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Chair of Demography and Social Challenges

PEOPLE AND IDENTITIES: A
DEMOGRAPHIC APPROACH TO
THE BOSNIAN MOSAIC

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ABSTRACT

Since the Middle Ages, Bosnia-Herzegovina has been characterized as a land of contact between the Catholic, Orthodox and Muslim worlds. On one hand, 500 years of Turkish domination and 40 years of Austro-Hungarian control have allowed the region to prosper and embark on an initial process of modernization and demographic growth, on the other, those have also been the cause of nationalistic pushes between the different Croat, Bosnian and Serb ethnic groups, all of them claiming Bosnia-Herzegovina as a core, native region of theirs. In the course of the early 20th century, the First World War and the Second World War, jointly with Yugoslav monarchical experience profoundly destabilized the fragile balances formed between the different groups since the end of the Ottoman rule, when the ethno-religious identity began to be matched by a nationalistic and ideologic political thrust. The human toll of the two World Wars and the subsequent Nazi-Fascist occupation between 1941 and 1944, demonstrated how the struggle for appropriation and definition of one's polity by a group could be served by the appropriation of different ideologies, whether on the left or on right. The conflict significantly slowed down the country's positive demographic growth path which had started since the Austro-Hungarian rule in the first decade of the century and which did not recover until 1948. Under Tito, socialist Bosnia experienced a newfound inter-ethnic harmony through a consociative model: peace contributed to considerable economic and demographic development with very rapid growth rates which kept a notable pace until the 1980's. The break-up of Yugoslavia in the 1990s and the ensuing civil war of 1992-1995 was the end result of the nationalistic entropy accumulated over the previous decades, which exploded with tremendous violence. The conflict was a disastrous blow to Bosnia's stability and demographic development which extends its consequences until present date, worsening an already declining trend which had started in the 70s.

Today's Bosnia and Herzegovina finds itself burdened by a very large ageing population, which will soon exit the working age and towards which the largest part of country's welfare budget state will have to focus and a very small youth population, which encounters increasing difficulties to generate new children and prefers to migrate abroad in search of better perspectives. Added to this is the fact that the country is made up of two distinct polities, the Bosnian-Croat and the Serbian one, which possess a low degree of mutual cooperation, creating political tension and hindering the fight against critical phenomena such as corruption. In light of the century-long history of regional conflicts that later spread continentally, the demographic and political stability of Bosnia is also a crucial issue for other states in the region and for the European Union. This paper therefore analyses the evolution of Bosnian polity throughout its history, emphasizing the importance of a broad historical demographic approach in understanding the recent phenomena of political disintegration that led to the 1992-1995 conflict. Through an approach that considers historical and demographic evolution as equally influenced by each other, this work demonstrates how the ethno-political dynamics that have taken place in the region have been both a product and a consequence of demographic trends.

INTRODUCTION

The social sciences dimension is an interdisciplinary and nuanced one, which evolves at a speed directly proportional to the degree of complexity of our societies. Peter Wagner places the birth of the social sciences in the period that he calls the '*first crisis of modernity*', referring specifically to the last portion of the 20th century, characterized by the nascent challenges to classical liberalist thought and the emergence of new social figures and phenomena in a society that was increasingly assuming 'mass' characteristics, the application of positivist thought in the social sciences posited them as an infallible tool for observing, analyzing and understanding human social phenomena on multiple levels, from the individual to the universal¹. Could it also be possible to detect a "*crisis of modernity*" trend today? Regardless of the political perspective in which this can be seen, as Italian citizen my answer should be affirmative: we do actually live in a World which is shaken by its foundation by internal and external threats, identity crises and rising social tensions. Given this, one must take a break and then consider how the question itself it's radically shaped by the perspective from which the concept of "World" is perceived. While it is unquestionably true that phenomena such as climate change or global instability are factors that affect any human being beyond its location on Earth, what is perceived as a period of crisis for a Western individual referring to the twilight of the capitalist and Euro-American world order, takes on a completely different meaning for individuals in other parts of the planet for whom this does not consist in a factor of crisis at all or could even be perceived as a positive trend: when some fall, others thrive. This reasoning must be imperative when approaching a political, demographic or socio-economic analysis: the objective and quantitative data is irretrievably mediated through qualitative variables

¹ Wagner 2013

that pass through the lens of the one analyzing them. Data alone do not constitute a tool for carrying out intellectually correct analyses. Despite the contemporary trends of “algorithmization”, studying and understanding the demography of a state, of a community or of any human group should not be reduced to a numerical calculation or a series of data-driven ratios; it is necessary to discombobulate the sociology of groups, masses and religions, also geography and political science must be taken into consideration: the existence of individuals in the same period and space, or sympatry, is a phenomenon governed by the perceptions they have of themselves, their conception of the group and their perception of distance and materiality² and because of this, any demographic analysis must be theoretically nuanced towards a large spectrum of different subjects. Any ethnodemographic and ethnopolitical study cannot fail to take these assumptions into account in order to be efficient and meaningful. The demographic characteristics of a group define its identity construction, which is embodied in the identification of symbols, territories, ideals and signs of belonging; this is then the cause and consequence at the same time of the construction of the group's history, which is objectivized in society, culture, nation and state³. This logically fits in with Skeldon's assumption regarding how “*population has been a highly politicized topic...since the times of Malthus*”⁴: the same Malthusian theories about the mechanisms of confrontation and conflict between groups triggered by resource scarcity and objective or perceived inequality in resource distribution⁵ can prove valuable, though not always infallible, tools in the study of political demography, especially in identifying and understanding those dynamics of 'Protracted Social Conflict' as

² Gellner 1983

³ Windefeld et al. 1995

⁴ Skeldon 2021

⁵ Møller 2003

described by Edward Azar⁶. Specifically addressing the "Protracted Social Conflict" theory, namely "*the prolonged and often violent struggle by communal groups for such basic needs as security, recognition and acceptance, fair access to political institutions and economic participation*"⁷. Also, according to Skeldon, the post-World War II period and the subsequent process of colonization of the Global South triggered a resurgence of the Social Sciences, specifically demography and political demography had to deal with the need to analyze complex, dynamic and continuously evolving socio-political postcolonial realities at a speed that Western societies could not sustain⁸. The power vacuums left by the process of decolonization and the fall of Soviet space paved the way for the tragic civil conflicts that occurred between the turn of the millennium in Somalia, Rwanda, Sierra Leone and Chechnya to name but a few. In this regard, the process of the break-up of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and the ensuing intra-state conflict from 1993 to 1995 and its resurgence in 1999 fit into this framework⁹. The nature of these conflicts, however, was dramatically different from the wars that took place during the 'short century', as they were characterized by the strong identity component of the rival groups, whose goal was no longer the subjugation of the enemy but its total physical and cultural elimination from the disputed space¹⁰. In this case, the spatial dimension takes on a crucial importance since it is through it that the relationships between the communities that inhabit it are defined, the division proposed by Pierre Bourdieu¹¹ between 'social space' and 'physical space'; where a physical presence in the same place does not determine the same presence in the social plane, declined in a mesoscopic dimension can help to shed light on the perceptions of groups

⁶ Azar 1986

⁷ ibidem

⁸ Skeldon 2021

⁹ Bougarel, Helms & Dujiginz 2007.

¹⁰ Kaldor 2003

¹¹ Bourdieu 1989

regarding the rightness of the distribution of resources and the type of interactions that take place between them. Given this, the causes of conflicts are not only to be found in geopolitical and economic factors, but a thorough review of internal social, ethnographic and socio-economic conditions is required. As I sit on my chair, only 416 km (approximately) separate Trieste from Sarajevo: what occurred in the Balkans between 1992 and 1999, one of the worst pages of human history, took place at an almost immediate distance from the country of my origin but, in spite of this, general attention never seems to have focused on the internal affairs of what seems to be a distant world, an '*East*' that is difficult to understand, suspended between innumerable centrifugal forces that by necessity reach as far as Italy and the European Union itself. From this awareness, my research question arises: attempt to conduct as precise an ethnodemographic survey of the history of Bosnia-Herzegovina as possible, tending to reconstruct the patterns that contributed to the occurrence of past and recent political crises, researching its causes, understanding its dynamics and interpreting its consequences with a special emphasis on the importance of demographic trends. The demographic research approach is given, as mentioned above, by the very strong ethnopolitical component that this conflict assumed: understanding demographic trends therefore means investigating towards one of the primary reasons for this conflict, as this paper hopes to do. Dealing with Bosnia-Herzegovina can be an arduous task: the socio-economic, cultural and ethnic complexity of the country, divided into its political and national communities, ends up composing a chaotic mosaic of elements, where it is difficult to navigate between causes and consequences¹². In order to understand the perilous situation in which the country finds itself today it is certainly almost instinctive to consider the internal conflict which at ravaged the country almost 30 years ago as

¹² Malcolm 1994

both cause and consequence of these local rifts and phenomena. While this is certainly a correct assumption, it is precisely the complexity in which the conflict erupted and lasted that requires anyone wishing to delve more systematically into the country, to do not to limit themselves to it and its immediate temporal and conceptual proximity, wishing to seek a more far-reaching and holistic approach to the country's situation, dealing also with the medium and long term consequences of it and also taking into consideration our contemporary and future time horizon. Understanding those data and the phenomena behind them is not only crucial for the future of the State itself, but also for the regional scenario, as the nature of the country consists of a fragile ethno-political balance created from Bosnia's independence until today and its spillover dynamics.

LIETERATURE REVIEW

Given their higher degree of reliability, this paper primarily uses data from official primary sources, such as the *Federalni Zavod Za Statistiku*, the Bosnian Federal Statistical Agency, FZS from here, which with its precious work is able to provide scholars with complete and up-to-date data on the demographic situation in the country; EUROSTAT, World Bank, UNDESA or other renewed international population studies-oriented agencies. All secondary source data were consulted only when distributed by organizations and international bodies with proven reliability such as other United Nations agencies, Freedom House or academics engaged in the analysis of country dynamics whose publications are not affected by any kind of internal or external political influence. General literature on the strict demographic subject is scarce and for the most part produced by Bosnian or Serbian academics who work directly in synergy with the country's federal agencies; this on the one hand results in a marked reliability index, and on the other hand means that much of the already existing literature is not available in English. The hope is that in the future there will be more attention paid to these phenomena also by international academics. The data for the censuses conducted in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia in 1921 and 1931 were obtained through primary sources, i.e. scanned official documents, and secondary sources, i.e. the relevant academic literature. As far as the literature relating to the ethno-political, social and historical dynamics of Bosnia-Herzegovina is concerned, it is more satisfying and comprehensive and generally succeeds in providing all the information required for this paper. Most of the publications come from Western and Balkan academia, among which liberalist approaches prevail with a smaller number of constructivist, realist or critical papers. Here again, it is not always easy to discern scientific objectivity from more animated approaches, given also the recent nature of the conflict and the issues involved; the

choice, again, was therefore to limit the use of journalistic sources and to rely as much as possible on academic literature. From the perspective of demographic literature, the field is scarce; there is no substantial academic literature that engages the discourse of ethno-political fractionalization and polity definition by including a demographic approach.

CHAPTER ONE

For any human group, History takes on an uplifting function of itself: the celebration and glorification of the past and the search for an ancient, atavistic, enemy serves the process of internal and external recognition of the group identity, specifically by recognizing “who we are” and “who we are not”, i.e. the external, rival group. In the process of defining this identity, many elements count: the group's value, religious, ethical system, social organisation, economy, political structure¹³. As we will attempt to analyse in this chapter, the composition of a people and the characteristics attached to it, its distribution in the territory is also a fundamental part of the process of constructing national identity. Knowing the history of Bosnia is essential to bring order to the colourful ethnic mosaic that characterises the region and to understand the balances, dynamics and fractures between the various peoples inhabiting it. As mentioned earlier, in light of the strongly ethnonationalist nature of the civil conflict that took place between 1992 and 1995 and how its socio-political consequences have rekindled the mechanism of particularistic rhetoric on the part of the various ethnic groups that populate the country today, reconstructing the history of Bosnia-Herzegovina is an effort towards understanding the deep dynamics that dominate the country. This chapter will provide a general overview of the historic and ethnopolitical macro-phenomena that

¹³ Forst 2014

have affected Bosnia-Herzegovina in over five hundred years, i.e. from the beginning of Ottoman rule until the proclamation of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. This overview is necessary in order to precisely understand the motivations, and above all the justifications, that have historically governed the relations between the Serbian Orthodox, Croat-Catholic and Bosniak-Muslim populations living together in the region; the fact that of all Yugoslavia it was precisely in Bosnia-Herzegovina that the 1992-1995 conflict had its worst consequences and where the worst brutalities took place is in fact not accidental or attributable to the political dynamics immediate to the process of the collapse of the SFRY but rooted in centuries-old processes of interaction that actively shaped the national and ethnic identities of each of those groups. One cannot understand what a Serb is without understanding why he or she is not a Croat, and vice versa, the same discourse is certainly applicable involving a Bosnian Muslim and this, as we shall see later, is a process of distinction that can only be achieved through the identification of precise historical and cultural coordinates. The process of regional and ethnic nationalization has taken on a profound dynamic that needs to be understood in order to put things in order.

