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Youth Reimagining Citizenship and Identity through Protest and Counterpublics in Bosnia-Herzegovina

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I. Introduction

The Spanish Square, *Španjolski Trg* or *Španski Trg* in Croatian and Bosnian respectively, is situated in the former "no-man's land" of postwar Mostar, Bosnia-Herzegovina (BiH). Mostar was once seen as the multicultural success story of the former Yugoslavia, but became a contested site between the emerging ethno-nationalist parties[1] during the 1990's wars. In the literature, Mostar is often referred to as the "microcosm" for ethno-nationally divided BiH (Calame and Charlesworth; Hayden 2007). The nature of the division manifests itself in complex ways in the politics, institutions, and spaces of Mostar, as well as the daily life and social interactions of the city's inhabitants. Ethnographer Carabelli (2014) describes Mostar as a "social canvas" where ethno-nationalists explicitly re-appropriate space as a method of demarcating the city as either ethnically "Bosniak" or "Croat." Discursively, ethno-nationalists dominate the public sphere, restricting the articulation of alternative identities and visions for the future. And yet the city is also not quite an exclusively ethno-nationalist space. Indeed, I argue in the following pages that space and identity converge in Mostar in complex ways, and that citizens imagining alternatives to rigid ethnic identity utilize space to assert their rights.

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[1] Ethno-nationalism surged during the dissolution of Yugoslavia as political elites utilized ethnicity as a tool to mobilize masses (Jovic 2001). Today in Mostar it refers to the two major political parties: the primarily Bosniak Party of Democratic Action (SDA) and the primarily Croat Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ), which each use different political frames and strategies to mobilize voters and conduct policy based on ethnic identification

The Spanish Square is a uniquely "in between" place in Mostar not only due to its central location between the eastern (predominantly Bosniak and Muslim) and western (predominantly Bosnian Croat and Catholic) "sides" of the city, but also because it represents the ebb and flow of unrest and civic mobilization in this divided city. In many ways, the central area of Mostar remains a borderland, surrounded by ethno-national symbols that distinguish the eastern and western sides of the city[2]. Located along the Boulevard, the dividing line during the war in the early 1990s, the international community[3] focused its funding and rebuilding efforts on reimagining the Spanish Square as a postwar mixing ground for Mostarians following a discourse of tolerance and multiculturalism. Proclaiming the Spanish Square part of Mostar's Central Zone[4], the international community emphasized reconstructing the war-damaged Mostar Gymnasium as a symbol of ethnically integrated education, building a Bruce Lee monument to represent Mostar's renewed multiculturalism, and establishing several NGOs to revitalize society. These efforts were part of a larger scheme to politically and spatially unify Mostar, met with intense resistance from ethno-political elites.

In Mostar, identity and space appear to be contested by ethno-nationalist elites on the one hand and the international community on the other. While the international

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[2]The Mostar Gymnasium engulfs the Square, boasting its reconstruction in coats of orange and yellow paint, while behind the Gymnasium the tall tower of the Franciscan Church and the Jubilee Cross atop Hum Hill define the predominantly Bosnian Croat side of western Mostar. Heavily damaged buildings still exist on both sides of the Boulevard, the main street that runs parallel to the square, but the damage is more extensive on the eastern and predominantly Bosniak side of the city, as it was heavily shelled during the war.

[3] Here, international community refers to the main countries and organizations involved in the reconstruction of BiH, including the European Union, United States, OSCE, USAID, etc.

[4]As part of the reconstruction and reintegration of Mostar directly after the war, the Central Zone was established as a "neutral" area in Mostar's 1996 Interim Statue. Ultimately it was a shared political space for joint control by Mostar's two vying nationalistic parties, HDZ and SDA. The agreement that established the Central Zone thus institutionalized the ethnic divide in the city created by the war. "In such a divided city, it is a comprehensible paradox chosen as a figure with no links whatsoever with the place, so that it would serve as a common symbol" (D'Alessio 2009: 22)

community has actively attempted to (re)create Mostar as a multicultural city, it has been met with fierce ethno-national resistance. Furthermore, the international community labels Mostarians, youth in particular, as apathetic and disengaged. My research about the 2014 social unrest and its manifestation on the Spanish Square counters both ethno-national and international discourses, revealing how the Spanish Square is reimagined by citizens as a site of occupational protest and ultimately a statement on alternative identity. The Spanish Square embodies the counterpublics of resistance in Mostar that give life to new identities through the language of rights.

