National Identity Construction and the Role of Political Elites: Protracted Conflict in Bosnia and Herzegovina?

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Summary

In this article, the author is trying to answer the question whether contemporary conflict in Bosnia and Herzegovina is of a protracted nature. He argues that conflict did not end with the Dayton Agreement in 1995, but only its violent phase. During the two past decades, lasting contradictions gained a character of deep-rooted and protracted social conflict, where basic human (societal) needs of constitutive nations (primarily identity) are mutually contested. The author argues his thesis through the analysis of four identity-based categories in the narratives of Bosnian political elites: state, nation, the Bosnian war, and the Srebrenica genocide.

Key words: basic human needs, social identity, protracted social conflict, political elites, nation, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bosnian war, Srebrenica genocide

Identity and Conflict

Introduction of structural violence by Johan Galtung (1964; 1971) was a revolutionary point in the development of peace studies and his academic career, but maybe even more important was his ‘cultural turn’ and the concept of cultural violence (Galtung, 1990). This conception presupposes that direct and structural forms of violence have their deeper sources, embedded in culture. All elements of science, ideology, art, media, and formal education that directly or indirectly legitimize direct and structural violence, Galtung defines as cultural or symbolic violence (Galtung, 1990). Very important elements of culture are social identities, which could also have (and they usually do) a function of conflict and violence legitimization. For proponents of this approach, culture becomes a frame in which people develop a sense of who they are, what activity they should take, and what are their social goals. Subsequently, identity becomes the action unit of culture and a problem-solving tool for coping in particular contexts (Lapid and Kratochwil, 1996). For instance, it plays a
fundamental role in social conflict, delineating ‘us’ from ‘them’ (the Other), mobilizing individuals and collectives, providing legitimization and validation for individual and group aspirations. Identities have a major impact on conflicts, but they are also transformed and reconstructed in a conflict process (Cook-Huffman, 2009).

There are at least five theoretical approaches to the concept of social identity: primordialism, instrumentalism, constructivism, institutionalism and realism (Varshney, 2007; Formozo, 2009; Korostelina, 2009). Primordialism is the oldest tradition based on the ontological essentialism and epistemological positivism. Primordialists insist on shared genes and ancestry, phenotypic proximity, common language, religion, etc. Instrumentalists perceive identity as a resource of collective mobilization and political manipulation based on the economic and political interests of elites. Central idea of constructivists is that our social identities are product of different social actors, agents and relations. Institutionalists claim that social identity is a consequence of political-institutional design – proportional or majoritarian polities, federal or unitary governments, national states or state-nations, etc. And realists use concept of security dilemma to explain logics of social identity formation and mobilization (Formozo, 2009; Varshney, 2007). The ‘ideal’ definition would probably be the one that combines positive sides of all, or at least most of the approaches: “Identities are complex, historically bound, socially constructed, and thus ever moving. They may be transitory in some cases, and rigid and inflexible in other as they are constituted in specific lived realities, bound and shared through story, myth, history, and legend” (Cook-Huffman, 2009, p. 19).

Theorists often discern individual or personal identity from collective, communal or social one. Former they define as individual sense of self, and latter as a consequence of prominent group membership. This distinction is only analytical, because different identities (family, gender, nation, religion, etc.) of the same person are empirically inseparable. It would be more correct and accurate to perceive personal identity as totality comprised of different layers. The most important question puzzling researchers of identity-conflict relation is how and when different identities or identity layers become meaningful and salient (Cook-Huffman, 2009).

Identity issues usually do not cause conflicts, however different circumstances, strategies and interests can shift conflict into ‘identity direction’. If conflicting parties induce the perception of identity threat, then defensive or preemptive (and preventive) activities, that increase rigidity and escalation of conflict, are possible. Also, the politics of denial and nonrecognition of a certain identity can cause the same reactions. Different theorists disagree whether identity based categories are negotiable or not, but some of the core elements of identity are definitely not, since no one would voluntarily challenge foundations of its social existence. Identity can also influence conflicts when one party is imposing ‘negative face’ onto other or endangering its autonomy. “Social
identities…should be understood neither as sources nor as consequences of conflict, but as form of consciousness that entirely changes the dynamic and structure of conflict. Once social identity becomes involved in interest-based or instrumental conflict, it then changes the nature of political or economic conflict in particular ways, making conflict protracted and deep-rooted” (Korostelina, 2009, p. 101). The most important approaches to this complex multidisciplinary topic are: ‘basic human needs’, ‘protracted social conflict’ and ‘theories of ethnic conflict’ (Cook-Huffman, 2009).

