

Chapter One

Introduction



Figure 1 Palestinian chair at the United Nations

Source: © Stan Honda/AFP/Getty Images

New York, 23 September 2011. The head of the Palestinian Authority, Mahmoud Abbas, is seeking a vote at the United Nations on an application for Palestinian admission to the UN as a member state. In the build-up to the request for the vote, Palestinian activists have produced a chair as a symbol of the desire for a Palestinian seat at the General Assembly of the United Nations. In the preceding weeks the chair has toured the Middle

East and Europe, before taking pride of place at news conferences in New York in the lead-up to the vote. The symbolism is easy to grasp: the chair is covered in blue velour, marked with the UN olive branches encircling a symbol of another seat, on which the Palestinian Authority's flag is imprinted. Underneath these images are sewn the words 'Palestine's Right: A full membership in the United Nations'. But underpinning this stark imagery are two more subtle assumptions: the first, that desire for Palestinian statehood could be fulfilled through the recognition granted by UN membership. Membership would serve as a symbol of statehood, despite not necessarily changing the forms of authority or territorial control in the West Bank and Gaza. Indeed, youth activists in Ramallah in the West Bank were keen to distinguish between the 'emotional' nature of international recognition and the unchanging 'practical' everyday experience of militarized checkpoints: settlement construction and inhibited freedom of movement (see BBC, 2011). But the second assumption is reflected in the symbolism of the seat itself. The claim to Palestinian statehood is not made solely in a speech to the General Assembly of the UN, but is rather symbolized through the creation of the seat. The act of producing the seat, and its tour through Europe and the Middle East, provide a chance to perform statehood, to ground the legitimacy and effect of the claim through repeated enactments of the securing of a UN seat. In this sense, performance is at the heart of attempts to convey state legitimacy. The design of the chair draws on audience expectations of a 'real' UN seat, primed as they would be to recognize the appropriate colours and symbolism for UN furniture.

States are improvised. Their legitimacy and ability to lay claim to rule rely on a capacity to perform their power. Such performances of the state are often spectacular: the pageantry of ambassadorial relations, the ceremony of opening parliament, the celebration of a military victory (see Bodnar, 1993; Marston, 1989; McConnell *et al.*, forthcoming; Navaro-Yashin, 2002). But more often they are prosaic: the modes of address and comportment at international borders, the use of headed paper to claim a missing tax return, the statutory warning advice on a bottle of wine (see Painter, 2006; Raento, 2006). As the claims to statehood of the Palestinian Authority attest, performances of the state are often more explicit where changes are desired in the existing inter-state system, where a particular political authority is seeking to assert or solidify a specific claim to the state. But alongside the use of performance lies a secondary part of this opening story: performances are structured by available resources. At first sight the creation of the seat appears to represent Palestinian subjection, where those excluded from formal state structures improvise their own version to illustrate the asymmetry of power relations (Scott, 1985). But the move to create a seat also illustrates the prevailing resources available to those seeking to contest the existing state system. In the case of the Palestinian Authority they drew on conventions of colour and imagery to lend legitimacy to the UN seat as a form of state symbolism. While they could not claim an 'official' seat,

the production of an ‘unofficial seat’ demonstrates the aspiration of state recognition. The focus on the UN underlines a wider public expectation of this institution as an arbiter of state legitimacy.

This book argues for an understanding of states as improvisations, where improvisation is conceived as a process that combines performance and resourcefulness. In order to make this argument the book explores the experience of state building in Bosnia and Herzegovina (or BiH¹). This approach contributes to three areas of existing scholarship. First it develops recent work in the social sciences that has explored the state as an idea or process rather than a stable administrative entity (Abrams, 2006 [1988]; Jones, 2007; Mitchell, 1999; Painter, 2006; Trouillot, 2001). This work has orientated attention on the forms of social and cultural effects produced by the state, arguing that the state should be understood as a human accomplishment rather than the static backdrop to political life (Radcliffe, 2001). Building on this approach this book highlights the forms of agency through which state improvisations are performed, exploring how competing understandings of the state may coexist in everyday life.

Second, this argument contributes to understandings of the state in BiH. Rather than lamenting the ‘failure’ or ‘weakness’ of the state, it centres on the forms of practices produced by intensive international intervention since the signing of the Dayton General Framework Agreement for Peace (GFAP) in December 1995. David Campbell (1998a, 1999) provides a nuanced set of illustrations of the territorial, social and democratic consequences of the connection between identity and territory forged at Dayton. This book extends Campbell’s analysis by exploring the ongoing political and spatial consequences of the GFAP. Analysis of the practices of the state illustrates the multiple institutions that have been enrolled in performing the state in BiH since 1995, including international agencies, domestic politicians, international non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and local civil society organizations. Rather than making a simple distinction between the power of international elites and the subordination of local political actors, this approach allows the analysis to explore the considerable entanglement of these groups. The theoretical framework of improvisation illuminates the multiple competing claims to state sovereignty that circulate in contemporary BiH. This approach contributes to recent work that has examined the geographically uneven nature of state effects following intervention in BiH, work that has explored refugee return (Toal and Dahlman, 2011), the state in everyday life (Bougarel *et al.*, 2007) and forms of criminal justice reform (Aitchison, 2011).

