

**SOCIAL NETWORK ANALYSIS:  
Identifying Effects of Personal Networks in Sarajevo**

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This paper is the result of research conducted in Sarajevo in Spring-Summer 2003. Its main subject is the construction and maintenance of ethnic or national identities and their effects on social relationships, especially those among young people.

We want to deconstruct some discourses about identity in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) by reflecting the social and discursive practices that construct and maintain them. I do not mean to accept things as they are without questioning where they come from, why they emerged and the effects they have.

When someone arrives in BiH, they bring with them concepts like ›ethnic group‹ or ›nation‹ to be applied to the reality they face. However, these concepts do not always fit into the situation the visitor finds. We have to be careful with the importation of these kind of concepts, because they are discursive practices that are not freed of the effects of people's own subjectivity and relationships.

**The Epistemological Framework**

We are starting from an epistemological and ontological point of view that is situated half-way between a socio-constructionist position and a structural position. For this reason, we understand that the knowledge we have about ourselves and about social reality is necessarily symbolic and constructed by the course of one's own daily life. Nevertheless, we do not deny the existence of material conditioners and structures of opportunities and reproduction of inequalities. Further, we consider it necessary to incorporate the actor's world of meanings in the analysis of reality. We understand reality as a product of the collective interchange of meaning contingent to a socio-historical moment within the framework of social positions.

**Main Goal**

Due to the great importance that nationalist and ethnicist discourses have had in the pre-war, war, and post-war periods, the identification of the current discourses about ethnic or national identities is central to the research, including the investigation into how these discourses are maintained and into their role in or effects on everyday relationships.

In general terms, this research represents an initial overview on the situation of young people in BiH, considering them as important actors in the peace-building process. This overview has been arrived at through analysis and observation of the initiatives, projects and practices among them.

**Hypotheses**

The first hypothesis maintains that the dominant discourses about ethnic identities have implicit within them an essentialist conception of identity and therefore exclude multiple affiliations. This conception delimits differentiated groups, imposing on them certain characteristics that give them cohesion as well as differentiating them from the people who belong to another category.

The second hypothesis, related to first, suggests that this essentialist conception that leads to such categorization has certain effects on social relations. The discourse maintained by individuals is going to be related to the structure of their personal network.

**Methodology**

During the time spent in BiH, we collected information in different ways to achieve our research goal.

On the one hand, we used ethnographic work, meaning: participant observation and interviews collected in field notes. This textual information was analysed using Discourse Analysis. We understand a discourse as a whole of linguistic practices situated in a concrete enunciative position inside a socio-historical and ideological setting for which we can define output

1 Cf. Antaki, Charles/Iñiguez, Lupicinio: El análisis del discurso en Psicología Social. Boletín de Psicología 44 (1994); Iñiguez, L.: Introducción a la Sección II Análisis de la conversación y/o análisis del discurso: hibridaciones metodológicas para el estudio de la «acción social» y/o «regímenes discursivos». In: Gordo, Ángel Juan/Linaza, José Luis (Eds.): Psicologías, Discursos, Poder. Madrid: Visor 1996; Parker, Ian: Discurso, cultura y poder en la vida cotidiana. In: Gordo/Linaza 1996.

2 Molina, José Luis: El análisis de redes sociales. Una introducción. Barcelona: Edicions Bellaterra 2001.

3 McCarthy, Christopher: Egonet. Personal Network Software. Available at: <http://survey.bebr.ufl.edu/EgoNet/>, 2003, last consulted, 02.03.2004.

4 Molina, J.L./McCarty, C.: Sampling Personal Network Structure: Proposal and Applications [in print].

conditions. This enunciative position draws with it certain effects both in subjectivity organization and in reflecting and maintaining certain social relationships.<sup>1</sup>

On the other hand, we used Social Network Analysis to analyse Personal Networks. I will briefly outline this technique since it represents an interesting new source of information for ethnographical research.