**Basic Human Needs Theory**

Following the work of psychologist Abraham Maslow (1943; 1954), John Burton, a prominent critic of the realist school of international relations during the 1970s, developed a concept of conflict resolution based on the human needs theory. He assumed that human motivations can be divided into three types: universal, cultural and transitory. Burton defined first category as necessary preconditions for development of the human kind (needs), second as culturally specific attributes (values), and third as motivations of transitory nature (interests).

“Human needs theory argues…that there are certain ontological and genetic needs that will be pursued, and that socialization processes, if not compatible with such human needs, far from socializing, will lead to frustrations, and to disturbed and anti-social personal and group behaviors. Individuals cannot be socialized into behaviors that destroy their identity and other need goals and, therefore, must react against social environments that do this” (Burton, 1990, p. 33). Besides the biological or genetic needs for food or shelter, there are socially ontological, basic human needs for identity, recognition, security and development. Frustration and denial of these needs leads to intractable or deep-rooted conflicts.

Burton’s colleague and associate, Edward Azar is another representative of this approach. His concept of protracted social conflict, similar to Burton’s intractable conflict, is dominantly based on the basic needs argumentation. His classification includes security, distinctive identity, social recognition of identity, and effective participation in the social processes dealing with security, identity and development issues (Azar, 1985).

Johan Galtung (2004), built his transcend and transform method on this concept as well. His main idea is to start conflict transformation (both/and approach) with determining conflicting parties’ legitimate goals, and main criteria for that should be basic human needs, i.e. survival, well-being, freedom and identity.

A few decades after the pioneering works of Burton and Azar, identity need became a central theorizing point and, in some respects, incorporated other needs as its aspects (Rubenstein, 2001).
Nevertheless, this evolution did not weaken basic human needs theory. On the contrary, it enhanced its applicability (new ‘ethnic’ conflicts and intractability of the old ones, ‘clash of civilizations’, immigration issues, etc.).

Human needs theorists further argue that, when human needs become an issue in conflict, traditional resolution techniques are often ineffective. Interest-based negotiation and mediation focused on interests and distribution of resources turns out to be insufficient and even counterproductive. Mistreatment or neglect of basic human needs can lead to increased polarization and dehumanization, and deepening of the conflict (Azar, 1985; Burton, 1990; Cook-Huffman, 2009).

Protracted Social Conflict

Based on his research and monitoring of conflictive events for over a decade, Azar came up with a type of seemingly irresolvable conflict, termed ‘protracted social conflict’. These conflicts are of a prolonged nature, characterized by multi-ethnic and communal cleavages and disintegrations, economic and technological underdevelopment, social injustice, economic disparities, and non-integrated social and political systems. Real causes of protracted conflicts are deep-rooted, and even those involved in this type of conflict sometimes have difficulties comprehending them. Basically, a denial of those essentials required for development of all the people and their communities, i.e. basic human needs (or societal needs), is causing the conflict. “Protracted social conflicts universally are situations which arise out of attempts to combat conditions of perceived victimization stemming from: 1. a denial of separate identity of parties involved in the political process; 2. an absence of security of culture and valued relationships; and 3. an absence of effective political participation through which victimization can be remedied” (Azar, 1985, p. 61). Another, very important Azar’s notion is that self image and ‘image of self by others’ are the vital elements of identity, and therefore they could be strong incentives for action and conflicts. Any solution not including transformation of these root features is only temporary, and could lead to new conflict eruptions (Azar, 1985; 1990).

As another critic of state-centric ‘realist school’, Azar suggested four clusters of variables that influence conflict longevity and violence intensity. First, he proposed that the focus for understanding conflict dynamics should be on communal content, and identity group (religious, ethnic, cultural, etc.) as a unit of analysis. Azar’s second variable is inter-communal dynamics, particularly activities concentrated on the denial of human needs. His third variable is governance and state’s role and their capacity to satisfy citizens’ societal needs. In most of the protracted conflict cases, dominant groups (mis)use their governing positions to fulfill self-interests at the expense of
other groups. Their elite often use tactics and strategies of exclusive identities followed by the process of counter-identification of afflicted groups. This deforms political system and weakens its legitimacy and capacity for basic needs fulfillment (weak, vulnerable or failed state). The fourth variable is international linkage, or the relations of economic dependency and political-military linkages that constitute regional and global networks of clientage and cross-border interests.

Further on, he added three more variables or determinants of social conflict: communal action, state actions and conflict dynamics. The first one involves formation and mobilization of identity groups, such as the emergence and character of leadership, selection of political goals, tactics and strategies, etc. State actions include an array of different policies, ranging from political accommodation to the domination, coercive repression and subjugation. Conflict dynamics are the various ‘built-in mechanisms of conflict’ like polarization, dehumanization, attribution error, security dilemma, ideational formulation of the enemy, and others (Azar, 1985; 1990; Cook-Huffman, 2009; Ramsbotham, et al., 2011).

