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Identities in Dialogue: Deconstructing the Dynamics of Bošnjak-Muslim Identities in Novi Pazar

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Identities in Dialogue:
Deconstructing the Dynamics of Bošnjak-Muslim Identities in Novi Pazar

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Independent Study Project
Spring 2005
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Preface

The field research presented in this paper was conducted in Novi Pazar, Serbia during the period of 16 April 2005 – 2 May 2005. This paper is presented as the final product of my Independent Study Project (ISP), facilitated by the Balkans Study Abroad Program of the School for International Training (SIT).

My research was aimed at understanding how individuals identify with larger, collective identities (national, ethnic, religious, etc.). In studying the history and current social situation of the former Yugoslavia countries, I learned that often individuals identify themselves within the terms of nation, ethnicity and religion. And I learned that often in this region those terms were used exchangeably. To better understand how differences among individuals and groups were conceived, I turned to the abounding academic theories written on the topics of nation, nationhood and nationalism.

In looking through the mass of theories, I realized that each academic creates theories of a *nation* based on his/her own perceptions, observations and interpretations of specific case studies. Each theory is more or less tailored to define unique manifestations of the *nation*. Ironically each theory aims at creating a larger, universal understanding of the *nation*, offering definitive criteria and delimiting rules. The summation of such theories is a mere cacophonous chord of academic jargon whose goal is to reach an assumed meta-existence of the *nation*. Such theories seem to imply that all the world is divided into *nations*, or *peoples*. These theories, in the worst case, can be used to uphold arguments that all *nations* are pure bounded, biological groups tied through blood or *gens*. I wondered when such studies of the idea of the *nation* would finally shed the

lingering aftertastes of 19th century sciences, which were steeped in the idea of deterministic evolution and the craze of categorization.

After discovering the fault of theories which attempted to explain a supposed universal truth, I decided to forgo such theories. After all, *nation* is a culturally constructed idea which is used to differentiate oneself and one's group from the Others. To understand *nation* one would have to understand how *nation* is culturally constructed, by specific people, in a specific time, in a specific place.

The existence of national categories, as proven by the (official) discourse within governmental institutions (constitutional quotas for representation within institutions, statistical reports of national/ethnic demographics and living conditions, etc), and the discourse of the public/masses (personal professions of belonging to a national/ethnic identity), is part of the social reality for individuals in the countries of the former Yugoslavia. Though the term *nation* is widely used, there are no exact definitions for this idea offered within the official and common discourse in society. Thus I set out to learn how individuals define *nation* through their own self-identification with a nation. I wondered what criteria individuals would use to define *nation*: history, origin, *familial gens*, language, cultural traditions, political affiliations, religions, etc.

I decided to study individuals' descriptions of their personal identity as related to larger, collective identities. I did not want to limit individuals' discourse to the collective identity in which I was most interested – the national identity, for the following reasons:

- 1) I did not want to limit and label individuals' self-identification to a *national* identification. Often what I termed a *national* identity (for example *Serb* or *Bošnjak*) was conceived by individuals as a religious, ethnic, regional or cultural identity.
- 2) Also I

did not want to reduce an individual to a single identity. I wanted to welcome the discussion of other identities should they be more prominent than, or equal to, their *national* identity. And I wanted to understand if and why individuals opted not to self-identity with a *nation*.

To access individuals' descriptions of a collective identity I initially planned to conduct three one-on-one interviews with six individuals. I hoped to draw out life histories and narratives, which would illustrate how individuals conceived and constructed their belonging to a larger, collective identity. I planned to allow the first interview to be unstructured, allowing the individual to offer personal background and descriptions of their society. I hoped to avoid limiting the individuals' discourse to *national* identities. Then, from the first interview, I hoped to discover what issues and identities were most significant to the individuals. I hoped that this initial interview would help me place *national* identities in a context. For the second and third interview I planned to focus more specifically on narratives related to *national* identities.

When I reached the field I quickly realized my research could not be conducted as planned. Individuals were reluctant to meet more than once – due to perhaps personal time constraints, mere indifference to my project, or (possible) discomfort caused by issues raised. As a result, I had to draw out individuals' description of a *national* identity immediately in the first, and only, interview. I created a short summary of my interests and intent [see *Appendix B*]. I used this summary to brief individuals before the interview so that we could focus our discussion on topics related to my research question.

To gain a balanced perspective of identities in Novi Pazar, I had hoped to interview a mix of individuals – ranging in age, gender, socio-economic status, and

national identification. However once in the field, I discovered that my set of interviewees was more or less structured by my main point of access to the community [see *Appendix C*]. This access point was Urban-In, a non-governmental organization dedicated to informing youth on democracy and intercultural tolerance. My set of interviewees leans heavily towards youth and one national group. If I had more time, I would have conducted more interviews with older individuals and individuals who identify with other national groups.

I interviewed thirteen “regular” individuals. Following the advice of my mentors, I interviewed a number “official” individuals, or community leaders. I interviewed the “officials” differently than the “regular” individuals. I did not ask the “officials” to describe their own personal identity, respecting the caution they must take with their public status and acknowledging the potential sensitive-nature of the topic. Instead I asked “officials” to offer observations and perceptions of the identity-question in Novi Pazar. For the “officials”, I accessed individuals in political parties and the local museum. Unfortunately religious leaders were unable to meet with me. For the “regulars”, I mostly accessed individuals who had already attained or aimed at receiving a higher education. If I had more time, I would have conducted more interviews with individuals who had not received a higher education – typically factory-workers or construction-workers. [See *Appendix A* for a Schedule of Interviews]

In the field, I realized there was a major cultural disconnect when talking about personal identities. I was looking for life stories which illustrated key moments in which individuals appropriated and interpreted definitions of *nation*. Though I will analyze the disconnect in greater detail later in this paper, here I will state that the interviews did not

produce life history monologues. Instead the interviews produced an interesting dialogue in which themes of the identity-question were discussed and debated. In this paper I have presented individuals voices – their opinions, reflections, proclamations, doubts, hopes, and frustrations. To analyze and deconstruct the meaning of a Bošnjak-Muslim identity group, I have put these voices in dialogue with other voices and my voice. The result is a destabilizing interpretation of the Bošnjak-Muslim identity group. Though there were many voices discussed many topics, there was a constant theme of hope for tolerance.

My time in Novi Pazar was spent meeting and interviewing individuals. I was introduced to most as a student-guest of Urban-In and of the family with whom I was staying. Through interviews and casual conversations sparked in cafes and people's homes, I gathered the information presented in this paper.

I want to thank Jill Benderly, the Academic Director of SIT Balkans, for her guidance and support. Without her constant encouragement and assistance in my brainstorming processes, my trek to and research in Novi Pazar would not have been possible. I want to thank Goga for being the first to enlighten me of the interesting multicultural situation of Sandžak. I offer many thanks to Aida and Sead at Urban-In and to my other gracious hosts in Novi Pazar, for their aid in securing interviewees and their hospitality. Finally, I send special thanks to my mentors Mladena Prelić and Miroslava Lukić-Krstanović, in the Ethnology Institute at the Serbian Academy of Sciences, for their wise words and expertise direction offered to me in the field.

Introduction

A month before I trekked into the field, I expressed my quandaries to the staff at SIT in Zagreb. I was interested in studying identities in a multi-cultural area; but I was uncertain of where I could find a dynamic multi-cultural community. Goga, one of staff members at SIT Zagreb, immediately suggested Sandžak and proffered a few articles which summarized the social situation and history of Sandžak. In reading the articles I discovered that Sandžak is an unofficial region which straddles the border of Serbia and Montenegro and extends from the border of Bosnia-Hercegovina to the border of Kosovo. This short description of the region sparked a number of questions in my mind: Why is this region termed *unofficial*? Why and how has this area retained the definition of a *region* despite the authorities' refusal to officially recognize the region? What factors bind this region together? Only a quick and superficial overview Sandžak can be offered here, for a lack of space and time, and in hopes that some of the vaguely highlighted issues will be better detailed, developed and problematized in the body of the paper.

Sandžak is commonly described as a multi-cultural or multi-ethnic area. Simply speaking the majority of inhabitants in this region identify as Bošnjak-Muslims. In the whole of Serbia and Montenegro, Bošnjak-Muslims make up approximately three percent of the total population.¹ In the Serbian part of Sandzak, according the 2002 census, Bošnjak-Muslims constitute approximately sixty percent of the 235,567 inhabitants.² In

¹ The statistical information was taken from a census taken in 1991. See Safeta Bi evac, "Bosniaks in Sandzak and Interethnic Tolerance in Novi Pazar," *Managing Multiethnic Local Communities*, 387. (fix footnote)

² For more statistical information see *Serbia's Sandzak: Still Forgotten*, International Crisis Group N 162, 8 April 2005. This article does not offer information on the exact population percentages in the Montenegrin portion of Sandžak. However it is known that in Montenegrin Sandžak, there are two towns

Novi Pazar, the main town of Sandžak, individuals who identify as Bošnjak-Muslims make up eighty percent of the population. The other twenty percent of the Novi Pazar population identify as Serbs. There is a very small percentage, which many locals mark as negligible, of individuals who declare other identities, such as Albanian, Macedonian, Roma, Chinese, etc.

History that binds and breaks Sandžak

The Serbian history of the area begins in the 11th century when the fortified town of Ras was established. Ras, speculated to be located today just outside or in Novi Pazar, was the seat of the first Serbian kingdom of medieval king Stefan Nemanjic.

The history of the region, as it is known as Sandžak, begins in 1461 when the town of Novi Pazar was founded by the new inheritors of the region, the Ottoman Turks. Since this year, the Ottomans ruled over Sandžak for approximately 450 years. Under Ottoman rule, Sandžak was initially a part of the Province of Bosnia. Hence “close ties” were fostered “through trade and family connections” between the regions of what is now Bosnia-Hercegovina and what is still termed Sandžak.³ In 1878, as a result of the Treaty of Berlin, Austro-Hungary full assumed military and civilian control over the region of Bosnia-Hercegovina. The region of Sandžak, however, though under Austro-Hungarian military control until 1908, remained under Ottoman civilian administration. Thus 1878 marked breakup of the official connection of the regions of Bosnia-Hercegovina and Sandžak. Sandžak remained under Ottoman control until forcefully seized by Serbian and Montenegrin troops in 1912.

(Plav and Rožaje), out of five, which foster a Bosniak-Muslim majority. In Serbian Sandžak, three towns (Novi Pazar, Tutin, and Sjenica), out of six, are made up of a Bosniak-Muslim majority.

³ Ibid., 3.

