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Bosnia's Authenticity

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A problem Bosnians face today is the stipulation by her enemies that Bosnia does not have a unifying cultural heritage. The misleading claim argues that, since Bosnia is a myth, it has no basis on which to be a state. In 1995, the Dayton Peace Accords left Bosnia-Herzegovina in limbo. On the one hand, the Dayton Peace Accords re-affirm Bosnia-Herzegovina as an internationally recognized and sovereign state, a unitary whole. On the other hand, the Dayton Peace Accords divide Bosnia-Herzegovina for the first time in its history into two distinct entities, a Federation and a part called Republic Srpska. The Dayton Peace Accords stopped the war, but neither the side for a united Bosnia-Herzegovina nor the side for a partitioned Bosnia-Herzegovina won. The war thus continues.

The war in Bosnia was a war between two notions of authenticity. The Soviet literary scholar Mikhail Bakhtin's notion of monologue versus dialogue and of authenticity is useful not just as a part of literary criticism. The notion is useful for understanding the working of politics in society. Nationalism privileges monologue as authenticity.

> Monologue is finalized and deaf to the other's response, does not expect it and does not acknowledge in it any decisive force. Monologue manages without the other, and therefore to some degree materializes all reality. Monologue pretends to be the ultimate word. It closes down the represented word and represented persons. (Bakhtin in Dentith 1984, 292-93)

Pushers of nationalism claim that only their monologic discourse "counts." There is one voice claiming to be the only authentic one.

Simon Dentith writes, "The dialogue of the polyphonic novel is authentic only insofar as it represents an engagement in which, in various ways, the discourses of self and other interpenetrate each other" (Dentith 1995, 42). The telling feature of Bosnia's heritage is its polyphonic character. Discourses in Bosnia interpenetrate each other like the dialogue of a polyphonic novel. Believers in dialogue and in a polyphonic society grant authenticity only when multiple voices are engaged with each other. Bakhtin explains why.

> Life by its very nature is dialogic. To live means to participate in dialogue: to ask questions, to heed, to respond, to agree, and so forth. . . . and this discourse enters into the dialogic fabric of human life, into the world symposium. (Bakhtin

in Dentith 1984, 293)

The war in Bosnia was started in order to disentangle the ways these cultural discourses interpenetrate each other. Tragically, the war in Bosnia-Herzegovina — between two antagonistic notions of authenticity — is being repeated today in other places in the world and the United States.

Reference

Dentith, Simon. 1995. *Bakhtinian Thought: An Introductory Reader*. Routledge.

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