

Bosniak or Muslim? Dilemma of one Nation with two Names

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I came to Istanbul and people asked me: "Who are you?" "I said, Turčin" (Turk) but they shook their heads: "Eh, you are not. You are Arnaut" (Albanian). So I came to Skadar as Arnautin, however, I was told that I was Bosniak. So, I went to Sarajevo as Bosniak and people around me asked where I am from. I answered: "Bosniak". They thought I was mad and I was told to be Crnogorac (Montenegrin), but with Islamic religion. Then, in Podgorica one guy told me that I am nothing more than Turčin (Turk). Well, one cannot understand this. Who am I and what am I? Nobody.

Zuvdija Hodžić, Gusinjska godina¹

1. Introduction

The story about a man trying to find his national name illustrates in some way the ongoing dilemma of the Muslim-Bosniak nation whether to keep the Muslim name or to accept a Bosniak national identity. The issue of the national identification of the Slav Muslims in Montenegro has become a burning topic of the last ten years of discussion among Muslim-Bosniak intellectuals. Due to the contemporary relaxation of the atmosphere in Montenegrin society, Muslims can more openly present this topic in the media, in public, and in the academic sphere. Scholars, religious representatives, journalists and politicians who represent Muslims in Montenegro focus their attention and work on their cultural heritage, history and traditions that led to a revival of the national identity. The fact that Muslims, as one of the national minorities, can publicly maintain such discussion is rare in the Balkan Peninsula where minorities are often excluded from public participation.

Despite external and internal pressure, for instance the war in Bosnia and Kosovo, the spread of the Serbian nationalism and the activities of radical paramilitary groups, Montenegro has kept its multiethnic and multinational composition. Currently, Montenegro, still officially part of the republic of Yugoslavia, has succeeded in avoiding violent interethnic conflict on its territory

and still remains a safe place for Muslims compared to other Balkan countries. Moreover, of all the countries of former Yugoslavia, Montenegro is the least ethnically homogenous. This small mountainous republic consists of 6.57% Albanians who are divided into Catholics and Muslims, 14.6% Slav Muslims (Musliman) and 9.3% Serbs and 61.9% Montenegrins.ⁱⁱ According to the last census in 1991, the total number of people in Montenegro is 615.035 people from which Muslims make 89.614.

When trying to understand the current debates about national identification, geographical position has to be taken into account as well. Montenegro's northern part, which is called Sandžak borders with Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia. Sandžak, which has been divided since 1912 between Montenegro and Serbia and represents a typical borderland where two religions-Islam and Orthodoxy meet. The territory of Sandžak is mainly inhabited by Muslims and orthodox Serbs and Montenegrins. According to the last census 73.045 Muslims live in Sandžak in the following municipalities: Rožaje (87%), Plav (58%), Bijelo Polje (41,6%), Berane (30,2%), Pljevlja (17,6%). The term Sandžak comes from the Ottoman times when the Ottomans labeled administrative or territorial districts. After the Second World War it was used to refer to the districts with a significant Muslim population.ⁱⁱⁱ Sandžak is economically less developed than other areas with higher unemployment and higher birth rate.^{iv} Besides Sandžak, the Muslims live in the following towns, which were incorporated into Montenegro immediately after the Berlin Congress (1878): Podgorica (5%), Bar (13,8%) and Nikšić (2%). However, for the purposes of this paper, I intend to discuss only Muslims from Sandžak (Sandžaklije) who were negatively hit by the violent conflict in the bordering Bosnia and where a major part of political activities of Muslims-Bosniaks took a part. Moreover, the fact that Sandžak borders with Bosnia strengthens the Bosniak national identity among Sandžak Muslims. In this region Matica Bošnjaka- an organization which currently promotes Bosniak national identity in Montenegro was established in Sandžak as well. I shall devote more attention to Matice Bošnjaka- her structure and ideology later.

In contrast, Muslims from the old Montenegrin places are more orientated towards Podgorica and tried to reduce secessionist tendencies, which intensified in Sandžak during the war in Bosnia. Indeed, Muslims from Bar and Podgorica have different perception of national identity, moreover, they usually consider *Sandžaklije* as less developed element and conservative element within Muslim community.

The principle goal of this paper is to understand and examine contemporary discourse among the Bosniak-Muslim intelligentsia about their national identity with the main emphasis on the national identification and its shape in the last ten years. I intend to present and clarify the arguments and different perception of the national identity among the discussants and to shed light on the meaning of Muslims and Bosniak concepts. To be more specific, my primary goal is to demonstrate, using the case of Slav Muslims in Montenegro

that national identity is not a static entity and being exposed to various political, cultural and social influences varies and changes its shape.

