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Eunice Castro Seixas

**North-South and East-West Relations.
Representation and Democratization in
Bosnia-Herzegovina**

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North-South and East-West Relations. Representation and Democratization in Bosnia-Herzegovina

Eunice Castro Seixas

PhD Candidate at Faculty of Economics and Center of Social Studies, Coimbra University, Portugal

Abstract

This paper will consider the issue of representation and democratization in Bosnia-Herzegovina, a post-conflict and transitional society where different international major players impose notions of development, democratization and transitional justice. It is based on fieldwork in BiH in 2009, 2010, as part of my doctoral thesis at Faculty of Economics and CES, University of Coimbra and funded by Foundation of Science and Technology (FCT).

The question of the number and heterogeneity of IC actors and their different interests in BiH is crucial to the representation of humanitarian and developmental aid, democratization, and transitional justice. At the same time as credibility of IC institutions decreases in BiH, images of the country as «forgotten», «Wild East» or as an «abnormal country» in contrast to «any normal European Country», persevere. The sensation of «stillness» or «not moving forward» has major consequences to participation and democratization. Moreover, nationalist discourse by ruling elites manipulates the representation of victimhood and human rights.

But the question is also how IC actors contribute to these representations and how they themselves portray BiH. BiH, entity-level as well as international media have major influences on the issue of representation. And how are these reciprocal representations between BiH and IC players related to intersections between North and South and East and West?

Introduction

Bosnia-Herzegovina (BiH) is, since Dayton Peace Agreement that put an end to war in 1995, under international regulation and the supervision of the “Office of the High Representative” (OHR), now also the European Union Special Representative. Many have been the critiques of the character of this international intervention and regulation process. Campbell argues that the international intervention was based on

an identity politics framework that created the image of Bosnia as “an intractable ethnic problem” on which EU and USA intervened “not to save the ideal of multiculturalism abroad but rather to shore up the nationalist imaginary so as to contain the ideal of multiculturalism at home” (Campbell, 1998). This argument relates to the more recent critiques on securitizing policies and its links to developmental aid and international intervention (see for instance Duffield, 2002, 2008, and CASE Collective, 2006).

Post-war intervention and regulation in BiH has been criticized for creating external aid dependency problems and promoting de-responsibility and lack of ownership in both civil society and politics (see for example, Bieber, 2002; Chandler, 2000). Chandler argues that this international supervision has been prolonged in order to provide “(...) a flexible form through which international institutions have extended their capacity to accommodate to and to influence new East/West and West/West international relations without the framework of the Cold War” (Chandler, 2000: 181); and that in whole, it has failed to constitute a stable society and promote transitional justice in BiH, instead. contributing to create a fragile or failing state.

I argue that these critiques do open the debate around the issue of North-South, East-West relations, and how these are linked to developmental aid policies and geopolitical questions in post Cold War World. But many of them leave aside the question of representation that is essential to this problematic. This paper will debate on how the BiH case can leads us to an interrogation about 1) How is the «South» being represented and constructed by the «North»; 2) How does this «South» represents itself and 3) How it represents the «North»? 4) How do these reciprocal representations contribute to North-South, Global-Local and also West-Non West relations? - These questions are inspired by Slater’s (2008) proposal for a post-colonial geopolitics but presume BiH is a good example of intersection of North-South and West-Non West dynamics, particularly if we focus on the issues of democratization as related to western external intervention.

This paper is based on fieldwork completed in BiH in the summers of 2009 and 2010 (in the whole I spend 5 months in Sarajevo, including a trip to Zenica and another to Banja Luka), as part of my doctoral thesis at CES, University of Coimbra. My research focused on the influence of international intervention on BiH civil society and

particularly through human rights organizations. Being a qualitative case study, diverse types of data were collected, both from in-depth interviews with members of local and international NGOs and other relevant actors and from document analysis (international and local NGO reports, surveys, and economic data). A broader perspective of critical ethnography oriented the study and I also use data from informal conversations and observations as well as from a field diary. Data analysis framework was critical discourse analysis, mainly following Norman Fairclough approach and categories.

