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RIVERINE CITIZENSHIP

A Bosnian City in Love with the River

Azra Hromadžić

CEU PRESS

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Azra Hromadžić



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*I dedicate my book to my late father, Hasan Hromadžić—a man who was
in love with his city—and to the people of Bihać.*



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Introduction

The Legend about the Una

Ancient Roman soldiers, due to constant warfare and conquering, grew somewhat rough and lost the ability to perceive beauty in the world. After reaching the banks of the Una River, they were profoundly moved by scenery they had never seen before. They were astonished by the emerald-green water, fairytale waterfalls, vibrant and unblemished riverbanks, and incomparable natural surroundings. One of these Roman soldiers, fascinated by the scene, exclaimed, “Una!” (Latin for “one” or “the only one”).

In July 2015, Bihać, a city “in love with the river,” located in the northwestern part of Bosnia and Herzegovina,¹ my home and a long-term research site, was enveloped in a political protest. Thousands of people got together—mostly digitally but also directly—to object to the city’s recent decision that gave concession to a joint Russian and Bosnian energy company to build a dam on the city’s Una River. The Una frames Bosnia’s northwestern border with Croatia and is famous for its beauty, fast currents, emerald color, water quality, tourist potential, and for having kept Bihać’s population sane and safe during the 1990s war. Armed with love for the river and the political agency this emotion generated, the 2015 “We will not give up the Una!” protest led to a politically significant outcome: pressured by the people, the city’s government reversed its decision to grant the concession. This was the only reversal of a city government decision on any matter in its postwar history. My book emerged during this moment when political authority stumbled and it aims to examine rivers as a site of environmental politics and what I call “riverine citizenship.”

¹ In this book, I mostly use Bosnia and Herzegovina when referring to the country, although I also use Bosnia and/or BiH where stylistically more appropriate.

This book is an effort to explain how the threat of dam-building transformed the seemingly apolitical love for the Una River into riverine citizenship—a formidable, situated political force around which thousands of people, near and far, mobilized. The book shows that this form of citizenship is not bound to a state or (national) territory, as citizenship is frequently understood in political science and political philosophy. Rather, riverine citizenship emerges from people’s affective and material attachment to the Una River. More specifically, in what follows, I explain how riverine citizenship in Bihać materializes from historically situated multispecies relationships between the town’s people and the Una, creating intersecting civic duties, relationships, and obligations, as well as exclusions and violence. *Riverine Citizenship* traces how this love for the river is formulated and performed, and with what kind of political effect.

Methodologically, the book pulls together numerous personal and professional engagements, collaborations, and experiences with Bihać and the Una River. The book is, in many ways, a labor of love and a commitment to the city and the Una River, the places I call “home.” It is this personal entanglement with the river that situates me in history and geography, gives me an orientation in life and in theory, and makes me, and many of my co-citizens, who we are—socially, culturally, ecologically, and more recently, politically. This historically shaped, socially cemented, war-intensified, and currently confronted love for the river—and the political agency it generates—is explained in more depth in the chapters that follow.

In addition to being a labor of love—and an anticipation of an imminent loss—this book is an experimental riverine ethnography. More specifically, *Riverine Citizenship* builds on over twenty years of committed ethnographic research in Bosnia and Herzegovina; my participation in the 2015 protest; more than 60 subsequent interviews with politicians, government workers, nongovernmental organizations, activists, media workers, and protestors; my analysis of the official minutes from City Council meetings; inspiration from works of fiction; collaborative sound recordings and listening walks; archival research with a socialist environmental organization “the Una River Emeralds”; field visits to the Una National Park; and my personal reminiscences of life under siege and swimming in the river during the war. These numerous, entangled methodological approaches are described in more detail in each subsequent chapter, as I move—literally, metaphorically, and affectively—between and across private archives; waterfalls, cascades, and national parks; riverine islands, tree houses, and boats; the river’s sounds, smells, and underground worlds; the city’s streets, coffee shops, living rooms, and cars; and town squares and government offices.

Theoretically, the book brings together literatures that are not usually brought together: sociological theories of lived citizenship; ideas about ecological and place-based citizenship in political philosophy and anthropology; interdisciplinary research on more-than-human geographies, pedagogies, new materialisms, and Indigenous and environmental humanities; anthropology of the senses and anthropology of the subterranean; studies of war ecologies and multispecies relationships; and theories on love, affect, and politics in political philosophy and feminist scholarship.

In addition to these seemingly eclectic choices in method and theory, the book's tone is also varied: it moves from intimate and proximate to highly theoretical conceptualizations of a river as an ethnographic subject and of an emerging form of riverine belonging, citizenship, and political life in our environmentally and socially threatened world.

Riverine Citizenship: A Lived, Place-based Form of Politics

Lived Citizenship

My thinking about riverine citizenship as a situated, lived form of citizenship is inspired by works in sociology, anthropology, and political science which emphasize citizenship as informal, experienced, embodied, and enacted in various real-life contexts (Kallio, Wood and Häkli 2020, 713–714). Building on phenomenology, interactionalism, existentialism, and pragmatism (Jacobson 2009), scholarship on lived citizenship reveals how the state is enmeshed in the ordinary and mundane. This understanding of citizenship is distinct from more formal understandings of citizenship as a legal, rights-, and duties-based status given to members of a territorially defined community. In contrast to a status-based understanding of citizenship, this lived, “alternative citizenship” (McNevin 2006) expands our “vocabularies of citizenship” (Lister et al. 2003) to encompass numerous people's everyday realities, engagements, and actions in a relationally understood world. This broadening of what counts as citizenship also allows for thinking about everyday politics differently. Here, politics unfold not only in the official realm but also within informal and domestic spaces (Dixon and Marston, 2011), revealing more expansive and flexible understandings of space, political belonging, and what it means “to live and be a citizen” (Kallio and Mitchell 2016, 716).

Scholars of lived citizenship also emphasize embodied performances of citizenship and people's everyday negotiations of rights, identities, and responsi-

bilities through their commonplace interactions with others (Kallio, Wood and Häkli 2020, 713). They challenge dominant spatialities of citizenship which stitch citizenship to the state and which mostly ignore forms of citizen action that are articulated beyond and below national borders. To challenge the normative, narrow contours of citizenship, scholars emphasize four dimensions of lived citizenship: “spatial, intersubjective, performed, and affective” (Kallio, Wood and Häkli 2020, 715). Focusing on the spatial aspect of citizenship necessitates new understandings of the geographies of citizenship (Desforges, Jones, and Woods 2005) and “a deeper engagement with space” (Kallio, Wood and Häkli 2020, 717). The focus on intersubjectivity allows for thinking of citizenship as a process of spatial and political “relationships with significant and strange others” (Kallio et al. 2020, 717), while the performative approach emphasizes practices and acts of citizenship (Isin 2008). Finally, while scholarship on citizenship traditionally overlooks emotions, lived citizenship thinks about what it means to (not) be a citizen in relation to affective experiences (Bartos 2013).

In this book, I expand this scholarship on lived citizenship in two main ways. First, while generative, this literature focuses exclusively on human-to-human relations. *Riverine Citizenship*, on the other hand, considers how our situated ecological relations and “naturecultures”—the fusion of nature and culture that recognizes their inseparability in ecological relationships (Fuentes 2010, Haraway 2003, Latour 1993, Taylor 2013)—impact our politics. *Riverine Citizenship* therefore considers relational ontologies between humans and non-human others—in this case, the people of Bihać and the Una River—as a site of mobilization and articulation of lived citizenship. More specifically, I argue that historically shaped and socially reproduced people-river cohabitation generates ecopolitist alliances and citizen actions (see Chapter 4). In particular, I show how it is precisely people’s historically shaped attachment to the Una River that moved people to action at a particular historical juncture, creating a unique ecopolitical formation: making politics an expression “of ecological and cultural attachment to place” (Escobar 2008, 7). Second, in addition to showing the possibilities and flexibilities of lived, situated riverine citizenship, I also recognize its boundaries, limitations, and exclusions. I show how ejections, externalities, and gaps in riverine love impinge upon its hegemonic form. More concretely, I demonstrate how riverine citizenship mobilizes some relations while, like all other forms of politics, it masks and excludes some others. The disenchanting consequences of these processes will become especially apparent in the last chapter of the book.

Place-based Citizenship

My thinking about riverine citizenship as a lived form and practice of citizenship is also influenced by theoretical conversations about ecological citizenship in political philosophy. Similar to sociological approaches to lived citizenship, ecological citizenship challenges our conceptual frameworks by focusing on citizenship as related to growing ecological problems and environmental survival. These palpable ecological challenges invite us to think about people's relations not only with each other but also with non-human others as well as with past generations (Rajković 2023) and future ones to whom we have an ecological responsibility (Christoff 1996, 151–169; Dobson 2005).

Dobson (2005) defines this environment-driven responsibility to each other and to future generations as “ecological citizenship.” For him, ecological citizenship emerges from non-territorial spaces of a community of citizens and relies on a principle of fair distribution of ecological space. He offers the concept of “ecological footprint” to define the political space within which ecological citizens fulfill their citizen obligations. This ecological footprint becomes the basis of political responsibility—generated by one's occupation and exploration of “ecological space”—which requires that those who have a higher ecological footprint fulfill concrete obligations to those whose right to resources is compromised (Vasiljević 2012, 105). Dobson (2005) therefore distinguishes between rights and obligations, where obligations become the main site of ecological citizenship, concerned with the environmental conditions of politics (Vasiljević 2012).

These philosophical thoughts on ecological citizenship find their articulation in Ochoa Espejo's (2020) thinking about citizenship *topologically* as a place-based, non-identitarian form of collective action. Here, “place” stands for a social and cultural formation which *orients* people's lives. In the place-based understanding of political life, constituent parts are seen as interrelated, so that politics, climate, water, and landforms take priority, even if temporarily, over traditionally understood identity markers. More specifically, this place-based form of citizenship is a “specific configuration of things in location” (Ochoa Espejo 2020, 14), where a dynamic web of practices and material forces connects humans to specific animals, plants, rocks, soil, riverbeds, and riverine worlds (Midžić 2022, 10–11) and disconnects them from others. These situated and interconnected webs of humans, institutions, land, and biota create overlapping civic duties and relations as well as boundaries and exclusions. For example, the Biščani's (citizens of Bihać) relationship to the river holds people in their dwelling place

and helps them realize the value of multispecies interdependency (Latour 2019, 83). This form of situated ecopolitics is grounded in embodied experiences of the everyday (Gagnon 2021, 22) and, as such, it challenges traditional borders and contours of citizenship. More explicitly, it exposes a different form of citizen action that emerges in an ecologically and socially threatened world: citizenship that is “local,” “primordial,” “liquid,” and deeply embodied, rather than territorial and nation-state-determined.

In order to capture the complex place-based, non-identitarian thinking about politics, Ochoa Espejo (2020) introduces “watersheds” as an analytic. She argues that watersheds are powerful metaphors for lived experiences and forms of citizenship since they are made of hard-to-control flows and circulations of water. They are connected and interdependent amalgams of landforms, subterranean configurations, vegetation, animals and their habitats, including people, their infrastructure, and their communities. Watersheds, understood as an assemblage of places and things, both living and non-living, are not backgrounds to political relations or a context within which social and political relations unfold. Rather, they are constitutive of these relations and they “determine the relevant political bonds” (Ochoa Espejo 2020, 19). As such, watersheds “construct territories from below” (Ochoa Espejo 2020, 18) and they create unique obligations towards those within the watershed, and these obligations in turn establish unique, non-identitarian, place-based collectivities (Ochoa Espejo 2020, 17–19).

Similarly, Escobar (2008) emphasizes how place-based environmental struggles powerfully “link body, environment, culture, and economy in all of their diversity” (Escobar 2008, 7). He highlights the embodiment and emplacement of human life that cannot be denied, despite the pervasive delocalization of social life and related anthropologists’ excitement about movement, displacement, traveling, diaspora, globalization, and migration. Inspired by Escobar, I emphasize the historical and changing character of the Bihać region (see below) in order to capture how today’s cultural, economic, and ecological struggles unfold against this “bioregional background” (Escobar 2008, 7)—a long history of geobiological life, landscape, and human settlement.

A place-based riverine form of citizenship therefore takes seriously not (only) who we are but “*where we are*” (Ochoa Espejo 2020, xii) and from where we act, speak, calculate, and engage with politics. For many Bišćani, *where we are*—where we think, act, and feel from—is understood as being next to, in, and with the Una River. More specifically, living next to, with, on, and from the Una River creates ethical and political obligations; hence, a deep moral connection is artic-

ulated between people and the river. Ochoa Espejo (2020, 22) argues that these place-specific duties—not driven by group identity or membership or national self-determination—have both a moral and instrumental value since they articulate our ethical standing in relation to naturecultures and allow us to coordinate a life in common. Importantly, this people-river togetherness is based not only on love, care, and joy—which abound in Bihać—but also on the danger, destruction, and exclusion that the Una has witnessed, memorialized, mirrored, and sometimes generated. This will become especially apparent in Chapter 3, when I discuss living with the river during times of war.

Thinking about riverine citizenship as place-specific allows us to trace these collectivities and obligations, inclusions and exclusions, and potentialities and limitations, while reconfiguring our thinking about spatialization and the logics of citizenship. Riverine watersheds, for example, are capillary-like but not random since they connect streams and rainfall to a common outlet. Therefore, thinking about a river’s unique surface and subterranean configurations helps us reorient our political commitments and obligations. In addition, through the prism of a place-based form of socio-political articulation, place is not confined by modern cartographies, articulations, and fragmentations of space that treat the space of citizenship as self-evident, bounded, identarian, and territorially determined. Rather, thinking about riverine citizenship as intimately linked to hard-to-control flows and circulations of water (Ochoa Espejo, 2020) allows us to “open up” place of citizenship. Riverine citizenship therefore embraces a web of situated, human and non-human life projects and ontologies, as well as water, soils, riverine animals, plants and rocks, and subterranean worlds and orientations, which together challenge surface boundaries—political, social, and corporeal—among people, states, and regions.

Place-based citizenship therefore constructs places “from below” (Ochoa Espejo 2020, 18) as ways of knowing, experiencing, and relating to the world. These relational, uneven, and interwoven practices and forms of life in Bihać guided, in 2015, the protest politics which brought together novel articulations and forms of defiance. These were struggles against other rationalizations of loving and caring for the river, and of living *with* and *from* the river, including the European Union’s sustainable development discourses and predatory green capitalism, which threaten to erase or destroy people’s sense of a dwelling place (Coulthard 2014, 60–61; Latour 2019).

Importantly, place-based citizenship does not mean that people who live in these spaces have a pre-political right to land, even though this view is not totally absent from numerous articulations of riverine love (see Chapter 5). Therefore,

place-based citizenship should not be understood as a form of eco-nationalism. Similar to place-based citizenship, eco-nationalisms also originate in a strong attachment to place, where “local knowledge of the natural environment, together with historical claims, strengthen nationalistic convictions” (Kovács 2021, 14). Eco-nationalisms and especially “far right ecologisms” (Cotofana, 2021) claim an alliance between nature, blood, and soil (see Bhan and Govindrajana, 2023). On the contrary, place-based citizenship does not claim that “a people or a nation *owns* a territory, or that land *belongs* to people” (Ochoa Espejo 2020, 19). Rather, territories emerge from *below*, from situated naturecultures and related social commitments and political sensibilities. As a result, I understand place-based citizenship as *nationalism’s opposite* since it is a non-identitarian form of collective action where individuals who do not identify as members of the groups that live in that territory can still have a right to the social topography by *joining* in established place-based relationships (Ochoa Espejo, 2020). Unlike ecological nationalisms, the ability of place-based riverine citizenship to embrace “others” in its fold is well captured by a Bihać-born, Zagreb-based university professor of bioethics, Hrvoje Jurić,² who told me: “There is a difference between this attachment to the Una River and nationalism. Nationalism is about particularity, territorial boundedness, purity, and exclusion. This riverine sense of belonging and obligation is so much bigger than that, and it is predicated on *inclusion*—everyone could be folded into it if they wish.” Both Ochoa Espejo and Jurić remind us that attachments to place are not always nationalist and exclusionary. Rather, place-based attachments can be potentially progressive and desirable, as these “local” duties and responsibilities “may give rise to non-exclusive ethics of care” (Kovács 2021, 14).

I am inspired by this aptitude of place-based politics and, by extension, riverine citizenship to fold into its ranks “everyone who loves the river.” This does not mean that “joining” and “folding in” are absolute, however. Rather, they are predicated not on nationalist/identitarian claims but on demonstrating a certain quality of riverine love and concern. More concretely, there is always an implicit claim, as the chapters ahead will demonstrate, that some people are more loving of and loved by the Una than others. These gaps and externalities—people who do not love the river “properly” or underground tributaries that carry toxins into the Una—return at certain junctures to illuminate the limitations

2 Most names have been changed to protect individual identities. The exception includes visible public figures such as well-known politicians, writers, businessmen, most university professors, managers of public companies, those who hold public offices, and those “ordinary people” who insisted that I use their real names.

of riverine citizenship as an inclusive ecopolitical formation. These restraints do not make riverine citizenship less potent, however; rather, they illustrate its historical alterations and political nature. More accurately, it is precisely at these junctures that we see *how* love matters.³ *Riverine Citizenship* traces these political transformations, and it highlights their significant political potentials as well as their refusals and limitations.

Thinking River as an Ethnographic Subject

Within the broader literature on sociality beyond the human (see Chapter 3), scholars researching waterscapes document how water is always a historically and culturally specific matter (Ballesterro 2019, Wagner et al. 2018, Hastrup and Hastrup 2016). Water is “a total social fact” (Orlove and Caton 2010), a phenomenon that cuts across virtually all domains of society: political institutions, economics, behavior, and cultural and religious practices.

Early anthropological writings on fresh water mostly focused on water beings in local mythologies and were symbolic in nature (Wagner et al. 2018, 1). These early endeavors were followed by mid-twentieth century interest in the relationship between water, agriculture, and political organization. Next, the focus turned to the value of water as a political and economic resource and, more recently, to an interest in fresh water as a scarce resource and commodity (Wagner et al. 2018, 2; Bakker 2003).

Similar to the broader literature on multispecies relations, numerous contemporary ethnographies of rivers emphasize deep intimacy and “commingling” (Salmond 2014, 293) between humans and rivers (see also Féaux de la Croix 2011). These scholars show that rivers have social lives and therefore need to be subject to ethnographic inquiry and engagement. Furthermore, they emphasize how rivers affect every dimension of human sociality and that they are crucial to how we construct and organize identities, for example, class, gender, and kinship (see Wagner et al. 2018, 4; Salmond 2014).

Due to the inherent sociality of rivers, most contemporary ethnographers treat rivers as subjects rather than objects of ethnographic inquiry (Wagner et al. 2018, 4). More specifically, rivers have moved from the role of a supporting actor in ethnographic accounts to being subjects around which ethnographies are organized (Krause 2010). For example, Krause (2010) asks if people who live

3 I am grateful to Ivan Rajković for helping me think through this idea.

by the Kemi River in Finland “think like a river.” This scholarship illuminates how human social and material lives are interwoven with the lives of rivers and how rivers bind land and people together (Salmond 2014, 295).

Contemporary ethnographies of rivers have revitalized earlier interest in myth and symbolism, but their focus is less historic and more epistemological and ontological (Wagner et al. 2018, 3). For example, following the ontological turn, literature on water and rivers in anthropology tends to decenter nature/culture distinctions (Hastrup and Hastrup 2015). This scholarship builds on the ideas of more than human relationality to argue that “water is a relative with whom we engage in social (and political) relations premised on interdependency and respect” (Yazzie and Baldy 2018, 3). For example, Indigenous scholars have documented ancestral forms of commingling which teach that “I am the river, and the river is me” (Salmond 2017, 286). This recognition has inspired the legal acknowledgment of some rivers as “living beings” (see Salmond 2014, footnote 1).

Importantly, many anthropologists interested in riverine worlds challenge human-centered epistemologies and “object-oriented ontology” (Archambault 2016, 248) and argue that agency should not be restricted to human beings. These scholars understand other-than-human-beings, such as rivers (as well as what we call plants, animals, and mountains), as “selves, that is, as beings that have a point of view” (Kohn 2013, 132). They also emphasize the danger of ignoring the agency of rivers since this reinforces an anthropocentric approach that destroys the world through pollution, loss of biodiversity, and climate change (Bennet 2010). Within this corpus, ethnographic literature documenting the impact of hydropower plants on the relationship between people (mostly Indigenous) and rivers explains in detail the scope of the current destruction of riverine worlds (see, among numerous others, Féaux de la Croix 2011, Folch 2016, Haberman 2006).

My work builds on this scholarship, on my long-term, in-depth ethnography of Bosnia’s social, cultural, economic, and material worlds, and on my intimate, enduring relationship with the city and the river, to examine *what riverine citizenship feels like and moves like as a socio-historically shaped, emerging political project*. Like these scholars, I am interested in the ways in which the Una River’s vibrant materiality—its structure, smell, sounds, rocks, and riverine worlds described in Chapter 2—makes Bišćani who they are. People in Bihać are greatly impacted by the river’s powers and moods, and they are certainly transformed through historical and everyday encounters with the river. This relationality produces togetherness, affective excess (Majstorović 2021), connection, depen-

dency, attachment, and care, as well as violence, fear, loss, exclusion, and destruction, all at once. Guided by the Bišćani's view of and attachment to the river, I use "ethnography in the way of theory" (Biehl 2013, 1). This approach does not situate ethnography outside of theory but rather puts it in a particular relationship to it. This broadening allows us to think about the river as an active, sensory, agentic subject and an object of human affection, desire, intervention, and destruction.

While many scholars of multispecies relations document affective encounters and forms of relatedness between humans and non-humans, I add politics to the mix. I argue that what is at stake are not only the ontological propositions and affective and loving relationships between humans and non-humans, but also the politically transformative effects of these situated multi-species encounters and affective states. In what follows, I demonstrate that affects, such as love, are shared, circulating forces that can engender political events and effects, as the Bihać political protest—and the ecopopulism that emerged as its result—clearly demonstrates. These struggles for water are distinctive because they have a propensity to re-emerge; the activists and lovers of the Una in Bihać know well that "battles would have to be fought over and over again, by them and by generations to come" (Muehlebach 2023, xiii).

Rather than engage in abstract theorizing about love and politics, in what follows I approach people's attachment to the river as a way of "deal[ing] with what's here" (Berlant 2011, 683). Thinking about politics and love in multispecies relationships allows us to pay attention to how "we are touched by what comes near" in a situated, ethnographic space of "contingent circulation" (Gunnaratnam and Hamilton 2017, 4). As Lucinda Carspecken reminds us: "A good ethnographer and an unconditional lover have practices in common. They listen, they attend to sensory and symbolic details, they acknowledge and respect insiders' perspectives" (Carspecken 2018, 3). As a result, instead of thinking about love as a "properly political concept" (see Hardt, 2011), I approach riverine love as a *properly ethnographic subject*. My riverine ethnography never "follows the lines" (Bessire 2019, 65). On the contrary, my ethnography, just like riverine love itself, is an inadequate flow: patchy, slow, granular, sometimes "irrelevant," discriminating, and open-ended. Approached ethnographically, love for the river is not ethereal and unearthly. Rather, it is political and material. It is historically, culturally, and materially produced and it circulates, unevenly, between humans and the river, folding some into its embrace while skipping over others.

The Una and its People

The Flow

Bosnia and Herzegovina has significant water wealth, and water plays a focal role in the national imaginary; fresh water is plentiful and has been available in cities for centuries. Bosnia, “whose name also doubles as the shorthand for the country at large, is itself named after one of its largest rivers” (Kurtović 2017, 3) and no less than three rivers, including the Una, form the “natural” border of the country.

The Una emerges in the village of Donja Suvaja in the Republic of Croatia, located 2.5 kilometers from the border with Bosnia and Herzegovina. The river surfaces from the ground in the form of a strong karst spring, whence it weaves a glorious course along the international border between Bosnia and Herzegovina and Croatia.⁴ This “fluid” border stands for both exchange and interconnectedness, as well as pollution, lack of control, suspicion, and anxiety (see Chapter 2).

From its spring in Croatia, the Una travels north for 212 kilometers, eventually entering the river Sava (a Danube tributary) close to the Croatian town of Jasenovac. Most of the Una’s watershed is in the northwestern part of the country, where Bihać, the largest city on the river, is located. While wandering northwards, the Una embraces numerous tributaries, most notably the Sana, Unac, Krušnica, and Krka.

The Una’s silhouette is irregular, shaped by altering topographies and the outline of the river’s tributaries. As a result of its immediate and complex topographical composition, the river sculpts magnificent waterfalls and playful cascades, deep canyons, and wide meadows, as it paves its course through the karstic soil embroidered with porous limestone, dolomite, and gypsum. This lavish karsticity shows in the river’s chemical composition as well: of all the watercourses in the Black Sea basin, the Una has the highest concentration of karst (Agencija za vodno područje rijeke Save 2016, 15).

The Una’s unique water structure enables the formation of an exceptional riverine milieu, famous for its luminous emerald color, sweet yet moist smell, exceptional cleanliness and lucidity, mighty noise, and spectacular riverine struc-

4 8,080 km² (3,120 sq mi) of its length belongs to Bosnia and Herzegovina, and 2,120 km² (820 sq mi) to Croatia (Agencija za vodno područje rijeke Save 2016,14). The total area of the Una River basin is 10,200 km² of which 79% is in Bosnia and Herzegovina and 21% in Croatia.

tures, such as *sedra*—a rare tufa deposit that takes thousands of years to form (see Chapter 2). This distinctive landscape has attracted numerous human occupants over the centuries (see below); given the river’s unique configuration, it is not surprising that many early human settlements in the Una River valley are located on the river’s banks, including the city of Bihać.

These material, political, and poetic features contribute to the perpetual lore about the Una as pure, as “the one and only,” as “the queen of all the rivers.” This is visible in the frequently recited *Legend about the Una* with which I began this Introduction, as well as in numerous everyday expressions and gestures. This historically and politically constructed view of the river as unique and singular (see Chapter 1) is embedded in its remarkable sensorial multiplicity and heterogeneity—of smells, sounds, and taste, for example. The river’s heterogeneity—the basis of its singularity—is embodied and hard to describe in images and words, but it is well-known and shared by the people of Bihać.

The chapters that follow will explain how this construction of the Una as “the one and only” and as “pristine” created environmental and political opportunities for Biščani to successfully mobilize to protect “their” river. At the same time, these formulations of the river as exceptional and pure prefigured the insistent branding, extraction, touristification, and uncontrolled and sprawling destruction of the Una, all of which I explore in detail in Chapter 6.

Bihać: Its People and History

The Una River Valley’s inhabitants’ lives have been inextricably intertwined with the life of the river. Archeological evidence suggests that throughout history people in this region created and retained a lifestyle intimately connected with the river. For example, the *Japodi* (or Iapydes) were an ancient people who dwelt off the Adriatic coast and eastwards of the Istrian peninsula, including the Una Valley. Their dwellings famously included *sojenicas*, or wooden stilt houses raised on oak piles over the river Una. Five of these settlements were discovered in the Bihać region (Raunig 2004). In addition to creating houses by, above, and on the water, the Japodi worshiped water, most notably the divine pair of water deities Vidasus and Thana, whose rocky reliefs persist today at some springs in the area. Many Japodian archeological artifacts are housed in Bihać’s “Muzej Pounja”⁵ (Pounje Museum), reminding the people of their connections to the

5 Pounje is a microregion of the Una River.

Japodian “water republic” (Šehić 2016). Bišćani regularly mention the Japodian riverine dwellings, as well as the tribe’s paganism and mysticism. The Japodi’s complex cohabitation with the river still informs people-river relationships in the town and inspires emerging ecotourism on the river (see Chapter 6).

The centuries that followed Japodian dominance exposed the riverine region to numerous invasions, peoples, powers, forces, and kernels of independence. This included the conquest by the Roman Empire in the first century, the time from which the *Legend about the Una* presumably originates. Roman dominance was interrupted by the arrival of the Slavs in the seventh century, who intermingled with and absorbed the Illyrian tribes. During early medieval times, the Una Valley was under threat and control of multiple kingdoms, including the Kingdom of the Franks from the west and the Byzantine Empire from the east, as well as the Venetian Republic from the south and the Kingdom of Hungary from the north, with the Una River often serving as a boundary (Delić 1997, 7).

The first medieval urban settlements and towns around the Una River developed in the middle of the thirteenth century. Bihać, as the center of the Una Valley and the Pounje region, first entered written records on February 26, 1260, in the charter of Hungarian King Béla IV. Just two years later, in 1262, Béla proclaimed Bihać a royal free city and placed it under the direct authority of the Hungarian throne. In these documents, the town is described as built on the river’s island of St. Ladislav, surrounded by the Una River and double city walls (Delić 1997, 8). Here, the river served as a protective belt around the island town.

In 1592, after numerous attempts and more than 200 years after the first Ottoman conquest of other parts of the Balkans, the Ottoman forces seized Bihać. During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Bihać was the westernmost military checkpoint of the Ottoman Kingdom, under periodic invasion from the Austrian Empire. The Una’s emerald waters became the borderline currents separating and connecting two great empires: the Austro-Hungarian and the Ottoman. After the defeat of the Ottomans in the Russo-Turkish War (1877-78), Austria-Hungary was given the right to annex and administer Bosnia and Herzegovina at the Congress of Berlin (1878). During the Austro-Hungarian occupation, the town witnessed substantial investment and development of social and material infrastructure, including the building of the Canal (*Jarak* or *Kanal*). It is on this canal that the first small hydropower plant in the region—today a national monument⁶—was built in 1911.

6 http://old.kons.gov.ba/main.php?id_struct=6&lang=1&action=view&id=3332

The Austro-Hungarian annexation ended with World War I, after which the area became a part of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, lasting until World War II and the Nazi invasion. World War II was especially turbulent in Bihać: first, the town was occupied by the Germans and then liberated by the Yugoslav Partisans, or the National Liberation Army (NOB), under the leadership of the communist leader Josip Broz Tito. Upon the liberation of the territory, the Bihać Republic—an area bigger than today’s Switzerland or Belgium—was formed by Tito and his Partisan Army. The Republic was a short-lived creation, existing between November 1942 and January 1943 in the first liberated area of Nazi-occupied Yugoslavia, and Bihać became its administrative center. In January 1943, Bihać was occupied by the Germans again until it was finally liberated by the Partisans in the spring of 1945. The town emerged from the war in ruins, a witness to numerous battles, betrayals, power struggles, overturns, and aerial bombardments. Growing up, I heard horrific stories about these times, including dead, bloated bodies of the war’s victims floating in the blood-stained Una.

During socialist times, from 1945 to 1991, the town developed significantly, becoming an industrial, transportation, educational, and cultural center of the region. During a period of exceptional socialist modernity and stability, the town grew tremendously, from 15,763 inhabitants in 1961 to 41,676 inhabitants in 1980 (Delić 1997, 13). The urban growth and related industrial development—primarily textile industry and pulp mill manufacturing on the Una and its tributaries, the Sana and the Unac—started to significantly pollute the river. To curb the increasing pollution, an ecological association, *Unski smaragdi* (the Una River Emeralds)⁷, was created. The main goal of the Association was to increase the environmental consciousness of Bihać’s children and to produce ecologically conscious socialist youth (see Chapter 1). The Association grew exponentially until the 1990s war, when its work, as well as overall industrial production and urban growth on the Una, were interrupted.

War and the River

After the declarations of independence by Slovenia and Croatia from Yugoslavia in the early 1990s, Bosnia and Herzegovina found itself faced with a choice between independence (supported by the majority of Bosniaks and Croats) and remaining in the Yugoslav federation (supported by the majority of Serbs). In February 1992, a state-wide referendum for independence from Yugoslavia took

7 I use “the Una River Emeralds,” “the Emeralds,” and “the Association” interchangeably in this book.

place, which was boycotted by the majority of Serb leaders. Regardless of the boycott, Bosnia and Herzegovina became an independent state on April 6. On the same day Bosnia and Herzegovina was officially recognized, Serbian paramilitary units and the Yugoslav People's Army attacked Bosnia's capital, Sarajevo, and started the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The army of the self-proclaimed Republika Srpska (RS) within Bosnia and Herzegovina, with the help of troops and weapons from Serbia, succeeded in conquering close to 70 percent of the country's territory by the end of 1993. It also perpetrated some of the most brutal acts of violence exercised against the non-Serb populations, which involved mass killings, ethnic cleansing, rape, and torture.

The Bihać region, also known as Krajina, with approximately 300,000 mostly Bosniak residents, is the northwestern pocket of the country and Bosnia's forgotten battlefield (O'Shea 2012). The largest town in Krajina is Bihać, the sixth-largest Bosnian town, with approximately 45,000 inhabitants. The Bihać region suffered terribly during the war; it was besieged for over three years but never conquered by the Serb army. At the beginning of the Bosnian War, most of the Serb population of Bihać left the city for other Serb-dominated regions of the country or abroad. The war in Bihać began in June 1992 with the Serb army besieging and intensely shelling the town. Bosniak (roughly 66 percent of the town's population) and Croat (roughly 8 percent of the town's population) armies and civilians defended their town jointly during the three-and-a-half-year siege. In 1993, Bihać became one of the six regions designated as safe by the United Nations (UN). The UN was supposed to protect the populations under siege from shelling and possible mass killings.⁸

The relationship between people and the Una deepened during the 1990s war. The Una supplied enough water for people to cover their basic needs, despite numerous attempts by the Serb army to interrupt the city's water supply. In addition, the river provided an escape from the endless shelling and detonations in the town, since its powerful waterfalls and pristine beaches offered shelter to citizens and concealed the noise of war-related destruction. Swimming together in the river provided the people of Bihać living under siege with an opportunity to create moments of play and laughter amidst destruction and death (see Chapter 3).

After more than three years of failed negotiations, bloody conflict, over 100,000 deaths, and the displacement of approximately 2 million people as ref-

8 The inability of the UN to protect "protected" regions came to full light with the fall of the Srebrenica enclave in the summer of 1995.

ugees, on December 14, 1995, the Dayton Peace Agreement, brokered by the U.S., brought an end to the Bosnian War. Ending a three-year-long siege, Bihać was liberated in the controversial Bosnian-Croatian army offensive of August 1995, soon after which the Dayton Peace Agreement was signed in Paris in December 1995. By constituting the state as a consociational (ethnic power-sharing) democracy, the Dayton Peace Agreement also solidified and legitimized a shallow state model in Bosnia and Herzegovina. More specifically, the consociational power-sharing arrangement presumes the cooperation of political elites across ethnic divides to manage conflicts. This model of power-sharing (Lijphart 1977) rests on the recognition and institutionalization of and the proportional allocation of resources to ethnically, religiously, or linguistically defined collectivities (Van den Berghe 2002). Fears of ethnic domination are therefore reduced by extending self-rule and segmental autonomy as far as possible to each community (Palmer 2005). This leads to the absolute political institutionalization of ethnicity on the substate entity level,⁹ protected by the autonomy of self-government, veto rights for each of the ethnic groups, and systems of proportionality and administrative power-sharing. This extreme decentralization of the Bosnian state and correlated fragmentation of governance directly impacts natural resource management, including the contemporary governance of the Una National Park (see Chapter 6).

This short and patchy history of war and peace in the region, and everything in between, suggests that the Una River, the city of Bihać, and its inhabitants have been historically intertwined in the same grammar of survival, creating a sense of connection, co-citizenship, and mutuality (Figures 1 and 2). The well-known local writer Faruk Šehić (2016) captures this profound, historical people-river togetherness when he writes: “Our town grew out of people’s bond with the river. The Una is the power that holds the town together, otherwise both the river and its people would have been swept away long ago; like tortoises with houses on their backs, they would have fled far and wide. They know very well that problems vanish by simply watching the flow of the river. They are, after all, river citizens” (Šehić 2016, 137). It is this complex, historically-shaped con-

9 In the case of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the contours of consociational democracy are even more complex. The state has seven levels of governance, 13 constitutions, hundreds of ministers, and over 600 deputies (Bieber 2005, 4). In addition, Bosnia and Herzegovina is best described as a “triple power-sharing system” (44), where power-sharing exists in entities and cantons and, to a much smaller degree, at the level of the state. The establishment of this seemingly equal, but in reality unbalanced, political arrangement has led to an “asymmetrical” (Kasapović 2005, 4), intolerably plural (Vlaisavljević 2005), inherently complex, unstable, and dysfunctional government (Bieber 2005, 40).



Fig. 1. Bihac towers, the Una, and a stranded boat (photo by the author).



Fig. 2. Bihac Church Tower, the Una, and fishermen (photo by the author).

viviality between the town's people and the river, the current politicization of this connection, and its relationship to contemporary ecopolitical formations that *Riverine Citizenship* promises to unpack.

The Book's Flow

This book is composed of six chapters which explore, together and separately, different dimensions of riverine citizenship—a form of politics where acting, speaking, calculating, and engaging politically are informed by being next to, in, and with the Una River. The chapters that follow jointly illustrate how living with the Una River creates ethical and political obligations, reflecting profound moral bonds between Bišćani and the Una.

Chapter 1 (“The Una River Emeralds: Producing Ecologically Conscious Children”) uses archival and ethnographic methods to explain the role of children-focused socialist vernacular environmentalisms in articulating green visions of nature, culture, society, personhood, and politics. More specifically, the chapter focuses on the formative relationship between an ecological association, *Unski smaragdi*, and the region's children which systematized, categorized, and valorized the Una's uniqueness and people-river contiguity. In the process, it created substantial political repository, which shaped riverine political awakenings in the mid-2000s.

Chapter 2 (“Traversing the Una: Riverine Ethnography and the Senses”) explores the Una's unique structure and how Bišćani get to know the river through their senses and bodily movements. Building on the anthropology of the senses, anthropology of the subterranean, riverine ethnography, and collaborative sound recordings and listening walks, the chapter argues that the Una's material properties—and the sensorial experiences they incite—influence Bišćani's connection to the river and, more recently, their political action. It shows how, for Bišćani, being by the river is a matter of rooted history, ecological and geographical orientation, and embodied sensoriality. This sensorial experience of the river shapes and reveals what it is to live a particular type of life, what people sometimes call *unski život*, or “the Una style of life,” and how to be in the world historically, ecologically, socially, and politically. The chapter argues that this sensorial, permeable, and embodied dimension of people-river conviviality gives force and flavor to riverine citizenship. More specifically, traversing and absorbing the river—broadly conceived to include water and air, flora and fauna, and the subterranean world—foregrounds Bišćani's independence and interdependence, agency

and creativity, inclusion and exclusion, and hope and anxiety. It also shapes their everyday sociality and, more recently and overtly, their politics.

Chapter 3 (“Life in an Age of Death: War and the River”) starts with an acknowledgment that most of the literature on wars understandably focuses on the horrific aspects of war, such as death, destruction, displacement, and trauma. The chapter argues, seemingly provocatively, that war is not only brutal and disastrous, but also in some respects deeply joyful and at times even fun. More specifically, the chapter asks: What kind of life emerges in these war-injured landscapes? Guided by this question, I argue that we cannot understand what war looks like and feels like if we do not understand the relationship between humans and other-than-humans. I show how, during the Bosnian War, shared moments of joy, fun, and togetherness (*communitas*) materialized between Bišćani and the Una River. Swimming in the river *together* provided the people of Bihać with an opportunity to create moments of play and laughter in between life and death. As people in Bihać explained, these were moment-by-moment living situations, where generations blended and where divisions, superiority, and pride were broken down, however temporarily, and new undifferentiated bonds among people were created—*communitas*. I demonstrate that this experience of swimming in and with the river during the war, and the sense of *communitas* it generated, further cemented the relationship between Bišćani and the river and prefigured riverine citizenship. More specifically, when the river was threatened by “green transition” projects in 2015, decades of the Una River Emeralds’ pedagogies, everyday practices of living by and traversing the river, and swimming in and with the river during the war fueled riverine citizenship in Bihać, as I illustrate in the following chapters.

Chapter 4 (“‘Ne damo Unu!’: The Making of Riverine Citizens”) builds on theoretical conversations about ecopopulism in political philosophy and anthropology to focus on the 2015 “We will not give up the Una!” protest. The chapter explains how the protest generated an ecopopulist movement that overtly politicized, for the first time in Bihać’s history, the affective riverine community described in the previous three chapters. The chapter shows how thousands of people got together to object to the city’s decision that gave a concession to a joint Russian and Bosnian energy company to develop a dam on the Una. Pressured by the people, the city’s politicians overturned their decision to award the concession. The chapter starts from this moment when the political rule was shaken, and it ethnographically unpacks the protest. It explains how the protest brought together multiple actors, resulting in an unlikely ecopopulist alliance of activists, diaspora, businessmen, academics, and ordinary cit-

izens who came together to successfully push against international and local “green transition” agendas.

Chapter 5 (“I Love the Una: On Love and Politics in Multispecies Relationships”) builds on the previous chapter to examine love for the river as a political force which generated a successful political protest and produced ecopopulist politics. The chapter ethnographically explores what “being in love with the river” looks like and moves like. It shows how love for the Una is literal rather than metaphorical; it manifests itself as an intention on the part of the citizens of Bihać to protect *unski život* and stay in sync with the river and, by extension, with themselves and each other. I illustrate how riverine love in Bihać has been historically perceived as vital, neutral, romantic, and apolitical, as both prior to and outside of politics, and *as life itself*. While these emotions have often been framed as transgenerational, transhuman, and prehistoric feelings for the river, in 2015 they emerged as central to the new political becomings and terrains of political struggle. More specifically, the 2015 protest made people realize that the Una should concern them politically. Riverine love, I argue, moved into the political sphere in Bihać, shattering the politics of impasse: *Unoljupci* (lovers of the Una) were transformed into riverine citizens. The Una thus emerged from the protest as a key political issue, offering a new ecopolitical formation and novel grammar for ecopopulist politics.

The sixth and final chapter (“This tourism will kill us all!': Ecotourism, a Fragmented State, and the Slow Death of the River”) examines the frontiers and limitations of riverine citizenship which were alluded to and prefigured in previous chapters. More specifically, it examines what happens in the aftermath of a successful ecopopulist revolt. It details how, during the protest, numerous groups and individuals came together, forming an unlikely coalition and generating ecopopulist sentiment. As a result of their efforts, the Una River is safe from damming for now. Instead, the river has been branded as a popular ecotourist destination, unleashing eco-opportunism and touristification, which, in the name of protecting, branding, and selling the unique, pristine *unski život*, is leading to the slow death of the river: bulldozing and cementing its banks, developing “nature-friendly and stress-free” resorts which dump tourists’ waste directly into the river, and expanding fish farm production which heavily pollutes the river. This chapter is a sober reminder that fighting for water is a perpetual, incomplete, and unfinished political task (Muehlebach 2023). I invite the reader to “flow,” however partially, imperfectly, or unpredictably (but never insipidly!) with me and the Una as we ponder prospects and limits of multispecies love, care, and politics in our environmentally, socially, and politically compromised world.

The Una River Emeralds

Producing Ecologically Conscious Children in Socialist Yugoslavia

Introduction

Vernacular and state-supported environmentalisms in socialist Eastern Europe played an important role in articulating “green” visions of nature, society, personhood, and politics, both within and without the auspices of the socialist state. The socialist citizens’ association *Unski smaragdi* (The Una River Emeralds) in Yugoslavia provides insights into the philosophies, strategies, politics, and pedagogies of these “socialist greens.” In this chapter, I show how these visions and practices of the Una River Emeralds generated an ecological sensibility and environmental consciousness from which contemporary articulations of riverine citizenship emerged.

The chapter begins with an exploration of the relationship between socialism, nature, and children. Next, I engage with ethnographic, archival, and interview materials to unpack the unique history, philosophy, mission, and accomplishments of the Una River Emeralds. Methodologically, most of this chapter stems from my analysis of “an everyday archive” and “an archive of the everyday.” This personal archive—perhaps better called a repository or collection—is a cardboard box containing Boško Marjanović’s “things”—books, photographs, magazines, legal documents, personal notes, and scribbles.

Boško Marjanović was a lawyer, journalist, children’s ecologist, publicist, writer, and essayist, and the founder of the Una River Emeralds. The box containing some of his works and personal notes was assembled by his widow, Nurzekija (Kija) Marjanović. I borrowed the box from Kija in the summers of 2019 and 2020 and in the winter of 2021/22. The box was a *traveling object*—it moved between several individuals and offices in Bihać interested in

ecology, tourism, and protection of the environment. Among ourselves, we frequently referred to the box, seeking knowledge about its voyages and locations. The box journeyed among us, lovingly covered by a blue plastic grocery bag to protect the contents from possible rain and snow during transportation. I spent many hours, especially in the winter of 2021/22, with the contents of the box, learning about Marjanović's life, the unique vision of the organization, and about what the world could have become. This seemingly small, personal archive—the box—houses a unique world: a vision of the world deeply entangled with the environment, tourism, spirituality, and politics. In addition to interpreting the contents of this collection, in this chapter I also employ data from my long-term ethnographic research in Bihać and from numerous interviews, memories, and sensorial experiences about, with, and in the Una River.

Thinking about Children, Socialism, and Nature

This section explores the unique relationship between childhood, nature, and socialism as productive of political imaginations, social formations, and everyday practices. I first turn to the ideas and ideologies of socialism and the figure of the child. Then I discuss the ways in which childhood and nature have often been coupled together, something that has had an important effect on how we think about and treat both.

Socialist Children

There is a unique relationship between ideologies, political imaginaries, economic interests, cultural beliefs, and the figure of the child. For example, in her work on transformations in the economic and sentimental value of children in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century U.S., Viviana Zelizer (1985, 21) explores cultural shaping and “the social construction of the economically ‘useless’ but emotionally ‘priceless’ child.” This relatively recent socio-cultural transformation has created, the author argues, an essential condition of contemporary childhood: the expulsion of children from the cash nexus and the cultural “sacralization” of children (Zelizer 1985, 11). This sentimentalization of children is intimately connected with capitalist transformation, especially the changing world of mothers and “the increasing domestication of middle-class women in the nineteenth century” (Zelizer 1985, 9).

While socialist ideologies, including environmental ones, also tend to present themselves as investments in future generations or children, what makes socialism (and fascism) unique, however, is the recognition of children as *political* beings (Duda 2015). More specifically, in socialist cultural imaginaries—unlike in the cultural and economic transformations that Zelizer explores in the U.S.—childhood becomes a site of political intervention. Childhood is therefore constructed as a site of bravery and agency and experienced as situated, messy, internationalized, and implicated, as well as pure, naïve, and universal.

After World War I in Europe, nationalism, militarism, and political indoctrination became the main characteristics of children's organizations (Duda 2015, 15). In the Soviet Union, efforts by the Communist Party were first aimed at internationalizing and then nationalizing the country's children and their view of the world. In Italy, after the war, the fascist regime promoted children's enthusiasm, passion, pride, impulsiveness, and swiftness (Duda 2015). The youth that emerged from these efforts were expected to be young adults dedicated to the fascist cause. The "strong, irresistible youth" were therefore simultaneously the target of fascism and its weapon (Passerini 1997). Similar to Italy, German fascist youth were expected to be healthy, strong, and loyal to Hitler—the youth saluted the leader between 50 and 150 times per day (Michaud 1997).

As a crucial part of nurturing new socialist youth, the countries of the socialist bloc promoted pioneer movements, which children usually entered in elementary school. While at first these movements were politically proselytizing and ideologically rigid, over time they started to promote an image of an "ideal socialist childhood" in which artistic, scientific, and technological inspirations intermingled with ideas about children's play and imagination. This generated imaginative and affective representations of the world of children; for example, images of the children themselves, images the children made and composed, songs they sang, and actions they partook in were widely circulated in the former Yugoslavia. This was done via school activities and through innovative extracurricular activities, which frequently included idealistic socialist visions. The most representative of these "magical" children's socialist spaces was the Pioneer Palace in Moscow, which opened in 1962 (Duda 2015, 20; Reid 2002, 142). This, and similar places, fostered children's creativity, initiative, self-confidence, and solidarity while concurrently nurturing—through frequent cultural manifestations, meetings, marches with flags, and displays of symbols and slogans—a distinctive socialist youth consciousness (Reid 2002, 148).

