Reconstructing Post-Conflict Cultures: A Case Study of Bosnia

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Defining Culture

A British official Brian Hopkinson working in Bosnia has declared international conflict management in Bosnia as involving "fighting a whole culture" (Interview, *File on Four*, BBC Radio 4, 30 May, 1999). Over the last decade tremendous interest has been expressed by international organisations such as UNESCO in the "deep cultural roots" of war. Cultural reform programmes are regarded today as a crucial component of international peace efforts. This chapter considers how international reconstruction efforts now encompasses cultural reform through a case study of peace building efforts in Bosnia. I begin by considering the understanding of culture held by international organisations before going on to examine international culture of peace models and their implementation in Bosnia. My research critically analyses the implications of international programmes for cultural autonomy and social cohesion in Bosnia.

International conflict models understand culture in terms of cultural identity or a particular culture's way of life, traditions and customs. The idea of a specific culture overlaps with the idea of an ethnic community whose attributes include a collective proper name, a myth of common ancestry, and shared historical memories (Smith, 1991, p. 21). This pluralist understanding of culture, which is often used interchangeably with ethnic identity, owes much to anthropology and social psychology. Its understanding may be contrasted to the classical understanding of culture as human perfection or the best of human civilisation expressed in works such as Matthew Arnold's *Culture and Anarchy*. Broadly speaking, international conflict management approaches embody the shift from seeing culture in terms of a universal human civilisation to multiple cultures. The pluralist understanding is associated with a certain caution over modernisation programmes and the endorsement of multiculturalist approaches recognising distinct cultural identities as the foundation for social harmony. Importantly, recognition of cultural pluralism

came to be valued as countering racism as well as the risks of both totalitarianism and modernity's destabilising of communities and creation of rootless, alienated individuals. Maintaining cultural or ethnic identities is seen as useful in preventing social alienation and in promoting social inclusion. This affirmation of cultural difference will be seen in international approaches in Bosnia.

UNESCO has played an important role in international policy endorsing a pluralist understanding of culture as well as a cultural model of conflict. We can see UNESCO's pluralist understanding in its recent Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity, which states that:

> culture should be regarded as a set of distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional features of society or a social group and that it encompasses, in addition to art and literature, lifestyles, ways of living together, value systems, traditions and beliefs (UNESCO, 2002).

The idea of building social stability on the basis of recognising cultural difference is also central to the Declaration which speaks of "Aspiring to greater solidarity on the basis of recognition of cultural diversity, of awareness of the unity of humankind, and of the development of intercultural exchanges" (UNESCO, 2002). Cultural prejudice is treated as a key cause of war. As UNESCO's constitution states:

> ignorance of each other's way and lives has been a common cause […] of that suspicion and mistrust between the peoples of the world through which their differences have all too often broken into war.

The culture and personality school centred around the works of anthropologists such as Ruth Benedict and Margaret Mead has had a strong influence on UNESCO's approach. In her seminal *Patterns of Culture* (1961), Benedict speaks of culture in terms of a particular society's patterns of thoughts and actions, and stresses the importance of understanding a culture in its own terms. Culture is identified with custom and tradition, whereas the classical understanding of culture

as human perfection saw culture as transcending custom and tradition. The culture and personality school was important in asserting a common humanity and challenging biological racism's hierarchy of superior and inferior races (Malik, 1996). Nevertheless its understanding of culture tends to re-affirm difference, in which cultural difference takes on a degree of permanence akin to biological difference, albeit without the previous hierarchical scale (*ibid.*).

Thus human nature is regarded as plastic, but a culture is seen as moulding, even predetermining, a given people's thoughts and actions (Benedict, 1961, p.183). Accordingly, the dominant contemporary cultural traits are considered to dictate violence and war (*ibid.*, p.180), but the idea of human nature as naturally aggressive and therefore prone to violence and war is challenged (*ibid.*, pp.22-23). It may be noted here that the war is not identified in Clausewitzian terms as a struggle for ideals, but identified negatively with violence, as an "asocial trait" (*ibid.*). This idea is echoed in UNESCO's sponsored *Seville Statement on Violence*, 1986, which refutes "the myth that human beings are predisposed to violence", and again in its report on its Culture of Peace Programme in which it states how, "Violence is not inevitable" (UNESCO, 1998a, para 2). If the propensity to violent conflict is regarded as a culturally acquired asocial trait, the implication is that different cultural models could promote benign social traits. Maintaining cultural pluralism is thus also being seen as important as demonstrating the possibility of alternatives ways of organising society.

Here we come to the influence of behaviouralism on international conflict models. Behaviouralism sees culture as a *learned* system of meaning and behaviour, and therefore as a system of meaning and behaviour that can be (re)taught, leading to the idea of specific programmes to create new patterns of thought and action. Behaviouralism thus shares the belief in the plasticity of human nature, but the very plasticity of human nature can also imply here, susceptibility to cultural conditioning. In other words, individuals in behaviouralist models may be cast negatively as malleable rather than positively, as creative.