Although Montenegrin Muslims share the same religion (Islam), a common Slavic language and common traditions, they form heterogeneous group without any united ideology which is underlined by fact that they have different sense of belonging and different degree of the affinity with Bosnia or Montenegro, making the issue more complicated. Thus, to find a national core of the national consciousness among the Montenegrin Muslims or a defined national identity is almost impossible. The trend among the intellectuals is to use the Bosniak national identity instead of the Muslim one for the reasons, which I shall explore later. Nevertheless, the formation of the national identity is still in process and it might be developed in another direction in the case of different political, social or economic events. Bearing in mind the last ten years of dynamic developments in the Balkan region, the further shaping of Muslim/Bosniak identity is probable.

This article traces the emergence of the national identification process of the Slav Muslims in Montenegro. The question of whether to keep the national name Muslim or to accept the Bosniak one has become a central topic discussed by academics, journalists and politicians. However, this battle is not just over the name but has wider meaning. For the first time, Muslim-Bosniak elite has the opportunity to discuss their national history. Moreover, the entire discourse is important for its contribution to the public's knowledge about their own history and cultural heritage, which has been almost forgotten.

Before the further examination, it is necessary to clarify the following terms: Muslim (Musliman), Bosniak (Bošnjak), Bosanac, which are essential for this paper. Furthermore, the current Bosniak-Muslim intellectual elite seeks for historical explanation and meaning of the above-mentioned terms in order to justify Bosniak or Muslim national identity. However, these attempts are rather unscientific and there is no absolute truth about the origin of these terms.

By the term Muslim I mean the Slavs who for various reasons converted to Islam during the Ottoman presence (1499-1878) in Montenegro. Since 1971, the term Muslim was used for the national designation of the entire Slav Muslim population in Yugoslavia and the Slav Muslims could officially declare themselves as Muslims in the sense of nation. They became one of the constituent nations in socialist Yugoslavia. The communist regime designated them with a name, which, without doubt, has a religious sound. The Montenegrin writer, close ally of Tito and later dissident, Milovan Djilas admitted "the absurdity of the name Musliman," which was used by the nationalists to deny the nationality of Muslims. According to him, the communists believed that the Muslims were only religious group without national consciousness and the term Muslims was introduced with expectations that majority of Muslims would become Serbs or Croats.^v The fact that the term Muslim was introduced by the communist regime hence is perceived as innovation of the Communists has become one of the main arguments of the current Bosniak intellectuals in Montenegro.

Muslim is in Arabic grammar a participium of the active verb *aslam* which means “to give your destiny to the God willing”; *an*-Persian suffix, expresses belonging to something.”^{vi} The fact that the term itself gives a religious connection to Islamic religion, although the religion doesn’t play so important role anymore, is one of the frequent arguments used by the recent supporters of the Bosniak identity. The term Muslim (Musliman) covers the Slav Muslims and is understood to have a national meaning. In contrast, the term muslim with a lower-case “m”(musliman) has just a religion meaning and refers to adherents with the Islamic religion.

Both terms Bosniak and Bosanac have been often confused even among the Muslims themselves. The name Bosniak (Bošnjak) has been almost forgotten in Montenegro and is considered by many people as an artificial notion imported from Bosnia. In 1993, it became the official national name for Muslims in Bosnia and the idea of the *Bošnjactvo*^{vii} spread to Montenegro as well. The term Bosniak has a deep-rooted historical tradition but its usage and meaning changed through historical periods. For instance, during the Ottoman and Austro-Hungarian over the territory of Bosnia, the term Bosniak labeled the Christian population as well. Apart from that, it is also worth mentioning that according to some scholars the term Bosniak was used in the territory of what is now Montenegro as well. One Turkish traveler, Evlija Čelebi wrote that the Ottomans called the language used by the Slavs as *Bosanski* or *Bošnjački* and they call themselves Bosniaks.^{viii} The *Bosanac* includes all people living on the territory Bosnia, i.e. Serbs, Croats and Muslims. However, this term has not become so popular and it has remained just on the local level. The truth is that there is no such precisely defined concept of the Bosniak or the Bosanac. For instance, Muhamed Filipović, a great ideologist of the Bosniak national identity considers all citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina to be Bosniaks^{ix}. Another propagator of Bosniak idea, Adil Zulfikarpašić, gives the *Bošnjastvo* wider and more variegated meaning and he claims “the Bosniak ethnic identity must be accessible to the Catholic and Orthodox, just as in the past when the non-Muslim population of Bosnia was called Bosniak.”^x This classification and dispute over the national names deserves more attention and deeper analysis; however, for the purpose of my thesis I use the term Muslim-Bosniak for the Slav Muslims and the term Bosanac for those inhabiting the territory belonging to Bosnia.

