

**Jašarević, Larisa. 2017. *Health and Wealth on the Bosnian Market: Intimate Debt*. Bloomington, Indianapolis: Indiana University Press. 282 pp. Hb.: \$80.00. ISBN: 9780253023827.**

In 2017, *Dubioza Kolektiv*, a popular Bosnian and Herzegovinian (B&H) music band released a song titled *Anthem of the Generation (Himna generacije)*. It is a song that depicts one of the most used words that describes, in contemporary B&H but also in surrounding countries, one of the most significant problems of modern ex-Yu people – *sekirancija* (worrying one's self sick) – in short, how everyday information from newspapers and web portals about celebrities, tragedies, terrorism, ecological catastrophes, wars, and economic crises influences, our health. In the case of this song – our prostate! The same year that this song was out and became very popular, not just in B&H but also Croatia and Serbia, Larisa Jašarević published her ethnography titled *Health and Wealth on the Bosnian Market: Intimate Debt*. If somebody were to make a film based on this ethnography, the *Dubioza Kolektiv* song would probably be a theme song of the movie. This book, as the author herself, has explained in the introductory chapter: ‘... traces connections that are not obvious, between places that have been simply overlooked, and speaks of issues that are shared across formal differences. Popular health, gifts and informal debts, medical and market experiences ...’ (p. 3). Larisa Jašarević is more or less focused on home-based medical practice but giving us the broader and everyday context – life – that surrounds these practices she creates beautiful and detailed ethnographic vignettes that, like glue on collage paper, connect these places and practices that, at first glance, seem to have no direct connections: ‘streets, marketplace, and clinics that occasioned the assemblies around common concerns with health and wealth’ (p. 37).

This is one of the most detailed ethnographies I have read lately. It takes us to intimate corners of her interlocutors’ lives, kitchen shelves, and closets, introducing us to their everyday lives, even behind the closed doors so that we can better understand their actions in the books research focus. Only a few pages from one person’s closet she takes us to a busy Bosnian market where we have to push our way through in order to find out about buying habits of contemporary Bosnians, and how merchants are surviving in new economic circumstances. Here, we learn how everyday economics are entangled in gift giving and taking inside and outside of the market. Selling and buying on the market has been facilitated by informal loans of money and commodities circulation, and accumulation of debts generates a sort of wealth. You don’t have actual money in your hand, but you have so many people in debt to you that you are basically rich. Being generous and always ready to help your neighbour is almost an act of duty but also enjoyment. However, since generosity is expected loans are almost never denied and because of the economic reality of B&H debts are extended into the future with an uncertain deadline.

This duty of unconditional help Larisa Jašarević connects with other omnipresent concepts of *nafaka*. As Jašarević explains:

Nafaka is a theory of wealth that emphasizes the singularity of each person in the business of surviving, living well, or ranking in profits, even if each

element is part of the larger and palpable market forces largely beyond one's control. *Nafaka* picks up everything about one's economic fortunes that is left unexplained after the computing of the usual variables: the class position in the given economic field, within the broader historical trends. In other words, *nafaka* is about the impossible questions – why this particular person, under these conditions, despite the odds, fared this way and not any other. *Nafaka* shows the extent to which economy is inseparable from ritual and quotidian domains of practice – an old lesson of economic anthropology – as well as the ways in which the improperly economic but shared sensibilities and inclinations vigorously inform the popular economy (p. 109).

This principle of *nafaka* is something that follows every B&H person from her/his first day of life until she/he dies. Moreover, it goes beyond any religious or national distinction. When a baby is born, everyone who comes to see the baby must bestow the baby by giving her/him money 'on the forehead' (*na čelo*), and in that way kick-start a child *nafaka* (luck and good health). This gift of debt follows you until the day of your last debt – the funeral expenses.

The story about health and wealth continues far from the marketplace with another B&H practice: the concept of *strava* – a magical practice that has three main principles: (1) it cures all illnesses, (2) it is for everyone, (3) and it has no price. Through descriptions of several individuals that practice *strava*, Jašarević explains how the entire therapeutic economy works as constant advancement of gifts which are also debts. The *strava* give-and-take, according to Jašarević, resonates with the rest of the informal debt economy.

In this part of the book, she introduces a significant character of the story that had a significant influence on her research and, it seems, her life – one of the people that heal others and practice *strava* – the Queen. Since she has a special relationship and unique way of approaching her, I will not go into detailed description of the character of the Queen; I will leave that to other readers to interpret on their own way. From a personal point of view, her description of the Queen convinced me that the supernatural exists even though that was not the intention of the author. Jašarević admits her fears that the Queen would probably be disappointed with her book, and that she thinks her description would offend the Queen and her patients.

As personally divided between researching and writing anthropological work and attempting to give something back to the local communities that I am researching in B&H, I would like to use this opportunity to ask Jašarević, if I may be so free, to write at some point in her life, the book the Queen told her to write, with the colours of the rainbow on the cover, the book the queen and her patients deserve. That would be a more anthropological act than any anthropological text. It is obvious, reading this book, how deeply the author was involved within her research and how her personal life framed her research but also how the research, in the end, had a dramatic influence on her personal life. Although she avoids using autoethnography as a tool, her entire book is coloured with her life, and it would not be close to what it is without her native point of view and her personal experiences and family and friends' connections and stories. I am not sure why

the author tries to blur this reality of her book. I consider it to be a strength of the book. It is because of her personal involvement and background that she realises and fairly warns about the complexity of B&H society. Only the researcher that truly acknowledges this complexity can worry about being read as naïve because of her description of B&H, as she does. However, two pages later, she shows how she is not naïve, and she emphasises how she is telling only a few among many possible stories of the B&H, stories that are not meant to be historically or economically comprehensive.

Nevertheless, these stories did brilliantly outline two parts of contemporary troubled B&H society in a manner that goes beyond any and every religious, nationalistic, and political division and that are shared among all the nations and religions of B&H: Health and Wealth. As Jašarević emphasises, the recurrent point of the book is that popular economy and broadly medical practices result in possibilities that may be odd or unanticipated by the formal economic and biomedical logic and by the ethno-national identities. Patients enter *strava* regardless of their national or religious identity; the Queen has patients from all corner of B&H that belong to all ethno-national categories. Health is something that does not recognise any borders, divisions, or identities and in B&H health is strongly interwoven with work, and the economic situation (i.e. wealth). To get back to the beginning of this review, – (*sekirancija/sikirancija*) worrying sickness, how Jašarević translates this is:

... a category of health disorder widely recognized by traditional, conventional, and alternative medicine and is associated with a whole range of symptoms, from irritability to indigestion to insomnia to visceral malfunction, as well as to a host of signs legible in medical technology. Among the most common shorthands for *sikirancija* are laboratory test results for cholesterol, diabetes, and blood pressure ... (p. 131).

To paraphrase the *Dubioza Kolektiv* song, this book is an anthem of the contemporary generations of B&H.

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