

The Politicisation of Victimhood – Paper to be presented at
SIT Symposium 'Conflict, Memory, and Reconciliation:
Bridging past, present, and future

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Abstract

No one credibly disputes that Bosniaks (Bosnian Muslims) were the victims of genocide during the war of the early-90's. This status is however currently being used against them by their own ethnic political elite. Former State-President Haris Silajdzic has shamelessly adopted the 'political pose of victimhood'¹ to further his own political agenda to the detriment of those who genuinely deserve support and recognition. Silajdzic has led the evolution of a post-war Bosniak identity based solely upon this victim-status. In terms of post-war state-building and conflict-transformation progress is not just obstructed but entirely paralysed by the hostile dynamic inherent in the absolute categories of victim:perpetrator. If identity is premised solely upon victimhood then not only will a reduction in perceived external threat jeopardise group solidarity but the identity itself will be endangered by reconciliation with the persecutor. Such a stance therefore precludes the possibility of engagement with the allegedly still 'sociocidal'² Serbs on even unrelated issues leading to political deadlock and socio-economic stagnation. Not only has the continued abuse of Bosnia's people by their own political elite resulted in diminished life-chances for all ethnic groups; so too has international silence on the issue led to a situation of conflict-exacerbation instead of transformation in the last decade. I intend to describe the process and motivation behind this political exploitation of victimhood in post-war Bosnia, analyse its most pertinent consequences, and discuss the options available to moderate this situation.

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¹ Williams, G. (2008) 'Dangerous victims: On some political dangers of vicarious claims to victimhood,' *Distinktion - Scandinavian Journal of Social Theory* 17pp77-95 p81

² Statement by Haris Silajdzic, 27 January 2000, to the Stockholm International Forum on the Holocaust at <http://balkan-studies.blogspot.com/2006/06/bosniaks-honor-holocaust-victims.html>

It is important to make two things clear from the outset of this paper – firstly that no attempt is being made to deny that Bosniaks were the victims of genocide during the war of the early-90's. Adequate truths have been unearthed, often literally, and are now supported by several judicial findings³ to render this fact beyond dispute. Leaving aside for now discussion of the specific finding of genocide, the majority of individual atrocities in the Bosnian war were committed against those deemed to be by their attackers: Bosniak. Secondly, the topic under discussion is the politicisation of victimhood not it's political use *per se*. Politics is one of the many forums where valid claims of victimhood and requests for redress must be made. I will attempt to distinguish between the legitimate search for justice however, and the political masquerade being perpetrated by certain political elites in post-war Bosnia. This is vital since alignment with a questionable political agenda allows detractors to question the integrity of the real victims' ongoing pursuit of justice. Furthermore the political manipulation of victimhood is itself contributing to continued injustice since the political deadlock it causes paralyses progress thus diminishing life-chances for all ethnic groups.

This paper is derived from a larger study of the evolution of ethno-nationalism in post-war Bosnia. It is clear, sixteen-years post-war, that stubborn ideological barriers to communication obstruct peacebuilding more so than physical minefields. It is widely acknowledged⁴ that leaders such as Slobodan Milosevic and Franjo Tudjman exploited the suffering, real or mythical, of their constituents to consolidate & mobilise them for their wartime aims. Identity-transformation strategies: strategies which focus on changing the *players*, not just the rules of the game have however been largely neglected by the post-war international presence in BiH. Identity is intransigent but not immutable. The fact that international peacemakers are the only group neglecting to engage with it post-war means the mutual antagonism of ethno-national identities there has been

³ International Criminal Tribunal for Former-Yugoslavia, 2001Krstic Judgement available at http://www.icty.org/x/cases/krstic/cis/en/cis_krstic.pdf ; International Court of Justice Press Statement: Application of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (Bosnia and Herzegovina v. Serbia and Montenegro) by H.E. Judge Rosalyn Higgins 26 February 2007 available at <http://www.icjci.org/court/index.php?pr=1898&pt=3&p1=1&p2=3&p3=1>; & Cohen, R. 'C.I.A. Report on Bosnia Blames Serbs for 90% of the War Crimes' *New York Times* March 09, 1995 available at <http://www.nytimes.com/1995/03/09/world/cia-report-on-bosnia-blames-serbs-for-90-of-the-war-crimes.html>

⁴ For detailed accounts of this phenomenon refer to (amongst many others): Bellamy, A. (2003) *The Formation of Croatian National Identity: A Centuries Old Dream?* Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, Duffy, G. & Lindstrom, N. (2002) 'Conflicting Identities: Solidary Incentives in the Serbo-Croatian War' *Journal of Peace Research* 39(1): 69-90, MacDonald, D. (2002) *Balkan Holocausts? Serbian and Croatian Victim-Centered Propoganda and the War in Yugoslavia* Manchester & New York: Manchester University Press, Campbell, D. (1998) *National Deconstruction: Violence, Identity and Justice in Bosnia* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press

allowed to metastasize. I will describe the process and motivation behind this political exploitation of victimhood in post-war Bosnia, analyse its most pertinent consequences, and discuss the options available to moderate this situation.

