Opting out of war but at what cost? A trajectory of transition in Serbia's Sandzak

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In the debates on the dissolution of former Yugoslavia, Sandzak- a land strip at the crossroads connecting Serbia, Montenegro, Bosnia- Herzegovina and Kosovo- has been often described as the 'last piece of the puzzle'. Despite the odds, Sandzak has escaped identity politics- fuelled conflict between its two main ethnic groups Bosniaks[1] and Serbs. Instead, over the last 25 years or so in the Serbian part of Sandzak, and specifically its main city Novi Pazar which is the focus of this paper, a distinct transition process has been unfurling, described by its inhabitants as 'neither peace nor war'[2]. This process is characterised by intra and inter-ethnic tensions against the backdrop of religious radicalisation, economic decline and political hostility perpetrated until recently by successive Serbian regimes, in contrast to previous experience of relative social harmony among Novi Pazar's inhabitants.

The situation of 'neither peace nor war' is a common reference in the large literature on contemporary wars and their legacies on political, social and economic dynamics towards peace and stability. Its consideration is by and large an afterscript in the studies attempting to explain the causes and drivers of violence of which 'neither peace nor war' can be one among possible outcomes. On the other hand, systematic studies of societies that have avoided armed violence amidst the turmoil of war are rare, with work by Anderson and Wallace (2013)[3] being a notable exception. Anderson and Wallace whose research focuses on 'peace communities', point out that opting out of war as an outcome of societal dynamic in the context of armed violence may not be stable. Their inquiry however stops short of probing into why that may be the case. On their own, the two bodies of literature which follow different epistemologies and methodologies are

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[1] The name Bosniak was first chosen in Bosnia and Herzegovina to replace a former name Muslims, and was subsequently adopted by Sandzak's Muslims.
[2] I deliberately avoid using Galtung's concept of negative peace to demarcate this study from the mainstream conflict and peace discourses.
[3] Tone Bringe (1995), Armakolas (2011) on Bosnia.

insufficient to explain why a society that has avoided war finds itself on a path of latent conflict and instability as that experienced by Novi Pazar's citizens and summed up in a phrase 'neither peace nor war'.

I propose to address this gap by drawing on the insights from the literature on the social processes of war. The literature on the social processes of war (Wood 2008; see also: Lubkemann 2004; Richards 2005), explores the transformative effect of war on social processes, and related outcomes in terms of reconfiguration in social relations. It does so on a premise that the same social processes can be underway in peace, but that they are marked by war in distinctive ways (Wood ibid: 540). This perspective helps address a tension in the existing scholarship arising from its dichotomous view of war and peace and salient social processes, while opening an analytical avenue to consider their inert-relation and its consequences. From the vantage point of the main debates in war and peace studies, Novi Pazar provides an interesting case in that it is a city only indirectly affected by the war in its neighbourhood- thus formally at peace. Its citizens at a critical historical juncture forged a joint effort to avoid a spiral of violence, but ended up in a precarious state of stable instability which is ill conducive to peace, human security and development. The necessity to study dialectic of war and peace has been increasingly recognised (Trimikliniotis 2016), and I argue, is pertinent for understanding transitions from war and post-totalitarianism in different local contexts which are mainly studied as distinctive processes. The insights from sociological and anthropological studies of the social processes are useful in teasing out the main societal dynamics shaping the transition trajectories which influence which way the precarious balance of stable instability moves over time.

By bringing into conversation scholarships on war, peace and post-totalitarian transition, and through bridging relevant macro and microsocial perspectives on societal processes and dynamics in such contexts, the paper aims to answer two questions: i. what explains a shift from relative social harmony in a local society to a situation of latent conflict and instability (but short of open warfare); ii. to what extent is local society able to preserve some capacity to counteract destructive social dynamics imparted by such a shift? It does so by developing a case study of Novi Pazar that explores four inter-linked social processes, namely political mobilisation; transformation and polarisation of social identities; norms transformation; and fragmentation of local political economy and their impacts on local social relations in Serbia Sandzak's transition towards liberal market democracy in a shadow of regional wars. It shows that fighting for a new place in Serbia by Sandzak's Bosniak elites on a minority- protection platform has had a catalytic effect on the polarisation and transformation of social identities both along ethnic and religious lines, while demographic change, religious radicalisation and weak governance have contrived to reshape normative frameworks in society. The study illustrates the powerful forces generated by those interconnected processes that have

crystalized identities, redrawn invisible and visible borders among individuals and communities, and created new relationships. But it also shows that local community has preserved some of its capacity to confront destructive impact of those forces on local social relations.