Finishing his research in 1985, Azar indentified more than sixty cases of protracted social conflicts in the world. Examples he mentioned are Lebanon, Sri Lanka, Northern Ireland, Ethiopia, Cyprus, Iran, Nigeria and Zimbabwe. Most of these conflicts, if not all, are still untransformed and unresolved.

**Theories of Ethnic Conflict**

Very important addition to theorizing identity and conflict are the theories of ethnic conflict. The strong point of these theories is its study of the relationship between social context and mobilization of identity categories. However, some of the core concepts of this approach, such as ethnic group, ethnic conflict and ethnic violence, are questioned and problematized. Its critics shifted academic attention to broader categories of social or communal identity and its content (Cook-Huffman, 2009).

Michael Benton argues that it is more proper to describe ‘ethnic conflicts’ as “political conflicts with an identifiable ethnic dimension”, and Bruce Gilley adds that this concept homogenizes rather different social and political phenomena (Guelke, 2010, p. 2). But the most influential and quite radical critique comes from the constructivist theoretical stances. Rogers Brubaker (2002) challenges the treatment of social groups (ethnic, national, racial, etc.) as “substantial entities to which interests and agency can be attributed”, or main protagonists of social conflict and units of social analysis. He calls this fallacy of intellectual reification – groupism. **Brubaker further argues that ethnic conflicts (suggests ethnicized or ethnically framed conflict as**
better terms) shouldn’t be understood as conflicts between the ethnic groups, but among
organizations, ethnopolitical entrepreneurs representing or claiming to represent ethnic groups. Their
goal is to socially reify those groups, to summon them and mobilize (Brubaker, 2002).

Ethnicity or ethnic groups should be conceptualized in processual, relational and dynamic
terms. Not as substantial groups, but practical categories, cognitive schemas, discursive frames or
political projects. “It means thinking of *ethnicization, racialization* and *nationalization* as political,
social, cultural and psychological processes. And it means taking as basic analytical category not the
‘group’ as an entity but *groupness* as a contextually fluctuating conceptual variable (Brubaker, 2002,
pp. 167-168).” Degree of groupness depends on particular categories, such as myths, collective
memories and narratives, and sociopolitical settings, like institutionalization, entrenchment in
administrative routines, etc. These categories are proposed, articulated and propagated ‘from above’,
and appropriated and internalized ‘from below’. Their function is to rationalize social world of
individuals, determine their expectations about category members and direct their attitudes toward
non-members (often through stereotypes and prejudices), sharing the sense of groupness (group
potential). Groupness is usually a cause or precondition of conflict, but it can also be its
consequence. Conflicts are often accompanied by “social struggles to label, interpret and explain it”
(Brubaker, 2002, p. 147). These ‘metaconflicts’ are integral and consequential part of every ‘regular’
conflict. Coding and framing of conflictual and violent past can become quite important factors of
identity construction and groupness enhancement (Brubaker, 2002; Guelke, 2010; Varshney, 2007;
Brubaker and Laitin, 1998; Anastasiou, 2009).

The main protagonists of these grouping processes and activities are various kinds of
organizations: governments, ministries, agencies, political parties, churches, non-governmental
organizations, media organizations, armed units, paramilitary organizations, terrorist group, and
others. Using ethnic categories, they structure perception and interpretation in everyday interaction
through official classifications and organizational routines. They use identity categories “to allocate
rights, regulate actions, distribute benefits and burdens, construct category-specific institutions,
identify particular persons as bearers of categorical attributes, ‘cultivate’ populations or, at the

*Bosnian conflicts and *metaconflicts*

The Bosnian civil war, as a part of the wars of the Yugoslav succession, officially started on
6 April 1992 (although incidents began a few months earlier), and it was a crucial battlefield and a
key conflict for understanding of the whole process of dissolution. After the declarations of
independence and armed interventions in Slovenia and Croatia, Parliament of Bosnia and Herzegovina approved the *Memorandum of Sovereignty* (15 October 1991) despite the opposition of Serbian members and legal disposition that all crucial decisions must be approved by the representatives of all three constituent nations. Reaction of the Serbian representatives, voted at the first multiparty elections in BiH (November 1990), was a formation of the Assembly of the Serb People in Bosnia and Herzegovina, as a highest representative and legislative body of the Serbian population. This Assembly held a plebiscite among the Bosnian Serbs to remain a part of Yugoslavia, and proclaimed the Republic of Serb People of Bosnia and Herzegovina (later to become Republika Srpska) on 9 January 1992, declaring it a part of Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. On the other side, Bosnian government and parliament, led by Muslim¹ and Croatian politicians, held a referendum for independence (64% turnout, 99% voted for), from 29 February to 1 March, and declared sovereignty of BiH three days later. The referendum was boycotted by the Serbs, which led to further polarization and the beginning of war (Bougarel, 2004; Kasapović, 2005; Halpern and Kajdikel, 2002; Bougarel, et al., 2007; Bose, 2007).

