

# **A New Regional Geography of a Revolution: Bosnia's Plenum Movement**

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This article sheds light on a recent reawakening of radical politics in the former Yugoslavia. It focuses on citizens living radical politics after socialism, as new groups and movements in the region struggle to embed radically democratic visions of society. Via an on-the-ground regional study the article exposes the endless post-conflict, post-socialist transition era, after Yugoslavia, which has for citizens meant general impoverishment, de-industrialisation, mass unemployment, and living under a post-democratic governance of divisive and corrupt elites. Out of this desert of post-socialism a form of horizontal democracy emerged called Plenum, the most radical experiment in non-institutional politics that can be found across the Balkans since the collapse of Yugoslavia.

Revolution; Regional Geography; Plenum; Radical Politics; Socialism; Yugoslavia; Bosnia-Herzegovina

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If this book has left the reader angry, good; or hopeful, good; or embarrassed, good; or determined, good; or intellectually aroused, good; for the book is a call to action, not merely an exercise in abstraction.

(Bunge, 2011, p. 240)

In a world hypnotised by the raptures of the neoliberal moment, the very idea of revolution has, in the global North at least, not just fallen out of fashion but removed itself to the infinite horizon of never-never land.

(Smith, 2010, p. 51)

### **The Rebel Peninsula**

There is a persistent imaginary of the region with which this article is concerned, an imagined Balkans that is still seemingly pervasive. This imagined Balkans can be found in the opening lines of Misha Glenny's (1999) magnum opus, *The Balkans, 1804–1999*, where Bram Stoker's (1897) *Dracula* is said to be representative of an almost gothic region. In the old Orientalist tradition it seems as if the Balkans occupies the centre of some sort of imaginative whirlpool, where every known superstition in the world is gathered (see Glenny, 1999).

Echoing the well-established literature on representations of the Balkans in literary studies and geography – such as *Inventing Ruritania* (Goldsworthy, 1998) and *Imagining the Balkans* (Todorova, 1997) – Mark Mazower (2002) details how this has come to be the case.

Mazower (2002) argues that representations of the Balkans loaded the Balkans with negative connotations: inharmonious conditions, small antagonistic states, and hostile nationalities, all

of which conspired to form the intractable Balkan or Eastern question (see also Carter, 1977; Glenny, 1999; Goldsworthy, 1998; Horvat and Štiks, 2015; Todorova, 1997). Writing of the Balkans as Europe's ghost, Slavoj Žižek (2000, p. 1-2) goes further. Down there, always somewhere a little further to the southeast, the Balkans are a photographic negative of a tolerant, multicultural, post-political, post-ideological Europe. A 'postmodern racism' exists, Žižek argues, where the Balkans are seen as the intolerant other, while the rest of Europe has supposedly come to terms with otherness in its much vaunted – indeed marketed – language of cosmopolitanism and multiculturalism (see Žižek, 2000, p. 1-2).

Yet instead of division and fragmentation – the common language of Balkanist literature – the region is in a new era of collective resistance after a recent rebirth of radical politics, as individuals forge a trajectory towards a democratic future (see Arsenijević, 2011, 2014; Gilbert and Mujanović, 2015; Gordy, 2015; Helms, 2013; Horvat and Štiks, 2015; Hromadžić, 2015; Jansen, 2015; Kurtović, 2015; Kraft, 2015; Majstorović, Vučkovic and Pepić, 2015; Mujkić, 2015; Murtagh, 2016; Touquet, 2015). There is, as such, a region of the European continent, that part of the continent that has for so long been defined by its radical politics, both nationalist and socialist, which is rebelling against the core. Embraced, subsumed and made dependently peripheral within the 'new' liberal global economy (see Harvey, 2005; Peck, 2010), there are now new reasons to engender a radical politics in this region for a post-Cold-War generation.

Beyond the capitalist anarchism associated with certain popular movements – such as Occupy – of recent times, the main charge of this emerging resistance across the Balkans seeks to deconstruct borders and openly questions the new Europe that emerged post-1989 (see Elden, 2013; Snel, 2014). This emerging resistance strives for a revolution (see Smith, 2010). Indeed the new radical politics in the old Yugoslavia – a country which made up a large part of the

Balkan Peninsula – aims to reanimate a form of socialism in the desert of post-socialism and states the need for a new radically democratic European project (see Horvat and Štiks, 2015). Decades after a forgotten socialist geographer, Fred Singleton (1985), spoke of a Balkan Federation of Socialist States as a response to Yugoslavia's fracturing, this formerly socialist region, which has exhausted the radical in many guises, once again provides a similarly radical manifesto for a radically democratic future. In order to write what revolution could now mean, after it was rendered ideologically absurd for so long (see Žižek, 1994), we must acknowledge the unique position of *the bastards of utopia* – those citizens left adrift after the collapse of Yugoslavia – living radical politics after socialism (see Smith, 2010, p. 51; Rasza, 2015).

Witnessed most explicitly in the former Yugoslav republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina, acts of remembering – acts of resistance (see Bourdieu, 1998) – re-invoking a socialist multi-ethnic Yugoslavia have become commonplace (see Arsenijević, 2014). Primarily dominated by a comparison with supposedly brighter and better days from the past – when the country was united and the society was based on the state rhetoric of social justice and the rights of workers – what this collective remembering reveals is a common sense of loss that people now feel in parts of the former Yugoslavia, a Yugo-nostalgia (see Luthar and Puznik, 2010). It was perhaps surprisingly due to its almost mythical status in history this century when a country called Yugoslavia was eventually rendered former. The Constitutional Charter of the State Union of Serbia and Montenegro was adopted in 2003, becoming the successor to the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. Yet a socialist Yugoslavia of brotherhood and unity, made up of six republics and two autonomous provinces – Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia, Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia, and Slovenia, and Kosovo and Vojvodina – was destroyed years before, in the days and months leading to ethnic conflict (see Campbell, 1998; Glenny, 1992; Little and Silber, 1996; Rieff, 1995; Thompson, 1992). There are though here on this

*rebel peninsula* (see Arsenijević, 2014; Horvat and Štiks, 2015; see also Harvey, 2012), material and institutional remnants and lived personal experiences and memories of that bygone Yugoslav socialist era (see Luthar and Puznik, 2010).

Here it is reported that formerly Yugoslav citizens feeling former in the present – a definition of trauma – are currently suffering through the devastating consequences of a twenty-year-old experiment in political, social, and economic engineering – after the collapse of a socialist Yugoslavia – known as ‘transition’ (see Arsenijević, 2011, 2014; Horvat and Štiks, 2015; see also Fontana, 2013). Yet, as this article goes on to describe, perhaps no other post-socialist region in the world can claim to be in such a period of dramatic change and resistance to the ‘transition’ period post-1989 than the post-socialist Balkan states. In 2014 to openly question the ‘transition’ to capitalism became commonplace in Yugoslavia’s new states. Resistance sprang from Zagreb to Ljubljana, from Skopje to Sarajevo, as popular movements across the region responded to two common enemies, rapacious neoliberal capitalism and the post-democratic governance of repeatedly corrupt and continually divisive elites (see Arsenijević, 2014; Horvat and Štiks, 2015; see also Fontana, 2013).

Citizen-activists in the post-socialist Yugoslav successor states, as such, undertook a multicultural and multi-ethnic resistance (see Bourdieu, 1998), treading a path towards a future of justice and democracy beyond national borders and territorial disputes. Entangled within their emancipatory struggle citizen-activists saw a present Yugoslavia, which was bit by bit disappearing. And they sought to retain what remains there were of that older and apparently discredited socialist state, and to reclaim a socialist space in a space of post-socialism. Most of all they sought to rescue the commons, the factories, the museums, the public spaces, indeed everything that the post-socialist ‘transition’ had in their eyes diminished (see Fontana, 2013). Occupying space, mobile citizen-activists took to the streets

and established self-governed assemblies, and resolved to embed new radically democratic or horizontal forms of governance (see Brookchin, 2014). The most radical of these experiments in non-institutional politics found across the Balkans since the collapse of Yugoslavia is *The Plenum Movement*, the focus of this article (see Arsenijević, 2014; Horvat and Štiks, 2015; Kraft, 2015).

Here the cultural raw materials used to open radical spaces, construct new civic discourses, and organise critical citizen-led dialogues are described, in order to give over a sense of from where and how *The Plenum Movement* emerged in the desert of post-socialism (see Horvat and Štiks, 2015). The movement began with a revolutionary event, which as Henri Lefebvre (2003, p. 19) notes, ‘generally take place in the street’, and then as is often the case the movement crystallised around specific spaces in cities – and in some small towns – across Bosnia-Herzegovina and indeed the wider former Yugoslavia. The event – significant protests after the closure of symbolic factories in the northern Bosnian city of Tuzla – sparked a mass citizen-led mobilisation, with the right to use public space as a site of dissent becoming the initial goal of the movement. Certain objectives were subsequently created, and the uprising coalesced around the formation of citizen-led assemblies or Plenum. The methods through which the movement attempted to force a revolution were at times violent – including the burning of the presidency building in the capital Sarajevo – though *The Plenum Movement* is largely a force through what it represents symbolically.

