

**Naši Narodi? Moji Identiteti:
Four Youth Perspectives on National Identity in Post-Dayton Bosnia and Herzegovina**

Seigel-Boettner, Jacob

Academic Director: Fridman, Orli

Project Advisor: Đurković, Svetlana

University of California, Berkeley

Major: Peace and Conflict Studies

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for Balkans: Post-Conflict Transformation in
Croatia, Bosnia and Serbia, SIT Study Abroad Spring 2009

Table of Contents:

Acknowledgements.....	3
Abstract.....	4
Introduction.....	5
Literature Review.....	7
Dayton and National Identity.....	7
Symbols and National Identity.....	8
The Term Bosniak.....	9
Youth in BiH.....	10
Outsider Positionality in BiH.....	12
Methodology.....	13
Interviews.....	14
B-Roll.....	15
My Lenses.....	17
Conclusion.....	20
Limitations of Study.....	24
Recommendations for Future Study.....	26
Primary Sources.....	27
Works Cited.....	28
Appendix.....	29
Sanski Most Interview Questions.....	29
Banja Luka Interview Questions.....	31

Acknowledgements

You can't just show up in a foreign country with a camera and start shooting. You need local knowledge: fixers, translators, and advisors. Thank you to Vahidin Omanović for helping make Sanski Most my second home for the month of April. Without his help I would not have been able to find such articulate and open individuals to interview in Sanski Most, let alone have a roof to edit under. Thank you to Nedžad Cerić for taking four hours out of his evening to translate Leila's interview word for word. His time and work made my job as a filmmaker much easier. Thanks to Mirjana Kosić and Danijela Majstorović for helping me find interviewees in Banja Luka in my last minute panic. Thank you to Svetlana Đurković for the lengthy late night advising sessions, without which I would have had much more difficulty processing my findings. Finally, thank you to Orli Fridman for letting me pursue this topic with my camera in addition to my pen. Hvala.

Abstract

On December 14th, 1995, the Dayton Peace Accords stopped the bullets in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Dayton split BiH along ethno-national lines. The Dayton-established constitution recognized three national groups as the constituents of BiH: Bosniaks, Serbs, and Croats. Three presidents, three languages, three textbooks. Residents of BiH are often required to identify themselves as either one of the constituent identities or Other. Bosnian and Herzegovinian is not an option.

Unlike the pre-war generations, young people in BiH today do not have a unifying Yugoslav identity to bring them together. For many, there is no such thing as a collective “Bosnian” national identity. This film explores the issue of national identity for four members of this post-Dayton generation. This is a film about Mirza (17, Sanski Most), Leila (16, Sanski Most), Lana (23, Banja Luka), and Dejan (25, Banja Luka). Through interviews and day-in-the-life footage the film explores whether or not they feel that they can identify with the three constituent identities, how they view the “others,” those from the other entity, and whether they identify themselves as “Bosnian” when it comes to nationality.

National identity in BiH is not synonymous with citizenship. The state of BiH does not promote a single national identity that can define all of those within its borders. It promotes three. This lack of a single national identity that ties individuals to BiH as a geographic space can make defining one’s national identity very complicated. All four interviewees had different answers, almost all of which went to varying degree beyond the three constitutionally recognized identities. All four attributed their national identities to different factors within their lives. Only two equated national identity to something along the lines of citizenship. One country. Three recognized identities. Four perspectives.

Introduction

Every time I read the news/I'm always more confused.
They're telling me to choose/But there's only lies to choose from.
–Michael Franti

The funny thing is, when I go to Serbia, people see me as Bosnian. Here in Bosnia, people see me as a Serb. When I give my passport to someone they think that I am from Croatia, and my Grandfather thinks that we should still have Yugoslavia back.
–Lana Bastašić

Bosnian...I am not even sure what that means exactly.
-Dejan Milinović

Nationality...hard question.
-Leila Bošković

I have been told numerous times in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) that if I am not confused, I have not been paying attention. I came to BiH, camera in hand, planning to make a documentary about young people and national identity¹. I carried with me all of the baggage that an American education can buy. All that I had learned about BiH, from my professors, CNN, and Hollywood, was framed what Dejan described to me as “the Bosniak-Serb-Croat triangle.” I saw national identity in BiH as being either Bosniak, Croat, or Serb. I had learned about the war from an American perspective, with the Serbs as the aggressors and the Bosniaks as the victims. There were no shades of grey. I wasn't paying attention.

After my first two months in the Balkans, I realized that I needed to take a step back, but also a step in. A step back from my preconceptions of post-Dayton BiH and what national identity here means. I realized that what I had thought were clear lines separating the constitutionally recognized national identities were in reality much less clear. There were not only shades of gray, but shades of color. I needed to take a step in: into the reality of four young

¹ National identity can imply many things, from citizenship to religious affiliation to location of residence. For the purposes of this project, national identity is defined as ethnicity unless otherwise noted.

people in BiH. Into a reality that differs greatly from person to person, street to street, town to town. Into a very personal reality that might not fit the images of BiH and national identity that I had before booking my ticket to the Balkans.

The objective of my research was to, through film, explore the issue of national identity for four young people in post-Dayton BiH. To listen to and try to understand views from both the Republika Srpska (RS) and Federation Bosnia and Herzegovina (FBiH) in an attempt to better understand what national identity means to my generation in BiH. I would have to ask some very difficult questions. Questions like whether or not members of the post-Dayton generation embrace one of the three identities offered to them. Whether they struggle to place themselves in different categorical drawers, or for that matter whether they chose to place themselves in drawers at all. How they view people their age from the other entity. Questions like whether they consider themselves “Bosnian”², and if so what this identity means to them. I was starting to pay attention.

