BOURDIEU AND SOCIAL MOVEMENTS THEORIES: SOME PRELIMINARY REMARKS ON A POSSIBLE CONCEPTUAL CROSS-FERTILIZATION IN THE CONTEXT OF (POST-)YUGOSLAV ANTI-WAR AND PEACE ACTIVISM

ABSTRACT This paper puts forth and calls for further unpacking of a potentially fruitful conceptual cross-fertilization between various social movements theories and Bourdieu’s sociology of practice. Following some of my most important predecessors, I argue that this theoretical hybridization could accommodate many threads of social movements research that otherwise would not cohere into a rounded theory. Bourdieu’s powerful conceptual armoury is both parsimonious and flexible and seems particularly well-suited to address the problematic issues pertaining to agency and structure in the field of social movements. In the second section of the paper, I call for an exploration of Yugoslav anti-war and pacifist activism immediately before and during the wars of Yugoslav succession. I perceive a number of politically and organizationally heterogeneous initiatives, taking place throughout the demised country, as a case that can be used to empirically test the proposed theoretical considerations. Yugoslav anti-war and pacifist activism has yet to receive the sociological attention that it deserves. It is a complex social phenomenon calling for a sophisticated and systematic examination which should position it between its antecedents – the embryonic forms of extra-institutional engagement during Yugoslav communism – and its divergent posterity, mostly circumscribed within the national fields of non-governmental organizations.

KEY WORDS Bourdieu, social movements, habitus, field, (post-)Yugoslav anti-war activism

APSTRAKT U ovom radu se izlaže i nudi za dalje promišljanje potencijalno plodonosno pojmovno ukrštanje između teorija društvenih pokreta i Burdijevove sociologije prakse. Sledeći neke od mojih najznačajnijih prethodnika, tvrdim da bi se navedenom teorijskom hibridizacijom mogle spojiti mnoge nitii iz istraživanja društvenih pokreta koje inače ne tvore

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zaokruženu teoriju. Burdijeova moćna pojmovna aparatura je istovremeno koncizna i fleksibilna, a i, čini se, posebno pogodna za hvatanje u koštac s pitanjima dejstvenosti i struke u domenu društvenih pokreta. U drugom delu članka zalažem se za ispitivanje jugoslovenskog antiratnog i pacifističkog aktivizma neposredno pre i tokom ratova za jugoslovensko nasledje. Identifikujem niz politički i organizaciono raznorodnih inicijativa, širom zemlje koja se raspasala, kao slučajeve koji se mogu upotrijebiti da se empirijski testiraju predložena teorijska razmatranja. Jugoslovenski antiratni i pacifistički aktivizam tek treba da dobije sociološku pažnju koju zaslužuje. Reč je o kompleksnom društvenom fenomenu koji iziskuje istančano i sistematsko istraživanje, što bi trebalo da ga pozicionira između prethodnika – začetaka vaninstitucionalnog angažmana u periodu komunizma u Jugoslaviji – i raznolikog potomstva, koje se uglavnom ograničava na nacionalna polja nevladinih organizacija.

KLJUČNE REČI Burdije, društveni pokreti, habitus, polje, (post)jugoslovenski antiratni aktivizam

Within the contemporary social science of Western provenance, social movements tend to be seen as part and parcel of social life. They have become so ubiquitous to make some authors claim that we live in a social movement society (Meyer & Tarrow, 1998). Irrespective of their pervasiveness and indisputable political relevance, social movements have for long escaped a unanimous definition and, consequently, a theory that could persuasively account for their differing manifestations. This is hardly surprising given that it is difficult to capture all the aspects of such often nebulous and erratic undertakings (social movements) at a sufficiently high level of abstraction while still meaningfully adhering to empirical substance.

The current paper represents an inceptive platform for a dialogue between Bourdieu’s sociology of practice and different social movements concepts in the context of still largely unexplored anti-war and peace activism before, during and after the wars of Yugoslav succession. I use the abundant conceptual apparatus of social movement theories as a Wittgensteinian toolkit and select from it those whose explanatory charge and abstracting potential can, in my view, be enhanced through a cross-fertilization with some of the pivotal concepts of Bourdieu’s theory of practice. I believe that Bourdieu’s theory can, in turn, also benefit from this exchange.

It is not my intention to provide an exhaustive overview of such a prolific field like social movements, particularly since this has already been done on numerous occasions by some of the most authoritative social movements scholars (e.g., Crossley, 2002; Della Porta & Diani, 1999). Rather, I begin to explore and call for further examination of a synthetic framework of movement analysis which draws upon Pierre Bourdieu’s sociology. This conceptual hybridization seems plausible enough to warrant both theoretical and empirical assessment of its capacity to
accommodate, consolidate and strengthen many scattered insights of social movement theories.

The idea to cross-fertilize Bourdieu’s sociology of practice and various theories of social movements and investigate how the latter can be strengthened by the former was first propounded by Crossley (2002) and further explored in his subsequent works (Crossley, 2003). There are, to the best of my knowledge, no empirical studies that test these theoretical considerations. In the current outline of this synthetic account, I closely follow Crossley’s original contribution which is based on the premise that the principal theories of social movements manifest problems in the ways in which they address issues of structure and agency, and that Bourdieu’s theory of practice can begin to remedy these shortcomings cogently and economically. Throughout the paper, I supply more explicit definitions of the principal concepts directly taken from Bourdieu’s extensive oeuvre (which Crossley sometimes leaves insufficiently specified) and I offer some critical remarks. These are, however, of only minor importance for what I consider to be an insightful and potentially fruitful theoretical advancement.

