

Apartheid Cartography

Identity, Territory and
Co-Existence in Bosnia

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When the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia unravelled in the early 1990s, the prospects for the six emerging republics varied greatly.¹ While the secession of Slovenia in 1991 was barely contested, the remaining Yugoslav authorities opposed the independence of other republics politically and militarily because they wanted to unite territory where Serbs outnumbered other groups to establish a “Greater Serbia”.

For the Republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina, the ethno-nationalist strategy of the Yugoslav regime created a crisis. Bosnia-Herzegovina was home to a sizable population of each of Yugoslavia’s three constituent peoples – conventionally understood as Serbs, Croats and Muslims – but remained a republic in which no single group ruled to the exclusion of others. Indeed, Bosnia was noted for its multicultural society, in which the neat conceptual distinctions so many wished to make between the constituent peoples failed to materialise.

When a diverse community is formed from tightly interwoven strands, forcing those strands apart can be a violent process, which is what happened in Bosnia during 1992-95. “Ethnic cleansing” was the name the Serbian authorities gave to their mono-nationalist strategy for overcoming Bosnian multiculturalism. It was the term the rest of the world adopted in an effort to understand a process through which non-Serbs were forced to flee territory deemed to be Serbian and killed if they did not. The violence that this strategy relied upon and produced was horrendous. More than one quarter of a million people were killed during the three years of war, and more than two million were displaced.

Yet various international schemes which sought to bring an end to the violence ended up encouraging it because of assumptions about ethnic identity, territory and conflict which did not correspond to the reality on the ground. The 1995 Dayton agreement, which brought a halt to the Bosnian war, in theory united Bosnia as a unitary state and multicultural society but in practice partitioned it into two, generating many of the problems the country now faces.

1. In the early 1990s, the Yugoslav republics were Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, Montenegro and Macedonia.

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2. "Political anthropology" signifies the intersections between conceptual assumptions about identity, space (often territory) and politics. See Todorov, T., *Mikhail Bakhtin: The Dialogical Principle*, trans. W. Godzich, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1994, p.94.
3. Bringa, T., *Being Muslim the Bosnian Way: Identity and Community in a Central Bosnian Village*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1995, p.21.
4. *Ibid.*, p.83.
5. See, for example, Mearsheimer, J.J., "Shrink Bosnia to Save It", *New York Times*, 31 March 1993; Mearsheimer, J. J. and Pape, R.A., "The Answer: A Partition Plan for Bosnia", *The New Republic*, 14 June 1993; Mearsheimer, J. J. and van Evera, S., "When Peace Means War", *The New Republic*, 18 December 1993 and "Partition is Inevitable Solution for Bosnia", *International Herald Tribune*, 25 September 1996; Kissinger, H., "America in the Eye of the Hurricane", *Washington Post*, 8 September 1996; O'Hanlon, M., "Bosnia: Better Left Partitioned", *Washington Post*, 10 April 1997; Pape, R., "Partition: An Exit Strategy for Bosnia", *Survival* 39, 1997-8, pp.25-28; Steel, R., "A Realistic Entity: Greater Sarajevo", *New York Times*, 26 July 1995; Will, G., "Morality and Map-Making", *Washington Post*, 7 September 1995.
A former National Security Council coordinator of US policy towards Bosnia (Daalder, I. H., "Bosnia After SFOR: Options for Continued US Engagement", *Survival* 39, 1997-98, pp.5-18) argues for the partition of Republika Srpska into two, with the supposedly more moderate western half becoming part of a new integrated Bosnia and the east being recognised as independent. C. G. Boyd ("Making Bosnia Work", *Foreign Affairs* 77, 1998, pp.42-55) and D. Doder ("Bosnia's False Peace", *Washington Post*, 16 March 1997) argue for three ethnic sub-states within a confederal state. R. M. Hayden argues that Bosnia divided itself from the elections of 1990 onwards, thereby making partition inevitable ("Schindler's Fate: Genocide, Ethnic Cleansing, and Population Transfers", *Slavic Review* 55, 1996, pp.727-748; "Bosnia: The Contradictions of 'Democracy' Without Consent", *East European Constitutional Review* 7, 1998, pp.47-51). Michael Lind ("In Defense of Liberal Nationalism", *Foreign Affairs* 73, 1994, pp.87-99) proposes that the United States advocate the sovereignty of culturally homogenous "national homelands" whenever multinational states collapse.
6. Mearsheimer, J.J., op. cit. 5.
7. Campbell, D., *National Deconstruction: Violence, Identity and Justice in Bosnia*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1998; Tuathail, G., *Critical Geopolitics*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1996, ch. 6.
8. Bakic-Hayden, M. and Hayden, R.M., "Orientalist Variations on the Theme 'Balkans': Symbolic Geography in Yugoslav Cultural Politics", *Slavic Review* 51, 1992, pp.1-15; Todorova, M. *Imagining the Balkans*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1997.
9. Hayden, R. M. "Imagined Communities and Real Victims: Self-Determination and Ethnic Cleansing in Yugoslavia", *American Ethnologist* 23, 1996, p.783.

Underpinning the agreement are notions which link ethnic identity in a "natural" relationship to territory, notions which matched the understanding of one party to the conflict (the ethnic cleansers) to the exclusion of the others (the non-nationalists). By legitimising exclusivist projects, international diplomacy has often worked to obscure and override existing non-nationalist options in Bosnia and, in effect, to oppose local forces that seek to overcome division. The violence associated with nationalist thinking – and the *de facto* convergence of paramilitaries, nationalists and peacemakers in a shared conception of identity – has made a return to coexistence less imaginable.

If international diplomacy is to avoid such self-defeating tendencies, it must become more critical of the outdated political anthropology² it has inherited. It must become more attuned to the way its own claims about primordial links between identity and territory have exacerbated the divisions and violence it purportedly works to counter. If it continues to assume that antagonists in "ethnic conflicts" are fixed, rigidly-defined groups who must always be separated to ensure peace, international diplomacy risks intensifying conflicts not just in Bosnia but wherever issues of identity and territory are at stake.

Constructing Bosnia

During much of the post-World War II period, different Bosnian communities shared not only the same territory but also the same economic life and, despite religious differences and their disparate cosmologies, many aspects of social life.³ Ethnic and religious differences were like the differences between men and women, villager and city dweller: often joked about but never precluding coexistence. Acknowledgement of cultural diversity and coexistence was itself an important element in people's identities.⁴

Yet in international diplomacy and much popular media coverage from the early 1990s onwards, "Bosnia" has been persistently constructed as a problem requiring territorial division of the country into ethnic enclaves, even though negotiators have often said they wanted the reintegration of the country. The basis of the drive for partition was a picture of Bosnia as a neatly ethnically-ordered world of Croats, Muslims and Serbs, in which other conceptions of identity had little political import and group relations could not be other than mutually exclusive and conflictual.

The influence of this picture can be seen throughout mainstream political thinking about Bosnia.⁵ According to political scientist John Mearsheimer, for example, it is "intractable ethnic hatreds" which make necessary the construction of a Bosnian state for Muslims, a Croatian state for Croats and a Serbian state for Serbs.⁶ "Ethnic violence" is meanwhile tirelessly stressed in academic and media accounts⁷ that treat the Balkans as an "other" to civilised Western Europe.⁸ "Primordial" communities are posited in a way which, in the words of academic R. M. Hayden, makes "existing heterogeneous ones unimaginable."⁹

Negotiating Bosnia

Public plans for the partition of Bosnia first came to prominence after meetings between Presidents Slobodan Milosevic of Serbia and

Montenegro and Franjo Tudjman of Croatia.¹⁰ Serbian Autonomous Regions were declared in Bosnia in the spring of 1991, and geographically-bounded Croatian communities in Bosanska Posavina and Herceg-Bosna later that year. Unofficial “Muslim” plans for partition were publicised at the same time in the Sarajevo media.¹¹ Nationalist ideologies justifying partition can also be found in the constitutions of the successor states to the former Yugoslavia.¹²

