

UNIVERSITY OF BELGRADE

Faculty of Political Sciences

Belgrade, July 2018

At the meeting of the Department of International Studies, held on 22 June 2017, the Master Thesis Defense Commission (hereby the Commission) for the candidate Slađan Rankić was formed with the following members: Prof. dr Nebojša Vladislavljević, assist. MA Goran Tepšić and prof. dr Nemanja Džuverović. The Council for the Second and Third Cycle of Studies has accepted the proposal made by the Department.

After reading the master thesis, the Commission is submitting the following report.

R E P O R T

The Master thesis of Slađan Rankić, entitled “Constructing the Self and the Other- The Case of Elite Discourse in Bosnia and Herzegovina” has 104 pages. Besides the Introduction and Conclusion, the thesis has 4 chapters. The chapter Forging identities is divided into three subchapters, while Constructing Bosniakdom and Constructing Serbdom are both further divided into four subchapters.

In the Introduction the author defines his research aims and hypothetical framework. The author's general hypothesis is Bosniak and Serbian elite discourse in Bosnia are “mirror image of the other and that these discourses are fundamentally in conflict.” He seeks to explore how is identity reconstruction undertaken in Bosnia after the Bosnian war, by local national elites. He acknowledges obstacles which the research faced, namely the selection of relevant works and authors for analysis. The author chose authors and works which are so similar to one another that they are “mirror images” of one another. He has therefore chosen authors from both the Bosniak and Serbian community in Bosnia, who wield comparable biographies and comparable: social, political and intellectual power. Likewise, their works chosen deal with their groups respective identity, covering similar themes and topics. This is done in order to minimize the influence of any factors outside of the discourse itself. Thusly, his aim is to prove that authors of mirroring social and political positions, writing about mirroring topics, will use the same discursive strategies to present the in-group in a positive and the out-group in a negative light.

In the first chapter the author presents an overview of Social constructivism and constructivist research strategies used to study national discourse. The author mainly utilizes

the discursive encounter approach. His reasoning is that there is relative power parity between the two communities, who are engaged in discourse, constantly reference the Other's writing and operate within the same textual (and linguistic) field. He then moves on to identify various strategies, which he would use later on as a methodological toolkit for examining the two national narratives. Most notably he presents these discursive pairs: "Victim We vs. Genocidal Other, Western We vs. Oriental (barbaric, uncivilized) Other, Tolerant We vs. Nationalist Other, Democratic We vs. Autocratic Other, Antifascist We vs. Fascist Other". He would move on to identify these strategies in the following chapters. Within these discursive encounters certain discursive boundaries exist, or *diacritics* over which the discursive conflict is being waged. The author uses these diacritics to identify points of conflict between the two communities and to analyse how identities are being reproduced in relation to these diacritics. The authors states that the Bosniak-Serbian discursive conflict is unique that it necessitates a modification of Anne Norton's concept of liminary Other. He gives a definition of this modification, dubbed Dissonant Other as "an ontologically and epistemologically unstable discursive Other, which simultaneously integral to and a part of the Self, on the other hand it is radically different, antagonistic and apart from the Self." This concept features prominently in the thesis.

In the second chapter the author presents a brief overview of the works he uses as an ontological basis for his research. The author particularly relies on Anderson, crucially his notion that "the nation is a solid community, moving up/down" and that it exists in horizontal/messianic time in which temporally disparate places, events and people exist simultaneously. Additionally, he presents Andersons differentiation of official nationalism from popular nationalism. The author states that his thesis merely deals with the former. He also draws upon the works of Said, Neumann and Anderson to stress the importance of the Other in national identity discourse. He claims that this is particularly salient within these two communities, due to their recent violent split and history of conflict. Both sides present themselves as victims of genocide at the hands of the Other, which the author would go on to identify in the Constructing Bosniakdom and Constructing Serbdom Chapters. The author also uses Huntington's work to better explore and explain the Bosniak/Serbian discursive encounter. He particularly uses the concepts of torn and cleft countries, from which he constructs the Western We concept, one of the discursive strategies used by both groups.