II. Political Context of Muslim-Bosniak National Identity

National identity or national identification has become a burning topic among the Muslim or Bosniak intelligentsia. The emergence of this issue is underlined by the fact that for the first time Muslim-Bosniak intellectual elite in Montenegro has the chance to conduct an open discussion about their perception of ‘identity’, particularly whether Montenegrin Muslims have Bosniak national identity or Muslim. Current discourse is not just about the name Bosniak or Muslim. It has wider and deeper meaning to provide the public with information about the cultural or historical heritage of Montenegrin Muslims, which has been

almost forgotten, even among the Muslims themselves. When trying to understand the issue of national identification, political context has to be taken into account, especially in the Balkan region where political factors and circumstances play a key role. Thus let me give a short overview of political events concerning Muslims in Montenegro.

The period after the collapse of Yugoslavia (1992) had a crucial impact on Muslims in Montenegro and on the notion of their national identity as the need for redefinition and transformation of national identity reappeared due to new political, economic and social changes. The fact that the Muslim population was divided among newly emerged states and in 1993 the Congress of Intellectuals of Bosnian Muslims accepted a Bosniak identity caused the 'identity crises' and insecurity among the Montenegrin Muslims. It seems to be absurd, especially for the outside observers, that a group of intellectuals and politicians collectively decided about national identity, which is usually understood as the individual belief and decision. Nevertheless, Bosniak has become the official name for Slav Muslims which has replaced the term Muslim. There were tendencies among some Bosniak intellectuals to extend the meaning of Bosniak to Bosnian Serbs and Croats as well. Indeed, the strongest political stream SDA (Party of Democratic Action) represented by Alija Izetbegović refused this idea and took religion- Islam as the basic attribute of the Bosniak national identity.

After the break-up of Yugoslavia the Muslims lost their previous status of constituent nation. They became a minority in a new Federation of Serbia and Montenegro (The Federal Republic of Yugoslavia), however, without any legally codified rights. The war in Bosnia and Herzegovina had a very negative impact on the Montenegrin Muslims, especially in Sandžak- a northern part of Montenegro. They became a target group of violence and harassment.

From the beginning of the 90's the situation of the Muslims in Montenegro gradually deteriorated. A great number of Muslims faced discrimination, physical attacks and hostilities. Numerous Sandžak Muslims lost their jobs, especially police and army officers, teachers and employees of governmental institutions.^{xi} They were underrepresented in the juridical system, police and public institutions.^{xii} Terror and mistreatment had many consequences. Since 1992 around 60, 000 Muslims left Sandžak for Turkey, Macedonia or Western countries. The Muslim community became more hostile towards the Montenegrin state and governmental institutions, which failed to protect them. The tragedy in Bosnia radicalized some Montenegrin Muslims. The Muslims in Montenegro could have heard every day stories about humiliation and suffering of their fellows in Bosnia. Despite the information embargo, Sandžak Muslims were aware of the detention camps and ethnic genocide committed on the Muslim population. The Radio Free Europe correspondent for Sandžak Sead Sadiković said: "In Bijelo Polje almost everybody has at least one relative in Bosnia. You can imagine when the war in Bosnia started, it caused panic and chaos among people here."^{xiii}

The result was that autonomist or secessionist movement represented by the Party of Democratic Action (SDA) increased. The local SDA openly

advocated political or cultural autonomy of Sandžak and its body the Muslim National Council of Sandžak under the leadership of Sulejman Ugljanin organized in October 1991 a referendum in both parts of Sandžak. People were asked “whether they were in favour of the region’s full political and territorial autonomy and its right to integration with one of the sovereign republics—presumably Bosnia and Herzegovina”.^{xiv} Both Serbian and Montenegrin authorities declared the referendum illegal and leaders of SDA were arrested.

