BOOK REVIEW

Peacebuilding in the Balkans: The View from the Ground Floor

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Yanuar Sumarlan[1]

Institute of Human Rights and Peace Studies, Mahidol University

ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
	Analyses on how the minorities survive in a peace-rebuilding attempt in a post-conflict society have always been interesting. Through an 8-year participant observation in Bosnia, Asst. Prof. Pickering decided to launch this interesting ethnographic-style inquiry. Following Varshney's (2002) suggestion to overthrow the old studies that looked into just political institutions and elites, the author begins a study on grassroots perspectives. She finds that the minorities must solve their daily problems through political choices that favor the moderate or are inclusive towards the minorities. This book adds and reminds us that beyond "normal" attention to policies from large bodies and majorities, there is a lived experience of the minorities that can be gathered and documented in meaningful ways.

Introduction

This author offers a totally new syllogism out of the old syllogism known in many continents and regions of post-conflict societies that "after the conflicts, all politicians and donors believe that they know the best for the people". The new syllogism is drawn from two premises: first, ordinary people live, test, and know of some theoretical solutions for their problems and,

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[1] Yanuar Sumarlan is a Lecturer at Institute of Human Rights and Peace Studies, Mahidol University

second, better knowledge and experience would expose ordinary people to the real working solutions for their problems. The obvious conclusion of these two premises would be "ordinary people would have been the ones who know the working solutions for the problems".

The author has been to Bosnia since 1988 to launch a series of ethnographic works to find out how the minorities in a post-conflict society like Bosnia live and survive the predicaments faced by the minorities. Believing that an in-depth approach that follows individuals over time would reveal a meaningful finding, the author followed certain individuals and families for eight years (1996-2004) to gain insights into how the evolution of nation-building projects influences ordinary people and how they in turn influence nation-building (page 12). These insights it was hoped might have offered enlightening voices on why Bosnia remains divided, why so many minorities feel threatened, and why other post-conflict areas continue to face tremendous constraints.

The older paradigm of ethnic politics view elites and the institutions they design and manipulate as creating the overriding incentives and constraints that determine interethnic relations both in other places and Bosnia. This paradigm later produced Balkan scholars who have depicted how international policies have failed to convince domestic elites to reconstruct Bosnia into a stable, self-sufficient, and plural democratic states. Another group of human rights researchers later focus on the state's treatment of its minorities.

This older paradigm was overturned by Varshney's (2002) scholarly work on ethnic politics who advocates a shift from studies of political institutions and elites; Varshney (2002) argues that civic networks forged in formal organizations in mixed cities of India explain variations of interethnic relations. Afterwards, some Balkan scholars take up this mid-level approach to dig below the surface of politicians and institutions and to scrutinize local activists instead; studies of grassroots perspectives take the form of techniques such as opinion polls or focus groups rooted in manufactured settings.

This review is made of seven parts: (1) the division of the book, (2) the questions or purposes of the whole argument/book, (3) the premises used to build up the argument, (4) the findings or data collected from the field, (5) concepts used to represent the realities in the study site, and (6) the complete argument.

Book Division

The book is set into six chapters. Chapter 1 is set to support the first premise of the author's argument that "ordinary people live, test, and know better possible solutions for their problems" through proof that an interactive multilevel network is truly existing. This network is made by the nationalizing state, putative external homelands, transnational actors, local minority activists, and ordinary minorities themselves. Chapter 2 is a testing ground to check whether interest-based or identity-based theories of grassroots behavior better predict reactions of ordinary Bosnians to peace-building projects. Chapter 2 also reveals the design of the ethnographic investigation and the comparative nature of the study. Chapter 3 is really the data of this study as it comes out of testimony and interviews that reveal how minorities understand the decisions they make about where to call home, how to rebuild their lives. These people talk less about money or instructions of political elites but they constantly stress their desire to live in a community that accords with the notion of who they are and where they fit socially. Chapter 4 reiterates and sets deeper details of the strategies that minorities use to integrate and the factors that influence the development and success of those strategies. The comparative nature of this study appears in Chapter 5 in which the author compares the process of minority integration in the primary site (a Bosnian city) to other places with different levels of urbanization and ethnic dominance. The final Chapter 6 builds up implications of this study to other places in Eurasia such as Kosovo, Croatia, Macedonia, Tajikistan and Afghanistan.

