

Reseña del libro: Hronešová, J. (2012). *Everyday Ethno-National Identities of Young People in Bosnia and Herzegovina*. Berlin, Germany: Peter Lang Verlag.

Book Review: Hronešová, J. (2012). *Everyday Ethno-National Identities of Young People in Bosnia and Herzegovina*. Berlin, Germany: Peter Lang Verlag.

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Resumen

Este artículo reseña *Everyday Ethno-National Identities of Young People in Bosnia and Herzegovina* (2012) de Jessie Barton Hronešová, centrándose en cómo los principios etnonacionales configuran las relaciones sociales cotidianas en la Bosnia y Herzegovina de posguerra. A partir de un enfoque cualitativo combinado, la autora articula un análisis macro-político basado en bibliografía secundaria y datos estadísticos con una investigación etnográfica de escala micro. El libro se estructura en tres partes: un marco teórico e histórico sobre la construcción de la identidad; un análisis intersubjetivo de los marcadores étnicos cotidianos, como nombres, lengua y religión, entendidos como dispositivos de clasificación social; y una exploración de la producción y mantenimiento de fronteras etnonacionales a través de la territorialización política y la segregación espacial. Hronešová cuestiona los enfoques constructivistas al sostener que la persistencia de las identidades etnonacionales en Bosnia se explica en gran medida por la ausencia de

contacto interétnico. El estudio muestra las experiencias de jóvenes en contextos postconflicto y pone de relieve el peso emocional y social de las identidades heredadas en la vida cotidiana.

Abstract This article analyses *Everyday Ethno-National Identities of Young People in Bosnia and Herzegovina* (2012) by Jessie Barton Hronešová, focusing on how ethno-national principles shape everyday social relations in post-war Bosnia and Herzegovina. Through a mixed qualitative approach, the author combines a macro-political analysis based on secondary literature and statistical data with a micro-scale ethnographic investigation. The book is structured in three parts: a theoretical and historical framework on the construction of identity; an intersubjective analysis of everyday ethnic markers, such as names, language, and religion, understood as devices of social classification; and an exploration of the production and maintenance of ethno-national boundaries through political territorialisation and spatial segregation. Hronešová challenges constructivist approaches by arguing that the persistence of ethno-national identities in Bosnia is largely explained by the absence of inter-ethnic contact. The study foregrounds the experiences of young people in post-conflict settings and highlights the emotional and social weight of inherited identities in everyday life.

Palabras clave: Identidad etnonacional, Juventud, Bosnia y Herzegovina de posguerra, Etnicidad cotidiana, Fronteras sociales, Etnografía, Relaciones interétnicas, Sociedades postconflicto

Keywords: Ethno-national identity, Youth, Post-war Bosnia and Herzegovina, Everyday ethnicity, Social boundaries, Ethnography, Interethnic relations, post-conflict societies

“Everyday Ethno-National Identities of Young People in Bosnia and Herzegovina” (2012) by Jessie Barton Hronešová draws a picture of how ethno-national principles influence social networks and personal relationships in everyday Bosnian life, from a political and macro perspective, through secondary bibliography and statistics, to a micro local level through the ethnographic method. The aim of this combined qualitative analysis is no other than giving voice to young people marginalized by social elites, to bring to the table the topic of how the ethnically cleansed and segregated

environment, as well as low experience with the pre-war supra-national socialist principles, affects their understanding of the other, as a category of identity (Hronešová, 2012, p.10).

Hronešová is a political sociologist at UCL's School of Slavonic and East European Studies, specializing in memory, identity, and post-war reconstruction in Southeast Europe. Her work on Bosnia stems from her broader research on transitional justice and victimhood, where she employs ethnographic fieldwork, archival research, and interviews to examine how young people's daily lives are influenced by historical narratives, intergenerational trauma, and political divisions.

The book is structured in three parts. The first establishes a theoretical background on identity, combining an extensive literature review with historical accounts of ethnic and religious identity in Bosnia. The second part focuses on internal and intersubjective aspects of identity. Hronešová aims to demonstrate how names act as "ethnic markers", shaping social relationships and indirectly assigning ethno-national categories (Hronešová, 2012, p.51). While Barthian (1969) theory frames this as boundary maintenance, Hronešová interprets naming and other ethnic markers as uncertainty-reduction tools, following Hale's (2008) theoretical approach. Language, similarly politicized, serves as an artificial ethno-national attribute that facilitates categorization (Hronešová, 2012, p.53). Religion, she argues, represents the principal content of ethno-national identity, functioning as a "cognitive shorthand" that provides predictability and reduces social uncertainty (Hronešová, 2012, p.65). The third section aims to answer how ethno-national boundaries are externally drawn and maintained by spatial divisions, localized identities, and external categorizations by the Bosnian authorities. Hronešová draws on Benedict Anderson's (1983) notion of imagined communities and Hale's (2008) concept of security within demarcated spaces to illustrate how political territorialization and physical separation reinforce identity (Hronešová, 2012, p.78). She is aware of the problem of positionality in her research, as she settles how being a woman limited her mobility throughout the country and affected her results. Moreover, the author makes a key point by stating how this monograph is not a generalisation, but only a representative of the case studied (Hronešová, 2012, p.21). This can also be observed in the tone of the book, although it is targeted for an academic public who is already aware of not only the history of the territory, but also the academic debate on identity approaches, she is precise and methodical when it comes to the use of terms, statistics, and interview transcripts.