1. The South as the radicalized periphery in the Balkans

Human Security and the Biopolitical Divide between Insured and Non-Insured Life

In post Cold-War the periphery is discursively represented as a place of barbarism, of the new wars, of the pre-political and the pre-modern. “New wars” in the 1990s – as the war in Yugoslavia- are, in this view, a barrier to development, as development is seen to prevent conflict, and on the other hand, security is seen to promote development. This corresponds to the nexus between security and development or “securitization of development” associated with the human security approach (Duffield & Waddell, 2004). Human Security approach thus operates through a series of dichotomies opposing the metropolis to the borderlands and donors to recipients of aid, which also correspond to a metaphor of order vs. chaos (Duffield, 2002). Such polarized and radicalized representation legitimizes “abyssal thinking” and the creation of insurmountable divisions between these “two worlds”, concealing any resemblances or shared responsibilities (see Santos, 2007).

Human security approach is linked to a radicalization of the image of the periphery and simultaneously serves to legitimize it. It constitutes an ‘assemblage of governance’, a set of biopolitical developmental devices at the service of global liberal governance (Duffield & Waddell, 2004). It manages the life of non-insured people in underdeveloped countries through technologies of psychosocial development and education that represent the new form of soft power. Development is associated to attitude and behavior change, following western liberal notions of self and empowerment. But this

merging of security and development is based on a containment strategy with the purpose of containing the conflicts in the periphery, preventing their spreading to 'developed countries' in the 'North'. Containment is an essential feature of this nexus between security and development as Duffield (2008) asserts: "An expanded nexus would add the proviso that you cannot have development or security without containing the mobility of underdeveloped life"(146). International containment is legitimized by the idea that the non-insured are dangerous to the North's security and dominant position.

Through the will to live beyond the limited basic needs ascribed to it, incomplete life is minded to make the wrong choices and, as such, to become dangerous. Radical self-reproduction equates with threatening forms of innovation and circulation, including the ability to survive beyond states and sap the walls they erect. Autonomous self-reproduction continually challenges attempts to achieve security through development as international containment. (Duffield 2008: 147)

Development assistance is thus detached from any idea of equity or social redistribution, from any critique to inequalities between 'North' and 'South'. Instead, it creates a "biopolitical divide" between developed and under-developed people, insured and non-insured life (Ibid.).

Bosnia-Herzegovina as a Peripheral Fragile State

Geopolitically, BiH represents a small, poor and peripheral country, one which international community regards as a "fragile" or "failing State", thus, in permanent state of emergency, status that legitimizes the international intervention, via development securitizing policies centered in the building of civil society and on the implementation of political and economic reforms.

Human Security constitutes an important discourse and practice by major donors in BiH¹, that gave priority to civil society building strategies of democratization as well as

to containment strategies via focus on visa, migration and human trafficking control, reinforcing and linking the images of both underdevelopment or lacking and instability of the region, thus of development and security. These lacking and instability legitimizes further intervention of IC, through more psychosocial development and containment strategies, more of the same.

Moreover, the creation of a permanent focus of instability in Europe borderlands, through the constant reactivation of the ghosts of the 1992-95 war, is often used as an instrument for geopolitical disputes between the several strong States in Europe and the USA. At the same time, the system of domination/control resulting from these securitizing policies is masked, as are the failures of the same policies in preventing the existing political impasse and economic dependency of BiH. This is achieved by blaming the recipients of aid by their underdevelopment, through a securitizing discourse that essentializes ethnical identities and its barbarism, and creates representations of the country as ««Wild West» or, more frequently, «Wild East», alternating in categorizing BiH as part of the «Western Balkans» or «Eastern Europe». This is a quite common ideological discursive strategy of polarizing and locating threats and Evil elsewhere (Van Dijk w.d.ⁱⁱ), in this case, in the East or in the borders of Europe. Any shared characteristics or responsibilities between western donors and Bosnian recipients of aid are thus concealed, as are international community responsibilities in promoting BiH lack of ownership (see Belloni, 2001). International media contribute to this picture by reinforcing the status of emergency and giving special focus on news related with violence or still the war (as the discovery of more common graves, Srebrenica day, or Wahhabism), or even anticipating the possibility of a new conflict. This came up in one of my interviews with a local journalist working for an international news agency who referred to this news about discovering new graves as news “for the International Community”, while locals seem to be tired of such news and thoughts about the past. At the same time, national elites still emphasize such news to continue their identity politics.

Human security approach to international assistance in BiH, based on notions of psychosocial development linked to civil society building and democratization (see *apud*), also contributed to creating essentialized identities by pathologizing the

recipients of aid through “international therapeutic governance” processes (Pupavac, 2005, 2010).

