IMPRISONED BY THE PAST

History and identity of ethnic groups in Bosnia and Herzegovina

Key words

history, national identity, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bosnian-Herzegovinian nations

Author

Dr Jelena Vukoičić holds PhD in Political Sciences from the University of Belgrade and she is an Associate Professor

Correspondence

jelenavukoicic1@gmail.com

Field

Political science

Summary

In this article the author analyses the role of history in the creation and affirmation of national identities of ethnic groups in Bosnia and Herzegovina. National identities of the local collectivities have been created and shaped under the influence of the turbulent history of this country that, for the most part, consisted of wars, uprisings, occupations and frequent political crisis. It should be emphasized that the main problem of Bosnian-Herzegovinian society is actually reflected in its rich and complex history - For a very long period Bosnian and Herzegovinian nations have been living in a world of parallel truths that actually represent a collection of their personal and collective experiences in different historical periods. Conflicting historical roles and perceptions of these roles are also major obstacles to the stability and preservation of Bosnia and Herzegovina. 'Multiethnic' society based on completely different historical and contemporary truths does not have many chances for a long-term stability, given that a kind of a common, widely accepted history is necessary for the establishment of a functioning community in post-conflict environment.

DOI

10.5937/pol1612072V

UDC

94:323.1(497.6)

Paper received on

11.10.2016.

Paper accepted for publishing on

05.11.2016.

INTRODUCTION

A large number of local and international scientists have, so far, tried to explain why the 20th century ended in blood in one European country. In most of the analyses, there are two prevailing explanations of the bloody collapse of Yugoslavia in the territory of Bosnia and Herzegovina. One of them is that, in this case, what happened was basically just another in the endless series of historical eruptions of ethnic hatred. According to this theory, throughout a major part of its history, the Balkans has represented the most backward and primitive part of Europe, constantly burdened by hatred and conflicts. The period of peace and relative political stability, which lasted from the end of World War II until the disintegration of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, is explained by the communist repression and dictatorship whose collapse again, 'threw' real Balkan 'nature' to the surface, which resulted in the tragic events of the last decade of the 20th century.

On the other hand, there is a theory according to which Bosnia and Herzegovina, for most of its history, was a functional multiethnic society that was being pushed into conflicts and wars by the manipulative political elite of neighbouring countries, primarily Serbia and Croatia, who have always had aspirations for conquering the territory of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and were constantly trying to 'undermine' the foundations of the multiethnic Bosnian community and gain the loyalty of local Serbs and Croats in order to achieve their goals.

Both of these theories, in fact, constitute rough simplifications of a complex reality – in its modern history

Bosnia and Herzegovina has never been a 'harmonious multiethnic society', as well as it could not be accurately described as an 'ethnic hatred hell'. It is true, however, that the contemporary Bosnian and Herzegovinian history, in short, is a history of wars and violence, conquests and occupations, uprisings and reprisals, frequent political crises and periodic regime changes, and that this history has shaped a society that exists today, together with all its ethnic particularities, mistrust and hostility, that stubbornly refuse to be transformed into 'civil and civilised', modern civic (non-ethnic) identities.

HISTORY AND NATIONAL IDENTITY

Any analysis of the phenomenon of national identity (See: Breuilly 1994; Smith 2010) in a modern world has to start from a historical perspective, given the fact that the way we experience the present largely depends on our knowledge of the past (Connerton 1989: 2).¹ Historical narratives create a framework for placing an individual within a particular interpretation of significant processes, which can be done in several ways. However, we need to distinguish social memory from a more specific practice that is best termed the activity of historical reconstruction (Connerton 1989: 3). History is often taught in the family so that the common experience of one generation is transferred to other generations. This process is individual, and, therefore, does not have to be dependent on the state and society. In some cases, memories of certain historical events, passed on from

¹ The opposite is also true; the way we 'see' the past significantly depends on our perception of the present.

one generation to another, significantly differ from the official versions of the same events, which may, among other things, be seen from the examples of communist countries of Eastern and Southeastern Europe after the Second World War, including former Yugoslavia. In the situations where the 'official history' is in conflict with individual memories and experiences, and, therefore, with a reality and truth, its power and influence are much limited, superficial and temporary. For this reason, the power of remembrance should never be underestimated.

Historical memory is closely linked to the concept of identity. As Gillis (1994: 3-5) notes, 'the parallel lives of these two terms alert us to the fact that the notion of identity depends on the idea of memory, and vice versa. The core meaning of any individual or group identity, namely, a sense of sameness over time and space, is sustained by remembering; and what is remembered is defined by the assumed identity'. George Schopflin also emphasises the importance of historical memory. According to his words (Schopflin 2000: 260), the memory represents a common part of the social knowledge, which the community does not renounce that simply. It is part of the identity and, therefore, no persuasion in an alleged history of a certain period being 'false' or 'imaginary' will not convince the group of the veracity of such claims. If anything, its members will consider these arguments to be an attack on them, which will only reinforce the boundaries that they set around their community.