In the second section of the paper, I attempt to bring the preceding theoretical considerations into a dialogue with the possibilities of their empirical substantiation by mapping out the ways in which one could operationalize them in the context of Yugoslav anti-war and peace activism towards the end of the 1980s and in the early 1990s. Before these research-oriented points, I offer a couple of terminological clarifications and discuss some of the principal reasons for which (post-)Yugoslav anti-war and peace activism, taking place immediately prior to and during the wars of Yugoslav succession, has remained a blind spot in a recently burgeoning corpus of Eastern European sociological scholarship. Either burnt on a traitor’s pyre or praised as political martyrs, the embryos of (post-)Yugoslav politically-focused civil society still await an empirically and theoretically sound assessment which would position them between their (non)communist predecessors and their contemporary descendants. The proposed theoretical framework, enhanced by Bourdieu’s potent and flexible conceptual armoury could, I propose, help with this task.

**Bourdieu’s Habitus and Theory of Crisis in the Field of Social Movements**

Pierre Bourdieu’s sociology comprises a broad system of empirically substantiated theoretical considerations that touch upon many spheres of social life and probe into the processes that assure reproduction of various forms of social practice. However, in contrast to many other theorists, Bourdieu suggests that a certain degree of conflict and struggle is inevitable in the processes of social reproduction. Although such a conception might raise some problems as to the circularity of social reproduction that Bourdieu posits, the notion of change as a
normal characteristic of the existent and newly generated social structures is important and might constitute a suitable point of departure for a theory of social movements. This is primarily due to the fact that social movements, in principle, are collective enterprises seeking, in the words of Blumer (1969, p. 99):

> to establish a new order of life. They have their inception in a condition of unrest, and derive their motive power, on the one hand, from dissatisfaction with the current form of life, and, on the other hand, from wishes and hopes for a new system of living. The career of a social movement depicts the emergence of a new order of life.

To understand Bourdieu’s notion of crisis, we have to introduce one of the most powerful and frequently used tools in Bourdieu’s conceptual tool kit bag – the *habitus* – both a product and a producer of the social – a concurrently structured and structuring entity that embodies an intricate interplay of synchronic and diachronic social elements. The habitus, to start by going back to Bourdieu (2000, p. 19), represents

> a set of dispositions, reflexes and forms of behaviour people acquire through acting in society. It reflects the different positions people have in society, whether they are brought up in a middle class environment or in a working class suburb.

The habitus of individuals or groups is positioned in a social sphere whose discursive level, the field of contention and debate, is underpinned by a broader layer of unspoken and pre-reflexive or, in Bourdieu’s lexicon, *doxic* assumptions and practices that remain latent and uncontested. This deep foundation of social life – which might imply, as Bourdieu’s theory of crisis in general does – an overly consensual perspective on the social order – is itself a product of struggles that have sunk into oblivion, making recurrent legitimation of the status quo and the state’s political power unnecessary (Crossley, 2002, 2003). In other words, the habitus normally tends to be a reflection of the broader context in which it is positioned, from which it stems and which it reproduces.

Nevertheless, there are instances in which doxic premises penetrate into and inundate the sphere of discourse and, by doing so, force the habitus out of its alignment with the realities of the space in which it is normally (re)produced. As Bourdieu (1977, p. 169) says:

> The critique which brings the undiscussed into discussion, the unformulated into formulation, has as the condition of its possibility objective crisis, which, in breaking the immediate fit between the subjective structures and the objective structures, destroys self-evidence practically…the would-be most radical critique always has the limits that are assigned to it by the objective conditions.

As a result of this critical moment, on whose nature and conditions for appearance Bourdieu remains rather elusive, the normally taken-for-granted
premises of social life retreat in front of innovative forms of praxis in which *rational and conscious computation supersedes habitus as the main principle of practice production* (Bourdieu, 1990, c.f., p. 108). Crossley (2003) is particularly critical of the way in which Bourdieu develops this point because he tends to read it as a complete suspension on the habitus in a period of crisis which opens up new agency possibilities that remain poorly specified in Bourdieu’s oeuvre.

It would be, according to Crossley, more plausible to argue that, instead of perceiving conscious computation and constitutive habits and expectations as mutually exclusive and thinking that certain features of the habitus are subdued in periods of crisis, they should rather be seen as mutually reinforcing features of practice. In my view, the habitus cannot be easily dismissed or superseded by an external actor or event because it actually determines who is to be affected by such influences and consequently who takes (or not) part in collective endeavours that try to resist them. In that sense, the habitus contains elements of its own partial suspension and transformation. It circumscribes the sphere of its own malleability and owes a lot of its explanatory potential exactly to this feature.

What is, however, more problematic and has by now remained somewhat untheorized when it comes to Bourdieu’s conception of struggle integrated in a normal social reproduction cycle, is its capacity to account for social movements *qua* undertakings that trespass the clearly demarcated area of institutionalized politics, (radically) rupture the existing power relations and generate new forms of social structure. Social activity marked by a drastic penetration into the intricate nexus of the political remains for Bourdieu somewhat of an exception, an extraordinary and particularly intense moment that cannot appreciate tenuous threads linking seemingly remote political episodes that, in fact, have the same ideological foundation (see Melucci (1986) on ‘submerged networks’ or Taylor’s (1989) ‘abeyance structures’) and testify to the resilience of oppositional social currents in many societies. In that sense, crises could actually be conceptualized as a sudden crystallization of strains and discontents that are latently but continuously brewing within the political arena.

