

Abstract:

This article explores the national identity of the Bosnian Serbs. It argues that through living for centuries in a land called 'Bosnia' or 'Bosnia-Herzegovina', the Bosnian Serbs developed a specific form of Serb national identity, one that has caused their political leaders often to conflict with the political classes of Serbia.

Key words:

Bosnia- Herzegovina, Serbia, Bosnian Serbs, nationalism, national identity.

Nationalists like to portray their nation as being homogenous; a 'seamless garment'. Yet nations and national identities are in fact heterogeneous; differences of identity may be produced within the same nation by differences in region, historical experience, socio-economic background or other factors. As there are differences of identity among Croats, between those from Zagorje, Slavonia, Istria, Dalmatia, Bosnia and so forth; and among Albanians, between those from Albania proper, Kosovo, Macedonia and so forth; so there are differences among Serbs, between those from Serbia proper, Vojvodina, Kosovo, Bosnia, Lika and so forth. This study will discuss the specific identity of the Bosnian Serbs, its differences with the identity of the Serbs from Serbia, and the historical consequences of this difference. It will trace the historical origins of the difference between the respective national identities of the Bosnian Serbs and of the Serbs from Serbia (henceforth referred to as 'Serbians' – *Srbijanci*). It will explore how this difference of identity resulted in different political goals and ideologies between the political classes of these two branches of the Serb nation, throughout the existence of Yugoslavia and up until the present day.

The original Serbs arrived in the western Balkans, including Bosnia, in the seventh century A.D. It is not, however, possible to trace the existence of the Serb nation in Bosnia, in unbroken continuity, back to this medieval population. The population of medieval Bosnia, which emerged as an effectively independent state under Ban Kulin in about 1180 and reached its greatest territorial extent under King Tvrtko in the second half of the fourteenth century, had ethnically heterogeneous roots. These included both the pre-Slavic (Illyrian or

Vlach) population of the region and the Slavic settlers, including Serbs and Croats, who arrived during the early middle ages. But there is no correlation between these medieval ethnic divisions among Bosnians and the contemporary ethnic division between Bosnian Serbs, Bosnian Croats and Bosnian Muslims or Bosniaks. The latter was the product of religious divisions created by the long period of Ottoman rule, which began definitely when the medieval Bosnian kingdom fell to the Ottomans in 1463. Prior to the Ottoman arrival, the Bosnian population had been principally divided between Catholics and between adherents of the Church of Bosnia, deemed heretical by the Catholic Church, with a smaller population of Orthodox in Hum or Hercegovina, which was acquired by Bosnia only in the fourteenth century. The Ottoman occupation resulted in the conversion of the greatest part of the Bosnian population to either Islam or Serbian Orthodoxy, while large numbers of Orthodox Vlachs migrated to Bosnia in the same period. It was this Orthodox population – Slavic and Vlach – that formed the basis of the modern Bosnian Serb nationality, while the Islamic population formed the basis of the Bosnian Muslim or Bosniak nationality and the Catholic population formed the basis for the Croat nationality. All three modern Bosnian nationalities have diverse ethnic origins; each of them is descended both from the original, already heterogeneous Bosnian medieval population and from more recent arrivals.¹

Ethnic Serbs are spread across the territory of the western Balkans; after Serbia itself, the largest populations of Serbs are in Bosnia-Herzegovina followed by Croatia and Montenegro, with smaller numbers in several other states of the region. This does not correspond to the historic borders of any Serbian state. Although Bosnia was briefly under Serbian suzerainty during the middle ages, the largest concentration of ethnic Serbs in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina, prior to the 1990s, was in western Bosnia and central Croatia; territories that mostly had never formed part of any Serbian state. It was the Serbian Orthodox Church, not any historic shared Serbian statehood or primordial ethnicity, that formed the underpinning for a single Serb nation spread across the western Balkans. In 1557, the Ottomans re-established the Serbian Orthodox patriarchate, with its see in Peć in present-day Kosovo. Stevan K. Pavlowitch says of the re-established patriarchate that it ‘provided a well-organized framework for its faithful over all the European lands controlled by the Turks, and remained across Hungarian and Venetian borders even after the tide had receded. It acted on behalf of the “Serbian nation”, and spread the name “Serb”. In fact, once could say that it was only then that something approaching a Serbian ethnic consciousness appeared.’²

Ironically, the Ottoman Empire was the state that united most of the lands inhabited by substantial numbers of Serbs, for whom the restored Serbian church provided unity; as Michael Boro Petrovich writes, ‘from 1557 until the Peace of Požarevac (Passarowitz) in 1718 virtually all Serbs found themselves together in an organization of their own.’ Furthermore, ‘it was the political, social and cultural role of the Serbian church that gave it such decisive importance in the preservation and rebirth of the Serbian nation. In effect, it was the Serbian church that provided the bridge between the medieval Serbian state and a modern secular Serbia in the early nineteenth century. Thanks to Ottoman policy, the patriarchate of Peć was the bearer not only of spiritual but of secular authority, as the legally confirmed organization of the Serbian *millet*.’³

Nevertheless, if the existence of a unified Serbian Orthodox Church laid the basis for a single Serb people sharing a national identity, the division of the Serbs between different states and provinces laid the basis for different interpretations of this national identity. Following their conquest of Bosnia in 1463, the Ottomans re-established Bosnia as a *sanjak* – an administrative-territorial unit. This was followed in 1580 by the establishment of an *eyalet* of Bosnia – a larger administrative territorial unit that grouped the Bosnian sanjak with other sanjaks. Though the borders of the *eyalet* of Bosnia fluctuated greatly over the succeeding decades and centuries, and at times included large parts of what are now Croatia, Serbia and Montenegro, nevertheless this entity - itself the heir of the medieval Bosnian kingdom - was the direct precursor of the modern province and subsequently republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina. The Serb Orthodox inhabitants of the *eyalet* of Bosnia, over centuries of living in it, evolved a consciousness of Bosnia as their country; i.e. a national identity that was Bosnian as well as Serb. This has meant a somewhat different national identity to that of the Serbians, and frequently to different perceptions of national interest, even to conflicts between these two branches of the Serb nation. In this respect, the Bosnian Serbs resemble the Montenegrins, for whom identification with the Serb nation had to be reconciled with awareness of their own distinct national tradition arising from having inhabited a distinct country of their own.⁴ Like the Montenegrins, Bosnian Serbs might differ among themselves, or over time, on the question of how far to submerge their own country and identity in the wider Serb nation. Unlike the Montenegrins, the Bosnian Serbs never evolved into a wholly separate nation in their own right. But like the Montenegrins, the Bosnian Serbs’ distinct national tradition, arising from having inhabited a homeland different from other Serbs,

helped to ensure that this homeland would never be united with Serbia into a single, Great Serb state.

The Serbian socialist Svetozar Markovic was among the first to caution that, given their long history of separation, unity between the different branches of the Serb nation would pose its own problems. In his 1872 essay 'Serbia in the East', Marković wrote:

But Prince Mihail himself was unable to establish a Great Serbia... We maintain that this policy came to nothing because against it were insurmountable obstacles. The first and greatest obstacle was independent Montenegro, which looked upon Hercegovina, Bosnia and Old Serbia exactly as Serbia did and, and which furthermore openly strove to found a completely independent Serb state. The second great obstacle was the Bosnian aristocracy with its existing rights... To acquire Bosnia by war would mean provoking a social revolution in Bosnia, destroying the local aristocracy, which has existed there for several centuries; and when the delighted common people had liberated itself from one master, would it then have consented to come under the Serbian gendarmes, captains and other masters ?⁵

Marković correctly predicted that the Serb population of Bosnia-Hercegovina would prove as much, or more, of an obstacle to Serbia's annexation of Bosnia-Hercegovina as the Muslim landlord class. Successive events in the one-hundred and twenty years after Marković's death in 1875 would prove him right.

