Journal for Cultural Research
Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:
http://www.informaworld.com/smpp/title~content=t713684902

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Online publication date: 13 June 2011

To cite this Article Arsenijević, Damir(2011) 'Gendering the Bone: The Politics of Memory in Bosnia and Herzegovina1', Journal for Cultural Research, 15: 2, 193 — 205
To link to this Article: DOI: 10.1080/14797585.2011.574059
URL: http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14797585.2011.574059

JOURNAL FOR CULTURAL RESEARCH VOLUME 15 NUMBER 2 (APRIL 2011)

Gendering the Bone: The Politics of Memory in Bosnia and Herzegovina[1]

Damir Arsenijević

This article explores and intervenes in the deadlock produced by the identifications of bodily remains resulting from genocide in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Every day, in that country, bodily remains are exhumed, counted, reassociated, managed and consecrated as *ethnic* remains. This is done through the strategic collaboration of forensic science; multiculturalist post-conflict management, with its politics of reconciliation; and religious ritual — an uncouth alliance between the scientist, the bureaucrat and the priest. In doing so, the scientist, the bureaucrat and the priest assume the perspective of the perpetrator of the crime. For it is in the fantasy of the perpetrator that the executed person is an ethnic *other*. The article intervenes by posing the question: what different praxis could deactivate the reification of bones as ethnic victims, would stop the prolongation of the injurious gaze of the perpetrator and would return the bones to common use through which we can contemplate hope after genocide? In other words, what is the politics that will enable us to be hopeful subjects in relation to these bones? Drawing on cultural production in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the article both challenges and goes beyond current mainstream political choices. Thus, it identifies and strengthens hopeful politics in cultural-as-political practices that productively bear witness to the precariousness of life. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, it is mainly women artists who harness traumatic events and the loss of the past and present in order to announce a more hopeful politics. What this hopeful politics after genocide is, through what praxis is it enacted, and by which subjects are the main concerns of this article.

Bodies without Bones

"What is this?"
"A black bin liner", you will say.
"What does it mean?", you will ask.

1. A version of this article was originally delivered at the London School of Economics Gender Institute Research Seminar, UK, in March 2008. I would like to thank the Special and Extension Programs and the Gender Department staff of the Central European University for their generous support that enabled me to complete this article.

ISSN 1479-7585 print/1740-1666 online/11/020193-13

DOI: 10.1080/14797585.2011.574059

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

CSK–124 or M–195 or LZ–2B–39, and these labels will rebound off the black bag back to you, making no sense or, rather, making non-sense and yet insisting, probing, demanding further questions. Perhaps the question should be approached differently: perhaps "who"?

Then, suddenly, this "it" becomes somebody's missing husband, somebody's missing son, somebody's missing father, somebody's case number whose DNA needs extracting before the lunch break, before a quick dash to the post office to pay the bills; somebody's case, number 124, one too many found, excavated, recovered and now he'll have to haggle over numbers, over bones, he'll say to another he: "You killed too". "Yes, but who started it?" And the whole thing will go on and on. But this "it" keeps insisting. Who is this? And when does this "it" become Ibrahim, Zvonko or Đorđe?

This "when" marks a specific moment — a moment of decision; a moment of naming. Tied to this moment was another moment of decision — the decision to kill; to hide the crime; to move one mass grave to another location, and then to another. Primary, secondary and tertiary mass graves. A neat linear progression. And then a femur, some cranial remains, a tooth, a rib are found. These bones again mark the moment of decision.

Now I ask you: when would you decide to name a set of mortal remains — a femur, a rib, a tooth, part of a skull — as a body, with a full identity and history? Are a femur, a tooth, a rib and part of the skull enough for you? What is the bare minimum you would identify as a body, would call a body?

The letter of the law insists:

> An identified missing person shall be deemed to be any person for whom it is reliably established that, following an identification process, the mortal remains recovered match such a person in her or his physical or inherited or biological traits or if a person is still alive. Identification procedures shall be carried out pursuant to the laws of Bosnia and Herzegovina. (Zakon o nestalim osobama Bosne i Hercegovine [Law on Missing Persons of Bosnia and Herzegovina], Article 2, para. 7)

The letter of the law insists on a definition of a missing person but says nothing about the actual body because it is precisely this body that is still beyond the limit of the law's symbolization, revealing its finiteness and arbitrariness; revealing the limitation of its power; revealing it as incomplete.

