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# Rethinking Childhood Subjectivity: The Psycho-Politics of Socialization, Private-Language Formation, and the Case of Bosnian Youth

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**RETHINKING CHILDHOOD SUBJECTIVITY:  
THE PSYCHO-POLITICS OF SOCIALIZATION, PRIVATE-  
LANGUAGE FORMATION,  
AND THE CASE OF BOSNIAN YOUTH**

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**ABSTRACT**

Under the guise of socialization, the child-subject born into the modern society is subjugated by a familial childhood trauma that appropriates the infantile psychosis caused by the incommunicability of early childhood. This appropriation, put to instrumental ends, results in a psychology of commodified object relations. In fact, there is a close relationship between the historical narrative of a culture and the trauma to which children are subjected as they become members of the social organization. The psycho-politics of the human condition are thus revealed in the realm of the progressive political discourse under which socialization occurs. This project concerns the psycho-political reading of trauma and socialization of children amidst the radical social transition in Bosnia and Herzegovina during the 1990s. The psycho-social situation of the youth raises questions about the social construction of identity, political subjectivity and the possibility of a democratic polity. I experiment with new concepts of political psychology to understand the relationship between the historical society and its infant citizens. Furthermore, I imagine ways of reconstituting theories of war trauma and memory to rediscover a democratic empowerment through a social education that pushes the notion of empowerment beyond its present scope.

**INTRODUCTION**

Even 15 years after the signing of the Dayton peace agreement, the dominance of a neoliberal geopolitical approach towards Bosnia and Herzegovina has resulted in social policy fixated on solidifying bureaucratic processes and sanctioning formulaic solutions to the problematic transition from failed state and war to peaceful “democratic” society. Bosnia remains a place where the discovery

of mass burial sites is still a regular occurrence, yet no critical challenge is posed to the culture that authorised genocide. While the illusion that the personally responsible are brought to justice is sustained for petty rhetorical stakes, news of a Chetnik (Serbian ultranationalist movement) youth rally breaking out in protest of an arriving convoy of human remains belonging to those killed in their locale are of little concern (Kolind, 2008). The perpetuations of fascist ideology and segregationist ultra-nationalistic rhetoric are not confined to isolated pockets of the Balkan societies, with the consequence that in postwar Bosnian society, youth culture is critically fractured. On one side there is an attraction to fascistic and violent political action. On the other side is a lack of civic authority that perpetuates political apathy and a turning away from the social. Either way, youth are unable to voice their critical perspective or find resources for understanding their society's demise. In popular political discourses, young Bosnians are increasingly dismissed as dispassionate and apolitical. Yet the prospect of a healthy democratic society depends on rejuvenating the war-traumatized Bosnian political community. This is a sustainable project only if we are able to entice youth to choose empowerment through civic participation instead of resignation to violence or apathy. In terms of their historical positioning and developmental relation to war trauma, the psychological lives of Bosnian youth indicate a radical break from their societal underpinnings. The ways their subjectivity is addressed will affect whether they are viewed as full of democratic possibility or another "lost generation."

The most worrisome part of the present social collage of Bosnia is that the stability of the normative culture is preserved through cultural institutions of trauma, rather than simply through a culture that happens to be traumatized. This essay deals with the social and political questions specifically pertaining to Bosnian youth caught in this dark social equation. At this time, there is a great need to frame critical questions in relational terms of post-trauma reintegration and mobilization of youth to preserve the Bosnian society. The inability of Bosnian educational institutions to provide the necessary social services for young adults, whose childhood socialization happened during the war years, reinforces this call to rethink the theoretical foundations upon which the practiced pedagogies are built. A telling common utterance belonging to the children of the war, whom I encountered during my preliminary research, was that "everything is exactly the same." In the aftermath of trauma's astonishment, ethics are forever changed. However, the impact of astonishment fades; its failure to attain permanence sets the stage for disillusionment on a trans-generational, meta-political scale. One thing is certain: an institutional solution to the problems of Bosnian youth must engage with, and avoid dismissing, this lingering astonishment—what their trauma-tested expectations of "real" working systems are. Our imaginative prescriptions must recognize the transitional situation in which they find themselves living, fifteen years after the end of the war.

Bosnian youth have little choice in terms of their expressions and social par-

ticipation. They may retreat into despair or become embroiled in the aftermaths of civil war. Both directions are emotionally impoverishing and represent an absence of an alternative language that can adequately capture new self- and social-identities. Indeed, Bosnian institutions, from the family to the schools, find continuity in outdated pedagogical models that fail to provide the critical support and resiliency youth require in their transition from civil war to democracy. There is a need to rethink how postwar pedagogy can be developed, and to re-conceptualize the relation between post-trauma integration and identity work. To this end, this project seeks to analyze the psychological factors needed for youth to create meaning from the ravages of war.

### **THE PSYCHO-POLITICAL FRAMEWORK**

In comparison to the rather linear trajectory of post-1947 Yugoslavian socialization and child-rearing practices, the conditions surrounding the early lives of the youngest of Yugoslavian youth in the years between 1990 and 1996 were characterized by the unpredictability and violence of war and social destruction. In 1990, Yugoslavian youth were positioned at a time in history when a once-promising, romanticized socialist democracy had just began to enter the final stage of its collapse under the weight of its own pluralistic identity incompatible with the neoliberal world order. Faced with this institutional deficit, people have turned to traditional communities that rely on ethnic nationalism to validate their claims, upholding the boundaries of conflict-era identity politics and effectively exacerbating political and ethnic divides. In the end, the society was unable to retain pluralism from the impending reactionary reversal that challenged the neoliberal conception of the political universe and its borders at the so-called “end of history,” and proved that its limits were always already incapable of receiving and understanding the new.