Three months, eight tapes, and several storyboards later, I had my film. Instead of telling a story about three clearly defined national identities, I ended up telling a story about four individuals. This is still a film about national identity, but it is also about individual identity. About Leila, Mirza, Lana, and Dejan. Four perspectives. Four voices. Many identities. Welcome to Bosnian and Herzegovina. I am paying attention now.

² The use of the word “Bosnian” to describe identity (both citizenship and nationality) is problematic, as it does not include those from Herzegovina. In this paper, the collective identity of those from BiH (both citizenship and nationality) will be referred to in general as Bosnian and Herzegovinian. When “Bosnian” (in quotations) is used, it is referring to the way that either I or one of my interviewees described the idea of a collective identity in BiH the film or the way that the author of a secondary source referred to a collective identity in BiH in his or her article.

Literature Review

Dayton and National Identity

In order to begin to understand the question of national identity and how it impacts youth in BiH, you have to start with Dayton and its impact on nationality and nationalist politics. Florian Beiber's *Governing Post-War Bosnia-Herzegovina* outlines the structure of the post-Dayton BiH government. The Dayton Accords did little to bridge the ethno-national divides created by the war, especially in the political arena. The wartime nationalist leaders became the peacetime political elites (Beiber 321). The Dayton-established BiH Constitution set up a government based on power sharing between the three constitutionally recognized ethno-national groups: Bosniaks, Serbs, and Croats. The presidency was to be made up of three individuals, one from each group. Parliament was also structured along ethno-national lines, with quotas in the House of Peoples to ensure that each of the three groups had adequate representation (Ibid 324-5). Those who did not identify with one of the three national groups, that is those who chose to see themselves as "Other" (the only choice for minorities under the new constitution) or "citizens" of BiH ("Bosnians") were given no representation (Ibid 327). Additionally, the Bosnian and Herzegovinian Constitution placed most decision making power with the entities (RS and FBiH), rather than with the state government (Ibid 327-8), further entangling politics with nationality.

In two of his policy briefs for the Democratization Policy Council³, Kurt Bassuener further describes the impact of Dayton on the political climate in BiH, specifically how it impacts the average citizen. He, like Beiber, describes how Dayton simply maintained the wartime status quo by allowing nationalist leaders to take reigns of political power (Bassuener

³ See Works Cited for details on the briefs.

2008, 3, Beiber 321). Dayton's coupling of political power with nationalist interests is embodied by Milorad Dodik, a one time moderate politician in the Republika Srpska who has since jumped on the nationalist bandwagon as he sees this as the best way to maintain power in the current political framework (Bassuener 2008, 3-4). Bassuener also describes how politicians in BiH have little incentive to be accountable to their constituents (Ibid 3). This has led over 70% of the population of BiH to "have no faith in politics to pursue their interests." They often do not vote, or use their votes simply as a vote against one of the other national parties (Bassuener 2009, 4). Voting and the broader political process have become deeply intertwined with one's national identity.

The Dayton Accords attempted to separate citizenship from nationality in order to ensure that all national groups received equal representation. In *Dilemmas of Nation-building and Citizenship in Dayton Bosnia*, Dejan Guzina explains that in attempting this Dayton actually heightened the importance of national identity to such a level that many in BiH now identify more with their nationality than their "Bosnian" citizenship. By recognizing three national groups (and not "Bosnians") as the constituent peoples of BiH, the Constitution places individuals' national identity (as either Bosniak, Serb, Croat, or Other) above their identity as "Bosnian" citizens. There is no option of identifying themselves primary as "Bosnians" (Guzina 226). Additionally, one cannot have a "dual nationality" (Ibid 231) making things complicated for those from multinational marriages.

Symbols and National Identity

Symbols are key to the construction and maintenance of a national identity. Because I will be attempting to document the manifestations of national identity that young people see in

their everyday lives, a better understanding of the context behind national symbols is crucial.

Nationbuilding as an Instrument of Peace? Exploring Local Attitudes Towards International Nationbuilding and Reconciliation in Bosnia and Herzegovina by Roland Kostić looks at the role of the international community in shaping BiH through Dayton and the OHR. He found that while many Bosniaks accept the OHR and international community-backed “Bosnian” national symbols (flag, coat of arms, national anthem), many Serbs and Croats do not as they don’t believe that these symbols adequately reflect their national heritage (Kostić 390-2).

In *Nationalism and Identity in Post-Dayton Accords: Bosnia-Herzegovina* Robinson and Pobrić further explore the creation of national symbols in BiH. They emphasize that there are two nationalist movements taking place side by side in BiH: one to differentiate each national identity from the others, and another to create a single “Bosnian” identity that respects the inherent cultural and ethnic diversity present in BiH (Robinson and Pobrić 240). Both of these movements use symbols to remind individuals of their nationality. The former movement’s use of symbols is exemplified by the renaming of streets in Sarajevo after almost exclusively Bosniak historical and cultural figures (Ibid 245-6). The later movement has attempted to create a unified “Bosnian” identity by placing Bogomil symbols on the national currency. Though these symbols do represent a uniquely “Bosnian” past, many see them as also representing a uniquely Bosniak past, as many Bogomils converted to Islam and became the ancestors of the present day Bosniaks (Ibid 247).

