



## **Individual Advanced Research Opportunities Program**

### **Research Report**

*The opinions, recommendations, and conclusions of the grantee are his/her own and do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of IREX or the US Department of State.*

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**Ethnic Entanglements: Sarajevo's Cultural Legacies in Discourse and Practice**

#### **Topic of Research:**

My research in Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) asks how the processes of state and nation building occurring in the wake of the violent destruction of what was once Yugoslavia express themselves in the identities that Sarajevans use as ethnically marked and marking actors. How do census categories and the mechanisms of state bureaucracy interact with prior knowledge and patterns of sociability to result in the identities that people attribute to themselves and to others? Must these identities demand exclusivity or might they recognize overlap, flexibility and mergers? In a word, the topic of my research is belonging, as articulated in everyday expressions of citizenship, ethnicity, urban living and religious affiliations by individuals living in a shaky, newly-constituted state that is divided into two "entities" and still ultimately dependent on guidelines laid down by the "international community" (that is, the UN, NATO, OSCE, EU and USA) to ensure its sovereignty. Examining how state simplification techniques ramify on and against the person, this research queries the conclusion that the wartime policy of ethnic cleansing has resulted in a new tripartite social reality and a commonsensical categorization scheme that mirrors it (e.g., Hayden 1996).

#### **Relevance and Contribution to the Field:**

My research has been inspired by and continues the tradition of critical cultural anthropology that, in focusing on real people's narratives and

practices of belonging in contemporary nation-states, it rejects the premise that the "hard facts" of censuses and maps speak for themselves (Anderson 1991; Appadurai 1996; Cohn 1990; Kertzer and Arel 2001; Urla 1993). Following in the footsteps of Foucault, an emerging anthropology of state practices has begun to reveal how simplifying strategies, shaped by and enforced through bureaucracy, make legible and controllable states' diverse populations while also forging citizens' subjectivities (Ferguson and Gupta 2002; Herzfeld 1997; Scott 1998). The research I have conducted in Sarajevo provides an ethnography of the post-war dynamics of power relations as they play out on and in the identities that were solidified in socialist Yugoslavia, if not over the *longue durée* of Bosnia's history. In short, this case study of the articulations of post-war Sarajevans' ethnic entanglements offers insights into the intersection of citizenship, subjectivity and culture.

The major policy significance of the research lies in demonstrating the profound problematics of making a contentiously negotiated peace treaty (after a particularly heinous war) the foundation of a country's constitutional stance on the "national" (read: ethnic) nature of its citizenry. Legal inscription of the Bosniacs, Croats and Serbs as the only three constituent—and incommensurable—nations of Bosnia and Herzegovina makes biological and cultural facts of hybridity as-if-not while solidifying a divisive tripartite split that endangers the building of good will among citizens, to say nothing of building a citizenry itself.

### **Approach and Research Methodology:**

The study was based on ethnographic methodology supplemented by archival work.

Use of archives: I compiled census data for Bosnia and Herzegovina at the BiH Federation Statistical Institute's library; and in the Registration Bureau (*matični ured*) of Sarajevo's Centar municipality, I recorded the "national belonging" entry from the marriage registration form of each bride and groom during the post-war years, 1996-2003.

The goal of working with census data was to determine in which ways the state decides upon and limits categories of national (=ethnic) belonging. The goal of working with the marriage registration forms was, in addition to documenting instances of inter-group marriage, to determine how people themselves define their "national belonging". Needless to say, the number and range of statements of national belonging written on the marriage registration forms far exceeded the number of categories (4) reported in the 2003 BiH census.

#### Ethnographic methods

--attendance at public forums and discussion groups (the forum of the Bosniac Intellectuals Congress; Krug 99, and "Među Nama" (*entre-nous*)) concerned with vital issues in the national consciousness and/or politics of contemporary, post-war Bosnia;

--strolling in the city to observe post-war damage and reconstruction; to participate in the evening promenade; to view patterns of marketing and shopping; and visits to museum and gallery exhibitions to grasp the semiotics of representation of Bosnia in artistic forms (e.g., the re-opening of the

Museum of the City of Sarajevo featuring Easter eggs; the exhibit of "Sarajevo Under Siege" in the Historical Museum; the re-opening of Sarajevo's Jewish Museum; and a special exhibit, "Forgotten Bosnia" co-sponsored by the Austrian Embassy and the City of Sarajevo that documents Bosnian villagers' confrontations with Austrian imperial troops in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century);

--interviews with representatives of leading cultural organizations (Napredak, Prosvjeta, Preperod, Cankar, Jewish Community, [acting] Director of the Zemaljski Muzej, Director of the national ballet) and political parties (SDA, SDS, HDZ, SPA, Stranka za BiH, Citizens' Party);

--life history interviews and ongoing conversations with some 20 individuals, ranging in age from 21 to 80; those who spent the war years in Sarajevo and those who left and then returned; those self-defined as Bosniacs, Serbs, Croats, Jews, Slovenians and those who disdain national labels preferring instead to call themselves Bosnians, BiHs or just plain people; those who are products of inter-ethnic marriages as well as those who narrate a timeless line of familial ethnic exclusivity; those from rather poor working class origins and those from parents in the liberal professions; artists, waitresses, taxi drivers, architects...but mainly university educated young people in their 20s.