Third, by exploring the nature and consequences of international intervention in BiH this argument contributes to emerging work studying the production of geopolitical knowledge. Recent scholarship in the fields of critical and feminist geopolitics has looked beyond traditional preoccupations with textual analysis of policy statements to explore the forms of

practices and materials that produce geopolitical knowledge. From studies of boundary disputes in Central Asia (Megoran, 2006) through to the circulation of knowledge in the bureaucracy of the European Commission (Kuus, 2011), scholars are looking towards geopolitics as a form of social practice. Understanding the state as an improvisation encourages a reflection on such everyday and banal practices that shape popular understandings of geopolitics. Consequently this study draws on four periods of residential fieldwork, comprising methodologies of extended interviews and participant observation to illustrate state improvisation in BiH and document subsequent forms of political subjectivity.

Examining BiH as an improvised state thus contributes to state theory, understandings of intervention in BiH and methodologies of critical geopolitics. The following sections provide greater detail concerning how the book contributes to these three areas of scholarship, before a concluding section summarizes the book's chapter structure. What is shared across these areas of inquiry is a focus on the forms of political agency established through attempts to create and present a coherent BiH state. This is not an attempt to establish a new overarching theory of the state, or to resolve debates concerning the relative influence of structure or agency in understanding state power. Rather I am seeking to present the utility of improvisation as a means through which to illuminate the contingent and plural nature of state claims in BiH.

1.1 States, Performance and Improvisation

The state is politically and intellectually seductive. At its most basic level, the state is a mechanism for fixing political power to geographical space through establishment of sovereignty over territory. Politically, this is attractive as it provides a form of order that acts 'as if' different state regimes are comparable across both time and space. Intellectually, this has allowed scholars of international relations to theorize political relationships through this pre-given geographical framework. The state becomes the lens through which global political contestation may be analysed and understood. But the state seduces in other ways. It also conjures a notion of distinct and concrete administrative entities that act as the centre of political decision making within a given territory. This is most commonly expressed in the distinction between state and society. Separating state and society allows policy makers to express statecraft as distinct from the messy context of the society within which it is embedded. Instead it can be presented as a form of political logic that is driven by the state's privileged position 'above' the society it serves (Abrams, 2006 [1988]; Ferguson and Gupta, 2002; Sharma and Gupta, 2006). This form of state reasoning leads to the production of intricate technologies to rule a given society, through statistics, cartography

and infrastructure. Intellectually this has led to a wealth of studies attempting to understand the interplay between state and society, work that has sought to theorize how one shapes the other (see Painter, 2003).

What stands out in these imaginaries of the state is the act of seduction. The state is not a natural expression of political power; it is a human achievement of control. This achievement is reflected in prevailing definitions of state sovereignty. Take the most regularly cited: Weber's definition of the state as a 'human community that (successfully) claims the monopoly of legitimate use of physical force within a given territory' (Weber, 1958: 78). The human community, physical force and territory are all central components, but the achievement of statehood is granted through the more elusive notion of the conferment of legitimacy (see Bratsis, 2006: 14). The first act of seeking to understand this seductive power of the state is to de-naturalize it, to sever it from an image of pre-existing or inevitable political territorializations. Our assumptions about the state are themselves a reflection of the power of this mental category to shape our thinking and orientate the design of research (Bilgin and Morton, 2002; Jeffrey, 2009a). Over the last century scholars have sought to examine this act of seduction by turning attention to the forms of practices and processes that reproduce the idea of the state. It has been established within Marxist and, more recently, post-structural studies of the state that we need to look beyond the representation of coherence to uncover the subjective processes whereby the idea of the state is conveyed as a stable truth (see Poulantzas, 1978; Weber, 1998).

The book explores the improvised state through the example of international attempts to establish a state of BiH since 1995. I argue that since the signing of GFAP the BiH state has been improvised among a variety of actors operating across a range of spatial scales. The focus on improvisation reflects a wider adoption of this term across the social sciences and humanities, including musical performance (Berliner, 1994), business administration (Baker *et al.*, 2003), education (C. Jeffrey *et al.*, 2008) and constitutional reform (Garvey, 1971). As this work attests, the lens of improvisation highlights the 'doing' of social practice as it is worked through in everyday life. In order to illustrate the practice of the Bosnian state in the post-conflict era, I break down the lens of improvisation into its two constituent parts: *performance* and *resourcefulness*. Taking these two facets in turn, this argument contributes to recent scholarship within the social sciences that has explored the operation of institutions, individuals and identities as 'performed'. The language of performance influences the theoretical context of the book in two ways.

First, *The Improvised State* draws on anti-foundationalist feminist theory that has sought to undermine the stability of essential identities. Following Butler (1997), scholars have argued that gender is not a status but should more readily be understood as a set of performances that reify particular prevailing understandings and hierarchies of gendered identity. This anti-foundationalist lens

will provide a framework through which the reproduction of particular categories and assumptions may be understood in post-Dayton BiH. Performances of the 'international community' and 'nationalist politics' are explored as practices rather than expressions of essential identities. It will be shown that acting and speaking about BiH does not simply report reality but actively constitutes and reproduces political categories and territorializations.