Although the idea of territorial or political integration with Bosnia is no longer popular among the Muslim population in Sandžak, it had a negative impact on the current discussion about national identity of Muslim or Bosniaks. There are still worries that a promotion and acceptance of the Bosniak national identity would lead to unification with Bosnia or another level of territorial aspirations. The fact that Bosniak is not a territorial term and at this moment there are not any tendencies which would indicate separatist or autonomist demands, is still ignored by those who criticize the Bosniak concept. Furthermore, the idea of Bošnjastvo is considered to be only political import from Bosnia. The chairman of Matica Muslimanska Avdul Kurpeović argues that “it (Bošnjastvo) is political invention of the SDA which tries to destabilize the situation in Montenegro”.^{xv} However, the SDA is a marginal political party and does not have any support among Montenegrin Muslims.

The peace agreement signed in December 1995 in Dayton had an important impact on Montenegrin Muslims. It reduced separatist or autonomist attempts in Sandžak. Political arrival of the current president Milo Djukanović helped to reaffirm Muslim loyalty toward the Montenegrin state. The official policy of the Montenegrin government on the current Muslim or Bosniak identity has changed in the last few years as well. It was unthinkable to use the term Bosniak in public, which was considered by the state authorities as separatist or danger for Montenegrin stability. Esad Kočan, one of the Bosniak intellectuals in Montenegro, described the situation:

it was unimaginable to talk in public about Bosniactvo. Just imagine what was happening here in the beginning of 90's – Bosniaks in Sandžak were often physically attacked, harassed, discriminated. It was not easy to be Bosniak (Muslim). Can you imagine that in such a situation somebody would start to talk about being Bosniak? People were frightened to think about it. It was not easy to say I am Bosniak. We have the chance now to remove this fear from people's mind.^{xvi}

During this year's election campaign Djukanović, when talking to Muslim-Bosniak electorate said he respected the current trend to be called Bosniak.

There is no doubt that during the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Muslims in Montenegro had to face persecution, open discrimination and physical abuse. Political factors determine to a great extent national identity of one nation, in our case Slav Muslims. Despite all that, Montenegro managed to avoid the large-scale interethnic conflict on its territory for various reasons.

III. Almanah Group

The above-analyzed current political constellation in Montenegro was one of the main impulses for the revival of national identity of Muslims. In a new political and social context, the issue of national identification of Montenegrin Muslims has become urgent and intensively covered by the Muslim-Bosniak intellectual elite. The Muslim population in Montenegro did not have many chances to form and develop their national consciousness; moreover they were permanently jeopardized by Serbian or Croatian nationalist circles. For the first time, they have the opportunity to openly conduct debates about their national identity, without any fear of being persecuted or sanctioned. The group of intellectuals surrounded around the journal *Almanah* have launched a great informative propaganda on cultural and historical treasury of Montenegrin Muslims-Bosniaks with the primary goal showing that Muslims- Bosniaks are people with the fully developed national consciousness and own history and culture.

The task here is to analyze and interpret the arguments of the main current streams: Bosniak, which is represented, by Matica Bošnjaka and Muslim represented by Matica Muslimanska in Montenegro. The issue is getting more complicated by the activities of the so-called *Almanah* group (*udruženje*), which officially represents both Muslim and Bosniak national concepts. *Almanah* is the only association of intellectuals in Montenegro, which deals with the issue of Muslims/Bosniaks in a complex way.

The *Almanah* association was established by the end of 1993 during the war in Bosnia when the situation in Montenegro was tense. The group of intellectuals around the Montenegrin novelist Husein Bašić started to publish *Almanah*—‘magazine for the examination, protection, presentation of cultural-historical heritage or treasury of Muslims-Bosniaks’. When trying to interpret *Almanahs* in order to understand the current debates about national identity, some factors have to be taken into account. *Almanahs* are published very irregularly-upon the financial support usually from Bosniaks-Muslims themselves. Every *Almanah* covers cultural topics with the main focus on national heroes- poets, novelists, folk singers known as *guslari*, painters, composers etc. in an extensive way. The primary goal is to highlight and to rediscover their cultural and national heritage.

It has to be said that in order to justify and promote Bosniak national identity, most of the contributors to *Almanahs* seek for Bošnjastvo or any of its references. For instance, national folk singer Avdo Medjedović and his epic song “The Wedding of Smailagić Maha” (*Ženidba Smailagić Mahe*) is considered to be Bosniak national hero. Currently, *Almanah* group has around two hundred members with various professional and national backgrounds. Besides the above-mentioned journal, *Almanah* has launched few projects in order to spread information about Muslim or Bosniak national heritage and to show that Bosniaks have historical roots in the Montenegrin territory.

