

**The Local Workforce of International Intervention in the Yugoslav Successor States: 'Precariat' or 'Projectariat'? Towards an Agenda for Future Research**  
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*The international organizations involved in peacebuilding, democratization and peacekeeping in the Yugoslav successor states have employed thousands of locally-recruited workers as project officers, language intermediaries and support staff. This makes them a distinct employment sector within these post-socialist and in several cases post-conflict economies, most significantly in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Kosovo. This paper evaluates arguments in favour of regarding this workforce firstly as a group of workers suffering precarity and secondly as a privileged social elite. While there are good grounds for recognising them as a distinctive social group, this distinctiveness has not led to a widely-expressed social identity based on the commonalities of their employment.*

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Since 1991, the nature of the break-up of Yugoslavia, the course of the conflict and the structure of the international interventions in the Yugoslav successor states during and after the wars have brought a number of new social groups into being. The public sphere in all these states contains many organizations claiming to represent the collective social identities of those who experienced the conflict in a certain way: every political entity thus has its associations of veterans, of wounded veterans, of bereaved mothers, of ex-prisoners, of displaced persons, and of other groups whose roles in the war have been acknowledged in established public narratives.<sup>1</sup> Yet when it comes to those who worked for the international armed forces and civilian organizations that have been hiring local workforces since interventions on the ground began in 1992, similar associations do not seem to exist. These workers are also relatively invisible in other ways. The locally-recruited language intermediaries and project workers working in the 'international

organization' sector in Yugoslav successor states do not appear as tropes in popular representations of the conflict to the extent that veterans, refugees and other such figures have been depicted in post-Yugoslav fiction and cinema, and where they do appear they are supporting characters rather than protagonists whose transformation is the focus of the narrative. There is not an institutionalized role for the local employees of international organizations in public debate or commemoration, nor is there a sense that this is demanded. It can be suggested, nonetheless, that the local workforce of international intervention in the Yugoslav successor states represents another social group to have emerged from the break-up of Yugoslavia, perhaps even a novel social class. Those who worked for international organizations during periods of large-scale violence and/or the implementation phases of a peace agreement were, like other groups with more recognition in post-Yugoslav societies, personally present in and affected by their presence in, a zone of conflict, and their experiences were structured by their social role.

Scholarship in sociology and political economy frequently distinguishes between the idea of a class as a set of people sharing the same socio-economic conditions and a class that has consciousness of itself as a class, with the ability to mobilize and take collective action: the difference between what Marx referred to as a 'class in itself' and a 'class for itself'.<sup>2</sup> In Marxist terms this made consciousness-raising activism imperative in order to transform a class from the former to the latter. The teleology of this projection is, however, questionable.<sup>3</sup> For understanding the significance of class in society, it may be more productive – and more compatible with anti-essentialist approaches to identity in general – to consider it as a social process rather than a relatively fixed group.<sup>4</sup> It is nevertheless useful to ask not only whether those working in a particular employment sector occupy a distinctive position in society but also -- given the significance of international organizations as socio-economic actors in the Yugoslav successor states -- how aware they are of this. In the case of the local workforce of international intervention, the nature of their employment has created an interplay of precarization and privilege which is distinctive within the postsocialist space – characterizations I will refer to using the terms 'precariat', a label popularized by Guy Standing to refer to what he considers as a contemporary precarious proletariat,<sup>5</sup> and 'projectariat', an inversion of that label which I apply to the idea of local international-organization workers as a privileged elite. Yet this distinctive social position has not given rise to a widely-

expressed and collective social identity based on current or former membership of this workforce. The reasons for this must be sought both in the conditions of the work itself and in the broader context of social disengagement in the post-Yugoslav region.

This inquiry into the local workforce of international intervention follows on from a research project (Languages at War) with which I was involved between 2008 and 2011, which studied the significance of languages in peace operations in Bosnia-Herzegovina (BiH) during the Bosnian conflict and the years immediately after the Dayton Peace Agreement.<sup>6</sup> Within this project, I opened up a research agenda on the working identities and experiences of people who had been employed as language intermediaries by one or more elements of the UN and NATO forces that had been stationed in BiH (31 of my interviewees fitted this profile; the remainder were mostly British military personnel, plus a smaller number of British civilian linguists and 2 former Danish soldiers).<sup>7</sup> This sought to identify how language intermediaries and the military personnel they worked with or for had conceived of local workers' roles, the educational trajectories and 'language learning narratives' of people who had become locally-employed language intermediaries, the shared experiences of a cohort of field interpreters in Republika Srpska, and the ways in which language intermediaries had made sense of the new political economy that post-socialism, armed conflict and international intervention had produced.<sup>8</sup> Interpreters, however, formed only one part of a larger locally-recruited workforce of international intervention which included project officers, cleaners, kitchen workers, IT specialists, administrators and other kinds of roles. Though these jobs differed in responsibilities and pay, it was not unusual for one individual to have worked in several different capacities for international organizations; analytically, this suggests one can conceive of an international-organizations 'sector' as a whole rather than several sectors made up of independent occupational groups.