Second, the language of performance has been adopted in strands of cultural geography which have identified the inadequacy of textual representation in conveying inter-subjective feelings. This scholarship has argued that performance highlights the embodied and enacted nature of social and political life which in many senses defies the closure of language and text. This has led some scholars to advocate non-representational theory that foregrounds affective responses to place and time (Anderson, 2006; Thrift, 2003). This work highlights performance as a dynamic set of processes conveyed through an assemblage of materials, apparatuses and milieus (Allen and Cochrane, 2007; Featherstone, 2008; McFarlane, 2009). Such debates concerning representation enrich understanding of international intervention by exploring the affective responses to attempts to establish new state practices, from despair at eviction from temporary accommodation to shared experiences of solidarity and hope at political rallies. The engagement with the concept of performance allows a more nuanced understanding of the social context in which statecraft is enacted and identifies spaces of resistance to dominant narratives of state building.

Understanding the state as a set of performances sheds light on the grounding of sovereignty claims in social and cultural practice, but it says rather less on the rationality that informs the selection of individual performances or how performances are contested and reshaped in everyday life. In order to explore these facets of state practice the book develops a second aspect of improvisation: resourcefulness. This aspect of improvisation is indebted to the structural anthropology of Claude Lévi-Strauss (1972), who through his study of belief systems coined the term *bricolage* to intimate the way in which non-Western societies make sense of the world through 'making do' with available social categories and symbols (see also Hebdige, 1979). This approach is rooted in a syntactic understanding of social forms as related through grammar relations, where society fits together 'like words in a sentence, to form a meaningful whole' (Garvey, 1971: 11). This structural approach has been criticized in recent years for underplaying individual agency and failing to account for forms of dominance and exploitation (Werbner, 1986). Acknowledging these criticisms and in order to adequately theorize the agency inherent in resourcefulness, I draw on the work of Pierre Bourdieu (1984, 1989) and in particular his economic metaphor of capital. This conceptualization of capital shares little with Marx's purely economic understanding of the term, and is instead used to illuminate scarcity across social, cultural and symbolic arenas (C. Jeffrey, 2001: 220;

Painter, 2000). For example, in contrast to developmental understandings of social capital as a form of ‘societal glue’, Bourdieu’s work emphasizes the value placed on ‘social connections’ (Calhoun, 1993: 70) or ‘group membership’ (Bourdieu, 1987: 4). Similarly, Bourdieu recognized the accumulation of cultural capital in various forms of credentials, in particular in the arena of education (C. Jeffrey *et al.*, 2008). The concepts of social and cultural capital provide a language through which to explore the everyday performances and dispositions that reproduce class advantage. Applying this approach to the performance of the state enables the development of a framework through which certain understandings of sovereignty and space are imbued with value. Adopting a lens of improvisation unsettles the concept of the state as a stable backdrop to political life, and instead analysis shifts to the forms of practice, materials and imaginaries that convey particular understandings of the state.

1.2 Towards a Political Anthropology of the Bosnian State

The BiH state cannot be understood in isolation from the wider rise and fall of Yugoslavia. Neither can this narrative of consolidation and fragmentation be divorced from the prevailing geopolitical interests of other states and powerful agencies. This is not to argue for a form of historical determinism, nor to indulge in the misconception that current BiH politics necessarily requires an understanding of medieval enmities and allegiances. As discussed in Chapter Three, the scholar of BiH needs to assess competing historical claims carefully, grounded as they are in different conceptualizations of just outcomes in the present day. Rather, in order to understand BiH state building it is necessary to examine key moments in its history and in doing so explore how the state of Yugoslavia was made and unmade through deliberate actions that prioritized different understandings of group membership, political authority and territorial claims.

The first state of Yugoslavia, the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, was established in 1918 through a union of Serbia and Montenegro with the South Slav lands of the former Austro-Hungarian Empire, principally the territories of Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia and Montenegro (see Hoare, 2010). The unity of this state was undone by the violence of the Second World War, where loyalties fragmented between Croat Ustaše forces, supported by Nazi Germany, Serb-nationalist Četnik groups, loyal to the exiled King Aleksander, and Partisan forces seeking to retain a unified Southern Slav state. Over the course of the conflict Allied support transferred from Serb-nationalist to Partisan forces, in part contributing to the inauguration of their leader, Josip Broz ‘Tito’, as the President of Yugoslavia from 1947 to 1980. This period of rule was one of intense Yugoslav state consolidation, under the banner of ‘*bratstvo i jedinstvo*’ (‘brotherhood and unity’), where

political elites sought to relegate group differences, such as those down 'national' or 'ethnic' lines, in order to promote civic solidarity to the state. These initiatives reflected the significance of centrifugal forces that sought to promote different visions of the state, often drawing on the borders of the six republics that comprised Yugoslavia (Slovenia, Croatia, Serbia, BiH, Montenegro and Macedonia) or in terms of unifying a single 'national' or 'ethnic' group within a continuous territory.

