



The bridge in ethnically divided Mostar

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Division and Denial and Nothing Else? Culture of History and Memory Politics in Bosnia and Herzegovina

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The article gives an overview of the fragmented historical culture in Bosnia and Herzegovina, twenty years after the end of the war, which left the country deeply divided along political and ethnic lines. Parallel ethnonational narratives about the past, both recent and distant, are dominating the public sphere. Yet, the memory landscape in the country should not be reduced to its ethnonational divisions: variations within the dominating narratives and a wide range of attitudes towards them also exist.

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The article gives an overview of the fragmented culture of history in Bosnia and Herzegovina, twenty years after the end of the 1992-1995 war which left the country deeply divided along political and ethnic lines. Parallel ethnonational narratives about the past are dominating the public sphere, with especially controversial interpretations of the 1992 -1995 war and the Second World War. In the same time, it is important not to reduce the memory landscape in BiH to its ethnonational divisions: variations within the dominating narratives and a wide range of attitudes towards them, local specificities and dynamics, as well as various efforts to challenge denial and also to build bridges between different memory groups, are some additional layers which provide a far more nuanced picture of the current culture of history in BiH.

The Specific Situation of Bosnia and Herzegovina

As in other Eastern European and Southeastern European countries, in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) the transition from socialism to post-socialism in the 1990s meant also that the focus in the field of historical representations in the public sphere turned from predominantly socialist to predominantly national patterns and perspectives. At the same time there are significant differences in BiH's post-socialist transition and current situation, in comparison for example with Hungary or Poland, which are important for understanding the specificities of the current culture of history in BiH.

Firstly, BiH is a very young state. It became a sovereign state in 1992, without having a history of being an independent state in the centuries before. BiH had been a more or less clearly defined political unit in contemporary history, but always as part of a larger ensemble: as a province of the Ottoman Empire from the end of the fifteenth century to 1878 and then of Austria-Hungary until 1918; as part of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia from 1918 until 1941 and then of the 'Independent State of Croatia' from 1941 to 1945, and as one of the six Republics within the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia from 1945 until 1992. The question of BiH's political definition has been very much disputed during the last 150 years, especially by Serb and Croat nationalists who regularly denied BiH the right to its own political identity and existence (this was especially evident during the Kingdom of Yugoslavia after 1929, during the 'Independent State of Croatia', and during the 1992–1995 war). BiH's status as a very young state and as one whose political identity has regularly been questioned and contested over the last hundred years makes the issue of historical legitimacy a particularly sensitive and acrimonious one in the country today.^[1]

Secondly, BiH is not a nation-state, as most European countries are, dominated by one national group, but a state comprised of three main national groups, the Bosniaks, the Serbs and the Croats, officially called the 'constituent peoples' of BiH. This diversity is the result of the development of different religious communities, which in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries developed into different national communities, the Serbs, the Croats, and the Muslims (who were recognized as their own ethnicity in the 1960s, with the nomenclature changing to 'Bosniaks' in 1993). In Tito's Yugoslavia BiH was the most ethnically diverse Republic and the only one where no single national group had the absolute majority, which is still the case today. Even if the three communities have been living on the same territory for a long time, with partially cooperative and partially conflicting interactions, each community developed an awareness of its own group specificity in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, what led to the diversity

of historical memories and narratives that characterizes today's BiH.

Thirdly, the transition towards post-socialism and independence was not achieved peacefully, but through a war, from 1992 to 1995, which was the bloodiest of the Yugoslav breakup wars, and which left BiH deeply divided and polarized along ethnic lines. These divisions were confirmed by the Dayton Peace Agreement (DPA) of November 1995, which continues to function as the political foundation of today's BiH. The DPA created a power sharing system between representatives of the three constituent peoples, institutionalizing a Serb-dominated 'Republic of Srpska' (RS) and a primarily Bosniak-Croat 'Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina' subdivided in ten cantons. Within this framework, the Bosnian Serb, Bosnian Croat and Bosniak nationalisms, which had intensified during the war, continue to dominate the political space in BiH while also competing with each other, emphasizing the need to protect the identity and interests of their respective ethnonational groups, and articulating very different conceptions of the history and the future of BiH. This means that in today's BiH we have not only different, but very antagonistic public memories and respective representations of history, and that these are highly politicized. This means also that because of the constitutional legitimation of the three constituent peoples and its divided political system, BiH is confronted – like no other European country – with the parallel co-existence of three official ethnonational identity constructions and historical narratives, which in many respects radically contradict and simultaneously reinforce each other.^[2]