Three and a half years later, after four rejected peace plans (Carrington-Cutileiro’s, Vance-Owen’s, Owen-Stoltenberg’s and Contact Group plan) and over one hundred thousand casualties (approximately 65% of them were Muslims/Bosniaks, 25% were Serbs, and 8% were Croats), the General Framework Agreement for Peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina (i.e. the Dayton Agreement) was signed in Paris on 14 December 1995. Agreement constituted new Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) as a special-type consociational state and asymmetrical federation made up of two entities, the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (FBiH) and the Republika Srpska (RS). New institutional design inherited some elements of Bosnian constitutional and political tradition based on a long history of regulating religious and ethnic divisions, namely communitarianism, collective rights, ethno-political proportionality and parity and ‘national key quotas’, but also territorialized and politically institutionalized those divisions. Primarily, that was the consequence of ethnic cleansing during the war, which was one of the main goals of national political and military elites. That turned Bosnia from ethnically mixed unified territory to homogenous three areas with a few enclaves (Kasapović, 2005; Bougarel, 2004).

Brubaker is only partially right when he points out that Yugoslav wars have more to do with “thuggery, warlordship, opportunistic looting and black market profiteering than with ethnicity” (Brubaker, 2002, p. 176), since the identity need had a significant role in these conflicts. Concept of

Yugoslavia (from 1918) was primarily an answer to the Serbian national question. For the Croats, Slovenes and other nations, Yugoslavia was predominantly a step toward national independence and statehood, and a relatively favorable environment for nation-building. At 1992, when major European countries and the USA started recognizing independence of Yugoslav republics, answer to the Serbian question was ‘erased’. Consequently, the war was an instrument of ‘writing’ new answers which included ethnic homogenization and cleansing (Ringmar, 1996).

In case of Bosnia, Serbian elites’ answer was remaining a part of Yugoslavia, or BiH as union of the national states, Muslim/Bosniak answer was independent, unitary, and Bosniak dominated BiH, and for Croats, the answer was a secession to Croatia, or as the second (and accepted) best option, independent federal BiH in confederation with Croatia. Therefore, the Dayton Agreement was some kind of compromise of interests which facilitated peaceful relations in Bosnia, and as Mirjana Kasapović argues, it is not itself the main cause of the political system ineffectiveness and inefficiency. Although the ‘Dayton Bosnia’ is excessively complex and weak state, central source of its disorganization is the lack of a minimal consensus of all three nations’ elites on the state and political system, and its necessity and desirability (Kasapović, 2005).

It is more than obvious that Bosnian political elites are in conflict over some of the crucial political principles, and being part of ethnopolitical system they are incorporating their perceptions and following narratives into identities of nations they are representing or claim to represent. Furthermore, they are intentionally presenting these quarrels as conflicts between nations, in order to preserve their positions, satisfy their interests, delegitimize political rivals and gain broader support at the elections. These ethnic entrepreneurs (re)construct identities making them mutually exclusive, threatening and potentially very destructive.

Ethnicization and national identity construction is a constant trait of post-Dayton Bosnia politics, but the groupness raising culminated during the 2012, when the Parliament of BiH adopted the Law on Census of Population, Households and Dwellings in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and 2013, when the census is going to take a place. This is going to be the first population census in BiH after 22 years (since 1991), and, what is more important, it will clearly show demographic consequences of the war and outcomes of elites’ nation construction. “When they answered the questions of ethnicity, at the census in March 1991, citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina could not even imagine how that statistical data would manage their lives in the next twenty years” (Pisker, 2012). Similar to the 1991 census, this is also an event of the utmost political importance.

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2 During the period of Yugoslavia, Montenegrins, Macedonians and Muslims articulated and developed their nationalities.
3 The Washington Agreement, signed between the leaders of Bosnian Croats and Bosniaks in March 1994, included the article about BiH-Croatia confederation, which was never implemented.
Following Azar’s theory of protracted social conflict and Brubaker’s critiques, I will analyze political elites’ identity related narratives, using certain categories of identification (or groupness) and inter-communal dynamics as units of analysis. Subject of the analysis, precisely, will be four identity categories: the state, the nation, the (Bosnian) war, and the genocide (in the BiH), in the ‘census period’. I found these categories as the key points of political dispute between elites in BiH, especially between Bosniaks and Serbs. Croats, as the smallest constituent nation and without autonomous entity and government, are somehow marginalized in this conflict (except the state issue) and they will be mostly omitted from this analysis.