The economic impact of international intervention missions on localities is acknowledged in the concept of a 'peacekeeping economy'.<sup>9</sup> This brings an extra level of complexity beyond the dislocations caused by the situation that is being intervened in, complicated further by the economic links between what the intervention does and what local actors in a conflict do.<sup>10</sup> International organizations are nonetheless a very significant economic presence in these contexts, and bring with them new forms of inequality between local people and international staff.<sup>11</sup> The

'peacekeeping economy' is defined in more detail by Kathleen M. Jennings, in her research on Haiti and Liberia, as 'the economic multiplier effect of peacekeeping operations via direct or indirect resource flows into the local economy, as well as to the construction or reconstruction of housing stock and other infrastructure, including "entertainment infrastructure"'.<sup>12</sup> Its direct resource flows in the form of employment comprise many different kinds of work, at varying levels of formality: 'the skilled, semi-skilled or unskilled formal sector jobs available to local staff in UN or NGO offices', informal work for international staff, and sex work.<sup>13</sup> Jennings's own research, however, focuses on sex work rather than other sectors of the peacekeeping economy. The experiences of local workforces directly employed by intervention agencies are still remarkably under-researched.

Conceiving of a 'peacekeeping economy' helps to identify the distinctiveness of this category of employment in a local context and also to call attention to the fact that, wherever interventions take place, this type of employment is likely to exist. This paper attempts to position the local workforce of international intervention in the Yugoslav successor states within wider post-Yugoslav society by attempting to locate them within the inequalities that have been created and exacerbated in these societies during and after the break-up of Yugoslavia, and to account for the weakness of the collective occupational identity that at first sight ought to exist.

### **Precarity and labour insecurity**

The characteristic experience of life in post-war BiH, Stef Jansen argues in his research into displacement and return, has been 'precariousness' and the desire to overcome it.<sup>14</sup> This precariousness should be thought of as a result not only of factors directly attributable to the war and the methods with which it was fought, but also of even deeper structural changes associated with the collapse of Yugoslav socialism and the establishment of a capitalist economy based on clientelistic privatization and neoliberal economic reforms.<sup>15</sup> Although certain factors that have helped to shape BiH's economic trajectory are specific to that country, other factors are common to all the Yugoslav successor states whether or not they were sites of protracted armed conflict. The local workforce of international intervention in the Yugoslav successor states therefore needs to be situated within this context.

Biographical interviews with former interpreters (one component of this workforce) brings to the foreground individual experiences of the impact of this precariousness on personal and family lives, but also commonly shared experiences that help to situate this workforce as a group.<sup>16</sup> Individual narratives told of desires to provide for retired, unemployed or unpaid parents; to repair property that had been damaged during or just after the war; to support oneself and one's family in a town to which they had been displaced; to manage medical conditions; to find ways of working that allowed one, as a parent, to provide a more secure existence for one's children and still to be able to spend time at home with them; to force an international employer to take responsibility for harm caused to a worker in the course of their work; to put together the resources necessary to work or study abroad and eventually to acquire permanent residence in another more economically stable country. Each narrative differed in its turning points and emphases, although the economic circumstances of BiH had to be taken into account in the various decisions made. This observation could apply to the narrative of almost anyone in BiH. Other factors, however, were much more distinctive to the particular type of employer and contract that they had had. These included salaries that were two to three times the average local wage and did not require a university degree or many years' experience, and at least some possibility of being hired without the *veze* (personal connections) required for a job in local administration,<sup>17</sup> but also distinct forms of precariousness that existed because of the work: the minimal or non-existent provision of sickness and maternity leave under many (but not all) contracts; the possibility of contract termination with a month's notice or less; the risk of injury that was experienced by interpreters who travelled on assignments with military units rather than working full-time at a headquarters. These meant that language intermediaries for foreign military forces in BiH did experience a specific form of precarity.

The concept of 'precarity' has emerged from French sociology and from labour movements in southern Europe to stand for an endemic economic uncertainty to which an ever greater number of people in the West are structurally exposed.<sup>18</sup> Its usefulness is in pointing to the effect of these conditions on the individual sense of self: it connotes not only the instability of living conditions in the short term but also an insecurity of the life course, and is associated with the absence of an ongoing work-based identity or a sense of progress that many of those now affected by precarity will have grown up expecting to experience.<sup>19</sup> The term 'precariat' is used

by Guy Standing to signal that those who are experiencing this dislocation, and particularly who are making the adjustment to -- or attempting to resist -- this shift in expectations for the life course, ought to be considered as a distinctive social group that risks becoming a site of social instability within the contemporary Western class structure if it is not already.<sup>20</sup>

The usefulness of this concept is not so much in Standing's reading of what drives social conflict, or in his terms of reference, which are restricted to the global North. Critiques of the language of precarity and precariousness have made their points well that 'precariousness has always been a seemingly natural condition' for workers and urban poor in the global South,<sup>21</sup> and indeed for 'societal others' such as undocumented migrants who are excluded from the welfare states of the global North.<sup>22</sup> Where the idea of the 'precariat' does still have some value is in the invitation to conceptualize a social group defined by the experience of a precarity they have previously not been used to. Precarity is not an entirely *common* experience, since systems of privilege based on gender, racism, cissexism, ableism, ethno-national identity and migration status (a non-exhaustive list) intersect with it in ways that Standing's own analysis does necessarily account for. What may be in some way shared, however, is a sense of some disruption to the life course and an inability to predict its future direction, rather than the precise state in which these processes leave each individual. The question when it comes to the local workforce of international intervention in the Yugoslav successor states would then be whether they can or should be conceived of as a group defined by the experience of precarization.

