NATIONAL IDENTITY IN BOSNIA-HERZEGOVINA
PART 1: A FRAMEWORK FOR EXPLORATION

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Introduction

In Bosnia-Herzegovina, the context where I live and work, national identity colors every aspect of everyday life.[1] The fusion of religion and (ethnic) national identity makes it a missiological issue. A good grasp of the dynamics of national identity in Bosnia-Herzegovina will help missionaries in the work of evangelism and discipleship. It is difficult for foreigners, however, to "get a handle" on just what national identity is and how it works in Bosnia-Herzegovina's because the context is so extraordinarily complex.[2]

This paper suggests a framework (consisting of two paradigms) for exploring national identity as it exists in contemporary Bosnia-Herzegovina. An accompanying paper demonstrates a rudimentary use of the first paradigm to contrast and compare ethnic national identity as it currently exists in Bosnia-Herzegovina with civic national identity as it existed in Socialist Bosnia-Herzegovina. It is written in the hope that this framework may adopted and used in similar contexts.

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[1] Many of Bosnia-Herzegovina's political and religious leaders still have not renounced the ethno-religious nationalism that led to the traumatic war of 1992-1995.
[2] "Bosnia-Herzegovina," claimed Slovene writer Josip Vidmar, "entered the twentieth century as the most complicated country in Europe." cited in Ivan Lovrenović, *Bosnia: A Cultural History* (New York: New York University Press, 2001), 108).

I. WHAT IS NATIONAL IDENTITY?

National identity is linked to the concept of a "nation."[3] In the English speaking world, while we are familiar with the terms "ethnic groups" and "ethnic identity," the term "national identity" is not common in everyday discourse nor in scholarly literature.[4] The reverse is true in Bosnia-Herzegovina. Bosnians don't often talk about their "ethnic group" (*naša etnička grupa*) but they often refer to their "people/nation" (*naš narod*).

This confusion is further complicated in the Slavic world by two additional factors, one historical and one linguistic. People in the Slavic speaking world tend to refer to "nations" rather than "ethnic groups" because of the influence of Stalin's theory of nations. In socialist times the state "objectified" selected "ethnic communities" by giving them official recognition as "nations" within their state. For example, in Socialist Yugoslavia, five social groups were initially given the status of "nations." This made Yugoslavia a "multi-national" state.

The Slavic term for "nation" is *narod*. English does not have a term to precisely translates the word "*narod.*"[5] Slavic researcher Teodor Shanin calls this the "case of the missing term" in the English language.[6] John Allcock, a specialist in South East European studies, summarizes the differences like this,

> Whereas the English term "nation" tends to set in motion a chain of associations of a primarily political character, linking it to the state (especially for North Americans), for South Slavs the associations are more likely to point towards a sense of belonging to a group with a shared past and culture.[7]

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[3] I'm using the term "nation" here to refer to a people, similar to the way Americans refer to the "Cherokee nation."

[4] Thomas Eriksen argues, however, that even in English, the term 'ethnic group' has come to mean, not a social group characterized by face to face interaction, but "something like a 'people.' " Tomas Eriksen, *Ethnicity and Nationalism* (London: Pluto Press, 2002), 11.

[5] "narod" corresponds roughly to the Biblical terms *gôy /gôyîm* and   θνος / θνη

[6] Theodor Shanin, "Soviet Theories of Ethnicity: The Case of a Missing Term," *New Left Review* 1.158 (July-Aug 1986).

[7] John Allcock, "The Kosovo War: Perspectives from Social, Political and International Theory." Presented at University of Sussex June 1999.
 <http://www.sussex.ac.uk/Units/SPT/seminars/kosovo/seminar3.html>, (March 5, 2007).

In this article I use the term "nation"[8] in the Slavic way to refer to,

> A large social collectivity bound together by a shared sense of solidarity (i.e. "us" vs. them")[9] based on kinship type relationships (i.e. intermarriage within the nation) and possessing a common name, language, history and heritage, territory, shared religious heritage (usually) and some form of organized leadership.

Many scholars would have no trouble using this definition to describe an ethnic group. Fenton is probably correct, however, in seeing a "nation" as an ethnic group which has, or seeks, political autonomy or statehood.[10]

Scholarly literature on nations and national identity and on ethnic groups and ethnicity[11] can be grouped around two contrasting positions: *primordialism* and *constructionism*. Primordialism views national identity as something objective, acquired by birth and fixed. Constructionism sees national identity as socially constructed, different for each individual and constantly in flux.