(...) international therapeutic governance pathologizes war-affected populations as psychologically dysfunctional and lacking the capacity for self-government without extensive external empowerment. Yet international therapeutic governance may actually inhibit post-war recovery even as its model of therapeutic justice and development seeks that populations lower their expectations of the peace and curb their aspirations (Pupavac, 2004: 377).

2. Self-Representations in BiH

Constantly confronted with these negative images and stuck to the past, the population of BiH appears to depress, and the main feeling I got from my fieldwork was of pessimism. Many people seem to be disinterested from any social or political mobilization and/or develop some kind of resentment/anger towards local elites¹ becoming seemingly ‘indifferent’ regarding political events. From my interviews emerged a dichotomic representation of difference opposing BiH to “any other normal European country”, therefore naturalizing a status of inferiority and negative exceptionalism of the country, closer to international stereotypical discourse on the Balkans (Seixas, 2010).

Pessimism and general distrust (in national institutions, in politicians, in media, in NGOs, see Gallup Balkan Monitor, 2009), hinder the «reinvention of the Present» (Santos, 2002). People seem to live for the moment, day by day as if they still were in war, ie, individual survival mechanisms seem to be at work, but there appears to be less solidarity, less creativity and less mobilization compared to war time (Seixas, 2010: 12)

¹ As a young man from Sarajevo told me “The politician are not among my friends”. And this was a feeling shared by many of the people I contacted. To distance oneself from politics is a way to distance from what is negative, from corruption and from identity politics.

Sometimes, an ironic performative reappropriation of the negative stereotype of BiH as a wild and savage place emerges. I heard the expression “In Bosnia everything is possible”, uttered by Bosnians more than once during my field work. This may represent a way to deconstruct the stereotype through an identification with it (Žižek, 2006), or, on the contrary, a “celebratory appropriation” that reinforces the stereotype (see Volcic, 2005, on Serbian intellectuals’ self-image protective strategies). This irony may however block potential will to social and political mobilization (Seixas, 2010).

Feelings of stillness, of BiH lagging progressively behind as compared to other Western Balkan Countries, of becoming alone, isolated, forgotten or abandoned by the international Community also emerged from my fieldwork. But some see instead, the actions of international community and the major players as quite planned and strategic, and the image of a puppet comes to mind.

3. The «International Community»

Tiredness, discredit and some resentment and anger towards international community are the feelings evoked by Bosnians during my fieldwork. At the same time, some people express the fear of what may happen if international community leaves. This resonates well with the so often used, both by national and international- image of BiH as a child, learning how to walk by its own. In some of my interviewees’ expressions it feels like a no-win situation. International community and its organizations/representatives are often criticized for not doing their job properly- that of assuring security- and instead, are seen to be illegitimately imposing political and economic reforms that should be decided by locals and serving their own political and economic interests, contributing to the dependency of the country.

The memories of the war and the failure of international community to act timely come to the surface quite easily in Sarajevo. Criticisms are also directed towards the way that Dayton Peace Agreement deliberately failed to establish winners and losers and consequently contributed to the general victimization that persists and prevents social reconciliation. In sum, international community appears to be progressively losing

credibility in BiH and being criticized for its strategies to development, democratization and reconciliation in the country. Mention of western imperialism and use of expressions as “foreign mercenaries”, denouncing of the differential salaries between local and foreigners employed by INGOs, or critiques to the process of privatization are just some examples of this. If some stress the heterogeneity of the “International Community” and therefore its inability to reach consensus and take action, a few envisage the major players as strategically manipulating BiH politics.

But these critiques and discredit are not accompanied by any social or political relevant alternative mobilizations that could enable greater self-accountability and constructive South-North dialogue.

4. Challenges to North-South and West-East Divide

Do the representations of BiH as a peripheral “Fragile State” by western donors and the way they are received and confronted by Bosnian challenge the biopolitical and geopolitical divide between North-South and West-East? Do the way Bosnian became distrustful and critic of “international community” discourses, practices and underlying intentions challenge this divide?

I believe they should if we really listen to them. Their distrust, resentment, anger and pessimism are easily understood given the political impasse and economic dependency of BiH, given past memories of the behavior of “international community” during the war, their feelings of tiredness and pessimism, rather than being irrational or pre-modern ways of being, they all have a reason to exist and are quite easy to understand if only we, “insured people” make an effort to put ourselves in “their shoes”. But foreigners in BiH have much higher salaries than locals, sometimes lots of free time to enjoy BiH important socializing at cafes and even without speaking Bosnian/Serbian/Croatian, at least in main cities, where everyone speaks English, so used they are to deal with foreigners. During the summer international film festival that takes place in Sarajevo every year, several persons tell me they like the city full of life and of foreigners, “multicultural as before”. But that aspect of identity is not highlighted by developmental discourse. And of course, foreigners can leave to their homeland if

contracts are over, they can leave any time, while containment procedures impede Bosnian to find work in other country.

