

Somatosphere Presents

A Book Forum on

Health and Wealth on the Bosnian Market: An Intimate Debt by Larisa Jašarević

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In [Health and Wealth on the Bosnian Market: An Intimate Debt](#), Larisa Jašarević explores the mutual entanglement between the economy, living body and the good life in postsocialist and postwar Bosnia. Beautifully written and theoretically sophisticated, this ethnography is a key addition to scholarly literature on debt, moral economies, medical anthropology, and material bodies. We are pleased to offer the following commentaries on this remarkable book.



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Inextricable

TATIANA CHUDAKOVA

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Jašarević's beautifully evocative, itinerant ethnography weaves along and sutures together trajectories that, at first, might appear to stand at a distance, their collocations seeming accidents of wandering. On the one end of *Health and Wealth* there are the open air, small scale markets, typical of post-war, post-socialist Bosnia and many other post-socialist spaces, where a multitude of commodities, from banal but inescapably needful objects to desirable, but frustratingly frivolous acquisitions, lay claims to the limited financial resources and sprawling social obligations of those who make a living, dwell in, or amble through these spaces. On the other end, we find practitioners of traditional (as well as new, previously unseen) therapeutic modalities, who share their gift of relieving suffering through a variety of exchanges, substantial and not. We also find patients, who seek comfort from ailments that tie back directly to markets, the management of debts, the obligations of giving, the effort to survive, and the desire to live well.

Jašarević's writing skirts carefully and provocatively around some of the familiar concepts, explored at length in medical anthropology, that link the economic and the bodily. In this, I find Jašarević's approach especially productive of new conceptual possibilities precisely because the text refuses, to view contingent and precarious edges—where debts, gifts, commodities, and therapeutics change hands and sediment in lived bodies—as a corollary of political neglect, or of impeded flows that preclude “access” to presumably better, pricier biomedical certainties. Instead, the ethnography shows quite the opposite: a zone of superconductive care – a care both in the sense of “tending to” and of “preoccupation with” – the dubiously bound and alarmingly efficacious bodies of others and of the self. In reversing Isabelle Stengers' (2002) account of how modern medicine constituted itself by hinging its efficacy on the ritual of the scientific trial (Jašarević 15) and, by implication, on the production of the abstract body, therapeutic pursuits in post-socialist Bosnia are focused on whether a treatment, technique, or substance might work for always concrete (and therefore concretely odd) embodied beings (Chapter 4). The body, in other words, is not something that can be taken for granted.

The concrete oddness of bodies is not the only conceptual provocation in Jašarević's account. In discussing *strava* (Chapter 5), the insistence on the materiality, or the “thinginess” of medical materials and curative intangibles, is remarkably helpful in avoiding the temptation to reduce to a purely symbolic form or to some version of a “meaning response” (Moerman 2002) the different *materia medica* that appear “incoherent” from the perspective of both biochemical and anthropological idioms. And, on the other hand, as Jašarević alerts us, taking such materialities seriously redirects one from the temptation to see in the mobilization of potent substances and activities only the contingent and unruly assemblages of multiple non-human actants, with a human presence variously bracketed out (195). Here, it occurs to me that both approaches -- the one that trains its focus on the potencies of the sign, and the one that insists on the inescapable uncertainties of what, actually, happens to work – are, in some way, stubbornly extractive, both preoccupied with the promise of an active ingredient (even if it cannot be found in the material itself), or with the frustrations of its impossible detection amidst the mess. There is something helpfully isomorphic for our anthropological thinking in *strava*'s insistence not to extract, not to detangle, but only to “take off” the uncertain sediments that result from bodies being produced in their fleshy pleasures and discomforts as always part of familiar and familial relationships of mutuality. Yet, by the time of the last chapter, “Queen of Health” (Chapter 6), patients, healers, anthropologists – and readers – are all firmly entangled in networks of mutual obligations. And while the Queen herself is careful to remind the anthropologist that none of this intimate indebtedness and its bodily efficacies ever stand entirely outside of capital, neither is capital prior to it.

The itineraries that tie the market to therapeutic sites where traditional and other forms of medicine are practiced are concretely material. Jašarević's ethnography demonstrates that such patient travels are open-ended, and yet one does not wander at random: cartographies of care are perfectly tangible matters of careful exchange and discursive curation. In this, Jašarević's anthropological attention also offers a unique methodological model for an itinerant ethnography that does not string sites along a commodity chain or trail particular institutional networks, but attends to patternings concerned with lateral movements across all kinds of social surfaces: on the one hand, the cyclicities and bounded circuits of economic obligations and, on the other, the fugues enabled by therapeutic pursuits. These turn out to be intimately connected, a relation that, at times tightens, and at others, loosens and expands, but, embodied, can never be fully escaped.

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Indebting Others

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Sometime in December, I glanced at an article on the increasing automation of the service industry. All I remember of it was that the journalist admitted that most mornings, she avoided the local coffee shop in her neighborhood in favor of a chain where she could get her coffee without having to interact with another person. This struck me at the time as awful, and another instance of how extreme our commodity-exchange society has become in urban, affluent parts of the globe – where one can go an entire week without even the token obligation of saying “Please,” “Thank you,” “How’s it going?” or “Fine, thanks,” much less any other humanly-mediated exchange of goods or services. With this in mind, I was looking forward to reading Larisa Jašarević’s new book, *Health and Wealth in the Bosnian Market: Intimate Debt*. It was, as expected, a plunge into a world where such a coffee experience seems flat out impossible, and not just because it would be difficult to find coffee to ‘take out’ and drink alone.