The 'Choice' of a Victim Identity

Bosniaks began decrying political/territorial gains made by violence during the war on the early 1990's⁵. This was both morally legitimate and an understandable attempt to counter attempts by Serb and international powers alike to impute moral equivalence to the conflict parties and therefore forestall intervention⁶. This same dynamic has however carried over into the post-war era and lends a misleading moral clarity to the actions of certain political elites, primarily the *Stranka za Bosnia-Hercegovina* (SBIH – The Party for Bosnia-Hercegovina) and its leader Haris Silajdzic.

Traditionally the least cohesive, and most contested of communities in Bosnia during the war the Bosniaks sought a foci for identity as the guardians of the country's multi-ethnicity. This attempt at magnanimity only survived the conflict in the form of sporadic veneers and inconsistently enforced quotas delineated by the Dayton Peace Agreement (DPA). Bosniak political parties now appeal to Bosniak voters and Bosniak voters have been engaged in a search for a core identity. Religious confession is a distinguisher insofar as Serbs are predominantly Orthodox, and Croats largely Catholic, although both rely on historical and pseudo-historical markers to fill-out their identities. However Bosniaks are not only massively varied in their level of devotion to Islam but, receiving little aid from Islamic countries during the war, are highly sceptical of attempts to import foreign strains of the religion in the post-war period.

The Israeli historian Saul Friedländer wrote in 1987 of 'the growing centrality of the *Shoah* for Jewish communities in the Diaspora and that "The *Shoah* is almost becoming a symbol of identification, for better or for worse, whether because of the weakening of the bond of religion or because of the lesser salience of Zionism and Israel as an identification element'⁷. Such

⁵ Silber, L. & Little, A. (1995) *The Death of Yugoslavia* London: Penguin Books p338

⁶ Cc.Gutman, RT. (1993) *Witness to Genocide* New York: Lisa Drew Books p:xxx; *New York Times* (1995) 'Bosnian Army said to Shell own Territory' November 10th & Bouris, E. (2007) *Complex Political Victims* Vermont: Kumarian Press pp 96-99

⁷ Evans, Richard. *In Hitler's Shadow*, New York: Pantheon, 1989 page 142

a dynamic, albeit deliberately exaggerated, is currently in evidence in post-war BiH. As a result an identity has been propagated by Bosniak power elites centred around victimhood – leading to the arguably unique irony of ‘...Moslem leaders comparing themselves to Jews...’⁸. Indeed Silajdzic has drawn repeated and explicit parallels between the Jewish experience at Auschwitz-Birkenau and that of Bosniaks at Srebrenica, in addition to tacitly comparing Serbs to Nazis⁹. Furthermore and of central significance to the current political deadlock is Silajdzic’s frequent description, since the 2007 International Court of Justice verdict¹⁰, of the *Republika Srpska* as the product of genocide and/or ‘sociocide’¹¹. I would contend that the significance of the repeated emphasis of the term ‘genocide’, as opposed to ‘crimes against humanity’ or ‘war crimes’ is that there is an element of overarching political direction and therefore responsibility implied in the definition of genocide. Silajdzic has used this in an attempt to render the guilty party’s political status forfeit. While qualitatively individuals suffer just as obscenely when victims of crimes against humanity as with genocide, the former legal category is frankly not so *politically* expedient.

Like the majority of political parties in post-war Bosnia, the SBiH is essentially a vehicle for the promotion of its leaders’ personal agenda. With increasing stridence since its foundation the party has campaigned to abolish the system designated in the DPA in favour of a centralised state without the entities of the *Republika Srpska* or the Federation. Despite ongoing political roadblocks preventing a post-war census, it is possible that Bosniaks now comprise not just a plurality but outright majority in post-war Bosnia. As a result many, on all sides, view Silajdzic’s cries for ‘one-man, one-vote’ not as a genuine move to reunify a multi-ethnic country or even naïve posturing but a blatant attempt to establish ethnic dominance¹². It may be argued that, as the recent victims of genocide a desire for political control amongst Bosniaks is more defensive than offensive. However this is not a constitutional system that has ever, or will ever, work in Bosnia and the suggestion thereof puts ethnic Serbs and Croats permanently on the defensive.

⁸ MacDonald, D. (2002) *Balkan Holocausts? Serbian and Croatian Victim-Centered Propoganda and the War in Yugoslavia* Manchester & New York: Manchester University Press p242

⁹The Stockholm International Forum on the Holocaust (2000) Statement by Haris Silajdzic, 27th January at <http://www.humanrights.gov.se/stockholmforum/2000/page940.html>

¹⁰ International Court of Justice *ibid*.

