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Flex Actors and Philanthropy in (Post-)Conflict Arenas: Soros' Open Society Foundations in the Post-Yugoslav Space

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Summary

This paper explores, through interviews and archive material, key actors in George Soros' Open Society Foundations in the post-Yugoslav space as "flex actors" or "flexians" who generate, occupy and transform new emergent spaces of power, advancing their own personal agendas as much, if not more, than organisational agendas. The focus is on three pivotal 'moments': the break-up of Yugoslavia and the wars in the early 1990s; the changes in Croatia and Serbia after Tudman and Milošević in 1999-2000; and the current confluence of austerity and new movement activism in the European periphery. The Soros "flexians" acted as key definers of conflict and post-conflict spaces in emerging and unstable discursive, institutional and political environments, with their claims to intellectual superiority, cosmopolitan sentiment and profound anti-nationalism serving to both define the contours of political opposition and reduce its broader resonance and impact. Later, a turn to 'policy' actually expanded the political opportunity structures for these "flexians" who often became key players in a contradictory 'modernisation' project emphasising the 'backwardness' of the region, or at least its political leadership, in relation to an imagined West and, at the same time, arguing that only domestic intellectual elites such as themselves could translate the values of modernity into implementable schemes. In the current 'moment', "flex actors" in the Foundations are negotiating new and complex relationships with movements against commodification, crony capitalism, the erosion of the right to public space and 'neo-liberal' austerity politics.

Keywords: Flex Actors, Soros, Post-Yugoslav Space, Post-Conflict, Philanthropy

Introduction¹

“On June 17, 1991, in Belgrade, I signed an agreement with (Federal Prime Minister Ante) Marković establishing the Soros Yugoslavia Foundation. A week later war erupted in Slovenia and Yugoslavia started to disintegrate” (Soros, 2011a: 7).

None but the most ardent conspiracy theorists – and some exist² – could attribute a key role in the break-up of Yugoslavia to George Soros and his Open Society Foundations. His role in the successor states, during and after the conflicts of the 1990s, is indisputably important, however. Here, my concern is much less with assessing the “impact” of Soros in the post-Yugoslav space in a traditional sense than with tracing, through interviews and archive material, Soros and key actors in his foundations as “flex actors” or “flexians”, operating “across borders”, pushing “beyond accepted steps and recognized routines” and performing “on the edge, trying out and inventing new patterns” (Wedel, 2009: 14).³ Soros and his Foundations “defy simple classification as existing at one level of analysis or another” (Callaghy

¹ This paper was first presented at a session ‘Advancing a Cause in the International Arena: flexians and activists in international governance’ under the auspices of the Association for the Anthropology of Policy at the Annual Meeting of the American Anthropological Association held in Chicago, Illinois in November 2013. I am grateful to participants in the session, particularly Janine Wedel, for their comments. I am indebted, as ever, to John Clarke for comments on an early draft which I have incorporated in this version. I particularly want to thank the respondents who were generous with their time and insights, constructive in their comments on a first draft, and supportive of publication.

² One conspiracy theory, in which Yugoslavia is destroyed by ‘shock therapy’, is best expressed by Engdahl (2004), who suggests that “Washington, using the NED (*National Endowment for Democracy*), George Soros’s Open Society Foundation and the IMF, introduced economic chaos into Yugoslavia as an instrument of geopolitical policy. In 1989, the IMF demanded that the Prime minister, Ante Marković, impose structural reform on the economy. For whatever reasons, he did. ... Using groups such as the Soros Foundation and NED, Washington financial support was channelled into often extreme nationalist or former fascist organizations that would guarantee a dismemberment of Yugoslavia. Reacting to this combination of IMF shock therapy and direct Washington destabilization, the Yugoslav president, Serb nationalist Slobodan Milosevic, organized a new Communist Party in November 1990, dedicated to prevent the breakup of the federated Yugoslav Republic. The stage was set for a gruesome series of regional ethnic wars which would last a decade and result in the deaths of more than 200,000 people.” (Engdahl, 2004: 239-240; http://www.takeoverworld.info/pdf/Engdahl_Century_of_War_book.pdf, accessed 5 November 2013).

³ For Wedel (2009), ‘flexians’ and ‘flex nets’ (when working in an exclusive network) personalise bureaucracy, privatise information, juggle roles and representations, and test the rules both of competition and of accountability. Flexians and flex nets adapt this *modus operandi* to advance their *own* agendas, rather than those of their organizations. Here, I am stretching her concept to suggest that within many of the Open Society Foundations in the former Yugoslavia the distinction between personal and organisational agendas was by no means clear cut. Hence a binary

et al., 2001: 6). The prescriptions, practices, and interventions of the Soros “flex actors” in the post-Yugoslav space cannot be reduced to a single imperative or motivation, but have to be seen as themselves generating, occupying and transforming “new and emergent spaces of power” (Newman, 2012: 8). In attempting to map what Newman has termed “the possibility of spaces of agency and of politics” (*ibid.*: 154), I construct, in broad brush strokes, an ambiguous, contradictory but, hopefully, plausible, story of some of the actors, discourses and practices of the Open Society Foundations in the post-Yugoslav space. It is a story which goes beyond the neat reductionism of critiques of Soros as a harbinger of ‘neo-liberal governmentality’ (Guilhot, 2007), without falling into the traps of hagiographic accounts of heroism and successful philanthropy (Sudetic, 2011).⁴ The story is woven around three pivotal ‘moments’⁵: the break-up of Yugoslavia and the wars in the early 1990s; the momentous changes in Croatia and Serbia under (and after) Tudman and Milošević in 1999-2000; and the current confluence of austerity, new movement activism, and the shattering of the European dream in the periphery and semi-periphery. Each of these conjunctural⁶ backdrops is used as a canvass to explore divergent understandings and interpretations in the mess of everyday micro-politics, new organisational forms, and interpersonal disagreements which can so easily be lost in the ‘big picture’.

Soros and the Foundations in the 1990s

Originally unconvinced of the need for an Open Society Foundation⁷ in Yugoslavia, Soros suggests that a number of “intellectuals” whom he met in the late 1980s at seminars in Dubrovnik, changed his mind (Soros, 2011a: 7). Sonja Licht, the first

opposition between ‘flexians’ and ‘activists’ may not always be so fixed: in short ‘flexians’ may also be ‘activists’.

