



DIALOG – MER ENN ORD

Jubileumsskrift for Nansen Dialog

1995–2005

Heidrun Sørli Røhr (red.)

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ETHNICITIES IN BOSNIA & HERZEGOVINA: BEING YOURSELF – MISSION IMPOSSIBLE

Nebojša Šavija-Ualha

One of the first questions that foreigners¹ ask me after they find out that I am from Bosnia and Herzegovina (B&H) is: “Which ethnic group do you belong to?” Faced with this question, I am always curious about what the agenda behind such a question is. First, what leads a person to ask such a question? Secondly, what does it mean to them when they get an answer?

Being able to ask such a question indicates that they have certain knowledge of B&H. Most probably, they know that there was a war in B&H and that the three ethnic groups, living there, were involved in it. It might also be the case that they have deeper insight and a certain position with regard to the situation there.

But, what can they get from my answer? In the majority of cases, I guess they get a more “secure” position for continuing our conversation. The answer will trigger instant discursive preparation. The person will choose a code of communication that consists of positions, stands, perspectives, and even tones of communication, which they apply (or want to apply) in communication with members of a specific ethnic group from B&H. It does not matter whether this code implies in a given situation agreement, sympathy, political correctness, neutrality, disagreement, or antagonism, it is still the code that is based upon their given image of a certain ethnic group from B&H and of course the general situation in that country as they see it.

¹ The term foreigner denominates all those coming from outside B&H, the “real” foreigners, outside of ex-Yugoslavia, and “our” foreigners coming from other parts of ex-Yugoslavia.

Such discursive preparation “secures” a relatively comfortable environment where conversation could be relatively easily controlled and predicted.

This means that there is an assumption made that there are three distinctive ethnic groups in B&H, namely Bosniaks,² Serbs and Croats. That is also to say that each of these groups has its distinctive cultural matrix that shapes their behavior³ and that different codes of communication could or should be exercised in relation to them.

I will suggest in this text that this is both right and wrong, and that the situation is far more complex than any of the actors (domestic or international) recognize. It has been common for political decisions regarding B&H at all levels, local and international, to be based on oversimplification of the conditions and relations in B&H. And, these simplifications were made with regard to the interpretation of ethnic-national identity.

There are some theories that argue that these simplifications were/are intentional. Not being inclined to the discourse of conspiracy theories, I will suggest that these simplifications are a product of a specific type of ignorance, certain *a priori* assumptions of mechanisms of ethnic-national identity formation and politics. David Campbell calls these assumptions ontological assumptions.

This conjunction of territorial representation, population identification, and historical determination means that for all the significant differences in the narratives we examined here, they give rise

2 A note on terminology. There are three main ethnic groups in Bosnia and Herzegovina: Bosniaks, Croats and Serbs. Foreigners still predominantly use the term “muslims” when referring to Bosniaks. In the seventies in Yugoslavia, this group was officially recognized as an ethnic group and termed “Musliman”. This was in contrast to the term “musliman” used to designate religious identity. Today most Musliman consider themselves Bosniaks, though some still use the term Musliman. The latter term is also still used by non-Bosniak nationalists. The term Bosniak, designating ethnicity, should not be confused with Bosanac, which denotes territorial belonging.

3 From ideology through clothing to language, etc.

to an order of representation we might understand in terms of what Derrida calls “ontopology.”⁴

Ontopology is a neologism that signifies the connection of the “ontological value of present-Being to its situation, to the stable and presentable determination of locality, the topos of territory, native soil, city, body in general.”⁵ A key assumption – if not the most important assumption – that informs the dominant understandings of the Bosnian war discussed above is that the political possibilities have been limited by the alignment between territory and identity, state and nation, all under the sign of “ethnicity,” supported by a particular account of history.⁶

In other words, as was mentioned earlier, the ontopological assumption is that B&H is a territory where the three distinctive ethnic groups have been living for centuries. According to predominant simplifications of national understanding of the relationship among ethnic groups, land and a state, an ethnic group claims a certain territory as its own land and through national movements articulates it into an exclusive national state. A *one ethnic group – one territory – one nation – one state* principle applied to the situation in B&H logically produces the idea of permanent antagonism and hatred among the ethnic groups sharing the same territory for centuries. From that perspective it is easier to comprehend the level of violence found in the recent war in B&H, and to jump to the conclusion that the ultimate solution for B&H should be its division into nationally exclusive units that might then negotiate certain relations between themselves, e.g. confederation, federation etc.