This project stretches the best of social, psychological and educational theory to its limits to address the psycho-political problematic of the Bosnian children of war. It focuses on the generation of Bosnian youth whose early childhood socialization occurred during the civil war years in Bosnia. It inquires into both the residues of trauma in identity formation and questions the emotional, political, and intellectual resources that contemporary Bosnian youth require to rebuild a war-torn society. It asks what happened to the early childhood socialization during the war years in Bosnia. What are the social consequences of the normalisation of war trauma during their childhood? And what prevents the surviving Bosnian youth from post-war reintegration and democratic mobilization? I have further ambitions to extend the theoretical implications beyond the current ethnographic confines. Because the project recognizes its political responsibility to be critical, and offer corrective measures and their application beyond theory, this project takes the risk to imagine reconstituting the way theory deals with war trauma and memory towards the realization of human empowerment reproducible through

educational institutions of society.

The only way to access the question of trauma in childhood and the challenge that it poses for the education and socialization of children is to bridge the conceptual gap between the world we can observe directly, account and theorize about, and the world of the inner experience, of memories and broken narratives that often can only be accessed by the person experiencing them. Considering the political subjectivity of children of war requires us to rise above the comfortable frame of the clinical. We cannot approach the complex subjectivity of Bosnian youth, who have grown up during war and been exposed to war and its extensions in familial trauma, without giving them principally what is theirs—their subject position without a pathological imposition. By removing this externalizing pathological categorization, we open up space to engage and explore internal psychosis not in terms of how we delineate it, but instead on its own terms: its development, its catalytic properties, and what it means for the empowerment (the ability to find a balance between one's self-reflexivity and participation in social relations) of its subject. If the trauma of war is an event that is stretched over a developmental stage of a child, and is more generally experienced by a whole generation of youth within a culture, then it ceases to be a case for the clinical approach, and can only be constructively dealt with through political and social lenses. So, what does it mean to look at the trauma of war in terms of its long-term ramifications on childhood: not clinically, but politically?

In my own research on the post-war social and political realities facing young Bosnian people who were children during the war, I have found that the clinical literature on their subjectivities has closed the space for constructive dialoguing. Rather, it engages in a borderline-insulting simplification of their complex narratives. Researchers have dismissed the psychological frames central to the present study as a Bosnian cultural trait supplanted by post-conflict social conditions. This project entertains a political concern for the subjectivity of youth and argues that it is neither an option nor a constructive move to profess to the whole generation of Bosnian youth that they are “sick,” “traumatized,” “backwards,” “stunted,” or “hyper-sensitive” in the light of their struggles to adjust to the emerging post-industrial consumerist psychological and economic orders choking the Balkan region. The goal of prescriptive social theory should be to assess the psycho-political foundations of this generation of youth and work with their abilities and anachronistic potentials. Their subject position signals a radical break from the social foundations of their predecessors—their statements are self-aware and rational, their wits sharp, and their situational critique dead on. Their “long-term neurosis” is not simply a condition that needs correction. Instead, as will become clearer in this article, their subjective position needs therapeutic existential recognition to will support the critical lenses they developed through trauma and the painful loss of innocence and objects of desire:

When we are speaking about the “subject” we are not always speaking about an individual: we are speaking about a model for agency and intelligibility,

one that is very often based on notions of sovereign power. At the most intimate levels, we are social; we are comported toward a “you”; we are outside ourselves, constituted in cultural norms that precede and exceed us, given over to a set of cultural norms and a field of power that condition us fundamentally (Butler, 2003, p. 32).

For the purpose of clarifying what is meant by psycho-politics, this quote from Judith Butler’s essay conveys the general critique as “[an] imposition of versions of agency” on the newborn (Butler, 2003, p. 34). Childhood development coincides with the formative moment of sociality, dictating the general frame and the particular attention in the subjective education and general conditioning into relationality, and by extension, the blossoming of the inner life through those prototypical experiences and spaces of relationality. Then the question of the primary vulnerability becomes connected to the question of the socio-ethical treatment of the subject during development, which is (in terms of global post-conflict humanist aspirations) highly political.

This effort to view the psychological conception of childhood subjectivity is a part of a larger critical movement towards a recognition of the choice that society makes for its young. In a social theory world saturated with knowledge and its complications, it is quite interesting (and arguably self-serving) that we do not have a sound theory of childhood. What seems so obvious and increasingly so out of reach is this issue: How can we recognize that the generational is formatively political? Theory often speaks about children as if they were already individuals, but the way in which they are conditioned to become what the society needs them to be is never problematized. Furthermore, attempts to pose this social critique are usually met with dismissals of “wishful thinking” (Richards, 1984). But the reality of the matter is that an ethical-political theory that aspires to think about the possibility of democracy—and by extension the type of education that would foster democratic subjectivities—must rethink the way it approaches the young.

A notion of democratic participation cannot emerge from hidden but nonetheless coercive beginnings. We cannot theorize about the democratic education of the individual in society, and also argue its pedagogy, through a rationale based on “knowledge” of the subject’s psychical makeup. The psycho-political framework is my attempt to begin a counter-discourse. Even in the most critical way, the dominant theoretical discourses on child subjectivity speak about the child-subject in a dissecting manner, where psychical world of the child is laid out in front of the theorist; where the child is most commodifiable, behaviorized, and thus manipulatable—and by extension, not wholly human. The psycho-political argument is that a serious consideration for the psychical well-being of a child-subject requires us to look at the way in which the society interestedly engages with, and takes advantage of, the child’s development, its attempts to understand the world, and to live within it.

Refusing the inquisitive framework that justifies socially reproductive violence without critical engagement, the psycho-political framework attempts to

begin a democratic imagining of the child-subject. Child psyche is not a terrain that we can understand nor even have access into. By viewing early childhood education and socialization through the Levinasian ethical lens, we can easily expose the way in which theory has violated the child-subject—we know not what is just, but we do know what is unjust (Levinas, 1989). In the present project, the psycho-political critique of childhood socialization is grounded in an alternative conception of childhood's psyche that does not subjugate the child to the analysis. The term I have developed is "private language": a way of symbolizing the child's narrative of meaning-making. Viewed strictly on the level of process and narrative, and never a matter of content, the appropriate concerns are critically limited to the notions of consistency, continuity, stability, predictability, disruption, dehabituating, and disillusionment. In this way, we can theorize the impact of intergenerational dynamics on the child-subject without having to pretend to dissect its insides.