HISTORICAL MEMORY, CONFLICTS AND IDENTITY IN THE BALKANS

The nature of the Bosnian war 'surprised' some observers from the Western world, who firmly believed that brutal armed conflicts were a matter of the past in 'civilised' Europe. Some others, again, immediately brought the outbreak of the war in connection with the history and mentality of local people. Back in the early 20th century various research projects conducted by certain Western scientific institutes, emphasised that the 'Balkan cruelty' was a matter of the past which was still repeated every time a political crisis span out of control. According to a report on the Balkan wars from 1912 and 1913 of the American Institute Carnegie Endowment, 'the burning of villages and the exodus of defeated population are normal and traditional occurrences of all Balkan wars and uprisings. It is a habit of all these people. The suffering that they themselves bore, they then inflict to others'.² After the outbreak of the wars in the nineties, the historical tendency to resort to violence in order to solve political problems was pronounced to be a part of the Balkan politics by some Western scientists, who stressed that the culture of violence and the violent suppression of differences had a long tradition in the region that was still pervasive (Schopflin 2000: 254). The massive attention that the Bosnian war received in the world, especially Western, media mostly served to enhance the country's popular image as

² See: Report of the International Commission to Inquire into the Causes and Conduit of the Balkan Wars. 1914. Washington D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

a Europe backyard's hellhole. Journalists looking for stories – the more lurid and macabre the better – could find a virtually inexhaustible supply in this place which seemed to have imploded and exploded at the same time. This type of coverage made a powerful impression on people's minds and its effects linger long after the end of the arm conflict (Bose 2002: 11). Throughout the world – not just the Western world – 'Bosnia' still evokes images of brutality, mass killing and ethnic cleansing, fuelled by the burning, ancient ethnic hatreds. These attitudes, although sometimes abused and used for the purpose of biased and unfounded analyses of the Balkan conflicts and history, are still based on facts – in its modern history the Balkans was the scene of many civil wars and conflicts motivated by ethnic and religious differences.

This, of course, does not mean that the social character of the Balkan peoples is specific or different from the character of others, nor that the peoples of the Balkan Peninsula are by nature 'more aggressive' than some other ethnic groups; it is simply a fact derived from certain historical circumstances which, to tell the truth, were least caused by wishes or activities of the Balkan inhabitants themselves. As Konstantin Nikiforov emphasizes (2005: 226), all in all, the Balkans had been the scene of conflicts of others' interests for centuries. The map of the Balkans was retailored many times, ignoring the aspirations and opinions of the Balkan people themselves. Basically, that is the cause of the Balkan constant disagreements and disputes, unregulated interethnic relations and inter-state borders. To use this fact as some sort of confirmation of innate aggressiveness of the people in the Balkans – is totally unjustified and is an example of theses

replacement, unprecedented in historiography.

As one Balkan proverb says: 'This region has such a rich history that it does not need a future.' Winston Churchill who once said 'the Balkans creates more history than it can consume' gave another well-known statement of the Balkans and its history. The knowledge and understanding of the history of the Balkans, certainly, is crucial to any attempt to resolve, or at least understand its past, present and future problems, not only because the history often repeated itself and because it points to the roots of contemporary political problems, but also because the history has enormous emotional significance for many people living in this region. Historical memories are colourful and alive in the memory of most people in the Balkans, regardless of whether they personally experienced events that are remembered or not.

This model of memorising the past, however, is not unique to the Balkans and the people who live on its territory, but, to a certain extent, exists in many modern countries. Common or social memory has a huge impact on individual memory. People will often revive a certain memory through contacts and interactions with other members of their group. To be able to communicate effectively with other members of our community we need to remember the same things that they remember. Our personal memories, if we really want to be part of a particular society, need to be harmonised with people, places, dates, language and symbols that characterise our society, which can only exist within the mental space created by the group itself. Attending the event that is 'kept in memory' is not necessary nor is the fact

whether we lived at the time when it happened (Connerton 1989: 36-8).

Apart from the fact that the Balkan people undeniably have a rich history, it should also be pointed out that its richness is even greater when one considers its role in the past, and, to a large extent present, in the social and political life of the countries located in this part of Europe. According to David Owen (1996: 27), in the Balkans, nothing is simple. Everything is imbued with history, and complexities bring confusion even to the most thorough study. The influence of history on the Balkan nations is undeniably great, its social weight is impressive which gives it, in a way, a timeless character and is one of the peculiarities of the local population in relation to some other nations.

Yossef Bodansky, observing Serbs and Croats, notes that these two nations had been formed and evolved over time accumulating experiences, which, in large part, have been shaped by their roles as the gatekeepers of Europe in the Balkans. Bodansky further states that a key factor in determining the intensity of the war that occurred in the nineties was precisely the impact of foreign domination on two largest nations in the former Yugoslavia, which lasted for hundreds of years – virtually their entire modern history. In the 20th century, when both Serbs and Croats won independence, two nations already had a very special heritage and a concept of political culture, economic development, as well as social and religious consciousness. These dramatically different historical experiences and heritage shaped the political culture of the dominant South Slavic nations, and especially their mutual relations.