This paper relies on theories of public and discursive space to examine how certain citizens search for alternative meanings and identities than the one afforded to them by ethno-nationalism and the international community as apathetic and disengaged. The Spanish Square represents one "alternative" or "in between" space, nominally accessible to the two majority ethnic groups in Mostar: Bosnian Croats and Bosniaks, caught in an ethnicity-citizenship nexus. The negotiation of identity through exclusionary processes of "us" vs. "them" are formed in public space[5] in Mostar and extended into the public sphere, as "who belongs" in public space becomes the question "who belongs on this side of Mostar, or who does Mostar belong to?" This process generates certain categories of citizenship, such as Bosniak and Croat—each ethnically reproduced because there has yet to emerge a singular, encompassing "Bosnian-Herzegovinian" identity. In this sense, there is no notion of a "citizen" of BiH, a situation heightened by the wartime destruction of social capital and political legitimacy. On the Spanish Square enters the Lefebvre's (1968) notion of "rights to the city" by transforming urban space. It

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[5] Private space (i.e. the family) also plays a critical role in shaping identity. Those who criticize the Habermasian public sphere such as Nancy Fraser (1992) might even argue that private and public space cannot be totally separated

acts an "in-between" space allows for publics to reimagine and negotiate BiH identity (ethnic vs. civic), activism, and citizenship.

Due to its central location and symbolic value, the Spanish Square has become the key location for citizens to express social discontent in Mostar. During the last two years, the Square has become closely linked to a particular form of occupational protest, especially amongst youth. These protests include the "Chocolate Revolution" that mobilized young people against nationalism generated by soccer rivalry, the "Baby-lution" that brought citizens together to demonstrate against governmental incompetence, and the student-led "Erasmus Protests" that demanded inclusion in the "Erasmus Plus" European educational exchange program. This appropriation of the Spanish Square marks the emergence of *visible* alternative publics or substitutes to the democratic politics only nominally available.

Despite the modest outcomes of the protests, I argue that they signify a potential reimagining of identity and citizenship. As one interlocutor said, "during the protests we came as *citizens* into the public space, not as NGOs or political parties." I will first describe several waves of protests that occurred on the Spanish Square before discussing the Spring 2014 uprising in order to demonstrate the alternative publics and the tactics they use in the struggle over the Spanish Square. Then through the protests and plenums of the Spring 2014 movement, I will reveal how participants in this alternative public voice their deep-seated frustration and anger, and visualize a new future for their city by demanding the restructuring of power relations. This occurred through two major events during the protests: first, the action of burning government buildings symbolic of ethno-nationalism; and second, the occupation of public space. By visibly burning buildings and

occupying the Spanish Square in the center of Mostar, citizens claimed to practice "real"

democracy by exercising their rights to expression. Utilizing the language of rights,

protestors exercised what Lefebvre (1968) calls the "right to the city," or the right of all

citizens regardless of ethnicity, citizenship, or gender to participate in the processes that

shape the city. By using the language of rights as a strategy to revitalize the public sphere

in Mostar, the struggle over the Spanish Square becomes visible, a crucial component in

legitimizing the demands of the protestors (Mitchell 2003), as well as revealing a

generational divide among those involved over the sites and tactics of collective action in

public spaces.

II. The Spanish Square: Mostar's Go-To Site for Protest

Spanish Square
Source: Taken by author in April 2014

While the Spring 2014 social unrest is the most prevalent example of mass

mobilization in Mostar, it is important to note that this movement builds on events from

the recent past. A series of organized and spontaneous collective protests took place on

the Spanish Square between the summer of 2012 and spring of 2014, offering Mostarians new opportunities for visibly exercising their right to expression and demand for political alternatives. In the following section, I investigate the alternative avenues of civic action and citizenship that were "awakened" by the protests. Masso (2012: 124) writes that in urban spaces "citizenship finds...a place to be enacted and demanded." In the Spanish Square, protestors enact new forms of citizenship and make claims to belong to this space, as they claim it as theirs to occupy. This appropriation of the Spanish Square marks the emergence of visible alternative publics or substitutes to the democratic politics only nominally available.

A university student named Aleksandar told me about the affectionately named "Chocolate Revolution," named after the chocolate that was communally shared as a way to bring people together after the riots that began when Croatia lost to Spain in the Euro Championship in the summer of 2012.[6] These riots incited ethno-nationalist rhetoric in Mostar. Aleksandar said, "I remember my friend saying, 'if the soccer fans share punches, we can share chocolate.'" He laughed, remembering how hot the day had been. Even though hundreds of bars of the donated chocolate melted and many grocery stores ran out of bottled water due to the high number of people from Mostar and neighboring cities attending the event, Aleksandar still felt that this "revolution" brought together the citizens of Mostar and showed that common problems could be discussed without reverting to violence and extremism. He had never before seen Mostarians coming

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[6]The two soccer teams in Mostar are divided along ethno-national lines. D'Alessio (2009: 13) writes: "Sport is typically a space of interaction but also of national symbolism, which means a source of both cohesion and conflict."

together in such a way, and afterwards began volunteering at the organization AIESEC[7].

