that they will say that, I don't know, I'm making up numbers, 15,000 Serbs were killed, 15,000 Muslims were killed. Until the moment when people here come and say 'Are you normal? Those are dead people, it doesn't matter which ones,' We will never go to the next step. Right now the whole world is in the year 2023 and the Balkans are in the year 2003 (Anonymous interview 10, July 20, 2023).

Dayton Bosnia, as discussed in the previous chapter, is built upon imposed divisions. For the elites who benefit from the Dayton paradigm, these divisions must be maintained, and my participants widely believe that these elites even cooperate to preserve them. Revisionism serves

as an ideological tool to uphold the status quo by continuously reinforcing division through the evocation of emotional attachment to past events, in which the co-nationals of the present electorate were killed or violated by the co-nationals of potential voters for the opponents of their nationalist parties. In Havel's and Žižek's terms, Dayton Bosnia represents a power structure or system of coordinates that young antifascists in Sarajevo seek to escape. A significant part of this struggle is their opposition to revisionism, so that a common response from my participants to various nationalist narratives and revisions was similar to the above-mentioned statement from the interview "Let us live our lives," or sentiments like "Let's keep the past in the past":

> I was talking to my father recently. I came to visit my parents, and he was watching another documentary on Al Jazeera about the war in Sarajevo. It's all we watch. I mean, it's all that's presented to us, not all what we watch. And I said that I just can't, I don't know when they're going to stop making these movies and documentaries and stop talking about the war. And he replied they're not going to stop talking about the war because it's not over. For me, the reason why I want the narrative of war to be stopped is because I think it's stopping us from pursuing other things, from pursuing art in different ways, from pursuing our lives. It is because we're constantly reminded of it. We're constantly reminded of hating a different side, you know? It's my side and their side and they did this and that to us, you know? No one in this country can be completely void of all of that because it's our history. A lot of people lost family members or their family members are left in the wheelchairs or half alive, you know, and how can you not have so much pain and hate inside you after that. And I think with antifascism, it's just trying to stop the war. There's one song from Hladno Pivo band, they're a Croatian band and the song is about end of the world and people here are arguing about whose father was a partisan and whose was not (Anonymous interview 6, July 13, 2023).

The *end of the world* here may not be taken literally, but rather as an exaggeration of the current situation. When life in post-war Yugoslavia is not as good as people would like it to be—when infrastructure is lacking, politicians are corrupt, standards of life are low—what ultimately matters to people is not these present issues but whether one's father was an antifascist or a collaborator. Something that happened more than half a century ago remains a central discourse because it is constantly revised and reinforced from above, as the interviewer states. I often had a feeling that youth in Sarajevo is exhausted by the old narratives and that nothing changes, for example one of participants said that it is almost impossible to make anything new in terms of arts because there

is still a market for the war narratives and thus people continue engaging with the past what is an obstacle to progress and future as was mentioned by one of the participants:

> 'Let's go and try to take money from the government to make a movie. Hmm, how can we get this money? Let's make another war movie because you know you can easily sell this outside.' This is how many people think, this is the safe mode. I think Sarajevo needs to get more balls to not go on with this safe mode, to do more experimenting. I talked to my friends, they are new in the film industry. I told them, come on, let's make a sci-fi movie in Sarajevo. The war was thirty years ago and more! Let's move on! This is my goal in art and to motivate new generations to think like 'okay past is past we need to move on.' Because I think that's the only way how we can get outside this bad government, bad politicians. They are talking only about war and nationalism. It's like there is a big magic spell on our society, that would explain why we are stuck for thirty years in the history. You cannot move forward here so we artists are trying to say this is stupid and we are stuck in in past! Let's go, let's move on, you know, this is what we are trying to do (Anonymous interview 1, July 2, 2023).

The terminology used by a participant in this quote indicates that, due to nationalist narratives and revisionism, young people in Sarajevo feel stuck in the past and, consequently, trapped within the system imposed by the Dayton Peace Agreement. Both theoretical frameworks offered by Žižek and Havel, while employing different concepts, discuss a similar attitude toward oppressive regimes—an attitude that parallels my participants' views on Dayton Bosnia and revisionism. They strive to live within the truth, outside the revisionist discourse, and thus seek to escape the system of coordinates established by Dayton Bosnia. What distinguishes my participants' opposition to Dayton Bosnia from Žižek's and Havel's calls for radical resistance is that my participants choose an alternative system of coordinates, as suggested by Žižek, only in their private lives. This is evident in their decision to remain anonymous in this study, as well as in their general reluctance to engage directly in the country's political life. They largely abstain from voting in elections and do not consider political participation—such as starting a political movement—as Havel would advocate. Even when a Mass commemorating Bleiburg victims and Nazi-allied soldiers was held in Sarajevo in 2020, the protests remained exclusively peaceful. The peaceful nature of antifascism in Sarajevo distinguishes it from the more radical approaches adopted by antifascists across Europe, a contrast that will be discussed in the following chapter. As such, the concluding chapter

of the dissertation departs from the context of Dayton Bosnia elaborated in the first three chapters and places youth antifascism in Sarajevo into a comparative global context.

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Chapter 4
Bosnian antifascism in the context of global trends: preservation of nonmilitant opposition

Introduction

Fascism is a totalitarian ideology against humanity and culture that is characterized by its relentless pursuit of power and the suppression of freedoms. Antifascism, as its counterpart, is equated to democracy and is associated with the general values it pursues to protect. Participants of my study in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), for example, pointed out migrants' and LGBTQ+ rights, struggle against nationalist revisionism of World War Two and the Yugoslav wars of the 1990s, feminism, ecological activism, initiatives against cyberbullying, and freedoms more broadly as important antifascist values. Whatever fascism aims to destroy antifascism strives to protect, the values that the former defends the latter aspires to demolish. At the same time, there is an incongruity associated with antifascism, which is addressed in the related literature criticizing its illiberal nature. Some antifascist participants in the study acknowledge that the concept may currently have a "dirty" connotation due to its connection to communism, as well as the contemporary radicalization of antifascists across the West. The opponents highlight that there is a slippery slope issue directing antifascism towards illiberalism, others even more critically equate it to fascism and Nazism. Using the example of the Enlightenment's intolerance, this chapter will examine how transformative ideologies that seek to morally reshape societies according to specific dogmas—such as antifascism, which explicitly aims at the moral transformation of societies across borders—tend to become illiberal despite initially embracing liberal values. For example, instances of street violence directed at perceived fascists and general militarization of antifascists in places like Sweden, Greece and the U.S. gave notoriety to antifascists across the West. Nevertheless,

antifascism in BiH does not follow this militant form of resistance, on the contrary, it remains peaceful.

In 2020, due to Covid-19 regulations, the annual commemoration of Nazi-allied Ustaše members and their families, who were killed by Tito's Partisans toward the end of the war in 1945, was canceled. The event, traditionally held in Bleiburg, Austria, was affected by the restrictions. Although it is questionable whether Covid-19 restrictions were the primary reason for the event's cancellation, as authorities and NGOs in Austria had already been concerned for several years about Ustaša symbols present at the commemorations and their association with fascism (Čusto 2018, 111). Controversially, an alternative commemoration was scheduled to take place in Sarajevo's Sacred Heart Cathedral. Taking into consideration the horrors carried out by the Ustaše in BiH there is no surprise that this event sparked mass protest in Sarajevo, nevertheless, it was peaceful and there were no reports of violence. This chapter makes a step away from the Dayton Bosnia framework and places Bosnian antifascism within the recent global trends and attempts to demonstrate why antifascism remains peaceful in BiH while across the West throughout the last two decades the militant trend among antifascists has become significant. To begin with, the chapter will highlight the instances of antifascism's illiberalism in the form of street violence in the cases of Sweden, Greece, and the United Stated. Further, it will discuss the general critique of antifascism's illiberalism since the post-WWII period until the present date. Then, using the example of Enlightenment's intolerance it will be demonstrated how transformative ethical ideologies, such as antifascism, tend to become illiberal. Finally, a comparative analysis will be offered to illustrate why militant form of antifascism is not emerging in the case of BiH while it becomes a tendency across the Europe and North America in cases such as Sweden, Greece, and the U.S. It is concluded here that the absence of a militant form of antifascism in BiH, compared

to global trends, is conditioned by two factors: first, it is not reactionary but rather a persistent tradition; second, it is ideologically rooted in the communist tradition rather than the anarchist one, which is more inclined toward violence and militarization.

Militant antifascism in Sweden, Greece, and the U.S.