If culture has always been seen as an aspect of international conflict approaches, its role has become pivotal in recent models, notably under the influence of social constructionist theories and their emphasis on the constructed nature of social identities and norms. The social constructionist approach has been neatly outlined by Tarja Vayarynen in her book, *Culture and International Conflict Resolution* (2001):

> Culture is constitutive of human reality. Culture offers a grammar for acting in and interpreting the world, and it refers to widely shared practices and to commonly held assumptions and presuppositions that individuals and groups hold about the world. It involves the social structuring of both the world outside the self and the internal world. According to this view, since culture produces understandings of conflict and conflict resolution, the study of these is an important element of any meaningful analysis of conflict. In other words, international conflict analysis should be a form of cultural analysis (Vararynen, 2001, p.3).

Recognising the constructed nature of social identities and norms, such proposals seek to re-create tolerant, non-violent ethnic traditions and inclusive multi-ethnic communities (see Broome, 1993, p.104; Wachtel, 1998, pp.2-3). Again social construction theories share a belief in the importance of culture and the plasticity of human nature, but in this plasticity they also tend to emphasise human vulnerability and the need for support.

That these conflict models share an emphasis on human frailty, asocial cultural traits and the need for external support, has ramifications for cultural autonomy, as I will show in international interventions in Bosnia. For there is an inherent tension in international cultural affirmation and cultural condemnation. The next section considers the implications of international cultural rehabilitation programmes for cultural self-determination.

Challenging Cultural Self-determination

Endorsing the psychological need for identity as a basic human need and the importance of culture recognition for the stability of societies, initiatives attempt to modify the content of cultural identities, while still respecting them. In this vein, the social psychologist Herbert Kelman describes conflict programmes as creating a new shared culture between former adversaries, without requiring the parties to give up their own culture:

> the goal of conflict resolution is to shape new political and social arrangements that will empower the parties, meet their vital needs for identity and security, and lay the foundation for a stable, cooperative relationship consistent with the welfare and development of each party. Such changes imply some redistribution of power, as well as the gradual creation of a new culture shared by the former adversaries (without of course abandoning their separate cultures) (Kelman, 1993, p.xi).

We can see these ideas in UNESCO's *Culture of Peace Programme*, set up in 1994, prompted by the intrastate character of wars in the post-Cold War era. UNESCO characterises these wars as "largely originating in the exploitation of lack of knowledge of others, and of other beliefs, values and perceptions, and ignorance and violation of fundamental human rights" (UNESCO, 1998b, para 11). Its programme aspires to transform a "culture of violence and war, into a culture of peace and non-violence" (UNESCO, 1998a, para 2). Its *Declaration on a Culture of Peace* outlines it as "a process of individual, collective and institutional transformation" (Article 2), "transforming values, attitudes and behaviours to those which promote a culture of peace and non-violence…" (Article 3), including respect for cultural identity and cultural diversity.

International conflict management advocates therefore, envisage a radical transformation of cultural norms through interventions at all levels of society, while stressing the importance of involving indigenous institutions and devising programmes in accordance with local cultures and traditions. Consequently, international emphasis on local participation does not mean that the population is free to

determine policy or indeed, their cultural expression. Historically, policies respecting cultural differences have been compatible with the denial of equal political rights as witnessed under the native administration of the British Empire and in parallels with current international approaches (see Campbell, 1997; Duffield, 1996; Duffield, 2004). The anthropologist Thomas Eriksen has wrily commented that "in order to save 'a culture' one must lose it!" (Eriksen, 1993, p.129).

Symbolic aspects of a culture may be fostered under international initiatives, but the consequence of these cultural programmes is to erode the personality of cultures. This loss of personality has three aspects. First, international cultural intervention is not based on a relationship of equality and reciprocity between internationals and locals. In recreating the post-conflict cultures, internationals sit in external judgement on the post-conflict society, but that society does not reciprocally sit in judgement on the home culture of the internationals. The substantial cultural reform advocated inevitably undermines the mutuality and intimacy of relations, necessary for the self-development of individuals and the building of a sense of community (Arendt, 1959). Second, as a consequence of the re-invention of cultural identities by international organisations, culture loses its creative aspect as the self-expression of a population (although individual artists, musicians, performers and writers may thrive under international patronage). People are no longer active, creative subjects, but subject to cultural identities and norms designated by outside bodies. Effectively, such external determination entails the mummification of culture (Fanon, 1965), in which cultural features are emptied of their social significance and reduced to symbolic accoutrements whether that be food dishes, crafts or folk songs or dances. Third, society and the individual citizen are denied their moral capacity for conceptualising the good and thereby denied their own moral subjectivity. As Frantz Fanon outlined in relation to colonial struggles, culture is inherently linked to political freedoms, without which cultural life withers: "it is around the people's struggles that African-Negro culture takes on substance, and not around songs, poems or folklore" (1965, p.189). However, cultural expression is being subject to external review thereby challenging the aesthetic capacity of communities. In international determination of

post-conflict cultures, it is not surprising that populations such as that in Bosnia feel little ownership over reconstruction. External cultural management tends to distance people from their culture and each other.