His experiences fundraising and organizing for the "Chocolate Revolution" awakened in

him a public service spirit that he describes as dormant until that point.

The "Chocolate Revolution" was a Mostar-specific event that I was unaware of

before this conversation. I did know about the Baby Revolution or "Baby-lution" as it

had spread across both entities of BiH during the first summer I spent there in 2013. In

February 2013 the governments of the separate ethnic Bosnian Serb and Bosniak-Croat

entities of BiH reached an impasse regarding identification numbers allocated to newborn

children. A three-month-old baby who needed to travel to receive critical medical

treatment was unable to receive care, and subsequently passed away. I was teaching in

Tuzla, a city in northern BiH, when the "Baby-lution" began, and I remember the outrage

of my students over the needless death of the baby. In my creative writing class, one of

my students wrote a passionate short story about the human rights of children. Her voice

reflects the horror that many in BiH felt when they realized that the incompetence of their

government could lead to human casualties. Protests in numerous cities sprung up due to

outrage across the country over the perceived ineptitude of the BiH government.

In Mostar, the "Baby-lution" protests took place on the Spanish Square, drawing

an increasing amount of demonstrators from both sides of Mostar. Across the country,

this moment was heralded as the first time that all ethno-national peoples of BiH were

uniting after two decades of division. After the "Baby-lution" dissipated, a man named

Muharem Hindic "Musica" remained in the Square, continuing to protest each day. He

became the honorary leader of the social unrest later that spring. Many of my

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[7]AIESEC provides young people access to global internships and leadership development opportunities on campus and abroad (https://www.aiesec.org)

interviewees marked the "Baby-lution" as the "spark" that eventually ignited the unrest in Spring 2014. "But did a baby have to die for the government to hear our cries?" one asked. The "Baby-lution" demonstrates the deep mistrust, anger, and shared frustration of the BiH public. This "revolution" and the "Chocolate Revolution" in particular also reflect the public's willingness to discuss problems without resorting to violence.

The third protest on the Spanish Square began in December 2013 when students expressed their concern that the government would not sign an agreement to join the "Erasmus Plus" student exchange program that would allow BiH students to study abroad and receive scholarships in other European countries. The student demonstrations began in Sarajevo and quickly spread to other cities. An interviewee described how there were 100 protestors on the Spanish Square for several hours. At the time, this was a monumental number, and the interviewee could not imagine that a few months later there would be thousands demonstrating on the Spanish Square.

The so-called "revolutions" on the Spanish Square represent the need for common meeting spaces in Mostar in order to facilitate networks of civic action. Caldiera (1996: 315) writes that at the core of the conception of urban public life "are notions that city space is open to be used and enjoyed by anyone, and that the consumption society it houses may become accessible to all." This is an ideal type as cities are always marred by social inequalities and social segregation. However, this ideal of open space—through which common values are fostered—remains central to the notion of public life and by extension democracy and citizenship. Caldiera describes how spatial segregation diminishes interactions across social groups, causing "the fiction of the overall social contract and the ideals of universal rights and equality which legitimated the modern

conception of public space [to] vanish" and limiting the possibility of democracy in this new public sphere (Caldiera 1996: 323). The lack of open public spaces in Mostar prevents citizens from engaging in public discourse that is a critical part of the public sphere and by extension of civil society. However, during each cycle of protests, demonstrators occupied the Spanish Square to force it to act as an open space. The discussions and actions that emerged from this occupation reimagined the Spanish Square as a makeshift town hall where all inhabitants of Mostar could express their needs and demands as equal citizens. By physically occupying this space, they transformed its purpose from an internationally imagined neutral "mixing" ground into an embodied form of protest.

III. The Generational Divide in the Protests

Burned Government Building
Source: Taken by author in April 2014

The first images of the Spring 2014 protests circulated around the Internet depicted chaos and destruction. Government buildings were burned and vandalized, such as the one depicted in the photograph above. While many other images of the protests showed thousands of people peacefully taking to the streets across BiH to demonstrate in solidarity with the original protests in Tuzla, the media, politicians, and protest leaders

largely blamed Mostar's young people for the "hooliganism" and vandalism of the burned government buildings in early February. The silencing of youth dissent and categorization of youth as hooligans is to be considered within the context of ethno-political parties, which feel threatened by any move from civil society. An interlocutor once told me, these parties consistently "try to breed new, loyal, blind ethno-political party members."