Throughout most of its history, not only Bosnia and Herzegovina, but also the

entire Balkans, was a territory divided by major cultural, religious and political units, who fought for the dominance and further expansion to the East or the West. This area used to define the boundary between the Western Roman Empire and the Eastern Byzantine Empire. It, then, became the dividing line between the Catholic and Orthodox Christianity, and, later, between the Western/European and Islamic/Turkish influence. The Balkans also represented the territory where Turkish and Austro-Hungarian Empire were battling for supremacy, and, after World War II, the Balkans became the border between the Western alliance and communist countries. For this reason, this region has always been a strategic zone of direct interests of the great powers, where their interpersonal conflicts took place, such as the conflicts between the Ottoman and Austro-Hungarian Empire, the Austro-Hungarian Empire and Tsarist Russia, the Axis and the Allies in World War II, and, somewhat less directly, between the Western alliance and the Warsaw Pact during the Cold war. These large divisions also caused deep rifts along ethnic and religious lines between nations in this part of Europe, leading to the formation of strong antagonisms and periodic conflicts, which were kept alive to the present day. For the purpose of the denomination of certain features of a series of events and conflicts between the Balkan states, in the late 19th and early 20th century, even some pejorative slogans were coined such as, for example, European 'powder keg' or the term 'Balkanization' (Stanovčić 2004: 9-35).

South Slavic nations had been developing for centuries under different historical influences in which different religions, customs and spiritual traditions were rooted – in a word, different cultural

matrixes as internal cohesive forces of the national unity. But as soon as foreign masters disappeared these differences began to corrosively erode state connective tissue (Koljević 1996: 46). Deep differences and strong animosities between the peoples in this part of Europe can be red about in various empirical studies of public opinion in the period after the fall of the Berlin Wall, and the authors of one of them from 1991 conclude the following, regarding the state of interethnic relations in post-communist Eastern Europe: 'We have already found out that the peoples of Eastern Europe, to put it simply, do not like their neighbours. Their ethnic divisions are so sharp and national intolerance so deep that the radical improvement of the relationship among them will not happen until the arrival of new generations' (Goati 2000: 66).

HISTORY AND NATIONAL IDENTITY OF SERBS, BOSNIAKS AND CROATS IN BH

As Sumantra Bose (2002: 10) rightly observes if there is one attribute that is indeed intrinsic to Bosnia past, present and, most probably, future – it is complexity and the fluidities, ambiguities and uncertainties that a complex historical legacy brings in its wake. A society shaped on the crossroads of empires for four centuries and on the cusp of competing modern nationalisms during a fifth, Bosnia defies simplistic categorisation.

From all parts of the Balkans, Bosnia and Herzegovina, most probably, suffered the deepest and most devastating impacts of the conflicts between the major world powers; Bosnia and Herzegovina's history is, in short, a history of peasant rebellions, wars and foreign occupations, intersected with the periods of social order (Bourg &

Shoup 1999: 34). For most of its history, Bosnia was a crossroads between Europe and Asia, Eastern and Western culture, Islam and Christianity, and conflicting national interests of international and regional factors. As Xavier Bougarel (2004: 45) emphasizes, for a long time Bosnia had been located at the crossroads of the impact of major monotheistic religions (Catholicism and Orthodoxy from the 11th century, the Christian West and the Muslim East from the 15th century). Bosnia is also characterised by constant migrations, including the settlement of South Slavs in the 7th century, as well as various religious conversions (acceptance of Christianity in the 9th century, the conversion from Catholicism to Orthodoxy and vice versa, starting from the 11th century, Bogomil heresy in the 13th and 14th century, partial Islamization between the 15th and 18th century).

Bugarel (2004: 45) further states that, in its history, Bosnia and Herzegovina was a scene of numerous military conflicts. In the middle Ages, the rivalry between South Slavic medieval states (Kingdom of Croatia, Serbia and Bosnia, principality of Hum) intersected the rivalries between Catholicism and Orthodoxy, and between regional powers (the Byzantine Empire, the Kingdom of Hungary, the Venetian Republic). Between the 14th and 19th century, with the integration of the South Slavs in the Ottoman Empire (Bulgaria, Serbia, Montenegro, Bosnia) or in the Austro-Hungarian monarchy (Slovenia, Croatia), the confrontation between Islam and Christianity was moved to the Balkans. The Ottoman conquest of Bosnia (1463) coincided, in fact, with the end of the Spanish Reconquista in Andalusia (1492). Therefore, Bosnia and Herzegovina, located at the northern borders of the Ottoman Empire, was

directly affected by the wars fought between the Ottoman Empire and the Austro-Hungarian monarchy, before it came under the administration of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy from 1878 to 1918. The author concludes that Bosnia and Herzegovina, as the periphery of the empire, was also a country where the wars of others fuelled the internal conflicts of Bosnian society and fed on them (Bugarel 2004: 45).

