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## A Good Deed is Not a Crime

### Moral Cosmologies of Favours in Muslim Bosnia

*David Henig*

On 18 August 2012 the grand mufti of the Bosnian Islamic Community, Mustafa ef. Cerić delivered his last public sermon before he stood down after nearly two decades in the position.<sup>1</sup> The sermon marked the end of the holy month of Ramadan and the beginning of the joyful *bajram* feast. The sermon was later interpreted by commentators as a series of the grand mufti's personal reflections on the development of post-socialist and post-war Bosnian society, and the moral role of Islam within it.<sup>2</sup> It also, however, offered an interesting perspective on the debates addressed in this book, including corruption, informal economy, and favours, and the need to critically re-imagine analytical frameworks that dominate these debates. The main message of the sermon was to outline a positive ten-point programme for the spiritual and moral regeneration of Bosnia-Herzegovina after the violent disintegration of socialist Yugoslavia in the 1990s. Point four of the outlined programme is particularly significant for the argument I develop in this chapter. Here, the grand mufti attacked the widespread bribery (*mito*) and corruption practices (*korupcija*) in Bosnian society as a problem of moral responsibility and Islamic ethics, namely as a problem between *halal* (lawful) and *haram* (unlawful), between moral and immoral conduct.

<sup>1</sup> The speech is available at <[http://www.rijaset.ba/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=14908:bajramska-hutba-reisu-l-uleme-1&catid=203:mina-vijesti-kat&Itemid=459](http://www.rijaset.ba/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=14908:bajramska-hutba-reisu-l-uleme-1&catid=203:mina-vijesti-kat&Itemid=459)>. Accessed 4 July 2016.

<sup>2</sup> I use the two prefixes 'post' deliberately as they play an important temporal framework in the mufti's argument.

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While the grand mufti was delivering his fierce words, I was in a Muslim village in the Zvezda highlands in Central Bosnia.<sup>3</sup> Together with half a dozen male villagers we were sitting in the house of Zahid,<sup>4</sup> and enjoying sweet Bosnian coffee and gorging ourselves on baklava after a month of fasting. We turned our attention to the television as the grand mufti moved on in his speech to critique decaying moral values in contemporary Bosnian society. The grand mufti then placed himself on a pedestal as the moral guarantor of all Bosnian Muslims at home and the diaspora, and appealed for a return to the appropriate moral values and traditions embedded in Islam as a solution to all problems in the country. As he spoke these moralizing words, our host Zahid pointed at the grand mufti on the screen and shouted 'Imams and Orthodox priests are the greatest thieves' (*Hodže i popovi najveći lopovi*). Then he added and gestured 'the mufti has some in his pocket', referring to corrupt money. Everyone in the room burst into laughter, and the joke earned Zahid another piece of sweet baklava from his wife, confirming his reputation as a dangerous joker, and a sharp critic of Bosnian post-war politics.

This fieldwork vignette succinctly captures a common moral dilemma that overshadows the ways in which Bosnian Muslims debate and evaluate the economy and politics in Bosnia-Herzegovina today. On the one hand, the vignette illustrates the zeitgeist of life in post-socialist, post-war Bosnia-Herzegovina in which issues of bribery, corruption, nepotism, unemployment, heavy indebtedness, and uneven economic development are part of everyday reflections on the Bosnian state and politics. One can encounter them during conversations everywhere, and across all categories of social actors, in rural and urban areas alike. In the village where Zahid was living, the level of unemployment has been consistently high for years, and six out of ten men are without any regular job and income. For villagers like Zahid, the post-war years have made for a daily struggle to survive as one needs to constantly negotiate and renegotiate how to get by, have enough means to send children to the municipal school, feed the family, and pay the high-interest microloans that plagued the country (Jasarevic 2012). 'You have to live', meaning 'you need to get by', is a common expression villagers frequently use when reflecting on such struggles. For Zahid and his fellow neighbours, 'to get by' has meant being involved in a number of activities over the past two decades, ranging from working on construction sites in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Azerbaijan, and Kazakhstan and illegal timber extraction

<sup>3</sup> Since I have carried out fieldwork chiefly in Central Bosnia, I shall use Bosnia when referring to my ethnographic field sites, and Bosnia-Herzegovina when referring to the general context in which my ethnography is situated.

<sup>4</sup> Names and details have been changed to protect the identity of individuals.

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to illicit employment at local sawmills and bartering locally produced dairy for various commodities with occasional traders who pass by the village. ‘You have to live’, villagers also often added after describing how they negotiated a deal through small illicit payments, or when asking for forgiveness after being caught by police during illegal timber extraction.

On the other hand, the idiom ‘you have to live’ also illustrates villagers’ questioning of and reflections on their individual actions, and the evaluation of such actions as framed within particular moral registers. And here the moral dilemma emerges. Zahid as well as other villagers were all in agreement with the grand mufti that one ought to live the moral (*halal*) way and avoid any **illicitness** in order to be a good Muslim. The villagers often asked how one can be simultaneously a good Muslim and get by without losing a sense of self-worth and dignity in the eyes of fellow consociates and the Almighty if ‘to get by’ in post-war Bosnia-Herzegovina included potentially immoral and certainly illegal actions. When looking at ‘favours’, this moral ambiguity in the lives of village Muslims in Bosnia-Herzegovina becomes useful to our thinking.

The outlined moral dilemma thus leads me to the heart of this chapter. I will explore the relationship between the notions of corruption, bribery, and favours, and Muslim moral imagination and ethical conduct. Specifically, this chapter juxtaposes and analytically distinguishes between normative discourses on illicit economic practices and instances of doing favours in three ethnographic contexts. These are education, mediating job access, and the negotiation of legality and illegality with the state. The negotiation of the line between morally (*halal*) acceptable conduct and immoral (*haram*) conduct in the day-to-day struggle for life often requires favours or kickbacks. This is not a morally clear-cut matter for villagers, but a matter of constant evaluation and judgement. Hence I move my argument from the political-economy approach that often dominates in the literature, towards the ethical dimension of everyday life that has recently developed in anthropology (e.g. Al-Mohammad and Peluso 2012; Laidlaw 2014). As Michael Lambek (2010) persuasively argues, ethics is intrinsic to the human condition, actions, and sociality rather than constituting any encompassing system of clear-cut rules, prescripts, or beliefs (see also Laidlaw 2014). A shift in the perspective towards the ethical dimension of ‘doing favours’ enables us to appreciate that one cannot fully know what one means, says, or does in ongoing clarifications, evaluations, and judgements, as these are negotiated and renegotiated in interactions with others through the flow of life (Carrithers 2005; Keane 2014; Lambek 2010).