Many of the university students I interviewed who had not participated in the "day of the burning buildings" viewed the destruction as discrediting the value of the protests in the eyes of many across BiH and the international community. They stressed that the violent acts should be viewed as completely separate from the organized protests, rallies, and plenums. However, for several young protestors in Mostar, the most indicative sign of the protest's success was the fear that the politicians showed while the government buildings burned. The protestors believe that "arson is the only way to be heard" and that "violence is articulate." In this section, I attempt to reconstruct "the day of the burning buildings" through the narratives of two young people present at the "violent" events in Mostar. They stressed that the burned government buildings were targeted as symbols of those in power. The act of burning selected buildings signaled not only social frustration, but also a strong stance against nationalism and a call for justice shared by the people of BiH.

The burning of governmental buildings is spatial destruction, rather than spatial occupation, a starkly different approach to protests than the non-violence promoted by past protest and the current protest leaders detailed below. While this act was often categorized as "violent," many young people claimed that this act was necessary to catch

the attention of the ethno-political parties and the international community. Omar considered the true violence and destruction of Mostar to be the fault of the politicians, who have become alienated from the people they were meant to represent. Furthermore, protestors specifically targeted the buildings that seemed the most removed and alienated from the alternative public, namely government institutions. By destroying what they perceived as the locus of their frustration, those who burned the buildings used these spaces to symbolize the goal of the protests: to demand to not only be heard but also to be *seen* and recognized as legitimate actors in the public sphere.

Ethno-nationalist politicians and media sources attempted to reframe the debate as ethnic and nationalist rather than discuss the socio-economic issues voiced by protestors in order to detract the public debate and refusing to consider anti-government reasoning behind the protests. For example, one party claimed that the gatherings would bring about inter-ethnic violence and a war-like situation (Bosnia-Herzegovina Protest Files 2014). By framing the events in such a way that focused on violence and youth troublemaking, ethno-nationalist actors were able to avoid sustained discussions of the intentions behind the protests. Many politicians sought to evade responsibility by blaming each other for the destruction of the buildings and the social unrest. This overlooked the fact that in Mostar, both nationalist headquarters were burned, suggesting that protestors were not targeting one national party or ethnic group, but rather the dysfunctional government in general.

I became increasingly intrigued by the usage of "youth" by both protest leaders as well as ethno-nationalist political and media sources. The term *youth* appeared to be a scapegoat for responsibility, an avenue to pinpoint blame for either the failure of the

protests to make concrete changes or for the violence that occurred. While youth are especially characterized as apathetic or "dwelling in the space of tomorrow" (Carabelli 2013), youth clearly played a significant role in the initial days of the protests. I organized interviews with students from both of Mostar's universities[8]. Many interviewees had been involved in the early February protests, and asked them to describe their version of the February events and their aftermath, with particular attention to the topic of youth (dis-)engagement as well as the burning of governmental buildings.

According to those present, there was a sense of energy as opposed to apathy in Mostar during the protests. "I know what I saw: a lot of angry people, thousands, walking from the Spanish Square to the government buildings, calling for others to join them, doing something together, united," said Omar when I asked him to describe the early days of the February protests. He is a technology student at the Dzemal Bijedic University of the eastern side of Mostar. A sense of entrepreneurial investment in his country prompted him to participate in the protests in early February, but like many other young people, he has stopped attending demonstrations. Jan offered his own version of the events in early February. He describes the scene in early February with excitement, as if he can remember every moment as clearly as if it happened yesterday. "Mostar never felt like this. There was no traffic, no police. On the streets, I recognized friends, professors, and even soccer fans from rival [soccer] teams together. There was energy in the air." Jan initially disagreed with the burning of the government buildings. Then he realized that taxpayer money would go into rebuilding them anyway. Indeed, the ethno-nationalist headquarters were renovated by the time I came to Mostar in April, while the

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[8] Mostar's two universities are divided along ethnic lines. However, there appears to be a greater degree of mixing at the university level due to economics, as the eastern (and primarily Bosniak) university has lower entrance fees.

shared city government building remained in ruins. On the third day of the protests Jan's curiosity drew him back to the Spanish Square, and he noticed that there were fewer people on the streets. The Spanish Square was swarming with special police, creating an atmosphere that Jan described as "intense, but not ethnic." Now he believes that burning the buildings was a necessary act to attract the attention and even the fear of the politicians. He said, "They had to be set on fire. Nothing can be achieved here without violence like that."