Today, criticisms of cultural peace programmes are isolated because of the consensus amongst international policy-makers over the importance of culture in explaining violent conflict and war. Advocates of culture of peace programmes tend to assume the impartiality of the international community, "the privileged *empty point of universality*" (Žižek, 1999, p. 216, emphasis in the original), and of the culpability of the culture of wartorn countries, legitimising unprecedented outside intervention into these societies.

Recreating a multicultural Bosnian identity

The international conflict model locates the persistence of ethnic divisions in the post-Yugoslav states in an intolerant and violent culture, and considers international intervention is required to recreate multicultural communities and to instil a culture of peace. Let me begin by outlining cultural differences between the three main ethnic groups of Bosnia: the Bosniacs (Muslims), Serbs and Croats, who made up around 44 percent, 33 percent and 17 percent respectfully according to the 1991 census. If culture is understood as a way of life, the way of life of people across the region is essentially the same. The link between ethnic identity and religious identity, for example, in secularised pre-war Bosnia did not translate into significant differences in the three ethnic groups' way of life. Even after the war the impact of religious identification on Bosnian cultural norms is less than it can appear. For example, Islamic religious identification, notably among urban dwellers, is visibly stronger in post-conflict Bosnia, but its impact is uneven and arguably waning, especially since the war on terrorism was declared by the United States. Any differences in cultural norms have tended to arise from locality, rather than ethnicity. Ethnic identities do not neatly embody urban or rural cleavages, although wartime political claims invoked Orientalist notions of civilised Western urban and uncivilised Eastern rural ethnic identities. Likewise the three ethnic groups speak the same language and any linguistic differences do not effect comprehension

and relate to locality rather than ethnicity. The importance of different cultural identities is how they symbolise different political allegiances that the three groups have had – the Croats leaning towards Zagreb, the Serbs towards Belgrade, and the Bosniacs towards Sarajevo – which appeal to distinct historical and cultural traditions to solidify their political constituencies. Thus claims to speak different languages are symbolic claims of ethnic allegiance. So the cultural differences asserted are constructed in important respects, yet they do embody conflicting political interests and political communities.

Moreover, ethnic identity was and remains politically important as both prewar Yugoslav and postwar-internationally drawn-up constitutional arrangements revolve around ethnic recognition. Following a decade of ethnic conflict, it has been forgotten how the former state of Yugoslavia was once regarded as at the forefront of fostering state policies to promote good ethnic relations. Ironically, the international community has attempted to address ethnic conflict by putting in place a similar system of ethnic representation and affirmative action, without analysing the failings of Yugoslavia's sophisticated system of ethnic rights (Hayden, 1999; Woodward, 1995). Detailed constitutional provisions dictate the balance of ethnic representation in public office at different levels, ensuring that ethnicity remains salient in public life. Here I am not examining the political arrangements made for Bosnia but highlighting international cultural management of Bosnia, so I will just make a few observations to indicate the context of international cultural management.

International officials have stated that they will be in Bosnia until they have overcome ethnic divisions and created a sustainable state. Yet the internationally-drawn up constitutional arrangements for Bosnia are unworkable without external intervention to overcome the impasses inherent to the system. Strikingly, a decade on from the end of the war, Bosnia still has the identity of a *post-conflict* society. International supervision of Bosnia was initially for a single year under the 1995 Dayton Agreement but self-government of the state has been indefinitely postponed. Actual authority in Bosnia has rested not with the Bosnian government but international officials under the United Nations Office of the High Representative (OHR) whose role

and powers have recently been transferred to the European Union. International officials have become incrementally more involved in the micro-management of Bosnian society, unchecked by the weak and fragmented local institutions. Internationals have not restricted their supervisory role to inter-ethnic relations but extended it into virtually all areas of public policy in their bid to realise the contemporary international vision of the good society in Bosnia. Thus OHR has determined a raft of measures including controversial privatisation schemes and pension reforms, along with new models for health service provision and family policy. Education, which I will discuss below, was not specified in the Dayton agreement as coming under international supervision; education's subsequent inclusion, as a field previously regarded as a domestic matter, illustrates Bosnia's *de facto* protectorate status. The OHR has effectively enjoyed executive powers, determining the national institutions, national symbols and national policy. A post for a social and economic rights internship in its Sarajevo office, advertised in December 1999, indicates the extent of international determination in Bosnia:

> The position involves undertaking an on-going review of law in the Federation and RS on issues including labour, pensions, health care, disability and others. You will participate in the drafting of laws, and communicate with local authorities to ensure their compliance with Human Rights standards as well as their implementation of the relevant legislation. (OHR, accessed 19 December, 1999)

Tellingly, international officials communicate to locals the laws that they are expected to ratify and comply with. The lessons drawn by international officials have consistently been that the international community will need to be more "robust" and less sensitive about democratic rights. In this vein, Carlos Westendorp of Spain, the second international High Representative in Bosnia (June 1997 to July 1999), argued that "a full international protectorate" was required, that this was "not the moment for post-colonial sensitivities" (Westendorp, 1999). His successors, namely, Wolfgang Petrisch of Austria (August 1999 to April 2002) and Paddy Ashdown of Britain (May 2002 to date) have taken an increasingly more robust line,

imposing laws and sacking officials opposing international policy. Just in July 2004, Ashdown sacked some sixty Bosnian Serb officials.