On behalf of the international governmental community, Bosnian peace negotiations got under way with a European Community Conference on the former Yugoslavia (ECCY) between September 1991 and August 1992. This conference aimed to resolve the conflicts emerging as Yugoslavia unravelled, and from it emerged a plan for Bosnia. Coming some weeks *before* widespread fighting broke out in Bosnia, a March 1992 “Statement of Principles for New Constitutional Arrangements for Bosnia and Herzegovina” envisaged Bosnia as a formally independent state, but partitioned along ethnic lines into three nations. According to the document, known as the Lisbon Principles, sovereignty was to reside “in the citizens of the Muslim, Serb and Croat nations and other nations and nationalities”.¹³

The idea that it was natural for different “ethnicities” to be identified with different Bosnian territories was one on which the major protagonists in the later conflict came increasingly to rely. It was a position clearly explained by the deputy commander of Bosnian Serb forces, General Milan Gvero, who declared in 1993 that:

“everybody has to live on his own territory, Muslims on Muslim territory, Serbs on Serbian . . . This [Serb areas in Bosnia] is pure Serbian territory, and there is no power on earth that can make us surrender it”.¹⁴

Achieving a neat fit between identity and territory was likely to be a violent process with an unpalatable outcome. As one diplomat remarked, “without significant ethnic cleansing it will be impossible to draw boundaries that will give any coherence to three primarily ethnically based regions. (They will look like some of the Bantustans)”.¹⁵ Such declarations by the peacemakers and the paramilitaries led human rights lawyer Zoran Pajic to observe that “while apartheid, which is based on the total segregation of ethnic groups, is falling apart in South Africa, it is being reborn in southern Europe”¹⁶ (*see* Box “An Analogy from South Africa”, p.5).

Censuses, Maps and Their Biases

Diplomats’ picture of monolithic national populations, at odds with so much of the historical lived experience of Bosnians, derives largely from the technologies of census-taking and cartography.¹⁷ “Bosnia” was subdivided and mapped by the international governmental community – both literally and metaphorically – in a way which rendered it as a problem requiring a particular solution.

The notion that the boundaries of the Bosnian “bantustans” could be drawn with some precision around homogeneous areas depended upon several prior assumptions. One was that national communities comprise people who are subjects with autonomous, intractable, observable, mutually exclusive, “ethnic” identities. Another is that those identities can be statistically represented in census data. Bolstering this second assumption were statistics rendering the identities of Bosnia

Parties to the Bosnian conflict relied on the idea that different ethnic groups belonged in different territories.

10. Klemencic, M. “Territorial Proposals for the Settlement of the War in Bosnia-Herzegovina”, in Pratt, M. and Schofield, C., (eds.) *Boundary and Territory Briefing* 1, International Boundaries Research Unit, 1994, p.28.

11. *Ibid.*, pp.30-34, 42.

12. Hayden, R. M., *op. cit.* 9.

13. PI 18/3/92: *Statement of Principles for New Constitutional Arrangements for Bosnia and Herzegovina*, Sarajevo, 18 March 1992, in *Balkan Odyssey CD-Rom*, version 1.1, Academic Edition, The Electric Company, London, 1995.

14. “Exuding Confidence, Serbian Nationalists Act as If War for Bosnia Is Won”, *New York Times*, 23 May 1993.

15. PI 4/10/92: *Constitutional Options. ICFY Working Paper on Constitutional Options*, in *Balkan Odyssey CD-Rom*, *op. cit.* 13.

16. Pajic, Z., “Bosnia-Herzegovina: From Multiethnic Coexistence to ‘Apartheid’ ... and Back”, in Akhavan, P. and Howse, R. (eds.) *Yugoslavia: The Former and the Future*, Brookings Institution, Washington, 1995, pp.156-7.

17. On cartography, *see* Harley, J.B., “Maps, Knowledge and Power” in Cosgrove, D. and Daniels, S., (eds.), *The Iconography of Landscape: Essays on the Symbolic Representation, Design and Use of Past Environments*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1988, pp. 277-312; Harley, J.B., “Deconstructing the Map”, *Carto-graphica*, 26, 1989, pp.1-20; Harley, J.B., “Cartography, Ethics and Social Theory”, *Cartographica* 27, 1990, pp.1-23.

as “ethnic” in particular, precise proportions: “44 per cent Muslim, 31 per cent Serb, 17 per cent Croats, 6 per cent Yugoslav,” with a small remainder.¹⁸ Together these assumptions removed from all consideration any aspects of individual and communal identity that were fluid and hybrid.

The source of the statistics used to specify the mutually exclusive “populations” which were imagined as filling up the different territories that were to make up Bosnia were Yugoslav census reports. Such reports might seem to be merely an objective accounting of the population. But it is important to remember that the “populations” distinguished by censuses are not naturally given.¹⁹

“counting practices carve up the population in a myriad of ways, sorting and dividing people, things, or behaviours into groups, leaving in their wake a host of categories and classifications . . . more than an administrative technique for the extraction and distribution of resources, statistics have become tools in the crafting of modern subjectivity and social reality”.²⁰

One example is the emergence of “Muslim” as a national category in the Yugoslav census. Although contemporary discourse has made “Muslim” synonymous with “Bosnian”, the relationship between the religious and the national is infinitely more complex. Prior to the 1961 census, when “Muslim” was given quasi-national status with the addition of the category “Muslim (ethnic membership),” Muslims were considered to be nationally “undetermined” or else subsumed under the heading of “Yugoslav undetermined.” In 1963, they entered the federal constitution’s list of constituent nations. By 1965, they had been granted the right to national self-determination by the League of Communists in Bosnia-Herzegovina. But it was not until 1971 that the census categorisation first established “Muslim” as a nationality on a par with Serb or Croat.²¹ This genealogy is obscured in international negotiations and scholarship, however, by the constant citation and use of 1991 census statistics alone. Obscured also are the highly politicised conditions in which the 1991 census was carried out in the former Yugoslavia – conditions in which the ethno-nationalisation of political discourse helped prefigure an outcome suggesting eternally-entrenched divisions of identity.²²

When such census-defined “identities” are poured into the separate spaces of ethnographic maps, adding the constraints of Euclidean cartography to the limitations of census categories,³³ the borders between these spaces begin to be seen more easily as “natural” community fault lines around which a territorialised politics of self-determination ought to revolve. In the past, such maps have often served colonialism by fixing “natives in their places” through their reduction of dynamic social situations to juxtapositions of mutually excluding territories.²⁴ In Bosnia, however, they were deployed to justify nationalist claims.

Maps and Dreams

During the Lisbon talks of early 1992, which gave rise to proposals for the apartheid-like partition of Bosnia, an ethnographic map “based on the national absolute or relative majority in each municipality” – but also taking into account economic, geographical and other criteria – was put forward as a way of defining the “territory of the constituent units”.²⁵ Such maps remained the foundation for many of the diplomatic community’s efforts to resolve the Bosnian war.²⁶ Even when

18. Few, if any, of the major academic accounts of Bosnia fail to mention this information. See Campbell, D., “MetaBosnia: The Narratives of the Bosnian War”, *Review of International Studies* 24, 1998, pp.261-281.
19. Anderson, B., *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, revised edition, Verso, London, 1991, p.174; Foucault, M., *The History of Sexuality, Volume I: An Introduction*, trans. by Robert Hurley, Vintage Books, New York, 1978, p.25.
20. Urla, J., “Cultural Politics in an Age of Statistics: Numbers, Nations, and the Making of Basque Identity”, *American Ethnologist* 20, 1993, p.820.
21. Bringa, T., op. cit. 3, pp.20-31; Friedman, F., *The Bosnian Muslims: Denial of a Nation*, Westview, Boulder, 1996, pp.151-56.
22. Hayden, R. M., op. cit. 9, p.789.
23. Noyes, J. K., “The Natives in Their Places: ‘Ethnographic Cartography’ and the Representation of Autonomous Spaces in Ovamboland, German South West Africa”, *History and Anthropology* 8, 1994, p.241.
24. Ibid.; Wilkinson, H. R., *Maps and Politics: A Review of the Ethnographic Cartography of Macedonia*, University of Liverpool Press, Liverpool, 1951.
25. PI 18/3/92: *Statement of Principles*, in *Balkan Odyssey* CD-Rom, op. cit. 13.
26. A number of different maps are based on the 1991 census, and their differences are deployed by different parties to different ends. See also Crampton, J., “Bordering on Bosnia”, *GeoJournal* 39, 1996, p.354, who, although critical of the failure of the cartographic imagination with respect to Bosnia, and aware of the rarity of homogenous villages and towns, nonetheless believed that “there were identifiable regions of ethnic predominance” which could be mapped. Interestingly, his ethnographic map relying on the 1991 census comes from the US State Department. Such maps, no matter what their sources, systematically underplay the contingency of identity politics, even when statistical renderings highlight the complexity. For a good example, see Bougarel’s table in Woodward, S. L., “Genocide or Partition: Two Faces of the Same Coin?”, *Slavic Review* 55, 1996, p.759.