Parallel Memory Politics Within a Divided Political Space

The Bosniak, Bosnian Serb and Bosnian Croat ethnonational historical narratives that are articulated in the BiH public sphere through public declarations, commemorations and history textbooks all focus on the history of their respective ethnonational groups. Each of them regularly glorifies its group's battles and simultaneously emphasizes its victimhood, while denying the 'dark side' of its history and directing blame and resentment toward the other national groups. They also provide homogenous continuity narratives, representing the deeply-rooted histories of their own ethnic groups; and are all used to affirm and legitimize their respective national identities and national projects.

Bosnian Serb memory politics occur mainly within the highly centralized Republic of Srpska (RS), which was formed in 1992 as a proto-state in order to combat an independent BiH and confirmed as an official part of BiH through the DPA in 1995. The current governing elites of the RS contest the necessity of the state of BiH and focus exclusively on developing the RS as a part of the Serbian nation. Consequently, the historical reference in public narratives within the RS is explicitly not to BiH, but rather, on the one hand, to the Serbian nation and its history from the Middle Ages on, and on the other, to the RS as a quasi-state, outside and in opposition to the state of BiH. The politics of history and historical narratives that have developed in RS aim mainly to legitimize the historical existence of the RS, especially since no comparable polity existed before 1992 and its legitimacy is regularly called into question in Bosniak nationalist circles. In 2007 the RS created a 'Commission for Nurturing the Traditions of the Liberation Wars', which has so far defined 20 important historical anniversaries, of which the half commemorate events from before 1992. The Commission presents the history of the Bosnian Serbs as a continuous fight for their freedom against the domination and oppression of the Muslims and the Croats and as a logical and natural trajectory leading to the creation in 1992 of the RS, which is projected to become independent from BiH in a near future.^[3]

With regard to Bosnian Croat nationalism, unlike in the 1990s and unlike Bosnian Serb nationalism, it does not currently advocate its own existence independently of or in opposition to the state of BiH. But

their representatives strongly advocate for the right of Bosnian Croats to have their own entity within BiH, arguing that they are outnumbered by the Bosniak majority in the Federation. At the same time they invoke the imminent threat of losing their identity, the Croats being the smallest group among the three constituent peoples in BiH. In this framework, Bosnian Croat politics of history insists on the long-term presence of Croats on the territory of BiH, and on the struggle for their existence, identity and interests against Serbs and Muslims over the past centuries. In Bosnian Croat narratives, which are mainly articulated in the Croat-dominated cantons within the Federation and by representatives of Bosnian Croat national parties in the government of the Federation, BiH is not denied as a historical reference; with regard to the 1992-1995-war, for example, Bosnian Croat political elites emphasize their loyalty towards BiH, rejecting the interpretation that the creation of the proto-state 'Herceg-Bosna' in 1993 had been part of a plan to partition BiH. At the same time, historical references to Croatia, with Zagreb as capital, are much more substantial, and in school textbooks Bosnian Croats are mainly portrayed as part of the Croat nation and its history.^[4]

While dominant Bosnian Serb narratives reject historical association with BiH and Bosnian Croat narratives give greater importance to Croatia than to BiH, the situation is very different regarding Bosniak national narratives, which are mainly articulated within the Federation, and especially in the cantons with Bosniak majority. Bosniak national parties identify strongly with BiH as a state, while at the same time contesting the legitimacy of the RS as well as the aspirations of Bosnian Croats to form their own polity. For them, memory politics serve to emphasize the existence and historical legitimacy of a national Bosnian identity as well as of an ethnic Bosniak identity, with the two identities often equated; and they often claim more or less explicitly that Bosniaks are the only 'true' Bosnians. The Kingdom of Bosnia in the Middle Ages is an important historical reference used to demonstrate both the continuity of a BiH state as well as a pre-Ottoman existence for Bosniaks. While the Ottoman period is mainly seen as a period of oppression in Bosnian Croat and Bosnian Serb narratives, it is considered positively within Bosniak narratives mainly in relation to the development of Islam in BiH. The history of BiH and of Bosniaks is viewed as a history of continuous threat of annihilation at the hands of neighbouring Serbia and Croatia; and Bosnian Serbs and Bosnian Croats are often portrayed as past (and potentially permanent) traitors and collaborators with Serbia and Croatia. Against this threat the independence of BiH is seen as a logical and natural historical achievement and as the only possibility for safeguarding Bosniak-Bosnian existence and identity.^[5]