Under Ottoman rule, many inhabitants of Sandžak had adopted the Islamic religion and a Turkish-influenced way of life. These individuals were identified as muslims. Then under subsequent rulers – Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes; Yugoslavia; and finally Serbia and Montenegro – the individuals who identified as muslims were often discriminated and oppressed on the basis of their identification.

Throughout the twentieth century, Sandžak was divided a number of times between newly created administrative regions. Historians often argue that such changes were “obvious[ly] inten[ded] to dilute Bošnjak [or Bošnjak-Muslim] political clout and keep Serbs in charge of the state administration”.⁴ In 2000, the by-now unofficial region of Sandžak was divided into two counties (*okruzi*). Now Novi Pazar is under the administration of Raška county, whose center is in Kraljevo (town 100 km north of Novi Pazar).⁵ In conducting interviews, I discovered that individuals’ use parts of the region’s history to validate and define their own identity. Later in the paper, I will illustrate these arguments.

Naming an identity

In labeling a group, I have thus far used the hyphenated term *Bošnjak-Muslim* to signal an ongoing, unfinished debate within and between identity groups. As I stated above many Sandžak inhabitants, under the Ottoman rule, adopted the Islamic religion and a Turkish-influenced way of life. According to historians and people of Sandžak, throughout the twentieth century, this group and its inheritors have sought official

⁴ Ibid., 6.

⁵ Historical information taken from *Serbia’s Sandzak: Still Forgotten*, International Crisis Group N 162, 8 April 2005. Many, who involved in the non-governmental and international organizations sector, argue that this version of the region’s history presents a rare and balanced perspective. In other words, the history is produced by a third party (International Crisis Group, which is affiliated with neither Serb groups or Bosniak-Muslim groups). This third party is sympathetic to the Bosniak-Muslim perspective, which has long been neglected by official, Serbian renditions of the region’s history. For more details on the regions history see source.

recognition of their identity. They wished to be identified as distinct from *Serbs*, *Bosnians*, *Turks*, and other existing identity categories. Finally in 1968 census *Muslim* appeared as an identity category. In this year population statistics shifted; individuals who had previously identified with the available categories, not opted to identify with the newly created category of *Muslim*. In the 1980s a debate surrounding the term *Muslim* arose. Many argued that *Muslim* implies a religious affiliation. However, individuals argued that *Muslim* with a capital *M* indicates an ethnic identity that is distinct from a religious identity. They argued that a religious identity is termed *muslim*, with a lowercase *m*. Because this new term still did not satisfy everyone, individuals started self-identifying as *Bošnjak* (*Bošnjak*). The term *Bošnjak* does not immediately connote religious affiliation. Also this term does not officially define connections to Bosnia; the term *Bosnac* defines an individual from Bosnia. Still some people argue that the term *Bošnjak* implies a certain connection to Bosnia, a connection many people deny and detest. Thus, in general use, to identify a community whose collective identity label is debated, I opt for the hyphenated term *Bošnjak-Muslim*. Later in the paper, I will highlight individuals' choices and arguments surrounding the naming of their identity.

Concepts of self and identity: the cross-cultural disconnect

Before reaching the field, I did not expect the term *identity* to engender confusion or misunderstanding. I wanted answers to what I thought was a basic question: *How do you identify yourself?* To reiterate, I assumed that the interviewees would offer stories to illustrate the meaning and significance of belonging to a nation, or other collective group. I hoped that these stories would reveal key moments of realization, clarification,

disillusionment, etc. However when I reached Novi Pazar, the site of my field research, I found myself struggling to explain my understanding of *identity* and *self-identification*.

In the whirlwind meeting and greeting during my first few days in Novi Pazar, I met a man who was involved with Urban-In. Like everyone else, he asked me, *So what are you doing here?* I explained to him that I am an undergraduate student interested in looking at individual identities. He paused to think for a moment and then responded thoughtfully, *You know, that's a very interesting topic. But I don't like identities.* I was a little confused. I wondered what was there to like or dislike about identities. Identities, as I understood it, were constructed by negotiations between selves and outsiders. I expressed my confusion, *What do you mean?* He responded, *Identities are constructed by history. And I don't like history either.* He explained that anyone can change history to fit their own needs. I then proposed another possibility, *Well don't you think identities can be constructed with components other than history? Like one's job, or one's position in a family?* He ignored my proposal, *You know, religious leaders are probably the best to talk to about identities. They know a lot about identities. I don't have an identity. We should stop looking at the past, we need look to the future.* I asked, *What kind of identity could you create for the future?* He liked that idea, *Yes, we need an identity for the future. We need to stop looking at the differences in the past.*

I assumed that individuals would place importance on their capacity to self-identify. I projected that individuals would value their ability to appropriate or deny elements of collective identities. Self-identification, as I understood it, was a very sovereign act. My understanding of self and identity was a current, Western understanding of self. This understanding of self often overlooks the external factors in

identity construction. In other words, individuals experience themselves as autonomous and bounded, independent from society.⁶

The man described an identity that was not created and dictated by himself. His identity was constructed by outsiders – writers of history, religious leaders, and the other leaders of his identity group. In such a model of identity-construction, an individual is a mere pawn in the debates and interpretations made by outsiders, including those who belong to his own identity group and those who belong to other identity groups. In this model an identity is created outside the individual. The individual has agency only in the decision to choose or deny such externally-constructed identity. In this situation, this man chose to deny belonging to an identity group.

In subsequent conversations and interviews, I experienced difficulty when trying to encourage discussions of identities. Often people's faces tightened when I proposed they tell me about their own identities or the dynamics of identity groups in Novi Pazar. In such situations I would say, *If you don't want to talk about it, that's ok*. In most cases, individuals would say, *Nevermind, it's ok*. And then they would resume telling me about identities. Often people were confused when I suggested that they tell me about identities. Various individuals asked me: *What do you mean?*, *Do you mean religion?*, or *Are we talking about prejudices here?* In some cases, people abruptly or awkwardly ended conversations of identities. In one case, in the middle of our conversation, an individual started collecting his things to signal the end. In another case, during a

⁶ Anthropologists Becker, Kondo and Geertz describe their realization of such a Western self after being exposed to different cultural notions of self. Becker in Fiji realized that an individual's body was appropriated and belonging to the community. Kondo in Japan and Geertz in Bali discovered a more contextual and relationally defined self. See Anne E. Becker, *Body, Self and Society: the View from Fiji*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995), Dorinne K. Kondo, Chapter 1, "The Eye," *Crafting Selves: Power, Gender and Discourses of Identity in Japanese Workplace*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), and Clifford Geertz, Chapter 14, "Person, Time and Conduct in Bali," *The Interpretation of Cultures*, (New York: Basic Books, 1973).

conservation of the current social situation in Novi Pazar, an individual stated, *I'm sick of talking about the war. Can we talk about something else?*

In the ex-Yugoslavia countries, identity debates between different nation, ethnic or religious groups have raged for years. Groups have strived to prove the validity of their group's existence, terminate their experience of oppression and discrimination, and gain recognition by administrative institutions. Perhaps individuals experience of tedium and distress as pawns, or even active participants, in such long-lasting identity-negotiations. Recalling the tensions and conflicts caused by past discussions of identity, perhaps individuals opt to remain as conscientious-objectors in the identity-debate I try to beckon.

Summary of findings

Over the course of two weeks, I interviewed sixteen individuals, three “official” individuals and thirteen “regular” individuals. Eleven individuals were interviewed in a one-on-one manner. Only three of these individuals agreed to meet for a second interview. Five individuals were interviewed in a focus group setting – one focus group of two, and another focus group of three. Structured more or less by my access to the community, the set of interviewees leans heavily toward Bošnjak-Muslim population of Novi Pazar. Hence my paper is structured toward analyzing the discourse and situation of *Bošnjak-Muslim identity group* in Novi Pazar. [For more information on interviews see *Appendix A* and *C*].

As stated earlier, commonly a deterministic understanding of identities is expressed by the interviewees. Identities are not created by an individual; it is structured by outsiders, or leaders of the identity debate, and assigned to the group. A bond or unity

to the group is expressed by individuals' declaration of "we", "our history", or "our language." Contrary to this common belief, not everyone agreed on the same criteria for defining this supposedly bounded or united group. And some individuals acknowledge variations within this group – either their own distinction from the group, or existence of factions within the group. Interestingly some individuals expressed that *Bošnjak-Muslim* identity was not an important identity for them.

Often individuals explained that tensions did not exist between *national groups*; or they simply alluded to *difficult times* or *tense situations* without defining the problem. Such persistent denial of tensions was usually followed by signals that would make me think she/he doth protest too much. For example individuals would express desire for better times, blame outsiders, or continue to actually describe problems.

In spite of expressions of exasperation with the identity debate and descriptions of tensions within and between identity groups, individuals continually expressed hope. Hope that others (those within their own *national* group, and those in other *national* groups) and outsiders (*Serbs in Belgrade* or *Bosnians*) could be become educated and tolerant of differences.

Novi Pazar: a social context for national identities

Novi Pazar a small town of 100,000 inhabitants is situated among rolling hills and rocky cliffs. Multi-storied homes, shiny foreign cars, and satellite dishes create a faux-atmosphere of abounding affluence. At closer look, crumbling buildings and potholed roads serve as a grounding reminder of the exhausting economic situation. The enduring legacy of the *schwartz* (black market and smuggling), which kept Novi Pazar alive during the 1990s sanctions on Serbia, is the prominent drug dealing. Recently Novi Pazar emerged from official undeveloped status, as the handful of growing textile and shoe factories try to stimulate the economy.

Apparently the interesting economic situation has created an extreme social stratification. Through interviews, I discovered a number of fascinating social dynamics not directly related to *national*, *ethnic*, or *religious* identities. Unfortunately due to a limit of time and space, I can only quickly summarize individuals' renditions of those dynamics here.

A young man with a flashy cell phone and equally flashy BMW claimed facetiously that, *You can only find such lazy people living so well in Novi Pazar*. Regardless of work ethic, such affluence was continually critiqued and called to my attention by my interviewees. At Gazivoda Jezero, a lake where residents of Novi Pazar spend free time, a large, shiny SUV drove past our picnic site. My host mother quickly pointed out the *bad children* driving the SUV. According to her these young people were of owners of new factories. With disgust she explained that they have *no culture, but they own big cars and fancy cell phones, and do drugs*.

Novi Pazar is a rather small town, such that people are bound to run into friends and family in the street. Individuals explained that because people live so closely and differences among individuals are obvious and known. One factory worker sadly explained to me that the economic stratification of the community had just recently become so acutely visible. Another interviewee, Aladin, seconded such renditions of lament. Aladin was born and raised in Novi Pazar. He left Novi Pazar at the age of eighteen to study for two high school years and all of college in Riverside, California. He had just returned in December 2004 at the age of twenty-three. His thoughts and feelings about the changed Novi Pazar were starting to ferment.

