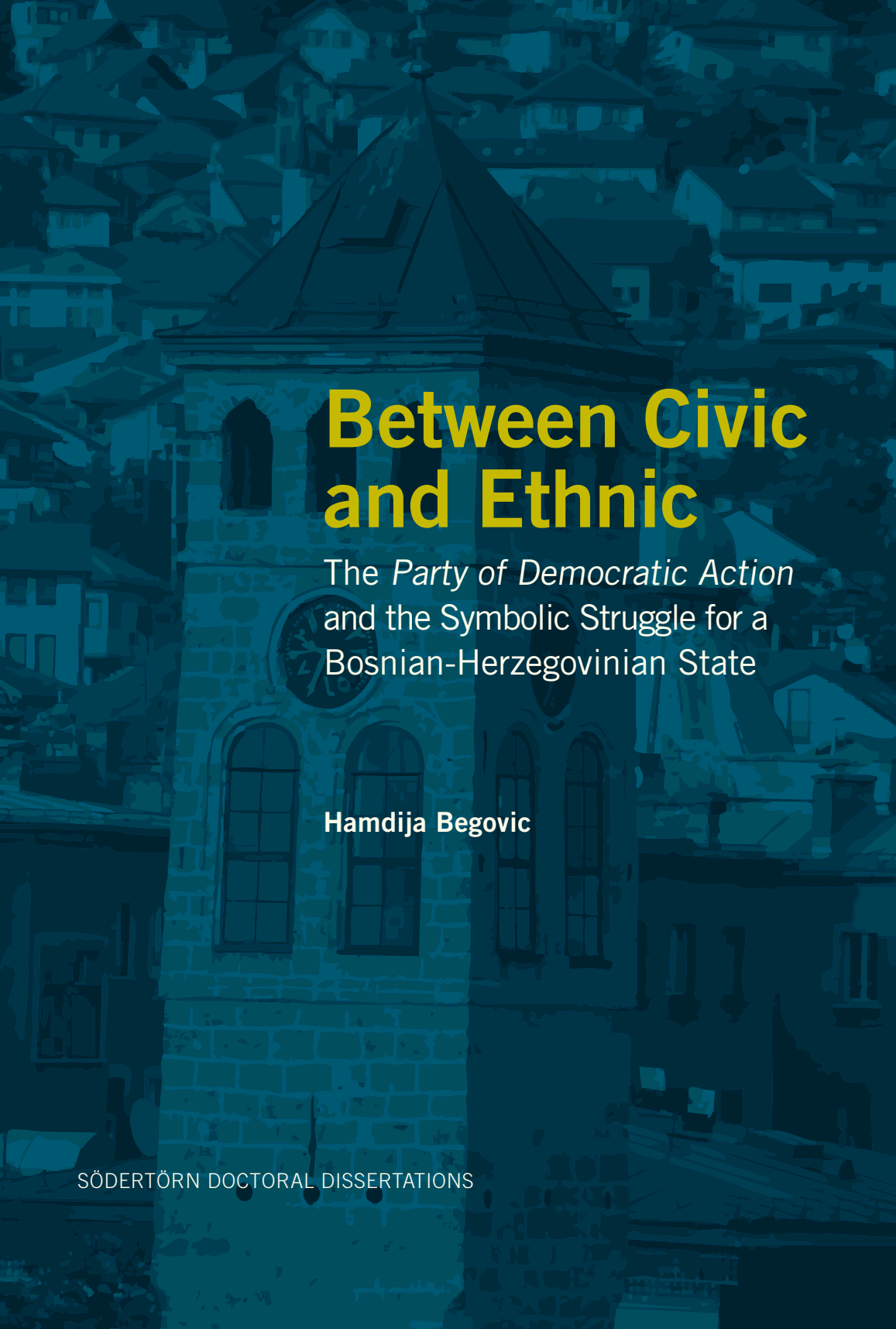

Between Civic and Ethnic

The *Party of Democratic Action* and the Symbolic Struggle for a Bosnian-Herzegovinian State

Hamdija Begovic

SÖDERTÖRN DOCTORAL DISSERTATIONS

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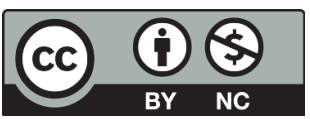
Södertörns högskola

Subject: Sociology
Research Area: Politics, Economy and the Organisation of Society
School of of Social Sciences
Baltic and East European Graduate School



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Cover image: Erlend Bjørtvedt, *Belfry of Sarajevo* (2012) CC BY-SA 3.0
Cover design: Jonathan Robson
Graphic form: Per Lindblom & Jonathan Robson

Printed by E-Print, Stockholm 2025

Södertörn Doctoral Dissertations 247
ISSN 1652–7399
ISBN 978-91-89962-30-9 (print)
ISBN 978-91-89962-31-6 (digital)

Abstract
This thesis examines the persistent political fragmentation of post-war Bosnia and Herzegovina, focusing on the role of the *Party of Democratic Action* (SDA) and the strategies of Bosniac political actors from the 1995 Dayton Agreement to the 2022 elections. Situated within the complex legacy of the Ottoman millet system and post-communist state-building, the study investigates how SDA activists conceptualise the relationship between Bosniac national identity and the Bosnian-Herzegovinian state amidst ethnic rivalries and external influences. Employing Pierre Bourdieu's political field theory, adapted to account for the political idiosyncrasies of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the research addresses the central question: How have the political strategies and interactions of the *Party of Democratic Action* (SDA), as a key Bosniac political actor, with other influential political actors, shaped Bosnia and Herzegovina's persistent status as a disintegrated post-war nation-state from 1995 to 2022? Through qualitative fieldwork, including interviews and participant observation with current and former SDA activists, the study reveals how Bosniacs navigate a contested political landscape marked by alliances with Western powers (as the meta-power) and tensions with Serb and Croat counterparts (as the meta-analysts). The findings highlight a patron–client dynamic with external actors, internal debates over civic versus ethnic nationalism and the enduring impact of historical communal structures on modern statehood. By offering new empirical insights into the SDA's activist perspectives and a sociological framework for understanding fragmented states, this thesis contributes to the scholarship on post-Ottoman nation-building and political field theory, illuminating broader patterns of political disintegration in diverse societies.

Keywords: Political fragmentation, Bosniac national identity, Party of Democratic Action (SDA), Dayton Agreement, Ottoman millet system, Post-communist state-building, Pierre Bourdieu's political field theory, Ethnic rivalries, Civic vs. ethnic nationalism, Post-Ottoman nation-building, Western Balkans, Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Abstract
Avhandlingen *Mellan medborgerligt och etniskt: Partiet för demokratisk aktion och den symboliska kampen för en bosnisk-hercegovinsk stat* undersöker den bestående politiska splittringen i efterkrigstidens Bosnien-Hercegovina. Detta görs genom en närmare granskning av bosniakiska politiska aktörers strategier, från Daytonavtalet 1995 till valet 2022, med fokus på den bosniakiska nyckelaktören Partiet för demokratisk aktion (SDA). Studien, som tar avstamp i det komplexa arvet från det osmanska millet-systemet och det postkommunistiska statsbygget, analyserar hur SDA-aktivister begripliggör förhållandet mellan bosniakisk nationell identitet och den bosnisk-hercegovinska staten i en kontext av etnisk rivalitet och externa politiska aktörers inflytande. Utifrån Pierre Bourdieus teori om det politiska fältet, anpassad för att ta hänsyn till Bosnien-Hercegovinas politiska särdrag, behandlas den centrala frågan: Hur har SDA:s politiska strategier och interaktioner med andra inflytelserika politiska aktörer format Bosnien-Hercegovinas bestående status som en splittrad efterkrigsnation från 1995 till 2022? Genom kvalitativt fältarbete, inklusive intervjuer och deltagande observation med nuvarande och tidigare SDA-aktivister, undersöks hur bosniaker navigerar i ett omtvistat politiskt landskap präglat av allianser med västmakter och spänningar med serbiska och kroatiska motsvarigheter. Västmakterna utgör fältets meta-kraft och de serbiska och kroatiska politiska aktörerna dess meta-analytiker. Resultaten belyser en patron-klient-dynamik med externa aktörer, interna debatter om medborgerlig kontra etnisk nationalism och historiska gemenskapsstrukturers bestående påverkan på modernt statsbygge. Genom att erbjuda nya empiriska insikter i SDA-aktivisternas perspektiv och en sociologisk ram för att förstå splittrade stater bidrar denna avhandling till forskningen om post-osmanskt nationsbygge och politisk fältteori, och belyser även bredare mönster av politisk desintegration i samhällen som präglas av mångfald.

Nyckelord: Politisk fragmentering, Bosniakisk nationell identitet, Partiet för demokratisk aktion (SDA), Daytonavtalet, Osmanska millet-systemet, Postkommunistiskt statsbygge, Pierre Bourdieus teori om det politiska fältet, Etniska rivaliteter, Medborgerlig kontra etnisk nationalism, Post-osmanskt nationsbygge, Västra Balkan, Bosnien-Hercegovina.

Acknowledgements

This thesis would not have been possible without the generosity, guidance and support of many remarkable individuals.

I am deeply grateful to the respondents who shared their time and insights, making this study possible. I owe immense gratitude to my supervisors, Alireza Behtoui, Alexandra Bogren and Zhanna Kravchenko, whose expert guidance and unwavering encouragement shaped this work. Their insightful feedback, even through moments of disagreement, challenged me to push beyond my limits. Their belief in my potential often surpassed my own and, for their mentorship, I am profoundly thankful.

I also extend my appreciation to the faculty and colleagues at Södertörn University's Department of Sociology, whose contributions enriched this thesis. Special thanks to Professors Adrienne Sörbom and Magnus Wennerhag – my internal opponents during the halftime and final seminars – and to Professors Dzenan Sahovic and Roland Kostić for their critical engagement as external opponents. My fellow PhD colleagues at Södertörn's School of Social Sciences, especially Sofia Beskow and Mattias Alvarsson from my cohort, provided camaraderie and invaluable feedback. In short, I thank everyone who proofread drafts, participated in academic seminars or contributed in ways that improved this work. Your collective efforts have left an indelible mark on this thesis and I am forever grateful. I am also grateful to Eva Karlberg, Liudmila Voronova and Lisa Kings, Director of Studies, for their academic support and to Lina Lorentz, Research Manager and the administrative staff for their essential assistance.

Finally, I am deeply grateful to my family; my parents, Fikret and Jasminka, for their unwavering love and encouragement and, likewise, my brother and sister, Erwin and Binaida. Above all, I thank my wife, Hanan, whose patience and strength sustained me through the births of our three children – Osman, Adnan and Sumeya – during this challenging PhD journey. Their presence gave me purpose and perspective. My thanks also extend to those relatives and friends who facilitated my research, including my aunt Azra Rizvanovic (and her daughter Nadine) and in-laws Abdihakim Abdulahi and Razan Daklallah for their warm hospitality during my

travels – and Haris Delić, whom I promised to include here for the last-minute ride to retrieve my forgotten passport as I was embarking upon my journey to conduct the field work. Countless others provided invaluable support in ways big and small and I am thankful for them all.

This thesis is a testament to your collective support – thank you.

Contents

Introduction

The famous Clausewitzian (1832/1984, p. 87) quip – that politics is the continuation of war by other means – seems quite relevant when studying a country such as Bosnia and Herzegovina, the home to three main ethnic groups[1] who find themselves negotiating their political everyday existence following a brutal war. These groups are: the Bosniacs, who comprise just over 50 percent of the population, followed by the Serbs who reach about 31 percent and the Croats at around 15 percent (Central Intelligence Agency 2024).

The population of the country is less than 4 million within a geographic area of around 51,000 square kilometres, yet the country's constitutional arrangement is such that Bosnia and Herzegovina (BH) operates under a complex political system established by the 1995 Dayton Agreement, characterised by a decentralised structure reflecting its multi-ethnic composition. The country is governed by a central state with a parliamentary system, featuring a bicameral Parliamentary Assembly consisting of the House of Representatives (42 seats) and the House of Peoples (15 seats), elected through a mix of direct and indirect methods. The executive branch includes a tripartite presidency, with three members representing the Bosniac, Serb and Croat communities, rotating every eight months to ensure ethnic balance. The Council of Ministers, led by a Chair (equivalent to a prime minister), handles day-to-day governance. Additionally, BH is divided into two autonomous entities – the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (Bosniac-Croat) and Republika Srpska (Serb) – each with its own parliament and government, alongside the Brčko District, which has special status. The Office of the High Representative (OHR), an international body, oversees the implementation of the Dayton Agreement, holding powers to remove officials and amend laws, further complicating BH's governance (Central Intelligence Agency 2024).

The sum total of this is that a set of fourteen separate local and national government bodies end up being tasked with the business of running

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[1] See Chapter 5 for a discussion on how to define ethnic groups.

everyday political affairs. This convoluted setup, put in place in order to cut short all-out violent confrontation through political compromise (without solving some of the underlying points of contestation), has generated a situation characterised by social ruptures and continued ethnic rivalry (Mujanović 2018, pp. 88–89).

The convoluted political system of Bosnia and Herzegovina has been referred to by one observer as 'the most complicated in the world' ('It's Complicated' 2018; see also Nardelli, Dzidić & Jukić 2014). Another assessment of the political system is that it is 'a monster' (Banović, Gavrić & Krause 2009, p. 15). The country has also been described as being in 'a permanent state of emergency' (Grebo 2009, p. 12).

Bosnia and Herzegovina's intricate political landscape is compounded by its challenging economic conditions, which further strain the country's fragmented post-war society. The nation's GDP *per capita* stands at approximately $19,900 (in purchasing power parity), reflecting its status as one of Europe's poorer countries, still grappling with the economic devastation of the 1992–1995 war and slow progress toward market reforms. Unemployment, estimated at 15.7 percent, underscores persistent structural issues, including a large informal economy, skill mismatches and significant youth emigration, which exacerbate ethnic and political tensions within the country's complex governance structure (Central Intelligence Agency 2024).

Situating Bosnia and Herzegovina: Historical and Regional Perspectives

In order to understand what sort of case I am examining in this study, I first need to situate it in its proper historical and geopolitical contexts. The collapse of the Ottoman Empire bequeathed a complex legacy of nation-building challenges to its successor states, a predicament vividly illustrated by Bosnia and Herzegovina's ongoing struggles to forge a cohesive statehood amid ethnic fragmentation and contested identities. Bosnia and Herzegovina's travails unfold within a broader post-Ottoman context, where the millet system's legacy of segmented communal identities impedes the creation of unified national polities. The millet system,[2] an Ottoman administrative framework that granted religious communities – such as

[2] The word *millet* originally meant 'religious community' and evolved into a way for the Ottomans to manage the empire's multi-religious and multi-ethnic empire, particularly from the 15th century onward. These populations were grouped into administrative units based on religion, with a certain measure of legal autonomy. For more on this, see Quataert (2005).

Muslims, Christians and Jews – autonomy under their own leaders to govern personal law, education and religious affairs, entrenched distinctions that later resisted national consolidation (cf. Smith 1986).

Bosnia and Herzegovina exemplifies a recurring pattern among post-Ottoman states like North Macedonia, Kosovo, Turkey, Cyprus, Lebanon, Syria, Iraq and Israel/Palestine, where ethnic identities, preserved under imperial systems like the Ottoman millet, shape modern national conflicts. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, the millet system's religious pluralism evolved into the triadic ethnic divisions of Bosniacs, Serbs and Croats, a dynamic echoed across the post-Ottoman world. For instance, in North Macedonia, Poulton (1995) highlights how millet-derived ethnic tensions between Macedonians and Albanians complicate nation-building, while Makdisi (2000) links Lebanon's sectarianism to Ottoman communal autonomy, tracing its roots to the millet system's reinforcement of religious distinctions. Similarly, Khoury (1987) and Malcolm (1998) reveal how Syria and Kosovo grapple with millet-influenced pluralism – between Sunni Arabs and Alawites or Albanians and Serbs – mirroring Bosnia and Herzegovina's triadic ethnic *impasse*. As Mazower (2000) suggests, the Balkans and beyond share a post-Ottoman trajectory whereby millet legacies fuel nationalist rivalries, transforming historical communal structures into modern geopolitical fault lines. Bosnia and Herzegovina, therefore, is not an outlier but a compelling case study in a wider phenomenon, where the Ottoman past continues to challenge the aspirations of statehood, illuminating the enduring tension between inherited ethnic diversity and the demands of national unity.

This shared post-Ottoman legacy was implicitly acknowledged by Branko Mikulić, a Bosnian-Croat member of the Yugoslav presidency, when he invoked the case of Lebanon during a speech in 1984.

> If we allow [a] multiparty system in this country, all . . . the people would get would be several new ethnic and religious parties without any specific political or economic agenda and issues except hatred for one another and their leaders' cries for partitions and secessions. We would have another Lebanon in this country and the League of Communists of Yugoslavia will never let it happen! (As cited in Perica 2002, p. 93).

This prescient, if partisan, remark was made less than a decade before the outbreak of the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina and suggests that the Yugoslav project was, in part, an attempt to come to grips with the legacy of the millet system as it sought to forge a new national identity that would

replace it. Bosnia and Herzegovina, in many ways, is a continuation of that attempt.

However, apart from the legacy of the millet system, there is also the issue of outside powers seeking to further their own interests by occupying themselves with the country's internal political matters. If we stick with Lebanon, some of the main outside forces that have been identified are neighbouring Syria, along with Russia, Iran, Saudi Arabia and the West (Arsan 2018; Harris 2012). In the case of Bosnia and Herzegovina, we have neighbouring Serbia and Croatia along with, as it were, the very same Russia, Iran, Saudi Arabia and the West (along with Turkey) (Mujanović 2018, 2023). Consider the following quote from British historian Philip Mansel:

> The proximity of rival religions at a strategic crossroads inspired a mating game of seduction and exploitation still being played today. Using emotional language to mask self-interest, each religious group tried to seduce a foreign power; each foreign power searched for suitable local protégés. Outside interference was matched by inside desire for more of it (Mansel 2011, p. 92)

The reference here is to *fin-de-siècle* Lebanon but Mansel might as well have been describing the Bosnia and Herzegovina of today, especially given the crucial political role played by the OHR, which holds the authority to punish and reward internal political actors. The case of outside actors determining the political fate of the locals is evident in other cases as well, for example in Israel/Palestine.

Apart from the post-Ottoman states, there are also the newly independent states that share a post-Communist history as well as Slavic linguistic and ethnic ties to Bosnia and Herzegovina; beyond that, there are other states that continually contend with the challenge of demographic fragmentation and ethnic or religious conflict.[3]

The point here is that an enhanced sociological understanding of the case that I have concerned myself with here offers the potential of adding to our understanding of political fragmentation and disintegrated states in a much wider sense.

In sum, then: post-war Bosnia and Herzegovina is burdened by the wartime tension between the three major 'constituent peoples' (as the Bosniacs, Croats and Serbs are known within the Dayton Constitution), which has

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[3] One such country that I will be returning to below is South Africa.

not been satisfactorily resolved politically after the establishment of the post-Dayton state.

This tension continues to simmer within a political system that sustains the underlying problem of ethnic competition, even as it was put in place to alleviate it. There is therefore much to explore here from a sociological perspective in terms of understanding the challenges of state-building within a fragmented post-millet society, working under the strains of the Dayton system.

The **purpose** of this study is to provide a sociological explanation for the polarised and fragmented political situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina, focusing on its disintegrated nation-state following the 1995 peace agreement. It examines the dynamic social processes, interactions and strategies among key actors that have influenced the post-war nation-state's trajectory up to the 2022 elections. This is done by focusing on one central actor, namely the Bosniac party *Stranka Demokratske Akcije* (The Party for Democratic Action – SDA). This is the largest party in the country and the one that Bosniacs have the most often voted to represent them since the breakup of Yugoslavia.[4]

It would be presumptuous of me to claim to cover Bosnian-Herzegovinian political life in its entirety, which is why I have made this methodological choice that serves to narrow down my exploration. I have zoomed in on one of the actors, seeking to describe the post-war political situation from their vantage point. Since the BH political field is filtered through an ethnic majoritarian interpretation of political participation, such that the mandate of the people is divided through ethno-nationalist parties, it is to one of these parties – the largest one in terms of total amount of votes – that I have directed my attention.

The Party of Democratic Action has been examined in the scholarly literature, yet there is a scarcity of field studies, particularly those employing a sociological lens with the political field as the central framework. My study addresses this gap, offering a novel contribution by exploring how SDA activists conceptualise Bosnia and Herzegovina's post-war political landscape, negotiate their political identities and enact their roles amid evolving political dynamics. Additionally, it investigates how the SDA, through its official documents and actions, interprets the national state-building project. By focusing on grassroots perspectives, this research

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[4] See Appendix A for more information about the party's electoral record.

illuminates how abstract political strategies are translated into everyday practice, an area underexplored in existing scholarship.

The **central research question** is: How have the political strategies and interactions of the Party of Democratic Action (SDA), as a key Bosniac political actor, with other influential political actors, shaped Bosnia and Herzegovina's persistent status as a disintegrated post-war nation-state between 1995 and 2022?

My first task is to investigate how (current and former) SDA activists conceptualise the strategic relationship between the Bosniac nation and the BH state, as set against the rival political actors in the country (and international actors peering in from without). I have, in order to do this, broken down the central question through a set of follow-up questions. These latter serve as rings that encircle and close in on the central question until they finally end up answering it. These are: How do SDA activists (including supporters-turned-dissidents) conceptualise the post-war political situation and the position of the Bosniac people (and the SDA) within that context? Which actors are understood to be the SDA's allies and adversaries and how is their positioning within BH political life understood? By processing this data with the help of previous research in the field and filtering it through sociological theory, a more general assessment about the post-war disintegrated BH state can be made.

In addition to interviews with current and former SDA activists, this study employs a range of qualitative methods to collect and analyse data. Participant observation was conducted at political meetings and events related to the SDA's activities. Furthermore, documents such as the SDA's party programmes, public interviews with party officials and content from the various social media accounts affiliated with the party were collected and analysed. These methods were triangulated with prior research and sociological theory in order to enable a nuanced analysis of the SDA's role and the dynamics within post-war Bosnia and Herzegovina's fragmented political landscape, contributing to a broader assessment of the country's disintegrated state status.

In conclusion, this study offers a sociological explanation of the post-war political situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina – or at least some fundamental and defining aspects of it – with regard to the nature of the Bosnian state and how the main political actors operate within it. It does this, in part, through offering previously unavailable empirical data related to the SDA, where the rank and file of the party (along with its dissidents) provide

information about themselves and their relationship to the state and to these other political actors.

Chapter Outline

This study is divided as follows. This introduction is followed by a two-part section wherein I set the stage for my study. I begin by offering a brief historical overview of Bosniac political activity from the Hapsburgs until Yugoslavia (Chapter 1), followed by a review of the scholarly literature on Bosniac political activity today (Chapter 2). This is followed by Chapter 3, which includes a review of the scholarly literature on the current state of BH politics in general (i.e. beyond only the Bosniacs) with a focus on the structural setup of the post-war political system, along with an identification of the main actors operating within this system. These chapters are intended to provide the reader with some necessary context.

Having given the reader some relevant background information on research about Bosnia and Herzegovina's political scene and Bosniacs as a political actor, I shift gear in Chapter 4 by turning to the central theoretical and analytical framework for this study, namely Pierre Bourdieu's political field theory. I provide a brief overview of his theory, emphasising the ways in which I have applied it to my case. I follow this up with Chapter 5 on how Bourdieu's theory has been discussed (and critiqued) by subsequent researchers in the context of societies characterised by ethnic heterogeneity and/or societal fragmentation. This chapter includes a discussion about some other theoretical treatments of the nation-state and the nation that are separate from Bourdieu but which are needed to fill in a few gaps.

These discussions about previous research and the theoretical framework serve as a preamble to my own empirical investigation. In Chapter 6, I begin with a section wherein I discuss and reflect upon my methodological choices, followed by what is essentially the central section of this entire study, divided into three chapters (7, 8 and 9), where I present, interpret and analyse my data. A concluding 10th chapter discusses how I have answered my research questions, with some reflections upon what I believe this study may mean for this research area.

CHAPTER 1

Bosniac Political Activity from the Hapsburg Occupation until the Fall of Yugoslavia

Introduction

Any study of BH politics within the BH political field would be deficient without some sort of historical background. The structural dynamics of BH political life…

> …have remained unchanged [since BH independence] and these are, in turn, segments of still older patterns, [therefore] to focus disproportionately on strictly contemporary affairs is to willingly discard not only context but, indeed, the primary engines and determinants of local politics (Mujanović 2018, p. 83).

This persistence of historical patterns reflects path-dependent processes, where early institutional arrangements shape subsequent political trajectories (see, e.g., Pierson 2000). This chapter, therefore, offers a brief overview of the history of Bosniac political activity from the time of the Hapsburg occupation up until the fall of Yugoslavia and the subsequent establishment of the BH state. The idea is not to cover every aspect but, rather, to touch upon some general trends and themes.

The structuring is based on a standard classification in the literature on Bosniac identity, rooted in the idea that what started out as a religious and class-based identity (in the immediate post-Ottoman period) evolved into a secularised nation-based identity (during the Communist era) and ended up coalescing around the BH state. For example, Ivo Banac's standard work on the subject describes Muslims in Bosnia and Herzegovina as traversing through the following three phases of post-Ottoman gradual secularisation of their identity: 'During Hapsburg and early Yugoslav times, they were primarily a *religious community*, with the Serb and Croat intelligentsia claiming them for themselves with regard to nationhood' (Banac 1996, p. 134). In the 1960s and 1970s, as Yugoslavia's Communist leader, Tito, increasingly had to rely on BH Communist leadership for his political aims,

he rewarded their loyalty by offering them *Muslim nationhood* within the Communist framework.

Banac identifies a final phase of *postcommunist statehood*, with the emergence of Alija Izetbegović's political movement (Banac 1996, pp. 145–147). Another, more recent, example is Krieštorac, who does not speak of three phases but nevertheless refers to a process whereby the Bosniacs have transformed from 'an ethno-religious group into a full fledged distinct and independent national group', centred on a self-aware secularised nationalism whereby their 'origins and fortune' are tied to Bosnia and Herzegovina (Krieštorac 2022, pp. 41, 167). Another example is Jezernik (2021), who refers to the post-Ottoman development of Bosniac identity as going from a millet to a nation, demonstrating the traversal from a pre-modern sharia-rooted conceptualisation to one that is ultimately derived from Western enlightenment ideas.

A BH sociologist, Šaćir Filandra, offers what amounts to the most expansive and thorough exploration of this evolutionary process and I have therefore relied on his work for the purposes of this chapter. Apart from conforming to a standard way of presenting the evolution of Bosniac identity, his three-stage division succeeds in assisting the outside reader in setting the historical stage for the emergence of the BH political field and the Bosniac political actor within it – the primary pedagogical purpose of this chapter. Whilst, too, I may have relied on Filandra for the classification, the historical overview itself is based on a variety of references.[5]

Finally, before proceeding to the overview, it needs to be pointed out that a specified definition of the term 'Bosniac' and its relationship to the designation 'Bosnian Muslim' or simply 'Muslim' (*Musliman*) – which might otherwise have been appropriate at the present moment – will, instead, have to be provided gradually as the narrative moves along, since the term itself and the varying shifts in the understanding and usage of it are the very thing that this historical overview centres around.

Background

Filandra divides the Bosniac national movement (generally referred to as the *Preporod*, meaning 'renaissance') into three stages culminating in SDA

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[5] My overview, in terms of identified trends, patterns and highlighted events, mostly mirrors the overview found in the recent treatments of Mujanović (2023) and Krieštorac (2022), except that the former goes back to Ottoman times and the latter all the way back to the medieval BH kingdom. For elaboration upon some of the issues discussed here, these two works are good starting points.

party founder Alija Izetbegović's political project of Bosniac affirmation within (or through) a BH state. Due to the marginal political role played by their rivals, Filandra explicitly identifies the Izetbegović-led SDA as the final manifestation of the *Preporod*, with Izetbegović becoming the first president of independent Bosnia and Herzegovina (Filandra 1998, p. 376). However, in order to understand the culmination of that development, one needs to bring the story back to the beginnings of the *Preporod* at the time of the Hapsburg occupation of Bosnia and Herzegovina – and, in order to do that, it is essential to anchor the timeline and context.

Bosnia and Herzegovina came under Hapsburg rule in 1878, following the Congress of Berlin, when the Austro-Hungarian Empire was granted authority to occupy and administer the region, which was previously part of the declining Ottoman Empire. This marked the end of over four centuries of Ottoman governance, which had shaped Bosnia and Herzegovina as a multi-ethnic territory with a significant Muslim population, alongside Orthodox Serbs and Catholic Croats. Hapsburg rule lasted until 1918, when the empire collapsed at the end of World War I and Bosnia and Herzegovina was incorporated into the newly formed Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, later renamed Yugoslavia. This period of foreign administration introduced new political and social dynamics, setting the stage for the evolution of Bosniac identity amid competing nationalisms and imperial interests (Malcolm 1994).

The Hapsburg occupation emerged in the wake of significant upheaval in the Balkans. By the late- 19th century, the Ottoman Empire, once a dominant power in southeastern Europe, was weakening, losing territories to nationalist movements and European powers. The 1878 transfer of Bosnia and Herzegovina to Austro-Hungarian control was a pragmatic move by the Great Powers in a bid to stabilise the region but it also ignited tensions among Bosnia and Herzegovina's diverse inhabitants. The Muslim population had enjoyed a privileged status under Ottoman rule as landowners and administrators. Under the Hapsburgs, they faced a new reality: a Catholic empire intent on balancing ethnic and religious groups to maintain order, often at the expense of local aspirations. This shift forced Bosniacs to navigate their identity and political role in a rapidly changing landscape, caught between the ambitions of their Serb and Croat neighbours and the policies of their new rulers (Amzi-Erdoğdular 2024; Glenny 2012; Jelavić́h 1983).

The transition from Hapsburg rule to the Yugoslav state in 1918 further complicated Bosniac political life. The Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and

Slovenes, established after World War I, sought to unify South Slavic peoples under a single monarchy dominated by Belgrade. For Bosnia and Herzegovina, this meant the loss of its distinct administrative status as it was absorbed into a centralised system that favoured Serb political influence. The interwar period saw growing ethnic rivalries, with Serb and Croat nationalists vying for control and often viewing the Muslims of Bosnia and Herzegovina as a group to be assimilated into their respective nations. This set the stage for the Bosniacs' struggle to define themselves, a process that unfolded across the 20th century through shifting alliances, resistance to external domination and eventual demands for recognition within a multi-ethnic Bosnia and Herzegovina (Hasanbegović 2022). These early developments under Hapsburg and Yugoslav rule laid the groundwork for the *Preporod*, the Bosniac national 'renaissance', as they sought to assert their place in a contested political space.

Stage One of the *Preporod* (From Hapsburg Occupation Until 1960s Communist Yugoslavia)

The BH political space has historically been contested and negotiated by three main stakeholders, with constant outside interference by major international players. This contestation has been reflected in Bosnia and Herzegovina's position within the various state formations to which it has belonged, such that the 'Bosnian Question' – Which ethnic group(s) should govern Bosnia and Herzegovina and under what form, i.e. should the country be partitioned and if not, how much autonomy should it enjoy? – has loomed large throughout the country's history. For the period under discussion in this chapter, Bosnia and Herzegovina has consistently been recognised as an administrative unit yet found itself in 'a subordinate position to a foreign metropolis' (Hoare 2007, p. 101) whether it be Vienna or Belgrade.

The main thesis argued for by Mujanović (2018) and others (cf. Bougarel & Clayer 2017, p. 170; Ramet 2013) is that nationalism and ethnic chauvinism have historically been and continue to this day to be cynically exploited by the elites of these three stakeholders (with the compliance of outside international forces) in order to perpetuate a corrupt and essentially kleptocratic system, tracing this back to late Ottoman times (Mujanović 2018, pp. 17–40). It is in this context of inter-Slavic rivalry and great power interference that the drama of the Bosniac national movement unfolds.

Under the Hapsburgs, whose policy was based on maintaining a confessional and ethnic balance that served to avoid destabilisation (which ultimately failed, as evidenced by Archduke Franz Ferdinand's ill-fated visit to Sarajevo), the Croats (being Catholics) generally had a positive stance towards the state – in contrast to the Serbs, who questioned the legitimacy of the Hapsburg occupation and cultivated irredentist aspirations (Imamović 1998, pp. 373–374). The Bosniac attitude toward the Hapsburgs was mixed and vacillated between the Croat and the Serb positions, with some Bosniac intellectuals and political figures seeking an alliance with the former group and others joining with the latter in calling for BH autonomy. Initial Bosniac resistance to the Austrian occupiers – which included, amongst other things, military confrontation, economic boycott as well as a mass exodus to the Ottoman domains – was followed by resignation to working within the Austrian system, particularly after the demoralising Young Turks revolution (Filandra 1998, pp. 27–31; Imamović 1998, pp. 361–362). Babuna (1996 pp. 131–132) points out that armed resistance to the Hapsburgs was mainly a peasant phenomenon, with the Bosniac elite distancing themselves from it early on.

The Bosniacs (those who did not migrate to the Ottoman domains, which around 100,000 did) went on to become loyal supporters of the Hapsburgs upon gaining religious and cultural autonomy, serving in the Kaiser's army (with the red fez part of the uniform); Hapsburg rule probably prevented the expulsion and killing of Muslims that had occurred during previous Serb and Montenegrin anti-Ottoman uprisings (Carmichael 2015, pp. 41–43; Ramet 2005, p. 248). The focus at this stage was on preserving the Muslim aristocracy's land possessions and safeguarding the practice of Islam amongst the Bosniacs who, at this point, primarily referred to themselves as Muslims (Filandra 1998, pp. 16, 37; Mujanović 2018, pp. 37–39) There were demands for BH autonomy within the empire as the means by which to safeguard Muslim interests but Filandra is keen to observe that there was, otherwise, very little attention given to questions of nationhood, statehood and language, which were to be articulated at a later stage.

This is in contrast to Serb and Croat intellectuals, who emphasised these very issues with a view to carving out an ethnic identity for themselves (Filandra 1998, pp. 34, 38–39).

> Muslims did not have myths of their own – they were aliens in their native land. The weakness or total absence of religious nationalism as exemplified

> in a churchlike hierarchical organization dedicated to the worship of ethnic nationalism made Serbo-Croatian-speaking Muslims uneven partners in the religious-nationalist competition in Yugoslavia (Perica 2002, pp. 74–75).

Mujanović (2023) similarly points out that the Bosniacs, at that time, lacked an interest in adopting a nationalist ideological programme based on the idea of a nation-state, even as their Christian neighbours latched on to these ideas as a form of anti-imperial resistance. A consequence of this was that many Bosniacs were caught between Croat and Serb nationalist projects, attaching themselves to one of these and identifying as either Serbs or Croats (Merdjanova 2013, p. 30). It left them, as per Merdjanova's (2013, p. 34) turn of phrase, 'a nation in search of a name'.[6]

One factor that has continued to influence political proceedings in Bosnia and Herzegovina up until today is the different groups' appeals to outside forces for help in promoting their cause. Bosnia and Herzegovina's destiny – and that of its peoples – continues to be characterised by its dependence on outside forces and their interests (Filandra 1998, p. 36). Where the BH Serbs naturally looked to Serbia (and, to a certain extent, Russia and Greece) and the BH Croats to Croatia (and Catholic Europe, headed by the Hapsburgs), the Bosniacs maintained strong ties with the *Sublime Porte*, compelling the Austrians to pursue an active policy of inducing the Bosniacs to sever these ties. Nešković (2013, pp. 14–15) argues that the main Bosniac strategy in the early period of Hapsburg rule was to carve out a certain amount of autonomy by which they could seek to safeguard the interests of the *Sublime Porte*[7] (which they understood to be representing their own interests).

The Hapsburgs were apprehensive about Bosniac institutional autonomy being tied to pan-Islamist causes and were therefore keen to create the still-extant institution of the *reis ul-ulema*, the 'head of the clerics', who would be independent from outside forces (apart from the Austrians themselves). Even so, the Bosniacs continued to maintain ties with the *Sublime Porte* and, in 1908, after some back and forth, the arrangement became that the Hapsburg emperor appointed the *reis* whilst the Ottoman *sheyhülislam*, the grand mufti, nevertheless had to accredit him. Bosniacs would also continue

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[6] Note that this takes a secularised conceptualisation of a 'nation' for granted, suggesting that a religious identity by itself is somewhat lacking. The idea that one might not feel a particular need for or find much merit in a secularised national identity does not seem to be entertained by either Merdjanova or Filandra.

[7] …i.e. the Ottoman government in Istanbul.

to study in the Ottoman empire through grants (Bougarel & Clayer 2017, pp. 62–64). This BH impulse for appeals to stronger international powers is so pronounced, it was claimed by Benjamin Kallay (the Austro-Hungarian administrator of Bosnia and Herzegovina during the late-19th century) that it was part of the national psyche (Imamović 1998, pp. 336–367).

Kallay's political project in Bosnia and Herzegovina included the promotion of *bošnjaštvo* or 'Bosniac-hood' (which, at this point, included all the inhabitants of Bosnia and Herzegovina regardless of their religion) as a counter-measure to Serb and Croat nationalism. This ultimately failed as these two nationalisms later coalesced into joined Yugoslav, meaning South Slav (sometimes also referred to as pro-Illyrian), resistance. Serb nationalism, famously, culminated in the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand (Carmichael 2015, pp. 43, 48–49). Whilst Bosniac elites and clergy protested against the anti-Serb rhetoric and the anti-Serb pogroms that followed this assassination, the Bosniacs generally remained loyal to the Hapsburgs and fought for them during World War I (Carmichael 2015, pp. 56–58; Imamović 1998, pp. 464–467). However, the Bosniacs were not completely in agreement as to their political future with the empire crumbling. Some intellectuals and politicians favoured joining in a union with Hungary; others preferred joining with Croatia and yet others wanted Bosnia and Herzegovina to be a part of the Yugoslav political project.[8]

However, common to all of these different currents was one crucial demand, whatever the political framework: Bosnia and Herzegovina was to have autonomy. Most Bosniacs, whilst seeking to preserve the integrity of Bosnia and Herzegovina, at the same time avoided taking a stance on the issue of nationality (Bougarel & Clayer 2017, pp. 100, 108–109; Hasanbegović 2022, pp. 522, 652, 656; Hoare 2007, p. 93; Jahić 2017).

Of all of these various options, it was the Yugoslav political project that eventually turned into reality. The Bosniacs were not directly involved in the creation and many did leave (see below) but those who stayed came to terms with it when BH administrative particularity (albeit not autonomy) was guaranteed (Filandra 1998, pp. 54; Hoare 2007, pp. 109–110). The main Bosniac national party (*Jugoslovenska Muslimanska Organizacija* – JMO)

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[8] For example: The first option was advocated by Šerif Arnautović, a member of the BH diet (a representative assembly under the Hapsburgs with limited legislative authority) and head of an organisation called *Ujedinjena Muslimska Organizacija*, 'The United Muslim Organisation' which enjoyed marginal support amongst Bosniacs. The Croatian option was favoured by Safvet-beg Bašagić, president of the BH diet and a noteworthy cultural figure, mainly in his capacity as a poet. The Yugoslav solution was championed by Mehmed Spaho, who went on to become the preeminent Bosniac leader within that state.

identified itself as primarily a Muslim politico-religious movement which, like previous iterations, fought for religious and land rights (Imamović 1998, pp. 494). Bosniacs, at this point, vacillated between officially identifying as either Serbs, Croats or Bosniacs (which still, at that point, was a supra-denominational term, tied to Bosnia and Herzegovina as a geographical location) mainly based on considerations having to do with preserving or advancing their social position (Bougarel & Clayer 2017, p. 69).

The issue of land rights was again at the forefront, its significance evidenced by the agrarian reforms under the Yugoslav monarchy which affected 51.6 percent of all agrarian land, around 90 percent of which was owned by Bosniacs. The change of ownership led to Bosniacs losing their land to Serbs in around 90 percent of the cases, amounting to an economic catastrophe (Imamović 1998). The emphasis on preserving the territorial integrity of lands inhabited by Muslims, which included the Sanjak region in today's Serbia and Montenegro, needs to be understood in that light; Bosniacs had a stake in much of the BH land itself as its literal owners, at least up until these reforms (Filandra 1998, pp. 78–79). This economic catastrophe was made worse by pogroms carried out by Serb militias (Filandra 1998, p. 57; Mujanović 2018, p. 44). The emigration, the physical elimination and the financial reversal of fortune – which created a collective 'crisis of self-esteem and purpose' (Carmichael 2015, p. 60) – naturally meant that the Bosniacs ended up with less political leverage. Another way of putting it is that they 'effectively [lost] all meaningful political power' (Mujanović 2023, p. 80). There were those who felt that staying in Yugoslavia entailed too many religious compromises and who thus emigrated to Turkey. This sort of emigration continued into the 1950s (Carmichael 2015, pp. 63–64). Those who stayed focused on preserving the territorial integrity of Bosnia and Herzegovina. It was felt by the JMO that the only bulwark against total domination by other actors was if the Bosniacs remained intact as a political unit within some unified BH political framework. Mehmed Spaho, the leader of the JMO and minister in the government, considered this question of Bosnia and Herzegovina's territorial integrity to be an existential one for the Bosniacs (Filandra 1998, p. 123).

These concerns over BH territorial integrity also need to be understood in the light of joint Serb and Croat attempts at carving the country up. The division of Bosnia and Herzegovina did occur several times during this period. The most famous arrangement is the Serbo-Croat partition of 1939, known as the Cvetković–Maček Agreement, named after two of the politicians involved in the negotiations (Hoare 2007, pp. 127–128).

> The erasing of Bosnia and Hercegovina from the map in successive stages between 1918 and 1939, and the political conquest of its peoples by foreign political parties based in Serbia and Croatia, resulted in an increasingly bitter struggle for power and possession; at once a struggle between Bosnians and a struggle between Serbia and Croatia over Bosnia and Hercegovina. Serbian and Croatian imperialist designs on Bosnian territory, and the mobilisation and counter-mobilisation of Bosnian Muslims, Serbs and Croats in response, brought Yugoslavia to the verge of civil war by 1941 (Hoare 2007, pp. 151–152)

The breakout of World War II prevented the enactment of the Cvetković–Maček agreement's stipulations. Nazi occupation of the country followed, with Bosnia and Herzegovina being incorporated into a fascist Croat state; however, the Communist government following the end of World War II reversed that arrangement and maintained the country's historical borders, affording Bosnia and Herzegovina the status of a socialist republic. The Bosniacs would again be subject to massacres, killed in their thousands at the hands of the Serb *chetnik* militias during World War II, in revenge for submitting to the Croat fascist state that had inflicted brutality on the Serbs. Indeed, some Bosniacs fought under a special SS division in the hopes of obtaining BH autonomy. Džafer-beg Kulenović (the JMO successor to Mehmed Spaho) allied himself with the fascist Croats, who promoted the inclusion of Muslims into their state; he had, prior to that, worked for the autonomy of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Others openly denounced the fascist violence against Serbs and some joined the Partisan resistance. This latter group, including defectors from the fascist divisions, mostly did so when the Communists promised the Bosniacs that they would uphold the territorial integrity of Bosnia and Herzegovina, which culminated in the establishment of the aforementioned BH republic within the overall framework of Yugoslavia. In other words, the Communists managed to win over the Bosniac autonomists. However, generally (and this was the case for the mass of ordinary BH people, whatever their religion), it was less a matter of ideology and more a question of changing alliances based on the very pragmatic concern of surviving the war (Bougarel & Clayer 2017, pp. 103–104; Carmichael 2015, pp. 72–73, 84; Hoare 2013, pp. 7–11, 379)

> [T]he Bosniak community and its respective political leaders, in an internally heterogenous fashion, broadly pursued policies which they believed would allow this populace to survive as a distinct people within its

> historic homeland. The latter occasionally meant accepting BiH's integration into greater state projects, above all the two Yugoslavias, but always with the provision that BiH would remain a coherent and autonomous unit within those states (Mujanović 2023, p. 70).

In sum, this first stage of the *Preporod* was characterised by the first emergence of political and economic demands which, to a certain degree, mirrored those of other Balkan national groups, particularly through political parties and organisations from 1906 onwards, starting with the *Muslimanska Narodna Organizacija*. The Bosniac people started to participate in the political process by voting in elections. Their rivalry with BH Christians was mainly characterised by a context in which they sought to preserve their religious distinctiveness and salvage some of their social and economic privileges (mainly based on landholding) that they were beginning to lose due to the Ottoman collapse; they mainly did so through increasing the political awareness of the Bosniac masses and manœuvering through the power struggle between the Hapsburg and Ottoman empires (Babura 1996, pp. 148–149). As we have seen, however, the need for a secularised national identity was not as pronounced as that found amongst Serbs and Croats, to the point that most Bosniacs felt comfortable either remaining silent on their national identity or joining ranks with Serbs or Croats.

The common denominator amongst the Bosniac leadership was a strategic focus on preserving BH territorial and political integrity. This concern spilled over into the Yugoslav monarchy as the Hapsburg empire crumbled – and then again into World War II, followed by Tito's Yugoslavia. It was the Partisan promise of maintaining BH territorial integrity (a promise that was kept when Bosnia and Herzegovina became a socialist republic within the state) that made Bosniacs join their ranks and support the Communist government. This brings us to the story of the next stage of the *Preporod,* under Communism.

Stage Two of the *Preporod* (The Communist Period Until the Fall of Yugoslavia)

The second stage of the *Preporod* developed under Communist rule and was characterised by a secularisation of the BH Muslim identity – the focus shifting away from the preservation of the Islamic character of Bosniacs and more attention given to achieving nationhood status within Yugoslavia, on par with the Serbs and Croats. The Muslim identity here is that described in

the literature as a 'sociological definition' of a Muslim, i.e. someone who identifies with the name, the history and the culture of Islam and Muslims but might be more or less adherent in terms of the theology and the religious practices (Bougarel & Clayer 2017, pp. 2–4; Merdjanova 2013, p. xv). This, in short, means that the term during this time became an ethnic more than a religious marker for the increasingly secularised Muslims of Bosnia and Herzegovina. The political dimensions of this sociological identity also became intimately tied to Bosnia and Herzegovina itself, such that it gained the status of a homeland (Abazović 2009, pp. 221, 229).

There were some exceptions to this secular and predominately ethnic conceptualisation of the Bosniac Muslim identity, with more emphasis on the religious aspects – for example through calls for allowing Muslim family law to continue to be consistent with Islamic law (Filandra 1998, p. 200). However, as the *Islamska zajednica*, the official organisation of the clergy, became integrated into the state structure, making it an instrument of the Communist party,[9] the religious character of the Bosniac identity gradually weakened by way of a focus on Communist ideology and secular nationhood. Indeed, the leadership positions in the *Islamska zajednica* consisted of Partisan veterans loyal to the Communist system who, in many ways, belonged to the new official civil religion of *bratstvo i jedinstvo*, 'brotherhood and unity' (Perica 2002, pp. 74–75, 94–95).

There were different phases to the Communist government's approach to religion, with a gradual diminishment of repression over time and with certain support as well (such as through the reconstruction of religious monuments with a cultural and historical significance) but always with a consistent goal of secularisation, right up until the very end of the Communist system (Sarač 2009, pp. 164–167). Organisations such as *Mladi Muslimani* ('Young Muslims'), which continued to work for the preservation of Islam amongst the Bosniacs and criticised the docility of the *Islamska zajednica*, were outlawed – with some of its members executed. Alija Izetbegović's activities with this organisation earned him his first stint in prison, between 1946 and 1949 (Filandra 1998, pp. 215–216; Perica 2002, pp. 76–77; Velikonja 2003, p. 218–219).

The Communist government initially did not recognise the Slavic Muslims as a separate nation, expecting them, instead, to adopt a Serb or Croat identity whilst retaining their religious affiliation. Official Com-

[9] It became increasingly wont to give its approval to measures such as the closing of Islamic institutions of learning and Sufi lodges (Filandra 1998, pp. 219–222; Velikonja 2003, p. 220).

munist doctrine initially deemed the 'confusion of religious and national identities' to be 'unenlightened and non-scientific' (Velikonja 2003, pp. 220–222).

This policy started to change in the 1960s, culminating in an official recognition of Muslim nationhood in 1968 (Filandra 1998, p. 136). This measure was intended to counter Serb and Croat nationalism – playing national groups against each other, in general, was a way to manage intra-party rivalries and to compensate for the lack of democratic pluralism – and to strengthen ties to Muslim countries in the Non-Aligned Movement. It had the effect of legitimising the Bosniacs as serious political players in Yugoslavia, particularly since nationality formed the basis for the distribution of resources. This also had the effect of increasing Bosniac self-confidence and, therefore, easing the grip of the secularisation process through a sort of national safety valve, as it were (Grandits 2009, p. 16; Merdjanova 2013, pp. 36–37; Velikonja 2003, pp. 225–226). In addition to this, recognising BH Muslims as a nation[10] was part of a larger strategy of legitimising regional Communist elites, rewarding the Muslim elites in the Communist party for their loyalty and helping to secularise their collective identity. It was also part of a strategy based on the idea that steering the direction of Muslim national affirmation would help to 'modernise' the Muslim population and to prevent the emergence of subversive, reactionary tendencies.[11]

Certain contingencies within the party structure – such as the political downfall of Aleksandar Ranković, a top-level party figure who favoured a centralised conception of Yugoslavia – was also an important factor in this regard. The name 'Bosniacs' (or 'Bosnians') was ruled out by the Communist regime as an ethnonym specific to the Muslims because it suggested that BH Serbs and Croats had a lesser claim to Bosnia and Herzegovina (Bougarel & Clayer 2017, pp. 126–136; Grandits 2009, pp. 32–37; Kamberović 2009, pp. 60, 73–74; Velikonja 2003, p. 223).

This improvement of the Bosniacs' political status was met with resistance.

> After more than a decade of relative political ascendancy, by the early 1980s Bosniak political elites and (purported) Bosniak political dissidents found

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[10] Such a conceptualisation of nationhood based on a secularised Muslim identity had the curious effect that one could be simultaneously Muslim and atheist or Muslim and Christian, with the former being a strictly national designation. The distinction between the national and the religious identity was made through a shift between the lower and the upper case M: *musliman* being a Muslim in the religious sense and *Musliman* being a Muslim in the national sense.

[11] Karčić (1997, p. 578) refers to this as an attempt to create a Muslim nation without Islam.

> themselves in the center of a series of major public scandals and affairs. And with them also appeared the specter of 'Muslim radicalism' as a supposed threat to the Yugoslav state, a hitherto virtually unknown phenomenon but one (in)directly prompted by Iran's 1978–79 Islamic Revolution, and the (re)emergence of Bosniaks as a relevant political factor in [Yugoslavia]. The advent of this discourse, which framed Bosniaks as an incipient Islamist constituency, would only grow over the next decade (Mujanović 2023, p. 96).

In the late 1960s, Muslim academics such as Muhamed Filipović and Fuad Muhić, who promoted this idea of Muslim national affirmation, were accused by certain sections of the party of harbouring Muslim nationalist and anti-Marxist ideas (Kamberović 2009, p. 67). This continued over the years with charges of 'pan-Islamism' or even 'Khomeinism', 'Ayatollism' and 'Khomeino-Ghaddafism' consistently directed by the Communist establishment at Bosniac intellectuals in the run-up to the fall of Communism, particularly in the 1980s (Filandra 1998, p. 305; Velikonja 2003, p. 227).

> [A]n intellectual ferment was taking place among the ranks of the Bosnian educated classes, as questions of national identity and rights were debated and, frequently, fought over: the complexities and paradoxes of the Bosnian national question were ultimately too great to be regulated by crude ideological formulations. […] Some Muslim intellectuals in this period demanded the establishment of separate Muslim institutions to protect and promote Muslim culture and intellectual tradition. They criticised the fact that the Muslims were the only one of the six recognised Yugoslav nations not to possess their own cultural and intellectual bodies: the other five nations had such bodies based on their respective republics, but the Bosnian Muslims were (except in the religious sphere) subsumed within the common Bosnian bodies […], some or all of which many Muslim intellectuals considered to be Serb-dominated (Hoare 2007, pp. 335–336)

There was little by way of consensus amongst Bosniac intellectuals with regard to identity and the extent to which it should be tied to Islam. However, those stressing an exclusively secular conception of Muslim nationhood could operate openly, whereas those opposing the 'modernisation' of the Muslim identity had to work through subterranean channels.

The **first group** was integrated within the political structure and focused on questions of culture and language, trying to fit the Bosniac nation within classical European national categories. They did encounter resistance by sometimes being subject to criticism in the Communist press but no legal

action was taken against them (Veladžić 2009, pp. 190–192). Even some political exiles who were generally critical of the Communist regime, such as Adil Zulfikarpašić (a former partisan fighter turned Communist dissident), were overall positive about a lot of the work done by the Communists in this regard because they supported the secularisation of the Muslim identity (Veladžić 2009, pp. 201–202).

As for **the second** and religiously inclined group, the government decided to send a clear message to them in 1983, through the 'Sarajevo trial' in which Alija Izetbegović, again together with other Muslim intellectuals, was sentenced to prison for promoting 'Muslim nationalism' and 'Islamic fundamentalism' (Hoare 2007, p. 339).

This tension between the Communist promoters of Muslim affirmation and those within the system who resisted this development grew out of the fact that politics in Bosnia and Herzegovina during this phase of the Communist era (1960s onward) became increasingly dominated by the Bosniacs at the expense of BH Serbs. Indeed, Serbs went from being the numerically dominant people in Bosnia and Herzegovina in the first half of the 20th century (45 percent of the population in 1931) to being overtaken by the Bosniacs by the end of it – reduced to one third in 1991 (Shoup 2018, p. 156). The de-legitimisation of Bosniac affirmation, followed by a de-legitimisation of the BH republic itself, may be understood as a response to this development (Hoare 2007, pp. 336–338, 359).

In sum, whilst the Bosniac struggle for affirmation had a religious emphasis during the Hapsburg and Yugoslav monarchy eras, there was a shift under Communism – steered by the ruling political establishment – to the promotion of a more secular national identity at a time when religious sentiments were suppressed. Those who sought to affirm a more religious identity had to work underground. The preservation of BH territorial integrity was again paramount during this period for the Bosniacs. This brings us to the third stage of the *Preporod* in which the Bosniac identity merges with BH statehood.

Stage Three of the *Preporod* (From the Fall of Communism Onwards): SDA on the Eve of and During the War

The third phase of the *Preporod* was, to a significant extent, characterised by the emergence of the more religiously inclined section of the Bosniac intel-

ligentsia out of their Communist-era subterranean existence, coalescing around the SDA (Sarač 2009, pp. 154–155).[12] During the first congress of the newly formed party, in December 1990, the process of secularisation hitherto described was denounced as 'brutal' and 'vulgar', destroying the 'essentially religious' nature of Bosniac national consciousness.