The paper makes three contribution: it adds to a modest body of literature on contemporary transition in Sandzak; it provides empirical evidence of context specific degree of impact on local societal dynamics, peace and stability exerted by various social processes related to war and pos-totalitarian transition; it highlights the importance of understanding micro and macro dynamics in tandem in accounting for diverse pathways societies take when facing a threat of armed violence.

The paper uses data from 16 interviews with a cross-section of local businessmen, civil society activists, experts, journalists, and the city government officials conducted in Novi Pazar in Spring 2015, and informal follow up interviews with a number of respondents conducted over the internet.

The social processes of war and peace

The proliferation of intra state wars in the 1990s has spurred large literature on their origins, conflict drivers and peace processes in their aftermath. Scholars have debated different factors that can push individuals, groups, communities and societies onto a path of armed violence focusing in particular on how politics and ideology can be triggers for taking up armed struggle (Fearon and Laitin 2000), and the role played by economic factors including poverty and inequality (Arnson and Zartman 2005; Berdal and Mallone 2000). In the 2000s a study of liberal peacebuilding as distinctive subfield was added, concerned with how complex legacies of war are addressed by and react to internationally promulgated models of restoring peace and stability in the aftermath of war (Paris 2004; Richmond and Franks 2011).

The scholarship on contemporary wars has mostly taken a macro and national level focus in so far as it has conceptualised war primarily as a form of violent contestation over the extant state among a myriad of armed actors. Consequently, it has directed its attention at the destructive nature of war-time violence and its distorting effects on political, economic and social dynamics which in the context of peacebuilding cause prolonged instability. Some of the Western Balkans countries, notably Bosnia- Herzegovina and Kosovo which have experienced simultaneous transitions from war and post-totalitarianism, feature prominently in those studies as paradigmatic cases of ethnic

identity fuelled political violence with long lasting consequences for the stability of those countries and the prosperity of their populations[4].

As evidence of fragile peace in the aftermath of many of post- Cold War armed conflicts gathered, more investigation of the microdynamics of civil wars and local societal dynamics followed (Kalyvas 2006). This scholarship has begun to probe into some of the established assertions in the field of war and peace studies regarding the temporal, spatial, and agential aspects of war and peace, which have been questioned by the sociologists and anthropologists studying contemporary wars. Sociological and anthropological studies of war time social conditions and dynamics highlight the dialectic nature of war and peace as well as the innate capacity of any society to avoid violence. Unlike the macropolitical scholarship on war and peace, they are interested in how local society adapts to violence and how individual and societal trajectories are shaped by conflict. Of particular significance is reconceptualization of war as transformative social condition that affects political, social, economic and cultural processes and alters social relations along war and peace continuum, with consequences on post-war social dynamic (Lubkemann 2008: 13; Trimiklionatis 2016; Olson 2014). Lubkemann (ibid: 109) argues that the focus on violence in the conduct of war as part of political struggle that prevails in the scholarship of war and peace, has occluded the existence of other forces and processes- and crucially of a variety of agendas- that shape war time social experience and its legacy for rebuilding peaceful societies. War reshapes existing institutions, brings to the fore new actors, creates new opportunities structures and alters incentives. Constructing social identities does not necessarily lead to violence. Avoiding violence when it happens and reorganising social relations is a pragmatic response both at the individual and community level and testifies to local agency (Anderson and Wallace 2013; Lubkemann ibid). Contrastingly, partaking in armed violence can sometimes be as much an expression of moral outrage at violence perpetrated against others as it is driven by ideology, personal harm, material deprivations, marginalization and alike (Wood ibid: 548).

Elisabeth Wood expands on the work of Lubkemann who focuses on war-time migration by broadening the analytical perspective to examine a range of context-specific social processes, which can have lasting effect on social relations in the aftermath of war. Those social processes are: political mobilization, military socialization, the polarization of social identities, the militarization of local authority, transformation of gender roles, and the fragmentation of the local political economy (ibid: 540). Wood posits that some of those processes may predate armed conflict- hence their root

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[4] A focus on political projects through armed violence may potentially account for a puzzling lack of interest in contemporary Sandzak by the scholars of the Western Balkans.

causes are not necessarily tied up to war- but that war changes them radically, and alters their consequences sometimes with irreversible effects (ibid: 540). This is an important point in two respects. It highlights the interlinkages between peace and war while underlining the importance of understanding those processes within a broader political, economic, and social-cultural dynamics. The broader national and transnational dynamics filtered by local circumstances shape social actors, structures, norms, and practices at the local level that give expression to the observed social processes and their effects (Trimikliniotis ibid; Wood 2008). Wood studies the effects of the social processes of war through the transformation of social networks (actors, relations, incentives). Where social bonds are preserved and/or solidified and new constructive relationships forged, this benefits societal recovery. Alternatively, when society becomes ruptured and new actors and networks that benefit from persistent conflict gain prominence, the effect is likely to be destabilizing.

