

## BOOK REVIEWS

**First Nationalism Then Identity: On Bosnian Muslims and Their Bosniak Identity**, by Mirsad Kriještorac, Michigan University Press, 2022, 330 pp., (open access), ISBN 9780472902880, \$85.00 (hardcover), ISBN 9780472075508, \$44.95 (paperback), ISBN: 978-0-472-90288-0, DOI: [10.3998/mpub.12276215](https://doi.org/10.3998/mpub.12276215).

Mirsad Kriještorac's book *First Nationalism Then Identity: On Bosnian Muslims and Their Bosniak Identity* explores how nationalism becomes an element of identity in Bosnian Muslim diasporas in the USA. The author articulates Bosnian Muslim Diasporas as attachment to their homeland and community from a perspective that measures nationalism strength and nationalism type within a case study. Comprising seven chapters, the book argues that the presupposition of the emergence of identity, then nationalism is actually the other way around.

Kriještorac suggests that, for Bosnian Muslims, religion is a preeminent element of their national group awareness. "Bosniak" seems to be the preferred name for their national identity among the Slavic-speaking Muslims from former Yugoslavia in the US, who used to identify themselves using various names such as Muslim, Turk, Bosnian, or Bosniak. In general, the book scrutinizes the relationship between national identity and territory (desired state), language and religion (in this case Islam), and how this relationship is formulated in emerging Bosniak nationalism. When territory is understood as the desired state, identity construction is grasped as a political category not state-driven but a substate form of nationalism. Language acts as a realm of recognition by its alphabet and its use. Lastly, Islam is engaged with nationalism as a distinctive element of Bosniak identity. Bosniak nationalism does not replace religion, and religion does not disclaim the national identity.

The first part of the book explicates the theories of nationalism and relates them to the Bosnian Muslim case at each step. This original outlook not only makes readers more aware of Bosniak nationalism from different theoretical perspectives but also adds to the significance of the research. Kriještorac benefits from Frederik Barth's argument, which emphasizes the groups' protection of their distinctive features even during the transformation of their groupness, while considering Bosniak identity under construction. Also, the book refers to the transnational character of Bosniak nationalism with Benedict Anderson's concept of "long-distance nationalism."

While most studies deal with top-down national identity-building processes, this study caters to the need for a bottom-up approach to the study of nationalism, bearing in mind the difficulty of defining and disaggregating salient identity. While doing so, this standpoint gives satisfactory information about the emergence of an independent Bosnian Muslim elite that would eventually lead to the rise of group consciousness. The research, with a sound theoretical background, treats nationalism as a form of groupness and demonstrates throughout the research how elites and bottom-up nationalism operate as concepts. Then, it binds contemporary discussions on nationalism and national identity. *First Nationalism Then Identity* reviews the vast literature by focusing on "identity" rather than treating nationalism as an ideology. Thus, the research addresses the methodological problem of treating identity as a category of practice versus a category of analysis. Many studies aiming at analyzing identity solely focus on how a particular identity is performed. Unlike those studies which have preconceptions of how identities should or can be performed as an outcome of structure and agency, this book observes the ascription of an identity as a simultaneous two-step process: The first phase includes the self-definition of one with a group identity. The second step is the self-investment phase that underlines practices of that identity within the group.

The literature review, together with its notes, would satisfy not only political scientists but also most readers wanting to learn about the history of Bosnian Muslims and the region. How this

background handles the process of naming, the struggle over ownership of language and the role of Islam in the emerging Bosniak identity also contribute to the value of the book.

Chapter 3, the empirical body of the book, elucidates the author's main contributions, supported by a detailed explanation of his methods. "Identity" is tackled in two ways: first, identity is approached as a matter of self-attachment to groupness without a state. Secondly, identity is understood as a construct that should be analyzed through the data collected from the diaspora, not just from the homeland. This approach depicts a national identity framework in the diaspora situation to pinpoint a national identity formation without the involvement of a state, in the case of a particular group that is distanced from their homeland and state.

Statistical findings reflect that those who display stronger nationalism are more likely to claim the elite-led Bosniak identity. On the other hand, the type of nationalism was found to be unrelated to the likelihood of the ascription of the national identity. Contrary to what is expected because of closed marriages, the sample does not stipulate ethnic bonds as a basis for a shared identity. Furthermore, the likelihood of ascription of Bosniak identity was impacted by neither ethnic nor civic nationalism. The study supports its hypotheses by arguing that the population sample collected from the US diaspora has not only embraced the Bosniak name but also further developed its identity to reinforce their nationalism.

The strengths of this book can be listed as follows. First, the book challenges two assents in the literature: that modern nationalism develops hand in hand with secularism and that Islam jarred nationalism. Thus, finding a space for national identity in Muslim societies to develop is quite difficult. The Bosnian Muslim case offers insight on how to associate Islam with nationalism. Secondly, contrary to the wide literature that focuses on official nationalisms, the insistence of Kriještorac on understanding the groupness of Bosnian Muslim diasporas adds originality to the method of studying nationalism from the bottom-up perspective. Another strength of the research comes from its courageous attempt to portray women's voices on nationalism and its aim to find gender-based differences at some point, in view of the gender barrier in collecting data. Reaching out to Muslim women in field studies has always been difficult. Finally, the book's effort to offer a model for measuring national identity can be considered noteworthy.

Despite its strengths, the book does not fully engage the gender difference since the hypothesis based on gender relies only on the emotions of women. These differences might arise from differences between women's experiences in Yugoslavia's political atmosphere, the Bosnian war and in the host country. Another drawback is that it tells little about citizenship concerns in Bosnia's historical background. Although the readers succinctly catch the Bosnian Muslims' ignored status in schooling and government offices in former Yugoslavia, citizenship policies and the meaning attributed to full citizenship, which might have had an effect on the Bosnian Muslims' groupness, is not addressed. Rather, citizenship is tackled as a contemporary category to define the difference between Bosnian and Bosniak as passport identities. Aside from the abovementioned shortcomings, the author gives a detailed explanation of the limits of the study, which should spark new research questions.

To conclude, *First Nationalism Then Identity* offers a highly interesting model for analysis, whose framework can be applied in future research projects concerning bottom-up national identity formations. The matter of nationalism type and nationalism strength could be noteworthy parameters for measuring the Bosniak national identity or other ethnic identities. This well-researched case study presents a valuable source for nationalism and identity politics scholars as well as those who seek a better understanding of Bosniak identity and transnational aspects of contemporary identities.

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