⁴ As such, the text is, like Soros himself, despite never acknowledging the long tradition of the concept in anthropology, concerned with reflexivity: “a very broad phenomenon that typically takes the form of feedback loops. The participants’ views influence the course of events, and the course of events influences the participants’ views” (Soros, 2009; <http://www.ft.com/intl/cms/s/2/0ca06172-bfe9-11de-aed2-00144feab49a.html#axzz2jmPX8vzb> accessed 5 November 2013).

⁵ By ‘moments’ I am referring, in Gordy’s terms, to “incidents” or “dramatic events” (Gordy, 2013: xii) resulting in significant changes in circumstances. This is close to Moulart and Jessop’s idea of ‘emblematic moments’ which “are like **snapshots**, representative events or emblems, reflecting ... an **eminent turnabout** in the development of social relations and forces”. Cited by Martinelli and Novy, <http://demologos.ncl.ac.uk/conference/session3.pdf>, accessed 11 November 2013.

⁶ Thinking conjuncturally involves an examination of the different, and sometimes divergent, tendencies at work in a particular location at a particular moment (Clarke, 2009).

⁷ Throughout the 1990s, the term Open Society Institute was used rather than Foundation. For the sake of simplicity, I refer throughout to the Open Society Foundation (OSF).

Executive Director, recalls “Soros heard about me, and this was the way he was recruiting people in those days. It was all done by him. He heard about me from the people active in the Hungarian Foundation because I worked a lot with the dissident circles there”⁸. Licht formed a Board drawn from each of the Federal Yugoslav Republics plus Kosovo, including Žarko Puhovski from Croatia, Vladimir Milčín from Macedonia, Zdravko Grebo from Bosnia-Herzegovina, Rastko Močnik from Slovenia, and others from Montenegro and Kosovo. Licht had known many of these intellectuals from student activism in 1968 and most, though not Licht herself as she had been out of the country at the time, were founders and leading members of *UJDI*⁹, the Association for a Yugoslav Democratic Initiative. UJDI, formed in early 1989, was a citizens’ initiative, composed of intellectuals some of whom were associated with the *Praxis School*¹⁰. The UJDI Manifesto had called for “Yugoslavia’s transformation into a federal, democratic community, that is, a community of citizens and federal units”¹¹, initially through the establishment of a freely elected Constitutive Parliament (Spaskovska, 2012: 50). Whilst their agenda was, in some ways, similar to Prime Minister Marković’s, UJDI initially decided to stay out of the political arena leaving the impression that they had “an elitist and detached outlook that could not resonate with the wider Yugoslav public” (*ibid.*: 53). Whilst UJDI’s anti-politics was, in fact, much more complex than Spaskovska suggests,¹² what is important here is how the group’s support for political, national, inter-ethnic and religious tolerance, though not their, more or less strong, shared desire to keep Yugoslavia together, found a home in the Open Society Foundations of the successor states as “the people that were responsible for these places (the Federal Republics) on the Board took over the responsibility for establishing the new foundations”¹³ in the independent states.

⁸ Interview, Belgrade, May 2013.

⁹ *Udruženje za jugoslavensku demokratsku inicijativu*.

¹⁰ The Praxis School were Yugoslav intellectuals closely associated with the journal Praxis published between 1964 and 1974 which argued for a humanist socialism. This and the subsequent journal Praxis International had close links to the Frankfurt School of philosophy (cf. Kanzleiter, 2009). http://www.blackwellreference.com/public/tocnode?id=g9781405184649_yr2012_chunk_g97814051846491637

¹¹ <http://www.balcanicaucaso.org/eng/Regions-and-countries/Serbia/The-Yugoslav-89-46153>, accessed 6 November 2013.

¹² The Economist Branko Horvat wrote in *Republika*: “Each political party is an organization of people with similar thinking whose goal is to accede to power. We are not interested in power and we do not all think in the same way.” The declared goal was more fundamental in nature: to work on the construction of democratic structures, necessary for the transition in the country.” Cited in <http://www.balcanicaucaso.org/eng/Regions-and-countries/Serbia/The-Yugoslav-89-46153> (12 November 2013).

¹³ Interview, Zagreb, October 2013.

One constant running throughout the interviews and related material is the autonomy which Soros gave to local Foundations, their staff, and their Boards:

Every national foundation in the network had its local integrity and independence. The Board decided what the priorities would be. New York never interfered providing the Board had the trust of the staff who did their work professionally.¹⁴

The whole staff and the whole Board were Macedonian citizens. Key decisions, even at the level of strategic priorities, they came from us. We agreed, and then we sent them for approval to the global Board. And I don't remember a single occasion when they went against our decisions. It just never happened.¹⁵

In the midst of war, the Yugoslav Foundation, covering Serbia including Kosovo and Montenegro, and the newly established Croatian and Slovenian Foundations, began work in early 1992, followed in 1993 by Foundations in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Macedonia. As a key figure recalled:

It was very much happening on an *ad hoc* basis. You just followed the needs and you built on good people, on people you trust. There was no way we could go through proper procedures on hiring and so on. You work with the people you trust.¹⁶

In an essay on the role of the Foundation in Croatia, Slavica Singer, a founding Board Member, is quoted as suggesting Soros introduced a “jazz-structure” mode of functioning, based on considerable local improvisation, allowing the Foundation to escape from bureaucratization and work effectively in a rapidly changing environment (Bjelousov, 2007: 40-41). Puhovski, in the same text, suggests that this sometimes created confusion and even chaos, with the Croatian Foundation changing its structure several times a year (*ibid.*: 41). This combination of autonomy and flexibility in a rapidly changing and highly uncertain environment, impacted differently in different Foundations. In Croatia, from 1992 until her death in 1999, the Executive Director was Karmen Bašić who became “the main figure of the Foundation regardless of the Board Chairs who were bigger names”¹⁷. She came into conflict with Puhovski, who saw her as making decisions alone and often under pressure from those who would be crucially affected by her decisions. He also expressed concern that “the Executive Director of the Open Society in one period had a salary seven times that of a full University Professor” (Puhovski, 2007: 38).

¹⁴ Interview, Belgrade, May 2013.

¹⁵ Interview, Skopje, March 2013.

¹⁶ Interview, Belgrade, May 2013.

¹⁷ Interview, Zagreb, 2013.

