The Noise Dissolves at the Border:

Affect and Mobilities in *Gastarbajteri* Buses

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Introduction

We were preparing to board a bus from Zurich to Croatia one evening in early spring 2021. I had previously left my luggage and occupied a seat before enjoying a final cigarette and a conversation with other smokers. The group was worried about the most recent set of COVID-19 restrictions and differences in the lockdown regimes and the numbers of those infected between Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Serbia. The Zurich bus station is a simple parking lot near the central train station that serves as the departure point for various bus companies, including those heading to the Western Balkans. During our conversation, we were interrupted by a woman in distress, struggling with an overstuffed, duck-taped shopping trolley bag. She sought help from the drivers to transport her bag to Eastern Croatia without her, explaining that she had accidentally chosen the bus to Bosnia, which had no room for her luggage. Initially, the drivers refused, but they relented after she offered to pay the fee and established herself as a regular passenger claiming it was simply a coincidence that she chose the bus that goes to Bosnia. Her problem was that the Bosnians[1] took too many deliveries not leaving enough room for bags of the regular passengers. The situation was resolved with an exchange of contact information and instructions for tracking the arrival. From the outside, this situation could appear unusual. How can passengers of a bus bound for

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[1] In this text, the term "Bosnians" refers to all citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina, while "Bosniaks" denote the South Slavic ethnic group that makes up one of the three constituent peoples of Bosnia and Herzegovina, with members also residing in Croatia, Serbia, and beyond. Similarly, "Croats" and "Serbs" refer to the other two constituent peoples of Bosnia and Herzegovina and other post-Yugoslav countries. In contrast, "Croatians" and "Serbians" are used to describe the citizens of Croatia and Serbia, respectively.

one country simply walk over to a bus heading to another and use it to transport their luggage? In the world of post-Yugoslav *gastarbajteri* buses, this was a common occurrence. After the matter was settled, the woman revealed that she was from a town in Northern Bosnia near a town in Eastern Croatia where this line runs. The drivers jokingly commented that it was not a coincidence that the Bosnian bus charges less, even though, in my experience, the difference was not that significant (around 100 CHF in both cases). This was not an isolated incident; similar situations had occurred on other trips to Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, and Serbia.

This chapter delves into the rhythms and dynamics (Lefebvre 2013) of the sensory environment experienced on *gastarbajteri* buses operating between Switzerland and Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Serbia. As social spaces, buses are sites of old friends' encounters, new acquaintanceships, long-held grudges, flirting, debates, singing, and a general good time mixed with sadness about split lives, border-crossing anxiety, the tension due to omnipresent small-scale smuggling, insecurity about the future, and the hope that migration will make sense in the long run. By examining the intersection of the affective turn and the mobilities paradigm in post-Yugoslav studies, this chapter aims to explore how space and affect correlate on these buses. Furthermore, it investigates the labor geographies (Herod 2001) of *gastarbajteri*[2] and the ways they evolve as individuals traverse different locations.

In exploring these dynamics, the chapter departs from another place that constituted Yugoslav affect, *kafana* (van de Port 1998; Hofman 2010, 143), or in its Western Yugoslav iteration, *birtija* (Opačić 2005, 19), and uses it to

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2   The term *Gastarbeiter* (German for "guest worker"), initially coined in the 1950s, has been abandoned in German due to its association with racist politics. In Bosnian-Croatian-Serbian (BCS), the term was adopted, albeit not without hegemonic implications, and is used to identify the demographics and culture associated with labor migration. For more on racialization and the choice to use the BCS term instead of the German term, see Kapetanović (2022, 87). I refer to BCS as a polycentric language based on the Shtokavian dialect of South Slavic; however, in instances where my sources use specific standards, I refer to the language as Bosnian, Croatian, Montenegrin, or Serbian only.

understand buses as a transitory space with similar qualities but different setting. Since the mid-1980s, small bus companies have been transporting labor migrants, *gastarbajteri* (Le Normand 2016, 50–69) between the (post-)Yugoslav region and Western Europe. Buses remain essential for the cross-border labor movement because they easily adjusted to changes in regional politics and fragmenting European transport regimes in the 1990s. Initially founded by local municipalities in the 1980s, these bus companies were privatized during and after the Yugoslav wars (1991–2001) and today are family-owned businesses. They continue serving local communities with capillary routes that reach smaller towns and rural areas. Long-time and recent migrants alike rely on these affordable and convenient buses for transportation between sending and receiving communities, although the latter insist on viewing them as temporary solutions before acquiring their own cars or using air travel. Because conventional buses lack the ticket classes found on airlines and trains, they are inexpensive and democratically uncomfortable. Those who ride buses are more likely to be working class, rural, and informal passengers navigating social systems from marginal positions. Even though some of these companies serve tourist destinations such as the Croatian coast or post-Yugoslav capitals, non-migrants and migrants from other regions seldom use them.

Examining the affective regimes in labor migrant buses helps to bridge the gap between identities and social practices in communities that transcend the nation-state. Building on Mankekar and Gupta's study (2016) of affective regimes in call centers, I define them as systems of relationships and intensities shaped by the space, labor practices, or economic exchanges that give rise to specific behaviors, attitudes, and performances. Through this lens, I aim to provide a fresh conceptualization of post-Yugoslav social life. Here I offer the concept of an "accidental Yugosphere," drawing inspiration from Tim Judah's term (2009), but reframing it beyond the complex and contradictory grid of identity politics and its attributed blind allies of shared politics, history, identities, or language. The chapter contrasts these debates by looking into the daily realities that labor migrants face when attempting to connect their places of origin and settlement. I do so by exploring the questions of senses, emotions, and affect

within the buses to develop a notion of post-Yugoslav commonality as shared collectivity or practice.

