

Selma Đuliman



Geosemiotics of Bosnian humor

A Sarajevo perspective



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Selma Đuliman

Geosemiotics of Bosnian humor: A Sarajevo perspective



Sarajevo, 2026.

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*To Amir, for giving my heart a home,
and to Hiba and Enes, living in my heart.*

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Preface

The very title of this book, *Geosemiotics of Bosnian humor: A Sarajevo perspective* indicates not only its focus – the humor of Sarajevo, but also the plentiful nature of humor in Bosnia.¹ The country has indeed become regionally recognizable for its humor, almost to the point of becoming a stereotype, owing in large part to the prevalence of jokes that focus on Bosnians, as well as the enduring popularity of Bosnian television sitcoms, films and series that have been produced for decades and have enjoyed significant success among regional audiences.

It was at the initial stages of my research that I realized my perspective needed a narrowed focus, which is why I opted for some aspects of humor from and about Sarajevo, my hometown. My goal is to investigate what makes Sarajevo humor special.

The approach consists of two theoretical frameworks, geosemiotics and the general theory of verbal humor (GTVH). This is a multimodal approach, encompassing both linguistic and cultural analysis of humor, with the visual aspect acting as an underlying element. In that respect, geosemiotics is the important link connecting the Sarajevo perspective of humor with humor universalities. The Sarajevo perspective entails the city's life, culture, habits and history that have influenced humor, e.g. the Olympic games, the siege of the city, political and social struggles in different periods, and so on, all within the framework of some universal humorous themes, such as war, sex, politics, ethnic humor, etc.

The introductory chapter of the book is a presentation of some of the most important works by Bosnian writers in the 20th century and the main humorous achievements in Bosnia in the 20th and early 21st century.

The methodology chapter focuses on the theoretical framework for the analysis: geosemiotics, as introduced to linguistics by Ron Scollon and

¹ The full name of my country is Bosnia and Herzegovina. However, the adjectival phrase *Bosnian and Herzegovinian* (humor, for example) in the title and elsewhere in the book would be too long, so I opted for the simpler option – Bosnia/Bosnian, especially since this is how the country is frequently referred to in English. My Herzegovinian friends and family will, no doubt, forgive me.

Suzanne Wong Scollon in their seminal work *Discourses in Place*, and the general theory of verbal humor, a comprehensive humor theory by Salvatore Attardo and Victor Raskin. The main goal of the methodology chapter is to establish the link between the two approaches necessary for the analysis.

The next five chapters are analytical, focusing on internet memes related to Sarajevo, a comic book by Bosnian Franciscans presenting their humorous anecdotes, artistic posters by Anur Hadžiomerspahić, as well as the *Top lista nadrealista* (TLN) sketches and the *Bruca Braca Bruda Brada* (BBBB) animated series. Each of these five chapters discusses the way in which Sarajevo is presented through humor, the significance of landscape for humor, as well as the way in which the GTVH reveals both the universal and particular traits of the selected humorous segments.

I do hope that readers will find something new and interesting in this book. As the author, I take full responsibility for its shortcomings and I remain open to collegial discussion about humor, Bosnia and Sarajevo.

Selma Đuliman
Sarajevo, July 2026

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I am also grateful to Nedžma Poračanin, Aida Dedović, as well as to Jan and Noa Hadžiomerspahić, my avid researchers, who took time and sent photos and memes of Sarajevo for the analysis, as well as to Admir Čular of the EKI-PA foundation and the *Helem nejse* collective for generous assistance.

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1 A short introduction to the development of contemporary Bosnian humor

*Glasom koga nemam, u jeziku, koga nemam
O kući, koju nemam, ja pjevam pjesmu, majko*

[With the voice I have not, in the tongue I have not,
about the home I have not, I sing my song, mother]

(Abdulah Sidran, 1991, p. 171)

These verses can serve almost as a universal introduction to the struggle of small cultures and their positioning in the world. Belonging to a small culture usually entails a struggle for recognition, a desire to be appreciated and recognized as a member of the society of the civilized. Bosnian culture, a small, underrepresented European culture, has gone through different phases of formation, fighting for its independence and even survival. It has also seen some notable moments of international recognition, both in the mainstream and in the *haute couture* artistic and academic circles.

Efforts of Bosnian scholars to define, present and “canonize” their culture have been ongoing and, especially in the second half of the 20th century, they were even deemed brave attempts at bringing forth the artistic creativity that had frequently been appropriated by different nationalistic tendencies against the “insignificant” (Bosnian) Other. Still, prominent Bosnian scholars have produced significant works affirming Bosnian literature and culture, establishing a solid scientific basis for further research. These scholars include Midhat Begić, Enes Duraković, Alija Isaković, Josip Lešić, Zdenko Lešić, Gordana Muzaferija, and Muhsin Rizvić, just to name a few.

Writing a book about humor is thus a demanding task, since humor is part of one’s cultural heritage, and the culture of Bosnia and Herzegovina is, as Abdulah Šarčević emphasized, “polyphonous, multifaceted, and in an endless conjunction” where “each distinctive culture is mediated by different traditions, cultures and religions” (Šarčević, 2011, pp. 35–36). That

said, the country's geographical position and its history have placed it right in the middle between the European and the Oriental tradition, with a history of Abrahamic religions practiced to a greater or lesser extent by its inhabitants, and all well-adapted to the moderate and in a way even isolated world of the Balkans.² All this in addition to almost half a century of being part of socialist Yugoslavia, which had never fully been relegated to either side of the Iron Curtain.

The Bosnian theoretician of literary drama Gordana Muzaferija (2000) emphasized that literature in multicultural Bosnia and Herzegovina relied on polyphony, where the Occidental and Oriental traditions were brought into contact and were not mutually exclusive, but rather comparative and intertwined, creating unity in the diversity of its four components: Bosniak, Croatian, Jewish and Serbian. This analogy can, in fact, be transposed to all other segments of Bosnian culture, including humor.

This also gives rise to the issue of defining Bosnian humor in this book. I come from Sarajevo, and have spent most of my life here. That means that this book will focus on the humor that is characteristic of Sarajevo, the capital of Bosnia and Herzegovina, which has been one of the largest cultural (economic, etc.) centers in the Western Balkans. This is important, since it is natural for large cities to draw in new residents who always contribute to and influence the wonderful diversity of new traditions while, at the same time, as new residents, they appropriate many traits of their new home. Hence, the analyzed examples will focus on humor that is created in Sarajevo, i.e., by Sarajevo-based artists, while I am aware that Bosnian humor does contain much more than the local Sarajevo form of expression. Still, the country is small and the popularity of the content I will present is widespread and understandable to people from Bosnia (but also in many areas of former Yugoslavia). That is why even the title of this book emphasizes the Sarajevo perspective.

This chapter will consist of an overview of Bosnian humor, which can be best achieved diachronically, based on the scholarly books and articles of Bosnian authors who focused primarily on the literary heritage of the country. I will also discuss humorous works and characters, as well as their (possible) origin. It is important to emphasize that the selection is, to some extent, arbitrary, but the goal here is not to produce a comprehensive anthology of Bosnian humor in all its forms and genres.

² Works by Maria Todorova (especially *Imagining the Balkans*, 1997) are a valuable read for a more comprehensive insight into the Balkan issues of identity, development and perception of the area, especially by the large European and Eastern countries.

1.1 Pre-Ottoman Bosnia, oral tradition and the book on humor and wisdom of Muslim folk

According to Gordana Muzaferija (2001), Bosnian medieval rulers used to have buffoons who would entertain them and their guests. Of course, the lack of written sources related to the literary heritage of the time makes research into the medieval period in Bosnia rather challenging. As Sead Šemsović (2015, p. 125) emphasized, the various layers of the intangible culture are essentially hard to retain, for neither institutional nor individual interest can completely preserve it, because it is the craft that one tries to encapsulate, not a material matter, passed on within a community from one generation to the next. Still, efforts by scientists and dedicated individuals are invaluable, since it is important to have at least some part of the oral tradition preserved in writing.

In the case of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Dervišević (2016, p. 262) writes that

(...) Bosniak short and humorous stories were recorded by means of the Turkish language, done by the hand of a Sarajevo chronicler, Mula Mustafa Bašeskija, and they go as far as the middle of the 18th century. From then until nowadays, the stories have been recorded and published occasionally. The first scripts of oral prose were mainly the result of some individual engagement, however, they had not been recorded in a professional and planned way until the 1960s under the auspices of the Ethnographic Department of the National Museum in Sarajevo, and the Institute for research of folklore in Sarajevo.

The oral tradition developed in Bosnia has been preserved, especially through the anthological efforts of Mehmed-beg Kapetanović Ljubušak, who in 1883 published *Narodno blago*, a collection of oral heritage of the local folk, Alija Isaković, who published *Biserje*, an anthology of Bosnian literature, first published in 1972, Munib Maglajlić, a researcher of Bosnian oral tradition, focusing especially on the *sevdalinka* poems, who edited, *inter alia*, an anthology entitled *Antologija bošnjačke usmene lirike* (1997), focusing on the lyrical expression of Bosniaks (Bosnian Muslims), etc.

The book *Narodni humor i mudrost Muslimana* [Humor and wisdom of Muslim folk] by Nasko Frndić, published in 1972, was the first collection of Bosnian oral tradition that treated humor. Although the book itself is focused on the oral tradition of “Muslims” of Bosnia, the author specifically emphasizes that this should by no means be understood in isolation from the other peoples of Bosnia and other south Slavic peoples, especially those

living in Bosnia, its cities and villages, for together they “lived through identical historical moments, sharing a common fate on the Balkan windwards” (1972, p. vii).

The book itself focuses on fairy tales, proverbs and riddles, with a special section on humor and wisdom in poetry. The section contains no separate commentary, but upon looking into some of the selected poems, it is evident that witticism and humor appear in love poems selected by Frndić. These are the famous *sevdalinka* songs, part of the Bosniak oral and musical tradition (see more: Đuliman, 2024).

Muhsin Rizvić (1994), Munib Maglajlić (1997), Damir Imamović (2017), and others emphasize that *sevdalinka* is part of the oral tradition, mainly developed in the Ottoman period (witnessed by, among other things, many borrowings from the Ottoman Turkish, which are still contained in contemporary Bosnian), and frequently perceived as a ballad. Muhsin Rizvić (1994, p. 123) emphasizes that *sevdalinks* are more complex in structure compared to typical lyrical poems. In 2024, UNESCO listed *sevdalinka* as intangible cultural heritage of Bosnia and Herzegovina (*UNESCO – Sevdalinka, Traditional Urban Folk Song*, 2025). Composed mainly of lyrical elements but frequently containing essential elements of ballads, *sevdalinks* are frequently marked by a feeling of darkened tragedy and pain. Nevertheless, *sevdalinks* and ballads are similar in that they are thematically related to the content of a sad or tragic love affair, but *sevdalinks*, unlike ballads, do not have a developed plot (Maglajlić, 1991, p. 52). In addition, *sevdalinks* cannot be classified thematically only as ballads. They are more than sad songs; in fact, many are cheerful love poems (for example, *Mujo kuje konja po mjesecu* [Muyo’s shoeing his horse under the moonlight]), or ballads that in the thematic core concern some historical event (for example, *Smrt braće Morića* [Death of the Morić brothers]), etc. As far as the verse structure is concerned, Maglajlić (1997, p. 182) emphasizes that the most frequent verses in *sevdalinks* are asymmetric decasyllable, symmetric and asymmetric octosyllable, as well as thirteen-syllable lines and lyrical decasyllable, usually spanning from five to fifteen verses.

Hence, humor can be found in *sevdalinks* in the joyful interplay between young people in love, either when they joyfully chat through metaphors, always behind the curtain, as was customary in the Muslim households, or in the excitement over the fast-approaching meeting with the loved one.

An interesting example of a humorous *sevdalinka* Frndić presents (1972, p. 162) would be *Star se Ćurčić pomamio* [Old man Ćurčić gave in to

his lust], about a case of polygamy which occurred when a rich old man fell in love with a young girl.

Ovčina (2019) emphasizes the following in his article about the *Ćurčić sevdalinka*:

Although polygamy in Bosnia and Herzegovina, permissible from the Islamic point of view, was not a rare occurrence in the past among the upper classes of Muslim society, Bosnian Muslim women did not willingly approve such a practice in their husbands.

He adds that this *sevdalinka* “commemorates” Lutvullah-bey Ćurčić, who married a young woman, although he himself had already been married and in his seventies and emphasizes that “(...) certain actions of individuals that did not fit into generally accepted social norms of behavior were very often subject to ridicule and mockery through humorous songs” (Ovčina, 2025).

The following verses are an illustration of mockery of the old man Ćurčić, because he got outwitted by the young woman, Almasa. In his version, Frndić (1972, p. 162) sometimes mentions her by “Masa”, a nickname derivate.

The Bosnian version and the English translation seen in Table 1.1 are from Damir Imamović’s album *Dvojka* [No. 2] (released in 2016). He is a researcher, author and singer of *sevdalinkas*. This is also the version sung by the famous *sevdalinka* singers Behka and Igbal Ljuca. Amira Sadiković translated the poem into English (Imamović, 2016):

Table 1.1
Star se Ćurčić pomamio / Old man Ćurčić gave in to his lust

Bosnian	English
Almasa je mudra bila Slamnat jastuk naložila Jastuk slame naložila Uz Ćurčića prislonila	Almasa was wise indeed A pillow she filled with hay and reed A pillow well fill she did, and then She placed it next to the old man
Kad se Ćurčić probudio Slamnat jastuk obljubio Kad se Ćurlić prevrnuo Jastuk slame zagrlio	When old man Ćurčić woke He gave the pillow a gentle stroke As he turned his lover to face It was hay that filled his embrace

Frndić's selection is part of the Bosnian oral tradition, which also encompasses the Ottoman period in Bosnia, including some anecdotes on *Nasreddin Hoja*, a character introduced to Bosnia by the Ottomans, which will be discussed in the following subsection.

Another valuable and recent contribution to research of oral tradition in Bosnia and Herzegovina, focusing on the novellas and humorous stories, is that of Amina Dervišević, who published a book on the subject entitled *Novelistička i šaljiva priča u bošnjačkoj usmenoj prozi* [Novelistic and Humorous Story in the Bosniak Oral Prose] (2016), which is a comprehensive overview of collections of such stories made by many dedicated researchers, including, for example, Nasko Frndić, whose work we discussed above. In the book, she also presented some anecdotes of Nasreddin Hoja, as well as some short stories, with an analysis in which she contextualizes and provides the necessary explanation of the themes and motifs (ranging from women, in many cases evil and cunning, witty servants, the difficulties of losing a child, etc.).

In the following section I will present some important influences on the development of the Bosnian humor during the Ottoman period.

1.2 The Ottoman period (1463–1878)

The Ottoman period in Bosnia was marked by the conquest of the area and subjugation of the local people that lasted for more than 400 years (Kasumović, 2021). In that period, there was a relatively significant literary production by a number of educated Bosnians. A selection of their literary opus, more precisely their poetry, can be found in the *Anthology of Bosniak Poetry in Oriental Languages* (Hadžiosmanović & Memija, 1997), as well as in the works of other authors (e.g. Kemura & Ćorović, 1912; Rizvić, 1994). Although they did not write humorous poetry per se, it can be said that certain humorous instances appear, be it through irony or some witticisms. One such example can be mentioned, where Sabit Užićanin, a famous Bosnian poet in the Ottoman period, who also served as an Ottoman dignitary to Bosnia, wrote a poem to the Grand Vizier Ahmed-pasha, urging for a transfer to another post, away from Bosnia, which he paralleled to hell (gehenna) (Ćatović & Bakšić, 2023). Although one cannot with certainty say whether the poet was aiming at humor in his address to the Grand Vizier, the very fact that his desperation has reached such a level can be perceived as humorous even from today's standpoint: Bosnia was even then perceived as an insignificant and impoverished land. As I will

show through some other examples in the analysis, this has been a frequent backdrop for many instances of Bosnian humor, as is the case with the fragment of Sabit Užičanin's poem to the Grand Vizier:

I have been confided a duty in Bosnia, a dire place

Reminding me of a valley in Gehenna (Bakšić & Čatović, 2023, p. 88)

The literary opus in Bosnia in the Ottoman period has been the subject of thorough research by Bosnian scholars such as Lamija Hadžiosmanović and Emina Memija (1995), Kerima Filan (2014), and Amina Šiljak-Jesenković (2015), to name just a few.

The Ottoman period undoubtedly gave rise to significant literary treasures in Bosnia, with new and sophisticated literary forms introduced to the literary canon. In the anthology of Bosniak poetry in oriental languages [*Antologija bošnjačke poezije na orijentalnim jezicima*] (1997, pp. 5–20) Emina Memija and Lamija Hadžiosmanović provide an overview of the development of the local literature under the influence of Ottoman poets, and they define the basic terms and developments of such poetry. As a basic introduction, mentioning the most important traits from their essay will suffice:

1. Divan – a form of poetry characteristic of highly intellectual circles, containing an abundance of Arabic and Persian phrases, as well as symbols from the pre-Islamic and Islamic era. A highly demanding poetic form resting on the *bayt* (a couplet);

2. Qasida – a poem containing a wide thematic range, usually written as forms of praise;

3. Masnavi – poems characteristic of Sufi poetry (the most famous poet being Rumi), abundant with symbolism and metaphors (butterfly, candles, light...).

As far as humor in such poetry is concerned, scholar Didem Havlioğlu writes that

According to the biographers, humor in classical Ottoman poetry can be divided in two major categories: first as a graceful and/or cheerful personal style adopted by a particular poet; and second, and more profoundly, as a valuable aesthetic tool or a literary craft under the category of witticism (*nükte*). (2015, p. 109).

However, in terms of the development of humorous forms in Bosnia, the Ottomans introduced two important literary characters: *Nasreddin Hoja* and *Karagöz* that will be introduced in the following section.

1.2.1 Nasreddin Hoja and the possible origins of Mujo, the “Bosnian Everyman” in humor

Nasreddin Hoja (depicted by Mustafa Ibrulj in figure 1.1), “a small, tiny man of the people, living mainly a difficult life, eternally in need, even in misery, dependent on the haves” (Isaković, 1984, p. 16) is a well-known character in the Bosnian literary tradition. He is, in fact, a character appearing in a number of Mediterranean cultures which experienced Arab influences, ranging from Morocco to Sicily, with variations of the name and the time the anecdotes appeared. A comprehensive study on Nasreddin Hoja as part of world heritage can be found in *Molla Nasreddin: The Making of a Modern Trickster (1906–1911)* (2023) by Janet Afary and Kamran Afary.



Figure 1.1 *Nasreddin Hoja*

Note. Adapted from *Nasrudin hodža: anegdote* (cover page), by A. Isaković (Ed.), 1984, Svjetlost. Copyright (2026) by Mustafa Ibrulj.

Compilations of stories were published in Bosnia already in the late 19th and during the 20th century (e.g. Mulabdić, 1893; Kapetnović Ljubušak 1897; Bejtić, 1962; Frndić, 1972; Isaković, 1984). The Nasreddin Hoja anecdotes had a considerable influence with the local people, since he was a Muslim cleric depicted as a funny character.

He can be seen almost as a Shakespearean character, the fool who out-smarts everybody (Đuliman, 2024, p. 53), a good, poor man who falls in and out of fate's favor while trying to make ends meet. Perhaps it can be hypothesized that the anecdotes gave rise to the popular jokes about Bosnians, more specifically about the famous character *Mujo*. Many parallels can be observed between the two: impoverished individuals, witty, kind-hearted, bearing the hardships of life with an uplifting spirit... That is, in a way, a perceived humorous image of the Bosnian everyman:

Nasreddin went to a wedding party in order to eat. They asked him if he had appetite. He said: What else can a pauper such as myself have in this world?

(Isaković, 1984, p. 181)

The jokes about *Mujo the Bosnian* are very common not only in Bosnia, but also in Croatia, Serbia, Montenegro... A significant number of such jokes can be found on many websites across former Yugoslavia, most prominent being vicevi.net, which also contains an array of jokes about many themes, religions, politicians, ethnicities, etc.³

When it comes to the possible origin of the *Mujo* jokes, I have not been able to determine any source. However, Omer Aksoy (2020, p. 113) writes that the *Mujo-Suljo-Fata* jokes are shaped around Nasreddin Hoja and based on the Temel-Dursun-Fadime characters which continue to be told as a reflection of the Turkish cultural ecology in Bosnian society (p. 113). This is a bold claim, and this is, in fact, to the best of my knowledge, the only paper stating that the *Suljo* and *Mujo* jokes were introduced by the Ottomans. Interviewing dr. Amina Šiljak-Jesenković, a prominent Bosnian scholar of Ottoman heritage, I learnt that such claims are disputable, since no such data exists. I also interviewed dr. Fahd Kasumović, professor of history, specializing in the Ottoman period in Bosnia, who emphasized that one should be careful in this case, since it has been well-documented that the Ottomans brought Nasreddin to Bosnia. However, Temel and Dursun do not appear in 18th century Bosnia, nor does Fata. In the meantime, he added, the Ottomans left and even if someone in Bosnia had heard of the two characters, those would have probably been very rare individuals.

³ Srđan Vučetić discusses the issue of contemporary jokes around Bosnia in his paper "Identity is a joking matter: Intergroup humour in Bosnia" (2004), addressing two questions: 1. why do people tell jokes and 2. where they come from (2004, p. 8). Also, Hajrudin Hromadžić, in his article "Natuknice o bosanskom humoru i vicu" [Lemmas on the Bosnian humor and joke], emphasizes that the self-deprecating humor of Bosnians is a superior, not an inferior characteristic of a culture (2021).

Hence, as a researcher I will observe the possibility Aksoy presents in his paper regarding the origin of the Suljo and Mujo jokes, but I will refrain from presenting this claim as a fact, since evidence is needed to substantiate it.

As far as the collections of the Nasreddin Hoja anecdotes in Bosnia are concerned, the 1984 publication by Alija Isaković is the largest. He produced a collection of 384 anecdotes, and classified them by type of humor: childish humor (34 anecdotes), light humor (137 anecdotes), black humor (28 anecdotes), futuristic humor (20 anecdotes), Dadaistic humor (13 anecdotes), surrealist humor (42 anecdotes) and philosophical humor (105 anecdotes). Isaković stated in his “Afterword” to the anecdotes that he classified the jokes on the basis of his own inclinations, “hoping that the reader will like it” (1984, p. 227).

A long time has passed since the publication of Isaković’s Nasreddin Hoja anecdotes. In the meantime, the character has gradually faded into oblivion in Bosnia, but remains, undoubtedly, an inseparable part of the humorous spirit that entered this area years ago.

1.2.2 Karagöz and the influence of the shadow theatre on the Sarajevo television cinematographic production

Shadow theatre, originating either from Central Asia or India (Chen, 2003), was introduced by the Ottomans to Bosnian culture at the turn of the 18th century (Draganović, 2023). It was a specific form of entertainment which, as Muzaferija (2001, p. 104) emphasized

(...) was in accordance with the requirements of Islam, eliminating the presence of a live actor on stage, but certainly cultivating dialogue as a dramatic form necessary for the performance to unfold, based on the improvisation in the *commedia dell'arte*, and was attractive as a quick response to current events (...).

Many scholars have written about the Karagöz shadow theatre, including Muzaferija (2001), Öztürk (2006), Hadžiosmanović (2007), Sönmez (2013), Smith (2004), etc. In this chapter, however, I will present the essential background of the scenery and characters that appear in Karadžoz.

When I interviewed dr. Amina Šiljak-Jesenković, she emphasized that the very scenery in Karagöz serves to frame the story, e.g. if a lemon tree is the background, then it is there to foreshadow the symbolism of the lemon tree – mood swings, contrasts of joy and sorrow, tranquility and suffering. If the background focuses on a supernatural being, then the story will focus on the supernatural; a weeping willow indicates sadness, etc.

Cengiz Özek (2018) provides an overview of the development and characters in the shadow theatre, which I will briefly introduce:⁴

1. Two central characters are Karagöz and Hacivat, standing in black-and-white opposition: Karagöz is uneducated, brave, fiercely against hypocrisy, a prototype of the man from the people. (...) The language he uses is colloquial, hence the obvious clash of different sociolects contributes to humor, especially since he does not understand (or pretends not to understand) the language of the educated, wealthy layers of society. Hacivat is his opposite: he is educated, his language is sophisticated, but although his understanding of philosophy and science is superficial, he takes pleasure in showing off the extent to which he understands all branches of life, from science, to economy, to various arts and life in general. He will never stand against those whom he perceives as people of personal interest to him and potential sources for his personal gain.

Other groups of characters include:

2. Women: known as Zenne portrayed negatively as gossipers, ugly, troublemakers, unsophisticated, etc.;

3. Characters speaking in the Istanbul dialect: Çelebi (a wealthy man, well-mannered, well-spoken, but also portrayed as a gigolo), Tiryaki (an opium addict), Beberuhi (a short man, meddling in things that are not his concern, rude, and often ridicules Karagöz), Matiz (a rude man, always fighting, threatening and a firm believer in the rule of brute force);

4. Provincial characters: Laz, Kastamonulu, Kayserili, Eğinli, Harputlu, Kurd;

5. Characters from outside Anatolia: Muhacir (the Immigrant, from Rumelia), the Albanian, the Arab, the Persian;

6. Non-Muslim characters: Rum (Greek), Frank (European/French), Ermeni (Armenian), Yahudi (Jew);

7. Characters with physical or mental defects;

8. Bullies and drunks;

⁴ Özek (2018, 234–241) does not mention the source of such a division of characters, but Šiljak-Jesenković attributes it to scholar Georg Jacob, a turkologist who published the work *Türkische volksliteratur: Ein erweiterter vortrag* [Turkish Folk Literature: An Extended Lecture] in 1901. Özek also mentions him in the references. Also, Draganović (2023) emphasizes that the division is based on the work of Cevdet Kudret (1968; 2013). Regardless, the list and comments on the characters in this section are based on the article by Cengiz Özek and the more detailed comments on the shadow theatre in Bosnian are provided in the by Hasib Ramić, in the catalogue to the *Karadžo i mađioničar* [Karadžo and the Magician] exhibition in Sarajevo, in 2013.

9. Entertainers: male and female dancers, a singer, a magician, a musician, an acrobat;

10. Supernatural characters;

11. Various occasional secondary characters and children.

It is important to emphasize that it comes as no surprise that Karagöz gained popularity at the time, because like many other popular characters, poor but honest and smart, coming from decent ordinary folk, it deeply resonated with the local population who had struggled under the oppression, difficult life and injustice, similar to the Nasreddin Hoja character. The other, even more important aspect, is that Karagöz directly influenced the creation of the first-ever humorous television series in Bosnia, its namesake *Karadžoz*. The series was aired from 1969 to 1971 (IMDB, 2025), and was in black and white (while the *Karadžoz* shadow theatre was, in fact, “in color”), as Figure 1.2 shows:



Figure 1.2
Karagöz

Note. From “Karadžoz 2 od 5 epizoda”, by Dzinic, 2011, YouTube (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FqEPKCMrJ2Y>).

The Karagöz shadow theatre play was also performed in 2024, organized by the Sarajevo City Museum as part of its 75th anniversary celebrations (Figure 1.3):

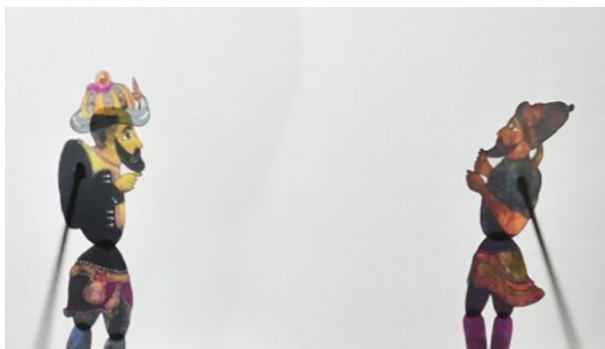


Figure 1.3
Karagöz in Sarajevo, 2024

Note. Adapted from “Bili smo u Despića kući,” by Unknown Author, 2024, *Radiosarajevo* (radiosarajevo.ba). Copyright 2026 by the Radiosarajevo.ba.

Rejhan Demirdžić, an iconic actor, not only brilliantly portrayed Hus-tametin-bey, but also wrote a script for the series. According to dramaturge Almir Imširević (2018), who later wrote *Fistik*, a play, based on *Karadžo*, his generation found the *Karadžo* TV series challenging to understand because its language was peppered with archaic words and words originating from Turkish, but it was nonetheless a source of joy when aired.

Rejhan Demirdžić later joined his colleague and friend, another brilliant actor Rudi Alvađ, in the humorous Sarajevo radio show *Cik Cak* [Zig Zag] which gained popularity all across former Yugoslavia. The two characters they played, *Momo and Uzeir* (figures 1.4 and 1.5), gained such high popularity that the two buildings constructed by our famous architect Ivan Štraus have become known as *Momo i Uzeir* (the two rising towers, figure 1.6). Momo and Uzeir are also characters who embodied the “Bosnian everyman” and they were depicted as wearing traditional Bosnian clothes.



Figure 1.4

Momo and Uzeir on the album cover

Note. Copyright most probably belongs to the label ZKP RTVL.



Figure 1.5

Rejhan and Rudi

Note. Adapted from “Svezak sjećanja,” by A. Hadžiabdić, 2021, Federalna (federalna.ba).



Figure 1.6
Ivan Štraus's Momo i Uzeir

Note. Photograph by the author.

1.3 Significant writers of humor in Bosnia – late 19th/early 20th century (until 1945)

The post-Ottoman period in Bosnia, by which I mean the arrival of the Austro-Hungarian Empire (the period lasted in Bosnia from 1848 to 1918), as well as the period following WWI, when Bosnia became part of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia (until 1941), brought about further struggles for Bosnians. The change of rulers and the consequent reorganization of life (political organization, economic struggles, etc.) proved to be a burden. The consequences of WWI were overwhelmingly felt.⁵ However, despite these many difficulties, culture and literature continued to develop, and literary critics and historians have provided thorough analyses of the life and work of early 20th century and the interregnum writers in Bosnia.⁶

⁵ Author Noel Malcom wrote *Bosnia: A Short History* in 1996 which is a comprehensive English language overview of the subject. Also, works of Bosnian historians are available for a more in-depth insight into the country's history: The Ottoman period – Fahd Kasumović (2022), Edin Radušić (2019); Austro-Hungarian period – Amila Kasumović (2024); between the world wars – Adnan Jahić (2014); WWII and the socialist period – Husnija Kamberović (2011).

⁶ Scholars Muhsin Rizvić and Josip Lešić stand out as researchers of the early 20th century and the interregnum period of Bosnian literature. Rizvić's works *Književno stvaranje muslimanskih pisaca u Bosni i Hercegovini u doba austrougarske vladavine* [Literary Production of Muslim Writers in Bosnia and Herzegovina in the Austro-Hungarian Period] (1972) and *Književni život Bosne i Hercegovine između dva rata* [Literary Life of Bosnia and Herzegovina between the Two Wars] (1980) are also comprehensive overviews

Josip Lešić dedicated a chapter of his book on BiH drama between the two wars to comedy (1988, pp. 486–507), presenting writers such as Esad Kazazović or Borivoje Jevtić, as well as Petar Kočić, a Bosnian and Serbian writer who is the author of the comedy *Jazavac pred sudom* [The Badger on Trial], criticizing the Habsburg Monarchy (1988, p. 486).

It should also be added that Gordana Muzaferija (1997, p. 11) mentions writer Hamid Šahinović Ekrem for writing interesting literary works, including comedy, a genre in which he best achieved his literary expression. She added that in all three comedies he wrote (*Đavo pod čegrom* [Devil under the Tent], *Orden* [A Medal] and *Punica* [Mother-in-Law]) he criticizes “(...) the primitivism and ignorance of the Bosniak villages, primarily their *muhtars* [leaders – S. Đ.], which is frequently presented in grotesque and even a harsh caricature.” (1997, p. 11).

Two writers of comedies from the period need to be discussed: Isak Samokovlija and Alija Nametak.

Isak Samokovlija, a BiH writer of Jewish heritage, is one of the most famous writers of prose in Bosnia. However, he also wrote a comedy *On je lud* [He Is Crazy] (1935), focusing on a professor of archaeology who lives in a villa somewhere in Bosnia, and who is completely focused on his research, much to the dismay of his two friends, the Doctor and the Counselor. The two decide to help their friend by inviting Mis Džopson (anglophone name, in English it would most probably be Miss Jobson, which is a curious choice, considering that the story unfolds in Bosnia), whose task is to drive the professor away from his ascetism. Lešić (1988, p. 499) emphasizes that this is “(...) an exceptionally original and, from the comedic angle, interesting and suitable topic, enabling Samokovlija to create ‘an excellent comedy’”, adding that although the comedy lived to see some negative criticism, it contains a lot of witty dialogue, unimposing humor and satirical details and lively characters.

Alija Nametak, another prominent Bosnian writer, wrote two comedies, *Abdullah Paša u kasabi* [Abdullah Pasha in the Casaba] and *Omer na naćvama* [Omer at the Bread Mixing Bowl]. Muzaferija (1997, p. 23) writes that the *Abdullah-paša u kasabi* is a play in which Nametak focuses on the issue of living “(...) between the East and the West, which results in the

of literary trends in Bosnia and Herzegovina, including some of its most famous writers of the period. Josip Lešić’s analyses of drama of Bosnia and Herzegovina are important scholarly contributions to the BiH literary synthesis, including his works on BiH drama between the two wars *Međuratna BH drama* (1988) and the work on the post-WWII drama *Savremena BH drama* (1990).

breakup of the patriarchal model of life, creating an antagonism between generations (...)” (1997, p. 23). Nametak, as Muzaferija emphasizes, brings

(...) laughter in one of the most challenging ways – by introducing the comical into drama and into reality, thus creating a ‘*theatre within the theatre*’, which is not Nametak’s invention, but he delivers it masterfully by structuring the complex exposition and characters. (1997, p. 23).

Also, his comedy *Omer na načvama* focuses on an “inversion of relations” between a husband and a wife, where Nametak “(...) develops a comical tension by opposing the male and female jobs (...) thereby painting an archetypal content of the folkloric comedy” (Muzaferija, 1997, p. 24). Josip Lešić writes of Nametak that he possessed “(...) a peculiar sense of the comical and it is a true shame that his engagement as a writer of comedies was short-lived – created in a bad time and during the circumstances that bloodily contradicted him.” (1991, p. 99).

Many of the Bosnian writers in the early 20th century onwards presented their work in Bosnian literary journals.

In addition, some prominent literary journals, e.g. *Behar*, *Gajret*, *Bosanska vila*, were active in promoting literary life, humor and witticisms.

1.3.1 Behar – list za pouku i zabavu (1900–1911)

The very title of the journal presented its editorial orientation: a journal of edification and entertainment. Muhsin Rizvić wrote a monograph on the journal titled *Behar: književnohistorijska monografija* (2000) [Behar: A Literary-historical Monograph], a comprehensive presentation of the development of the journal and the most prominent writers who published there. Rizvić’s introductory chapter contains interesting data on the journal, including the first editor-in-chief, one of the most prominent Bosnian writers and intellectuals of his time, Safvet-beg Bašagić. He also added that other prominent Bosnian writers, e.g. Edhem Mulabdić and Musa Ćazim Ćatić followed. The journal was abundant with short stories, anecdotes and proverbs. As far as the “entertainment” in the journal is concerned, short stories and witticisms were prevalent, “(...) many of which were translated from other languages, eastern and western, some containing jokes and humor in the general sense of the word, but there were also instances of local short stories with a funny substance (...)” (2000, p. 118).

1.3.2 Gajret – list za društvene poslove i narodno prosvjećivanje (1907–1941)

This journal is to an extent different in that it was formed by the educational and humanitarian association *Gajret* (namesake), with various, also prominent Bosnian writers serving as editors-in-chief over the years (Edhem Mulabdić, Osman Đikić, Avdo Sumbul, etc.) (Rizvić, 2000, p. 9).

1.3.3 Bosanska vila

This journal was published by the Serb Educational and Cultural Association *Prosvjeta* (established in 1902) in Sarajevo. It was published from 1885 to 1914. As Rizvić (2000, p. 35) notices, *Behar* and *Bosanska vila* were quite similar in form, both publishing the belles-lettres, people's witticisms and translations. *Bosanska vila* was, similarly to *Behar*, published with a heading that read *List za zabavu, pouku i književnost* [Journal for Entertainment, Edification and Literature] (“Bosanska vila”, 2022).

The following section will include the post-World War II period and the writers who created some of the most popular plays in Bosnian literature.⁷ Many of these works have been produced as theatre or television plays, while some served as the basis for successful works of Bosnian cinematography.

1.4 Bosnian writers and humor: 1945–late 1980s

1.4.1 Skender Kulenović: “Djelidba”

Among the most important works of Bosnian literature is *Djelidba* (the action of sharing something, division (Halilović et al., p. 195) by Skender Kulenović, a versatile Bosnian writer whose literary opus includes some of the most important pieces of modern Bosnian poetry and prose.

This play was written as a comedy in the aftermath of WWII. The plot is set in a Bosnian village, where people wait for humanitarian aid. However, the local powerholders try to manipulate the distribution towards residents of their own ethnicity, creating a confusion that results in issues with the aid lists, so that ultimately the humanitarian convoy comes and goes but the people are left empty-handed.

⁷ Aleksandar Hemon, renowned Bosnian and American author, discussed the way in which writers use humor with John Freeman at the Bookstan festival in Sarajevo (2016). Transcript of the article with segments translated by Una Tanović is available at: <https://lithub.com/how-the-writer-uses-humor-aleksandar-hemon/>.

Djelidba was deemed controversial and banned after its first performance in 1948 (Vidosavljević, 2011), and it was not until 1991, when socialist Yugoslavia was facing breakup and when the ban of literary and other artistic works ended, that it was again set at the Sarajevo Chamber Theatre (*Kamerni teatar*), while the Sarajevo Television produced the film directed by Faruk Piragić, also in 1991 (IMDB, n.d.).

Gordana Muzaferija (2000, p. 9) wrote that Kulenović produced in *Djelidba* the literary continuum of Branislav Nušić (a Serbian satirical writer) and Nikolai Gogol, and is “the creator of a new, provocative drama, reaching the peak of satirical spirit and verbal humor, placing it amongst the so far unsurpassed place in the line of development of BiH comedy (...)”

The Sarajevo Chamber Theatre continues with the performances of *Djelidba* throughout Bosnia (Figure 1.7), with Aleš Kurt as director of the play, gaining considerable success with the audience.



Figure 1.7
“*Djelidba*” by Aleš Kurt

Note. Adapted from “*Djelidba*,” by Skender Kulenović, 1947, Kamerni teatar 55 (<https://www.kamerniteatar55.ba/events/djelidba>). Copyright [2026] by Kamerni teatar 55.

1.4.2 Derviš Sušić: “Tale”

Derviš Sušić, another classic among the Bosnian writers, is widely known for his novels (one of them being *Uhode/Spies*, translated into English by Amira Sadiković and published by the BiH Academy for Arts and Sciences). His work has also been the subject of research among literary critics and historians. Amra Kozlica’s (2018) study of his plays presented a thorough analysis of Sušić’s style, language and themes, and presented him also as a writer of comedies. One such instance is his play *Bujrum* (1967) for which Kozlica emphasized Sušić’s comical focus on the contrast between the Bosnian mentality and that of the Other, in this case, tourists and Bosnians living and working abroad (2018, p. 53).

However, I particularly wish to mention his work *Tale*, because Sušić wrote both the screenplay and the novel in parallel. Kozlica notes that *Tale* is “(...) as all other works by Sušić, a rebellion against authority, the state,

violence and the politics of single-mindedness. Sušić's literary work as a whole is the dream of a free man, unbound, unrestrained." (2018, p. 25).

Tale Ličanin⁸ appears as a character in the oral literary tradition in Bosnia (Durić, 1983; Buturović, 1997), and Derviš Sušić used him as the basis for the protagonist in his own works. Writer Branko Ćopić (1971, as cited in Durić, 2000) said of Tale: "(...) our Don Quixote, the difference being that our Tale was always down to earth while the former lived in clouds." (p. 160). Durić characterized Tale as being "(...) a harmony in discordance (...) who lives to amuse himself and others." (2000, p. 146)

Nenad Kostić (2025) wrote a comprehensive essay comparing the *Tale* novel and the TV drama, but I would like to emphasize that one of the main reasons behind the controversy of the piece is that the TV miniseries, directed by Sulejman Kupusović, produced by Sarajevo Radio and Television, (Figure 1.8) focuses on the Bleiburg repatriations, and also tackles the role of the BiH Islamic Community during World War II (Kozlica, 2018). When it comes to Sušić's contribution to BiH comedy through *Tale*, as Kostić emphasizes,

The humor is presented throughout the series through the wit and charisma of the character (...), and is integrated in the novel through Tale's rhyming hallucinations in which the author criticizes socialist society and technocracy that can become a dystopian reality. (...) This is successfully achieved through both media, using the Bosnian vernacular, which contributes to the closeness of Tale to readers or viewers, so it is no wonder that his character is still among the most beloved to this day." (Kostić, 2025)



Figure 1.8
"Tale", a poster

Note. Adapted from "Tale, TV miniseries" directed by S. Kupusović, 1977–1979, IMDB (https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0075591/?ref_=ttfc_ov_bk).

⁸ Sead Šemsović (2023) mentions some sources that indicate Tale may have been a real-life character.

1.4.3 Alija Isaković: “To”

Writer Alija Isaković produced many literary genres. An engaged historian of folklore in Bosnia, with the *Nasreddin Hoja* (1984) collection of anecdotes, an anthologist of literature with the first published anthology of Bosnian literature (1972) *Biserje*, a linguist with a keen interest in the Bosnian language best observed in the *Dictionary of characteristic expressions in the Bosnian language* (1992), as well as a number of texts on the subject, Alija Isaković’s literary opus is just as captivating. In describing Isaković’s style and thematic inclinations, literary historian Enes Duraković said: “(...) Alija Isaković is looking for a consistent image of human duality, in a determined effort to mark the *opposites* of human existence, of the constant chasm of the creative and the destructive principle (...)” (1997, p. 13).

This quote serves as a very good introduction to the plot of the play *To*, described by Muzaferija as a psychological and naturalist play, questioning the distance between life and death. (1996, p. 32) In it, the tragedy unfolds in the *opposites* of the fate of the main protagonist, who comes to a *kafana* (a significant term in the Balkans, a type of a pub or a coffeehouse, which I introduce further in section 1.5.2) and starts terrorizing guests, accusing one of them for the murder of his brother. The transformation of the main protagonist from avenger to murderer, since it is revealed in the end that he killed his own brother, is a story of despair, which leads readers (and viewers) to intense events unfolding in a very limited space. All the characters are nameless (Brother, Guest, Doctor, Waiter, Singer...) and are victims of what becomes “a totalitarian world (...) leaving no possibility of abandonment of the harsh existential circle, symbolically presented by the enclosed, circular shape of the kafana (...)” (Duraković, 2018, p. 118). Such a text is, in Muzaferija’s view, a tragic phase, “where tragedy is expressed through a comic metaphor (...) entering the poetics of the absurd of Beckett and Ionesco (...)” (2000, p. 13).

The play was first aired on television in 1969, directed by Aleksandar Jevđević, and it appeared on stage at the Mostar National Theatre in 1979, directed by Ahmet Obradović (Vukadinović & Amidžić, 2017). It was finally published as a play in 1981 and is therefore seen as another interesting process of text transformation from a television screenplay to adaptations for the theatre and, ultimately, to a drama published for reading audiences in 1981 by the Svjetlost publishing house from Sarajevo.

Figure 1.9 shows a photo from the Narodno pozorište Mostar performance of the play, directed by Ivan Leo Lema (NPM, 2019).



Figure 1.9
A performance of “To”

Note. Adapted from “To” by Alija Isaković, 1979, Narodno pozorište Mostar (<https://npm.ba/vijesti/337-predstava-to-u-petak-u-npm-u>). Copyright [2026] by Narodno pozorište Mostar.

Alija Isaković’s play *To* presents a connection not only to the misfortunes and even tragedies of the Bosnian everyman seen in Kulenović’s *Djelidba* play, but also to the works and characters seen in the works of Abdulah Sidran. What binds them together is the difficult life of the Bosnian everyman (mostly working class), but also the spirit of resistance and struggle even in the direst of circumstances, frequently including self-mockery of such a life and situations.

1.4.4 Abdulah Sidran: “Sjećaš li se Doli Bel?” and “Otac na službenom putu”

Abdulah Sidran was a prolific Bosnian writer and poet who had undoubtedly influenced the Sarajevo humor scene of the 1980s, bringing the spirit of the Sarajevo streets and life into his works, most notably, into screenplays for films directed by Emir Kusturica: *Sjećaš li se Doli Bel* [Do you remember Dolly Bell?] and *Otac na službenom putu* [When father was away on business].

A multiple-times winner of literary awards, which include the PEN Center of France Award (1994) and the Umberto Saba Award for Poetry (2005), Abdulah Sidran was a writer whose spirit remains to resonate in the works of Sarajevo artists. Having grown up in post-WWII Sarajevo, frequently himself on a verge of poverty, Sidran was able to transpose his experience and the experience of other working-class people of Sarajevo into his writing. The difficult childhood and adolescent life and its reflection in his writing can especially be seen in his autobiography *Otkup sirove kože* [Purchase of Rawhide] (2012), where some memories of small, dumpy roach-infested apartments and other aspects of poverty but also childish happiness and adolescent curiosity can clearly be recognized in the two aforementioned films by Emir Kusturica.

He and Sidran were a cinematographic duo that produced award-winning films and, perhaps even more importantly, memorable scenes and

lines that resonate primarily with the Sarajevo, but also with the Yugoslav audiences. Humor that stems from the same kind of human experience of economic struggle of the (Bosnian) working class is similar to that seen in the existentialist plays *Djelidba* and *To*.

When father was Away on Business (1985) focuses on 1950s Sarajevo, and a boy who sees his father imprisoned without apparent reason, although he was most probably betrayed by his own brother (the boy's uncle), who had accused him of being a Stalinist – this was the period in Yugoslavia that saw tensions between Tito and Stalin. This is a reaction to the strict communist oppression of the period. Malik, the boy, believes that his father, in fact, went on a business trip. Humorous scenes are frequent because the family's hardships are seen through the eyes of a child. The film was nominated for the Academy Award and won the Palme d'Or in 1985. (*Otac na službenom putu* – *Filmski leksikon*, 2003).

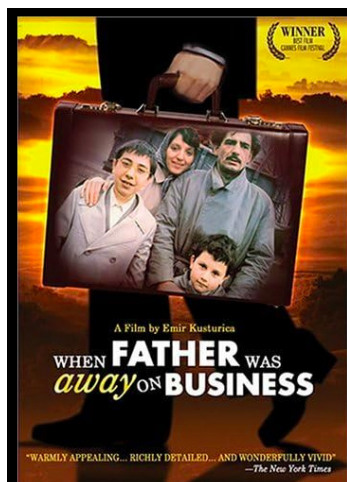


Figure 1.10

“*When Father was away on Business*”, a poster

Note. Adapted from “When Father was away on Business” directed by E. Kusturica, 1985, IMDB (https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0089748/mediaviewer/rm211262720/?ref_=tt_ph_2).

Do you remember Dolly Bell? (poster seen in Figure 1.11) is set in 1960s Sarajevo, and was the first film directed by Emir Kusturica. The protagonist is Dino, a teenager who lives in Sarajevo and is obsessed with hypnosis, believing it could even help spread communism. He falls in love with a young prostitute, Dolly Bell. Dino is a music lover and practices the song “24 mila baci” that appears as a leitmotif throughout the film. This is a coming of age film where typical teenage themes are treated (music, sex, growing pains, etc.), but where the difficult life of a Sarajevo family is also depicted. The boy's father succumbs to alcohol, but the family is hopeful

when they learn they will be moving into a long-awaited apartment of their own. (Skenderagić, 2012).⁹

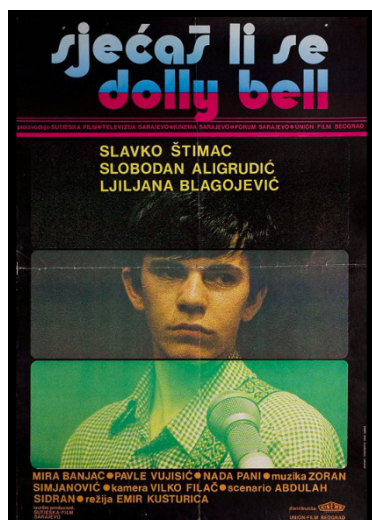


Figure 1.11

“Do You Remember Dolly Bell?”, a poster

Note. Adapted from “Do You Remember Dolly Bell” directed by E. Kusturica, 1981, IMDB (<https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0083089/mediaviewer/rm3069777409/>).

1.4.5 Bosnian writers in cinematography – Emir Kusturica and Goran Mihić: “Dom za vješanje”

Emir Kusturica made the *Time of the Gypsies* film in 1988 and won the Best Director Award in Cannes in 1989. This is another story of a teenager, but this time of a Romani, Perhan. Native of Sarajevo, Perhan lives the difficult life of a gypsy with his family. The film is peculiar because it depicted the hardships of the Romani people, their struggles and challenges, being among the most vulnerable populations in Sarajevo. They are exposed to different kinds of abuse, drawn into a life of crime. Perhan, although under severe living circumstances is still a teenager, dreaming a different life, practicing telekinesis (Skenderagić, 2019).

This tragic story is also abundant with humor and actor Davor Dujmović portrayed the character so well that it had become a humorous icon of sorts, cast also by the *Top lista nadrealista* TV show in its 3rd season.

⁹ Mirza Skenderagić is one of the writers of interesting film presentations at the filmofil.ba. Articles are written in Bosnian, and I recommend the local audience interested in film to visit the webpage.

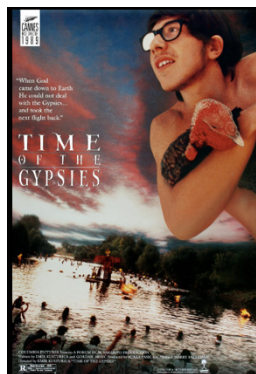


Figure 1.12
"Time of the Gypsies", a poster

Note. Adapted from "Time of the Gypsies" directed by E. Kusturica, 1988, IMDB (https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0097223/mediaviewer/rm3865344257/?ref_=tt_ov_i).