A constructivist understanding of "nations" is popular among scholars today. Benedict Anderson's famous definition of a nation as an "*imagined political community"* is often citied. This shouldn't be pushed too far, however, for

> If social groups and social identity are in a "continual state of flux" then social analysis of these groups becomes impossible. There must be some measure of continuity and stability to a group if it is to be seen as an object of analysis.[12]

From a missiological perspective, it makes little difference whether national identity is real or imagined. Regardless of how you understand it, it deeply impacts both everyday life and missionary work in contemporary Bosnia-Herzegovina.

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[8] i.e. with quotation marks to indicate I'm using it in a specialized sense

[9] I use the term ethnicity to describe this shared sense of solidarity.

[10] He writes, "if an ethnic group wishes to rule itself it needs to start calling itself a nation." 263. Steve Fenton, *Ethnicity* (Cambridge: Polity, 2003), 52-53.

[11] Historically, the study of ethnic groups and ethnicity has been the domain of anthropologists and the study of nations, national identity and nationalism has been the domain of political scientists and sociologists.

[12] Horatiu Rusu, "Towards a Theoretical Model of Identity: The Sociocultural Identity as Internalisation of Religious Values." Round table presentation at Globalization, Integration and Social Development in Central and Eastern Europe. Sibiu, Romania, 2003, 2-3.

I find Anthony Smith's ethno-symbolism approach the most useful perspective for examining national identity in Bosnia-Herzegovina. This perspective is reflected in the definition of "nation" I've articulated above. It can be classified as a soft form of primordialism.

I've spelled out my working definition of a "nation." What then is national identity? Webster defines identity refers to the state or quality of being the same as something or someone else.[13] In this basic sense, "identity" emerges as the answer to one of three basic questions:

Two Types of Identity

Type of Identity	Basic question answered
Personal identity	Who am I?
Collective (group) identity	Who are "we"?
	Who are "they"?

A person's identity is expressed through

> Their name, which serves first to single them out from other people, and then that deeper, intangible something that constitutes who one really is and for which we do not have a precise word."[14]

Group identity is more difficult to conceptualize. It is related to personal identity. A person's interaction with others, and the "recognition" or "non-recognition" received based on existing social identity categories forms a crucial part of an individual's "social identity." Some of the most basic forms of collective social identities are ethnic, national, religious, confessional, civic, regional and local. [15]

Both individuals and groups have multiple identities. At any given point in time, both personally and collectively, one of these identities is a primary identity and others

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[13] "Identity," *Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary,* 2004, <http://www.merriam-webster.com> (March 7, 2006).

[14] John Earl Joseph, *Language and Identity: National, Ethnic, Religious* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 1.

[15] *cf.* Manuel Castells, *The Power of Identity* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1997).

have varying degrees of salience. I define national identity as, "the collective sense that individuals within a "nation" have of who they are."

This "collective sense" that lies at the heart of national identity has both objective and subjective dimensions. It encompasses both the outer, objective sense of the visible expression[16] of a "nation" in space and time *and* the inner, subjective sense that people within that "nation" believe and/or feel about who they are as a "nation."

The term "nationalism" is often used to describe the same phenomenon as "national identity," i.e. as a descriptor of a people's sense of affiliation with their nation. This causes confusion. Jasna Milošević Đorđević admits that it is hard to distinguish between nationalism and national identity. The key question, she suggests, is "Are they essentially the same thing, differing only in intensity, or do they describe two different phenomena?"

I prefer to use the term "national identity" in a neutral way (it is neither good nor bad, it just "is") and the term "nationalism" in a negative way (to refer to something that is "bad"). I agree with the approach of John Keane who passionately argues that,

> Nationalism is a scavenger. It feeds upon the pre-existing sense of nationhood within a given territory, transforming that shared national identity into a bizarre parody of its former self. Nationalism is a pathological form of national identity which tends…to destroy its heterogeneity by squeezing the nation into the Nation. Nationalism has a fanatical core. In contrast to national identity, whose boundaries are not fixed and whose tolerance of difference and openness to other forms of life is qualitatively greater, nationalism requires its adherents to believe in the belief itself… Nationalism has nothing of the humility of national identity.[17]

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[16] The objective sense of national identity is usually expressed in concrete and symbolic ways that are recognizable by those both inside and outside the nation or "people" see
Arthur Schlesinger, *The Disuniting of America: Reflections on a Multicultural Society* (New York: Norton, 1992), 168.
[17] John Keane, *Reflections on Violence* (London: Verso, 1996), 125-27.