In Macedonia, Vladimir Milčin became Executive Director, a position he still holds, whilst continuing to work as a Professor in the Faculty of Dramatic Arts in Skopje, arguing that holding both positions increased his autonomy. Licht led the Serbian Foundation on a full-time basis throughout the 1990s whereas in Bosnia-Herzegovina the first Executive Director was Zdravko Grebo who combined the post with a professorship in the Faculty of Law in Sarajevo and initiating Sarajevo's independent radio station Radio Zid, managing to broadcast constantly during the war (Kurtović, 2012). In addition, many of the key actors in the Foundations were closely involved with a number of other groups and organisations, many also escaping simple definitions as 'foreign' or 'local', and sharing a broad anti-nationalist and human rights orientation such as Helsinki Citizens' Assembly, Helsinki Committees for Human Rights and so on. Srđan Dvornik, brought in by Bašić to be Programme Officer in Croatia, was a founding member of the Anti-War Campaign, Croatia, and Licht maintained close links with the Centre for Anti-War Action, Women in Black and other groups in Serbia. These interlocking networks resemble Wedel's 'flex nets' only in terms of their form, and not their motivation, with one respondent describing the war years as "heroic", with the Foundations "offering support to islands of freedom and resistance"¹⁸. The Serbian Foundation experienced a rapid growth in its budget which was "approximately 600,000 USD in 1992 and already in 1993 it was 5 m. USD"¹⁹. According to its Annual Report for 1992, still listing Puhovski as Executive Director and Chairman of the Board with Karmen Bašić as General Secretary, the Croatian Foundation's budget was 321,660.09 USD, 82.42% of which went on programme costs and the remainder on operational costs. By 1994, the Programme Budget had risen to 3.84 m. USD.

Whilst the flex nets Wedel discusses manipulate and subvert normal conventions of accountability and transparency precisely in order to further their interests, the Foundations faced huge dilemmas around these, at that point quite new, discursive categories, in the context of rapidly changing environments, war, and, crucially, more or less authoritarian or semi-authoritarian regimes willing and able to manipulate, to an extent, 'the rule of law'. The space to be governed, whether sparsely or densely, was very much "under construction". The Open Society Foundations in this period were new 'transboundary formations', or emergent 'installations' (Latham, 2001: 75), in a context where "diverse structures, actors, ideas, practices, and institutions with varying ranges" cannot be pinned down as operating within "a common social and political frame" (Callaghy, Kassimir and Latham, 2001: 6).

¹⁸ Interview, Belgrade, May 2013.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

The issue of transparency, in particular, posed problems. As one respondent argued in relation to the Foundation in Serbia:

It was not possible to be transparent in a normal way. But somehow I think the most important proof that we were doing things right was that we were never accused of financial wrongdoing. We were accused of being paid traitors, spies, but never accused of any financial wrongdoing. And the financial police were always coming. We always had a very good accountant and what we also did every year, we would buy a whole page ad in *Politika* on how we spent the money. Of course, it was very difficult to account for everything. Banks (in Serbia) refused to work with us.²⁰

In contrast, the Croatian Foundation was accused of tax evasion at the end of 1996 with Karmen Bašić and the Foundation's Chief Accountant given a one year suspended sentence. Although clearly politically motivated, the charges arose after Srđan Dvornik and a bookkeeper were stopped at the Slovenian-Croatian border and found to be in possession of 60,000 USD in cash. The irony of the situation is well expressed by one respondent:

So-called Croatian patriots took money out of the country and we went abroad to get money to bring in to Croatia. I remember in a bank near Graz where I went a few times to get money and once I was in a line with then Prime Minister Mateša and from one bag he deposited a lot of money and I took a similar amount back. And of course it was a situation which was open to abuse. But the fact is that the standards for accounting for expenditure were completely different. It would be like I would say X wants to do research on this and that. He needs 5,000 USD and he would get it and sign something. And lots of intellectuals did this. And they made research that no one read, and that was that. We were all one family and we all knew each other. I give you, you give me and so on. And as far as I can estimate with most people it worked fine. All of it was more or less with people giving their word.²¹

An extended network of people, joined by their shared open society values, often made decisions on each others' projects in ways which sometimes ran counter to some of those values. What Soros' Open Society Foundations created in the post-Yugoslav space, in a very short period of time, was a discursive shift from "resistance is futile" to "resistance can be well-funded". When the sums were small, lack of transparency was, perhaps, less of an issue. However, a key arena of struggle in the 1990s was regime control of print and electronic media, with the Open Society Foundations throughout the post-Yugoslav space funding, often with quite

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ Interview, Zagreb, October 2013.

large sums, various kinds of alternative media, mainly newspapers, magazines and radio stations. An interesting perspective on this was expressed by one respondent in Bosnia-Herzegovina:

The Foundation (in Bosnia-Herzegovina) between 1994 and 2000 gave something like 9 m. USD for media, which was a huge amount of money. The thing which from the beginning was a mistake in my view was this story of independent media. In a market economy, media cannot be independent. I mean they are either dependent on donors, dependent on business or dependent on politics. Support to media was really important in the war and immediate post-war period, it allowed for voices to be heard, through our support and others, which had a different vision of the situation.²²

It is true that often large grants were awarded to media ventures which later folded or, in some cases, notably with B92 in Serbia and the *zamir* internet provider in Croatia (Stubbs, 2004), Open Society grants helped to sustain ventures which were later sold to the financial benefit of their owners. Other stories gained currency that funds were given to media ventures driven by Board members of the Open Society Foundations who remained present when the funds were being discussed. One apocryphal story from Croatia has one such Board member when asked if he did not think there was a conflict of interest stating “yes, I was present, but I did not speak”. When told this story, one respondent reflected that some conflicts of interest went beyond this and that “in some cases and in some specific periods of time there was not enough transparency from the Foundation towards the public”²³.

Whilst a general picture emerged of Soros, and key members of the Open Society Foundation in New York, largely leaving national Boards to decide priorities, Soros was very much engaged directly in the political arena during the 1990s in the Yugoslav successor states. One respondent in Croatia went so far as to suggest, in relation to Soros’ short meeting with President Franjo Tuđman in 1993:

Soros had some kind of collector’s fixed idea of gathering up Presidents with whom he could be in contact. So Tuđman was on that list at number one and even if he spoke terrible things to him it was OK. So I was surprised that he recounted not just calmly but with joy a conversation which by its content should have been very uncomfortable. For him it was enough that Tuđman had agreed to see him, never mind that he swore at him.²⁴

The Tuđman regime and pro-regime media launched repeated attacks on the Croatian Foundation, accusing Soros of interfering in Croatia’s internal affairs.

²² Interview, Zadar, October 2013.