1.5 Television humor of the 1980s and early 1990s: *Top lista nadrealista* and *Audicija*

1.5.1 Top lista nadrealista

The 1980s were the last decade of Yugoslavia as a country: president Josip Broz Tito died, the country was preparing for the 1984 Sarajevo Winter Olympic Games, many young bands inclined towards new wave and punk were gaining considerable popularity. Among those bands were *Crvena Jabuka* and *Zabranjeno pušenje*, as well as musician Mirko Srđić (a.k.a. Elvis J. Kurtović). They joined forces with some of their friends from high school and started a radio show that would later become a TV show: *Top lista nadrealista* [Surrealist Top List] (figures 1.13 and 1.14). The TV show had gained significant popularity across the former country, to the extent that many people, especially those who remember the 1980s, associate Bosnian humor primarily with this TV show.



Figure 1.13
TLN, some of the members

Note. Adapted from "Prije 35 godina snimljena je prva TV epizoda Nadrealista," I. Mrenica, 2019, *Klix* (klix.ba). Copyright 2026 by the Klix.ba.

Since the *Top lista nadrealista* show will be separately treated in the analysis, I will not present it in detail, but it is important to mention that this Sarajevo-based group of artists created the phenomenon known as *novi primitivizam* [new primitivism] which is considered to be the Yugoslav response to the British new wave and punk subculture (Handžar, 2020, p. 51). One of the founders of the movement, musician Elvis J. Kurtović stated that the movement

(...) was formed in Sarajevo, Koševo, in 1981, when one generation of rockers returned from the army and the other just left. Zena Đozić still keeps the letter we sent him when he was in the army, telling him we had formed a new movement called New Primitives. We'd dress in funny suits, for example, I was wearing a white suit from the prom, I had an acoustic guitar, and some terrible shoes I took from my old man. (Bobanović, 2012).

Their humor focuses on the people of Sarajevo, especially those from different Sarajevo neighborhoods, young people and their struggles, petty criminals, miners, but also class stratification, etc. The TV show would usually contain sketches, as well as musical performances by different Yugoslav artists. They have frequently been compared to the Monty Python Flying Circus show (e.g., Toè, 2012).

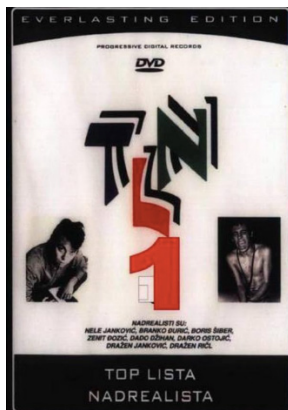


Figure 1.14
TLN, a poster

Note. Adapted from “Top lista nadrealista” produced by Televizija Sarajevo, 1984–1994, IMDB (<https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0191740/>).

However, as much as the *Top lista nadrealista* humor (has) resonated with Yugoslav audiences, there is a shift in humor sophistication as compared to the satirical and socially engaged humor of, for example, Kulenović, Sidran or even Kusturica (although the *Sjećaš li se Doli Bel?* film was produced at the same time when the first TLN season was aired): the humor had become street-oriented. That said, the catch phrases they

produced are used by many even today, but television had obviously shifted towards wider audiences whose idea of entertainment was more on the side of frequently shallow humor with a lot of profanities, but also a lot of slang typical of the Sarajevo expression of the 1980s, which can be observed as a special linguistic value. As Mrenica (2019) emphasized, it was truly challenging for the national television, but the fact is that the spirit of the Sarajevo streets of an entire generation, as well as of the common people of the city, was reflected in the TLN show.

The TLN main members went their separate ways when the war broke out, but Zenit Dožić, today a successful producer and one of the main TLN protagonists, remained in Sarajevo and even continued to produce new episodes (the wartime TLN) with other members of the show who had also remained. The same happened after the war, but neither of those sketches proved as successful as the three “Yugoslav” TLN seasons.

1.5.2 On “kafana”, “raja” and “sijelo”

“Kafana”, “raja” and “sijelo”¹⁰ are notions that have been an important segment of Bosnian (and Balkan) culture for generations. For the TLN show, the *raja* concept is especially important, since it has been present throughout the episodes, and the Gen X, who were teenagers and young adults in Sarajevo in the 1980s, embraced “raja” as a perceived concept of socialization to the extent that the phrase “sarajevska raja” had become known across Yugoslavia as carrying the specific spirit of Sarajevo, its young people and the feeling of being part of a group.

1.5.2.1 Kafana

As I have mentioned previously in the text (the section on the play *To* by Alija Isaković), the notion *kafana*, although very important, cannot be considered specific for Bosnia: it is a phenomenon characteristic of the countries of South-East Europe, and it entails a special kind of gathering of people in what could be most closely described as a tavern. The concept was introduced by the Ottomans together with the name (it arrived to Turkish from Persian and Arabic – Škaljić, 1973, p. 381) denoting a “place

¹⁰ I should add here that I could have introduced these concepts in one of the earlier chapters, since for example, Alija Isaković’s play “To” takes place in a *kafana*. Still, I opted to place them as a subchapter to the TLN segment, for the three notions are present in many of their sketches: (e.g. *sijelo* at Reuf’s, *kafana* “Kod dva goluba”, while the *raja* concept is constantly implied).

where coffee is drunk, as well as other warm or cool beverages” (Halilović et al., 2010, p. 429). This contemporary definition of *kafana* mentions that beverages are served, but it is alcohol that gives it a special substance – all the people who assemble there reveal their nature, they relax and present themselves to others because of the spirits (wine, grappa – the famous *rakija* in our milieu). That can be seen in many depictions of scenes from the *kafana*. In fact, in Alija Isaković’s play *To*, which is entirely situated in a *kafana*, Brother is revealed to be a killer because he was drunk.

Beyond the basic definition, the importance of the *kafana* as a social phenomenon is discussed by Dragoljub B. Đorđević in multiple research studies. For example, in the edited book *Kafanologija* [the term is culture-specific, stylistically highly marked, and a possible translation could be *Kafanology*] (2012), he presents the position and importance of the *kafana* in society, highlighting the importance of a scholarly approach to the concept, and in his paper “Iskričava sociološka kafanologija” [Sparkling sociological kafanology], he emphasizes that the *kafana* is a form of social institution (2013, p. 81). Indeed, it is a place where guests gather, irrespective of their background, which can be seen in the previously-presented plays *Djelidba* and *To*, as well as in the film *Do You Remember Dolly Bell?*

One of the best descriptions of guests and the atmosphere of the *kafana* is presented in the text “Kafana – više od stola i čaše: Kultura ugođaja i umetnost gostoprimstva na Balkanu” [Kafana – more than a table and a glass: The culture of atmosphere and hospitality in the Balkans], worth presenting here in entirety:

In a *kafana*, everything starts with the approach — from the way the guest enters to the way the host welcomes. It is not just about serving food and drinks, but about the ritual that is repeated from one evening to another, and the art of creating an atmosphere from an ordinary encounter. In this game between the guest and the host, there is an unwritten code of conduct, which is equally important for both parties. A *kafana* has its own silent hierarchy, its own rhythms, and its own etiquette. Guests come with respect — because they come to a space that is more than a place; hosts welcome with dignity — because they are not selling a product, but an experience. In this relationship, the recognizable “tone” of every *kafana* is created — that warm, recognizable note that makes one feel “like at home, but better.” (aska, 2025).

1.5.2.2 Sijelo

People would visit each other's homes for *sijelo*, which also featured fun and relaxed conversations (Halilović et al., 2010, p. 1190). Of course, *sijelo* or *prelo* in Bosnia has been familiar for generations, and it was also customary in the socialist period to visit friends' homes (Hangi, 1906) where the hostess would usually serve *meze* (a form of appetizers) and beverages. *Sijelo* could last for hours. The *Top lista nadrealista show*, for example, presented several sketches depicting a *sijelo* in the apartment of Reuf and Minka, who are visited by their friend Tiho. The entire scenery is familiar to those who lived in 1980s Yugoslavia, since the living room and the clothes (which even included Reuf, the host, wearing his pajamas) were almost a verbatim copy of many living spaces and people at the time. Unlike at the *kafana*, guests at a *sijelo* are always close friends and relatives.

1.5.2.3 Raja

The Dictionary of Turkish Expressions in Serbo-Croatian and Croato-Serbian (Škaljić, 1973) defines *raja* as: 1. non-Muslim subjects in the Ottoman Empire; 2. crowd, mob, gang. The lexicographer adds that the word stems from Arabic, with the primary meaning "herd", as well as "subjects". Contrary to the popular perception of the word, its history was not as appealing. Evliya Çelebi, the famous explorer from the Ottoman period, provided a thorough overview of the historical usage of the term in the Ottoman period (Čelebi, 1996, pp. 651–653), where he emphasized that the term was used to encompass different subjects, depending on the period of the empire: 1. In the classical period until the 17th century it denoted all subjects, regardless of religious background; 2. from the mid-17th century, the term was used in the European part of the empire for Christian subjects, and 3. from the early 18th century to 1839, when the term *raja* was legally annulled, it was used for all non-Muslim subjects of the Ottoman Empire.

The position of *raja* varied depending on the period, as well as on the religious affiliation of people subsumed under the term, with Muslim *raja* having been in a more favorable position (1996, p. 652), and the worst period for *raja* came in the 17th century, when the Ottoman Empire started to weaken.¹¹ Interestingly, Çelebi mentions that *raja* would occasionally rise against Turkish feudalism, providing the First Serbian Uprising as an

¹¹ Scholars such as Ahmed Aličić (1980) and Fahd Kasumović (2014) wrote about the position of *raja* in the Ottoman period.

example, but also adding that similar events occurred in Bosnia and Macedonia (1996, p. 653).

Clearly, the meaning of the term gradually evolved in the Bosnian language, so as to denote: “1. a group of young people who hang out; 2. a communicative and an approachable person” (Halilović et al., 2010, p. 1102). This is the exact perception of the word employed by the *Top lista nadrealista* show, as well as the entire generation of young people in 1980s Sarajevo. David Orlov (2020) writes in his article about Bosnian humor that “The highest form of social recognition in Sarajevo was to be a part of *raja*” (2020, p. 186). Also, Nebojša Šavija-Valha discussed the “*raja*” phenomenon in his book *Raja. Ironijski subjekt svakodnevnice komunikacije u Bosni i Hercegovini i raja kao strategija življenja* [Raja. An Ironic Subject of Everyday Communication in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Raja as a Strategy of Living] (2013), offering an interesting anthropological perspective of the notion. He reflects on the concept through an observation that “(...) regardless of ethnic, class, status, professional, interest-based, etc. identities, *raja* demands ‘balance’” (Šavija-Valha, n.d., web). I emphasize it because it directly corresponds the atmosphere of the *kafana*, which is the space where different people meet. Such grouping clearly provides a special base for Bosnian writers, directors, screenwriters and other content creators of humor in Bosnia.

Also, in order to determine whether the notion has changed over the past three decades, I conducted an ad-hoc survey with 116 students of the University of Sarajevo – Faculty of Philosophy, aged between 19 and 23. The majority said they were aware of the term but did not use it; some thought it had become anachronistic, and that they understood that the term was mostly Sarajevo-oriented, but they mostly had no perception of being part of ‘*raja*’ the way their parents had when they were young. Their answers are an indicator, and I daresay, an invitation to linguists, sociologists and anthropologists to investigate the current trends among young people and their understanding of the phrase “being part of *raja*”.

1.5.3 Audicija

Audicija [Audition] was a semestral task entitled “a sketch for a character and imitation” for a group of young students at the Sarajevo Academy of Performing Arts, who would later become some of the best in the region: Željko Ninčić, Emir Hadžihafizbegović, Haris Burina, Saša Petrović, Jasmin Geljo, Željko Kecojević, Senad Bašić, Branko Đurić and Mladen Nelević (Črnaló, 2023). The premise is set in a theatre, where people of

different backgrounds and education, as well as ambitions, appear before the professor of acting (played by Boro Stjepanović, a renowned actor, who also directed the *Audicija* play) in an attempt to pass the entrance exam.

An array of characters, some obscure, some stereotypical Sarajevan, as well as intellectuals, aspiring singers, etc., engage in funny conversations with the professor and try to act.

The play was extremely popular in the former Yugoslavia, to the extent that the young actors even went on tours, playing *Audicija* in many Yugoslav theatres, with over 3 million viewers (Mrenica, 2020). However, once the play was televised in 1986, it gained a cult status. It is popular even today, with over 2.3 million views on YouTube.

Similar to the TLN show, *Audicija* also contained a lot of humor that focused mainly on working-class people. In this instance, they are all trying to present themselves in the best possible light, since all the characters are trying to pass an entrance exam for the drama academy. Perhaps that contrast made the humor even more pronounced: fairly uneducated people are reciting Shakespeare or other great writers of world literature, which is funny in itself, but also the (sad) contrast is added when one keeps in mind that they are all working class people, struggling to make ends meet (a similar sentiment shown in Sidran's opus, for example).

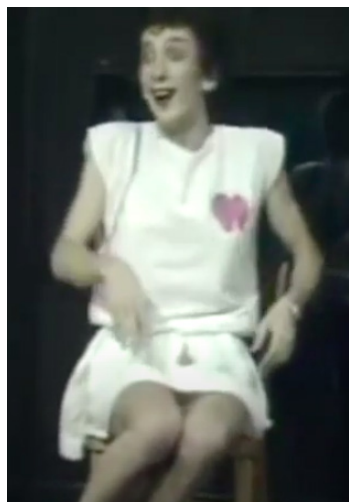


Figure 1.15

Actor Admir Glamočak in *Audicija*

Note. From “Audicija Obala 1985”, by SemsoVelicanstveniOsamstocetrdesetPrvi, 2011, YouTube (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XTWlo1pOS6Q>).

1.6 Bosnian humor and war

Accounts of war and the Siege of Sarajevo (1992–1995) are many and well documented, through the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia, through many essays and books on the dissolution of Yugoslavia, etc. However, even during the most difficult times, Bosnians continued living their normal lives in absolute abnormality: going to school, going to work, and whenever possible, especially in Sarajevo, going to the theatre, concerts, etc. The period was not marked as much by any novelty in Bosnian humor, but they did make jokes about the dire situation they were caught in.

David Orlov wrote in his article that

(...)in the case of Bosnia and Herzegovina, humour should not be viewed as a mere response to this particular war, because humour as a coping mechanism has been used there for generations and has become a visible and distinctive element of Bosnian identity. By continuing to engage in self-directed humour during the war, Bosnians fought back by imitating the normal life that they had before the war, and humour was part of that life. (2020, p. 174)

Wartime humor should not be viewed as a Bosnian novelty, however. Such jokes are frequent, for example, jokes on WWII, on the Holocaust, etc., and they are observed as a test of the extent to which humor can be deemed acceptable (Critchley, 2002). The discussion on acceptability and limits of humor is ongoing (e.g. Poplar, 2022), but it is important to emphasize that when Bosnians tell jokes about war, it is in the majority of cases self-directed (Orlov, 2022).

The humorous content in art form did not bring about any specific forms of comedy. There have been instances, however, of humor in Bosnian films produced after the war, one of the most famous and cited examples include Danis Tanović's film *Ničija zemlja* [No Man's Land], the 2000 Academy Award Winner. In one of the scenes, a soldier in a trench is reading a newspaper and says: "Uuuu, auuu" One of his fellow combatants asks: "What is it?" "Well, some serious shit's going on in Rwanda" (Tanović, 2001).

Such instances are frequent in Bosnian cinematography which produced some quality films focusing on war: *Grbavica* (2006, directed by Jasmila Žbanić, the Golden Bear award), *Kod amidže Idriza* (2004, directed by Pjer Žalica), *Quo vadis, Aida?* (2020, directed by Jasmila Žbanić), etc.

Still, it should be emphasized that Bosnians did make fun of their own misfortunes during the war, perhaps as a coping mechanism, perhaps even

as a sign of spite. Examples are numerous and can be found, among other places, on the *vicevi.net* webpage, as well as in books and articles on the subject (e.g. Kreševljaković (2015); Ćmit Ćngor & Verkerke (2015); Orlov (2020); Hamer (2025), etc.). One such example could be the joke about Mujo and Suljo trying to escape sniper fire in the city (Kreševljaković, 2015):

Mujo and Suljo were running across an intersection. Suddenly, a sniper bullet tore off Mujo's ear! Mujo returned to the middle of the intersection and started looking for something while bullets continued to whiz around him. Realizing that he was looking for his ear, Suljo shouted: "Let go of your ear, the sniper will kill you." To this, Mujo replied: "I don't care about my ear, I had a cigarette behind it."

This joke depicts the horrific war reality of Bosnia, especially Sarajevo, where snipers would shoot at civilians. This joke contains a contrast between snipers and smoking (an almost stereotypical habit of Bosnians).

Such real-life witticisms of people in Bosnia during the war can also be seen in Ozren Kebo's book *Sarajevo – A Beginner's Guide* (2025) translated by Amira Sadiković and Christopher Biehl. The book is an account of the war experience in Sarajevo, with humor appearing as a coping mechanism, although the author stated that for him, that book was a painful memory, wishing that there had been no reason for writing it (2016, p. 7).

Another such "real-life" war humor example can be seen in Figure 1.16, which is a photograph by Kemal Hodžić. He took a photo of the Maršala Tita street in the war, at the very center of Sarajevo, where a huge wall was placed to protect citizens from sniper fire from the Trebević mountain (seen also in the background of the image). Someone, however, wrote Pink Floyd on the wall, establishing the link with the famous band and their song *The Wall*. This stands as a strong opposition to the danger and suffering of the people, especially seen in the hunched man crossing the street, intensified by the black-and-white photo, metaphorically linking the wall protecting people from sniper fire with music, and some other, essentially normal life, as Figure 1.16 shows:¹²

¹² Asja Mandić's book *Umjetnost pod opsadom: Poetika iz ruševine* [Art Under the Siege: Poetics from Ruins] was published in 2025, but it came to my attention only recently. It is a valuable read, for it too considers Sarajevo art during the siege and, more interestingly, it discusses the way in which different spaces were used in Sarajevo during the war either to create art, or were transformed so to accommodate art.

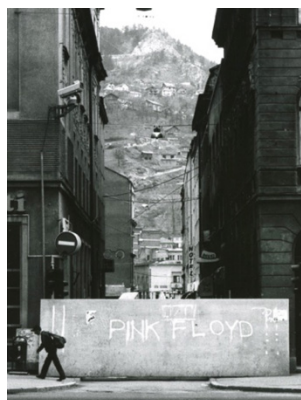


Figure 1.16
Zaštita od snajperske vatre, Ulica marsala Tita, 1993.

Note. From *Umjetnost pod opsadom: Petika iz ruševine* (p. 192), by A. Mandić, 2025, UNIVERSITY PRESS – Izdanja magistrat. Copyright 2026 by Kemal Hadžić.

Later during the war, someone wrote over the wall the name of another band, popular in the 1980s and 1990s: Skid Row, and below the title of their song *I Remember You* and the name of their singer. That resonated as funny as well, since the primary function of that very wall was still to protect the citizens from sniper fire, but the inscriptions on the wall gave the “battle of the bands” vibe as well, which resonates as funny. Writer Asmir Kujović even wrote about it in one of his texts (2015), and said the following:

After two years, if my memory serves me well, someone covered the inscription ‘Pink Floyd’ with ‘Skid Row’ and ‘I remember you – Sebastian’. The message of isolation was understood as a challenge in the eternal and irreconcilable conflict of generations over musical tastes. The younger generation, who grew up in the late eighties with American bands such as ‘Guns N’ Roses’ and ‘Skid Row’, got the opportunity to express their contempt for the music of the old and already faded ‘Pink Floyd’ granddads on this wall. (Kujović, 2015)

As far as war and art is concerned, it should also be mentioned that theatre had a major role in the lives of the citizens of Sarajevo, who were especially honored when Susan Sontag arrived to the city and shared the fate of its citizens, directing the play *Waiting for Godot*. Director Nihad Kreševljaković presented a valuable contribution commemorating Susan Sontag’s support to Bosnian citizens and to the citizens of Sarajevo with his film *Don’t Cry for Me Sarajevo – Susan Sontag u Sarajevu* (2023).

Hana Bajrović Čardaković (2023) emphasized that, during the siege of Sarajevo, a total of 57 premieres were played at the major theatres of Sarajevo, and those included different genres. Tragedies were statistically least played, while there were 5 comedies performed (pp. 32–38). Bajrović

Čolaković adds that the artists thus “(...) celebrated and gave advantage to life” (2023, p. 36), adding that one of the most famous BiH directors, Aida Begić, recognized comedy as the base of theatrical activities in the war. By way of comparison, the number of plays that premiered in Sarajevo before the war.

Theatre production during the siege was, indeed, fascinating. Although it is difficult to obtain the number of premieres in theatres across Sarajevo prior to the war for a comparison, it will suffice to add that the Sarajevo National Theatre, which is the largest in the country, premiered four plays (dramas) in the 1990/1991 season, as well as three plays in 1991/1992 (courtesy of the National Theatre archivist, Maida Mehić-Avdić).

1.7 Out of the dark: postwar humor

Postwar artistic production intensified in Bosnia, especially in Sarajevo, which saw the exciting period of reconstruction and recovery. Many festivals gained prominence, especially the Sarajevo Film Festival, which has become an important European film festival. That in addition to, for example, the Bašćaršija Nights, Bookstan, Jazz Fest Sarajevo, just to name a few. As far as comedy is concerned, I will here mention but some of the most interesting trends, starting with a regionally-popular TV series – *Lud, zbunjen, normalan* [Crazy, Confused, Normal].

1.7.1 Regional popularity of “Lud, zbunjen, normalan”, a TV Series

In a new paradigm of Bosnian life, where the working class of Bosnia faced the new reality of economic instability and consequences of the past war, a TV series appeared, directed by Elmir Jukić, screenplay by Feđa Isović, titled *Lud, zbunjen, normalan* [Crazy, Confused, Normal], that focuses on three generations of the Fazlinović family from Sarajevo. They all live in an apartment and together they face the challenges of daily life in Sarajevo. The actors in the series are some of the most renowned in the country (Tatjana Šojić, Emir Hadžihafizbegović, Senad Bašić, Emina Muftić, etc.) and the regional popularity of the TV series was considerable, to the extent that the show was aired for over a decade (from 2007 to 2021) (IMDB, n.d.). However, the humor of the series, as is the case with other televised humor in Bosnia since the 1980s, does not contain artistic subtlety, which is to be anticipated with all forms of expression aimed at wider audiences. Nonetheless, the fact is that the scenes from the series are regionally mentioned by ordinary people, who compare their lives and situations with those of

the series' characters. This is the only TV series to date that matched the popularity of the TLN show, to the extent that a significant number of people refer to some scenes and quotes from the series in the daily life.



Figure 1.17

Lud, zbunjen, normalan, a poster

Note. Adapted from “Lud, zbunjen, normalan” directed by E. Jukić, 2007, IMDb (<https://www.imdb.com/title/tt1093078/>).

Still, in spite of the elevated postwar atmosphere in Bosnia, the country also faced difficulties in economic, social, psychological and many different kinds of recovery. In addition, it also saw the rise of the *nouveau riche* class of citizens, standing in a sharp contrast to the rest of the impoverished population. Such a situation also deeply resonated with artists, who used their skill to warn against the many negative trends in the society. Their engaged art was in many ways humorous, since irony and sarcasm are used as effective tools to expose the ruthlessness of social injustice.

1.7.2 Subtlety of humor in engaged works of Bosnian visual artists

Criticism of the emerging postwar crisis was seen in the works of Bosnian multimedia artists, including Anur Hadžiomerspahić, Almir Kurt, Samir Plasto, Damir Nikšić, just to name a few. Their work contains criticism of society, politics and the economy. Although their primary goal was not humor *per se*, the many works they produced are comparable to the artistic achievements of writers such as Derviš Sušić, or Skender Kulenović, but in the visual media. That said, their work does not contain the usual colloquial means of appeasement, on the contrary: they warned the public against the negative trends that arose in Bosnia after the war, which as a country faced the challenges of a life of transition to democracy and the free market, where a lot of corrupted politicians and groups formed alliances and

assumed the position of political power, preventing the country from moving forward with much needed reforms.

Such a level of corruption and the resulting lack of economic, intellectual and other forms of progress in Bosnia (with other former Yugoslav countries following a similar pattern) is perhaps best described by Davor Sučić (a.k.a. Sejo Sexon), one of the founders of the Band *Zabranjeno pušenje* and the New Primitivism movement, and Boro Kontić, in their book *Pamtim to kao da je bilo danas* [I Remember It Like It Was Today] (2024, 2nd ed.). In the concluding remarks, Sučić says

Come to think of it, one could have expected this. It could all have been seen in the war. The careerism, the profiteers, the negative selection, favoring of the uneducated and the illiterate (...) I see it not only as the product of politics and of a system. Today, that is the product of a mentality of all the peoples who live here. Simply, it has lasted for too long, the brainwashing the lowering of the criteria. And that is why our task is that much harder (Sučić & Kontić, cited in Grozdanić, 2024).¹³

Hence, these are the engaged artists and their form of expression from the humor standpoint can be viewed as satirical, sarcastic and ironic. I will dedicate a section in the analysis to one of the most prominent artists from this circle – Anur Hadžiomerspahić.

As I bring this chapter towards the conclusion, I would like to emphasize that the decades that followed after the war saw the birth of new generations, with no immediate experience of the war and the postwar challenges, save for the memories of their parents and other older family members. These young people are focusing on the social, political and other life issues in new circumstances, where the internet has become the favored means of communication and even artistic expression. That said, platforms such as YouTube, Tik Tok, Instagram, etc., are now the favorite tools of content creators, and that in many respects includes humor. I will

¹³ The phenomenon of post-transitional societies of Eastern Europe and, especially, the Balkans, is presented in the work of Mischa Glenny, for example, in his books *The Re-birth of History: Eastern Europe in the Age of Democracy* (1990), *The Balkans: Nationalism, War and the Great Powers, 1804–1999* (2001) and, most importantly, *McMafia: A Journey Through the Global Criminal Underworld* (2008), where he presents the organized crime in Eastern Europe after the fall of the Soviet Union, when the countries of Eastern Europe entered the free market and moved towards democracy as the form of government. Glenny shows that such a situation gave rise not only to organized crime, but also to the link between the corrupt politicians and criminals.

present some of these new trends and artists in the analysis, in chapters focusing on memes and the *Bruca Braca Bruda Brada* animated series.

1.8 Bosnian humor – final remarks

In this short overview of the development of Bosnian humor, it is noticeable that the Bosnian common folk, people living ordinary and difficult lives are a recurring theme. The “Bosnian everyman” is seen as a humorous theme, either through mockery of his hardships, or as a leitmotif in the subtle, artistic humor of engaged writers and artists.

The medium of expression has naturally changed and evolved through time, starting from the oral tradition that included short stories and witticisms, to the *sevdalinka* songs, to the Ottoman shadow theatre and the Nasreddin Hoja anecdotes, all the way to the subtle plays that were televised in the second half of the 20th century, the TV sketches seen in the popular TV series *Top lista nadrealista*, or in the war humor and the humor found in the engaged art aimed at criticizing contemporary Bosnian society, as well as in the animated series published on YouTube.

As far as early research endeavors are concerned, I emphasize the fact that the oral tradition has been preserved and researched primarily by invaluable efforts of dedicated individuals, in the older period especially by Mula Mustafa Bašeskija, Safvet-beg Bašagić (especially in journals such as *Behar* and *Gajret*), as well as Nasko Frndić, Josip Lešić, Alija Isaković, Gordana Muzaferija, and more recently, Amira Dervišević. This is far from an exhaustive list, but I need to mention that these efforts concerned the oral tradition in general, as well as literary and theatre studies in Bosnia, and hence, humor is mentioned in their work as one of the literary and/or artistic features in poems, plays, etc. I again need to highlight the necessity of conducting a thorough research of humor of the Ottoman period in Bosnia, hopefully within a multidisciplinary research project.

Also, I discuss three important concepts of socialization in Bosnia (especially in Sarajevo) – *kafana* (a pub, a tavern), *sijelo* (a Balkan version of *apéro*), and *raja*, a concept also related to the non-existence of boundaries between people in the sense that their background was irrelevant. The concept of “being part of *raja*” has remained an inevitable part of Gen-X’s memories and the feeling of friendship.

The inevitability of war humor is also briefly presented in the chapter, with important instances of self-mockery which served as an encouragement to Bosnians despite the war. Bosnians did make fun of their own

ordeal during the 1992–1995 war, through jokes, through art (especially the very vibrant theatre scene), as well as through some examples of street art, encapsulated by photographs of primarily war-torn Sarajevo.

The post-war period is presented in the chapter through the engagement of Bosnian artists warning against political corruption and all the consequences of postwar challenges. Their work does not even have to be aimed at being humorous *per se*, but it resonates with people who perhaps may find the hard reality tragicomical. One of these visual artists, Anur Hadžiomerspahić, will be presented separately in the analysis.

Of course, there have been very popular instances of the common humor presented in the highly popular TV series *Lud, zbunjen, normalan*, as well as the most recent instance of humor of the young generations seen through the eyes of young people assembled around the band *Helem nejse*: the *Bruca Braca Bruda Brada* series, which will also be presented in the analysis chapter, as a form of animated humor of young, postwar generations.

While conducting research for the chapter on the development of Bosnian humor, I realized that studies on this phenomenon are rather scarce. This is not to say, however, that humor scholars in Bosnia do not exist: Jadranka Kolenović-Đapo, Nihada Delibegović-Džanić and Adi Fejzić are, in my opinion, most prominent, writing about humor in general, from different perspectives, be it psychological or linguistic. Still, finding researchers and studies focusing on Bosnian humor in the 20th and early 21st century Bosnian scholarship was rather challenging. Some Bosnian internet portals, for example, included interesting texts on Bosnian humor, reflecting personal views and experiences. Authors like Nihad Kreševljaković, Aleksandar Hemon, Hajrudin Hromadžić and Ozren Kebo are among these.

However, I did find some international articles and studies on Bosnian humor by researchers like Srđan Vučetić, David Orlov and Petra Hamer.

As I was researching the library files, I came across some master thesis on humor, defended at the University of Sarajevo, my home university. As an educator myself, and also mentor of several master thesis on humor, I am pleased to learn that my colleagues, professors Sarina Bakić, Belma Buljubašić and Emina Dedić-Bukvić, supervised master theses in the field, from the perspective of pedagogy, political science and communicology. The students were Selma Dragolj, who wrote about humor as a desirable characteristic of teachers in creating an inspiring environment for learning (2019), Amna Tuzović who focused on the importance of political humor in the reconciliation process in Bosnia (2019), and Erol Handžar, whose

thesis focused on the TLN show as a media phenomenon that influenced the subcultural development of Sarajevo (2020), and whom I have already mentioned in the text.

Sarajevo humor is the focus of this book, but I should note that it is not all-encompassing. There are other traits of humor in and about Sarajevo that can be analyzed from different perspectives, for example, linguistic (primarily phonetic, since variations of the Sarajevo speech in humor are also the subject of many jokes), socio-cultural, focusing on, for example, ethnic humor, since different ethnic communities have lived in Sarajevo for centuries, all contributing to the development of humor, or being even targets of humor, and so on, in addition to different forms of humor that I mentioned above.

2 Theoretical framework and methodology

The main goal of this book is the presentation of Bosnian (Sarajevo-based and Sarajevo-oriented) humor through a geosemiotic framework. It is necessary to introduce the main concepts of the framework, as well as an overview of some research in the field, specifically focusing on the ‘sense of place’ and the ‘local color’, which I will discuss below in some detail. It is also important to emphasize that the connection between geosemiotics (a multidisciplinary, even transdisciplinary field) and humor studies, particularly the general theory of verbal humor (GTVH), will need to be established, because to the best of my knowledge, this is the first such application.

2.1 On humor, laughter, exhilaration and mirth

Humor has been extensively discussed in linguistic research (e.g. Raskin, 1985; Attardo and Raskin, 1991; Attardo, 1994; 2001; 2020; Hempelmann 2010; Tsakona, 2020; Yus, 2023, etc.). As part of the universal human ability to make life more fun, easier, and bearable, humor occurs in people’s everyday lives, either as a conscious linguistic expression or as a spontaneous reaction to phenomena that surround us, which are not necessarily caused by the actions of human beings. For example, these are the situations where we perceive animal behavior as humorous, like in videos posted on different online platforms where the behavior of pets is perceived as funny.

Although different descriptions of humor exist across scientific disciplines, defining it is not an easy task. Attardo (1994), in fact, underlines the impossibility of offering an ‘a priori’ definition. Still, some general framework related to humor has been introduced, and I will adopt Attardo’s approach to the main concepts pertinent to humor research (2020, p. 4), where he uses the term *humor* as an umbrella term for the stimulus, as well as the terms *mirth* for the emotional response, *laughter* and *smiling* for the physical responses.

As we observe humor as a stimulus, it is important also to emphasize that it does not always elicit laughter as a reaction. In that respect, I also

assume the position that there is no necessary correlation between the two phenomena, in line with Attardo's view:

there is no one-to-one correlation between humor and laughter and/or smiling. There is at best a general association between the two, but it would be a serious error to assume that because you observe either of the two items the other must be present as well. (2020, p. 18)

In addition to laughter, other important humor-related concepts are 'exhilaration', and 'mirth'. If laughter is a behavioral reaction to humor, we can say that 'mirth' or 'exhilaration' are psychological reactions to it (in Attardo's words, the emotional response).

Willibald Ruch introduced the term 'exhilaration', defining it as

an emotion construct denoting a temporary increase in a cheerful state that is observable in behavior, physiology, and emotional experience, and that occurs in response to humor, but also to other stimuli. (1993, p. 606)

Rod Martin defines the connection as follows:

Mirth is related to joy, but is somewhat different because of the element of 'funniness' involved. It is accompanied by activation of the pleasure circuits in the limbic system as well as various autonomic and endocrine responses, and is what makes humor so enjoyable. (Martin & Kuiper, 2016)

There are some differences between the two concepts in psychology, but they are not important for the purposes of my present research, because I will analyze humor as it appears in the examples, and not the (possible) reactions of the readers/viewers of the humorous content. However, "punchlines" and "jab lines" are notions that will appear relevant for the analysis in this book, and I will briefly present them in the following section.

2.2 On punchlines and jab lines

Traditionally, a punch line is the funny part of a joke, typically occurring at the end of the text. The term is used in that sense in humor studies. The concept of "jab line" is a neologism (Attardo, 2001). "Punch lines" and "jab lines" are both instances of humor but differ by the position in the text, as Attardo (2001, p. 82) explains:

Jab lines differ from punch lines in that they may occur in any other position in the text. Semantically speaking, they are identical objects. Their only difference lies in the textual position in which they occur and in their textual function.

The reason why this distinction is important is that some texts contain humor that can be a) independent of the final point of the joke (especially in longer jokes, where several humorous events may occur) and b) the “main” humorous event does not necessarily have to be placed in the final position.

The following joke, involving a boy, Perica, another well-known character in jokes in the former Yugoslavia, may serve as an example. The joke is listed under the category “Texts” entitled “A Letter to Santa” (Vicevi, 2026) indicating that the structure of the joke is different from that commonly observed (shorter forms, one-liners, question/answer forms, etc.):

Dear Santa,

You must be surprised that I’m writing to you today, after the holidays, but I would like to clarify some things that happened during the past year, and on the very day that I sent you my New Year’s wishes. I wrote to you that I wanted a bicycle, roller skates, a Matchbox race track, a Sony PlayStation. I worked really hard, studying all year, I was never late and I even came to school early to help my friends with their homework. I was the best student in my class and I even won the first place in the state competition of young mathematicians. In the whole neighborhood, I was best behaved. I behaved better than my brother, mom and dad, not to mention my neighbors. I went to church every Sunday, the priest almost had a heart attack when he saw me, but I survived that too. I helped old people cross the street. I got the ‘best little policeman’ badge. Since even the biggest fool can conclude from the above that I was an exemplary child during the whole of last year, now I would like to ask you, Santa, a few questions.

How did you even have the balls to leave a crappy yoyo under the Christmas tree after all what I’d done? And those fucking socks with the Matrix sign and those Legos?

Do you have any brains in that fat head of yours? Do you think I’ve been struggling and trying for nothing all fucking year? Fuck you! You fucked me over like I was your worst enemy, you left the best bike to the kid across the street even though he already has three (his mom is fucking her boss so she makes serious money). Don’t you dare try to get into my house through the chimney next year. I’ll beat you like a little monkey, you bearded jerk. And I’ll make sausages out of that deer of yours and you’ll have to walk to the North Pole. Just like I’m walking now because you didn’t bring me a bike. Fuck you, Santa! Just so you know I remember everything and next year I’ll fucking crush you, you fat, bearded faggot.

With love, yours truly,

Perica

This is a rather long text with several different instances of humor, for example, the explanation for why the kid next door has three bikes, or the very intention of making sausages of Santa's deer. Additionally, ending the letter with the phrase "with love" after addressing Santa with such aggression and vulgarity can also be considered humorous and stylistically inappropriate (and hence introducing a contrast/opposition).

Still, the joke resolution is not contained in the final position, which means that several jab lines are present in this instance, with the underlying humor resting in the contrast between the first section of the text, where the boy calmly writes to Santa, describing all the achievements and hard work of the previous year, and the second section of the letter where he aggressively expresses his dissatisfaction with the presents he got (the way in which he finishes the letter is also interesting, because after all the threats, he expresses some love and respect for Santa, which completely falls within the expected structure of letter writing, but is stylistically humorous due to the sudden shift from hatred to love, respect, etc., even on the surface).

Humor in linguistics is analyzed in various subdisciplines, e.g. translation studies, discourse analysis, psycholinguistics, etc. (see an overview in: *The Routledge Handbook of Language and Humor*, Attardo, 2017). Certainly, one of the most prominent is the general theory of verbal humor (GTVH) by Salvatore Attardo and Victor Raskin, which will be discussed further in this chapter and applied in the analyses throughout this book. Still, in order to discuss the GTVH, I will briefly present its direct predecessor, Victor Raskin's semantic script theory of humor (SSTH).¹⁴

2.3 Semantic script theory of humor (SSTH)

Raskin starts from the observation that, just as a speaker can determine whether a particular sentence belongs to a set of grammatical sentences, they can also determine whether a text is humorous or not. From this follows the key hypothesis of this theory:

A text can be characterized as a single-joke-carrying-text if both of the conditions are satisfied: i) The text is compatible, fully or in part, with two differ-

¹⁴ It is necessary to emphasize that the overview of the humor theories (the SSTH and the GTVH), as well as geosemiotics (its main principles and notions) are here presented so as to account for the segments crucial for the analysis. I am aware that each of these theories are more detailed and complex in nature, but further explanations would be beyond the scope of this study.

ent scripts ii) The two scripts with which the text is compatible are opposite in a special sense (...). The two scripts with which some text is compatible are said to overlap fully or in part in this text. (Raskin, 1985, p. 99)

It is important to highlight three components: 1) scripts, 2) overlap and 3) opposition.

Scripts, in Raskin's understanding of humor, are groups of related concepts. They imply organized pieces of information in the broadest sense (Attardo, 1994). Therefore, a script represents an organized cognitive structure that provides information about objects, organizations, activities and ways in which tasks are performed. Scripts are not necessarily a sequence of activities, such as, for example, cooking a meal, but may imply other forms of organization, for example, partonomic, such as the *ČEVAPI* DISH (consisting of minced beef, *somun* (bun), chopped onion, *kajmak* (cream), etc.).

Scripts are concepts activated by hearing or reading a text. However, a text may be compatible with more than one interpretation, i.e., may activate more than one script. This is called "overlap," which is the second important SSTH concept. As Attardo (1994, p. 203) points out (and exemplifies), overlaps occur when there are

stretches of text that are compatible with more than one 'reading,' i.e., would fit more than one script; for instance, imagine a text describing someone getting up, fixing breakfast, leaving the house, etc. These events could fit the script for GO TO WORK but also for GO ON A FISHING TRIP – hence the stretch of the text would be compatible with both scripts.

However, overlap alone is insufficient to generate humor, for another element is necessary: opposition, the third important component of the SSTH main hypothesis. Oppositions are, according to Raskin, binary, and fall within three broad categories (1985, p. 111) ACTUAL vs. NON-ACTUAL, NORMAL vs. ABNORMAL and POSSIBLE vs. IMPOSSIBLE. Likewise, Raskin further emphasizes (1985, p. 113–114) that the most common oppositions occur within what we could call five main subclasses of script oppositions: GOOD vs. BAD, LIFE vs. DEATH, OBSCENE vs. NON-OBSCENE, MONEY vs. NO MONEY, HIGH vs. LOW (STATURE).

The following joke can be used as an example: "I broke the record – now it won't play". Polysemous word "break" allows for the overlap of scripts TO BREAK THE RECORD, to achieve something nobody else has, and 2. TO BREAK THE RECORD meaning the physical destruction of an object used to play music. The Script Opposition is activated once the second part of

the text appears: “now it won’t play”, which initiates the reinterpretation, or the second reading of the text.¹⁵

Raskin (1985, p. 81) also distinguishes between the “common sense” scripts, which are “(...) the knowledge of what people do in certain situations, how they do it, in what order, etc.”, “individual” scripts, determined by the person’s individual background and personal experience and “restricted scripts”, shared with a certain group of people (family, friends, etc.) but “(...) not with the whole speech community of native speakers of the same language.” In this book, such instances are seen in, for example, Chapter 3, where I indicated the restricted scripts in some examples of memes, or in Chapter 5, where the analysis also shows such instances in Anur Hadžiomespahić’s posters.

The SSTH constitutes one of the six Knowledge resources (KRs) of the general theory of verbal humor (GTVH), which I will introduce in the following section.

2.4 General theory of verbal humor (GTVH)

In broadening the SSTH, Attardo and Raskin wanted to encompass other areas of linguistics, most notably, textual linguistics, the theory of narrativity, and pragmatics (Attardo, 1994). The result was the general theory of verbal humor.

In 1991, in the article “Script Theory Revis(it)ed: Joke Similarity and Joke Representation Model”, Salvatore Attardo and Victor Raskin proposed the GTVH. Based on Raskin’s SSTH (1985) the GTVH proposes six Knowledge Resources (KRs), which I will present here in succession (see more discussion in: Attardo & Raskin, 1991; Ruch, Attardo, & Raskin, 1993; Attardo, 1994; and, especially, Attardo 2020).

2.4.1 Knowledge resources (KRs)

Attardo describes KRs as parameters “(...) upon which someone wishing to construct a joke from scratch would have to draw from.” (2020, p. 137), adding that, from a different perspective, they are “a collection of tools to analyze an aspect of the joke.” (2020, p. 138).

Using the KRs we can analyze the similarity of jokes, as well as determine the differences between punchlines. Hence, they are organized hierarchically, which means that if two jokes are compared, those that differ

¹⁵ The element forcing to the surface the presence of the second sense is called “disjunct-
tor” (Attardo, 2020, p. 190).

only in the LA parameter will retain greater similarity, whereas jokes that differ in the SO parameter are expected to be the least similar.

Therefore, in this section, I will present the KRs from the highest level of predicted similarity downwards: Language (LA), Narrative Strategy (NS), Target (TA), Situation (SI), Logical Mechanism (LM) and Script Opposition (SO).

1. Language (LA): All linguistic components of the text at all levels. Attardo (2020, p. 139) explains that

It contains a phonological, morphological, syntactic and lexical description of the text. It also contains information about the basic frequency of occurrence of these units in general texts as well as information connecting this sort of formal features of texts to registers and stylistic codes.

It is important to emphasize that, in this KR, the position of the punchline is highly important. In that regard, it is necessary to account for the difference between ‘punchlines’ and ‘jab lines’ as introduced in the section 2.2.

In addition, phonological structure is also observed within this KR, as seen in the following example, where the punchline rests on the same pronunciation in the English language for an ethnic group and a diary product: “What do Saddam Hussein and Little Miss Muffet have in common? – They both had Kurds/curds in their way.” (*Saddam Jokes*, 2024)

2. Narrative strategy (NS): This parameter accounts for the way in which humor is presented in a text, including jokes, dialogues, longer texts, etc. However, not all jokes are narratives, especially those concerning visual humor, such as memes, which contain both a visual and a textual element, without narration. In that regard, Attardo (2020, p. 142) emphasized that the NS parameter accounts for all forms of textual organization, including visual ones.

3. Target (TA) is the butt of the joke. They are related to humans or human activity (Attardo, 2020, p. 144) and are, for example, the stereotypical classifications of people found on many websites in former Yugoslavia (see: vicevi.net, vicevi.ba, etc.). They include blondes, different nationalities (Serbs, Croats, etc.), different professions (policeman, doctor, lawyer, etc.), religions, etc. In order for a joke to contain a TA, aggression is necessary (Attardo, 2020). Hence, this parameter is optional in cases where no aggression is present.

Still, according to the view of Priego-Valverde et al. (as cited in Attardo, 2020, p. 145), humor may be “speaker/hearer/other-oriented”. Humor orientation has been described in detail by Attardo (2020, p. 145–147), and here I will briefly discuss the main elements. At this point it is important to emphasize that Attardo considers this an extension of GTVH “which has the advantage that it no longer requires the knowledge resource to be optional, in case of lack of aggression.” (2020, p. 145).

Humor can be: a) speaker-oriented, or self-deprecating, where the speaker reflects on their own habits, character traits, etc. in a humorous way. An example of such humor would be if a blonde woman decided to use “stupid blonde” stereotype to joke about herself; b) hearer-oriented humor, where we may decide to joke about our interlocutors using the same set of stereotypes against them as was the case in the previous example, or just make fun of their habits, etc.; c) “other-oriented” which can include any person, group of people and situations they might find themselves in, regardless of whether the speaker is part of such group.

One such example could be when a trolleybus broke down in downtown Sarajevo, and then some passengers and passers-by decided to help by pushing it. An article was published about the event by the *Dnevni avaz* daily (2018), together with on-the-site photos, one of which is seen in Figure 2.1:



Figure 2.1
Trolleybus

Note. From “Samo kod nas,” 2018, *Dnevni avaz* (<https://avaz.ba/bih/sarajevo/375697/samo-kod-nas-gradani-glavnog-grad-bih-gurali-trolejbus>). Copyright 2025 by Dnevni avaz.

It is worth noting that the people pushing the trolley bus in the image are not the TA, although the image is oriented to them.¹⁶ The TA here are citizens who, as the Avaz article points out, have grown so accustomed to such situations in public transportation that even pushing a trolleybus to help resolve a traffic jam has become a normal activity.

¹⁶ A verbal description of the image would include wording along the lines of “they are pushing the trolleybus,” which clarifies that the orientation is third person.

4. Situation (SI): This parameter concerns what Attardo and Raskin (1991, p. 303) called props of the joke, or, more specifically, objects, instruments, activities of/in a joke (Ruch, Attardo & Raskin, 1993, p. 125). Attardo (2020, p. 147) further explains that it is the background script describing the environment in which the events take place and its activation may be entirely inferential.

In light of the “background” environment, it is important to mention here the notions “focal” and “backgrounded” incongruity (Hempelmann and Attardo 2011; Attardo 2020). Some jokes can contain several SOs, but they are neither addressed nor resolved in the text. Such SOs constitute the “backgrounded incongruity”. On the other hand, “focal” incongruity concerns the punch line and its resolution (Attardo, 2020, p. 89). Many jokes involving animals can serve as an illustration of the backgrounded incongruity, since their ability to talk for example, is never addressed.

A joke on Montenegrins, who stereotypically appear in jokes in the former Yugoslav area as lazy¹⁷, could serve as an example of the SI KR:

There was a famine in Montenegro. They'd eaten everything they had, all they could. One day, the patriarch said: “Let's go to the cliff and die by jumping into the abyss.” Everyone agreed. They stood on the cliff and started the countdown. All of a sudden, someone shouted: “Some people have brought potatoes!” The patriarch asked: “Peeled?” “No.” To that the patriarch responded: “Let us jump, brothers and sisters!” (Vicevi, 2026)

The SI KR in this case appears in the activation of several incongruities, the most prominent being MONTENEGRINS with the immediate activation of the script LAZY. Also, there is a patriarch who suggests that suicide be committed, which goes against the religion he is part of (and this is an incongruity, of course). That means that the broad scripts activated are also LIFE, DEATH, RELIGION. However, the incongruity of a religious person suggesting suicide is not addressed in the joke.

It is also important to emphasize that initially backgrounded incongruities may be activated in the punchline, in other words, they may be focalized (Attardo, 2020, p. 149). In this case, for example, the LIFE/DEATH

¹⁷ Funnily, Montenegrins decided to play along with the lazy Montenegrin stereotype, so the annual competition in lying down has become a funny tradition of sorts, with the 2025 winner having broken the previous record by having spent 51 hours lying down (“Zanimljivi Crnogorci”, 2025). This could also be seen as an example of the “first person-oriented” humor presented in the TA KR.

scripts will be focalized in the punchline (whereas RELIGION/SUICIDE is not activated).

5. Logical mechanism (LM): The way in which two scripts are brought together (Ruch, Attardo, & Raskin, 1993), or, more precisely, “(...) it accounts for the resolution of the incongruity (script opposition and overlap).” (Attardo, 2020, p. 149).

Furthermore, Hempelmann and Attardo (2011) and Attardo (2020) emphasize that the resolution is always partial, and in cases of, for example, absurd humor, there is no resolution at all. Ergo, the LM KR is optional.

To illustrate this, I will provide two jokes in contrast. The first is: Q: Why did the picture go to jail? A: Because he was framed. (*Why did the picture go to jail?*, 2026) The resolution in this instance rests in the polysemic nature of the word “frame”, which has a number of different meanings. The two key meanings for understanding the resolution of this joke are a) (noun) The frame of a picture or mirror is the wood, metal, or plastic that is fitted around it, especially when it is displayed or hung on a wall, and b) (verb) If someone frames an innocent person, they make other people think that the person is guilty of a crime, by lying or inventing evidence (*Definition of frame*, 2025). The resolution rests on the ambiguity of the verb (incarceration of the picture, rather than the fact that many pictures are put in frames).