In the debates on what constitutes a favour, as many chapters in this book discuss, emphasis is often placed on social exchanges, that is, how connections are established or maintained to facilitate a (illicit) service (Ledeneva

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1998; this volume). What is often neglected is an exploration of the question of how decisions to participate in such forms of exchange are made in the first place. The decision of whether to ask for, or for whom one will do, a favour is contingent rather than prescriptive, and often requires judgements over whether to do it for *that* person in *that* situation or not. This is an inherently ethical problem that reminds us of the moral issues inherent in what is conventionally labelled ‘economies of favours’, and which I address in this chapter. In so doing, I will suggest that one way of looking at the ethical dimension in exchanges of favours is through the economy of good deeds as understood in the context of Muslims’ moral imagination. Before I do so, however, let me return to the grand mufti’s speech for a moment.

### From Economies of Favour Towards an Economy of Good Deeds

According to the grand mufti, the overall rebirth from the post-socialist and post-war economic and moral decline lies in re-establishing the boundaries between *haram* and *halal*, that is, between the immoral and moral in people’s everyday conduct. Such an appeal is not just a kind of a theological or moralizing discourse advocated in the public. On the contrary, I suggest that by paying attention to the use of the moral categories of *halal* and *haram* we can shed a different light on the debates about corruption and favours in a post-socialist context and beyond, namely from the perspective of vernacular moral cosmologies and how these are instantiated and negotiated in quotidian ethical conduct. Indeed, the great majority of debates on illicit economic practices and moralities under post-socialism are conventionally framed to conform to ethnocentric models of civil society, social capital, shortage economy, and the like (Lowell 2005). Others have glorified informal economies and favours as an autonomous sphere of action and conduct, resisting the state. Be that as it may, such debates reproduce to a certain extent the Cold-War ethnocentric perspective by employing the distinction ‘formal/informal’, which reproduces the West/East divide in one way or another, as a starting point of analysis instead of problematizing such analytical categories in the first place (Makovicky and Henig, this volume; for a substantial critique see Creed 2011).

In his splendid ethnography on revitalized mumming rituals in rural Bulgaria, Gerald Creed (2011) has forged a path to move away from such a framework. For Creed, it is the ritual action that works as a way to challenge the dominating ethnocentric analytical perspectives on the grassroots economies and moralities after socialism. Similarly, Chris Hann (this volume) offers a different perspective by examining the gift exchange of *pálinka* (homemade

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brandy) in Hungary in a *longue durée* framework, rather than treating it simply as a product of the shortage economy during socialism. This chapter follows a similar critical path. It takes seriously the notions of *halal* and *haram* as a grassroots perspective on Muslim moral imagination underlying the spheres of exchange and value, and how these notions are instantiated and negotiated in everyday ethical conduct.

As I have argued elsewhere at length (Henig, n.d.), among village Muslims in Bosnia-Herzegovina the moral categories of *haram* and *halal* are significant conceptual operators in vernacular Muslim cosmologies that inform the notions and conceptions of what it means to be a good Muslim and live a good Muslim life. The two moral categories interconnect multiple domains of value and exchange instantiated in a specific moral aesthetic of generosity that I describe as *halal* economies. In the Central Bosnian highlands, where I have carried out the bulk of my research, being a good Muslim person (*insan*) and living a good life requires one to enter, and be embedded in, a perpetual cycle of ‘vital exchange’ of good deeds, merits, and prayers—for blessing, prosperity, and fortune—between the living, the dead, and the Almighty (see Barraud et al. 1994; Rosen 2002). Living a life that is conceived of in terms of a flow of vital exchange between the realms of the everyday and the spiritual is considered by village Muslims as living the *halal* way. Thus, if the problem of corruption and illicit practices in Bosnia-Herzegovina is framed as a problem between *halal* moralities and *haram* immoralities and conduct, where should we situate the debates on favours? When and for whom is the act of doing a favour *halal*—morally acceptable—and when does it become *haram*—immoral?

To answer these questions, I follow Caroline Humphrey’s observation (this volume) that favours are a distinct mode of action that have moral value and even a sacred dimension. By examining this argument ethnographically, we can then move away from the normative, legalistic, and political-economic views that single out favours simply as part of illicit or illegal practices, or as a way of getting by in situations of a shortage economy and a dysfunctional state and bureaucracy. For many villagers like Zahid, who strive and struggle both to be a good Muslim but also to get by under precarious conditions, being involved in an economy of favours is first and foremost an action that pertains to the realm of everyday ethical conduct. It enables villagers to carve a space for acting the *halal* way, and thus to maintain the flow of vital exchange in their personal eschatologies and with their consociates.

In the great majority of debates, corruption and related illicit economic practices are understood within the cost-benefits, or transactional, framework—that is, as a way of securing advantage and access for oneself or one’s own (Haller and Shore 2005, 2). This is also a commonly accepted understanding of corruption shared among village Muslims in Bosnia-Herzegovina. Indeed, Zahid was well

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aware of the argument that to actively corrupt someone with money to gain personal benefits, or to be corrupt, would be morally and legally dubious, that is, *haram*. On the other hand, as I shall discuss, there is an ambiguous sphere of various forms of informal brokerage, leverage (*štela* in Bosnian), and connections (*veze* in Bosnian) in which a number of villagers regularly participate, including Zahid himself. These activities and exchanges are not necessarily understood as legally problematic, but are nonetheless conceived of as morally dubious, and therefore potentially *haram*-like, thus creating the moral dilemma outlined in the Introduction. In this chapter, I suggest that another way of looking at this dilemma might be to look at it through a different moral register of action, that of doing favours. The act of doing favours, unlike actively corrupting someone, is first and foremost understood and evaluated by village Muslims as acting the *halal* way. What is a favour then?