4 David Campbell, *National Deconstruction – Violence, Identity, and justice in Bosnia*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, London, 1998, p 80.

5 Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International*, New York, Routledge, 1994 quoted from David Campbell, Op.Cit. p. 80.

6 David Campbell, Ibid. p. 80

Moreover, this account is central not only to macronarratives of the observer-interpreters but to the micronarratives of at least one of the protagonists in the conflict. As such, whether explicitly or implicitly...we can conclude that the dominant narratives of media and the academy have operated in terms that have helped legitimize and sustain geopolitical positions of extreme nationalists.⁷

The predominance of an ethnic register understood in this way has been operative throughout preparations for the war, during the war, and even for getting peace agreements in B&H.⁸ And all major actors on the scene, local and international, ultimately operate with it. But one can argue that in different phases, not everyone involved has used such an approach.

During the war the government of the Republic of B&H, predominantly consisted of Bosniaks, but also with considerable numbers of Serbs and Croats (who did not fall under the pressure of nationalist parties). This government promoted the concept of citizenship rather than ethnicity for B&H⁹. A dominant narrative of this group included the idea that the war in B&H was a case of aggression from neighboring countries rather than a civil war. But by accepting the conditions of various peace treaties, Bosniaks from the government of B&H, ultimately accepted the ethnic register.

On the other hand, Serbs governed by SDS¹⁰ have exclusively used the ethnic register in all the phases of the war, concluding from it that the war in B&H was a civil war. Croats, lead by HDZ,¹¹ have been alternating between these two positions depending on the po-

7 Ibid.

8 Both the Washington peace agreement that constituted the Federation of B&H, and the Dayton peace agreement that constituted B&H as it is now, consisting of FB&H, Republika Srpska and District Brčko.

9 The concept of citizenship was pushed by several different groups of all ethnicities even before the war. But nationalist Serbs and Croats have been interpreting the Bosniak's devotion to liberal citizenship to be influenced by their ethnic interest in being in majority.

10 Serbian Democratic Party – SDS is a Serbian nationalist party

11 Croatian Democratic Union – HDZ is a Croatian national party.

litical situation and the real balance of power. Representatives of the international community (IC) have almost exclusively been using the ethnic register.

One can conclude that a focus on ethnic solutions marginalized any other possible political approach to solving the crisis in B&H. Obviously it has turned out to be ultimately impossible to solve the crisis based on this ethnic principle, simply because such an ideology does not correspond to the situation, unless it produces it. There is a fundamental deficit between the signifier and the signified. What does this actually mean? We have a paradox at work: the use of the ethnic principle where the very ethnicities¹² are questionable. Or more precisely, one has been producing and imposing ethnic categories while exercising the ethnic principle.¹³ It is a game in which no one wins, since there is always a certain deficit, either on the side of establishing principle or on the side of established ethnicities. Because of these deficits in the game, B&H is “condemned” to constant post-war crisis management.

I will not plead here for other political solutions for B&H, but I will suggest a different anthropological approach to identities in B&H, which might deconstruct the ontopological approach.¹⁴

As Campbell points out: “Violence, history, and ethnicity are concepts central to the conventional narrativizations of the conflict in Bosnia”.¹⁵ And I will not challenge that convention. Moreover, I will fully rely upon these concepts, but somehow I am trying to de-territorialize or put them in other contexts.