Sweden is one of the most prominent examples of antifascism becoming militant in the 21st century (Koch 2018, 26). This is evident in the frequent outbreaks of violence on nearly every relevant occasion. In 2012, a small and calm Swedish town Eskilstuna turned into a violent battlefield between the police, antifascists, and members of the nationalist Party of Swedes and the Nationalist Youth Movement, who jointly organized a march under the slogan "Swedish jobs for Swedish People" during international Labor Day (Larsson, 2012). The counterdemonstration, unlike in BiH, although qualitatively the cause of the protest was less fascistic, was not peaceful and stones were thrown in the direction of nationalist activists resulting in hospitalization of eight people and the subsequent physical clash between the two sides (ibid.). In 2014, in Jönköping 19 people were arrested following the clashes between antifascist and members of the far-right who carried out a neo-Nazi protest during the May Day (The Local Sweden, 2014). Three years later, a similar clash between the left and right in Gothenburg resulted in the arrests of 30 people as well as injuries among the police and civilians have been reported (WION, 2017). Members of the Revolutionary Front – a far-left fraction of militant socialists inspired by the British Anti-Fascist Action movement (Copsey, 2016) – are responsible for most of these violent incidents. In response to a Vice News reporter's question about the Revolutionary Front's use of violence despite the availability of non-militant alternatives to combat the far-right, the interviewed antifascist stated, "It's not good to use violence but it's a tool. When it comes to the antifascist war against the Nazi movement, we can't afford to think about the public opinion" (Hanrahan, 2014). The tools they

may use against opponents in clashes include “tear gas for self-defense, homemade knuckles, and, if there are too many of them, I switch to the knife,” as the respondent stated (ibid.).

Greek militant antifascism is potentially the most aggressive and radical in Europe as the activities may include arson, bombings, assassinations, and assaults (Gartenstein-Ross et al. 2021). Greece has been one of the most affected countries across the continent by the economic crisis of 2008. Despite a dire economic situation comparing to Western European nations, due to its geographic location Greece has received a disproportionately large number of immigrants. The situation led to an increase in popularity of ultranationalist organization and later political party Golden Dawn, which by 2012 was able to claim almost 7% of the national vote (Testa 2019, 59). The escalation of violence and the peak of polarization between the left and right took place in 2013 when a member of the Golden Dawn murdered antifascist musician Pavlos Fyssas (ibid.). Following the tragic event, antifascists clashed with police shouting the slogan “Kill fascists in every neighborhood” (Bray 2017, 101). This call to action was realized in November 2013 when two members of the Golden Dawn were assassinated and one was wounded (Copsey and Merrill 2020, 124). This demonstrates that militant antifascist motto “by any means necessary” is not just words but can end up in lethal violence under the conditions the far-right crosses the line (ibid.). In addition to that, the Golden Dawn stated that their offices have been bombed 10 times (Bray 2017, 101). Similarly, violence was widespread in Greece after police murdered Alexis Grigoropoulos in 2008: “frustrated segments of society (which included anarchists and antifascists) took to the streets to attack luxury shops, besiege police stations and government ministries, smash and torch banks, expropriate food from supermarkets, and occupy schools, universities, and radio and television stations” (ibid., 100).

On May 31, 2020, Donald Trump tweeted "The United States of America will be designating ANTIFA as a Terrorist Organization" (2020). Although antifascists in the U.S. have been active for a considerable amount of time, they rose to prominence after Trump's election to the presidency when they initiated a physical opposition against the elected president's supporters and police (Harbarger 2017). In 2017, the word 'antifa' was even shortlisted by Oxford dictionary among the words of the year (Oxford Languages, 2017). Among numerous antifascist organizations in the United States, Rose City Antifa (RCA) form the city of Portland is one of the most popular militant antifascist groups (Copsey and Merrill, 2020, 122). Since the election of Trump, an organization that was formed in 2007 in order to counter a neo-Nazi concert that was supposed to take place in Portland (Mogelson 2020), became a constant participant in clashes against the far-right. Copsey and Merrill (2020, 2021) in defense of organization's non-terroristic nature claim that militant tactics constitute only a small proportion of their actions, nevertheless, the authors agree that violence is also present: "Yet it is undoubtedly true that militant anti-fascists do engage in political violence, which they could, in theory, escalate to more lethal acts" (ibid., 124). The legitimization of violence for the members of RCA lies in the perceived moral righteousness of their actions in opposition to the illegitimacy of their adversaries (ibid., 30). Such as, for example, when a nationalist Jeremy Christian stabbed to death two people who tried to protect a Muslim woman wearing hijab who was abused by the former (ibid., p. 18). In response, RCA, along with other militant Antifa groups in the U.S., has put their "bodies on the line" and were willing to break the law, including carrying out physical attacks on opponents and police, as numerous demonstrations since 2016 have shown. Although in all three cases, political violence by antifascists was framed as a response to extremism—albeit to varying degrees—by nationalists and the far-right, the

militarization of antifascism and its use of illiberal tactics have attracted widespread attention and criticism.

Critique of antifascism's illiberalism

The critique of antifascism's illiberalism is not a new tendency. One of the major critiques holding that antifascism is not an innocent ideology comes from Furet, de Felice, Grunenberg, and Diner (Rabinbach 1996, 14) who demonstrated how the ideology has been used in the post-war communist regimes in order to legitimize authoritarian states and totalitarian repressions against the perceived enemies – what has been coined as antifascism with Stalin's face (ibid.). For example, in the Soviet Union after the victory over fascism on the battlefield any domestic opponent could have been labeled as fascist and end up Gulag or even executed (Faraldo 2016, 206-207). This critique, however, has already been discussed in the previous chapters within the context of "two totalitarianisms" conception. Here, I will focus on the nature of antifascism within liberal democracies at present date, specifically, the ostracism in the form of repression of political opponents, the far-right, de-platforming perceived fascists, and similar. Such cases lay the grounds for a critique of antifascism among the scholars who point out its illiberal nature. Similar example is the recent incident of the repression of freedom of speech – an enforcement to speak in a certain way – by the antifascists is presented by Paul Gottfried:

> For instance, a gathering of German historians at Munster in 2018 was devoted to finding new ways to combat a supposedly ubiquitous Right. When contemporary historian Axel Schildt delivered a speech at the conference calling for the banning of certain words that might encourage fascist attitudes—for example, words containing the noun "Volk"—the audience went wild applauding (2021, 75).

Transformative ethical ideologies aim at the establishment of dogmas instituting what is morally acceptable and what is impermissible and thus normalize certain kinds of behavior, or speech in this case, while discriminating the contradictory ones. Adherence to the latter leads to repressions on behalf of the ideology's followers and consequently to social ostracism. The issue

discussed here deals with the question where to draw the line and it is true that even in liberal societies the limits of freedom of speech are always debated, as in the case of ban on Nazi symbols in Germany or the libel laws of the U.S. and U.K. However, in the discourse regarding what constitutes fascism today and consequently the limits of what is allowed to be said or not, the repressive initiatives are getting more common among contemporary antifascists. The fight against fascism while there is no evident adversary as Hitler's Germany or Mussolini's Italy often takes a form of opposition against the Right and conservatism in general and thus the problem of a slippery slope emerges – where do we draw a line between the legitimate measures of fighting fascism and the violation of freedom of expression and speech?

These two stories are merely anecdotes but when you put them and other similar ones together you get a pattern. Using the words of German writer Frank Böckelmann, we are witnessing an improvised antifascist grand spectacle (2018, 5, cited in Gottfried 2021, 75-76). It is improvised because what may be considered as an act of fascism or Nazism today is easily manipulated by the liberal governments and antifascists such as, for example, those who oppose the Third World Muslims immigration in Germany may be accused of taking the language of Nazism (Gottfried 2021, 76). That's where the critique of antifascism lies – its proponents use fascism as an f-word for accusing and delegitimizing any opposition and thus excluding it from a political discourse – a strategy that is obviously illiberal. What is important is that persecution of the perceived fascists goes beyond social ostracism and cancellation from public debates – it has to be mentioned that far-right can be accused of the same sins – as contemporary antifascist organizations, such as Members of the Revolutionary Front in Sweden or the Rose City Antifa in the U.S., across the West are becoming militant and physically assault those who they consider as fascists, punch them in the faces in streets and engage in fights at the events organized by the far-

right, break into the private properties of the perceived fascists and crash them, or attack their enemies in the cyberspace. It applies to numerous antifascist movements across the European countries or the U.S. but does not happen in the case of BiH. Such as one of participants in this study stated:

> Definitely, antifascist movement in Bosnia and Herzegovina is non-violent. It is true that we have a history of wars and fascism especially during the World War II but I might say that it would be contradictory if our antifa movement would be violent towards those who are worshiping fascists. Everyone should have a right of opinion and using violence would be something that the fascists in Yugoslavia or during the World War II have been doing. I am proud that our antifascist movement is non-violent (Anonymous interview 25, August 16, 2023).

The unique experience of the Yugoslav antifascism is central to its peaceful nature at present, both in terms of absence of street violence or policing speech as in the two anecdotes above, which will further be demonstrated in the concluding section of this chapter.