²³ Interview, Zagreb, May 2013.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

Puhovski recalled one article in *Večernji list* in 1993 suggesting that Puhovski was “the local agent of a wider Anglo-French Jewish-liberal conspiracy against Croatia and Germany” (Puhovski, 2007: 38). Soros sought to counter such criticisms by bringing in Jakša Kušan, a Croatian émigré who had edited, from London, the newspaper *Nova Hrvatska*, a strong voice for Croatian independence, as a Board member and later President of the Board. Kušan recounts that Soros had even been willing to allow Tuđman’s then Chief of Staff Jure Radić to become a Board Member. Tuđman told Soros that the Foundation was full of pro-Yugoslav oriented communists and that Kušan was worse than the others, working for Western intelligence services (Kušan, 2007: 43). Puhovski judged that he was becoming an obstacle to the Foundation’s work and resigned from the Foundation, expressing concern that gradually more nationally oriented people were being brought into the Board.

The line to be drawn is clear from Slavica Singer’s statement that “the Foundation has never been in the function of any daily politics, but rather anticipated certain things and events, and has always been at the forefront of change, especially in the sphere of civil society” (Singer, 2007: 41). Of course, within Tuđman’s world view, civil society, along with independent media, was part of an international conspiracy to undermine Croatian sovereignty and statehood and resuscitate some kind of Yugoslav federation. This was most clearly expressed in his speech on returning from the USA in November 1996, where he had been diagnosed with cancer, after protests against the attempt to close Zagreb’s *Radio 101* in which he spoke of “red, yellow and black devils”, “traitors”, and “Yugo-communist and Yugo-Serbian dilettantes and crackpots” being supported by “grants from world centres” with “big ideas about human rights”²⁵.

In Serbia, open hostility towards the Foundation began when Soros signed a petition calling for air strikes against Serbian forces to end the siege of Sarajevo. The Foundation was banned by the Milošević regime, through a Constitutional Court decision which revoked its registration, in February 1996. According to one respondent, at that time, Milošević, one of the guarantors of the Dayton Peace Agreement which ended the war in Bosnia-Herzegovina, “thought he could close down the Soros Foundation and there would not be major problems”²⁶. After Sonja Licht managed to arrange a meeting with US Vice President Al Gore in June 1996, the decision to revoke the Foundation’s registration was reversed. Subsequently, the Serbian Foundation became much more explicitly identified with growing anti-Milošević protests and, against Soros’ wishes, largely because he feared for the

²⁵ The speech can be found (in Croatian) at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jIppnU2nKBc>, accessed 11 November 2013.

²⁶ Interview, Belgrade, May 2013.

safety of the staff and Board, the Foundation decided to remain open throughout the NATO bombing as a result of the Kosovo crisis in 1999.

In Macedonia, Soros was engaged politically in Macedonia's dispute with Greece, and even provided significant credits to the Government to purchase oil and later cattle food unavailable as a result of Greece's embargo. He had good relationships with both Macedonian President Kiro Gligorov and Prime Minister Branko Crvenkovski. Statements that Macedonia needed to compromise with Greece over the name issue and, later, his support for an Albanian-led University in Tetovo/Tetova, drew hostility from nationalist forces around VMRO who came to power much later. At the same time, his choice of key staff and Board members faced open criticism within Macedonia and, notably, from senior Bulgarian politicians, accusing him of choosing communists. In Bosnia-Herzegovina, Soros famously visited Sarajevo in November 1993 when the city was under siege and, as noted above, was active in seeking political and military solutions to end the siege of the city.

When assessing the role of the Open Society Foundations in the region during and immediately after the wars, the humanitarian dimension is often forgotten in part because, as the then Director of the Foundation in New York Aryeh Neier has noted, humanitarian assistance has never been a major part of OSF's mission (Neier, 2011). In Bosnia-Herzegovina, Soros wanted to offer both direct help and to ensure that international humanitarian organisations bore witness to the shocking events unfolding. OSFs in the region offered direct support, or support via UNHCR and International NGOs, to refugees and displaced persons. In Serbia, war and, crucially, the impact of sanctions, meant that, at first, a "humanitarian response to the consequences of war" came before the task of "building open societies"²⁷, initially through importing medicines via the Red Cross which the regime tacitly allowed.

Whilst the wars saw not only a massive international agency presence and the growth of a discourse of 'humanitarianism', the Open Society Foundations remained unusual actors. The view of one respondent in Croatia that "if we had not had George Soros, we would have had to invent him"²⁸, of course, goes to the heart of the issue. It is impossible to know what a post-Yugoslav space without the Open Society Foundations in the 1990s would have been like. There would certainly have been support for new NGOs and the supposed building of civil societies and there was massive humanitarian assistance often far exceeding the sums Soros provided. At the same time, alternative media and culture would probably have struggled to secure levels of funding coming close to that which they received from the Foundations although, of course, what implications this would have had for the nature,

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ Interview, Zagreb, October 2013.

scale and impact of their continued activities is impossible to judge. It is interesting that, consistently, respondents pointed to small grants to enable scholars from the region to attend conferences abroad, continue to publish and have access to scientific journals, and scholarships to students as the part of the work which “opened up and challenged the isolation”²⁹ of the region.

Claims have been made that the Foundations supported “authentic voices and initiatives that otherwise would have been left in the dark”³⁰, securing the survival of what Žarko Puhovski has called “a residuum of alternative culture, publics and ideologies” (Puhovski, 2007: 39). The relationship between the active agency of the Soros flex actors and wider politics in the period is, of course, rather more complex. One respondent openly suggested that, at least in Bosnia-Herzegovina, a focus on big themes which were “very political” was a product of “the first generation of the most well known leaders of civil society” who were a kind of “ex-Yugoslav, nostalgic, leftist, UJDI grouping”³¹.

If it is the case that “scripts that develop during a time of formative social action tend to be relatively resilient, even in the face of changing political, institutional and historical conditions” (Stubbs, 2012: 27), then the UJDI experience may be significant although more in terms of a commitment to an intellectual and elite-driven democratisation than any fixed leftist politics, much less Yugo-nostalgia. Indeed, ‘leftism’ is a rather tricky flexible signifier throughout this period, and even before, in late socialist Yugoslavia. In different times and in different places, ‘leftism’ could be a cloak around which to cover oppositional discourses or a label to be attached by others for the purposes of denying credibility, ironically, both by the socialist regime and the new national formations which emerged in the 1990s. How far Soros, invoking the discourse of an ‘open society’ against the twin scourges of communism and nationalism, was aware of the Yugoslav ‘exception’ is an open question. It is certainly the case that many of the battles around the Foundation in Croatia in this period, and particularly around the role of particular individuals, was played out in terms of accusations of ‘leftism’.