The Yugoslav Pioneer Alliance was a product of similar understandings and visions of socialist childhood and upbringing. The Alliance was established on

December 27, 1942, in Bihać, at the First Congress of the United Alliance of Antifascist Youth of Yugoslavia (*Ujedinjeni savez antifašističke omladine Jugoslavije*). The Alliance promoted a unique relationship between children and their country, its leader, Tito, and the country's numerous nations and nationalities. This was done through easily memorable and frequently recited slogans including "brotherhood and unity" (*bratstvo i jedinstvo*) and through the proliferation of stories about children's heroes, such as Boško Buha.¹

In addition to penetrating Yugoslav schools, the pioneer organizations were concerned with how the children in Yugoslavia spent their free time. The focus here was on extracurricular activities that promoted health and rest, as well as creativity, work, and the development of leadership skills. A Yugoslav pioneer thus became a symbol of an ethical child who was honest, sincere, adventurous, advanced, persistent, healthy, and hard-working (Paravina 1980, 106).²

While in the early years after World War II the Yugoslav Pioneer Alliance resembled the Soviet one, over time it developed its own unique features and orientations, breaking away from the overtly politicized Soviet model. This became especially visible in the late sixties and early seventies, and most notably after 1976, when the Yugoslav idea of workers' self-management—where individuals participated in the Yugoslav project through self-governing work organizations—was put into law (see *Zakon o udruženom radu*, or Law on Associated Labor). The notion of workers' self-management quickly infiltrated the pioneer organizations, cultivating the notion that pioneers should be agentive and involved and have an active relationship "to everything happening around them" (Paravina 1980, 54). As one member of the communist youth leadership stressed, "We do not need to expose the children to political organizing and propaganda, making them disciplined and obedient. Rather, the pioneer is imagined as free and aware of his or her rights, duties, and obligations" (Paravina quoted in Duda 2015, 72). This also led to the point of view that "children know some things better than we do. This is not some demagogy, but a fact. If we just feed them [propaganda] as if they are some birds, then they will get full too quickly, and they will say, 'Enough!'" (Srećko Bijelić quoted in Duda 2015, 79). This idea that children know some things better than adults was also frequently uttered by

1 Boško Buha was a young partisan and an icon of the Yugoslav anti-fascist resistance movement who joined the movement at the age of 15 and who, a year later, was ambushed by Chetniks and killed. Stories, songs, and legends about this youth circulated widely throughout Yugoslav socialist curricula and popular culture, generating a strong sense of pride in, sacrifice for, and belonging to socialist Yugoslavia among the country's children.

2 PIONIR: Pošten, Iskren, Odvažan, Napredan, Istrajan, Radišan (see Paravina 1980).

Marjanović, as I will explain at more length below. First, however, I turn to a short discussion of children and nature.

On Children and Nature

In her important work *Reconfiguring the Natures of Childhood*, Affrica Taylor (2013) argues that Enlightenment philosophers produced a romantic coupling of Nature and childhood.³ Here, childhood and Nature are bundled together as “the essential and original raw materials of life itself” (Taylor 2013, xiii). This clasp- ing of a singularly understood Nature and “Nature’s child” (Rousseau 2003) has had serious consequences for how we think about and engage with both Nature and children.

In this “romantic coupling,” Nature is understood as “mononature” (Latour 2004), a singular entity with a capital “N.” Regardless of the seemingly singular, monolithic idea of Nature, Taylor argues that we use the concept very promiscuously. Nature “appears to be a monolithic self-evident idea with a high degree of integrity” (Taylor 2013, 4), and yet it emerges as paradoxical—a complex notion “which we cannot not desire” (Haraway quoted in Taylor 2013, 4). This promiscuous use of the notion of Nature is why Williams (1983, 219) suggests that “nature” is “perhaps the most complex word in the language.”

Furthermore, the author suggests that this singular, conventional notion of Nature has a “precise history” (Williams 1983, 220). This particular history starts with the first use of the word “Nature” in the English language, which was recorded in the thirteenth century to describe “the essential character and quality of something” (Williams 1983, 219). However, in the fourteenth century, people started to refer to Nature as “the inherent force which directs either the world or human beings or both” (Williams 1983, 219). In the seventeenth century, however, a third approach to Nature emerged. This new approach focused on “the material world itself, taken as including or not including human beings” (Williams 1983, 219). These three employments of Nature—as *essence*, as *force*, and as *material reduction* of “a multiplicity to a singularity” (Williams 1983, 220–1)—build upon each other and are mutually reinforcing (Taylor 2013, 5).

The uncritical deployment of a singular, capitalized Nature was coupled with the similarly singular idea of an innocent child. We see this perhaps most clearly

3 My thinking about “nature” and “childhood” in the context of the Una River is largely influenced by Affrica Taylor’s influential book *Reconfiguring the Natures of Childhood*. This section draws heavily from this work.

in the works of the Enlightenment philosophers, such as Rousseau, who understood childhood and Nature as intensely bound together. Both the figure of a singular, capitalized Nature and the figure of an innocent child were approached essentially as the original raw materials of life itself, where Nature was defined as “the child’s best teacher” (Rousseau 2003, 3). Here, “childhood and nature seem like a perfect match. Young children are often declared to have a natural affinity or connection with nature, and in turn, Mother Nature is often referred to as the exemplary guide and nurturer during the early childhood years” (Taylor 2013, xiii).

Rousseau, who was a poor and distant father with very little first-hand experience with children, argued that children are born into an originally natural state of essential goodness. He further argued that both “innocent Nature” and “the innocent child” are threatened by the destructive forces of society. This coupling of childhood with Nature materialized into the figure of *Nature’s child*, where both Nature and childhood were perceived as innocent, authentic, and pure. This state, Rousseau wrote in *Emile* (1762), needed to be protected from the contamination of adults and society. This initiated the development of pedagogy, which further glued together Nature and childhood, additionally cementing the notion of Nature’s child. The Nature’s child construct has been highly influential, contributing to a well-known tradition of early childhood education. This pedagogy includes a holistic view of the child, which emphasizes free play, fun and creativity, and the free expression of ideas and feelings. Reminiscences of this approach, which has dominated western pedagogies of childhood, as well as its critiques and unique renditions, can be recognized in the philosophy of the Una River Emeralds, as will become apparent in the pages that follow.

For a long time, the field of childhood studies echoed the naturalist assumptions about childhood and the universalist premises that flowed from them. However, more recently, scholars have started to focus on the transformation of “the natural into the cultural” (Jenks 2005, 49). This post-structural paradigmatic shift, inspired by Michel Foucault’s (1982; 1990) notion of discourse as a linguistic practice that produces social subjects and truth regimes, has allowed scholars to redouble their efforts to debunk essentialist or truth claims about childhood (Taylor 2013, xvi; see also MacNaughton, 2005; Dahlberg and Moss, 2005; Dahlberg, Moss, and Pence, 2007). The deconstruction of nature and, by extension, of childhood is perhaps best captured in the following statement: “There is no natural or evolutionary child, only the historically produced discourses and power relations that constitute the child as an object and subject of knowledge, practice, and political intervention” (Hultqvist and Dahlberg 2001, 9). On the other hand, this move to deconstruct the relation

between nature and childhood and to point out the socially constructive “nature” of childhood has had its challenges as well. For example, Taylor, paraphrasing Prout (Taylor 2013, xviii), argues that “by insisting that childhood is an entirely discursive production, social constructionists risk unwittingly contributing to this flawed modernist project” that creates singular certainties. More specifically, social constructionism ironically “stands in danger of becoming merely a reverse discourse, declaring ‘society’ where previously had been written ‘nature’” (Prout quoted in Taylor 2013, xviii). Similarly, Hillevi Lenz-Taguchi (2010) warns against the constructionist propensity to privilege the discursive and dismiss the significance of matter.

Numerous scholars of “nature” have argued that behind this seemingly uniform façade, there are multiple referents and applications of the “nature” concept (Castree, 2005; Daston and Vidal, 2004; Hinchcliffe, 2007; Latour, 2004; Soper, 1995). Inspired by and contributing to the ontological turn and new materialism, many scholars have embarked on a journey to knock singular Nature off its capitalized pedestal—and to reclaim nature (or natures) in other forms (Taylor 2013, xv). This has involved numerous trans-disciplinary incursions into science studies (especially Latour, 1993, 2004; Haraway, 1994, 2003, 2004a, 2004b, 2004c, 2004d, 2004e, 2008a, 2011) and human geography (Whatmore, 2002; Castree, 2001, 2005; Massey, 1993, 2005; Hinchcliffe, 2005, 2007). Building on these efforts, Taylor set out to reconstruct, reconfigure, and rearticulate the relationship between nature and childhood and to “deromanticize it, to render it less assuredly natural and normal and to reconfigure it as infinitely more dynamic and complex” (Taylor, 2013, xiii). Her goal is not “just to ridicule and discard the relationship between nature and childhood, but to hijack it from the Romantics, to politicize, reorient and reconfigure it as a lively and foreclosed set of relations with a different set of political and ethical affordances” (Taylor, 2013, xiv). In Taylor’s work, both childhood and nature emerge as messy and implicated, rather than pure and innocent. She introduces the term “naturecultures,” which situates and differentiates rather than decontextualizes many childhoods and many natures. This multiplicity recognizes the “nature-culture” entanglement within real-world relations rather than their protected existence in a separate space. “Naturecultures” and Taylor’s other analytic term, “common worlds,” complicate the categorical divisions between nature and culture in order to “queer the natures of childhood and to reconfigure them as enmeshed natureculture common worlds” (Taylor, 2013, xxii). The author enacts these concepts to explore the “pedagogical possibilities of reconfigured early childhood common worlds—envisioning these natureculture worlds as an opportunity for

learning *with* others and as a way to practice an expanded and worldly form of inclusion” (Taylor, 2013, xxiii).

Both constructivist and deconstructivist and singular and multiple understandings of nature and children are evident in the Una River Emeralds’ philosophy, representations, and practices. While children’s ecological consciousness was never the focus of the Yugoslav regime’s engagement with children, from the beginning of Yugoslav socialism there was a clear orientation of adults and children towards nature. For example, in the 1930s, while the communist party was still working illegally in Yugoslavia, it influenced workers’ organizations and workers’ climbing associations (*planinarska društva*) to organize excursions in nature where the participants would read and discuss communist publications (Duda 2015). Later, in Zagreb, the communists were affiliated with the Workers’ Climbing Association and its children’s groups, including the children’s “Friends of Nature” (*prijatelji prirode*) associations. What is more, from the 1950s, the Green Patrol (*gorani* or *zelena patrola*)—a primarily youth-based social organization without official membership⁴—became the key actor in the reforestation of socialist Yugoslavia (Bešević 1963). Importantly, these socialist youth were often described as more ecologically responsible than the adult urban population or peasants who were often blamed for deforestation (Rajković 2023). This focus on “ecologically responsible pioneers and youth” allowed the regime to not only construct, detach from the rest of the citizen body, and favor the youth as “ecologically sensible citizens” but also to disavow the pre-socialist past as rural, backward, and ecologically regressive (Rajković 2023).

The Una River Emeralds Association grew from and among these multiple traditions, ideologies, and ecological formations—both global and local. The Association frequently combined these seemingly opposing points of view—realist and visionary, scientific and poetic, secular and mystical, singular and multiple, and heteronormative and queering—in order to capture people’s unique relationship to the Una River and transform it into a prolific socialist pedagogy that fostered a distinctive ecological milieu. This ecological milieu was understood much more broadly than its English translation suggests. While in English, *ecology* is focused on “the study of the relationships between living organisms, including humans, and their physical environment [and] seeks to understand the vital connections between plants and animals and the world around them,”⁵ Marjanović

4 <http://www.yugopapir.com/2022/01/zelene-patrole-cuvaju-sumadiju-63-mladi.html>

5 <https://www.esa.org/about/what-does-ecology-have-to-do-with-me/#::-:text=Ecology%20is%20the%20study%20of,and%20the%20world%20around%20them>

and many other Bosnians understand *ekologija* as a *world view* and *way of life* that incorporates science, philosophy, sociology, poetry, art, politics, and activism.

This multitude of perspectives situates the Una River Emeralds in-between the two predominant types of environmentalism in the world: the northern and the southern (Guha and Martinez-Alier 1997).⁶ More specifically, the Association employed visions and strategies of northern world environmentalism—such as its global propensities, planetary grammar, commitment to facts and science, and struggle to change people’s *attitudes* toward nature. At the same time, the Emeralds engaged in tactics and discourses of the “environmentalism of the poor” with its emphasis on local experience, emic ecologies, people-oriented struggles for justice and inclusion, and defending a particular way of being, living, and acting in the world—*unski život* or the Una style of life. It is to this unique ecological world and environmental activism of the Una River Emeralds that we turn next.

The Una River Emeralds and “Its” Children

The Origins

The Una River is an anchor and a compass that situates Bišćani in the larger context of life on Earth. This became clear during my conversation with Hrvoje Jurić, who, in his youth, was one of the most active members of the Una River Emeralds. He started his publishing career with the Una River Emeralds magazine in 1987. In sixth grade, he published his first poem, “It Is Sad in the Park.” Today, this Bihać-native works as a professor of bioethics at the University of Zagreb. Much of this section is inspired by my conversation with Hrvoje⁷ and his writings about the Una.

In 2017, I met Hrvoje at a restaurant tellingly called River, located on the right bank of the Una in Bihać. As we looked at a group of teenage boys jump-

6 Guha and Martinez-Alier (1997) argue that these two forms of environmentalism—the southern and the northern—differ in their origins, styles and ideologies. More specifically, the “southern environmentalism of the poor” originates as a clash over productive resources and exists as “a third kind of class conflict, so to speak, but one with deep ecological implications” (Guha and Martinez-Alier 1997, 18). On the other hand, “the norden environmentalisms” such as “the wilderness movement” in the U.S., emerges “outside of the production process. It is in this respect more of a single-issue movement, calling for a change in attitudes (towards the natural world)” (Guha and Martinez-Alier 1997, 18).

7 In this chapter I switch between Hrvoje and Jurić. I use “Hrvoje” when I index his role as an interviewee with me. I use “Jurić” when describing his professional views and publications.

ing into the river while its currents tenderly carried a family of ducks downstream, he said, “Sit here and look at this [the river] ... and you will learn something. Something about continuity, that it all flows...there is something that is much more permanent than we are. One cannot explain this rationally, but rather ‘religiously’.⁸ That we have a privilege to live in that long, endless context.” Hrvoje has expressed this sentiment on many other occasions since his youth. For example, in an interview with Radio Zagreb when he was in eighth grade, he said, “We cannot say everything about the Una with poetry; we can just look at her and enjoy her beauty” (*Unski smaragdi* 1989, 11). Hrvoje’s words, then and now, are powerful, and their vigor emanates from his river-oriented upbringing, which opened his senses, encouraged his poetic tendencies, and directed his philosophical training, his deep awareness of his own transience, and his lived experience of *ekologija*—the interwovenness of human and non-human lives and landscapes.

Several days after having coffee with Hrvoje, I met with a well-known Bosnian author, Nihad Hasanović, at Opal, a restaurant located on the river’s other, left bank. After I shared with Nihad my interest in the relationship between love, politics, and the river, he concluded: “It is that primitive relationship... I do not say ‘primitive’ in a bad way. What I mean is that the Una was there before the Christians, before the people who are here now, before the Illyrian tribes, before the apes...” Nihad’s words resonate with Haraway’s writings (2008, 6) when she comments that our alliance with other beings “ties us to the lives of our primate kin.” In this sense, the river is a “palimpsest of prior forms of life” (Khan 2016, 181).

This ancestral, primordial sentiment and relationship between Bihać’s inhabitants and the Una River was solidified during socialist times, when on May 17, 1985—the Day of the River—the ecological association *Unski smaragdi* was established by Boško Marjanović. Marjanović was born on September 17,⁹ 1933, in the small village of Bačvani, near the Una River, in the foothills of Mount Kozara, close to Bosanska Dubica.¹⁰ According to Marjanović’s widow, Nurzekija (Kija), Marjanović’s childhood was very difficult. Kija recalls:

8 For a detailed account of river worship and religious beliefs, see Haberman 2006.

9 The number 17 was important to Marjanović. He was born on September 17 and then moved to Bihać later in life on another September 17. He chose May 17 as the Day of the Una River.

10 Bosanska Dubica was renamed Kozarska Dubica after the 1990s war. This is an official policy in Republika Srpska, where all cities, towns, and villages that had either “Bosnia” or “Bosnian” in their names have been replaced with other names which exclude Bosnian connotation. Bosanska Dubica is nestled between two rivers, the Sava and its tributary, the Una.

His father, Ilija, joined Tito's partisans in 1941 and was killed the same year. His mother, Milka, died of breast cancer in 1945. As a child, Boško suffered from pediatric paralysis, and as a result, one of his legs was shorter. Without parents, at the end of World War II, he ended up in an orphanage, first in Banja Luka, then in Bihać, where he arrived on September 17, 1949. Others in Bihać called him Švabo [Swabian, after a region in Germany] because he was blond with blue eyes. He learned early on to persevere.

Marjanović was ambitious, life-loving, and exceptionally productive. After completing *Gimnazija*, the most prestigious high school in Bihać, Marijanović went to Croatia, where he earned a degree in law from the University of Zagreb. He never practiced law, however. During and after his university studies, he worked as a journalist and writer.¹¹ He published seventeen books and edited numerous volumes, articles, magazines, and brochures, including *Unski smaragdi: Časopis za prirodu i kulturu* (Unski Smaragdi: Magazine for Nature and Culture) He also compiled a vinyl album with songs about the Una River. Almost all his writings and activities revolved around the Una and its unique natural composition and sociological significance for Bihać, for *Smaragdna dolina* (the Emerald Valley)—the name he coined for the Una River basin—and for the world.

In order to develop and implement his vision for the protection of the Una River, he worked tirelessly on establishing the Una River Emeralds Association. The Association started its activities in the 1980s as a small group of 10-15 enthusiasts in Bihać. They regularly gathered in Boško and Kija's apartment in Bihać's socialist government-built neighborhood called Ozimice II. Kija remembers, with a big smile: "For the first 15 years, the Una River Emeralds' main office was our apartment. They used our landline for correspondence and our rooms for their offices. Everything was focused on one main goal: to make the Una River a UNESCO world heritage site."

The full name of the Association is *The Society for Nourishing Environmental Culture and Preservation of the Una River: The Una River Emeralds*. As the name suggests, the Association's goal was to capture, deepen, channel, systematize, and nurture the sentiment that people had developed towards "their" river over the centuries. With its widely popular slogans, such as "The Una River should not be protected from people, but rather we should teach people to guard the Una" and

11 Marjanović frequently stressed that he was mainly a journalist. He wrote: "I am not a writer but a journalist. That is why my writing does not have a unique form.... My observations have their temporality and their life logic" (Marjanović 2001, 7).

“Clear Mind – Clear Una,” the Association was able to capture people’s unique relationship to the river and transform it into a cultural/environmental sensibility, labor organization, and prolific pedagogy that nurtured a distinctive ecological milieu and, more recently, a political repository. At its peak, the Association included over 163,820 members, so-called “friends of the river,” 734 of whom were from abroad, from 97 different countries (Marjanović 2000, 173).¹²

Members and friends of the river received an ecological identification card that stated: “Love you cannot buy, love you cannot sell—love is exchanged for love, and you, the friend of the ‘Una River Emeralds’ Association for the ecological upbringing of children, give as much as you can and wish to give!”¹³ The Association’s main goal was therefore to *capture*, *structure*, and *systematize* the historically and sociologically produced *love* between people—both near and far—and the river.

The Scope

The management of this non-profit, self-financing organization reflected its systematicity. Once established, the Association’s structure grew more robust with time, consisting of the Council, the Executive Board, the Council of the School of Children’s Painting, the Editorial Board of the *Unski smaragdi* magazine, and the Children’s Parliament (*Unski smaragdi* 1998/9, 28). This elaborate structure and systematicity are often mentioned by those who were active in the Association as children. In addition, former and current members often refer to the massive scope of the Una River Emeralds’ work, which intertwined arts and science, philosophy and biology, and both global orientation and local intervention. This was done systematically to clasp together people and the river and to make the town’s (and the world’s) citizens “realize the value of interdependency” (Latour 2019, 83). Hrvoje remembers this incredible systematicity of the organization:

Boško Marjanović was, at the same time, an activist and a systemic and pragmatic person... he believed that one needs to save everything. It was a unique idea [the Una River Emeralds] Boško Marjanović, *he was a system* [emphasis mine]. His own publications are instrumentally and intently connected with the Una River Emeralds. He published, I believe, 50 books. And he wrote about everything: the river, the city, the wider context, politics, his life, love, illness, his meditations....

12 *Sedre rijeke Une i Una bez sedri: Naučna tribina.*

13 For a discussion on love, politics, and the Una River, see Chapter 5.

The scope, holistic approach, and systematicity of the Association are perhaps best captured in the Una River Emeralds' magazine, *Unski smaragdi* (no longer published). To take one issue as an example, the cover page of *Unski smaragdi* issue no. 3, published in 1990, shows the Una River waterfalls, under which an alarming title warns the reader: "Crucial Days to Save the Una River." The short text below the title explains that two major state energy and engineering companies—Elektorprivreda and Energoinvest—created a study that proposed the development of six hydropower plants on the Una River. The author of the text, Marjanović himself, then uses Zagreb and Sarajevo-based scientific studies to support his argument against building dams on the Una and to advocate instead for ecologically sustainable tourism on the river. Among other things, he says: "To the people of this region, there is nothing that gives them more hope than the Una River, since they believe that this river will soon become a *fabrika turizma* [tourism factory]."

On the right side of the cover page, the magazine's English and German content (two essays) is listed, thus suggesting that the magazine's readership is "worldly" and that the Association wants to spread its message globally. This reflected the approach, frequently stated by the Emeralds, that they could never have too many friends and associates—an idea crucial for the formation of riverine citizenship. Understanding that the fate of the river is linked to both local and global processes, the organization worked tirelessly to establish cooperation and collaboration with individuals, movements, associations, and organizations in Bihać, the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Yugoslav state, Europe, and the world (*Unski smaragdi* 1990, 10-11).

The first essay published in English and German, titled "A Record about the River: The Una is the Only One," describes the Una's twirling flow from its spring to its confluence with the Sava (*Unski smaragdi* 1990, 9). The second essay—"Ecology School for Children"—tells the story of the Ecology School curriculum, which included the following: the Children's School of Watercolor Painting; the *Journal for Nature and Culture*; the celebration of May 17th—Una River Day; and a message to first-grade students (*Unski smaragdi* 1990, 10). In addition, issue no. 3 includes the following content: 1) selected letters from members across the republic, the country, and the world; 2) a workshop for biology teachers on teaching an *Ekologija* course as a school elective; 3) reflections from professors and "ordinary people" titled "The Philosophy of Profit-Making" (which critiqued the aforementioned ideas about dam-building on the Una); 4) a cartoon critiquing increased pollution on the Una titled "The Poisoned Uterus" showing a baby born with a gas mask; 5) reporting on eco-friendly industries in Bihać;

6) a commentary on the “Sculpture Garden” at the medieval castle of Ostrožac, which looms over the Una; and 7) information about the “Music against Pollution” event, and much more. This broad scope shows the wide reach and varied mediums of the Emeralds’ efforts, with two threats to the river especially emphasized: the threat of hydropower plants and the danger of pollution, intensified by urbanization and socialist industrialization.

The Mission

In addition to creating an all-encompassing system, the Association’s mission was to *nourish*, “via pedagogical, promotional, and other socially appropriate activities, a culture of preservation and protection of the Una River” (*Unski smaragdi*, “Statute” 2012, 3). This *nourishing* aspect was uniquely forward-looking, as Jurić often mentioned in his philosophical writings. For example, in his chapter “Ekologija-od etike do bio-etike” or “Ecology—from ethics to bioethics” (2000a, 30), he writes:

I would dare say that the Una River Emeralds were, in some way, ahead of most other ecological associations in the world. You can see that in the very name of the Una River Emeralds: *The Society for Nourishing Environmental Culture and Preservation of the Una River*. This “nourishing of culture”—and not only “care and protection”—reveals the Una River Emeralds’ true mission. That is exactly where I see the biggest accomplishment of the Emeralds: in attracting youth to the idea of ecology, via ecological education in schools, via art, and via media. Realizing that older generations are captive to their habits, which prevent them from seeing the immediacy of the struggle for the environment, the Emeralds turned to children, the emissaries of the new ecological civilization.

Jurić underscores the Una River Emeralds’ focus on systematicity, through which the relationship between *ekologija* and pedagogy/nourishing was fostered. In addition, his comments emphasize “the varieties of environmentalism” (Guha and Martinez-Alier 1987) that the Association made practical and effective use of. For example, Jurić often cites his engagement with the Una River Emeralds as deeply intertwined with his interest in *ekologija*, which he describes as a “conscious love of nature” (Jurić 2000a, 30). This emic notion of *ekologija* echoes the “environmentalism of the south,” which accentuates grounded ecological consciousness and local environmental struggles for self-reproduction (Guha and

Martinez-Alier 1987). Relatedly, Jurić sees his philosophical interest and expertise in bioethics as directly influenced by his particular “ecological upbringing.” He stresses that “the Una River Emeralds were my first school of *ekologija* where I developed my ‘*ecological sensibility*’ [emphasis mine] and principles of ecology, which, I later realized, were the most important principles” (Jurić 2000a, 30).

On the other hand, Jurić’s comment that since “older generations are captive to their habits, which prevent them from seeing the immediacy of the struggle for the environment, the Emeralds turned to children” reveals the organization’s commitment to the production of an *ekologija*-centered, future-oriented, and river-committed socialist youth citizen, capable of nourishing a culture of care and protection of the Una. This explicit ageism in the Association’s approach is also a central feature of the environmentalism of the north (Guha and Martinez-Alier 1987). In this approach, *ekologija* is not about the former rural attachments to water as a source of subsistence, for example (Rajković 2023). Rather, it is about the protection of the river *in its own right*. This formulation of the Una River as a good in and of itself that needs to be saved for future generations, and not seen as a debt to and an inheritance from the older generations (Rajković 2023), foreshadowed riverine citizenship and had a considerable effect on how the Una was (and was not) to be protected in the future. These future-oriented scripts would substantially shape the nature, contours, and texture of riverine citizenship, as the following chapters will demonstrate. All these seemingly opposing examples reveal the Una River Emeralds’ unique articulation of “natureculture,” which combines, however incompletely, “the southern” (commitments to people’s local interests, understandings, and struggles) and “the northern” (the value of the river in its own right) environmentalist ideologies, with their unique socialist-humanist, Yugoslav bent.

The Children

During our conversation, Hrvoje often mentioned systematicity and nourishing as key domains of the Emeralds’ efforts. He reflected on the way in which Marjanović engaged children—both *democratically* and *instrumentally*.

Boško was a true communist. He believed that quantity would produce quality—that the base produces the superstructure. His approach was ... if he gathers 25,000 kids, at least 10 of us will become the leaders. That was the modern socialist order ... education and development. I mean, the Emeralds are often described as a children’s association, but they are really Boško’s creation. But

I do not really see that as a problem.... We, the children, were treated democratically—our voice was always important. In a sense, his instrumental employment of children for the wider environmental cause—the protection of the Una River—was not a bad thing.

Hrvoje's comment suggests that Marjanović and, by extension, the Una River Emeralds were nurturing, respectful, and inclusive, as well as instrumental in the education of children. Their instrumental approach is visible in one of the Association's more recent grant applications, where it is stated: "Since the Una River Emeralds have an absolute moral right to Bihać's children..." (Bosnić, Marjanović, and Alibabić 2003, 2). Here, the Association claims its "moral right" to Bihać's children and employs children as "river ambassadors," whose task it is to advance and enact a culture of nourishment for the Una's preservation and protection. In this way, while using the seemingly apolitical figure of the child and "childhood innocence," the Association was able to engage in "the political": on behalf of the river and children, it fiercely, boldly, locally, and globally lobbied with scientists, artists, politicians, and lawmakers. At the same time, the Association's approach to children was inclusive and respectful. Marjanović, I was repeatedly told, listened to children and included children in leadership roles in the Association. Kija remembers that Boško

really loved and respected children. We could not have our own children. When I proposed to him that we adopt a child, he told me: "I promise you our house will always be full of children." Honestly, I thought he was crazy. I understood what he meant 10 years later. Our apartment was the main office of the Una River Emeralds—the children used our space, our telephone... our home was always full of children. All that was done for one and only one goal: to make the Una a World Heritage site one day.

Marjanović often said that children are wise and that they see and call things as they are. His letter to children, written shortly before his death in 2003, articulates some of these complex approaches and sentiments:

Dear children, you have always been my best friends. The Una obliged us to an unbreakable friendship, and we should be forever grateful to her [the Una] for that. Very few people can proudly say they have so many children who love each other like biological siblings, like Nurzekija and I can. I did invent the Una River Emeralds, but you made them unique and unparalleled.

In turn, you taught me that truth does not have two sides and that life is not black and white but mostly purple. To reach that conclusion, one must learn your language, the language of children. This is the language of the heart, soul, and love, and it is understood by well-intentioned people. ... You used to call me “the blond sailor from the Una.” Today, I am an old man by the Una. You should know that I am feeling well about it because you surround me. Our apartment at Ozimice II will always be open to you. Thank you for our amazing journey and friendship!

Marjanović’s moving words emphasized the purity of children, for example, when he states that “the language of children ... is the language of the heart, soul, and love,” while, at the same time, recognizing children as educators whose wisdom and ability to see things better than adults can teach us “that truth does not have two sides and that life is not black and white, but mostly purple.” This reflects the Emeralds’ unique approach to *ekologija* as neither southern nor northern, but both southern and northern, and more.

Marjanović thought long and hard about the special relationship between the river and children. He famously said:

Every time someone asks me, “What are the Una River Emeralds?” I pause. Not because the answer is so difficult, but because it comes with great responsibility in relation to the Una and children. The Una River Emeralds are not Štrbački buk and Martin Brod.¹⁴ The Una River Emeralds are the children, their enthusiasm, their desire, their minds, and their originality to simply live for the Una and from the Una. The Una opens their senses, but they also help the Una by making sure that this sensibility reaches not only the local areas but also the places we never dreamt of.¹⁵

Using both different scales—global and local—and tactics—scientific, sensorial, philosophical, historical, and artistic—to nourish *ekološko vaspitanje*, that is, the ecological upbringing of children (Marjanović 2000, 163), required “ecological literacy.” This ecological literacy encompassed the “Ecological Alphabet of the Una River,” which highlighted different basic aspects of *ekologija*, including pollution, future, tourism, culture, nature, science, folklore, children, honor,

14 Štrbački buk and Martin Brod are recognized as the Una’s two most beautiful waterfalls, and they are the main attractions in the Una National Park.

15 <https://www.facebook.com/iloveunariver/videos/bo%C5%A1ko-marjanovi%C4%87-uni/1620138924701338/> accessed January 17, 2022.

fish, mountains, and other dimensions of the cultural, natural, technological, economic, and social life in and around the river (for a full list, see Marjanović 1998, 197–201).

In addition, the Association organized literary and painting activities; developed art schools, colonies, and exhibits; created scientific symposia, conferences, round tables, and public forums to *systematically* document the Una's biodiversity; published promotional materials, conference papers, and literary works; prepared ecological, cultural, tourist, and sports events; established children's ecological competitions; promoted cleaning and forestation activities; organized children's ecological tourism; lobbied with the government; and influenced laws that guided school curricula (for a long list of activities, see *Unski smaragdi* "Statute" 2012, 3). Perhaps the most ambitious project—which reflected systematicity, ecology, and environmental pedagogy—was the struggle to include *ekologija* as a subject in elementary and secondary schools in Bihać. This happened in 1989. Kija remembers this period as being "fantastic and promising, when people's consciousness about the protection of the Una was growing." It was this systemic, wide-reaching nourishment of riverine consciousness that prepared the ground for riverine citizenship.

The Art

In addition, Marjanović recognized the unique power of art forms to propel environmental sensibilities and pedagogies. He published an edited volume, *The Una in Art (Una u umjetnosti)*, and he recognized music as a unique type of expression of the relationship between the Una River and people. In one of his numerous reflections titled "The People Did Not Dare..." (*Narod se nije usudio...*), Marjanović (*Unski smaragdi* 2000, 18) asked: "How is it that the most beautiful river has not been sung about by the people?" He interpreted this seeming "absence" into a symbol of the Una's uniqueness when he answered his own question: "Perhaps people realized that the Una's beauty is so vast that one cannot capture it in a song, so the people left the river alone." Later in the same article, he wrote: "The Una River Emeralds, knowing that music can positively influence the nurturing of ecological culture, published a vinyl record with an unbelievable circulation of 10,000 copies, 50% of which was sold and the other 50% distributed as a gift around the world." On the same page of the magazine, there is a song, "The Most Beautiful River," written by a local musician, Enver Salihović-Enko. The third verse, the chorus of the song, captures some of the Emeralds' emphasis on ecological upbringing and fostering a caring relationship between children

and the Una: “You are the most beautiful of all rivers; Every child eagerly awaits you; To protect you when s/he grows up; To love you because you are the Una River.” This conceptualization of the Una as “the one and only” and “the most beautiful and unique river in the world,” one that deserves to be loved, nourished a powerful ecological consciousness in Bihać, which prepared the ground for riverine citizenship to emerge. At the same time, by idealizing and elevating the Una on a pedestal of world ecology—the most beautiful river in the world—this approach also prefigured the Una’s future capitalist branding, commercialization, touristification, and contemporary ruination (see Chapter 6).

The Association also sponsored the cantata and vinyl recording “A Night on the Una River” (*Noć na Uni*).¹⁶ The text below the picture on the record’s cover spells out the main axioms of the Emeralds: “The Una River should not be protected from people, but rather we should teach people to guard the Una.” The production of this cantata was announced on page 12 of the first issue of *Unski smaragdi* (1987) magazine:

In an effort to foster a culture of nourishment, preservation, and protection of the Una River, to promote its values in the world, and to develop tourism, we have organized an artistic event. The authors in their works have been inspired by the beauty of this unique river. Among these artistic accomplishments, special recognition is reserved for the cantata “A Night on the Una River,” a piece of classical music composed in 1902, whose author is Josip Hatze, a well-known Yugoslav composer.

In addition to recognizing the importance of music for deepening ecological pedagogy, the Association sent watercolor cards to newly married couples (“Happy Marriage on the Clear Una”) and to newborn children (“Ecological Message to the Newborn”). The “Happy Marriage on the Clear Una” card includes this message: “The children of the Una River Emeralds wish you a happy life and marriage and healthy and beautiful offspring. Love that is crowned in Bihać, the children’s ecological city, is also a marriage with the Una—the most beautiful river in the world. Transfer your love for the Una and the city of Bihać to your children in the name of a healthier and better future. Let the clear and emerald Una River splash your marriage with happiness.” The second card, “Ecological Message to the Newborn,” includes the following text: “Welcome to the life

¹⁶ Društvo “Unski smaragdi” Bihać, “Noć na Uni,” July 2, 2018, YouTube video, 5:57, <https://youtube.com/jx4O3nJf5cA>.

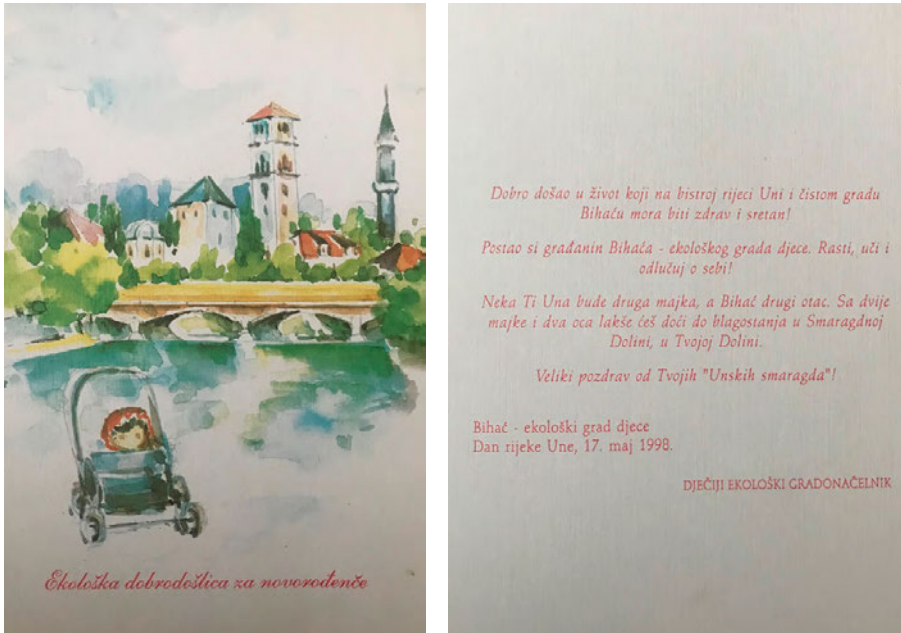


Fig. 3-4. The Una River Emerald's Ecological Message to the Newborn (photo by author)

which, next to the clear river Una and the clean city of Bihać, should be healthy and happy! You are now a citizen of Bihać—grow, learn, and think for yourself! Let the Una be your second mother, and Bihać your second father. With two mothers and two fathers, you will more easily reach prosperity in the Emerald Valley, your valley! Great regards from your *Unski smaragdi*” (see Figures 3 and 4). Both cards are signed by the children’s ecological mayor.

It is obvious that the Emeralds anthropomorphized the river and placed it within the ideal social(ist) order of heterosexual family love. In these images, the relationship between the river’s emerald beauty, creativity, and youth is accentuated. In addition, the care and love for one’s own family and the future health and happiness of one’s children are directly tied to the fate, and thus the protection, of the river. By saying that “love that is crowned in Bihać, the children’s ecological city, is also a marriage with the Una,” they are suggesting that those whose marriage took place in the riverine city of Bihać were not only marrying each other, they were simultaneously “marrying” the river as well. Therefore, the human marriage, the card also suggests, will be happy if the Una continues to be “happy”—clear and emerald-colored—and if future generations continue to love and protect her. Similarly, the message to the newborn merges family, happiness, the river, and the city, where the child is invited to consider the Una

as his or her second mother and Bihać as a second father. This construction of Bihać as a second father and the Una as a second mother symbolically removes the children from the lineages of family, class, and generation, however. Instead, it frames them as river-bound, forward-thinking riverine emissaries and bearers of an ecological future, thus prefiguring a particular type of ecopolitical formation—with the figure of an ecologically sensible, caring, responsible, and future-oriented pioneer or child citizen at its center.

Science, Art, and Social Organization

Realizing that the Una was getting increasingly polluted with human and industrial waste, in 1991, as the war in Croatia started to unfold, Marjanović organized an international conference titled “An Assessment of the Natural and Social Values of the Una River Basin” (*Valorizacija prirodnih i društvenih vrijednosti sliva rijeke Une*), which gathered 54 scientists who explored and valorized the Una’s structural—biological, chemical, physical, and geological—uniqueness, and he used this scientific factuality and confirmation to restlessly fight for the river’s protection. This conference produced 85 scientific papers, and its conclusions and recommendations—as well as its deep foundation in the natural sciences and their proclaimed objectivity—were continually cited in the Emeralds’ publications and lobbying efforts. Some experts at the conference mentioned that the Una’s water quality was unsatisfactory¹⁷ due to rapid industrialization and urbanization which had transformed half of the Una’s basin—the region called Pounje—from a natural ecosystem into a rural and urban ecosystem. Furthermore, the conference participants highlighted the lack of a clear vision for the region’s development, which, the experts agreed, should be focused on tourism, not hydropower. To secure this vision of development, the main recommendation from the conference was to include the river on the list of UNESCO’s World Heritage sites while continuing to nourish a culture of protection and preservation via the Emeralds’ unique pedagogy (*Unski smaragdi* 1991).

Reflecting on this vast domain of the Association’s work, Hrvoje recognized three main domains of the Emeralds’ intervention: artistic sensibility, the scientific dimension (such as biology, cultural anthropology, and philosophy), and labor organization. He elaborates:

17 The water quality notably increased after the war, when significant industrial production in Bihać came to a halt and was eventually destroyed both by the war and by the shady postwar and post-socialist privatization processes.

All these layers were the products of the main project and method: education and pedagogy. The Una River Emeralds became an educational and pedagogical hub where the three layers intermingled... because Boško.... regardless of how ‘crazy’ he seemed, because he pushed everyone.... I mean, he pushed us—poets, fiction writers, and artists—to write, sing about, and paint the Una... but he was equally committed to the scientific dimension, to precisely document the Una’s unique biological, geological, and chemical structure and value. He wanted to show and record how and why we needed to exploit the Una minimally so that we could save this ‘fragile’ organism for future generations.

A similar approach is evident in Jurić’s article “Nature and Ethics,” which was first presented at the conference “The Tufa of the Una River and the Una River without Tufa” (*Sedra rijeke Une i Una bez sedre*) and then published in a volume with the same title edited by Marjanović. In the article, Jurić echoes Marjanović’s work and emphasizes the Emeralds’ ecological imperative, which states that “no one science or practice, no one school of thought or action, is less important than the other; rather, all of them, working together, are needed for us to complete our collective homework, which concerns man and his environment and protection of nature and all life” (Jurić 2000b, 112).

This systemic pedagogical, environmental, and political organization produced eminent results. For example, in their brief overview of the Una River Emeralds’ important strategies, events, and accomplishments, Bosnić, Marjanović, and Alibabić (2003) mention 334,000 publications and promotional materials distributed in 96 countries; over 200,000 members; the creation of the Una River maiden sculpture; participation in eco-festivals in Berlin and Prague; and multiple scientific conferences valorizing the Una’s natural world.

These local, regional, national, and international efforts to nourish a culture of protection and care for the river did not go unnoticed. In 1990, two years before the beginning of the war in Bihać, the Una River Emeralds were awarded the UN Global 500 Charter medal, given to individuals and organizations for outstanding achievements in the protection and improvement of the environment. Encouraged by this international honor, the Association declared “the Una River Emeralds’ children the heralds of the ecological civilization” (“The Eko-Una” World Children’s Ecological Center, 1) and planned to use this designation to make Bihać an ecological center for the world’s children. These plans were violently interrupted by the Bosnian War (1992–95), which reconfigured the way in which the youth in the town experienced and thought about “their” river (see Chapter 3).

War, Children, and Ecology

During the war, the Una River supplied enough water for the people of Bihać to cover their basic needs, despite numerous attempts by the Serb army to interrupt the city's water supply. In addition, the river provided an escape from the endless shelling and detonations in town since its powerful cascades and pristine beaches offered shelter to citizens and concealed the noise of war-related destruction. Swimming together in the river provided the children and youth of Bihać living under siege with an opportunity to create moments of play and laughter amid death and destruction, as I describe in detail in Chapter 3.

Following these wider societal (re)orientations to the Una River during the war, the Emeralds' discourse and intervention shifted as well to emphasize the common fate of the children and the river during the war. For example, Marjanović started to write and publish about the war and to reach out to the leaders of the international community and the ambassadors of Western countries located in Bosnia to intervene in the conflict and save Bihać's children, "the messengers of the ecological civilization." The Association continued to work tirelessly under siege: they organized three round table discussions, published three books, and prepared a museum collection ("Ecology and the Una River"), while still ensuring that the Una River Day celebrations took place on May 17.

During the war, Marjanović's writings explored the connection between the Una River, the war, and Bihać's children; more specifically, he connected the war and the river through children. The titles of the three round-table discussions reflected this newly found connection: "The Protection of Children in the Bihać Region," "The Ecological and Cultural Creativity of Children in Wartime Conditions," and "What Should We Build on the Una River after the War?" The results of the last round table "gave priority to tourism and categorically declined the possibility of the construction of hydroelectric plants and the installation of dirty technology industries on this unique river" (*Unski smaragdi* 1998/9, 7). These recommendations are intimately linked to post-war efforts to stimulate *ekološki razvoj* (ecological development) by building ecologically friendly, sustainable tourism on the river and by establishing the Una National Park, developments I explore in depth in Chapter 6.

The Association's wartime endeavors resulted in three books written or edited by Marjanović: a book about ecological etiquette titled *ECO-GIFT*; Marjanović's memoir, *The Life Race of a Journalist from the Una (Životna trka novinara sa rijeke Une)*; and an edited volume, *My Suffering during the War: Children from the River Una (Moje*

stradanje u ratu: djeca sa Une), in which he collected the reflections and artwork of 1,037 Emeralds' children, capturing their wartime suffering.

Marjanović dedicated the latter book to the children of the Una River Emeralds, thanking them for loving and defending the river during the war. He said: "This was the way in which the children of the Una Emeralds thought about and worried about their ecological future during the four-year war blockade and under constant shelling" (*Unski smaragdi* 1998/9, 29). Marjanović sent this book to numerous national and international politicians, many of whom responded to him with their letters compiled in the archive box, thanking him for the book and for his activism.

According to his friends from the Association, Marjanović was aware that some people would criticize him for focusing on ecology at a time when people living under siege, including Bihać's children, were starving and targeted for destruction. As Hrvoje remembers, Marjanović thought: "A river made of blood is flowing down the streets of Bihać... how can we afford to think about the Una now? That seemed excessive. We were trying to survive the war. And that is when he connected the river, the children, and historical-ecological consciousness." According to Hrvoje, Marjanović shifted his discourse to send a message that the war would pass: "If we allowed the destruction of the river to take place during this exceptional time of war, all our criteria about what constitutes a life worth living would be lost." As a result, according to Hrvoje, the Emeralds' message became twofold: "The war will last for one, two, or maybe five years. We must have the Una after the war. The protection of the Una is no different during peace and war ... Fighting for the Una's protection helps us. It helps us to keep in touch with ourselves, to preserve our identity, and to ground us. It is almost like the Una becomes a spiritual device to help us survive." This new focus shifted the organization's discourse and opened up new topics, including resistance to aggression and protection of the river. But the Emeralds' story remained the same in the sense that they did not allow the protection of the Una to be pushed aside as superfluous during the war—rather, they advocated the idea that if the Una was not protected during the war, then after the war, Bihać (and the world) would face a real tragedy: the loss of a river that is essential for our understanding of ourselves and for our orientation in the world.

In 1994, the Association returned the UN Global 500 award to the United Nations. Marjanović explained that his act was the Association's reaction to the UN betraying the children of Bihać by not protecting them from extreme suffering. Kija remembers:

Boško was very angry when the UN and the rest of the world did not do much to save the Una River Emeralds' children. One day in 1994, he saw a boy, our neighbor, go to buy milk for his family and, as he was walking back from the store, a grenade exploded. The boy died right there, his blood and milk spilled together on the street.... Boško had to return it [the Global 500 award] after that ... and then, at the end of the war, a disappointed Boško went on a hunger strike. I was against it. He did not eat for 13 days; he just drank water. People from the military came, many others came, all begging him to stop with the strike. But nothing happened ... that is, until the teacher Jasna came from the kindergarten with 15 children. They brought two pieces of cake and two cigarettes [laughs]. And they came ready to perform for him. They sang and danced and then they said: "And even now you do not want to eat?" It took him a long time to recover from the hunger strike.