A favour is a type of action, Humphrey argues, that has a moral value by virtue of not being apprehended in the transactional framework of costs-benefits and immoral gains.<sup>5</sup> It requires non-transactional performative reciprocity such as saying ‘thank you’ (Humphrey this volume; also Laidlaw 2000). By drawing on Julian Pitt-Rivers’ argument on grace (2011), Humphrey invites us to rethink favours as an act of gratuity that is incalculable, and demands reciprocity of sentiment. Pitt-Rivers himself goes to the core of the matter when he elegantly puts it, ‘both favors and contracts involve reciprocity, but contractual reciprocity, the basis of trade, is not the same thing as the reciprocity of the heart’ (2011, 427). Humphrey and Pitt-Rivers detect a distinct potentiality in human action and the ways of forming relations, largely shared across time, moral traditions, and regions, that complements generosity—*gratuitousness*. Yet both Humphrey and Pitt-Rivers are aware of the need to ethnographically contextualize specific forms of religious etiquette, moral aesthetic, and social relations associated with acts of grace.

What would then be an ethnographic approximation of Humphrey and Pitt-Rivers’ arguments on framing favour as grace and gratuitousness for village Muslims in Bosnia? To answer this question, I shall suggest that for villagers like Zahid, living with the moral dilemma of how to get things done in a non-corrupt, gratuitous, and thus *halal* way, we need to turn our attention to the question of everyday ethical conduct. In Central Bosnia, village Muslims’ actions are informed and cultivated by the social etiquette of good deeds and merits, recognized as doing *sevap* (from Turkish). Similarly, Kimberly Hart (2013) in her recent work in rural Turkey, has shown how village Muslims implement the moral category of *hayir* (good deeds) to

<sup>5</sup> See also Alena Ledeneva’s work (1998, 2011).

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respond ‘to the social effects of economic change, as well as to address their personal quests for salvation’ (2013, 74). Hart shows how village Muslims utilize and cultivate the practice of *hayir* to create ‘networks of charitable activity, [and] distributing goods’ (Hart 2013, 76) that helps the villagers to overcome the widening socio-economic gap. The vernacular notion and practice of *hayir* thus refers to a form of everyday ethics of economic redistribution and social justice that is recognized by Islamic theologians as *sadaqa* (*sadaka* in Bosnian), that is, an act of voluntary charitable giving (Benthall 1999; Mauss 1954; Singer 2008). Hart shows that such everyday ethical conduct of doing good deeds is instantiated in small gestures of help and assistance that do not separate rich from poor, ‘since the poor can make gestural contributions’ (Hart 2013, 78), or as Bosnian villagers often pointed out to me ‘*sadaka* is a kind word’. This is exactly what Humphrey and Julian Pitt-Rivers have in mind when writing about favours as the non-transactional reciprocity of sentiment:

whenever a favor has been done the return of grace is always expected, whether in the form of a material manifestation (regardless of the material value of that which is returned) or merely in verbal expression. (Pitt-Rivers 2011 [1992], 425)

Or, as Lawrence Rosen puts it in the Moroccan context, to cast the comparative net more widely:

the word *khayyir* [Arabic equivalent of Turkish *hayir*], with its rich overtones of blessedness, the good aspects of life, the gift of divine bounty, the good things men do for and with one another . . . a circle of beneficence. (Rosen 2002, 12)

These are cogent arguments for bringing the debates on favours and the economy of good deeds into closer dialogue. Acts of good deeds, Hart suggests (2013, 78), are the acts of small sacrifices which earn merit, and as such are situated in the encompassing moral cosmologies of vital exchange, or circles of beneficence, with the Almighty. In turn, the act of a good deed, instantiated through generosity, self-sacrifice, or reciprocity of sentiment, is by no means a self-oriented transactional act of gaining personal advantage at the expense of others. On the contrary, it is a *gratuitous* act, that is, a favour.

Although village Muslims in the Central Bosnian highlands recognize the concept of *hayir*, *hajr*, or *hair*, the meaning is different, leaning towards generalized notions of ‘the good’. Instead, a good deed is known as another, originally Turkish, word, *sevap* (translated in Bosnian as *dobro djelo*). In what follows, I trace how the notion of good deeds (*sevap*) emerges as an ethnographic approximation of gratuitousness or favour in Muslim Bosnia in **the** three contexts, that is, education, mediating job access, and negotiation of legality and illegality with the state. Before I do so, a further terminological clarification is necessary to move away from the formal/informal economy debates.



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## Away from (Bosnian) Informal Economies

This chapter began with the speech of the grand mufti, and his fierce critique of corruption and bribery in post-socialist, post-war Bosnia-Herzegovina. The word the mufti used in his speech when referring to bribery—*mito*—is just one of many vernacular terms used in day-to-day encounters. The term *mito* refers to direct acts of illicit payments, as does the word *korupcija*. There are two other terms frequently used in Bosnian, that of *štela* and *veze* respectively. These two terms are used in the ambiguous sphere of illicit economic practices where mediation or leverage of access to resources are negotiated, rather than bribery (*mito*) as such (for a detailed examination, see Brković 2015a, 2015b).