The issue of ‘Yugo-nostalgia’ is also rather complex and also served, again particularly in Croatia, to be a label used to deny certain actors political credibility throughout the 1990s. The transformation of the Yugoslav Foundation into national successor state Foundations certainly relied on a network of intellectuals whose activities in UJDI suggested that they had sought to keep Yugoslavia together, albeit in a very changed form. And yet, by accepting roles in the new national Founda-

²⁹ Interview, Zagreb, May 2013.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ Interview, Sarajevo, October 2013.

tions they were, in a rather interesting way, contributing to the legitimacy of the new states. In a further paradox, what one respondent termed 'Soros geography' clearly saw the post-Yugoslav space as important and, indeed, the Foundations were encouraged to promote 'regional collaboration and networking', creating a rather elitist 'civil regionalism' which was different from the usual portrayal as being "based on participatory, inclusive and partnership modes of governance" (Jonas and Pinetl, 2006: 482).

Civil Society and Partnerships for Democratic Change

In this context, the role of the Open Society Foundations, particularly in Croatia and Serbia, in the dramatic changes in 1999 and 2000, with the end of the Milošević and Tuđman regimes, are worthy of study. A 'big picture' narrative in Croatia sees the Open Society Foundation as an important actor helping to strengthen a more unified civil society voice which contributed, alongside a new unified political opposition, to undermine the legitimacy of the semi-authoritarian HDZ-led regime and, through a 'get out the vote campaign', helped to alter public discourse and maximise the turn-out of those wanting significant political change. In this sense, the Open Society Foundation was a key 'intermestic' actor (Pugh, 2000), at one and the same time being 'international', part of an increasingly co-ordinated group of foreign donors working on supporting key civil society actors, and 'domestic' being a hub for anti-regime intellectuals some of whom played a key role in the very groups created within civil society to bring about change and, indeed, subsequently, in new 'think tank'-like strategic partnerships with the new Government.

The Open Society Foundation was a key initiator of the Civic Coalition for Free and Fair Elections, *GLAS 99* (the word *glas* means both 'voice' and 'vote' in Croatian), along with USAID's Office for Transitional Initiatives (OTI), the Croatian Helsinki Committee for Human Rights (HHO), the Anti-War Campaign, Croatia, the environmental NGO *Zelena akcija* (Green Action) and several women's NGOs. The group was explicitly influenced by activists from Slovakia who, with US support, had successfully mobilised in an election which saw the defeat of the semi-authoritarian Prime Minister Vladimir Mečiar (Fisher and Bijelić, 2007). HHO, itself primarily funded by the Open Society Foundation, seconded one of its employees, Tin Gazivoda, to be the Head of the Central Office of *GLAS 99*. The campaign gained momentum with 145 organisations involved by December 1999, organised into four groups focusing respectively on youth, women's issues, the environment, and pensioners. The campaign was well funded if not always well co-ordinated, with the Open Society Foundation and OTI the main funders, joined by the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, Freedom House, the National Endowment for Democracy, UK-government organisations, and others.

At the same time, the relationship with *GONG*, an NGO formed in early 1997 as an organisation to monitor independently elections, was rather strained. A key figure from *GONG* told me that *GLAS 99* was more explicitly political, in terms of wanting to remove HDZ from power, which occurred in the 3 January 2000 elections, and that their refusal to join the campaign directly was not well received by some, including the Open Society Foundation.³² At the same time, Tin Gazivoda's doctoral thesis suggests that tensions eased over time and that, indeed, in some cities, both *GONG* and *GLAS 99*'s efforts were led by the same people (Gazivoda, 2012: 229). Leading HDZ figures complained of an international conspiracy with Tuđman's legal advisor Mirko Ramušćak making a public call in July 1999 for Croatian citizens to boycott newspapers "that serve Soros and his sick idea to subjugate nations and states to his evil empire" (Fisher and Bijelić, 2007: 72). Unlike in Slovakia, some international funders, notably those linked to USAID who provided more than 5 m. USD for the campaign, "did not hide their aim of altering the country's political situation through assistance to civic activity ... going as far as instructing local activists on what to include in their literature" (*ibid.*: 67).

Of course, whilst other events, notably the successful efforts, led by the US Embassy, to ensure a united opposition for the elections and, crucially, the death of Tuđman himself in December 1999, were as important, the role of civil initiatives, including *GLAS 99*, should not be understated. In terms of the Open Society Foundation in Croatia, the election of the new coalition Government, led by Social Democratic Party leader Ivica Račan, offered an opportunity for a very different kind of intervention. It is worth remembering that, by this time, "policy was a magical word"³³ to Soros. In addition, Soros was beginning to emphasise the task of "putting a semblance of order to the foundations that had sprung up across Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union" including "introducing fiscal discipline" (Soros, 2011b: 28-29). As one respondent states:

The Foundation from 2000 was changing its whole way of working because Soros realised that his vision of helping the countries of Eastern Europe through lots of money, goodwill, and flexibility had given people, in some countries and in some situations, the impression that they could spend the money as they liked. And so there was a shift, in terms of strengthening and making more visible the Foundation in managerial terms, so that there should be an organisation with clear goals, more focused, with greater emphasis on strategy.³⁴

³² Interview, Sarajevo, October 2013.

³³ Interview, Skopje, March 2013.

³⁴ Interview, Sarajevo, October 2013.

Whilst in the run up to the elections, neither Račan nor other opposition leaders had developed close relationships with NGOs, there were networks linking some opposition leaders with some intellectuals associated with the Open Society Foundation, and a general view that the new Government should be supported. One respondent suggests there were “great expectations on the part of the Board of the Foundation who really thought they would be able to influence the Government”³⁵. Soros’ own general interest in new co-operative partnerships to strengthen democracy dovetailed with the desire to engage with the new Government which one respondent suggested “was not really thought through”³⁶. Soros met Račan in both 2000 and 2001 and an extensive package of support for different policy domains and different Ministries was developed. New kinds of flexible partnerships emerged between the Government, the Foundation, and key senior academics, many of whom received grants to offer strategic support through think-tanks and professional associations including the Croatian Legal Centre. Whilst the reasons for the failure are not clear, there is a degree of consensus that, in this period there was “a lot of money, a lot of effort put in and little or nothing really came out”³⁷ particularly in the areas of decentralisation, judicial reform, and the reform of public administration where lengthy policy papers were produced which were essentially “dropped and burnt”³⁸. More was achieved in areas including public health reform and, later, support for people with mental disabilities, in part at least because the funding was also linked to new innovative projects. At the same time, the Foundation had problems with appointing a new Executive Director after the death of Karmen Bašić and one appointment in particular, that of Branko Vuković, as well as attracting a great deal of media interest, ended in disputed circumstances. What is, perhaps, most interesting here is that what was “a big and very problematic transition as they called it of the Foundation from grant giving to some sort of think tank that should support the work of the Government” which, although “as a concept was always very very unclear”³⁹ can also be seen, in retrospect, as creating new opportunities and new arenas for key flex actors.

