Introduction: Whose Bosnia?

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INTRODUCTION

Whose Bosnia?

By the end of the nineteenth century—an era marked by the rise of new nation-making projects worldwide—patriotism had become a ubiquitous point of reference, “a general spice for everything,” Milutin Garašanin wrote in 1892. As a leading Serbian diplomat, publicist, and minister of the interior, Garašanin spent much of his career trying to cultivate new national attachments to Serbia and to expand the state’s realms to neighboring Balkan regions. But at the same time, Garašanin was exasperated by the intractable proliferation of patriotic phrases, symbols, gatherings, and activities that enabled so many actors to claim to have become “ever more patriotic.” “Instead of laboring to bring ourselves up to [patriotism], we have found that it is much more practical and much easier to pull it from the upper reaches down toward us,” Garašanin complained; “we have debased it from deed to desire.” And it is the endlessness of patriotic desires that Garašanin found especially unsettling: “If, for example, you wish for Serbia to be an empire, and you see that this is not enough, you can immediately wish for a great empire; and if that is also too little, you wish for it to be twice as great an empire; and when you’re bored with that, you wish for three times as great, and so on until infinity. Within the limits of desires for patriotism, there are no limits.”

This book is about the proliferation and compulsion of patriotic desires. Garašanin’s nineteenth-century observations are a good place to begin exploring these issues because they articulate both a patriotic compulsion to continually expand national spaces and a frustration with patriotism itself, which is characterized as inadequate, incomplete, and not powerful enough to fulfill its lofty mission.

First, there is what one could call the proliferation of nationalist cultural forms. In this regard, Garašanin emphasized the rapid multiplication of “ready-made patriotic phrases,” creating “a kind of patriotic menu” from which one could choose how to present oneself as a national subject in nineteenth-century Serbia (often by invoking the “unliberated” lands of Kosovo, Macedonia, and Bosnia). Garašanin’s descriptions made it clear that this phenomenon was not limited to official political discourse. “One patriotizes in music notes,” in business deals, dance halls, and government offices, in social gatherings, lunches, and dinners, spawning new patriotic expressions, Garašanin wrote; they “seep into everything” and reshape how
people speak, socialize, and behave themselves as proper nationals. Like other popular “phraseologies,” Garašanin suggested, this profusion of patriotism was a transnational phenomenon, one that “travels from one state to another; it has not yet been established whether it is carried by the winds or whether people transfer it.”  In many ways, this observation resembles Benedict Anderson’s idea of the nation as a “modular” template that had become “available for pirating” since the early nineteenth century. While giving support to such interpretations, Garašanin’s notes emphasize even more strongly the open-endedness of nationalism, especially its ability to produce an enormous array of expressions and thus keep national forms open to further variations and appropriations across different political contexts.

This proliferation of nationalism is distinct from a second major phenomenon that one can observe in Garašanin’s work. The mass spread of patriotic forms, in Garašanin’s view, could only create a nationalism that is shallow and inadequate, encouraging impossible patriotic desires. Having condemned his Serbian compatriots for their superficial zeal, Garašanin then called for an urgent renewal of “true” patriotism that would exceed its popular iterations and create an even more deeply patriotic Serbian nation. “Could there be a more magnificent and more patriotic vision than when new activists, new patriots, new preachers of Serbian life” emerge, Garašanin wrote, when activists “create even the slightest cracks through which Serbian thought could radiate outside of Serbia,” allowing its nationalism to “burst out with its full power” and “stun the world.” What is remarkable about this account is its demonstration of the compelling force of nationalist frustrations and visions. Garašanin simultaneously denounces popular desires for more patriotism as shallow, insatiable, and “infinite,” and he himself urgently calls for more and more patriotism. The arc of this logic is important to note: it begins with the premise of flawed patriotism of one’s co-nationals and then moves to resolve this foundational disappointment by creating an ever more powerful national project.

A number of analysts have already noted the significance of such pressures and discontents for the formation of new nationalist projects. Homi Bhabha has described nationalism as “an idea whose cultural compulsion lies in the impossible unity of the nation as a symbolic force.”  Étienne Balibar has highlighted an enduring problem of nation-making in which states and “nationalist ideologies almost succeed, but not quite . . . and this situation unleashes a permanent process of displacement and escape. You need more nationalism. You need a nationalism which is, so to speak, more nationalistic than nationalism itself.” In this way, “we meet again with the fact that there is no intrinsic end to this process.” This phenomenon, as Balibar suggested, is difficult to name; indeed, there are no clearly established terms in critical literature for these dynamics. I propose here a term like “nation-compulsion” as a shorthand for these pressures: a compulsion not
in a pathological sense, but something closer to a set of political and moral imperatives that one grapples with as part of becoming and maintaining oneself as a proper patriot.

