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**POLITICAL ACTION AND IDENTITY ISSUE IN CASE OF FIKRET ABDIĆ  
(KRAJIŠNIKS BETWEEN BOSNIAKHOOD AND MUSLIMHOOD)**

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## Political Action And Identity Issue In Case Of Fikret Abdić (Krajišniks between Bosniakhood and Muslimhood)

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### **Introduction**

Already formed social identity is based on various processes that society was gone through in its historical development. During those processes, properties of a system which remain invariant under given group of transformations (Maranda 1972, 330.) turned into characteristics of that particular society. For Krajišniks, *invariant properties of system* emerge in a clear and comprehensive image. Military history and permanent struggle during decades and centuries contributed to their self/recognition as obstinate, irreconcilable and proud men. But, it is not only self/recognition. It is way of life. The issue is how and why those characteristics became so solid and unchangeable, in one hand, and what was changed, on the other? Which circumstances led society to preserve their identity over time and which agents did/do it?

In this article I deal with phenomenon of rising regional identity under extreme circumstances such as war, and interrelationship between regional and national identity during vivid nation-building process. Through narratives about Krajišnik's identity and concrete political action of Fikret Abdić, director of food-factory Agrokomerc, I will try to evaluate differences between two concepts; Bosniakhood and Muslimhood, and to put them in the midst of political misunderstanding between Bosniaks. The role of supranational Yugoslav identity, as a factor who installed ambiguity in Bosniak identity, has been emphasized through elaboration of Krajišniks regional identity which, on the other hand, partly brought misunderstandings among Krajišniks as a homogenous population.

## **Regional identity – Circumstances of appearance**

When scholars, inhabitants of Bihaćka krajina and ordinary Bosniaks from other parts of Bosnia and Herzegovina talk about Krajišniks, they emphasized their different mentality and special social values. Listening and reading that comments from Bosniaks about population of Krajina, questions appear and ask what can be mentioned as main connection between them. The image which emerges in stories and emphasizes that connection is almost always the same. Islam as mutual religion is strongest and most substantial feature of theirs. On the other hand, there is story about Krajišniks which describes them as non-practicing Muslims.<sup>1</sup> But, how some scholars perceive, this religious liaison, for Krajišniks, is also something what can be changed and what is not so rooted in that particular society. If history will bring them in position to choose between religion and region they will probably convert rather than leave homeland (Dervišević 2006, 266 – 267). So, this stance gives opinion that space, particular landscape shaped their identity and it is first for what Krajišniks will die for.

Nevertheless, this too simplified analysis, even untrue in fundamental postulate, has a good basis which include two most significant topics Krajišniks care about, the religion and, their true homeland, region of Bihaćka krajina.<sup>2</sup> How these two terms function together in the case of Krajina society; how they came into juncture in that space, that particular county; what are the consequences to collective identity? It is necessary to point out that Krajina, as its name speaks, is borderland, frontier. Population of that region through history

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<sup>1</sup> This Story tells how Krajišniks will give money, satisfied and happily, for reconstruction and build of mosques but they'll never come in mosque to pray. Nevertheless, that description is not valuable only for Krajišniks but for Bosniaks in general, so it phenomenon strengthen mutual self-identification among them, not faded. Yet, relation to religion will be one of the main dissidences between two concepts; Bosniakhood and Muslimhood, which emerged and which I will explore in this work.

<sup>2</sup> Trying to support his own stance Dervišević said that before Ottomans Krajišniks were Catholics instead Bosnia where heretics, bogomils were majority. When Ottomans came and conquest this county Habsburgs and Turks made an agreement that population should go out and be settled somewhere in Habsburg Empire. Only insignificant number of Krajišniks went out but the rest converted to Islam because they loved their homeland more than Catholicism (Dervišević, 2006). Of course, there are some of historical facts but that region, under ottoman rule, was a very vivid emigrational area with a lot of demographic changes, but relationship to that space remain the same like quondam inhabitants, so it must be explored from other angle. The almost same story will take place in 1993, when some political options allegedly proposed moving Muslim population from Bihaćka krajina to Romanija plateau near Sarajevo.

was on the end of various cultures and civilizations. In their case the most significant and for their identity and mentality absolutely most important was the region's position of borderland and the end of Ottoman Empire. Military border was imagined and worked as a space of conflict, here between catholic and ottoman world (Zanini 2002, 98). That space, time by time, became closed, overcrowded and miserable. Life under such regime, life conditions, certainly strengthen cultural identity of inhabitants (Zanini 2002, 92).

Once, during conversation with a colleague, I mentioned and used the expression *identity under pressure*<sup>3</sup> trying to describe krajišniks identity/mentality/characteristics from they (but not just they) point of view. There's no better way then to embody narratives and stories told by Krajišniks and about Krajišniks apropos their social condition and mentality. Actually, is there any society in southeastern Europe which has gone through such historical development and was exposed to extreme living circumstances as Muslim population of Bihaćka krajina? Probably not, so this periphrasis *identity under pressure* seems very appropriate. Racked between permanent war conditions, negligence of government and poverty they had to define themselves, their position, more often then others. There were few mirror-societies (*Habsburg borderland*<sup>4</sup>, *Muslims in Bosnia*) to look at, which described them as peculiarity and gave picture of them, but most important, made distinction between *us* and *others*.