Slavoj Žižek, one of the most prominent contemporary philosophers, who was born and raised in Yugoslavia is also critical of the form that antifascism is currently taking in the West. The Slovenian philosopher sarcastically states that a new specter is haunting the West, the specter of fascism – more precisely, the demonized image of fascism as a form of political fetish and dominant dogma (Žižek 2017). Anyone who does not follow the norms imposed by antifascism risks being accused of fascism. Including Žižek himself who was accused of collaborating with fascism when he discussed the effectiveness of alt-right mobilization of the working class. Žižek argues that the liberal West employs antifascism to distract society from the actual antagonisms and discriminates the opposition through the use of f-word. This point is well summarized by Paul Gottfried, a paleoconservative political philosopher and a vocal opponent of antifascism, in *Antifascism – the Course of a Crusade*:

> The term "fascism" functions as a resource that the speaker, whether a journalist, actor, comedian, educator, politician, or member of the clergy, can lay hold of to demonize an opponent. Today the f-word is wielded mostly to bully and isolate political opponents (2021, 2).

When fascism emerges it has to be pointed out and addressed. Both tasks are significant but in our case the former requires a special attention because as we have already observed it is possible to be falsely accused of fascism and sometimes even unjustly face the consequences such as in the cases of Žižek. In this regard, Umberto Eco's essay *Ur-Fascism* (1995) might be a helpful guidance to point out fascism when it is emerging. However, it might be problematic as Italian philosopher highlights fourteen features of fascism and presence of any of them, according to the author, allows fascism to rise to power. I would not argue against this claim per se, however, it also implies the vagueness regarding what fascism is, which Eco accepts. This conceptual fuzziness in regards to fascism at present allows antifascists, as Gottfried argues, to attack virtually anyone and in this respect the author concludes that what the movement of antifascism resembles the most is German Nazism (Gottfried, 24). Related to this concern, one of the first significant accusations of antifascism in regards to its conceptional fuzziness comes from George Orwell, one of the most notable opponents of totalitarianism of the 20th century as well as an antifascist fighter during Spanish Civil War (Buchanan 2016, p. 68). Potentially, Orwell was the first to warn about the use of fascism as an f-word for delegitimizing any opposition which has become a tendency of the present time:

> Because it is impossible to define Fascism satisfactorily without making admissions which neither the Fascists themselves, nor the Conservatives, nor Socialists of any colour, are willing to make. All one can do for the moment is to use the word with a certain amount of circumspection and not, as is usually done, degrade it to the level of a swearword (Orwell 1952, cited in Gottfried 2021, 3).

It is not surprising because as early as of 1933 Spanish antifascists have been using the word to label and delegitimize not only their fascist enemies but virtually anyone they disagreed with including the allies within the left (García 2016a, 95). It is something that Orwell could have witnessed himself as a participant of the partisan struggle and consequently got disillusioned with the ideology's promises. Similarly, a few decades later in a liberalizing post-war Italy, a prominent

poet and director Pier Paolo Pasolini claimed that there can be nothing worse than the fascism of the antifascists (Gottfried 2021, 48). In a letter to Alberto Moravia, Pasolini expressed a concern similar to Žižek's, that antifascism is a stick that the ruling elites use to mislead and repress the masses:

> I wonder, dear Alberto, if this angry anti-fascism that is vented in the streets today when Fascism is over, isn't ultimately a weapon of distraction that the ruling class uses on students and workers to constrain dissent. Pushing the masses to fight a non-existent enemy while modern consumerism crawls, insinuates itself and wears out an already moribund society (Pasolini cited in Parks 2018).

The critique of antifascism's illiberalism has been accepted by Mark Bray – a historian and political activist who carries the flag of contemporary western antifascism and who argues that the ideology is "an illiberal politics of social revolutionism" (2017, XV). Bray rejects Voltaire's liberal postulate that we have to defend each other's right to say whatever regardless of whether we agree with them or not. Instead, he stresses that there can be no room for freedom of speech for the Nazi and fascists: "After Auschwitz and Treblinka, anti-fascists committed themselves to fighting to the death the ability of organized Nazis to say anything" (ibid.). There is an obvious slippery slope issue with Bray's position as we have already observed. It may not be easy to identify the actual instances of fascism and thus the actions that are not fascistic may be considered as such by the antifascists like Bray.

Thus far, the chapter has discussed two seemingly different forms of antifascism's illiberalism: policing speech—such as in Žižek's case and Gottfried's example of banning the word *Volk*—and actual street violence committed by antifascists in Sweden, Greece, and the U.S. Before proceeding further, some clarifications are required. Despite constituting similarly different issues, these are interconnected and form a spectrum of illiberal actions, depending on the degree of aggression from the Right or perceived fascists. History demonstrates that physical violence is often perpetuated following the policing of speech and the delegitimization of opponents through

dehumanization and name-calling, as seen in genocidal instances. Although such violence—compared to that committed by antifascists—is both qualitatively and quantitatively disproportionate, and drawing a parallel may even be morally impermissible, there is no doubt that policing speech and street violence exist on the same spectrum, with the former potentially leading to the latter. This has been demonstrated in the cases of Sweden, Greece, and the U.S., where antifascism has also escalated from verbal violence to physical violence. Most importantly, both are rooted in antifascists' inherent belief in the moral superiority and dignity of their position. Antifascists see themselves as representatives of a 'common humanity' (García 2016b, Rabinbach 1996). The ethical sanction they self-ascribe comes from the opposition to ultimate evils such as fascism and Nazism. Antifascism, in the minds of its adherents, possesses a "philosophical dignity" as it epitomizes rational universalism (Rabinbach, 10). A claim similar to what Enlightenment infused. In addition, neither antifascism nor its ideological predecessor are bound by the borders of the nation states, they strive to promote the values across the borders for all humanity. Antifascists, Hugo García argues, assume that their duty to oppose fascism spans even in "far away countries between people which they knew nothing about" (2016b, 566). Western antifascists see no issue in interference with the beliefs of people distant from where they reside as their goal is not to bring a cultural shift in their own countries only but to transform the way people live across the globe, irrespective of the fact if those people may belong to a different culture or have varying value systems. For antifascists, it is a zero-sum game, as Bray argues:

> From an anti-fascist perspective, the question is not about establishing a neutral line beyond which right-wing politics cannot cross, but about entirely transforming society by tearing down oppression in all its forms. For revolutionary socialist anti-fascists, the question to ask is, "Who will win the political struggle?" (ibid., 156).

It is the counterargument Bray offers in response to a critique that antifascism restricts freedom of speech and represses opposition. In his view, if the right-wing politics are not cut at the grassroots,

there is a chance that they will slide into totalitarianism and fascism will rise once again and thus the means antifascists undertake are legitimate, including violence (ibid.). However, it is questionable if general right-wing politics should immediately be associated with fascism. This assumption constitutes the illiberalism of antifascism. Currently, the ideology often does not consider conservative or religious conception of life as simply an alternative perspective regarding how people chose to live but as a deviant norm that should be transformed. The goal of the modern democracies is to distance themselves from the perceived fascism:

> When the term "antifascist" is applied to a regime, what is being designated is a political society that consciously acts in relation to a transformative design. Modern democracies are to be constantly on guard against fascism, and their perhaps unnamed telos is to combat this danger, partly by seeking to act and think in a way that clearly distinguishes democracy from what it opposes (Gottfried, 125).

This tendency sometimes may lead to a problem of shifting the focus from the actual social issues. For instance, in the case of Greece, antifascists stress the problem of the rise of the Golden Dawn far-right neo-Nazi organization, which is obviously important. However, the factors leading to its rise should not be obfuscated, which includes deep economic recession and migration crisis. On the issue of obfuscation of the reasons behind contemporary socio-economic issues Žižek (2017) states: "The demonised image of a fascist threat clearly serves as a new political fetish, fetish in the simple Freudian sense of a fascinating image whose function is to obfuscate the true antagonism." The position Žižek would take in relation to the mentioned issues in Greece is that the refugees actually want to live in their home countries but the West, in his opinion, instead of accepting this reality creates a pseudo-"cultural" war of civilization and anyone who takes a position against migration is being labeled as a fascist or a fanatic lacking liberal values of hospitality and toleration:

> The obscenity of the situation is breath-taking: global capitalism is now presenting itself as the last protection against fascism, and if you try to point this out you are accused of *complicity* with fascism. Today's panicky anti-fascism doesn't bring hope, it kills hope – the hope that we'll really get rid of the threat of racist populism (ibid.).