The SDA was initially the umbrella under which the religiously inclined Bosniacs joined forces with the leaders of the secular faction that had been active in promoting Bosniac affirmation within Communist Yugoslavia; however, this alliance proved short-lived. Two of the most prominent of these political leaders, the aforementioned Muhamed Filipović and Adil Zulfikarpašić, became critical of the religious overtones of the SDA's political project (accusing Izetbegović of right-wing clericalism) and formed their own party *(Muslimanska Bošnjačka Organizacija*, 'The Muslim Bosniac Organisation' or MBO) in 1990, before the first post-Communist elections in Yugoslavia in November of that year. The SDA won 86 seats, with the MBO gaining two (Babuna 2005, p. 409; Bougarel & Clayer 2017, p. 93). Another rival, businessman-turned-politician Fikret Abdić, collaborated with the Serbian president Slobodan Milošević and went on to fight the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina. He led the Bosniacs of *Bihaćka* (or *Cazinska*) *Krajina*, a region in the north-west of Bosnia and Herzegovina, as they broke away from Izetbegović's central government in Sarajevo. This happened in 1993.

Abdić and his followers felt that Izetbegović and the SDA (as well as those within the splinter party formed by Zulfikarpašić and Filipović) were too high-handed and Sarajevo-centred in their approach to Bosniac politics and rejected their leadership. This rejection included refusing to adopt the ethnonym 'Bosniac', opting instead for a secularised conceptualisation of the term *Musliman* that took the socialist phase of the people's history into account. Ultimately, this manifestation of opposition to the SDA was intimately tied to the person of Abdić to the point where a cult of personality was formed around him (Mulaosmanović 2009, pp. 147–149).

Like their predecessors, the JMO, the SDA initially sought to work for Bosniac affirmation within Yugoslavia, cautious in their pursuit of BH sovereignty and only opting for independence when it was clear that Yugoslavia would not be able to survive – at which point Bosniacs embraced BH statehood (Hoare 2007, p. 362). The BH Serb leadership positioned itself

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[12] For an overview of the history of the SDA, please refer to Appendix A, where I provide a translation of the party's official document which briefly outlines its history (the *historijat*).

firmly against the BH state, claiming that Bosnia and Herzegovina was as artificial as Yugoslavia and similarly doomed to dissolution.

These two positions *vis-à-vis* the BH state became most clearly articulated and manifested in political action through, on the one hand, the SDA and, on the other, *Srpska Demokratska Stranka*, 'The Serb Democratic Party', led by Radovan Karadžić (Shoup 2018, pp. 159–162). The BH Croats, for their part, represented by *Hrvatska Demokratska Zajednica* (HDZ, 'The Croatian Democratic Union'), voted in favor of BH independence in 1992 as a measure against Serb domination within Yugoslavia, followed up by their own irredentist aspirations. The Serb and Croat nationalists' turn to separatism was gradual and the enmity between the three nationalist parties was preceded by an initial pre-war mutual understanding in which they considered each other to be their respective peoples' representatives, taking a collective stance against their common opponent – the Communists. Indeed, they even held political rallies together. The deterioration of this relationship came as a result of irreconcilable differences regarding what to do about a crumbling and unsustainable Yugoslavia (this is where the Bosniacs and Croats joined forces against the Serbs in favour of BH independence) and then, during the war, what to do about Bosnia and Herzegovina itself (here is where the Croats, temporarily, worked against the Bosniacs by seeking to fragment the BH state). These developments were exacerbated from outside Bosnia and Herzegovina by Franjo Tudjman (the President of Croatia) and Slobodan Milošević (Hoare 2007, pp. 342–344; Bennett 2016, p. 57-58).

The BH Serbs and BH Croats went on to form their own proto-states: the *Republika Srpska Bosna i Hercegovina* (The Republic of Serb Bosnia and Herzegovina) and the *Hrvatska Republika Herceg-Bosna* (The Croatian Republic of Herzeg-Bosna). Whilst *Republika Srpska* still stands, enshrined by the Dayton Accords, the BH Croats formally abandoned their irredentism and resumed their alliance with the Bosniacs, culminating in the Bosniac-Croat federation that is today part of the BH constitutional arrangement (Hoare 2007, pp. 369; Velikonja 2003, p. 236).

In short: whilst the overall Bosniac aspiration was to preserve the territorial integrity of Bosnia and Herzegovina at all costs through the newly formed BH state, the Serbs and Croats questioned the legitimacy of the BH state such that, at its worst, this led to an all-out war between all three groups. However, this was further complicated through the intra-Bosniac military conflict with Abdić.

The Bosniac focus on defending the BH state was based on a presupposition that the integrity of the BH geographical unit, in this case in the form of a multi-ethnic state, signified the *sine qua non* of Bosniac survival (Filandra 1998, pp. 380–384; Mujanović 2023, p. 83). The SDA, therefore, came to distinguish itself from its two nationalist counterparts in that it identified with Bosnia and Herzegovina rather than with Serbia or Croatia; Izetbegović's government, in contrast to the Serb and Croat proto-states, was multi-national, with the chief of staff of the military a Croat and the deputy commander a Serb.

At the same time however, its non-civic, national character nevertheless made the SDA the mirror-image of SDS and HDZ. The SDA's strategy was, if not contradictory, then at least Janus-faced, in that it was formed around Muslim distinctiveness coupled with strategic BH civic nationalism.[13] This created a tension in the party, exacerbated by the state of war, such that it became a point of contention as to which of these two aspects of SDA's strategy should be emphasised or, indeed, focused on exclusively.

> Awareness of the extent to which belief in [multinational] 'brotherhood and unity' weakened the Muslims' ability to defend themselves formed a major catalyst to the flowering of an integral, separatist Muslim nationalism under the SDA, which in turn accelerated the unravelling of the multinational republic. The SDA's orientation and composition were purely Muslim while its patriotic identification was with a unified Bosnia and Hercegovina as the common homeland of all Bosnia's people. This contradictory character pulled the SDA two ways, but in consequence of the rebellion of first the Bosnian Serbs and then the Croats, the international community's collusion with the dismemberment of Bosnia and Hercegovina and the structural difficulties of organising multinational resistance movement, the SDA increasingly turned in the direction of outright Muslim separatism (Hoare 2007, pp. 367–368).

Babuna's assessment is that it is unclear to what degree the leadership within the SDA entertained the thought of Muslim separatism (even as certain radical elements within the party certainly supported the idea) but, even if they did, it was only for a brief period of time (Babuna 2005, p. 416). Velikonja (2003, pp. 278–279) points out that, whilst there were elements within the SDA who promoted Muslim separatism, Izetbegović never openly advocated for anything other than a secular state. Whatever the case may be, a separatist strategy was certainly dismissed or abandoned in favour

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[13] Further discussion on civic nationalism is forthcoming in the section below on theory.

of an exclusive focus on civic BH nationalism, with Izetbegović himself, later on, as a post-war statesman trying to steer the Bosniacs into this direction of civic nationalism, inclusive of Serbs and Croats as fellow countrymen (Filandra 2012, pp. 446–448; Hoare 2007, p. 375).

Before this ended up becoming the final position of the SDA, however, the tension led to a series of splits that resulted in the parting of ways with Haris Silajdžić, who had served as a minister of foreign affairs and prime minister[14] under Izetbegović (Filandra 1998, pp. 380–385). This echoed the earlier split with Adil Zulfikarpašić and Muhamed Filipović.

A crucial point in this third phase of the *Preporod* was the adoption, in 1993, of the name 'Bosniac' as the official ethnonym, such that we have the case of a people who entered the war as Muslims and exited it as Bosniacs. The term Bosniac – previously used mainly as a territorial designation that encompassed the non-Muslims of Bosnia and Herzegovina– was officially approved by the Second Bosniac Congress (*Drugi Bosnjacki Sabor*), in the autumn of 1993 (Donia & Fine 1994, p. 73; Imamović 1998, p. 569). With this move, going from 'Muslimness' to 'Bosniachood', we see the culmination of a post-Ottoman secularisation process (Kriještorac 2022, p. 41).

One final point about the internal workings of the party. Hoare (2007, pp. 342–348) describes the leadership style of the SDA at the time of its formation as leaning toward the conspiratorial (in reaction to years of suppression) and autocratic, centred around Izetbegović. Shoup (2018, p. 159) points out that this was also due to the critical situation in which Bosnia and Herzegovina found itself, such that most of the decision-making was concentrated in the hands of the Presidency and the Crisis Command. The SDA's recruitment strategy at this early point, it should also be noted, included co-opting former Communist *apparatchiks*. This gave the party a reputation as a vehicle for careerists who wished to survive the transition to a post-Communist order (Bougarel & Clayer 2017 pp. 194–195).

Conclusion

The most salient aspect of the historical overview for this study is, perhaps, that one common collective Bosniac ambition over this entire three-stage period seems to persist: the effort to maintain the unity and territorial integrity of Bosnia and Herzegovina as a self-preservation measure (given that

[14] He later went on to form his own civic-nationalist party, *Stranka Za Bosnu i Hercegovinu* (The Party for Bosnia and Herzegovina-Herzegovina) and served as the Bosniac member of the BH presidency between 2006 and 2010.

it is within such a unit that Bosniacs could constitute a politically significant part of the population), along with seeking alliances with internal or outside political actors that commit themselves to such a policy. In short, 'for the past 144 years, Bosnian Muslims have been the main Bosnian group that tied its own survival to the survival of [Bosnia and Herzegovina]' (Krieštorac 2022, p. 41). This type of Bosniac-wide consensus has, however, been lacking when it comes to what precisely Bosniac self-preservation means in practical terms, with material stability, national affirmation, preservation of religious identity as against secularisation (or *vice versa*) and other factors (or a combination of several of them) being prioritised amongst different segments of Bosniac political life. Bosniac political activity has also been fraught with political rivalries, rooted in personal ambition as well as ideological tension.

The collective political ambitions of the Bosniac people coalesced around the SDA at the time of the independence of Bosnia and Herzegovina and, whilst that initial unity did not last, with fractionalisation occurring early on and (as we shall see below) continuing up to today, they have remained the largest party in the country after the war. So, with this initial historical background informing us about the process that led up to the independence of Bosnia and Herzegovina, we may now turn to the literature as it pertains to post-Dayton Bosniac political activity, with a focus on the SDA.

CHAPTER 2

The Bosniacs and the SDA after Dayton

Introduction

The post-Dayton focus of the Bosniacs has continued to be two-fold: an articulation and fortification of a secularised Bosniac *national identity* and a consolidation of the gains made from the war pertaining to *the BH state*. These are the two main themes that reoccur throughout the literature and these need to be unpacked a bit so that one may understand how the Bosniac identity and the BH state have been conceptualised and made to form a basis for political activity. However, there are also issues that have to do with internal disagreements and rivalries within the Bosniac political corpus, along with questions of how the Bosniacs relate to other stakeholders on the BH political scene. These, then, are the main themes discussed in this chapter: Bosniac identity; the BH state; the Bosniacs' relationship to local stakeholders; intra-Bosniac rivalry; and relationships with international stakeholders. The main purpose of this (and the following) chapter is to present the current research on these topics in order to identify the research gaps that I intend to fill. Let us begin with the issue of Bosniac identity.

Who are the Bosniacs?

As should be clear from the previous section, there are two main schools of thought within the Bosniac political corpus[15] with regards to how to conceptualise one fundamental aspect of the Bosniac identity, namely the Islamic aspect. Whilst both groups agree on one basic thing, that the Bosniacs are a distinct nation as opposed to a mere south-Slavic religious denomination or *millet* (where the name 'Bosniac' is a geographical marker and not an ethnonym), there is a difference regarding how to understand

[15] For example, amongst political representatives and public intellectuals. There are, within these two groups, those who could otherwise have been identified as Bosniacs but who prefer to call themselves Bosnians or even to stick to the old 'Yugoslav as ethnicity' label and who have, as such, disengaged from this debate.

the relationship between Islam and Bosniac-hood. At one end of the spectrum there are those who consider Islam to be a critical aspect of Bosniac identity, such that a non-believing Bosniac is, in some sense, deficient (albeit not necessarily disqualified from belonging to the nation). At the other end, there are those who would deem it incidental, arguing that the Islamic nature of Bosniacs is a historical quirk (and could be deemed a charming one or an unfortunate one, depending on one's personal proclivities). Ultimately, since Islam is demoted to a secondary status, with the focus being on national identity centred around a secular state, both of these perspectives reflect a fundamentally secular understanding of the Bosniac identity; the difference lay in how much emphasis to put on one particular aspect (the Islamic one). This was the most clearly reflected in Bosniac politics through the rivalry between *Mladi Muslimani* and the Communist Bosniacs, which spilled over into the early split within the SDA between Alija Izetbegović and Adil Zulfikarpašić (along with Muhamed Filipović and Fikret Abdić), as discussed in the previous section. As is often the case, many people outside of politics will fall somewhere in between these two ends of the spectrum although they might lean in one or the other direction. Fortunately, two recent studies on Bosniac identity happen to align with different points along this spectrum, offering neat illustrations of both perspectives from an academic angle. However, I have also chosen to highlight these two studies because they possess the additional merit of being comprehensive in scope; they provide an extended analysis of the themes that have been discussed in other studies as well and serve as a nice starting point for this section. I will be returning them throughout this chapter.

The first perspective is represented in Kriještorac (2022, p. 53), who highlights the Islamic religion as one of three pillars (or building-blocks) of Bosniac identity. At the same time, however, he stresses the secular dimensions of Bosniac identity (which are directly related to the land, history and culture of Bosnia and Herzegovina) and observes that the designation 'Muslim by nationality' was partially imposed on the Bosniacs by Serb and Croat Communists in order to over-emphasise this religious dimension and thereby avoid creating an impression that Bosniacs have a stronger claim to the country than Serbs and Croats. This gave rise to an awkward situation whereby the Bosniacs were singled out as a sort of reactionary remnant of the Ottoman *ancien régime*, which had a debilitating effect on the Bosniacs' ability to pursue their political ambitions as a nation (Kriještorac 2022, p. 3). Nevertheless, Kriještorac stresses the Islamic dimension of Bosniac

identity by singling out two major aspects related to Bosniac-hood that influence public as well as private life. These are the official Islamic religious organisation (*Islamska Zajednica* – 'The Islamic Community' or IZ for short) and the Hanafi school of Islamic practice (along with the Maturidi theological school to which it is connected). The IZ (which espouses Hanafism/Maturidism), as an institution, has taken on the role of an authority not only on Islam but on what it means to be Bosniac; as such, it mediates between different sections of Bosniac public life and is entangled within various social and political structures, making it a feature of Bosniac-hood that cannot be overlooked (Kriještorac 2022, pp. 70, 84). As for Hanafism/Maturidism, it is well beyond the scope of this study to discuss the intricacies of Kriještorac's thesis with regard to how these two schools have shaped Bosniac-hood. However, the gist of the argument is that the flexibility and pragmatism inherent to this strand of Islam have been particularly conducive to the local needs of Bosniac Muslims and have contributed to the development of something that is perceived to be a specifically Bosniac form of Islam. This, in turn, has added to the idea that there is something particular or distinctive about Bosniac identity, to the degree that it has manifested itself through a *sui generis* religious practice. This tends to be referred to as 'Bosnian Islam' and has become a part of the collective Bosniac self-image (Kriještorac 2022, pp. 75–76).

When Kriještorac discusses the other two building blocks/pillars of Bosniac identity, he does not diverge all that much from Mujanović, so let us discuss his other two blocks/pillars together with the latter's analysis of Bosniac identity. First, however, let us see where Mujanović departs from Kriještorac, whom he references directly as someone who over-emphasises the Islamic dimension (Mujanović 2023, p. 164). Instead, Mujanović understands there to be a continuity between today's expressions of religious practice and pre-Islamic antecedents.

> I define the Bosniak nation as a community who believe themselves to be indigenous to the historic Bosnian lands; who continue to identify with and support BiH as a distinct and sovereign polity and maintain the existence of an accompanying distinct Bosnian cultural and linguistic identity; and who, though predominantly (culturally) Muslim, maintain claims to both a pre-Islamic and pre-Christian past as organic features of their historic national identity, which is also cited as conceptual proof of their ancestral belonging in the historic Bosnian lands (Mujanović 2023, p. 26).

Mujanović agrees with Kriještorac that the 'Muslimness' of Bosniacs has been over-emphasised by Serbs and Croats (with Mujanović adding that the same has been done by Western observers and researchers) and, whilst he does acknowledge that Islam is a significant cultural marker, he argues that it is the most pronounced amongst conservative elements, particularly the SDA. However, as an argument for his thesis that it is the Bosniacs' relationship to Bosnia and Herzegovina (to the exclusion of Islam) that forms the 'the binding membrane' of Bosniac identity, he highlights syncretic formulations, used by the SDA, which place the Ottoman legacy alongside the pre-Islamic medieval BH kingdom, Austria-Hungary, Yugoslavia and Europe in general as crucial features of Bosniac-hood. He argues that this demonstrates that, at the end of the day, it is Bosnia and Herzegovina's historicity as a polity that counts, even for the SDA, as it does for Bosniacs in general. Also telling is the fact that the Bosniacs (including the SDA) ended up rejecting 'Muslim' as an ethnonym and, instead, tend to embrace a narrative in which pre-Islamic Bosnia and Herzegovina is understood to have been a *refugium hereticorum* wherein a multiplicity of religions co-existed. Ultimately, Mujanović presents statistical data which demonstrate that Bosniacs themselves tend to connect their Bosniac identity to Bosnia and Herzegovina rather than to Islam as a prevailing feature of their self-conception (Mujanović 2023, pp. 28–40).

> It is that universalist acceptance and embrace of nearly all Bosnian political and confessional traditions that is primary to modern Bosniak ideological self-conception. It is the attachment to [Bosnia and Herzegovina] as a distinct and independent polity, with its own distinct political and social traditions, that animates contemporary Bosniak national narratives. Arguably, even more than [Islam] (Mujanović 2023, p. 40).

This shows that the difference between Kriještorac and Mujanović is one of emphasis – and Kriještorac goes on to align with Mujanović on the other features of Bosniac identity presented in Mujanović's definition of Bosniac identity (as quoted earlier). The other two building blocks discussed by him are the Bosnian language (Kriještorac 2022, pp. 84–91) and a concern for the integrity of Bosnia and Herzegovina as a territory and an entity (Kriještorac 2022, pp. 54–68). The issue of the relationship between the Bosniacs and the BH state (or polity/entity) will be discussed separately below. Let us now move on to other studies on Bosniac identity.

One aspect that pertains to the aforementioned tension between a religious and a secular identity concerns a manifestation of Bosniac

nationalism that sometimes spills over into Muslim separatism. This was more pronounced during times of war and is less conspicuous in post-Dayton Bosnia and Herzegovina. There is also a parallel theme running through the literature (particularly in the wake of 9/11) which concerns the purported ties between the Bosniac national movement and Islamic fundamentalism and terrorism, giving us a reverberation of the discussion in 1980s Yugoslavia (and, indeed, going back to Hapsburg anxiety over Bosniac pan-Islamism via the *Sublime Porte*). Some of the less-serious contributions in this regard, which portray Bosnia and Herzegovina as the home of a future caliphate, are discussed in and/or critiqued by Hoare (2008), Tziampiris (2009), Bougarel & Clayer (2017, pp. 6–7), Mujanović (2023, p. 32) and Li (2020, pp. 34–36).[16] Correia (2013a, p. 403) argues that foreign observers have, in this regard, been guilty of 'acritically' repeating Serb and Croat nationalist propaganda that does not reflect the empirical data. Leaving the more sensationalist research aside, let us see how the issue of Muslim separatism (which tends to be associated with the SDA) has been discussed in the literature.

As we have seen, Filandra's assessment is that Alija Izetbegović, whatever his youthful philosophical cogitations, finally settled on promoting an inclusive, civic BH identity. Merdjanova (2013, p. 75) similarly argues that the idea of secular nationalism has prevailed within the SDA. She describes Alija Izetbegović and the SDA, at the time of its founding, as representative of pan-Islamism, highlighting, for example, the fact that party meetings would begin with the *basmala* (a Muslim invocation for blessings), yet she concludes that the very struggle for Bosniac affirmation with an emphasis on Islam paradoxically ended up secularising Islam by nationalising it (2013, pp. 33–34).

Hoare (2007), whilst dismissing the idea that Izetbegović was an extremist or fundamentalist, understands him to have been a Muslim nationalist whose dedication to a civic Bosnia and Herzegovina was negotiable and that the SDA's conceptualisation of the Bosniac identity is riddled with paradoxes that are difficult to disentangle, although he sees post-Dayton Izetbegović and the SDA ultimately as proponents of an integrated BH state (2007, pp. 405–408). Banac (1996, p. 147) states that Izetbegović 'championed a secular, multinational Bosnian state, in which the rights of the three constituent communities would be guaranteed and protected'.

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[16] For example, several of these works are marred by problems such as plagiarism and mistakes in translation.

Bougarel and Clayer (2017) echo all of the above researchers in concluding that secularism has prevailed within the SDA; however, their analysis is that the path to that destination has been a thorny one. They trace the historical origins of the SDA back to the *Mladi Muslimani* organisation, described as pan-Islamists. As the SDA was thus formed and headed by pan-Islamists, an exceptional state of affairs emerged ('the Bosnian exception' they call it) in which a largely secular Bosniac population was represented and governed by a group of pan-Islamists.

This ended, roughly, with the death of Alija Izetbegović in 2003 and through the aftermath of 9/11, turning the SDA into a more pronouncedly secular party. This development was galvanised with the formation of splinter parties, including those (such as *Stranka Demokratske Aktivnosti*, 'The Party for Democratic Activities') which became dissatisfied with the marginalisation of the pan-Islamist current within the party (Bougarel & Clayer 2017, pp. 214, 219–220).

Babuna disagrees with this analysis and considers the SDA to have been more of a big tent party that brought various factions of Bosniac society together, with the pan-Islamists being a mere faction within the party rather than its dominant constituent. He argues that Alija Izetbegović, early on, himself decided to sideline some of the pan-Islamists in favour of moderates. In the end, he opted for promoting the idea of an inclusive multi-ethnic 'Bosnianhood'.

The emergence of Izetbegović's son, Bakir, as a key player within the party (after Alija's death) also had the effect of marginalising the more radical elements within the party. In short, the SDA have (particularly in a post-9/11 world) sought to officially cement themselves as a party working for secularism and civic values, distancing themselves from the nationalist and Islamist labels that were more pronounced in an earlier period (Babuna 2005, pp. 424–430; Perica 2002, pp. 87, 169).

Bougarel and Clayer (2017, p. 151) also go on to state that, whilst the Bosniacs are generally secularised, a 're-Islamisicisation' of the Bosniac people happened from the 1960s onward, corresponding to Filandra's second phase of the *Preporod*. This was facilitated by the liberalisation of the Communist regime and the recognition of the Muslim nation, coupled with the Yugoslav state's efforts to forge ties with non-aligned Muslim countries. This re-Islamicisation has taken various twists and turns – with, for example, a type of intellectual Islamic modernism dominating at certain points or manifesting itself through more visibility for Islamic symbols in the public sphere at other times. This is coupled with a type of Salafism emerging, not

least through Bosniacs who studied abroad, foreign fighters joining the BH army and Islamic NGOs that established themselves in Bosnia and Herzegovina during the war in the 1990s.

Merdjanova (2013) points out that there are other dimensions to the Bosniac identity, even if we were to stress the Islamic element, thus complicating the picture even more. Indeed, the very concept of a pan-Islamic community, an '*Ummah*', is riddled with complexities to begin with; it is of 'a dynamic nature and encompasses a plurality of discourses, actors, funds, and ideological and political interests' (2013, 54–55). It coexists with the national identity but also interacts and competes with it. Added to this Merdjanova mentions the pan-Balkan Muslim identity (2013, p. 59), the neo-Ottoman identity shared with Muslims (and non-Muslims) everywhere from Turkey to the Crimea to the Middle East (2013, p. 76) and the identity of the Westernised, secular 'European Muslim' (2013, p. 110). She argues that the BH government's appeal to the *Ummah* during the war was primarily tactical (2013, p. 58). The complex nature of this is compounded by the consideration that nationalism itself might serve as an ersatz religion even if religion proper is taken out of the equation, making things difficult to disentangle when the national identity is intertwined with a religious identity (2013, p. 8).

Šehagić (2021) discusses the issue of the European element of Bosniac identity and processes of racialisation when encountering the West, by using the diaspora experience in Germany as a starting-point for a wider discussion about Bosniac identity. Generally, Bosniacs view themselves as white Europeans and their Europeanness has been understood within the German government and in wider society as a factor that has made them well-integrated. At the same time, however, their quasi-Oriental status as Muslims and from th Balkans has afforded them an in-between position: not quite European and not quite Oriental (2021 pp. 225–229). Invoking the anthropological work of Talal Asad, Šehagić goes on to discuss how European identity has historically been constructed in opposition to Islam, making Bosniacs eager to over-emphasise their Europeanness to the West. The racialisation of Islam has meant that they have developed a constant need to prove themselves as Europeans (2021 pp. 231–234).

The question of Bosniac identity with regards to balancing the European and Islamic elements also brings us to the question of how the Bosniacs have handled this issue in the arena of international politics (particularly during the war). This discussion will thus have to continue in the context of the Bosniacs' relationship to international stakeholders, which will be dealt

with below. Let us now turn to the question of Bosniacs' relationship to the BH state.

Bosniacs and the BH State

There seems to be a consensus in the literature, as it pertains to the Bosniacs' relationship to the BH state, that their post-Dayton political activity has generally coalesced around the strengthening of BH state institutions, with the attendant promotion of a kind of civic nationalism.[17] There is, however, some tension or dissonance there due to the simultaneous presence, in conservative circles, of an ethnically particularistic Bosniac identity in which Islam holds a central position (even if only as a cultural signifier). This tension between the ethnoreligious Bosniac and the civic BH identity (with a particular focus on how the SDA approaches this issue compared to its Bosniac political rivals) will be discussed below, where I examine intra-Bosniac rivalry. The discussion here will be about how Bosniacs perceive the BH state as a political institution.

In short, the question of the preservation and strengthening of the BH state is perceived as one of biological survival for the Bosniacs.

> The question is: How are the Bosniacs to survive and safeguard the conditions needed for their continued progress within the BH space? Some within the Bosniac political corpus consider the order of the circles of value to be: religion, nation, state. In other words: only by emphasizing the religious distinction of Bosniacs and through diligence in defending that distinction will the nation and the state be safeguarded. Such a theoretically valid stance will in political practice be manifested through a conflation between religion and politics, the theologizing of politics and neglect of the state. Scarcest are the political forces and actors, most needed in Bosnia and Herzegovina, who think through, understand and comprehend Bosniac survival in such a way that they see the preservation of the Bosnian state as a condition for the preservation of Bosniac nationhood and spirituality. Mistaken are those who consider that by only defending the religious or the religious and national aspects, neglecting the defense of Bosnia and Herzegovina as a state, will the faith and the nation be adequately defended. Historical experience tells us that it is only through the state and state apparatus that national and spiritual distinctiveness is safeguarded (Filandra 1998, p. 392).

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[17] See the section on the theoretical framework for this study for a longer discussion about the concept.

This quote from Filandra (which also echoes the earlier discussion about how much emphasis to put on the Islamic dimension of Bosniac identity) illustrates how high the stakes are understood to be. Imamović (1998, p. 573) concurs with Filandra that the preservation of the BH state has emerged as the main Bosniac political priority of the 1990s. Kriještorac (2022, pp. 4–66) points out that a political focus on preserving the integrity of Bosnia and Herzegovina as a political entity has generally characterised post-Ottoman Bosniac political engagement; much of his discussion rests on offering historical details of this.[18] After the war, he describes how preserving the integrity of the BH state has 'consum[ed] all [Bosniac] energy' to the point where other aspects of their identity, such as language or religion, have been neglected (2022, p. 67). Since this observation that the BH state holds a central position for Bosniacs is omni-present in the literature[19] and fairly straightforward, I now turn to the researcher who has given the most comprehensive and informative treatment of this – namely Mujanović (2023) – and zoom in on his analysis.

Like Kriještorac, Mujanović is keen to point out that a political focus on Bosnia and Herzegovina as a polity enjoys historical precedence, although he highlights how the experience of the wartime genocide has definitively linked Bosniac political imagination to the BH state.

> That is, the Bosnian state's survival is seen as a precondition for the Bosniak nation's survival, both because it is understood as their national homeland and because the stated aim of the Croat and Serb nationalist sides during the 1990s was the partition of BiH and the expulsion and/or extermination of the Bosniak community from the territories that each side claimed for its respective parastates (Mujanović 2023, p. 54).

The parallels to the Jewish people's relationship with the state of Israel is quite obvious here, to the degree that Mujanović speaks of a 'Zionist turn' in post-genocide Bosniac political thinking. The discussion about the religious dimension to Bosniac identity comes to the fore here again, since the Bosniacs have periodically been identified as Muslims in a religious as well as an ethno-national sense (Mujanović 2023, pp. 54–55). The main difference is that, whilst Israel is conceptualised as a 'Jewish state' (and identified as such in the declaration of independence), this is not the case with

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[18] I have also discussed this in the historical overview.

[19] Another example: '[The Bosniacs] could not abandon the defence of [Bosnia and Herzegovina] as a state or administrative entity and still survive as a unified national community' (Hoare 2004, p. 128).

Bosnia and Herzegovina, which Bosniacs envision as a civic state. This difference, whilst obvious to me as a reader, is not actually mentioned by Mujanović. Kriještorac (2022, p. 237), however, discusses a similar point when making another comparison, this time with Switzerland.

> Although [Bosnia and Herzegovina] is occasionally described politically as a possible 'Switzerland of the Balkans' because it is geographically located between Croatia in the north and Serbia in the south and has large populations of Croats and Serbs living in it, nevertheless, BiH is different in at least one important way: in Switzerland, each national group has a corresponding national state to provide for the full balance of power among them while, in Bosnia and Herzegovina, (Bosnian) Muslims do not have a national state. That is why most of the accused Bosnian Serb and Croat war criminals easily went from [Bosnia and Herzegovina] to their respective national states, where many of them still live outside the reach of the [Bosnian] judiciary and law enforcement.

In short, then, we have a situation in which the Bosniacs understand the BH state as a *sine qua non* of their survival and have directed most of their post-war political energy into maintaining the integrity of this state. At the same time, however, the state is not conceptualised as a national home that is exclusive to one ethnic group. As we have seen, even Alija Izetbegović and his SDA have propagated for a civic form of Bosnian nationalism. Since Bosniac identity and the idea of a BH state are so intertwined, it can be difficult to distinguish between civic BH nationalism and Bosniac nationalism, even for Bosniacs themselves (Kriještorac 2022, p. 68). Bosniac school textbooks tend to portray the Bosniacs as the authentic defenders of Bosnian-hood against those who wish to fragment the Bosnian civic identity. Indeed, the historical conversion process to Islam is perceived in this very light, such that Bosniac-hood (with its Islamic element) is intertwined with Bosnian-hood. 'Conversion to Islam ensured the continuity of landownership and gave the Muslims legitimacy as the "authentic" inheritor of BH particularity' (Carmichael 2015, p. 16).

This discussion raises the issue of how BH Serbs and BH Croats relate to Bosniac conceptualisations of a civic BH nationalism and a BH state, so let us now turn to that issue, along with others that relate to how Bosniacs engage politically with these two groups.

The Bosniacs and their local rivals

The purpose here is to display how Bosniacs have generally tended to understand these two rivals, along with how they engage with them politically. Mujanović (2023) offers the most comprehensive overview in this regard.

I quoted Mujanović earlier when discussing the BH state. A part of that quote reads: '[T]he stated aim of the Croat and Serb nationalist sides during the 1990s was the partition of BiH and the expulsion and/or extermination of the Bosniak community from the territories that each side claimed for its respective parastates' (Mujanović 2023, p. 54). This quote summarises the Bosniac perception. By repeatedly seeking to carve up Bosnia and Herzegovina during the 20th century – most vociferously during the war of the 1990s – and by continuing to resist a civic-based and unitary conceptualisation of BH society and the BH state (which they seek to destabilise, if not dismantle), the Serbs and, to a lesser but still substantial extent, the Croats represent an existential threat to Bosnia and Herzegovina and, thereby, the Bosniacs.[20] What is deemed to be particularly ominous is the Serb/Croat post-Dayton tendency to cooperate in pursuit of their mutual goals, with the help of the neighbouring states of Croatia and Serbia. Mujanović (2023, p. 136) summarises the predicament that the Bosniacs understand themselves to be in *vis-à-vis* their rival stakeholders:

> So, while the likes of Dodik and Čović have the entirety of the Serbian and Croatian states, respectively, aiding their anti-Bosnian efforts, in addition to their expansive institutional powers within [Bosnia and Herzegovina], the pro-[Bosnian] forces do not even have access to a unified state apparatus within BiH. And they certainly do not have any kind of 'kin' state to appeal to for assistance or to retreat to.

So, perceptions aside, how has the post-Dayton Bosniac political engagement with the Serbs and Croats manifested itself?

Generally, a recurring set of negotiations involving these three local stakeholders and the Western stakeholders (the OHR, the EU and the US) have followed the war. The particularities of the proposed reform deals (some of which have been abandoned and some of which have been signed) are beyond the scope of this study – particularly since the BH constitutional arrangement is difficult to understand in its byzantine complexity to begin

[20] Whether or not this is really the case is a different matter but what I am aiming for here is the Bosniac framing, as explained by Mujanović (2023).

with – but they have generally consisted of various assemblages of compromise between the Bosniac state-strengthening aspirations and the Serb and Croat politics of de-centralisation (Mujanović 2023, pp. 52–56). The largest reform effort to date, spearheaded by the US, was known as the 'April package'[21] and was only narrowly rejected. The SDA were in favour of this package but it fell through, largely due to the opposition of SDA-dissident Haris Silajdžić, demonstrating how intra-Bosniac rivalry is also a factor in Bosniac political engagement with the Serbs and Croats (Mujanović 2023, p. 156). In short, then, painstaking political wrangling overseen by Western stakeholders, within the framework of the complicated Dayton constitution, has characterised Bosniac political engagement with the Serbs and Croats, with the aim of delivering constitutional reform that will make the BH state less dysfunctional.

Before I go on to elaborate upon intra-Bosniac rivalry below, let me turn to another aspect of the rivalry between the three local stakeholders, namely the mutually exclusive 'victimhood narrative'. With regard to the Bosniacs, it is centred around the genocide during the war. 'The majority of [Western and Muslim] public opinion sympathised with [Bosniac] suffering […] [and Bosniacs were perceived] as the principal victims of the "ethnic cleansing" carried out by the Serbian nationalists' (Bougarel & Clayer 2017, p. 6). A 'victimhood competition' has been playing out in the post-war BH political field in which, as mentioned earlier, all three of the main actors seek to strengthen their position by highlighting their own suffering (Bašić 2015; Moll 2013; Sokol 2014).

> [Historical monuments in Bosnia and Herzegovina] construct and reinforce mutually exclusive narratives that are part of the ethno-national identities, and as such are instruments of identity-building. Memory initiatives are very rarely directed towards civic nation-building that would include all the ethno-national groups. Instead, identity consolidation is carried out on the level of the ethno-national groups, within which monuments only serve to strengthen divisions. Thus, aside from attempts by some civil society organizations which aim to strengthen the civic Bosnian identity over the ethno-national identities, it is difficult to speak about strategies of identity consolidation on the state level. Instead, identity-building takes place in the entities (the Republika Srpska and the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina), cantons, and local levels, where the crucial roles are played by ethno-national regimes and the elites of the three prevailing groups.

[21] Again, the particularities of this reform proposal are beyond the scope of this study but they centred around the operation of the state-level parliament and the presidency.

> Although the Bosniak identity-building is connected to the state, still it is an ethnically conceived nationhood and excludes other groups. When it comes to the Serb and Croat identity consolidation, their connection with the state is almost non-existent[.] (Sokol 2014, p. 121)

Significantly, this aspect of the Bosniac strategy is enacted in a context in which BH Serbs engage in genocide denial and crime relativisation (Hronešová 2021; Ramet 2007).

Intra-Bosniac rivalry

In the historical overview I went over some of the scholarly assessments of the SDA, which are varied, if not contradictory, in terms of describing the party's ideology, at least in terms of the party's origins and the turbulent period during the war. The general conclusion, however, is that the post-Dayton iteration of the party has settled around BH civic nationalism, with a focus on strengthening the BH state, such that Islamist tendencies are mostly left by the wayside. Mujanović (2023, p. 28) refers to this type of civic BH nationalism with a Bosniac backbone as 'quasi-nationalist'.

The post-war rivalry between the SDA and other parties that seek to represent the Bosniacs revolve around the same points of contention as have hitherto been discussed regarding, on the one hand, emphasising Bosniac particularity and the central role of Islam or, on the other, seeking to avoid 'religious integrism' (Velikonja 2003, p. 226) and continuing the process of secularisation that began during Communist rule (albeit without the repressive measures).

The SDA, which represents the first approach, won the first two post-Dayton elections but, in the 2000 election, the **Social Democratic Party (SDP)** and Haris Silajdžić's *Stranka za Bosnu i Hercegovinu*, the **'Party for Bosnia and Herzegovina-Herzegovina' (SBiH)**, emerged as the main rivals to SDA which now lost the absolute majority of the votes.[22] Both parties wanted to put more stress on cultivating a *secular, civic identity* amongst all Bosnians. Bieber (2006, p. 41) refers to Silajdžić as 'more moderate' than the SDA and the SDP as 'the main moderate political party' amongst Bosniacs. Silajdžić left the SDA to form

> a European-oriented secular and moderate [party which] viewed [the] future government in Bosnia and Herzegovina as a coalition of moderate secular

[22] See the appendix for an overview of SDA's post-Dayton election results.

> Muslims, former communists, and other supporters of Bosnia and Herzegovina's independence and secular democracy (Perica 2002, p. 171).

However, when seeking votes, Silajdžić fell back on nationalist rhetoric, arguably because the political system (as discussed above) leaves little room for cross-ethnic campaigning. His top priority issue when in power was to highlight the problems of the Dayton constitution and to seek the dismantling of Republika Srpska based on the argument that its existence was made possible through genocide (Bennett 2016, pp. 183, 194–195). Šedo has referred to Silajdžić's strategy in this regard as opportunistic, meaning that 'it always depends on which elements of its programme or campaign momentarily prevails, whether liberal and non-ethnic, or Bosniak nationalist' (Šedo 2013, p. 93).

As for the SDP, the *de facto* Communist successor party, it offers a more civic-centred vision of Bosnia and Herzegovina than the SDA but, since such a vision tends to be aligned with Bosniac interests, it is mostly Bosniacs who tend to vote for them (Bieber 2020, p. 64; Stojarová 2013a, p. 30–31). Significantly, the SDA and all of the other parties that seek to gain Bosniac votes have one crucial point in common: they seek to strengthen the BH state, as opposed to those who wish to fragment and delegitimise it. Ultimately, the differences between the SDA and the other parties that vie for Bosniac votes would seem to be mostly surface-level.

> In fact, over time, these [moderate] parties would become indistinguishable from their ethno-nationalist competitors in terms of patronage-based control over state institutions, use of ethno-nationalist rhetoric and limited support for reform (Bieber 2020, p. 24).

Another Bosniac civic party that seeks to win votes away from the SDA is *Naša Stranka*, **'Our Party'**. They also wish to stress the BH identity over the Bosniac one. Indeed, the SDA's rivals in terms of the Bosniac vote can be categorised based on which of these two identities they stress (Jukić 2009, p. 281). Another dividing line between the SDA and the Bosniac-dominated civic parties is their characterisation of the SDA as representatives of patrimonialism and the conglomeration of a stale, corrupt ruling elite that needs to be replaced by a fresh set of civic-minded politicians for real reform to happen.

A relatively newly formed party (established in 2018) in this regard is the *Narod i pravda* ('**People and Justice**') party. It is interesting to note here that, apart from the SDP, these parties that seek to rival the SDA tend to be

formed by SDA dissidents, i.e. they are splinter parties. This includes *Narod i pravda*. Indeed, the leaders of this party tend to stress ideological continuity with Alija Izetbegović's political vision and to lament the corruption within the SDA (Mujanović 2023, pp. 49–51; Repovac *et al*. 2022). Generally speaking, these civic parties have not been successful in changing the tide in Bosnia and Herzegovina in terms of ethnically based patrimonialism, even as they gained some momentum following the protests in 2014. This is because the idea of a civic state tends to be indistinguishable from Bosniac nationalist aims and is therefore antithetical to Serb and Croat ambitions, as sometimes acknowledged by politicians within the SDP itself. The idea of a civic BH identity is essentially part of a Bosniac discourse which makes it difficult to make a straightforward distinction between Bosniac nationalist and non-nationalist parties (Sarajlić 2010, pp. 72–73). The result is that these civic parties have 'not enjoyed the large-scale success outside of urban, Bosniak areas that would be necessary for […] broader systemic political change' (Hulsey & Keil 2020, p. 360: Mujkić 2015). In other words, their appeal to Serb and Croat voters is too insignificant to make them into credible alternatives to a nationalist party such as the SDA, which then, in turn, can focus on a clear pro-Bosniac message.

Media magnate Fahrudin Radončić, leader of *Savez za bolju budućnost* ('**Union for a Better Future of Bosnia and Herzegovina**'), is yet another rival with a populist (also described as centrist) agenda. Corruption scandals have proven too burdensome for his political career, leaving the SDA as the current uncontested Bosniac nationalist (or quasi-nationalist) party (Kapidžić 2020, p. 92; Mujanović 2023, p. 115; Sarajlić 2010, p. 83). Another more marginal rival to the SDA is the 'Bosnian-Herzegovinian Patriotic Party', formed and led by Sefer Halilović, war-time general of the BH army. Its main focus (similar to Silajdžić) is on dismantling the Dayton constitution, turning Bosnia and Herzegovina back into a republic (Carmichael 2015, pp. 138–139; Jukić 2009, p. 277).

Mujanović (2023, p. 116) summarises the situation thus:

> [Bosniac political] fragmentation has […] occurred primarily along personalist rather than ideological-programmatic lines, and as such the disagreements between the parties which receive significant portions of Bosniak votes are often incoherent. They center on leadership disputes and personal feuds rather than substantive differences in policy or ideology.

That being said, there is one aspect of intra-Bosniac rivalry that does seem to be related to ideology. This concerns the instrumentalisation of Islam on the part of the SDA, as discussed mainly by Bougarel and Clayer (2017). Early on in the history of the SDA, factors such as 'religiosity that was more ostentatious the more recent it was' helped one along in one's political career and the state and the army were utilised for the re-Islamicisation of Bosniacs. The 'new converts' to the SDA have jokingly been dubbed 'watermelons' (green on the outside, red on the inside) and mosque attendance started to become seen as politically opportunistic – with the ones sitting in the first row, again, jokingly being dubbed 'comrades' (Bougarel 1999). However, the authors claim that this instrumentalisation of religion was most pronounced during the war and has gradually ended in peace time, even as Islam continues to occupy a central place in the post-Communist Bosniac identity (Bougarel & Clayer 2017, p. 195). That being said, the question of the visibility of Islam in BH society (mostly in the Federation) to an extent that was unthinkable in Communist Yugoslavia remains a point of contention in the Bosniac public discourse (Karčić 2013, p. 307).

The Bosniacs and International Powers

The themes that we have discussed thus far tend to intersect and this is the case here as well. The question of how the Bosniacs have tended to deal with international stakeholders in Bosnia and Herzegovina is, to a large degree, related to both how they relate to the local stakeholders (i.e. they engage with outside stakeholders in order to gain leverage against internal ones) and to questions that have to do with identity. For example, the issue of Europeanness and Muslimness and the supposed 'Bosnian' form of Islam that has been discussed earlier is tied to Bosniac self-perception as much as it is tied to the political relationship to the West and the Muslim world. Bougarel and Clayer (2017, pp. 215, 223–224) argue that the constant distancing from radicalism and the insistence on being representatives of a tolerant, European, modern and, sometimes, even secular Islam (as against Gulf influence) comes from the Bosniacs having to justify their existence in Europe. This clinging to a 'tolerant, Bosnian Islam' trope could be understood as part of a general Bosniac yearning for affirmation from the West, tied to the adoption of the ethnonym 'Bosniac' instead of staying with 'Muslim" (2017, p. 193). This is very much in line with the thesis presented by Babuna (2005), who argues that the political and military crisis in Bosnia and Herzegovina pushed the SDA into following a pragmatic, strategic

policy of survival, more or less devoid of political ideology. The various shifts between and appeals to the Western and Muslim worlds were made in desperation more so than through deliberation and, in post-Dayton Bosnia and Herzegovina, a *realpolitik*-based approach has prevailed in which European integration and a secular BH state are deemed to provide security for the Bosniacs and to maintain the territorial integrity of the country (2005, pp. 437–438). Hayden (2013, pp. 73–81, 358–360) argues that the Bosniacs' relationship to their Islamic identity needs to be contextualised as a response to Serb and Croat 'othering'; it serves as a defiant counter-response without necessarily entailing an Islamist political project to back it up. Indeed, he concurs that projecting the image of Bosnia and Herzegovina as multi-religious and 'European' was used as a Bosniac self-defense mechanism designed to shore up Western support. There is also the matter of the Bosniac diaspora serving as a bridge between the local Bosniacs and international stakeholders. Various types of lobbying campaigns in the West are considered a crucial aspect of the diplomatic effort to strengthen the BH state, even if local institutions are not directly involved and even if there have been few tangible (post-Dayton) political gains that can be traced back to lobbying by the Bosniac diaspora in the West (Mujanović 2023, pp. 150–153).

Daryll Li has an original approach to the question of political alliances with the Muslim world, which he prefers to understand as a type of 'Muslim universalism' that rivals other types of universalism, one that seemingly defies the conventional understanding of the Westphalian nation-state as a fundamental constituent unit (Li 2020, pp. 31–32).[23] He refers here to the internationalisation of the Bosnian/Bosniac cause through a specifically Muslim discourse with references to a pan-Islamic 'Ummah", which ran parallel with appeals to the secular 'international community'.

> The dilemma facing Bosnian Muslims can be thought of as one of crosscutting universalisms. From some universalist projects they faced suspicions of being too nationalist in their narrow particularity, either not truly secular and tolerant enough for liberals, or insufficiently pious and devout for Salafis. […] The vicissitudes of Bosniak nationalism are thus a reminder that nationalism's relationship with universalist projects is always necessarily ambivalent. […] In the case of Muslims in Bosnia, all of the things that made them deficient in terms of national categories—the overlap of apparently

[23] For other forms of universalism or cosmopolitanism, see Munck (1986), Nunan (2020) and Nussbaum (2008).

> incongruous identities such as Muslimness and Europeanness—also multiplied potential points of connection with the outside world. They could speak in multiple universalist idioms: not simply Western versus Islamic, but within and across those categories as well. Bosnia, with the messiness of its categories and names, should be understood as an exemplar, and not an exception, of the ambiguities of nationalism and universalism (Li 2020, p. 61).

What Li shows us is that Izetbegović, the SDA and the BH government had to juggle three different identities: 1) their civic, BH identity, 2) their European identity (as part of the so-called international community, which is arguably an extension of the West) and 3) their Muslim identity extended beyond Bosnia and Herzegovina itself (as part of the Ummah). These three different identities were utilised strategically through diplomatic efforts depending on which gains the SDA sought to achieve. For example, when they appealed for Western intervention, they emphasised their European identity. When they sought to attract civic-minded non-Muslims in Bosnia and Herzegovina, they emphasised their BH identity. When they appealed to Islamic solidarity, they emphasised their belongingness to the Ummah. This mainly applies to the war-time situation but remains an issue in post-Dayton Bosnia and Herzegovina as well, especially given the allegation that a Bosniac majority in Bosnia and Herzegovina would entail the country morphing into an Islamic theocracy (Mujanović 2023, p. 87). These tensions are also relevant with regards to intra-Bosniac rivalry, since the question of how to achieve a balance between Western and Muslim international powers is one that has divided the Bosniac political corpus, with the SDA (especially under the leadership of Bakir Izetbegović) seeking to strengthen ties with Turkey.

Conclusion

This section has highlighted some of the major themes that emerge in the existing literature related to the Bosniac stakeholder (represented by the SDA and their rivals for the Bosniac vote, mainly the SDP and SDA splinter parties) on the BH political scene. As has been shown, the BH political scene and the role of the Bosniacs within it has been studied and analysed with the contingent, relational and temporal dynamics of Bosniac political identity in mind; however, these past analyses have typically approached the subject from a top-down perspective, with less focus on the grassroots level, at which ordinary Bosniacs actively negotiate and renegotiate their political

identity in response to the shifting realities of everyday politics. I am interested in exploring how this process of negotiation and renegotiation unfolds in real time – how Bosniacs adapt their sense of self and political allegiance as they encounter daily challenges, interactions with the state and pressures from local and international actors. Additionally, I aim to provide a deeper understanding of how these internal tensions within the Bosniac community, arising from their ongoing identity struggles, influence the broader landscape of BH politics, particularly with regards to its fragmented and fractious nature where competing visions of statehood and nationhood seem to collide. Subsequent chapters in this thesis will elucidate how I have designed my empirical study (with a relevant discussion about the epistemological foundations which shape my sociological approach to questions of identity) and how I have utilised sociological theory in order to fill the research gaps; however, the point here is that I have not been interested in resolving the debate about the nature of Bosniac identity or the Bosniacs' relationship to the BH state – indeed, my intention has not been to enter into that debate to begin with but, rather, to explore how identity construction and the conceptualisation of the state translate into lived political experience under the specific structural pressures found in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

In essence, while the existing literature extensively debates the nature of Bosniac national identity – grappling with who the Bosniacs are as a distinct nation – my research seeks to delve deeper into a less-explored dimension: how Bosniacs conceptualise and live out their own political role within Bosnia and Herzegovina. Specifically, I aim to uncover how they perceive themselves as a political actor, including the purposes, responsibilities and aspirations they attribute to their collective presence in the political sphere – what might be considered their *raison d'être* as a political collectivity. This inquiry extends beyond self-definition to encompass their relational perceptions and political practice: how do Bosniacs view the other key actors, such as BH Serbs, Croats and international stakeholders – who shape the political landscape of Bosnia and Herzegovina – and how do they position themselves politically against these other actors? These questions probe the interplay between national identity and political agency, revealing not just who the Bosniacs believe themselves to be but how they position themselves amidst a complex web of allies, adversaries and overseers in the context of a specific political structure. Despite the richness of prior studies, these aspects of Bosniac political experience remain under-explored (specifically,

from an empirical perspective), presenting a gap that my work aims to address.

Another thing missing from these other previous studies is a discussion about the transferability of the BH political situation; how can a sociological understanding of the matters discussed here add to our understanding of the political situation in fragmented societies in a general sense, particularly other post-Ottoman ones?

In the following section I focus a bit more on the current research beyond just the Bosniacs and the SDA, in order to further contextualise this study and to further demonstrate the research gap that I have argued exists.

CHAPTER 3

Political Contestation in Bosnia and Herzegovina Today: The State of Play

Introduction

In this section I present prior research on political contestation within the BH political field, focusing on the major stakeholders involved and seeking to understand how the said contestation manifests itself within and is shaped by the country's political system. The purpose is to identify a research gap which I then go on to fill in the following sections. I have identified a set of recurring themes that offer an overview of the most prominent features of these aspects of BH political life. The focus is on general patterns and themes in the literature which mainly describe, explain and analyse the structural arrangement of BH political institutions and/or delve into the identity and activities of the major local and international stakeholders.

The outline is as follows: I first discuss research about the BH political system and its constitutional order (which is related to the Western stakeholders that are involved in BH politics). This is followed by research on the major local stakeholders, namely the three constituent peoples (the Bosniacs, the BH Serbs and the BH Croats). I then present studies about the country's transition to a post-Communist society and the attendant problems of political corruption. Finally, I discuss studies on the involvement of non-Western stakeholders. These are the main themes that I have identified in the literature on the BH political scene.

The Dayton Accords and Western Involvement

The US-initiated Dayton Accords which ended the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina have put a system in place that reflects the nationalist rivalry between the three main actors in the field. There is a *nacionalni ključ* ('national key') that forms the basis of its political organisation with, for example, a presidency that rotates between a Serb, a Croat and a Bosniac

member (Larise 2015, p. 209). This arrangement abolished the war-time multi-national republic, replacing it with a loose union of two entities (a Croat-Bosniac Federation and a Serb Republic) and a district (Brčko[24]). The literature features quite a few value judgements about the Dayton Accords, almost universally negative. For example, Nešković (2013) argues (p. 202) that the BH constitutional order serves as a structural impediment to the evolution of a civic, BH national identity. Hayden (2013, p. 301) argues that it 'ensure[s] that the representatives of any group could use legitimate constitutional structures to prevent taking any decision at all, thereby immobilizing the constitutional system'. Marko (2013, p. 75) argues that the system is unworkable such that 'each and every legislative reform is seen through the lens of national interests triggering immediately the mechanisms of power play based on veto threats'. Mujanović (2018, pp. 2–11) argues that the Accords failed to solve some of the underlying points of contestation, which has generated a political situation that has been characterised by social ruptures and political rivalry through an ethnic majoritarian understanding of the political will of the people.

Bosnia and Herzegovina is ultimately governed by an international body, the Peace Implementation Council, headed by The Office of the High Representative (OHR). Again, this aspect of the arrangement has also been negatively assessed in the literature. For example, Bieber (2006) and Hayden (2013) argue that the country is a *de facto* Western protectorate. The country has also been described as being in 'a permanent state of emergency' (Grebo 2009, p. 12). Another assessment is that this arrangement renders Bosnia and Herzegovina an 'unfinished' state, with a constitutional setup that is poised to lead to more disintegration (Nešković 2013, p. 298). The word 'dysfunctional' is also used to describe the BH state (Bieber 2006, p. 40; Keil & Perry 2015a, p. 469; Ramet 2013, pp. 12–13). Marko (2013, p. 78) goes so far as to refer to it as a 'failed state'. That, however, is not the most severe assessment. Banović *et al.* (2009, p. 15) refer to it as 'a monster'. Another evaluation, a little more tempered, is that it is 'bizarre' (Mujanović 2023, p. 15).

Some researchers qualify these negative assessments by pointing out that the initial challenges in Bosnia and Herzegovina are substantial. Mavrikos-Adamou (2015, p. 173) argues that the system that is put in place needs to build novel democratic institutions in a post-Communist system (and

[24] The particularities of the arrangement with a district are not relevant to this study. For an overview of the history behind why the Brčko district became a part of the Dayton Accords – and its workings within the political system of Bosnia and Herzegovina – see Lilić (2009).

culture) whilst facilitating reconciliation in a post-war context. The structures, with the power-sharing arrangements, need to balance local interests and international norms. If assessed based on whether the system has contributed to a shift away from violence as a conflict-resolution mechanism, it has been successful, argues Keil (2013, pp. 208–209), who goes on to claim that other alternatives are not currently viable. In this context, Bieber (2015, p. 213) calls Bosnia and Herzegovina a 'failed success of international state-building'.