The fieldwork research comprised eleven return bus journeys from January to September 2021, with individual legs of the bus trips taking from 13 to 27 hours to complete.[3] Each trip began in either a country of settlement or origin and excluded regular bus stops in intermediate countries, except for rest stops at gas stations. During fieldwork, I engaged in unobtrusive behavior, interacting with passengers, staff members, border police, and service personnel at the rest stops, only when invited. To maintain a low profile, data collection consisted solely of textual, ethnographic notes recorded in a messenger app on my phone (Instagram). These notes encompassed personal observations, experiences, and comments from other bus passengers addressed to the entire bus or myself, without collecting any personal data (three connected data or more in accordance with the GDPR[4] pseudonymization/anonymization rules[5]). For example, when interacting with individual passengers or drivers, I documented the dialogue without gathering personal information to protect their identities. While I did not immediately advertise my research, I maintained transparency about my role if someone inquired about my presence on the bus or my occupation.

The original research primarily focused on buses as sensory environments and affective regimes as a means of building post-Yugoslav connections. Nonetheless, close contact with human subjects in such settings inevitably involves

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3   Research Project "The Politics of Migration and Identity in an Era of Rising Mobilities – Post-Yugoslav Communities in Switzerland" supported by the Basic Research Fund (GFF) at the University of St. Gallen, implemented from September 2019 to March 2022.

4   General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)—EU Regulation 2016/679 of 27 April 2016 on the protection of natural persons with regard to the processing of personal data and the free movement of such data and repealing Directive 95/46/EC.

5   As defined in Article 4 of the GDPR, no more than three data were recorded in interaction with one person. Data most usually recorded included locations. In cases where other data were recorded (age, sex, or proclaimed ethnic identity), locations (toponyms) were immediately changed to regions to illustrate the movement yet retain anonymity.

some form of testimony involving personal stories and traumas.[6] In these cases, I remained highly conscious of my co-passengers' personal data protection and ability to give consent, anonymizing any potential personal information by automatically changing toponyms and names.

An exception was made for a passenger from Srebrenica, as striking a balance between privacy protection and acknowledging and remembering the genocide felt necessary. In this instance, I altered the majority of other data related to the specific interlocutor to protect their privacy. While modifying other data, I endeavored to maintain similarities with related or relevant data (professions, toponyms, experiences), but this remains subjective. As such, readers should interpret this chapter as an account of personal experiences rather than an exercise in positivist science.

As I originate from Bosanski Novi/Novi Grad, a border town in northwest Bosnia with a high migration rate to German-speaking countries, blending into a labor migrant bus was not unusual for me. Throughout my childhood, I accompanied my mother on bus trips to Serbia to obtain merchandise (textiles, toys, and gas) that she resold at our local market. My younger brother works as a caregiver in Düsseldorf, and during our early years, we both exclusively traveled by bus to Austria and Germany. In addition, most of my elementary and secondary school classmates now reside in Germany and Switzerland. Although I did not find the extent of journeys and small-scale smuggling unusual and my identities remain relational and fluid, my privileges have not disappeared

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6   The concept of testimony I am referring to here is a specific practice and methodology developed by Noa Treister through the project "Testimony – Truth or Politics: The Concept of Testimony in the Commemoration of the Yugoslav Wars," implemented by the Center for Cultural Decontamination, Belgrade (2017–2018). Drawing on the methodology introduced by Sylvain Lazarus, Treister uses testimony (involving forgotten war veterans, factory workers, labor migrants, and minorities, as several days long, in-depth interviews and continuous relationships with her subjects spanning from the 2000s to today) to reveal the stories of those who were unwilling to justify the positions of the post-war and post-socialist regimes. These individuals were silenced through direct political repression and through systematic erasure of the frame of reference connecting these testimonies to the reality they purport to represent. Methodology and more information are available at the project website (https://svedocan-stvo-imenovatitoratom.org).

during this experience. While I felt like an insider on the buses, I recognized that this mode of transportation was a choice for me but a necessity for my fellow passengers. This difference in our positions highlights why, despite feeling close to these individuals and sharing a working-class background, I see the privilege of the middle-class salariat I inhabit as distancing me from claiming the label of a labor migrant.

Gastarbajteri Buses as a System: A Theoretical Framework

The *gastarbajteri* buses are practically transnational spaces, connecting developed regions of the European Economic Core (Hospers 2003; Netrdová and Nosek 2016) with sending communities in the former Yugoslav space, yet they remain unapologetically liminal and provincial. Regular commutes overflow with sensory experiences, such as quiet or loud conversations between acquaintances and strangers, confessions, jokes, small talk, blaring music, videos playing on mobile phones and tablets, smells of food, perfume, body odor, physical contacts and its avoidance, irritation, happiness, boredom, sadness, and ignoring. These spaces allow migrants from different ethnicities and regional backgrounds to engage with each other as a means to pass the time on the bus, traversing serious and mundane topics such as life in their home communities and Switzerland, work, seasons, the past, and politics. The ephemerality of the space provides an illusion of freedom, while the physical proximity of familiar Others facilitates interactions among post-Yugoslavs.

