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MEMORY AND THE USES OF WARTIME PAST  
IN CONTEMPORARY BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA:

THE CASE OF THE BOSNIAK CAMPAIGN  
FOR THE OCTOBER 2013 POPULATION CENSUS

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This paper explores the question of how the recent past and wartime memories have been used as a narrative component during the 2013 population census in Bosnia and Herzegovina, which was the country's first official population count since the violent conflict and mass demographic changes of the early 1990s. It examines narratives employed in debates over the census within the Bosniak group and considers the relationship of these narratives with the Bosniak political position. The paper argues that the 2013 population census in Bosnia and Herzegovina was a highly politicized process, imbued with heated debates and aggressive political campaigns that surrounded the identity questions on ethno-national and religious affiliation and mother tongue.

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## *Introduction*

TWO SCHOOL-AGE GIRLS wearing traditional hijabs are sitting in a living room and drinking large cups of coffee. A boy, introduced as their younger brother, enters the room dressed in combat trousers, apparently very upset. Soon afterwards, he emotionally speaks of his discomfort: 'How does he dare to call me a Bosnian? What Bosnian? I am a Bosniak!' He continues explaining to his sisters: 'They want to deceive us that we are all Bosnians'. After expressing anger over this issue in a way that obviously belongs to the adult world, the three children join their voices to declare: 'The time has come to proudly say: We are Bosniaks!' A video with this content has been a part of the Bosniak campaign for the 2013 population census in Bosnia and Herzegovina (hereafter: Bosnia or BiH). Its creators claimed it promotes positive values among the Bosnian youth; BiH advocates of children's rights viewed it rather as an abuse of children for political purposes. This was just one example of the highly emotional, but also highly politicised debates over the 2013 population census in Bosnia.

Population censuses serve the purpose of providing precise and geographically detailed count of the country's population and its characteristics at a particular point in time. This accurate demographic and social data is furthermore used as a valuable statistical input for planning and evaluating long-term policies (EU Commission 2011). In countries with population consisting of various different nations and cultures, population censuses often become highly politicized processes (Kertzner & Ariel 2004, Silitoe & White 1992, Urla 1993, Visoka & Gjevori 2013). Through the questions of one's identity, such as ethnicity, religion or language, population censuses transform into means of national 'head-count' and tools for the regulation of groups' participation in political processes and public life. They become instruments for preserving and strengthening domination of the ethnic majority, often through excluding 'others' (Christopher 2006). In

multi-ethnic countries, responding to the census questions on one's ethnic identity is not only a symbolic act; it is a status issue which shapes collective, and very often individual rights, and thus affects citizens' daily lives (Jović 2011).

The October 2013 census in multi-national and multi-confessional BiH surely fits within this context. Being the first to be held in twenty-two years it was set to reflect the changing ethnic and demographic picture after the dramatic 1992-1995 war. Bosnia's recent wartime past and post-war political arrangements have been playing a central role in setting the tone of census campaigns. Uses of the wartime experience and memories became an important tool for all stakeholders in an attempt to influence the census process and alter abstract statistical data into concrete and tangible political gains. For most groups in Bosnia, the population census has been seen as a prominent political issue and, often, as a virtually 'life or death' matter.

In 1991, when the last population census took place, Bosnia was a home of 4.4 million people. It was often said that its various groups lived together in a 'leopard-skin' ethnic territorial pattern, meaning that the country was ethnically mixed to such extent that there were no ethnically homogeneous regions.<sup>1</sup> The three biggest groups – Muslims (Bosniaks), Serbs and Croats – were the constituent nations of the republic, but none of these constituted the absolute majority. More specifically, according to the 1991 census there were 43.5 per cent Muslims (Bosniaks), 31.2 per cent Serbs, and 17.4 per cent Croats. Among the remaining groups, which among others included Bosnians, Montenegrins, Albanians and Roma, most numerous were the Yugoslavs with 5.5 per cent. The three most practiced religions, corresponding to the three respective main groups, were Islam (42.7 per cent), Christian Orthodoxy (29.3 per cent), and Catholicism (13.5 per cent).<sup>2</sup>

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1. According to the 1991 census, more than twenty major ethnic groups lived in Bosnia.

2. Zavod za statistiku Republike Bosne i Hercegovine, Statistički Bilten 233 and 234, October and December 1993.

But since then the country's demographic picture has radically changed. The 1992-1995 war, characterized by waves of brutal ethnic cleansing, resulted in nearly 100,000 dead (IDC 2013) and over half of the country's total population displaced. The fact that no population census has been conducted for nearly two decades after the end of the armed conflict amplified the importance of the 2013 census.

However, it is more Bosnia's current political arrangements, and all the implications stemming from it, which made tensions run high. The war ended in 1995 with the signing of the Dayton Peace Agreement (DPA), which introduced a political system in which the most numerous nations in Bosnia – Bosniaks, Serbs and Croats – which were also the 1990s warring sides, were declared as the country's 'constituent peoples'. The category of 'constituent peoples' [*konstitutivni narodi*] is a legacy of the former Yugoslavia, where holding of this status meant being a 'state-forming' people and not a nationality [*narodnost*] or national minority [*manjina*], regardless of whether a particular group was in a numerical superiority within the respective country or not. The aforementioned three nations [*narodi*] were constituent within the Socialist Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina; in the vernacular of the Socialist regime, the country belonged to neither Muslims (Bosniaks) nor Serbs or Croats, but equally to all three of them. The re-introduced status of constituent nations in post-Dayton BiH meant that each nation, as a collective entity, has equal rights to participate in governing the state. After the 2000 BiH Constitutional Court 'decision on the constituency of the people' (formally known as the Decision on the case U-5/98), the three groups were made constituent throughout the country, irrespective of their local numerical strength. The three groups have shared political power at all levels, in some cases equally and in others proportionally to their respective demographic strength, as part of a complex system of consociational arrangements set up by the DPA.