An Analogy from South Africa

During South Africa's apartheid era, "homelands" or Bantustans were constructed for the majority African peoples. Dividing the African population into so-called ethnic groups, the Bantustans were claimed to be places where cultures could be preserved and African "nations" developed. Attempting, in the words of scholar Robert Nixon, to "petrify racial and ethnic identities in a condition of timeless purity and physical isolation", the Bantustans were part of an effort to give apartheid a positive gloss. In the 1960s and 1970s, they were given the Swiss-sounding label "cantons" in an effort to make them appear consistent with African decolonisation and self-determination. Yet the Bantustans were independent only in the eyes of some homeland leaders and the white South African government.

In the early 1990s, South Africa began dismantling the Bantustans as part of the progression to a democratic and de-racialised South Africa. The country was re-mapped to reincorporate the Bantustans and delineate a new provincial structure that made it difficult to associate identity and territory.

Conservatives opposed to the African National Congress contested these changes, maintaining that only an ethnically-divided polity could contain the violence inhering in a heterogeneous society. Taking their cue from Balkan nationalists advocating ethnic political spaces, they claimed that the violence that accompanied demands for ethnic self-determination in Central and Eastern Europe - most notably, the former Yugoslavia - amounted to belated vindication of the previous South African policy of "separate development". In the wake of the 1994 elections in South Africa, the Afrikaaner Freedom Front, seeking the basis for a white homeland, even revived the idea of "cantons", duly dispatching fact-finding missions to Belgium and Switzerland. Interestingly,

the term "canton" was also applied by nationalists to the "ethnic territories" mooted for Bosnia in March 1992. During talks held in Lisbon in February 1992, one observer reported, "every Serb and Croat politician in Bosnia seemed to have a copy of the Swiss constitution in his office".

Critics of the 1995 Dayton accord, which brought an end to the fighting in Bosnia, look at the South African analogy in a different light. They argue that the agreement has regrettably institutionalised a political logic rightly abandoned in South Africa after 1994. According to Zoran Pajic - a former law professor from the University of Sarajevo and member of the Ad Hoc Group of Experts on Southern Africa at the United Nations Commission on Human Rights - the Dayton accord "proclaim[s] democracy while entrenching apartheid structures and ethnic-based parties." As Radha Kumar remarks, partition is a colonial practice "always made at third-party intervention".

Yet the official understanding of Dayton is that it calls for the restoration of a unified, multiethnic Bosnia in the face of a local drive for division. Richard Holbrooke, the chief US negotiator of the treaty, argues that Dayton not only ended the war but also "established [Bosnia as] a single, multiethnic country". Any tendency toward partition, in Holbrooke's eyes, is a result of problems with the accord's implementation rather than its purpose or provisions. Tacitly accepting this view, some US Congressional representatives called for the renegotiation of the Dayton agreement to secure an ethnic partition of Bosnia that would allow the US to withdraw.

Holbrooke is wrong. The problems Dayton bequeathed to Bosnia are not simply problems of the accord's (non)implementation. Although different parts of the agreement can be interpreted in different ways, in practice it is often read as militating against the possibility of a multiethnic nation. For example, former Republika Srpska President Biljana Plavsic, a recipient of enthusiastic backing from the international community,

sees attempts to make Bosnia a multi-ethnic society again as the main threat to attempts to enforce the letter of the Dayton agreement.

Peacemakers and paramilitaries alike have posited a link between identity and territory which recalls apartheid. Although this partitionism is styled as an unfortunate but necessary realism, it in fact embodies a dangerous idealism that, by failing to heed the reality of heterogeneity and the impossibility of division, tends to produce the very outcomes it seeks to avoid.

Sources: Drummond, J., "Reincorporating the Bantustans into South Africa: The Question of Bophuthatswana", *Geography* 76, 1991, p. 369; Marc, G. *Ethnicity and Politics in South Africa*, Zed Books, London, 1993; Norval, A. *Deconstructing Apartheid Discourse*, Verso, London, 1996; Silber, L. and Little, A., *The Death of Yugoslavia*. Penguin Books, London, 1996; Nixon, R., *Homelands, Harlem and Hollywood: South African Culture and the World Beyond*, Routledge, New York, 1994; Manzo, K., *Creating Boundaries: The Politics of Race and Nation*, Lynne Rienner, Boulder, 1996; Borden, A., "The Lesson Unlearned", *WarReport* 58, 1998, pp.6-8; Pajic, Z., "A Critical Appraisal of Human Rights Provisions of the Dayton Constitution of Bosnia and Herzegovina", *Human Rights Quarterly* 20, 1998, p.137; Kumar, R., "The Troubled History of Partition", *Foreign Affairs* 76, 1997, p.22; Holbrooke, R., *To End a War*. Random House, New York, 1998; *The Independent*, 24 February 1996; Hutchison, K. B., "The Bosnia Puzzle Needs a New Solution" *New York Times*, 11 September 1997; Gow, J., *The Triumph of the Lack of Will: International Diplomacy and the Yugoslav War*, Hurst & Co, London, 1997; Sharp, J. M. O., "Dayton Report Card", *International Security* 22, 1997-98, pp.101-137; Vuillamy, E., "Bosnia: The Victory of Appeasement", *International Affairs* 74, 1998, pp.73-92; *Oslobodjenje* [Sarajevo], 20 July 1998; RFE/RL Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Bosnia Report 2, number 29, 22 July 1998.

Acknowledging cultural diversity and coexistence had been an important part of Bosnian people's identities.

27. To counter ethno-national claims that any one group had rights to a majority of Bosnian territory, a 1992 map produced in Sarajevo maintains that 53 per cent of Bosnia was "state owned" with 28 per cent "privately owned." One group of observers (Golubic, S., Campbell, S. and Golubic, T., "How Not to Divide the Indivisible", in Ali, R. and Lifschultz, L., (eds.) *Why Bosnia? Reflections on the Balkan War*, Pamphleteer's Press, Stony Creek CT, 1993, p.226) proposed a "watershed subdivision" of Bosnia as the basis for a functional separation of communities which would remain mixed. Interestingly, this proposal was consistent with the priority accorded the Swiss model, as it followed the practice of some Swiss mountain cantons. Although the proposal is rightly premised on the impossibility for ethnic cantonisation to achieve anything other than the perpetuation of violence, it still preserves the notion that some sort of division is necessary, and somewhat naively argues that "the boundaries of the Watershed Plan are inherently objective". In a similar vein, a plan devised in 1991 by unnamed planners in Sarajevo called for functional regions organised around major cities to divide Bosnia, while the Bosnian government – having rejected the ethnic cantonisation of the Lisbon Principles – proposed in August 1992 a scheme for non-ethnic cantons (Klemencic, M., op. cit. 10, 1994, pp.35-36, 41).

28. Klemencic, M., op. cit. 10, p.41.

29. *Ibid.*, p.37.

30. Resolutions 771 (1992) and 779 (1992), in *Balkan Odyssey* CD-Rom, op. cit. 13.

31. Hage, G., "The Spatial Imaginary of National Practices: Dwelling-Domesticating/Being-Exterminating", *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 14, 1996, pp.463-485.