Cultural identity of Krajišniks, by adopting two earlier mentioned determinants, was built on religion and homeland as a vertical axis of identity and backwardness, misery, pride as a horizontal one. On the one hand it delivers, as a final product, sensation among Krajišniks that only they can understand each other. And on the other hand, central authorities were impressed as representatives of mean, inhuman and careless potentate. This opinion about government in general, and *older brother* (authorities in Istanbul and Sarajevo) in particular became a political hypothesis of Krajišniks political thought. That

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<sup>3</sup> It is a historical fact that the krajina society was under pressure for centuries, so their identity was developed also under the same circumstances.

<sup>4</sup> Relationship between borderers on both sides is very interesting and essential for understanding of some phenomena in modern time. It is known that between them inter-respect based on mutual life conditions and conditional predicament was self-evident. Godfathering between frontiersmen, warriors were widespread. Hence, horizontal relations affected Krajišniks stance about mutuality and communitarianism.

particular narrative, about values and social conditions, overpowered all others and became basis of collective memory.

## **Memory and Identity**

Mustafa Cerić, naibu-reis of Islamic Community in Bosnia and Herzegovina<sup>5</sup> giving a lecture on the *Council of Bosnian-Muslim intellectuals*<sup>6</sup> (22. January 1994) claimed that Bosnian Muslims have no identity because they have no continuity of remembrance (Cerić 1997, 15.) The continuity of memory, is understandable from Cerić's stance, is crucial for the process of nation-building and identity-forming. Very fruitful description about memory and identity which fits with Cerić's stance was pronounced by John Gillis:

*The parallel lives of these two terms alert us to the fact that the notion of identity depends on idea of memory and vice versa. The core meaning of any individual or group identity, namely, a sense of sameness over time and space, is sustained by remembering; and what is remembered is defined by the assumed identity (Gillis: 1997, 3.)*

Correlation of Cerić's and Gillis' attitudes partly explains the problem of Bosniakhood. The historical fact is that Bosniaks had a lack of memory what finally put them in position of non-national collectivity, and what remained in socialist Yugoslavia until the seventies. Trying to describe contemporary state of Bosniak, on example of Bosniak who escaped and were persecuted from some parts of Bosnia and Herzegovina during war (1992 – 1995) Mustafa Cerić said:

*I have to tell you something about meetings with our refuges in Zagreb. These muhajjirs<sup>7</sup> came from the periphery of the Republic, starting from Bijeljina, and so on. My dear brothers and sisters, those people don't know at all way they are persecuted.*

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<sup>5</sup> Reis-ul-ulema is the superior of Muslims. This institution was established during Austro-Hungarian rule in Bosnia and Herzegovina and it is unique in Islamic world. Naibu-reis is his assistant, deputy.

<sup>6</sup> Council of Bosnian – Muslim intellectuals (Today Council of Bosniak Intellectuals) was one of the most important cultural institutions among Bosniaks during the war and in the after-war period.

<sup>7</sup> Refuges (arab.)

*These people don't know whether they are or they are not Muslims. They are a completely undefined mass without any identity (Cerić 1997, 14 – 15.)*<sup>8</sup>

This rough and clear statement of present reis-ul-ulema (Grand mufti of Bosnia) Mustafa Cerić shows why national identity of Bosniaks is still ambiguous, undefined and problematic. Reasons are various and a lot of them, like many Bosniak scholars think, lie in the sense of lag from modernity and processes of modernization which caused a lack of national institutions which have to cherish national culture and build national identity. On one hand it can be true, but on the other hand it is controversial because of the process of Bosniak national affirmation and modernization in the socialist period. Yet, this sense of lag and historical consciousness of lack<sup>9</sup> has been and is a dominant narrative in explication of Bosniak unfinished and undeveloped national identity.

Krajišniks were in different positions apropos memory. Their memory was kept in oral history, their epic, unique literary genre in Bosniak literature. During the centuries other Bosniaks took krajišniks epic, which was widespread all over Bosnia and further, over Balkans, as own in need to preserve memory on the past and ancestors (Šmaus: 1997). Of course, even if krajišnik's epic tried to rise above its own space of birth, it mainly affected mentality and self-identification of Krajišniks giving them the most significant characteristics and building their system of values. Figures and places<sup>10</sup> were memorized in krajišniks individual and collective consciousness by epic and they grounded self-identification on it. Thus, Krajišnik identity and memory were social constructs without being directly influenced by politics, hereof Gillis' opinion "that is all the more apparent that both identity and memory are political and social constructs" cannot be fully applicable

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<sup>8</sup> "Moram van kazati nešto i o susretima sa našim prognanicima u Zagrebu. Ti muhadžiri tamo su došli sa rubnih mjesta Republike, počevši od Bijeljine, pa dalje... Braćo moja draga i moje sestre, pa ti ljudi uopće ne znaju ni zašto ih progone. Oni ne znaju ni da su Muslimani, ni da nisu Muslimani. Oni ne znaju. Oni su jedna potpuno nedefinisana masa koja uopće nema nikakvog identiteta".