Moreover, Crossley (2003) suggests that another serious reservation that social movements scholars might have with Bourdieu’s theory of crisis has to do with the idea that, by conceptualizing or reducing a crisis to a mismatch between the habitus and the actualities of the field they inhabit, Bourdieu, to a certain extent, fails to accentuate the importance of the preconditions of protest and movement formation. Although one could possibly stretch the concepts of the habitus and field to account for this, one would be better advised to have recourse to a rich bibliography on political opportunities, resources and networks for a better exposition of the kind of strains that can actually stimulate mass mobilization (e.g., Jenkins, 1983; Tarrow, 1998).
Exploring the Radical Habitus

One of the first fruitful channels for the marriage between social movement conceptual armoury and Bourdieu’s theory of practice pertains to the fact that Bourdieu does not really provide an exhaustive explanation for the biographical impact that participation in a memorable political event might have (c.f., McAdam, 1988 for a classic study on this issue; also Searle-Chatterjee, 1999) or, in other words, for the ways in which the habitus propels one towards and undergoes transformation as a result of engagement in empowering social activism.

Sociological studies, mostly conducted in the United States, have by now clearly established that politically active individuals tend to remain so for years after their initial political experiences, in spite of the fact that this might slightly subside over time. Much of this research demonstrates that it is exactly participation in protest that is crucial for subsequent social movement involvement (c.f., Jennings, 1987; Sherkat & Blocker, 1997). Crossley (2003, p. 51) refers to this newly created disposition towards further political activism as radical habitus and he posits that:

The formation of a radical habitus is closely bound up with an individual’s biography, but their biography is, in turn, intertwined with and affected by their social-structural location, as well as broader historical trends and events.

The essence of such a radical habitus is that it is not movement-specific. That is to say that the disposition towards politically conscious activism represents a general platform upon which many diverse causes might be taken up and struggled for. Research demonstrates that activists tend to move from one to another or be simultaneously involved in multiple social movements (Crossley, 2003). It would be also plausible to assume that, in the first instance, activists might come together on a particularly salient issue, but subsequently assume different (or divergent) activist paths as the salience of their cause subsides or the movement grows large enough to start disintegrating along ideological cleavages that sooner or later emerge within it.

The concept of habitus, then, nicely captures two aspects of social movement participation and integrates findings stemming from different theoretical tracks. The first relates to the fact that once involved, activists tend to remain in the field of contention making it in many cases plausible ‘to theorize activism in terms of durable dispositions’ (Crossley, 2003, p. 51). But, what particularly strengthens the marriage between the concept of the habitus and social movements research is that it shows that this disposition is generated, shaped and structured through engagement in activism. This process is crucial for the field of contention and extra-institutional involvement in political issues because it secures the survival of activism as a social practice.

The notion of the radical habitus, in this regard, also accounts for the recurrent finding that the ways in which young people are schooled into politics is tightly
related to the family and the educational system as the two principal suppliers of the knowledge and means for engagement in political life. Among many other authors working on this topic, Downton and Wehr (1997) demonstrated that people born and raised within an environment in which political issues are frequently on the agenda are more likely to subsequently become activists and have more political agency. The over-representation of the middle class and the ways in which the skills and know-how acquired through exposure to and socialization within a certain cultural context are masked as natural properties and defined as superior to those of other groups is, of course, a persistent theme of Bourdieu’s sociology (e.g., Bourdieu, 1984). The class specificity of habitus, thus, appreciates the role that the appropriation of and exposure to different forms of capital (or resources in the lexicon of social movement theories) has upon people’s developmental trajectories and their propensities to participate in political activism.

The radical habitus as a basis for theorizing social movements promises to resolve the impasse of rational action theory (e.g., Olson, 1971) which finds a pursuit of purposes beneficial for the whole community quite problematic. Rational action theory would assume that actors who know that they are not going to be the only beneficiaries of the positive outcomes of actions in which they engage, would actually abstain from acting and, thus, allow others to produce the desired effects for them. A consequence of this is that no one is sufficiently motivated to take part in a collective enterprise. There are, however, people who engage in insurgencies and even put their lives at stake for a political cause. Rational action theory cannot account for this although there are some attempts to claim that activists do accrue certain benefits unavailable to those who remain passive. This is still rather unsatisfactory given that it is not clear why only some people tend to be interested in such benefits (Crossley, 2003; Olson, 1971).

Although neophyte recruitment for protest participation remains out of the explanatory reach of this theoretical hybridization, Bourdieu’s concept of habitus makes us appreciate that a disposition to engage in political protest is engendered and shaped by a certain type of biographical exposure to the formative political experiences or, in other words, by being positioned in and having access to an environment in which political issues are salient. It is, actually, within this context that a non-economic kind of incentives emerges, namely the one that pertains to existential and ethical motivations behind political participation. Activists tend to claim that participation was simply inevitable for them, that they could not have done otherwise (c.f., Bilić, 2008) – an affirmation that goes counter to some of the basic premises of rational choice theory.

Further, Crossley (2003) posits that the concept of habitus supersedes political domain, citing studies which demonstrate that activists tend to pursue occupations and have lifestyles which are compatible with their political perspectives. One could
have some reservations about this artificial separation between the personal and the political which Crossley puts forth, but which can be elegantly accounted for by the habitus. Personal and political domains are indistinguishably intertwined and it is only natural that personal concerns will stream into the activists’ political sphere and vice versa. The habitus should draw these seemingly separate realms into a unified whole by accentuating ‘a common structure running through political activity, work-life and lifestyle’ (p. 54). The extent, however, to which such a fluid integration takes place is informed by a range of ‘objective’ political, economic, social and biographical determinants. For the same reason, the habitus of all activists is not equally radical. I will come back to this issue in the second part of the paper.

**Capital, Fields and Illusio in Social Movements**

Social movements, of course, cannot be sole products of the habitus because they are to an important extent determined by the flows of different forms of (what Bourdieu calls) capital. Bourdieu differentiates between three such forms, and by doing so advances the notion of capital well beyond its everyday economist connotations.