Today kids are separated in schools – between those whose parents make a good living and those whose parents who don't. [...] When we were kids, we didn't care about anything. [...] Growing up, as kids, we knew what was right from wrong. Now kids growing up don't know the difference. They see that drug dealers are the ones that are making the money. It's sad – a guy who doesn't go to school just becomes lucky and makes money. This is so bad.

Indeed, I discovered that the current economic situation did cause doubts in the minds of the youth. A seventeen year-old boy, Mirza, explained that he wanted to leave Novi Pazar. When asked why, he revealed such doubts and concerns:

Now there is crisis. People don't have money. It is Serbian salary, with European prices. [...] In 1992, there was a golden age. Now you see the people with expensive cars? They made money selling jeans, cigarettes, gasoline, bread, everything – on schwertz. Now it's hard to be respected here. Life is easier when you do illegal things. All of Serbia is like that. And I don't like that. A better

time is coming... [he pauses] My parents say that. A time is coming when people who go to school can make money. Now, the mafia has the money... I don't know if I believe them [his parents].

Identity discourse on the topics of the economic stratification, the drug problem, the influx of *seljaci* (villagers), the paradox of conservatism and religiosity versus drinking and premarital sex were highlighted more strongly than discourse of national identity by some individuals. But, again, I must leave these topics to be developed at another time.

No Nation? No religion? Impossible.

Earlier I introduced my realization of a more deterministic identity-model, where identities are not tailored and designed independently by the individual. Individuals in this model are born into a group identity that is constructed outside the individual. This group identity has been debated and constructed for years before the individual's lifetime by past, group leaders. This identity includes stories of origin, elements of history, and ideas of unity.

When asking to individuals to define their identity, I expected them to turn the question around to me. But I did not expect another cross-cultural disconnect. My definition of self, a western model, acknowledges the internal, individual agency in the construction a unique and independent identity. I did not expect individuals to disregard my own proclamation of my self-identity.

One of my first days in Novi Pazar, my self-identification was challenged. After explaining my interest in identities, a university-aged member of Urban-In asked me, *So what about you? What's your religion?* Knowing that my self-identity saga would take

time to explain, I responded simply, *Nothing*. The young man stared squarely and blankly at my face, looking like he expected me to offer another answer. After a few milla-seconds, it looked like he regained composure from the surprise. He blinked and muttered, *I'm sorry. I don't understand*. Before I could qualify my answer in hopes of easing his bewilderment, the conversation was interrupted.

I received another opportunity to declare my self-identity. Mirza, a student of the gymnasium and member of Urban-In, asked me *What is your religion?* This time, I bashfully tried to concisely explain, *I believe in God, but I don't identify with one religion. I believe that many religions are celebrating the same God*. Mirza interrupted me as he theatrically wagged his finger. Lightly berating me he preached, *That's not good. You need to have a religion. It doesn't matter what religion. Just pick. You need to read the Koran. Have you read the Koran? You should read some Buddhist stuff. Just pick one religion. Is it good for you*. It was as if without a religion, I was some undefined, floating individual. It seems individuals were unable to comprehend who I was if I did not have some belonging, some background, or something to define me.

In another situation, no matter how hard I tried to explain my self-identification, I was constantly pinned by their understanding of an identity. The following is small piece of a focus group discussion with Admir and Damir, two post-graduate students and teaching assistants in the department English Language and Literature at the International University of Novi Pazar:

Me: I am curious as to how you define, or conceive the term nation or ethnicity? And if you feel that term applies to you and the way in which you identify?

Admir: Nations? Well, I see ourselves as a nation. And all the people here... Muslims, you know. [long pause] Even though this is not our mother country, we belong to [pause] the people in Bosnia. And we [original emphasis] are a nation. We belong to the nation of Muslims.

Damir: No, let's say Bosnians. You can say Muslim, Jew, or Christian in Germany and in other countries.

Admir: Ok, it's a wider term.

Damir: So, then, Bosnian-Muslims.

Me: What kind of aspects do you think make up the definition of a nation?

*Admir: I don't know. Maybe you can say... Since we are a majority here, maybe we can say that we are a nation. For example, the people in Bosnia. If we belong to... for example, Serb—... I don't know, Serb community, Serb society, or Serb people... we would be a nation also... as Serbs. But we live here, in this part of the country, outside of our country. We are still the nation. We cannot that we are not the nation when you live outside of the country. We **have** [original emphasis] to say that. For example if you live outside of America, would you still be American? Would you belong to that group of people.*

Me: I personally don't think that there is a "nation" of America—

Damir: Ok, do you consider America a nation?

Me: I don't know any American who would use the term nation to define themselves as you use the term nation. The idea of being an American is very civic. [...]

Admir: Ok, fine. What nation do you belong to then?

Me: I don't belong to a nation. I don't have a nation.

Admir: Really?

Damir: Ok, fine. From your father's side.

Admir: [laughs and says facetiously] So you don't have an identity.

Before talking about *nation*, we had talked about *identities*. They had asked about my identity. I tried to illustrate my own drama of identity negotiations. I explained that having a Korean mother and American father, I experienced a certain divided identity. I tried to convey the sense of not belonging to a greater collective identity group. Though my family was involved in a Korean community, I did not have a community of individuals with whom I could share the experience of the exact same bi-cultural upbringing. They did not seem interested in my description of my self-identity, as they had interrupted me and cut me off a number of times. Instead they asked about the heritage of my father, I explained that his ancestors were from Flemish Belgium, Ireland and France, with a few exceptions. Despite my failed attempts to communicate my understanding of a nation and my self-identification, they pressed the issue further.

Admir: Ok what is your definition of a nation?

Me: Like I said, in America—

Admir: [interrupting] What? It is a number? Or what? Geographic position? Or what? Just generally speaking.

Me: In all that I've studied, the concept of a nation is different from place to place. For me, nation is only a civic definition. I was born in America and therefore I am an American citizen.

Damir: But there still is a line that divides people.

Me: What do you mean?

Damir: America is still ghettoized, you know. [It seemed he was trying to offer examples of natural divisions of people, even apparent in America, which would uphold the idea of different and distinct peoples or nations.] In New York... there is still the typical Irish, the typical Chinese, the Pakistani.

Me: I feel those types of differences and divisions are simply culturally constructed.

Damir: What? Are we talking about prejudices here?

Me: No, purely individual definitions of personal identity—

Admir: [interrupting] Ok, ok. It's quite general to say identity. You have to specify identity. Cultural, national, religious, ethnic what. [Previously I had clarified that I was interested in all such identities. And I had asked what identities were most important to them. Their answers to that question had progressed as a debate with disconnects, such as this.] We can show you our town. We can show the differences between our town and Serbian towns. Our architecture. Our architecture is different of course.

There the conversation abruptly ended, it seemed we were all frazzled by our inefficiency to communicate. Damir quickly moved our thoughts from the finished conversation to the topic of my name last.

Damir: Your surname. It sounds French.

Me: Yea, it does. But it's Flemish, from Belgium.

Admir: You know, it's very strange that you have a Flemish surname.

Damir: [in agreement] Yes.

Me: You think so?

Damir: Yes, because you are half-Irish and half-Korean

After having described the complexities of my self-identity, and explained that I did not belong to a nation, they insisted on filtering me through their identity-model. I had to belong to some nation or, to use the words Admir. Despite my persistent protestations, I was reduced to a mix of two nations – the Irish and the Koreans.

Though many did not question the deterministic identity-model, there were some individuals who signaled discomfort with the traditional concept of identities. Some individuals I interviewed expressed desire to break from the deterministic boundaries of this identity-mode. And thus they accepted my strange way of constructing my own identity. Sead, a twenty year old businessman who runs his parents' denim factory, tried to explain the nuances of his own identity. During the interview he expressed a strong feeling of belonging to a larger group of *Bošnjaci*, by describing a unity created by the shared experience of constant discrimination by the Serbian government. But he refined his identity description, *We are Bošnjaci, we were used to be called Muslims. But my father is an atheist.*

At the end of the interview, he said, *Can I ask you a question. And I am sorry if I offend you.* I welcomed his question, *What is your religion?* Remembering the past complications I experienced in trying to explain my religion I asked, *Would you like to hear the long version or the short version?* He asked for the long version. I explained my personal beliefs and also described my father's agnostic beliefs. Sead, who had just identified himself as an atheist *Bošnjak*, was now intrigued with this new belief. He exclaimed, *Your father is a great man. I really would like to speak with him. That's great. You know, I think the government uses religion to shape people's mind. If Bush tells the leaders at the church that all the Iraqis are bad, everybody in the church says that Iraqis are bad. Everyone believes it.*

Perhaps his tale of Bush and churches was a projection of his own experience of religion in his home. Perhaps leaders shaped and manipulated the opinions of religious groups. To pull himself away from this easily-manipulated group, he decided that he

would drop his religious identity. His openness to think outside of pre-determined identity groups allowed him to accept my own uniquely constructed identity. Like Sead, others also described a rejection of traditional identities. Some of these individuals hoped for a newly forged identity, and others simply wished for no identity.

Name debate

Let us revisit a portion of the discussion with Admir and Damir:

Admir: We belong to the nation of Muslims.

Damir: No, let's say Bosnians. You can say Muslim, Jew, or Christian in Germany and in other countries.

Admir: Ok, it's a wider term.

Damir: So, then, Bosnian-Muslims.

Here Admir initially labeled his nation *Muslim*. We do not know whether Admir was conceiving a strictly religious definition of nation or a wider non-religious definition. Damir perceived Admir's term *Muslim* to be religious, as he equated *Muslim*, as a nation, to *Jew* or *Christian*, other religious groups. Interestingly Damir expressed an initial preference for the term *Bosnian*, a non-religious concept with definite connections to the country Bosnia. Quickly Damir negotiated with Admir's initial term to create a collaborative term *Bosnian-Muslims*. Such interchange seems to be a microcosmic representation of the larger, ongoing name debate among members of this identity group.

Musliman: Does nation equal religion?

Sead labeled his identity group a *Bošnjak*. His use of the term *Bošnjak* does not signal per se that he assume that all members of this group are automatically affiliated with a certain religious confession. However he declared his atheist beliefs in the same breath as his declaration to a *Bošnjak* identity. Thereby he signaled that a religion affiliation is assumed to be linked to the national identity of *Bošnjak*.