Compared to the general demographics of migrants living in Switzerland, bus passengers tend to be less socially mobile, belong to lower social classes, have lower levels of education, and hold lower-paying jobs. The age dynamics and incomplete family networks reflect these demographics. Although bus users' years of age vary greatly, there is a clear distinction between middle-aged and older passengers who see buses as a convenient mode of transportation and those in their twenties who view it as a necessary evil while striving for more

ambitious jobs. Older passengers, whose children live in Switzerland, reported that their children have had transitioned to other modes of transportation and were no longer interested in taking buses. Meanwhile, younger passengers are almost exclusively first-generation migrants with limited experience traveling between Switzerland and the Balkans.

Debates on the post-Yugoslav connections regularly focus on issues relevant to top-down analyses of past and present social realities, such as relationships between states and their respective societies (Jović 2009; Bieber et al. 2014). These discussions also bring up the gridlocks of identity politics (Bieber 2015; Štiks 2015a), language (Greenberg 2008; Bugarski 2012), and the revalorization of Yugoslav heritage (Mrduljaš and Kulić 2012; Petrović 2013), among other topics. However, in the aftermath of the traumatic dissolution of the joint state and subsequent disappointing realities, the region's working-class and working-class cultures have remained hidden in their interactions with other parts of society, adapting to fit general post-Yugoslav and post-socialist paradigms. Post-Yugoslav labor migrants exemplify this issue. Originating predominantly from underdeveloped rural areas of Yugoslavia, these migrants began settling in industrial centers across Western and Northern Europe from 1960 onwards. This migration served as a compromise between addressing Yugoslav unemployment concerns and meeting Western labor demands.[7] Over the course of more than 50 years and with several generations now residing in host countries, these groups have significantly improved their social standing and economic circumstances (Bernard 2019). As the Yugoslav state disintegrated, so too did the labor migrants' sense of community and belonging. Alliances shifted from the federal level to now nation-states, with migrants seeking respect by emphasizing their support for their respective nations. Despite the enhanced social position and growing economic power of the labor migrants in their host countries, they still face relatively low cultural capital in their countries and communities of origin.

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7   On Yugoslav labor migration, see Vladimir Ivanović (2012) and Brigitte Le Normand (2021).

As a result, labor migrants present a fitting case for examining working classes and working-class culture, both of which have been underexplored in the (post-)Yugoslav context. Working classes in Yugoslav history were defined by participation in the economy through labor and the inability to utilize state resources (Archer et al. 2016; Petrović and Hofman 2017). In contrast, socialist Yugoslav society viewed the working classes as both a revolutionary subject and an object of modernization (Musić 2021; Dobrivojević Tomić 2022). This distinction is crucial when comparing the working classes of Yugoslavia to those in Western Europe, particularly postwar Britain's working class (Hoggart and Williams 1960; Hebdige 2012; Thompson 2013). [8] Despite differences in political affiliation, similarities in working-class culture still exist, operating within comparable frameworks, such as mass consumerism of low-privilege cultural forms, and rural-urban social sentiments.

In contrast to the working classes themselves, Yugoslav working-class culture was much more similar to British definitions, characterized by iconic language, low privilege, and mass entertainment. A striking example of class difference in Yugoslav socialism was epitomized by popular music (Petrović and Hofman 2017, 71–72). Treating the working class as a process rather than a structure (Thompson 2013) necessitates maintaining an awareness of working-class culture, regardless of one's approach to the class itself.

By exploring the post-Yugoslav affective regimes within its mobile, yet marginalized demographics of labor migrants, this chapter challenges potential biases stemming from the class position of researchers and the research in understanding new post-Yugoslav realities. The chapter operates with the assumption of working-class culture as an autonomous cultural framework, characterized by a specific technology and typology of language, favoring orality over written language (Ong 2012) and iconic over symbolic signification. This

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8   Working class bias in post-Yugoslav societies and social sciences was already explored in regional social studies, including several contributors of this volume. For example, Goran Musić demonstrates how in early post-socialist Serbia, working classes were coopted by the ruling nationalistic elites of Slobodan Milošević and directed against the outside enemies (2021).

specificity implies that when they speak BCS to each other, the individuals who use buses and those who travel by planes do not speak the same language.

The focus on mobilities, such as transportation systems and regiments for the movement of people, information, and goods (Sheller and Urry 2006), aids in understanding this distinction by exposing practices and growing disparities between those who choose when and how to move, those who must move to survive (the subject of this chapter), and those who remain mobile only through their electronic devices (Sheller 2018). In *gastarbajteri* buses, bodies congregate in movement and constitute a specific affect, which I refer to as the accidental Yugosphere. Drawing on Tim Judah's definition, I move beyond the Yugosphere as a rapprochement between the post-Yugoslav states, political and other elites, and the essentially growing integration of free markets, to see the accidental Yugosphere as a specific post-Yugoslav form of commonality without communality. The post-Yugoslav commonality is connected to shared expectations or disappointments arising from the realities of unfulfilled promises of security and economic distribution within the context of nation-states' independence and post-socialist transition, which results in asymmetric benefits. It is a feeling that people from the region have something in common, akin to previously mentioned history, languages, or cultural intimacy. In contrast to Judah's concept, this commonality continued developing even after the clashes between nationalist governments following the political turn to the right in Croatia and Serbia during the 2010s. On the other hand, the term "communality" encompasses shared identity politics, claims to a joint future, political projects, and a joint state—essentially the elements that differentiate Yugoslavia from the Yugosphere. In a sense, communality brings together those aspects of social and political life that formed a political community. While Yugoslavia embodied both commonality and communality for its citizens, the Yugosphere only entails commonality.