The second, contrasting example would be the joke from a Bosnian repository of jokes: “Two old women were sitting in the dark. The third came in and turned the light on.” (*Babe*, 2026). This appears to be an absurdist joke, since the first two women could have turned on the light. This joke is a very good example where the LM KR is unnecessary, because there is no resolution. In other words, there is nothing in the text of the joke that resolves the incongruity. Rather, this is an illogical sequence of events (where people are sitting in the dark, for no clear reason). Hence, the set-up of the joke is visible, but the resolution does not appear. Scripts that may be activated here are part of a logical sequence of events (another example is available in the SO section).

Absurdist jokes are frequently grouped as “stupid” within the categorization of jokes at many websites in former Yugoslavia (vicevi.net; vicevi.ba; vicevi.hr, etc.).

6. Script opposition (SO): This parameter is, in fact, Raskin’s Semantic Script Theory of Humor, which I introduced in the section 2.3. To avoid

repetition, I will here only briefly reiterate the most important segments that constitute this parameter: a) a script is a cognitive network of associations surrounding a word, which is reflective of one's experience, education, culture, etc.; b) humor will appear if the text is compatible with two different scripts and the two scripts need to be in opposition that is resolved in the punchline when the listeners shift from the more evident script to the less evident (alternative) script; c) scripts can be "common", "individual" and "restricted".

As I have emphasized at the beginning of this chapter, geosemiotics will be the theoretical framework when observing humor in this book. Hence, the following section will present some general ideas central to the field.

2.5 On geosemiotics, visual semiotics, signs and indexicality

In their seminal work *Discourses in Place: Language in the Material World* (2003), Ron Scollon and Suzie Wong Scollon analyze the way in which language is interpreted when placed in the material world. They provide a definition of 'geosemiotics' as "(...) the study of the social meaning of the material placement of signs and discourses and of our actions in the material world." (2003, p. 211).

In the present book, the visual aspect of humor is strongly emphasized, which is where the connection between visual semiotics, i.e. the way in which visual images produce social meaning (Scollon and Scollon, 2003, p. 217) and the linguistics of humor is established: I will observe the way in which the visual aspect of Sarajevo is related to humor. I will describe two perspectives: focalized and non-focalized.

By a "focalized" perspective, I mean the manipulation of language and signs that concern, or are situated in Sarajevo in order to achieve or enhance humor. For example, Chapter 3 analyses memes and photographs of Sarajevo streets where the manipulation of signs directly contributes to humor (e.g. *ćevap*, a culinary specialty of Sarajevo used on a billboard or on the wall of a restaurant for commercial purposes). Furthermore, Chapter 7 discusses the *Bruca Braca Bruda Brada* animated series that manipulates Sarajevo-area landmarks for satirical purposes (e.g. the *Sebilj* fountain stolen and moved from its original location in the Old Town to the working-class suburb of *Švrakino selo*, which is also the exact image of this book cover).

By the "non-focalized" perspective I mean that Sarajevo, its recognizable surroundings, its signs and streets, form the background, without the creators having an intention to manipulate it in order to create humor. Such

examples are observed in the *Top lista nadrealista* (TLN) show, which consists of sketches filmed in Sarajevo, but the signs observed do not change the original purpose. For example, a *ćevabdžinica* restaurant does not change the purpose, the tram is still used as a means of transportation, etc. But they all visually establish the connection between Sarajevo, a certain location in the city, with humor in a TLN sketch. Of course, there are instances in the TLN show that contain different, focalized examples, and one of the most striking is that a schoolyard wall is used to mark a fictional border between (also fictional) cities – East and West Sarajevo (see Chapter 6).

Signs and discourse(s) are important notions that need to be addressed. I will provide here an explanation based on the Scollons' definitions of these terms (2003).

2.5.1 Language in use: The Welcome to Sarajevo signs

The Scollons observe discourse in two ways: first, in a narrow sense, which they define as language in use, and in the broader sense, as “a body of language use and other factors that form a ‘social language’ such as the discourse of traffic regulation, commercial discourse, medical discourse, legal discourse.” (Scollon & Scollon, 2003, p. 210).

In this book, for example, the humor analyzed concerns the Bosnian language. Discourse in a broader sense includes factors that form a ‘social language’; for example, a graffiti that reads *Welcome to Švrakino* on the wall of a building in Sarajevo (Figure 2.2), entailing much more than what is written. It entails an array of social relationships that exist in Švrakino, a neighborhood in Sarajevo, which Sarajevans and people familiar with the city will understand, (e.g. poverty, fear, crime, etc.).

That said, the image here is a parody of sorts of the usual sign welcoming visitors to a city (not neighborhoods).



Figure 2.2
Welcome to Švrakino

Note. Photograph by the author.

Interestingly, today, the “welcome to Sarajevo” sign (appearing at all road entrances to the city) is geosemiotically significant, also involving the notion of discourse in a broader sense:



Figure 2.3

Welcome to Sarajevo

Note. Photograph by the author.

Image M3 shows a “Welcome to Sarajevo” sign that displays the words of welcome in Bosnian/Croatian/Serbian language, in Latin and Cyrillic alphabets, as well as in English (in the top part of the sign). Below the name of the city an Olympic games symbol is visible, indicating that Sarajevo is an Olympic city. However, at the bottom of the sign, the number 1425 is written in a visibly larger font compared to the rest of the text that follows, which reads, in Bosnian and in English, that the city had undergone a siege. Indeed, the 1992–1995 siege lasted for the entire 1425 days, and the number itself carries significance to its citizens, while it also provides some additional information about the city to the visitors. If that number and the text following it were placed under any other “welcome to” sign in the world, it would lose the intended meaning.

Also, during the siege, people used black humor to emphasize the difficult situation they were in. Similar to the “Švrakino” parody I described above, Figure 2.4 shows a war photograph by Ron Haviv, where the “Welcome to Sarajevo” graffiti is seen on the wall of a destroyed house, with some soldiers below it. The graffiti is, hence, also a parody, while the photograph today serves as a valuable memory and testimony of the city’s

history, certainly different from today's perspective of Sarajevo as a tourist destination:



Figure 2.4
A “war” welcome

Note. From *Welcome to Sarajevo* [Photograph], by R. Haviv, n.d., <https://www.sa92.ba/v1/index.php?showimage=273>. Copyright 2026 by Sarajevo Under Siege 1992–1996. | Sarajevo pod opsadom 1992–1996.

2.5.2 Signs in place: indexicality

In addition to discourse, the Scollons also write about the meaning of the sign in semiotics as “a material object that indicates or refers to something other than itself; includes icons, indexes and symbols.” (2003, p. 216). For example, the already-mentioned *Sebilj* fountain is a material object, but the fountain itself indicates not the source of water as its primary function. Rather, it is a landmark of Sarajevo, one of the major tourist attractions.

Although the definition mentions the notions ‘icons’, ‘indexes’ and ‘symbols’, I will not write about the relationship between them,¹⁸ since this would exceed the scope of the analysis in this book, but will consider an important aspect that is relevant to the analysis: ‘indexicality’. This term entails “(...) context-dependency of signs (...) the study of those aspects of meaning which depend on the placement of the sign in the material world.” (Scollon and Scollon, p. 212). For example, Figure 2.3 shows (among other) the Olympic rings. They are placed on the “welcome to Sarajevo” road sign, under the name of the city. That means that they are indexical, marking Sarajevo as the Olympic city (the 1984 Winter Olympics were held there). If the Olympic rings were placed under the name of a city which has not hosted the games, indexicality would be breached, since the appropriate

¹⁸ For further reading, see Jackie Jia Lou’s text “Locating power in *place* and *space*: A geosemiotic approach to context” (2014).

context would not exist either (mere love of sports and the Olympic games, for example, is insufficient for the Olympic symbols to be used, not to mention that the International Olympic Committee's approval is necessary to use the Olympic symbols, including the rings).

As I have illustrated above, the geosemiotical perspective entails the placement of signs and, as the Scollons emphasize, actions in the material world. In our case, the primary perspective of the material world is Sarajevo, with its recognizable features. Those features may elicit a feeling related to an experience, for example, positive or negative, in people who have visited Sarajevo, or, from the perspective of Sarajevans, the feeling of belonging to a place. That brings into focus another two important concepts that are closely linked to the geosemiotical perspective: the 'sense of place' and the 'local color'.

2.6 The sense of place and the local color

The term 'sense of place' was introduced in the field of geography, with authors such as Lynch (1960) and Tuan (1977) being among the first proponents of the concept. Furthermore, different academic disciplines, such as geography, architecture and urban design, as well as sociology, cultural studies and psychology have started using the term (Hashemzad et al., 2012).

The primary definition and the way in which I will observe the 'sense of place' in this book really draws back to Tuan, who writes that "a place is a center of meaning constructed by experience" (1975, p. 152). The notion concerns a positive feeling about a place, i.e. 'topophilia' (Tuan, 1975).

Still, I must emphasize that I will also observe the negative (or, better, critical) stance towards Sarajevo, especially in the satirical portrayal of the city in the *Bruca Braca Bruda Brada* chapter, where appropriate.¹⁹

'Local color' is another concept closely related to the 'sense of place.' However, the key difference is that 'local color' is used as a term to denote "(...) a style of writing which focuses on the presentation of the features and peculiarities of a particular locality and its inhabitants." (Rajput, 2018, p. 119). Moreover, in his essay "Local colour revisited – an essay in conceptual genealogy" (2008), Vladimir Kapor offers an extensive overview of the genealogy and usage of the term, which he defines as "a set of features used for a vivid and distinctive depiction of a spatially or temporally remote setting" (2008, p.

¹⁹ Đuliman, Bošnjak and Attardo observe the negative perspective through satire in a text, currently in preparation.

41). And, this 'remote setting' is key to the way in which I will approach and use the term in the analysis.

That said, the perspective of a person spatially or temporally distant from, from example, Sarajevo, entails a feeling of detachment and the perception of "otherness", which may appear as important in some segments of the analysis. Generally, this does not necessarily involve only being unfamiliar with a present-day location (Sarajevo, or any other city): time is a significant factor as well, since the way of life, language, even urban appearance of a place, may appear distant and different to the contemporary people, even if they live in the same area.

Hence, my approach to the two notions concerns the presence or absence of attachment to a place. It may appear as a hair-splitting distinction, and I will agree that it is not really pivotal, but it accounts for a difference in the perception of signs.

To further illustrate, the 'sense of place' entails an emotional attachment to a location, or some form of experience that surpasses the feeling of 'getting to know a culture'. If we take the *Sebilj* fountain as an example, the 'sense of place' perspective will entail for Sarajevans and those familiar with the city not only a landmark of Sarajevo, but also different memories, for instance, connected to the location, or experiences (positive or otherwise) one may have had in its vicinity.

From the 'local color' perspective, *Sebilj* may be an object that will be perceived differently by different people: from the perspective of, say, a westerner, whose notion of a fountain does not really match the *Sebilj*, or as something influenced by oriental cultures, etc.

The same may apply to *ćevap*: from the 'sense of place' perspective, it may relate to the experience of eating the meal, the comparison of different quality of the meal, depending on the restaurant, etc. From the 'local color' perspective, the *ćevap* may be a dish that is characteristic of Sarajevo, a dish that is part of the tourist itinerary, etc. In fact, Kapor even emphasizes that "Couleur locale writing (...) set an important benchmark – a ground zero in representing otherness (...)" (2008, p. 54).

Therefore, in this book, the 'sense of place' and 'local color' will be used to emphasize, on the one hand, a form of attachment, or to emphasize 'otherness', some ways or perspectives that may appear odd or unknown.

2.7 Case study



Figure 2.5
You were a rose

Note. From “Ružica si bila, sada više nisi” by @bosnian.problems, 2026, April 20, Instagram (instagram.com). Copyright 2026 by bosnian.problems.

Figure 2.7 contains an example I selected as the case study, taken from the Instagram account @bosnian.problems.

The meme shows a traditional dessert *ružica*, served frequently in Bosnia on different occasions. Together with delights such as *baklava*, this particular dessert was introduced to Bosnia by the Ottomans. The English translation could be “rose pie”, but I need to emphasize here that the Turkish dish *Gül böreği* (rose börek) is a savory dish (TurkFoody, 2026), while in Bosnia, *ružica* is always a sweet dish (*Ružice (Đul-Pita) – the Balkan Kitchen*, 2026). Visually, the pastry is rolled so that it resembles a rose bud, hence the name “ružica” (“ruža” is Bosnian for rose, while “ružica” is the diminutive form). The word is polysemic in nature, since it can mean both a dessert and a beloved (female) person (“ružica” is not typically used as a diminutive form of the flower rose).

The upper text of the meme reads (in a literal translation) RUŽICA SI BILA [YOU WERE A ROSE], while the text in the lower section reads SADA VIŠE NISI [NOW YOU ARE NO MORE]. This is a verse from a song by the famous Sarajevo pop and rock band *Bijelo dugme*. They were among the most popular Yugoslav bands in the 1970s and 1980s. Both *ružica* and (especially) the Bijelo dugme band establish a sense of place for the 1970s and 1980s Sarajevo.

From the GTVH perspective, the KRs apply as follows:

1) Language (LA): The text causes ambiguity in combination with the upper and lower image because the Bijelo dugme song is manipulated in order to indicate that the cake has been eaten.

2) Narrative Strategy (NS): The text is organized so that one line is written on the upper image, and the other on the lower. The two lines are part of one of the most famous songs by the band Bijelo dugme.

3) Situation (SI): Eating a cake.

4) Target (TA): The meme does not contain this parameter (except for maybe a far-fetched attempt of presenting the Target as speaker-oriented, or self-deprecating humor, where a person mocks their love of eating the *ružica*).

5) Logical Mechanism (LM): The resolution is achieved once the viewer understands that the Bijelo dugme song was used to say that the cake was eaten. In this instance, the song was manipulated so that the word “ružica” denotes the meaning “cake”, instead of “the beloved”.

6) Semantic Opposition (SO): Ambiguity appears because of the referent of RUŽICA: CAKE vs. THE BELOVED.

This case study presents a complete hierarchical presentation of the KRs. In the analytical chapters, the KRs irrelevant for a certain example will not be mentioned at all.

2.8 Towards the analysis

The analytical framework will consist of five chapters, each focusing on different aspects of visual humor. Chapter 3 will focus on Sarajevo-related memes, as well as some humorous images of Sarajevo, its restaurants, billboards and streets.

Chapter 4 analyses a comic book that centers on anecdotes about Bosnian Franciscans. This is an interesting form of analysis because, on the one hand, it observes the visual presentation of (Sarajevo-related) anecdotes through comic book drawings and, on the other hand, because Bosnian Franciscans themselves authored the book, meaning that they selected the anecdotes, provided the general commentary and stated that the humor is at their own expense and presented in their own way.

Chapter 5 presents posters as a form of engaged art by the renowned Sarajevo artist Anur Hadžiomerspahić.

Chapter 6 discusses humor in the regionally-famous Sarajevo TV series *Top lista nadrealista* (TLN). Their humor was popular in former Yugoslavia in the 1980s to the extent that even today many who remember the

period will easily associate Sarajevo humor with the TLN show. The visual aspect of TLN humor is significant because it was filmed on the streets of Sarajevo in the 1980s and early 1990s in the form of short sketches, making the scenes a time capsule of sorts, eliciting the feelings of nostalgia for many people.

The last chapter of the analysis, chapter 8, will focus on *Bruca Braca Bruda Brada* (BBBB), an animated series about a gang from *Švrakino selo*, a working-class neighborhood of Sarajevo, which I briefly introduced in the chapter 1. In the past several years, the BBBB series has gained a cult following of sorts, with over 100.000 subscribers to the BBBB YouTube channel (as of May 2026).

3 Sarajevo humor through memes, billboards, curious drawings and objects

Memes have been present in the human society long before the Internet revolution. Richard Dawkins was the first to use the term in his 1976 book *The Selfish Gene*, but later said that

[T]he very idea of the meme, has itself mutated and evolved in a new direction. An internet meme is a hijacking of the original idea. Instead of mutating by random chance, before spreading by a form of Darwinian selection, internet memes are altered deliberately by human creativity. In the hijacked version, mutations are designed—not random—with the full knowledge of the person doing the mutating. (Dawkins, 2013, as cited in Wiggins and Bowers, 2014, p. 6)

In spite the popularity of the phenomenon, Díaz (2013) is right to say that the meme is not easy to define, while Shifman (2013) even begins her article on memes with the sentence “Memes are a pain.” Still, in spite of the difficulty, she presented a view which is in congruence with the focus of this book, i.e., observing humor as a cultural phenomenon, a creative (and artistic) process:

Internet memes are defined here as units of popular culture that are circulated, imitated, and transformed by individual Internet users, creating a shared cultural experience in the process. (Shifman, 2013, p. 367)

In the first part of the chapter, I will analyze memes that focus on Sarajevo so that I will observe them from the geosemiotic perspective and through the lens of the GTVH. I should note that the Bosnian memes have been analyzed already in the Đuliman and Attardo (2024) article “Humor in the Age of the Internet: The Case of Glocal Memes”, where the focus was on the memes that contained images of either famous people or bands (e.g. Depeche Mode) or scenes from famous Hollywood movies (e.g. Lord of the Rings) with a comment directly related to the Bosnian context (the way of life or some very local themes or situations).²⁰ In the article, we em-

²⁰ Internet humor from the linguistic perspective is discussed in Salvatore Attardo’s book *Humor 2.0: How the Internet Changed Humor*. The author provides a comprehensive perspective on Internet humor and its different forms, including memes.

phasized the Bosnian meme producers (producers + users, Bruns, 2008) appropriated the global, Western mainstream memes to express typical traditional concepts and concerns (Attardo & Đuliman, 2024, p. 12). This appropriation is a significant concept from the geosemiotic angle because it will create the sense of place with the Bosnian audience (or the audience familiar with the local culture), making humor locally-oriented.

In this case, the five selected memes concern Sarajevo, four being entirely created from the local environment. This means that the local news, local historical figures, or local films were used as the visual background, as well as the commentary of the meme creator. Only one meme contains an image from *Joker*, a blockbuster film starring Joaquin Phoenix, with the original text modified to adjust it to the Sarajevo context (more details about the structure of the meme is provided in section 3.1.5).

The selected memes differ visually in that the creative process encompassed the combination of images, either stills from films or news screenshots, or drawings. Regardless of the technical aspect, they all concern Sarajevo.

The second part of the chapter contains “interventions in space”. That means that I analyzed photographs I took of objects (the *nanule* slippers, the *Only Fools and Horses* van), commercial posters (the Zmaj čevabdžinica), or drawings (the Creation of čevap) in and around Sarajevo, which are not internet memes *per se*, but they are deliberate interventions in the physical space of the city, aimed at attracting people’s attention in a humorous way, either for commercial purposes, or simply to enhance the ambience in a restaurant. These images are photographs, taken in Sarajevo, at a certain location, in a certain moment.

Memes that concern Bosnia, Sarajevo, the Balkans and its way of life are abundant in number, but I find that the selected memes and the Sarajevo images are the most typical reflection of the humorous spirit Bosnians (more specifically, Sarajevans) have stereotypically been known for – self-deprecating humor through the use of tradition, the love of food, and everyday (sometimes challenging) situations.

3.1 Sarajevo memes

3.1.1 Sarajevo smog

The first example (Figure 3.1) contains a scene from a Bosnian film *Valter brani Sarajevo* [Walter Defends Sarajevo] (1972) and another image of Sarajevo engulfed by smog:



Figure 3.1
Sarajevo smog

Note. From “Sehen Sie diese Stadt?” meme, by U. r/bih, ca. 2018, Reddit (https://www.reddit.com/r/bih/comments/a30cln/sehen_sie_diese_stadt/). Copyright 2026 by Reddit.

The film *Valter brani Sarajevo*, by the Bosnian film director Hajrudin Krvavac, is one of the most famous Yugoslav films focusing on the anti-fascist movement in the WWII. The film tells the story of Vladimir Perić a.k.a. Walter, a commander of partisans in Sarajevo during WWII. He is a war hero and the film influenced the citizens of Sarajevo to the extent that they perceive him as one of the symbols of the city. The main reason for that is, in fact, the very end of the film when the German colonel von Dietrich points at Sarajevo from a hilltop (which is the location easily detected by Sarajevo citizens – the *Bijela tabija* fortress, a popular viewing point) and says to a Gestapo officer that the reason for his failure in finding Walter is that the entire city is, in fact, Walter: “Sehen Sie diese Stadt? Das ist Walter” [See this city? This is Walter.]

Metaphorically, thus, Sarajevo is seen as a hero city, living unity and resistance in the most difficult times. Even today citizens of Sarajevo fondly remember the scene and use the Walter character in different situations, be

it when they express pride or praise, or, as in this case, humor. Hence, Walter the hero is part of the city's local color.

Sadly, Sarajevo has been struggling with heavy smog during the winter months for a number of years, partly due to its geographical position (surrounded by mountains), and partly due to human intervention (many construction projects, too many cars, some citizens using coal for heating, etc.). The smog gets so thick that visibility is highly reduced, causing a number of problems, from grounded flights to health issues.

Thus, the sense of place in the meme (in both the images) is established through the viewpoint – the *Bijela tabija* fortress from which the characters are overlooking the city (the view provides the authentic Sarajevo scenery), and through smog, since it greatly contributes to the local color of Sarajevo, although an unfavorable one.

We can say then that the GTVH's SI parameter is the scene from the film.

In this example, the NS KR is contained in the question-answer form, with the interrogative sentence written over the screenshot from the film (question) and the answer written over an image of the smog-covered Sarajevo. The answer is also visually more striking, the font is larger and the exclamation mark is also an indicator of negative emotions.

The humor is self-deprecating. Sarajevans are mocking the situation they have been in for years, so the TA parameter is first-person.

The image below and the comment give rise to incongruity, with the SO SARAJEVO IS WALTER (activated by the previous knowledge of the film where Sarajevo, the city, is compared to Walter, the hero, with nodes such as BRAVERY and PRIDE) vs. SARAJEVO IN SMOG (with nodes such as POLLUTION, DIRT, REDUCED VISIBILITY), and the sentence *Vidite li ovaj grad?* [See this city?] is ambiguous between the metaphorical meaning (in the film) and the literal meaning (in the lower part of the meme).

The LM rests in the realization that Sarajevo has become invisible because of smog. In fact, the metaphor in the film portraying Sarajevo as a hero diminishes under the real-life realization that Sarajevo has, in fact, lost the battle, not against the Nazis, but against smog, i.e., with pollution. Hence, Sarajevo, a warrior and hero city loses the battle against air pollution.

The following example concerns news about a car crash, a frequent occurrence in big cities, including Sarajevo:

3.1.2 Dating in Sarajevo



Figure 3.2
Three automobiles collide

Note. From “Stanje u Sarajevu redovno,” by @captain_bosnica, 2022, December 15, Instagram (instagram.com). Copyright 2022 by captain_bosnica.

The meme shows an image from a news article about a car crash in Sarajevo (“Stanje u Sarajevu redovno”, 2022). The buildings in the background and some shops establish the sense of place: *Socijalno*, one of the busiest areas in Sarajevo. The traffic frequency there is quite high so the car crash circumstance comes as no surprise.

Hence, the SI parameter in the meme is a car crash. I should add that it frequently happens that people will not wait for the police to arrive when minor car crashes happen. Instead, they just exchange contact details and settle the damage privately. This is important to emphasize because it explains the reason behind one of the people on the image is seen providing their phone number.

The text in English gives rise to the SO: CAR CRASH vs. DATE. The LM rests in the polysemous nature of the script SUDAR (a car crash and a date).

3.1.3 Golf club Sarajevo

The following example (Figure 3.3) focuses on Sarajevo’s devotion to Golf, the vehicle, through a witty contrast between Sarajevo and Paris:



Figure 3.3
Golf club Sarajevo

Note. From “Golf Club Sarajevo,” by @raja.sarajevo, n.d., Instagram (instagram.com).

The sense of place in the image below is established in two ways: first, the location is *Baščaršija*, a tourist attraction in Sarajevo, with the *Sebilj* fountain visible in the background. Also, pigeons in the image are an important element in this respect, since people feed them at that location, and it can be said that they contribute to the local atmosphere, similar to pigeons at Venice’s St. Mark’s Square, prior to the 2008 feeding ban (“Venice to fine tourists”, 2008).

Second, the Golf car is probably the most frequently used car in Sarajevo. The VW company vehicles in general are popular in Bosnia, but the pictured Golf 2 has acquired a cult status. First, the Golf was manufactured by TAS (Tvornica automobila Sarajevo), a car producing factory in Sarajevo. Sadly, due to the 1992–1995 war, the production facilities were destroyed and the company ceased to exist (“The Story of the Golf from Sarajevo”, 2024). The TAS-produced Golf was distributed all over former Yugoslavia and the popularity among Bosnians was so high that it even entered some local jokes (e.g. if a person was not as bright, Bosnians would joke that their thinking process was the same as starting the Golf diesel engine on *Bjelašnica* – it was difficult to start due to the low temperatures on the mountain).

Second, the Golf 1 and 2 car was pivotal during the siege of Sarajevo, since most citizens owned it (because of the TAS production) and the vehicle proved very resistant. Hence, the Golf 2 vehicle has a very special place in the lives of Bosnians, especially Sarajevans, and it can be said that the TAS Golf 2 is part of the local color of the city.

As far as the meme is concerned, the contrast between two images establishes the SO parameter GOLF (sports) and GOLF (car), which means that the polysemous nature of the word again plays a role in reaching the LM, which is that the Sarajevo golf club means the popularity of the vehicle in Sarajevo, while in Paris it is the beautifully arranged golf court.

This said, the image is more of a drawing than it is a representation of the Paris International Golf Club. That means that Paris was only taken randomly, it could have been any other city, since the intention was to show what appreciating Golf means in Sarajevo is very different from what it means in other cities.²¹

3.1.4 Franz Ferdinand's negative review

Sarajevo is also (in)famous for being the site of the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand of Austria and his wife Sophie Duchess of Hohenberg, leading to a sequence of events that resulted in World War I (Butcher, 2014). Today, tourists in Sarajevo visit the assassination site and the museum "Sarajevo 1878–1918" as part of their itinerary. Figure 3.4 shows a meme concerning the Archduke and his visit:



Figure 3.4
Bad review

Note. From *Teepublic.com*, by Styr Designs, n.d., (<https://www.teepublic.com/kids-t-shirt/39605725-history-meme-archduke-franz-ferdinand-world-war-i>)

²¹ I should emphasize that Sarajevo does have a golf club: <https://bhgolf.ba/organizator/golf-klub-sarajevo/1>.

Sarajevo has become an important tourist center in the Balkans, with many historical and natural sights, as well as museums, festivals, exhibitions, concerts (etc.) increasingly attracting people from around the world. Of course, in the age of the Internet, tourists are able not only to book accommodation and travel tickets online, but also to reflect upon the experience of staying at a particular location (be at a city, resort, hotel, etc.).

This meme relates to the experience of Archduke Franz Ferdinand in Sarajevo. The sense of place is established by the very mention of the name Franz Ferdinand and Sophie, since Sarajevans (and all those familiar with Sarajevo) will immediately remember the exact location of the assassination. In addition, they have become part of the vivid history of the city, to the extent that, for example, young people will dress up as Franz and Sophie for masquerades. Also, a very popular tea concept store in Sarajevo is named after them, *Svijet čaja Franz & Sophie* (<https://www.franz-sophie.ba>).

The LA KR contains the image of the Archduke Ferdinand (his official portrait) which serves as the profile picture that frequently appears on apps (such as Booking, etc.).²² In addition, below the profile picture, five stars are displayed, also typical of such apps where tourists rate the experience (one star indicating a very bad and five stars excellent experience). In this case, only one star is highlighted.

The SI parameter in this example is a tourist review.

As per the TA KR, it depends on the creator of the meme. If the creator is Sarajevan, then the humor is self-deprecating. However, I am of the opinion that the humor is aggressive and the TA is Sarajevo, since nothing indicates that the creator is from Sarajevo (the webpage is international and the author creates different historical memes).

The text below the rating initiates incongruity, because of the signature (Archduke Franz Ferdinand). The Semantic Opposition is LIFE vs. DEATH, and the LM is that the Archduke was assassinated in Sarajevo, hence the negative reviews. In addition, backgrounded incongruity appears here also, since Franz Ferdinand is dead, hence, he cannot post reviews.

3.1.5 Joker in Švrakino selo

The last example in this group of images concerns a restricted script: ŠVRAKINO SELO, part of Sarajevo familiar to the local residents or the Sarajevo connoisseurs:

²² The name Styrman appears on the image, but it is the creator of the meme: Styr Designs.

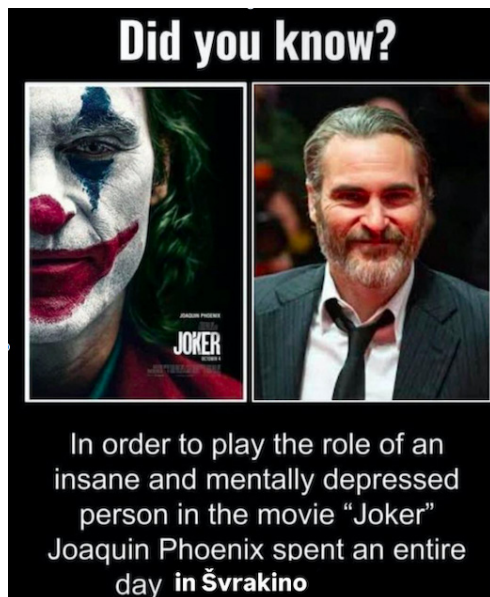


Figure 3.5
Joker in Švrakino

Note. From “Did you know?,” by @da.ansar, n.d., Instagram (instagram.com).

This particular meme was generated in 2020 on Reddit, in the format that imagines actor Joaquin Phoenix undergoing demanding preparations, physical and psychological, for the role of Joker. The format “gained major prominence online in late 2020 where people use the phrasal template by recaptioning the bottom text” (Philipp, 2025).

This is the case of “memetic drift”, which appears when an original meme is used to create other, adjusted memes. Shifman et al. (2014) use the term “founder meme”.

Hence, the meme shown in the image M 5 contains “the phrasal template” that provides a local context, i.e. the sense of place, in mentioning Švrakino (selo), a working-class area of Sarajevo, recently popularized by the BBBB animated series (further discussed in the chapter 7).

The SO is JOKER (with nodes INSANE and MENTALLY DEPRESSED PERSON) vs. ŠVRAKINO (with nodes WORKING-CLASS, CRIME, DANGEROUS AREA). The LM KR entails that the Švrakino selo area of Sarajevo is so dangerous that it is the right location for actors to prepare for the roles of villains.

3.2 Sarajevo humor on billboards, curious drawings and objects

In addition to memes, I have noticed that some companies in Sarajevo advertise themselves through billboards, interesting drawings and placements of objects, thus deliberately manipulating the space to attract the customers' attention. They do so by using either the global or the local themes and motifs, for example, the Nike logo and slogan on the *nanule* slippers, the Bosnian dragon in traditional clothing, etc. The examples I will analyze concern restaurants and a household appliances shop.

3.2.1 Nike nanule

Figure 3.6 shows *nanule*, traditional slippers introduced to the Balkans by the Ottoman Empire. They are characterized by a wooden platform and a leather belt. They have become popular traditional shoe wear and a symbol of the traditional Bosnian way of life to the extent that even a *sevdalin-ka* (traditional poem I introduced in chapter 1) “Ne klepeći nanulama” [Don't Clack with *Nanule*] was written about a man grieving for his deceased mother, asking his wife not to clack when she walks down in *nanule* because the sound reminds him of his mother. Hence, the notion itself is a strong symbol of the traditional way of life in Bosnia.²³



Figure 3.6
Nike nanule

Note. Photograph by the author.

²³ See more on *nanule* in Bosnia in: Hangi (1906), Kreševljaković (1961), and, especially, Bumbul (2018).

The image above was taken at one of the Sarajevo restaurants. The local color is established, connecting the visitors familiar with the tradition of wearing these slippers. Humor here arises because of the engraved symbol, slogan and name of the Nike company. SOs established are TRADITIONAL vs. CONTEMPORARY VALUES. The LM parameter will follow if people are familiar with the *nanule* concept. It could be argued that this is part of a restricted script, since the symbolism and the traditional importance of *nanule* in Sarajevo (and in other parts of the country) may not be as familiar to many foreigners.

3.2.2 Bosnian dragon

The poster visible in Figure 3.7, serving as an advert for the *ćevabdžinica* restaurant is also representative of traditional values:



Figure 3.7
Feed the dragon within

Note. Photograph by the author.

Two dragons are seen sitting at a table, dressed in the traditional Bosnian clothes (both wearing the fez hat and the dragon on the left wearing the traditional coat), eating *ćevapi*, also pictured both in their hands and on the table. The two portions on the table are portions of the Sarajevo *ćevapi*, reproduced faithfully in the image, meaning that they are drawn as served with the special bun (*somun*), chopped onions and some cream (*kajmak*). Hence, when I mention the Sarajevo *ćevapi* dish, I mean that the bun (the *somun*) is a distinctive visual feature of the meal, since in other towns in Bosnia, as well as elsewhere in the region, some similar pastry is frequently used, and is named differently sometimes (most frequently, the term used is “*lepina*”).

All these elements establish a strong sense of place, and the *ćevapi* meal, the way they are served and distinguished by the particular bun, *somun*, contributes to the local color of Sarajevo.²⁴ In fact, the notion SOMUN is indexed for the Sarajevo *ćevap*, since it invoking an image of a particular bun served with a particular meal in Sarajevo.

The text above reads NAHRANI ZMAJA U SEBI [FEED THE DRAGON WITHIN]. The bottom of the poster contains phone numbers of two locations in Sarajevo where the restaurants are located, while the center bottom of the page shows the *Zmaj ćevabdžinica* logo and the name. The sense of place is also established by the very mention of the name of the restaurant, because it is one of the most popular *ćevabdžinica* restaurants in Sarajevo.

However, I should also add that Bosnians also have a strong connection to the ZMAJ notion for two reasons. First is the national hero, Husein-ka-petan Gradašćević (1802–1834), a famous Bosnian commander, member of the noble Gradašćević family, who fought for Bosnian autonomy within the Ottoman Empire.²⁵ He is known as *Zmaj od Bosne* (the Dragon of Bosnia).

Also, the Bosnian national football team is nicknamed Zmajevi (Dragons).

This is not to say, however, that the Zmaj restaurant name (more information on the restaurant available at: cevabdziniczmaj.ba) is in any way connected to either the famous captain, and especially not to the Bosnian football team, which earned the nickname by Mustafa (Marjan) Mijajlović, a Bosnian sport commentator in (“Marijan Mijajlović se vratio u Sarajevo”, 2020) but the dragon symbolism indeed deeply resonates with Bosnians.

From the GTVH perspective, The LA parameter is a poster serving as promotional material. The sense of place is related to the SI, where *ćevapi* are being eaten (by two dragons in traditional Bosnian clothes). The two dragons are causing the incongruity, where the opposing SO is REAL vs. UNREAL. The LM rests in the realization that the name of the *ćevabdžinica* is ZMAJ. Of course, the presentation of the two dragons in traditional Bosnian clothes can be further analyzed as hyperdetermination, since the clothes add to the humorous effect.

²⁴ I wrote about the importance of *ćevapi* in the lives of Sarajevans in the *Bruca Braca Bruda Brada* chapter.

²⁵ More information on Husein-ka-petan Gradašćević is available at his Wikipedia page, but Bosnian historian Husnija Kamberović wrote an extensive biography about him in 2002, marking 200th anniversary of Gradašćević's birth.

The importance of *ćevap* in Sarajevo is seen also in the following example, a drawing on the wall of a *ćevabdžinica* at the very center of Sarajevo.

3.2.3 Creation of *ćevap*

Figure 3.8 shows an image that involves the heritage of two cultures: Italian and Bosnian. It depicts a fragment from the famous fresco on the Sistine Chapel ceiling *The Creation of Adam* (frequently replicated on posters, mugs and cups, laptop backgrounds, etc.) by Michelangelo with the image of a portion of the Sarajevo *ćevapi* displayed in a *ćevabdžinica*.



Figure 3.8
Creation of ćevap

Note. Photograph by Noa Hadžiomerspahić. Reprinted with permission.

I have described the Sarajevski *ćevap* characteristics in the section above. This means that the drawing of the meal establishes the local color, since, as I have mentioned, *ćevapi* vary across Bosnia and further, across the Balkans, and these presented in the image are distinctly Sarajevan.

The incongruity is contained in the SO THE CREATION OF ADAM vs. A PORTION OF ĆEVAPI. The LM KR entails that the *ćevapi* meal are a God's creation, highly important in the culture of Bosnia. I should add, however, that the image itself is a restricted script for two possible reasons. First, there may be people who are unfamiliar with Michelangelo's *Creation of Adam*. The other (more probable) is that there are people who are unfamiliar with *ćevapi*, their importance in the Bosnian culinary culture, and their cult-like status in Sarajevo.

3.2.4 OFAH in Hadžići

The last example I will analyze in this chapter concerns a British TV series, immensely popular in former Yugoslavia: *Only Fools and Horses* (in Bosnian: *Mučke*), sometimes abbreviated as OFAH. The TV series focuses on two Trotter brothers, Derek “Del Boy” and Rodney, who live in Peckham, London, where they make ends meet by wheeling and dealing, with the ambition of becoming millionaires one day. The TV series was aired from 1981 to 2003 (Only Fools and Horses, 1981).

The Trotter brothers own a three-wheel van Reliant Regal, which itself evokes the sense of place to all who are familiar with the TV series. The brothers would drive it around, mainly around the Peckham area. Hence, the car itself is indexed for the TV series, while the writing at the back, which reads, TROTTERS INDEPENDENT TRADING Co NEW YORK – PARIS – PECKHAM is indexed for their “company” (as seen in the replica of the car, Figure 3.9).²⁶

I should also add that humor here rests in the SO BIG CITIES vs. LONDON SUBURBS because Peckham, a working-class London district is being compared to the major cities. The LM KR is that these are the places where the company operates, which can also be interpreted as the TRUE vs. NOT TRUE SO, to the viewers of the series. In addition, the fact that the company’s car is derelict provides information about the company itself (with nodes such as UNSUCCESSFUL, ILLEGAL, etc.). This is part of the image’s hyperdetermination.

However, this car is placed in Hadžići, a suburb of Sarajevo, in front of a shop:



Figure 3.9
OFAH in Hadžići

Note. Photograph by the author.

²⁶ Many images of the van in the OFAH series are available on the Internet, but I refrained from using one myself in order not to breach the photography copyright.

The sense of place is immediately established, since those familiar with Hadžići, the suburb of Sarajevo, will notice the surrounding: the M-17 regional road, the Bingo store in the distance, the Konzum store and the gas station in the background, etc. However, the car itself is moved from the Peckham (London) environment to Hadžići. In addition, it is a symbol of the OFAH series, hence, it does not belong in any way to the said environment of Hadžići (Sarajevo).

Although a vast majority of Sarajevans (and Bosnians, as well as many tourists) may recognize the vehicle from the OFAH series, incongruity arises because its very placement in the physical space of Hadžići (or anywhere else in Sarajevo) is awkward. The car is not even placed in front of a car repair shop or any shop dealing with cars (although, even then it would be awkward, since the vehicle is strongly indexed for the OFAH series). This causes another SO: LONDON vs. SARAJEVO (or ENGLAND vs. BOSNIA).

Sarajevo journalists investigated this interesting story (e.g. Bobeta, 2024), and learned that two brothers own a company selling second-hand household appliances, who decided to joke about the similarities between them and the Trotter brothers. They are also dedicated fans of the series. Although the similarity between their rather successful company and the Trotter brothers is rather far-fetched, the idea proved very clever from the advertising perspective.

Hence, the LM is that the two brothers from Bosnia, fans of the series, started a company together selling second-hand household appliances. And unless one is familiar with this story, one is left to one's own imagination, since the van truly stands out and is not in any way part of the local Sarajevan color.

3.3 There's more to memes than meets the eye

The focus of this chapter is memes and funny captions from the non-virtual world, representing some of the most prevalent themes concerning Sarajevo: weather, the 1914 assassination, *ćevapi*, Sarajevo suburbs, traditional symbols. All these themes invoke a strong sense of place, represented through typologically different memes, varying from drawings, to film screenshots, news sections and/or the combination of these visual techniques.

From the GTVH standpoint, the SI parameter depicts either some everyday Sarajevo topics (e.g. leaving a review during a tourist visit or dealing with a car crash, or a film scene), while the incongruity rests either in the

polysemic relationship of scripts, as was the case with the example 3.3, with the GOLF (sport vs. car) depiction, or Sarajevo being used as a metaphorical description of a hero-city, seen in the example 3.1, where the visual element is contrasted so that the scene from the film is used in opposition to the real-life image of the city covered in smog.

Humor in these memes is self-deprecating, which is especially obvious in the examples 3.1 and 3.5. Also, relatively restricted scripts make resolving the incongruity rather challenging in some examples (unless people are familiar with the Walter character, or the *Švrakino selo* area of Sarajevo).

The second section of the chapter concerns photographs of the Sarajevo streets and restaurants, depicting symbols that combine the traditional and contemporary values, Bosnian and international (e.g. Nike *nanule* slippers), the dragon and the (mainly Gen X's) love of the OFAH series.

The images invoke a sense of place, as well as the local color, especially the *somun* bun depicted in figures 3.7 and 3.8, distinctly Sarajevan, while in other areas of Bosnia the bun is not the same (it is called "Sarajevski somun" [the somun of Sarajevo]).

While the incongruity in the examples is caused either by the unexpected play with the traditional symbols (the Nike *nanule*, or the traditionally-clad dragons eating ćevapi), or by mixing of different cultural heritage (the Creation of ćevap seen in figure 3.8), one example stands out because the incongruity is caused by the awkward positioning of the van seen in the highly popular British TV series in the 1980s and 1990s, OFAH. That means that the object stands out in the Sarajevo environment, without contributing to the local color or the sense of place in any way, leaving all the passersby rather confused. Only after the journalists investigated the story did Sarajevans learn about the OFAH van and the two brothers who own it (hence, the LM is divulged). The van is still visible at that particular location, and continues to draw attention despite not becoming part of the local environment.

Memes have been selected as the first chapter of the analysis in this book, since they are the simplest representation of humor compared to other forms that I will consider further. That is not to say that humor in memes is not as captivating and witty. Also, memes and similar visual representations of the Sarajevo (-related) humor may vary across the internet, and it would be impossible to encompass them all in this one chapter. However, the selected examples do, in my opinion, present the most important thematic framework of any city – tradition, food and a glimpse into the daily life. To paraphrase Neil Young, there's more to memes than meets the eye.

4 Humor in a comic book: Bosnian Franciscans

Bosnian Franciscans, a Catholic order in Bosnia and Herzegovina, have been part of the Bosnian identity, shaping the country's spiritual and cultural landscape since the late 13th century when they first arrived to Bosnia, having been sent by the Pope

(...) to bring the Bosnian Christians back to the Catholic faith because they had strayed from it at that time. They were to do this through non-violence, that is, through persuasion. Accordingly, they were missionaries who had come from various European regions, for example: Italy, England, France, Germany, Poland, and, of course, from the neighboring Dalmatia. (Gavran, 2014).

The Franciscan Province *Bosna Srebrena* derives the name from Srebrenica, a town in Bosnia, known for a difficult recent history, but that is where they first settled. A detailed overview of Bosnian Franciscans' history and mission is available at their webpage (bosnasrebrena.ba), but there are a number of other scholarly articles and books of different researchers on the topic, e.g. Jelenić (1912), Mandić (1968), Gavran (1990), etc.

The position and importance of Bosnian Franciscans in the life of Bosnia was recognized even by the Sultan Mehmed II (the Conqueror), who issued the *Ahdname* (a decree) in 1464, granting them their rights (Gujić, 1935; Imamović, 2018). Of course, the important act by the Sultan does not mean that the life was easy, but Bosnian Franciscans have remained with their people and in their country, even in the most challenging times.

Bosnian Franciscans' contribution to the development of Bosnia in the spiritual, artistic, architectural and literary sense has been immense and has been investigated by various scholars and writers. One of the most prominent researchers of their literary contributions is Ivan Lovrenović. He wrote several articles and studies on the topic, most famous being his novel *Putovanje Ivana Frane Jukića* [The Voyage of Ivan Frano Jukić] (1977), where he used the real-life character, Franciscan Frano Jukić, himself a significant literary contributor to the Bosnian literary history, portrayed in this novel through vivid images of the Franciscans 19th century life.

I am aware that this short overview is insufficient to present the importance and influence of Bosnian Franciscans on the country's history and

cultural heritage, but may serve as an invitation to all the interested readers to discover more. As far as humor is concerned, one of their more recent contributions has caught my attention: a comic book of anecdotes titled *Fratri bosanski u stripu: na svoj račun – na svoj način* [Bosnian Friars in a Comic Book: At Their Own Expense – In Their Own Way], which I will analyze in the following segments.

4.1 Bosnian Friars: at their own expense – in their own way

The comic book *Fratri bosanski u stripu: na svoj račun – na svoj način* [Bosnian Friars in a Comic Book: At Their Own Expense – In Their Own Way] was published by the Rama-Šćit Franciscan Monastery in 2015, with Tomislav Brković and Marko Dješka mentioned as the authors. One of the authors, friar Tomislav Brković, provides a detailed foreword to the book, writing about the position of humor in religion, illustrating it with a quote by Catholic theologian Karl-Jozef Kuschel: “Christus hat nie gelacht?” [Didn’t Christ ever laugh?] (Kuschel, 2012, as cited in Brković & Dješka, 2015).

Hence, the reader is able to perceive humor through the eyes of the Bosnian Franciscans, which is an interesting perspective, since their humor has not been widely known to the general Bosnian public, but it is certainly a valuable insight into the life and views of our Franciscan order.

The book contains 61 jokes shown through cartoons, many of which reflect different periods of Bosnian (and Franciscan) history and experience, real-life Franciscans, and presentations of place through the cartoons. It contains even a list of friars mentioned in the comics (Brković & Dješka, 2015, pp. 85–86). For example, the book is dedicated to Father Luka Markešić (1937–2014), a well-known Bosnian Franciscan, whom many Bosnians hold close to their hearts. He was a noble man, known for his strong spirituality and cheerful, open mind. Friar Tomislav stated in his dedication: “I dedicate this book to Bosnian Franciscan Friar LUKA (MIRKO) MARKEŠIĆ (Proslap u Rami 1937 – Sarajevo 2014), a professor, a teacher, a role model, a guardian of BiH, its history, culture and statehood” (Brković & Dješka, 2015, p. 4). This strong message would certainly deeply resonate with many Bosnians, and the image of Friar Markešić is presented in the book through caricature, where his smile and kind nature are immediately observed:



Figure 4.1
Friar Luka Markešić in the comic book



Figure 4.2
Photo of Friar Luka Markešić

Note. From *Ramski vjesnik*, n.d., 2020 (www.ramski-vjesnik.ba).

In many respects, this is a valuable contribution to Bosnian humor and is worth the attention of linguists and other humor researchers.

My goal in this chapter is to present an analysis of humor, primarily focusing on the Sarajevo anecdotes. In that respect, I will analyze six examples, which is the total number of anecdotes focusing on Sarajevo. That said, other places in Bosnia and Herzegovina have also been represented, hence, this is a valuable read for all those interested in Bosnian humor and humor of the Bosnian Franciscans.

Apart from the geosemiotic perspective, which is an angle I consider in the corpus analysis, the GTVH perspective contains some elements which I will immediately emphasize, in order not to repeat the identical observation in the examples that follow. This does not mean I will not reflect upon these parameters if necessary, but only when there is another element to be analyzed, appearing only in those particular examples.

First, the Language (LA) KR is significant because of the friar's habit. It is a characteristic brown, hooded robe, with a white belt around the waist. This immediately sets them apart from other people in the comic book,

save for the instances when the location is the monastery and where they engage with other friars (no civilians present).

The characteristic robe in drawing and in real-life can be seen in figures 4.1 and 4.2 above. The robe is typical of the friars and their monastic way of life, entailing Catholic faith, deep spirituality and virtue. In addition, this is a comic book, which means that the language entails the enhanced visual expressions of people (similar to that of caricatures), which are frequently humorous. Hence, the contrast between their robe and the surroundings, as well as the enhanced images of people, contribute to humor in this comic book. The extent to which this parameter is relevant rests in the fact that the anecdotes in their entirety would absolutely lose sense if those were stories about other people, not Bosnian Franciscans, since the situations are humorous because they present the world of Franciscans in contrast with the world of common people.

Second, Narrative Strategy (NS) KR is observed in the typical organization of the comic book, with the narrative section presented in the square narrative panel where the context (or the main premise of the anecdote) is explained, and the narrative part in round panels, characterized by the uppercase letters.

The analysis will contain first the image of the example, and then the translation of the text. The translation aims at presenting the essence of humor as it appears in the comic, which means that in some instances I could have opted for a functional translation but that would result in the loss of culture-specific humor. The title of the anecdote is translated in bold, and I followed the same text organization of the comic book: the narrative section is in the sentence case, while the spoken sections are translated in the uppercase letters. The translation appears in square brackets.

Finally, some examples contain instances of humor are rather explicit, as it will be shown later in the text. In view of this, I would like to emphasize that I personally felt slight unease when I was analyzing them, given the Franciscans' absolute devotion in their faith. Still, all these anecdotes show their witty spirit and the sense of humor *at their own expense – in their own way*.

4.2 Analysis of Bosnian Franciscans' humor

Figure 4.3 *This thing between the legs*

OVO MEĐU NOGAMA



[THIS THING BETWEEN THE LEGS]

During the Austro-Hungarian rule, friars would often travel from Mostar to Sarajevo by a train called *Čiro*. Tobacco from Herzegovina to Bosnia was smuggled mostly on that route. Women named *duhanke* (tobacco women) would smuggle the most. In order to fight smuggling, finance police officers called *filanci* would patrol the train to fight smuggling. On one occasion, a *duhanka* noticed a patrol thoroughly searching the train.