¹¹ Haris Silajdzic address to the 63rd session of the United Nations General Assembly 23rd September 2008 http://www.un.org/en/ga/63/generaldebate/pdf/bosniaherzegovina_en.pdf

¹² Author interviews with: Nina Sajic SNSD, Foreign Policy Adviser to the BiH Presidency Member Nebojsa Radmanovic, Banja Luka, BiH – 07/03/10; Anonymous Western Diplomat, Banja Luka, BiH – 11/03/10; & Sead Numanovic – Editor-in-Chief – *Dnevni Avaz*, Sarajevo, BiH – 13/07/10

Silajdzic used opposition to the 2006 'April Package' of Constitutional Reforms, claiming they legitimised the RS, thereby 'legalising genocide'¹³ to successfully re-launch his political career. His party now seeks to parlay the 2007 ICJ verdict into a retroactive legal reason for the dissolution of the Dayton-mandated *Republika Srpska*. This is based upon a legally dubious interpretation of the International Law Commission's Articles of States' Responsibility, adopted by the UN in 2001, that 'No state shall recognise as lawful a situation created by a serious breach of a (peremptory norm of international law)'¹⁴.

Explaining Silajdzic's Choice

Forefather of nationalism theory Ernest Renan observed that 'suffering in common unites people more than joy. In national memories, laments are worth more than triumphs...'¹⁵. Indeed such are the cohesive powers of shared suffering that it is unsurprising that Bosniak politicians have sought recourse to it in order to ensure a receptive and united constituency post-war. While this is undoubtedly part of this discourse's use by politicians in the SDA such as Sulejman Tihic, it does not entirely explain the SBiH's actions. Former Bosnian High Representative Paddy Ashdown speculates that Silajdzic is 'deeply damaged' by the government which he was part of abandoning the safe haven of Srebrenica and is acting partially therefore out of guilt¹⁶. However there are far more numerous and far less worthy explanations for Silajdzic's recent actions than a desire for expiation. Considering the fact that he has 'no record of achievement'¹⁷ since becoming a member of the state presidency for helping his constituents, I would suggest these motives are far more accurate.

Adoption of the 'political pose' of victimhood has clear strategic benefits. First amongst these is its effectiveness in silencing intra-ethnic critique of Silajdzic's actions; as independent journalist Tihomir Loza observes: '...how exactly do you question someone promising to undo Srebrenica's tragedy? You just don't?'¹⁸ Former Deputy-High Representative Graham Day similarly notes parallels with the Israeli public relations book: 'you cannot criticize me I represent the voice of the holocaust'¹⁹. Political

¹³ Haris Silajdzic interview with Al Jazeera 10/03/07 <http://www.youtube.com/user/AlJazeeraEnglish>

¹⁴ Haris Silajdzic address to the 63rd session of the United Nations General Assembly 23rd September 2008 http://www.un.org/en/ga/63/generaldebate/pdf/bosniaherzegovina_en.pdf

¹⁵ 'Qu'est-ce-que c'est qu'une Nation?' Address presented at the Sorbonne 1882

¹⁶ Author interview with Paddy Ashdown, London, UK. 23rd June 2010

¹⁷ Author interview with Matthew Rycroft, British Ambassador to BiH, Sarajevo, Bosnia-Herzegovina 29th April 2008

¹⁸ Loza, T. (2007) 'Playing With Srebrenica' *Transitions Online* 20 March at <http://www.tol.org/client/article/18402-playing-with-srebrenica.html>

¹⁹ Author interview with Graham Day, via telephone from Nicosia, Cyprus 12th November 2010

moderate and one of the few ethnic Serbs to be awarded a Golden Lily for his service in the Bosnian army, Slavisa Sucur summarises this situation: 'Creating the sense that the whole ethnic group is a collective victim basically is a justification to do whatever you want... I strongly believe that the guilt should be individualised, and the *victimhood should be individualised*. The problem with fascism rising is one side has said 'we are the victims' – no there are *people* who were victims. You are not the victims – you were nobody before the war and now you have this and that and so do people around you. You are not victims but there are many people who are.'²⁰

Similar vicarious attributions of stoicism, purity and strength for surviving at all may also be imputed. All of which ultimately elevate the victim group above bystanders and perpetrators even further; whether personally deserved or simply claimed as an effect of group membership. As American-Jewish journalist Ian Baruma admitted: 'I am not the child of Holocaust survivors. My mother was Jewish, but she lived in England, and no immediate relations were killed by the Nazis. And yet even I couldn't escape a momentary feeling of *vicarious virtue*, especially when I came across tourists from Germany.'²¹

Furthermore a reduction of the restraining impact of normative standards on the victimised group is noted by philosopher Gareth Williams as in a world which allowed such atrocity to occur there is perceived to be 'no meaningful prospect of outside accountability...' and 'Where accountability fails, responsibility across time is all too likely to fail.'²² Little effective oversight of the group's actions is possible if no-one is perceived as untainted enough to judge them. As Hannah Arendt warned: 'We are simply not equipped to deal, on a human, political level, with a guilt that is beyond crime and an innocence that is beyond goodness or virtue...'²³. In the political arena such claims to absolute purity effectively removes one from the same sphere as those interlocutors required in mundane governance. This effect has even been observed to be trans-generational, further attenuating the claim. 'The innocence and vulnerability that characterize the Holocaust victim also characterises modern Jews. Such an identity demands the presence of a Jewish state (to protect the Jews) but also justifies the actions of the state as righteous because they are being carried out by such a 'pure' people...'²⁴.