My first challenge in this regard is to de-temporalize and de-historicize historical events in B&H. Rather than historical facts, I will consider them as elements in a narrative structure.¹⁶

12 As an ontopological construction

13 Which has been and continues to be the main objective of extreme nationalists

14 Which is in line with what Campbell suggests, but concentrating on the internal (ethnic) identity dynamics.

15 Campbell p. 92.

16 Doing this, I invent nothing new. Actually I am acting in the same way as the national elites do: history is used, manipulated and constructed for the purpose of present claims, not on behalf historical ones.

In the following consideration, ethnicity will be in focus. As mentioned earlier, the ethnic register is dominant in all narratives of B&H and it is the very core of the ontological assumption. This is no coincidence, since ethnicity as such has become a main issue in the social sciences in the last decades. And it is not only a scientific term in B&H, but one central to human practice. It becomes the political issue *par excellence*, whether speaking about postcolonial recovery of countries of the so-called Third World, immigration to the West, or about post-socialist countries of Eastern Europe.

The first question arising from this is whether it is possible to find common denominators of ethnicity in all these contexts. The second is which explicit or implicit theories of ethnicity are used to shape the ontological notion of ethnicity at the basis of attempts to resolve the crisis in B&H? Giving a thorough analysis or answers to these questions is far beyond the range of this text. But what could be interesting for this discussion is to indicate possible paradigms, which form the basis for different theories that inform these ontological notions of ethnicity. This categorization does not exclude the possibility for these theories to float among the different paradigms and that many of them were, consciously or unconsciously, used to build the notions of ethnicity.

First, there are primordial theories,¹⁷ which put ethnicity in the sphere of biological or cultural inheritance. Inheritance appears as a primary fact that forms the “unexplainable” quality of an ethnic group. Second, we have sociobiological theories, which are also in the primordialist category, based on the belief that “an ethnic culture is nothing else than a means for maximizing survival opportunities and group reproduction”.¹⁸ Third, there are the instrumentalist and mobilization theories which “regard ethnicity as a resource to be mobilized in gaining political power and economical profit”.¹⁹

17 See more on this classification in: Philippe Poutignat, Jocelyne Streiff-Fenart, *Théories de l'ethnicité*, Presses universitaires de France, 1995. Here quoted from Serbian translation, Filip Putinja, Žoslin Stref-Fenar, *Teorije o etnicitetu*, XX VEK, Beograd 1997.

18 Philippe Poutignat, Jocelyne Streiff-Fenart, *Ibid.* p. P.106.

19 *Ibid.* p. 107.

Fourth, neo-Marxist theories interpret ethnicity as a reflection of economical antagonisms. Fifth, neo-cultural approaches are focused on symbolic systems of differentiation of ethnic groups.

Unfortunately, lack of space does not allow me to elaborate links of these paradigms and theories of belonging in building the ontological assumption. But even at a glance one can recognize narratives used in justifying connections between ethnicity, territory and its resources, violence, etc.

Finally, we have theories on ethnicity as social interaction. In this setting there are situational analyses of ethnicity that “study production and usage of nominators by which members of multiethnic societies identify and differ among themselves, and it also study tactical choices and strategies which they use to get as much as possible from interethnic relationships”.²⁰

The latter approach, which has been developed from a turn that Fredrik Barth introduced in anthropology, seems to me the most applicable in analyzing the ethnic situation in B&H beyond prevailing narratives. But this approach also has the highest epistemological potential; since it does not deny characteristics that previous theories explain, but rather considers them as consequences or strategies of ethnic differentiations.²¹

In this context, differentiation gets a central position in research: the cultural content is not important; it is important how the content is manipulated to differentiate between “us” and “them”. Ethnicity is not an independent entity. It exists only and exclusively in this active difference, which is always and from the beginning produced, and which is completely arbitrary in relation to the cultural material from which it is made of.²²

²⁰ Ibid. p. 131

²¹ Fredrik Barth (Ed.): *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries*, Universitetsforlaget, Oslo - Bergen - Tromsø, 1982. Here quoted from Fredrik Bart, *Etnicke grupe i njihove granice*, in *Teorije o etnicitetu* p. 216-217.