1.1 The Ottoman rule and the Islamization of Bosnia (1463-1878).

Conventionally, 1463 is given as the date of the Ottoman conquest of Bosnia, a region formerly ruled by local Slavic lords (the Banat of Bosnia), who reigned over a population already heterogeneously composed of Croatian and Bosnian Catholics and Serbian Orthodox refugees from the past Ottoman advance in Serbia¹⁴. From that date, Bosnia became one of the core provinces of the rising Ottoman Empire, whose rule would have lasted over four hundred years and would have radically transformed the religious and cultural framework of the region. Indeed, by the will of the Sultans,

¹⁴Carmichael 2015

Bosnia went through a slow but profound process of religious conversion, largely abandoning Christianity and embracing Islam¹⁵. Nevertheless, the Ottoman system, also known as *milyet*, granted a large degree of religious freedom, ensuring that the Catholic and Orthodox churches continued to exist¹⁶; the latter in particular was given a special status of religious self-government through the establishment of an 'autocephalous' Serbian Orthodox Church¹⁷. On the other hand, the majority of the local population was being pressurised towards conversion to Islam, a process that contributed to the creation of a separation of identity between the converted communities, present especially in the urban and central areas of the region, and those that remained anchored to their previous faiths. It was through this process of religious conversion that the Muslim Bosnian community, those we call Bosniaks, found its own distinct and separate identity from the "Serbs" label, which then meant the embrace of the Orthodox faith as a defining condition¹⁸. A proof of the defining role of religion in the social identification is given by how the Ottoman administration did not distinguish between ethnic groups as much as between the various religious groups¹⁹; according to Pinson, it is this the main factor that shaped a cultural separate identity of the Bosnian people rather than an actual ethnic difference between the Bosnian and Serbian-Croatian people. Sarajevo under Ottoman rule became a flourishing commercial and cultural centre²⁰. Pinson also provides us with data from the Ottoman administration regarding the distribution of Christian (without distinction between Catholic and Orthodox) and Islamic religion among the households between Bosnia, Herzegovina and the town of Zvornik.

¹⁵ Pinson 1993

¹⁶ Payton & James 2006

¹⁷ *ibidem*

¹⁸ Kalčić 2005

¹⁹ Yetişgin 2007

²⁰ Pinson 1993

Table 1. Distribution of Christian and Muslim Households in Bosnia in the mid XVI century according to Pinson's data.

<i>Region</i>	Christian Households	Muslim Households
Sanjak of Bosnia	16.619	16.935
Sanjak of Zvornik	13.112	2.654
Sanjak of Herzegovina	9.588	7.077

It can therefore be seen that by the mid-16th century, the majority of the Bosnian population was already Muslim²¹. As complicated as it is to pinpoint a precise number of inhabitants of Bosnia Herzegovina before 1851, the year of the first official census conducted in the region by the Turkish authorities, the sources provided by Pinson manage to show us that the region was inhabited by roughly one and a half million people around the middle of the 17th century.

²¹ Pinson 1993

Table 2. The beliefs of Bosnia-Herzegovina according to the Catholic Visitation Reports as provided by Pinson

<i>Date</i>	<i>Name</i>	<i>Muslims</i>	<i>Catholics</i>	<i>Orthodox</i>
1624	Masarecci	900.000	300.000	150.000 (just Bosnia minus Herzegovina)
1626	Georgjievich	Less than Christian Combined	250.000	More than Catholics (Herzegovina included)
1655	Maravich	Majority are Muslims	73.000	No figure
1809	French consul	600.000	120.000	500.000

The Ottoman presence, however, did not only bring prosperity to the region: violence, rebellions, repression and epidemics drove many individuals, Catholics and Orthodox alike, to leave the region for Dalmatia, Slavonia and Baranja²². The centrifugal tendencies of the Christian faith groups tended to be counterbalanced by immigrants from Anatolia and the border areas that the Ottoman Empire gradually lost to the Austrian enemy²³. In 1699, the Treaty of Karlowitz proclaimed the first Ottoman recession from the Balkan region: the Turks had to cede the region of today's Croatia to Venice and the Austrian Empire, who undertook to re-Christianise the region. This event

²² Malcolm 1994

²³ Koller & Kemal 2004

tended to mark the beginning of the Ottoman decline on continental Europe²⁴. The first official census was only conducted by the Ottoman authorities in 1851, although it is considered as unreliable by several authors due to the inefficiency of the Turkish administration, for the first time ever, it was possible to make a general count of the number of individuals populating the region²⁵. The count was then repeated three more times, in 1865, 1871 and 1876.

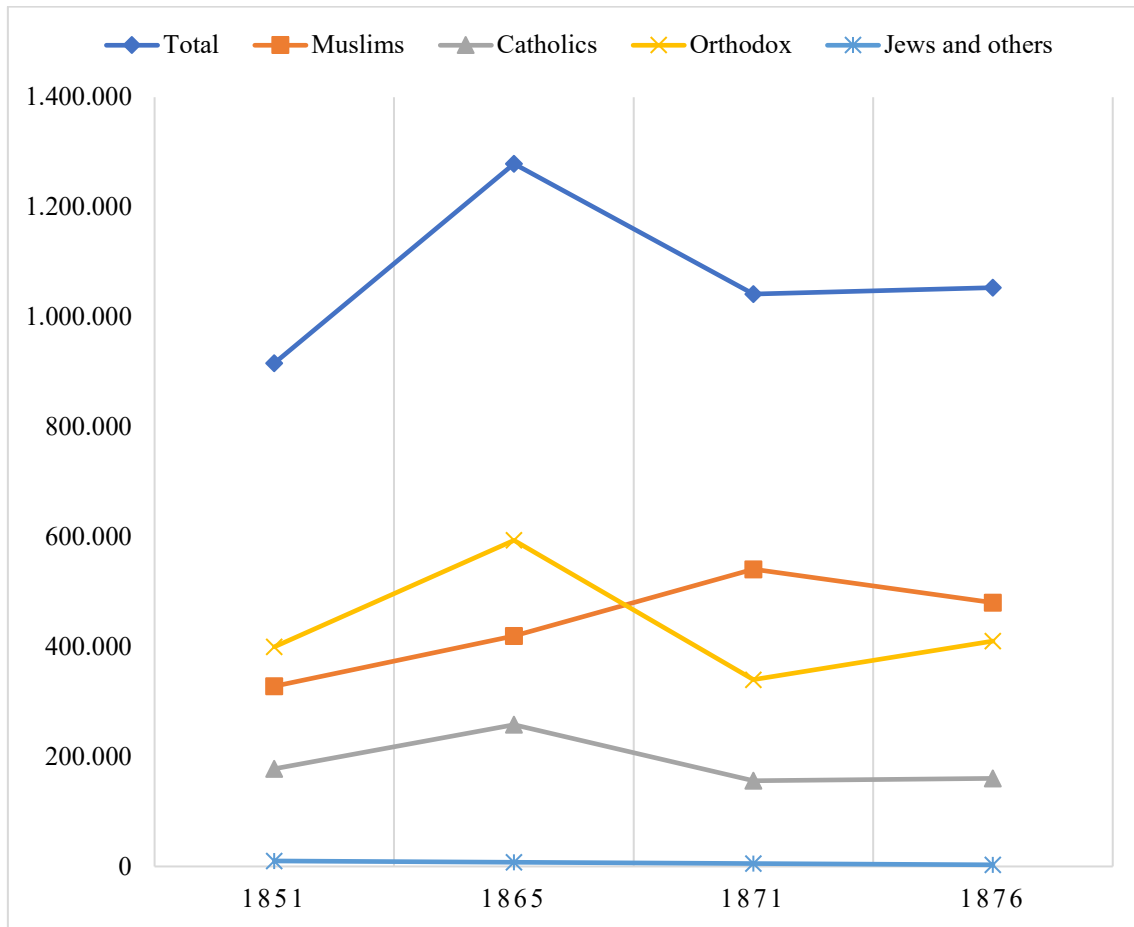
Table 3. Ottoman censuses between 1851 and 1876

<i>Year of census</i>	Total Population	Muslims	Catholics	Orthodox	Jews and others
<i>1851</i>	916.000	328.000	178.000	400.000	10.000
<i>1865</i>	1.278.850	419.628	257.920	593.548	7.754
<i>1871</i>	1.042.000	541.000	156.000	340.000	5.000
<i>1876</i>	1.053.700	480.000	160.000	410.000	3.000

²⁴ Carmichael 2015

²⁵ Tanović, Pasalic & Golijanin 2014.

Figure 1. Population flow and ethnic distribution (1851-1876)



As may appear on an immediate reading of the table Bosnia's population faced a variable trend: the decrease in population is plausible in the light of epidemics and the serious situation of instability that the region experienced in the twilight of Ottoman rule²⁶, Bosnia after all suffered from the same ailments as the "sick man of Europe," the Ottoman Empire, namely a general industrial and social backwardness, with a non-existent welfare state and very poor local health care, which left the region still decidedly exposed to calamities such as widespread epidemics²⁷; the population change had also affected the distribution of the different beliefs: Ottoman instability paved the way to the migration of many Muslim Bosniak families into the inner territories of the

²⁶ Tanović, Pasalic & Golijanin 2014; Malcolm 1994

²⁷ Hoare 2014

faltering empire and how many people felt free to return to publicly embrace their Christian faith, renouncing Islam²⁸. With regard to the geographical distribution of the communities, the Muslim population was concentrated in the urban areas of the country, such as Sarajevo, Banja Luka, Tuzla and in the central areas west of the Drina River; the Serbian Orthodox groups were more popular in the northern areas of the country, namely the Basanska Krajina area - a mountainous region bordering today's Bosnia and modern Croatia - and the eastern areas of the region, east of the Drina River. Catholics were concentrated in the western part of the region, in the Mostar area²⁹. Adding to this, a small Jewish community was concentrated exclusively in the city of Sarajevo, enjoying a good degree of religious autonomy from the Ottoman authorities, resembling the privileges of the Serbian Orthodox Church but without developing a particular sense of ethno-religious self-determination in the region, if one excludes the general Zionist movement that affected Europe in the last decades of the 19th century.

²⁸ Pinson 1993

²⁹ Ibidem; Handžic 1994

1.2 The Austro-Hungarian Rule as a starting point for regional ethnonationalism
(1878-1914)

Figure 2. Map of Bosnia-Herzegovina under the Austro-Hungarian rule, retrieved by Carmichael 2015



The last years of Ottoman rule were characterised by growing tensions, stemming from nationalistic drives of the Serbian and Croatian populations. In 1875, vast rebellions in Bosnia, Serbia and Montenegro cornered the Ottoman forces, which were already dispersed as far as Bulgaria to suppress the general uprisings of the Christian Bulgarian against Turkish rule³⁰; the repression both in Bulgaria and in the Balkans was reckless and led to massive pillaging, destruction and casualties³¹. Russia's intervention in support of the uprisings resulted in the Russo-Ottoman War of 1877-1878, which was then largely won by Russian forces. Following the Berlin Conference of 1878, Bosnia-Herzegovina came under Austrian administration after four hundred years of Ottoman rule, not however as a proper territory of the Austro-Hungarian empire but as a "Condominium", subject to the central administration in Vienna, to which the regional government was subordinate. The new region was divided in six municipalities: Sarajevo, Travnik, Bihac, Banja Luka, Mostar and Tuzla³². During the Austrian presence, Bosnia underwent a partial modernisation: road and railway infrastructures were built throughout the region and a modern education system for children was introduced, albeit timidly, in what was perceived in Vienna as a true 'civilizing mission'³³. The Austrian-Hungarian administration delivered four censuses of the region: one in 1879, one in 1885, one in 1895 and one in 1910. From this point on, it is possible to shed more light on the actual population numbers in Bosnia; Austro-Hungarian reports can be considered with a greater degree of reliability than those

³⁰ Bataković 1996

³¹ *ibidem*

³² Tanović, Pasalic & Golijanin 2014; Yavuz et al. 2012

³³ Rutner 2018

conducted by the Ottoman administration so much so that they are considered valid and accepted as valid record by the *Federalni Zavod Za Statistiku*³⁴.