²⁰ Author interview with Slavisa Sucur, Vogosca, Bosnia-Herzegovina, May 23rd 2008

²¹ Baruma, I. (1999) 'The Joys and Perils of Victimhood' *New York Review of Books* April 8th, my italics.

²² *Ibid.* p10

²³ Arendt, H. (1992) *Correspondence with Karl Jaspers 1926-1969*, New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Letter 43, p54

²⁴ Bouris, E. (2007) *Complex Political Victims* Vermont: Kumarian Press p59

It is both a positive and understandable move for Bosniaks to seek to define themselves more clearly post-war considering the extent to which they suffered from the negative ascriptions of others during the conflict. The direction that the SBiH has led them in in this regard however is not contributing to individual life chances beyond those of a small political clique, and in its appropriation by a political agenda obstructing the real search for justice. The most significant harm inflicted by this political manipulation of victimhood however is that the elites depending on this platform for the continuance of their power arguably have a vested interest in the continuing persecution of their own people. In Haris Silajdzic's case arguably his constituent's continued suffering is in his best interests since it allows him to... 'exploit his injury to excuse his failures'²⁵. Indeed it is acknowledged by international legal experts that genocide and other conflicts are sometimes used '...to direct political pressure and public attention away from leaders' unable to meet minimum commitments.'²⁶ It is possible that the SBiH is one of the few to attempt such political sleight-of-hand when on the *receiving*-end of such abuses

The SBiH members have been termed *Foteljasi* by critics meaning 'armchair' politicians – concerned solely with their own comfort and enrichment²⁷. Anecdotal too barbed paraphrases of the SBiH's 2006 election slogan '100% BiH' have entered pop culture; from commentators describing the party's performance as '*Haris 100% neceg Silajdzic*' (100% Nothing) and graffiti of '*Haris 100% Izdaja*' (100% Betrayal) decorating the walls of Sarajevo.

Lastly Silajdzic's specific focus on *Srebrenica* is equally strategic and not only, or even *primarily*, directed at his domestic audience. 'The self-assigned status as the victim does not necessarily indicate weakness. On the contrary, it provides strength vis-à-vis the international community, which usually tends to support the victimised side...'²⁸. Srebrenica was the site of horrific violence during the war but frankly so too were many other towns around Bosnia and the Krajina. What makes Srebrenica useful is its status as the shibboleth of all international failings in BiH. A deserved degree of guilt elicited by its name coupled with a tacit anti-*Republika*

²⁵ Cole, A. (2007) *The Cult of True Victimhood: From the war on welfare to the war on terror* Stanford: Stanford University Press p5

²⁶ Eckhard Strauss, Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, paper presented at 'A Contextual View of Genocidal Intent' Leicester University, UK, 21-23rd September 2011

²⁷ Author interview with Slavisa Sucur, *ibid.* & Grandits, H. (2008) 'The Power of Armchair Politicians' in Xavier Bougarel, Elissa Helms and Ger Duijzings (eds.) *The New Bosnian Mosaic: identities, memories and moral claims in a post-war society*. Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Ltd. pp101-122.

²⁸ Bar-Tal, D., Chernyak-Hai, L., Schori, N. & Gundar, A. (2009) 'A Sense of Self-Perceived Victimhood in Intractable Conflicts' *The International Review of the Red Cross* 91(874) pp229-258 p241

Srpska prejudice stemming from the acts of the war has kept the international community silent during Silajdzic's increasingly strident anti-entity pronouncements thereby heightening inter-ethnic tensions in-country to their current level.

The *Republika Srpska* and its political overlord Milorad Dodik have received their fair, and sometimes unfair, share of condemnation for acting contrary to the DPA. This distracts from the fact that, as far as calls for territorial revanchism are concerned, the Bosniak political elite are arguably now just as culpable. Whether through war-spawned guilt or a conscious refusal to criticise one of the US-brokered Washington Agreement's offspring the Bosnian Muslim political elite are remarkably uncensured. This apparent bias exacerbates a further consequence of the political adoption of a victimhood persona. While it may be a position with significant ethico-political leverage attached it also lends itself to an inherent passivity on the part of the Bosniaks. The SBiH clearly feel that the onus is on an indicted international community to rectify the current situation. Not only is such an attitude at odds with the requirements of post-war rebuilding but so too is it massively unrealistic based upon the international community's increasingly desperate search for an exit strategy in BiH.