There are a number of similarities between these Bosnian terms and the concept of *blat* discussed by Alena Ledeneva (1998, 2006) and other authors (Lovell et al. 2000) when referring to Russia's informal economic networks and moralities. For Ledeneva, *blat* is 'the use of personal networks and informal contacts to obtain goods and services in short supply and to find a way around formal procedures', or 'a distinctive form of social relationship or social exchange articulating private interests and human needs against the rigid control of the state', and also 'an exchange of "favours of access" in conditions of shortage and a state system of privileges' (1998, 1, 7, 37). Since Ledeneva's hallmark publication on *blat*, entitled *Russia's Economies of Favour*, the concept of *blat* has become something of an ideal type for various studies focusing on illicit economic practices in the post-socialist context at large.<sup>6</sup> More importantly though, the concepts of 'informal economy' and 'economy of favours' have been used often interchangeably since then, although the two are not alike (see Chapter 1). The reason for discussing these terminological distinctions as a cautionary note here is that both *štela* and *veze* can also be traced back to the times of Yugoslav socialism and it would be easy to see them simply as a kind of favour. As with the Soviet practice of *blat* (Ledeneva 1998), *štela*, unlike direct acts of corruption or bribery (*mito*), falls into a different moral register. *Štela* embraces a moral view on the importance and acceptance of the use of various personal connections to obtain goods, services, jobs, or information in situations of shortage or impossibility of access.<sup>7</sup> The etymology of the term and its further contextualization deserve to be quoted at length:

[*Štela*] originates from German *stellen*, which means "to set up" or "connection" ... the word has been present in colloquial speech since the time of socialism. To say

<sup>6</sup> Ledeneva (personal communication; also 2008), however, has been rather cautious lately in making any direct analogies between *blat* and other somewhat similar practices (for a detailed discussion on *guanxi* see Swancutt, Chapter 5, this volume).

<sup>7</sup> It is important to note, however, that 'shortage' had a very different meaning in the socialist Soviet and Yugoslav economies respectively.

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someone has a *štela* to get into university or to get a job means s/he has a connection and that the potential competition is “a set up”. It can also denote the person who acts as a *štela* (for someone), i.e. a “connection”. . . . The word *štela* and its derivatives have a less negative connotation than the word “corruption”: they are “softer” and more connected to private than to public discourses, although increasingly common in public discourse. (UNDP Report 2009, 73)

This explication is cited here from the most authoritative text on *štela* to date, that is, the 2009 United Nations Development Programme’s report, symptomatically called *The Ties that Bind: Social Capital in Bosnia and Herzegovina*. The report is the product of a normative perspective on post-socialist, post-war Bosnia-Herzegovina, and its rhetoric is not dissimilar from the trope of ‘amoral familism’ outlined in Banfield’s work *The moral basis of a backward society* (1958). It bundles statistical data, qualitative focus groups, and questionnaires rather than providing the reader with a grassroots perspective on quotidian sociality and economic predicaments in the country. The conceptual and methodological framework, and the overall language of the report are further heavily influenced by Robert Putnam’s *Making Democracy Work* (1993), which was written in a similar normative vein as Banfield’s study. The report is thus yet another example of what Gerald Creed describes as ‘teleological and ethnocentric baggage with practical political importance within global systems of power, and making an effort to redeem segments of East European societies within that system’ (2011, 11).<sup>8</sup> Indeed, one of the key issues mentioned in the report as a major obstacle to the development of democracy and civil society, to use the language of the report, in post-war Bosnia-Herzegovina is the practice of *štela*, which originates, however, in the pre-war socialist past. The practice of *štela* is understood in the report as a soft form of corruption, nepotism, clientelism, or patronage. However, the key qualitative findings of the report cannot simply be ignored. We can read them in a nutshell as follows:

Bosnia-Herzegovina is a society dominated by strong family ties; people spend time with and trust their immediate social networks of family, acquaintances and close friends invariably across ethnicity, age, gender, or cantons; *štela* is widespread between people and service providers, and 95% of the survey respondents answered that *štela* is always or frequently useful for access to social services; 85.7% of respondents see personal connections as the only way to get a job, and the majority use family connections in search of employment. (UNDP Report 2009, 23)

<sup>8</sup> Gerald Creed (2011, 113) astutely observes that an ‘informal economy’ once celebrated—by Western politicians, commentators, and social scientists alike—as an act of resistance and autonomy against the socialist state, has become since 1989 ‘a problem, now often redefined as “corruption”’, and he convincingly shows how the concept of civil society ‘is offered as the enlightened alternative’, although it was this very ‘civil society’ that enabled the flourishing of ‘informal economy’ during socialism in the first place.

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It is not my intention to question the accuracy of these findings. In fact, the ethnographic data I have collected during my fieldwork also indicates the pervasiveness of *štela* in everyday life, in rural as well as urban areas (Brković 2015a, 2015b). The case in point here, however, is the appreciation that neither *štela* nor another form of favouritism are clear-cut categories. Rather, they are morally polythetic (Humphrey and Hugh-Jones 1992, 2) and highly contextual, emerging and reemerging from the ethical conduct of individuals throughout the flow of life. When I asked, for example, my friend Adnan, a local activist and a DJ living in Sarajevo, about *štela* in 2012, he immediately replied that ‘it has become so normal and acceptable that people no longer think of corruption as a problem’. This comment can be read in two ways. On the one hand, it confirms the findings of the report and its conflation of *štela* with (softer) corruption. However, on the other hand, it illustrates, though somewhat hyperbolically, that despite its pervasiveness, the practice of *štela* is not free of contextual judgements and evaluations. In other words, not only urbanites like Adnan, but villagers like Zahid, or high-profile individuals like the grand mufti, are all aware of the moral perils that stem from day-to-day means and struggles to get by in post-socialist, post-war Bosnia-Herzegovina. And it is the latter that is missing in the report, which brings me back to the point made earlier in the chapter, that there is no lack of debate among Bosnians of different walks of life about corruption in the country. What is also often missing are peoples’ concerns as to how one can get by without losing a sense of self-worth and dignity in the eyes of fellow consociates in the socio-economically deprived post-war polity.