Kija's reminiscences show how in Bihać, the besieged city of ruins, the river and the children became "an active site of engagement" (Todd 2014, 17), where milk, blood, and the river were deeply entangled. The Emeralds' narrative, children's death and survival, and war experiences were all folded into the river story. People living under siege in Bihać found appreciation for the precariousness of life, which made them *notice* the river in a new way since they were able to grasp the river "from up close" (Latour 2018, 74). This enabled the Emeralds to further tap into this "primordial" sentiment that recognized and nurtured more than just human relations, allowing Biščani to not only stay safe and *normalni* ("normal" or "sane"), as Hrvoje suggested, but to also opened up new kinds of possibilities for relating, togetherness, and ecological consciousness.

Reverberations: Contemporary Transformations

After the Bosnian War, and the Cold War more broadly, the Una River Emeralds combined the history of nourishing an environmental culture and protecting the river with the children's wartime experiences to pronounce Bihać's children as "the messengers of an ecological civilization from the Una River" (*Unski smaragdi* 1998/9, 28). The Association claimed that the Bihać children were uniquely positioned to lead the world in environmental protection. Their priority was to make sure that ecology remained in the elementary and secondary school curricula. Their second goal was to establish the Una as a UNESCO World Heritage Site, to build a world ecological village named "ECO-UNA," and to encourage the

development of ecological tourism in the Emerald Valley (*Unski smaragdi* 1998/9, 29). As a result, in 1998 they proclaimed Bihać to be the ecological city for all the world's children (*Unski smaragdi* 1998/9, 28): "Based on what has been done so far, what is being done now, and what will be done in the future concerning ecological education and the training of children, we can conclude that Bihać and the Emerald Valley have become a world metropolis of children's ecology."

On May 17, 1998, Una River Day, the Emeralds' Children's Parliament proclaimed Bihać to be the Ecological Town of Children. They met at Bihać City Hall, announced their proclamation, and chose a children's mayor (Samir Abdić) and a mayor's deputy (Vedrana Vuković). The children gave the town's "ecological key" to the then mayor of Bihać, Adnan Alagić, and said that "adults are welcome to the Children's Ecological Town as long as they behave in ecologically acceptable ways" (*Unski smaragdi* 1998/9, 16). The Association then revisited its prewar plans to build the Ecological Center for the Children of the World in Bihać. The Center, which never materialized, was supposed to revolve around the Children's Eco Village—a hub for ecological pedagogy and activities—which was to be partially built on stilts to reflect the architectural dwellings of the *Japodi* tribes who lived by the Una River during ancient times (see Introduction). Some of the proposed activities of the Center included an eco-sports festival, an eco-music parade, an eco-comic book school, eco-puppeteers, an eco-carnival, an eco-horseback riding school, an eco-mountaineering school, an eco-kayaking school, an eco-theater, and many others (Bosnić, Marjanović, and Alibabić 2003, 2).

Boško Marjanović died on March 23, 2003, after a long battle with cancer. During his long illness, about which he wrote two books (*A Villain in an Environment of Love and Kindness* or *Zlotvor u okruženju ljubavi i dobrote* and *The Life Race of a Journalist from the Una River* or *Životna trka novinara sa rijeke Une*), he added another layer of wisdom to his world views, which stayed deeply entangled with the Una River and children. He started his last book, *Villain*, with these words: "Next to fascism, there are three big evils: drugs, alcohol, and a polluted environment." Here, once again, he used his unique vision to bridge social problems that are often kept apart in theory, policy, and practice—youth drug and alcohol addiction and environmental pollution.¹⁸

Knowing that death was near, Marjanović wrote two letters to be shared with the public after his death. The first letter (quoted above) was to the Una River Emeralds' children, while the second was a farewell letter, written on December 23, 2002. This letter states:

18 See Marjanović, *The Campaign and Battle Against Drugs, Alcoholism, and Pollution* (Personal Archive).

I request that my remains be cremated and the ashes be deposited in Štrbački buk. There should be an empty urn on the river's floor.... I politely request not to receive any posthumous awards, honors, or recognitions. In a moment of heightened emotions, many realistic and unrealistic things are promised, which are later forgotten. The people are the ones who know what to remember and what to forget. Anyhow, what I received during my lifetime from the Una River, from the children on its banks, from Bihać, and from you [Kija] is worth an infinity. If there is an opportunity, have Liha [a local singer] sing "The Una River Maiden" or "Bihać and I." What gives me solace is this: "I am glad I am not going over the river, to the other side, but into the Una River, the most beautiful river in the world." With a clear and healthy mind, Boško Marjanović.

Today, next to Štrbački buk, the Una's most famous waterfall, there is a plaque dedicated to Boško Marjanović. Every year on March 23 (the day of Marjanović's death) and on May 17 (Una River Day), the children from Bihać gather on the main bridge in Bihać and throw flowers into the river to honor their "čika [uncle] Boško."

The Una River Emeralds are still active today, even though their influence has shrunk considerably since Boško Marjanović died (see Chapter 6). Also, with the end of socialism, the pioneer associations ceased to exist, and the Una River Emeralds lost their access to the school curricula. Some argue that the organization needs to be reimagined and restructured to meet the needs of the current post-socialist, post-Cold War, neoliberal era. Regardless of their shrinking reach, the Emeralds' unique socialist vernacular and environmental pedagogy, which emphasizes the conviviality between people and the river, still lingers in Bihać. It lives through different school-based scientific projects, ecological competitions, literary expressions, embodied gestures, circulating affects, and everyday encounters. Kija mentioned how she sees contemporary articulations of the Una River Emeralds' work everywhere. For example, once she was sitting with her friend and her friend's granddaughter in a café by the Una River. The child ate ice cream and got her hands dirty. When the grandmother suggested that she wash her hands in the Una River, the granddaughter replied: "We cannot dirty *this* river, grandma."

The Emeralds' teachings are also visible in numerous publications. For example, in the preface to the book *The Una: A Photo-Monograph (Una: fotomonografija)*, published in 2002, the late professor of Bosnian language Hasan Tijanović writes:

Unlike any other river, the Una River has been able to remain clean for a long time, not because it is miraculously exempt from the threats of time and space but simply for the fact that here ecological consciousness has become a reality and a program, almost a cult, originating from the perspective that the Una River should not be protected from people but rather people should be taught to protect it. And they do it more and more, mainly thanks to The Una Emeralds—the Society for Nourishing Environmental Culture and Preservation of the Una River, founded on May 17, 1985. From that day on, the Una River has had its own holiday, Una River Day. The main task and objective of the Una Emeralds has been the education and training of young people in cooperation with primary and secondary schools. The Una Emeralds has over 160,000 members, including about 1,000 members in 96 countries worldwide. For its original activity, organization, and creativity, it was awarded the world’s greatest environmental prize—the UN GLOBAL 500 Charter Medal—in 1990. And every year something new comes out: a book on ecological etiquette, the Children’s Ecological Parliament, Bihać—Children’s Ecological Town, tourism in the Emerald Valley, and ecological plans and projects for the twenty-first century. And the Una River dominates them all.

This legacy is also visible in a painting by a 6-year-old named Alan (see Figure 5). In this painting, the child depicts a person who has thrown a plastic bottle into the Una River and who is then arrested by a police officer. Another, more personal, encounter with (post)socialist pedagogies of care for the river comes from my then 6-year-old son, who attended a local daycare during my Fulbright visit to Bihać in 2017. During that time, he, together with other children attending daycare, was initiated, without my knowledge, into the Una River Emeralds. One day, like most days on our way back from school, he and I were strolling by the Una River. As always, he stopped to look at the Una’s flourishing material contents—fish, rocks, seaweed, and *sedra* (tufa). Seeing a floating label that detached from a bottle of mineral water placed in the water to cool, he asked me: “Mummy, which river is this?” “The Una,” I replied. He immediately took the label out of the water while saying, without hesitation and with conviction: “*Ja sam njen čuvar* (I am her guardian!)” Finally, as a member of the last Yugoslav generation in Bihać, I also deeply embody this riverine sensibility, approach to *ekologija*, and river-oriented way of being in the world. This embodied orientation expresses itself in many mundane and not-so-mundane acts and gestures, including the writing of this book.



Fig. 5. 6-year-old Alan's picture of a person who threw a plastic bottle into the Una River and who was then arrested by a police officer (photo by author).

This widespread and embodied ecological consciousness about the Una River in Bihać, visible in the little girl's utterance, Alan's painting, and my son's statement, are perhaps the most impactful long-term effects of the Emeralds' work. Today, this sentiment, which was fostered for centuries and systematized by the Emeralds, is complexly interrelated—sometimes clashing against, at other times resembling and supporting—with the river's natural worlds, riverine politics and riverine citizenship, green capitalism, extractive economies, hydraulic pressures, and sustainable, ecological tourisms. These themes are explored in subsequent chapters of this book.

Conclusion

Reporter: Do you live close to the Una in Bihać?
Hrvoje Jurić, 8th grade: *Svi su u Bihaću blizu Une*
 (Everyone in Bihać is close to the Una)

Unski smaragdi 1989, 11

By focusing on one example of the children-focused environmentalist movement—the Una River Emeralds—this chapter showed that vernacular and state-supported environmentalisms played an important role in articulating green visions of nature, society, personhood, and politics, both within and without

the patronage of the socialist state. Furthermore, this chapter illustrated how these visions and practices utilized, in complex ways, both the figure of the child—the socialist pioneer—and actual children from Bihać to act in the ecological present and to envision particular ecological futures. These environmental legacies and repositories have greatly impacted not only the way people live with, next to, and on the river, but also how this proximity to and conviviality with the river have shaped their politics and survival, as the chapters that follow will clearly demonstrate.

The Una River Emeralds are therefore a unique children-centered, adult-run socialism-originated project, which combines “north” and “south,” romanticism and rational thought, and primordial, pagan sensibility and socialist labor organization. These seemingly incommensurable approaches coexist in practice in Bihać, without an “evident sense of contradiction” (Salmond 2014). The modern—rational, scientific, nature/culture separating, and classificatory—and the pagan/mystical—which posits humans, animals, trees, stones, plants, and everything else that is of this earth as part of nature—constantly commingle in Bihać. According to Jurić (2000b, 105), this pagan, ancient, and pre-modern understanding of nature and humans, according to which humanity is fused with nature, started to reawaken—after a century of thinking about humans as outside of nature—due to climate change and dangers related to the disappearance of *homo sapiens*.

The Association, since its inception, has practiced a version of “natureculture”—an approach that sees nature and culture as tightly interwoven. Regardless of whether or not it is explicitly stated, the uniquely formulated—both comprehensive and select—love of the Una is apparent in the Association’s activities and scope, such as in writing, ecopoetry, painting, photography, sonography, filmmaking, scientific publications, and political activism.

And that is why, according to Hrvoje, the idea of fostering children-oriented ecological consciousness and practice has survived three epochs: socialism/communism, war, and post-socialism/capitalism. Its narrative about children and the river has not changed much in the last 35 years, even though the political regimes and ideologies have changed drastically. “Why?” asks Hrvoje. “Because these are good ideas,” is his reply. The Una River Emeralds are a magnetizing force that collects, names, and systematizes long-standing affective and historically produced sensibilities that shape how citizens of Bihać traverse—physically, politically, and symbolically—their city and the world.

Traversing the Una

Riverine Ethnography and the Senses

Introduction

This chapter explores the Una River's unique structure and how Bišćani get to know the river through their senses, imagination, and bodily movements. The chapter argues that the Una's visible and invisible material properties—and the variety of sensorial experiences they incite—influence Bišćani's visceral connection to the river and the way they approach themselves, each other, and the earth they live on. More specifically, traversing the river—broadly conceived to include the river's water and air, flora and fauna, and the subterranean materiality—foregrounds Bišćani's independence and interdependence, agency and creativity, and hope and anxiety. It also shapes their everyday sociality and, more recently and overtly, their politics; the sensorial, permeable, and embodied dimension of people-river contiguity gives force and flavor to riverine citizenship.

For many Bišćani, being by the river is a matter of rooted history, ecological and geographical orientation, and embodied sensoriality—what they sometimes referred to as *unski život* (the Una-style of life). Being in a particular time and place, intensely affected by the river's deep historicity and materiality—events, color, smell, sound, temperature, and underground world, among others—constitutes Bišćani's concrete lives. Importantly, sensorial experiences of the river are crucial for how Bišćani constitute not only their everyday practices and knowledge about the world, but also themselves. Trnka (2020, 3) names this sensorial and embodied way of experiencing the world *traversing*. More concretely, she defines traversing as “ways of seeing, experiencing, and moving through the world and the kinds of persons we become through them” (Trnka 2020, 3).

Therefore, traversing highlights the relational, intensely embodied, movement-oriented nature of living a human life (Trnka 2020, 14).

In this chapter, I show how Biščani become particular people and political subjects by traversing by, across, and in the Una River. I capture and unpack Biščani's experience of journeying and consuming the river, and how this experience gives force to riverine citizenship. In order to achieve this, the chapter employs a variety of seemingly eclectic approaches and methods. It intentionally and perhaps unconventionally brings together collaborative and experimental sonic ethnographies, natural science and geological discourses, and social science approaches to thinking, researching, and paying attention to sensory lives and landscapes.

Thinking about Senses

The intertwined sensorial, social, and political experience of the river-people conviviality is mundane, habitual, and repetitive, as well as extraordinary. This is remarkable in the sense that it shapes and reveals what it is to live a particular type of life—*unski život*—and how to be in the world, historically, ecologically, socially, and politically. This experience of riverine citizenship integrates and amplifies the amalgamation of the senses, or what Ackerman (1990) calls “synaesthesia.” In Bihać, synaesthesia has its own history—from the long experience of cohabitation with the river to the Una River Emeralds' pedagogies and the intimate explorations of the river during the war (see Chapter 3).

The phrase “anthropology of the senses” was coined by the historian Roy Porter in his preface to Alain Corbin's (1986) book *The Foul and the Fragrant* (Classen 1997, 406). Anthropologists interested in the sensorial have been examining sensory perceptions as a cultural as well as physical act, where sight, hearing, touch, taste, and smell are not only understood as “means of apprehending physical phenomena, but also as avenues for the transmission of cultural values” (Classen 1997, 401). In this literature, scholars examine both the practical uses of the senses as well as how different sensory domains are invested with social values. This is important in the case of the Una River since sight, touch, taste, smell, and sound play a crucial role in how the river's agentic properties are experienced, constructed, and folded into a particular worldview—*unski život*—and, more recently, into a unique political repository.

In what follows, I build on these insights, using my fieldnotes and personal and collaborative sensorial experiences of the Una River, to explore the river's

unique structure and its surface and subterranean riverine worlds, and to expand, broaden, and challenge the emphasis on frontal orientation and visual perception.¹ This broadening requires a different form of conceptual vision to grasp how people's experiences of these material properties of the river impact the way *unski život* and riverine politics unfold in Bihać.

Words and Images

Most descriptions and portrayals of the Una—similar to the majority of “Western” riverine accounts—are textual and (audio)visual. The Una's unique beauty, often imagined, described, and captured in words and images, is especially well documented in numerous and frequently recited poems, documentary recordings, and paintings by local and regional artists. For example, a late Yugoslav poet and novelist, Skender Kulenović, who was born in Bosanski Petrovac, 50 kilometers from Bihać, famously wrote:

It is the Una! The Una River! Father is laughing. He thinks I am afraid and holds me, telling me not to be, telling me the bridge is firm. And I am not afraid, I am just floating, all illuminated by that Una River, that marvel of marvels which I can only call the beauty, the beauty. I have too few eyes to watch it, my lungs are too small to breathe enough of it...

Similarly, another famous Yugoslav poet and short story writer, the late Ćamil Sijarić, who was born in Montenegro but wrote about the Una River, emphasized the agentive properties of the river and their powerful impact on human faculties when he wrote:

1 In the West, vision is considered the most important sense (Synnott 1991). This privileging of sight has its own historicity—it grew in predominance in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries when it became associated with the fast-growing field of science. This emphasis on the visual was used to create a hierarchy of societies around the world based on their preferred senses. For example, in the early nineteenth century, the natural historian Oken postulated a sensory hierarchy of human races, “with the European ‘eye-man’ at the top, followed by the Asian ‘ear-man,’ the Native American ‘nose-man,’ the Australian ‘tongue man,’ and the African ‘skin man’” (Gould 1985, 204-205). Here “sight and, to a lesser extent, hearing were deemed to be the predominant senses of ‘civilized’ Westerners, smell, taste, and touch were assumed to predominate among ‘primitive’ non-Westerners” (Classen 1997, 405). Contemporary anthropology of the senses distances itself from these earlier racist classifications to explore the role of odors, tastes, and tactilities, in addition to the role of sights and sounds, “not as evidence of evolutionary status ... but as essential clues to the ways by which a society fashions and embodies a meaningful world” (Classen 1997, 405).

Let those who don't know how to love come to the Una River, and they will learn to love; those who can't sing, let them come to the Una River—and they will learn to sing; those who can't speak—they will begin to speak by the Una River; those who can't hear—they will begin to hear near the Una River; those who can't see—they will regain their sight near the Una River.

In these and many similar instances, the Una is romanticized and portrayed as a powerful force that heals humans and “imbues” them with life.

A great majority of art works depicting the river are done in the romantic realist style, which combines romanticism and realism. Some people in Bihać are critical of this overt and repetitive romanticization and fetishization of the river. For example, a well-known artist in Bihać commented:

Historically, most local art depicts the Una River. The river is the main source of inspiration and the artists, mostly painters, approach it romantically, with a dose of realism. There are some exceptions, like Ahmet Ibukić, who depicts the river in an expressionist style...but still, the great majority use romanticism or romantic realism. Some of these works are very good, but this art depicts the same entities repeatedly—like *sedra* [tufa], the waterfalls in Kostela [a village on the Una], the main bridge over the Una in Bihać...it is a bit exhausting, honestly. You probably know this: most houses and apartments have at least one large painting of some of these dominant themes...do you have one in your parents' apartment?²

In addition to painting, photography is one of the main techniques through which people attempt to visually capture the river's beauty, moods, destruction, agency, and force. Capturing the Una's uniqueness is propelled by numerous photography contests, such as the popular “best photograph competition,” organized by the Tourist Association of Bihać. Hundreds of photographers enter the competition each year. The entries are submitted on Facebook, and the best ones—according to a team of expert judges—are printed and exhibited in the main art gallery in Bihać.

More recently, with the development of high-flying art produced by drone technologies, new angles from which to depict the Una have emerged. One of the

2 Indeed, we do have a large painting of the river, the main bridge, the church tower, and the mosque. My parents received this painting as a housewarming gift in the 1980s. It was painted in 1981 by a well-known local painter, Dilko Kišmić. It hangs on the most prominent wall in the apartment, in the living room.

most popular and frequently captured images is *Srce prirode* (Heart of Nature) near *Japodski otoci* (Japodian Islands), a popular “green tourism” destination outside of Bihać (see Chapter 6). Here, five small islands, connected with wooden bridges, form a heart-shaped land mass, framed by green trees and blue water, clearly visible from the air. In May 2022, for Una River Day, I attended an exhibit of Una-inspired, mostly drone-produced photographs by a self-taught photographer, Irfan Alijagić. The exhibit featured “above” the bird’s-eye views of the river, including a compelling photograph depicting an eagle flying over the river.

This preference for visual portrayals of the river is nicely captured in the book *The Una: A Photo-Monograph* (2002), which brings together hundreds of photographs of the river with limited textual interventions. In the Introduction, the late local professor of the Bosnian language, Hasan Tijanović, explains:

It seems that the Una River doesn’t allow anyone to come close to it. Maybe it is because of this changeability and the elusive play of light and shadow—the mixing of blue and deep blue color in different moments, days, and seasons—that the Una River has attracted, tortured, and entertained artists, encouraging them to try to transcend, in sound or word, what they have seen, heard, or felt. They would adorn it and dress it up in every possible way, but it would not work. Skender Kulenović, Ćamil Sijarić, and Enver Krupić [a local painter who used the Una for inspiration] may have come closest to it in their attempts. That is why photography, especially art photography, is the most expressive, the truest, and the most powerful manner of presentation of this unique river.

This text emphasizes the power of photography, and it pays tribute to the river’s sublime power and agency, where the Una “doesn’t allow anyone to come close to it” and yet at the same time she “encourages, tortures, and entertains.” This complexity of the river, its converging beauty and threatening depth, was explained by Romana, an Una National Park employee, who told me: “To me, the Una is so beautiful. But there is a section by Midžića Lake where it is ugly, terrifying, deep, and so still.” Another Una National Park employee and a former deep-water diver, Sara, added: “Yes, it is the same deep down when you dive in. It is very, very dark down there. It is scary but also somehow peaceful and sublime.” This portrayal of the Una as multiple (both dark and light) as well as unique, singular, and sublime (an inspiring, unfathomable, and frightening force) is coupled with the Emeralds’ pedagogy that also recognizes the Una’s plurality as well as its unique, untamed nature, which requires people to learn how to live with the river rationally, responsibly, and respectfully. As Kija Marjanović

said at the 37th Una River Emeralds Academy in May 2022: “We do not defend the Una with teary eyes but with clear minds.” Hasan Tijanović also recognizes this locally articulated form and expression of riverine citizenship and “rational responsibility” to the river when he writes:

This photo-monograph of the Una River is an attempt to capture, in words and pictures, the sparkle of this water above all waters, this joy for the thirsty mouth, this poem and tear, for this is one of the last clean rivers in Europe and wants to remain such. And it could remain clean if we live in harmony with it, which becomes more and more necessary with every passing day. Among other things, the aim of this book is to prevent the Una River from being a subject for newspapers and meetings and to ensure that plastic and tin have no place in it unless they are components of boats, kayaks, or fishing tackle The aim of this book is to present this, and if you see someone on a cold winter morning standing on one of the bridges over the Una River and instead of throwing in waste of this and future centuries, crumbles stale bread to feed the fish or birds, the aim of this book will have been met.

This call to citizen-action and protection of the river builds on several dimensions of *unski život* in Bihać, including the perpetual romanticization of the “queen of all rivers”; the fear of the river’s sublime powers; the Emeralds’ pedagogies and ecologies of care; and the popular (and problematic) social practice of feeding bread to the jumping fish. Here, it is implied that riverine citizenship can be triggered from recognition that “the river wants to remain clean” and from the experience of reading poetry about the Una and producing and looking at paintings and photographs depicting the river. These practices generate awe, respect, sociality, and responsibility in Bišćani towards the river on which their lives depend in multiple ways. In addition to these textual and visual representations of the river, it is the sense of sound that gives added force to riverine citizenship in Bihać. And it is to the sound pulsations of the Una that we turn next.

Sound Vibrations of the Una

Scholars interested in sound (Mason and Davies 2009; Pink 2009) argue that “to mark out the sonic is not to argue that it can be granted autonomy, or that it provides some privileged arena for social and cultural inquiry” (Matless 2005, 746). Rather, the sonic aspect has a distinct contribution to make to anthropo-

logical inquiry and ethnographic exploration. Furthermore, the sonic dimension is deeply intertwined with other sensorial worlds and projections.

Bišćani's lives are submerged in the Una's unique sounds. Many people mention that due to its many waterfalls and rapids, the Una River makes unique sounds called *huk*, *žubor*, and *šum*, which are "good for the nerves." Here, the sound is not "simply" embodied, even though Bišćani have visceral and often subconscious reactions to it. Rather, the sound circulates among human and non-human agents, and it serves as a social and political force within which bodies come together and act together—riverine citizenship. For example, some Bišćani refer to this sound as a "compass" that orients their bodies to the river and to each other. Near the river, the sound becomes agentive and immersive—sublime, seductive, calming, daring, intimidating, and sometimes frightening, depending on the time of day, the color of the sky, and the season, for example. This contextual experience of sound reveals an intermingling of the senses and the cultural and contextual nature of sound. Regardless of how it is perceived, the Una River's sound orients bodies. As one of my interviewees said, "Usually, I can hear the Una before I can see her. Sometimes I do not even realize that I hear her. *I kad je čujem, mene nože same tamo odnesu* (And when I hear the river, my legs simply take me to it)." Another interviewee added, half-jokingly: "I guess you are saying that all roads do not lead to Rome but to the Una River [laughs]."

Methodologically, Gallagher (2011) distinguishes two main strands within sonic studies: sonic ethnographies, which utilize both written text and more-than-textual representations of sound, and soundscape studies (and their critiques), which encompass field recordings, sound mapping, and soundwalks. In this section, I draw from both approaches: I use my ethnographic fieldnotes and textual and visceral reflections to capture my interviewees' descriptions of the river's unique sounds. In addition, I engage in field recordings, soundwalks, and sound immersions.

In the summer of 2021, together with a friend and colleague, Amir Husak, an assistant professor of media studies at The New School for Social Research in New York, I spent several weeks recording the polyvocality of the sounds of the Una River and its immediate surroundings. Amir provided the necessary equipment and extensive experience in audio recording. During our collaborative work, we carefully selected several diverse sections of the river. There, we spent hours recording the river and "attentively listening" (Tsing 2015) to the riverine worlds. While we did not try to block human voices and other "noises," this exercise certainly destabilized the assumed centrality of the human voice in the production of anthropological meaning (Gallagher 2011). This allowed

us to develop a sonic “thick description” (Geertz 1975) and to engage more fully with the river’s complex, multisensorial worlds. This exercise also produced a sonic-sensorial assemblage composed of multiple human and more-than-human actants, including water and wind, fuzzy windjammers, long cables, 32-bit field recorders, headphones, people and objects, and our own bodies—eyes, ears, hands, and feet. During the exercise, I grasped the inseparability of listening and hearing from the other senses, with hearing coextensive with sight, thermoception, taste, touch, and more.

This experience was designed to capture the unique sonic composition of several river coordinates and to generate deeper awareness and knowledge about them. At the same time, the exercise was performative since we were documenting the sound “here and now,” which was to be replayed and performed in front of diverse potential audiences “there and then.” In addition, Amir and I engaged in a listening process together—we were attuned to each other’s listening. This collaborative listening minimized our tendency to objectify sound and make it external to perception. Listening together also taught us that sound is not “out there.” Rather, it is relational, intrinsic, collective, and nascent (Peterson and Brennan 2020). As the hours and days passed, Amir and I realized we were listening in, with, and against the soundscape (Helmreich 2010, 10).³

Listening with and against soundscape

Both Helmreich and my interviewees emphasize sonic immersion and porosity while challenging the notion of humans entering the objectified and external soundscape. For example, Dado remarked:

3 Soundscape has been defined as a “conceptual apparatus—one designating an acoustic environment that listeners experience as surrounding them in space.” According to the composer Schaffer, who coined this term, soundscape is a “sonic version of landscape, an object of contemplation” (Helmreich 2010, 10). In addition, Steven Feld (1992) suggests that soundscape assumes an imagined listener and certain acoustemology, a concept that envisions listening persons as emplaced in space, possessing internal subjectivities that process external objectivities. Here, soundscape is perceived and interpreted as resonating with bodies and lives in space and time. This argument is epistemological in essence, and it shows how sound and sound experiences shape different, culturally specific ways of being and knowing the world (Field 1992). Helmreich (2010) challenges this conceptualization of sound as an external medium, out there, that we “enter.” He suggests that this and similar approaches conceive of soundscapes as things in the world waiting to be tuned into. This objectifies sound rather than treating it as experiential (Helmreich 2010). Helmreich further complicates our understanding of sound by exploring sonic immersion and what he calls transduction, or “the transmutation and conversion of signals across media that, when accomplished seamlessly, can produce a sense of effortless presence” (Helmreich 2010, 10). Here, emplacement imagines sound immersion—the arrival of listeners at a “sense of being at once emplaced in space and, at times, porously continuous with it” (Helmreich 2010, 10).

When I swim in this river, I do not know if I hear the Una or if it is my blood going through my veins. The Una is so cold and bright that it makes my blood move faster... by the way, we can recognize people who learned how to swim in this river. Since it is so cold, you must swim faster. We sometimes say that you have to move so quickly that your chest stays dry. It is a unique style of swimming. I recognize people from Bihać when I go to the Croatian coast and I see them swim! But I wanted to tell you that when I swim, I think I can hear it.... Very cold water and my own warm blood, both rushing through my body. How can I better explain it to you...it is all one unified sound...I do not even know how to describe it. I do not know... somehow very vigorous and hushed at once.

Here Dado not only explores the sonic and material porousness between the river and his own body, but he also invites other sensorial dimensions into the mix—touch, temperature, and sight (“cold, bright water”), for example. Aware of the tendency to treat soundscape as an “objectification of sound” and therefore as separate from experience, Amir and I approached sound as an occasion for intense traversing and “immersion in, and commingling with, the world in which we find ourselves” (Ingold 2007). Put simply, we wanted to understand what it feels like to “hear” the river. Therefore, sound for us was not an object out there that needed to be captured, recorded, and cognized. It was neither mental nor only material. Rather, it was a phenomenon we experienced bodily as we journeyed by, in, and across the river, and we were deeply engrossed in it. It was a way of “being in and knowing about the world” (Peterson and Brennan 2020, 371).

While performing sound recordings, I learned that listening moves beyond the ear because my body experienced sound as both frequency and vibration (Peterson and Brennan 2020, 4). This frequency was a subtle and powerful sensation, which positioned my body in a certain way. For example, during our listening exercises, I found myself “spontaneously” hunching my shoulders closer to the river. Another time, I perceived the sound as increasing with each second. It was so powerful that I felt and visualized the waterfall moving toward me. At times, I was propelled to get up and walk to the river. On one occasion, without much thinking, I ended up entering the river’s flow (while Amir was searching for me, a bit concerned). In those moments, I literally submerged myself into the river’s cold currents, into this distinctively watery soundscape. After I swam, unexpectedly, in the river that day, I wrote only a single onomatopoeic word “capturing” my submersion: *buc* (plo).

This experience of hearing the river and swimming in the river was simultaneously both overwhelming and eventful and calming and deliberate. During these long hours by or in the river, sound became a fleeting moment, “the waves” circulating amongst bodies and souls. For example, I experienced the river’s sound as a mode of vibration which not only enabled life to survive but also to *multiply and intensify*, to “generate excess, further vibratory forces, more effects, useless effects, qualities that can’t be directly capitalized” (Grosz 2008, 54). This multiplicity and polyvocality of the river has been frequently recognized, allowing for yet another dimension of the Una’s singularity to emerge in discourse. It is what one of my interviewees, Narcisa, described as the Una’s “unique frequency.” She said: “The Una’s *huk* [roar] simply pulls me to her shores. She has that kind of power and energy. Every time I come closer to the Una, I have a certain reaction because the Una has its own frequency.”

I also experienced the Una’s “unique frequency born out of multiplicity” while engaging in “listening walks” (Schafer 1994, 212). I would walk along a predefined route while listening intently to the changing acoustic environments as I experienced them. Once, after walking across a pedestrian bridge in Bihać, I wrote that “the sound of the river is the sound of the city.” This sound-generated bodily awareness and orientation is something that many Bišćani comment on and refer to, often nonchalantly and mundanely. As one of my interviewees said: *mene noge same odnesu na Beton* (“my legs just take me to Beton”⁴). And another person said: “See, I come here, to the river. I swim. I relax. And I never think of sound as a part of this experience. But now I realize how much sound shapes my experience of the river.” These comments show how listening is often subliminal, “the banal, unnoticed ways of attuning toward sound in everyday life or the means by which we orient toward one another in interpersonal communication” (Peterson and Brennan 2020, 373). Therefore, traversing the Una’s soundscape is both distinctly mundane and habitual, powerful yet unmarked in language and consciousness, *and* deliberate, calculated, and generative of people’s bodily orientations, socio-cultural identities, and, most recently, political sensibilities.

Ethnographies of the Sonic in Bihać

The city was built by the river, on the river, and with the river in a way that produces a viscosity between people and the river. Walking to the river every day, socializing by or in it, and listening to the river are habitual practices in Bihać.

4 Beton is a concrete barrier in the river.

Like most Bišćani, I am attuned to these invisible riverine sonic maps. For example, on my first day back to Bihać in July 2021, I woke up early, excited to be back home. Without thinking much, I walked around the city and let “my legs take me where I needed to go.” Predictably, I ended up at Beton.

Beton is a concrete barrier in the center of Bihać. It was erected in 1911 to channel and tame the natural flow of the river, creating a canal that feeds the city’s first, small hydropower plant, which was built in 1912. At that time, Bihać was under Austro-Hungarian rule, and the challenging job of building Beton was given to the “Jonas” company from Graz (Radić 1997, 114). Both the canal and the power plant are national monuments today. Over time, people turned Beton into a walkway which allows them to stroll “into the middle of the Una,” to sit by it, look at it, listen to it, drink and make out by it, and swim in it. Beton is in the middle of the river, but it is also in the center of Bihać, under the city’s main bridge, where coffee shops and restaurants decorate the river’s banks. When sitting at Beton, one can sometimes see who is crossing the bridge, who is drinking coffee, and where; one can also observe the town in its routine and everydayness, while being deeply immersed in the river’s materiality—its color, temperature, texture, and sound. Here, city life and the riverine world merge into one.

I experienced the sonic immersion by Beton multiple times, including during the war siege (see Chapter 3), and especially on this July morning, when I consciously focused on experiencing the Una. I sat at the very edge of Beton, absorbing the early morning sensorial amalgamate of people, cars, restaurant, birds, ducks, jumping fish, and the river, all coming together and acting together in cacophony. I was not interested in extracting the sound of the river from its wider context. Rather, my goal was to develop an appreciation for the messy riverine sonic environment (Samuels et al 1994, 7). My listening felt intimate, uncertain, and constantly arriving. Sound became a process, foregrounding my perception and my physical relation to the river and others around me. It was unsettling but I tried to stay open to it. In my fieldnotes, I wrote:

I am sitting at the edge of Beton, by *slap* (the waterfall), listening to the Una. The first thing I hear is the waterfall in its full glory and magnitude. I close my eyes. The waterfall... it flows, it carries, it stops, it turns around. It comes closer to me. The water is deafening, bubbly, and foamy. At times, the river reminds me of liquid lace. Its noise blocks the sound of the thin traffic on the bridge. I see the cars and people moving, but I do not hear them. This water is so loud that it is somehow silent... A few drops from the waterfall land



CLICK TO LISTEN

on my face and my arms. The water is cold. I feel the sound and the cold vibrate behind my eyes. The sound also travels through me; it is bubbling. My shoulders “naturally” curve towards the river. I can feel the breeze, *povjetarac*, but I cannot hear it. The sound is taking over my senses—the smell and the visual—they are so deeply connected. “Cold, lacelike water makes the river louder,” I stipulate. The sound changes the tone, color, and frequency. It is so omnipresent that it feels like silence. I look at my watch; it is 9:13 a.m. Only eleven minutes have passed, but it feels much, much longer.

I was not alone in this perception of the Una’s *noise as silence*, as that sound which brings you peace and quiet. In July 2021, Amir and I were standing on a small river ferry that took us from the Una’s right bank to one of the river islands called Mlinčići (Small Mills) in Bosanska Otoka, 50 kilometers from Bihać. I asked Ramo, the ferryman, what he hears when he crosses the river.

Azra: “What do you hear right now?”

Ramo: “Life.”

Azra: “What kind of life?”

Ramo: “Quiet life.”

Azra, laughing: “How can it be quiet when it is so noisy here?”

Ramo: “That does not matter at all.”

Many of my interviewees perceived “loud” nature as quiet, but regarded human sound as noise and pollution, no matter the volume, thus exemplifying the power of culture to shape our experience of the sensorial.⁵ A similar notion of hearing silence and finding peace and quiet amidst the river’s sometimes roaring noise was articulated a few minutes later by a 10-year-old, Ema, who was swimming in the Una at the Mlinčići’s beach. I asked Ema, “What do you hear when you swim in the Una?” She said: “Shhhhhhh.” I pushed on, “Ema, what is that “shhhhhhh”?” She replied, without any hesitation and with conviction: “*Tišina*” (Silence).

Similar to my encounter with the river that morning at Beton, people in Bihać experience Una’s materiality as layers of deeply intertwined sensorial experiences, where sound plays a crucial role. Here, multiple sounds converge. For example, Lejla, whose family owns part of an island in the center of Bihać, took

⁵ I am grateful to Heather Michel Riddle for this comment.

me for a ride in her *lada* (wooden river boat), which she skillfully maneuvered around fast, familiar rapids. At one point, she remarked:

I love the *lada* the most. As soon as I sit in it and get away from the land, I feel *peace* [English in the original]. The river, the water... When I swim in it, it is so peaceful. And when I go to those waterfalls [she gestured to a group of small cascades close to her island]... that *buka* [noise]... I love it so much. But that is not the only sound of the river... See, the Una everywhere has a different sound.

This “Una everywhere has a different sound” was also articulated by Narcisa, who said:

When it comes to the sounds of the Una... she has a unique quantity of sonic layers which are entangled, overlapping, and gradual... something like a symphony. But the sound of the Una does not depend on the Una alone, but it includes us, those living in relation to the Una... where we come together with the river. It depends on us and the Una’s geomorphology. So, the sound varies. It is different in the slow-moving parts of the river...there, it is cyclical, calming. Pure *alegría*.⁶ It is different by the waterfalls. There, it is wild, dangerous... the Una roars, makes itself heard, it warns and dominates the landscape with sound. It can be overwhelming and even scary at times. It provokes much adrenaline in me. There, the Una is more gothic... like *Carmina Burana*.⁷

Here, Narcisa unpacks the different sonic landscapes of the Una—the “quiet one and the wild one.” Since we lack “sonic grammar,” she borrows metaphors from famous classical pieces of music, as well as her own bodily experience, to articulate this sonic complexity. Similar to Narcisa, Nihad emphasizes the lack of proper language to describe the Una’s sound, especially in its less pronounced form. He says:

I was ten years old when we moved to Midžića mahala [a neighborhood located on the right bank of the Una River close to the center of Bihać]. There,

6 *Alegría* means happiness in Spanish.

7 *Carmina Burana* is a cantata composed in 1935 and 1936 by Carl Orff, based on 24 poems from the medieval collection *Carmina Burana*.

the Una is background noise. It is like... shhhhhhhh.....huuuuuuu... Its sounds mix with the wind caught in the branches of the three large poplar trees. These sounds you must hear for yourself; it is difficult for me to describe them to you.

Nihad's and Narcisa's words highlight the commonly mentioned struggle to describe the Una River's sound with language. In addition, they allude to something I heard many times: that this sound is very familiar to people, but that they can never understand it fully, just like the river itself. This impenetrable comprehensibility is perhaps best captured in an early poem by Hrvoje Jurić (1990, 18) when he, at the age of 8, wrote: *Kako ona samo u predvečerje šumi, i kako je jaka i glasna, ja je nikad nisam razumio, ali uvijek mi je bila jasna.* (“How she murmurs in the evening, so strong, so loud! I never understood her, but she was always clear to me.”) What is more, Lejla, Narcisa, Nihad, Hrvoje, and many others also emphasized something that I heard many times in Bihać: that the Una's singularity and uniqueness—apparent in many abovementioned words and images—is experienced and multiplied in various sensorial, emplaced, and embodied ways.

My ethnographic notes include numerous instances of and worries about the sonic pollution of the river. The Una's “natural, sometimes unpredictable and deep roar” intermingles with “improper” and “unnatural” human-made noise which, in my informants' words, “pollutes” the river. One person called this “sonic violence” and another used the term “sound torture.” In June 2022, I took my son, then almost 11 years old, to Beton in the late evening. While 6 years ago he was “guarding the Una” (see Chapter 1), this time we were looking at the same spot, now covered with unfamiliar algae, which signaled potential contamination and the possible presence of an invasive plant species (see Chapter 6). We sat at the edge of Beton, where, one year earlier, I sat alone and listened to the morning sounds. I asked him to close his eyes and tell me what he heard. He replied: “I hear the Una River and I like it. It is fast and it roars. I also hear a very loud car on the bridge and some very loud music. I do not like that.”

Similar to Levi, Dado stressed “the invasion of turbo-folk music”—a musical genre that originated in Serbia and quickly became popular throughout the region.⁸ He said: “The Una was never related to turbo-folk and *narodna* (folk) music. These do not go together—the Una and *narodnjaci*. That is decadent. Playing a guitar and singing together by the Una is just fine; they belong together.

8 Turbo-folk is a mixture of traditional folk music and modern pop-music elements that is often despised by those with (ostensibly) better musical taste.

But turbo-folk—never.” This perception of only certain sounds and behaviors (and, by extension, certain people) belonging to the river was articulated multiple times during my fieldwork. Once, while I was interviewing Samir, who was illegally building a house on the river’s banks in the Una National Park (see Chapter 6), he remarked: “See this neighbor of mine (pointing at the house next to his)? The other night, he played some music worse than Šaban.⁹ They are loud, sitting close to the river, drinking. We tell him, ‘You can’t do that. This is nature. It should be quiet.’ To which he replied, ‘I have enough nature in Kazani (a village close to the town of Prijedor in Republika Srpska).’ See, people from Cazin, Bužim, and other places that do not have rivers or any water really... they do not know how to be by the Una, the only one.” Similar to Dado and Samir, a former city council member said during an interview: “He (referring to a former Bosnian army soldier among the leading war profiteers and mafia men in postwar Bosnia-Herzegovina) now sits on the city council and is trying to get a permit to build a raft on the Una, right by “Čardak” (a restaurant by the Una), so that people can drink and stuff their faces with food by the Una, with turbo folk blasting in the background.” Here we see some of the logic that fuels riverine citizenship, embracing some people into its ranks while excluding others. This logic goes like this: the Una River is pristine, and it has a polyphony of natural and people-made sounds that ground and orient Bišćani—historically, socially, culturally, and politically. This sonic multitude makes the river unique. Sound pollution and those who practice it do not belong in this community.

While Dado, Samir, and the former city council member could be seen as exclusive and discriminatory against those who dare to bring “their turbo-folk music and their loud ways” to the Una’s banks, I became more sympathetic to their words after spending one night at a “tree house” in a “stress-free zone” on an “eco-friendly and sustainable tourism” island nearby Bihać (see Chapter 6). The tree house was ineffectually isolated from “stress” since turbo-folk was blaring until 2 a.m. from a newly built weekend house across the river. The noise was unbearable, and I started to suffocate—it was hard to sleep, hear, or even breathe.

One of Bihać’s favorite nightclubs is in the very center of town, on the river’s right bank. Its exceptionally loud techno music is so dominant that many people avoid going to that section of the river on Saturday night since, as a friend said, “We can’t have a conversation there. Even the fish hide (laughs). It’s unbearable. I feel for the people who live there.” And indeed, the people who

9 The late Šaban Šaulić was a popular turbo-folk singer in the region.

live close to the nightclub have written on different online platforms, including Facebook, and to the city council and mayor to complain about the “sonic violence by the river.” Their complaints have been in vain, however, since the nightclub belongs to a well-connected family in town.

In Bihać, the sonic violence and sonic enhancement in and around the river come together to create a soundscape that impacts how people traverse the city. On some occasions, “one’s legs take them to the river.” In other instances, one avoids certain riverine geographies due to the human and non-human sounds emanating from and around them. While not often verbally discussed, the experiences of the riverine sounds reveal how sound works between and through Bišćani. For example, their words reveal that sonic (and other forms of) pollution are seen as external to the “clear, pristine river,” and this duality impacts the way Bišćani think of themselves. More specifically, when people in Bihać describe the “natural” noise of the river as peaceful and silent and compare it to the “wrong and artificial type of noise,” such as the buzz of the city or the turbo-folk music, we realize that the Una is situated in multiple human and more-than-human environments, which people notice and evaluate differently. For example, many people do not consciously hear the river even if they are in close proximity to it; they start to miss it once they leave town and become conscious of its absence. The story of sonic pollution is thus also the story of what gets noticed and what does not, and why.

Perceiving Odors

Another sensorial aspect of the river, frequently mentioned by my interviewees, is the assemblage of smells and odors. The sense of smell is closely linked with emotion and memory, more than any other human sense (Hackett and Dusci 1976). Tround et al. (2020) discovered a positive correlation between environmental identity and chemical smell sensitivity. They explain this correlation by zooming into the shared dimensions of two processes: memory and emotion.¹⁰ Furthermore, due to the neurological organization of the brain, odors play a crucial role in learning, memorizing, and embodying specific experiences, events,

10 Masaoka et al. (2012, 379) show how brain structures allow for a “shortcut” between the perception of smell on the one hand and emotion and memory on the other: “In olfactory perception, information bypasses the thalamus to ascend directly to olfactory-related limbic structures, including the piriform cortex, entorhinal cortex, amygdala, hippocampus, and orbitofrontal cortex. Direct input to these areas overlaps with areas related to emotion and memory.”

or places. What is more, memories of smells of nature occurring during childhood or adolescence have been repeatedly shown to influence adults' environmental identity (Chawla 2009; Clayton and Myers 2011; Olivos-Jara, Aragonés, and Navarro-Carrascal 2014). From a psychological perspective, olfaction and environmental identity are therefore closely intertwined.

The closely intertwined relationship between culturally and historically shaped “smells of nature” on the one hand and “environmental identity” on the other is evident in Bišćani's olfactory experiences and perceptions. Some people describe the Una's fragrance as *slatkast* or “sweet.” Haris, who was a soldier during the 1990s war, remembers: “Our war perfume was the Una (laughs). I remember, I would come back from the *položaj* (front line), and I could smell the river first. If you went to town, you could tell who went to swim in the river that day because they smelled sweet, like her (the river).” Similar to Haris, Lejla told me that the Una's smell is “crisp,” especially by the waterfalls. She added: “When I go away from Bihać, this is what I miss the most. The Una's smell... not the way the river looks or the way it sounds. I miss more that unique smell, which changes as you traverse the river. For example, in deep, slow parts, the smell is also deep, like algae. By my favorite waterfall, which I can only access by *lađa*, you know, the one by my house, the smell is crisp and sweet. And that is where I am the happiest. This scent, *to me najviše opali* (it hits me the most).” While Lejla emphasizes the fresh smell of the river's waterfall, others emphasize other smells attached to activities done by the river. For example, Dado remembers his favorite childhood smell: it is the smell of the Old Grist Mill on the Una River in Ripač, eight kilometers from Bihać.

Other people, however, did not describe the river's smell as necessarily attractive but rather as *specifičan* (specific). Here, “specific” stands for familiarity and uniqueness, not appeal. For instance, in May 2022, I was strolling with two employees of the Una National Park by one of the river's main waterfalls in the village of Martin Brod, located within the Park. As we walked, the water from the waterfall sprayed us. “Just like at Niagara Falls!” Romana laughed. However, Sara and Romana did not comment further on how wet we got from standing by “the Una's falls” or how loud the waterfall was; rather, they reflected on the river's specific smell. Romana remarked, “Oh, this smell... honestly, it's not really attractive, but it's so recognizable, so familiar... it's somehow moist... the smell of *memla* (damp). It's that damp smell, and somehow it fits this river.” On another occasion, I was having coffee by the Una with a group of friends, and we talked about the river and its specific smell. Everyone was searching for words to describe it, when Haris stated: “To me, the Una stinks.” Irena re-

sponded: “What? It does not!” Seeing our puzzled faces, Haris elaborated: “You know, it’s that *specifičan* smell... I smell it the most near *sedra*. It’s somehow oily from all that algae and plants and *sedra*.”