²² Arbitrary here does not mean that any content could be used as the differentiation material. It simply means that there is no law how to privilege one available content over another, and that the content with the least differentiation potential could become key element in the process of differentiation.

Historically,²³ the territory of B&H is characterized by permanent migrations, conquest, and cultural and ideological influences and compulsions during the last thousand years and particularly in the last two centuries.²⁴ Such dynamics made internal consolidation of B&H society and creation of autochthon elites to lead the consolidation impossible.²⁵ Furthermore, B&H society has very early been constituted as, and has remained basically a colonial society. This means, that internal coherence has mainly been established in relation to external agents. Within such a setting it is possible to notice a relatively stabile range of the populations' behavior: relatively short resistance to a colonial power – adaptation – antagonistic acculturation.

After a relatively short resistance to the colonial power,²⁶ a process of adaptation to the colonial power comes, and finally there is adoption of its ideology and cultural matrix through forming a new specific identity. This process never covers the whole population and there are always significant residues of the previously created identities. So during Christianization we see many pagan habits remaining, the Bosnian Church existed during and after several crusades initiated by the Pope, Islamization saw remnants of Christianity left

23 Again I appeal for understanding the historical events in this text as de-temporal, structural ones

24 Very instructive historical overviews of B&H from the inter-ethnic relations perspective were given in Robert J. Donia, John V.A. Fine, Jr, *Bosnia and Herzegovina - A Tradition Betrayed*, Hurst and Company, London, 1994.

25 Donia and Fine argue that during the medieval period Bosnians, divided among Catholic, Orthodox and Bosnian Churches, were by no means good believers: the clergy was small in numbers, usually quite illiterate, churches were small and used almost exclusively by nobles". p. 43-44. "Rulers and nobles (unlike their contemporaries in most of Europe, including the nobility of Serbia and Croatia) were indifferent to religious issues. They intermarried and formed alliances across denominational lines; when it suited their worldly aims, they changed faith easily. They made no attempt to proselytize for their own faiths or to persecute others, consciously resisting calls from the Pope or the Hungarians to prosecute those of other faiths." p. 26. "As a result, few Christians were deeply attached to any Christian Church or religious community, be it through belief or through sense of community." p. 44.

26 Meaning several years.

behind, and with secularization, elements of a religiously differentiated society.

Precisely this difference of “old” and newly created identities allows the transfer of a “them” from the colonial power to intra-society groups, where the group, which is ideologically identified and antagonistically acculturated with the colonial power, takes a relatively dominant function in the society.²⁷ Political and symbolic differentiations occur within this hierarchical relationship. This continuous process never stops. The continuity is shown by a tendency of a permanent switch of identities over time, and mainly but not exclusively in the form of taking on the dominant identity.²⁸

Donia and Fine show in the case of Ottoman conquest:

After 1463 Islam appeared on the scene. It was a dynamic, well-preached new religion, having the advantage of being the religion of the conquering state...Moreover, in many cases, religious motives may not have been predominant in causing people to accept the new faith. And, finally, acceptance is a better word than conversion to describe what occurred in Bosnia. Probably few Bosnians in accepting Islam underwent any deep changes in patterns of thought or way of life. Most of those who became Muslims probably continued to live as they always had, retaining most of their domestic customs and many Christian practices. They adopted with conversion a few Islamic practices, which quickly would have acquired great symbolic value and would soon have come to be viewed as the essentials of Islam.²⁹

Since this choice is primarily determined by external factors it stays merely at the manifestation and the surface level. In this context, the newly formed dominant identity is brutally affirmed to the

27 In a lack of their own elites, they rely upon colonial elites.

28 After the Ottomans came, not all conversions were towards Islam, many switched from one form of Christianity to the other. Ibid. p. 35.

