WHAT IS A NATION?
The Case of Bosniaks, Croats, & Serbs as the Case for Renan
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Ernest Renan (1823-1892)

The existence of a nation is a daily plebiscite...

Forgetting, I would even go so far as to say, historical error is a crucial factor in the creation of a nation.

In his lecture delivered at the Sorbonne on March 11, 1882, which was later published as an essay entitled What is a Nation? (Qu’est-ce qu’une nation?), Ernest Renan gave one of the most astute, concise, and convincing answers to this question.¹ For more than a century now his answers have directly or indirectly influenced countless works on the subject by political philosophers, sociologist, social psychologist, anthropologists, political scientists, and historians. Among these scholars of nation and nationalism one encounters the names of Ernest Gellner, Eric Hobsbawm, Benedict Anderson, Clifford Geertz, Anthony Smith, and many others. Yet, if one is looking for a summary of the entire 20th century scholarship related to the nation building theory, one could simply return to Renan’s essay.

To put it briefly, whereas German writers, like Johann Gottlieb Fichte, defined the nation by objective criteria such as race or ethnic group (das Volk), Renan claimed

¹ Ernest Renan, “Qu’est-ce qu’une nation?,” in Oeuvres complètes, (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1947-61), vol. I, pp. 887-907, for English translations of the essay see:
that the usage of these criteria is arbitrary and that the nation is primarily defined by the *willfulness to live together*. In other words, Renan declared that the existence of a nation was essentially based on a “daily plebiscite” (*un plébiscite de tous les jours*), positive shared memories, even more importantly common suffering, and, above all, on *oblivion*. Hence, neither race, nor language, nor religion, nor culture, in Renan’s opinion, were deciding factors in the creation of either the German and French nations in the 19th century or of the ancient Greek, Jewish, or Armenian polities.

On the following pages, I reexamine the validity of this conclusion by Renan while contrasting and comparing it with the views of other scholars of nationalism and testing their hypotheses on the cases of the Central Western Balkan nations – the Bosniaks, Croats, and Serbs.

1.1. The Problem Of The Tower Of Babel

Most scholars would agree that to enter the field of social sciences with a few basic questions regarding the vocabulary pertaining to the theory of the national identity building means to enter the Tower of Babel construction site. The main problem of the scholarship on national identity is that there is a myriad of often confusing definitions of the key terms in the discussion, like nation, ethnicity, state, and nationalism. The term *nation* is often used as a synonym for the term *state*. In parallel, there is the term *nation-state*. Even more importantly, the fine line between the terms *nation* and *ethnicity* is often unclear. It is generally assumed that culture defines ethnicity, while politics defines nation. However, it is practically impossible to find a culture that has not been influenced by politics and politics that has not claimed to be protecting a tradition, i.e., a culture. Furthermore, the boundary between nationalism and patriotism is equally blurred, especially in the vocabulary of nationalists. Finally, what one scholar may call a national liberation movement, another

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may call a nationalist movement, with pejorative connotations. In addition to all of this, there is a problem with translating some terms from one language into another, and especially so in the case of differing political and social systems, such as the East European vs. the West European vs. the American system.

The imbroglio of definitions of the key terms in the discussion seems to be at the same time the result and cause of two essential academic debates on nation. The first debate between primordialists and perennialists, on one side, and modernists, on the other, is over the antiquity of nation. In this debate ethnosymbolists try to be somewhere in between, although terminologically speaking, they seem to be closer to the modernists. The second debate is over the nature of ethnic ties between primordialists, perennialists, and ethnosymbolists, on one side, and instrumentalisists and constructionists, who are mostly modernists, on the other. It is necessary at the very outset to emphasize that none of the abovementioned schools of thought is totally monolithic, but that their adherents often differ among themselves as to some specific issues. However, there are some essential ideas shared by all supporters within each theory. Due to the limitations of this paper, I shall try to focus only on the main issues of the debates and on the commonly shared opinions within each school. As we shall see, my research on the case of Bosniaks, Croats, and Serbs favors the modernist, instrumentalist, and constructionist views.

1.2. Debate On The Antiquity Of Nation

1.2.1. The Primordialists’ Views

One of the two main issues which troubles the researchers of nationhood is the question of the antiquity of nation, i.e., the question of when a nation was born. The primordialists’ view in this regard is very simple and clear. Since primordialists “hold that nationality is a ‘natural’ part of human beings, as natural as speech, sight or smell,” they believe that “nations have existed since time immemorial.”

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1.2.2. The Perennialists’ Views

Without subscribing to the view that nation is a result of any kind of primordial or natural ties, Anthony Smith clarifies, some scholars suggest that the nation is a “transhistorical phenomenon, recurring in many periods and continents, irrespective of economics, political, and cultural conditions.” ⁴ Smith names these scholars “perennialists.” The term perennial can equally mean constant, as well as recurrent and as such perfectly applies to both forms of perennialism – the continuous and recurrent perennialism.

One of the most prominent representatives of continuous perennialism is Adrian Hastings. ⁵ Hastings believes that nation was born with the birth of written literature in vernacular language. Consequently, in most cases the nation could be considered as being born in the Middle Ages. Hence, Hastings suggests, for instance, that the Anglo-Saxon kingdom of King Alfred and his successors already constituted an English nation that survived in a continuum until today. As much as the invention of the alphabet marked the beginning of history and civilization, analogously, perennialists claim, the appearance of written vernacular literature should be considered a mark of the beginning of national civilizations, i.e., nations. As we can see, perennialists put a lot of stress on language, culture, and religion. Consequently, according to them, the education of people in their vernacular is the key factor in the national identity development process. However, it is highly questionable how much average people of the Middle Ages really wrote and read in their native tongue. I am not referring here to elites, but rather to serfs. The Bosnian medieval historiography

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does not seem to provide any documents, which would prove a general “high reading culture” at the given time. The situation seems to be similar all over Europe.

Another continuous perennialist whom I would like to introduce here is Hugh Seton-Watson. Seton-Watson’s views are intriguing, because he evidently applies a double standard in determining the birth of nation. Thus, he agrees with modernists that nation and nationalism, as an ideology and movement, are recent and novel, however, only in the case of “new nations” – Czechs and Slovaks, Rumanians, Bulgarians, Serbs and Croats, Ukrainians, Estonians, Azeris, Kurds, Syrians, Pakistanis, Malaysians, and Indonesians. According to Seton-Watson, these new nations were “created deliberately and often swiftly” as an outcome of treaties after long warfare, such as the Napoleonic wars or World War I. On the other side, “old continuous nations” – France, England, Scotland, Holland, Castile, Portugal, Denmark, Sweden, Poland, Hungary, and Russia – started slowly forming their national identity in the early Middle Ages. As to these “old” nations, Seton-Watson explains that “[the] long process by which in Europe sovereign states arose and nations were formed has its origins in the collapse of the Roman Empire, the attempts to revive imperial power, the slow decay of the revival, and the still slower withering away of its mythology.”

Theoretically speaking, it could be claimed then that, for instance, the early medieval Bosnian state was also formed after the fall of the Roman Empire and that the country was independent, which could have given her its peculiar character and identity. However, this does not mean, in my opinion, that the early medieval Bosniak or Charlemagne’s subjects could be considered nations in the sense in which we perceive the modern-day Bosniak or French nations.