Haris is not alone in describing the smell of the river as “oily.” On one occasion, I was talking to Nihad about the Una’s materiality. He did not need much probing to elegantly share his sensorial experiences of the Una’s material properties, which he often traversed in his life and his dreams:

I often dream about the Una. It is always a positive experience. I always feel warm. I dream that my *mahala* (neighborhood) is flooded and vegetation grows from the water, just like it grows in real life around the Neretva River near Čapljina. In my dream, I conquered some waterfalls. Children were jumping from one *ada* [a river island formed from *sedra*] to the next. I felt good, positive. Sometimes I dream about lots of swimmers in the river. (Pauses). During the war, I also dreamed about the river. It made me feel optimistic, it gave me hope. It gave me energy to endure. There was not much action in those dreams, it was more like video art, images... In my dreams, the Una is drinkable everywhere, just like it is in real life in Martin Brod. In one dream, I was standing in it, and it was a warm, pleasant temperature. I was holding small golden rocks. And then I felt *that smell*.... The Una has at least two or three different smells. One smell is the smell of the river known to those who grew up in Bihać. This is a slimy smell, the smell of algae and moss. If you stand at the waterfall by Beton, you can smell that oily odor. When you swim in it, if you are perceptive, you can feel it as a thin, oily layer that covers your whole body. The second smell is the scent of *jugovina* [the southern wind] in the springtime when the snow is melting. The third smell is the Mediterranean... The Una has a unique smell, just like a person. We recognize the scents of different people with whom we spend a lot of time. It is the same with the Una. But it goes even deeper than that... I think it is realistic to assume that the Una smelled the same one million years ago. This smell connects you and me and all of us to that primordial time, the time before reason and before emotion.

Nihad’s description of the Una’s diverse smells—which he divided into at least three different traces—brings together wind and air, trees, plants, and water—to illuminate human-river contiguity and the river’s singularity, which develops from the river’s majestic, unrepeatable heterogeneity. Nihad’s words become philosophical when he describes the Una and its smell as a *life constant*, a

thing that “smelled the same one million years ago,” which creates an understanding of the world before “reason and emotion.” This unique riverine structure becomes a way for Nihad and others to orient and ground themselves in the history and geography of earth-living, producing a sense of “dwelling place” (Latour 2018) from which to view, understand, and act in the world. In the next section, I turn to these distinctive riverine structures of the Una.

The River’s Structure

Bišćani frequently mention the river’s unique materiality. For example, they emphasize the Una’s mysterious *jutarnja magla*, or “morning fog,” floating above the river during certain seasons and at specific hours of the day. Fog adds intimacy, anticipation, (un)predictability, and magic to the people’s experience of the Una. Bišćani are not the only ones intrigued by fog; many scientists and writers are similarly captivated. Branch (2022) writes: “Fog is fickle—hard to predict, hard to research, even hard to define. It might be the trickiest thing in meteorology to measure. Unlike temperature, humidity, wind or precipitation, there is no reliable gauge for fog. We know how it forms, but we don’t know precisely where it’s going—later today, or in the years ahead.”

Magla’s distinctive materiality provokes several senses at once—sight, hearing, and touch, for example. Vildana remembers: “We would wait for the fog... when it starts to rise from the river, early in the morning, we would sit in our *lada* and set out into the middle of the river. I remember the swallow birds would fly above our heads. Then the magic would arrive. We would enter this fog, and I would not know where I was. I moved in and out of the fog, entering, exiting, and entering again. It was like dancing, but silently, and the fog would embrace me, lead me, take me. That was magic.” Similar to Vildana, Dado frequently referred to *magla* when thinking about his experience in, by, and on the Una: “The fog arrives in August. It is fresh around the Una in the morning, so inviting. I often wake up early in August, and walk to it, into it ...and the Una releases this fog. It’s an incredible sight.” Here, water and air (and the birds in it) converge to produce the fog which Bišćani navigate, moving in and out of it, and “dancing” in it and with it. This way of being with the river includes waking up early, entering a *lada*, and traversing in and out of the *magla*, where people both lose direction and find themselves. Therefore, fog is a vital part of the Una’s climatology and culture and Bišćani’s life force.. It is understood not only as an extension of the river, but also as a unique, agentive structure with

a distinctive economy, consistency, temperature, smell, touch, and sound. This assemblage of senses gives substance and tenor to riverine citizenship while it also penetrates people's bodies and their ecological and political imagination.

The most stated physical quality of the river, however, is its cleanliness, which fosters flourishing biodiversity and riverine worlds, including some endemic fish and plant species (Alibabić, Vahčić, and Bajramović 2007). This riverine complexity is studied by experts as well as poets and writers. For example, it is mentioned by Tijanović (2002) who writes:

The *Proteus newt*¹¹ lives in the Una river basin in the underground waters of Grmeč Mountain; about 170 medicinal herbs grow by the Una River; one rare plant—*Campanula unensis*, or the Una bluebell, was named after the Una River; 28¹² different kinds of fish live in this river and the biggest among them, the huchen, can weigh up to 30 kg; chamois can be seen in Grmuša Canyon; small crayfish can be seen in sandy silts, which is a sure sign of clean water; the colorful riverbed of the Una River and the play of the rapids and waterfalls is the result of a living, long-lasting, and rare biochemical process of creation of sedimentary rocks without which the Una River would lose its basic characteristics. And so on...

In addition to the species mentioned by Tijanović, the Una is also home to large grayling, brown trout, and rainbow trout. The Una's fish varieties were described in Patagonia's award-winning documentary *Una—The One*, which features the Una's unique riverine structure and the fly fishing it enables.¹³ The lowest stretches around Bihać are famous for the natural reproduction of huchen, or Balkan salmon, and huge specimens have been caught on fly and spin baits. Many people emphasize the water's quality by saying that the water from the river is safe to drink, especially upstream. There, the river is categorized as first-class when it comes to cleanliness.¹⁴ The water's cleanliness—in addition

11. Tijanović is likely referring to the *Proteus anguinus*, or Olm, an aquatic salamander native to the underground streams of the limestone promontories surrounding the Una River.

12. I was told that the actual number is 38.

13. <https://www.patagonia.com/stories/save-the-blue-heart-of-europe-una-the-one/story-71512.html>.

14. The first analysis of the Una's water quality was conducted in the 1970s. Then, the Una was categorized mostly as II, III, and IV class on location (for example, close to or far from inhabited areas). There were some significant issues due to the massive timber, textile, packaging, and steel industries. During the war, production was halted, and, consequently, the water quality significantly improved. According to the "Feasibility Study for the Una National Park from 2005, the water quality at most of the stations studied ranged from class I (near Martin Brod) to class III (after larger settlements, such as Bihać and Kulen Vakuf), with most of the river being categorized

to the river's distinctive structure and texture—gives life to *sedra* (tufa)—a porous, sedimentary, carbonate, cryptocrystalline, and monomineralic rock built of calcite. *Sedra* materializes from different abiotic and biotic factors found in exceptionally clean and cold waters (Lakušić et al. 1991; Redžić et al. 1991).¹⁵ It is *sedra* that people most frequently associate with the Una's unique structure and its emerald color.

Sedra needs at least 3,000 years to form, and some tufa are over 7,000 years old. In one year, if the conditions are right, *sedra* grows only a few millimeters.¹⁶ Twenty-three types of algae and 17 types of moss contribute to the growth of *sedra* in the Una (Alibabić, interview, July 2021). These algae and moss are known as *sedrotvorci*, or *sedra*-creators. Furthermore, *sedra* grows much faster in the summer than in the winter months, so climate is also of importance. With increasingly hotter summers due to climate change and related lower water levels in the river, there is a real danger that *sedra*'s growth might slow down.¹⁷ In addition to these preconditions for *sedra*'s deposition, sedimentation is impacted by numerous other parameters, including the volume of water, the rate of the water's flow, the presence of light, and water cleanliness (Horvatinčić 2000, 29). Even a minimal increase in water pollution by organic pollutants (such as wastewater) can impact the development of *sedra*. Vildana Alibabić, a professor at the University of Bihać, a leading expert on the Una's flora and fauna, a politician, and an activist, told me that *sedra* also shapes the Una's *korito*, or river-bed—the

as class II (Federacija Bosne i Hercegovine, Federal Ministry of Physical Planning 2005, 37). At the present moment, we see the beginning of worsening quality due to the massive and unregulated development of ecotourism (see Chapter 6).

- 15 In addition, in order for *sedra* to develop and survive, several conditions have to be met: a) saturation with calcium carbonate has to be high, with the saturation index above 3, usually between 5 and 7; b) water pH has to be above 8, with those sections exhibiting intense *sedra* sedimentation having a pH value of water between 8.2 and 8.4; c) concentration of dissolved organic matter has to be less than 10 mg/L of carbon (Horvatinčić 2000, 29). If only one of these elements is slightly elevated or reduced, sedimentation will not take place. In addition to these specific characteristics of the Una's water, plant communities, especially algae and moss, have an important role in *sedra* formation (Horvatinčić 2000, 29).
- 16 *Sedra* materializes in at least four different rock or algae formations in the river: the first, up to one meter tall, are rock barriers in the water, such as those at Mlinčičev Buk and Lohovo Dvoslap. The second ones are underwater—small island-like formations, which, with time, can become real riverine islands with lush vegetation, known as “ade.” Some of them are large and inhabited. The third formations are caves and travertine cones. Finally, the most visually and sonically impressive are tectonically produced slopes and waterfalls, such as the famous Štrbački buk, the biggest waterfall on the Una (Alibabić, interview). Together, these formations produce conditions for a rich and complex riverine world, with blue-green algae that form solid limestone, which then becomes home to water lilies, tubers, and algae. Above the water, at those places where water travels and robustly splits over *sedra*, we find oligochaeta (a type of riverine worm), riverine crabs, and snails.
- 17 With advanced dating technologies, we know that *sedra* only sediments during warmer geological periods, such as the Holocene or Riss-Würm Interglacial Stage (Horvatinčić 2000, 29).



Fig. 6. The Una River, *sedra*, and the never completed Dom penzionera (Retirement Home) in the background (photo by author).



Fig. 7. The Una and *sedra* (photo by author).

river's main (infra)structure, which creates the hydrogeological complex of waterfalls and wide cascades that make the Una unique (Figures 6 and 7).

Many people in Bihać understand that *sedra* produces a unique flow of the river. For example, Nihad explains: "The Una is different. It is not like the Miljacka (the river that flows through Sarajevo) or the Neretva (the river that flows through Mostar), which have single-line riverbeds. The Una plays around with us—one second, she is here, the next second, she disappears. She plays hide-and-go-seek with us!" Here, the *sedra*-formed riverine structures create the river's playful, agentive "personality," which is prone to teasing and play. These descriptions point to a remarkable riverine life and water world, which has developed over centuries through unique social and natural processes that include not only the life in and by the river but also the Una's unique subterranean structures and interactions. It is to these underground terrains that I turn next.

The Una's Subterranean World

The new materialism scholarship in geography, anthropology, and related disciplines approaches soil as "lively, complex, more-than-human ecologies" (Pigott 2020, 1665). Here, mist, rocks, smells, and sounds are "a part of us" and are fundamental to what we are because they are the elements that comprise us (Povinelli 2017, 506). When approached through this scholarship, the Una River becomes distinctive not only due to its water, riverine floor, rock composition, and riparian vegetation, but also due to its complex subterranean world.

In geography and geology, the wider region through which the Una flows is referred to as the Dinaric karst.¹⁸ Water in the Dinaric karst is drained toward two seas: the Adriatic Sea and the Black Sea. The surface streams are few, even though the area sees high amounts of precipitation (Zupan Hajna 2012). The karst field harbors numerous sinking rivers, usually flowing underground from one field to another. A few large rivers cross the carbonate belts along the Dinaric karst (Zupan Hajna 2012, 197). In some of these rivers, such as the Una, *sedra* deposits are abundant (Zupan Hajna 2012, 197).

18 Karst forms are complex surface and subsurface topographies found in the Dinaric Mountains, formed primarily by "solutional processes of carbonate rocks of the region which are extremely well folded and fractured due to tectonic events" (Zupan Hajna 2012, 358). These formations shape the western part of the Balkan Peninsula and the entire Adriatic Sea coastal belt (Zupan Hajna 2012). Its most characteristic terrain forms are high plateaus, numerous fields and valleys, enormous leveled surfaces, large and deep caves, plummeting rivers, and plentiful springs.

While much of the larger region is bare of surface vegetation, Bihać, located in the Una River valley, at the boundary of the Dinaric karst and the Pannonian basin, is lavishly green and blue, and is rich in vegetation and fertile soil. Named after the Una River and the nearest mountain that shapes its valley, Plješevica, the Plješevica-Una Aquifer is made up of limestones and dolomites. Underground water movement reflects “the lithostratigraphic terrain structure, tectonic relationships, and hydrological (permeable) characteristics of rocks” (World Bank 2020, 12). Its water quantity is plentiful, unlike most aquifers studied by anthropologists, where depletion of groundwater aquifers is the major moral, social, and political concern (see Bessire 2019a, 2022 and Ballesterro 2022, among others).

Aquifers are historically and culturally specific matters. Due to their location under the earth’s surface, aquifers occupy a peculiar symbolic place, and their “invisibility to the naked eye makes stark how embedded aquifers are in the specific political and scientific histories through which they become recognizable” (Ballesterro 2019a, 21). They are complex, unbounded, “patchy, uneven, and multiple” (Bessire 2022) as well as “mosaic, inchoate, [and] disjunctive” (Bessire 2019, 64). Importantly, unlike objects on the surface of the earth, which help humans consider their presence by “insinuating themselves to our senses of sight, smell, touch, or hearing, subsurface entities have material properties that can only be inferred conceptually” (Ballesterro 2019a, 42).¹⁹

In Bihać, imaginations about the underground soil and water are tangible and frequently articulated. Unlike places in the Americas studied by Ballesterro and Bessire,²⁰ Bihać is rich in water and the aquifer is not (yet) imagined as an emergency infrastructure and place of extraction. Rather, due to its extreme sub-

19 While aquifers are often imagined as “sitting in pocket-like formations, as sealed tanks holding water for our enjoyment” (Ballesterro 2019a, 34), their spatial and volumetric existence is much messier. They are assemblages of materials (sand, rock, and gravel, for example) and empty spaces that blur differences between content and container. Their borders are ambiguous, defined by the passage of water across volumetric space (Ballesterro 2019a, 34). However, aquifers are not bounded underground containers that “hold” water (Ballesterro 2019a). Ballesterro (2019a, 34) suggests that we should think of them as sponges which “suck liquids in and leak their excess toward the environment; they are expanding and contracting structures they stand for water movement and changing volumes.” As such, aquifers interrupt imaginaries of horizontal traversing. More specifically, “against the precedence of the visual in panoptic politics, this politics of volume demands a form of nonvisual and circular awareness” (Ballesterro 2019a, 26) and an intentional interruption of imaginaries of horizontal wayfaring (Ingold 2011).

20 In many parts of the world, where surface water is becoming scarce, aquifers are imagined by people as “infrastructures” (Ballesterro 2019a), as vessels where additional water is stored for human use and survival. More specifically, if there is a crisis and life depends on water, there is no hesitation to cut “into the underground to extract water and sustain whatever is left of life” (Ballesterro 2019a, 27). Therefore, aquifers become sites of subterranean imaginaries, political contestation, extraction, and depletion (Bassire 2019).

terranean porousness, it manifests itself as a site of social anxiety and a battlefield in the wider geopolitics of the subsurface for different reasons.

The Plješevica-Una Aquifer's groundwater "flows" from Croatia to Bosnia and Herzegovina, toward the strong karstic springs in the Una River watershed, namely, Klokot, Privilica, Ostrovica, and Žegar. These springs—especially Klokot, the largest natural water spring in Europe—are used to supply the City of Bihać with potable water, and therefore, the protection of this spring is of great importance for the Municipality of Bihać. The estimated size of the catchment area of Klokot and Privilica is 951.5 km² (World Bank 2020, 9). Importantly, 90% of the catchment area is in Croatia and only 10% is in the territory of Bosnia and Herzegovina (World Bank 2020, 9), which means that human and non-human practices and processes in Croatia directly impact the quality of drinking water in Bihać. There are certain international regulations related to transborder aquifers, including the Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes—the Water Convention, as well as several UN Resolutions (World Bank 2020, 18), but they are not regularly followed or enforced. This delicate transborder water situation—both above and below the surface—was recognized by the European Union and the World Bank, which financially supported the "Study on the Establishment of the Klokot (Bihać) Spring Cross-border Sanitary Protection Zones." The results of the study, published in 2020, clearly illustrate that the water quality is not satisfactory at the Klokot spring and that increasing bacteriological contamination (the significant and frequent presence of Coliform bacteria, *Escherichia coli* bacteria, *Enterococcus* bacteria, and *Clostridium perfringens* bacteria) cannot be removed by chlorine disinfection, which is what the public utility company Vodovod has been allegedly practicing (World Bank 2020, 21).²¹

There are 109 identified polluters of the Klokot water spring catchment area, 89 of which are in Croatia (World Bank 2020). Of those, the World Bank (2020, 147) identified 32 polluters with significant influence on the ground water quality, including the Plitvice Lakes National Park and Plješevica mountain deforestation (see below), with Željava, a former military airport being in the second-tier category of polluters (147).

When I visited Bihać in 2017 most citizens blamed the recent contamination of water on their neighbor, Croatia. At that time, tap water, I was told, was not

21 One of the problems is that in the last few years, Vodovod has been conducting psychochemical and microbiological analysis only twice a month on average, which is "inadequate for the spring which supplies more than 50,000 people of the city of Bihać" (World Bank 2020, 20).

safe to drink. The citizens contrasted this poor quality of drinking water with the high quality of the Una River's natural flow by saying: "It is safer to drink water from the Una than to consume tap water." I was told that the main reason for such contamination is Croatia's badly managed and maintained sewage system at the Plitvice Lakes National Park (Plitvice Lakes NP), located at the border between Bosnia and Croatia, 21 kilometers from Bihać, which was leaking into the karst aquifer. The soil's porous composition allowed for wastewater to travel for kilometers underground into Klokot. Tourism at Plitvice has doubled in the last 15 years without the construction of an appropriate wastewater collection and treatment system, causing a significant increase in contamination from landfills with uncontrolled waste disposal, including Rastovača pit, Pony pit, Plitvice water source pit, Poljanak pit, and Golubnjača pit (World Bank 2020, 22, 32). The World Bank (2020, 21) concluded that the intensification of tourism in the Plitvice Lakes NP in Croatia has contributed significantly to the deterioration of the microbiological quality of the Klokot spring water.

The septic waters from the Plitvice Lakes NP have been seeping underground for months and probably years, creating a subterranean "toxic sovereignty" (Povinelli 2017, 510). One of my interviewees referred to these processes as "a siege of Bihać from below," thus evading any sovereign, surface borders between the countries. This public outcry about waters and borders has signaled a possible transformation of (post)war animosities into seemingly demilitarized struggles around water quality and water supply, underground flow and sewage infrastructure, and borders and lands. This crisis and perpetual anxiety have given rise to a "sense of homeland under siege" (Bessire 2022), which fuels not only riverine citizenship but also threatens to cement identitarian, ethnonational politics between Bosnia and Croatia.²² Furthermore, the fear of underground contamination has reminded Bišćani of the viscous porosity (Tuana 2008) of the soil and of their own bodies, fostering anxieties and contaminated intimacies that highlight the porousness of the skin, bodies, and soils that feed riverine citi-

22 The Plitvice's septic lake "scandal" was covered in the Bosnian and Croatian media, including Al-jazeera Balkans (see Fahrudin Vojić), which published a piece titled "Piju li građani Bihaća fekalije koje dolaze iz Hrvatske?" or "Do Citizens of Bihać Drink Feces Coming from Croatia?" (<https://balkans.aljazeera.net teme/2017/9/8/piju-li-gradani-bihaca-fekalije-koje-dolaze-iz-hrvatske>) and a popular Croatian news outlet, Dnevnik 3, which in 2015 published a satirical piece titled "New 'Lake' Discovered at Plitvice: Watch on an Empty Stomach" (<https://poslovnidnevnik.ba/2015/12/30/otkriveno-novo-jezero-na-plitvicama-gledati-samo-na-prazan-zeludac/>). In it, an unnamed journalist describes "the largest open septic tank" where the wastewater accumulated from over 1,200,000 tourists drains into an additional contaminated "lake" instead of being properly treated and channeled. The infrastructure to support so many tourists was "simply" not there—instead, the septic "lake" has seeped into the porous karst soil for several years.

zenship. More specifically, in 2017, Bišćani realized that their bodies were “co-constituted by sediments and toxins” (Povinelli 2017, 509) and that “with our bodies [and souls and ways of life – A. H.] on the line, we can never be disengaged observers at a distance from ecological crisis; we exist within it, creating as well as crossing boundaries” (Clarke 2019).²³

In addition to wastewater seeping into the transborder aquifer, there are other “pressure factors”—past, present, and future—that are (potentially) leaking into the karst aquifer and the springs from which drinking water is collected. For example, during socialism, Bihać was one of the main military hubs in Yugoslavia, and its military infrastructure included the Željava Air Base, situated on the border between Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina under Plješevica Mountain. The military airport, built in 1968, was the largest underground airport in the former Yugoslavia and one of the biggest in Europe. The airport initiated the significant growth of the city, providing novel employment opportunities due to which many military families moved to Bihać from other parts of Yugoslavia.

Most of the airport was within the mountain, with only the taxiways and runways on the outer surfaces. In addition to the airport itself, the complex included military quarters for 250 soldiers, with additional capacity for 1,000 reserve soldiers, as well as a restaurant for 1500 soldiers, a motor vehicle maintenance shop, a gas station with 5 tanks, and a boiler room. In 1990, a wastewater facility was also built (World Bank 2020, 207). Waste oils and lubricants were stored in oil barrels, and silver bromide, thinners, and other chemicals were used. The procedure for disposing of these wastes is unknown (World Bank 2020, 162). The airport is Yugoslavia’s “toxic gift to Bosnia” (Hodžić 2023, 9), which enabled life and employment while polluting both soil and water and bodies and souls.

As they were retreating from Bihać in 1992, the Yugoslav People’s Army mined the airport which was severely damaged, and it has not been in use since. The internal damage has not been assessed, and it is not known what “equipment, means, and waste were left inside the massif (oils, lubricants, radioactive substances, and other harmful substances)” (World Bank 2020, 163). The former airport is now caught in these transborder tensions and disputes—the facilities are shared by the local governments of Bihać and Lika-Senj County in Croatia. Meanwhile, defying the “surface” geopolitics, polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs)—carcinogenic and slow-evaporating chemical compounds used around the world in industrial and consumer products since the 1930s until they were banned in 1979—from the former airport are probably seeping into the ground,

23 <https://culanth.org/fieldsights/porosity-and-protection>

presenting “an issue of concern.” This situation reshapes Bišćani’s recognition of the socialist inheritance (Hodžić 2023, 5) and its contemporary manifestations, stimulating both “water anxieties” and an urge to do something to generate dissent: riverine citizenship.

In addition to worrying about contamination from the past (Željava) and the present (Plivice Lakes NP), many Bišćani are anxious about the approved location for a radioactive nuclear waste storage facility which will need to store half of Croatia’s nuclear waste (the country was expected to store this waste by the end of 2023). The chosen location is Trgovska Gora, an underdeveloped part of Croatia on the border with Bosnia. While the Croatian government claims that there are no risks associated with the location, the Bosnian government, activists, scientists, and ordinary people argue that the plan poses a great risk for public health and wildlife in northwestern Bosnia. Mario Crnković, an environmental activist from Novi Grad, the town closest to, and therefore most impacted by, the potential nuclear waste storage unit, sums up these concerns:

Trgovska Gora is geologically karst and limestone, therefore permeable. This means that the soil is not stable; rather, it is seismic ground with numerous landslides. Therefore, this cannot be a location for that kind of unit. In addition, we need to look at the hydrological characteristics of the whole area, with its many underground waters... The location is only 800 meters from the Una River, which is the source of potable water for many municipalities in its basin.²⁴

After numerous meetings, lobbying efforts, and political calculations near and far, the disposal of nuclear waste at Trgovska Gora was postponed until 2028.

In addition to the growing anxieties related to underground contamination from the Plitvice Lakes, Željava, and Trgovska Gora, the “migrant crisis” in Bihać added another layer of anxiety about surface- and underground-encroaching water pollution. In March 2018, Bihać materialized as the newest “hot spot” on the so-called “Balkan migrant route.” This was due to the city’s proximity to Croatia and thus the EU border, in addition to the closing of borders and routes elsewhere in Europe. Between 2018 and 2022, the city was harboring between 1,000 and 5,000 people from South Asia, the Middle East, and North Africa who were trying to cross into Croatia and the rest of the EU. And the problem continues

24 <https://www.slobodnaevropa.org/a/eksperti-i-pravnici-iz-bih-u-borbi-protiv-radioaktivnog-odlagali%C5%A1ta-u-hrvatskoj/30673967.html>

to this day as migrants and refugees attempting to cross into Croatia and the EU are routinely sent back to Bosnia and Hercegovina, and to Bihać in particular.²⁵

While waiting to cross into the EU, these individuals navigate and manage everyday living with, next to, and among the people of Bihać. It should not be surprising that at first most *migranti* spend their time around the Una River. For many of them, the Una River provides the only source of hygiene and, possibly, moments of joy. The residents of Bihać have been both understanding (“Where else would they go to wash?”), inclusive (“They know how to properly use public spaces!” exclaimed one local architect in awe), and alarmed. These alarming discourses are multidimensional. For example, one person exclaimed: “I fully understand that they have to wash their clothes and their bodies [in the river]. They have no access to bathrooms and showers. But this river is so clean, we’ve protected it. We don’t wash clothes in it anymore because we know that detergent is bad for the fish.” Here, *migranti* are seen as both needy and polluting invaders, contaminating the sacred, socially produced bond between humans and non-humans, people and the river.

In June 2019, the City of Bihać and the Una Sana Canton singlehandedly started forcefully removing migrants from their semi-licit, crowded, and inapt dwellings in town. While welcoming this “take over,” many people were concerned about the means of forceful removal of people and the inhumane location of the new camp. The migrants were sometimes patrolled by the police and made to walk for six kilometers in a prisoner-style single-file formation with their right hand on the shoulder of the person in front of them. After a public outcry about these practices, which were reminiscent of war, refugeeness, and imprisonment, *migranti* were bused out of town to a forest clearing, a former communal landfill located six kilometers from Bihać near the village of Vučjak in the foothills of the heavily mined Plješevica Mountain.

Vučjak etymologically stems from *vukovi*, or wolves, connoting a daunting space where wilderness and animals dominate over humans. *Migranti* forced to stay there became (im)mobile humans—suspended in time and space—who were literally sleeping and waiting on tons of toxic garbage, surrounded by still unexploded landmines from the most recent war (there have been three explosions near Vučjak since the end of the war), and encircled by wolves. What is more, this heavy human activity on top of the landfill produced untreated human waste, feces, and garbage, which seeped into the porous soil. According to Alibabić, these contaminants need less than a day to travel underground to

25 <https://www.rferl.org/a/bosnia-croatia-migrants-schengen/32344155.html>

reach Klokot, ironically circling back into the bodies of local people. A study conducted in 1984 confirms this: “[when] tracing the underground watercourses on October 9, 1984, a direct connection of this location with the water source Klokot was determined” (World Bank 2020, 150). Even though the landfill was partially rehabilitated and covered with clay, the amount of leachate seeping into the ground is unknown since no subsequent surveys have been carried out (World Bank 2020, 151). This already difficult and tense situation, which brought together *migranti*, *Bišćani*, landfills, wolves, trees, and borders, was further exacerbated by massive deforestation of the upper parts of Plješevica Mountain by the Croatian military and police, with an aim to increase logging activity and to monitor, police, and “push back” the migrant flow across the mountain (World Bank 2020, 147).

These examples show how Bihać’s ground waters and water infrastructures intermingle heavily with subsurface waters, and this “mixing up” of the “unknown” ground and “known” surface waters, which enter the Una, its tributary Klokot, and people’s bodies, fosters political imaginaries and transborder anxieties. These local concerns are further exacerbated by the state of water infrastructure in Bihać. Aldina Bašanović, the Executive Director for Economic and Legal Affairs at Bihać’s Public Utility Water Company Vodovod, explains:

Our system is a mixed system. There is no part of town that has only one water source—it is a ring system which is fed from five different springs. One of the concerns is the existence of some old, asbestos-containing plumbing. There are not many of them, but people talk a lot about this, they are afraid. All other infrastructure is PVC [polyvinyl chloride] based. As infrastructure breaks down, we change the pipes and put new ones in.

Bašanović also mentioned the problem with the wastewater management in the city’s very center, where parts of town are not connected to the newer sewage infrastructure, which treats the wastewater, so these effluents go straight into the Una. She elaborates:

The very center of town does not have a proper sewage system. We do not have a solution for that issue right now. The reason is that the old infrastructure, which took all wastewater from the city center into the Una River, was never connected to the new infrastructure, which takes the water to the Wastewater Treatment Plant in Velhovo (near Bihać), which, by the way, works well. In

addition, there are at least 300–400 people who have connected their house’s sewer lines to the rainfall water system, not the sewage system.

These surface and underground contaminations, transborder intrusions and extractions, and infrastructural inadequacies foster Bišćani’s anxieties and produce new political frustrations, uncomfortable convergences of people and things, and transborder accusations while promoting the development of expert knowledge and projects.

In addition, these real and perceived degradations of Bihać’s water sources, both past and present, point to a particular understanding of natureculture in Bihać. According to this logic, waste is perceived as something outside of pristine nature.²⁶ This approach to the river frames the Una as unspoiled and in need of protection from waste; rubbish and pollution, however proximate and present, must be extracted from the river’s glorious, pristine beauty. Nevertheless, these pollutants continue to haunt both the river and its denizens since the parasitic “excluded thirds”²⁷ (Simens 2017)—both human and non-human—refuse to be contained and expelled. Rather, they perpetually and stubbornly return and reemerge.²⁸ Together, these multifaceted processes and the imaginaries they generate contribute to the local environmental logics, anxieties, and worries that fuel riverine citizenship.

Conclusion

Riverine citizenship in Bihać is deeply entangled with the river’s unique materiality, and the sensorial, traversing bodily experiences this materiality generates. The sensorial aspects of human and non-human landscapes in Bihać, which, as Narcisa observed, “both overwhelm you and make you who you are,” are often

26 This is quite different from, let’s say, India, where people love, cherish, and consume polluted rivers. For example, Haberman (2006) shows how there is no duality between the Yamuna River and pollution.

27 Simens (2017), building on Serres (2007), defines excluded thirds as referring to those aspects of human and more-than-just-human relationships that are excluded yet never go away. Since “perfect exclusion is never possible” (Simens 2017, 5) these excluded thirds emit “noise.” These parasitic quasi-objects are often framed as passive objects, but they never stay away, quiet or invisible. Rather, they constantly intervene and change our relations (see Simons 2017, 14). Therefore, these “parasites” (Serres 2007), just like the Una’s underground toxins and pollutants, can never be excluded or ignored completely, “they can only [maybe] be reduced to an acceptable level” (Simens 2017, 6).

28 I am thankful to Ivan Rajković for this comment.

used to articulate the effects of river-human conviviality that provide the basis of riverine politics. Here, riverine citizenship stems from a place-based, inborn feeling which makes you know you are home, living *unski život*, however precariously. This historical entanglement between people and their “pristine, beloved river” generates a particular form of natureculture that paints the river as clean and clear, regardless of its perpetual contamination.

However, in this chapter we also learned about the pollution of the Una. By tracing discourses and practices of riverine waste and pollution, we realize that framing the Una as pristine and clean invites certain formations—people, flows, and landscapes—into the riverine imaginary while denying connections to waters and soils elsewhere. This selective inclusion reveals a wider conceptual dichotomy of what is considered to belong to nature and the river and what is left outside—dirt. As a result, the boundaries of riverine citizenship become delineated by elements cast aside which always threaten to return, like the toxic underground tributaries of the Una itself.

My ethnography reveals that these environmental hazards—such as Željava Air Base, the Vučjak landfill, and the polluted water system—are nearby and that Bišćani are aware of them. This awareness, however, makes the Una even more valuable—and therefore in need of ceaseless protection—to people in the town. As Nihad pointed out, the Una is the last place of refuge, escape, and sanity amid creeping environmental, societal, economic, and political dangers.²⁹ This view of the river as a place of refuge, escape, and sanity was further intensified during the Bosnian war. This war-amplified people-river conviviality will be explored in the next chapter.

29 I am grateful to Ivan Rajković for helping me think about these tensions.

Life in the Age of Death War and the River¹

Bišćani's historically and sensorially shaped, sociologically complex, and physically intimate relationship with the Una River intensified during the Bosnian War. During this time, people's connection to the river became even more proximate, immediate, and vital. Simply put, *ratni život* (war life) was an amplified *unski život*. This war-deepened, river-people conviviality facilitated the production of *communitas*. More concretely, while swimming together during the war, people experienced "synaesthesia"—an intermingling of the senses—which vibrated between the bodies of the swimmers. This "sheer force of the vibrational body" (Atanasovski 2016, 484) created a certain type of viscosity, affective force, and a sense of living together with each other and the river—a prelude to riverine citizenship.

Many citizens of Bihać vividly remember swimming in and with the river during the war. For example, in the summer of 2018, I was sitting with Aldijana in a café by the Una River in Bihać. As we looked at the river's emerald currents, we talked about our shared memories of the Bosnian War. We traveled from one recollection to another, but Aldijana always circled back to the time we spent swimming in the Una River:

The most powerful was our experience at Jotanovi [a section of the river]. Twenty of us would start walking to Jotanovi from Ozimice II [a socialist-government-built neighborhood]. We would walk through the fields and

1 An earlier version of some parts of this chapter has been published in Azra Hromadžić, "Life in an age of death: War and the river in Bosnia and Herzegovina," *American Anthropologist*, Vol. 124, Issue 2 (June 2022): 263–78, <https://anthrosource.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/aman.13710>.

high grass. We weren't afraid of it. We would start our journey early in the morning, with a truck tire in one hand because we didn't have a water mattress, and a bottle of diluted "Step" juice in the other because we didn't have food to take. I remember my friend, you know him, Samir; he carried his guitar, and another boy, Emin, would sing that song, you probably remember it, "Zlatne godine" [The Golden Age]. We had one cigarette and we would share it. That was *zajedništvo* [togetherness]. We, the younger ones, attached ourselves to you, the older ones. And what I remember the most is going down the river from Šestica [Waterfall #6] with a truck tire since we did not have water mattresses. I knew every single tufa and how to avoid it. I think I could go down the river now without hitting one. My body remembers it, I believe. That was how we grew up in war: by learning where the rocks were in the river and how to navigate them. This might sound crazy to some people, but this was beautiful, that togetherness we had, that we were all together. And that was the Una and her ability to bring us together, in one place.

For Aldijana, the Una River is not a passive background against which social life unfolded during the war; rather, she emphasizes the Una's unique materiality and ability to bring people together "in one place." Furthermore, she explains how the Una united people at a time when the world, as Bišćani knew it, was undergoing massive destruction and reordering. This "beautiful feeling of togetherness" was born out of multiple, conflicting elements—war-produced death and destruction; hunger and singing; cigarettes and guitars; dangerous walks to the river's bank; life under siege; people's zest for "things," life, and fun; and the Una's unique material properties, such as tufa, which needed to be learned and mastered. This everyday traversing of and swimming in the river during the war further attached people to the river and created a political repository that fostered riverine citizenship in the postwar period.

In this chapter, I resist the temptation to dismiss Aldijana's story as an "anecdote," a token of "individual resiliency," or a powerful "work of memory." Rather, I take Aldijana's account as a guide to pull apart normative descriptions of the horror of war from the everyday substrate that makes them ordinary.² More specifically, propelled by Aldijana's story and my own experience of living under siege during the Bosnian War, in what follows I suggest that life in war is not only brutal and disastrous but also, in some respects, joyful and at times even fun. This observation requires that we portray the real and horrific experi-

2 I am grateful to Andrea Ballestero for this idea.

ences of death and destruction while asking: What kind of life emerges in these injured landscapes? How is it that people experience joy amid the horrific destruction of life and the world as one knows it? And how do these embodied, inter-subjectively circulating memories of swimming with the river and each other contribute to riverine citizenship?

Guided by these questions, in this chapter I reveal how during the Bosnian War, in the devastated, besieged city of ruins, Bihać, meaningful life materialized from multispecies relationships. More specifically, I argue that we cannot understand what war in Bihać looked like and felt like if we ignore the entanglements between humans and nonhumans—in this case, between Bišćani and the Una River.

While there is some literature that includes “nature” in descriptions of war experiences, these representations are mostly about danger and hiding rather than joy. By focusing on the joy that people experienced while swimming in and with “their” river in the context of war, I show how this historically, socially, and materially unique river enabled people to experience *zajedništvo*, or “being together,” which was also a source of pleasure and happiness. Capturing, portraying, and analyzing these entanglements between people and the river during the war, and their facilitation of *communitas* and riverine citizenship, is the main undertaking of this chapter.

Methodologically, this chapter brings together twenty years of ethnographic research in Bosnia and Herzegovina, in-depth interviews, works of fiction, and my own personal reminiscences of life under siege. My memories of swimming in the river are still vivid and deeply embodied, and yet I learned to suspect them. Similar to Zoe Todd’s (2016, 11) experiences, during my anthropological training (and still today), I faced critiques that we cannot “maintain objectivity when working with our own political, legal, and intellectual concerns.” I also learned to think that I was possibly too close to “it” and in danger of “going native” (see A. Hromadžić 2023). As a result, I intellectually detached myself from these memories. However, encouraged by several female mentors³ and “grounded and supported by a crowd of thinkers” (Puig de la Bellacasa 2017, 2), in this chapter I revisit my memories of living under siege during the Bosnian War and combine them with my long-term, in-depth ethnography of Bosnia’s social, cultural, economic, and material worlds. Finally, I bring Faruk Šehić’s fiction into the methodological mix, since I have learned that biographical fiction perhaps most eloquently captures war sentiments and the “everyday” of war.

3 Kathlyn Hall, Ritty Lukose, Liliane Weissberg, and Etty Jehn, I am very grateful to you.

Theoretically, this chapter pulls together three bodies of literature that are not usually knotted together. First, I engage with anthropological studies of “everyday life” and “the ordinary” in situations of “critical events” (Das 2006), such as war. This scholarship discusses the complexities of life in war and other violent settings, and it asks how we are to move beyond abstract, text-bound definitions of war and pay attention to war experiences—what war tastes, feels, looks, and moves like (Nordstrom 2004). Second, this chapter engages with scholarship on “sociality beyond the human” (Lien and Pálsson 2019, 3). My goal, however, is not to shift human agency to the Una River; rather, the point here is to emphasize the bonds between people and the river that facilitate a sense of companionship, mutuality, and living fully. In other words, for Biščani, the Una River is not a human agent, but it is still a powerful force that affects them deeply. Finally, I complete my theoretical explorations with scholarship on *communitas*. This scholarship broadens the notion of community (Esposito 2010, 2013; Kipoukiolis 2018; Nancy 2000) and dares to take romance, love, humor, and joy seriously despite death, violence, and destruction. *Communitas* allows me to capture the sentiments and experiences of the river-mediated togetherness that Biščani spun with each other during the war. Connecting these three bodies of scholarship, explained in more detail in the next section, helps me document, make sense of, and hopefully advance our understanding of the many ways of being human during war. It also helps us trace the transformations of war-intensified connections between people and the river into political repositories—embodied affects and shared narratives—from which riverine citizenship was to unfold decades after the war.

Theoretical Inspirations

War Ethnography

We still find echoes of Hobbes’s ideas about the state of nature in contemporary studies of war; nevertheless, ethnographies of war show how “everyday” and “ordinary” become day-to-day accomplishments that require routine labor. I am inspired by this body of work where complexities and paradoxes of life in war have been widely discussed. This literature documents the ways of sustaining a “good life” under violent and unpredictable circumstances, and it brings together death and resistance (Aretxaga 1997); survival and humor (Bryant and Hatay 2011; Nordstrom 2004; Sacco 2002); sonic violence and sonic resistance

(Atanasovski 2016); sociality, intimacy, and care (Theidon 2012); love and survival (Bolten 2012); and subjectivity and affect (Navaro-Yashin 2012). This scholarship descends into, rather than ascends from, “ordinary” lives, where the violent event “attaches itself with its tentacles into everyday life and folds itself into the recesses of the ordinary” (Das 2006, 1). As a result, these works challenge and move beyond the duality of inner/outer, past/present/future, and structure/agency (Das 2006). Instead, ethnographers of war and its aftermath pay attention to everyday experience, “in which everyday life absorbs the traumatic collective violence” (Das 2006, 16).

The ethnographic literature on war and violence also illuminates the capacity of people to use humor to create “spaces of collective solidarity” (Van Ramshorst 2017, 1) and to love, socialize, be joyous, and be funny, even in the depths of horrifying experiences where people seemingly “laugh out of place” (Goldstein 2013, see also Atanasovski 2016, Rác 2016). Here, “the secret source of humor is not joy but sorrow,” and the wartime lives that “produce humor and joy are lives that are themselves plagued by particular kinds of tragedy and suffering” (Goldstein 2013). As this chapter demonstrates, in the ruins of war, humor becomes a shared mechanism to cope with vulnerability and to create moments of joy, where I, borrowing from Spinoza (2012), understand joy as one of the most important affects that influence variation in our power of acting and living.

These complexities of life in war and its aftermath are captured in Joe Sacco’s (2002) graphic novel *Safe Area Goražde*, where the author, who spent weeks living in the besieged enclave of Goražde, in eastern Bosnia, uses his drawings to capture the intimate—intense, dreadful, deadly, and funny, all at once—moments that constitute the everyday lives of a dozen besieged people. Sacco depicts people’s subjectivity in the context of ruination and abjection (Navaro-Yashin 2012), and he encapsulates the complexity of life under siege, where violence is physical, structural, and intimate (Theidon 2012), where soundscapes of war—warning sirens and rock songs—vibrate through bodies and souls (Atanasovski 2016), and where people’s “everyday, normal” desires—for a new pair of jeans, bananas, or a music record—have their own histories and logics (also see Bryant and Hatay 2011). This and other studies that take an up-close and personal view of violence reveal both what is visible and what is left invisible in “the shadows” of war (Nordstrom 2004). Collectively, these ethnographies show that violence should not be understood as an interruption of life to which we simply bear witness. Rather, as Veena Das (2006) shows in her ethnography of extreme forms of violence that followed the Partition of India in 1947, “violence has entered recesses of the ordinary.”

Anthropological literature on Bosnia and Herzegovina has made a considerable contribution to this complex and nuanced understanding of everyday life during (Maček 2009; Sacco 2002) and after war (see, among others, Gilbert 2020; Halilovich 2013; Helms 2013; Henig 2020; A. Hromadžić 2015; Jansen 2015; Jašarević 2017; Kurtović 2020; Wagner 2008). Scholarship on the Yugoslav wars has been dominated by abstract and prescribed political science notions of ethnicity, nationalism, and postwar reconstruction. Anthropologists complicate these dominant narratives, offering painstaking ethnographic studies that show that people in the Balkans have had to historically and continually negotiate tensions and conflicts that are integral parts of everyday life in any community, especially in culturally “diverse regions” that have been under foreign occupation for much of their history (Bougarel, Helms, and Duijzings 2007; Bringa 1995; Jansen 2005; Jansen, Brković, and Čelebičić 2016). These studies illustrate how ethnic identities are constructed, contingent, and fluctuating and how ethnic nationalism and ethnopolitics are more complicated than they first appear; regardless of their misleadingly even surface, they do not disclose underlying fissures easily (Herzfeld 2005, 2). Maček’s ethnography of life under siege in Sarajevo demonstrates these ethnographic efforts perhaps most clearly, as Maček carefully documents how Sarajevans gradually “became ethnic” as the war progressed. These “discoveries” allow the author to turn the dominant narrative about ethnic nationalism as a cause of the Bosnian War on its head: ethnic nationalism in Bosnia, Maček convincingly argues, was the product rather than the cause of war.

These prolific ethnographies of war emphasize human-to-human and human-and-built-environment relations. My work departs from this approach, however, by emphasizing people’s attachment to the “natural world” that enabled more-than-human conviviality during the war. I show how human life in war is more fully experienced in relation to nonhumans, which, importantly, makes that life more ordinary.

Furthermore, escaping into what we call “nature”—such as fleeing into forests and walking across treacherous mountains to escape life under siege, genocide, and persecution—is well documented in numerous personal accounts of war and survival (see, among others, Nuhanović 2019; Suljagić 2005). Extending this “danger of nature” into the postwar period, and pushing against recent enthusiasm about multispecies economies, Henig (2019) illustrates the risks that Bosnia’s beautiful mountains—still sprinkled with largely invisible and deadly unexploded ordnances—present to those who are forced to make a living from them. While many of these complex material, social, and environmental as-

pects of war and postwar sociality have been discussed in several anthropological studies, the story of people discovering meaning and experiencing joy with and in “nature” during war is largely nonexistent in anthropological scholarship.

Sociality beyond the Human

My thinking about life in an age of death is inspired by the literature on forms of sociality beyond the human. This endeavor has been promoted by many names, including “‘more than human’ (Whatmore 2002), ‘posthumanism’ (Smart and Smart 2017), ‘posthumanist performativity’ (Barad 2003), ‘becoming with’ (Haraway 2008), ‘multispecies ethnography’ (Kirksey and Helmreich 2010), ‘ethnography of life forms’ (Hartigan 2015), ‘co-domestic’ (Fijn 2011), ‘more than human sociality’ (Tsing 2013), ‘biosocial becomings’ (Ingold and Pálsson 2013), the ‘anthropo-not-seen’ (de la Cadena 2015), ‘the non-human turn’ (Grusin 2015), and ‘co-species histories’ (Tsing et al. 2017)” (see Lien and Pálsson 2019, 4).

Numerous scholars note that an other-than-human focus does not need to signal a turn away from the human, which will, they suggest, continue to be at the forefront of anthropological inquiry. Instead, this effort marks a shift from a concern with culture and sociality as strictly human attributes (Lien and Pálsson 2019, 5). This broadening allows for an extended sociality that recognizes “a world of many worlds” (de la Cadena and Blaser 2018) and a pluriverse of “radical interdependence” (Escobar 2018, 47) between humans and nonhumans. Humans and nonhumans, or “what we call forests, animals, rivers, and mountains” (Blaser and de la Cadena 2017, 186), generate heterogeneous assemblages of life and multiple ways of knowing and defining the world. Numerous scholars have argued that by assuming that the term “social” is restricted to the human domain, scholars trained in the Western tradition have failed to notice something Indigenous scholars and scholars of Indigeneity have been articulating for decades: cross-species relations are crucial to cultural and social reproduction, and these relations are embedded in and constituted by a “realm which also includes inanimate presences of many kinds” (Lien and Pálsson 2019, 8; TallBear 2019). As TallBear (2019) notes, in rejecting the binaries of life versus not life and humans versus nature, as well as other more Eurocentric hierarchies of life, we can develop an understanding of existence that focuses on “being in good relation” with nonhumans. Most of the multispecies scholarship urges us to extend forms of care beyond our own species (Tsing 2015, Kohn 2014, Haraway 2008, Latour 2013), an approach that could, perhaps, help us trace a path for “living on a damaged planet” (Tsing et al. 2017). But “being in good relation” is a com-

plex and slippery endeavor where care for some species invites the eradication of others (see Bocci 2017, see also Bhan and Govindrajana 2023) and where love for some beings is contrasted with “violently unloving” others (Chao 2018, 624).

My ethnography of life in an age of war complicates this duality and distinction between those beings that humans are in a positive (loving, caring) relation with and those that we violate (Bocci 2017) or that violate us (Chao 2018). More specifically, my ethnography includes historically and socially situated humans living with and relating to the Una River, where this relationality produces joy, fun, togetherness, mindfulness, connection, companionship, care, violence, fear, loss, and destruction, all at once.

Within this broader literature on sociality beyond the human, scholars researching waterscapes document how water has always been a historically and culturally specific matter (Ballesterro 2019). Some of this “anthropology of water” literature, following the ontological turn, also works to de-center nature/culture distinctions (Hastrup and Hastrup 2015), and it builds on the ideas of more-than-human relationality to argue that “water is a relative with whom we engage in social and political interdependency and respect” (Yazzie and Baldy 2018, 3). For example, Indigenous scholars have documented “ancestral forms of comingling,” which teach that “I am the river, and the river is me” (Salmond 2017). These scholars understand other-than-human beings, such as plants, animals, and mountains, as “selves, that is, beings with a point of view” (Kohn 2013, 132).