The absence of communality is underscored by the uncertainty in naming the region. Following the dissolution of the joint state, the prefix Yugo- struggles to find an appropriate suffix and is habitually replaced with euphemisms such as Balkan, the region (BCS: *regija*, *region*), or the vague but safe term

"ours" (BCS: *naš*). Nonetheless, the lexical element "Yugo" (BCS: *Jugo*) continues to function in the oral language used among post-Yugoslav migrants, albeit infrequently and occasionally as a slur by the majority population. The accidental Yugosphere, therefore, is not necessarily connected to Yugoslavia or Yugonostalgia. It exists in the space between identities reshaped by nation-states and practices that transcend them. This is most evident among labor migrants, who have primarily constituted the core passengers on these buses for the last 40 years. Labor migrants from various post-Yugoslav communities share spaces, expectations, and affective regimes in the industrial centers of their host countries, despite being accused of hatred and extreme nationalism in the media. In this sense, I see the accidental Yugosphere as a framework of commonality that does not require communality.

The Drive and Perceptive Systems

On the bus, one becomes acutely aware of their physical presence rather quickly. The modest seat size and the restricted space between them create congestion in the shared area. This congestion serves as both an inconvenience and a catalyst for interaction, as passengers engage with one another to compensate for the potential friction of being in each other's personal spaces. Touching, as a form of physical or emotional contact, becomes more prominent in these interactions. During the rides, both men and women touched me as part of polite conversation, joking, proving their point or filling the gaps in their thoughts. Such touching is something I forgot how to do while living in Austria, Germany, and Switzerland, where this practice is less prevalent outside of the migrant population, and it was additionally marginalized during the COVID-19 pandemic. Yet, after exchanging names and personal stories and building some rapport on the buses, it came easily.

Conversations, laughter, singing, and the whole mood on the buses reminded me more of a busy night at a tavern or *kafana* than of public transportation. This is a considerable departure from my previous experiences on

buses operated by large European firms such as Flixbus. The atmosphere on the *gastarbajteri* buses was more akin to a small-town gathering where, despite perceived differences, travelers were not strangers to one another. Buses are places where post-Yugoslav migrants connect, engage, and form an in-between, transitory, liminal post-Yugoslav space. These experiences underscore the distinctions between migrant buses and other modes of transportation, such as planes or trains.

The sensory experience of passengers is influenced by the quality, frequency, and structure of bus routes. Based on the work structure of the communities of settlement, the companies plan the routes to maximize the amount of free time available in the communities of origin. The busiest day for rides from Switzerland to the Balkans is Friday, and Sundays are the busiest days for return trips. The buses leave Switzerland in the early afternoon on Fridays, just after the end of the workday, and travel overnight to arrive at their destination the next morning. The return ride on Sunday departs early in the morning and arrives in Switzerland late in the evening or early the next morning, allowing the younger and more physically fit passengers to go straight to work. By traveling overnight, buses allow passengers to spend more time in their hometowns, but at the expense of comfort and sleep. Due to decreased movement during the COVID-19 lockdowns of 2020–2021, companies reduced their daily services to multiple times per week.

A typical ride for me started in St. Gallen. Like in Zurich, the St. Gallen bus station is an inconspicuous parking lot behind the central train station. At this location, I was picked up by either the main buses (those traveling to Serbia) or the support vehicles, personal automobiles for the lines operating to Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina. These vehicles would transport the few passengers to Zurich. In Zurich, we would board a van or a larger bus, depending on whether Zurich, Zug, or Lucerne was the main distribution node in Switzerland. Once the buses reached the distribution node in the destination countries, passengers were again divided into smaller groups and transferred to other vehicles heading to their final destinations. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, the main points were towns in the north, such as Bosanski Šamac. Here,

the Bosnian lines split into three directions covering the east (Tuzla, Živinice, Kalesija, Srebrenica), the west (Doboj, Banja Luka, Prijedor, Sanski Most, Bihać) or the center of the country (Zenica, Sarajevo). In Croatia, the principal distribution node is Rijeka, where the lines divide towards the east (Zagreb and Slavonia) and the south (Dalmatia). Meanwhile, in Serbia, the main connection point is Belgrade.

Route flexibility is not uncommon for larger European operators such as BlaBlaBus, Eurolines, or Flixbus. In comparison, large corporations operate this way to reduce expenses, boost profit margins, and gain market dominance. The *gastarbajteri* bus companies are similarly profit-driven, but they use this route arrangement to reach the marginal and isolated chain migration communities. By specializing in transporting labor migrants and providing services to their communities, these buses reconfigure the locations, languages, and forms of engagement between the sending and receiving societies in the migration process. Due to licensing restrictions, bus operators do not take on new passengers or drop them off in the countries between (Italy, Slovenia, Austria, Hungary). Individual passengers move between these capillary lines and across the borders of the post-Yugoslav states to optimize their arrival or departure times and other journey conditions. As a result, within the buses, there are never exclusively Croats, Bosniaks or Serbs on board; instead, there is always an indeterminable presence of the post-Yugoslav Other.