Table 4. Austro-Hungarian censuses between 1879 and 1910

<i>Year of census</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>Male population</i>	<i>Female population</i>	<i>Population density per km₂</i>
1879	1.158.44	607.789	550.651	22,6
1885	1.336.091	705.025	631.066	26,1
1895	1.568.092	828.190	739.902	30,6
1910	1.898.044	994.852	903.192	37,1

³⁴ Tanović, Pasalic & Golijanin 2014

The first thing that can be deduced from this table is the increase in population from 1879 to 1910: in just over thirty years, Bosnia increased by 739.604 individuals, a percentual change of the 63,84%. This large increase has been driven by two main factors: the first is the improvement, albeit not drastic, of living conditions in the region, the semi-modernisation process implemented by the Austro-Hungarians and the political stabilisation of the region³⁵, which left behind the season of turmoil of previous decades, contributed in large part to set the ground for a demographic growth. We note that the increase is also gradual and incremental, between 1879 and 1885, the population increased by 15,3%; in the decade 1885-1895 by 17,3%, between 1895 and 1910 by 21,05%. The latter years of the XIX century also brought a discrete phenomenon of migration to Bosnia, which had been perceived as new colonial region of the Austro-Hungarian empire whose mineral and agro-industrial resources could be exploited industrially for practically the first time ever, which prompted many males from other regions of the Empire to seek employment with the new companies emerging in the region³⁶. The Hungarian, Croat and Galician workers who moved in the region were joined by a small number of wealthy Austrian immigrants within the country's bureaucratic and administrative apparatus³⁷. The migration phenomenon could also justify the disproportion in the male-female ratio, which in 1910 peaks at more than 90.000 individuals, making the male population 9,21% larger than the female one. The migration phenomenon was more concentrated in the region's main urban centres, specifically Sarajevo, which became the administrative capital of Bosnia: this justifies

³⁵ Carmicheal 2015, Rutner 2018

³⁶ Malcolm 1994

³⁷ ibidem

the increase in density per square kilometre over the decades. The Austro-Hungarian censuses also provided, like the Ottoman ones, an overview of the different confessions of the inhabitants of Bosnia.

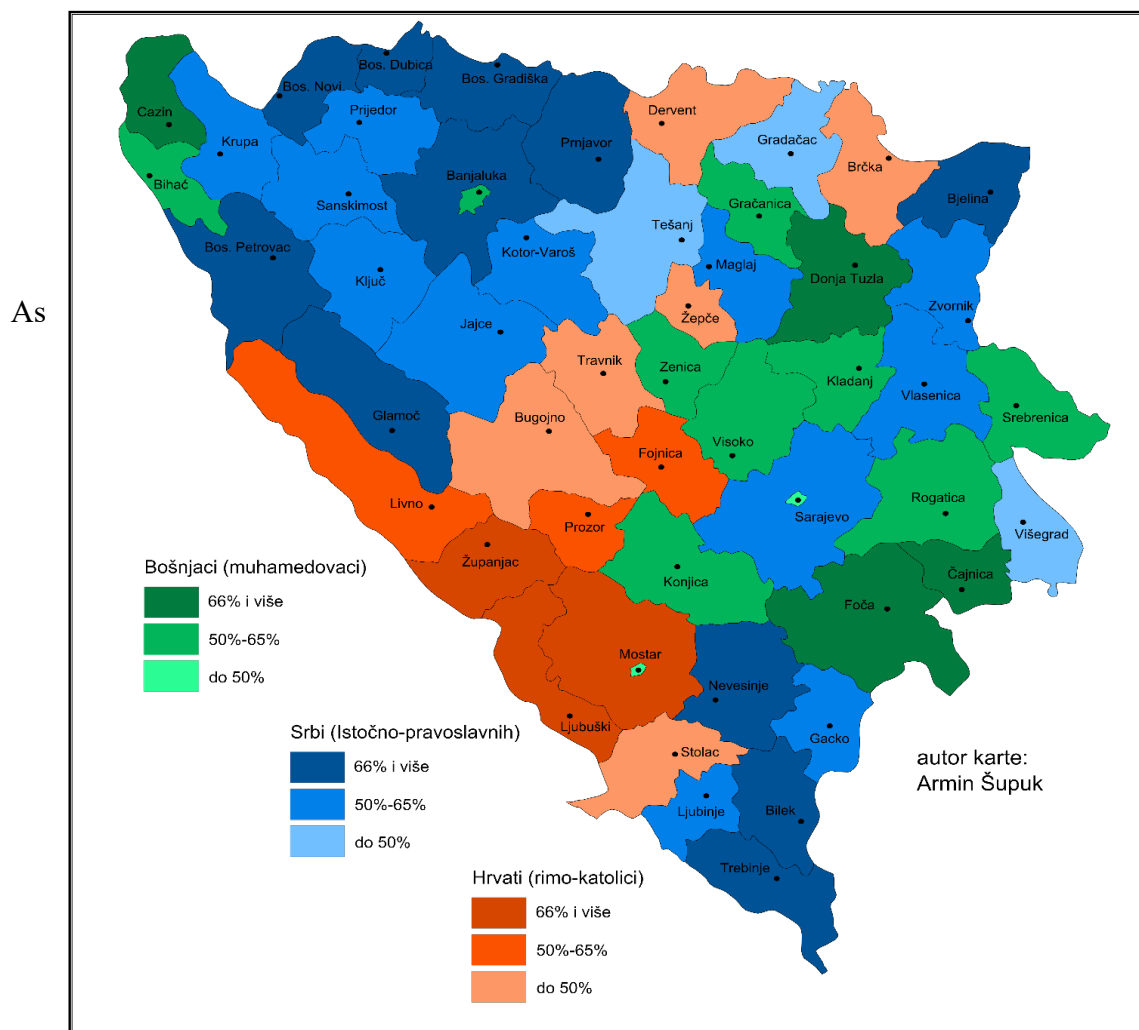
Table 5. Muslim, Catholic and Orthodox faiths distribution according to Austro-Hungarian censuses

<i>Year of census</i>	Muslims	Catholics	Orthodox	Jews and others
1879	448.749	210.216	496.375	3.924
1885	492.710	265.788	571.250	6.343
1895	548.632	334.142	673.246	12.072
1910	612.137	442.197	825.418	19.092

The table shows that the majority of the population was made of Orthodox believers, followed by the Muslims and then the Catholics. This can be explained in two ways: the

first is the aforementioned influx of immigrants to Bosnia, of whom a substantial portion came from Serbia and Carpathia, regions with an Orthodox majority; the second reason is the emigration from Bosnia of individuals of the Muslim faith to those European regions which were still part of the Ottoman Empire, such as Macedonia³⁸. As of 1910, the Orthodox population was in the majority in 27 districts, In the same period the Muslims comprised the majority in the town of Sarajevo and in 15 districts, the Catholics had majority in 12 districts³⁹.

Figure 2. Distribution of Muslim, Orthodox and Catholic Population in Bosnia in 1895



³⁸ Pinson 1993

³⁹ Dyker 1972

can be seen from the map, the regions with an Orthodox majority were those in northern Krajina region, those near the southern borders of the country adjacent to Montenegro, and those eastward of the Drina River, as well as around Sarajevo. The Muslim population, on the other hand, was concentrated around the central and southern parts of the country, as well as in the city of Sarajevo. On the eve of World War I, Bosnia-Herzegovina presented itself as an ethnically divided region with three major groups that resented the Austro-Hungarian presence, especially after the direct annexation of 1908; the largest of these groups, the Orthodox, was marked by a strong nationalistic animosity, self-identifying as ethnically Serbian and increasingly pushing for reunion with Serbia, which had gained its independence from the Ottoman Empire in 1878, precisely as a result of the Berlin Conference⁴⁰. It was at this juncture that a profound process of self-identification of religious denominations into different ethno-cultural communities took place⁴¹. On the one hand, the Muslim and Catholic population accepted, albeit not without resistance, the rule of the Austrian Kaiser Franz Joseph, who succeeded in integrating Bosnian Muslims and Catholics into the imperial army thanks to promises of greater autonomy; on the other hand, the Orthodox population continued to harbour a strong resentment towards the Habsburg crown⁴². Gaining an insight into this situation paves the way in the process of contextualization of the intentions and claims of the Sarajevo terrorist attack of June 28th 1914, which claimed life of Archduke Franz Ferdinand, triggering the cycle of events that led, two months later, to the outbreak of the First World War. Gavrilo Princip, the material perpetrator of the assassination attempt that cost Archduke Franz Ferdinand his life, in fact belonged to a Bosnian Serb terrorist organization called the "Black Hand," whose purpose was to fight for the annexation of the Serbian Orthodox majority territories of Bosnia to Serbia,

⁴⁰ Bataković 1996b

⁴¹ Budding 1997

⁴² Bataković 1996b

completing the process of national reunification of the Serbian people⁴³. The fact that, according to the investigations of the Austro-Hungarian authorities, this organization had been in close contact with the secret services in Belgrade led to Kaiser Franz Joseph's decision to initiate hostilities.

1.3.The two World Wars and the Kingdom of Yugoslavia: ideological affiliation beside the ethnical one. (1914-1945).

As it was directly annexed by the Austro-Hungarian Empire in 1908, the Bosnian population was directly affected by the events of the First World War, although regionally it affected neighbouring Serbia more, which had been invaded by Austro-Hungarian troops⁴⁴. Immediately after the outbreak of hostilities, numerous Bosnian units were formed, comprising mostly Muslim but also Catholic and Orthodox soldiers, who fought both on the eastern front against the Russian Empire and on the Isonzo front, distinguishing themselves by their determination against the Italian army⁴⁵. According to Winkler and the official Austrian estimate, the number of Bosnian military casualties is set at 34.016 dead: 76.000 at the end of 1918, also calculating the civilian toll caused by the Spanish flu⁴⁶. With the end of the First World War in 1918, the Austro-Hungarian Empire also ceased to exist, in whose place numerous new European nations emerged. On December 1st 1918, the Crown Prince and regent to the throne of Serbia, Alexander Karageorgevich proclaimed the birth of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes declaring himself as the new sovereign Alexander I. The new state, whose capital was Belgrade, occupied an area of 247,542 km², taking in the territories that today make up Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia, Serbia, Montenegro and North Macedonia⁴⁷.

⁴³ Calic 2019

⁴⁴ Newman 2011

⁴⁵ Malcolm 1994

⁴⁶ Winkler 1940

⁴⁷ Carmicheal 2015

Two censuses were conducted, one in 1921 and one in 1931⁴⁸; like those conducted in previous years, the population in these was divided by religion and not by ethnic group, as it was important for the new Yugoslav state to try to create an interethnic national identity that went beyond the sense of belonging of the nationalities inhabiting the new kingdom⁴⁹. It is interesting to note, in this regard, that the very name of the state language became “*Slovene-Serbocroatian*”, a posited definition since, although Serbian and Croatian are indeed intelligible to each other without complications by speakers, Slovene is characterised as a language in its own right and not assimilated with others. This nomenclature was however intended precisely in order to reinforce the idea of a positive interethnicity of the newborn kingdom, without a dominant ruling group⁵⁰.

Table 6. Bosnia-Herzegovina population according to the Kingdom of Yugoslavia’s censuses.