In Serbia, in the face of perhaps a much more explicitly authoritarian regime and, from 1996 onwards, significant waves of popular protests, the Open Society Foundation continued to see one of its roles as “creating a critical mass of people who could contribute to democratic change”⁴⁰ or, as another respondent suggests:

³⁵ Interview, Zagreb, May 2013.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ Interview, Belgrade, May 2013.

We had to become, so to say, part and parcel of the resistance movement. Nothing else was possible. Until then you could try to say we were neutral; we were never neutral but you know. Of course, we never supported political parties because that is crossing the line. But we were supporting the resistance movement in different ways.⁴¹

One of its activities was to fund *CeSID*, the Centre for Free Elections and Democracy, which pointed to serious irregularities in elections in 1996 and 1997. After two further years of increased repression, and the NATO intervention during the war in Kosovo, civic initiatives approached the September 2000 Federal and Presidential elections with a similar level of preparation to their counterparts in Croatia albeit with a wider spectrum of initiatives including the youth movement *OTPOR*, the technocratic expert-led *G17+*, Civic Initiatives, the European Movement, and *IZLAZ 2000* (cf. Minić and Dereta, 2007). The Open Society Fund was again, both a funder and participant in these activities, also seeking with some other donors to co-ordinate and unify activities. The state run election committee confirmed that Milošević had lost to the opposition candidate Vojislav Koštunica but that a second round run off would be needed. After a day of mass protests on 5 October 2000, Milošević conceded defeat and Koštunica was confirmed to have gained an absolute majority of votes cast. The Democratic Opposition of Serbia won a landslide in parliamentary elections in December 2000, with Zoran Đinđić elected as Serbian Prime Minister.

After the October events, the Serbian Foundation called on the services of two PR experts to support the Government and “to start communicating the change”⁴². A number of important activists on the civic scene returned to or entered formal politics, some working within the new Government. Soros and Đinđić met on a number of occasions and although there was an agreement that a change in focus was needed, and the priorities – “supporting judicial reform; supporting the reform of public administration; and supporting educational reform”⁴³ – were similar to those in Croatia, the relationship was much looser. One argument was that “we never saw ourselves as part of government, as part of the regime, we are for an open society, and the mission is to keep that alive”⁴⁴. In addition, the assassination of Đinđić in March 2003 and the election of a new Government retreating from reforms, revealed the limits of what could be achieved working in partnership with Government and the continued existence of forces working within or near the state which would resist change. As one respondent states:

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

When the government started to go back on reforms, then we supported the same actors to try to make reforms an irreversible process. We opened a completely new area, to pressure the Government to follow EU policies and accession.⁴⁵

Partnerships were also central to the work of the Foundation in Macedonia which had, from an early stage, diversified its funding sources and become less reliant on funds from within the Soros network. The strategy was described by one respondent as deciding on key themes and then working on who to partner with, where to get the money from, and how to ensure the right people worked on the topic. The Foundation in Macedonia has a number of partnerships with USAID, including a long standing programme on Roma, emerging as a new Soros priority after 2000. Common to all the Foundations in the region, but particularly pronounced in the Macedonian case, is the creation of “*spinofovi*/spin-offs: projects led by people from the foundation which then registered and are still active. In practically every programme area where the Foundation has been active there is at least one, and more usually two or more, strong spin offs”⁴⁶. In contrast to the trends in Croatia and Serbia, the election of a VMRO-led Government in Macedonia limited the room for manoeuvre of the Foundation in Macedonia and has meant, in fact, that it has increasingly played a role as part of a civic opposition to the renewal of nationalism, seeing “impartiality as a dead letter” since “the state has huge resources at its disposal”⁴⁷ but sometimes keeping a distance from opposition-led activities.

In Bosnia-Herzegovina, Soros’ wish to introduce greater financial discipline coincided with the appointment of an Executive Director who, unlike the previous occupants of the post, was not a high profile public figure. Together with a new Board, and a much reduced budget, new priorities emerged which included work with Roma, an education programme, concentrating on the curriculum in primary schools, juvenile justice, a focus on the voices of youth in the public arena and local government. The emphasis has been on more efficient and effective programming compared to general budgets for broad themes which one respondent argued resembled, on a larger scale, the former Yugoslav *SIZ* system (*Samoupravna interesna zajednica*/self-managed community of interest) “you know, a *SIZ* for education, a *SIZ* for culture, and so on”⁴⁸. In a crowded international actor environment, partnerships with other donors have been less emphasised, although some have developed with “modest” donors who “never put a political agenda ahead of their donor agenda ... were not focused on who was in power in the country but, rather, focused on real

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ Interview, Skopje, March 2013.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ Interview, Sarajevo, October 2013.

problems and, very importantly, without the need for self advertisement, who did not want their huge sign everywhere”⁴⁹. In a divided state where entities and smaller units have real power, the Foundation did try to work with, and strengthen, central state bodies with limited results as such bodies became over reliant on donor funds, on the one hand, and on specific personalities within the agencies on the other so that “when a new person comes in it is like starting from scratch”⁵⁰. Initially, some of the new Board were close to the Social Democratic Party but “when we saw how SDP acted we realised that we could not support any political option because they are all the same, all bad”. Instead, there has been a focus on working with local governments in both entities, some of which “have made a difference – in terms of their relationship to citizens and transparency”. However, the limits on what innovative local governments can do are also a result of the fact that:

all these local structures are part of bigger politics, that is to say the political parties. So you can go as far as that political party allows but no further. We had the chance to meet some great people who would do much more but the party leadership, the discipline, the system itself made it impossible.⁵¹

In the second key ‘moment’ of the life cycle of the Open Society Foundations in the post-Yugoslav space, we can observe, in some ways, greater influence from the global Soros structures, in terms of the themes to be addressed, the importance of policy-based strategic partnerships, and the introduction of some elements of new managerialism including a degree of fiscal restraint. At the same time, these broader constraints and suggestions were always reshaped within the specific contours of the national Foundations. The flexible nature of this is demonstrated both by the ability of key players in the Foundations to adapt to these changes and, more crucially, the complex reworking of multiple identities or what Wedel (2004) has termed “transidentities” which multiplied the potentialities for influence of the Soros ‘flexians’ in this period. The linkage between the Foundations’ global and regional networks, local academic-consultants, and policy oriented ‘think-tanks’ creates new forms of ‘transnational policy transfer entrepreneurship’ (Stone, 2012: 494) and ‘global policy advocacy networks’ (Deacon, 2007: 16). The creation of agendas and modes of operation which then, directly or indirectly, benefit the same players is an important consequence of this. In some ways, even before ‘Europeanisation’, a kind of ‘Sorosification’ can be observed in which national agendas are “reconfigured, reframed and re-coupled” (Lendvai, 2007: 31) creating “different

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

scripts” which enable new coalitions, themselves implicated in the initial reconfiguring, to emerge and prosper.