The discourse of Bissa, a student at the state university at Novi Pazar, supports the idea that nation is equal to religion. I asked Bissa if she could ever identify as a Serb, in a purely civic sense, meaning a citizen of Serbia. Her response declared that was not a possibility:

We are not Serb. We are Musliman. I am Musliman from Serbia. For example: In Belgium, if I live there, I can be Jew, Musliman, or anything. People confuse the country and people. Serbian country and Serbian people. We don't call him Christian man, but we call him Serbian man. If you look at a map, you have a lot more Muslimani here. Christians, or Catholics, are in the north. People confuse Serbia country for Serb, the Christian people.

Another individual also expressed a similar direct equation of nation and religion. Mirza, a gymnasia student, illustrated the rise of nationalism at the death of Tito:

The bad thing about communism is that you could not have religion. [...] The good things was that then, there were no differences – I am Muslim, you are Christian. No. There were no wars. [He returns his thought to the bad aspects of communism]. The worse thing was that you could not have religions. If you were religious you couldn't tell anyone. It was like a secret – like the Christian catacombs in the Roman times, you know. Now with democracy, you can say your own opinion. You can say what you want. So when Tito died, people starting making stories about religions. Serbs started saying things. Croats said, Oh, Mi Hrvati. And lots of Muslims started saying that too.

In both these illustrations, *Musliman/Muslim* group was perceived as a religious group and defined as comparable to groups of *Serbs* and *Croats*. For these two

individuals, national groups indicated a specific religious affiliation. To find out if others felt the same, I asked interviewees how they defined *nation (narod)*? Ramiz, the eighty year old president of the Sandžak Intellectual Club and former member of the communist political party, described his theory to me:

I see people in two ways: a population as a populus, with voting and civil rights, and population as an ethnic group, which has its own ethnical characteristics. I see that nation as different from the ethnic nation. Ethnic nation is a group of people who have the same origins. And a nation as a nation has formed in the new ages, in the new century. Today we lose our ethnic origin – our blood origins, and origins by land. People are traveling, immigrating, and emigrating. They are creating new ethnical nations and other political nations so that they will live together. And those new communities are made up of different nations from different origins. We have an example of the German nation, Italian nation, or American nation. Those are nations consisted of different ethnical communities, but now they are one nation. So you have in one nation, what is similar to all of them, what they have in common – like languages, customs. But now there can be different religions in one nation. No one has deserved to be some ethnicity – because he is born into it and he cannot choose it.

Ramiz illustrates two nations, one that is civic and the other that is based on origin, blood, birth, or what he calls *ethnicity*. Initially Ramiz's nuanced theory of nations allows him to disassociate religion directly from nation, though probably a civic nation. However, in explaining his own tale of identity negotiations he reveals that it is popularly understood that *nation* directly connected to *religion*. Ramiz lived a through an

era in which individuals could not define themselves as Muslim or Bošnjak. He explained that because he was a member of the communist party, he had to declare some sort of belonging; he could not opt to be undeclared. And so he chose to identify as a Serb. He expresses that he was ready to take on a sort of *civic* identity that was separate from his *ethnic* or *religious* belonging. I asked him if others today would accept a dual-identity composed of both civic and ethnic/religious/national elements. Ramiz explained the reason why individuals would be reluctant to do so, and the reason why he changed his identity to *Muslim*, when the option appeared on the 1968 census: *The Serbs have never us as Serbs. Because the Serbian Orthodox Church only recognizes Serbs as Orthodox people, as Christians. Not the Muslims, or other religions.*

His communist background fostered an understanding of a dual-identity, which was not in conflict and was composed harmoniously of civic and religious components. In contrast, others do not recognize such a dual identity. Instead others insist that a national belonging defines religious belonging.

Bošnjak: Is there a connection to Bosnia?

If we look back to Admir's description of his nation, we recall his proclamations of belonging to the people of Bosnia and originating from the mother country of Bosnia. Interestingly other individuals having lived their whole life in Novi Pazar, never once setting foot in Bosnia, express a different opinion: There is no connection to Bosnia. In one focus group discussion, the dynamics of a public and politicized debate, which argues the *Bošnjak-Muslim* connections to Bosnia, was strongly manifested. Three students, Fikrija, Banina and Anaida, at the International University of Novi Pazar explained their feelings about possible connections to Bosnia:

Me: What would happen if you leave this country and you needed to explain to people, who don't understand the situation here, who you are? How would you define yourself?

Fikrija: Well I would tell them that I am from Serbia-Montenegro.

Banina: I won't

Fikrija: But I don't feel so close.

Me: With Serbia-Montenegro? What term?

Fikrija: Yes. You know there were six countries. It was better. I can't explain it to you. Because you should just feel it. It's like someone takes a part of you.

Like a family... that's broken. Like a broken family. [Previously she was explaining that she identifies primarily as a Yugoslavian. Her self-identification is another bit of lingering evidence of the former attempts under communism to forge a civic identity.]

*Anaida: I generally agree with this. But as far as nationality is concerned, it's not easy to define yourself, to identify yourself. Because if you live... You know, it is related to religion. If you say you are from Serbia. The first thing that people think is that you are a Serb. But you are not. People here we are not sure how to identify ourselves. So we decided to identify ourselves as Bošnjak. And when you say you are Bošnjak, it means that you live in Serbia or Bosnia, it means that you are a Muslim, and that you speak the Bosnian language. That's how we identify ourselves... [She looks around and then corrects herself]. I mean, **I** [original emphasis].*

Anaida conveys difficulty in defining an identity that satisfies both herself and others. Traditionally, as we have seen, *nation* identification is directly linked to religion. Though they commonly adhere to this traditionally understanding of identity, individuals often reveal a certain tension. A tension often arises when an individual, coming from a background (or family) which upholds Turkish-influenced traditions and the Islamic religion, decides to reject part of their inherited collective identity. Often religion, as we have witnessed in earlier accounts, is a rejected element of the collective identity. The tension stems from the fact that the identity-model does not acknowledge individuals' agency in constructing their own identity. A group identity, which is designed outside of the individual in public and politicized debates, does not allow individuals to pick and choose elements of their identity. Hence there is friction between the sturdy group-identity's incapacity to flex and adjust, and the individual's desire to choose and reject

elements of his/her identity. Anaida's description of the traditional concept of a *Bošnjak-Muslim* identity was followed by chimes of rebuttal.

Me: How do you feel then about the term Bošnjak, is there... Do you feel a connection to Bosnia?

Banina: [silently shakes her head].

Anaida: You know, there is a connection to Bosnia. But that's so confusing. We don't feel so...

Banina: We hate each other. [Laughing.]

Banina's comment recalls our conversation that preceded the taped focus-group session. I explained that I had visited and enjoyed Sarajevo. The girls made joking faces of disgust. Banina described a tension between people from Sarajevo and people from Sandžak. Fikrija seconded that opinion. She believed that Sarajevans look down on people. I disagreed, saying that I did no experience such discrimination in Sarajevo. Fikrija contested, *You don't know what's it's like unless you've lived there for a long time. I live there for a few years, I went to school there. People in Sarajevo look on people from Sandžak.* Anaida remained quiet in the previous conversation. But here, she interjected to explain Banina's light comment.

Anaida: We are not so familiar to each other. We don't really like it. Bosnian people... Maybe you have heard it before. Bosnian people don't like people from Sandžak. I don't know why. I really don't know why. I don't know what is the reason that they have prejudices against us.

Fikrija: I think there is one reason. Some people from Sandžak went to Bosnia after the war. And they built some houses there. They brought some money from here, you know. They were just... They were not so good people. [Long pause]. And because of that, few people from Sandžak, they think the whole people from here are the same, you know. And I don't like it. But I think all of us have that kind of problem. If one part of the Bosnian people are not so good to us, we'll think that al of them are not good. I think that is it. But I don't know. I'm not sure. Because I met some people there. [She slows down and marks her words with a tone of incredulity]. When I was there in 1999, they thought that I was from some rural place. That thought that I'm not normal, that I am so different...

Banina: Savage. [Laughs.] Yes, it's true.

*Fikrija: But when they get close to me, they saw that we are not all the same. [She is probably referring to the plurality of people and personalities in Sandžak.] Because there **are** [original emphasis] normal people here. Good people and...*

Banina: And they can see how much we are the same. [She is probably referring to the similarities between herself and people in Bosnia.] Well I don't like to identify myself as Bošnjak, or Serbian either. I usually say that I am from Sandžak and I am Muslim. I don't say that I'm Serbian-Montenegrin... from Serbia. I am not Serb. I just like to say that I'm from Sandžak and I am Muslim. I don't like that definition, Bošnjak. It's not very clear to me. I really don't understand that relation, it's not clear to me. That's why I usually say that I am Muslim from Sandžak. And that's the end of my story.

Me: And how does most of your family, or parents, feel? The same?

Banina: Well they are older and they are religion. And they like those origins and those connections. And they like to say I'm Bošnjak, we are the same people. I don't know. I told you, I don't like to define myself as that. That's it. I would say I am Muslim from Sandžak, and I come from Novi Pazar, and that's it. I don't have connections...

Me: And do you feel that that is a collective Sandžak identity? Do you think that other people in Novi Pazar, or outside of Novi Pazar feel that connection with the rest of the region?

Banina: I don't know what to say... I don't know where is the connection. The people are similar. When you think about it, we are all the same... Same mentality, the way we are thinking... But I don't like to define myself as Bošnjak. I am not from Bosnia. And there are thoughts about Bošnjak people.

Me: You mean like prejudices?

Banina: Yes. Well there are always there bad ones [prejudices]. I just don't like to identify myself as that.

Anaida: [Addressing Banina] But you know there is a matter of nationality.

Banina: Well yes, but...

Anaida: I think you have to identify yourself somehow. I think it's better to say your nationality. Then you say what religion you belong to. Because it sounds like you have your own prejudices about that.

Banina: Well, I do have that. I am from Serbia. Sandžak is in Serbia, not in Bosnia. And that's why I don't like to define—

Anaida: [Interrupting] Well there are two terms Bosnians and Bošnjak.

Banina: Well, they are connected. [She indicates her distaste with the connection of the two terms.]

[There is a long silence as the girls stare at each other.]

*Anaida: It **is** [original emphasis] connected. [She argues the that there is a connection between the two groups.]*

*Banina: [Laughs, throws her hands up, and emphasizes each word.] **So what?***

Following Banina comments there was another long silence. I broke the silence by expressing that I wanted to understand each girls' point of view. We concluded that

the historical connections between Sandžak and Bosnia were of prime importance to Anaida. Banina however, regardless of cultural or religious similarities between the two regions, refused to recognize a connection to Bosnia. Anaida, adhering to the identity-model, remained steadfast with the current, popular definition of her group's identity. Banina, on the other hand, rejected the traditional identity-model and denied identification with the *Bošnjak* group.