The Implications of the Political Manipulation of Victimhood

Former-Knesset member Avraham Burg opined recently that his native Israel has become 'a nation of victims, and our state religion the worship and tending of traumas...'²⁹ In the Bosnian context Silajdzic's worship of trauma has several consequences, all are negative. Indeed activist and vice-president of the non-nationalist party *Nasa Stranka* Maja Marjanovic notes that in post-war Bosnia the *only* people benefiting from this deadlocked *status quo* are the political elites who instigated it: 'If we look at the elections of 2006 – it is *amazing* how the big parties played-off each other and secured votes...But when it translates into the everyday lives of everyday people – it's a catastrophe'³⁰.

As regards issues of transitional justice, the political co-optation of victimhood effectively gives would-be opponents an imperative to undermine such claims. Whilst admittedly such claims may well be viewed as legitimate political targets even without comprising the sole platform of a competitor, they are *guaranteed* to be challenged if they are. In Bosnia this has resulted in the increasing extremism of Silajdzic's main antagonist

²⁹ Berg, A. (2008) *The Holocaust is Over: We must rise from its ashes* New York: Palgrave McMillan p76

³⁰ Author interview with Maja Marjanovic, Sarajevo, Bosnia-Herzegovina May 20th 2008

Milorad Dodik to the point of genocide-denial. 'We cannot and will never accept qualifying that event (Srebrenica) as a genocide...'.³¹ Dodik has also asked for a 'recount' of the reported number of victims of this massacre, despite the original report actually being produced by his own entity in 2004³². The extent to which such repellent moves are made in response to Silajdzic's provocation is impossible to quantify precisely but arguably the posture of a key rival is likely to be a significant motivation for any political action. While Milorad Dodik is one of the most nimble of politicians in BiH today, and may very well see Silajdzic's pose for what it is, the risk is of course that few others will see through their leader's sophistry.

Furthermore, although always a salient issue in post-war Bosnia, the heightened rhetoric since Silajdzic's 2006 election to the state presidency has intensified the ongoing absurd but damaging necrowar regarding who can 'boast' the highest number of wartime victims. Kada Hotic, vice-president of the Mothers of Srebrenica Association noted the irony that nationalist politicians, despite professing to protect their own people, are usually fairly pleased if they can claim to have incurred the greatest ethnic body-count³³. This has heightened the defensiveness of the already suspicious Serbs to the point where Dragan Cavic, former RS-president who laudably apologised for Srebrenica in 2004 lamented that in the 'current climate it seemed like he had spoken in 2024 not 2004.'³⁴ Indeed, should Silajdzic's successor Bakir Izetbegovic not relinquish this discourse then the potential contribution to peacebuilding that the upcoming Karadzic and Mladic verdicts may have is likely to suffer by association with an regressive political agenda.

In addition to this detrimental impact on the general discourse of transitional justice the political manipulation of victimhood has little realistic prospect of righting the wrongs of genocide. Silajdzic's legalistic attempts to push the international community to abolish the entity system, (a move which incidentally would remove the minimal protection the Croat minority receives as part of the joint Croat-Bosniak Federation) are utterly futile. The international community, even at its most united, has never in post-war Bosnia shown the inclination to flex its muscles to that degree. Indeed, as mention previously, in the past five years the primary

³¹ Dodik, M. (2010) Interview with *Vecerni Novosti* Newspaper reprinted in AFP Presse France April 27th at <http://www.france24.com/en/20100427-srebrenica-was-not-genocide-bosnian-serb-leader>

³² Balkan Insight (2010) 'Dodik Wants Review of Srebrenica Numbers' April 9th at <http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/dodik-wants-review-of-srebrenica-numbers>

³³ Private communication with author, Association of the Mothers of Srebrenica & Zepa, Sarajevo, BiH 25th August 2010.

³⁴ Dragan Cavic interview with Lara J. Nettelfield and Sarah E. Wagner 13th July 2010 at <http://www.cambridgeblog.org/2010/10/the-fifteenth-anniversary-of-the-srebrenica-genocide-memorial-visit-to-srebrenica%E2%80%99s-crimes-scenes%E2%80%94part-three-of-a-series/>

concern of all but European Union member states has been to depart. The EU itself is also proving reticent on major constitutional reform requirements for Bosnia's accession, apparently hoping the impetus for such changes will come from domestic sources.