Interpreters employed by foreign armed forces were certainly subject to all seven forms of labour insecurity identified by Standing: labour market security (adequate opportunities to earn income); employment security ("hiring and firing" protections); job security (ability to continue in the same line of work with growth in income and status); work security (health and safety protection at work); skill reproduction security (opportunity to be trained and to use the new skills); income security (assured adequate and stable income, including social security); and representation security (collective representation of workers).<sup>23</sup> The same can be said to at least some degree for the wider group of local workers employed by international organizations. The clearest form of labour insecurity that this workforce has experienced lies in the short-term, project-based nature of the work (thus relating to

job security). Certain posts were and are linked to specifically funded projects with a fixed end date or with a constant and uncertain search for follow-on funding. Whereas some organizations appear to be present in a country for an indefinite period, others are subject to continued uncertainty about the length of their involvement (e.g. when foreign military forces are present on frequently renewed mandates rather than with a commitment of a knowable period of time), making it difficult to conceive of the jobs they offer as long-term. Depending on the organization, opportunities for structured progress, promotion and growth in skills may also be limited (affecting job security and skill reproduction security). Pathways for locally-employed workers to progress within an organization exist in some organizations but not others: some of those directly employed by the United Nations, for instance, have been able to be integrated into the organization and work on UN projects elsewhere in the world (such as a former medical doctor who became a senior interpreter at the UNPROFOR HQ in Sarajevo and later a UN programme officer in Iraq, eventually joining the Iraq team of the UN's Department of Political Affairs).<sup>24</sup> At the other extreme were posts such as the interpreting contracts offered by individual military forces in BiH (apart from the NATO HQ structure, which did operate a more professionalized language service after 2000).<sup>25</sup> These did tend to offer a graduated pay scale, but its structure was simple (based on length of service and/or a very basically framed language test) and did not contain significant incentives to progress; people working as interpreters could grow in informal seniority and responsibility but rarely had local civilian posts within the same organization that they could move into, though some schemes to civilianize administrative support did exist. The work histories of local staff are characterized by frequent changes of job and discontinuity.

The other forms of labour insecurity also apply. Labour market security (adequate opportunities of any kind to earn income) is regrettably poor in all the Yugoslav successor states, though the extent of this insecurity varies between and indeed within them. Income security (an assured adequate and stable income) cannot be said to be assured for the local employees of international organizations, given the structural instability of project-based working. Representation security, the collective representation of workers, is also absent: international organizations' local employees are not represented by any union or professional association. While there are for instance associations of professional translators in the different successor

states which may include members who have worked for international organizations, they are constituted as associations of those with professional qualifications and experience in translation and are concerned with defending professional quality and rates against amateur competition (which may also include former employees of international organizations).<sup>26</sup> Levels of employment security (protection from unequal recruitment practices and unfair dismissal) and work security (how far employees' health and safety are protected at work) will have varied depending on the contracts offered by each organization and also, in historical perspective, on the period during which a person worked. Under the most precarious military interpreting contracts, interpreters could be dismissed by supervisors at will, and the contracts in any case lasted month to month.<sup>27</sup> The degree of work security or insecurity varied even more drastically depending on organization, location and time. Working in an area directly affected by conflict in a period where fighting was occurring posed the greatest ongoing danger, followed by the shorter-term dangers of working in a locality that was experiencing civil unrest. Posts that required frequent field visits and therefore frequent travel incurred more danger than posts based at a headquarters or an urban office, and risks associated with travel would be further inflected by factors such as whether a route used had been mined or whether an organization's drivers or vehicles were thought to be at high risk of causing accidents. Work security and the financial and health-related consequences of injury were among the most important preoccupations of the field interpreters I interviewed,<sup>28</sup> but this cannot be generalized (at least not in terms of intensity) to the experiences of local employees of international organizations as a whole.

These combinations of working conditions are deserving of research, and differ from the experiences of people employed by local firms or by the domestic public sector in BiH. However, the sector of international organization employment is often remarkably invisible in the literature on the political economy of BiH, which along with Kosovo must be where this sector has the most importance compared to other sectors. Michael Pugh's research on BiH, for instance, characterizes the Bosnian economy usefully in many respects: this is a picture of BiH where the individuals most implicated in the use and ordering of violence during the war are still the greatest economic beneficiaries in the country, and where the state has been systematically diminished as an economic actor 'by privatizing essential services and shifting responsibility for employment and welfare from the state to the individual'.<sup>29</sup>



Its economy is characterized by crony capitalism and privatization, poor growth, high unemployment, dependence on the informal economy, and 'aggressive social engineering' directed towards shrinking the country's public and social space.<sup>30</sup> His article with Boris Divjak on corruption does acknowledge 'aid disbursements and transfers by peacekeepers and foreign personnel (still an estimated 9 per cent of GDP in 2006)' as an important component of the Bosnian economy.<sup>31</sup> The international organizations sector is discussed in the context of growth but not in the context of the success or failure of job creation, where it has clearly had a non-negligible impact for at least a section of Bosnian society.

Does studying this workforce alter the picture of the economy in BiH (and suggest therefore that it may alter it for other Yugoslav successor states as well)? Even if it does not do so at a macro level, at a more local and person-centric levels of analysis this workforce clearly exists. Viewing this workforce through the lens of precarization provides one way of understanding their socio-economic positioning, but does not account for an alternative way to regard them: that compared to other members of their society who have not been in a position to take up this form of employment they are in fact in a privileged position within the post-conflict economy. Stef Jansen makes this observation in his analysis of the political economy of post-Dayton BiH: 'Foreign Intervention Agencies provided many of the best remunerated jobs in the formal economy', despite the short-term nature of the contracts, and were also a source of 'language proficiency, social networks and finances' that facilitated mobility abroad.<sup>32</sup> The following section considers a number of ways in which the local workforce of international organizations might be regarded as privileged. However, even if this workforce ought to be considered a beneficiary of the intervention, it has not collectively benefited from the post-conflict economy in the same way as, for instance, the stratum of elite privatizers. Its privileges within society lie in different sites.