The autonomy enjoyed by the Bosnian Orthodox community under the Ottomans, combined with the memory, preserved by the Orthodox clergy, of the Serbian medieval state, were the twin foundations of Bosnian Serb nationhood. At the same time, centuries of living in the land of Bosnia, as distinct from Serbia, gave the Bosnian Serb urban elite an awareness of, and patriotic identification with, their Bosnian homeland that in some ways resembled that of the Muslims. Indeed, early Bosnian Serb nationalists tended to espouse a nationalism that was inclusive of the Bosnian Muslim elite, not anti-Islamic, and that while looking to Serbia, at the same time expressed its awareness of Bosnia as a distinct land in its own right. In the late 1840s a delegation of Serbs from Bosnia visited Russian political circles, declaring 'that

the Bosniaks would gladly be the rulers of their country while paying the Sultan a definite tribute.’ Their project was ‘inspired by the example of their neighbour and sister Serbia.’⁶ When the Bosnian Christians, above all Orthodox, rebelled against the Ottomans in the 1870s, the rebellion, under the leadership of the Bosnian Serb urban middle classes, was both Serb-nationalist and Bosnia-patriotic in organisation. Representatives of the Bosnian rebel bands held a gathering at the village of Jamnica in December 1874, one that was referred to subsequently as the ‘Bosnian national parliament’. Among its most prominent actions were an appeal to the Great Powers for international recognition, the appointment of a ‘provisional government’ known as the ‘National Council for Liberation in Bosnia’, and the framing of an appeal to the Bosnian Muslims to join the rebellion, promising full respect for their religion and property.⁷ In July 1876, the Bosnian rebel leaders issued a ‘Proclamation to the Bosnian people’ in which they announced that ‘we, the entire leadership of the Bosnian rebel detachments as the only legal representatives of the Serb land of Bosnia... proclaim that our homeland Bosnia be joined to the principality of Serbia’.⁸ Yet the rebels were aware that Bosnian and Serbian interests had diverged following Belgrade’s signing of a peace treaty with the Porte in March 1877, when it was felt among them that ‘nothing now links us with Serbia’.⁹ The rebels’ ‘Provisional National Bosnian Government’, formed in October of the same year, announced that ‘the Bosnian nation has never wanted, nor now wants, to become a constituent part of any other state’. It ‘wishes to unite with other Serbian lands. If that unification, in the present political circumstances of Europe, is not permitted us as we wish, then the Bosnian nation wishes to have its complete freedom and self government’, without prejudicing its right to unite with other Serb lands in the future.¹⁰

Bosnian Serb nationalism, as it emerged in the nineteenth century, therefore favoured both unification with Serbia and other Serb lands and sovereignty for Bosnia. This duality found its most eloquent spokesman in the Bosnian Serb revolutionary Vaso Pelagić. The ‘Ustasha proclamation’ put forward by Pelagić during the rebellion of 1875-78 called for Bosnia-Hercegovina’s unification with ‘both Serbian principalities [Serbia and Montenegro]’, but made clear that the carrier of sovereignty in the land of Bosnia should be its own parliament with its own government.¹¹ Pelagić advocated that ‘Bosnia-Hercegovina become an independent state or enter a brotherly and free union with the Serbian Principality and other nations of the Danubian region and the Balkan peninsula’.¹² In this period, Bosnian

sovereignty was seen as a stepping-stone toward unity with Serbia; no possible contradiction was envisaged between the two.

The Bosnian rebellion of 1875-1878 nevertheless provided an early manifestation of the principal structural weakness of Bosnian Serb nationalism: its inability fully to embrace the Muslims and the Bosnian Orthodox peasantry at the same time. Under the Ottomans, the landlord class was Islamised. Although by the 1870s most Muslim and the majority of Catholic peasants were free, in that they were not fiscally or legally obliged to the Muslim landlord class, the majority of Orthodox peasants remained subordinate to the Muslim landlords. Although this subordination was not strictly speaking 'feudal', this fiscal and legal subordination resembled in many respects the serfdom of Christian feudal Europe. These 'enserfed' Orthodox peasants naturally viewed the Muslim landlord class as the national oppressor. To satisfy the Bosnian Serb masses, the Bosnian Serb national movement would have to satisfy the class aspirations of the peasantry vis-à-vis the Muslim landlords. Yet to conquer Bosnia-Herzegovina, the Bosnian Serb national movement would have to embrace the Muslim element, which meant providing guarantees for the Muslim landlords. This dilemma was ultimately inescapable, and explains in part the failure of the rebellion of 1875-1878. The Bosnian Serb merchants who provided most of the rebel leaders shared their Serb national identity with the peasants that comprised the rebel rank and file, but enjoyed close relations with the Muslim elite, with whom they were, as tax farmers, complicit in exploiting the peasantry. The rebel leaders consequently fell between two stools: their rejection of the expropriation of the Muslim landlords alienated the rebel masses while their aim of unification with Serbia prevented them from winning significant Muslim or Croat support. The rebellion therefore stagnated and ended in failure.¹³

Bosnia, which from the 1870s became 'Bosnia-Herzegovina', was viewed by Bosnian Serb nationalists as a 'Serb land', and the Bosnian Muslims and Catholics as Muslim and Catholic Serbs. This became more problematic, however, following the occupation of the country by Austria-Hungary in 1878, and particularly after Benjamin Kállay became Austro-Hungarian Finance Minister, therefore ruler of Bosnia-Herzegovina, in 1882. Kállay preserved the economic privileges of the Muslim landlords and the Muslim domination of municipal government. He sought to create a new, 'Bosniak' national identity that would be

inter-confessional and inclusive of all Bosnian citizens - a project known as *Bošnjastvo*, that translates roughly as 'Bosniakism'. From 1883, the language of state was known as 'Bosnian'. In 1889, the regime introduced a Bosnian flag and coat-of-arms, designed on the basis of research into historical Bosnian symbols and intended to signify a Bosnian identity wholly distinct from the Serbian and the Croatian.¹⁴ The government's assumption of the right to appoint Orthodox Metropolitans for Bosnia-Hercegovina, interference in municipal government, removal of municipal control over schools, forced transformation of Serb Orthodox schools into inter-confessional state schools, restrictions on the use of the Cyrillic alphabet and ban on the official use of the Serb name, represented a violation of rights that the Serb Orthodox community had enjoyed in the Ottoman Empire. This united the Bosnian Serb population against the government and behind a specifically Serb-national movement for church and school autonomy. This meant that the Serb-nationalist view of all Bosnia-Hercegovina and of all Catholics and Muslims as 'Serb' was now at loggerheads with the Serb national movements goals of autonomy vis-à-vis the central Bosnian authorities and separateness vis-à-vis other Bosnians in the fields of education and language. Bosnian Serb nationalism was pulling simultaneously in opposite directions.