Focusing on nationalist contestations over Bosnia as its terrain, this book examines the proliferation of national forms and the patriotic compulsion that these forms have historically exerted in an attempt to explain the resilience of nationalism since its emergence in the nineteenth century. The following analysis generally emphasizes two distinct ways in which nationalist politics have remained so open-ended and prolific in their output. On the one hand, this study investigates and specifies the generative processes, such as the ones described by Garašanin, that have helped propel national projects onward by creating new expressions, projects, and variations of national forms in and around Bosnia-Herzegovina. On the other hand, in order to understand what I have called the nation-compulsion, it delves into a number of particular subjects that nationalists in the nineteenth-century Balkans found especially compelling—subjects like “the people,” national suffering, youth. Working together, the proliferation and compulsion of nationalism have made it an immensely dynamic and open-ended force, one that eludes any clear sense of historical closure.

Bosnia is an ideal place for exploring these issues. As the site of the 1914 assassination that triggered the First World War and the territory where the term “ethnic cleansing” was invented during the Yugoslav wars of the 1990s, Bosnia has become a global symbol of nationalist conflict and ethnic division in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. But the formative nationalist contestations over this land began well before 1914, emerging with the rise of new political movements during the long nineteenth century. This book turns to this often-overlooked historical terrain to explore the formation and proliferation of patriotic attachments to this contested national space.

The Approach: Grounded Theory in the Modern Balkans

This approach differs from other accounts of nation-making in several ways, but its fundamental departure is in its insistence on the open-endedness of nationalism that enables it to remain such a vital political project. To grasp the implications of this view, it is necessary to reconsider the often unstated assumptions that underpin textbook accounts of nation-formation. Most scholarly narratives of nation-making trace how certain elites tried to spread and establish their patriotic programs among target populations, such as populations within or around existing state boundaries, or populations seen as the basis for a future, though not yet realized, state. In what is one of the best-known such typologies, the historian Miroslav Hroch presented a three-stage model of the development of nationalism among the
“small nations” of Eastern and Northern Europe, progressing from elite scholarly patriotism (phase A) to nationalist advocacy in the public sphere (phase B) to the emergence of a mass political movement (phase C). Dealing not with “small nations” but with great powers of Western Europe, other studies—like Eugen Weber’s classic history of French nation-making—explored how already strong states possessing key instruments of nationalization (the army, school, and administration) steadily turned “peasants into Frenchmen.” These influential arguments, of course, have been challenged by subsequent scholarship, which has critiqued the “ethnicist” and “statist” assumptions of this historiography. Yet even the arc of most critical studies reinforces, however unwittingly, a core aspect of national narratives: a guiding focus on the final outcome, namely, the long-term consolidation of national identities (including regional counter-identities), a process usually drawing to a close with the establishment of stable state institutions.

It is in this sense that such accounts outline a kind of “completist” paradigm of nation-formation. It is a narrative paradigm in which scholars diagnose and explain the historical factors, obstacles, and phases that made—or failed to make—various populations into nationals, thus completing the process of nationalization in one way or another. The story usually ends there, with Frenchmen, Turks, Serbs, and other nationals clearly established, or with failures like Yugoslavia plainly apparent to us today. Nation-formation in this paradigm is acknowledged as immensely complex, but it is still conceived in terms of finite outcomes, ends achieved or not achieved: languages standardized, masses nationalized, states established, etc. While there is considerable room for gradations, including different sequences, stages, or weak and strong processes, such analyses still pose nation-making as a more or less completable process, with failure usually being read as a self-evident mark of closure.

In the following pages I propose a different approach to understanding the dynamics of nationalism. Can the process that Eugen Weber called the “internal colonialism” of nation-building—in his view a clearly positive development—ever be truly complete? When South Slavic activists like the twentieth-century writer Pero Slijepčević urged that national consciousness must be “foisted directly and forcefully from the outside” on “our own people,” what kind of political relations did this activism entail? How and when does one come to know who are, and who are not, one’s “own people”? In taking up such questions, this book understands the project of nationalizing one’s “own people” not as a passing stage but as the basic structural condition on which national projects are founded and continually renewed.