Besides these three ethnonational approaches, there are also non-nationalist Bosnian history narratives, which insist on the multinational heritage of BiH. Representatives of this group can be found among all three national groups and also among Bosnians who refuse to define themselves (primarily) ethnically. Because they also strongly identify with BiH, these approaches have some common points with Bosniak narratives, insisting as well, for example, on the significance of the Bosnian Kingdom in the Middle Ages as a reference point for the historical continuity and political legitimacy of BiH. But at the same time they refuse to reduce the history of BiH to one of its ethnonational components. These voices have difficulty being heard in public space; and on the political level their representatives, for example the Social-Democrat Party of BiH, sometimes do not clearly differentiate themselves from more nationalist approaches.^[6]

Antagonistic Perceptions of the 1992–1995 War and of World War II

Due to the reasons mentioned at the beginning of this text, it is not just some historical periods or events that are a matter of controversy in BiH, it is history itself that is highly disputed, which suggests that

each historical event is potentially the subject of antagonistic and disputed perceptions. Nevertheless, there are two historical periods that do predominate in the sphere of public remembrance: the 1992–1995 war and the World War II.

1. Different Interpretations of the 1992–1995 War

The 1992–1995 war is the most present, controversial and emotional topic in public representations of history in BiH. There are several reasons for this. One is the depth and violence of the trauma caused by this war, which lasted three and half years and left no family untouched: in a population of four million, more than 500 000 served as soldiers; 100 000 persons were killed, nearly half of them civilians; and two million persons – meaning every second inhabitant – became displaced persons or refugees, of which around 200 000 persons were imprisoned in camps; the number of women raped is estimated at 20 000–50 000. Another reason is that the war did not end with the military victory of any one side, but with a military and political stalemate institutionalized in the DPA, which allowed the competing ethnonational elites and ideologies to continue to proliferate in the political sphere. This also means that the fundamental and controversial question around which the war was fought – 'How should BiH look like?' - continues even today to dominate political life. At the same time, the question 'What kind of war did we fight in the 1990s?' has yet to meet with any kind of consensus, but continues to be answered in radically different ways. Jovana Mihjalović-Trbovc has distinguished four "main points of divergence among the dominant narratives about the Bosnian war": whether the war was a product of Serbian aggression or a civil war among political actors within BiH; whether 'ethnic cleansing' was premeditated by the Serbian side or an immanent consequence of the war; whether genocide was the overall aim of the Serbian side or whether it took place only in Srebrenica in July 1995; and whether the Croatian side was a defender of or aggressor in BiH.^[7]

Due to the high degree of politicization of historical questions in general, and especially of questions related to 1992–1995, divergences around these questions are mostly articulated not in the form of debates or dialogue, but in one-sided statements or mutual accusations and blaming. Since the politics of history within BiH is mainly articulated in separate spheres, direct interaction is rare. Most of the time, conflicts of opinion erupt in the media when one side is loudly commemorating an anniversary, or when decisions related to war crimes trials are celebrated by one side and condemned by another. In such public confrontations between narratives, the emphasis on one's own victimhood is regularly accompanied by a refusal to critically address one's own role in the recent war. Denial of one's own crimes and emphasis on one's own victimhood can be found on all sides, but with different inflections. Bosnian Serb narratives are often accompanied by a discourse of complaint according to which everybody talks only about Bosniak victims and Serb victims have been neglected or forgotten. Among Bosniaks can often be found the attitude that crimes committed by Bosniaks should not be talked about because this would put them on the same level as those committed by Bosnian Serbs or Bosnian Croats. The mutual non-recognition of the other's suffering in turn reinforces the will to emphasize one's own victimhood, and contributes to a dynamic that reinforces the general fragmentation of the culture of remembrance between 'us' and 'them'.