Capital can present itself in three fundamental guises: as *economic capital*, which is immediately and directly convertible into money and may be institutionalized in the form of property rights; as *cultural capital*, which is convertible, in certain conditions, into economic capital and may be institutionalized in the form of educational qualifications; and as *social capital*, made up of social obligations (‘connections’), which is convertible, in certain conditions, into economic capital and may be institutionalized in the form of a title of nobility (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 242).

That material resources, however precarious, are a necessity for movements to develop is an empirically substantiated claim that can hardly be disputed (e.g., McCarthy & Zald, 1977). But resources that are crucial for social movements are not only of financial nature, they are also social and cultural/symbolic. Bourdieu’s (1986, p. 245) view of social capital as

the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition – or, in other words, to membership in a group – which provides each of its members with the backing of the collectivity-owned capital, a ‘credential’ which entitles them to credit, in the various senses of the word

squares nicely with the network theory of social movements which perceived movements as highly complex network structures (Diani & McAdam, 2003). Bourdieu can be particularly credited for accentuating the idea of cultural and
symbolic capital which is yet to receive adequate attention from social movement theorists. He says:

Cultural capital can exist in three forms: in the embodied state, i.e., in the form of long-lasting dispositions of the mind and body; in the objectified state, in the form of cultural goods (pictures, books, dictionaries, instruments, machines, etc.) which are the trace or realization of theories or critiques of these theories, problematics, etc.; and in the institutionalized state, a form of objectification which must be set apart because [...] it confers entirely original properties on the cultural capital which it is presumed to guarantee (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 247).

Social movements definitely constitute places within which different forms of capital intersect and Bourdieu’s notion of cultural capital shifts the analysis away from simplistic economic paradigms.

What is more, the idea to perceive social movements as spheres of contention has its origin already in McCarthy and Zald’s (1977) model. These authors talk about a social space in which interdependent movement activities compete for a finite pool of socially available resources (c.f., Crossley, 2003). Different political and ideological causes rise to prominence, stir public debate and sink into oblivion within this universe of contention. Yet again, Bourdieu (as cited in Moi, 1991, p. 1021) has a more encompassing view of a field as “A space in which a game takes place, [a space] of objective relations between individuals or institutions who are competing for the same stake”. This definition preserves the economic metaphor, but also extends it further towards other forms of capital flows, such as cultural, symbolic and social. Bourdieu does this by referring to the notion of game – rules of behaviour and their value-laden motivations operating in a certain field – that appreciates, but cannot be reduced to simplistic economic criteria which constitute only one out of many forces governing the social world.

Drawing upon Tilly (1978) and McAdam et al. (2001), Crossley (2003) suggests that the field of movement activism should be called field of contention, although he acknowledges that such a notion surpasses movement field to include various forms of resistance that are not necessarily movements. I am somewhat sceptical about this designation, because I believe that, given that they are intrinsically relational and contain finite amounts of their respective capital, all fields constituting the social universe are characterized by contention. This might be, it is true, more overt in the case of social movements. One could argue that the field of social movements actually opens up as a crystallization of discontent which is continuously spread across other fields. Contention is, thus, an overarching feature of the social, the inescapable undercurrent embedded in the intricate tapestry of relations among social actors.
Finally, Crossley (2003) is not particularly explicit about the last of Bourdieu’s concepts that will be employed here for social movements analysis, and that is *illusio* – a link between habitus and field, a hardly tangible property upon which activism thrives by ignoring the forces of reality or pushing some of its portions into the sphere of the questionable and changeable. In the words of Bourdieu (1996, p. 333):

The foundation of belief resides in *illusio*, the adherence to the game as a game, the acceptance of the fundamental premise that the game, literary or scientific, is worth being played, being taken seriously.

*Illusio* represents the activists’ investment in the rules of the game and their belief that what they put at stake is valuable. In that sense, *illusio* stimulates the generation of new forms of practices and knowledge and perpetuates movement claims. *Illusio* is a motivational engine behind activism that propels it by resisting disillusionment. It is, therefore, quite easy to see how this interesting concept could enter into the broader and recurrent debates within the realm of social movements theories that pertain to activists’ motivation to take part in protest. Social activism is often normatively charged, it is based on a certain vision of the social world and the concept of *illusio* captures a fair portion of this motivational dynamics.

There is no doubt that Bourdieu’s sociology would lend itself to further cross-fertilization possibilities. However, in the following section I will attempt to bring this theoretical debate closer to the realm of (post-)Yugoslav anti-war and pacifist activism towards the end of the 1980s and in the early 1990s. I will outline at least three reasons for the paucity of sociological studies on this topic and then proceed to discussing some ways in which the above conceptual synthesis can be operationalized in this particular context.

**Yugoslav Anti-War and Peace Activism**

It is, first of all, important to provide a terminological clarification which has to do with the necessity to keep anti-war and peace (or pacifist) activism conceptually separate, in spite of the fact that they are related, overlapping and sometimes used interchangeably. I believe that anti-war activism, on the one hand, and peace activism, on the other, are distinct forms of civic engagement and differentiating between them is particularly relevant in the context of (post-)Yugoslav activism where a lot of tensions among the activists stemmed from the central cleavage separating anti-war from pacifist efforts.

My understanding, in principle, is that a peace activist (or a pacifist) is by default an anti-war activist, whereas an anti-war activist need not necessarily be a pacifist. Anti-war activism often has a personal and local dimension (in the sense of
private war-related grievances stimulating resistance to a particular war happening here and now), whereas peace activism is informed by a broader, globally-oriented set of values and orientations according to which war or any kind of military means must never be used for conflict resolution. Peace activism is, thus, propelled by community-oriented practices and it, in this regard, often stems from a clear political stance.