In this particular post-socialist, post-conflict region, the movement offers what could be seen as an ‘alternative transition’ or a ‘counter transition’ to the ‘transition’ to capitalism after Yugoslavia – or more specifically an alternative to a toxic nexus of neoliberal capitalism and ethno-nationalist politics, after the collapse of a socialist Yugoslavia (see Arsenijević, 2011, 2014; see also Bieber, 2006). And the multi-local movement deconstructs the overbearing

regional schema within which it finds itself without ever arguing for constitutional reform and a tearing up of the Dayton Agreement, signed in 1995 as a territorial peace deal (see Murtagh, 2016). Indeed today Dayton<sup>1</sup> is perhaps the only thing holding the country Bosnia-Herzegovina together, whilst simultaneously separating it into distinct entities (see Campbell, 1999; Crampton, 1996; see also Belloni, 2009; Bieber, 2006; Jeffrey, 2012; Toal and Dahlman, 2011; see also Gordy, 2015). As such *The Plenum Movement* instead, in an attempt to bypass the entrenched territorial politics of the region, produced radical openings from where neoliberalism is challenged, and created vital multi-ethnic spaces beyond yet within the fixed identitarian and ethno-nationalist regional entities present (see Bieber, 2006; Jeffrey, 2012; Toal and Dahlman, 2011). The movement primarily was about individuals freeing themselves from a toxic nexus of nationalism and neoliberalism, as the revolt enabled citizens to become citizens again and to form bonds and ties beyond their ethnicities, in order to then reimagine society together (see Arsenijević, 2014; see also Anderson, 1983; Brubaker, 2002; Campbell, 1998; Nancy, 2000).

*The Plenum Movement* is an ideology in its public denial of ethno-nationalism – accepted by the international community for over two decades (see Kennedy and Riga, 2013) – and an imagined future also in its openness to all citizens as individuals not flattened ethnic-identities (see Touquet, 2015; see also Anderson, 1983; Brubaker, 2002; Campbell, 1998; Nancy, 2000). The movement – transferrable, malleable, and importantly transparent – encouraged citizen-activists to shuttle between mass protests and street mobilisations, blockades, sit-ins and direct action taking and occupying public space, manifestos and demands delivered to parliament, remembrance and therapy in order to collectively mourn a traumatic past, and citizens’ assemblies where a reimagined socialism was solidified (see Arsenijević, 2014; Kraft, 2015). *The Plenum Movement* was and is, as such, in its horizontal form, in its overall goal to create an alternative to the post-socialist neoliberal ‘transition’ era,

and in its deconstructing of ethno-nationalist divides post-conflict (see Campbell, 1999; Crampton, 1996), a radical *new regional geographies* in the state within which it finds itself and also in grand scope a simultaneous opening-on-to and distancing-from the new Europe (see Jeffrey, 2008).

This article and the socio-political movement itself are committed to the region out of which they emerged, though the uprising in February 2014 – widely reported as the Bosnian Spring – and the describing of it here extends to and parallels with movements across Europe and the Middle East. After the global financial crisis and the failure of capitalism, there has been a marked upsurge in citizen-led activism across the globe, the Occupy movements and the Arab Spring, the protests in Gezi Park in Istanbul and in the Maidan in Kiev. Such events encompassed the Balkans, from the Aganaktismenoi in Greece to the formation of Plenum in Bosnia-Herzegovina. The scale of dissent in the Balkans was unprecedented in the post-socialist neoliberal ‘transition’ era. It was a revolutionary moment in a region where a world that isn’t capitalist could be imagined, or more specifically could be re-imagined (see Harvey and Haraway, 1995, p. 519). In the few years since Neil Smith (2010) penned *The Revolutionary Imperative*, a proliferation of revolt has occurred meaning that revolution is now seemingly less absurd. The story of this attempted heist on capitalism is told in what follows perhaps surprisingly not through the guise of a post-structuralist, Marxist, anarchist, or radical geography, it is instead as the geographer William Bunge (2011, p. 240) writes, written as ‘a call to action, not merely an exercise in abstraction’, a study of the regional social and material conditions out of which a revolution could emerge. A never-never land (Smith, 2010, p. 51).



## **What kind of geography for what kind of socio-political movement?**

Writing regions, undertaking a regional study, was once a standard form of geographic communication and critique (see e.g., De La Blache, 1926; Hartshorne, 1939; Sauer, 1925). This was until the quantitative revolution in the middle of the previous century. And more definitively the critical turn in human geography towards the end of the twentieth century. From then on, writing regions as they were experienced phenomenologically, or arguing culturally, historically or politically with regions, was deemed to be old-fashioned (see Agnew, 2013). To describe a region in itself was thought to be a conservative or basic undertaking, which could lead to a simplification or neglect of witnessed peoples and places. And indeed to invoke a regional geography was thought to privilege one region over another, to focus on particularities rather than abstractions, or on the other hand, regional geography seemed simply too rudimentary, unable to describe the modern interconnected and highly networked brave 'new' liberal world. The longstanding subgenre of regional geography was as such seen to be outdated. It apparently missed the everyday and personal specificities of identities and places, and arguably glossed over large swathes of political, cultural and historical landscapes, without ever being able to get at, describe, or study the new economic and political spaces of the now globalised world, or indeed to critically examine the existence of these new spaces.

The works of Carl Sauer (1925), Paul Vidal De La Blache (1926), and Richard Hartshorne (1939), for example, came to be critiqued for their singular modes of description. And in the decades that followed, further healthy if unresolved concerns about describing a particular region, or undertaking a regional study, emerged. Broadly these concerns were attentive to a discipline littered with skeletons from a colonial era of murderous neglects and encounter (Robinson, 2003, p. 277). While postcolonial and feminist perspectives on the situatedness of

knowledge – and the concomitant relational nature of researcher positionality – have done much to avoid replicating the colonial-era power relations of the old-fashioned regional study, the skeletons of the past bear consideration for any new regional geography to exist (see England, 1994; Rose, 1997).

Since the 1980s there have been attempts to reintroduce a new form of regional geography (see e.g., Thrift, 1983; Gilbert, 1988). This revised sub-genre was extended in the following decades, as geographers performed relational regions of various scales and deconstructed historical borders. The new regional geography resituated the regional, considering regions, the state, the city, and the local, in relation, using this newly multi-dimensional, interconnected territorial approach to examine economics, governance and politics (see e.g., Agnew, 2013; Elden, 2005, 2009, 2010; Jonas, 2012; Jones, 2009; Jones and MacLeod, 2001, 2004, 2007; Murphy, 2013; Paasi, 1991, 1999, 2002, 2003; Painter, 2010). Building on and referring to this work I seek to borrow from its polymorphic understanding of socio-spatial relations and the region (see Jessop, Brenner, and Jones, 2008; see also Latour, 2007; Jones, 2009), yet return here to a prior regional geography, of a revolution, of injustice, of political struggle.

As in *Fitzgerald: Geography of a Revolution*, a definitive regional study undertaken by the geographer William Bunge (1971), I will argue in this article with regions and write a regional geography which considers the view from below, or the view of social groups marginalised in orthodox political history (see Agnew, 2013). It is precisely through studying regions and writing at a regional scale – which unlike the national scale does not represent a privileging of institutions associated with the interests and outlooks of political elites (see Agnew, 2013) – that an emancipatory struggle was once placed and explored geographically in one square mile of Detroit, in a community known as Fitzgerald (see Bunge, 1971).

Vitally, this article does not seek to simply return to a static, territorial, or mapped regional geography (see e.g., Vidal de La Blache, 1926; Hartshorne, 1939; Sauer, 1925), rather it uses the grounded political intentions of the now old-fashioned regional study to deconstruct the fixed borders of regions from below – replicating the practice of *The Plenum Movement* – speaking back to the relational multi-scalar interconnected new regional geography in radical ambition (see e.g., Agnew, 2013; Elden, 2005, 2009, 2010, 2013; Jonas, 2012; Jones, 2009; Jones and MacLeod, 2001, 2004, 2007; Murphy, 2013; Paasi, 1991, 1999, 2002, 2003; Painter, 2010). The re-writing of regions from below is a vitally important counter-narrative in regions defined and fixed by their traumatic pasts; or indeed regions that seem as if they can only ever be analysed via the gaze of an elevated, distanced, geopolitical eye (see Toal, 1996). As is conveyed in what follows, through a grounded geographical practice it is possible to offer a critically-oriented and intentionally disruptive perspective, documenting the rhythms and affective atmospheres of a social and political movement (see Lefebvre, 2004). And through this practice an attempt is made to re-define and under-cut the stubborn regional schema associated with the implicit identitarian and ethnic territorial geopolitics of this particular region of the world. A region of the world where a simplistic tracing between state and territory, and politics and governance, undergirds the processes involved in the making and unmaking of political subjects and the attachments and detachments of space, politics, and citizens (see Agnew, 2016; Brenner and Elden, 2009; Elden, 2013; Latour, 2007).