In terms of domestic post-war state-building progress is not just obstructed but entirely paralysed by the hostile dynamic inherent in the absolute categories of victim: perpetrator. For example so ingrained in the political and identity narrative of Israel has its victimhood become that even contemporary political acts such as a moratorium on further settlements are interpreted through this prism and felt as a further Shoah-related injury³⁵. If identity is premised solely upon victimhood then not only will a reduction in perceived external threat jeopardise group-solidarity but the identity itself will be fundamentally 'imperilled by reconciliation with the persecutor.'³⁶ Such a stance therefore precludes the possibility of engagement with the allegedly still 'sociocidal'³⁷ Serbs on even unrelated issues. This political limbo has led to stalled social and economic development a fact which may further exacerbate ethnic distance if attributed to other ethnic groups rather than one's own leaders '...the more people suffered, the more they assigned collective guilt to the group perceived as being responsible for their suffering.'³⁸

Something which must also be monitored is the troubling paradox sometimes observed amongst those who view themselves as victims displaying a subsequent tendency to victimise others. Serbia, Israel, and the US after September 11th are only the most obvious examples³⁹. While the Bosniak are not at this stage yet the effect that the constant repetition of passivity, of being acted *upon* or done *to* can have on reducing perceived personal responsibility needs considered. If a status created by someone else is a central part of identity then almost any guilty act on the victims' part can be projected upon to the initial aggressor, effectively

³⁵ Burg *ibid.* p23

³⁶ Williams *ibid.* p14

³⁷ 'Bosnia's Silajdzic Questions Serbia's Intentions' Balkan Insight, 13 April 2010 at <http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/main/news/27303>, 'Haris Silajdzic: comprehensive reform of the Dayton (2)' Council of Europe Youtube Channel 03 October 2008 at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v12v3jnPKLI>, Statement by Haris Silajdžić to the 63rd Session of the United Nations General Assembly on the occasion of the General Debate, 23 September 2008 at http://www.un.org/ga/63/generaldebate/pdf/bosniaherzegovina_en.pdf & Statement by Haris Silajdzic, 27 January 2000, to the Stockholm International Forum on the Holocaust at <http://balkan-studies.blogspot.com/2006/06/bosniaks-honor-holocaust-victims.html>

³⁸ Corkalo, Biruski & Penic in Bar-tal et al. 2009 *ibid.* p250

³⁹ For details of this phenomenon refer to: Yanay, N. (2002) 'Understanding Collective Hatred' *Analyses of Social Issues and Public Policy* 2 pp53-60 Sternberg, R. (2000) 'A Duplex Theory of Hate: Development and application to terrorism, massacre and genocide' *Review of General Psychology* 7 pp 299-328

saying: 'look what they have made us into'⁴⁰. There is the possibility that this logic could trigger further cycles of violence. Fears of repeated persecution also possess an inherent dynamic: hostility is anticipated and, if absent, projected and then used to affirm pre-emptive strikes. For example: Arab opposition to Jewish settlement in Palestine was not based on anti-Semitism yet '...blindness to this was one large cause of the failure to find an effective accommodation between Arabs and Jews.'⁴¹

Discussion

The adoption of the political pose of victimhood is clearly politically expedient but ultimately socially paralysing. In December 2008 Suleiman Tihic, the only major political party leader who was personally the victim of serious war crimes called on his fellow Bosniaks to abjure 'the philosophy of victimhood and self-pity'⁴². This cry to reclaim a sense of personal agency; perhaps to challenge the ascription of an identity either by those who committed violent acts or political leaders who have exploited and therefore compounded this must be considered. Occupying the position of eternal victim effectively puts the power, this time of apology, in the hands of those perceived as wrong-doers. Perhaps in becoming an active forgiver of others rather than waiting for a, possibly permanently withheld, apology would be a more positive identity for Bosniaks struggling to situate themselves in post-war Bosnia. If however it is in their leaders' interest to keep them perpetually labelled as victims then Bosniaks may never receive adequate support to come to terms with their survival; their empowerment and the reconstruction of their self-esteem appears counter to the interests of those supposed to represent them.

It is worth asking if the political elite who have consciously cultivated this pose of victimhood have actually led their own people into an ideological cul-de-sac where the only way of healing their own pain is by relinquishing their ethnic identity – one of the few things which has survived the war. Have Haris Silajdzic and the SBiH effectively imprisoned Bosniaks between a place of suffering or extinction in a way that Karadzic, Milosevic and Tudjman never managed?

⁴⁰ Williams, *ibid.* p13 & Eriksen, T. (2001) 'Ethnic Identity, National Identity, and Intergroup Conflict: the significance of personal experiences' in Lee Jussim, Richard Ashmore & David Wilder (eds.) *Social Identity and Intergroup Conflict* New York: Oxford University Press Inc pp 42-70

⁴¹ Williams *ibid.* p9

⁴² Quoted in International Crisis Group (2009) 'Bosnia's Incomplete Transition: Between Dayton and Europe', Europe Report # 198 p11 at http://www.crisisgroup.org/~media/Files/europe/198_bosnias_incomplete_transition_between_dayton_and_europe.pdf

Some Possible Options

One pathway is found in the strategy of a relatively new party. *Nasa Stranka* ('Our Party') describe themselves as 'post-ideological' in that their platform is social justice, however they do not attempt to claim they live in a post-nationalist or a-nationalist community, or ask members to relinquish strongly held identities. They simply state that identity politics are not actually relevant to the improvement of life-chances in post-war Bosnia⁴³. Holding that the majority of the population's interests are neither one-dimensional nor fundamentally opposed⁴⁴. NS believe that the key to changing the political status quo in Bosnia depends upon emphasising commonality of *interest* not difference of identity. This approach arguably displaces ethno-nationalism from the political arena, rather than seeking to transform its content *per se*. However considering the current situation this would be a massive improvement.