To get at these issues, I approach national politics in Bosnia using what Claudio Lomnitz has characterized as “grounded theory.” In his historical-anthropological studies of nationalism, Lomnitz wrote of the challenge of making “provincial” findings—in his case based on research across
Mexico—speak to a wider range of theoretical and methodological issues. “As opposed to England, France, Germany, or the United States,” Lomnitz wrote, knowledge produced in a “provincial” context like Mexico “is usually thought to be parochial and prosaic,” lacking the power to set “world-historical” trends or to reshape broad theories of national phenomena. Although Lomnitz wrote of these challenges with Mexico and Latin America in mind, this predicament has also been noted by scholars working on Eastern Europe, Southeast Asia, and other “areas” once marked as non-Western—or insufficiently Western—and thus incapable of generating universalizing principles. As Maria Todorova has shown, the ambiguous geopolitical position of the Balkans—a region long described as geographically European but as historically, economically, and culturally non-European—has similarly ensured that “lack,” “lag,” and “backwardness” have remained the dominant tropes of analyses of nationalism in this area.

As a way of transcending the limitations usually imposed on provincial knowledge, Lomnitz developed the notion of a “grounded theoretical” analysis of nationalist politics. Such an approach is “grounded because it works through a vast and dense set of facts, and grounded because it has to confront, and hopefully to transgress, an order of confinement” to its provincial locale. It is at the same time theoretical since it seeks to identify and interpret the underlying assumptions and relationships that constitute nationalist politics in a given historical context.

This grounded theoretical approach is especially useful for studying nationalism’s cultural forms in and around Bosnia-Herzegovina, allowing us to delve into what Garašanin described as a patriotism driven by endlessly multiplying desires and compelling demands. These distinct phenomena require a kind of historical analysis that differs from the familiar blow-by-blow accounts of nation-building events (e.g., establishment of parties, acquisition of territories, institutional reorganization, etc.), which in themselves cannot adequately capture the development of enduring national forms, subjectivities, and practices. To get at this kind of history, I return to the groundwork of South Slavic national activists—ethnographers, insurgents, teachers, academics, poets, politicians, and other actors often grouped together as “intellectuals”—in order to closely read the archives that they produced and to analyze the issues that they struggled with as they claimed Bosnia for different causes. To call these actors “elites” is, of course, accurate in the obvious sense of this term; emerging nineteenth-century patriots certainly constituted and proclaimed themselves to be a distinct social formation that led and organized nation-making projects. In substantial part, this study is thus a contribution to understanding the cultural and intellectual production of nationalism. But insofar as it invokes hierarchical models of top-down dictation, the term “elites” also risks distorting our focus and obscuring more interesting questions about the workings of nationalism, including questions about how one becomes a patriot, how national
forms spread, and what makes nation-making seem, in the eyes of nationalists themselves, so grievously incomplete and so promisingly open-ended.\textsuperscript{16}

If some of the key debates in the following pages appear abstract, it is largely because the work of nationalists themselves is inescapably abstract, based as it is around foundational abstractions like “the people,” “our brothers,” and “national destiny.”\textsuperscript{17} Instead of avoiding such issues or trying to assign fixed meanings to patriotic subjects, I consider precisely their inhering ambiguities and trace the historical contexts that made them possible. By unpacking recurring concerns of South Slavic activists, I hope to outline research questions that—grounded as they are in the Bosnian terrain—may be useful in other contexts as well.\textsuperscript{18}

\subsection*{The Setting: Bosnia-Herzegovina as a National Question}

As a province ruled by both the Ottoman and Habsburg Empires during the long nineteenth century—Ottoman until 1878, Habsburg from 1878 to 1914—Bosnia presents a fascinating site of transnational and transimperial competition and mutual influence. At the outset of the nineteenth century, Bosnia was an Ottoman borderland, the Porte’s westernmost European province. The province’s boundaries were forged in the aftermath of the long Habsburg-Ottoman wars, beginning in the seventeenth and extending into the eighteenth century, when a series of diplomatic treaties set stable borders between the two empires. Bosnia was the name of the larger province that absorbed the southeastern region of Herzegovina after it was reorganized several times and disbanded in 1865, later resulting in the official designation of the land as Bosnia-Herzegovina; the name Bosnia was a common shorthand for the entire region.\textsuperscript{19} By the mid-nineteenth century, the rise of the Serbian principality and the strengthening of Montenegro to Bosnia’s east and southeast gave the province the outlines that the country roughly holds today (see map I.1).\textsuperscript{20} The Ottoman Empire ruled Bosnia until 1875–1878, when a series of peasant uprisings and international conflicts forced Istanbul to cede control of Bosnia to the Habsburg Monarchy. Invoking the international mandate to occupy and “civilize” the province, Austria-Hungary administered Bosnia from 1878 until the First World War, when both Ottoman and Habsburg states collapsed and new states, including Yugoslavia, were created in their wake.