29 Ibid. p.44 (Italics in original)

colonial power by the strongest intra-group compulsions and inter-group antagonism.

But this inter-group antagonism is not to be interpreted as an interethnic antagonism. As Donia and Fine conclude:

...despite its ad nauseam repetition in the international press, nowhere do we find evidence of the alleged centuries of hatred (whether religious or ethnic) among various Bosnian groups that has supposedly permeated their history.³⁰

Also they show that “few Bosnians’ ever referred to themselves as Serbs or Croats, and those who did were to be found in border regions”³¹. And such a situation stayed until the nineteenth century.³² So from this point of view, the centuries long ethnic hatred and antagonism are nonsense.

The antagonism is to be considered more in social or class terms: the dominant group in close connection with the colonial power has privileges that are challenged by those who are unprivileged. Simultaneously with this hierarchical antagonism, the dominant group creates channels of an inter-group interaction and looks for *modus vivendi* in everyday life.

This interplay and mutual interdependence of group antagonism and cooperation could be seen on two levels. Both elites and population play in double registers. Seen from the perspectives of the political leadership, the elites play the game of cooperation with colonial power. Simultaneously, across the vertical line toward the grassroots they increase group tensions, by insisting on antagonism.³³

On the other side, the general population has no major problem with inter-group communication at the grassroots or the horizontal

³⁰ Ibid. p.7

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid. p. 73.

³³ The structure of these double registers is shown by Rastko Mocnik in *The Balkans as an Element in Ideological Mechanisms*, in: *Balkan as Metaphor: Between Globalization and Fragmentation*, Ed. Dušan I. Bijelic, Obrad Savic, The MIT Press, Cambridge Massachusetts, London, England, 2002. p. 79-85.

level; rather they cooperate in everyday life in social and cultural spheres without significant limitations. But on the political, vertical level, they immediately take a self-defensive, antagonistic position toward the other (dominant) group.

This is due to the fact that the dominant identity owes its very existence and position exactly to the differentiation towards the non-dominant group. In this differentiation play, the colonial power ultimately appears only as an active phantasm, “transcendentally signified” that makes the play possible. The colonial power becomes an empty space that might be filled by any content.³⁴ As such it contains endless potential for differentiation. In a given condition, each of the potentials could create a chain of signifiers that arbitrarily signify identities and their relationships: Christianity, Bosnian Church, Islam, communism and nationalism are discursive practices of identification in B&H society and simultaneously efficient survival strategies in a given geostrategic setting. And none of these identities/strategies ever appeared as firm and distinct ones.

Speaking with contemporary vocabulary, B&H has always been the postmodern society *par excellence*, in which only differences exist without any positive determination. And in the context of a national constitution according to the principle: *one ethnic group – one territory – one nation – one state*, B&H is basically an uprooted nation³⁵, open to continuous usurpations and various ideological modalities.

Being open and indeterminable, the ideologies are short lived yet extremely intensive. They are short lived since no lasting monolithic authority has ever been possible in B&H due to the constant changes to which B&H society has been exposed.³⁶ These ideologies, lacking any authoritative, inclusive, closing element, tend to dissolve

34 That might be imagined as a conqueror, even pure ideology.

35 In this regard any advocacy among political leftist and civic activists for the Bosnian nation is naive and a romantic kind of sentiment.

36 Even the myth of “transcendentally signified” is questionable. Although very submissive at first appearance, precisely pragmatic, Bosnians developed an extreme sense for irony and self-irony. Any success, any insistence on something, any difference, any grandeur, and any celebrity are instantly laughed at. Beyond politics, humor and irony are everyday mechanisms for keeping society quite egalitarian and basically stable.

themselves under the force of entropy. These ideologies are intensive since they are built by a recurring and powerful surge in the production of symbols that claim to signify something that cannot really be signified; the distinct ethnic self, “us” as opposed to “them”. War appears as the ultimate mechanism for attempting to do this.