I am deeply impacted by this scholarship. Like these scholars, I am interested in the ways in which the Una River’s unique sociality and materiality—its structure, smell, sounds, rocks, and riverine worlds—make Bišćani who they are. They are undoubtedly transformed through everyday encounters with the river. However, while many Bišćani literally love “their” river, they do not have an interest, and neither do I, in trying to see the world from the river’s point of view. Therefore, my ethnography does not offer insight into the river’s perspective and intentionality.⁴ Rather, it focuses on Bišćani’s unique war experience of togetherness as mediated and impacted by the river’s sublime powers and its social history, unique structure, and complex materiality.

Following Ballesterro’s (2019, 416) suggestion that what is missing from our “anthropology of water” accounts are “the joy and pleasures that coexist with the damaging practices we document,” in this chapter, I describe the soothing, creative, joyful, and productive, but sometimes also violent and destructive, effects the Una River had on humans in Bihać during the Bosnian War. I detail

4 For a similar perspective, see Archambault (2016).

how the “war swimmers” (re)learned that they were situated and “knotted beings” (Haraway 2008), powerfully attached to and constituted by the river. This realization and rediscovery helped them redefine their dreadful predicament, inserting moments of love, fun, care, joy, and *communitas* during life under siege.

Communitas

According to Esposito (2013, 14), *communitas* destabilizes the boundaries of a person, exposing them to contagion by others; “*communitas* opens, exposes, and turns individuals inside out, freeing them to their exteriority” (49). Similarly, Jean-Luc Nancy (2000, 12, 35) argues that a community as *communitas* is devoid of a proper substance; it happens and is an act of association that sets up a space of co-appearance and relations. It is a *mélange*—a dialogue of plural voices and encounters that carve out the space between us. *Communitas* is therefore a pure relation that joins multiple subjects without forming a subject or an entity itself and without tying a bond of belonging around language, soil, and ethnicity (Esposito 2010, 29, 38, 48, 53). What we share in *communitas* is essentially a lack of identity (Nancy 2000). It is precisely this “lack of identity” that has allowed for a riverine, non-territorial, and non-ethnic sense of belonging (see Introduction) to eventually fuel riverine citizenship.

Some anthropologists have noted that *communitas*—or a collective relation without an essence—emerges “in-between things” (Ruby 1982), in a liminal space.⁵ During these transitions, people “find each other to be just ordinary people after all” (E. Turner 2012, 4). *Communitas* is therefore a newly found togetherness, or, in Aldijana’s words, *zajedništvo*, which does not take sides and which “seeks the whole universe as its boundary” (E. Turner 2012, 30). It is “humanity, bar none” (E. Turner 2012, 5).⁶

Communitas is a good companion to war because it frequently develops, as E. Turner (2012, 73, 74) reminds us, in spaces and times of struggle, “in an environment sheltered by the hope and love between the members of a badly shaken community . . . between life and death.” It is precisely in those daring circum-

5 According to Victor Turner (1990), liminality is a stage in a social process that has a quality of ambiguity or disorientation that occurs in the middle stage of rites. In this stage, participants no longer hold their preritual status, but they have not yet begun the transition to the status they will hold when the rite is complete. While there is robust literature on liminality in anthropology, I do not engage with that literature here.

6 This is in contrast to Émile Durkheim’s notion of solidarity, which is an emotional, effervescent bond between individuals who are collectively in opposition to some other group (E. Turner 2012).

stances that *communitas* reveals itself as a “sense felt by a group of people when their life together takes on full meaning” (2012, 1). Additionally, *communitas* also recognizes the “energy of nature” (E. Turner 2012, 165). While *communitas* is often conceived as “coming up from below,” it also exists “in the very environment,” in humanity’s relations to nonhuman worlds, where communal life is in tune with an interdependency with nature (E. Turner 2012, 144). This realization of the interdependency and conviviality of humans and the environment—such as swimming in and with the Una River during the war—illuminates the relationship of person-to-river-to-person which generates a sense of something pulling us around (2012, 151). This “something” resists easy analysis, and it is difficult to capture: “it is like music, you have to be in it, hear it, to join in” (2012, 11). In this instance, you had to be swimming in and with the Una River to fully grasp the conviviality between people and the river that contributed to the joys of war. More specifically, the river’s unique sociality, materiality, and liquidity produced viscosity, which allowed swimmers to destabilize the boundaries of their own person, to expose themselves to other swimmers, to move in sync, to co-appear, and to “stick” to each other—*zajedništvo*.

Stitching together war, more-than-human relations, and *communitas* illuminates the material connectedness between humans and nonhumans and the transfigurations necessary to account for the power with which anxiety, struggle, and futility undergird conviviality and memory retrieval. My employment of *communitas* builds on this theoretical insight. However, I expand the concept of *communitas* to include recent anthropological discussions of more-than-human relationality. By enmeshing the discussion of *communitas* with my ethnographic data and personal memories of life in an age of death, I capture the unfolding of river-facilitated *communitas*—as a phenomenon in action and as an act of association that sets up a space of co-appearance and relations (Nancy 2000)—through stories of Bišćani below. First, however, I quickly introduce the reader to life in Bihać under siege (1992-95).

Focusing on Bihać and the Una under Siege

The state of siege created a massive social, political, spatial, and economic reordering where people felt newly “entangled, abandoned, engaged, and reconfigured” (Greenhouse 2002, 4). I was sixteen years old when the war started in my hometown. During the war, together with my family and the people of Bihać, I spent three and a half years under siege, with no electricity or regular food supplies. In my memories of those times, pictures of violence, destruction, hun-

ger, deprivation, long lines for humanitarian aid, and refugees pouring into our town are intertwined with reminiscences of friendship, family support, neighbors cooking together, dance-group rehearsals under heavy bombings, and my first “real” date under a rain of bullets. My recollections are similar to descriptions by Bryant and Hatay (2011, 642), who studied life in the militarized Turkish Cypriot enclaves and observed, “Such are the stories of the period: deprivation and dances, crowding and concerts, child soldiers and beauty contests.”

During the war, Biščani continued to live together. Our schooling was sporadic. We read books and did homework using light produced from a shoelace dipped in kerosene. Heavy shelling launched from the surrounding hills frequently interrupted our school days. The hardest moment of the war came toward the end, when my twenty-four-year-old brother was terribly injured and unable to walk for six months. His legs were pierced with numerous pieces of shrapnel, some of which caused substantial wounds. We nicknamed the biggest wound on his leg “the schnitzel”—laughing despite the pain, injury, and hunger. Our laughs and dark humor—the greatest tool of *communitas* in frightening conditions (E. Turner 2012, 80)—overlapped with injury, death, and dying.

While living precariously, we also followed “worldly” trends in music, politics, and fashion.⁷ In between shellings, my friends and I went to a nearby coffee shop and bar called “Mond,” where, using electricity from a generator, we watched, listened, and danced to Bon Jovi’s new single “Keep the Faith.” Back at our socialist-government-built apartment building, we jointly watched—on a small TV connected to a car battery—CNN reports about “our” siege and dependent predicament. After watching the news, we frequently played guitar and sang loudly until the morning hours, our parents and neighbors tolerating our singing.⁸ The local radio station hosts went from one apartment building to the next, recording unique ways children and youth lived, studied, resisted, and performed together in their “sheltered” hallways and basements. In these dark hallways, my friends and I longed for a new pair of Levi’s 501 jeans while managing to buy, on the black market, a Turkish-made hair coloring to dye our hair red, black, or orange. During long and hot summer days, our cement apartment buildings became confining and crowded with bodies and stale air; walking to and swimming in and with the Una River, while risky and dangerous, became our main source of revival, sociality, meaning-making, entertain-

7 For a related description of everyday activities during the air raids during the 1990s NATO bombing of Serbia, see Rącz 2016.

8 For a similar description of singing amid destruction, see Atanasovski 2016.

ment, and joy. The river supplied enough water for people to cover their basic needs, despite numerous attempts by the Serb army to interrupt the city's water supply, and it provided an escape from shelling and detonations in town because its powerful waterfalls and unspoiled beaches offered shelter to citizens and concealed the noise of war-related destruction, creating moments of play and laughter amid destruction and death.

“We Were Naked in front of Each Other”

The Una River, the city of Bihać, and its inhabitants have been historically intertwined in the same grammar of survival, creating a sense of connection and co-citizenship. This bond became amplified during the war when Biščani, as Haris once told me, “rediscovered the river.” Faruk Šehić, a well-known Bosnian author who was born in Bosanska Krupa, a town on the Una 23 kilometers downstream from Bihać and whose book—*Quiet Flows the Una*—has been translated into a dozen languages, skillfully explains this war-deepened cohabitation. More specifically, he emphasizes the multispecies relationship between people, their river ancestors, and other earthly beings to remind Biščani that life stretches before, after, and beyond the siege. In the process, while committing to a particular “place”—the river—he anchors people in the long history of the Earth.

When the first body finally jumps in, all things from dry land are forgotten. . . . Perhaps we really are reborn every time we dive into the water. We return to the primordial case adorned with seaweed; our memory returns there. Perhaps our cells remember their former shapes before the scales fell from our skin and we finally began crawling through the shallows toward the terrible, dry land. Swimming was then another word for resurrection and new life (Šehić 2011, 146).

Šehić captures how the river allowed one to suspend the outer world of violence and destruction, anchor oneself in the context of earthly history, and reconnect oneself with both the past and the future. These observations capture something unique about Biščani's enmeshed sociocultural, historic, geographic, and environmental sensibilities. They demonstrate how the river became an anchor and a compass that guided and situated Biščani living under siege in the larger context of life on Earth. For example, Narcisa, an architect interested in dwellings and landscapes by the Una River, remembers thinking during the war,

“The Una flows and passes, and the war will pass.” Narcisa’s comments echo Nihad’s and Hrvoje’s ideas (see Chapter 1) that the Una anchors people in the long history and geology of the region, the world, and the universe.

This (hi)story of entangled, “primitive” coexistence between people and the river exceeds Bišćani’s contemporary problems and human-centered experiences. This experience of being human in Bihać that brings together people and the river is not only spiritual and cognitive but also visceral, as Narcisa explains:

Every time I approach the Una, I have a certain reaction because the Una has its own frequency. Remember our philosophizing during the war, when we read Hermann Hesse’s *Steppenwolf* together? . . . That relationship is not only spiritual but also chemical. . . . What I mean is that I breathe more deeply here [by the river]. Stress leaves my body. I feel some cleansing, therapeutic effect. And I developed this during the war.

This recognition of the co-constitution of the biological, chemical, and spiritual self and the river was significantly deepened during the war, when many people shifted from sitting and philosophizing by the river to swimming in and with the river and with each other. Lejla, whose family owns a segment of an island in the middle of the river, remembers:

The Una before the war was our summer fun. She acquired a new meaning during the war. She was still about fun, but she was also about survival. Because of her, we left our basements and shelters. We went from protected to dangerous spaces. We walked to the river and Radio “Korenica”⁹ wished us a nice time swimming. And we knew their weapons could reach us and kill us. But we still went.

Narcisa echoes Lejla’s memories of the Una “pulling” people out of shelters to the same place by the river and E. Turner’s (2012, 151) reflections on *comunitas* as “something [that] seemed to be pulling us around” when she says, “It was dangerous, but we still went. The Una brought us to her banks.” From these experiences, an intense awareness of oneself in relation to one’s companions emerged from the dangerous, cigarette-sharing, and water-mattress-carrying walk to the river waterfalls and risky travel down the river’s fast currents.

9 Korenica is a settlement in Croatia, not far from Bihać. During the war, it was one of the strongholds of the Serb forces in the region.



CLICK TO
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Alma, for example, emphasizes how the Una's currents carried and guided the swimmers' bodies when she says, "I still remember that adrenaline. How did we have the courage to go down the river like that? It was so dangerous! We felt so alive, so vulnerable yet so strong and defiant . . . so together, and we trusted her [the Una] to carry us to her shores." Alma's words suggest a sense of viscosity, where the river's liquid became the "glue" that held together, guided, and harmonized the swimmers' movements, pulling them together and tearing them apart, exposing them to each other, and allowing them to experience joy and life in common with each other and the river.

This form of *communitas* opened, exposed, and turned "individuals inside out, freeing them to their exteriority" (Esposito 2013, 49). The swimmers continuously emphasized that in those spaces there was no ranking among them, and laughter and singing overcame them freely—*communitas*. Furthermore, through the blurring and blending of voices in collective singing, yelling, and swimming, "the sound of equity was achieved" (E. Turner 2012, 28). This was a *mélange*—a dialogue of plural voices and encounters carving out the space between us (Nancy 2000, 12, 35). Rank differential qualities were temporarily suspended, and generational differences, as Narcisa recalls, were deferred: "We experienced a unique transgenerational bonding . . . people who were thirty and forty were with us. I was thirteen. We were there together, 'naked' in front of each other, and at any moment, any one of us, all of us could die. And that is why we were so together." In the "true" spirit of *communitas*, swimming together in and with the Una suspended and reconfigured, without fully erasing, the hierarchies that frame much of living during peaceful times, including age cohorts.

In addition to stressing the Una's ability to bring people together and help them transcend contemporary violence and destruction, Aldijana, Narcisa, Alma, and Faruk all mentioned some aspect of the Una's material uniqueness. Here, seaweed and river rocks, for example, allow the swimmers to transgress their predicament and their temporal boundaries and to feel a connection to things that came before and that will come after. Other people also frequently mentioned the Una's unique physical attributes. After all, it is *sedra* that Aldijana remembers learning how to avoid while "traveling" down the river from Waterfall #6 during the war. Similarly, Alem remembers "the mystical summer nights by the river during the war. I do not see her in the dark, but I feel her, strongly, I hear her roar, I smell her sweet scent, I feel the confronting chill that the wind delivers, and I grasp her strength with all my being."

Here, the state of oneness, unity, and rebirth that the swimmers experienced with each other, with their river ancestors, with other earthly beings, and with

the Una's unique material properties—*sedra*, *slatkast* scent, *žubor*, *šum*, and *huk*—exists connected to but also outside of and in between the norms and fixed categories of either war or peace. Rather, equality, undifferentiated humanness, and humility emerge—*communitas*. This relatedness and collaboration between people and the river amid destruction, death, and devastation motivated people living under siege to go on; to believe; to experience strength, love, and joy; to live fully; and to transcend, however incompletely and temporarily, division, hierarchization, and devastation.

Importantly, people's memories of the Una, which, as Lejla recalls, "made" people leave their shelters and embark on a potentially deadly walk to the river's beaches, are linked to other memories of the river's force and relationship—not only to life but also to pain and death. For example, Ena remembers the dangers of walking to and hiding in the river during the war:

remember one day . . . we were walking to Jotanovi. Suddenly, they started shooting at the city, at us. We were exposed, terrified. If we had started running, there was a good chance we would not have reached the closest house to seek shelter. Howitzers and tanks were shooting at us from the hills, the ground was shaking. We entered the Una to seek refuge. After about five to ten minutes, we realized there was a better chance to survive if we started running than if we were to continue squatting in the Una, in that studen [ice-cold environment]. I really think I lost most of my organs that day from squatting in such cold for so long [laughs]. But we survived. In the river. And the name of that river is the Una. And my city is in love with her. And I am in love with her.

In Ena's statement, love and survival merge with danger and destruction. Here, the Una is a sublime entity—the one that provides shelter but also "destroys all the organs." Many people commented on the danger and destruction that the Una witnessed, memorialized, mirrored, and sometimes generated. For example, Dado mentioned how almost everyone who went down Waterfall #6 during the war has a scar on their right hip from hitting a particular *sedra* in the water that was hard to avoid. Others commented on how the Una's fast current occasionally carried the bodies of those who died defending her banks. During our coffee date by the Una, Nihad recalled that the first dead body he saw was in the Una River. The body, he said, "was floating . . . swollen, huge, and grotesque. I've had many dreams about it since." In addition, every year the river "swallows" the bodies of those who are not skilled enough to navigate her invisible yet powerful currents and whirlpools (see Figure 8).



Fig. 8. The plaque commemorating the life of twenty-seven-year-old Amir Hošić, who drowned in the Una River while hanging out at night with his friends on May 18, 2013. The plaque is placed close to where Amir fell in. The sign reads: “I am wondering why, you beautiful Una, took his youth away and covered us in sadness. His kindness, decency, gentle smile, and love disappeared in your waves. You, the only river, for as long as you murmur, we will remember one youth. Because death does not exist, people die only when they are forgotten. Your family, your friends, and your city will never forget you, Amir” (photo by author).

The victims of the Una’s sublime power include my uncle, whom I never met and who, at the age of three, drowned in the Una in the 1950s. It took Bišćani—family, friends, and volunteers—five days to recover his body from the river bushes more than a kilometer downstream from where he fell in. The toll of the dead and injured by the Una is high, and it leaves more or less visible marks on Bišćani’s bodies and souls. I often think of the painfully red hands of the women who washed clothes in the cold river during the war and who frequently developed rheumatoid arthritis. In my instance, it was juvenile arthritis, probably caused by swimming in the Una. Propelled by these experiences with death, injury, disease, and struggle that were born out of proximity to and conviviality with the river, people in Bihać often reflect on the sublime powers of the Una to both abundantly provide and take life. This is in contrast to much scholarship on multispecies relationships that usually focuses on either positive, loving, and caring relationships between particular humans and non-humans or the destructive aspects of these relationships (see Bhan and Govindrajan 2023). My ethnography shows how people’s relationship to the Una is neither all lov-

ing nor all destructive, but both. Importantly, the Una's unique power to both give and take life does not diminish but rather accentuates Bišćani's respect for and relatedness to the river. Furthermore, these "dark moments" shed light on those instances of wartime living during which death did not fully overcome nor "cast a dark cloud across them" (E. Turner 2012, 73, 74). Rather, it provided the people in Bihac with a context in which to reflect on and partially reinvent the meaning of life and to seek togetherness, joy, and even fun.

The Return to Jotanovi

In 2021, together with two friends with whom I used to swim in the Una River during the war, Alma and Narcisa, I returned to the Jotanovi wartime beach. In order to get to the beach, we had to traverse sections of the river where the current was fast and unpredictable. As a result, in order to cross over to "our" wartime beach, we had to hold onto each other firmly. As we slowly pushed forward, we commented on how the river's *korito* (bed) had changed, reminding us of the Una's unique, vibrant, and pulsating materiality described in Chapter 2. As we stumbled across the river, walking from one *ada* to another, we experienced moments of heightened emotion and uncontrolled laughter, as well as stretches of silence and reflection. When we finally arrived at the last island, where our beach was located, we spotted a young woman who was sitting on a thin blanket, next to the river, and who was reading a book. Narcisa said: "Let's see what she is reading." As we approached, the girl looked up and put her book down, its cover facing the sky. I looked down and saw the familiar cover of Herman Hesse's *Steppenwolf*. I looked at Narcisa in disbelief. I saw her expression change as she recognized the book cover. "Can you believe this?" I whispered. The young girl was confused by our reaction—she quickly explained that she had picked up the book at random, from a book stand in the center of the city, on her way to the river. We explained to her that we used to read that book during the war, together, by the river, creating moments of togetherness and metaphysical contemplation amid demise and death. No one commented, but we all smiled, searching for words, feeling close to the girl yet very distant from her (see Figure 9).

I realized at that moment that our experience of socializing with the river and with each other was a highly generational experience—an experience that my friends and I embodied. The girl reading Hesse by the Una echoed our experience, but she could not understand it since she did not partake in the war

Fig. 9. The girl reading Herman Hesse's *Steppenwolf* by the Una (photo by author).



swimming and reading by the river. The transgression of social boundaries and the sense of *communitas* forged by the war were therefore temporary accomplishments that diminished when war turned to peace. This moment of simultaneous familiarity and estrangement reminded me that not just life but the real appreciation of its full glory are tragically transient and precarious in nature; it takes death to feel fully alive.¹⁰

After a while, the three of us continued walking on the familiar yet altered path to the beach. The beach was slightly smaller compared to during the war; the Una had swallowed up some of the riverbank. The place felt uncanny—familiar but transformed. I felt both grounded and dislocated. We sat down and quietly observed some young boys who were flowing down the river from Waterfall #6. We joked that they had better avoid that *sedra*. We also remarked, both with a sense of sadness and a sense of relief, that these young boys, just like the young girl reading Hesse, did not know what Waterfall #6 meant to us, people who survived the siege by jumping from the waterfall into the swift, cold current. Then we quietly stared at the flow of the river, not knowing what to say or

10 I am grateful to Ivan Rajković for this thought.

do, feeling simultaneously a sense of fulfillment and a sense of loss. We got up, and without saying anything, holding hands, we slowly walked into the river, feeling the embrace of the familiar, cold current. We swam together, with the river and each other.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I showed that wartime lives are neither “bare” (Agamben 1998) nor only violent, brutish, short, and tragic, as the Hobbesian view would have it, but also joyful and, at times, even fun. The ethnographic data, interview materials, personal memories, and works of fiction brought together on these pages deviated from the usual reports of horror about life under siege. I showed how, during the Bosnian War, the besieged people of Bihać experienced moments of joy while swimming with each other in and with the Una River. The river here became “an active site of engagement” (Todd 2014, 217). More concretely, people living under siege during the Bosnian War found appreciation for a precariousness of life that made them notice the river in a new way since they were able to grasp the river “from up close” (Latour 2018, 74). This allowed Biščani to find a “place to land” (Latour 2018) amid the ruins of war. This helped them not only to stay, in some respects, safer and *normalni* (normal or sane) during the war but also made them open to new kinds of possibilities of relating and togetherness—*communitas*.

What I learned from Biščani is that the best way to live amid the ruins of war was to live *with, inside, around, and through* the river. In other words, in Bihać, during the war, life livable was life swimmable. In addition to being a moment-by-moment type of living, this compassionate entanglement with each other and with the river required trans-temporal and trans-human reflection, as visible in the quotes above. For Biščani living under siege during the Bosnian War, the Una River was not “simply” a resource, environment, property, or specter. Rather, people’s lives were yoked to the life of the river. Intense moment-by-moment living situations emerged from this composition—generations blended together and certain divisions, senses of superiority, and pride were broken down and suspended while new, undifferentiated bonds between the people, and the people and the river, were created. Swimming, exploring, and surviving together, as Narcisa said, “made us naked in front of each other.”

These deeply embodied wartime experiences of people-river conviviality have impacted the way this wartime generation of Biščani has thought about

life and politics since the war. This became especially visible decades after the war, in the mid-2000s, when the Una River was threatened by the joint forces of “green transition,” “green capitalism,” and “green grabbing” (see Chapter 4). This threat to the river triggered the sedimented wartime experiences of *zajedništvo* with the river and with each other. When combined with socialist ecological pedagogies (Chapter 1) and the quotidian traversing of the river (Chapter 2), the embodied and recited memories of wartime swimming generated a political repository that unleashed ecopopulism and riverine citizenship. It is to this transformation of political repository into political becoming that I turn next.

“Ne damo Unu!” The Making of Riverine Citizens

Introduction

This chapter builds on the previous one to explore how multispecies conviviality—shaped by decades of the Una River Emeralds’ pedagogies, the river’s unique materiality, and swimming in and with the river during the war—fueled riverine citizenship in Bihać. More specifically, it focuses on the 2015 “Ne damo Unu!” (“We will not give up the Una!”) protest to demonstrate how this protest generated both activism and ecopopulism, overtly politicizing, for the first time, the affective riverine community described in the previous chapters.

In this part of the book, I build on my own participation in the “Ne damo Unu!” protest. I happened to be “in the field” (see A. Hromadžić 2023) at the time of the protest, doing unrelated research, and my decision to join in was “simple”—as someone who was born and raised in Bihać and who swam and survived in and with the river during the war, I felt I had a duty to join my co-citizens to help protect the Una River. The chapter follows the formation of this opposition against riverine extraction—an unlikely alliance of advocates, businessmen, academics, and ordinary citizens who pushed in activist and populist fashion against green capitalist¹ agendas, greenwashing² grammars, and green grabbing³ projects.

- 1 Green capitalism is an attempt to combine capitalist approaches to development with environmental conservation. It also denotes the effort to solve the problems of climate change using the same logic of capitalism that caused the problems in the first place.
- 2 Greenwashing is a term used to depict state and business strategies that talk about and propagate “environmentally friendly” impacts when they do not actually exist.
- 3 Green grabbing, or green colonialism, is the appropriation and use of foreign lands, usually in the “global south,” for environmental extraction and development.

The chapter starts with a short discussion of the literature on (eco)populism in the Balkans and beyond. Then, I explore the relationship between green statecraft, green capitalism, and green grabbing. More specifically, the chapter follows different government officials and their business partners as they employ the grammar of capitalist greenwashing, security, and green transition.⁴ The last part of the chapter examines a particular river-inspired logic and grammar of people's resistance to these government and business ideas of living with and from the Una River.

Thinking Ecopopulism

My thinking about riverine citizenship and environmental politics has been impacted by the growing scholarship on ecopopulism. This literature is a subsection of the larger body of literature on populism. Contemporary approaches to populism are largely inspired by Laclau's 2005 book *On Populist Reason*, in which the author argues that populism is not limited to a racist, nativist, or proto-fascist ideology of the far right, as is frequently assumed. Rather, Laclau (2005) claims that both leftist and right-wing forms of politics could be accurately described as populist.

Some scholars have argued that ecopopulist movements and their politics may be the vehicle for reinvigorating progressive politics (Szasz 1994). Importantly, scholars recognize that those joining ecopopulist movements do not necessarily have a common identity, a sense of "belongingness" (Laclau 2005). Rather, these movements might be better understood as "articulations." Articulations, according to Stewart Hall (1983, 120-121), are links, connections, and unifications of different elements which materialize under certain conditions. An articulation is a linkage which is not necessary, determined, absolute, or essential for all times. Rather, it is a transient formulation of distinct elements which come together but never mold into one another. Hall's employment of articulation is similar to Laclau's (2005) "chains of equivalence," which are used to grasp populist politics as groupings of distinct entities that become magnetized or pulled together around a common conviction and/or common enemy. This common articulation of diverse elements became visible during the Bihać protest, when individuals and groups with different backgrounds and different ideas about how to

4 Green transition refers to a strategy of turning the current environmentally unsustainable global situation into a new sustainable paradigm by shifting to renewable energy and decarbonization.

love, care for, and live with, in, on, and from the river came together and acted together to defend the river from an outside threat, a dam. This chapter traces this particular articulation—its logics and effects, and its opposition.

Anthropologists of ecopopulism stress that these chains of equivalence and articulations do not happen in a vacuum, however. Rather, as Rajković (2021) has convincingly argued, “equivalences are made in living webs and cycles, in an intergenerational moral ecology connecting the dead, the living, and those still to be born.” They also magnetize non-human entities, where animals, plants, rocks, soil, riverbeds, and riverine worlds inspire ecopopulist imaginations and “join” humans in protest.

Ecopopulist literature focuses on those instances of collective environmental forces that are no longer adequately organized by formerly hegemonic social forms (Mazzarella 2019). Ecopopulism shares many features with other forms of populism: “a Manichean division of the population into a valorized majority us—the people—and a demonized minority them [in the case of Bihać, the city government, which wants to “sell the river”]; a folksy or vernacular tone, coupled with an organistic emphasis on community and place [“Una, the Only One”]; a suspicion of high-flown expert discourse and cosmopolitan rootlessness [the EU discourse of sustainable development]; and a powerful impulse toward bypassing, mediating, and moderating institutions and procedures in pursuit of an immediate, redemptive, and affect-intensive presencing of popular sovereignty [the protest]” (Canovan 1999 cited in Mazzarella 2019, 47).

Ecopopulism in its contemporary form traces its beginnings from the modern environmental justice movement, where thousands of community groups have developed over the last fifty years, coordinating regional, national, and international infrastructures in order to protest against dumping hazardous wastes, predatory hydropower, the use of pesticides and other environmentally damaging toxic substances, and other environment-centered issues. In the Balkans, these ecopopulist formations have taken on a unique shape, which reflects “the region’s conceptions of place, landscape, livelihoods, and present and potential political futures” (Kovács 2021, 1; see also J. Petrović 2020). For example, responding to the Balkan national capitalists, European banks, and national energy sector’s plans for building over 3,500 small hydropower plants, the so-called *minihidroelektrane*, or mHEs⁵ (Djunda 2021), ecopopulist movements in the Bal-

5 mHEs are under 10 megawatts, run-of-river hydropower plants which divert rivers and streams into pipes and which are frequently described as a nature-friendly, sustainable, and renewable form of energy, but in reality depleting multiple forms of life (see Djunda 2021).

kans formed against these initiatives. These movements include, among others, the fight of the “brave women of Kruščica” (see Midžić 2018), the “Pusti me da tečem” or “Let me flow” fight to preserve the Neretva river (Save the Blue Heart of Europe)⁶, the “troubles on the river Drina” (see Kurtović 2022), the “river guardians” in Stara Planina (see Rajković 2020), and the “Ne damo Unu!” protest, which I describe in this chapter. These struggles have their unique, place-based articulations, but they are also part of larger, regional patterns and configurations. For example, Rajković (2020) defines three main features of these ecopopulist movements in the Balkans: “First, they emerge as motley alliances—of affected villagers and their urban kin, ecologists and nature lovers, and a wide chunk of the citizenry mobilized through online platforms. Second, the struggles stay localized: while there is a lot of collaboration, specific groups defend particular rivers and river regions. Third, the ‘river guardians’ present themselves as going beyond politics to defend ‘life itself’” (Rajković 2020).

These three attributes of ecopopulism in the Balkans are highly visible in the articulations of riverine activism in Bihać—social actors with dissimilar understandings, affects, and demands came together under the umbrella of *unski život*; they stayed firmly grounded in their dwelling place, while realizing over time that they are but one instance in the larger struggle to protect the Balkan rivers; and they magnetized an unexpected group of actors, including regional activists, local students, Bihać diaspora, Italian engineers, local businessmen, pensioners, and others. By following this situated form of environmentalist and ecopopulist reasoning and action, and by placing it within the local history of disillusionment and protest, as well as the larger environmental struggles in the region, this chapter traces environmental struggles beyond mere protest rhetoric. Rather, it connects these local manifestations of environmental predations with regional riverine struggles in the Balkans and with life and death on this planet.

Diverting Water and the Rise of Riverine Activism

The 2015 “Ne damo Unu!” protest against dam-building on the Una did not happen in a vacuum. Rather, it emerged on the wings of popular discontent stemming from decades of dispossession and disillusionment in postwar Bosnia and

6 <https://balkanrivers.net/en/news/great-victory-for-the-citizens-of-the-neretvica-valley-the-concession-contract-terminated>

Herzegovina. The country emerged from the war as a destroyed, internationally maldeveloped, and bureaucratically massive state marked by institutionalized ethnic divisions and fragmented governmental arrangements prone to corruption. While grappling with the devastating effects of war—death, displacement, and extreme ethnicization of people and territory—the Bosnian state simultaneously underwent major economic transformations, first from collective ownership to state ownership and then from state ownership to private ownership (Donais 2005; Pugh 2002).⁷ The ethnonationalist elites employ and nurture the politics of ethnic hatred, division, and mistrust, while through their “embedded networks,”⁸ they control access to employment, donations, tenders, alternative jobs, wages, and future visions (see also Kurtović 2020; Mujanović 2014; Pugh 2002; Donais 2002, 2005). The effects of these structural violences are painfully present in the everyday lives of “ordinary people” who, through taxes, pay the costs of these processes, including the irrational costs of business operations, their subsidies, and the salaries of employees in a vast public sector infected with nepotism (Divjak and Martinović 2009, 33).

Many people, focused on day-to-day survival during the war and in the immediate postwar years, were largely unaware of the privatization of state-owned (formerly collective) property—a process that David Harvey (2003) referred to as “accumulation through dispossession” and what Timothy Mitchell (1999, 28) characterized as “a chaotic reallocation of collective resources.” This massive socioeconomic dispossession generated thousands of unemployed workers from formerly socialist companies—perpetually *na čekajnju* (waiting)—which now, skeletal, neglected, and abandoned, dot Bosnian landscapes. This moment arose as the most critical moment of the Bosnian “transition.” Instead of the imagined market capitalism and democracy, this “transition” led to protracted and multiplying crises, which induced feelings of being driven out (Kurtović 2022) and that everything in the transitioning present—the state, money, people, lives, and the future—is moving away (see H. Hromadžić 2022).

These processes of dispossession, neglect, and exploitation produced citizen hibernation and withdrawal from official politics (Greenberg 2011; A. Hromadžić

7 In its 2009 report, *Transparency International* states that through the process of delayed privatization, and through quasi-sociopolitical electoral rhetoric and the centralization of power in the hands of several wartime elites, “the unhindered looting of state [until recently, collective, i.e., workers’] property takes place behind the scenes” (Divjak and Martinović, 2009, 34).

8 Embedded networks is the term used by *Transparency International* to illustrate “interest groups associated with the structures of power, which, through conflict of interest and the placing of personal interests above public ones, gain unwarranted benefit at the expense of citizens” (Divjak and Martinović 2009, 33).

2015), as well as a series of protests against ethnonational elites and the “unbearable state” (A. Hromadžić 2021). One of the first protests took place in the summer of 2012 in the city of Banja Luka over the rights to a recently privatized park. A wave of protests, inspired by frustrations over political deadlocks and their effects on the country’s youngest citizens, then followed in 2013 under the name “Bosnian Baby-lution” (Kurtović and Hromadžić 2017). These protests were a prelude to the most massive postwar demonstrations, which took place in February 2014. This February 2014 protest revealed political corruption and rising inequality as key grievances for many citizens (Kurtović and Hromadžić 2017). The protest brought together a mix of impoverished workers, seniors, war veterans, football hooligans, and unemployed youth who used violent methods (setting on fire various governmental headquarters and clashing with the police) and expanded the geography of civic mobilization⁹ (Kurtović and Hromadžić 2017). In Bihać, a hotel under the ownership of the then cantonal prime minister was also vandalized, a highly symbolic act illuminating the people’s anguish over corruption among the ethnonationalist leaders. The most visible face of this protest was a local teacher and activist, Aida Sejdić, who later became the key figure of the 2015 “Ne damo Unu!” protest, showing activist continuities across spaces of dissent. It was also in Bihać, in April 2015, that public intellectuals in the town and its diaspora came together to write a letter against the city government’s plan to close the only art gallery in town. Then Mayor Emdžad Galijašević’s plan was to give a concession for the space to a foreign bank. This letter, which both my brother and I signed, was widely circulated and finally convinced the mayor to give up on his plans.

While these different protests illuminated massive capitalist destruction, dispossession, and extraction of common lives, homes, property, and industry, Bosnia’s “natural wealth” has emerged as the latest frontier of capitalist extraction and Balkan politics (see Kurtović 2022; Rajković 2020, 2022, 2023). The Balkans—frequently portrayed in scholarship and popular imagination as a site of unique socialist experimentation as well as wartime destruction and ruination—is literally green and blue, therefore rich in “natural resources.” Furthermore, Bosnia is the most forested country in Europe, and the western Balkan region has the largest remaining unexploited hydropower potential on the continent. This “wealth” has increased interest in Bosnia’s “wild, pristine rivers,” which harbor Europe’s highest concentration of endemic fish species (Freyhof and Brooks

9 The protest originated not in the capital city, Sarajevo, but in the northeastern town of Tuzla, and then spread throughout the Federation of BiH.

2011) and provide hydropower for approximately one third of the country’s electric generation (Gallop and Ralev 2022, 4).

Unsurprisingly, Bosnia’s significant water potential has also generated substantial interest among local ethnonationalist elites to produce lucrative concessionary contracts for their regional and international clients and supporters, since other forms of extraction and accumulation—mainly postwar reconstruction and privatization of state property—have been exhausted (Kurtović 2022). These ethnonationalists have shown notable flexibility and skill when engaging in “green statecraft” to bring advantages to investors. Not surprisingly, there is also a growing international interest to partake in the extraction of Bosnian and Balkan natural wealth—water and minerals (especially lithium)—mostly among Chinese, German, Austrian, Turkish, and American individuals and companies (Gallop and Ralev 2022).¹⁰ This nominally green hydropower production has become the new frontier of environmental dispossession and ecological imperialism, where many local businessmen, international and national banks, and urban bureaucrats, as well as the Balkan states themselves, partake in aggressive green grabbing.

The ostensibly green technology is presented in typical green capitalist logic as a solution by many southeast European governments—already familiar with hydropower—to develop renewable energy as requested by the EU accession and reform regime. While historically relying on coal, since the signing of the Paris Climate Accord,¹¹ the Balkans have become a major frontier of green capitalism. More specifically, the “green transition” and especially renewable hydropower have been packaged as a prerequisite for the Western Balkan states to gain economic independence, modernize, and get “closer” to Europe and EU membership. As a result, the Balkan rivers are experiencing a huge escalation in hydropower “largely prompted by the perceived need for renewable energy to fulfill a short-sighted EU Directive (2009/28/EC) through creating publicly subsidized investment opportunities” (Singer et al.).¹²

As a result of these and other hydraulic pressures, over 3,500 mHEs under 10 megawatts are currently being planned in the Balkans, 400 of which are in Bos-

10 There are some recent indications of a slowdown in financing, however: “Financing is becoming more scarce as the European Investment Bank, European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, and Germany’s KfW have become more cautious of late, leaving Chinese and Turkish banks, as well as the US International Development Finance Corporation (DFC), among the few willing to bet on such a risky sector” (Gallop and Ralev 2022) (<https://www.balkanrivers.net/en/news/new-report-southeast-europe-hydropower-investment-risks-are-high-and-rising>). Accessed September 15, 2022.

11 <https://unfccc.int/process-and-meetings/the-paris-agreement>.

12 <https://fileshare.uibk.ac.at/f/06cf1cab20a442e2b466/>.

nia alone.¹³ These mHEs are frequently described as a nature-friendly, sustainable, and renewable form of energy where no massive impoundments are inserted into the rivers. Rather, these run-of-river hydropower plants divert rivers and streams into pipes. In the process, they also divert attention and profits, mostly at the expense of local and marginalized populations, depopulating and emptying Balkan landscapes (Rajković 2020). While branded as sustainable and environmentally friendly, there is increasing evidence that these carbon-free, “green technologies,” largely driven by feed-in tariff schemes,¹⁴ cause environmental mayhem, depleting fish, limiting irrigation, interrupting subterranean flows, and causing subsidence, landslides, and floods (Gallop and Ralev 2022, Kurtović 2022, Rajković 2020). Not surprisingly, the majority of the country’s citizens are angered by these initiatives, creating regionally palpable public opposition—activism and ecopopulism—magnetizing diverse interests, individuals, groups, initiatives, and organizations. This has propelled many, however positioned in relation to power, to act here and now, giving rise to the popularization of environmental crisis across the region. These environmentalist protests and movements have at times been successful in stopping projects before the stage of physical confrontation,¹⁵ while in other instances people in the Balkans “have faced arrests, lawsuits, fines, and violence from the police or private security to defend the region’s rivers” (Gallop and Ralev 2022, 4). These alliances have been channeling riverine affects, politicizing multispecies conviviality, and generating riverine citizens who now think and vote with “their” rivers in mind.¹⁶

Abundance of Water and Excess of Suspicion

The Bihać mayor’s plans to give a concession to the Bosna Energy Company to build an mHE in the village of Martin Brod, 50 kilometers southeast of Bihać, became known to the people via an online portal, ABC. In 2015, ABC was com-

13 <https://balkanrivers.net/en/map>.

14 <https://bankwatch.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/who-pays-who-profits.pdf>.

15 <https://riverwatch.eu/en/general/news/hydropower-plants-una-national-park-halted>.

16 One of these alliances is the “Coalition for the Protection of Rivers of Bosnia and Herzegovina,” which in 2016 brought together twenty organizations scattered around the otherwise ethnically divided country. The coalition engages in “monitoring and reviewing plans for the construction of hydropower plants and advocating for the development of tourism, traditional and complementary activities that can provide more diverse jobs and greater development for local communities” (River Watch 1). The intent of these activists is to put a stop to the new generation of speculators and “green grabbers” looking to seize this natural wealth and capture its energetic potential.

prised of a small group of enthusiastic young people. The aim of ABC was to frame and brand the Una as an exceptional instance of the Earth’s natural, transgenerational heritage and an attractive tourist product for Bosnia, Europe, and the world.

Given their interest in the protection and promotion of the river, ABC closely followed meetings and rumors related to the mayor’s plans to give concessions for dam-building on the Una. For example, they learned that the mayor’s delegation visited Martin Brod in December 2014, telling the inhabitants about international investors’ interests in building an mHE in their village, and asking the people to support the idea.¹⁷ Martin Brod, located in the heart of the Una National Park (Una NP), harbors 124 registered inhabitants (the actual number is much smaller) and is the site of some of the most beautiful travertine cascades and waterfalls on the Una, currently on the tentative list of UNESCO’s World Natural Heritage Sites. Building a dam in this location is therefore exceptionally controversial and likely illegal.

ABC also learned about a closed-door meeting scheduled for May 7, 2015, under the name “Hydropotential on the Una River.” It was jointly organized by the People and Natural Resources Association, the City of Bihać, and the Institute of Hydro Technology from Sarajevo. During the meeting, Edhem Bičakčić, a Sarajevo-based businessman, one of the founders of SDA (the main nationalist Bosniak party), a former director of Elektroprivreda (the biggest public electric company in Bosnia and Herzegovina), and a former prime minister of FBiH, allegedly said, addressing those in the audience who challenged his plans: “Thank you for the opportunity to present this project [building an mHE in the Una NP] to you. This is the project you created yourselves since it exists in the spatial plan of the Una NP and the Federation of BiH. I did not come up with this idea, my expert team did not draw it up, this was already included in your cantonal and Una NP plans” (Stanković-Luković 2015). Bičakčić, while correct to some extent (see below), failed to mention, however, that according to the Law of the Una NP, only an ecologically friendly mHE could be built in the NP *exclusively to meet the needs of the local population*—a non-existent need (Stanković-Luković 2015).

Bičakčić’s involvement in this “green transition” project raised much suspicion among the local population. In 2001, Bičakčić was removed from his position as director of Elektroprivreda by the then High Representative in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Wolfgang Petric, for actions during his term as prime minister of the Federation of BiH. These actions were to the “detriment of good governance, the rule of law, and budgetary security in the Federation of Bosnia

17 <https://zurnal.info/clanak/hidrocentrale-na-uni-unistavanje-prirode-zbog-50-hiljada-km/19143>.

and Herzegovina.” According to the Office of the High Representative (OHR),¹⁸ “Mr. Bičakčić abused the powers vested in his office to redirect public revenues through a complex and corrupt system of financial diversions, with large sums of money ending in the coffers of the Party of Democratic Action (SDA)” (Office of the High Representative 2001). At the time of writing this book, Bičakčić was the president of the national branch of CIGRÉ (International Council on Large Electric Systems), which focuses on energy systems and especially on renewable energy sources in Bosnia and Herzegovina. He was quoted as saying: “Bosnia has around 50 small hydropower plants and it can have 600 of them, 300 in each entity. They are being built now, but the administrative procedure is very complex. Unless all the doors are open, people often give up on their nice intentions” (Sarajevo Times 2016). Not surprisingly, seeing Bičakčić’s name associated with the mHE in Martin Brod produced much suspicion among the local population that *ovo nisu čista posla* (these are some suspicious dealings), especially since Bosnia already produces an excess of electricity (Kurtović 2022).

ABC realized that regardless of the public’s disapproval of both Bičakčić and dams on the Una, the plans to build an mHE in Martin Brod were unfolding behind the scenes. The warning about these rapidly unfolding developments came from abroad, as Damir from ABC remembers: “Everything started with an Italian journalist who used to come here during the war. She was well-connected and knew a lot....and she became very interested in these developments. She was the first to tell us about the city’s plans to build a run-of-river hydro-power plant in Martin Brod. She found out somehow and she shared her information with us.”

After learning about the city’s evolving plans, ABC contacted an engineer originally from Bihać, with a current address in Italy. He put ABC in touch with “Engineers without Borders” in Florence, Italy. This group offered their expert opinion on the effects of possible damming on the river. Around the same time, ABC also learned that the mayor’s advisor together with a Russian investor named Oleg, was going to visit Martin Brod. This visit was legally required since in the FBiH a concession cannot be given without the consent of the local self-governing unit (*jedinica lokalne samouprave*) (Bjelić n.d.).¹⁹ Damir remembers the Martin Brod meeting:

18 The OHR was established formally by the Peace Implementation Council (PIC) as the instrument through which the “international community” would monitor the implementation of the peace settlement and oversee the civilian aspects of the Dayton Peace Agreement.

19 Bosnia and Herzegovina signed the Aarhus Convention in 2008 (BiH-MU 08/08), which states that when it comes to the environment, all interested parties, including local communities, have

First, I should tell you that I think this Russian, Oleg, is not real. It was all Bičakčić and his control of the SDA behind the curtains. This is his company, Bosna Energy! I think these were our local interest groups using Russians or Chinese to mask their maneuverings. When we learned about the so-called Russian investor's visit to Martin Brod, I decided to go there with my camera. That was a big deal when I showed up with the camera. At first, the mayor's advisor said that 17 or 18 people would get jobs working at the unit. In such a small village, where very few people live, this would make a big difference. But that was a lie. We already knew that these run-of-river power plants are highly automated and need to be visited by an engineer sporadically to make sure all is in order. There is no economic calculation here.²⁰ I think this visit was just a prelude for a much bigger hydropower plant they want to build on the Unac [an Una tributary]. We were very concerned about the small power plant in Martin Brod, of course. But we feared the one on the Unac even more, since building it would eliminate the Una and all life in, around, and on it as we know it.

Damir's words reveal that any perceived attack on the river creates much suspicion. Building an mHE in Martin Brod was seen as unacceptable due to its damaging effects on the riverine world and the lurking suspicion that an mHE in Martin Brod was seen as a pretense for a bigger dam on the Una's tributary, the Unac. The small mHE was seen as river-damaging; the larger one was perceived as annihilating—an attack on *unski život* itself.

The Unac River flows into the Una near the village of Martin Brod. The plan to build a large dam on the Unac is at least 70 years old; it was first considered in the 1950s to accumulate a reliable water supply for a large cellulose factory in Drvar, a town 80 kilometers southeast of Bihać, in the Unac valley. During

to be informed and consulted. This protection of local community rights is also included in the 2009 Constitutional Court of the FBiH's decision to establish that the Law on Forests (Official Gazette of the Federation of the BiH number 20/02, 29/03, and 37/04) violated the rights of municipalities for local self-governance (Vlasak 2018, 604-5). The challenge in Bosnia is the extreme fragmentation of the state and legal system, where 14 different concession agencies operate in the country, often using vague definitions and convoluted language related to the "public interest."

20 Similar confusion about the economic benefits of the project was articulated by another core member of the ABC Association: "There is no profit in this... I was told the investment would be around 4 million marks [roughly 2 million dollars]. The expected profit for the investor is supposed to be about 1 million per year. Of course, after he pays all the fees, he will be left with several hundred thousand dollars. So, even if theoretically the investor makes 1 million, the documents I was able to see suggest that 2% of this profit goes toward the concession. By the way, in other parts of Bosnia and Herzegovina, this is usually 5%. Even if the Una-Sana Canton gets 5%, not 2% as suggested in the document, that means the Canton would receive 50,000 KM [roughly 25,000 dollars] annually. And that is then split between the canton and the city. This is such a small amount of money that we are asking ourselves, Why are they doing this?" (Stanković-Luković 2015).

an exploratory visit to the area, 19 Yugoslav People's Army's soldiers died while mining the karstic soil; this tragedy paused the plans for the dam. In 1986, Elektroprivreda—the largest public electric company in Bosnia—conducted a feasibility study for the dam; the study concluded that it would be possible to build a dam 2 kilometers upstream from the Unac and the Una confluence, between Martin Brod and Drvar. According to Elektroprivreda's *Proposal for Development and Investment* from May 2007 (adopted by the FBiH Parliament in 2008; see below), this dam is envisioned to be 130 meters high and 250 meters long, with an installed flow of 80 m³/sec. The cellulose factory in Drvar closed after the war. Regardless, every couple of years the plans for the Unac HE (hydroelectric dam) cycle back into cantonal and federal sustainable development proposals, political accusations, and plotting schemes (see, for example, Zavod za Vodoprivredu d.d. Sarajevo 2010).

