IV

BOSNIA-HERZEGOVINA: POST-CONFLICT DYNAMICS

Introduction

Post-Conflict Dynamics in Bosnia-Herzegovina: Identities, Nationalization, and Missing Bodies

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Since the creation of independent nation-states in Southeast Europe, several programs of mass population displacement and politics of dislocation have been implemented. The 1923 compulsory population exchange between Greece and Turkey, which fixed the destiny and the legal status of two million people, was considered at the time as a successful solution to interstate crisis regarding minorities. The geographical and political separation of Greek and Turkish Cypriots in 1976 and, more recently, the partitioning of Bosnia, define different ways of treating the same "problem." What is interesting, however, is that different political regimes—royal (in the case of Greece), postcolonial "democratic" (in the case of Cyprus), postsocialist "democratic" (in the case of Bosnia)— resorted to similar "solutions."

The three articles presented here are based on ethnographic fieldwork. They examine the experiences and narratives of people who are involved in conflict and post-conflict situations in Bosnia-Herzegovina. They show how, far from being arbitrary or irrational, violence is rooted in rivalries for leadership, in divisions of labor and competitions for limited resources, in the emergence of disputes dividing the population according to minority and majority principles or according to arguments of historical legitimacy.

Laura Huttunen studies the liminal category of the missing and its ambiguous and disturbing character. The main argument of Torsten Kolind is that violence is not creative, since war did not create new identities in the locality that he examines. Stef Jansen revisits the elites/people dichotomy in order to show that this structure functions in a vertical way but is not inevitably unidirectional. The conclusions of the articles by Kolind and Jansen may, however, seem contradictory. The first one asserts that the patterns of identification of the Muslims of Stolac (southern Herzegovina) are tied to prewar interethnic social life, since the war did not essentialize ethnic and religious identities. On the contrary, the second one analyzes how "ordinary people" enact nationalist subjectivity. What I will try to show here is that the authors' data and analyses constitute two opposite poles in a continuum. Huttunen makes this continuum even wider, by including in it the category of the missing and the dilemma that it presents for those who want to keep their memory alive.

Writing of Indonesia in 1965, Clifford Geertz (1995: 7) defines the critical transitional period when the emergence of hatred progressively undermines peaceful coexistence, as a long one:

"When the massacres finally arrived, they seemed, as do most popular convulsions—takings of Winter palaces, stormings of Bastilles—a post-script to a story long in the writing … the actual eruption of violence comes more as a completion, a rounding off, than as a breaking into something new."

Even if the outbreak of violence is a postscript to an already written story, social actors read and interpret this story in contradictory ways and react by choosing between an extended range of options: they may consider the story plausible (or not), they may want to modify it or, on the contrary, to enact it and profit from its development. According to Mary Douglas (1990: 10), "A risk is not only the probability of an event but also the probable magnitude of its outcome, and everything depends on the value that is set on the outcome. The evaluation is a political, aesthetic, and moral matter."

The informants of Kolind and Jansen not only offer different interpretations of the same story, but their implication in it is also dissimilar. If Kolind's informants consider that they became Bosnians because of the tactical war errors of their opponents, the foot soldiers interviewed by Jansen are proud of their actions that allowed history to unfold. Their attachment to history is revealing: as we all know, the creation of homogeneous nation-states, based on the principle of self-determination, as well as the definition of their territorial boundaries, have been accomplished, in most cases, through war. As Peter Loizos (1988: 639) notes, "modern nation-states freely use violence against enemies within and without, congratulate themselves for doing so, and thus set examples to their citizens of action which might be emulated."

Nevertheless, the nation-state is not perceived as a threatening political model; on the contrary, the homogeneity of a population is considered to be a stabilizing factor, whereas multicultural societies seem to be unsustainable or "artificial." To paraphrase Douglas (1990: 8), real dangers, like ethnic or religious conflict, "are being used to give automatic, self-validating legitimacy to established law and order." From that point of view, conflict constitutes a resource confirming and defending political choices and policies of intervention that are based on principles and values judged to be universal and beyond (re)consideration.