The read was a holiday gift that offered up multiple pleasures, among them, a view into the complicated and seemingly contradictory world of post-socialist, post-war Bosnia, where ephemeral communities form and dissipate (à la Jean-Luc Nancy) in the two primary sites for the book: in local markets and in the pursuit of health care. These are communities that transcend the ethno-national, religious and other institutionalized differences for which Bosnia is more often known. The book was also an immersion into a world where daily economic transactions are thoroughly embedded in the local social order through gift exchange, even though these are structured by the world of hard commodity exchange in the form of inadequate fixed incomes on the one hand and undeferrable deadlines for high-interest microloan payments on the other. All this is presented in elaborate, evocative prose that strives to capture the collective experience of what it is to live in Bosnia at this particular historic moment, one where neoliberal globalization has eviscerated most of the national economy, particularly larger-scale manufacturing.

Jašarević deploys the indefinite pronoun to include the reader as well as herself (as both objectifying ethnographer and homegrown participant), in what it is to be a person in contemporary Bosnia rather than to be Bosnian. Thus, in Bosnia, “one can be left with no one obvious way to pay or extend a gift, but might feel obligated and indebted in a convoluted way

that leaves one with no means of responding graciously” (p. 17), or “Incomes and profits hinge on one’s willingness to lend money to others, to extend goods and services on credit, to wait for payment, and to secure alternate sources of money if the clients’ deferrals of debt settlement upset one’s own schedule of loan installments and investments.” (P. 28)

This inclusive ethnographic voice is particularized by an abundance of stories of memorable people, in specific circumstances, with singular talents, kinship relations, afflictions and prosperities. They are mostly middle-aged or older, living “on the edge.” Many once enjoyed a socialist professional career and middle-class lifestyle that now defines their expectations for “living well.” They are traders and their customers, pharmacists and medical professionals, health-seekers, and a healer-queen. We encounter them in open-air markets, in trains, taxis and buses, in lines in pharmacies and in waiting rooms of various health providers, from the biomedical to mixtures of bioenergetic, herbalist, augury, and Koranic. They are intertwined in webs of indebtedness that comprise gift-like exchange relations, always owing and obligated and incessantly lending and giving. They exchange to acquire for themselves and family but also to provide others with not just needs like medicine, house repairs and bank loan repayments, but cosmetics, sweets, “most-modern” fashion items and the sacred annual vacation – the things necessary to “live well.”

These are never anonymous actors engaged in terminal, disembedded, commodity-exchange, but people who turn even money into a gift – as when a trader indulgently lends a customer money to pay for a vacation, because she has faith not that it will be “repaid,” but that it will be “given back” (p.95). Likewise, the commodities traded here are never abstract exchange values but always use-value particulars of consequential materiality, holding out potential for outright gifting or some kind of exchange depending on the moment: flower bouquets, colorful nail polish, local honey, out-of-fashion pants, Coca-Cola, medicinal Japanese mushrooms, cell phones and cheap but sparkly costume jewelry. At the same time, medical care and pharmaceuticals once provided by the socialist state have become increasingly commodified and more difficult to bring into the gift economy. The book is thus a masterful example of how the financialization of neoliberal capitalism globally can both increase commodification of areas once enclaved from such pressures, but also, counterintuitively, decommodify both commodities and exchange relations in local flea markets. As Jašarević demonstrates, in such sites of exchange, left-over and out-of-date things that are nonetheless material, displayable and giftable, circulate among people shut out of productive and institutionalized “normal” employment. Although she draws explicitly on Marxian thinkers,

the book seems more in dialogue with work drawing on Simmel and Polanyi (though she does not mention them). It furthers our understanding of how contemporary societies are complex mixtures of gift- and commodity-exchange principles – often in ways that this classic opposition fails to capture. It also illustrates the need for far more nuance in what counts as a commodity, when, and under what conditions, than Marxian definitions allow.

Jašarević makes the case that in Bosnia, people living lives of incessant, inescapable indebtedness are thereby inculcated with a “disposition to generosity,” or a habitus of sharing, rather than just the calculating strategists Bourdieu depicts in his elaboration of Maussian gift-exchange theory. She celebrates the generosity provoked by intimacy-generating debt even though a major theme of the book is that this life of constant indebtedness is perilous to health and well-being, and, as she admits, no one else but the anthropologist calls it “generosity” or confuses market debts with gifts (p.104). The many accounts of her informants – friends, family, neighbors, pharmacists, healers, favorite traders and acquaintances – are convincing, in that generous affect does seem to flow between spheres of market and gift relations. At the same time, for me there is a melancholy irony to the fact that Yugoslav socialism is now remembered as a time of “living well.” It was also a time when people throughout eastern Europe expressed hope for conditions where one was not forced to go through informal networks to get things done, and yearned for the possibility of friendship and intimacy “free” of instrumental needs, unburdened from obligations, and sequestered from economic exchange. Simmel’s thought is instructive here, as it embraces the profound ambivalence of modernity and the effects of money; exploring what is gained and what is lost; how and when it matters; of alienation in freedom and of oppression in social obligation.