The frustrations experienced by international administrators have led them to blame their difficulties in carrying out programmes on the Balkan mentality. In line with culturalist explanations, Westendorp, described the international community's role as encompassing building "a new set of values, new traditions" (quoted in Hedges, 1998). International programmes have sought not just to reform the political culture, but to transform the culture in general to a culture of peace and tolerance. Even interpersonal and family relations are coming under international direction because of the link made in the culturalist theories between war and the experience of violence in childhood. The oxymoron of internationals creating "new traditions" is lost on Westerndorp, but it is indicative of fundamental contradictions in international cultural management. On the one hand, the international conflict model is over-deterministic in explaining war as dictated by culture in which victims of conflict are viewed as instructed by their experience of violence into becoming future perpetrators of violence. On the other hand the international cultural reform programmes suggest a superficial and instrumental view of culture in which tradition can simply be re-described by external advocates and inculcated locally without having materially transformed peoples' lives. Here culture is suddenly no longer understood as arising from peoples' lived experiences. Meanwhile the emphasis on creating "new traditions" is also indicative of the past-orientated nature of international conflict management in Bosnia and its difficulties in creating a dynamic forward-looking vision for the country.

Recreating Bosnian Culture through Education

We can see international concerns with rehabilitating Bosnia's post-conflict culture in countless international non-governmental programmes. International officials are concentrating many of their cultural initiatives on the younger generation, encouraging them to identify with international institution-building, perceiving the older generation as intractable. As a human rights official in Bosnia wrote to me, "Maybe we should cut them out and just talk to the kids!"

(MacGregor, email correspondence, 18 December, 1999). This remark is also indicative of how international officials tend to have a technocratic understanding of the obstacles to reforming Bosnian culture, in terms of marginalising "the spoilers", in which ethnic divisions are seen as irrational in a world envisaged as consisting of an essential harmony of interests. So inter-ethnic divisions are not regarded as reflecting conflicting material interests, but as the result of learnt prejudices and miscommunications which can be unlearnt through positive images, positive role models and positive communication, hence the international attention given to educational reform to reconstitute social relations (Burton, 1997; Reardon, 1988; Vayarynen, 2001).

Former Yugoslavia's education system was praised internationally as one of the most advanced models for multi-ethnic tolerance (Pupavac, 2001). The cultural diversity of former Yugoslavia was emphasised in the school curriculum, rather than repressed (Ugresic, 1998, pp.131-132). Accordingly, schools in Bosnia were ethnically integrated and followed a curriculum which, for all of its evident faults, did strive to be culturally inclusive and recognise the cultural contributions of its different ethnic groups. Symbolically, textbooks, for example, were written in both the Latin and Cyrillic script and pupils used both scripts. However, Bosnia's multi-ethnic education system failed to prevent war and soon reflected the wartime ethnic divisions. Even following the Dayton peace agreement, post-conflict Bosnia's education system continued to reflect ethnic divisions and it is only in the last year or two that the international community has begun to re-integrate education. The divisions can be seen in the differences between the two political entities of Bosnia: the Republika Srpska and the Federation and then within the Federation. So until very recently, in the Bosnian Serb-dominated Republika Srpska, children followed a curriculum based on the curriculum of Serbia. In the Federation, responsibility for education was devolved to the ten cantons. Children in the five Bosniac-dominated cantons followed the Sarajevo curriculum, the three Croatian-dominated cantons followed a curriculum based on the curriculum of Croatia, while the two mixed cantons have had parallel schooling. The ethnic segregation of education has resulted in the bussing of children to areas following the curriculum reflecting their ethnic allegiances. Ironically, however,

it may be noted that the Bosnian Minister of Education justified the segregation of education in terms of fulfilling minority rights. This stance was immediately condemned by international officials, but it does demonstrate how the affirmation of cultural difference can foster divisions.

Initially international efforts to reform education were based on ad hoc initiatives by a range of international organisations and experts including the Council of Europe, the World Bank, UNESCO, UNICEF, even SFOR (the NATO Stabilization Force). In 2002 the OSCE gained the international mandate to pursue systematic education reform of primary, secondary and higher education (Perry, 2003, p.93).[1]

The reform process itself is very revealing of the tensions in international conflict models. The earlier international education reform reports often ignored former Yugoslavia's education approach, very much treating post-conflict Bosnia as a *tabula rasa*, an offensive stance given how its old education system was. The hubris of external experts in disregarding the country's history of multi-ethnic education alienated locals who might have been more conciliatory. The importance of not treating Bosnia as a *tabula rasa* has subsequently been acknowledged, as has the damage caused by overlooking the country's professional expertise (Perry, 2003, p.19). Indeed international reform initiatives have tended to re-ignite political controversies over education and retrench positions, at least in the short-term. Attempting to redress earlier reform initiatives, local ownership has become a *sin qua non* of the internationally-supervised education reform process which has deployed a participatory approach through working groups involving locals with externals cast as playing a supportive role (Perry, 2003, p.17).