32. Klemencic, M., op. cit. 10, p.44.

33. For an analysis of the concentration camps and their media coverage, see Campbell, D., "Atrocity, Memory, Photography: Imaging the Concentration Camps of Bosnia – The Case of ITN versus *Living Marxism*, Parts I and II," *Human Rights Review*, forthcoming 2001.

mapped borders were not directly invoked, alternatives – such as current military front lines – indirectly recurred to ethnic principles. Non-ethnic bases for territorial division, such as land ownership or functional use, received little media attention.²⁷

These cartographies resulted in a "mechanical division based on the crudest calculation of ethnic majorities".²⁸ As such, they were powerless to represent the contingency and flux of identity politics in Bosnia. No matter how detailed the 1991 census was, no matter how diligent the diplomats, no amount of cartographic effort would have been able to achieve the perfect alignment between identity and territory necessary to satisfy the nationalists. Even if census technology and the notion of idealised, monolithic national populations are accepted, the divisions envisaged in Lisbon would have resulted in nearly 18 per cent of what had been defined as the Muslim population, 50 per cent of the Serb population and 60 per cent of the Croat population residing outside the constituent units designed for them.²⁹ As a later group of negotiators recognised:

"The population of Bosnia and Herzegovina is inextricably intermingled. Thus there appears to be no viable way to create three territorially distinct States based on ethnic or confessional principles. Any plan to do so would involve incorporating a very large number of members of the other ethnic/confessional groups, or consist of a number of separate enclaves of each ethnic/confessional group. Such a plan could achieve homogeneity and coherent boundaries only by a process of enforced population transfer – which has already been condemned by the International Conference, as well as by the General Assembly."³⁰

There is, of course, no necessary progression from ethnic statistics-collecting and ethnographic mapping to the politics of forced migration or genocide. But a similar kind of imagination is at work in all these diverse practices.³¹ While a military commander engaged in "ethnic cleansing" and an international diplomat using census data to map a political solution to that "ethnic cleansing" may seem to be polar opposites, in fact the two are working within the same nationalist logic. It is a logic without much basis in social actuality. Partition is a form of idealism that fails to heed the realism of heterogeneity and the impossibility of division – except through the advocacy and pursuit of ethnic cleansing.

A Step Forward and a Step Back

From April 1992 onwards, the brutal strategies of ethnic cleansing, conducted almost exclusively by Bosnian Serb forces, inscribed a new map of division in Bosnia.³² The parties to the conflict did not accept the plan envisaged by the Lisbon Principles. The United Nations Protection Force (UNPROFOR), designed to do little more than aid relief convoys, was deployed in Bosnia and economic sanctions were imposed against Serbia and Montenegro. Diplomatic negotiations, despite the formal existence of the ECCY process, were inactive.

In the wake of the August 1992 revelations about camps in which non-Serbs were interned,³³ however, the European Community and the UN established the International Conference on the Former Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (ICFY) as the forum for their efforts to negotiate an end to the war. The resulting agreement produced no map. Instead, it voiced strong opposition to the violence and to ethnic

cleansing and established a series of principles (known as the London principles) to serve as the basis for a negotiated settlement of the Yugoslav conflicts. Constitutional protection of ethnic and national communities was stressed, along with the right to self-determination – but also the priority of individual rights and the importance of sovereignty, independence, territorial integrity, and “assurances of non-intervention by outside military forces whether formed units or irregulars”.

Enacting these principles was the responsibility of the Co-Chairs, the former US Secretary of State, Cyrus Vance, and the former UK Social Democrat Party (SDP) leader, David Owen. Beginning in early September 1992, a special Working Group pursued negotiations on a constitutional settlement for Bosnia and Herzegovina that were to culminate in the Vance-Owen Peace Plan of January 1993.³⁴

Vance and Owen rejected any model based on three separate, ethnically-based states, which they rightly saw as involving forced population transfers and ethnic cleansing. They also pointed out that a confederation formed of three such states would be inherently unstable, for at least two – the Croat and Serbian entities – would surely forge immediate and stronger connections with neighbouring states of the former Yugoslavia (namely Croatia and Serbia) than they would with the other two units of Bosnia and Herzegovina.³⁵

At the same time, however, the Bosnian government position calling for a centralised, unitary state was opposed by “at least two of the principal ethnic/confessional groups,” who claimed that it “would not protect [Bosnian Croat and Bosnian Serb] interests in the wake of the bloody civil strife that now sunders the country”.³⁶ As a result, Vance and Owen argued, “the only viable and stable solution that does not acquiesce in already accomplished ethnic cleansing, and in further internationally unacceptable practices, appears to be the establishment of a decentralised State”³⁷ whose principal functions would be carried out by autonomous provinces.

At this point, though supposedly having rejected arguments for ethnically-based territories, Vance and Owen began to revert to ethnic considerations. They stated, for example, that if the number of provinces of a reconstituted Bosnia were too few:

“it would be difficult to *realise ethnic homogeneity* without either violating the principle of geographic coherence or accepting the results of ethnic cleansing”.

Vance and Owen went on to envisage a set of provinces most of which would “have a considerable majority of one of the three major groups” and a country in which “each group would be living in a province in which it constitutes a numerical majority”.³⁸

Why “realis[ing] ethnic homogeneity” should have been a factor at all given the Co-Chairs’ previous reflections is not clear, but it does suggest that the old nationalist imaginary was never far from the negotiators’ minds.³⁹ The result was that the Working Group on Bosnia and Herzegovina began to move in directions that made the sovereignty and integrity of Bosnia less attainable.⁴⁰

In the end, the Vance-Owen Peace Plan (VOPP) envisaged a Bosnia made up of nine provinces plus a capital district for Sarajevo. Each community would have ended up as a majority in three provinces, with the Sarajevo district being a *de facto* fourth Muslim area. According to cartographer Mladen Klemencic, the Bihac region (with a 75 per cent Muslim population) would have been the most “homogenous”, and Travnik (with a Croat plurality of 43.6 per cent) the least.⁴¹

***Ethnic cleansers
and diplomats
were working
within the same
nationalist logic.***

34. Secretary-General, United Nations, *Secretary-General's Report on the International Conference on the Former Yugoslavia*, November 11, 1992, *International Legal Materials* 31, 1992, pp.1554, 1559.

35. *Ibid.*, p.1559.

36. *Ibid.*, p.1560.

37. *Ibid.*, p.1560.

38. *Ibid.*, p.1561, emphasis added.

39. For sanguine analyses, see Gow, J., *The Triumph of the Lack of Will: International Diplomacy and the Yugoslav War*, Hurst & Co, London, 1997, p.313, and Sharp, J. M. O., “Dayton Report Card”, *International Security* 22, 1997-98, pp.101-137. Both share a limited conception of ‘multi-ethnicity’ with the international diplomats they otherwise disagree with.

40. Secretary-General, *op. cit.* 34, p.1559.

41. Klemencic, M. *op. cit.* 10, pp.46-49.

The Vance-Owen Peace Plan relied on half-hidden principles of ethnic partition.

Although ethnicity had become a central organising criterion in the VOPP, in other words, no province in the plan could have been “homogeneous” without large-scale forced population transfers. Nearly 43 per cent of Bosnian Serbs, 44 per cent of Muslims (30 per cent if Sarajevo was regarded as “Muslim”) and 37 per cent of Bosnian Croats would have been stranded outside “their” majority areas under the VOPP.

The Vance-Owen Peace Plan was defeated in May 1993, due largely to the US’s failure to support its major proposals. This failure enfeebled UN and EU diplomatic efforts. The US’s desire to be more flexible in meeting Serb demands meant that the negotiating process was given over to the combined initiative of Croatia and Serbia. The dismemberment of Bosnia became even more likely.

When David Owen and Thorvold Stoltenberg (Cyrus Vance’s replacement and a former Norwegian Foreign Minister) met with the other negotiating parties in Geneva in June 1993, the foundations for further peace plans “basically of the same family” were laid.⁴² Although the half-hidden ethnic principles of the VOPP had meant division and possible *de facto* partition, the three plans that followed went even further, calling for *de jure* partition⁴³ (see Box, “Peace Plans and Ethnic Premises from Geneva to Dayton, Ohio”, pp.10-11).

Diplomacy Divided against Itself

The two different forms which most of the international diplomatic community’s Bosnian peace proposals took – either holding on to the international boundaries and integrity of Bosnia but dividing it internally along ethnic lines, or virtually dissolving the country⁴⁴ – both involved devolutions of political power to ethnic majorities, and both embodied, to some extent, the logic of partition.

According to this logic, Bosnia is a seamless, ethnically-ordered world of Croats, Muslims and Serbs in which other conceptions of identity have little political import and where group relations cannot be other than mutually exclusive and conflictual – a picture of extreme ethnic exclusiveness which does not correspond to reality on the ground. But because each of the international proposals for division of Bosnia could not bring into being the “homogeneous territories” they sought, they endangered the “minority groups” they had in effect created in each territory. In effect, the proposals created new “ethnic minorities” at the same time as they legitimised strategies to eradicate them. Moves toward partition have encouraged violence rather than countering it.