Omar had a similar opinion of the burned buildings, responding that he is a "great fan of provoked social change," and defines "violence" only as the damaging of human life, not buildings[9]. The burned buildings were meant to send a clear message to the politicians that the public was frustrated. However, to some citizens the flames that went up across BiH were a reminder of the bloody and destructive 1990s war, a catastrophe that no one wants to recur. Omar believes that the older generation demonstrates in the Square because they do not want to repeat the violent events of twenty years ago. He explained that due to the war, it is part of the "collective past to be scared," but this particularly impacts the older generation who instead promotes nonviolence. Yet, Omar believes that no one in Mostar wants another war. His father died during the war, and he refuses to accept political ideology that plays on wartime fears. Young people feel frustrated with the peaceful methods of the older generation that is primarily involved in the continuing demonstrations on the Spanish Square. "You lose too much time on a

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[9]Tilly (2013) would call this structural violence, or "physical violence built into the institutions of the society—that is, institutional violence—with the purpose or consequence of maintaining domination or oppression" (289). This is also what an interlocutor referred to as "the system," or the government that works to oppress and subdue the populace. Considering the internal debate over physical or structural violence leads me to the intergenerational and methodological fractures in Mostar's protests.

message of peace!" Omar exclaimed. "We young people don't just want to destroy property because we are frustrated, but because we want to change society."

Omar's voice represents a profound intergenerational fracture in Mostar, between the nonviolent approach of the older generation and the impatient frustration of the younger generation. Two decades after the peace agreement that ended the war in BiH, few of the young people that I interviewed have direct memories of the war. The common theme that I noted during my conversations with youth was that they feel frustrated with the slow, time-consuming approach of the older generation. The older demonstrators on the Spanish Square advocate nonviolent resistance and strength in numbers; however, they are paralyzed in decision making due to the numerous, divergent demands for change held by individual members. Young people, on the other hand, do not approve of this "Gandhian" methodology and want fast, visible results. Chatterjee (2014: 66) writes that if protestors want to be effective "they must succeed in applying the right pressure at the right places in the governmental machinery. This would frequently mean the bending or stretching of rules, because existing procedures have historically worked to exclude or marginalize them." This has been the case on the Spanish Square, where young people have found creative, alternative means to be heard and seen in public. Politics and civil society generally exclude and marginalize youth in the public sphere, forcing them to devise new strategies. Now I turn to the "older" generation's sustained occupational tactics on the Spanish Square.

IV. The Ethno-political Divide of the Protests

Protests on Spanish Square
Source: Taken by Author in April 2014

The chaos and energy of the "day of the burning buildings" differs starkly with

the daily demonstrations on the Spanish Square. Demonstrators met every day from five

to six or seven in the evening, blowing whistles, waving signs and banners, and making

impassioned speeches. They used six Otpor! flags[10] as well as signs that called for the

engagement and activism of young people. At times the demonstrators chanted "East,

West, North, South," calling together the different sides and corners of the city. I arrived

on the scene on the 69th day of the protests, as the demonstrators told me proudly.

Between seventy and one hundred people came to protest in the Spanish Square every

day that month, rain or shine. The majority appeared to be around sixty years old.

Standing on the sidelines as I observed the demonstrations, I saw only a handful of young

people at the edges of the event.

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[10]Otpor! was the movement that overthrew former President Slobodan Milosevic. A friend of mine in Mostar explained that the demonstrators now use the Otpor! flags to make a statement against the dividing tactics of the government and politicians

When I approached a group of protestors with a small notebook in hand, one man was enthusiastic to tell me his side of the story. He told me how he had been a journalist, but during the protests he had been fired because he refused to make inflammatory nationalist statements. "The media tries to divide us here in Mostar, and make us protestors look crazy!" He explained how citizens from both sides of Mostar had come together during the initial days of the protests; however, the HDZ controlled media sources quickly began depicting the demonstrations as "pro-Bosniak" or "pro-Muslim," and blamed the Bosniaks for "invading" the western side of the city. The media promoted this perception across BiH, capitalizing on the fact that the majority of protests took place in predominantly Bosniak cities.