Of course, now that we have opened this to contestation and negotiation over meaning, this larger question — what is a body? — is a theoretical and political question that has its concrete materiality. For us, the question is: how do we gender not just the body, but this particular body? Or, how do we gender a femur, a tooth, a rib or part of the skull? How do we gender the bone?

Each day in Bosnia and Herzegovina, bodily remains are exhumed, counted, reassociated, managed and consecrated as *ethnic* remains. This is done through the strategic collaboration of forensic science; multiculturalist post-conflict management with its politics of reconciliation; and religious ritual — an uncouth alliance between the scientist, the bureaucrat and the priest. In doing so, the

scientist, the bureaucrat and the priest assume the perspective of the perpetrator of the crime. For it is in the fantasy of the perpetrator that the executed person is the ethnic *other*. What different praxis could deactivate the reification of bones as ethnic victims, would stop the prolongation of the injurious gaze of the perpetrator and would return the bones to such common use through which we can contemplate hope after genocide? In other words, what is the politics that will enable us to be hopeful subjects in relation to these bones?

In addition to being a researcher and a lecturer in the fields of literature and cultural studies, I am also a translator. Every day, I am involved in shifting the boundaries between discourses, making them even more unintelligible to one another. One particular day in March 2008, I am in a morgue, interpreting over a table on which the remains of different men are laid out, and a forensic pathologist touches a vertebra, saying: "Ovo su procedure koje pratimo" (These are the procedures we follow). "Procjenjuje se da je 30,000 nestalih iz Bosne i Hercegovine … danas je ukupan broj nestalih oko 13,500 iz BiH" (An estimated 30,000 were missing from the Bosnia and Herzegovina conflict … today the number of missing persons is approximately 13,500 from Bosnia and Herzegovina). He touches the bones with his bare hands and I wince every time he does it. What else is in these bones other than themselves?

I am told that the day before, in the middle of a similar presentation, a mother — a representative of a family association — left the room. "Leave that bone alone, it is not yours, it is not yours!", she almost screamed. But whose is the bone? Does it belong to the perpetrators who killed and buried the bodies? Does it belong to the family members of the missing persons? Does it belong to the diplomat in whose country peace in Bosnia was brokered? Does it belong to those, like me, who feel ashamed and wince every time the bone is touched? Yes and no. It belongs to all of us. It is a societal thing. It is thus precisely because the suffering and death which resulted from genocide are the effects of the politics of terror and, as such, are pre-eminently a public matter. The emancipated process of becoming a subject can only take place when the subject is freed from the shackles of a victim position or any other position that is merely focused on the interests of a particularist identity.

"Leave that bone alone…" is one way to gender this bone. Gender is relational. To talk about the surviving mother, wife, son or daughter, lover, is to talk about these bones of a son, a husband, a father, a lover. To gender the bone is to reveal how power relations are gendered — to start revealing the logic behind the biopolitical order that makes a raped woman whose husband was taken away, and who is missing a topos of ethno-nationalist wars, an order that includes solely through exclusion. To gender the bone is to talk about the suspended state in which families of missing persons exist — deprived of any rights until a certificate is issued to confirm, in the symbolic order, the disappearance of their loved ones. This means to maintain gender not just as quotidian experience but gender as an analytic category, shedding light on existing inequalities, such that it does not immure one woman's mourning into a separate ethnic category (our women are ethnic women) but insists on traversing the

existing gender logic. To gender the bone is to "speak truth to power"; to assume an ethico-political position when talking about the injustices of the dominant ethno-nationalist ideologies; to reveal them in all their bankruptcy during the war and after — in the transition, when the only "transit" they made was from one comfortable chair and office into another. To gender the bone is to challenge the logic of the dominant ideologies that appropriate and mythologize the bone and thus insist on a social organization that posits certain roles for women and for men as the only possible ones. All these "genderings" are the gendering of politics — the art of thinking how to be otherwise in order to question the criteria of plausibility of the dominant and to shift the boundaries of possibility.