Specifically in this article, it is suggested that ‘going back to a regional geography’ can be a way of tracing the growth of a nascent social and political movement built by citizens previously written out of an orthodox political history (see Thrift, 1994, p. 200; see also Agnew, 2013). Going back to a grounded, specific, individual, human, regional geography here is particularly worthwhile as it enables a regional writing of the embodied political

subjectivities of individuals involved in direct action, and in so doing, importantly, it retains the voice of the individual in a region where it is common to collectivise the individual voice. Meaning a reconstituted regional geography here represents and is of a movement that seeks to deconstruct a fixed identitarian politics, and remove from below and within ethno-nationalist regional borders (see Thrift, 1983; see also Campbell, 1999; Crampton, 1996; see also Murtagh, 2016). In the process ‘going back to a regional geography’ is here argued, as such, to be a way of charting an emancipatory struggle, where citizens feel as if they are enabled to become individual political beings again, citizens again (see Thrift, 1994, p. 200; see also Anderson, 1983; Brubaker, 2002; Nancy, 2000).

To write of a revolution as it emerges amidst the streets and squares of cities – where in which freshly political citizens are reclaiming and repairing public space – the article embraces a regional geography approach yet updates it and animates it, borrowing from recent geographic work which documents the rhythms of the subject in landscape as it lingers, waits, detours, and ruminates, in order to landscape regions (see Wylie, 2007; Matless, 2014). As such, the experiential narrative produced is reminiscent of a form of non-representational (see Thrift, 2008), embodied, landscape geography, which has emerged in the past decade and a half dealing with performance, affect, and aesthetics in-place, yet it relocates this work to a region of the world where in which it perhaps seems to some to be out-of-place (see e.g., Daniels, 2006, 2012; DeSilvey, 2007, 2010, 2012; Dubow, 2001, 2011; Edensor, 2005, 2008; Lorimer, 2003, 2006, 2012; Lorimer and Wylie, 2010; Matless, 2008, 2010, 2014; Pearson, 2006; Riding, 2015a, 2016; Rose, 2012; Wylie, 2002, 2005). This embodied research obliquely refers back to an older form of regional geography, and the on-the-ground regional study, and could be used to refocus a writing of regions, reasserting a view from below (see Riding, 2015b; see also Agnew, 2013).

Presently this landscaping of regions is perhaps jarringly transported to the region with which this article is concerned, as it is common to construct a certain geopolitical narrative in order to write of the former Yugoslavia. Work draws on either ethnographic data collected to explore state-building and post-conflict reconstruction (see e.g., Jeffrey, 2006), or, through a form of discourse analysis work interrogates the loss or dispossession of identity, deconstructing the internal skirmishes of ethnic and identitarian debate (see e.g., Campbell, 1998). Reanimating a regional geography – borrowing from a non-representational, embodied, landscape geography, and channelling the critical methodology and grounded field-work of William Bunge (1971) – this article drifts somewhat against the more established geopolitical discourses associated with research on the collapse of Yugoslavia (see e.g., Campbell, 1998; Glenny, 1992; Little and Silber, 1996; Rieff, 1995; Thompson, 1992), the post-socialist ‘transition’ era after Yugoslavia (see e.g., Horvat and Štiks, 2015; Jeffrey, 2012; Toal and Dahlman, 2011), and the Balkans more widely (see e.g., Glenny, 1999; Goldsworthy, 1998; Mazower, 2002; Todorova, 1997; Žižek, 2000). And in so doing this first-hand account of a political uprising witnessed over three months, follows instead the trail of another, more grounded, descriptive, everyday version of the geopolitical (see de Certeau, 1984; see also Bunge, 1971; Toal, 1996).

Clearly the form of regional geography outlined so far seems to be far removed from the radical geography often associated with social and political movements. Defining what sort of a geography must be used to chart and describe a nascent socio-political movement, or indeed what it must look like, what it must represent, what it must build upon, is a constant theme in human geography. In effect David Harvey (2015) and Simon Springer (2014) recently delineated not only what a radical geography must be – anarchist or Marxist, or indeed both, as when closely inspected the distinction drawn somewhat falls apart – but also what kind of geography can be viewed as radical, and used to write of a revolution, of

political struggle. Referring to their polemic pieces here is to ask whether an alternative geographical writing of nascent socio-political movements is possible, which considers regions and their everyday processes and affects and the embodied practice of citizen-activists in regional landscapes. Through this alternative regional landscape geography an emancipatory struggle is physically placed in the region from which it emerged and a radical fracturing of space is represented on-the-ground. Claiming, occupying, and repairing public space, embedding new spatial links between citizens, and inspiring newly political beings, *The Plenum Movement* is a regional performing of space (see Arsenijević, 2014), a realising of radical regions, as such it has a regional geography.

### **Notes on a Revolution**

A note on methods of analysis follows here. In the appendix of an article entitled, *On the determination of social action in space and time*, Nigel Thrift (1983) offers a methodology for a reconstituted regional geography. The methodology provided was never deployed.<sup>2</sup> Within the appendix Thrift (1983) notes a rich vein to be tapped and reworked, that is the use of autobiographies and diaries, in addition to more typical compositional approaches. Autobiographies and diaries can be used effectively to approach contextual regional issues, and they are ‘a useful adjunct to give depth to conventional compositional accounts’, while ‘even one diary can provide a multitude of information’, and can be used ‘as a means of posing a series of contextual questions’ (Thrift, 1983, p. 57). Here a life history approach is taken once more, as field diaries are mined, and oral history is used to investigate, as Thrift (1983, p. 57) calls it, ‘the exact content of sociability’, recording how ‘personality grows up in a particular region’.

In order to trace a trajectory of this region from a socialist Yugoslavia to the present-day, and to offer a geographical examination of the Yugoslav socialist experience, field notes and fragments of autobiography written in a field diary by a geographer committed to socialist volunteerism Fred Singleton are analysed. And they are used to provide context to a present-day uprising. Singleton's scholarship was of this region and is a regional geography, and the field diary that he kept is re-used here as a way of extending backwards a geographer's on-the-ground practice. This archival data was gathered in the now defunct Yugoslav Studies Research Unit at the University of Bradford, which Singleton helped to create. In boxes, largely un-useable, basically sorted, due to the decline of regional studies and the collapse of Yugoslavia there has been little interest in what is contained within the 16.5 linear metres of boxes. In a book which speaks to a life history approach that Thrift (1982) sets out for a reconstituted regional geography, Singleton (1985) in *A Short History of the Yugoslav Peoples* attempts to trace the history of the South Slavs who came together at the end of World War I to form a Yugoslav state, and who now live together in the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. Here a similar yet updated attempt is made though the departure point and continuing arrival of this geographical endeavour is the socialist former Yugoslavia.

In addition to collecting, re-presenting and analysing archival data, a field diary was taken along whilst travelling through the region and a placed oral history or a local history was written-up. The field notes taken are used in what follows as a way of conveying the fast-moving, fluid, affective, sometimes violent situation occurring, creating a half-finished narrative akin to the socio-political movement itself (see Taussig, 2011). Field notes air a perspective – they are placed words grounded within the popular movement – which speak back to citizens involved in direct action rather than for them. This disruptive literary approach, as such, mimics the disruptive nature of the uprising. The raw and immediate

qualities of field notes convey an affective moment in the lived landscape, other to the emotionless analytical expository writing common in much geographical research.

Conveying directly political impressions flattens the gaze of the geographer (see Perec, 2008, 2010; Toal, 1996), transferring the affective moment of being there to the reader, appropriate for documenting a nascent radical politics because they are situated, contextual, and add a real of-the-moment weight to the fact that where an uprising occurs matters.

Re-embracing a situated, embodied, expressive form of geographical inquiry, allows for a writing of space, citizens, politics, and as such it reveals the patterns that led to an uprising occurring *here* (see Merrifield, 1995). The words themselves on-the-page – a representational act undertaken in the moment of being there – act in and of the world as a direct record of time spent somewhere (see Dewsbury et al., 2002). These relatively under-processed and under-used impressions ask wider political questions of how nascent socio-political movements are written of and transferred beyond an immediate uprising. The aim though here is not to exclude other voices, rather the aim is to collaborate with and support *The Plenum Movement*, and as such scattered amongst the field notes and archival research, are analytical observations and the words of citizen-activists. The notes are as such accompanied by provisions to interpret dimensions of this socio-political phenomenon, the legacies of the past that brought it into being, the regional landscapes in which this struggle manifests itself, and the phenomenon of political participation in this region of the world.

The article is presented from this point on as a reimagining of the classic on-the-ground regional study, *Fitzgerald: Geography of a Revolution*, collected by the geographer William Bunge (1971). *The Certain Past*, *The Crucial Present*, and *The Uncertain Future*. This partial and controversial book, which pays attention to concrete particularities rather than universal abstractions, is perhaps the closest that a geographer has come to deploying Thrift's (1983)



reconstituted regional geography, and is referred back to here as a vivid exemplar and a way into the terrain of revolution. A micro-historical effort, it is no old-time ideographic regionalist study, it has a feel of the region, and necessarily gets at the heart of the region, the other aim of this article (see Thrift, 1994).