She started running from them through the train... reaching a long, half-empty, dimly lit compartment with one of the passengers being an old man in the Franciscan robe. She, troubled and considering her options, placed the unfortunate bundle under the friar's habit. He didn't even have the time to defend himself before a *filanac* shouted: THIS IS A CONTROL. WHAT DO YOU HAVE TO DECLARE?! THE BREAD IS INSIDE ME, THE ROBE IS ON ME, AND THIS THING BETWEEN MY LEGS BELONGS TO THIS LADY HERE! (All laughing). WELL, THE OLD MAN HAS SOME FIRE IN HIM LEFT.]

Alongside the already-described importance (and symbolism) of the Bosnian Franciscans' habit, the example establishes a sense of place primarily because of the image and the mention of the train "Ćiro", which operated on the narrow-gauge line across Bosnia (the first image in the example, Figure 4.3, as well as Figure 4.4). With its characteristic steam locomotive, the train itself remains a very popular symbol of transportation in the Sarajevo area, used by many commuters to reach the city for various reasons – education, trade, tourism, etc.:



Figure 4.4
Ćiro train.

Note. From Zavičajni muzej Travnik, n.d. (muzejtravnik.ba). Copyright 2026 by Zavičajni muzej Travnik.

This is not to say that Ćiro was only a symbol of Sarajevo, but since I am focusing on the Sarajevo perspective of humor, it is necessary to emphasize it.

The extent to which the Sarajevo area population was connected sentimentally to the Ćiro train even in the mid-20th century (the train stopped operating in 1978) is seen in the article by Vidak Klisara (2019), where he conducted interviews with the local people who described the importance of the train in their lives.

One of the most famous Ćiro train stations in Sarajevo is the Bistrik station (Figure 4.5), a national monument:



Figure 4.5
Bistrik station today

Note. Photograph by the author.

Today, the Ćiro narrow-gauge line is being converted into bicycle lanes, an EU-funded project. This is another way of emphasizing the sentiment people feel with the narrow-gauge line in Bosnia and with Ćiro, the train. The track in the Sarajevo area called “Giro di Ćiro Sarajevo-Pala” opened on 6 June 2026 (“Od Sarajeva do Pala”, 2026).

I should note here that the tobacco smuggling women (“duhanke”) and the finance police officers (“filanci”) clearly had their nicknames mentioned in the example, but the practice had long ceased to exist and, although we might argue the indexicality of their nicknames in relation to the Ćiro train operating on the Herzegovina-Bosnia line over a hundred years ago, the contemporary audiences are not familiar with the concept.

The main humorous event here does not contain the Target (TA) KR, since the friar’s panicked answer is not tendentious, unlike, for example, the police officer’s reaction to what the friar said. Humor here arises only as a reaction to the uncomfortable situation the friar is brought in by the female smuggler. The Situation (SI) KR is tobacco smuggling in the Mostar-Sarajevo train, the practice already described in the very example.

The main SO rests primarily on the SEX vs. NO SEX framework. Bosnian Franciscans are Catholic priests and celibacy is one of the traits of their life. Here, the woman catches the Franciscan by surprise when she throws the tobacco package under his habit, hoping the guard will not find it. I should note here also that such behavior would be obscure regardless of whether the passenger is a Franciscan or not. Her move is a prerequisite for the main humor content, and its absurdity is humorous as well, hence, it is an instance of hyperdetermination. In addition, the narrative section includes a euphemism “the unfortunate bundle” for the smuggled tobacco package, hence, it can be said that it is another instance of hyperdetermination.

The Franciscan's honest response to the police officer's question is the main humorous event in this example. The friar is, of course, aware that the woman had inserted something illegal under his habit, but is compelled by his faith to tell the truth, at the same time wishing not to betray the woman. His witty answer brings about another opposition TRUTH vs. LIE, and the main SO is TOBACCO vs. PENIS.

The primary interpretation of the "thing between the legs" euphemism is a sexual organ, and this gives rise to the SO CELIBATE vs. NON-CELIBATE. In this case, the LM is that the priest is sexually interested in the woman, which is the resolution arrived at by the police officer, who comments that the "old man" has some fire in him yet. It means that he came to the conclusion inferentially, by interpreting the implicature, not by resolving the SO, since he was unaware of the bundle placed by the woman under the friar's habit. It should be noted that this, in fact, strips him off his calling – he is no longer seen as a friar, but as an old man.

I should also add that the "omniscient" reader of the comic book may observe the reaction of the police officer on the train as a humor enhancer, since he is not even aware of the bundle under the friar's habit, but immediately interprets the implication as something sexual.

The following example also concerns the SEX vs. NO SEX opposition, this time in a Sarajevo tram.

Figure 4.6 *Key to the monastery*

KLJUČ OD SAMOSTANA



KEY TO THE MONASTERY

The Kreševo guardian arrived in Sarajevo and decided that the best way to reach the final destination was by tram. He was sitting next to a pretty-looking girl. Because of an old woman crossing the street outside the pedestrian crossing (the zebra), the driver suddenly pulled the breaks. And the girl fell straight into the guardian's lap. "OH, HO!" "THAT, MISS, IS NOT A OH, HO, IT IS THE KEY TO THE MONASTERY!"

The sense of place is established in this example for two reasons: one is the exact location of the tram making a slight turn left towards the Baščaršija area in Sarajevo, the very heart of the old town:



Figure 4.7
Sarajevo tram turns left

Note. Photograph by the author.

The sense of place also appears because of the tram, which will be discussed in more detail in the *Top lista nadrealista* section. It is characteristic of Sarajevo and highly popular as a means of transport among its citizens. The image contains the sign GRAS which is the acronym for the public transportation company of Sarajevo. The acronym is written on the tram, and is, thus, indexed. This said, the experiences of public transportation under this company have not always been favorable, which is discussed more in the Sarajevo trolley bus incident meme, in the previous chapter.

Also, Kreševo, mentioned at the very beginning of the narrative section, is a small town famous for the 14th century Bosnian Franciscan monastery ("Povijest samostana", n.d.). The friar in question is the monastery's guardian, or head of the monastery in the Franciscan order, frequently responsible for the monastery keys (Batinić, 1913; Lukić, 2019), although his responsibilities may vary (*Catholic Answers*, 2019).

The NS KR is again the dialogue, as well as the narration characteristic of the comic books. The SI KR is the tram ride and the inevitable gravitational pull as a reaction to the sudden pull of the tram breaks, when a young woman lands in the friar's lap. I should also mention here that the visual presentation of the old woman crossing the street, the driver pulling the breaks and the passengers' faces while falling are part of the backgrounded incongruity in this comic scene: the old lady walking like there

is nothing around her that puts her into danger, the plump tram driver, the exaggerated image of people falling down in the tram with visible fear and confusion over their faces are all part of the humor characteristic of caricatures. It is important to highlight that this entire experience is an example of focalization within the geosemiotic perspective, since this is a clear depiction of the Sarajevo tram ride experience, meaning that the sense of place is triggered.

The SO KR primarily rests on the SEX vs. NO SEX scripts. Her reaction is seen in the exclamation OH, HO, which implies that she felt embarrassment because of the situation in which she landed on his lap. It could also imply that she is flattered that he is so sexually aroused that his penis is hard (METAL vs. PENIS). That is also visually enhanced by the drawing of her face, where she covers her lips as in an embarrassment. Interpretations of her exclamation and her gesture may vary, but the main humorous content is the friar's reaction to her. His interpretation is connected to the script SEX, where the SO leading to humor is KEY vs. (ERECT) PENIS (the adjective HARD describes both), as well as MONASTERY GUARDIAN vs. MAN. The former is the connection to the SEX vs. NO SEX SO, where the fact that the narration in the beginning of scene mentions that the girl is pretty, which serves as an additional information to the reader, and may be considered as important later, when the friar starts reacting to the girl (similar to the Raskin's doctor-patient joke, see more in Attardo, 2020). In this case, once the SEX script is activated, it may be said that the girl's good looks indicate that the guardian found her interesting as a woman.

His reaction, however, is a warning against her possible misinterpretation of his own character, where the monastery key is also an indicator of his position within the Franciscan order. The fact that he is wearing the habit should be an indicator enough, but the girl, as was the case in the previous example, did not observe the guardian as a Catholic celibate priest, but as a man. Here, I do not mean to state that the priests or other people in celibate are unable to feel any kind of desire, but that their dedication is such that it is even offensive to perceive them in their mission as people who succumb to the most instinctual urges.

That said, our perception and the perception of some friars regarding other people and everything that constitutes human nature may significantly be different, as is the case in the following example, an anecdote about late friar Bonifac Badrov, professor at the Franciscan Theology:

Figure 4.8 *What a beautiful creature!***KAKVOG LI LIJEPOG STVORENJA!****WHAT A BEAUTIFUL CREATURE!**

After the completed studies in theology at the Franciscan Faculty of Theology in Sarajevo (located in Bistrik at the time), the quinquennials (fifth year students) had an exam before friar Bonifac Badrov. He was a very thorough professor. Albeit a modest man, he taught philosophy, his subject, with great erudition, even piousness. After the exam and lunch at the professors' hall, coffee was served. A nun postulant was serving. She was a rather pretty girl. Professor friar Bonifac stared at her. When the quinquennials noticed that, they started mumbling. LOOK AT OUR SAINT! And he said: "DEAR LORD, I'M LOOKING AT HOW BEAUTIFUL THIS GOD'S CREATURE IS AND I WONDER HOW BEAUTIFUL THEN DEAR GOD MUST BE!"

The sense of place in this example is established in the initial image, where St. Anthony's monastery in Bistrik, an area in the Old Town, Sarajevo, is drawn. The narrative part also mentions that the Franciscan Theology used to be located there (today, the faculty occupies premises in another part of the city). The location is an important Sarajevo landmark, bearing a special meaning to Sarajevans of different denominations, since many see it as a place of friendliness and worship, referred to as "the church of all Sarajevans" ("Crkva svih Sarajlija – Crkva Sv. Ante Padovanskog", n.d.). The place itself is important only as the location of the anecdote, but does not influence the events.

From a humorous standpoint, the example focuses on the perception of the girl by friar Badrov on the one hand, and by the quinquennials on the other.

The contrast appears within the SO SEX vs. NO SEX as the broadest opposition, within which we can perceive the issues of CELIBATE vs. NONCELIBATE, since they all belong to the Catholic order, as well as VIRTUOUS vs. NON-VIRTUOUS. The last opposition is of a particular importance, since it describes the essence of friar Badrov's character – a deeply spiritual, pious philosophy professor.

Unlike his students who undermine his character by attributing to him the sinful actions and thoughts (in this case, most obviously, lust), Badrov compares the physical beauty of the girl to the moment of God's creation. Her beauty is, as was the case in the previous example, an information of significance, since it does influence the perception of professor Badrov by his students, who think he observes the girl lustfully.

When they whisper "BEHOLD, THIS IS OUR SAINT" they make a sarcastic remark that effectively aims at not only downgrading Badrov's qualities of being a friar, but also an educator/professor. This means that the students are mocking their professor, which means that in this case he is the TA KR. Their judgement is reminiscent of Pontius Pilate's words "Behold your King" (*English Standard Version Bible*, 2001, John. 9:14), and there is a possibility that the words depicted in this example are a deliberate association to this quote. In this case, the sinful comment on the sinfulness of others.

Friar Badrov's answer is fully in line with the devout and spiritual nature of his character. He observes the beauty of the girl not as a manifestation of lust, but through a true moment of creation through divine intervention. His observation is fully in line with the Genesis 1:27 line "So God created mankind in His own image (...)" (*English Standard Version Bible*, 2001).

Although humor in this example may not be as indelicate as in the previous two instances, it is a worthy anecdote to the memory of Bonifac Badrov (1896–1974), a Bosnian Franciscan, philosopher and professor.

Figure 4.9 *An available seat*

MJESTO ZA SJEDENJE



AN AVAILABLE SEAT

Friar Božo Borić²⁷ traveled by the Centrotans bus from Makarska to Sarajevo. In Gradac, a woman attempted to enter the bus, but the driver warned her: THERE ARE NO AVAILABLE SEATS. ANOTHER SARAJEVO-BOUND BUS ARRIVES IN HALF AN HOUR. Wanting to take this particular bus, the woman decided to stand. She reached the seats occupied by friar Božo Borić and a young man. She couldn't contain herself and she commented: NOT EVEN A SINGLE GENTLEMAN IS LEFT. – YOU ARE MISTAKEN, MADAM, THERE ARE GENTLEMEN, BUT THERE ARE NO AVAILABLE SEATS!

²⁷ An article was published upon the passing of friar Božo Borić (2012), emphasizing that he loved Sarajevo, his home town, more than any other place in the world (“Ukop franjevca Bosne Srebrene Božidara Bože Borića”, 2012).

The Situation KR concerns traveling in a crowded Sarajevo-bound bus on a very famous route for Bosnians (especially Sarajevans): Makarska – Sarajevo. For decades, Sarajevans have chosen Makarska (a small coastal town in Croatia) as one of their most favorite vacation destinations (alongside Dubrovnik). The importance of this small town as a holiday destination for Sarajevans is seen, for example, in this 2025 *Biznis Info* article about a new fast road being constructed which would enable all those from Sarajevo to reach Makarska even faster (“Kreće gradnja ceste”, 2025).

The Centrotrans Bus company is, similar to the GRAS company from the “Key to the monastery” example, a Sarajevo-based company, operating both in the city and beyond (regionally and internationally). The company’s name is visible on the bus, hence, it is indexed, and it establishes the sense of place together with the road sign MOSTAR-KONJIC-SARAJEVO, located at the road connecting Sarajevo to the Dalmatian coast (the well-known M-17 regional road). Both the Centrotrans Bus company, as well as the M-17 regional road entail the familiar experience of travel to and from Sarajevo, which includes not only the experience of sightseeing the wonderful nature of Bosnia (the Neretva river canyon, the Herzegovina plateau), but also the ritual of stopping at several small restaurants near Jablanica, a town en route to/from Sarajevo, which are famous for roasted lamb. The restaurants are strategically placed right next to the road and even today the busses (as well as other vehicles, cars, etc.) are seen parked in front of such places.

That ritual has become famous among all citizens of former Yugoslavia, while Sarajevans will make an additional effort and even take some lamb home after returning from vacation at the seaside. Perhaps the most famous such restaurant is the “Lovački dom”, commonly known as “Kod Gojka” (At Gojko’s). Its popularity is seen, for example, in this 2025 article by a Croatian portal *Klik Ploče* (“Kod Gojka”, 2025). Another article (2023) even went as far as to say that the Jablanica lamb is the most famous in the world (“Zašto je jablanička janjetina najpoznatija”, 2023).²⁸

The example focuses on the stubborn woman who would rather stand than wait for another bus to Sarajevo. In fact, she was clearly intent on using the fact that she is a woman to influence some men to let her sit in their place. To that end, she uses implicature by which she is trying to position herself as a person in need and a gentleman should then offer her his seat.

²⁸ M. Grabovac (2024) wrote a comprehensive description of the famous Jablanica restaurants, with some interesting images in his article available at: <https://bljesak.info/gospodarstvo/turizam/Foto-u-jablanici-napravite-nezaboravnu-pauzu-na-va%C5%A1em-putovanju/473606>.

The SO KR is established in friar Božo Borić's response GENTLEMEN vs. NO AVAILABLE SEATS. The LM rests in the realization that he saw through the woman's dishonorable intentions, for she had an option to wait for another bus; instead she chose manipulation and would not mind someone else standing on that long trip to Sarajevo.

In the following example, the issue of making a seat available in public transportation is again treated.

Figure 4.10 *Well, yes to that*



WELL, YES TO THAT

Friar Vitomir Slugić and friar Tomislav Međugorac met in Sarajevo. After lunch, friar Tomislav wanted to travel home. They sat on a tram that went from Baščaršija through the

Cathedral stop towards the Main railway station. Since the Baščaršija was the first station, there were enough empty seats. They sat together. At the first station, a lot of passengers had entered. Among them, there was a partisan officer who moved with difficulty. Friar Vitomir addressed him: please, HAVE A SEAT MISTER CAPTAIN! – COMRADE, I'M NOT A MISTER! – WELL, I APOLOGIZE, BUT BY *MISTER*, I DID NOT IMPLY THE *MISTER* IN A NEGATIVE SENSE – WHO DESPISES EVERYONE, BUT IN A POSITIVE SENSE – A WELL-MANNERED MAN WHO DESPISES NO ONE. – WELL, YES TO THAT!

The Baščaršija setting presented in the first image of the drawing is a very familiar setting to everyone in Sarajevo. To this day (as the Figure 4.11 shows), the view of the old town has changed, but slightly. The tram departs even today from that same initial station, visible both in the drawing and in the photo, although the drawing perspective is different from that in the photo because the Sebilj fountain is not shown in the Figure 4.11.



Figure 4.11
Baščaršija station today

Note. Photograph by the author.

In addition, the description of the number of passengers is similar to today's situation, where slightly fewer passengers enter, but the number increases at the Cathedral station. This is all an established sense of place, and the behavior of the Sarajevo tram passengers has been commented on in the TLN chapter.

Just as the friars are presented wearing their robes, the partisan captain is presented wearing the uniform, with a distinct star on his hat. This is an indexed symbol of the resistance movement during World War II in Yugoslavia, as well as a distinct symbol of the Yugoslav People's Army after

the war. In addition, the red star was also seen on the flag of the country. Hence, the star is indexed for Yugoslavia as a country, as well as the (initially communist but later) socialist ideology that prevailed during the country's existence. In addition, the anecdote takes place after World War II, since the partisan captain enters the tram, which would have been an impossible event during the war, when Sarajevo was occupied by the fascist Independent State of Croatia.

One should be aware, however, that the Yugoslav authorities did not favor religion. Quiet practices were not banned, but the official stance was in accordance with the prevalent socialist ideology. There have been some valuable studies and articles written about religion in the post-World War II Yugoslavia, most notably by Jukić (1981) and Duranović (2021).

In addition, the new form of address was “drug” (“comrade”) instead of “gospodin” (“mister”) since the former marked the way in which the communist and socialist class operated, verbally implying the equality among people, since the latter resembled the “old-fashioned” and bourgeois form of address in their view, expressing privilege of one class over some other. This, however, does not entail that this was a true situation in Yugoslavia: with many beneficial measures introduced aimed at the improvement of lives of all citizens (e.g. free education for all, even obligatory for the first several years of primary school), there always was the class of more privileged citizens.

Another reality of the postwar Yugoslav situation was that many of the people who arrived to towns and cities were not well-mannered; many were fairly uneducated, but were recognized for their special status if they had been members of the partisan movement during the World War II.

These are all some traits of the postwar Yugoslav society that help contextualize the anecdote presented in this example.

The SI KR is a tram ride and the entrance of a passenger with difficulty walking. SOs in the most essential sense concern the framework HIGH vs. LOW STATUS (Raskin, 1985). This primarily concerns the lack of sophistication and social skills of the partisan captain, which will, ultimately, result in him being the TA KR of this humorous example. Furthermore, the SO also includes a very distinct relationship: COMRADE vs. MISTER. This can be considered part of a broader relationship COMMUNISM/SOCIALISM vs. CAPITALISM. As I have already mentioned in the segment above, the form of government has changed so that affected almost all segments of life, including the favorable forms of address. “Comrade” was the favorable, or even desired, form of address, as can be seen from the reaction of the

partisan captain. His reaction taken literally implies the lack of manners. Hence the incongruity rests on the GOOD vs. BAD MANNERS SO, which triggers the reaction of the friar. The polysemic nature of the expression “mister” is the trigger of ambivalence (I refrain from using the term incongruity, for it does not really concern humor) in this case, for it means a) a form of address and b) a well-mannered person, but also a person who may display manners and behavior others, especially less educated and those of the lower class may perceive as snobbish. This last segment is of special importance, because the issue of class was important in the socialist Yugoslavia: everybody was equal (although, as I have already emphasized, that did not entirely correspond with the reality). This other concept is, in fact, similar to the meaning of the word “gentleman” in English, which I did not use in the translation for it is not a form of address during greetings.

The ambivalence results in a response which contains not only definitions of the term, but also reasons behind the word choice of the friar: he meant it not as a form of greeting, an option immediately eliminated by simply not even being mentioned, but as an expression denoting a genuine, well-mannered man, not a crude who dislikes people. This opens a possibility of interpreting the friar’s response as a sarcastic comment, which makes the partisan captain the TA.

In any case, the partisan’s response only highlights the extent of his lack of sophistication, accepting the explanation and takes the seat.

Figure 4.12 *Meho's bathing Maksim***MEHO MAKSIMA KUPA****[MEHO'S BATHING MAKSIM]**

It was after the World War II that many Bosnian friars were jailed without a trial. It happened that a friar shared his cell with a Muslim from Bihać. The Muslim knew that the friar was a Catholic priest, but he saw him do something awkward, that he was praying in an awkward manner. He was reading from a breviary in Latin: INTROIBO AD ALTARE DEI... MEA CULPA, MEA CULPA, MEA MAXIMA CULPA. The Muslim thought about it, and later commented with fellow prisoners: WELL, I SOMEHOW UNDERSTOOD THE FIRST PART: GO, IBRO, WASH THE TOOLS, FOR THE HORSE REQUIRES FREQUENT WASHING. BUT I SIMPLY CANNOT UNDERSTAND THE SECOND PART WHEN HE REPEATS: MEHO'S BATHING, MEHO'S BATHING, MEHO'S BATHING MAKSIM! – WHY WOULD HE NEED TO WASH HIM SO FREQUENTLY?]

In this example, the SI KR is a prison cell, in which an incarcerated friar is praying. The Muslim inmate from a small town in Bosnia is confused by hearing Latin for the first time. The fact that the narrative section in the example emphasizes that the Muslim had been aware that the friar was Catholic indicates that it is not the Christian (Catholic) faith that he was unfamiliar with, but the Latin language. This is confirmed when he expresses confusion to other inmates, stating that he understood the first part of the prayer. In addition, the emphasis that the Muslim is from Bihać, a small town in Bosnia, could be a significant information for the readers, since it is a very small place and in the post-WWII society, the number of illiterate people was significant, especially in the more rural areas.

What he utters gives rise to incongruity, where the SO is LATIN LANGUAGE vs. BOSNIAN LANGUAGE. The incongruity trigger is seen in the section of the utterance when the Muslim says to have understood the first part of the prayer, and then utters nonsensical phrases in Bosnian, which phonically correlate with the Latin prayer: INTROIBO AD ALTERE DEI vs. IDI, IBRO, ALATA²⁹ OPERI, adding that he did not understand the second part of the prayer at all, again uttering nonsense phrases in Bosnian which phonically correlate with Latin: MEA CULPA, MEA CULPA, MEA MAXIMA CULPA vs. MEHO KUPA, MEHO KUPA, MEHO MAKSIMA KUPA.³⁰ The LM follows once the hearers realize that he does not, indeed, understand a word of Latin, and that the confusion of two languages occurred. It is at this point, in fact, that the information about the Muslim's origin (Bihać) comes as important, explaining that the man is uneducated.

That said, the reaction of the other inmate to what the Muslim said also indicates his own lack of education, and is an example of hyperdetermination.

This particular example does not contain the elements of the sense of place as I have discussed so far. However, visually, the prison robes (the characteristic striped garments) are indexed for the prison. Moreover, the mention of the Muslim religion and of the Bosnian town contribute to index the regional sense of place.

²⁹ It should be noted that ALAT is a word also polysemic in nature in the Bosnian language: In the contemporary meaning, it relates to a tool (or a set of tools), while it also means a sorrel horse (Halilović et al., 2010, p. 12).

³⁰ Meho and Maksim are common names in Bosnia.

4.3 Conclusion: *I laugh, therefore I am*

This chapter focused on the analysis of a comic book as humorous content. What makes it unusual is that the Bosnian Franciscans produced it through a series of anecdotes concerning friars and situations they have encountered.

The geosemiotic perspective observed Sarajevo or Sarajevo-related events, but I should emphasize that the location itself did not affect the humorous event. The perspective did, however, emphasize the strong sense of place, since the drawings present the very familiar and detailed representation of the Sarajevo streets and surroundings, which can be seen in, for example, the Sarajevo tram ride experience, the Bistrik station where the Ćiro train used to stop, the Baščaršija perspective, etc.

The GTVH parameters primarily reflected the SO SEX vs. NO SEX script, which included micro scripts, e.g. the friars' celibate and the relationship of friars themselves with the "human" side of life. In addition, the EDUCATION script was also prominent, with the SO varying from the LITERATE vs. ILLITERATE and WELL-BEHAVED vs. MISBEHAVED. These appear in the mockery of the behavior of the illiterate local population (the Muslim prisoner) or the unsophisticated people regardless of their social position (the partisan captain).

The TA KR is primarily seen in the title of the book *Fratri bosanski u stripu: na svoj račun – na svoj način* [Bosnian Friars in a Comic Book: At Their Own Expense – In Their Own Way]. This means that the humor appears as first-person oriented (self-deprecating), and that there is lack of aggressive humor. This humor orientation is, to an extent, in line with the high values associated with the true believers, but that does not mean that the anecdotes do not contain the implied possibilities of the TA KR – the partisan captain is most likely the TA of the Franciscan's irony.

The SI KR is diverse, including public transportation (train, tram), prison and the monastery.

In the introductory section of this chapter, I emphasized that the LA KR can be observed in the Franciscans' habit, which sets them apart from other people. In fact, the anecdotes are humorous because they concern the experience of the Bosnian Franciscans with the ordinary people. In addition, the visual humor is seen through the comic book, where the characters' features are enhanced, contributing to humor.

The chapter on Bosnian Franciscans is important not only because of the unusual, or even unexpected form of humor by which they presented

themselves in a new light – the comic book, but also because this is an unexplored and for many even an unfamiliar book, depicting not only humor but also the lives of Bosnians through the eyes of the friars. That makes it a very valuable read and it is only suitable to end this chapter with Ivan Markešić's quote (2015, p. 13) from his preface to this book: *Rideo ergo sum* [I laugh, therefore I am].

5 Humor in engaged art: Anur Hadžiomerspahić's *Human Condition*

In this chapter, I will introduce humor in engaged art observed in the cycle *Human Condition* by Anur Hadžiomerspahić, known mononymously also as Anur, an award-winning, internationally recognized Bosnian artist.

In the book *ArteFacts: Bosna i Hercegovina na Venecijanskom bijenalu 1993–2003* [ArteFacts: Bosnia and Herzegovina at the Venice Biennale 1993–2003]³¹ (2007), art historian Asja Mandić presented Anur's work as possessing

(...) a technical perfection, and one feels in them a fusion of sophisticated graphic design and original concept. There is no wandering, no oscillation in this type of artistic expression – from the beginning to the end he is fully aware of the style and language he employs. (Mandić, 2007, p. 127).³²

Indeed, Anur is one of the leading voices of the generation which not only saw the destruction of war, but also greatly suffered from its consequences in the sense that the young people, especially young men born in Sarajevo³³ in the 1960s and 1970s, were drafted, were refugees, were killed

³¹ This is a valuable book, since it presents the works of contemporary Bosnian artists. It resulted from an exhibition organized by the Ars Aevi (entitled exactly like that *ArteFacts: Bosna i Hercegovina na Venecijanskom bijenalu 1993–2003* [ArteFacts: Bosnia and Herzegovina at the Venice Biennale 1993–2003]) and was published in Bosnian and in English.

³² More information on Anur's life and work can be found at: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anur_Hadžiomerspahić. It is important to emphasize here that Anur Hadžiomerspahić's art is versatile, encompassing both visual art and music. He is one of the founders of the *Ars Aevi* project, which is the Museum of Contemporary Art in Sarajevo. The building was designed by the famous Italian architect Renzo Piano, and should be soon constructed. The extraordinary collection contains the works of Bosnian and international contemporary artists (more information is available at the Ars Aevi website: <https://www.arsaevi.ba/home>).

³³ It should be noted, however, that my emphasis on Sarajevo does not mean that the horrific experience of war does not affect all people at varying degrees and that such experience was not seen in other places in Bosnia during the war. In that sense, for example, Faruk Šehić (1970), our acclaimed, also internationally-recognized writer, transferred his war experience in Bihać, a town in Bosnia, to his novels, while Aleksandar Hemon

or wounded. Hence the metaphor that they were young birds who had their wings cut off just as they had started spreading them is not a pathetic description, but rather a depiction of strength they showed in the direst of times, continuing to warn against dangers humanity faces at the hands of selfish, powerful elites.

And this is why his cycle of works *Human Condition* is even more important in the contemporary moment, when the world faces an unprecedented danger of global war, economic uncertainty and deterioration of humanistic values (be it in art, education, etc.). In that sense, introducing the *Human Condition* cycle, Mandić emphasized the following:

One of the ways to understand human condition is to view human nature as an arena of conflict between the human emotions of love, altruism and the need for cooperation, on the one hand, and competition, aggression and selfishness on the other. (Mandić, pp. 127–129)

Anur exhibited the cycle for the first time in 1996, in Milan's Istituto Europeo di Design. It is a collection of posters, in black and white, an art form that has a promotional and educational goal (Mandić, 2007, p. 127). He continued working on the project in subsequent years, and Harald Szeemann selected *Human Condition – Made in Bosnia* to be exhibited at the 49th Venice Biennale (Mandić, 2007; Szeemann, 2001). The exhibition focused on works that "(...) reveal anxiety, pain and disappointment in the nature of humans, who are capable of such hatred, murder and war." (Mandić, 2007, p. 127).

Considering the fact that I will analyze a selection of works from the *Human Condition* cycle, it is important to take into account the nature of the posters presenting the grim reality of life,³⁴ not only through the lens of linguistics, but also through humor. This especially when one considers that I am a linguist and an art devotee, not an art historian or an artist.

(1964) wrote about the identity of being a refugee. Hence, my emphasis on Sarajevo in this case stems from two reasons: first, it is Anur's hometown and, second, Sarajevo is the focus of this book. This is in line, in a way, with the sense of place that I have also discussed, but I will reflect upon this later in the chapter.

³⁴ During the siege of Sarajevo, an artistic trio, known as *Trio*, Lejla Mulabegović, Dalila and Bojan Hadžihalilović, designed posters showing the brutal reality of the war. The posters were designed as postcards titled *Greetings from Sarajevo*. The works depict different aspects of modern and contemporary art and logos, adjusted to present the terrible reality of the city at the time. They too would be an interesting analysis from the GTVH and/or geosemiotic perspective (see more at: <https://museuminexile.com/index.php/trio>).

Hence, for the readers more interested in Anur's *Human Condition* cycle, reading Mandić's important chapter is recommended.

My selection of examples for analysis comes from the retrospective exhibition held in 2016 in Sarajevo, at the Collegium Artisticum gallery. Of course, it would be impossible and redundant in this chapter to encompass all the *Human Condition* posters exhibited, so the selection of nine posters for the analysis is the result of my personal preference on the one hand, and on the thematic framework encompassing the most prominent characteristics of the contemporary life I felt important to emphasize on the other.

As this book is concerned with the analysis of Bosnian humor from the geosemiotic perspective, I will first emphasize that the sense of place is difficult to establish in the analysis, except for one example (poster seen in Figure 5.3). This means that the selected examples send a universal message concerning the dilapidated state of contemporary human society, serving as a warning, as has been the case with so many works of art throughout history. Even leaving aside my choice of examples for the analysis, almost the entire *Human Condition* cycle contains works that are impossible to pin down to a single space.

However, it is also important to mention that works from this collection were exhibited at the Sarajevo *Tržnica* (marketplace), as seen in the Figure 5.1 (as well as in some other places around the city). This visual aspect of placing a selection of this cycle immediately establishes the sense of place, since the Sarajevo *Tržnica* was the location of one of the largest massacres in Sarajevo during the siege (*IRMCT*, n.d.), and is today one of the most frequented places of Sarajevans and tourists alike. In that sense, the universality of the message in this case was localized, with Sarajevans immediately connecting the exhibited works to the experience of war and the post-war period. In other words, the "human condition" experience is transposed to the local level and the experience of Bosnians living in contemporary society:



Figure 5.1
Sarajevo Tržnica

Note. From Anur Hadžiomerspahić, *plakati* [Photograph], by N.G., 2023, Radiosarajevo (<https://radiosarajevo.ba/metromahala/kultura/anur-hadziomerspahic-izlozba-radova-priznatog-bh-umjetnika-i-dizajnera-u-galeriji-alu-sarajevo/491248>).

In addition, displaying the works in public spaces was an integral part of the artist's exhibition concept. Because his art was based on a mode he referred to as "artvertising", combining art and advertising, Anur's aim was to take art out of the art galleries and present it directly to people. By formatting and displaying his artwork as advertising, he wanted to communicate directly with people and "meet them where they're at", have them encounter art as they go about their everyday lives. (Tanović, 2016)

Of course, art in general, as well as the *Human Condition* cycle, is part of the universal human experience, where the sense of place is just – everywhere. In the dire times we are witnessing, this exhibition can now be presented (and localized, depending on the collective and individual experience) in Washington, in London, in Sarajevo, in Beijing, in Kuala Lumpur, in Tokyo, in Sydney, etc.

Before I start analyzing the examples through the GTVH, it is also important to address the question of what is humorous in this engaged form of art, which deals with the most serious and even brutal themes? The answer rests primarily on the irony and sarcasm of Anur's posters, aiming not only to entertain, but also to warn or to even painfully remind us of the decline of the society we live in and the general decline of the human condition. He ridicules the unforgiving anti-humanistic practices even we ourselves are frequently victims of, to varying degrees. This, of course, concerns the broadest level of explanation.

More narrowly, it is my intention to show in the linguistic analysis of the examples below that humor appears in sophisticated forms which may or may not be recognized or even appreciated as funny, since some people may find all these themes truly serious and distressing.

Hence, as was the case with the chapter on the Bosnian Franciscans, I will now first introduce the common characteristics of the entire analyzed

section from the GTVH perspective, so as to avoid the unnecessary repetition in the analysis of particular examples.

The LA KR is black and white posters which are in this case a reflection of the artist's social engagement. Hence, the poster is a semiotic strategy aimed at emphasizing the flaws of society through the manipulation of artefacts universally recognized as objects in close relation to a particular activity (e.g. the helmet functioning as a potty).

The NS KR is observed through either a single word, or an extended noun phrase, serving as a link with the visual aspect of the poster. In this way the artist provides the viewer with context. The phrases are written in English but also (in two examples) in Italian. The reason is because, as I have already pointed out, the works were exhibited, and were conceived to be exhibited, in different public venues. So, when they were exhibited at the Coop supermarket in Venice (*Urban magazin*, 2017), for example, the phrases were given in Italian and English, which is in line with Anur's aim to communicate with the public at large, depending on the location where they were displayed.

Thus, the link contained in the above-mentioned phrases, helps the viewers reach the LM, especially in cases when SOs appear more difficult to resolve. Hence, the commentary at the bottom of the poster leads to the incongruity resolution.

That said, I consider that the LM here is present in every example, but understood from my own perspective, since it may happen that some readers/viewers of posters do not reach it or reach some other conclusions. This is why art is versatile, and sometimes difficult to grasp (and so is humor). Hence, I will observe the way in which the SO parameter forms.

I will discuss other parameters as and if they appear in the individual examples.

5.1 Analysis of the *Human Condition*

The first poster (Figure 5.2) in this analysis focuses on war, an inevitable topic in Bosnia and Herzegovina because of the immediate experience in the period from 1992 to 1995, but also globally, when the humanity is facing uncertainty because of the several ongoing conflicts.

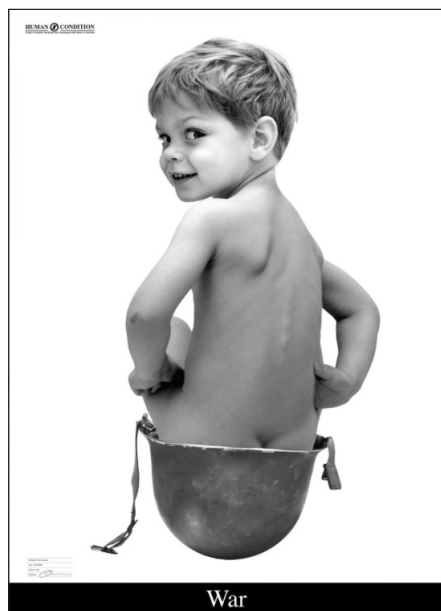


Figure 5.2

War

Note. From *Human Condition*, by A. Hadžiomerspahić, n.d., nomad.ba (<https://nomad.ba/3x/anur-hadziomerspahic-human-condition-1993-1997>). Copyright [2026] by Ulvija Tanović. Reprinted with permission.

A naked child is seen on the poster, sitting on a military helmet. The SO is MILITARY HELMET vs. POTTY, since the only reasonable explanation for a naked child to sit on such an object is because it resembles the potty. In this case, the visual element may at first appear confusing because the object may not be recognized immediately as a helmet, but the belts on each side clearly indicate its usage (the small belts are used to fasten the helmet to the head). Even though this incongruity may be rather easily resolved, the script WAR also aids in reaching the LM, which entails reversal of the usage of the helmet for human excrement instead of the protection of the head, indicating that war is always waste (of life, of resources, of time, etc.). I should add that this script is in line with the opposition EXCREMENT vs. NON-EXCREMENT, which is missing in Raskin's 1985 list of basic oppositions "(...) although a large segment of humor is based precisely on those." (Attardo, 2020, p. 132). The latter contrast will be exemplified in the analysis of the following example (Figure 5.3).

One might also add that the innocence of the child and the smile on the child's face stand in contrast to the war. That is true enough, but such an interpretation is more related to additional perceptions of the poster, adding perhaps to the humor intensity, but not the resolution of incongruity.³⁵

³⁵ Another aspect of the posters, or another way of reading them, is that they are the artist's personal commentary on the "big topics" identified in the text of the poster. So, in

The next example also concerns war, but is treated through a rather different perspective, and is the only segment in the analysis directly mentioning Sarajevo:

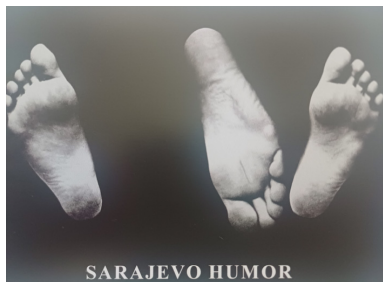


Figure 5.3
Sarajevo Humor

Note. From *ARTEFACTS* (p. 132), by A. Mandć, 2007, Ars Aevi muzej savremene umjetnosti. Copyright 2026 by Ulvija Tanović.

The background of the image is black, while three feet are foregrounded. It is a clear reference to the famous symbol of sex, used worldwide, mainly to introduce the audience to the sexual content of a film, for example. The symbol of four entangled feet is widely used in different media to indicate sex, be it as a warning to viewers of a film about its sexual content, or for some other purposes. However, tracing the original concept and the artist has proven a rather difficult task.³⁶

The three legs presented in the poster may represent, for example, a sexual position where one of the legs is simply not seen (being perhaps bent

this case, it was quite literal, that's why the child at the poster is Jan, the artist's son, not some random child. The message conveyed would be: "I poo on your war and the death it wrought not just with my art but with the literal life I fathered." So, there's also the SO LIFE vs. DEATH in this case. And the reason why I am placing this comment in the footnote is because I was able to retrieve the information about the child and the artist's stance from a personal conversation with the artist's wife and my friend, Ulvija Tanović, which makes this privilege part of the restricted script. Still, as I have mentioned, art and message it conveys will render differently with people and the interpretation will vary. This is then my additional interpretation.

³⁶ It may have been that the symbol originated from the ca. 1970 poster, seen on this image:



Figure 5.4
Couple's Feet

Note. Adapted from Etsy, by Carnaby mfg co. Ca 1970, <https://www.etsy.com/listing/1194084999/vintage-original-1970s-feet-sex-orgasm>.

at the knee). The SO entails the script SARAJEVO HUMOR vs. FEET SEX SYMBOL. In this case, the LM will then be that the person depicted on the poster is disabled because he lost a leg in the war. Hence, this is the case of a PHYSICAL HANDICAP being part of a restricted script, meaning that an audience unfamiliar with the events of the 1992–1995 siege of Sarajevo will not be able to interpret the image. In addition, SARAJEVO HUMOR in the context of this poster may also be part of a restricted script because perhaps not many people are aware that Sarajevans would really make fun of their own misfortunes during the most difficult of times under the brutal siege (which is an issue I discussed in the chapter on Bosnian humor where I reflected on the 1992–1995 war). Of course, this is black humor, self-deprecating, and whether or not people would find it really funny will depend, as always, on individual perception and preferences.

Another interesting perspective of the “human condition” presented in Anur’s posters through the usage of toilet-related objects concerns the issue of, as the artist points out, existence.



Figure 5.5
Esistenza/Existence

Note. From *Human Condition*, by A. Hadžiomerspahić, n.d, nomad.ba (<https://nomad.ba/3x/anur-hadziomerspahic-human-condition-1993-1997>). Copyright [2026] by Ulvija Tanović. Reprinted with permission.

Unlike the previous example, where the helmet may not be immediately identified as such, the objects are in this case easily detectable and the SO is: TOILET SEAT vs. BASKETBALL NET. However, also unlike the

The copyright has been ascribed to Carnaby mfg co, but I cannot claim with certainty that this is the original work that served as an inspiration for the now internationally-recognized symbol, nor that this is/was the original poster. Should any reader find additional information about it, I would much appreciate it.

previous example, reaching the LM with the aid of the script ESISTENZA/EXISTENCE does not help resolve the incongruity. What is more, it could be said that it leaves the viewer even more confused, because interpreting the poster is demanding, which is why it is considered artistic. Without the script EXISTENCE, the image itself would be less demanding to interpret, that is, the SO could be established more easily, leading, for example, to the LM that it is a human (biological) activity performed on an object resembling the hoop. If considered such a way, the humor is unintelligent, non-challenging. Of course, that is not the intention of the poster.

Introducing the ontological element EXISTENCE, in fact, broadens the possible interpretations and perspectives of viewers who may reach different conclusions, while, in some cases, the LM may be left out, which is a matter of personal interpretation and understanding of art. Hence, the LM may be that the existence is difficult (because the biological activity itself can be difficult at times), it can also be futile in nature, since certain people aim to actually score a lot in life through futile activities: all the scoring we strive for in life ends up in the toilet – we strive, we score, we consume only to excrete.

The following poster reflects what could be considered one of the most important aspects of life – love:



Figure 5.6
Love/Amore

Note. From *Human Condition*, by A. Hadžiomerspahić, n.d, nomad.ba (<https://nomad.ba/3x/anur-hadziomerspahic-human-condition-1993-1997>). Copyright [2026] by Ulvija Tanović. Reprinted with permission.

The Bosnian experience of old age frequently entails the practice of placing one's dental prosthesis at night in a glass filled with water, next to the bed. The image depicts two prostheses placed in a single glass, an

utterly unhygienic practice. The image clearly shows that the dental prostheses belong to two people, since the upper is smaller and clearly shows a different teeth structure than the lower one.

The SO is TWO PROSTHESES vs. A SINGLE GLASS. It can be considered that the script OLD AGE is the general context that appears to the poster viewers, but the LM would be difficult to reach without the script LOVE/ AMORE below (even the possibility of a person using a spare prosthesis, which can be connected to the stereotypical view of old people always having a spare item for something, would fail because the two prostheses are not the same).

The LM is that love between two people is presented through their placement of two dental prostheses in a single glass, where they do not mind the lack of hygiene.³⁷ What is more, in a certain metaphorical sense, this can even present a kiss, since the prostheses are placed in a single space, sharing the same liquid (including some amount of saliva). What is more, the Italian word AMORE intensifies the comical effect, since Bosnians view Italian and French as very romantic languages (certainly, they are not the only ones with such general perception).

The following example, however, reflects a darker aspect of human existence – consumerism.

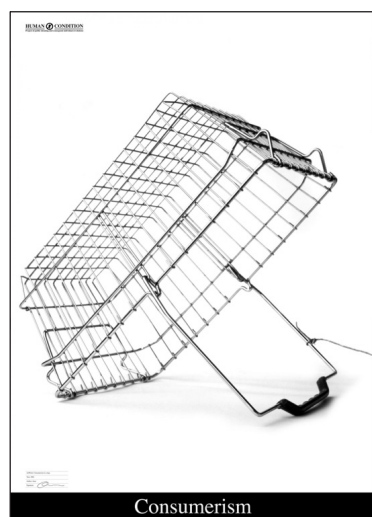


Figure 5.7
Consumerism

Note. From *Human Condition*, by A. Hadžiomerspahić, n.d, nomad.ba (<https://nomad.ba/3x/anur-hadziomerspahic-human-condition-1993-1997>). Copyright [2026] by Ulvija Tanović. Reprinted with permission.

³⁷ The fun fact is that this is actually a documentary photo of Anur's grandparents' prostheses (as emphasized by Hicks, 2017). Still, I will keep this information as a funny anecdote, since this detail cannot be rendered by the audience observing the poster.

The image shows a grocery basket physically turned upside down, assuming an angle where the handle serves as a lever holding it in a reversed position. A small string tied to the handle is essential in presenting the object as a trap. This is the artist's manipulation of the object's function, similar to the example presented in Figure 5.2.

The SO is GROCERY BASKET vs. TRAP. The artist's comment with the script CONSUMERISM aids in reaching the LM, which is that the people are trapped by the consumer culture, like animals in a trap. Of course, it also suggests that people are not even aware of having fallen victims to consumerism. Rather, being trapped in such a state has become habitual with people, with very few individuals even being aware of the danger consumerism entails.

It is also noteworthy to emphasize that the habit has been decades in the making. That said, had Anur created the poster at a later stage, perhaps he would use some other symbol of the consumer society, since nowadays shopping has increasingly digitalized, with people using different platforms to buy groceries, clothes, etc. Still, even in our digitalized existence of online shopping, the grocery basket remains the pictogram we click on to buy things. Just as is the case with, for example, the phone receiver: many have not actually seen it, let alone picked one up. Still, although they have become divorced from their physical reality, they are used as symbols on our smartphones.

And as much as consumerism is an identity-forming activity (Stearns, 2006), the notion of consolation has considerably shifted. This is seen in Anur's poster, shown in Figure 5.8:



Figure 5.8
Tranquility

Note. From *Human Condition*, by A. Hadžiomerspahić, n.d, nomad.ba (<https://nomad.ba/3x/anur-hadziomerspahic-human-condition-1993-1997>). Copyright [2026] by Ulvija Tanović. Reprinted with permission.

A fist is foregrounded holding an object resembling prayer beads, which are used in some religions for repetition of prayers. In the Abrahamic religions which dominate the Balkans, primarily in Christianity (rosary) and Islam (misbaha), such beads are a very familiar concept. However, in place of beads, we observe pills. The SO KR is PRAYER BEADS vs. PILLS³⁸. The script TRANQUILITY may aid in reaching the LM where the relationship between the contemporary life where people living under the burden of an ever-increasing stress more and more seek comfort in using pills as a form of tranquilizer and even to achieve peace of mind rather than finding consolation in the prayer, which proves insufficient.

This is, in a way, in line with the consumer culture where there is an almost instinctual habit to constantly purchase unnecessary items, people in this case will reach for sedatives to find some form of comfort or inner peace through the unnecessary usage of pills (many articles treat the issue of depression in society and the overuse of anti-anxiety medication and antidepressants, e.g. Conti et al. 2011; Evans & Sullivan, 2014; etc.).

Another form of addiction in the contemporary society concerns the media. For decades already, we have been hearing from mental health experts warning against the information overload and the influence of different media on human mental condition and reasoning (e.g. Alavi et al., 2011; Višnjić et al., 2024; Soriano-Molina et al., 2025; etc.). The term ‘infocixation’ (Dias, 2014) is a good illustration of this human condition. This especially concerns the digital age, where owing to different internet platforms people are exposed to an immense amount of information, even becoming even blind to personally experiencing of the world and using different modes of learning. The poster presented in Figure 5.9 illustrates this:

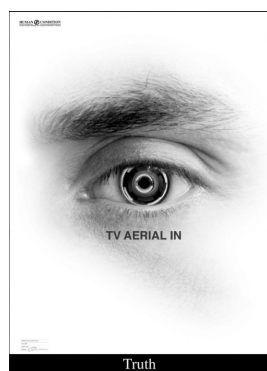


Figure 5.9
Truth

Note. From *Human Condition*, by A. Hadžiomerspahić, n.d, nomad.ba (<https://nomad.ba/3x/anur-hadziomerspahic-human-condition-1993-1997>). Copyright [2026] by Ulvija Tanović. Reprinted with permission.

³⁸ I should emphasize here that there may be people who will immediately recognize that these pills are Prozac. Still, this does not at all have to be the case.

The poster depicts a human eye with intense shading in the iris and pupil area. The text immediately below the eye reads TV AERIAL IN indicating that the human eye has a TV aerial inserted. The SO in this case is EYE vs. TV AERIAL. The image alone would be almost impossible to interpret without the TV AERIAL IN script, since, even with the script TRUTH at very bottom of the poster, it would not carry any intended value for the human weakness to digital media.

The LM rests in the realization (the truth) that people have become addicted to the media, and in the contemporary age, to the digital content. Never before have we been more exposed to different kinds of information and never before have we been less able to reach logical conclusions or form our own opinions, which is, as Christopher Roosen (2019) emphasized, an information paradox.

Although the concept of aerials (internal and/or external) has become rather obsolete, especially in the last decade with the advancement of digital media, the overexposure, manipulation and dependence on the media has been a burdensome trait of contemporary humanity, as we seek comfort and escape from reality, aligning with in the previous two examples, depicting other major addictions, consumerism and pills.

Figure 5.10 depicts another obsession of contemporary society – appearance:



Figure 5.10
Appearance

Note. From *Human Condition*, by A. Hadžiomerspahić, n.d, nomad.ba (<https://nomad.ba/3x/anur-hadziomerspahic-human-condition-1993-1997>). Copyright [2026] by Ulvija Tanović. Reprinted with permission.