It is early March and I am done in the morgue; done for the day. I go outside into the street, where people are rummaging through dustbins because 25% of them live below the poverty line. In Sarajevo, protesting farmers have "short-stepped" themselves and, rather than step into the Parliament building, have decided to install prefabricated houses in front of the steps of the Parliament. This means they are likely to spend hundreds of days there, because, as they blend into the landscape, they become ever more invisible. The steel workers' trade union in Zenica has lost its battle against the new owners of the company. Kosovo is independent. Instead of being taken back home, one of the first girls born in the independent state was rushed to the grave of one of the fighters for an independent Kosovo. She was named Pavaresia ("Independence"). So, nothing changes: boys continue to name girls; continue to inscribe this "soil and blood" story into a girl's name; continue to locate the soil and blood in the past, present and future of the nation. But how independent is Pavaresia really going to be, I wonder? What will she remember and who? And for whom? To do what? Does she mark the end of the battle that is, in effect, the battle on the field of memory or, on the biopolitical continuum, is she just one amongst many?

The Politics of Memory: Always Bumping and Stumbling in the State of Exception

Trauma-Market

Aren't you just a victim
selling your own trauma?
asked the Harvard blonde
with the brains worth half a million.
I couldn't find the words in English to say
Do you have any idea how right you are?
Nine deaths, bleeding eardrums,
Dodging bullets —
It all fits in the word trauma.
And yes, I was unable to say in English,
I'm afraid
that's the only valuable thing I have. (Bašić 2004, p. 36)

These final words echo the utterance of a citizen whose very politics is at issue, as Agamben (1998, p. 188) argues, in her natural body. Speaking from such a state of exception, how is she to bear witness to trauma and loss; how is she to become, as Shoshana Felman (2002, p. 7) asks, a "witness who turns trauma, as experience, into insight and whose innovative concepts [may give us] new tools with which to think?" How is she to give mourning a productive transformative form?

Mourning is a state of upheaval, a state of turbulence. For Agamben (2000, p. 138), these limit states occur when we are "experiencing absolute impotence, bumping against solitude and speechlessness over and over again precisely there where we were expecting company and words". For Wendy Brown (2005, p. 100), the condition of mourning "is a stumbling and stuttering one, a condition of disturbed ground, of inarticulateness, of disorientation in and about time". "A mourning being", continues Brown,

> must learn to walk again, on ground once secured by the now lost object, a process that makes palpable how contingent firm ground and level ground always is … a mourning being also learns a new temporality, one in which past meets future without moving through a present (in which the present all but vanishes) yet also one in which the future is unmoored from parts of the past, thus puncturing conceits of linearity with a different way of living time. (Brown 2005, p. 100)

"*Nine deaths, bleeding eardrums, / Dodging bullets*" — this insistence on stumbling signification, on articulating the disorientation, on the rebounding off a black bin liner — perforates the linearity and homogeneity of the term "trauma". From this ethical position, from the attempt to "encircle the Real", to articulate the limits of symbolization, the traumatic past becomes, after Walter Benjamin,

> an image which flashes up at the instant when it can be recognized and is never seen again. For every image of the past that is not recognized by the present as one of its own concerns threatens to disappear irretrievably. (Benjamin 1999, p. 247)

In bearing witness to the past by bearing witness to the limits of the symbolization of trauma one makes past injustices bear productively on future struggles.

Bosnia and Herzegovina is said to be dealing with multiple losses. Here is another snapshot: it is late September 2005, and the so-called post-war transition is relentless. Various billboards are competing for your attention, selling you a bigger car, advertising a better drink, or luring you into buying a swankier fridge. Among them, hauntingly, is this billboard showing a tatty, soiled Spitfire bomber jacket, spread out on a white surface, a piece of paper next to it reading: 282 KRA. From a distance, I can just make out the jacket, the inscription and, in huge black-and-red letters: "Srebrenica Podrinje Identification Project". The spectacle lures me in — I get closer. I read the rest: "Article of clothing found on a victim of genocide, 282 KRA".