A further contradiction preventing the achievement of a 'Serb Bosnia' was the class conflict between the 'enserfed' Orthodox peasantry and the Muslim landlord class. The Serb political classes were required, under pressure from the Serb peasant populace, to push for reform of agrarian relations in Bosnia-Hercegovina. Yet this drew a wedge between them and the Muslims, preventing the absorption of the latter into Serb national politics. Thus, leaders of the Serb and Muslim autonomist movements met at Kiseljak near Sarajevo in August 1901 and produced a draft of an agreement for cooperation that called for an autonomous Bosnia-Hercegovina with a Serb governor and Muslim vice-governor under the aegis of the Ottoman Sultan. But on account of disagreement over the agrarian question, this draft agreement remained unsigned on the Muslim side.¹⁵ Despite their shared opposition to Habsburg rule and goal of Bosnian autonomy, the Serb and Muslim national movements crystallised wholly distinct from one another in the period of this rule. Hence the foundation of the 'Serb National Organisation' in 1907 in parallel to the 'Muslim National Organisation', as well as the 'Croat National Union', formed the year before. Hence also the formation of wholly separate cultural societies for the three principal Bosnian nationalities in the early years of the twentieth centuries: the Muslim society 'Gajret' ('Zeal'); the Serb 'Prosvjeta'

(‘Enlightenment’); and the Croat ‘Napredak’ (‘Progress’). These societies then became the principal institutional promoters of national identity in Bosnia-Herzegovina in the decades that followed; through financing the education of students from the ranks of their respective nationalities, they acted to create nationally conscious intelligentsias.¹⁶ Meanwhile, the Austro-Hungarian occupation had been followed by the increasing foundation of nationally exclusive Serb and Croat newspapers, usually by Serbs and Croats from the Habsburg lands or by Bosnians educated among them who adopted their respective national outlooks.¹⁷ This acted to consolidate the Bosnian Serb and Croat reading publics as distinct, nationally homogenous ‘imagined communities’.

The highpoint of Serb-nationalist Bosnian autonomism was nevertheless reached in the period of the Austro-Hungarian annexation of Bosnia-Herzegovina in 1908. This annexation was itself prompted by the Young Turk revolution of that year and the restoration of the Ottoman constitution, and by the consequent joint demand of the Muslim National Organisation and Serb National Organisation – formally submitted by Ali-beg Firdus and Gligorije Jeftanović, on behalf of the two organisations, to Ban István Burián - that Bosnia-Herzegovina, too, be granted a constitution and parliament. When Austria-Hungary responded to the Young Turk and Bosnian autonomist threat to its control of the country by annexing Bosnia-Herzegovina on 5 October, the two parties responded with a joint proclamation to the ‘people of Bosnia-Herzegovina’, asserting the unity of Serbs and Muslims in the struggle for Bosnian autonomy. In 1909, Serb National Organisation representative Nikola Stojanović issued a denunciation of the draft Austro-Hungarian constitution for Bosnia-Herzegovina, in the process making an eloquent demand for Bosnian national self-determination. Stojanović denounced the division of the Bosnian parliament by curia on the grounds that ‘the government creates for us religious curias and in that way sanctions the earlier conflicts.’ In contrast to this, ‘the Serb National Organisation expressed as its programme the universal, equal, secret and direct right to vote’. This, it should be said, was linked to Stojanović’s accusation that the curial system was intended ‘to bypass the Orthodox majority’. He went on: ‘Complete autonomy is the only true solution to the question of Bosnia-Herzegovina, because only this protects the Bosniaks and Herzegovinians, joined by a common past and origins, from assimilation by heterogeneous elements, and guarantees the indivisibility of Bosnia and Herzegovina; only on this basis can control by the

signatory powers to the Berlin Congress be replaced by the self-control of a single nation, one that Austria-Hungary itself has declared to be mature.’¹⁸

Stojanović’s statement reflected the still-dominant belief among Bosnian Serb nationalists that Bosnia-Herzegovina could emerge as a unitary, self-governing nation-state – both Bosnian and Serb – formed around the core of the Orthodox majority. Yet in this period, the Bosnian Serb political elite began to divide between the supporters of the older, more conservative, traditional Serb current and those of the younger, more cosmopolitan, more oppositionist Yugoslav current influenced by pro-Yugoslav currents in the other Habsburg South Slav lands. The older current, which was heir to the Serb autonomist movement of the 1880s and 1890s and was represented by individuals such as Jeftanović and his son-in-law Milan Srškić, remained dominant among the Serb *čaršija*; it was generally loyal to the Habsburgs during World War I and formed the basis for the Bosnian wing of the People’s Radical Party in the interwar period. By contrast, the younger current, represented by individuals such as Stojanović, had its stronghold outside of Sarajevo in the town of Mostar.¹⁹ Its members during World War I sought Bosnia-Herzegovina’s unification with Serbia on a Yugoslav rather than a Great Serbian basis.

The Bosnian Serb political classes were further fractured by divisions over the agrarian question, which became more acute after early March 1910, when Emperor Franz Joseph ordered Ban Burián to begin the process of resolving the agrarian dispute through the voluntary purchase by the overwhelmingly Serb serfs of their farms. This reform amounted to only a very meagre step toward solving the problem, one that was to register very little success. In response, the Serb parliamentary club issued a declaration in March 1910, demanding that ‘Bosnia-Herzegovina should become an independent administrative oblast with all the characteristics of a state, safeguarding its unity and historical-political individuality’, and calling for a ‘solution to the agrarian question’ through the ‘compulsory redemption of the serfs’.²⁰ These maximal Serb goals therefore linked the demand for national liberation for the land of Bosnia-Herzegovina with the demand for class liberation for the predominantly Serb serfs. Yet the apparent unwillingness of the majority of Serb parliamentary delegates to press for the realisation of their own program led to a split in Serb ranks, with a radical minority led by Petar Kočić agitating against the majority’s ‘betrayal’ of the goals of Bosnian autonomy on the one hand and of the redemption of the serfs on the

other.²¹ For Kočić, Bosnian autonomism and Serb nationalism were now combined with a partisan advocacy of the cause of the Serb 'serfs' vis-à-vis the Muslim landlords, a class struggle which tended to express itself in sectarian, anti-Muslim terms. Kočić's radical pro-peasant and anti-Muslim faction was the father of the Bosnian wing of the League of Farmers of the interwar period, which in turn begat the Bosnian wing of the Chetnik movement of World War II.

As Bosnia-Herzegovina modernised and prospered economically under Austro-Hungarian rule, so class divisions among the previously relatively homogenous Bosnian Serb and Croat communities increased, while the elites of all three Bosnian nationalities became more conservative. Conversely, the network of radical student groups that retrospectively came to be known as 'Young Bosnia' represented a reaction against these developments. Hostile to urban, bourgeois civilization, to the social influences of Western Europe and to the Serb elite or *čaršija* in cities such as Sarajevo, Young Bosnia's activists tended to hold principles that were puritanical, mystical and anti-materialist, drawn unconsciously from the ethics of rural society based on Orthodox Christianity and the extended family (*zadruga*). Their fanatical national-radicalism and their longing for martyrdom were a reflection of the Orthodox religious milieu in which the majority of them had been raised. Young Bosnia nevertheless grew from what was primarily a Great Serb nationalist movement in its early years, into one that in the last years before World War I was Yugoslavist in character, preaching an end to religious divisions, the cooperation of Serbs, Croats and Muslims and the unification of the South Slavs on a federal basis. Its young members, and those of similar organisations, came from the first generations to be schooled in the nationally mixed schools and colleges of Austro-Hungarian Bosnia-Herzegovina; their family backgrounds were in the religiously segregated countryside, but they spent their youth among Bosnians and others of all nationalities.²² Yet Young Bosnia was very far from representative of the Bosnian Serb mainstream, and the Bosnian Serb elite was generally outraged by the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand by Young Bosnia radicals on 28 June 1914, and remained loyal to the Austro-Hungarian Empire at the start of the war. On 1 August, four days after the Empire declared war on Serbia, a delegation of Sarajevo Serbs visited the Vice-President of the Country Government to express their continued loyalty to the Emperor.²³