While sometimes I seek it out, this morning I avoided the regimented, branded space of Starbucks, where barristas are coached in what they can or cannot say, and every sight, sound, taste and smell is subjected to an abstract commodity logic (i.e., produced entirely with exchange-value in mind, combining freedom from obligation for the consumer and profit for the corporation). Instead, I chat with the middle-aged woman at a locally-owned coffee shop chain, where they serve branded coffee, and put a folded dollar bill into the tip jar; “Here you go, honey,” she says when she hands me my bagel. To identify both places as simply realms of commodity exchange is to collapse the distinctions between them. At the same time, they are infinitely more commodified than the coffee-commodity purchased at a Bosnian open-air market and gifted to create shared, momentary pleasures by traders burdened with mutual indebtedness.

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Bodies, Lives, Temporalities Unbound

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At the very end of *Health and Wealth on the Bosnian Market: Intimate Debt*, Larisa Jašarević makes an intriguing statement: “Over the course of my weekly visits in 2007, the queen would repeat to the audience of her patients: ‘I looked into her future and allowed her to write’” (p. 258). Coming at the conclusion of her sinuous, circuitous ethnography, Jašarević’s statement is a reflection on the nature of the complicated interpersonal relationships that develop over the course of long-term fieldwork. A central figure in Jašarević’s research, the queen was simultaneously a key informant, a gatekeeper, a mercurial enigma, an inspiration, and a critic, not simply for the inquisitive ethnographer but also for the patients who sought out the queen for treatment. As Jašarević learned over the course of many years, but often in ways that only became clear through hindsight, relationships between people are always unequal, always shifting, always partial, and always never fully known or knowable. Fieldwork itself is never a project of equality, completeness, or knowingness.

At the same time, Jašarević’s comment brings us back to a question that gains urgency as it circulates and builds throughout the book: for people who are struggling to cope with difficult pasts and difficult presents, how do they make sense of futures that are unknown? How do they cope when the precarity of their everyday lives and the worlds they inhabit are constantly shifting and swirling in ways that make it difficult to see or feel their way through into something approaching or approximating stability? How do they create a sense of self when their lives are constantly unbound by the realities of their daily lives?

In this rich, sprawling ethnography, Jašarević examines how ordinary people of all ages and from all backgrounds attempt not just to survive but to thrive in a postsocialist, post-war Bosnia. Her interlocutors are concerned with attaining a good life, whether that is getting by or getting ahead. Their pursuit of this oftentimes elusive good life and a sense of wellbeing is at times economic and at others biomedical. Yet as Jašarević shows so clearly, the economic and biomedical are not separable but intertwined and infused within one another. As such, the expenses and debts that people incur are constituted as relationalities of care and concern.

The queen emerges as a key figure in these relationalities. As a healer, she helps people overcome their ailments and troubles – physical, psychological, emotional, and metaphysical – and in so doing, guides them to move from difficult pasts and presents into, hopefully better, futures. The queen works by diagnosing and dispensing treatment plans, relying on encouragement and sensations of touch – even if she does not actually touch her patients but moves her body around theirs in ways that make patients feel that they have been touched. Patients pay as they can, but the debts that are generated and repaid are beyond the monetary.

In the queen's treatments, and in the many other ways in which Bosnians strive toward wellbeing, the confluence of past, present, and future becomes real, even palpable. Part of the queen's powers come from her ability to prognosticate, to prophesy, to divine what is not yet known, such as when she diagnoses medical conditions that are later verified by more conventional biomedical tests. The queen performs a knowingness that is rooted in an assertion that she can know the future. But the more intriguing part of this is that the queen is also presenting herself as someone who can control the future – or at least control what we know about the future. Here is where the queen's provocation "I looked into her future and allowed her to write" becomes both a moment of foresight and a moment of hindsight. The path of the queen's patients and of the ethnographer's work were predetermined but only realized in hindsight.

Or maybe they were predetermined in hindsight?

This relationality between anticipatory futures and realized pasts, as simultaneously both and neither, as forward-looking and backward-looking, is a constantly tantalizing presence and friction in the book. Curiously, it rarely emerges as an explicit theme in the analysis, even as it drives how Jašarević presents her material and how readers approach those materials. Jašarević elects a mode of ethnographic writing that is deliberately, occasionally frustratingly, nonlinear as she weaves between temporalities and spaces. The recursively self-looping journeys of explication that we follow would seem to invite us to think critically about how the people whose lives we are shadowing, and even how we as readers, grapple with positioning pasts, presents, and futures into some kind of relationality.

If Jašarević had grappled more directly with these temporal rearrangements, prognostications, and reflections, what would this have done to the analysis? How might we understand the debts that people incur and attempt to repay if we see them through the overlapping,

recursively self-looping webs and cycles of daily life that shape their daily lives? What is the nature of intimacy – of the “oddly bodily lives” (p. 13) – at stake here, when a sense of self, a sense of one’s body, a sense of one’s connection to others is constantly moving back and forth? And what is the nature of the person in a postsocialist, post-war Bosnia, when the person is constantly moving into and out of moments, intimacies, existences?