The 1995 Dayton agreement’s purported advocacy of “multi-ethnicity” was anything but antithetical to ethnic divisions. This was a “multi-ethnicity” of enclaves. By moving to “depluralize the nation”, it undermined efforts to “denationalize pluralism”.⁴⁵ The practical effect was to make partition more likely – an outcome whose consequences international representatives in Bosnia struggled against, although it was one partly of their own making.

Such paradoxes run deep in the history of international diplomacy in Bosnia. Because of this history, the Dayton agreement, overseen by the United States and signed by all parties to the conflict, created a Bosnia comprised of two distinct entities – the Republika Srpska and a Muslim-Croat Federation – each of which has its own ethnically-organised political structures, controls citizenship, can “establish special parallel relationships with neighbouring states,” and maintains

42. Owen, D., *Balkan Odyssey*, Victor Gollancz, London, 1995, p.190.

43. As Owen acknowledges (op. cit., p.191), “we were now dealing with a three-part division. I was determined that what emerged should not be called the Owen-Stoltenberg map, a label which all the parties for different reasons were only too keen to slap on it: this was neither our map nor our plan and it was important that it should be seen to have come from the Serbs and the Croats.”

44. Klemencic, M., op. cit. 10, p.71.

45. Connolly, W.E., “Pluralism, Multiculturalism, and the Nation-State: Rethinking the Connections”, *Journal of Political Ideologies* 1, 1996, p.56. Much Euro-American political discourse conflates “ethnic” and “national” into a code for race – for example, in the contentious debates about the impact of immigration on the identity of Britain, France, Germany and the United States. In these debates, differences (“cultural”, “ethnic” and “racial”) are often said to be divisive in a way that makes separation a progressive policy. This nationalist imaginary, which also drives Dayton, embodies a “meta-racism” which is central to Euro-American conceptions of community and not, as is commonly suggested, a condition found only amongst the “primitives” of the Balkans. See Balibar, E. and Wallerstein, I. *Race, Nation, Class: Ambiguous Identities*, Verso, London, 1991; Duffield, M. “Symphony of the Damned: Racial Discourse, Complex Political Emergencies and Humanitarian Aid”, *Disasters* 20, 1996, pp.173-193; Salecl, R., *The Spoils of Freedom: Psychoanalysis and Feminism After the Fall of Socialism*, Routledge, London, 1994; Todorova, M., op. cit. 8.

control over the legitimate use of force. Yet all this is somehow supposed to be “consistent with the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Bosnia and Herzegovina”,⁴⁶ which has no integrated army or police force to secure its borders and territory.⁴⁷ Moreover, although in theory Dayton reunited Bosnia as a unitary state and multicultural society, the existence of what are supposedly no more than autonomous regions within a single state in effect legitimised boundaries won through ethnic cleansing.

Similar contradictions can be found in the statements of individual diplomats themselves. On the one hand, for example, David Owen pointed to the existence of a strong basis for a peaceful, non-apartheid solution in Bosnia, where, he said, many people “still see themselves as European and even now don’t think of themselves as Muslim, Croat or Serb”:

“Some deliberately and proudly call themselves just Bosnians. The sentiment is reflected in the degree of intermarriage. It’s reflected in the fact that, even now, you can go to Sarajevo under bombardment and see Muslims, Serbs and Croats living together in the same streets and apartments. Throughout Yugoslavia people are still all mixed in together and, in many cases, living peaceably.”⁴⁸

In line with this view, the VOPP proposed that “none of the provinces [are] to have a name that specifically identifies it with one of the major ethnic groups” and that the composition of the police force should be “non-discriminatory”.⁴⁹

Yet, on the other hand, Owen exacerbated the “ethnicization” of Bosnia by backing certain Bosnian leaders’ appeal to ethnic antagonisms and their association of territory with ethnicity. In a *Foreign Affairs* interview, for instance, Owen denied that his peace plan was “rewarding Serbian aggression” by arguing that:

“The rural Bosnian Serbs sat on over 60 per cent of the country before the war, and we are offering them three provinces covering 43 per cent . . . The Bosnian Serbs are fighting for territory in which they have lived for centuries.”⁵⁰

The argument was identical to that offered by the Serbian leader, Jovan Zametica:

“Bosnian Serbs do not imagine they are conquering anything. Most of the land in Bosnia is theirs, legally, farm by farm. They have tried to secure its possession – within some form of Serbian state, statelet or set of cantons . . . Before the war, 64 per cent of land was registered to Serbs as most lived in rural areas”⁵¹

Such contradictions continue to crop up. Most notably, while international powers openly press for non-nationalists to succeed in elections (such as the municipal votes of April 2000 and the national poll in November 2000), the Bosnian electoral system – put into place by the international community – depends upon, sanctions and rewards ethnic division. Voter registration forms, the membership of the electoral commission, and the constitutional structure whereby people in the two entities are required to vote for their group’s candidate, are mechanisms which perpetuate the very divisions foreign diplomats (not to mention many Bosnians themselves) wish to overcome.⁵² Similarly, Federation authorities have pursued segregated educational curricula at the same time as international representatives have demanded integrationist educational materials.⁵³

46. Bosnia and Herzegovina-Croatia-Yugoslavia, *General Framework Agreement for Peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina with Annexes*, Done at Paris, December 14, 1995, *International Legal Materials* 35, 1995, pp.118, 120; Gow, J., *op. cit.* 49, pp.289-92.
47. The arrangements for the three-member shared presidency (one from each constituent nation) set out in Article 5 (v) of the constitution involve a Standing Committee on Military Matters which co-ordinates rather than commands military forces. It is comprised of a Serb member who is commander-in-chief of the Republika Srpska army, a Croat member who is commander-in-chief of the Croat Defence Council, and a Bosniac member who is commander-in-chief of the army of Bosnia and Herzegovina.
48. Owen, D., IN 16/2/93, “*Foreign Affairs*” Interview, in *Balkan Odyssey* CD-Rom, *op. cit.* 13.
49. Secretary-General, *op. cit.* 34, pp.1585, 1591.
50. *Text of Interview with Lord David Owen on the Future of the Balkans*, 1995, in *Balkan Odyssey* CD-Rom, *op. cit.* 13. The Bosnian war was, Owen hastened to add, a “war of aggression” as well as a “civil war”. He noted that the Serbian side “have of course been aided and abetted by Serbs outside Bosnia-Herzegovina. And they have been substantially equipped militarily by Serbs outside Bosnia-Herzegovina. It is a very complex war in its origins.”
51. Zametica, J., “Squeezed Off the Map”, *Guardian Weekly*, 23 May 1993. The contradiction in Owen’s thought calls to mind the incoherent view – expressed in Kaufmann, C., “Intervention in Ethnic and Ideological Civil Wars: Why One Can be Done and the Other Can’t”, *Security Studies* 6, 1996, p.66n. – that Bosnia’s conflict is an “ethnic” one even though the groups are “ethnically indistinguishable.” Significantly, the 1992 report on the ICFY process also accepts at face value the self-identifications of the “parties” as “three major ‘constituent peoples’ or ethnic/confessional groups, namely the Muslims, the Serbs and the Croats . . . Two of the parties contend that in designing a government for the country a predominant role must be given to these ‘constituent peoples’. The other party considers that there should be no such overt recognition, although it admits that the political processes of the country have been and are likely to continue to be characterised by religio/ethnic factors” (Secretary-General, *op. cit.* 34, p.1562).
52. The results of the municipal and national elections in 2000 show that while there is a trend of increasing support for non-nationalists, the three major ethnically-organized political parties predominate. Support for nationalists is strongest among Bosnian Croats and Bosnian Serbs, while the Bosniac vote is divided between the “Muslim” SDA and the increasingly popular Social Democrats. See International Crisis Group (ICG), *Bosnia’s Municipal Elections: Winners and Losers*, 28 April 2000.
53. On the re-writing of text books, see Donia, R., “The Quest for Tolerance in Sarajevo’s textbooks,” *Human Rights Review*, 1, January-March 2000, pp.38-55.

Peace Plans and Ethnic Premises

The five international peace proposals promulgated following the failure of the Vance-Owen Peace Plan (VOPP) in May 1993 pushed even more strongly for ethnic partition.