<sup>9</sup> Marija Todorova uses these tropes in analysis of scientific approaches to East European nationalism, especially in theories on nationalism and modernity. These tropes are emphasized, as Todorova shows, in words of anthropologist Akhil Gupta who problematize and connect them to national question in the Third World. (See: Todorova, M. 2005: "The Trap of Backwardness: Modernity, Temporality and the Study of Eastern European Nationalism". *Slavic Review* 64 (1): 140 – 164.

<sup>10</sup> "Identities are shaped by embodied and embedded narratives, located in particular places. In the terms of cultural geography it is not spaces which ground identification but places. A space become place by being invested with meaning, a social signification that produce identity, by being named, by *embodying the symbolic and imaginary investments of a population*" (Reisenleutner 2001, 9.)

to krajišnik society (Gillis 1997, 4.) Of course, taking indirect political influences, such as rejection of that influences, it can be accounted as agent of krajišniks constructed identity and memory.

Another lecturer, Alaga Dervišević, speaking on topic *Krajišniks through past* (Berlin, August 1993) emphasized few figures from Cazinska krajina<sup>11</sup> and their contributions to population of the region. He spoke about heroism of local heroes and especially rebellions from Turks income to communistic era (Dervišević 2006, 262). He tried to emphasize rebel sense of Krajišniks, which is, by the way, famous.<sup>12</sup> Also professor Filipović gave, good example about genesis of inhabitants of Bihaćka krajina and their spirit and character:

*So, this population which was originally from Lika, Dalmatia and Zadar hinterland... was concentrated in a small area, thickly populated and lived in specific conditions. They developed a particular life style and inner relations which cannot be visible in other parts of Bosnia. It was martial people which was not martial only by conditions of life, but by spirit and devotion to their tightly land, religion and tradition what was among them absolutely identified. Actually, that population had an epic spirit and that unique and beautiful picture they made, describing the own lifestyle, accomplishments and heroes is the best and complete definition of their spirit and character. (Filipović 2008, 28.)*

Thus, remarkable position of epics in krajišniks tradition and collective consciousness is shown and emphasized as a basis of krajišniks cultural identity. Memory was/is grounded and alive, axis around which circles is rebellion and suspicious to authorities. One verse of the well-known epic explains Krajišniks opinion and relationship to authorities:

*Bojičiću<sup>13</sup> bojiš li se koga*

*Boga malo, a cara nimalo*

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<sup>11</sup> Cazinska krajina is a smaller area which covers municipalities of Cazin and Velika Kladuša. In the past this name for Krajina was the most outspreaded in literature and among inhabitants.

<sup>12</sup> "Our native ability for fight is also visible because Ottomans conquered this region for 150 years" (Interview with inhabitant M.D. Bosanska Krupa, 24. 6. 2007.)

<sup>13</sup> *Bojičić, are you afraid of anyone, from God a little, from Emperor not at all.* Alija Bojičić is an epic hero. His surname in Bosnian language is derivative from verb afraid; be afraid.

So, that particular memory and tradition made on its interpretations gave the most important characteristics to Krajišniks they also wear nowadays. As it was emphasized earlier, it's mistrust to central, governmental authorities, support of the own community and a sense of historically conditional predicament. The frame in which stories can operate, by being comprehensive, by being domestic and close to Krajišniks was made. Past was a lesson and a message of what can happen if Krajišniks put their destiny in hands of others.

### **The role of supranational identity**

Period after Second World War when socialist Yugoslavia lived her lungful life and had possibility to applied own social rules and values is extremely important for understandable approach to Muslim/Bosniak national question, therefore also to Krajišniks regional identity. It can explain, partly or fully, why Bosniak national identity still refers to ambiguity, immaturity and non-establish, as it has been emphasized earlier. First thought about connection between Bosniaks and Yugoslav idea, through prism of national identity goes to Constitution of 1974, who recognized Muslims (Bosniaks) as a nation. But, before official recognition of Muslim nation, communists had a major role in holding up continuous Bosniak national development what, finally, resulted with *paradigm shift* which happen among Bosniaks/Krajišniks. Quite authentic and fruitful description of communist strategy and modes of its practical appliance after Second World War gave French historian and researcher Xavier Bougarel:

*The Communist Party first suppressed the Muslim Committee (Muslimanski odbor) existing within the National Liberation Front, and then carried out a campaign against IVZ (Islamic Religious Community, A.M.). In 1947, the abolition of Islamic courts, the nationalization of the vaqufs (religious – charitable foundations and the closure to the madrasas (religious schools) led to disappearance of the very institutions which had formed the backbone of the Bosnian Muslim community. Finally, in 1949, the Muslim cultural society Preporod (Revival) was dissolved, only three years after its foundation. After having instrumentalized the communitarian modes of the Bosnian Muslims to its own advantage, the Communist Party of Yugoslavia set about dismantling them (Bougarel 2003, 106.)*



Bosniaks, according to Bougarel, were prepared for adopting socialistic idea as their only possible and successful entrance to modernity. The socio-economical and cultural modernization, around which many phenomena circles, of Bosnian society resulted in “the partial disappearance of traditional communitarianism” (Bougarel: 2003, 107.) Still, it would be practical to say how modernization was not fully applied so there are controversial judgments about it and its influences on national identity. Those judgments operate in extreme opposition, from absolute positive to pronouncedly negative. As it always be, the truth is somewhere in the middle.