### **PSYCHO-POLITICS OF CHILDHOOD: PRIVATE LANGUAGE AND THE STUDY OF TRAUMA**

In order to deconstruct the clinical objectification of war-trauma-experienced children, I would like to present an interdisciplinary theoretical composite of the child at the center of trans-generational socialization schemas and an inexorable socio-historical mechanism only concerned with efficiency of incorporation. This collage is important because it introduces the necessary theoretical categories that ground the psycho-political importance of war trauma. The fact of the matter is that every person, as a political subject, is born at the mercy of a preceding generation. And the case remains even for the democratic societies that the adult world consciously and self-interestedly chooses to engage in ideological indoctrination: to manipulate (through the implantation or omission of certain details) the formative psychic narratives of children, in order to make up for what cues their social reality lacks. The psychological lives of Yugoslavian youth during 1990-1995 offer a rare snapshot of a generation caught without such institutional guarantors amidst major trans-generational, psychodynamic shifts. And the way we constitute their subjectivity in terms of their socio-historical placement and their developmental relationship with war trauma will directly affect whether we view them as a schism full of possibility or another "lost" generation.

Under the logic of necessity that prioritizes the welfare of the society, every person who is considered a productive, functioning member of a socio-economic cultural cell has externally imposed psychic agents that regulate and produce acceptable and meaningful experience in the individual subject. The terms of comprehensibility (or boundaries of self-awareness) are tied to both the cultural character at the center of the socialization patterns as well as the accidentally constituted subjective experience. In this way, while the filters and sensors for social affectation are programmed (Ego-development), and the emotional memory

supporting the authenticity of the subject's drive for life is refined and developed by social experience. In the modern compromise between private and public psychological interests, *private language* accommodates the human subject by psychically preserving the consciously inaccessible emotional meaning. The inaccessible emotional meaning is made up of emotional imprints of object relations established during formative moments of early childhood, which make up the unconscious, and effectively provide stability—not only upholding the person's livelihood, but also the productivity of the person according to the socio-economic and cultural standards.

I relied on a connection between Erich Fromm's macro- and Melanie Klein's micro-economics of psycho-politics to assemble the concept of private language. Fromm ties the character structure of the subject, which is the product of the socio-historical libidinal subject position at onset of birth, with the personal interpretation of words (Fromm, 1969, p. 306). Words become our entry point into symbolic meaning outside of their direct signification. As children, we come to learn to symbolize our internal meanings with language afforded to us by our nurturers. This point goes far in elaborating the consequences of psychodynamic changes between the experience and the perspective of different generations. The way that any preceding generation nurtures its descendants is always already bound up with the socio-historical and cultural lexicon that is partly made up of its own inheritance and the history of its existential education. Thus this lexicon prepares the young for acknowledgment and fitting into the establishment, but not necessarily the new historical experiences.

For psycho-political schemas, words define the outline of the political in the libido-cognitive life (Deese, 1970; Lyons & Wales, 1966). I have found that both Melanie Klein and Heinz Kohut's reflections on their analytic experience elaborate on the psycho-linguistic intricacies of object relations (Klein, 1974; Kohut, 1971). Words are essentially relational and thus social in nature. Through the historical consideration of personal narratives, words become objects with emotional depth and historical underpinnings, linking them to the inner makeup of the subject and tying the subject back to the social environment that nursed it. A psycho-political consideration of what is shared and exchanged between the public and the private from birth brings us to a radical political realization that private language—the narrative (the terms by which or the lack thereof) of one's understanding of one's own subjectivity—is inherently political.

In terms of psychoanalytic object relations theory, private language captures the libidinal structure in the relationships formed with internalized objects, relationships which secure the survival of personal historical meanings by preserving the emotional imprint of a given relationality to an object of attachment. This is an act of social compromise in which the trauma of early childhood socialization is soothed by that relational preservation. Surviving the mechanism of sublimation in which the original object of the nurturer is repressed while the drive itself is preserved, the phantasy-imprinted private language becomes an expression of



the meaning of that specific relationality (Laing, 1971, p. 106).

In this way, private language embodies the limits of potential self-awareness as the desire for exploration outside of the primary social relations becomes fused with the emotionally imprinted terms of relation. Structurally, the way in which this principal relationality is established hypostatizes the desires that have been allowed to find expression within the matrixes of rules and priorities of culture. Those matrixes—the rules of engagement, negotiation, and satisfaction—are stable as long as there are not too many disjunctions between the culturally regulated dictations for private-language development and the common experiences of the emotional everyday life. In case of war, trauma disturbs the limits of such experience and upsets the balance between the individually-internal and the outside-social status-quo stability. The most important point is that as a result of war-time psycho-social disjunctions overpowering cultural authority over children's formative socialization, trauma transforms self-perception to address the expanded psychosocial limits. This is one way of explaining the feeling of helplessness commonly shared by the old and the young in Bosnia—it comes from the fact that their psychological life has been transformed and brought to new limits and understandings of the social. While their private—yet culturally shared—definitions of object-relations, internal and external, have dramatically changed in terms of the (un)ethical life and death, the transitional politico-social life has not been acute to this psychosocial development. It has ignored, and in most cases tried to repress, the social recognition of these seismic shifts.