The Union of Three Republics Plan

September 1993

In the aftermath of the VOPP, Serb and Croat leaders agreed to dispel any pretence of a unitary Bosnia, instead referring to a "confederation" of republics for three constituent peoples". In Owen's account:

"Karadzic said that Serbs could no longer accept the [VOPP's] constitutional principles. Provinces were unacceptable. They were interested in a confederal solution with three republics – Republika Srpska, Herceg Bosna, and a Muslim Republic (Milosevic suggested Republika Bosna)."

A division of Bosnia into a Serb republic with 53 per cent of the territory, a Muslim entity with at least 30 per cent and a Croat unit with 17 per cent was, broadly speaking, the new framework for all subsequent talks. Yet once again the ideal of homogeneous ethnic territories resulted in a self-contradictory map – in this case one in which 35 per cent of Muslims and Serbs and 53 per cent of Croats were resident outside their supposed republics.

Owen and Stoltenberg (Vance's replacement) were still purportedly abiding by principles that explicitly rejected nationalist logic and addressed Bosnian government concerns. Yet this did not prevent Owen from deriding as "unrealistic" a Bosnian government proposal that any federal arrangement should be based on equality for all citizens and equal rights for the constituent nations, and that the federal units "could not be divided exclusively along ethnic lines". The end result was a plan for a Union of Three Republics in which Sarajevo would become a UN-administered city. Under this plan,

a weak central administration appointed by the constituent republics could not have held its own against the real sources of power and identity.

The European Union Action Plan

November 1993

Although the Bosnian government accepted the Union of Three Republics Plan in principle, they declined to sign it. Dissatisfied with the less than one-third of the territory they had been allocated, and unable to contest the Plan's ethnic rationale, it pursued an entity with three per cent more territory. The European Union Action Plan (EUAP) of November 1993 was an attempt to secure this territorial concession.

The EUAP began from the premise that "Bosnia and Herzegovina seems almost certain to split into two independent republics, and probably three." Owen argued that the Muslims – whose non-ethnic proposals, organised around a unitary Bosnian state, were consistently rejected – were increasingly having to think in terms of an independent state of their own. No agreement was reached, but the EUAP did make a recommendation, following a Bosnian Serb proposal, that shaped subsequent diplomatic negotiations. This was that Muslims (with one-third of the territory) and Croats (with 17.5 per cent) would together have 51 per cent of Bosnia, leaving the Bosnian Serbs with 49 per cent. As Holbrooke notes, no succeeding maps challenged this split, which took on an "an almost theological force."

The Washington Agreements

March 1994

The United States had remained largely on the negotiating sidelines during the second half of 1993, but following a policy review in early 1994 it became more engaged. The Clinton administration readied itself to increase pressure on the Bosnian government to accept partition (something Owen thought it had

already acceded to), an important part of which was the proposal for a Muslim-Croat federation and a possible confederation between Bosnia and Croatia.

The Washington Agreements of March 1994 returned to the notion of cantonisation via a two-republic solution. The Agreements combined Bosnian government-controlled territory with that of the Croat community and spoke only of Bosniacs and Croats as constituent peoples, but left open the possibility for Bosnian Serbs to constitute a second republic and join a Union at a later stage.

Once again, nothing could obscure the ethnic calculations behind the proposed cantons, which were to be demarcated according to the same 1991 population census and ethnographic map that had been used in both the Lisbon talks and the VOPP.

Moreover, a provision that allowed each ethnic community to establish its own Council of Cantons meant that the "two-republic" appearance of the Federation concealed a deeper "three-republic" logic.

Unsurprisingly, this attempt to establish unity between Bosnians and Bosnian Croats turned out to confirm and exacerbate the political differences between them.

The Contact Group Plan

July 1994

In the wake of NATO's military response to the February 1994 bombing of a Sarajevo marketplace by Bosnian Serb forces, and following on from the Washington Agreements, the focus of diplomatic activity moved towards a Contact Group. Comprising representatives of the US, Russia, Germany, Britain and France, this was an *ad hoc* diplomatic arrangement which met for the first time at the end of April 1994.

The first Contact Group proposal, a constitutional structure based on a loose Union derived from the Union of Three Republics Plan, was unsuccessful, as Richard Holbrooke notes:

. . . . from Geneva to Dayton, Ohio

"[T]he Croats made it clear that a two-way arrangement between the Federation and the Serbs would be unacceptable to them. Any Union had to take into account the fact there were three constituent peoples. The Serbs were reluctant to discuss any type of Union arrangement at all. They argued that the establishment of the Bosniac-Croat Federation and the proposed confederation with Croatia ruled out any possibility of the Republika Srpska joining such a Union."

Contrary to its expressed intent, the Washington Agreements, with their underlying three-republic logic, had strengthened the drive for total partition.

The Contact Group then decided to concentrate on territorial rather than political issues. The consequence, in July 1994, was a new map – organised around the 51-49 per cent split of territory between two entities. The Contact Group refused to negotiate further with Bosnian Serbs unless they accepted it.

The General Framework Agreement *December 1995*

The Croatian military's capture of the Krajina areas south of Zagreb, heavy NATO bombing of Bosnian Serb positions, and the retreat of the Bosnian Serb army brought about through the combined efforts of Bosnian and Croatian forces – actions encouraged by Holbrooke and his team – helped create the conditions for a resumption of negotiations in the summer of 1995. As Holbrooke observed in a fax to Warren Christopher, US Secretary of State, on 20 September 1995, the military violence was a form of cartographic practice:

"Contrary to many press reports and other impressions, the Federation military offensive has so far helped the peace process. This basic truth is perhaps not something we can say publicly right now

. . . In fact, the map negotiation, which always seemed to me to be our most daunting challenge, is taking place right now on the battlefield, and so far, in a manner beneficial to the map. In only a few weeks, the famous 70 per cent-30 per cent division of the country has gone to around 50-50, obviously making our task easier."

But military action was supported by the US only as long as the maps laid down by previous peace initiatives guided it. At a White House meeting on 21 September 1995, Holbrooke admitted to Anthony Lake, the National Security Adviser, that contrary to the US government's public calls for a halt to the Federation advance, and despite a request that the Federation not take Banja Luka, a town in northern Bosnia controlled by the Bosnian Serbs:

"we did not give the Croatians and the Bosnians any other 'red lights.' On the contrary, our team made no effort to discourage them from taking [the northern Bosnian towns of] Prijedor and Sanski Most and other terrain that is theirs on the Contact Group map. The map negotiations are taking place on the battlefield right now, and that is one of the reasons we have not delayed our territorial discussions. It would help the negotiations greatly if these towns fell."

Owen confirms that some of NATO's decisions (for example, Serb aircraft which counterattacked Croat and Muslim forces were not shot down as required by the no-fly zone policy, nor were the airfields from which they took off attacked) reflected a determination to ensure that the fighting would result in borders resembling those of the Contact Group plan and its 51-49 per cent territorial division. Military maps, with their implicit assumptions about ethnicity and territory, began to take precedence over the more explicit ethnographic maps they resembled. Of course, making reality fit the Contact Group map, as then US Ambassador to the UN Madeleine Albright made clear, meant that populations would have to be transferred, territories traded, and, in effect, a programme of ethnic cleansing pursued.

Meeting in Geneva and New York in September 1995, the foreign ministers of Bosnia, Croatia and Yugoslavia (the latter working on behalf of the Bosnian Serbs) agreed that "Bosnia and Herzegovina will continue its legal existence with its present borders and continuing international recognition"; and that it "will consist of two entities, the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina as established by the Washington Agreements, and the Republika Srpska".

Missing was any mention of the nature of the central government which would provide the "connective tissue between the two entities". Without this, as Holbrooke conceded, "the agreement could easily be construed as having partitioned Bosnia, when the exact opposite was our goal."

The General Framework Agreement (GFA) – produced by the subsequent talks held in November 1995 at the Wright-Patterson Air Force Base in Dayton, Ohio – endorses agreements between three parties: the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina (a subject with an international legal personality, comprising two entities), the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Republika Srpska. The Inter-Entity Boundary Line and the Zone of Separation demarcated the entities. This structure remains the shape of Bosnia today.