Depoliticising identity in Bosnia will not be easy – as NS's relatively weak electoral performance to-date indicates - yet it is feasible. Indeed Daniel Byman, concurs that 'Identity change policies can bypass group status concerns by appealing directly to individuals who compose the group.'⁴⁵ There is certainly a constituency for such an approach: a 2009 UNDP survey found that fewer than 25% of respondents state-wide believed that only ethno-nationalist political parties could protect their interests⁴⁶. Simultaneously 76% of those polled across the country reported high levels of pride in belonging to their ethnic group⁴⁷. This may indicate that NS's strategy of not minimising identity just highlighting its irrelevance to most significant issues such as pensions, employment, healthcare and education could find support.

In lieu of domestic leaders who eschew such ideological manipulation, or a robust civil society to lobby for justice outside the central political arena what can be done? The onus falls on the international community to accept that neither their tribunal nor the elections they have sponsored

⁴³ While the party do not agree that ethno-nationalist identity is the primary concern of Bosnians they are more than happy to engage the incumbent nationalist elite on the subject, observing that drawing this group out on the subject of bread-and-butter issues may very well expose some holes in their level of concern for their co-ethnics Author interview with Maja Marjanovic *ibid*.

⁴⁴ For survey data supporting this assertion refer to Oxford Research International (2007) *The Silent Majority Speaks* <http://europeandcis.undp.org/cpr/show/161BE7CD-F203-1EE9-BD4C1FDAE001EFBC>

⁴⁵ Byman, D. (2000) 'Forever Enemies? The Manipulation of Ethnic Identities to End Ethnic Wars,' *Security Studies*. 9 (3): 149-190. P157

⁴⁶ United Nations Development Programme (2009) *Time for Change-* Graph 5 <http://www.undp.ba/upload/publications/Early%20Warning%20System%202009.pdf>

⁴⁷ *Op. Cit.* Graph 7

are adequate to create peace BiH, indeed both tainted by the games being played on-the-ground.

Indeed the structural, elite-focused approach that has been employed is the standard operating procedure of the post-WWII international community, but it has been criticised by the school of conflict transformation for being inadequate to entrench sustainable peace and for being readily undermined by its neglect of social and cultural reconstruction⁴⁸. Johan Galtung included for the first time the psycho-social elements of conflict, arguing that these are as significant as the more objective components, and that conflict transformation must involve all levels of society not only the elite⁴⁹.

Considering the continued problems with the institutional-ideological interaction encountered by the international presence in Bosnia there are reasons to ask if the adoption of a more transformative approach, specifically one that minimises the influence of power-elites or weakens their ideological armoury, would have fared better. Firstly, these elites have, through daily political practice in Bosnia, been a powerful post-war hindrance to peace. Neither the elite-bargaining imperative of the consociational model nor the centripetal incentives of the integrative approach have managed to produce the desired moderation in the stance of domestic political elites. Secondly, conflict transformation theory indicates that failure to engage with the underlying causes of conflict will mean that relationships are unlikely to be sufficiently transformed to *embed* peace⁵⁰. Indeed we have seen that, left unmoderated, relationships can be manipulated post-war to actually exacerbate the conflict.

Unfortunately beyond cosmetic dabbling with flags, licence plates and mute national anthems the international community has undertaken no process akin to the symbolic and ideological denazification of WWII or the disestablishment of Japanese Shintoism and its nationalist constellations⁵¹. Indeed 'Bosnian' is not even an identity-category recognised in state

⁴⁸ Cc. Lederach, J-P. (1997) *Building Peace: Sustainable Reconciliation in Divided Societies*. Washington, D.C.: United States Institute of Peace Press & Paris, R. (2004) *At War's End: Building Peace after Civil Conflict*. New York: Cambridge University Press

⁴⁹ Galtung, J. (2004) *Transcend and transform: An introduction to conflict work*. Boulder, CO: Paradigm & Galtung, J. (2010) 'Peace Studies and Conflict Resolution: The Need for Transdisciplinarity', *Transcultural Psychiatry* 47(1): 20-32

⁵⁰ Lederach in Pearson, F. (2001) 'Dimensions of Conflict Resolution in Ethnopolitical Disputes', *Journal of Peace Research* 38(3): 275-287 P278

⁵¹ This process may have been interrupted by the Cold War however the attempt in itself arguably established a moral baseline for the post-war era, placing nationalist extremism well outside normative boundaries in both countries (see Morris, 1960 & Bower, 1981).

legal documents⁵² leaving no choice but to subscribe to one ethnic group for any political participation. Considering the conditions extant in 1995, it may have been impossible to find an alternative starting point to Dayton's ethno-nationalist fiefdoms⁵³. But the current impasse may have been avoided through a subsequent consistency in at least one element of the international approach: Accept the centrality of ethno-nationalism in the conflict but then undertake some degree of ideological disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration in the post-war era. Events since 1995, and most clearly since 2006, indicate that un-reconstructed ethno-nationalist ideology jeopardises any progress made.