The certainty of followers of transformative ideologies in the legitimacy and righteousness of whatever actions they take lies in the belief of ethical superiority of the respective dogmas. Mark Bray, for instance, sees no issue in discriminative method of de-platforming alt-right speakers. Moreover, Bray considers violence on behalf of the U.S. Antifa as 'ethical' (Bray, 169). Such an uncompromising certainty of truth resembles the 'end of history' ideologies that have been proclaimed multiple times, notably by Karl Marx and Francis Fukuyama, and are regarded as forms ethical apotheosis. Since democratic regimes and antifascism have defeated their ideological adversaries in the earlier century their followers consider their dogmas as a contemporary moral compass for humanity and feel 'ethical' duty to point out what is right and wrong and in the latter case to deal with it, if needed even with the use of violence. It is a 'moral' duty of antifascism to oppose fascism which, as Nigel Copsey (2010, xiv-xxi, cited in Buchanan 2016, 68) argues, is rooted "in the democratic values of the Enlightenment tradition". Tom Buchanan, however, questions whether the ideology genuinely promoted Enlightenment values such as humanism and rationalism or if it was instead used to dehumanize fascists and 'legitimately' imprison them without proper trials (ibid.). Violence, as Buchanan concludes, cannot be separated from the political identity of antifascists (ibid.). Similarly, Enlightenment should also be questioned in regards to whether it promoted humanism and rationalism. The connection that Nigel Copsey's draws between antifascism and Enlightenment serves as a foundation for the following section. Antifascism is an ideological successor of enlightenment especially in its certainty of what is right and in illiberal repressions in relation to what it considers as wrong. Both Enlightenment and antifascism can be defined as transformative ethical ideologies, and such ones have a tendency to become illiberal, as it will further be demonstrated.

Enlightenment and illiberalism of transformative ethical ideologies

To the question what constitutes Enlightenment, Immanuel Kant replied that it is a man's emergence form a self-imposed immaturity (1969). Reason was a tool of enlightened philosophes to bring society out of this nonage. As Kant proclaimed the époque's unofficial moto *sapere aude* – dare to know – the search for what is reasonable, moral and right was central to the ideological agenda of Enlightenment. The goal was to delegitimize the monopoly of religion over moral domain and its interference with the personal freedoms of people and replacing it with the norms rooted in reasonable explanations and tolerance towards whatever people chose to believe in their private lives. In retrospective, the goal has been achieved as metaphorically God eventually died. However, the initial quest for tolerance led to intolerance on behalf of the enlightened elites in relation to those who refused to get enlightened – the ones deemed intolerant – the religious communities such as Jews or Mormons and colonized 'backward' oriental subjects as Native Americans. It is similar to what we observe today – discrimination of the 'perceived' fascist enemies and depriving them of the rights that the antifascists themselves promote, such as freedom of expression that is violated by de-platforming campaigns. Both Enlightenment in the past and antifascism today demonstrate how liberal ideals may end up in illiberal treatment of opponents, which is a common tendency of transformative 'ethical' ideologies.

In the eyes of the enlightened community, religion was considered as a step away from the fundamental enlightenment values, which they aimed to institute as a dominant doxa. Marquis de Condorcet in the essay on the perfectibility of men addresses the prejudices implied by religion:

> Truth, in spite of the transient success of prejudices, and the support they receive from the corruption of governments or of the people, must in the end obtain a durable triumph; by what ties nature has indissolubly united the advancement of knowledge with the progress of liberty, virtue, and respect for the natural rights of man; how these blessings, the only real ones, though so frequently seen apart as to be thought incompatible, must necessarily amalgamate and become inseparable, the moment knowledge shall have arrived at a certain pitch in a great number of nations at once, the moment it shall have penetrated the whole mass of a great people, whose language shall have become universal (1995, 392-393).

This extract has a positive connotation and promises bright future to humanity. At the same time, it is exemplar of the absolutist nature of Enlightenment and its uncompromising certainty regarding what constitutes universal truth. Condorcet was awaiting a triumph of the way of life that Enlightenment promoted. No other alternatives were possible in his opinion. In this respect, the path he predicted for humanity is not compatible with any other as it is the only true one – the world he prophesizes includes humanity altogether, implying that all alternative ways of living which contradict the values preached by Enlightenment would extinct, what parallels the motivations of contemporary antifascists to spread their massage across the borders. Condorcet, unlike contemporary antifascists, did not advocate for enforcement of this truth. Anticipating Hegel's dialectics, he believed this class would naturally come into existence as it constitutes the only truth that can make humanity happy and free – the end of history. Enlightenment philosophes grounded their arguments in the concept of human nature, as Condorcet does in this extract, consequently, they believed that their truth is natural and thus moral. Other possible interpretations of human life were seen as contrary to human nature, and thus wrong.

An enemy, through the opposition to which Enlightenment came into being, was the Church which created religious superstitions, made humanity ignorant and put it into chains, what contradicts Enlightenment's principles. A pre-Enlightenment Europe was a place of constant wars and conflicts between the European powers. Despite the fact that some of these wars did not start on the grounds of religious disputes, such as the American Revolution or the War of Polish Succession, enlightenment philosophes regarded organized religion as a significant factor leading to most of the wars on the continent and thus sought to diminish its power (Grell, Peter and Porter, 2000). J.G.A. Pocock describes this attempt as "a series of programs for reducing the power of either churches or congregations to disturb the peace of civil society by challenging its authority"

(2017, 275). Religion was seen as a fruitful foundation for the conflicts as well as contradicting the values of the Enlightenment so that philosophes took an uncompromising position against it and as a consequence against the people who choose to stick to religious dogmas. While most of the enlightenment philosophes were the proponents of rights and freedoms, many of them shared discriminatory assumptions in relation to religious people. They shared a belief that religion, with its superstitions and miracles, is not grounded in reason – the driving force of the age. Adherence to religious dogmas was seen as a force impeding Enlightenment and the progress it was offering to humanity. Religion and the wars it used to cause was perceived as a path to darkness in opposition to the light Enlightenment was offering. Through reason, enlightenment philosophes came to conclusions regarding human nature on the basis of which they established the only possible truth. The certainty they held regarding this truth made them illiberal in relation to those who refused to join such as closed religious communities, what contradicts the initial noble liberal quest for toleration. In this respect, the Enlightenment's attitudes towards European Jewish population is exemplar.

Commenting on Voltaire's potential anti-Semitism, Arthur Hertzberg brought up philosophe's notorious commentaries about Jews. For example, in a letter to Isaac de Pinto, Voltaire states that people have a right to be whatever they please to be, including Jews, however, under the condition they are philosophes (Hertzberg 1990). Being a philosophe of Voltaire's kind implies adherence to the norms these philosophes shared, religious superstitions and Judaism did not fall into that category. Thus, Voltaire's comment means that a Jew can become whoever he pleases to be only insofar as he leaves Judaism and becomes a follower of the truth dictated by Enlightenment. In Voltaire's opinion, at some point Jews could become deadly to humanity due to fanaticism that naturally exists in their hearts and thus justified a potential punishment for them:

"You have surpassed all nations in impertinent fables, in bad conduct and in barbarism. You deserve to be punished, for this is your destiny" (ibid.). Similar to Voltaire, d'Holbach (1995) who advocated for a reasonable religious tolerance, considered Judaism as a manifestation of dogmatism and intolerance. In their attempt to promote tolerance in general such philosophes were at the same time self-contradictorily intolerant to the ones who refused to become tolerant and to accept the reason promoted by Enlightenment (Champion 2010). Johann Gottlieb Fichte, who is more associated with Romanticism rather than Enlightenment, however, who developed his ideas on the works of Immanuel Kant, highlighted the critique of closed communities that made them intolerable: **"**The Jews are a "state within the state," incapable of any integration and thus damned to wander the world" (Fichte 1793, cited in Sander 2015). The Jewish question in the 18th century enlightening Germany was also considered in terms whether they are able to be virtuous in a manner preached by Enlightenment or not. According to *Aufklärers* (the enlighteners in Germany) thinkers, religious beliefs should have been replaced by the virtue grounded in rationality rather than in superstitious and largely it was assumed that Jews could not be virtuous under these conditions (Sorkin 2016). Jews were not the only targets of the enlightenment community of philosophes, similarly were treated other closed religious communities unwilling to change such as Mormons, or 'barbarian' in the eyes of European colonizers cultures that are unable to convert into civilized people such as Native Americans.

The age of Enlightenment found on reason is notable for the ideas regarding human nature and consequently for the humanistic laws of nature. The shared view regarding the universal applicability of these laws among the philosophes led to a rise of illiberalism of Enlightenment. There was a definite way to see how the world should be in their opinion and those who refused to follow it were denied toleration. Which is similar to what we can observe at present in terms of

the antifascists' attitudes towards their perceived enemies and ostracism. The nature of arguments against religion was rooted not only in an attempt to promote the rights of people and religious tolerance but also because religion as an institution ideologically stood in opposition to the nature of Enlightenment, what parallels antifascism in relation to the far-right politics. In this respect, Juan Pablo Dominguez argues:

> The Enlightenment was a source of tolerance, but also of discrimination. The very idea of toleration was used to trace a line between enlightened, acceptable citizens and intolerable fanatics. Enlightenment authors often denied toleration to those deemed intolerant and argued that most religious confessions were intolerant. Paradoxically, these authors' arguments reveal their own touch of intolerance since one can argue that they only demanded toleration for a reduced elite of educated and open-minded contemporaries, in which they of course included themselves (2017, 276).