The relevance of this text in the academic context is brought by her engaging debate with Fredrik Barth (1969) and Thomas Eriksen (1992). Whereas constructivist approaches argue that ethnic identities are

constituted and maintained through social interaction, Hronešová challenges this perspective by suggesting that in Bosnia, boundaries persist largely due to the lack of inter-ethnic contact. She proposes that ethnic identities in Bosnia are not just empty labels, but religion and descent give them emotional weight, so when individuals have personal contact with the “other,” their identities can become more flexible and multilayered. In this sense, “ethnic markers” are key to understanding the way boundaries are established through criteria such as names, places, language, and so on (Hronešová, 2012, p.47). She proposes that young people’s identities in Bosnia are mainly inherited through family background and kinship, becoming visible in everyday ethnic markers such as first names (e.g., “Ahmed” versus “Marko”), spoken language or dialect, and religious affiliation, which together operate as clear signals of group membership and help maintain boundaries between communities. This observation leads her to define “ethno-national identity” as the most appropriate framework for analyzing the Bosnian context, given the inextricable link between ethnicity and religion in the region. Hronešová operationalizes the concept of identity in ways that account for its local manifestations, including the careful use of spelling, pronunciation notes, and local terminology. Her postmodernist perspective frames identity as a dynamic, interactive process shaped by oppositional relationships between “self/us” and “other/them” (Hronešová, 2012, p.23). She further integrates Tajfel (1978, 1981) theory on the role of violence in identity formation, situating her analysis within both historical and contemporary frameworks.

Nevertheless, from the first pages, we can notice her culturalist point of view, drawing broadly on Clifford Geertz (1973), which lacks a clear identification of the role of the economic sphere in her analysis of identity creation. She does not take into account the role of consumption in identity formation (Stearns, 2001), nor the concept of habitus developed by Pierre Bourdieu (1991). Incorporating Bourdieu’s framework could have strengthened the analysis of how ethno-national boundaries are reproduced through everyday practices and embodied dispositions, rather than only through explicit ethnic markers such as names, language, or religion. For instance, the transmission of identity through family and kinship networks could also be interpreted as the reproduction of habitus, where socialized dispositions shape perceptions of belonging and difference long before direct inter-ethnic interaction occurs. Moreover, although religion occupies a central place in her explanation of ethno-national identity, she does not engage with Max Weber’s theory of the disenchantment of the world (1905, 1917, 1922) or with the role of religion in capitalist modernity, which could have provided a more nuanced understanding of why religious affiliation retains such

social force in a contemporary post-socialist context. In this sense, her framework for “identity” appears operationalized in a way that reinforces her hypothesis, while the concept of religion itself remains insufficiently defined. This criticism, however, refers to the broader theoretical orientation of the book rather than to its methodological contribution. Indeed, Hronešová’s ethnographic approach still succeeds in producing the kind of “thick description” associated with Geertzian anthropology, despite the limitations of its culturalist framework.

Hronešová employs two complementary qualitative methodologies. First, a historical narrative relies on secondary literature and theoretical frameworks to situate the empirical findings. Second, her ethnographic research adopts a bottom-up approach, combining open-ended in-depth interviews, focus groups, participant observation, and observational research design. Still, she does not include reflexivity in the methodology nor findings, and this is problematic as it follows from the traditional idea that social knowledge is an objective finding, instead of following the framework from which to define fieldwork, as an interpretative and relational process (Guber, 2004). The interviews follow a snowball sampling method, which allows the collection of layered perspectives from young people aged 18 to 29, fifteen years after the war (Hronešová, 2012, p.18). This dual approach ensures that the analysis remains both interpretative and descriptive, producing what Geertz (1973, p.6) would describe as “thick description”, Brubaker’s (2006) “everyday ethnicity,” and Weber’s (1917) “web of significance.” Hronešová’s reliance on cases rather than statistical samples is deliberate, emphasizing the depth of lived experience over quantitative generalization. The reliance on qualitative methods allows for depth but may reduce generalizability, raising questions about how these findings relate to other regions or post-conflict contexts, and raises the question on the relevance of the book in a broader context. At the same time, it is surprising that Hronešová does not incorporate discourse analysis of media, newspapers, or political communication. This limitation in the use of archival and documentary sources may have shaped the scope of the findings, since media representations and political narratives are central to the production and circulation of ethno-national categories in contemporary societies. The absence of systematic engagement with these materials leaves a gap in the analysis, as it prevents a fuller understanding of how identity is not only experienced at the interpersonal level but also actively constructed through institutional and public discourses. In particular, sources such as press coverage, political speeches, educational policies, and school textbooks could have significantly enriched the framework by revealing how cultural and educational

systems contribute to the normalisation and reproduction of ethno-national distinctions in post-war Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Hronešová incorporates testimonies that reveal the psychological and social consequences of ethno-national labelling. Some participants describe the term “Bosniak” as artificial and a product of wartime politics, reflecting the dissonance between lived experience and imposed categories (Hronešová, 2012, p.80). Others express identity crises, ambivalence toward belonging, or even a desire to leave Bosnia altogether. Young people negotiate complex roles as victims or perpetrators depending on their ethnic affiliation, underscoring the deeply embedded influence of post-war narratives. The use of ethnography and micro-narratives to the targeted subjects successfully fulfils the main aim of giving voice to the lived experiences of young people and their conflicts in identity formation.

Overall, *Everyday Ethno-National Identities of Young People in Bosnia and Herzegovina* makes a significant contribution to the study of nationalism, post-conflict identities, and the sociology of youth in the Balkans. Its main strength lies in combining ethnographic depth with a broader historical and political analysis to illuminate how ethno-national divisions are reproduced in everyday life. The book is particularly useful for scholars in political sociology, social anthropology, and Southeast European studies who are interested in identity formation in post-war contexts, as well as for those examining intergenerational socialization and the persistence of collective categories in fragmented societies.

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