The image depicts a female body in a dress, posing. A hanger is seen in place of the head. The SO KR is HEAD (the most important and distinctive

part of human body, containing the brain, the features, everything that makes a person immediately distinguishable from others) vs. CLOTHNG HANGER (an inanimate object used for hanging clothes). The script APPEARANCE leads to the resolution of incongruity (LM) in that in the contemporary world the female personality is subordinated to the physical appearance. Hence, the society favors trends over people, suggesting an emptiness of character. I could also bring the image to the metaphorical level of FORM vs. SUBSTANCE relationship and say that the contemporary society does not favor the distinctive character traits of people, who become spiritually hollow when they focus on external appearance.

Anur's depiction of the dangers, emptiness, all the negative aspects of contemporary life result in the alienation of the individual from the society, as depicted in Figure 5.11:

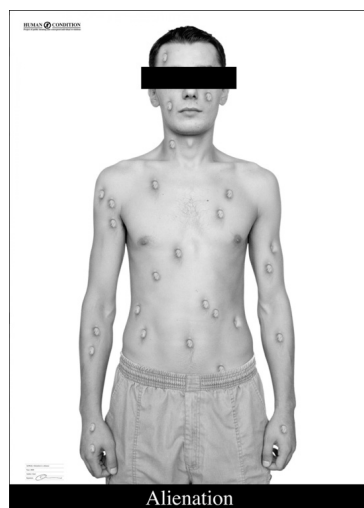


Figure 5.11
Alienation

Note. From *Human Condition*, by A. Hadžiomerspahić, n.d, nomad.ba (<https://nomad.ba/3x/anur-hadziomerspahic-human-condition-1993-1997>). Copyright [2026] by Ulvija Tanović. Reprinted with permission.

The image shows a male body with a black line censoring the eyes, making the detection of the individual difficult. This resembles medical research photos of human subjects. Hence, the SO appears in the HEALTHY vs. DISEASED scripts. The belly button is here placed all over the body, and this may be even challenging to detect in the photo (the dots may appear as anything else, not necessarily as belly buttons). The SO is NATURAL vs. UNNATURAL, since the human body contains only one belly button and which is, of course, located in the navel. The LM is reached through the comment Alienation, since the viewer may render that the belly button is the first element of alienation of a person – from their mother, at birth. As

life goes by, alienation from people, places and things becomes inevitable. The belly buttons here are a representation of different forms of alienation a person experiences in their lifetime. And the number of alienations is quite significant. And that is, indeed, the disease.

5.2 Anur Hadžiomerspahić's humor – final remarks

The chapter on humor in engaged art focuses on the acclaimed Bosnian artist Anur Hadžiomerspahić's *Human Condition* cycle. The aim was to observe humor as it appears on his posters, a form of artistic expression frequently used for advertising or educational purposes, or, in Anur's words, "artvertising". By these posters, he communicated with the public about the negative aspects of contemporary life.

Humor here is not everyday and easy-to-reach. I emphasized that Anur's form of engagement with the audience in this cycle was rather immediate, which means that the key message linking the image with his idea/perception of the contemporary life is displayed in a single word or a phrase written in Italian or in English, depending on the location where the posters were displayed – ideally at a public place, a supermarket (e.g. Venice) or at a marketplace (e.g. Sarajevo).

That means that the sense of place is difficult or even impossible to establish when these posters are observed in isolation, for they become localized once exhibited at a certain location, where people will then, depending on their experience, interpret the message: the *War* poster, for example, will most certainly resonate more deeply at the Sarajevo marketplace than in Venice, because of the immediate experience of war in Sarajevo. The prayer beads that are presented as prescription pills on the *Tranquility* poster will also resonate with the local audience since they are widely used in Bosnia, especially by Christians and Muslims. Also, black humor observed in the *Sarajevo Humour* poster is a fine example of the way in which citizens of Sarajevo joked about their misfortunes in the most difficult times.

As far as the GTVH analysis is concerned, it focused on the universal message of posters regarding the contemporary life, save for one example (the *Sarajevo Humour* poster).

In that sense, I emphasized that the LA parameter in all cases is the poster as a semiotic strategy where the artist manipulates artefacts to denote a particular activity or state. The NS KR is the highly important single word or a noun phrase where Anur brings the viewers closer to his intended meaning of the image he presents in the poster.

I also highlighted that the SO KR is observable in all the examples, but also the LM KR, because if the meaning (the message) behind the poster is rendered, it follows that incongruity is resolved.

Apart from the aforementioned examples of the funny relationship of people towards love and war, other examples treat the dangers and, perhaps, inevitability of consumerism, media manipulation and superficiality (intellectual, analytical, emotional, etc.), controlling our lives, and we are then left with the most difficult human condition, a disease – alienation.

6 Top lista nadrealista (TLN)

The *Top lista nadrealista* [Surrealist Top List] show has become a synonym for Bosnian humor throughout Yugoslavia. In the chapter on Bosnian humor, I briefly introduced the show, its significance and the people behind it, so the interested readers can go to the section 1.5.1 for additional information. I will here again emphasize that their humor dominated the 1980s and early 1990s Yugoslavia, especially since the television aired it at one of the prime slots.

To this day, the TLN show remains a special, dominant force of popular humorous expression, especially among the Gen X population that can well remember not only their humor, but also the circumstances, political and other, that had prevailed in the country at the time.

What is so interesting about the TLN show? In addition to the humor appealing to a wide-range audience, this was a form of social criticism. The socialist authorities obviously did not have much objection to the show, given the fact that they allowed it to be aired, most probably because they did not think it would and could cause any uprising against the system at the time. In addition, after Tito's death in 1980, some cracks in the country started to show, with a prevailing sense of the world that was about to change: the Iron Curtain was nearing its end, as the process of the European unification, peaking in 1989 with the fall of the Berlin Wall, was approaching. That meant that some new, different voices started to emerge in the country which was not completely freed from the strict system of control, but the grip started loosening.

In the following section, I will analyze the selected scenes from the show. The selection is clearly based on my personal preferences, in other words, favorite sketches, but most probably other TLN viewers would find these sketches as interesting, since these particular scenes were retold for days after the premiere, in anticipation for the next episode. I am aware that the selection might vary among the readers acquainted with the TLN humor, but to those unfamiliar with their concept, I hope to be able to provide a glimpse of the famous *Nadrealisti*, who certainly remain one of the staples of humor in Bosnia.

The scenes will be analyzed through screenshots, since the materials are sketches publicly available on YouTube. I will provide a brief description of the sketches selected for the analysis so that readers unfamiliar with the TLN show are able to gain some insight into the context. I will also provide the transcription and the translation of the important humorous segments.

6.1 Little Red Riding Hood porn film

The Little Red Riding Hood (in Bosnian: “Crvenkapica”) sketch unfolds as a porn movie. That is seen in the figures 6.1 and 6.2, where the caption reads: *Prvi YU porno* [the first Yugoslav porn film], followed by the title *Crvenkapica u carstvu čula* [Little Red Riding Hood in the Realm of the Senses], implying the famous 1976 erotic art film *In the Realm of the Senses* (Ōshima et al., 1977). This means that a global storyline (a fairytale and a foreign erotic film) is adjusted to the local context.



Figure 6.1
Prvi YU porno



Figure 6.2
Crvenkapica u carstvu čula



Figure 6.3
Bridge in the background

Note. Screenshots are from “TLN, Crvenkapica u carstvu čula” [Video], by the buncinglemon, 2012, YouTube (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5IJimzgwImw&t=24s>). Copyright 2026 by Top lista nadrealista. Screenshots by author.

The entire sketch is in the German language, which is a reaction to the popularity of German porn films in Yugoslavia. The premise is that the Little Red Riding Hood runs into the Big Bad Wolf, saying she is in a hurry to deal with a problem with her mathematics homework assignment. The Wolf says he too has a problem, a sexual problem, and the two agree to first deal with the Wolf’s issue and then with the homework.

Yugoslav authorities were very strict in attempts to ban the distribution of pornographic content, but were in many respects unsuccessful, since the black-market distribution was thriving at the time, as was discussed in the 1971 *Yugopapir* article, emphasizing that freedom was greater in Germany and that perversion was sought after, as well as that the Yugoslav militia was involved in preventing and seizing the activities of the local porn film producers (“Porno pošast u Jugoslaviji”, 1971).

Figure 6.1 shows Little Red Riding Hood strolling through the forest with the Wolf. From the geosemiotic perspective, the background of the image does not contain any connections to the Sarajevo setting, since the two could be strolling through any forest. However, Figure 6.3 depicts an image where a slightly arched bridge in the background reveals the exact location of the sketch: *Vrelo Bosne*, a huge green area encompassing the Bosna river spring, containing many pedestrian lanes and areas suitable for picnic. This is a protected natural area, highly popular among Sarajevans and tourists alike (*Kantonalna javna ustanova za zaštićena prirodna područja*, 2024). The curvature of the bridge and its fence are very characteristic of this location, and the sense of place is immediately established for Sarajevans and the people familiar with the city. The location in the sketch thus changes from a family-oriented outing area to a porn film shooting location.

Little Red Riding Hood is dressed as usual, with a red hat and an apron, carrying a basket of flowers. The person accompanying her is the Wolf,

more clearly visible in Figure 6.2. The actor playing the wolf (whom people familiar with the TLN show will recognize as Branko Đurić Đuro, which will also contribute to humor as far as the local audience is concerned) wears the mask, but also a sweater with the *Vučko* image. This is geosemiotically significant, since the *Vučko* wolf was the Sarajevo Olympic Games' mascot. The *Vučko* image is, thus, indexed for the 1984 Olympics held in Sarajevo, but, in this instance, it is also transposed to denote the big bad wolf aura around the anthropomorphized character in this "porn film" TLN sketch. The sweater itself, because of the *Vučko* mascot, is a geosemiotic marker of the location: Sarajevo.

Hence, what we see in this instance is a focalized perspective within the geosemiotic framework, where the location is deliberately manipulated so as to enhance humor (an outing area becomes the scene of a porn film) and where the mascot is used to portray one of the characters in the porn film. All these are instances of backgrounded incongruities, especially the Big Bad Wolf, and fall within the Situation KR of the GTVH.

Also, within the GTVH framework, the NS KR is observed in figures 1 and 2, where a text is written in white, italic. Given the familiar background of the fairy tale, this text (although part of a sketch and, in this case, a screen-shot) visually resembles a meme. The text provides a context of the sketch.

As far as the SO KR is concerned, several incongruities can be observed. First, there is the FAIRY TALE vs. PORN FILM opposition, with LITTLE RED RIDING HOOD and the WOLF as part of the FAIRY TALE script.

The script BIG BAD WOLF is opposed to the script VUČKO. This opposition does not entail the general framework of this sketch (SEX), but the metaphorical representation of *Vučko*, the mascot, as the Big Bad Wolf is part of backgrounded incongruity, since it does appear as a humorous content but it is not the main reason of humor in this sketch. Hence, we can conclude that this opposition falls within the general framework of the GOOD vs. BAD scripts.

The script PORN FILM includes both the script LITTLE RED RIDING HOOD IN THE REALM OF THE SENSES, as well as the erotic film IN THE REALM OF THE SENSES, which is implied in the title of this TLN sketch. This is where the SEX super-script appears as the main humorous framework in this sketch: the intention of the Wolf in this case is not to eat the girl, but to have sex with her. Figures 6.2 and 6.3 reflect this, where the Big Bad Wolf is seen gazing at and then touching Little Red Riding Hood's bottom. That said, we can add that the changed storyline of the Little Red Riding Hood also falls

within the opposition of general scripts POSSIBLE vs. IMPOSSIBLE because of the sexual drive of the wolf, not his hunger, as is seen in the fairy tale.

The script PORN FILM is also in opposition to the script VRELO BOSNE, since, as I have described earlier in the text, this is an outing area and a protected landscape, and this also occurs within the POSSIBLE vs. IMPOSSIBLE framework. In addition, tents are not common in the Vrelo Bosne area, because people either use the benches and the local restaurants and cafes, or maybe blankets. The tent, seen in Figure 6.3, and which will later be seen as the central location of the entire sketch is a visually expressed metaphor for the Little Red Riding Hood's house. In that sense, we can also observe the opposition of TENT and HOUSE scripts.

As far as the LM KR is concerned, it can be said that the resolution of the opposing scripts is rather inferential. Backgrounded incongruity that the audience may observe is that it is the woods-like location and that the tent serves a house in this sketch because of the surrounding terrain that resembles a clearing in the forest, which is where the grandmother's house is located in the fairy tale. Also, the Little Red Riding Hood fairy tale is used as a base for the fairy tale porn fantasy sketch, in which the Big Bad Wolf has intentions other than those presented in the typical fairy tale plot.

In the following segment, an array of characters joins Little Red Riding Hood and the Big Bad Wolf in the tent, as is seen in figures 6.4–8:



Figure 6.4
Hunter



Figure 6.5
Sister



Figure 6.6
Random girls



Figure 6.7
Grandmother



Figure 6.8
Footballer

Note. Screenshots are from “TLN, Crvenkapica u carstvu čula” [Video], by the buncinglemon, 2012, YouTube (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5IJimzgwImw&t=24s>). Copyright 2026 by Top lista nadrealista. Screenshots by author.

Some of the characters include those who appear in the fairy tale – the Hunter (Figure 6.4) and the Grandmother (Figure 6.7). There is a character that physically resembles Little Red Riding Hood (Figure 6.5), who turns out to be her sister, but that is only deduced from the video, not from the image itself, although it may be presupposed. Some other random characters are shown, namely, two young women (Figure 6.6) and a footballer (Figure 6.8). The footballer’s dress is indexed from the Bosnian perspective as the *Željezničar* football (soccer) club³⁹ (one of the two major football clubs in Sarajevo) jersey is observed. A footballer wearing the *Željezničar* club jersey and participates in the orgy significantly contributes to humor.

This array of characters going under the tent in a porn film signals orgy, hence, from the GTVH perspective, the following scripts appear: SEX with ORGY as the accompanying script, as well as PERVERSION, given the previous emphasis on perversion in the German porn films (cf. the 1971 newspaper article presented above). INCEST appears as part of the PERVERSION script because of the involvement of the Little Red Riding Hood’s sister and grandmother in the orgy. I should note that a number of characters is able to enter the relatively small tent (seen collapsing in the video at a later stage), which is also an SO: POSSIBLE vs. IMPOSSIBLE, since it is physically impossible for a small object to hold a large number of people.

Also, GRANDMOTHER appears as a script in opposition to ORGY, or even SEX as the broadest general SO framework. In addition, the grandmother in this sketch appears wearing the traditional clothing, which is particularly humor-inducing. The reason for this rests in the fact that the clothes she wears are typical of the Bosnian old women, usually from villages.⁴⁰ Her

³⁹ I should add that the Yugoslav national football team also wore predominantly blue, sometimes blue-and-white jersey, similar to that of the *Željezničar* football club from Sarajevo.

⁴⁰ This type of clothes is not seen exclusively on some old women in Bosnia, but also wider, in the entire Balkan region, but I, of course, am providing the Bosnian perspective.

clothing style also raises the sense of place, since her clothing is rather traditional (by this I mean “old-fashioned”, since these clothes are not indexed for the Bosnian womenswear as seen in museums nowadays). This means that the traditional values that are here being challenged. Hence, the overlap of scripts TRADITIONAL VALUES and ORGY/PERVERSION come to the forefront. In addition, the fact that she walks with support of a cane indicates that she is in some pain or is staggering, while then she partakes in an orgy is also a humorous opposition: ORGY vs. LOW MOBILITY.

The SI KR entails that the various characters in the sketch are involved in the orgy, which is practically normal for such an activity, but the types of characters appearing are humor triggers. The hunter was supposed to kill the wolf and save the girl and her grandmother, instead, he joins them in sex; the same applies to the grandmother, who was supposed to be a victim but is here a willing participant in an orgy. Little Red Riding Hood’s sister, as well as the two random girls and a random footballer are but weird additions to this event (in line with the surrealist humor of the entire show).

This sketch primarily rests on the SOs FAIRY TALE vs. PORN MOVIE; TRADITIONAL VALUES vs. PERVERSION; PORN FILM vs. THE VRELO BOSNE AREA; THE BIG BAD WOLF vs. VUČKO. Of course, I do not exclude the possibility of some additional interpretations, but these are the most prominent in this sketch.

The following sketch also involves localization of a global storyline, in this case a famous film.

6.2 The Jelena Hunter

The premise of the sketch is a film award presentation ceremony, and the announcer says that a clip from the famous film *The Deer Hunter* would be shown. This is where the audience makes a connection to the famous 1979 film by Michael Cimino, but the sketch focuses on a different plot, where a hunter is looking for a girl, Jelena. The title is a pun because the film was translated verbatim into the Bosnian language – “Lovac na jelene”, but the TLN sketch uses the homophonic nature of the female name Jelena, which sounds exactly the same as the plural form of the noun “deer” (accusative case) in Bosnian. Once the clip is shown, the audience sees familiar places in Sarajevo and a fully armed hunter, looking for women, asking them their name.

Hence, this pun, from the GTVH perspective entails LA KR so that title of the film in its original translation (as I have said, the verbatim

translation) “Lovac na jelene” is manipulated to create another meaning, where a woman “Jelena” is being hunted.

Figures 6.9–12 show familiar locations in Sarajevo:



Figure 6.9
Hunter in Veliki park



Figure 6.10
Woman in Veliki park



Figure 6.11
Hunter in ćevabdžinica

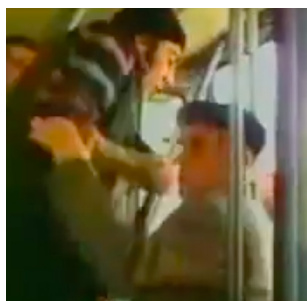


Figure 6.12
Hunter in a tram

Note. Screenshots are from “Top Lista Nadrealista – Lovac na jelene” [Video], by iscco, 2010, YouTube (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TqcTwHUflYY>). Copyright 2026 by Top lista nadrealista. Screenshots by author.

Figures 6.9 and 6.10 show the *Veliki park* area in Sarajevo, at the very center of the city. The characteristic lampposts and an old Ottoman graveyard are clearly seen. In addition, the park is located on a mild slope, hence the uneven terrain is also geosemiotically significant. The incongruity here rests in the transformation of the park into a hunting ground, where women named Jelena are seen as prey, and it is another example of the focalized perspective within the geosemiotic framework. Still, in this case, it is important to emphasize that the entire city, in the hunter's mind, is transformed into the hunting ground. Hence, the transformation of space in that regard is from the hunter's perspective, not from the perspective of other people seen in the sketch, which enhances humor in the entire scene. In addition, backgrounded incongruity is also the very appearance of the hunter because he does not fit the geosemiotic space: it is the Sarajevo city park, and the people around (seen in Figure 6.9 in the background), including the woman he is after (Figure 6.10), are dressed and behave normally.

Also, there is no dialogue in the sketch almost to the very end: the only verbal exchange is between the hunter and random women – he asks them their name, they answer the question. Hence, the incongruity contained in the mismatch between the title of the sketch and the armed hunter walking around Sarajevo is resolved once the viewers realize that he is after a woman called Jelena. That means that the viewers revert to the secondary interpretation of the semantic oppositions of homophonous scripts JELENE and arrive at the resolution – the hunter is hunting women.

We may also expand this to say that the overall interpretation is that the TLN sketch mocks the title of the film, using this linguistic, homophonous feature in the Bosnian language, introducing a new situation where the new plot is a tragic love film, not the war drama. That entails that in the GTVH perspective, the SI KR is the hunt for a human girl.

Figures 6.11 and 6.12 are also humorous, but are not visually even connected to the main SI. Figure 6.11 thus shows the hunter eating *ćevapi* (a dish also discussed in the section 3.2.2), at a well-known location in Sarajevo – the Old Town, i.e., the *Baščaršija* area. These are the traditional traits of cultural heritage introduced by the Ottomans during their reign (for more on that period, see Chapter 1), which Bosnians, especially Sarajevans immediately recognize. Hence, the sense of place is established in this example, and the *ćevapi* dish on the table is indexed for the Sarajevo *ćevabdžinica* restaurants, while the traditional crafts shop in the background is also indexed for the *Baščaršija* area of Sarajevo. Again, incongruity rests in the hunter and the gun he holds on the table while eating.

In that sense, SOs are ČEVAPI vs. GUN; HUNTER vs. BAŠČARŠIJA. This too is backgrounded incongruity, since the main storyline in the sketch is the literal hunt for a girl.

Figure 12 is another example of backgrounded incongruity, but, in this case, the hunter, who can be seen standing in the tram, is not as prominent. Geosemiotically, the Sarajevo tram is important because it is one of the most popular, even reliable, means of transportation in the city (I have discussed the Sarajevo tram experience in the section 4.2). However, Sarajevans have been known for frequently not following public transportation etiquette rules, which is shown in the Figure 6.12. The hunter and an older gentleman come into contact at the exit from the tram. The passengers should first be allowed to leave the vehicle before others enter, which is not the case here, and the old man is clearly misbehaving. Hence the main script opposition in this jab line is ETIQUETTE vs. NO ETIQUETTE. The behavior of people in the Sarajevo public transportation is such that this scene brings to attention not the armed person in the tram, but the behavior of passengers. Citizens of Sarajevo are here the TA KR.

The last section in this segment of analysis shows a familiar location in Sarajevo – the *Alipašino polje* neighborhood, a working-class suburb:



Figure 6.13
“One shot” mantra



Figure 6.14
Jelena dies

Note. Screenshots are from “Top Lista Nadrealista – Lovac na jelene” [Video], by iscco, 2010, YouTube (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TqcTwHUflYY>). Copyright 2026 by Top lista nadrealista. Screenshots by author.

The blue skyscraper visible in the background of Figure 6.13 establishes the sense of place, since it is located in the *Alipašino polje* area of Sarajevo. The hunter is seen aiming at a woman (an indication that he has found a Jelena), in front of the building. Figure 6.14 shows her lying on the ground

with a gunshot wound to her heart. The main script in this case is KILLING OF A GIRL, and from today's perspective, this depiction may even be considered controversial, since the Bosnian society has been increasingly raising awareness against femicide: the number of such deaths reached a staggering 35 in the period from 2023 to 2024 (Krstović, 2025). However, in this case, black humor is realized with the background knowledge that this is a sketch parodying the famous film, and that homophony is used as the humorous trigger. These two particular images are in contrast to the film in the "one shot" mantra: Mike, the film character, kills the deer with one shot, while in this case the hunter kills Jelena, the girl, with "only" one shot. The SOs contrasted here are WILDLIFE vs. HUMAN BEINGS and the humorous trigger is that they both here fall under the script PREY. In addition, scripts URBAN AREA and HUNTING GROUNDS are in contrast, under the wider SO NORMAL vs. ABNORMAL and LIFE vs. DEATH.

6.3 Swedish migrants in Sarajevo

The sketch starts as a TV report from one of the Sarajevo patisseries suspected to employ illegal migrants from Sweden, a country this sketch describes as deeply troubled by civil unrest due to some problems with Eskimos. In the 1980s, many people in Bosnia would tie Nordic countries to Eskimos, polar bears and the royal penguins, regardless of the geographical and other relevant facts concerning these people and animals.

Also, in former Yugoslavia, ethnic Albanians used to run patisseries, serving some famous delicacies, for example, *tulumba*, a dessert similar to churros, as well as crème desserts like *krempita* and *šampita*, as well as ice creams, lemonade and *boza*, a fermented beverage. Such places in Sarajevo are very rare today.

The reporter (Figure 6.15) is standing in front of one of the most famous "Albanian patisseries", which can clearly be recognized by elder members of the audience, since the place has closed in the meantime. Older Sarajevans will immediately identify the characteristic wall tiles in that particular patisserie, which was located in the Kralja Tomislava street, in the city center, as well as the beverage machine and the ice cream cones, indexed for such places.

This sketch uses the Sarajevo "Albanian patisserie" without changing its function. Hence, this is the non-focalized perspective of the geosemiotical framework. In fact, the patisserie and the fictional Albanian owner are used in the sketch to enhance the stereotypical view of Albanians. This

means that the situation in the country at the time was unsteady, and the TLN show had clearly found a way to address that issue.



Figure 6.15
In front of the patisserie

Note. The screenshot is from “Top Lista Nadrealista – Strani (Svedjani) radnici u Sarajevu” [Video], by Top Lista Nadrealista & Slozna braca, 2013, YouTube (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0_1RZDdmsYY). Copyright 2026 by Top lista nadrealista. Screenshot by author.

The man in white, dressed as a tennis player gives rise to incongruity, since such people would never be seen working at a place like that. The SO in this case is PATISSERIE vs. TENNIS PLAYER. In this instance it is not the white color of the man’s clothes, but the sweat bands that indicate that he is dressed as a tennis player.

The SI KR is that the TV news reporter presents the issue of illegal migrants from Sweden, and is reporting from one such location, a patisserie where they are supposedly working, ran by an Albanian *Šefčet Haljimi* and his sons *Džej Ar Haljimi* and *Jok Ju Ar Haljimi*.

The stereotypical view of Albanians in the former Yugoslav area is that they are well-connected, frequently crime-prone. Apart from that, Albania was seen by Yugoslavs as underdeveloped, to an extent that there was a joke that circulated (and made famous by another popular comedy, the *Audicija*, described in the section 1.5.3): “Jebo zemlju kojoj je Albanija zapad” [Screw a country to which Albania is the west], as a response to the question why the then-Yugoslav republic of Macedonia was a bad place to live in.

This said, the TA KR is Albanians, and the mockery is particularly seen in their names. The last name *Haljimi* is Albanian, and some varieties exist, depending on their location: Chalimi, Halimy, etc. (*Acta Croatica*, 2026), as well as the name *Šefčet*. However, his sons’ names are made-up, and are aimed at mocking the Albanian names many Yugoslavs perceived as funny: *Džej Ar* (J. R.), the name derived from the then-very famous US soap opera *Dallas*, as well as *Jok Ju Ar*, which is a wordplay combining a Turkish negation “jok”, still used informally in Bosnian, to give it an air of the *Dallas* show atmosphere. These names are, in fact, jab lines.

The main SOs that appear are ALBANIAN NAMES vs. MADEUP NAMES and ALBANIANS vs. YUGOSLAVS; SWEDISH IMMIGRANTS vs. ALBANIAN EMPLOYER.

The inside of the patisserie is incongruous because the two people are playing tennis behind the counter, as Figure 6.16 shows:

Figure 6.16 *A tennis match*



Note. The screenshot is from “Top Lista Nadrealista – Strani (Svedjani) radnici u Sarajevu” [Video], by Top Lista Nadrealista & Slozna braca, 2013, YouTube (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0_1RZDdmsYY). Copyright 2026 by Top lista nadrealista. Screenshot by author.

This is a reference to the famous Swedish tennis players, most notably, Mats Wilander and Stefan Edberg, who both competed against the famous Yugoslav tennis star Slobodan Živojinović. In the video, as they are playing, *Money, Money, Money*, the famous ABBA song, can be heard in the background. All these were stereotypical depictions of Swedes and their culture by Yugoslavs, and this is another example of backgrounded incongruity.

As the interview progresses, the Swedish waiter presents an ice-cream serving to the reporter on a tennis racket (Figure 6.17), while the man in the center of the image, wearing the “Hawaiian-style” shirt and some jewelry and smoking, is the Albanian boss, Šefćet Haljimi:

Figure 6.17 *An ice cream serving*



Figure 6.18 *Hand kissing*



Note. The screenshot is from “Top Lista Nadrealista – Strani (Svedjani) radnici u Sarajevu” [Video], by Top Lista Nadrealista & Slozna braca, 2013, YouTube (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0_1RZDdmsYY). Copyright 2026 by Top lista nadrealista. Screenshot by author.

His appearance does not entail his Albanian ethnicity: it may be tied to scripts such as UNDEREDUCATED, KITSCH, even CRIMINAL, but not necessarily ALBANIAN. However, what reveals his stereotypical Albanian character is the accent, mocked by Yugoslavs because of the peculiar pronunciation. That primarily concerns the manner in which Albanians are perceived to pronounce the voiced palatal lateral approximant /ʎ/, present in both languages, Albanian and Bosnian. In this sketch, the Šefčet character is prone to lambdacism, i.e., overusing the /ʎ/ sound and placing it even where it does not exist in a word (he, for example, says in English to the workers: /pʎiz/ instead of /pli:z/, etc.). The relationship between Haljimi and the Swedish worker is the one that could be easily be described as exploitation, observed in Figure 6.18. The ice cream portion served on a tennis racket, Šefčet Haljimi's appearance and the hand kissing gesture are all examples of backgrounded incongruity.

The following transcript shows Šefčet Haljimi's answer to the reporter's question about his satisfaction as an employer with the workers from Sweden:

[HALJIMI: *Kvajat pljiz. Ja misljam da tu nema nikakvih problema da je to sve odlično, ja sam zaposljam momke iz Švedska to kulturni momci, čisti, kod njih nema nikakva nešto dljaka da padne u sljadoljed to je odlično, to su kulturni momci, misljam da njema njikakvih problema.*

REPORTER: *A zbog čega ste izabrali baš švedsku nacionalnost da ih zovnete?*

HALJIMI: *Mene je teško pogodila ta sirotinja ti socijalni nemiri u Švedska ti problemi sa Eskimima koje oni sada imaju... Ja sam mene je prosto zaboljelo srce kada sad vidim ta teška koncentracija tamo u Švedska.*

[HALJIMI: Quiet, please. I think there are no problems, everything is great, I hired the guys from Sweden, they are cultured guys, clean, there is no such thing as a hair falling into the ice cream, all is great, they are cultured guys, I think there are no problems.

REPORTER: And why did you choose Swedes?

HALJIMI: I am deeply affected by that poverty, that social unrest in Sweden, those problems with the Eskimos that they now have ... My heart simply ached when I saw that heavy concentration there in Sweden.]

It is important to emphasize that, in Bosnian, words such as *misliti* [think], *odlično* [excellent], *zaposliti* [hire], *dlaka* [hair], etc. do not contain the /ʎ/ sound, and that is not seen in the rough translation above, and neither is the English “please” that he utters at the very beginning as /pʎiz/. In addition, the character does not use the cases correctly (Bosnian/

Croatian/Montenegrin/Serbian all have distinct cases), and the last section of his speech is rather incoherent (he most probably misuses the word “concentration”).

In this section, from the GTVH perspective, the NS KR is characterized by jab lines which appear alongside Haljimi’s illiteracy: poverty and social unrest in Sweden, problems with Eskimos, no hair in the ice cream. The hair in the ice cream is particularly interesting since hygiene at such places was perceived as at least questionable.

In contrast to his high praise of the Swedish workers and the expressed concern over the events in Sweden during the interview, Haljimi imposes himself upon the Swedes as a boss they need to obey and respect, as is seen (also) in Figure 6.19, where Haljimi is pulling the Swedish waiter’s hair:



Figure 6.19
Hair pulling

Note. The screenshot is from “Top Lista Nadrealista – Strani (Svedjani) radnici u Sarajevu” [Video], by Top Lista Nadrealista & Slozna braca, 2013, YouTube (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0_1RZDdmsYY). Copyright 2026 by Top lista nadrealista. Screenshot by author.

The SOs that appear in this case are PRAISE vs. SCOLDING; HUMILIATION vs. RESPECT (of the Swedish workers); PHYSICAL VIOLENCE vs. NORMAL TREATMENT OF EMPLOYEES. Hence, the sketch closes by the Albanian revealing his true nature, which is when the LM KR is established, enforcing the stereotypical view of the Albanian people and their business in former Yugoslavia, as crime-prone, violence-prone, illiterate and primitive thugs.

6.4 *Burek in space*

The *Burek u svemiru* [*burek in space*] sketch is based on the Star Wars franchise,⁴¹ where the characters portray a spaceship crew in search of a

⁴¹ The reason behind my opinion that it is the Star Wars not the Star Trek franchise is the appearance of an R2-D2-like robot in the sketch. Although R2-D2 is said to have had a cameo appearance in the film *Star Trek: Into Darkness* (Child, 2013), this robot is the Star Wars character.

planet with sufficient amount of *burek* supplies. The introduction shows the crew with a voiceover by the captain expressing his concern over the low *burek* supplies on the ship, and a suspicion that someone's been stealing from the safe where the last amounts are kept.

Before further analyzing the sketch, it is important to explain the concept of *burek* in Bosnia, since it is one of the most popular traditional dishes introduced to the region by the Ottomans. It is a kind of a pie filled with minced meat. Other ingredients may vary, but minced meat is key. Many recipes are available online, but Bosnians are very sensitive about this particular kind of pie, considering it luxurious, to the extent that there is even a saying: "Sve su pite pitice a burek je pitac." [All pies are little pies, while burek is the alpha pie.] Curiously, Bosnian words for other kinds of pies, enjoyed by the population almost with the same vigor, e.g. *zeljanica* (spinach filled), *krompiruša* (potato-filled), *sirnica* (cheese-filled), *jabukovača* (apple-filled), etc., are feminine, while *burek* is the only kind of pie in Bosnia that is masculine by grammatical gender. To my knowledge, this linguistic trait has not been discussed so far. Still, the fact remains – Bosnians take great pride in making and presenting *burek* to visitors. *Burek* is either homemade or bought in specialized shops suitably called "buregdžinica", i.e., the place where *burek* (and other kinds of pie) is sold.

An interesting and funny dispute recently occurred with our neighbors (Croatia and Serbia), where we openly debated that there is no such thing as "burek sa sirom" (*burek* with cheese), since, culturally, for example, in Croatia, they will name this particular Ottoman-inherited kind of meal simply as "burek" and will express the different filling by adding the ingredient that dominates the dish. One such example is *Coolinarika*, a very popular culinary website based in Croatia, where a user posted a very detailed description of the cooking process, including even the way in which dough is prepared, but one of the reactions in the comments reads: "Nije burek sa sirom nego sirnica." (It is not *burek* with cheese, but *sirnica* (the cheese-filled pie). (*Najbolji burek sa sirom*, 2021).

Recently, the Bosna basketball team played in Belgrade, and the Serbian fans decided to provoke Bosnians by lifting the banner "burek sa sirom" (Figure 6.20).

The TLN show presented the enthusiasm about *burek* in this sketch. As the crew "follows the scent of burek" through space, they notice a planet that could be the solution to their problems.



Figure 6.20
Burek with cheese

Note. Adapted from “Burek sa sirom: Beograđani na utakmici Zvezde i Bosne podigli šaljiv transparent,” by ABA League/Dragana Stjepanović, 2026, *Klix* (klix.ba). Copyright 2026 by ABA League/Dragana Stjepanović.

In the GTVH sense, the NS of the entire sketch can be said to function as an episode from a sci-fi TV series (the basis for which is *Star Wars*), with voiceovers explaining the context of the situation and introducing the characters, and dialogues as the episode progresses. The SI here is that aliens are looking for *burek* in Sarajevo. As the sketch progresses, targets, backgrounded incongruities and jab lines, as well as different script oppositions appear, but it would be impossible to introduce the sketch in its entirety in this analysis, so I will analyze the most significant segments.

The voiceover introduces the characters, together with their main traits, all of which are humorous in their own right, and form backgrounded incongruity: Captain Zenit, young, determined, intelligent, scores high on moral and political scales; Adem and Belma, two young people whose task is to procreate, enabling thus the continuation of the human species at the mother planet; dr. Karajlić, the brilliant mind of the expedition, he used to be a child prodigy who invented “a transmission oven for baking lamb”⁴², but also a person rumored to have copied the doctoral thesis from a buddy; Drago Kudelja⁴³, a footballer, perfectly fit; Đuro, a weak character, susceptible to different influences and part of the expedition only because he is the nephew of the Space Workers Association’s director. Finally, there

⁴² The tradition of eating spit lamb and other roasted meat is also a very important segment of the Bosnian culinary tradition. The popularity of such roasts is seen, for example, in Jablanica, a small town en route to the south of the country, where people from the entire region travelling nearby visit specially to taste the meat and have a break. I wrote about the Jablanica lamb in the section 4.1.

⁴³ His name is probably derived from Nebojša Gudelj, a Yugoslav footballer. There is nothing peculiar about this name similarity in the sketch, and the only reason that perhaps this character is even introduced is to emphasize the popularity of football (soccer) in former Yugoslavia.

is a vacuum cleaner RCI made by the *Olovo electronic industry*, dubbed as *Hala CX 16*. The name of the Bosnian robot is a jab line.

Humorous traits are contained in all these characters. Zenit, Đuro, Karajlić are the three main characters and creators of the entire TLN show, together with Boris Šiber (who here plays the footballer). However, the attributes assigned to them in this sketch reflect some of the traits recognized in the Bosnian (at the time – Yugoslav) society. This primarily concerns nepotism, in the case of Đuro, as well as suspicious scientific behavior in the case of dr. Karajlić. The SOs are thus MERITOCRACY vs. NEPOTISM, and ACADEMIC HONESTY vs. ACADEMIC DISHONESTY. Both these negative trends are highly observable in all former Yugoslav republics, since there is a frequent practice of plagiarism in the academic circles, and nepotism elsewhere, which especially resonates with the local population who are frustrated over the fact that even the public competitions are believed to be prepared in advance for some favorable candidates.

In addition, the script SEX appears in the case of characters Adem and Belma, described by the technical term of procreation and continuation of the human species.

The vacuum cleaner (in Bosnian: *usisivač*) is the character presented in the sketch to imitate the space robots, most probably the R2-D2 (figures 6.21 and 6.22):



Figure 6.21
Hala CX 16 vacuum cleaner

Note. The screenshot is from “TLN – Burek u svemiru” [Video], by the bouncinglemon, 2012, YouTube (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lr-VYxmknhM>).

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Screenshot by author.

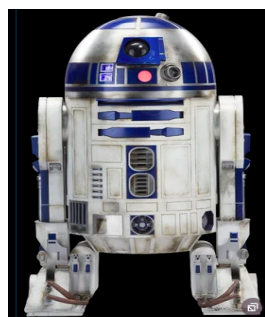


Figure 6.22
R2-D2

Note. Adapted from “R2-D2,” n.d., Wookieepedia (starwars.fandom.com/wiki/R2-D2).

The two are in semantic opposition: R2-D2 vs. HALA CX 16. In this case, R2-D2 is the TA, since a plain vacuum cleaner is being compared to the little robot. The humorous trigger is the name *Hala CX 16*, ascribed to the vacuum cleaner. *Hala* is a colloquial word for the toilette in Bosnian, hence, the advanced robot is being compared to a vacuum cleaner dubbed the toilet, manufactured in a small Bosnian town of Olovo. Although Olovo is a town with some industrial activity, the “Olovo Electronic Industry” is pure fiction.

Sketches where some valuable matters, achievements and things are compared to the notions of lesser value, are frequent in the entire series. Hence, there have been instances where the doctors are portrayed as having earned their PhDs at some small Bosnian villages, etc.

Another interpretation, part of the backgrounded incongruity in this case, is that the low-quality vacuum cleaner is the main robot of this starship. The prevailing SOs are HIGH vs. LOW quality, making this entire expedition obscure.

The crew lands in Sarajevo, in the vicinity of the Holiday Inn Hotel and the *Momo i Uzeir* skyscrapers (discussed in section 1.2.2), which are also Sarajevo landmarks. They are the yellow and blue buildings, as Figure 6.23 shows. Also, the background shows the tram, which carries special relevance for Sarajevo, as discussed in section 4.1.



Figure 6.23

The crew lands in Sarajevo

Note. The screenshot is from “TLN – Burek u svemiru” [Video], by the bouncinglemon, 2012, YouTube (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lr-VYxmknhM>). Copyright 2026 by Top lista nadrealista. Screenshot by author.

From this location, Captain Zenit issues orders to cover and explore the destination:

Kapetan Zenit: Drugovi, naši putevi se ovde razilaze. Burek moramo pronaći, to je osnovni imperative ove ekspedicije. Ti, Kudelja Drago, kao moj najbolji kozmonaut, ti ćeš da ideš na siromašni jug. Noga. Ti... Nemoj da praviš problema okolo, znaš. Slušaj, ti ćeš na tehnološki istok. Karajliću, ti si lokalizator, pretražuj, znaš. Ti ćeš na truli zapad. A ja ću na bogati sjever.

[Captain Zenit: Comrades, our paths diverge here. We must find burek, that is the basic imperative of this expedition. You, Kudelja Drago, as my best

cosmonaut, you will go to the poor south. Now beat it. You... Don't make trouble around here, you know. Listen, you will go to the technological east. Karajlić, you are the localizer, search, you know. You will go to the rotten west. And I will go to the rich north.]

Here, the captain issues orders and the main component of the captain's address is the socialist perspective of the parts of the world, more precisely, the countries that occupy certain geographical positions.

The Captain's speech, from the LA KR parameter, contains stylistic features of informal speech (for example, *beat it*), as well as the word COMRADES which is an inference trigger, in other words, that signals that the space crew is socialist. Hence, the SO is ALIENS vs. SOCIALISM, and the script SOCIALISM in his speech also contains two important nodes: ROTTEN WEST and COMRADES. Although the captain emphasizes that the south is "poor" or that the east is "technological" that does not entail the uniquely socialist perception. However, the script ROTTEN WEST does, since it was a phrase used by the socialist authorities to present everything that is western (values, products, way of life) as bad (Marković, 2021). Of course, the reality of the situation has been different, hence, this too is an instance of the REAL vs. NOT REAL frame which contains these SOs.

Finally, a jab line that appears is that the captain assigns himself to explore the RICH NORTH, meaning that the best position in the mission will be his. That means that he uses hierarchy to place himself at the best position.

Figure 6.24 is a scene from the sketch, significant because of other two phenomena linked to Sarajevo: *jalijaš* and *šaner*. The words are borrowings from Turkish and in the Bosnian language they denote similar meanings: *jalija*: "1. bandit, bully; 2. trifler; lazy man; rambler" (Halilović et al. 2010, p. 456) and *šaner*: "1. petty thief; 2. a person characterized by undistinguished speech and behavior" (Halilović et al. 2010, p. 1286). These determinants are indexed for the Sarajevo city area, especially the outskirts and (most notably in the 1980s) for the old town Sarajevo. What is especially important for both *jalijaš* and *šaner* is the colloquial language of Sarajevo, a rather neglected area of linguistic research. In the text we are preparing, titled "Sense of place as situations: multimodal resources in the *Bruca Braca Bruda Brada* animated series" (Đuliman et al., 2026), we have signaled some basic phonetic characteristics of such speech, and mentioned some works published on the topic so far.

Thugs are found in many cities throughout the world, but in the case of Sarajevo they have been stylistically marked by the collective nouns

presented above. From the geosemiotic perspective, the JALIJA and ŠANER trigger the sense of place for Sarajevo. They are part of backgrounded incongruity in this sketch, intensified by the meeting with the alien (SO in this case is JALIJA/ŠANER vs. ALIEN). In addition, the location of the sketch is *Kovači*, a neighborhood in the old town Sarajevo, immediately recognized by the old cemetery and the high wall (the wall can be clearly seen in the screenshot background, in figures 6.24 and 6.25, while the video shows the street quite clearly):



Figure 6.24
Jalija meet the alien

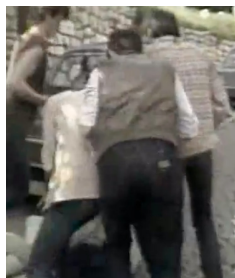


Figure 6.25
Jalija beat the alien

Note. Screenshots are from “TLN – Burek u svemiru” [Video], by the bouncinglemon, 2012, YouTube (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lr-VYxmknhM>). Copyright 2026 by Top lista nadrealista. Screenshot by author.

The dialogue below is typical of thugs finding a reason to attack. The speech is colloquial, characterized in the Bosnian language by elision (*kupov’o*, *šukn’o*, *rek’o*, *ša’s*), by non-distinguishing affricates (although the transcript does not show that feature, it can be heard in the video), and by the stylistically marked words, like “burazer”, “šuknuti”, “murija” and, especially, “ba”, a buzzword of the Sarajevo jargon, an abbreviated form of the word “bolan”, which originally means “a sick person” but used to express some form of surprise, plea or objection (Halilović et al., 2010, p. 40):

[Jalijaš 1: Čekaj, znam ja odnekud tebe. Jes ti ono meni diro burazera ispred Skenderije?

Jalijaš 2: Jel bila gužva kad si ovo kupov’o?

Jalijaš 1: Jesi mu ga sad šukn’o.

Svi jalijaši: Čekaj, ba, ša’s to rek’o? (premlaćvanje) Bježi, bježi, murija, murija.

Thug 1: Wait, I know you from somewhere. Did you mess with my brother in front of Skenderija?

Thug 2: Was it crowded when you bought this?

Thug 1: Did you just tell him.

All thugs: Wait, what did you just say? (beating up the alien) Run, run, the cops are coming.]

From the GTVH perspective, the LA KR parameter in this case is the Sarajevo colloquial speech with the aforementioned characteristics, while SO is THUG vs. ALIEN. In this exchange, there is no punchline, but some jab lines, and the TA is the alien. The most striking is an attempt of a joke by Thug 2, asking “Was it crowded when you bought this?” The SI is that they want to humiliate the alien. The question is an implicature: the clothes are ugly. Thug 1 understands and loves the aggressive humor, praising Thug 2 for making such a god remark. Expectedly, the intention was to physically attack the alien, which happens as shown in the Figure 6.25. Of course, as is frequently the case with thugs, they escape as soon as they see the police. This is humorous because the LM KR behind such behavior is the realization that they are cowards, hiding behind numbers and physical strength, while they run when they see the police arriving.

The sketch is coming to an end when the captain finds a *buregdžinica* restaurant:

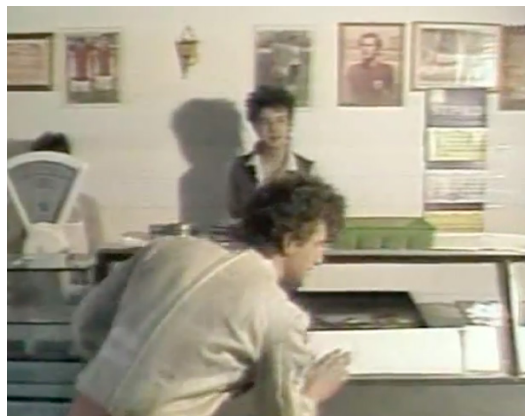


Figure 6.26
Captain in buregdžinica

Note. The screenshot is from “TLN – Burek u svemiru” [Video], by the bouncinglemon, 2012, YouTube (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lr-VYxmknhM>). Copyright 2026 by Top lista nadrealista. Screenshot by author.

From the geosemiotic perspective, just as was the case with the Albanian patisserie, the space is very typical of “buregdžinica”, meaning that there is a display of pies, a scale and, perhaps visually most striking, posters and pictures on the walls. Hence, the sense of place is present in this image, signaling a familiar background of the Sarajevo “buregdžinica”. In this particular case, the prevailing color is red, which is the color of the Sarajevo Football Club. This red color is indexed for the *Sarajevo* football club, just as the blue color is indexed for the *Željezničar* football club. Of course, the indexing concerns the Sarajevo context only, for these colors are distinctive features of the Sarajevo city derby. The sports memorabilia

displayed on the wall means that the owner is either a fan or even a former footballer. In Sarajevo, it is almost a tradition for restaurants to be run by football players, and that especially concerns another phenomenon – the *ćevapi* restaurants (commonly known as “ćevabdžinice”).

Figure 6.26 shows the captain’s thrilled reaction to the pie, with the salesman observing him with a smirk. A short exchange follows:

[Kapetan Zenit: Burek... Burek, sirnica, zeljanica, krompiruša...

Prodavač: Prava radnja, šta je?

Kapetan Zenit: De, de, jarane, majke ti, ovoga... Jel’ ovo burek?

Prodavač: Kol’ko ćeš bureka?

Kapetan Zenit: Bureka, stavi, stavi, stavi... Ovako da se pojede malo.

Prodavač: Aaa, ogladnila mušterija?

Kapetan Zenit: Jest, jest, oglandila.

Captain Zenit: Burek... Burek, sirnica, zeljanica, krompiruša...

Salesman: This is a real shop, you know.

Captain Zenit: Come on, buddy, gimme this... Is this burek?

Salesman: How much do you want?

Captain Zenit: Burek, put it, put it, put it... This much, so one can eat nicely.

Salesman: Oh, a hungry customer?

Captain Zenit: Yes, yes, I’m hungry.]

The SI KR in this case is the “buregdžinica” setting, where the alien captain enters and finds an array of different pies (I mentioned the different kinds of pies at the beginning of this section). The humor arises because he is thrilled to see such abundance, and the SO KR is USUAL vs. UNUSUAL, in the sense that the “buregdžinica” setting and the variety of pies there is very usual for Bosnians. Thus, the captain’s thrill is incongruous to such an environment. The salesman’s reaction is that the captain must be hungry. That would be a logical reaction of a person to such a behavior, since the salesman is not aware of the fact that the captain is an alien. Hence, ALIEN is a script, part of the backgrounded incongruity.

Humor in this scene is rather benign, since there is no aggression. The level of captain’s fascination with something as ordinary as *burek* is similar to that of a child, and stylistically, this humor may even be observed as a special kind of appreciation of this important segment of the Bosnian cuisine.

6.5 Twilight Zone with *Rade Pendrek*

The Twilight Zone sketch reflects the events that marked an important political moment in Yugoslavia, the Žuta Greda (Montenegro) protests (figure 6.27), where workers, supported by students, expressed dissatisfaction over the economic situation. The event took place on October 8, 1988, a time when Yugoslavia was facing a difficult economic crisis, heavy inflation and an outstanding debt.⁴⁴



Figure 6.27
Žuta Greda protests, 1988

Note. Adapted from “PODSJEĆANJE: Kako je u Crnoj Gori na današnji dan prije 27 godina spriječen prvi pokušaj državnog udara,” by n.d., 2015, *Analitika*, <https://www.portalanalitika.me/clanak/204236--podsjecanje-kako-je-u-crnoj-gori-na-danasnji-dan-prije-27-godina-sprijecen-prvi-pokusaj-drzavnog-udara>

The sketch presents this event in a different reality, as an episode from the popular TV series *The Twilight Zone*, where one Rade Pendrek, a member of the Yugoslav Militia, falls asleep after finishing his shift. It is important to emphasize that, in Yugoslavia, the equivalent of police was the Militia, with very broad powers, and were known for using them, hence, they were feared. The LA KR is that a Twilight Zone episode is presented in Yugoslavia, in (then-official) Serbo-Croatian language, with all other segments familiar to the audience: the introduction where a narrator describes the events, the event in the alternate reality, and the outro, with the closing commentary of the narrator. It should also be noted that there is a pun in Rade's last name, since *pendrek* is a *truncheon*, indicating that this man's life is entirely focused on his job. His last name is, in fact, a jab line.