The following Forging Bosniakdom chapter is divided into four subchapters: Our Glorious History, Words of the Grandfather, Words of the Father and Who are We and who are our Enemies. The first subchapter analyzes the national history of the Bosniaks, written by

Mustafa Imamović. He uses this subchapter to identify the diacritics, strategies used to construct the Self and Other, crucial contentious historical events and narrative tropes. The unique tolerant nature of the Bosnian church, benevolent Ottoman rule, primordialism of the Bosniak nation, Islamic and Western civilizational kinship, Bosniak tolerant and democratic nature and supreme victimhood (during the Eastern question, the Agrarian reform, National revolutions, two World wars and two Yugoslavias) are all present in this chapter. He would later identify and analyze them in the following chapters. Thus, *Our Glorious History* is the “foundational” chapter. *Words of the Grandfather* analyzes the view of Adil Zulfikarpašić, the most prominent Bosniak nationalist dissident in SFRY. The author analyzes his views on key contentious issues and compares his discourse to the previous chapter. *Words of the Father* deals with the views of Alija Izetbegović. This chapter is much more focused on Bosnian civil war and events leading up to it. The author nevertheless identifies the key strategies and discursive tropes. The fourth chapter deals with the views of contemporary intellectuals on Bosniak identity and its relationship with the Other. It is contemporary in the sense that the works analyzed are written within the past decade, even though the authors may be contemporaries of the nationalist dissidents. The author concludes that Bosniak discourse is remarkably consistent across all the works analyzed, with a clear antagonism towards the Other.

The *Constructing Serbdom* chapter is the mirror image of the *Constructing Bosniakdom* chapter, content and structure wise. The first chapter presents the medieval Bosnian state and church as Serbian, the Ottoman rule as oppressive, Serbian revolution was an emancipatory, democratic and anti-imperialist struggle, Serbs as an inherently democratic and tolerant people and the supreme victims in the region (subjected to persecution and genocide under the Turks, economic exploitation during the Agrarian reform, cultural suppression under the Austrians, physical destruction and the hands of the Other in the two World wars and political subjugation in the two Yugoslavias) and Serbs are the primordial people and progenitor of the Other. Likewise, this chapter is the “foundational” one for the analysis of Serbian discourse. All of these topics are explored in subsequent chapters, which mirror the Bosniak ones. The author concludes that Serbian discourse is remarkably consistent across all the works analyzed, with a clear antagonism towards the Other.

In the Conclusion the author claims that he proved his initial hypothesis that the two discourses mirror one another and are in deep conflict. He moves on to state that it is unlikely that this conflictual discursive encounter would be overcome, since the encounter enforces the conflict between official nationalisms and both are pressured by popular nationalisms to

remain conflictual. Likewise, since these official nationalisms are products of relatively new states it is unlikely that they would critically examine the creation of said states, lest they lose legitimacy and trigger popular backlash. The author does state that his research is limited to discourse produced by writers embedded in official institutions, who mirror one another in terms of social, political, cultural and intellectual clout. He suggests that discursive encounters between the two nations should be explored further. He concludes that, for the time being, both groups need each other primarily as an enemy and that is unlikely to change.

The Commission is convinced that the candidate Slađan Rankić has shown a deep understanding of theoretical considerations regarding nationalism, ethnic conflicts, and protracted social conflicts. Also, the Commission is convinced that the candidate possesses comprehensive knowledge on the history of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the most recent "discursive turn" that is taking place in all three ethnic communities in the country. Based on this, the Commission concludes that the master thesis "Constructing the Self and the Other - The Case of Elite Discourse in Bosnia and Herzegovina" by Slađan Rankić fulfils all the formal criteria for the public defence.

The Commission:

Prof. dr Nebojša Vladislavljević

Assist. MA Goran Tepšić

Prof. dr Nemanja Džuverović