National identity is best studied, argues Đorđević, by analyzing the meaning and structure of national identity for individuals, examining what it means in its essence and how those individuals understand and experience it.[18]

This dovetails nicely with Rogers Brubaker's suggestion that the term "identity" is too broad a concept to use as a category of analysis. Instead of trying to examine the nebulous concept of national identity it is wiser, he contends, to examine:

- Categorization (or identification),
- Self-understanding (or social location) and
- Solidarity (this is term, Brubacker labels this groupness or commonality)

Any examination of national identity, therefore, involves studying these three dimensions (categorization, self-understanding and solidarity). National identity is a complex, multi-dimensional construct that "makes visible" these core subjective, objective and emotional components that give a "nation" its identity in contrast to other (usually neighboring) nations. Viewed this way, national identity in Bosnia-Herzegovina includes:

- The objective categories of national identification ("nations") available in Bosnia-Herzegovina
- An individual's subjective sense of belonging to one of these "nations" and
- The strong emotional sense of collective solidarity people in a "nation" feel toward others in the same "nation"

Scholars often distinguish between two forms of national identity: civil and ethnic. Anthony Smith traces these differences to civic and ethnic understandings of what a "nation" is. A civic understanding of "nations" is a "peculiarly Western concept" that views a "nation" in terms of territory, laws and a common civic culture and ideology.[19] An ethnic understanding of "nations" views a "nation" in terms of common ethnic descent, a common language and common customs. Since there are few true

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[18] Jasna Milošević Đorđević, "Jedan pokušaj klasifikacije teorijskih razmatranja nacionalnog identiteta" [An attempt a classifying theories of national identity]. *Psihologija* [*Psychology*] 36 2 (2003):125-40. She cites a range of contemporary scholars who favor this approach: Brubaker, Calhoun, Sollors, Billig, Medrano, Gutierrez, Archiles, Marti, Roccas, and Brewer.
[19] Anthony Smith, *National Identity* (London: Penguin, 1991), 9-11.

"nation-states,"[20] the term "nation" has come to blend two sets of dimensions, the one civic and territory, the other ethnic and genealogical, in varying proportions.[21] Slovenian scholar Mitja Velikonja explains it this way,

> The perception of national identity in eastern, central and southern Europe was different from that of western and northern Europe and emerged at a much later date. Whereas a specific historical course of events in the former resulted in the prevalence of the territorial-political concept of the nation-state, the east was more heavily influenced by linguistic, cultural and religious considerations.[22]

The following table conceptualizes these dynamics for the United States, Croatia / Serbia and Bosnia-Herzegovina.

Civic vs. Ethnic Identity in Three Contexts

Type	United States	Croatia / Serbia	Bosnia-Herzegovina
Civic Identity	American	Croatian, Serbian	Bosnian
Ethnic Identity	Optional (irrelevant for the core population)	Croatian / Serbia (Fused with the Civic Identity)	Required (legally) and important (three fixed categories)

II. A PARADIGM FOR EXAMINING THE SYNCHRONIC ASPECT OF NATIONAL IDENTITY

Biblical scholar Dennis Duling developed what he labeled the "Socio-Cultural Model of Ethnicity" based on Anthony Smith's ethno-symbolism approach to ethnicity. He notes,

> [It] highlights key representative (not comprehensive) socio-cultural features and is an outsider's model (*etic* model) that is "imposed" on the available data. It is general and abstract and therefore runs the risk of oversimplifying distinctive local ethnographic and historical information.[23]
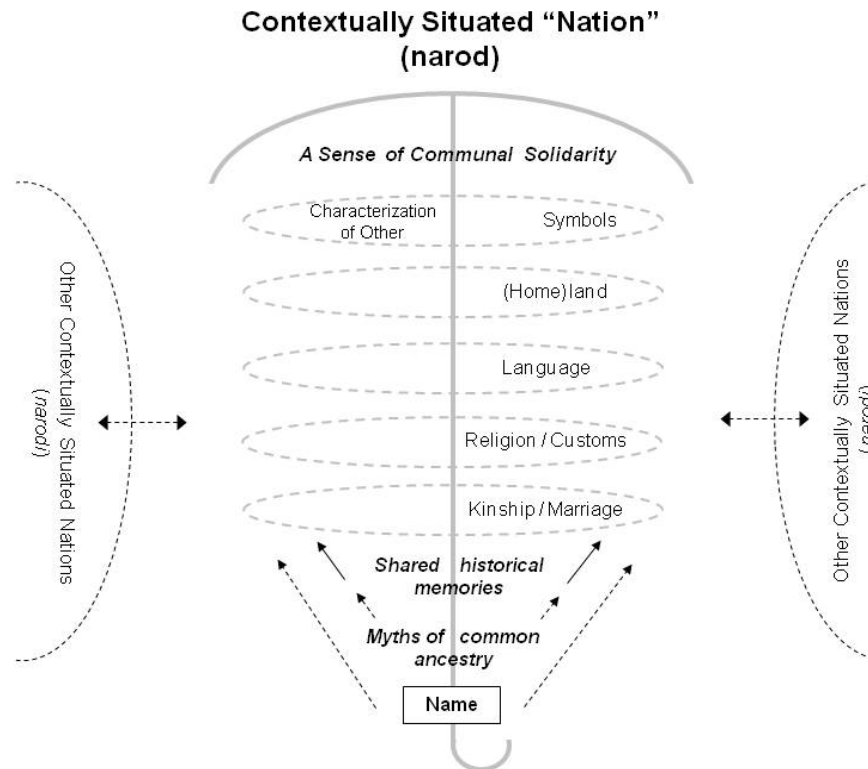
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[20] Smith cites Walter Connor's estimate in the early 1970s that only 10% of states fall into this category. Ibid. 15. Bosnia's neighbors, Croatia, Serbia and Montenegro are true "nation-states." Bosnia is a multi-national state.