Perhaps the most discussed facet of this land, the one constantly revisited by politicians and scholars alike, was its “national” or “ethnic” composition. Such phrases seem self-evident, evoking confident projections of clear-cut population counts, but the numbers themselves necessarily conflate a vast array of social relations into deceptively solid “ethnic” categories. In Ottoman-era official registers, the key criterion of intercommunal difference was confessional affiliation, usually assessed for the purposes of
Map 1.1 “Changes in Turkey in Europe, 1856–1878.” In this rendering, Bosnia’s position as the outermost Ottoman periphery is emphasized by its borders jutting out of the map frame. From John G. Bartholomew, *A Literary and Historical Atlas of Europe* (New York: Dutton, 1912).
taxation. In nineteenth-century Ottoman Bosnia, population estimates for the province (there were no systematic surveys as such) agree that the Orthodox accounted for the largest number, followed by Muslims, Catholics, Jews, and Roma.21 Beginning in the 1850s, Ottoman population estimates for the entire province usually cited a figure of about a million inhabitants; the numbers almost doubled during the Habsburg period and reached just under two million inhabitants by 1914. The extensive census counts carried out by the Habsburg administration after 1878 inherited the earlier Ottoman templates, officially using religion as the primary category of difference and treating the resulting groups as autonomous political constituencies. This development is especially significant in light of Habsburg policies elsewhere in the Dual Monarchy, which used language as the basic census category. In Habsburg Bosnia, however, “language” appeared less relevant as a census rubric because most of the population spoke a variant of the same South Slavic dialect, leaving “confession” as the most conspicuous marker of difference.22

The last Austro-Hungarian census in Bosnia in 1910 reported approximately the following scheme (by group count and percentage of total population): 434,000 (22%) Catholic, 825,000 (44%) Orthodox, 612,000 (31%) Muslim, and 26,000 (3%) so-called others. Even at the time, the rubric “confessional” was often read as “national”; Orthodoxy was equated with Serbs, Catholicism with Croats, and Islam with Bosniaks or Bosnian Muslims—but nationalists themselves contested these conflations. In 1911, the Habsburg administration produced for its own imperial use one of the first “ethno-confessional” maps of Bosnia: a color-coded, expertly shaded vision of difference mapped onto neatly bounded districts (see map I.2).

Such mappings and numbers, of course, primarily reflect political obsessions rather than the more tangible factors—physical geography, local affiliations, economic relationships—that could be said to “compose” a place. Already in the 1890s, Serbian and Greek geographers openly wrote that their practice of assigning a different color for each ethnic group was “not done in an ethnographic, but in a distinct, so to say ethnocratic way,” denoting not who actually lived in a given area, “but which group is dominant in a given colored area.”23 As many scholars have long stressed, statistics claiming to represent nationality tend to treat groups as homogeneous and permanent, thus concealing other social dynamics and identifications both across and within these categories. Fluctuating census numbers (e.g., showing a rise in the Catholic population during the Habsburg period) can hint at deeper social transformations (population growth, migration changes, conversions, etc.), but they also reinforce the basic rubrics themselves.24

During the nineteenth century, emerging national activists projected claims of both unifying sameness and radical difference onto this Bosnian context. Since the 1840s, budding South Slavic patriots—overwhelmingly based in neighboring Serbia and Croatia, where processes of “national
awakening” were already flourishing—looked to the “unawakened” Bosnia as a space where new patriotic sentiments would spread and lead to some kind of national unification. Based in the Habsburg realms, Croatian patriots declared Bosnia and its inhabitants natural parts of their national community, invoking bonds of language, history, and folklore. At the same time,
Serbian nation-builders used very similar arguments to proclaim the same terrain as rightly their own, but they could also rely on a major resource: the autonomous principality of Serbia that broke away from the Ottoman Empire at the beginning of the nineteenth century and became an independent state by 1878. Like Greece and Bulgaria, Serbia claimed many populations around its borders as “Serbian” and sought to expand its territory, particularly in Macedonia (which Serbia partly conquered in 1912) and Bosnia (which remained under Habsburg rule). Since the 1860s, many Yugoslav activists, even as they disagreed with earlier Serbian claims, shared this view of Bosnia as an unliberated land central to their projects. Thus both Serbian and Croatian patriots, including those from Bosnia itself, often appointed themselves as guardians and awakeners of a land that remained—in their eyes—“unawakened,” silent, suffering, and generally unable to realize its national potential without its bigger Serbian and Croatian brothers.