When I asked a young man and woman what they were protesting, the woman exclaimed, "Everything! We have no rights. Unless we are part of a political party, then we have rights, but politics is what divides us! We are trying to change the entire system of this country" the woman exclaimed. She explained that she had a degree in education but cannot find a job as a schoolteacher and instead works as a sales clerk in the mall. She blames the political system, because without affiliation with a nationalist party she cannot secure a job. "I am unsatisfied," she lamented. "Just like all of us here on the Square today."

Through the stories of the protestors on the Spanish Square that day, I learned that the majority of the demonstrators represent the unemployed, the elderly, and the Bosniaks of Mostar—in other words, the relatively marginalized inhabitants of the city[11]. However, these demographics had shifted substantially since the initial days of the protests in early

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[11]Excluding the Roma, who are perhaps the most marginalized community in BiH, Bosniaks are relatively less well off than Croats as the major industries are located in West Mostar

February, when the protests were heralded as a movement to unite the citizens of BiH across ethnic and religious backgrounds. When I asked what had ultimately divided the citizens besides the media, the man pointed across the Spanish Square, towards the western side of the city. "See the police?" he asked, and I noticed several policemen stationed around a van in the middle of the Spanish Square, several of them wearing camouflaged uniforms. "They keep us from crossing to the Croat side. They keep us divided, just like during the war."

Before my arrival in Mostar, the demonstrators had tried to cross the Spanish Square to pass the police. The protestors told me how they had approached the police with their arms raised, signaling their desire for nonviolence. However, the police had beaten them back, broken the collarbone of the protestors' unofficial leader, and took him and another protestor into custody. This use of bodily force against the protestors counters the use of another kind of force to destroy the government buildings. These two events demonstrate what Omar meant when he said that the "real" violence was used against the people by the government.

"They treat us like it is war," the man repeated, shaking his head in disgust. The protestors kept emphasizing their philosophy of nonviolence, both in their stories and the flags and signs they had put up around the Square, several quoting Gandhi and Mandela. An older woman approached us when she heard us talking about the police. "They are watching us!" she whispered, clearly frightened. She explained how the police had taken pictures of everyone present at the protests. She believed that the police are tracking their daily activities, ready to question or imprison them at whim. "That is why the Croats no

longer protest with us. They were all threatened, to lose their jobs, their futures. They are too scared to join us now. But we are open to everyone who is oppressed."

The man added, "Everyone who has a job is too afraid to protest, on both sides. That's why you only see us here, the unemployed, and the elderly. We have nothing left to lose."

The older woman chimed in again: "Everyone here in Mostar is good. I am Muslim. I don't care if you are Catholic. God is one. Everyone is here at the protest, all three people," revealing that she still believes in the unifying power of the protests.

These stories explained the predominantly older, unemployed, and Bosniak demographic of the ongoing demonstrations. But where were the young, educated people of Mostar? Where were the NGO activists? The group around me shrugged when I asked about the youth, but a man in his mid 30s, who would later tell me that he has a university diploma and speaks fluent English, approached us.

"We had youth participating with us, but they think peaceful protests are not the way," he said, referring to the government buildings that were destroyed in February. "They don't realize that we need to put constant pressure on the government by demonstrating everyday. Is it better to have huge protests occasionally, or small protests everyday? The power is on the streets!"

These statements largely capture the different tactics between younger and older Mostarians. The older generation seems to have an undertone that suggests that youth should be part of this movement in order for it to succeed, as they symbolize the energy and vitality of the protests.

IV. The Protest Leadership and the Language of "Rights"

On the 70th day of protests, I was invited to join a plenum meeting. The plenum marked a transition from purely protesting to the formation of "real" democracy in the form of a popular assembly through which Mostarians discussed social justice and demands against the government. These "democratic" assemblies were organized across BiH, with the strongest hold in Tuzla. Asim Mujkic, quoted by Tatjana Sekulic (2014: 11), stresses the non-hierarchical structure of the plenum: "Decisions are made by a simple majority of votes, each individual has only one vote, and everyone addressing the Plenum has his or her two minutes to be heard."

Two Mostarians named Nada and Adnan largely organized the plenum. Even though both leaders were young, they promoted the "older generation's" peaceful, non-violent resistance by occupying the Spanish Square everyday and making their demands known publicly through rallies and plenums. While these two leaders appeared to have leftist ideological leanings, the movement in general did not have a cohesive ideology or political stance. In fact, the movement attempted to be as apolitical as possible, responding to an environment where politics were deemed immoral and corrupt. Both leaders experienced government tactics to silence the protests, and feared that the lack of youth engagement could hurt the protests in the long-term. In the eyes of the university students who have stopped protesting, they represented the "older generation."