The Term Bosniak

For many outsiders, the term Bosniak can be very confusing. Is it synonymous with Bosnian and Herzegovinian? Does it only describe Bosnian Muslims? Why is their national

identity the only one that seems to reflect the country in which they live? Aydin Babuna's *National Identity, Islam and Politics in Post-Communist Bosnia-Herzegovina* examines the evolution of Bosniak nationhood. It was not until the 1993 that Bosniak became the national label for all Bosnian Muslims (Ibid 414). It was decided at the time to be a secular term, despite the fact that it described a group that was defined at least in part by its religion (Ibid 417). Since the inception of the term Bosniak however, religion has begun to play a much larger role in differentiating Bosnian Muslims (Bosniaks) from Bosnian Serbs and Croats (Ibid 436).

Youth in BiH

Before examining how youth as a demographic have dealt with the issue of national identity (and especially before entering into their lives with a camera), one has to first get a better idea of the general sentiments that young people in Bosnia hold towards their country and government. The Youth Information Agency of Bosnia-Herzegovina published an *Independent Evaluation of the National Youth Policy in Bosnia-Herzegovina* that statistically describes the civic participation, education, employment, social activities, and political attitudes of young people in Bosnia. Among the statistics of particular importance to my project:

- “77% of youth want to leave BiH” (OIA 2)
- “1% of youth believe that they can have an impact on politics” (Ibid)
- “Less than 25% of youth vote in elections, with the most frequent excuses being ‘there is nobody I can vote for,’ ‘I am disappointed with the politicians,’ and ‘I am not interested’ ” (Ibid)

Given the obvious connection between politicians and nationality (Bassuener 2009, 4), these

figures could be evidence of a strong backlash by young people against nationalist political agendas, and therefore national identity as a whole.

Young people in BiH are taught that they belong to a specific national group from the first day that they set foot in school. In *Religion and education in Bosnia: Integration not segregation?* Charles Russo describes the post-war education system as deeply divided along ethno-national lines. The state-level government of BiH exercises little control over the education system, leaving this to the entity-level governments. There are three separate separate education systems, three separate curriculums. In the FBiH, there is a different Ministry of Education for each of the ten cantons. Each of these ministries has its own administration and curriculum, meaning that in Bosniak-majority cantons the textbooks often come from Sarajevo, and in Croat-majority cantons the textbooks often come from Zagreb. In the Republika Srpska there is a single Ministry of Education, but the curriculum that it implements has a decidedly Serb bias. Additionally, while religious education is not compulsory, those who do not participate are often stigmatized by their teachers and classmates. Religious education is only offered for the three main religions, isolating those who do not follow any of the three. In the Republika Srpska, only Orthodox education is offered (Russo).

Turning finally to the issue of national identity among young people, I have come across two important of studies. The first, Steve Gillard's *Winning the Peace: Youth, Identity, and Peacebuilding in Bosnia and Herzegovina*, look at the identity question for young people immediately after the war. In Gillard's study he found that many of the young people in Mostar had shared a collective identity (in this cast Mostarian) before the war that they often saw as more important than any national identity (Gillard 82, 85). While the war diminished this sense of collective identity, it was still clung to by many young people in the study (Ibid 91).

“Bosnian” was much more complex. Some described the concept of being “Bosnian” in terms of citizenship, others as synonymous with Muslim, and still others as being an identity forced upon them by a “Muslim hegemony” (Ibid).

The second study looks at the issue of national identity among my target population, the young people who have grown up in post-Dayton Bosnia. *Identity and Reconciliation: Two Main Tasks for the Young in Bosnia Herzegovina* by Hanna Hjort and Ann Frisén also looks at the issue of identity among young Mostarians, but with a different conclusion. Unlike those in Gillard’s study, Hjort and Frisén’s survey participants had no collective identity (i.e. Yugoslav or that of a pre-war multi-cultural Mostar) to hearken back to. Their results seemed to indicate that while the young people that they studied may identify strongly with a certain ethnic group, they don’t often stop and think about what this identity actually means. For them, the exploration of one’s national identity is not encouraged (Hjort and Frisén 157).

Outsider Positionality in BiH

Finally, the introduction to *The New Bosnian Mosaic* describes two very problematic lenses that many studies look at BiH through, both of which are very relevant to my study of national identity. First, many studies confine themselves to a top down view of BiH from the perspective of Dayton. They rely only on “expert” opinions and do not ask ordinary citizens to tell their stories (Bougarel et al. 12-13). I plan to do the opposite. While Dayton is a backdrop for my project, it will not be the focus. I will not be interviewing any “experts,” but rather one of the least listened to demographics in BiH: young people.

The second lens that studies of BiH often use is that of ethnicity. In doing so, studies often ignore the fact that much of BiH has been ethnically cleansed along entity lines, such that

the FBiH almost exclusively Bosniak and Bosnian Croat and the RS almost exclusively Bosnian Serb. These studies often advocate ethnic quotas in attempts to give an equal say to all those in BiH regardless of their ethnicity. The problem with this is that in advocating these quotas they are in fact emphasizing ethnicity, giving power to the very nationalist parties that drive the wedge further between the different ethnicities (Bougarel et al. 13). In keeping an open mind, I hope to avoid such simplifications. I realize that populations in the entities have become relatively homogenous, which is why I am conducting research on both sides of the RS-FBiH border. The purpose of my study is not to advocate a solution. It is to listen. In listening, I hope to gain a better understanding for the variety of opinions and views that youth in BiH have when it comes to the future of their country.

