

INTRODUCTION

Is democracy working? People learning about my research on elections in postwar Bosnia-Herzegovina tended to ask me this question. Depending on who was asking, I responded with one of what became a standard stock of appropriate answers. Sometimes I sighed and said that it was difficult to tell but that it appeared that the nationalist parties had less of a grip than they did during the war and its immediate aftermath. I would caution that it was a slow and jagged process—three steps forward, two steps back. For other conversation partners, I would laugh awkwardly and say that because it was an extremely complicated and contentious question, I was fortunate that it was not my research question. For yet others, I responded that the elections were going very well: electoral fraud was down and confidence in the results was up. All of these answers were problematic, flawed, and evasive. Yet each answer also responded to a democratic assumption, be it the existence of institutions such as competitive elections or the putative values and attitudes of democracy. I recently hit on a new answer that comes closer to doing justice to both the question and my research's ability to answer: it depends on what you think democracy is supposed to do. My problem in answering this question all these years is in part that it was hard to tell, that it was not my research question, and that electoral trust did seem to be rising; in addition, however, democracy and elections were overworked in Bosnia-Herzegovina. They were being asked to transform too many things.

Who was asking democracy to work so hard? Building democracy in postwar Bosnia-Herzegovina was the purview of the "international community." Bosnians did not independently create or demand democratic institutions; rather, the international community implemented and reg-

ulated postwar elections and other democratic institutions on behalf of Bosnians through the legal authority of the 1995 peace treaty brokered at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base in Dayton, Ohio. Elections were agreed upon in Annex III of the peace treaty, with the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) receiving responsibility for the implementation, supervision, and certification of an election to take place six to nine months after the peace treaty's signing. The mandate was repeatedly renewed, and the OSCE ultimately organized six elections between 1996 and 2000. The *Is democracy working?* question framed the existence for election and democratization personnel working for the OSCE as part of the international community—their jobs were rationalized by the hope that the eventual answer would be yes.

In the pages that follow, I turn on its head the *Is democracy working?* question asked by political scientists, election personnel, and my various dinner companions. Instead of asking whether democracy has been implemented and what impediments to implementation remain, I ask *How do democracy and elections work? What work do they do? What allows the question, and others like it, to be asked at all? What allows it to be answered?* Turning the question around allows democracy to be treated as a cultural and political practice and as a form of social knowledge rather than as a dry set of institutions or a universal ideology solely affected by culture, politics, and knowledge. Many scholars now acknowledge the role that culture plays in democracy and democratization (see Dahl 1997; Diamond 1996; Huntington 1997; Putnam 1993).¹ Yet by treating “culture” as a variable that hinders or promotes the successful development of “democracy,” these authors essentialize culture, isolate it from other domains of social existence, and imply that other domains—such as the “technical” or “bureaucratic”—are somehow noncultural. This research draws from literature that suggests that culture is crucial in the definition and practice of democracy itself (see, e.g., Holston and Caldeira 1998). Democracy depends on cultural norms and practices not because they obstruct or limit it but because they create democracy and articulate its possibilities.

Thus, this work reconceptualizes democratization as a project concerned with the production of social knowledge rather than as a process of removing obstacles or promoting democratic characteristics and conditions. Taking that social knowledge as its object, the book ethnographically investigates the making and meaning of democracy in postwar Bosnia-Herzegovina through careful attention to the technical and bureaucratic tools through which democracy came into being—ballots,

electoral rolls, voter preparation guides, and international electoral supervision. Through a documentation of the production of elections on the one hand and the phenomena that elections produced and normalized on the other, I argue that international intervention and apolitical technologies combine to introduce, establish, and normalize particular practices and epistemologies of democracy. Through its examination of elections and the practices of implementing elections in postwar Bosnia-Herzegovina, this work analyzes contemporary meanings, mentalities, and mechanisms of democracy and global governance and exposes the epistemological and legitimation work of democratic practice and power.

Something called the international community deploys itself all over the world. Representative of a post-cold war international order, this conglomeration of actors—often discursively treated as unitary—increasingly attempts to resolve conflicts, reconstruct societies, and transform, incubate, and act as governments in places as diverse as Afghanistan, Kosovo, Mozambique, Haiti, and East Timor. In Bosnia-Herzegovina, one of the first postwar reconstruction cases taken on in the aftermath of the cold war, the international community became deeply involved in the new country's physical, economic, social, and political transformations. Indeed, international organizations have been so influential and powerful in Bosnia-Herzegovina that many observers insist that Bosnia-Herzegovina was simply an international protectorate in disguise (e.g., Chandler 1999a, 1999b), given international agencies' hubris, lack of accountability, and unilateralism (e.g., Divjak 2001; Hayden 1998; Knaus and Martin 2003). However, the situation was pragmatically ambiguous and normatively confusing, as other commentators called for this conglomeration to act more like a protectorate (e.g., International Crisis Group 1999).² Bisecting the evaluation of the role of international intervention into a neat dichotomy, however, simply helps occlude the on-the-ground intricacies of power and governance and problematically continues its erroneous representation as unitary, stable, and singularly purposeful. While almost all international reconstruction activities were framed by the logics of transformation, liberalism, and neoliberalism, their coordination and complementarity were not necessarily given despite organizational charts, established hierarchies of power and prestige, and the deployment of inter-agency "coordinating bodies." There were simply too many actors and agendas on the ground.