Immediately below it is another poster advertising US illusionist David Copperfield's show, scheduled for early October 2005 and endorsed by one of the members of the Bosnian presidency. And, through a fiction more focused and sharpened than lived life itself, as if by one of Copperfield's own tricks, this image of Copperfield, juxtaposed with the Srebrenica Identification Project billboard, flits by, illuminating the depoliticizing normalization that is being carried out by the dominant — the "confiscation of memory" from the citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina (Ugrešić 1998). Not only the body that once wore the jacket is missing and gone forever, but those who stayed alive — 44% of whom are unemployed and 25% of whom are living below the poverty line — are being sold an illusion, which, to buy, costs one-tenth of an average monthly salary.

All these images insist, ricochet and beg answers to what this grievous estrangement is. I see it as a combination of the collapse of socialism, war and the human loss that is entailed in it; the post-war neo-liberal capitalist transition and the victims of genocide whose bodies are still missing. The outcome of such an "estrangement" is the construction and rewriting of the collective memory carried out by the ruling ethno-nationalist elites. For, as Dubravka Ugrešić (1998, p. 227) writes: "[t]he political battle is a battle for the territory of collective memory".

Alongside such a prolongation of injury, perpetrated by the ethno-nationalist elites, is another widespread inclination — to blame it on "them"; to blame it on the ethno-nationalists. This is done mainly by those who belong to the so-called "anti-nationalist" camp — who, whilst complaining and blaming, all the while invest in maintaining the *us* versus *them* binary: nationalists versus anti-nationalists. As such, these anti-nationalists are part of the problem rather than its solution. This is an attempt to saturate the political, to present this binary struggle as the only one — i.e. it is an attempt to foreclose the political. This foreclosure is a prohibition of the political imaginary, a prohibition of going beyond posited choices. The most vociferous of these anti-nationalists construct themselves as members of the "intellectual elite", proponents of "civic values and culture" and, on the basis of this articulation of their struggle, they present themselves as being above politics, beyond ideological filth, insisting on non-ideological solutions to social problems. Amongst such injury, loss and inequality as dominates the social field, why is there such a libidinal investment in the purity of one's own position? Purity for whom to do what, one might ask. This is, of course, the position of the Hegelian "beautiful soul", which bemoans its predicament whilst secretly parasitizing it. Their attempt to represent the nationalist versus anti-nationalist binary, to paraphrase Marx, is an attempt to install this binary as a general illumination that bathes all other colours and modifies their particularity. This is a pre-eminently ideological position and is perhaps best exemplified in their attempt to rewrite history.

In the same allegedly non-ideological vein, they insist on separating history and ideology. In this pure history, the anti-fascist struggle of the Second World War is omitted — a struggle which uncomfortably haunts and ruptures the pure position of the beautiful soul, that Bosnia and Herzegovina was constructed as a

modern political project through partisan politics.[2] To claim, as one of these intellectuals would have it, that "the two worst evils of the twentieth century are fascism and communism" (see Arsenijević 2007) is a type of revisionism that aims to eradicate proper emancipatory gestures from cultural memory. These were gestures that, in the name of equality and justice, aimed at social transformation. This type of revisionism attempts to hide another important thing: the transition to capitalism of the former Yugoslavia. As Rastko Močnik has argued, such a gesture is symptomatic of nationalist political and intellectual elites who bring capitalism to the post-socialist East. Precisely what these elites cannot grasp is the idea and practice of anti-fascist solidarity:

> The anti-fascist struggle discloses as a lie their nationalist and chauvinist rhetoric, all their celebration of the selfish values of capitalism … anti-fascism proves for everyone and forevermore the untruth that people are above all selfish individuals, the untruth that people have to hate one another. (Močnik 1999, pp. 72–73)

In short, their anti-nationalist stance is not political, but managerial. That is why they can hold hands with the multiculturalist demand for a greater respect for identities, and that is why some of them have even been involved in approaches to the "gendering" of former Yugoslav societies. Gender for whom? To do what? Their management manages out of existence, silencing, for instance, the legacy of Yugoslav feminism in the shape of the Anti-Fascist Women's Front. Rather than insist on politics proper, on the rewriting of political possibilities that will transform not tolerate, they aim to make society tolerable for themselves. Gender, in their terms, just like multiculturalist politics, is the reduction of social conflict to a friction among many identities, recasting cultural, religious and ethnic difference as "sites of conflict that need to be attenuated and managed through the practice of tolerance" (Brown 2006, p. 15).