This combination of research methods coupled with reading the daily newspaper and watching televised news reports, enabled documentation of the interactive dialectics between the state and its citizens, often mediated by smaller political, cultural and educational institutions, in shaping and contesting categories and practices of national belonging.

### **Research Findings and Preliminary Conclusions:**

Not surprisingly, my findings reveal that processes of national categorization are still in flux, but pressures are increasingly placed on individuals to solidify their national identities according to the ethnic divides inscribed in the 1995 Dayton Peace Accords and then mandated in BiH's constitution. Along with noting how citizens are complying with pressures to classify themselves either as Bosniacs, Croats or Serbs, the research reveals other perhaps weaker yet persistent voices that are crying out against the coalition of nationalist camps by proclaiming themselves BOSNIANS or BiHs as they push for an inclusive identity-of-all-citizens that acknowledges slippage across ethno-religious boundaries and a slew of mergers and hybridities that have characterized life in Bosnia over the centuries (Donia and Fine 1994). Yet lack of recognition through official techniques of enumeration have made even the most careful of scholars and policy makers reach the conclusion that the policy of ethnic cleansing pursued in the 1992-95 war was successful in dividing up and redistributing the population. My study indicates, that at least in Sarajevo, a significant portion of the population rejects the reasons, rationales and results of ethnic cleansing not only because it is morally reprehensible but also because it clashes with their historical and contemporary understandings of Bosnia as a multi-cultural, if not inter-cultural, society and their roles in it.

### **Suggestions for Future Research Agendas for the Scholarly Community:**

Cultural anthropologists and critical sociologists are already engaged in studies of the state that look at connections between citizenship and subjectivity, the ramifications of power on the person, and how state-imposed census categories become uncontested cultural categories. However, little work has been done on the connection between census and common sense in the formerly communist world. This is surprising since so many studies of nationality in the USSR and Yugoslavia (for example) were conducted in the cold war period. Even more so, scholars should take note—and explore the significance—of the ironic reversal of Russia and Bosnia in their stance toward hybrid categories of belonging. In the Soviet Union, although "Soviet man" was loudly proclaimed as a universal goal and a nationwide social fact, during its 70 years no space was ever provided in the census for citizens to declare themselves as Soviets. Instead, they had to select from some 120 national categories. Today, however, in the Russian Federation, citizens are able to declare themselves part of the overarching *rossiskii narod*, that is, (Russophile) citizens of the Russian (=Rossiskaia) Federation. Contrarily, in BiH, despite a legacy of the hybrid umbrella category, Yugoslav, since 1996 each citizen has been urged to declare him- or herself as belonging to one specific national group. In the 2003 census report of the BiH Federation, only 4 categories appeared: Bosniacs, Croats, Serbs, and "Ostali"—or the remainder, those citizens of BiH that do not belong to the three constituent nations. I would hope that in the years ahead research will be undertaken to consider how nation-states decide upon and make operational residual categories of citizens who are outside of the nation(s) as they explore how and why censuses and cultural sensibilities in Eurasia are forged and put into practice.

**Recommendations for the US Policy Community:**

Denying people official routes to what they believe are authentic expressions of their belongings may well entrench exclusivist cultural categories and deepen the wells of antagonism and violence.

I would recommend that the US policy community involved in stabilization efforts in Bosnia and Herzegovina urge inclusion of an umbrella Bosnian or BiH category of belonging in official statements and documents alongside of the current Bosniac-Croat-Serb tripartite scheme. Legal recognition of hybrid peoples and cultures may result in Bosnia-Herzegovina becoming a state of all its citizens and ease resolution of its current situation as a hopelessly divided and bureaucratically embroiled polity (each major office must have a Bosniac, a Croat and a Serb filling it). Alternatively, many Sarajevans have voiced concerns that sharpening the incommensurability among groups may result in:

- a) another war,
- b) the annexation of some BiH territory to Croatia and Serbia leading to the creation of Bosnian Bantustans, and
- c) perpetuation and factualization of the myth that Bosniacs, Croats and Serbs are the only constituent nations of BiH and that cultural and biological overlaps are not, never were and can never be possible, thereby precluding the option of BiH joining the European Union, the country's best hope for economic revitalization and social prosperity.