### *The Certain Past*

The fascination of Yugoslavia for Fred Singleton was in its great rarity. He first arrived in Sarajevo, the capital of the then Yugoslav Socialist Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1953. At this time, the city had changed little from 1914 when this former Turkish provincial capital suddenly became the centre of the world's attention. It was June 28 1914, when Gavrilo Princip, a young Bosnian Serb, stood aside the Latin Bridge and assassinated the heir to the Austro-Hungarian throne, Franz Ferdinand and his wife Sofia. By 1953 nothing much had been altered in the city since the shooting, which had led to World War I. The old city was still a medieval rabbit warren of narrow streets and alleys. Visitors could watch craftsmen at work by the light of oil lamps in tiny, single roomed workshops often in the street, and as Singleton noted in a field diary, they could purchase copper coffee pots, jewellery, shoes and clothing made in full view of customers.

As a geographer Singleton was interested in the contrasts between the different environments in Yugoslavia. The differences were according to Singleton not only physical, between, for example, the green hills of Zagorje and the waterless Dinaric Karst, or the endless plains of the Vojvodina and the wild mountains of Sal Plavina. The differences were also in the ways of life and culture of the people. You had in Yugoslavia a microcosm of the world at large. For Singleton, a geographer is concerned with the distribution of natural and human phenomena on the surface of the earth, and they try to describe these distributions and to

understand their inter-relations. One particular aspect of geography and indeed Yugoslavia which interested Singleton was the problem of political frontiers.

Singleton had first seen Yugoslavia in 1945 when he was a sailor in the Royal Navy, and his ship visited Pula for two days. However he does not consider this to have been a visit to Yugoslavia, for Pula in 1945 was under military occupation and it was not possible to make contact with the people. His first real visit to Yugoslavia was in 1948. During the ensuing years he made several visits to the Julian Alps where he climbed with friends. Later he went climbing in Bosnia and he exchanged regular visits with the members of the Treskavica club who first met him in 1953. And in 1958 he brought a group of adult students from the Workers Educational Association to study at a summer school in Ljubljana. In later years a series of exchanges developed between Yugoslavia and the Workers Educational Association. These initial visits to Yugoslavia convinced Singleton that further geographical research needed to be undertaken in the country.

After sending a letter of application on June 3 1966, a memo concerning the use of a Hayter Committee Grant for Yugoslav Studies was sent in reply to Singleton. The sum of £800 was granted for the remainder of the academic year, with a continuing grant for 1966-67, to enable the geographer to undertake a pilot survey with the view to developing a unit for research in Yugoslavia. On April 15 1966 Singleton travelled to Ljubljana to discuss frontier studies, economic geography, and economic organisation with members of the university and associated institutes. From Ljubljana he made his way to Zagreb on April 20. He visited the Rade Koncar factory in Zagreb and the Department of Geography at the University of Zagreb. By April 24 he was in Novi Sad at the Department of Agriculture discussing studies in agricultural geography, and on April 27 in Belgrade he met academics at the Institute of International Affairs, the Federal Commission on Cultural Exchanges, and the Federal

Commission on Tourism. His final appointment was in Skopje at the Department of Economics and the Department of Agriculture, concerning projects in economic and agricultural geography. During this period he visited Kosmet before returning to Belgrade and possibly Novi Sad. On May 20 he went to Sinjsko Polje to consider regional studies of a developing area on the Karst. He returned to the University of Bradford, where it was proposed the unit for research in Yugoslavia would be based on May 25 1966.

After further research trips to the former country in late 1966, Singleton was asked in 1967 by the BBC to take on a whole series of five programmes about Yugoslavia. He was to go out with a producer in the first week of July for a preliminary survey, and with a camera team in September to do the filming. On July 2 1967 he writes to Phyllis Auty, who was also writing about Yugoslavia and was in regular correspondence with Singleton to say that he will be leaving at nine in the morning on the BBC trip (see Auty, 1965). By November 1967 the programmes were being aired on BBC Two. The short descriptions of each film concisely describe the changing face of Yugoslavia.<sup>3</sup>

In the period between the initial letter sent to Phyllis Auty on July 2 1967 and the airing of the programmes, Singleton had made pages of notes about his series called *Yugoslavia*. He was struggling with the title for the first programme and scribbled a number of ideas down, before settling upon a different title altogether,

*Six in one.*

*Six of one...?*

*Six into one does go?*

*Six makes one?*

This numerical language of divisions, additions, subtractions, tells its own story. While Singleton's extensive notes on each film included in the series describe the history and

development of Yugoslavia after World War II. Brief jottings in a little notebook, they also provide an insight into his deep and abiding affection for Yugoslavia, for the people, and their achievements. The five films Singleton made remain an important visual archiving of a former country. Yet his jotted notes seem to point more so towards an uncertain future.<sup>4</sup>

After massive demonstrations in the Socialist Autonomous Province of Kosovo, an area of Yugoslavia inhabited mainly by ethnic Albanians, Singleton writes pages of words about ‘the national question’ in Yugoslavia. Through the prism of events in Kosovo in 1981 – when young ethnic Albanians demanded full republican status within the Yugoslav federation – he attempts to review the national question in Yugoslavia. Singleton writes that this is no longer a Yugoslav problem, as it requires a proper Balkan context for its solution, something close to the old idea of a Balkan Federation of Socialist States. However he continues that it would be naive to believe that the national question, even if Albanian demands were met, would be solved once and for all in Yugoslavia.

When Singleton visited Sarajevo again in September 1983 he found the atmosphere greatly changed. A major programme of modernisation had cleaned up the old town and removed the picturesque but ‘unsanitary’ backstreets, and the radical author noticed the expulsion of craft labour spaces. The cobbled square of the market place – the Baščaršija – was still there, with its Turkish style fountain in the centre, and hand made goods were still sold – but in 1983 they were sold in brightly lit shops surrounding a shopping precinct, where tourists could use their American Express cards to buy goods made in co-operative workshops and small factories. The modern town had spread in a narrow ribbon of concrete along the valley bottom, stretching several kilometres downstream from the old city. A large industrialised area, with factories making heavy electrical equipment and chemicals, was by 1983

surrounded by multi-storey apartments housing workers. It was a sign of the economic transformation which Yugoslavia had undergone since World War II.

Singleton saw on his visit to Sarajevo in 1983, the final preparations being made both in the city and on the ski-slopes at Jahorina 20 kilometres away, for the 1984 *Winter Olympic Games*. Visitors who spent time away from the games could find, according to Singleton's scribbled notes from the time, many interesting reminders of Bosnia's long and often violent history. Seventy years after the assassination of Franz and Sofia Ferdinand the eyes of the world were again on Sarajevo, but for happier reasons. During this period Yugoslavia faced many economic problems, yet at this time there were few tensions in the relations between the different cultural groups which made up the complex multi-national society. Singleton noted that Sarajevo had a good record in community relations, where Muslims, Orthodox Christians, and Roman Catholics had learned to live side by side in harmony. Indeed ethnic tensions were only rarely apparent and the Yugoslav modus vivendi was by and large as tolerant as any multicultural state. Singleton was for this reason sure that visitors to the games would have a safe and memorable experience.

At this point in time, the archival fragments end. Singleton witnessed only the beginning of the certain past. Documenting the certain past now involves remembering the following. A deep economic crisis hit Yugoslavia in the late 1980s. Some republics felt they were subsidising others during the downturn, which affected relations between the republics of Yugoslavia. In 1990, the winners of multiparty elections held in Yugoslav republics, the first since a socialist Yugoslavia was founded after World War II, were mainly nationalist parties. The Communist League of Yugoslavia disintegrated. It had seemed less relevant after the reforms of the 1970s<sup>5</sup> and was further side-lined after a quick succession of major events including the death of Tito, the end of communism, and the fall of the Berlin Wall. A

diminished Yugoslavia continued. The Federal Republic of Yugoslavia was formed in 1992, consisting of two members, Serbia and Montenegro. The same year the war in multi-ethnic Bosnia-Herzegovina began, and almost a decade of bloody ethnic conflict ensued, ending with the war in Kosovo, where the national question first exploded in 1981, as Singleton noted. In the brutal years that followed millions of people were displaced as a result of what was called ethnic cleansing, a nationalist passion which made possible heinous war criminality, the 1995 genocide in Srebrenica, mass murder not seen on the continent since World War II, and the deaths of over 100,000 people (see Glenny, 1992; Little and Silber, 1996; Rieff, 1995; Thompson, 1992).