This suspicion that a large hydropower plant is the actual plan of the ethnonationalist tycoons and their real or imagined Russian counterparts was articulated to me by numerous citizens of Bihać. One activist told me: "First they will install this pipe, the one that is, as they say, 'safe for the environment.' It is made of concrete, 1 meter in diameter, but it can be quite long since it diverts water from the river to the plant. Building it will begin to hurt everything that makes the Una unique. However, the main thing is that this small hydropower plant opens the doors to build much bigger HEs on the river in the future. Because they can just say it is for the 'public interest.'" This activist's words capture the lurking and widely shared concern that the river is endangered, that the government would sell anything (even the Una!) for their own profit, and that they will use the vague language of "public interest" to do so. Distrust in state bureaucrats and ethnonational business leaders—who are often the same people, as Bičakčić's involvement demonstrates—and their "green schemes" have produced a wide gap between "the elites" and "ordinary people," thus generating space for ecopopulism to emerge. Fear for the river's—and by extension one's own—future, coupled with a deep suspicion that the government will, once again, betray them by selling the river to green capitalism, has fueled riverine activism, ecopopulism, and riverine citizenship in Bihać.

The validity of this seemingly excessive suspicion about "bigger dams being planned on the river" was confirmed later in an interview I conducted with the head of the Water Management Unit of the Una-Sana Cantonal Ministry of Agriculture, Water Management, and Forestry. This person also happened to be my relative, Suad. I like Suad and I enjoy his humor, expertise, and abundant optimism. Talking about dams on the river, however, was uncharted territory for both of us.

On the day of the interview, I arrived at the Cantonal Ministry a little bit early. Upon my arrival, the employee who shared the office with Suad said: “I can’t listen to this, *ja sam zeleni* [I am with the greens²¹]!” We all laughed as she left, releasing some tension in the air. Suad prepared for my visit: he had a bottle of his homemade plum brandy for me to take back to the U.S. “For you,” he said with a big, sincere smile. He also had some printed materials available for me while keeping the feasibility study for the mHE plant in Martin Brod away from me. “Confidential material,” he commented. First, he explained the Cantonal Law on Concessions to me.²² He told me that the canton proposes a development project, and then a feasibility study is conducted. In this case, it was a Sarajevo-based company, Hydrotechnics d.o.o., which conducted the study for the mHE in Martin Brod. I took a quick look at the material, subject # 1456. The study was short, only a few pages in length. Soon after the study was completed, an investment offer arrived from Sarajevo. I asked Suad who sent this offer, to which he replied: “It doesn’t matter.” I pushed, “Why don’t you tell me if it doesn’t matter?” and after a second of hesitation, he replied, “OK, it was Bosna Energy.”

The Bosna Energy Company does not exist anymore; its traces have been removed from the Internet. In 2015, however, the investigative branch of the Federal TV Magazine *Mreža Federalne* examined the origins of this company. While the Russian investor was introduced at the meeting in Martin Brod simply as a businessman named “Oleg,” interested in building a run-of-river power plant in Martin Brod, a journalist from the Federal TV learned that the investor’s full name was Oleg Helminski and that he was a Russian national with an intermediary firm in the Czech Republic (Stanković-Luković 2015).

Some background context is needed here: Prior to the investor’s visit to Martin Brod in November 2014, the Federal Ministry for Spatial Planning issued its 20-year “Spatial Plan” (Plan) for the Una River Basin—the area defined to be of special importance to the FBiH (Official Gazette Federation of Bosnia and Her-

21 This comment shows identification not necessarily with the small, mostly Tuzla-focused political party that does not have much visibility in Bosnia and Herzegovina (see <https://zeleni.org/en/>), but with *zeleni* (greens) more broadly and ideologically conceived.

22 “In line with the complex constitutional structure of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the country’s legal framework for concession and non-concession PPPs [public-private partnerships] is characterized by fragmentation. The laws regulating PPPs and concession operate at several levels: for Bosnia and Herzegovina at the national level, for each sub-national entity (in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina and in the Republika Srpska) at the sub-national level, and at the cantonal level. All ten cantons possess their own legal frameworks, procedures, and bodies. In total, there are 14 concession laws and 12 PPP Laws (i.e. non-concession PPP Laws) in force in Bosnia and Herzegovina” (European Bank for Reconstruction and Development. n.d.).

zegovina, 21/92). Even though the plan was adopted in 2014, it covered the period between 2007 and 2027. An employee of the Una National Park (Una NP) said with a heavy dose of irony: “This is a 7-year-backward-plan,” meaning that this plan governs “the past, the present, and the future,” covering the 7-year period prior to the plan’s adoption! This employee also used “backward” in the sense that the plan, according to him, challenged and dismantled some of the work and objectives of the Una NP.

This 20-year plan explained that on May 28, 2008, the Una NP was created by the Parliament of the FBiH. The Park’s main objective is the protection of the Una River and its tributaries, the Krka and the Unac, which also run through the Park. According to the Law of the Una NP, Article 6, Paragraph 19, “it is prohibited to build new objects and infrastructure for energy supply, except for the supply of energy from renewable sources (solar energy, biomass energy, geothermal energy, hydrothermal energy, and water flow energy) *for the needs of the population and activities within the NP*” (Nacionalni Park “Una,” 2008, 4; emphasis mine). A few months later, in September 2008, the Parliament of the FBiH also adopted “The Strategic Plan and Program for the Energy Sector Development,” according to which the possibility of an Unac HE located in the zone of highest protection (Zone A) within the Una NP was included, clearly contradicting the Law of the Una NP. Arriving 7 years late and using convoluted language, the 2014 Spatial Plan proposed to resolve this “collision of interests” between the energy sector in the FBiH and the Law of the Una NP by stating:

During the polemics that surrounded the two opposing positions, a more rigid approach to the regime of environmental protections was voiced. This approach questioned the validity of any development project [in the Una NP] ... There is the justified suspicion that, in this way, the functioning and survival of the NP was also put into question [alluding to the idea that some development in the Park is necessary]. For this reason, this plan recommends the possibility of developmental projects, including the building of a small “diverting water type energy-generating object.” All construction and extraction would be environmentally friendly (Official Gazette 21/92, 4).

This spatial plan from 2014 does not mention the possibility of a large HE on the Una and its tributaries. The plan recognized, in a shallow ecological²³ fash-

23 Shallow ecology refers to the position that environmental preservation should only be practiced to the extent that it meets human interests.

ion, however, that the Una NP includes both "nature" and "people" who need to live and prosper in the Park. For example, the plan recommended the revival of Martin Brod's old mills; in this way, some people could be employed, and water would be channeled to "stabilize the configuration of the waterfalls" (Official Gazette 21/92, 4). However, while seeking reconciliation between "green development" and protection of the environment, the plan allowed for the prospect of an eco-friendly run-of-river hydropower plant to be built on the river, without emphasizing the "for the needs of the local population" part, however. Not surprisingly, soon after the 2014 plan was adopted by the Parliament of Bosnia and Herzegovina, in a typical green capitalist and green grabbing fashion, Oleg Helminski registered a firm in Bosnia called Bosna Energy. According to the court registry, the headquarters of Bosna Energy was in Sarajevo, at Bistrik 11. Interestingly, the same address was shared by another firm, Bičakčić d.o.o. (Stanković-Luković 2015).

During my meeting at the Cantonal Ministry, I learned that Suad was quite enthusiastic about the canton's hydropower potential and the possibility of building dams on both the Una and the Unac. Using the logic of green statecraft, he reminded me that Bosnia and Herzegovina signed an agreement with the EU to increase its sustainable energy production from 36% to 41% by 2020. According to Suad, these initiatives on the Unac and in Martin Brod would help the canton meet that goal. Interestingly, but not that surprisingly, Suad's linguistic register incorporated the same terms that those whom he called *zeleni* used, such as "green future," "sustainability," "ecotourism," *demografsko pražnjenje*, or "demographic emptiness," and "economic revival." Suad and the activists therefore shared "green grammar," confirming that most contemporary politics are environmental politics (Rajković 2022, 5).

What I realized during the meeting was that both groups—the local government and the activists opposing it—were advocating for living with and on the river, with a comparable combination of thrill and concern, but with remarkably different understandings and perspectives. For example, what Suad shared with me was not simply a corrupt game to extract wealth through hydropower. Rather, he utilized the language of local biopolitics—the need to provide *life* for the population of Bihać, to provide people with jobs and development so they would not leave the region, and to save the river with which people connect their lives. More specifically, he emphasized that "development" is also done in the name of life; he was trying to articulate his ideas on how best to live with the river, just as the activists were doing.²⁴

24 I am grateful to Ivan Rajković for this comment.

In order to clarify what a small power plant in Martin Brod would look like, Suad drew a pipe for me on a small piece of paper, while explaining: “What people do not know is that this small power plant would only work when the river levels are high, when there is a surplus of water in the river. Because in the fall and winter, we do have a surplus of water. What are we doing with that surplus? Nothing! It floods areas downstream! We must move away from coal and invest in green and clean energy projects. See, the excess water is diverted through this type of pipe when the water levels are high. It stops working when the water levels are low.” He paused, and in the common green transition language of *primicanje Evropi* (“getting closer to Europe”), he concluded: “Norway does this so well...why can’t we?” He admitted that building this type of dam could possibly damage the *sedra* and riverine life in some locales. He thought this was an acceptable sacrifice, given the country’s commitment to meet EU requirements. “Do we want to enter the EU, or not?” he asked hypothetically. I understood how, in the context of the painful EU enlargement schemes and Bosnia’s perpetual “catching up with Europe,” building dams on the Una was seen as a fulfillment of “green” development and modernization hopes, responsibilities, dreams, and desires.

Suad became especially animated when talking about the prospect of the Unac dam, however. I learned that both the Una-Sana Canton and the federal government in Sarajevo were still considering this project, regardless of the 2014 Spatial Plan:

With this accumulation, this dam, we would resolve the issues of flooding in the lower part of the river, at the town of Kulen Vakuf, and even here, in Bihac. The Unac is a beautiful canyon, there are two very big hills, ideal for a dam. Unfortunately, there was that accident during socialism; some soldiers died when the loose soil collapsed, so this issue is a bit sensitive. Multiple studies and proposals from the Federation [of BiH] suggest that this is a good investment. You see, the riverbed is dry in August and September. Totally dry. But in November and March, when it rains for 48 hours straight, there is an abundance of water, over 50-55 cubic meters per second. It is a waste to let that just flow away! It is important to accumulate that surplus and stop this massive flow which causes problems downstream... I honestly do not understand *zeleni* who are against this. There is no water there now, no fish, and the *sedra* is exposed, dying. The soil is porous, the water disappears, it is all dead. If we had a big dam there, the water flow would be regulated; it would be lush and green, and not brown and dry as it is now! There would

be a lake there. Ecotourism would develop. People would want to live there, not like now; it is *pustara* [the middle of nowhere, a wasteland]. Twenty-five million Bosnian convertible marks [roughly 13 million dollars] would be derived from this project. How is that a bad idea?

Suad saw this dam as a solution to what he understood as an "already dead" Unac river and the depopulated landscapes that surround it. Employing the language of green transition and ecotourism, he argued that building a large dam on the Unac is an ecologically and economically responsible thing to do—he was, as I understood it, articulating his ideas on how best to live with the river. I followed and understood his logic but felt compelled to share with him what I learned from Biščani who do not trust the government. I told him that people worry that this dam, if ever built, would not be built properly due to corruption. As one person told me, "Everything they [the government] build has cheap materials in it. They pick companies based on their connections, not on expertise...You know, I am looking for an apartment to buy, and I am only looking for those apartment buildings that were built before the 1990s, during socialism. The things they are building now will all collapse." People are also very suspicious, I told Suad, because they think that the profit generated by the dam, if there would be any, would not stay in the canton or in the city, but that it would go elsewhere—into the pockets of green grabbers and the government in Sarajevo. I also told him that Biščani felt they were living in limbo, caught between two eras: the modern era focused on development and the postmodern era focused on the environment. The first encourages development, modernization, building big dams, and "catching up" with developed Europe and the world. The second, environmental, phase focuses on climate change and ecological concerns that challenge modernist developments that recklessly consume natural resources. Biščani I spoke to felt that they were not only geographically on the semi-periphery (Blagojević 2009, Majstorović 2021), but that they simultaneously reside in two differing temporalities—the modern and the postmodern. I told Suad that one activist exclaimed in front of me: "Are we to simultaneously build and destroy? The rest of Europe and the U.S. are destroying these dams so that wild salmon can survive. Are we supposed to concurrently destroy and revive 'our' Danube salmon?" Suad listened to me, smiling the whole time, and after a moment of hesitation, he concluded: "Ok, then we should not build anything. Everything should just fall apart. But others will only respect you if you are economically strong. We just write and propose but nothing is ever being built; we are all suspicious and therefore we do nothing." I left the office unsettled.

A similar point of view was articulated by the mayor's former advisor, who accompanied the Russian investor to the meeting in Martin Brod. I met him in the summer of 2017 in his new office—he was now in charge of the privatization of the former socialist textile giant Kombiteks, the fragments of which he was enthusiastically repackaging and selling. When I asked him, at the beginning of our meeting, what were his plans for the factory workers (the owners of this collective property during socialism) who have been perpetually, for decades, *na čekanju* (waiting), he answered: *Radnici će na mežare* (“Those workers will die”). He told me:

I have been to many places in the world. This [the Una] is one polluted river! I was by the Soča River in Slovenia. Have you seen the Soča? It's so beautiful. “The Una is the most beautiful river,” yeah right. They misuse her for their needs and then they say, “This is the most beautiful river.” That's a travesty. Here is the thing—as an advisor to the mayor, I had a task. I knew and I still know the small hydropower plant in Martin Brod is a good idea. There is so much water there! And these small hydropower plants, they are not bad for the environment. They do not destroy the river and the fish. Look, I am prepared [he shows me pages about small hydropower plants printed from Wikipedia]. And then they came...some *zeleći*, some foreign woman who during the war traded in humanitarian aid... come on! We need energy! ...We really should build a dam on the Unac River. So what, biodiversity would be destroyed, but new things would grow. Come on, people, that happens all the time. Like the privatization of this company. I do not see it as death but as new life... You asked me if the small power plant was just a prelude for a big one, on the Unac River? So, what if it was? That could be *slamka spasa* [the last chance] ...They say they will live from ecotourism! Let me see some report—how many people live from their tourism, please? Come on! People are leaving. We are demographically emptying out... Honestly, I am so tired of that Una...You live in *Amerika*; what is *Amerika* without the dam on the Niagara River? And what would have happened to us if we did not have Kostela²⁵ during the war? You know the current world crisis... without energy, you are nobody. You need energy for peace, stability, and to fight terrorism.

25 Kostela is a village downstream from Bihać where, in 1952, a 10 MW dam, Hidroelektrana Slapovi na Uni (Waterfalls on the Una), was built on the Una River. This dam was the second one to be built in Bosnia and Herzegovina during socialism, and it is still the only dam in the Una River Basin. It was very important during the war because it supplied Bihać, which was under siege

This (former) government bureaucrat and businessman reveals the inner workings of green statecraft and green capitalism. More specifically, his words reveal the nexus between energy sustainability and security ("without energy, you are nobody. You need energy for peace, stability, and to fight terrorism"); the realities of postwar and postsocialist privatization (which he sees as a new chance for capital growth—regardless of the fact that thousands of dispossessed workers are dying, permanently *na čekanju*); war survival and energy independence (the Kostela dam); war corruption ("she traded in humanitarian aid"); agitation with uneducated *zeleni*; and disregard for riverine worlds—such as *sedra*—which take thousands of years to form but whose destruction is brushed away since "new things will grow."

I shared what I learned from these meetings with Professor Alibabić. She immediately and passionately pushed back against these ideas:

And they tell me that building a large dam on the Unac would help protect the sedra and the fish... They say that the sedra is now dying because the water in the river is too low and that the dam will regulate the river levels and cover and protect the sedra.... Well, did they tell you *why* the Unac River is dry in the summer? Because of *their* development! For ten years, FINVEST massively deforested the mountains around Drvar. They were given a concession to do so. The debris from this deforestation was illegally dumped into the nearby streams. The Unac is fed by 36 streams and a small river. So, the company plugged these streams with their debris!²⁶ ...And who guarantees them that the water will stay in their lake? I have not seen such a study that would prove that the captured water will stay contained! That soil is made of karst and sedra. What if the water just seeps through the river's floor and disappears? And what kind of fish will live in the Unac if the water temperature increases, as it would, by 4°C due to their dam? That temperature would be too warm for the sedra to sustain itself. That is catastrophic, that kind of thinking. And what did they tell you about the flooding in Kulen Vakuf? That was resolved; the riverbed was enlarged, so there is no more flooding. [She pauses, inhales deeply, calms down, and continues in a lower,

for 3.5 years, with electricity, however minimally and sporadically. The dam was modernized in 2001, and there are current plans for its expansion.

26 I was not able to confirm the validity of this statement. However, I did find several articles in the local weekly *Krajina* from 1964 that discuss the (potential) influence of the cellulose factory in Drvar on the Una (see "Fabrika celuloze i papira u Drvaru ne smije upropastiti Unu" and "Fabrika celuloze i papira u Drvaru neće upropastiti Unu," *Krajina*, April 2, 1964).

calmer voice]. They are boring to me with their constant talk about these dams. They would kill Drvar with a dam. They say Drvar is emptying out already. But do we need to flood it? We can bring it back, and this whole region, through organic farming, for example. We have good fertile and uncontaminated soil.... I am prepared to talk about small power plants because I don't know enough about them. But I know one thing: if these run-of-river hydropower plants are at all bad for the environment, there is no chance that our people would allow them to be built on the Una.”

This sentiment of not knowing exactly what this small, run-of-river hydropower plant in the heart of the Una NP would look like nor why it is *really* being proposed, when coupled with decades of dispossession, mistrust, and betrayal by the government, propelled local people to action, unleashing palpable ecopopulism on social media and to a lesser extent, on the streets of Bihać. This emerging grammar of riverine politics became apparent in the aftermath of the July 2015 city council meeting to vote on the proposed concession for the mHE in Martin Brod.

Watershed: From Riverine Activism to Ecopopulism

The 2015 meeting in Martin Brod did not go as planned. The Russian investor and the mayor's advisor went to Martin Brod thinking it would be relatively easy to convince a small group of mostly elderly residents to support the plans for an mHE. However, they were faced with suspicious residents, an ABC camera, and the vocal presence of the head of a Martin Brod-based fish farm, who, fearing the impact of the dam on his lucrative business, spoke openly against the dam. The businessman unexpectedly aligned himself with the *zeleni*, demonstrating, once again, the ability of riverine life to create unlikely articulations: between local villagers, ABC activists, international environmental organizations, and a private fish farm business considered by some to be the biggest river polluter.

This visit to the local community was followed by a meeting of the city council. The official minutes of the meeting²⁷ show that the city council met on July 15, 2015, and its agenda included nine items. The first agenda item was “Proposal for a Decision on Granting Consent for the Initiation of a Concession Award

27 Due to a change in the city government leadership at the time of my research (one of the ABC activists became the new mayor's deputy while another is currently the head of the Bihać Tourist Office), I was able to obtain the official minutes of this meeting.

Procedure through a Public Tender—Tender for the Design, Construction, Management, and Transmission of an mHE in the Martin Brod and Dobrenica Locales." After the legal validity of the procedures was established by various city government committees, the councilors clearly divided along party lines, taking turns arguing for and against giving a concession. Those from the SDA party aligned with the mayor in supporting the mHE in Martin Brod. They listed arguments such as the importance of local development, the benign effects on the environment, and strong supervision over the construction and operation of the dam. The mayor also stressed that an expert study (he was alluding to the study by Hydrotechnics d.o.o.) concluded that the river would not be compromised by this project and that this was both an ecologically acceptable and economically profitable endeavor. Furthermore, he added that the timing was right since there were interested investors, whose investment would lead to more local employment—especially needed at a time of demographic emptying—and to an increase in the city budget through taxes and fees. Finally, he stressed that this mHE would bring electricity to those areas where electricity was still scarce.

On the other hand, those who opposed the proposal, mostly gathered around the Social Democratic Party (SDP), argued that the decision was illegal since it ignored the law of the Una NP, that it would negatively impact the Una's flora and fauna, and that this would mark the beginning of the commodification of the river. In addition, some councilors noted that the Federal Ministry had already rejected the same proposal from Bosna Energy on March 20, 2015, precisely because it was located in the zone of utmost natural value and protection within the Una NP. They also stressed the problems of unsynchronized laws and management plans between the federal, cantonal, and city levels and the Una NP.²⁸ One councilor also mentioned that she was very surprised that foreign organizations and associations knew more about the mHE plans than the citizens of Bihać. Multiple councilors spoke about the uniqueness of the Una River and its massive ecotourist potential, and they argued for more support for the Una NP, not dams. Another person questioned the legitimacy of any

28 Bosnia is extremely administratively and ethnically fragmented. It harbors unsynchronized, multi-layered, and contradictory laws that are very hard to follow and which impede the management of natural resources. Vlasak (2018, 600) explains: "Natural resources governance is constituted by plural, dissociative bureaucracies which thwart national level, state-centered, joint governance. In general, where policies are created at the center or at a level of expected joint governance, the resulting hurdle is one of the coordinating competencies vertically among relevant substate bureaucracies. The consociational effect of entrenched, uncoupled political units in state governance regularly impedes implementation of natural resources policies at levels that require coordination".

“expert” that claims that the river would not be damaged by an mHE: “I mean, do they really know better than the citizens of Bihać who have lived on the Una’s banks for centuries?” One councilor also stated that the citizens were obviously against this proposal, that they were protesting outside, and that there should be a public referendum on this topic. He added that ABC had gathered 35,000 signatures (the correct number was 11,265²⁹) against the mHE plans. Finally, one councilor mentioned her mistrust of the Russian investor since “Russia has been the main obstacle to Bosnian development and that they even oppose the Resolution on Srebrenica Genocide.”

This summary of the heated discussion at the city council meeting shows that the plans to build an mHE did not exist in a political vacuum; rather, they were shaped by complicated local and regional histories and geopolitics, including experiences and perceptions of the war and postwar geopolitics and current business interests (Russia not recognizing the Srebrenica genocide is linked with the Russian businessman’s intentions); competing versions of proper sustainable development (hydropower vs. ecotourism); the post-socialist privatization of industry and the environment; and “expert knowledge” vs. “people’s wisdom.”

Interestingly, the mayor and the opposition all spoke about *unski život* and how best to live with and from the river, and both groups spoke about stopping demographic emptying, but from very different perspectives: while the mayor argued that dams and hydropower were necessary for life on the Una to endure and for the people to stop leaving the region for economic reasons, the opposition claimed that the dams would destroy the river and ecotourism on the river, which they saw as the only way for life on the Una to continue. As one interviewee mentioned: “What would we be without the Una? If they start extracting from her...I imagine the Nigerian delta after Shell extracted its oil and polluted its landscapes. That is what this will look like if we do not protect the Una—postapocalyptic, brown and black, stickiness everywhere.”

The councilors vote was clearly split across party lines, with 16 councilors from the SDA supporting the proposal, 12 councilors (10 from the SDP and 2 from the SBB) voting against, and 12 abstaining. Upon the request of one of the opposing councilors, the individual votes were announced and recorded. Then the president of the city council announced that at the 13th meeting of the city council on July 15, 2015, the city council voted in favor of granting consent for the initiation of a concession award procedure for an mHE in Martin Brod. It is this vote and everything that preceded it—decades of dispossession and gov-

29 https://www.onlinepeticija.com/peticija_protiv_izgradnje_hidroelektrana_na_rijeci_uni

ernment betrayal; individual and collective embodiment of the Una River Emeralds' riverine pedagogies and visions; swimming in the river during the war and the sense of *communitas* it created—that unleashed ecopopulism and transformed activists into riverine citizens.

"Ne Damo Unu!": The Making of Riverine Citizens

ABC followed the city council meeting closely, and it used the tactic of "information, distribution, and personalization" to inform the public about the vote. As Damir remembers: "First we personified the city council. We wrote about every single person—those 16 SDA councilors who supported the decision—informing the public about their record." At the same time, ABC started to receive support from the region. "We were a news portal; we did not have the people or the knowledge to do more. But support came from multiple places in the region, such as the Center for Environment in Banja Luka, Eko Akcija in Sarajevo, multiple organizations from Croatia, Save the Blue Heart of Europe, RiverWatch, German EuroNatur, and then the Florence engineers... They helped us so much, because we really did not know... We realized that we were one instance in this larger struggle." This realization that they were not alone and that there were other environmental groups, near and far, eager to join the ranks signals two things at once: first, it reflects the fact that most riverine struggles in the Balkans "stay localized: while there is a lot of collaboration, specific groups defend particular rivers and river regions" (Rajković 2020). At the same time, as the "Ne damo Unu!" protest progressed, it started to draw in, both physically and digitally, activists from elsewhere, everywhere, including the rest of the country, the Balkan region, Europe, and the sizable Bihac diaspora in Europe and the U.S.

ABC did not want to directly invite people to protest the city council's vote. Rather, their main goal was to report on the politicking, corruption, and maneuvering around the proposed dam-building. They also sent all the relevant information they had gathered privately to Aida Sejdić. Aida then used this information to strategize with other activists and supporters, including me, to eventually invite people to protest.

The Una River Emeralds and the Una NP also started to become more vocal in their opposition to the dam, even though the ABC activists were bitter that these organizations did not take a more active role in organizing the opposition. For example, one person complained: "We waited for a single sentence from the Una NP for one year! They only became vocal when the public opinion palpably

shifted against the dam.” Another added: “And where were the Una River Emeralds in all this? They participated but they did not lead. And they should be the ones leading and organizing massive protests on the streets.”

The city council vote was a watershed moment—the fury started to grow and multiply through the city streets, where rumors and information traveled among acquaintances, creating an energy of urgency, dissent, survival, and solidarity. Social media sites were flooded with people objecting to the decision, and local and regional media wrote articles about it. Under this significant pressure from below and, for different reasons, pressure from above (the SDA leadership in Sarajevo), on July 20, the mayor called for an extraordinary session of the city council to revoke the decision in support of the concession that had been adopted only five days prior. The mayor’s explanation for the extraordinary session used the legal basis detailed in the Official Gazette of the City of Bihać No. 2/11, which stipulates that: “(1) The city council or mayor can, within three business days after a decision or act, ask the city council or mayor to reconsider a decision or act which it deems non-constitutional or illegal, or the implantation of which could cause irreparable damage to the interests or property of the municipality” (Gradsko vijeće Bihać, *The Mayor*, 2015). The city council’s notes detail that the mayor then reviewed the decision that he himself had originally proposed and concluded three days later that the implementation of this decision could cause “irreparable damage to the municipality’s interests and property.” Therefore, the mayor asked the city council to review its decision, especially due to the conflicting interpretations about the legal basis for giving concessions that existed between the Cantonal Ministry and the Una NP, and because there was an incongruity between the federal and cantonal legal regulations pertaining to this area of law. In this way, the mayor also attempted to shift the responsibility away from his office and municipality and reframe it as legal tension between the Una NP, the Federal Ministry of Spatial Planning, and the Cantonal Ministry of Agriculture, Water Management, and Forestry. The extraordinary session was scheduled for July 23.

This gave the activists three days to organize a protest, but not enough time to seek legal permission to protest. As a result, the invitation to protest was sent via private channels. On the day of the extraordinary session, around fifty protestors from Bihać, Banja Luka, and Sarajevo gathered in front of city hall, carrying banners with the following messages, which wove together many actors, solidarities, injustices, warnings, and visions for the future: “Bičakčić, get lost. Sarajevo for the Una!”; “Una 1: Emdžo [the mayor’s nickname] o”; “Unski smaragdi: HE on the Una: No! Tourism on the Una: Yes!”; “Una, that is Us”; “The

Fig. 10. The Protestors. The three banners read (from left to right): "Dams on the Una "No", Tourism on the Una "Yes" (The Una River Emeralds); "The Una, that's us"; and "The Una is not for sale" (Photo credit: Center for Environment).



Una is not for Sale"; and "Let the Una be, so that we don't have to start a rebellion!" (see Figures 10 and 11).

While only a small group of us physically gathered in front of city hall, we felt connected to many more people who supported us from near and far, in person and online. While it would be easy to dismiss this online support as yet another instance of *klikaši*, or "clickers," who feel that by signing a petition online they have fulfilled their civic duty, Sanela invites us to contextualize this act:

One must put this in perspective. Since the end of the war, these people have been witnessing extreme forms of dispossession and nepotism, especially since 2008, when international organizations and their recovery funds receded. *Mic-po-mic* [step-by-step]. The politics gets nasty, squeezes money out of people. You can't do anything [such as] find a job without engaging in nepotism. People aren't stupid, especially youth. They have the internet to see all that. That is when hope dwindles. They give up. They don't count on politicians, on the state. However, they did sign this digital petition. 13,000 people signed. Which means they still have a little bit of hope in them, they haven't fully given up yet. And we need to respect that.

During the protest, some people stopped by for a few seconds just to tell us we had their support, while others sent private messages explaining that they were afraid to leave their jobs and join the protest since the city is the main employer in town and their jobs were in jeopardy. One person said, "I would join you, but I have three children..." In one instance, a nurse from the local hospital walked by Aida, opened her jacket, and gave her a small banner while whispering: "Don't worry, everything I wrote is good. I'm just afraid to be here and hold it myself. Thank you." The head of the Una NP also reluctantly joined at first, not knowing how this would affect his job. Therefore, the protest physically

Fig. 11. The Protest. The banner reads: “Let the Una be, so that we don’t have to start a rebellion” (Photo credit: Center for Environment).



gathered those who decided to risk everything and those of us who were not dependent on the city for jobs, with many people supporting us from the shadows.

While we were waiting and chanting outside, the extraordinary session was taking place behind the closed doors of city hall. The SDP councilors were quick to mention public disapproval visible in the demonstration outside the building. They criticized those councilors from the SDA who supported the decision in the first place. Some SDA councilors defended their positions, noting that the materials made available by the canton and Hydrotechnics d.o.o. suggested that this environmentally friendly, green, sustainable, and renewable energy investment could only improve the economic situation in the region. Others added that those who felt self-righteous were using the situation strictly for their own political advantage, not because they really cared about the river. If they really cared, one councilor said, they would do something about the hundreds of weekend homes being (mostly illegally) built on the Una, violently cementing her banks without proper permission or sewage systems in place (see Chapter 6). One well-connected councilor, and a former wartime commander, blamed the Federal Ministry for leaving the option of building an mHE in the Una NP in its spatial plan: “If they say it is good for development, ethical, and green, why would I think it’s not?” A young councilor pushed against it, saying that everyone knows that this was not only the Federal Ministry’s fault. “It is clear who started this process and why,” he concluded, alluding to the alliance between the mayor, the SDA in Sarajevo, Bičakčić, and the Russian investor. Another councilor who supported the mHE added that “the dam [in Kostela] saved us during the wartime siege,” highlighting another common logic of green statecraft—security. Developing energy independence through renewable sources is therefore seen as key for the country’s survival, safety, and green transition.

In addition, this councilor noted: "This mHE will not cause any damage to the river! Those who are so concerned about protecting the river should go to the river (the city hall is in proximity to the river) and see how much the river is being polluted. They should work on protecting the river from all harmful influences, not just from mHEs." He invited everyone to go to Lohovo [a popular tourist village on the river, upstream from Bihać, with two significant systems of cascades and waterfalls] and see how tycoons have taken over the river there, disfiguring the river's banks with their "illegal" construction (see Chapter 6).

This exchange reveals something important that was also articulated by my relative, Suad. ABC's focus on the Una dam framed the destruction of the Una in a very focused and visible way, but it also simplified much broader ills—illegal cementing of the river's banks, for example—that have been destroying the river. Protestors, like all political actors, paid selective attention to certain frames and problematics while, at the same time, ignoring some others. These gaps and externalities shaped riverine citizenship and prefigured massive touristification of the Una (see Chapter 6).

After almost three hours of this debate and our protesting outside the city hall, the vote was taken. This time all 28 councilors present voted to void their previous decision to give permission to start the process of a concession for an mHE on the Una River. When pressured by riverine citizens' newly articulated, growing ecopopulism, the city government reversed its decision to grant the concession. This was the only reversal of a city government decision on any matter in its postwar history. Two years later, in the summer of 2017, I asked the former mayor's deputy why all the SDA representatives changed their vote, even though they thought that an mHE in Martin Broad was a good idea. He responded, still visibly agitated:

Why did they change their decision? Because they [the SDA leadership in Sarajevo] *got scared of populism* and they called the mayor. They worried they would lose the next election. I wouldn't have changed my position. I would have pushed to the end because I know what's right. Even if they say I'm a thief, that I'm selling the river... I don't give a fuck what they say about me. These people are uneducated, and their petty interests are at play. They are monkeys (idiots). Come on, idiots, do you really think that I'm so powerful? I was just given a task by my boss... Everyone knows that decision-making here works *na vertikalnom principu* [in a vertical fashion]. Don't call on me, call Bičakčić or Izetbegović [the president of the SDA and a member of the Bosnian presidency numerous times]. I'm not powerful.... Who will swim in

their Una now? Everyone is leaving Krajina since there are no jobs here. You will see, some Arabs and Blacks will take over, just wait...

These words illuminate the fact that governance in Bosnia and Herzegovina is layered, convoluted, and often works vertically—where the Sarajevo-based party leaders and businessmen, often the same people, tell their “local men” what to do. In addition, the deputy mentions demographic emptying, which, according to him, could be stopped by the development that the dam would generate. He concludes with a racist comment hinting at the increasing number of Arab tourists “discovering the region,” especially at the time of the interview. His words were almost prophetic in the sense that two years after the interview, Bihać became a hot spot on the Balkan migrant route where dispossessed and war-escaping people from the Middle East, South Asia, and North Africa started to “populate” Bihać’s emptying natural landscapes, urban core, and industrial ruins (A. Hromadžić 2020).

His comments also reveal the links between green statecraft, green capitalism, and green grabbing. His words underscore the schism between fragmented and inconsistent laws (for example, the Federal Ministry’s “Spatial Plan” and the Una NP development plans), while also hinting at sub rosa maneuverings of current and former government officials and tycoons (the mayor, his deputy, the city councilors, Bičakčić, and Izetbegović), and real and imagined international businessmen, such as the Russian, Oleg. On the other hand, what started as a small protest magnetized a significant number of differently positioned citizens. These individuals, with their diverse interests but armed with concern for the river, the political agency this concern generated, and the deep mistrust of the government, temporarily set aside their dissimilarities to defend the Una River and the *unski život* it enables. And due to their collective coming together, the Una River is, for now, safe from damming.

This accomplishment felt like a major victory in the Balkan context. And yet, the success of the protest felt bittersweet, both energizing and paralyzing to me: The mayor—who was later found guilty on corruption charges—learned about my participation in the protest and believed I had a significant role to play in its organizing. The reason for his opinion was my Facebook post on July 19, 2015, when I circulated an invitation to protest. This gesture stemmed from my “membership” in a small and private Facebook group of activists and other “river guardians” who were gathered together by Aida Sejdić to strategize about resistance to the city’s plan. In one of her messages to our private group, Aida told us that we did not have the city’s permission to protest and that permis-

sion would take several days to obtain. We did not have time to wait for permission, however, since the city council meeting was the next day. Aida told us to invite people to protest through our private channels. I missed that message and publicly posted the invitation on my Facebook page for 5 minutes, after which I realized my mistake and removed the post. The then director of the institution where I was conducting fieldwork at the time saw my call to protest, however. He informed the mayor about it. Angered, the mayor refused to review my cousin's annual contract with one of the city's agencies. My cousin, who wholeheartedly supported my participation in the protest (her sister was also protesting), was, however, left unemployed for almost a year. This act of retribution and attempt to silence significant diasporic support for the protection of the river reminded me, once again, that we, "native" researchers, are in a precarious position while in "the field/home." On the one hand, we enjoy significant advantages of access and familiarity. On the other hand, we lose the privilege to be perceived as outsiders, seemingly disconnected from often intricate and convoluted historical, social, and economic relations in "the field." Rather, we are (seen as) deeply implicated in them, and, at times, we, and even more importantly, those identified as connected to us, experience socio-political pressures, manipulation, silencing, punishment, and extraction. The experience of having a family member punished for my participation in the protest left me field-paralyzed for a year and shattered any idea I might have had that a researcher is an "objective," autonomous subject removed from "local" formations of power and politics.

Conclusion

Decades of deepening popular resentment related to postsocialist and postwar dispossession, when combined with the pressures of green capitalism and massive plans for "sustainable development" on the Balkan rivers, propelled a small group of activists organized around ABC to document and widely share the plans for the building of an mHP on the Una River. This riverine activism created a unique political sensorium, which in 2015 generated ecopopulism and riverine citizenship.

The alliance that formed during the protest fractured the existing allegiances and introduced new, ecopopulist political grammars and actions. The watershed moment that transformed activism into populism happened when, under pressure from protestors, the city government reversed its vote for the first time in

its postwar history. This ecopopulism materialized as political consciousness, with the Una at its center. More specifically, the protest allowed many differently positioned groups, individuals, organizations, and witnesses to come together and act together—articulation—in the name of love for the river.

What I realized during the protest was that ecopopulism was not only fueled by the abundance of water—and the predatory capitalism it unleashed—nor only by people’s suspicion that the government was, once again, betraying them. It was also propelled by love. As Damir told me at the end of our interview: “This was different. We entered this fight with our hearts.” I understood later that this protest was remarkable because it overtly mobilized, for the first time, *love for the river as a political force*. This showed how the Una—historically seen as either pre-political or beyond politics—became a “hyper-subject—a common signifier that is *pregiven* to the act of gathering” (Rajković 2022, 4). As Edin—a founding member of ABC and, at the time of my research, mayor’s advisor in Bihać—told me: “After the 2015 protest, the Una became the key word! She was politically almost invisible before, but now every party mentions protection of the Una in their political platform.”

What does it mean to enter a political protest armed with love for the river, I wondered? How is this eco-politics different from other types of politics, if at all? What kind of love is this? Whom and what does it invite into its fold, and whom and what does it exclude and to what effect? I turn to these questions on love and politics in the next chapter.

“I Love the Una” On Love and Politics in Multispecies Relationships

Introduction

The “Ne Damo Unu!” protest—described at great length in the previous chapter—stopped, at least for the time being, the combined forces of green capitalism, green statecraft, and green grabbing from their efforts to build a dam on the Una River. It also revealed and further cemented the importance of the Una River to life itself—biological, social, and political—in Bihać. For example, after the protest some Biščani told me that not joining the protest was not an option for them; rather, protesting dam-building on the Una was a heartfelt *moralna dužnost*, or “moral duty,” to the river, each other, and oneself.

I understood this vernacular grammar of riverine citizenship and the sentiment it magnetized: I also joined the protest because the Una makes me who I am—one of the *unski ljudi*, or “the Una’s people” (Šehić 2011, 35).” This *unska sensibilitnost* (“Una sensibility”) made us, the protestors—near and far, physical and digital—experience the threat to the river viscerally, in “our gut” (Mazzarella 2009). Our sense of “being in the world” was jeopardized by the possible destruction of the river. As a result, at a difficult political juncture in 2015, many people in Bihać realized something we have always felt: that the Una was our grounding, our orientation in space and time, and our compass that situates us in a particular way in the long history of the Earth. Life without the Una, as Damir told me, is “an unimaginable life” for Bihać’s emerging riverine citizens.

In the pages that follow, I ethnographically explore what “being in love with the river” looks like, sounds like, and moves like. I illustrate how this love is literal rather than metaphoric; it manifests itself as the Una River Emeralds’ nurturing of ecological consciousness and the related intention of the citizens of

Bihać to preserve *unski život* and to “stay in sync” (Berlant 2011) with the river and, by extension, with themselves and each other. By doing ethnographic research on people-river congruity, I am also making the claim that other, non-human beings should concern us intellectually, politically, and emotionally. This position generates an ethical ideal, a value on which other values are built and which we can never fully reach. I, following Carspecken (2017, 2), call this ethical ideal *love*.

There is much contemporary skepticism, suspicion, and abandonment of love as a political and social force (hooks 2000). For example, bell hooks (2000) observes the scarcity of public discussion, public policy, and good literature on love. Nevertheless, many authors interested in Bosnian rivers have recognized the “acute, aching love—the kind that inspires folk songs and popular devotion” (Kurtović 2022, 2). This love for Bosnia’s rivers, however, is frequently minimized or glossed over as superficial, naïve, or as a romantic veneer. Sometimes, riverine love is mythologized, described as ethnological, irrelevant, and trivial, and often met with academic cynicism. My goal in this chapter, however, is to pause and think seriously about the relationship between riverine love and ecopolitism, and to trace how riverine love in Bihać matters historically, emotionally,

socio-culturally, economically, instrumentally, and morally to Bišćani. This means paying attention to how love is formulated, how it matters and to whom, and who and what it leaves out.

I argue that we need to approach riverine love as place-based, shaped not by who we are but where we are, as situated beings. For many Bišćani, being in the world is only thinkable insofar as it is localized (Badiou 2009, 113). To be is to be *there*, by the Una, “to be in a particular place, not just to exist in a world, but to inhabit it” (Dunn 2017, 201) (see Figures 12 and 13).



Fig. 12. Boys on their way to swim in the Una River in 1965. The text reads: “In a minute, these “cosmonauts” will be swimming in the Una [to find relief] from the heat. Krajina, July 8, 1965 (photo by the author).”



Fig. 13. Swimmers in the Una River in 2017 (photo by the author).

This world is therefore organized very distinctly around the Una River. As a result, riverine love stems from capillary-like threads that connect—materially and discursively—humans, institutions, landscapes, soundscapes, and biota. It is the glue that links places and things, both living and non-living, which in turn constitute social and political relations: riverine citizenship. As such, it creates unique obligations towards those within the Una River’s reach, and these responsibilities generate unique, non-identitarian, place-based collectivities (Ochoa Espejo 2020, 18).

This chapter starts with a theoretical discussion about love and politics in political philosophy and feminist scholarship. Then I contrast these normative approaches with situated, ethnographic descriptions of place-based, lived citizenship and affective politics that emerge from situated, multi-species encounters and affective relations between humans and non-humans, or more specifically, between Bišćani and the Una River. More concretely, I show how the threat of environmental dispossession and loss of the river—and the *unski život* it enables—has politicized riverine love and vernacular ecological consciousness and fueled citizen-action. This riverine citizenship has drawn some people into its ranks while framing others outside of love’s reach, incapable of proper riverine love and care.

Thinking About Multispecies Love, Politics, and Justice

Twenty years ago, Kelley (2002, 12) argued that freedom and love “may be the most revolutionary ideas available to us, and yet as intellectuals we have failed miserably to grapple with their political and analytical importance.” Since then, numerous scholars (see, among others, Ahmed 2004; Hardt and Negri 2005; Hardt 2011; Nash 2013; Wilkinson 2016) have explored the complex relationship between love, power, affect, politics, and justice.

My thinking about love, politics, power, morality, and citizenship is inspired by much recent theorizing about the possibilities and limitations of love as a “properly political concept” (Hardt 2011). The main claim in this body of literature is that the properly political concept of love should overcome the conventional conceptions that separate “political interest from our affective lives” (Hardt 2011, 676). Rather, Hardt (2011) argues that love and affect, and power and politics, are deeply intertwined and necessary for humans to create and maintain relations with each other and the world. Some scholars, including the German-American theologian Paul Tillich, as well as those writing in the Black feminist tradition of love-politics, have developed this relationship between love and politics even further to focus on the potential of love for “a theory of justice” (Nash 2013, 2). As bell hooks has argued, “all the great movements for social justice in our society have strongly emphasized a love ethic” (hooks 2000, xvii). Similarly, in his writings on love and politics, Tillich (1954) defines the trilogy of structure in being: love, power, and justice. According to the author, these three elements have an ontological dignity, and “they produce everything there is” (Tillich 1954, 21).

One of the most influential works on love and politics comes from Hardt (2011, 678), who argues that for love to be a properly political concept, it must have three main qualities. The first is to challenge the conventional division between public and private; the second is to operate in the field of multiplicity and difference; and the third is to be transformative. First, the properly political form of love is not to be limited to the private sphere, to the “bourgeois couple and the claustrophobic confines of the nuclear family” (Shwartz 2009, 812). Rather, love needs to be liberated from these social structures so that it can become a “more generous and unrestrained concept” (Hardt quoted in Schwartz 2009, 812). This “public” form of love creates bonds “that are at once intimate and social, destroying conventional divisions between public and private.”

Second, love as a properly political concept prefers “multitude” over sameness. Hardt suggests that this properly political love emerges from encounters and in-

teractions of difference, and it recognizes the continuum between the personal and the political that unleashes the coming of democracy—or love for what is different. This political concept of love must move across scales of difference since the narcissistic love of the same, or love for those who are like us, has destroyed the possibility of love as a more generous and positive political concept (Schwartz 2009, 812). For example, Hannah Arendt (1958) understood this narcissistic “love for the same” as inimical to politics, as anti-political, “perhaps the most powerful of all antipolitical human forces” (quoted in Hardt 2011, 678). Similarly, Nash (2013, 3) argues that political love is a “strategy for remaking the self and for moving beyond the limitations of selfhood.”

Finally, this scholarship understands love as the motor of collective transformation and duration or continuity (Hardt 2011, 676). According to Hardt (2011), political love is transformative since we become different through our encounters with others. The properly political concept of love recognizes love’s subversive energy and releases the transformative power of love, “something in which we come out different” (Hardt quoted in Schwartz 2009, 812).

Hardt’s ideas about a properly political concept of love have been challenged by feminist scholars who argue that love “is not entirely ethical” (Berlant 2011, 684) since it magnetizes many kinds of different interests, including “prophetic, erotic, aggressive, singular, [and] collective” (Berlant 2011, 688). Furthermore, as Sara Ahmed (2004) argues, a claim of acting in or through love can enable the exertion of different kinds of power. Similarly, others argue that love is not only a site of joy and unity in multitude, but that it is also a “source of exclusion, violence, and domination” (Wilkinson 2017, 57). Patton’s work (1988) sums up these critiques by characterizing love as “too dangerous a basis of social politics” (370). Building on Patton’s insights, Wilkinson (2017, 58) examines this “properly political” form of love further to emphasize “the inextricable relationship between power and domination.” I am inspired by these works which critically consider the relationship between love, politics, justice, and social transformation. I am especially interested in the ability of love to politically elevate, include, and multiply, as well as to exclude, other, and reduce.

The majority of this scholarship is normative and therefore invested in thinking about abstract “public feelings” but not so much about how “global politics and history manifest themselves at the level of *lived affective experience*” (Cvetkovich 2007, 461; emphasis mine). Inspired by Cvetkovich (2007), my work moves beyond thinking about politics from the position of liberal democracies and their self-autonomous, liberal subjects and bourgeois-style families to thinking about riverine love and politics affectively, contextually, and ethnographically.

For me, the question is not whether love can be political; rather, I am interested in *how* love gets to be formulated and to what political effect.