Hoare (2007, pp. 401) argues that ethnopolitics are enshrined in the BH political system. Hulsey (2015, p. 42) concludes that fragmentation of the country is built into the system through the ethnic key principle. Grebo (2009, p. 12) concludes that the fragmentation means that the country is in a permanent state of emergency. A crucial aspect here is that the Dayton constitution is one that does not enjoy the support of a majority of Bosnia and Herzegovina's people. The Bosniacs would like to see Bosnia and Herzegovina governed according to a *citizens' state concept*, based on more centralisation, whereas the BH Serbs and BH Croats opt for a *national-territorial concept*, with as much autonomy as possible for the three different constituent nations, within their own defined territories, with the implycation that a disintegration of the state will eventually follow by way of *rebus sic stantibus.*[25] The Dayton setup, instead, offers an unstable *hybrid model* that pleases none of the three actors (Ramet 2013, pp. 23–26; Nešković 2013, p. 294).

Bennett (2016) and Manning (2010) point out that the OHR acknowledges these problems and seeks to alleviate them by way of gradual Euro-Atlantic integration (with membership in the EU as the final prize). The US and EU approach to Bosnia and Herzegovina is one of 'conditionality', in which economic aid is exchanged for compliance with Western expectations about regional progress, including a commitment to peace, privatesation, democratisation and so on. Local leaders have managed to manœuvre their way through this arrangement, implementing only what is needed to continue what amounts to a type of protection racket, manufacturing political crises (that are perpetually framed as ethnic conflicts) when needed in order to sidestep reform attempts (Marko 2013, pp. 61–63; Mujanović 2018, pp. 47–49). Western overseers have generally tended to reward integrative efforts supported by Bosniacs, albeit with the occasional

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[25] Meaning that the international community will accept Bosnia and Herzegovina's dismemberment along ethnic lines when it becomes obvious that it is no more than a failed state.

disagreement between the US and the EU with regard to particular policies (Hoare 2021).

The literature also features a few proposals for constructive ways to deal with these perceived problems. Some analysts – such as Hoare (2021), Marko (2013) and Mujanović (2018) – contend that Bosnia and Herzegovina cannot gain stability except by way of sustained Western involvement that serves to enhance the state-building process. Others argue that BH politicians should be left to their own devices (cf. Bieber 2006; Ramet 2013).

The Main Local Stakeholders

The three main stakeholders in Bosnia and Herzegovina (the Bosniacs, Serbs and Croats) are known in the Dayton constitution as the constituent peoples of the country. The rivalry between these three peoples therefore constitutes a major theme in the available literature on Bosnia and Herzegovina. The focal points of these three stakeholders have been summarised by Merdžanović (2015, p. 371):

> The Croats' insistence on their autochthonous character that should legitimize their claim for a third entity, the Bosniaks' adherence to a strong central state which nevertheless accommodates their group interests, [and] the Serbs' constant public contemplation of possible secession and the nature of the smaller entity.

I have already discussed the Bosniacs and will therefore be focusing on the other two stakeholders, namely the BH Serbs and the BH Croats, offering a general outline of their post-Dayton political contestation on the BH political scene.

The BH Serbs

The general trend with regards to BH Serb political contestation has been summarised by Perry (2015, p. 15) as being based on 'resistance to integrative political reforms of *any* kind'. Bieber (2015, p. 217) notes that politicians who govern Republika Srpska consistently work for the strengthening of self-government, rejecting any measures that strengthen the state. Marko (2013, p. 78) argues that the Serb politicians seek to undermine the integrity and sovereignty of Bosnia and Herzegovina and its key-level institutions using political obstruction.

Nešković (2013, p. 390) argues that one aspect of this effort to undermine the BH state consists in supporting the Croats in their bid for their own entity. However, the main measure, as identified by Correia (2013b), is 'Serbianisation' of the territory under the control of Republika Srpska, whereby the shared BH aspects of the history of these locations is blotted out. For example, this is done by changing city names, removing the prefix *Bosanski* (Bosnian) and sometimes replacing it with *Srpski* (Serbian). Several authors (Correia 2013b; Jujic 2009; Ramet 2013) have identified a shift from a belligerent and aggressive form of Serbianisation to one that projects a more moderate image. Legal means are used to obstruct the reversal of war-time measures (Carmichael 2015, p. 85; Correia 2013b, pp. 332–335). This shift coincided with the rise of Milorad Dodik, the leader of *Savez Nezavisnih Socijaldemokrata* (SNSD), the 'Alliance of Independent Social Democrats'. He first became prime minister of Republika Srpska in 1998 and was considered a moderate (as compared to the war-time leadership), promoted by the international community. However, having been out of office between 2001 and 2005, he re-emerged as a hardline nationalist politician, propelling himself thereby to the leadership of the BH Serbs. Ramet (2013, p. 40) argues that Dodik's post-2006 political strategy is, to a large degree, designed to assert his primacy amongst BH Serb politicians through hardline nationalist rhetoric. Dodik's efforts to obstruct the BH political process and his threats of secession have made the US and EU change their assessment of him such that, in 2017, he was placed on a US Treasury blacklist (Bieber 2020, p. 66; Marko 2013, p. 78; Mujanović 2018, pp. 124, 114–115).

One central feature of BH political contestation that is common to all three stakeholders is the recourse to projecting a self-image as victims.[26] The accusation that Bosniacs seek to establish an Islamic state is a general theme in Dodik's rhetoric in this regard (Hrle Smith 2015, p. 73). Coupled with this is a focus on historical grievances, with specific emphasis on the Second World War and Ottoman rule in the Balkans and the idea that the Serbs are defending Christian Europe against an Islamic threat (Karčić 2002; Perry 2013; Torsti 2013, pp. 222–223). This, argues Correia (2013b, pp. 329–330), is done in order to contribute to the disintegration of Bosnia and Herzegovina by supporting the legitimacy of Republika Srpska as separate from the rest of the country, with the Serbs as perpetual victims against

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[26] For a general overview of this phenomenon amongst all three stakeholders, see Clark (2014, pp. 165–168). This was also discussed in Chapter 2.

Islamic tyranny. Bieber (2020, p. 66) argues that the victimhood narrative now tends to centre around the unfair treatment and existential threats to Republika Srpska coming from the West (including the OHR) and the Bosniacs/the Muslim world, respectively.

It should, finally, perhaps go without saying that BH Serb politics are intimately connected to what goes on in Belgrade. Indeed, Serbia has been described as a 'kin state' of the BH Serbs, with the former (together with Russia) acting as a patron of the latter – and it is generally understood that BH Serb attempts at secession imply a future unification between Republika Srpska and Serbia (Bieber 2020, p. 66; Keil 2013, pp. 84–85).

The BH Croats

As for the BH Croats, one of the central issues discussed in the literature concerns the creation of a third, Croat, entity which would be closely attached to Croatia (Stojarová 2013b, p. 52). This, argues Ramet (2013, p. 19), entails a peaceful continuation (or realignment) of war-time goals as it effectively means the resuscitation of the war-time secessionist proto-statelet *Herceg-Bosna,* albeit through its inclusion into the BH state apparatus. Lippmann (2019, p. 93) highlights the case of the city of Mostar, the would-be capital of Herceg-Bosna, as a practical example of how war-time measures intended to divide Bosnia and Herzegovina along ethnic lines continue to affect post-Dayton day-to-day political life. Some 35,000 Bosniacs were driven out from the western part of the city during the war, making for a completely divided post-Dayton city.

Ramet (2013, pp. 19, 33–34) points out that, when Dodik was still considered a moderate in the late 1990s and early 2000s, it was these fissiparous tendencies amongst BH Croats that worried Western actors more so than Serb separatism, to the point that the Croatian member of the BH presidency, Ante Jelavić, was removed from that office by Wolfgang Petritsch, the High Representative at the time. There has, since then, been sympathy within the EU for this Croat call for a third entity. This is because the Croats, who are less numerous than the Bosniacs and Serbs to begin with, are relatively weakly represented in BH state institutions.

Ramet (2013, p. 30) goes on to point out that the Croat frustration with the current constitutional setup (in which they are paired with the Bosniacs within the Federation) is exemplified by the fact that the Croat member of

the presidency tends to be elected through Bosniac votes.[27] This has made the Croats question the democratic legitimacy of the election laws. Mujanović (2023, pp. 118–121) argues that the current High Representative, Christian Schmidt, has generally been sympathetic to Croatian appeals for election reform, with the Croatian government exerting much diplomatic effort in this regard.

Mujanović (2023, pp. 118–119) explains that Croat political life in Bosnia and Herzegovina has been dominated by the nationalist *Hrvatska Demokratska Zajednica*, the 'Croat Democratic Union' (HDZ). This domination is partly explained by the BH Croats' marginalised position which not only calls for national cohesion but is also due to the fact that most of them hold dual citizenship and there is a certain fluidity between the HDZ's Croatian and its BH branch, with the latter drawing support from the more-developed infrastructure of the former. This has also meant that the BH branch lacks in autonomy and that BH Croat politics are intertwined with the politics of Croatia, much like BH Serb politics are intertwined with Serbian politics. Since BH Croats with dual Croatian citizenship are also EU citizens, they hope to be able to influence the EU's policy on Bosnia and Herzegovina and its Croat population. This is perhaps the most clearly illustrated by the curious circumstance that HDZ politician Željana Zovko has served both as an ambassador for Bosnia and Herzegovina and as a member of the European Parliament for Croatia.

The leader of the HDZ in Bosnia and Herzegovina since 2005 has been Dragan Čović. His leadership position within Croat political life has been challenged through the splinter party 'HDZ 1990' and the dispute has been driven by ideological concerns as well as personal intrigue. However, as several of the authors mention, political figures associated with all three stakeholders have refashioned themselves as nationalists following an earlier stint as Communist *apparatchiks*. This includes Čović (Bennett 2016, p. 257; Bieber 2013, pp. 315–32; Hoare 2013, p. 281).

Of the various researchers on BH politics, Florian Bieber's *œuvres* tend to be those with the most information and analysis about Croat political life. He points out that a curious feature of Croat nationalist politics is that, whilst both the HDZ and HDZ 1990 appropriate religious symbols to further their nationalist political agendas, there have been tensions between the HDZ and the Catholic Church, with its more universalistic values. For

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[27] The current Croat member of the presidency is Željko Komšić, a non-nationalist who fought in the BH army during the war.

example, whilst the HDZ was, at certain points, seeking the partition of Bosnia and Herzegovina during the war, Pope John Paul II – as well as the local church hierarchy – favoured the territorial integrity of the country. Added to this is the Franciscan order, which has historically played a significant role in the religious and cultural life of Croats in Bosnia and Herzegovina and whose relationship to both the Vatican and the HDZ has, at times, been contentious, with certain segments of the Franciscan order supporting Croat separatism and others aligning with the Catholic Church's position on the territorial integrity of Bosnia and Herzegovina (Bieber 2013, pp. 323–325).

As mentioned previously, there is a 'victimhood competition' between the three stakeholders. Sokol (2014, pp. 117–119) points out that an important part of this victimhood narrative is the above-mentioned characterisation of Croats as relatively disenfranchised within the constitutional set-up of Bosnia and Herzegovina. This is connected to the aspiration to form a third, Croat, entity such that it is framed as a political struggle for national survival. This struggle is interlaced with and understood as the continuation of the defensive and just *Domomovinski rat* (Homeland War) that was common to Croats in both Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, with the narrative – as it relates to BH Croats – having some of its own distinctive features such as the commemoration of the proclamation of Herceg-Bosna. Related to this, as Torsti (2013, p. 209) points out, is the idea that Croatia rather than Bosnia and Herzegovina is the politically legitimate homeland of the BH Croats.

Another issue discussed in the literature is language, where Croatian is a key ethnic marker and subject to political contestation, as discussed by Perry (2013, pp. 236–238). Political contestation as it concerns language is focused on guaranteeing the right of Croat pupils to education in the Croatian language exclusively, with the implication that these pupils will effectively be separated from non-Croat ones. The Constitutional Court of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina issued a decision which found such arrangements to be based on ethnically divided curricula detrimental to 'the vital interests of other constituent peoples'; however, since federal institutions such as the Ministry of Education have remained weak, this has not been implemented and universities and schools continue to operate under the assumption that the right to the preservation of one's mother tongue includes the right to separate education. Another aspect to this is that many Croats (as well as Serbs) turn to their 'kin states' for print media and television, which reinforces the ethnic division. The mass media in

Bosnia and Herzegovina plays a divisive role by promoting specific ethnic interests (Bieber 2010, p. 320; Nešković 2013, p. 367).

Bieber (2006, pp. 147–148) summarises Croat political contestation by arguing that the general trend is to resist Bosniac attempts at centralisation based on the principle of one person, one vote (in contradistinction to the 'ethnic key' concept), because this would entail further Croat marginalisation.

Post-Communist Elites and Corruption

I have hitherto highlighted how stakeholders are discussed in terms of collective groups or institutions who seek to further their interests. However, there is also the aspect of individual interests. One of the major, oft-recurring themes in the literature is that of corruption – and of BH politics, to a large degree (if not mainly), being characterised by the post-Communist elites' appropriation of nationalist rhetoric and policies as a way of holding on to power.[28]

> Sometimes presented as a return to 'ancient hatred', the Yugoslav wars were above all the product of post-communist political elites deliberately exacerbating nationalist passions and interethnic conflict. […] In the Yugoslav space, the war therefore served not only to implement different nationalist projects, but also to perpetuate certain power practices inherited from the communist period and to neutralise the democratic aspirations of the population (Bougarel & Clayer 2017, p. 170).

Mujkić (2015, p. 630) argues that Bosnia and Herzegovina should not be understood as a country of three constituent peoples but, rather, of two constituent classes: 'the class of agents of ethno-political entrepreneurship and the class of objects (or subjects) of the former's expropriation'. Kapidžić (2020, pp. 95–97) argues that political corruption flows from the institutional setup which is conducive to patrimonialism and ethnic demagoguery. A similar analysis is presented by Mujanović (2018, p. 25), who claims that the dissolution of Yugoslavia was 'marked by a process of state capture by entrenched criminal and provincial conglomerates under the cover of national liberation'. He adds, however, that it is not merely a case of the gullible peoples of Bosnia and Herzegovina being swayed by the jingoism of cynical elites; it is also a structural problem that incentivises the

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[28] The best overviews of the most recent developments in this regard are those of Bieber (2020, pp. 63–68) and Hoare (2021).

preservation of the status quo. The BH public, whether or not they agree with nationalist policies and even if they see through the demagoguery of the rhetoric, prefer to keep the nationalist elites in power as they function as a sort of patron in a national economy centered around the public sector (2018, p. 92). In other words, whilst the Dayton constitution legitimises patrimonialism by way of ethnopolitics, the economic structure and the culture of political corruption serve to entrench this system further. The connection between the Dayton constitution, international involvement and local corruption is stressed by Divjak and Pugh (2013, p. 82), who argue that 'the complex administrative mechanics prescribed by Dayton', through shared domestic and international sovereignty, have limited attempts to establish a common social contract between citizens and the state that is supposed to represent them, such that social cohesion, instead, 'lies in local, clientilistic loyalties and informal economic activity'. This is echoed throughout the literature.

Bennett (2016, p. xviii) points out that the public keeps re-electing politicians who are otherwise (as shown through polling) highly unpopular, based on the logic that voting for a non-nationalist alternative under the current system would be tantamount to indulging in a luxury that one cannot afford. Mavrikos-Adamous (2015, p. 187) summarises this type of analysis by pointing out that fragmented politics are 'cemented into the institutional foundation' of Bosnia and Herzegovina and that party leaders are unwilling to overcome the dysfunctions of the political system. Bieber (2020, pp. 64–65) compares Bosnia and Herzegovina to Lebanon in this regard, pointing out that the institutionalisation of mono-ethnic electorates has enshrined the hegemony of ethno-nationalist politics. Nešković (2013, p. 327) refers to the current system as a 'partocracy', to which Bosnia and Herzegovina has been especially vulnerable due to it, by its constitutional setup, being in a *de facto* transitional phase toward further disintegration. He also argues that the current dysfunctionality in BH politics is due to the amount of energy used up within this partocratic system on discussing the problems of the past and the problems of the political structure of a future, hypothetical Bosnia and Herzegovina, which is seen as preferable (as it preserves the partocratic *status quo*) to dealing with the present realities (2013, p. 408). Gordy (2014, p. 111) calls the system an 'ethnokleptocracy'.

Also, the fragmented nature of the post-Dayton political field has hindered the emergence of a single economic space, as argued by Donais (2005, pp. 162–163). This is related to the idea that Bosnia and Herzegovina is an 'unconsolidated state'. The state, Divjak and Pugh (2013, pp. 82–86)

argue, cannot pursue fiscal policies or implement development strategies independent of the entities and cantons. This fragmentation of authority has increased the risk of abuse, with corruption endemic in the granting of licences and permits on a clientilistic basis. There is an absence of a multi-stakeholder, holistic and country-wide approach to fighting corruption. All of this has affected public trust in the country's institutions, with one survey showing that political parties were considered to be the most corrupt sector by far. However, trust in international players is low as well. Čaušević (2013, p. 113) notes that, of the main obstacles to economic development identified through his research, almost all are of an institutional and political nature. These obstacles include: 'government instability, political instability, the inefficient government bureaucracy, the tax rates and corruption'.

Hoare (2021) concurs with the bleak analysis, painting a picture of a society in which political life is dominated by monoethnic parties, the education system is mostly ethnically segregated and the economy is burdened by over-bureaucratisation and corruption, as manifested in the problematic handling of the Covid-19 pandemic in both the Federation and the Republika Srpska. Perry (2015, p. 35) adds to this bleak picture the observation that the international community is too exasperated to offer any real support to those bottom-up civic voices that do seek constitutional reform.

Finally, there is also the issue of the post-Communist instrumentalisation of religion (as discussed earlier in the context of the SDA). Abazović (2014, p. 38–40) argues that this is a general feature of BH politics, such that 'religion [has been] politicized through ethnicization' following the collapse of socialism. Whilst there are individuals – and even religious leaders – within all three groups who resist this tendency to reduce religion to ethnicity, the very nature of the political system is such that every citizen is ethnically and confessionally marked, making religion the means for political legitimisation for all three constituent peoples.

Non-Western International Involvement

The international community, spearheaded by the US and the EU, has played a crucial role in the political workings of Bosnia and Herzegovina, to the point that the High Representative has been described by Bieber (2010, p. 315) as a 'European Raj' and Bosnia and Herzegovina as a 'semi-protectorate'. However, with a change in the political circumstances within the West, some analysts are suggesting that the BH elites are bracing themselves

for a change of affairs in which non-Western actors might begin to play a more prominent role in the future. Mujanović (2018), for example, observes that the US under Trump, as well as post-Brexit Britain, have ceased to show much interest in the Balkans, leaving the space open not only to the EU[29] (with Germany the most active in this regard) but also to other emerging international actors. The entrenched BH elites, in other words, are bracing themselves for structural change in the international system, with a weakening 'Euro-Atlantic order'. The shift in international involvement entails a mere pivoting on the part of the elites rather than a substantial change in the make-up of BH politics. These other international actors include Russia, China, Turkey and, to some extent, the Gulf states (2018, p. 100). Another analyst who concurs with this assessment is Huskić (2020) and another is Bieber (2020).

The role of Russia, argues Bieber (2020, p. 105), is concentrated on counteracting the presence and goals of the EU and NATO. There is a particular focus on cementing the relationship with their historical allies, the Serbs, as led by Dodik in Bosnia and Herzegovina. It is in the context of this discussion that Mujanović (2018, pp. 111–115) offers the most striking argument for his claim that BH elites employ nationalist rhetoric in order to camouflage the essentially kleptocratic nature of the internal political system. He reminds us that Dodik's post-2006 close, strategic, relationship with Russia was preceded by a similar relationship to the US in the late 1990s; indeed, it was through direct US intervention that Dodik, at that time an anti-nationalist, ascended to high political office. Huskić (2020, pp. 90–94), echoing Mujanović, argues that Russia's involvement in the Balkans is based on a three-dimensional strategy: 1) it is identity-based (cultivating the Slavic and Orthodox bond with the Serbs); 2) it seeks to counteract EU, US and NATO influence; and 3) it seeks to safeguard Russian economic interests. All three dimensions are mutually reinforcing. So, whilst the government of Republika Srpska, for example, blocks every Bosniac initiative for Bosnia and Herzegovina to join NATO and has made sure that Bosnia and Herzegovina abstained from the vote in UNGA which condemned Russia's annexation of Crimea, Russia in turn supports Republika Srpska in its disputes with the OHR and Western embassies. Bajrović (2022) points out that Russia has also sought to court the favor of BH Croats in its

[29] The analysis that the US have, to a large degree, left the space open for the EU is shared by Bougarel and Clayer (2017, p. 219).

strategy to weaken the Bosniacs. Mujanović (2023, p. 141) has also noted that Dodik, in addition to Russia, considers Hungary to be a crucial ally.

Hoare (2021) and Büyük and Öztürk (2019) argue that Turkey's relationship with the Bosniacs mirrors that of the Russians with the Serbs. Mujanović's (2018, pp. 126–128) assessment of the influence of Turkey is brief. He notes, almost in passing, that Turkey's strategic activities are motivated by realpolitik more than by imperial neo-Ottoman romanticism, with a focus on using the Balkans as a bargaining chip against the EU. This is echoed by Birgül (2015). Huskić (2020, p. 84–85), on the other hand, notes that strenghtening Turkish influence in Bosnia and Herzegovina is part of Erdogan's wider foreign policy strategy, which has been dubbed as neo-Ottomanism. Several researchers point out that Turkish–Serbian relations have been very good under Erdogan's leadership, with the Turks perceiving Serbia as a key strategic partner for influence in the Balkans and Serbia profiting from the economic investments. Compared to this, Turkish influence in Bosnia and Herzegovina has been less focused on economic investments, focusing more on 'personalised relations' between Erdogan and Izetbegović and ambitious soft-power projects such as popular TV shows, including a mini-series on the life of Alija Izetbegović (Büyük & Öztürk 2019; Vračić 2016; pp. 22, 27–29).

Öztürk and Akgönül, S. (2020, pp. 233–236) point out that Erdogan's pro-active Balkan policy was initiated by Turgut Özal in the late 1980s but has since been intensified largely due to the foreign policy strategy associated with foreign minister Ahmet Davutoglu. These two authors echo what has hitherto been mentioned: Turkey has a particular focus on its relationship to the Balkan's Sunni Muslims (mainly through soft power) but maintains strategic friendships with other actors as well, mainly Serbia. They do, however, identify a shift in Erdogan's policy post-2011, pointing out that it has become more polarised (*vis-à-vis* the West and oppositional Kemalists) with a heavier focus on Islamic identity politics. Here they depart from Mujanović in accentuating the neo-Ottoman aspects of this newer policy, whereby Erdogan seems to seek leadership of the Muslim Ummah. The Gülen Movement is seen as particularly threatening in this regard, comprising a rivalling Islamist alternative.

Merdjanova (2013, p. 77) also writes on the question of Turkish influence, in addition to assessing the Gulf influence and the problem of Muslim extremism in Bosnia and Herzegovina. She notes that there has been a degree of competition between Turkish organisations (state-funded and NGOs) and those from the Gulf, with the former gaining an upper hand

after 9/11, facilitated by policy-level security concerns. Turkish agencies fund cultural and religious projects – such as the restoration of the Old Bridge in Mostar levelled by Croat nationalists – and provide grants for BH citizens wanting to study in Turkey. The state-level cooperation with local religious institutions is managed by the Ministry for Religious Affairs, the *Diyanet*. However, there are also non-state actors, such as the Gülen Movement, that provide funding and exert their influence. The presence of foreign actors from the Muslim world has stirred an internal debate about Bosniac and Islamic identity (2013, pp. 70–81).

The Gulf states, according to Mujanović (2018, pp. 120–125), are primarily interested in expanding their economic influence in Europe through the Balkans, focusing mainly on real estate, with the local economy benefiting from tourism and, mostly in the case of the countries surrounding Bosnia and Herzegovina, arms and munitions sales benefiting the local elites. The commercial linkages between the Balkans and the Gulf countries (including Iran) are more pronounced than the religious influence, even as the latter is present as well, through the financing of mosques and religious institutions (Huskić 2020, pp. 96–97). Öktem (2010) notes that the Sunni Gulf countries have naturally been more successful in spreading their particular ideas about Islam than the Shiite Iranians. This is echoed by Bishku (2016, p. 203). Karčić's assessment (2010a; 2010b) is that Iranian religious influence, which is more subtle than Sunni proselytisation from the Gulf, could pose a challenge to the Sunni establishment in the country which, as it were, has been quite unapprehensive and welcoming of outer influence in general (whether it be from Shiite Iran or from Sunni countries of different legal schools).

There has also been an increase in the Chinese presence in the Balkans. Mujanović's (2018, p. 118) assessment is that the Chinese strategy mainly consists of projecting an image of stable government and a prosperous economic model through investments in high-visibility projects (infrastructure, cultural centres, etc.) that are designed to attract the recognition and support of the local governments along with boosting China's financial power (not least through using their own work-force for these projects). Huskić (2020, p. 101) argues that this interest in Bosnia and Herzegovina is, as of yet, exclusively driven by economic interests, such that China has been cautious not to take sides in the internal disputes between the various actors in the political field. It favours neither of the two entities nor is it aligned with any ethnic political elite.

Conclusion

As can be seen from this overview of the literature, researchers tend to focus on Bosnia and Herzegovina's perilous status as an 'unfinished' state (and a *de facto* protectorate of the West), characterised by various forms of corruption and ethnic competition between the three constituent peoples. It is also generally agreed that non-Western stakeholders (the main ones being Russia, Turkey and China) are seeking to gain more influence as American interest in the country cools off.

What is lacking in these studies is an understanding of what it means for one's national identity to operate within an 'unfinished state' which functions as a Western protectorate – and how this affects political mobilisation. How does this reflect back upon the relationship with the West and with other rival external actors? Questions of national identity, the nature of the corruption touched upon in the literature, attitudes toward internal and external stakeholders – these issues and how they inter-relate are not necessarily straightforward and cry for empirical investigation. For example, the literature details elite strategies (e.g., Dodik's obstructionism, Čović's third-entity push) and institutional critiques (e.g., Dayton's dysfunctionality) but it lacks first-hand accounts from political activists. While it describes macro-level contestation, it does not explore how activists experience or enact these dynamics on the ground. There is a lack of grassroots perspectives, limiting insights into how abstract strategies translate into everyday political practice. In particular, the relationship between the structural issues discussed here and the identity questions discussed in the previous chapter are not explored due to the lack of empirical data.

In sum, the overarching gaps and opportunities with regards to the available research centre on these areas: there is an empirical void on activists on the ground, such that elite narratives are prioritised over low- or mid-level activist voices; there is a lack of structural–social linkage, where structural analysis is present (e.g. of the political constraints of the Dayton constitution) without the accompanying explanation of how these structural limitations mediate political strategy and on-the-ground activism. My study is, therefore, positioned to fill these gaps by exploring how SDA activists and dissidents conceptualise the post-war political situation from their own vantage point and how the party, in its documents and political actions, interprets the BH state project.

Let me now offer an overview of the theoretical framework utilised in this study in order to achieve my research aims.

CHAPTER 4

Analytical Framework: The Concept of the Political Field

Introduction

A fundamental starting point for a sociologist studying the persistent political fragmentation of post-war Bosnia and Herzegovina is that ethnic sentiment transforms into social conflict only through the politicisation and activation of ethnic identities within a specific social arena. This necessitates a detailed analysis of the processes through which political actors strategically mobilise ethnic boundaries to shape state-building outcomes. Pierre Bourdieu's theory of the political field provides a robust analytical framework through which to investigate these dynamics, particularly by illuminating how power struggles among actors, such as the Party of Democratic Action (SDA), construct and contest the symbolic and material dimensions of the BH state. By conceptualising the political field as a space where actors compete for symbolic capital and influence over state legitimacy, Bourdieu's theory enables this study to address its central research question. Specifically, it offers tools with which to examine how SDA activists navigate ethnic rivalries, align with external powers and negotiate civic versus ethnic nationalism.

Bourdieu, like Clausewitz (1832/1984, p. 87), invoked war as a metaphor when he sought to explain how struggles in the social domain(s) are played out.

> A field is simultaneously a space of conflict and competition, the analogy here being with a battlefield, in which participants vie to establish monopoly over the species of capital effective in it – cultural authority in the artistic field, scientific authority in the scientific field, sacerdotal authority in the religious field, and so forth – and the power to decree the hierarchy and 'conversion rates' between all forms of authority in the field of power (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992, pp. 16–18).

The study of battle within the political field concerns how social actors position themselves against rival actors within various domains in society, mutually aspiring to gain political power in order to maximise their interests by way of various types of capital. The particularities of the strategies employed, the forms of capital sought after and utilised and the sociopolitical effects of this process are tracked and analysed. In short, the political field is a battlefield in which various social groups compete for legitimisation and power distributed through various forms of capital.

One way to conceptualise politics is to consider it to be quintessentially about interests – the interests of different actors in society as they pursue their individual and collective goals by way of utilising the instrument of political power. This is the basic starting point from which Bourdieu proceeded to construct an entire theoretical framework by which we can sociologically study politics in a given society. Since this framework is central to my study of BH politics, this section offers a general outline of the main features of the theory. Due to the importance that it holds for his overall theory, let us use Bourdieu's analysis of the actual quiddity of the state as a point of entry.

The State and the Struggle for Capital

The state is central to Bourdieu's theory of the political field; indeed, the field of politics is ultimately the space in which the struggle for influence over the state takes place (Bourdieu 1994, pp. 4–5). In order to study and analyse the state, we first have to break free from the mental categories that have been imposed upon us by the state itself, so that we do not end up reinforcing these very categories in the name of 'common sense'. This is the very task of sociology (Bourdieu 2014, pp. 3–5). However, it is a difficult task due to the omnipresence of the state and the obscure manner in which it wields its influence upon us. '[T]he state is the name that we give to the hidden, invisible principles – indicating a kind of *deus absconditus* – of the social order' (Bourdieu 2014, p. 7) and it works through 'unconscious symbolic forms, which are apparently deeply self-evident' (Bourdieu 2014, p. 9) The state, by 'theatricalising' the official, universalises the particular, i.e. it makes the ideas upon which the state is legitimised and organised appear undisputable (Bourdieu 2014, p. 28). In short:

> You could say that the state is ultimately the place where official speech, regulations, rules, order, mandate and appointment is current. In this logic, the state is characterized by being the site of a universally recognized power,

> recognized even when challenged[.] The state is the site of a recognized power that has behind it social consensus, a consensus granted to an instance charged with defining the public good, that is, that which is good for the public, in public, for the set of people who define the public (Bourdieu 2014, p. 84).

The sociologist, then, needs to uncover what has been hidden in an attempt to create a meta-discourse by which an analysis of the state and the field of politics may be offered (Bourdieu 2014, p. 13). The sociologist comes along and de-universalises what has hitherto been universalised by the state in an attempt to understand it beyond the mental structures that it has constructed (Bourdieu 2014, pp. 35–39). So where the state is '*meta*',[30] the sociologist in turn becomes *meta-meta*.[31] The non-sociological, common-sense, received understanding of the state which has been imposed on us is called *doxic* (Bourdieu 2014, p. 107). The task of the sociologist is to demolish *doxic* thinking (Bourdieu 2014, p. 117).

One of the ways in which a sociologist might perform this task is through studying the mechanisms through which the state wields its power and Bourdieu has broken this down for us through his notion of *capital*, extended beyond the myopic Marxian focus on the economic variety. Economic capital is but one form of capital over which the state holds power but the state is ultimately the entity which concentrates all the different species of capital and presides over its subsequent re-circulation, re-production and re-distribution through a process of conversion, governing thereby the relation of competing forces in society. The state is the king of the gods of Mount Olympus, the high god arbitrating between the lesser gods. This explains why some sort of control over – or at least constructive interaction with – the state is decisive for actors who seek to maximise their interests.

Bourdieu has enumerated the types of capital concentrated by the state. We have the capital of *physical force*, which quite straightforwardly refers to the monopoly of violence through the army (against external forces) and

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[30] …i.e. it is 'capable of exercising a power over other species of power, and particularly over their rate of exchange (and thereby over the balance of power between their respective holders)' (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992, p. 114; italics in the original),

[31] 'He places himself somewhat outside the game[.] […] The sociologist does something that is both disappointing and disturbing. Instead of doing this work with the official, he states what is involved in doing the official work – he is "meta-meta". If it is true that the state is meta, then the sociologist is always a step beyond. This means that he is very irritating, and people always want to say to him, "And what about you . . .?" He is "beyond the beyond"' (Bourdieu 2014, p. 54).

police (against those who seek disruption from within). *Economic capital* is also quite self-explanatory, with features such as taxation (the legitimisation of what is otherwise considered racketeering) and the establishment of a national market. *Informational capital* is the process whereby the state shapes 'mental structures' through the gathering of various forms of data (such as official censuses) for the purpose of classification and codification, leading to a unification of the cultural market. The school system (through the reproduction of a standard national narrative) inculcates into the citizen a sense of 'national culture' that often manifests itself as a civic religion. These different types of capital are interwoven. For example, it would be difficult to imagine the capital of physical force without economic capital to back it up. The interwovenness and mutual interdependence between these forms of capital is particularly evident when considering the final form of capital: *symbolic capital,* which infuses all the other forms. The exercise of symbolic capital refers to a process whereby 'categories of perception' are constructed and these determine how social phenomena are perceived. Exercising symbolic power means giving or withholding legitimacy; it entails providing a narrative framework around practices, rituals and other social phenomena to the point that it gives them particular value and prestige (Bourdieu 1994, pp. 5–9). The state is the 'central bank' of symbolic capital (2014, pp. 122–123). Indeed, the state *is* symbolic power itself (2014, p. 161). Again, the main way in which it wields its symbolic power is through the school system, by which it inculcates its cognitive and evaluative structures (2014, p. 168). Naturally, getting access to these forms of capital is vital for those pursuing and/or maintaining their own interests.

The study of the political field, then, is the study of how social actors position themselves against rival actors within various domains in society (economic, cultural, educational and so on), mutually aspiring to gain political power in order to maximise their interests by way of various types of capital. The particularities of the strategies which are employed and the sociopolitical effects of this process are tracked and analysed. In short, the political field is a battlefield in which various social groups compete for the legitimisation and power[32] distributed through these forms of capital. The top prize in this competition, as we have seen, is the state, as it offers a concentration of capital and affords the winner an opportunity to monopolise power. To study political actors is to identify their specific interests and the

[32] Power refers to the relative accumulation of capital – more capital equals more power. The ultimate manifestation of power is 'symbolic violence', as discussed below.

strategies by which they have sought to reach the goal of accumulating capital in competition with rival groups. We need to understand the interests and the strategies (the positioning) of these rival groups as well because the actions of all groups within the political field are determined by a relational logic. In other words, an actor's position in a given space is contingent on where there is room to stand and, even if one intends to remove the occupant of some sought-after spot, one has to assess the situation first and proceed from one's own starting point. If one manages to reach that spot, one still needs to contend with its former occupant, who will remain somewhere else in the space after having been removed from his/her spot, waiting for his/her chance to regain it.

Politics as Theatre or as a Game of Opposition

Bourdieu goes on to illustrate how state power can be exercised by groups who have managed to reach social domination through being successful in accumulating capital: they focus on reproducing the conditions that enable their retention of power, imposing their conceptualisation of legitimacy on the rest of society. These 'dominant classes are able to manipulate symbols, values, knowledge, and tastes so as to uphold their own continued domination by making them appear objectively valid, natural, universalistic and meritocratic' (van den Berg & Janoski 2005, p. 92). In its more pronounced form, this turns into 'symbolic violence'. What this means is that the state, through its hold over symbolic capital (in conjunction with the other forms), can impose its will to such an elevated degree and generate such impactful effects on society (particularly with regards to the mental horizons of people, such as by determining what should be considered as 'common sense'), that it would otherwise take actual violence to secure that level of submission (2005, p. 15). In getting access to these instruments, one is not only afforded the opportunity to advance one's cause and secure one's interests; one may actually end up legitimising them to the point where they become universalised.[33] This is done through delineating 'the universe of what is politically thinkable' and deciding what is to be part of the public discourse by fixing its dimensions (Bourdieu 1991, p. 172). In other words, if political power in general and symbolic capital in particular are used wisely, group interests may very well end up converging with 'the national

[33] This can happen within an organisation such as a political party as well, where the personal interests of those who dominate the party become universalised through a monopoly of 'instituted political interests' (Bourdieu 1991, p. 175).

interest' – the interests of one ethnic group or class merges together with the interests of the state, for example. One of the implications of this is that the analysis of a party's ideology needs to be preceded by an analysis of the political field, because the opportunities and limitations of the latter shape the contents of the former. As with the relationship with other interest groups, the logic here is relational (or situational). One's ideology is directly contingent on the space for manœuvre. To decipher the ideology of a political party and the choices of its representatives means, therefore, looking at the political field and assessing

> the possible and impossible, probable and improbable stances for the different occupants of different positions is what enables the politician to 'choose' suitable and agreed stances, and to avoid 'compromising' stances, which would mean being of the same mind as the occupants of opposite positions in the space of the political field. This feel for the political game, which enables politicians to predict the stances of other politicians, is also what makes them predictable for other politicians: predictable and thus responsible, in other words, competent, serious, trustworthy – in short, ready to play, with consistency and without arousing surprise or disappointing people's expectations, the role assigned to them by the structure of the space of the game (Bourdieu 1991, p. 177).

Bourdieu is, of course, echoing the comment attributed to Bismarck about politics being the art of the possible. It is a form of thespian art, as it were. Politics consists, to a large degree, of theatrics, wherein the representative of a particular group engages in mimetics by acting out his or her interests (and perhaps simultaneously pursuing his or her own personal ones with or without the accompanying self-awareness). The culture surrounding these theatrics might even turn intricate to the point that those uninitiated in all of the conventions (the language, the style of 'acting', the etiquette) become alienated. It then becomes a sort of game which is more or less exclusive to the initiated and the professionals (Bourdieu 1991, pp. 182–184). A complementary way of looking at politics is to view it as a game of opposition, which means that the relational logic which we have been impressing upon the reader, which governs the positioning within the field, is equally operative *within* the group (internal conflict) as it is *between* different groups (external conflict). This accounts for ideological fractions within a party but, viewed from a wider time-perspective, it also explains why group strategies will shift over time: because the room for manœuvre will change

with time and the opportunity to occupy a particular space in the field might open up after having once been unattainable (and *vice versa*).

The discussion up until this point should also explain why one group will have its realists and its idealists, its right and its left, within its ranks: the former are more attuned to the political game (closer to the political field), whilst the latter belong more to the intellectual field wherein ideas trump theatrics. One could also understand the group as having its own field (a type of sub-field) with the occupants on one side struggling against those on the other. Those who are the most attuned to the game, indeed who make their living playing it, are the professionals. Their job is to speak for the non-professionals (or, again, to act out their interests in a theatre) through slogans, promises, programmes etc. The professionals live and die (politically speaking) by legitimacy through symbolic capital, of which political capital is but a form. Another way to put this is that they need to earn the credence of the non-professionals by their adeptness in theatricalised representation – i.e. by showing results, turning words into practice (Bourdieu 1991, pp.187–192). Bourdieu also breaks down the different forms of political capital that the professional needs to finesse. *Fame* or popularity (what Weber refers to when he discusses charisma) is one obvious example of political capital but there is also the *delegated capital of authority* invested to the political actor (an official) by an institution, such as a party. This generates the capital of *recognition* and *loyalties*. This process, whereby professional representatives of a group are granted official recognition through investiture by an organisation, leads to a type of sedimentation of this entire symbolic structure. The group struggle in the political field becomes mechanised, bureaucratised, institutionalised. The institution possesses the legitimacy to represent the group through its officials, the professionals. Bourdieu refers to this as the *objectification* of political capital, where struggle in the political field is not only about maximising the interests of the group but is now also a career (Bourdieu 1991, pp. 194–197). This, of course, will generate internal struggles because, where there are jobs, there is competition for jobs. However, since symbolic capital is often more precious than economic capital, the competition is also for status and prestige. Working for the group, then, can and will entail working for one's self-aggrandisement.

> The more advanced the process of institutionalization of political capital is, the more the winning of 'hearts and minds' tends to become subordinated to the winning of jobs; and the more militants, linked by their 'devotion' to the

> 'cause' and by nothing else have to make way for the 'prebendaries', as Weber calls them, lastingly linked to the apparatus by the benefits and advantages that it grants them, and holding on to the apparatus as long as the apparatus keeps them in its grasp by redistributing to them part of the material or symbolic booty that it wins with their help (as in the case of the spoils of American parties) (Bourdieu 1991, p. 197).

Apart from self-aggrandisement, there is *self-consecration*. This is the process whereby the delegate of the group becomes its spokesperson, like an oracle channeling a deity. In receiving a mandate to speak for the group one dissolves into the group and, in so doing, one simultaneously suppresses and transcends one's own personal identity. One makes oneself nothing, becoming everything in turn (Bourdieu 1991, p. 211). Through this analysis, Bourdieu adds another dimension to his theory. There is the struggle for maximising interests *between* groups; there is the struggle for maximising interests *within* the group; but there is also the process of the individual *becoming* the group through investiture, thereby (consciously or not) promoting his or her interests. This is a particularly salient point in cases where the group struggle becomes identified with an exceptionally charismatic figure (cf. the title 'The father of the nation') whose own personal or political proclivities fuse with the interest of the group such that the critic of the delegate may become a traitor to the cause. This is a type of symbolic imposition that Bourdieu refers to as the *monopolisation of collective truth*. It is subject to usurpation by the ambitious, when the delegate manages to convince the mandators that their interests generally coincide. This is cynical but, when it works, it is often-times because it happens to be true. The interests of the group and those of their representative do tend to be in sync: if the latter is successful (delivers strategic results) the former will benefit as well (Bourdieu 1991, pp. 212–214). What we have here – the body of delegates – is an entire apparatus at work. It might – and it does – happen that the apparatus acquires a volition of its own such that its self-preservation becomes paramount, to the point where everything else become secondary. 'The party *is* the nation; the avant-garde *are* the people'. The delegates end up working for the apparatus instead of for the mandators. The types of delegate who are the most prone to favouring the apparatus over the mandators are those who are the most dependent on it for capital. Bourdieu provides us here with an account of the social mechanisms behind a type of political corruption, where the apparatus becomes an end-in-itself. Instead of serving the people, the people are there

to serve it (and to be manipulated by it). Similarly, the apparatus is not there to promote ideology but, rather, ideology is there to promote the apparatus.

> There are jobs, privileges, and people who take them; far from feeling guilty about having served their interests, they will claim that they are not taking these jobs for their own benefit, but for that of the Party or the Cause, just as they will invoke, so as to hang on to those jobs, the rule that says you do not give up a position you have won. […] There is a sort of self-consecration of the apparatus, a theodicy of the apparatus. The apparatus is always right (Bourdieu 1991, p. 219).

Types of Field Strategy

Having established that the political field is a domain of struggle, competition and, indeed, battle, one in which actors seek to assert dominance (and, ultimately, inflict violence) upon their opponents[34] – just as one would do on an actual battlefield (except that here we have in mind symbolic violence) – it follows that there will be a select number of strategies that may be at one's disposal at any given point in time and that these strategies will vary in their potency (otherwise you would not have winners and losers). It also follows that both the latent potency of the strategies and the accessibility to them will be contingent upon one's positioning in the field. Depending on where one stands, one will seek to achieve 'the formation, selection [or] imposition of systems of classification' based on the premise that cognitive structures and social structures are 'recursively and structurally linked' to the point that the imposition of 'the definition of the world that is most congruent with [a group's] particular interests' governs 'the reproduction and transformation of structures of domination' (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992, pp. 14–15).

So what *is* strategy? One thing that it is important to note at the outset is that an actor's adoption of strategy flows from the nature of the political field itself (meaning the relational logic that was discussed above). One should not make the mistake of ascribing intentionality to the actors in the field in the sense that their manœuvering is preplanned and calculated (which, in another looser, non-technical, sense, it of course is). The word 'strategy' as used here refers to

> the active deployment of objectively oriented 'lines of action' that obey regularities and form coherent and socially intelligible patterns, even though

[34] With the proviso that these opponents can be one's former or future associates/collaborators.

> they do not follow conscious rules or aim at the premeditated goals posited by a strategist (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992, p. 25).

If you find yourself pushed into a particularly drafty part of a house by another one of its occupants, it is not so much calculative intentionality that induces you to look after a more comfortable spot in the house (and to seek revenge on your tormentor) but is, rather, the nature of the space and the contingency of your position in relation to the other occupant that has triggered this impulse. In other words, one does not *choose* to employ strategies in social life; strategic action is *inherent* on being a social being. As beings, we are the '*personification* of exigencies actually or potentially inscribed in the structure of the field or, more precisely, in the position occupied in the field' (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992, p. 44; italics in the original). Strategy is a choice only within the constraints of the relational logic of the political field. What this also tells us is that by strategising and seeking to maximise one's interests within the field, one reproduces and legitimises its structure. This is the case even if the ultimate goal is to destabilise the equilibrium of the field. You accept the premise that the field is the domain in which political struggle is carried out, with the specific regularities that characterise the manifestations of that struggle and to which one needs to adapt (if not conform). Bourdieu calls this mutual recognition of the actuality and logic of the field by the actors a *doxa* or a belief. He compares participation in a field struggle to playing a game of cards. By the mere act of playing, one implicitly concedes that the game, with its rules and its stakes, is worth playing. One then proceeds to play the game based on the idea that certain cards or combination of cards, profer a relative advantage in the game, so that one's actions are geared toward acquiring these cards and using them in gainful ways. If the rules of the game correspond to the regularities of the field, the trump cards are the equivalent of capital. Thus, just as with cards, the way in which you combine and expend different forms of capital will depend on the needs of your particular circumstances. Strategy, then, means being able to play one's cards well regardless of what you may have been dealt. This is also where the concept of *habitus* is relevant. Bourdieu refers to habitus as 'the different systems of dispositions [that actors] have acquired by internalizing a determinate type of social and economic condition, and which find in a definite trajectory within the field under consideration a more or less favorable opportunity to become actualized' (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992, p. 105). Elsewhere he refers to it as a 'feel for the game' (1992, p. 128).

It is also in the context of this discussion that Bourdieu introduces the terms *conservation* and *subversion*. Someone who has been dealt an advantageous set of cards will seek to preserve his or her gains through a cautious approach, whereas he or she with a bad set might be more prone to risk-taking. This might change during the course of the game. If risk-taking pays off, conservation might replace the earlier approach. The one who starts off as an outsider in the field (or within a party), might turn protective of the *status quo* upon achieving some success in manœuvering. However, another approach, popularly known as 'state capture', is to change the system that regulates political and economic resources upon achieving success (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992, pp. 99–100).

State-Building Through Symbolic Violence: Some Historical Examples

Bourdieu's field theory, as we have seen, offers a robust lens for understanding the state as a meta-power within the political field, a status achieved through the accumulation and deployment of symbolic capital, particularly via symbolic violence. In this framework, the state is not merely an administrative entity but a dynamic actor that shapes social reality by imposing a shared *doxa* – a set of unquestioned beliefs about its legitimacy and authority. Symbolic violence, distinct from physical coercion, operates through institutions like education, law and culture to naturalise the state's dominance, transforming diverse populations into a unified citizenry. Let us now briefly explore how states in Western Europe and settler colonial contexts (Australia, Canada, the United States) became meta-powers by employing symbolic violence to suppress regional, ethnic and indigenous identities. Note that the references provided describe the historical process; I have presented these findings using Bourdieu's concepts to make a theoretical point.

In France, the construction of a centralised state exemplifies Bourdieu's notion of the state as a meta-power. During the Third Republic (1870–1914), the French government transformed rural peasants into a cohesive national body by suppressing regional languages like Breton, Basque and Occitan. Eugen Weber (1976) details how compulsory education, military service and infrastructure development all standardised French culture, eradicating the linguistic diversity deemed a threat to national unity. This enabled the state to define Frenchness and enforce a *doxa* of centralised authority. The state's meta-power emerged as it monopolised not just

physical violence but also the symbolic means to shape perceptions of legitimacy, a centuries-long project rooted in the Revolution's linguistic policies. Brubaker (1992) contrasts France's state-centred, assimilationist approach with Germany's ethnocultural model. In France, the state-building process involved creating a civic nation through universal citizenship, rooted in the Revolutionary ideals of 1789. He argues that 'the French understanding of nationhood has been state-centered and assimilationist' (1992, p. 1), emphasising how the state extended citizenship to diverse populations – Bretons, Basques, Jews and immigrants – provided that they adopted French culture and language. In contrast, Germany's state-building lagged due to its fragmented history, with national identity coalescing around an ethnocultural core rather than a strong state. Brubaker explains that 'German nationhood was conceived in opposition to the territorial state' (1992, p. 4), rooted in a pre-political cultural unity of language and descent rather than civic incorporation. The 19th-century German nationalist movement, which idealised a 'community of descent' (1992, p. 114), excluding groups like the Sorbs or the Poles unless they assimilated into the German ethnos. The Prussian-led unification imposed this ethnocultural identity through education and bureaucracy, marginalising regional diversity (e.g., Bavarian or Saxon dialects). Once unified, the German state wielded symbolic violence to align its population with this ethnic *doxa*, achieving meta-power status by the late-19th century, though its reliance on descent left it less universalist than France.

Britain's state-building followed a similar trajectory, forging a unified identity through symbolic violence against Celtic cultures. Linda Colley (1992) argues that Britishness was constructed, post-1707 Acts of Union, by marginalising Welsh, Irish and Scottish Gaelic identities, often through education and legal systems that privileged English norms. This suppression, reinforced by opposition to external 'others' like France, consolidated the British state's symbolic capital, positioning it as the meta-power in a field where regional actors were subordinated. The state's ability to impose a national narrative created a *doxa* of British unity, masking internal diversity and asserting centralised authority over time.

Alvarez-Junco (2011) analyses the construction of Spanish identity – particularly during the 19th and 20th centuries – and how the central government suppressed regional identities, including those of Catalans, Basques and Galicians. Italy's unification during the *Risorgimento* further illustrates state-building through symbolic violence. Riall (1994) and Dickie (1999) describe how the Italian state marginalised regional dialects (e.g.,

Sicilian, Venetian) and cultures to promote a Tuscan-based standard Italian. Education and cultural institutions enforced this linguistic hegemony, transforming diverse regions into a singular Italian identity. The state's symbolic capital accrued as it asserted meta-power over a fragmented field, overcoming regional autonomy to establish a national *doxa*.

In settler colonial contexts, symbolic violence took a more overtly coercive form, yet it still aligns with Bourdieu's framework. In Australia, the Stolen Generations policy forcibly removed indigenous children, assimilating them into European norms through boarding schools (Haebich 2000). Canada's residential school system similarly eradicated indigenous languages and cultures, embedding a Euro-Canadian *doxa* (Milloy 1999). In the United States, David Wallace Adams (1995) documents how Native American boarding schools stripped away tribal identities, imposing a national identity aligned with settler interests. In each case, the state's meta-power status was secured by accumulating symbolic capital through education and legal systems, violently suppressing alternative *doxas* to establish a unified field under colonial control.

These examples illuminate Bourdieu's state as a meta-power that dominates the political field by monopolising symbolic violence. It also illuminates the various manifestations and forms of symbolic violence and the mechanisms by which it is wielded. Symbolic capital enables the state to unify actors around a common *doxa*, subordinating rival identities.

Conclusion

This section has offered an overview of the main components of Bourdieu's theory of the political field, which forms the basis for my understanding of the data. His discussion about the *nature* of the political field (with a particular focus on the *state*), along with his identification of the various *forms of capital* and his discussion about the mechanisms of political *positioning* and *strategising* are crucial to his theory and form the basis of my analytical framework.

The present study focuses on a situation where the political field is fragmented and the state is contested, where the state is not the natural centre of authority and where the positioning of the actors relative to each other *within* a field might not be the major sociological concern but, rather, where the actors' asymmetrical positioning *relative to* the field *qua* field is the major point around which the actors' mutual strategising revolves. Bosnia and Herzegovina, in other words, is a country where the field – and,

in particular, the state – seems to be under heavy strain. It would seem, therefore, that there is mutual benefit in studying the BH situation through the lens of political field theory: it can offer us an account of the sociological basis for the political contestation in the country and can also challenge and extend an established sociological theory (Bukve 2019, pp. 81–82) by virtue of its application to a complex, fragmented and idiosyncratic field. The particularities of the relationship between the framework and the empirical data will be discussed in the section in which I share my methodological choices.

There are, however, some questions that I would like to address before I move on to my own empirical data. These questions concern Bourdieu's conceptualisation of power and capital – and specifically the central position which he assigns to the state. Where does Bourdieu stand in relation to other sociologists in this regard and are there any limitations to his conceptualisation when looking at political fields outside of Bourdieu's French context? This also brings us to issues not directly addressed by Bourdieu which are, nevertheless, relevant to my empirical case, such as the nature of nationalism. There is also the question of how to understand individual and collective agency given the seemingly deterministic relationship between the state and the political actor that Bourdieu offers us, combined with his discussions about political positioning and strategising. These issues will be addressed in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 5

Political Field Theory in a Wider Sociological Context

Introduction

Bourdieu was obviously not alone in identifying some of the social mechanisms at play in the world of politics. Indeed, there is much commonality between his ideas and those found within the classics of sociology. Weber (2004, p. 33), for example, proclaimed that the 'state is regarded as the sole source of the "right" to use violence' and that engaging in politics today is 'to strive for a share of power or to influence the distribution of power' in the specific context of a state. This contrasts with pre-modern times, when non-state organisations (such as clans) enjoyed some of the powers that are now concentrated within the state. This corresponds to Bourdieu's idea of the state's monopolisation of the capital of physical force. Similarly, Bourdieu's discussion of the concept of informational capital which has the power to shape 'mental structures' finds echo in Foucault's concept of the episteme. 'In any given culture and at any given moment, there is always only one *episteme* that defines the conditions of possibility of all knowledge, whether expressed in a theory or silently invested in a practice' (Foucault 2005, p 183; italics in the original). One manifestation of how this is 'invested in practice' is through the 'disciplinary society' to which we are all subjected, by way of schools, hospitals, barracks and so on (Focuault 1978). Also, Bourdieu's discussion about symbolic capital seems very much to overlap with Steven Lukes (2005, p. 109) 'third dimension of power' which involves 'securing the consent to domination of willing subjects'. Given that this study is not one of comparative theory, I avoid delving into the particularities of where Bourdieu stands in relation to these and other theorists. However, I will be looking at one study in which Bourdieu is compared to another of sociology's classical thinkers, namely Gramsci. This is because that study, written by Michael Burawoy (2012), has a bearing upon the case of the BH political field. Burawoy's study belongs to a work co-written by Karl von Holdt (2012) and the latter follows up on his analy-

sis and develops it in a subsequent chapter, which is why I have used it as well.

One of the things that distinguishes Bourdieu from these other theorists is that his political field theory is focused on a centralised, stable state model, exemplified by France, which overlooks the dynamics of other types of state, particularly fragmented, newly emergent post-war ones. An essential feature of this chapter, therefore, is that it looks at how researchers (including Burawoy and von Holdt) have sought to utilise field theory outside of the French context – and specifically how to understand states that are essentially different from France in terms of history, structure, stability etc. I have singled out studies that offer conceptual themes and analytical tools that appear to be relevant to Bosnia and Herzegovina, as they focus on fields characterised by various forms of fragmentation and involve societal conflict. These issues bring us to questions of state-building and the very concept of a 'nation' – and how the idea of the state and the nation are framed by people on the ground.