Year of census	Total	Male population	Female population	Population density per km₂
1921	1.890.440	966.209	924.231	36,2
1931	2.323.555	1.185.040	1.138.515	45,1

⁴⁸ Tanović, Pasalic & Golijanin 2014

⁴⁹ Bieber 2015

⁵⁰ ibidem

Between 1921 and 1931, the population increased by 433,115 individuals, by 29%, a pace that is basically consistent with the positive growth trend that has been affecting the region since the end of the last century. It must be considered, however, how these figures are also influenced by the change in the administrative division that the Kingdom underwent during the course of its existence. If, in fact, at the time of the 1921 referendum, the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes -the name assumed by the Kingdom prior to 192- was divided into 7 regions, by 1931 the Kingdom of Yugoslavia appeared divided into 9 Banovinas, corresponding to the country's main waterways and far removed from the historical administrative divisions that formed the entities prior to the unitary State⁵¹. King Alexander II's intention was indeed to forge a new inter-ethnic and Pan Yugoslav entity and the new administrative subdivisions were to assist in this process of renewal, the inspiration for which was probably given by the subdivision of French departments in post-Revolutionary France in the 18th century⁵².

Figure 3. Territorial division of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia in 1929



⁵¹ Boskovska 2017, Calic 2019

⁵² Boskovska 2017

Our area of interest, the one of today's Bosnia Herzegovina, was essentially included within the Banovinas of the Drina in the central part, the Zeta in the south, the Littoral in the southwest and the Vrbas in the north. It is presumable to consider that the number of inhabitants of Bosnia reported by Pasalic is inclusive of these four Banovinas, which, however, also incorporate territories that historically did not belong to Bosnia and Herzegovina such as the Dalmatian coast (Littoral banovina) and Montenegro (Zeta banovina); the final count could therefore be overstated by this new territorial division⁵³. Given this, the demographic increase could have been plausible due to the development of the region, the absence of conflict, and also by a significant migration of Orthodox families from Hungary and Bulgaria to the new kingdom of Yugoslavia and of Muslim families from Bosnia to the European territories still in the hands of the Ottoman Empire⁵⁴. The migration phenomenon also justifies the overabundance of citizens of the Orthodox faith compared to those of the Muslim and Catholic faiths.

Table 7. Religion's distribution according to the 1921 and 1931 censuses.

<i>Year of census</i>	Muslims	Catholics	Orthodox	Jews and others
1921	588.173	453.617	829.360	19.560
1931	718.079	547.949	1.028.139	29.388

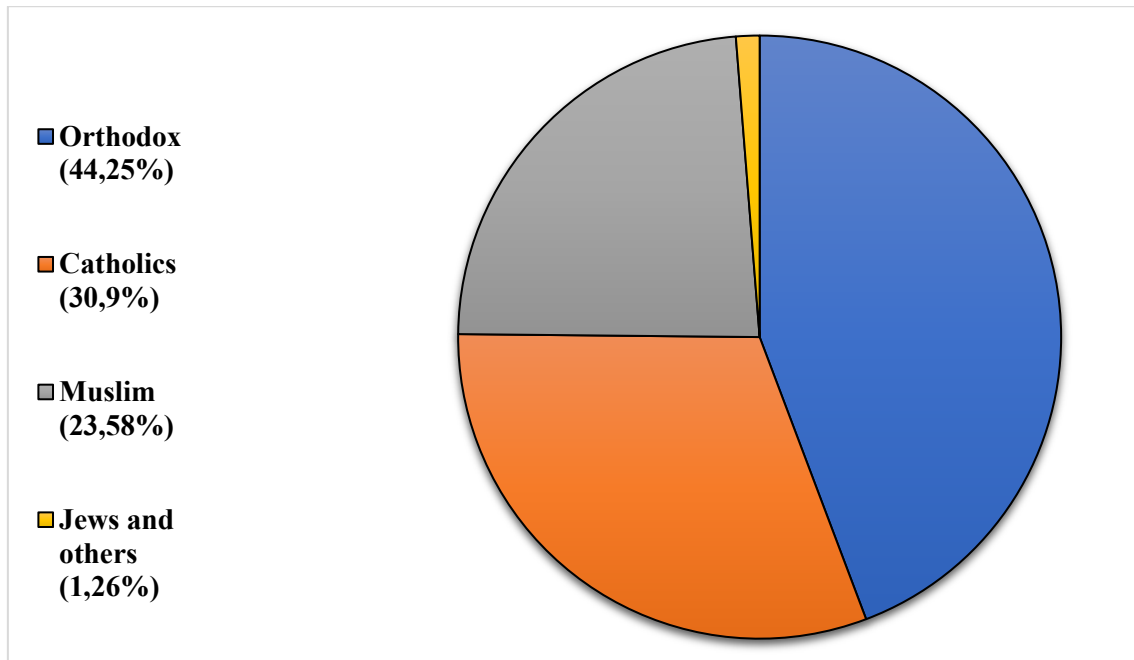
Believing the previous assumption, one considers Muslim believers as 'Bosniaks', individuals of the Orthodox faith to be 'Serbs' and Catholic believers like 'Croats', the

⁵³ Tanović, Pasalic & Golijanin 2014.

⁵⁴ *ibidem*

inter-ethnic picture that emerges shows a clear Serbian majority, where in 1931 accounted for the 44,25% of Bosnia's total population.

Figure 4. Religious distribution in Bosnia by 1931



This, in addition to the fact that the reigning royal family was the Serbian Karageorgevich dynasty, fuelled the feeling among the citizens of the minority ethnic groups that they were once again subjected to the domination of a foreign entity, in this case the Serbians, far from the dream of independence they had savoured after the dissolution of the Austro-Hungarian Empire⁵⁵. This contributed to the re-emergence of separatist tendencies, especially in Croatia, where in 1929 Ante Pavelic founded the *Ustaše* movement, which ideology was greatly inspired by Mussolini's fascism and in Macedonia, where the IMRO, the Macedonian Workers' Revolutionary Organisation, a Communist Macedonian ethnonationalist group, led a resurgence of its activities against

⁵⁵ Carmicheal 2015, Cadic 2019

both Yugoslavian and Bulgarian authorities⁵⁶. Evidence of the inter-ethnic tensions was another deadly attack on a monarch: this time it was the Yugoslav king, Alexander I, who perished during his visit to Marseille on October 9th 1934, killed by Vlado Chernozemski, a Bulgarian citizen and member of the IMRO. However, the attack was carried out in synchrony with the support of Pavelic's *Ustaše* who, together with the IMRO, claimed responsibility for the attack⁵⁷. Since at the time of the death of King Alexander I, his son and successor, Prince Peter II was too young to rule, the regency fell to his uncle, Prince Pavle. At the outbreak of the Second World War in 1939, Pavle proclaimed Yugoslavia's neutrality; nevertheless, the standing continental situation in 1941, after the Axis powers had conquered Europe, made him starting direct negotiations with Berlin and Rome to join the Tripartite Pact, aware of the impossibility of receiving support from the Allies⁵⁸. His intentions were overturned by the Crown Prince Peter II, who came of age and carried out a coup d'état to depose his uncle and prevent Yugoslavia's alignment with the Nazi-Fascist powers, relinquishing the country's previous agreements with the Tripartite Pact. As result of this, on 6 April 1941, the German Reich launched a large-scale retaliatory invasion of the kingdom, which eventually capitulated on April 17, only 13 days later⁵⁹. As a consequence of this, the territory of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia was divided between areas of occupation by the Axis members and a new political entity, the Independent State of Croatia (NDH), a puppet government of Berlin and Rome led by Ante Pavelic and the *Ustaše*. The NDH had Zagreb as its capital, it covered an area of 115,133 square kilometres and housed a population of 6.300.000 Croats, Serbs, Bosniaks and German minorities. The state included most of present-day Croatia, without parts of Dalmatia,

⁵⁶ Malcolm 1994

⁵⁷ Kovrig 1976

⁵⁸ Calic 2019

⁵⁹ Carmichael 2015; Malcolm 1994

Istria and Venezia Giulia that were part of Italy; Međimurje and southern Baranja that were part of Hungary⁶⁰. It also included all of modern Bosnia and Herzegovina. It roughly included the entire area of the former Austro-Hungarian Empire where Croatian or Serbian was spoken. Wanting to pursue the ideal of an 'ethnically pure' Croatian state, Pavelic's regime committed itself from the first moment of its existence to the systematic extermination of individuals considered to be 'non-Croats' such as: Jews, Roma and, above all, Serbian Orthodox⁶¹. With regard to the latter, since they spoke the same language, Serbo-Croatian, the distinction had to be made exclusively on a religious basis, also demonstrating the close cooperation that existed between the *Ustaše* regime and the Croatian Catholic Church, echoing the Spanish Franco model⁶². According to data collected by Tomasevich, already by 1942, more than 200.000 ethnic Serbs had left the country, to which must be added the 330.000 who died as a result of the armed conflict or due to the systematic persecution they received, i.e. destruction of villages, deportation to camps in the Reich, summary executions, looting and violence of all kinds; about 250.000 Orthodox were forcibly converted to Catholicism⁶³. The data provided by the Federal Bureau of Statistics in Belgrade manage to provide a clearer and more specific picture with regard to Bosnia alone, where, according to the bureau's estimates, 179.730 people were killed, of whom 129.114 Serbs (72,1%), 29.539 Bosniaks (16,5%), 7.850 Croats (4,4%) and 12.542 (7%) individuals including Jews and other minor groups such as Roma⁶⁴. The Muslim-Bosniak population was not particularly persecuted by the new fascist regime; on the contrary, it was considered by Pavelic himself to be part of the "great Croatian nation"⁶⁵; this attempt at assimilation

⁶⁰ Presseisen 1960.

⁶¹ Pino & Cingolani 2018.

⁶² Calic 2019

⁶³ Tomasevich 2002.

⁶⁴ Gumz 2001, Bulajić 1992.

⁶⁵ Malcom 1994

bore fruit, at least in the first period, where not only did the Bosnian population not openly take sides with the *Ustaše* but fighting units were even formed on the side of the Axis powers, especially among the German army⁶⁶. The same cannot be said for the Serbian and Jewish population. However, as similarly happened in all parts of Europe where the brutality of the Axis forces took place, armed resistance groups against the invaders also spontaneously organised themselves in Bosnia. There were two main groups of organised and armed opposition to the NDH: the first of these was the *Cetniks*, a Serbian-Orthodox paramilitary group, whose aim was to fight Croats and Nazis in the name of the Yugoslav crown of the Karajdorjevic family⁶⁷. They focused mainly on the area of the Drina Valley and made their Orthodox, Serbian and Monarchist identity the leitmotif of their political action, reflecting the still deep-rooted values within the rural mentality of the Serbian population in Bosnia. It is no mystery that they were considered by the Tito and its partisans to be an even worse threat than the Nazi-fascist troops, given also the particular cruelty with which the *Cetniks* conducted their guerrilla actions⁶⁸. The second main resistance group to the *Ustaše* and the Axis powers were the communist partisans led by Josif Broz Tito. A man of great charisma and outstanding political and military leadership, Tito succeeded in creating an inter-ethnic, tactically well-organised communist partisan force, supplied by both the USSR and the Western Allies and able to stand up directly to the overwhelming German, Italian and Croatian forces until 1945. After defeating the rival *Cetniks*, against whom a real civil war had broken out, he was appointed 'Marshal of Yugoslavia' in 1944, successfully leading the communist Yugoslav resistance until the end of the war one year after. The immense popularity and political influence stemming from his victorious leadership in the conflict put him in a position to proclaim himself Head of

⁶⁶ Tomasevich 2002.

⁶⁷ Hoare 2006

⁶⁸ Tomasevich 2002.

State of the reborn Yugoslav state in 1945⁶⁹. Taking this framework of ethnic and ideological polarisation into account is crucial to understand the historical value set adopted by the various groups in the decades that followed, where the events of the First World War and the Second World War took on a founding value even several decades later in a propagandistic, sensationalist and revisionist sense.