As a result of all this, Bosnian and Herzegovinian society is permeated with different influences and this diversity has made a major impact on the demographic and social structure of the region; it was, in fact, a decisive factor in the creation of antagonistic ethnic identities and strong national feelings. Specifically, as the cultural and religious mosaic in Bosnia and Herzegovina became more complex, the relations between different ethnic communities became more complicated; a rift was created between 'new' and 'old' groups, whose conflicts periodically escalated into violent clashes. These historical antagonisms are especially significant in the overall analysis of Bosnian and Herzegovinian history, especially when an additional historical fact is taken into account. Even though Bosnia and Herzegovina was under the rule of foreign occupying forces throughout most of its modern history, none of its three major ethnic groups – Serbs, Bosniaks and Croats – have never accepted the domination of the other one. Occasionally forced to obey external forces authority, such as the Ottoman Empire or Austria-Hungary, they have never been subjugated to one another. This fact alone can explain the events in Bosnia and Herzegovina after the disintegration of Yugoslavia. The fear of the domination of the other, more

powerful and more numerous ethnic group, as well as a determination that, under any circumstances, this dominance could not be accepted, led the people of Bosnia-Herzegovina to yet another bloody interethnic war. According to David Owen (1996: 29), history of the Balkans shows that there is a tradition of readiness for resolving disputes with the use of weapons and the acceptance of violent, even agreed relocation of the people as a result of war. This implies a culture of violence in a civilisation at the crossroads, where three religions, Orthodox Christianity, Islam and Roman Catholicism, divided communities and, in the dark and poisonous nationalism, occasionally became symbols of recognition.

Brutal interethnic conflicts, that periodically interrupted relatively calm periods in the history of Bosnia and Herzegovina, shaped the perception of the national consciousness of its residents, defining it mainly through the opposition to the 'other'. National identities of the three largest local ethnic communities were shaped in blood, mostly their own, spilled by their compatriots of different religion and nationality. In this way 'parallel' histories were created influencing, to a large extent, the creation of different 'realities' where the capacity for interethnic empathy represented the greatest collateral damage. The nations of Bosnia and Herzegovina (and of the entire Balkans) are generally characterised by a strong sense of empathy on a national basis, but lack of it for the 'hostile' communities, and, consequently, their victims.

It should be noted, however, that this history is characterised by the fact that most 'common' elements are interpreted in completely different ways. The history of Bosnia and Herzegovina, accepted by

the majority of its population, does not exist; analysing Serbian, Bosniak and Croat version of it, it could rather be concluded that it is about three different states than one country. The interpretation of history is, therefore, a key factor in understanding the structure and perception of the identity of the people in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Serbs, Bosniaks and Croats perceive their history in completely different ways, which often, if not always, contradict one another.

A good example of this parallel interpretation of historical events is given by Nedeljko Šipovac (2005) in his article about paradoxes in contemporary Bosnia and Herzegovina. According to Šipovac (2005: 415), as it turns out it is even clearer to laymen than the creators of the Dayton Peace Agreement and international actors that accompany its implementation in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and in other former republics of disintegrated Yugoslavia – exactly the same historical facts and events have completely different interpretations and meanings, depending on the ethnic group. The culmination could be represented by different interpretations of the assassination by Gavrilo Princip of the heir to the Austro-Hungarian Empire, Franz Ferdinand, in Sarajevo, on St. Vitus Day (Vidovdan) in 1914, and the name of the bridge on the river Miljacka. In fact, while the Yugoslav historiography between the two World Wars, as well as the one after World War II, treated the organisation Mlada Bosna (Young Bosnia) as a revolutionary youth association for the fight against the invaders of their homeland Bosnia and Herzegovina, and celebrated assassins as young, romantic revolutionaries, who thought that by individual armed activities the hated Austro-Hungarian Empire could

be brought down, Bosnia and Herzegovina, with Alija Izetbegovic as a president, representing itself in the civil war as a state of all three constituent nations, began interpreting this historic event quite differently. Both Mlada Bosna and its members were declared a terrorist organisation and the terrorists, and Most Gavrila Principa (the Bridge of Gavrilo Princip) was renamed to Most Princa Ferdinanda (the Bridge of Prince Ferdinand), which was annoying even for Austria, whose representatives intervened with the Bosniak authorities asking for both the bridge and the devastated old Museum of Mlada Bosna next to it and Principova stopa (Princip's foot) imprinted in the asphalt on the spot from which the gunman shot killing Ferdinand and his wife, to be left alone, because they already entered the history under that name, and everyday life as the most visited tourist attraction in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Different interpretations of 'the same' history do not represent a particular characteristic of the peoples in Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Balkans, but of the majority of ethnic and national communities that share 'the same', and yet different past and often lay claims to the same territory. Actually, the groups that share the same history often interpret their shared experiences in completely different, sometimes diametrically opposite ways. Their narratives about themselves and others - auto stereotypes and hetero stereotypes³

³ In an intercultural setting, one of the goals of the participant is getting to know the attitudes and personality of the communication partner. In this process, we usually apply both evidence and our existing beliefs about the members of the other group – these are called cultural

- can, in some way, be based on historical facts, but are so heavily modified that they hardly still resemble each other. Such stories define one group compared to another in antagonistic terms (Kolsto 2005).