Methodology

As with many documentaries, my filmmaking methodology centered around two types of footage: interviews and b-roll. B-roll footage is all of the background footage that is superimposed over interviews or recorded audio to illustrate what is being described. The subjects of my film were four young people from BiH: Mirza (17, from Sanski Most), Leila (16, from Sanski Most), Lana (23, from Banja Luka), and Dejan (25, from Banja Luka). While I was initially worried that the age difference between the Sanski Most and Banja Luka interviewees would be a problem, their stories turned out to complement each other quite well. The extra maturity and articulateness of the Banja Luka interviewees was a plus given that our interviews were arranged at the last minute, and I did not have a chance to brief them to the same extent as the Sanski Most interviewees.

Interviews

Before I even got out the camera, I explained my project and sent the interviewees copies of the questions. In doing this, I hoped to make them not only more comfortable with the camera, but with me as a filmmaker/interviewer/researcher. For the most part, I think this was successful. I was able to sit down with Leila and Mirza several days before either of their interviews and explain my project and the questions that I would be asking. Giving them time to digest and ask questions was crucial as they were quite a bit younger than Lana and Dejan, and not as able to articulate themselves on the spot, especially on such a complex issue. With Lana and Dejan, largely due to the last minute organization of our interviews, I was not able to have a face-to-face meeting before we began filming. However, I emailed the questions to them ahead of time and was able to explain my project in more detail as we walked from our meeting place in central Banja Luka to the locations where we filmed the interviews. Because they were older, more articulate, and spoke better English, I don't think that this lack of a formal briefing had any impact on the quality of their interviews.

I tried to ease my way into the issue of nationality by beginning the interviews with more general questions that gave them a chance to introduce themselves. I asked them to think about the interview like a letter to a pen pal in the U.S. Before getting into the complex identity issues, they would have to first introduce themselves their "pen pal" (the audience), talking about themselves, their families, and their hobbies. I think that this definitely helped open them up when we finally came to the issue of identity. I hope that this also showed them that I as a filmmaker was interested in them as individuals, not just their views on national identity. I think that this more casual approach at the beginning had a larger impact on the quality of Leila and

Mirza's interviews. They were younger and at first a bit more camera shy, so easing them into the more difficult subjects definitely helped.

I found that some of the best interview footage came from segments where I simply dropped the questions, and had more of a conversation with the interviewee. This was particularly the case with Mirza and Lana, both of whom offered up their best sound bites (Mirza on football and Lana on the complexity of national identity) during these more casual periods. This proved to be a double-edged sword however, as editing segments where they jumped in right after my question or comment proved tricky. I tried to cut my own voice out of the documentary (these were their stories, not mine), but this was not always possible in these segments.

B-Roll

In my film, b-roll consisted of landscape shots, candid shots of people on the streets of Sanski Most and Banja Luka, and shots of my interviewees interacting with their environments (Leila at play practice, Mirza and Dejan walking through town). I think that this footage is the hardest to shoot, as it often very awkward for both the filmmaker and those being filmed. For the candid shots in the streets of Sanski Most and Banja Luka, I had to simply set up my camera and try to catch interesting faces in the frame. This made me feel like a bit of a paparazzi, but the footage was crucial to my film (being a film about *people*). Things became especially awkward when people realized that they were being filmed, but luckily no one hassled me about it.

Filming b-roll of my interviewees was more awkward for them than me, as they had to try to act normal in whatever activity I was filming (whether it be simply walking down the street or hanging out with friends) and forget that the camera was pointed at them. Mirza described to me how during one of our shots, his friends saw that he was being filmed, and it

made him feel a bit strange. I tried my best to explain to him and my other interviewees that this footage was very important to my film, and luckily he and the others were willing to suspend their own discomfort with having a camera intrude into their personal lives.

With Mirza in particular however I definitely hit a point where I had to put away the camera. We had been brainstorming about how best to express his Muslim identity on film, and he got a bit uncomfortable when I asked if I could film him praying at home. I realize that I had probably overstepped my bounds here, but I tried to frame my question as unobtrusively as possible, saying that I completely understood if this was too personal to him for me to film. After seeing his reaction (definitely not comfortable with me filming this), I felt very guilty. I had seen footage of people praying in other documentaries, and had simply jumped to the conclusion that I could film a similar shot of him. I am not completely sure how I will approach issues like this in future projects, but I don't think that I will ever ask to film such a personal matter unless it is very clear that the person is comfortable with it or they offer to let me film.

There were several b-roll shots that I had wanted to get, but was not able to: Mirza playing soccer, Lana walking through Banja Luka, and Lana and Dejan hanging out with friends. I was not able to shoot these shots primarily due to time constraints. In the case of Lana and Dejan, I was only able to be in Banja Luka for three days, and such shots did not fit into their schedules. Additionally, because I wasn't in Banja Luka for as long as I was in Sanski Most, I was unable to make them familiar with myself or my project to the point where I felt that I would be able to ask them to let me film these more intimate sequences. In Mirza and Leila's case, I was a resident of Sanski Most, saw them around town, and worked as an intern at the Center for Peacebuilding (CIM) where both of them had participated in programs. They both had a great deal of respect for CIM and its director, Vahidin Omanović (who had recommended them to me

as possible subjects for my film). These connections helped me reach a point with them that was not possible in Banja Luka, which in turn made both them and myself more comfortable filming the more candid, personal b-roll footage.