2. Dealing With the Legacies of World War II

Besides the 1992–1995 war, the next most controversial historical topic in BiH is World War II. For forty years, in BiH as in other Yugoslav Republics, the predominant memory narrative had focused on the period between 1941 and 1945, specifically on the heroic fight of the multinational partisans against foreign occupiers and their domestic collaborators, the (Croat) Ustasha and the (Serb) Chetniks.

Diverging narratives about World War II were an important part of the national mobilizations in the 1980s and 1990s; and with the fall of socialism, the dominant interpretation of World War II also crumbled and was replaced by different ethnonational interpretations. Bosnian Croat narratives thus focus on the Croat victims of the partisans, the massacre of Bleiburg in 1945 being the symbol of Croat victimhood. Bosnian Serbs insist on the suffering of Serbs, the concentration and extermination camp of Jasenovac being their primary symbol; and Bosniaks emphasize their own victimhood, especially with regard to massacres committed by Chetniks against Muslims in Eastern BiH. At the same time the perception of the partisans and the other political-military groups has changed: in Bosnian Croat narratives, the partisans tend to be perceived negatively as anti-Croat and anti-Catholic oppressors; and while the Ustasha regime is not officially glorified, it is also not openly criticized. On the Bosnian Serb side, there have been attempts to rehabilitate the Chetniks, defining them as an antifascist resistance, while ignoring their collaboration with the German occupiers; on the other hand there has also been a strong re-appropriation of partisan legacy, with claims that "Serbs were the partisans, and the partisans were Serbs", together with accusations that Muslims collaborated with both the Nazis and the Ustasha. On the Bosniak side, the perception of the partisans is ambivalent; their legacy is in part rejected because of their anti-religious disposition, and in part appropriated insofar as Muslims participated in the partisan movement. At the same time, the question of Muslim collaboration with the Ustasha regime is downplayed, while allegations by Bosnian Serb parties that the majority of Muslims were fascists are vigorously rejected.^[8]

As with the 1992-1995 war, main tendencies in narratives related to the World War II involve self-victimization on the one hand and denial of one's own crimes on the other. References to World War II are also used to establish lines of historical continuity and to demonstrate the accuracy of one's own vision of history against those of the other groups. In Bosniak and Bosnian narratives, the defence between 1992 and 1995 is for example sometimes described as the 'antifascist struggle', thus asserting continuity with the partisan fight between 1941 and 1945. In Bosnian Serb narratives, Jasenovac is sometimes employed in order to counterbalance Srebrenica; and the appropriation of the antifascist legacy as a line of defence against allegations of crimes committed in the war of 1992–1995 appears for example in Milorad Dodik's declaration that the Serb people "largely carried the anti-fascist struggle in the former Yugoslavia, and due to that it cannot be a criminal and genocidal people."^[9]

3. Which National Holidays for BiH?

The divisions in public remembrance within BiH and the lack of consensus around historical topics appear also in the country's lack of a common national holiday. When BiH became independent in 1992, 25 November was chosen as the national holiday, with reference to the day in 1943 when the 'National Anti-Fascist Council of the People's Liberation of Bosnia and Hercegovina' was created, laying the foundations for the establishment of the Republic of BiH in socialist Yugoslavia, which later became the foundation for the independence of BiH. With the DPA it was decided that a commission should develop new proposals for a national holiday, but the representatives of the different national elites could not come to an agreement. That means that in the Federation, especially in territories with a Bosniak majority, 25 November continues to be celebrated as the official 'Statehood Day'; additionally 1 March is also celebrated, in honor of the referendum for a sovereign BiH signed on that day in 1992, which is therefore considered the birthday of independent BiH. The political elites in RS have so far strictly refused to recognize these two holidays, which emphasize the historical legitimacy of the state of BiH; and their representatives have consequently refused until now to participate in celebrations of them. Instead, the RS has developed its own calendar of 'republican holidays', the most important being the following: the 'Day of the Republic' on 9 January, commemorating the creation of the RS on that day in