New Activisms and the Fight Against Austerity Politics

In the most recent period, in which George Soros has himself, by all admissions, been much less personally involved except on issues which he cares deeply about, the Foundations in the region have gone on rather divergent paths. The Croatia Foundation was closed in mid-2006, having been given only six months notice. The decision came as a shock to some staff and Board members as Soros himself, when he visited in early 2005, had seemed to be impressed by work on a new ‘Open Society Index’ which he suggested could be replicated throughout the region. At a time of cost cutting within the global network, others suggested that the failure of the partnership with the Račan government also played a crucial role. Some felt that a key architect of the decision was Beka Vučo, long-term director of the South East Europe programme in New York, who Jakša Kušan suggested “to put it mildly, was not favourably inclined towards Croatia” (Kušan, 2007: 42). The last Executive Director, Andrea Feldman, was concerned that:

we did not receive any clear justification for the decision, and we were not given the chance to eventually struggle for a continuation of the work for at least another two or three years. But that is the fate of private foundations (Feldman, 2007: 46).

In early 2009 Soros announced a 100 m. USD Emergency Fund to help countries in Central and Eastern Europe mitigate the effects of the economic and financial crisis. Having closed the Foundation in Croatia, although some projects were still funded from other parts of the network, Tin Gazivoda, a former Open Society Croatia Board member was appointed as a special advisor overseeing the Emergency Fund and, subsequently, a small office. Some previous staff and Board members criticised the move in strong terms, arguing that this was going against the local autonomy which had been so important within the Foundation. Others argued that the ‘flexibility’ of the new arrangement, whilst sometimes causing difficulties, was also a strength not least in terms of “reaching out to a new generation”, working with some “unusual suspects” and, above all, “responding to a very different socio-economic environment”⁵².

In this sense, the new focus in Croatia connects well with Soros’ concern with the Euro crisis and the increasing gap between a rich core and an ever poorer periphery within an austerity-driven European Union, culminating in establishing a

⁵² Interview, Zagreb, May 2013.

new Open Society Initiative for Europe, based in Barcelona with a key Bulgarian flex actor, Ivan Krastev, as Chairman of the Board. Some of the Initiative's priorities include solidarity with Greece and, indeed, support for innovative social programmes for the poor and vulnerable there, engaging with new civic actors and social movements, as well as advocacy work ahead of the next elections for the European Parliament in 2014. The new Croatian office can be seen as in step with aspects of Soros' thinking, not least in terms of the idea that:

in the Soros geography this East-West line of thinking within Europe is becoming more and more irrelevant and people are thinking more in terms of North-South, core-periphery, periphery of the periphery, creditor-debtor. It is moving towards an understanding that on the socio-political level, there is this new energy developing, and that the organisation is trying to engage with that in a meaningful way. And how that will play out is a question mark, but this is something that is no longer just something that is being mentioned by a few radicals but is becoming a principle.⁵³

Respondents from some of the other Foundations in the region are clearly aware of the new realities and priorities although their accommodation to them varies. The Macedonian Foundation has begun to finance and work with "informal groups"⁵⁴ although the partnership on this with USAID suggests that this is less of an innovative approach than is sometimes suggested. An awareness that "formal NGOs, the vast majority of them anyway, have fallen into a particular routine and a kind of inertia"⁵⁵ was shared by several respondents. One respondent suggested that the Foundations had helped to create:

a new alternative culture of professionals in NGOs. People with a quarter century now of experience in NGOs. And some had not even graduated. And for me that's a problem. Moving from one to another, changing their names, and so on. But true activists do not exist. On the one hand it was probably necessary in the early 1990s. However, it needed to stop.⁵⁶

A slightly different perspective was offered by one respondent in Serbia, arguing that:

Those who were active in the 1990s, in human rights organisations, by definition, nothing was ever good enough, you can always find a breach of human rights, but it is important that the new generation who had no connection with past events,

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ Interview, Skopje, March 2013.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ Interview, Zagreb, October 2013.

they should be able to suggest things so that you can move from a defensive strategy to a more offensive strategy. So new challenges provide new opportunities.⁵⁷

Moving beyond “this first generation, the elite, who took up so much space that they blocked the new generation from any kind of activities”⁵⁸ was generally agreed to be important. The Macedonian Foundation had offered support to “a new generation of leftists, even anarchists” who are concerned with questions regarding “what kind of capitalism” there will be and critiquing the currently dominant form of “wild capitalism”⁵⁹.

In some sense, then, the new ‘moment’ constitutes a reformulation of the relationship between the local translation of Soros’ vision and achieved or ascribed labels of ‘leftism’ most pronounced in the first ‘moment’.⁶⁰ It is not clear how the different Foundations will relate to these new movements nor how much there is scope for new partnerships with actors such as the *Heinrich Boell Stiftung* (with which the Croatian office has good co-operation) and the *Rosa Luxembourgh Stiftung*, much less as to how diverse forms of support will alter the shape and demands of these movements. A contradiction may be emerging between support for “those young people who are questioning the liberal variety of capitalism, who are looking for new solutions and a new framework” through which the Foundations gain “a timely understanding of extremist movements, of the left and the right, to reduce the susceptibility or the likelihood that the victims of free market economic activities will identify with these extremist ideas and movements” and a desire “to neutralise all extremist groups who are the enemies of constitutional democracy, through grants or whatever”⁶¹.

At the same time, the retirement of the President of the global Foundation Aryeh Neier and his replacement by Chris Stone loomed large in many of the interviews. Whilst seeing this as part of a “big transition”, not least as “the global Board, which was Advisory, has become Executive”⁶², one respondent suggested that the aim is to maximise the positive synergies between local Foundations and other network programmes suggesting that:

⁵⁷ Interview, Belgrade, March 2013.