Finally, there is also the question of how to resolve a seeming paradox in Bourdieu's theoretical system: the role assigned to the state *vis-à-vis* the political actor on the field seems quite deterministic, yet he puts a lot of energy into analysing how political actors manipulate their positioning within the field using different strategies. I have looked at how this issue might be resolved.

Burawoy's and von Holdt's Analysis of Bourdieu

For Burawoy (2012), Bourdieu's idea of symbolic violence corresponds to Gramsci's idea of 'hegemony'. The parallels are 'remarkable': Bourdieu's fields of cultural domination read like Gramsci's superstructures (Burawoy 2012, p. 52). Gramsci writes of the dominant bourgeois classes who secure and maintain their financial and political domination through cultural domination, by way of instilling in the working classes a sense of what constitutes the natural order of political organisation and the financial system. Ultimately, class struggle is between systems of ideologies 'that provide a common language, discourse and a normative vision' of society (2012, p. 57). The values, norms, conventions and mores of the bourgeoise end up being mistaken for common sense, even amongst the working classes. This is not coercion – there is willing participation on behalf of the dominated. The state plays a crucial role here. Burawoy quotes Gramsci directly: 'The State is the entire complex of practical and theoretical

activities with which the ruling class not only justifies and maintains its dominance, but manages to win the active consent of those over whom it rules' (cited in Burawoy 2012, p. 60). This line of reasoning is mirrored in Bourdieu when he analyses symbolic domination. Again, the state is central. It does not need to resort to violence or to disciplinary constraint. It produces an 'ordered social world' by way of 'incorporated cognitive structures' that secure submission (2012, p. 61). Of course, there are differences between Bourdieu and Gramsci as well, mainly in the level of agency that the two allow for those who are dominated and subject to hegemony or symbolic domination; for Bourdieu symbolic domination renders those who are affected by it less capable of self-reflection and introspection because they entirely internalise the 'common sense' associated with the dominant order, whereas Gramsci allows for more awareness and, ultimately, an ability to see beyond the bourgeois ideology and break free from its domination (2012, pp. 60–62).

I return to the question of agency at the end of this chapter; however, let us linger a bit more on this concept of Bourdieu and the state. For Bourdieu, as we have seen, the political field is the domain in which one seeks to attain capital, which is intimately tied to the state, particularly through symbolic capital. By gaining state power, one gains the ability to engage in symbolic domination. Von Holdt, building upon Burawoy, problematises this understanding of the relationship between symbolic domination and the state. He bases his criticism on an empirical investigation into South Africa, where he observes that the state has failed to emerge as 'the authority of authorities' that 'establishes and reproduces shared symbolic forms of thought' (von Holdt 2012, p. 68). Where, in these other cases, the social order settles into a 'common sense' shape, this will not happen in a country such as South Africa, where the symbolic order is 'contested, fluid and ambiguous' (2012, p. 68). The symbolic order during the apartheid era was, to a great extent, based on the idea of whites being associated with the skills needed to run a modern bureaucratic state. These whites were therefore promoted as the natural rulers of the country, with the black population being identified as largely devoid of these skills and therefore naturally excluded from positions of power. Now, with the dismantling of apartheid and the transition to a new political system, the aftereffects of this symbolic order are such that there are whites who continue to question the ability of blacks to run a country, whereas many blacks remain suspicious that whites who enjoy positions of power might have originally been placed there not through real merit but because of the privileges

afforded to them on account of their race. This generates a racialised instability that runs throughout society and which, during the apartheid era, delegitimised the racialised authority structures and continue to undermine authority after the transition to democracy. This results in a breakdown in discipline and in suspicion of state institutions (von Holdt 2012, pp. 68–69).

> The instability and contestation within state institutions over the state's meaning and purposes undermine its ability to establish and sustain a coherent structure of symbolic domination. Skills and authority are not simply technical matters but are crucial dimensions of a classification system and its symbolic order; if the state is internally divided with respect to such dimensions of symbolic order, there is very little possibility that it will be able to enforce and stabilise symbolic order throughout society (2012, p. 70)

What von Holdt's study suggests is that Bourdieu's understanding of the state, with its monopoly on symbolic domination, needs to be set against the empirical reality in the field. This is done, firstly, by studying the historical context of the society in which one is interested. A young state that has emerged through social upheaval or war or when the system by which the state is run has recently been put into place after a highly contested process, cannot be compared to a state with a centuries-long track record of inculcating loyalty into its citizens through the educational system and other mechanisms.

> [I]n a situation of historical upheaval and change such as South Africa's, it is not only the state that is the source of symbolic order: subalterns too construct symbolic orders from below in their struggles to appropriate, disrupt or reshape dominant meanings. Just as the post-apartheid state does not hold a monopoly over material violence, so it is unable to monopolise symbolic violence. In South Africa today, very little is self-evident, established or settled. Indeed, what we have is not so much a classification struggle in the Bourdieusian sense, but a classification crisis, a symbolic crisis (von Holdt 2012, p. 72).

I might finally add a related point: in a discussion (separate from Burawoy's and von Holdt's), the researchers Berezin, Sandusky and Davidson (2020, p. 110) describe those who seek to strengthen the legitimacy of the state as *legitimacy entrepreneurs*. These correspond to the incumbents, using Fligstein's and McAdam's (2012) terminology (see below). In other words, seeking to strengthen or weaken the symbolic power of the state could be understood as part of the game within the political field.

Political Field Theory and Fragmented Societies

Let us now look at two ways in which Bourdieu's theory has been utilised and adapted in two countries that share some salient features with Bosnia and Herzegovina: cultural and religious diversity rooted in the institutional set-up of the country (Belgium) and a post-Communist political system (the former Czechoslovakia), respectively. The former has survived as a state formation, whereas the latter could not stand the test of internal inter-ethnic tension.

In their case study of Belgium, Mangez and Lienard (2015) point out that their country of focus, along with certain other European countries (Bosnia and Herzegovina being one of them), is marked by a process of cultural differentiation in which divergent sociological communities are distinguished from each other on the basis of factors such as language and ethnicity. The social cleavages produced by this differentiation contribute to the structuring of the space of the relative positions of actors. This set of circumstances shapes the way in which different types of cultural capital are contested (2015, p. 186). This may lead to the *splitting* of fields. For example, where there is a linguistic–cultural divide, there may be a splitting of the cultural field. This is where there is not merely a case of polarisation within the field but, in fact, a doubling of fields, such that the struggle for legitimisation no longer occurs within the same space. However, the result of this fragmentation, in which specific groups converge around a specific identity (cultural, linguistic, religious, ethnic) beyond the limits of their respective fields need not lead to splitting and can, instead, forge other types of arrangement (such as federalisation) that require the suspension of particular stakes in some fields. This is referred to as pillarisation because these groups clinch to a proverbial pillar that extends through and beyond the fields (2015, pp. 189–190). In other words, there is a multidimensionality to the field of power in societies characterised by cultural differentiation that needs to be taken into account when analysing the field of politics, particularly since this has an effect on field strategy. Furthering or preventing field-splitting might be strategies used by actors in such societies, for example. One may also accept the splitting of one field (such as that of education) in order to preserve the intactness of another (that of economy, for example). Mangez and Lienard (2015, p. 194) argue that, since Bourdieu's theory is tailored to understanding functional differentiation within societies whose social formation is culturally homogenous, this theoretical development was needed.

Eyal (2005), in his study of the Czechoslovak political field following the collapse of Communism, focuses on some of the particulars of how social and class conflicts are *transposed* from the social space onto the political field. In so doing, they either *reflect*, *invert*, *condense* or *polarise* these conflicts. These various forms of transposition are not mutually exclusive and might overlap with or follow one another. Significantly, it was the polarisation of the social space (through opposition in the field of *discursive strategies*), transposed onto the political field (through theatricalised representation, as discussed earlier), that eventually led to a split between the Czech and Slovak republics (Eyal 2005, pp. 151–152). Polarisation, then, fits neatly with Mangez's and Lienard's concept of fragmentation along ethnic, religious or linguistic lines, to the point of a splitting of the field. With Belgium, this did not lead to a disintegration of the country but functions as a stabilising mechanism that preserves the integrity of the state, whereas Eyal's case study provides us with an example of where it has a disruptive effect on the state. This shows us that polarisation and field-splitting are nuanced concepts that may generate divergent outcomes in terms of what happens to the state. As for the other types of transposition enumerated by Eyal, *reflection* is where there is a symmetrical relationship between conflicts in social space and in the political field, such that a particular party represents the overall interests of its constituency. *Inversion* is when the social divisions are reflected asymmetrically in the political field, as when the class elite represent the workers. *Condensation* is when social conflicts play themselves out within certain parties (such as catch-all parties) rather than through cross-party rivalry (Eyal 2005, p. 154). Eyal's study demonstrates how certain issues in the social space, having to do with economic and cultural capital, eventually led to the breakup of the Czechoslovak federation despite a majority of the voters not being in favour of such an outcome. However, since the majority of Czechs voted for a candidate on one side of the social divide and the Slovaks voted for someone on the other side, the *polarisation* was such that a breakup nevertheless ensued (Eyal 2005, p. 174). In other words, there seems to be an element of path dependence to this particular aspect of Eyal's explanation of what happened in Czechoslovakia. What Eyal shows us is that the process by which conflicts in social space are transferred to and managed in the political field has a direct bearing on how a variety of political issues are conceptualised and conjoined (such that radical economic reform ends up being identified as pro-Czech and anti-Slovak, for example) and may also have a direct impact upon the structure of the state. This means that the sociologist needs

to look at how different actors in a fragmented society operate when seeking to transfer conflicts in social space over into the political field; the question of the modality of conflict transposition is also a question of strategy. The various forms of transposition may lead to dramatically different outcomes, including unintended ones. Where partial pillarisation (to use the term employed by Mangez and Lienard) might be sought after, polarisation and breakup might result instead.

In a similar vein, Fligstein and McAdam (2012, pp. 99–100) have further developed field theory in specific ways that concern us here, particularly with regards to field contestation and instability. They identify three main sources of field destabilisation: outside invasion (i.e. the entrance of new members into the field, which may or may not have a subversive effect); disruptive changes in related fields that have a ripple effect; and macro-events (such as war). The main significance of Fligstein's and McAdam's theory here is that it demonstrates that the skills possessed by an actor in manœuvering within the political field and in using various forms of capital to secure strategic gains may mean little if the political field itself is unsettled (2012, p. 102). Before analysing how actors employ strategy to maximise their interests within the political field, it is important to understand the nature of the field itself and how different actors relate to the field (before transposing conflicts from social space). Fligstein and McAdam identify two main categories of actor: the *incumbents* – those who wish to preserve the current structure or salvage as much of it as possible during a crisis – and the *challengers* – those who identify their interests with the rupture of the field and whose strategy to a large degree consists of contending the field and taking advantage of destabilising events (Fligstein & McAdam 2012, pp. 105–107). This dynamic may lead to the creation of new fields through political manœuvering by the challengers (e.g. by creating new coalitions)[35] (2012, pp. 109–110).

State-Building and the 'Unfinished State'

Thus far, I have presented how other researchers have discussed volatile and fragmented states which suffer from a shortage of symbolic capital. Let us, therefore, now discuss the nature of state-building. What needs to be remembered is that the state comes in different forms and that to speak of the nature of the state is perilous in the absence of some sort of empirical backing. Since I am studying Bosnia and Herzegovina as 'a disintegrated

[35] This is akin to the concept of pillarisation leading to a splitting of the field, as discussed above.

post-war nation-state', I have chosen to highlight a couple of studies that deal with societies that can be described in similar terms and to use their theoretical arguments to analyse my data.

I begin with Wimmer (2013), whose work is useful insofar as it discusses the legitimacy of post-war (multi-ethnic) states. He argues that the crucial factor that determines their fate is whether or not the nation-building process manages to gain legitimacy across ethnic lines. He shows 'how particular power relations between the state and other political actors combine with their varying visions of a legitimate political order to produce different political identities, forms of statehood and dynamics of violent conflict' (2013, p. 5). According to Wimmer, where this legitimisation process fails in multiethnic societies, then war is a looming possibility (2013, p. 6). War results 'from the struggle between competing projects of state-building based on different principles of political legitimacy' (2013, p. 115) and secessionist wars are less likely when the state enjoys high levels of legitimacy (2013, p. 127). This also ties back to the legitimacy entrepreneurs.

So what *is* nation-building or state-building? Brubaker discusses different forms of state-building through a couple of case studies of newly independent, un-finished 'successor states'. He refers to these states as 'nationalising' ones, stressing the unfinished nature of the state project, where independent statehood did not signal the end of a process but, rather, a transition to a new form of nationalist politics. The newly formed state is only nominally sovereign (due to its lack of internal cohesion), 'a shell that [has] to be filled with national content', so that it can be fully realised as a nation-state. Nationalising policies – i.e. policies designed to strengthen the state – are justified based on the notion that the state itself stands and falls on a 'core nation' and that the reason for the unfinished nature of the state is the weak condition of this core nation. The logical conclusion of this line of reasoning is that the core nation, in a sense, is the state itself. At the least, the state is *of* and *for* this group (Brubaker 2011, p. 1786). Brubaker also discusses different forms of nationalisation – identifying, for example, four domains in which the position of the 'core nation' (and thus the state itself) is sought to be strengthened; these are demography, language, polity and economy (2011, pp. 1797–1802).

Brubaker illustrates these nationalising processes through case studies of post-Soviet states, specifically Estonia, Latvia, Kazakhstan and Ukraine, each grappling with the challenge of consolidating statehood after the Soviet collapse. In Estonia and Latvia, nationalising policies thus focused on reinforcing the ethnic Estonian and Latvian 'core nations' through stringent

citizenship and language laws that marginalised Russian-speaking populations. These measures aimed to secure demographic and linguistic dominance for the titular ethnic groups, often at the expense of minority inclusion and reflecting the states' efforts to assert sovereignty amidst perceived threats from a large Russian minority and Russia's regional influence. In contrast, Kazakhstan pursued a more-inclusive nationalising strategy, promoting a civic Kazakhstani identity while subtly prioritising ethnic Kazakhs in political and economic spheres. This approach sought to balance the significant Russian minority's presence with the need to strengthen the Kazakh core nation, using bilingual policies and economic incentives to foster cohesion. Ukraine, meanwhile, faced a fragmented national landscape, with nationalising efforts oscillating between promoting the Ukrainian language and culture in the West and accommodating Russian-speaking regions in the East. These policies highlighted the contested nature of the 'core nation', as regional divisions and historical ties to Russia complicated efforts to forge a unified national identity (Brubaker 2011, pp. 1792–1804).

These cases underscore Brubaker's argument that nationalising states are dynamic arenas where the 'core nation' seeks to fill the state's 'shell' with national content, often through contested and context-specific strategies. Whether through exclusionary measures – as in the Baltic states – or through more-integrative approaches – as in Kazakhstan – these processes reveal the tension between state sovereignty and internal diversity. By examining these examples, Brubaker highlights how nationalisation is not a uniform process but a complex interplay of policies and practices shaped by historical legacies and geopolitical realities (Brubaker 2011, pp. 1805–1807), offering a comparative lens for understanding similar dynamics in other fragmented states such as Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Another feature of Brubaker's analysis is that he highlights the important role played by actors who operate outside the state. In 'states-in-the-making' such as those that followed the collapse of Yugoslavia, the question of how to negotiate the relationship between state, the citizens within the state and the 'external homeland' states with which some of these citizens identify[36] becomes crucial (Brubaker 1996, pp. 43–44). In this regard, he also refers to the role played by other external actors (primarily militarily, politically and economically powerful states) who seek to affect the outcome of the nationalisation process. For example, Western states will seek to

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[36] So, in the case of the BH Croats, for example, the external homeland would be Croatia.

integrate these 'states-in-the-making' into the European economic and security structures (which entails enforcing a certain 'discipline' on these states) whereas other actors (such as Russia) will offer their own incentives which are intended to draw these states into their sphere of influence (Brubaker 1996, p. 47).

The Nation and Ethnicity as Framing

Any study of a national group will be deficient without some discussion about what a nation or an ethnic group[37] should be understood to be in the first place. What I am interested in here is not necessarily to settle on a definition (preceded by the usual etymological and historical examinations) but, rather, to share with the reader how the issue can be approached sociologically and to offer some basic conceptual parameters that are needed when moving forward. What concerns me is the important observation that ethnicities and nations are not to be approached as objective or 'primordial'[38] entities but need, rather, to be studied within the context of situationally bound, continual social processes that are subject to negotiation (Fenton 2010, pp. 71–73). Now, the degree to which ethnic/national groups are socially constructed is a matter for epistemology (I discuss this aspect further in the next section) but the notion that various empirically observable social mechanisms play a part in the development and activation of ethnic identity in various social (not least political) contexts is axiomatic for any sociological undertaking related to the matter. National identities, therefore, 'are in some measure created, sustained and made relevant in political action by ethnically oriented actors and by the state' (Fenton 2010, p. 72). Of course, there are even ways of combining a primordial understanding with the social constructivist one – whereby, for example, one studies how national feeling is instrumentalised without adopting a constructivist approach; however, the point here is that the sociological approach is concerned with the social processes to the exclusion of the truth claims or emotional attachments tied to the definitions of a nation. The exploration of how ethnicity/the nation emerges and manifests itself in the social world is sought, whereas rigid and fixed definitions are seen as detrimental (Fenton 2010, pp. 82–87). The question then becomes one of how best to study these social processes – here is where sociology

[37] I use the terms interchangeably for our basic purposes here, even though there are certainly other contexts where a differentiation is necessary.
[38] One could perhaps also use the terms 'fixed' or 'essentialist'.

offers a plethora of analytical and methodological approaches and starting points.

Since national identity construction is a dynamic process – i.e. rather than being something 'out there' that we discover, something primordial – it is in some measure created and sustained by particular actors in specific social contexts and is temporal. It follows from this that, in order to study national identity, sociologists need to understand how particular actors take part in this process of the creation and sustainment of identity; in other words, empirical engagement is necessary.

In examining the BH political field and studying the 'state-in-the-making' process, with a particular focus on the SDA as a main political actor, it is imperative to include a concise theoretical discussion on the identity-formation process. Again, there are several possible sociological approaches to this which often overlap even where the terminology or even some of the basic premises may differ. Discourse analysis, narrative theory, semiotics and symbolic interactionism all represent different possible approaches to the question at hand. I have chosen to highlight framing theory because it focuses on the mediated relational nature of how issues are constructed in a very specific political sphere (Roslyng & Dindler 2023, p. 11). Since I am not interested in the Bosniac identity *per se* but, rather, the Bosniac identity in relation to the BH political field, I believe that this approach suits my case.

The process of framing is a type of reality construction which has been referred to as 'the politics of signification' (Benford & Snow 2000, pp. 613–614). Benford and Snow (2000, p. 615) identify three core tasks that characterise the process of framing: to 'negotiate a shared understanding of some problematic condition or situation [that is] in need of change, [identify] who or what is to blame, articulate an alternative set of arrangements and urge others to act in concert to affect the change'. These three forms of framing are condensed as diagnostic, prognostic and motivational. Also, whilst there is some controversy regarding the extent to which this is the case, there is a general understanding that a conceptualisation of injustice, with the identification of a victim whose unfavourable situation is to be remedied, tends to be central to these framing processes so that what would otherwise be abstract norms can be connected to emotions in order to motivate action (Jasper 1998, p. 414). Again, the value of this approach is that it situates political identity within a particular context which can, in my estimation, be transferred to the Bourdieusian political field, as framing

necessitates competing actors. This also fits quite well with the 'relational phenomenology' discussed by McNay (2008, pp. 280–281).

This explains why the question of Bosniac framing will re-occur as a theme throughout my study, not only when I discuss questions of Bosniac identity but also when I discuss the Bosniac perception of the other actors – and indeed the field itself. This act of framing, this relational shaping of one's political identity in real time, is an essential feature of the game or theatre of politics as discussed by Bourdieu and, as such, it can be tied to concepts that are central to field theory. For example, habitus, as a type of internalised strategising manifested through socially ingrained patterns of thought and behaviour, is intimately tied to questions of identity.

Framing can also be understood as a way in which actors on the field exercise agency, since the way that one frames the field itself and the actors within it determines how one decides to act. In this regard, we find that Fligstein and McAdam make a direct connection between collective framing and changes within the field:

> With what forms of action and collective action frames do incumbents and challengers respond to the developing crisis? How do these change over the life of the episode? What role do key external actors/strategic action fields play in precipitating the episode, shaping its trajectory, and ultimately helping to affect a new field settlement? (Fligstein & McAdam 2012, p. 166).

For example, if one's framing includes the idea that there is very little space for actors to manœuvre and make political change, then presumably one will be less motivated to act (at least within the system); conversely, if one considers the field to be wide open and understands oneself to possess a lot of agency, then there is a greater likelihood for political mobilisation within the system. The question of agency is discussed further below.

The focus of this discussion thus far has been to set the stage by pointing out that national identity needs to be studied as a mediated and relational phenomenon. Below are some approaches to the nation which I have chosen because I deem them to be highly relevant to my particular case and which can, in some cases, be understood as particular ways of framing.

Different Forms of Nationalism and *Dignity Capital*

To examine the Party of Democratic Action's (SDA) strategies within Bosnia and Herzegovina's fragmented political field, this study employs the concept of nationalism, focusing on its civic and ethnic forms, to elucidate

how Bosniac activists conceptualise their relationship to the state. Leah Greenfield's (2016) typology of nationalism, outlined in her book *Advanced Introduction to Nationalism*, provides a foundational framework for this analysis. Greenfield identifies three ideal types of nationalism – *individualistic-civic*, *collectivistic-civic* and *ethnic* – derived from the interplay of how the nation is defined (as an association of individuals or a collective entity) and the criteria for membership (civic – based on voluntary citizenship – or ethnic, rooted in inherited traits). In this study, the focus is on individualistic-civic and ethnic nationalism, as these are the most relevant to the Bosnian-Herzegovinian context.

Individualistic-civic nationalism, according to Greenfield (2016), envisions the nation as a voluntary association of individuals united by shared political values, legal rights and citizenship, irrespective of cultural or ethnic differences. This form, often associated with Western democracies like France or the United States, emphasises personal agency and loyalty to state institutions, prioritising political unity and civic participation over cultural homogeneity (Greenfield 2016, p. 33). It emerges from individual experiences that coalesce into a collective commitment to a shared political project, fostering a sense of nationhood grounded in universal principles. In contrast, ethnic nationalism defines the nation as a unitary, organic community bound by common ancestry, language, culture or historical narratives (2016, p. 34). Frequently observed in post-imperial or ethnically diverse settings, such as the Balkans, this form frames national identity as inherited and exclusive, often arising in cultural environments where elites, feeling marginalised compared to external models, emphasise ethnic distinctiveness through a process which Greenfield links to *ressentiment* (2016, p. 34). While these ideal types provide analytical clarity, Greenfield acknowledges that real-world nationalisms rarely align perfectly with one type, often blending elements of civic and ethnic identities due to historical and social contingencies.

Craig Calhoun (2007), in his volume *Nations Matter: Culture, History and the Cosmopolitan Dream*, challenges the traditional dichotomy between civic and ethnic nationalism. He argues that this binary oversimplifies the complex and dynamic nature of national identities and points out that even archetypal civic nations, such as France, have historically incorporated ethnic elements, as seen in appeals to a culturally defined Frenchness alongside universalist civic ideals. Conversely, ethnic nationalisms often adopt civic rhetoric to legitimise their claims, blurring the distinction between the two forms. For Calhoun, national identities are not fixed but

are continually reshaped through public discourse, institutional practices and historical processes.

> The opposition of civic and ethnic nationalisms exerts a powerful influence over the study of nationalism, but like many typologies it obscures as much as it reveals. It not only crowds out a variety of other variables and leads too many to locate national traditions as wholes on one side or the other of the divide rather than studying their internal tensions. It also encourages misrecognition of the cultural constructions on which ostensibly wholly civic nationalisms rest. It encourages self-declared civic nationalists, liberals, and cosmopolitans to be too complacent, seeing central evils of the modern world produced at a safe distance by ethnic nationalists from whom they are surely deeply different (Calhoun 2007, p. 146).

This critique is particularly salient in Bosnia and Herzegovina, where the SDA's pursuit of a civic nationalism to legitimise a centralised state coexists with ethnic assertions of Bosniac cultural and historical identity, reflecting the fluid interplay of these nationalist forms in a post-Ottoman, post-conflict context.

In this study, Greenfield's civic-ethnic framework, tempered by Calhoun's critique, informs the analysis of the SDA's strategies. The party's advocacy for a civic nationalism, aimed at fostering a unified Bosnian-Herzegovinian state, is interwoven with ethnic undertones tied to Bosniac heritage, highlighting the complexity of nation-building in a fragmented political field where the state's legitimacy and symbolic capital remain contested.

The Problem of Agency

When one reads Bourdieu's discussion about field actors, one is struck by how constrained they seem to be by the rules and the *doxa* that are inherent to 'the game of opposition' and how vulnerable they are to symbolic violence; one is therefore left wondering about the extent of individual agency. Indeed, Bourdieu himself addressed this issue and sought to mitigate this impression by stressing the role of capital:

> *[S]ocial agents are not 'particles'* that are mechanically pushed and pulled about by external forces. They are, rather, bearers of capitals and, depending on their trajectory and on the position they occupy in the field by virtue of their endowment (volume and structure) in capital, they have a propensity to orient themselves actively either toward the preservation of the distribu-

> tion of capital or toward the subversion of this distribution (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992, p. 108–109; italics in the original).

This is one way to approach the issue and it is up to the reader to decide whether this elucidates the issue of how to understand the role that agency plays in Bourdieu's theoretical framework.

As has been shown in this chapter, there are plenty of researchers who have gone on to develop Bourdieu's theory with stronger emphasis placed on the role of agency. Fligstein and McAdam, for example, invoke the concept of 'social skill' which they refer to as 'a foundational perspective on how the nature and fundamental communicative/interactive capacities of modern humans inform our theory' (2012, p. 32). In other words, agency is not only possible within field theory, it is also foundational to it as socially skilled actors play a crucial role in shaping field dynamics, fostering cooperation and driving change – i.e. accruing capital.

I would like to present another approach to this issue, offered by McNay (2008). Instead of capital, this one relies upon the concept of habitus. McNay starts off by acknowledging that the symbolic violence that is inflicted upon individuals in a society renders them vulnerable to the internalisation of social structures, which are expressed through the regularity and uniformity of habitus. At the same time, however, there is never one single way in which one interacts in response to external circumstances. Individual action results from intentional engagement and in this there is space for spontaneity and creative agency. There is a 'field of action' where this 'relational phenomenology' operates[39] (McNay 2008, pp. 280–281).

For example, one may respond to a challenging situation by using violence or one may seek to build a coalition with potential allies; depending on which choice one makes, there are several other courses of action that one has to decide upon. For example, if a person decides upon a violent path, does one form an alliance with another military power? If one opts, instead, for coalition-building, which potential ally does one pick and how does one go about courting them? So, by studying the ways in which actors relate to habitus within a field of action, one simultaneously studies the way

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[39] This invocation of yet another field (of action) is a seemingly elegant solution to the problem of agency although one also fears that it might be abused, whereby a new field is created as a sort of *deus ex machina* solution to theoretical difficulties and we end up with a Russian doll of fields that serves to explain every new complexity.

in which agency manifests itself. In short, one could say that this entire discussion goes back to how one defines agency.[40]

For the purposes of this study, I am less interested in pinpointing what agency is from a philosophical point of view and prefer to focus on how the 'field of action' manifests itself in the BH political field: what is understood to be possible and achievable from the point of view of the Bosniacs associated with SDA and what is not.

Conclusion

This chapter has demonstrated how Pierre Bourdieu's theory of the political field equips this study to analyse the SDA in the context of Bosnia and Herzegovina's fragmented post-war state. I have also identified certain limitations that require complementary perspectives to address the study's specific research questions. Bourdieu's foundational framework opens up opportunities for additional analytical tools – such as 'field-splitting', 'settlement' and 'rupture' – to examine how SDA activists mobilise ethnic identities, negotiate alliances and contest state legitimacy, directly addressing my central research question. These concepts allow me to dissect the SDA's strategic positioning within BH's complex multiethnic arena, adapting it to the empirical realities of a post-war context where ethnic politics dominate.

Bourdieu's emphasis on the state's monopoly over symbolic capital and power, rooted in his French case, poses challenges when applied to BH's decentralised, multiethnic governance. To address this limitation and enrich my analysis, I draw on other researchers who broaden the understanding of state-building and nationalism beyond unitary state models. For example, Brubaker's (2011) focus on the contingent, mediated nature of ethnic and national identity informs my exploration of how SDA activists conceptualise Bosniak nationalism within BH's civic state framework, addressing sub-questions about their alignment with external powers and ethnic versus civic ideologies. Greenfield (2016) and Calhoun (2007) add further nuance to this discussion. Similarly, Eyal's (2005) analysis of Czechoslovakia's fragmented state-building provides a comparative lens

[40] In a Bourdieusian sense, agency would mean that one cannot escape from finding oneself in the middle of a game of cards with its particular rules; nor is one able to change the hand that one has been dealt or to dismiss the other players at the table. Nevertheless, one is free to proceed from there and play one's hand in the way one sees fit. This form of agency is limited but it is there.

through which to contextualise BH's unique post-war dynamics, thus aiding my study of the SDA's navigation of post-Ottoman legacies.

Bourdieu's theory, supplemented by these perspectives, provides a framework to investigate how individual and collective actors exercise agency through strategic decision-making, addressing my aim to uncover the mechanisms behind the SDA's influence on BH's political fragmentation. By synthesising these theoretical tools, this study adapts and extends Bourdieu's framework to analyse the SDA within the BH political field.

CHAPTER 6

The Research Process

Introduction

Several of the authors discussed in the section on theory offer methodological guidance for the prospective researcher. This includes Bourdieu, who coined the term 'structural constructivism' – or 'constructivist structuralism' (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992, p. 11) to describe his approach to sociological practice. Through this approach, Bourdieu seeks to bridge the divide between those who emphasise understanding hidden structures and those who stress human agency as the key mechanisms that determine human behaviour. He does this by highlighting the centrality of *habitus* (as the generating force for human practice) and *fields* (as the structured social spaces where human practice unfolds). The position of the actor within the field shapes what transpires within it.

This insight has also informed Bourdieu's understanding of the researcher's own embeddedness in social relations which may distort scientific knowledge. This calls for *epistemic reflexivity*, which requires the researcher to account for their own biases (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992, pp. 36–46). This methodological vigilance (1992, p. 29) therefore demands that the researcher examines his or her own habitus and field positionality. His recommendations about methodological reflexivity are taken into account as I discuss my own positionality as a researcher. This is to be found throughout this chapter, especially in the section on ethical considerations.

Bourdieu 'stresses the need for *relational thinking* about the social units under study, comparing structurally or functionally equivalent traits of actors, agents or institutions in order to identify the social spaces that make up social reality' (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992, pp. 30–31). He also stressed that a researcher needs to map out the field and seek to understand the structure of relations between the positions of the relevant actors. Position-taking is known through analysing the system of practices and expressions employed by actors in the field. This is because it is precisely one's position within the field that shapes one's view of the world – which, in turn, one

seeks to impose on others, making the entire process somewhat akin to a feedback loop (1992, pp. 105–107). The positions and positionings of various actors in the political field are possible to analyse because they are arranged and connected within a space of objective relations.

One may, for example, study networks that are formed and maintained in order to advance certain interests (or to prevent others from advancing theirs). These networks and the actors involved can be more or less easy to identify depending on their visibility and the openness of their proceedings. Bourdieu insists on sticking close to the data, both in order to find these networks and in order to understand how actors make use of capital (particularly symbolic capital through habitus) in this struggle for power, even as he works from the premise that the political field cannot be reduced to individual interactions because the central unit of analysis is that of structural configurations (1992, pp. 112–113).

One way of pinpointing the strategy of actors is to analyze the use of language in order to detect what type of symbolic capital is being expended. However, this entails placing the use of language 'within the full universe of compossible practices' which includes everything from dress to furniture (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, pp. 148–149). There is a symbolic message being sent there about where legitimacy resides and it would be mistaken to focus on mere linguistic analysis of their speeches without taking this into account. However, where recourse is taken to linguistic analysis, it behoves the researcher to analyse how certain conceptualisations – about which issues, concerns or questions qualify as problems – emerge within the space of objective relations. Problems (or one's understanding of what constitutes a problem) arise not spontaneously but, rather, through a progressive collective effort that seeks to give them a stamp of legitimacy.

The goal is to make certain problems – those relevant to the actors who recognise them as such and seek to impose that recognition on others – into *official* problems that require political action. The problem, as such, has been socially constructed (or one could say that there is some sort of framing involved). This happens through 'meetings and committees, associations and leagues, caucuses and movements, demonstrations and petition drives' … and so on (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, pp. 238–239).

This discussion about Bourdieu's methodological advice hopefully explains why, in my data coding (see below), I shall be focusing on how the SDA strategises within the political field in relation to other actors, mainly the Croat and Serb nationalist rivals but also other actors such as foreign powers. The centrality of understanding the relationship *between* these

spaces and fields in order to identify how the field itself takes shape is also highlighted by Fligstein and McAdam (2012, p. 169), along with Martin and Judd (2020). Our inquiry, then, concerns the nature of the SDA's *strategic relationship* with the political field based on the Filandran premise that the party's politics represents a particular phase of the *Preporod,* one that operates through 'objective relations […] of symbolic power [manifested through] rhetorical strategies' (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, p. 258). The idea is to study how Bosniac concerns are set against the concerns of rival actors as they move from the social space to the political field (1992, pp. 239–240).

The above discussion should also make clear why I have sought to balance out structural issues with those that focus on human agency; indeed, this is why the theory chapter includes an entire section on the problem of human agency and social structure. This methodological commitment to balancing structure and agency is further reinforced by the study's epistemological grounding in critical realism, which posits that reality consists of stratified layers, including underlying structures (e.g., social, political and historical mechanisms) that generate observable events; however, these structures are only partially accessible through human perception and agency. I now turn to a discussion about these epistemological considerations.

Epistemological Foundations of this Study

Critical realism serves as a sort of epistemological inspiration for this study, with its premise that reality is not one single thing to be studied and described but, rather, operates on different levels or in different domains; it is 'structured, differentiated, stratified and changing'. One of the follow-up conclusions based on this premise is that, whilst there is a core of 'reality' that is independent from human consciousness, there is also a dimension to this very same reality that is nevertheless socially determined by our human endeavour to study it (Danermark *et al.* 2005, pp. 5–6). This, in other words, strikes a middle ground between social constructionism and realism (or positivism), whereby a subject is studied with the understanding that theoretical assumptions and other human attempts at makings sense of the data are bound to affect a person's understanding, without going so far as to reducing ontology to this socially determined aspect of the study process. Of course, the opposite approach – whereby reality is reduced to hard data without acknowledging that the human effort of conducting science itself

forms one of these levels of reality and is therefore bound to shape our understanding of the data themselves – is criticised as too reductionist as well (Danermark *et al.* 2005, p. 8). This approach can be summarised by stating that 'reality has an *objective existence* but [that] our knowledge of it is conceptually mediated' (2005, p. 15, italics in the original).

In more methodologically concrete terms, the interaction between theory and empirical data is done through various forms of inferential processes (primarily abduction[41] and retroduction[42]) whereby there is a constant interplay between the theoretical framework and the empirical data. The basic idea is to advance from the empirical observation and arrive at a 'conceptualisation of transfactual conditions', as posited by Danermark *et al.* (2005, pp. 88–98).

> Social reality consists of structures and internally related objects containing causally operating properties. Knowledge of this social reality can only be attained if we go beyond what is empirically observable by asking questions about and developing concepts of the more fundamental, transfactual conditions for the events and phenomena under study.

With regards to this study, the point of gathering and analysing empirical data, therefore, is not to present an objective explanation of certain social phenomena with the presumption that a slice of reality has thereby been offered but is, rather, to contribute to the human, collective, cumulative process that is science, in an effort to come closer to understanding the world around us. In other words, I make no definitive pronouncements on reality itself[43] but I do make some on data and theory[44] (i.e. the tools used to approach reality), thereby contributing to human knowledge of reality. The effort is cumulative and collective by necessity, since multiple perspectives and approaches are needed, with a varied distribution of work. The job of

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[41] To interpret and recontextualize individual phenomena within a conceptual framework or a set of ideas. To be able to understand something in a new way by observing and interpreting this something in a new conceptual framework'" (Danermark, et al. 2005, p. 80). Fundamental to this is an open-mindedness with regards to the relationship between hypotheses and data. One considers various possibilities until one settles upon a hypothesis that best accounts for the data.

[42] 'From a description and analysis of concrete phenomena to reconstruct the basic conditions for these phenomena to be what they are. By way of thought operations and counterfactual thinking to argue towards transfactual conditions' (Danermark *et al.* 2005, p. 80). In other words, the key is to find underlying structures and mechanisms which explain observable phenomena.

[43] For example, as has been discussed earlier, I do not make any claims about what ethnicity *is*.

[44] Instead, I make claims about how ethnicity can be *conceptualised* sociologically and I do gather and analyse (on the basis of these conceptualisations) empirical data.

the researcher is to explain events and processes, which entails conceptualising how these events and processes occur by focusing on social structures and mechanisms (Danermark *et al.* 2005, pp. 74, 197).

More concretely, this means that I take the perspective of the Bosniacs as an empirical starting point for understanding my area of study; however, by juxtaposing that specific perspective of the research and theoretical literature with my own analysis of all of these thrown into the mix, it is my ambition to say something more about the matter than offered by the specific perspective of the Bosniacs.

Data Collection

The empirical basis for this study consists of a three-fold collection of qualitative data. **First**: a set of semi-structured qualitative interviews with party officials and former party members of the SDA; **second**: participant observation during both official party meetings and non-official social situations involving current and former party members; and **third**: the collection and analysis of written documents. I have opted for this sort of data triangulation because I wish to make 'the cognitive process in [my] project more fertile by making use of several perspectives' (Flick 2018, p. 529).

What this means in practice is that I wish to explore possible differences between what is projected to the public (through the party programme and published interviews) and what I notice and observe during private, anonymous interviews and at gatherings and party events. This also explains why I have opted to interview dissidents who have abandoned the party, as their perspectives might clash with the official narrative, thus putting the official output in a different light. However, another reason for that choice lay in the fact that these dissidents are 'graduates of the school of the SDA' (as one respondent put it), such that the rival parties are, in fact, offshoots of the SDA. Indeed, all the dissidents (except one, 'Hilmija'[45]) still admire Alija Izetbegović and believe that they are, in fact, carrying on his political mission. They are therefore still part of the third phase of the *Preporod*, even if they have moved on from the SDA.

The Interviews

My primary focus has been on current or former SDA members of the BH national and/or federal parliament, as these are official, high-level repre-

[45] See the appendix for more information about the informants.

sentatives of the party. However, I have also included mid- and lower-level functionaries, such as SDA members of municipal councils or mere candidates for such offices. The only exceptions to this are founding members of the SDA, who established local branches and helped to recruit candidates without necessarily standing for office themselves. They were there from Day 1 and possess valuable historical insights into the very beginnings of the party (with some of them having been personal friends of Alija Izetbegović).

A few of my respondents live in Republiska Srpska or outside of Bosnia and Herzegovina – in the diaspora – which somewhat broadens the perspective regarding issues related to the Bosniac population in these areas as well; nevertheless, the main focus has been the federation, since this is where the SDA is centred. This type of data selection is strategic or information-oriented, meaning that I have selected these cases because they afford me the opportunity for relevant, theoretically informed analysis (Brinkmann 2013 pp. 57–58; Hammersley & Atkinson 2007, p. 33).

The number of participants was theory-dependent, meaning that I continued to collect data until I had gathered enough cases to be able to conduct the analysis described in the section below (Saldaña 2016, p. 59). In practice this means that I continued to conduct interviews until the informants consistently returned to the same themes, to the point that a general narrative emerged – one that was consistent across the different informants and could even be anticipated in subsequent interviews. In this way, I ended up with a total of 27 interviews, 19 of them with pro-SDA respondents and the remaining 8 with dissidents. The interviews were conducted in the form of conversations, with the help of a semi-structured interview guide.

The questions were partially based on Filandra's understanding of the role of the SDA as a carrier of the Bosniac *Preporod* in the current historical phase. The objective was to assess how the SDA strategises the transfer of (what are perceived as) Bosniac national interests in the cultural, religious or some other social space, over into the political field.

The questions were also based on my understanding of field theory (as outlined in the theory section of this thesis) in the light of current research on the BH political field (as outlined in the literature review). These questions also developed over time based on what earlier respondents had brought up and stressed. For example, when Alija Izetbegović's successor (and Bakir Izetbegović's predecessor) as party president, Sulejman Tihić, was identified by some as a former Communist who had been instrumental

in turning the party into a vehicle for the personal enrichment of its functionaries, I naturally followed up on that line of inquiry with subsequent respondents.

I found and contacted the respondents through official government and party channels – mainly the relevant official websites and social media accounts. I also found respondents through certain channels in Sweden, for example through the BH embassy or through the Bosniac mosque community. Both of these efforts led to a snowball effect, leading to further respondents. With regards to finding former members, I have primarily directed my attention towards the cadres of three Bosniac parties: *Stranka za Bosnu i Herzegovinu* (The Party for Bosnia and Herzegovina-Herzegovina), *Savez za Bolju Budućnost Bosne i Hercegovine* (Union for a Better Future of Bosnia and Herzegovina-Herzegovina) and *Narod i Pravda* (People and Justice), with the heaviest emphasis on the latter party (it being the most successful SDA offshoot presently). All were founded by former members of the SDA: Haris Silajdžić, Fahrudin Radončić and Elmedin Konaković respectively. I have contacted respondents from these parties through official channels (by visiting the party headquarters as well as online) and proceeded from there through snowball sampling. In three cases, however, I managed to secure interviews by meeting the respondents in a café or in the street (more on that below).

It should be acknowledged here that the respondents vary in their knowledge about the political field and, indeed, the *doxa* and the habitus that Bourdieu speaks about in his works. A high-level politician on a national level will be privy to information and possess a certain level of habitus that might not be shared by his low-level, locally based counterparts. The fact that I have tossed out a broad net and included both categories amounts to a limitation of this study from one angle since I might have been able to gather more information about the intricacies of the game of politics had all of my informants been high-level insiders. From another angle, however, I believe that it constitutes a strength. This is because seeking to map out the political field means that you look at the peripheral actors along with the central ones; the actor who belongs to the latter category is no less of an actor than the one belonging to the former – and both categories of actors have a share in making up the field itself. Tables 1.2 and 1.3 (in the Appendix) offer overviews of the pro-SDA and the dissident respondents, respectively. They contain the pseudonyms used, with information about the respondents' age, gender, education and relationship to the SDA along with the duration of the interview.

As for the questions, they were of course designed to address topics central to political field theory, namely the nature of the field itself, along with an identification of its actors and the strategies that are employed by them. The questions were quite straightforward in that regard. For example, when I wanted to perceive how the respondent understands the Bosniac as a political actor, I would ask generally about Bosniac identity, the collective goals and aspirations of the Bosniac people and the historical and current attempts at achieving these goals, etc. For tables with an overview of the respondents and the themes discussed during the interviews, please refer to the Appendix, where the connection between the themes and the interview guide used in the field is laid out.

Participant Observation

The main reason for choosing this method is that it affords me, as a researcher, the opportunity to gather information and impressions, beyond the official party narrative, which would otherwise be difficult to obtain. This was mainly done through developing a less-formal relationship with the respondents, which provided me with the opportunity to observe how they interact in settings where my own presence becomes less intrusive. This does not, of course, mean that my role as a researcher is substituted for that of a new acquaintance but it does give me an opportunity to enter, precisely *as* a researcher, into the world of my respondents in order to get a firsthand account of their activities (Wästerfors 2018, p. 315). It also gives me an opportunity to note down not only the specific words during social interactions and events but also the atmosphere in such settings, which is helpful when seeking to find contrasts between the various social dimensions within the SDA (the stage persona *contra* the interpersonal interaction with fellow politicians and voters; the official narrative *contra* disclosures during a private interview and so on).

For example, during a post-interview stroll along Marshall Tito Street in central Sarajevo, the SDA politician who had been my respondent stopped several times in order to chat with, and introduce me to, colleagues from rival parties with whom he was on very friendly terms – and whom he encouraged me to interview. These colleagues included former SDA members who spoke very negatively of the manœuverings and intrigues within the SDA, in his good-natured presence. Another example is where I followed one of my SDA politician respondents to a cultural event (heavily attended by other SDA politicians) and, having just previously discussed the

issue of corruption in BH politics during our interview, became the recipient of some insider information regarding the wheeling and dealing in local politics. Apart from that, party events such as campaign meetings afforded me an opportunity to observe the symbols employed and how these participants interacted with the props and paraphernalia during these meetings, in affirmative as well as dismissive terms. In short, participant observation has given me an opportunity to grasp the 'symbolic dimensions' related to the SDA as well as to explore some of what goes on under the surface (Balsiger & Lambelet 2014, pp. 147–150).

It is sometimes difficult to demarcate where participant observation begins and where it ends which, in turn, makes it difficult to pinpoint the amount of time spent on this activity. For example, when I leave the actual physical presence of the politician whom I have been following (or 'shadowing') during a participant observation session but whose name and political dealings are later discussed by other relevant actors (fellow colleagues, potential voters) at another location, it may be understood either as a new session or as an extension of the first. Nevertheless, the Appendix offers a table in which I broadly[46] seek to outline the venues in which the participant observation took place. In short, there was a total of 18 venues, ranging from the parliament building to the city boulevard. The shortest duration was 30 minutes and the longest 3 hours and 30 minutes – but they generally lasted for an hour. I was granted access to these sessions through some sort of invitation on the part of the informant, always in an informal and sometimes even in an implicit manner, where an interview was preceded by or spilled over into participant observation without any sort of prelude or epilogue to the interview itself. This tended to ensure that the informant was more relaxed and ready to share information – as if with an acquaintance (indeed, there was a lot of gossip shared) – but it also meant that I probably missed out on other perspectives from activists who might be more suspicious of an outsider. Table 1.4 (see the Appendix) offers an

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[46] I say 'broadly' because what is classed as an interview and what as participant observation may, again, sometimes be subject to interpretation. This is particularly the case with some of the café settings, which were not initially meant to be venues of participant observation but which, in retrospect, ended up becoming just that. For example, during one interview with a pro-SDA respondent in a café (Café Setting I in the table), a dissident and fierce critic of the SDA showed up at the same café (situated right next to a popular mosque; this was shortly before the Friday prayer). Their encounter was not only very friendly (similar to how things unfolded during the stroll through Sarajevo) but it was also through the prompting of the pro-SDA respondent that the dissident agreed to an interview with me, after the Friday prayer on the very same day.

overview of the details of these sessions – more specifically the venues, the number of participants and the duration of the sessions.

All of the respondents who were interviewed in addition to being observed belong to the list of pro-SDA respondents, with the exception of four. They are included in the City Centre Event, the Café Setting I Event and the Government Building I and II, respectively (see Table 1.4 in the Appendix). There is also one idiosyncrasy that needs to be mentioned here but without any details, so as not to compromise the confidentiality of the person in question. One of the people interviewed as a pro-SDA respondent has since left the party, so the data presented here represent a timebound snapshot.

Document Collection

The same logic that guided my approach to the interview data is at work here as well (meaning that I wish to understand how the SDA conceptualises the BH political field and the main actors within it) with an emphasis on the official narrative in this regard, as contrasted to the more unofficial aspects that may be revealed through the interviews and the observations. This is also where Bourdieu's and Wacquant's (1992, p. 258) focus on symbolic power being wielded through rhetorical strategies becomes particularly significant, since these types of official document tell a story not only through content but also through form. Denzin (2009, p. 265) points out that 'the reality of any archival producing agency is a reality representing that agency's interpretations of what has occurred, what is to be reported, and what is to be saved for future generations'. This consideration explains why I have chosen public records and published speeches and interviews – i.e. documents that have a 'stamp of approval' – through the official party website, which offers us an opportunity to understand how and through what type of stylistic choices, the party wishes to portray the BH political field with its various actors.

Documents can also offer a fuller picture of the official narrative where individual accounts might be more fragmentary (Merriam 2009, p. 155) and this eliminates the risk of observer presence affecting the data (Denzin 2009, pp. 260–261). There is also the time aspect: different documents may project concerns that were emphasised at particular moments in time. That being said, the way in which the documents have been created and presented has obviously been determined by a certain conceptualisation about the audience, which is why I have tried to look at various genres that target

somewhat different recipients. These genres are: *official party documents* (the party programme, the statutes of the party, the resolutions and the official historical account of the party's origins); *social media content* (posts from three Facebook pages: the party think-tank, the youth association and the women's association); and *campaign material* (interviews and speeches posted on the website of the party and that of the party leader, along with a campaign ad). Taken together, these should offer a representative picture of what the party wishes to project to various segments of the public.

I have decided upon these genres by using a funnelling sampling sequence strategy, starting from the official party website itself (and that of the party leader) and gradually tightening the focus by finding my way to those sections that carry the most weight – meaning that these sections of the party website contain content that is comparatively more dense in information and is updated the most frequently – and those that put more emphasis on active engagement with the public (through commentary on current affairs and links to social media sites) as it projects an official image of the party. The official party documents' genre offers a more representative, matter-of-fact account of the party's aims, objectives and its self-image with regards to its place in the BH political field and I have selected those that are the most official in this regard as this affords me the opportunity to compare and contrast the texts in this genre with the lighter and more interactive content in the other genres (which is potentially more impactful in an age of social media) along with the confidential information found in my interviews (Bryman 2008, p. 495). In short, I seek to evaluate both the party's self-image and how it is projected to the wider public interactively.

I have, in concrete terms, collected the party programme, the statutes of the party, the resolutions and the official historical account of the party's origins and development up until the present time, all of which have been retrieved from the official party website (as of February 2023). There are some themes and patterns that are common to all of these documents – and some that are particular to the historical account of the party (the *historijat*[47]), mainly due to its narrative style, in contrast to the more prosaic and bureaucratic language found in the other documents. The statutes (a 52-page document issued in connection with the party's seventh congress in September 2019) lists 173 points (broken down into sub-points) that are mainly related to the organisation of the party; however, several points deal

[47] A full translation of this document is provided in Appendix A.

with matters of political strategy and the party's overall political vision for Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The party programme (*Programska deklaracija*), also issued in connection with the congress in 2019, is a 14-page document that focuses more on these strategies and goals touched upon in the statutes. It presents the identity of the party, along with the impact it seeks to make in the BH political field by listing 29 focal points. This text is less bureaucratic and more inviting than the statutes, as it combines a listing of issues with added discussions about why these points matter and how the party will seek to impose its political vision. The resolutions (issued under the same circumstances as the documents above) are nine in number, with each resolution ranging between three and seven pages. These resolutions highlight what are presumably some of the more-prioritised focal points that are discussed in the other documents, with more details regarding why and how they are to be dealt with by the party – if and when in power. The resolutions read like an addendum to the party programme, being similar in tone and serving as an extended discussion on what was already mentioned there.

The *historijat* consists of around 1,800 words and also features one picture. Whilst the other documents are downloaded from the website as pdfs, this text is presented directly on the webpage. It offers a general overview of how and why the party was formed and how it has developed up until today – and also includes a short summary of the party's goals. A list of the general aims of the party is included as well. In other words, by reading these texts, one comes away with a fairly comprehensive understanding of how the party wishes to portray itself to the outside world.

For the other two genres, the campaign material and the social media content, I have opted for a combination of operational construct selection and typical case selection (Patton 1990, pp. 173, 177). This means that I have selected such texts amongst the various interviews, speeches and Facebook posts that relate to, discuss, comment upon, describe, analyse (and so on) the defining features of the BH political scene as it has been outlined through the scholarly literature. I have, in more concrete terms, sought out texts that deal with the six themes found in the literature review. These are:

- The Dayton Accords and Western stakeholders in Bosnia and Herzegovina
- Bosniac political strategies
- BH Serb political strategies
- BH Croat political strategies

- Non-Western stakeholders in Bosnia and Herzegovina
- Post-Communist elites and corruption.

I initially decided to pick out three texts on each theme for both genres (which would have given me a total of 36 texts) but I quickly found out that these six themes tend to emerge throughout the various texts without a neat demarcation. In other words, the texts rarely zoom in on one theme to the exclusion of others; they are polyphonic to the point that one text may even encompass all of the themes. I therefore settled upon re-using the texts where several themes converge, making sure that each of the six themes is discussed in at least three texts. By 'discussed' I mean that that particular theme cannot be mentioned in mere passing – there has to be some type of analysis. A text, for example, that mentions Turkey as a friendly country to Bosnia and Herzegovina would not qualify as discussing the theme of non-Western stakeholders in BH politics, whereas a text – where at least some of the mechanisms of that friendliness (say through investments in BH infrastructure) are outlined or analysed – would do so.

With this I ended up with 11 interviews with various high-level SDA officials along with three speeches by Bakir Izetbegović.[48] This gave me a total of 14 texts for the campaign material genre, with each of the themes sprinkled throughout. For the social media genre, the same approach gave me a total of 29 posts[49] which were published between 19 October 2020 and 30 September 2022. Here the texts are shorter and less analytical,[50] with more symbolic content through, for example, picture-heavy shares in these posts, such that the more-text-dominated shares are found in links to outside websites that feature interviews or opinion pieces (which I have also used). In addition to all of this, for reasons already explained above in my discussion on social media content, I have also included the 1-minute promotional video before the 2022 elections, aired on BH television and found on the party's official Youtube account. For an overview of the documents, please refer to the appendix.

These documents include a set of recurring themes, consisting of certain concepts, symbols, tropes, ideas, slogans and talking points that convey a

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[48] I tried to get a fairly current selection but had to go back to 2016 in order to cover all the themes properly. The time period covered, then, is between 2016 and the last day of September 2022, just before the national election.

[49] Eleven posts from the party youth association page, nine from the party's women's section page and 11 from the party's political academy page.

[50] Thus I have not been as strict in only using texts with some analytical context as with the interviews and speeches.

particular conceptualisation of the BH political field itself, along with the SDA's role within it and the role of other actors (whether antagonistic to the SDA or not) within the field. It should be said that, by selecting the texts based on pre-selected themes, one runs the risk of missing out on possibly relevant information. Whilst this is unavoidable to a certain degree (one cannot cover everything and must sort out the information according to some type of system), it is also the case that texts tend to be polyphonic and can rarely be squeezed perfectly into specific scholarly categories. My job has therefore been to use these themes as starting points whilst continuing to be on the lookout for information that goes beyond my pre-determined categories. One way to mitigate this problem is to engage in a form of triangulation whereby the pre-selected themes are juxtaposed against theory in order to discover new possible angles to the initial thematic approach. However, this also entails being constantly open to the possibility of the data 'talking back' to the themes and the theory.

Again, please refer to the Appendix, which includes an overview of and details about the documents.