[21] Anthony Smith, Ibid. 15.

[22] Mitja Velikonja, *Religious Separation Political Intolerance in Bosnia-Herzegovina* (*Religious Separation and* College Station, TX: Texas A&M University Press, 2003), 11.

[23] Dennis Duling, "Ethnicity, Ethnocentrism, and the Matthean Ethnos," *Biblical Theology Bulletin* (December 2005).

Duling conceptualizes ethnicity as the "cultural stuff" under the cultural umbrella

Contextually Situated "Nation"
(narod)

A Sense of Communal Solidarity

Characterization of Other · Symbols

(Home)land

Language

Religion / Customs

Kinship / Marriage

Shared historical memories

Myths of common ancestry

Name

Other Contextually Situated Nations *(narod)*

Other Contextually Situated Nations *(narod)*

but it recognizes that cultural characteristics are subject to self-definition and change by the group itself." Building on Duling's model, I've developed the Contextually Situated "Nation" [CSN] model to aid in examining the complicated dynamics of national identity in Bosnia-Herzegovina. In adapting Duling's model, I focused on "nation" rather than ethnic groups, I left out his category of pheno-typical features as this is not a factor in Bosnia-Herzegovina and I replaced the dimension of "time" with a new variable: "interaction with surrounding nations."

The CSN model considers national identity as the *collective sense* that individuals within the "nations" of Bosnia-Herzegovina *have of who they are*.

Following Brubaker, the paradigm I am proposing for examining the synchronic aspect of national identity is three dimensional:

- National Identity as categorization or identification *(the objective dimension of identity).*

- National Identity as self-understanding *(the subjective dimension of identity)*
- National Identity as solidarity *(the emotional dimension of identity).*

The paradigm examines these three dimensions of national identity by focusing on the seven core aspects of national identity the CSN model highlights. I summarize it like this:

**Proposed Paradigm for Examining the
Synchronic Aspect of National Identity**

Dimension	Core Aspect of National Identity
Objective Dimension (Categories)	1) Name
	2) Kinship basis of membership in the "nation"
	3) Religious heritage
Subjective Dimension (Self-Understanding)	4) Historical narratives (myth)
	5) Language
	6) Core territory
Emotional Dimension (Solidarity)	7) Symbolic expressions of national identity and negative characterization of "outsiders"

III. A PARADIGM FOR EXAMINING THE DIACHRONIC ASPECT OF NATIONAL IDENTITY

Alex Bellamy, in his research on contemporary Croatia, developed a three-level model to explain the formation of national identity.[24] He approached national identity as a phenomenon operating at multiple levels within a society and in multiple social spheres.[25] In his study of Croatia Bellamy focused on six social spheres: the economy, sport (particularly soccer), regionalism (in Istria), language, education and religion. National identity, he argued, is constituted by the complex interaction at multiple levels and multiple spheres in society. This "constructed" identity becomes embedded in the

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[24] Alex J. Bellamy, *The Formation of Croatian National Identity: A Centuries-Old Dream? Europe in Change* (New York: Manchester University Press, 2003).
[25] His model is based on Paul James' concept of multidimensional national identity. Paul James see the "nation" as constituted at the most abstract level but constantly reproduced, represented and reinterpreted at the most local level in ways that cause cross-level contradictions. Bellamy, 26.

lived out experiences of people. These dynamics make national identity complex, overlapping and often contradictory.