Novi Pazar at the cross roads amid regional turbulence and state repression in the 1990s

Novi Pazar is the largest urban settlement in Sandzak, an area to the south west of Serbia, which, until the country's split with Montenegro in 2006, spread across the territory of another five municipalities[5] which have since been under Montenegro's jurisdiction. It is an informal political, economic and cultural centre with a population of around 137,000 inhabitants of which 33% are under 25. Its Serb and Bosniak inhabitants speak a common dialect of Serbian language and there are no visible differences in their physical features. It is also one of the poorest cities with a rate of unemployment more than double Serbia's average. In 2013 under Serbia's regional development programme it was characterised as 'devastated area', and as 'actively impoverished area' according to the World Bank.

Novi Pazar was established by the Ottomans in the fifteen century and was the second largest city after Sarajevo- the present capital of Bosnia- Herzegovina and a point of gravity in the redefinition of contemporary identity among Novi Pazar's Bosniaks. During socialist times in former Yugoslavia, Novi Pazar underwent a process of modernisation through a state-coordinated industrialisation policy. This led to an economic revival in the 1970s, based on a diversified industry dominated by labour-intensive textiles and leather processing which benefited disproportionately female labour force. In retrospect, those were the golden days in the recent history of the city and its local economy, whose dynamism attracted an influx of workers - low skilled and educated alike - from various parts of Serbia, alongside significant rural-urban migration (Lyon 2008).

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[5] Serbian Sandzak consists of six municipalities: Novi Pazar, Tutin, Sjenica, Nova Varos, Priboj and Priejepolje.

In the early 1990s while the rest of Yugoslavia was in an economic freefall, Novi Pazar thrived economically, taking advantage of its border geography to develop unregulated and to a significant degree illicit economy which expanded as formal economy contracted. The local entrepreneurs' links with the Sandzak diaspora in Turkey were instrumental in facilitating trade and keeping the commerce going even as the wars of former Yugoslavia's dissolution were unleashed. From 1992 onwards, when the war in Bosnia- Herzegovina began, the political and security context changed which would ultimately bring to an end the economic boom and change economic fortunes of Novi Pazar's citizens.

Under Milosevic, Serbia's regime took increasingly hostile attitude towards Islam and Muslims, including those living within its own borders in the Muslim-majority Sandzak (Biserko 2010; ICG 2005; Morrison and Robertson 2013). It implemented a systematic policy of repression and fear in Sandzak. This was in response to the Novi Pazar-based political initiative to pursue an agenda of self-determination which was linked to the broader Muslim (Bosniak) 'question'[6] arising from the disintegration of former Yugoslavia, and in particular developments in Bosnia- Herzegovina (Morrison and Roberts ibid; ICG 2005). Novi Pazar's physical proximity to the Bosnian border exposed the city to the Serbian regime's campaign of terror and intimidation. The villages and towns in Novi Pazar's hinterland were systematically attacked, ethnically cleansed of their non-Serb populations, and subjected to murder, and destruction and looting of homes on a massive scale. Acute violence in Novi Pazar was intermittent, with the longest episode in 1993 when Serbian forces staged a three-and-a-half month siege. Although armed violence experienced by the city itself was limited, Serbian regime's conduct in a broader region- especially in Bosnia- Herzegovina, gave it a definitive meaning that local patterns of peaceful co-existence were under threat against looming risk of war. And yet, during the siege of Novi Pazar by Serbian armed forces, local businessmen from different ethnic backgrounds organized and negotiated with the commanding officers to prevent the onslaught on the city that would have decimated their businesses and endangered their livelihoods. Local residents too, in a similar show of inter-ethnic solidarity, mobilized to assist Serbian military personnel by furnishing their every request[i] in exchange for sparing the city from military attacks.