The death of Tito in 1980 marked the start of a decade of decline for the Yugoslav state; as economic disparities between the republics grew (though these problems had a longer lineage), nationalist movements began to emerge from the fragmentation of the single-party *Savez komunista Jugoslavije* (League of Communists of Yugoslavia). In the later 1980s key figures such as Slobodan Milošević in Serbia and Franjo Tuđman in Croatia began to speak of the significance of unifying 'their' ethnic group and political territory; in short, cultivating a political discourse of ethnically aligned states. Considering the extensive intermingling of people now aligning themselves with different 'ethnic' groups, the outcome of such political rubrics would always require massive population movements. For example, the 1991 Yugoslav census indicates that there was a population of around 245 800 people in the Krajina region of the Republic of Croatia identifying themselves as Serb, and 760 852 people resident in the Republic of BiH who considered themselves Croat.² These demographic realities added complexity to the supposed moral clarity of calls by nationalist politicians for 'self-determination', as such outcomes would produce challenges for newly created minority populations within successor states. This was illustrated in the case of the declarations of independence by Croatia and (to a lesser extent) Slovenia in 1991, where the *Jugoslovenska narodna armija* (Yugoslav People's Army or JNA) was deployed by Slobodan Milošević ostensibly to protect the unity of the Yugoslav state, though perhaps most significantly to defend Serb populations in the Krajina (see Gow, 2003). In turn Tuđman presented the right of Croatian independence in the language of self-determination following a referendum on 19 May 1991. In order to arbitrate on these competing claims to independence, the then European Economic Community established the Arbitration Commission of the Peace Conference on the former Yugoslavia (usually known as the 'Badinter Commission' after its first President, Robert Badinter). Placing particular emphasis on the legal principle of *Uti possidetis* ('as you possess'), across a number of judgments the Badinter Commission sought to preserve the existing borders of the Yugoslav republics, as opposed to granting self-determination to those minorities living within these territories (see Pomerance, 1998).

This tension between the recognition of existing borders and the rights of minority groups became more pronounced in the case of BiH. Following the successful independence claims of Slovenia, Croatia and Macedonia, by the end of 1991 Yugoslavia comprised only BiH, Serbia and Montenegro.

Within BiH the population was demographically mixed between those identifying as Bosnian Muslim, or Bosniak (43.5% of the population), those identifying themselves as Serb (31.2%), those identifying as Croats (17.4%) and those identifying themselves as Yugoslav (5.5%).³ In February 1992 Alija Izetbegović, then President of the Bosnian Republic and one of the leading figures in the Bosniak-orientated *Stranka demokratske akcije* (Party for Democratic Action, or SDA), called a referendum for independence. The majority of those loyal to Serb causes boycotted the referendum, seeing the vote as both unconstitutional and leading to minority status in a BiH state. Despite this resistance the turnout for the vote was 63%, with 99.4% of voters preferring independence (Bethlehem and Weller, 1997: xxxiv). With this strong democratic mandate Izetbegović claimed independence on 3 March 1992; by 7 April this had been recognized by the European Community and the United States.

The claims to independence and its recognition led to a series of military skirmishes in Sarajevo and the northern Bosnian town of Bosanski Brod (see Bethlehem and Weller, 1997). The violence spread over 1992 as military forces loyal to Serb causes, in particular the newly formed *Vojaska Republike Srpske* (Army of Republika Srpska, or VRS) and the remains of the JNA, sought to create an 'ethnically pure' Serb territory by expelling or murdering non-Serb populations (Silber and Little, 1996; Toal and Dahlman, 2011). Of course, such 'ethnic' interpretations of the violence reproduced the categories espoused by perpetrating individuals and groups. However, as documented in Chapters Three and Four, a consensus soon emerged between BiH politicians and intervening agencies that the ethnic matrix was the dominant framework for understanding the violence in BiH, whether or not this reflected the everyday experience of BiH citizens during or prior to the violence (see Bringa, 1995). While figures are disputed, a 2007 report conducted by the Research and Documentation Center Sarajevo and funded by the Norwegian government estimates that over the following three-and-a-half years of conflict 97 207 people lost their lives, around 65% of whom were registered as Bosniak (see Research and Documentation Center Sarajevo, 2007).

The violence in BiH between 1992 and 1995 has prompted considerable scholarly reflection on the causes and consequences of the conflict (Bennett, 1995; Silber and Little, 1996; Sokolovic, 2005; Udovički and Ridgeway, 2000). One of the shared conclusions of this work relates to the danger of attempting to identify a singular cause for the conflict, and in particular challenging the simplistic political refrain that the war was a consequence of 'ancient hatreds'. The quest for a singular explanation to the conflict in BiH requires a violent simplification of complex social, political and economic realities (see Bose, 2002; Campbell, 1998a). As Bougarel *et al.* (2007: 11) note, interpretations of the violence have often been seduced by imaginaries of ethnic social cleavages that ignore the economic, criminal and wider

political networks and affiliations that motivated the conflict (see also Andreas, 2008; Bojičić, 1996).

But beyond attempts to explain the causes of the violence, there is an allied debate concerning the geopolitics of the conflict itself. One of the key areas of disagreement among scholars examining the conflict in BiH between 1992 and 1995 is whether this violence should be described as a 'civil war' (comprising antagonists emerging from within the borders of a single state) or a 'foreign aggression' with warring parties crossing state boundaries (see Woodward, 1995, 1996). This argument rests on questions of state recognition, specifically whether the Bosnian declaration of independence in April 1995 marked the creation of an independent sovereign state. If it did, the presence of the JNA is evidence of external aggression orchestrated from the remains of Yugoslavia (then Serbia and Montenegro). If BiH was still part of Yugoslavia, as groups loyal to Serb causes have suggested, it is perhaps easier to present the violence as an 'internal' matter.⁴ This geographical debate has two security dimensions. First, defining the state also defines the minority group: those identifying as Serbs would be a minority in the newly independent BiH, while those identifying as Bosniaks feared minority status in the remnants of Yugoslavia. With weak guarantees for minority rights in both states, the nature of the state shaped perceptions of group security. Second, if the conflict is presented as an external aggression there is a moral imperative among UN Security Council members to intervene to halt the violence, as occurred in the case of Iraq's invasion of Kuwait in 1990. This debate illustrates the significance of questions of recognition and legitimacy to understandings of the state and security. States do not simply exist, but are made through acts intended to convince audiences of the legitimacy of particular sovereign arrangements.