Disputed Distinction: Bošnjak Nation and Sandžak

Assimilation versus Resistance: Existence of a Bošnjak Nation

In a previously presented piece of Ramiz's monologue, he explains that new nations can be forged, both a civic nation and an ethnic nation. His understanding of the possibility to create new ethnic nations was probably influenced by the idea that his ethnic group of Bošnjak, formerly known as Muslim, was carved out of the Serb and Croat population.

The national identity of Bošnjak has been formed in the last hundred years.

During the Turkish government here – there were just two divisions. Islamic and Christian – you could be a Serb who transferred to Islam. A Croat, a Hungarian, a Bulgarian, it's not important. [...] In the middle ages, there was a rule – the country is the religion of the ruler. There was one Serbian king who was Catholic. Therefore all Serbs were Catholic. He broke from the Orthodoxy of Byzantium. And so all Serbs became Catholic. The Turkish government didn't force anyone to convert to Islam. But you couldn't develop yourself if you weren't a Muslim. Just like in Communism: you couldn't develop yourself if you declared a religion.

Here in this portion text and throughout his rest of his two interviews, runs a theme of assimilation. He illustrates that birth of *Bošnjak* nation at the moment when other national groups were assimilated into the Turkish culture of the Ottoman rulers. He made subsequent examples of emigrants from Sandžak to Turkey who after generations identify as only Turkish, and Irish and African-Americans in America who (he argued) identify as only American. New nations are formed when characteristics and aspects of old nations are fused to create new hybrid. And old nations are lost when they are fused into other nations.

We have in history – many other communities that have been assimilated. And you have on the Balkans... There were living the Celts, Trachaens, Illyrians. And they are all gone now. Also in Europe, you had Celts, Havarians, Avars. And now they are all assimilated into nations. [...] Speaking of Muslims who immigrated to Turkey [from Sandžak], after some generations they become Turkish. Children live in a new community. In school they learn the Turkish language. They are forgetting their customs, and they are just becoming Turks. Also in America, you have African-Americans, and Indo-Americans [Native Americans], and the Irishmen. But after a few generations they are only Americans.

Ramiz illuminated historical tales of dying off civilizations. He seemed to argue that assimilation of *nations* into other *nations* was a natural, imminent event proved through moments in history. His acknowledgement of the imminent fading away of *nations*, underscored his implied valuing of persistence and resistance of *nations*.

The belonging to some nation is marked by making customs, believing in a religion, talking their language. Those are all relative aspects. They can be changed in a very short time. However some ethnical groups are more resistant to assimilation – they are more compact. They can exist for several centuries and not be assimilated by other groups. For example the Roma. Although for hundreds of years, they have been living in countries around the world, they still are what they are.

Following this heralding of enduring nations, Ramiz recounts a century of the *Bošnjak* resistance struggle against constant pressure to change, assimilate or leave. [For Ramiz's entire monologue of this history see *Appendix E*]. After the history of the *Bošnjak*'s nations persistence, he exclaimed:

They must have certain characteristics to be a different ethnic nation. Bošnjak nation has its own ethnicity, its own architecture, its own religion, its own customs, its own rituals. Whoever is serious in the world today, cannot deny that Bošnjaci are a nation.

When I asked other individuals to define their national belonging, they assumed that my question implied some doubts of the existence of their nation. A few, like Admir and Damir as presented earlier, argued the existence of their nation on the basis that they had their own architecture, language, history and so forth. In an interview with Fikrija, a twenty-nine year woman who worked in a denim factory as a sewer, themes of a distinct culture was presented. (Fikrija was shy and sometimes reluctant to respond. And so the translator often spoke for her, or changed her words. For the purpose of analyzing her actual voice and the dialogue between Fikrija and the translator, I had the taped interview

completely re-translated. For the purpose of illustrating the dynamic of the many voices I included the translator's text, when he did not merely translate, but added his own voice instead.)

Me: Can you describe Novi Pazar to me? What are your favorite things about Novi Pazar?

Translator: What do you like about the people? What do you enjoy most? (Serbian)

[Another person comes along and badgers Fikrija]

Fikrija: Izo take a hike, you're making me nervous I can't talk...probably because we're the same. (Serbian)

Translator: It's because we are the same in here. Most people are the same, they do the same things she likes.

Me: How are you the same?

Fikrija: Their mentality. (Serbian)

Translator: Their way of thinking, and how they act.

Me: And do you think it's different out side of Novi Pazar?

Fikrija: I think it is. (Serbian)

Me: And how is that?

Fikrija: I think the culture is different. What else do I tell her? (Serbian)

Translator: What is so different, give an example of it, on what you have seen. (Serbian)

Fikrija: We are a little primitive compared to the people in Serbia. Not that huh? (Serbian)

Translator: Just tell her what makes us different. (Serbian)

Fikrija: Well, the way we go out, the way we live... I don't know how to explain. There are rules, like going out up until 11 pm. I don't like the fact that here it's bad if you're seen with a boyfriend or if you change boyfriends. (Serbian)

Me: And why is that way?

Fikrija: Because it's the remains, the people here haven't changed much. (Serbian)

Translator: It's the way of thinking from before 200,300 years.

Me: Do you think it will change it will stay like that.

Fikrija: Not anytime soon. And I don't like it(Serbian)

Me: Do most people think like you?

Fikrija: I think there are more who think differently. (Serbian)

Translator: There are more people which think different. (English) You mean about marriage and stuff? (Serbian)

Fikrija: Yes. (Serbian)

Translator: There are more people who get married with 18 years.

Me: Is that ok with you?

Translator: Yes.

Fikrija: No. It's by our religion. Remove them [girls] as soon as possible, so they don't make mistakes. (Serbian)

Translator: Our religion is not like that! (Serbian)

Fikrija: Yes it is. Our religion doesn't allow you to go out, to have a boyfriend. (Serbian)

Translator: Her religion is not letting you to have many different boyfriends. Just one and get married. With that one. I can't be the one talking... (Serbian)

Fikrija attempted to illustrate the customs, that are shaped by religious traditions, that are so apparent in one's everyday life. I asked Fikrija if she ever wished to live outside of Novi Pazar. Despite her previous complaints, she exclaimed that she would never leave, because of her attachment to Novi Pazar's unique way of life. Such description and laudations of a distinct, unique culture was often present in individual's description of a Bošnjak-Muslim identity. Fikrija ended her interview by seconding the Ramiz's theme of assimilation. She expressed fear of assimilation, but anticipation of resistance. (The translator translated this section accurately.)

Me: Is there anything else you can say about Novi Pazar.

Fikrija: It's changed a lot. People are getting to be too modern, and to be too fanatic [extremist]. Some people are too modern and some are too fanatic [extremist].

Me: What do you mean fanatic?

Fikrija: Like in their religion. In the way that they observe life.

Me: And so you don't like both those changes?

Fikrija: I am in between those. And people are thinking that I'm different because I am in between those. I don't know. I would like for our life to change better. To go a little faster towards Europe. But we shouldn't throw away our religion, and our religious beliefs.

Me: And do you think people are afraid of that? Changing towards Europe?

Fikrija: I think people are afraid. I think that way. I don't know why. We are a lot different from Europe. I hope we don't become assimilated with them.

Me: And so you think that there might be danger of losing culture or traditions as you go toward Europe?

Fikrija: I don't know. I'm not sure it will happen.

Histories in Argument: Existence of Sandžak

As described earlier, both *Serbs* and *Bošnjak-Muslims* hold strong historical ties to the region. Generally speaking, *Serbs* feels that the region is a marker the medieval

heritage of the Serbian state. Ironically region that is the cradle of the Serb state, is saturated with evidence of *Bošnjak-Muslim* culture and history – presence of a *Bošnjak - Muslim* majority, mosques and Turkish architecture, and the perpetual labeling and recognition of a region of called *Sandžak*. Nevertheless, explains International Crisis Group, “In Serbian eyes, this identity [Sandžak identity] signals that there are potential disloyal citizens like Serbian Albanians in Kosovo and Serbian Hungarians in Vojvodina.⁷ To concisely summarize the debate surrounding the region of Sandžak Aladin stated, *For Serbs, to say you are from Sandžak – it’s like poking them in the eye*. The objection of the existence of Sandžak emerged in an interview with a member from the Democratic Party of Serbia (DSS):

Bošnjak parties want the region to be called Sandžak. That region would include a part of Montenegro. Our party doesn’t recognize that type of program, even though our party is for regionalism, and not centralization. Our goal is to have regions satisfy economic models, not national models. In our local exposure [local party branch], we don’t deal with such issues. A decision like this would be reached by consensus of political elites. Formally the region of Sandzak does not exist. Serbia has counties. Novi Pazar is a town in Raška county, whose center is Kraljevo.

Then I pressured the idea that Novi Pazar supposed close association with the rest of the county. I asked, *Is there a close connection between Novi Pazar and Kraljevo?* He answered briefly, *Novi Pazar’s connection to Kraljevo is the same as all its other connections*. I wondered to what extent this DSS party member disapproved of the idea

⁷ *Sandzak: Still Forgotten*, International Crisis Group N 162, 8 April 2005, 17.

of Sandžak. As he disowned the debate and placed it onto *political elite*, I wondered perhaps if he felt that the argument of Sandžak was unimportant.

Upon my introduction to the town, individuals who self-identified as *Bošnjak-Muslim* were proud to tell me about both the Turkish and Serbian monuments. It seems that for the individuals in Novi Pazar, accepting both legacies, Turkish and Serbian, was not an issue. Like many others, Sead expressed exasperation with the heralding of Serbian history over an erased Sandžak history; he wanted to embrace both.

*The media is always asking, why are Bošnjaci making a new mosque for themselves? Or just because they are making a new mosque in Novi Pazar, Belgrade comes to say, we will now rebuild a church from 12th c in Novi Pazar. That's just stupid stuff. All churches in Novi Pazar from 9th, 10th, 13th centuries – they are **our** [original emphasis] cultural heritage. It's our heritage and we have the right to use it, to keep it, to keep it safe. And we can use it for tourism. So tourist from all over the world can come see that the oldest churches in Balkan peninsula are in Novi Pazar, and the first Serbian capital is in Novi Pazar. I think we have a right to feel like it is ours. Not only for Christian religion. I think so. A lot of people think that way in Novi Pazar.*

Many young students expressed frustration with the biased history taught to them in their schools. Ramiz once stated that children in Novi Pazar want to hear about their history, their people, and their heroes. As I stated earlier, the history presented in the most recent International Crisis Group (ICG) report on Sandžak presents a rare and balanced perspective. One of the workers at Urban-In declared happily that the history in the ICG report was like poetry.