Socialistic period and its ideology, influential and significant, surely helped rearrangement of krajišniks identity. It was not raw reshaping or fundamentally identity changing at once, but correcting the essence and meanings of identity on both, vertical and horizontal level. It, of course, affected all Yugoslav people but Bosniaks, and Krajišniks as significant part of Bosniak people, were touched with very strong consequences. It can be explained by emergence of *favorable framework*. Talking about Bosniaks and their destiny in Yugoslavia Bougarel emphasized that:

*Yugoslav federalism represented not only protection against Serb and Croat nationalisms, but also favorable framework for the affirmation of the specific identity and interests of the young Muslim nation. It is therefore no surprise that in addition to the Muslim political leaders within the League of Communists and Marxist intellectuals linked to the process of "national affirmation" (such as Atif Purivatra or Muhamed Filipović) the Muslim population at large and even the ulemas of the IVZ became strongly committed to Tito's Yugoslavia (Bougarel 2003, 107 – 108).*

Vertical axis, as a backbone of any collectivity, was reshaped in primal postulate. Islam, for communists and their ideological interpretations, for Bosniaks and their culture had significance in the past, but modernity should operate with, to modern time more compatible and thus better ideological frame, socialism and brotherhood and unity. As a narrative, who emphasized krajišniks regional identity, partaken history of Bihaćka republika. Tradition originated from Bihaćka republika<sup>14</sup>, and it gave rise to culture and values. In an odd way, values of ancestors vanished. What stayed was master narrative

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<sup>14</sup> Bihaćka republika – a region controlled and governed by Yugoslav partisans during the WWII. Bihać was the centre of this region.

about rebel mentality against enemies of people, Ottomans, Austro-Hungarians or royal Yugoslavia and Germans who succeed in National Liberation War.

Not earlier than the seventies of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, it was possible to perceive some changes in cultural customs of inhabitants. It was undoubtedly coupled with economic expansion and given political frame to Bihaćka krajina and its population. Marxist study centre, established in B&H by the end of 1974, and subsequently in Bihać as a municipal branch (Istorija SK BiH 1990, 204), contributed to the process of accepting Yugoslavism and identifying with that supranational category. That centre made detachment from tradition and pre-socialist values and models. As Benedict Anderson emphasized, and what took a role in Yugoslav ideology: “The nation... is premised on new republican modalities that establish horizontal relations among people inhabiting demarcated territories.” (Todorova 2005, 141). These horizontal relations were something what made Yugoslavism, brotherhood and unity and socialism acceptable. Quondam conditions of population, backwardness, poverty, misery, were replaced with progress, education, equality, at least as a shape of wishing state which have to be achieved. Psychologically, hope that circumstances of historically conditional predicament can be overwhelmed looks attractive, and when it was materialized by economic progress *light was visible on the end of the tunnel*.

But, *Agrokomerc affair*,<sup>15</sup> which succeed to substantially shake up krajišniks society, accelerated Krajišniks efforts in searching for own roots. It turned Krajišniks, especially elite gathered around Fikret Abdić to define own history, instead Bosnian/Bosniaks/Muslims or Yugoslav. Once, history which had to be part of mutual past of South Slavs, as Abdić dreamed, became only *ours*, people from the frontier.<sup>16</sup> Confusion which emerged in late eighties, in era of fallen communism, Serb rouse nationalism, and violent propaganda against Muslims/Krajišniks opened gates to krajišniks rediscovery of own roots and recovery of lost histories only as theirs and no ones else. In a few words, Krajišniks are already made community and there is not possibility to become a part of any larger collective, national or supranational. Like British Black population, Krajišniks found

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<sup>15</sup> Agrokomerc affair – The biggest financial and political affair in Yugoslavia happen in 1987.

<sup>16</sup> This was obvious with publishing monograph *Velika Kladuša through centuries* and chiseling sculpture of local hero Mujo Hrnjica who lived in 17<sup>th</sup> century.

“the histories that have never been told about ourselves, that we could not learn in schools, that were not in any books, and that we had to recover”<sup>17</sup> (Hall 1991, 52.) Krajišniks rediscovery happened on simple level of self-recognizing by connecting own state to narratives about ancestors. Therefore, krajišniks regional identity who had a chance to overcome cultural frame and significantly shape Bosniak national identity, now, under historical development, was in position to be politically established as a particularity once for all. Chance to conquest freedom and take destiny in own hands were there.