But the national and transnational political dynamic pulled in the opposite direction. By the end of 1995 when the war in Bosnia- Herzegovina ended, the political dynamics in Serbia's Sandzak were firmly bound up in a pursuit of some form of autonomy with its concrete formulation changing according to the ebbs and flows of deeply divided Bosniak political corpus. The monopoly of power

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[6] In 1992, a local branch of Bosnia-Herzegovina's main Bosniak political party, Democratic Action (SDA), was established in Novi Pazar under the leadership of Sulejman Ugljanin, a Sarajevo educated dentist. To this day, SDA remains one of the main political forces in Novi Pazar.

among the Bosniaks in Novi Pazar that the Party of Democratic Action (SDA) led by Sulejman Ugljanin enjoyed in the early 1990s, was challenged by the Sandzak Democratic Party (SDP) of his former colleague and friend Rasim Ljajic, and over time increasingly by another former SDA member Muharem Zukorlic, the Sandzak's mufti. Those three leaders and their parties emerged as key political interlocutors to the successive Serbia governments after the overthrow of Milosevic in 2000, as they- arguably under international pressure- took to formulate a national minority protection framework that would dampen Bosniaks' demands and ally any prospect of autonomy for Sandzak.

Political mobilisation

Political mobilisation among the Bosniaks in Sandzak began during the final years of former Yugoslavia when the SDA of Sandzak, acting with the approval of Alija Izetbegovic the founder of Bosnian SDA, organised a referendum on Sandzak's autonomy in 1990. The move was prompted by a realisation that a disintegration of Yugoslavia along the former republics' boundaries was inevitable ushering a process of nation state building. This created an incentive for the Bosniak political parties to join forces as a way of increasing their leverage in a battle for territorial domination over Bosnia-Herzegovina waged by Serbia and Croatia. Thus Bosniak political mobilisation at this stage took place foremost in the context of a larger issue concerning Bosnian statehood, and the position of Bosniaks as the largest ethnic group (Zdravkovski 2014). As the war in Bosnia- Herzegovina raged on and evidence of involvement by the Milosevic regime accumulated, this worked to tie the Sandzak's Bosniaks' political trajectory closer to developments in and around Bosnia- Herzegovina's conflict. Towards the end of Bosnian war, with support of Bosnian SDA, the SDA Sandzak adopted in 1993 a Memorandum on the Establishment of a Special Status for the Sandzak, which provoked strong reaction by Serbian regime and forced the SDA leader Sulejman Ugljanin to flee the country temporarily (ibid). The adoption of a memorandum was a watershed moment in charting a trajectory of Sandzak's transition around the minority protection agenda with far reaching repercussions for the political, economic and social development and the transformation of local social networks in Novi Pazar.

But political mobilisation was not just a reaction to violence against the ethnic kin, but also to Serbian regime's repression at home. In 1991-1995 the regime engaged in active suppression of the Bosniak political movement. According to some accounts, 17,000 Bosniaks were interrogated during that period, accused of plotting to set up a separate state and possessing arms. This 'informative investigation' often included physical torture and beatings. According to James Lyon, 1990s were an era of terror, marked by ethnic cleansing, human rights abuses and discrimination. Report by the

Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Sandzak claims that by the end of 1996 police searched 1,082 homes for guns, took 446 persons into custody, and 422 were physically mistreated. In an ICG account (2005:13), for Bosniaks the message of the 1990s was that, owing to "state-sanctioned crimes and official legalized discrimination," they were now "second-class citizens, who no longer enjoyed the protection of the state; an unwanted and harmful foreign organism whose life and property had no value before the law."

The arrival of new political parties on the Sandzak's Bosnian political scene, besides the SDA, has worked to further entrench the political agenda focused on the protection of Bosniaks, now defined as minority Serbian citizens whose mother country was Bosnia-Herzegovina and who spoke Bosnian language. The issue of language and right to education has been one of the key battle grounds between the government in Belgrade and the Bosniak National Council- a body set up to promote the minority protection agenda dominated by the SDA. The entry onto a political scene of mufti Muharem Zukorlic, a young entrepreneurial cleric, who rallied around cultural and educational agenda for the Bosniaks, provided a unique impetus to political mobilisation. The vitriolic anti-Serb rhetoric by the two majority Bosniak political parties (the SDA and the SDP), combined with their unprincipled collaboration with successive Serbian governments, have strengthened the religious pull and Zukorlic's standing, and eventually secured him a seat in Serbia's government. Thus three strong networks around those local strong men emerged to capture local politics and economy, and divide local Bosniak community. Not having access to one of those networks- colloquially called 'Suljo's', 'Rasim's' and 'Mufti's'[7]- became a constraint in going about daily lives for ordinary citizens, and especially for running business or getting a job in the local public sector. The relations among the three leaders and their supporters have been for most part since the mid 1990s antagonistic and at times openly violent, including a murder of an SDA member during election rally in Novi Pazar in 2006.