⁶⁹ Malcolm 1994

CHAPTER TWO

Figure 5. Map of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia in 1948 provided by Carmichael (2015)



On November 29 1945, the birth of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRPY) was announced, with Tito heading a communist government to which the

former ruler, Peter II, had transferred all powers of the former Yugoslav state⁷⁰ The new entity covered an area of 255,804 km², corresponding to the territory occupied by the former kingdom of Yugoslavia with which it shared the capital, Belgrade; it appeared on the global scene as the continuation of the monarchical state that had ceased to exist in 1941 with, however, a completely different form of government⁷¹. The new SFRPY consisted of six republics, Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Serbia, Montenegro and Macedonia, as well as two autonomous provinces, namely Kosovo, which was annexed to the Serbian Republic but was granted the status of an autonomous province due to the strong Albanian presence in the region, and Vojvodina, a region populated by Serbs, Hungarians and Croats, which was also annexed to the Serbian Republic⁷². The First State Constitution, promulgated in 1946, outlined the new political balance of the state, which was to be a de facto one-party communist regime under the sole leadership of Marshal Tito⁷³. The charter recognised five founding peoples of the federation: Croats, Serbs, Slovenes, Montenegrins and Macedonians. The Muslim Bosniaks were therefore not considered as a separate people, but rather as a Muslim component of the Serbian people. It would have to wait until 1971 for the Bosniaks to receive their official recognition as the sixth constituent people of the Yugoslav Federation. This system was heavily inspired by the model through which Stalin's Soviet Union had managed to contain nationalist pressures within it, i.e. by managing to make socialist values the glue of the Soviet state, while still recognising margins of self-government for the different nationalities and founding republics⁷⁴. Similarly, Tito's strategy was to dilute the nationalist sentiments of Croats, Serbs, Slovenes, Montenegrins, Bosnians and Macedonians within the socialist river that had animated first the fierce resistance

⁷⁰ Tomasevich 2002.

⁷¹ Malcolm 199; Benson & Leslie 2001

⁷² Sil 1994.

⁷³ Hoare 2014

⁷⁴ Pešić & Peace 1996.

against the Nazi-Fascist invaders and then the process of national reconstruction⁷⁵. During his presidency for life, Tito was able to effectively control the centuries-old ethnonationalist drives that ran through the State, especially from the Croatian Republic. But Tito's control over Yugoslavia was not solely the result of his charisma or political insight; in fact, it is estimated that more than 250.000 people died between 1945 and 1946 as a result of executions, forced labour in prison camps and 'death marches'; the regime's newly formed secret police, the "Department for the Protection of the People" (OZNa), immediately proved to be one of the most useful weapons in the hands of the Croatian Marshal, fiercely silencing any form of dissent⁷⁶. The Yugoslav state became a socialist dictatorship, merging state and party and concentrating the offices of state in the single figure of Tito. However, the Yugoslav project had to include not only total control of the state and society but also of popular culture, it had to enter homes and forge a new ideology that could undo the cycle of traditions and belonging to which the Yugoslav peoples were still anchored. The massive use of propaganda and education, especially towards the younger classes, became the leitmotif of the new Yugoslav socialist 'kulturkampf'⁷⁷. As we shall see, this strategy proved to be successful, although it met some resistance in the more rural parts of the country and did not succeed in completely wipe out any nationalist particularism from the Federation. Indeed, despite the grim interlude of the NDH, the Croatian population continued to perceive itself as stuck in an 'unfinished' process of national formation where the new Yugoslav socialism was nothing more than yet another hegemonic framework of Belgrade opposed to Zagreb⁷⁸. The last decade of the Federal Republic saw the re-emergence of ethnonationalist drives that had been kept under control by Tito. However, while the end

⁷⁵ *ibidem*

⁷⁶ Pešić & Peace 1996.

⁷⁷ *ibidem*

⁷⁸ Calic 2019.

of the Yugoslav experience for Croats, Slovenes, Bosnians, Macedonians and Montenegrins (in part) represented an opportunity to embark on the process of independence, for the Serbian political class, it represented a real '*conspiracy against Serbia*', an alleged conspiracy carried out by the Yugoslav peoples against Belgrade⁷⁹. This sentiment was what resulted in the 'Memorandum' of the Belgrade Academy of Sciences, which is considered the programmatic document of the Serbian ethnic cleansing programme in Bosnia⁸⁰.

2.1. The new Socialist Bosnia-Herzegovina: a laboratory of identity and identification (1948-1961).

Cradle of the communist partisan movement, under Tito's leadership the region of Bosnia, now called the Socialist Republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina, reverted to its traditional territorial conformation of the Austro-Hungarian period, with a total area of 51,129 square kilometres and with Sarajevo as regional capital. Unlike the other republics of the Federation, which were populated by a majority ethnic group that gave local political direction, Bosnia-Herzegovina was a federal entity governed by a mechanism of local entity consociativism where Croats, Bosniaks and Serbs would take equal turns in managing internal affairs⁸¹. Having been the ideological and operational home of Yugoslav resistance and socialism, Bosnia could to all intents and purposes represent the correct application of the 'socialist patriotism' ideologized by Tito and the party. Indeed, during most of the existence of the Socialist Republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina, inter-ethnic tensions between the various groups decreased decisively. The difficult balance between state socialism and the Islamic religious communities, already achieved with the Serbian Orthodox Church in the 1970s, helped to strengthen the

⁷⁹ Cohen 1996.

⁸⁰ Budding 1998.

⁸¹ Malcolm 1994

position of the Bosniaks within the republic and ensure their loyalty to the Yugoslav cause⁸². It must be emphasised that in defining the territorial borders of the new Republic of Bosnia, the Yugoslav authorities decided to take away the historical territory of Sandžak, located in the southern part of the region, and divide it under the jurisdiction of the Serbian and Montenegrin Republics, essentially leaving thousands of Bosniak Muslims cut off from their historical region of belonging⁸³. Demographically and economically, the region suffered greatly from the consequences of the Second World War and the occupation by the Axis powers, but the Yugoslav government's efforts from the outset were not only to re-establish acceptable living conditions but also to thoroughly modernise and industrialise the socio-economic fabric of Bosnia-Herzegovina⁸⁴. The main economic thrust took place through the implementation of various five-year plans, consistent with the socialist regime and thus with the development of primary resources and heavy industry⁸⁵. Bosnia's mineral wealth ensured that the region became the main industrial base for the newly formed Yugoslav Army, due to its high reserves of bauxite, lignite and zinc composites. Due to the concentration of military industries on its territory, Bosnia soon became a region in the process of developing a deep industrial network, which was fundamental to the economic revival that was to occur within a few years; the symbol of this industrial renaissance was the city of Zenica, which grew by 56% between the end of the war and 1953⁸⁶; Sarajevo also experienced significant growth. However, unlike the COMINFORM economies, the Yugoslav economy also contemplated the possibility of trade with the capitalist West or with other non-aligned countries in Middle-East, Africa

⁸² Perica 2003

⁸³ Carmichael 2015

⁸⁴ Malcolm 1994

⁸⁵ Carmichael 2015; Calic 2019

⁸⁶ *ibidem*

and South East Asia, especially after the Bandung conference in 1955⁸⁷. The achievement of peace and the extraordinary economic development that took place in the region in the wake of the other European economic booms of the 1950s helped boost the population growth rate. The modern essence of the new Yugoslav state also lies in the precision with which federal censuses were conducted; in 1948, 1953, 1961, 1971, 1981 and 1991. Starting from the first census, the division of the population by religious groups disappeared and the division by ethnic groups was introduced, as constitutional entities (though as forementioned the Bosniak-Muslim one would not be present until the 1961s census. This nuance gives us a better understanding of how the new leadership's attempt was not, as it was for Alexander II, to try to create a pan-Yugoslav identity by eliminating ethnic connotations between the peoples of the region, but, on the contrary, Yugoslavia's socialist ambition was to recognise its differences, which were to be mitigated in the light of the 'socialist patriotism' that united the country⁸⁸. With the founding of the Federal Statistical Office of Yugoslavia in 1947, the vital statistics of the population of Bosnia-Herzegovina also began to be documented, enabling us to deepen the demographic picture of the region and make it more complete.

⁸⁷ Mladek 1952

⁸⁸ Ivešić 2021

Table 8. Bosnia-Herzegovina population according to the first two SFRY's censuses.

<i>Year of census</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>Male population</i>	<i>Female population</i>	<i>Population density per km₂</i>
<i>1948</i>	2.564.308	1.236.932	1.327.376	50,1
<i>1953</i>	2.847.459	1.385.559	1.461.900	55,6

Analysing the results of the two censuses, two things can be understood immediately: the first is the impact that the Second World War had on Bosnia-Herzegovina's population growth, the second is its rapid recovery in the 1950s. With regard to the demographic consequences of the conflict, it can be seen that comparing the 1931 census with the 1948 census, the population had increased from 2.323.555 inhabitants to 2.564.308, an increase of 240.753 individuals, a percentage increase of 10,36%, far from the rate experienced in the first decades of the 20th century. It can be seen that there was a disparity between the female and male population, with the former being significantly more numerous, thus presenting another element of difference from previous censuses, which saw a slightly larger male population. The low growth rate and the decrease in the male population can both be justified in light of the consequences of the fighting during the Second World War. An analysis of the 1953

census shows how peace, the process of industrial modernisation undertaken by Yugoslavia and the general improvement in the socio-economic conditions of the population led to an initial increase in the population growth rate, which rose by 283.510 individuals, i.e. by 11%, in which regard the population density also increased, reflecting the urban development of the country; the male-female gap, however, tended to remain unbalanced in favour of females.

Figure 6. Ethnic distribution in Bosnia by 1953

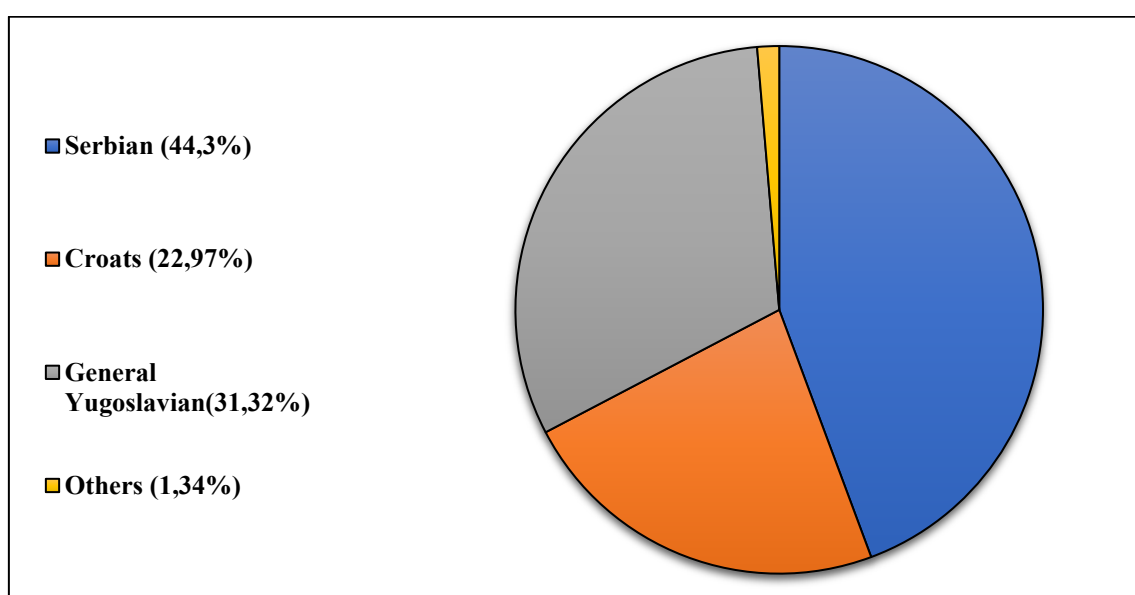


Table 9. Vital statistics in Bosnia-Herzegovina in 1948 and 1953.