The Questions

The big question the author tries to answer is to reveal the ways and strategies of the minorities to react to peace-building programs in real life. The larger purpose of such a question is surely to expose the reasons for Bosnia's persistent division, its minorities' feeling of being threatened, and the constraints affecting the minorities (page 13).

The Premises and Argument

The premises thrown by this study can be gauged from the conclusions of the study itself. The syllogistic argument set in a three-set premise-premise-conclusion for the three questions

are (1) the minorities must thread along a very complicated interethnic relations (page 139) within which stand the contributing factors to intolerance (biological ages, social practices, demographic variables, and others), (2) the minorities must tiptoe around the political battlefield built up after a series of peacebuilding processes (page 148), and (3) thus, such a concept of "political choices" exists among the minorities (page 158) to favor moderate or inclusive political factions or parties or politicians towards the minorities.

The Data

The data as presented in Chapter 3 and 4 could be simplified into two parts: dilemma of migration or "text" of the minorities' lives (people returning to their previous homes after armed conflicts and find themselves as "minorities") and the plague of politics or the "context" of the surrounding majorities (the majorities usually bear intolerance that affects the politics for the minorities' room for representation). This study tests the two main theories that explain the reasons and decision-making processes behind migration of former war refugees to their former homes and villages. The first theory, which is known as interest-based theory, assumes that ordinary people accept the communal labels, values and interests promoted by group activists and then use them in their decision about migration. The second theory, also known as identity-based theory, investigates these contentions (page 87). The second theory opens the possibility that not all individuals embrace the ideas pushed by nationalists that interests and values are inextricably linked to ethnicity. The second theory questions the claims of interest-based theory that ordinary people mechanistically calculate the costs and benefits associated with decisions according to stable values determined by ethnic group elites (page 87).

The dilemma of migration has been represented by a widow named Zlata who returned in 1996 to Sarajevo after spending the war in Serbia caring for her then-ill husband and young grand-daughters. Born in Serbia, she spent much of her life with her late husband (a Serb born in Bosnia) in Bosnia. When she returned to Serb-held suburbs in Sarajevo in 1996, she was able to reenter her apartment before squatters claimed it. Planning to sell her apartment, she wanted to move away from Sarajevo to Serbia's Vojvodina province where her husband was buried. She reported her reason to move back to Serbia's Vojvodina province as the following:

Here [in Sarajevo], I'm visited only by my friend from my hometown and by my daughter's family. I know that my [new Muslim] neighbors don't want to have contact with me. Look! Those holes on the wall are from snipers from the Muslim side. No, I don't want to stay (page 92).

Zlata felt alienated from a postwar Sarajevo dominated by Muslims displaced from the countryside that it encouraged her to move away from her home of thirty years. Her preference to move to Serbia became her only choice when Bosnian authorities rejected her application to resume receiving social services from Sarajevo rather than from the place of her displacement (Serbia). This fact illustrates the role of political manipulation of social services in thwarting returns [of former houseowners]. Later, the author met her again in Vojvodina province to find her relieved as having left an uncomfortable community in Sarajevo. Thus, her reason is a combination of attachment to birth place and her late husband, alienation from the newcomers to Sarajevo, obstruction of Bosnian authorities, and insecurity of living in Sarajevo.

Zlata's and many others' stories reveal a combination of utilitarian factors and emotional attachments that the minorities use in their decision-making in migratory patterns. Nela, for example, is a Bosnian-Serb who lived in Sarajevo among Muslim communities and left the city during the war. Her attachment to a mixed community and to humanism enables her to use a multiethnic network of pre-war colleagues to help secure her return and re-employment in Sarajevo (page 97).

The pivotal "context" or the plague of politics that stands as the backdrop of these many stories is the public support for minority return in the study site. The most dramatic change among the inhabitants of certain places that express the most opposition to minority return during the postwar period (December 1995 and December 1999) took place among Bosnian-Serbs from Serb-dominated areas (18 percent of population surveyed to 42 percent); from February 2001 to February 2005, populations from Serb-dominated areas (both Serbs and minorities) increased their support to minority return from 69 to 81 percent (page 142). The author is torn between two possibilities that this increasing support is caused either by Bosnians' internalized idea to accept the idea of minority return or resign to the idea that after concerted efforts of transnational actors to promote such idea or by the thought that these returnees are old and less threatening to the majority in the areas where they return (page

142). The author, however, suggests that realities lie somewhere between these two poles (page 142). The best attempt to represent this hanging situation is "Bosnians have accepted coexistence but have rejected multiculturalism" (page 144).