Relationship to Serbia: Victimization and Distancing

In talking about the Serbia, both the Serbian government and the Serbs living outside of Novi Pazar, individuals expressed themes of victimization. As a result of prolonged experience of victimization by Serbia, individuals expressed it very difficult to identify in any with Serbia, in other words admitting that one lives in Serbia or that one is a citizen of Serbia. I asked Admir and Damir to describe to me the conflicting experience of the Bošnjak-Muslim identity group, holding majority Sandžak and still experiencing discrimination.

Admir: In the municipality government – there are mostly Muslims.

Damir: Yea, now we hold the power here.

Admir: They always say remember where you live. On whose ground you live.

Even though you are majority here, don't forget whose country is this. That's the paradox.

Damir: We are natives here. We have been here for centuries, you know.

Though we are minorities in this country, this is our base. [referring to Sandžak].

Sead also vividly expressed through a number of personal experiences that illustrated the oppressive-oppressed relationship between Serbia and the Bošnjak-Muslim identity group. He explained that he suffered a distinct discrimination, given his status and experiences as a profiting businessman.

In the media you hear, [assumes a mock tone] people in Novi Pazar have something against our government and our country. The biggest problem is Sandžak, is Novi Pazar. The media is making problems, saying that people in Novi Pazar don't like each other. Or they are thinking we will do this, or we will

do that. It's just like playing with kids. . They [Serbian government] are always looking at us – asking how we make money. Saying that we get our money from the black market. [...] In Sandžak, we are treated like Kosovo, like Albanians, by Serbia, the government. We are all the time trying to be loyal citizens. I pay them 10,000 dollars for taxes every year. But they are all the time pushing us from Serbia. And they are asking us why you don't like Serbia. [long pause]. That's some strange situation. It's hard to explain, if you are not living here and not experiencing it yourself. I feel it the most when I am going to Belgrade from Novi Pazar. I drive, for business, back and forth. In first 100 km outside of Sandžak, you can feel it every time. You can feel how the government is trying to push you from your country. Telling you every time that this is not your country. You shouldn't be here. But you have to be. We were born here, we have only this country to live in. Polices on the roads stop you and tell you to change your country if you don't like this one. They are all the time annoying you. They stop you and they ask you - give me your blinkers, give me your back light, what's in your trunk, give me your documents, where are you going, what are you doing. I don't think it's normal. I don't think they want us to feel like it's our country.

Aladin described a similar experience of victimization or othering by Serbia. In response, he exclaimed that he could never identify with Serbia.

They reject us. Serbia didn't do anything for us. So we invented the term Bošnjak. So the situation is the same as it is for the Kurds in Turkey. They don't have their own state. [...] Serbs say that we brought all the wars here. Since 400, 500 years ago. They just don't let it slide. In America my self identification became

really important, more important than it is here. Identifying myself was not a problem here. For people outside of Serbia, they think we are all the same. But we are not. We are Bošnjaci – not Bosnian, not Serbian. It is not as popular to say Bošnjaci. They should teach this in school. You know, they are making books for it now. In school, still the history books teach kids how the Turks were bad. You know I always felt like an outside when I'm in Belgrade. When they here me speak, or they see me name, they know I am not from there. [...] Muslims will never call themselves Serbs. There is a major cultural difference. Compare it to the African-Americans, it's kind of similar to that. There was a Yugoslavia. That was the attempt for a civic identity. But that didn't work.

Fikrija, Banina and Anaida expressed great frustration with the othering and prejudices perpetuated by outsiders through history books.

Banina: Well many people in the other parts of Serbia, don't know what kind of people are we? That we are normal people.

Fikrija: [emphasizes] yea, normal.

Banina: They always think imagine the town [as it was during] the Turks. That we are all savages. Wars everything. Fighting.

Me: You think they still think that?

Anaida: Still they still connect us to Turks.

Banina: They think, oh you have a friend Muslim? Oh, that's so... How can you do that? That's the first question they ask when they meet us. They see that we are normal like any other people.

Anaida and Fikrija: Yes.

Fikrija: They can't believe that we are normal, like them. [Resuming a tone of incredulity] Because they think that we are savages or something. I can't believe it.

Anaida: There are many from other parts of Serbia who don't want to meet us. You know I had a chance to hear some of those conversations. They have their prejudices, they have their attitudes. They don't want to change it, they don't want to meet you. I was talking about people from other parts of Serbia. It's very unpleasant to hear. When you hear there attitudes, they have no wish to meet you. You are different nationality, different religion. You mean nothing to them. And that's it. You just can't be connected to them. You can't meet them. You can't prove that they are wrong. And that's it. And that's something that it is a

problem here. And I can say for some Muslim people. I know some people who have those prejudices about Serbs. And that's also very bad. That's need to changed.

Me: Are people trying to change those ideas?

Fikrija: [Facetiously.] You know it's history and history is not changeable, you know? They think it is like that, and nobody can tell them that it is different. Because they like the way it is written and it is good for some people here. Never mind who cares about the others.

Banina: It's in the blood. It's Balkan-syndrome, you know. [Laughs.] They believe in that history.

Vice President of the Skupština (local municipal council), who identifies as a *Bošnjak*, in an interview illustrated his perception of the government oppression. He alluded to constant pressure and instigation caused by Belgrade administration. He explained that in Novi Pazar is cost 500 euros to get a phone installed in homes, and for the rest of Serbia is cost 100 euros. Then he in continuing to explain the situation of the police force, he expressed hope in cooperation with Serbia.

Today eighty percent of the police force is Serb and, twenty percent Muslim. Our population is the opposite eighty percent Muslims and twenty percent Serbs.

However, he are heading toward democratization. Following the changes made on 5 October 2000, some Bošnjaks were appointed to the chief of police. But the lower level stays the same. There are not enough Bošnjaks there. This is a complex problem and it will take some time to change. Many of the Muslim youth are eliminated before they can even entire the police academy in Belgrade. They are usually failed for medical reasons. [...] I hope that the new democratic government in Serbia will make the police force not corrupt. I hope that youth from Novi Pazar will enter the police academy. It does not matter if they are Serbs or Bošnjaks. It is just important that they are from here.

Denial of tension and desire for tolerance

For most, problems and discrimination were imposed by outsiders, both Serbs from outside of Sandžak or the official Serbian government. However when trying to illustrate the social situation within Novi Pazar, individuals were hesitant to critique the other national groups. Individuals uncomfortably tried to paint a picture of full integration and harmony. However further into their discourse, they revealed a history and present situation of quiet, stagnant tension.

Most individuals' initially denied any presence of tension by stating two of the common phrases: *I don't make any differences* or that *my religion teaches me to respect other religions*. Most individuals expressed confusion or uncertainty about my questioning their identity. Perhaps they were afraid that I might have some hidden agenda: if they declared their identity (for most this meant declaring their religion), I would peg them as extremists, or if they described problems between identity groups, I would peg them as nationalists. For most, I was able assuage their fears and coax a description of their identification and the current social situation.

Fikrija, the factory worker, initially expressed strong uncertainty and then later decided to describe her identity:

Fikrija: I don't declare myself at all. (Serbian)

Translator: She doesn't want to tell you her identity.

Me: Is there a reason?

Fikrija: Well, I don't know, there are reasons... (Serbian)

Translator: There are some reasons.

Me: Are not comfortable talking about them? If so, that's ok.

Translator: You don't feel ok while talking about it? (Serbian)

Fikrija: No, I'm fine it's just that... (Serbian)

Translator: She's ok but...

Fikrija: I never made any difference between religions; I was raised never to make any difference. (Serbian)

Translator: She never made difference between religions.

Fikrija: No, I believe my own... (Serbian)
Translator: Then say what you believe in, and how. (Serbian)
Fikrija: I believe in my religion, I believe in our God, Islam, I believe in Allah. (Serbian)
Translator: She's Islamic.
Fikrija: I also respect other people's religion. My friends are always mixed. (Serbian)
Translator: She's respecting any other religion. She had always mixed friends, from every identity.
Fikrija: I always find something, I'm so complicated. (Laughs) (Serbian)
Me: Really? That sounds interesting. I'd like to hear anything else you want to say about it.
Translator: Say something else c'mon. (Serbian)
Fikrija: Let her ask. (Serbian)
Translator: Ask her questions.
Me: [Laughs] Ok, so you say your own identity's complicated.
Fikrija: So what? (Serbian)
Translator: Are you mixed, a hybrid? (Serbian)
Fikrija: No. (Serbian)
Translator: No.
Me: No. Are your ideas about the identities complicated?
Translator: Do you have any beliefs, about being unsure what you believe in? (Serbian)
Fikrija: No. I'm certain in what I believe but... (Serbian)
Translator: She's certain in what she's believing.
Fikrija: Our faith tells us... Can't you explain that to her? (Serbian)
Translator: Her religion is telling you to be like that.
Fikrija: To respect others. I believe firmly and that's why I respect other religions. (Serbian)

Similarly, Sabina, a gymnasia student, throughout two interviews neglected to focus on the topic of national, religion, or ethnic identities. She often alluded to social tensions caused by the discussion of identities. Sabina continually proclaimed her desire to construct her own identity. She expressed dissatisfaction with the herd-mentality of people in Novi Pazar. She stated once, *You were born alone, and you will die alone. So people need to learn how to live their life by themselves.* Such rebellion to identity-model that does not acknowledge individual agency, was expressed by her unique fashions, including unnaturally red hair and multiple piercings, and her motivation to study hard in

hopes of leaving Novi Pazar, and perhaps even Serbia. During the middle of one of her sermons on individual-identity construction, she paused. She asked me, *Do you want me to talk about religion now?* I responded, *Sure, if that's one of the important identities for people here.* She responded:

I don't think religion is that important. It doesn't matter what religion you are. Or if you are religious. It's good to be religious. Religious tell you to do good things. But for me all people are the same. You know, in Islam, they tell you that you can't drink. But I think fifty-percent of Muslims in Novi Pazar drink. It's not religion that makes you a good person. You can still be bad with religion. One of my good friends, she is covered, and we hang out a lot. She tells me things that I should do and shouldn't do. I don't like that. Because I don't make differences between people. My mom, she taught me not to make differences between people. My mom said, don't look at the man's name to know if he is a good person. Just look at how he acts to know if he is a good person. I know people who have the same religion as me, and they can do really bad things to you. In Novi Pazar, most people here are Muslim. I have some friends who are not Muslim. They sometimes never go out to the same places I go to at night. There are some Christian clubs here. If I go there, people think, what are you doing here. I think sometimes it's really important for other people. [With tones of amusement and incredulity] When I was little I really didn't know how people know they were different. If there was a boy Stefan, how do you know if he is Muslim or Christian. When I was little there were not many Christians in my school. I was hanging out with Muslims. But I started noticing that even your friends could be

mean to you, even if they are your religion. My sister told me, that I will meet all kinds of people in the world. Some people will be your friends, but not always.