The desire to present certain sovereign arrangements in the former Yugoslavia as legitimate has been the focus of academic debate over the past fifteen years. This work has explored a number of aspects of state sovereignty in South East Europe, from the rise of the Yugoslav state following anti-Imperial struggles of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Jambrek, 1975; Udovički and Ridgeway, 2000), through ethno-national projects that sought to link statehood with ethnic identity (Gow, 2003; Judah, 2000), to international attempts to establish BiH following the signing of the GFAP (Bose, 2002; Chandler, 1999). Much of this work has explored the nature of state sovereignty from a 'top-down' perspective, drawing on historical accounts, largely from official archives, examined through methods of discourse and content analysis. This attachment to the primacy of the state reflects what Bilgin and Morton (2002) term the 'embedded statism' of political analysis, where twentieth-century scholarship and politics have demonstrated an enduring attachment to states as territorial 'containers of power' within geopolitical discourse (Taylor, 1994).

The analyst of sovereignty in BiH therefore faces a challenge: to acknowledge the significance of new state arrangements without reducing political life to the activities of the state. One of the theoretical and empirical responses to this challenge has been to examine the localized expression of the state in social practices and institutions. Drawing on perspectives from anthropology and political geography, this work has explored the practices, materials and subjectivities through which ideas of the state and society are conveyed in BiH (see Bougarel *et al.*, 2007). In doing so this work has advanced a critical geopolitics of the state, where the assertion of state territorialities illustrates particular power relations rather than revealing essential truths (Jeffrey, 2007; Ó Tuathail, 1996). Mirroring the discussions of state theory conducted above, this work has begun to explore the techniques through which certain understandings of the Bosnian state are made credible and normal, while others are cast out as criminal or abnormal.

This approach is exemplified in Toal and Dahlman's (2011) exploration of the extent and characteristics of refugee return in BiH after the GFAP. Rather than emphasizing classical geopolitical concerns of Great Power relations, where the nature of the Bosnian state may be derived from imaginaries of global power dynamics, the authors illustrate a more localized and plural account of the state:

In conditions of crisis, hierarchies of power come undone and alternative connectivities and networks – those created by diasporas, arms smugglers, media networks, cultural activists and Secret Service agents – emerge as competitors and potential replacements. Geopolitics in such conditions is less a determining location or a stable hierarchy than an entrepreneurial field for the creation of networks that subvert and undermine traditional verticals of power and governance. (Toal and Dahlman, 2011: 10)

This analysis draws attention to the challenge of reasserting state authority in conditions of multiple competing claims to power. One of the tensions in this process in BiH has been the attempt to establish a new state architecture while simultaneously presenting imposed forms of rule as democratically legitimate. As the political system in BiH stagnated after the signing of the GFAP, and nationalist political parties continued to strengthen their political support, the Peace Implementation Council (PIC⁵) expanded the executive and legislative powers of the Office of the High Representative (OHR), the internationally led organization responsible for implementing the GFAP. At the 1997 PIC conference in Bonn the High Representative was granted so-called 'Bonn Powers', to implement any law considered necessary for the implementation of the GFAP while removing any official (elected or otherwise) that was deemed to be obstructing this process.

Bonn Powers have presented a challenge to processes of democratization in BiH, and have led David Chandler (1999) to suggest that intervening agencies are 'faking democracy' where international supervision denies the Bosnian population the opportunity to participate in the political process. But this assertion of fakery suggests there is an 'authentic' form of democracy against which the political process in BiH may be assessed. While forms of political intervention have often sought to limit domestic political decision making, particularly when it contravenes the GFAP, it is not so straightforward as to constitute a counterfeit of Western models. Instead, as Toal and Dahlman (2011) suggest, we need to focus on the forms of institution and agency (the 'entrepreneurial field') that have been cultivated through processes of international intervention.

The establishment of the state is, then, at once a process of securing territory under the rule of a single administrative authority and the concurrent process of elevating that authority as somehow 'above' the society within which it operates. The GFAP created the impression of secure borders for BiH, through the signatures of the leaders of neighbouring states (most notably Croatia's Franjo Tuđman and Serbia and Montenegro's Slobodan Milošević). This imagined territorial security enabled the performance of many of the international signifiers of statehood, including the establishment of formal diplomatic relations, the creation of unified border controls and the acquisition of a seat at the UN General Assembly. But state existence came at the price of a compromise regarding the relationship between imagined ethnic identity and political space. As David Campbell (1998a, 1999) has illustrated, the GFAP retained the concept of a unified BiH while partitioning the state into ethnically attributed areas, in particular the two Entities of the Republika Srpska (RS) and the Muslim-Croat Federation. This act enshrined what Asim Mujkić (2007) refers to as the ethnopolitics of Dayton, where ethnic identity became endorsed as the primary affiliation of political participation.

The compromises at Dayton have had profound effects on the ability to convey the second sense of the state: that it operates 'above' a given society. State 'verticality' is a product of uneven power relations, where state agencies have the capability to act coercively and shape the behaviour of individuals and institutions (see Ferguson and Gupta, 2002). Such coercive force takes many forms, as exemplified by Bougarel *et al.* (2007), who explore a range of settings through which ideas of Bosnian statehood have been conveyed and resisted, including acts of commemoration, forms of justice and experiences of everyday urban life. While the assertion of Bonn Powers by the OHR suggests a form of executive authority for international representatives, the anthropological work of Bougarel *et al.* (2007) illustrates the forms of social and cultural practice that shape the possibility of implementing new forms of Bosnian statehood.