Data Analysis

The interviews are *meaning-focused*, exploring how the informants understand and define (i.e. the meaning that they imbue into) key terms related to the Bosniac nation, the BH state and the political strategy *vis-à-vis* rival actors – including the meaning which they attribute to both their strategies and actions and how these are contextualised within a broader network of inter-related terms and concepts. I search for *value-statements*, *descriptive statements* and *prescriptive statements*, as a basis for a *descriptive-interpretive idea analysis* (Lindberg 2017). This is done through *meaning concentration* whereby the main *units of meaning* are identified in the interview transcripts in order to find the dominant traits and themes in these units. These are then interwoven into a final, descriptive account of the results. I have opted for this type of interview and analysis because they are conducive to theoretical analysis (Brinkmann & Kvale 2009, pp. 221–222, 231–232), with a view to understanding something hitherto unexplored (Brinkmann 2013, p. 68).

For example, an informant might say that the Dayton Accords, a flawed peace agreement (value statement), ended a military conflict which now continues in political terms (descriptive statement). This demands that the Bosniac intelligentsia organise itself within and around the SDA (or a rival

party) in order to deliver political wins that serve to strengthen the BH state (prescriptive statement). Now, having collected these data and organised them into these categories, I am better equipped to see how political field theory serves to cast light upon the data. In addition I can see how the other theoretical perspectives that I have used either reinforce or challenge the main theory. This is what the critical theorists refer to as abduction and retroduction.

I have coded my interviews in two cycles (with the help of the NVivo qualitative analysis software). The first cycle consisted of using analytical memos with a particular focus on *value coding* in which the 'integrated value, attitudes and belief systems' of a participant are assessed (Saldaña 2016, p. 124), *concept coding* in which meso or macro levels of meaning are assigned to the data in order to contextualise them within a broader scheme (2016, p. 292) and *versus coding*, whereby the conflicts between actors in the political field may be identified (2016, p. 298). The coding process also includes categorising, as the different values, codes and forms of statements etc. are all organised into thematic categories.

The second cycle involved re-examining or going through the material and using pattern coding in order to identify the themes ('themeing the data') which could serve as the basis for a type of elaborative coding. This process was informed by a pre-existing theoretical framework (Saldaña 2016, p. 256) grounded in the terms and concepts presented in the theory sections. In other words, I have analysed the interviews by way of identifying when and where the discussion is about social space, the BH political field and/or the relationship between them, invoking concepts such as 'civic nationalism', 'conflict transposition', 'field splitting', 'symbolic violence' and so on when relevant. This means that there has been a constant real-time interaction between theory and data based on the understanding that they inform each other: theory contextualises the data but, as I mentioned earlier, the data may very well 'talk back' to the theory.

I have therefore been guided by a sense of seeking to find what cannot be said to fit into the theoretical framework, in order to strengthen the reliability[51] of the study. The most obvious example of this is how I have, very early on, had to question Bourdieu's conceptualisation of the state and

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[51] Although the term 'reliability' is more commonly associated with quantitative research, I use it to denote the consistency and trustworthiness of this study. In this qualitative context, it refers to the ability of my methods to consistently generate coherent findings by integrating empirical data with theoretical insights in analysing Bosnia and Herzegovina's political field. See the research design section below for more context.

its capacity for symbolic violence. I did not set out with such a skeptical approach but it was through interacting with the data (and, later on, discovering the work of Burawoy and von Holdt) that I felt that there were discrepancies which needed to be addressed. Other such discrepancies are discussed in the relevant sections below.

As for the participant observation, since it represents such a hands-on and intensive form of conducting research, the analysis could not be fully postponed to when the data collection was over; methodological reflections and decisions had to be made as certain analytical reflections emerged in the field. What I decided to note down, even mentally, was based on my on-the-ground analysis of what went on in real-time; I constantly had to make micro decisions about what is or is not relevant to my research questions. This means that the data analysis is, in some way, embedded into the collection process itself.[52] The post-collection process consists of sorting the field notes and coding them based on the themes and concepts discussed above, to see if and where there are any connections – and this is where data triangulation is central both in that I compare the field observations to the other data collected and in that my respondents have sometimes been those observed. In other words, the coding and theming process has been separated such that I analysis the interviews separately from the participant observation but the resulting codes and themes have, in the next step, been collected together for the purposes of an integrated analysis. This also goes for the documents: the coding is separate but the subsequent analysis takes all the categories of data into account.

There is a type of inductive analysis at play here as I try to see where the general observations and the specific details fit into the categories provided by a theoretical conceptualisation of the matter at hand. However, precisely because my fieldwork has been largely theory-driven, the observations themselves have been guided early on by my prior understanding of field theory in general and specifically the BH field (based on my literature review) so that the post-collection analysis has also consisted in seeing where that prior understanding might need to be questioned and/or readjusted based on the data. Another important aspect of the analysis in this regard is to not over-analyse to the point where I make the data fit into my prior understanding and to see if and when I might have been guilty of this

[52] This, of course, applied to the interviews as well, to a certain extent. Follow-up questions, for example, are decided upon according to a similar logic and process.

in my in-the-field note-taking (Balsiger & Lambert 2014, pp. 163–166; Marvasti 2014, pp. 360–361).

Of course, I also need to assess where my presence might have affected the action on the ground. For example, it struck me during the field work itself that the SDA politician with whom I strolled through the city might have been particularly relaxed and affable with his rival colleagues in order to make a point in my presence. The rapport that I manage to develop with those whom I observe and interview might influence the action on the ground and this needs to be kept in mind during the analysis (Marvasti 2014, pp. 355–357). This point is salient considering that several of the respondents identified me, as a researcher, as a type of Bosniac ambassador to Western academia (this is discussed more below). I cannot rule out that some ideas that are more palatable to a Western audience were highlighted for this reason. On the other hand, these are the very same respondents who were also openly critical of the West for its perceived hypocrisy with regard to Bosnia and Herzegovina, so I doubt that it ever reached the level of dissimulation but is probably, instead, a manifestation of certain dissonant ideas regarding the West that are tied to the BH political field and the Bosniac identity, as highlighted in the literature review.

There is a reflection related to my own presence as a researcher that cannot be passed over. A brief glance at the table of respondents reveals that there is only one woman included. This is not for a lack of trying to find female respondents or for a lack of female politicians. I suspect that my own presence as a male researcher made the women reluctant to accept the invitations for one-on-one interviews from a male stranger, particularly when I reached out through Facebook. On the other hand, I did get an opportunity to interact with several female politicians during the participant observation sessions, especially during the Informal Socialisation Event (see Appendix). I have also included media interviews with and Facebook shares from women active in the party, which hopefully balances things out somewhat. Nevertheless, the female perspective is one omission that future field studies would need to investigate further. Speaking of outliers, there is also the case of the respondent Nikola, a non-Bosniac SDA dissident. I stumbled upon him through the snowball method. Since he is an isolated case I cannot draw wide-ranging conclusions from his answers but they were highly valuable with regards to the theme of both BH and Bosniac identity as perceived by a non-Bosniac who nevertheless joined a Bosniac party (apart from his analysis of the BH political field in general).

The analysis of documents follows the template used for the analysis of the interviews; the process is the standard one in terms of qualitative content analysis, with a focus not on the frequency of certain themes but on the meaning of what is being communicated (with regards to how the BH political field is conceptualised, in this case). Open-coding, in which one records noticeable patterns in the data, is followed by 'axial-coding' in which various passages are categoried based on the themes highlighted in the first step, before being finished off with selective coding in which one looks for anomalies in the data. Each major point of interpretation, as presented in the results section, is corroborated with several illustrative quotations and/or paraphrases (Merriam 2009, pp. 151–153; Wesley 2014, pp. 148–152). This type of analysis corresponds to what Wesley refers to as narrative analysis, as it 'investigate[s] the content, origins, evolution, and impact of the message [contained in the document] as a "story" about political life' (2014, p. 138). The story here, of course, is that of the BH political field with its various actors and, importantly, the very quiddity of the field itself.

> These narratives frequently tie the past to the present and future, speak of political transformations, and identify specific heroes, villains, and plotlines. These 'storied' messages can be studied from a variety of perspectives. Some analysts focus on the historical or political contexts in which the stories are told, for instance, while others examine the role of the stories in the lives of individual actors or their impact on the community as a whole. In this sense, narrative analysts are not primarily concerned with the factual accuracy of the stories they uncover; rather, their concern is with the ways in which these stories serve as interpretive lenses through which the authors represent themselves and others (Wesley 2014, pp. 138–139).

Whilst the information from the informants was scattered in nature, I nevertheless noticed that what emerged from the interviews was a general narrative on Bosnia and Herzegovina and Bosniacs which was quite uniform across the data, the main difference being whether the SDA plays the role of main protagonist or not. Such a narrative, given that it is filled with neatly arranged value/descriptive/prescriptive statements contextualised through an overall story, assists me in assessing how the Bosniacs/Bosnia and Herzegovina fit within the scheme of political field theory. Indeed, it offers me the rudiments of a story about the field such that my job then becomes to connect the theoretical dots.

The validity of such an approach is dependent on a rigorous process of coding, one that establishes and demonstrates a correspondence between highlighted key words and expressions, the 'tone' of a text, and the narrative (the theme) that has been identified. What this means, in simple terms, is that, if I make the claim, for example, that the party programme stresses the importance of defending the integrity of the BH political field, I have to be specific about why I have coded the text in the way that I have. This is the most obviously done through highlighting and commenting on specific quotations. Inter-code testing, by way of seminars and discussions within the scholarly community whereby my conclusions are scrutinised, is crucial for the reliability of this process (Wesley 2014, pp. 142–143). Corroborating one's findings through triangulation is another way of strengthening the reliability of the study, as it gives external support to one's interpretation of the data (2014, pp. 146–147). I have sought to achieve this by supplementing the document analysis with the interviews and the participant observation. In particular, I consider the discussions on the SDA's party programme with the party's dissidents significant in this regard, as it has afforded me the opportunity to penetrate beyond official rhetoric (2014, pp. 147–148).

Ethical Considerations

There are two main aspects to research ethics with regards to its relevance and importance. A high ethical standard protects the people involved but also ensures research integrity and satisfies demands for professionalism. Improper ways of acquiring data have a detrimental effect on the overall quality of the study (Israel & Hay 2006, pp. 2–7). There are also two aspects to my own positionality as a researcher: *vis-à-vis* the informant (mainly during the interview session) and *vis-à-vis* the information (during the post-interview analysis). These issues will be discussed here.

As a researcher, I am generally in a privileged position when it comes to conveying the narrative that the respondents divulge; in effect, I contribute to the construction of their oral accounts (Hammersley & Atkinson 2007, pp. 235–236). This means that certain of the informants will be 'rewarded' when I choose to highlight their stance on an issue, perhaps at the cost of another perspective which I have deemed less relevant for my study. I have sought informed consent, which has entailed divulging what participation in my study entails (including that the analysis and interpretation of data is mine), with guarantees that one has the right to opt-out of the study at any

time (Israel & Hay 2006, pp. 64–66). These guarantees were written in a document which was signed by all participants.

I mainly consulted Israel and Hay (2006) in preparing the said document; the following are the main considerations that were taken into account. I made sure to obtain informed consent from my informants (Israel & Hay 2006, p. 60); I promised them external confidentiality,[53] whilst not doing the same with anonymity since I knew their identities through the one-on-one interviews (2006, p. 156). I also produced a protocol (shared up-front) which outlines how to proceed in case any of my informants felt stressed to the point of ending the interview. In all of this I considered the non-maleficence principle (2006, p. 96) which could be compromised if I failed to protect the identities of my informants. This included unlinking names and identifying details, safeguarding the data and complying with the requirements of the local ethics committee[54] (2006, p. 91). This also included explicitly warning the informants to avoid divulging sensitive information (2006, p. 83).

I also promised them that the data collected from them would be stored in a safe server on the Södertörn University campus and would be accessible only to myself and my supervisor. The sensitive nature of this aspect was particularly pronounced when I sought informants in the Republika Srpska entity, where Bosniacs had been killed or expelled during the war. I had some difficulty finding people who were willing to be interviewed on such a sensitive matter as Bosniac identity and my guarantees of confidentiality were sometimes feeble when set against fears of government surveillance. In the Federation entity, however, some of the informants initially seemed apprehensive about my general motives but these appeared to be allayed when the document of consent confirmed my credentials as a student at a Swedish university.[55]

Having just stated that the researcher is in a privileged position, the relationship between myself and the informants was much more nuanced than to be reduced to such a hierarchical formula. This is complicated by the fact that the informants occupied all sorts of social positions on more or less both ends of the spectrum. Sometimes I felt to be in an inferior social position while, at other times, it was the opposite.

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[53] The informants have been assigned random pseudonyms (see the Appendix), except that the one non-Bosniac informant has been assigned a non-Bosniac-sounding name.

[54] As such, this study was subjected to an ethics review by the Swedish Ethical Review Authority, which approved my research before I conducted the field work.

[55] Due to the reputation of the country and its educational system.

> Traditionally, oral historians have emphasised caution, distance, and objecttivity in interviews with members of elites and egalitarianism, reciprocity, and authenticity in interviews with people outside elites. However, this epistemological dichotomy reflects implicit romantic assumptions about the subjects of history from the bottom up (Blee 1993, p. 597).

Even if I were to adhere to this 'traditional' approach, it would scarcely be applicable here since it would be impossible to lump the informants together. So, my approach to questions of distance and objectivity is perhaps more relevant in the context of a discussion about my role as a *Bosniac* researcher, which brings us to the issue of a possible conflict of interests (Israel & Hay 2006, p. 120). I belong to the same ethno-religious group as my informants (except for one) and, in their capacity as members of Bosniac parties, they claim to represent me as well. This could potentially make me vulnerable to becoming emotionally invested and sympathetic to one or the other perspective conveyed to me during the course of my field work; however, there is also a wider issue here pertaining to my role as someone who is a researcher as opposed to an activist.

My task is not to assess which political vision is the best or to promote a certain cause but to answer the specific research questions posed at the beginning of this thesis. In order to avoid reducing this study to activism, I need to be transparent about my own position as both a researcher and a Bosniac, thereby hopefully maintaining my research integrity (Israel & Hay 2006, p. 114). The British Sociological Association Statement of Ethical Practice has been useful in providing guidance for how to approach these issues. For example, it states that '[r]esearch should be undertaken with a view to providing information or explanation rather than being constrained to reach particular conclusions or prescribe particular courses of action' (British Sociological Association 2017, p. 9). In addition to this, I have also avoided over-compensating by affected attempts at distancing myself from the informants.

There were several occasions on which the informants explicitly asked me to go back to the West and tell them 'the truth' about the Bosniacs (or something along those lines), as if I were part of a Bosniac diaspora diplomacy effort. My response to such situations was simply to let such remarks pass without comment, particularly since they were meant as rhetorical flourishes rather than direct requests. These situations were not limited to my role as a BH-Swedish researcher but also came up when discussing intra-Bosniac rivalry, where I tried to maintain a neutral position in order

to access all types of perspective. Of course, no matter how much I prepared, it would be impossible to anticipate every possible scenario in which my role as an 'insider' Bosniac researcher could create ethical dilemmas for me but I was guided by this pragmatic approach, which would give me access to all types of perspective (Toy-Cronin 2018, p. 467). Thankfully, I did not find that I was put into difficult positions. Again, where informants addressed me directly, they were not expecting responses *per se*. One of the informants, for example, suggested that perhaps someone such as myself, given my education, should be presented as a candidate for office (as opposed to someone who benefits from nepotism or other forms of corruption) but this was obviously for rhetorical effect and I politely nodded as the informant moved on to the next point.

I specifically consulted Clark (2012) for my interviews, since her field work was conducted in Bosnia and Herzegovina – dealing with a political issue (inter-ethnic relations) – and her insights therefore seemed the most relevant for my project. In her article she explores four issues deemed the most salient and in need of consideration before, during and after the field work. All four issues are interrelated when applied to my study. Two of her points touch upon representation and reward, which I have discussed just now. Of the other two, the first one concerns objectivity. The researcher might be pressured to side with a particular group or perspective and to disregard information from certain less-persuasive respondents. In my case, this again meant that I needed to endeavour to maintain an impartial stance and avoid being swayed by one or the other respondent and their particular stance on certain issues to the point where it affected my presentation of the results and the subsequent analysis.

Clark's second point concerns the relationship between the interviewer and the interviewee; she mainly discusses empathy with victims of atrocities during the war but, in my case, it is more relevant to speak of the charisma of politicians and, again, to not let the verbal skills of certain respondents skew my research. There were certainly a couple of informants who conducting an interview with gave me something of a thrill due to their social position. The basic questions asked were, however, the same for all informants and I made a conscious effort to maintain the same neutral stance without exception. The same was the case when coding and analysing the data: I made an effort to avoid giving preference to a certain perspective.

Bosnia and Herzegovina is a small country, with the number of people active within or around the SDA limited. Being too specific about the biographical data of my respondents could therefore easily compromise

their confidentiality. Merely stating the age and type of education of a mid-level official in a town is enough to identify the local politician in question, which explains the vagueness of some of the variable categorisations in the tables found in the Appendix. In fact, even a city such as Sarajevo is quite provincial in this regard. Again, merely pointing out that a respondent, say, used to work as a medical doctor is sometimes enough to divulge their identity if I couple that information with their age.

The following information should therefore be kept in mind when studying the Appendix. Included in the 'natural sciences' under education (all of them are university-level unless otherwise stated) are the applied ones, such as engineering and medicine. By 'city', I am referring to one of the following: Sarajevo, Zenica, Mostar or Tuzla. 'Towns' are all other residential places that are big enough to constitute municipalities of their own and 'villages' are smaller settlements outside cities or towns. Those that I have categorised as 'senior' respondents are those aged 46 years or above, with those up to 45 years old being categorised as 'junior'. By 'new party affiliation' I refer to one of these three: *Stranka za Bosnu i Herzegovinu* (The Party for Bosnia and Herzegovina-Herzegovina), *Savez za Bolju Budućnost Bosne i Hercegovine* (Union for a Better Future of Bosnia and Herzegovina-Herzegovina) and *Narod i Pravda* (People and Justice) – or one of the now-defunct parties. A 'high-level politician' is one who has been a member of the national or federal parliament and/or member of the party board (*glavni odbor*) or presidium (*predsjedništvo*). Anyone in a city council is a mid-level politician, with those who ran for such an office but failed to be elected or local politicians in a town municipality being categorised as low-level officials.

Research Design

Various measures have been taken to ensure methodological rigor. To summarise, I employed several strategies to enhance dependability (consistency of the research process), credibility (accuracy in capturing participants' perspectives), confirmability (objectivity reflecting data, not researcher bias) and transferability (potential applicability to other contexts through detailed descriptions). This was done by following established qualitative research principles (Lincoln & Guba 1985). Dependability was achieved through standardised data collection and systematic analysis. A structured interview guide (Appendix, Table 1.1) with thematic questions ensured consistency across 18 interviews with pro-SDA and dissident activists (Appendix, Tables 1.2–1.3). Participant observation sessions (Appen-

dix, Table 1.4) followed a protocol to maintain uniformity, while document analysis (Appendix, Table 1.5) adhered to a predefined selection criterion. Thematic coding (Saldaña 2016) was conducted iteratively, with an audit trail of coding decisions documented to ensure analytical consistency. Credibility was strengthened by triangulating data from interviews, observations and documents (Flick 2018), allowing cross-verification of SDA activists' perspectives on the BH political field. Prolonged engagement during fieldwork in Sarajevo, supported by local networks, facilitated my rapport with respondents, enhancing the depth and authenticity of their accounts. Including both pro-SDA and dissident voices ensured a balanced representation of perspectives. To address confirmability, I engaged in reflexive practice – acknowledging my background and potential biases – and I sought feedback from supervisors and external reviewers to validate interpretations. Ethical practices further supported data integrity.

Let me now discuss the generalisability and transferability of this study. By examining the complex society of Bosnia and Herzegovina and subjecting the data to theoretically informed interpretation (Bukve 2019, pp. 81–82), this study contributes to the extension of Bourdieu's political field theory beyond the societies where it has typically been applied. My aim is to enhance the theory's applicability, making the findings transferable to other contexts through the intermediation of theory (Marshall & Rossman 2016, p. 262; Yin 2003, pp. 38–40). Specifically, the thick descriptions of the BH political field provided in this study, grounded in critical realism and Bourdieu's framework, enable readers to assess the transferability of findings to other post-Ottoman states – such as Serbia, Kosovo, North Macedonia, Cyprus, Syria, Lebanon, Iraq and Turkey itself – where fragmented political fields, historical legacies of Ottoman governance and ethnic contestation similarly shape political dynamics. By collecting and analysing data on the BH political field, the study facilitates broader statements about field theory, particularly its relevance to nation-states and fragmented societies.

This application of political field theory to BH offers mutual benefits: it provides a sociological account of political contestation in the country and extends Bourdieu's theory by applying it to a complex, fragmented and idiosyncratic field. This extension is achieved through a theoretically informed interpretation of new empirical material (Bukve 2019, pp. 81–82), with findings generalisable to the theory itself (Yin 2003, pp. 38–40). To address gaps in Bourdieu's framework, I supplemented it with additional analytical

tools from theories of nationalism, ethnicity and the state, as discussed in a previous chapter, ensuring a robust analysis of the BH context.

The case study design further supports transferability. Single case studies can be holistic (treating the unit as a single set) or embedded (analysing sub-units to draw conclusions about the larger unit). My study combines both approaches. It is holistic in examining the Bosniac actor as a single unit but embedded in its analysis of sub-units (SDA politicians and dissidents) and its broader focus on the BH political field. This embedded design aligns with the relational nature of Bourdieu's theory, which requires connecting different units of study (Yin 2003, pp. 42–45). As an explanatory case study, it moves beyond inductive data collection to place findings in a wider theoretical context (Bukve 2019, p. 75; Yin 2003, p. 4). The detailed contextualisation of the BH political field, coupled with the theoretical lens, enhances the transferability of insights to other post-Ottoman states grappling with similar socio-political complexities.

Data Presentation

Finally, since the data collection process was never a case of collecting raw data followed by analytical interpretation but, rather, one of seeking to better understand and further develop field theory through the very process of confronting it with the data (thereby structuring and making sense of my findings as well), presenting the 'results' under one section, followed by another section entitled 'analysis of the results', would not make much sense.[56] Instead, I have decided to relate the data by way of a set of thematic sections that immediately place them in their theoretical context. This warrants a brief overview of these themes.

Generally, I have found that what emerges out of the data revolves around three aspects of the BH political field, a sort of triptych consisting of the very **nature of the field** itself, the various **actors and their respective roles** within the field and the **field strategies** specifically connected to the Bosniac actor (including the in-group rivalries and intrigues). This follows from the fact that these three topics are central to field theory itself and thus my interview questions were subsequently designed to address them. They therefore make up the thematic sections presented in individual chapters.

It is important to note that these three themes overlap to a degree that is quite intense, as in the concept of the three 'constituent peoples' that has been determined by the country's constitution and is therefore related not

[56] However, some of my own final conclusions have been saved for a separate section.

only to the nature of the field (the way the political spoils are divided within the field and what these spoils consists of in terms of different forms of power) but also to the field actors, as it clearly pinpoints which three actors are the main ones (i.e. between whom these spoils are divided, setting thereby the stage for rivalries between these various actors, including in-group rivalries). The constitution itself emerged through American arbitration (the Dayton Accords); a foreign institution – known as the Office of the High Representative – is tasked with overseeing the implementation of the Dayton Accords, which reveals that, apart from the three constituent peoples, there are also other outside actors who are very active in the BH political field.

With that, let us now turn to the data.

CHAPTER 7

The Nature of the Bosnian-Herzegovinian Political Field

In this chapter, various aspects of the nature and 'quiddity' of the BH political field are discussed. The focus here is on *aspects*, as opposed to total and exhaustive coverage. This is necessarily the case not only because I have limited myself to understanding the field from the viewpoint of one particular actor but also because the informants themselves never sought to offer a comprehensive picture but, rather, highlighted certain salient features – a pattern also reflected in the documents analysed.

Within the framework of this overall theme, several sub-themes emerge out of the data. These have mostly to do with those historical aspects of the field which have shaped it over time, along with normative assessments of its contemporary make-up. Again, there will be much overlap between this chapter and the two that follow because it is difficult to disentangle the various features of the field. Touching upon field actors and strategies is unavoidable in this chapter but I do so in the context of trying to understand the nature of the field itself. One could also consider this chapter as a prolegomena to the following ones, whereby I provide some contextual background about the field and introduce the actors, followed by an expanded discussion about them and their strategies in subsequent sections.

I shall be offering some introductory remarks about the informants as they appear throughout the text but please refer to the Appendix for a general overview of their backgrounds.

Historical Continuity of the Field

It should already be quite clear to the reader, by way of the historical overview at the beginning of this work, along with the literature review, that history is ever-present in Bosnia and Herzegovina, which continues to be shaped by both its turbulent recent past as well as events that emerge only quite dimly through the mists of time. Indeed, it is quite frequently the case that the time–space continuum seemingly suspends itself, as both old and new history intertwine and merge into the present. In other words, a

Gramscian war of discourses is waged, about the country's historical narrative and about who the actors were and are. Such historical narratives play a crucial role in the construction of national identity within 'states-in-the-making'.

I would like to illustrate what this means by jumping straight to my discussion with a mid-level SDA politician, Amer, who dedicated almost half of our one-hour interview to the pre-modern history of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the ethnogenesis of the Bosniacs, all as a way of making a statement about the enduring nature of Bosnia and Herzegovina as both a country and as an idea. It felt as though we were meeting precisely in order to discuss history. The particular details that he dwelled upon might have been unique to him but the overall thesis that he wished to present was more or less identical to what most of the other informants were quite emphatic in conveying as well. Amer was convinced that Bosniacs are, as it were, the descendants of the Germanic Ostrogoths who used to rule today's Bosnia and Herzegovina (and beyond) at the time of the barbarian invasions. The significance here lay in the Arian element. For Amer, even though, as a natural scientist, he claims that DNA studies can substantiate his thesis, this is certainly not a question of race, particularly since intermarriage with the Slavic and Illyrian populations that have inhabited Bosnia and Herzegovina would render the Germanic blood running through Bosniac veins quite diluted anyway. It is, rather, the Arian heresy, which the Ostrogoths championed, that Amer wanted to bring to my attention in order to prove his point. His claim, based upon the reading that he has done, is that the Arian church fused into what was later known as the 'Bosnian church'. This, it turns out, is significant for a practicing Muslim such as Amer because it provides the pre-Islamic Bosniacs with a Christology which, in many ways, falls in line with Islamic theology. This story offers religious continuity that shields the Bosniacs from the charge of being religious turncoats – but even that is not the main significance of his thesis. In fact, Amer concedes that the Arian elements dissipated over time and that the Bosnian church became a broad tent that welcomed all sorts of Christian heresies and became an amalgamation of them. *That* is precisely the point...

Mirroring most of the other respondents who also keep returning to this very point, what Amer wishes to convey here is that Bosnia and Herzegovina, for almost all of its recorded history, has been a European outlier: a *refugium hereticum*, a safe haven for religious dissenters, an oasis of tolerance in the midst of religious persecution. This was the case with the

Arian Ostrogoths as it was under the medieval kingdom in today's Bosnia and Herzegovina that welcomed Christian heretics; this continued with the Ottomans through their pluralistic millet system that extended its protection to Sephardic Jews fleeing the Spanish inquisition, for example. Bosniacs are, after all, the ultimate European heretics, even today in their capacity as white Muslims.

This point was not only stressed by pro-SDA respondents but is also scattered throughout the data, making it a sort of cross-partisan, quintessential Bosniac[57] talking-point. For example, the dissident Hilmija, the sole respondent whose criticism of the SDA included Alija Izetbegović himself, makes the claim that there is historical continuity to this aspect of Bosnia and Herzegovina *vis-à-vis* the other European countries manifested through the Bosniac yearning for a civil state at a time when far-right xenophobia is on the rise in the West.

> Europe is also [like the Serbs and Croats] turning to nationalism and chauvinism and intolerance instead of tolerance, broad-mindedness and everything else that should characterise Europe. […] I understand Bosnia and Herzegovina to be the source of [European] multiculturalism: where people lived *together*, not *beside* each other. We did not receive much help from Europe [in our struggle to maintain this]. They very well know that we are the original paradigm of multiculturalism.

At this point, I interjected and asked Hilmija whether it is perhaps the case that the lukewarm Western reception to the idea of a civic state in Bosnia and Herzegovina (i.e. the lack of help referred to) might stem from a distrust of the narrative he had just presented about BH multiculturalism. In other words, do they truly 'very well know' this; could this not be a sort of Bosniac national myth?

> [My] claim [of BH paradigmatic multiculturalism] needs to be proved. How is it to be proved – through the most difficult circumstances. [That is when] you show your true face, without a mask. […] For example, through war. War raises the temperature such that every mask starts to melt. The behaviour of the Muslims/Bosniacs during the war [proves my claim]. Everyone has to admit […] that during these most difficult times of war, the Bosniacs

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[57] Note that when I discuss 'the Bosniacs' within the context of my data, I am (unless otherwise specified) only referring to my respondents, without generalising about all Bosniacs. Similarly, whenever I mention 'the Serbs and the Croats', I am referring to how they are discussed by my respondents.

> acted like civilised people. That is a fact. […] We demonstrated that our values are very close to, practically identical to, European ones.

This is where I, again, interjected in order to ask what he makes of Alija Izetbegović's claim that Bosniac tolerance is more due to the Islamic element than the European one. I mentioned the *Convivencia* of al-Andalus as another European Islamic example, in contrast to the inquisitions that followed the fall of Islamic Spain. Hilmija acknowledged that the Ottomans did perpetuate a policy of tolerance, mentioning the Sephardic refugees as an example but, just like Amer, he pushes the BH 'paradigmatic multiculturalism' further back in history.

> Bosnia and Herzegovina was a safe haven for those that Europe had rejected. This is connected to the Bosnian church, which was considered heretical, particularly by the papal institution. Wars were waged in Bosnia and Herzegovina over this. Crusades were waged, including Hungarian campaigns. Why did they attack [Bosnia and Herzegovina]? Because there was a church [here] which was heretical and which embraced others who wanted to come mainly due to religious persecution. […] [They came] from all of Europe. Take the Sephards. […] They knew that Bosnia was a place where they could seek refuge. […] The Ottoman heritage wasn not that deep in Bosnia [at that point in time]. The Ottoman state was still quite new here [when the Sephards came].

This invocation of history constitutes, I believe, a prime example of how there is an attempt by Bosniac actors to legitimise the BH political field through the use of symbolic capital, by back-projecting the current project of enhancing the legitimacy of the BH state into the pages of history books. This fits with Mujanović's point (discussed in Chapter 2) about the pre-Islamic history of Bosnia and Herzegovina being crucial to Bosniac national identity. The struggle for a civic state in Bosnia and Herzegovina is depicted as a perennial one, with the Bosniacs elevated as the tolerant and broad-minded protagonist outside of European orthodoxy, struggling on against retrograde forces either in the form of chauvinist Serbs and Croats or of Western Europeans whose tolerant, progressive self-image is poorly reflected in their policies toward Bosnia and Herzegovina. It would be proper here to speak of the Bosniacs whom I have interviewed as the *incumbents* in a Fligstenian/McAdamian sense (given that they discuss contexts of crisis which continue to be applicable to post-war Bosnia and Herzegovina) and it is also possible to identify them as having taken on the role of *legiti-*

macy entrepreneurs. As a central part of this is their self-proclaimed role as champions of what Greenfield (2016) refers to as *collectivistic-civic nationalism,* which Bosnia and Herzegovina is said to represent (in its idealised, utopic form). Connected to this is her concept of *dignity capital*, which the Bosniacs use here in order to advance their cause. This aspect of the Bosniac identity, tied to the history of Bosnia and Herzegovina as a political unit, is fraught with tension. For example, the data reflect an anxiety about whether Bosnia and Herzegovina is even tenable as a state, i.e. whether the enduring nature of Bosnia and Herzegovina, characterised by tolerance, really is that enduring or will ultimately be relegated to the footnotes of history. One of the songs played at an SDA rally that I attended has the refrain 'if Bosnia and Herzegovina ceases to be, so will we' (*ne bude li Bosne, tada neće biti ni nas*), which strikes a defiant note yet, at the same time, sows doubt in the listener. Indeed, all of the respondents (without exception) did, in a sense, acknowledge that Bosnia and Herzegovina is currently untenable given its status as a *de facto* Western protectorate. When I, at one point, asked Hilmija whether Bosnia and Herzegovina is a failed state, he became quite upset and pointed out that 'if we Bosniacs give room for such ideas within our collective discourse then Bosnia and Herzegovina is doomed', since Bosniacs are the only group that, as a collective, work towards perpetuating the historical continuity between the tolerant Bosnia and Herzegovina of old and its present iteration. In other words, if Bosniacs become demoralised to the point where they cease to function as legitimacy entrepreneurs, there is no hope for Bosnia and Herzegovina. The Croats and Serbs, whilst there are individual exceptions, are the *challengers* and have no stake in preserving any BH historical continuity.

As Wimmer (2013) pointed out, post-war states need legitimacy across ethnic lines if they are to survive, so this sort of historical narrative, which paints the picture of Bosnia and Herzegovina as the quintessential and perennial multi-ethnic political space, is used as a tool (what Eyal 2005, refers to as a *discursive strategy*) in the service of the legitimisation of Bosnia and Herzegovina as a modern state. This legitimisation is a part of the *nationalising* process discussed by Brubaker (2011). Bosnia and Herzegovina, as a successor state, or a state-in-the-making, needs some sort of national myth which can prop up the state. For the Bosniacs, their role as the *core nation* is a natural part of this national myth: they are the champions of Bosnia and Herzegovina, those tasked with the responsibility of maintaining historical continuity, maintaining the country as an all-embracing, multi-ethnic polity, a united political field with the state as its

main instrument. It is a paradoxical situation, with a civic nationalism that is carried by and embodied in a particular ethnic group. It is as if this core nation is blessed with the ability to rise above petty ethnic concerns in their role as the guardians of multiethnic Bosnia and Herzegovina. Indeed, Omer (a party functionary) refers to the Bosniacs as a 'chosen people' in this very sense: they are tasked with the responsibility of looking beyond their own narrow concerns to the benefit of all the peoples of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

There is one aspect to this that is not addressed in the theoretical literature (since it does not deal with the BH context) nor was it directly acknowledged by the informants; even though they do touch upon an important aspect of this, it sticks out from the empirical data (especially in the light of Bourdieu's discussion about the modern nation-state). I am referring to the Ottoman legacy and the fact that, for Bosniacs, this legacy is relevant insomuch as they see themselves as perpetuating Ottoman religious tolerance in a multi-ethnic society. However, the elephant in the room is that the Ottoman state was a pre-modern, pre-nation state empire, one in which Bosniacs were privileged. The extent to which it is possible to reconcile this Ottoman legacy within a modern nation-state is difficult to say. Even if one did extend this historical continuity back in time beyond the Ottomans, as Hilmija and Amer wish to do, the question remains: how does one envision and put this 'paradigmatic multiculturalism' into practice within the context of a modern nation-state? For the Bosniacs, it would seem that their role as champions of this idea is crucial – with the result that what, for the Bosniacs themselves, appears as enlightened and tolerant and concurrent with European values, to the *challengers* to this vision (Croats and Serbs) it might seem like a residue of Bosniac hegemony during Ottoman times.

There is more than a hint of condescension or paternalism there. What is more, the state which Bourdieu[58] describes has a much wider reach (through its institutions and through new technology) and much more capacity for symbolic violence than a pre-modern state, so it is easy to understand why the concept of Bosniacs as the numerically superior and politically dominant nation within a nation-state might be understood as something qualitatively different from that which was the case during medieval times.

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[58] Echoed by the likes of Foucault (1991).

These points about the Bosniacs as a core nation and the Croats and Serbs as challengers to the Bosniac vision of the state will be fleshed out in the coming chapters but, for the purposes of this discussion, I merely wish to point out that the historical legacy of the BH political field is an important part of the empirical data and needs to be kept in mind as we go forward because it creates a paradoxical situation where a collectivistic-civic nationalism finds itself tangled together with a very specific Bosniac national myth that has more to do with national feeling than theoretical consistency.

Contested Memories: Bosnia and Herzegovina's Relationship to its Yugoslav Past

I have discussed the Ottoman legacy but the importance of history to the shaping of the BH political field does not end there. There is another aspect which ties back to the idea that the BH field is historically connected to multiculturalism, again with Bosniacs as the main carriers of that vision. That is the issue of Communist Yugoslavia as a state project. Here the respondents were a bit more divided. Some of them understood it to have been a fair attempt at multiculturalism in theory (even if it failed to live up to its ideals in practice) and were therefore not, as a matter of principle, against Bosnia and Herzegovina as a political field being part of a larger field in the form of Yugoslavia. Others, however (and they are in the majority), express the view that it is not possible to separate theory from practice and that the state was never meant to be anything but a camouflaged vehicle for Serb and, to a lesser extent, Croat nationalism, with the political exclusion of Bosniacs and the dismantling of their identity as inherent features of the Yugoslav project.

Abid is a fair representative of the former category of respondents. He was the founder of a local branch of the SDA in what is today Republika Srpska (but now lives in the diaspora and is no longer active in politics but remains an SDA supporter) and he points out that the Bosniacs he knows were all in favour of remaining in a more federated Yugoslavia (which was initially the official position of the party). He believes that it was the Serbs who, through their chauvinistic policies and rhetoric, served as *de facto* saboteurs (again, we could call it challengers) of multicultural Yugoslavia, with the Bosniacs as the main proponents of a truly multicultural and civic-minded society. In other words, the Bosniacs, according to Abid, saw Yugoslavia as a sort of extended Bosnia and Herzegovina and therefore took

on the role of incumbents *vis-à-vis* the Yugoslav state, much as they do with independent Bosnia and Herzegovina.[59] It is only when the challengers (the Serbs) managed to deform Yugoslavia, turning it into *de facto* Greater Serbia, that the roles were reversed and the Bosniacs were cornered into stripping themselves of their role as incumbents, reinventing themselves into challengers by championing an independent Bosnia and Herzegovina which would inherit the concept of a multicultural and civic-minded society. Thus, the main difference between Yugoslavia and Bosnia and Herzegovina proper is that, besides the geographical size and added ethnic groups, Yugoslavia lacked the historical tradition and continuity that Bosnia and Herzegovina enjoys, making the former project less likely to succeed and the latter project destined to do so.

This optimism with regard to the ultimate destiny of Bosnia and Herzegovina (and its future status as a multicultural and civic state) is universal amongst the respondents as it is tied to an idea of BH exceptionalism which forms an essential part of the Bosniac national mythology: Bosnia and Herzegovina as the shining multicultural city upon a hill. The other set of informants who dismiss the Yugoslav project highlight this point as well but they stress not only the lack of historical continuity as a mere challenge in the case of Yugoslavia but also the fact that they believe that the project was doomed to failure as a truly multicultural state because of the inherent hostility to the Bosniacs in their capacity as the Ottoman era ruling class with a reactionary religious tradition. To put it simply, the first group of respondents believe that Yugoslavia could have been salvaged, something that those in the second group rule out.

Nedim belongs to this latter group. He currently holds a government job as an SDA functionary. I asked him whether the Bosniacs could have survived as a people within a democratic Yugoslavia.

> Hardly. From what I remember and have been told by others [and read], the Bosniacs were slowly but surely moving towards extinction. They were losing their identity. Melting away. […] We weren't allowed to develop. Just remember the strange circumstances surrounding the death of Džemal Bijedić. He was a Communist under that system and managed to attain a leadership position and was killed overnight because he became a threat to

[59] This seems to fit quite well with what is presented in some of the literature wherein the Bosniacs have been highlighted as objects of favourable policies from the 1960s until the early 1980s, as a measure against Serb and Croat nationalism (see Chapter 1).

> them. The same thing further back [in history] with [the death of] Mehmed Spaho.[60] […]

I pressed the question a bit further: but what if Yugoslavia had transformed itself into a truly democratic society?

> Truly, it couldn't survive as a such because of the six republics containing even more national groups with their own traditions and their own concerns. In a democratic society such a thing wouldn't be able to survive, except as a farce for a limited amount of time.

The sentiment here is that, what Yugoslavia could not accomplish, Bosnia and Herzegovina can, in the way that it has for centuries. One crucial problem, however, is that the failure of Yugoslavia has had devastating consequences for Bosnia and Herzegovina, causing a disruption in the historical continuity of BH multiculturalism. This is partially because the concept of a civic society, as opposed to one based on ethnic nationalism, has become discredited due to the Yugoslav failure, such that there are those who now believe that Bosnia and Herzegovina, as a sort of mini-Yugoslavia, is likewise doomed (as discussed in the literature review). Indeed, to those who are skeptical about the idea of a multi-cultural Bosnia and Herzegovina, it mirrors the Yugoslav case, in being a camouflaged vehicle for one group's nationalism and domination over others (with the Bosniacs taking the place of the Serbs). These problems are acknowledged by the informants and this admission co-exists in a tense relationship with the idea of BH exceptionalism. This perpetual dialogue with history is part and parcel of the nationalising process that is crucial to the development of successor states, Bosnia and Herzegovina being no exception.[61]

Instability in the BH Field: The Local Actors as Incumbents and Challengers

Whilst the concept of the BH political 'field' was, of course, not discussed by the informants or found in the documents in that term as such, the idea that the structure of BH politics, that BH political life as it manifests itself in

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[60] Note that Spaho was active during pre-Communist Yugoslavia.

[61] Opinions about Yugoslavia are mixed among my informants but it would be interesting (in a follow-up study) to see how Bosniacs who have never been within the orbit of the SDA – meaning those who are more left-leaning – relate to the Ottoman legacy compared to how they view the former Yugoslavia.

practice and, most significantly, that the country's political institutions with the state at its centre, are characterised by shakiness, instability and volatility, is perhaps the most obvious piece of information that can be extracted from the data; it is the low-hanging fruit of this study.

From the more subdued expression of this in the SDA party programme[62] and resolutions[63] which highlight the structural flaws of the Dayton constitutional order and the need for its fundamental re-structuring, to the more eye-catching proclamation by Šefik Džaferović (the top-level SDA politician and Bosniac member of the presidency from 2018 to 2022) that 'war is a possibility',[64] the sentiment is clear: Bosnia and Herzegovina exhibits a persistent dysfunction as a political unit.

At the outset, one might ask the very question whether there is even such a thing as *one* BH political field. Hilmija stressed that the country itself is not properly demarcated, meaning that there is no signed agreement with neighbouring Croatia and Serbia about borders, adding that the issue of how to properly define and demarcate state property within the country itself is an ongoing legal issue.

Nevertheless, apart from the technicalities, the data are quite clear about the Bosniac perception in which the Serbs and Croats[65] are understood to be disinterested in the idea of a unified Bosnia and Herzegovina. Whilst finger-pointing at these two groups, however, is omnipresent in the data, it is not only a problem of political shenanigans courtesy of Serbs and Croats but is also a question of the Bosniacs themselves contributing to the instability by, *de facto*, not believing in (or caring about) Bosnia and Herzegovina as a legitimate arena for serious politics but, rather, one that is used for self-promotion and enrichment. This is something that my informants themselves bring up as a piece of self-criticism. In other words, whilst the Bosniacs might want a unified and functional BH field on paper, in practice they are not much more invested in it than their Serb and Croat counterparts (and they are prepared to collaborate with them in order to preserve the *status quo*, even as they go through the motions of public displays of mutual antagonism). In other words, the Bosniacs may very well be the core nation, the incumbents, the legitimacy entrepreneurs – but they are not particularly good at it.

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[62] Paragraph II.

[63] Cf. resolution No. 1.

[64] This is a part of the headline to one of the articles shared on the official SDA website which I have used as part of my data. See the Appendix for more information about this category of data.

[65] More specifically: Milorad Dodik and Dragan Čović.

This sort of criticism was expressed by the informants and can also be found in the articles, speeches and interviews. Abid, for example, compared the Bosniacs unfavourably to Zionist Jews; the latter know the value of a state and they know how to work for it, whereas the former are too short-sighted to understand that a little bit of personal sacrifice has collective benefits which end up trickling down to everyone. 'The streets of Srebrenica should be paved with gold', he told me in this regard, alluding to the idea that public money has, instead, been flowing into private pockets. Bakir Izetbegović, in one of the interviews featured on the SDA website, referred to this 'lack of unity, fight for positions of power and betrayal [of the people]' as the defining problem of the Bosniacs.[66]

Bosniac Corruption and the Instability of the Bosnian-Herzegovinian Political Field

Some informants again invoked history in order to explain Bosniac political corruption. However, it is not only a question of corruption but one of incompetence as well. Since the Bosniacs were excluded from positions of political leadership (or, as with Džemal Bijedić or Hamdija Pozderac, removed upon attaining them), they turned into a collective that is now incapable of ruling over a country. They are a nation of political illiterates after having been the ruling class during the Ottoman era. This is by design, i.e. they were relegated to such a status by the Yugoslav (i.e. Serb and Croat) leadership as punishment, precisely for having made up the ruling class during the Ottoman era, much like the claws and teeth of the lion are pulled out or the wings of an eagle are clipped.[67] This is something that was stressed to me by Halil, a Muslim cleric who lives in the diaspora and who supports the SDA. Here is part of his version of that analysis:

> Just imagine how naïve our people have been. How utterly sincere towards their enemy [who in turn] has worked according to a plan. [We are like this] even today, as if a magic spell has been cast upon us. […] [We are] naïve, uninterested. In every single one of their houses you will find occupants who [are politically informed]. We are only concerned with crime stories and sport. […] We cannot rule, we lack the training to rule. […] Even those

[66] This, of course, was in the context of criticising SDA dissidents who have gone on to form a new party.

[67] Note that the blame is again assigned to the Serbs and Croats. In their Greenfieldian *ressentiment* towards the Bosniacs, they turned them into a politically incompetent collective.

> from amongst our ranks who occupied positions of leadership, they didn't really rule, others did. They only executed what others told them to do.

So, if the existence of a unified BH political field hinges upon the Bosniacs (as the legitimacy entrepreneurs who are concerned about and invested in its unity), the status of the field as unstable and divided will be a foregone conclusion due to the incompetence and corrupt reality of the Bosniacs. Hyperbolic assessments aside, one may say that the Bosniacs take on and struggle in the role of core nation/incumbents/legitimacy entrepreneurs. This is where Bourdieu's discussion about the *objectification* of political capital is highly relevant. The Bosniacs, as it were, have objectified their role as core nation/incumbents/legitimacy entrepreneurs such that they use this role for personal status-seeking and enrichment. This is a common piece of self-criticism found in the data.

Foreign Actors and the Instability of the Bosnian-Herzegovinian Political Field

If the Serbs and Croats as challengers are not interested in a BH unified field and, if the Bosniacs are insufficiently skilled at being legitimacy entrepreneurs or incumbents, it would ultimately be up to foreign actors (the US and the EU as the most important guarantors of the Dayton Agreement) to keep the field unified and maintain its functionality. They are the meta-power, the protectors of the BH state. Indeed, every single one of my informants, without exception, agreed with the statement that Bosnia and Herzegovina is a *de facto* Western protectorate, with quite a few adding that this is the only thing that prevents Bosnia and Herzegovina from descending into chaos. This explains why they also expressed much disappointment and frustration with how Western actors have approached their task; they believe that the country would have a better likelihood of success as a functional political project if the West had taken their task more seriously and acted differently. Several of them trace this back to the war itself, where the West's passivity played into the hands of forces that wanted to divide Bosnia and Herzegovina, with the post-war approach being a mere continuation of that.

> If they [the US] had let us enter [militarily] in Banja Luka as we were about to do [at the end of the war, defeating the Army of Republika Srpska] … a clear victor [would have] emerged. And the victor then gets to determine the rules of the game, within the bounds of human rights […] those that need to

> be prosecuted are prosecuted. […] They didn't allow the war to end [on its own volition, with the Bosniacs winning through an assault on Banja Luka]. […] Every conflict needs to be resolved [through a victor]. This is natural.

This was SDA dissident, Abdullah, speaking. He is no longer involved in politics but used to be a relatively high-level functionary and is now fiercely critical of his former party and its leader. He went on with this exercise in counterfactual history, explaining that the West should have acted in Bosnia and Herzegovina as they did in Germany after World War II: have the defeated party undergo a 'catharsis' (i.e. something akin to the de-Nazification process), followed by money being invested into the build-up of the country. Instead of 'allowing' the Bosniacs to finish the job militarily by entering Banja Luka and emerging as clear-cut winners, they enforced the Dayton Accords, which is effectively a stalemate whereby everyone is dissatisfied within a dysfunctional system. Abdullah's frustration with the West in this regard is exacerbated by the impression that, whilst the West stopped the Bosniacs from finishing the job, their approach to neighbouring Croatia was entirely different.

> Consider Operation Storm [in which the Croatian army decisively defeated Serb separatists at the end of the war]. It was an American plan. It was hardly a Croatian operation [since the Americans were calling the shots]. It was decided that the Serbs should not remain in Croatia. There were more Serbs in Croatia at that time than there are now in Bosnia and Herzegovina. They allowed [the Croats] to clean up.

The BH field is unstable because the foundation upon which it stands is shaky to begin with, something which can largely (but not exclusively) be traced back to the Western approach during and after the war. This is a crucial point because this piece of analysis on the part of my informants (expressed the most explicitly by Abdullah but otherwise universally present to a larger or lesser degree) touches upon something that causes a bit of friction between the data and Bourdieu's field theory. Indeed, one may consider this a case of the data 'speaking back' at the theory. Bourdieu's analysis tends to focus on the actors within the field itself and, when he takes a step back and considers a meta-force beyond the actors, he readily invokes the state as the ultimate power that shapes the field and determines the way in which actors will position themselves within the field and against each other. The role of the sociologist, according to Bourdieu, is to investigate all these actor relationships through appreciating the meta-role

played by the state, becoming a meta-meta-analyst in the process. Whilst all of this is fine and well, the data presented here suggest that there might be more to the story, particularly in such cases where the sovereignty of a particular state seems to be more nominal than actual (as discussed by Brubaker 2011).

If Bosnia and Herzegovina is some sort of Western protectorate, as my informants agree that it is, then we need to look outside of the BH field in order to identify the relevant Western actors; we need to assess their role in shaping the nature of the field. The most obvious way is to study how they determine the rules of the game (through the Dayton Accords, the Bonn powers and so on) but it is ultimately more subtle than that, as we are dealing with the Thomas theorem[68] here; the mere fact that the actors within the field understand themselves to be constrained within a Western protectorate, whatever the actual veracity of that statement, suggests that these outside actors are more than mere actors; they play the role of a meta-power alongside the state.

In an earlier section I mentioned von Holdt and his criticism of Bourdieu in this regard but he focused on the lack of symbolic capital enjoyed by the South African state without putting sufficient stress on the fact that outside actors played a crucial part in undermining the legitimacy of the apartheid regime by being a rival meta-power. In the case of Bosnia and Herzegovina, this outside meta-power seeks to prop up the state but this patron–client relationship ends up undermining it because it becomes evident to the actors within the field that the state cannot stand on its own (hence the acknowledgement by my informants that Bosnia and Herzegovina is a protectorate). As a complement to von Holdt (2012) we can turn to Brubaker's (2011) point about nominal sovereignty of successor states and the influence of external actors to their development. We also have Fligstein and McAdam (2012), who discuss outside influence in the form of invasions and ripple effects from related fields. However, I would argue that this is mainly an empirical question such that the analytical tools applied to individual cases will have to be designed keeping in mind the particular relationships between the state in question and the relevant outside meta-power(s). In a case such as Bosnia and Herzegovina, this is particularly relevant due to the weakness of the state, the fragmented nature of the field and the small size of the country. Perhaps a fresh set of analytical tools are needed. For example, it might be asked whether one should entirely strip

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[68] 'If men define situations as real, they are real in their consequences' (Thomas 1928).

away the status of 'meta-power' from the BH state and transfer it to the OHR or to the US.

Going back to Abdullah's point about the contrast between the historical Western approach to Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, other informants highlighted the preferential treatment given to the Croats today by the High Representative Christian Schmidt (in that their political demands are accommodated and championed). Not everyone agreed with this sentiment, particularly the SDA dissidents who now belong to the People and Justice Party. Also, SDA politician Naila was not particularly critical of Schmidt but, apart from these exceptions, the informants agreed that the OHR is, today, a destabilising factor in this regard, playing into the hands of Dragan Čović and his plans for the destabilisation of Bosnia and Herzegovina. I mention this particular criticism against the West because it does not constitute a mere complaint about political inertia but, rather, is more an indictment of the West itself. Moreover, this is an issue that again demonstrates how difficult it is to separate the various aspects of the BH field through distinct thematic sections because this issue intersects with questions of identity, history, strategy and so on.

There is a quite clear sense here in which the Bosniacs feel that they are defending European values against retrograde forces and should therefore be receiving full support from the West in their efforts to pursue a civic state – yet the idea is, instead, met with apprehension. In other words, there is a sense in which the Bosniacs feel that the West is failing as a meta-power partner to the state; they are being bad protectors or patrons. This is similar to how the Bosniacs are being a bad core nation in their capacity as incumbents/legitimacy entrepreneurs but, whilst this is the case, the Bosniacs certainly perceive themselves to be a good client to the Western patron, i.e. they do want to conform to European norms about democracy, human rights, tolerance and so on. They expect more from the patron. There is, in other words, a perceived asymmetry to the relationship whereby the Bosniacs are seeking to conform with Western norms but are frustrated in these efforts and treated as 'the other'. Everyone to whom I talked, with the exception of SDA dissident Elvedin, traced this back to anti-Muslim prejudice. Hilmija mentioned how one Western high-ranking official asked him outright: 'Why are you guys Muslims?', meaning that, in the eyes of the Westerner, there is a supposed inherent contradiction between the looks and behaviour of the Bosniacs and their religious identity. This is a patron–client relationship between an internal and an external actor which has

hitherto been unexplored in the literature on field theory and which deserves to be highlighted.

One way for the frustrated client to cope with this psychologically is to proclaim him- or herself morally superior to the other actors on the field (including the patron) by developing a national identity that revolves around the very concept through which one asserts this superiority; in this case it is the idea of Bosnia and Herzegovina as a European 'city upon a hill'. What we have here is, again, the idea of BH exceptionalism and the Bosniac national myth that guides them as actors in their legitimisation of Bosnia and Herzegovina. This is a form of symbolic capital which is employed and which can be better understood by again invoking Greenfield's concepts of *dignity capital* and *ressentiment*. Indeed, her alternative name for the last concept is perhaps better at getting across the idea: *existential envy*. According to Greenfield (2016), nationalism (even if it be the civic variety, as is the case here with the Bosniac yearning for a civil state) is a response to a collective sense of inferiority *vis-à-vis* other actors. In this case, it appears that the small size of the Bosniac nation (in terms of both population and political leverage) and its limited ability to manœuvre within the field without some sort of Western patronage both necessitate some form of compensation. The frustration about the uneven relationship with the West – made particularly difficult by the underlying Western suspicion that, as Muslims, the Bosniacs are ill-prepared to be the carriers of European values (related to democracy and a civic society free from ethnic and religious discrimination) to the point that their very Europeanness is brought into question because of Islam – turns into a resentful sense of superiority that is tied to the BH political field itself.