European statesmen, journalists, and political figures were intensely invested in the formation of new nations in the Balkans, actively intervening in some situations and generally keeping a close watch over these processes. The Serbian and Greek revolutions at the beginning of the nineteenth century (1804–1817 and 1821–1830, respectively) and the subsequent growth of national movements elicited a tremendous amount of Western European interest and captured the attention of writers from Lord Byron to Leopold von Ranke to Karl Marx. This international framework meant that South Slavic national activists—as well as Ottoman and Habsburg officials—always carried out their work with “Europe” in mind, explicitly appealing to transnational audiences and liberal opinion across England, France, Germany, and Russia.

It is important to remember that Serbian and Croatian movements were inseparably intertwined projects that developed shared repertoires, aims, and practices, especially as they concerned Bosnia-Herzegovina. Leading South Slavic figures frequently depicted Bosnia as a space of Serbo-Croatian national convergence, a process that promised to sweep across the province’s different confessions, thus demonstrating the power of the emerging national movements. At the same time, however, rival nationalist claims explicitly opposed each other, claiming Bosnia exclusively for one or the other side and thus envisioning a Serbian-Croatian confrontation over the province.

In declaring national disputes as inevitable, many actors (as well as outside observers) simply pointed to the intercommunal differences—Muslims, Croats, Serbs, and “others” occupying the same place—as guarantees of present or future problems. In these winner-take-all understandings, the diagnosis of difference itself portends division. The history of twentieth-century partitions, designed to identify and separate groups according to various criteria, seems only to reinforce the notion that “different peoples” ultimately cannot live together (e.g., Protestants and Catholics in Ireland,
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Hindus and Muslims in India, Serbs and Croats in Yugoslavia, etc.). Although Samuel Huntington’s “clash of civilizations” is one recent example of this kind of thinking, the tradition is longer and is familiar to students of Eastern Europe, the Middle East, and other areas where communal differences are cited as insurmountable obstacles to lasting peace. In 1944, a leading Harvard scholar explicated such assumptions in the title of one of the first American surveys of southeast Europe—The Balkans: Many Peoples, Many Problems.

The question that arose in the nineteenth century—whose is Bosnia?—captures some of the key assumptions behind nationalist disputes across Eastern Europe. By the 1870s, this question became a ubiquitous staple of Serbian and Croatian polemics, which passionately rehearsed arguments over slogans like “Bosnia is Serbian” and “Bosnia is Croatian.” At the turn of the twentieth century, mirroring claims over the same peoples became more intense, assuming languages of “anthropological” and “racial” difference at the same time that Serbian, Muslim, and Croatian activists forged new alliances in the name of Yugoslav unity. Not only Croatian and Serbian, but also Ottoman and Habsburg imperial officials as well as Yugoslav Communists entered these debates, reinterpreting “the Bosnian question” and mapping their own political visions—frequently by appropriating already established patriotic idioms—onto this contested terrain throughout the twentieth century.

Over the past two hundred years, these varied political projects have waxed and waned, with Bosnia erupting to the forefront of particular international crises (as in 1875, 1908, 1914, or 1992) and receding to the background at other times. At certain junctures, especially in the 1930s and the 1990s, plans for a Serbian-Croatian partition of Bosnia were advocated as “solutions” to the persisting “national question in Yugoslavia.” Others condemned such attempts as violations of “a historical entity which has its own identity and its own history.” Amid the violent dismemberment of Yugoslavia, the Dayton Peace Accord ended the Bosnian War (1992–1995) by instituting de facto partition within the now-independent country (see map I.3). In the wake of ethnic cleansing, Bosnia’s status as a “no man’s land” has fascinated filmmakers, policy experts, philosophers, and historians across the world. Many also saw the best qualities of socialist Yugoslavia embodied in this place. Slavoj Žižek was certainly not the only thinker to argue in the 1990s that “what could be said to embody the positive legacy of Titoist Yugoslavia—its much-praised multiculturalist tolerance—was (‘Muslim’) Bosnia.”