In June 2000, Almanah organized a great conference called “Multiethnic Mirror of Montenegro” (*Multietničko zrcalo Crne Gore*), which focused on the national identity issue of Muslims-Bosniaks. Almanah managed to bring to the conference 47 historians, journalists, politicians, legal experts, writers, political analysts of the different national or ethnic origin with the different political orientation to discuss how “others” view Muslims-Bosniaks and how they perceive themselves. This meeting had a great importance for several reasons. First of all, Muslims-Bosniaks as a national or ethnical minority had a chance for the first time to present burning issues like duplicity of their national identity, and to openly discuss their political, social and economic situation within Montenegrin society, which is exceptional if we look closer at minorities issues in other countries of the Balkan region. Secondly, it definitely helped to normalize interethnic or international relations in Montenegro, since everybody had the chance to present his or her viewpoint on the current situation of minorities or national or ethnical groups.^{xvii} Finally, it helped the Muslim-Bosniak elite to clarify their arguments and concepts about national identity and hopefully reduce traditional stereotypes or negative images about the Muslim population.

To conclude, Almanah officially represents both Muslim and Bosniak current concepts. However, based on my observation and interviews, the Almanah group has pro- Bosniak orientation. The Bosniak ideology unambiguously dominates in Almanahs. Until now there has been no attention given to issues like culture, history or national identity of Muslims-Bosniaks in Montenegro. The Almanah group as the first associations of intellectuals has started to deal with these issues. The entire discussion remains only on the intellectual level, and ordinary people are still not involved in the above-mentioned issues. It might evoke the era of national awakening in the 19th century when debates about national heritage were in most of the cases conducted among the intellectual elite.

IV. Contemporary Discourse: Muslim or Bosniak?

Muslim is our traditional and the only name. If Muslims in Bosnia changed their national name to Bosniak it doesn't mean that Montenegrin Muslims have to do the same. We have the right to keep our name- Muslim. Any attempts to introduce the Bosniak name in Montenegro has to be seen as a project of Greater Bosniak assimilation of all Muslims from former Yugoslavia.^{xviii}

(Avdul Kurpeović)

The term Muslim designates adherents of one of the biggest religion-Islam. It is not national name but religious. It was made up by the communists. Now for the first time we got the chance to give us our

real name, which is Bošnjak. It is a traditional and old name for all Muslims from former Yugoslavia.^{xix}

(Hamdija Šarkinović)

These two abstracts from personal interviews illustrate the different perception of national name or identity for Muslims-Bosniaks in Montenegro, which I shall examine in this section. Within the Montenegrin intellectual community it has become popular to search for the meaning and history of Bosniak and the Muslim term in order to prove their verity. In my opinion, there is no absolute truth or certainty about the historical origin of both Bosniak and Muslim terms hence any attempts to prove the right usage of one of these two terms are rather unscientific and incorrect with ideological allusion. Moreover, in different historical periods Muslims were called by various names. Despite the efforts of the contemporary intellectual elite to find a historical justification for designation of Muslim or Bosniak national identity, both terms themselves give a certain connotation. Kurpeović argues that Bosniak designates only Muslims in Bosnia and Herzegovina, indeed its inhabitants and the spread of Bosniactvo in Montenegro would lead to territorial demands it happened during the conflict in Bosnia and Herzegovina and he insists that “national identification with Bosnia would endanger the Muslim position in Montenegro and they would become the ghettoized element within Montenegrin society.”^{xx} In the Program of Matica Muslimanska he points out the fact that Muslim national identity in Montenegro is endangered after the break-up of Yugoslavia.^{xxi} His argument goes even further and he claims “it (Bošnjastvo) negates national identity of Muslims. If Montenegrin Muslims accept Bosniak national name and Bosnia as motherland than they would automatically become minority within Montenegrin state. It endangers our unity.”^{xxii}

The fact is that the term Bosniak has a close connotation with Bosnia, which is according to Šarkinović motherland (*matična država*) of Bosniaks. However, as Esad Kočan argues it is inevitable to differentiate between motherland or kin state and state membership and he adds “people are mixing the terms national identity, *matična država*, citizenship. Bosnia is *matična država* of Bosniak nation and we are the same nation. Bosnia has emotional and psychological value for many Bosniaks in Montenegro. But the fear of the territorial pretensions is absurd. If you ask me what is my country the answer would be Montenegro.”^{xxiii}