The recurrent perennialists believe that “nations, national identities and even nationalisms may come and go, but the phenomenon itself is universal and, as a form

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of association and collective identity, disembedded.”

Thus, for instance, Eduard Meyer asserts that there were three nations even in antiquity – the Greeks, the Persians, and the Jews – and that they have reappeared as nations several times in history.

It is interesting to notice that continuous perennialists are mostly medievalist historians, most of them focusing on Western societies. On the other hand, recurrent perennialists are mostly ancient historians. It appears that scholars tend to place the birth of nation in the age in which they specialize.

1.2.3. Ethnosymbolists’ Views

In regard to the question of the antiquity of nation, as the founder of the ethnosymbolism Anthony Smith himself states, ethnosymbolists try to find a “midway” between the polarized and seemingly irreconcilable views of modernists and perennialists. Modernists, like Susan Reynolds, insist on the autonomy of each historical epoch and accuse perennialists of transferring ideas and concepts from the modern into earlier epochs. Along the same lines, John Breuilly does not accept any kind of nationalism before the 18th century. On the other hand, perennialists believe that such a separation of epochs is artificial, i.e., that there has had to be some flow of cultural and political identities over the borders of historical eras. Thus, at least in the cases of the so-called “old nations,” perennialists see continuity and regard early medieval polities as embryos of modern nations.

However, although at first sight diametrically opposite, some perennialists and modernists are willing to bargain. Thus, as we saw earlier, the perennialist Seton-Watson believes that East European and some Asian nations are definitely modern. On the other side, the modernist Reynolds allows that “barbarian kingdoms,” such as Saxons, Lombards, Franks, Visigoths, and Anglo-Saxons, shared many of the same features and functioned in similar ways as modern nations. However, in spite of all of

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8 Anthony Smith, The Nation in History, p. 35.
9 Ibidem, p. 41.
these similarities, Reynolds still identifies these kingdoms as “communities of custom, law, and common mythological descent” and never as “nations.”

How does ethnosymbolism find that “midway” in the polarization between modernists and perennialists? And how is the ethnosymbolist theory new and different? In regard to the antiquity of nation, Anthony Smith, does not seem to be very inventive. As we shall see, his theory essentially does not differ at all from the modernist view, as presented by Susan Reynolds. Thus, Smith agrees with modernists that nations are fundamentally a modern phenomenon and rejects the perennialists’ views about the political continuity of nations. On the other side, ethnosymbolists criticize modernists for beginning “their analyses of nations and nationalism from a modern, even contemporary standpoint, or from a predicted future.” What ethnosymbolists stress is the need to treat nations and nationalisms as collective cultural identities and ideologies over “la longue durée,” i.e., over a long span of time. From this stress on ethnic and cultural continuity ethnosymbolism derives its name. Smith introduces the concepts of “ethnie” to describe cultural identities from the premodern times and “nation” to describe the modern national identities. However, in stating this, Smith does not seem to be original. No modernist has ever completely denied the cultural influences of premodern epochs on modernity. Smith’s “ethnies” are in no way different from Reynolds’ “cultural communities.” Thus, as to the antiquity of nation, Smith could be considered a modernist. The difference between ethnosymbolists and modernists (the latter are also instrumentalists and constructionists) primarily lies in the ways that they treat the question of the nature of ethnic ties, about which I shall speak in due course.

Furthermore, Smith, as stated earlier, although in disagreement with continuous perennialists as to the political continuity of European nations, advocates the cultural continuity of ethnies. However, recurrent perennialists, too, have always used cultural continuity to prove the reasons for recurrence of nations. How then is Smith’s theory

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different from the recurrent perennialists’ theory? In order to answer this question, we
have to look more closely at Smith’s definition of nation and ethnie.

The main difference between ethnie and nation, in Smith’s opinion, is that
while “ethnies are defined largely by their ancestry myths and historical memories;
nations are defined by the historic territory they occupy and by their mass, public
cultures and common laws.”\textsuperscript{13} When stating this, Smith is aware that according to his
given definition of nation, the first-century-C.E. Jews and Armenians could be
regarded as nations. However, for Smith they are only “approximating to the ideal type
of nation.”\textsuperscript{14} With this latter statement, Smith’s theory begins to appear inconsistent
and self-contradictory. Many scholars have criticized ethnosymbolists from different
angles, exactly for being “conceptually confused.”\textsuperscript{15}

1.2.4. Modernists’ Views

Modernists derive their name from their opinion that nations and nationalism
are modern phenomena, i.e., that nation was born in the 18\textsuperscript{th} and 19\textsuperscript{th} century. In
Walker Connor’s words, nations are “mass phenomena” involving \textit{common citizenship}
for all members “at least in theory.” As it is largely accepted, the concept of \textit{civic society}
and the increase of an urban working population were brought about through
the French revolution and industrialization. Thus, according to modernists, and
especially those of Marxian orientation, the nation is interpreted as a product of the
bourgeoisie or the result of societal evolution and economic changes. Furthermore, the
modernists also consider Romanticism and Enlightenment as equally important in the
nation building process. Thus, like perennialists, modernists also believe that improved
\textit{education} for larger masses became the seed of nationhood, however, at a much later
time. As a consequence of \textit{mass education}, a larger intellectual elite appeared who in
turn played an important role in promoting and enhancing education and national
ideology. Thus, for Ernest Gellner, “the tidal wave of modernization eroded traditional

\textsuperscript{13} Ibidem, p. 65.
\textsuperscript{14} Ibidem, p. 63.
\textsuperscript{15} Umut Özkermlı, \textit{Theories of Nationalism}…, pp. 183-189.
role-based societies and replaced them with literate ‘high’ cultures in the swollen, anonymous urban centers.”\textsuperscript{16}

Hence, the modernists find the ultimate root of nation in the \textit{constitutionalism} of the French revolution, i.e., in its \textit{Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen (Déclaration des droits de l’homme et du citoyen)} of 1789. Nation was essentially born out of the principle of \textit{popular sovereignty}, which rose in opposition to the principle of the divine right of kings that characterized the French monarchy. The \textit{Declaration} eliminated the special rights of the nobility and clergy and guaranteed \textit{social equality among citizens}, at least in theory. In the \textit{Declaration}, it is stated that “all the citizens, being equal in the eyes of the law, are equally admissible to all public dignities, places, and employments, according to their capacity and without distinction other than that of their virtues and of their talents.”\textsuperscript{17} Fundamental rights, not only for the French citizens, but for “all men without exception” were set forth in the \textit{Declaration}. However, the status of women or slaves was not explicitly addressed in the \textit{Declaration}. Therefore, it would not be incorrect to state that the concept of nation kept on developing, with its ups and downs, from the French revolution in 1789 until the mid 20\textsuperscript{th} century. By this time, most women and slaves around the world became political subjects and acquired the same rights as the white men. During this period, the concept of nation continued to be defined and redefined by scholars, depending on how they perceived the tie between an individual and her/his ethnos and nation.