At the time of the outbreak of World War I, therefore, the Bosnian Serb political classes were therefore divided over national strategy. Yet the political ideologies of all factions reflected, in different ways, the Bosnian Serb national identity. As the collapse of Austria-Hungary and Bosnia-Herzegovina's unification with Serbia and with other South Slav lands approached, the dominant faction among the Bosnian Serb political elite sought to manage this unification in a manner that would avoid a break either with their counterparts from among the Bosnian Muslim and Croat elites, or with the pro-unification politicians of other Habsburg South Slav lands, or with the government of Serbia. This strategy reflected a peculiarly Bosnian Serb understanding that, while unification with Serbia was the goal, collaboration between Bosnian Serbs and non-Serbs could not be sacrificed to this goal, and that the feelings and aspirations of the latter had to be taken into account. According to Pero Slijepčević, a leading Bosnian Serb supporter of the Yugoslav Committee - the London-based body of emigre South Slav politicians under the leadership of the Dalmatian Croat Ante Trumbić that lobbied the Allied governments in favour of the establishment of a unified Yugoslav state - he and his collaborators saw themselves as representing 'the whole of Bosnia, not just its Serb part', and worked to avoid 'a break between Serbia and the Yugoslav Committee [that] would hit Bosnia-Herzegovina the hardest, tearing it apart both spiritually and perhaps also territorially'. Consequently, Bosnia-Herzegovina's representatives played the role 'that Bosnia-Herzegovina ought to play: the role of intermediary, the role of buckle between Serbia and Croatia'.²⁴ In particular following the outbreak of revolution in Russia in 1917, the desire of the Bosnian Serb political classes to maintain a united front with their Croat and Muslim counterpart was heightened by their fear of popular revolution; they feared the revolutionary-nationalist fervour of the Bosnian Serb peasant masses directed against the Muslim landlords.

The pro-Yugoslav standpoint of the leading Bosnian Serb politicians standpoint brought them into frequent conflict with the Serbian government of Nikola Pašić, which wished to establish Serbia's exclusive right to Bosnia-Herzegovina, irrespective of any wider Yugoslav dimension. In January 1918, Pašić requested that Nikola Stojanović, as a Bosnian Serb member of the Yugoslav Committee, campaign solely for Bosnia-Herzegovina's unification with Serbia outside of the Yugoslav framework, something the Stojanović refused in the belief that this would mean a break between Serbia and the Serbs on the one hand and the Croats and Slovene on the other, an unsightly scramble for territory and 'even that Bosnia

be divided between the Serbs and Croats'.²⁵ In the negotiations in Geneva in November 1918 over the form that Yugoslav unification should take, Stojanović and his fellow Bosnian Serb member of the Yugoslav Committee Dušan Vasiljević sided with their colleagues in the Yugoslav Committee and against the Serbian government in favour of an essentially confederal union between the Kingdom of Serbia on the one hand and the State of Slovenes, Croats and Serbs on the other.²⁶ The Bosnian Serb political elite kept rank with other Bosnians and Habsburg South Slavs, ultimately through the medium of the first National Government of Bosnia-Hercegovina, which was established on 30 October 1918. The latter, dominated by Serbs and headed by the Bosnian Serb Atanasije Šola, kept a check on radical manifestations of Serb irredentism. On 1 December 1918, the State of Slovenes, Croats and Serbs, including Bosnia-Hercegovina, was united with Serbia under the Karađorđević dynasty to form the 'Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes'. Bosnia-Hercegovina joined this state as a distinct entity under international law, having successfully resisted considerable pressure from the Serbian government and army to declare Bosnia-Hercegovina's unification with Serbia prior to the act of all-Yugoslav unification.²⁷ That Bosnia-Hercegovina was not formally united with Serbia by the time of Yugoslav unification in 1918 was the direct result of actions taken by the Bosnian Serb political elite in the face of popular irredentist pressure from the Bosnian Serb masses. This demonstrated that far from simply being part of a larger, seamless Serb nation, the Bosnian Serbs formed a national corpus in their own right: their elite perceived a national interest and followed a national strategy that were independent of, and to some extent in conflict with, those of the political elite of Serbia.

This divergence between the national politics of the Bosnian Serbs and the Serbians continued after Yugoslav unification, even though the Bosnian Serbs were themselves deeply divided. After 1918, the greater part of the Bosnian Serb political elite rejected the Great Serb nationalism of Serbia's People's Radical Party under Pašić, choosing instead to unite with Yugoslav-oriented elements from other former Habsburg lands and from Serbia to form the integral-Yugoslavist Democratic Party. This was a reflection of their past collaboration with, and attempt to maintain unity with, their non-Serb Bosnian counterparts. The Bosnian Serb leaders made a particular effort to draw Muslims and Croats into the Democratic Party project. Almost all Bosnian political factions participated in the founding conference of this party, which took place, symbolically, in Sarajevo in February 1919, but the principal Croat and Muslim factions ultimately refused to join the party on account of its centralist

programme.²⁸ The Democratic Party was rejected also by the bulk of the Bosnian Serb masses which, thanks to the class division between Serb peasants and Muslim landlords, gave their support overwhelmingly to overtly Serb nationalist parties: the People's Radical Party and the League of Farmers. Yet the Bosnian Serb politicians of these parties, too, remained guided by peculiarly Bosnian concerns that divided them from Serbia's political classes.

The largest segment of the Bosnian Serb electorate gave its support to the People's Radical Party, whose Bosnian wing was heir to the conservative, Sarajevo-based section of the Bosnian Serb elite under Jeftanović, that had led the campaign for religious autonomy under Austria-Hungary, then made its peace with the Austrian Kaiser and court in 1909. This political faction, in which the dominant figure was Srškić, had split with the Democrats when the latter in April 1919 chose to merge with the anti-Radical opposition in Serbia; Srškić's faction became the Bosnian wing of the Radicals instead. Yet when the Serbian-dominated Radical-Democratic coalition government in Belgrade adopted a more moderate position vis-à-vis the Muslim landlord class than was acceptable to the Bosnian Serb electorate, Srškić resigned as Bosnian prime minister in protest, thus squaring his commitments to his Bosnian Serb constituents with his obligations toward his party leadership in Belgrade and articulating a particular Bosnian Serb national interest. Meanwhile, a significant constituency among the Bosnian Serbs demanded a still more radical reckoning with the Muslim landlords, and their expropriation with minimal compensation. To press for this, this constituency spawned a 'Labourer's Organisation', which in 1920 emerged as the Bosnian wing of the League of Farmers party. In 1921 the Radical-Democrat bloc in the Yugoslav constitutional assembly bought the support of the principal Bosnian Muslim party (the Yugoslav Muslim Organisation – JMO) for the draft constitution, by giving concessions to the Muslim landlords on the issue of agrarian reform and by undertaking to preserve the administrative borders of Bosnia-Hercegovina within the new state. The League of Farmers voted against the constitution in protest. On the eve of the vote on the constitution, Vojislav Lazić, on behalf of the Farmers in the constitutional assembly, complained that the government was 'more keen to collaborate with the beys than with the representatives of the Farmer-worker nation', and that '[n]ational unity has been totally confounded by the fact that, at the last moment, the historical borders of Bosnia have been conceded'.²⁹

Thus, the different traditions of Bosnian Serb nationalism were represented by the Bosnian wings of the Democratic, Radical and Farmers' parties. The Bosnian wing of the Democratic Party - which included the greater part of the pre-unification Bosnian Serb political elite but enjoyed minimal electoral support among the Bosnian Serb masses – represented the *non-sectarian* tradition of Bosnian Serb nationalism, which favoured the collaboration between Bosnian Serbs, Croats and Muslims in the interests of Bosnian unity. The Bosnian wing of the People's Radical Party – heir to the autonomist movement of the Austro-Hungarian era and to the conservative, Sarajevo-based wing of the pre-unification Bosnian Serb elite, and enjoying the strongest electoral support among the Bosnian Serb masses – represented the *hegemonist* tradition of Bosnian Serb nationalism, which viewed all Bosnia-Herzegovina as a Serb land and all Bosnians (or at least all Orthodox and Muslims) as Serbs, and which sought to subsume all of them within the Serb national movement. The Bosnian wing of the League of Farmers – heir to Petar Kočić's radical faction under Austria-Hungary, and the second-most-popular party among Bosnian Serb voters – represented the *separatist* tradition of Bosnian Serb nationalism, which viewed the Muslim landlords as the class enemy and viewed the nation in narrowly Serb Orthodox terms. All three groups interpreted the national interest differently from the political classes of Serbia.

