

PATRIA REVISITED

# Pretending to be a tourist in Bosnia (2)

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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I took pictures of Baščaršija, Sarači, the Gazi Husrev Beg mosque, Turkish grocery stores, Turkish-Bosnian friendship memorabilia, I ordered Pita (Börek in its Bosnian vest) and Turkish coffee, I took pictures of the cathedral, of the tramway, of the eternal flame, of random pedestrians. I rested at the emblematic fountain Sebilj and photographed it, imagining how I would juxtapose the photograph to a picture of Izmir's Sebilj. I wandered from sokak to čikmaz, I discovered a new bridge on river Miljacka, I found the Akademija building invaded by an Apple store, I found myself bewildered by another new shopping center's light pollution. Having coffee and scrolling through my Sarajevo centered news feed, I tried to situate my impressions within current developments in the public discourse and media.

I read that Saudis were increasingly spreading their petrodollars in Bosnia's Muslim-Croat federation. A TV news clip was circulating, showing Gulf Arabs, the men wearing T-Shirts, the women veiled in black abayas, on their touristic discovery of Bosnia, rhapsodizing about the sheer greenness of the country. An Arab woman said: "We come to Bosnia because it is green and Muslim." The speaker highlighted that one of the "major shortcomings" in Bosnia was the absence of high class hotels, stressing the importance of further investments from the Gulf countries. The light polluting shopping center is the opus of the Al Shiddi Trading Establish-



ment from Riyadh, whose grotesque building is praised an "investment" by the "investors", on a memorial stone next to the shopping center. Its homepage calls the building a "present to the citizens of Sarajevo". The complex, called Sarajevo City Center, met one of Bosnia's "major shortcomings" with a high class hotel on its top floor.

The next day, I have enough from the touristic intermezzo, and move to J.'s place. J. lives on Koševsko brdo, with a view on the Olympic Bjelašnica mountains and the railway station. Since J. is working for a transnational television chain, we discuss many different issues from the news feed, especially Germany and Turkey related topics. J., who had been spending some of the war years and her late childhood as a refugee in Germany, was preparing an emission on the fall of the Berlin Wall, and I try to connect her with possible interlocutors from Berlin. A warm wind blows through the open window, the sun is shining, and Bjelašnica is completely free of snow. We sit at the table, each of us scrolling on their touch pads, checking the news, and I comment on a current strike of the German railway union, and how it had infuriated

many people in Germany. I complain about rampant neoliberal policies, and the general state of the German railways.

J. sheds a wondering gaze at me. She stands up and asks me to follow her to the balcony, where she points her forefinger to a storage siding close to the central station. I see a long row of light rail wagons. J. says: "Can you imagine? They bought a brand new train, and only when it was brought to Sarajevo, they realized that it doesn't fit the tracks. What a waste of money! This can only happen in our land (samo kod nas)."

After more than a week at J.'s place, I was reminded that there, in Bosnia, were also us, and I came to cherish this connection, upon a phone call of my migrant mother in Germany to her migrant sister in Austria. My aunt, in the Alpine skiing resort, asked my mother in Franconia: When will we see your son again? Will he ever visit us? Is he in Berlin, is he in Istanbul? Where is he? My mother probably said: We know him. He always does what he wants, and now he is sleeping on a friend's couch in Sarajevo (kaže mama da spavaš na kauču).

I was sleeping on my friend's couch, but I was also a son and a nephew and a cousin and a grandson, in Bosnia, where I could,

besides raja, relate to relatives, from Bosnia - whether in Bosnia, in Austria, in Germany, in Istanbul, in America, or elsewhere. I moved deliberately in the transnational space. I used Facebook a lot, and on my mother's advice, I chatted with my cousin, I called my uncle in Austria, and now, there was the furnished flat of my uncle's mother. In Grbavica.

And this is what Bosnia gave to us: a transnational social space. We are also - some more, and some less - from Bosnia. My cousin was born in Austria, but she is also from Bosnia. I was born, as a twin brother, in Germany, but I am also from Bosnia. My twin sister feels, perhaps, a bit less from Bosnia, because I have spent more time there. I know Sarajevo well, I know shortcuts, back alleys, slang words - I have raja there. I feel embraced and at home there. While most visitors without Nashyeyzik cannot pronounce Grbavica - I even had a flat there. I had spent a week in that Grbavica flat in 1998, with its owners, with my relatives, with Ivana and Selim. But now, Ivana and Selim were not there anymore. Ivana is pokojna, and Selim rahmetli.

There, in Bosnia, you can distinguish people's deaths by knowing their names. As long as there is tradition. **NV**