The memories of certain traumatic events and periods in the history of the Balkans have always had an enormous significance in the national consciousness of the local population. As Miron Rezun notices (1995: 51), the more one delves into the topic of mutual hatred, the more he or she becomes aware of the fact that the Second World War in no way represents a part of history in the minds of the South Slavs. This terrible war is eternally present; it is constantly mentioned, and the new generations of children today learn about it as if it happened yesterday; memories of the war strengthen hatred and dislikes of the people. Rezun concludes that, therefore, what happened during the Second World War occupies a central place in the whole research of European and Yugoslav drama, because we cannot understand current events, if our memory of the past is weak. Most authors of the papers on the topic of Bosnia and Herzegovina emphasise the importance of history in explaining the mechanisms that led to the outbreak of interethnic violence in the nineties. According to Burg and Shoup (1999: 17), an explanation of what happened in the period from 1992 to 1995 lies in the

stereotypes. Stereotypes of this kind can concern our own group or the other group and, depending on this fact, they are called auto-stereotypes and hetero-stereotypes. Members of a certain group may also share common conceptions about the other party's stereotypical assumptions about themselves, or about the respective 'other' group.

manner in which the functional society was deliberately destroyed, and then replaced by a 'war of all against all' on ethnic grounds. The ease with which this was achieved is not a result of a deliberate act – regardless of whether we call it aggression or nationalism, but it can rather be explained by the interaction between external forces, the society of Bosnia and Herzegovina itself with its deep ethnic, regional and class cleavages, and history. The turbulent and violent history of Bosnia and Herzegovina did heighten fears and created ways of thinking that set up communal solidarity beyond mutual adjustment, and, therefore, must be taken into consideration in order to understand the war and the sequence of events in it. Different, yet mutually pervasive factors as reasons for the dissolution of the state and the outbreak of the wars in the nineties, are also emphasised by Leonard Cohen. According to Cohen (1995: 328), the three main factors behind the destructive processes in the former Yugoslavia are: First, the persistence and amplification of deep-seated animosities among various ethnic and religious groups living together for centuries in the Balkan region; second, the desire of many Yugoslav citizens to address injustices that occurred as a result of bloodshed among various ethnic groups during World War II; and, finally, the collapse of the national policy of the Communist regime.

The significance of the past is almost impossible to avoid in political analyses of the Bosnian war; In some cases, the conflict has been presented as a 'continuation of the long struggle between Islam and Christianity, i.e. the Ottoman Empire and the local Orthodox and Catholic populations' or as a 'collation of historical accounts between Serbs,

Muslims and Croats'. Although these views represent a significant simplification and, in some way, a distortion of a far more complex reality, the question of history, both the factual and mythological one, is crucial in understanding the motives and goals of the sides in conflict. Needless to say, the memory, commemorations and myths played an important role in the Bosnian war; the war would not be possible to understand if one ignored the role that the perception of the past played in understanding the history and present by its participants. Frequent references to historical events were used to legitimise the war efforts and mobilise the population, and political and military leaders often made 'historical parallels' to explain their actions.

The incredible impact of the history on the Balkan nations may, for the most part, explain the contemporary significance of religion and cultural identity in Bosnia and Herzegovina, given the fact that the animosity among Serbs, Bosniaks and Croats is far more a result of their conflicting historical roles, especially in the period of Ottoman governance, than their religiously conditioned, incompatible ways of living.⁴ In other words, Serbs and Croats associate Bosniaks, or Bosnian Muslims, with the conquests of the Ottoman Empire and the destruction of the

medieval Christian Bosnia and Herzegovina, as well as the sufferings of the Christian population during the centuries-long period of Ottoman governance. Given the fact that the medieval Slavs were Christians who came into contact with Islam only after their land had been seized and occupied by the Ottoman Empire, Slavic, i.e. Bosnian Muslims, are also perceived as 'traitors' of their own (Serbian/Orthodox or Croatian/Catholic), national and religious community. Branding of the Bosnian Muslims as 'Turks' by their Serbian and Croatian compatriots, although it is well known that most of them are of Slavic origin, is a good example of this perception. Therefore, Serbian and Croatian contempt for, and fear of 'Muslim' Bosnia are not, by themselves, the results of their animosity towards Islam or Muslims in general, but towards the Ottoman Turks and the Ottoman Empire, whose domination they had been subjected to for centuries.