International personnel and projects called for major changes in

Bosnian infrastructure, institutions, and behavior; however, they simultaneously demanded that Bosnians implement and take responsibility for those changes. International agencies formally and informally championed the concept of Bosnian ownership, which included ownership of phenomena as abstract as destiny and as concrete as property, as well as control over government and rebellious citizens. The tension between the power of international agencies and personnel—and the dominant discourse of ownership led to a perverse situation some commentators labeled “enlightened absolutism” and “enlightened colonialism” (P. Moore 2002; Rieff 1999). Both these terms have historical precedent. Harkening back to seventeenth-century monarchs such as Frederick II of Prussia and Catherine the Great of Russia, “enlightened absolutists justified their absolute authority by proclaiming themselves servants of the state or the people. The enlightened served the state by pushing for reform in the government in order to stamp out unequal treatment before the law and preserve rights and property” (Hooker 1996). Similarly, “enlightened colonialism” melded the exploitation of resources for colonial interests with a “civilizing mission,” an appreciation for native culture, and support for new local governing elites (Chatterjee 1986; Merry 1991, 2000; cf. Kipling 1899). The existence of enlightened absolutism and enlightened colonialism in postwar Bosnia-Herzegovina references current notions of progress and modernity within a larger system of authority and exploitation, all via the idea of stewardship. The still emerging system of global liberal governance, of which the international community in postwar Bosnia-Herzegovina constituted just one instance, takes as its object both the transformation of institutions and of the conduct of a population (Duffield 2001; see also Ferguson and Gupta 2002; Foucault 1991). The international community attempts to reach these two goals through complex political machinery—tools and techniques that act explicitly and implicitly through coercion and desire—and through specific logics and rationales of being and truth.

Croatia and Slovenia, two republics of the now defunct Yugoslavia, declared themselves independent in June 1991 after a decade of economic deterioration and political paralysis (following Josip Tito’s death in 1980). Their secession effectively sealed Yugoslavia’s demise (see Malcolm 1994; Ramet 1985; Silber and Little 1995; Woodward 1995a for historical accounts of Yugoslavia and its precursors). War officially began in Bosnia-Herzegovina on April 6, 1992, when armed soldiers fired on Sarajevo from the mountainsides that overlook the city. More than three

years later, in November 1995, the presidents of Serbia, Croatia, and Bosnia-Herzegovina signed a peace treaty, stopping the carnage and setting the stage for the reconstruction of Bosnia-Herzegovina. The signing of the General Framework for Peace, otherwise known as the Dayton Peace Accords or simply Dayton, marked the end of the 44-month-long war, the arrival of masses of international workers, and a corresponding shift in their goals from humanitarian aid and peace brokering to (re)building and reconciliation processes. The peace treaty did not merely end the bloodshed; it also provided a liberal and neoliberal prescription for Bosnia's ills and a model for and legitimation of intensive interventions by international institutions.

The peace agreement signed at Dayton was unlike any other peace treaty of modern times, not merely because it was imposed by powers external to the conflict, but because of the far-reaching powers given to the international community which extended well beyond military matters to cover the most basic aspects of government and society. The majority of annexes to the Dayton Agreement were not related to the ending of hostilities, traditionally the role of a peace agreement, but the political project of democratizing Bosnia, of "reconstructing a society." (Chandler 1999a:43)

Chandler continues by arguing that Bosnians and Bosnian institutions, despite the rhetoric of self-government and international withdrawal, had little space to make or implement policy. Dayton marked a new mode of international intervention.³

Employees and volunteers with international organizations were the "experts" who designed and implemented these state-building and society-molding strategies—that is, the actual bodies of this powerful, discursive international community. In this book, I highlight the members of the community—"internationals," as they called themselves—in their own right, examining the institutions, practices, myths, and rituals that patterned their lives and work. The international community exists not in its essence of reality but through these bodies and their languages, texts, schemes, and other material-making practices. Refusing to treat these diverse international entities as a given allows a detailed, microlevel examination of the workings of what James Ferguson and Akhil Gupta (2002) call the emerging system of transnational governmentality—that is, the modes of government that are being set up on a global scale. This government of conduct is characterized by "the out-

sourcing of the functions of the state to NGOs and other ostensibly non-state actors” (Ferguson and Gupta 2002:990). Internationals in postwar Bosnia-Herzegovina, working for IGOs such as the World Bank, the European Community Monitoring Mission, or the UN Development Programme; NGOs such as the International Committee of the Red Cross, Catholic Charities, or Save the Children; or corporations such as Coca Cola and Volkswagen (to name just a few of the most well known), were the persons taking on these roles and functions.

I take as a point of departure the need to understand the quotidian within international and global forms of governance, knowledge, and transformations in the same way that scholars of colonialism seek to understand the workings of colonial power and state agents. In this way, this book complements scholarship focused on the effects and impacts of global processes on states and societies, often through the existence of international organizations or institutions. However, this literature runs the risk of leaving unmarked the cultural practices of those organizations and their foreign experts. Assumptions of neat hegemonic or unitary operations by international forces or institutions should not be made; like colonialism, globalization and global governance are neither monolithic nor omnipotent (Cooper and Stoler 1997; Hannerz 1987). Any reification of the international community or internationalism conceals the fact that its power, authority, and ability to impose systems of order are put into place by people—by men and women of different classes and nations who may conceptualize their participation in distinct ways. After all, an international has to come from somewhere. The task, then, is (at least) twofold: to question how and why experts and their interventions become so familiar, expected, and natural and to examine their efforts at (and tensions involving) power, authority, and imposition.