Besides influence of Bosnia- Herzegovina's politicians and religious community, Belgrade's politics of divide and rule has been an important factor in the relationships among the Sandzak's Bosniak leaders and in shaping their political agendas. Strong antagonism of the late 1990s and early 2000s has been more recently supplanted by episodes of more amicable relationships depending on those parties' electoral fortunes and access to Belgrade government. While pragmatically adjusting political agendas and rhetoric when participating in the government, any risk to political power triggers a return to hard- line stance regarding the minority protection agenda. For example, the SDA shifted its political agenda to political autonomy whenever it was in opposition- but when in

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[7] Interview, identity protected.

government it reverted to the cultural autonomy and minority protection issues. Mufti Zukorlic has also changed colours over time as a religious and political leader, associated with different parts of Serbia's political establishment as well as the Bosniak one-- from having a moderate view of Muslim protection and emancipation during Zoran Djindic's term in office, to becoming increasingly extreme in his condemnation of Serbian government and its handling of the Bosniak's question, to yet again adapting his political view now that he is a part of Vucic's government. Bosniaks' gathering demands for more autonomy have contributed to a parallel process of political mobilisation among Novi Pazar's Serbs as has the national political agenda towards Sandzak's Bosniaks. Political mobilisation among Novi Pazar Serbs has been strongly shaped by a sense of their own insecurity (Damad 2015) which has contributed to popularity of nationalist parties among Serb minority in Sandzak, now uncertain of its own future as a minority in this part of Serbia.

Transformation and polarisation of identity

The corollary of bilateral political mobilisation in Novi Pazar and religious resurgence in Serbia and Sandzak has been the transformation and polarisation of social identities both along ethnic and religious lines which has sparked different forms of social segregation in the city. During the turbulent events leading to the break up of former Yugoslavia, a strong pro-Yugoslav sentiment among Novi Pazar citizens, solidified during the city's economic upswing in the 1970s, was retained. Unity and solidarity were openly embraced and publicly demonstrated as the demise of Yugoslavia became inevitable, bringing to surface the questions over Sandzak's status in independent Serbia. While pragmatism was decisive in the joint efforts of the local community to protect the city from the Serbian military attacks described earlier in this paper, opting out of war owed also to a history of strong social relations forged at the workplace, in the neighbourhood and through participation in the city's lively art and sports life.

Political mobilisation has engendered new political loyalties reflected in voting partners where Bosniaks in Novi Pazar overwhelmingly vote for the Bosniak ethnic parties and the parties close to mufti Zukorlic in contrast to their neighbours who support the Serbian political block. But beyond politics, there are strong economic and cultural undercurrents that reinforce the divisions imparted through the interplay of national and local level politics. Party loyalty secures jobs and determines access to opportunities in a depressed economic environment of Novi Pazar. Historically, the Serbs have been disproportionately represented in the local public administration and government institutions such as the courts, police force, health and education services. The main parties' revisiting of the ethnic make-up of official institutions, the police in particular, under the pretext of reversing discrimination against the ethnic majority group, has palpable economic repercussions

from the reallocation of scarce employment this entails. It feeds resentment towards and the mistrust of the local government among Novi Pazar's Serb population and reinforces the grip of ethno- national parties over local society.

The right to education of Bosniak students in Bosnian language, and an upsurge in the provision of religious education reinscribe identities and sharpen the division between the two main communities in Novi Pazar in a number of ways. The biggest mosque in the old city hosts a religious school and a kindergarten and operates pupils' dress code which is in stark contrast to that of the nearby secular school cluster located in the school precinct. While it is impossible to establish a correlation, the fact that after school, the children no longer hang around with their schoolmates, but instead hurry to their homes, is a telling sign of an unyielding border that is separating the Bosniak and Serb communities.[8] Mufti Zukorlic is a founder and a president of the International University in Novi Pazar, and numbers of trained clerics have swelled over time so that they make a sizable group among job seekers registered with the local employment agency.