Among many writers critical of the expansion of global capital, Amartya Sen (*Freedom as Development*) presents the way in which post-industrial consumer-oriented capitalism and its extensions in extractive industrial capitalism forestall a given “developing” society's ability to cope with the new economic terms of societal preservation, and consequently cannot provide socially sustainable outlets for individual frustration (Sen, 2002). Additionally, what further becomes sensible in this context is Baudrillard's presentation of the despotic future in *Simulations*, where the consumerist-post-industrial capitalist economy has driven the pressure for limit-expansion of private language to the point where one is always already situated in a world of simulation, where the flexibility of inner object relations is so plastic it can mould to provide itself with repressively de-sublimated satisfaction from any number of objects, inadvertently causing the complete a-pollicisation of the subject's private conceptions as the proverbial “map” always already precludes “the terrain” (Baudrillard, 1983).

Before going any further, I would like to allow for further digestion of this theoretical presentation of the ethnographically placed, materially accounted, psycho-politically understood human subject by elaborating on some of the road signs in this logic.

Cornelius Castoriadis presents the imaginary (meaning: *in* the psyche, *in* the imagination) institution of society, a conception that captures the inter-relational dynamic between the society and the individual in a socio-historical manner (Cas-

toriadis, 1987). The society totalizes itself inside a person's mind through the complexes of socialization and familial emotional indoctrination in order to create a certain economic harmony between itself and the newborn subject of its agency. For Castoriadis a society always is instituted through the collective action of the individuals who compose it, the relevant question being whether or not this institution is conscious and hence autonomous, or heteronomous, that is, ascribed to a being external to society (e.g., god, the ancestors, the leader, etc.) (Castoriadis, 1995a). Castoriadis is not alone in his theorization on the trans-generational social processes. The question of the individual's relation to the society has been central to the critical works of the Frankfurt School. By far the most psychologically versed of the school, Erich Fromm and Herbert Marcuse's theorizations give a sense of a human subject's placement in and treatment by multi-dimensional social processes and systems.

As a paradigmatic example, even though Marcuse's work speaks so clearly about the psychodynamics of post-industrial social reproduction (the way in which an individual's desires are reconstituted to fit in the social and political economy); it is seldom that a direct statement can be drawn out as to who (and how one) can benefit from these theories. I have found what was lacking in Marcuse and Fromm's work in modern psychoanalytic contributions of Melanie Klein. In her theorizations, a lexicon of object-relations unfolds in a way that does not dramatically diverge from a main concern over the well-being of the child-subject. It is clear from the beginning that who we are talking about is the child, and that the child is the prototypical subject of social reproduction who suffers from those indoctrinating processes and their persistent reliance on regulated trauma.

Klein's theory of childhood object relations and its implication for psychological and emotional life brings us as far towards the social as towards the effects of language on the developing subjectivity of the child (Waddell, 1998). Klein's observation of a continuing internal dialogue between the original and social aspects of the self serves as basis for a psycho-political reading of childhood socialization. In her reflections on therapy experiences, it is clear that children entered her therapy space having consistently been denied these experiences before. Furthermore, they seem to be dispossessed by a bombardment of already-externally-accounted language. This is precisely the reason why, during psychotherapy of the young, Klein listens closely and offers language for the child struggling to piece together a workable representation of internal conflicts. Under harmonious social relations, received vocabulary allows a child in later periods of its social life to re-articulate her or his feelings more accurately and branch out of the family. In her conception of the epistemophilic instinct (which arguably enables play-based therapy to come through object-relations theory), Klein suggests that a private language of crystallized and symbolic images has been established structurally in such a fashion that post-infancy stimuli can then be afforded or denied place within the socialized standards of the libidinal economy (Klein, 1964, p. 107). In this sense, private language is the psyche's response to the structural

questions of how subjectivity guarantees adaptability for the unforeseen future, and how it negotiates with its crystallizing (phantasy-ideal image) approach of the unconscious. Klein's theorization is central to finding a practical edge on the psycho-political problematic of trauma for the Bosnian youth: external language especially does not fit with private language requirements of trauma survivor children. The result of this mismatch is an alternative psychodynamic development incompatible with the postwar social provisions.

In order to theorize politically about the human subject, we must discover concepts forged in the spirit of our mission. If it is a democratic conceptualization of the psyche of a proto-democrat that we are talking about, then we need psycho-political concepts that will decisively speak to the agency of the child-subject. Private language, as an orienting concept, allows us to theorize the psycho-political notion of the child-subject, without falling into the conceptual trap of speaking without giving the subject the sense of own-ness necessary to any post-colonial political discourse. Private language is a concept that captures the processes of socialization and socio-cultural indoctrination while acknowledging in *spatial* terms the agency of the child separate from the world. This effort is central to a (re)constitutive theoretical foundation to rebuild our understanding of trauma in a political light, and allow us to rise above the clinical.

Private language has its alliance with the libidinal, the "drive" or "mechanical" underpinnings of the child's most *own* conception of selfhood (i.e. the Id). The Ego (the conscious or the rational aspect of the psyche) actually serves the purpose of socializing the private, as it filters and forces the self to either abandon its private language completely or to find ways to augment/substitute/translate its meanings (Freud, 1966). This reading means that Freud's treatment of the Id is at best incomplete. Instead of the Ego ascending to the primacy of subjectivity—as the entity in the psyche that knows "I"—it is the libidinally based aspect of the psyche that appears to be the kernel of selfhood. Since it has its private language, the Id also has its structures and its order, and therefore it is not simply a must-be-controlled volatile substance in the mind. This development is important, because it provides a certain reclaiming of the child's original (Id-based) subjectivity from a "primitive" or "asocial" or even "anti-social" taint that it has been traditionally given in order to be mistreated and abused. As Freud understands in *Civilization and Its Discontents*, the historical placement of his theories could never allow for an alternative reading precisely because of his clinical responsibility. The fact of history was not a matter open to negotiation, which consequently meant that there was no way that the terms of social interaction were going to change so dramatically as to liberate the libidinal from the domination of the rational (Freud, 2004).