In this respect, it is no accident that the first ethnic clash in B&H history actually took place during WWII³⁷. It was a consequence of centrifugal powers from Serbian and Croatian neighbors, having ontopological claims over B&H population and territory since the nineteenth century. Violence was used as the ultimate tool for ethnic differentiation.

So the ethnic identity could actually be understood as a quite new form of identification within B&H society. Due to the Ottoman legacy and its *millet* system, group differentiation was only possible according to religion. So the religious difference was the only difference capable of denominating belonging to a certain group.

The identification of the ethnic groups as such, actually starts in the moment when religion is withdrawn from the public sphere.

Nineteenth century strategies of nation building were based on this principle: Orthodox were Serbs, Catholics were Croats. These strategies followed/preserved the *millet* patterns, partly introducing secular society by introducing the ethnic name, which at the same time is inseparable from its religious origins.

The post-war socialist regime has continued to confirm the existence of ethnic identities in B&H. Under the pressure of communist radical secularization, secularized religious groups became the ethnic groups and at the same time *Ethnos* became *demos*, a plural element within a homogenized communist ideology.³⁸ Still, the religious origin of the nation is preserved although religion itself is mar-

37 Donia, John V.A. Fine, Jr, Op.Cit. p. 11.

38 See: Ugo Vlaisavljevic, Jugoslovenski komunizam i poslije: kontinuitet etnopolitike, (Yugoslav Communism and After it; Continuity of Ethno-politics) Journal STATUS, No. 2, 2004, Mostar. p. 118-123.

ginalized. So the *millet* system persisted throughout the communist regime, and even today.³⁹

The “final” constitution of the ethnic groups happened with the fall of the communist ideology and by creating new ethnic semi-otic universes. A production of new symbolic orders and histories is open and visible in everyday life.⁴⁰ And in this process the religions played the main homogenizing role. After the pre-communist religions’ comeback, the society is again divided along religious lines. One cannot think of Bosniaks, Serbs and Croats in B&H beyond their religious belonging,⁴¹ simply because the religious difference among them is the only significant difference.⁴²

The role of ideology becomes very apparent in the process of ethnic constitution of B&H. But ideology itself cannot complete the job. It must be supported by “reality”. There must be some differences in “reality”. And the war as “the ultimate reality”⁴³ “proves” a prime difference between “us” and “them”, the human and the beast. Again, the war was an attempt to complete the process of ethnic differentiation.⁴⁴ And again it turns out to be a “mission impossible”.

Beyond political strategies, or even despite them, one can question whether Bosniaks’ insisting on aggression includes an alibi to their neighbors, Bosnian Serbs, who would never have attacked them unless manipulated from Serbia. The insistence on Serbian

39 Usually the question of ethnic belonging asked by a Bosnian is actually: what is your belief? And the answer is Bosniak (Muslim), Croat (Roman Catholic) or Serb (Christian Orthodox).

40 Three new languages are invented, some marginal historical personalities are promoted as important national characters; streets, schools, kindergartens are named after them, etc.

41 Even when they declare themselves as atheists.

42 All others are myths or political manipulation exercised very efficiently by the elites.

43 On War as the ultimate reality see: Ugo Vlaisavljevic, *South Slav Identity and Ultimate War-Reality in: Balkan as Metaphor* Op.cit.

44 Not to be understood as if I claim that a cause of the war is the need for ethnic differentiation, but just that one of the functions of the war is to strengthen the ethnic divisions.

aggression somehow diminishes the responsibility of Bosnian Serbs for the war.