\textbf{1.3. Debate On The Nature Of Ethnic Ties}

The second question upon which researchers of nationhood have not been able to agree is the question of the nature of ethnic ties. It is not by chance that we are talking here about the nature of ethnic ties instead of national ties. The former term is more universal and transhistorical. It should also be noted that the boundary between

\textsuperscript{17} \textit{Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen}, point 6, from the Human Constitutional Rights website http://www.hrcr.org/docs/frenchdec.html (accessed on November 26, 2008).
the terms ethnicity and nation is in some theories so vague that, for instance, in the vocabulary of the primordialists and perennialists there is no difference between the two terms. Thus, in his elaborations on the antiquity of nation, John Armstrong states that the perennialism of nation reflects the very nature of the ethnic bond. What Armstrong implies here is that since ethnicity and nation are actually identical in their nature, they have existed as one since ever. Through Armstrong we can best see how the debate in regard to the antiquity of nation is related to the debate of the nature of ethnic ties.

Hence, primordialists, perennialists, and ethnosymbolists believe that preexisting, pre-modern, religious, linguistic, and in general, cultural attachments, and historical memories are crucial in establishing ethnic and national identity, as well as in constraining the elites and shaping their outlooks and actions in regard to their communities. On the other side, instrumentalists and constructionists (who are mostly modernists) believe that the elites manipulate the existing ethnic symbols or construct new ones to mobilize masses and then use the nation as an instrument to gain political and economic power.

Neither constructionists nor instrumentalists completely deny the human and emotional attachment of elites to their communities, nor do primordialists, perennialists, and ethnosymbolists completely deny the possibility that the elites manipulate people’s ethnic feelings. The difference between the two sides in the debate is often rather a matter of emphasis and intuition than of completely opposing arguments. In any case, what is noticeable in the theories and approaches of all of the mentioned schools of thought is the frequent lack of well-based socio-psychological arguments.

1.3.1. Instrumentalists’ and Constructionists’ Views

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As stated before, instrumentalists and constructionists believe that the elites manipulate the existing ethnic symbols and construct new ones in order to mobilize masses and then use the nation as an instrument to gain political and economic power. The basic tenet of the instrumentalist and constructionist theory is the idea of the “falsity” of nations developed by Ernest Gellner and Eric Hobsbawm. When Gellner and Hobsbawm categorize the nation as “false” and “artificial” they actually mean that it is “invented.” They believe that the elites construct national traditions, mythology, and iconography in order to be able to manipulate people’s feelings. With the idea that national symbols are out of touch with historical facts, Gellner and Hobsbawm essentially repeat Renan’s maxim that historical error is a crucial factor in the creation of a nation.

Although I agree with Gellner’s and Hobsbawm’s general views in terms of mechanisms of national identity construction and with the falsity of national symbols, in regard to the deeper level of causality and functionality of the nation, I rather agree with another constructionist, Benedict Anderson, who advocates that the fact that nations are “imagined” does not imply that they are necessarily “false” or “artificial.” The nation is “real” regardless of whether it is a result of “manipulations,” “irrational assumptions,” “abstractions,” or “imagination.” What is so real about the nation then?

The constructionists’ initial mistake was that they extensively focused on the bourgeoisie and neglected the general population. By doing so, they failed to explain WHY the bourgeois national ideology finds such a powerful resonance among the people. Many constructionist theorists have noticed the need for studying the emotions of general population in order to answer this question and consequently to understand the nature of ethnic and national ties. Thus, for instance, analyzing the views of their primordialist opponents, Jack Eller and Reed Coughlan, complained about the “failure

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of sociology and anthropology to deal intelligibly with emotions.” They analyzed how religious or ethnic sentiments are induced in people and explained the success of nationalism through its ritualistic nature. Relying on Durkheim’s observations on religion, they concluded that national rituals “magically work their effects on participants making some sensations stronger and producing others at that very moment.”

Although Eller and Coughlan successfully described national rituals as mechanisms through which national sentiments are induced in people, I would not agree that national rituals exert any “magical” effects on people. Eller and Coughlan themselves also failed to successfully deal with human emotions, because they also focused on external stimuli (nationalist propaganda) and neglected internal emotional mechanisms within human beings. The strength of nationalist propaganda machinery does not explain the susceptibility of people to the machinery itself. In my opinion, only social psychology can explain human vulnerability to nationalist brainwashing, and as such, it has to be integrated into any study of nationalism.

The timing of national hysteria seems to uncover the very nature of ethnic and national bonds. It appears that religious, ethnic, and national iconography and rituals become prominent in times of economic crisis, internal political instability, impending war threat, or a mixture of these factors. This set of circumstances naturally makes people feel insecure and fearful for their basic existence. According to Abraham Maslow, the human need for safety takes second priority only to physiological needs. If the nation is what provides that security, individuals will adopt any given national identification, and the bond to the nation will be very real and strong, because it will be meaningful. The greater the threat, the stronger the bond.

In times when fear clouds one's reason, the question of the historical accuracy of national symbols, rituals, and traditions is totally irrelevant for the development of national feelings. What matters is what the given identity offers to people. And again,

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22 Ibidem, p. 193, italics mine.
if a national identification provides people with a feeling of psychological well-being (or even superiority) and with a feeling of security, they will adopt that national identity.

In sum, what is real about the nation is the internalized feeling of security that it offers to people in times of turbulence. What remains artificial about it is invented national origins, traditions, mythology, and iconography.

1.3.2. Primordialists’ Views

As stated earlier, primordialists believe that there is a “primordial, ineffable, at times overpowering, and coercive” bond between an individual and his ethnic and national group.\textsuperscript{24} They are convinced that that natural and powerful tie works equally with the elites, as it does with common people, and that it shapes the elites’ attitudes and actions regarding their ethnicities and nations. Although at the first sight primordialism may appear as monolithic, it can be divided into three distinguishable branches – naturalist, sociobiological, and culturalist primordialism.

1.3.2.1. Naturalist primordialism

As to the naturalist primordialism, this approach is the most extreme one, most often rejected by scholars, and most frequently adopted by nationalists. Naturalist primordialism asserts that national identities are as much a natural part of human beings as any physiological organ. Consequently, since the bond between human being and her/his nation is natural, there is no distinction between nation and ethnicity, and nationalism seems to be an attribute of humanity in all ages. A man is born into a nation, so that her/his nation is “predetermined” or “naturally fixed,” i.e., one is born into a nation in the same way as s/he is born into a family.\textsuperscript{25} As such, national attachments are “unchangeable.” Furthermore, naturalist primordialists hold that the


The world is divided into nations as a part of a natural order and these groups will “tend” to exclude each other.26

The major weakness of the naturalist theory, from which all of its other flaws emerge, is that it does not offer any scientific explanation for that “naturalness” of ethnic ties. It seems that naturalist primordialists allude to what Freud interpreted as people’s “natural” tendency to feel closeness toward their “leader” and “psychological group” (nation), because they perceive them as imaginary extensions of the father and paternal home. However, Freud did not believe that the selection of “ego-ideal” (leader) is “naturally fixed,” but that it can be influenced by one’s fellow men and public opinion in the mature age of an individual, as much as by the parents in the early age.27

Hence, what naturalists failed to realize is that the attachment to nation is arbitrary, because it ceases to exist as soon as the nation stops emulating the safety of the paternal home. Therefore, it could not be concluded that national and ethnic identification is “unchangeable.” As Renan said, the existence of a nation is [a matter of] a daily plebiscite. Further on, if the environment in which one happily grows up is multi-ethnic, then there is no “natural” reason for that person to exclude “the other” or to feel better in a mono-ethnic environment.