The fear of subordination is not new in the Balkans; it has always dominated the lives of the people in Bosnia and Herzegovina, as well as in other regions of the peninsula, mainly due to their bitter historical experiences under the rule of the Ottoman Empire, but also because of the large number of interethnic conflicts in which vulnerable populations, settled in territories under hostile power, suffered huge losses. It should be noted that each regional and global war was followed by brutal interethnic conflicts among certain nations in the Balkans. This particularly applies to Bosnia and Herzegovina in which each collapse of a larger entity governing the country resulted in armed

⁴ The period of Ottoman governance is crucial to understanding the dynamics of interethnic relations in contemporary Bosnia and Herzegovina. Bosniak historiography views this period as a 'golden era', the most prosperous period in the history of the country, marked by the high achievements in all fields. On the other hand, Serbian and Croatian historians describe Ottoman Empire as a dungeon of their nations, a political system in which Christian population was being discriminated against in all walks of life.

conflicts among different ethnic communities.⁵

NATIONAL AND CIVIL IDENTITY IN CONTEMPORARY BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

Today, more than two decades after the end of the war, the international predicament in Bosnia is perhaps best described by a paradoxical phrase – power and powerlessness. An increasingly intrusive international presence has not produced the expected breakthroughs. The inability to change the balance of power between local and international elites decisively in the latter's favour – because of the support troublemaking local elites continue to command at the mass level – is a source of severe frustration (Bose 2002: 9).

Although international officials have always argued that the aim of the Dayton peace agreement was to establish a democratic and civil society in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and create mechanisms that would protect everyone's civil rights which would, eventually, diminish the importance of ethnic identities, both the past and the present reveal a different truth. Almost all political disputes between local political parties and leaders have been based on ethnic issues, and a

large number of problems arising between people in both entities are ethnically motivated. It seems that the only 'civil' body in the country is the international apparatus, which, to tell the truth, has long been trying to implement a policy of creating supranational identities in Bosnian and Herzegovinian society without much success. The attempts of 'national conversion', under a lower or higher degree of coercion, among the population of Bosnia and Herzegovina, however, are not a modern invention; something similar had been tried by the authorities of the Ottoman Empire, Austria-Hungary, and the authorities of the first and second Yugoslavia – it may, in fact, be said that since the second half of the 19th century, when the modern national identities emerged in Bosnia and Herzegovina, these identities have been systematically, institutionally, politically, sometimes even violently, repressed, suppressed and subverted, and that each time after the end of the domination of the entity that initiated the process of their transformation they would 'reappear' stronger and more stable than before. The impossibility of creating a 'Bosnian' identity, to an extent, may be contributed to the fact that Bosnia and Herzegovina, from the Middle Ages to the present day, has never been a self governed, independent state. As Mirjana Kasapović (2005: 13) points out, from the Middle Ages to the end of the 20th century Bosnia and Herzegovina was never an independent state so that the state could never play the integrational role which is apparently attributed to it. On the contrary, in the intensive processes of the national integrations on the South-Slavonic territories in the second half of the 19th century and the first half of the 20th century it belonged to different state

⁵ Since the late 19th century every collapse of the larger entity that governed Bosnia and Herzegovina resulted in the mass violence between local ethnic groups – Serbs, Bosniaks and Croats fought each other after the withdrawal of ottoman forces, between 1875 and 1878 after the collapse of Austria-Hungary, between 1914 and 1918, after the fall of First Yugoslavia, from 1941 untill 1945, and, most recently, after the fall of Second Yugoslavia, from 1992 untill 1995.

entities – the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy and the monarchical Yugoslavia – in which the Croatian and the Serbian communities lived in Croatia and in Serbia. So the Croats and the Serbs in Bosnia and Herzegovina were not created through the 'nationalist propaganda by the neighbors' but were a part of the processes of the integration of the Croatian and the Serbian nations within the same state entities. The processes of national integration among the Croats and the Serbs have been completed and it would be useless to expect that the Bosnian state, practically reconstructed from the outside after the civil war, will be able to 'delete' their results and redirect them into the processes of the creation of a new Bosnian or Bosniac nation. That the creation of a state is not a sufficient condition for creating a nation is best illustrated by the failed attempt at creating a Yugoslav nation after the establishment of the Yugoslav state in 1918.

It can be concluded that the conflicting historical roles and the perception of these roles, therefore, are major obstacles to the stability and preservation of Bosnia and Herzegovina. 'Multiethnic' society based on completely different histories and different historical and contemporary truths does not have many chances for a long-term stability, given the fact that some kind of a common, generally accepted history is necessary for the establishment of a functioning community in a post-conflict environment. To be successfully implemented, the reconciliation of ethnic and national groups and countries at the macro level requires the acceptance of a joint 'truth' – a reliable narrative of the events of the

past – as a basis of a general belief in a common future (Dwyer 1999: 81-98).⁶

At the same time, the creation and preservation of the culture of an ethnic or national group largely depends on its special features in comparison with other cultures, especially neighbouring and/or rival ones. Each culture constructs its discourses in contrast to another culture, thus enabling it to see itself as a stable, unified culture, as a bearer of moral values (Horowitz 1985). Different interpretations of similar characteristics (such as a language or customs) or events (such as different historical periods) hereby become the manners of defence and protection of a 'unique' way of living and a system of values. The key element in all this is a comparison. Collectives will observe themselves in relation to others, so that ethnicity is neither exclusively created internally, nor merely defined by