### **Regional leaders and struggle for autonomy**

Power is crucial for guidance of masses and communities. Many times it was shown in history, today it is undeniable fact. First Krajišnik who had real power in Bihaćka krajina after many decades was Fikret Abdić, director of food-factory "Agrokomerc" in Velika Kladuša. Like no one in Bosnia, and wider, he ruled over people in his county. Myth about him as a "visionary man" and his imagined importance for people of Bihaćka krajina was constructed in eighties, before dissolution of SFRY started.<sup>18</sup> For him, own importance was obvious, but also, what is more significant, for inhabitants of that region. In early autumn of '93. Božidar Šićl, lawyer who was Abdić's right hand and "head of law matters" during existence of Autonomous Region of Western Bosnia (ARWB) said that he don't know any man who sublimate all aspirations of people and can identify himself with people but Abdić. Hence, Abdić's belief how he is true savior was built on fruitful ground. In one letter sent to international negotiators Stoltenberg – Owen during war in Bosnia (1992 – 1995), which also was announced to people by Radio Velkaton from Velika Kladuša on 4. 6. 1993. Abdić said:

*Excellencies,*

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<sup>17</sup> During my research I went to the presentation of the book *Cazinska buna 1950*. in Cazin on may, 2007. The poster which announced that event had supplement *Untold story*. Even if the book was published in 1990. and author said that he thinks how nothing has left untold, promoters constantly emphasized that krajišniks history have to be told and recovered. It is no other way to evaluate such manifestations then as collective searches for identity.

<sup>18</sup> I mentioned and explained in my previous works how legend and myth about Abdić was build during seventies and eighties when he were one of the most successful manager in Yugoslavia. But, when Agrokomerc affair started (1987) myth was completely full and Abdić became undoubted leader among Muslims. Among Krajišniks he wasn't just a leader, he became messiah.

*In letter from 4. 6. 1993. I was free to avert your attention on fact that command of Fifth corps of Bosnian army lately doing senseless and unacceptable actions explaining them as orders from Headquarters, such as need to as soon as possible we start to form Province no.1, Bihać province...*

*I am aware of my too much opened approach to this problem and also to you as co-presidents, but these are my last attempts to save my people, but not humiliate him, to protect our dignity in Bihać, Tuzla, Zenica and elsewhere, but not to capitulate. To help him, not to betray, to achieve goal, to save people, not to disappoint him, because I keep in mind my respect to people and his enormous respect for me. Because of big wish to help, strength of big visionary man in economy I transfused in vision of future of my people, and I believe that I fathomed in essence of his real interest and moves which we made to help him. (Jašarević 1997, 21-22.)<sup>19</sup>*

Most important in those stances is his faith in himself and belief that his vision is undeniable and the best for Muslims/Bosniaks. That stance "that he will try to help and not to disappointed people who has enormous respect for him" was astonishing. It shows that he was convinced that he is savior, only Muslim in Bosnia who knows what to do, especially when war started and hard decisions should be made.

In this letter Abdić indirectly announced that he will go against Bosnian government (even if he talked about Muslims, not Krajišniks) and he'll try to establish Province of Bihać, territory when he will be in absolute power. A very same day when Bošnjački sabor<sup>20</sup> was held in Sarajevo on 27-28. September 1993, Abdić successfully began with his political action which also encroached to question of national identity. In Velika Kladuša suspicious Initiative board maintained Constitutional Parliament of Autonomous Region of Western Bosnia (ARWB) on 27. September 1993. For all troubles and suffering Muslims going

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<sup>19</sup> Ekselencije, U mom pismu od 4. lipnja 1993. godine bio sam slobodan da skrenem vašu pozornost na činjenicu da komanda ovdašnjeg korpusa A R BiH u posljednje vrijeme čini nerazumne i neprihvatljive radnje obrazlažući ih naređenjima iz ŠVK, kao i potrebu da se čim prije pristupi formiranju Provincije br. 1 – Bihaćke provincije... Svjestan sam da je ovo suviše otvoren pristup prema problemu i Vama kao kopredsjednicima, ali to su moji zadnji pokušaji da moj narod spasim, ali ne i ponizim, da mu sačuvam dostojanstvo i dignitet u Bihaću, Tuzli, Zenici i drugdje, a ne da prihvatim kapitulaciju. Da mu pomognem a ne da ga izdam, da postignem cilj, sačuvam narod, da ga ne razočaram, jer imam u vidu moje poštovanje prema narodu i njegovo ogromno poštovanje prema meni. Zbog velike želje da pomognem, snagu dokazanog vizionara u privredi pretočio sam u viziju budućnosti moga naroda i vjerujem da sam pronikao u suštinu njegovog interesa i poteza koji se čine da mu se pomogne.

<sup>20</sup> Bošnjački sabor (Bosniaks convention) is most important because on that event Bosniak intellectuals adopt national name Bosniak instead Muslim.

through in Bosnia because of war Fikret Abdić accused SDA (Party of Democratic Action)<sup>21</sup> and President Alija Izetbegović. Muslims are, according to Abdić, brought instead true victim into position of third belligerent and such historical stain Muslims of western Bosnia cannot pass over.<sup>22</sup> Hence, Krajišniks should be aware of historical moment and create their own entity.