### **A 'projectariat' apart?**

A different approach to understanding the position of local staff members of international organizations in the Yugoslav successor states might be to regard them as a group who by virtue of the skills and experience they had gained while working for international organizations could have had a distinctive advantage in promoting

inter-ethnic reconciliation or taking action that would improve the general quality of life in their country. Gordana Božić, for instance, comments with reference to BiH: 'Those young men and women, often in their teens, working as language assistants for the international organizations were the first to cross to "the other side" during and after the conflict.'<sup>33</sup> Božić argues that these early inter-ethnic crossings of boundaries were largely a pragmatic choice based on economic reasons rather than a performative demonstration of multi-ethnic idealism: 'Getting or protecting a job, and not their "natural" predisposition to ethnic tolerance, was the main force in overcoming or suppressing their fear and distrust felt towards the members of other ethnic groups'.<sup>34</sup>

This is not to say that, in narratives with a longer perspective, workers who had been crossing inter-ethnic boundaries at these times would necessarily narrate their actions as having been solely economically motivated.<sup>35</sup> Three of the former interpreters I interviewed near Banja Luka who had been working for British forces in the first few years after Dayton, for instance, considered that the work had given them insights into alternative ways that political and social relations in BiH could be organized, and implied that their voices and views were marginalized in Republika Srpska society as a whole.<sup>36</sup> Another interpreter from a Federation town who had been employed on an IFOR/SFOR base in Republika Srpska in his late teens narrated an adult life course that had begun with crossing the lines through work, continued by serving as an example for other people in his home town to visit the neighbouring town in the RS, and led to further work towards reconciliation as a project officer in a different international organization.<sup>37</sup> These narrators did attach a significance to the movements of their younger selves in ways that went beyond the economic. The question still remains, however, of how far an orientation towards alternatives to ethnopolitics on the part of local staff would have been developed through the experiences of their work and how far it would have stemmed from existing predispositions as a result of factors such as socio-political engagement, parental attitudes, intergenerational class identifications and a commitment to 'staying normal', all of which could then have led to making this type of work more attractive among the available means of improving the economic situation of oneself and one's family.

Another lens on how the local employees of international organizations might be regarded as set apart from the societies of the Yugoslav successor states appears in

Paul Stubbs's study of the operations of a Croatian humanitarian NGO during the conflicts in Croatia and BiH, where he argues that the Croatian NGO sector was 'a source of global upwards social mobility' for locals who worked in it, bringing them into a 'new globalized professional middle class' who mutually reciprocated funding decisions.<sup>38</sup> This class in Croatia, he suggests, was to at least some extent a continuity of 'those who formed the middle class, and sometimes the elite, in post-1945 Croatia but also those who claim membership, or have the hallmarks, of a previous, Austrian or Austro-Hungarian, middle class'<sup>39</sup> -- suggesting that understanding the processes through which this workforce constitutes itself requires attention to the symbolic practices of identification with 'urban' and 'cosmopolitan' values discussed by Stef Jansen.<sup>40</sup> Adam Fagan, writing on Bosnia-Herzegovina, similarly observed that 'the ownership of this knowledge and expertise [developed by work with and for international organizations] is currently in the hands of a few -- an elite group of civil society organization professionals [...]'.<sup>41</sup> Were local staff then not so much a new class so much as a reproduction of a class that was already identifiable in pre-war Yugoslavia? Access to the pre-requisites for obtaining jobs with international organizations (for instance, the ability to have learned English regardless of what language one had been assigned to learn at school) is likely to have been socially stratified to at least some extent,<sup>42</sup> although to *what* extent for the societies of the various successor states still requires more research. Even if this sector represented only the reproduction of a class, however, it was still a class that was reproducing itself in novel ways that had been brought on by the conditions of postconflict, postsocialist life.

A further dimension of advantage from which local employees of international organizations had the ability to benefit is proposed by James Scott in his discussion of the power available to 'local guide'-type figures (as Scott terms them) in contexts where the power of a state is extending into and radically reshaping social relations. In the French colonization of Vietnam, for instance, Vietnamese French-speakers employed as clerks and language intermediaries enjoyed fluency in the new 'language' of land tenure and the ability to profit personally from this head start in understanding, as well as significant control over how the new system would be represented to the non-French-speaking cultivators and tenants of land.<sup>43</sup> '[A]ll those who had mastered the official linguistic code' were similarly privileged as intermediaries in metropolitan France when the French state strove to make local

practice 'legible' by insisting that all interaction with the state and the law was to take place in standard French.<sup>44</sup> Recent research in Translation Studies makes a similar point, calling for research into the agency of translators to account for their capacity for manipulation and bias and to reflect critically on the comforting myth of the translator as an inter-cultural bridge.<sup>45</sup> This would require looking in more detail at the ways in which local employees of international organizations may have been able to gain from the knowledge acquired through their positions and their power to frame that knowledge in representing it to others – as well as examining the advantages that holding one of these posts may have provided in the informal economy.