Conflicts lead to demographic changes, movements of population, redistribution of resources and property. For example, the 1990s war that disrupted Yugoslavia resulted in the marginalization and depopulation of many rural areas (Leutloff-Grandits 2006). It is also clear that certain categories of people can be socioeconomically empowered during or after the explosion of violence. The place of women in society is, for example, influenced by war. Speaking about the participation of Greek women in the Civil War from 1946 to 1949, Janet Hart (1996: 141) points out that "The involvement of women in resistance and war often represents an opening in the political system, an opportunity for women to become a conscious political class with new access to the public sphere and all its attendant power structures."

If war often paves the way for the reorganization of gender relations, it does not necessarily improve women's condition. The 1990s war in ex-Yugoslavia showed, to a great extent, the efficiency of rape as a weapon of war and reinforced the threat of a "patriarchal backlash." Karl Kaser defines three causes for this backlash: the consequences of the 1990s wars, re-Islamization in Turkey and the Muslim Balkan communities, and retraditionalism in the postsocialist Balkan countries (2008: 278).

Violence gives new roles to women—emancipating or humiliating—and turns them into subjects or objects, according to the circumstances and the historical period: this leads us to the crucial question of self-realization that Jansen treats in his article. The latter shows how nationalization's appeal is sometimes rooted in its capacity to project hope and to formulate trajectories through which people implicated in violent actions can retrospectively emerge as subjects. If Jansen questions intentionality, Kolind examines zones of social interaction and face-to-face

contacts. Different scope, different positioning: the same story can have many variants. People are manipulated by the elites, but one of the effects of violence is not necessarily less agency, since some of them may become minor actors in the unfolding of history (as Jansen's article shows) and others may maintain respectful interethnic contacts during and after the war (as Kolind argues). Tactics of terror are rational: implication in them or the decision to keep one's distance involve, to a certain degree, rational calculations of costs and benefits.

However, the fact that violence inaugurates a period of limited choices must also be taken into account: "The wartime politics of identity was based not on choice but on absence of choice, not on negotiations, but on survival" (Povrzanovic 2000: 151). At the same time, violence gives new meaning to the way that different categories of social actors perceive a specific place: there are those who are ready to shed their blood to keep it or to make it "theirs," and those who just want to go on with their everyday life and do not wish to change local living conditions. The eruption of violence also modifies the relationship of people to time: if for many, the security of the past and its knowable character are permanently stressed (as for Kolind's informants), for others, the emphasis is on the necessity to drastically transform the legacy of the past in order to construct a new and promising era (as for Jansen's informants). Jan Assmann (1995: 133) reminds us that "one group remembers the past in fear from deviating from its model, the next for fear of repeating the past."

Huttunen's article illustrates, from another point of view, Geertz's notion of "a story long in the writing": because of the indeterminacy the missing introduce into social and political life, the story cannot be given an end. Huttunen analyzes the enigma and the troubling liminality of absent citizens, who stand as a painful indication of an unfinished process, of an ambiguous status that seeks closure. It is impossible to ascertain whether they are dead or alive. Hence, they are "legally present, but familially absent": even the wife of the missing does not know whether she is a widow or not (Sant Cassia 2005: 87–88). Ambiguity, in this case, is relational and contagious: "missing persons are treated as lost (i.e. potentially recoverable) rather than dead (i.e. absent and non-recoverable)" (Sant Cassia 2005: 156). If Jansen focuses on self-realization and Kolind on social interaction, both show how people control the sense of their life. It is the loss of this control that Huttunen analyzes when she stresses the difficulty in maintaining socially present those who have disappeared.

Whereas Arjun Appadurai (1998: 920) shows in a famous article how the body can become "a site for resolving uncertainty," Huttunen makes of the missing body a permanent locus of ambiguity that only identification and reburial can resolve. Appadurai's argument is related to the pressure of globalization and to the uncertainty that it creates. Even if Huttunen does not venture into this field, it is clear that cases of disappearance are particularly disturbing for our bureaucratic societies and for the biopolitical relationship between citizens and the state that Giorgio Agamben (1998) has lengthily described.

If violence tends to be a key marker between "then" and "now," between old structures vanishing and new ones emerging, between definitions of "better" and "worse," each of the three articles presented here gives a different response concerning these distinctions: with Jansen, we are in a teleological notion of history; with Kolind, we are in a continuity schema that refuses to consider war as a breaking point; and with Huttunen, we are in a transient, reversible, and open-ended time, whose density and duration depend on the fate of missing bodies.

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