Year	<i>Live births</i>	<i>Deaths</i>	<i>Natural change</i>	<i>Crude birth rate (per 1000)</i>	<i>Crude death rate (per 1000)</i>	<i>Natural change</i>	<i>Total fertility rate</i>
1948	90.700	41.600	49.100	35,1	16,1	19,0	N.A.
1953	110.373	41.199	69.174	38,5	14,4	24,2	5,33

2.1.1. The Demographic transition theory model applied to Bosnia-Herzegovina.

Having finally access to the vital statistic, from now on, it will possible for us to analyse the demographic evolution of Bosnia-Herzegovina through the lens of the “Demographic transition” theory. Born in the late 1920’s by the impulse of Warren Thompson⁸⁹, who had identified 3 groups of countries to be analysed, each with characteristics typical of different phases of the demographic transition. The countries in group A, i.e. the Anglo-Saxon and industrialised European countries (UK, USA, Germany, France) were the most modernized and would experience population stagnation and then decline within a few decades, those in group B (the countries of

⁸⁹ Thompson 1929

Central and Southern Europe) presented a condition of population growth similar to those in group A fifty years earlier and, finally, those in group C -the majority of the world population- which did not present any birth control mechanism and whom would have had experienced an uncontrolled growth for the next years this approach stands by the fact that improved living conditions, scientific and economic progress, educational and scientific development and male-female socioeconomic equality provide a shaping influence on the growth rate of the population of a given state by breaking the mechanisms embedded in the 'traditions'. By the latter, we mean the social inequality between men and women and the lack of health care development; factors that would lead a population to nourish high fertility rates and high mortality rates at the same time⁹⁰. Modernity, and thus the abandonment of this status quo, overturns this mechanism, contemplating both a reduction in fertility and mortality due to progresses in technology, economy, health and social equality and rights; this process, however, is not instantaneous and it develops over a perspective of several decades, if not centuries. For this reason, theory has identified several stages in which the demographic transition unfolds from traditional to modern society, each stage presents its own characteristics and it could be associated with different stages of a country's economic, social and technological development⁹¹. The multitude of factors involved makes it spontaneous to consider how the transition from tradition to modernity is not one but rather the combination of different transitions: we can therefore argue about age, fertility, urban, migration and familiar transition⁹². Compared to this initial model, this theory underwent numerous corrections and revisions during the 20th century; the contribution of the European Fertility Project in the 1960s on the Spanish case emphasised the

⁹⁰ Thompson 1929; Weeks 2015

⁹¹ Weeks 2015

⁹² Leasure 1962; Weeks 2015.

crucial importance of the secularisation process, which can be transversal and produce the same impact even in regions with different degrees of socio-economic development. This could also be a valid point of departure when analysing the situation in Yugoslavia, which also undertook a homogeneous demographic transition path between the 1950s and 1990s, even though there were significant socio-economic and economic development differences between the different forming republics. In general, given five different phases of demographic transition that can be identified, each one presenting a higher level of modernization, the immediate post-war Yugoslavia can be placed at a transition point between the first and the second: a state severely compromised by the conflict a few years earlier, with a poor health and social network. The elevated mortality rate is however largely balanced by the high birth rate, typical of countries that do not follow birth control policies and whose citizens do not possess or do not wish to apply the means to prevent conception. However, as mentioned earlier, the Yugoslav government began a massive modernisation effort right from the start, which would bear fruit in the decades that followed. It should be kept in mind that in the 1948 and 1953 censuses, Yugoslav citizens of Muslim faith residing in Bosnia, Kosovo and Montenegro were not given the opportunity to declare themselves as belonging to an ethnic group other than Serbian or Croatian: it is estimated that almost all of them self-declared themselves as 'Yugoslavs of undefined ethnicity', one shall then consider this labelling as, though not precise, representative of Bosnian Muslim citizens⁹³.

⁹³ Eller 1999

2.2. The economic and demographic boom and the rise of the Bosniak identification issue (1961-1971)

This period was a time of fundamental transformation for the Yugoslav state, which moved definitively from a predominantly agricultural and manufacturing economy to an industry-based one⁹⁴. The end of the diplomatic cleavage with the USSR following Stalin's death proved crucial in this regard, as Belgrade was finally able to return to importing economic, material and human capital from the Communist Bloc, a factor that had proved crucial in the late 1940s in the immediate postwar recovery process but which did not have the desired long-term effects due to the diplomatic crisis between Tito and the secretary of the USSR. These can be regarded as the 'golden age' of the SFRY: the general improvement in GDP due to the heavy state investments also manifested itself in the flow of money into the pockets of Yugoslav citizens whose living conditions underwent a decisive improvement⁹⁵. Bosnia, however, remained the tail end of the federation as far as economic development was concerned; it could neither catch up with the pace of industrial growth of the neighbouring republics nor be an important aggregator of foreign investment; with the end of the Warsaw Pact's threat of invasion, the usefulness of relocating Yugoslav heavy and military industry inland (i.e. Bosnia) was diminished, and it was redirected to Serbia, leaving dozens of 'unfinished' industrial poles and cities. The country was also progressing from a cultural and social point of view, but it was in Bosnia that cultural resistance to the modernisation process was felt the most⁹⁶. Given this, the general upgrade of economic conditions, human development and the refined welfare state, which was particularly dear to the Yugoslav socialist regime, favoured a real population boom between the 1960s and 1970s. From 1953 to 1961, the population of Bosnia-Herzegovina increased

⁹⁴ Calic 2019

⁹⁵ Woodward 1995

⁹⁶ Halpern 1970

by 430.489 individuals, a percentage growth rate of 15,1%; between 1961 and 1971, the increase was 468.163 individuals, or 14,3%. Although these growth rates do not reach the extraordinary growth rate recorded between the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century, the increase is constant and important, especially when placed in relation to the conditions in the region after the World War: from 1948 to 1971, the population of Bosnia grew by 46%, i.e. 1.181.803 more individuals. The increase in population density is evidence of the extraordinary phenomenon of urbanisation that swept the country, in a manner not comparable to any other European state; during the 1960s, millions of Yugoslavs left their villages and moved to large urban centres, which also underwent major modernisation⁹⁷. Although Belgrade, the federal capital, was the city that underwent this process the most, Sarajevo too was affected by a wave of new workers from the countryside, triggering a full-blown internal migration phenomenon. The reasons for this were economic and political: from the first point of view, the cities were becoming extremely lively industrial centres, able to attract foreign investment from all the world's nations and from both Iron Curtain blocs, presenting hitherto brand-new job opportunities⁹⁸. The second reason was more political: urban development and migration from the countryside to the city fitted perfectly with the modernisation and secularisation process of the country, where the countryside was automatically synonymous with tradition and, consequentially, a reactionary environment.

⁹⁷ Ibidem; Calic 2019

⁹⁸ Pinson 1994

Table 10. Bosnia-Herzegovina population according to the SFRY's censuses of 1961 and 1971

<i>Year of census</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>Male population</i>	<i>Female population</i>	<i>Population density per km₂</i>
<i>1961</i>	3.277.948	1.599.665	1.678.283	65
<i>1971</i>	3.746.111	1.834.600	1.911.511	73,2

However, the urbanisation process was not always welcomed by the rural population: during the 1960⁹⁹s, various confrontations arose between the federal authorities and farmers, who resented the state's interventionism in their affairs, namely the collectivisation of agricultural production and the introduction of production quotas to be met, plus the state's efforts to ban numerous cultural practices considered by now anachronistic but still followed by a large part of the population in the more peripheral areas¹⁰⁰. Those were the germs of a new type of centre-periphery cleavage that was being generated, a division that would carry its consequences until thirty years later. It is therefore important to bear in mind how the territorial distribution of the different ethnic groups plays an important role here: the fact that the most peripheral and inaccessible

⁹⁹ Malcolm 1994

¹⁰⁰*ibidem*

areas of Bosnia were the mountains of Krajina, Serbian ancestral land, alienated the Serbian Orthodox in the region, who resented the socialist government's attempts to secularise the culture, even though, as mentioned above, relations between the Yugoslav state and the Orthodox Church were generally good. Since the 1961 census, the numbering of the different ethnic groups populating the federation was introduced, allowing us to have a clearer view of their distribution in Bosnia-Herzegovina; this is particularly important in the context of the Bosniaks of the Muslim faith, as it was finally possible for them to identify themselves also in the census declaration, they could thus declare themselves 'Muslim in ethnic sense' and not necessarily have to fit into the Croat or Serb ethnic group¹⁰¹. 1971 is an extremely important date for the Yugoslav Bosniaks in that they were finally recognised as the sixth constituent ethnic category of the Yugoslav federation in the new constitution; this, happening at practically the same time as the Bosniaks outnumbered the ethnic Serbs in Bosnia-Herzegovina. The process of self-determination of the Bosnian Muslim people had only just begun and had already caused quite a few headaches for the government in Belgrade, which was dissatisfied with the autonomist turn envisaged by the new constitution, which in fact included a more liberal reorganisation of the entire Yugoslav federal system¹⁰². This was also prompted by the 'Croatian Spring' of 1970, a series of protests that spread throughout the Socialist Republic of Croatia -and endorsed by the more nationalistic components of the regional party- in which greater regional autonomy and a relaxation of control by Belgrade were demanded. Indeed, it was the general impression of the non-Serb peoples that it was the Serbian Socialist Republic that was the real 'primus inter pares' of the federal system: Serbs represented the majority of the total Yugoslav citizens (likewise the 37%) and were over-represented in

¹⁰¹ Knezevic 2001

¹⁰² Calic 2019

both political offices and the armed forces¹⁰³; the liberalisation process thus began to be seen, on both sides, as a national issue.

Table 11. Vital statistics in Bosnia-Herzegovina in 1961 and 1971.

<i>Year</i>	<i>Live births</i>	<i>Deaths</i>	<i>Natural change</i>	<i>Crude birth rate (per 1000)</i>	<i>Crude death rate (per 1000)</i>	<i>Natural change (per 1000)</i>	<i>Total fertility rate</i>
<i>1961</i>	108.076	29.413	78.663	32,8	8,9	23,9	3,91
<i>1971</i>	82.694	24.915	57.779	22,0	6,6	15,4	2,83

Vital statistics indicate that Bosnia-Herzegovina in the 1960s and 1970s was fully in the midst of the second phase of the demographic transition: the country could boast a rapid increase in population due to a high birth rate and a decreasing death rate, although the momentum in 1971 had already slowed down somewhat compared to 10 years earlier. We note how life expectancy has generally improved over the years, rising from 53 years in 1948 to 67 in 1971¹⁰⁴. This particular condition of general population growth, which in turn consists mostly of young individuals under 35 years of age, is defined as

¹⁰³ Norbu 1999

¹⁰⁴ UN 2024

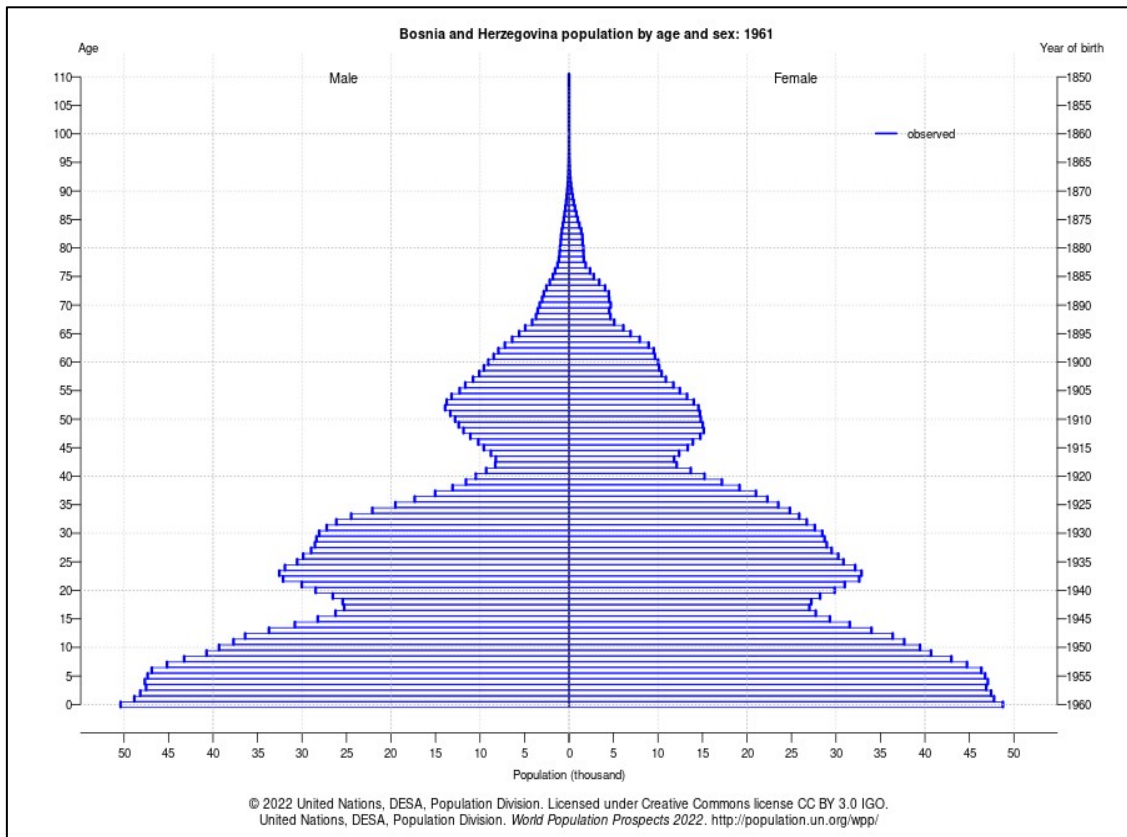
the 'demographic window of opportunity'¹⁰⁵, i.e. a phase in which the correct application of social policies and support for parents and children manages to guarantee constant social and economic growth over the years in the face of a population that is destined to be increasingly numerous and consequently in need of social services in the future¹⁰⁶. As we shall see in the following pages, the Yugoslav government failed to successfully implement policies in the 1970s and 1980s that could positively exploit this rapid population increase. In addition to all this, consider how Yugoslavia as a whole began to be affected by outward migration, which, although small, made Bosnia-Herzegovina one of the most affected regions due to its economic status. Framed by the government as 'temporary workers abroad', these workers were able to move to also in Western bloc countries, including West Germany and the USA, but very often ended up staying there indefinitely¹⁰⁷.