This grassroots perspective sheds light on the moral heterogeneity of what is normatively described in the report as corruption, or ‘soft corruption’, that is, *štela*. An alternative route to appreciate such moral heterogeneity and ambiguity that I propose in this chapter is to examine how such debates, and more importantly actions and practices, are part of everyday ethics, enabling village Muslims to carve a space for acting the *halal* way in a situation in which it seems to be almost impossible to get by without *štela*. In order to do so, it is crucial to distinguish not only between corruption (*mito*) and soft corruption, or informality (*štela*), but also between these and the acts of doing favours and the ethics of doing good deeds. The term *štela*, despite its similarities with the concept of *blat*, is not by definition a favour as understood by Humphrey or Pitt-Rivers. Instead, I suggest, a *štela*-like act can become a favour under certain circumstances, such as the moral dilemma discussed in this chapter—that is, when apprehended as an act of grace and generosity that maintains the sense of self-worth (Humphrey, Rakowski this volume), or as a good deed that earns merit in personal eschatology.

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### Economies of Good Deeds in Muslim Bosnia

In what follows I turn towards the events and situations in which the very notions of *štela* or *veze* are dismissed in the name of a good deed (*sevap*). These moments are ambiguous and slippery (see also Humphrey, Makovicky, and Reeves, this volume), and the potentiality of an action to be performed and evaluated as a *gratuitous* favour is the case in point here. I want to discuss three contexts which are often associated with a range of practices labelled as corruption, illicitness, *štela* or *veze*. However, these, **at the same time** can become **also** favours—that is, conceived of as good deeds, and thus morally *halal*. Specifically, I look at the spheres of education, mediating job access, and negotiation of legality and illegality with the state.

#### *Mujo's story*

Let us first consider the sphere of education. Education as a domain of negotiating access through personal connections (*veze/štela*) or through other means has been widely recognized in the literature on post-socialism (Humphrey this volume). Access to education through personal connections is also vividly discussed and negotiated in rural as well as urban areas across Bosnia-Herzegovina. It includes elementary schools, as much as grammar and high schools and universities. The latter in particular have gained attention in a number of local media and international reports (e.g. UNDP 2009). As I discussed with university students on a number of occasions, to pursue a university degree is for many students more than just a matter of having good personal connections (*veze/štela*). It also sometimes requires a considerable amount of money, and one needs to calculate not only university fees, but also additional money for 'insuring' success in exams and the like. All of my interviewees with a university experience have had an experience when they had to use, at some point, either personal connections or small amounts of illicit payments, and often both, to get through the system. In the case of tertiary or lower stages of education the preference has been solely given to mobilizing, and the use of, personal networks in order to access a service (*veze/štela*). An intriguing observation during my fieldwork, however, was that a number of cases of leverage or providing access were neither classified nor understood as *štela* or *veze*. On the contrary, these events were framed and pursued as an act of a good will, that is, as *sevap*. This echoes Humphrey's and Pitt-Rivers' observations that for an act to be a favour it has to be recognized as such, rather than implying a priori that there is a distinct class of acts which *are* favours. Let us consider this argument further by exploring a case study from a Muslim village in the Central Bosnian highlands that I call Brdo (Henig 2012a, 6–8), and specifically the story of Mujo.

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Mujo is simultaneously a village imam (*hodža*), a high-school teacher in the municipal town, and also a neighbour, with extended agnatic networks of relatives in the village. These three layers of social identity straddle particular moral registers, duties, and obligations, that of Islamic moral authority, civil servant, and kin respectively. In day-to-day situations, Mujo has to negotiate often contradictory expectations emerging from these different strands, and yet maintain his moral accountability, as well as self-worth to be a good Muslim. In his everyday conduct, he places emphasis on the notion of good deeds (*sevap*) as a form of everyday ethics that enable him to balance such diverse and often contradictory expectations and obligations, and yet to live the *halal* way as a good Muslim.

As a local imam and a high-school teacher Mujo's networks of access to influence things are dense and wide. It is no surprise that he is often approached after prayers in the mosque, as a moral authority, or over coffee, as kin, to solve various issues. As he often confessed to me, people approach him with unrealistic expectations not only of what he can do, but also of what he is willing to do, and he makes it very explicit that he does not want to do anything that would be considered as *veze* or *štela*. But it does not mean that Mujo would not engage in doing favours for his fellow mosque or village consociates at all, as the following example illustrates.

One autumn day in 2009, Mujo was approached by Nurfet, who is his neighbour and a distant relative. In fact, Mujo was walking home through the neighbours' gardens and Nurfet dragged him in for a coffee as he wanted to ask him for help, but not in public. While sitting in Nurfet's living room it took some time to get over the obligatory conversational themes. Only then, Mujo was asked if he could help Nurfet's daughter to enrol for the prestigious subject of economic management at the municipal high school where Mujo is a teacher. In this conversation over coffee, Nurfet tacitly implied that the two of them are distant relatives and close neighbours (*komšije*), notions that implicate mutuality, help, and compassion (Henig 2012a). Moreover, Nurfet also carefully reminded Mujo of his socio-economic situation, that of being the only breadwinner in the house, yet with a small and irregular salary from the village sawmill, four kids, and massive debts. There was no way for Nurfet to ensure that his daughter would get enrolled without any connections and assistance, that is, *veze* or *štela*.

Mujo, as someone who concurs with the view of the grand mufti that people should know the moral boundaries of *halal* and *haram* in their day-to-day conduct, was reluctant to help Nurfet in the guise of a distant relative. This would imply to him exactly what *veze/štela* is. Participating in *veze/štela* matters is for Mujo acting the *haram* way. At the same time, he knew about Nurfet's difficult situation, and was thus concerned about the well-being of his fellow Muslim and his family in need. This matter of concern falls into the

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register of Mujo's everyday ethics, that of acting the *halal* way in the ongoing flow of vital exchange with fellow consociates and the Almighty that earns merits for doing good deeds (*sevap*). Mujo, therefore, eventually decided to intervene in the selection process, and Nurfet's daughter was enrolled although her grades were slightly below the required average (Mujo explained to the selection committee that her poor grades were due to her difficult family situation, rather than being just an average student). From the very beginning Mujo did so in the name of merciful God, as an act of grace. Nurfet and his relatives reciprocated with sentiment by thanking Mujo on many occasions, saying 'may God bless you'. Mujo's response always was '*halal* to you', meaning in this context that his help was morally acceptable, and more importantly, it was a gratuitous act, free of obligation (*halal*), and that Nurfet's family does not owe him anything. Although other villagers, as well as a number of teachers knew about the enrolment process, none of them questioned what Mujo did, nor invoked this case as an instance of using connections for personal gain, as they did in the case of some other students. On the contrary, the overall arrangement was evaluated and recognized as an act of good deeds.