### *The Crucial Present*

The war in Bosnia was eventually brought to an end in December 1995, when the Dayton Agreement was signed. A 'peace' time has lasted to this day, although the framework agreement, which divided the country in roughly half along ethnic lines, has prevented Bosnia-Herzegovina from developing entirely beyond wartime divisions (see Campbell, 1999; Crampton, 1996; see also Belloni, 2009; Bieber, 2006; Jeffrey, 2012; Toal and Dahlman, 2011). Preceded by an agreement between Bosniaks and Bosnian Croats signed in Washington in 1994, the country was separated into two political entities: the predominantly Bosnian Serb, Republika Srpska, and the mainly Bosniak and Bosnian Croat, Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, sometimes informally referred to as the Bosniak-Croat Federation. Locally, the country is further separated out, as the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina has 10 autonomous cantons with their own governments. Each canton is known as majority Bosnian Croat, majority Bosniak, or 'mixed' (see Nancy, 2000). Within the cantons are municipalities and homogenous enclaves, which further define the individuals living there

(see Campbell, 1999; Crampton, 1996; see also Anderson, 1983; Brubaker, 2002; Campbell, 1998; Nancy, 2000). And while Republika Srpska is lead more centrally from the de facto capital Banja Luka, there are still observable geographical divisions between the northern portion and southern portion of ‘the state within a state’, which is often said to be under threat of being wiped off the map, acting in-place as a nationalising of civic discourse nullifying post-ethnic activism (see Touquet, 2012, 2015).<sup>6</sup>

This cartographic representational idiosyncrasy or more precisely ‘apartheid cartography’ enforces a nationalist overhaul of space upon individuals in Bosnia-Herzegovina and the wider Yugoslavia (see Campbell, 1999; Crampton, 1996). Cartography has arguably enabled a post-socialist era of never-ending ‘transition’, diminished democracy, and the continuation of nationalist governance that it was hoped would fade away (see Gordy, 2015). Resembling Berlin after World War II, Sarajevo itself is a meeting point of the different lines that were drawn across Bosnia-Herzegovina and is partly in Republika Srpska and partly in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina. The de jure capital of Republika Srpska is Sarajevo, the de facto capital of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina is Sarajevo, and Sarajevo is the capital of the country Bosnia-Herzegovina, where a weak central government also resides. It is no surprise therefore that protests erupted here, bypassing and dissolving the divisions on the map. Sarajevo is a place that was for Jean-Luc Nancy (2000), a *mêlée*, due to its long history of multiculturalism in a real and not prescribed sense (see also Rieff, 1995). It was a historical regional focus as bridge between East and West and the old power blocs. Sarajevo is, as such, a non-aligned space, a place where a profoundly anti-capitalist and radically democratic vision of society could form (see Arsenijević, 2014; Horvat and Štiks, 2015; see also Harvey, 2012).

Sarajevo, February 7, 2014: On a television screen are the ice-skaters Torvill and Dean, describing thirty years later their gold medal performance at the Sarajevo 1984 *Winter Olympic Games*. The channel is changed. Flaming buildings and lines of riot police are visible, protesters, Molotov cocktails, rocks, rubber bullets and tear gas. Some of the buildings on the screen look familiar. “Where are these riots happening?” “Sarajevo, hell has come to Sarajevo.”

*The uprising began on February 4 2014 in the northern Bosnian city of Tuzla, peacefully to begin with. Many protesters were former workers at recently closed factories, including DITA, Polihem, Guming, and Konjuh. Initially protesters gathered outside the Tuzla cantonal government building, holding the state responsible for the collapse of factories in the region since 2000, when they were covertly privatised. Over the ensuing days the protests spread to other Bosnian towns and cities, including Bihać, Mostar, Zenica, and Sarajevo. The brutality of the police response to the initial protests in Tuzla lead to thousands marching on the streets, heading towards the presidency building in the capital Sarajevo. And the protest in Tuzla grew to 10,000 people. Protests in turn spread to the wider region as a reawakening of radical politics on the Balkan Peninsula occurred, almost seventy years after a socialist Yugoslavia was first formed. Protests were held on February 12 in Belgrade, Serbia and on February 13 in Zagreb, Croatia, in support of the political struggle in Bosnia-Herzegovina. And there were also reports of anti-government protests in Montenegro and Kosovo.*

Sarajevo, February 7, 2014: We sit watching lights flickering, minarets, domes, and spires, rivers and mountains, a cemetery directly beneath, the Latin Bridge dead ahead and sniper alley just about visible in the distance, all the while black smoke billows overhead and police sirens wail above the hum of the city. Sad that once again the world was looking at Sarajevo, Mugbina, a politics student at the University of Sarajevo, tells me about her life in the city



whilst we head downstream towards the riots. A huge crowd is blocking traffic as Mugbina and I travel by the flaming presidency building on the old tram. Flames, upturned cars, police officers resembling soldiers and injured civilians slide by through the window, bringing back traumatic memories for Mugbina of the war twenty years ago. But Mugbina supports the protests and the outpouring of anger, and she describes as we reach the grey tower blocks of Novi Sarajevo how politicians continue to divide citizens, how everything is corrupt, education, politics, everything; unemployment is commonplace, young people feel they have to leave to survive, and the only way to get anywhere in life is to join a political party.

Sarajevo, February 8, 2014: Photographing damage and speaking to protesters who were cleaning the streets, the scene is eerily normal and quiet. *Policija Stop* is still stripped around the destroyed white building, burnt stuff suffuses the air, hatted police officers mill about ominously, upturned cars sit twisted into ashen remains, black curls lick above nonexistent windows, bits of furniture barricade a broken door, glass from a bus stop remains strewn across the pavement, while journalists stand and point lenses. I turn right towards the stadium in the trail of a large crowd marching and flying banners. An old man is sat down holding a sign. He asks me to take a photograph. A flyover covers a little market and flats are crammed in on a hill to the left serviced by a train that goes up and down. The array of things on sale implies this is a desperate attempt to sell anything. Beyond that the tower of the Olympic Stadium comes into view. A puppy scrabbles about yelping in the undergrowth, piercingly sad, as the crowd continues by.

Tuzla, February 12, 2014: High-rise apartment blocks litter the landscape, former utopia turned dystopia, walking along the drain in Tuzla back to town. Neither Arthur J. Evans (1876) in the 1870s, nor Rebecca West (1942) in the 1930s, ventured to this part of Bosnia-Herzegovina on their travels. It is the old industrial backbone of the former Yugoslavia.

Communities here thrived due to the natural resources the land provided. Agriculture uses up half of the available territory. Tuzla, the main city in the centre of the northeast was the beating heart of Yugoslav industry. Indeed Tuzla is named after the extensive salt reserves found underneath the city. The name Tuzla, an important Ottoman garrison, derives from the Turkish for salt mine. Large coal deposits, thermo-electric plants, socialist smokestacks, clouds rolling across concrete cooling towers, endless pipelines, vast grey boxes, produce energy for the rest of the country. The coal mines dotted around the city power the Tuzla Power Station, the largest in Bosnia-Herzegovina. The region is an industrial machine. In the past decade five former state-owned companies, including an industrial detergent factory called DITA, were sold to private owners who sold assets, stopped paying workers, and then filed for bankruptcy.

DITA is an industrial detergent factory on the edge of Tuzla. Lorries stand empty in the forecourt, not a soul is about, trees whisper in the wind above the silent machinery, no gravel being crunched by feet, or engines whirring into action, a taxi rank has zero cabs, cavernous peaked hangers contain stopped conveyors, giant domes lay dormant, offices echo without the sound of humans, lampposts provide light for stray dogs only, pointless roads and pavements lead to nowhere of use, padlocked barred gates prevent entry to people, pylons crackle, powering not, overgrown graffitied signs adorn, nature reclaiming, sordid and delicate, as idly foaming streams trundle by. The plant has been left to the elements, copper has been stripped, assembly has ceased, pipes, valves, metres, scales, destroyed, costing huge amounts to fix, just jumbles of stuff now, matter without purpose, corrugated metal art forms. “Nothing is happening here, absolutely nothing, the workers are at home,” Emina a former worker at DITA explains. Ministers said production would begin again in 2013. It did not begin.

*The closure of the factories left hundreds without work, adding to the intolerably high unemployment rate. One, two, three, four, five symbolic factories shutting sparked protests in the city of Tuzla, which spread quickly across Bosnia-Herzegovina. Industry is the soul of this region of the country, its heritage, its identity beyond ethnicity, the working class, the former working class. Everything is former. Tuzla has been inhabited continuously for more than six thousand years. People marked the land, ingrained themselves in landscape, mined in mountains, re-routed rivers, milled monuments, protested on pavements, occupied for occupation.*

Tuzla, February 13, 2014: I speak to workers and learn that factories were the powerhouses and the hearts of production in Tuzla and the former Yugoslavia. In a clandestine way, without the workers knowing, these factories were privatised by the government(s) and sold to new owners. The new owners almost immediately reduced the quality of the product sold, failed to maintain and properly inspect the machinery, and deciding the factory was not profitable enough began to pay the workers less, some not at all, and started to lay off experienced staff. The workers felt they had to do something about it, as they had a stake in the factory, and the city of Tuzla had a stake in the factory. Despite some workers being owed months of wages they continued to show up for work and attempted to keep the factory properly functioning. There were workers who had been working at DITA since the 1970s and saw it as a symbol of a prospering socialist Yugoslavia. So they turned up for work each day, for weeks and months without pay. Until one morning the owners padlocked the gates and refused the workers entry. Backed into a corner and fearing the owners would strip the factory of assets, such as the copper wire, the workers at DITA blockaded the entrance to the factory. Occupying a space around the factory, the workers protested for production to continue, in the hope that they could themselves reopen it. Each day they worried that the machines were slowly decaying, yet they remained hopeful. The protests took various forms,

even hunger strikes. The public stood behind the DITA workers, and the small protest outside the factory spread to Tuzla, and other towns and cities across Bosnia-Herzegovina. Yet the protests needed a voice, a forum through which protesters could publically address citizens, they needed to become politically engaged again, to become political beings.