Upon boarding, passengers are immersed in a variety of visual and auditory stimuli, scents, tastes, and bodily experiences. The drivers check and charge tickets, provide initial instructions and coordinate assistance with border crossing and other duties, but they do not control the rides. When not asleep, passengers engage with one another in conversation, use their media gadgets to watch Netflix or interact with social media platforms like Facebook and TikTok or participate in private conversations through Viber and WhatsApp calls, often without using headphones. Once a symbol of luxury in the 1990s, the bus television sets are still extant but rarely used. These interactions predominantly occur in BCS, whether human-generated or emanating from media devices, defining the soundscape of the journey.

As repeatedly pointed out by my fellow passengers, buses are considered less privileged compared to trains, cars, and airplanes precisely due to the discomfort and length of their journeys. This distinction in privilege is reflected in the lower ticket prices compared to flights and railroads. Having a taller and bulkier body has made me acutely aware of the limited ways in which I may sit or move to improve my comfort. Lighting, aromas, and sounds can make it challenging to fall asleep, and fatigue can swiftly alter one's perception and mood. After a twelve-hour bus journey, one gains new insight into Brian Massumi's postulate regarding how the body endeavors to escape the conceptual framework imposed by construction and prescription (2002, 4).

Olfactory, gustatory, and tactile experiences are included in the universal submission to sensory experience. Buses are filled with a range of odors, from neutral to aggressive smells. These include the scents of fabric detergents used for cleaning between rides, perfumes on passengers, foodstuffs, beer in cans, the smell of the bus restroom, and the ever-present aroma of cigarettes, which some passengers continue to smoke in the bus restroom despite the ban. These experiences, frequently restricted in other public contexts, are more potent and intermittent. Long bus journeys affect perception and emotional charge, resulting in a positive or negative atmosphere that is mirrored in the passengers' dispositions. Some journeys were joyful, light, and optimistic about the future. The passengers clustered their talks with jokes, witty remarks, and entertaining anecdotes. Tales of past and present hardships weighed down other rides, with frequent topics being probable dangers on the trip (overzealous customs agents, border police asking for additional documents—usually COVID-19 passes). During the holiday season and lockdowns caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, the ambiance on the buses was even more perceptible.

The fullness of stimulation, perception, emotion, and affect is best exemplified by the soundscape. The sounds on the bus emerge and fade in predictable patterns, following the routines of the journey, boarding, and disembarkation of passengers. Unlike the event from this chapter's introduction, typical journeys start pretty quietly. During the initial leg of a trip, passengers maintain silence or have brief conversations with the drivers. The situation changes when

the vehicle reaches the main distribution node and fills with more commuters. On capillary lines, seat sales are maximized, so passengers rarely remain alone. Long distances and agreeable company encourage conversation. On the rides back to Switzerland, the drivers or passengers actively establish familiarity by coordinating small-scale cigarette smuggling. They ask directly other passengers if they smoke and how many cigarettes they are carrying in order to distribute excessive quantities of cigarettes that would be confiscated if discovered with only one individual (a maximum of 200 cigarettes per person). On Friday rides to the Balkans, it was not uncommon for middle-aged men to be inebriated. As they celebrate the beginning of the weekend and the impending reunion with their loved ones, they serve as entertainers or agitators on the bus, altering the ambiance and volume of conversation.

The sounds of human communication and non-human-generated noises blend and compete within the soundscape. The bus diesel engines provide a continuous hum as a base of the background noise, supplemented by the sounds of highway traffic and air-conditioning. This tonal palette is further built by non-vocal human sounds, such as movement, eating, drinking, coughing, and sounds of media devices. During the packed trips, crowds easily overpower mechanical noises changing the soundscape to a clamor. In these situations, only during border inspections do the sounds disappear entirely. At these locations, drivers stop their vehicles, and passengers disembark to form a line leading to the checkpoint. Conversations either terminate abruptly or become faint and nearly whisper-like. The exceptions are the individual voices of the passengers who approach the checkpoint and answer indeterminable questions from the border police sitting inside. The protracted silence continues until each passenger has passed through the checkpoint and is waiting for the bus in the designated smoking area. The commotion returns and reaches its peak as the bus enters the destination country and allows the passengers back on board.

Changes in noise levels before, during, and after the border are the consequence of human behavior that has been carefully orchestrated. The drivers instruct passengers on what to do during bus rides, such as when to board, recline, stand, or take a break, as well as how to navigate border checkpoints.

Voices and mechanical noises, such as a bus engine, siren, or loudspeakers, are used by drivers to indicate changes in choreography. These choreographies are also the result of individual behavior repertoires, group dynamics, and physical constraints that define the space. Individuals engage with, utilize, or disregard these choreographies, just as they do with the soundscape. Buses, as a social context, are filled with sensations that communicate and demonstrate affective changes.