Naturalist primordialists are correct when they pay attention in their wording and state that national groups “tend” to exclude others. This means that they do not necessarily have to do so. However, the key question is when and why they do so. Only when people feel a threat to their own existence will they tend to exclude the other. Hence, if the goal of studying nationalism is to prevent future conflicts, then one of the most important factors, if not the only one, to be taken care of is the establishment of a feeling of security for all. That is achieved by ensuring economic security, political stability, and the rule of law.

1.3.2.2. Sociobiological Primordialism

Sociobiological primordialism is in many instances identical to the naturalist primordialism. The basic difference is that sociobiological primordialism provides much more sophisticated genetic, physiological, and behavioral arguments. However, in my opinion, sociobiological primordialism does not consistently explain the psychological dynamics of identification either.

The basic question asked by sociobiology is: why are animals social, that is, why do they cooperate? According to Pierre van den Berghe, the main representative of the sociobiological approach to nationalism, the answer to this question was long intuitively known: “Animals are social to the extent that cooperation is mutually beneficial.”

Needless to say, van den Berghe believes that the same applies to human beings. Hence, van den Berghe is convinced that both, animals and humans, are social and cooperative in order to survive and achieve psychological well-being.

Comparing human sociality with that of animals and elaborating on this topic, van den Berghe concludes that there are three crucial mechanisms in human sociality: kin selection, reciprocity, and coercion. Kin selection refers to mating and implies preference for mating with relatives. “Ethnic and race sentiments are to be understood as an extended and attenuated form of kin selection.” While the term “relatives” may mean people of the same ethnic or racial background, it does not have to be so. Van den Berghe clarifies that “only a few of the world’s societies use primarily morphological phenotypes to define themselves.” What is used mostly are cultural criteria of group membership. This means that even in mating people do not necessarily look for mates of the same “blood,” but rather of the same “culture,” whatever the term may mean to them.

As to reciprocity, van den Berghe defines it as a “cooperation for mutual benefit with expectation of return” and explains that “it can operate between kin and

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29 Ibidem, p. 403.
non-kin. Coercion is the use of force for one sided benefit.”

Van den Berghe advocates that all human societies continue to exist on all three principles of sociality. Further on, he adds that “the larger and the more complex a society becomes, the greater the importance of reciprocity.” He further expands his theory with a thought that most liberal sociologists find unacceptable, namely, that “while kin selection – real or putative – is more dominant in intra-group relations, coercion becomes the rule of inter-ethnic (or inter-racial) relationships. Ethnic groups may occasionally enter into a symbiotic, mutually beneficial relationship (reciprocity), but this is usually short-lived; relations between different groups are more often that not antagonistic.”

The greatest achievement of van den Berghe’s theory, in my opinion, is that he successfully identified the key reasons for human socialization and cooperation (and consequently identification) by finding them in sheer personal interests and benefits regardless of their nature. On the other side, the weakness of van den Berghe’s theory lies in its logic. If the true reasons for human socialization and cooperation are indeed the sheer personal interests and benefits, then there is no reason to believe that “cooperation for mutual benefit” would be more typical for intra-ethnic and “the use of force for one-sided benefit” for inter-ethnic relationships. It would be much more logical and consistent to assume that humans use both cooperation and force, in both intra-ethnic and inter-ethnic relationships, whatever works the best for their own interests and benefits in any given moment.

The sociobiological primordialists are aware that the protection of one’s own interests and benefits is aimed at the protection of one’s own feeling of safety. However, the key question now is where our feelings come from. “The first observation that psychology has made is that the very way our minds work – the way we process information – shapes the way we feel about ourselves and about others.”

This means that our emotions are produced by our thoughts and beliefs, besides by our biochemistry. That is where the second weakness of the sociobiological premordialism

31 Ibidem, p. 403.
32 Ibidem, p. 403.
33 Ibidem, p. 409.
lies. It is a quite natural phenomenon for a human to be angry and aggressive, but in order to feel so, one has to know or believe that s/he is threatened. Equally, human beings are friendly in their natural estate, i.e., whenever they feel safe and in balance. Certainly, these positive feelings also depend on our beliefs and thoughts. While both of our abilities, to be cooperative and to be coercive, are natural, whether we shall exert one or the other behavior depends on our perception of the reality. How we shall perceive reality depends on our religious and/or secular education, public opinion, and media. Therefore, not in human nature, but rather in the educational system one needs to look for the principal explanation for why people have historically been more cooperative within their own group and more hostile with others. Simply, people have been educated to view things in a certain manner and behave accordingly. Dogs and cats can be trained to live together. Why not different ethnic, religious, or racial groups?

1.3.2.3. Culturalist Primordialism

The most widespread form of primordialism is culturalist primordialism. As one can assume, culturalist primordialism also ascribes tremendous strength to ethnic, religious, and moral bonds and sees in them something inexplicable and spiritual. Within anthropology, the most prominent culturalist primordialist is Clifford Geertz. He describes humans’ “primordial attachment” to nation in the following way:

One is bound to one’s kinsman, one’s neighbor, one’s fellow believer, ipso facto; as the result not merely of personal affection, practical necessity, common interests, or incurred obligation, but at least in great part by virtue of some unaccountable absolute import attributed to the very tie itself. The general strength of such primordial bonds, and the types of them that are important, differ from person to person, from society to society, and from time to time. But for virtually every person, in every society, at almost all times, some attachments seem to flow more from a sense of natural – some would say spiritual – affinity than from social interaction.35

As we can see, having taken the ethnic ties as granted (ipso facto), Geertz abstracts and obscures them to the point of ascribing to them an “unaccountable absolute significance.” The nature of ethnic ties, in my opinion, does not fall into the realm of mystery, spirituality, or inexplicable natural laws, but is rather related to the factors, which Geertz minimizes in his statement above. People assign a special meaning to ethnic ties exactly because of that “personal affection, practical necessity, common interests, [and] incurred obligation.” In other words, meanings attributed to ethnic ties always reflect our conscious attempts to meet our basic needs for psychological well-being and survival. Psychology is unequivocal as to the reasons why people associate so strongly with their ethnic groups. Thus, in regard to the human search for the “similar others,” i.e., one’s own social group, the Bosnian psychiatrist, Dušan Kecmanović, states:

There are many reasons why people seek similarities. First of all, similar others are easier to talk to. Second, people like harmony, internal consistency, and cognitive consonance between different parts of their system of thought. ‘To encounter instances of similarities to oneself is to encounter such harmony and tension reduction, whilst instances of dissimilarities raise tension, cause internal discord and cry out for the effort of resolution.’ Third, consensual validation is one of the main reasons behind the attraction of attitude similarity. The fact that other people share my views testifies to the correctness of my attitudes; they are ratified and validated through consensual validation. Subsequently, I feel more competent in dealing with the world. ‘The search for and consequences of attitudinal similarity thus assume a functional significance for the individual.’