### Social Network Analysis

Social Network Analysis studies specific relations between defined elements (people, groups, organizations, discourse elements, etc.). It differs from traditional analysis in that, while the former explains, for example, people's behaviour with regard to their social class, profession or ethnic affiliation, Social Network Analysis also takes into account the connections between these elements. Its principal characteristic, then, is to include relational and network data in the analysis. We understand that relational data is a specific link between two elements. From this pair of elements and relations between them, it is possible to construct a network. In order to do this, it employs some elements from graphs theory and matrix algebra.<sup>2</sup>

We have to distinguish here between two perspectives: the *egocentric* and the *sociocentric*, that is, one that focusses on individuals or one that focusses on complete social networks (people, institutions, etc). We will employ the first perspective here.

### Personal Network Analysis

Our idea is to use PNA for research among young people in BiH in order to obtain information about the structure of their relations and to identify some connections between personal networks and discourses.

To do so, we are using a program developed for this kind of analysis called »EGONET«.<sup>3</sup> Let us look at an example to illustrate this:

We ask a person to answer the questions asked in the program. The task is to make a list of 45 persons and to introduce some attributes for each one. McCarthy suggest that a number between 45 and 60 people had to be sufficient if the name generator is a free-list of people from all categories, meaning that each informant has to name 45 names without consulting any previous list. The free-list generator tends to generate intimate ties in the beginning, but the roster is long enough to gather information from different areas of the personal network structure.<sup>4</sup>

For this research, I asked for the *age, gender, job, nationality, religion, intensity of relationship* (from intimate to acquaintance) and *type of relationship* (friend, family, work-related, etc).

*Nationality* was the most problematic attribute since it was the focus of our research. For that reason, the first period in Sarajevo was dedicated to confirming the categories that were used in everyday conversations. Those categories were the ones we then used in the questionnaire.

Three clear and excluding categories were used to classify the people in BiH (»Serbian«, »Croatian« and »Muslim« or »Bosniak«). These categories completely agree with and can be used as synonyms of the religious categories Orthodox Christian, Catholic and Muslim. A fourth category, »Bosnian«, is non-excluding and has a complex use. »Bosnian« concerns citizenship, but it is peculiar in that it is only used by people with more heterogeneous networks to denominate some Muslims and children of mixed marriages.

Finally, we asked who knows whom among the 45 people nominated by every informant. From these answers, we obtained a data matrix that is represented by graph 1.

The personal network itself allows us to obtain a lot of information from, for example, the number of components (or disconnected sub-networks), the density of relationships, etc. For example, the personal network reported by this person is a typical young female network (1 component, great importance of strong ties, strong density, etc) although it is interesting to note that she knows more males than females.



white: women  
black: men

Chart 1

The chart becomes more interesting when the representation of the network is combined with the attributes of each person represented in it.



white: intimate  
black: acquaintance

Chart 2

Here, for example, we can see the intensity of the relationship. We can see that our test person has a circle of intimates and then a second group of people she knows less closely. In the next graph, we can observe the type of relationship she has to the people in her network. Since she is a young student woman, the majority of the people in her network are friends.



white: family  
light grey: friends  
dark grey: studies  
black: work

Chart 3



Square: Serbian  
Triangle: Croatian  
Down Arrow: Bosniak  
Circle: Bosnian  
Diamond: Yugoslav  
Hourglass: Other

Chart 4

In this last graph, and this is the most interesting one for our research, we can see the national affiliation of the people in her network.

After obtaining this data, we can combine information like, e.g., national affiliation with the intensity of the relationship, etc., to work out some hypotheses or interpretations. It is important to share the information obtained with informants in order to contrast results and to obtain some explanations. It also helps to offer them feedback about their networks, such as, e.g., defining ›key players‹ (the people who are able to access the entire personal network together and therefore to organize them the biggest birthday party).

### Results

In general terms, we can claim that we have found a relation between the discourse sustained by a person and the categories she/he uses to classify people and to identify him/herself, as well as the structure of his or her personal relations, meaning his/her network's level of national homogeneity.

We will now show the prevailing discursive directions in the ontology of such »national« categories, identified via the analysis of all collected textual data together with some examples of the respective personal networks.

### Ethnicist Discourse

The *ethnicist* discourse, elaborated by nationalist elites and supported by the international community, whose device of maintenance impregnates all social spheres, from the country's constitution to familiar jokes, is the hegemonic discourse. It maintains the existence of differentiated groups whose difference goes beyond religious practices. These groups are denominated ›ethnic groups‹ or ›nations‹ indifferently. History is taken to try to prove their immutable existence throughout the centuries. Among those who sustain this discourse, we have found two variants of approach to the possibility of coexistence resorting two different causal explanations for the recent conflict: the ›clash of civilizations discourse‹ and the ›multiethnic discourse‹.