Ultimately, what we glimpse through Jašarević’s accounts of people touching, reaching for, reaching back, through bodies, through time, through space, is a person not as an autonomous entity but as a Möbius strip. Bodies constantly move into and out of themselves, one another, and their lives. Pasts, presents, and futures collide, merge, blend, reemerge. Even ethnographic authors and ethnographic subjects blend into one another. Ultimately, what becomes so evident in this intriguing ethnography is that we are in a new moment when it is not just that bodies and relationships are unbounded, but that people, relationships, and temporalities are always one thing and another thing simultaneously. There are boundaries, but it is the boundary of the Möbius strip that is always inside and outside.

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Bodily Detours

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Health and Wealth on the Bosnian Market invites readers on a most provocative ethnographic journey, a journey that reveals how bodies fold out—pleasurably and painfully—into mundane affairs of money, goods, and gifts, into shared moments of care and compassion, strange suffering and suspicious trust. This ethnographic excursion shows also how conditions of economic precarity fold back onto bodily experience. Market vendors complain to each other about their pain, fear, and stress as business is down; one marketgoer is seduced into purchasing a pair of green leather gloves though they cost more than she can normally afford; and many men and women, young and old, relentlessly try to find a good and genuine healer who would restore their bodies and good life, as they continue to struggle with unpaid debts and unreturned loans. What may appear, initially at least, an invitation to *tour* sites of bodily healing soon turns out to be—most fascinatingly—a *detour* through spaces where bodily life, market exchange, magic, and healing practices converge in unexpected ways. The ethnographic itinerary is a detour—a roundabout route rather than a straight trail—precisely because it is counterintuitive in relation to its object: A study about healing in Bosnia, some readers might think, is about biomedical facilities or postwar interventions on ethnicized bodies or collective trauma. But what *Health and Wealth* so beautifully and painstakingly shows is precisely that such associations can appear naïve and futile if read against mundane life.

Hanging out at markets, traveling on buses and trains, visiting people’s homes, and attending various kinds of healing sessions in towns and villages, Larisa Jašarević argues that, to understand bodily lives in contemporary Bosnia, it is essential to renounce the idea of the body proper. The widely popular paradigm of a thing-like body that is self-contained in its sovereign individuality (3) and rooted in the biological organism of biomedical discourse (121) fails to account for what Jašarević calls *oddly bodily lives*: “the ordinarily strange materiality, extensity, and animacy of the bodies, the kind of vitality that is uncontained, worked up irresistibly through bodies’ contact with so much else, potentially everyone and everything else” (13). For example, healing practices such as *strava*, a traditional therapy that treats bodily disorders associated with stress, nerves, and trauma, among other things, illustrates quite well what *oddly bodily lives* are all about. In *strava*, bodies can be healed at a distance, after (or even

before) actual contact with that body or its intimate possessions. “Intimacy,” Jašarević argues, “extends one’s presence beyond the immediately sited body, with disordering consequences” (210). These are bodies that can extend through touch, but not only, and thus expand in space and time.

Health and Wealth does not set out to depict an alter-ontology—an ontology drawn from or seeped in cultural alterity. Quite the contrary. What Jašarević describes as “moments of ontological uncertainty” are historically situated events that are animated by competing and often contested understandings of bodily domains. Of particular historical salience is here the articulation of bodies and markets. Indeed, in Bosnia, bodies are perceived to have changed since the end of the war in 1995; there is more suffering, there are more afflictions; there are more venues for healing. Market vendors express their stress over debts or slumping sales by talking of bodily afflictions; they are nervous, feeling cold, and worry about ending up in a mental health institution. As the Jašarević puts it, “skin and bones participate in the toil of collecting funds and generating surplus value to pay back interest” (97), rendering “the market as a thoroughly bodily affair” (127). And therewith, a deeply historical one at that.

I find this argument fascinating and certainly convincing. As with any provocative *detour*, however, I am also left thinking about a possible *retour*: how a theory of oddly bodily lives can also attend to how the body proper—not as a real thing but as a *fetish*, a *fantasy*—is now hegemonically engrained in globally circulating idioms of biomedicine, commodity aesthetics, and media. How can we also account for the processes through which, in its global circulation, the *fantasy* of a self-contained, individually sovereign body is repetitively inscribed onto and forced upon desire, flesh, and myriad particular forms of embodiment? (I may be excused that, in asking these questions, I am slightly departing from Jašarević’s own analytic language, bringing in concepts that are central to own thinking). One ethnographic moment in the book posed this question for me. After dismissively noting the false extravagance of her departed customer, whom she called a “peasant kid,” Selma, a market vendor “next started fiddling with her daughter’s shirt, attempting to tuck the straps of her daughter’s bra beneath her tank top before giving up, frustrated: ‘Why didn’t you sew those together?’” (75). This example prompted me to reflect on how images of particular, desirable bodies circulate, creating both the hierarchies against which bodies are evaluated and, perhaps, also frustration with the impossibility of being or becoming the desired body image. Amidst expandable and expansive embodiments, what kinds of fantasies do *images* of self-contained, perfectly shaped bodies generate? Is there an awareness of “lack,” of an inability to ever become that image, a lack that,

as Jacques Lacan would have it, drives desire? Or, do the dynamics of oddly bodily lives refigure, rescale, and rearrange the seductive qualities of such commodity images? How, in other words, does the fetishistic body proper of advertisements, commodities, or television inscribe its limits into the otherwise oddly bodily lives of everyday Bosnia? This might be a marginal question for an otherwise extraordinary book on the oddly bodily dynamics of ordinary life.