A Game between the Insiders and the Outsiders of "Ours"

The accidental Yugosphere as a system is framed by shared commonality (mutual intelligibility of the BCS language, history, culture, entertainment, everyday life, and social realities) and absent communality (separate identity politics, modes of political organizing, ideas of future). This system of post-Yugoslav commonality without communality enables individuals that engage in it to have shared expectations even in the absence of prior experience. The condition is based on a concrete historical experience of the former Yugoslavia as a political project and the material reality in which the affective regimes were founded. The affective regimes succeeded after Yugoslavia fell apart and each of the seven republics gained independence and redefined their political projects. Thus, labor migrants' bus rides disclose the Yugosphere as a virtual category, as defined by Gilles Deleuze as "real but abstract,"[9] and by Brian Massumi as "inaccessible to the senses" but felt in its affects (2002, 133). The accidental Yugosphere is an affective regime constituted by this system of expectations.

Even though various intellectual, political, and literary projects explore post-Yugoslav communalities (Gilbert et al. 2008, 10–11; Mazzucchelli 2012;

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9   Deleuze here paraphrased Proust's formula: "real without being actual, ideal without being abstract" (1991, 96).

Bilić 2016; Goldstein 2017; Matijević 2020) and, explicitly, solidarities (Kirn 2014; Štiks 2015b; Hofman 2021), they remain limited to the left or liberal-leaning elites and their supporters. Due to the type of language and forms of medialization (theatre, literature, conferences, roundtables) they use, these projects have a limited reach to those that do not take part in the public life mediated by written language, working classes of the post-Yugoslav spaces and those with this background elsewhere. This chapter argues that working-class individuals (including labor migrants) are not excluded from this process, and that working-class culture mediates this condition. Individuals from the working class make their own connections and political statements. The example of an encounter that follows delineates the traces of this condition.

I met Zaim[10] in early 2021 on the bus from Switzerland to Bosnia. This particular ride was one of the busiest, as it took place during the lockdown of winter of 2020–2021. Buses are regularly without enumerated seats, and in this situation, drivers either leave it for passengers to find a free spot on their own or match passengers based on gender and age in order to avoid conflicts. The driver instructed us to wait for allocated seats because of the large number of passengers, and as the passengers in front of me were moving on to the back of the bus, I was happy to have a seat secured when a driver asked me to sit next to a man fashioning a long beard. Once seated by the window, I observed that he had tucked several volumes into the pocket in front of him. The book covers featured Arabic script. I wondered if he had placed the books there to peruse during the trip and to demonstrate his religious interest. The combination of his lengthy beard and the books led me to believe he was religious, possibly a Wahhabi adherent, despite the fact that I was aware that these assumptions may be overly general. This observation brought to mind everything I already knew about this religious group.

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10   Zaim is a pseudonym used to protect the individual's anonymity. In accordance with GDPR rules on anonymization and pseudonymization, which differ based on the number of personal data collected (less than three for anonymization, more than three for pseudonymization with informed consent), the information presented here has been modified to preserve anonymity.

I first learned about Wahhabis in Sarajevo in the early 2000s when a child-hood friend studying there told me that there were these folks who gave scholar-ships to prudish young people. She was interested in getting the scholarship, but she was concerned that they might learn she also liked rave music and not appreciate her choice of spending free time. Coming from a Serbian Orthodox community and being a newly self-discovered atheist at the age of nineteen, this amused me. It was something new and strange. Later, I had my own experien-ces with Wahhabi shop owners, people on the street, protesters against Saraje-vo Pride, and former Wahhabis in the Bosnian peace movement who became my friends. My idea of Wahhabis was superficial but old, making me both in-trigued and uneasy. These were my automatisms that added to the atmosphere. I casually observed a fellow passenger as he conversed with other passengers, the majority of whom were males, wondering if he would approach the women in the group. I saw how he talked to them, when and how he answered.

I am sure I looked different to him, too. I became aware of his perception of me for the first time during data collection for the border patrol. During this procedure, drivers send a list to collect our personal information, including our names, passport numbers, places of birth, and current Swiss residence. Al-though a serious privacy breach, this practice is convenient for law enforcement and widespread among passengers. My full first name, Milorad, indicates my Serbian background, and while I go by my nickname, Mišo, as this is the name I grew up with and I prefer, I noticed that he repeatedly referred to me by my full name.

Cultural assumptions about my sexuality also arose. I am comfortable with my sexuality, gender, and body as a cis gay male. In the post-Yugoslav context, this involves employing a variety of strategies in everyday experiences. People sometimes express astonishment when I mention my partner and praise my "straight acting" demeanor without realizing the implication of their praise. But people also frequently indicate their awareness of my sexuality by comment-ing on my manner of speech, approving its "cultural" quality or offering unso-licited compliments on my dancing and singing skills. Although I cannot be certain that Zaim understood or even considered my orientation, his repeated

comments about my accent and speech patterns gave me the impression that he did. He never inquired about my marital status and only inquired about my children. When he asked what I was doing in Switzerland, I explained my endeavor and how these trips served as research for my forthcoming book. Our interaction was rooted in our respective networks of automatisms.

My fellow passenger was, like myself, a large person. At the start of the journey, this meant apologizing for every intrusion into personal space while sharing the armrest and legroom in carefully choreographed dances. Our initial conversations consisted predominantly of tuning in and out of other passengers' conversations. These conversations followed a predetermined script and included performative utterances expressing automated opinions on Switzerland, COVID-19, the responses of Balkan states, and other current topics. As the night progressed, we simply had to accept that we would be in each other's space. Gradually, as we diverged from communal topics, a personal dialogue developed, and the two of us shared what had been discussed in the larger group on the bus, but followed the same script.