Elections are considered the centerpiece of democracy. However, as scholars have pointed out, an election is not sufficient for democracy; there must be more, such as respect for the rule of law, a thriving civil society, and a free media (Carothers 1997a; Schmitter and Karl 1991). Efforts to expand democracy past the dominant minimalist definition championed by Joseph A. Schumpeter—“that institutional arrangement for arriving at political decisions in which individuals acquire the power to decide by means of a competitive struggle for the people’s vote” (1947:269)—have resulted in expansive definitions that acknowledge social and economic conditions and processes. Yet little attention has

consequently been paid to cultural, instrumental, or technical aspects of democratic government. I contribute an anthropological perspective to scholarship on the place of elections in democracy and processes of democratization; the development of electoral institutions, rules, and systems; and the development of electoral management bodies. This research, based primarily in the disciplines of political science and international relations, tends to be highly pragmatic and utilitarian, focusing on effective and efficient determinants, systematic or sociohistorical obstacles, and prescriptions for the future. My research widens the unit of analysis, analyzing the knowledge system in which both elections and election scholarship reside (cf. Barry and Slater 2002a, 2002b on how the discipline of economics acts as a technology, as something that attempts to frame economic processes and shape material economic arrangements). I do so here through an ethnographic study of electoral materials such as ballots, electoral rolls, voter preparation guides, and international electoral supervisors.

Focusing on the agents of elections—the human and nonhuman actors that give elections form—demonstrates that technique (or *techne*) creates democratic facts, knowledge, and order (see Barry 2002; Callon 1998; Latour 1988, 1999; Latour and Woolgar 1979; Law and Hassard 1999). Technical practices disguise interests by rendering them apolitical and mundane (Barry 2002; Riles 2002; Rose 1999). However, the technical and the instrumental (such as bureaucratic practice) are not apolitical, acultural, or simply functional. Recent work (e.g., Ferguson 1994; Jain 2004; Mitchell 1989, 2002; Riles 1998, 2000, 2006) has aptly demonstrated that they form an epistemological base for modern rationality and authority. Through what could be called the government of democracy, international assistance efforts and apolitical technologies contribute to the introduction, establishment, management, and ordering of modern social relations and forms of authority. That is, the *techne* of democracy produces social knowledge, which in turn specifies and naturalizes “how conduct should be conducted” (M. Dean 1999; Foucault 1991; Gordon 1991). As democracy promotion and exportation become more entrenched as foreign policy goals—including at the UN and European Union—it is important to understand the facets that go into making it work.

Elections, though no longer solely equated with democracy, remain the top-funded and -promoted democratization project. Many critics have charged that there is an overemphasis on elections (e.g., International Crisis Group 2000b on Bosnian elections), but the emphasis is not

fading. As Marina Ottaway (2002) points out, the “cookie-cutter approach” appears to demand elections about two years after a peace treaty. The gap between analysis and practice suggests that elections, as technical exercises, are at the forefront of transformation models.

At this point, it is necessary to stress the particularity of current meanings of democracy. The cold war “triumph” of neoliberalism led to a global circulation of democratic discourse (Verdery 1996) and new circulations of professional elite who advise, manage, teach, promote, demonstrate, and advertise liberal and neoliberal solutions and practices, including “democracy” and “democratic” forms of governance and power. As one international remarked during an interview, “Democratization is a new form of missionary work—elections simply replace the Bible.” But what messages are embedded within the evangelical sermon? Since the cold war, democracy and democratization efforts have moved away from strictly procedural criteria and toward an alignment with cultural components such as vibrant civil society, tolerance, and willingness to compromise (Chandler 1999a). Democratization projects are increasingly incorporated into international humanitarian and development packages given to aid-receiving areas. Indeed, in some areas, governments must prove that they are taking concrete steps toward democracy (and market reform) to receive aid packages from donor governments and international agencies. However, this primacy as a policy strategy by Americans, Europeans, and the UN, among others, is relatively new. During the cold war, democracy may have been communism’s foil, but combating the Red Tide did not necessarily translate into efforts to promote democracy. Right-wing dictators were preferable to democratically elected leftist leaders, and proxy wars were not uncommon. The internationalization of democracy in the 1990s was made possible in part through the mapping of emancipatory values and human rights onto democracy; however, Guillhot argues that the newest push for democratic political systems was tightly connected and entirely subordinated to the imposition of neoliberal economic orthodoxy (2005:192–93).

Shifts in democratic meaning, the problems of categorizing democracy, and the qualification of hundreds of types of democracy suggest that democracy is fluid. In their discussion of the tension between analytical differentiation and conceptual validity, David Collier and Steven Levitsky (1996) list some of the many adjectives used to qualify democracy, including *praetorian*, *plebiscitarian*, *procedural*, *electoral*, *semicompetitive*, *full*, *illiberal*, *one-party*, *hybrid*, *mature*, *incomplete*, *neopatrimonial*, *consol-*

idated, parliamentary, postauthoritarian, fragile, uncertain, neocolonial, bankrupt, low-income, unruly, elitist, dual, blocked, overinstitutionalized, and tarnished. They call for greater consistency and clarity of meaning in scholars' usage of the concept as a way of avoiding conceptual stretching yet retaining an ability to differentiate. These goals, of course, cannot be wholly accomplished simultaneously—or they at least imply a trade-off. Of course, scholarship in political science and sociology has developed useful distinctions that bridge some of the debates on what democracy is and what it should be (e.g., Huber, Rueschemeyer, and Stephens 1997 on formal, social, and participatory democracy). However, I suggest that the constant and endless contestation in scholarship and in the public realm over meanings and definitions also points to an ever more important need to understand democracy in and through its localities and particularities—for example, as a political form, in the diversity of values associated (or conflated) with it, in the constitutive nature of its practices, as well as in its relationships with power. The on-the-ground variance of democracy suggests that cannot be defined a priori (Paley 2002).