This is symbolic capital used as a coping mechanism which, again, is found throughout the data, usually in the form of a proclamation that the West should come to Bosnia and Herzegovina to learn about true tolerance and democracy. By 'coping mechanism' I mean that, with it, the roles are reversed: instead of seeing themselves as the frustrated client, the Bosniacs come out on top as a teacher of the West, even as the political reality is that they occupy a subordinate position. This is accumulation of dignity capital in real-time. Musa, an Islamic cleric who fought with the 7th Muslim Brigade during the war and remains loyal to the SDA, echoes the general sentiment of the respondents:

> The West cannot impose its own narrative [about Islamic radicalism] upon us. […] Sarajevo is a cultural metropolis. You have all four houses of wor-

> ship next to each other. Why doesn't the international community focus upon that? *Begova dzamija* [the main mosque in Sarajevo] was destroyed but the cathedral was not. […] *Begova dzamija* was damaged yet not a single church or synagogue was scratched. Why? It is *we* who possess the culture of coexistence. We want to show the world that it is possible to live based on the principle of being together, talking to each other, being friends, visiting each other, having coffee together. My neighbour, Igor, is my best friend, we visit each other every evening. […] *That* is Bosnia and Herzegovina. […] Europeans need not be afraid of Muslims. They shouldn't fear a minaret. […] Muslims here don't fear the church bells. We are used to them. […] On the contrary, this [ringing of church bells alongside the Islamic call to prayer] constitutes the symphony [of the city]. […] Europeans need to come here to learn about multiculturalism, instead of telling us about it. I picked up a rifle [in order to defend multiculturalism]. *That* is the SDA.

Instability in the Bosnian-Herzegovinian Political Field: The Problem of 'The Unfinished State'

Having introduced the concept of outside meta-powers and the patron–client relationship, let us now stay with the original meta-power as discussed by Bourdieu: the state. Given the central role of the state in field theory, it is inevitable that the nature of the state is bound to affect the nature of the field. Let us therefore see how the state is conceptualised within the data.

There is a distinction to be made here between descriptive references to the BH political field and normative ones. Sometimes these two overlap but often they do not. For example, one of the main themes found in the data is that the BH political field should be *unified*, whereas it is, in fact, *divided*. Page 2 of the party programme states that the party seeks to preserve the 'integrity of the state of Bosnia and Herzegovina, as well as the inviolability of its borders'. This statement also illustrates the idea, found throughout the data, that, as far as the SDA is concerned, the BH state apparatus is the legitimate legal manifestation of what we would call the BH political field. The problem for the Bosniacs is that this is a vision that exists on paper and in the minds and hearts of Bosniacs but which is struggling to gain real ground in the field:[69] it is a normative assessment, not a descriptive one. One could also put it this way: the Bosniacs wish that Bourdieu was right about the symbolic power of the state but, reluctantly, they find themselves

[69] Or struggling to *define* the field to the degree that the Bosniacs would like.

in agreement with von Holdt about the limitations of the state in a divided society.

This is perhaps the appropriate point at which to discuss something to which I will be returning throughout this study but which might be introduced here. This is my contention (hopefully not too reductionistic) that Bourdieu's discussion about the state is basically a discussion about the *French* state as it had developed during his time – or, more specifically, it is a discussion about a certain *type* of state that has emerged throughout history (it does not have to be the French state *per se* but it serves as an illustration of this type of state). For him, the state is crucial to actors working within the field because it is the main depository and convertor of capital, especially as the state enjoys all the symbolic capital and holds the capacity for symbolic violence. Let us refer to this as the state *alafranga*.[70] For the Bosniacs, this is exactly the state that they want, for reasons that have been touched upon and that will be elucidated throughout this study. The reality on the ground, however, is similar to von Holdt's description of the South African state: you have an element of the population that does not share the Bosniac vision of the BH state, which undermines its capacity for symbolic domination. One major source of Bosniac frustration is the perception that their efforts to turn Bosnia and Herzegovina into a state *alafranga* are being thwarted by internal as well as external actors: Bosnia and Herzegovina is condemned to the status of a state such as the one described by von Holdt, where the symbolic order is contested, ambiguous. As we have seen, too, from Hilmija and Musa, the Bosniacs feel that one of the reasons why these efforts at turning Bosnia and Herzegovina into a state *alafranga* are frustrated is the suspicion of internal and external (Western) actors in the field that they are, in fact, more interested in a state in which they recreate their Ottoman-era status as hegemon of Bosnia and Herzegovina, as a sort of modern-day *moriscos*, crypto-Islamists who are more interested in a state *alaturca*.

During several of my participant observation sessions with my informants, both loyalists and dissidents, we ended up taking a walk in the Old Town of Sarajevo. In the centre of it, in the old bazaar near Gazi Husrev-beg mosque, there is a prominent Ottoman-era clock tower (*Sahat Kula*) which

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[70] The word *alafranga* was used in the Ottoman period to denote the adoption of Western norms and conventions with regards to matters of government, society and culture. When a Muslim from the Ottoman domain seeks to emulate the West, he or she is doing something *alafranga*. The opposite, when he or she avoids conforming to the West and seeks to retain Ottoman norms and conventions, is referred to as *alaturca*.

has been declared a national monument by the government. At first glance, it looks like any other European clock, with the same mechanisms but, if one takes a closer look, one notices that the numerals are Eastern Arabic, while a further close look tells you that it appears to be out of order, giving the wrong time of the day. This is because it shows lunar time *alaturca*, such that 12 o'clock strikes at the moment of sunset (as opposed to midnight). Sunset is when a new day begins in traditional Islamic culture and the clock is based on that convention. In other words, the clock, with its design and mechanism, appears to be *alafranga* but a closer look reveals that it is actually *alaturca*.

This tension between *alafranga* and *alaturca* (symbolised here by the clock tower) is inherent to Bosniac identity. It is being played out internally within the Bosniac community (with a wedge between the secularly and the religiously oriented elements with the community) but it is also one that they need to relate to as they interact with outside actors, having to convince the West and the Serbs and Croats that they do want Bosnia and Herzegovina to conform with Western norms of democracy. Again, I intend to develop this point as we move on but what is important here is to note that there is a fissure between the state as envisioned by the Bosniacs (which corresponds to how Bourdieu describes it) and the state that they find themselves in (which corresponds to how von Holdt observes it in South Africa).

It should of course be noted here that Bosnia and Herzegovina remains a functional state in the sense that the country has not descended into utter anarchy and the various actors still work within the framework of the state, so its symbolic power is intact to the degree that the Serbs and Croats have stopped short of turning to violent rebellion (this is what Bieber referred to when he described the BH experiment as a failed success); however, this is obviously not to the degree that the Bosniacs would like.

This sentiment was expressed the most markedly by those of my informants who fought as soldiers during the war and who feel that, with all of its disfunction, the mere fact that the BH state is there means that the struggles of the war veterans were not in vain. One of these veterans is Mahir, whose emphatic way of conveying this idea surprised me. He happens to be a retired Islamic cleric (and former SDA functionary, still loyal to the party) and he said that, without a free BH state, there would be no Islamic religion in the land and that the number one religious priority of the Bosniacs is to preserve the state. Under the former system in Yugoslavia, the Muslims were not free to preach their religion whereas now, in Bosnia and Herze-

govina, they enjoy more freedom than in all other countries of the Muslim world. So even with von Holdt's caveat, there is still much truth to Bourdieu's analysis about the state as a meta-power; this is reinforced by the fact that, even if BH Serb and BH Croat actors resist the Bosniac conceptualisation of a state, the concept of a state as an abstraction is still alive and kicking. Dodik's secessionism, for example, still operates within the paradigm of a future unified Serbian state. The issue, therefore, is not with the concept of the state but, rather, the concept of a civic BH state as envisioned by the Bosniacs. The basic point here is that several competing and mutually exclusive visions of a state (or several states) within one field, as is the case with the BH political field, serves to weaken it. The question then becomes whether the result is something akin to pillarisation (as in Belgium) or outright polarisation that might lead to field splitting (as in Czechoslovakia). Bosnia and Herzegovina, it would seem, balances somewhere between the former and the latter and it is this limbo state, with the uncertainty about the status of Bosnia and Herzegovina (particularly with the various warnings of a looming war), which adds to the instability of the field. In short, one could say that the BH field is in a chronic state of low-intensity existential crisis, due to it being a struggling, unfinished state.

The idea of the state being unfinished tends to be expressed in the data through the language of lacking 'normalcy' and not following 'European standards', with the Dayton Accords being understood as a fundamental hinderance in that regard, along with the destructive actors playing their part to exacerbate the problem. The *historijat* states that the SDA seeks to achieve 'the constitutional integration of BiH, [with] a decentralised state of multi-ethnic regions and local self-government according to European standards' and with 'amendments to the Dayton Peace Agreement that will enable BiH to be established as a functional and normal state'. This 'functional and normal state' is what I refer to when I speak of a state *alafranga*, a state with the powers of capital elucidated by Bourdieu. The other documents fill out some of the details in this regard. What is basically meant, apart from the state being democratic and following principles related to the rule of law and those of human rights, is that political rights for citizens should not be based on discriminatory ethnic divisions. This is particularly stressed throughout the first of the nine resolutions, which deal with constitutional reform and electoral legislation. Here Bosnia and Herzegovina is envisioned as a country that conforms to EU standards with regards to concepts related to efficient government, democracy, human rights, the rule of law and so on. On the first page, it is stated that a new constitution

should 'centre the citizen as an individual' whose political and other rights are enabled in that capacity, according to 'international documents' that deal with fundamental freedoms and human rights. However, at the same time, these documents stop short of explicitly calling for a civic state. Instead, the concept of 'constitutional peoples' and the safeguarding of their 'vital interests' is maintained on the very same page of the same resolution. This is significant since other pieces of data suggest that the idea of a civic state is indeed an explicit ambition. This suggests that, at the time of writing of these documents, the idea of a civic state seemed unrealistic to the point that ignoring the realities on the ground would be tantamount to a dereliction of duty with regards to playing the political game. This is presumably why Republika Srpska is taken for granted as well, with no discussion about its dissolution; instead, minority (specifically Bosniac) rights in that entity are stressed (cf. page 8 of the party programme).

Sometimes the descriptive term amounts to a type of homonym in the sense that it is both descriptive and normative, such that further elaboration is needed. One such theme is that of *Bosnian multiculturalism*, meaning that Bosnia and Herzegovina *should* be multicultural in a specific sense, whereas *it is* multicultural but in another sense. In short, the BH field should be a space for different ethnic and religious groups to thrive and prosper on their own terms. This multicultural and tolerant outlook is what being 'Bosnian' *should* mean, as stressed on page 8 of the party programme.

> Affirmation of the Bosnian identity as a common determinant of all citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina implies national Bosnian patriotism, nurturing and developing the traditional values of tolerance and coexistence of our peoples, their different cultures and religions. The culture of each of the people of Bosnia and Herzegovina is part of the cultural heritage of all of us, not only the people from whom they originate.
>
> Bosnian identity is not a denial of the ethnic or national affiliation of Bosniacs, Serbs, Croats and others, but the development of a sense of belonging to the state of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Bosnian identity is also contained in what are the common, social and civil interests of all citizens of BiH. The affirmation of Bosniac-ness as the ethnic or national determinant of the most numerous people in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the confirmation of its identity and integrity is a prerequisite for the development of the Bosnian identity.
>
> The equality of peoples and the protection of ethnic and national values are part of the foundations of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Ethnic rights must be harmonised with the Decision of the Constitutional Court of Bosnia and

> Herzegovina on the constitution of peoples, and other collective rights with democratic standards. These rights must be protected equally on the entire territory of the state of Bosnia and Herzegovina. At the same time, they cannot be in conflict with the interests of the state of Bosnia and Herzegovina and universal human rights and freedoms, and they cannot question the rights of others.

It is acknowledged in the documents that the above normative description does not align with the reality on the ground. Bosnia and Herzegovina *should be* multicultural in a pluralistic and civic sense yet is *de facto* multicultural in a divisive sense. It is what Mangez and Lienard (2015) would refer to as fragmented and what Wimmer (2018) would call a deficit in legitimacy across ethnic lines. Notice, however, that, whilst all of these multicultural sentiments are stressed, 'Bosniac-ness' is simultaneously highlighted as directly tied to the BH identity. This suggests that Bosniacs are specifically tied to the BH state itself and that the dividing lines between the Bosniac and BH identities are somewhat blurred. Moreover, the comment about Bosniacs being the 'most numerous' people in the country is a clear give-away that the SDA is, at the end of the day, a party that represents the Bosniacs as against other peoples in the country. It is important to remember, therefore, that the Bosniac mantra of a 'civic society' and 'civic state" does not exist in a vacuum. It belongs to the BH political field, which means that, again, we see how, in a convoluted way, this form of Greenfieldian (2016) civic nationalism merges together with Bosniac nationalism through the idea that they make up the core nation of the country.

This is an example of what Bourdieu refers to when he claims that the state 'universalises the particular'. The Bosniacs want to universalise their own particular form of nationalism by elevating it to a state matter, something that encompasses all of the actors in the field. This is also something discussed in the literature review, where Kriještorac (2022), Mujanović (2023) and Sarajlić (2010) acknowledged that disentangling the Bosniac and the Bosnian identities (and therefore ethnic from civic nationalism) proves difficult in practice. This reinforces Calhoun's (2007) critique of a dichotomous understanding of civic versus ethnic nationalism, where the former is typified as 'good' and the latter as 'bad'; in reality, their mutual relationship is messy, sometimes to the point where they become difficult to distinguish in a neat way.

Finally, given all of these problems with the BH state, a question that one may ask oneself is: is it possible for Bosnia and Herzegovina to ever emerge

as a functional civic state, as envisioned by the Bosniacs? The answer provided in the data is that, first of all, it has to because, without the BH state, there would be no Bosniac people with an Islamic identity. This was agreed upon by all of my informants, be they loyalists or dissidents, except Nusret (a dissident who now lives in the diaspora and works in academia) who does not think of the issue in those terms and is more worried about how political corruption might distort the practice of Islam amongst Bosniacs by tying it too overtly to a nation state. Also, he is not particularly concerned with preserving a national identity as long as the religious identity is maintained.[71] However, Nusret is an outlier in this regard – for the other informants, the question of the survival of Bosnia and Herzegovina as a state is an existential one. The other part of the answer to the question posed has already been touched upon when I mentioned BH exceptionalism and the associated optimism about the country's future. It *has to* turn into a functional civic state and it *will*. The most vivid expression of this is found with Omer, whom I mentioned earlier when he referred to the Bosniacs as a 'chosen people'. He predictably also refers to Bosnia and Herzegovina as 'a promised land' – and the parallels with Zionism have been made by other informants as well (most explicitly by Abid). The problem highlighted by these informants is that, whilst the Zionists are skilled, serious and organised, the Bosniacs are inept, corrupt and neglectful.

Factors Behind the Instability of the BH Field – Field Exodus

If Bosnia and Herzegovina is the 'promised land', the idea that it is a neglected one is found throughout the data. The Bosniacs as a collective are not particularly interested in working politically on preserving their own rights in Republika Srpska; the Bosniac political parties (spearheaded by the SDA) have abandoned them.

This criticism is, of course, mostly leveled at the SDA by those dissidents who promise that, if they were in power, they would change this state of affairs – but the same criticism was expressed by pro-SDA informants who live in Republika Srpska (Ahmet and Ibrahim); they feel that their own party has failed them. This goes back to the problem of short-term personal gain being prioritised over long-term strategic action: since the SDA is strongest in the Federation, it makes little political sense for individual politicians to focus on a constituency that lives outside of it. Some SDA politicians with whom I have raised this issue make a few attempts at defending

[71] It is perhaps significant that he lives outside of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

their party. Nedim, for example (who hails from a city in Republika Srpska but now works as a functionary in the Federation), puts the blame on the authorities in Republika Srpska who make life for Bosniacs unbearable such that all of the efforts made by the SDA (through collecting funds and investing it in infrastructure and the like) are rendered futile because the Bosniacs do not feel safe living there; however, many of the SDA politicians themselves acknowledge that not enough has been done and that the SDA vision is myopic in its focus on the Federation. Dino is an example. He is a war veteran who works as an SDA functionary and he mentioned that the Bosniacs are simply waiting for the non-Bosniacs to leave the Federation and that the Bosniacs from Republika Srpska will gradually gravitate towards it. The implication, of course, is that the country will be utterly divided along ethnic lines.[72] This will affect the nature of the political field itself, adding to the polarisation.

The issue, however, is not simply one of the Bosniacs feeling compelled to leave Republika Srpska. There is a general exodus out of the 'promised land', compounding the problem of political neglect. This is perhaps also one instance of the data talking back to the theory since this is something that I have not found to be addressed by Bourdieu. I have already discussed the circumstance that weak states make for unstable fields and I have also discussed the issue of strong outside actors influencing the field to the point of defining it or determining its shape. Here, nevertheless, we also have the issue of the population within a field peeking outside to other fields and admiring the foreign grass. This is also bound to affect the shape of the field, not least through demographic shifts which affect the very domain of struggle itself and determine the strategic choices of the actors. This is not only a problem for Bosnia and Herzegovina – since globalisation has made economic migration and brain drain a universal issue (as pointed out by Bakir Izetbegović when confronted by this problem in one of the interviews) – but the issue in Bosnia and Herzegovina is complicated by the fact that the three constituent peoples of the country have different perspectives and prospects when it comes to this issue.

> [The international community is desperate to] stop the exodus of [the Croats]. […] [The] Croats are leaving, they are travelling away. They are not even interested in going to Croatia, they continue into the West. […] Serbs and Bosniacs are also leaving, but not in the same numbers. It is their [the

[72] The idea, as mentioned by Dino, is that the Croats will slowly leave the Federation in favour of Croatia or some other EU country.

> West's] misfortune that we are the majority, over 50 percent, and we are leaving in smaller numbers than the Croats and Serbs. There is no need to over-analyze it here. […] We are Muslims and we have the [numerical] dominance here. They fear an Islamic country in Europe. […] Us Bosniacs have nowhere else to go. We are encircled here, in a small [Turkish] coffee-cup [*fildzan*]. Croats can go to Croatia and the Serbs can go to Serbia, but we have to other place to go. We have been here for thousands of years … There aren't that many of us … Two million, or two million Bosniacs, something like that. We are now in the situation that we fiercely have to defend ourselves, using peaceful means, through intelligence, in cooperation with our neighbors and friends. That is the essence of what is going on.

This is Nedim speaking again, and this is a common sentiment usually expressed by the turn of phrase that the Bosniacs 'have no plan B', echoing Mujanović and Kriještorac, who refer to the Bosniacs' lack of a kin-state similar to that of the BH Croats and the BH Serbs. This claim is somewhat contradicted by the fact that the Bosniacs are also known to seek their fortune in the diaspora but, for most of my informants, this is not a viable option because (to quote Alem, a high-level SDA functionary) 'the Bosniacs are predisposed to assimilation'.

Conclusion: The Bosniac Framing of the Field

Having discussed the Bosniac understanding of the BH political field, there are two salient points with which I feel the need to conclude this chapter. The first is that, with some exceptions (which have been duly highlighted above), the way in which the dire political situation is conceptualised in its broad outline is quite universal amongst my informants, be they loyal to the SDA or dissidents. They agree about the dysfunctions of a divided field which can be traced back to the Dayton Accords and an unfinished state[73] which, in turn, are exacerbated by the external and internal actors (not least the Bosniacs themselves – even though the loyalists and the dissidents put the blame at the doorstep of the other) and by the local population abandoning the field to an alarming degree. The same patterns are found in the documents as well, with the public material displaying a higher emphasis on blaming political opponents for the problems (and fewer accusations against the West, even though there are some of those, too). The Bosniacs are not doing a good job of being a core nation but they are doing a good job of being a client to the West. The West, in turn, is being a bad patron.

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[73] Even though they might not use these specific terms.

The challengers in the field are working against the state. All of this makes for a highly unstable political field.

The other salient point which I want to linger on here concerns an aspect that is related to this historical assessment, which again I find throughout the data – namely, the idea of an historical continuity of 'BH exceptionalism' culminating in a future multicultural society within a civic state. There is a clear Bosniac framing that emerges. There are several aspects to this framing that need to be analysed here. Firstly, the idea that, whilst the current situation is highly precarious, there is a utopic past (Bosnia and Herzegovina as a *refugium hereticorum)* and a utopic future (civic state) to find solace in and look forward to, which serves as some sort of capital[74] which can be procured as a means by which to motivate political action. Secondly, without making any judgement about the historical accuracy of this arguably romanticised notion about BH exceptionalism, it is undoubtedly one that is politically convenient and easily digestible to the international community (i.e. politically correct). One could imagine a counterfactual scenario in which a traditionalist Muslim civilisation is dominant politically and economically and where certain Islamic aspects of Bosniac identity and Bosnia and Herzegovina's past are stressed instead – or a scenario in which Russian hegemony is undisputed, where the Slavic elements of Bosniac identity are highlighted. Instead, it is an EU- and US-friendly image of a tolerant Bosnia and Herzegovina that is projected. Again, I refrain from making any value judgements here; the point is simply that this is part of a framing process (with some of the strategic reasons for this discussed below but, in short, this is part and parcel of being a good client to the Western patron).

Thirdly and finally, there is one very significant and defining aspect of this framing – the idea that the Bosniacs are the champions of this tolerant Bosnia and Herzegovina as against their rival actors on the field. Their conceptualisation of a unified field, held together by a civic state, is understood to be the natural and given historical continuation of the tolerant, multicultural Bosnia and Herzegovina of the past.

It is quite clear that there is a lot of tension when it comes to my informants' belief in the viability of a unified BH political field. One way in which this is manifested is through appeals to successful examples in his-

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[74] There is a bit of both symbolic and dignity capital in this. The former in the sense that this framing seeks strength from an existing BH state and the latter in the sense that this relationship to the BH state is abstracted insomuch as it also looks beyond the state as it exists today and leans back upon an unfulfilled conceptualisation of it, based on a form of civic nationalism.

tory, with a hope that a future civic state *alafranga* will solve the Gordian knot of BH politics. However, this does not really serve to ease the tension since we have the challengers to this vision, the Serbs and Croats, who (effectively) question whether a functional state *alafranga*, with all its powers of control and symbolic capital, can really be be made to satisfy all parties in a society such as Bosnia and Herzegovina. A state *alafranga*, as demonstrated by Bourdieu, demands much more of its citizens than a pre-modern society did of its subjects, specifically with regards to identifying with the state and its institutions. There is also the issue of how to set up a civic state in which one nation does dominate numerically (which the Bosniacs do, as several of my informants have stressed) but only narrowly so. It is possible to imagine a different framing to that of the Bosniacs, where it is the BH Serbs and BH Croats who, as it were, champion the values of pre-modern Bosnia and Herzegovina by being field challengers and resisting the clutches of the modern nation-state and its pretentions to symbolic violence. This is competition between different framings, where one's skill in articulating one's own framing and promoting it – Eyal (2005) refers to it as a discursive strategy – as against one's rivals and their framing will be crucial to one's political success. This is especially the case where outside powers arbitrate between these actors on the basis of these various framings and this outside patron-actor (the West) seems to share the challenger perspective to the degree that they are wary of fully accepting the Bosniac framing about the state.

Let us now turn to Chapter 8, in which I delve more into the field actors.

CHAPTER 8

Contestation and Alliance: Dynamics Among Actors in the Bosnian-Herzegovinian Political Field

Having set the stage with a discussion about the general nature of the field, it is now time to discuss the field actors who operate within it. Again, the data display the vantage point of the Bosniacs so the discussion is not exhaustive but will, by necessity, be about specific aspects of the actors and their relationship to each other– and, more specifically (given the aims of this study), their relationship *to the field itself*. The wheeling and dealing of everyday politics is touched upon as well (these types of issue are the most pronounced in the media interviews, with a lot of finger-pointing) but, given the nature of the problems of the field (as discussed in the previous section), the general tendency within the data is to link the everyday and the seemingly mundane to themes of an existential nature about the possibilities for Bosniac survival within a functioning BH state.

There are some nuances to and new details about how these actors are treated in the data compared to what I found in the literature though the actors themselves are the same, so my task has mainly been to process and analyse these data using field theory as a filter. The main novelty and perhaps the most significant empirical contribution here is found in the treatment of what emerges as a type of Bosniac sub-field.

This chapter can be somewhat difficult to separate from the following one but, where this one deals with who the actors are and what they want, Chapter 9 deals more with how they seek to achieve their goals more specifically.

The BH Serbs and the BH Croats

The Dayton Accords single out the Serbs and the Croats alongside the Bosniacs as the 'constituent peoples' of Bosnia and Herzegovina which, among other things, means that no one belonging to a group other than these three may run for the office of president. In other words, the very constitution of the BH state entails a sort of sectioning off of the political field

along ethnic lines. The game of opposition on the BH field is therefore clearly between these three main players, with other groups (such as the Roma and the Jews) being directly excluded from certain key parts within the very domain of struggle itself. The interesting part of my job is therefore not to identify these key actors – they have been served to me without any effort – but to seek to understand who these two actors are (or, rather, how they are perceived by the Bosniacs) beyond the one-dimensional designation of a constituent people.

Unfortunately, there is not much there in the data in this regard. As expected, the Serbs and Croats are identified with what, according to a field-theory perspective, amounts to field challengers, those who have a stake in causing field rupture and who seek to delegitimise and destabilise the field by challenging the symbolic power of the state. However, as I discussed previously in the context of Bosniac framing, there is an alternative way to look at this. When Bourdieu discusses the state as meta-capital, he also mentions the sociologists as engaging in *meta-meta* analysis; they demolish the *doxic* thinking associated with the state. Sociology, according to Bourdeu (2014, pp. 38–39; italics in the original):

> makes a demonic claim quite analogous to that of the state, that of constructing the true view of the social world, more true than the official one. It is in competition with the official construction of the state, even if it says what the state says, even if it says that the state speaks the official truth and thereby finds itself in the position of metastate, something that is not envisaged by the state. The sociologist does something analogous to the *coup de force* that creates the state by appropriating the monopoly of the construction of legitimate representation of the social world, that is, by tacitly dispossessing each of the social agents of [. . . their] claim to construct a personal representation of the state, by claiming to speak the truth about the social world.

By doing this, the sociologist is a 'spoiler' who spoils the narrative of the state (Bourdieu 2014, p. 58). This is precisely what the BH Serbs and BH Croats do as actors in the field; they spoil the Bosniac narrative by questioning the legitimacy of the BH state.

There are many proclamations from my informants about the Serbs and Croats not all being the same and that there are many honourable and decent people among them (with 'honorable and decent' being a shorthand for 'in favour of a civic state *alafranga*'). Željko Komšić, the Croat member of the Presidency, is generally invoked by my informants as someone who

might very well win the Bosniac vote if a single president, regardless of ethnicity, were to be chosen. Generally, however, Serbs mean Dodik and Croats mean Čović. Both Dodik and Čović means dividing the field and sabotaging every attempt at turning Bosnia and Herzegovina into a functional, civic and 'normal' state. For the Bosniacs, this sort of sabotage against the state is connected to the idea of what Greenfield (2016) describes as ethnic nationalism. This is because, to the Bosniacs, the state *alafranga*, with all its symbolic and doxic power, is simultaneously tied to the idea of civic nationalism because this is how their status as a core nation, as nationalisers, comes to the fore. This is where we need to highlight again that this is a paradoxical situation: Bosniac nationalism becomes tied to civic nationalism as it is the Bosniac gateway to the state and its symbolic power. It is in this context that Greenfield (2016) also pointed out that the state is the cornerstone of nationalism. For the Bosniacs, this is a sort of state-nationalism, with the Bosniacs identifying the most clearly with the state. This is how Bosniac nationalism merges with civic nationalism – through the state.

Since the notion that the Serbs and Croats represent spoilers is quite obvious, I was interested in seeing whether there are instances in the data of something resembling a more three-dimensional analysis of these two groups. There are – but such instances do not go much beyond extending the positive assessment about Komšić to other like-minded Croats and Serbs. The two clearest examples of this are found in the narratives of Omer (the SDA high-level functionary) and Nusret (the diaspora academic and dissident). The former made a distinction between civic-minded and nationalist Serbs and Croats by using the term 'Partisans' to designate the former group. The Partisans were the anti-fascist resistance group during World War II, led by Josip Broz Tito; for Omer, the Serb and Croat Partisans who have remained true to the multi-ethnic ideal of Yugoslavia have embraced Bosnia and Herzegovina as a continuation of that vision. He finds this division to be more clearly pronounced in the Croats: one half of them are fascists ('*Ustaše*') and the other half is what he calls 'genetical Partisans'. I was expecting him to mention Komšić as an example of the latter but, instead, he used the former president of Croatia, Stipe Mesić.

As for the Serbs, Omer's assessment is that they follow their leadership blindly; if the leaders are liberals, then the masses will follow and, likewise, if the leaders are fascists, then the masses will follow, adding that the Serbs are wonderful to live with in peacetime but turn into monsters during war. The goal of the Bosniacs is to get as many of the non-fascist Serbs and

Croats on their side. 'Whether we will succeed remains a question mark', he concluded. What essentially amounts to the same analysis was offered by Nusret as well, only he used the terms 'urban' and 'rural' instead of 'Partisan' and 'fascist'. These two categories are essentially the same: the 'good guys' and the 'bad guys' – those who want a civic state and those who are caught up in ethnic nationalism.

> We are aware that, in Bosnia, there are two groups of people. There is an urban milieu, people who have gone to school, who grew up on the streets [of larger cities], who lived together with others [of a different ethnicity]. To that group belongs [someone like] Komšić, for example. [Also] the former chair of the parliament, Miro Lazović. A Serb – but he is one of us, a Bosnian. That group, regardless of ethnicity … it is a social group. […] At work, we made fun of [the rural people]. There was a group of them [that we made fun of]. They were Bosniacs from Sanjak. […] Those are the two groups. You have the urban class, and […] those who grew up in the village.

Whilst Omer and Nusret use different terminologies to describe this, they have effectively identified another political actor in the BH political field, namely the 'Bosnian', the good guy. The idea that the Bosniacs need to nurture this idea of Bosnian-hood is ubiquitous in the data, so let us look more closely at this issue.

The 'Bosnian' as a Fourth Actor in the Field?

We have seen how the Bosniacs take on the role of a core nation, engaging in a process of legitimisation of the BH state by presenting the claim that Bosnia and Herzegovina has always been and should always be a place where different nationalities live together. However, since nationalism is the cornerstone of the state – as pointed out by Greenfield (2016) – they also have to engage in nationalisation and, as a part of that process, they end up offering a sort of civic nationalism such that we still end up with one nation, albeit one that is a composite of different ethnicities. This is the concept of the 'Bosnian' which is offered as a civic alternative to ethnic nationalism and proposed as a political actor in the field that can transcend ethnic identities.

The 'Bosnian" is an added, fourth, political actor in the sense that this category cannot be accommodated within the tripartite constituent-people division found in the Dayton Accords, yet it is one that simultaneously cuts across it and mostly aligns with the Bosniac vision of 'Bosnian' (civic)

identity, which explains the welcoming and paternalistic attitude toward those Serbs and Croats who gravitate towards it. The concept of a 'fourth actor' in Bosnia and Herzegovina was touched upon by Bakir Izetbegović – in one of the interviews that I studied, in the context of an answer to a question about the dominance of HDZ amongst the Croats – and deserves to be quoted in full because it neatly highlights the point that I am making:

> [HDZ's proposal for additional] [d]ecentralisation and additional federalisation in Bosnia and Herzegovina really does not make sense. What else is there to be federalised in a country with two entities, ten cantons and one district? We are a country with 13 constitutions and 13 parliaments; we have more than 100 ministers and around 600 parliamentarians. The constitutive nature of the [three] peoples is an unquestionable category but at least one million people live in this country who are civically committed and who do not want to be nationally defined and classified in politics. The majority are ethnic Bosniacs but there are also Croats, Serbs and children from mixed marriages among them. In politics, they do not want to be forced to pick an ethnicity, to be pushed into some kind of one-third 'Bosniac quota'. They can lean back upon the judgments of the European Court of Human Rights, they have a representative in parliament at both the state and the federal level that equals the number of the SDA and is double that of the HDZ. We cannot ignore all this, we must find a new ethnic and civil balance on which the Dayton Peace Agreement itself was established. Everyone should feel comfortable in this country, no one should be deprived, no one should be dominated. I truly believe that this is not a utopia, that there are realisable solutions that will guarantee equality to the constituent nations but will not make democracy, the will and the very existence of the majority in the parliaments meaningless.

The last apologetic part of the statement reveals that this idea of civic nationalism is clearly understood to be a Bosniac project, with token Serbs and Croats joining it. This frustrates my informants to the point of exasperation, since the idea of a civic political system based on the principle of 'one man, one vote' is a given in the West yet is somehow unacceptable in Bosnia and Herzegovina, equated as it is with Bosniac nationalism or extremism. Again, the Bosniacs feel that they are being good clients but are met with partial rejection by their patrons. However, my findings also suggest that the aspirations toward a civic society are understood to be less associated with Bosniac extremism by the West when they are mixed in with social liberal policies. My SDA informants make this connection and they acknowledge that a socially liberal party such as *Naša Stranka* (Our

Party) is not as stigmatised in the West – even though it shares the SDA's vision of a civic society – but they tend to understand this as either an expression of Western Islamophobia and/or as a sort of neo-colonialism whereby Bosniacs are expected to do as they are told, which the SDA is not prepared to do, whilst their rivals are. For example, Husein (an SDA mid-level functionary) invoked the issue of the 'Algerian six', a group of foreign fighters who gained BH citizenship during the war. Suspicions of supporting terrorism were raised against them by the US following 11 September 2001 but they were found innocent in a BH court. Nevertheless, they were illegally turned over to the US and detained in Guantanamo Bay without charges for several years. Husein is convinced that the politician who was responsible for this decision at the time, the Social Democrat Zlatko Lagumdžija, was completely convinced that these men were innocent but acquiesced to American demands (to the degree that he had any choice in the matter to begin with) in order to maintain their friendship. This demonstrates to us how habitus forms an important part of Bosniac agency *vis-à-vis* the real meta-power in the field; in their role as a client to the patron, they understand that their engagement demands a certain habitus. One aspect of this is the ability to project an image of being in conformity with Western values when it comes to social issues – and here is where some of the problems and contradictions related to the *alafranga*/*alaturca* dichotomy come to the fore. As mentioned earlier, my informants feel that the Bosniacs are being good clients, conforming to European norms (even more so than the West when it comes to the values of multiculturalism and pluralism) and that, for this, they should be rewarded with full support in their pursuit of a state *alafranga*.

However, we also see that some of my informants (SDA loyalists) have suspicions about Western neo-colonial aspirations in the region and find that these are mainly expressed through the promotion of socially liberal policies. One of the issues raised, by Husein and Alem for example (both established SDA politicians), is that of the Pride parade held in Sarajevo. To them, this is something that leftist Bosniac politicians insist upon in order to ingratiate themselves with the West. This suggests that the idea of the Bosniacs living up to all of the expectations and demands of their patrons is not as straightforward as it first appears. The Bosniacs with whom I have spoken *do* want a civic state devoid of ethnic discrimination but some are skeptical of these aspects of social policy. In other words, they are not necessarily the ideal client after all. So, we again see this tension between the European and the Islamic elements of Bosniac-hood, this wavering between

alafranga and *alaturca*, which is part and parcel of the Bosniac experience in the political field.

An obvious issue that complicates matters in this regard for the SDA is Izetbegović's close relationship to Erdogan. Since Omer was one of the informants who expressed the most frustration with the Western attitude towards Bosniac aspirations for a civic society – 'apparently' he, at one point, said sarcastically, 'the civic idea is Bosniac radicalism whereas the most humane thing in this country is apartheid' – I asked him whether the idea of a civic BH project courtesy of the SDA loses legitimacy in the light of the party's overtures to Erdogan.

> The West is fighting Turkey and we are the collateral damage. Every connection to Erdogan [is considered] radical. But Erdogan became radical as soon as he said no to the IMF. As soon as anyone on this planet [does that] he becomes a monster that everyone must fight. This means that there is some sort of soft occupation by a Western monetary system [of other countries].

What emerges from this *alafranga/alaturca* back-and-forth is the following. The Bosniacs, as the core nation, are looking to settle the field in the midst of field rupture and are struggling in their efforts to maintain state legitimisation across ethnic lines by offering a new type of political identity ('Bosnian') that is tied to a specific form of statehood. This is a clear example of what Brubaker (2011) refers to as nationalising. Wimmer argued that whether or not this type of effort succeeds can make or break a post-war state by either deterring or encouraging secessionist aspirations, which explains the urgency if not the outright desperation. One of the reasons why this does not seem to work for the Bosniacs is that they are struggling to balance these efforts with what is also typical for the incumbents/legitimacy entrepreneurs of a successor 'unfinished state', which is to tie the nationalisation process back to a core nation. The SDA want to have their cake and eat it too: they want a 'normal' society and state, based on the EU model, using civic Bosnian-hood as a shorthand for that aspiration – but they also want to cultivate the idea that they constitute the Muslim backbone of Bosnia and Herzegovina in their capacity as the numerically largest field actor, one that, out of the three constituent peoples, identifies the most intimately with the field (as represented by the state). They want a civic state in line with European norms but they are also skeptical of the social policies that are expected to follow. This unresolved tension is symbolised by the balancing act of identifying and seeking an alliance with both the

West and with Erdogan. That there is unresolved tension there is not only my conclusion but is clear to my informants as well. For example, Alem brought up the possibility of cutting the Gordian knot and looking for entirely new options (Russia, China), either beyond or along with the West and Turkey alike.

However, this tension does not only play out within the BH psyche, it also comes about due to the nature of the field and because of the stances of the other actors within it. Naila, the only female whom I managed to interview and a high-level SDA functionary, explained to me that the attempts at gathering people around a BH political identity were the most pronounced in the period following the 11 September attacks in 2001, under the leadership of Sulejman Tihić. This failed, she says, because there were not enough non-Bosniacs who were willing to join these efforts. However, as I have previously discussed in the literature review, it is also simply the case that the current system based on ethnic quotas makes such a project unlikely to succeed by design. Superimposing a fourth political actor in the field in effect means creating something that is not there. This also explains why other parties such as the Social Democrats, even though they are less keen to prop up the Bosniacs as a core nation and therefore less associated with Bosniac nationalism or extremism, struggle in these efforts as well. Again, Bakir Izetbegović analysed the matter in one of his interviews:

> The SDA, both as it is now and as it was 28 years ago when it was founded, did not absorb but promoted the civic concept. That is not in doubt. It is questionable whether the SDA can be gradually transformed into a multi-ethnic party. So far, we have not succeeded and there have been modest attempts. Some words of Alija Izetbegović oblige us to move more decisively in that direction. For example, 'it's time for us all to be more Bosnian' or another remark that he made only in front of me, 'Bosnia and Herzegovina is a lock that is opened by a key with three teeth. The SDA has only one'. That's how it is with the SDA, we have to join forces with those who have the other two teeth, the Serbs and the Croats. Unfortunately, it is no better with the so-called civic parties [such as the Social Democrats and Our Party] and they only have one or one and a half teeth. They are strong in Sarajevo, Tuzla, Bihać and the eastern part of Mostar. There are no traces of them in Banja Luka, Prijedor, Široki Brijeg or the western part of Mostar. They aren't present there and they don't even try to be.

This, finally, brings us to Nikola, the only non-Bosniac I interviewed. He is very much a Komšić-type figure, being a civic-minded Croat, except that his

socially conservative leanings made him gravitate toward the SDA rather than the Social Democrats or Komšić's centre-left alternative. He left the SDA due to concerns about corruption but remains loyal to Alija Izetbegović's vision of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Nikola is a prime example of someone who transcends the 'three constituent peoples' category in a way that has enabled him to be elected for political office by a Bosniac constituency (which he cites as evidence for his claims that Bosniacs are not interested in a civic state only in order to dominate the two other ethnic groups). What I found interesting, however, is that his primary identity is that of a Sarajevan. Nevertheless, it seems to me that one of the reasons why someone like Nikola can align himself with the Bosniacs is because, like them, he is engaging in a juggling act between a multiplicity of identities (just like the Bosniacs engaging with a majority Christian Europe and adopting a Muslim European identity, he is a Croat engaging with a majority Muslim/Bosniac Sarajevo and adopting a Croat identity). He cited the Lebanese novelist (of mixed ethnicity), Amin Maalouf, as someone who, in his books, has managed to capture what it means to embrace the idea that identity can be a patchwork. However, for people like Nikola and the Bosniacs with whom he has aligned himself, this sort of complexity and cosmopolitanism can be difficult to reconcile with a state *alafranga* – where some sort of nationalism is the cornerstone. This is why the Bosniacs and Nikola end up promoting a form of civic nationalism, since they find themselves compelled to engage in the process of nationalising and cross-ethnic legitimisation for the unfinished BH state to have a chance at survival.

Before moving on to the next point of discussion, it should be added that, apart from this fourth actor, there are, of course, the ethnic minorities (the Roma, Jews, Germans and others) who do not belong to the constituent peoples. Their rights are invoked by the Bosniacs when arguing for a civic state (which also means that they would fall under this category of the 'Bosnian' field actor) but, apart from that, they are not really present in the data. However, there is one more actor who does get mentioned more often – namely, the diaspora Bosniac. This tends to be in the context of discussions about diplomacy and lobbying efforts with Western countries (meaning that diaspora Bosniacs or, generally, civic-minded people originally from Bosnia and Herzegovina, as described above, can be used as a resource in the efforts to influence Western governments). However, there are also instances when this category of diaspora Bosniacs emerges as a separate field actor, with one foot within the field and one foot without. The clearest examples of this are found with two of my informants. Fadil, an SDA dissident, mentioned that he

personally prefers the centrist party Platform for Progress, led by Mirsad Hadžikadić, a Banja Luka-born, America-based academic; nevertheless, he does not vote for this party in the elections because it lacks a grassroots presence in the country and he would not be able to mobilise people and organise a proper defense in the event of war. Similarly, the SDA politician, Nisvet, mentioned that he agrees with Mirsad Hadžikadić ideologically but, as a politician, he believes him to be bound for failure because he is 'too foreign; he does not understand the mentality of our people'. The implication here is that he is too naïve and ill-prepared to play the game of politics in the BH field. What we see here is some sort of reflection upon what I would like to discuss in the context of Bosniac agency, since this is clearly tied to Bourdieu's concept of habitus – and we have seen earlier how McNay (2008) ties habitus to the field of action. We have also seen how Fligstein and McAdam (2012) tie the idea of agency to the concept of social skill and this is something that comes to the fore here. For these informants, the diaspora Bosniacs possess the skills and have internalised the habitus for engagement with Western actors outside of Bosnia and Herzegovina but lack the skills/habitus necessary for working *within* the Bosniac political field itself. There is a clear role assigned to the diaspora: promote the cause of the BH state in your countries of residence (by lobbying the local governments, influencing journalists and so on) but stay away from trying to run for political office in Bosnia and Herzegovina itself.

The Bosniacs as a *Core Nation*

I have already touched upon the issue of the Bosniacs as the 'core nation' of Bosnia and Herzegovina – the legitimacy entrepreneurs, the incumbents. This is evident within the data to such a degree that it is nearly always the case that the actual term 'core nation' can be found. The actual expression used by several of my informants is 'backbone of the country', so the concept is certainly there.

There are two main arguments presented by the informants as a basis for this. The first one is the idea that the Bosniacs are numerically dominant in the country. I have already quoted page 8 of the party programme, which states this explicitly; I have also quoted a couple of my informants who discuss this in those terms, too, particularly in the context of the Croat exodus from the country. The other argument is basically one in which their relationship to the field is invoked.[75] The Bosniacs constitute the collective force

[75] They do not use the theoretical terms mentioned here.

in the country who seek to settle and stabilise a ruptured field against actors who seek to destabilise it by challenging the symbolic power of the state. The role of the SDA is quite crucial here; for those who have remained loyal to the party, the SDA represents a sort of *avantgarde* of Bosniac defenders of Bosnia and Herzegovina against its enemies; as for the dissidents, since they were once affiliated with the party, they still like to refer to its historical role at the time of the fall of Yugoslavia. Generally, these dissidents will point to Alija Izetbegović as a sort of *de facto* father of the nation but the exception to this rule, Husnija (who criticizes Izetbegović), is still keen to highlight the argument that the SDA, at its inception, was not a political party in the normal sense but, rather, a broad national movement. For Husnija, given that he feels that the current version of the party is vulgar (particularly in what he identifies as an instrumentalisation of Islam), this is a way of justifying having belonged to it in the past. Indeed, he does not even identify as a politician (to the point that he told me that he is not particularly interested in politics) but was thrust into that role when joining the effort to defend Bosnia and Herzegovina against its enemies in its hour of need. The idea here is that the SDA was a manifestation of a collective Bosniac effort to defend the country at a time when the corresponding collective efforts of the two other constituent peoples were concentrated upon tearing it apart – this is what gives the Bosniacs the right to a core nation status.

As is to be expected, this historical role which has been assigned to the SDA is invoked in the contemporary political debate, particularly within the Bosniac sub-field. For example, Husein mentioned that one of the reasons why he joined the SDA is that the Social Democrats (whose economic policies he sympathises with) were not as involved in the defence of the country during the war. However, this way of putting it does not really do justice to the sentiment that is actually being projected here. Instead, it was more clearly articulated in a televised pre-election debate between Bakir Izetbegović and his rival for the office of Bosniac member of the presidency, the Social Democrat Denis Bećirović (who would go on to win the election). The latter had raised concerns about the former using bellicose and un-diplomatic language that might alienate the West in a politically sensitive time for the country. The video clip which captures the following exchange was shared on Facebook by the SDA Youth Association.

> Izetbegović: So, let us note [what is going on]. Biden recently approved military aid to Bosnia and Herzegovina. NATO decided to help Bosnia and

> Herzegovina along with Ukraine. And then someone gets angry that I said that we find ourselves in a moment when [the Serbs] are threatening to turn the [river] Drina into blood and when they are threatening to divide our country, to finish what they didn't finish during the war. […] Naturally, we won't let 92 happen again. They will not lead Bosniacs to slaughter again.
>
> Bećirović: [We] will not allow that either. […] No, no, no ... No one will allow that.
>
> Izetbegović: If [my rhetoric] will anger the American embassy, let it be angry. […]
>
> Bećirović: What I am saying is that the country needs to be defended by way of a system. Not through rhetoric that will harm us. We have the military […] We have a defence law. We have the police force. I believe that we have to do this through a system.
>
> Izetbegović: Of course.
>
> Bećirović: Not through exclamations that might attract problems.
>
> Izetbegović: [The rhetoric that] a Bosniac is allowed [to use] compared to what a Serb or a Croat of Bosnia and Herzegovina is allowed to say [is unevenly balanced]. When I say that we are developing a weapons industry for commercial reasons, but also for [preparation in case of war], everyone rises up and says that I am threatening a war. [At the same time the Serbs] are procuring planes, procuring systems, procuring drones and so on. They are trying to silence us. Mister Denis is trying to shut me up. Well, he won't. I will certainly warn my people that, in a world that is increasingly dangerous, it has to be strong. Of course, by way of the system. Of course, by way of the system. Don't teach me that the state should be strengthened. *We* made the state, you didn't make it.
>
> Becirevic: I have spoken about this for four years in parliament.
>
> Izetbegović: You have talked a lot, we have been doing it. Forging a state.
>
> Bećirović: You talk about it two months before an election.
>
> Izetbegović: For 32 years we have been forging a state.

This is a good example of how the game of opposition operates within the group as well, not just with actors who are not part of the in-group. Here we see that Bakir Izetbegović engages in what Bourdieu (1991) refers to as self-aggrandisement and self-consecration. It is also an example of the monopolisation of collective truth. The Bosniacs want a state *alafranga* and the SDA is the only actor within the Bosniac sub-field capable of delivering just that. Bourdieu also refers to this as political capital becoming objectified and

pointed out that those 'professionals' or insiders who have this type of experience playing the political game (as the SDA undoubtedly has) tend to use capital accrued over the years in order to perpetuate their position. They use fame, recognition, loyalties and delegated capital of authority as tools. This is encapsulated in Izetbegović's claim that the SDA made the state and that their intra-Bosniac rivals have only been talking without delivering any results.

The word state-making or state-building (*državotvornost*) is commonly invoked, to the degree that Fadil, who founded a local chapter of the party before the war but is highly critical of the party today, mentioned that, whilst in theory he prefers Mirsad Hadžikadić's Platform for Progress, he nevertheless still votes for the SDA in the elections because they are the only party capable of steering the country in the event of war. The general point here, at any rate, is that the Bosniacs (whether it be by way of the SDA or otherwise) have a stake in the state and the country; without this actor in the field, Bosnia and Herzegovina is doomed. The Bosniac self-perception is that they are the glue that keeps the country together. The SDA's perception is that they comprise the ruling caste within the Bosniac corpus. The SDA is the quintessential Bosniac party, gathering the people together; and it is simultaneously the quintessential BH party, defending the state. This is a clear-cut case of the state being used as meta-capital by the SDA to convince the electorate to vote for them.[76] The SDA organised the defense of the state and they continue to defend it by non-military means. In other words, the BH political field is the SDA's *responsibility*. This attitude is mostly evident in the *historijat*, where the SDA is identified as the 'key political actor' in the defence of the BH state but also in the party programme where, on page 3, political attacks on the Bosniacs are equated with attacks against Bosnia and Herzegovina itself. Since SDA also consider themselves the champions of the Bosniac people, the take-home message is that any attempts at disrupting the political work of the SDA puts Bosnia and Herzegovina itself at risk. The party programme, on the same page, goes on to state that:

> The [war time] aggressors did not succeed in their intentions to divide Bosnia and Herzegovina and destroy the Bosnians and Herzegovinians but, as a result of the war, the country was left with an arrangement and an internal structure with numerous possibilities for obstructions and blockades. Even today, retrograde forces, in peacetime, by political means, are trying to achieve the goals that they could not achieve during the war. As the role of

[76] I will return to this point in the next chapter.

> the international community in the [political] process in Bosnia and Herzegovina weakens, these forces are increasingly vocal in their demands for additional territorial and ethnic divisions. We will never allow any additional divisions but will persevere and work hard to end the existing ones. We will work to strengthen the state of Bosnia and Herzegovina and will oppose any attempt to devastate state institutions.

This quote suggests that the BH political field, as manifested through the BH state, represents a *de facto Bosniac homeland* – a place where their biological, religious and cultural survival is safeguarded. The perception is that, whilst the Serbs and Croats of Bosnia and Herzegovina have other political alternatives (in the form of neighbouring countries), the Bosniacs are 'tied by destinty' (page 3 of the political programme) to the BH state. Since Bosniac survival hinges on the success of the BH state project, they are more entitled to it than the other constituent peoples. Unless, of course, they join the Bosniacs in tying their destiny to Bosnia and Herzegovina by renouncing their claims to Serbia or Croatia.

The Foreign Actors – The West and the Rest

The fact that Bosnia and Herzegovina is geopolitically positioned in a way that invites outside attention has been stressed throughout the data. Husnija, for example, calls Bosnia and Herzegovina a 'crossroads of civilisations', whereas Nusret prefers the term 'buffer zone'. These geopolitical circumstances are a crucial empirical reality that needs to be kept in mind as we engage with the theoretical literature. For example, Eyal's (2005) concept of transposition was developed in order to explain the Czechoslovak field but, in the case of Bosnia and Herzegovina, we perhaps need to add another layer of abstraction beyond the ones that he enumerates. There is a symbiotic relationship between the geopolitical positioning of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the social space that needs to precede a discussion about the transposition process. This is something pointed out by Brubaker (2011) in his discussion about successor states. The fact that it is a small country and therefore vulnerable to outside influence is obviously an important factor, along with the circumstance that the country's immediate neighbours are two nation-states that represent two peoples who also make up two of the three constituent peoples of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Let us begin with these two neighbours.

The general perception is that, whilst the Serbian state is unequivocally and consistently destructive in its aspirations to destabilise Bosnia and

Herzegovina, with the long-term aim of incorporating parts of it in a would-be-Greater Serbia, the relationship to Croatia has historically fluctuated between benignity and destructiveness. I mentioned that Omer considers the former Croatian president, Stipe Mesić, to be a model 'genetical Partizan' who partnered with the Bosniacs in pushing for a civic Bosnia and Herzegovina. At the same time, the current situation with the Croatian government is considered to be near-catastrophic. Some sort of coalition has been established in which the government of Croatia and Dragan Čović are working together with Milorad Dodik and the Serbian government in order to weaken the Bosniacs' position in the field. '[The Croats] are flirting with Belgrade', as Izetbegović puts it in an interview. This is ominous in itself, since the Bosniacs have traditionally had to work together with the Croats in averting Serbian attempts at domination (as evidenced by the Bosniac–Croat federation) but the problem is compounded by added difficulties coming from outside actors. Russia is a traditional ally of Serbia and supports the activities of Dodik in Bosnia and Herzegovina and, as such, is also involved in this Serb–Croat coalition against the Bosniacs. The OHR, which has generally seen eye-to-eye with the Bosniacs, has been blatantly pro-Croat under the leadership of Christian Schmidt, who insists on using his Bonn powers to enact an election reform which is favourable to the Croats. This, in effect, means that the Bosniacs are facing a frontal assault from the major actors in the field. The above assessment is the general one within the SDA, found amongst my informants and clearly expressed in the speeches and interviews that I have studied. The only SDA informant who did not agree with this is Naila, who continues to feel that the OHR is a constructive and non-biased force in the country. The SDA dissidents who have gone to the People and Justice party also tend to disagree with this assessment and consider it to be an expression of an SDA siege mentality. The other dissidents who are not involved with the People and Justice party, however, are somewhat more inclined to accept this narrative and are wary of the Serbian/Croatian/Russian interference in the BH political field and the pro-Croat bias of Christian Schmidt.

This discussion is impossible to separate from the issue of the field strategies of these various actors, so the details and the specific examples from the data related to this will be presented in the next chapter – Chapter 9 – as I discuss the specific roles played by these actors. However, before proceeding with that, let me finish by mentioning the other outside actors which have been identified in the data. These are the same ones which have been discussed in the literature review, namely Turkey and the Gulf coun-

tries, with China being mentioned as well. My SDA informants are generally pro-Turkey, whereas the dissidents are more ambivalent. The Arab Gulf countries are mostly considered in the context of investments (as is China), whereas Iran is hardly discussed, except as a generic friendly nation. The Americans are also discussed as a major player, of course, with a general sense that a new world order is emerging, one in which the US' role as the world's undisputed hegemon will diminish. Populist movements in various European countries are also discussed as potentially detrimental for Bosnia and Herzegovina. These are the actors that have been identified but, again, details about their roles will be mentioned in the following chapter.