The least equivocal researchers in identifying local employees of international organizations as a social group have been Sultan Barakat and Zilha Kapisazović, who refer to them as 'a new Bosnian social class'.<sup>46</sup> At the same time, however, they suggest that the organizations who employed these workers tended to think of them as no more than 'a quasi-group that will disappear as the international presence declines'.<sup>47</sup> This contrasts with the ways that international organizations regard those social groups that have been publicly and institutionally recognized as having been produced as a result of the conflict, such as veterans or refugees: the reintegration of war-affected groups into post-war society is ostensibly among the objectives of an intervention, however poorly implemented or unsuccessful it may turn out to be. No corresponding structural need is however perceived to reintegrate local staff. Barakat and Kapisazović's study in Sarajevo during the early 2000s found that many organizations felt that the most likely long-term strategy for their local staff was likely to be starting a new business; these same potential entrepreneurs, on the other hand, felt that they lacked the knowledge and start-up capital to consider doing so, and were instead likely to seek work with a different kind of employer inside or outside BiH.<sup>48</sup> The international intervention can thus be seen as presenting a paradoxical combination of long-term aspirations and short-term thinking. On the one hand, the organizations' work was supposed to bring about deep structural changes in the country's civil society, economic functionality, and political relations; at the level of funding, however, projects existed from grant to grant; organizations had plans for macro-level change but little in the way of firm strategies for how the local staff they had employed might be able to contribute to that change after their employment, in the long term.

In attempting to identify the local staff of international organizations as a social group, one must assess how far the similarities in working conditions that they have experienced, and the ways in which they have been positioned in society as a result of their work, have led to the emergence of an occupational group identity which is self-conscious. These workers' common status as locally-recruited employees of international organizations would be more meaningful if it was a shared experience from which they themselves derived meaning, rather than just a label analytically imposed from outside. While current and former workers in this sector certainly have social practices and networks based on their work, it is harder to talk about a group 'identity' in the sense of a social group which has public representation as such. It is difficult even to find a one-word term that will still incorporate everyone whom it ought to include ('project workers' and 'interpreters', for instance, are not identical but both fall into this wider space). Barakat and Kapetanović use the term *lokalci*, or 'locals', throughout their article,<sup>49</sup> yet the people to whom it refers are local in relation to the non-local staff members of the organizations they work for, not in relation to the rest of the society they live in. With an ethical commitment to representing people in the terms by which they wish to be defined, it is important to find a term that makes sense within their own experience. This terminological difficulty suggests in itself that a strong social identity derived from this form of work is lacking: no one word has emerged with which people who have done this work represent themselves collectively.

The weakness of social identification should be explained with reference to the structure of the employment itself, but also of the wider socio-economic and political context in which this employment sector has been situated. Employment trajectories in this sector are fragmented and transitory. The sector itself could be characterised as fragmented, in the sense that it is composed of multiple organizational practices and cultures (including those of foreign military forces, United Nations offices, large humanitarian NGOs such as the International Committee of the Red Cross or Médecins Sans Frontières, national development agencies, inter-governmental political organizations, small-scale humanitarian and conflict-resolution initiatives, and civil society foundations). Yet it is common for workers in this sector to have switched between several different types of organization, working on a short-term basis for each one; this would mitigate the potential fragmentary effect of organizational differences on solidarity among their local employees.

A more serious obstacle is the question of whether certain jobs in this sector have resulted in better transferable skills than other jobs and thus permit much more successful strategies for ameliorating precarity, to an extent that would frustrate attempts to conceive of workers in this sector as a unified social group (particularly whether a divide between non-manual and manual labour cleaves through the potential unifying factors). This cannot be answered without taking into account the backgrounds and positionality of employees' backgrounds before entering the sector. For instance, movement from a manual job such as kitchen hand into a non-manual and better paid interpreting job (which might then lead to project work with another organization) was not unknown among locally-recruited employees of foreign military forces in Bosnia-Herzegovina in the late 1990s.<sup>50</sup> However, it was primarily younger workers with higher cultural capital (students, graduates, or people who would have expected to be studying if not for the war) who were able to follow this route of working themselves up: age, class and prior education, as well as family responsibilities and ties to a particular place, all affected whether and how workers in the lower-status and lower-paid jobs with international organizations sought to move on from them. Taking individual life courses into account also calls attention to the third dimension of fragmentation that has impeded the formation of a self-conscious group. This third dimension is that working in this sector has typically been conceived of as an expedient, not a profession in itself. People typically began working for international organizations because it was the only work available or the highest-paying work available, or because the war and its aftermath had made it impossible for them to fulfil their pre-war career intentions.<sup>51</sup> Employment in the international organizations sector thus appears more as a stopgap, a springboard to opportunities elsewhere, or an enforced necessity rather than an end in its own right: often it is conceived of as a temporary stage to be passed through, whether or not an individual succeeds in passing through it.

However, answers must also be sought outside the sector itself. The break-up of Yugoslavia involved the weakening – some would say the deliberate destruction – of all forms of solidarity other than ethnic, a process at its most forceful in the successor societies that experienced armed conflict in the 1990s; where non-ethnic solidarities have been re-asserted, they must compete with the dominant discourses of ethnopolitics. The collapse of many pre-war industries and the deinstitutionalization of organized labour have drastically weakened work-based

solidarity across the Western Balkans, as shown by the decline of trades unions across the region.<sup>52</sup> The civil society promotion initiatives that have formed part of international organizations' peacebuilding strategies have not prioritized social solidarity among occupational groups, and in practice have hived off a 'relatively small set of professionalized civil society actors' which have adapted to donors' preferred practices at the risk of becoming detached from broader society outside these narrow milieus.<sup>53</sup> These are not propitious conditions in which a new self-conscious occupational social identity can emerge. The lack of self-conscious identification by international organization workers as an occupational group must be seen in the context of the depoliticization of society across the region since the break-up of Yugoslavia. Recent events such as the anti-corruption rallies in Croatia in 2011 and the 'JMBG protests' in Bosnia-Herzegovina in 2013 (expressing anger that a dispute between politicians from the constitutional entities was temporarily preventing the registration of births) suggested an increased capacity for public mobilization around non-ethnic themes in the aftermath of the global financial crisis.<sup>54</sup> A more sustained mass engagement in support of social and political alternatives to ethnopolitical clientelism took place in Tuzla, Sarajevo and other deindustrialized cities in Bosnia-Herzegovina in February 2014, at the time this article was being revised for publication.<sup>55</sup> The longer-term outcomes of these protests cannot yet be determined, nor can the prospects for them to strengthen self-recognition of an occupational identity among ex-employees of international organizations in BiH.