The “natural and spiritual affinity” toward one’s own ethnic or national group about which Geertz speaks has as its goal the achievement of “harmony” and “tension reduction” on which Kecmanović elaborates. For most of us, our paternal home and familiar sounds, smells, tastes, and images from our early childhood evoke the feeling of security and tension reduction. That is exactly what an adult seeks when identifying

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with her/his ethnicity. However, it is very important to notice that Kecmanović, like van den Berghe, does not imply that the “similar others” are necessarily defined through common language, race, or religion, but rather through common values and worldviews. Consequently, as one’s values and worldviews change, her/his social identification is also simultaneously altered.

It is very intriguing that Ernest Renan, who could be considered the forerunner of modernism and constructionism, also saw nation as a spiritual principle. However, unlike cultural premordialists, he tried to rationalize and explain that spiritual dimension of nation. Thus, for Renan:

A nation is a soul, a spiritual principle. Two things, which in truth are but one, constitute this soul or spiritual principle. One lies in the past, one in the present. One is the possession in common of a rich legacy of memories; the other is present-day consent, the desire to live together, the will to perpetuate the value of the heritage that one has received in an undivided form.  

However, being aware that the collective memories can be manipulated, Renan clarified his position stating that actually “forgetting, I would even go so far as to say historical error, is a crucial factor in the creation of a nation, which is why progress in historical studies often constitutes a danger for [the principle of] nationality.” Renan is fully aware that what will be forgotten and what will be remembered is decided by the elites. The crucial question now becomes the question of whether the elites are guided by their personal interests or cultural attachments, in the process of determining what their communities will and will not remember.

Unlike instrumentalists, the culturalist primordialists believe that it is primarily cultural attachments and not personal interests that shape the actions and attitudes of the elites in regard to their ethnicity and nation. For example, let us look at the case of the rise of Pakistani nationalism, which has many aspects in common with the nationalism of the Bosnian-Herzegovinan Muslims. The culturalist primordialist, Francis Robinson, believes that the attitude of the Pakistani Muslim elites was shaped

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38 Ernest Renan, “What is a nation?,” in *Becoming National: A Reader*, p. 52.
39 Ibidem, p. 45.
by traditional Islamic values and beliefs that required from them to safeguard their distinctive heritage and community, and seek greater autonomy and ultimately independence for the United Provinces in the northwest India and the Bengal. According to Robinson, “Islamic ideas and values … both provide a large part of the framework of norms and desirable ends within which the United Provinces Muslim elite take their rational political decisions, and on occasion act as motivating force.”

As we can see, Robinson stresses “ethno-religious attachments” of the elites. However, he also acknowledges the political rationality of the elites. For culturalist primordialists, as Anthony Smith stated, “primordial attachments are not nonrational, let alone irrational.”

On the other end of the discussion on the rise of Pakistani nationalism is Paul Brass who deems that the Pakistani Muslim elite had mobilized Muslim masses for the independence struggle by manipulating Islamic symbols. According to Brass, when mobilizing people, the Muslim elite had in their mind primarily their own political and economic interests. However, neither does Brass completely deny the ethno-religious attachments of the elites. On the contrary, he considers them powerful and lasting.

Robinson’s and Brass’s positions are both all-encompassing, and the difference between them lies, as usual, in emphasis. Thinking in terms of social psychology and keeping in mind Maslow’s pyramid of human needs that prioritize the physiological needs (air, water, food, sex) and safety needs over the esteem needs (self-esteem and respect for others), I find Brass’s view more convincing. In my opinion, it is very unlikely that most of the elite members would sacrifice their own class interests for any higher interest. First of all, they do not have to be in a dilemma at all. Elites are raised to believe that their class status is God-given and/or honestly earned by themselves or

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41 Anthony Smith, *The Nation in History*, p. 23.
their ancestors and, as such, is legal and legitimate. They can justify their struggle for their personal interests and social status as a part of the struggle for a general God-given religious, moral, and traditional order. This is exactly the case of the vast majority of the 19th century Bosnian Muslim landlords.

1.3.3. Ethnosymbolists’ Views

The views of ethnosymbolists in regard to the nature of ethnic ties are very similar to those of primordialists. In the words of its father, Anthony Smith:

Ethnosymbolism regards the central components of ethnic and national phenomena as both sociocultural and symbolic, rather than demographic and political. Apart from various symbols, like language, dress, emblems, rituals, and artifacts, these elements consist in memories, myths, values, and traditions and in the instrumentalized practices that derive from them. By 45

By stressing the sociocultural and symbolic components of ethnic and national phenomena and downplaying the political component, ethnosymbolists want to refute the constructionist and instrumentalist view that nation is a political construct and an instrument of the elites. However, when discussing how national symbols “give concrete meaning and visibility to the abstractions of nationalism,” Smith does not seem to differ at all from the constructionists and instrumentalists. He states that:

[The] representations and images of the nation exert a profound influence over large numbers of people, exactly because they can be very widely disseminated by the media. In each of these media, specific images of the nation and its liberation, its heroic past, and its glorious future can be created and purveyed, so that the nation ceases to be the abstract property of intellectuals and becomes the immemorial imagined community of all those designated as its members and citizens. By 47

By talking about nation as an “abstract property of intellectuals,” Smith obviously agrees with the modernists’ postulate that nation is an instrument of the elites. By

45 Anthony Smith, The Nation in History, p. 66.
46 Ibidem, p. 73.
47 Ibidem, p. 73, italics mine.
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stressing the role of the media, he also confirms the modernists’ claim that nation is a product of the massive manipulation of people by the elites, i.e., that it is a construct of the elite.

However, Smith expands his analysis and states that the elites would not be able to manipulate people if they had no prior emotional attachments to their ethnicities. I agree with this observation. However, in my opinion, Smith does not offer any thorough scientific elaboration and explanation as to WHY people have those “emotional attachments” to their ethnicities and nations. The salient point of Smith’s psychological analysis is the introduction of the concept of “love for nation” into the debate. Smith’s concept of “love” is not any more self-explanatory or any less obscure than Geertz’s “unaccountable absolute significance” ascribed to ethnic ties, or his “spiritual affinity” to an ethnic group. To support his view, Smith introduces analysis of the Lord’s song (Ps. 137:4-6), and concludes that the psalmist declares, “I must love my homeland and sacrifice my ‘chief joy’ for her.” Along the same lines, Smith agrees with John Armstrong that the only way to explain “mass national self-sacrifice” in combat for national liberty is through “love for and duty to their beloved city and homeland…”

Hence, Smith believes that the essence of ethnic ties lies in “love” for one’s own nation and that that love is so strong that people are willing “to lay down their lives for their nation.” According to Smith, love for nation is stronger than love for one’s own life. The problem with this analysis of human “national feelings” is that it stops where it should actually start. Smith never asks himself why people love their nations? One’s answer to this question determines one’s view in regard to the general theory on nationhood.