Gender, in these terms (and this is Wendy Brown again)

> can be bent, proliferated, troubled, resignified, morphed, theatricalised, parodied, deployed, resisted, imitated, regulated … but not emancipated … gendered regimes can be seen to share a predicament with global capitalism: each is available to almost any innovation and possibility except freedom, equality, and collective human control. (Brown 2005, pp. 111–112)

In this vision, gender tolerates but it does not transform. Constructed in this way, and following the capitalist imperative constantly to reinvent itself, gender is a mono-experience in the great multitude, rather than an analytic tool, shedding light on the questions of subordination and inequality. Used like this, gender is a part of the problem, not its solution.

2. I am relying here on the indispensible critical and theoretical breakthroughs by Branimir Stojanović and Nebojša Jovanović.

In Bosnia and Herzegovina, in the memory transaction that takes place every day among its different generations — from those born in the 1920s and 1930s who remember the anti-fascist struggle, to those born after the wars of the 1990s, to whom living in ethnically divided societies is presented as the norm — gender, perceived as a mono-experience, supports further societal segregation. This fosters what Balibar (1991) has termed "meta-racism", in which different cultures can only coexist by living in separate ghettos.

I am arguing that the proper political way — a more effective one — is to insist on a "gendering" such as will establish a new temporality, a temporality that blasts the linear continuum of attempts at revisionism and maintains a fidelity to past failed attempts at social transformation. This kind of temporality simultaneously maintains a fidelity to the loss of transformation and a commitment to learning how to "stumble" and "stutter" anew on contingent ground. Such fidelity and commitment do not entail a lamentation about past failures of social transformation, but allow us to reignite our political imagination — the evocation of past failed attempts at social transformation serving to articulate new political subjectivity.

The Field of Cultural Production in Bosnia and Herzegovina: Ground for the Articulation of Hopeful Politics

Srebrenica

1995
1996
1997
1998
1999
2000
2001
2002
2003
2004
2005…

I wish I could
At last
Lie me down
In that grave
Which is not there
By my child
Who is not there
To keep his hands warm again… (Duraković 2007, p. 98)

The lone voice of a mother haunts and disturbs the official political interpretations of and bartering over bodies without bones. The words of the poem come before the words, "Leave that bone alone, it is not yours". They are the words

of bones put "on hold" by the dominant biopolitics, bones caught between two deaths — waiting for death to be marked in the symbolic. The speaking subject assumes the empty place of the bones, speaking on their behalf. The speaking voice also reappropriates and rearticulates what is presented by the dominant as the linear temporality of transition: "1995, 1996, 1997, 1998, 1999, 2000, 2001, 2002, 2003, 2004, 2005…". This now becomes a new, rewritten temporality: the temporality of bodies without bones; the temporality of a mother, who, together with these bones, is caught in between two deaths; a mourning subject who stutters and stumbles. This mother learns "a different way of living time", in which "the future is unmoored from parts of the past" — from those neat delineations of political negotiations: now the war stops, now peace ensues, now we are in "transition". Here, mourning is a creative process: the mother's plaint constructs a site both for commemoration and for the body without bones. She is caught in the web of petty politics — ranging from the straightforward denial of genocide to the haggling over the numbers of the missing — the politics that affects her life and the whereabouts of her child. She does not even have the comfort of identifying a piece of clothing, not even an empty bomber jacket. All she has is her mourning, its absences and silences — ellipses.