Spontaneously gathered activists, of course, do not cluster in one or the other group at the beginning of their public engagement. These profiles become more salient in concrete political circumstances and as a result of specific events and developments, such as, for example, the foreign military interventions in Bosnia or Serbia. It is also important to note that an anti-war stance can be articulated from a nationalist perspective, whereas pacifist activism tends to be more related to left-oriented and environmentalist attitudes.

A lot of sociological accounts on Yugoslavia’s dissolution gloss over such distinctions. The 1990s carnage has become the present day locus classicus of the most ideologically diverse discussions of nationalism and its destructive force. Nationalism, as the explanatory paradigm in the area of (post-)Yugoslav studies, has colonized the field, practically circumscribing the sphere of the thinkable and it has, by doing so, obscured a range of civic (and sometimes also centripetal) initiatives. A flurry of books and research articles have focused on strong centrifugal forces, including those devoted to the (ex-)Yugoslav intellectuals who provided the ideological framework for the dissolution of the country (e.g., Dragovic-Soso, 2002). The authoritative bibliographical corpus that perceives nationalism as the most important cause of Yugoslavia’s disintegration has appreciably grown over the last decade and it is becoming increasingly difficult to contribute an original and insightful argument to this debate.

In my initial thinking on the topic, I have frequently encountered the criticism that such groups as (post-)Yugoslav anti-war and peace activists are by no means representative and they are, consequently, I suppose, less worthy of a sociologist/political scientist’s attention. Quite the contrary seems to be the case in my eyes. The more recent European history (to stay closer to home in both space and time) teaches us that what is quantitatively insignificant should not be outright dismissed as unimportant. The power of ideas and the impact they produce is not directly related to the order of their numerical magnitude or, at least, not at all times. Ideas float within a permeable social frame and suddenly crystallize under propitious circumstances. Caught in constant conjunctural fluctuation, the mainstream and the marginal can quickly alternate. As social scientists we also have a professional proclivity towards (putative) peripherality and we are intrigued by the ways in which it manages to reproduce itself, thriving upon scarce resources and facing
constant risks of extinction, while concurrently shaping (and being shaped by), displacing and denying the centre.

More specifically, though, the dearth of sociological interest in the topic of Yugoslav anti-war and peace campaigns is tightly related to the ways in which scholars on the region perceive the nature and the causes of the destructive nationalism and the country’s ultimate dissolution. As Ana Dević (1997) convincingly argues, the majority of research studies on the former Yugoslavia are based on the paradigm that multi-national societies are by definition conflictual and characterized by a tendency towards ethnically homogeneous nation-states. Ethnic identity tends to be perceived as a fixed category that is superimposed over a whole range of other possible personal affiliations. It is, therefore, no wonder that when essentialized nationalist sentiments acquire central status, not much space is left for anti-war or peace initiatives regardless of their form or scope. However, the mere fact that these initiatives were undertaken debunks the idea that all political mobilization stems from ethnicity and allegedly universal desire of the people to live in separate and ethnically homogeneous states.

While I recognize the devastating impact that ideologically manipulated nationalist sentiments had on the course of Yugoslavia’s disintegration, it might be, perhaps, the right moment to take the spotlight off the advocates of destructive nationalism. The above-mentioned works should now be complemented by studies that examine the various counter-movements by positioning them in the right historical and social contexts. I believe that these politically and organizationally heterogeneous initiatives deserve public appreciation as testaments of civic courage and social responsibility.

The study of such undertakings forces the researcher to take a serious look at Yugoslav politics, society and culture, and thereby to give agency back to the citizens of the devastated country (Bilić, 2010). By the same token, it demonstrates how the war, far from being an inevitability produced by ancient hatreds, was the result of a whole complex of interactions among both long- and short-term political, economic, social and geo-strategic factors in which different republic elites as well as different civic activists had appreciably uneven access to resources and power. This kind of research is unlikely to focus on the vast majority of non-participants, but it might, nevertheless, illuminate some of the reasons for their passivity. It could also contribute to our understanding, not only of the outcome of events, but of the multiple equilibria that preceded what we today know as historical facts. “The major effect of historical evolution is to abolish history by relegating to the past, that is, to the unconscious, the lateral possibles that it eliminated” (Bourdieu, 1998, p. 56).

Moreover, there are at least two further reasons for the paucity of studies on (post-)Yugoslav anti-war initiatives. The first of these is that civic and political contention is intrinsically episodic. The instances of civic challenges to the rapidly
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degenerating communist system in Yugoslavia became increasingly weak and brief. Traditional democratization and civil society literature tends to skim over these short-lived attempts, instead focusing on permanent organizations or, at least, those that managed to better withstand the pressures of the regime (Kaldor, 2003).

Secondly, more extensive research covering the entire territory of the former Yugoslavia or more than one successor state, became increasingly difficult in the immediate post-war period due to a couple of inter-related factors. For example, contact with former academic colleagues was scarce and the exchange of information was difficult. After the fragmentation of the country, the focus was quickly and sometimes rather purposefully shifted from the federal (Yugoslav) level to the particular concerns of the newborn nation-states. However, the time seems now ripe for a reversal of this trend. As the deafening nationalist clamour has subsided and some of the deepest wounds are slowly healing, it is the task of post-Yugoslav historiography, sociology and political science to offer critical and empirically founded readings of the events surrounding Yugoslavia’s demise (c.f., Jović, 2009).