In my opinion, the ethnosymbolists’ emphasis on the power of “love for nation” (patriotism) and their idea of “mass national self-sacrifice” are simply exaggerations. So far as it is known to psychology, in the case of mentally healthy individuals, only

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49 Anthony Smith, The Nation in History, p. 60, italics mine.
50 Ibidem, p. 60, italics mine.
51 Umut Özkırımlı, Theories of Nationalism, p. 216.
maternal and paternal instincts can override the instincts for self-preservation. Therefore, what Smith sees as a “massive self-sacrifice” committed in the name of some abstract nation could rather be interpreted as a struggle against the common tangible enemy for the preservation of very concrete offspring. Heroes – people who consciously decide to risk their own lives to save others without asking for a reward – are rather exceptions who confirm the rule that the vast majority of people are more attached to their own life than to any moral or ethical principle, or any ethnic ties, or national interest.

What is intriguing about Smith’s vocabulary and arguments, as well as about the vocabulary and arguments of most primordialists, perennialists, and even some modernists is that they are based on abstract religious concepts. Thus, Anthony Smith speaks of nation as a “sacred community” based on “sacrificial and unconditional love.” The culturalist primordialist Clifford Geertz attributes the ethnic and national tie to an “unaccountable absolute significance.” No less abstractly, the constructionists, Jack Eller and Reed Coughlan, explain the bourgeois success in misleading people into nationalism through “magical” effects of nationalists’ rituals on general population. After hearing all of these phrases, it is no surprise that nationalism has often been identified as the “secularized god of our time.”

1.4. Nationalism As A Secularized God Of Our Time

The religious terminology used in the previous section to describe nation and nationalism opens a new, intriguing perspective on these two concepts. As Kecmanović stated, “Nationalism is … said to be the secularized god of our time…” The constructionists, especially those of Marxian provenience, view nationalism, like religion, as something that unnecessarily divides people and creates conflicts. Furthermore, they believe that nationalism, again like religion, will slowly die out as humanity moves forward from the age of superstition to the age of reason. They

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assume that through education people will become aware of the elites’ manipulation of ethnic symbols and of the invention of national myths, iconography, and relics.

Besides (Marxian) constructionists, ethnosophists also regard nationalism as a religion. While discussing the nation as a “sacred community,” Anthony Smith cites George Mosse’s opinion that “nationalism should be regarded as a popular form of civic religion, with a specific liturgy and rites appropriate to a secular, political religion of the masses.”

A discussion on nationalism as a form of religion is in my opinion of extreme importance, because it can efficiently summarize the debates on the nature of ethnic ties and the antiquity of nation. Representatives of all theories on nationalism agree that the phenomenon of nationalism is similar if not identical to the phenomenon of religion. However, by stating so they think of the outward imagery of nationalism and religion, i.e., of rituals, relics, icons, devotion, and unquestioned beliefs. In my opinion, exploring the essence of nationalism and religion brings us to a much deeper level of understanding of both of them. Nationalism tremendously resembles religion also due the fact that people establish and cherish attachment to the nation and religion for the same psychological reasons. People identify with national ideas, as with religious doctrines, in order to achieve a feeling of security, protection, and support.

How should we then define nationalism? Kellas sees it as both an “idea” and a “form of behaviour,” Kedourie as a “doctrine,” Smith as an “ideological movement,” Gellner as a “political principle,” and Calhoun as a “discursive formation.” In addition to these concise definitions, when attempting a thorough

53 Anthony Smith, The Nation in History, p. 74. This is Smith’s summary of Mosse’s views as expressed in his works:
George Mosse, Confronting the Nation: Jewish and Western Nationalisms, (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, Brandeis University, 1994).

definition of nationalism, one should not forget Smith’s exhaustive list of the logical corollaries of nationalism:

1. securing fraternity and equality among co-nationals or citizens by integrating them into a homogenous unit;
2. unification in a single nation-state of extraterritorial co-nationals;
3. stressing cultural individuality through accentuation of ‘natural’ differentiae;
4. a drive for economic autarchy and self-sustaining growth;
5. attempts to expand the nation-state to maintain international power and status;
6. renewing the cultural and social fabric of the nation through sweeping institutional changes, to maintain international parity.\textsuperscript{59}

From this list of the outcomes of nationalism it is possible to detect the motives, which make people adopt nationalism as an ideology, movement, and sentiment. Those motives appear to be of political, economic, and social nature, but ultimately they all can be explained as psychological. Hence, the motive behind all motives for people to engage in nationalism is to secure their survival and psychological well-being. Whether this goal can be achieved through nationalism in the long run is an entirely different question.

In times of economic crisis and political instability, people naturally feel insecure. The longer the period of tension, anxiety, and depression lasts, the more people turn to the secular “opium for people.” Yugoslavia of the early 1990s is a good example of what it looks like when fear explodes in a “national hysteria.” Looking at their fellow citizens from the side, Yugoslav anti-nationalists used to define nationalism neither as a religion, nor as an ideology, nor as a political movement, nor as a sentiment, but rather as a psychiatric diagnosis.

Leaving aside analogies between nationalism and religion or mental disease, and keeping in mind previously portrayed psychological, social, political, and economic dimensions of nationalism, it could be stated that

1) [Nationalism is] a political doctrine extolling the nation as a supreme value and representing it as a dominant principle of societal organization;\textsuperscript{60} and

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2) Nationalism a sentiment and ideology of attachment to a nation and to its interests.\textsuperscript{61}

1.5. An Attempt Of Defining Nation, Ethnicity, And State

In any study of nation, the hardest problem seems to be how to distinguish nation from ethnicity. Once again, the problem springs from the multiplicity of criteria used to define these two concepts. Of course, the selection of the key criterion depends on a scholar’s position in regard to the debates on the nature of ethnic ties and the antiquity of nation. Based on my previous analyses, I came to the general conclusion that our ethnic and national feelings are determined by our thoughts and beliefs. The latter are in turn determined by our environment – our society, as much as by our family.

Keeping that in mind, I would agree once again with Renan that personal and collective memories play the key role in identity construction, as well as in inter-ethnic relationships. If I were to prioritize, then I would say that human personal memories and experiences are the most important factor in the identity construction process. Collective memories are of secondary significance. Thus, if collective memories and experiences are in disagreement with personal ones, with time they will be superseded, especially if they become a psychological burden for an individual. Hence, more than language, dialect, even religion, or any other cultural artifact, personal and collective memories shape our personal and social identity. If we add to these factors the previously mentioned “harmony” and “tension reduction” that human beings feel when surrounded by similar people, then we have the complete psychological and cultural background through which ethnicity can be defined.\textsuperscript{62} Thus, it could be concluded that

\textsuperscript{62} Dušan Kecmanović, \textit{The Mass Psychology of Ethnonationalism}, p. 5.
**Ethnicity** represents a group of people who share some or all of the following elements of identity – personal and collective memories, language, dialect, religion, customs, culture, worldviews, and/or real or fictitious ancestors.

The very fact that members of an ethnicity do not have to share all elements of identity tells us a lot about the fluidity of ethnic identity. Thus, people can feel the attachment to as many groups as they want. As Crawford Young stated, “ethnicity is in its essence a subjective phenomenon.” Generally speaking, I agree with the central thesis of Young’s work *The Politics of Cultural Pluralism*, which reads “that the process of integration and disintegration, and crystallization of identity are dynamic; that the definition and boundaries of cultural groups are fluid rather than static; that the secular trend is toward broader patterns of incorporation, both at the national and sub-national level.”