In order to achieve this, I focus on the affective experience of riverine conviviality, citizenship, and co-dependence. Scholars who study affect suggest that an encounter is affective when it triggers some sort of effect: when it “gets us in the gut” (Mazzarella 2009, 299), inspires, unsettles, troubles, moves, arouses, destroys, motivates, and/or impresses (Ahmed 2010; Archambault 2016; Majstorović 2021; T. Petrović 2024). Those interested in love as a mode of affect have argued that love is not located in subjects or objects; rather, it is produced through movement since “emotions circulate between bodies” (Ahmed 2004, 4). These circulating “affective economies” (Ahmed 2004) materialize from situated sociohistorical geographies and embedded encounters (Stewart 2007), and they at times produce what Vergas (2018) calls *cariño*, a form of affective solidarity. In Bihać, affective riverine solidarities are produced through circulating ecological relations and naturecultures—unruly amalgamations of water, soils, riverine animals, plants and rocks, humans, and subterranean worlds and orientations—which together challenge surface boundaries—political, social, and bodily—among people, states, and regions. The emphasis is on the interconnectivity, entanglement, and dependability of many different forms, matters, and actants, and the exclusion of some others.

A City in Love with the River

Overt riverine love manifests in numerous ways, including the ABC declaration of Bihać as *Grad zaljubljen u rijeku*, or “A City in Love with the River.” In 2015, *Grad zaljubljen u rijeku* became the slogan of the Bihać Tourist Association and was widely used by city officials and ordinary people alike. The association also created the highly popular “I Love the Una” logo to highlight its work on the promotion and protection of the river and to expand the network of people following the rules initially designed by the Una River Emeralds.

The *Grad zaljubljen u rijeku* slogan captured a locally well-known social fact: the Una River, the city of Bihać, and its inhabitants have been historically intertwined in the same grammar of survival, creating a sense of connection and mutuality. Faruk Šehić (2011, 137) captures this profound people-river conviviality when he writes: “Our town grew out of people’s bond with the river. The Una is the power that holds the town together. Otherwise, both the town and its people would have been swept away a long time ago . . . All the people in this

town are believers in the water. They know very well that most problems vanish by simply watching the flow of the river."

People often remark that spending time by the river and traversing its currents, islands, and banks—vital practices of *unski život*—makes them *bolji ljudi* ("better people"), happier, *mudriji* ("wiser"), and more aware of their connection to each other and riverine beings. Some say that they feel *nekako kompletan* ("somehow complete") when they are by the river, and disoriented and *nekako izgubljen* ("somehow lost") when away from the river for too long. "When I stay away for too long, let's say more than six months, I miss her frequency," commented Narcisa, who now lives in Sarajevo. When further probed about these remarks about their relationship to the river, my interlocutors told me that it is "simple" since we are all *Unoljupci* ("lovers of the Una") and that *mi stvarno volimo Unu* ("and we really love the Una"). What does this "really loving the Una" look like? What does it do? How does it matter?

By doing ethnographic research, I learned that riverine love is complex—both romantic and sublime, and selfish and brutal. It is both life-giving and life-taking. Sometimes the Una itself is perceived as "flowing, liquid love" (Haberman 2006) and other times it is experienced as murky and hostile. It is the river of delight and joy, and of worry and troubles. Amorildo, the former head of the Una National Park, articulates what riverine love feels like to him compellingly. When, in the aftermath of the 2015 protest, he was asked by the Office of the High Representative in Bosnia why he opposed building "sustainable, mini hydropower plants on the Una," he replied: "Do you know I was born 10 meters away from the Una? My parents' house is on the riverbank. If I were given a chance to be born again, I would like to be a fish, so that I could live *in* the river and not *next to* it. That is what the Una is to me; you cannot touch her!" Similar to Amorildo, Vildana explains:

My relationship with the river is an old relationship; it started even before me, my mom had this feeling as well. And my grandparents before her...all the way back to the *Japodi* [an ancient Illyrian tribe]. How can I describe this relationship to you? I simply love the Una. That love is a part of me. I was born three meters from its banks, in Pokoj [a village close to Bihać], in our family house. The Una permeates my childhood... my fears, and my courage. In the part where she is the widest, we kids would compete to see who could swim over to the other bank the fastest. We jumped into her cold currents from tall bridges. Pure adrenalin. My first kiss, first guitar... and my first experience of death were also in

the Una. A whirlpool pulled in my 14-year-old friend and she drowned. All that happened by the Una and in the Una. And all of us, Bišćani, we share experiences like these.

Both Amorildo and Vildana emphasize *unski život*, a type of living with, next to, and, when possible, in the river. This everyday, transgenerational experience is what defines riverine love and Bišćani as situated, fully living human beings. While listening to Bišćani explain their love for the river, I realized that their love is literal rather than metaphoric (Archambault 2016). As Vildana said: “Being in love with the river is...hmmmm... it is the Una. That’s it. It is simply when your breath is taken away and you have no words. You don’t know. You try to speak, but you stutter...”

In many instances, the Una is portrayed as a powerful substance that not only takes life but also heals humans and “injects” them with existence. A well-known local cameraman, Hasan Arnautović, who spent most of his career filming the river at various locations, explains:

Whenever I get a chance, I film and record. My focus is on the Una River, the pearl of the Krajina region. *This river flows through my veins*, at least that is how I feel. *This river writes poetry* about Bihać, Krupa, Novi, and all other places through which it flows. And good people live on the banks of the Una River; they witness and are seduced by this unusual beauty (Pilipović 2018; emphasis mine).

A comparable understanding of the Una as the people’s blood and bloodline was echoed in the 2022 documentary *Expedition on 3 Rivers*, where the narrator, Irfan Alijagić, concludes: “For as long as the Una has us, it will be unique and special. Because it *runs through our veins*, and you do not give up ‘blood’ easily.”¹ Similarly, an October 2022 Facebook post by Jasmina states: “The Una is my never-completed dream. The Una is *moj život* (my life). *Una teče mojim venama* (The Una runs through my veins).” In these comments, the Una is very agentive: it “runs through the veins” and it “writes” poetry. Its life-giving liquid “mixes” with the blood of humans, so that the boundary between river and blood and human and non-human becomes blurry. Here, interdependency and responsibility are emphasized since human life depends on the

1 Expedition on 3 Rivers, “Expedition on 3 Rivers – Official Trailer,” YouTube Video, 2:40, August 11, 2022, <https://youtu.be/xR4VdXPN3jQ>

river, and, as Irfan mentioned, "the river depends on us" because for as long as she has us, she will be "unique and special." Riverine love is therefore centered around transgenerational, multispecies porousness, responsibility, and the care that stems from it.

This multispecies interdependency contributes to a unique sense of situated, "expanded kinship" (Rajković 2022, 9) and accountability that escapes dominant perceptions of citizen-obligations, temporal, territorial, and geographical scales, and political alliances. Biščani are united around the image of the river as something greater than themselves, which, as Hrvoje reminds us, "flows from times immemorial to generations still to be born." In the case of the Una River, this expanded kinship—biota—includes the Illyrian Japodi tribes, *Unska pastrmka*, or the Una trout, the Plješevica-Una aquifer, *sedra* and huchen, thousands of members of the Una River Emeralds, the 2015 protestors and their near and far supporters, ancestors, and not yet born children.

This idea of rivers as the source of life and a life-giving substance is relatively common in the region. For example, during his work with the "river guardians" in Serbia, Rajković (2022) heard similar comments, where activists referred to each other as *braća i sestre po rijekama*, or "river brothers and river sisters." This idea of riverine belonging, where blood and the river become synonymous and tantamount with life itself, imagines the Balkan rivers as "the last shared substance, something that unites different actors in their struggle for the 'streams of life' to continue—and against those who would stop them and spread death" (Rajković 2022, 9). In the context of Bihać, these "spreaders of death" include a diverse group of actors and actants: the Serbian enemy that besieged Bihać and threatened to kill swimmers during the war, contemporary green capitalists and green grabbers interested in building dams on the Una, invasive species, climate change, and diverse groups of eco-opportunists and water polluters.

At times, riverine love resembles a cult—an absolute devotion to and excessive admiration of the river. For example, when I asked my 78-year-old acquaintance, a founding member of the Una River Emeralds, if I could ask her a few questions about the Una, she responded: *Ma za Unu me možeš tući* ("Well, if it's for the Una's benefit, you can beat me up if you want"). This comment, which made both of us laugh, mirrors Anesa's observation: "For the Una, you are ready to die if you need to. It's as simple as that. It doesn't get any deeper, this feeling. Because without the Una, there is nothing. Who are we without the Una? How would we orient ourselves? I mean this *doslovno* (literally)... You wake up in the morning, and where do you go? Where would you socialize, drink coffee, meet your friends, take a walk, and make out?"

For Anesa, this riverine love is experienced and articulated as an “orientation”—the foundation of how one moves through the city and thinks about the world. It is also quotidian since most everyday rituals—drinking coffee, talking, walking, making out—take place next to the river. Therefore, the 2015 threat to the river—a vital substance on which the citizens of Bihać depend materially, socially, historically, epistemologically, and ontologically—released a feeling that *unski život* itself is at stake and that if green capitalist circulation and extraction succeed, life itself will end. *Unski život* is used here in a more comprehensive, nontechnical way to include “what biologists classify as ‘non-living’: rivers, landscapes, ecosystems” (Haberman 2006, 21). The unique material properties of the Una—*sedra*, *magla*, *slatkast* scent, and *huk*—invisible yet feared and consumed underground contaminants, and material and non-material entanglements of people and the river give rise to *unski život* and the possibility of “vital politics” (Muehlebach 2017). As a result, *unski život* and riverine love manifest themselves as an orientation and as a way to both traverse the river and anchor oneself in place.

Riverine Love: Heteronormativity, Romance, and Seduction

The proximity of people and the riverine world is also frequently anthropomorphized, romanticized, and enveloped in heteronormative clichés. When in 2020, I asked the graphic designer who coined the *Grad zaljubljen u rijeku* logo, what he meant by this phrase, he said: “Bihać is a boy, and the Una is a girl.” He is not alone; most of the city’s inhabitants naturalize and frequently employ these normative heterosexual matrices to refer to the river. The Una is thus described as *raskošna ljepotica* (“exuberant beauty”), *divlja sirena* (“wild mermaid”), and like “some beautiful and capricious young girl from Krajina who wants to protect her luxurious yet innocent beauty from others so she can gift it only to those dearest to her” (Stav 2019). The Una is thus young and capricious, loyal and dangerous, playful and deadly, and wild and tamed, all at once.

There are many instances where Biščani articulate their understanding of the Una as both seductive and nurturing, embracing and clutching, friendly and capricious, motherly and sensual, intimate and distant, and life-making and life-taking. For example, on September 28, 2021, Almir Bašanović, an ichthyologist and activist from Bihać, wrote the following love letter to the Una River, in which he openly expresses his affection, vulnerability, conviviality, fear, and desire. Here I include only half of the letter:

In the last several months, I started writing this numerous times; I write, and write, and then.... I delete. I delete because writing will make me emotionally naked in front of her [the Una]; I am not concerned about others. There is much fear, rage, awe, respect, jealousy...all those things that exist in every true love. This is the type of love from which every part of your body hurts and which you feel as trouble that unfolds in your veins, but you surrender to it and let it take you, who knows where. In my case, I know exactly where it is taking me and where both of us, she and I, will end up. Those who did not grow up by the Una will perhaps not understand me, but all I can do is to try to describe this love and respect for everything that makes one river and her people.

Straight from the maternity ward I was put into the crib at Jotanovi [a section of the river], at the Victims of Fascism Street in Bihać, and since the moment I was planted there, I do not know where I belong or where and to whom I am going. Perhaps, once you inhale her May fog with your first breath, it intoxicates you, it marks you, it appropriates you, and it does not let you go of its icy embrace. I am telling you, love and trouble!

My first memories are not of my house, mother and father, some toy...rather, they are connected with her. One of the very first memories is of the path between our and Saća's garden, along the property line, which was twenty centimeters wide, covered in grass... a garden to the left, and a garden to the right, and my three-year-old feet, which struggled to stay on the grass and not step on onions, lettuce, carrots... That narrow, slightly elevated property line took me, barefooted, to her, where she is the most beautiful, at Jotanovi. I always went to Jotanovi trustingly; why would I not? I was guided by the Una's people. And she was always there, just for me, so beautiful, never boring. After the property line between the two gardens, there is a short field, and then comes the corn field that touches the sky. At least that is what they seemed like to me, the biggest corn in the world, I never saw bigger corn even though it probably existed. And while my calves were getting cut by the corn husks, with feet covered in dust, I approached the meadow by the escarpment, and the meadow was full of people, the Una's people. In the meadow, along the cliff, all the way to her, there was a small spring from which we drank water. One would approach her; she was so cold, as if she was pushing us away, as if she did not want us. And you stand in the water, playing with the sand under your feet, maybe thinking it might be warmer that way...you stand there, and she slowly lets you in, you merge with her, and you live with her, and you become one of the Una's people. And once you become one of them, you develop an awareness of every little rock, waterfall, willow, fish, snail... and you start to feel like you are also part of her, you feel and see all that beauty, cleanness, power, and force. You feel that you belong here, that this is you,

that this is your home, and that she will always shine and guard like a lighthouse in the dark, to show you where to return and where to go if you get lost.

She tried to take me several times, to hide me in her murky depths. The first time, when I was four years old, Sejo Saćin plucked me out of her jealous embrace. I felt awkward at that moment. One would expect to feel fear, panic...but the beauty of the blue sky and willow branches that I saw through her clear waters while she was embracing me, that tenderness, peace, and safety...that I cannot describe...when you are melting away from beauty and love. In that moment I felt someone pulling my hair all the way to the river's bank while asking me: "Where are you going?" While Sejo Saćin was smacking my back and drying my face, I did not say anything, I was confused. Today I know what I would want to reply to him; I would say that I was going home, following light and love.

Later, the Una's people joked about me not being a virgin anymore, saying that now I was one of them. And she did leave her marks on us, the Una's people, perhaps because of her enormous love. Through the years, because of this love, there were all kinds of cuts and tears to the bone, moments of drowning, happiness, and sadness, as if she were trying to mark her people, to show to the others that they were hers, to remind them of where and to whom they belong. She is proud of her people, and she keeps them tight in her embrace. And the People of the Una also protect her with jealousy; they live with her, breathe her, and want to show her to everyone so that more people can become the Una's people, because there should be more and more of us. What is she to the Una's people? Well, she is a mother, sister, lover, and ruler.

Almir's words depict the life-making and life-taking affective and material entanglement of the river and "her people." His account demonstrates how love for the Una River is sublime, often anthropomorphized, and described as romantic and heteronormative, mirroring the grammar of heterosexual romance: life and death, despair and jealousy, and wisdom and absurdity. The Una gives life and takes care of "her" people, but she also seduces them, marks them physically and spiritually, invites them in and pushes them away. The Una—like a goddess—is all-encompassing: She is "their mother, their sister, their lover, and their ruler." She is responsible for them, and they are, in return, responsible for her.

These expressions mirror other maternalistic metaphors in the region, from working together building *omladinske pruge* ("youth railways") in Yugoslavia (see Thompson 1948), to viewing factories as mothers, to rivers themselves being seen as mothers and sisters (Rajković 2020). These narratives expose the complicated relationship between excessive feminine metaphors and paternalistic power structures.

They also speak of an ideology of eco-social reproduction and a fluid understanding of kinship, which challenge the presumed secular nature of citizenship.²

These "slippages" between the constructed, idealized, desired, and feared power of femininity and the Una are numerous and highly visible in quotidian encounters and more symbolic, ritualized practices. For example, the most popular female name in Bihać and the Bihać-based diaspora is Una. This is also, not surprisingly, my daughter's name. The name, which means unique and inimitable in Latin, is sometimes described as *kratko ali slatko* ("short but sweet").³ Car-

rying this name comes with symbolic value along with some privileges; for example, anyone with the name Una does not have to pay an entrance fee to the Una National Park—a symbolic and material gesture my daughter enjoys.

In addition to the name, there is an ever more tangible "River Maiden" statue, the most famous statue in the city, made by the Zagreb-based sculptor, the late Vladimir Herljević. The statue was commissioned by the Una River Emeralds and erected on the right bank of the river in 1986. Since then, it has been damaged, restored, and moved several times from one side of the river to the other (see Figure 14). The comparison, identification, and insistence on resemblance between the city's young, beautiful girls and the river are visible in the Una River Emeralds' many publications. For example, in one of their magazines, Boško Marjanović writes: "Aldijana Zirić is in many ways a true *Djevojka sa Une* ("River Maiden"). Exotic, beautiful, smart, knows what she wants and how much she can achieve, but is also always careful, deliberate, and balanced..."



Fig. 14. *Djevojka sa Une* (River Maiden), the Una River, and the church tower (photo by author).

2 I am grateful to Ivan Rajković for making me think in this direction.

3 Unikat koji treba da se čuva: Saznajte simboliku kratkog imena UNA!, accessed April 22, 2021, <https://aska.rs/unikat-koji-treba-da-se-cuva-saznajte-simboliku-kratkog-imena-una/>.

While they anthropomorphize, romanticize, heterosexualize, personify, and normalize their love for the Una, Bišćani also view their relationship with the river as purer, more reliable, consistent, inalienable, and irreplaceable than their romantic relations with humans. These views make the Una into a sacred river to Bišćani. As Hrvoje said in Chapter 1: “Sit here and look at this [the river] ... and you will learn something. Something about continuity, that it all flows... there is something that is much more permanent than we are. One cannot explain this rationally, but rather ‘religiously.’” This unique type of river “worship” is not necessarily related to a dominant understanding of religion as such, but rather stems from everyday sociality, multispecies codependency, socialist environmentalist epistemologies and pedagogies, and an Illyrian, polytheistic past. This interconnectedness is sometimes described in scholarship as spiritual ecology, which combines three domains: the intellectual, the activist, and the emotional (Sponsel 2018). For example, Sponsel (2018, 26) suggests that it is precisely emotion—composed of biophilia (love of life), topophilia (love of place), and solastalgia (pain or sickness felt when a cherished place is threatened or lost)—that motivates intellectual work and activism.

The “holiness” of the Una is recognized by many “outside” observers, including Ulrich Eichelmann, the founder of Save the Blue Heart of Europe, who remarked: “The Una is something like the holy river for Bosnia and Herzegovina, so I was always convinced that ‘not the Una’ [that the Una was safe from green capitalism]. Most of the local people were also convinced that ‘not the Una!’” This comment is remarkable because it reveals two things at once: it shows how someone like Ulrich could become one of the Una’s people or a riverine citizen by responding (“not the Una!”) to the river in a way that Almir hoped people near and far would: by “seeing” the river as “the one and only.” At the same time, this comment also frames the Una as exceptional and therefore worthy of saving, perhaps at the expense of other rivers and places that are not seen as equally unique. As a result, the Una can be understood as a “singular plural” (Nancy 2000)—simultaneously connected and disconnected from other flows, tributaries, landforms, subterranean worlds, and riverine struggles in the region.

Grad zaljubljen u rijeku is therefore not a metaphor and should be taken without skepticism. Living with, next to, and, if and when possible, in the river is what defines many Bišćani as biological, historical, geographic, economic, cultural, and moral beings. When in 2015 this “holy” river was threatened by green capitalism, the love for the river was unleashed and citizens’ sense of civic responsibility and moral obligation to the river, each other, and themselves was amplified. It was at this juncture that people in Bihać understood that *unski*

život and riverine love may be the most politically compelling ideas available to them. More precisely, this love's seemingly "apolitical," affective nature made it meta-political, revealing intimate connections between "the subjective and the social, between the emotional and the political" (Nash 2013, 2). In the process, *Unoljupci* were transformed into riverine citizens.

Riverine Love as a Political Force

In the summer of 2015, riverine love offered a new grammar for political engagement and shifted the political in Bihać, shattering the politics of impasse. This protest, unlike prior ones, was effective because it broke away from thinking of identity and politics as such, thus fracturing the rules of "normal" political experience. The contours of politics were stretched, where pre-political, political, and post-political were all mobilized to guard meaningful life with and from the Una. People experienced the attack on the river deeply, and not only biologically—life for them was never just biological but always couched in a concrete social, cultural, political, historical, geographical, and economic context. As Rajković (2022, 5) succinctly puts it, "life always runs through concrete lives." In Bihać, life is never just *život*; it is always *unski život*.

Ecopopulism was driven by *unski život* as the site of a new political "grammar," which in 2015 marked the limit of what was bearable. Attacks on *unski život* led to politically potent articulations of disbelief ("that they would dare to touch her"), as a bodily change ("I felt it in my belly that I had to stand up for her"), as anger ("I can't believe how far they are willing to go for profit"), "boiling over" (*prekipilo je*), and a "gut feeling" (*nešto je u meni proradilo i ja sam jednostavno izašla na protest*), or "something was awakened in me and I simply joined the protest") that transformed many Biščani near and far from being "just" *Unoljupci* into riverine citizens some of whom took to the streets even though all previous street-takings ended in disillusionment and disappointment. By naming this emotion "love," Biščani explained their *unique orientation* toward the river and understood themselves as "river citizens" (Šehić 2011).

But what kind of politics is this? Traditional views of politics see territories as separated pieces of land owned by identity groups (Ochoa Espejo 2020). I build on Ochoa Espejo's (2020) work to argue that riverine citizenship in Bihać should be understood not territorially but topologically, as a watershed: people, institutions, the land, and biota create overlapping civic duties and relations. It is precisely this belonging to and responsibility before the river—not the rights,

duties, and obligations to an ethnic group, city, or state—that keeps many people in their dwelling place. As fisherman Enes once told me: “I only feel natural by the Una River. Without it, I would have left a long time ago.” Similarly, Mirza, an active soldier in the Bosnian Army who served in Afghanistan told me: “I did not go to the protests because as a soldier I am not allowed to be political, to take sides, and especially to go to protests. But if there were a need there, in the end, I would join the protests. Because how can I defend a country that destroys this?” When I asked him, “What do you mean by ‘this’?” he replied readily: “If they take the Una, we’ll lose ourselves. If that happens you won’t need an army, you won’t need anything.”

Mirza’s words show that Biščani’s realization that the Una is critical to their survival does not mean that they “lose themselves” (Hardt cited in Willkinson 2017, 59) in this love. Rather, they *find* themselves since this love tells them who they are, where they are, and what matters. This love is both joyful and patient, and desperate and urgent. As a result, citizens of Bihać who signed the petition and/or took to the streets in 2015 not only sought a transformation, as Hardt would suggest. Rather, they also sought survival.

Many activists and their supporters articulate this situated riverine love, broadly conceived, as an obvious site of citizen-mobilization. For example, when I asked why she decided to join the protest in 2015, Selma exclaimed: *Naravno da sam izašla na protest. Pa mi smo svi Unoljupci* (“Of course I joined the protest. We are all Lovers of the Una”). While this sentiment could be dismissed as romantic, innocent, cute, and naïve, for Selma and many others in Bihać, attachment to the river is the basis of their lifeworld, their “compass in the world,” and their ontology. A banner carried by a young boy, a member of the Una River Emeralds, at the 2015 protest summarizes this ontology in a simple, revealing way: *Una, to smo mi*, or “The Una, That’s Us.” *Unoljupci* were transformed into riverine citizens.

For the people of Bihać, their coming together for, around, and through the river illuminated and confirmed what was a concrete and troubling situation: the threat of a dam on the Una. The 2015 protest magnetized these pluriversal forces and generated something unique, worth fighting for, risking a job, and even entering official politics. Vildana Alibabić, who entered official politics after the protests, explains:

I have been waging this battle to protect the Una for twenty years, Azra. 20 years! And in 2015 it came to this question: do I give up or do I “arm” myself? The Una “told” me I should enter politics. And I did. How did she tell me, you ask? There is not much to say; I simply felt it. This is how I felt it

the first time. Not long before the war... see that weeping willow over there? I came up to it and laid down under its branches. And suddenly, from here [she points at her chest and belly], I see a beam of light. It goes up and up to the sky, and it becomes a huge dome. And I am the only one who can see that it is possible to walk under the dome. I left Bihać soon after this experience to study in Zagreb, but I always wondered what that was. What happened at that moment? Now I think the dome represented evil. And all this under the dome was a fight against it.... And it was the Una which made me see it. I believe in the Una the most. I believe in her energy—the same energy that defended us during the war. The energy of nature and the energy of people. Here, we need to help people realize that honest people still exist. That's why I joined a political party. Because I believe in her [the river]. I felt I had to enter politics because "enough is enough!" 2015 was the key moment when I understood we will destroy ourselves if things continue as they are. We have only two options: to either overcome these negative forces or to surrender to them.

These words by Vildana, a professor of biotechnology at the University of Bihać and the main expert on the Una's biodiversity, demonstrate how people in Bihać hold and combine multiple views—scientific, political, emotional, "religious," and magical—and move between them quite fluidly. During the interview, I could see all these differing views coexisting, colliding, and interacting with each other, revealing a form of life that is grounded in a river-aware way of thinking about history, "energy," responsibility, life, civic duties, and relations. Vildana's comments also challenge our dominant ideas about sovereignty when she says: *Una je dio mog suvereniteta. Ja sebe ne znam i ne razumijem bez Une* ("The Una is part of my sovereignty! I don't know or understand myself without the Una"). Vildana suggests that people-river responsibility overflows and circumvents sovereignty in its traditional sense. Rather, her words reveal a form of sovereign agency where yearning, anger, fear, desire, despair, and determination emerge in an ecologically and socially threatened world. This sovereignty is "local," "grounded," "liquid," and deeply embodied in the experience of the everyday (Gagnon 2021), rather than territorial and nation-state-determined. It is composed of relational ontologies between people and the river.

Therefore, protecting the Una and, by extension, oneself felt like an existential, ontological crisis that required political action. As Damir remembers: "We entered this [protest] differently, we approached this fight *with our hearts*... And somehow, that created some energy, it moved us, it all clicked. And sup-

port started to pour in: the Blue Heart of Europe, the Italian engineers, the Coalition [for the Protection of Rivers], now Patagonia ...All these organizations joined us because they recognized that we went all in, *leading with our hearts*.”

This “fight with our hearts” or doing “something in the name of love” (Ahmed 2004, 124) moved potentiality to actuality, *dynamis* to *energia*,⁴ and sentiment to politics (Tillich 1954, 22) during the Una protest. “It opened bodies to [human and non-human] others” (Ahmed 2004). Here, an excess of water and an excess of suspicion triggered an “excess of love” (Majstorović 2021). This love manifested itself not only symbolically, “religiously,” and culturally, but also as biologically, historically, socially, and economically existential, therefore political. While riverine love has historically circulated between subjects and objects, people and the river, and bodies and souls, when threatened by green capitalism, green gabbing, and extractive economies, it became overtly political. It revealed compassion not as pity but rather as “com-*passion*,” as a contagion, as the contact of “being with one another in turmoil” (Nancy 2000, xiii). This fight clearly and “strongly emphasized a love ethic” (hooks 2000, xvii). As a result, in 2015, love and affective attachment to the river emerged as a moving part of life, justice, and politics that directed Bišćani’s drive toward unity among the exhausted, seemingly defeated, and separated.

The mobilization of love for the river was transformed into love as an overt political force. For example, Edin Morankić, a former ABC activist and then the mayor’s deputy, explains:

It is unique—the way people feel about the Una. I have never seen that relationship with a river before. My father is from central Bosnia, and he grew up by the Bosna River, but he has no deep relationship with it. And when we wrote for the ABC portal in 2014 and 2015, we wrote from our hearts. Armin wrote the most. We knew people were apolitical, so we wrote, we filmed, we started a petition. And then... people started to pay attention. They learned about the meeting in Martin Brod and then they followed the meeting at the city council. And from that moment, when the vote took place, and it was broadcast on the radio, the Una became *političko pitanje* [a question of politics]. The people revolted and said, “Don’t touch the river.” And the *politika* [the political elites] had to listen this time. And what I mean when I say that the Una is a political question is that prior to this, the Una was not important to people politically. Now, it is *ključna stvar* [the key issue]. As a result,

4 Tillich borrowed these terms from Aristotle.

no politician today would dare to come out in public and suggest building any type of dam on the Una, since dams now have a negative connotation.

Edin's words demonstrate how, through moral and emotional power stemming from riverine love, the activists overthrew fear and unleashed courage to defend the river with which they felt bound in affection. This act revealed the power of riverine love, and it politicized that love and the river, transforming them into a "key political issue."

The riverine love described here is therefore not just a speech, act, or political veneer which masks the "real, exclusive, nationalistic nature" of emotion (Ahmed 2004). Rather, riverine love is understood topologically, affectively, and polyvocally. Almir's words demonstrate the scope of this inclusive, non-nationalistic, and multiplying nature of riverine care and love which fuels riverine citizenship when he says: "And the Una's people also protect her; they live her, breathe her, and want to show her to everyone so that more people can become the Una's people, because there should be more and more of us." Following Almir's logic, the whole world is potentially Bišćani's kindred, magnetized by care and concern for the river, and liberated from strictly territorial forms of belonging and citizenship.

However, riverine citizenship is not as absolute as it often claims to be. Locality still matters, and it is reinforced by what it means to be born, grow up, and form next to the Una—which is a particular snippet of what the Una as a river of many tributaries and geo-connections beyond Bihać is all about. In this sense, both the *Unoljupci* and the Una's own flow shape love in particular ways that are not defined by territory but are still emplaced or "landed" (Latour 2018). This requires that the protestors stand alongside some people and against some other others (Ahmed 2004), such as those in power who voted for the construction of the hydropower plant in the first place. For example, I heard one person describe the members of the city council, a number of whom originate from the villages around Bihać which are geographically detached from the Una: "Of course they gave a permit to that Russian tycoon and that sleazy Bičakčić. They don't care about her [the Una]. They grew up *na brdima* ("in the hills"), away from water and civilization. They probably don't even know how to swim." Taking love in Bihać seriously requires that we pay attention to its locality and therefore its materiality, which always has a specific, situated form and scope that places some within love's grasp while excluding others from its embrace. This shows that riverine citizenship is predicated on certain narratives and performative acts. More concretely, it is inclusive of everyone who

supports a *specific way of loving*, being with, living from, and caring for the river while excluding some others: those who perhaps love the river differently and those “who don’t know how to swim.”

Conclusion

In his analysis of the environmental protests and ecological alliances in Serbia, Rajković (2022, 10) writes: “If something more than bios connects these different groups, it is still to be articulated.” In this chapter, I argued that that *something* is love. In 2015, when “their” river was threatened by extractive forces and formations, Bišćani felt that the Una was something they did not know how to live without, and this feeling propelled them to action.

As Spinoza wrote long ago, emotions shape what bodies can do. They are “the modifications of the body by which the power of action on the body is increased or diminished” (Spinoza 1959, 85). Centuries of multispecies relations in Bihać, which combined riverine love, dependency, and survival, created a unique political repository. Love for the river as a political force emerged from this political repository when wider hydraulic pressures threatened the river and motivated citizens of Bihać to act and feel differently in the imperfect present. Under the burden of extractive economies and green capitalism, this “liquid pressure” unleashed a protest that delivered one of the biggest postwar political changes in the city. More specifically, the relationship between the people and the river, which was experienced as affective and driven by love, gave Bišćani the force and political imagination to push against international and local interest groups and to defend, even if temporarily, the river and, by extension, themselves.

This situated, place-based, “primordial,” and transgenerational understanding of life worth living as the Una style of life does not mean that only those who were born by the Una can partake in riverine citizenship. Rather, the key here is the type of riverine love and care one feels (or does not feel) and is expected to nurture and perform. For example, all the Emeralds’ 113,000 members from 93 countries who were committed to a particular vision of the river and the life with, from, and next to the Una could be included within riverine citizenship. More specifically, a riverine citizen is anyone (from anywhere) who respects the river and cares for the river *in the way* that the Emeralds’ have conceptualized it—by embodying and practicing ecological sensibility that favors meticulously documenting, perpetually educating, painting, reciting, traversing, swimming in, listening and attending to, and restlessly protecting the

river from real and perceived greed and industrial development, while, at the same time, stressing the importance of ecotourism as the main engine of ethically justified, sustainable local growth.

This framing interpellates some people into riverine citizens but not others, since there is always a tacit claim that some people are more loving and caring towards the Una and more in reach of her own love, while others—near and far—are excluded from it since they do not love the river or they love it differently. This is precisely what makes love political here—the fact that it unites as well as divides, but not in the politically conventional, identitarian way. In 2015, this required a suspension of certain political logics and pacts, such as development and hydropower, while favoring some others, such as branding *unski život* and promoting ecotourism. These choices of inclusion and exclusion came back to haunt the river and riverine citizens, as the next chapter will demonstrate.

“This tourism will kill us all!”

Ecotourism, a Fragmented State, and the Slow Death of the River

*Before you had a river that was not branded.
The establishment of the Una National Park is a brand
in itself. We do not need any further promotion.*

(An Una National Park employee)

Introduction

As a result of the 2015 “Ne damo Unu!” protest, the Una is safe from damming for now. Instead, in the name of the Emeralds’ legacies, the long-fought-for preservation of the river, a green future, *unski život*, and love for the river, the Una has been branded as a popular ecotourist destination. This designation has unleashed significant and unregulated “touristification,” which burdens the Una with tourism (H. Hromadžić 2021). Nominally “green” and adorned with prefixes such as “eco-,” “sustainable,” and “natural,” touristification in Bihać is leading to the slow (and not so slow) death of the river: bulldozing and cementing its banks, developing “stress-free” resorts that dump tourists’ waste directly into the river, and expanding fish farm production. In addition, rising touristification propels illicit building without proper documentation or infrastructure in place—processes that are individually perhaps not too impactful but that have a significant effect on the river when taken collectively.

Numerous riverine citizens in Bihać observe this uncontrolled touristification of the river and fear that the “green greed” that supports it might “literally eat them away” (Midžić 2022). At the same time, by consuming “green ecology” in these eco-villages—frequenting restaurants built on the cemented riverbanks, going on the Una water safari, rafting on the Una, or transforming their own property into a rented, “ecotourist” property—a significant number of Biščani participate in touristification and, by extension, in the river’s slow destruction. Consequently, touristification emerges both as a site of critique of the river’s



Fig. 15. Ethnographic groundings: fishermen, Una NP employees, and the ethnographer (photo by author).

destruction and as prudent participation in the river's commodification to further one's life projects.

How do we make sense of the literal riverine love described in Chapter 5 and the simultaneous neglect and destruction of the river done in the name of green tourism, economic growth, and "the need to survive"? Are we witnessing, as bell hooks (1999) argues, the contemporary abandonment and trivialization of love? Is hooks correct when she says that abuse and neglect cannot coexist with love (hooks 1999)? To suggest that touristification proves that love for the river is "fake," "romantic," and "self-interested" would be crude, however. At the same time, the current destruction of the river raises questions about the limitations of riverine citizenship, especially in the context of an "unbearable" (A. Hromadžić 2021) and "semi-absent" (A. Hromadžić 2015b) state in Bosnia and Herzegovina,¹ grueling post-socialist dispossessions, aggressive "bio-eco marketing" (H. Hromadžić 2022), and attacks on everything public. When combined with the diminishing influence of the Una River Emeralds since Marjanović's death in 2003, gradually fading memories of swimming together during the war, and the massive exodus of youth from the region (see below), this dystopian context becomes even more challenging for thinking about riverine citizenship and environmental futures.

1 I call the Bosnian state semi-absent since it is bureaucratically and politically ubiquitous but biopolitically shrinking.

To capture these complexities and contradictions of simultaneous love for and exploitation of the river, and to ground myself ethnographically (see Figure 15), in this chapter I focus on the establishment and work of the Una National Park (Una NP or Park)—a contemporary extension of the Una River Emeralds. I compliment my ethnography of the Una NP with examples of eco-opportunist enterprises which threaten the Una, *unski život*, and *život* more broadly.

Una National Park: The Land of Water Magic

Thinking about and developing the tourist potential of the Una River valley has been a socio-economic preoccupation in Bihać since at least socialist times. For example, a quick visit to the cantonal archive in December 2023 revealed multiple articles from 1964 and 1965 with titles such as "Tourism Is Our Need and Our Opportunity" (*Krajina*, January 28, 1965, 3); "Who Will Finance the Tourist Association in Pounje" (*Krajina*, November 4, 1965, 5); and "Tourism: Our Increasingly Important Economic Sector" (*Krajina*, May 13, 1965, 3).

Likewise, one of Boško Marjanović's main goals was to establish the Una NP and to promote ecologically sustainable and responsible tourism in the Bihać region. Marjanović fought his whole life to preserve the river from hydropower, and he was confident that sustainable ecotourism was key to the ecological and economic future of the region. He said: "To the people of this region, there is nothing that gives them more hope than the Una River, since they believe that this river will soon become a *fabrika turizma* [a tourist factory]" (Marjanović 1998, 28). Similarly, the former manager of the Una NP refers to the Park as the *motor razvoja* ("engine of development") of the region. The choice of the phrases *fabrika turizma* and *motor razvoja* reflects both the language of socialist modernity ("tourist factory") and its transformation into the contemporary grammar of green capitalism and "sustainable development" ("engine of development").

Marjanović's optimism for ecologically friendly tourism echoes many scholars' enthusiasm for sustainable tourism: while mass tourism has been heavily described as damaging to local naturecultures, alternative forms of tourism, including "ecotourism," "community-based tourism," "cultural tourism," and "alternative tourism," have gained a positive reputation among social scientists, environmental conservationists, development practitioners, and indigenous rights activists. This broad enthusiasm for sustainable tourism indexes the transformation of both capital and nature, where capital enters an "ecological phase" which treats nature as capital (Stronza 2001). These processes include a progressive "se-

miototic conquest of social life” by expert discourses and economic conceptions, which are extended to the very heart of nature and life (Stronza 2011). What this “semiotic conquest” means in Bihać is that even those who are most critical of hydropower developments and those who are students of the Una’s biodiversity agree that the Una should be branded for tourism purposes and that regulated, “sustainably managed” green tourism is the future of this region. This environmental reasoning, which exploits, brands, and extracts as well as loves, respects, protects, and conserves the river, is common in Bihać. For example, Sara explains: “Boško and the Una River Emeralds ... those were the people who understood well that the Una is unique and that we can live from her, “package” her, brand her. That we can sell that unique feeling of being by the Una, that unique, hospitable Bosnian mentality.” This “packaging” of the Una as “the one and only” has had unintended consequences, however. More specifically, privileging one form of environmental reasoning that becomes salient—framing the Una as “the one and only” and “the queen of the rivers”—favors the establishment of a national park and the development of ecotourism, while omitting other forms of life with and from the river. As a result of this ecopolitical form, the Una River Emeralds, biodiversity experts, and many ordinary people have readily and eagerly participated in nominally green touristification.

Most people who worked with Marjanović think that he would have applauded the establishment of the Una NP. Marjanović died in 2003, before the Una NP was established, but he prepared the legal and socio-cultural context for the park. Numerous valorization studies that he commissioned before the war became the stepping stones for the 2005 Feasibility Study (*Studija izvodivosti*), which declared the upper section of the river of special interest to the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (FBiH), based on which the Una NP was written into federal law in 2008 (Zakon o Nacionalnom parku “Una”). The management of the Park officially began when the Una Public Company, or *Javno preduzeće “Una”* (Una JP), a government-owned enterprise, was founded and registered by the FBiH in 2009 (Official Gazette of the FBiH, 71/08). According to Amorildo Mulić, the former manager of Una JP, Marjanović told him right before he died: *Vjerujem ti u vezi Une i ostavljam ti Unu u amanet* (“I trust you when it comes to the Una, and I leave her in your care”), a statement he often repeats with pride and conviction.

The Una NP is the largest of the country’s three national parks. The Park covers an area of 19,800 hectares, most of which is located within the boundaries of the Bihać municipality. Some 13,500 hectares are in a zone of strict and targeted protection, while 6,300 hectares are in a development zone. The Park was founded with a focus on “the preservation of the overall landscape and bi-

ological diversity" (Nacionalni Park "Una"). A quick look at the organization's web page reveals the Park's approach to the people-river conviviality in Bihać, one that reverberates the Una River Emeralds philosophy: "The local population has always been aware of the exceptional value of the area in which they live and the threats that exist which could infringe on its fundamental values; therefore, the vision about this area being proclaimed a protected area was created decades ago" (Nacionalni Park Una).

Given the many bureaucratic and logistical obstacles, Una JP started managing the Park in 2011, three years after its establishment. Amorildo vividly remembers the early challenges: "After the Una NP was written into law, I had only two things: a small amount of money in an account and an advisory board. I didn't have an office, for example. Many people didn't understand what kind of tourism this would be... You know, many of our people believe tourism is just rafting on the river. At that time, Bihać had only three hotels. It was not easy, for sure!" Una JP has grown substantially since then. For example, it has been recognized as one of the "Top 100 Organizations in BiH," an honor it has received on more than one occasion. This award is given to those companies that make exceptional contributions to the development of the country's economy.

Since 2008, the NP's *fabrika turizma* has grown exponentially, especially during the summer months, when thousands of international and local tourists are bused to the newly branded UNALAND—*Zemlja vodenih čarolija*, or "UNALAND—The Land of Water Magic" (Jusubašić 2021). The Park hopes that UNALAND will become a European "anti-stress oasis," where people will come from all corners of Europe—which, due to hydropower and industrial pollution, has destroyed most of its wild rivers—to this pristine, anti-stress context to relax "gastronomically, culturally, and environmentally" (Una JP, interview). The Park also uses the branding of UNALAND as an opportunity to remind the audience, near and far, that the Una River is both a unique, magical space, and an endangered river in need of constant protection:

The Una is not just a river. The Una is also water, and water we drink. The Una *is the one and only*, the unique one. The Una is a source of life, *the queen of all rivers*. The Una is an emerald, the Una is an oasis of anti-stress, the Una is energy, the Una is universal value. But the Una and her banks are being destroyed by pollution and especially by illegal construction. Some want to tear her apart, to sell her, to use concessions to privatize her, to build dams and put her rapids into pipes. *E neće moći* ["Well, that's not going to happen!"]. That is why we are even more determined to energetically and jointly continue our

activities focused on the river's protection and preservation, to create "UN-ALAND" as a destination known to the whole world, and together with the Una National Park, it will become the flagship of ecotourism offerings in this part of Europe. The Una is our planet" (Jusubašić 2021, emphasis mine).

The former manager of Una JP starts his statement by recycling the well-known "the one and only" and "the queen of all rivers" narratives, as well as the discourse which paints the river as a European "anti-stress oasis." This romanticized, heteronormative, and new age-like language is often nonchalantly and uncritically used in Bihać, as H. Hromadžić (2021) remarks: "On the one hand, there is the undisguised, a bit naïve, Bišćani's love for the river which cuts through their town. That fascination is reflected in a non-critical glorification of the Una and its beauty, which is described as unique and incomparable to anything else in this world." The former manager of the Park recycles some of this non-critical, sloganized, and worn-out language about "the queen of all rivers." But he does not stop at this ostensibly superficial recital of popular, manufactured slogans, however. Rather, he combines love for the river and the Una River Emeralds' pedagogy to emphasize the political responsibility that stems from people's experience of the river "from up close" (Latour 2018). Grasped as such, the Una becomes "the water you drink," which intermingles with Bišćani's bodies in the most intimate way. This experience of conviviality and the "mixing" of blood, land, and water allows him and other Bišćani to find "a place to land" (Latour 2018) on this Earth, since "the Una is our planet." Ironically, it is this very particular ecopolitical form ("the one and only," "the queen of all rivers," the NP, and ecotourism) that results in an environmentalist agenda which turns the Una into a European oasis of water magic as the main recipe for the region's "ecotourist development," while leaving other visions out of its frame. These brandings and logics of ecotourism produce externalized and "unexpected" needs and effects—the building of roads, the bulldozing and cementing of riverine banks, and the development of fish farms, among others—which then come to haunt the river. It is to these unintended "green articulations" and their destructive effects that I turn next.

"This tourism will kill us all!"

Many tourists are bused to the Park from the nearby Croatian coast, but there is a rising number of those who come specifically to Bihać. Tourists include individuals and groups from different geographies, environmental philoso-

phies, and classes. For example, right before the Covid pandemic, numerous Arab tourists from the Gulf States started to visit the Park in large numbers, and that trend somewhat resumed after the worst of the Covid pandemic had passed. Tourists from Western Europe and Bosnia's sizable diaspora also started to arrive in significant numbers. In addition, many regional and local tourists interested in "the land of water magic" started to arrive, especially during Covid, when the country's borders were sealed, making movement across them nearly impossible. These tourists visited the Park and stayed in numerous, newly developed private accommodations on the river's banks. The Park also saw an increase in adventure and sports tourism. This amalgamation of people from everywhere and elsewhere resulted in novel convergences of histories, bodies, and souls, producing an "ecotourist bubble" (Carrier and Macleod 2005) and "a somewhat unusual image of the new, 'tourist' Bihać in these summer months. It is a kind of 'postmodern' collage of new geopolitics and historical realities... In it, populations that are otherwise unrelated overlap in a small space" (H. Hromadžić 2021). These tourist developments have produced new environmental logics and related anxious discourses about survival, green capitalism, ecotourism, economic marginalization, national character, and exclusion, while fueling hopes, anxieties, and insecurities about the region's hydraulic, tourist, and national futures.

According to an employee of Una JP, this sizable tourism growth, visible in the number of tickets sold with an average annual increase of approximately 30%, cannot be supported by the Park's limited financial, human, and infrastructural resources. There is a need for a special management plan for supervising visitors, for which Una JP lacks the financial and human resources. In addition, this increasing tourist presence is intensifying the pressure on Una JP to build a "modern road" to the Park's most popular site—the magnificent 40-meter-wide cascade and 25-meter-tall waterfall called Štrbački buk. This push to infrastructurally develop—to build "a proper road"—offers seemingly different visions of tourist growth. The road has become a symbolic and political space where different ideas about development, (post)modernity, and tourism—"mass" vs. "ecologically sustainable"—have ostensibly collided. In reality, they are deeply intertwined, as an employee of the Park remarks:

Before we build the road, we need to clearly establish the balance between economic gain and protection of the area. See, tourists who come from the West never complain about the gravel road—to them, driving on this road full of potholes is part of the experience, an adventure. They understand it

because they have similar regulations in their *uredenim državama* ["regulated states"]. But the new road matters to our domestic tourists and especially our diaspora. Our people find the gravel road embarrassing. And don't forget, most of our local and diaspora tourists are passive tourists; they don't want to walk more than one or two kilometers. They complain. They want to drive on a new road, park the car, walk to a nearby restaurant, sit, eat, and look at the waterfall. But this waterfall is in a zone of the highest protection within the Park. We must protect every cliff, every rock. We can't cut through these formations to build a road. Political elites want to build this road as well, it would give them political points...they don't think about the logistics of it... where to build a turnstile, where to park all these cars. The field next to the waterfall is already full of cars, imagine what would happen if we were to build a fast, smooth road. It would be a disaster!

While both welcomed (due to the need for economic growth) and dreaded (due to weak infrastructure, understaffing, and fragmentation of natural resources management), the expansion of the Park's tourism has exposed internalized Orientalisms, which nominally separate mass (passive, excessive) tourism—preferred by “inactive” domestic tourists, “Arab tourists,” and many politicians on the one hand—and ecologically friendly, “pothole loving,” adventurous “Western” tourism—favored by environmentally mindful tourists who seek exploration and preservation, on the other. These touristic commentaries reinsert centuries-old East/West distinctions that privilege the West and Westerners as more civil while revealing how people in Bihać, similar to Greeks studied by David Knight, “re-examine their position vis-à-vis European modernity and the West” (Knight 2017, 168). This tension between supposedly separated, racialized tourisms (Westerners vs. Arabs vs. diaspora vs. domestic) and a need to balance between them in order to survive is captured in the words of one Una JP employee who says: “We understand that ‘nature preservation’ [in English] is a bait for eco-tourism. Parks that have water especially attract tourists and have a lot of tourist potential. They also house a great deal of biodiversity. This is the ‘bait’ that can produce economic growth. The key is to balance nature conservancy with mass tourism. This is a big challenge since it is very hard to resist mass tourism, especially when you depend on it economically to survive, at least for now.”