Imposing Democracy?

Even on my first visit to Bosnia-Herzegovina, in December 1996, one year after the signing of Dayton, I was struck by the nature of the international interventions in Bosnia-Herzegovina. The intensity and scope of the interventions were mind-boggling. Out of this concentrated chaos, a paradox emerged: the idea of imposing democracy. If a dominant signifier of democracy is rule by the people and thus embodies a spirit of group decision making (whatever form that takes), then how are we to reconcile the enforced adoption of this form of rule? The imposition of democracy by a foreign minority appeared contradictory. This paradox led me into an examination of two linked spheres: Who was imposing, and what was being imposed? That is, what were the practices of internationals, and what were the practices of “democracy”?

The spheres of internationality and democracy are not separate, of course, but extensively mediate each other. For example, an excerpt from my fieldwork journal written during the 1997 voter registration period unsurprisingly demonstrates that the context of election registration was firmly embedded in international social and political power relations. More surprisingly, it shows that the content was as well.

Work is a zoo, or rather a circus. If you get past the tedium of processing 70–90,000 forms a day, then it is quite amusing. We spent all day opening envelopes from Croatia and Serbia today (refugee voter applications). No problem; except the supervisors at the Registration Centers like to attach little notes to the forms (which are scanned by high speed machines that DON'T like little notes). The little notes (taped, stapled, and paper clipped to the forms) say things like: "Dear Sir or Madam, this elderly refugee lady cannot remember her birthday. However, she should be allowed to vote, I certify it is okay." Or: "This gentleman walked out without his stamped receipt. However, we noticed that he left his name blank as well as his identification number blank on the forms. However, he is a valid voter and should be allowed to vote." And how are we to know who this gentleman is? At any rate, we throw these cute notes away, and get increasingly upset when we open envelopes with notes since we can't do anything about any of them.

The relationships between content and context are important yet are under-studied within the realms of purportedly acultural technical and bureaucratic processes. International supervisors, representatives of democracy and enforcers of electoral rules, negotiated the rules and procedures from particular social locations: as professionals and as technical specialists (and as members of their individual nation-states). These social locations informed the way technique was practiced, for example, giving some supervisors (in their minds) the authority to bypass the procedures. The registration form required a birth date and an identification number; the supervisors felt fine "certifying" that some voters did not need to record that information. The technique, meant to be standard and universal, was not so, either in its design or in its implementation.

The mediations between democracy and internationals were further apparent at one post-Election Day congratulatory meeting for the international electoral staff, a group that included me. The speaker made two statements that hinted at some of the underlying logics of the international intervention and the project of democratization in Bosnia-Herzegovina. After applauding us for our work, she told us that we should be proud since "this has been an exercise in demonstrating democracy." She continued on a more solemn note, with a gesture toward the political outcome of the election, "You don't always get what you've paid for."

The election results had strongly backed the nationalist political parties that the international powers desperately wanted out of office. According to internationals, their presence in Bosnia-Herzegovina constituted an expensive pedagogical exercise with few results to justify the expense. I, as a participant in this meeting and in the exercise of “demonstrating democracy,” wondered exactly what I had demonstrated and how I had demonstrated it.

Democratic Dreaming

During the November 2000 election period, the voter information branch of the Election Department of the OSCE released an election song as part of a voter turnout campaign attempting to counter increasing signs of apathy and the growing belief that voting did not change anything.⁴ Like the political parties, the OSCE was angling for votes; that is, OSCE election officials hoped for high voter turnout (and the consequent increased legitimacy of the election as form and as result). A catchy pop tune, “Zgrabi svoju sreću” (Grab Your Luck) highlighted the connotations and dreams associated with elections and by extension democracy. The song repeatedly emphasizes the ability to choose one’s own future:

I know the times are hard
Scratch, look under the sand
Maybe you’ll find luck
Smaller or bigger
Why does the same song always play
When you can choose

Life goes sideways
Because it has no tracks
Dig under the surface
You may just dig out luck
Smaller or bigger
Why does the same song always play
When you can choose

Life sails without sails
Put your hand in your chest
You may touch clear luck

Smaller or bigger
 Why does the same song always play
 When you can choose

Nothing will fall from the sky
 Somewhere somebody needs you
 And finds you in his luck
 Smaller or bigger
 Why does the same song always play
 When you can choose

Grab your luck
 It's somewhere near you
 Grab your luck
 You hesitate without need
 And may everyone choose their own luck

The song refutes the popular complaint that nothing ever changes and reminds listeners that they have the ability to change the song of the future; life is hard, life sails along uncontrollably, life is scary, but it does not have to be. The lyrics question why listeners always choose the same song and implore them instead to make an active choice in determining the future—to grab their luck. Rejecting the connotation of fate, luck is lyrically associated with the ability to choose, having an opinion or voice, and the potential for a better future. Luck, they sing, is of one's own making. Created in an attempt to promote the election and put focus on "issues" rather than ethnonational rhetoric, the song pinpointed Election Day as the moment of choice. Election Day and the voting process constituted the way toward easier times, a forward-moving, on-track life, and smooth sailing.