Aiming to preserve the autonomy of each of these groups, the DPA largely decentralised the country through *de facto* in-

stitutionalising its wartime ethnic partition. Today's Bosnia comprises two entities, the predominantly Bosniak and Croat 'Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina' (hereafter FBiH) and the predominantly Serb 'Republika Srpska' (hereafter RS), as well as the autonomous Brčko District. The previously highly-mixed BiH population is now deeply divided along ethnic lines; it inhabits largely ethnically homogenous territories, and possesses identities constructed in opposition to one another as well as differing interpretations of the recent wartime past and divergent visions with regards to the future organization of the state. At the same time, the privileges that the three constituent peoples enjoy, such as access to certain governmental and public administration posts, are not equally guaranteed to the other groups within Bosnia, which are collectively referred to as 'Others'. The discriminatory provisions of the Bosnian Constitution, both with regards to the rights of constituent nations in territories where they are not in the majority and with regards to the rights of 'Others', have been widely criticised internationally. This has particularly been the case after the 2009 European Court of Human Rights ruling in the case of 'Sejdić and Finci vs. BiH' (European Court of Human Rights 2009). As a result of the court's ruling against the Bosnian state, the country has been repeatedly asked by both the European Union and the Council of Europe to erase the discriminatory clauses from its Constitution and ensure equality of political rights for all groups.

Within that complex picture, each of the main Bosnian groups perceived the 2013 population census as an instrument for consolidation and expansion of a given set of political power and prerogatives. It has been understood as a possible base for one group's political domination and as the means for limiting similar potential of others. At the same time, the wartime remains very much alive as part of collective and individual memory, while due to its use in daily political competition war memory represents an inexhaustible reservoir for scoring political points. It comes then as no surprise that political competition over the population census came to match corresponding war

memories. The disputes and controversies surrounding the census followed familiar narrative patterns associated to ethnic readings of the recent war.

In this study, we aim to explore this phenomenon of the use of wartime past in political competition over the 2013 population census. We will do so by elucidating the relevant narratives employed by the most numerous Bosnian group and by explicating linkages to political positions. We will firstly focus on the centrality of the war-related themes and their enduring historical importance; we will do so on the one hand by offering a quick overview of the question during the times of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY) and on the other by demonstrating how these narratives changed in character with the rise of nationalism in the 1980s and 1990s. Then we will discuss the ways in which wartime past has been used in Bosniak campaigns for the 2013 census. The analysis relies on campaigns led or coordinated by Bosniak political parties, religious bodies, prominent civil society organisations, intellectuals and mainstream media in the period between October 2012 and October 2013. The analysis has also used some of the more marginal and, therefore, less influential narratives, such as those expressed in radical nationalist journals, Internet portals and diaspora associations.

### *Uses of wartime past in Yugoslav politics and political discourse*

‘Second Yugoslavia’ was born out of the traumatic events of the Second World War and the resistance struggle led by Communist partisans (Rusinow 1977; Lampe 1966). The experience of war and violence became the basis of the new Socialist regime legitimacy. On one hand it was the memory of the fratricidal ethnic-civil war and on the other the decisiveness of the partisan military force that sealed later developments: ‘... the level of violence and the thoroughness of the defeat of the enemies ... gave the Yugoslav political elite a head start in establishing its

regime and meeting the prerequisites for legitimacy' (Denitch 1976: 199). The Socialist regime formulated an official ideology of collaboration and unity among the Yugoslav nations. This ideology was also based in the partisan struggle, which the regime promoted as a fight against both Nazis and domestic traitors and fascists – a type of 'brotherhood in arms' of the Yugoslav nations. The so-called 'Brotherhood and Unity' became a refreshingly new vision of Yugoslav unity, which was tormented during both the 'First Yugoslavia' and the Second World War. During the Socialist Yugoslavia militarisation would become one of the central features of the regime. The Yugoslav People's Army became constitutionally recognized as one of the core bodies with a role in decision-making. And the wider society continued to be socialized into the defence effort through compulsory conscription and the concept of territorial defence that created a parallel military structure in support of the Army. The Socialist regime anything but removed the discourse of belligerence from public space; it only transformed its meaning and changed its ideological orientation. The partisan struggle, or the National Liberation Movement in Yugoslav Socialist jargon, was exploited and discursively linked to the Socialist revolution: the victory of the former was depicted as a proof and guarantee for the victory of the latter (Musabegović 2009). The partisans' wartime experience thus became a key ideological tool for the Socialist regime. As a source of legitimacy, the partisan struggle, together with the 'workers' self-management', the Yugoslav road to Socialism, became key 'founding myths' and cornerstones of the Yugoslav socialist regime (Rusinow 1977: 61).

Denitch (1976: 55-81) analyses the ways in which war and the partisan struggle contributed to the transformation of Yugoslav socio-political order. The wartime delegitimation of important elements of the traditional social order, such as the civil service, the military establishment and country notables, war-induced upward social mobility, the emergence of new class of state functionaries made up of members of the National Liberation Committees, the Army officer corps originating from the

partisan cadre were all examples of the new social structure that was created as a by-product of the partisan-led war. Importantly, the new regime also ensured that the reconstitution of the social structure would invariably benefit the process of regime consolidation. The Communist Party ensured that social mobility and the regime-sanctioned system of benefits and rewards would privilege those social strata supportive of the regime. The Association of Veterans of the National-Liberation War [*Savez udruženja boraca narodno-oslobodilačkog rata*-SUBNOR] was one of the mass organisations that the regime recognized in its socio-political organization and became its supportive arm, especially in the first post-war decades. During the same period, participation in the partisan struggle became one of the most important types of ascriptive status that Communist party members could enjoy and it was underpinned by significant social prestige and special benefits (Denitch 1976: 86-89). Finally, even more important role in the socio-political organization of the regime and in the decision making structure at all levels of governance played the professional military. The official involvement of the military cadre in decision-making was preserved until the collapse of Federation and, in fact, it played an intricate and decisive role in the disintegration of the country and the subsequent war (Cohen 1989; Gow 1992).

This legitimation process was reflected also in public discourse, underpinning an inextricable link between the people, the Socialist regime and the partisan war legacy. The latter and other war-related themes were illustrated in all aspects of public life, from the education and intellectual production to arts and popular culture. Yugoslav cinematography excelled in the production of films depicting the heroic partisan struggle. These films were among the most popular in Socialist Yugoslavia, with the fame of some spreading beyond the borders of the country. Hollywood celebrities acted in some film re-enactments of the historic partisan battles. The official Socialist narrative of the Second World War was also mirrored in the country's memorialscape. Scores of memorial objects dotted cities, towns and vil-



lages, while large partisan memorial parks were built in country landscapes. The Socialist regime's entanglement with war-related features led to a highly militarized society (Allcock 2000: 387). Simultaneously, the over-exposure to the official narrative of fratricidal conflict from which the Communists saved the Yugoslav nations can be seen as one of the reasons aggravating the crisis in the 1980s. The over-emphasis on the periods of conflict over the periods of peace has popularized the idea that war among Yugoslavs is a recurrent phenomenon. Thus, with the regime's collapse it was easy for nationalists to foster the idea of settling old scores with other Yugoslav nations and for people to draw the conclusion that war was unavoidable (Puhovski 1995).