While I rarely saw Nada at demonstrations on the Spanish Square, she viewed the occupation of the Square as a key tactic and was active during plenums, where she would facilitate debates while Musica, the unofficial leader of the protest movement, sat quietly but attentively at her side. She was inspired by her experiences witnessing the 2011 Occupy Movement in Madrid while pursuing her master's degree in political science and

sociology in Spain at the time. She was offered a PhD scholarship but decided to return to Mostar in 2009, as she felt compelled to make a change in the city where she grew up. She returned to Mostar full of hope and idealism, believing she could make a difference in this city plagued by ethno-national division and youth disillusionment. "I was so wrong," she said. "The last three years I have been fighting with local authorities and each time I keep hitting a wall." However, when the protests began, Nada felt a renewed sense of purpose, as she believed that the Occupy Movement's tactics could help change the political situation in Mostar. While Nada did not herself use Lefebvre's terminology, the boom of recent social movements around the world in fact draws on his concept of the "right to the city" through occupation and use of public space to make certain claims about social justice and citizenship.

For Nada, "real" democracy could be realized through the plenums, which is where she focused her organizational efforts. By "real" democracy, she implied participatory democracy open and accessible to all citizens in BiH. She believed that this is not realized in Mostar or in BiH due to the constitutional setup and ethno-national control of the government. Indeed, public mistrust in the government runs so deep that activists such as Nada are afraid that ethno-political parties will coopt or further divide the movement.

Nada described herself as a victim of ethno-political engineering. After writing a newspaper column supporting the protests, the Minister of Education warned her that he could end her teaching contract at a Mostar high school. Furthermore, her family's bakery was threatened if she continued to attend the protests and plenums. As the bakery is her family's primary source of income, Nada had to end her overt participation in the

movement that she had been so passionately leading. This explains why I rarely saw Nada on the Spanish Square although she was involved in the protests. The threats from the government shook Nada deeply, but did not surprise her, as she believes it is a warning from the government to the protestors to "remain silent."

Shortly after observing the protests for the first time, I met Adnan, one of the public faces of the protests, in a small café next to the Old Bridge. We each ordered traditional coffee, served thick and grainy in a little brass pot with a single piece of *lokum* Turkish delight. Adnan had bright blue eyes and a soft voice, lighting a cigarette and blowing smoke out of the window, so that he constantly turned away from my tape recorder. He was resistant to disclose details about himself, except that he had grown up in Mostar and had only left during the war, and that he was currently unemployed. When I asked him why there were fewer people attending the demonstrations and meetings, he snapped to attention. He stubbed his cigarette. "It's the system of fear that causes people to drop out of the protests," he said, referring to the pervasive ethno-nationalism that overshadows politics. "The plenum is just the brain of the movement; only the protests with mass amounts of people can bring change. In reality, you need constant pressure."

Adnan looked frustrated, explaining that if even a small percentage of Mostar's student population participated, they could help bring change. "Do they think change happens overnight? They are involved in fake activism, maybe they go to some lectures about changing the world, but they are not on the street." I recalled my interview with Omar, who had voiced the frustration of the university-aged population with the slow pace of the daily demonstrations. While the protests and plenum meetings are to the protestors a catalyst for social change, to Omar they seem like a waste of time because he

does not foresee it as a mechanism for tangible and durable change. Furthermore, Omar attended the first and second plenum meetings, but felt that his voice was drowned out by the older generation who was frightened by his ideas. While Adnan is likely no more than five to ten years older than Omar, his leadership tactics oppose what Omar considers "action."

For Adnan, the plenum was the mechanism to disrupt the lethargy imposed on society, an avenue to having and using a voice otherwise excluded by politics. That was the only way to exercise rights in what he calls an otherwise "rightless" country. "In the plenum, we are all newborns, born equal," he said emphatically. His profound frustration with "the system" was clear when he spoke. He felt subjugated by his country's political and administrative system that not only lacked economic prospects but also lacked political choices. The massive number of demonstrators in early February revealed the deep-seated frustration shared by many people in BiH, but the dwindling number on the Spanish Square signaled to Adnan that "the system" was ultimately stronger and able to easily subdue the population, including the youth.

My conversations with different protest leaders and participants indicated that fear and mistrust had two edges, the first being suspicions about the government, and the second coming from the gaps between generations. Fear may intensify the experience of social difference through spatial segregation, and create new forms of inequality, thereby limiting the public sphere and democratic freedoms. In Mostar, fear is often manipulated as a mobilizing factor by ethno-political elites. These often elites solidify their power by playing on wartime fears of the ethnic "other," as can be seen by the ethno-politically manipulated media coverage of the protests detailed above. While the protests were

united during the initial days, such fear mongering quickly divided the protests along ethnic lines, reflecting the wider division of the city.