The enormity of this problem—and the need to keep the “two tourisms” discursively separate but mixed in practice—became clear to me when I interviewed the owner of a private “stress-free” resort located nine kilometers upstream

from Bihać. The resort sits on five river islands—*ade*—connected by wooden bridges. From the sky, the islands form a heart, and the resort brands itself as the “heart of nature.” I very much enjoyed talking to the resort’s owner—an enthusiastic person who spends much of his creative energy on bettering Bihać’s tourist offerings. After spending a night at his resort, I asked him to talk to me since I was confused. The resort, I told him, promised an experience of unspoiled nature. For example, it did not offer Wi-Fi (when I asked the waiter for the Wi-Fi password, he told me with a huge, sincere smile: “You can’t have Wi-Fi in the heart of nature”). At the same time, buses of tourists were brought to the location almost every day during the summer months. Loud and massive weddings and high school reunions (including mine!) took place on the central island in “the heart of nature” almost every weekend during summer. “The stress-free experience was quite stressful,” I told him semi-jokingly. He looked at me and said, genuinely: “I know. I would really like this to be a ‘true’ stress-free resort. But I can’t afford it right now. Right now, *I need to survive*. And bus-ing tourists to the islands allows me to do that. But I hope in 10 years I will be able to make this a true stress-free resort.” At that moment I realized that he felt caught between his “love for the river” and his “need to survive.” On the one hand, he was one of the activists during the 2015 protest who wrote numerous posts for ABC critiquing plans for hydropower development on the Una. On the other hand, he “had to survive,” and that survival relied on mass, unsustainable tourism in the name of a green, sustainable future—thus, ironically, contributing to the slow death of the river. This simultaneous desire for and critique of “sustainable development” shows how modern and postmodern can coexist schizophrenically in the same geographical and cultural region. In addition, it reveals how people in an economically marginalized region can desire “proper green tourism” but *can’t afford it here and now*. Rather, to endure and/or prosper, they, only seemingly awkwardly, blend green and mass tourism, often with devastating effects.

This increase in domestic and foreign tourism in the Una NP and its surroundings has also prompted both the legal and illegal construction of weekend homes and “ecotourist” resorts on the river to accommodate an increasing demand. This was something that many people agreed on: Bihać could live on Una-centered, ecologically-friendly tourism, but this eco-friendly tourism had to be carefully planned and monitored by adequate government bodies. Given a bureaucratically monstrous and dysfunctional state and the fragmented governance in BiH, eco-friendly tourism has transformed into tourism gone rogue. As one Una NP employee remarked:

The Una was much more polluted in the last century. The socialist industry was developed and there were more people who lived by the river. The war and the related destruction of industry and displacement of people helped the river's conservation. The Una recovered during the war. But now she is threatened again, not due to dams or industrial pollution but due to illegal construction. This process is quiet, elemental, and uncontrolled. People who own the land in and next to the Park think they can do whatever they want since the land is theirs. However, according to the Federation's Spatial Plan, there is no building allowed in the zones of highest protection. And yet, people are building houses, motels, and eco-villages. And since *ovdje nema sistema* ["there is no system in place here"], no one is destroying these illegally built objects. That is the biggest problem. Illegal building is currently a much bigger threat to the river and the National Park than dams. I am afraid *ovaj turizam* [this tourism] will kill us all!

This statement points to the lack of working systems and regulations, the ineffectiveness of laws, and the extreme decentralization and fragmentation of the internationally designed postwar Bosnian state. This context makes the functioning of a "national" park challenging, which in turn allows for rapid and "wild" construction both within and outside the Park's boundaries. The phrase "this tourism" is also telling, suggesting that there is something about this particular form of tourism and its implementation that is deeply problematic. This mushrooming of illegal construction clashes with the Law of the Una NP (Article 6.12 which states that "it is forbidden to build new structures for vacation or tourist accommodation or to expand existing buildings or change the purpose of existing buildings for reasons of tourism" within the entirety of the Park except in certain designated populated areas and localities. It is to these complicated arrangements of the state, laws, boundaries, and governance and their impact on the everyday life of the Park and the river that I now turn.

Fragmented State, *Betonizacija*, and Elastic Borders

The radical decentralization of the postwar state in Bosnia and Herzegovina and the related fragmentation of governance directly impact natural resource management. For example, even though there are three national parks in Bosnia and Herzegovina, there is no supervising agency at the national level, so the competencies are delegated to the entities—the highly centralized Repub-

lika Srpska (RS) and the highly decentralized FBiH, which is further divided into 10 cantons, including the Una-Sana Canton where Bihać is located. In the RS, there is a water agency and water regulations at the entity level. In the FBiH, there is a Ministry of Agriculture, Water Management, and Forestry, which has oversight over water legislation (*Zakon o vodama*) in the entity (Official Gazette of the FBiH, 33/03). According to Article 3 of this law, water is a "public good" under the protection of BiH, the FBiH, cantons, and both city and municipal governments, with the management of water based on the principle of non-commerciality, according to which water is not a commodity but rather an "inheritance which has to be protected" (Midžić 2022). Furthermore, each of the 10 cantons has its own water regulations, including the Una-Sana Canton, which issued its own water law in March of 2011 (Official Gazette, Una-Sana Canton 4/11). In addition, the city of Bihać has a mayor's advisor for strategic planning, management of projects, utility services, water, and protection of the environment (Official Gazette, City of Bihać 04/2-21- 23/21). There is very little collaboration and coordination among the different governing structures managing water. In this constellation, where the state itself is semi-absent (A. Hromadžić 2015b), the designation "national" park is only nominally national since there is no national authority—ministry or institute—to oversee and manage the Park.

Given this tremendous fragmentation of governance and lack of coordination, it should not be surprising that the Una NP was established in 2008 by FBiH federal law without the involvement of cantonal ministries, municipalities, and companies directly impacted by this law. This decentralization created significant problems for the Park's management. For example, the FBiH's Law of the Una NP (Federacija Bosne i Hercegovine 2006) and the FBiH Federal Ministry of Physical Planning's "Spatial Plan for the Una River Basin," published in the Official Gazette in 2014, have significantly different boundaries for the Park, where the 2014 law, without consulting the relevant agencies, considerably increased the size of the park, creating a management crisis within Una JP (Vlasak 2018). The reason for the increase in the Park's surface area was pressure from the European Union, which had been admonishing Bosnia and Herzegovina for significantly lagging behind its neighbors, with only 2.6% of its area designated as protected (FAO 2015 cited in Vlasak 2018). Increasing the size of the state's first national park was an "easy" way for the FBiH to increase this percentage and to try to "catch up with Europe." The Una JP management, which found itself suddenly responsible for managing a much larger area than it had capacity to manage, was infuriated.

In addition to monstrous and paralyzing bureaucracy, there is the problem of environmental governance—more specifically, of supervision and inspection of the significant unlawful construction on the ground. This became apparent during my field visit with one of the Una NP rangers, Hase. In the summer of 2018, I accompanied Hase on his regular field visit to one of the most “problematic” places in the Park, the *Dvoslap* (Two Waterfalls) and *Troslap* (Three Waterfalls) sections of the river, in Lohovo village. A relatively short ride from the city, this beautiful stretch of the river, where the Una is voluminous and vigorous, as well as wide, accessible, and inviting, has been one of the favorite spots for many people to fish and spend time next to and with the river.

According to Hase, illicit construction within the Park’s boundaries started in the village of Lohovo, when one person bought a sizable plot of land from a Serb refugee²—who permanently moved abroad—for 70,000 BAM (Bosnian Convertible Mark; roughly \$40,000). The new owner quickly divided the land into many long, narrow plots. While the land was initially purchased before the establishment of the Una NP, the selling of the parceled lots, according to Hase, happened soon after the Park was established, but before Una JP had assumed operations—the process significantly slowed down by Bosnia’s massive and fragmented state bureaucracy. The land sold quickly, and illegal construction started almost immediately.

Before taking me into the Park to see the *situaciju na terenu* (“situation in the field”) in Lohovo, Hase invited me to have coffee with him and, I realized, to prepare me for what I might see. According to the law, the riverbank is state property, and no structure can be legally built within 15 meters of the bank. However, most people build their houses illegally, by and on the river, since they are prepared to pay the one-time 5,000 Bosnian convertible marks penalty, an inadequate measure to prevent illicit building. According to Hase, illegal construction, and not the dams, is the biggest problem the Una NP has faced since its establishment, which makes him feel powerless: “Right now, I just write and write (reports on unlawful construction), and nothing happens.”

The reasons for why “nothing happens” are manyfold, including the corruption-prone, convoluted, overlapping, and fragmented governance in BiH. Furthermore, it is not wartime destruction but rather the postwar dispossession of collective ownership, its transformation into state property, the privatization

2 Bihac was liberated in August 1995 by the combined Bosnian and Croatian army forces, marking the end of the three-year-long siege. Many Serbs from the villages which besieged the town during the war fled these villages fearing revenge from the encroaching Bosnian army. Some villages, such as Pritoka and Lohovo, were heavily damaged and burned down in the process.

of state property, and the extreme decentralization, fragmentation, and literal emptying of the state that have provided fertile ground for illicit construction and touristification to intensify. Moreover, the sprawling illegal construction, especially *betonizacija*, or the pouring of concrete on the river's banks, is a symbolic and material practice that reveals the heart of the current problem, as H. Hromadžić (2021) explains:

The concreting of the Una's banks is not a new phenomenon... However, one negative new development—that started to sprout in the mid-1990s with the establishment of "the new, independent Bosnia and Herzegovina"—is the appearance of larger commercial construction projects undertaken by private owners of tourist properties located on the river's banks. The existing FBiH water law states that in order to protect and preserve water [a public good], one cannot build structures within 15 meters of the riverbank. However, we now have a situation where outdoor patios of many restaurants and coffee shops are made of concrete surfaces, built on the river itself, where the riverbank is openly destroyed and concrete penetrates the riverbed.

These visible, continuous changes to the river are worrying and angering many Bišćani. For example, Vildana Alibabić frequently informs the public via social media about what *betonizacija* of the riverbank does to *sedra* and, by extension, to the river. In a Facebook post on August 1, 2022, she wrote: "You *sedra* destroyers! I am addressing every individual who dares to defile the Una's banks. I am especially addressing this generation of *betonaša* (concreters) and *bageraša* (excavators) who think they can do whatever they want. Are you even aware of what you are doing? What are you thinking?" Warnings and complaints about *sedra's* destruction due to the rapid and unregulated growth of "sustainable" eco-tourist dwellings are becoming louder and more common. Responding to the professor's comment, another Bišćanin ironically remarked: "New tourists want sleek concrete surfaces and easy access to the river. They don't want their pedicures to be destroyed by walking over *sedra* and stepping into sludge." This comment hints at the way "proper Bišćani" traverse the river—walking over *sedra* is not easy; it is uneven and slippery, but it is part of "the Una experience." On the other hand, the comment suggests that tourists do not know how to be with and in the river. Similarly, *sedra* shapes the water's currents, and swimming next to these formations can be tricky—one must know how to avoid being pulled down by the invisible but powerful current under the *sedra*. Therefore, ecotourism, which cements and bulldozes the riverbank, changes the way

one experiences the river's unique materiality, directly impacting conviviality between people and the river.

In addition, the houses and structures that are built without government planning are, as fishermen Enes succinctly puts it, “*ništa ni sa čim*” (“all over the place”). One looks like a mountain cottage, the next is a modern house, and the third is in a totally different style. And one house is purple! How can you have a purple house by the river?” I realized the extent of this failure of governance while talking to an employee at Bihać City Hall, who told me that, to the federal inspector sitting in Sarajevo, Bihać is a peripheral city, a long six-hour drive from the capital; therefore, they do not visit often. This puts great pressure on the cantonal, municipal, and Una JP supervising authorities. As a result, the implementation of laws becomes personal since “everyone in Bihać knows everyone else,” and it is hard to create the bureaucratic distance allegedly needed for the implementation of the law. As an employee of the municipality told me:

We do have laws. But who will respect them and issue a demolition order when one of these structures, for example, is owned by a judge and two others—I showed them to you—by policemen in town? And then, which company will agree to demolish the properties? No one wants to do that job, regardless of how much you pay them, *da se ne zamjere* [“not to get on the wrong side”]. Finding people who want to do inspections is also almost impossible. We currently have only two people in the municipality who do that job, and one is out on medical leave. *No one wants to get on the wrong side...*

“No one wants to get on the wrong side” since politics are convoluted and personal, and these jobs are delicate and at times dangerous, demonstrating how power, politics, and fear work on people.

This “degradation of the state, Park, and river” underscores Midžić’s assessment about water management in Bosnia: “What we call a water crisis is a crisis of governance” (Midžić 2022). I witnessed the effects of this crisis of governance and the related reliance on “bureaucratic proximity” and the massive use of *veže* (connections) on many occasions in Bihać. For example, Hase and I stopped by one property in Lohovo. The owner, Samir, whom Hase knew *iz viđenja* (“by sight”), was present. Samir, after learning that he knew my father through sports, agreed to speak to us.

You know what? When the first plot was purchased, all this should have been destroyed. *Da je tu bilo države!* [“If we only had a state!”] There are so many pol-

iticians and *jaki ljudi* ["powerful people"] who have done what they wanted. For example, look at the border of the Park. That border, on paper, looks set [does it, I wondered, thinking about two different laws with two different Park boundaries]. But in real life, *it moves*. Nenad [an entrepreneur with one of the largest "ecotourist" resorts bordering the Park] first moved the NP sign. No one budged. Then came Asmir [a successful businessman who made his fortune trading on the black market during the war]. He bought the area next to *Dvoslap*! He's that powerful! Everyone knows that *Dvoslap* is in the Park. But Asmir moved the sign, which means he moved the de facto border of the Park. *Gdje to ima?* ["Where else does that exist?"]. An individual moves the sign marking the entrance to a national park! Tycoons get permits from the Federation because they have connections in Sarajevo, so you can't touch them. *Jaki ljudi* with big properties are invincible. And we, *mali ljudi* [small fish], must pay huge fees and taxes. This state will change its laws and borders to meet the *jaki ljudi's* needs. *Luda država i još luđi ljudi* ["A crazy state and even crazier people"].

Samir's words reveal a great deal about unregulated "green tourism" in the unsynchronized governance of this *luda država*: laws that are plastic and adjustable to meet the needs of *jaki ljudi*; profound perceptions of injustice; private interests and predatory greed; and a perpetual, intense yearning for survival and normalcy. His commentary also reveals the plasticity of law and the elasticity of land, where the boundaries and rules of both are fluid, contested, and unenforceable on the ground. Rather, the Park must constantly negotiate its borders with local *jaki ljudi*, promote its authority, and reassert its very existence.

Later, while Hase and I were driving back to Bihać, he confirmed to me that the owner of the nearby eco-village indeed moved the sign marking the entrance to the Park in order to accommodate his "eco-village." This eco-village looks like a "carousel" made up of a hotel, wellness center with an indoor pool, "traditional houses," children's playgrounds, a domestic animal "zoo," sculptures of dancers, and rides in a traditional *lada* (river boat) to Dvoslap, in which enormous amounts of "traditional" food and international beer are served and consumed in great quantities. This eco-village is tacky, an emblematic instance of touristification in the name of ecotourism. The only thing that makes this place "green," I thought, while standing on the balcony of the tower in the middle of the crowded eco-village overlooking Dvoslap and Troslap, is its "illegal" proximity to the emerald, green river. And yet, many people in Bihać and beyond—urban and rural, activists and conformists, near and far—regularly visit this and

similar eco-villages around town. At the same time, those who consider themselves to be “true lovers of the Una” are very critical of the people who frequent these “green” establishments, with a tendency to blame certain “rural others” or “those who do not know how to swim” (see Chapter 5) for not knowing or not caring to maintain the river properly. This was nicely exemplified in a widely shared and liked, discriminatory post on Facebook that said: “They [the rural others, diaspora, etc.] flee from villages to cities only to go to ethno-villages.”

Polluted Waters and Invasive Species

While standing at the center of this eco-village, I could smell *kanalizacija*, or sewage, traveling down a partially exposed concrete tunnel and canal that take wastewater straight into the river. When the water levels drop during the hot summer months, people at this and other similar eco-villages avoid sitting at tables near the sewage pipes and canals, where the smell of traveling human waste can be ubiquitous. The practice of disposing of wastewater into the river is common in and around Bihać, where even the city center does not have its own sewer infrastructure resolved and where wastewater from homes, restaurants, city hall, and a polyclinic is dumped directly into the river. Curious about this leaking sewer infrastructure, I met with an employee at Vodovod, Bihać’s public utility water company, who explained:

The center of town doesn’t have an adequate sewer system. Circumstances are such that we can’t resolve it right now, it’s quite complicated. The old network was built during Austro-Hungarian rule, and it delivers wastewater from the city center into the Una. That old network has not been connected to the new wastewater collector that was recently built and which works well. Therefore, the human waste from the center of the city still goes into the Una. What exacerbates this problem is that there is also a new trend of building weekend houses, mostly for tourists, by the river. Most of these new structures have concrete pipes that take the wastewater straight into the river, even though, according to the current building code, that is not allowed. But many of them say, “If the city does it, why can’t we?” And then there are those individuals who build septic tanks... According to the law, septic tanks must be watertight. But some of our people, you know how it is, they make them as leaky as possible, so it does not fill up and overflow onto their property. Some buy plastic septic tanks, install them, the city in-

spection comes, says it is all ok, and then, as soon as they leave, the owner makes a big hole in the tank so it can overflow.

The old, unconnected city wastewater network and intentionally leaking septic tanks are impacting the river's quality. This could, as Hase expressed his concern to me, potentially threaten the National Park's accreditation. Given the findings published in the Assessment of the Quality of Water of the River Una in the National Park Una (Alešević et al., 2019), Hase's worries are probably warranted. The assessment was based on 72 samples that were collected within the Una National Park over a period of six months (January–June 2018) and analyzed using the membrane filtration method. Emphasis was placed on the presence of coliform bacteria, usually secreted by feces, which enter natural water sources through wastewater. Of the 72 samples taken, 14 tested positive for bacteria, all from sites in Lohovo and Ripač (Alešević et al., 2019).

In addition to human wastewater, which is, according to many experts, causing the decline in the Una's water quality in some stretches of the river, people worry about the influence of a large fish farm located in Martin Brod. I was told on many occasions that this farm, which mostly breeds *kalifa* (California trout, see below) for the Serbian market, allegedly dumps fish waste and chemicals into the river, sometimes releasing an "unbearable smell" into Martin Brod. Intrigued by these allegations, in November 2022, I met with the owner of the fish farm, Fadil. I knew him *iz viđenja*. This influential and well-connected businessman was a loud voice against the hydropower plant in Martin Brod. When I reminded him of his role in the protest, he said:

I grew up by the river in Bakšaiš [a Bihać neighborhood]. As a teenager, I used to be a fisherman. Fishing saved me from trouble in my teens. The Una is the nucleus of our development, which is why we need to protect her. If we allowed a small power plant to be built, that would open Pandora's box. We can't allow that to happen, because without the Una, we are nothing. The future here is tourism. I know that, and I started building a resort on the Una [shows me the pamphlet]. I'm just waiting for the road to Martin Brod to be completed so that I can open it. I will say something possibly controversial now—I don't agree with those who say people can't intervene at all. Sometimes we need to intervene. But what they're doing in Lohovo and Kulen Vakuf—that's blasphemy. All that *beton* [concrete] needs to be demolished. *People don't see how this accumulates*. The other day I was in my *lada*, and I saw a man cementing the bank of the river. I told him: "What are you doing?"

To which he responded: “Isn’t it nicer this way, all clean and smooth, rather than that, on the other side, all wild and overgrown?” *He doesn’t think beyond his two meters...* I asked him, “Can you imagine what it would look like if the person next to you were to do the same [cement the bank] and the one next to him, and so on?” He said, “You’re right.” Of course, I’m right! The Una is being destroyed two meters at a time!

Fadil’s words are extremely revealing. They illuminate something vital about the limit of riverine love in the region: the fact that the Una River is being destroyed (seemingly) inadvertently and gradually, “two meters at a time.” Importantly, this type of destruction of the river—both individual and collective, gradual and mundane—implicates almost all citizens of Bihać, making it especially hard to mobilize against (see below). These processes reveal constraints on riverine citizenship in the context of green tourism, the individual and collective “need to survive,” and a dysfunctional, semi-absent state.

While still thinking about the complexities of his words, I asked Fadil about the farm’s alleged contamination of the river. He explained without any hesitation:

The fish farm was built in the village of Martin Brod during socialism, and it operated as a state farm under many different names. I purchased it on January 1, 2000...When I purchased the company, this farm was old, devastated, and neglected (he shows me pictures of the farm on the first day he took over). I cleaned it and fixed it. In 1999, the old company produced 19,000 tons of fish. Now we produce 500,000 tons. ... And no, we do not pollute the river. These are just stories. All we use is diluted H₂O₂ [hydrogen peroxide] to clean the baby fish gills, so the sand won’t clog them. But yes, we do release fish waste into the river. That is not bad for the river. It’s organic. We have no other option. Listen, I would love to build a waste-settling tank. That would generate excellent compost which is now in demand. The plan to build the fish waste-settling tank here is listed in the law. [He goes into his office, behind his desk, and brings out the Official Gazette published on November 12, 2014, which mentions the plans to build a waste settling tank in this location]. This could be an amazing business—to create fertilizer from that waste. But here is the problem—this land is private. The owner, who is a Serb and lives in Serbia, refuses to sell the land. Apparently, the Orthodox priest in Martin Brod, which is a Serb village, told everyone not to sell their land. But if we had a functional state, the National Park would have

the power to buy this land at a fair market price to protect a river that is of national interest. However, since we do not have a functional state, the fish and human waste are released into the river.

This statement is exceptionally rich. First, Fadil's comment about the Serb priest in Martin Brod discouraging people in the village to sell the land to Fadil's (Bosniak) business is connected to Hase's earlier comment about a Serb refugee selling his land to a Bosniak entrepreneur. Both comments reveal how wartime violence, postwar ethnicization of people and territory, monstrous bureaucracy in BiH, and ecotourist colonization overlap, while exposing externalities—such as war and land, fish and human waste, and bulldozers and concrete—that a hegemonic form of *unski život*, ecotourism, tends to omit from view and, thus, makes hard to address.³ In addition, I learned from Fadil that destructive riverine interventions are not a recent development; they existed in socialism as well (see below), sometimes with very serious negative effects for the river. These interventions—including proposals to build large dams and dumping toxic waste from local industries into the Una—are the main reasons why the Una River Emeralds Association and its systemic and considerable river-centered activism emerged in the first place.

There is evidence, however, that pollution, the cementing of the riverbank, and an increase in fish farming are significantly changing the chemical and biological composition of the river, especially in the zone of its highest protection. These changes are visible even to the naked eye. In July 2021, Dado, who has a house in Ripač, took me to the main bridge under which the color of the Una was unrecognizable—a deep brownish green—due to, he explained, rapidly growing algae, which prefer warmer and less clean waters (see Figure 16). This is changing “everything inside,” he added,



Fig. 16. The riverbed covered by deep brownish green algae (photo by author).

3 I am grateful to Ivan Rajković for this comment.

and it “might destroy the riverine world. Just look at the new species that are developing here, devouring our authentic species, such as *potočna pastrmka* (brown trout). Brown trout are hard to spot these days; *kalifa* has taken over.”

Dado is not the only person concerned about the swiftly changing riverine world. In addition to the palpable concerns about pollution, endangered *sedra*, and touristification, there is an increasing anxiety among scientists, fishermen, and laypeople alike that some invasive species—such as *kalifa*—will rapidly deplete the river’s authentic fish varieties. In an interview, Professor Alibabić emphasizes: “There are no more brown trout [native to the Una] in the river; it has been taken over by the Californian trout. *Kalifa* rules the river now. *Kalifa* is a predator. It was released into the Una in 1985 to increase fish variety, and since then it has completely taken over.” When I shared this view with Fadil, he disagreed:

These stories that *kalifa* is now destroying our autochthone brown trout are not really accurate. The endangerment of brown trout began during socialism, due to human intervention. There is a village upstream from Martin Brod. There was a one- or two-meter-tall cascade waterfall there. They believed that the waterfall was the reason why the meadows downstream were flooding. So, they destroyed the waterfall. But another devastation followed; chub used to spawn there, where the water was slow and stagnant. But when the natural flooding stopped, chub stopped spawning there. Our brown trout lost one of its main food sources. Brown trout in the Una used to weigh on average 800 grams, but they now weigh about 300 grams... That’s why it’s disappearing; it has nothing to eat!

To put these opposing views into context and to learn more about increasingly dreaded invasive species in the Una, in May 2022 and then again in July 2022, I attended a presentation of an Erasmus+ project, “Educational Capacity Strengthening for Risk Management of Non-native Aquatic Species in Western Balkans.” The presentation took place at the Chamber of Commerce in Bihać. Doctoral candidate Subha Avdić presented the main objectives of the project while informing the audience about the harmful effects of aquaculture—fish farming—in the Una. The audience—composed of researchers, professors, mayor’s office staff, fishermen, activists, Una NP representatives, and an ethnographer—learned that the “invasive species” situation is especially alarming in the Western Balkans. Although the European Union introduced “invasive species legislation” in 2014 (EU-a 1143/2014), European countries outside the EU are not obliged to follow these regulations (Avdić 2022). It was noted that Bosnia’s

legislation on invasive species is very poorly regulated, which opens "corridors for invasion" (Avdić 2022). Using survey data and other indicators, Avdić demonstrated the negative impacts of fish farming on indigenous species and their ecosystems, causing "economic devastation, climate change, and illness in humans." According to Avdić's presentation, the list of invasive and horizon varieties⁴ in Bosnia and Herzegovina includes 65 new species, inclusive of one type of mushroom, 14 types of plants, seven varieties of crabs, five categories of mollusks, 36 kinds of fish, and two types of mammals (Avdić 2022). For example, the signal crayfish (*pacifastacus leniusculus*) and the monkey goby (*neogobius fluviatilis*) were both recently, for the first time, spotted in the Una River.

The audience also brought up the new and growing influence of the Cameron bird, which was a protected species under socialism but is now "devouring fish," thus becoming a threat to the river. In addition, the rapid spread of *Japanski dvor*, or Japanese knotweed, was articulated as one of the biggest hazards. The representative of the Una NP explained that as a part of the "Sava TIES: Preserving Sava River Basin Habitats through Transnational Management of Invasive Alien Species Project," the Park conducted a pilot project to remove—mechanically and chemically—this highly invasive plant. Fishermen also jumped in with their comments, adding their own experiences with new invasive species, which, according to them, greatly threaten the river. When the malpractices of some fishermen—who, I was told, catch fry or introduce invasive fish species because they are fished more easily—were combined with contamination stemming from the "green tourism" and fish farms around Bihać, the river's future emerged as alarming, and the mood at the meeting reflected this concern. The scope, speed, and seriousness of these developments revealed an additional problem: the need for better research and data collection.

This lack of research and monitoring bodies also reflects the state's fragmented governance. For example, since the Institute for the Protection of the Environment does not exist at the cantonal level, there is no monitoring body that collects data on invasive species in the Una-Sana Canton and thus ensures that laws are being respected and protections are followed. In response to these challenges, the Una NP representative suggested that we need to cultivate "citizen-scientists" (English in the original), in which ordinary citizens—hikers and other nature lovers—would be educated about invasive species and smartphone-friendly software with which they can capture and locate invasive species. In

4 Horizon species are those varieties that might enter from one geographic area into another geographic area.

this way, combining the Emeralds' philosophy and contemporary neoliberalization of environmental protection, the emerging figure of the citizen-scientist—an ordinary person who, while swimming, hiking, or traversing the terrain around the river, engages in research and protection of the river—would add both urgency and contingency to riverine citizenship in a semi-absent state.

Some changes to the river's structure and composition are visible to the naked eye. People feel both disoriented by and powerless in the face of these creeping developments. Tourism, which has been seen by many as a site of Bihać's environmental future, is turning into "this tourism" or touristification, which threatens to "kill us all!" Many people feel incapacitated by these developments. And yet, regardless of their prevalence, these sprawling and burgeoning practices, unlike the concrete and focused threat of dams, are difficult to mobilize against. As Emir told me in November 2022: "How do you mobilize around these growing yet dispersed threats to the river? It is much easier to organize around a dam—a dam is something concrete, tangible, locatable, coming from the outside...but how do you rally people around this disseminated threat where almost everyone contributes to it in some way?" "I don't know," I whispered, while thinking about the complexity of this situation. It is hard, I realized, to mobilize against a dispersed threat that "everyone contributes to" in the context where the danger has always been clearly coated as industrial or in the form of dams, thus externalizing and curtailing other forms of threat and destruction.

The Una River Emeralds' Children

Touristification has also revealed the shrinking influence of the Una River Emeralds. While Boško Marjanović understood the development of the Una NP as one of the Association's most important goals, he saw the Park as one instance of the Association's ambitious and broad agenda. However, the Una River Emeralds exist today in the shadow of the Una NP, a condition symbolically reflected in the fact that, at the time of my research, the head of Una JP was also the head of the Una River Emeralds. When I asked him about this double function, he said: "The Una River Emeralds have served their function. The Emeralds internationalized love for the river—that riverine consciousness that became palpable here in the 1960s. Honestly, *I do not have time for it...*" These words reveal something I witnessed on the ground: instead of being the main force of riverine citizenship, near and far, the Una River Emeralds have become an

overlooked segment under the custodianship of the Una NP. The overworked head of Una JP did not have time to develop the Association and adapt its vision and operation to the shifting local and global contexts. He felt that the main goal of the Una River Emeralds—the establishment of the Una NP, which protects the river—has been accomplished. Due to this approach, the Emeralds now have more of a symbolic role. The ironic effect of this is that instead of a perpetual fight for the river, exemplified by Boško Marjanović, the establishment of the Una NP has led to the end of the popular environmental struggle. When I shared this observation with Almir, he told me:

The main problem is the cultivation and nourishment of a culture of care for the river—that unique sentiment is not being adequately reproduced anymore. After the war, ecology was expelled from the local curricula. They [politicians] added religion to school curricula instead. The Una River Emeralds, unfortunately, do not amount to much these days. As a result, youth do not spend time by the river. Some never enter the river! They do not come close to it, even when they sit by it, if you know what I mean. *Tourism changes the consciousness of people.* Today, the Una River Emeralds have little children draw a waterfall, but these children do not know what lives in that waterfall! They are not taught in school. I would reinsert a mandatory ecology course—actually, no, an Una River course. So, young children can learn about the river, spend time by and in the river. Instead, youth swim in swimming pools attached to newly built weekend homes.

As Almir's comment highlights, youth in Bihać are becoming detached from the Una River Emeralds' vernacular pedagogy of riverine care and riverine citizenship. Some youth, those who can afford to rent *vikendice* (weekend homes) with outdoor pools, spend their time close to the river but distant from the riverine world. Emir, an employee of the Una NP and an environmental activist in his mid-twenties, comments on this generational shift by saying: "Young people don't want to think too much about it, about the Una and environmentalism. The pedagogy of the Una River Emeralds has been overshadowed; they've lost most of their influence... [As a result] most youth don't have that *something*; only a handful have that riverine sensibility... The politics and the lack of a proper system are to blame because young people are *ubijeni u pojam* ("pushed to the edge, disillusioned").

While waiting to leave the country for the "West" or for a better future to arrive in Bosnia, tired of navigating the broken, corrupt state, the majority of

youth in Bihać engage in “hibernation”—the active and agentive withdrawal from politics and society (see A. Hromadžić 2014). This seeps into their relationship to the river as well, and it diminishes the transmission of riverine citizenship. While physically *here*, many youth are often already socio-politically and environmentally *elsewhere*. And their parents, whose memories of swimming in the river during the war are both present and fading, are increasingly thinking about engaging in touristification of the Una in order to make a living and/or increase their wealth. Those who purchased land or transformed their existing properties to fit the needs of growing “eco-friendly” tourism are spending less and less time by the river. Rather, they are busy preparing houses for tourists and cleaning after them. An acquaintance who used to swim in the river during the war and who owns a weekend home by the river told me recently: “I don’t have time to sit down. I can’t remember the last time I sat by the river, you know, really sat down.”

These remarks point to the core of the issue: The vision of life with the Una and from the Una contained contradictions right from the start, and here we see their full realization. For example, the environmentalist narrative that speaks in the name of “life,” or *unski život*, sometimes forgets that life always runs through singular lives, which means that communal and individual self-reproduction sometimes clash (Rajković 2022). More specifically, the fact that people are torn between love and care for the river on the one hand and the need to “survive” and “make a living” on the other is a conflict intrinsic to capitalist eco-social reproduction. As a result of these tensions, an increasing number of people in Bihać engage in touristification—a form of tourism that is both linked to and significantly different from Marjanović’s vision of ecological tourism. Current touristification leads to packaging and selling the UNALAND experience, bulldozing and cementing its banks, and therefore increasingly living *from* the river and not *with* the river, and in the process, effectively detaching people from the Una. And that is the irony of riverine love and, by extension, riverine citizenship: people in Bihać have been very successful in fighting against the historically identified threat of the dam. The war interrupted industrial pollution of the river, and the protestors temporarily defeated plans for dam-building. At the same time, their vision and their efforts to protect and survive with the river via touristification disguised as ecotourism will likely and ultimately lead to the Una’s downfall.

Conclusion

In 2015, an ecopopulist uprising in Bihać successfully magnetized different interests and individuals united mainly around love for the river and an appreciation for and commitment to protecting *unski život*. United in their efforts to stop plans to build dams on the Una, these disparate actors were also united in their vision to turn the Una into a unique *fabrika turizma*. This particular ecopolitical form, frequently proliferated first by the Emeralds and more recently by the Una NP, has been guided by vernacular riverine sensibility and ecological consciousness—riverine citizenship.

However, these formations were transmuted by numerous, interrelated forces, including Bosnia's complicated, entangled, dystopian realities as a corrupt, burocratically massive, dysfunctional, and fragmented state; the country's flexible, moving borders and bendable, contingent laws which protect the powerful; penetrating, predatory green capitalism which favors neoliberal logics and the destruction of the environment in the name of its protection; touristification and "eco-friendly" construction projects that bulldoze and pour concrete over the river's banks; leaking, outdated infrastructures and growing pollution related to global climate change and local malpractices; the Una River Emeralds' diminishing ability to transmit vernacular environmental pedagogies and fight for its version of *unski život*; massive emigration of disillusioned Biščani to the West; and individuals' need to survive which propels them to engage in capitalist eco-social reproduction. Many people in Bihać feel both disoriented and powerless in the face of these entangled and creeping developments, the effects of which are still to be determined.

As a result of these multiple, intertwined processes, riverine citizenship and riverine love are suspect in Bihać: both tangible and uncertain, and genuine and dubious. This seeming contradiction contests bell hook's theoretical dichotomy between love and abuse. Rather, in this unique time-space conundrum, many Biščani feel caught between care for the river and the need to survive *here* and *now*. The historically shaped and deeply felt love for the river on the one hand and the aggressive yet gradual destruction of the river "two meters at the time" on the other coexist in Bihać, however distressingly and seemingly incompatibly. This dilemma is not simply a contradiction; rather, it is a grotesque, startling materialization of the ecopolitical form that frames the Una as "the one and only" and imagines the Una as a *fabrika turizma*. The peculiar expression and articulation of riverine environmentalism in Bihać—a form of activism that is different in many ways from its Western counterparts—al-

lows for the possibility that one can indeed love and pollute the river at the same time (Haberman 2006).

As a result of these conjugated processes, ecological, green tourism is turning into touristification, and many Bišćani are mundanely detaching themselves from the river. The river's slow death is easier to ignore from that social, physical, and symbolic distance. Puzzled and worried about what this means for the river and for environmental futures near and far, I turned to Vildana: "Where do you see hope?" I asked. She responded: "All I think about is that unique life by and with the Una... it's still here. I think about the Japodian tribes who lived here thousands of years ago...they took from her, exploited her, but never too much. We can't live like they did due to our consumer society, which is changing our orientation to everything and everyone. That is our and the Una's biggest challenge—that changing orientation to life." She paused, and seeing my bleak face, she looked me in the eye, leaned forward, and said: "But don't worry that much, Azra. There are still many of us, *unška djeca* [children of the Una]. We're around. We might be a bit disoriented right now, but it's not too late. We're only tired and discombobulated by these creeping tourist developments and expectations. And even if we fail, I know one thing that Boško Marjanović used to say: *Una će se dići* (the Una will rise)."



In the end...

...the Una did rise. The mighty river flooded the Smaragd valley first in December 2022 and then in May 2023, intimidating bodies and souls along the way. While the Una had historically submerged certain regions within her reach, these floods were exceptional in their intensity and velocity. The river transformed from its emerald-green shade to a muddy, moody, roaring force. People contemplated her, listened to her, and tried to anticipate her. They respected her, obeyed her, and moved out of her way. And they talked about her.

Many somberly murmured about the sublime powers of the Una. “By flooding us, she is defending herself. Taking back what is hers, her banks...,” they claimed. Others pointed out, with a kernel of satisfaction, that the most severely flooded properties were the “illegally” built weekend homes and hotels on the banks of the river. A friend sent me a picture of one ferociously flooded eco-village and commented: “I’m afraid to say this out loud, but I’m kind of glad this happened to them.” My friend is not alone. Many environmental activists and ordinary people alike emphasize the causal relationship between green capitalist violences, *bespravna gradnja* (illegal building) and the harshness of the recent floods. The self-proclaimed “true” lovers of the Una used this opportunity to remind people of the ultimate betrayal of those who, in the same sentence, “advertise their weekend homes on the Una and sing eulogies to her.” Those people, I was told, pour 30 meters of concrete on the Una’s bank, kill all riverine life, and then say: “The Una is the most beautiful river anywhere; Bihać is the most beautiful city anywhere.” Those, I was told, are the rottenest type of people.

Surrounded by images of growling water overflowing everything in its path, I struggled to see direction and hope. Once again, I turned to Hrvoje’s words:

Where do I see hope? I think hope is in the Una River Emeralds' ecological-pedagogical narrative. That type of pedagogy is similar to the *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*¹—it's not some apolitical pedagogy, you know. The Emeralds were one of the first non-governmental organizations [NGOs] in Yugoslavia. I still don't know how they managed to navigate all those socialist structures...I believe that the new, imposed narrative about "the commons"² might be our opportunity... That story was not relevant when the Emeralds were formed, since the idea of the commons only makes sense in the context of capitalism. The commons are territories outside of capitalism's reach. In socialism, the commons is a nonsensical idea since all public goods are within the collective or state domain. There is nothing outside to be named and protected... The hope is that our old socialist sensibilities—the Emeralds' everyday pragmatism and robust belief in the river—could be productively linked to the capitalist idea of the commons and public good. In my opinion, that is the only logical direction within the larger politicization and socialization of the river—the only thing that can save the river. The larger narrative and the current direction are coopted by capitalism and quasi-liberal NGO-ization, so we need to grab the idea of the commons, apply the Emeralds' pedagogy, and run with it...

I wanted to cling to Hrvoje's pragmatic hope, which links the Emeralds' original teachings to the ideas of the commons and not to capitalism-driven "green tourism". This, I thought, could perhaps become a script not only for the preservation of the Una but of other rivers (and landscapes) in the Balkan region facing touristification and/or extraction in the name of "green tourism" and "sustainable development." At the same time, I was witnessing the diminishing reach and lessening impact of the Emeralds' ecological pedagogy. For example, after the war, the Emeralds were erased from the ethnicized, religionized school curricula. Their domain and influence have been noticeably shrinking, shifting from the more political to the increasingly symbolic. From systemic, global lobbying efforts focused on teaching the whole world how to love the river and creating tangible plans to build the World Children's Ecological Center on the

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- 1 *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* is a famous book by the Brazilian author Paulo Freire (see Freire 2000) in which the author offers a theory of education focused on those marginalized and oppressed by capitalism. He develops an explanation of oppression under capitalism and a theory of liberation which outlines the steps by which the oppressed can regain their dignity and humanity.
 - 2 The commons are public land or spaces in the capitalist system which nobody owns. Rather than being privately owned, they are natural and cultural resources that belong to everyone.

Una's banks, the organization's activities and ambitions have shrunk to much less striving, repetitive local manifestations, such as the annual eco-quiz competition and the celebration of Una River Day.

In addition, larger geopolitical and social formations are impacting the rhythm of riverine life in the region. For example, young people in town—the base of the Una River Emeralds' vision—are actively detaching themselves from the Bosnian state, both politically and physically. During multiple visits to Bosnia in the last 20 years, I witnessed Bosnian youth engage in what I call “hibernation”—an agentive detachment from official Bosnian politics. In a context where extreme unemployment is a structural condition that stretches across generations, the politics of distribution and remittances from abroad that circulate among family and friends keep most people fed and alive. This calamitous present generates a perpetual, visceral disappointment in the country and its future among the youth that not even the Una can appease. This stimulates a desire among youth to leave their home for “better”—if less beautiful—places, creating a further gap between Bosnia and “Europe” and between the youth and the state. Consequently, for many Bosnian youth, staying in their country presents a challenge and an impossibility, and planning to leave becomes a natural, habitual expectation of the self and others. As a result, potential riverine citizens are leaving their city and “their” river en masse. One interlocutor recently called it an “epidemic,” where all over town (and the country) classroom sizes are shrinking, schools are closing, and teachers are losing their jobs because there are no children to teach.

Those youth who stay spend their time by the river differently. They prefer to rent weekend homes with pools instead of swimming in the river. Their parents, many of whom swam in the Una during the war, are often too busy to sit by the river since they have to clean their rental properties for the next wave of ecotourists. They do this because the Una, following the Emeralds' vision, has been elevated as an ecotourist destination, made exceptionally visible, brandable, and rentable. Ironically, this promotion of the river, in the name of “eco-friendly tourism”—a disfigured realization of the Emeralds' vision—is producing touristification and (re)moving the river, figuratively and literally, to the background of social life in Bihać and to the frontier of capitalist extraction. These processes are actively detaching citizens from the Una's watershed, practically, symbolically, affectively, and politically.

In addition, the powerful memories of wartime swimming and transgenerational *zajedništvo* are fading with time. They are memories that are not transgenerationally contagious and transmittable. “You have to be in it, to hear it, to

join it,” Edith Turner (2012, 11) reminds us. We talk to our children, of course, with nostalgia and longing, about our wartime swimming. We tell them how we lived together with the river and each other during the war. Some of us occasionally visit the “war beach” at Jotanovi, which is now mostly empty. Occasionally we enter the river and swim in it, but we don’t go down the fastest rapids, and we don’t teach our children to do it either. We show them, from a distance, Waterfall #6 and tell them how alive we felt during the war going down that waterfall. “But it’s too dangerous to do it now,” we say to them and to ourselves, while quietly wondering how our parents let us swim “like that” during the war.

Increasingly, our wartime swimming seems simultaneously more important and more elusive, even to us. We take our children to the Una, of course. We pay for their Una experience: take them on the Una Safari, the Una River rafting, purchase tickets to the Una NP, and frequent “ecotourist” restaurants where we taste fish from the Una. The fish we eat is mostly *kalifa* since the Una’s trout is hard to find. If we swim in the river, it is often for a fee, at beaches that have been groomed by the mushrooming ecotourist establishments. We, the riverine citizens, are being transformed into riverine consumers.

Regardless of these practices, many people tell me, with conviction, that they “love the river more than anything else.” And in some complicated way, I believe they do. “How does one love the river?” I ask myself. The chapters in this book document different dimensions and textures of this riverine love: its historicity, its sensorial facets, its politics, its logics, its contours, its inclusions and exclusions, its betrayals and violences, and its considerable socio-political aptitudes and limitations. The book is, in essence, about riverine love’s momentous potential, abundant pedagogy, and somber, crippling constraints. The book shows that riverine love is neither natural nor a given, even if it appears primordial at times. It is not an endless repository for us to use at will. It is a political act of will and determination. To exist and to flourish, it requires prolific and relentless commitment, patience, and laboring connections. As bell hooks (2000, 93) has said: “When we choose to love, we choose to move against fear—against alienation and separation. The choice to love is a choice to connect—to find ourselves in the other.” Do we choose to love and to find ourselves in the Una and each other? I ask this as I swim, get lost, find myself, leave, return, and wait, lovingly, uncertainly.

I finish this book with a quote and an artistic intervention. First, the words. As I moved with the Una throughout this book, simultaneously feeling elevated and deflated, I remembered the words of Jean-Luc Nancy, who, during the siege of Sarajevo, wrote: “What I am talking about here is compassion, but not com-

passion as a pity that feels sorry for itself and feeds on itself. Com-*passion* is the contagion, the contact of being with one another in this turmoil. Compassion is not altruism, nor is it identification; it is the disturbance of violent relatedness” (Nancy 2000, xiii). *Riverine Citizenship* is an attempt to illuminate the alterity and the relationship—not based on pity but based on commitment—of one being, Bišćani, with another, the Una—in its contagion and turmoil. Nancy’s brilliance, once again, provided me with the syntax to carve out and name that space of interrelatedness—com-*passion*—that disrupts the violent, if loving, relatedness.

While helpful, these words still felt somehow inadequate. Searching for other mediums, other “grammars,” I stumbled upon an artistic intervention: a watermark designed by the Bihać-born designer Adi Dizdarević, who created this design to point out the rigidity—mental and material—in our approach toward the river that we are com-*passionate* about. The artist, in an activist fashion, invites people to copy and paste and widely share this design.

[Una]

Adi Dizdarević, Monogram.

I understand this topographical intervention as a counterpart to topological, place-based lived citizenship. According to Dizdarević, the rigid “geometrical” boundaries are reminders and critiques of the concrete-covered riverine banks that are mutilating the river and life itself. There is another interpretation of this work, however. The brackets could also be seen as fences—material, mental, and discursive—that detach “the one and only” from the world.³

In an email exchange on September 3, 2023, Dizdarević told me that this design “should have never existed,” meaning that we, the riverine citizens, should have never permitted the Una’s banks to become disfigured. And yet, the design does exist ... for us to lovingly circulate or to dismantle with love.

3 I am grateful to Heather Michel Riddle for this comment.



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Water potential is a significant natural wealth of most parts of the Balkans which gave rise to a surge in hydropower investments unparalleled across Europe. As part of the process, a dam was planned to be built on the Una River which runs through the Bosnian town of Bihać. This alarmed the city's residents, culminating in a protest in 2015. The book begins with this protest and it explores how the threat of dam construction transformed the seemingly apolitical love of the river into a powerful political force around which thousands of people mobilized: riverine citizenship.

"This book is an extraordinary testimony to relations between the River Una and the Bišćani in northern Bosnia and Herzegovina who live alongside her. It flows seamlessly from socialist childhood, through the river as a source of joy and escape during a deadly war, to collective action that defeated plans to build a dam and new threats emerging from the river's rebranding as a site of ecotourism. *Riverine Citizenship* is a meditation on multispecies love, never shying away from the painful, the destructive, and the violent, as rigorous and innovative as it is moving and poetic. It is a passionate plea for an expanded ethics of care and an inclusive ecological citizenship."

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"From the depths and flows of its emerald waters, Azra Hromadžić has channeled the ethnographic sensorium of the 'one and only' Una into an insightful, poetic treatise on riverine love—love as affect, ethics, and politics. If we listen with her, we hear how joy can emerge in war and greed can color devotion. Above all, she offers us an anthropology of hope born from the entwined lives of a river and its people."

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