This song was just one of the electoral propaganda items that appeared during the registration and campaign periods. Aimed at reaching a broad audience, electoral messages—passed to the public in everyday situations via magazine ads, radio jingles, drink coasters, grocery bags, sugar packets, billboards, and television commercials—informed the public that an election was imminent and attempted to attach particular meanings to elections and democracy.⁵

Ads and public announcements also often urged voters to favor politicians who campaigned on concrete improvement issues and who offered pragmatic action. As late as September 2002, after the elections

had already been “handed over” to Bosnians, the High Representative called on voters to “give their vote to politicians and political parties who are prepared to implement necessary reforms” (OHR 2002b). Issue topics were implanted into the swirl of electoral messages, such as “stamping out corruption” and “improving the economy,” but elections themselves were always also offered as solutions. Slogans developed for the various elections expanded on the basic definition of election as choice by linking choice to agency, decision making, change, and the future. For example, during the election period for the 1997 municipal elections, beer mats proclaimed, “The Decision Is in Your Hands!” (fig. 3). The election’s official slogan was “Elections Are the Way for Your Future.” Later elections similarly proclaimed themselves mechanisms for change: “With Change to a Better Life” and “Vote for Changes.” Even “how to vote” informational posters plastered around towns and outside polling stations carried those phrases—in larger font than any other phrase or even the explanatory content of the poster. Not surprisingly, the widely touted “change” slogans upset the larger political parties in power, which saw the tactic as the international powers’ not-so-subtle suggestion that voters oust incumbents.

Typical rhetoric expounded around the world paints democracy as holding the promise of salvation and progress but as being too often encumbered by “politics” and politicians; Bosnia was no different. Elections were touted as an avenue for citizen (rather than politician) participation in decisions about the future. During the 1999 registration period, another beer mat scolded Bosnians, “Don’t Let Other People Decide for You. It Is Too Late When You Make Decisions about Your Registration on Election Day.” The coaster conveyed the message that voting (via registering) was a way to give input on important decisions and suggested that all Bosnians should participate in the election so as to not allow decisions to be made without them. Media campaigns emphasized Election Day (through voting) as the means through which citizens could influence politics, change their living situations, and express choice. Within the propaganda, the political nature of elections (and democracy) (as compared to elections as merely an instrumental means of organizing and structuring politics) was completely absent, replaced by omnipresent associations between progress and agency. Downplaying and deemphasizing the limitations of elections and the reality of democratic negotiations and debate while marketing a decontextualized, technical event as transformative and progressive demonstrates that the



Fig. 3. Beer mats (coasters) were common sites for electoral messages suggesting how much time Bosnians (and internationals) spent in café-bars. The slogan in the lower right corner reads, “Elections are the way to your future.” (Courtesy of the Organization for Security and Co-Operation in Europe, *Mission to Bosnia and Herzegovina.*)

democratic model is predicated on an ideology of improvement and change. However, its practices are neither necessarily progressive nor intrinsically transformative.

Despite active voter turnout campaigns, Bosnia-Herzegovina never faced low voter turnout. The first postwar elections had an original estimation of 109 percent turnout (International Crisis Group 1996a:54) with high charges of double voting and voting by dead persons. The five elections held during my fieldwork had turnout rates between 60 percent and 88 percent. This compares favorably with an estimated average global turnout rate during the 1990s of 64 percent (Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance 2002). Although voter turnout decreased in each postwar election, especially among younger adults discouraged by the lack of change and poor economic outlook, slogans and logos were not strictly necessary *vis-à-vis* voter participation. Rather, they were necessary to reach certain voters, to implant particular connotations in voters, and to articulate the functionality and importance of voters and their decision making to democracy: to make democracy work. Juxtaposing these electoral imaginations and promises against electoral practices demonstrates that elections and democracy are not simply means by which citizens choose their governments but also mechanisms through which particular conceptualizations—in this case, of participation, agency, democracy, progress, choice, and Europe—are naturalized and normalized, to the detriment of other possibilities.

Inquiries

Can you be here Tuesday? This question was posed to me over the phone, long distance from Bosnia-Herzegovina. It was Thursday morning in California. Thus began a peculiar blend of fieldwork into international efforts to bring or build democracy in Bosnia-Herzegovina and participation in the efforts themselves. When I arrived in Sarajevo on Tuesday, June 3, 1997, I had no idea that I was embarking on a long-term field project into electoral practices. In fact, by mid-July, a mere six weeks later, I had quit my electoral job as a registration supervisor, opting instead for a research position with a well-regarded international NGO that was rebuilding 200 homes for returning refugees and displaced people in northwest Bosnia and wanted the process documented and evaluated.⁶ The project manager knew that housing was crucial—and potentially inadequate—for successful reintroduction and socioeconomic survival. He wanted to know what returnees' real and perceived conditions were and would be. This project would have led me into interesting anthropological terrain, analyzing postwar conditions and adaptations in Bosnia-Herzegovina as well as new transnational networks between returning refugees and their host country, in this case, Germany.⁷ Because of a health emergency, I was ultimately unable to conduct the research, instead returning to California to recuperate for the rest of the summer. But I had not seen the last of elections. The election was scheduled for mid-September, and much remained to be done. E-mails trickled into my California inbox, asking if I would be able to return to Bosnia-Herzegovina. I replied cautiously yet affirmatively, fearing for my health and fearing the wrath and anguish of my doctor and my family. The situation remained vague and undetermined (at least in my eyes) when an express mail envelope arrived from a travel agent with a round trip ticket to Split, Croatia, the arrival and departure location for international election supervisors. With guarantees from the OSCE that I would be in Sarajevo (and thus near medical facilities) and guarantees from me that the illness had resolved itself, I spent two weeks in front of a computer screen hammering out a database program to determine the validity of tendered ballots.⁸ In retrospect, my last-minute, opportunistic, and serendipitous arrivals were typical of other international arrival narratives I heard during my research. My favorite conversations often began with, "So, how did you get here?" It seemed that

everyone had a story with a seemingly random twist, an unexpected turn, or a frantic decision.