In the following chapters I build on this perspective to examine state building at both a local and national scale in BiH, exploring in particular

how the distinction between state and society has been practised following the signing of the GFAP. Attempts to foster democracy in BiH have sought to bolster local civil society through funding autonomous NGOs, but despite pockets of success (Fagan, 2005; Ivanić, 2005) the effects have been to foster dependency on Western donors (Bieber, 2000, 2005) and promote a narrow interpretation of what constitutes democratic participation (Belloni, 2001). This focus draws attention to the ambiguous role of civil society in BiH where such organizations have been celebrated by both international and domestic political elites as evidence of the democratization of BiH society, while their agendas have often been shaped by the availability of funds or the nature of new regulatory obligations. Rather than acting as a focal point for political participation, I argue that cultivation of civil society expresses a wider desire to distinguish between state and society. Where in practice the lines between state and society are blurred to the point of indistinction, the enshrinement of civil society suggests an elevated state operating 'above' an arena of democratic participation. It is through a study of state as an improvisation, comprising both performance and resourcefulness, that the political effects of such ideas of the state come to the fore.

The approach taken over the following six chapters provides an insight into the dynamic nature of state practices in BiH as changing political contexts have established new priorities for both international and domestic politicians. The failed attempt to renegotiate the constitution of the BiH state in October 2009 illustrates how fundamental questions regarding the nature of BiH continue to be open to public debate (see ICG, 2009). Just as the GFAP was able to accommodate a range of divergent political interests, its enactment as a political framework has set the context for a variety of ideas of the state to coexist. For example, one of the central geographical imaginaries of changing statehood in BiH relates to the enrolment of ideas of Europe into political debate, where actors from across the political spectrum seek to bolster their positions through evidence of their European credentials (Ó Tuathail, 2005). But despite the consensus among international and domestic politicians concerning the virtue of the European project, studying the practice of closer European collaboration illustrates a range of underlying state projects.

1.3 Critical Geopolitics and Qualitative Research Strategy

Studying the state as an improvisation has a series of methodological implications. As suggested above, this approach to the state comes from a critical geopolitical perspective, a style of analysis that emerged from a desire to question the neutrality of geographical claims in the actions of political elites. In particular, the work of Gearóid Ó Tuathail (1986, 1996) has been

at the forefront of analysis of conceptions of danger within Cold War US policy debates, where designations of the risk posed by the Soviet Union and its allies led to increased militarization of US foreign policy. Rather than seeing spatial designations of threat as innocent attempts to uncover certain geographical truths, Ó Tuathail's perspective foregrounds the productive nature of such actions: they simultaneously describe and produce a particular understanding of the world. In order to theorize this process Ó Tuathail and Agnew (1992) draw on the work of Michel Foucault (1980) to examine geopolitics as discourse, a means of exploring how political elites validate their understandings of the world through representations of global space. This approach centres attention on the forms of idiom and imagery through which designations of hierarchy and difference are geographically expressed.

Merje Kuus's (2007) exploration of geopolitical discourses of NATO expansion in Estonia provides an example of the implications of a critical perspective for questions of research strategy. Kuus's study employs a methodology of discourse analysis, where the researcher is not attempting to uncover hidden truths but rather to explore 'the persistent assumptions, themes, and tropes that both enable and constrain political debate and political practice' (Kuus, 2007: 9). Discourse, within this framework, is not restricted to speech, but rather reflects the wider context that allows certain speech acts to appear feasible and logical and others unfeasible and illogical (*ibid.*; see also Müller, 2008). Toal and Dahlman (2011: 12) endorse this approach, defining geopolitics as a 'culturally embedded practice operating across networks of power' which needs to be approached as 'a field of competing political constructions vying to describe the conditions within which states operate and what normative strategy best realizes state and national interests'.

A critical approach to geopolitics has profound implications for understandings of research objectivity. Toal and Dahlman's emphasis on competition identifies the need to explore geopolitics as a dynamic set of practices, as individuals and institutions attempt to perform particular understandings of space. Moving from the abstract to the specific, this raises the question of where and when such geopolitical practices take place and how they may be apprehended. Traditional approaches to critical geopolitical analysis have privileged policy texts, official documents or newspaper sources as sites of analytical interest (see Ó Tuathail *et al.*, 2006). As a response to this work, feminist scholars have sought to provide more situated accounts of geopolitical practice that focus on the body, the home, the street and the workplace as varied sites of gendered geopolitical knowledge production (Dowler and Sharp, 2001; Hyndman, 2003). This perspective forces us to abandon a desire for a 'god trick' (Haraway, 1988), where the researcher proclaims an elevated position from which to articulate the nature of geopolitical realities. Instead, it

highlights the positionality of the researcher as an active social agent that shapes the outcome of the research process (see Rose, 1997).