Returning to Castoriadis's notion of the imaginary constitution of society this time *from* the perspective of the child-subject, this imaginary social intrusion meant to socialize the child into the social economies has an exploitative taint (Castoriadis, 1987). I have introduced the concept of private language to problematize the psycho-political dynamic occurring on this level. As in the

colonial situation, the child's language—by which it conceives of its imaginary objects—in time comes to be dominated by external definitions. As an orienting concept, the purpose of private language as a category is not to provide access for the practitioner or the instituting agency, but it is to solidify an alternative non-clinical and political view of children of war. In this Wittgensteinian sense, private language is a psycho-political dynamic within the subject and is a primary communicative device for the subject and its own inner objects. Therefore, the child's inner "language" connotes not a linguistic parallel to psychic objects, but a multi-dimensional relation and feel of relationality to an object of desire (that is characterized in terms of its nature of stimulus—does it cause anxiety, what color of pleasure does it have, etc.). Every time a parental figure asserts dominance over the elements of the stories that give the child greater insight into the workings of the world or of its surroundings, whether this dominance is exclaimed through physical and psychological coercion or simply out of exercising their mastery over language and rhetoric, the child's ability to explore the emotional weight and the corresponding language (even if it is entirely invented) continues to close as it ages. In this sense, the imaginary institution of society means the social order's domination, and specifically in the post-industrial age, it means the regulation and repressive de-sublimation of private language.

As we develop the political consideration of the newborn child, whose development is interwoven with socialization, private language is a helpful concept because it is not bound exclusively to the clinical discourses surrounding child psychology. Instead, just in the way that it allows us to theorize what happens to the psychological subjectivity of a child in the process of "normal" socialization during early childhood development, we are also enabled to see how the same sense of psychological subjectivity is emancipated, or at least deregulated, when the socially-formative mechanisms lose their gears. In other words, while there is a certain unavoidable top-down approach to the child's subject-position from the clinical studies perspective, the interdisciplinary conception of private language starts with the assumption that children have, and will always have, their own representations of the external reality in their possession. We do not have to approach the child as always already lacking in order to theorize about her subjectivity; instead we are enabled to consider how her adaptive and interpersonal processes are cultivated, manipulated, transformed, inaugurated and muted.

It is also productive to speak of private language in terms of being a private establishment or patternization of relations: a psychical bridge between emotional relationality and the iconoclastic symbols of the culturally formatted unconscious. Private language is the realization *and* the structural evidence of the politically intent social formation of the child's psyche. It captures the cultural and familial imprint in the principles of relationality that the child forms not only with future external objects but also his savored internal ones. Before moving onto the question of trauma, I would like to underscore that in the terms of relationality, private self-knowledge (or private language) has the function of synchronizing the inter-

nal with the external as long as there persists a synergistic relationship between the family and the social life of the child (Fromm, 1969; Laing, 1971). In this way private language functions as the extension and support of a greater social process. Of interest to this present project is what happens when the central focus of the synergy is lost amidst social crisis, and just how the function of private language changes from one of alliance to the socialization process to one of *empowering* the subject at the cost of the socialization process. Without the dramatic effect of trauma on the psycho-politics of private language, the young make sense of the world by conforming to the narratives on which they are raised in order to become productive members of society.

This much is clear from a psycho-social analysis of traditional Yugoslavian socialization. In the stable past of the social regime, there was little space for conceptions of psycho-political resistance. Typical of the society's appropriation of the child-subject, the Yugoslavian patterns of social reproduction left little to no openings that would empower one's private development of an ongoing self-reflexivity with defining the order of one's internal objects. Without a way to actively access internal dynamics, the individual remains a manipulated subject of the social system. Trauma can cause individuation on the level of private language, producing a new subject in history with a language of its own. This portends the possibility of a new education. In the concluding section, I will address the educational possibilities in recognizing the social-psychological impact of trauma that alienates the child from the social indoctrination processes and becomes the first ethics in the constitution of *the democracy to come*.

Here is precisely what I mean by "emancipation" of private language. When the child is first conscious of communication between parent and self, and when, secondarily, the child resists the smooth cultural implementation of meaning, unlike her parents who were socialized smoothly in a stable time, the child no longer accept external definitions and meanings for her private imaginary objects. The child comes to own her own private language, tragically, in most cases, because she does not have the capacity on her own to deal with this reality, nor someone cognizant of this fact to assist her in this process of ownership. The contemporary case of Bosnian youth shows what happens to a whole generation of war de-socialized children, whose private language has been de-aligned from that of the traditional cultural trajectory. Fifteen years after the end of the war, these youth are stuck in an existential purgatory of sorts. In their ennui and malaise, they do see themselves in a perpetual state of existential exceptionalism. But precisely because they remain unsupported, they do not see the ethical and political exceptionality of their subject position. In their refusal to buy into the language and systems of their elders, and in their awareness of the insincere performativity of the post-conflict social relations, lies their hope and strength to be themselves in a way that their parent generations never had. Their private language has a flexibility that must be directly addressed, because these youth can easily play the hand that the post-conflict society has dealt them. They can become Machiavellian,

who profit quietly from the performative, but we will lose the proto-democratic psycho-political possibility that has been the only positive outcome of this genocidal social destruction.

## **WAR TRAUMA AND CHILDHOOD IN BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA**

At this point I would like to explicitly tie war trauma to early childhood development and (always already political) socialization. Within the interdisciplinary situating of the child-subject in the socialization process, it is not hard to imagine that in societies undergoing the process of social dissolution by war, the violence spills over into the familial sphere, causing social deconstruction in the formative scenes. In this sense, the alienation that was culturally patterned to occur at certain periods in the young child's life occurs earlier and erratically. The child's sense of self develops in stark antagonism towards his parents as the child comes to conceive of the world not through a graduated, partial exposure by his genealogical predecessors but traumatically early through his own. As for the political reading of psychological violence of war and its contamination of cultural, and especially familial, relations, own-ness in this context is defined in terms of private-language-ownership. As the child is alienated from the parents, who were initially the direct suppliers of private language definitions, the child begins to observe and formulate concepts in a vacuum of parental (psychical) authority.