Conclusion: The Bosniac Framing of the Actors

The most striking feature about the Bosniac framing of the field actors, as compared to the framing of the field itself, is that, whilst there is a general consensus about the field (the Bosniacs want it to be unified and stable) and the state (they essentially want a state *alafranga*), there is much more controversy when it comes to how the actors are framed. The consensus about the field does spill over into the framing of the BH Serbs and BH Croats (they are 'spoilers', dividers of the field and disruptors, unless they are civic-minded, like Željko Komšić or my informant Nikola, in which case they are embraced as fellow 'Bosnians'). Nevertheless, as soon as we start discussing the foreign actors, we begin to notice the rift, particularly when it comes to how one positions oneself against the West. Some informants (such as Naila) see the West as an altogether positive presence, whereas some (such as Omer) look at it as a neo-colonial power, with a lot of distribution between these two extremes (e.g. their presence is for the good but could do more; or they do a bad job but we still need them here; and so on). In other words, whilst the informants mostly agree that the West could do more as a patron, there is a spectrum with regards to how well or badly they are performing. However, it is when we turn within and look at the Bosniac field actor that the real divide becomes quite apparent: there is a Bosniac sub-field within which the game of opposition is played out and the actors position themselves against each other.

This game of opposition is a general struggle for symbolic capital. If the Bosniacs, in their role as a core nation, understand themselves to be the champions of the BH state against those who seek to destabilise it in a general sense, then the question arises as to who, amongst this core nation, should take on the responsibility of performing this task in a more specific

sense, i.e. who should form the vanguard or the elite (i.e. who should be elected to office)? There is a general scramble for this type of symbolic capital. The following chapter will discuss the particular strategies used by the different actors within the Bosniac sub-field in order to obtain this capital but we have already seen that the general tendency in this regard is for the SDA to invoke its historical role in the establishment and defence of the BH state, which is tied to its *državotvornost* (its capacity for continuing to build the BH state). This is something that the SDA's rivals have to contend with as they develop their own narrative.

With this, we turn to Chapter 9, which is about field strategising.

CHAPTER 9

Agency and Strategy in the Bosnian-Herzegovinian Political Field

Having discussed the nature of the field and identified the field actors, we now turn to how these actors operate within the field. It bears repeating that the purpose here is not to present an *objective* account of how the Bosniacs' rivals position themselves in the field; on the contrary, the idea is to gain insight into how the Bosniacs position themselves by understanding their *perception* of the position of the other actors in the field and their *reaction* to this positionality, particularly with regards to the perceived strategising of these rivals or allies. In other words, in this section I am less interested in the strategy of these rival actors but more focused on how the Bosniacs position themselves against them. This, of course, does not preclude that there is some truth in the Bosniacs' perception but what is primarily sought after in this regard is the general contours of the Bosniac framing. This follows from Bourdieu's idea that an actor's position in the field is necessarily relational or mediated. I would also like to remind the reader that, by turning now to what McNay (2008) refers to as a 'relational phenomenology', we are also treading upon the Bosniacs' 'field of action'. In other words, we get to explore aspects of actor agency; we gain some understanding of why the Bosniacs play the game of cards in the way that they do.

We will continue from where we left off by discussing the Bosniac subfield, within the context of a general discussion about Bosniac strategising. This is followed by a treatment of the BH Serbs and BH Croats and then a discussion about the foreign actors, finishing off with some concluding remarks about Bosniac framing. After this chapter, the study is completed by a final section with some general conclusions about my findings.

General Bosniac Strategising

I have already established that the Bosniacs understand themselves to be a sort of guardian of the state, the 'core nation' who are the champions or guarantors of a stable and unified field; they are the incumbents, the legi-

timacy entrepreneurs. It follows from this that their strategising is meant to serve the goal of unifying/stabilising the field and strengthening the state, helping it along its path towards becoming a state *alafranga*. Strategy, as Bourdieu pointed out, means working toward a situation in which your mental structures, your definition of the world, governs the reproduction and structures of domination. If political power in general and symbolic capital in particular are used wisely, group interests may very well end up converging with 'the national interest'. This is what the state *alafranga* is used for. However, given that the current BH state is an unfinished one (indeed, a non-sovereign Western protectorate), the Bosniacs understand themselves to be severely limited in their field of action, i.e. in their capacity to act independently and pro-actively. They operate, as has been discussed, within the confines of being clients to a patron, the West, rather than working independently through the tools offered by the state *alafranga*. This means that the Bosniacs, due to their client status, do not entirely fit into Bourdieu's concept of conservers of the *status quo*, since they are dissatisfied with it. It is those with power who conserve and the Bosniacs are aware that the actor with real power is the West. Their efforts and strategising are, rather, concentrated upon creating the conditions through which a satisfactory situation might emerge by appealing to their patrons. I have already presented the parts of the data which support such an analysis so I shall avoid repeating myself; the point here is that, whilst political field theory is based on the premise that an actor operates according to a relational logic, the Bosniacs are very much aware of this – they understand that they are reacting and responding to the manœuverings of the other actors in and around the field (particularly the Western actors who are the *de facto* rulers of the country); in other words, they have no illusions of being a fully sovereign people in a sovereign country. This is why it is necessary to understand how they perceive the strategising of the other field actors in order to understand their own strategising.

However, before discussing these other actors, there are, nevertheless, some remarks about general Bosniac strategising to be made. It is interesting to note that most of my informants, particularly but certainly not exclusively the dissidents, lament that Bosniac careerism, opportunism and amateurism have been impediments to the development of a coherent political strategy. This is generally expressed with the statement that there is no strategy to speak of at all. The analysis of Adnan, a dissident who left the SDA and is now active in another party, is very representative, which is why I shall transmit it at length.

> From the movement that started with the late Alija Izetbegović and the others who were there [with him] – the national movement, the movement for a state, for the Bosniacs – we have now moved to … it seems to me, from what I have been able to tell … it has only come to … power and enjoyment [*vlast i slast*]. Meaning, the only goal is to come into power. And when you do get power – and all of this is in the name of [national] defence, religion, the nation, the Bosniacs – you go on to do all sorts of things. […] Unfortunately, as Bosniacs, our, well, Bosniac leaders … I haven't seen a clear strategy. […] As I said, one makes sure to get into office and, through office, you get certain benefits.

I asked him if perhaps the strategy developed *ad hoc*, such that one first made sure to benefit oneself, followed by some concern for what can accomplished politically following this personal self-enrichment.

> It is really a question of … from this perspective … how much interest at all there has been in seeing what can be accomplished. Rather I get the impression, seeing what state the Bosniacs and the country are in […] There has not been the least effort to create a system. Any system at all. So that we know exactly … for example, you arrive here from Sweden, someone else arrives, returns [Bosnia and Herzegovina] … We don't have a clear … The way from point A to point B. No. […] Unfortunately, everything is politicised. […] Thirty years have passed since the war. Still, after 30 years we are still talking … […] We had the opportunity to raise an entirely new generation. If we had wanted. Unfortunately, I have the feeling … […] I often go to Republika Srpska. We have no strategy at all when it comes to that area. As for [the Canton of Sarajevo], we have no Serbs or Croats here, only Bosniacs. […] Where is the strategy?

I think that I would be amiss if I did not mention one thing in this regard, from my participant observation sessions. I was invited to the ministry and parliament buildings in Sarajevo, along with two government buildings in the Federation. The courteous way in which I was met by the security personnel (upon identifying myself) and then escorted to the office; the luxurious surroundings and furnishings in those buildings (particularly those in Sarajevo), the free beverages served to me by the in-house waiter and the magnificent view of the city from the window – all of these things were mere inklings of the *vlast i slast* spoken of by Adnan – and yet I came out with the feeling that, were I to enter the field of politics, I could scarcely consider myself immune from the things discussed by Bourdieu in the

context of the 'professionals' of the game of opposition in politics and by my informants in the context of Bosniac corruption.

It was quite difficult to find a divergent opinion about the problem of *vlast i slast*. Again, this was the general sentiment even when I discussed the matter with SDA politicians. For example, the high-level functionary, Omer, mentioned to me that he did not believe that the ideological differences between his party and the leftist ones (in the Federation) were that big; people pick parties based on personal interest. This aligns with Mujanović's assessment that there are no real ideological differences between the various Bosniac politicians. For Omer it was, rather, a question of what *should* be the Bosniac strategy instead of the current chaos of opportunism. Obviously, one part of this strategy is an internal fight against this sort of political corruption. Adnan addressed this as well:

> I sometimes have the feeling – and the fear – that things are too late. The question is how many more generations will have to go for naught before we can get to a point zero, to change the people's awareness. The strategy of the Bosniacs is a very simple matter. As I said, I am a believer. In everything I try to put faith first. We sometimes have a wrong perception of faith. Faith is not only in the mosque. No, faith teaches me how to behave with my neighbour, with my kids, with my wife, my parents, the entire society. It does not merely teach me how to pray and that is it. The same is the case here [in my political office]. […] It is a responsibility [*amanet*].

This is perhaps an expression of the *alafranga* and *alaturca* tension in Bosniac identity (and politics), which here comes to the fore as a religiously motivated stress on integrity and moral values in politics without any overt references to Islamic legal matters, something maybe akin to a Muslim version of continental Christian Democracy. I remind the reader that the SDA is affiliated with the EPP, the Christian Democratic alliance in the European parliament. Perhaps this is one way of reconciling the *alafranga/alaturca* tension.

There were more secular versions of this type of analysis but it was certainly universal. For other strategic goals to be reachable, a general confrontation with corruption is understood to be a necessary precondition. Indeed, the main point of conflict between the SDA and its offshoot rivals concerns this very issue: who is better equipped to 'clean up' Bosniac politics? The dissidents argue that the tree is rotten from the roots and that one needs to start from scratch, whereas the loyalists counter with the claim that the reason why the dissidents left the party is because they were themselves

power-hungry and so, when they failed to reach the position that they had envisioned for themselves, they effectively purged themselves from the party.

The loyalists and the dissidents do not disagree about the general strategic goals of the Bosniacs, which are all about working toward a state *ala-franga*. These were the strategic goals that one keeps coming back to in the data. With the exception of the statutes and political programme (where there were plenty of quite generic statements about preserving the family, caring for the elderly, investing in education, culture and sports, etc.), there were few cases of specific strategic proposals; everything is overshadowed by this general strategic goal of strengthening the state and working toward a civic society. In the same way that corruption is the most urgent matter facing the Bosniacs, such that all other matters are secondary (even though questions related to social conservatism do come up, as discussed below in the next section), the problem of an unfinished state and a divided field is the most urgent issue facing the country.

Since political ideas are sometimes the most effectively conveyed through symbols and emotionally charged rhetoric, let me illustrate how this strategic goal of the Bosniacs is packaged to the public by sharing some of the observations I made through participant observation. For example, when I went to the final pre-election gathering (*završni skup*) in Zetra sports stadium in Sarajevo, what first struck me was the paraphernalia and the music. I already mentioned the line in a song: 'If Bosnia and Herzegovina ceases to be, so will we', which quite unequivocally gets the message across. A dozen or so signs with aphoristic quotes from Bakir Izetbegović were dispersed throughout the venue. For example, one sign read: 'The SDA will return the strength to the Bosniac people and to all Bosnian patriots! It will unite them again'. Here we see the idea of the interconnectedness between the idea of the Bosniac field actor and the fourth, 'Bosnian' actor. The idea of a civic identity and a unified field is connected to Bosniac strength. The idea of field unity as a strategy was evident in another sign that read: 'No breaking up of Bosnia and Herzegovina! No federalisation, no more entities and division'. The election slogan, also visible everywhere on the giant TV screens, was *Sigurno*, which has a dual meaning of both 'safely' (as in, the SDA will make sure to keep the country and the Bosniacs safe) and 'steadily' (as in, the SDA will run the country with a steady hand and/or it will win the election steadily).

When Bakir Izetbegović and his wife Sebija took their seats (flanked by party sympathisers known to be decorated war veterans), a choir entered

the stage in order to sing a patriotic song in quasi-operatic style. The following is a part of the lyrics:

> To have an inch of Bosnia's land taken away! Will not be allowed!
>
> To have the proud and the defiant crushed! Will not be allowed!
>
> To have evil feet walking in the field! Will not be allowed!
>
> To have hatred poison the clear waters! Will not be allowed!
>
> To have rights and freedoms taken away! Will not be allowed!
>
> To have our strength, our will destroyed! Will not be allowed!
>
> To have a brother raise his hand against brother! Will not be allowed!
>
> […]
>
> It is my immortal land!

From this, one may conclude that one of the major themes was that Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Bosniacs need to be kept safe. Indeed, one of the mantras of Bakir Izetbegović, expressed in the interviews that I studied, is that his political strategy is to offer the Bosniacs 'one hundred years of peace, after one hundred years of war'. It is clear from the data that it is presupposed that this entails having a state *alafranga*. I have already mentioned that such a state should be based on civic principles rather than ethnic division and that it should have the capacity for the symbolic capital that Bourdieu speaks of. One crucial aspect of that, as illustrated by the quote above, is that such a state is also inherently stable and provides peace.

This is exactly what Wimmer (2013) refers to in his analysis of the post-war state: they need legitimacy across ethnic lines to survive and this is something acknowledged by the Bosniacs. If Bosnia and Herzegovina is to survive, it needs to have all the symbolic capital associated with a state *alafranga*. This is a fundamental strategic goal and quite a straightforward one. You cannot have a safe and stable Bosnia and Herzegovina if there are forces which seek to fragment it. The problem for the Bosniacs is that this clearly alienates those Serbs and Croats who are not as interested in a BH state *alafranga*. This is tied to the implication that such a state is favourable to the Bosniacs given their majority status. This complex, anxious and tense relationship between Bosniac-hood and Bosnian-hood comes to the fore during the pre-election gatherings. There was a barrage of mixed messages

being sent out, mostly through the symbolism employed although, sometimes, this issue was addressed more explicitly.

For example, at another gathering I attended, held in the conference hall of the Hotel Holiday Inn, party member Bisera Turković (foreign minister at the time) made a point of mentioning that Alija Izetbegović was *not* a radical Islamist, as his political enemies (particularly some of the Serb and Croat politicians) sometimes tried to allege; as evidence for this, she invoked the fact that Alija had been instrumental in promoting her political advancement even though she is both a woman and someone of partial Jewish ethnicity. Another example is the SDA politician Ivica Sarić, an ethnic Croat and an opera singer by training, who sung the war-time BH national anthem during this gathering, demonstrating that the SDA believes in the idea of a civic society (as opposed to Bosniac chauvinism). During the speeches held by the politicians, including Bakir Izetbegović, the idea of a civic state that should be inclusive of Serbs and Croats was repeated. However, all this was mixed in with arguably particularistic Bosniac and Islamic symbolism as well, in such a way that the tension was sometimes more or less acknowledged. For example, when beginning his speech in Zetra sports stadium, Bakir greeted the audience saying: 'My dear SDAists and SDAettes (*SDA:ovci i SDA-ovke*), valued citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina, all of you who are present this night in Zetra or are following us through the media – *Esselamu alejkum* and good evening'. An Islamic greeting to the Bosniacs, along with a secular one for the 'valued citizens' referred to earlier. This was repeated by some of the other speakers, who would greet the audience by saying *selam* and good evening. One of the clearest examples of this tension was the *fatiha* read for the *shahids*, the martyrs, who died during the war. The *fatiha* is the opening chapter of the *Qur'an*, which is traditionally read for the dead. The *shahids* are Muslim martyrs who die on the path of God. Here, the path of God is clearly understood to be the establishment and defence of a civic, secular[77] state. There was a sort of crossbreeding between Islamic and civic on display everywhere. This again tells us that there is unresolved tension between the *alafranga* and the *alaturca* aspects of Bosniac identity.

Another way to approach this overall strategy or vision for Bosnia and Herzegovina is to look at the SDA's election video that aired on state and commercial television in the country. The narrator says:

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[77] There was really no mention of anything other than a secular state in the data.

> I swear to you, country of lilies. That I am a protector of your borders. It is my people, my only blood. Defiant, proud. For the coming ages, that never will the evildoers crush our dreams. We drink your clean water, and we till our fertile land. We build it, for those who love the homeland. For your children, and the coming generations. Because you are the only one, my homeland. Powerfully, for Bosnia and Herzegovina. *Sigurno* – the SDA.

The images shown are panoramic views of the BH landscape, mixed in with a lot of waving of the war-time flag (with the golden lilies, a symbol of the pre-Islamic kingdom of Bosnia and Herzegovina, symbolising the historical continuity and, therefore, cross-ethnic legitimacy of the BH state as something other than a Muslim project) along with the new, post-war flag. The promotional video also features a famous war veteran preparing for Islamic prayer by performing the ablution (*abdest*), with the call to prayer being heard in the background. A young, blonde girl, holding a lily flower in her hand and joining an SDA march in which a lot of SDA flags along with the other two BH flags are being waved, is also featured.

There are also several images that depict the 'building of the homeland for those who love it', spoken of by the narrator: a field being tilled, windmills, bridges being built … This type of emphasis of the Islamic aspects of Bosniac-hood, along with the overt connection between such a conceptualisation of Bosniac identity with the BH state (the crossbreeding referred to above) is perhaps one of the most obvious points of contention between the SDA loyalists and the dissidents. The latter often accuse the SDA of instrumentalising Islam for their own ends. With this very point, we now come to the next section of this chapter, in which we discuss the game of opposition within the Bosniac sub-field.

The Bosniac Sub-Field

We have already discussed how the Bosniacs understand themselves to be acting within a very limited field of action when it comes to the general political field. So, the first question one may ask here is: when it comes to the Bosniac sub-field, is the field of action expanded compared to the wider field? In other words, do the Bosniacs understand themselves to be comparatively more free to act independently in their game of opposition against each other? This is, to some degree, a point of contention between the SDA loyalists and the dissidents, with the former occupying a position of what could loosely be called a form of hard determinism and the latter one of soft determinism.

As shown above, the dissident, Adnan, was frustrated with the Bosniac complaint that Serbs and Croats keep obstructing their efforts to create a functioning society, pointing out that these two actors have not been able to do that in Sarajevo and that it is the Bosniacs themselves who reduced city politics into a vehicle for careerism. Similarly, the dissident, Nusret, said that he is not really interested in the likes of Dodik or Čović, because he believes that the fate of the Bosniacs stands and falls upon the moral uplift of the people, i.e. it is a matter for the cultural or religious rather than the political field. However, most of the other informants, including the dissidents, were quite clear about the field of action being limited here as well. Not so much because of the Serbs and Croats themselves but because of certain systemic issues that, again, are traced back to the very nature of the field. Specifically, it is the perception that Bosnia and Herzegovina is a Western protectorate, such that the real power lies with the outside actors rather than the political institutions (including the state). However, for the dissidents this still leaves enough room to be able to work with these outside actors in order to make political progress. This empirical situation in the BH political field raises theoretical questions about agency for actors within a non-sovereign, successor state; in other words, how does a client act within the field under the auspices of an outside patron? Let us look at how some of the informants understand the issue.

The most optimistic in this regard was Elvedin, who dismisses the claim (he calls it 'the cliché') that the West has an anti-Muslim bias such that they will never allow Muslims to run their own political affairs in the heart of Europe and pointing to the fact that they supported the establishment of Kosovo. If the Bosniacs play their cards right, the West can be a partner for a civic Bosnia and Herzegovina. At the same time, however, Elvedin himself mentioned that one of the very first post-war SDA dissidents, Haris Silajdžić, was probably goaded into seeking to de-throne Alija Izetbegović (at the time when they also promoted Dodik as the Serb alternative to the war-time leadership). In other words, the West picks its favourites, grooms them and promotes them.

The difference between the soft determinism of someone like Elvedin and the hard one of the SDA loyalists is that the former believes that the Western actors are doing the picking through a sort of give-and-take, such that the Bosniacs can use this to their advantage, whereas the latter group believes that the Bosniacs are the victims of manipulation and a type of neo-colonialism. Indeed, these SDA loyalists believe that the breakout parties, such as the latest People and Justice party, exist only because disgruntled

careerists within the SDA were approached by Western actors (usually the word 'embassies' is used as a metonym) and promised support if they betray the SDA and align themselves with Western interests. This is how the rise of Elmedin Konaković (the leader of People and Justice) is explained by Omer:

> Nobody from the West (or from the East) came here, out of the blue, just to help. In that sense, we do not generally have any friends. […] [The Western actors] seek to make space for themselves and they, essentially, put together a team that will create space for them to exploit the resources of this country. By credits, making us dependent on them. That is understandable, right. However, what is not understandable is that a political option exists here that goes along with that. And we currently have [such a political option]. […] Why do they go along? Because their involvement in politics is exclusively based on personal interest. […] Elmedin Konaković [and the leftist Bosniac politicians] Edin Forto and Nermin Nikšić have, based on personal interests, compromised the entire country.

This is the general SDA accusation put against the dissidents – that they are opportunists who are being instrumentalised by Western actors against the interests of Bosnia and Herzegovina. The diaspora SDA supporter, Halil's, way of putting it was that Konaković would sell his own mother if he could make a good profit. He is accused of doing whatever he is told by his Western patron. What we see here is the patron–client relationship being tied together with the *alafranga/alaturca* tension in Bosniac identity and politics, manifesting itself through this split in the relationship with the West and with Turkey.

Whilst the Bosniacs, in general, find that their only real political option is to operate as an 'ideal client' to the West due to the latter's overwhelming power in the political field, there is one group (soft determinists, generally – but not exclusively – found in the dissidents) who understand the patron to be a positive force for the Bosniacs. The other group (hard determinists, mostly found within the SDA) are those who acknowledge that the Bosniacs have no choice but to operate within a patron–client paradigm, yet they adopt a type of victimhood narrative (not completely unlike the Serbs) *vis-à-vis* the West, seeing it as a neo-colonial force. This makes them look to Turkey as a minor patron who might be able to offer a counterweight to the major one (the West).

This approach to Turkey, the (relative) distancing from the West and the overall appeal to an Islamic identity has opened up the SDA to dissident criticism that they are instrumentalising the Islamic faith and engaging in

vulgar demagoguery for votes. Hilmija, the former high-level SDA functionary-turned-dissident, claimed that he had personally heard SDA politicians making up a narration of the Prophet Muhammad (*hadith*) for his own political gain. In other words, there is a consensus about opportunism and careerism being the guiding lights of Bosniac politics but the specificity of the accusation against one's rival differs depending on whether the loyalist or the dissident is making the accusation. There were instances of more-concrete criticism based on specific points of strategy; for example, Elvedin wants the leadership of the SDA to be multi-ethnic so that the party can become a civic rather than a Bosniac one but such specific suggestions were rare. In essence, the opposition is claiming that the SDA is seeking to monopolise collective truth. Another way to put it is that they seek to monopolise the status of a core nation; a sort of core within the core. The opposition are the spoilers, the challengers, the subverters who question the narrative put forth by the SDA. This SDA narrative amounts to no less than self-aggrandisement or self-consecration based on what the opposition deems to be the false idea that the SDA are the ones who created and defended the BH state and that they are defenders of the Islamic faith.

Like the Serbs and Croats, who spoil the Bosniac narrative about the BH state, the opposition to the SDA spoil their narrative about their relationship to the state and to the Bosniac people. The individual SDA politicians seek to merge their own identities with the Bosniac cause, all for political positions. The counterclaim on the part of the SDA informants is that the opposition cynically pushes a narrative about being idealists in order to usurp the position of their political rivals. The opposition are the ones who are self-consecrating, pretending to have clean hands when they have, in fact, been turned away from the SDA due to their corruption becoming evident.

Since we have now established that the Achilles heel of the Bosniac subfield is understood to be corruption, the question arises as to how to solve this problem. What should be the strategy *there*? As for the dissidents who have gone on to other parties, their answer is obviously to form a new party. Hilmija, Adnan, Sakib, Nikola and Elvedin moved on to other parties. Others, like Nisvet, feel that not only the SDA but also the political field in Bosnia and Herzegovina is rotten to the core, such that abandoning politics and moving to the field of culture or religion in order to focus on moral improvement is better. However, what about the SDA loyalists? Again, all of the SDA informants to whom I spoke conceded that the party had been taken advantage of by careerists and opportunists. For someone like Mahir

(a pro-SDA war veteran and Islamic cleric), this was part of the growing pains associated with the SDA evolving from a mass national movement (gathering all sorts of people, well-intentioned and ill-intentioned both) into a settled, conventional party. He also boiled it down to corruption being firmly rooted in BH society. 'Everyone is passionately against nepotism', he said, 'until their own child needs to get into university or get a job. Then they ask you to help them get ahead. And then afterwards they go back to being passionately against nepotism'. Another example is Armin, a junior SDA politician working in a medium-sized town in Bosnia and Herzegovina. He openly told me that he and his younger colleagues are biding their time, waiting for the local party boss to consider sharing some of the power that he has managed to accumulate for himself over the years. Given that the problem was acknowledged, what solutions and strategies were offered?

For one of the most interesting and illustrative pieces of data in this regard we may again turn to Omer. He considers Bakir Izetbegović to be a personal friend; indeed, their friendship stretches back to before Bakir became active in party politics. He believes that the very reason for Bakir's involvement in the party, against Alija's wishes, was that he was dissatisfied with his father's choice of successor, namely the late Sulejman Tihić. Several of my informants have identified Tihić as one of the main antagonists in the story of SDA corruption. This includes some of the dissidents, like Elvedin, who consider Tihić to have been a Communist who has been guilty of entryism. Other dissidents believe this to be too far-fetched and simplistic an explanation. Nikola, for example, remembers Tihić to have been an entirely uncharismatic person who lacked the ability to dominate the party to the extent that the critics allege. There are also SDA loyalists, such as Mahir, who did not want to indulge in the besmirching of the character of a deceased Muslim and dismissed the allegations. Apart from that, however, the claim that Tihić was instrumental in corrupting the SDA kept popping up and Omer agreed with those informants who stated that Alija's biggest political mistake was to anoint him as his successor.

At any rate, Omer was, at the same time, critical of the way in which Bakir had gone about trying to clean up the party after Tihić's departure, even though he believes that his intentions were pure. The controversial issue that Omer brings up in this regard is also one that keeps coming back in the data, namely the role of Bakir's wife, Sebija. Critics of the SDA point to her involvement in politics as the smoking gun of SDA nepotism. Some of the critics (such as the dissident Elvedin) describe her as a Svengali-like

figure who dominates Bakir and prevents him from reforming the SDA, whereas others (like the dissident, Abdullah) believe that Bakir cannot be exonerated. 'I believe that there was a mix-up at the maternity ward, when Bakir was born', Abdullah told me jokingly, alluding to the difference in character between him and his late father. Whatever the marital dynamics may be, someone like Omer agreed that Sebija's involvement in politics had turned into a problem.

> The biggest, perhaps the only, mistake of Bakir Izetbegović was to let Sebija Izetbegović enter into the politics of the party. You cannot say that about [her position as the general director of] the Clinical Centre [of the University of Sarajevo] considering that, everywhere, she attained [great] results and managed the place. In fact, you can take your hat off there. […] The problem is that she is there because President Izetbegović allowed her to become active in the political organs of the party. […] In one sense, I do understand him considering that she was actually trying to help him because, around Bakir, there were so many wolves that he had to have someone whom he could trust to be [his eyes and ears] in the field and in the lower levels of power and so on. This [proved to be] a double-edged sword, since Sebija is the one who promoted Konaković, who went on to do what he did. So, I don't know how smart or not it is for him … I personally would never have done that. […] Perhaps it was of some help [for him for a while]. But now I doubt that it is of much help. Now it is perhaps a problem. I cannot say much there, it is a personal matter – but the question now is whether there is something that Bakir can do to change this or if Sebija, herself, has to realise that she is no longer providing him with a supporting belt but is suffocating him with it.

This issue has been addressed by others in the party, notably by Bakir himself. In an interview with Radio Sarajevo, he refers to the criticism of Sebija as an expression of misogyny that is part of the Balkan mentality, stating that her political future is a matter for her to decide upon, not him. He adds that, at the end of the day, she was voted in by the electorate. The issue is also addressed by the Women's Association of the SDA, through their Facebook page. For example, they share an article in which Sebija is mentioned as someone who will fight corruption in Sarajevo. They also share a post which highlights what is referred to as the SDA's dedication to promoting women in 'political, public and cultural life'.

In conclusion, both the SDA loyalists and the dissidents portray themselves as the elements within the Bosniac sub-field that are worthy of being the true political heirs of Alija Izetbegović in their capacity as the legitimacy

entrepreneurs who will fight for the BH state. The point of contention is who will deal with the Achilles heel of Bosniac politics: corruption. The criticism from both directions in this regard is essentially one and the same. The dissidents claim that the SDA is corrupt; the loyalist agree but turn the tables on the dissidents by claiming that the dissidents themselves are the corrupt element within the party, those whom Bakir Izetbegović purged. This debate about how to tackle Bosniac corruption overshadows most other discussions about strategy.[78] That being said, there is one issue where the loyalists seek to get an edge over the dissidents, related to the self-perception that the SDA is the political option that is *državotvornost* (i.e. adept at statecraft, as discussed above).

This is particularly clear in the *historijat*, the document in which the history of the party is discussed, where the party's role in the defence of the country is stressed. This is also related to the idea that it is the dissidents who are corrupt, since they will be ready to sell out their country for personal gain. However, this talking-point is warded off by the dissidents who point out that the SDA started out as a Bosniac national movement such that some of those who ended up leaving the party (e.g. Haris Silajdžić and Edhem Bičakčić) were equally involved in the defence of the country. In summary, the sub-Bosniac framing here is as such: the SDA loyalists see themselves as the 'core within the core nation', those who built the BH state and keep fighting to strengthen it and move it towards becoming a state *alafranga*, with the dissidents being spoilers who sacrifice the Bosniac political cause on the altar of self-promotion. The dissidents, on the other hand, see themselves as idealists who expose the SDA for engaging in no less than self-aggrandisement/self-consecration by invoking their role during the war – and they also expose them for engaging in the objectification of the Bosniac political cause by conflating it with themselves. Both of these groups (with one exception within the dissidents) claim that they are the real heirs to Alija Izetbegović.

This, then is the mutual blame game that characterises the Bosniac subfield. Where there is general discussion about strategy, it is more related to the other actors in the field, which brings us to the next section.

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[78] There are, of course, plenty of discussions about economic policy, the rights of the elderly, policies about sports and culture and so on, in the party programme but these issues were generally not highlighted by my informants. Compared to these major existential issues of the survival of the BH state (and the way that Bosniac corruption jeopardises that cause), they are peripheral issues.

Serbs and Croats

In a very general sense, the Bosniac strategy boils down to legitimising the BH state and the idea of a unified political field. This, in concrete terms, is mostly interpreted as moving Bosnia and Herzegovina in the direction of a state *alafranga* with strong symbolic capital (this is what, in the data – for example, in the *historijat* – tends to be referred to as a 'functional and normal state'). We have seen that a major aspect of field theory is the relational nature of strategising such that, in this case, the Bosniac strategy is, to a large degree, composed of interpreting and reacting to what the other field actors are doing.

The BH Serbs and Croats are generally understood to be 'spoilers' of this vision of the state and the field, those who counter the Bosniac legitimising strategy of promoting civic nationalism with their own ethnic version. This is quite clear in the data, from the party programme down to the informants. Let us stay with the *historijat* and see how these spoilers are described there:

> The party affirms European values and standards and membership in Euro-Atlantic integrations, while preserving the traditional values of Bosnian identity. The SDA will continue to advocate strongly for civic society and the rule of law. Aware that the germ of fascism and totalitarianism in Europe – and especially in the Balkans – has never been eradicated, the SDA sees itself at the forefront of anti-fascist forces that oppose all forms of discrimination and totalitarianism. In times to come, the SDA together with other patriotic and democratic forces in Bosnia and Herzegovina will have an opportunity to complete the processes they started 15 years ago.

I have chosen this excerpt because it combines identifying the protagonist (the SDA) and the antagonists (fascistis/totalitarians who oppose European/BH values and standards) and offering an overall strategy by which to counter the antagonists (working together for a civic society with patriotic/democratic forces in the field along with Euro-Atlantic integration). Serbs and Croats are not mentioned here explicitly although it is implied that those who oppose the civic conceptualisation of Bosnia and Herzegovina are fascists and it is understood that Serb and Croat nationalists (spearheaded by Dodik and Čović) are targeted whereas civic-minded non-Bosniacs (such as Željko Komšić) are included in the anti-fascist camp. This is significant because this is an obvious nod to the multicultural ideals of Communist Yugoslavia and it falls neatly in line with Omer's analysis that

the SDA are continuing the work of the Yugoslav Partisans (still a symbol of anti-fascim) in this regard, such that non-Bosniacs who were a part of this movement are more likely to embrace the idea of a state *alafranga*. Elsewhere in the data, this is referred to as 'a pro-BH block'. This consolidation of such a block, gathering together the Bosniacs and the 'Partisan element' found amongst the non-Bosniacs, is therefore a major part of SDA's strategy (according to Izetbegović, as stated in one of the interviews, such a block would amount to about 60% of the BH parliament). We have previously discussed it in the context of the fourth actor in the field, the 'Bosnian' actor. Indeed, turning the SDA itself into the quintessential party of this fourth actor used to be part of the strategy in the early 2000s and dissidents such as my informant, Elvedin, still argue for such measures but, as pointed out by, for example, Naila, this earlier strategy was not feasible for reasons beyond the control of the SDA.[79]

Apart from being referred to as outright fascists (which is a reference to Serb and Croat ethnic nationalism set against the civic nationalism promoted by the Bosniacs), there are various ways in which the Serbs and Croats are identified as what I refer to as field spoilers; there are various ways in which their 'spoiler strategy', based on ethnic nationalism, has been highlighted from the Bosniac 'legitimist' civic nationalist perspective. Tracking all of these ways is beyond the scope of this study but let me offer a few examples. In an open letter written to foreign officials in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bakir Izetbegović states the following:

> I do not need to convince you, in particular, because you can see for yourself every day that the SDA, since its foundation, has pursued a policy that respects the multicultural spirit and reality of Bosnia and Herzegovina and that it is committed to a balance of ethnic and civic principles in the functioning of Bosnia and Herzegovina. On the other hand, [Čović's] HDZ wants the complete dominance of the ethnic principle through so-called 'legitimate representation', which means that only Croats who were voted for by Croatian voters, only Bosniacs who were voted by Bosniac voters etc. can participate in political life. Such a policy would lead to a definitive ethnic division of the country.

In the same letter, Izetbegović points out that Čović is seeking to portray the SDA's vision for a civic Bosnia and Herzegovina as a camouflaged attempt

[79] The understanding being that the Dayton constitutional set-up based on ethnic quotas is such that a civic party alternative is bound to fail and that there are not enough non-Bosniacs willing to join such a party.

at creating an Islamic state. What we see here is a central aspect of the SDA's strategy, one which turns out to be a mirror image of the Croat strategy – being a good client to the Western patron. In other words, the Bosniacs and the Croats are direct rivals for Western patronage. This follows from the logic that the Bosniac field of action is limited due to the client status of the BH successor state-in-the-making. The SDA and the Croats are both courting the favour of and appealing to the democratic sensibilities of the West but they do so by framing the field struggle in different ways and by emphasising different features of the field (even as these two strategies mirror each other). For the Croats, this is done by stressing the need for a system in which the democratic rights of the Croats are safeguarded (what Izetbegović refers to in the letter as 'legitimate representation') and this is the most obviously symbolised by the issue of the Croat member of the presidency currently being voted in by the Bosniacs. Such a strategy is fortified by the accusation that Bosniacs, in their capacity as Muslims, cannot be trusted with being the majority people in a civic state according to the principle of one man, one vote – this would ultimately undermine democracy rather than strengthen it and would also undermine European values in the Balkans, given that these are rooted in Christian values. In other words, the dispute is not over the secular aspects of European values (such as democracy, religious toleration, minority rights and so on) but over the claim that an identity historically rooted in Western Christianity is a necessary condition for such values to exist – and this is something that the Bosniacs lack. This is how the Croat strategy is perceived by the Bosniacs; part of this perception is the idea that the Croats have been successful in getting the current High Representative, the Christian Democrat Christian Schmidt, to do their bidding. The implication is that the *alafranga* pretensions of the Bosniacs are just a cover for their true, underlying *alaturca* identity; they do not really want a civic state, they want to dominate the Croats. The Bosniac reaction to this, i.e. their countermove with regards to getting the West on their side, has been to claim that they are the ones who are the true defenders of European values in Bosnia and Herzegovina rather than the Croats. As we have seen earlier, from Husnija, for example, the Bosniac track record during the war is invoked as proof of this. The fact that the Muslim Bosniacs did not seek to destroy churches at a time when their enemies systematically destroyed mosques and national treasures (such as the UNESCO world heritage site, the Old Bridge in Mostar, destroyed by Croat forces during the war) tends to be highlighted. The Croat strategy or framing is therefore more-or-less mirrored, to the

point that, where the Croats cry Islamism, the Bosniacs cry fascism. Another way of deflecting from the accusation of Islamism is found, again, with Husnija. As we saw earlier, he is very keen to stress the European values of the Bosniacs by tracing them back to their pre-Islamic history. Bosnia and Herzegovina has always been a *refugium hereticum,* as it were, even at a time when the rest of Europe was bogged down in inquisitions. Bosniacs are, in that sense, the quintessential European people, certainly more European than the Croats. Another version of this strategy of courting the West by appealing to their democratic sensibilities consists in taking the Bosniac case for a civic state directly to various European institutions. The general point here is that a major strategy of both the Bosniacs and the Croats is to lobby the West by portraying themselves as more and the other as less European. It is a strategy of framing (demonstrating that one is a better client than one's rival), which entails accepting certain *doxa* (regarding European and Western values and norms), habitus and social skill (knowing how to appeal to Western sensibilities).

This contrasts somewhat with how the field struggle is manifested with regards to the Serbs. The Serbs, to be sure, are also keen to play the *alaturca* card in portraying the Bosniacs as not only crypto-Islamists but also outright terrorists,[80] with the Serbs taking on the role of defenders of Europe. However, Dodik is less inclined to seek the patronage of the West in the way that the Croats do; instead, he turns to Russia (with constant coordination with neighbouring Serbia, in the same way that Čović works with the Croatian government). However, in the game of politics as it is played on the BH political field, this also entails cooperating with the Croats in order to destabilise the field itself. This, in turn, has led to a sort of triple *entente* between the Serbs, Croats and Russians. In one of the interviews I studied, Bakir Izetbegović identifies the common strategy of the Serbs and Croats as one of sabotaging any attempts at making Bosnia and Herzegovina into a functional state, for example by stalling and blocking the smooth running of state affairs as soon as they get the opportunity. In this, they have found a common purpose. 'Čović managed to transfer his personal frustration with Komšić to the Croatian people, then drag Croatia and even Serbia and Russia into it, in order to put pressure on me, on us', he says. In the same interview, Izetbegović describes Čović as 'flirting with' Serbia in this regard. In other interviews, he refers to a Serb–Croat alliance. As an example of this, he refers to Čović's official visit to Banja Luka on the

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[80] See the literature review and the discussion on school textbooks in Republika Srpska.

occasion of the controversial celebration of the founding of Republika Srpska.

> What Čović and Dodik are doing is a peacetime, soft version of what Serbian and Croatian leaders did during the war and what ended up being detrimental to all, especially the BH Croats. The SNSD and HDZ have long cooperated and coordinated on the issue of appointments in state institutions and the judiciary in such a way as to squeeze out the Bosniacs. […] It is a harmful cooperation which, if deepened, can lead to national imbalances, Bosniac dissatisfaction, political vacuums and crises in the functioning of the state.

The main difference between Čović and Dodik is that, whilst the former's strategy is settled on election reform, the latter is more open about his ultimate goal, namely secession. The idea is to contribute to the dysfunctionality of the BH state until it reaches such a point that it proves to be a failed one, whereupon a peaceful 'divorce' becomes the only tenable solution. As discussed above, strategising boils down to establishing your own mental structures as the dominating ones – it is about framing. The Serbs and Croats share a particular framing (based on a common problem definition) which is at odds with the Bosniac one; where the Bosniacs seek to legitimise the idea of a state *alafranga* based on civic nationalism, the Serbs and Croats seek to undermine this attempt through ethnic nationalism and by advancing the claim that the Bosniacs are pushing *alafranga* as a cover for *alaturca*. They challenge the Bosniac core nation by spoiling its nationalising efforts across ethnic lines. They seek to weaken the symbolic power of the BH state because they also recognise the tremendous potential for symbolic violence of the state as the 'authority of authorities'. They seek fragmentation and field-splitting which will eventually lead to the dissolution of the BH state in its current form.

Džaferović, in an interview, comments on this, stating that Dodik is engaging in 'destabilization that can ultimately end in war and Dodik must know that'. The talk of peaceful separation 'is not possible'. In another interview, he states that 'Dodik's policy is based on constantly violating Dayton and undermining stability – and exclusively on spreading hatred and fear'. The Bosniac allegation of Serb–Croat strategising to destabilide the state and the field is summarized in one passage of the previously mentioned open letter by Izetbegović:

> The SDA believes that every people in Bosnia and Herzegovina has the right to be represented politically and to protect their vital national interests but that they have no right to impose their will on others and to block political processes and life in the country with ultimatums and blackmail. In recent years, this is precisely the practice implemented by the SNSD at the state level by blocking institutions and at the level of the Federation of BiH by the HDZ by blocking the implementation of the election results from 2018, due to which the new Government of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina was never formed, by blocking the election of judges of the Constitutional Court or by blocking the House of Peoples of the Federal Parliament, in which 37 laws and more than 150 other documents were suspended without any explanation.

The Serbs, like the Croats, are spoilers who seek to spoil Bosniac state legitimisation efforts by promoting ethnic over civic nationalism in order to make sure that the BH state remains 'unfinished' and finally collapses. He is paving the way for Serb secession. The Croat pretensions are the same but Dodik is more open about it.

Since one of the major ways in which Dodik seeks to attain his goals of secession, according to the Bosniac perception, is intimately tied to global politics and foreign actors, now is the appropriate time to move on to the next section. However, before we do so, let me highlight one last thing. In the theory chapter I mentioned that Brubaker (2011) stresses the effect that an 'external homeland' to a minority group within a state-in-the-making can have on local politics. In the case of Bosnia and Herzegovina, its neighbouring countries essentially play the role of a second patron; for the Croatians, the Croatian state is a minor patron (besides the West) and, for the Serbs, Serbia plays the same role (with Russia being the major patron). The Bosniacs have no second state to lean back upon, which (in their minds) cements their status as a core nation because Bosnia and Herzegovina is their only homeland, such that they treasure it more than actors who have other nation-states to call their own. This being said, however, the Bosniacs do have something akin to a second patron – Turkey. This, again, offers us a segway to the next section.

Foreign Actors – the West and the Rest

In this section I discuss the outside actors on the BH field. Since the neighbouring Serbian and Croatian states are generally understood to be the (lesser) patrons of the BH Serbs and BH Croats respectively, a discussion about their role would be redundant here, as I have already discussed these

actors in the previous section. My focus will, instead, be on the major actors identified in the data, namely the West (the EU and US), Russia and Turkey.

It is more or less impossible to underestimate the role of the Western actor on the BH political field since the field of action and therefore the strategic possibilities of the internal actors is dependent on the role played by the Western actor who oversees and regulates the field. This is why I have referred to their relationship with the Bosniacs as a patron–client relationship. This is manifested by the strategy of the Bosniacs being very much focused on lobbying the West. The same is the case with the Croats, as the preceding discussion has shown. Whilst we also saw that the Serbs are less inclined to lobby the West in favour of seeking the support of Russia, their field of action is, nevertheless, very much dependent on the West since, even though they are not as interested in courting their favour as the Bosniacs and the Croats are, they still need to develop their strategy with the overwhelming Western presence taken into account. Their relationship to the West is not a patron–client one but, rather, one of coercive dependency through which they manœuvre reluctantly. This is the most obvious when it comes to their plans for secession.

My informants generally agree that, if it had not been for the war in Ukraine, a war might have broken out in Bosnia and Herzegovina over the issue of Serb secession. Dino, for example, the SDA functionary who is a war veteran and lives near the border with Republika Srpska, tells me that he noticed increased activities with regards to military-style training in the sports clubs in that part of the country prior to the war in Ukraine, with a diminishment afterwards. However, this idea about the future of Bosnia and Herzegovina hinging on the West and Russia is openly espoused by the SDA leadership. Bakir Izetbegović's open proclamations mirror the narrative that I found from my informants, including most of the dissidents. Izetbegović himself stated that, if Ukraine falls, then Serbia will be emboldened in its Greater Serbia aspirations. This is a clear example of what Fligstein and McAdam (2012) refer to as ripple effects from related fields and is one of their major contributions to Bourdieu's theory, which does not focus on the relationship between fields which relate to each other. This is especially the case for the BH field, which is essentially a playground for outside actors, where the state-in-the-making is only nominally sovereign. The general understanding amongst the Bosniacs is that Serb aspirations stand and fall with the fortunes of Russia *vis-à-vis* the West and that the Bosniacs – and indeed the local people on the ground – have very little say in the

matter. This is why one of the major strategic goals of the SDA is for Bosnia and Herzegovina to join NATO, as also stated in their political programme. This is also why one of the major strategic goals of Dodik is to prevent Bosnia and Herzegovina from joining NATO. Izetbegović:

> Russia's influence is growing, it is increasingly one-sided and, on the question of NATO integration, it is opposed to our strategic commitments, laws and adopted documents. Therefore, Russia directly interferes in the internal affairs of Bosnia and Herzegovina. We do not need a crisis in relations with Russia, we all respect that great country and we expect it to respect us.

This issue demonstrates some of the complexities and intersectionality with regards to the SDA's geopolitical positioning. For example, whilst it is generally acknowledged that, even though China's current presence in the Balkans is not overtly political in nature (dissident Elvedin, who has had quite a few business dealings with them, considers them to be 'very correct' in how they approach the different ethnic groups in Bosnia and Herzegovina), it is also understood that they are allied to Russia. Nevertheless, within this group of allies we also find Iran. This is problematic for the SDA which, on the one hand, acknowledges the help that Iran provided to Bosnia and Herzegovina during the war (mostly in the form of arms) and cherishes their friendship;[81] on the other hand, they are wary of their relationship to Russia. Whilst this is the case with Iran, Izetbegović mentioned that one of the reasons why he wants to strengthen Bosnia and Herzegovina's relationship to another friendly Muslim country, Turkey, is because they might help in joining NATO. It would therefore be too simplistic to say that the SDA are oriented to either the West or to the Muslim world; however, it is very much the case that they understand the Western actor to be the most powerful one and that their overtures to the Muslim world seem to be mostly rhetorical in comparison to their commitment to joining NATO and the EU. For example, much of Naila's work as a politician has consisted in seeking to lobby the West by making the issue of a non-civic system in Bosnia and Herzegovina one of human rights and taking the matter to the Council of Europe. There is no such expectation about the Muslim countries being able to make concrete changes to the constitutional arrangement.

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[81] For example, the SDA Women's Association Facebook group shared a post in which they encouraged their followers to celebrate the Quds Day, instituted by Khomeini.

The major divergence of opinion in the data with regards to how the Bosniacs should position themselves concerns how much one should be flirting with the likes of Turkey. Here, again, we have the issue of the wavering between *alafranga* and *alaturca*, with the Turks as a possible quasi-alternative to the Western patron. Whilst everyone agrees that an alliance with the US and the EU is the default position, there is some discussion about the degree to which we can expect a new world order to emerge, such that the overwhelming influence and power of the West might become a thing of the past. Someone like the SDA politician, Alem, will even say that the Bosniacs might consider working with Russia but this is an outlier – the general tendency is for the informants to highlight Turkey. The official documents such as the political programme and the public proncouncements are quite generic in this regard, with the basic idea being that the SDA wants to be friends with both the West and the East. For example, this is what Izetbegović has to say:

> As long as the sovereignty of Bosnia and Herzegovina is respected, there will be no problems with anyone, Russia, Turkey, Serbia, Croatia... Turkey supports everything that is important for Bosnia and Herzegovina, everything that stabilises us, it does not interfere in our internal affairs, respects our decisions. Of course, [Turkey] is the closest to the Bosniacs but she always tries to ensure that everyone benefits from her support.

This is an expression of the *alafranga/alaturca* tension which is here resolved or, rather, avoided by a cop-out: a simple nod to both aspects of that identity.

As for the informants, some are quite enthusiastic about working with Turkey whilst others (found mostly but not exclusively amongst the dissidents) are more cynical, pointing out that Turkey's interests in the Balkans are as self-centred as those of the West. Dissident Nisvet, for example, makes his case by invoking the historical uprisings against the Ottoman Turks, led by the Bosniac Husein-kapetan Gradaščević .

> It is nice to speak of Ottoman Turkey. But if we speak about today's Turkey. Yes, all the credit to them, they did help out [during the war]. Women would take off their jewellery [and donate it to the war effort in] Bosnia. We wouldn't have been able to defend ourselves [without Turkey's help] considering how expensive everything was during that time. But we see now [that they aren't investing in Bosnia]. But the Turks aren't to blame! I am not trying to denigrate them. They don't have anyone to [do business] with.

Elsewhere he mentions that the Bosniacs should not look to Turkey as its patron and that it would be wiser to seek to learn how to cooperate with the neighbouring Croats and Serbs rather than to put one's hopes in Turkey. However, the reason why I have dubbed this relationship to Turkey as a mere quasi-alternative is because it is quite clearly the case that, even with this (mostly sentimental) approach to Turkey, the Bosniacs have clearly settled upon the idea that their destiny is tied to the BH state and that the destiny of the BH state is (at least currently) very much tied to the West, not least because it is a *de facto* Western protectorate. As such, the main Bosniac strategy consists in lobbying the West, making use of *doxa* and habitus in order to prove their 'ideal client' status. The main antagonist in the story of outside actors is Russia, as it chronically supports the Serbs in their role as 'spoilers'. Turkey is mostly viewed as a sympathetic but ultimately benign rather than decisive outside actor.

Conclusion: The Bosniac Framing of the Strategic Struggle

Nowhere, perhaps, is the issue of the Bosniac framing as crucial as it is here; a major aspect of the Bosniac strategy in the field consists in transferring their framing of the issues relevant to the BH political field over to the Western actor. In other words, one of the major tasks of the Bosniacs as legitimacy entrepreneurs is to convince the Western actor to adopt the Bosniac framing of the BH political field and state and tied to this is the idea that they play the role of an ideal client to the West. This is what I have referred to as the lobbying strategy. This follows from the understanding that the Bosniacs – and indeed all of the other actors in the field – are very much limited in their field of action given that the Western outside actor is the ultimate arbiter of power. Even the idea of promoting civic nationalism by creating a pro-BH block is understood to be limited in its potential given the structural limitations in the field (with these limitations being imposed by the West, through the Dayton Accords).

The Bosniac framing is based on the idea that their conceptualisation of the BH political field, society and state is the quintessentially European one, fully in line with European values of a democratic society, according to the principle of one man, one vote. European countries would never, it is claimed, accept the idea of a constitutional system according to ethnic quotas, so why should this be acceptable for Bosnia and Herzegovina? In their efforts to get this point across, they have taken the issue to the European council. Also as a part of this effort to equate their cause with Euro-

pean values, they are outspoken about wanting to join the EU and NATO. To put it differently, the Bosniac claim is that their aspirations towards a state *alafranga* is completely in line with their ideal client status, since such a state complies with Western norms and values. What is more, to couch this in theoretical terms, they have accepted the necessary *doxa* and mastered the necessary habitus in order for their aspirations to receive full Western support. The fact that this support is not as unequivocal as they would like, i.e. the fact that these necessary conditions prove not to be sufficient, is met with frustration.

The main rivals of the Bosniacs in this struggle to get the Western actor on their side are the Croats, who lean back upon their Catholic identity in their own lobbying efforts; from a Bosniac perspective, they have been successful in getting the OHR (currently headed by a Christian Democrat) on their side. The fact that the Bosniacs are predominantly Muslim is understood to be a disadvantage in this regard, which is why friendly relationships with the likes of Turkey and, to a lesser extent, Iran, are seen as necessary as a balancing measure to their efforts to get the West on their side. This is where the *alaturca* aspects of Bosniac identity come to the fore in their relationships with these foreign actors and where the claim of being ideal clients to the Western patron starts to look a little worn at the edges.

The other rivals are, of course, the BH Serbs, who are seen to be aligned with Russia and whose interactions with the Western actor are based on coercive dependency. The Bosniac strategy with regards to the Serbs is therefore to double down on gaining the favour of the West by framing the issue as one between a Western block and a Russian block, with the Bosniacs belonging to the former and the Serbs to the latter. The Serbs are portrayed as a political actor in the field that is hostile to the EU. SDA politician Šefik Džaferović articulated this strategy of lobbying the EU in the context of hoping for sanctions against Dodik:

> I expect multilateral action, which will include all those interested in preserving the Dayton Peace Agreement, including the members of the European Union, especially those who are witnesses to the Dayton Peace Agreement. Given that the EU is a witness to the Dayton Agreement, as well as that the Council of the EU and the European Commission participate in the Peace Implementation Council, the EU's obligation is to adequately protect this agreement, which is an existential interest for the European Union itself. Brussels has taken a lenient attitude in some previous situations and this has not proved to be effective. Moreover, this is exactly what encouraged the

> destructive policies from the Republika Srpska entity, whereby they became convinced that, if they were brazen enough, they could break the EU.

As I stated earlier, the struggle in the field is essentially one of competing framings. The Bosniacs perceive themselves to be the core nation, champions of civic nationalism, with the antagonists being the challengers (Serbs and Croats) who confront the Bosniacs with their ethnic nationalism with which they seek to keep the BH state un-finished. This is because, for the Serbs and Croats, the Bosniac efforts at creating a civic state will *de facto* end up as a manifestation of Bosniac ethnic nationalism whereby they dominate the other two constituent peoples. It is not a state *alafranga* at all, it is a state *alaturca* – or a state *alafranga* in service of *alaturca*. Again, the Croats and Serbs are not mere spoilers and challengers; it could be argued that they play the role of a meta-meta sociological analyst as described by Bourdieu, who deconstructs the BH state and recognises (and resists) its potential for symbolic violence. Again, it is a question of framing.

For the Bosniacs, the idea of being in a chronic state of supplication *vis-à-vis* the West, reduced to the inferior position in a patron–client relationship, is not ideal. The hope is that, some day, through these strategic efforts, the BH state will become 'finished', i.e. it will become a 'normal and functional' state *alafranga*, with real sovereignty and a unified field where the other actors are less capable of seeking to divide and fragment it. Until then, the strategy of lobbying the West remains the supreme one.

Finally, we have also seen how all three main actors in the field perpetuate a type of victimhood narrative as part of their framing, which confirms what has been discussed in the literature. For the Bosniacs, they are victims of internal actors who seek to keep them from establishing a state *alafranga*, whereas the Western patron is seen as not rewarding their 'ideal clientage' with such a state. The Serbs and Croats, on the other hand, are victims of the Bosniacs, who want to be politically dominant through the capital, which they can monopolise through the state *alafranga*.

CHAPTER 10

Conclusions

In the introduction to this study, I posed a central question:

How have the political strategies and interactions of the Party of Democratic Action (SDA), as a key Bosniac political actor, with other influential political actors, shaped Bosnia and Herzegovina's persistent status as a disintegrated post-war nation-state from 1995 to 2022?