The entire sketch is a reversal, since this is an alternate reality where the power is no longer in the hands of the militia, but the students and workers, and this is, in fact, backgrounded incongruity and the reversal of roles in then the LM KR. Viewers who remember the Yugoslav circumstances at the time, and who remember the powers of the militia, would certainly

⁴⁴ Biljana Nikolić's analysis of the circumstances leading to the protests and the Žuta Greda event, as well as the political manipulation of workers by Slobodan Milošević, the infamous Serbian politician, can be found on the following link: <https://www.vijesti.me/vijesti/politika/476633/nakon-zute-grede-nije-bilo-povratka>.

find this portrayal absurd. Hence, in this twisted situation, the main SOs are REAL vs. UNREAL and POSSIBLE vs. IMPOSSIBLE.

The SI KR is that Rade the militiaman is arrested, in a Kafkaian setting, for he does not understand what is going on or reasons behind his arrest. He wakes up on a bench in a park and is approached by three men demanding him to present his index (Figure 6.28). “Index” is a student gradebook, still used at universities in the majority of countries of former Yugoslavia. Normally, the Yugoslav Militia, and in the current moment police in Bosnia (and, presumably, elsewhere in the world) ask people to present their ID cards. The fact that the students are asking the militiaman to present his “index” is an illustration of the reversal of the roles (and the situation) in this sketch, which is backgrounded incongruity.



Figure 6.28
Rade Pendrek wakes up

Note. The screenshot is from “Top Lista Nadrealista – Zona sumraka” [Video], by Top Lista Nadrealista & Slozna braca, 2006, YouTube (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dfJHDQuvUsE>). Copyright 2026 by Top lista nadrealista. Screenshot by author.

Although the exact location cannot be determined, the characteristic blue uniform of the Yugoslav militia is visible. The three men interrogating him wear suits and white papers can be seen protruding from what appear to be bags placed on the right hip where the police would normally carry their sidearm holsters. That is an incongruity, with the PISTOL vs. PAPER as the SO KR. The LM KR is that militia are no longer in charge. Rather, it is the students. The following exchange further illustrates the scene:

[STUDENT 1: Halo, druže, diži se!

STUDENT 2: Pokažite nam indeks.

RADE PENDREK: Kako?

STUDENT 2: Pokažite nam indeks. Brzo!

RADE PENDREK: Ma šta je ovo?

STUDENT 1: Ma pokažite nam indeks, šta se ti praviš mentalno retardiran, budalo jedna.

RADE PENDREK: Ma kakav indeks? Kakav indeks? Gdje sam ja ovo?

STUDENT 3: Vidi ti njega! Indeks!

STUDENT 1: *Nemoj da nam tu imputiraš agresivnost.*

STUDENT 2: *Interesantan si ti slučaj.*

(*Odvođe ga.*)

STUDENT 1: *Pazi kako se ponašaš.*

STUDENT 3 (*preko toki vokija*): *Kolega Ćimiću, sve je u redu.*

STUDENT 1: Hey, comrade, stand up!

STUDENT 2: Show us the index.

RADE PENDREK: What?

STUDENT 2: Show us the index. Quickly!

RADE PENDREK: What is this?

STUDENT 1: Show us the index, what, you pretending to be mentally retarded, you fool?

RADE PENDREK: What kind of index? What index? Where am I?

STUDENT 3: The behavior with this one! Index!

STUDENT 1: Don't impute we're aggressive.

STUDENT 2: You are an interesting case.

(*They take him away.*)

STUDENT 1: Watch how you behave.

STUDENT 3 (*over the radio*): *Colleague Ćimić, all is fine.*]

This segment shows the common treatment of the people by the militia, where any suspicious behavior is examined. The identity document is now an index. This is an incongruity with SO INDEX vs. IDENTITY CARD.

In this segment, the LA KR segment is what would be the typical militia manner of address, seen in orders and occasional insults. However, the situation is reversed, with the militia man now being interrogated by students. Hence, the TA KR is the militia officer, who is downgraded to the extent of humiliation, especially when Student 1 offends him by comparing him to a mentally retarded person, calling him a fool. This is an extreme form of offense, unacceptable by today's standards, but in the Yugoslav society, many groups of people, for example, those with psychological disorders, or members of the LGBTQ+ population, were not only frowned upon, but even openly offended and threatened. In addition, comparing an individual to "a mentally retarded person" was even a frequent practice. Hence, the SO in this case is STUDENTS vs. MILITIA OFFICER, where the LM entails the reversal of roles, just as it is the case when Figure 6.28 is observed (PISTOL vs. PAPER).

Form of address is also important in this exchange, since the common, official form was DRUG (COMRADE). Student 3 at the very end addresses a person (Ćimić) as "colleague", typical of the academic register. Another pair of opposing scripts is COMRADE vs. COLLEAGUE. It is resolved again

by understanding that there is a reversal of the situation and that students have become higher in the hierarchy than the militia.

Figure 6.29 shows militia officers walking along the Sarajevo Academy of Fine Arts. Geosemiotically, this is a significant location, since the place is another landmark of Sarajevo, in addition to being the location where artists assemble and educate. The sense of place is established, but militia officers marching in the vicinity establishes an incongruity: that part of town is never used for organizing violent protests. In the immediate vicinity there are cafes and a couple of galleries, as well as a cinema. Militia officers chant that they want their truncheons back, signifying they are disarmed for some reason. There is thus a role reversal between the students and the police, with the police manifesting in the streets and the students are guardians of the “order”. The opposing scripts are ACADEMY OF FINE ARTS vs. PROTESTS; while the script DISARMED MILITIA is also incongruous.



Figure 6.29
Militia protesting

Note. The screenshot is from “Top Lista Nadrealista – Zona sumraka” [Video], by Top Lista Nadrealista & Slozna braca, 2006, YouTube (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dfJHDQuvUsE>). Copyright 2026 by Top lista nadrealista. Screenshot by author.

The transcription below is a recreation of the Žuta Greda workers’ protests. The militia officers are chanting and evoking the place Žuta Greda, which is indexed, since it was there that the militia attacked the workers. They now stand humiliated and ashamed because of the reversal of the situation. A worker is addressing them, promising to consider their demands, but they do not listen. Out of options, the worker issues an order. This is the key moment connecting the sketch to the Žuta Greda incident, where his utterance “Workers, execute the order” is in opposition to the order by Božidar Radonjić, commander of the militia present at the Žuta Greda location, who uttered: “Milicijo, postupi po naređenju!” [Militia, execute the order!]. Hence, the opposing scripts are WORKERS vs. MILITIA and THE WORKER vs. BOŽIDAR RADONJIĆ, with the worker this time holding power.

[MILICIJA: *Vratite nam palice! Vratite nam palice!*

RADNIK: *Drugovi milicioneri, molim vas da se u najvećem miru dostojanstveno razidete...*

MILICIJA: Uaaaa.

RADNIK: *Obećavamo da ćemo najozbiljnije da razmotrimo vaše...*

MILICIJA: Uaaaa. (pjevaju) *Žuta Gredo gledaj bruku, Žuta Gredo gledaj bruku. Radnici će da nas tuku, radnici će da nas tuku.*

RADNIK: *Odred radnika, postupite po naređenju.*

(*Sukobljavaju se.*)

RADE PENDREK: *Udri ga, Mehmede!*

MILITIA: Give us back our truncheons! Give us back our truncheons!

WORKER: Comrades policemen, please leave in peace and dignity...

MILITIA: Uaaaa.

WORKER: We promise to seriously consider your...

MILITIA: Uaaaa. (singing) *Žuta Greda, look at this disgrace, Žuta Greda, look at this disgrace. The workers will beat us, the workers will beat us.*

WORKER: Workers, execute the order.

(*They collide.*)

RADE PENDREK: *Hit him hard, Mehmed!*

Figure 6.30 depicts workers and militia as they collide, with Rade Pendrek, arrested by the students, observing from the distance. This location is also familiar, the green surface showing the bank of the Miljacka river, flowing through Sarajevo. Rade Pendrek is voicing his support to Mehmed, his colleague: “Udri ga, Mehmede!”. This is a one-liner, part of backgrounded incongruity, because the Muslim name Mehmed renders as funny for members of militia. This is not to say that there were no *Mehmeds* or *Muhameds* in the militia, on the contrary. Still, the name does initiate a specific sense of place and a sentiment of common life in Sarajevo. In addition, the helplessness of Rade Pendrek’s position in this new reality is shown in this utterance, since the only thing he could do was to watch.



Figure 6.30

Helpless militiaman Rade Pendrek

Note. The screenshot is from “Top Lista Nadrealista – Zona sumraka” [Video], by Top Lista Nadrealista & Slozna braca, 2006, YouTube (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dfJHDQuvUsE>). Copyright 2026 by Top lista nadrealista. Screenshot by author.

Figure 6.31 shows Rade Pendrek being taken to a building, which is the real-life location of the University of Sarajevo (UNSA) Rectorate and the Faculty of Law. That signals that the power is now in the hands of the university. Geosmiotically, this is the focalized perspective where a landmark (the UNSA building) is deliberately manipulated to enhance humor – its function is now an interrogation unit, and this is also part of backgrounded incongruity where the reversal of roles takes place: students have taken over the power.



Figure 6.31
Rade Pendrek enters the university interrogation unit

Note. The screenshot is from “Top Lista Nadrealista – Zona sumraka” [Video], by Top Lista Nadrealista & Slozna braca, 2006, YouTube (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dfJHDQuvUsE>). Copyright 2026 by Top lista nadrealista. Screenshot by author.

The dialogue below shows the typical interrogation, with the inspector using psychological means of pressure to elicit the desired information. The NS contains jab lines which I will address further in the text, but now it is important to again emphasize that Rade Pendrek does not know what is going on and that he honestly does not know answers to the questions asked by the inspector, prof. dr. Ćimić.⁴⁵ This is a Kafkaian situation, but also a situation which used to be a common experience for the people of interest for the Yugoslav authorities. Those individuals would be arrested and interrogated, frequently without any reason or evidence of wrongdoings.⁴⁶

[ĆIMIĆ: *Aaaa, to je ta ptičica.*

STUDENT 3: *Da, gospodine Ćimiću, možete misliti, nema indeksa. Ne nosi ga sa sobom.*

⁴⁵ Professor Esad Ćimić, a philosopher and sociologist, was a professor at the University of Sarajevo at the time. Whether the name of this inspector is a direct reference to him is unknown, but one should remain open to such a possibility.

⁴⁶ Individuals of interest were frequently followed by members of the Yugoslav secret service, better known as the Directorate for State Security (abbreviated as UDBA). In addition, sometimes even the citizens would report strange or suspicious activities. This practice was depicted in the movie *Balkanski špijun* [The Balkan Spy] (1984) by Serbian directors Dušan Kovačević and Božidar Nikolić. The film is a true masterpiece of Yugoslav cinematography.

ĆIMIĆ: *Da se upoznamo, ja sam inspektor, prof. dr. Ćimić. Sad ćete nam ispričati sve, od samoga početka.*

RADE PENDREK: *Druže Ćimiću...*

ĆIMIĆ: *Doktore Ćimiću, doktore.*

RADE PENDREK: *Aj, aj, doktore Ćimiću, doktore Ćimiću. Ja ne znam... Ja sam sinoć leg'o najnormalnije, ovo...*

ĆIMIĆ: *A ne znaš, je li, ptičice, misliš da si puno pametan? I tvrde ptičice od tebe ovdje su propjevale. Vojo, Mozart.*

(Vojo pušta Mozarta na gramofonu.)

RADE PENDREK *(prestrašen)*: *Jo, nemojte, molim vas... Joj, joooooj..*

ĆIMIĆ: *Jače, jače.*

(Rade Pendrek nastavlja da vrišti.)

ĆIMIĆ: *Vojo, dosta. Imena...*

RADE PENDREK: *Koje? Šta imena? Ja ne znam, ja stvarno ne znam...*

ĆIMIĆ: *Imena!*

RADE PENDREK: *Šta imena? Ja bi' ali koja?*

ĆIMIĆ: *Misliš da si tvrd orah? Ali, slomili smo mi i tvrde od tebe, imamo mi i za takve metode... Vojo, Nietzsche.*

VOJO: *Izvolite, druže profesore.*

ĆIMIĆ čita odlomak iz knjige Volja za moć, spominje da je Bog stvorio čovjeka.

RADE PENDREK vrišti u agoniji i budi se u svom krevetu, smiruje.

ĆIMIĆ: *Aaah, that's the birdie.*

STUDENT 3: *Yes, Mr. Ćimić, imagine, he has no index on him. He does not carry it.*

ĆIMIĆ: *Let's meet, I'm inspector professor Ćimić, PhD. Now, you're going to tell us everything, from the very beginning.*

RADE PENDREK: *Comrade Ćimić...*

ĆIMIĆ: *It's doctor Ćimić, doctor.*

RADE PENDREK: *Oh, oh, doctor Ćimić, doctor Ćimić. I don't know... I slept perfectly normal last night, this...*

ĆIMIĆ: *Oh, you don't know, do you, birdie, you think you're smarter? We've made even tougher birds sing. Vojo, Mozart.*

(Vojo plays a Mozart record.)

RADE PENDREK *(terrified)*: *Oh, don't, please... Nooo, nooooo....*

ĆIMIĆ: *Louder, louder.*

(RADE PENDREK continues to scream.)

ĆIMIĆ: *Vojo, enough. Names...*

RADE PENDREK: *Which ones? What names? I don't know, I really don't know...*

ĆIMIĆ: *Names!*

RADE PENDREK: *What names? I would, but which names?*

ĆIMIĆ: Do you think you're a tough nut to crack? But we've cracked even tougher than you, we have methods for such things... Vojo, Nietzsche.

VOJO: Here you go, comrade professor.

ĆIMIĆ reads an excerpt from *The Will to Power*, mentioning that God created man.

RADE PENDREK screams in agony and wakes up in his bed, calms down.]

This dialogue is another example of a typical interrogation, but here too the roles are reversed. The very title and the position of the inspector carries a semantic opposition: ACADEMIC TITLE vs. INSPECTOR. Members of the academic community hold titles, while militia inspectors did not have academic ranks. Again, COMRADE, as a typical form of address in socialism is here replaced even by GOSPODIN (MISTER) or DOCTOR. This incongruity is even enforced when Ćimić corrects Rade Pendrek, emphasizing the necessity of being called “Dr. Ćimić”. The visual effect is even more striking when he uses a book to press against Rade Pendrek’s nose as a form of physical pressure to correct and even to humiliate him (Figure 6.32). This is a form of aggressive humor, where Rade Pendrek’s weakness is exposed completely, and he is the target:



Figure 6.32

The coercion of Rade Pendrek

Note. The screenshot is from “Top Lista Nadrealista – Zona sumraka” [Video], by Top Lista Nadrealista & Slozna braca, 2006, YouTube (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dfjHDQuvUsE>). Copyright 2026 by Top lista nadrealista. Screenshot by author.

Although the inspector uses phrases typical of such situations (e.g. about the birdies that will sing and nuts that will crack, which are here examples of jab lines), incongruity in much of this exchange is seen primarily in the manner of the coercion, since pressure is not applied as blackmail or physical force (save for the book and nose part), but by playing famous pieces of music and reading philosophy. These “methods of torture” are part of backgrounded incongruity. Hence, when Mozart is played, Rade Pendrek starts screaming and begs for mercy. Incongruity rests in the SO MOZART vs. TORTURE. Another element of extortion concerns the philosopher Nietzsche. Not only does Rade Pendrek reject literature in general

(just as he rejects classical music), but the fact that a philosophy work is read causes Rade to react just as dreadfully as he reacted when Mozart was played. The LM for the entire section of the sketch is that Rade Pendrek is an uneducated individual who dreads the works of classical music. This portrays him in almost a stereotypical light of jokes about policemen being STUPID and UNEDUCATED.

The reversal of powers in this sketch resulted in CULTURE (a script I use in a very broad sense to encompass music, philosophy, literature, and other arts) being used as a form of torture. This is in opposition to the simplicity and one-mindedness of the militia (in today's jargon – the police). Visual reactions to Mozart and Nietzsche can be seen in figures 6.33 and 6.36, as well as Ćimić's exhilarated reaction to Mozart and the joy of reading Nietzsche, shown in figures 6.34 and 6.35.

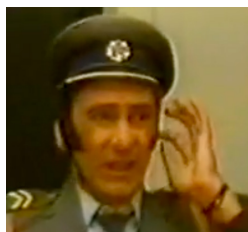


Figure 6.33
*Rade Pendrek and
Mozart*



Figure 6.34
*Prof. Ćimić and
Mozart*



Figure 6.35
*Prof. Ćimić and
Nietzsche*

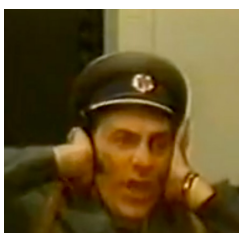


Figure 6.36
*Rade Pendrek and
Nietzsche*

Note. Screenshots are from “Top Lista Nadrealista – Zona sumraka” [Video], by Top Lista Nadrealista & Slozna braca, 2006, YouTube (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dfJHDQuvUsE>). Copyright 2026 by Top lista nadrealista. Screenshot by author.

Figure 6.37 shows Rade Pendrek waking up from the nightmare, after the intensity of torture and screaming becomes unbearable. He is back to the real-life situation of power that he possesses as a militia officer.



Figure 6.37
Rade Pendrek wakes up again

Note. The screenshot is from “Top Lista Nadrealista – Zona sumraka” [Video], by Top Lista Nadrealista & Slozna braca, 2006, YouTube (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dfJHDQuvUsE>). Copyright 2026 by Top lista nadrealista. Screenshot by author.

This entire sketch addresses a situation relevant in the late 1980s Yugoslavia. Many references made can be considered part of the restricted script, since almost 40 years have passed since the event, and the entire system in Bosnia has changed, going from socialism to, what the European Commission (2026) describes as a decentralized parliamentary republic. Hence, there is a likely possibility that the people born in the 1990s onwards would not find the sketch, or many of its segments, funny, since they could easily miss much of the underlying humor.

6.6 Popušlić family war

The sketch about the Popušlić family war is presented in the form of a news report from an apartment block in Sarajevo (Figure 6.38). The last name “Popušlić” is a pun, implying that the family will get the short end of the stick. This is a commonly used slang word in the Bosnian language, a vulgarity meaning fellatio.

The image shows a skyscraper, but the exact location is impossible to determine. The smoke rises around it indicating a war zone. In the video, gunfire is heard as the camera zooms in on the reporter. The SI KR is that of war, and, to a viewer with no military or experience of war, the situation is absurd, hence, the SO is REAL vs. UNREAL.⁴⁷

⁴⁷ Ironically, Sarajevo did see the destruction of property and loss of life during the 1992–1995 siege. Hence, the entire sketch with the destroyed apartment would become a sad reality for Sarajevans.

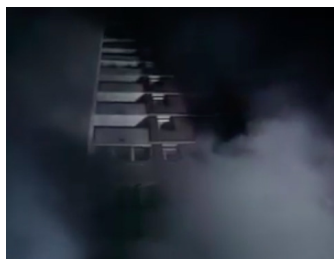


Figure 6.38
Popušlić family skyscraper

Note. The screenshot is from “Top lista nadrealista – rat u kući (HD)” [Video], by Nemanja M., 2003, YouTube (<https://youtu.be/8547GJ9mV0M>). Copyright 2026 by Top lista nadrealista. Screenshot by author.

Further, Figure 6.39 shows a reporter with a PRESS sign displayed on his shoulder. The press sign is indexed for this individual. Also, he holds a camera which is another object clearly indicating his profession. He is met by an armed man, holding a machine gun (Figure 6.40). Their “instruments of work” are indicated in the background, the soldier with a rifle and the reporter with a camera. The reporter is raising his hand, indicating surrender, indicating that he is aware that the soldier holds power over his life.



Figure 6.39
News reporter



Figure 6.40
News reporter meets a soldier

Note. Screenshots are from “Top lista nadrealista – rat u kući (HD)” [Video], by Nemanja M., 2003, YouTube (<https://youtu.be/8547GJ9mV0M>). Copyright 2026 by Top lista nadrealista. Screenshot by author.

The sketch further unfolds in the Popušlić family apartment. The family war is backgrounded incongruity in the sketch and, in this section, the SI KR is a news report. Geosemiotically, we can observe here the transposition of space, where their apartment is turned into a battleground, while the family is split into two opposing sides, fighting to conquer certain parts of the territory (i.e., certain rooms and other areas of the apartment). This

is the focalized perspective where the space is deliberately changed from its primary function in order to enhance humor. This can be also said of the furniture, which is now used as a protective shield against the enemy gunfire. We also see the transformation of family roles, in the sense that members of nuclear family are fighting against one another in a real armed conflict. Hence, the broadest SO in this section is REAL vs. UNREAL, with additional oppositions such as APARTMENT vs. BATTLEGROUND; FURNITURE vs. BUNKER; FAMILY vs. ENEMIES.



Figure 6.41
Mother's side



Figure 6.42
Father's side

Note. Screenshots are from “Top lista nadrealista – rat u kući (HD)” [Video], by Nemanja M., 2003, YouTube (<https://youtu.be/8547GJ9mV0M>).
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The reporter interviews the family members (primarily, the Mother):

[ŽENA: Ćoroo, Ćorooo...

MUŽ: Mrš, mamojebu, mrš!

ŽENA: Mangupeeee, razbili smo vas.

SIN 1: Mama, došla ova televizija...

ŽENA: A, jel', dobar dan! Ali da budete objektivni, molim vas.

REPORTER: Koji su razlozi ovako žestokih sukoba?

ŽENA: Eh, kad je počeo ovaj rat (meci odjekuju)... ne obazirite se na ovo... Moj muž je odlučio da se rastavi od mene radi potpuno suprotnih političkih pogleda.

MUŽ (dobacuje): Lažeee, lažeeee.

ŽENA: Ja sam rekla, možemo se razvest', al' da se zna, moja je glavna kuhinja, sporedna kuhinja, velika soba, SAO dječija soba, i kupatilo, jer ja na to plažem istorijsko parvo, znaš, mangupe, istorijsko parvo, da, da.

MUŽ: Ja radim 20 godina u željezari, to ništa, jel' tako mali? (Obrća se sinu koji je na njegovoj strani.)

SIN 2: Dobro je, stara, položila si, stara.

WIFE: Hey, Four-eyed, Four-eyed...

HUSBAND: Fuck you, you motherfucker!

WIFE: You loafer, we totally broke you.

SON 1: Mom, here comes this television...

WIFE: Oh, hello! But be objective, please.

REPORTER: What are the reasons for such a fierce conflict?

WIFE: Well, when this war started (bullets echo)... don't pay attention to this... My husband decided to separate because of our completely opposite political views.

HUSBAND (throws in): She's lying, she's lying.

WIFE: I said, we can separate, under the condition that I get the main kitchen, the side kitchen, the large room, the autonomous province of children's room, and the bathroom, because I lay historical claim to that, you know, you loafer, historical claim, that's right.

HUSBAND: I've been working in a steel plant for 20 years, and that counts for nothing, right kid? (He turns to his son who is on his side.)

SON 2: It's okay, mom, you really outdid yourself, mom.]

The main SO in this exchange is that the couple has reached the point of irreconcilable differences because of the opposing political views, and decided to separate. The entire description rests on, what would under normal circumstances be, the division of property. Instead, they engaged in a full-scale war. Thus, the main semantic opposition is DIVORCE vs. WAR, in the broader framework of the script ABSURD.

In addition, the dialogue contains several jab lines:

1. Insults: Husband and Wife engage in a range of insults, from swearing to slurs, all aggressive humor where they both are targets.

2. The family property is treated virtually as a territory to be captured. Hence, the SO is APARTMENT vs. TERRITORY, which arises as incongruity, with the wife laying most claims. That too is an underlying incongruity, for two reasons. First, the historical role of women in the household is treated, where she stays at home focusing on her chores, while men would work and provide for their families. Here, she claims the entire flat to the husband's fierce disagreement, seen in his reaction where he sarcastically

asks whether the 20 years' work in a steel plant was worth nothing. The SO is MALE vs. FEMALE ROLES, within the WAR script. The WAR script is especially prominent here because she emphasizes she has a historical claim to that territory. This is another script, SECESSIONISM, used frequently at the time by the then-Serbian president Slobodan Milošević to annex the territories of former Yugoslav republics into the greater Serbia. The historical claim is thus incongruous, where the SO is WIFE vs. SLOBODAN MILOŠEVIĆ. This is an example of absurd humor, within the broader SO REAL vs. UNREAL. I should add that this is an example of a restricted script, because a historical context of that time period is necessary to understand the "historical claim" segment.

3. The children's room is also an example of incongruity in this context, because the wife mentions it is an autonomous "oblast". The opposing scripts are AUTONOMOUS OBLAST CHILDREN'S ROOM vs. SERBIAN AUTONOMOUS OBLAST KRAJINA (abbreviated as "SAO Krajina").⁴⁸ As a short context, the Serbs loyal to Milošević formed an autonomous region in Croatia, all in an attempt to realize the plan of creating a greater Serbia. Hence, the comparison of a section of the apartment to the real-life issue in Yugoslavia at the time, is part of the absurd humor that dominates the sketch.

4. There are two more interesting jab lines: one is that the Wife says to the reporter not to pay attention to the bullets, as she continues talking about the conflict. That is an incongruity, with opposing framework POSSIBLE vs. IMPOSSIBLE and LIFE vs. DEATH. Another incongruity is that she urges the reporter to be objective, implying a lack of trust in journalists.

The above dialogue is, in fact, a depiction of the conflict and dissolution of Yugoslavia. The couple and their children are metaphors for the former Yugoslav republics, and the surreal situation of the dissolution of the country. The scene is even more absurd when the Wife presents a student "a lodger studying law for nine years" (Figure 6.43):

⁴⁸ "Oblast" is a word for an area or a region.



Figure 6.43
Law student

Note. The screenshot is from “Top lista nadrealista – rat u kući (HD)” [Video], by Nemanja M., 2003, YouTube (<https://youtu.be/8547GJ9mV0M>). Copyright 2026 by Top lista nadrealista. Screenshot by author.

Incongruity in this image rests on the student reading in a completely devastated place. The picture loosely hanging from the wall, the lamp and the destroyed wardrobe closet in the background are indexed objects for a family home, but have now completely lost their function. He stands as the appearance of reason in the otherwise chaotic situation. Hence, the opposition is NORMAL vs. NOT NORMAL; SANE vs. INSANE and PROGRESS vs. DESTRUCTION. Also, her utterance also contains incongruity: STUDYING FOR NINE YEARS vs. STUDYING FOR FOUR YEARS (at the time, the study period at the Faculty of Law lasted four years). The resolution is that he, clearly, is a bad student.

The last segment I will analyze in this scene concerns the visit by the European observers, a reference to the European Community Monitoring Mission in Yugoslavia (ECMM)⁴⁹. The selected transcription shows the general sentiment towards the ECMM mission (and Figure 6.44 depicts the observers in their white uniforms by which they were recognized in the early 1990s in Yugoslavia):

[POSMATRAČ 1: *Dobro večer, dobro večer!*

POPUŠLIČI: *pozdravljaju.*

POSMATRAČ 1: *Vidim, ovdje se malo ratuje, je li?*

POPUŠLIČI: *Nije, nije.*

POSMATRAČ: *Jeste, jeste.*

ŽENA: *Sinoć proslava.*

POSMATRAČ 2: *Rupe od metaka.*

MUŽ: *Ma komarci.*

POSMATRAČ 1: *Komarci, komarci. Pa otkad ja ovaj poslo radim niste se ni rodili.*

⁴⁹ British military historian and army officer Jonathon Riley wrote a book on the subject, titled *The Monitor Mission in the Balkans* (1992).

POSMATRAČ 2 (*pokazuje na sliku na zidu*): *A ovaj kulturno-istorijski spomenik ovdje? Oštećen.*

POSMATRAČ 1: *Auuuuu... Ponesite, Johane...*

MUŽ: *Ja ga kupio!*

POSMATRAČ 1: *I lampu, Johane...*

ŽENA: *Nemojte...*

POSMATRAČ 1: *I kofer, Johane.*

ŽENA: *Nemojte kofer!*

POSMATRAČ 1: *Ja radim svoj pos'o, gospođo! Svoj pos'o!*

ŽENA: *Ali mi smo samo malo pjevali.*

POSMATRAČ 1: *Pjevali ste vi, jeste, Srbijo moja, jeste, Hrvatska lijepa zemlja, jeste, Bosno moja, znam, znam...*

SIN 1: *Znate koju smo pjevali?*

(Svi šute dok Sin 1 smišlja pjesmu. Započinje pjevat popularnu folk pjesmu. Svi mu se priključuju, uključujući i posmatrača. Sin 1 postaje sumnjičav na posmatrača jer znaju tekst pjesme i optužuje ih da su lažni posmatrači. Reportaža se završava.)

OBSERVER 1: *Good evening, good evening!*

(Popušlićs greet them.)

OBSERVER 1: *I see, there's a bit of a war going on here, isn't there?*

POPUŠLIĆS: *No, it's not.*

OBSERVER: *Yes, it is.*

WIFE: *Last night's party.*

OBSERVER 2: *Bullet holes.*

HUSBAND: *Oh, those are mosquitoes.*

OBSERVER 1: *Mosquitoes, mosquitoes. I've been doing this job since before you were born.*

OBSERVER 2 (*pointing to a picture on the wall*): *And this cultural and historical monument here? Damaged.*

OBSERVER 1: *Ooooo... Take it, Johan...*

HUSBAND: *I bought it!*

OBSERVER 1: *And the lamp, Johan...*

WIFE: *Don't...*

OBSERVER 1: *And the suitcase, Johan.*

WIFE: *Don't take the suitcase!*

OBSERVER 1: *I'm doing my job, ma'am! My job!*

WOMAN: *But we were just singing a little.*

OBSERVER 1: *You were singing, yea, right, my Serbia; Croatia is a beautiful country, right, my Bosnia... I know, I know...*

SON 1: *You know which one we sang?*

(Silence as he tries to think of a song and then starts singing a popular folk song. Everybody joins him, including the observers. Son 1 becomes suspicious about the fact that the observers are singing and accuses them of being false observers. The report ends.)]



Figure 6.44
ECMM visits

Note. The screenshot is from “Top lista nadrealista – rat u kući (HD)” [Video], by Nemanja M., 2003, YouTube (<https://youtu.be/8547GJ9mV0M>). Copyright 2026 by Top lista nadrealista. Screenshot by author.

Several jab lines appear in the above exchange as well. Those include the general framework SO TRUE vs. NOT TRUE by both the Popušlić family and the Observer. First, Wife says there was a party in the apartment the previous night. The SO is PARTY vs. BATTLE. The second is when the Husband comments on the holes in the wall, with the SOs BULLET HOLES vs. MOSQUITOES, minimizing the size and the origin of the holes. The LM KR behind these incongruities is that the family fears consequences, i.e., some form of penalty by the observers, so they lie. Observer 1 sarcastically tells them they cannot trick him because he is too experienced in his job, which is absurd, in a way, since it would be impossible to confuse he damage caused by firearms with that caused by reckless behavior at a party. Hence, the Observer 1 even considering such a possibility is absurd. However, this is part of backgrounded incongruity, since the entire situation presented in the sketch is surreal.

The characterization of the picture hanging from the wall as cultural and historical monument is a point of incongruity. Hence, SOs are PICTURE vs. MONUMENT (of course, some masterpieces are part of the world heritage and can be classified as monuments, but a picture hanging from the Pupušlić family wall is certainly not, hence, the Observer 2 is exaggerating). The resolution is the intention of robbery under the guise of doing one's job. The observers do not stop there, but use their position to take some other belongings they find valuable. Additional SOs are EUROPEAN OBSERVERS vs. THIEVES. The LM KR partly rests in neo-colonialism, where the perceived powers would come to a country and take valuables

under the guise of protection of goods. Their neo-colonial trait is also seen in the reaction to the songs they accuse the family of singing, mentioning Bosnia, Croatia and Serbia in a derogatory manner. It is indicative that they observe everybody the same way, without making any effort to understand the situation. The general opposition is TRUST vs. NO TRUST and LITTLE PEOPLES vs. GREAT NATIONS. The TRUE vs. NOT TRUE framework also encompasses the Observer 1's utterance that he is doing his job. The opposition is EUROPEAN OBSERVER vs. THEFT. Clearly, the care for historical and cultural monuments here is an excuse for theft.

The end of the sketch is the accusation of the Observers being fake because they knew lyrics to the popular local folk song. SO IS REAL vs. FAKE and the resolution is not direct, but rather implicit, again amplifying the mistrust towards the European Observers.

The last segment of the TLN show analysis focuses on another aspect of the Yugoslav political crisis: a divided country.

6.7 East and West Sarajevo

At the very dawn of the breakup of Yugoslavia, the TLN show began increasingly focusing on the issue, covering a range of topics that were looming over the citizens' lives: a growing threat of war, economic crisis, uncertain future. Some of their episodes were incredibly precise in the depiction of future events and today people even describe them as "prophetic". Whether prophetic, or created on the basis of logical reasoning, the last sketch in this section shows Sarajevo as a divided city – East Sarajevo and West Sarajevo. Perhaps based on the Berlin Wall (1961–1989), this portrayal of the Sarajevo wall deeply resonates with the citizens because of the war that ensued, when Sarajevo underwent a siege (1992–1995), surrounded by heavy artillery, like a wall.

The sketch begins in a studio (Figure 6.45), with a map of Yugoslavia, divided in two (east and west), indicating the rising nationalistic politics in the country. That was the time when the aggressive politics of then-Serbian president Slobodan Milošević was becoming increasingly prominent.⁵⁰ The date in the upper right corner indicates that the entire sketch is taking place in the future (that particular episode was aired in the early 1990s).

⁵⁰ BBC filmed a documentary series titled *The Death of Yugoslavia*, explaining the events that lead to the break-up of the country and the wars that ensued. The series is accompanied by a book of the same title co-authored by Allan Little and Laura Silber (1996).

In the sketch, the announcer reads that the date marks four years since the division of “the regressive Socialist Yugoslavia and three and a half years since the so-called Sarajevo issue was resolved”. The SOs are YUGOSLAVIA vs. DIVIDED YUGOSLAVIA, within the general framework POSSIBLE vs. IMPOSSIBLE, since such a division of Yugoslavia seemed impossible to people (disintegration of the country, perhaps, but not the division to an eastern and a western block). In addition, to many Bosnians at the time (and even today) the Yugoslav sentiment was very strong, hence, another script opposition may appear: REGRESSIVE YUGOSLAVIA vs. PROGRESSIVE YUGOSLAVIA. If such a sentiment is/was prevalent with the viewers, the LM KR would be an ironic statement. In other words, the situation that ensued after the division was far worse than that when the country was unified.

DIVIDED SARAJEVO is another incongruity, because in the midst of crisis, nobody would even think that anything bad could possibly happen in Sarajevo, given its extraordinary multiethnic character. Hence, this too falls within the POSSIBLE vs. IMPOSSIBLE framework. The resolution in this case does not exist. The humor is absurd, because the imagined SI KR was inconceivable at the time.

The perception of the majority of people in Bosnia then was that peace was non-negotiable, that Bosnia and Herzegovina, together with other Yugoslav republics, should become independent countries and join Euro-Atlantic structures. Slobodan Milošević’s politics, on the other hand, was characterized by an entirely different agenda, opposing the progressive, European values, planning to create a greater Serbia and subjugate the people of the neighboring republics. He was oriented towards Russia, which is the reason why the perception of the majority of Bosnian population perceived the “east” as something derogatory in nature.



Figure 6.45
Divided Yugoslavia – a map

Note. The screenshot is from “Top Lista Nadrealista – Podjela Sarajeva (Sarajevski zid) (HQ)” [Video], by Top Lista Nadrealista & Slozna braca, 2006, YouTube (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dfJHDQuvUsE>). Copyright 2026 by Top lista nadrealista. Screenshot by author.

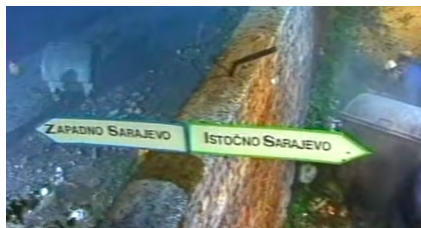
The announcer says:

Sinoć se na sarajevskom zidu desio teži međudržavni incident. Kompjuter koji je do sada izvanredno radio i koji nije dozvoljavao da smetljarske ekipe s obe strane zida čiste okolinu istovremeno sinoć je napravio veliku grešku. Imamo izvještaj o tome.

[Last night, a serious interstate incident occurred at the Sarajevo Wall. The computer, which had been working perfectly until now and which did not allow garbage crews on both sides of the wall to clean the area at the same time, made a big mistake last night. We have a report about it.]

Figure 6.46 shows the wall, with the sign indicating the direction of East Sarajevo and West Sarajevo. The wall is not immediately recognized as a Sarajevo landmark, but as the sketch progresses it becomes a recognizable place: it is a wall of a school in Sarajevo, in the Mejtaš area (city center). This is another instance of a focalized perspective within the geosemiot-ic parameter, where a schoolyard wall becomes a border wall. Hence, the sense of place in this case is the school area, transposed in this sketch so as to present the divide between two cities and, more broadly, two countries (East and West Yugoslavia). The area is gloomy with two waste containers, one on each side, clearly visible.

Figure 6.46 *The wall*



Note. The screenshot is from “Top Lista Nadrealista – Podjela Sarajeva (Sarajevski zid) (HQ)” [Video], by Top Lista Nadrealista & Slozna braca, 2006, YouTube (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dfJHDQuvUsE>). Copyright 2026 by Top lista nadrealista. Screenshot by author.

Two waste disposal teams arrive to the wall, each on their own side. The East Sarajevo side starts throwing garbage over the fence (Figure 6.47), with a bag clearly flying over towards West Sarajevo. This is an SO: CLEAN vs. DIRTY in which the incongruity rests on street cleaners throwing garbage over the wall. The LM KR is that they treat the other side as enemies. The resolution, thus, entails that they are not friendly towards their neighbors.



Figure 6.47
Flying garbage

Note. The screenshot is from “Top Lista Nadrealista – Podjela Sarajeva (Sarajevski zid) (HQ)” [Video], by Top Lista Nadrealista & Slozna braca, 2006, YouTube (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dfJHDQuvUsE>). Copyright 2026 by Top lista nadrealista. Screenshot by author.

A verbal exchange ensues:

SMETLJARI IZ ZAPADNOG SARAJEVA: *Šta je ovo? Smetljari jedni!*

[Šta je ovo, jebo vas! Šta bacaš to, majmune!

(Oba tima nastavljaju bacati smeće preko zida.)

SMETLJARI IZ ISTOČNOG SARAJEVA: *Pa ti bacaš! Pa vi ste bacali jučer nama! Vidi se ko baca!*

SMETLJARI IZ ZAPADNOG SARAJEVA: *Jebo vas zip.*

SMETLJARI IZ ISTOČNOG SARAJEVA: *Jebo vas spektar.*

(Bacanje smeća i gundanje se nastavlja. Po jedan smetljari iz Zapadnog i Istočnog Sarajeva se penju na zid da se obračunaju (Slika 38). Kad su se počeli tući, prepoznali su jedan drugog (slike 37. i 38).)

ČISTAČ IZ ISTOČNOG SARAJEVA: *Rambo!*

ČISTAČ IZ ZAPADNOG SARAJEVA: *Hamo! Jarane, ba, zar nisi u Švedskoj?*

ČISTAČ IZ ISTOČNOG SARAJEVA: *Nisam, ost'o ja ovde.*

ČISTAČ IZ ZAPADNOG SARAJEVA: *14 godina!*

(Oba tima čistača prepoznaju druga sa zapadne, odnosno, istočne strane i raduju se susretu.)

ČISTAČ IZ ZAPADNOG SARAJEVA: *Hajmo na piće! Haj vam u Triglav.*

ČISTAČ IZ ISTOČNOG SARAJEVA: *Hajmo u Drinu.*

ČISTAČ IZ ZAPADNOG SARAJEVA: *Hajmo u Triglav jebeš Drinu bolan jeftinije! (Kako ne mogu da se dogovore, nastavljaju s tučom i bacanjem smeća na drugu stranu. Kada se čuje sirena plicije, bježe svi osim jednog.)*

WASTE COLLECTORS FROM WEST SARAJEVO: *What is this? You garbagemen!*

What the fuck is this! Why are you throwing garbage, you monkey!

(Both garbage cleaning teams continue throwing garbage over the wall.)

WASTE COLLECTORS FROM EAST SARAJEVO: *You're throwing garbage over! You were throwing at us yesterday! Look who's throwing!*

WASTE COLLECTORS FROM WEST SARAJEVO: *Screw zip.*

WASTE COLLECTORS FROM EAST SARAJEVO: *Screw specter.*

(The throwing of garbage over the wall and grumbling continues. One garbage cleaner from West and one from East Sarajevo climb the wall to fight. When they started fighting, they recognize each other (Images 44 and 45).)

WASTE COLLECTOR FROM EAST SARAJEVO: Rambo!

WASTE COLLECTOR FROM WEST SARAJEVO: Hamo! Dude, aren't you in Sweden?

WASTE COLLECTOR FROM EAST SARAJEVO: No, I stayed here.

WASTE COLLECTOR FROM WEST SARAJEVO: 14 years!

(Both teams of cleaners recognize their colleagues from the west and east sides and look forward to meeting.)

WASTE COLLECTOR FROM WEST SARAJEVO: Let's go for a drink! Let's go to Triglav.

WASTE COLLECTOR FROM EAST SARAJEVO: Let's go to Drina.

WASTE COLLECTOR FROM WEST SARAJEVO: Let's go to Triglav, fuck Drina, it's cheaper!

As they cannot agree, they continue fighting and throwing garbage over the wall. As the police siren is heard in the distance, they all escape but one.]

This exchange is a humorous dialogue, characterized by two prominent jab lines. Before I comment on them, I need to emphasize that two garbagemen climb the wall in order to fight, only to realize that they used to be colleagues once, and are happy to have met again (Figure 6.48):



Figure 6.48
Garbagemen meet

Note. The screenshot is from “Top Lista Nadrealista – Podjela Sarajeva (Sarajevski zid) (HQ)” [Video], by Top Lista Nadrealista & Slozna braca, 2006, YouTube (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dfJHDQuvUsE>). Copyright 2026 by Top lista nadrealista. Screenshot by author.

The first jab line is a derogatory term for waste collectors, which I translated as ‘garbagemen’. This is a form of aggressive humor where they insult their fellow colleagues, but, ironically, they too are doing the same job. The LM KR is that the ‘garbageman’ term is used not to mark the profession, but to mark a negative behavior.

Another one is the choice of the *kafana*: TRIGLAV vs. DRINA. Triglav is a mountain in Slovenia, while Drina is a river in east Bosnia. This is an issue triggering the continuation of the fight: the cleaning men argue over

trivialities, with script oppositions IMPORTANT vs. UNIMPORTANT. The important segment would cover the possibility of recuperating a friendship, but that collapses in the unimportant argument over the *kafana* preference.

The two cleaning teams continue throwing trash over the wall and leave when police sirens are heard. One remains and cleans the wall. Ironically, the wall remains clean (Figure 6.49), while the rubbish remains in both West and East Sarajevo.



Figure 6.49
Cleaning the wall

Note. The screenshot is from “Top Lista Nadrealista – Podjela Sarajeva (Sarajevski zid) (HQ)” [Video], by Top Lista Nadrealista & Slozna braca, 2006, YouTube (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dfjHDQvUsE>). Copyright 2026 by Top lista nadrealista. Screenshot by author.

6.8 It is impossible to end the TLN story

The TLN show is an inevitable segment of Bosnian humor. It depicts the genuine spirit of the 1980s and early 1990s Sarajevo. Topics they treated through humor were always a form of social criticism, regardless if it was a reaction against the oppression of the system, where freedom of expression (individual, artistic, etc.) was limited or sometimes even prohibited, or a reaction on the important political events, or, simply, humor focused on stereotypical characteristics of the “Bosnian everyman”: kind-hearted but also thuggishly rude, frequently uneducated but proud, etc.

As far as the geosemiotic perspective is concerned, the sense of place is raised since, as I said, the show was filmed on the streets of Sarajevo in the 1980s and the early 1990s. Hence, the sketches are a time capsule of sorts, showing the people of Sarajevo in that period, with their different preferences, habits and hobbies. In addition, two perspectives can be observed

within the geosemiotic framework: focalized and non-focalized. In the focalized perspective, the TLN show manipulates the locations and certain objects in order to enhance humor. For example, the Vrelo Bosne outing area becomes a porn film shooting space in an imaginary forest, the University of Sarajevo building is presented as an interrogation unit, a schoolyard wall becomes a border between two cities and two countries (similar to what the Berlin Wall used to be). The non-focalized perspective presents the Sarajevo streets and objects which do not change the function, but the characters' behavior and even appearance are in contrast to the surrounding. For example, the hunter with a shotgun is seen walking around, using the public transportation, eating at a restaurant, etc. Another example is the sketch where aliens are walking the streets of Sarajevo, meeting the people and being perceived differently, depending on the circumstances (some thugs beat an alien just because he is different, while the *buregdžnica* restaurant waiter feels sorry for Captain Zenit because he appears to be hungry).

The TLN humor may not resonate as much with young people today, which is an inevitable consequence of the passing of time. However, it is impossible to end the TLN story, for *Nadrealisti* will always have a special place in the cultural heritage of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

7 Bruca Braca Bruda Brada (BBBB)

Bruca Braca Bruda Brada (BBBB) is an animated series created by *Helem nejse*, an artistic collective from Sarajevo. The series has become popular in the region, primarily in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Serbia and Montenegro, to the extent that the number of views on the YouTube channel, where the series is aired, has reached over 26.8 million, with 102,000 subscribers (June 2026). The series is frequently called “Bosnian *South Park*” (Krivošić, 2024).

Its success rests in humorous, witty criticism of the Bosnian society, which has undergone significant difficulties since the war ended in 1995. Economic and social crisis has been deepened by corrupt politicians, organized crime, characterized especially by the close ties between politicians and criminals, the struggle of the working-class people to make ends meet while living on fringes of the society, war veterans facing not only the psychological consequences of war, but also a lack of state support where they are left to fend for themselves, neglect of quality education and culture platforms, where artists are tilting at windmills but still persist, etc. These are some of the themes treated by the series, and the fact that it has become popular in former Yugoslav republics is an indicator that such a situation is no different elsewhere.

The breakup of Yugoslavia and the change of the political paradigm that ensued, together with the wars, the ferocity of which was mostly felt in Bosnia and Herzegovina, brought about changes in the lives of people who suddenly faced the post-Yugoslav reality. That means that the period of transition from socialism to democracy has reflected negatively on the lives of citizens who are still living varying degrees of economic insecurities, stranded in their day-to-day realities.

More about the position of the working class in Yugoslavia as compared to today, as well as about the *Švrakino selo* suburbs of Sarajevo, can be found in Đuliman & Bošnjak (2026), but it is important to mention here that the working-class people in former Yugoslavia have faced a change of the social paradigm in the sense that their position has been downgraded to the extent that many have lost social protection and job opportunities.

In such circumstances, the people have largely either migrated to some other countries, or have resorted to different ways of making ends meet, which sometimes inevitably involves a life tied to crime. This stranded position of many people, especially youth not seeing any future prospect, is portrayed in the BBBB series.

Reflecting upon the humor of BBBB, Ines Mrenica (2024) said that the series is perhaps the most important and the bravest of the Bosnian humor since the TLN show. Indeed, their popularity is an indicator of the extent to which their message resonates with the viewers, but it is important to emphasize that the two series speak to different audiences. The BBBB series is contemporary, treating the topics that concern the current social reality, while the TLN series reached peak popularity in the 1980s, where times were different in many respects. That said, we can observe that the early episodes of the TLN series depicted a different life, more relaxed, filled with hope of a bright future of Yugoslavia, while the episodes leading towards the breakup of the country and the war did contain a lot of dark humor and a less-optimistic prospect.

The young people now in their twenties and early thirties do not even remember the TLN period and the humor presented there does not resonate much with them, simply because they cannot identify with the situation prevalent at the time. In that sense, it is natural to observe the two series as reflections of voices of different generations.

In the following analysis, I will present the BBBB series so that I will show some of the most appealing themes, since treating particular episodes in the series would be an impossible task for the scope of this book. This said, I will not include the dialogues and images from the episodes that have already been analyzed in our papers (Đuliman & Bošnjak, 2026; Đuliman et al., in preparation).

It is also important to emphasize that, unlike the TLN sketches, the BBBB series focuses on episodes which are independent of one another but present a storyline. This initially appeared as a problem which I solved by deciding to walk the readers through two episodes of the series, focusing on the most important images and dialogues. The reason behind my decision was that the papers we have written so far about BBBB may serve as an introduction to the main themes and the language of the series (which I will briefly comment on in the following section) (Đuliman and Bošnjak, 2026), or on the visual aspects of humor from an episode of the series where we are discussing the sense of place as situations (Đuliman et al., in preparation).

The episodes presented in the following analysis will inevitably encompass the storyline, which provides also the necessary context, visual elements and the dialogues that appear. A “trialogue” was, thus, inevitable, and I am well aware that the humor of the BBBB series cannot be described in full by this book. My intention here is to tantalize the readers’ curiosity, hoping that they will either experience or even write about the BBBB humor in their own research endeavors.

I should add in the end that the last segment will contain an analysis of the poem “Mora” [Nightmare] by Abdulah Sidran, the famous Bosnian poet I quoted at the very introduction to the chapter about the Bosnian humor. He is parodied by the BBBB series and I felt it more than appropriate to include him in the analysis, as an homage of sorts to his everlasting spirit.