Van Evera, although more sceptical than Kalyvas, notes that while wholesale transformation is implausible in a post-conflict context it might be possible to minimise the malignancy of certain identities. 'Serbs will be Serbs and Croats will be Croats. Neither will assimilate to being something else. But Serb and Croat nationalism can be tempered into something more benign.'⁵⁴ How then could such a reformation be undertaken?

While it is an imperfect solution the much-debated yet never-actualised Bosnian Truth Commission may be a means to expose some of the instrumentalism surrounding ethno-nationalist discourse in Bosnia. It would also obviate the need for the international community to effectively weigh-in on nationalist ideology something they are apparently uncomfortable with. Furthermore the degree to which the international community would have to be directly involved in a truth commission is not necessarily proportionate to the benefit it may gain in terms of stability and the achievement of an exit-option. The academic debate surrounding 'peace versus justice' tends to view truth commissions and criminal trials as largely exclusive⁵⁵. However, if the structural and psycho-social must both be considered in post-war conflict-regulation strategies then such distinctions may have to be overcome. While the international community both instituted the Hague tribunal and sponsored domestic hybrid war crimes trials, the third-party imposition of truth commissions is rare.

As one of the key problems encountered in post-war Bosnia is the reliance of elected politicians on mutually hostile ethno-nationalisms then

⁵² Author interview with Marjanovic *Ibid*.

⁵³ Author's personal communication with Paddy Ashdown, Bath 10th September 2010

⁵⁴ van Evera, S. (2001) 'Primordialism Lives!' *APSA-CP: Newsletter of the Organized Section* p21 & Kalyvas, S. (2008) 'Ethnic Defection and Civil War' *Comparative Political Studies* 41(8):1043-1068

⁵⁵ Villa-Vicencio, C. (2010) 'Inclusive Justice: The Limits of Trial Justice and Truth Commissions' in Chandra Sriram & Suren Pillay, eds. *Peace Versus Justice: The Dilemma of Transitional Justice in Africa*. Rochester: James Curry Press

removing or at least minimising the role of these elected officials may perhaps also prove beneficial. The extension of international supervision and election moratoriums are not a new suggestions, indeed this was successfully attempted for sometime in Brcko⁵⁶. However the OHR Head of Political Affairs, and longest-serving international official in Bosnia, Archie Tuta admits it was never considered *countrywide* due to an international aversion to accusations of imperialism⁵⁷. Tuta views this aversion as regrettable considering the measures the international community had to eventually adopt anyway to deal with nationalist obstruction, noting we should have been 'braver, sooner'⁵⁸. Similarly political advisor to the European Commission Delegation Elisabeth Tomasinac admits that perpetually avoiding engagement with ethno-nationalists has effectively stored-up trouble for a time when the international presence is exhausted and the EU unwilling to provide a suitably muscular replacement⁵⁹. Potential political cover for postponing elections may be found in the fact that it is now widely agreed that the immediate period after the signing of the DPA was devoted to physical reconstruction rather than state-building⁶⁰ and there was therefore little for elected politicians to do other than consolidate nationalist enclaves.

Ultimately, although only taking the Bosniaks as an example herein, the changes in ethno-nationalist identity in the post-war period are such that we must consider the international non-intervention therein a failure. Unrestrained these ideologies have been used to perpetuate ethnic power cliques to the detriment of the general populace and international attempts at peacebuilding. Whether this will prompt a change in international behaviour is unknown, but it would seem that without some amelioration of ethno-nationalism, Bosnia faces a miserable future.

⁵⁶ Parish, M. (2010) *A Free City in the Balkans: Reconstructing Divided Society in Bosnia*. London & New York: I.B. Taurus & Co. Ltd.

⁵⁷ Author interview with Archie Tuta, Sarajevo, BiH 23rd April 2008

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ Author interview with Elisabeth Tomasinac, Sarajevo, 16th May 2008

⁶⁰ Author interview with Mark Wheeler, Office of the High Representative, Sarajevo, BiH 23rd May 2008. Wheeler noted that much of the political debate during this time was spent debating where and when ethnic leaders should meet; if a neutral shape of table and colour of flower-arrangements could be found; and if there were any rooms available with three separate doors so each ethnic representative could enter simultaneously.