The political fragmentation of the Bosnian Serbs following the establishment of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes reflected an insurmountable structural weakness in Bosnian Serb nationalism vis-à-vis the Bosnian Muslims, who successfully united behind a single party, the JMO. Mainstream Bosnian Serb nationalism during the 1920s, as represented by the Radicals, was unable to overcome the contradiction faced by the need to unify the Serb nation in Bosnia-Herzegovina and coopt the Muslims *at the same time*. The Radicals could not hope to challenge the JMO's hold over the Muslim electorate if they supported the sectional interests of the Bosnian Serb peasantry unconditionally. Yet so long as they attempted to win over the Muslim elite by a conciliatory stance on the agrarian question, they could not eliminate the Farmers as a competitor for the Bosnian Serb vote. The Radicals were therefore unable to dominate the Bosnian Serb vote as the JMO dominated the Muslim vote, therefore were at a disadvantage in their political competition with the JMO. This was the root of a wholly new tendency among Bosnian Serb nationalists: retreat from the claim to exclusive possession of all Bosnia-Herzegovina, to support for the Bosnia-Herzegovina's *partition*. Srškić, increasingly desperate as the 1920s progressed in the face of

the Radicals' inability to compete successfully with the JMO for control of Bosnia-Hercegovina, pursued a policy that was autonomous of the Radical leadership in Belgrade, attacking the JMO as his irreconcilable enemy even when the Radicals and JMO were allies at the Yugoslav level. Srškić blamed the Bosnian Radicals' failure on Clause 135 of the Yugoslav constitution, that preserved the provincial borders of Bosnia-Hercegovina and the six traditional Bosnian oblasts within the administrative framework of the kingdom, allowing the JMO to cooperate with the principal Croat party (the Croat Peasant Party – HSS) and preserve its influence at the oblast level. At the same time, the Radicals' political campaign against the JMO escalated into actual physical terror and violence.

Srškić's struggle with the JMO for control of Bosnia-Hercegovina culminated in him once again breaking ranks with the People's Radical Party leadership to support the dictatorship of King Aleksandar, established on 6 January 1929. As Minister of Justice under the dictatorship, Srškić engineered the 'Law on the Naming and Division of the Kingdom into Administrative Territories' of 3 October 1929, through which the kingdom – now renamed the 'Kingdom of Yugoslavia' - was partitioned into nine provinces or 'banovinas' that disregarded the historical borders between the different Yugoslav lands. In particular, Bosnia-Hercegovina was partitioned between four banovinas – the Vrbas, Primorje, Drina and Zeta Banovinas. In three of these banovinas, the Serbs enjoyed a majority; in the fourth, the Primorje Banovina, the Croats enjoyed a majority; while the Muslims were left as a minority in all four, with the aim of fulfilling Srškić's plan to assimilate them into the Serb and Croat nations. The Law on the Islamic Religious Community of Yugoslavia of 31 January 1930 deprived the Bosnian Muslims of all autonomy in religious affairs. All high-ranking Islamic officials were to be appointed by the King, up to and including the Reis ul-ulema, who was to be transferred from Sarajevo and seated in Belgrade, with authority over all Yugoslavia's Muslims. Finally, Srškić's determination to destroy forever the JMO and any possibility of Muslim autonomous political mobilisation was reflected in the new Yugoslav constitution of 1931, which stated: 'There may be no association on a religious, tribal or regional basis within the party-political sphere nor in the sphere of physical education'.³⁰

Srškić's peculiarly Bosnian Serb perception of national interest thus led him to break with the Radicals in Serbia to pursue his campaign against the JMO, which now involved abolishing all traces of Bosnia-Hercegovina as an administrative entity. Yet just as Bosnian

Serb politicians were ready to break ranks with their Serbian counterparts, so the latter were ready to break ranks with the former, when their own different perception of national interest required it. Srškić's triumph was short-lived. The assassination of King Aleksandar on 9 October 1934, followed by the appointment of a government under Milan Stojadinović in June 1935, led to the reversal of Aleksandar's policy toward Bosnia-Hercegovina and the Muslims. Stojadinović created what was nominally a new political party, but was in fact a coalition of existing parties: the Yugoslav Radical Union (JRZ), formed from a merger of the Radicals, the JMO and the Slovene People's Party. This policy effectively ceded power in Bosnia-Hercegovina to the JMO and the Muslims, to which the fragmented Bosnian Radicals were very much a junior partner. The Stojadinović regime (1935-39) thus marked the low point of Bosnian Serb political fortunes in Yugoslavia. Bosnian Serbs, alienated from the regime on account of its alliance with the JMO, gave only meagre support to the JRZ. The vice president of the JRZ organisation in the north-east Bosnian town of Brčko, for example, wrote to Stojadinović in October 1935 that, while a minority of politically conscious Serbs in Brčko recognised that the alliance with the JMO was necessary for higher state interests, the Serb masses were alienated by this policy.³¹ In December 1936, Government Minister Lazar Marković learned from a Bosnian Serb correspondent that 'among the Serbs a terrible depression and apathy is reigning that bodes ill for Herceg-Bosna'.³² Serb members of the JRZ 'felt themselves to be a constituent part of a deserved majority in both the state and the party; they could not cope in the position of a minority in a party grouping and did not know how to subordinate their local and personal interests to the higher interests of the party and state', as one of them reported to Stojadinović in October 1938.³³

Nevertheless, Dragiša Cvetković, who succeeded Stojadinović as Yugoslav prime minister following the latter's fall in February 1939, sacrificed the Muslims just as Stojadinović had sacrificed the Bosnian Serbs. On 26 August 1939, Cvetković signed an agreement with HSS leader Vlatko Maček. This 'Cvetković-Maček Agreement' or '*Sporazum*' established an autonomous Croatian 'Banovina' within the framework of the Yugoslav state. The Banovina of Croatia was formed from the merger of Yugoslavia's two Croat-majority banovinas - the Sava and Primorje Banovinas - plus some additional territory. Cvetković thereby built upon Srškić's partition of Bosnia-Hercegovina, which was now more overtly divided between Serbs and Croats. Yet whereas Srškić had been motivated by a Bosnian Serb desire to defeat the JMO and establish Serb control over the best part of Bosnia-Hercegovina,

the motivation of Cvetković, and above all of his patron, the Yugoslav regent Prince Pavle, was essentially Serbian: the desire to reach an accommodation with the Croatian opposition that would preserve Yugoslavia, at the expense if necessary of the Bosnian Serbs and Muslims. According to the recollections of Branko Miljuš, who had been Minister without Portfolio under Cvetković, the latter responded to his objections to the *Sporazum* with the question: ‘How much longer will you Serbs from Bosnia obstruct our Sporazum with the Croats ?’ In Miljuš’s opinion, Cvetković represented a ‘type of politician for whom the territory between the Drina and the Adriatic represented simply a field of manoeuvre, and the Orthodox and Muslim population of that area so many bargaining counters’.³⁴ Cvetković and his supporters, for their part, claimed that, as concerned the Serbo-Croat dispute, ‘the main role in provoking all these conflicts was played precisely by those Serbs from the ‘prečanski areas’ [i.e. Serbs from Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina] headed by Svetozar Pribićević, as the one most familiar with Croatian conditions’, while ‘the “Serbs from Serbia”, on the basis of the latter’s prescriptions and advice - of course incorrect - attempted to resolve them’.³⁵ In this dispute between Bosnian Serb and Serbian emigres over the *Sporazum*, each blamed the other for betraying the national interest.