7.1 Main BBBB characters and *Švrakino selo*, their home

Unlike the TLN show where sketches would thematically vary, with few recurring characters, the BBBB animated series has four main protagonists and a number of recurring characters. I will present the main protagonists, while the recurring characters will be briefly introduced in the analysis, as they appear in the selected material.

The four characters, Bruca (Dino Dumina), Braca (Ajnur Varijantaš), Bruda (Dženan Horror) and Brada (Slobodan Milošević) are drawn as stick figures (Figure 7.1).

Figure 7.1

Bruca, Braca, Bruda, Brada. And Cura, the dog.



Note. Adapted from “BBBB.ba”, by Helem nejse, n.d., bbbb.ba.
Copyright 2026 by Helem nejse.

This simple animation shows some important character traits: they are always smoking marijuana, which is seen in the lit joints they almost always hold; the details in their wardrobe indicate some character traits,

especially in the case of Bruda (tomahawk hairstyle and slack square sling bag), a chain around the neck of Bruca, indicating the *nouveau riche* class, Brada's beard, as well as a neat hairdo and beard style of Bruca, the "intellectual" of the group. In addition, Bruda's American pit bull terrier Momak [boy] he calls Cura [girl] is always with them, frequently introducing new episodes of the series. The dog's breed is also an indicator of the thug lifestyle because frequently the criminal underworld prides in owning dangerous dogs (in this case a pit bull).

Their nicknames are all slang words for "brother", save for Brada (Beard), a kind-hearted drug addict whose real name is Slobodan Milošević, the infamous Serbian politician that shares nothing of his evil traits with Brada. Names of characters are discussed in detail in the Đuliman & Bošnjak (2026) paper, but here it will suffice to say that usually the first names are common in Bosnia, while the last names and nicknames denote the essential traits of characters. In the analysis, I will reflect upon some of their names if necessary.

A striking feature in the entire series is the colloquial language, characteristic of Sarajevo. This is primarily seen in the use of style markers, highly culture specific, containing fillers such as the famous *ba*, the most prominent characteristic of the Sarajevo slang.

Swear words as empty categories are also frequent: *Allaha mi*, *Dine mi*, *dede'm*, etc. This said, the characters who do not even consider religion as important swear by Allah, for example.

Profanities (*pičko*, *jebemu*, *koji kurac*, etc.) as semantically empty categories, more precisely, swear words used without an intention to offend also fillers, stylistically marked. In fact, they can be seen as humor enhancers, since the characters sometimes use profanities in the middle of a serious conversation.

In addition, character traits are portrayed through particular manner of speaking. For example, a corrupt local politician speaks at a speed that makes him almost incomprehensible; *Braca*, the spoiled son of a local politician, speaks with a vocal fry; *Bruda's* voice is hoarse, in contrast to the soft but unrefined speech of his friend *Bruca*, the intellectual of the group. Brada's voice is slow, and his speech is frequently delayed by the elongation of vowels, indicating his drug addiction, since he has trouble focusing and needs a lot of strength sometimes to produce a speech segment.

The series is set in Švrakino selo, a working-class neighborhood in Sarajevo, with the main assembly point of the group being a real-life space graphically reimagined to some extent to meet the needs of the series. The

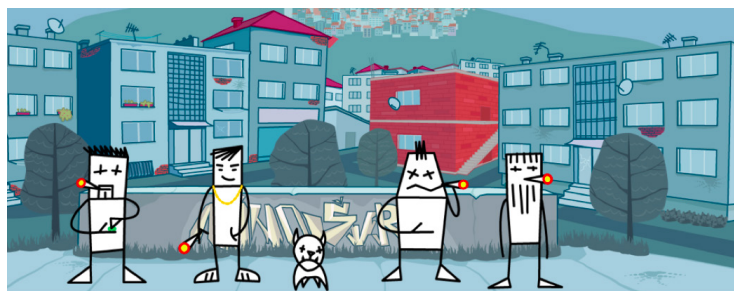
wall in the BBBB image is a transformed space in the sense that the large wall observed in the real-life image at the square is reduced to a small size, which is a usual background of the animated series, with the argot “KINOŠVRA” (Švrakino) visible usually in the background (figures 7.2 and 7.3). The use of argot in the Bosnian colloquial language is frequent, mostly involving the local metathesis, where the first syllable in a word is moved to the final position (Durmišević & Hodžić-Čavkić, 2026). This is the case with the Švrakino wall graffiti: the initial syllable ŠVRA is moved to the final position.

Figure 7.2 *Real-life Švrakino selo*



Note. Photograph by Matija Bošnjak. Reprinted with permission.

Figure 7.3 *BBBB at the meeting point*



Note. Adapted from “BBBB.ba”, by Helem nejse, n.d., bbbb.ba.
Copyright 2026 by Helem nejse.

The sense of place is visually established and the episodes open with the four main characters and the dog standing in front of the wall. The characters call the location “kota” [the meeting point]. Geosemiotically, this is the non-focalized perspective, which means that changes to the scenery showed in Figure 7.3 do not reflect a change of the original function of the location in order to create humor. It has been adapted in the animated series to an extent, so that the original image of the wall is changed, as I have explained above, but the scenery has remained the same: rundown

buildings with some visible damage to the façade, some scattered trees and some flowerpots at windows or satellite dishes. In addition, the Mojmiło hill is visible in the background of both the images, including some houses.

In the bottom right corner, Figure 7.3 shows a concrete scar, which is the result of the shelling of the city during the 1992–1995 siege. Although Figure 7.2 does not show that detail, concrete scars⁵¹ can be seen in Švrakino selo, although over 30 years have passed since the end of the war. The war scars still observable in the Švrakino selo area are also indicative of the city authorities' neglect of that part of the city.

Hence, in this particular setting, the only element that may be said to enhance humor to an extent is the "KINOŠVRA" graffiti on the wall. Sadly, I have been unable to find such a graffiti in Švrakino selo.

One of the most striking BBBB episodes in which the Sarajevo buildings, monuments and other significant sights are foregrounded is *Gdje je Saraj'vo jel' nekad bilo* [Where's Sarajevo, did it use to be], which I will analyze in the following section.

7.2 Where's Sarajevo, did it use to be?

The episode title, *Gdje je Saraj'vo, jel' nekad bilo* is a wordplay of a song by a popular Bosnian singer Edin Dervišhalidović (a.k.a. Dino Merlin), titled *Jel' Sarajevo gdje je nekad bilo* [Is Sarajevo still where it used to be]. While Dino Merlin's song reflects a man's absence from the city and nostalgia, the BBBB episode aims at presenting the people of the suburbs as rarely visiting the city proper unless there is a particular reason. This is especially reflected in Bruda's comment: "Šta ću u gradu kad nemam ročište?" [Why go to town, I don't have a court date?]. His comment is obnoxious, since Bruda does not at all seem to understand the experience of visiting the city, which extends far beyond being summoned to the court.

The premise of the episode is that Bruca, Braca, Burda and Brada decide (upon Braca's proposal) to go out to the town. Braca states that his three friends are primitive, rarely in contact with the civilized world, initiating thus the real-life story of Sarajevo, relating to whether or not someone is really from Sarajevo (meaning, their family should stem from the city for generations, and if they had arrived and stayed in Sarajevo because of the war, as refugees, especially from Eastern Bosnia, they are looked

⁵¹ Certain locations in the city were sites of massacres. In such cases, the concrete scars have been painted red and are called "Sarajevo roses" (I will provide a more detailed description in the section 7.3).

down upon). The discussion continues as Bruda drives them to the city so fast that they end up crashing right in front of the BiH Presidency building (Figure 7.4).

Figure 7.4 BBBB crash in front of the BiH Presidency



Note. The screenshot is from “GDJE JE SARAJ’VO JEL’ NEKAD BILO | Sebilj završio u Švrakinom | Animirana serija #BBBB | EP5” [Video], by Bruca Braca Bruda Brada, 2021, YouTube (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RRo1LOYF0IE>). Copyright 2026 by Helem nejse & EKIPIA. Screenshot by author.

The SI KR of the entire image is that of a car crash, and the location invokes the sense of place to those familiar with Sarajevo: the Presidency building is recognizable primarily because of the façade color, by the balcony and the entrance. This is almost a verbatim reproduction. However, from the humor standpoint, there are three segments constituting hyperdetermination⁵² (and I will provide still images for each of the examples below): first, in real life, the inscription at the entrance to the building reads BiH Presidency in Bosnian, Croatian and Serbian respectively, in strict observance of state-level legislation requiring that all three languages be used. This is a sad reality, since the inscription is absolutely the same in all three languages. The fact that Bosnians, Croatsians, Montenegrins and Serbs understand each other indicates that they speak the same language from the linguistic standpoint, and I am of the opinion that it is a polycentric language. However, the language manipulation in Bosnia (and elsewhere), reflects nationalistic tendencies. Such manipulation has

⁵² Hyperdetermination is defined as “multiple concurrent sources of humor” in a text (Attardo, 2001, p. 131).

been discussed a number of times already, in linguistics, for example, in the book by Snježana Kordić *Jezik i nacionalizam* [Language and Nationalism] (2010), but also in other media and even memes where the attention is drawn to the absurdity of such practice (e.g. L'Express, 2017).⁵³

However, Figure 7.5 shows an inscription of a rather different content:

Figure 7.5 *Three-glutton presidency and three-headed head chief*



Note. The still image is from “GDJE JE SARAЈ’VO JEL’ NEKAD BILO | Sebilj završio u Švrakinom | Animirana serija #BBBB | EP5” [Video], by Bruca Braca Bruda Brada, 2021, YouTube (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RRo1LOYF0IE>). Copyright 2026 by Helem nejse & EKIPA.

From the GTVH perspective, humor is seen in the LA KR parameter, where the same language is used to transmit the same message,

⁵³ I should emphasize, however, that the Serbian and Croatian nationalistic tendencies in Bosnia have been such that the Bosnian language is presented frequently either as the “language of Bosniaks (Bosnian Muslims)”, or so that the people who wish to are being denied the right to name their language as such: Bosnian. A striking example of such practice is in the Republika Srpska entity of Bosnia, where children were denied the right to call their language Bosnian, and the authorities insisted either to use the term Serbian or, as previously mentioned, “the language of Bosniaks” (see, for example, Veselinović, 2015).

Similar tendencies have existed in the parts of Bosnia where Bosnian Croats constitute the majority, denying the Serb and Bosniak children in schools to call their language the way they would like (see: *Uskraćeno pravo na maternji jezik – Ured Koordinatora za reformu javne uprave*, 2018).

Still, one should keep in mind that these are exclusively the activities of nationalistic politicians, not the general population, since there are many in Bosnia irrespective of ethnicity who will call their language Bosnian, refusing to be part of such manipulation, or who do not deny the existence of the Bosnian language.

three times (the only exception being the Cyrillic script used to indicate the Serb language, which is a false analogy, since it is one of the two official scripts). The inscription in the first four rows reads: TROGLADNO PREDSEDNIŠTVO [THREE-GLUTTON PRESIDENCY], as well as TROGLAVO POGLAVIČARSTVO [THREE-HEADED HEAD CHIEF] in the last two rows. These are examples of wordplay, where, in the first case, the fact that Bosnia has a presidency consisting of three members is used in combination with the adjective GLADAN [HUNGRY, GLUTTON], creating the SO HUNGRY/GLUTTON vs. PRESIDENCY. LM KR in this case is that the members of Presidency are power-hungry politicians. The second case, the THREE-HEADED HEAD CHIEF, is aimed at mocking linguistic purism most frequently observed in some Croatian linguistic circles,⁵⁴ mostly politically motivated. I should add that such tendencies exist in Bosnia as well with some linguists of other ethnicities, also politically motivated. Hence, the SO here is the broad framework SENSICAL vs. NONSENSICAL (WORDS).

Second, the two black stelae in the background are also geosemiotically significant, since a number of such stelae can be seen throughout Sarajevo, containing the alleged quotes by president of the Presidency of the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Alija Izetbegović. He was also the founder of the *Stranka demokratske akcije* (SDA) party, which is a center-right party, known for and suspected of primarily assembling rich Bosniak families (especially those who got rich during the war), participating in corruption, nepotism and other forms of dubious activities. These stelae are primarily an attempt of the party to create a personality cult. However, it turned out that the quotes used were not those of Alija Izetbegović, but of various world-renowned writers, philosophers, etc. The scandal was immense, and the Bosnian press wrote about it (see, e.g. Avdić, 2020). To this day, the city authorities have not removed the stelae (Figure 7.6).

⁵⁴ There are, however, linguists who oppose such practices, correctly arguing that language should be observed within linguistics as a scientific discipline, not as means of political oppression or “purity” of one language variety above others. One such valuable example is the book *Jeziku je svejedno* [Language does not care] (2019) by Anđel Starčević, Mate Kapović and Daliborka Savić.



Figure 7.6
Stela of wisdom in Sarajevo

Note. Photograph by the author.

However, the BBBB placed two such stelae in front of the Presidency building (in reality, that is not the case). That is a manipulation of objects in order to create humor, in other words, the focalized perspective. Hence, the series uses the stelae as a starting point of real-life mockery, which is particularly seen in the made-up inscriptions that read: BOLJE ISPASTI BUDALA NEGO IZ VOZA [BETTER TURN OUT A FOOL THAN FALL OUT OF A TRAIN], and MI NIŠTA NE OBEĆAVAMO I TO ISPUNJAVAMO U POTPUNOSTI [WE PROMISE NOTHING AND WE KEEP THAT PROMISE] (figures 7.7 and 7.8).

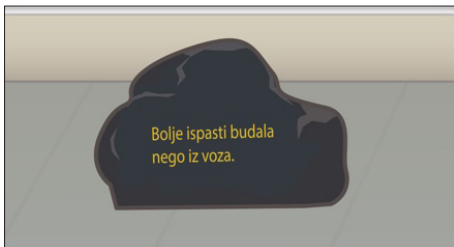


Figure 7.7
Stela of BBBB wisdom 1



Figure 7.8
Stela of BBBB wisdom 2

Note. Still images are from “GDJE JE SARAJ’VO JEL’ NEKAD BILO | Sebilj završio u Švrakinom | Animirana serija #BBBB | EP5” [Video], by Bruca Braca Bruda Brada, 2021, YouTube (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RRo1LOYF0IE>). Copyright 2026 by Helem nejse & EKIPA.

Also, the stelae indicate the TA KR, which is the SDA party. The NS KR is inscriptions, containing the absurd messages. That said, the stela to the left raises the incongruity seen in the SO TO TURN OUT A FOOL vs. TO FALL OUT OF A TRAIN, with the two scripts TRAIN and FOOL brought into overlap. This is an absurd claim in that it is a fairly logical statement, since the latter activity would possibly lead to death or, in the best-case scenario, a serious injury. Hence, the SOs are realized within the larger framework LIFE vs. DEATH. Still, there is no resolution to this incongruity because of the absurd statement. The same applies to the inscription on the stela to the right, which implies the failed behavior of Bosnian politicians: they have used a rhetoric resting on many empty promises and are comfortable in not even trying to fulfill them. The absurdity of this sentence is seen in the question: can a promise contain nothing and can that nothing be fulfilled? In other words, the SO in this case would include the framework POSSIBLE vs. IMPOSSIBLE and the LM KR is not realized (resolution of the incongruity does not exist).⁵⁵

The third important segment on the image concerns the traffic bollards, one of which Bruda hit by the car (Figure 7.9).



Figure 7.9
The newest traffic bollard

Note. The still image is from “GDJE JE SARAJ’VO JEL’ NEKAD BILO | Sebilj završio u Švrakinom | Animirana serija #BBBB | EP5” [Video], by Bruca Braca Bruda Brada, 2021, YouTube (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RRo1LOYF0IE>). Copyright 2026 by Helem nejse & EKIPA.

⁵⁵ These inscriptions are similar to the absurd humor that appears in the Italian *Alan Ford* comic book, which used to be highly popular in Yugoslavia. More precisely, these are similar to graphic t-shirts by Grunf, one of the main characters. I wrote an article about it (Đuliman, 2017).

Driving in Sarajevo (frequent traffic jams, irresponsible drivers and pedestrians) has been a problem for the city authorities for quite some time. There are instances almost every day of traffic accidents with varying degrees of damage to life and property. The bollards are frequently damaged because of reckless parking, and public money is spent for their replacement or repair, without any measures taken to control the situation. In that sense, each of the bollards presented in Figure 7.8 contains the inscription “najnoviji stub” [the newest bollard]. The NS in this case is also the inscription, this time on a bollard rather than on a stela, while the incongruity trigger is the inscription, since bollards do not contain any text. The fact that the superlative form is used indicates the frequent replacement, and the SO is CAUTIOUS DRIVING vs. RECKLESS DRIVING, all in the broader category: NORMAL vs. ABNORMAL.

Figures 7.10 and 7.11 show two Bosnian politicians, who served as members of the BiH Presidency (there are three members of the Presidency, each representing one of the three largest ethnic groups, which is in accordance with the current discriminatory constitution of the country⁵⁶). The image shows two politicians, Milorad Dodik (Serb) and Željko Komšić (Croat). Interestingly, their heads are presented as real-life (naturalistic) images, unlike many of their characters, including the four main protagonists of the series. It is frequently the case in the series that the heads of the politicians are presented as real-life images.

⁵⁶ Discrimination is rooted in the BiH Constitution because, for example, Jewish or Romani citizens are not allowed to run for members of the Presidency. Jakob Finci and Dervo Sejdić took this to the European Court of Human Rights and its 2009 judgement confirmed discrimination (European Court of Human Rights, 2009). The judgement has not yet been implemented.

Figure 7.10 Milorad Dodik in BBBB



Figure 7.11 Željko Komšić in BBBB



Note. Screenshots are from “GDJE JE SARAJ’VO JEL’ NEKAD BILO | Sebilj završio u Švrakinom | Animirana serija #BBBB | EP5” [Video], by Bruca Braca Bruda Brada, 2021, YouTube (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RRo1LOYF0IE>). Copyright 2026 by Helem nejse & EKIPA. Screenshot by author.

When the episode was put on YouTube in 2021, these two politicians were serving as BiH Presidency members. Milorad Dodik (Figure 7.9), then-member of the Presidency, is a Serb nationalist, undermining the progress of the country, presenting the right-wing ultranationalist views against Bosniaks and Croats. His absolute political opposite is Željko Komšić (Figure 7.10), a Bosnian Croat. He advocates the policy of equality of all citizens of Bosnia, regardless of their ethnicity, religious or other forms of affiliation. Still, these two images show them together, living under the same roof of the BiH Presidency. Hence, the underlying tone is that of the sad reality of politicians, living their own comfortable lives and interests, regardless of the seemingly efficient mask of their polar different political opinions. Backgrounded incongruity in both these cases falls under the script HYPOCRISY.

Milorad Dodik is here shown dressed in pink slippers and a pink robe. The color pink, stereotypically seen in the Balkans as the “girly color”, is the opposite of the macho bully image Dodik represents. Hence, his appearance at the door dressed so entails backgrounded incongruity portraying him as a weak character. Another backgrounded incongruity in this case is the fact that Dodik, who is doing everything in his power to prevent the progress of the country, lives and works at the highest level of government, where he feels at home, and that stands for his hypocrisy.

Backgrounded incongruity is also seen in Željko Komšić's position of the hand and finger, since that is the allusion to his coalition with the nationalist party (at the time, predominantly, SDA party I mentioned previously in the text), although he had claimed he would never do that. In an interview he pointed to his cheek stating he would never lose face. Hence, the image is a semiotic device referring to his betrayal of principles he had been elected upon.⁵⁷

As far as the dialogue in this section is concerned, it is interesting to mention the part when Dodik opens the door after hearing the crash Bruda had caused:

[DODIK: *Šta to vi radite ovdje? Šta je ovo, Inzko jesi ti?*

BRUDA: *Oooo, Dole, Dodara, šta ima, brat moj lijepi? Dobar? Ti sad ovdje sa stanom, jel?*

DODIK: *O, Bruda, šta ima? Evo hodam, ne mogu da spavam, hrče onaj Bakir. Malo izašo da prošetam glavu da razbistrim.*

KOMŠIĆ: *Mile, halo, Mile. Uđi, bolan, hoću da zaključam.*

DODIK: *Vidi, stalno me opstruira. Ne znam jel mi gore kad ovaj spava il' onaj kad je budan.*

BRUDA: *Eee, jel' normala da ovdje parkiram, paša, a?*

DODIK: *Ma ništa se ne sekiraj, Bruda.*

DODIK: What are you doing here? Inzko, is that you?

BRUDA: Oh, Dole, Dodara, what's up, bro? You good? You live here now?

DODIK: Oh, Bruda, what's up? I've been walking around, I can't sleep, Bakir's snoring. I just want to vent a little, to clear my mind.

KOMŠIĆ: Mile, hey, Mile, come in. I want to lock up.

DODIK: Look at him, obstructing me all the time. I don't know if it's worse when he's asleep or when the other one is awake.

BRUDA: Buddy, is it ok for me to park here?

DODIK: Sure, don't worry, Bruda.]

The dialogue also contains backgrounded incongruity, primarily focusing on the closeness of the powerful politicians with the Office of the High Representative (Valentin Inzko was the High Representative), which is a body overseeing the implementation of the Dayton Peace Agreement for BiH (civil responsibilities),⁵⁸ as well as Dodik's hypocritical stance of

⁵⁷ Komšić's pointing to the cheek was widely discussed in the Bosnian press, e.g.: Gudelj, 2018; Patria, 2020, etc. Here, however, I need to emphasize that although these sources discuss the same issue, their interpretation, i.e. agenda, varies, depending on the orientation and the ownership of the news portals.

⁵⁸ See more at The Office of the High Representative web: www.ohr.int.

being constantly obstructed by other Bosnian politicians while he is the one causing the majority of problems (a response to Komšić's invitation to get back into the building), and, above all, the link between the organized crime and politicians, which is one of the main themes of the entire BBBB series (see more in Đuliman & Bošnjak, 2026).

This is best seen in the way in which Bruda and Dodik communicate. First, Bruda addresses Dodik very friendly, using nicknames that denote closeness (Dole, Dodara) and "brat moj lijepi" (literal translation: my beautiful brother). This phrase is used colloquially between (male) friends. This is a sharp contrast between the way in which Dodik is perceived as a person (not known by friendly nicknames even by his own supporters), hence the general framework of the SOs are NORMAL vs. ABNORMAL. This same SO applies to the segment where Dodik, a member of the BiH Presidency allowed Bruda, a criminal, to leave the car in front of the building (which is always prohibited).

The underlying tone of this episode reflects an important BBBB theme: a negative stance towards primitivism and snobbery of either the *nouveau riche* or those who consider themselves "native Sarajevans". The former is the sad reality of post-Yugoslav societies, reflected in many respects not only in the behavior of people, but also in the fact that the ruling political elites do not care for either culture or education, giving way to many obscure characters, quasi-individuals and opportunists to further degrade the cultural life and education in the region. In the context of Sarajevo, isolation of the working-class population of the suburbs is evident, and this BBBB episode portrays it through the four protagonists' walk through the city, observing the marvels of architecture (figures 7.12–14):



Figure 7.12
BBBB in Baščaršija



Figure 7.13
BBBB in front of the Cathedral



Figure 7.14
BBBB in front of Vječna vatra

Note. Screenshots are from “GDJE JE SARAJ’VO JEL’ NEKAD BILO | Sebilj završio u Švrakinom | Animirana serija #BBBB | EP5” [Video], by Bruca Braca Bruda Brada, 2021, YouTube (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RRo1LOYF0IE>). Copyright 2026 by Helem nejse & EKIPA. Screenshot by author.

The images present the characters walking around Sarajevo, with the *Sebilj* fountain, the *Sacred Heart Cathedral* and the *Vječna vatra* [Eternal Flame] memorial seen in the background. These are all symbols evoking a strong sense of place in Sarajevo, for they are each a symbol from a different historical era: the Sebilj fountain (the Ottoman architecture), the cathedral, a masterpiece by architect Josip Vančaš (the Austro-Hungarian period), the Eternal Flame, a monument to the victims of the Second World War, completed in 1946, (the communist period). The characters observe their city in awe, which is reflected especially in figures 7.12 and 7.12, where they appear in front of the slightly bent and hazy monuments, which is a signal of their surprise. Brada even says: “A što je lijep objekat, Dine mi. Vidi se da je čo’ek im’o ukusa, Allah mu rahmetile.” [Well, this sure is a nice object, I swear. One can tell the guy had taste, may Allah have mercy on him.]

This segment is funny for several reasons. First, Bruda clearly sees the Sacred Heart Cathedral for the first time. Considering that he takes pride in being Sarajevan, him being unfamiliar with one of the city’s symbols is incongruous, with the SO primarily established in the framework POSSIBLE vs. IMPOSSIBLE. The logical mechanism in this case is that Bruda is highly uneducated. In addition, him referring to “čo’ek” (i.e., “the guy”) adds to humor because he appears to be judging the taste of the famed architect, who constructed many culturally significant objects in Sarajevo. LM KR is that Bruda is a highly uneducated character. Lastly, he pays respect to the late architect by uttering a Muslim honorific phrase for the deceased. This is not only funny because Josip Vančaš was Catholic (in fact, this may not even be relevant, since different religions will pay respect to the deceased people in different ways) but because Bruda uttering such a phrase is hypocritical, since he is a drug dealer, a criminal who will use all he can to his own gain, even religion. Later I will show that the BBBB

series also attributes this hypocritical stance to the politicians, for example. Hence, the SO in this case is RELIGION vs. HYPOCRISY.

Figure 7.14 adds to the sense of place not only because of the Eternal Flame memorial but also because of the break-dancers that appear. Break-dancers and other street artists are frequently seen performing in front of the Eternal Flame, although they can also be seen in other locations in the area. The yellow box used to collect the money is important for further development of the story as well, but here I will focus on Brada's reaction to the Eternal Flame and Braca's explanation of the monument:

[BRADA: Aaaaa, eno vatre! Gori sve! Zovite vatrospasce! Požaaaar, požaaaar! Upomoooć!

BRACA: Joj, Brada, jesi šlagerant, to ti je Vječna vatra, bolan, to ti je spomenik žrtvama borbe protiv antifašizma.

BRADA: Ooooh, fire! Everything's burning! Call fire saviors! Fire! Fire! Heeeelp!

BRACA: Damn, Brada, you're funny, this is the Eternal Flame, a monument to the victims of the fight against anti-fascism!]

Just as it was the case with Bruda in the previous section, the lack of education of the characters is seen here as a resolution to the incongruity that arises first in Brada's case, where he panics when he sees the flame, thinking that the place is on fire. The opposing SOs are FIRE vs. ETERNAL FLAME MEMORIAL. Him using the word "vatrospasci" (fire saviors) instead of firefighters is backgrounded incongruity, showing his illiteracy.

However, Braca's reaction to his panic is particularly funny, because of the two reasons. First, this utterance shows that Braca is equally uneducated as Bruda and Brada. He is aware that the Eternal Flame is a memorial, but he states that it is a memorial to "the fight against anti-fascism". The second reason, however, is far more intentional, for it contains a reference to the then-mayor of Sarajevo, Abdulah Skaka. Upon celebrating the Sarajevo Liberation Day (6 April), Mayor Skaka stated on two separate occasions that it was "a victory over anti-fascism" ("Abdulah Skaka borac protiv antifašizma", 2017). This unintentional mistake caused immediate reactions among politicians and citizens alike. Of course, his position does not allow for such slips of tongue without a public apology, which had never occurred. That said, the TA KR would be Abdulah Skaka, former Mayor of Sarajevo, while the SOs are FASCISM vs. ANTI-FASCISM.⁵⁹ The LM KR

⁵⁹ On this occasion, I will mention but will not especially reflect upon the right-wing revisionist tendencies in the countries of former Yugoslavia which are trying to (at least)

in this case is twofold. One is that the Mayor of Sarajevo is uneducated and second, that he is arrogant, which is sad, but also funny to a significant extent because it falls in line with the behavior of many Bosnian politicians. That said, it is no accident that Braca speaks this utterance, since he belongs to a family of corrupt politicians.

Also, the monuments presented in this section of the episode are not manipulated to create or enhance humor (non-focalized perspective). They stand in a sharp contrast to the characters and their behavior.

The episode continues by the protagonists stealing the box used by the break-dancers to collect donations, thinking they had a lot of money there. They run through the city towards a high-end restaurant (Figure 7.15). Although the sense of place is not evoked in this instance, the inscription is significant for the humor analysis.



Figure 7.15 *Zlotna kašika restaurant*
Note. The screenshot is from “GDJE JE SARAJ’VO JEL’ NEKAD BILO | Sebilj završio u Švrakinom | Animirana serija #BBBB | EP5” [Video], by Bruca Braca Bruda Brada, 2021, YouTube (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RRo1LOYF0IE>). Copyright 2026 by Helem nejse & EKIPA. Screenshot by author.

The inscription on the restaurant reads (lines separated in this text by commas):

[EXTRA RENOVIRANI RESTORAN, VL. SIN, NAJSKUPLJI RESTORAN U GRADU, ZLOTNA KAŠIKA

EXTRA RENOVATED RESTAURANT, OWNED BY THE SON, THE MOST EXPENSIVE RESTAURANT IN TOWN, GOLDEN SPOON.]

These lines immediately establish the connection with Alija Izetbegović, a Bosnian politician whom I mentioned previously in the text, as well as his son, also a politician, Bakir Izetbegović. The humor here rests in the connection between the supposed statement made by Alija Izetbegović to a Bosnian soldier during the war that the people would eat with golden

relativize the fight against Nazis and their allies during the WWII. Historians such as Husnija Kamberović (e.g. 2014) (BiH), Hrvoje Klasić (2024) (Croatia) and Latinka Perović (2006) (Serbia) have extensively written and discussed the issue, warning against such practices.

spoons after the war (indicating the level of prosperity)⁶⁰ and the fact that his son, Bakir Izetbegović, a Bosnian politician who assumed the position of the leader of his father's party later, heavily prospered politically and in many other respects during and after the war. The NS KR in this case is a restaurant inscription while the SOs are POLITICAL CORRUPTION vs. ECONOMIC CRISIS, PROSPERITY vs. HARDSHIPS and POLITICAL FAMILY vs. DEMOCRACY.

Also, the text shown in the Figure 7.15, reads “zlotna” /zlɔ:tna:/, which is an incorrect pronunciation of the adjective “zlatna” (golden) /zla:tna:/. It is an important phonetic feature of the manner in which Alija Izetbegović and his son, Bakir, mispronounce words, inclining more towards the closed vowels. This is easily recognizable in the image in the Bosnian language to the native Bosnian speakers, since the alphabet immediately reflects the pronunciation (one to one correspondence between letters and sounds). It can be even said that such a (mis)pronunciation is a distinctive feature of the two politicians' speech. The insinuation is immediate to the Bosnian audience and the ZLOTNA inscription can be seen as a humor enhancer in this case.

In addition, the TA KR is Alija Izetbegović and his son, Bakir Izetbegović. The resolution itself does not occur. This is a sarcastic portrayal of the Bosnian reality which is seen through the prosperity of politicians and the hardships of citizens.

After the four eat and drink heavily, and the bill at the restaurant by far exceeds the meager amount contained in the break-dancers' box, they decide to exit before the waiter returns. The waiter gets angry and calls Mili, a recurring, snobbish BBBB character, to address the issue. In the meantime, Bruca, Braca, Bruda and Brada decide to return home because Bruca senses there would be trouble. Although Bruda shows no fear over it, he calls Berso to pick them up.

Berso is a war veteran, also one of the frequently recurring characters in the series. He is Bruda's right hand man, doing odd jobs to survive. He is one of the most explicit examples of suffering of the working class in Bosnia I discussed at the beginning of this chapter.

Just like Bruca, Braca, Bruda and Brada, Berso too is uncertain about the exact location of the city. And the extent of his uncertainty is seen in Figure 7.16:

⁶⁰ The “Alija Izetbegović” Museum would later deny that he had ever made such a statement (“Alija Izetbegović nije obećao ‘zlatne kašike’”, 2021).



Figure 7.16 *Berso on the Moon*
Note. The screenshot is from “GDJE JE SARAJ’VO JEL’ NEKAD BILO | Sebilj završio u Švrakinom | Animirana serija #BBBB | EP5” [Video], by Bruca Braca Bruda Brada, 2021, YouTube (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RRo1LOYF0IE>). Copyright 2026 by Helem nejse & EKIPA. Screenshot by author.

Unable to locate Sarajevo, Berso ends up on the Moon, and the incongruity is seen in the SO MOON vs. SARAJEVO, while the LM is that Berso is absolutely lost. This image is an exaggeration emphasizing the extent of detachment of certain people from the city life, as well as their physical detachment even from “Sarajevo proper”, regardless of the fact that they live in the suburbs. This detachment, however, is also to a significant extent influenced by the ruling politicians’ neglect of the suburban areas.

While waiting for Berso, the four protagonists go to McTrovač (McPoisoner), a reference to McDonalds. Figure 7.17 depicts the waiter who assembled a number of people ready to fight, while the silhouettes of Bruca, Braca, Bruda and Brada are seen opposite them.



Figure 7.17 *McPoisoner*

Note. The screenshot is from “GDJE JE SARAJ’VO JEL’ NEKAD BILO | Sebilj završio u Švrakinom | Animirana serija #BBBB | EP5” [Video], by Bruca Braca Bruda Brada, 2021, YouTube (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RRo1LOYF0IE>). Copyright 2026 by Helem nejse & EKIPA. Screenshot by author.

The McDonald’s franchise opened in Bosnia and Herzegovina in 2011, and, due to the dubious activities of the company that held the license, it closed in 2022 (“McDonald’su u Sarajevu nisu glave došli ćeapi”, 2023). The opening of McDonald’s was welcomed by Bosnians, and some Sarajevans and Sarajevo-based restaurants made fun of the fact that McDonald’s would pose strong competition to the local, traditional food. The joke went so far that a famous Sarajevo *ćevabdžinica* restaurant brought dozens

of portions of their food as a housewarming gift. That joke made regional news (e.g. “Na otvorenju McDonalds’a u Sarajevu”, 2011).

Geosemiotically, the manipulation of the *McPoisoner* restaurant logo resembles that of McDonald’s, and it may be that some people will connect it to the famous franchise based on the appearance, regardless of the language. The BBBB scene depicts McDonald’s as the place selling highly processed food, hence the wordplay *McPoisoner* and their slogan: PREGRŠT LOŠIH OPCIJA [AN ABUNDANCE OF BAD CHOICES]. The main SO here is HEALTHY FOOD vs. UNHEALTHY FOOD.

The BBBB presents the *McPoisoner* restaurant as an international place, and the people assembled in the Figure 7.17 are “self-proclaimed citizens” of Sarajevo, cultured, educated and ready to defend the city from primitives. This is even accented by the waiter who says:

[KONOBAR: *Drago mi je da je u ovom gradu ostalo još ono malo pismene raje spremno da stane u kraj prmitivizmu i opštem papanluku.*

WAITER: I’m glad to see that there are still some literate people left in this town who are ready to fight primitivism and overall hillbillyism.]

I will explain the reason for describing this group of people as “self-proclaimed citizens” later, but, at the surface, the people in the image resonate with the Sarajevo citizens who appreciate culture and urban living: members of clergy (Orthodox, Catholic, Muslim, Jewish), all clearly presented in their religious robes, as well as adherents of hip-hop culture, and citizens whose values are presented by a banner that reads “SPASIMO HASTAHANU” [LET’S SAVE HASTAHANA]. *Hastahana* is a small park in the center of Sarajevo, which was brought to the focus of public attention in 2019 when citizens prevented it from being used as a construction site for the National Bank building. The image shows the SOs SOPHISTICATED vs. PRIMITIVE and URBAN vs. SUBURBAN VALUES. I should note, however, that the suburban in this context does not entail any form of bad characterization of the suburban people or the way of life. Rather, in this instance, it concerns the uneducated criminal underworld that prevails among the Sarajevo working class areas.

In addition, the fact that the clergy members are seen carrying clubs does not entail in this case the hypocrisy of organized religion. Rather, this depicts the defense of virtues a city life entails and they are ready to fight for.

The fight ensues, Bruca, Braca, Bruda and Brada vs. the people assembled around the waiter (a typical animated image of the fight in Figure 7.18):



Figure 7.18 A cloud of fists

Note. The screenshot is from “GDJE JE SARAJ’VO JEL’ NEKAD BILO | Sebilj završio u Švrakinom | Animirana serija #BBBB | EP5” [Video], by Bruca Braca Bruda Brada, 2021, YouTube (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RRo1LOYF0IE>). Copyright 2026 by Helem nejse & EKIPA. Screenshot by author.

After the fighting ends, Bruca, Brada and Bruda finally meet with Berso, but notice that their friend Brada is missing. They realize that the “urban gang” kidnaped him and decide to take revenge by taking the *Sebilj* fountain to Švrakino selo (Figure 7.19):

Figure 7.19 *Sebilj* in Švrakino selo

Note. The screenshot is from “GDJE JE SARAJ’VO JEL’ NEKAD BILO | Sebilj završio u Švrakinom | Animirana serija #BBBB | EP5” [Video], by Bruca Braca Bruda Brada, 2021, YouTube (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RRo1LOYF0IE>). Copyright 2026 by Helem nejse & EKIPA. Screenshot by author.

The *Sebilj* fountain is seen in the background, and, unlike its original location, its position in the Švrakino selo surroundings is incongruous, with the SO SEBILJ FOUNTAIN vs. ŠVRAKINO SELO. Geosemiotically, this is perhaps the most significant example of landscape manipulation to not only enhance, but even to create humor: this is the focalized perspective in which the BBBB creators moved one of the most significant symbols of Sarajevo to the suburbs, creating a *quid pro quo* hostage situation, where the fountain is being traded for Brada, their friend. In addition, the relationship of the BBBB gang towards *Sebilj* is seen by the very positioning of the fountain in the area, since they moved it from its original location to Švrakino selo, using a bulldozer (also shown in the Figure 7.19), carelessly handling it and placing it behind the wall, where it is shown leaning and without its characteristic illumination. That means that, for them, the fountain carries no significance.

Another geosemiotically significant segment in this case is the mortar scar, foregrounded in the image at the bottom center-left position. I have already mentioned the scars of war, visible still in many locations around Sarajevo, but especially in the Švrakino selo area, since the city authorities have not reconstructed many of the buildings and streets there. Foregrounding of the concrete scar primarily emphasizes the neglect of Švrakino selo, but additionally creates the sense of place because of the Sarajevo roses. They are indexed for Sarajevo, since they are sites of massacres that have been painted red across the city: the mortar that killed and wounded people during the war left the concrete scar that has been turned into the memorial site. The red color (the color of blood and roses) is the reason behind the name (more information can be found at <https://sarajevoroses.net/>).

Bruda is seen in the image on the phone. In the video, he is speaking to Mili, a recurring character in the series:

[BRUDA: *Alo, ba, Mili, slušaj me dobro kume, ba. Ama ja sam ba rek'o svoje što sam im'o bolan. Ama dok mi ne vratite brata mog, dušu moju uzdanicu, sve ću vam simbol po simbol izvaljivat'. Haj sad vozdra!*

BRUDA: Hello, Mili, listen to me carefully now, bruv. I've said my piece. Until you return my brother, my soul, my rock, I'll rip out all your symbols, one by one. So bye now!]

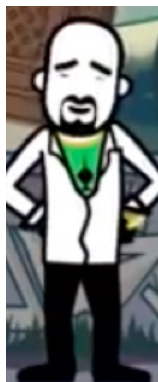
Mili is a snob, constantly complaining about the primitive people living in Sarajevo, claiming they have stolen the soul of the city. In the meantime, he himself is thriving on the city budget, under the pretense of being a sophisticated Sarajevan. He is one of the reasons why I mentioned earlier in the text that the people assembled in the McPoisoner restaurant are “self-proclaimed citizens” of Sarajevo. Such snobs really exist in the city, thinking they have a prerogative of determining who is and who is not a proper Sarajevo citizen. Hence, the semantic contrast that appears in this case is SNOB vs. HILLBILLY, where Bruda (the hillbilly) resents the city symbols to the extent that he not only takes them hostage, but he also detaches himself from the city proper. This is seen in the segment where he states YOUR SYMBOLS. That is, to an extent, absurd, since he was born and he lives in Švrakino selo, which a part of Sarajevo.

Mili obeys and arrives with Brada to Švrakino. Figure 7.20 shows Ber-so, Mili and Brada standing together:

Figure 7.20 *Mili in Švrakino selo*

Note. The screenshot is from “GDJE JE SARAJ’VO JEL’ NEKAD BILO | Sebilj završio u Švrakinom | Animirana serija #BBBB | EP5” [Video], by Bruca Braca Bruda Brada, 2021, YouTube (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RRo1LOYF0IE>). Copyright 2026 by Helem nejse & EKIPA. Screenshot by author.

With the Sebilj fountain still in the background, Berso notices another symbol, an image on Mili’s shirt. It is a depiction of the Hum Tower in Sarajevo (Figure 7.21).

Figure 7.21
Hum tower on Mili’s shirt

Note. The screenshot is from “GDJE JE SARAJ’VO JEL’ NEKAD BILO | Sebilj završio u Švrakinom | Animirana serija #BBBB | EP5” [Video], by Bruca Braca Bruda Brada, 2021, YouTube (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RRo1LOYF0IE>). Copyright 2026 by Helem nejse & EKIPA. Screenshot by author.

It served as a TV tower and is still waiting to be reconstructed, having suffered destruction at the beginning of the war. Hence, the T-shirt establishes the sense of place, but Berso does not make the connection between the Hum Tower and Sarajevo symbols. To him, the TV tower signifies something else:

[BERSO: *Sredina ’93. Slušaj priču, pičko. Mi gore na Humu pod onim repetitorom, mrkli mrak. Samo se vukovi čuju, prijatelju. Sa mnom na liniji jedan, Allah mu rahmetile, pogin’o je godinu dana poslije toga, jedan Alen, kako se ono preziv’o, joj, slagat ću te, da me jebeš ne mogu se sjetit’, al’ uglavnom, nako fino dijete, iz Nike Kolumbića Šake, pridružio nam se, dole u gradu. A bilo ga strah, pičko, odmah sam ja vidio ne leži mu ta adresa. Kad grupnu nešto, evo ko tu će ti sad stojiš. Ja se budim, prijatelju, svi oko mene mrtvi. Samo ja i pečko ostadosmo živi. A on će poginut’ nedugo poslije toga, Allah mu rahmetile. Šta*

je poenta priče, pičko? E tom komandiru što nas je slao dadoše i ordenje i ulicu i to baš onu iz koje je ovaj mali. A meni se od te granate sve pomiješalo, prijatelju, pa ne znam ni še sam doš'o ni đe sam poš'o. A reći ću ti još jednu stvar, pičko. Ulica će vazda bit' više nego dobrih ljudi. Prijatelju. Pičko.

BERSO: Mid-1993. Listen to the story, pussy. We were on the Hum hill, under the TV tower. Only wolves could be heard howling. At the frontline, there was a kid, may Allah have mercy on him, he died a year after, Alen was his name, can't remember his last name, God, I'd be lying, but I can't remember, but he was a nice kid, from the Nike Kolumboća Šake street, he joined us in town. And he was afraid, pussy, I'd immediately noticed he was not comfortable with the address. When something hit, at the distance where you're standing. And I woke up to see everybody dead. The kid and I were the only ones left alive. And the kid died too not long after, may Allah have mercy on him. What is the point of this story, pussy? Well, to the commander went the medals, the street, and it was the street where this kid lived. And everything got mixed up in my head from that mortar and I'm not sure if I have arrived or if I'm going somewhere. And I will tell you one other thing, pussy. Streets will always outnumber good people.]

Berso's monologue is an instance of black humor, and it may not even resonate as humorous to the readers who did not experience the Siege of Sarajevo, or who have not had some kind of war experience. This monologue is a similar example to the Santa Clause letter joke mentioned in the section 2.2, where the NS KR includes humor with several jab lines, rather than punchlines. Berso's monologue contains a seemingly disconnected train of thoughts, but, although stylistically inconsistent, he paints a sad story about the fate of a young man in the war and the severe fate of many lower-ranking fighters and ordinary people whose lives and fates are forever lost to memory, while other, either higher-ranking or less-deserving people are honored. This is a universal message regarding the terrible realities of war.

Jab lines that appear in this monologue stem primarily in Berso's use of vulgar expressions, where he addresses Mili, his interlocutor, as "pussy". This is not intended as an insult, it is more of a vague expression, and it stands in sharp contrast to his mention of God (Allah in the Islamic tradition) on two occasions. As I have emphasized already, this is the use of profanities as empty categories in the sense that they are not intended as an insult, but are used as filler words.

In addition, Berso's perception of the Hum Tower is that it is nothing but a transmitter. To him, it is not a symbol of the city as perceived by the

majority of people in Sarajevo. That too is an indicator of an undereducated individual, detached from the urban habits, which is in line with the general portrayal of the main protagonists in this episode.

The Nike Kolumbića Šake street is a jab line because Sarajevo does, indeed, have streets named after the fallen soldiers, usually some local people whose nicknames have been included in the street name. This particular person is made up, but the connotation is clear to Sarajevans (some examples of such street names include Želimira Vidovića Kellyja, Mitra Trifunivoća Uče, Fadila Jahića Španca, etc.). Still, it is tragically contrasted with the fact that it is the street where the young man, who died and will fade away in memory, used to live, and his street is named after some other “more important” character. There is also a deeper meaning to this jab line because many young men in Sarajevo defended their city without having ever experienced any kind of military training. Hence, this is an instance of a dark irony of sorts, since the young man died in the war.

Berso’s self-description is another jab line, because he is a recurring character in the series who does seem to be displaced physically and temporally. Still, as is the case in this monologue, he is able to produce some witty remarks, including this one, where he utters the last jab line, which is a matter-of-fact statement universally recognized as true: good people are difficult to find and the non-deserving will be rewarded.

The SOs that appear in the succession of jab lines are primarily LIFE vs. DEATH and JUSTICE vs. INJUSTICE.

7.3 The Wall

This episode of the series focuses mostly on close ties between politicians and organized crime. This is an interesting resemblance with the TLN sketch about a wall dividing Sarajevo (section 6.7), but in this BBBB episode, the wall is the result of a wide conspiracy and, as it is shown, neither last long. This episode too contains many instances of humor, particularly observed in witty dialogues, but I will present and analyze only the most prominent examples. The NS KR in many of the examples that follow is the form of a dialogue that is usually directly dependent on the very image (in the previous episode, the visual aspect itself contained humor much less dependent on the verbal expression).

The four protagonists go to their meeting point, to the Švrakino wall, but this time they find themselves in a different situation: the wall is no longer small. Figures 7.22 and 7.23 illustrate the divide.

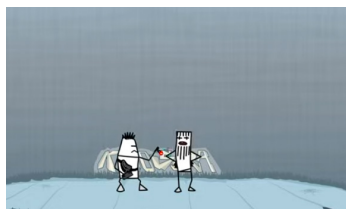


Figure 7.22
Bruda, Brada and the wall

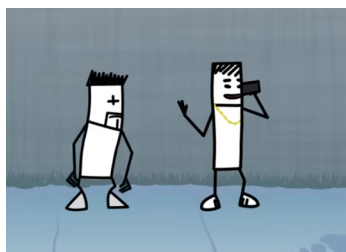


Figure 7.23
Bruca, Braca and the wall

Note. Screenshots are from “ZID | Istočno i Zapadno Švrakino | Animirana serija #BBBB | EP31” [Video], by Bruca Braca Bruda Brada, 2025, YouTube (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jec7A5ELui0>). Copyright 2026 by Helem nejse & EKIPA. Screenshot by author.

The wall in this case is the SI KR, since it is the “canvas” upon which all the humor of the episode rests.

Bruda and Braca talk over the phone, not realizing that everything has drastically changed:

[BRACA: E, Bruda, mačko, jes’ kont’o do kote da garnemo, evo našli se ja i Bruca, čekamo te.

BRUDA: Ama, debilu, na koti sam, ba, odjebi od mene, ba.

BRACA: A nemoj nas furat’ Bruda, ja i Bruca na koti stojimo, kriziramo, kontaš?

BRUDA: Kod zidića?

BRACA: Kako, brate, kojeg zidića?

BRUDA: Slušaj me sad dobro, moronu glupi. Nije mi dan počeo kako volim, i nje mi sekunde do zajebancije, jel jasno to? I ako se sad okrenem i vidim te iza sebe, onih batina iz drugog osnovne ćeš se sjećat’ ko najljepše uspomene iz odrastanja u Brudinom okruženju, gospodara mi!

BRACA: E, Bruda, mačko, vidi ovo. Mislim da smo i mi i ti kod zidića, samo što je zidić malo narast’o, znaš?

BRUCA: Bruda, brate, reci mi samo jel’ ga i ti vidiš il’ smo se Braca i ja prepušili?

BRUDA: Šta je ovo, ba?

BRACA: Hey, Bruda, kitten, d’you plan to come over to the meeting point to lit one, Bruca and I’ve met, we’re waiting for you.

BRUDA: You idiot, I’m at the hangout, fuck off.

BRACA: Don’t roast us, Bruda, Bruca and I are here at the meeting point, we’re in a crisis, get it?

BRUDA: In front of the little wall?

BRACA: What little wall?

BRUDA: Listen to me, you stupid moron. The day hasn't started the way I like, and I don't feel like fooling around. If I turn around now and see you standing behind me, the beating you received in the second grade of primary school will resonate in your mind as the most beautiful memory from growing up near Bruda, I swear!

BRACA: Oh, Bruda, kitten, look. I think we are all in front of the little wall. It's just that the little wall has grown a bit, y'know.

BRUCA: Bruda, my brother, tell me if you see it too, or have Braca and I greened out?

BRUDA: What the hell is this?]

This exchange is another example of dialogue as the NS, with hyperdertermination instances occurring throughout, consisting of several jab lines and humor triggers. Before I outline them, it is important to mention that the entire exchange rests on the characters' inability to understand that an enormous wall appeared before them. This illustrates the characters' lack of intelligence functioning as the backgrounded incongruity.