Counter - arguments of Kočan and other Bosniak intellectuals in Montenegro that Bosniak national identification does not necessary mean territorial aspirations have definitely some justification. However, Kurpeović’s claim about the danger of the Bosniak national concept has some validity as well. The truth is that there was an autonomist or secessionist movement in the Montenegrin Sandžak but these tendencies did not find anymore any support among Muslim-Bosniak population in Montenegro. His argument that the idea of Bosniactvo and Bosniak national identity would cause Montenegrin instability does not have sufficient backing. In other words it is contentious to say that if the

Slav Muslims in Montenegro decide one day to accept the Bosniak national identity as their fellows in Bosnia and Herzegovina it would automatically bring instability and chaos. If we follow this presumption, than it would mean that for instance the very fact of the presence of Albanians, Croats, Serbs and other national minorities destabilize Montenegro. Sead Sadiković emphasizes the absurdity of such a claim “Bosnian Serbs and Croats are citizens of Bosnia but their *matična država* is Serbia or Croatia. If we accept the argument of Kurpeović than the existence of any national minority has negative consequences for the state.”^{xxiv} To sum up, Bosniak national identity means identification with Bosnia which for many Muslims-Bosniaks especially from Sandžak has a great emotional and psychological value. The concept of Bosniak national identity and Bosnia as *matična država* does not by any means undermine the loyalty to the Montenegrin state which is according to the research results of the Center for Democracy and Human Rights (CEDEM) widespread among the Muslim population.

The first table demonstrates to what extend Montenegrins, Serbs and Muslims identify themselves with the Montenegrin state which, in other words shows loyalty as well. As we can see from the table around 69% of Muslim population has the highest degree of identification with the Montenegrin state. On the contrary, only 1.1% does not have any identification.

Table 1.1. *The Intensity of Identification with the Montenegrin State*

Identification with the Montenegrin state (%)					
Nationality	1	2	3	4	n.k.
Montenegrins	70,8	13,7	3,1	3	9,4
Serbs	33,2	24,1	7,5	17	18,2
Muslims (Muslimani)	69	6,9	6,9	1,1	16,1

Source: “Javno mnjenje Crne Gore 2000.” CEDEM, January 2000.

Note: 1- the highest intensity of identification with the Montenegrin state and 4 is the zero identification.. n.k.- without opinion

Table 1.2 *Trust of Muslims in the Institutions of the Montenegrin State*

Institutions	1 (%)	2 (%)	3 (%)	No answer (%)
Prime Minister	66,7	19,5	2,3	4,6
Parliament	42,5	33,3	10,3	8
Government	55,2	24,1	6,9	6,9
Judges	31	36,8	11,5	13,8
Police	42,5	24,1	11,5	14,9

Source: “Javno mnjenje Crne Gore 2000.” CEDEM, January 2000.

Note: 1- the highest belief or trust and 3 is the lowest level of trust.

The second table illustrates trust of Muslim population in the Montenegrin state institutions which de facto indicates loyalty as well. The greatest belief is in the institution of the Montenegrin premier minister (66.7%). It is worth mentioning that Djukanović has succeeded to regain loyalty and trust of Muslims by his pragmatic and flexible policy.

When trying to understand the current debates the Bosniak or Muslim, we have to ask what is the meaning of religion, in our case Islam, in the overtly secularized Muslim society in Montenegro. In fact, the role and significance of religion in the process of national identification of the Muslims-Bosniaks is the crucial topic of the contemporary discourse. Oddly enough, both sides agreed that in the case of Muslims religion was an important and crucial factor in the process of building national identity or nation. Kurpeović emphasized the role of Islam during the interview by saying that “Islamic religion was the primary impulse for formation of our (Muslim) national identity. Muslim nation was developed on the base of Islam and culture.”^{xxv} A similar opinion was presented by the supporters of the Bosniak national variant. In the words of Šerbo Rastoder, “religion is one of the most fundamental substrate of the national identification regardless a high degree of secularization of Muslims. It is also important element of recognizing others and us. In the Balkan region, religion was the base for national homogenization.”^{xxvi} The head of *Islamiska zajednica* (Islamic community) reis Idris Demirović told me “despite a large secularization within Muslim community, Islam is still a crucial part of our (Muslim) identity. Even if they change national name and become Bosniaks religion will remain the main indicator of their national identification.”^{xxvii}

The fact is that compared to Serbs and Croats, Slav Muslims did not have their own territory or piece of land where they could have established a national state. Thus, Muslims without having the chance to form a nation state (*nacionalna država*) became fixed by the religion. Despite a large level of secularization, religion has become for many Muslims a fixed indicator of their mutual identification. As Michael King, who deals with Muslims in Europe and new Islamic identity claims that secularization of religious identity does not necessarily negate its role in identity.^{xxviii} This reflects the case of the Montenegrin Muslims.