My Lenses

As a student, researcher, filmmaker, and outsider in BiH I definitely brought along some unwanted baggage. As a student/researcher, I brought an academic bias to the table. I have noticed two general tendencies among outsiders (including myself) when it comes to studying BiH. The first is that we often quickly categorize people into what we see as simple identities (i.e. Bosniak, Serb, Croat). As Dejan reminded me, BiH is much more than just a “Bosniak-Serb-Croat triangle.” Leila was a perfect example of this. The second is that many outsiders think that the only peaceful future for BiH is one in which there are no entities, and everyone calls themselves a Bosnian and Herzegovinian. As peace studies student, I definitely bought into this idea, believing that it is the only way to establish a sustainable peace in BiH. After having listened to Lana and Dejan, I have come to realize that one cannot simply wish all those in BiH to call themselves “Bosnians” when it comes to national identity. I could not apply the American model in which nationality and citizenship are synonymous. I now realize that many in BiH do not want to be considered “Bosnian” when it comes to their national identity (at least in the way that they currently see “Bosnian” defined), and any peaceful scenario for the future will have to account for this.

I definitely brought with a bias against the Republika Srpska. In all of my peace studies

classes, the war in BiH is described in terms of Serb aggressors and Muslim⁴ victims. Listening to Dejan express his frustrations with the negative description of Serbs in the media has helped me begin to get past this blanket simplification. It is still there to a certain degree, but I now catch myself whenever I start to make a generalization about the Republika Srpska or Bosnian Serbs.

As a filmmaker, I constantly look for the most exciting or interesting angle on a story. In the case of my project, this angle was the national identity issue. The filmmaker in me wanted to showcase the extremes of all sides, as on paper this seemed that it would make the best story. From my position behind the camera however, I began to see that this was not giving fair treatment to my interviewees or the subject matter that I was attempting to explore. In a phone conversation with a Danijela Majstorović, a professor in Banja Luka who eventually connected me with Lana and Dejan, I had to confront this bias. When I told Danijela, herself a filmmaker, that I was making a documentary about youth and national identity, her response was, “oh, not another one.” She got upset when I said that I wanted to try to find two individuals to interview in Banja Luka, one with a nationalist perspective and one with a more moderate perspective. She explained that she didn’t want me to try to showcase such a contrast, as it would make the nationalist interviewee look bad. I also got the feeling that she did not want someone to make another film that showed people from Banja Luka as simply flag-waving Serbs.

After re-watching all four interviews, I can see the reason for her frustration. I could have easily edited together my film in a way that only showcased my interviewees’ national identity, especially how they related to the three constitutionally recognized identities. It would have been

⁴ I had never heard the term Bosniak until I came to BiH. All of my classes at Berkeley had simply referred to “Muslims” or “Bosnian Muslims.”

“just another one,” a film that showed a BiH deeply fractured with no common ground between three sides. A black and white BiH. In short, conforming to all of the stereotypes that academics and the media portray about BiH. On the other hand, I could edit together a film that showed divides, but also showed a common ground...and the fact that in reality there are many more than three sides. This second cut would show national identity as a crucial issue in BiH, but also point out that people are more than just the national categories that many (especially those in American academia) lump them into. I have tried to do the latter.

While this holding back may not be the best practice when it comes to traditional field research⁵, my position as a researcher and filmmaker made things slightly different. Because I was also making a film that could be shown to people beyond the academic community, I had additional responsibilities to those of a traditional researcher. Whatever stories I depicted in my film could shape opinions of those back in the U.S. who watch my film. Because of this, I could not simply show or tell the story that I wanted to depict. I had to be conscious of the views and opinions of those with whom I interacted in BiH. In the end, I do not believe that this limited my research or final film at all, but forced me to take a step back from my own view of national identity in BiH and listen.

My own positionality was not something that I could simply erase or shove under the table. That said, I tried my best to keep an open mind and not let these lenses distort my film in any way. Many of these personal preconceptions and prejudices about BiH and national identity were shattered by the voices of my interviewees. As often as possible I tried to listen and let

⁵ I define traditional field research as research that results in a paper or article usually intended firstly for an academic audience. This differs from a film in its intended audience. Films can be shown in a academic setting, but are also often shared with the broad public.

them tell their stories, guiding only when I had to. I hope that my film ended up portraying the issues from their points of view, not my own.

...

Conclusion

As an American coming to BiH, I saw nationality as synonymous with citizenship. Whether or not they are proud to be American, the majority of those carrying American passports would doubtlessly describe themselves at least in some part as American when asked about their nationality.

Baseball, apple pie, Bruce Springsteen⁶. The stars and stripes, the right to vote, the so-called “American dream.” All of these help define Americans as *Americans*. Though I might never have met Joe the Plummer⁷ or Anne Nixon Cooper⁸, I know that as residents of the United States we all share some common conception of an American national identity. We all share a national identity that, while it embraces diversity, has common elements.

In America, nationality is citizenship. The U.S. government promotes both the American national identity and the symbols that go along with it. It takes an active role in convincing all citizens within the 50 states to partake in a common national identity. As I have learned, this is not the case in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

In BiH, there is no single nationality that all citizens can identify with. As Lana and Dejan both mentioned, “you cannot say that there are Bosnians in Bosnia”. Instead of attempting to unite all citizens of BiH under a single national identity defined at least in part by geographical borders, the state

⁶ Any doubt that Springsteen is an American icon can be erased by his inclusion in the We Are One concert at the inauguration of President Barack Obama.