In this regard, an effort should be made, I would submit, to resist a purely national focus and work on the three Yugoslav successor states directly involved in the protracted armed conflict. This potentially fruitful interest goes beyond the typical methodologists’ praise of comparative research design and more insightful material that it normally yields. Such a trans-national (Yugoslav) orientation is to be maintained primarily because war (and, consequently, anti-war activism) is by nature an interactive phenomenon with, as in the Yugoslav case, asymmetric power distributions of those involved in it. In that vein, I think that Bosnia, Croatia and Serbia are interwoven in an intricate triadic nexus that can only be appreciated as a whole, paying close attention to the abundance of antagonistic war perceptions that shift with different geographical and ideological vantage points both within and between the republics/states and international actors.

In attempting to put the neglected activities and efforts of Yugoslav anti-war and peace activists more prominently onto the research agenda, such studies could spotlight two theoretically fruitful concerns. The first of these is historical continuity. Recognizing the historicity of the events in question, research could set out to analyze a dynamic set of processes related to the attempt to bring about political change and avert or, at least, alleviate armed conflict in the former Yugoslavia.

In relation to this, a particular challenge facing a student of (post-)Yugoslav civic activism has to do with the question of whether all activists were really aspiring to a profound social change². Social movements studies have paid a lot of

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² I thank my anonymous reviewer for this important remark.
attention to the processes of mobilization and resource management, but they have not been equally interested in the vital question of political orientations underlying collective enterprises (Walder, 2009). It is, in this regard, pertinent to go back to Crossley (2003) and note that it might be, at least, in certain instances, problematic to apply his notion of radical habitus as a general activist habitus here. This concept has originated in the Western sociological scholarship in which it is tightly related to left-wing activism aiming at transforming and subverting power relations in capitalist societies.

Thus, while radical habitus as a concept might be, indeed, applicable to some activists wanting an authentic discontinuity, it does not work for those who engaged in activism for the sake of maintaining (disrupted) continuity. The political and social processes in which (post)Yugoslav anti-war and peace activists found themselves were embedded in the broader context of tectonic changes that were then taking place in Eastern Europe and the world. In that vein, the kind of research I am proposing should oppose the widespread trend in the scholarship on participatory efforts and public protest of detaching these phenomena from their historical context (Clemens & Hughes, 2002). The question arises as to for whom it was at all structurally and politically possible to be taken aback by Yugoslavia’s demise to such an extent to become willing to do something about it. This is a rather intangible issue that might be difficult to capture in individual interviews, but its contours could become more obvious by increasing sample variance as well as recovering political attitudes through biographical and documentary analysis.

More generally, examinations of (post-)Yugoslav anti-war and pacifist activism must strive to bridge the gap that might exist between history, sociology, and political science and show that in spite of the fact that events (past or present) tend to have identifiable causes conducive to academic inquiry, they should not be viewed as the inevitable consequence of unalterable social forces. Paying closer attention to history, in other words, demonstrates that current and future developments, albeit certainly influenced by power relations, systematic processes or mere vicissitudes of the past, are by no means entirely determined by them. This is particularly relevant for a region in which the past is an unavoidable point of contention that, for the sake of the future, needs to be mastered by both the academic community and the broader public.

The second principal theoretical concern is the fact that the vast majority of studies on social movements focus on how alternative initiatives are formed as well as on the ways in which they develop and act as challengers of the political system. There is, however, a conspicuous paucity of social science research on the reasons why social movements fail. Even though they require a substantial level of coordination, protest activities are fluid and nebulous undertakings whose outcomes
are always uncertain and dependent on popular support and a whole range of other factors (Tilly, 1986).

Competition over a pacifist or bellicose agenda must not be reduced solely to the interplay between activists and regime(s), but should take into consideration the multiplicity as well as the differing nature of the system challengers and the possibility of competition among them. More specifically, the question is how (post-)Yugoslav anti-war and peace activists articulated (a) precarious position(s) of political agents resisting or promoting the powerful nationalizing discourses and why is it that they did not collectively manage to find a channel that would have given them a higher level of legitimacy during the wars of Yugoslav succession. Studying the mechanisms responsible for the success or failure of independent (political) activism is especially relevant for a region in which the spheres of autonomous civic activism and the state have not yet been clearly demarcated.

**Recovering Yugoslav Anti-War and Peace Activism through a Bourdieuan Analysis**

Although there is a paucity of studies of Yugoslav pacifist activism, there are also notable exceptions (Fridman, 2006; Jansen, 2005) and I will focus here on one of them, attempting to show how it could benefit from an articulation with Bourdieu’s theory of practice. Ana Dević (1997), for example, was among the first to document anti-war initiatives that took place on the Yugoslav territory prior to and during the 1990s armed conflict. Her contribution describes the emergence of anti-war campaigns in the former Yugoslavia and it is rather exhaustive, given that she provides an enumeration of collective actions and protests in all Yugoslav republics and provinces. Moreover, she criticizes the widespread insistence on essentialized national identities and analyzes structural preconditions of ethno-nationalism as a top-to-bottom project of the desperate ‘communist’ functionaries concerned about their weakening legitimacy. As we will also see below, Dević posits that a genuinely non-ethno-nationalistic, urban, cosmopolitan and predominantly pan-Yugoslav identity provided the basis for pacifist activism towards the end of the 1980s in the disintegrating Yugoslavia.

Dević’s (1997) paper claims that Yugoslav anti-war activism is characterized by two important changes that took place not long after its emergence. First, all anti-war initiatives passed through two phases since they emerged in 1991. The initial stage, from 1991 to 1992, consisted of a variety of street demonstrations and artistic protests against the political elites who were implicitly or openly promoting war as a possible solution to their irreconcilably divergent political interests. Throughout the second stage, street demonstrations subsided while some of the anti-war groups transformed into what Dević calls *proto-NGOs* that were predominantly conceived
as documentation centres gathering data on war crimes, human rights violations or offering humanitarian/legal aid and counselling to refugees. At this stage there was a substantive influx of financial support originating from the US and Western Europe.