However, the participatory approach does not equal local determination. Tellingly, the education working groups were chaired by internationals and had to report to an international steering group. Moreover, international officials have been ready to circumvent democratic processes and impose educational changes. For example, in the internationally-administered city of Brcko, international officials have been willing to impose the reintegration of schools

along with a new integrated curriculum, by firing all the local teachers, and rehiring a selection of teachers, on higher salaries to sugar the pill of imposition (Perry, 2003, p.80). Indicatively the OSCE has not wanted to make education reform an election issue, fearful that popular involvement would hinder reforms (Perry, 2003, p.87). As one international official in Bosnia admits, "Imposition of reforms from external forces is […] inconsistent with the development and consolidation of democracy" (*ibid.*, p.94), while nevertheless endorsing the necessity of imposing reforms. The ironies of international experts demanding more democracy and critical thinking in the classroom, even as they are rather nervous of its expression outside the classroom, are inescapable. Again the international education reform process illustrates how international support for cultural identities also involves a readiness to override cultural autonomy.

Much of the international reform efforts have focused on revising the textbooks in the so-called national subjects, that is, the subjects of history, language, literature, geography, religion, which have been most controversial in inter-ethnic relations. The different curricula of post-conflict Bosnia, as under former Yugoslavia, are orientated around officially-approved textbooks, and so the revision of textbooks plays a central role in education reform.

In line with the international conflict model and understanding of cultural reform, the Bosnian curriculum is being redrafted and individual textbooks censored to ensure that children are presented with suitable role models and receive appropriate messages on inter-ethnic tolerance and non-violence. At the same time, international officials have repeatedly stressed that education reforms will respect the culture of each ethnic group. The UN High Representative's Advisor for Education Claude Kieffer described the main objective of an education symposium in February 2000 as finding "an agreement on revisions of curriculums, but in such a manner that would preserve the identity of all children in BiH [Bosnia and Herzegovina], regardless of where they live" (Lenhart *et al*, 1999). Repeatedly international reports give education an important role in "cultural identity preservation" and "instilling pride in one's culture, history and heritage" (Perry, 2003, p.15). However, international cultural

recognition immediately faces the problem that the cultural identities being asserted today are incompatible with each other and the political allegiance the international community wishes to promote, as well as with the international culture of peace model. Thus the international education group wants to challenge Bosnian Croat identification with Croatia, and Bosnian Serb identification with Serbia, and Muslim identification of themselves as the victims in the war. This is outlined in a summary report on the above symposium:

> The expert team from the Heidelberg University that prepared the report found unacceptable aspects in the curriculums of all three peoples. Bosniaks insist on their position as victim of the recent war. Croats obviously ignore the other peoples in BiH [Bosnia and Herzegovina] and emphasize their love towards the Republic of Croatia. The insolent attitude in the RS [Republika Srpska] is based on a belonging to "the Serb fatherland" leaning on Serbia and refusing to be part of BiH (Lenart *et al*, 1999, p. 27).

The first aspect of realising a moral Bosnian identity and community is defining the community as Bosnian, reintegrating schools and eradicating content that undermines the state of Bosnia, such as the inclusion of the Yugoslav anthem in Bosnian Serb textbooks. The second aspect relates to reforming the three main ethnic identities and aspects of their cultural tradition, and it is this aspect that I now want to focus on.

Let me first take the reforms expected of the Bosniac identity in relation to history textbooks as my first example, before examining an international review of Bosnian Serb literature textbooks in more detail. The international experts' report to UNESCO is critical of the Bosniac syllabus for its "view of history in which Bosniacs are mainly seen as victims of aggression, genocide, ethnic cleansing in past and present" (Lenart, 1999, p.27). Their approach to history, as that of the Bosnian Croats and Serbs, is considered divisive and an obstacle to overcoming ethnic division. The Bosnian authorities have been required to delete from school textbooks comparisons of Milosevic to Hitler and the Serbs to the Nazis. But it is disingenuous for the Bosniacs to be told that they must remove reference to the war

as genocide, and may not characterise the Croats and Serbs as aggressors when the international community and the Western media have repeatedly endorsed their understanding of themselves as victims of aggression and genocide. Indeed the Chicago Education Board authorised a television programme with views that would fall foul of the international requirements for the Bosnian media and schools. Nevertheless, while the West has justified its intervention in the region in terms of stopping aggression and genocide, a non-divisive version of these events is somehow to be constructed respecting the Bosniac version, but also inclusive of ethnic Croats or Serbs and their suffering. However, divisions cannot be simply re-described or papered over in the curriculum, as evident in the ultimate failure of former Yugoslavia's multi-ethnic education policies to overcome ethnic differences. It is difficult to envisage content celebrating ethnic diversity that could be currently mutually acceptable and convincing when many of the nationalist stereotypes appear to have been realised for each ethnic group as a result of atrocities committed during the war. The only way that the curriculum can help move beyond current divisions is by promoting as full an examination of issues as possible. But the international community is putting certain discussions off limits. The warning of one international official, that the textbook reforms should not simply mean "new mono-perspectives" replace "the old-mono perspective histories" (Perry, 2003, p.99), is apposite. So whereas the old Yugoslav textbooks may be criticised for glossing over past inter-ethnic conflicts and being uncritical towards the Yugoslav authorities, equally, international advisors have struggled to address the past in textbooks, while also expecting to present the role of the international community in positive terms. Notably, international officials have been reluctant to allow textbooks to discuss the conflict in the wider international context or criticisms against the international community. The international experts have adopted an uncritical approach, wanting textbooks to treat the international community and Europe as neutral, unproblematic concepts (for example, Lenart *et al.*, 1999, p.13). Content orientated towards Europe and the international community is considered desirable and has been praised by the international education experts (*ibid.*), while material critical of European institutions or the international community has been condemned (*ibid.*, p.54). Hence a sanitised view of international