Dominguez's critique in relation to the discriminatory nature of enlightenment's toleration is fair but he is not right in respect to the audience – educated elites – of those for whom they demanded the toleration. If it was the case, why would they even care if some small closed religious communities refused getting enlightened? On the contrary, they expected transformation of humanity altogether in line with the 'moral' norms they have come up with. The truth that enlightenment philosophes agreed upon was seen as essential and single way to ethical community of humans, as Marquis de Condorcet stated, and anyone who would be against or even simply discordant should not be tolerated. Such attitude is grounded in the enlightenment idea that despite the differences people across the world might have, the ultimate ends for everyone are the same and thus the path to these ends should also be identical, which is through what was perceived as reasonable. Isaiah Berlin, in this respect, argues that on the basis of ideas of Descartes, a dogma of one system of knowledge has emerged, the philosophes held a belief that this system "embracing all provinces and answering all questions, could be established by unbreakable chains of logical argument from universally valid axioms, not subject to refutation or modification by any experience of an empirical kind" (Berlin 1998, 245). Berlin confirms the earlier mentioned

absolutist nature of Enlightenment claiming that for all of its adherents there was only one universal civilization (ibid., 255). Berlin's point is that the Enlightenment scholars have agreed upon a single way that lets humanity become wise, happy, virtuous, and free. The grounds for such an absolutist belief lie in the reason and the approach to science that shaped the époque – the nature of the enlightenment's intolerance and illiberalism is found upon what Berlin conceptualizes as *rationalism's original sin*:

> At some point I realized that what all these views had in common was a Platonic ideal: in the first place, that, as in the sciences, all genuine questions must have one true answer and one only, all the rest being necessarily errors; in the second place, that there must be a dependable path towards the discovery of these truths; in the third place, that the true answers, when found, must necessarily be compatible with one another and form a single whole, for one truth cannot be incompatible with another – that we know a priori. In the case of morals we could then conceive what the perfect life must be, founded as it would be on a correct understanding of the rules that governed the universe (Berlin1991, 5, as cited in Yack 2012, 51).

There is no doubt that the earlier mentioned assertion by Nigel Copsey that antifascism's opposition to fascism is rooted in the values of Enlightenment, however, same could be said about the discriminative attitudes shared by both transformative ethical ideologies. It should also be mentioned that Enlightenment, just as antifascism at present, was not homogeneous. It was a community of people who had similar but also sometimes conflicting ideas. Which also applies to antifascism today. As I will demonstrate, the case of BiH does not follow the illiberal trajectory of antifascism that is becoming a tendency in Europe and North America.

Nonmilitant antifascism in Bosnia and Herzegovina

Towards the end of spring of 1945 the Yugoslav Army's antifascist Partisans have regained almost all of its territories that have been occupied by the Axis powers since 1941. The success of Tito's Partisans caused the Axis-allied forces and local collaborators mainly from the Independent State of Croatia to flee in the fear of retribution. On May 7, 1945, around 200,000 Ustaša troops and their families under the command of Ante Pavelić departed towards the Austrian border (Glenny 2012, 530). The refugees were able to cross the border and surrender to the British army, which

was their plan as they were forced to choose the lesser of two evils. However, after being disarmed by the British nearby Bleiburg town they were handed over to Tito's Partisans (Tomasevich 2001, 757). During WWII, Ustaša became notorious for annihilation of Orthodox Serbs, Jews, Roma people and other minorities, organization of deaths camps, rapes and other war crimes. According to various estimates from 200 to 500 thousand people have been exterminated by the Ustaša during this period. Consequently, their fear of retribution was not irrational and as the Partisans took them as prisoners they were not treated according to the rules of just war. On a four-day 'death march' back to the Yugoslav territory around 30,000 of them were killed or died due to inhumane conditions of the march and later in Tezno tens of thousands of the former Nazi collaborators, their wives and children were executed indiscriminately and without proper trials (Glenny 2012, 530; Pavlaković et al. 2018, 15). This event is remembered in Croatia and constitutes one of the major national narratives (Tomasevich 2001, Palmberger 2016). The Croats seek recognition of the war crimes committed against these Ustaša members, as the absence of such recognition legitimizes their rehabilitation (Glenny 2012, 629). In the eyes of Croatian nationalists, the annual event in Bleiburg symbolizes the sufferings of their ancestors under communism (Pavlaković et al. 2018, 10). The demand for recognition of the murders on behalf of the Partisans can be justified as the event is well documented and clearly war crimes have been committed. At the same time, the atrocities committed by the Ustaša should also be considered and thus an annual commemoration of these Ustaša victims that is held in Bleiburg is interpreted by many as rehabilitation of the Nazi war criminals. This perspective is largely shared in BiH where people have been directly affected by fascism on behalf of Ustaša during WWII (Čusto 2018). Consequently, in 2020, the decision to hold a commemorative Mass in Sarajevo's Sacred Heart Cathedral—after the Austrian government canceled the event in Bleiburg due to COVID-19 regulations and concerns over Ustaša symbols

associated with fascism, which are present annually at the commemoration—was met with mass antifascist protests in BiH's capital. One of the study participants recalled this even with indignation:

> They decided that there should be a commemoration Mass for the victims of Bleiburg in Sarajevo. And when this was known, this was a huge scandal. So many say 'Come on! this city was occupied by the Ustaša. The Ustaša killed thousands of people here. And now you seriously want to make a commemoration Mass for Ustaša people?' I mean, even if they were killed, so they became victims? And there was a big demonstration against it, so thousands of people were gathering in the streets and there was a big banner, 'we all antifascists' or 'me too I'm an antifascist'. And this was really more than 5,000 or 6,000 people gathered, which is a lot for Sarajevo. And this is also a sign that this antifascist tradition is quite strong (Anonymous interview 2, July 2, 2023).

Thousands of people marched in Sarajevo holding antifascist banners such as "I am antifascist too." The Mass was condemned by the city authorities as well as by the World Jewish Congress. Despite this and the presence of thousands of protesters in the streets of Sarajevo, the controversial Mass was still carried out by Archbishop Vinko Puljić who claimed that "praying for victims' souls did not mean approval of their acts" (BBC 2020). In addition, even the government of BiH declared that they cannot interfere with the affairs of the Catholic Church and thus ban the Mass that goes against the Bosnian antifascist tradition (Spaić 2020). What is the most significant about the event is not only the fact that a commemoration of condemned Nazis took place in a city that is traditionally known for its antifascist stance, but also that there was not a single report of violence – the protest was completely peaceful despite the atrocities committed by the Ustaša – something that can hardly be imagined in the cases of Sweden, Greece, or the U.S. where antifascism often acquires a more militant trajectory even in less controversial instances, as it was demonstrated in a section on militant antifascism above.

The abovementioned discussion of militant antifascism in three cases does not imply that the left in Sweden, Greece and the U.S. has completely turned into a militant direction. It is true that militant antifascists in every case constitute only a small proportion within the left comparing to peaceful nonmilitant activists, nevertheless, their presence is visible and significant. In all cases

radicalization and militarization has been a reaction to certain initiatives of the far-right or a response to their violence. There is no incentive to defame antifascism especially considering that the violence committed by the far-right is both qualitatively and quantitatively more significant. What is under consideration here are the reasons explaining a complete absence of militant form of antifascism in BiH while it is in place across the antifascist movements in other cases in Europe and North America. Antifascism is a transnational movement, and its values are often shared among geographically distant groups (García et al., 2016). However, while the militant trend of antifascism has been growing in popularity across the West in the 21st century, it has not been adopted by antifascists in BiH. Below I provide three arguments to explain this tendency and illustrate the uniqueness of the Bosnian antifascism.

Bosnian antifascism is not reactionary but rather a persistent tradition

Generally, antifascism is a reactionary phenomenon. It is no wonder there is a difficulty in terms of defining the concept either among scholars or participants of my study because primarily it stands against fascism however it is defined. Originally, antifascism emerged in a pre-WWII Europe as a response to the spread of Mussolini's fascistic ideas mainly in Italy, Weimar Republic, Spain, Portugal, Great Britain and France. After the defeat of the Axis powers antifascism for some period became less visible as it was believed that fascism eventually lost. However, the antifascist ideas rose to prominence once again when, for example, Oswald Mosley's Union Movement accused Jews for the post-WWII economic hardships in Great Britain or due to the rise of Jean-Marie Le Pen's nationalist party following the immigration crisis in France after the Algerian War. Similarly, after the fall of the Berlin Wall, due to the explosion of Nazism across Europe antifascists have radicalized once again in order to fight it. A similar reactionary response on behalf of the antifascists can be witnessed in the 21st century as they self-organize to combat the rise of

neo-Nazis in Sweden and Greece due to the economic hardships and immigration crisis or in the U.S. following the election of Donald Trump and radicalization of the far-right, as demonstrated earlier.