Another change which Dević (1997) notes is that the thematic and organizational evolution of peace initiatives coincided with the move from initiatives that fostered coordination of protest activities among different Yugoslav republics to those confined within the borders of the newly formed nation-states. Dević claims that the central reason for this is to be found in the failure of telecommunications and post services towards the end of 1991. This is, of course, true, but to a certain extent fails to acknowledge innovative communication channels that the activists devised to keep in touch once the main means were severed. Unable to meet on Yugoslav territory, many anti-war groups (financially supported by Western foundations) organized gatherings outside their countries. With this in mind, one could explore how the possibility to travel earned some activists an ominous label of ‘anti-war profiteers’ and how the skills of fund-raising and speaking English, for example, accrued increasing importance and weakened the ‘genuineness’ of the pacifist cause.

I have invoked this important contribution to the rapidly expanding field of Yugoslav sociological scholarship because it was the first to start unpacking the complexities of the resistance to the wars of Yugoslav succession and has been therefore widely cited. This paper only points to the tip of the political iceberg and glosses over rich and intricate dynamics within the sphere of anti-war activism, some of which, as the work I am proposing could demonstrate, can be held responsible for its weakness to bring about a more relevant social change. However, it can provide a good starting point for operationalizing the above-proposed theoretical considerations that would also amend some of its shortcomings.

What is most problematic about Dević’s article is its conspicuous lack of a broader theoretical framework. For this reason, the empirical data, whose sources sometimes remain obscure, do not entirely cohere into a cogent analysis. Dević (1997) offers helpful hints from theory (p. 148) and rightly shows that anti-war activism mobilized the most urban segments of the Yugoslav society, but the empirical and the theoretical components of the paper remain strikingly asunder and the author does not really demonstrate how the social movements theories to which she points can account for the unmaking of Yugoslav civic identities.

First of all, Bourdieu’s conceptual armoury with the habitus at its helm could possibly elucidate why only some people in the disintegrating Yugoslavia were shocked out of their habitual acceptance of the field in which they were located as their habits and expectations were smashed against the agonizing reality. It could also make a social and ideological differentiation among them both within and between the republics/states. The tender ‘fit’ between objective structures and
subjective expectations was broken in a particularly dramatic way in a communist regime that enjoyed worldwide acclaim allowing many of its citizens to travel freely across the globe as well as have an easy access to health and educational services. What are the principal features of the habitus of those who were pushed into innovative forms of praxis and critical reflection as the doxic and the discursive exchanged their place accompanying a blatant collapse of social structure? How is this related to Bourdieu’s claim in the final chapter of *Distinction* that the educated are more likely to take part in the public sphere as they have better resources that enable such an engagement? Was a biographical exposure to the formative experiences of political engagement possible only for a small portion of urban population despite the widespread ‘ politicization’ that the ‘communist’ regime supposedly encouraged? What were the major differences between Serbia, Croatia and Bosnia and what can they be attributed to? In what ways was it different to be an activist in, for example, Zagreb and Belgrade or Osijek and Pančevo? How did some other staple features of the habitus (like gender, for example) attempt to compete with and outstrip the rising importance of national identity towards the end of the 1980s? Given that, as we saw above, the activist habitus is not movement-specific, how and why did the activists move from one initiative to the other?

Moreover, in relation to the discussion above, I have some reservations about the overly unified way in which Dević (1997) treats the various movements and initiatives that she reviews given that she rarely departs from the central divisive axis that separates ethno-nationalist authorities and anti-war activists who engendered a resistance field characterized by a constant discursive struggle. This axis is in itself problematic given that one could have an anti-war orientation in the sense of resisting the Yugoslav National Army, but taking an active part in the Croatian or Bosnian military forces. Also, Yugoslav pacifist activism was, to a great extent, about creating, expanding and cherishing the field of contention, fostering a range of alternative voices within the suffocating atmosphere of aggressive nationalism (e.g., Teršelić, 1997).

The important moments in the developmental trajectory of anti-war activism, such as the shift from one protest strategy – street demonstrations – to documentation and legal aid as well as the fragmentation of activism along national lines – remain under-theorized. This was surely not a smooth and, so to say, non-residual conversion. Bourdieu’s concept of habitus, as outlined in the current paper, could remedy this by joining forces with ‘repertoire selection’ and accounting for the diverging protest strategies that the activists employed. When and why are some protest strategies effective, when are they abandoned and substituted by more appropriate ones? Who becomes prominent and who is put aside in this process?

Another set of very important issues relate to financial, cultural and symbolic resources that were at the activists’ disposal and that they themselves created. Why
did not the activists manage to capitalize in a more successful manner on the civic or cultural capital that they inherited from their predecessors, particularly given that a substantive amount of such a capital was accrued through Yugoslav feminist engagement? What were the main cleavages among the feminist and other activists in the republics/states of our interest? How did the competition for different forms of capital marked by sometimes diametrically divergent ideological stances within the field of contention weaken the overarching activists’ cause (if there was one at all)? What was the role of other fields in which (post-)Yugoslav pacifist activists tried to find allies in order to increase the legitimacy of their struggle, such as, for example, the media and the international political sphere? Bearing these ideological distinctions in mind, it is plausible to ask about the basis upon which the field of political contention created before and during the wars of Yugoslav succession was partitioned? What are the criteria for the fragmentation and professionalisation of the post-Yugoslav civic fields within nation-states’ political spheres? Is there a new generation of civic activists? To what extent do they articulate their stance as a continuation/opposition to their Yugoslav predecessors?