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Precarious Workers and Political Community *in potentia*

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Health and Wealth on the Bosnia Market: Intimate Debt is an achievement of originality and imagination. By documenting how “existential worry is the norm” (131) and “indebtedness is the human condition in contemporary Bosnia” (257)—indeed, what “human beings have in common” in “oddly bodily” ways—Jašarević’s study expands significantly how we conceive precarity and its effects. I immediately began thinking with it, and not only because I also do my research in the city and region—and new conditions of “the market”—where her research takes place. Where she moved among traders and healers, my research is on the activism of workers from industrial firms confronting the effects of the privatization and bankruptcy of formerly socially-owned companies. I focus in particular on the claims-based forms of politics workers practice when they do not have recourse to the usual tactics of withholding their labor: protest rallies, occupying public space in tent encampments, hunger strikes, among other actions. Most are aimed at recuperating months, if not years, of unpaid salaries and social and health insurance contributions – and to restart production in factories idled by debt and disinvestment. Reading this book opened up fresh insights onto the debilitating stakes of disemployment, the indignity and injury of debt, and the logics that animate syndical activism.

For example, Jašarević’s study shows how the radical reduction of financial resources and access to the formal health care system that come with disemployment drastically curtails one’s ability to participate in the gift-debt economy. This limits one’s capacity to create the wealth and value that comes from accumulating, deferring, and discharging/giving debt-gifts that, in turn, extend care and sustain health, add some measure of pleasure to “just surviving,” constitute the grounds of being-in-common rather than merely being, and that create the non-monetary or non-economic surpluses that can “redistribute fortunes and reorder health” (17). And because participation in the gift/debt economy is acutely felt and embodied, concerns about one’s relative standing in debt/gift relations and circulations can itself constitute a form of suffering, or being “worried-sick” (*sikirancija*); here disemployment is a source of bodily disorder that inhibits its treatment and remedy. This is compounded when that disemployment is caused by inefficacious, even punitive debt.

In this regard, I found particularly valuable two disconnected observations in the text: the first was that many of Jašarević's interlocutors were outraged at having to pay back micro-credit loans with interest, particularly when such loans were extended with a humanitarian ethos. This was because Bosnians "hold them to a standard of the informal, personal loans that are interest free" (93). Elsewhere she finds Tuzlans criticizing the health clinic and social care center for being "on the outside of the gift economy" (162). That people desire or expect the gift/debt economy to extend into all domains having to do with health and the conditions for well-being, and that all debt relations should to some degree follow the logics of interpersonal relations of loaning/gifting, suggests a re-consideration of the kind of debt loaded onto workers through the privatization of companies that were once socially-owned and self-managed by the workers.

For example, cases abound of wealthy or politically-connected individuals who take out bank loans, ostensibly to invest in and "modernize" production – but without any intention of investing or paying back the loans. When they default, fail to pay worker salaries and insurance contributions, and production collapses, it is the workers who are saddled with the effects of company debt. Workers think of the company as "theirs"—as it once was, before the state turned socially-owned firms into state-owned firms during the 1990s war—but not the debt. Not surprisingly, they act utterly unbound morally by the idea that these bank loans should determine the future of their factory and their lives.

However, the injury of such situations is made all the more acute not only because workers suffer the effects of debt that they did not take out, but also because these debts have no human face, do not facilitate present and future relations, gave no benefit or enjoyment, and clearly fall outside of the moral logics and actual exchanges of the gift economy. If indebtedness is the human condition in Bosnia, some forms of debt are experienced as inhuman – they destroy the conditions of common humanity rather than sustain it. Jašarević's conceptualization of debt points us to the embodied nature of indignity, a political emotion that animates much syndical activism as well as the moral logic of worker demands.

These insights inform why so many of the political tactics of these disemployed workers draw attention to and focus on their suffering. Jašarević demonstrates that economic suffering is not only embodied but relational, that seeing or hearing about others' suffering can generate the same in the beholder, revealing a "solidarity among the bodies" (36), "an extended contiguity of a living human that thoroughly involves the self with the other when it comes to

concerns over health and death” (121). Indeed, if stories or displays of suffering compel care or extensions of credit in more interpersonal contexts (such as pharmacies or among the market traders), might they not do something similar for those on hunger strike or blockading the entrance to a factory campus with a hastily constructed tent encampment? By carrying out acts that underscore their vulnerability, these workers regularly proliferate participant roles of giving and receiving care. When they receive it publicly—from fellow citizens, Red Cross volunteers, other workers/union, and individual municipal officials—they underscore both the legitimacy of their claim to be cared for and the illegitimacy of a government which refuses to give or secure such care. This may or may not succeed in moving government in desired directions, but it does sustain a critical “being-in-common” and political community *in potentia*.