You need to look at how a person acts to know if he is good.

Sabina's personal mantra upheld the idea of not recognizing divisions in society. This decision freed her from making biased judgment of (groups of) individuals; thereby she avoided participating in the clash and tension of identities.

Sabina and Fikrija struggle with the idea of proclaiming their identity, as they alluded to the social tensions. Others, who did not struggle with declaring their identity, struggled with decision to illustrate the social dynamic between the identity groups. Individuals would merely allude to *hard times* or *tense situations*.

In our first interview, Bissa merely alluded to possible problems between identity groups. She explained, *This country has a lot of wars people. And a lot of people are in a really bad financial situation. I could understand that, but I don't know how they sleep.* I was really confused, *What do you mean?* She responded vaguely, *If I do something bad, I don't know how they could sleep.* Still I was confused, *You mean in the war?* She was frustrated that I did not understand her ambiguous hints, *No, not in the war. No. I mean today. In politics. Maybe some man comes here, and he does something bad to someone... I don't understand people.* During that interview, Bissa did not finish describing what she meant. However days later in a casual conversation, she repeated that phrase, *I don't know how he can sleep at night when he does something bad.* She was starting to illustrate the social situation of identity groups. She lowered her voice to a whisper, *I talked to someone online. He leaves in Prishtina, Kosovo- you know. He was so happy one day. So I asked him why he was so happy. He told me he was happy*

because he just killed one Serb man. Resuming in a voice of shock, I asked him what are you talking about. He explained that he had killed some Serb. I was so angry. I just asked him, how do you sleep at night?

In another interview Bissa claimed that there was more *Musliman-Musliman fighting*, as she put it, than fights between Bošnjak-Muslims and Serbs:

*Here, we don't have a lot of fights. There are more fights Muslim between Muslim. In the politics. They are jealous of each other. It is possible that there are Muslim-Serb problems too. [...] I respect my religion. In Islam, we must respect other religions. We live and let live. That's the good part of Islam. But there are, you know, the Arab fighters. They fight for Allah. That is wrong. That man that was here selling books. [Referring to a bearded man who had tried earlier to sell us books and tapes.] Those people, they go the wrong way. They believe in something different. Some people in the *đamija* [mosque], they saw them pray for differently for Allah. But these people they believe in a different way. [...] I tell my mom, look mom, because I am so scared. In market, in *Samald Komerc*, the cashier, she is all covered in black. Even her hands were covered in black gloves. I am so scared of that...[She pauses.] If she chooses that way – that's ok. There are two kinds of people, no three kinds of people. There are people who are not covered. There are ok They respect everyone else. There are women who are covered. That's ok too. And the third kind of people, that's the wrong way, that's *secta*. These are the women that are completely covered. In the last year, it's been happening a lot.*

The ultra-conservative religious trends described earlier by Fikrija and here by Bissa, was documented as *Wahhabism* groups in the recent ICG report.

*The Wahhabis first appeared in 1997, when a new imam at a local mosque began requiring his congregatioin to pray in the Wahhabi manner. [...] Their influence is clearly felt: five years ago, one rarely saw Bošnjak women wearing head scarves in Novi Pazar: today a significantly larger number of women on the evening stroll display head scarves and other modest clothing associated with Wahhabi or at least conservative Islam. [...] Since the ouster of Milosevic, some young men also have been cultivating Wahhabi fashions, including the bears, high trousers and vest. During the dzuma (Friday prayers), Wahhabis typically disrupt services by standing up and leaving when the Ders begins.*⁸

ICG describes, though Wahhabis have not committed any illegal acts, their presence is nonetheless unsettling for the other follower of the Islam faith in Sandžak. ICG explains that Wahhabis are too “intolerant and too radical, not in keeping with Balkan Islamic tradition and custom.”⁹

In denying cross-national tensions, individuals are also asserting their own position within a factionalized identity group. In interviews, political members seconded, Bissa’s criqitue of ulta-conservatism and nationalism still lingering in the Bošnjak-Muslim identity. The Vice President of the local municipal council lightly alludes to *Musliman-Musliman fights*, to use Bissa’s words, as manifested in politics:

Maybe you are aware that current political situation is very complicated. The local assembly is not functioning correctly. There is Suliman Uglianin, who is the

⁸ Ibid, 24.

⁹ Ibid, 25.

mayor of our city. The main reason of that disfunction – the mayor is not respecting democratic principles. He governs with some sort of absolutism.

Another politician, the member of the Democratic Party of Serbia (DSS) which I interviewed, explained the not only the Musliman-Musliman conflict, but also cross-national problems. He explained that Ugljanin's party, the Party for Democratic Action (SDA), was an extremist Bošnjak party. He likened Ugljanin to Milosevic – manipulating and instilling hate in people so as to create a group solidarity. Then he continued to praise the other Bošnjak parties, which he had *only the best words*. As for Serb and Bošnjak tensions he explained:

In the lower level, political wars between Serbs and Bošnjaks are very noticeable in the past few years. So our goal is to build cooperation between these two peoples. There were many incidents. We are viewers of nationalistic hate. You can see this in sports manifestations. One time – there was a separation of youth. Serbs in one café and Bošnjaks in another café. It wasn't so often that they go to cafes with both nations. The process hasn't been finished yet. It's a long process. Media has a main act in this. Politicians, organizations, NGO need to be more active. By setting examples in the town, hanging out together. being friends together, lowering the count of fights. More and more cafes should be mixed with both nations. There are also some extreme rivers within both nations.

Once individuals had defined the slightly tense situation between national groups they always expressed hope that soon people would be able to live together without being labeled. After describing divisions within society, Fikrija, the university student, expressed hopes for a better future.

When I was five, there was a girl who was only a year older. And she came and asked me: Fikrija, are you Serb or Muslim. So I answered I don't know. So I went to my mom, Am I a Serb or the other... I can't remember how do you say it. [Laughs] Mom said to me, Who asked you that? She was so angry. People are only joking about it. But it's very bad that you can't talk to others, because there are things that you think and no one can change it. And are things that others think and no one can change it too. And it's not so public, that kind of question. It's very personal, and you shouldn't talk about it out. [...] But when I was primary school, people are talking about it everywhere. It was bad. For example when I was six, when my cousins telling me, don't write Cyrillic, only Serbs write it. I went to my sister's friend, I said that too. And she was surprised that a girl who is only 10 can say something like that. But it's much easier now, you accept something, you reject something. [...] I really hope that it will be better soon. It must be better.

Zajedno za toleranciju

On easter morning, at the home of my host family, there were colored eggs at the breakfast table. My host mother, who defines herself as both Turkish and Bosnian, handed me an egg, explaining that her friend gave her the eggs to give to her children. I suppose I gave her a look of surprise, as she answered, *Well of course. We live together and we work together.* In interviews, individuals would often explain that they enjoyed growing in a multi-cultural environment.

During my stay in Novi Pazar, a photo exhibit entitled *Svakodnevni Zivot I Kultura Mog Kraja* (Everyday Life and Customs of My Homeland) opened at the Ras

Muzej. The exhibit included photos of various countryside scenes, traditional clothing, and rustic objects. The catalogue exclaimed that appreciating differences would help people reach across differences:

Implementing a project, that enhances the positive values of an ethnic diversity and promote tolerance and dialogue in this conflictive environment, was therefore considered important. The aim of the project is prevention of a new ethnic conflict escalation. [...] Intercultural learning is a process where we learn how to live together, thus learning to live in a world of differences which is a starting point for coexistence in peace.¹⁰

A museum worker at Musej Ras, through explanations of the museum's objectives revealed the commonly expressed desire to have both identity groups appreciating a commonly held history.

The museum is very, very important in this region. The basic goal of this museum is to make all the history and cultures in this museum equal – Serbs and Bošnjaks equally. For example, if a tourist comes to monastery near Novi Pazar – the monks there can tell you about first Serbian govt here in 11-12th c. If you go to Ottoman monasteries – they will tell you about when Novi Pazar was founded and when the Turks came and the Islamization of Novi Pazar. But if you come to the museum you can get either information – material proof, from science aspect, from history aspect. There won't be religious aspects in that speech. So if a tourist comes to museum – they have the right to understand the history of the town. You don't understand the situation in Novi Pazar. And I don't expect you to

¹⁰ Svakodnevni Zivot I Kultura Mog Kraja (Everyday life and customs of my homeland), Exhibit catalogue, Musej Ras, Novi Pazar, Spring 2005, 5.

understand it all at once, the whole situation. You have to feel the life in Novi Pazar – the positive and negative aspects of Novi Pazar. When you feel that, you will understand that all I have said is right.

In light of all descriptions personal identity dramas, conflicts within the Bošnjak-Muslim identity group, and social tensions between identity groups, individuals were careful to end the conversation with a sense of hope. Many were waiting for a better time when differences would not cause discrimination or intolerance. During my bus drive back to Belgrade, I looked out the window as we were leaving Sandžak. On the roadside, graffitied into a rock-face were the words: *Zajedno za toleranciju*. Indeed, in the interviews, the final words of most called for an effort to reach together for tolerance.