The harried and uncertain nature of these international positions led many people to ask, “What type of person can take up these positions?” Who can, on one or two weeks’ notice, pack up their lives and move to Bosnia (or Cambodia or East Timor or Côte d’Ivoire) for between six weeks and six months? The tempo of the job recruitment process affects the tenor and dynamics of international life.⁹ Among other things, the tempo and short-term nature of hiring and contracts in Bosnia combined with postwar living conditions created a lively social scene as internationals sought companionship, entertainment, and sustenance. Reflecting on the changes in international daily life over almost a decade of intervention, a human resource administrator stated that the situation had really settled down since “the early days.”

I think the international community has normalized—[now,] it’s like living anywhere else. People spend more time in their houses now because they have nice creature comforts. I live in a nice house with a lovely yard. I have satellite TV with more [channels] than before. Now we get film channels [too]. My life could be the same in Atlanta. I get up, shower, go to work, maybe see friends, come home for dinner, watch television, sleep, get up and do it again. On the weekends, I garden and go grocery shopping—the same things I’d do in Georgia. Normally in expat world, people are looking for a life different than the suburb they could have in France or the U.S. So there are fewer mission junkies now; we tend to have more specialists, more senior professionals. It’s still difficult to get skilled people sometimes, given the diplomatic pressures we face, but neither are we taking fresh people like before.

“Mission junkies” is a term that many people use to refer to those who simply go from crisis to crisis, drawn to the adrenalin, the pay, the danger, the morality, and the freedom allowed under such start-up, emergency conditions. According to the same administrator, mission junkies are a type of “lifer” or “hanger-on”:

I think that the lifers are a certain type of person—one who is trying to escape. There are mission junkies going from crisis to crisis, but there are also some who can’t manage to do anything else.

They're here from a fluke. Economically, they could get at home maybe half of what they earn here. And there are others, which I have no respect for, who just reinvent themselves so they can stay. Sometimes that's because they can't have their life with power, a nanny, a cleaner, and a driver, back at home. Sometimes its because there isn't the same action back where they're from. They don't want to go back, and that rejection of their norms and homeplace is unhealthy.

Over the course of a decade's involvement with internationals and international organizations in Bosnia-Herzegovina, I learned from others how hard it was to leave given the ordinariness of life "at home" and the uncertainty of what might come next. Friends and colleagues told me how reassuring it must be for me (and I always agreed) that I always returned to the same place (i.e., the university and my department).

I ultimately held five positions within the Election Department over the course of five elections and four years (1997–2000): registration supervisor, polling supervisor, chief of administration for the election supervision branch, and (twice) election trainer. Most of these positions were similarly uncertain or unplanned in their origination. I was often extremely lucky—in the right place at the right time and meeting the right people. I also earned a reputation as a serious and competent employee, which apparently assisted in my repeated assignments. Along with the flexibility needed to match the last-minute, anxiety-filled, and rushed nature of the international organizations, these factors helped me to obtain my jobs and later to receive permission to conduct research within the OSCE. The jobs facilitated my in-depth understanding of the election bureaucracy in a way not possible through more traditional participant observation. "Becoming a native" may be one of the best ways to understand and examine modernity's forms, especially bureaucratic ones. Many ethnographers now take this tack through, for example, obtaining internships, volunteering time and/or expertise, or becoming an employee, consultant, or "expert," as few organizations are willing to set up a chair in the corner for an ethnographic interloper. Becoming a bureaucrat allows a type of intimate access not accessible through observing, listening, and asking.

Given my background as an OSCE employee, I was surprised at the access and gatekeeping issues I later encountered while conducting independent ethnographic fieldwork. As I bitterly joked to a neighbor after being thrown out of a meeting because the organizer felt that it was

not relevant to my research, “He needs to worry about what I already know, not what I still want to find out.” However, one colleague equally bitterly remarked that my access issues were the same issues that everyone dealt with on a daily basis—fighting for information, justifying one’s existence, trying to impress the “right” people and to avoid making enemies. He claimed that my struggles were participant observation par excellence. Just as issues of “studying up” are tinged with power plays and fears of exposure (Nader 1972), so are many relations between staff members and their supervisors. I truthfully told leery electoral administrators that I was not interested in a journalistic exposé; I was not evaluating their practices, I constantly reiterated, but was conducting a cultural and sociological analysis of the democratization projects in Bosnia-Herzegovina. However, electoral officials had difficulty seeing how attending logistics meetings or training events would help me. Barred by media and political criticisms, my note taking made some officials nervous and reluctant to be open. Although I had received high-level permission, access had to be repeatedly negotiated at lower levels of the regional and departmental chain of command and with individual colleagues. Issues of access, fear, and exposure constantly mixed with popular ideas regarding what anthropologists study and how they collect data.