Following Jean-Luc Nancy, Jašarević seeks political potential in “communities of disposition” that are inoperable, “potent for as long as [they] escape any formal recruitment” (140). Her examples range from the waiting rooms of various health experts to gathering among traders’ stalls in the market or around obituaries posted wherever people live and congregate. Yet it would be fruitful to read Jašarević alongside Butler’s recent theorization of the political charge of assembled precarious bodies (2015). For example, unemployed workers have regularly gathered outside of various cantonal government buildings in Tuzla, ostensibly to protest the lack of justice regarding a range of privatization- or bankruptcy-related grievances. But much of the actual time of these protests are spent in smaller groups, usually with people gathered around a worker who is sharing some detail of their lives, some implication of the injustices and injuries they face. Others form a circle, clustered around the speaker, murmuring or commenting or “nts-ntsing”. Those present may or may not know everyone assembled; some may have belonged to the same firms, many did not. These are indeed “circumstantial communities,” “at once arranged by historical, economic, and social circumstances, but also decidedly spontaneous and recurrently empathetic, caring, and sharing, effectively making a difference in how it feels to live on the edge, every day” (140). Yet such circumstantial communities do not always remain inoperable. Rather this political *in potentia* can emerge into effective, if provisional, forms of popular sovereignty. This happened in February 2014, where over the course of three days, a mostly routine protest of such unemployed workers in Tuzla touched off a more generalized uprising that overwhelmed state security forces, pressured the cantonal premier and his government to resign, and gave birth to the plenum, an unprecedented experiment in democratic decision-making and polity-formation. Many observers wondered at this discharge of social force and popular energy, particularly from a

population long believed to be passive, precarious, and inert. It is a gift of Jašarević's book to identify forms of being-in-common that might ground an otherwise political.

Work cited:

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On Ethnographic Affinity and Affection

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Many years ago, when I read an early version of the text that would become the second chapter of Larisa Jašarević's remarkable new book, I found myself mesmerized by its stunning, exquisite and at times, downright opulent attention to the details of everyday life in postwar and postsocialist Bosnia, a place-in-the-world that the author and I share in more ways than one. Reading the account of an (otherwise insolvent) mother's ingenious plan to acquire—through deferral and a sort of harmless collusion, a pair of green leather gloves for her daughter, to match a pair of boots of the same hue, no less—I realized that I was encountering a truly special anthropological account of a place otherwise intimately familiar. Perhaps it was the story itself that grabbed me—a tale of stubborn and quite specific desire amidst limited means, or the manner in which it was told—beautifully and generously. Perhaps the story reminded me of the lengths to which people—my own family included—go to live splendidly. Perhaps I recognized myself and those I love in the small act of burying the gloves at the bottom of the pile. It is difficult to summarize why, but in a blink of an eye, I was in love—with the text itself, with the author's voice and the imaginative anthropological horizons which this piece of writing offered to me as another (and still inexperienced) scholar of Bosnian lifeworlds.

Stubbornly and deliberately resisting conventional tropes and questions, sites and figures, *Health and Wealth on the Bosnian Market* is not only a major and much needed addition to a burgeoning new anthropological literature on contemporary Bosnia (e.g. Hromadžić 2015; Jansen 2015; Helms 2015; Brković 2017), but also an original, highly readable and compelling contribution to medical, economic and political anthropology. The book descends into the stuff of everyday life in order to conjure up a veritable melee (to use a formulation of the constantly present Jean-Luc Nancy) of objects, some more familiar, like the market, gift and the body, and others more exotic, like *nafaka*, *sevap* and *strava*—and conscripts this mix in order to narrate Bosnia otherwise.

By remaining attuned to the informal exchanges taking place on the margins of a newly and violently marketized economy, Jašarević at once picks up and transforms the perennial debate

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that has reigned in Bosnia ever since the end of the war: how is it that people appear to be living so well when the local economy has been decimated by the privatization of industries, withdrawal of development funds and humanitarian assistance and widespread unemployment, now routinely measured at over 40%? Jašarević provides a pointed, theoretically sophisticated and original account of this “statistical unreason,” by ethnographically tracing the intimate debts which produce not only obligation but value and possibility itself. What’s more, by charting out socialist-era logics, patterns and expectations of consumption, she gets us to pay attention to the ever-evolving interweaving of wealth with health. A case in point: a trader responds to her question of what it is like to work on a market by showing her the contents of her bag, comprising many medications, both prescribed and acquired, which testify to the *oddly bodily* ways in which the so-called postsocialist “transition” is lived and experienced. Indeed, it is the body itself that is the star witness of the postsocialist upheaval and the principal ethnographic object of this book.

Jašarević is a keen ethnographic observer and a master storyteller; her work could best be described as anthropology of affection, by which I mean at least three things. First, her ethnographic accounts bubble and overflow with love and regard for those she encountered in the field, whether they are familiar faces or mysterious healers, like the one-off Kraljica, who is a constant object of attention, interest and desire. To be sure, these forms of love are complex and unfinished, haunted by occasional moments of anthropologist’s own whispered protest, over the ways in which she was emplaced and the demands placed on her by others. The care and generosity with which she offers these portraits is only matched by the ability of her text to invoke, interpolate, break hearts and make fall in love. An ethnography of a myriad of embodied afflictions (see for example, the list on pg. 176) does not only follow in the trail of various remedies, curative substances and therapeutic practices, but offers itself as a form of a restorative affection. Last but not least, Jašarević’s unique ethnographic style harnesses affective capacities of these stories and ethnographic objects in ways that change and transform the reader, and invite her to reimagine the tools and tactics of ethnographic exportation itself.