The State

Members of the Bosniak political elite, politicians, NGO activists, intellectuals and religious community representatives, generally agree that the independent and sovereign Bosnian state was their primary goal, both in war and peace; and that they were not satisfied with the Dayton Agreement from the very beginning. Right after signing it, Alija Izetbegović, 'father of the nation' said: “This is not a just peace, but it is more just than the continuation of war. In such a situation as it is, and the world like this, better peace could not be achieved” (Radio Sarajevo, 21 November 2012). The main reasons of their dissatisfaction were ‘division’ of Bosnia and ‘legalization’ of Republika Srpska. They especially criticized RS because of its ‘genocidal nature’: “This 'republic' in question, was created by Karadžić on a genocidal basis” (Anadolu Agency, 8 August 2012); discrimination of the non-Serbs: “Bosniak nation has survived genocide and the imposition of the Dayton Constitution, which includes elements of apartheid and discrimination” (B92, 4 September 2012); or because of the occupation of the ‘Bosniak land’: “…the territory of RS is just an occupied zone of BiH” (Oslobođenje, 16 July 2013). Some of them would like to see its end, like Sejfudin Tokić: “Republika Srpska should disappear due to discrimination of the non-Serbs…”; or Sefer Haliović: “…RS is an Orthodox Christian entity, which has Orthodoxy in its own roots. Therefore, RS is economically, politically, military, and especially morally unsustainable and we all hope that one day we will see its end” (B92, 14 April 2013).

4 Late A. Izetbegović, being the most influential Bosniak politician is often quoted in the media.
5 Mustafa Cerić, former leader of the Islamic Community in BiH and a President of the Bosniak World Congress.
6 Emir Suljagić, leader of the Bosniak NGO coalition ‘1st March’ (the date of the 1991 referendum for independence).
7 President of the Bosniak Movement and a coordinator of the coalition ‘It is important to be a Bosniak’
8 A war general and commanding officer of the Army of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and President of a minor political party, Bosnian Patriotic Party.
Bosniak politicians often like to stress that struggle for their vision of Bosnia is not over: “We have entered a third decade of the struggle for the survival of integral BiH, for its development, and well-being of our people. This battle, armed and political, has been led by the same kind of people. They defend freedom, unity, and, above all, the dignity of our people. And that struggle is not over yet” (Nezavisne, 16 June 2013); and if someone tries to secede, they will confront him: “Splitting the country definitely leads to war” (Glas Srpske, 17 August 2013). S. Halilović, even declared that it is more likely that Sandžak (Muslim/Bosniak dominated part of Serbia) would become a part of BiH, than RS a part of Serbia and added: “if Dodik and [the Serbian President] Nikolić continue with this [pro-independent] rhetoric, let them know that they have declared war on Bosnia and let them know they will lose that war” (Radio Sarajevo, 2 May 2013).

On the other side, Serbian elites are to some extent satisfied with the Dayton Bosnia, but they advocate its further decentralization (a union of three independent states) or, preferably, independence of the RS. There was a multitude of statements that challenged the statehood of BiH and invoked its ending. Most of them came from the President of RS, Milorad Dodik. He stated that BiH is not in the Serbian interest: “Serbs have never truly accepted Bosnia. BiH, after the breakup of Yugoslavia, ceased to be a political and historical interest of the Serbian people. Bosnia has not experienced the fate of the former Yugoslavia because there was a strong ‘international factor’ and its wish to preserve it…” (B92, 8 January 2013); and that BiH is nothing but a great cost: “You can now be hypocrites and say, as some foreigners do, that Bosnia has a chance. I think that…BiH stands no chance and that we are all at a dramatic loss, and that BiH costs us a lot” (Radio Sarajevo, 20 July 2012). He also expressed his feelings toward BiH in one of the interviews: “I do not like BiH. […] I live in Republika Srpska. […] And BiH does not cause me any other feeling than disgust” (Večernji, 17 September 2012); and on a various occasions called it a monster, rotten, virtual and a devil-state: “This is a devil-state; there is no democracy, there is nothing” (Avaz, 26 May 2013).