For the children of war, their parents supply the linguistic concepts for children to develop their own internal languages, but that the responsibility for the "definition" –once it has entered private language–is actually with the child, not with the parent. As significant portions of their childhoods fell at a time of war, their parents were distracted by a crumbling social infrastructure and the loss of all their worldly investments. And in the vacuum of parenting and pedagogical attention, Western post-industrial consumerist interests re-wrote their private languages; the escape from war-torn reality provided by media and toys became a peculiarly parasitic relief. In the psychodynamic realm, personal symbolizations were transmuted into already commoditized ones, such that their concrete fantasies of happiness and fulfillment fed into the new system of repression (to which they acutely were attuned). Furthermore, the internal contradictions they were deeply aware of pushed them towards political apathy as every expenditure of energy further stabilized and entrenched the system's oppression and perpetuation. This alienation occurs on the level of the interpersonal. It reduces the proto-social experience within the family to that of a performance, wherein the child realizes early on that the parents are not truthful. More than merely withholding insight into the workings of the world, the parents were exposed to be unreliable for the task of transferring accurate information about the reality, given possibility the parents were not aware of their mis-projections. As the child develops his sensitivity to the parental (misconceived) psychic messages, he continues to be further

alienated, and the psychic development of his own self-awareness and his own subjectivity taking on unexpected terms.

Finally, *What is the psycho-political impact of trauma?* The young Bosnian people who volunteered for my interviews by and large expressed the post-war existential problems caused by the de-linearization of their private language from that of the older social order. While struggling to find the words to express their individual inner conflicts and to articulate a defense of their own subjectivities in light of a society that dismisses their remarks as resulting from being tainted by trauma, they were nonetheless able to describe the self-reflexivity they shared with other members of this generation (Lesic, 1995; Sendak, 1994; Wilmer, 2002). War trauma and primary familial alienation during the war crystallized in the childhood memories of these young people. And it continues to remind them of what real social change and fulfillment could and should mean.

If trauma, as a psychodynamic developmental experience, boils down to being a direct experience of the real—in the least bit about the unsublimated—then, for any generation typically destined for social construction, trauma breaks the prototypical socially-reproductive private language formulas. In this sense, trauma, given the right socio-historical conditions (in a post-industrial socialist-humanist ideal universe) can act as a force of politico-ethical evolution. Unfortunately, since the post-war Bosnia offers no progressive reconsiderations of the human condition, these youth become conflicted on the psycho-political level. In the postindustrial consumerist social present (as Bosnia, like many countries of the Eastern bloc open their borders and deregulate their economies in desperation for Western European investment), the youth are disappointed to realize time and again that they are being sold secondary fulfillment with the promise of fulfilling the primary lack. The lack of which I speak, of course, is in the realm of the social: the desire to feel recognized and connected to the lives of others. In the language of Marcuse, after the war, the new performance principle rushed to fill the vacuum left by the dislocation of the transitional reality principles produced by war trauma. In the absence of a public language to address private knowledge, helplessness became a quotidian experience. This widespread helplessness, loneliness, and political defeatism in Bosnian youth culture today no doubt stem from profound dissatisfaction with the new terms of sublimation. To those who have experienced—and must now live with—war trauma, secondary narcissistic consumer socialization does not have the same effect as it does on the populations of the West—in moments of lucidity, even though they seldom find the language to articulate their private convictions, what the Bosnian youth express is a sense that their humanity is being reduced. Their clarity and resilience, gained through painful tribulations, are dismissed as counter-productive and unimportant.

The post-war political economy fosters another level of dissent and psycho-political frustration that makes these youth feel inadequate, imbalanced, abnormal, and eventually existentially depressed and apolitical (Jones, 2004). Today, as the numbers of Bosnian youth dropping-out and succumbing to the transitory

pleasures of illicit sedation rise, the young generations across the Balkans seem to perform their initial responses from psycho-politics of their trauma: the only way to win really is to refuse to play.

For any type of democratic institutional prospects for the Balkan region, the psycho-political after-effects of trauma pose a serious challenge. There has to be a way to account politically for personal internal functioning and mechanics. For the generations of Bosnians who survived the war and its multidimensional shattering, there is a growing need for an active, psycho-political moratorium—a public suspension of social processes that continue to camouflage the psychological realities of people's inner lives under the facade of the "life as usual." In one way this is a call for a suspension of political indoctrination along the normative lines; but more so it is an argument to take an alternative route in the triage from the Balkans' trauma of modernity. This deliberate temporary suspension of historical, political, and ideological language in the contexts of private lexicons has the potential to allow for development of private language extensions that take advantage of the war-trauma-created psychic spaces.

My research suggests that the popular unhappiness and apolitical depressive condition of Bosnian youth stems in large part from a shared awareness of the nonexistence of their own spaces for political and ethical meaning-creation. Therefore, instead of pursuing the common tactic of attacking the forces perpetuating the ultranationalist or ideological language of repressing dominance, I shift the critical focus to the psycho-political importance of private language development; in other words, I shift the focus to the opposite side of the spectrum from ideology to seek ways to open up the space for discovery. Of course, activists cannot expect adults to simply lift their hands and pass off their parental authority to them, but the point stands that there is a need to provide for that which has been lacking in the post-war parenting of Bosnian youth, which are, namely, proactive strategies to focus and develop their own sense of self and counter hegemonic nationalist-identity narratives.