As a fellow Bosnian and a fellow anthropologist of Bosnia, I read Jašarević’s work with a sort of awe and wonder, marveling at ethnographic treasures she manages to excavate, and the richness and deliberativeness of her prose, which reveals so much, especially to knowing eyes and ears, intimately familiar with her own ethnographic tracks and the worlds into which she breathes new colors. Her account of the Bosnian everyday life and economy rings so true and

so familiar, yet the skill with which she manages to capture that reality is inimitable. The Bosnia that emerges in her book is to me the Bosnia of my own life, the forms of care, attention and hopefulness, that structure my own affective orientations and anchor my sense of being in the world, even as a long-term diasporan Bosnian (as well as a fellow anthropological researcher of the region). She, more than any other living ethnographer of Bosnia, manages to give texture to the complex of embodied and sensual orientations that registers as home. What's more, she invites us all to pay better attention to that which seems mundane, or alternatively—too strange, to those things that do not register as keywords, anthropological or otherwise, and in doing so blasts open an exit from the aporias of tired political narratives that continue to besiege Bosnia and the world alike.

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Gut Response (or Do Obsessions Expire?)

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Generosity is contagious. Inescapable, come to think of it. Insufferable, if in thinking it, some of us would like the bliss of a fresh start, a clean slate, the relief of stories, field-wise and otherwise, that end. The gift of reading & writing time that you have jointly expanded on the *Health and Wealth on the Bosnian Market: Intimate Debt*, the sheer brilliance and bright details of insights you offered have lit up the tinder at the potlatch party, which is the *Somatosphere* Book Forum itself. For a literally-minded author, this is more than serious. A response is due but I am, from the start, outmatched by your initial generosity. Whatever I do—and I may even do well—will not cancel the initial gift-act, which I register with a mix of shame, undue affect (could I hug you? Pledge my service? At least shake your hand?), and the tight, however-named but unresolved knot in my gut that quickened since I read what you wrote, thinking that I have to write back.

Put differently, the book is an attempt to recount the implications of generosity at a scale of both one particular historical terrain of cultural economy and, because generosity is potentially unbound and unpinned, to explore the visceral, relational, habitual circumstances that generosity more generally generates elsewhere, potentially everywhere, though always with a difference. Generosity is spurred by the formal market conditions for exchange that regularly traffics in non-monetized surpluses (as our Book Forum does) and variously attributes debts and appreciates values. But exchange always also hinges on the bodily-framed extensions, appropriations, and mediations of value and its transformations into wealth. Bodily efforts, embodied temporalities and dispositions underlie and undergo the business of exchange. In the Bosnia-Herzegovina I studied, the implications of this simple proposal tend to the extreme. All exchanges, it seemed, were skewed towards the tall expectations of gift-giving, and many were consequentially indebting, while the transactions interrupted bodily affairs and raised medical concerns that further embedded one in such a market capable of extending far into the domains of home, street, or clinic, and further, to organ tissues, to tactile interfaces between fidgety fingers and attractive things, to high ideals of and frustrated desires for solvency and real efficacy.

Caldwell describes my ethnographic writing as “deliberately non-linear, occasionally frustratingly” so, and wishes for an explicit theorization of the selves composed in the itinerant temporality. Fair enough. In a way of an answer, “looping” between the protracted and the unresolved (debt) and the forward-looking possibilities (a windfall or a cure), which are other than futures, entails, indeed, a back-and-forth modality and recursive historicity of the past—but not expired—quasi-determinations (a diagnosis). Importantly, this modality unfolds within the meantime of recurrent and overlapping extensions and deferrals: this is no simple “present,” but is the time and the matter of experience. Put another way, whatever the Queen might have seen when she looked at my future could not have been anticipated at any instance of our encounter, over the years. All of us who sought her (more than clinical) attention, found the terms of our relationship reshuffled from one meeting to the next. The achievements in our understandings—on my end: how the Queen touches, what I may ask, and on a patient’s end, perhaps: ‘what is the matter with me, is this working—would not necessarily transcend the given meeting. In that sense, the history of our encounters did not add up neatly to a retroactive or prophetic future. Which is not a comment on the Queen’s ability to extend her prognostic gaze to the pre-phenomenal but rather a trial for an ethnographic writing and understanding. Because it was not just the “one-off Kraljica” as Kurtović well puts it, that charged me with understanding events as temporal convolutions with significance and embodied consequences that cannot be subsumed by the final directionality of how the ethnographic story goes. “Detouring” was not so much a clever research method as an artifact devised after the fact, making sense of the mode I adopted by default, improvising, following the quotidian trails between market and medicine, while in ethnographic pursuit of the elusive: bodily experience. Detouring seeks to invoke the graininess and the gravity of the experiential, taking place in the time marked by the openness of informal debts, which anticipate repayments but without the reassurance of unilinear flows and stable outcomes.