The period 1939-1941 witnessed the strongest manifestation in the entire Yugoslav period of Bosnian Serb national mobilisation, autonomous of Serbia’s political classes. The Muslims mobilised in opposition to the *Sporazum* and to the partition of Bosnia-Herzegovina, in the ‘Muslim Movement for the Autonomy of Bosnia-Herzegovina’, which demanded the establishment of a Bosnian banovina equivalent to the Croatian one, heightening the insecurity of the Bosnian Serbs. The latter mobilised either against the *Sporazum*, or against the possible establishment of a Bosnian banovina, or against both. In the words of one correspondent of *Srpski glas*, the newspaper of the Serb Cultural Club: ‘We were struck with shock when the Sporazum was published and when we saw that those deciding in Belgrade had sacrificed us Bosnian Serbs without a thought’.³⁶ All Serb political parties were totally opposed to Bosnian autonomy as demanded by the Muslim Movement, but a minority within the Bosnian Serb political classes were ready to buy off the Croats by accepting the *Sporazum*. For example, Dobroslav Jevđević, head of the Bosnian section of the Yugoslav National Party, broke ranks with the latter’s leadership by embracing the *Sporazum* on an anti-Muslim basis: ‘since, as we said, we do not deem Bosnia-Herzegovina to be a territory with a particular state right, because it does not comprise any kind of particular ethnic,

economic, communications, nor in its present frontiers historical whole, we make no bones about the fact that the administrative division should be carried out on the basis of the tribal ownership of each part of the Bosnian land, except where military or industrial-defensive interests do not permit this.³⁷

Yet such Bosnian Serb voices were outnumbered by those that opposed the *Sporazum*. Branko Kaluđerčić, a Bosnian Serb follower of Stojadinović, argued: ‘It is wholly understandable that the Serbs of Bosnia-Hercegovina are without exception frightened and excited, and are raising their voice against the notion that even a single district of Bosnia-Hercegovina be sacrificed to the kind of political system of terror that reigns in Croatia.’ He insisted: ‘no one has the right to decide that a single district of Bosnia-Hercegovina be separated from Belgrade and from Yugoslavia, for whose greatness and unity Bosnia-Hercegovina gave many lives and much blood of its best sons.’³⁸ Some Bosnian Serbs even revived the tradition of Serb-Muslim cooperation in their resistance to the *Sporazum*. Serbs from Brčko denounced the inclusion of their town in the Banovina of Croatia as a ‘complete injustice to Serbdom and at once an injustice to our Muslim brothers, of whose feelings and thoughts nobody has taken account.’³⁹ A particularly hardline opposition to the *Sporazum* and to Bosnian autonomy was expressed by the Serb Cultural Club, a pan-Serb, extreme-nationalist organisation that was to a considerable degree dominated by Bosnian Serbs, with Nikola Stojanović as vice-president, Vasa Čubrilović as secretary and Vladimir Čorović as its intellectual motor.⁴⁰ Serb Cultural Club member Stevan Moljević, provided the fullest articulation of the pro-partition ideology of Bosnian Serb nationalism, born of the recognition that *even in a united Yugoslavia* Bosnia-Hercegovina as a Serb land was lost. His concern was therefore to ensure that ‘the Serbs in the area encompassing Bosanska Krajina, Banija, Kordun, Lika and Northern Dalmatia, which forms a compact whole of over 1,200,000 souls, [not] be put in a subordinate position either to Zagreb or to Sarajevo’. Moljević favoured the abandonment of Serb defence of Bosnian unity; the abandonment of Sarajevo as a Serb city; and a defence instead of the Serb-majority Vrbas Banovina centred on the city of Banja Luka; ‘Today in Banja Luka the Serbs have a relative majority. In time they will have an absolute majority.’ Banja Luka, therefore, had to become a ‘mighty cultural centre’ for the 1,200,000 Serbs of this area, that would ‘paralyse the influence of Zagreb and Sarajevo’ and ‘be the frontier guard of Belgrade.’⁴¹

The Bosnian Serbs arose in November-December 1939 in a spontaneous movement directed against their forcible inclusion in an autonomous Bosnian banovina: the Movement 'Serbs Assemble !' Paradoxically, the Bosnian Serbs arose on an autonomous Bosnian basis to oppose Bosnian autonomy. On 11 November, a conference of Serb organisations and societies convened in Sarajevo to express the Serb opposition to Bosnian autonomy. The conference resolved: 'Regarding the plan - that in the new ordering of the state, beside the Banovinas of Serbia, Croatia and Slovenia, Bosnia-Hercegovina be detached to form a separate, fourth banovina - all Serbs of Bosnia-Hercegovina reply with a decisive and unconditional "No", and every attempt to enact such a plan will collapse in the face of the most decisive resistance of the Bosnian-Hercegovinian Serbs, of whose unity in such a struggle, if it is presented to them, nobody need doubt for a moment.'⁴² The conference led to the formation of a Council of Serb and Other National Societies and Institutions that assumed a leadership role in the movement. Similar conferences of Serb organisations and societies were then held in other towns across Bosnia-Hercegovina. The movement culminated with an assembly organised in Doboj on 31 December 1939, at which five-hundred delegates representing 'all national, cultural and other societies from all Bosnia-Hercegovina' presided over a crowd of three-thousand people. President of the assembly Jovan Žakula, who was president of the Orthodox Church municipality for the town of Doboj, referred dismissively in his opening speech to Bosnia-Hercegovina's 'so-called historical borders', yet the assembly represented Bosnian Serbs alone, not Serbs from other parts of Yugoslavia. The purpose of the assembly, in the words of Milan A. Božić, was to show that 'the national and state question cannot be resolved without us, cannot be resolved without the Serb nation of Bosnia-Hercegovina or against its wishes'. Ilija Berić of Bosanski Brod appealed to 'Serb Sarajevo, brave and heroic Tuzla, glorious Banja Luka and Mostar, the pride of Serbdom, and the other towns and villages of our proud Bosnia and stout Hercegovina, that together we raise a strong and decisive voice, that we are one, that we are indivisible, that we shall everywhere and always be and remain with mother Serbia, and that no force will separate us.' This speech and the very form of the Doboj assembly illustrate that even though Bosnian Serb nationalism in 1939 was directed at the negation of Bosnian autonomy, its frame of reference remained Bosnian and its rhetoric Bosnian-patriotic.⁴³

The events of 1939-1941 demonstrate that the Bosnian Serbs comprised a national corpus in their own right, entirely ready and able to mobilise independently of the political

classes of Serbia. They appeared to demonstrate also a virtually unequivocal rejection by both the Bosnian Serb elite and populace of any form of Bosnian autonomy. Yet Bosnian Serbs opposed Bosnian autonomy only when it implied a move *away* from union with Serbia, as it appeared to do in 1939, and when it was Bosnian autonomy under Muslim leadership. In World War II, the Partisan movement in Bosnia-Herzegovina, headed by the Communist Party of Yugoslavia, won the battle for political leadership over the Bosnian Serb masses, despite – or perhaps because – of the fact that it fought under the banner of self-rule for a multinational Bosnia-Herzegovina of Serbs, Croats and Muslims. The Germans and Italians who invaded and destroyed the Kingdom of Yugoslavia in April 1941 separated Bosnia-Herzegovina from Serbia, incorporating it within a Croat-fascist puppet-state, the so-called ‘Independent State of Croatia’, which carried out genocide against the Serb, Jewish and Gypsy population of Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina. The Partisans fought under the banner of Bosnian self-rule within a re-established Yugoslavia, in which Bosnia-Herzegovina would again be united with Serbia, not on a Great Serb basis, as part of an enlarged Serbian state, but on a federal Yugoslav basis. The establishment of the People’s Republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina in 1943-1946, as a constituent member of a Yugoslav federation along with Serbia, Croatia and other South Slav lands, represented the fulfilment of traditional Bosnian Serb national aspirations.