institutions and policies is to be presented. But unless the conflict is discussed in relation to international developments then the three main ethnic groups are left with mutual recriminations. At the same time a culture deferential to the international community is to be cultivated and enforced in Bosnia.

I will now focus on the international review of Bosnian Serb literature textbooks. International officials have been judging the content of the literature textbooks, for example, according to whether the works contribute towards the ethnic identities and traditions that the international community wants to instil. The review of Bosnian Serb literature textbooks is particularly interesting because of how they touch upon the core of the South Slav cultural tradition as well as key problems in the international officials' attempt to preserve and reconcile conflicting cultural identities. Past literary works, such as epics from the oral tradition, have come in for criticism. As Perry observes, "While the teaching of Serb poems might be viewed as study of legitimate cultural heritage by Bosnian Serbs, it can be seen as an expression of extreme nationalism by Bosniaks" (Perry, 2003, p. 36). An international experts' report to UNESCO drew attention to how, "In the people's (oral) literature there are some poems against the Turks and Austrians (not acceptable)" (Lenart *et al.*, p.42). Given the centuries of foreign rule, it is unsurprising that folk tradition should express hostility to its rulers. Undoubtedly, the international censorship of these or other works deemed offensive to any of the ethnic groups may contribute to a new sanitised history and tradition, but rather unconvincingly and belittling in the process all the parties as lacking the capacity to renegotiate their relations and cultural heritage. The proposed censorship of works from the oral tradition and other classical works has tremendous political and cultural significance. The rediscovery of the oral tradition in the nineteenth century and the flourishing of South Slav culture was seen as representing the stirrings of national self-determination, celebrated not just in the region but across Europe. The publication in 1847 of the epic poem *The Mountain Wreath* by Petar II Petrovic Njegos, Orthodox Archbishop and statesman from Montenegro, came to symbolise the struggle for national self-determination. His works were not just read and appreciated by Serbs, but by others seeking greater independence for the South Slavs. The Catholic Bishop

Strossmayer's library contained collections of the oral poetry compiled by Vuk Karadzic and works by Njegos, while the Croatian sculptor Ivan Mestrovic was inspired to build a statue to Njegos. Anti-Turkish or anti-Muslim elements in Njegos or other works were read in the context of centuries under the Ottoman Rule (Zogovic, 1947, pp.247-270). Their themes may be compared to foreign poems on similar themes, for example, Lord Byron's poetry promoting the cause of Greek independence or Alfred Tennyson's poem "Montenegro" (Ricks, 1969, p.1240, discussed in Norris, p.28) or anti-English themes in Irish literature or anti-Spanish in Dutch literature and so on. Indeed, were the international community to censor books in school on the grounds of negative portrayals of Bosnian Muslims, Ottoman officials or Islamic clerics, then this would effect the works of Mesa Selimovic, a key twentieth century Bosnian novelist of Muslim ethnicity. His compelling novel *Death and the Dervish* explores contemporary political oppression through a Kafkaesque treatment of Bosnia under Ottoman rule. Likewise Croatia's most famous twentieth century author Miroslav Krleza could fall foul of censorship of negative portrayals of Austrians, Croats, Hapsburg officials or Catholic priests. Consequently, were works to be excised for their negative portrayals, this would excise some of the best works that the region has produced, affecting the cultural expression of the aggrieved group as well since the most damning portrayals often come from within a cultural tradition. The novels of the Serbian writer Slobodan Selenic, for example, which I discuss below, represent some of the most critical explorations of Serbian politics and culture. His works would fall foul of any ban on negative portrayals of Serbs.

At issue in the textbook reforms is not a question of replacing one verse or extract with another – quiet revisions were already contemplated by Serbian officials – but the symbolic and actual loss of the right to self-determination. The international community's measures to expunge negative portrayals of the Ottoman and Austro-Hungarian Empires from Bosnian Serb textbooks represents a ridiculous sanitisation of history. The removal of various works from the oral tradition and other key authors by international officials signifies curtailment of cultural self-determination, alongside political self-determination and symbolic reversal of emancipatory

developments of the last two centuries. Moreover, the unintended but foreseeable consequences of such international measures is constantly to recreate nationalist cause célèbres, fuelling on-going ethnic insecurity and tensions, and discouraging any sense of ownership and responsibility for rebuilding of peaceful ethnic relations. Meanwhile, popular culture, notably music, has continued to be shared across the ethnic divisions, belying cultural defensiveness over preserving distinct cultural identities as well the assumptions of international cultural management.

