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BOSNIA REMEMBERED – PART II: THE LOST GENERATION

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“Cigarettes were worth more than money during the war,” says Adnan Zuka, 25, of Sarajevo. A trim, clean shaven Bosnian Muslim, Adnan is finishing his undergraduate degree in English literature while working a day job as a tour guide. Most afternoons, he rides around his hometown in a bus and tells Australian, European, and American tourists about his wartime childhood memories. “A pack could go for as much as 500 Bosnian marks,” about \$150 in equivalent purchasing power. “Smugglers would roll cigarettes from paper out of old library books.” Adnan smiles, setting up his punch line, “We could smoke and read Shakespeare at the same time.”

Sarajevo’s 21st century present appears permanently linked to its wartime past. Adnan’s office sits across from the Latin Bridge, where Gavrilo Princip and five other activists conspired to ambush the motorcade of Austrian Archduke Franz Ferdinand and his wife, Sophie. Nervous teenagers with no experience handling arms, four of the six renegades were too scared or incompetent to fire their weapons when the moment arrived.¹ Unfortunately for the Archduke, his driver took a wrong turn, stopping the car for several seconds and enabling Princip’s plot to succeed through sheer luck. Every other aspect of the scheme failed, including the student’s plan to martyr themselves. Princip and other assailants swallowed cyanide capsules with expired poison immediately following the attack, leaving them sickened but not dead.

After surviving the assassination and recovering in prison from their attempted suicide, Princip and his comrades left little doubt on their own motives for the killings that led Europe into World War I. The Yugoslav Progressive Youth Movement protested Austria-Hungary’s 1908 annexation of Bosnia & Herzegovina as Hapsburg Empire territory. “I am a Yugoslav nationalist, aiming for the unification of all Yugoslavs,” said Princip at his 1914 trial. “I do not care what form or state, but it must be free from Austria.”² Archduke Ferdinand and his bride’s death resulted from the student’s embrace of a pan-Yugoslavian youth movement embracing Serbs, Croats, and Bosnians alike. When the students attacked the Archduke, their ambition was certainly not to instigate World War I. Their aspiration to unite Yugoslavia under a single ruler endured well beyond the “war to end all wars” their bullets started.

TUNNELS, FIELDS, AND CEMETERIES

This desire for freedom from empirical interference wasn’t confined to anti-Hapsburg students, and partisans of another kind would eventually make it a reality. Although the Kingdom of Serbia fought against the Austro-

¹ Misha Glenny, *The Balkans: Nationalism, War and the Great Powers, 1804-1999* (Viking: New York, 1999), pp. 304-305.

² Noel Malcolm, *Bosnia: A Short History* (Pan Books: London, 2002), p. 153

Hungarians during World War I, many Serbs—as well as Croats, Slovenes, and Bosnians—were drafted into Austria's army and fought against their own ethnicity. Ironically, a Serb would not unite Yugoslavia (although Serbs would, according to some, derive a greater benefit from unity). Instead Josip Broz, a Slovene-Croat peasant whom the world would know as Tito, rose from obscurity to create one of the most powerful countries in southern Europe. Today, Bosnian, Serbian, and Croatian survivors reminisce about this mythical golden era, when Tito reigned and Yugoslavia made sense.

The next stop on Adnan's war tour, the Sarajevo Tunnel, feels like a Balkan Flanders Field. The poet wrote of the Belgian World War I battlefield cemetery, where vibrant poppies peacefully bloom on meadows during the northern European spring. On clear days, white crosses of war cemeteries look down from the Tunnel and sprawl into the city, visually climbing up Sarajevo's hills like ivy on New England buildings. In both places, the current tranquility contrasts the past's carnage.

Tourists looking for meaning in southern Europe's post-Yugoslavia horrors find paradoxical inspiration in the iron, wood, and steel artery that was the Bosnian Muslim's lifeline during the Serbian siege. Civilians and resistance fighters alike funneled UN-supplied MREs, C-rations, and gasoline, enduring both heavy Serb artillery fire and the UN's weak enforcement of humanitarian aid distribution. The entrance outside Sarajevo serves as an interactive war exhibit where tall tourists clang their heads off the rafters as they shuffle beneath the earth. Signed photos from Morgan Freeman, Angelina Jolie, Kevin Spacey, and Michael Moore are among dozens of celebrity pictures adorning the Tunnel's spacious memorabilia walls. Ticket prices for the Sarajevo Tunnel tour have tripled this year, although they still cost far less than Shakespeare Cigarettes did during the war.