A shift in cultural orientation towards promoting religious content reinforces identity polarisation. The main sporting events that once were the pride of the city, have been renamed to mark Muslim religious holidays, as have music and art events for which the city was regionally acclaimed. The largest bookshop at the main square offers a large display of books with the religious (Islamic) content but also on the themes of jihad which works as a symbolic dividing line. Such seemingly mundane practice has a distancing effect in the relationships between the main ethnic communities in Novi Pazar, as well as within each of those groups, namely between the supporters of the city's secular tradition and those who embrace a newly found religious zeal.

The arrival of Wahabis as a new type of actor, and their concentration in parts of the city, notably areas of the old town, has created virtual no go zones and act as a visible symbol of identity transformation (Islamic dress code for men and women; men wearing distinctive beards; enforcement of alcohol ban in parts of the city). Wahabis also act as providers of public services, such a street cleaning in parts of the city where they live, or various maintenance services for poor families, which serves to introduce another line of differentiation among the segments of the local population faced with poverty and a lack of state- provided social welfare. Their presence in Novi Pazar has however been viewed primarily as a political issue and has affected local- national level political dynamics. The Serbian regime has used their presence as an additional leverage with the

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[8] Interview: Damad 2015

Bosniak parties on the grounds that Wahabi followers are part of global terrorist movement and as such represent a threat to Serbia's security.

Historically, Novi Pazar has had several fairly ethnically homogenised neighbourhoods, such as mostly Serb inhabited Vasar mahala, and Rasadnik where the majority of residents were Bosniaks. A large section of the population lived in the socialist-era housing blocks which worked as microcosm of former Yugoslavia's multicultural tradition. During the 1990s, many non-Muslim residents either left the city or relocated to 'ethnic neighbourhoods'; very few Serbs still live in the city centre.[9] This process has been amplified through large scale migration sparked by the events of the 1990s. An outpouring of the local population - Bosniak along the traditional migratory routes towards Bosnia-Herzegovina and Turkey, and Serb towards Belgrade - was counteracted by inflows of mostly Muslim faith refugees from Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia and Kosovo and an influx of the Muslim populations from neighbouring villages seeking refuge in the city. The city received some 10,000 people over the ten years between 1992 and 2002, including some 6,000 refugees who settled mostly in illegally built housing at the city's fringes without proper infrastructure and access to the city. This is driving a process of gradual 'ghettoisation' of the city, as more ethnically homogenous neighbourhoods are created dissolving all neighbourhood networks, and friendships. According to a head of one of the most prominent local NGOs Damad, Novi Pazar operates as two parallel universes: Serb and Bosniak one with both communities increasingly socialising only among themselves.

Norms change

A combination of demographic change, religious radicalisation and weak governance has been a potent mix in reshaping normative frameworks for handling urban conditions where identity has come to define access to public services (security, justice, healthcare etc) and to opportunities for jobs and social promotion.

A large influx of the rural population and the change in social status through newly acquired wealth by actors able to take advantage of fluid governance context of transition, have had both visible and indirect impact on the cultural and urban fabric of the city. The influx of rural population is for example linked to a rise in illegal dwelling and the construction of houses and business premises built without legal permissions. Illegal construction is not exclusive to refugees and rural immigrants in the city's purlieus. Some of the most elegant homes of Novi Pazar's new elites, and some business premises in the city's prime locations, have been built without due urban planning process.[ii] In some cases the buildings have no water pipelines or electricity connections, which results in 'electricity

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[9] Interview, identity protected

theft'. In other cases, apartment buildings with no car parking facilities have been inserted into city-center neighborhoods, contributing to a sense of disorderly urbanization and the city's decay. Such practices have often gone unsanctioned due to weak local governance and corruption, and the ability of those involved to connect to the politico-commercial networks that influence the running of the local institutions[10]. The proliferation of Illegal and unregulated construction building is symptomatic of weak rule of law which is a consequence of local government malfunction. Local governance has been permeated by clientelist relations and allegations of corruption and crime surrounding government officials. But its malfunction is also due to local government focusing on different priorities depending on the political currents and the relations between the Bosniak political establishment and that in Belgrade, as well as being affected by its weak financial position. As one of my informants articulated it, highlighting the state-society distance characteristic of Novi Pazar's transition: the "elite agenda is about autonomy, motorway, the airport – in contrast, citizens' concerns are water, electricity and sewage."[11]