*Out of this desert of post-socialism, where all remnants of a socialist society were being systematically eroded, The Plenum Movement emerged. It is a radical experiment in horizontal democracy. Organised autonomously, citizens' assemblies, or Plenum, articulate socialism beyond the state and Plenum are not aligned to a single political party. Plenum are – in simply existing as public gatherings open to anyone in spaces outside of the traditional governmental and elite spirals and circles – post-nationalist in a region that remains heavily influenced by nationalist politics during the post-conflict, post-socialist, 'transition' era. Yet their existence required an event – a symbolic moment – to politicise anger, hunger, and frustration, and that is what the closing of DITA, and the other factories, provided. The political potential of space within a post-socialist country was taken up by those first protesters remembering an old Yugoslavia in the present. In so doing bodies were made political and people were given the opportunity to discuss politics beyond nationalism, beyond the municipality, the canton, the entity; beyond yet within the lines that the Dayton Agreement drew across the country.*

Tuzla, February 18, 2014: A DITA worker stands and defines what her struggle is at the Plenum of Citizens of Tuzla. She connects the collapse of Yugoslavia, the collapse of socialism, to her struggle, the production of a new type of labourer, a wage labourer mercenary. She describes how many young men from Tuzla went to Iraq and Afghanistan to fight in a war. That was the only thing that they could hope for. There is no production that you can do here anymore. “Bosnia is a testing ground for a new type of labour, a nexus

between capitalism and mass atrocity,” Damir, a member of the Plenum of Citizens of Tuzla tells me. He continues to describe how the raw materials of *The Plenum Movement* began with the workers at DITA organising and occupying, and how the movement itself began here in Tuzla: “That is the marvelous politics in all of this, the workers invented the protest as a new way of protesting for production, rather than going on strike to cease production, they actually protested to keep the commons, that is the most important thing. It took various ways of trying to get the government to listen. It all congealed when everybody stood behind the workers of those five factories.”

Sarajevo, March 4, 2014: A protest outside the torched presidency building has blockaded the intersection between Alipašina and Maršala Tita almost continuously for 25 days. Today a car drove through the crowd and hit a protestor. I witness an ambulance at the scene. The group are peacefully protesting, holding banners, and speaking passionately about Bosnia-Herzegovina over a loud speaker. Often people will speak who have been beaten by police officers. According to Emir, an artist and activist living in Sarajevo, “The blockade is about taking a space for the Plenum.” Plenum, emerging across the country, are citizens’ assemblies which bypass a fixed ethno-nationalist and identitarian politics, creating a space for those citizens who would like to talk about politics beyond nationalism, and to air their frustrations and traumas, “In the hope of decontaminating politics of corruption and nationalism,” said Emir. “The politicians have stayed in power for this long by differentiating between people and implicated in this are the international community who only speak to the elected officials,” Emir concluded, as he rushed off to do an interview with a journalist. With the elections looming the worry amongst the protesters at the blockade was that the government(s) would once again campaign on an identitarian basis, attempting to turn citizens against each other.<sup>7</sup>

Sarajevo, March 6, 2014: The main locus of the protest movement has now switched to the direct democratic Plenum emerging across Bosnia-Herzegovina. The following cities now have their own Plenum: Sarajevo, Tuzla, Zenica, Mostar, Travnik, Brčko, Goražde, Konjic, Cazin, Donji Vakuf, Fojnica, Orašje and Bugojno. The demands of the Plenum of Citizens of Sarajevo were distributed widely on social media and were passed around in hard copy.<sup>8</sup> They demonstrate the switching of the movement from street violence to formalised political action. Importantly the demands do not enter *The Plenum Movement* into the usual ethno-nationalist politics of the region, via arguing for constitutional reform and a rewriting of the Dayton Agreement (see Campbell, 1999; Crampton, 1996; see also Belloni, 2009; Bieber, 2006; Jeffrey, 2012; Toal and Dahlman, 2011). Instead each local Plenum created located and concrete social and economic demands for each canton, which sought to open further spaces for dialogue across space, as other cantons reported back with similar socio-economic problems.

*The Dayton Agreement set in place a government that is impossible, unwieldy, but actually there is an internal paradox within Dayton. Dayton enabled Plenum. Plenum is the logical contradiction of Dayton taken to the final step. That would be a very productive way of looking at it. Dayton is not the problem, the entities are not a problem, the cantons are not a problem, that is a technical question, it is a political question that it functions, but the question is how do you push the system to its logical conclusion, how you identify the internal paradox within it, so that you can push it. If you want, psychoanalytically speaking, how do you find the symptom, and focus on the symptom.*

In the crucial present redrawing the map was not the aim (see Campbell, 1999; Crampton, 1996; see also Jeffrey, 2012; Toal and Dahlman, 2011). Creating spaces amenable to an alternative politics, within the fixed cantons, municipalities and entities of the Dayton

Agreement was the overall goal of *The Plenum Movement*. The political engagement this provided citizens with is not to be downplayed (see Arsenijević, 2011, 2014; Gilbert and Mujanović, 2015; Gordy, 2015; Helms, 2013; Horvat and Štiks, 2015; Hromadžić, 2015; Jansen, 2015; Kurtović, 2015; Kraft, 2015; Majstorović, Vučković and Pepić, 2015; Mujkić, 2015; Murtagh, 2016; Touquet, 2015). There was, up until the creation of Plenum, no way to voice your own personal political opinion (see Arsenijević, 2011). Through the complicated, corrupt and divisive political system, which encourages a flattening of the self, an individual was forced to first represent their ethnic identity (see Anderson 1983; Brubaker, 2002; Campbell, 1998; Nancy, 2000). This lack of breathing space, the lack of an ability to speak as an individual voice, is what allowed *The Plenum Movement* to gain a grip over the regional consciousness. It allowed Plenum to become a popular citizen movement without a single institution, non-governmental organisation, international body, or political party on board (see Kraft, 2015).

Citizens felt for the first time as if they had a political voice beyond their ethnicity, and that Plenum was unambiguously, transparently, a forum, an assembly for citizens, a group meeting for all, first and foremost. Plenum enabled citizens to become citizens again, and not framed, or flattened ethnic identities (see Anderson, 1983; Brubaker, 2002; Nancy, 2000).

This is what gave the movement power – the fact that it represented everyone – and was not interested in working with existing institutions, but rather it sought to demand publically in public space, at Plenum, and through social media as a citizen voice. It demanded action from those who had forced citizens to participate in public life as a Bosniak, Bosnian Croat, or Bosnian Serb. If indeed the movement did eventually slip into the spirals, webs, and spheres of party politics and political structures, its power as a citizen voice would be diminished and its force, through ongoing cooperation and in opening dialogue, would be weakened (see Mujkić and Hulsey, 2010; Stojarova and Emerson, 2010). It would lead to the movement

losing the very thing which made it different from all of the other political initiatives which seek to re-write the Dayton Agreement for a perceived ethno-political gain. The conquest of state power would be a misguided strategy (see Holloway, 2005). For this reason *The Plenum Movement* remained anti-political, beyond the usual territorial, ethnic, and nationalist geopolitics of the state.

### ***The Uncertain Future***

*What is the Plenum demand that managed to universalise the whole thing?*

*That is when people reached the bottom, which is hunger.*

*People are hungry out there in the street. This is a working class city.*

Plenum are a *Eulogy for the Mêlée*, they are small eulogies for a Yugoslavia, a Bosnia, a Sarajevo of the certain past, before ethnic cleansing (see Nancy, 2000). They are in a phenomenological sense the spirit of what Jean-Luc Nancy (2000) calls, being singular plural. Plenum claim existence is co-existence, they are part of an emancipatory struggle, and they are a vital being-with, which the delineation of a formerly socialist space into nationalist segregation has denied for twenty years or more (see Campbell, 1999; Crampton, 1996; see also Jeffrey, 2012; Toal and Dahlman, 2011). Documenting the morphology of regions and the fracturing of states, reveals here a nationalist overhaul of space, which manifests itself locally in the street, the city, the municipality, the canton, the entity, and indeed in the individual (see Elden, 2013; see also Anderson, 1983; Brubaker, 2002; Campbell, 1998; Nancy, 2000). Within this overbearing structure how does one reclaim a space beyond nationalist lines on a map and reimagine society? And how does one mobilise a whole population when there are the divisions of municipalities, cantons, entities?



*Plenum is here to stay because increasingly there are Plenum being created in every little town in Bosnia. We are sitting together and thinking about how we can solidify this in order to make it into a movement. Then we will address all of the levels simultaneously. The canton is the key, the canton has all the power, all the power is derogated to the canton. That is why it is key. The municipality is not the key because the municipality is the garbage, waste disposal, the parks, but they are also important after you claim the space. This is not about occupying, I think it is about claiming and I think there is the difference, it is about taking it and re-taking.*

In the weeks after the burning of the presidency building some politicians resigned, including whole cantonal governments, while many protesters were charged with public disorder, fined, and arrested. Class solidarity was enabled again because people still have a living memory of socialism. Galleries and museums became spaces where working groups of the Plenum are held, a public space for thinking about politics. They got reactivated, empty husks, closed to the public, got reused and reclaimed because of Plenum. The threat of protest continues to give legitimacy to the Plenum. And the abolition of the so called ‘white bread’<sup>9</sup> happened as a result of pressure from Plenum. Other very specific demands continue to be made. For example, the Plenum of Citizens of Sarajevo calls for a public inquiry into the process of how formerly publically owned factories were privatised, and how that privatisation happened.