Sources: Owen, D. (1995) *Balkan Odyssey*, Victor Gollancz, London; Holbrooke, R., *To End a War*, Random House, New York, 1998; *Balkan Odyssey CD-Rom*, version 1.1, Academic Edition, The Electric Company, London, 1995; Klemencic, M. "Territorial Proposals for the Settlement of the War in Bosnia-Herzegovina", in Pratt, M. and Schofield, C., (eds.), *Boundary and Territory Briefing 1*, International Boundaries Research Unit, 1994; *New York Times*, 11 February 1994; Szasz, P., "Introductory Note: Bosnia and Herzegovina-Croatia-Yugoslavia: General Framework Agreement for Peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina with Annexes", done at Paris, 14 December 1995, *International Legal Materials* 35, pp.75-80.

With a different political anthropology, things could have turned out differently in Bosnia.

Nationalists — accommodated, legitimised and sustained by international diplomacy — are now in conflict with international representatives urging Bosnia's reintegration.

54. ICG Bosnia Project, *Changing the Logic of Bosnian Politics: ICG Discussion Paper on Electoral Reform*, Sarajevo, 10 March 1998.

55. Kaufmann, C., "Possible and Impossible Solutions to Ethnic Civil Wars" *International Security* 20, 1996, pp.136-175.

56. Ibid.

Even organisations that are critical of the implicit partitionism of official international mediation efforts can fall into such inconsistencies. The International Crisis Group (ICG), an international think-tank noted for its political analyses of Bosnia, recommended that a new system of voting be used for the September 1998 national elections as a way of forcing parties to appeal to voters outside their natural constituencies. Notwithstanding this integrationist aim, however, the ICG proposal called for electoral rolls and voter identity cards that mark ethnicity, and a guaranteed quota of seats for each ethnic group to be pre-determined by reference to the 1991 census. All this was justified on the dubious historical basis that:

“the concept of separate ethnic identities is deeply rooted in Bosnian society. The identities were formed during more than four centuries of Ottoman rule . . . [and] have remained clearly defined into the late 20th century.”⁵⁴

Like the official peacemakers, the ICG was appealing to a political anthropology that licenses the divisive policies the organisation in fact opposes.

Rethinking Ethnicity

To avoid such self-defeating contradictions and to find a way out of the straitjacket it has bequeathed Bosnia through the Dayton agreement, the international diplomatic community must become more aware of the shortcomings of the political anthropology that so often guides its actions.

According to this anthropology, antagonists in “ethnic conflicts” like Bosnia’s are fixed, rigidly-defined groups “who purportedly share cultural or racial characteristics, especially common ancestry or territorial origins, which distinguish them from members of other groups.” Such identities are often said to be dependent not only on “language, culture, and religion, which are hard to change” but also on “parentage, which no one can change.”⁵⁵ Such identities are often said to be transparently evident in “public or private records”:

“while it might not have been possible to predict the Yugoslav civil war thirty years in advance, one could have identified the members of each of the warring groups from the 1961 census, which identified the nationality of all but 1.8 per cent of the population.”⁵⁶

Remarks like this one (from an international studies academic whose thinking reflects that of many negotiators) are oblivious not only to the politics of statistics, but also to the specific way the categories of the Yugoslav census were constructed. “In unprepared encounters,” the same scholar goes on, ethnicity can also often be “gauged by outward appearance”:

“Tutsis are generally tall and thin, while Hutus are relatively short and stocky; Russians are generally fairer than Kazakhs. . . . Despite claims that the Hutu-Tutsi ethnic division was invented by the Belgians, 1969 census data showed significant physical differences: Tutsi males averaged 5 feet 9 inches and 126 pounds, Hutus 5 feet 5 inches and 131 pounds.”

Even leaving aside the dubious implications that an average of four inches and five pounds could harbour political significance, or that physical differences have nothing to do with political and economic

history, this remark exhibits a form of racism long since discredited in anthropology and sociology.⁵⁷

The crude essentialism and primitive rigidity of such conceptions of ethnicity favour partition, or “a well-defined demographic front that separates nearly homogenous regions”. “Solutions that aim at restoring multi-ethnic civil politics and at avoiding population transfers” are said to be simply unworkable:

“The international community must abandon attempts to restore war-torn multi-ethnic states. Instead, it must facilitate and protect population movements to create true national homelands”.⁵⁸

This brief for apartheid politics exhibits a studied ignorance of the anthropological evidence for the contingent and constructed nature of ethnic identity⁵⁹ and the way in which uncertainty about its reality contributes to “ethnic violence”.⁶⁰ Striving to naturalise ethnicity, it vainly attempts to remove questions of identity and difference from the realm of politics instead of grasping ethnicity as a *component* of politics – in particular, the representational politics of identity, particularly the identity of “others”.

It is partly because much of the international diplomatic community is still mired in this naturalised view of ethnicity that Bosnia continues to appear to it, more often than not, as a world ordered according to *a priori* ethnic categories. When pondering whether or not one could regard Bosnian president Alija Izetbegovic as a “fundamentalist,” David Owen even resorted to the idea that ethnicity can normally be physically observed: “There were no outward and visible signs that he was a Muslim. He, his son and his daughter dressed and acted as Europeans.”⁶¹

With a different political anthropology, things could have turned out differently in Bosnia. At certain junctures, had identity been seen as a political creation rather than something pre-fixed and natural, then the political effects of particular representations of identity could have been a topic of the talks. Openings existed for such discussions,⁶² but imagination and commitment were lacking. Had these opportunities been pursued, structures that accommodated the heterogeneity of Bosnia by insisting on the unity of the state, while guaranteeing minority rights, could have been developed. International representations of the 1999 Kosovo crisis – in which the clash was said to be between Serbs and “ethnic Albanians,” as though the latter group were unproblematically homogenous – show the persistence of this problem.⁶³

Beyond the Enclave

If international diplomacy is to do better, it must draw on the plentiful research that shows that “ethnicity” is a politicised category of identity politics. To avoid becoming trapped in further contradictions, international diplomats must take seriously notions of “multi-ethnicity” which do not resort to partition and exclusionary violence, but which allow for living in different ways on the same territory.

In Bosnia, more attention should have been paid to local forces that contested the nationalist imaginary,⁶⁴ and the non-ethnic and non-national options of the London principles should have been put into practice. While this admittedly would have been difficult politically, it should be remembered that all parties were supporting these principles in August 1992. The claim that partition is “inevitable” is based

57. American Association of Physical Anthropology, “Statement on Biological Aspects of Race”, *American Journal of Physical Anthropology* 101, 1996, pp.569-570.

58. Kaufmann, C., op. cit. 55, pp.137, 149, 139.

59. Banks, M., *Ethnicity: Anthropological Constructions*, Routledge, London, 1996; Comaroff, J., “Of Totemism and Ethnicity: Consciousness, Practice and the Signs of Inequality”, *Ethnos* 52, 1987, pp.301-323 and “Humanity, Ethnicity, Nationality”, *Theory and Society* 20, 1991, pp.661-687; Denich, B., “Unmaking Multi-Ethnicity in Yugoslavia: Metamorphosis Observed”, *Anthropology of East Europe Review* 11, 1993, pp.43-53; Danforth, L. M., *The Macedonian Conflict: Ethnic Nationalism in a Transnational World*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1995; Verdery, K., “Ethnicity, Nationalism, and State-Making”, in Vermeulen, H. and Grovers, C. (eds.) *The Anthropology of Ethnicity: Beyond “Ethnic Groups and Boundaries”*, Het Spinhuis, Amsterdam, 1994, pp. 33-58.

60. Appadurai, A., “Dead Certainty: Ethnic Violence in the Era of Globalization”, *Public Culture* 25, 1998, pp.225-247.

61. Owen, D., op. cit. 42, p.39.

62. These included the November 1992 report by the ICFY Co-Chairs which made clear the assumptions they were working with (and how they had been contested in part by the Bosnian government), and the memorandum from Lord Owen’s staff during the negotiations for the Washington Agreements which made obvious the different approach of the US to the make-up of Bosnia. Moreover, the documents creating the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, along with the Bosnian constitution in the General Framework Agreement, spoke of “Bosniacs” rather than “Muslims,” thereby indicating change was clearly possible. See Bringa, T., op. cit. 3, pp.32-36.

63. Blumi, I., “The Commodification of Otherness and the Ethnic Unit in the Balkans: How to Think about Albanians,” *East European Politics and Societies* 12 (3) 1998, pp.527-569.