As Yugoslavia descended into chaos in the 1980s, rising nationalism became the catalyst in the process of state collapse and the subsequent war (Lydall 1989; Simmie & Dekleva 1991). The memories of past wars acquired a central place in the re-emergent and increasingly dominant nationalist narratives. All over Yugoslavia nationalist intellectuals and ethnic entrepreneurs cultivated historical revisionism. Perhaps the most thorough efforts at revising official histories focused on the Second World War (Kamberović 2007).<sup>3</sup> The past military glory of the nation, the victimization in the hands of enemies and the past crimes perpetrated by those enemies became standard components in the re-emergent nationalist narratives. Violence –past and present, real or perceived– became instrumental in clarifying the often-blurry boundaries of nations that lived together for several decades (Bowman 2003).

Slobodan Milošević, the central figure in the process of the collapse of Yugoslavia, owed much of his carefully crafted leadership élan to the manipulation of war themes and the rhetoric

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3. For the question of historical revisionism in the Balkans, see Institut za Istoriju u Sarajevu 2007; for historical revisionism by Serbian intellectuals and for the latter's role in the revival of Serbian nationalism in the 1980s, see Dragović-Soso 2002; for Croatian revisionism, see Goldstein and Hutinec 2007; and for aspects of the politicization of historiography in post-war Bosnia, see Kamberović 2012.

of violent antagonism (Pappas 2008; Silber & Little 1995). As crisis escalated, old and new leaderships increasingly subscribed to officially sanctioned nationalist narratives focusing on past wars. Serbian nationalism obsessed with past wars, from the Kosovo battle of 1389 and the loss of the 'earthly kingdom' all the way to the Second World War and the massacring of Serbs in the territories of the Nazi-ally Independent State of Croatia (*Nezavisna Država Hrvatska*-NDH). Croatia under the rule of nationalist Croat Democratic Community (HDZ) attempted to whitewash the darkest pages in Croatian history by largely rehabilitating the NDH. Nationalist Bosniaks attempted to whitewash Nazi and NDH collaborationists from their ranks.

Similar efforts aimed to transform meaning in public space: renaming of streets, squares and entire towns, displaying of controversial symbols and associated paraphernalia, 're-discovery' and celebration of previously outcast legacies, neglect or destruction of the Socialist era heritage. Memorial ceremonies and commemorative rituals, which were widespread practices in Socialist Yugoslavia, transformed to fit the nationalist causes of individual nations, as opposed to celebrating the joint partisan struggle. Historical revisionism brought controversies over past war events. Among others, at stake was the number of victims during the Second World War, and especially the number of Serbs who died in the hands of Ustasha (Bogosavljević 2000). For Croatian revisionists underplaying the significance of Jasenovac, the notorious NDH concentration camp, went hand-in-hand with re-discovering and emphasising the murdering of fleeing Croats by Yugoslav partisans (MacDonald 2002; Pavlaković 2007). The re-discovery, redefinition, denial, emphasising and de-emphasising of wartime massacres, invariably defined the newly nationalized politics of the time (Hayden 1994). 'Rival exhumations' (Denich 1994) were conducted to provide substance to the nationalistic claims of past victimization. As nationalism sharpened divisions and war drew closer past wartime symbols became visible signals for contemporaneous radicalized identities. Structural components of myths widespread among Balkan peoples (Schopflin

1999; 1997; Kolsto 2005), symbols, perceived traditions and historical narratives became tools for the active re-negotiation and fixing of cultural boundaries among groups that shared many cultural features and peacefully lived together for decades.

The breakup of Yugoslavia has left the deepest scars on BiH. The 1992-1995 war left the country with a divided territory and divided people, with non-functioning government and state institutions, and with heightened nationalisms. The difficult socio-political predicament can be seen as a direct consequence of the 1992-1995 war, while wartime narratives and memories still infuse tensions in Bosnians' everyday life and sharpen ethnic divisions. The legacy of war can be seen in almost every corner, from the residual mine fields, abandoned houses, destroyed or decaying infrastructure to the demolished cultural heritage. Furthermore, Bosnian political elites of all colour rarely miss an opportunity to remind their fellow nationals of bitter wartime experiences, thus employing an effective tool for political manipulation and preservation of political power.

### *The 2013 population census: Significance and controversies*

The significant delay in holding the first post-war population count in Bosnia was caused by the political disagreements over the questions that the census form would include. Particularly, the main disputes surrounded the question of whether the population would declare their national/ethnic identity, religion and mother tongue. These disputes postponed until February 2012 the adoption of the required law for conducting the census.<sup>4</sup> The law that was finally adopted envisaged the census form that includes the three identity questions: national/ethnic affiliation, religion and mother tongue. Although answering these

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4. Zakon o popisu stanovništva, domaćinstava i stanova u Bosni i Hercegovini 2013. godine, Službeni Glasnik BiH 10/12; 18/13.

questions was to be optional, it became the backbone of all subsequent debates and controversies over the population census. All parties launched highly assertive campaigns in order to 'educate' citizens about the 'proper' ways in which these questions should to be answered. The stakes were high as each group has something to gain or lose depending on its final percentage after the results of the census are announced.

Political elites from the RS were the most eager to collect identity-related data; they perceive it in their interest to show that the RS has a comfortable majority Serb population, which will further consolidate the Bosnian Serb position and build the foundations for possible future statehood. The Croats feared that if their share in overall demographic picture were to fall under 10 per cent, the insistence for an equal treatment to Bosniaks and Serbs, or for a third, exclusively Croat entity, would become less credible, and their bargaining power would diminish (Bieber 2013). The category of population referred to as 'Others' consists of all ethnic groups within Bosnia other than the three constituent peoples, but amongst them, the most active in the census campaign were the Bosnians. These are citizens who refuse to express their identity in ethno-national and religious terms and instead opt for a civic Bosnian identification. Bosnians saw in this census an opportunity to show their numerical power, which, if proven to be significant or even higher compared to one of the constituent peoples, could offer arguments against the ethnicity-oriented structure of state. The 'Bosnian' group has been particularly attractive to young, well-educated urbanites, especially the ones in Bosniak-majority cities in the Federation of BiH.