⁶ However, Bosnia and Herzegovina is still very far from a mutually accepted version of any period in its modern history. Historical accounts differ sharply, depending on the ethnic group. Each group holds its own version of the country's history, and the respective versions are reflected in each side's rhetoric. This historical rhetoric has become a crucial part of the ongoing conflict – each side holds its own biases; those biases affect the way each side interprets the past; these biased interpretations are repeated and circulated as if they were a fact, thus further feeding and strengthening partisan bias on both sides. In such a conflict it becomes increasingly difficult to uncover the *authentic* history due to the continual cycle of interpretation and propaganda. In this way, historical 'facts' can add significantly to a conflict's intractability; see: Schultz, N. 2003. 'Historical Facts' in G. Burgess and Heidi Burgess (eds.). *Beyond Intractability*. Boulder: Conflict Information Consortium, University of Colorado.

its external borders, but it is a constant interaction between these two processes. In addition, it is an unfolding process, a continuous creation of contemporary discourses, a piece of work that still lacks its final form, although those participating in it perceive it as stable, even static.

CONCLUSION

During most of its history Bosnia and Herzegovina was a crossroads of various civilisations, religions and cultures, in whose territory influences of Europe and Asia, Eastern and Western culture, Islam and Christianity, as well as various national and state interests of regional and international mutually permeated. As a result of these factors Bosnian and Herzegovian society has been imbued with different influences under which antagonistic national identities were formed and brutal ethnic conflicts provoked in different historical periods. The rich and complex history of this country, which enabled the creation of the existing ethnic mosaic, actually reflects the basic problem of its society; for a very long period of time Bosnia and Herzegovina's nations have been living in a world of parallel truths that is nothing more than a collection of their personal and collective experiences from different historical periods. As Nenad Kecmanović points out (2007: 7), both Turkish occupation and the Austro-Hungarian annexation and two Yugoslavias, including even NDH interlude, one of the three nations remembered as a golden age, and the other two as a prison of the nation. There is no any big event in the history of the country that was experienced in the same way by all three nations, either as a date of a common triumph and pride, or as a common misfortune and suffering,

but instead every event separated them along ethnic lines into victors and defeated, heroes and martyrs, patriots and traitors. Mirjana Kasapović (2005: 7) also highlights the fact that the political history of this country has been characterized by the coexistence and the conflict of three major religious and ethnic segments: Catholic-Croatian, Muslim-Bosniac, and Orthodox-Serbian. The religious segments began taking shape as far back as the 11th century following the collapse of the integral Christian community into the Western and the Eastern Church, and were intensified during the islamization of a part of the Bosnian Christian population under the rule of the Ottoman Empire (1463-1878). Historically speaking, the religious cleavages were the first to emerge; in the processes of the establishment of modern ethnic and national communities they morphed into ethnic and national cleavages. The nature of the cleavages and the resulting conflicts were affected by numerous factors, primarily foreign rule. Of the three states that ruled Bosnia from the mid-1400s to the end of the 20th century, the Muslims religiously and politically felt allegiance only to the Ottoman Empire, the Croats to the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy (1878-1918), and the Serbs to Yugoslavia (1918-1992). In more than five centuries of a shared history, the members of the three major religious and ethnic communities never permanently, unitedly and massively stood behind one state. Only one community would do so, while the members of the other two would be adversaries or enemies of the incumbent ruling power. This centuries-old division was also manifested in the 1990s in the different attitude of the three communities to the idea of an independent Bosnian state.

The conflicting relations between Bosnia and Herzegovina's peoples have always been endangering the state tissue preventing the centralisation of power within it. As Momčilo Subotić emphasizes (2012: 273), historical experience has shown that Bosnia and Herzegovina could be unitary and centralised only under the external occupation and as a corpus separatum or an autonomous republic within the broader framework of government. Although the civil war ended more than twenty years ago, Bosnia and Herzegovina could hardly be described as a stable state, even harder as a self-sustaining one; strictly speaking, Bosnia and Herzegovina is maintained by a complex and cumbersome apparatus of international institutions, which vowed on the idea of preserving the 'multicultural' society at any cost. What would happen or what will happen when the international community leaves this territory is a question that is difficult, if not impossible to answer at this moment. However, there is only one thing that is certain at this time – the consensus in Bosnia and Herzegovina does not exist regarding many important state issues, and if there is something all three constituent nations agree about, it is only the desire for autonomy in decision-making on important political and ethnic issues and, most importantly, disabling the 'others' to decide on these matters.

REFERENCES

Azar, E. F. (1990). *The Management of Protracted Social Conflict: Theory and Cases*. Hampshire: Dartmouth.

Bodansky, Y. *Offensive in the Balkans - The Potential for a Wider War as a Result of a Foreign Intervention in Bosnia and*

Herzegovina, The International Strategic Studies Association,
<http://www.balkania.net>.