The situation in BiH is different. Although antifascism initially emerged as a reactionary movement against the Axis occupation of the Balkans, after the victory of Tito's Partisans, it became a cornerstone of Yugoslav ideology and later evolved into a widely cherished tradition, even in the post-Yugoslav period. Whenever some fascistic incident takes place, and such ones are quite common in BiH, it does not result in an immediate violent or militant response as in the cases discussed above. Radicalization of people usually happens as a response to certain incidents, such as arguably in the case of the murder of Alexis Grigoropoulos "an entire generation of Greek youth had been radicalized" (Bray 2017, 100). The left in BiH is popular not because of certain critical events that shape it but because antifascism is constantly there and in a way under skin, as one of the participants described this sentiment in Sarajevo: "it's (antifascism) like in the skin of the city, you learn about it at school, in your family, especially while I was growing up". Another participant who was born in 1995 after the breakup of Yugoslavia stated: "I learned antifascist values not in formal education, but mostly in the family. So it's a part of growing up, raising up." Antifascism in BiH is naturally transmitted from generation to generation through shared memories in families, through education in schools, as well as it is there in both cultural and physical landscape, as mentioned by one of the participants in the study:

> From the Socialist Republic of Yugoslavia, I guess, maybe the most valuable would be antifascism as a value. Just a value in terms of society. And individually. I think it's a value. Because I feel like if you speak to the older generations, I think sometimes, especially like my grandparents' generation, I think they can tell you a lot more historically and specifically about things that they remember. Then if you talk to my parents, it's something that they were watching growing up, you could learn about it in school, you could see it in the movies, read about it in the newspapers, monuments (Anonymous interview 9, July 20, 2023).

As long as antifascism in BiH is not a reactionary response to certain acts or fascistic violence, it is rooted in a tradition rather than in radical and immediate response to fascism and thus it takes a rather peaceful form, for instance, a member of an antifascist organization from Tuzla highlighted a non-militant form of Bosnian antifascism:

> So antifascism is one of the core values of the organization in our statute. In the modern day where we are not fighting fascism with weapons but we still have to fight the fascistic ideas. And we usually try to approach it in that way that the remaining fascist ideas are never visible in our societies again. And we have to show young people that they have the ability to actually still fight against those remaining ideas and rhetoric through like non-violent resistance or through communication and building critical thinking (Anonymous interview 20, August 10, 2023).

Although participants praise this non-militant nature of antifascism in BiH, many are critical of political power behind the ideology, for example one respondent mentioned:

> As a value it still exists, as like a movement a force it's no longer, it's not something that when you say like antifascism that you feel you can't really connect it to any power source here. Yes, antifascism as a core value that was brought to us by the Communist Party which won the war, Partisans who fought against Nazis and collaborationists (Anonymous interview 9, July 20, 2023).

The connection of antifascism to communism and Tito's Yugoslavia is what distinguishes BiH from the cases discussed. To the question why Bosnian antifa is never violent one of the participants who was probably the most radically-minded among the people I met stated:

> The truth is that we in Bosnia and Herzegovina do not have an antifa movement that is ready for this type of action. Our antifascist associations are mostly people of the older generation, who only pay tribute to the Partisans and the past. We do not have a serious antifa movement that is ready for more radical actions. The mentality of this people is otherwise passive, the protests are also very poorly attended, I call it a society that has resigned itself to slavery and suffering (Anonymous interview 1, July 2, 2023).

Having spent two months in the field I cannot fully agree with the statement as young people are active in the antifascist struggle but it is true that antifascists are comparatively less radical than across the West and are less organized in terms of taking a more direct action. That has to do with the connection between the antifascist tradition and communist legacy.

Bosnian antifascism is rooted in communist tradition rather than anarchist

While conducting the interviews and attending the events at DKC I constantly had a feeling that I was witnessing anarchism in practice because the ideology's central features were visibly present

such as decentralized horizontal structure, the principles of free associationism, voluntarism, egalitarianism, anti-capitalism. Nevertheless, whenever I asked whether the principles of anarchism are central to the ideology of DKC members I have always received a negative response. Among the dozens of people I interacted with, only two identified as anarchists—specifically, anarcho-syndicalists. Everyone else ideologically positioned themselves as Marxists or communists. That is, according to one of the respondents, a critical difference between Bosnian and other antifascisms across the West in terms of militarization:

> Our antifascism is closely connected to the memories and heritage of socialist Yugoslavia, and its origins and practices differ from those in Western countries, which were never socialist but always capitalist. Additionally, in many of these countries, antifascism is closely linked to anarchist movements, which barely exist in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Direct actions, sometimes involving radical or violent activities, are usually associated with anarchists (Anonymous interview 9, July 20, 2023).

Antifascism, as some of the respondents of the study mentioned, is not an ideology in itself. For example, one of the DKC's most active members stated: "Antifascism for me is not an ideology. It's a set of values. An ideology for me has to have a vision of a world. Antifascism just has a vision of a world without fascism." Antifascism, as participants argue, has to be grounded in a certain ideology and for most people in BiH it is either communism or Marxism, while in the cases of the discussed militant antifascist movements it is related to anarchism. Traditionally, anarchists do not have trust in state institutions and do not see appealing to government for solutions as a useful option. Thus, direct action is the most preferred solution anarchists seek, which often leads to confrontational political outcomes (Vysotsky 2013; Gartenstein-Ross et al. 2021). This tradition goes back to the 19th century anarchism when ideology's followers engaged in what was called *propaganda by deed*, a strategy to use violent actions in order to overthrow oppressive political structures (ibid.). Anarchism, which is not inherently violent but rather aspires to bring order, has acquired a negative connotation largely due to this strategy, which is still used by militant anarchist antifascists—though it is now mostly referred to as 'direct action'. This

militant approach is justified for three reasons: (1) historically, governments at the institutional level have failed to prevent the rise of fascism; (2) in contrast, militant confrontation has proven effective—not only during World War II but also more broadly—in excluding fascists from public discourse; and finally (3), the very nature of fascism itself is seen as justifying the use of violence against it. These reasons altogether provide anarchist antifascists with a moral justification to fight fascism in the name of humanity and justice by 'whatever means possible' because of their certainty that only a militant approach has a potential to impede fascism as well as due to a belief that the opposition is an ultimate evil, which parallels intolerance of Enlightenment and the attitudes of the Enlightened elites towards those deemed intolerant. Ariel Koch (2018, 8), for instance, argues that the perceived fascists in the eyes of the militant antifascists are an evil that has to be annihilated and thus they are ready to use force against them both in their own countries as well as abroad.

While antifascist at present may be criticized for this militant approach by their respective Western governments, such as an attempt to designate Antifa as a terrorist organization in the U.S., a similar justification has been used on multiple occasions by the allied forces during WWII. For instance, Winston Churchill and Arthur Harris initially justified indiscriminate mass bombings of German cities as a last resort option, similar Michael Walzer's (2006) doctrine of supreme emergency, on the grounds that fascism constituted an ultimate evil and that its potential victory would have changed the humanistic values of the global community. At present, the difference between the general far-right or even neo-Nazism and the fascism of Hitler and Mussolini is undoubtedly visible, nevertheless, the militant antifascists take an absolutist position in response to what they consider as fascistic, similar to the absolutism of the Enlightenment. However, this tendency is missing in the case of BiH. I argue that this is due to the degree of polarization in

Sweden, Greece, and the U.S. compared to the studied case, which is linked to the history of radicalization in these three countries throughout the 20th century. In contrast, BiH had no opportunity for political radicalization during Tito's rule, resulting in a less radical and nonmilitant form of antifascism.