Using some surveys of Bosnians, the author tries to find the underlying factors that bring both tolerance and intolerance to the idea of mixed communities. The author also decides to create some factors or measurable parameter to represent "intolerance" such as "expressed unwillingness to live next to someone of a different religion" as part of a statistical model to test three sets of factors previously believed as part of intolerance (page 144). These factors are (1) participation in civic groups that build social capital (NGOs, religious groups), (2) approval of past and current state-building projects, and (3) socio-economic and demographic factors found in other settings to affect intolerance of difference. As expected, none of these factors are conclusively proven in any place as every place/population surveyed has its own characters. For example, for Serbs in the Republika Srpska, only one social practice (exposure to divisive rhetoric in religious hierarchy) and one demographic variable (nationalist ideology) influence intolerance.

The Concepts

The main concepts applied in this study appear in the historical phases of Bosnia's history starting in Chapter 1: historical multilevel networks, the post-war multilevel network, and the better model. Historical multilevel networks appear in a form of regimes that rule Bosnia through the attempts to wipe out differences through genocide (World War II), assimilation (Royal Yugoslavia), favoritism of one religion but tolerance to others (the Ottoman Empire), to one-party control and promotion of cross-communal cooperation (Socialist Yugoslavia). The Socialist Multilevel Network shared with the Ottomans the notion that successful rule over the South Slavic people required recognizing the differences among those peoples. In World War II, Josip Broz Tito promised to end the mass suffering from the ethnic violence and to establish a Yugoslav state that would treat all nationalities equally. The Post-socialist Multilevel Network appeared as in the mid-1980s, all the factors that held Yugoslavia together—international attempts, a mixed economy, protective political system, economic equality, shared sovereignty—began to crumble.

Serbia's Communist Party Slobodan Milosevic undermined power-sharing arrangements to set Slovenian and then Croatian elites to accelerate their own moves towards independence (page 23). Leaders of the dominant group in each republic like Croat elites in Croatia sought to create ***nationalizing states*** that were now oriented against the ***putative homeland*** (Serbia) over its Serb minority and territory. Lacking the glue of genuine agreement about the future of the country, the parties in the multiethnic coalition quickly deadlocked governance in Bosnia, setting the stage for minority activists to take control (at the national level, Serbian party and Croatian party elites were merely minorities unable to exert control over state politics). Each minority group, however, dominated certain municipalities, and they quickly transformed themselves into powerful majorities seeking to establish separate states or "***nationalizing states***" within Bosnia (page 25). While Bosnian Muslim and Croat leaders supported Bosnian independence, Bosnian Serbs adamantly rejected Bosnia's exit from what was left of Yugoslavia, asserting that they would not be a minority. Bosnian leaders then joined with Macedonian leaders in advocating a reconfiguration of Yugoslavia into a looser confederation. Nevertheless, knowing the Muslims were dispersed throughout Bosnia, the Muslim party SDA argued for a whole, unitary, and ethnically mixed Bosnia. Because Muslims were interspersed with Croats and Serbs, partition of Bosnia into Serb and Croat "republics" would require the ***destruction of multiethnic life*** and the separation of peoples.

Transnational actors hastened the partition of Bosnia (page 26). The UN refused a request by the Bosnian government in 1991 to deploy preventive monitors of peacekeepers. The European Community precipitated violent integration by encouraging Bosnia to hold a referendum on independence, the success of which was a prerequisite for recognition by EC members. With Serbs boycotting the plebiscite, the majority of Bosnians (99.7 percent of 63.4 percent of electoral turn-out) voted in a March 1992 referendum to "support the sovereign and independent state of equal citizens, the peoples of Bosnia and Hercegovian (Muslims, Serbs, Croats, and members of other nations living in it." Bosnian Serb activists set up barricades in Sarajevo to close it off. One day after the EC recognized Bosnia as an independent state, Bosnian Serbs established a "Serbian republic of Bosnia-Hercegovina" and withdrew from all Bosnian state institution. Bosnia Serb leaders launched a war with the assistance of the army and paramilitaries from its ***putative external motherlands***. And so began a war of everyone against everyone else through expulsions, violence, and murders of different ethnic groups by the majority ethnic-based groups in the place.