While in principle citizens originating from any group could potentially subscribe to this civic-oriented Bosnian group, it was Bosniaks who felt mostly threatened by the success of the 'Bosnian campaign'. The stakes were thus the highest for Bosniaks. The census may affect their power under the current political arrangement in the country and will likely confirm the outcome of wartime ethnic cleansing, to which their fellow nationals have been exposed the most. In addition, the census has

the potential to impact on core aspects of Bosniak identity-building process. The 2013 census was the first opportunity for Bosnian Muslims to identify as 'Bosniaks', a historic name dating back to medieval times that was officially re-instated during the war.<sup>5</sup> As Bosniaks in Yugoslavia for decades were either deprived of their national name or were compelled to declare their ethnicity as 'Muslim', many feel that ambivalence as to national identity remains among Bosniak-origin citizens of BiH. In addition, with Bosnian Serbs and Croats by and large attracted by nation-building processes of their neighbouring mother states, Bosniaks are largely alone in promoting the idea of tying national identification with an independent Bosnian state. However, this leaves them exposed to the attractiveness of political versions of 'Bosnianness' and to groups advocating the abandonment of national labels, such as the 'Bosnian' group mentioned above. Thus, Bosniak political elites feared that splits in census identification might significantly lower the numbers of Bosniaks in the country, with many negative political and social consequences.

### *Bosniak narratives about the 2013 population census: Actors and campaigns*

Given the above-described significance, the 2013 census became a highly politicized process and was characterised by more or less aggressive media campaigns by many actors within each major group. This has been especially the case with the Bosniak population, which, as we have seen above, encountered the most complex identity dilemmas. This made the Bosniak census campaign the most energetic compared to the campaigns of the other relevant actors.

The main protagonists involved in pro-Bosniak census campaign were the Party of Democratic Action [*Stranka demokratske*

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5. In September 1993, the Congress of Bosniak Intellectuals re-introduced the historical ethnic name Bosniaks instead of the previously used 'Muslim by nationality' (Bougarel 2009).

*akcije*, hereafter SDA], which has been the most important Bosniak party since the end of the Socialist regime, the Islamic Community [Islamska zajednica], which is the official organisation of the Islamic religion in the country, and a coalition of civil society organisations gathered together in the campaign under the name 'It is important to be Bosniak' [*Bitno je biti Bošnjak*, hereafter BJBB coalition].<sup>6</sup> The BJBB coalition organisations included the 'Bosniak Movement for Equality of Peoples' [*Bošnjački pokret za ravnopravnost naroda*], the 'Active Bosniak Network' [*Aktivna bošnjačka mreža - ABOM*], the 'Bosniak Cultural Community' [*Bošnjačka kulturna zajednica, BKZ*], the 'Institute for Research on Genocide' in Canada [*Institut za istraživanje genocida*], the 'Congress of North American Bosniaks' [*Kongres Bošnjaka Sjeverne Amerike*]. The aim of the BJBB coalition was to ensure that all BiH citizens of Bosniak national origin, in the country and abroad, would participate in the 2013 census and would declare their national identity as Bosniak, their religion as Islam, and their language as Bosnian. The coordinator of the campaign was Sejfudin Tokić, the head of the NGO 'Bosniak Movement for Equality of Peoples'. Prominent Bosniak scholars and intellectuals also supported the campaign. Several of these intellectuals published their opinions in the controversial Islamist magazine SAFF<sup>7</sup> and at the official website of the BJBB coalition member 'Association for Culture, Education and Sport' [*Asocijacija za kulturu, obrazovanje i sport, AKOS*], an NGO which advocates the education of Bosnian youth in line with the spiritual and traditional values of Bosniaks. The common character-

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6. See details about the BJBB coalition in the *Bošnjaci.net* web magazine, available at: <http://www.bosnjaci.net/prilog.php?pid=47188>.

7. SAFF is a political magazine advocating radical Bosniak nationalist and Islamist views (despite the fact that these two can to some extent be seen as contradictory). It is considered an outcast by moderate, liberal and anti-nationalist Bosniaks and many moderate nationalists alike. There are, however, some interaction and channels of communication between these radicals and a more moderate version of Bosniak nationalism, as it became clear also during the campaigns for the 2013 census.

istic of all the above organisations was the use, to a lesser or greater extent, of wartime experience and memories as narrative tools in political competition over the 2013 population census. In the remaining sections we analyse different aspects of the uses of wartime experience and memories in these pro-Bosniak campaigns.

### *Past identifications and the war experience as trauma*

'I am a Bosniak, my religion is Islam, my language is Bosnian' – this slogan has been at the core of the Bosniak census campaign. The concerns over national identity of Bosniaks have a long tradition. Bosniak national identity-building process has traditionally been delayed and weaker compared to the similar processes of more powerful neighbours. During the Ottoman times and under the millet system Bosniak Muslims could hardly develop a national conscience. When the Ottoman influence weakened it was the confident nation building of Serbs and Croats that set the tone; as a result many Bosniaks were attracted by the national movements of their neighbours. It was only during Socialist Yugoslavia that Bosniaks eventually found the political space to develop their separate national identity. This process was affirmed in official terms by the Socialist regime –i.e. the then Muslims were recognised as a nation [*narod*] on par with other Yugoslav nations– only in 1971. The 1992-1995 war was the first in which a self-conscious politically and nationally separate Bosniak nation fought battles against both powerful neighbouring nations.<sup>8</sup>

Fear of potential ambivalence over the content and process Bosniak national identity building informed the political debates over the census. The fears were strengthened when it became clear that the Bosnian campaign's influence was growing, with the danger of making significant inroads in core Bosniak terri-

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8. For more on the question of Bosniak identity and nation building processes, see Bringa 1995; Purivatra 1970; Ramet 1994.

tories (such as the Bosniak-majority cities of Sarajevo, Tuzla and Zenica). All these made some Bosniaks perceive the 2013 census as ‘the most important question in the last one hundred years’ (Sejfudin Tokić for Radio Sarajevo, 24 February 2013), ‘the most important event for Bosnia since defence against external aggression’, a ‘political referendum on the future of Bosnia and position of the Bosniak people in it’ (Sejfudin Tokić for *Vijesti*, 6 May 2013), and ‘more important than any elections and all political parties together’ (Sejfudin Tokić for AKOS, 3 December 2012).