## **Conclusion**

Of all the members of post-Yugoslav societies with whom international organizations have had contact, their most sustained and everyday contact has been with their own locally-recruited employees. Yet – despite the great volume of reporting that such organizations generate about other matters – empirical evidence about their own workers' circumstances, experiences and trajectories remains slight. Academic research has also paid little attention to these workers as a category. To conceive of them as such is admittedly impeded by certain factors – both the stratification and inequality of workers within the sector, and the lack of a self-consciously articulated narrative of their occupational identity as a social role. Yet the sheer number of

people who have worked for international organizations in former Yugoslavia in the last two decades makes this sector worthy of greater recognition both in research and in policy. Their invisibility as a workforce to date, combined with the short-termism of international intervention, makes it easy for them to be institutionally disregarded. International organizations should, at the very least, take more note of the effects of the employment they create and the employment conditions that they stipulate or permit. Although examples of better practice exist, too many posts in this sector have been created without built-in pathways for developing and training staff within an organization, with short notice periods and without sufficient provision for health care.

Even though the potential for deriving a broader social identity from membership of the international-organization workforce is weak, this employment sector is still an important phenomenon within the postsocialist, postconflict economy in former Yugoslavia. For those who have worked in it, it is often a source of lasting social ties, as well as material and immaterial resources that affect their life course in the future. For researchers, it is an example of the kind of area for empirical inquiry that tends to be neglected as a consequence of the over-representation of ethnic politics and elite institution-building in much of the academic literature, particularly in sociology and political science.<sup>56</sup> Improving the evidence base relating to this workforce will also make it possible to understand more accurately how they are positioned within wider social relations, and foregrounding the locally-recruited staff of international interventions will add an extra dimension to the recognition of local agency within peacekeeping economies.<sup>57</sup> This form of employment therefore needs to be taken into account in research inspired by the so-called 'local turn' in the critical study of peacebuilding.<sup>58</sup>

The evidence base on the international-organizations employment sector should also be broadened beyond the focus on large-scale missions that has been maintained in the literature so far (and to which the use of data from BiH admittedly also contributes), since this risks leaving invisible other sites and spaces that have not hosted missions of this size. The relationship between global practices of security and intervention and more localized experiences of post-socialist dislocation takes in not just BiH, Kosovo and the former UN Protected Areas in Croatia but also the entirety of eastern Europe, where foreign bases and training facilities are also to be found; where the shape of the domestic military and its relationship with wider



society has been conditioned by adapting to NATO enlargement and to coalition warfare in Iraq and Afghanistan; where foreign-funded projects in support of democratization and civil society create jobs with a similar profile to those being discussed here. These sites also should not be neglected in future research, even though the focus of this paper is only on the Yugoslav successor states.

Despite the further research that remains to be done on this workforce, it is already evident that a binary of economic 'beneficiaries' and 'victims' of the break-up of Yugoslavia is too simplistic to accommodate the complexities of how the locally-recruited workforce of international intervention is situated within post-Yugoslav societies. To speak of this workforce only as part of a transnational 'precariat' misses some important aspects of its character and origin. To speak of it only as a 'projectariat' may risk lifting the people who have happened to do this work away from their counterparts with similar values and symbolic practices who have not. There is nevertheless a case for more extensive study of the people, experiences and processes that have constituted this workforce since international organizations began recruiting large numbers of workers within the Yugoslav successor states: in order to pursue a research question outside the constraints of a narrow focus on ethnic politics, in order to fill out questions of local agency in peacebuilding, and in order to better inform how international organizations may manage their locally-recruited workforces in future.

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<sup>1</sup> See, e.g., Sharon Fisher, 'Contentious Politics in Croatia: the War Veterans Movement', in Cas Mudde and Petr Kopecký (ed.) *Uncivil Society?: Contentious Politics in Post-Communist Europe*, London and New York: Routledge, 2003, pp.74--92; Elissa Helms, 'The Gender of Coffee: Women and Reconciliation Initiatives in Post-War Bosnia and Herzegovina', *Focaal*, Vol.57, 2010, pp.17--32.

<sup>2</sup> See Stuart Hall, 'Gramsci's Relevance for the Study of Race and Ethnicity', *Journal of Communication Inquiry*, Vol.10, No.2, 1986, pp.5--27.

<sup>3</sup> Margaret R. Somers, 'Narrativity, Narrative Identity, and Social Action: Rethinking English Working-Class Formation', *Social Science History*, Vol.16, No.4, 1992, pp.591--630, p.594--5.

<sup>4</sup> Katherine Gibson and Julie Graham, 'Rethinking Class in Industrial Geography: Creating a Space for an Alternative Politics of Class', *Economic Geography*, Vol.68, No.2, 1992, pp.109--27.