To conclude, in constructing national identity religion plays an important role and in the case of Muslims it stimulated their identity. However, with secularization of the Muslim population the need for a challenge of national name has emerged. The term Muslim does not reflect notion of their identity and vice versa. By accepting the term Bosniak, the images about Muslims as religious, conservative, backward element might be reduced.

5. Conclusion

The current debate whether to accept Bosniak or Muslim national name has a wider meaning. The ambition of intellectuals who are centered around the Almanah group is to spread information about national heritage of the Muslim-Bosniaks in Montenegro and to avoid the tragedy that Muslims themselves would forget about their history and culture, in other words avoiding cultural assimilation. In this respect it might remind reminiscent of the period of national awakening of the oppressed nations in the 19th century for several reasons. It is the intellectual elite - historians, journalists, novelists, poets, religious representatives who conduct contemporary discourse about national identity. Furthermore, they publish the journal Almanah and organize various meeting and conferences to bring attention on the issue of specificity and the uniqueness of the Muslim-Bosniak nation.

National identity of the Montenegrin Muslims or Bosniaks has fully developed only in the recent decades and is therefore younger than national identity of other Balkan ethnic groups, notably Serbs and Croats, who accepted Western concepts of the modern nationalism much earlier. Due to new political conditions, particularly the break-up of Yugoslavia, a division of Muslims into new states and official acceptance of the Bosniak national identity has mobilized Muslim-Bosniak intellectuals to start debates about their national identity and relevant issues. The analysis of perception and developing of national identity is closely linked to the analysis of political, historical and cultural context. Thus when trying to understand this phenomenon of unsolved national identity of the Muslim-Bosniak nation in Montenegro several factors have to be taken into account.

Closer inspection of the history of the Slav Muslims in Montenegro would demonstrate that Muslims did not get many opportunities to develop into a fully mature nation. During the Ottoman period, society was divided on religious grounds into religious groups thus we can not yet talk of Serbs, Montenegrins, Croats or Bosniaks. After the Berlin Congress, the Muslim population became a religious minority in the newly recognized state of Montenegro and despite the relatively tolerant policy of King Nikola, Muslims remained a religious group and were considered as the same nation as the Orthodox majority. During the interwar Yugoslavia they were subject of the ideological fight between Serbian and Croatian nationalist who consider them either as the purest Serbs or the Croats. The era of post-war Yugoslavia had a great impact on the national issue of Muslims who were designated by the communist authorities as one of the constituent nation under the name Muslim. As we can see historical circumstances were not disposed towards the Muslims-Bosniaks and their development of national identity.

Nowadays, the political situation in Montenegro is in favour of the Muslims-Bosniaks who have for the first time chance to decide about their national name. As I have examined there are recently two variants being disused-Bosniak and Muslim. Both sides seek historical evidence to prove that Muslim or

Bosniak is the true name for Muslim-Bosniak nation. However, these attempts are rather unscientific. In order to prove their origin they project their own ideologies into the meanings. It is not clear yet whether the same procedure will be chosen as in Bosnia where a group of intellectuals and politicians decided the national name. Based on my observation and research in Montenegro, my belief is that in the case of Montenegrin Muslims-Bosniaks, the elite will avoid such a solution. Compared to Bosnia, there is no need or urgency to call for official decision. The census which is planned to take place next year will indicate to what extent the current debate has an impact on ordinary people.

The question of national identity and national identification has to be addressed in particular political, social and historical context. As I have demonstrated in the case of the Slav Muslims in Montenegro, national identity is not a static entity and is determined by a social and political environment which develops differently in different context. The current trend among the Muslims-Bosniak intellectual elite in Montenegro is to accept Bosniak national identity for the reasons mentioned above. To sum up, the term Muslim is understood as religious term which labels religious believer in Islam. Furthermore, Bosniak intellectuals hope that if the Bosniak national identity is accepted instead of old Muslim one, the images and stereotypes about Muslim community will be finally reduced. The true is that debates about national heritage of the Muslims-Bosniaks can definitely cut the myths and prejudices about Muslims in Montenegro. However, with the changing of social and political conditions and shifting of boundaries further shaping of identity can be expected as well.