¹⁰⁵ Goerres, Vanhuyse 2021

¹⁰⁶ Giordano 2023

¹⁰⁷ Malcolm 1994

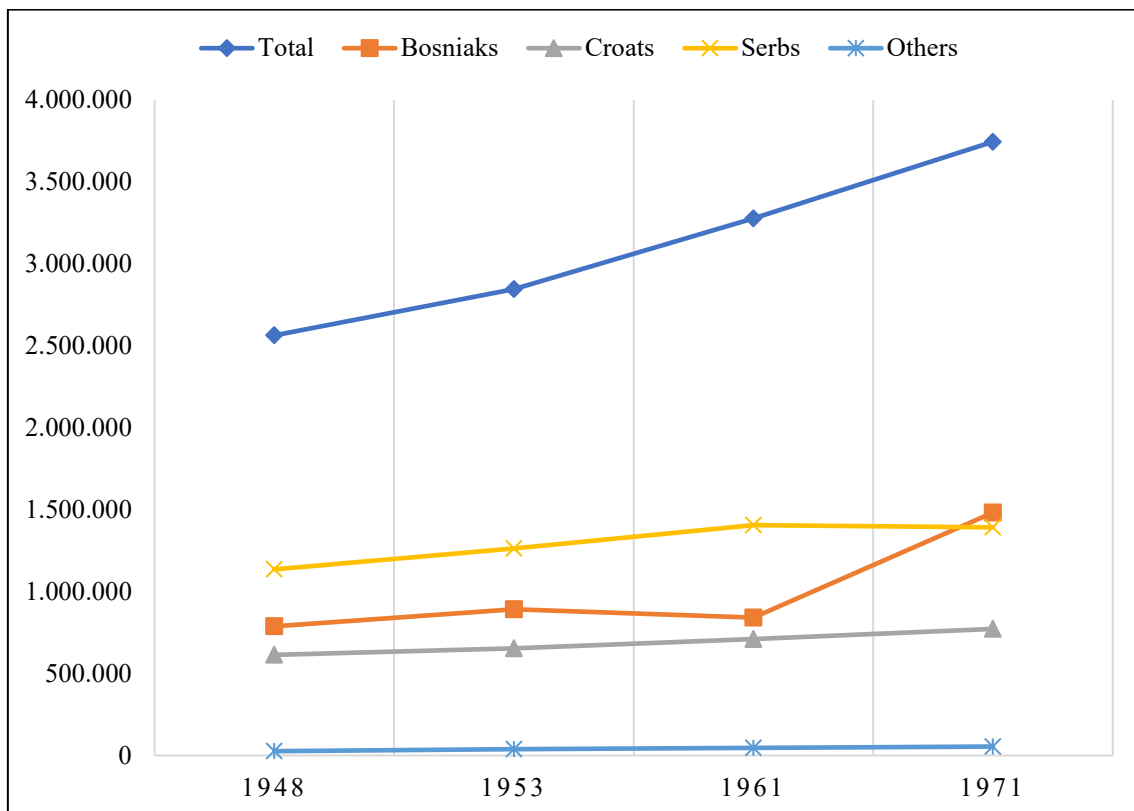
Figure 7. Population pyramid in 1961, UNDESA 2024



Although Bosnia was experiencing a period of general population growth, it did not involve all ethnic groups in the region, being focused solely on the Bosniak one, who grew by the 88%, namely from 788.403 individuals in 1948 to 1.482.430 in 1971. It then became the majority ethnic component in Bosnia-Herzegovina, surpassing even the Serbian population in numbers. It is plausible to assume that the causes of this 'overtaking' are twofold: the first is more technical, linked to the new nomenclature of 'Bosniak Muslims' present since the 1961 referendum and the constitutional recognition of this ethnic group ten years later, which plausibly also led to a consequence in the census calculation, in which an increasing number of Bosnian Muslims proceeded to self-identify with this ethnic group, a possibility denied in the past. The second motivation can be found both in the internal and external migration phenomenon and in

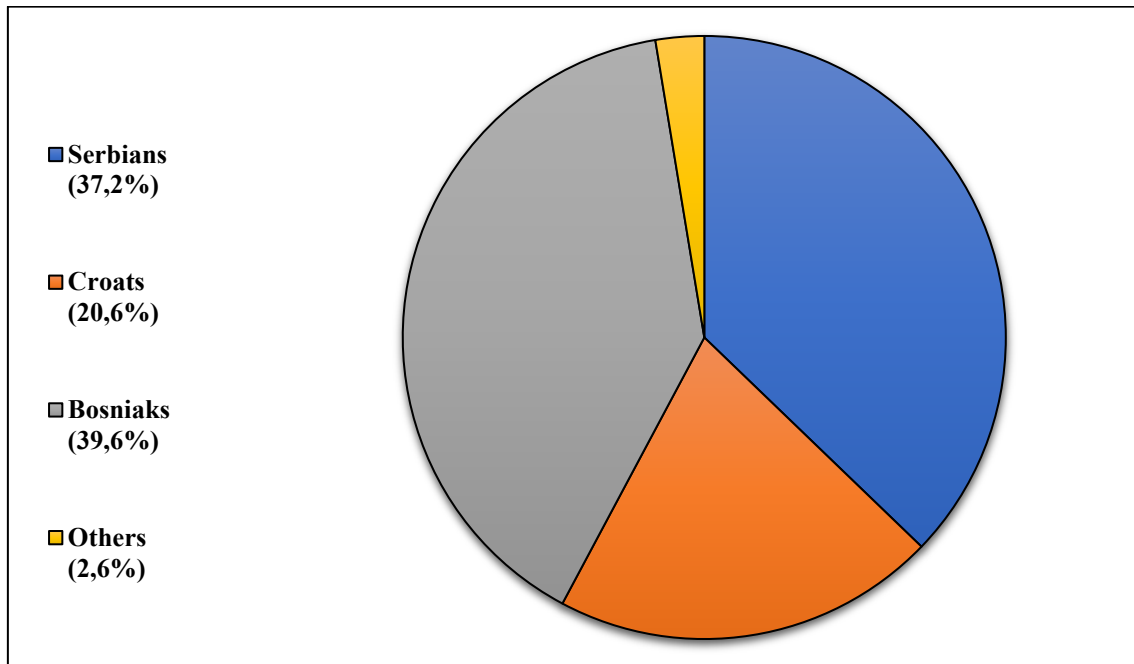
a possible imbalance in the fertility rate between ethnic Serbs and Bosnians; vital statistics, however, have not been diversified by ethnic group, so this can only be an assumption. It is also unlikely that the Serbian population had been “merged” within the Bosnian one, since 88,5% of marriages were celebrated among the same ethnic communities¹⁰⁸. On the other hand, the 'overtaking' is also given by the fact that, in contrast to the Bosniak population, the Serbian population had stopped growing as early as 1961, the Serbian political elite, both in Sarajevo and Belgrade, was very aware of this “replacement” process and started prompting from the 1970s process of reflection on the Serbian national question and its claims.

Figure 8. POPULATION FLOW AND ETHNIC DISTRIBUTION (1948-1971)



¹⁰⁸ ibidem

Figure 9. Ethnic distribution in Bosnia by 1971



2.3. Demographic slowdown, rise of nationalisms and the disintegration of the SFRY (1971-1992).

In 1986, the Serbian Academy of Arts and Sciences published its homonymous memorandum¹⁰⁹, known as “*Memorandum of the Serbian Academy of Arts and Sciences*”, divided in two parts, namely “*The Crisis of the Yugoslav Economy and Society*” and “*The position of Serbia and Serbian people*”, in which academics in Belgrade denounced how the decline of the Yugoslav economy was essentially caused by the loosening of control by the federal government following the constitutional reform of 1974 and the process of liberalisation of the economy and the greater autonomy granted to the republics that made up the federation. However, it was not only an economic document, in its second part a 'Serbian National Cause' was called into

¹⁰⁹ Budding 1999.

question for the first time, in which the fate of the Serbian people was directly threatened by the rise of Slovenian and Croatian control within the structures of Yugoslavia, even going so far as to argue how Tito, who had meanwhile died in 1980, had as a Croat slowly created a federation made up of measures to strangle the Serbian people¹¹⁰. In other words, the problem of the Serbian nation and people had become the economic, political and moral state Yugoslavia was in in the mid-1980s. As is well known, this document became the programmatic manifesto of the new Serbian nationalism and Serbian revivalism against the Croats, who were guilty of the fascist genocides of the Second World War, and against the Bosnians, the reincarnation of those much-hated Ottoman rulers who had dominated the Serbian people for 500 years. Although it was probably the one that re-emerged most destructively, Serbian nationalism was not the only ethnic particularism to emerge in Yugoslavia in those years, Croat political elites and Muslim religious elites in Bosnia were both pursuing a path of national and ethnic awareness and rationalisation, openly challenging the leadership of a Yugoslav federation that, as has been mentioned above, was still seen as a direct propagation of Serbian power¹¹¹. It is necessary, however, to ask how in so few years we have gone from the '*Yugoslavia felix*' of the 1970s to this situation of general tensions. Like any major historical phenomenon, the dissolution of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia is a process that requires numerous analyses from different points of view to form a complex picture, however, the purpose of this paper is precisely to look for the extent to which demographic factors interfered with the event. After all, the performance of the Yugoslav economy had drastically changed from previous decades: the oil crisis of 1978 and 1979 had been a death blow to Yugoslav heavy industry, which had not been able to recover to growth levels since then: constant state

¹¹⁰ Denich 1994; Budding 199

¹¹¹ Pesic 1996

bailouts, on the other hand, in addition to failing to turn around the fortunes of strategic enterprises, contributed to skyrocketing inflation and the accumulation of unmanageable debt to foreign creditors, thus increasingly turning the crisis from financial to real, directly into the pockets of Yugoslav citizens¹¹². As much as the consequences of the vertical fall of the Yugoslav economy produced effects in all the federated socialist republics, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Serbia and its autonomous provinces were particularly interesting from the economic meltdown. In 1989, Bosnia's GDP per capita was half that of Croatia and one third that of Slovenia, and between 1986 and 1989, the national GDP had contracted by 9,23%¹¹³. On the other hand, ten years of uninterrupted economic crisis had not brought positive results from a demographic point of view either: the slowly but inexorably ageing Bosnian population had drastically reduced its growth rate, young Yugoslavs living in Bosnia were gradually finding it more and more difficult to procreate in a poor environment with few future perspectives, possibly seeking to migrate abroad in search of new opportunities. Demographically, Bosnia-Herzegovina in the 1980s was undergoing several interrelated phenomena: a general impoverishment in economic terms, a net slowdown in the population growth rate, an increasing migration phenomenon, and an increase in the disproportion of the various ethnic groups in the region in favor of the Bosniaks while the Serb population kept its negative trend.

¹¹² Woodward 1995

¹¹³ Slack 2001

Table 12. Bosnia-Herzegovina population according to the SFRY's censuses of 1981 and 1991

<i>Year of census</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>Male population</i>	<i>Female population</i>	<i>Population density per km₂</i>
<i>1981</i>	4.124.256	2.050.913	2.073.343	80,6
<i>1991</i>	4.377.033	2.813.795	2.193.238	85,5

Analysing population change, it soon becomes apparent how the trend of slowing population growth that had already started in the 1970s continued through the 1980s until the beginning of the last decade of the 20th century. The growth rate between 1981 and 1991 was 6.12%, whereby the population of Bosnia-Herzegovina increased by 252,777 individuals; it is also interesting to note that during the 1980s, the male population outnumbered the female population.