Similarly, my encounter with the managerial, logistic, and other technical practices of international bureaucracies and electoral administrations provoked anxieties about my choice of ethnographic methods and sites. My bureaucratic and elite data seemed terribly thin and already known. These practices were not difficult to infiltrate: spreadsheets, memos, note taking, teaching, and organizing files were not necessarily new to me, although I had never thought of myself as an expert (or a professional) in these areas.¹⁰ Annelise Riles (2000, 2002) remarks on the difficulty of researching and analyzing the analytical and organizational devices groups use when they are the same devices social scientists use. In her study of the character and aesthetics of information, she comments that the material she describes may feel achingly familiar because she had an “ethnographic encounter with knowledge practices already familiar to, and indeed in use by, the anthropologist” (2000:5). Anthropology should continue its queries of the practices that are predominantly unmarked in our own lives, such as logistics, pragmatism, research, and bureaucracy, because they are powerful tools of interpretation and understanding and we are not alone in using them. Like scholars of technique and form, including those from within science and

technology studies who argue that an effect of scientific practice is the creation of conceivability and possibility, I demonstrate here, through a detailed description and analysis of democracy's inner workings—electoral quotidian life—that democratic practice does not discover facts as much as create them. In this way, it may be productive to think of Bosnia-Herzegovina, at least metaphorically, as a large laboratory. Not only were social engineering experiments occurring through the transformative intentionalities of aid and development projects, but particular epistemologies also were becoming codified and institutionalized, particularly in the realm of “democratization.” Conducting ethnographic analysis on the everyday life of internationals and their practices thus represents a commitment to understanding how the world is shaped by the analytical tools of modernity, including social science, statistics, analytical reports, and other shared features of both my ethnographic and my election work.

Power, Privilege, and Unintelligibility

Beyond confronting the methodological and analytical constraints of familiarity and elite access, I faced questions of how to study large, intermittent technobureaucratic events and how to address the high degree of change and uncertainty running through my fieldwork and the international context (cf. Greenhouse, Mertz, and Warren 2002). Not only was I attempting to study a political process—democratization—based on ideals of transformation, but my colleagues were in constant flux. International organizations in Bosnia-Herzegovina had a high turnover rate, and many positions were contract based, ending when the funding dried up. The relatively short-term employment opportunities within election work (generally two weeks to six or eight months) and an average tenure in Bosnia of approximately two years for those in other fields meant that my informants changed from year to year and even month to month. They often knew little about or had little experience in Bosnia-Herzegovina, let alone in their particular job positions—everyone was thrown into the mix and did their best to muddle through work and life. How does ethnographic analysis work when few people know the answers, when people disagree on the answers, or when people do not care that they do not know? Definitive interpretations were not always available. Given this state of ethnographic affairs, Ferguson comments that “miscommunication and partial communication were not simply temporary obstacles in the methodological process of the ethnographer

but central features of the ‘authentic’ cultural experience” (1999:208). In the case of my informants in Bosnia-Herzegovina, this was true inside work as well as outside. Inside their job contexts, informants did not always know why X was X, why Y had been implemented, or why Z had changed. They often left Bosnia-Herzegovina just as they began to gain some semblance of knowledge or experience. Unfamiliar with Bosnian languages yet circulating in Bosnian public life, few international workers could pick up the conversations swirling around them, read newspaper headlines or watch television programming, or talk to Bosnians on the street. In this sense, anthropologists must take seriously unintelligibility and the idea that culture may not be shared or agreed upon. In his analysis of modernity in Zambia, Ferguson (1999) argues that the social significance, effect, and import of Copperbelt cosmopolitanism may be in its “noise.” Can we, he asks, read the production of noise itself as a social practice? In Bosnia’s international project of elections, unintelligibility acted to give greater authority to fixed objects and practices. The aesthetics and form became more important than the intent. Consequently, I focus extensively on electoral objects—what were the relationships among objects, unintelligibility, and the zeal to bring order to Bosnia-Herzegovina? As a result of the unintelligible noise experienced by many internationals, decisions are represented in this text as agentless. This is because informants often did not know why or how a change had been made or who had made it. Little on-the-ground knowledge existed of whether a change was part of a strategy with a goal, an economic necessity, or a rectification of an oversight. Part of the struggle of this fieldwork was sorting out the *ex post facto* explanations that informants constructed for themselves as the most logical alternatives despite their gloss or lack of knowledge.

One of the most disturbing features of internationals was their poor language skills, especially in light of their ability to make decisions for and judgments about Bosnia-Herzegovina and Bosnians. The disconnect surely contributed to the structural division and societal separation of internationals and international institutions from Bosnia-Herzegovina. However, it also affected knowledge practices. As an American diplomat confided to me about his previous posting with the U.S. State Department, “Before, where I was stationed, I really understood [what was going on] because I got out there. Here, we don’t have any idea. It’s all recycled or recirculated information. We’re not really talking—just to other internationals.” Both Ann Janette Rosga (2005) and Andrew Gilbert (2004, 2005) crucially theorize the effects of international uncer-

tainty and unknowledge (what I call *gloss*) combined with transformative potential and authority. Rosga, for example, details the assumptions underlying her confusion and annoyance when some members of a training program refused to participate in a pedagogical exercise that she had designed for them. Only afterward did it become apparent that the Serbs in her group were nervous conducting “on-the-street” interviews in Sarajevo, a predominantly Muslim city after the war. As an international, the gaps in her knowledge included areas of linguistic translation, international donor distrust, war anxieties, and intra-Bosnian resentments and affected the project she was implementing (on child trafficking) from design to data collection to writing the final report. However, as Gilbert (2005) points out, knowledge too can be dangerous if it is not predicated on “careful and systematic observations of various kinds of interactions and social action where meanings are negotiated and become effective in the practices of everyday life.” This is what I term *gloss*: not all internationals realized that their “knowledge” was only a veneer; however, in all cases, their policy and practical work was based on this “knowledge.”