Similarly, stepping into differently marketized medical practices, I encountered therapies that treated bodies and medicinal objects as at once concrete and present and temporally and spatially extended in ways that challenged my sense of the here and now. In *strava*, the traditional but revamped therapy for anxiety and depression, patients were treated remotely, via traces and extensions achieved through familial and amorous relations, especially those broken off, as well as contacts barely or yet to be made. The therapist, reciting Quran, works on the affected gut, while her therapeutic-diagnostic purview presumes the visceral tense of the past and the prospective. Chudakova, working on Tibetan medicine in and beyond Buryatia,

is most probably sympathetic to my theoretical insistence on the materiality of bodies and efficacy of practices whose anatomies and techniques are routinely translated into biomedical indices, at the risk of being rendered fantastic by the act of comparison. And Chudakova is spot-on, though steps ahead of me, in articulating the point that the method leads away from the “stubbornly extractive” approaches that favor either the meaning-making Subject or the distributed agency of ontologically flat actants.

Moreover, taking seriously the working propositions that guide self-care and medical practices in contemporary Bosnia requires not just troubling the universal body proper, medically or otherwise normative, but considering the common “oddness” of bodies. Meiu raises a crucial question: do the oddly bodily dynamics refigure the seductive qualities of the global fantasy of the body-proper, indexed by various commodities? One answer could be issued from the Queen’s clinic, where bodies presumed by different cosmologies (Islamic, traditional, biomedical) are referenced and variously subverted by the practice that is conversant with them yet self-consciously divergent (“do not compare me,” the Queen demands). The insistence on incommensurability is itself undermined by the Queen’s translations and comparisons, as when she fondles the page of the human anatomy atlas. Caressing the images of muscles and nerves, the queen claims to see the insides of her patients’ bodies looking “just like this” but different. The Queen, reportedly, sees them “alive” and she touches them, without hands, at a distance. The proposition excited me to no end as I thought it with Jean-Luc Nancy. What excited is not Lacanian “lack” but something that Meiu should find like/unlike, or resonant with difference: distance. Skin, the iconic point of access and withdrawal, can be stroked, even transgressed to the point, but the limit is reasserted and re-energized, particularly while the subject is invested in drawing close or approximating (the dear other or the ideal of properness). Among the therapists, bodily surface is not limited by the skin as the mark of anatomical and volitional autonomy, but extended in sensible-intangible ways in which senses, thoughts, wishes, and appetites plunge bodies into the world while the distance remains the condition of possibility for touching. It allows a break, distinction, a breathing room. And yet, this is a precarious distance. Not only does it allow contagion but invites disorders brought about too much touching.

In fact, the book is commenting on the pervasive fantasy of the universal body in a different way. Fehérváry picked up on this when she noted the inclusive, indefinite subject pronoun I use to refer to “one” or “some” and “us,” inclusive of the dear readers as well as people encountered in Bosnia. This summoning trick is playing up the carnal commonalities that

presumably link us while also counting on the shared if not universal body *improper*—contiguous, prone to contacts and contagions. The anecdote that Fehérváry reports—about a journalist’s avoidance of the neighborhood café in favor of a coffee chain—I read as the evidence of the oddly bodily ways in which we are caught up in market exchanges, everywhere. The journalist cannot bear contact that, without hands, touches too much. Modern commodity does not relieve us of the pressure just rearranges the field that is Nancy’s nightmare: *immunditia* “underworld” of extreme, spontaneous intimacy, where distances are collapsed, and bodies cannot not touch.

Gilbert’s fine reading is touching on this point, while thinking it on the grounds of political protests, workers’ dispossessions, and various forms of activism which, Kurtović deftly shows, blend different genres of grievance with visceral-ethical cries of injustice. I could not be happier that the implications of “circumstantial communities” are taken seriously alongside with more formally political assemblages around Bosnia-Herzegovina but my (im)modest wish would be to draw closer to the limit. I can only drop hints: the particular materiality of the bodies on the edge, gathered around non-events (waiting for health, reading obituaries), is not exactly Butler’s concern, and is risky not just outwards (the way a “mob” is) but inwards, surface-upon-surface, to the subject’s gut, nerves, organic flows or structures. Another way to put this is that I wish (us) to tend to the gathering potential away from the analytic of “performativity,” which Butler foregrounds. “Inoperable” then might seem quite a resilient quality and yet the dispositions towards being together, the empathic charge (a “superconductivity”—to repurpose Chudakova’s marvelous word) they carry is powerful, resonant across different terrains, but unmanageable. Gilbert’s and Kurtović’s emergent graphic ethnography of industrial workers, I imagine, will run into the guts, so to speak, and I cannot wait to read how it goes.

It is only appropriate to end this response with a note on the gut. Kurtović’s most generous reading cleverly finds bodies to be “the star ethnographic objects,” the material, experiential witnesses of the post-socialist worlds whose quotidian excess registers as “statistical unreason.” Our mutual reading proceeds in-between the lines, where Kurtović also winks at the fact that ethnographers are, unavoidably, embodied subjects, rarely impervious to the worlds they study. The risks and stakes grow for those of us who know the ethnographic place otherwise, intimately, and may well become unreasonable, obsessive, unhealthy. My mother is relieved that the book is done, shelved out of sight, and—ever an optimist, thinks and thanks Goodness—that obsessions expire. Nor is she the only one. Such thinking-thanking concerning

us, the daughters of the place we designate as “home” with prepositions of movement (*to, back to, from* Bosnia), the inheritors of the unforeseen histories and its post- trajectories, we swallow indulgently and nurse the gut that balks.

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