⁷ The man who John McCain used to exemplify the blue-collar American worker on the 2008 U.S. Presidential Election campaign trail.

⁸ Anne Nixon Cooper is the 106-year-old African-American woman who President Barack Obama mentioned in his election victory speech in Chicago on November 5th, 2008.

<http://elections.nytimes.com/2008/results/president/speeches/obama-victory-speech.html>

recognizes three identities, two of which are inextricably tied to nations outside of BiH. Nationality does not equal citizenship. Because the state does not promote a single national identity, the questions that I asked of Mirza, Leila, Dejan and Lana did not have a single answer. For that matter, they had more than three. Because national identity is not readily described as a singular concept by the state, it meant something different to each individual. As with everything in BiH, it was complicated

For Mirza, nationality was in a large part tied to religion. He saw himself as a Bosniak, identifying himself as part of this larger group based on his Muslim faith. Never mind the fact that Bosniak is a secular label (Babuna 417), Mirza saw Bosniak as defined to a large degree by Islam. But Mirza also saw himself as “Bosnian.” For him, this national identity went above and beyond citizenship. He saw ex-patriots from BiH not as belonging to their new home countries, but as “Bosnians” to the core. His “Bosnians” all cheered for the BiH national football club. He was proud of what he described as his “unique country.” However, taking a step back I realized that his “Bosnian” national identity did not exist under the BiH Constitution, and many like Dejan refuse to identify with it.

For Dejan, nationality was defined by family and tradition. His parents and grandparents all saw themselves as Serb, and therefore he was a Serb. He saw his ancestry and family traditions as connecting him to countless other Serbs both in BiH and in Serbia. For him, a “Bosnian” national identity was created by others, and did not define him. He saw himself as a “Bosnian citizen,” but for him the idea of being “Bosnian” only meant that he was from within the borders of BiH. There was no common national identity that connected him to Mirza.

For Leila, the issue of national identity became much more complicated. Her national identities were just as much about *not* belonging as it was about belonging. Leila made a conscious choice not to identify herself as a Bosniak. She did not want anything to do with national group that saw simply to be a by-product of the war. Instead, she created an entirely new dual-national identity for herself, one that

defined her as an individual rather than a member of a group. Her entry on the dotted line went beyond the four⁹ that she had to choose from. Despite this unique personal identity, she (like Mirza) saw herself as a member of a “Bosnian” nation. Her “Bosnian” nationality was defined by a love for what she saw as a single culture, language, and perhaps most importantly, country.

For Lana, national identity in and of itself was problematic. She did not want define herself as belonging to any of the three national groups, and thus chose not to identify herself as belonging to any nationality. Lana even saw the idea of being a “Bosnian” as an identity that she could not relate to.

The lack of a single national identity (like American) put forth by the state in BiH has made defining oneself in terms of nationality very complicated. Three options are given, but none seem to fully describe the individuals with whom I spoke. Only Dejan and Mirza could identify themselves as belonging to one of the national identities imagined by the BiH Constitution. Even then Dejan said that he did not believe in the teachings of the Orthodox Church (a key component of both what he and Lana described as the Bosnian Serb identity), and Mirza also saw himself as “Bosnian,” an identity that the state does not recognize when it comes to nationality. Lana and Leila completely disregarded the three constitutionally recognized identities. They created their own, despite the fact that they could not officially identify themselves as such on the dotted line.

I do not want to belittle the issue of national identity in BiH. All four of my interviewees clearly described how they see their society as split into three national groups. For Mirza and Leila, the divide between the Republika Srpska and Federation was more akin to a national than an entity border. However, after interviewing all four individuals, I cannot help but come to the conclusion that things are much more complicated than this simple “Bosniak-Serb-Croat triangle” as Dejan described it. Yes BiH is split into three national groups by its Constitution, but there are many more internal variations and

⁹ In her interview, Leila said that in school she often had to choose from Bosniak, Serb, Croat, and Other when filling out forms.

divides within this seemingly clear-cut picture.

Were I to make this same film in America, I doubt that I would get this many vastly different answers to the question of national identity. American citizens have a single national identity that they can to a least a certain extent relate to. They can define themselves as a part of a whole, as belonging to a physical space both in the sense of nationality and citizenship. They may identify themselves with a hyphen: African-American, Irish-American, Italian-American, Mexican-American, but they would all use American. When I let the camera roll in BiH, I got a very different story. While Dejan may see himself as a Bosnian Serb, “Bosnian” is not hyphenated, and does define him in the same way that the “American” in Irish-American defines me. The state of BiH recognizes no single national identity that defines *all* those living within its borders. It recognizes three, none of which are necessarily tied to BiH as a geographical space. I listened to descriptions of four, all differing from these three to at least a certain extent. All in one country. Do the math. It’s complicated.

This started off as a film about four young people and three national identities. This became a film about individuals. About Leila, Mirza, Lana, and Dejan. About four perspectives. Four voices. Many identities. About belonging, but also being different. Welcome to Bosnia and Herzegovina. I am paying attention now. I hope you are to.