I believe that the introspective turn, as well as the re-emergent nationalism, in youth culture can be explained by the lack of an alternative self-oriented language for self-conception. These proactive strategies can be envisioned either as a form of political psychotherapy and pedagogy or as practical arts approaches. The point is to give the youth a language to initiate what they have privately experienced and have since tried to repress solely to survive under the guise of normalcy and normal performance. In the end, this means engaging the youth sincerely to address their desire and yearning for genuine recognition. This means not perpetuating the rancid patterns of engagement that rely on pre-war pedagogical and social structures for training and education. These youth carry the lessons and the experience of the war with them every day; they hardly need further reminders of their socio-historical position. Instead, what they need and deserve is the strengthening of their personhood and the mental space to legitimately and without embarrassment explore their own selfhood and private language defini-



tions and extensions.

This is a call to rethink the theory authorizing the current approach towards the youths' psychological well-being. We must meet them where they have been struggling. By supporting them in their discovery of language(s) to express their private anxieties and desires, we can empower young people to confront the psychic knots of their own trauma; in the process of loosening these knots perhaps they will (re)discover a model for sustainable and fulfilling sociality from within themselves. In the post-conflict society that does nothing more than obscure the source of its violence and continues to profit from trauma, the so-called "alienated" youth can become their own reflexive principles. They can reflect their subjectivities away from being considered embarrassing problematic anomalies that refuses to be normalized. If the case is that no one understands them, then let us help them understand themselves—let us give them the tools to understand their own exceptionality, because that much at least can serve as a needed dose of genuine self-empowerment.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> The Dayton Agreement brought the end of the war in 1995, controversially legitimizing the "ethnic cleansing" by recognizing the geopolitical entity of Republika Srpska. In the 1995 peace agreement, Bosnia and Hercegovina was divided into three entities, which were to function as state-bodies within a larger federal system. These are Republika Srpska, Federation of Bosnia and Hercegovina, and the Brcko District.

<sup>2</sup> As Dubravka Ugresic puts it in her article "Karadzic and his grandchildren," the international community seems to be satisfied to capture the few bad men who can symbolically bear the weight of ethical responsibility of the inhumanity which unraveled itself in Bosnia during the 1990s. The fact of the matter is that the capture of these war criminals does not address the issue of what are we going to do about the re-emergent ultra-nationalistic and fascistic youth movements across the Balkans (Ugresic, 2008).

<sup>3</sup> Judith Butler succinctly explains the relational perspective on childhood subjectivity: If I deny that prior to the formation of my "will," my body related me to others whom I did not choose to have in proximity to myself, if I build a notion of "autonomy" on the basis of the denial of this sphere of a primary and unwilling physical proximity with others, then am I denying the social conditions of my embodiment in the name of autonomy? (Butler, 2003, p. 16) <sup>4</sup> The qualitative data that gave life to this theoretical project is based on my research in Bosnia and Herzegovina from 2006 to 2009. It is made up of an ethnography of personal narratives compiled through interviews and family histories. Most of my research to date draws on the experiences and research on young Bosnian adults who were children-in-latency during the war in the 1990s in the Bosnian cities of Brcko, Koraj, Sarajevo, Srebrenica, Srebrenik, and Tuzla. The youngest of them was 6 years old in 1990 and the oldest was 16. I based my methodology on a theoretical synthesis of Jean Piaget and Melanie Klein's respective works in terms of cognitive capacity during early childhood development and memory-constructivist, as well as an object-relational conception of private narrative (Klein, 1974; Piaget, 2002). I chose participants based on whether I was able to gain insight into their personal histories beyond what the participants

were willing to share in the course of a single interview. There was a general resistance to outsider researchers and interviews when it comes to recalling childhood memories of war or speaking about one's position in one's family. For this reason, my research revolves around eight young Bosnians, with whom I developed personal relationships allowing for inter-subjective self-reflexivity. From the beginning of my research, I focused on fostering a constructive relationship with each one of the participants, sharing with them the details of my similar narrative, recognizing a multitude of similar positions on post-war family dynamics, and sympathizing with their young subject positions. These personalized efforts were absolutely necessary to earn their trust for them to want to rethink their earlier war-related memorial regurgitations and speak about it in less performative but more self-reflective terms. From a total of five families, three ethnic backgrounds, two economic classes and diasporic connections, and an equal diversity in gender and family roles, these young people held their childhood war experience as their the focal commonality weaving through their personal narrative.

<sup>5</sup> 1947 marks the commemoration of the state-central social reconstruction and redistribution went in effect (Wilmer, 2002).

<sup>6</sup> This notion will be developed further in the remainder of the paper.

<sup>7</sup> In postcolonial theory, starting with the work of Franz Fanon and his arguably still misread, anachronistic work *Black skin, white masks*, where he develops a postcolonial, intersubjective, post-materialistic narrative this idea has led indigenous theorists to theorize on their own subject position and create language for their experience which might not have been correctly captured by previous (strictly "objective") institutional thought (Fanon, 2007). And here it serves as the basis of my underlying critique of the clinical approach.

<sup>8</sup> Most of academic research on the topic of childhood and war trauma meet at the therapeutic level: how to support and treat trauma survivors. In individual studies, this therapeutic concern confirms or challenges therapeutic theories or suggests the need to be creative in engaging the children during treatment, but there is scarcely useful research that deals with the political implications of war trauma on children. Paula Webster and Yvette Harris' article, "Working with Children Who Have Experienced War, Terrorism, and Disaster" exemplifies the general practitioner oriented literature, where war trauma is expounded upon as a serious pedagogical roadblock (Webster & Harris, 2009). Here, Jane M. Gangi and Ellis Barowsky's article, "Listening to Children's Voices," in the same volume, points to the arts as a means of broadening the palette for reaching children who have lived through war trauma (Gangi & Barowsky, 2009). Gargi Roysircar's article, "Child Survivor of War: A Case Study," epitomizes the research catering to the practitioners of counseling, in which the subjectivity of the "child survivor" is broken down into a case history and clinical issues (acculturative stress, the culture's inability to deal with PTSD) (Roysircar, 2004). In his treatment, Roysircar does present his choice of an existential approach, in which personal narrative formation and didactic education are combined in the healing process into a structured meaning-making effort. Aside from the clinically oriented literature, I came across Cornelia Sorabji's article "Managing memories in post-war Sarajevo: Individuals, bad memories, and new wars," which successfully documents the personal narratives of a number of Bosnian people whose experiences during the war have altered their identity and worldview almost generationally (Sorabji, 2006). Without falling back into objectification of these people, Sorabji portrays the way in which survivors utilize their memories of war in very complicated and categorically resistant ways. Another piece of literature that I found valuable for the current efforts was Glen Palmer's article on "Resilience in child refugees: An historical study," which argues that there is a psychological characteristic similarity among unaccompanied refugee and evacuee children that were sent to Australia in the late 1930s (Palmer, 2000). This article opened up the psycho-political scope of my project, as I was able to draw many similarities between his descriptions of the factors that played into the character formation of the Australian children and the young people in my study.