Across the next six chapters of this book I will be presenting a critical geopolitical perspective of statecraft in BiH, attentive to concerns regarding qualitative method and positionality. The research draws on four periods of residential fieldwork in BiH (2002–03, 2005, 2007 and 2009) and is informed more broadly by working for an NGO in BiH between 1999 and 2000. The switch from NGO worker to NGO researcher was initially difficult to navigate. My privileged access to audiences with international organizations led to a number of NGOs requesting advocacy on their behalf. These experiences reminded me of Nancy Scheper-Hughes's (1992) study of violence among street communities of North East Brazil. Prior to her research she had worked in these communities establishing a crèche and assisting with the immunization of young children. When she returned to Brazil to conduct fieldwork, she described how local people became resentful of her lack of action and help (Scheper-Hughes, 1992: 16). This only emphasized the importance of being explicit about the purpose of my research, that I was not affiliated to a donor organization or the UK government. As I discuss below, the changing research position underscored the significance of dissemination events designed to engage research participants in the process of drawing conclusions and building theory.

The research has used a qualitative, interpretive strategy, allowing the development of an understanding of the practices of the state in BiH, how they are shaped by human agency and how they have evolved through time. The aim of such methodologies is to explore the practices of everyday life to reveal 'the processes and meanings which undergird social action, and which enable order to be reproduced and sometimes challenged' (Herbert, 2000: 551). In the early research visits I was based in the northern Bosnian town of Brčko and in more recent visits in Sarajevo, Mostar and Bijeljina. The majority of the research participants have been members of local NGOs, community associations (*mjesne zajednice*), local state agencies and international organizations. The principal method of data collection was extended interviews and participant observation of NGO and state practices. Interviews, whether in English or Bosnian, were recorded and transcribed and these transcripts then discussed with research participants during repeat interviews. Towards the end of the research period in Brčko I held a dissemination event, where members of NGOs, political parties, the local state and international organizations were invited to discuss some preliminary findings from the research. Across all periods of residential fieldwork I have kept a field journal, excerpts of which appear in the following chapters to illustrate contextual points.

This methodology seeks to build on Megoran's (2006: 622) call for greater emphasis within political geographic inquiry on 'people's experience and everyday understandings of the phenomena under question',

where political outcomes are understood as produced in the friction and interplay of social encounters. *The Improvised State* will therefore provide a grounded account of the nature and outcomes of Bosnian state practices since the GFAP. The utility of this approach is not simply specificity or empirical detail, but rather to provide a framework for understanding attempts to build state capacity in other settings at other times. Improvisation offers a means through which the production, reception and resistance to nascent state practices may be observed and theorized. Such an approach draws into sharp focus the limits of international intervention, the anti-democratic mechanisms that such processes can put in place and the significant scope for resistance to emergent state effects.

1.4 Structure of the Book

Chapter Two develops the theoretical framework of the book. The chapter opens with a review of literature that has sketched an anti-foundational account of the state, drawing particular inspiration from the work of Philip Abrams (2006 [1988]), Michel-Rolph Trouillot (2001) and Tim Mitchell (2006). As discussed above, this work has deviated from an understanding of the state as a pre-existing political and territorial formulation that may be studied in isolation from wider social, cultural and political processes. The challenge posed by the state, or 'the state effect' in Mitchell's (2006) terms, is to identify how the idea of a detached and authoritative entity is established and reproduced. *The Improvised State* explores this process through an understanding of the state as a result of a set of improvisations. As discussed above, improvisation captures a dual process: both *performance* and *resourcefulness*. When drawing on musical examples such as free-form jazz, scholars have stressed the lack of planning or prior stipulation and cited improvisation as acting 'on the spur of the moment' (see Weick, 1998). In this sense improvisation orientates our attention to the performed nature of social and cultural life as it is enacted through the intent of the performer. In contrast, accounts of social improvisation have tended to explore improvisation as the ability to 'make do' with available materials. This approach is developed through the work of French structuralist anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss (1972) and his notion of *bricolage*, defined as the use of pre-existing materials and repertoires in new configurations of social and cultural practice. But the utility of Lévi-Strauss's vocabulary is constrained by his silence on questions of power or dominance (see Werbner, 1986). As a corrective, Pierre Bourdieu's concepts of *habitus* and *capital* (1984) have sought to introduce a sense of agency and constraint into understandings of bricolage. In doing so, Bourdieu's approach alerts us to the role of structured improvisations in reproducing particular elite class advantage through social and cultural practice. This dual framework of analysis – both

performance and resourcefulness – illuminates contemporary state practices in BiH and allows us to understand how particular political perspectives have solidified in the post-conflict period.

Chapter Three develops the theoretical foundations outlined in Chapter Two, through an exploration of the geopolitical histories of BiH. As set out above, it is not the purpose of this book to establish a definitive history of the causes or outcomes of the conflict. Instead, I want to investigate how geographical arguments, ideas and concepts have become central to understandings of the violence. In itself this is not new; geographers and scholars from affiliated disciplines have been examining the geopolitics of the conflict for some time (see Campbell, 1998a; Ó Tuathail, 1996, 2002; Simms, 2001; Toal and Dahlman, 2011). But within this chapter I build on this work to explore how plural understandings of space and power have contributed to present-day improvisations of the state. I argue that there are three prominent spatial narratives to the history of violence in BiH: the fault line, the barrier and the vortex. I explore each of these geopolitical frames in turn, and examine some of the ways in which they have been adopted within cultural and political practices. The key point here is that these spatial stories contradict each other, since they envisage different ideas of the relationship between political communities and space. Perhaps the clearest example of this tension is the GFAP, which attempted to incorporate aspects of all three spatial histories.