BiH case does clearly show the dangers of securitizing developmental policies, the danger of contributing not to the improvement of the lives and security in the country but rather to maintaining and managing the non-insured life as Duffield says. Hence the sensation of stillness and not moving forward, sometimes of moving backwards, hence the pessimism, the feeling of no-win situation. Moreover they are blamed, in donors' discourses, for lacking the trust in their institutions, lacking the political will, for lacking. In order for the biopolitical divide to be maintained, BiH must continue to be seen as a potential focus of pre-modern violence, irrationality, Wahhabism and danger, It has to continue a Fragile State, a "child" or a "new student" in democratization and self-ownership.

However, the seemingly inconsistencies of "International Community" policies towards BiH as well as the failures in reconciliation and state-building are too visible to be ignored. Bosnians are not silent regarding issues of international community responsibilities in the present state of the country, self-ownership or the role of these in the North-South, West-East divide.

Conclusion

BiH may have served to western powers develop new forms of cohering and legitimizing global governance international institutions like UN, NATO and the OSCE (Chandler, 2000) and build social cohesion at home. And the bigger the search for community/moral cohesion at home the stronger the radicalization of development abroad (Duffield, 2008). However, these same international institutions and their policies have been recently the target of many criticisms, specifically in relation to their actions in the Balkans and BiH. This cannot simply be forgotten and it is also academics responsibility to insure that it isn't as Duffield (2008) stresses.

On the other hand, as in colonization binary representation of difference required the continuous repetition of the stereotyped images of the colonized (Bhabha, 1994), human security technologies require consistent containment and control of non-insured life, which can be problematic (Duffield, 2008). Indeed, the nexus of security

and development involves containment as an essential way to impede both the spreading of non-insured life to the West and the potential emergence of resistances/alternatives to global governance external management of “Fragile States” as BiH.

Through the will to live beyond the limited basic needs ascribed to it, incomplete life is minded to make the wrong choices and, as such, to become dangerous. Radical self-reproduction equates with threatening forms of innovation and circulation, including the ability to survive beyond states and sap the walls they erect. Autonomous self-reproduction continually challenges attempts to achieve security through development as international containment (Duffield 2008: 147)

In other words, this representation of non-insured, self-reliant lives can backfire and create problems to the West dominance. Duffield see this as a risk of a global war, not only metaphorically as contrary ways of life of ‘developed’ and ‘underdeveloped’, ‘insured’ and ‘non-insured modalities’ of life, but a real global war leading to death.

Through their associated modalities of circulation—and the need to police them—global civil war connects the livelihood conflicts of the global South with threats to critical infrastructure in the North. Since the end of the Cold War, the radical interdependence of world events has placed a renewed emphasis on the need for social cohesion at home while, at the same time, urging a fresh wave of intervention abroad to reconstruct weak and fragile states, or remove rogue ones. What is at stake in this war is the West’s ability to contain and manage international poverty while maintaining the ability of mass society to live and consume beyond its means. Supported by the massed ranks of career politicians and big business, there is a real possibility that this disastrous formula for sharing the world with others will be defended to the death.

This is a dark image but a possible one if Western countries continue to build their power on this biopolitical divide. There are other alternatives and we should also focus on those. Can any other players in international community compete with global governance actors and suggest a new approach to development in peripheral States like BiH? Will BiH, more and more tired and unsatisfied with western actors, turn to other coalitions?

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ⁱ My analysis focused on two major donors and respective documents on BiH: European Commission reports and USAID “the Country Assistance Strategy for Bosnia and Herzegovina 2009-2013”.

ⁱⁱ “It is not surprising that such a mixture of dominant conservative, male, and white ideologies also colours the perception of international affairs, and, hence, the ideologies in the North about the South; hence also, the new official NATO ideology about a threatening Islam, the refugee invasion, the international terrorism-scare, Japan bashing in the USA, the global war on drugs, and so on. That is, threats and evil are located elsewhere and after the obsession with communism from the East (strategically used especially to control leftist forces at home) is now virtually always in the South (Van Dijk, w.d.: 40).