It should be said something about character of Fikret Abdić. He was the true product of socialist modernization. Peasant who finished faculty and escaped destiny to be poor and uneducated as many of his fellow citizens were, Abdić had to be thankful to system. He found job in state factory and very early as a young man became a director, time by time one of the most successful in Bosnia and Herzegovina, even wider in Yugoslavia. It brought him respect and reputation among people of Bihaćka krajina, actually, he had a potential to become their hero, rescuer and beloved son for all of times. A burden was on Abdić's shoulder and he was ready to carry it on. He knew which course to take. As he said once: "I believe that I come to essence of true interest of my people" (Jašarević 1997, 22).

Thus, modernization process in Yugoslavia/B&H in mind of Fikret Abdić was matter of progress in every area of human life. The things left behind were symbols of backwardness, by following politics and its given coordinates people can reach modernity and catch up modern and developed world. Deployment was necessary and everything has to be subjected to that goal. Socialist concept which brought Muslims to national affirmation was big step forward, and, how later events discovered for Abdić was good transition to final ones. The concept was connected to material progress which will raise material culture and fulfilled expectations of ancestors.<sup>23</sup> Ideology is good as far as can do it. Islam, therefore, was failure; socialism had a chance to be successful; democratization should be the last step which has to finish whole process of nation-building.

One social phenomenon who emerged during socialism should be emphasized. Mixed marriages were one of the socialist innovations and something strange to Muslim

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<sup>21</sup> Party of Democratic Action is political strength which cultivates Islamic values and belongs to Muslim cultural circle, how they defined themselves.

<sup>22</sup> Proглаšenje Autonomne pokrajine Zapadna Bosna, (video-dvd) 27. 9. 1993. (In following: Proглаšenje AP ZB). In author's archive

<sup>23</sup> "We shouldn't forget that our inheritance is to justify meaning of all our sacrifices". (Proглаšenje AP ZB)

people, especially in Bihaćka krajina. Actually history witnessed that mixed marriages weren't known among Bosniaks until socialist era (Bougarel 2003, 107.) Yet, Fikret Abdić was resolute to reject vestige of past as an unnecessary burden. After all, some of social norms and customs were connected to surpassed Islam and its values. It represented backwardness which has to be eliminated in every form. From tradition, he meant, should be taken only what can be useful for nowadays. So, Fikret Abdić, even if he was from patriarchal family, had a daughter married to Croat and sister married to Serb.<sup>24</sup> It was bright success of modernity and personification of progress, great achievement which others should follow. It was clear sign to Krajišniks that modernity breaks some of social values which were established centuries ago strongly connected to self-identification and people's feeling of unity.

### **Bosniaks versus Muslims in Bihaćka krajina**

Abdić's concept of community, values and identity, actually, was unclear and indeterminate. To be truthful, he has no chance to develop own idea about it, but also question is did he had potential to do it. Instead paroles and glorification of own personality and people, there was nothing concrete. It is known that he leaned his personality on krajišniks tradition and heroes, especially Mujo Hrnjica, who represented fighter against authorities and enemies of population on border. He emphasized rebel mentality and population's liberal consciousness: "You are witnesses that history repeating here from 1950, 1987, and 1992. Our aspiration for freedom always was suppressed by persecutions, extortions, sufferings".<sup>25</sup> Interesting part of this stance is his emphasizing only political troubles from socialist era, but that's something what still remained in collective consciousness and what was quite good to be explored for masses gathering.

One event was very appropriate to assert different positions about problem of Bosniak national identity and nation-building processes. In fact, that event, Bošnjački sabor (27. 9. 1993.), had potential to consolidate krajišniks efforts (Krajišniks under Abdić's control) and emphasize their stance as only accurate. Talking about new adopted national

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<sup>24</sup> N, A 1995: Atentat na bosansko rukovodstvo, In: Bošnjački avaz, 16. 1. 1995: 12.

<sup>25</sup> Proglašenje AP ZB.

denomination, Bosniak, Abdić said few interesting and indicative sentences which had strength to penetrate into consciousness of ordinary people. Elaborating what is Muslim and what is Bosniak he said: “I don’t acknowledge that Bosniakhood. I cannot be something what Alija Izetbegović and Adil Zulfikarpašić<sup>26</sup> agreed. I am Muslim.”<sup>27</sup>

So, beginning of life of Autonomous Region of Western Bosnia was also colored by that question of national identity, its denomination and its system of values. For Abdić, only Muslimhood had historical basis, it had continuity and as such was rooted in consciousness of population. Bosniakhood is nothing then fabrication and fulfillment of Zulfikarpašić’s wishes. Therefore, Bosniakhood is something what shouldn’t be of essential importance for Muslims because it is unreal concept and agent of the past. That concept will never be adopted among Krajišniks, Abdić thought.

