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Fellow Seminar

Bojan Bilić

Academic-Activist Interactions, Tensions and Dilemmas in the
Context of (Post-)Yugoslav Anti-War Engagement

The wars of the Yugoslav succession have become the present day *locus classicus* of the ideologically disparate debates on state collapse and nationalism's destructive force. The vast majority of accounts that have by now engaged with the Yugoslav conflicts — sometimes with rather unfavourable political and social consequences — have employed nationalism as the principal explanatory paradigm. The insistence on various distortions of nationalist sentiment, present, to a greater or lesser extent, in all of the former Yugoslav republics, has obscured a rich dynamics of anti-war engagement which unfolded prior to and throughout the Yugoslav wars. Thus, almost two decades after the internationally-brokered General Framework Agreement for Peace (Dayton Agreement), there is relatively little that we know about the processes through which the imminence of an armed conflict awakened dormant social networks, strengthened existing activist circles, and/or created new ones. Given that a lot of recent research uncritically "normalises" the current post-Yugoslav situation and perceives the newly generated and still unconsolidated nation-states as "natural" results of long-term historical processes, insufficient space is left for the analysis of trans-republican, pan-Yugoslav or supra-national peace-oriented civic engagement.

In this talk I will present and build upon my doctoral research to argue that Yugoslav anti-war engagement appropriated and expanded the already existing activist networks which were created as a result of trans-Yugoslav political cooperations in the second half of the 20th century. In doing so, I will start unpacking complex academic-activist dynamics by showing how activist enterprises operate as repositories of social and intellectual capital that can help them to become alternative sites of knowledge production which either seek or resist entrance into official educational systems. I will also offer tentative methodological considerations pertaining to ethnographic work in a sensitive post-conflict environment.

Bojan Bilić holds a PhD in Political Sociology from the University College London School of Slavonic and East European Studies. He is the author of *We Were Gasping for Air: (Post-)Yugoslav Anti-War Activism and Its Legacy* (2012) and co-editor (with Vesna Janković) of *Resisting the Evil: (Post-)Yugoslav Anti-War Contention* (2012).