Conclusion

The last thing to mention, returning back to the point of policing speech, in order to demonstrate a more peaceful form of antifascism in BiH, is an absence of strong language in relation to perceived fascists – a tendency of "name calling" – due to which contemporary antifascism is accused of indiscriminate attitudes towards the right and illiberalism in general. Whenever I asked the study participants to characterize their opposition, they struggled, with only some using the word *papak*, which literally translates to cloven hoof, but more closely in a conversation style it means arsehole. Someone who is designated as *papak* may be perceived as uncultured, rural, or someone apolitical who spends time in Shisha bars and loves Turbo-folk (a subgenre of contemporary South Slavic pop music) genre of music, or men who wear tighten jeans and women who overdress. These are some of the explanations I have collected. In general, it is a derogative term you could use in BiH to designate someone you disagree with. The usage of this word in relation to those who they don't consider as members of the antifascist community demonstrates a tendency of moral transformative ideologies to slide towards illiberalism and intolerance. Nevertheless, it was rarely mentioned by the interviewees and those who did mention it belong to the youngest strata of the respondents of the study. More senior antifascists and DKC members disapproved the use of this word in relation to those who are not active in the antifascist movement. Militant antifascists, on the contrary, see the opposition in a more uncompromising manner and thus are ready to use strong vocabulary in relation to the perceived fascists and to dehumanize them. To the question whether the designation of *papak* may be considered as a slippery slope

towards a more radical form of antifascism in BiH, a respondent who is commonly referred as a 'mom' of DKC youth replied negatively but highlighted the possibility that under certain conditions it can happen:

> However, I do think that with the changes that the world is undergoing we might be looking at changes in these aspects as well since societies are generally becoming more militant and violent and if the right is pushing with violent measures than the left will in time probably respond in the same way. Therefore, it will have more to do with the general state and levels of violence in society than with tradition of antifascism in BiH (Anonymous interview 9, July 20, 2023).

Despite a global tendency of militarization of antifascism, the movement in BiH remains exclusively peaceful. As the chapter demonstrates, it is because traditional Bosnian antifascism is rooted in communist ideology and lack anarchist inclination to direct action as well as due to the absence of radicalization in Tito's Yugoslavia unlike other cases in Europe and North America where anarchist ideology dominates antifascism and provides it with a militant component. Obviously, it may be questionable if the Tito's communist regime indeed lacked the grounds for radicalization and polarization, as the wars of the 1990s or extermination of political opponents in the 1940s demonstrate, however, as it was demonstrated in the earlier chapters, in BiH a uniquely (along with Montenegro) positive picture of communism and antifascism is preserved in the memory of the population.

Nevertheless, whether it will remain so may be questionable as it is mentioned in the response above. The historical memory of the most recent war is still strong in BiH, you may start a conversation about peanuts but eventually in ten minutes the talk about the last war is very likely to begin. So, as the participants in the study constantly mentioned, for Bosnian society everything is fine as long as there is no war, and thus militant resistance on behalf of antifascists is still missing but it may change as the historical memory of the Yugoslav Wars of the 1990s shades away or if the right gets more aggressive as in Sweden, Greece, and the U.S.. This discussion is, however, beyond the scope of this chapter or dissertation.

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Conclusion

This dissertation has explored how a group of young antifascist activists in Sarajevo engages with and responds to the complex social and political realities of post-war Bosnia and Herzegovina—commonly referred to as Dayton Bosnia. The war that took place in Bosnia and Herzegovina between 1992 and 1995 ended with an agreement signed in Dayton, in the U.S. The Dayton Peace Agreement and its Annex 4, is a current constitution of BiH. However, it did not end the war by instituting a fully sovereign state. Instead, it resembles an international protectorate imposed through a top-down approach. The Office of High Representative (OHR) which is composed of foreign observers became central authority directly affecting the politics of the country. The main issue, however, is not that international actors took a significant role in Bosnia's internal affairs, but a political system that the Dayton Agreement put in place. While pursuing the goal to bring an end to 'inherent ethnic hatreds' it was assumed by the creators of Dayton that the best way would be to give equal representation to each ethnic group such as by dividing the territory across ethnic lines, having three presidents representing each, as well as dozens of ministries with equal proportion of each ethnic group. As a consequence, the noble goal created a dysfunctional state. As my respondents claim, the state cannot function because there always has to be a consensus for any decision to be proceeded but it is impossible in such a complex and divided political system with, for example, fourteen ministries of education only. Most importantly, Dayton Agreement contributed to a loss of hope with respect to any political change because it created a status quo where the rule of nationalist and corrupted elites cannot be challenged. Under normal conditions, while competing for the positions in power, such as in elections, political campaigners try to win over electorate and attract voters by distributing collective hope. They need to make promises appealing to their electorate and take responsibility for keeping their promises to a certain extent.

In BiH such incentives are unappealing to the elites because they are certain of winning any electoral cycle. The idea here is that the main nationalist parties representing Bosnian Muslims, Croats and Serbs are confident that their respective populations to a larger extent would keep on voting along nationalist lines within the Dayton framework irrespective of what kind of policies they promote, whether they are corrupted or not. In this scenario, antifascism provides my interlocutors with a moral framework for opposing what they perceive as immoral divisive nationalist politics of Dayton Bosnia.

Through in-depth ethnographic fieldwork with a focus on their gathering site, *Društveno Kulturni Centar (DKC)*, I examined how these individuals interpret and embody antifascist values as both a moral framework and a mode of everyday resistance in the context of Dayton Bosnia. My interaction with the members of the DKC community and with the focus on the antifascist nature of their activism helped to illuminate how young Sarajevans navigate the unequally distributed societal hope in Dayton Bosnia and attempt to generate it themselves through their daily activities at DKC and beyond. Their actions offer a compelling micro-level lens through which to understand larger structural issues in the country, including nationalism, revisionist memory politics, and widespread societal hopelessness. I explore this by examining how they understand and perceive the Yugoslav and antifascist past, how they juxtapose it with present-day Dayton Bosnia, and how they consequently envision a desirable and dignified future. Antifascism is a significant collective element of Bosnian culture that proved effective in the past and remains relevant today. I argue that the focus on antifascist youth in Sarajevo has a potential to add to our understanding of the socio-political and economic issues discussed in the scholarship on Dayton Bosnia, as it allows to see how new generations on the ground are affected by the institutional framework that was put in place three decades ago.

Disciplinarily, this thesis is situated at the intersection of anthropology and political theory. I offer a micro-level anthropological study of a small group of young antifascist activists in Sarajevo, which I further apply and generalize to broader political issues: decolonization in the first chapter, the distribution of hope across society in the second chapter, the question of freedom in the context of the nationalized state in the third chapter, and a comparative study of the ideological foundations of antifascism in the final chapter. As such antifascism is also treated as a heuristic to discuss larger issues within the Dayton Bosnia context, such as hopelessness, revisionism, nationalism, corruption, dysfunctional and accountable state, perception of the failed promises of democracy and capitalism following the end of war and how they respond to it, and more. While existing scholarship does address these issues in relation to Dayton Bosnia, my account presents a unique interpretation grounded in the perspectives of the participants in my study – young antifascist activists in Sarajevo. I focused not on the factual accuracy of my participants' understandings of the antifascist or Yugoslav past—though I recognize these sometimes contradict historical facts—but rather on their perspectives as such. Regardless of their factual validity, these views shape participants' behavior, choices, and beliefs.

Chapter 1 demonstrates how antifascism is preserved in the collective memory of Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), where the absence of a clear future—resulting from its neocolonial condition under the Dayton system—ensures its persistence. The young antifascists in my study turn to the past as a source of normality and modernity, reimagining antifascism as a viable framework in contrast to their current hopeless reality. For my participants, antifascism in BiH represents a time of greater economic stability, personal freedoms, and state autonomy and capacity—elements lacking in present-day Dayton Bosnia. In Chapter 2, within the framework of the anthropology of hope, I examine how the participants in this study navigate the hopelessness

of Dayton Bosnia through antifascism. Antifascists who refuse to conform to the Dayton system find themselves in a state of stuckedness, as societal hope in Dayton Bosnia is not extended to them. My participants refer to antifascism primarily because they perceive Yugoslavia as a more just regime—one in which merit was respected, and anyone who deserved it could live a normal life: having a job, an apartment, the freedom to travel both within Yugoslavia and across Europe, and the ability to purchase goods—unlike under the conditions of Dayton Bosnia. Choosing to remain outside the Dayton system, despite its implied benefits, is what constitutes a dignified life for them, even though they lack opportunities for upward social mobility. In Chapter 3, I explore how an antifascist stance in opposition to Dayton Bosnia functions as an alternative to nationalized politics—specifically, as resistance to the nationalist narratives and historical revisions that political elites use to maintain power by artificially inflaming ethnic tensions and distracting society from urgent socio-economic issues. I show how these tactics affect the daily lives and freedoms of my participants. Finally, in Chapter 4, I move beyond the context of Dayton Bosnia and situate youth antifascism in Sarajevo within recent global trends, discussing antifascism's illiberal potential. I argue that, unlike in countries such as Greece, Sweden, and the United States—where instances of street violence against perceived fascists and general militarization are evident—antifascism in Sarajevo and BiH remains peaceful and does not follow this trend of militarization.

This conclusions are largely shared in scholarship on BiH and specifically on the Dayton framework. However, while writing the dissertation I was concerned with the political developments in BiH and across the post-Yugoslav region as they might have led to radical shifts in societies affecting the validity of arguments through the dissertation. The wave of protests across the Balkans that started in 2011 and culminated in BiH in 2014 was framed as a Balkan Spring.