The ethnicist discourse, based on the »clash of civilizations« theory<sup>5</sup>, maintains that the coexistence of ethnic groups is impossible as demonstrated by the great amount of wars conducted on this territory, and asserts that the best solution would be for each group to live separated in an ethnically homogenous territory. In their opinion, the war was a logical consequence of the impossibility of coexistence. This discourse is sustained by the Serbian nationalists (SDS) and Croatian nationalists (HDZ), although we have also heard it, to a lesser extent, from some Muslim nationalists.

The people who sustain this discourse live in highly homogenous circles and use excluding categories (›Serbian‹, ›Croatian‹, ›Bosniak‹) to describe other people and themselves.

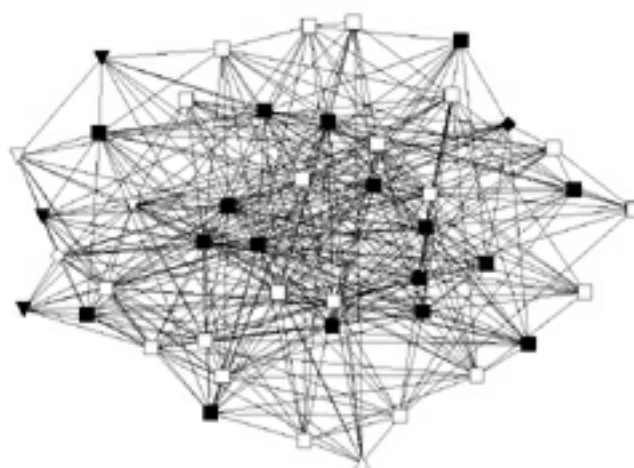
Here is an example of a homogenous personal network (black symbols showing men and white symbols women):

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Huntington, Samuel P.: El choque de civilizaciones y la reconfiguración del orden mundial. Transl. by Jose Pedro Tosaus. [orig. title: The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of the World Order]. Barcelona: Paidós 1996.



Square: Serbian  
Triangle: Croatian  
Down Arrow: Bosniak  
Circle: Bosnian  
Diamond: Yugoslav  
Hourglass: Other

Chart 5



Square: Serbian  
Triangle: Croatian  
Down Arrow: Bosniak  
Circle: Bosnian  
Diamond: Yugoslav  
Hourglass: Other

Chart 6

The first test person uses only the categories of ›Bosniak‹ (85%) and also knows a few ›Croats‹ (13%), except for one ›Yugoslav‹ neighbour (2%). The ›Croats‹ whom he knows are located on the periphery of his network. He denominates himself ›Bosniak‹ as well. In the interview he maintained an ethnicist discourse, raising the existence of differentiated ethnic groups and claiming difficulties of coexistence.

The second test person sustained the same type of discourse. As we can see, his is also a strongly homogenous network, even more so than the previous one, although in this case the dominating category is that of ›Serbs‹ (82%). He does not use the ›Bosnian‹ category either and denominates himself a ›Serb‹. We can observe a difference in the density of relations between the two networks (25% in the first and 42% in the second network). The density of relations in a network means the number of actual relations out of the possible between the people in the network, e.g., in the first network the 25% of the people in the network know each other. The higher density of relations in the second network is probably due to the fact that the second person lives in the Serbian part of Sarajevo located a few kilometres away from the centre in a semi-rural environment. Nevertheless, the nucleus of the first network also displays a rather strong degree of density.