The narratives employed by Bosniaks depict their nation as a victim of centuries-long efforts –originating from Serb and Croat nationalists– aimed to question, undermine or suppress Bosniak national integrity and cultural uniqueness. This is a standard narrative line that could be found in either more radical or more moderate forms in most intellectual thinking and academic production in Bosnia since the end of the Socialist regime. It is also in line with wartime efforts by Bosniak nationalists to limit pluralism and to curtail those political ideas and social attitudes that are perceived as ‘unpatriotic’ and as dividing the Bosniak national body. The ‘unpatriotic’ social stance has often been portrayed in the 1990s as a social attitude that accompanies some kind of ‘inferiority’ complex, shame or negative social stigma for one’s Muslim identity. ‘Be what you really are’ [*Budi ono što jesi*] has been one of the mottos of nationalist intellectuals and activists in the 1990s. In that context, in a proclamation about 2013 census the Islamic Community in BiH cited:

There are no nations in the world whose national name is ‘Muslim’. This could have happened only to us, Bosniaks, because we have been living unfree for the last hundred years or more. There are few nations in the world whose own ethnic and national name has been contested so persistently and for so long. This could have happened only to Bosniaks because they have constantly been deprived their national freedom. There are a few nations which had the name of their language abolished. This could have happened only to Bosniaks because others can-



not watch them live in the freedom of their culture and tradition (AKOS, 12 November 2012).

The Islamic Community paints here Bosniak history as a long process of political attempts to suppress national identity. The quote makes reference to the official name 'Muslim' (with capital M to make a distinction from Muslims in the religious sense who can belong also to other national groups, such as Albanians and Turks). This name, which as we have seen was abolished in 1993, was the official designation sanctioned by the Socialist regime in its long process of Bosniak national affirmation. Most analysts credit the Socialist regime with the legislation that first prevented the encroachment of Bosniaks by the national body of Serbs and Croats and later permitted full Bosniak national affirmation. The Islamic Community, however, includes the Communist regime, and its officially sanctioned designation 'Muslim', in the perceived long line of efforts to suppress Bosniak national identity and freedom. By making reference to the last hundred years, the Islamic Community includes in the list of authorities that 'victimised' Bosniak identity also the first Yugoslavia (Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes and Kingdom of Yugoslavia) and – presumably – the Second World War Independent State of Croatia. By qualifying the period as "one hundred years or more" it remains ambivalent as to whether the Austro-Hungarian Empire is included in the list, despite the fact that historians consider Vienna's rule as generally non-hostile towards Bosniaks. Presumably the text excludes the Ottoman Empire. During the latter, however, while Bosniaks held a superior class position, they did not enjoy national affirmation.

Similar historical interpretations are conveyed also in the statement on the census by the prominent Bosniak intellectual and member of the Academy of Sciences of BiH Muhamed Filipović:

They are trying to deny our right on a true identity so that we return to that mass of historically and culturally unidentified people, among which we were forced to be for a century or more. [...] Running away from our own being, from our historical and

national name [...] is an expression of fear that the very name Bosniak carries a stigma, and a possibility of persecution, misfortune and suffering (AKOS, 11 November 2012).

In relation to the identity question, the narratives on physical extermination of Bosniaks through genocide and ethnic cleansing in the latest war have been used as a central point in the census campaign. This use of the recent wartime experience and memories has been greatly exploited in the two main narrative lines that we present next.

*Bosniaks and the 'fake dilemma':  
'Being Bosnian means being nothing'*

The first narrative line focuses on concerns in relation to the identity dilemma 'Bosniak or Bosnian'. This dilemma has been seen as 'fake' and fabricated from actors outside the Bosniak national corpus with the purpose to confuse Bosniaks, reduce their actual number, weaken their power and influence or even lead them to extinction. This idea is reflected in the following quotes:

What is the goal now? After 200,000 Bosniaks killed and the 'squeezing' of survivors in enclaves very similar to those of Gaza or the West Bank, the Bosniaks are now to be broken from inside, to be dissolved [...] after which the territory they live in could easily be dissolved too. Who does not consider this as a certainty after the horrors of the 1990s, in a situation whereby war ideas are being implemented by other means but with the same goals as during the war, he needs to go through the history class again [...] After they divided us into those from Bosnia, Herzegovina, Sandžak, Krajina, Posavina, Tuzla, Sarajevo, Zenica, etc., their goal now is to divide us into Bosniaks and Bosnians? All this is part of the process of atomisation whose final outcome can only be the disappearance of the Bosniak people altogether (Faruk Vele, Islamic Community in BiH, 14 December 2012).<sup>9</sup>

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9. The reference to 200,000 Bosniak dead has been common among Bosniak nationalists. This claim was refuted by the rigorous scientific in-

The name 'Bosnian' or 'Herzegovinian' as a substitute for the ethnic and national name 'Bosniak' is the biggest deception and a delusion that is being served (...) with the intention to deprive Bosniaks of a common sense, to humiliate and degrade them spiritually, nationally, culturally and politically. Who is not aware of this, suffers from amnesia which has unfortunately cost Bosniaks many times, and caused great sufferings, including genocide (Proglas Rijaseta Islamske Zajednice [Proclamation of the High Executive and Administrative Council of the Islamic Community], AKOS, 12 November 2012).

A clear reference is made here to a powerful wartime narrative line that stressed the necessity of Bosniak unity. This narrative line maintained that the suffering of Bosniaks was made possible by the division of the Bosniak body politic. This division, the narrative goes, was a result of Bosniaks' subscribing to various different political options for decades and for often relinquishing their cultural uniqueness by joining the ranks of the atheist Communist party. This narrative line was particularly powerful in the 1990s when Alija Izetbegović, while leading the struggle for the survival of Bosnia, also tried to politically homogenise Bosniaks and create in his party SDA an all-inclusive political front. For example, one of the prime targets of this pressure was the leftist local government of Tuzla, which during the war sustained attacks by powerful nationalist forces supported by Sarajevo (Armakolas 2011).