1992; 9 May as the Day of Victory against Fascism in 1945; and 21 November, in celebration of the 1995 Dayton Peace Accords in which the RS was granted international recognition. Especially the choice of the 9 January regularly meets with strong rejection in Bosniak circles since they associate the creation of the RS primarily with the attempt to destroy BiH and with crimes committed against Bosniaks. The Bosnian Croat national elites partially accept and partially reject the state holidays celebrated in the Federation: their representatives sometimes participate in the commemoration of the 25 November in Sarajevo; at the same time, governments of cantons with Croat majority often prefer to mark other anniversaries, such as the creation of the entity of 'Herceg-Bosna' in 1993. Currently, the situation appears to be in a deadlock; a new proposal in January 2014 to define state holidays for BiH made no progress in this field.[10]

Nothing But Ethnonationalism, Competition and Denial? Necessary Nuances in Today's Culture of History in BiH

It is important not to reduce the memory landscape in BiH to the ethnonational narratives and the competition among them. There are also other layers to the culture of history and the politics of history in BiH that need to be taken in consideration. They differ from the dominant patterns and partially also challenge them, and they provide a far more nuanced picture.

1. Variations Within National Narratives, Negotiating Dominant Narratives

First of all it is necessary to emphasize that the ethnonational groups and narratives are by no means homogenous and monolithic (even if one of their purposes is to make one believe so), and that there are also many variations and lines of fragmentation existing within the three ethnonational memory narratives, with various tendencies emphasizing different aspects that are sometimes in conflict with each other.^[11] In Sarajevo for example, even if we consider only the Bosniak population, we find at least three different group memories related to 1992–1995: the memories of those who stayed during the siege, of those who fled to Sarajevo from the countryside, and of those who left the city during the siege and returned later. The interaction between these memories is not easy because each is associated with different, quite difficult and often traumatic experiences.

Also, even if the ethnonational narratives, in their various articulations, are dominant within the public sphere, this does not mean that individuals, groups and organizations necessarily reproduce or accept them. There is considerable diversity in individual memories throughout the population, and these do not necessarily correspond with general public narratives; the attitudes of ordinary people towards official historical narratives also covers a wide range between distancing and identification.^[12] Further, not every organization reproduces mainstream narratives: the Historical Museum of BiH in Sarajevo, for example, in its exhibition on the siege of the city, deliberately avoids the words 'aggression' and 'genocide', which are standard terms in the dominant Bosniak war narratives.^[13] For anybody dealing with history and memory in BiH one of the main challenges is, consciously or unconsciously, how to cope with the dominant ethnonational narratives.

2. Local Specificities and Dynamics: the Cases of Tuzla and Prijedor

It is also important to take into consideration local specificities and dynamics. Tuzla is an interesting case: the third-largest city in BiH, with a population that since the first multiparty-elections in BiH in 1990 has given the highest proportion of votes to non-nationalist parties, has bucked predominant

remembrance trends in postwar BiH by promoting more inclusive, multinational remembrance approaches; an example of this is the reconstruction of the Slana Banja Memorial.^[14] Prijedor is another interesting case, but for other reasons. In 1992 the town was the scene of one of the most murderous 'ethnic-cleansing' campaigns against a non-Serb population during the whole war. Today, Prijedor is situated within the RS, and like most towns in BiH, has been dominated since the war by a 90% majority of one ethnic group, in this case Bosnian Serbs. In the center of the town, only monuments to Serb victims have been erected, none to non-Serb victims. The notorious Omarska camp, where more than 500 Bosniak civilians were murdered between May and August 1992, also remains unmarked. In this sense Prijedor is a rather typical illustration of how victimhood of a majority group is emphasized and acknowledgement of suffering refused to non-majority groups. At the same time, several thousand Bosniaks returned to Prijedor after the war, which is a high number of returnees by comparison with other cities. Many of the survivors have organized in associations that advocate for the recognition of crimes committed against them. In those parts of town where they form the majority, they have succeeded in erecting monuments to the victims of 1992, and they regularly organize public actions commemorating 1992 in the Serb-dominated parts of Prijedor as well, despite and in opposition to resistance from the town government.^[15]

