

Spirit of Bosnia / Duh Bosne

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Mission Statement

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One over-looked casualty of the war in Bosnia is her collective commitment to a pluralistic, tolerant, integrated society. Unconscionable violence and vicious propaganda were brought to bear against her heritage, cultural convictions, social practices, and civic order—making it next to impossible for Bosnia to sustain her multi-confessional and syncretistic-informed traditions. Tone Bringa, author of *Being Muslim the Bosnian Way*, writes, “Neither Bosniak, nor Croat, nor Serb identities can be fully understood with reference only to Islam or Christianity respectively but have to be considered in a specific Bosnian context that has resulted in a shared history and locality among Bosnians of Islamic as well as Christian backgrounds” (2002:31). When one considers Bringa’s statement carefully, one understands that multiculturalism is a misnomer for recounting Bosnia’s heritage. In Bosnia, there were not multiple cultures co-residing in the same vicinity. Nor were there multiple cultures coexisting independently of each other. There was a singular culture that encompassed each ethnicity and made different faiths—Catholicism, Judaism, Islam, and Orthodoxy—culturally interdependent.

Notable scholars such as Ivo Banac, Tone Bringa, Robert Donia, John Fine, Ivan Lovrenovi?, Rusmir Mahmut?ehaji?, Noel Malcolm and others provide compelling accounts of how a vibrant, noble Bosnian tradition exists historically, culturally, and politically. This tradition, however, is either overlooked because of misleading or inadequate education or denied because of conflicting political agendas, whether local or international. What Rusmir Mahmut?ehaji? has called the denial of Bosnia occurs not only in policy but also in academic discussions. This non-recognition of Bosnia— – this failure to grasp what Bosnia is— – is common in scholarly contexts.

As the meticulous research of Andras Riedlmayer (1994) clearly demonstrates, the evil in the war against Bosnia was to eradicate as completely as possible the evidence of Bosnia’s heritage. The point was to destroy not only Bosnian communities (villages, towns, and cities), but also cultural material (libraries, mosques, churches, bridges, schools) that bore witness to the legacy of Bosnia’s heritage. What happened in Bosnia was not genocide alone— – the willful destruction of one community or group of people within a society. What happened in Bosnia can best be described as sociocide—the murdering of a complex, progressive, enlightened society in order that a simple, regressive, bigoted society could replace it (Doubt 2000).

Ivo Banac (193:138-39) makes the following observation.

If Bosnia were a collectivity of separate entities, then it would have been a mini-Yugoslavia. But it is not that. Bosnia is a historical entity which has its own identity

and its own history. . . . I view Bosnia as primarily a functioning society which Yugoslavia never was. My question is how does one keep a complicated, complex identity like Bosnia-Herzegovina together?

The mission of this journal, *Duh Bosne / The Spirit of Bosnia*, is to address the question posed by Banac openly and critically. Drawing upon the disciplines of anthropology, history, literary criticism, political science, sociology, and theology, the journal asks what it is about the Jerusalem-like configuration of faiths in Bosnia that made her vulnerable to the nationalism of her neighbors. What is it about Bosnia's enigmatic mixture of epochs, including a distinctive medieval period from the 13th to 15th centuries, the Ottoman Empire starting in the 15th century, the Austro-Hungarian Empire during the 19th century, and communist Yugoslavia during the 20th century that made her defenseless in the face of nationalistic nation-state building centered on a monolithic ethnicity? When one recognizes the principled and progressive character of the Bosnian heritage, recounted eloquently in many scholarly and literary works, one would predict that Bosnia would be the last place where ethnic cleansing could have occurred with such viciousness and sadism. Within former-Yugoslavia, Bosnia served as a compelling model for the civic society of the entire region. When Croatia and Serbia sought to build nation-states based on an antithetical model of civic order, the healthier and more progressive model found in Bosnia was a threat to her neighbors.

The tragedy of Bosnia after the war is that she does indeed have a trans-ethnic history and culture, but today there are few viable or functional trans-ethnic institutions to support, respect, and sustain her traditions and culture. International groups working in Bosnia inadvertently assume a shallow, instrumental, and formulaic relation to Bosnia, which makes it difficult for Bosnia as a society to re-establish the trans-ethnic institutions she needs. The result is that Bosnia's trans-ethnic traditions, cultures, and histories are at risk. This mission of this journal is to redress this problem as incisively as it can. The journal seeks to publish important and challenging essays that provide inconvenient facts for the party opinions of Bosnia's enemies and uncomfortable arguments for the ideologies that misrepresent and destroy Bosnia. The first issue starts with two notable classics from Bosnian literature, Ivo Andrić's "Bridges," and Mak Dizdar's "House of Mile." Metaphorically, both capture the compelling character of the Bosnian spirit. Then, the issue turns to a famous but previously un-translated essay, "The Bosnian Spirit in Literature – —What is it?" by Muhammed Filipović, first published in 1967. The issue concludes with two timely essays on the current situation in Bosnia: "Bosnia after Dayton" by Rusmir Mahmutćehajić, and "The Hypocrisy of Democracy" by Svetlana Broz. The issue also introduces new translations of several poems from Mak Dizdar, one of the most significant writers from Bosnia in the twentieth century.

Together, these works open the first issue of *Spirit of Bosnia*. The journal is bilingual; articles will be published in both Bosnian and English. Following the example of Noel Malcolm and many others, Bosnia is used to refer to the whole territory of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Ivan Lovrenović (2001:227-28) explains the historical as well as the philosophical reason for this decision.

If Bosnia is a name for any kind of identity, its content is not the mathematical sum of nations or national cultures, nor is it their drowning in a new (supra) national construction. Its content lies in permanent cultural interaction. The name Bosnian is thus not a term for a national order, nor only a regional or territorial one. It is a name

for the process of civilization we have described, something which through all historical changes and political adversities has lasted for a millennium, to an equal degree practiced in everyday life with equal vitality by all. In this process of interaction as a constant (its name is Bosnia) national cultures participate as variables, retaining their special identities and exposing themselves to continuous culturecreating relations of receiving and giving. In practice, every national culture in Bosnia is both what it is by name, and something more.

References

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