While I consider ethnicity a “psycho-social and cultural concept,” as to the concept of nation, I agree with Francis Emerich’s view that nation “is not a scientific, but [rather] a political concept.” Does this mean that ethnicity is not related to politics at all? Not entirely. However, there seems to be a difference in the ways that ethnicity and nation are related to politics. In my opinion, it is completely legitimate to say that politics exerts a strong influence on people’s perceptions of their own and other ethnicities. However, what is important to notice here is that that influence is always one-directional – from politics to people. As long as the relationship between ethnicity and politics is not bi-directional, i.e., as long as the ethnicity or, put better, the ethnic elites do not start influencing politics, ethnicity remains ethnicity. On the other hand:

**Nation** is any group of people – one ethnicity or a group of them - who participate in political power through their representatives governing their (common) state.

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64 Ibidem, p. 11.
65 Emerich Francis, *Interethnic Relations*, p. xvi.
Hence, the relationship between politics and people in the case of nation is bi-directional.

These definitions of nation and ethnicity seem to be universal in the sense that they can be used across different political and social systems. Thus, for instance, American nation is a multi-ethnic nation. American ethnicities are not political subjects and as such are not represented in the American state institutions. On the other side, former Yugoslavia was a multi-national state, because different ethnicities as such were represented in state organizations. Although the concept may sound paradoxical in the West, former Yugoslavs were a “multi-national nation.”

As mentioned earlier, the main difference between ethnicity and nation, according to Anthony Smith, is that “[a] nation must possess its homeland; an ethnie needs not.” Modernists also agree with this view. So do I. Since the term state practically means “people organized with the goal to protect their territory,” it is actually a synonym for the term nation or for the phrase politicized ethnicity. Therefore, we can say that:

The state is a form of human association distinguished from other social groups by its purpose, the establishment of order and security; its methods, the laws and their enforcement; its territory, the area of jurisdiction or geographic boundaries; and finally by its sovereignty.

Summa summarum, I regard “ethnicity” as a psycho-social and cultural concept. Ethnicity offers to people psychological well-being through “tension reduction” as a way of connecting them with the similar others who do not necessarily need to belong to the same linguistic, religious, or racial, but rather cultural group. Through its network, ethnicity also provides for people’s physical survival that further enhances their psychological well-being and strengthens their ethnic bonds. The social network of ethnicity operates on the basis of unwritten moral, ethical, and/or religious

66 Anthony Smith, The Nation in History, p. 65, italics mine.
laws. On the other side, I consider “nation” a political concept, which represents a politically organized ethnicity or a group of ethnicities. Established nations possess a complete state apparatus and written laws.

The relationship between people and their nations is of a more dramatic nature than their relationship to their ethnicities. Nations emerge in times that require decisive political action, i.e., in the times of economic and political instability and/or cataclysm. The general population most often stops stressing its national identity and abandons nationalistic tendencies in times of peace and security, even to the extent of becoming completely apolitical.

1.6. Identity Creation And Change – The Bosnian Case

The case of the national identity construction of the Bosnian-Herzegovinan Muslims and their neighbors, Serbs and Croats, supports the modernist, instrumentalist, and constructionist view in regard to the antiquity of nation and the nature of ethnic ties. Even a brief exploration of the identity formation and change in Bosnia and Herzegovina gives a significant contribution to the general theory of identity formation mechanisms.

The first example from the Bosnian history, which implies that economic, political, and consequently social advantages are crucial in the nation building process, is the case of the Bosnian Muslim landowners who at the beginning of the 20th century created their national identity on the basis of their religious affiliation abandoning their original ethnic name “Bosniak.” They promulgated their Muslim nationality through their first political party called the Muslim National Organization (MNO), which was established in December 1906. The question is why these Bosnian Muslim landlords stressed the religious component of their identity instead of the ethno-regional one when establishing their national identity. It is true that the MNO and its successor, the Yugoslav Muslim Organization (YMO), definitely pleaded for the protection of the Islamic religious and cultural heritage, as well as for the cultural and political autonomy of Bosnia and Herzegovina. However, it seems that they decided to act
politically as Muslims primarily for the sake of their economic and political interests. Namely, from the very beginning of the Austro-Hungarian rule in Bosnia Herzegovina (1878-1918), whenever the Bosnian Muslim landlords were under the pressure of agrarian reforms, they insisted that Islamic law should prevail in relations between them and their serfs (mostly Christians) who worked their land. As Robert Donia concludes, “The Muslim activists were careful to cloak their goals in the garb of religious devotion, but their real objective was to preserve or increase their own power.”\(^{68}\) The fact that at the given time (until 1918) the Serbian Orthodox Kingdom had strong anti-Islamic sentiments and that the Bosnian archbishop Joseph Stadler (a Croatized Austrian Jesuit) was committed to converting Bosnian Muslims to Catholicism definitely helped the Bosnian Muslim landlords mobilize the largely apolitical Bosnian Muslim masses and gain their votes. It should be also added that if Islamic fanaticism were the main reason for these Bosnian Muslim landlords to build their national identity around Islam, then it would have been impossible for them to make political coalitions with Serb (Orthodox) and Croat (Catholic) political parties’ leaders. And, indeed, the condition which they used to impose on the Serb and Croat national parties for the political coalitions with them clearly reveals the main concern of the MNO and the main reason why they built their national identity on the basis of their religious identity. After the election of the Bosnian Parliament in 1910, at first the MNO was allied with the Serb National Organization (SNO), but only after the Serb leaders accepted to keep the issue of agrarian reforms off the agenda. However, the alliance ended in 1911 after the MNO leaders suspected that Serbian nationalists had initiated a peasant uprising directed against them. After the alliance with the SNO broke, the MNO made a new political alliance with the Croat National Union (CNU), but again only after the CNU leaders agreed not to oppose the continuation of Muslim landowner privileges.\(^{69}\) The fact that the national political program initiated by these Bosnian Muslim landlords had as its primary goal the protection of their personal


political and economic interest does not prove only that social advantages are crucial in the nation building process, but also that national identity in general is a political category, not a cultural one.

Furthermore, the following example from Bosnian history also proves that identity change is highly influenced by social advantages offered by the new identity, as well as that swift identity change happens almost exclusively among the higher social classes. Thus, in the late 19th and at the beginning of the 20th century the Bosnian Muslim landlords and their educated intellectual offspring not only made coalitions with the Serb and Croat national parties, but also declared themselves as Serbs or Croats, abandoning their Muslim nationality. Their new national identity reflected their membership in either the Serb or Croat coalition. Some of them even changed their coalitions and national identity several times. Since they conditioned their coalitions on the demand for agrarian privileges, it could be concluded that their national identity change was primarily influenced by economic and political advantages. This conclusion can be supported by “an editorial in the Yugoslav Muslim Organization’s journal [which] in 1920 openly recommended that Muslims should identify with whichever nation offered them the fairest chance of ‘economic development.’”