Appendices

Schedule of Interviews

1. Meho

Occupation: pediatrician; member of Municipal Council (Skupština); VP of SDP local branch

Translator: Emir

Taping: yes

Date/Time: Wednesday, April 20, 2005; 1:30 pm

Location: Urban-In, downstairs

2. Sead

Occupation: student at European University of Management, Belgrade; runs family-owned factory

Translation: n/a

Taping: yes

Date/Time: Wednesday, April 20, 2005; 10 pm

Location: restaurant

3. Tanja

Occupation: worker at Muzej Ras, Novi Pazar

Translation: Ivan

Taping: yes

Date/Time: Thursday, April 21, 2005; 11:30am

Location: office in the museum

4. Alwasa

Occupation: gymnasium student

Translation: n/a

Taping: yes

Date/Time: Friday, April 22, 2005; 1:15pm

Location: Urban-In, attic

5. Birsena

Occupation: state university student, member of Urban-In (1-year)

Translation: n/a

Taping: yes

Date/Time: Saturday, April 23, 2005; 2 pm

Location: Urban-In, attic

6. Ramiz

Occupation: president of Sandžak Intellectual Club

Translation: Ivan

Taping: yes

Date/Time: Monday, April 25, 2005, 11:30am

Location: Sandžak Intellectual Club

7. Mirza

Occupation: gymnasium student, member of Urban-In

Translation: n/a

Taping: no (requested no taping)

Date/Time: Monday, April 25, 2005, 8:30pm

Location: Urban-In, attic

8. Sabina

Occupation: gymnasia student
Translation: n/a
Taping: no (requested no taping)
Date/Time: Tuesday, April 26, 2005; 7:30pm
Location: Café Elite

9. Aladin

Occupation: graduate of California State University of San Bernadino
Translation: n/a
Taping: no (music too loud)
Date/Time: Tuesday, April 26, 2005; 10:00pm
Location: K2 Restaurant

10. Fikrija

Occupation: factory worker
Translation: Sead (Emir reviewed and re-translated tape)
Taping: yes
Date/Time: Wednesday, April 27, 2005; 2pm
Location: Casaba Factory

11. Ramiz (second interview)

Occupation: president of Sandžak Intellectual Club
Translation: Ivan
Taping: yes
Date/Time: Thursday, April 28, 2005; 12:45pm
Location: Sandžak Intellectual Club

12. Željko

Occupation: secretary of DSS local branch
Translation: Ivan
Taping: no (requested no taping)
Date/Time: Thursday, April 28, 2005; 3:00pm
Location: Urban-In; downstairs

13. Birsena (second interview)

Occupation: state university student, member of Urban-In (1-year)
Translation: n/a
Taping: no (music too loud)
Date/Time: Thursday, April 28, 2005; 4:30pm
Location: Aquarium Café

14. Focus Group: Admir and Damir

Occupation: post-graduate students; teaching assistants at International University of Novi Pazar (private)
Translation: n/a
Taping: yes
Date/Time: Thursday, April 28, 2005; 9pm
Location: Sunce Restaurant

15. Focus Group: Fikrija, Banina and Anaida

Occupation: students at International University of Novi Pazar (private)
Translation: n/a
Taping: yes
Date/Time: Friday, April 29, 2005; 1:30pm
Location: office in International University of Novi Pazar

16. Sabina (second interview)

Occupation: gymnasia student
Translation: n/a
Taping: no (requested no taping)
Date/Time: Friday, April 29, 2005; 6:30pm
Location: Café Elite

Pre-Interview Briefing

Original in English

About myself and my research:

I am an American undergraduate student from Mount Holyoke College in Massachusetts. I am studying for one semester in Zagreb at the American institution of School for International Training (SIT). My anthropological research and observations collected in Novi Pazar will go to my project paper for SIT. The research and observations may be further used for my undergraduate anthropology thesis at Mount Holyoke College.

I am looking at how individuals identify with larger, collective identities specifically national, regional, religious, etc. I am also interested in understanding how other collective identities and other personal identities connect to the larger collective identities. I am interested to find out how larger collective identities are conceived and constructed by the most basic social unity – the individual. By analyzing this small slice of reality, first-hand confessions and descriptions of an identity, I hope to better understand the greater social, cultural, and political dynamics between identity groups in Sandzak, and the greater Serbia.

I am interested in studying individual descriptions, definitions and understanding of collective identities (ie national, regional, religious) through their narratives and life histories. Through studying history and politics of this region, I have heard the use of collective identities (national, regional, and religious). However I have not heard these terms clearly described. I am interested, as a student researcher, in hearing how individuals define and conceive these terms. I understand and value the plurality and cross-cutting of identities. I welcome individuals' incorporation of other identities, not mentioned, into their discussion.

Translated/Edited into Serbian by Mladena Prelić

Nakoliko reči o meni i ovom istraživanju

Zovem se Christine DeBacker. Studiram na Mount Holyoke College-u, u Massachusetts-u, SAD. Ove godine provodim jedan semestar na američkoj Međunarodnoj školi u Zagrebu (School for International Training – SIT). U Novom Pazaru nameravam da obavim istraživanje iz oblasti kulturne antropologije za projekat koji radim na SIT-u o različitim identitetima u Sandžaku. Moguće je da ću rezultate istraživanja koristiti i za svoj diplomski rad u Americi.

Zanima me kako se pojedinci identifikuju sa širim, kolektivnim, posebno nacionalnim, regionalnim i verskim identitetima. Prvenstveno me interesuje kako pojedinac razume kolektivni identitet i kako ga izgrađuje. Takođe me zanima kako se drugi kolektivni i pojedinačni identiteti povezuju sa ovim pomenutim širim identitetima. Analizirajući mali segment stvarnosti, na nivou iskaza običnih ljudi i njihovih opisa sopstvenog identiteta, nadam se da ću bolje razumeti širu socijalnu, kulturnu i političku dinamiku između različitih grupa u Sandžaku i u Srbiji.

Interesuju me, dakle, opisi, definicije i načini razumevanja kolektivnih identiteta – nacionalnih, regionalnih, verskih – kroz priče i životne istorije pojedinaca. Ovi izrazi – nacionalno, regionalno, versko – često su u upotrebi i često ih čujemo. Ipak, retko čujemo njihovo precizno određenje - šta ljudi tačno pod njima podrazumevaju. Kao studenta-istraživača, zanima me kako moji sagovornici određuju i razumeju značenje ovih pojmova.

Razumem i poštujem pluralnost i mešovite, kompleksne identitete. Ako moji sagovornici u svoje priče uključe i druge identitete koje nisam pomenula, to će mi takođe biti korisno u radu.

Statistics

(explain the officials versus regular idea in the preface (methodology), and restate here. Say that officials will be represented in parantheses, since the questions that I asked them where different from the questions I asked the “regular” people. I asked about how they observe the situation in NP, they usually spoke at length about their job, and their position. Rather than sharing personal information that the “regular” people did.)

Birth Years

Pre-1950s:	1	[total: 1]
1950s-1960s:	(3)	[total: 3]
1970s:	3	[total: 3]
1980-1985:	6	[total: 6]
1985-1990:	3	[total: 3]
		[final total: 16]

Education:

Gymnasia:	3 current, 1 completed	[total: 4]
University:	5 current, 1 (2) completed	[total: 8]
Post-Graduate Studies:	2 current, 1 (1) completed	[total: 4]
		[final total: 16]

Gender

Women:	7 (1)	[total: 8]
Men:	6 (2)	[total: 8]
		[final total: 16]

Identity Claims:

Muslim/Musliman/Bošnjak:	13 (1)	[total: 14]
Serb:	(2)	[total: 2]
		[final total: 16]

Map of Serbia and Montenegro

Ramiz's Monologue: Rendition on the History of Bošnjak-Muslims

The national identity of Bošnjak has been formed in the last hundred years. During the Turkish government here – there were just two division. Islamic and Christian – you could be a Serb who transferred to Islam. A Croat, a Hungarian, a Bulgarian, it's not important. You could get any high place in the country except the Sultan [even if you weren't Muslim]. You had to be loyal to the government. [...] In the middle ages, there was a rule – the country is the religion of the ruler. There was one Serbian king who was Catholic. Therefore all Serbs were Catholic. He broke from the Orthodoxy of Byzantia. And so all Serbs became Catholic. The Turkish government didn't force anyone to convert to Islam. But you couldn't develop yourself if you weren't a Muslim. Just like in Communism: you couldn't develop yourself if you declared a religion. The first who went to Islam were the rich men – because they wanted to keep what they owned – they were afraid of losing it. Under Serbian government, if you weren't Christian you couldn't go to the high function. And then Serbian Orthodox church didn't claim there was Islamization, but there was Turkization. So the Serbian officers – said whoever is muslim is a turk. So there was a great Turkish religion – because they had two identities in one. So the whole environment was that there were Turks – though they spoke the same language as Serbs and Croats, and they started feeling like Serbs. But the Turks called them Bošnjaks and never accepted them as Turks. The people called the real people in Turkey – turkusha.

In Bosnian Sandžak until 1912 – there was only one identification by religion – Christian and Islamic. So the Prime Minister of Serbia at that time, in Sandžak were forcing Orthodoxy people to claim like Serbs. In Croatia, Croatian agents forced Catholics in western Bosnia to say that are Croatian. When Serbian Orthodoxy church from here – Muslims stayed and they didn't know what they are. Are they Serbian or are they Croatian ... People in Dubrovnik in Croatia –until a hundred years ago were claiming that they were Serbs, and the Catholic church were claiming that they were Croatian. There was a party in the Yugoslavia, that was called Yugoslavia Muslims Organization (JMO)who claim that the identity Muslims must be a cultural thing and you can't make any kind of pressure. In northern part of Sandžak in Pripolje, Priboj and Novivaraš, there was the Yugoslavia Muslims Organization. In southern part of Sandzak, there was the Đemijet, confessional party who gathered people of Islamic origin not matter what ethnicity they were.

Serbia pressured people to claim Serb and Muslim. Macedonia and Montenegro were not nations at that time. JMO said they cannot create pressures. They formed a charity organization to help people get their identity rights. After World War II, Muslims were recognized as a nation equal to all other nations. Occupiers of nationalist forces wanted to provoke brother-brother killing wars. In a great part they succeeded, and people wanted to kill themselves. Those forces aimed to get Albanians out of this area. Although during war, Sijenica, Tutin were in Serbia. In war, the government, nationalistic troops joined to created a great Albania. During the war there were Albanians schools, need to put Albanian on firms (companies) and to wear an Albanina hat. Society never accepted

the Albanization. During the war in Pljevac, anti-Fascistic council was formed by Muslims of Sandžak. In that time, Sandžak was republic. They had skupstina, government, and other government bodies. March 29, 1945, there was a decision saying that Sandžak will lose the autonomy. After the war, 1945-1948, communist governor, had opinion like the kingdom, Muslims will have to be Serbs or Croats. On the census you had to choose Serb or Croat, there was no option for Muslim. So people again feared that people will lose their identity. In 1964, it was the first time the term Muslim was used for national identity. In 1968, we finally got the national autonomy. Our name was Muslim. The main different between identities was that ethnicity had a capital M and religion had a lower case m. Some suggested to get term Bošnjak instead of Muslim. Because it's hard to differentiate religion from ethnicity. Serbs and Croats in Bosnia gave objections, because they are Bošnjaks too. They said it defined where they live. During war in Bosnia 1994, those people made a difference between nation and religion, Serbs and Croats of Bosnia in that time didn't want to say anymore that they are Bosnians. They proclaimed that they are now in Bosnia – not Muslims. Bosnian ethnicity has their own language which they took took from Serbian. Only in Bosnian language, is it a literal language. They must have certain characteristics to be a different ethnic nation. Bošnjak nation has its own ethnicity, its own architecture, its own religion, its own customs, its own rituals. Whoever is serious in the world today, cannot deny that Bošnjaci are a nation.

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