The process of establishing the Bosnian republic was very much led and driven by Bosnian Serbs: the Bosnian Partisans were never less than 60% Serb in composition, and Serbs numerically dominated the Bosnian Partisan movement at every level. In 1945, the fledgling Bosnian state that emerged from the war had a Serb president, Vojislav Kecmanović; a Serb prime minister, Rodoljub Čolaković; and a Serb secretary of its Communist organisation, Đuro Pucar. Although sharing the internationalist and multinational-Yugoslav ideals of their non-Serb Communist comrades, Bosnian Serb Communists such as Čolaković and Pucar also expressed their Bosnian Serb national identity. At the Second Session of the Country Antifascist Council of the People’s Liberation of Bosnia-Herzegovina in June-July 1944, at which Bosnian statehood was formally re-established by the Partisans, Pucar gave the first keynote speech, stating: ‘Thanks to historical and political circumstances, the Serb people, which was the most threatened, found within itself enough living strength to wage the struggle against the occupier. Led by democratic forces, it developed a democratic spirit in its struggle; thus it could introduce the

idea of brotherhood among the peoples of Bosnia-Herzegovina. To it belongs the honour and glory of introducing the idea of brotherhood among the Muslims and among the Croats.⁴⁴ In attributing to the Bosnian Serbs the role of bringers of freedom to Bosnia-Herzegovina and the Bosnians in general, Pucar interpreted the Bosnian Partisan achievement as part of the Bosnian Serb revolutionary tradition. This was not an entirely accurate interpretation, as despite the Serb preponderance within them, the Bosnian Partisans were very much a multinational movement to which Muslims and Croats as well as Serbs made a crucial contribution. The Bosnian Partisan movement was the child both of the genuinely multinational interwar labour movement that spawned the Communists, and of the principally Serb Bosnian peasant-radical tradition.

The Partisans' Bosnian Chetnik rivals, too, were a child of the Bosnian peasant-radical tradition, and despite their Great Serb ideology, they continued to express a Bosnian Serb national identity and outlook that put them at loggerheads with Draža Mihailović's Serbian-oriented Chetnik Supreme Command. The Bosnian Chetniks' sense of identification with the land of Bosnia-Herzegovina; their jealousy over their own autonomy; and their understanding of the Serb rebellion as a Bosnian people's uprising rather than as a conventional military struggle waged by Yugoslav Army officers - all this marked their divergence with Mihailović's leadership. Bosnian Chetnik commanders tended to view Mihailović's officer-delegates as representatives of an alien and hierarchical officer corps, and their conflicts over authority with these delegates on occasion erupted into violence, even killing. Stevan Botić, commander of the Mountain Staff of the Bosnian Chetnik Detachments, claimed in the course of his conflict with Mihailović's command that 'we are not at all separatists, but we wish to preserve the unity of Bosnian Chetnik action and do not permit that men interfere in our Bosnian problems who did not participate in the Bosnian uprising, nor are familiar with the situation in Bosnia.' He claimed also 'that Bosnia has its special problems and that not a single Bosnian wants to have anybody imposed upon him as a tutor, just as we Serbs of Bosnia do not want to set up some kind of Serb unit just for ourselves, like they think we do'.⁴⁵ He claimed that around Mihailović 'are gathered men who want to be master of Bosnia, when she is liberated... Around Brother Draža are gathered mostly Montenegrins and Serbians who do not understand our circumstances'.⁴⁶ On 21 August 1942, Botić's Mountain Staff of the Bosnian Chetnik Detachments held a joint conference with another Bosnian Chetnik staff, Radoslav Radić's General Staff of the Bosnian Chetnik

Detachments, to prepare for the formation of a unified Bosnian Chetnik command and to adopt a united stand vis-à-vis the Chetnik movement in Serbia. The conference recognised Mihailović as supreme Chetnik commander but remained committed to the principle that Mihailović had no right to appoint Chetnik commanders for Bosnia without their agreement, and insisted that such commanders had to be Bosnians.⁴⁷

The conflict between the Partisans and Chetniks in Bosnia-Herzegovina of 1941-1945 reflected, so far as the Bosnian Serbs were concerned, a fissure in their national identity induced by economic and social change. The Partisans were spearheaded by the Communists, who were the product of the pre-war labour movement, itself a product of the urban and industrial civilisation that had begun to emerge with the industrial revolution following the Austro-Hungarian occupation of 1878. In the Bosnian towns, there was a stronger tradition of inter-ethnic civic coexistence that transcended the divisions between Serb, Croat and Muslim nationalists, while the Bosnian labour movement was based on the principle of working-class unity across ethnic divisions. This urban and industrial culture found expression in the multinational composition of the Communists and Partisans, which embraced Croats, Muslims, Jews and others as well as Serbs, and in support for a multinational Bosnian republic as the common state of Serbs, Croats and Muslims. Although the Partisans were also a child of the Bosnian peasant-radical tradition, it was their Communist spearhead that ultimately defined their politics. By contrast, the Chetniks were more exclusively an heir of the peasant-radical tradition; the direct successor of the League of Farmers, whose politics were defined by the Serb peasantry's class struggle with the Muslim landlords. Unlike the population of the towns, the population of the Bosnian countryside lived on plots of land exclusively owned or occupied by mono-national families. The Serb peasants' national outlook therefore tended to be more ethno-religiously exclusive than that of the Serb urban population. This outlook found its most extreme expression in the Chetniks' genocidal campaign against the non-Serb population of Bosnia-Herzegovina, particularly the Muslims, and their goal of a nationally homogenous Great Serbia.⁴⁸ Yet it was the Partisan movement that proved stronger.

The People's Republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina, renamed in 1963 the 'Socialist Republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina', was dominated by Bosnian Serbs for the first two decades of its existence, until the second half of the 1960s. From that time on, however, Serb

preponderance within the Bosnian republic began to decline while Muslim power rose, due to a number of factors: the relative numerical decline in the Serb population and rise in the Muslim population, on account of higher Serb out-migration and a higher Muslim birth-rate, leading to the Muslims overtaking the Serbs as the largest Bosnian nationality by 1971; the formal recognition of the Muslims as a nation in their own right in 1968, coupled with a Muslim national cultural renaissance in this period; the rehabilitation from 1966 of the Bosnian Croats, who had previously suffered widespread discrimination on account of their generally weak support for the Partisans; the fall of the Serbian strongman Aleksandar Ranković, vice-president of Yugoslavia, in 1966, and the consequent weakening of Serbian predominance within Yugoslavia as a whole; and the retirement of the Bosnian Serb Communist strongman Đuro Pucar in 1969 and the rise of a new generation of Bosnian Communist leaders headed by the Croat Branko Mikulić and the Muslim Hamdija Pozderac. This process was paralleled by the loosening of the Yugoslav federation from the late 1960s onward and its evolution along semi-confederal lines, culminating in the Yugoslav constitution of 1974. The Bosnian republic, in which Serbs were increasingly less dominant and numerous, was increasingly also more independent of the federal centre and resembled more closely a sovereign entity.⁴⁹ So too did the other members of the federation, including the Socialist Autonomous Provinces of Kosovo and Vojvodina, which though formally part of Serbia, came to escape its control and enjoy most of the attributes of the Yugoslav republics. This process generated a Serb-nationalist backlash, among the Serbs of Bosnia-Herzegovina, Serbia and elsewhere, which expressed itself in the regime of Slobodan Milošević after 1987, the ‘anti-bureaucratic revolution’, the ‘happening of the people’, and the Wars of Yugoslav Succession, in which the Milošević regime and Serb nationalists in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina sought to carve out new Serb borders. In Bosnia-Herzegovina, the retirement of the Partisan generation of Communist leaders during the 1980s, who were generally committed to Bosnian republican statehood, opened the way for the emergence of a new generation of Bosnian Serb leaders who would lead the backlash against the latter.