Unpredictably, he brought up Srebrenica. He mentioned it when I asked where he was from. Coincidentally, he was from a village adjacent to Srebrenica that I had visited by chance. He continued to tell me that he was present in the enclave during the genocide after noticing my silence. This turn in the discourse surprised me, but I indicated my acceptance and encouraged him to continue. Then, he described how he got there, who accompanied him, and what happened to him and his family.

This was a spontaneous testimony, but I accepted it because I recognized its significance for him and that he wanted to share it. Furthermore, I understood that my role was to remain seated and listen. Since moving away from Bosnia, I found it increasingly difficult to discuss the war. I viewed the outside interest as insensitive or dishonest. Though I had my share of war experiences, I was unwilling to volunteer them on demand. Studying and working in Southeast European Studies departments required me to constantly revise and relearn my conceptions of the war and, more often than not, to perform the post-war Bosnian through these questions to their students and well-intended Western

colleagues. People from outside the former Yugoslavia inquired about my war experiences after just meeting or between mundane conversations about up-coming vacations or picking up furniture. Such performances gave me a strong feeling of inauthenticity, so I avoided discussing the war with strangers. For this reason, as soon as possible, I chose to write about the post-Yugoslav region outside of its traumatic past, focusing on everyday life and hope.

He then detailed his life during and after the enclave, that summer in Sre-brenica, and his flight prior to the atrocities. He recounted how, as a fifteen-year-old, he trekked for three days to Tuzla, unsure of the fate of his family and overcome with concern for those who remained behind while he was alone. He described his arrival in Switzerland as a refugee, meeting his wife's family, and establishing an existence there. Throughout this time, he was unaware of what happened to his family members, and his "normal" life was disrupted by returns for the arduous process of identifying the murdered family members and planning the funeral.

During the time he spoke, we were interrupted twice. The first time, the wife of a drunk man got into a fight with a few other men who were making fun of her husband. Zaim participated in the general commotion by shouting his piece on drinking and alcohol and its detrimental effects. The second time we were interrupted, a woman sitting behind us fainted, leading other passengers (mostly women) to provide her with space, air, and water. The drivers refused to stop when a few passengers repeatedly asked them to, explaining that we were in Italy and claiming that the Italians would hold them for too long as they would likely call the police. They insisted on driving us to Slovenia, where they could leave the woman at the gas station, and she would be cared for while we moved on. Many passengers, myself included, opposed the idea of leaving her unconscious and alone. My interpretation was that the drivers did not feel com-petent to seek assistance in Italy, and Slovenia felt closer and easier to manage. Thankfully, the woman recovered some moments later. Though still poorly, she asked to be driven to Bosnia. After both episodes, Zaim returned to his life story while I considered whether I should leave, whether this was ethical at all, and what to do.

Zaim discussed his religious experience in a distinct instance. He became religious in Switzerland and believed religion was a positive force that kept him in check. He clarified that he was not a Wahhabi; he merely had a long beard but valued his daughter's education immensely. His father-in-law was a significant factor in his religious development. The religion books he carried and kept tucked in the pocket of the seat in front of him were for reading, but he never had the time. As a result, he ended up dragging them around and feeling guilty for not reading them. I shared this experience and mentioned the two books in my bag that I hadn't found time to read either.

Zaim then proceeded to describe his life in Switzerland. He described the challenges he faced in learning the local language and the pride he felt in speaking it fluently. He talked about how intelligent and successful his children were. When he asked if I had any children and I said no, we learned that I was only a few years younger than him, but that our lives had taken divergent paths. He then explained that he only traveled by bus when he was alone and that they used the family car when his family traveled with him. There were other "Yugos" living in his building, where he also served as the maintenance man in exchange for reduced rent. He recalled the obstacles he had had to overcome to establish a life there and how "our people" (BCS: *naši ljudi*) would lend a hand from time to time.

Without my prompting, Zaim brought up the topic of ex-Yugoslavs abroad, which is the focus of my project but seemed trivial and irrelevant at that moment. He was not sure how to properly refer to ex-Yugoslavs, "our people," thinking of Croats or Serbs. He never asked me what I had meant when I said "our people," giving me the impression that this was also an actual category for him. Nonetheless, Zaim did identify with fellow Bosniaks residing there, conveying to me a dual-layered concept of *naš* ("our people") in which Bosniaks constituted the inner core, while the wider post-Yugoslav community encompassed the outer layer. Due to their shared ethnic identity, he felt closer to the Bosniaks.

When Zaim spoke about other post-Yugoslavs in his life, he described the difficulties in reconstructing these relationships after the war and the dissolution of Yugoslavia, as well as how natural and effortless these relationships now

felt. My sense of inauthenticity returned as I suspected that he might perceive me differently and perform to satisfy my expectations and interests. Regardless, he continued to discuss his post-Yugoslav connections, even after I had inquired about his Colombian or Turkish neighbors, whom he only briefly mentioned in a maintenance-related anecdote.