64. Bougarel, I., “Bosnia and Herzegovina – State and Communitarianism”, in Dyker, D. A and Vejvoda, I. (eds.) *Yugoslavia and After: A Study in Fragmentation, Despair and Rebirth*, Longman, London, 1996, pp.87-115; Campbell, D., op. cit. 7, ch.7.

Ethnicity is not naturally given but is part of politics.

Understanding conflicts in terms of primordial links between identity and territory exacerbates divisions and violence.

on the reiteration of a particular, problematic political anthropology rather than on any essential quality of identity politics and “ethnic” conflict in the Balkans.

It does not follow, of course, that territorial integrity and state-centric political sovereignty are the best options for Bosnia. Dimensions other than those of the state or the international arena need to be recognised. One initiative is the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugee’s (UNHCR) “Open Cities” strategy, whereby particular towns and villages are granted increased economic assistance if they encourage the return of refugees regardless of ethnicity. In such communities, freedom of movement and settlement would challenge fixed categories of identity. To date, this strategy has not realised its potential, although increasing numbers of refugees are overcoming the political hostility of “their” group leaderships to return to areas where they are a minority.⁶⁵ Indeed, these all-important “minority returns” represent an increasing trend. In the year 2000, almost 60,000 refugees will have returned home to live in communities where other groups are in power. That is a four-fold increase on the previous year, and individuals acting independently, without foreign assistance, are achieving it. Such assistance – from financial aid to the provision of security – must be provided, as these minority returns are the most important manifestation of Bosnia’s multicultural reintegration.⁶⁶

For one town in particular, this strategy could be crucial. Brcko, in the north-east corner of Bosnia – strategically vital to Bosnian Serbs and historically significant to Bosnians/Muslims as the site of some of the worst ethnic cleansing in 1992 – could not be controlled by Republika Srpska without legitimising partition. The International Crisis Group thus proposed that the municipality be granted special status. Sovereignty would be formally shared, a new municipal council would administer the zone, and limited autonomy – which could not be territorially based – would be granted to individual communities to secure cultural rights.⁶⁷ International diplomats accepted elements of this proposal, and in March 2000 Brcko became a neutral condominium that overlapped the Inter-Entity Boundary Line that divided Bosnia’s two constitutive regions. It is a resolution, however, which is still hotly contested. When the education authorities of Brcko said pupils from all groups must learn in integrated classrooms, Serbian students rioted and violence against Muslim children increased.⁶⁸

Such creative re-articulations of sovereignty among cities, the state and international representatives are potentially progressive developments, although the fate of EU-administered Mostar, in the southwest of Bosnia, is instructive. Despite years of transnational authority and millions of dollars in aid, ethnic divisions are as vicious as ever. This serves as a reminder that new administrative or spatial arrangements themselves do not make for inclusive polities open to difference. Contesting the identity politics of partition involves more than the redrawing of geopolitical boundaries. It has to problematise identity and the power relations that effected the division in the first place. That means the international community has to shift its attention away from ethnic and nationalist leaders, and ally itself with non-nationalist forces. In Mostar, reliance on the Croatian nationalist party (the HDZ) as a partner for reconstruction has been fatal to the process. Because international powers legitimised the HDZ, in whose name much of the ethnic cleansing in the Herzegovina region was carried out, the HDZ has been able to block plans to reintegrate Mostar, while pocketing much of the financial assistance of its own divisive plans.⁶⁹

65. Sharp, J.M.O., op. cit. 39, p.27; ICG Bosnia Project, *Going Nowhere Fast: Refugees and Internally Displaced Persons in Bosnia*, Sarajevo, 30 April 1997; *A Tale of Two Cities: Return of Displaced Persons to Jajce and Travnik*, Sarajevo, 3 June 1998; *The Konjic Conundrum: Why Minorities Have Failed to Return to Model Open City*, Sarajevo, 19 June 1998.

66. ICG, *Bosnia’s Refugee Logjam Breaks: Is the International Community Ready?*, 31 May 2000.

67. ICG Bosnia Project, *Brcko: What Bosnia Could Be*, Sarajevo, 10 February 1998.

68. “Bosnian Town Split By Pupils Schooled in Hate,” *The Guardian*, 20 October 2000, p.20.

69. See ICG, *Reunifying Mostar: Opportunities for Progress*, 19 April 2000.

Bosnia Beyond the Nationalist Imaginary

Ethnographic study reveals that, to most Bosnians, and particularly to the post-World War II generations, being Bosnian meant growing up in:

“an environment where cultural pluralism was intrinsic to the social order. Dealing with cultural difference was part of people’s most immediate experience of social life outside the confines of their home, and it was therefore an essential part of their identity.”⁷⁰

This mode of being cannot be easily understood in dichotomous terms as separate or mixed, or some straightforward combination of the two. It was both of these at the same time.

Traces of this legacy persist in the present and can be fostered for the future, despite the alliance of paramilitaries, nationalists and peacemakers who have ignored, oppressed or attempted to eradicate this inclusive logic of political identity. Even after horrendous violence, the desire for an integrated, non-nationalist future lives on, and not just among urban elites.

The task is not to take communal politics backwards to a romantic ideal of a lost Bosnian past, but to recover that which has been made less imaginable through the violence associated with the nationalist imaginary. For some, this means taking the opportunity created by the demise of the two major architects of Bosnia’s ethnic division – Croatia’s late President Tudjman, and Serbia’s overthrown President Milosevic – to rewrite the Dayton agreement. For others, while going beyond parts of the Dayton accords is important, a wholesale revamp would be counterproductive.⁷¹

Whichever strategy prevails, it is the case – contrary to those analysts whose inflexible schemas see only the hardening of identities and positions – that when free from nationalist pressures, the people of Bosnia do not want partition. The majority of displaced persons have indicated a willingness to reintegrate – less than half of those displaced by the violence of the 1992-1995 war have returned to their homes – and many are now returning to their homes regardless of which group controls the area.⁷² While not ideologically committed to multi-ethnicity, they do have an interest in resuming normal, safe and productive lives in which questions of nationality are marginal. Vital to the furthering of these possibilities is the need to bring war criminals to justice. That those who perpetrated the horrors of ethnic cleansing remain at large and often in power (especially in Republika Srpska) is a major barrier to reconciliation.⁷³

The challenge for representatives of other nations is to pursue policies that support this “remapping”, to ally themselves to those social forces within Bosnia who share this vision, and to reconsider all the practices that straitjacket a place and its peoples in terms of ethnic and nationalist categories. In 1997 the Peace Implementation Council (international governments’ oversight body for the reconstruction of Bosnia) substantially increased the powers of its senior official in Bosnia, the head of the Office of the High Representative (OHR). Among the levers given to the High Representative were new powers to make binding decisions when Bosnia’s elected representatives obstruct integrationist policies. While this is a form of neo-colonial authority, it nonetheless makes it possible for international powers to encourage directly the restoration of a multicultural polity. The results

***New opportunities
exist to transcend
nationalist logic in
Bosnia.***

70. Bringa, T., op. cit. 3, p.83.

71. For an informative debate on this issue, see “Time to Rewrite Dayton,” *Balkan Crisis Report* 203, Institute for War and Peace Reporting, 12 December 2000.

72. With more than three-quarters of Bosniacs and Croats (but only one-quarter of Serbs) registering to vote according to their 1991 place of residence, and supporting agencies – such as the locally organised and multi-ethnic Coalition for Return – working to make it possible for refugees to return home, those most directly affected by the violence have demonstrated their intent. See Bosco, D., “Reintegrating Bosnia: A Progress Report”, *The Washington Quarterly* 21, 1998, pp.65-81; ICG Bosnia Project, *Minority Returns or Mass Relocation?*, Sarajevo, 14 May 1998 and *The Western Gate of Central Bosnia: The Politics of Return in Bugojno and Prozor-Rama*, Sarajevo, 31 July 1998.

As E. M. Cousens notes, “Among international opponents to partition, the most persuasive are those who have contact with Bosnia at the community level. They do not describe a population ideologically committed to multi-ethnicity, but they do see a serious and widespread interest in resuming normal, safe and productive lives where questions of nationality are marginal” (“Making Peace in Bosnia Work”, *Cornell International Law Journal* 30, 1997, p.817).

73. ICG, *War Criminals in Bosnia’s Republika Srpska: Who Are the People in Your Neighbourhood?* 2 November 2000.