Finally, (post-)Yugoslav pacifist activism was, and civic engagement in the region still is, a risky enterprise. Struggling to avert an armed conflict, lessen the gravity of its consequences and encourage others to come to terms with it in an environment charged by destructive nationalist sentiment, is an activity that can easily put one’s life at stake. It appears that from an economic point of view, this kind of social involvement can incur, if not outright losses, at least constant pressures for survival. My assumption is that Bourdieu’s concept of *illusio* could assist us to better appreciate the motivational force that propelled some people towards pacifist activism in the disintegrating Yugoslavia. What were the existential and ethical needs that the engagement in protest satisfied for Yugoslav activists? Why did only some of the citizens feel the urge to react to the destructive project of their irresponsible leaderships? How do they feel about their *illusio* twenty years afterwards? How did neophytes capitalize upon this motivation to increase their own political agency and take part in a precarious social endeavour? What was the biographical impact of activism? Who remained within the civic arena and who dropped out and why?

These are only some of the questions that are inspired by the proposed articulation between Bourdieu’s theory of practice and various theories of social movements. Some of these have been, to a certain extent, already addressed in the literature, but many of them are still awaiting a proper empirical investigation. One could plausibly assume that such a research would enhance the status of social movements theories in the Yugoslav and wider East European context in which they up to now have not been sufficiently explored.
Conclusion

This paper constitutes an invitation to venture into new conceptual grounds that could make us revisit the existing knowledge about (post-)Yugoslav anti-war and pacifist activism and possibly yield some innovative insights. More specifically, this paper puts forth and calls for further examination and unpacking of a potentially fruitful conceptual cross-fertilization between sometimes insufficiently robust social movement theories and Bourdieu’s sociology of practice. Following some of my most important predecessors, I argue that this theoretical hybridization could neatly accommodate many threads of social movement research that otherwise would not cohere into a rounded theory. Bourdieu’s powerful conceptual armoury is both parsimonious and flexible enough and it is, in my view, particularly well-suited to address the problematic issues pertaining to agency and structure in the field of social movements.

Secondly, I call for an exploration of Yugoslav anti-war and pacifist activism immediately before and during the wars of Yugoslav succession and perceive an array of activist initiatives and campaigns, which took place throughout the demised country, as a case that could put the proposed theoretical considerations to an empirical test. (Post-)Yugoslav anti-war and pacifist activism, probably due to its precarious and rather episodic nature, has not by now received the sociological attention that it deserves. It, therefore, remains a complex social phenomenon that calls for a more systematic examination which should position it between its antecedents – the embryonic forms of extra-institutional engagement during Yugoslav communism – and its numerous and sometimes divergent posterity circumscribed within the national fields of non-governmental organizations.

In this regard, the application of the proposed dialogue between different theories of social movements and some of the fundamental concepts of Bourdieu’s sociology of practice could open up new explanatory vistas that would better appreciate the biographical impact which various forms of exposure to civic activism might have. It would also elucidate how politicized reflexive disposition is an integral part of social agency closely related to the dynamic of reproduction within the field of social movements, and how this disposition stems from a certain habitus and then incorporates itself in a transformed one so that it can thrive upon and stimulate social change. In other words, the suggested articulation between social movement theories and Bourdieu’s key concepts could, if empirically applied in the (post-)Yugoslav context, demonstrate how the sector (or field) of social movements becomes an expanded and consolidated social structure that entails vibrant inter-relations between activists who take up, struggle for or abandon different ideological causes.
More specifically, the research agenda that I propose here could contribute to and promote the existing knowledge in the field of social movements in a specific Eastern European context in the following ways: first, it would constitute one of the inceptive attempts to systematically apply the conceptual instrumentarium of social movement theories to explore Yugoslav anti-war and peace initiatives and, in that sense, it would unearth, acknowledge and begin to explain the rather short career of a range of anti-war and pacifist collective undertakings before and during the wars of Yugoslav succession; second, such a study would point to the different manners in which (post-) Yugoslav anti-war and peace activism was conceived and practised as a function of the differing power relations and positions within the armed conflict; the resistance practices were not the same in Serbia, Bosnia and Croatia, but that they differed in accordance with power distributions and ideological orientations that circumscribed the sphere of the thinkable and realizable; third, this research would, in all likelihood, demonstrate how the present-day extra-institutional activism in these three post-Yugoslav countries stems from a plethora of anti-war and pacifist campaigns that took place throughout the 1990s and how those are themselves embedded in the history of Yugoslav post-Second World War (mostly feminist) civic activism; fourth, on a predominantly theoretical note, research questions revolving around this topic could be addressed through a potentially fruitful synthesis between Bourdieu’s theory of practice and theories of social movements and, thus, act as a platform for empirically testing the capacity of Bourdieu’s thought to strengthen the explanatory potency of social movements theories; finally, unlike the vast majority of studies on social movements that focus on their emergence and development, this research would be particularly interested in the ways in which social movements are weakened and marginalized and the mechanisms upon which they draw to resist oppression and protect their critical voice within an authoritarian political arena.

Ultimately, this exciting agenda can be realized without necessarily corroborating Bourdieu’s insights, but rather using them as a starting point for reflecting upon and analytically dissecting a complex social phenomenon. One would, actually, need to see what transformation Bourdieu’s principal concepts undergo as they penetrate the sphere of social movements. Wacquant says in the introduction to An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. xiv) that “an invitation to think with Bourdieu is of necessity an invitation to think beyond Bourdieu, and against him whenever required.” Both the value and the beauty of social thought reside not in the dogmatization with which neatly ordered concepts capture and construct our reality, but in reflexivity and flexibility with which it grows out of and beyond itself.
References