However, if we look at the region from a current perspective, the goals of that revolution can hardly be considered realized. At the very least, we may argue in favor of such a conclusion in the context of the events that have taken place across the region since late 2024 and continue to escalate to this day. Arguably, we are witnessing Balkan Spring 2.0, and similar demands highlight that the same issues are still in place. Throughout the last year of my dissertation, I have been anticipating something similar: what if something happens across ex-Yugoslavia, particularly in BiH, and how would it affect my assumptions, arguments, and the whole dissertation? Exactly what I anticipated has recently happened. Consequently, the shape and theme of the conclusion to my dissertation have been determined by external factors, and I find it necessary to discuss what is currently happening in the region, and in BiH specifically, as it is directly related to my study.

To begin with, with regard to antifascism, it is agreed in scholarship that the protests that took place between 2011 and 2014 could be framed as a 'trans-Yugoslav leftist sensibility,' with antifascism per se playing a significant role (Petrović 2016, Kurtović and Hromadžić 2017, Hofman 2021). If my dissertation had been written at that historical conjuncture, its findings would have immediately been proven as perfectly valid. In the meantime, however, no conclusions can be made, as the current events have not yet been sufficiently addressed, as they are happening right at this moment while I am writing this conclusion. While scholarly evaluation of the events has not yet been sufficiently produced, and as I am personally not in the field to provide a concise understanding of the events, I have attempted to draw certain conclusions with regard to my dissertation based on online news articles discussing the widespread protests across the Balkan Peninsula.

Global attention was drawn to the region following a tragic event that occurred on November 1 in Novi Sad, Serbia, when the roof of a recently renovated train station collapsed, killing 15

people (Savanović 2025). "Since then, a continuous wave of anti-corruption protests, mainly organized by students, has swept across Serbia. Over the past five months, hundreds of thousands of protesters have demanded political change and challenged Aleksandar Vučić's long-standing rule as the country's president, with some protests drawing over 300,000 participants (Salzmann and Schwarz 2025). In Montenegro, protesters took to the streets of Podgorica to demand the resignation of the country's high-ranking officials following a similarly atrocious event that claimed the lives of 12 people—a mass shooting that occurred in the city of Cetinje on January 1 (Koseva 2025). Similarly, on March 16, North Macedonia experienced a traumatic event when a nightclub fire in Kočani killed 59 people and injured more than 150 (Guilbert 2025). The following day, thousands of protesters took to the streets to demand justice.

The media coverage of these events raises issues similar to those discussed in my dissertation. For example, one online article is titled *'Serbia's Student Movement Is Rekindling Hope,'* which correlates with one of the main themes of the present study (Krstić and Juhász, 2025). Similarly, the futural framework concerning what participants in my study hope for can be seen in the creative self-designation of protesters in Montenegro—*Kamo Śutra*—which is translated as *'Where Tomorrow'* (Visnjic 2025). Additionally, during the time when people are protesting in the streets, the debates under the title "Politically Motivated Revisionism Threatens the Anti-Fascist Legacy of Montenegro" are continued (Marinović 2025). While it is yet difficult to establish the role of antifascism in these protests, the signs of its presence are at least visible. Saša Savanović (2025), for example, with regards to protests in Serbia claims that "the student struggle is an anti-fascist one, because it is concerned with the well-being of others." Additionally, revisionism of antifascism and fascism, which was one of the main themes of this study, are also in place in the context of the current protests, such as:

> Six high-ranking Serbian church bishops issued a letter at the end of February criticising the "dehumanising language" used by Metropolitan David of Kruševac, who called the student protesters "Serbian Ustašas" – a reference to a Croatian fascist movement (Bogdanovski 2025).

The seemingly unrelated events and resulting protests across the region, in reality, share a common goal among participants—one that parallels the views of my respondents—which is a struggle against corrupt, unaccountable governments and dysfunctional states that affect the lives of ordinary people to such an extent that they end up paying with their lives for their representatives' inability to provide normal living conditions. This is not a bold accusation, as these events are not believed to be random, unfortunate incidents that somehow happened to coincide within the same time period. All of these events are considered predictable and avoidable, as it has already been well documented that corruption was widespread in the renovation of the train station in Novi Sad, the shooter in Cetinje had previously been convicted of violence and gun possession, and the nightclub in Kočani did not undergo the legally required safety inspections. In the views of the protesters across the region, corruption of the governments is a cause of dysfunctional state affecting people's lives, similar was argued in this dissertation with regards to Dayton Bosnia. Finally, BiH itself and institutional framework of Dayton Bosnia has been recently challenged to a previously unprecedented degree.

Finally, the main theme running throughout this dissertation is that the nationalized politics of Dayton Bosnia—with its division of power along ethnic lines—enables political elites to preserve power by securing electoral victories through the support of co-national majorities. It was argued that this system is so essential to national political elites that they are willing to cooperate across ethnic lines while simultaneously deploying nationalist narratives and historical revisionism to manufacture artificial political tensions. In doing so, they effectively distract society from pressing socio-economic issues, allowing themselves to remain in power, evade accountability, and advance their own interests. With regard to the main themes of the dissertation, this status quo

contributes to a state of hopelessness in society, as the state is virtually dysfunctional under such conditions, and paradoxically, revisionism and nationalist narratives are used to promote the preservation of the system and the integrity of the country. This description of Dayton Bosnia, as demonstrated throughout the dissertation, is widely agreed upon by scholars and is also held by an absolute majority of my participants. However, in recent months, this view has been challenged.

Milorad Dodik, the leader of Republika Srpska for nearly two decades, was accused of violating the Dayton Peace Agreement and endangering the country's integrity following his signing of laws that suspended rulings by the Constitutional Court and by international peace envoy Christian Schmidt in 2023. This year, Dodik faced legal persecutions and was prohibited from politics for six years, sentenced to one year of jail time, and the separatist laws his has signed were suspened as seens as "an attack on the constitutional order" (Hajdari, 2025a, Sito-sucic 2025a). In response, Dodik banned the judiciary and security forces of the Federation in Republika Srpska, further contributing to the country's political instability (Hajdari, 2025b). This, in turn, led to the enlargement of the EU peacekeeping forces in BiH, with troops being immediately deployed (ibid.). The Federation issued a warrant and requested EUFOR to arrest Dodik in order to preserve stability and prevent further escalation of the crisis (Hajdari, 2025c; Sito-Sucic, 2025b). Meanwhile, the leader of Republika Srpska called for Russia's help and is currently believed to be in Moscow (Newsroom, 2025). In his latest public statements, Dodik claimed that he would not do anything to jeopardize peace in BiH (Trifkovic, 2025).

What is important in the context of my dissertation is not the future of BiH per se, nor its integrity within the framework of the Dayton Peace Agreement, but rather the motivations behind Dodik's separatist intentions. His actions contradict the main theoretical framework of the current study, which argues that Dayton Bosnia favors political elites who, in turn, promote its

preservation. Why, then, did Dodik decide to challenge the long-standing status quo that has favored political elites across nationalist lines? In the current situation, which is still unfolding, I can only offer speculation, albeit based on reasonable grounds. Briefly, Dodik's actions do not challenge the aforementioned theoretical framework; rather, they contribute to some of the main arguments of the dissertation. While the dissertation emphasizes how a dysfunctional state creates a sense of hopelessness in the country's capital and most advanced and prosperous city, Sarajevo, the extent of this issue in Republika Srpska is far more pressing. The region is not only considered the most underdeveloped in the country but also among the most underdeveloped in the broader former Yugoslav region. With Dodik continuously losing popularity in Republika Srpska, more people favor staying within the Federation, and the number of those supporting disintegration is decreasing. At the moment, Dodik has likely reached the lowest point of popularity among the citizens of Republika Srpska. Given this, it can be assumed that the usual tactic of securing political power within Dayton Bosnia through nationalist appeals and revisionism may no longer be sufficient for maintaining power. As a result, Dodik has decided to take a radical and unprecedented step to challenge the fundamentals of the Dayton Peace Agreement and pursue disintegration, hoping for broad support from the population in the part of the Federation he governs. His aspirations have not been successful, potentially due to the population's frustration with the dysfunctional state, the absence of hope for upward social mobility, and a general lack of hope for a normal life under his rule. On the contrary, it is evident that Dayton Bosnia will persist, as the EU has demonstrated an immediate intention to preserve stability in the region. This situation is not surprising, given the atrocities that occurred in BiH during the last war, including the EU's failure to prevent the genocide in Srebrenica. Determined not to repeat such a humiliating failure of its foreign and security policy, the EU remains cautious in its approach to the Western

Balkans. Additionally, the ongoing instability in Ukraine heightens broader security concerns across the continent. As a result, EU leaders are reluctant to risk the accession of another politically unstable country. Consequently, the EU will continue to promote peace and state integrity within the Dayton framework. As such, the nationalized politics of Dayton Bosnia, discussed in this dissertation, will remain in place.

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