Bose, S. (2002). *Bosnia and Herzegovina: Nationalist Partition and International Intervention*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Breuilly, J. (1994). *Nationalism and the State*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Bugarel, K. (2004). *Bosna – Anatomija rata*. Beograd: Edicija reč.

Burg, S. L. & P. S. Shoup. (1999). *The War in Bosnia-Herzegovina: Ethnic Conflict and International Intervention*. London: M.E. Sharpe.

Cohen, L. J. (1995). *Broken Bonds: Yugoslavia's Disintegration and Balkan Politics in Transition*. Oxford: Westview Press.

Connerton, P. (1989). *How Societies Remember*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

Dwyer, S. (1999). 'Reconciliation for Realists', *Ethics and International Affairs* 13: 81-98.

Gillis, J. R. (1994). 'Memory and Identity: The History of a Relationship' in J. R. Gillis (ed.), *Commemorations: The Politics of National identity*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Goati, V. (2000). 'A model of democracy in Southeast Europe', *Democratization processes in countries in transition*. Belgrade: IDN.

Horowitz, D. (1985). *Ethnic Groups in Conflict*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Kasapović, M. (2005). 'Bosnia and Herzegovina: Consociational or Liberal Democracy', *Politička misao* 17, 5: 3-30.

Kecmanović, N. (2005). *Dometi demokratije*. Beograd: FPN.

Kecmanović, N. (2007). *Nemoguća država*. Beograd: Filip Višnjić.

Kolsto, P. (ed.). (2005). *Myths and Boundaries in Southeastern Europe*. London: Hurst & Company.

Koljević, N. (1996). *Od Platona do Dejtona – Zapisi o državi našim povodom*. Banja Luka: Glas Srpski.

Nikiforov, K. (2005). 'Mjesto i uloga Dejtonskog sporazuma na postjugoslovenskom prostoru', In *Republika Srpska – Deset godina Dejtonskog mirovnog sporazuma*. Banja Luka: Akademija nauka i umjetnosti Republike Srpske.

Oven, D. (1996). *Balkanska odiseja*. Beograd: Radio B92.

Report of the International Commission to Inquire into the Causes and Conduit of the Balkan Wars. (1914). Washington D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. 1914.

Rezun, M. (1995). *Europe and War in the Balkans: Towards a New Yugoslav Identity*. London: Praeger.

Schopflin, G. (2000). *Nations, Identity, Power: The New Politics of Europe*. London: Hurst & Company.

Schultz, N. (2003). 'Historical Facts' in G. Burgess and Heidi Burgess (eds.). *Beyond Intractability. Conflict Information Consortium*. Boulder: University of Colorado.

Smith, A. D. (2010). *Nationalism*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Stanovčić, V. (2004). *Democracy and Minorities in Southeastern Europe, Prospects of Multiculturalism in Western Balkan States*. Belgrade.

Subotić, M. (2012). *Identitet i geopolitička stvarnost Srba*. Beograd: Institut za političke studije.

Šipovac, N. (2005). 'Suštinu Dejtona ne znaju ni njegovi moćni donosioci' u *Republika Srpska – Deset godina Dejtonskog mirovnog sporazuma*. Banja Luka: Akademija nauka i umjetnosti Republike Srpske.

Williams, R. M. (2004). *The Wars Within: Peoples and States in Conflict*. New Delhi: Manas Publications.

ЗАРОБЉЕНИ У ПРОШЛОСТИ

Историја и идентитет етничких група у Босни и Херцеговини

Кључне ријечи

Историја, национални идентитет, Босна и Херцеговина, босанскохерцеговачке нације

Аутор

Др Јелена Вукоичић је докторирала политичке науке на Универзитету у Београду и данас је ванредни професор.

Кореспонденција

jelenavukoicic1@gmail.com

Област

Политикологија

Сажетак

У овом чланку ауторка анализира улогу историје у стварању и афирмацији националних идентитета етничких група у Босни и Херцеговини. Национални идентитети локалних колективитета створени су и обликовани под утицајем бурне историје ове земље која се, у највећој мери, састоји од ратова, устанака, окупација и честих политичких криза. Треба истаћи да је главни проблем босанскохерцеговачког друштва заправо рефлексија богате и комплексне историје - Током веома дугог периода босанскохерцеговачке нације су живеле у свету паралелних истина које заправо представљају колекцију њихових личних и колективних искустава у различитим историјским периодима. Сукобљене историјске улоге и перцепције тих улога су главне препреке за стабилност и очување Босне и Херцеговине. 'Мултиетничко' друштво засновано на потпуно различитим историјским и савременим истинама нема много шансе за дугорочну стабилност, с обзиром да је нека врста заједничке широко прихваћене историје неопходна за успостављање функционалне заједнице у постконфликтном окружењу.

DOI

10.5937/pol1612072V

UDK

94:323.1(497.6)

Датум пријема чланка

11.10.2016.

Датум коначног прихватања чланка за објављивање

05.11.2016.