However, Caldiera notes that social movements may blur such distinctions because "when excluded residents discover that they have rights to the city, they manage to transform their neighborhoods and to improve the quality of their lives" (Caldiera 1996: 326). It appears from my interview with Adnan and my observations from the Spanish Square that many Mostarians have (re)discovered the language of rights, either through destruction of government property, physical occupation of the Spanish Square, or vocal participation in the plenums. Mostarians still face tremendous obstacles in exercising their new visions of the future and their claims of citizenship due to the restricted access to the public sphere. Fear and mistrust continue to be manipulated by political elites, who manipulate these emotions and the raw memories of the war to determine the outcome of social unrest. At least temporarily, the protests on the Spanish Square emerged as a visible form of discontent, where Mostar's alternative publics had an avenue to exercise their "right to the city" and demand to be heard by their political representatives.

V. Alternative Visions of Citizenship

"Nationalism is in direct opposition to human empathy," Armina said, capturing what she believes to be the main message of the protests. An unemployed masters student at the University of Sarajevo, she was involved in both the Mostar and Sarajevo plenums, and spoke passionately about the movement and the people involved. She believed that "Mostar is a peculiar case because a metaphysical wall in our minds divides us, but I think the protests can change this. I am not Serb, Bosniak, or Croat. Freedom is my nationality." Using the word "nationality," she revealed a new vision of citizenship that

she desires for her country. While nationality in BiH implies affiliation with an ethnic identity, she reimagines a "freedom" nationality, one open to all people of BiH, symbolizing their rights as citizens of one country. She saw it her duty as a human being and a citizen of BiH to take part in the protests, as a way to empathize with the plight of the people of her country. The poorest people, those who truly suffer, have no voice, Armina explained. The political platforms of nationalist parties do not consider socioeconomics a priority. She saw people from all backgrounds unite during the initial days of the protests, standing in front of government buildings with signs reading "we are hungry in three languages." The three languages represent the three constituent people of BiH, Serbs, Bosniaks, and Croats, who since the war have come to define their shared language in national terms[12]. Thus, these signs refute ethno-nationally-determined citizenship, and reveals that many people are more concerned about poverty, unemployment, and socioeconomic hardships.

Reflecting on Armina's words, the Spanish Square becomes the logical spatial location for the protests. Despite enforced police presence during the daily demonstrations, protestors felt relatively safe on the Spanish Square, as this place invokes no ethno-nationalist connotation. Instead, its very location along the wartime dividing lines of the city allows the protestors to transcend wartime memories and recreate the Square as an alternative public. Here, Mostarians can engage in discourse parallel to the political sphere that they reject for being dominated by mainstream ethno-national politics. In other words, the Spanish Square is a site of politicization whereby Mostarians become aware of their political agency and citizenship rights and thus make claims using

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[12]During socialist Yugoslavia, the language was referred to as Serbo-Croatian. Today it is called Croatian, Serbian, or Bosnian depending where you are and whom you are speaking with.

the language of rights. Lefebvre's "right to the city" citizenship disregards nationality, ethnicity, and gender as "rather it is earned by living out the routines of everyday life in the space of the city" (Purcell 2002: 102). While Lefebvre advocated a radical restructuring of power relations in favor of the working class, I have utilized the right to the city to demonstrate how protestors on the Spanish Square visualized a non-ethnic kind of citizenship (which my interlocutors term "nationality")—one open to all inhabitants of Mostar regardless of religion, ethnicity, or birth.

The increasing levels of mobilization on the Spanish Square demonstrate the shifting consciousness and demands for greater inclusion in the public sphere, which necessitates more inclusive notions of citizenship. The waves of protests build on the deep-seated frustrations of both younger and older generations. For civil society to function, not all Mostarians must be united along a single front, but should rather have the opportunity to engage in alternative sites for debate and collective action. However, the lack of unity during the protests also reflects the profound intergenerational and social divisions that persist in Mostar. Without common, open spaces to reimagine citizenship or nationality, Mostarians remain vulnerable to ethno-political engineering and divisive tactics. On a more positive note, the mass participation in the Spring 2014 protests potentially lays the groundwork for future mobilizations by connecting channels of civic action and active citizenship. Active protestors have promoted new interpretations of the very notion of citizenship or nationality through the language of rights.

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