<sup>9</sup> Developed in the following discussion.

<sup>10</sup> In the social systems theories of Castoriadis, Foucault, and Adorno, the society produces the necessary means by which it can reproduce itself independent of human reason or the individual's conscious action to contribute to the whole's well-being (Adorno, 1974; Castoriadis, 1995a; Foucault, 2003). In the same logic, in the radical psychoanalytic literature belonging to Otto Rank and Wilhelm Reich, the establishment of the Ego's mastery is read in terms of the social system's need for a dominance over the inner domain (Rank, 1993; Reich, Higgins & Raphael, 1983).

<sup>11</sup> While Gottlob Frege and John Locke provide us with the historical and socio-political capture of this logic, I have relied on the first three chapters of David Riesman's *Lonely Crowd* to get a sense of the sociological perspective on the society's general treatment of the newborn human subject (Frege & Bynum, 1972; Locke & Yolton, 1993; Riesman, 1966).

<sup>12</sup> Private language could also be defined as the development of internal self-narrative, privately acquired libidinal meanings for objects both social and imaginary.

<sup>13</sup> In this light, the history of European existential literature can be viewed as a record of caricatured subjects, whose subject has to struggle to create his own private language in the face of a dearth of comparable recognition in the social sphere.

<sup>14</sup> Initially, Fromm's essay, "On the Structure of Social Character," at the end of *Escape From Freedom* has been very instructive for this effort. Klein's *Narrative of A Child Analysis* in junction with *Love, Guilt and Reparation* elaborated on Fromm's general expositions and provided the logic of the psychical with clear presentation of its place in a particular socio-historical and cultural setting (Fromm, 1969; Klein, 1964; Klein, 1985).

<sup>15</sup> Kohut's essay, "Idealizing Transference (Gratitude) and Its Role in Structure Building," presents evidence of the effect of words on the persona in the case that they are already symbolically familiar to the subject (Kohut, 1971).

<sup>16</sup> In *Exodus and Revolution*, Walzer's reading of 40 years in the desert provides us with an interesting example of this dynamic, where the Jews of Israel are taken into the desert, traumatized and allowed to reconstitute their inner lives accordingly, then brought back to Egypt which they had forgotten was the land they left in search of the promised land, and told by Moses that this was in fact the promised land (Walzer, 1985).

<sup>17</sup> Marcuse's essay "Repressive Tolerance," his book *Counter-revolution and Revolt*, along with Fromm's *The Art of Love and The Sane Society* have been essential in this foundational effort (Fromm, 1974; Fromm & Ingleby, 1991; Marcuse, 1972).

<sup>18</sup> See Trinh T. Minh-Ha's "Not You/Like You," which succinctly argues this postcolonial argument on the subjectivity of the other and the risking of objectivity we must enact before ethically engaging it (Trinh, 1989).

<sup>19</sup> One could argue that Freud's rendition of the libidinal aspect of the psyche is weak precisely at this point, because it makes it seem as if the psyche has no allies over its own dominion; that is to say, the conscious and the unconscious are forces of their own, using the body and its energies, but never building a sense of the subjectivity and its capabilities. I believe that this is what Otto Rank and Wilhelm Reich's contentions with Freud's libido theory were. Freud's analysis treatment in *Little Hans* comes to mind (Freud, 1977). Throughout this case it is very clear that the analysis provided by Freud, and arguably miscarried by Hans' father (who was a student and a first-acolyte of Freud), does not fit the case. More so than the analysis, what jumps out from the analytical narrative is the way in which Hans picks up on the adults' attempts to co-opt and rewrite his personal (inner) narrative and begins to playfully toy with their increasingly frustrated stipulations about what an object of anxiety in real life might correlate to in Hans' psychical world.

<sup>20</sup> Although there is no time to elaborate on the implication of this theoretical development in this

article, I would like to also suggest that this effort is crucial to progressive democratic theory that has to begin considering child psychology.

<sup>21</sup> In Freud's essay on *Splitting of the Ego in Defence Processes*, ego-splitting could be brought up in relation to the private language structure for compromise-negotiations of psychic object interests setup to deals between reality and Phantasy (Freud, 1966).

<sup>22</sup> The youth are continually pressured to accept the secondary in place of their primary as those pressures were able to interject and affect their libidinal development during their formative childhoods. This is an important part of the equation, but one that I do not have time to address in this article. It involves the socio-historical consideration of the 1980s' federal government efforts to prepare the Yugoslavian people for consumer markets. This effort, starting in the couple of years following the death of the state patriarch, was market by Western children's shows and the universe of commodities tied to them. Years later, this effort would be proven to be the prototypical psycho-social preparation of the new generation for secondary-narcissistic consumption. Riesman's *Lonely Crowd* has been indispensable in this reflection. The sociological theoretical framework that he presents is very useful in ordering the historical state narrative and its interaction with a subject group (Riesman, 1966).

<sup>23</sup> Marcuse's *performance principle* is a critical development of Freud's reality principle in the sense that the term situates the socio-economic historical moment in which the given reality principle of a certain subjectivity is the center of the discourse (Marcuse, 1974).

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