Works not previously deemed offensive to ethnic identities are being censored, representing a major assault on the right to cultural expression. The erosion of the region's cultural autonomy is illustrated in the treatment of Andric's *The Bridge Over The Drina* (1959) for which the author won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1961. The work has had huge cultural and political significance. Andric wrote at the time of the award that, "I think that my country, through its literature, has received international recognition" (quoted in Hawkesworth, 1984, p.30). Chronicling tales in the town of Visegrad over three and a half centuries of Ottoman and Austro-Hungarian rule, extracts from *The Bridge Over The Drina* commonly appeared in school textbooks in former Yugoslavia. A popular passage cited was his description of Christian children being taken away as blood tribute by the Ottoman authorities to be trained as janissaries, one of whom becomes the Grand Vezir Mehmed Pasha who was to build the famous bridge (Andric, 1959, pp.23-26.). However, the international working group on education wants the familiar passage, a cruel but poignant rags-to-riches tale exploring division and reconciliation through the vision of the bridge, removed from the Bosnian Serb reader on literature because it is now deemed offensive to the Bosniacs and inimical to ethnic reconciliation. But it appears that some readers are more equal than others when it comes to choosing what they may read. For while the OHR was seeking to censor passages of *The Bridge Over The Drina* former High Representative Petrisch, then presiding over the textbook revisions, praised the novel in his diary (OHR, 1999).

Censorship of the work in school textbooks would represent heavier censorship than Andric experienced under the most repressive periods

of Communist rule in Yugoslavia. Works such as *The Bridge Over The Drina* were published in the 1940s, despite the official doctrine of Socialist Realism in literature and some official doubts about Andric's political loyalty to the new regime because of his diplomatic career in pre-war Yugoslavia. *The Bridge over The Drina* was not considered by the Yugoslav authorities to contravene the policy of brotherhood and unity or offend Yugoslavia's ethnic groups, quite the contrary. The belief that Andric was shared by all the ethnic groups of Yugoslavia was underscored by his refusal to declare himself a particular ethnic identity. Personally sanctioning its publication, the Yugoslav Commissar for Culture Radovan Zogovic praised Andric's chronicle for its humanism and its bridging of differences between people in general, irrespective of their ethnic or social background (Zogovic, 1947, pp.221-222). Such were the reasons why Andric won the Nobel Prize for Literature. Critics did not previously discuss Andric's works as being anti-Muslim (Arzunovic, 1999; Eekman 1978, pp.91-101; Lukic, 1972; Hawkesworth, 1984; Norris, 1999, pp.59-68, 90; Wachtel, 1997). This is a phenomenon that has come to the fore since the outbreak of war. Cultural specialists exploring anti-Croat and anti-Muslim sentiment in Serbian literature do not single out Andric's writing in this regard: Arzunovic, for example, describes Andric as pro-Bosnian (Arzunovic, 1999, p.138), while Wachtel relegates contention to a footnote (Wachtel, 1997, pp.274-275). Attacking Andric for stereotyping Muslims is to read today's ethnic divisions into his work. One cannot discern discrimination in his characterisation of his Croatian, Muslim or Serbian figures, nor has past criticism. Where Andric's characterisation has previously been criticised, it has been for caricaturing people of the region in general, rather than particular ethnic groups. For example, his characterisation has been criticised as "exotic" colouration, appealing to Western stereotypes of the region as "'Balkan,' 'oriental,' 'peasant,'" and expectations of "dark motives, killings and primitivism" (Lukic, 1972, p.158). The portrayal of Andric as anti-Muslim or anti-Croat has arisen from Andric's role as symbolising a common Yugoslav identity – therefore in the current political circumstances being associated with Serbian nationalism.

Reminiscent of Orwell's goodspeak, rather than the humanism of "nothing human is alien to me", the themes of textbooks are to be

restricted to subjects providing unambiguous models of behaviour. Literary works depicting scenes of hatred and violence are deplored and equated with acts of violence as a consequence of a belief in a continuum of violence and contemporary theories positing the direct effects of negative representations on individuals (see for example, Fish, 1994).