*You can't perceive this as some kind of interregnum. The space is opened up. The only way is for the industries to be taken out of privatisation and become a public asset again. The whole labour law is the key. We cannot collectively accept to become the slaves again, under a different name. That is going to be the next battle.*

I hear the following at the Plenum of Citizens of Sarajevo, which manifestly spatialises the corrupt nepotistic political system (see Agnew, 2016; see also Arsenijević, 2014), revealing

microstructures within state structures: “People saw that if you have people who are hungry, if unemployment is over 40 percent, and somebody can receive 15 times the average salary for a year for doing nothing, that is not fair. Politicians can earn up to 13000 marks each month and the average salary is 700 marks. And they did that by establishing something even more horrible, the various committees, cantonal government, federal government, state government. You end up forming a committee, to form another committee, to form a working group, to form a task force, four levels, for each you get paid 800 marks, already for four you have 3200 marks, on top of your salary, and on top of all the benefits that you have. The whole point is now to tackle these little microstructures that they create for themselves, so they cannot get paid additionally for the job that they are already paid for.”

There are core Plenum principles, which translate as openness, transparency, and non-corruption. Plenum opened a space, a possibility into which people can jump. Almost everybody spoke at the Plenum of Citizens of Sarajevo, as the space enabled a kind of collective therapy (see Arsenijević, 2011). Certain performances were demanded from those who attended: no one voice is greater than another and no individual voice is perceived as animal howl. It is, as such, a space for speech beyond prohibition, enabling a disjointed society to collectively mourn a traumatic past and its enduring traces. In the desert of post-socialism, at Plenum, those present, imagine a forgotten future, a socialist future beyond the ethno-nationalist divisions of the ‘transition’ era (see Arsenijević, 2011, 2014; Gilbert and Mujanović, 2015; Gordy, 2015; Helms, 2013; Horvat and Štiks, 2015; Hromadžić, 2015; Jansen, 2015; Kraft, 2015; Kurtović, 2015; Majstorović, Vučković and Pepić, 2015; Mujkić, 2015; Murtagh, 2016; Touquet, 2015).

*The Plenum helps to abolish the multicultural apartheid, and how does it do that, it does that by saying there is one person, there is one vote, so I don't actually participate in the Plenum*

*as a white middle-aged man, or a Bosniak, Bosnian Croat, or Bosnian Serb, but I participate as a political being. The political parties set up the division of public space. This is pretty much about space, and that is why it is important to think about the street and the protest in terms of space. Why is space important and why are people in motion important? That is a strategy. That is a political action. If the political parties divided up the public space, Plenum erased this separation and opened up a proper public space. That is the first thing, and if you enable that, you get an onrush of people who had fled into their private space and were not able to participate in public life.*

Sarajevo, April 9, 2014: It was called *The Plenum of all Plenums*, a symbolic gathering staged in Sarajevo. And it was envisaged that this Plenum of all Plenums would include Plenum participants from across the region. As participants made their way from Mostar, Tuzla, Zenica, and other towns and cities by bus to the capital, they foresaw a pivotal moment in the history of the movement. In an attempt to strengthen and solidify *The Plenum Movement*, Plenum of various places came together to voice a common language of struggle through set demands. Working groups of Plenum had by this time reduced in size, they consisted of citizens sat indoors working through a manifesto, which they hoped could now be joined into a single document and delivered to parliament. The date was April 9 2014, over two months after the initial uprising, though here they were in Sarajevo, citizens from different Plenum together, to present a list of concrete demands to the government. As they made their way to the meeting site, Plenum realised to their surprise that it was strangely quiet, and a small crowd of activists stood where there should have been active citizenry. It was too late seemingly, the rage had deceased, and the affective atmosphere of the initial uprising was apparently lost. The revolution is over, long live the revolution.

Sarajevo, May 16, 2014: This was not the end of the story though. In the wake of a natural disaster Plenum travelled across the region, delivered aid, truded through flood-waters under Plenum banners, and called upon all citizens to help stranded citizens. The response was enormous, as the mass floods washed away all distinctions that had previously separated populations. Entities, cantons, municipalities, cities, villages, streets, houses, humans were covered in dirty liquid quickly spreading disease, and food and medical supplies were in short supply. The Plenum of Citizens of Sarajevo gave their final demands. The proclamation begins: “13th Plenum of Citizens of Sarajevo. PROCLAMATION TO GOVERNMENT INSTITUTIONS of the City of Sarajevo, the Sarajevo Canton, and the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina: Considering your completely inadequate response to the natural disaster, the least you can do is to begin to behave responsibly and comply with these citizens’ demands. Ordinary citizens have mobilised to help the vulnerable communities across the country faster and better than you have – you, who are paid to do this. You will not emerge from this unfortunate situation as winners!”<sup>10</sup>

Sarajevo, February 7, 2015: Everything changed on that day in February 2014. February 7 2014 saw a population unite against perhaps the most complex and contradictory political system in the world, as well as its corrupt leadership. *The Plenum Movement* was brief, but it highlighted the potential of local movements to enact positive change within deeply divided societies. Though it struggled to maintain its initial momentum as a non-institutional alternative to institutional politics, Plenum is unmoved as a mechanism through which citizens can act as political beings again beyond playing out an ethno-nationalism. Plenum was never envisaged as a way into state politics anyway. Looking back now at those hopeful three months, where power briefly resided with citizens, it is difficult to work out specifically and precisely what did indeed change, and what was achieved. Contradictions become apparent, the street or the Plenum, concrete demands or a plea for a common language of

struggle, an institution in itself or a tool for change. Yet this is perhaps to miss the enduring influence of Plenum. It was a movement which altered a public consciousness, discourse, and thinking, and indeed it removed some of the internal borders between citizens. As such, to think of Plenum as a success or a failure is to miss its revolutionary agenda. For a brief moment, people stood together, in cities, on streets, in squares, at Plenum, and that will not be quickly forgotten. Here, in Sarajevo, February 7 has been marked each year since.

With an uncertain future after a period of hope where the region goes from here is unclear. Experimenting with assemblies as a tool of revolt is not over (see Brookchin, 2014; Wainwright, 2003; Webber, 2011). And a trial with direct democracy is not over, as it can now be reanimated at any time. From Macedonia to Slovenia, Kosovo to Montenegro, we are seeing weekly rumblings of discontent and hopeful voices railing against their political situation (see Horvat and Štiks, 2015). *The Plenum Movement* provided a pivotal shift in political discourse, created spaces of dissent within an overbearing political structure, and enabled a traumatised society to collectively mourn what was lost as Yugoslavia collapsed (see Murtagh, 2016; see also Campbell, 1999; Crampton, 1996; see also Jeffrey, 2012; Toal and Dahlman, 2011). It offers possibilities for future popular movements that seek to change state structures from below, and it provided a transitory hope for citizens feeling former in the present, who could briefly contemplate a forgotten socialist future (see Arsenijević, 2010).

*The Plenum Movement* was a clear opportunity to engage and develop locally driven solutions to a difficult and complicated regional situation, as it gave a voice to citizens previously unheard and ignored (see Arsenijević, 2011, 2014; Gilbert and Mujanović, 2015; Gordy, 2015; Helms, 2013; Horvat and Štiks, 2015; Hromadžić, 2015; Jansen, 2015; Kraft, 2015; Kurtović, 2015; Majstorović, Vučkovic and Pepić, 2015; Mujkić, 2015; Murtagh, 2016; Touquet, 2015). Its power derived from its multi-local nature, chipping away at

regional structures, cantons, entities, municipalities – without ever reverting back to a territorial spatial demand and a rewriting of a peace agreement based on ethnic division (see Murtagh, 2016) – and its power was perhaps lost when the movement arrived at a single point in time and space. *The Plenum of all Plenums* reduced a diversity of voices to a small number of demands and in a sense brought about the end of the movement before it had even begun. *The Plenum Movement* melted away in the shadow of the institutional capital as a single, pure, entity in itself, no longer radically diverse and disparate, no longer an anti-apartheid ideology, no longer a hopeful enigma, no longer an opposition to a divisive elite, it instead appeared as a political party, another level or apparatus of government.

The story of *The Plenum Movement* is one of revolution told here through the guise of a geography which is equally radical in form. Both may eventually age into respectability. Though remaining defiantly unrespectable is what initially provided their power to shake the foundations of a state and a discipline (see Bunge, 1971). There is a little bit of the defiance of William Bunge (1971) and *The Plenum Movement* within this article. Undertaking an on-the-ground regional study, mirroring the form of an unusual and definitive text is done here at a time when the world needs a new geography of a revolution in a suffocating post-democratic age, where in which *The Plenum Movement* provided only a brief breathing space.