Bosniak concerns over the 'atomisation' of their respective ethnic body has been additionally intensified by the belief that

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investigation of the Sarajevo-based Centre for Investigation and Documentation (IDC) that puts the number of the total military and civilian fatalities of all groups at about 100,000 (IDC 2013). The work of the IDC has been severely criticized by nationalists as underplaying the suffering of the Bosniak nation. The reference to Gaza and the West Bank is made to communicate discontent over the effects of ethnic cleansing and other wartime population movement. As a result of these, Bosniaks, who before the war lived more or less throughout BiH, are now concentrated in a large strip of land in Central Bosnia and a smaller enclave in North-West Bosnia. 'Bantustan' is another historical analogy often used to describe the same effects of the war for Bosniaks.

Bosnian Serbs and –to a lesser extent– Bosnian Croats have fewer identity dilemmas than Bosniaks in relation to the 2013 population census. Indeed, since the collapse of Yugoslavia it has traditionally been relatively easier for Serb and Croat elites, whether as a result of more aggressive nationalist discourse or due to the demographic superiority of Bosniaks, to homogenise their ethnic brethren when it comes to questions of national interest and identity. In addition, due to the fact that it was mostly Bosniaks who were left with the onus to promote an inclusive civic Bosnian nationalism, Serbs and Croats felt more ‘immune’ to the appeal of ‘Bosnianness’. Interestingly, many Serbs and Croats living in Bosniak-majority cities were also attracted by the idea of ‘Bosnianness’. But these people were anyhow largely written-off by their respective ethnically-oriented leaderships, which, both during and after the war, led campaigns to convince them to resettle in areas where their respective ethnic group formed the majority. Finally, especially for Bosnian Serbs who fully controlled the political space of Republika Srpska and for those Bosnian Croats inhabiting compact virtually mono-ethnic areas, political homogeneity did not leave much space for ambivalence when it comes to national identification. The identities of Bosnian Serbs and Croats are discursively constructed by political elites as more ‘fixed’, less ambivalent and in lesser need of ‘clarification’ than those of Bosniaks.

As political power in Bosnia is delicately distributed among the three constituent peoples, numerical strength of each and every one of them plays an important role in the preservation and consolidation of a given set of political prerogatives. Thus, the ‘fake’ identity dilemmas of what is considered to be the Bosniak ethnic body have been understood as a direct threat to the Bosniak political position and their future survival in the country. In that sense, the intellectual and member of the Academy of Sciences of BiH Esad Duraković stated that the aggression on Bosnia was committed, beyond any doubt, ‘in order for Bosniaks to be partially killed and partially dispossessed –all these so that they stop being a relevant political subject in

Bosnia'. The population census, he further concludes, 'is in fact acting in the same direction and with the same purpose, only by other means' (TRT Bosanski, 25 December 2012).

With this in mind, the campaigns aggressively urged all Bosniaks not to declare their ethnicity as Bosnian, typically exploiting overly sensitive issues, such as the Bosniak wartime trauma, in order to stress the importance of their appeal:

Let's not proceed with 'self-genocide' by dividing ourselves into Bosnians, Herzegovinians, Muslims and other similar platitudes. We have already paid an enormous price for our freedom and our name (Daniel Toljaga, Al Jazeera Balkans, 12 November 2012).

The essence of the manipulation lies in the fact that these infatuated Bosniaks believe that by declaring themselves as Bosnians they will accomplish something, while the only thing they will be actually doing is contributing to the genocide against their own people (Fatmir Alispahić, SAFF, 7 December 2012).

Each Bosniak who declares himself as a Bosnian will be written on the same history page in which the creators of the Srebrenica massacre and genocide against Bosniaks are written. To these Bosniaks we have to explain that by being Bosnians they are actually becoming the soldiers of Radovan Karadžić, Milorad Dodik and their Zionist sponsors and advisors (Fatmir Alispahić, 7 December 2012).<sup>10</sup>

Each Bosniak who has survived the genocide, each Bosniak who has lived in Sarajevo and only by Allah's will has been missed by the grenade or a Chetnik's bullet from the hill –has an obligation to identify himself as a Bosniak. If he does not declare as a

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10. Radovan Karadžić is the wartime political leader of Bosnian Serbs and is currently in trial at the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY). Milorad Dodik is the current leader of the Bosnian Serbs, widely criticised for his use of nationalist and separatist rhetoric. The reference to 'Zionist sponsors and advisors' is in line with a new radical nationalist rhetoric, which adopts anti-Semitic views of foreign Islamists, and is in contrast to the traditionally tolerant Bosnian Islam.

Bosniak it is as if that bullet from Trebević actually shot him (AKOS, 3 December 2012).<sup>11</sup>

The trauma of genocide during the 1992-1995 war, including the notorious Srebrenica case, is repeatedly utilised to taint those Bosniaks who wish to declare in the census in non-ethnic terms. All the above quotes use extremely emotional language with references to events that are deeply traumatic for Bosniaks. At the same, some references, such as being together with the creators of the Srebrenica genocide or being like soldiers of those who ordered it, must be understood as deeply offensive to any Bosniak and no less to those who wish to declare as Bosnians. Many of the latter have likely participated as combatants in the war, have been themselves injured or otherwise victimised, or have had victims in their families. In the same line is the following statement:

Insisting now, on the eve of the census, on someone to declare himself as a Bosnian, is the same like insisting on the arms embargo from the beginning of the aggression, on the pretext that there would be less killings and it would stop the war (Fahrudin Sinanović, SAFF, 7 December 2012).

This is another outrageous and offensive statement. The arms embargo is a reference to the attempts of the international community to prevent the spread of the wars in the 1990s by banning imports of weapons into the area. The effects of this

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11. Chetniks [*Četnici*] were the royalist and nationalist Serbian movement during the Second World War. The word is used in a derogatory sense to describe all Serbian nationalists. Trebević is a mountain near Sarajevo from where Serbian artillery attacks targeted the capital during the 1992-1995 war. The use of the word 'bullets' is also an implicit reference to Serbian snipers who killed many Sarajevo civilians during the war. The Bosnian Serb forces besieged the Bosnian capital for 1430 days. It is estimated that more than 14,000 people were killed or went missing in the wider area of pre-war Sarajevo city. The vast majority were killed in the besieged part of the city. For more, see IDC 2013.

was that those already heavily armed, mainly the Serbs, had the military advantage over those who could not secure arms to defend themselves, mainly the Bosniaks. The arms embargo was experienced as a treacherous act by the international community and the West, which left Bosniaks defenceless and which greatly aggravated their tragedy. Again here, declaring as 'Bosnian' is portrayed as a treachery on par with the role of the international community in the war.