### Multi-Ethnic Discourse

*Multi-ethnic* discourse on the other hand supposes that coexistence is possible in spite of the differences among the population groups, as is demonstrated by the multiple periods of pacific coexistence that these groups have enjoyed. This discourse, which is maintained by SDA nationalists, names the war as an aggression emerging from Serbian aspirations to obtain a »Great Serbia«. The majority of interviewed people maintained this type of discourse. They denominate themselves ›Bosnian‹ although they consider themselves belonging to one of the



### Cosmopolitan Discourse

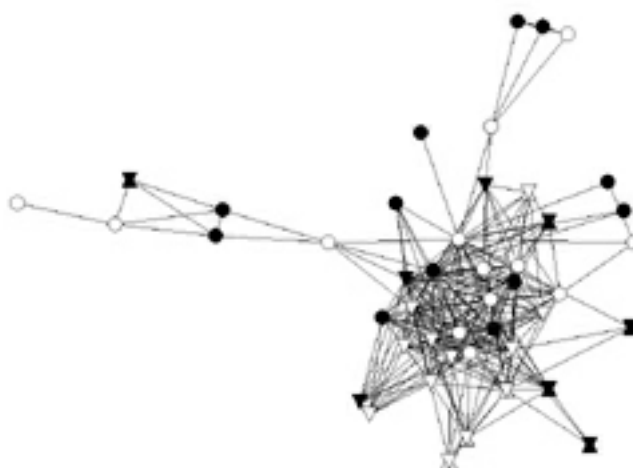
The *cosmopolitan* discourse, which is maintained by certain intellectuals, holds that such ethnic groups or differences in Bosnia as are claimed by the other two forms of discourse do not exist and that these have been constructed and manipulated by the nationalistic elites in order to represent a political war as an ethnic conflict. According to this interpretation, the Bosnian conflict developed between two opposite ideological options: nationalism and cosmopolitanism.

This group, which is in a minority, is made up of people who do not contemplate such »national« categories for their own relationships or for their personal identity. They describe themselves as ›Bosnian‹ and they employ this category for a great number of people in their networks, although they do not apply it to all of their acquaintances with the explanation that they try to describe each person, not according to their own criteria, but according to how these people would describe themselves. The persons who conduct a *cosmopolitan* discourse have the most heterogeneous networks.



Square: Serbian  
Triangle: Croatian  
Down Arrow: Bosniak  
Circle: Bosnian  
Diamond: Yugoslav  
Hourglass: Other

Chart 9



Square: Serbian  
Triangle: Croatian  
Down Arrow: Bosniak  
Circle: Bosnian  
Diamond: Yugoslav  
Hourglass: Other

Chart 10

The first test person has quite a dense network (40%) with one central person connecting the world of work with the world of family and friends – in fact this person is her husband, they both work together. ›Bosnians‹ (42%) and ›Bosniaks‹ (33%) form the nucleus, whereas on the periphery there is more variety (15% ›Croats‹ and 6% ›Serbs‹).

The second network shows a lower density (20%) and has a dense nucleus formed by ›Bosnians‹ (22%), who are the test person's family, the rest are described as ›Bosnians‹ (56%) and ›Others‹ (22%). The two separated groups of people are relationships via work and studies.

## Conclusions

From this research we can conclude that:

- The discourse maintained by most of the people interviewed in Sarajevo is related to an essentialist conception of individual identity.
- The adopted discourse, the conception of one's own identity and the social relations maintained conform to a feedback mechanism.
- An *ethnicist* discourse, based on the existence of differentiated and excluding ethnic groups, leads to relations based on segregation.

Based on these findings we can state that there is a relationship between the composition of personal networks (and therefore everyday life relationships) and the ethnic discourses that are maintained; this applies in the studied cases. Excluding discourses are associated with a high homogeneity in the relationships while discourses that accept multi-affiliation are related to more diverse social networks.

Given this mechanism of interchange between discourses and personal networks, a change in one of the elements involved is going to generate changes in the other elements. That is, a change in the language used in the Social Sciences would generate, in the long term, a change in the discourses and, therefore, in social relations. In the same way, a change in the structure of relations (for example by means of the workshops organized by NGOs, meeting new people, etc) could lead, although it does not necessarily have to, to a change in the conception of one's own identity and to a change in the discourses about collective identities in BiH, and *vice versa*.

The maintenance of such discourses as lead to the war due to the importation of other people's concepts (like ›ethnic group‹ or ›nation‹) to describe the Bosnian reality (by local nationalists and some simplistic foreign interpretations), currently produces social segregation. My proposal then would be to begin to think about questioning these concepts since, as we have observed, they are not exempt of effects on collective meaning, self-perception and relationships among the Bosnian people.

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