<sup>5</sup> See Guy Standing, *The Precariat: the New Dangerous Class*, London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2011.

<sup>6</sup> See Hilary Footitt and Michael Kelly (ed.), *Languages at War: Policies and Practices of Language Contacts in Conflict*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012; Michael Kelly and Catherine Baker, *Interpreting the Peace: Peace Operations, Conflict and Language in Bosnia-Herzegovina*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013.

<sup>7</sup> Language intermediaries employed by the military are often referred to in English as 'interpreters' and sometimes as 'translators', although their roles could often be a mixture of interpreting and translation. Some had the job title 'language assistant'. Some other posts were not conceived purely as linguistic but demanded a significant amount of interpreting and translation from the post-holder, such as civilian administrative positions at an SFOR divisional headquarters, which were in practice likely to be held by former interpreters for that force. The term 'language intermediary' stands for any person who was primarily employed to provide language support in the shape of interpreting and/or translation. The interviews referred to here were semi-structured interviews which began with a chronological narrative of the interviewee's experience as a language intermediary (and any prior experiences interviewees considered relevant) and continued with more detailed follow-up questions posed by the interviewer. Most interviews lasted between one and two hours, with the longest running to three and a half.

<sup>8</sup> Catherine Baker, 'The Care and Feeding of Linguists: the Working Environment of Interpreters, Translators, and Linguists During Peacekeeping in Bosnia-Herzegovina', *War and Society*, Vol.29, No.2, 2010, pp.154--75; Catherine Baker, 'Tito's Children?: Language Learning, Educational Resources, and Cultural Capital in the Life Histories of Interpreters Working in Bosnia and Herzegovina', *Südosteuropa*, Vol.59, No.4, 2011, pp.477--501; Catherine Baker, 'When Bosnia was a Commonwealth Country: British Forces and their Interpreters in Republika Srpska 1995--2007', *History Workshop Journal*, Vol.74, No.1, 2012, pp.131--55; Catherine Baker, 'Prosperity without Security: the Precarity of Interpreters in Postsocialist, Postconflict Bosnia-Herzegovina', 2012, *Slavic Review*, Vol.71, No.4, 2012, pp.849--72.

<sup>9</sup> Kathleen M. Jennings, 'Unintended Consequences of Intimacy: Political Economies of Peacekeeping and Sex Tourism', *International Peacekeeping*, Vol.17, No.2, 2010, pp.229--43.

<sup>10</sup> See Peter Andreas, 'Symbiosis Between Peace Operations and Illicit Business in Bosnia', *International Peacekeeping*, Vol.16, No.1, 2009, pp.33--46.

<sup>11</sup> Paul Higate and Marsha Henry, 'Engendering (In)security in Peace Support Operations', *Security Dialogue*, Vol.35, No.4, 2004, pp. 481--98, p.483.

<sup>12</sup> Jennings, 'Unintended Consequences', p.231.

<sup>13</sup> Jennings, 'Unintended Consequences', p.231.

<sup>14</sup> Stef Jansen, 'The Privatisation of Home and Hope: Return, Reforms and the Foreign Intervention in Bosnia-Herzegovina', *Dialectical Anthropology*, Vol.30, 2006, pp.177--99, p.185.

<sup>15</sup> Jansen, 'Privatisation', p.186--7.

<sup>16</sup> Baker, 'Prosperity without Security'.

<sup>17</sup> This is not to say that *veze* were never significant in the hiring of interpreters. It is likely that they were (despite the efforts of the foreign forces who acted as employers and believed that their goal was to recruit the best qualified, rather than the best connected, person for the job), but they need not necessarily have been the same *veze* as for other jobs.

<sup>18</sup> Standing, *Precariat*, p.9. See also Nancy Ettliger, 'Precarity Unbound', *Alternatives: Global, Local, Political*, Vol.32, 2007, pp.319--40; Louise Waite, 'A Place and Space for a Critical Geography of Precarity?', *Geography Compass*, Vol.3, No.1, 2009, pp.412--33.

<sup>19</sup> There are obvious parallels here with the approach to researching post-socialism by looking at individual adjustments to 'transition' that is employed by a number of anthropologists including Kristen Ghodsee and others: see, for instance, Kristen Ghodsee, *Lost in Transition: Ethnographies of Everyday Life after Communism*, Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011.

<sup>20</sup> Standing, *Precariat*.

<sup>21</sup> Ronaldo Munck, 'The Precariat: a View from the South', *Third World Quarterly*, Vol.34, No.5, 2013, pp.747--62, p.747.