The ways in which social norms have been changing have had other indirect manifestations. New arrivals to the city life often embrace different worldviews and in the words of one of my correspondents, different more aggressive forms of communication and interacting. They are usually adept in navigating local informal channels and rely on their own social networks to carve out their own place in the malleable social environments transformed by the toxic mix of ethno-national politics, religious radicalisation and shrewd ways of wealth accumulation. One of my respondents, commenting on the local Wahabi followers, described them as aggressive and operating in 'tribe-like' fashion. They are also among the staunchest advocates of abandoning long standing cultural traditions such as observance of secular pubic holidays in favour of the religious one. According to the study by NGO Damad (2015), a choice of which holidays to celebrate, and whether or not to celebrate New Year's Eve, can all be instigators of great controversy or direct opposition. Friday is the day of Muslim prayer in Novi Pazar and businesses close at mid day. During Muslim religious holidays many of the city's Serb inhabitants prefer not to visit public places which turn into sites of practicing typical religious rituals. A pressure to abandon the city's secular tradition is manifested also in the restriction to a freedom of expression and facilitated by the control of media. in January 2015, a play entitled 'Beton mahala',[12] being staged by a cast from the local youth theatre, was closed down after only two nights, allegedly because the local political establishment did not like the content which dealt with the city's contemporary issues, including inter-ethnic

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[10] Interview, identity protected.
[11] Interview with Zibija Sarenkapic.
[12] Mahala is the Turkish word to describe a suburb harbouring a culture of gossip; beton is the local name for concrete.

relations.[13] Political control of local media (as well as national media) is pronounced - mufti Zukorlic, for example, at one point owned two TV stations, a newspaper, and a weekly magazine, and a number of other outlets are controlled by the SDP leadership which reinforces the effect that changing norms have on local society.

But this account of the changing social norms in Novi Pazar and their impact on social relations does not mean there has been resistance by the local community. The reaction has come not only in the form of civil society activism. While doing my research I encountered an interesting display of how people try to fight this change in normative frameworks that govern the city's urban conditions by falling back on familiar practices rooted in local tradition, values and codes of conduct for interacting within community. Underneath a jewellery shop in the old town the owner has put up a sign in which he names a couple who failed to pay him back a sum of money and whom by this notice, he bans from entering his shop. The meaning of this act is that the owner, in all likelyhood disillusioned with the justice system, in fact falls back on the traditional social norms in exposing the breach of trust that served as a basis of his conduct with the named couple.

Fragmentation of local political economy

Novi Pazar has seen a change in local economic fortunes over the last 25 years as consequence of profound deindustrialization and destruction of productive capacity on a massive scale. The process of economic decay which started in the late 1980s as Yugoslavia was engulfed in economic crisis was interrupted during the early 1990s. While Serbia was under economic sanctions because of its involvement in the wars in Bosnia and Croatia, local economy in Novi Pazar thrived. In a fluid legal context created by the absence of an effective state presence at the local level, much of the illegal business relied on trust and existing social bonds nurtured within the confines of this small city, which often criss-crossed ethnic demarcation lines, as well as local and transnational space.[14] The city hosted a bustling foreign exchange market fuelled by illegal trade, including in weapons, drugs and people, conducted by organised crime groups, which flourished under the fiat of war economy in this border region (ref Morrison and Roberts, ibid 162). This kind of economic accumulation during the wars in its neighbourhood has had major consequences in terms of social stratification, and the city's normative and moral order. Amid this hubbub of informal commerce, the socialist-era factories - once the pride of the city and its economic lifeline - lay idle and neglected, their former

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[13] Source: Interview; The play is critical of the local politics of division in Novi Pazar.
[14] Source: Interview, ibid; Interview with Bisera Seceragic

skill base repurposed for the needs of booming (privately owned) informal economy. The textile and shoe industry went through a boom cycle, and productive capacity expanded massively. Production of counterfeit goods benefited from weak regulation in this border area and the involvement of organised crime (Kostovicova 2003). While the illegal commerce benefited the Bosniaks and the Serbs alike many of whom had lost jobs in state owned companies, it advantaged the Bosniaks disproportionately creating new social divisions. The Bosniaks were the majority owners of those workshops, while the Serbian population worked in the state sector with low and irregular salaries.

