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## The Struggle for Boj za

### The memories, politics and emotions on film

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As part of the protest wave that followed the Arab Spring, 15 of May movement in Spain and Occupy Wall Street, Slovenian activists occupied a small square in front of the Ljubljana stock exchange, or Borza, set up tents and remained there through the winter. Siniša Gačić's film *Boj za* (A Struggle For) deals with the 6 month long protest in front of Ljubljana's stock exchange that started on the 15th of October, 2011. The documentary won the 'Vesna' prize at the 17. Slovenian Film Festival in the port-town of Portorož in September. It has since been screened around the country. Thus far, it is the only feature-length film representation of the struggle and it that way a valuable contribution to the memory of the struggle. *Boj za* follows the life in the camp from when the first tent is set up to when the final tent is taken down. It is an unflinching look at the highs and lows of maintaining a space of protest open 24 hours a day for 6 months.

The film takes its title from the name given to the camp by the activists, who turned Borza into *Boj za*, the stock exchange into the struggle. This naming followed an incident on the first day of the occupation when a pole from one of the protest banners became lodged under the 'r' in the Borza sign, knocking the letter down. It was quickly replaced with a 'j', spelling Boj za. Over the months that followed Boj za was a rich tapestry of ideas, actions and communities that were drawn together to experiment with different forms of every-day politics. An experiment that was highly productive but experienced its own decline when the energy of much of the community began to run out. In focusing much of the film on the emotions and atmosphere of the camp and its eventual decline, Siniša Gačić's film misses much of the diversity in ideas that it produced. The film also provides little in the way of context, such as why this protest was happening and what relation it bore to the wider European context.

The movement itself took the name '15 October' in reference to to the day the initial protest. As a site of protest, the stock exchange was chosen following a rally in Ljubljana's city center. This drew attention to the role of financial actors in the ongoing, global financial crisis affecting also the daily lives of people, not just banks, insurance companies and day traders. At the time of the protest Slovenia was in its fourth year of economic crisis following the 2008 collapse of its construction industry. The crisis and economic decline came as a result of the changing global economic conditions, where credit and other financial instruments are increasingly central to the production of value and extraction of wealth today. These instruments were effectively a form of life support for a country whose industrial sector had been in decline since independence from Yugoslavia in 1991. But when the global credit crunch occurred in 2008, the Slovenian financial bubble soon burst. The

crisis trickled down to affect the workers and families through loss of industries, jobs, rising living costs and rising interest rates on existing debts.

Very quickly the community that formed around the stock exchange opened up a great diversity of pressing social questions. Reflecting the diversity of the participants, activists held daily workshops on, among other things, homelessness and housing, policies towards 'illegal' drug use, the financial economy, treatment of the mentally ill and elections. These provided a rich exchange between the activists, and between the Boj za community and the wider public. Activists also took these discussions beyond the camp and Ljubljana, such as during the occupation of Ljubljana university's Faculty of Arts; during a housing protest Murska Sobota, a city on the Eastern side of Slovenia; when activists attempted to block an eviction; and when 20 of activists traveled to Frankfurt am Main to join a European-wide protest against the European Central Bank.

The methods used for organizing the camp, the activities and the social relations was another unique aspect of the Slovenian Occupy experience. The principle of direct democracy was well known to the public through Occupy Wall Street, but Slovenian activists adopted a modified version, 'Democracy of Direct Action', where proposals and decisions about activities and protests came out of the daily workshops, and the General Assembly was space for reporting the days activities and discussing issues related to the camp itself. This reversed the structure used in Occupy Wall Street and empowered the workshops as the principle site of deliberation. This created a horizontal relationship between activists but also avoided a bureaucratizing of the camp's political processes. Similarly with another method used, the 'subjective turn', the aim was to avoid abstract debates, and rather to start discussions, analysis and action from a personal perspective or situation. These methods have been the subject to multiple academic and non-academic articles.

However, little of this context and rich content is captured in the film *Boj za*. Some protests are included, with sloganeering and speeches, and there are shots of the group discussions and workshops, but in most cases without audible dialogue. The narrative of the film is vague, as it follows activists from the camp involved in different kinds of discussions, confrontations and protests. The viewer never learns anything about them beyond what can be taken from a few snippets of dialogue and their presence in the camp. The film-maker chose not to use interviews or narration to guide the viewer through the film. He relied instead on the clarity of the image, and the knowledge of the viewer to make sense of the film, something that will be much easier for a local audience, which may have followed the protests in-person or through the media.

*Boj Za* does capture the emotion of the camp life, however. Emotions are an important aspect of protests, as they contribute to the maintenance or collapse of such collective experiences. They are also essential to the formation of relationships and solidarity among the activists, and of a wider political identity. In this aspect the film is an honest portrait of the Boj za experience. The occupation started as part of the largest non-union demonstrations in Slovenia at that time. There was initially large public support for the camp, significant media attention and anywhere between 80 to 100 people taking part in the camp activities during the days. This gave the camp a large amount of positive energy that lasted into the new year of 2012. What followed was a slow decline in numbers, overall energy, and wider public attention. Activities in the form of workshops and protests did continue during this time, but increasingly the camp was plagued with internal conflicts over the objective of the camp, and over maintaining its presence. This upswing and downturn of

the camp are well portrayed in this film through every-day scenes such as the assemblies, protests, confrontation with police, public interaction, and the clean ups. Boj za was closed quietly in March by the activists themselves.

The film *Boj za* is a consistent, visually pleasing film, with a tempo that matches the atmosphere of the camp. In this, *Boj za* gives viewers a unique insight into the atmosphere of the occupied space in front of the stock exchange from start to finish.

Gačić ends the film with scenes of the Slovenian Vstaja (uprising) that gripped the country just over a year after the Boj za camp was established. In these protests we again meet many of the same faces/activists from the Boj za camp. While it does show that the community of activists didn't collapse with the camp, the lack of context for any of these protests leaves the viewer wondering what exactly the point of the occupation was. It rarely seems like there was much politics taking place, when in reality every aspect of the camp, from common cooking to discussing financial markets were political acts. The film covers some crucial aspects of the protest, but sadly leaves much of the story untold.

David Brown