In the same time Serbian politicians use every opportunity to stress the statness of Republika Srpska, and readiness to hold the referendum as soon as the conditions allow them to. “Serbs, as a nation, have two states, Serbia and Republika Srpska. RS has all the criteria of state, government,
Bosnian citizens…"

(Radio at the 2013 census, explained his national affiliation with the following words: “…it is not a secret that I will declare myself a part he commented with the following words:

“I am here at the invitation of my friend, President of RS Milorad Dodik, to be November 2012); and another evidence of M. Dodik generally supports Croatian proposals: “If a three-ethnic territorial structure does not prevail as a realistic solution, the agony will remain until one day we all come to conclusion that BiH no longer exists” (Hrvatska riječ, 23 November 2012); and another evidence of their alliance is Čović’s presence at the RS National Day celebration, which he commented with the following words: “I am here at the invitation of my friend, President of RS Milorad Dodik, to be a part of this celebration” (Hrvatska riječ, 12 January 2013).

12 M. Dodik.
13 President of the Serbian Democratic Party (SDS), founded by Radovan Karadžić.
14 Croatian elites, although supporting both sides, are closer to the Serbian positions on the issues of the state. They feel minorized in the FBIH and their key goal is a creation of the Croatian entity. Dragan Čović, President of the Croatian Democratic Community of BiH (HDZ BiH), told that territorial autonomy would be a rational solution for the Croats and a precondition for the normal functioning of BiH. In addition, he argued that “what we have now absolutely does not offer any possibility but to perceive Federation of BiH as an entity of the Bosniak nation” (Nezavisne, 26 September 2012). One year later, he proposed concrete reforms: “To the suggestion to reduce the number of cantons, we answered with a proposal to abolish the Federation. That would solve a lot of problems” (BH-index, 26 August 2013). M. Dodik generally supports Croatian proposals: “If a three-ethnic territorial structure does not prevail as a realistic solution, the agony will remain until one day we all come to conclusion that BiH no longer exists” (Hrvatska riječ, 23 November 2012); and another evidence of their alliance is Čović’s presence at the RS National Day celebration, which he commented with the following words: “I am here at the invitation of my friend, President of RS Milorad Dodik, to be a part of this celebration” (Hrvatska riječ, 12 January 2013).

15 Damir Hadžić (Social Democratic Party of BiH), Minister of Transport and Communication of BiH and a coordinator of the 2013 census, explained his national affiliation with the following words: “…it is not a secret that I will declare myself at the next census…as a Bosnian. I am convinced that I share this primary identity with the hundreds of thousands of Bosnian citizens…” (Radio Sarajevo, 6 February 2013).
16 Mustafa Spahić, professor, imam, close associate of A. Izetbegović, and a communist dissident.
whole BiH” (Anadolu Agency, 30 November 2012). As Mustafa Cerić once said, there is no Bosnia without Bosniaks, and no Bosniaks without Bosnia (Anadolu Agency, 29 December 2012). How do they perceive the Other is perhaps best illustrated by the B. Izetbegović’s description of Emir Kusturica (an Orthodox Serb of a Muslim Bosnian descent): “…the great director and even greater traitor” (Glas Srpske, 16 August 2013).

Serbian identity in Bosnia is constructed on the premises of particularity of RS, integration with Serbia (not territorial, but cultural and national) and negation of ‘Bosnia’. During the commemoration in Donja Gradina (part of the Jasenovac concentration camp in the WWII), Dodik declared that “we do not want to lose our identity, grieves and sufferings, and we do not want to lose Srpska” (B92, 12 May 2013). He also expressed his unconditional devotion to Serbia: “We (RS) are ready to do anything for Serbia… […] Serbia is our love, we dream of a strong and respected Serbia. We live for that day” (Radio Sarajevo, 10 August 2012); and emphasized the unity of RS and Serbia: “We are not going to NATO without Serbia, because then there would be a border on the Drina” (Oslobodenje, 24 September 2012). Furthermore, Dodik often underlines that he is primarily a Serb, and certainly not a Bosnian, not even as regional affiliation (B92, 13 May 2013).

It is clear that Bosniaks are not the Serbian primary Other, but Bosnia as a concept: “I do not consider Bosniaks bad people, I have a problem with their politics of domination…and marginalization, that want to introduce Turkey as a dominant political actor in the country, which would determine measures and conditions of our development” (B92, 15 October 2012). “When they bring Bosniaks to the streets of Sarajevo trying naively to transform us into citizens, instead of members of our nation, we have to be careful and even more united” (Oslobodenje, 28 June 2013). Problem of the language is a good example of that. In his debate with reisu-l-ulema Kavazović, Dodik stated: “…I would like to remind him that there is no Bosnian language, as he likes to mislead the public. […] Bosniaks have the right to their own language, but it cannot be called Bosnian, but Bosniak. The name of the language reflects the name of the nation” (Radio Sarajevo, 9 August 2013).