Limitations of the Study

- You cannot make a really good documentary in one month. This is not long enough to make the subjects of your film comfortable with you, your camera, and your project. Especially when you are in a foreign country. In a perfect world I would have lived in Sanski Most for a month, then in Banja Luka for a month. This would have given me two weeks to concentrate on each of my subjects to film day-in-the-life type footage: morning routines, interacting

with family, hanging out with friends, going to school, etc. This footage would have made the film longer, and would have allowed me to make all four stories much more personal, showing both how national identity affects each individual on a day-to-day basis, but also fleshing out each interviewee as a character. Focusing for longer periods on each subject would also (hopefully) make them more comfortable with the camera, and may have led them to reveal more anecdotes that illustrated the views that they expressed in the initial interviews. On the whole, a longer shooting period would have made for a more complete and dynamic story.

- In retrospect, filming the documentary entirely in Bosanski/Srpski/Hrvatski with subtitles would have helped each of the interviewees explain themselves better, and would have helped with the continuity of the film. As Lana and Dejan both spoke perfect English and Leila had to use Bosanski, Mirza was the only one who I felt was limited in his self-expression by the language barrier. Throughout the interview he said that he couldn't express his views fully in English, but I had little choice as I didn't have time to do subtitles, which are very time consuming, for more than one interview. If I had interviewed both Leila and Mirza in Bosanski, I would have then had to do interview Lana and Dejan in Srpski so as not to make viewers think that only those in the Republika Srpska speak English. Given my one-month shooting schedule, subtitling four interviews would not have been realistically possible.
- Though the age disparity between my interviewees did not seem to be a problem when I was cutting the film together, I now realize that I probably would have gotten a much more polarized view had I interviewed two young people in Banja Luka who were closer to Leila and Mirza's age. Lana's interview turned out to provide much of the commentary and

explanation about the complexities and problems with national identity. However, she herself said that her views had not been so radical when she was younger. She had at one point had no problem considering herself a Serb. Had I interviewed younger people in Banja Luka, my film might not have ended with a focus on moving beyond the three constitutionally recognized national identities (with Leila being the exception). Had I interviewed older people in Sanski Most, my film might have focused more on rejection of these identities and less on prejudices and stereotypes, both of which Leila and Mirza felt much more strongly about. I don't know if this age difference turned into a *limitation* of my study, but it is worth noting. In the end I think hearing from two different age groups gave me a more dynamic story, though perhaps I should have had a younger and an older interviewee in each town to make things more even.

- If I wanted to more comprehensive view of national identity, I should have included a young person who on at least some level identified themselves as Croat. I was not able to include someone who identified themselves as a Croat, largely due to the fact that there is not a large Croat population in the region in which I filmed. However, because my four interviewees brought up four very different views of national identity, I do not think that my film was completely lacking. The fact that Lana brought in the idea of Croatian identity (as she was born and raised there) also helped make up for this deficiency.
- Finally, the fact that I only focused on four subjects was a clear limitation to my study. My film is about four individual views, not the general views of youth in BiH as a whole. Such a study would have required many months and a different structure. At the same time, such a study would, I think, have slipped back into the mindset of broad categorizations when it comes to national identity. By focusing on four views, I did not show any broad trends, but

rather how four individuals have transcended the categories that many quantitative researchers and policy makers have placed them in. This may not have been the initial intent of my project, but I feel that it became the end focus, and allowed me to tell a story that not many researchers have yet explored.

Recommendations for Further Study

- It would be interesting to further explore Roma identity in BiH, as they cannot officially identify themselves as anything besides “Other,” and have no representation in government. Additionally, Roma differ from other minorities in that they are considered second-class citizens by many even before the question of national identity comes into play.
- After talking to Mirza about what it means to him to be Muslim, I discovered that he is unique in his degree of religious devotion. He said that most young people are far more secular. One possible future study could be an exploration of Islam and youth in BiH that looks at what being Muslim means to them (whether it is faith, or simply an identity that differentiates them from Serbs and Croats). It would also be interesting to examine how religious education, both in the schools (secular and religious) and in the family affects young people’s views of national identity.
- The question of religion could be taken a step further in a study that looks at the role of religion in young peoples’ formation of a national identity. This came up a bit in my film, but I did not explore it very deeply. In hindsight I could have easily cut together another shorter film on the topic based on the interview footage that I already have. Religion came up in every interview almost without my asking.

- Mirza talked about how football gave him something in common with young people his age in the Republika Srpska. I had the opportunity to go for a bike ride with an 18-year old from Sanski Most who rides for a team from Banja Luka. It is very clear to me that sports have been able to build a bridge between young people in the entities in a way that few other factors have. One could also explore the duality that sports bring to the national identity issue: how on one hand it gives individuals the chance to travel and meet those from the “other side,” while on the other hand it can create a very violent fan base that turns team affiliation into a nationalist issue. Exploring these issues, especially through film, would make for a great research project, though it would probably take much more than a month.

Primary Sources

Bastašić, Lana. Personal Interview. 22 April 2009

Bošković, Leila. Personal Interview. 18 April 2009

Hadžiahmetović, Mirza. Personal Interview. 11 April 2009

Milinović, Dejan. Personal Interview. 23 April 2009

Works Cited

Babuna, Aydin. “National Identity, Islam and Politics in Post-Communist Bosnia-Herzegovina.” East European Quarterly. XXXIX. No. 4 (January 2006): 405-447

Bassuener, Kurt. How to Pull Out of Bosnia-Herzegovina’s Dead-End: A Strategy for Success. Democratization Policy Council. Briefing: 19 February 2009. <www.democractizationpolicy.org>

Bassuener, Kurt. Understanding and Breaking Bosnia and Herzegovina’s Constitutional Deadlock: A New Approach for the European Union and United States. Democratization Policy Council. Briefing: 21 February 2008. <www.democractizationpolicy.org>