Other statements about the census also focus on the sacrifices and the human cost paid during the war:

It is our obligation to declare ourselves as Bosniaks in the 2013 census; an obligation towards the *šehidi*, all those who were killed because they were Bosniaks (Sejfudin Tokić for AKOS, 3 December 2012).<sup>12</sup>

[...] to the local fools it is hard to explain that behind all this there is an intention to slaughter by pen that part of the population which escaped slaughtering under the knife, and this way deprive them of numerous rights and constituent status, and position them under the umbrella of 'Others' where it will be easy to manipulate and persecute them, here and there, over again (Faruk Vele, Islamic Community in BiH, 14 December 2012).

The above quotes construct an obligation in the name of all Bosniaks who lost their lives during the war. What is particularly interesting in the use of language of the second quote is the implicit reference to ritualised atrocity and dehumanising killing in the hands of the enemy, which took place during the 1992-1995 war.<sup>13</sup> This traumatic wartime experience is directly associated to the census which is depicted also as a slaughter with the intention of relegate the status of Bosniaks and turn

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12. 'šehidi' or 'martyrs' are Muslims who have laid down their life fulfilling a religious commandment, or have died fighting or defending their faith or family. Bougarel (2007) has analysed the 'cult of *šehidi*' in the Bosniak-dominated part of Bosnia since the 1992-95 war.

13. For an analysis of the issue, see Allcock 2000: 398ff.

them into a weaker minority group (and not a constituent nation) that could easily be manipulated and persecuted.

Except seeing the main threat coming from the Serb and Croat political elites in Bosnia, the prominent figures in the pro-Bosniak census campaign blamed other external and internal actors for ‘confusing’ their fellow nationals. Sejfudin Tokić, the spokesman of the BJBB coalition, wrote that ‘some NGOs’, with financial help from abroad, ‘tried to accomplish those goals which in the latest aggression on Bosnia and Herzegovina could not be accomplished by neither Milošević nor Tuđman’<sup>14</sup> (Bosnian Genocide, 18 February 2013). Similarly, Fatmir Alispahić, an influential radical nationalist publicist, emphasized that the census represents a long-prepared project of the ‘NGOs and some Serb and Croat media in Sarajevo’, with an aim to force Bosniaks to identify themselves as Bosnians and thus lose their identity, as ‘being Bosnian means being nothing’ (SAFF, 7 December 2012). The same author characterized the 2013 census as created and conducted with the ‘genocidal intent’ to reduce the number of Bosniaks in Bosnia, orchestrated in neighbouring Serbia and Croatia, and helped by the Bosniak political elites. Through the pages of the SAFF journal (11 October 2013), Alispahić accused Bosniak politicians of participating in a ‘joint criminal enterprise’<sup>15</sup> with the Serb elites from Belgrade because they have not objected the ‘genocidal’ content of the Law on Census. All this, which according to Alispahić represents ‘the continuation of the Srebrenica genocide by other means’, is supported by the international community. The latter, argues Alispahić, introduced the arms embargo during the war and approved the genocidal population census two decades after.<sup>16</sup> The idea that the international

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14. The wartime political leaders of Serbia and Croatia respectively.

15. ‘Joint criminal enterprise’ is a legal doctrine used by the prosecution in the ICTY to prove political and military leaders’ responsibility for mass war crimes and genocide committed during the Yugoslav wars 1991-1999 (Bigi 2010).

16. Fatmir Alispahić, Panel/public debate on the 2013 population census in Gornja Maoča, 13 September 2013, available at: <http://www.youtube.com>.



community is essentially anti-Islamic and, thus, anti-Bosniak is also promoted by the prominent intellectual Esad Duraković:

Bosnia is the only country in Europe in which Muslims, i.e. Bosniaks, are the state-forming nation [...]. It does not suit Europe! [...] Now the census is being prepared in such a way so that the Bosniaks declare their identity as 'this and that', but that they lose in the end the constituent people's status. All this, in my opinion, is the goal of many countries of the international community (TRT Bosanski, 25 December 2012).

### *Bosniaks in Republika Srpska: The census as legalisation of ethnic cleansing*

The second narrative line puts a special emphasis on concerns over the status of the Bosniak community in the predominantly Serb entity of Bosnia called Republika Srpska. The Bosniak campaign aimed to educate Bosniak returnees in Republika Srpska about the importance of declaring the 'right' identity and to encourage Bosniak diaspora to participate in the very process.

The Republika Srpska, initially proclaimed by Serb nationalists in 1992 and later recognised as an entity by the Dayton Peace Accord in 1995, has been viewed by Bosniaks as a 'genocidal creation' [genocidna tvorevina], a political entity built on the acts of forcible expulsion, ethnic cleansing or genocide against the Bosniaks.<sup>17</sup> Indeed, many municipalities that now belong to the RS had before the war majority or significant minorities of non-Serbs. These populations became the target of an aggressive military campaign, especially in the first six months of the war,

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com/watch?v=8TnlAaNHCTg. It is characteristic of the complex and ambivalent post-war Bosnian politics that both Sejfudin Tokić and Fatmir Alispahić were during the 1992-1995 war among the most militant anti-nationalists opposing both the homogenising campaigns of SDA and the increasing religious influence among Bosniaks.

17. For an academic analysis of this argument see Bećirević 2009.

which virtually 'emptied' the Serb-controlled territories of non-Serbs. Despite the efforts of the international community only a limited number of Bosniaks and others returned in the RS.<sup>18</sup> The incomplete and problematic return process, reverse migration as a result of socio-economic disadvantage, bureaucratic pressure and the inflammatory nationalist rhetoric by Bosnian Serb politicians are among the many reasons that led to the dwindling of Bosniak demographic presence and weakened political role in the RS. These reasons, together with a general difficulty to mobilise Bosniaks in the RS and the dilemma over the 'Bosniak vs. Bosnian' identification, have made Bosniak leaders particularly nervous over the census results. What is at stake is the preservation of the already limited Bosniak power in RS and their ability to influence the political developments in this entity. Thus, many Bosniaks fear that the population census will confirm that few Bosniaks are left in the RS and that, despite all efforts, Bosnian multi-ethnicity is lost forever. This in turn might encourage separatists among Serbs and Croats and ultimately deprive Bosniaks of part of the Bosnian territory. All these concerns are reflected in the following statements:

Bosniaks have experienced genocide and ethnic cleansing, and this population census will be the stamp of an expert witness to it (Anadolu agency, 29 October 2012).