Since Bosnia was the target of so many rival projects, scholars often confront temptations—sometimes outright requests—to mediate among the competing sides, to bring out alternative voices that speak against nationalist divisions, or to rescue from oblivion some dimension of this land that has been silenced by ethno-national narratives. While I understand these temptations,
and while national and imperial forces have often suppressed different kinds of politics, this book does not claim to speak for some “silent” Bosnia, nor does it aim to recover a Bosnia that is somehow “better”—that is, less nationalist and more liberal—than its past or present. Instead, this book focuses on the dominant forms of nationalist politics, asking what demands, practices, and forces have historically shaped the proliferation of nationalist projects on this terrain, marked as it is by tropes of awakening, silence, and suffering. This book consequently takes a broad view of “the Bosnian question,” tracing a wide range of actors and movements that have produced its various iterations. Its key protagonists are not only Bosnians who worked in this province but also actors like Serbian statesmen, Croatian writers, and Ottoman and Habsburg officials who forged intense political attachments to this land and thus made themselves central to its history.
Having passed through hundreds of arguments, visions, and revisions, the nineteenth-century question, “whose is Bosnia?” became a habituated expression of nationalist dispute, a metonym for the more general history of South Slavic national contestations. Precisely because of its deeply engrained status in political discourse, this question deserves closer scrutiny to reveal its assumptions and implicit narrative codes.

The Code of Questions: The Plan of the Book

To ask the question, whose is Bosnia? (or, whose is Kashmir? or, whose is Cyprus?) is to pose an already coded prompt, a riddle that structures expectations and presupposes certain kinds of explanations and answers. The question, whose is Bosnia? presents an apparent enigma that already anticipates contestations, partial solutions, interruptions, and complications between many sides: Serbs, Croats, Muslims, Ottomans, Habsburgs, Yugoslavs, Communists, American peacemakers, and so on. Crucially, such questions presuppose that, after all the entanglements and twists of history, there are answers that provide the satisfaction of having an end to the story. Histories of national questions have often been written with such narrative expectations of drama in mind—unresolved question, complicating delays, and answer that reveals the truth and restores clarity.

There are many examples of history written with such narrative expectations in mind. Writing in a series of articles in 2000, for instance, Timothy Garton Ash characterized the toppling of Slobodan Milošević as “the last revolution” that not only concluded the Yugoslav Wars but also signified “the end of an even longer and larger story: the two-centuries-old, delayed, and long-interrupted process of the formation of modern European nation-states out of the ruins of the Ottoman Empire.” Historians like Gale Stokes similarly found that “solving” the Yugoslav wars required the recognition that the nationalist projects, for better or worse, continue to be the only “realistic” options around. The wars were appalling, of course, but they were simply “the final working out of a long European tradition of violent ethnic homogenization,” a protracted process of the “redrawing of state borders onto ethnic lines” over the last two centuries. Nationalist partition, however tragic, here appears as narrative relief: the resolution of a number of long-standing historical questions (the Eastern Question, the Bosnian question, the Yugoslav question, etc.). That once-perplexing riddle, whose is Bosnia?, the evasive problem that vexed so many statesmen, observers, and writers since the nineteenth century, thus abruptly arrives at its ultimate settlement in the 1990s through violence, war, and partition. The history of Bosnia told in this key is basically dramatic.

But there are always other ways of reading this history. Instead of playing out the suspense of the dramatic plotline culminating in the present,
this book strives to reopen those critical situations where different kinds of national tensions take place, something closer to Brecht’s “epic” than to the “dramatic” staging of riveting tragedies. Such an analysis treats “national questions” not as settleable territorial disputes that can be resolved through border changes and power-sharing agreements, but as deeper questions that inhere in nationalist concerns with producing and reproducing proper patriotic subjects. Far from “solving” such questions in the Yugoslav space, the violence of the twentieth century has only intensified and reinvented them for new post-1990s generations. A sustained look at the processes of identification with one’s co-nationals reveals the reversible course of these practices, thus removing the aura of inevitability fostered by dramatically coded questions and inviting a more active engagement with nationalism as a living problem.