Comments by paraethnographers like the American diplomat—following George E. Marcus’s conceptualization of social actors critically conscious of their own situations and often located within centers of power and privilege (Marcus 2000; Holmes, Marcus, and Westbrook 2006)—as well as the circumstances discussed by Rosga and Gilbert suggest that the incredible power and transformational strategies of internationals’ interventions were based on knowledge that was at best superficial. My language skills mirrored those of the typical international worker: rudimentary. As an anthropologist, I found my isolation disturbing yet fascinating, since it also gave me incredible insight into the world of most international workers. While some, including some high-level diplomats, among them at least one American ambassador, spoke Serbo-Croatian fluently, some spoke Serbo-Croatian because of their family backgrounds, and a few learned the language to a conversational level or better, internationals on the whole relied on interpreters, translators, English-speaking Bosnians, hubris, and a healthy sense of the functionality of goodwill.¹¹ I used strangeness and fascination as methodological tools to probe into the internationals’ world of partial understandings and limited communication yet privileged authority and aggrandized self-representations.

Methodologically, I also took advantage of the fact that multiple elec-

tions occurred during a relatively short amount of time. Within four years, I participated in five internationally implemented elections. In this research, I used data from all five elections, although my data are more thorough, varied, and detailed from the two election periods in 2000 when I was explicitly gathering ethnographic data. The scale of the election project was immense, however. Unable to observe it all, I learned as much as possible via my own positions and roles. I worked or observed at three distinct operational levels—headquarters, regional office, and field office—in teams or suboffices. Thus, I intimately learned about an electoral position and its relationships yet maintained observations of other electoral positions and relationships. I also devised strategies to gather information from other positions that I could not observe as a result of temporal and spatial constraints. For example, I asked municipal election committee supervisors to keep diaries of their experiences during their six-week tenures. Similarly, I gave questionnaires to hundreds of registration and polling supervisors in 1998 and 2000 to help me understand their practices and their interpretations of their role in bringing democracy to Bosnia-Herzegovina. Simultaneous events and tasks made it difficult to grasp a sense of the larger whole; these textual responses were one way to engage with other electoral positions on Election Day and the weeks preceding it. I used these strategies in tandem with fieldnotes, interviews with a wide range of electoral staff, observations, and the collection of administrative, technical, and electoral materials.

Observing and participating in election implementation over the course of several elections broadened the range of possibilities. However, it also highlighted how much change was occurring in Bosnia-Herzegovina and within the community of internationals. Throughout this book, I take advantage of this longitudinal perspective, since significant changes in content, context, and focus occurred during this four-year period. I document processes of production and usage in democratic forms, practices, and knowledge rather than simply providing a snapshot of any single moment in time. While capturing change undoubtedly benefited my study, it poses problems in terms of representation. How does one describe an activity when the details are different each time it was witnessed? I primarily use two strategies: (1) choosing one election's activity as an exemplar, and (2) focusing on the shared components. In most cases, I have chosen to focus on an exemplar but point out shifts in practice or logics as appropriate. I have avoided drawing composite events, since doing so appeared to be

counterproductive to analyses of processes. What is interesting is the continuity of logic underneath the change as well as representations of progress within the process. Similarly, as is conventional in ethnographies, I have endeavored to protect my informants' identities. This required changing person's names as well as modifying nationalities, job titles and responsibilities, residence location, and, occasionally, dates of residence in Bosnia. These strategies were used to protect the confidences of, and any unintended or undesirable effects of those confidences on my informants, friends, and colleagues. However, they also serve to discourage spurious connections with identity or temporal and spatial fixity. For this same reason, some narratives and quotes are simply anonymous. However, the book's attention to the deployment of power also required that I make every effort to match pseudonym names, positions, nationalities, and the like to the reality of any given person's location in networks of power relations, hierarchies, and competencies.

Polling Anthropology

This book is divided into two parts. The first section examines the logics of the international community through an analysis of the practices and rationales of the community's members, be they internationals or Bosnians. The second section takes up the logics of democracy through a close examination of the practices that constitute it. Each section is prefaced by an autoethnographic vignette of my introduction to these strange yet oddly familiar worlds. I hope that these vignettes make the familiar a little less so and give some life to the technical and bureaucratic. I begin, however, in "Blueprints and Builders," with a discussion of the "international community" in Bosnia-Herzegovina, suggesting that it is important to examine *it* as a *them*: the international community is a social and political construct, not a singular political entity. I describe the scope and role of the international interventions in postwar, postsocialist Bosnia-Herzegovina after the signing of the Dayton Peace Accords in November 1995. Then the book turns toward "Internationality" through a focus on the relationships between international personnel and mechanisms of government built into a model of international intervention with a transformative mission. Through detailed descriptions of these internationals' work practices and the assumptions embedded within them, the chapters shed light on the practices and epistemologies of government hidden within explicitly and specifically political projects.

Turning toward what was imposed and how, the chapters in “Democratic Governance” examine the processes, norms, materiality, and practices created or set in motion by elections. The usage and deployment of ballots, voters, polling and counting procedures, and the like help to create the neutral, inclusive, and universal representations embedded in democracy. However, each chapter also seeks to problematize the authority on which democracy rested in Bosnia-Herzegovina. I close the book with a consideration of the international circuit of democracy promotion as a foreign policy tool for the consolidation of democratic knowledge. As described and analyzed in this work, an election is not solely or even primarily about participation. Analyzing the techniques of electoral and democratic government demonstrates that much of the work done is epistemological. The seemingly unimportant notes attached to the registration forms matter—a lot. Complex interpretive and technical tasks articulate democratic governance and its possibilities.