I listened while Zaim spoke. He was a fellow man, a fellow Bosnian, a fellow Yugo, confiding his experience to me, and listening was the best I could do. Despite my initial reservations about discussing the war with strangers or reducing the post-Yugoslav identity to our violent past, Zaim's sincerity and openness helped dispel my cynicism. His desire to share his experiences and my willingness to listen made the intense emotions surrounding the war and personal memories seem fitting within the confines of the bus because this is a space where one meets and confides in strangers. This testimony was probably triggered by the fact that my name is Milorad, yet a pre-script made this situation possible, and this pre-script is the bus. I am not sure this experience would have happened if we had met elsewhere. The fact that we were both cramped in the small seats of a packed bus carrying labor migrants from Switzerland back home, and we were in this situation for 14 hours, opened the possibility. On the *gastarbajteri* bus, there is an implicit understanding that passengers casually exchange personal narratives with one another. It is expected that these meetings do not have the same weight outside this particular setting, ultimately transforming the bus into an accidental Yugosphere.

Conclusion

The passengers of *gastarbajteri* buses typically fall into two categories: those who can manage the lengthy rides and those who easily get sick of them. Experience with driving, crossing borders, concern over having the proper documentation, and proximity to illegal activities such as small-scale smuggling, all result in intense discomfort and conflicting reactions. Frequent bus riders either anticipate it or accept it as an inevitability, whereas less frequent passengers may

display irritation or ennui. Sharing personal stories and connecting with fellow passengers may be a remedy for the discomfort of the experience. The atmosphere on the buses is characterized by a dynamic interplay between these two groups, whose emotional expressions and contributions range from uplifting energy, spirited commotion, singing, humor, and general happiness to tedium, irritation, and frustration. Because they share a mutually understandable language (or languages) and cultural intimacy, these individuals engage in a deeper level of mediation and automatisms—the affect.

Buses serve as a bridge between our space and theirs, embodying the familiar, nostalgic, and well-known characteristics of the other space, whether it is a sovereign Balkan realm in Switzerland or a Swiss domain in the Balkans. The previously mentioned branching of routes and multiple physical vehicles and drivers during individual journeys, create a situation where everyone travels together from a distribution node in Switzerland to a distribution node in the Balkans. This practice incorporates local and regional dynamics, stimulating interaction among post-Yugoslav migrants, as buses from the Podrinje region in eastern Bosnia, or Slavonia in Croatia, frequently transport individuals from northwest Serbia, while buses operating in eastern Croatia and northern Bosnia may share passengers. Transitioning between local, national, and international lines, passengers move through various vehicles during distinct segments of the journey, drawing migrants from diverse communities and sometimes different ethnic groups into proximity. However, this exchange remains limited in terms of class affiliation. The close interaction occurs simply because different labor migrants occupy neighboring seats and spend extended periods in tight spaces.

The experiences on the buses led me through a series of affective states, alternating between conscious and unconscious articulation. These feelings included anxiety, panic, paranoia, nausea, an unpleasant taste in my mouth, and a racing pulse. Even though my documents were always in order and I never carried anything more suspicious than a cigarette carton for other passengers, I was not immune to the experiences shared on the bus.

Affect permeates and spreads throughout shared environments, generating a social atmosphere that influences individual states. The impact of the

environment is reflected and navigated. The feedback loop between sensing and creating the atmosphere is particularly complicated in light of post-Yugoslav connections and affective regimes. Post-Yugoslav migrants have shared a history of conflicting identity politics and the heritage of the Yugoslav wars. Moreover, as working-class members in their settlement societies, they have shared experiences of marginalization, as well as practical proximity to members of other post-Yugoslav religious and ethnic groups who bear a tremendous emotional burden. Post-Yugoslav affective regimes are visible in instances where people declare their tolerance for another country out of nowhere or abruptly condemn war and atrocities. These regimes are also evident in the unsolicited testimonies and experiences shared in semi-private conversations or jokes that indicate belonging or otherness. Affective regimes are accomplished by signaling openness and closeness in conversations, speaking in a manner that allows others outside the conversation to overhear, and signaling virtues or vices.

Individuals who participate in the affective regimes of the Yugosphere may express opinions, reiterate opinions heard elsewhere, challenge established attitudes, share life lessons learned, broach taboo topics or engage in superficial and light conversations. As an affective regime, the Yugosphere permits the practice of difference and the exploration of distance within a shared commonality, intensifying affect. The subjects of these interactions are not limited to mutual differences or similarities; they also include personal and sensitive topics such as low wages, idle factory lines, unemployment, and insecurity in the Balkans, as well as alienation in Switzerland, the warmth of Bosnia, Croatia or Serbia, comfort in Switzerland, coexistence with other ethnic groups, and the inherent good and evil of humanity. Passengers practice the difference and investigate distances during these rides, tapping into their affect and responding with either interest or resentment.

The Yugosphere's affective regime that operates in *gastarbajteri* buses, capitalizing on the commonality, is enabled by the working-class culture shared across the region. This culture primarily emerges from the intelligibility of language, distinct language usage, shared enjoyment of cultural products like music, and the powerful memories and personal ethics that evoke the intimacy of a familiar

other. However, it does not necessarily oppose new solidarity social movements emerging in the post-socialist context across the region, which draw on the Yugoslav experience as a legacy for new leftist politics. As spaces where post-Yugoslavs interact, the *gastarbajteri* buses can be compared to workplaces, sporting events, pubs, and cafés in their countries of origin and settlement. Although proximity is chosen at these locations, bus passengers are forced to stand near together by design. Therefore, I contend that the accidental Yugosphere is not rooted in a shared socialist heritage or politics, even if they are not necessarily excluded. As an affective regime, the accidental Yugosphere is a shared expectations framework.

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