How are the traumatic events and loss in this work being harnessed for a more hopeful politics? I would argue that the political critique voiced in the mother's plaint rests on the inversion of the meaning and the address of her plaint. As Freud has argued, melancholic discourse, as a "plaint" in the old meaning of the word, cannot be taken at face value, but should be understood as proceeding from a "mental constellation of revolt". In this revolt, the melancholics "are not ashamed and do not hide themselves". Everything "they say about themselves is at bottom said about someone else" and "they are far from evincing towards those around them the attitude of humility and submissiveness" (Freud 1991, p. 257).

Here, therefore, the plaint of the mother should primarily be seen as a critique addressed to the ethno-nationalist biopolitics that currently manipulates trauma and loss. If we understand this critique as the mother's revolt, then she is opposing the humility and submissiveness that the ethno-nationalist biopolitics requires of its subjects. The plaint of the mother says: I am not ashamed to show my pain. I am not hiding it. My child does not have his grave, but is buried somewhere in an unknown mass grave over whose disclosure you barter, scoring your political points, telling us how to mourn, keeping us all "on hold" and living off us. These are my wounds. "And they speak a terrible truth. In their ellipsis and silences they dismantle your authority: the vanity of your mimetic narratives and your monumental history; the metaphoric emblems in which you inscribe The Great Book of Life" (Bhabha 1992, p. 66).

> They gave me his t-shirt and the top of a track suit. When it was buried, the top was blue. But now, it wasn't blue any longer, it was decomposed and it wasn't Grandpa's. Grandpa's top I knew, this one I didn't. (Šehabović 2007, p. 13)[3]

3. All translations are mine.

This is the beginning of a short story by Šejla Šehabović, one of the most promising young women writers in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Through her work, she problematizes war, post-war transition, identity, belonging and silenced women in the cultural memory of Bosnia and Herzegovina. This particular short story is entitled "Ruvejda". In it, a 25-year-old narrator from eastern Bosnia, now living in the USA, returns to Bosnia to give a sample of her blood to help identify her grandfather's remains. It is a story of the retrieval of male genealogy in the cultural memory — the reconstruction of male fate and identification — through blood samples harvested from women. But not all women are "good" for identification — only mothers, daughters, sisters or granddaughters, those with direct blood lineage. Married women, who only have their husband's last name, not his DNA, cannot assist in identification. "Granddaughters are good for identification", the narrator continues. "They don't remember anything, they don't cry, and they are not afraid of needles. They are also good because only they are of male blood. The blood is most important. Irreplaceable" (Šehabović 2007, p. 17).

The narrator shifts constantly back and forth between two cultures: Bosnian and American. The translatability of signs between these two cultures is constantly negotiated: the memory of the grandfather, a tailor, who used to iron the legs of trousers and, in the apartment of the narrator's lover, an ineptly hidden trouser leg belonging to the trousers of the lover's wife and protruding out of a wardrobe. The trouser leg is blue, like the grandfather's top. Who hides and attempts to delete what in cultural memory? And why?

In attempting to uncover the protruding trouser leg belonging to another woman, the narrator — interrupted by a sudden question from her lover standing behind her, "What is it you're looking for inside there?" — spills red wine on the carpet, leaving, as the narrator says, "a blood red stain" (Šehabović 2007, p. 21). She walks away from the apartment, slamming the door as hard as she can.

> "Do you have a number we can call you on to let you know about the results of the DNA analysis?"
>
> The official was compassionate this time. She came from one of the European countries and will probably use all this to write her Master's thesis.
>
> "I only have my American mobile. But I've switched it off."
>
> "If all is OK, there will be no need for you to give another blood sample. Sometimes it takes us several attempts, because everything is so badly organized here."
>
> She looked at me conspiratorially. I grabbed the back of her tiny, Asiatic hand, and snatched the sample lying on the desk. I put it in my bag with such speed that she barely managed to let out some half-articulated sounds of amazement. Rising from her chair, her mouth gaping, she watched me leave.
>
> That was the last time I was in the morgue. (Šehabović 2007, p. 21)

This is a brief moment of decision; a moment of an act which cuts through the symbolic; a Bartleby moment of subtraction, of "I would prefer not to". As such,

this act does not make sense within the symbolic parameters of organized identifications, of the biopolitics of ethno-nationalism, of anti-nationalist beautiful souls. It establishes its own logic, its own parameters. In this act, the bottle with the woman's blood stains the symbolic and, precisely because it maintains and insists on the gap between societal regulations and the void of their absence, this stain stands for the collapse of the existing symbolic order. That is, it insists that the symbolic order is "non-all" (Žižek 2006, pp. 382–383).