Or one might make an hypothesis on the destruction of places of worship during war. It can be seen not as a symbolic act of ultimate destruction of the other ethnicity, but rather as destruction of the only significant difference among neighbors.⁴⁵ At an unconscious level the act actually says: “We are the same”. It can be argued that this act is not a recognition of the other, but quite contrary, its denial and hence the violence. But, structurally speaking, the argument cannot justify how Bosnians recognized each other, quite contrary, this recognition is hard, if not impossible to achieve. The fact that Bosnians belong to different religions does not mean that they perceive each other in the term of otherness. Bosnians recognize the other only as the Great Other, which is “always” conqueror, the enemy, always dominant. Finally “we⁴⁶” are all the same, “we” are all *raja*.⁴⁷ So if you transfer these images to the internal relation, as was proposed above, one actually deals with those “pretending” otherness.⁴⁸

And still we had the “typical” Bosnian matrix. Even today’s continuous ethnic constitution and self-confirmation has a “colonial” tinge, whether it is related to the potential colonial power of “moth-

45 Nebojsa Savija Valha: *Razaranje hramova u Bosni i Hercegovini – Etnopshioanalitička skica* (Destruction of Temples in Bosnia and Herzegovina – An Ethno-psychoanalytical Outline), Journal ALBUM, Sarajevo No. 10. p. 226-230.

46 The term “We” here denominates all Bosnians, Bosniaks, Serbs, Croats and others. It is an important social skill in B&H to know the exact meaning of that term in different contexts.

47 Turkish word, plural. During the Ottoman period it denominates common, unprivileged citizens. In contemporary colloquial language it denominates insiders. And everybody should become *raja*, or go somewhere else. It cannot be interpreted in ethnic terms by any means. The ethnic reality is completely opposite to the *raja* reality. *Raja* makes jokes with those who are ethnically aware.

48 A dominant narrative among the majority of Bosniaks (and those declaring themselves primarily as citizens’) is that “We are all Bosnians. Bosnian Serbs are Orthodox Bosnians, Bosnian Croats are Catholic Bosnians”. Croat and Serbs on the other side claim that Bosniaks are Islamized Croats or Serbs.

er” countries,⁴⁹ or to the memory of the colonial power in which a specific group had a privileged position.⁵⁰ In both cases it is a paradoxical discourse of inferiority. The groups in Bosnia all the time emphasize their bad and jeopardized position in B&H society. They actually, in discursive practices – not politically – minimize their power: they are minorities, but they all belong to the greater national systems, which actually make them “dangerous” in comparison to the others. These kinds of discourse actually straighten their position both in security terms due to the connection to the greater power, and in the context of confirming the significant difference. And even today there are significant residues of previous ideologies and identities.

In an attempt to conclude this text I will emphasize that I by no means have been trying to assert that the existence of the three ethnic groups is questionable. Quite contrary, I see this as a finished process: we have the three major ethnic groups articulated as nations living in B&H today, namely Bosniaks, Serbs and Croats. It is a social and political reality. Certain percentages of other nationalities and non-declared ones are of insignificant importance.

What I have been trying to argue is that these nations are not monolithically articulated under the ontopological assumptions. They were not constituted in a vertical line, from “blood & soil” as basic constituencies to the symbolic superstructures. Rather, they have been constituted horizontally, in a sequence of pragmatic choices, in continuous interaction with each other under the influence and severe pressure of different colonial powers and different ideological systems.

By imposing the ontopological discourse in the interpretation of B&H reality, local and international actors actually close opportunities to resolve the actual and permanent crisis in the country. The best one can get is support for the *status quo*. And it is easy to fall into the trap of supporting ethnic division with the possible ulti-

49 In the case of Serbs and Croats and their identification with Serbs from Serbia and Croats from Croatia.

50 In the case of Bosniaks and their symptomatic identification with Turkey.

mate result of dividing the country! From the ontopological perspective, country division looks like a rational solution. But, imposing assumes using force, and in the end it results in violence. Such an approach leads to a vicious cycle.

Contrary to the ontopological one, the pragmatic and horizontal perspective opens possibilities since it “naturally” and logically follows from the existing social environment. This perspective sees the B&H society and its ethnicities as heterogeneously articulated, consisting of permanent interactions and intertwining. As such, in spite of paradoxes, contradistinctions and *aporia* in B&H society, this perspective already contains premises and models of coexistence. They could be recalled, interpreted in the contemporary setting and finally negotiated.