3. Civil Society Challenges to the Denial of Crimes

In general in BiH, an increasing number of associations of civilian victims have become very vocal in the public sphere, claiming the right to recognition of what happened to them and addressing the denial of crimes committed during the war of 1992–1995 – even if they primarily address denial by 'the other side' and their work is often politically instrumentalized. There are also individual intellectuals and some media that criticize not only acts of denial by 'the other side', but also blind spots in their own group, as for example the Sarajevo newspapers *Slobodna Bosna* and *Dani*, or the political analysts Dragan Bursac and Srdjan Puhalo, who live in Banja Luka. There are, furthermore, different NGOs that have tried to establish and disseminate reliable and verifiable facts about the war and postwar-issues in order to tackle denial on all sides and the political manipulation of such topics. One example is the Balkan Investigative Reporting Network BiH (BIRN BiH), which since 2005 has aimed to circulate accurate and independent reports about war crime trials and transitional justice issues.^[16] Another example is the Research and Documentation Center in Sarajevo, which has established a detailed cartography of war crimes committed in all of BiH, as well as an extensive list of names of nearly 96 000 persons killed in BiH during the war.^[17] Two other NGOs, Transitional Justice, Accountability and Remembrance in BiH in Sarajevo and the Center for Democracy and Transitional Justice in Banja Luka, launched a project in 2014 to map, on the basis of empirical research and court findings, all of the prison, detention and concentration camps established between 1992 and 1995, a topic about which numerous very different accounts and contradictory information have circulated.^[18]

RECOM, which is by far the largest initiative to address the problem of denial, not only in BiH, but in all of former Yugoslavia, has brought together more than 1800 civil society organizations and individuals, including many from BiH. The initiative calls for "the establishment of a Regional Commission Tasked with Establishing the Facts about All Victims of War Crimes and Other Serious Human Rights Violations Committed on the Territory of the Former Yugoslavia in the period from 1991–2001."^[19] Launched in 2007, it has since then organized numerous public consultations and media campaigns, and in 2011 collected more than 500,000 signatures of support in the former Yugoslavia. Even if it has not (yet) succeeded in convincing the governments of the successor states of Yugoslavia to form such a commission, and even if there is no guarantee that this will ever happen, the RECOM-initiative has been an important step in raising awareness in BiH and the region about existing problems in the field of

dealing with the past. It also shows that there are committed actors who are working to change the current situation.^[20]

4. Initiatives for Building Bridges

Additionally and partially in combination with attempts to establish facts and challenge denial, there exist different initiatives, also mainly on the level of the civil society, which aim to build bridges between different groups and memories and to bring them into constructive communication. The Center for Non-Violent Action, for example, has worked for many years with war veterans from the different armies that fought in BiH.^[21] The International Commission on Missing Persons (ICMP) and the Catholic Relief Services (CRS) have been developing projects that bring together Bosniak, Serb and Croat family associations of missing persons or other victim associations.^[22] The Youth Initiative for Human Rights BiH brings together young people from different parts of BiH and engages them with different memories and attitudes related to the 1992–1995 war.^[23] In the field of history education, the Euroclio HIP–BiH association works with history teachers from different parts of the country who are developing teaching materials that represent different perspectives on the history of BiH and the region.^[24] Another example of building bridges are activities that focus on the memory of inter-ethnic rescue and help during the 1992–1995 war, which are promoted as examples of reconciliation and/or civic courage; examples of this are the NGOs Gariwo and the Post-Conflict Research Center.^[25]

5. Different Attitudes Within Civil Society

The different attempts and activities especially from civil society actors do not mean that there are no problems, disputes and contradictions among these actors. The RECOM initiative has suffered especially in BiH from personal rivalries between NGOs and from disagreements about aims and strategy. More generally, civil society actors active in the field of transitional justice face different dilemmas and often do not agree on how to tackle them: How to support victims but at the same time avoid the trap of victimhood? What is more important, to show empathy for different views of the past or to establish a uniform 'truth'? To what extent should ethnicity be emphasized or ignored as an identity factor? What is most important: truth, justice, or reconciliation? And if the three concepts are considered equally important, then how do we deal with potential conflicts between them; for example, when the wish for reconciliation implies the desire not to talk about the past?^[26]