Some minorities throughout Bosnia fled to putative external homelands either to avoid becoming targets or to dodge the draft. At the end of the war, more than half of Bosnia's population (2.5 million) had been displaced.

The Post-war Multilevel Network (transactional actors) faced a major dilemma about the displaced minorities. After the U.S-led NATO bombed Bosnian Serb military targets and infrastructure, international mediators in November 1995 compelled regional leaders to sign on to an agreement (in Dayton, Ohio). This agreement was signed by the presidents of Bosnia, Croatia, and Serbia. The transnational actors or "***institutional designers***" interpreted the Dayton Peace Agreement and its implications for state-building differently. American negotiator Holbrooke claimed the goals were "to turn the 60-day ceasefire into a permanent peace and to gain agreement for a multiethnic state". Bosnjak leaders portrayed Dayton Agreement as a reaffirmation of the sovereignty of Bosnia as a unified, multiethnic state and as reinforcement of the right of displaced persons to return to their prewar homes. Serb politicians, however, emphasized that the agreement allowed for a separate Serb entity, complete with its own army and police force ('a way station on the path to partition" along ethnic lines); Bosnian Croat leaders shared this Agreement as a way to partition.

The political system that transnational actors imposed on Bosnia at Dayton complicated an already difficult situation for ordinary people from areas where their ethnic group after the war was now in the minority. First, Bosnia consisted of two entities: the Croat-Muslim Federation of Bosnia and the Republika Srpska. The political system was modeled on ***consociationalism*** which guarantees major ethnic groups a role in governing. This political prescription views the mixing of ordinary people as contributing to conflict. Scholars of consociationalism themselves recognized that the Dayton power-sharing arrangement did not create enough incentives for interethnic cooperation among elites and instead encouraged political conflict—isolation, at best—along ethnic lines. For example, vital interest veto could paralyze decision-making at the national level; since each group can block national-level activity, nothing gets done.

Not surprisingly, elites who used violence earlier to try to create homogeneous areas turned to other means for achieving the same goal after the war. ***Devolution*** and the ***power vacuum*** at the center of the postwar political system benefited minority activists most because they were the ones who exercised considerable power at lower levels of the political

system and through the parallel informal political, security, and economic networks that were strengthened during the war.

The multilevel networks at the key points in Bosnia's past and present emphasize the dynamic nature of the relationship among actors who influence the behavior of ordinary minorities. The networks that uncover the roles of local-level players are so often overlooked. Instead of waiting for the other actors in this series of networks to dictate their lives, ordinary minorities, in the mere acts of living their daily lives and formulating opinions on events affecting them, interacted with members of the networks to influence the reconstruction process in an unexpected **new model of ways**.

The Complete Argument

The book is set by two main premises. The first is the finding that the minorities must trudge through a very complicated interethnic relations full of factors or variables correlated to intolerance. The second is that the minorities must face the battlefield peppered with a rather imposed peacebuilding processes beyond their clutches. As the conclusion of these two premises, the minorities must solve their daily problems through political choices that favor the moderate or are inclusive towards the minorities.

The value of these set of findings and conclusions appear in the implications for other similar places undergoing peacebuilding processes that could be very complicated. However, the attempt by the author to throw some statistical tests on the data gathered from a highly non-probabilistic (or random) sampling procedures should be treated with care. Before concluding that these findings of statistical parts of her book, the author Paula Pickering needs to forewarn the readers that any conclusions drawn from these statistical tests are not supposed to be taken lightly when it goes to the generalization to larger populations of multiethnic Bosnia.

This book is surely indispensable to anyone working in peace and human rights field as the information gathered and analyzed in the book is very rich regarding the minorities' lives and struggle in a hostile and anti-rights environment. To the larger readership, this book adds and reminds the audience that besides our "normal" attention to policies from large bodies and majorities, there exists a layer of lived experience that only those who are willing

to dwell and traverse in everyday lives of people could gather and document in meaningful ways.

Reference:

Varshney, A. (2002). *Ethnic conflict and civic life: Hindus and Muslims in India*. New Haven: Yale University Press.