To better fit the Bosnian context, I added an additional level to Bellamy's three levels - the ideological level controlled by the academic and religious elite. The revised model is conceptualized in the following table.
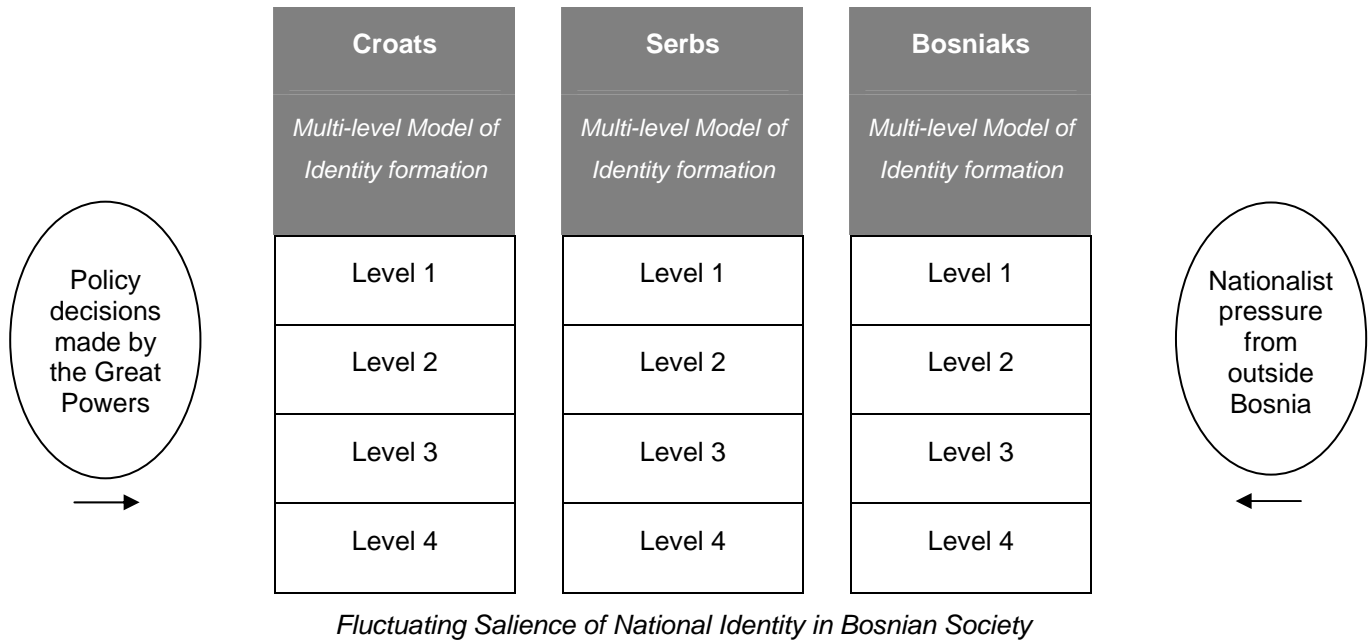
Bellamy's Multi-level Model of National Identity Formation

Level 1	Academic and Religious Elites (Concepts / Writings)
Level 2	Historical and Religious narratives (myth) ("Big Stories")
Level 3	Instrumental Usage of the "Big Stories" to legitimize political programs (structures and actors)
Level 4	Banal Nationalism (Everyday life) i.e. how narratives of national identity articulated by political and religious leaders are continually reinterpreted in everyday life.

The movement in the model is downward from the abstract levels to its concrete manifestation at local and individual levels.

Because contemporary Bosnia-Herzegovina is a state of three constituent "nations", Bosnia-Herzegovina is in the confusing position of having three national identities.   I've summarized the proposed paradigm like this:

Proposed Paradigm for Examining the
Diachronic Aspect of National Identity

Croats	Serbs	Bosniaks
Multi-level Model of Identity formation	*Multi-level Model of Identity formation*	*Multi-level Model of Identity formation*
Level 1	Level 1	Level 1
Level 2	Level 2	Level 2
Level 3	Level 3	Level 3
Level 4	Level 4	Level 4

Policy decisions made by the Great Powers →

Nationalist pressure from outside Bosnia ←

Fluctuating Salience of National Identity in Bosnian Society

These two paradigms, *The Paradigm for Examining the Synchronic Aspect of National Identity,* and *The Paradigm for Examining the Diachronic Aspect of National Identity* together provide a useful framework for examining national identity and its dynamics in Bosnia-Herzegovina.