The consequence is to severely restrict the approved literary canon. Newer works that have deliberately sought to explore contemporary nationalism without being simplistic have found themselves condemned as nationalist. In particular, there has been a failure to distinguish between the author's views and those of the characters portrayed. The novels of Slobodan Selenic (1933-1995) have explored issues of national identity and the impact of ethnic divisions and war on different generations (Selenic, 1990b, 1996, 1996).[2] His novel *Timor Mortis* (1991) sought to undermine the legitimacy of nationalists claiming that Croatian and Serbian relations were inherently hostile by the literary device of exposing his characters making such assertions as unreliable narrators.[3] This is a literary device used by other regional writers, most notably by Selimovic in his novel *Death and The Dervish*. However, reductive readings of his novel have treated Selenic's views as identical to nationalist anti-Croatian views expressed by these unreliable narrators (Arzunovic, 1999, p.140; Wachtel, 1997, pp.219-223). In one such literal reading, Wachtel accuses Selenic of changing from a "belief in Yugoslavism [...] towards particularist nationalism" and as "ultimately encouraging the kind of seemingly irrational aggressive behaviour by Serbs in mixed Serb-Croat regions that was so characteristic of the 1991 war" (Wachtel, 1997, p.219) despite Selenic's publicly and privately stated-views affirming the desirability of ethnic coexistence.[4] The superficial interpretation of Selenic's novel illustrates how writers and their public in the region are prejudged as intolerant and unable to see beyond stereotypes. Alarmingly, the consequence of such readings resulted in calls for the removal of his novel *Timor Mortis* from the syllabus, although it is precisely a text seeking to challenge stereotypes in an interesting literary way.

A broader implication is that literature is to eschew the messiness of life and readers are to be confined to sanitised themes that cause no

offence and ensure no confusion over their meaning. As Selenic himself warned (in Jevtic, 1991, p.42), if politics is to dictate literature, there is a danger of stifling creativity and reducing literature to political tracts. Instead of removing Selenic's texts a more imaginative approach promoting critical reading would be, for example, to discuss Selenic and Selimovic's work together and their use of unreliable narrators to address social prejudices and political oppression. Again a freer exploration of the region's literary traditions, instead of its over-cautious management, would foster understanding of both past inter-ethnic conflict and past inter-ethnic cooperation. Selimovic, for example, identified himself as a Serbian writer, that is, with the Serbian literary tradition, despite his Muslim ethnicity. His case illustrates how cultural identities overlap (here Bosnian and Serbian), that a literary tradition should not be seen in mono-ethnic terms (here Serbian), and that great cultural expression transcends identity and speaks to humanity, whatever the specificity of its subject. However, international cultural reform initiatives seeing social harmony in affirming distinct cultural identities even as they seek to reform them, actually reinforce a sense of difference.

The international community does not just see its remit as stamping out nationalist content in textbooks and the media, but has taken on the role of general censor to judge the appropriateness of violent themes per se. There is further international censorship of material deemed inappropriate as imparting premature knowledge of violence, which is deemed to inculcate violence as opposed to counter violence – influenced by the rather passive notion of human plasticity which informs international conflict models. As a consequence of fears of early exposure to violence leading to violence rather than a rejection of violence, there is even international censorship where the violence is shown for didactic purposes to instil aversion to war. For example, the report to UNESCO does not find the watching of films on the Holocaust at Grade 3 level acceptable in the subject Nature and Society in the Serbian curriculum, stating, "The contents on the genocide committed against Serbs, Jews and Roma, although corresponding to reality, are in the context of grade 3 just tolerable. What is by all means not acceptable is the relevant instruction on 'watching movies about the genocide'" (Lenhart *et al*., 1999, p.45). Violence on television is also supervised, including in news reports.

A television station in Republika Srpska was ordered to pay a fine for showing footage of the war in Chechnya that international officials considered unsuitable for children and elderly people (OHR, Summary of Radio-Television, 1999).

Alienating Culture?

The lack of trust underlying the continuing extension of international regulation of the post-Yugoslav states is resulting in the erosion of cultural self-determination. Ironically, fear of the development of a culture of dependency has repeatedly been expressed by international officials, but a culture of dependency is the logic of the extensive international cultural management. Rule by international officials is reminiscent of a return to the days of the consuls, which Andric wrote about so evocatively. Yet past foreign rulers in certain respects had a more laissez faire attitude towards the beliefs of their subjects (and a leaner administration). International officials' expanding remit in Bosnia demonstrates a systematic attempt to re-create a Bosnian multi-ethnic culture, but their technocratic approach risks alienating the population as well as impoverishing cultural expression and distorting the country's rich cultural influences. The international community's efforts may successfully re-create a new official multi-ethnic culture, but to what extent the population identifies with it is a harder problem to resolve. Sanitising history and cultural expression can only create an unconvincing shared cultural identity. International success in this area ultimately depends on the degree to which the population feels secure in the new state. As long as people continue to feel insecure in Bosnia and see security lying in their ethnic ties or outside the country then they will continue to be defensive over their separate cultural identities. Indicatively while international officials see hope in Bosnia's youth, many young people in the country see their future elsewhere.

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Endnotes

[1] Valery Perry's report gives fascinating insights into the international education reform process.

[2] Selenic was also famous for challenging official censorship in his portrayal of Yugoslav labour camps in his novel *Pismo Glava*, like Aleksander Solzhenitsyn's *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovitsch* (1974).

[3] Interview with Selenic, Belgrade, 21 October 1992; and Selenic's conversations with David Norris over a number of years.

[4] Selenic has noted how while *Timor Mortis* was condemned as anti-Croatian, *Ocevi i oci* was attacked as anti-Serbian, and *Prijatelji* as insulting to Macedonians: the latter because a Serbian woman in the novel falls in love with an Albanian and leaves her Macedonian boyfriend. (See Jevtic, 1991, pp.30-31, p.43).