## Notes

1. The Dayton Agreement separated Bosnia-Herzegovina, though it also enabled Bosnia-Herzegovina to remain a single country. It was an initial peace agreement designed to be replaced. As Gordy (2015, p. 611) writes:

“The 1995 Dayton Peace Agreement included a provisional draft constitution for Bosnia and Herzegovina, which was appended to the principal agreement as Annex 4. The General Framework Agreement for Peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina was signed on 14 December 1995. The fifteen-page document was clearly intended as a temporary arrangement to be superseded by a Constitution that would be agreed by elected political officials in the state and approved by public vote. But this has never happened. As political actors in the country repeatedly demonstrated that they lacked the capacity and political will to agree on structures for new institutions.”

2. A methodology for a ‘reconstituted regional geography’ with citations removed (Thrift 1983, p. 57):

“The outline of a reconstructed regional geography which I have given in this paper gives a quite natural eminence to the life history approach – oral history and the use of autobiographies and diaries – and to local history techniques as well as to the more conventional compositional approaches. Oral history is a rich source of contextual knowledge that is increasingly being tapped... But oral history is now increasingly being applied to the study of archetypal class-structured experiences such as migration, to the working experiences of different fractions of the working class, and to the life experiences of a society as a whole. It also provides a useful adjunct to give ‘depth’ to conventional compositional accounts in, for instance, social history and sociology... Autobiographies and diaries can also be used effectively in exploring contextual issues... Even one diary can provide a multitude of information on

personality formation, sociability, and so forth... As a postscript to this appendix, I want to suggest one method that, so far as I am aware, has not been used in the literature. That is 'reconstruction' of individuals. This method consists of deducing the characteristics of the life paths of a set of specified individuals within a locale and thereby suggesting what would be the main features to be found in an interview, diary (the source I have used), or autobiography."

3. The descriptions of each film included in Fred Singleton's series Yugoslavia, shown on BBC Two:

Friday 24 November, 1967, 19.30: YUGOSLAVIA, five films on the changing face of Communism. 1: Serbia. In more than twenty years as a Communist country, Yugoslavia has continually provided many political and economic surprises for East and West. Tonight's film looks at Serbia, the central republic of the six which make up the Federation of Yugoslavia.

Friday 1 December, 1967, 19.30: YUGOSLAVIA, five films on the changing face of Communism. 2: The North. Yugoslav industrial production is rising at a rate second only to Japan. But most development has taken place in the north, where industry already existed, leaving the rest of the country trailing behind.

Friday 8 December, 1967, 19.30: YUGOSLAVIA, five films on the changing face of Communism. 3: Dalmatia. The development of the Dalmatian coast as a tourist centre is a striking economic success which last year earned the Yugoslavs £90 million in foreign exchange and closed their trade gap. But only twenty miles inland from the glittering coast is another Yugoslavia whose problems still await a solution.

Friday 15 December, 1967, 19.30: YUGOSLAVIA, five films on the changing face of Communism. 4: Macedonia. This beautiful impoverished land is the Deep South of



Yugoslavia. Vigorous efforts are being made to raise it to prosperity by starting a complex industrial revolution.

Friday 22 December, 1967, 19.30: YUGOSLAVIA, five films on the changing face of Communism. 5: Unity or Death? Have twenty years of Communism solved the problem of making a single nation from a variety of races and religions?

4. The jotted notes on each film to be included in Fred Singleton's series Yugoslavia, shown on BBC Two:

Programme 1. "BRIGAMA means with trouble." The acronymic of the names of Yugoslavia's seven neighbours spells out the nature of the country's brief history. The first programme describes the country's diversity and the problems and the strengths of the Federation.

Programme 2. "Titoism." Tito and the communists unified Yugoslavia. But they did not impose a rigid ideology on the developing nation. The role of the League of Communists in politics is quite different from any other communist state, as is the role Yugoslavia plays in the world.

Programme 3. "The Sparse Land." The first indication that the rigid soviet model would not be followed came with Yugoslavia's policy towards agriculture. After an early failure to make collectivisation work agriculture was left in the hands of the peasants. So the problems persist. The drift from the land, the ageing labour force, the lack of investment capital, part-time farming and so on. State farms are now the most efficient part of agriculture. Is collectivisation now the answer?

Programme 4. "The Political Factory." The industrialisation of Yugoslavia. The evolution of the enterprise structure and workers control. The exploitation of tourism to bridge the balance of payment gap.

Programme 5. “Doctor of Engineer.” A recent survey showed that 98.9% of Yugoslavs want their children to be white collar workers. The problems of educational change in a developing society.

5. The reforms of the 1970s:

The new Constitution of 1974 and the Law on Associated Labour of 1976 reorganised the economy from top to bottom. Under this system, workers gained more control over management decisions, banks, and social services. At the same time, Yugoslavia became more federalised as party authority was decentralised to republic and provincial governments and local communes. The new statutes introduced a system of self-management agreements to coordinate interaction among basic organisations of associated labour, and Social Compacts to coordinate interaction between economic and political bodies. Yugoslav self-management socialism was born.

6. The President of Republika Srpska, Milorad Dodik, has stated continuously a desire to gain independence for the entity Republika Srpska, and to hold an independence referendum.

7. The confirmed results of the election in 2014, which returned mostly the same politicians and political parties to power:

<https://www.izbori.ba/Potvrđjeni2014/Finalni/ParlamentBIH/Default.aspx>

(last accessed July 27 2016)

8. The demands of the Plenum of Citizens of Sarajevo:

1. ESTABLISHMENT OF A GOVERNMENT OF EXPERTS: The urgent establishment of a Sarajevo Canton government of experts without political affiliations, in consultation with the Plenum.

2. AUDIT OF THE SALARIES AND BENEFITS OF PUBLIC OFFICIALS IN SARAJEVO CANTON AND BRINGING THEM INTO ACCORDANCE WITH

THE CURRENT ECONOMIC SITUATION: An immediate end to ‘white bread’<sup>1</sup> or the payment of salaries and allowances to ministers and the prime minister after the end of their terms of office. An end to additional payments to representatives in Sarajevo Canton on the basis of participation in commissions, committees and other bodies which are an integral part of the Sarajevo Cantonal Assembly. A new ban on all representatives and public officials in Sarajevo Canton from participating in the management committees and oversight committees of public enterprises and institutions of public significance in Sarajevo Canton. Reducing the highest salaries of public officials to the level of twice the average salary in Sarajevo Canton. Reducing the fleet of vehicles belonging to public institutions in Sarajevo Canton by 50%, likewise all costs related to the use of official vehicles and official travel.

3. AUDIT OF PRIVATISATION: To order the Cantonal Privatisation Agency to urgently conduct an audit of the privatisation process of public enterprises in Sarajevo Canton, including Feroelektro, the Holiday Inn, Sarabon, Zora, Kljuc, and all the other enterprises where suspicious privatisation has taken place, including enterprises of federal significance (Vranica, Hidrogradnja, GP Put, Unis Pretis, and others).

4. ESTABLISHMENT OF AN INDEPENDENT COMMISSION OF EXPERTS FOR VERIFYING THE FACTS OF THE EVENTS OF 7 FEBRUARY, WHOSE MANDATE WILL INCLUDE RECORDING AND VALUING THE DAMAGE, AND VERIFYING THE RESPONSIBILITY OF THE POLICE SERVICES FOR EXCESSIVE USE OF FORCE AND MISTREATMENT OF ARRESTEES

9. The ‘abolition’ of the ‘white bread’, the name given to an official perk that grants top politicians the right to receive their salaries for a whole year after their mandates end: On March 2 2014, the state parliament’s House of Representatives approved a law abolishing ‘white bread’ for all politicians and officials at state level. Only one day

later, however, the state government, the Council of Ministers, adopted a draft law reintroducing the same privilege. Some progress had been made. Three of the ten cantons in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Sarajevo, Tuzla and Una-Sana cantons, have already done away with the perk. Bosnia is not the only country in the region where the pay-off exists. In Montenegro and Croatia, politicians and MPs continue to receive their salaries for six months after their mandates end, while in Serbia they get paid for three months.

**10. The final demands of the Plenum of Citizens of Sarajevo:**

DEMAND 1: IMMEDIATE adoption of a change to the 2014 budget through which the financial resources allotted to funding political parties is redirected to provide assistance to the people and communities affected by the flooding.

DEMAND 2: IMMEDIATE drafting of a plan to clean up the damage and help the vulnerable citizens and communities. In this regard, we demand that for the coming year, all political appointees and office holders, at all levels of the government mentioned above, give back a portion of their compensation and other expenses to be used for the benefit of affected citizens and communities.

DEMAND 3: IMMEDIATE creation of a special body at the entity level that will oversee the work of all institutions involved in dispensing and distributing assistance and cleaning up damage; citizen representatives will be included in this body.

DEMAND 4: BEGIN a thorough reorganisation of the civil defense forces at all levels, and in the process, investigate irregularities and omissions in the expenditure of financial resources and division of labor to date, as well as those responsible.

BEGIN CRIMINAL PROCEEDINGS against the responsible parties. Citizen representatives must be included in these proceedings.

DEMAND 5: IMMEDIATE INTERVENTION by the executive and judicial branches to halt all irregularities in the distribution of assistance, market speculation, and all forms of profiteering and realising material gain from the misfortune of citizens and communities. IMMEDIATE revision of the Criminal Law of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Article 286, so that every misappropriation of assistance to vulnerable communities or property in these communities will be punished by a prison sentence lasting a MINIMUM of five years.

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