### *Friends of God are just merciful*

Another sphere I wish to discuss is the job market and how access to it is mediated. As in the case of education, there is no significant difference between rural and urban areas of Bosnia-Herzegovina, especially as Sarajevo is the main magnet for getting a job for a vast number of villagers. Having a job, and even more importantly having a regular income, has become a precious resource for a great number of Bosnians of different walks of life. The feeling shared by all my friends and interviewees was that either one needs to have lots of money to get even a mediocre job as a shop assistant or a security guard, or one needs to have connections with political parties.<sup>9</sup>

This was also the perception of Samir, whom I have known for many years as someone who embraced values of non-ethnic, participatory democracy and open civil society as the ultimate aim of post-war development in Bosnian-Herzegovina. His understanding of these concepts was heavily influenced by a number of workshops and projects organized by various international NGOs after the war in which he participated. When I met Samir again in 2012, however, he was fed up and determined to get a job through a political party

<sup>9</sup> There is no standard price for these jobs, but for example a security guard working as a gatekeeper for a car park for a state institution, whom I know well, paid *štela* of €2,500, which was the equivalent of six months' salary. Getting a job as a shop assistant in a grocery shop in Sarajevo cost the family of my friend *štela* of €3,000 to the manager of the local branch. A considerable number of teachers at local schools have some connections with local politicians through whom they applied for their respective jobs, using their *veze*.

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in municipal elections as he has not received any salary in his current job, at the time, for twelve months. ‘Political parties’, he told me, ‘are the only ones who really control jobs in this country today’. Samir managed to get nominated for the SDP (Social Democratic Party), and was busy mobilizing his family and kin networks, neighbours, friends, and friends of friends across the three constitutive Bosnian nationalities in the promise of becoming an access point for his electorate for getting jobs or other things done, should he be elected. There was no moral ambiguity for Samir between the embraced values of civil society and mobilizing his networks, while promising help in the future, in case of success. **This was the way for Samir of how things get done.**

The story of Samir is rather characteristic of a number of post-socialist contexts (Kaneff this volume), as well as beyond, for political nepotism and patronage more broadly (Boissevain 1974). Is there any space for **the** doing favours beyond nepotism and patronage in accessing the job market? Can the act of mediating access to a job be considered a moral act of favour or solely an act of nepotism? While in the case study of education it was important *who* was approached to turn such situations into an act of grace, here the *who* is as important as *where* the debating and negotiating of the access is located. In other words, the question is whether there is any alternative moral space other than the political domain, including bars, cafés or back doors, that eventually swallowed Samir.

Here I am specifically interested in the role of dervish, or Sufi, sheikhs and their lodges (*tekija*) in post-socialist, post-war Bosnia-Herzegovina—not only as a space of contemplation, refuge, and spiritual apprenticeship, but also as a potentially alternative network of assistance and help that is imbued with the moralities of care and good deeds. Specifically, what role do spaces of worship play in situations such as mediating or arranging access to the job market? I have written about these lodges at length elsewhere (Henig 2014), but the lodges are also important places where the employed and unemployed, employers and employees, meet and interact.

Among the dervish disciples, the sheikh is recognized and obeyed for his closeness to God. The sheikh is a mediator of access between the divine world and the world of humans, as much as between humans themselves. Indeed, he is the one who cares about the hearts and souls of all of his disciples, not only during the prayer gatherings (*zikir*), but all the time (through dreams for example), outside of the life in the lodge. The sheikh’s unique qualities to mediate between worlds and realms, and his closeness to God, make any of his actions acts of grace, and blessing (Gilsenan 1982). In a similar vein to the imam Mujo, all **s**heikhs I have interviewed explained to me that it is their duty to do so. In return, the disciples reciprocate with sentiment, with their ultimate love and obedience as an enactment of appropriate moral conduct (*adab*) that informs their everyday ethical conduct inside as well as outside of the lodge.

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In the half a dozen lodges where I have carried out fieldwork across Bosnia-Herzegovina, I observed again and again situations such as the following. Said is a dervish disciple in his early thirties. He worked abroad for a few years despite a small hand impairment, and was made redundant only as a result of the post-2008 economic crisis. Following his return to a municipal town in Central Bosnia, he was unable to find a job, even a temporary one, for months. During one of the evenings in the lodge another disciple, Zakir, appeared after two months of absence. Zakir works in an administrative position for the state-run forestry company. The sheikh of the lodge took Zakir aside later during the evening and asked him if he could hire Said as an assistant for the forest surveyors. Zakir, without any question or comment, answered yes, and was utterly thrilled and blessed by the sheikh's trust in him. A few days later, Said was already working in the position. Similarly, another sheikh in another municipal town opened a discussion after one of the prayer gatherings, asking one of the disciples, an assistant director in the local school, if he could make sure that the wife of another disciple would be hired for the recently advertised position of English language teacher. And she eventually was. Yet another example is of a sheikh from Sarajevo who regularly instructs one of his disciples, an owner of a medium-size building company, to hire as many unemployed disciples as possible for seasonal jobs in summer. And the list of such interventions, or acts of mediating access, could continue.

It would be easy to see the role of sheikhs in the process of mediating the access to jobs simply in the same terms as in the case of Samir, that is, as a form of nepotism and patronage whereby votes and support, or loyalty in the case of disciples, are exchanged for prospective benefits. The reciprocal logic of politico-economic patronage is contractual. However, sheikhs offer a different morality of exchange—that of love, mercifulness, and grace. Their mediating role is analogous to their mediation of the divine to the hearts of their disciples. They act in the name of God and his gratuitousness. This does not mean that no reciprocity would be involved in such favours. However, the moral register that we are dealing with here is what Pitt-Rivers describes when he writes about favours, that is, 'reciprocity of heart' (Pitt-Rivers 2011 [1992], 427). These interventions of sheikhs, or help from other disciples, are morally *halal*, and conceived of as both appropriate moral conduct and duty, and as an act of good deed, that is reciprocated in return by prayers, love, and sentiment.