This was broken down into two follow-up questions: How do SDA activists (including supporters-turned-dissidents) conceptualise the post-war political situation and the position of the Bosniac people (and the SDA) within that context? Which actors are understood to be the SDA's allies and adversaries and how is their positioning within BH political life understood?

I have sought to answer these questions by mapping out the BH political field itself (i.e. identifying the main actors) and describing (using political field theory) how the SDA positions itself against these other actors. This means that I have sought to understand how its activists conceptualise these other actors and how they relate to them strategically. I have also sought to understand how this conceptualisation reflects back upon their own self-understanding as a political actor and how this, in turn, reflects upon their understanding of the field itself and the game of politics played within it. All this was done with a view to gaining a broader understanding of the BH political field (and its fragmented nature) and the BH state (and its unfinished status).

What follows is a summary of my results, with a few final reflections about my conclusions.

Mapping out the BH Political Field

To understand the dynamics of Bosnia and Herzegovina's post-war political landscape, this study maps the political field with the SDA at its centre, a methodological choice driven by the empirical focus on SDA activists'

perspectives. This centrality mirrors the SDA's understanding of the Bosniacs in general and themselves in particular as the incumbent and core-nation actor within the BH political field.

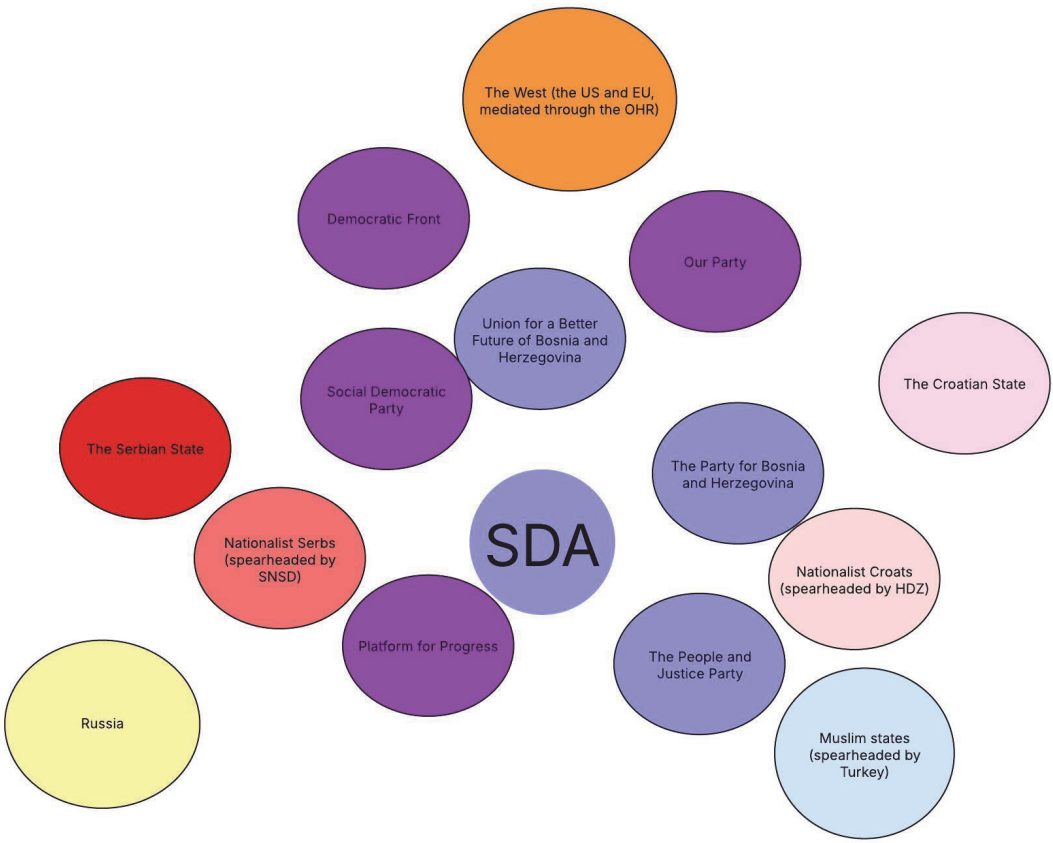

Figure 1. A visualisation of the fragmented BH political field (from the SDA vantage point)

According to the SDA perspective, the Bosniacs are the ones tasked with the mission to drive cross-ethnic nationalisation through a form of civic nationalism aimed at legitimising the BH state. In this context, they frame themselves as the political representatives of the Bosniacs, the bearers of *državotvornost*, a state-building capability central to their self-understanding as stewards of Bosnia and Herzegovina's statehood. This self-perception is evidenced by their claimed accomplishments, which they view as pivotal to the state's formation and persistence within a contested field.

My informants emphasise the SDA's role in creating the BH state through organising the 1992 referendum on independence, a foundational act of nationalisation that, in their narrative, established BH's sovereignty, with the Bosniacs as incumbents leading the charge. During the war, the SDA's leadership in defending the country against external aggressors preserved the state's territorial integrity, reinforcing their symbolic capital as defenders of the nation. Post-war, while holding power during significant periods,[82] the SDA's members see themselves as having upheld state institutions, ensuring their functionality and the overall economic viability of the country within the Dayton Agreement's fragmented framework.

They see themselves working on behalf of the Bosniacs through nationalising policies, such as advocating for measures that confer meta-power status to the BH state (from the current holder, the West). These efforts aim to elevate the state's legitimacy and autonomy within the political field, positioning it as a meta-power capable of over-riding ethnic divisions. Bosniac critics of the party accuse the SDA of what amounts to self-aggrandisement; their political posturing camouflages their true motives: self-interest. These critics also argue that the SDA has failed in working with the Western meta-power in the field and that, as SDA dissidents who have moved on to form splinter parties, they could do a better job of transferring meta-power status over to the Bosnian state through cultivating the patron–client relationship with the West. These splinter parties include the 'People and Justice Party', the 'Party for Bosnia and Herzegovina' and the 'Union for a Better Future for Bosnia and Herzegovina'.

This intra-Bosniac division is one of the challenges faced by the SDA in its pursuit of turning Bosnia and Herzegovina into a unified, civic nation-state – or what I have referred to as a state *alafranga*. Several intra-Bosniac splits, driven by ideological and leadership disputes, have fragmented Bosniac political unity, leading to the formation of new parties. This internal fragmentation disrupts the SDA's accumulation of political capital, diminishing their capacity to lead cross-ethnic nationalisation as incumbents. Apart from the splinter parties mentioned above, the main rivals to the SDA in this regard are to be found in the civic-minded parties such as the Social Democrats, 'Our Party', the 'Platform for Progress' and the 'Democratic Front'.

The other main challenge to Bosniac and SDA institutional stewardship, they argue, is represented by their main rivals in the field: the Bosnian Serb

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[82] See Appendix B.

and Bosnian Croat spoilers, who counter Bosniac civic nationalism with an ethnic nationalism of their own. These are spearheaded by the 'Alliance of Independent Social Democrats' (SNSD) in the case of the Bosnian Serbs and the 'Croatian Democratic Union' (HDZ) in the case of the Bosnian Croats. They, in turn, are supported by neighbouring Serbia and Croatia. The Bosnian Serbs and Bosnian Croats operate as meta-analysts, contesting the BH state's symbolic capital and undermining the SDA's legitimacy as representatives of a unified BH.

This struggle between the SDA and their Bosnian Serb and Bosnian Croat actors fragments the political field, thwarting the SDA's vision of a centralised nation-state. The SDA struggles to construct a unified national identity that transcends ethnic divisions. Their promotion of civic nationalism, intended to foster cross-ethnic unity, is often perceived as Bosniac-centric. The blurred line between civic and ethnic nationalism, as discussed by Calhoun (2007), complicates the SDA's narrative-building – its nationalising narratives fail to resonate across the field, hindering the creation of a cohesive national identity.

Beyond Serbia and Croatia, external state powers further complicate the SDA's state-building agenda. These actors, acting as external field influencers, dilute the SDA's autonomy and shift meta-power dynamics away from the BH state. The Western actor, for example, takes on the role as the true meta-power in the field, whereas Russia supports its Serb rivals within it. Even Turkey, which several of my informants understand to be a Bosniac ally, diminishes the symbolic power of the BH state by revealing its fragility and its dependency on foreigners. This is reinforced by BH's status as a nation-state in the making, with weak institutions susceptible to corruption and ethnic patronage-based control. The Dayton Agreement entrenches ethnic divisions through structures like the ethnic quotas. This temporal aspect of state-building limits the SDA's capacity to unify the political field under a single national identity.

This is a general overview of the field, a sort of mapping out of the main actors and how they position themselves against each other. What follows is a discussion about some of the intricacies of the actor relationships and how these bear upon the field itself.

The BH State and the Bosniac Patron–Client Relationship with the West

Bosnia and Herzegovina's post-war political landscape reveals a stark contrast between the aspirations of the Bosniac-led SDA and the historical trajectories of Western states upon which they want to model Bosnia and Herzegovina. My informants envision a centralised, stable, unitary state with robust symbolic capital, capable of unifying a fragmented political field and asserting itself as the meta-power – a role akin to that of a mature Western nation-state like Pierre Bourdieu's France. However, Bosnia and Herzegovina's status as a newly emergent, post-conflict state, burdened by ethnic divisions and a weak sovereignty, stands in sharp opposition to the centuries-long processes of nation- and state-building that have endowed Western states with their symbolic authority. Becoming a meta-power is a temporal achievement. Western states' symbolic capital emerged from centuries of centralisation, suppression and institutionalisation processes. Bosnia and Herzegovina's newly emergent status as a state – one beset by ethnic fragmentation and external dependency, an unfinished state – renders it unable to wield the symbolic violence that has historically been capable of transforming diverse populations into cohesive nations. Unlike France, where internal consolidation preceded external strength, Bosnia and Herzegovina's field remains contested both within and without.

My informants understand Bosnia and Herzegovina to be a protectorate of the West (which primarily means the US, along with the EU). The real meta-power in the field is understood to be the West, rather than the BH state. The Western actor designed the current dysfunctional constitutional set-up and is the one with the power to fix it; the Western actor is the ultimate arbiter of the destiny of the BH state. In other European political fields, where the state is 'finished', it makes sense for the actors to work toward getting access to the capital of the state, in particular the symbolic capital. However, in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the local actors' best bet is to influence the *de facto* meta-power, the West, in the desired direction. For my informants, this desired direction is clear: to steer Bosnia and Herzegovina into becoming a state *alafranga* where the meta-power now invested in the West gets transferred to the state.

It is clear from the data that this strategy (which I have referred to as the 'ideal client' strategy) is the one that both the SDA and its splinter parties have adopted, whereby they position themselves in the field in such a way that the outside Western actor will recognise them as and reward them for

being the one internal actor whose vision for the country is the most congruent with Western norms and values. Indeed, my informants understand the Bosniacs to be living up to this role as the ideal client for the West to such a degree that they sometimes find themselves incredulous in the face of the patron's failure to reward them. This leads to a form of resentment, whereby dignity capital is used as a sort of coping mechanism.

I must, of course, linger a bit on what is meant by a 'state *alafranga*', which is the same as a 'finished' state or, as my informants like to call it, a 'functional' state. There are two aspects to the state *alafranga* – one which could be called exoteric and one esoteric. The exoteric aspects are the ones that are generally found in the data. Here, the goal is a state that is democratic, secular and based on the idea of civic citizenship, meaning that voting is done on the principle of one person, one vote, rather than the idea of ethnic quotas. In concrete terms, this would mean that the president of the country would be the person – of any ethnicity – with the most votes, as opposed to having the office rotate between a Bosniac, a Serb and a Croat to the exclusion of other minorities. It would also mean, in the long run, the dissolution of the two ethnic-based entities with their own parliaments and presidencies, which contribute to the current tumorous, byzantine situation.

For my informants, this strengthening of the BH state, making it more streamlined and functional, represents the Gordian knot that is able to solve all of the main problems related to the dysfunctionality of the political system which manifests itself through a divided political field. The logic goes that, since the Western countries would not tolerate a political system based on the idea of ethnic division (amounting to ethnic discrimination) for themselves, they should, in theory, be on board with moving Bosnia and Herzegovina in the direction of a civic, Western system, a system *alafranga*.

However, there are other aspects to the state *alafranga*, esoteric ones that are not directly invoked by my informants – these are the ones that might explain why the Western actor's approach to the issue in practice differs from how my informants believe that it should manifest itself. It might also explain why the Serbs and the Croats resist such a development. By esoteric I am referring to those aspects of the state that are treated in the theoretical literature discussed in this work, more specifically those aspects of the state as meta-power discussed by Bourdieu. He explained how political actors in the field seek to gain the powers invested in the state due to the various forms of capital that this power unleashes.

The main form of capital is symbolic capital which, if used to its full potential, might lead to symbolic violence. This form of capital offers one

the power to impose one's own framing on others, turning it into something universal. The implication of this is that if the Bosniacs, in their capacity as a relative majority in the country, do manage to accrue the capital that is associated with the state, then they will be able to inflict symbolic violence upon the other constituent peoples by imposing their own framing upon the entire populace (through education and other means that are related to the forms of capital inherent to state power). My informants perceive that the other major actors in the field, from the Bosnian Serbs and Bosnian Croats to the Western actor, do not trust the Bosniac claim that they want a civic state. There is a suspicion that they will seek to use the symbolic capital associated with the state in order to impose Bosniac ethnic nationalism.

The problem for the Bosniacs is that the BH state (being an unfinished successor-state with very limited sovereignty) does not currently enjoy the status of meta-power that the French state does, which Bourdieu uses as a template for his analysis. This, then, is what I mean when I say that my informants want a state *alafranga*. They want the meta-power state analysed by Bourdieu, which perhaps explains why the Serbs and the Croats resist this Bosniac aspiration; they are not necessarily opposed to the exoteric aspects, the idea of civic nationalism and democracy according the principle of one man, one vote *per se* but they understand something about the esoteric ones, meaning the meta-power of the state and its capacity for symbolic violence, even if they do not express their resistance using Bourdieu's terminology.

This perhaps also explains why the Western actor is reluctant to go along with the political vision espoused by my informants, even though these aspirations for the state *alafranga* agree with Western norms and values with regards to its exoteric aspects; the esoteric aspects of the state are such that giving unequal access to state power to only one actor in a country with the demographic make-up of Bosnia and Herzegovina would automatically rupture a fragile ethno-political eco-system. Again, we see that this is a question of framing. Let us, therefore, delve a bit deeper into how to understand and compare these different framings by looking at the three actors and their roles in the field.

Core Nation or Corrupt Nation?

I have used different theoretical terms to describe the Bosniacs (as understood by my informants): they are the incumbents of the field, the legi-

timacy entrepreneurs who want to legitimise the BH state by engaging in a cross-ethnic nationalising project. They believe that, for various reasons, which includes the fact that they do not have an alternative nation-state in contrast to the Serbs and Croats, are more invested into the BH state and more concerned about its preservation. This state-building mission is something that they fought for with their lives during the war in the 1990s but this was preceded by a long political struggle.

In short, my informants understand the Bosniacs to be the core nation of Bosnia and Herzegovina. The two most prominent ways in which they take on the responsibility of a core nation is through petitioning their Western patron to allow the transfer of meta-power status over from the patron to the BH state; the second way is through the promotion of civic nationalism. We have already discussed the former, so let us now focus a bit on the latter.

For my informants, the proof in the pudding with regard to their core-nation status is the notion that they are willing to set aside their own petty nationalist concerns in favour of creating a civic society which is inclusive of all ethnic groups. For example, they would gladly abolish the three-presidency system in favour of one which is based on the principle of one man, one vote – whereby a single president is voted into office, even if that president were to be a non-Bosniac (such as Željko Komšić). Indeed, the Bosniacs sacrificed their lives for such a civic conception of a BH republic during the 1990s and are now working to establish it through peaceful means.

As a part of this they promote the idea of an inclusive civic, 'Bosnian' political actor that supersedes the current three constituent peoples – which is not only discriminatory against minorities such as the Roma and the Jews but does not take into account the fact that there are people from mixed marriages (such as, again, Željko Komšić, who is half-Croat and half-Serb and married to a Bosniac woman) who do not fit into any of these categories. Again, however, for the Croat and Serb actors in the field, the matter is not as simple as accepting Bosniac framing at face value. The Bosniac framing is that this proposed 'Bosnian' actor legitimises the civic state *alafranga* across ethnic lines.

However, if one adopts a different, non-Bosniac framing, it is easy to see how this fourth political actor very conveniently serves Bosniac interests in their struggle to attain all the esoteric features of the state *alafranga*. In other words, it is easy to see how civic 'state nationalism', which is tied to a supposed status of core nation, is understood as a vehicle for Bosniac nationalism, given that the Bosniacs understand Bosnia and Herzegovina to be their national home which safeguards their national interests and in

which they form a relative majority. From this non-Bosniac framing perspective, 'Bosnian' and Bosniac nationalism are almost indistinguishable not only linguistically but also in their essence. I shall be discussing how to understand non-Bosniac framing in the section below but the point here is that the 'core-nation status' is obviously something that is part of the Bosniac framing and can be challenged through alternative framings.

However, there is also another issue that causes problems to attempts to legitimise the idea of civic nationalism. Several of the studies that I have looked at in my literature review point out that there is a divide within the Bosniac community with regards to how much emphasis to put on Islam as a constituent element of Bosniac identity. This discussion is at its most pronounced in Kriještorac (2022) and Mujanović (2023), with the former, as we have seen, putting a bit more emphasis on the religious aspects of Bosniac identity than the latter but with both agreeing that Bosniacs, in general, have settled upon working politically to uphold a secular BH state and have made this a major aspect of their national identity. This cultural/religious divide within the Bosniacs has been transposed, to use Eyal's (2005) terminology, from the social space to the political field, such that we have historically had the divide between the Mladi Muslimani and the Bosniac Communists, followed by the post-independence divide between the SDA and the SDP (and their respective offshoots). Again, however, both camps understand Bosnia and Herzegovina to be a sort of national home – and it is significant that both Mujanović and Kriještorac agree that it is difficult to distinguish civic 'Bosnian' nationalism from ethnic 'Bosniac' nationalism. Calhoun (2007) has also problematised this dichotomous division of ethnic and civic nationalism.

Given that I have only looked at the SDA and its offshoots in this study, I have not been able to determine what sort of comparative findings an empirical investigation into more pronouncedly leftist parties would yield but I have been able to show that this divide within the Bosniac community is nevertheless relevant to how the Bosniacs operate within the political field as a whole.

I have chosen to categorise this divide under what I refer to as *alafranga/alaturca* tension, which manifests itself in different ways politically. The most fundamental way in which it does this is through a clear and unequivocal Bosniac affirmation that the BH state should be one that is secular and democratic according to Western standards (i.e. the exoteric aspects of the *alafranga* state) which is met with the response from other actors (Westerners, Serbs and Croats) that this affirmation is not as clear

and unequivocal as the Bosniacs seem to think; as with the seemingly *alafranga* clocktower in Sarajevo, a closer look reveals that there might be some *alaturca* in there after all. My informants argue that the Bosniacs have decidedly settled upon the idea of a democratic, secular state, as opposed to an Islamic one – or one in which non-Muslims are subjected to discriminatory policies *vis-à-vis* Muslims.

This does not mean that Islam is absent from Bosniac politics but that appeals to Islam tend generally to be made within the context of securing the right for Muslims to practice their religion freely or in the context of quite generic moralistic anti-corruption sentiments, i.e. nothing that would necessarily have to contradict the idea of a secular state. This includes social issues, where religious considerations have influenced certain policy stances – related to, for example, the gay-pride parade in Sarajevo – but these policy stances are articulated as generically conservative ones, within the paradigm of a secular state. One could perhaps call this a Muslim version of continental Christian Democracy, especially given the SDA's association with the EPP. Yet again, however, for the non-Bosniac actors, it is not as simple as accepting the Bosniac framing at face value.

As we have seen, struggle in the political field consists, to a large degree, of competing framings, such that political work in the field means seeking to make your framing prevail over that of your rivals; the idea that the Bosniacs are champions of Western-style democracy and secularism is understood by their rivals to be a part of their framing strategy, which can and should be approached critically. However, it is clear that several of my informants feel that the Bosniac framing is not only critically assessed but, as it were, dismissed out of hand due to anti-Muslim prejudice. There can be no Muslim version of Christian Democracy and Muslims cannot be trusted to run a democratic state in Europe. The West has this *a priori* suspicion about the Bosniacs which the Croats and Serbs exploit by suggesting or overtly claiming that the Bosniacs want to create an Islamic state or use a secular BH state as an instrument of domination over Christians, given that they will enjoy a position of relative majority.

What we see here is that all three major actors in the field – the Bosniacs, the Serbs and the Croats – make a victimhood narrative into a crucial part of their framing, as the literature review also showed. The Serbs and the Christians are the victims of Muslims and the Bosniacs are the victims of Christians. Indeed, some of my informants see the West as a neo-colonial presence in their country. Yet even those who *do* see the West as a more positive presence express disappointment with their timidity in allowing for

the establishment of a state *alafranga*. This is yet another important aspect of the *alafranga/alaturca* tension: my SDA informants sense that, even if they wholeheartedly opt for the *alafranga*, they will never be able to fully escape the *alaturca*; there will be lingering suspicions about crypto-Islamism. An underlying assumption here is that Muslims should be encouraged by the West in their embrace of *alafranga* over *alaturca* rather than being pushed away.

This victimhood aspect of the framing is not meant to lead to defeatism; the idea is to use it as a springboard for political action in the field. The empirical data suggest that there are two fundamental ways in which this is done (what could be understood as two competing framings), both of which are related to the *alafranga/alaturca* tension: either through seeking to alleviate Western fears about crypto-Islamism by doubling-down on the embrace of *alafranga* (this approach is mostly present amongst SDA dissidents) or through a sort of reclaiming of agency which involves a renegotiation of the *alaturca*, the most obviously manifested through political overtures to Turkey and the wider Muslim world and through socially conservative policies that might be objectionable to Western observers (mostly present amongst SDA loyalists).

In between these two positions there is also some ambivalence about how to deal with this *alafranga/alaturca* tension, perhaps the most obviously expressed in the official party documents which state that the Bosniacs want to be friends with the West as well as the Muslim world. All of this suggests that there is some ambivalence to the 'ideal client' strategy: the Bosniacs agree that the Western patron is the meta-power in the field although some of them adopt this strategy begrudgingly and explore ways to manœuvre beyond it by looking to Turkey as a counterweight.

Finally, there is one major problem that is highlighted in the data which tarnishes the self-image as a core nation. This is the understanding that much of the rhetoric about defending and preserving the BH state, promoting an inclusive form of civic nationalism which legitimises the state and these other forms of strategies and measures which are associated with the idea of core-nation status, are just that – mere rhetoric. This self-serving core-nation rhetoric serves to camouflage the fact that Bosniacs are more interested in using the BH state for their own selfish purposes. They are, first and foremost, careerists – the Bosniacs are not a core nation but, rather, a corrupt nation. Of course, this assessment is qualified by the proviso that it applies to one's political rivals; in other words, it is part of intra-Bosniac field polemics where SDA dissidents accuse their former party of

being corrupt beyond redemption and the loyalists accuse the breakout parties of being the refuge of corrupt politicians who were purged from the party. Generalisations about corrupt Bosniacs in the data serve mainly as hyperbole but there is agreement about it being a major problem which stands in the way of the strategic goals of the Bosniacs within the political field. The prime example of this is the neglect of Republika Srpska by Bosniac politicians in the Federation who cannot expect to gain votes by focusing on a part of the country that does not include their electorate.

The Serbs and Croats: Spoilers or Meta-Analysts?

Given that the SDA has taken on the role of incumbents and legitimacy entrepreneurs on behalf of the Bosniacs and sees itself as a sort of core nation (whether or not that is used as a cover for individual career ambition on the part of Bosniac politicians), an obvious conclusion would be that its local Serb and Croat rivals are the challengers or, indeed, the spoilers who seek to counteract Bosniac attempts at legitimising the state. One way in which they do this is to set ethnic nationalism against the Bosniac civic version but it is, ultimately, through seeking to sabotage the attempts at turning the unfinished BH state into a finished one, a state alafranga, that they resist their Bosniac rivals.

My findings suggest a deeper dynamic at play. By resisting efforts to transform the state into a potent instrument of doxic power and symbolic violence wielded by a rival actor, Bosnian Serb and Bosnian Croat political actors, wittingly or unwittingly, assume a role akin to Bourdieu's meta-analyst, typically assigned to the sociologist. Unlike sociologists, who employ scientific methods to dissect state power, these actors adopt political strategies to challenge the state's potential for Bosniac domination, driven by their own ethnic and political interests. When Bosniac politicians assert that they do not intend to use the state as an instrument of dominance over other ethnic groups, Serbs and Croats recognise that the modern state *alafranga*, by its very structure and the symbolic capital inherent to it, is designed to dominate its citizenry – an intrinsic purpose embedded in its construction. This is the sense in which they take on the role of meta-analyst.

A state *alafranga* in the hands of the Bosniacs (through their numerical majority) means that Bosniac framing is universalised through the education system and through the various symbolic forms of violence that are inflicted upon non-Bosniacs. Of course, the Croats and Serbs do not use the same terminology that Bourdieu does (or that I do when I speak of the

esoteric and the exoteric aspects of the state *alafranga*) but, when Dragan Čović says that a civic state is a state in which Bosniacs will dominate (or when he more crudely puts it that such a state is a *de facto* Islamic state), he is in his own way making the same case.

Let me summarise all these relationship dynamics with a figure. Where Figure 1 identified the primary actors within the BH political field, Figure 2 provides a visualisation of their relational dynamics with each other and the BH state. Arrows in the diagram indicate theoretical concepts from sociological theory and point to the relational nature of field dynamics. For example, the diagram shows that the BH state is an unfinished one and one lacking in meta-power status – and it also tells us that the state's relationship to the West is characterised by protectorate status. The West, in turn, is the *de facto* meta-power in the field and its relationship to the Bosniacs is characterised by a patron–client relationship – and so on.

This diagram illustrates how each actor's status, strategies and interactions shape the fragmented post-war state.

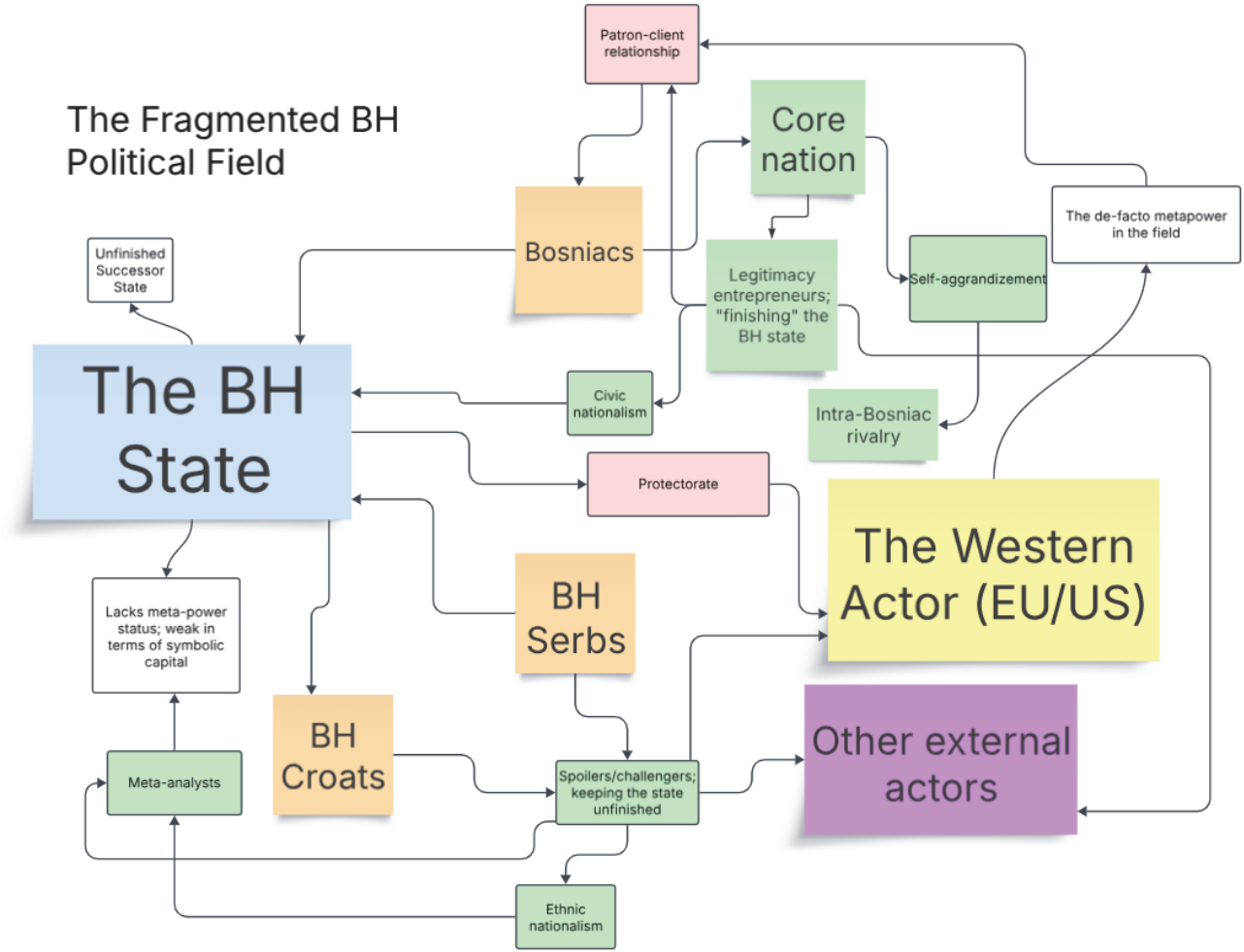

Figure 2. A visualisation of the relationship dynamics between the various actors on the fragmented BH political field.

The Contributions of this Study and its Applicability to Other Contexts

Based on the above analysis, there is a wider question that needs to be addressed, one that links back to my discussion, in the introductory chapter, about the common challenges faced by post-Ottoman states with regards to nation-building. It is a question of what this is a case of and what the potential transferability of this study is. The question is: What does this study and the scholarly contribution it offers have to say, in a more general sense, about the nation- and state-building processes?

I argue that this study contributes a transferable model for understanding state-building challenges in post-Ottoman contexts marked by ethnic tensions and contested state legitimacy.

This study shows that the nature of the political field and the way that the actors within it operate will be determined by the role and stability of the state or, in other words, whether it functions as the meta-power in the field. When its symbolic power is strong, the state plays the role of the meta-power in the field such that the major political actors focus on gaining and wielding state power. This is the top prize in the game of politics because the state enjoys not only the monopoly of violence but, more importantly, has the potential to unleash various forms of symbolic violence upon the citizenry through such means as compulsory mass education (whereby the particular concerns of the ruling power are elevated into national concerns). When the symbolic power is weak, however, the state ends up struggling to assert its meta-power status and the activities of the actors within the field turn into a game of settling the status of the state through various forms of political strategising that coalesce around the actual meta-power in the field. This does not mean that the state is totally impotent, nor does it mean that settling the status of the state is the only thing that political field actors do. Political life will continue to include such things as enacting and executing policies related to waste management, road maintenance, zoning regulation and so on – but these activities are ultimately overshadowed by the question of the status of the state.

This begs the question: How does one measure the degree of symbolic or meta power? There is obviously no way to measure it in quantitative terms – at least, not with any exactness – but the key concepts here are those that relate to the legitimacy and functionality of the state. Do the citizens identify with the state? Do they understand it to serve their interests? Do they trust in its institutions? Do they feel that the everyday political process

runs efficiently? Do the state and its actions even 'make sense'? This ties back to Bourdieu's concept of *doxa* or the 'logic' of the state. If the major actors in the field have doubts about the very logic of the state (or even its *raison d'être*), then what we have is a state that struggles to be the meta-power of the field.

Yet apart from looking at the legitimacy and functionality, one also looks at the sovereignty of the state. If the state is understood by the various actors in the field to be limited in its capacity to wield power independently of outside actors, this also undermines the meta-power status of the state. In the case of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the expression that has been used by my respondents to describe this lack of sovereignty is 'protectorate status'. This is related to another major conclusion of this study which is that, if the symbolic power of the state is weak, if there is little potential for symbolic violence through the state, one looks outside the state for the meta-power of the field. For the BH field, this meta-power status is found with the West (the US and the EU). Based on this, I can conclude that this may apply to other fields where the state lacks the status of a meta-power – in other words, an outside power comes in to fill the void. The only other scenario that I can imagine is some sort of anarchy or war-like situation that endures until a meta-power emerges in the field. This could very well end up being the state itself, having reached meta-power status through military means, such that symbolic violence is enabled or unlocked as a result of literal, physical violence.

Let us now turn to strategising. I have already mentioned that the activities of the actors within the field where the state lacks meta-power status turn into a game of settling the status of the state through various forms of political strategising that coalesces around the actual meta-power in the field. This needs a bit of unpacking, first of all through a discussion about the actors themselves. My findings show that, in a field such as the one that I have studied and described, where the status of the state is under ongoing negotiation, two sets of actors might emerge. The first set includes those actors who identify with the state and work towards enhancing its legitimacy, functionality and sovereignty (and its capacity for symbolic violence). In other words, they want the state to be the meta-power in the field. They are the legitimacy entrepreneurs or the incumbents. This might (as in the case of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Bosniacs) be related to ethnicity, such that this group of actors understand themselves to be a sort of core nation tasked with the duty of guarding the state and making it

legitimate, functional and sovereign (they understand such a state to align with their own national interests).

The other set of actors do not see such a state to be in their interest and resist the efforts to imbue the state with a maximal capacity for symbolic violence. They are the spoilers in the field or, as I prefer to understand them, the meta-analysts, who perceive that the meta-power of the state will be wielded at their expense. This might, again, be related to ethnicity, where this group of actors belongs to a minority group *vis-à-vis* the incumbents such that the resistance to the state is understood to be a resistance against being under the domination of the incumbents. The ultimate goal for this group of actors depends upon historical, social, political and geographical factors that determine their relationship with the state and the other actors in the field (particularly the incumbents).

For example, past grievances might compel the meta-analysts to fear a total erasure of their identity through the physical or symbolic violence of the state, such that they aspire towards secession. This might also involve some sort of irredentism if the neighbouring country has ethnic ties to this group. However, it could also be the case that the relationship with the state and the incumbents in the field is more benign (and where there is no neighbouring kin state, with no potential for irredentist activity), such that some sort of federalism is sought after (where the symbolic power of the state is less concentrated and therefore less potent as a destructive force).

What is crucial to understand here is that the strategising of these actors in this type of political field will depend upon their relationship with the actual meta-power. My case is one where the meta-power is an outside stakeholder, a major global power (or rather two, the US and the EU), so I will not go beyond such a scenario.[83] Now, where the incumbents understand this outside meta-power to be generally aligned with their interests (as the Bosniacs do with the US and the EU), their strategising will logically centre around using their proximity to and alignment with the meta-power to their advantage against their field rivals, the meta-analysts. The long-term goal behind such a strategy is to transfer, to the extent that it is possible, the meta-power status over to the state, making it a legitimate, functional and sovereign state that enjoys the highest possible level of symbolic power. I have referred to this as a patron–client relationship. This

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[83] Again, the only alternative I can imagine, beyond either the state or some outside force being the meta-power in the field, is war or anarchy. Perhaps an institution such as the church could hold this status – as might have been the case in certain societies in Europe during the medieval era – but such a pre-modern scenario is beyond the scope of this study.

overall strategy does not preclude seeking alliances with other actors inside or outside the field (such as the Bosniacs do with Turkey, to which it has a historical ties) nor does it mean that the patron–client relationship is without its frustrations – but this is the main characteristic of their strategising.

However, the case could also very well be reversed, such that the meta-analysts find themselves aligned with the outside meta-power which supports their aspirations for secession or federalisation or whatever it might be. It could also be the case that the meta-analysts are in the majority and the incumbents are in the minority, so that the latter rule through non-democratic means. In such a case, the meta-analysts might align with the outside meta-power not in order to achieve federalism or seek to secede but, rather, in order to promote democracy and make the political playing field more level. In other words, they are less interested in diminishing the symbolic power of the state but, instead, want to achieve a role-reversal, such that they take the place of the incumbents through their numerical majority, which requires a democratic political system. This was the case in countries such as South Africa and Rhodesia (even if Zimbabwe ended up going in a non-democratic direction).

Where the meta-power does not seem to align with the aspirations of the meta-analysts, however, one strategy will be to engage in diplomatic efforts to convince the meta-power to reconsider their alliance with the incumbents – this could be combined with working together with other local and outside actors in order to resist the efforts of the incumbents to imbue the state with meta-power status. A total turning away from the meta-power in the field is another strategy, especially in a situation where this outside actor's meta-power status seems to be up for negotiation and where an up-and-coming global power seems poised to take over the meta-power status in the field. I should add that it could also be the case that the meta-power status is unclearly divided between rival global powers already from the start, in a sort of bipolar or multipolar situation. This might be the case in places such as Taiwan, where local actors find themselves in the middle of a struggle for hegemony between the US and China.

This study advances the understanding of Bosnia and Herzegovina's post-war political dynamics by addressing the lacunae highlighted in Chapters 2 and 3. Where prior studies like those of Mujanović (2023) and Bougarel and Clayer (2017) focus on elite strategies and structural critiques, my qualitative fieldwork with SDA activists fills the persistent gap in activist-level perspectives, revealing their lived experiences of the fragmented political field, from the patron–client strategy with the West to

internal corruption critiques. This approach captures some of the evolving tensions like the *alafranga/alaturca* divide and responses to Turkey's rising influence – which static accounts overlook. Furthermore, my exploration of the SDA's operational interactions with Serb and Croat actors (e.g., as 'spoilers' or 'meta-analysts') and external powers (e.g., the West as meta-power) offers a more granular view of how these engagements shape Bosnia and Herzegovinas's disintegrated state beyond the high-level focus of scholars like Ramet (2013) and Perry (2015).

Beyond empirical depth, this study adds a sociological framework by adapting Bourdieu's field theory to Bosnia and Herzegovina's specific context, providing a systematic explanation absent in the descriptive narratives of studies such as those by Hoare (2007). My reconceptualisation of the West as the field's meta-power, my identification of the BH Serbs' and BH Croats' role as meta-analysts and the Bosniacs' role as incumbents integrates micro-level activist strategies with macro-level structures, addressing the structural–social disconnect in prior analyses. This theoretical lens not only connects identity debates (e.g., 'core nation' vs 'corrupt nation') with political contestation but also offers a transferable model for post-Ottoman state-building, enhancing the literature's fragmented thematic approach.

Together, these contributions – empirical intensity and theoretical coherence – fill the lacunae identified in the review sections of this study, positioning my work as a sociological contribution to understanding Bosnia and Herzegovina's persistent disintegration.

Limitations of the Study

This study has provided insights into the post-war political dynamics of Bosnia and Herzegovina (BH) from 1995 to 2022, focusing on the Party of Democratic Action (SDA) and their self-understood role as bearers of *državotvornost* in advancing the Bosniacs' incumbent status within the political field. However, in reflecting on the study's limitations, I acknowledge several shortcomings that could have been addressed with additional data, alternative methods or a broader scope. These limitations, outlined below, highlight areas for improvement and pave the way for future research questions that will help to deepen our understanding of BH's fragmented political landscape.

One primary limitation is the study's focus on the Bosniac perspective, particularly that of SDA-affiliated informants. While my critical realist epistemology allowed me to set this perspective against Bourdieu's field

theory in order to draw broader conclusions about the political field, the limited inclusion of other actors' viewpoints – Serbs, Croats, external actors (notably Western powers) and the 'Bosnian' civic actors (including those of mixed ethnicity or minorities like Jews, Roma and ethnic Germans) – restricts the study's depth. Incorporating these perspectives could have provided a more nuanced understanding of field dynamics, particularly how competing forms of symbolic capital shape nationalisation efforts. For instance, interviews with Serb and Croat meta-analysts or Western diplomats might have revealed alternative interpretations of the SDA's cross-ethnic nationalising strategies. Similarly, the under-representation of non-SDA Bosniacs, including those to the political left or right, limits insights into the Bosniac sub-field's diversity. A mixed-methods approach, combining interviews with surveys or focus groups across these populations, could have enriched the data and mitigated this bias.

Another significant shortcoming is the limited access to female informants, which is particularly problematic given the opposition to Sebija Izetbegović within the SDA milieu. My data, drawn primarily from male informants, probably under-represents gender-specific perspectives on leadership and corruption – key issues in the study. Employing targeted sampling to include more female voices, perhaps through ethnographic observation at SDA events, could have addressed this gap and provided a fuller picture of internal party dynamics. This methodological oversight underscores a broader need for gender-sensitive approaches in studying BH's political field.

A further limitation lies in the underdeveloped exploration of the *alafranga/alaturca* tension, which I identified as a critical dimension of Bosniac identity but analysed only superficially. This tension – between Western-oriented (*alafranga*) state-building and traditional, Muslim-oriented (*alaturca*) identity – shapes the SDA's nationalisation efforts although it is constrained by the study's reliance on Bourdieu's field theory, which is rooted in Western, particularly French, contexts. While Bourdieu's framework effectively illuminated the Bosniacs' relationship to the state *alafranga* (e.g., their pursuit of meta-power status), it offered limited tools with which to unpack how Bosniacs reconcile their ethnic, religious and political identities *alaturca*. A more robust theoretical approach, drawing on scholars like Wael Hallaq, Talal Asad or Saba Mahmood, who analyse Muslim encounters with modernity, could have provided deeper insights. Additionally, fieldwork among fringe Bosniac groups, such as Salafi actors who reject the state *alafranga*, might have enriched the analysis but would

have required a different study design, possibly involving comparative case studies or the discourse analysis of religious texts.

These limitations highlight several questions for future research.

- First, how do Serb, Croat and Western actors' perceptions of symbolic capital and meta-power differ from the SDA's and how do these competing visions shape BH's political field?
- Second, what role do civic 'Bosnian' actors, including minorities and mixed-ethnicity groups, play in contesting or supporting nationalisation efforts?
- Third, how do gender dynamics, particularly among female political actors, influence perceptions of leadership and corruption within the SDA and beyond?
- Finally, how can the *alafranga/alaturca* tension be theorised to better understand Bosniac identity formation, especially among groups rejecting Western state models?

Addressing these questions through interdisciplinary methods – such as combining Bourdieu's field theory with non-Western frameworks, conducting multi-actor ethnographies or analysing archival data – could yield a more comprehensive understanding of BH's state-building challenges.

In acknowledging these shortcomings, I recognise that my study, while rigorous within its scope, leaves room for broader and more inclusive approaches. By highlighting these gaps and proposing avenues for future inquiry, I hope to contribute to ongoing discussions about BH's complex path toward a unified nation-state.

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Appendix A – A Full Translation of the SDA's *Historijat*

The Party of Democratic Action emerged during the global collapse of the socialist system and the impending dissolution of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRJ). The SDA was a response to the 50-year-long political and cultural suppression of Yugoslav Muslims and the evident threat of war looming over Bosnia and Herzegovina. As a broad popular movement, it became the spearhead of the political emancipation of Bosnian Muslims and a key political actor in defending the constitutional [*državno-pravnog*] continuity of Bosnia and Herzegovina at the end of the 20th century.

The SDA was founded on 26 May 1990, at its Founding Assembly held in Sarajevo. It was the first registered political party after 45 years of a one-party system in Yugoslavia. In its Programme Declaration, the SDA defined itself as a 'political alliance of citizens of Yugoslavia belonging to the Muslim cultural-historical circle, as well as other citizens of Yugoslavia who accept the programme and goals of the Party'. It emphasised a 'special interest in preserving Bosnia and Herzegovina as a common state of Muslims, Serbs and Croats. In this regard, the SDA will vigorously oppose attempts to destabilise Bosnia and Herzegovina, its division or appropriation, regardless of the source of such claims'. The Initiative Committee for the establishment of the Party consisted of 40 determined intellectuals, artists and entrepreneurs from Sarajevo, Zagreb, Mostar, Ljubljana and Banja Luka.

At the 1st Congress of the SDA, held in November 1991 in Sarajevo, the SDA president prophetically warned about the consequences of attempts to divide Bosnia:

> … some new cartographers, completely unaware that they are sitting on a powder keg, are drawing new maps and dividing Bosnia extensively… if the powder keg explodes, everything will vanish in smoke and shame – cartographers, generals, all parties, all leaders, all laws, and institutions and the greatest part of what was built here through the painstaking work of dozens of generations over the years. Since they have the misfortune of being indestructible, only three bloodied and defeated peoples will remain, bewildered and reduced to the brink of barbarism.

The SDA delayed but could not prevent the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The powder keg exploded. During the aggression against Bosnia and Herzegovina, the SDA managed to unite diverse political parties loyal to Bosnia, thus avoiding the trap of a civil war between the three Bosnian peoples.

Even in peacetime, the Party of Democratic Action continued to gather parties with similar political visions. In the local elections held in 1997, it led the Coalition for a Whole and Democratic Bosnia and Herzegovina. The Coalition won the majority of votes in 56 out of a total of 135 municipalities where elections were held. In the general elections held a year later, in 1998, the SDA again participated with coalition partners and secured 34.9% of the votes. The Coalition's candidate, Alija Izetbegović, was once again elected as the Bosniac member of the Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Out of a total of 42 seats in the House of Representatives of the Parliamentary Assembly of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the CD Coalition won 17 mandates. Out of 140 seats in the House of Representatives of the Federation, the Coalition secured 68 mandates and, in the National Assembly of Republika Srpska, won 15 out of 83 seats. In the November 2000 elections, the SDA ran independently.

The SDA will continue to strongly advocate for a civic society and the rule of law. Aware that the seeds of fascism and totalitarianism in Europe, particularly in the Balkans, have never been eradicated, the SDA sees itself as part of the front line of antifascist forces opposing all forms of discrimination and totalitarianism. In the times ahead, the SDA, together with other patriotic and democratic forces in Bosnia and Herzegovina, has the opportunity to complete the processes it began 15 years ago. Reforms leading to a functional state and a unified economic space should attract new capital to Bosnia and Herzegovina and boost the economy. A revitalised economy should ease tensions between opposing forces in Bosnia and create a positive climate for an even faster economic recovery, creating a spiral of positive processes – unlike the one that led to crises and wars at the beginning of the 1990s.

Appendix B – An overview of the SDA's post-Dayton election results

These results have been retrieved from the Central Electoral Commision of Bosnia and Herzegovina (n.d.).

1996 Elections: the SDA, led by Alija Izetbegović, capitalised on its wartime leadership to dominate Bosniac votes in the first post-war election. Izetbegović won the Bosniac seat in the tripartite presidency with 80% of the Bosniac vote. The SDA also gained 19 seats in the 42-seat House of Representatives, making it the largest party in the Federation.

1998 Elections: The SDA maintained its grip on Bosniac voters, though its dominance slightly waned as the Social Democratic Party (SDP) gained momentum. Izetbegović was re-elected to the presidency with 86.8% of the Bosniak vote but the SDA's parliamentary seats dropped to 17.

2002–2010 Elections: After Izetbegović's death in 2003, the leadership passed to Sulejman Tihić and, later, Bakir Izetbegović (Alija's son). The SDA remained the leading Bosniac party, initially securing the Bosniac presidencial seat and significant parliamentary representation. In 2006, Haris Silajdžić (Party for Bosnia and Herzegovina) won the Bosniac presidency, temporarily outflanking the SDA. However, in 2010, Bakir Izetbegović reclaimed the presidency for the SDA, winning 34.9% of the vote. The SDA typically won 8–10 seats in the House of Representatives during this period.

2014 Elections: Bakir Izetbegović was re-elected as the Bosniac presidency member with 32.9% of the vote, defeating Fahrudin Radončić (Union for a Better Future of Bosnia and Herzegovina, an SDA splinter party). The SDA secured 9 out of 42 seats in the House of Representatives.

2018 Elections: Šefik Džaferović replaced Izetbegović as the SDA candidate for the presidency given that the latter was constitutionally barred from

running for a third consecutive term. The former gained 36,6% of the vote and won. The party again won 9 seats in the House of Representatives.

2022 Elections: The SDA faced a significant setback when Denis Bećirović (SDP) won the Bosniac presidencial seat with 57.4% of the vote, defeating Bakir Izetbegović (46.9% votes). This marked the first time since 2006 that the SDA had lost the Bosniac presidency. The party still secured 8 seats in the House of Representatives but a coalition of the SDP, the SDA splinter party People and Justice and other parties aimed to exclude the SDA from government.

Appendix C – Data Collection Tables

Table 1.1 Thematic overview of my interview guide

Theme	**Examples of enquiry**
Biographical information	Date of birth; family background; education; career trajectory
Involvement in politics	Reasons for early involvement; history of involvement in the SDA (and, if applicable, post-SDA activities); analysis of the SDA's role in BH politics and its evolution over time; personal experiences within the party over time and with politics overall
Bosniac identity and Bosniac political mobilisation	What defines a Bosniac? What should Bosniacs aspire to collectively and how? What challenges are they facing and how are these to be tackled? How do you assess the various attempts to organise the Bosniac people politically?
The BH political field	How do you understand Bosnia and Herzegovina as a political entity? How should Bosnia and Herzegovina be constituted politically? How does that vision stand against the current reality of BH politics? How do you view the future of Bosnia and Herzegovina as a political entity?
The actors within the BH political field	Who are the main actors in BH politics? In your analysis, what are their goals? What methods do they use in achieving their goals? How successful have they been in that regard?

Table 1.2 Overview of pro-SDA respondents

Pseudonym	**Age**	**Gender**	**Region**	**Relationship to the SDA**	**Education**	**Interview duration**
Husein	Senior	Male	City (F)	Mid-level party official	Natural science	1.5 hours
Dino	Senior	Male	City (F)	Mid-level party official	Natural science	1.5 hours
Fehim	Junior	Male	City (F)	Low-level party official	Business	1.5 hours

Mahir	Senior	Male	City (F)	High-level party official	Clerical	1.5 hours
Naila	Senior	Female	City (F)	High-level party official	Law	1 hour
Ibrahim	Senior	Male	Village (RS)	Low-level party official	Vocational training	1.5 hours
Ahmet	Senior	Male	Village (RS)	Founder of local branch; no current position	High-school level	1.5 hours
Halil	Senior	Male	Diaspora (Town, F)	Founder of local branch; no current position	Clerical	1.5 hours
Amer	Junior	Male	City (F)	Mid-level party official	Natural science	1 hour
Omer	Senior	Male	City (F)	High-level party official	Natural science	1 hour
Nedim	Senior	Male	City (F)	Mid-level party official	Humanities	1 hour
Musa	Junior	Male	City (F)	Founder of local branch; no current position	Education	30 minutes
Armin	Junior	Male	Town (F)	Low-level party official	Natural science	1.5 hours
Mensur	Junior	Male	Town (F)	Low-level party official	Natural science	1 hour
Ševal	Senior	Male	City (F)	High-level party official	Business	30 minutes
Nisvet	Junior	Male	City (F)	Mid-level party official	Clerical	1.5 hours
Abid	Senior	Male	Diaspora (Village, RS)	Founder of local branch; no current position	Law	3 hours
Alem	Junior	Male	City (F)	High-level party official	Vocational training	1 hour

Table 1.3 Overview of dissident respondents

Pseudonym	**Age**	**Gender**	**Region**	**Relationship to the SDA**	**Education**	**Interview duration**
Nusret	Senior	Male	Diaspora (City, F)	Founder of local branch. No new party affiliation	Natural science	5 hours

Fadil	Senior	Male	Diaspora & City (F)	Founder of local branch. No new party affiliation	Humanities	2 hours
Hilmija	Senior	Male	City (F)	Former high-level party official. New party affiliation	Humanities	3.5 hours
Adnan	Junior	Male	City (F)	Former mid-level party official. New party affiliation	Humanities	1 hour
Elvedin	Senior	Male	City (F)	Former high-level party official. New party affiliation	Natural science	1 hour
Nikola	Junior	Male	City (F)	Former mid-level party official. New party affiliation	Law	30 minutes*
Abdullah	Senior	Male	City (F)	Former high-level party official. No new party affiliation	Natural science	1 hour
Sakib	Junior	Male	City (F)	Former mid-level party official. New party affiliation	Humanities	

*With a follow-up written addition to the interview from the respondent, with supplementary analysis.

Table 1.4 Overview of participant observation sessions

Venue	**Number of respondents included (apart from other attendees)**	**Duration**
Party Campaign Meeting I (City, F)	3	2 hours
Party Campaign Meeting II (City, F)	10	4 hours
Party Campaign Meeting III (City, F)	3	2 hours
Parliament Building, Sarajevo	1	1 hour
Minister Building, Sarajevo	1	1 hour
City Centre, Sarajevo	2	1 hour
Cultural Event (Town, F)	2	2 hours
Café Setting I (City, F)	2	1 hour

Restaurant Setting (Town, F)	2	1.5 hours
Mosque I (Diaspora)	1	2 hours
Informal Socialisation Event, Sarajevo	2	1 hour
Café Setting II (City, F)	1	3.5 hours
Café Setting III	1	1 hour
Café Setting IV	1	1 hour
Mosque II (Village, RS)	2	1 hour
Mosque III (City, F)	1	30 minutes
Government Building I (City, F)	1	1 hour
Government Building II (City, F)	1	1 hour

Table 1.5 Overview of documents

Genre	**Document**	**Quantity**
Official Party Document	Party Programme	1 document, 14 pages
Official Party Document	Statutes of the Party	1 document, 52 pages
Official Party Document	Party Resolutions	9 documents, ranging from 4 to 7 pages each
Official Party Document	Official Party History	I document, 7 pages
Social Media Content	Party Think Tank Facebook shares	11 Facebook shares
Social Media Content	Party Youth Association Facebook shares	9 Facebook shares
Social Media Content	Party Women's Association Facebook shares	9 Facebook shares
Campaign Material	Interviews at Party leader's official website	2 interviews
Campaign Material	Interviews at the official Party website	10 interviews
Campaign Material	Speeches at Party leader's official website	5 speeches
Campaign Material	Campaign website	1 minute

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This thesis investigates the political fragmentation of post-war Bosnia and Herzegovina, focusing on the Bosniac *Party of Democratic Action* (SDA) and its role in state and nation-building from the 1995 Dayton Agreement to the 2022 elections. Utilizing Pierre Bourdieu's political field theory, tailored to Bosnia and Herzegovina's multi-ethnic context, the study analyzes qualitative data from interviews, participant observation with SDA activists (as well as dissidents), and party documents, including programs and public statements. It identifies the key actors in the political field and examines how Bosniacs around SDA negotiate ethnic rivalries, external influences, and tensions between civic and ethnic nationalism in their pursuit of post-war state and nation-building.

Offering new empirical insights into grassroots perspectives and a sociological framework, this work advances scholarship on post-Ottoman state and nation-building and the dynamics of political disintegration in diverse societies.

Hamdija Begovic carries out sociological research with a special focus on Muslims and modernity. This is his PhD thesis.

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ISBN 978-91-89962-30-9 (print) / 978-91-89962-31-6 (digital) | Södertörns högskola | publications@sh.se

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