The population census in Bosnia (...) is politicized, under the control of the occupying government of the RS, with a tendency to marginalise Bosniaks, eliminate Bosniak diaspora, and officially confirm the results of the aggression (Raja Chicago, 17 December 2012).<sup>19</sup>

We have to realise that the forces that wanted the destruction of Bosnia and Bosniaks have not disappeared, they are still here,

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18. For a comprehensive analysis of the international community-led refugee and displaced persons return process, see Toal & Dahlman 2011.

19. *Raja Chicago* is a web magazine of the Bosniak diaspora in Chicago, USA.

present in the political life, having political power [...] They would prefer to continue this process and the work done by Milošević, Karadžić, Tu man and Boban, a work that begun by slaughtering and murdering and ended in genocide. [Just this time] instead of doing it with shells and bullets, [they would realise it] with the population census... (Fahrudin Sinanović, AKOS, 27 November 2012).<sup>20</sup>

The Party of Democratic Action (SDA) also addressed concerns over the effects of ethnic cleansing and the reflection in the census results. SDA invited all citizens to be enumerated in their 1991 places of residence, no matter where they now live. The party specifically emphasized that this is important for those Bosniaks who come from regions where ‘due to genocide and persecution, a drastic change in the ethnic structure of the population has taken place’ (Moje Vijesti, 6 July 2013). The importance of the question of declaring the Bosniak identity in the RS has also been underlined by Srebrenica survivor and activist Emir Suljagić, the coordinator of the coalition ‘First of March’ [Prvi mart], a civil society coalition of Bosniaks in the RS.<sup>21</sup> Even though Suljagić himself admitted that he was going to declare his identity as ‘Bosnian’, he stressed that the government of the RS has been wishing for years to ‘reduce the number of Bosniaks to the level of a statistical error’, that this population census would serve as a ‘new instrument for a violent attack on the territorial integrity of Bosnia’, and therefore it was of crucial importance that Bosniaks in the RS identify as such.<sup>22</sup>

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20. Mate Boban was a Croat politician in BiH and wartime president of the self-proclaimed Croatian Republic of Herceg-Bosna.

21. ‘First of March’ coalition aims to gather together and coordinate civil society organizations, victims’ associations, veterans’ associations, organizations of returnees, refugees and displaced persons, that work towards uncovering the truth, fight against genocide and the protection of human rights of returnees in Republika Srpska, available at: <http://www.prvimart.ba/>.

22. Emir Suljagić, Panel/public debate on the population census, November 2012, available at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pAsnjVOCHK4>.

The Bosniaks were also concerned about the participation of their diaspora in the 2013 population census, as Article 7 of the Law on Census provides that persons who do not live or do not expect to live in the place of enumeration for a continuous period of at least twelve months, will not be counted in the total population of the enumerated area. Some opinion makers among the Bosniak diaspora recognised in this provision the RS government's intent to 'legalise the ethnic cleansings of the 1990s' and create conditions for its separation from the Bosnian state:

The census introduces the final phase of eliminating refugees and displaced persons: their removal from the population register of Bosnia and Herzegovina. (Raja Chicago, 17 December 2012)

Separatists from the RS await this census as a tool for demolition of the state, which will help them to eliminate Bosniak diaspora and give the decisive blow to Bosniaks in Bosnia. (Raja Chicago, 17 December 2012)

### *Conclusions*

The October 2013 population census in Bosnia and Herzegovina was a highly politicized process, imbued with heated debates and aggressive campaigns that surrounded the question of identity. In every multi-ethnic society, expressing one's identity is an important segment of the population counts. But in Bosnia this question has carried a special weight. Since the end of the armed conflict in 1995, political power has been shared among the three nations constitutionally acknowledged as 'constituent'. Despite legally guaranteed equality, a group's numerical advantage can certainly become an infinite source of political legitimacy and a strong argument in political competition, insofar as each of the constituent nations have different stances on various issues important for the country's functioning and organisational set up. Therefore, the population census was perceived as a crucial step in this process, even more so because it

was the country's first demographic count since the introduction of the current political and institutional arrangement.

The different census campaigns, to a lesser or greater extent, employed narratives that exploited the recent wartime past for strengthening their arguments and gaining sympathy for their appeals. War narratives and memories are still a central component of Bosnian everyday life. They play an important role in keeping the country's political and social landscape divided along ethnic lines. And they are actively used by political elites of all colour for scoring political points. The higher the stakes for any certain group's political position, the more frequent and more aggressive wartime narratives are likely to become.

The narratives of the wartime past have been used the most by the pro-Bosniak census campaign as one part of the Bosniak population feels threatened by identity ambivalence and the consequences of the dilemma 'Bosniak or Bosnian'. Thus, the population census played an important role for the Bosniaks in two aspects: one is the opportunity to use the census for identity-building process and in response to the 'Bosnian' campaign; the other is to consolidate political power on the basis of the census results or prevent other groups from exploiting the results for the same purpose. The explanation for the extensive use of wartime narratives lies partly in the fact that the past plays an important role in all nationalist narratives and identity-building processes and partly in the fact that the recent Bosnian past represents a very effective tool for use in political competition. Bosniak perceived victimisation served the purpose of justifying the actions of their political representatives in the present and providing necessary political capital and legitimacy.

The pro-Bosniak census campaign attempted to depict the Bosniak nation as a constant victim of aggressive Serb and Croat nationalisms, whose most recent manifestations were the mass expulsions, ethnic cleansing and genocide against Bosniaks in the 1992-1995 war. Ethnic cleansing and genocide have been exploited as themes due to their emotional load and significance for the Bosniak population. It was primarily stressed

in the campaign that if Bosniaks do not declare their identity as such and thus lose their numerical advantage, they would consciously choose to give up their historical territory and political role. In this view, if not prevented by Bosniaks themselves, the census could represent nothing less than a continuation of genocide by other means. As this paper has demonstrated, the use of highly emotional and historically charged language and narratives came together with the high stakes that the pro-Bosniak campaign saw in the 2013 population census.

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