

Bosnia was the starting and ending point of my Balkans tour, between Sarajevo's Baščaršija, Mostar's Old Bridge, Sandžak's pešter heights and Ibar valley, Prizren's multilingual place name signs, Macedonia's shrub lands and Alexander the Great statues

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» In Bosnia, everything else was quite different from the Izmir experience. Different were the little things: you drink čaj only in *hastaluk* ("Tea? Are you ill?"). You always drink coffee there: Turkish coffee, the invasive Nes, the endemic form of espresso styled *obična kafa*. Different were also the big things, the whole thing: the mode. While the mode in Izmir was sitting and writing, it was moving and speaking in the Balkans: like painting a picture here, and screening a movie there. I recorded interviews with many people, I took photographs of them, of me, of us. The mode alone had it: the feeling of there is no there there decreased with every conversation. In Macedonia, there was less there, and even there's theres were changing like the weather. Sunny Montenegro, cloudy Macedonia.

Whenever I land in Sarajevo Butmir, I watch out for the B. family's house, for the hotels in Ilidža, for the seminar house of Schüler Helfen Leben, where I used to have work sessions with B., planning the campaign, discussing fundraising, having endless coffee and cigarettes. Landing in Sarajevo feels like coming home and coming back, and it evokes all kind of emotional carnival. I think I still know more people in Sarajevo than in Berlin, and one of them, my former colleague J., offered me to stay at her place. But at the airport, I felt the sudden urge to book a hotel room for the first day and night. I told J. that I would come tomorrow, and I found a cheap and central hotel in the Mula Mustafa Bašeskija street, close to Ferhadija and Baščaršija, in the Ottoman heart of the city. I took a cab from the airport to the hotel. In the car, I answered dozens of questions, in a way that led me appear like a stranger with proper language skills in *Nashyezik*.

Taken for not too familiar with Bosnia, the cab driver gave me an introductory lecture on Sarajevo as a former hub of culture in Yugoslavia; On the Winter Olympics of 1984; On the general grandeur of former Yugoslavia; On the merits of the great leader Tito; On nowadays' widespread corruption and the holistic misery all over former Yugoslavia. The war years weren't part of the lecture. The dramatic climax of his monologue culminated in what was now,



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Pretending to be a tourist in Bosnia (1)

and what was now, was that the complete country was in a mess - not without stressing how beautiful everything was before:

"In Yugoslavia, you could travel to every corner of the country without fear. People had smiling faces. You could sleep at any parking lot. Nowhere, never did we lock our doors. When I was young, we used to eat and drink with friends from Serbia, from Croatia, from Macedonia, on the Adriatic coast. My enterprise sent me, my colleagues, all our families, on holidays to our beautiful coast. It was still our coast, then. What were Czechs, Poles, Hungarians, compared to us? Bulgarians, Romanians! What did they have? Nothing did they have! What did they understand about socialism? Nothing! East Germany! We had it all! We had socialism, we had health care for free, but we weren't insane. We had Coca Cola, and we were proud of our passports, we could travel to the East and to the West without visa, we were welcome everywhere. I used to take my kids to Trieste to buy them *farmerke* (Jeans), whenever I wanted to. And now? Look at me, look at this country! I have to show my papers when I go to Dubrovnik! We are all ill, and we are tired. And what do we have now? This is not a country, this is disgrace! And what we have, is in the hands of Sandžaklije, look at this tower! The urban raja has given up the city!"

And what were I doing in Sarajevo, he asked? - I am writing on a re-discovery of the Balkans, I said, and that it had to do with migrant Sandžaklije; that I was working in Berlin, the Balkans, and Istanbul. He said he had relatives in Berlin and Istanbul.

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Most Bosnians have relatives in diaspora. I thought of my own family, of migration, of migration as the topic of my thesis, of my migrating thesis, of my migrating black notebook, filled with migrating manuscripts, about if and how this conversation would become part of my travel notes. To unveil the robust layer of structuring memories from childhood, from my post-adolescent Sarajevo years, I didn't tell my relatives and

friends in Bosnia that I was staying over in a hotel. I badly wanted to see Sarajevo with a stranger's eyes, to capture it from a photographer's lens; I wanted to feel like a tourist on trip advisor, I wanted to taste Pita and Baklava in Baščaršija, as if I hadn't grown up with it. At least for the first day and night.

At the hotel reception, a friendly lady with that typical Sarajevo accent said that the weather was strange. As strange as across the year: first, they faced an unprecedented flood catastrophe in late spring, and now, the quince trees wanted to blossom in November. She borrowed a phrase from the popular *sevdalinka* "Snijeg pade na behar na voće", suggesting that there may even fall snow on ripe fruits in next spring. I came from another weather: this morning was grey and rainy in Berlin, where the fallen tree leaves were spreading their earthy smell. I tried to keep a friendly distance, I listened more than I spoke. The lady received my dog-eared passport, my fore and last name did the rest, my German accent made her smile - I was other. She was sweet and friendly with me, and she behaved more regular and distanced with local guests. I got what I ordered, and I completed my habitus. I chose beige hiking pants, an anachronistic colorful batik shirt, a bumbag, and a very visible camera. My outdoor coat was sparkling in communist red. In this touristic masquerade, I went on to rediscover Sarajevo, lusting for unspent, fresh impressions, *taze* (fresh) like *somuni* (flatbread) from the bakeries of Kovači. **NV**