The War

The war and the genocide are maybe the most important categories of the identity conflict between Bosniaks and Serbs. Their interpretations and narratives of these events are almost completely opposed.

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17 Husein Kavazović, current leader of the Islamic Community of BiH.
18 M. Dodik.
For Bosniak elites, war was a “heroic phase when we built our army, first time after 500 years” (Radio Sarajevo, 2 September 2013); a glorious resistance against the Serbian aggression: “Bosniaks confronted the aggression on Bosnia and Herzegovina and thwarted the plans of the Greater Serbia…” (Oslobodenje, 8 September 2012); and time when the chivalry of Bosniak nation was forged: “Here in Sarajevo, there in Bihać, Mostar and on all the other bastions of our country, the chivalry of our nation was forged. …white tombstones are exclamations of our memory to that chivalry. The best of our sons have defended this country” (Oslobodenje, 9 August 2013). Unlike Serbs, Bosniaks did not do anything wrong: “When going to negotiations to the European countries I do not have to bow my head down, because we did not kill women, children and old people. We did not attack anyone’s sanctuaries. However, our enemies did all that, and right before the eyes of the entire West” (Anadolu Agency, 19 October 2012).

On the other side, the Assembly of RS adopted an official position about the nature of war in Bosnia in the Declaration on the causes, character and consequences of the tragic armed conflict in BiH (1992-1995). Some of the main points are: “…in evaluating events of the previous war, there is a lack of objective, balanced and unbiased approach on all sides in BiH and abroad, especially when it comes to violations of the International Humanitarian Law, and the attitudes toward the causes, character and consequences of the war. Negative qualifications of particular events have been the basis of many forms of the Serbian nation satanization. […] …’the tragic conflict’ in BiH, based on the scientific, expert and historical criteria and standards, had a character of the civil war, with a high degree of the international factor involvement. […] …verdicts imposed by the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) did not contribute to the reconciliation and truth about the wars in the region. The National Assembly emphasizes that ICTY…cannot impose collective sentences on nations, organizations or governments” (Bigportal, 19 June 2013).

Maybe the best example of contradicting narratives is a perception of the NATO intervention in BiH. Commenting that intervention, former prime minister and member of the Presidency of BiH, Haris Silajdžić, said that he really enjoyed it and that Serbs deserve it. One of the Alija Izetbegović’s associates, Mufid Memija, added: “There was a great relief and excitement. …the people of BiH experienced NATO intervention as an act of justice. By the standards of contemporary political

18 Bakir Izetbegović.
19 Sulejman Tihić, President of the Party of Democratic Action (SDA), founded by A. Izetbegović and a former member of the Presidency of BiH.
20 Husein Kavazović.
21 Alija Izetbegović.
22 Sulejman Tihić rejected the Declaration as a falsification of history: “The Declaration is groundless, discriminatory and falsifies the history of BiH from 1992 to 1995” (Radio Sarajevo, 2 July 2013).
The genocide in Srebrenica was confirmed in a few verdicts of ICTY and the International Court of Justice, and as a legal matter it is not a subject of this article. Nevertheless, its political implications articulated through the political narratives are very important part of this prolonged conflict. As in other cases of genocide, there is one side trying to deny it and other side trying to make a ‘political capital’ out of it.

Building their image of the ‘only victim’, Bosniak elite is trying to equalize Srebrenica genocide with the Holocaust: “Innocent and helpless victims were faced with the cold and merciless hatred of criminals akin to those in the Nazi camps of Hitler’s Germany” (VOA news, 11 July 2013);²⁵ to present it as a global symbol of evil: “Srebrenica became a synonym, not only of the three-year conflict brutalities in the former Yugoslavia, but also a symbol of evil and injustice for the whole humanity” (Anadolu Agency, 2 August 2013);²⁶ and to use it to delegitimize RS: “It is morally unsound and politically dysfunctional that a place like Sreberenica belongs to those responsible for the genocide. It would be the same if a museum in the former concentration camp Auschwitz is run by the Nazis...” (Radio Sarajevo, 29 May 2012). They often interpret it as culmination of a century-long genocide against Bosniaks: “Over the last hundred years, from the Balkan Wars onwards, we had hundreds of Srebrenicas. Hundreds of pits in BiH where our

²⁴ Member of the Presidency of BiH, Zlatko Lagumdžija (President of the Social Democratic Party of BiH), and the Turkish Minister of Foreign Affairs, Ahmet Davutoğlu, in their joint article in The Washington Post.
grandfathers, brothers, mothers, sisters, and innocent people were being killed, raped and tortured” (Anadolu Agency, 11 July 2012);\(^{27}\) which is still going on: “Being Bosniak in the ‘eyes’ of Ministry of Interior Affairs and Government of the RS seems the same as having an infectious disease” (Oslobodenje, 4 June 2013).\(^{28}\) To sum up, Bosniaks perceive themselves as the “European Palestinians” (Anadolu Agency, 17 August 2012).\(^{29}\)