System of values was shown through those two concepts; Bosniakhood<sup>28</sup>, concept of SDA and its leader Alija Izetbegović, which was leaned on Islam, history (mostly under ottoman rule) and tradition, and Abdić’s concept of Muslimhood connected to socialist modernization and material progress. Affirmation of religious identity, especially its practice in public was against Abdić’s philosophy. He was convinced that “we won’t get help from international community if we will not be European Muslims, if we don’t include ourselves in European civilizations...”<sup>29</sup> He emphasized it because *Islamic renaissance* through actions of SDA, for him, was unacceptable, it represented back in the past which basic content was backwardness. One episode is absolutely provocative and need to be emphasized. On the opening of Manifestation of Autonomous Region Western Bosnia Abdić asked from audience to show respect for fallen soldiers by *rahmet*<sup>30</sup> and minute of silence. Nevertheless, even if 99% in auditorium were Muslims nobody prayed El-Fatiha or else, but show their respect by minute of silence. Of course, that small gesture spoke a lot

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<sup>26</sup> Adil Zulfikarpašić (1921 – 2008), founder of Bošnjački institut (Bosniak Institute) in Zurich (1988), which was replaced in Sarajevo (2001).

<sup>27</sup> Political magazine **Pošteno**, Federalna televizija (FTV), *Da li je moguće pomirenje među Krajišnicima* 20. 11. 2008. (Abdić’s video about Bosniak nation from October 1993.)

<sup>28</sup> Bosniakhood wasn’t concept of Alija Izetbegović at first, he developed his philosophical ideas around universal category of Ummah, but wartime and suffering turned his mind and he started to intercede for it.

<sup>29</sup> Proglašenje AP ZB.

<sup>30</sup> He said: “To consign *rahmet* (mercy) to fallen soldiers”, but Islamic tradition, in such situation, knows for praying El-Fatiha, opening chapter from Qur’an.

about *Autonomists* approach to question of nation-building and values which have to be accepted. While SDA, through its political work strengthened Islamic values, *Autonomists* tried to avoid such deployment by conceptualizing modernity as opposition to religious awakening. Things SDA did for *Autonomists* were misuse of religion. Abdić proclaimed: "We will ensure conditions for freedom of faith; we will build and renew religious objects, but not misuse them as some from SDA do".<sup>31</sup>

As hard as Abdić's political action divided Bosniaks and Krajišniks in a manner of *narcissism of small differences*, trench and division among Krajišniks were harder and ruinous, perhaps because differences were smallest. One of the main Abdić's assistants, Sead Kajtezović, in very vulgar speech which he had in November 1993. defined position of ARWB apropos central authorities:

*Now enemy number one for me is Alija Izetbegović. On that basis who thinks to talk, there is no talking. There's no unity of Muslims, for me only exist unity of Krajišniks... And that gang will not escape from Bužim. There's Alija moved in, and he'll remember when he moved in. The worst Krajišnik can speak to me. The best Sarajevans have nothing to speak with me. Next phase after Province is state. We have nothing with Sarajevo. We have strength for it, we will achieve it. For me, Sarajevo doesn't exist.*  
(Jašarević 1997, 72 -73.)<sup>32</sup>

But, if Bosniaks from other parts of Bosnia and Herzegovina became strangers and enemies, Kajtezović betrayed his stance about *worst Krajišnik*. Fratricidal war emerged among Krajišniks and was extremely violent. Fifth corps of Bosnian Army (worst Krajišniks, according to Kajtezović), with units located in Bihać, Bužim and better part of Cazin represented and actually was on position of guardian of Bosniak identity and values. For autonomists it was failure and unexpectable division of Krajišniks. Abdić dreamed that his Province will split institutions; Parliament in Bihać, Government in Cazin and President

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<sup>31</sup> Proglašanje AP ZB.

<sup>32</sup> "Za mene je sad neprijatelj broj jedan Alija Izetbegović. Na toj osnovi ko misli razgovarati tu nema priče. Nema jedinstva Muslimana, za mene postoji samo jedinstvo Krajišnika... A ta banda se iz Bužima izvući neće. Tamo se Alija uselio i zapamtice kad se uselio. Najgori Krajišnik može sa mnom razgovarati, Sarajlija najbolji nema šta sa mnom razgovarati. Slijedeća faza je iza Pokrajine država. Nemamo sa Sarajevom ništa. I mi za to imao snage, mi ćemo to ostvariti. Za mene Sarajevo ne postoji."



(himself) in Velika Kladuša.<sup>33</sup> That was now far away from reality and these positions had to be conquered through military actions. That part of history of Bihaćka krajina broke Krajišniks attitude about them, the unity they emphasized earlier vanished. Krajišniks identity, narrative about it survived like stories about bravest Bosniaks, who die for they religion, homeland and nation. The last war helped better part of Krajišniks to make final step into Bosniak national frame. Autonomist stayed out of that process, still trying to be Muslims.

## **Conclusion**

When we speak about Bosniak nation-building, which we try to explore and define, the process is obviously and surely loaded by more and various significances. The complexity of Bosniak history cannot give any attribute but ambiguity and it is her basic advantage for investigators of social phenomena, especially national question. Many changes Bosniaks were through supported that; unequal political development, ruptures of social processes, and lack of cultural institutions. All that took place in explanations and became axis around which narratives about Bosnian Muslims circulate.