⁵⁸ Interview, Sarajevo, October 2013.

⁵⁹ Interview, Skopje, March 2013.

⁶⁰ Lack of time prevented interviews with key actors in the Foundation in Slovenia where throughout the history of the Foundation and, subsequently, when many of the activities were transferred to the Peace Institute, a consistent left-leaning analysis and set of practices has been in evidence.

⁶¹ Interview, Belgrade, March 2013.

⁶² Interview, Skopje, March 2013.

the new director is trying to make the whole thing, the internal capacity, not just money, to use this in the best way possible for the whole network. It may be mission impossible but to make as much as possible of all the capacities which have been built over all these years, of people who are in the foundation, spin offs and virtual spin offs, to use this capacity to help wherever we work to have the best effect.⁶³

In Macedonia, one respondent argued that, in any case:

we already know all about strict procedures from USAID, evaluations, monitoring and all that, clear goals. It is not a shock for us but for others it is.⁶⁴

Within Croatia, the sustainability of a more flexible approach may be called into question given the insistence on formal procedures globally. From his own writings Soros appears concerned with what the legacy of the Open Society Foundations will be, suggesting that there is “a sphere of activity that needs to be carried on beyond my lifetime and does not really require either Aryeh (Neier)’s presence or mine. That niche consists in empowering civil society to hold government accountable” (Soros, 2011b: 41). Of course, given the ‘definitional volatility’, ‘conceptual elasticity’ and even ‘logical incoherence’ of the concept of ‘civil society’ (Bilić, 2011), ‘civil society’ is no more nor less than “a translation device, or a set of nested claims, moving across sites, spaces and levels” (Stubbs, 2012: 14). A ‘network of networks’ which has “grown organically by responding to needs and opportunities as they arise” (Soros, 2011b: 37) is more than what Soros himself describes as “two very different foundations combined in one” (*ibid.*: 42), one rather chaotic and with an elastic budget and led by him, the other, until recently led by Neier, a more formal organization with a tight budget. As should be clear from this text, there are many more Open Society Foundations than this, operating on a rather flexible continuum in different places at different times. The work of translation, of deflection and adoption of the founder’s ideals, in which he clearly wished to combine open societies with certain kinds of free markets, certainly faces contradictions in the current conjuncture. It would be surprising, however, if the flex actors working in and around the Foundations did not conjure out of these contradictions yet more experimental and innovative ways of working in the future.

Conclusions

This text has done no more than scratch the surface of the flex-like nature of actors in and around the Open Society Foundations in the post-Yugoslav space, across three specific ‘moments’. The absence of any detailed engagement with the Founda-

⁶³ Interview, Belgrade, May 2013.

⁶⁴ Interview, Skopje, March 2013.

tions in Slovenia and Montenegro, both of which closed in the mid-2000s, nor with the Foundation in Kosovo after the NATO intervention and Kosovo's declaration of independence are, of course, major omissions. There is also, clearly, a need for more interviews, beyond the inner circle of Soros actors, and greater triangulation with archival and other sources. At the same time, I suggest that there is enough in the text to justify a move away from a traditional view of the Foundations in terms of philanthropy alone and, instead, to widen the idea of 'flexians' beyond Wedel's original and highly innovative use of the concept.

The emergence of the Open Society Foundations coincided with the creation of post-Yugoslav space(s) and new nation states in the first 'moment', and this is suggestive of a more complex picture than merely seeing the Foundations as reactive to new regimes in each of the post-Yugoslav countries. Instead, they can be seen as major contributors, definers, and redefiners of the nature of those spaces in an emerging and radically unfinished institutional and political environment. Both the new (nation) states and the Foundations, separately but, of course also, crucially, in a complex relation with each other, were engaged in 'boundary work' in the sense of delineating the nature and limits of "questions of power, knowledge, agency and social structure" (Van Houtom, Kramsch and Zierhofer, 2005: 28).

The Foundations were crucial, I would suggest, in the delineation of a space, at one and the same time oppositional and resistant to, as well as compliant with, hegemonic practices operating at diverse scales. They helped to institutionalise a kind of semi- or better flexible-public sphere which, in its claims to intellectual superiority, cosmopolitan sentiment and profound anti-nationalism may have served to both define the contours of political opposition and reduce their broader social impact and resonance. This production of difference, inequality and authority helped to sustain "new assemblages of governance" (Newman and Clarke, 2009: 65) which created new and complex spaces of agency and of politics for the first wave of Open Society 'flexians'. Crucially, this flexible-public sphere created new material inequalities and very different potentials for the reproduction of cultural capital between different scales. All of this occurred in a rather short space of time and raises rather complex questions about the legacy of intellectual practices within the already rather flexible pluralist context of late socialist Yugoslavia and the degree of path-breaking which the existence of the Open Society Foundations actually introduced.

The turn to 'policy', coinciding as it did with a turn to more ordered managerial practices, did not close down the political opportunity structures for the Open Society 'flexians' but, rather, expanded them into new paradoxes of "anti-political politics" and "collaborative-oppositionism" in which emerging 'think tanks' performed policy work which has been widely recognised to have been both materially well rewarded and generally ineffective in terms of real change. In many ways the

Foundations were key players in a contradictory ‘intermestic modernisation’ project at once emphasising the ‘backwardness’ of the region, or at least its political leadership, in relation to an imagined West and, at the same time, arguing that only domestic intellectual elites could understand the context and translate the (universal) values of modernity into locally or nationally implementable schemes. The Foundations both lived within, and helped to redefine, a contradictory modernisation of the semi-periphery which, as Blagojević (2006) has argued, creates an internal ambivalence of “simultaneous opposition and acceptance, imitation and rejection”.

The third ‘moment’ whilst, perhaps, not representing any kind of ‘final’ contradiction, does pose significant questions about the current and future relationship between the Foundations and the ‘new left sensibility’ of movements against commodification, crony capitalism, the erosion of the right to public space and ‘neoliberal’ austerity politics (cf. Stubbs, 2012). These movements do much more, of course, than merely ‘change the geography’ and are part of an effort to “rethink the categories used to explain the social, political and economic situation in the Balkans” (Horvat and Štiks, 2012). In one sense, these movements articulate a critique of NGOs, and by extension the Open Society Foundations as either irrelevant or part of the problem. However, the flexibility on both sides, the impossibility of a ‘pure’ politics outside of the realms of culture, education, governance, and so on, and, not unimportantly, longer-term and newer forms of material insecurity, suggest that new relationships between funding practices and political strategies articulated by emergent social movements may well emerge in the future.

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