The question ahead is how to construct an order that gives body to such a stain, one that does not attempt to wipe it clean. An approach could be: how to effect the coming to power of a woman who has snatched her own blood sample?

Conclusion: A Political Critique of Culture — the Snatching of the Sample

"Our identification process is almost completely locally driven. Our labs in Bosnia and Herzegovina have assisted identifications of the World Trade Center victims and the Tsunami victims. We are helping the government of Iraq as well". The American diplomat nods in satisfaction. In the end, all this money poured into Bosnia following the war is not for nothing. There is something to show for it.

But is this the "target"? Is this the "deliverable project"? Is this "empowerment" or "building local capacities"? Is the only option for Bosnians to be given a niche in the international service industry as experts, assisting around the world in the identification of mortal remains? To produce material for somebody's Master's thesis? To be a case study? Is that the only way to ensure translatability?

In terms of knowledge production, what would be the equivalent of a Bartleby gesture, the equal of our narrator's act of snatching the sample? Surely this would be to reclaim the means of knowledge production — a reclamation that would go beyond legitimizing one's position solely based on personal experience, to one which would insist that the regulations on which rests the current division of labour of knowledge production, the current distribution of power, are non-all.

This "snatching of the sample" echoes an argument put forward by Agamben in his essay "In Praise of Profanation". To profane, according to Agamben, means "to return to common use that which has been removed to the sphere of the sacred", but which is not a mere restoration of a "natural use" of that which was removed. Profanation, for Agamben, is not limited to the abolition of the form of separation "in order to regain an uncontaminated use that lies either beyond or before it" (Agamben 2007, p. 85). The activity that results from profanation becomes

> a pure means, that is, a praxis that, while firmly maintaining its nature as a means, is emancipated from its relationship to an end; it has joyously forgotten its goal and can now show itself as such, as a means without an end. The creation of new use is possible only by deactivating an old use, rendering it inoperative. (Agamben 2007, p. 86)

To gender the bone means to profane it — to repeat "Leave that bone alone" — to snatch away from the apparatuses the possibility of the use of the sample that

they have captured. In such a reclaiming of possibility, new uses open up which go beyond the nationalist versus anti-nationalist binary and rewrite the very parameters of the possibility of use.

The stance of the political critique of culture is that which makes possible the translatability of such profanation. This depends on international ties of solidarity that, bound together, keep open the gap between societal regulations and the void of their absence; that together profane. A political critique of culture goes beyond area studies and makes the world its home.

How can we insist on transformation amidst resignation and scepticism? Profanation, as has been discussed here, resembles the words of Raymond Williams, who, long ago, at another time of resignation and scepticism, articulated "practical hope":

> We can also be sure … that while many of its forms will be extensive and pervasive there will be certain decisive confrontations, with very powerful opposing forces, which will all too sharply remind us that we are attempting cultural *revolution* and not some unimpeded process of social growth. But what will get us through such confrontations, and in some important cases into them, is not only association and organization; it will be also … the "material force of the idea: the production and the practice of possibility." (Williams 2005, p. 273)

"[T]he production and practice of possibility."

I am back in what is called a "reassociation centre", where bones are neatly put together to make up a body — or what is left thereof. I am no longer translating because a young Bosnian woman, an expert in forensic anthropology, is doing her presentation in impeccable English. Suddenly, I am confronted with several tables on which these bodies reassume identities, regain names. On one of these tables there is a piece of skull, a femur, ribs and teeth, and a chart indicating the bones that are still missing. "But there's enough to take the sample and establish the identity", says the young woman.

As I turn around and leave the room, the only thing I can see is the gaps in the skeleton. I reach for my mobile with a strong urge to call several people and tell them how this makes no sense. They are all far away, some in different countries, but nonetheless I want to tell them that I love them. I want to give them those bones that are missing.

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