The fall of the Communist regime in Bosnia-Herzegovina in 1990 and the first free elections resulted in a coalition government of three nationalist parties representing each of the Bosnian nationalities: the Serb Democratic Party (SDS), Croat Democratic Union (HDZ) and (Muslim) Party of Democratic Action (SDA). Yet the Bosnian Serb nationalist backlash

immediately expressed itself in a campaign to set up regional associations of 'Serb municipalities' as expressions of Serb self-rule at the local level. In April 1991, Pale, the only Sarajevo municipality where the SDS had achieved an absolute majority in the elections of autumn 1990, seceded from the city of Sarajevo, and would later become the Bosnian Serb rebel capital. In September 1991 the Serb regional associations grew into autonomous regional bodies. Thus the Serb Autonomous Oblast (SAO) of Herzegovina was established on 12 September, followed by the Autonomous Region of Bosanska Krajina on the 17th and the SAO of Romanija on the 19th. The SAOs of Semberija and North Bosnia were subsequently established, bringing the total to five. These SAOs were autonomous regional bodies that grouped together Serb-controlled municipalities, violating the authority of the central government in Sarajevo. This separatist drive was catalysed by resistance to the emergence of Bosnia-Herzegovina as a sovereign state, under a Muslim-nationalist president, Alija Izetbegović. Following the Bosnian parliament's vote on 14 October 1991 to establish the Socialist Republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina as a sovereign state, the SDS delegates seceded from the parliament in protest and on 24 October established a separate 'Serb National Assembly' claiming to represent the Bosnian Serb population as a whole. On 9 January 1992, the 'Serb Republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina' was formally proclaimed. Following the declaration of Bosnian independence and with international recognition of this independence approaching, the two SDS members of the Bosnian Presidency resigned from that body on 4 April and left Sarajevo. The Serb Republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina dropped the Bosnian appellation in September, becoming merely the 'Serb Republic' ('Republika Srpska').⁵⁰

The establishment of a separate Bosnian 'Serb Republic' necessarily required a brutal war, the destruction of the Republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina and the extermination or expulsion of the non-Serb population on the new Serb entity's territory. Yet through the Milošević regime in Belgrade and the Republika Srpska leadership under Radovan Karadžić and Ratko Mladić were partners in this process, the perceptions of Serb national interest on the part of these two Serb regimes continued to diverge, as they had for successive earlier generations of Serbian and Bosnian Serb leaders. The Bosnian Serb rebels resisted the efforts of Belgrade to pressurise them into accepting successive international peace plans; Belgrade retaliated by imposing sanctions on the Republika Srpska, but proved unable to impose its will on the latter. The goal of unifying 'Serb lands' east and west of the Drina to form an enlarged Serb state proved to be as elusive in the 1990s as it had been in earlier periods. The

emergence instead of a semi-independent Bosnian ‘Serb Republic’ wholly separate from Serbia, which achieved international recognition under the 1995 Dayton Peace Accords, was a more natural culmination of Bosnian Serb national aspirations. But it was not the only one: an alternative, albeit minority Bosnian Serb current was provided by those politically conscious Serbs who remained loyal to the concept of a unified, multinational Bosnia-Herzegovina during the 1990s. Including such individuals as Bogić Bogičević, Jovan Divjak and Mirko Pejanović, as well as many Partisan veterans, members of this anti-nationalist current founded the ‘Serb Consultative Council’ in 1993, refounded the following year as the ‘Serb Civic Council’.⁵¹ The Bosnian Serbs, to this day, continue to express their national identity in diverse ways.

Summary

National identities are not homogenous; differences of identity may be produced within the same nation by differences in region, historical experience, socio-economic background or other factors. The Bosnian Serbs, by virtue of living for centuries in the land of Bosnia or Bosnia-Hercegovina, developed a form of Serb national identity that differed from that of other Serbs, including the Serbs of Serbia (Serbians). Bosnian Serb politicians have pursued specifically Bosnian Serb national politics that regularly set them at loggerheads with the political elite of Serbia. This Bosnian Serb national politics has differed over time and has itself been expressed in different currents, but it has always reflected an identity and worldview that is both Serb and Bosnian. The overriding goals of Bosnian Serb national politics before 1918 were the liberation or autonomy of Bosnia-Hercegovina and unification with Serbia and other lands identified as Serb; the first goal was seen as a means toward the second, but the second did not necessarily negate the first. After 1918, when unification with Serbia was achieved, albeit on a Yugoslav rather than a pan-Serb basis, Bosnian Serb national politics shifted to resisting Bosnian autonomy. After the Axis destruction of Yugoslavia in 1941, the Partisan movement embodied a new expression of Serb-led Bosnian autonomism, which resulted in the unification of Bosnia-Hercegovina and Serbia on a Yugoslav federal basis, as two distinct republics. In the 1990s, with the fall of Communism and collapse of Yugoslavia, Bosnian Serb nationalists rejected Bosnian independence and, with Serbia's assistance, established a separate Bosnian Serb entity – the 'Serb Republic' or 'Republika Srpska'.

It was the Serbian Orthodox Church that provided the basis for a single Serb national identity stretching across the western Balkans. The autonomy enjoyed by the Bosnian Orthodox community under the Ottomans, combined with the memory, preserved by the Orthodox clergy, of the Serbian medieval state, were the twin foundations of Bosnian Serb nationhood. This nationhood was then conditioned by the multi-religious or multi-national character of Bosnian society. The fact that up until the end of World War I, the Bosnian Serb peasants were predominantly non-free and legally subordinate to Muslim landlords conditioned the course of Bosnian Serb national politics. The impossibility of the Serb political classes satisfying the class aspirations of their Serb peasant constituents, while at the same time winning over the Bosnian Muslims to Serb national politics, was the principal structural

weakness of Bosnian Serb nationalism. It ensured a permanent, irresolvable tension, between on the one hand the Bosnian Serb assumption that all Bosnian Muslims (and Catholics) were really Serb and that Bosnia-Hercegovina was a Serb land, and on the de-facto treatment of the Muslims and Croats as the national 'others', and ultimately of Bosnia-Hercegovina as an alien entity oppressing the Orthodox Serbs, and from which they sought autonomy. During the interwar period, Bosnian Serb weakness vis-à-vis the Muslims in the struggle for control of Bosnia-Hercegovina manifested itself in support for the country's partition. Although the Serb-dominated Bosnian Partisan movement resulted in the establishment of a unitary Bosnian republic within federal Yugoslavia, the prospect of independence for a unitary and Muslim-led Bosnia-Hercegovina resulted in a new, and this time successful, Bosnian Serb partitionist drive.

Given the repeated conflict between the Bosnian Serb political classes on the one hand and those of Serbia on the other, the establishment of the Republika Srpska as an autonomous entity separate from Serbia should be seen as a more natural outcome of Bosnian Serb national aspirations than a 'Great Serbia' that proved repeatedly unrealisable.

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