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INTERVIEWS (tape record)

- Hodžić, Zuvdija. Interview by author, Podgorica, 14 April 2001.
- Hodžić, Zuvdija. Interview by author, Podgorica, 20 August 2000
- Kočan, Esad. Interview by author, Podgorica, 24 April, 2001.
- Kurpeović, Avdul. Interview by author, Podgorica, 20 April 2001.
- Sadiković, Sead. Interview by author, Bijelo Polje, 21 April 2001.
- Šarkinović, Hamdija. Interview by author, Plav, 23 April 2001.
- Rastoder, Šerbo. Interview by author, Bar, 22 April 2001.

ⁱ I was told this story by historian Zuvdija Hodžić during our conversation about current debates on national identification of Muslims-Bosniaks. Hodžić was borne in Gusinje, which is a small town in Sandžak, inhabited by Albanians and Muslims. He is a member of the Almanah group and one of the first initiators of Almanah. The story I was told is from his novel *Gusinjska godina* (One year in Gusinje), which was published in 1997. Zuvdija Hodžić. Personal interview, 14 April 2001. Podgorica.

ⁱⁱ Veselin Pavičević, *Izborni sistem i izbori u Crnoj Gori 1990-1996*. (Podgorica, 1997), 96.

ⁱⁱⁱ Břetislav Dančák et al., *Národnostní politika v postkomunistických zemích*. (Brno: Masarykova universita, 2000), 279.

^{iv} On Muslims in Sandžak see Hakija Avdić, *Položaj Muslimana u Sandžaku*. (Sarajevo: Biblioteka Ključanin, 1991).

^v Milovan Djilas, and, Nadežda Gaće, *Bošnjak Adil Zulfikarpašić*. (Zürich: Bošnjacki institut, 1995), 102-104.

^{vi} Ladislav Hladký, *Bosna a Hercegovina*. (Brno: Doplněk, 1996), 50.

^{vii} Bošnjastvo emerges from the idea that Slav Muslim in the Balkans are autochthonous ethnic group or nation with traditional name Bosniak.

^{viii} Evlija Čelebi (1611-1682) was a Turkish writer and diplomat As an official, he visited a large part of the empire and collected information and impressions. Ejup Mušović, *Muslimani Crne Gore od pada Zeta (1499)*. (Novi Pazar: Muzej Ras, 1997).

^{ix} Esad Kočan, "Identitet proizilazi iz države," *Monitor*, 24 August 1997, 23.

^x Djilas, 97.

^{xi} Annual Report of Activities 1993/1994. International Helsinki Federation for Human Rights. (Vienna, 1994).

^{xii} On the police participation and terror on Muslim population in Montenegro see Šeki Radončić, *Crna kutija* (Podgorica: Monitor, 1996).

^{xiii} Sead Sadiković. Personal interview. 23. Aug. 2000.

^{xiv} Hugh Poulton. Taji-Farouki Suha (ed.), *Muslim Identity and the Balkan State*. (London: Hurst and Company, 1997), 175.

^{xv} Avdul Kurpeović. Personal interview. 22.4. 2001, Podgorica.

^{xvi} Kočan is a member of Almanah group. Esad Kočan, Personal interview. 24 April 2001. Podgorica.

^{xvii} In September 1997 Montenegrin political parties Democrat Socialist Party, Social Democrat Party, National Party, Liberal Alliance signed so called „Sporazum o minimu izgradnje demokratske infrastrukture“ (Agreement about minimal democratic infrascuture). The agreement introduced new terminology- manjinski narod (national minority) instead of term national and ethnical group.

^{xviii} Avdul Kurpeović. Personal interview. 20 April 2001.

^{xix} Hamdija Sarkinović. Personal interview. 23 April 2001.

^{xx} Avdul Kurpeović, Personal interview. 20 April 2001.

^{xxi} Avdul Kurpeović. Program nacionalne afirmacije Muslimana u Crnoj Gori. Mat, (Podgorica: Matice muslimanska Crne Gore, 1998).

^{xxii} Avdul Kurpeović. Personal interview. 20 April 2001.

^{xxiii} Esad Kočan, Personal interview. 24 April, 2001.

^{xxiv} Sead Sadiković. Personal interview. 21 April 2001.

^{xxv} Avdul Kurpeović. Personal interview. 20 April 2001.

^{xxvi} Šerbo Rastoder. Personal interview. 22 April 2001:

^{xxvii} Idris Demirović. Personal interview. 21 April 2001.

^{xxviii} Michael King, *Muslims in Europe: A new Identity for Islam*. (Florence: European University Institute, 1993), 24.