However, while Muslim elites kept on changing their national identity until 1941 between the Bosniak, Croat, Serb and Yugoslav option, the Muslim masses did not change their identity, because they were largely apolitical and did not understand either the concept of nation or the reason of why their elites chose to change their identity. Simply, they had nothing to gain by changing their identity. They simply remained that what they had been for centuries – Muslims. Thus, even in the census of 1948 only 72,000 Bosnian-Herzegovinan Muslims declared themselves as Muslim Serbs, 25,000 as Muslim Croats, and 778,000 as Muslims undeclared in the national sense. These facts, hence, prove once again that identity change occurs for the sake of economic and political advantages. They also confirm my previous conclusion that

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71 The figures are overtaken from Noel Malcolm, Bosnia: a Short History, pp. 197-8.
economic and political advantages enjoyed by the elites are crucial in the nation building process and, once again, that national identity in general is a political category, not a cultural one.

Another example from Bosnian, Croatian and Serbian history once again reaffirms my previous conclusions. Thus, for example, although at the end of the 19th century there were obvious cultural differences between the Orthodox, Catholic, and Muslim populations in Bosnia and Herzegovina forming three ethno-religious groups, the Croat and Serb nationalists were ready to overlook these differences, stress linguistic similarities, and claim that the Bosnian-Herzegovinan Muslims were actually Serbs or Croats of Islamic faith. This flexibility of Croat and Serb nationalism could have been legitimized on the basis of the ethno-linguistic principle. However, the fact is that both the Serb and Croat nationalists actually needed the Bosnian-Herzegovinan Muslims for their competing national causes. Thus, at the given time (after 1878) the Croats needed the Bosnian Muslims in order to be able to practically realize the political idea of Trialism within the Austro-Hungarian monarchy.72 On the other side, the Serbs needed the Bosnian Muslims to help them detach Bosnia-Herzegovina from the Austro-Hungarian Empire and unite it with the Serbian Kingdom. Furthermore, at the end of the 19th century the Croat nation not only encompassed people of different religions (Catholics and Muslims), but also people of different ethno-genetic and ethno-linguistic origins (štokavian Croats of Croatia and Slavonia, čakavian Croats of Dalmatia, kajkavian Croats of Zagorje, Austrians, Hungarians, Germans, Poles, Czechs, Italians, the catholicized Morlachs of Dalmatia and Lika, and the štokavian Bosnian Catholics who used to declare themselves as “Latins” in the ethnic sense). All of these people were mobilized by the Croat national leaders, sometimes in order to protect themselves from aggressive Hungarian domination and centralism, and sometimes from Serb domination. Equally, at the same time not only did the ethnic Serbs of Serbia start declaring themselves as Serbs, so did the Orthodox Christians in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the ethnic Vlachs of Serbia (who were Orthodox), as well as

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72 Trialism was the notion that the South Slav lands should be united under the aegis of the Habsburg Emperor to create a third, South Slav entity of Monarchy in addition to the Hungarian and Austrian ones.
the Orthodox Christian Roma of Serbia and Bosnia-Herzegovina. They were mobilized by the Serb national leaders at times because of the fear of the Ottoman, or of the Austro-Hungarian, or of Croatian centralism and domination.

1.7. Epilogue: “Historical error is a crucial factor in the creation of a nation...”

In the end, what is a nation? In the search for an answer to this question, my analyses have evolved around two main questions in the study of nationhood. The first question is the question of the antiquity of nation and the second one is the question of the nature of ethnic ties.

In regard to the question of the birth of nation, I concluded that it is placed at different eras by different scholars. Thus, primordialist believe that “nations have existed since time immemorial,” perennialists that nations are “transhistorical phenomena, recurring in many periods and continents, irrespective of economics, political, and cultural conditions,” and finally ethnosymbolists and modernists share the view that nation was born in the 18th and 19th century. I adopted the modernist view that the key criterion in determining the birth of the nation is the appearance of the constitution, which guaranties popular sovereignty and social equality among citizens. Hence, I concluded that the nation is born when people become political subjects.

Through analysis of the debate on the nature of ethnic ties, I generally agreed with constructionists who advocate that nation is a “political construct” and with instrumentalists who claim that elites use the concepts of ethnicity and nation as instruments in order to achieve their personal economic and political goals. Although I generally agreed with the constructionists, Eric Hobsbawm and Ernest Gellner, that nation and its traditions, myths, and iconography are “invented,” I rather agreed with another constructionist, Benedict Anderson, who claims that nation cannot be considered “artificial,” for it has its “natural” purpose. Nation seems to be perceived by general population as an instrument to achieve psychological security and physical survival. Keeping this psychological postulate in mind, I could not agree with primordialists, perennialists, and ethnosymbolists that social identity is
“predetermined,” “naturally fixed,” and “unchangeable.” People can and will alter their social identity if it does not serve its purpose – the fostering of psychological stability and physical survival.

If taken rationally, the identification process and ethnic ties do not appear as something completely abstract and intangible. However, the culturalist primordialist, Clifford Geertz, attributes the ethnic and national ties to an “unaccountable absolute import.” No less abstractly, the constructionists, Jack Eller and Reed Coughlan, explain the bourgeois success in misleading people into nationalism through “magical” effects of nationalists’ rituals on general population. The obscurity and mystification of ethnic ties continued with the ethnosymbolism of Anthony Smith, who spoke of nation as a “sacred community” based on “sacrificial and unconditional love.” After hearing all of these phrases, it is no surprise that nationalism is often identified as the “secularized god of our time.”

While presenting the above theories and my agreement or disagreement with them, I adopted the following definitions:

1) **Nationalism** is a political doctrine extolling the nation as a supreme value and representing it as a dominant principle of societal organization. **Nationalism** is also a sentiment and ideology of attachment to a nation and to its interests.

2) **Ethnicity** represents a group of people who share some or all of the following elements of identity – personal and collective memories, language, dialect, religion, customs, culture, worldviews, and/or real or fictitious ancestors.

3) **Nation** is any group of people – one ethnicity or a group of them - who participate in political power through their representatives governing their (common) state.

4) **The state / nation** is a form of human association distinguished from other social groups by its purpose, the establishment of order and security; its
methods, the laws and their enforcement; its territory, the area of jurisdiction or geographic boundaries; and finally by its sovereignty.

From the case of the national identity construction and change in Bosnia and Herzegovina and her neighbors, I have concluded that since the dialectological, religious, and cultural differences can be overlooked in the process of nation building, nations are not necessarily the result of the human attachment to one’s own ethno-symbolism, but rather a result of a political contract. People build, modify, and change their national identity under the influence of the current economic and political conditions to achieve physical safety and psychological stability. Since the identity of every ethnic group is multi-layered, i.e., composed of several elements (religion, moral codex, language, dialect, kinship, culture, historical memories), national ideologists can select and stress any of the given elements of ethnic identity to satisfy the needs of any national ideology. The elites are those who decide what people will learn and remember and what they will forget and how their identity will be shaped. In his essay *What is a nation?*, Renan concludes that “forgetting, I would even go so far as to say historical error, is a crucial factor in the creation of a nation, which is why progress in historical studies often constitutes a danger for [the principle of] nationality.” The case of Bosniaks, Croats, and Serbs proves Renan right.