6. Changes in the Field of Official Memory Politics?

Despite the heterogeneity of the civil society sector, their efforts and activities in particular illustrate that it is difficult to portray the culture of remembrance in BiH as stagnating and lacking the will to tackle existing problems. That things are partially moving, also on official levels, is evident in the fact that in 2012 an Expert Working Group, composed of representatives of the RS, the Federation, the state and different civil society organizations, agreed on a draft for a 'Transitional Justice Strategy for BiH'. However, the political parties in power refused to implement the proposal, which again shows how high the level of resistance remains in BiH against changes in the current culture of division and denial.^[27] Another interesting example of progress on this front is that in 2013 the municipality of Sarajevo accepted the proposal to build a monument in Kazani, where mainly Bosnian Serb civilians were killed in 1993 by a unit of the Army of BiH. If this initiative should really be implemented it would be an important symbolic step, as it would be the first time that a municipality would erect a monument to victims of crimes committed by their own majority group.^[28]

7. The Difficult Position of a Non-Ideological Historiography

In this brief overview about the current state of the public culture of history in BiH, historiography as a discipline has yet to be mentioned. This is not an accident. Because of the high degree of politicization of historical questions, and because the dominant ethnonational elites are only interested in research that confirms their own 'truth', it is very difficult to develop and publicize critical and non-ideological historical research, especially on the 1992–1995 war. The Croatian journalist Slavenka Drakulić has summarized the situation in the Balkans with the following: "Too much memory, too little history."^[29] How difficult it is for professional historians in BiH to simply do their normal work also became evident during the Centennial of the First World War in 2014. During it, the Institute of History in Sarajevo organized an international conference on the topic 'The Great War: Regional Approaches and Global Context'. But public debate in the media was focused solely on the question 'Gavrilo Princip – hero or terrorist?', and showed no interest in more nuanced interpretations by historians, nor in their statements that the conference was about the First World War in general and not just about Gavrilo Princip. Likewise, international media were almost exclusively interested in the ethnonational divisions around World War I commemorations in BiH, and not in scholarly content of the conference.^[30]

8. Contradictory Attitudes of the International Community

This brings me to one last point that is important for understanding the problems and challenges of the culture of history in BiH: the ambiguous role of the international community. One international actor that plays an essential role is the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY), but it does so in a paradoxical way. On the one hand, through its numerous trials and verdicts the ICTY has contributed a great deal to the establishment of well-researched and documented facts about war crimes committed during the 1990s, especially in BiH. On the other hand, the self-assigned mission of the ICTY was that through its work it would contribute to challenging the dominant ethnonational narratives of denial and to reconciling the different groups in BiH and the Balkans. A number of scholars have tended to view the ICTY as having failed in this mission, and they even consider its work so far as having helped to deepen existing divisions and attitudes of denial.^[31]

More generally, the attitude of the international community regarding the remembrance of the 1992–1995 war appears to be very contradictory.^[32] Quite often, the international community tries not to involve itself too directly in issues of war-related remembrance because they are seen as being a 'hot potato'. The main exception is Srebrenica, where the international community directly intervened in order to build a memorial, which can be seen as an act of compensation linked to its incapacity to prevent a crime that international courts have qualified as genocide from happening in an UN-protected zone. The attitude that, aside from Srebrenica, the international community has tried as far as possible to avoid tackling the issue of war remembrance often goes hand in hand with the discourse of 'moving on' and recommendations that BiH stop focusing on war-related questions and start looking towards the future. At the same time, there are different international actors who very actively support constructive approaches towards the past, especially through the civil society actors mentioned above. All in all, the heterogeneous international community constituted by the European Union, the UNDP, the OSCE, the Office of the High Representative as well as various national governments, Foundations and NGOs, appears to lack a coherent strategy for tackling questions of representing the past in the public sphere. With its contradictory attitudes, the international community must be seen as part of the problem in the divided sphere of public history in BiH.

Footnotes

1. For a general overview of the modern history of Bosnia and Herzegovina, see Noel Malcolm, *Bosnia: A short history*, London: Pan Books, 1996 and Marko Attila Hoare, *The History of Bosnia: From the Middle Ages to the Present Day*, London: Saqi, 2007.
2. On the 1992–1995 war and postwar Bosnia, see for example Marie-Janine Calic, *Krieg und Frieden in Bosnien und Herzegowina*, expanded edition, Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1996; Sumantra Bose, *Bosnia After Dayton: Nationalist Partition and International Intervention*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2002.
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