Bougarel, Xavier, Elissa Helms and Ger Duijzings ed. The New Bosnian Mosaic: Identities, Memories and Moral Claims in a Post-War Society. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007

Gillard, Steve. "Winning the Peace: Youth, Identity and Peacebuilding in Bosnia and Herzegovina" International Peacekeeping. Vol. 8. No. 1 (Spring 2001): 77-98

Guzina, Dejan. "Dilemmas of Nation-building and Citizenship in Dayton Bosnia." National Identities. Vol. 9. No. 3 (September 2007): 217-234

Hjort, Hanna and Ann Frisé. "Ethnic Identity and Reconciliation: Two Main Tasks for the Young in Bosnia-Herzegovina." Adolescence. Vol. 41. No 161 (Spring 2006): 141-163

Kostić, Roland. "Nationbuilding as an Instrument of Peace? Exploring Local Attitudes towards International Nationbuilding and Reconciliation in Bosnia and Herzegovina." Civil Wars. Vol. 10. Issue 4 (2008): 384-412

Robinson, Guy M. and Alma Pobrić. "Nationalism and Identity in Post-Dayton Accords: Bosnia-Herzegovina." Tijdschrift voor Economische en Sociale Geografie. Vol. 97. No. 3 (2006): 237-252

Russo, Charles J. "Religion and education in Bosnia: Integration not segregation?" Brigham Young University Law Review. 2000. 25 February 2009.

< http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_qa3736/is_200001/ai_n8883462 >

Youth Information Agency Bosnia-Herzegovina. Independent Evaluation of the national youth policy in Bosnia-Herzegovina. World Programme of Action for Youth: Sarajevo. 29 April 2005.

Appendix

Sanski Most Interview Questions

Opening

-Tell me a little bit about yourself. Think of this as the introduction to a pen pal letter.

-What is your name?

-How old are you?

-Where are you from?

-What grade in school are you?

-Describe your family. Pets?

-Hobbies?

-Anything else?

-Can you walk me through your perfect day in Sanski Most?

Definitions

-How do you define nationality?

-Citizenship?

Identity

-If you had to participate in a census tomorrow and were given the choice of Serb, Croat, Bosniak, and Other as your nationality, how would you identify yourself?

-If you were on the streets of New York and someone asked you what your nationality was, how would you answer them?

-If answer is different than the previous question, why?

-If answer was the same, how would you explain this national identity to them?

-Do you feel like either of these national identities would accurately describe how you -

identify yourself? Why or why not?

-Constitutionally recognized identities aside, how do you identify yourself when it comes to national identity?

-What factors in your life do you feel like have the largest impact on or best represent your sense of national identity? Family? Religion? Hometown? Entity? Politics? School? Friends? Symbols?

-Do you feel that you have had any control over your national identity?

-If so then how?

-If not then who has? Family? Government? International Community?

-Do you feel that you have any other identities that are more important to you than your national identity? Brother/sister, student, athlete, musician, young person, friend, etc.

The Other(s)

-Do you ever travel to the Republika Srpska? If so how often, if not why?

-Do you feel that people look at you differently in the Republika Spska than in the Federation?

-Have you ever had any interactions with people your age from the Republika Srpska? -- What was it like? What did you talk about? Did the fact that you are from the Federation ever come up?

-Do people in and around Sanski Most have any stereotypes about the Republika Srpska and people who live there?

Closing

-Have/do you consider yourself "Bosnian" (not just Bosniak) when it comes to nationality?

If so, what does being “Bosnian” mean to you?

-If not, do you think you will ever consider yourself “Bosnian?” Why or why not?

Banja Luka Interview Questions

Opening

-Tell me a little bit about yourself. Think of this as the introduction to a pen pal letter.

-What is your name?

-How old are you?

-Where are you from?

-What grade in school are you?

-Describe your family. Pets?

-Hobbies?

-Anything else?

-Can you walk me through your perfect day in Sanski Most?

Definitions

-How do you define nationality?

-Citizenship?

Identity

-If you had to participate in a census tomorrow and were given the choice of Serb, Croat, Bosniak, and Other as your nationality, how would you identify yourself?

-If you were on the streets of New York and someone asked you what your nationality was, how would you answer them?

-If answer is different then the previous question, why?

-If answer was the same, how would you explain this national identity to them?

- Do you feel like either of these national identities would accurately describe how you - identify yourself? Why or why not?
- Constitutionally recognized identities aside, how do you identify yourself when it comes to national identity?
- What factors in your life do you feel like have the largest impact on or best represent your sense of national identity? Family? Religion? Hometown? Entity? Politics? School? Friends? Symbols?
- Do you feel that you have had any control over your national identity?
- If so then how?
- If not then who has? Family? Government? International Community?
- Do you feel that you have any other identities that are more important to you than your national identity? Brother/sister, student, athlete, musician, young person, friend, etc.

The Other(s)

- Do you ever travel to the Federation? If so how often, if not why?
- Do you feel that people look at you different in the Federation than in the Republika Srpska?
- Have you ever had any interactions with people your age from the Federation?
- What was it like? What did you talk about? Did the fact that you are from the Republika Srpska ever come up?
- Do people in and around Banja Luka have any stereotypes about the Federation and people who live there?

Closing

- Have/do you consider yourself “Bosnian” (not just Bosniak) when it comes to

nationality?

If so, what does being “Bosnian” mean to you?

-If not, do you think you will ever consider yourself “Bosnian?” Why or why not?