Although M. Dodik was one of the very few RS politicians that publicly recognized genocide in Srebrenica, he changed his opinion stating that the Srebrenica genocide was politically imposed: “I claim here that the genocide was not committed! There was no genocide! There was a plan by a certain foreigners and Bosniak politicians to impose the guilt and responsibility upon us, for something we did not do” (Oslobodenje, 24 September 2012). Besides denying it, he also stresses that Serbs were actually the real victims, in the WWII: “[Bosniaks] are committing self-genocide by constantly claiming that they are the victims. RS and Serbian people did not commit genocide in the past, but they were the victims of genocide in Jasenovac and other places, that predecessors of Mustafa Cerić strongly supported” (Radio Sarajevo, 2 June 2012); and again in the last war: “The census will clearly demonstrate a schism in the Bosniak nation, because some will declare themselves Bosniak and other Bosnian or Muslim. It will also show that there are no Serbs in Sarajevo and that some kind of genocide happened there, since it does not involve only killing, but also systematic displacement of population” (Radio Sarajevo, 15 July 2013).

Conclusion

Bosniak political elites never really come to terms with the Dayton solution, arguing it legalizes Serbian aggression and genocide. Although, there are some proponents of single Bosnian (or Bosniak) nation made of members of all three religions, Bosniak elite dominantly perceives members of Bosniak nation as those who are religiously Muslim (alternatively atheistic) and speak Bosnian language (not Croatian or Serbian). Former concept of the nation is completely anti-systemic, disputed from both Croatian and Serbian elites, whereas letter concept is completely exclusive, and, in combination with genocide and aggression narratives, inevitably determines Serbs (and potentially Croats) as the other and potential enemies.

Serbian political elites envisage Bosnia as a union of three sovereign national entities. They claim that Republika Srpska gained its independence and subjectivity in 1992 and that Dayton

\(^{27}\) Mustafa Cerić.

\(^{28}\) Emir Suljagić.

\(^{29}\) Emir Zlatar, General Secretary of the Council of the Bosniak Intellectuals Congress.
Agreement only verified it, so it cannot be abolished by the Agreement revision. Current political system is the maximum of centralism they can accept, and they represent themselves as the guardians of the Constitution. Republika Srpska is the cornerstone of their national identity construction, which excludes anything designated as Bosnian (not Bosnian Serbs, but Serbs). Therefore the Other for them is more Bosnia as a concept (Bosnian state, language, and potential nation), than the neighboring nations. This Bosnian ‘quarrel’ meets most of the Azar’s conditions for protracted social conflict: perceived victimization and attempts to combat it (Bosniaks as the victims of Serbian aggression and genocide), denials of identity (negation of ‘Bosnia’ or RS), imposition of the ‘negative face’ (‘genocidal RS’), counter-identification (Serbs as non-Bosnians), absence of remedy mechanisms for victimization, state incapable of satisfying societal needs (BiH and both entities), misuse of the governing position (every party in the Bosnian government is following their national interests), polarization (pro-Bosnian is in the same time anti-RS, and vice versa), dehumanization (Serbs as Nazis, Bosnia as a monster and devil-state), security dilemma (potential secession), institutionalization of collective memories and narratives, etc. This does not necessarily mean that conflict will turn back to its violent phase, but it has a lot of preconditions for that. Cultural and structural violence dominate its social and political context.

Bosnia will probably stay deeply divided society and a failed state as long as there is an interest of international community (EU and NATO) for that. When those interests cease to exist, it will most likely fell apart or become a confederation of three sovereign states, and that is the main precondition for the transformation of this conflict to begin. The first scenario would probably lead to violence.

30 Croatian political elites lead dual politics. On one side, they supported Bosnian independence and creation of Bosniak-Croatian entity, but on the other side they fought Bosniaks in the war and later confronted their politics of domination in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina. As they even held referendum in 2000 and, based on its results, proclaimed Croatian self-rule – the third entity, which was declared illegal by the High Representative, they are much closer to the Serbian vision of three entities. Their identity struggle is mainly directed toward Bosniaks as the Other, since they fear their supremacy. Beside the national ones, international political elites also have a significant role, since they are present in the Bosnian domestic politics, primarily through the Office of the High Representative. Their political engineering (the Bonn Powers) and promotion of ‘civil society and liberalism’ proven to be very conflict stimulating (Kasapović, 2005).


Media