THE LOST GENERATION

Although the war memorials are, by far, Adnan's highest selling tour package, he would just as soon forget the violence that defined his childhood. "The tourists are interesting, but the tours are sometimes draining," he says. A budding international scholar in his own right, Adnan appreciates the pull his city offers for the dozens of global celebrities during their parade through Sarajevo's war exhibits. At the same time, scarred buildings, wounded psyches, and unresolved treaties persist as reminders of issues war did not resolve. "We are Bosnia's lost generation," says Adnan, using a term Gertrude Stein coined to describe those who survived World War I. "We get tired of talking about the war, but we also need to talk about it."

In November 1995, after Serb, Croat, and Bosnian leaders signed the cease fire, Adnan remembers families keeping goats on their balconies for months, not able to believe the violence had finally ended. In 2005, I recall my own mystification with peace after spending most of the previous year in Iraq. I was pleasantly surprised not to find roadside bombs hidden inside parking lot dumpsters or exploding from highway culverts. Peace can be as disorienting as war, especially when imposed suddenly on a person—or a nation.

RADICAL BOSNIAN ISLAM?

In the same way, religion, when mandated without warning, can be as disorienting as an abrupt peace. Like many Bosnian Muslims, Adnan disapproves of western sexual mores and supports "traditional family values"; his rhetoric sounds similar to Bible Belt Evangelical Christianity. At the same time, Adnan rejects the radical Wahhabists who attempted to impose Sunni theocracy on Bosnians during the civil war. "I am conservative but open-minded," he says, "I do not like to be told when, where, or how to pray."

With a centuries-old legacy of moderation imparted from Ottoman rule, Wahhabism in Bosnia has a brief, troubled history. In 1992, about 1,000 Saudi *mujahideen* veterans of Afghanistan—including numerous associates of the late Osama bin Laden—answered a call for *jihad* in Bosnia. "They came from all over," says Adnan, settling in villages near Tuzla in northeastern Bosnia. Initially, Bosnian Muslims welcomed the Saudis as defenders; the influx of weapons, warriors, and cash supplied the fledgling Bosnian Army with enough resources to balance their odds. Saudi Arabia alone funneled over \$373 million into Bosnia through Islamic charity fronts like the Benevolence International Foundation, establishing a practice that would later fund Iraqi insurgents.³

³ Sarah Schlesinger. "Wahhabism: A Forgotten Legacy of the Bosnian War," *Hudson Institute*, November 7, 2011.

But the *mujahideen* had other ideas beyond *jihad* against Serbs. Soon after arriving, the holy warriors pushed to establish *sharia* law. In another pattern that would emerge in Iraq, the Wahhabists killed Bosnian men unwilling to adhere to their strict doctrines and took young women, often forcibly, as wives. The practice went against a longstanding tradition of Bosnian Muslim moderation. “Although ‘god-fearing’, the Bosnians were notably less strict than some other Muslim societies in their adherence to several Islamic practices,” wrote historian Noel Malcolm. “They always had a weakness for drinking *raki* and the use of the veil was disregarded.”⁴ In Bosnian culture, radical Islam was, and is, far from mainstream.

Today, Wahhabists in Bosnia are scorned as “short pants,” referring to their preference for rolling trouser cuffs to their knees. In downtown Sarajevo’s walking district, worshipers at the Gazi Husrev Bey Mosque ignore a Wahhabist’s pamphlets, as if the literature sullies what websites call “the most important house of Islamic worship in Bosnia.” Wahhabists retain a safe zone in Gornja Maoca, a village near Tuzla where activist Mevlid Jasarevic, 24, trained for an October 2011 attack on the U.S. Embassy in Sarajevo. Jasarevic, a Bosnian Wahhabist Muslim who is ethnically Serb, wounded one Bosnian police officer during the attack, which ended when he was apprehended after a 50 minute standoff. He remains in custody, and his trial began last month. Beyond underscoring the point about how far his ideology is beyond the Bosnian mainstream, Adnan had little to say about Jasarevic’s attack.

Every lost generation Bosnian I spoke with feels ashamed of displaying excessive passion for religion or ethnicity. Instead, they define themselves as nationalism’s fierce opponents. “I am an anti-nationalist,” Adnan says, using the term as if he was debating against a political party. “I am proud of being a Muslim, but no one should kill over national differences.” In the Bosnian context, nationalism suggests the violent assertion of cultural superiority over others, and youth condemn it loudly across faith and culture. Dubioza Kolektiv, a popular crossover band, reflects the lost generation’s anti-nationalist anger through funk and ska rhythms, a Bosnian activist fusion of Bob Marley and Rage Against the Machine. The children of those who killed and died are relieved to exist, yet consumed with confusion over their violent past. And despite their idealistic ambitions, national identities remain uncomfortably lodged in their consciousness.