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- <sup>22</sup> Ettliger, 'Precarity Unbound', p.322.
- <sup>23</sup> Standing, *Precariat*, p.10.
- <sup>24</sup> Gordana Sandić-Hadžihasanović, 'Darko Močibob: glas koji je saopštio mir u BiH', *Radio Slobodna Evropa*, 14 December 2012. Available at <http://www.slobodnaevropa.org/content/moibob-za-rse-ovjek-koji-je-graanima-bih-objavio-mir/24798692.html> (accessed 14 February 2014).
- <sup>25</sup> Kelly and Baker, *Interpreting the Peace*, pp. 86--107, 119--23.
- <sup>26</sup> Interview with professional translator, Sarajevo, 28 October 2009.
- <sup>27</sup> Kelly and Baker, *Interpreting the Peace*, p. 115.
- <sup>28</sup> Baker, 'Prosperity without Security', pp. 858--61.
- <sup>29</sup> Michael Pugh, 'Postwar Political Economy in Bosnia and Herzegovina: the Spoils of Peace', *Global Governance*, Vol.8, No.4, 2002, pp.467--82, p.468.
- <sup>30</sup> Michael Pugh, 'Transformation in the Political Economy of Bosnia since Dayton', *International Peacekeeping*, Vol.12, No.3, 2005, pp.448--62, p.459.
- <sup>31</sup> Boris Divjak and Michael Pugh, 'The Political Economy of Corruption in Bosnia and Herzegovina', *International Peacekeeping*, Vol.15, No.3, 2008, pp.373--86, p.381.
- <sup>32</sup> Jansen, 'Privatisation', p.193.
- <sup>33</sup> Gordana Božić, 'Conversations with Bosnian Youth: From the Youth Relay Race to the Successor Generation Initiative', *Nationalities Papers*, Vol.35, No.4, 2007, pp.743--72, p.755.
- <sup>34</sup> Božić, 'Conversations', p.755.
- <sup>35</sup> While I am wary of reifying the notion of 'inter-ethnic boundaries', these are the terms in which these movements were narrated by those who had undertaken them.
- <sup>36</sup> For instance, interview with former interpreter and administrator in Banja Luka, 14 May 2010.
- <sup>37</sup> Interview with former interpreter, 13 May 2010.
- <sup>38</sup> Paul Stubbs, 'NGO Work with Forced Migrants in Croatia: Lineages of a Global Middle Class?', *International Peacekeeping*, Vol. 4, No.4, 1997, pp.50--60, p.57.
- <sup>39</sup> Stubbs, 'NGO Work', p.57.
- <sup>40</sup> Stef Jansen, *Antinacionalizam: etnografija otpora u Beogradu i Zagrebu*, trans. Aleksandra Bajazetov-Vučen, Belgrade: XX vek, 2005.
- <sup>41</sup> Adam Fagan, 'Civil Society in Bosnia Ten Years after Dayton', *International Peacekeeping*, Vol.12, No.3, 2005, pp.406--19, p.414.
- <sup>42</sup> See Baker, 'Tito's Children?'.
- <sup>43</sup> James Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed*, New Haven. CT: Yale University Press, 1998, p.48.
- <sup>44</sup> Scott, *Seeing Like a State*, p.72.
- <sup>45</sup> Mona Baker, *Translation and Conflict: a Narrative Account*, London and New York: Routledge, 2006; Moira Inghilleri, 'The Ethical Task of the Translator in the Geo-Political Arena', *Translation Studies* Vol.1, No.2, 2008, pp.212--23.
- <sup>46</sup> Sultan Barakat and Zilha Kapisazović, 'Being *lokalci*: Evaluating the Impact of International Aid Agencies on Local Human Resources: the Case of Post-War Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina', *European Journal of Development Research*, Vol.15, No.1, 2003, pp.55--72, p.58.
- <sup>47</sup> Barakat and Kapisazović, 'Being *lokalci*', p.58.
- <sup>48</sup> Barakat and Kapisazović, 'Being *lokalci*', p.65.
- <sup>49</sup> Barakat and Kapisazović, 'Being *lokalci*'.
- <sup>50</sup> For instance, interview with former kitchen worker and interpreter, Tuzla, 19 May 2010.
- <sup>51</sup> See Baker, 'Tito's Children?'.
- <sup>52</sup> Heribert Kohl, 'Social Dialogue, Workers' Rights and Freedom of Association in the Western Balkans -- a Survey after a First Round of Empirical Research', *South-East Europe Review*, Vol.2, 2009, pp. 151--73.
- <sup>53</sup> Roberto Belloni, 'Civil Society and Peacebuilding in Bosnia and Herzegovina', *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol.38, No.2, 2001, pp. 163--80, p. 169; Stephanie Kappler, 'Divergent Transformation and Centrifugal Peacebuilding: the EU in Bosnia and Herzegovina', *International Peacekeeping*, Vol.19, No.5, 2012, pp.612--27, p. 620.
- <sup>54</sup> See Srećko Horvat and Igor Štiks, 'Welcome to the Desert of Transition! Post-Socialism, the European Union and a New Left in the Balkans', *Monthly Review*, Vol.63, No.10, 2012. Available at <http://monthlyreview.org/2012/03/01/welcome-to-the-desert-of-transition> (accessed 15 November 2013); Indira Hasanović, 'JMBG: Because It Can Get Worse', *Duh Bosne*, Vol. 8, No. 3. 2013. Available at <http://www.ceeol.com/aspx/getdocument.aspx?logid=5&id=5756a6f03e784438ac0f5dc659552674> (accessed 14 February 2014).

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<sup>55</sup> See Stef Jansen, 'Can the Revolt in Bosnia-Herzegovina Send a Message to the Wider World?', *Balkan Insight*, 13 February 2014. Available at <http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/blog/can-the-revolt-in-bosnia-and-herzegovina-send-a-message-to-the-wider-world> (accessed 14 February 2014).

<sup>56</sup> See Heleen Touquet and Peter Vermeersch, 'Bosnia and Herzegovina: Thinking Beyond Institution-Building', *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics*, Vol.14, No.2, 2008, pp.266--88.

<sup>57</sup> See Michael Pugh, 'Local Agency and Political Economies of Peacebuilding', *Studies in Ethnicity and Nationalism*, Vol.11, No. 2, 2011, pp.308--20.

<sup>58</sup> See Roger Mac Ginty and Oliver Richmond, 'The Local Turn in Peace Building: a Critical Agenda for Peace', *Third World Quarterly*, Vol.34, No.5, 2013, pp.763--83.