Such plural and conflicting performances of the state will be explored through an examination in Chapter Four of state-building strategies in the period after the signing of the GFAP. Using the localized example of Brčko District this chapter explores how improvisations of the state are ephemeral moments that attempt to claim permanence. The idea of the state may be dynamic and plural, but observations of its performance suggest stability, durability and stasis. This argument is made through an examination of three improvisations of the state: stability, security and neutrality. Each of these sections examines how political elites sought to convey a sense of a coherent local state, drawing in particular on the symbolic resource of the ability to create law. While the empirical focus may be Brčko District, the story that unfolds illustrates a common refrain in state-building contexts: plural performances of state authority coexist across the same territory. The enactment of Brčko District as a local state institution required the unification of laws to change individual understanding of the nature of statehood, to make people ‘think’ in terms of the new idea of the state.

Developing the discussion, Chapter Five explores the nature of Bosnian state improvisation in the example of democratization. Democratization has been one of the central discourses of international intervention in BiH (Bose, 2002; Campbell, 1998a). This chapter explores how this discourse has been performed in terms of both the spectacular nature of presidential and local elections (including the performance of voting and the symbolic

nature of election posters) and the more substantive conceptions of democratization relating to attempts to foster civil society organizations. This discussion develops the application of Bourdieu's ideas to explore the ways in which international donors and regulators have conferred legitimacy on particular styles of democratic participation, while sidelining or legislating against other practices. I argue that systems of funding and regulation have gentrified civil society, producing a set of compliant organizations that entrench particular understandings of state power within BiH society. It is through this discussion that the resourcefulness at the heart of state improvisation is brought to the fore, as regulating bodies employ historical precedents (such as the Yugoslavian concept of the *mjesne zajednice*, or local community associations) in order to foster associative life. In turn, newly formed NGOs have exploited a range of repertoires in order to gain access to funding and respect, from improving English language skills to developing links with hard-line nationalist political parties such as the *Srpska demokratska stranka* (Serb Democratic Party or SDS). This discussion highlights the contradictory nature of state improvisation: while it provides space to challenge the often anti-democratic nature of international intervention, it illustrates that the resulting critiques are not necessarily emancipatory. They are instead offering differing visions of state performance, enshrined in particular understandings of identity and territory based on ethno-national affiliation.

Chapter Six explores how attempts to establish instruments of transitional justice have shaped the improvisation of the Bosnian state. The chapter focuses in particular on the process through which transitional justice has been 'localized' in BiH since 2005 through the establishment of a War Crimes Chamber (WCC) of the Court of Bosnia and Herzegovina. This institution is due to take over the competencies of the International Criminal Tribunal of the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) at The Hague when its mandate ceases at the end of the trial of Radovan Karadžić. The chapter examines how this reorganization of judicial functions has reshaped the practice of state improvisation in BiH. In particular, it focuses on the mechanisms through which the WCC has attempted to build its legitimacy with Bosnian citizenry through its outreach programmes. This illustration provides evidence of the competing notions of the Bosnian state that have been performed since 1995, from the GFAP's pragmatism to the idealism offered by claims to retributive and restorative justice. This tension is explored through the everyday responses of civil society organization to initiatives to bring war criminals to trial.

The final substantive chapter explores how understandings of state improvisation assist analysis of BiH's struggle for accession to the EU. This discussion illuminates the variety of different interpretations of Europe that have circulated within political discourses in post-GFAP BiH. Rather than standing as a signifier of a post-territorial or cosmopolitan political future,

it is argued that Europe is mobilized as a means through which to bolster a range of state projects within BiH.

The conclusion provides a summary of the key arguments made across the preceding seven chapters. In scholarly terms the focus on improvisation draws attention to the significance of the performance of sovereignty, a fleeting, dynamic and contested set of practices that are always incomplete, evolving, and constrained by available resources. In so doing, the analysis highlights a set of policy implications, relating to the effectiveness of state performances and their ability to foster democratic and shared understandings of political practice. The objective of these discussions is to move beyond the illumination of contradictions of Bosnian statehood towards an understanding of the political effects of such contradictions as they are played out in BiH. By highlighting the lived experience of BiH statehood this discussion will contribute to analysis within human geography and affiliated disciplines that has explored the nature of the contemporary state and the moral underpinnings of international intervention in the sovereignty of post-conflict states.

Notes

- 1 A note on abbreviations and terminology: the state of Bosnia and Herzegovina will be abbreviated to BiH for the remainder of the book. I try to refer to ethnic groups (Croat, Serb, Bosniak) sparingly (for the reasons given in the opening pages of Chapter Three), but when I do, I acknowledge that these are imperfect labels that are contested by both those they encompass and external commentators. They are, however, labels that are common in everyday life and political discourse in BiH.
- 2 These figures are derived from the 1991 Yugoslav Census, which may not be an entirely reliable picture of Yugoslavia's demography, not least since a number of groups advocated boycotting the poll or were placed under duress to withdraw participation (see Bennett, 1995).
- 3 Again these figures are drawn from the 1991 Yugoslav Census and should be approached with caution for the reasons stated in n. 2.
- 4 The presentation of the conflict as a 'civil war' is further complicated by the presence of Croatian military forces on BiH territory, particularly towards the end of the war (see Silber and Little, 1996).
- 5 Founded at a conference in London in December 1995, the PIC is a coordinating body representing 42 states and (currently) 13 international organizations. The PIC oversees the work of the OHR and its role in implementing the civilian aspects of the GFAP.