NATIONALISM AND THE TITO MYTH

Bojan Pilipovic is a Bosnian Serb who lives in Dubica, a village near the Bosnia-Croatian border. A graphic designer, Bojan, 25, is friendly, confident, and multicultural. Although Bojan’s friendships extend across all ethnic groups, he fervently cheers for Serbia’s national soccer team. Like Adnan and Dubioza Kolektiv, Bojan is an anti-nationalist. Anti-nationalism, however, is less relevant to Bojan than Marshall Tito’s bygone Yugoslavian greatness.

Josep Broz Tito, an obscure peasant whose leadership and acumen elevated both Yugoslavia and himself to the world stage, has become canonized as a secular saint in this generation’s consciousness. After moving to Vienna, Tito, then 21, was drafted into the Austro-Hungarian army during World War I, where he fought against Serbia. Although Tito erased all mention of his Austro-Hungarian service in his official biography, he first gained a reputation for leadership, courage and compassion as an Austro-Hungarian non-commissioned officer.⁵ After fighting in Serbia and Russia, Tito was wounded in 1915 and convalesced for two years in Russian prisoner-of-war camps. He escaped in 1917, witnessed the Russian Revolution in St. Petersburg, and returned to his homeland after the war a converted communist.

While Tito’s exploits as a World War II resistance leader and Yugoslavian ruler have been well chronicled, westerners often incorrectly classify Tito’s reign alongside other southern European dictators such as Francisco Franco and Nicolae Ceausescu in history’s dustbin. Unlike these rulers, who fell out of their countrymen’s favor soon after relinquishing power, Tito remains a mythological hero of the people: a Balkan blend of George Washington, Abraham Lincoln, and Russell Crowe. Both during and after World War II, Winston Churchill was among Tito’s many western supporters, sharing champagne with Tito and supporting his anti-Stalin brand of “liberal communism.”⁶ “Tito was the man,” Bojan declares, echoing his generation’s collective sentiment.

4 Malcolm, *Bosnia: A Short History*, p. 105. Typically made with fermented plums, *raki* or *rakija* is Balkan home-brewed whiskey; like *ouzo* to Greeks and *grappa* to Italians.

5 Glenny, *The Balkans: Nationalism, War and the Great Powers, 1804-1999*, pp. 571-572.

6 In 1987, Sir Fitzroy MacLean—a Scottish adventurer who may have been one of several characters Ian Fleming amalgamated when

The Tito myth is understandable, especially given his remarkable achievements. He fathered a country, united fratricidal factions, and, with an actor's brash, cavalier, virile brawn, branded himself as a Robin Hood-like defender of commoners. Unfortunately, in the course of repressing all ethnic groups equally to retain his authority, Tito often played them off against each other. Since elections did not exist as a release valve for political frustrations, nationalist positions became more extreme and entrenched the longer Tito ruled. "Instead of accommodating legitimate expressions of national identity," writes historian Misha Glenny, "his preferred solution to the problem was to suppress it, or, worse still, to neutralize one nationalism by pitting another against it."⁷ To retain power, Tito drove both Serbian and Croatian nationalism underground. In the late 1980s, when these forces explosively emerged, both sides had lost the modernizing, liberal characteristics they once possessed.⁸

If they cannot believe in the memory of Tito, the ultimate Balkan anti-nationalist, where can Adnan, Bojan, and the rest of Bosnia's lost generation turn to for hope? Where can they draw strength to maintain their generation's vision of peace? Is a peaceful Yugoslavia possible, or is the region destined for perpetual conflict? And, finally, what policy lessons can the United States draw from our experience in Bosnia as we examine the risks, costs, and moral quandaries of future political and military interventions?

Coming in Part 3: The Lessons of Bosnia

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inventing James Bond—famously described his 1943 orders from Churchill: "Find out who [in Yugoslavia] is killing the most Germans, and suggest means by which we could help them kill more." MacLean, who died in 1996, later wrote two biographies of Tito and was, like Churchill, a vocal advocate.

⁷ Glenny, *The Balkans: Nationalism, War and the Great Powers, 1804-1999, Ibid.*, p. 574.

⁸ Glenny, *The Balkans: Nationalism, War and the Great Powers, 1804-1999*, p. 593. This especially emerged in the late 1960s and early 1970s, when Tito forced liberal Croat and Serb scholars into dueling over linguistic and political autonomy. Glenny and Malcolm both argue Tito's actions marginalized moderates, and suggest the later rise of extremism resulted directly from this political repression.