Yet, something was unchangeable. Structure of Bosnian spirituality, from Early Middle Age to modernity, shows solidness and durability. Despite if there is talk about heretics in Middle Age or Muslims after Ottoman income, Bosnia was distinguished from other parts of Europe. Political, social and economic conditions never significantly influenced and shackled up that structure. Only in socialist era most of people slowly started to adopt some forms of modern, untraditional lifestyle.

So, spirituality instead ethnicity should be main spot, the key, from which researchers begin their investigations connected to Bosniak identity. After all, South Slav nation-builders primarily focused their attention and narratives on religion, hence all Catholics became Croats, Orthodox became Serbs, Muslims became Muslims/Bosniaks. After that national intellectuals tried to robe members of particular religion into unique ethnicity.

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<sup>33</sup> Proglašenje AP ZB.

In this case, concerned to Krajišniks regional identity, spirituality, or return to religion, should be emphasized as a main spot of misunderstanding between Muslim (SDA) and Krajišnik (Fikret Abdić) political leaderships. Demand of return to Islamic values and lifestyle which SDA proclaimed was quite opposite to Abdić's stance of continual development of people. While SDA was focused on vertical axis, the backbone of people, as primal differentiation between Muslims and others, axis which have to be renewed, Abdić emphasized improved horizontal level, life conditions which was connected to socialist modernization.<sup>34</sup> Muslim socialist elite took Yugoslavism as a *favorable framework* to develop own nation, Abdić thought about Muslimhood as *a frame* for Yugoslav idea. History became teacher, sacrifices over Ottoman rule found place in communist narration; oppressed rose themselves through emerged working class, unity became real with sharing good and bad.

There are three major influences which helped beginning of Bosniak/Muslim national awakening<sup>35</sup>: cultural re/production, political action which succeeds with recognition of Muslim nation and economics. Intertwined, they brought idea of Bosniaks national identity in centre of political and social action. Mainly connected to Ottoman period, Bosnian (Bosniak) history, literature and art, through mass-media, cultural and scientific institutions after softness of communist regime in seventies and eighties were accessible to Muslim population. The past and roots were re/discovered and the doors for full affirmation were slowly opened.

That wasn't case with Krajišniks. They started better communication with center (Sarajevo), but that communication stayed at level of transport and exchange of goods. Exchange of ideas, its spreading among people did not exist. Process of *Bosniak renaissance* didn't influence that region and its inhabitants. Their leadership was devoted to socialist idea and accomplishments of Yugoslavia, to material progress and escape from backwardness. Recognition of Muslim nation, for them, also was victory of socialism.

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<sup>34</sup> Of course, Abdić's devotion to Serbs national program shouldn't be forgotten and that misunderstanding can be explained on practical, political level. But, reasons why he was devoted to realization of Milošević's policy also include different concept of Bosniak national development. Also, ambiguous relation to Ottomans and that part of Bosniak history was stone of stumble.

<sup>35</sup> Maybe this term is not fully acceptable but it can successfully describe what happened inside Muslim corps in SFR Yugoslavia in seventies and eighties.

While in Sarajevo were vivid intellectual circle which renewed Bosniakhood/Muslimhood, in Bihaćka krajina that process never came in focus of their elite or media. That is one of the main reasons why Abdić's concept in era of national (religious) awakening had effect among Muslim population in Bihaćka krajina.

On the beginning of democratization and dissolution of Yugoslavia those two concepts emerged as two opposites.<sup>36</sup> During wartime (1992 – 1995) Krajišniks opened most dramatic part of Bosniak misunderstandings and self-definition. People under Abdić's rule (minority) were contra central authorities, Bosniakhood and especially SDA.<sup>37</sup> Legitimate government in Bihać supported policy of Sarajevo. Both of them emphasized their krajišniks tradition; *Autonomist* rebel and aspiration for freedom, Government forces borderland/borderer as a guardian of Islam and Islamic world.

Stories we write, tell and hear, mostly, can and do bear a lot of meanings. This is one of their ways to be seductive and interesting for listeners and readers. Historical processes, as an exceptionally complex social actions, are also intertwined by various meanings they carry during own development. That's why the interpretation of particular historical process can be told from different corners and we should keep it in mind during our research efforts and, especially, interpretations.

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<sup>36</sup> It have to be said that SDA and especially Alija Izetbegović in first time didn't pay attention to national question, it came in focus during war when nation and state building became synchronous processes, perhaps first and last lime in Bosnian history, and partly looked like *normal European nation-state building*.

<sup>37</sup> Very fruitful stance had A. D. He said: "Some don't recognize Bosniakhood because of SDA and Alija Izetbegović. They think about self as Muslims and Bosnians in national sense. Nobody of *Autonomists* will accept that they were against state, they were against SDA and Alija, and of course (with smile), we cannot allow that there wasn't rebel in Bihaćka krajina while Alija ruled". Interview with A. D. Sarajevo, 14. 6. 2007.

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