I write as someone whose personal background is shaped by these histories. I was born in Sarajevo, Yugoslavia, and lived in that city until the outbreak of war in 1992. A year and a half later, my family and I, like many citizens of the newly formed Bosnia-Herzegovina, came to the United States through its refugee resettlement program. I received my professional training and employment as a historian at various American institutions. It will surprise no one that I have deep attachments to Bosnia, Yugoslavia, and the United States. This personal background is, for me, more than a link that connects the autobiographical and the historiographical by way of their shared site; it also made me more aware of the possibilities and limitations of history as a discipline that usually touches only certain senses of the past. This particular project is born out of the conviction that we badly need new narratives not only of Bosnia’s national space but also of nationalism as a political force. My aim here is thus not to settle nationalist disputes, but rather to raise research questions about how we, as students of nationalism, can productively study this very much living phenomenon.

The issues that I present in the following chapters are arranged thematically. They are the result of my close reading of nationalist works in nineteenth-century Bosnia, where certain issues kept reappearing in various guises. By following these archival traces, I found myself assembling something like a formative repertoire of nationalist concerns, which constitute the core subjects of this book: “the people,” suffering, activism, youth, and imperial rivalry.

Chapters 1 and 2 analyze the emergence of Bosnia as a space central to South Slavic national identifications and patriotic sentiments. Chapter 1 explores how folkloric pursuits in Bosnia and Herzegovina, often dismissed as a passing romantic stage of nationalism, were in fact crucial to the self-fashioning of national activists, enabling them to develop new ethnographic-populist practices and to outline the subject of their activity: the narod or “the people.” Alongside folklore, Serbian and Croatian activists discovered in Bosnia another core concern: the suffering of the Bosnian
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Christians under Turkish rule. As Chapter 2 shows, the vast body of patriotic writing on this subject powerfully reconfigured South Slavic categories of identification and established suffering as a foundational—and continuously renewable—sentiment of national consciousness.

The following three chapters analyze struggles over the organization of national activism. Chapter 3 turns to the impact of the Serbian nationalizing mission in Bosnia. It explores the anxieties raised by the process of nation-formation in this province, especially as it concerned the possibility of nationalizing Bosnian Muslims and the disappointments that this project continually produced. Chapter 4 charts the rise of the nationalist youth or omladina movements among the South Slavs, paying special attention to the linkages of youth and heroism at the turn of the century. This development, exemplified by the rise of the Young Bosnia movement, not only bolstered political attacks—the 1914 assassination happened “when Gavrilo Princip decided to show Franz Ferdinand whose is Bosnia,” one Young Bosnian wrote—but also intensified the nationalist anticipation of youth as an extraordinary but not fully formed political element. Chapter 5 turns to the Ottoman and the Habsburg Empires and their appropriation of nationalist cultural forms; these processes show how these states, often perceived as being “anational” or “supra-ethnic,” created patriotic programs in Bosnia from the 1860s onward and made crucial contributions to the proliferation of nationalist politics. The epilogue offers some reflections on these themes more broadly.

Each chapter can be read as a thematic essay in itself, or as a part of an overarching exploration of the formative concerns of nation-making.

Findings: The Co-National as (Br)other

Bosnia’s history has often been told as either a chronicle of long-simmering ethnic tensions and conflict or as a story attesting to enduring solidarity and peaceful coexistence between Serbs, Croats, and Muslims. Rather than take sides in this debate, this book reconsiders the historical formation of these foundational categories and focuses on the recurring slippages between otherness and sameness, division and unity, in national projects revolving around Bosnia.

The relationship of the Serbian and Croatian movements to Bosnian Muslims provides an especially productive terrain for such an analysis. Like other national movements that rose in the nineteenth-century Balkans, Serbian and Croatian projects defined themselves against the background of “the Turkish yoke,” appealing to Christian (both Orthodox and Catholic) peasants to rise up against “the Turks” and their oppression. Yet even as they explicitly named “the Turks” as their mortal enemy, many Serbian-Croatian patriots simultaneously described Bosnian “Turks” or “Muhammedans” as
their “brothers,” pointing to shared language, customs, and ancestry and calling for a cross-confessional expansion of patriotic sentiments. Many Serbian-Croatian nationalists envisioned a national future where Bosnian Muslims would shed their “backward” qualities and embrace the ethos of South Slavic unity, thus demonstrating the power of patriotism to triumph over political divisions. In 1850, Ivan Franjo Jukić, a leading national activist in Bosnia, summed up these tensions thus: Bosnian Muslims are “the greatest enemies of their own people and their own same-blooded brothers.”