### '*Sevap can't be illegal*'

In my last example I want to discuss situations in which the very notions of legality and illegality are brought into question when re-animated as a matter of good deeds. Specifically, I am interested in the grassroots negotiations of villagers with the state over the legality of their conduct. In the Central Bosnian



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highlands, day-to-day encounters and negotiations with the state are manifold. However, there is one sphere of activity where the boundaries of legality and illegality, and the role of *štela* or favours, are daily negotiated—that of illegal/legal forest extraction, especially firewood. This has become a prominent issue in the current situation of economic hardship and intensified monitoring and patrolling activities of the state against illegal extraction, as this is a precious source of income to the cantonal budgets.

In the villages, and to a large extent in a number of municipal towns, firewood is an indispensable fuel, used for both cooking as well as heating. Villagers often say that they have been using the surrounding forests for extraction since time immemorial, no matter who the owner was. What is less discussed, however, is how the extraction has been historically negotiated with the owners. There are two categories of ownership recognized in this context: private and state-owned. The former re-emerged in the villages only after the disintegration of socialist Yugoslavia when some villagers successfully claimed their confiscated property back, and when some of the nouveau riche purchased plots of forested land. The private forest is not even conceived of by villagers as a possibility for extraction without any permission, partly due to the fact that it would be impossible to avoid public scrutiny in the village. The state-owned forest, however, has been exploited extensively during and even more so after Yugoslav socialism.

After the war of the 1990s, when rural areas were devastated economically and villagers were left unemployed, a considerable number of small village sawmills arose across the region to exploit its rich forest resources (Henig 2012a, 6–8). This led many villagers to illegally extract timber as a way to get by (see also Rakowski's contribution to this volume and the parallel case of bootleg miners). To cut a long story short, this was the case in Brdo, which became rather infamous in the municipality as some of the villagers engaged in illegal extraction on a massive scale. However, the consequences of such increased illegal extraction made even the collecting of firewood, needless to say timber, for free very difficult. As I have discussed elsewhere (Henig 2012b), this has led some particularly poor villagers to enter mined forested areas despite the danger of unexploded ordnance (the patrol does not usually enter these areas).

The key figure in the overall process of negotiating permission has always been the forest patrol, who can 'close his eyes', or on the contrary, issue a fine, and in the case of commercial illegal extraction this can lead even to prosecution. The forest patrol is thus the key node in the network of access to illegal/legal firewood. This position inevitably invites various attempts of bribery or exchange of services in order to obtain permission to extract. According to some villagers, the forest patrol were some of the richest people in the municipality during Yugoslav times, with expensive cars and spectacular houses

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due to their involvement in illicit practices. They also enjoyed this somewhat distinguished importance during the time of my fieldwork. Whenever the patrol appeared in or around the village, those who were in the forest were instantly warned via mobile phones. At the same time, the patrol was immediately invited to one of the houses and served as special guests with coffee, alcohol, delights, and the like, while various other villagers were passing by the house and trying to have a word with the patrol, and thus consolidate their relationship. Indeed, being on good terms with the patrol required the constant cultivation of such relationships. Gifts of meat and honey were used for bartering permission to extract timber, or for bribing the patrol during these coffee meetings. I personally found myself in a similar situation when my landlord, desperate to obtain permission to cut a tree, promised the patrol that I would download and print pictures from his camera without even consulting me on the matter. So, the emerging question is whether there is any space for acts of favour or good deeds within these negotiations in which it would seem nearly impossible to get by without any illicitness? To answer this question we need to return to the argument made earlier about the ethical side of the story about favours, and understand that the decision of to whom one will bestow a favour is contingent rather than prescriptive, and thus requires judgements to recognize *that* negotiation as a favour to *that* person in *that* situation (see Strathern 1992).

This was the case for Mensur, a villager in his mid-thirties who was about to build a house in one of the growing Sarajevo suburbs. He had obtained a job there, through *štela*, and commuting had become inconvenient. To get timber for the construction work on his house, Mensur asked a couple of cousins from the village for help. They decided to get the timber from the mined areas, ensuring Mensur would not have to arrange permission, and thus save some extra money for other work. I joined them and helped as much as I could and was allowed. When we finished and loaded everything on the carriage, one of the cousins told me 'what you did today was *sevap* (a good deed)'. As I joined villagers on their adventures to the forest quite often and had never been told that my help was considered as a good deed, I asked the cousin for further clarification. 'This timber', he continued, 'is for the house (*kuća*), and helping with the house is always *sevap*', a point that requires a brief explanation. As I have argued elsewhere, in rural Bosnia the house (*kuća*) is one of the key imaginative resources of vernacular cosmology of vital exchange that people draw upon in their reflections on life, well-being, or relatedness (Henig 2012a, 10; see also Bringa 1995, 85–118), as well as a central nexus for accessing and maintaining personal fortune and luck in the flow of life.

In the afternoon, a while after we got back from the forest, I was with one of the cousins when he received a phone call from a panicking Mensur. The forest patrol found out about the timber, or rather someone had denounced

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Mensur, and was on the way to see him. When we came to Mensur's house, we found him stressed over whether he would get a fine, because he did not negotiate any 'form' of permission beforehand. Moreover, this time the patrol was someone new and none of the neighbours could locate him in any known social networks. When the patrol arrived, Mensur and his cousins apologized, but then immediately explained that there was no commercial intention in cutting the trees, and that he needed it for his house. One of the cousins repeated 'this was for the house, and helping with the house is *sevap*', highlighting that it has nothing to do with any illicit business but with good deeds, that is, with the very vital exchange between the living and the Almighty. The patrol repeated that Mensur should at least have asked first, but said that Mensur could get a little bit more if he needed it, and that this was *halal*. However, next time he needed to let the patrol know.