A group of jab lines in this dialogue is stylistic in nature, which means that the manner in which the characters speak using either insults or forms of address enhance humor. This primarily concerns Bruda's usage of insults "idiot" and "stupid moron", which are contrasted with his own inability to notice the wall, which enhances the SOs SMART vs. STUPID. Another jab line is "kitten" used by Braca to address Bruda. In Bosnian, this colloquialism is very frequent among friends, but the addressee is always female. Braca is particularly known to use this expression when talking to all his friends, mostly male thugs. Hence, the usage of an epithet ascribed to women in this case is part of Bruca's snobbish manner of speaking. In the Đuliman and Bošnjak paper on the BBBB humor (2026), we described Braca's speech as characterized by a vocal fry, pronouncing certain words with functional dyslalia, although he is a grown man. This is in line with the overall portrayal of his character as a spoiled son of a local politician.

Another jab line is when Bruda threatens Braca with a beating in case he appeared behind him after all. He describes the level of pain he would inflict on Braca through an implicature, which, observed within the GTVH framework, contains the SOs BEATINGS vs. A BEAUTIFUL MEMORY and the LM KR in this case is a threat.

The realization about the enormous wall suddenly appears and another jab line is when Braca tells Bruda that the "little wall has grown a bit". This again falls in line with Braca's borderline feminine, snobbish speech,

and the SO is within the framework POSSIBLE vs. IMPOSSIBLE, since walls do not grow on their own.

The immensity of the wall is shown in Figure 7.24, where it is clearly seen that the wall is traversing the entire planet.



Figure 7.24
The wall encircling the planet

Note. The screenshot is from “ZID | Istočno i Zapadno Švrakino | Animirana serija #BBBB | EP31” [Video], by Bruca Braca Bruda Brada, 2025, YouTube (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jec7A5ELui0>). Copyright 2026 by Helem nejse & EKIPA. Screenshot by author.

The image clearly shows the division of the world into the eastern and western hemisphere, which may, in the European context, resonate with the audience remembering or being familiar with the concept of the Iron Curtain, during the Cold War era. It is significant from the humorous standpoint to emphasize that a global affair materialized as an enormous wall, which goes straight through Švrakino selo, bringing the suburbs of Sarajevo to the forefront of global events. That said, the SO is ŠVRAKINO SELO vs. THE WORLD. This incongruity is in the background of the entire episode, with a slow realization (i.e., the LM KR) that the organized crime and politicians at all levels of government, local and international, frequently work hand in hand, as I will show in the examples that follow.

Also, the episode focuses on the division of Švrakino selo to *East and West Švrakino*, similar to the TLN sketch where the division concerned Sarajevo being divided into East and West Sarajevo. And while the TLN sketch treated the issue of the division of Sarajevo because of the growing tensions and political crisis, in the period when the rest of Europe was increasingly uniting and when the Berlin Wall fell, the division in the BBBB series concerns, as I have said, political corruption and links with organized crime, but also a strong feeling of “local suburb-patriotism”. In other words, a special kind of toponophilia that is frequently observed with many Sarajevans, who grow attached to the part of the city they grow up or live in.

The next significant focus of the episode is a TV studio, presenting the host, Amer Čanković, in his TV show *Petkom iza džume* [On Fridays, after the Jum’ah]. He introduces his guest, Berso, a construction worker (Figure 7.25).



Figure 7.25
TV studio

Note. The screenshot is from “ZID | Istočno i Zapadno Švrakino | Animirana serija #BBBB | EP31” [Video], by Bruca Braca Bruda Brada, 2025, YouTube (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jec7A5ELui0>). Copyright 2026 by Helem nejse & EKIPA. Screenshot by author.

Humor appears in the very name of the TV show, since it contains the name of the Muslim Friday prayer.⁶¹ In this case, the focus is directed towards the male Muslim audience, since they are the ones attending the prayer, hence, the backgrounded incongruity entails that the TV show is male-oriented, and that the “serious conversations” are reserved for male interlocutors, with the SOs MALE vs. FEMALE. In addition, the fact that the target is the Muslim male audience, it is expected that the topics and behavior would fall within the scope of Islam.

The studio is presented so that it signals the Islamic nature of the TV show: the green color, the Ottoman-style entrance in the background, and the hookah at the lower right corner of the image. This is the semiotic organization of the text (the LA KR), and the said elements are all symbols that resonate with the audience familiar with the local representations of the Islamic tradition and the Ottoman heritage in Bosnia (there are abundant examples of the Bosnian architecture and traditional homes with the distinctive elements of the Islamic influence), creating, thus, the sense of place.

However, the host, Admir Čanković, one of the founding members of the *Helem nejse* collective and one of the BBBB series creators, appears with Berso as his guest. This is in contrast with the Islamic background of the studio and the expected nature of the TV show itself. Hence, the SO is RELIGION vs. NO RELIGION, signaling that the TV show will not focus on religion after all.

In the interview that takes place, it becomes clear that the main theme is the wall:

⁶¹ “Jum‘ah, Friday of the Muslim week and the special noon service on Friday that all adult, male, free Muslims are obliged to attend.” (*Encyclopedia Britannica*, 2023)

[ČANKOVIĆ: *Sa nama u studiju gospodin Mersud Alifugo, građevinar. Gospodine Alifugo, jeste li vi izgradili takozvani Sarajevski zid?*

BERSO: *Vidi, pičko, ne more se o jednoj takvoj temi na takav način razgovarat'. Pa zamisli da svako na ulici ko sretne svog Bersagu ima parvo da ga nešto tak priupita. Vi, recimo, svi znate, a i ti, Čankoviću, znaš, jel?*

ČANKOVIĆ: Joining us in the studio is Mr. Mersud Alifugo, a construction worker. Mr. Alifugo, did you build the famous Sarajevo wall?

BERSO: Looky here, pussy, one does not discuss such a topic this way. Well, can you imagine if everybody meeting their Bersaga in the street took the liberty of asking such a thing. You all know who did, and you too, Čanković, certainly know it, right?]

This is the first time in the series that Berso's full name is revealed: Mersud Alifugo. Unlike his nickname (Berso), his last name is manipulated, creating a pun: Alifugo, a direct reference to his profession – construction worker, since “fuga” is the Bosnian word for “grout”. He almost always appears in blue overalls, a semiotic device revealing his profession.

In addition, he refers to himself in the third person, using the nickname BERSAGA. This is another pun, because the suffix *-aga* was, in fact, an honorific during the Ottoman period, while the local population frequently adds it to the male names either to express a friendly relationship or banter. Here, Berso is using it in order to express a friendly stance towards the interlocutor, still refusing to provide an answer.

The interview continues and the host pressures Berso further, asking at least to name the investor. To that, Berso replies:

[BERSO: *Puuuno ti meni pitanja postavljaš, prijatelju. Da si bogdo k'o onaj Amerikanac, ni jedno pitanje ne postavlja, nego se, bogami, prifatilo lopate. Ja mu kažem, nemoj, prijatelju, imaju radnici, ma neće ni da čuje. Bogami je dobrih lopata on sam poteg'o. Jes', Allaha mi.*

ČANKOVIĆ: *Odlično. A koji je to bio Amerikanac?*

BERSO: *Ne znam, prijatelju, slabo pamtim imena, al' imam sliku, sve zadokumentovano, što se kaže.*

BERSO: You sure ask a lot of questions, my friend. If only you were like the American, he didn't ask any questions, but rolled up his sleeves. I even told him, don't do that, friend, there are workers... He didn't want to hear it. He sure did work his fingers to the bone. He did, I swear on Allah.

ČANKOVIĆ: Excellent. And who was the American?

BERSO: I really don't know, my friend, I'm not good with names. But here's the picture, all is documented, as they say.]

The LA KR entails Berso's highly colloquialized speech, primarily seen in the ellipsis that appears in Bosnian when pronouncing certain words (e.g. *k'o* instead of *kao*; *jes'* instead of *jeste*; *poteg'o* instead of *potegao*, etc.). In addition, he also uses idioms denoting the meaning of "hard work". They are, indeed, part of the Bosnian language, but are not as widely used (unlike those in the English translation, e.g. *to roll up one's sleeves* and *work one's fingers to the bone*). His use of language is humorous, and is part of the hyperdetermination in this dialogue.

Berso mentions an American who did not speak much but wanted to work. He unintentionally reveals the investor, although he had clearly been trying to avoid the answer. The fact that he mentions workers who should be doing the job instead of the American (who can also be construction workers) gives rise to incongruity, since the SOs are WORKERS vs. THE AMERICAN. The resolution (LM KR) occurs when Berso presents the image of the American (Figure 7.26).



Figure 7.26
Investors

Note. The screenshot is from "ZID | Istočno i Zapadno Švrakino | Animirana serija #BBBB | EP31" [Video], by Bruca Braca Bruda Brada, 2025, YouTube (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jec7A5ELui0>). Copyright 2026 by Helem nejse & EKIPA. Screenshot by author.

This image is part of the LM KR– it is a resolution of the incongruity regarding the "mysterious American". Not only does it become clear that the US President Donald Trump is one of the investors, but also that the other investor is the Russian President, Vladimir Putin. This is another instance of hyperdetermination.

Hence, Figure 7.26 depicts the two presidents standing together in Švrakino selo during the construction of the wall. The implied meaning is that the two opposing sides, (SO KR USA vs. RUSSIA) are not necessarily as opposed with these two presidents in power. Another humorous segment in the image is that the two most powerful men in the world stand together with Berso in Švrakino selo. These are humor enhancers, where,

Švrakino selo is again focalized as a very important place on the map of global events.

[ČANKOVIĆ: *A, recite mi, Berso, koliko ste naplatili ovaj posao?*

BERSO: *Sedam i po hiljada, prijatelju. Tu sam i ja, i ruke, i materijali, i kad sam poplać'o svij'u, ostala mi dvica i po, ma nisam htio puno da uzimam, pičko, kontam će će ti duša, Berso, valja i sevapa zaradit'.*

ČANKOVIĆ: *Sedam i po hiljada? A na šta ćete, Berso, potrošit' ovaj zarađeni novac?*

BERSO: *Pa vidi, Roki. Na jednoj operaciji sam već bio. Sad na jesen, ako Bog da, još jedna, i onda na ljeto Alain Delon. Kad je zalížem a 'vako glav'com zamahnem, da oprosti javnost, ma pice jebe lice, prijatelju.*

ČANKOVIĆ: Tell me, Berso, how much did you charge for this job?

BERSO: Seven and a half thousand, my friend. It covers me, the work, the material, and when I paid everybody their share, I was left with two thousand. I didn't want to take a lot of money, pussy. You cunt, I thought, don't take much, Berso, where's your soul gonna go? One should earn some thawab as well.

ČANKOVIĆ: Seven and a half? What will you spend the money on, Berso?

BERSO: Look here, Rocky. I've undergone one surgery. And now, God willing, in the fall, I'll do another, and then, come summer, Alain Delon. And when I slick it back and tilt my little head like so, may the viewers excuse my language, pussies will wait in line, my friend.]

Asked about the amount of money he earned, Berso mentions a sum of 7500 KM (cca. 4000 EUR). Even if it were any other currency, the amount is rather inadequate given the size of the project. In addition, he mentions that the amount was sufficient for the construction material and for the payment of other workers, hence the SO PROPORTIONATE vs. DISPROPORTIONATE (AMOUNT). This may lead to the conclusion that wheeling and dealing is in question. This is an implied possibility.

As per humorous content of the sequence, two segments stand out. First, the manner in which Berso distributed the earned amount. Rather generous, he is here perceived as a good, God-fearing man. However, from a humorous standpoint we can observe a contrast between the good-natured personality and a hint of piousness, which is seen through the use of the Islamic term for a spiritual reward after doing good deeds with the usage of profanities. Hence, the SOs are THAWAB vs. CUNT. To that, as seen to the very end of the dialogue, Berso, in fact, desires the superficial traits (physical appearance) and expresses sexual desire. The broader SO framework in this case is SEX vs. NO SEX and PIOUS vs. PROFANE.

Berso's profane nature is thus particularly observed in the last sequence of the dialogue, as well as in the images presented in figures 7.25 and 7.26, showing some bandage and traces of hair on Berso's head. Although it may be assumed he underwent hair transplant surgery, that does not necessarily have to be the case, since the bandage on the head could have been the result of an injury, especially concerning the fact that he is a construction worker. In addition, he does say he would spend his money on another surgery, but does not mention what kind. Hence, incongruity appears regarding the head bandage, where one can guess between the likely hair transplant and some other kind of head surgery, and the SOs are thus HEAD SURGERY FOR INJURY/CONDITION vs. HEAD SURGERY AS A BEAUTY TREATMENT. The resolution (LM KR) is arrived at inferentially, after Berso gives hints, comparing himself to Alain Delon, and mentioning that women would line up desiring him.

He even presents the way in which he would comb his hair and strike a pose (slick back and tilt the little head). Such a comparison and the use of profanities when he presents himself as desirable to women are humor enhancers. Berso's plans are devoid of reality, since he is by the appearance and the manner quite the opposite of Alain Delon (or of any other man that would be perceived as handsome or desirable by women), hence, self-deception is another source of incongruity, within the SO REAL vs. NOT REAL.

The episode moves forward to introduce the local level of corruption. More precisely, it focuses on Tahsim Horor Tata, a recurring character in the series, the father of Bruda, one of the four main protagonists. Tahsim is a local drug lord, with close ties to local politicians. He is one of the symbols of the connection between politicians and criminals in the country, i.e. the corruption. His last name Horor (literally, horror) denotes his malice, while the nickname "Tata" (daddy) refers to the fact that he is Bruda's father, but is also a metaphor, for he is the crime boss in Švrakino selo.

The following section illustrates his close ties with politicians, as it is revealed that he was the one in charge of the construction of the wall, as well as the person who organized criminal business around the wall. He is in his office, speaking to Milorad Dodik, the politician whom I mentioned already in the analysis, as a powerful, corrupt Serb nationalist. The Tata character speaks to him over the cell phone, and his identity is not immediately revealed:

[*Nemoj, Mile. Nemoj, duša moja, nemoj, nemoj plakati. E jebem mu miša malog. Nemoj, bubi moj, nemoj, nemoj. Ima nas, rješavat ćemo. Hajde, hajde,*

hajde, drži se. (prekida vezu) Milorad Dodik. Zove petnaesti put od jutros, plače k'o godina, ost'o na zapadnoj strani. Al' ko ga jebe.

Don't, Mile. Don't, sweetheart, don't cry. Oh, sun of a gun. Don't, munchkin, just don't. There's plenty of us, we'll deal with it. Come on, hold it together (hangs up). Milorad Dodik. He's called fifteen times this morning, drowning in tears, stuck on the west side. But fuck him.]

Incongruity rises because of the manner in which Tata speaks to the person over the phone. Tata is never seen talking to anybody affectionately. He uses Bosnian expressions that are appropriate when addressing children ("duša moja", "bubi moj"), which even include a profanity that is not perceived as vulgar and is also part of the affectionate talk in the Bosnian language ("jebemu miša malog"). The English translation "sweetheart" or "munchkin" does not fully express such emotions.

Tata is clearly consoling somebody and the SOs are ALOOF vs. AFFECTIONATE. A Mile is mentioned at the very beginning of Tata's utterance, but given Dodik's nature, one does not expect the need for being consoled. The resolution (the LM) occurs immediately after Tata hangs up addressing Bruda (seen sitting in across from him on the image BBBB 21) that it was Milorad Dodik.

Tata explains the reason for Dodik's distress, and that is that he got stuck on the western side after the wall was erected. Dodik is openly inclined towards Vladimir Putin and Russia, hence, the issue of values is immediately (non-lexically) activated: DODIK vs. WESTERN VALUES. That is in line with his real-life political aspirations, but the fact that he is calling Tata for help, and Tata, clearly, does not care, indicates that the world of organized crime in Bosnia overpowers even the most powerful politicians.

In the following segments of the analysis I will focus more on Tata's office. Figure 7.27 shows an image where the following nodes dominate: TOMAHAWK, CIGAR, CLOSED SPACE, FOOD LEFTOVERS. Those create a semantic network that indicate that Tata is a CRIMINAL, a script that best describes him.

Also, the window behind him is high and barred, implying that his office is, in fact, a prison cell, which is the case, as I will illustrate further in the analysis.

Figure 7.27 *Tata's office*

Note. The screenshot is from “ZID | Istočno i Zapadno Švrakino | Animirana serija #BBBB | EP31” [Video], by Bruca Braca Bruda Brada, 2025, YouTube (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jec7A5ELui0>). Copyright 2026 by Helem nejse & EKIPA. Screenshot by author.

This image also contains a jab line contained in the name of the beverage on Tata's desk (a close-up image seen in Figure 7.28). The name of the beverage is “švrakija”, which is a wordplay concerning “rakija”, a strong alcoholic beverage, highly popular in the Balkans. The wordplay, more precisely, a portmanteau, consisting of the blend words “švrakino” and “rakija”, evoke the sense of place regarding the Balkans and this highly popular “plum brandy”, as well as Švrakino selo.

Figure 7.28
Švrakija

Note. The screenshot is from “ZID | Istočno i Zapadno Švrakino | Animirana serija #BBBB | EP31” [Video], by Bruca Braca Bruda Brada, 2025, YouTube (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jec7A5ELui0>). Copyright 2026 by Helem nejse & EKIPA. Screenshot by author.

Tata explains to Bruda that their position in the situation with the wall is not bad at all, given the fact that he had personally arranged with the contractor to have the wall pass through his office.

From the geosemiotic angle, the position of Tata's (prison) office establishes the sense of place, because the Court of BiH, together with an incarceration unit, is set in Švrakino selo (Figure 7.29; real-life photo observed in Figure 7.30). The fact that Tata is imprisoned and that he is operating a business from his office-like cell, again describes the level of corruption that the BBBB series is portraying as one of the key problems in the Bosnian society, reaching even the judicial system in the country:

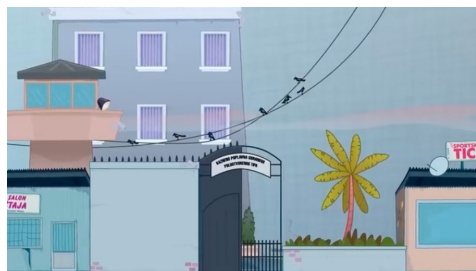


Figure 7.29 Tata's office (exterior)

Note. The screenshot is from “ZID | Istočno i Zapadno Švrakino | Animirana serija #BBBB | EP31” [Video], by Bruca Braca Bruda Brada, 2025, YouTube (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jec7A5ELui0>). Copyright 2026 by Helem nejse & EKIPA. Screenshot by author.



Figure 7.30 Court of BiH

Note. Photograph by the author.

The episode moves on to present the people who actually benefitted from the wall. Ironically, the wall provided a new sense of freedom for the citizens, allowing them to avoid “unwanted” activities, such as spending time with family, spending money on birthdays and holidays, etc.

Braca, for example, gained fame as an artist. He received funding from the “World Delegation for the Support to the Young People Facing the Trauma of the Sarajevo Wall”.

They visit him, asking about his recent creations because he is obliged to justify financial resources. Braca says:

[BRACA: *Možda da prvo predstavim samog sebe. Znači, ja sam Ajnur Varijantaš u raji poznat kao Braca, otkako je ovaj zid uništio naše živote i našu mladost prekinuo na pola, ljudi me zovi i Sarajevski Banksy. A ovo što vidite je najnoviji momenat iz mog ciklusa Pendžeri i turšije, novi uradak kojeg sam nazvao Pendžer, turšija i nana koja zaljeva đulbešećerku uz još par nekih detalja koje možemo proć kasnije.*

PREDSTAVNIK DELEGACIJE: *Objasni nam, Ajnure, na koji način ova slika predstavlja tvoj bijeg iz ove surove reale?*

BRACA: *Evo, na primjer, ova turšija koja lagano fermentira na prozoru predstavlja to vrijeme koje prolazi i koje nas neupitno vodi do promjene. Vri turšija u tegli, vri u nama. Ja sam kroz turšiju opis'o nas, a, recimo, vidite ove nanule koje se luftiraju na pendžeru? One, u stvari, čekaju svog vlasnika s druge strane da ih ponovo natakne i da krenemo konačno dalje.*

BRACA: Perhaps I should introduce myself first. So, my name is Ajnur the Chancer, people also know me as Braca, but since this wall ruined our lives and cut our youth in two, people have also called me Banksy of Sarajevo. And you can see this latest bit from my Windows and Pickles Series, I titled it Window, Pickles and Nana Watering Damask Rose, with a few details that we can cover later.

DELEGATION REPRESENTATIVE: Please tell us, Ajnur, how does this work present your escape from this cruel reality?

BRACA: Here, for example, this jar of pickles, fermenting slowly on the window sill, is the time passing slowly but inevitably leading us into change. Pickles bubbling in the jar, everything bubbling inside us. So, I used pickles to describe us; see these wooden slippers airing in the window? They are, in fact, waiting for their owner from the other side, to put them on again and that we finally move forward.]

Braca's monologue contains several instances of hyperdetermination. The first concerns his real name: Ajnur Varijantaš [Ajnur the Chancer], signaling the nature of his character. This is part of the backgrounded incongruity, which rests on the wider SO MONEY vs. NO MONEY. As it has been mentioned in the introductory section to this chapter, he is a person who will use every opportunity for personal gain. In this case, he uses international funds to pose as an artist.

His comment regarding the wall is another instance of humor, since his statement that the wall "cut our youth in two" is an absurdity (SO ABSURD vs. NON-ABSURD), even in a metaphorical sense, because the youth can be terminated, not cut in half. I should emphasize that, although the Bosnian text does contain the verb *prekinuti* [end, terminate], the expression renders as humorous since the manner adverb that follows, "na pola" [in half], semantically cannot follow it (in other words, you do not terminate something in half).

The main source of humor in this section is when Braca compares himself to Banksy. He presents his work (Figure 7.31) as an artistic endeavor, but he clearly plagiarized the idea from Banksy: it is not that he is an anonymous artist who draws murals in an original artistic expression, but he does not hide his identity and the "art" he creates is not original, but Banksy's, only locally-adjusted. The SOs are BRACA vs. BANKSY with PLAGIARISM as the background knowledge script (provided that Banksy's work is familiar to the audience).



Figure 7.31 *Windows and pickles*

Note. The screenshot is from “ZID | Istočno i Zapadno Švrakino | Animirana serija #BBBB | EP31” [Video], by Bruca Braca Bruda Brada, 2025, YouTube (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jec7A5ELui0>). Copyright 2026 by Helem nejse & EKIPA. Screenshot by author.

The very content of his art, as he explains it, contains backgrounded incongruity primarily seen in the SO TRADITIONAL vs. MODERN. In this sense, the items he presents as “his art” invoke the sense of place because they are part of the local tradition: what he is presenting are elements deeply rooted in the Bosnian culture: *avlija* (an Ottoman borrowing, meaning courtyard); *nana* (grandmother), *nanule* (wooden slippers worn in the courtyard, already mentioned in the book, especially in the section 3.2.1), *pendžer* (again, an Ottoman borrowing, meaning window) and *đulbešćerka* (the Damascus rose) grown, frequently for generations, in the Bosnian households.⁶² These expressions are not frequently used by younger generations (save for *nana*, which may appear in some families), and this very contrast between Braca’s Banksy-inspired artistic expression with the archaic language resonates as funny with the native speakers of Bosnian.

The last segment of the episode focuses on the discovery that the criminal underworld is digging tunnels under the wall so that the people and goods could flow. This causes concern among the citizens but, as I have already mentioned, crime paradoxically does not concern them, but the chance that they would have to live together again. They assemble in protest, in front of Tata’s office (which is, as I have already presented in the analysis, a prison cell) to protect the wall:

⁶² I have already written about the cultural significance of this rose with Amira Sadiković in the paper “Krokodil *Lacoste* Zlatka Topčića kao *Silvertown*: Analiza prevoda drame” (2022).

Figure 7.32 *Justice for the wall*

Note. The screenshot is from “ZID | Istočno i Zapadno Švrakino | Animirana serija #BBBB | EP31” [Video], by Bruca Braca Bruda Brada, 2025, YouTube (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jec7A5ELui0>). Copyright 2026 by Helem nejse & EKIPA. Screenshot by author.

Figure 7.32 depicts people carrying banners which are all hyperdertermination segments. From the Language (LA) perspective, they are adjusted texts of slogans, some more contemporary, but, interestingly, some from the socialist-era. Hence, one banner reads *BOLJE ZID NEGO SPID* [WALL IS BETTER THAN SPEED] similar to the famous socialist-era slogan *BOLJE GROB NEGO ROB* [GRAVE IS BETTER THAN SLAVERY]. Another banner reads *MI SMO ZIDOVI, ZID JE NAŠ* [WE’RE THE WALL’S, HE WALL IS OURS] [WE’RE TITO’S, TITO’S OURS]. The incongruity rests on a wider Script Opposition *SOCIALISM* vs. *DEMOCRACY*. In light of that, the SOs in the first instance are *WALL* vs. *GRAVE* and *DRUGS* vs. *SLAVE*. As for the second example, the wall is presented as an equal to the late President of Yugoslavia, Josip Broz Tito (which, at the time, was unimaginable). Hence, the SO is *WALL* vs. *TITO*, indicating the importance of the wall for the citizens.

More contemporary slogans are *PRAVDA ZA ZID* [JUSTICE FOR THE WALL], where the wall is metaphorically presented as a living being, while the slogan *ZID JE NAŠA KULTURNA BAŠTINA* [THE WALL IS OUR CULTURAL HERITAGE] again emphasizes the importance of the wall.

In the “justice for the wall” slogan, the wall is brought forth as a living thing, and not only that, but it also implies that some form of injustice has been committed against it, since the “justice for...” slogans are used in Bosnia to express support to individuals whose legal treatment is considered unfair. Hence, the SOs are *ANIMATE* vs. *INANIMATE* and *JUSTICE* vs. *INJUSTICE*. In addition, the fact that a wall is equalized to the cultural

heritage is another example of absurdist humor, but it again emphasizes the extent to which the wall is important to the protesters. Hence, the incongruity is seen in the SO SARAJEVO WALL vs. CULTURAL HERITAGE, within the wider SO ABSURD vs. NON-ABSURD.

The episode ends with the wall collapsing and one man uttering in horror that people have to live together again:

Figure 7. 33 *The wall collapses*



Note. The screenshot is from “ZID | Istočno i Zapadno Švrakino | Animirana serija #BBBB | EP31” [Video], by Bruca Braca Bruda Brada, 2025, YouTube (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jec7A5ELui0>). Copyright 2026 by Helem nejse & EKIPA. Screenshot by author.

[ČOVJEK: E sad smo najebali, valja nam opet živit' jedni s drugima!

MAN: Well, now we're screwed! Now we need to live together again!]

This segment can be seen as a mockery of a strong divisive right-wing political narrative in Bosnia, lasting for over 35 years already. That said, the behavior of citizens is incongruous, since the divide is not a preferable state of being with people in the country. Hence, the SO DIVISION vs. UNITY appears, where the favorable state of affairs is division. In addition, the profanity at the very beginning of the man's utterance is stylistically marked, reinforcing the sentiment of the people towards unity. Of course, the Berlin wall, which I mentioned as well as the very beginning of this chapter, can be seen as a funny comparison when it comes to the people's reaction in this scene: what the Berlin citizens saw as a liberation in 1988 with the fall of the wall, the unity, progress and hope for a better future, the Švrakino (and, by extension, Sarajevo) citizens see as a form of imprisonment because they have to “live together”. By that, in fact, they mean their next of kin.

7.4 Sidran

Abdulah Sidran is a well-known Bosnian writer. His poetry has been translated into many languages and he has been widely recognized as the main influence on the film director Emir Kusturica. I introduced his work and influence on the Bosnian cinematography in the chapter about the Bosnian humor, but here I will present the way in which the BBBB creators parodied him and his poem “Mora” [Nightmare]. The poem speaks of identity, of a strong collectivist “quest for the ‘home of being’” in cultural determination of Bosnians (Duraković, 2012, 96–97). Hence, I would say that “Mora” is also a leitmotif in this book – a quest for the identity of Bosnian humor.

Abdulah Sidran and “Mora” were parodied by the BBBB in one of their episodes, where Ičo (a drug addict) is reciting the poem, but, as the transcript and the translations show, he focuses on his own identity– drugs. Hence, humor here rests of the SOs VOICE/LANGUAGE and/or HOME vs. DRUGS. I should note, though, that the drugs he mentions are the names of antipsychotics, opioids and heavy sedatives (benzodiazepine): Leponex, Tramal and Xanax.

Table 7.1 *Abdulah Sidran’s “Nightmare”*

Mora	Nightmare
Šta to radiš, sine?	What are you doing, son?
Sanjam, majko. Sanjam, majko, kako pjevam,	I am dreaming, mother. I’m dreaming, mother, that I’m singing,
a ti me питаš, u mome snu: Šta to činiš, sinko?	and you ask me, in my dream, what are you doing, son?
O čemu, u snu, pjevaš, sine?	What are you singing about in your dream, son?
Pjevam, majko, kako sam imao kuću, a sad nemam kuće. O tome pjevam, majko.	I’m singing, mother, about how I once had a home,
Kako sam, majko, imao glas, i jezik svoj imao,	and now I have none. That’s what I’m singing about, mother.
a sad ni glasa ni jezika nemam.	How I once had a voice, mother, and a tongue of my own,
Glasom, koga nemam, u jeziku, koga nemam,	and now I have no voice or tongue.
o kući, koju nemam, ja pjevam pjesmu, majko.	With the voice I have not, in the tongue I have not,
	about the home I have not, I sing my song, mother.

Table 7.2 *Ićo's "Nightmare"*⁶³

Ićina mora	Ićo's Nightmare
Sanjam majko kako tramala nema	I am dreaming, mother, that I'm out of
Ni lepih majko da nema	Tramal
A ni ksanaksa da nema majko	Out of Leponex too,
I ti mi u tom snu govoriš	And my Xanax is all gone as well,
Ma ima, Ićo, i lepih i tramala	mother,
I ksanaksa, sine, imaš	And in my dream, you're saying to me
A ja s ksanaksima kojih nemam	Don't worry, Ićo, there's Leponex and
I lepih kojih nemam	Tramal
Bez tramala koje nemam	And Xanax too, my son, there's plenty
Ja snivam snove majko, jarane	And with the Xanax I have not,
	And the Leponex I have not,
	And the Tramal I have not,
	Mother, I dream my dreams, man

Verses in the two tables show the contrast between Abdulah Sidran's "Nightmare" and Ićo's version of the poem. The visual contrast is observed in figures 7.34 and 7.35. The sense of place is established because of Ićo's selection of clothing elements, since Abdulah Sidran used to frequently wear the beret and the sweater (in addition, there is a resemblance between Sidran's and Ićo's chubby appearance). These are all examples of hyperdetermination where Sidran is portrayed through a playful jab.

To the viewers unfamiliar with this poet, this image in the cartoon and the recital of this parodied poem appear as the playful mockery of the tradition (in this case, Muslim) in Bosnia, with the same SOs: HOME/LANGUAGE vs. DRUGS, within the more general SO framework TRADITIONAL vs. CONTEMPORARY. Ićo's image would then be observed as the mockery of the traditional Muslim clothing elements: the beret, the sweater.⁶⁴ From the GTVH perspective, these are semiotic components of the LA KR.

⁶³ Translated by Ulvija Tanović.

⁶⁴ According to historian Jovana Šaljić Ratković (2024), much of the male Muslim population in the area of former Yugoslavia in the early 20th century, influenced by the reforms of Mustafa Kemal Pasha Atatürk, the father of the modern Republic of Turkey, started wearing the beret instead of the Moroccan fez hat, also introduced to the area by the Ottomans. Of course, I am here merely presenting the main, simplified explanation from her article behind the reason for the change, since Šaljić Ratković meticulously describes different political and social implications of this and other changes that followed for "the Muslims of the South Slavic area" (2024, p. 318). This explanation will serve the

I should add that, in the video, traditional music is also added to Ićo's recital, which can be seen as a humor enhancer in the entire scene (available at: <https://youtu.be/DGYR4LHd7J0>).



Figure 7.34
Abdulah Sidran

Note. Adapted from “Abdulah Sidran left an Indelible Mark,” by Unknown Author, 2025, *Sarajevo Times* (radiosarajevo.ba). Copyright 2026 by sarajevotimes.com.



Figure 7.35
Ićo as Sidran

Note. The screenshot is from “ZID | Istočno i Zapadno Švrakino | Animirana serija #BBBB | EP31” [Video], by Bruca Braca Bruda Brada, 2025, YouTube (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jec7A5ELui0>). Copyright 2026 by Helem nejse & EKIPA. Screenshot by author.

7.5 *Bruca Braca Bruda Brada: an invaluable continuation of the Sarajevo humor tradition*

This chapter focused on the BBBB animated series. The task was rather challenging, since I not only focused on verbally expressed humor, but also on the animation, which functions either independently from, but more frequently, in congruence with the dialogue.

Hence, the animator is able to manipulate the appearance of space and of characters. That means that the geosemiotic perspective emerges as a layered analysis, combining not only the witty dialogues, but also the visual content. Sometimes, the animation is true to the real-life situation, for example, when the BBBB characters walk around Sarajevo, their hometown, observing and admiring some of its landmarks for the first time. That

purpose of my description of the hat worn by Sidran, as well as by many traditional Bosniaks in the 20th century. Today, this practice is seen mostly with older people.

is when the perspective is non-focalized, since the landmarks and streets of Sarajevo serve only as a background contrasted by the characters who appear odd, mostly by behavior. The other, focalized perspective means that the animator is able to move the objects from one location to the other. The purpose of the animation is then not only to enhance but also to create humor. Such examples include stelae in front of the Presidency building, or drawing an entire wall, straight not only through Švrakino selo, but also through half of the planet, and, most strikingly, moving the Sebilj fountain, one of the main Sarajevo symbols, from its original location in the Old Town Sarajevo to Švrakino selo. In addition to such layers, animation also foregrounds certain details on otherwise simple appearance of the four main characters portrayed as stick figures in the series: the tomahawk hairdo, the golden chain, lit joints, etc. These details indicate their character traits.

Animation in the BBBB series, thus, contains many elements of hyper-determination, running parallel to the storyline, and the most detailed example is seen in the section 7.2 (Figure 7.4) where many humorous details are observed in the drawing of the Presidency building.

The analysis showed also that politicians and the criminal underworld are frequently targeted, together with snobs and the *nouveau riche*. However, there are instances of non-aggressive humor, where the people who struggle to make ends meet are portrayed as humorous but not through mockery; rather those are instances of ironic or even black humor where their downgraded position in the society is brought forth. Perhaps the most striking example is Berso, a war veteran who is trying to make ends meet by doing odd jobs, but frequently tells stories about the war, revealing the difficult fate of many who have either lost their lives or survived but living on the verge of poverty.

Hence, the BBBB series contains a lot of witty humor, where the storyline, the animation and, particularly, dialogues, present the current situation in Bosnia, particularly in Sarajevo: economic crisis, corrupt politicians, deprived life of the working class... However, the BBBB series is also an exceptional portrayal of the Sarajevo life, its symbols, culture, and, slang which, sadly, I was unable to analyze in this chapter. Still, I hope we will see some papers on this topic soon, especially those concerning phonological traits of the Sarajevo slang.

The BBBB series continues to draw the attention of local and regional audiences alike. The *Helem nejse* and *Ekipa* have already announced a movie and a brand-new season of the show. Is this the Bosnian *South Park*?

Perhaps. But, I am certain that this animated series is the kind of creation that will remain part of the humor identity of an entire generation, the people born in the 1990s and younger, but also including some of us, Gen-Xers, who have made room for it in our hearts, next to the TLN show.

8 Conclusion

In this book I analyzed Bosnian humor focusing on Sarajevo from the angle of geosemiotics and using the General Theory of Verbal Humor (GTVH). This approach encompasses a multimodal analysis, where visual humor plays an important role. I analyzed various creative forms: memes, a comic book, artistic posters, sketches and animations. Based on the analysis, several important conclusions need to be emphasized.

The geosemiotic framework focused on the analysis of humorous examples that take place in or are connected to Sarajevo, its streets, monuments and other visual features related to the city (for example, the Vučko Olympic mascot, the Sebilj fountain, etc.). These visual elements of Sarajevo establish the city as the background of the text and thus create the sense of place for the audience (the recipients of humor). This background is not limited to mere geographical location, but also includes other connections to Sarajevo, be it personal experience of life in or a visit to the city, certain events tied to the city, its traditions, etc.

The geosemiotic approach to humor is closely connected to the Situation parameter of the GTVH, and this is the crucial link between the two theoretical frameworks. Not only does the geosemiotic approach visualize Sarajevo as the background in the analyzed examples, but it is also frequently part of the backgrounded incongruity, a segment of the Situation KR.

Two perspectives are observed in the analysis of the sense of place within the geosemiotic framework: the focalized and the non-focalized. The focalized perspective means that the streets, monuments and other Sarajevo-related symbols are deliberately manipulated to enhance humor by (partially) changing their function(s). This is emphasized in the *Top lista nadrealista* (TLN) sketches, when, for example, a schoolyard and its wall are transformed so that they “become” a border between two cities, or when the University of Sarajevo building is transformed into an interrogation unit, or when the Vrelo Bosne outing area is transformed into the setting for the Little Red Riding Hood fairy tale sexual fantasy sketch. This focalized perspective contributes to humor, since the audience, either local or familiar with Sarajevo, will immediately recognize these locations in their “new” functions.

Another example of the change of function implemented as the focalizing factor can be found in Anur Hadžiomerspahić's work, where a military helmet is used as a potty, or where pills are used so as to appear as prayer beads. These are small objects, not buildings that have been transformed, but they too can serve as examples of such focalization. In this case, however, the Sarajevo perspective is not emphasized, since these objects are used universally, but as soon as, for example, the image of the military helmet used as a potty appears at the Sarajevo market, the geosemiotic perspective of the Bosnian war and the artist's message about the war is accentuated.

Still, the change of function is not the only way to focalize. Focalizations may also occur independently of the change of function. The drawings in the comic book about the Bosnian Franciscans deliberately emphasize certain features, thus enhancing humor. This is frequently employed in comic books, especially with the human face, where certain characteristic features may be intensified in the drawings. Hence, we see the exaggerated drawing of friar Luka Markešić's eyeglasses, or friar Božo Borić's protruding nose, etc. But the example of the exaggerated depiction of the Sarajevo tram, where it is seen as rushing at a curve and sounding the train horn to avoid hitting an old woman while the packed passengers inside the tram are trying to remain on their feet, also focalizes the typical Sarajevo tram experience. Hence, the drawings in this comic book resemble caricatures, and such exaggeration on the one hand contributes to humor, while also establishing the geosemiotic perspective of the Sarajevo-related experience.

The focalized perspective is also observed in the *Bruca Braca Burda Brada* (BBBB) animated series, where the locations and monuments do not change their primary function, but are drawn so as to emphasize a certain feature. For example, the building of the Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina is drawn so that the very expensive sidewalk is foregrounded, together with steles containing the alleged quotes by Alija Izetbegović, former Chairman of the Presidency.

The chapter on memes contains examples of the focalized perspective, where one of the city's landmarks, the Sebilj fountain, is presented as a parking area for Golf 2 vehicles.

In the non-focalized perspective, Sarajevo and Sarajevo-related objects serve only as a general backdrop, with no deliberate attempts at changing their function. Such examples are perhaps best observed in the TLN sketches, which were filmed in Sarajevo in the 1980s and the early 1990s, encapsulating the city in that period, as well as in many examples in the

comic book about Bosnian Franciscans, whose drawings also encapsulate Sarajevo at a certain point in time.

Both these perspectives are important for humor because they are frequently part of the backgrounded incongruity. This is especially true of the focalized perspective, which occurs either by changing an object's function (be it a building or a smaller, everyday object), or by exaggerating certain features of people or objects, as can be seen in the comic books, for example.

Indexicality is another geosemiotic element observed in the analysis, also frequently appearing as backgrounded incongruity. Indexicality is the property of referring from a sign to its context and vice-versa, or "the property of context-dependency of signs, especially language" (Scollon and Scollon, 2003, p. 212), and is observed, for instance, in some examples in the comic book about Bosnian Franciscans, where the star (a symbol associated with communism), indexed on the Yugoslav People's Army uniform, appears as a contrast between the uniformed characters and the friars, who wear their Franciscan robe. In these cases, indexicality contributes to humor because the contrast between the uniformed men (with the characteristic star insignia) and the Franciscans in their robes enhances humor, since two completely different ways and understandings of life come into contact.

Another significant example of indexicality as backgrounded incongruity includes the TLN sketch where a footballer wearing a blue jersey (which is the jersey of the *Željezničar* football team from Sarajevo, as well as of the former Yugoslav national football team, and therefore indexes them) partakes in an orgy in the Little Red Riding Hood fairy tale sketch.

Indexicality in memes is observed also in the placement of the three-wheeled car indexed for the *Only Fools and Horses* TV series (usually located in a street in Peckham, a London district) in front of a shop selling household appliances in one of the Sarajevo suburbs.

The BBBB series also contains such examples, the most prominent being the one where the French beret and the pullover, indexed for the traditional Muslim clothing in Bosnia and frequently worn by the poet Abdulah Sidran, are worn by the drug addict Ićo.

It is also worth emphasizing that the geosemiotic perspective was less directly applicable to Anur Hadžiomerspahić's *Human Condition* cycle, for his aim was to ironically present the negative aspects of contemporary life in general through a collection of artistic posters. Still, the sense of place is triggered once the posters are placed at a certain location, in the Sarajevo Tržnica for example. At that point, the general human condition is

recognized by the local people through their own experience, e.g. the poster entitled “War” is observed by the citizens of Sarajevo through their own, immediate experience of war.

As far as the GTVH approach is further concerned, apart from the Situation KR, which is the most important link with the geosemiotic perspective in the analysis, as we saw earlier, it is important to emphasize that the Language KR, a semiotic resource which includes all linguistic components at all levels (Attardo, 2020), is observed in many instances, depending on the example treated, but the most important general characteristic that may serve as a link to the sense of place is the localization of a global theme. This means that familiar content from, for example, the film industry, is used by the content creators so as to create local humor. In the context of Bosnian humor, this theme has already been discussed by Attardo & Đuliman (2024), as well as in this book, in the memes section, where localization is observed through manipulating certain global images and applying them to local situations, e.g. the “Creation of Ćevap” wall poster, or the meme where the actor Joaquin Phoenix undergoes preparations for the role of Joker in the Švrakino selo neighborhood of Sarajevo. Localization can also be observed in the TLN sketches, especially in instances where the famous film *The Deer Hunter* and *The Twilight Zone* TV series were used as the basis for a local story.

The Target KR has shown numerous examples of self-deprecating humor, best seen in the comic book about the Bosnian Franciscans, whose title emphasizes the aspect of self-mockery. In addition, self-deprecating humor can be observed in some examples of memes, the most interesting being the Sarajevo smog meme where the perspective shifts depending on the creator of the meme: if the creator was a Sarajevan, then the humor would be self-deprecating. If not, then the humor would be aggressive. Still, the meme works only if one has intimate knowledge of the smog, hence presumably the author was a resident in Sarajevo or at least had extensive experience of its weather. The TLN and the BBBB series are replete with examples of self-deprecating humor, mocking the traditions and habits of Sarajevans (with examples such as pushing the bus). However, the analyzed examples also include targets such as (and most frequently) politicians, police officers, as well as instances of ethnic humor, especially in the TLN immigration sketch where the Target are Albanians. The Script Opposition KR appears throughout the analyzed examples, with Raskin’s basic oppositions GOOD vs. BAD, SEX. vs. NO SEX, LIFE vs. DEATH, as well as NORMAL vs. ABNORMAL, RELIGION vs. NO RELIGION. These are universal oppositions, but are localized by different humorous devices, such

as the backgrounded incongruity observed in the visual elements that are part of the geosemiotic perspective (Sarajevo streets, monuments, symbols) which trigger an emotional response, making the humor Sarajevo-related.

Thus, for example, the Bosnian Franciscans comic book contains examples of anecdotes with oppositions SEX vs. NO SEX, EDUCATED vs. NON-EDUCATED, or COMMUNISM vs. CAPITALISM, which are localized as Sarajevo humor because of the visual elements of Sarajevo and the names of the friars, real individuals, who spent years of service (some their entire lives) in Sarajevo.

The same applies to memes where oppositions such as TRADITIONAL vs. NON-TRADITIONAL, or POLLUTION vs. NO POLLUTION appear as localized Sarajevo humor because of their visual elements, depicting the city itself or some signs indexed for the city (e.g. the Sebilj fountain).

The TLN and the BBBB shows also contain several instances of SO TRADITIONAL vs. NON-TRADITIONAL VALUES, where living according to traditional values is exposed to mockery, for example in the TLN sketch with the alien mission to find *burek* in Sarajevo, or in the BBBB example where one of the characters draws some traditional symbols on the wall (the *nanule* slippers, the Damascus rose, etc.) pretending to be Banksy. These traditional symbols trigger the sense of place and the universal oppositions become localized for the Sarajevo context.

It is important to note that the criticism of tradition does not appear as a form of rebellion against the symbols or the notion of cultural heritage. Rather, in both the TLN and BBBB series, it appears as a reaction against the people who oppose cultural, educational and other forms of societal development. In the TLN case, it was a reaction against the groupthink of the decaying socialist regime, as well as expressing the anti-war stance they took at the dawn of the breakup of Yugoslavia. To their mind, the conservative political elites propagated these dangerous and, ultimately, tragic actions when they started using traditional values as a screen to hide their nefarious plans of country disintegration and war.

In the BBBB case, the reaction is against anti-intellectualism and the ever-increasing anti-educational and anti-cultural positions frequently demonstrated by the right-leaning, corrupt political elites, whose activities have negatively affected Bosnian society for over 30 years. Similar to the negative trends of the late 1980s and the early 1990s, the elites wrongly and deliberately misinterpret tradition as a cover to propagate the most regressive attitudes in society while they thrive in corruption.

That said, POLITICAL CORRUPTION vs. TRANSPARENCY is another SO observed in both the series, even though they reflect the spirit of different historical periods in Sarajevo. The names of political parties, politicians and/or visual insinuations about certain political events in Yugoslavia (in the case of the TLN show, for example, insinuations against socialism in the aliens sketch) and in Bosnia and Herzegovina (in the BBBB series, for example, the mockery of Bosnian political families) trigger the sense of place for the audience, again making humor locally-oriented.

Finally, the SOs in the case of Anur Hadžiomerspahić's *Human Condition* cycle are universal, and are, as I have already emphasized, localized by being placed in a certain location in a given city. Hence, the danger of war observed in the SO EXCREMENT vs. NON-EXCREMENT, or DETACHMENT observed in the SO HEALTHY vs. DISEASED, will be localized by different experiences in different cities.

In the end, what I have shown in this book is that the Situation KR is much more important in the GTVH framework than originally considered, since it contains the geosemiotic perspective of humor that frequently causes backgrounded incongruity. Also, geosemiotics is an important aspect of humor studies, since the landscape can be manipulated so as to trigger the sense of place through the humor creators' deliberate manipulation of the surroundings aimed at creating or enhancing humor (the focalized perspective). Another possibility is that the sense of place is triggered by the background of the humorous content, but with no intention to deliberately cause humor (the non-focalized perspective).

One of the main questions I addressed in this book concerned the issue of Sarajevo humor, more precisely, its main traits. The analysis has shown that it encompasses a wide range of topics seen from the local perspective, such as politics, war, sexuality and religion, all presented in the local context, in a certain time period, and the humor is frequently ridiculing the authorities and those who think highly of themselves or live at the expense of others. The humor is also self-deprecating, for it ridicules the average Bosnian – an uneducated but a kind-hearted person, who suffers injustices but somehow manages to overcome them. And that “Bosnian everyman” is portrayed frequently in all instances of the analysis, from memes to the BBBB animated series.

Lastly, Bosnia is much more than Sarajevo, its capital city. The country has a lot to offer in humor elsewhere, for example, in Banja Luka, Goražde, Mostar, Tuzla... I hope to see many more studies of Bosnian humor in the future.

Abstract/Sažetak

The main goal of this book is the presentation of Bosnian (Sarajevo-based and Sarajevo-oriented) humor through a geosemiotic framework. The connection between geosemiotics and humor studies, particularly the general theory of verbal humor (GTVH), is established in the analysis which contains a selection of material that focuses on and/or originates from Sarajevo: memes, a comic book by Bosnian Franciscans, artistic posters by Anur Hadžiomerspahić, the *Top lista nadrealista* (TLN) show sketches, and the *Bruca Braca Bruda Brada* (BBBB) animated series. This is a different approach to humor studies, aimed at investigating the extent to which the Sarajevo landscape and Sarajevo-related symbols generate or enhance humor. The book also offers an overview of the Bosnian humor development, starting from the Ottoman influences, towards the 20th and early 21st century's literary and visual media works related to humor. These include some of the most significant Bosnian writers, film and theatre directors, as well as other artists whose works have influenced Bosnian humor.

Glavni cilj ove knjige je predstaviti bosanski humor (iz sarajevskog ugla i humor usmjeren na Sarajevo) kroz geosemiotički okvir. Veza između geosemiotike i studija humora, posebno opće teorije verbalnog humora (OTVH), uspostavlja se u analizi koja sadrži izbor materijala koji se usmjerava na Sarajevo i (ili) potječe iz Sarajeva: internetski memovi, strip bosanskih franjevac, umjetnički poster Anura Hadžiomerspahića, skečevi iz *Top liste nadrealista* (TLN) i animirane serije *Bruca Braca Bruda Brada* (BBBB). Ovo je drukčiji pristup studijama humora koji ima za cilj istražiti u kojoj mjeri pejzaž Sarajeva i simboli vezani za Sarajevo stvaraju ili intenziviraju humor. Knjiga također nudi i prikaz razvoja bosanskog humora, počevši od osmanskih utjecaja ka književnim i vizuelnim ostvarenjima vezanim za humor u 20. i ranom 21. vijeku. Ta ostvarenja uključuju neke od najznamenitijih bosanskohercegovačkih pisaca, filmskih i pozorišnih reditelja, kao i drugih umjetnika koji su utjecali na bosanski humor.

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