Unlike the ontopological perspective that might be transferred only by *monologue*, which is always a vertical communication, the language of the ruler, of the *paterfamilias*, hence the language of force, terror and violence, the other perspective offers the possibility of horizontal communication – of *dialogue*. Different needs, attitudes, positions and solutions could be discussed, negotiated, adopted or denied for the common good only in a relationship where no one dominates. It might be that this is the (only) political (or any other) perspective of B&H society.⁵¹

As stated before for the Bosnian nation one may say for the Bosnian nations that they are uprooted nations, having no possibility to claim exclusive territory and hence are more like members of a cooperative farm “condemned” to share the land for common good – to use agricultural metaphors so popular among the population of B&H. Also in their everyday ethnic articulation they could not fully express their nationhood, unlike people from neighboring states or

51 This perspective is THE political perspective in its original (though reinterpreted in some specific points) Aristotelian meaning: free and equal citizens discuss and decide about the life of a *polis* in dialogue. There is no (political) reality or truth before and beyond dialogue, -it actually establishes them. See Aristotle’s “Politics”, <http://classics.mit.edu/Aristotle/politics.html> and “Nicomachean Ethics” <http://classics.mit.edu/Aristotle/nicomachaen.html> . Also Hannah Arendt’s interpretation in: *The Human Condition*, The University Press Chicago, 1998.

elsewhere:⁵² their articulation must stop in a place where it starts to enter the symbolic space of the other. It looks quite applicable for B&H what Derrida argues for European cultural identity, “neither monopoly nor dispersion”:

*...European cultural identity... cannot and must not be dispersed into a myriad of provinces, into a municipality of self-enclosed idioms of petty little nationalisms, each one jealous and untranslatable... But, on the other hand, it cannot and must not accept the capital of a centralizing authority that, by means of trans-European cultural mechanisms... be they state-run or not, would control and standardize.*⁵³

What is more important, the Bosnian case of identity constitution and reconciliation overcomes narrow regional contexts. Particularly in continuous reinterpretation of multicultural paradigms it gets a wider, if not global perspective. As Campbell concludes:

*“Bosnia” can therefore be thought as signifying an articulation of identity that embodies many of the onto-political assumptions of deconstructive thought... “Bosnia” is testament to constitution of an identity that was realized in a community without essence. It is an identity enabled not by closure but by the aporias abundant in a context of radical interdependence. It is an identity that operated in terms of the care for the complex relationship of identity/difference many want to advocate. In this context, if we wish to enable deterritorialized conception of identity in a global world, Bosnia might contain a number of instructive reflections.*⁵⁴

52 I do not argue that the other ethnicities are monolithically articulated under the ontological assumption, but that Bosnians have to be more careful when expressing themselves. Many Western societies become familiar with this reality, due to immigration.

53 Jacques Derrida, *The Other Heading: reflection on Today Europe*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington 1992, p. 38-39, quoted from David Campbell Op.Cit. p.188.

54 David Campbell, *Ibid.* p. 217-218

Let me here go back to the beginning and see what happens when the answer to the question “which ethnic group do you belong to?” is not an appropriate one. That is when a person from Bosnia and Herzegovina does not declare belonging to any one ethnic group. In most cases it produces considerable confusion. Suddenly, the discourse is left without its “zero” point from which it develops. There is no “transcendental”, archetypical Bosnian of the *X* ethnic group. Also, there is no available deciphering code to use in conversation. In this text I argued that the same confusion must be at place even when the person declares her/himself as being Bosniak, Serb, or Croat, or even when it declares being Jew, Roma, Albanian, Czech, Ukrainian, or any other minority living there. The code for deciphering Bosnian heterogeneous culture(s) is a very complex one.

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