As this case study illustrates, there is no lack of illicitness involved in villagers' interactions and negotiations with the patrol to extract the forest. On the contrary, this has long been bread and butter for numerous villagers as one 'has to live' and struggle to get by. However, the question of how one can get by without losing the sense of self-worth through being a good Muslim remains. As the case of Mensur illustrates, there are moments and situations that have the potentiality to become a favour, or a good deed, that go beyond notions of legal/illegal as they are apprehended as particular ethical decisions here and now. This brings me back to the argument that a favour is not a distinct class of action as such, but is rather a potentiality immanent to an action or an event, and falls into the category of ethical decisions to do a favour to *that* person in *that* situation. Here, in the case of Mensur, the potentiality was accentuated firstly by the notion and subsequently by the act of recognition that 'helping with the house is always *sevap* (a good deed)', hence granting Mensur 'permission' to get extra timber without invoking any illicitness, that is, *štela* or *veze*. This recognition re-animated the situation of negotiation with the patrol as a matter of vital exchange of good deeds for earning merits in one's personal eschatology, that is, in the moral register of being *halal*.

## Conclusion: Good Deeds as Favours

What is a favour? And what could an act of favour, as encompassed in a Muslim moral cosmology of vital exchange and instantiated in everyday ethics, look like? In the literature, the act of doing a favour is often described interchangeably with notions of corruption, nepotism, or bribery. The question thus arising from this chapter and, indeed, from the volume as a whole is, what makes a favour a distinct act of exchange? Or is there anything distinct

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about favours at all? This chapter has sought to demonstrate the need for differentiation between these concepts, their immoralities/moralities, their value, and the ethical conduct these entail. If the acts of gift exchange and reciprocity are pervasive features of human economy (Hann this volume), then we may want to consider a parallel social history of favours in the history of human economy as well (for a similar approach more generally see Graeber 2001, 2011). One way to do so, as suggested in this chapter, is to follow the path outlined by Caroline Humphrey and Julian Pitt-Rivers. As they both persuasively illustrated, an act of favour—*gratuitousness*—expresses a distinct potentiality of human action, forms of relatedness, and their ethical qualities which are largely shared across time, moral traditions, and regions. A favour as an act of gratuity has a moral value by virtue of not being conceived within a transactional framework, and therefore should not be so easily lumped together with notions of corruption, nepotism, or bribery (Humphrey this volume). However, as Pitt-Rivers reminds us, unlike ‘pure’ or ‘free’ gifts, a favour demands reciprocity, though a non-transactional one, including sentiments, affects, a prayer, and an acknowledgement of merits. Therefore, this argument needs to be ethnographically substantiated and contextualized, as such potentiality is often instantiated in grace events, through specific forms of religious etiquette, forms of relatedness, moral aesthetics, and more generally in everyday ethics (Lambek 2010). With this in mind, I discussed how such an economy of favours may be ethnographically approximated in post-socialist, post-war Bosnia-Herzegovina.

This chapter started with the speech of the Bosnian grand mufti and his use of *halal* and *haram* categories of moral imagination and ethical conduct in his critique of corruption and illicit economic practices. I suggested that we take the grand mufti’s argument seriously for two reasons. Firstly, it offers a way to shed a different light on debates about corruption and favours, that is, from the perspective of Muslim moral cosmology as it is instantiated and negotiated in Muslims’ everyday ethical actions and practices. Indeed, I showed that day-to-day life is, for many villagers, a struggle and a constant balancing between the realms of ‘getting by’ under the conditions of precarious post-socialist and post-war development and at the same being a good Muslim, that is, acting the *halal* way. To straddle this divide, in a non-corrupted, gratuitous, and thus *halal* way, is informed by the etiquette of good deeds and merits (*sevap*), as I illustrated with three ethnographic case studies. The notion of good deeds (*sevap*) emerges here as an ethnographic instance of *gratuitousness* or favour. In turn, I argued, Bosnian Muslims’ engagement in the economy of good deeds needs to be understood in the wider cosmology of life apprehended as an ongoing flow of vital exchange between the living, the dead and the Almighty that earns merits in one’s personal eschatology.

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Secondly, the perspective proposed by the grand mufti offers a distinct way of thinking about the issues of illicit economic practices, predominantly described as a realm of informal economy, corruption, and the like. I argued, following Gerald Creed's work (2011), that the latter arguments continue to reproduce ethnocentric Cold War analytical categories, and also policies (e.g. UNDP Report 2009). By re-animating the debates on illicit economies as a matter of *halal* and *haram*—that is, from the perspective of a Muslim moral cosmology—the grand mufti's speech provides us with yet another conceptual toolkit to re-imagine the dominant ethnocentric analytical concepts and arguments on grassroots economies, moralities, and the notions of value after socialism. And this brings us back to the need to appreciate the distinct moralities and ethical conduct between normative concepts such as corruption, nepotism, and bribery, and favours, here described as an act of good deed.

To conclude let us return to the Muslim villager Zahid, who criticized the grand mufti so vigorously at the beginning of this chapter. When Zahid denounced the highest Bosnian Muslim religious authority for being involved in illicit economic conduct, everyone in the room nodded, although we all knew that Zahid, like other fellow neighbours and friends sitting around the table, had been involved in various trickeries and *štela* practices as well. We also knew, however, that unlike the grand mufti who has been receiving *redovna plaća* (regular income), Zahid and his family have been without any regular income for a decade. Yet he, like many of his Bosnian fellows, needed to somehow get by, he 'had to live', without losing his sense of being a good Muslim. The speech, however, implied to Zahid, that what he was doing to feed his family made him less worthy as a Muslim than people like the grand mufti. Of course he was aware of the need to live the *halal* way for his personal eschatology and he struggled every day to do so. And being involved in the economy of good deeds was a way for villagers like Zahid to balance such moral ambiguities. Indeed, when I asked him about the ambiguity of his earlier critical judgements against the grand mufti as being corrupted during one of his many illicit negotiations with the forest patrol, he immediately replied without any hesitation, 'a good deed is not a crime' (*'sevap nije zločin'*).

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