The informal market in textiles and footwear was brought to end after new borders were inserted (following Kosovo's independence and the split between Serbia and Montenegro) and Serbian state began to enforce its regulatory role. The economic shock to the local economy was magnified by failed privatisation of state owned companies, which often was clouded in corruption. Local economy has been transformed by the informal and criminal networks linked to the political establishment which has undermined opportunities for the development of formal economy and for job creation. Sustaining business or starting it is difficult without affiliation to the main political parties and recourse to their networks. In this environment, as one of respondents noted, a 'wrong kind' of entrepreneurs has profited from the new opportunities for commerce that have opened up during transition in Sandzak and its environment. This kind of entrepreneur shuns legal means of trading and instead relies on informal channels, which often require support from the top of political establishment (Cvejic 2016).

Novi Pazar's transport sector was able to exploit the unregulated border between Serbia and Kosovo, and to benefit from a buoyant informal trade in that particular area (Bjelic 2012). According to some accounts, it was during this time that Novi Pazar became one of the important drug smuggling points on the route from Turkey to Western Europe and a wealth thus generated was subsequently used in corrupt business activities which dominate the city's toxic political economy (Morisson and Roberts, ibid). Economic reforms aimed at facilitating development of market economy, particularly trade liberalisation, have adversely affected local businesses in textile and footwear industry already suffering from unfair competition from illegal commerce. Those commercial actors interested in investing in legally regulated production which largely comprise of small and medium size companies are routinely subject to discrimination in access to business funding, securing urban locations, or receipt of other types of services that might improve their commercial prospects (Evropski pokret 2009).[15] Furthermore, they are subject to excessive

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[15] Source: Interview

government inspections used inter alia for bribe extortion[16]. Women have been major victims of the decay of the local economy and its fragmentation, through job losses; they represent some 70% of total registered unemployed in Novi Pazar.

Fragmentation of political economy is closely related to the local- national political dynamics, while creating new opportunities for wealth creation. This is perhaps best illustrated by the actions of mufti Zukorlic under whose leadership Islamic community has become increasingly tied to economic and political interests. The support he has received from parts of the political establishment in Belgrade was an important enabling factor in facilitating the acquisition of substantial asset portfolio by him personally and the Islamic community he represents. But the spectre of actors able to pursue profit seeking agenda by taking the advantage of such opportunities extends across Novi Pazar's political and economic establishment and their collaborators operating in the informal sphere.

Conclusion

The motivation for this paper was the puzzle presented by Novi Pazar's war-time experience; it demonstrated the ability to prosper economically and to preserve inter-ethnic peace amidst violent regional conflict fuelled by exclusive identity politics. Since then, much has changed. While inter-ethnic conflict is unlikely, multiple lines divide its resident. Most are living insecure lives, dependent on remittances from families living abroad. The Bosniak majority's aggressive reconstruction of an ethnic identity in response to the Serbian regime's intrusive nation-state building priviledging Serb-majority, has set in motion processes that are challenging the city's internal community cohesion and transforming social relations. Many of the institutions, such as work environment and socialist-era work related housing, that traditionally facilitated mixing of the people and enabled a common experience of living together and managing differences, no longer exist. This gradual erosion in social networks is being exacerbated by the overall socio-economic conditions shaped by poverty and underdevelopment, and poor public services provision linked to the absence of state- level policies.

At the core of this transformation are interconnected dynamics of political mobilisation along ethnic lines, transformation of identity, retraditionalization marked by religious radicalisation and fragmented local political economy captured by various alliances of political, religious, business and criminal actors. The victim is the city's collective interest, which has given way to various actors' power-driven private and political agendas. In this context, civic minded individuals have faced the choice between siding with those actors or withdrawing from the public sphere and leaving the city vulnerable to the disintegrative effect of this political economy. Novi Pazar citizens believe that if

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[16] Source: Interview; European movement:

only the economy could turn around, it would be possible to reverse some of the damage caused by intertwining dynamics of those social processes. But for the time being as one of my informants suggests, 'all political energy is channelled towards institutionalisation of differences rather than nurturing legacy of living together'. Economic decay, weak governance, hostile political economy characterised by inequality and privilege are legacies of the social processes that characterise transition in Novi Pazar. These characteristics of Novi Pazar's social condition in their main traits are not dissimilar to experiences of many countries that had gone through the trauma of intra state war and speak to the dialectics of war and peace. Traditional tolerance and good neighbourly relations seem to have given way to 'formalising intercultural dialogue' in the framework of minority protection agenda. The minority agenda has earned its place as the framework of political action between Bosniak political establishment and Serbian state and with it comes myriad ways in which tensions within and among local communities in Novi Pazar and broader region of Serbia's Sandzak are rekindled.

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