My argument here is not that the position of Bosnian Muslims was somehow exceptional, but rather that struggles around Muslims’ status as potential co-nationals outline an exemplary and central figure of nation-making, a figure that is neither enemy nor ally, neither “ours” nor “theirs,” neither “brother” nor “Other”—an undecidable figure that I have called (br)other.

To understand the centrality of the (br)other to the work of nationalism, it is helpful to contrast it with another common understanding of relations between co-nationals. The nation is an imagined community, Benedict Anderson famously wrote, “imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members . . . yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion.” Anderson stressed “fraternal,” “horizontal comradeship” as the defining quality of the national community, “regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each.” But in their emphasis on the crucial idea of comradeship, Andersonian accounts tend to frame national bonds in binary terms, resulting in relations that are either “brotherly” or “unbrotherly,” harmonious or conflictual, united or ultimately divided.

A closer look at these relations reveals a much more interesting and dynamic picture of patriotic brotherhood, one fraught with abiding anxieties over recognizing, identifying, and relating to one’s “fellow members,” be they peasants, or women, or children, or, in the South Slavic context, Muslims—that is, people continually depicted as backward, ignorant, hostile, disappointing, and otherwise insufficiently patriotic, yet at the same time acknowledged as indispensable to the national future.

The co-national, in this understanding, is the national (br)other: signifying at the same time the potential of being both “brother” and “Other,” containing the fantasy of both complete assimilation and ominous, insurmountable difference—and thus making visible a range of passages between seeming opposites. Brothers and brotherhood are deeply naturalized figures in histories of nationalism; part of their power resides in their habitual characterizations of national relations as brotherly, implying or at least expecting a sense of shared ancestry, intimacy, and fellowship among its overwhelmingly male members. This “familial, fraternalist and thus androcentric configuration of politics,” as Jacques Derrida and Mona Ozouf have shown, has inscribed particular Christian understandings of fraternity into modern conceptions of democracy, privileging certain genealogies and senses of
brotherhood as seemingly universal and self-evident. While Andersonian accounts of “imagined communities” have long viewed the nation as a historical construct, they have nonetheless left intact its crucial assumption of the nation as a self-evident “brotherhood.” One task of this book is to bring into sharper focus the brother, this naturalized—and therefore often overlooked—subject of national histories.

Drawing on the writings of Zygmunt Bauman and Jacques Derrida, I suggest the term “(br)other” as an interpretive device, a strategy of double writing that enables us to simultaneously hold two terms that usually have opposite meanings. Taking advantage of the accidental overlap of two terms in English, “(br)other” designates neither a new content nor a third term separate from the foundational binary. It is instead an analytical practice that brings out other meanings, citations, and decisions that one makes in particular readings, a way of keeping in mind different possibilities that inhabit the brother and the Other. Such interpretive practices help us stay alert to the range and reversibility of processes of national identification.

The (br)other as an analytical strategy can be traced here only as an outline; its actual workings emerge more fully through deeper contextual exploration of national relations, which this book pursues in the following pages. Being the subject of different interpretations and interventions, the figure of the (br)other allows us to trace the formation of diverse political valences, relationships, and commitments. Given the assumptions of fraternity as an overwhelmingly male society, focus on the (br)other can also highlight the persistent concerns over the gendering of national subjects and patriotic norms. One could, within the context of uneven power relations between different constituencies, also analyze gradations that make certain figures something like “little” or “big” (br)others. This book cannot develop all of these possibilities of (br)otherhood; instead, it takes the history of Serbian-Croatian attempts to nationalize Bosnian Muslims as grounds for elaborating the meanings of the (br)other as a co-national.

Having (br)others for co-nationals exposes a peculiar quality of nationalism: its relentless and impossible drives to “finally” consolidate relations among co-nationals. Since the nineteenth century, countless patriotic projects have claimed to have “finally” settled who is a Serb, or a Croat, or a Muslim, and who is not, to have “finally” established a lasting sense of unity among “our people.” Nonetheless, the (br)other reappears, undoing any permanent sense of closure of nation-making and unsettling proclaimed bonds of national unity. To read and write (br)others into histories of nationalism is thus to underline the matters that repeatedly expose this strangeness of “us” as a foundational category of nationhood.