Figure 10. Population Pyramid in 1991, UNDESA 2024

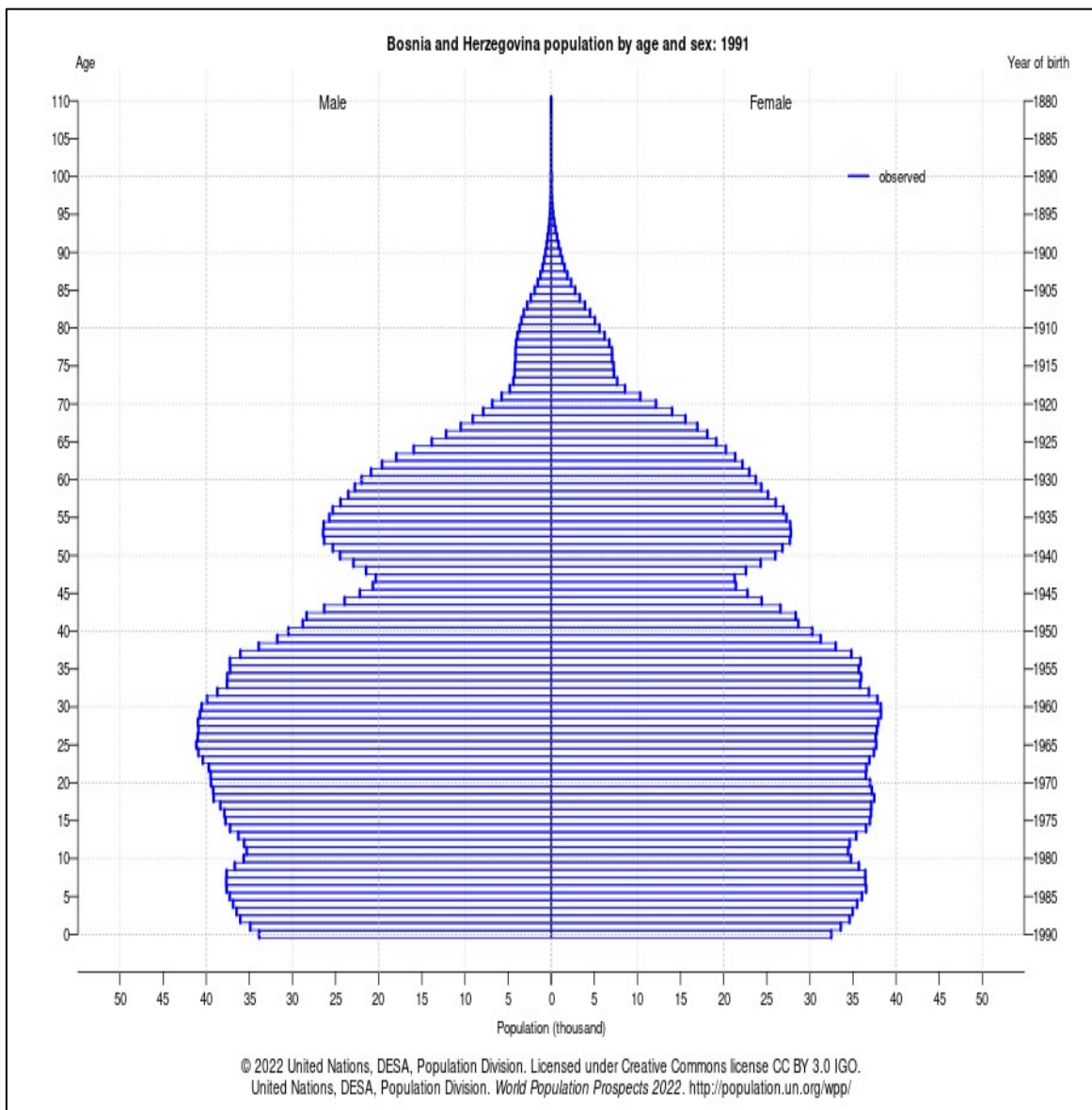


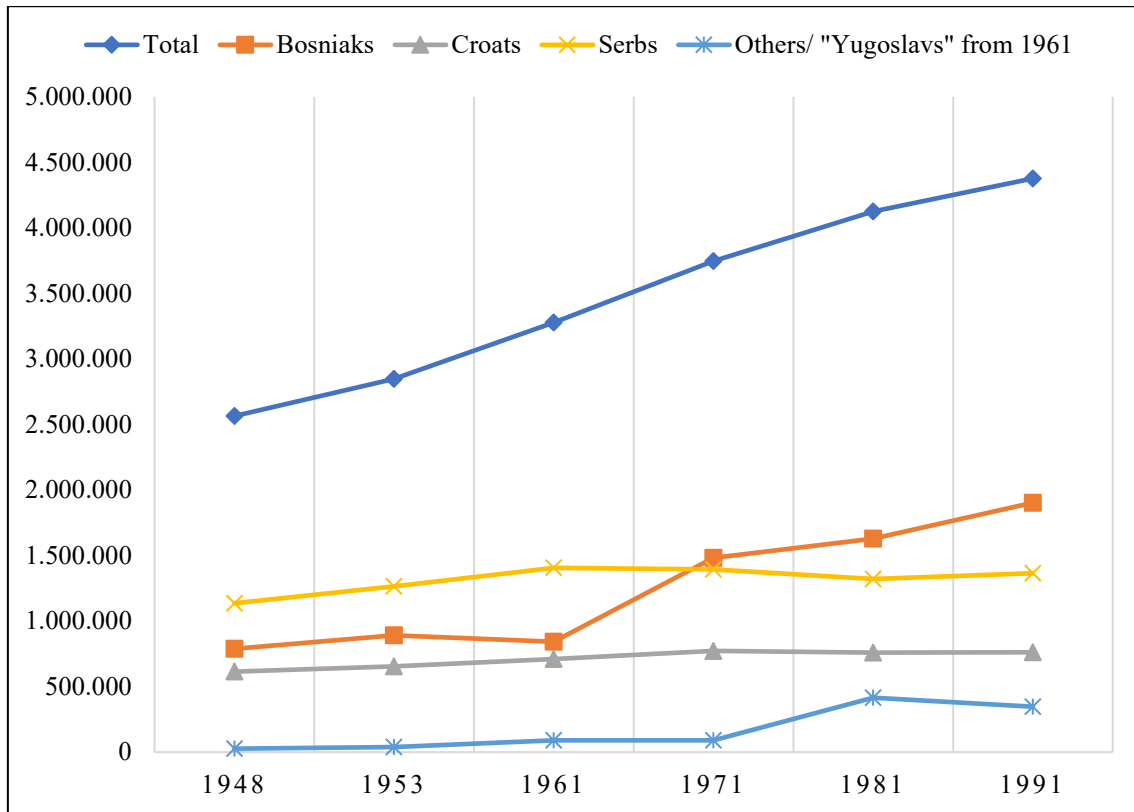
Table 13. Vital statistics in Bosnia-Herzegovina in 1981 and 1991.

<i>Year</i>	<i>Live births</i>	<i>Deaths</i>	<i>Natural change</i>	<i>Crude birth rate (per 1000)</i>	<i>Crude death rate (per 1000)</i>	<i>Natural change (per 1000)</i>	<i>Total fertility rate</i>
<i>1981</i>	71.031	26.222	44.809	17,2	6,3	10,8	2,03
<i>1991</i>	64.769	30.680	34.089	14,8	7,0	7,8	1,87

From the analysis of the population pyramid and vital statistics applied to the theory of demographic transition, the picture that emerges is one of a country slowly but surely transitioning from the second to the third stage of demographic transition, where the third stage is characterized by a demographic "plateau", a condition in which the population has found its equilibrium without increasing or decreasing. This particular condition is given by the steady decrease in the mortality rate but also by the decline in the fertility rate; interestingly, between 1981 and 1991 in Bosnia and Herzegovina the mortality rate had instead increased -phenomenon attributable to the worsening socioeconomic condition of the citizens- further exacerbating the slowdown in growth. The decline in births remained constant between 1981 and 1991, where in the last

census conducted by SFRY the fertility rate fell below the threshold of two children per woman.

Figure 11. POPULATION FLOW AND ETHNIC DISTRIBUTION (1948-1991)



The economic crisis soon turned into a political crisis: the Federal Council, the country's new political authority after Tito's death, was unable to reach a compromise between the Serbian centralist positions (which dominated the council given the votes of Serbia, Montenegro and the two autonomous provinces of Vojvodina and Kosovo) and the more autonomist Croatian and Slovenian ones¹¹⁴. The 40th congress of the League of Communists of Yugoslavia in January 1990 saw its own dissolution as the Slovenian and Croatian delegations left the party. At the same time, tensions in Kosovo between the Albanian majority and Serbian minority were reaching critical levels, convincing the

¹¹⁴ Bebler 1993; Malcolm 1994

Serbian political class to begin preparations for a general mobilisation to protect ethnic Serbs throughout the region: it was the beginning of the end for Yugoslavia¹¹⁵.

2.3.1. A Malthusian approach to understand the conflict?

As mentioned earlier, the breakup of Yugoslavia and consequently the direct causes of the 1991-1995 Balkan conflict were the result of numerous factors, interrelated but different political, social and economic nature. However, the particular emphasis of Serbian nationalist rhetoric on the "conspiracy against the Serbian people" and the feeling of "encirclement" felt by Serbian communities at home and in neighbouring Bosnia-Herzegovina and Croatia succeeds in giving us the cue to make a deeper analysis, recognizing the role of demographics in the re-emergence of nationalisms in the region. While it is indeed true that the political crisis was triggered by confrontations of a political nature by representatives of increasingly national states, the military escalation of the civil conflict in Yugoslavia was linked to tensions regarding the ethnic Serb minority in Croatia and, shortly thereafter in Bosnia; in fact, it was the two ethnically Serb minorities in the two regions that demanded and mobilized the intervention of the Belgrade government in their defence, triggering the conflict. The key to this approach lies in the aforementioned numerical "outnumbering" of the Bosniak population by comparison with the Serb population from the 1970s onward; it was interpreted by the more nationalist Serbian political class, the one that would later be guilty of the terrible genocide that took place, as a direct threat to the survival of the Serbian people. Both General Radko Mladic and the president of the self-declared "Serbian Republic of Krajina" Radovan Karadzic expressed their fear of the "*Muslim demographic bomb*," using this factor as a justifying element of their xenophobic policies. Croatian President Franjo Tudman also clearly expressed a "*demographic*

¹¹⁵ Malcolm 1994; Hoare 2007

paranoia" about the increase of the Bosniak Muslim population¹¹⁶. Once we have clarified how Serbian nationalism identified the increase in the Bosnian Muslim population as one of the main reasons for the existential threat hanging over the Serbian people, we need to move on to what this threat had represented and what the genocide of tens of thousands of individuals was supposed to "protect the Serbian people" from. As much as that of "ethnic substitution" was a fear that was slowly being instilled within the Serbian population through the incessant media propaganda machine, this does not seem to have plausibly been the main reason for the explosion of Serbian nationalism as much as the economic crisis that had been plaguing the federation for ten years. General impoverishment, exacerbated by the already difficult living conditions in Bosnia, triggered a mechanism of "inter-ethnic competition," in which the Serb, Bosnian, and Croat populations have begun a process of contending for dwindling economic resources. Economic contention soon became a reason for the stiffening of inter-ethnic contact between the communities, which ended up becoming increasingly isolated. It is therefore no coincidence that the episodes that triggered the conflict occurred not in Bosnia's large urban centres such as Sarajevo, where inter-ethnic divisions had been significantly smoothed out during the socialist period by recording high numbers of inter-ethnic marriages, but in the rural and mountainous regions where the process of ethnic mixture had not taken place. The Krajina regions were also those most historically intolerant of the secularization process carried out by the Yugoslav government after World War II and the urbanization process, the same regions that had seen the birth of the Chetniks' resistance during World War II, the memory of which was becoming increasingly lucid. It is plausible to think how the mechanism of inter-ethnic competition was linked in double strand to the emergence of this cleavage center-

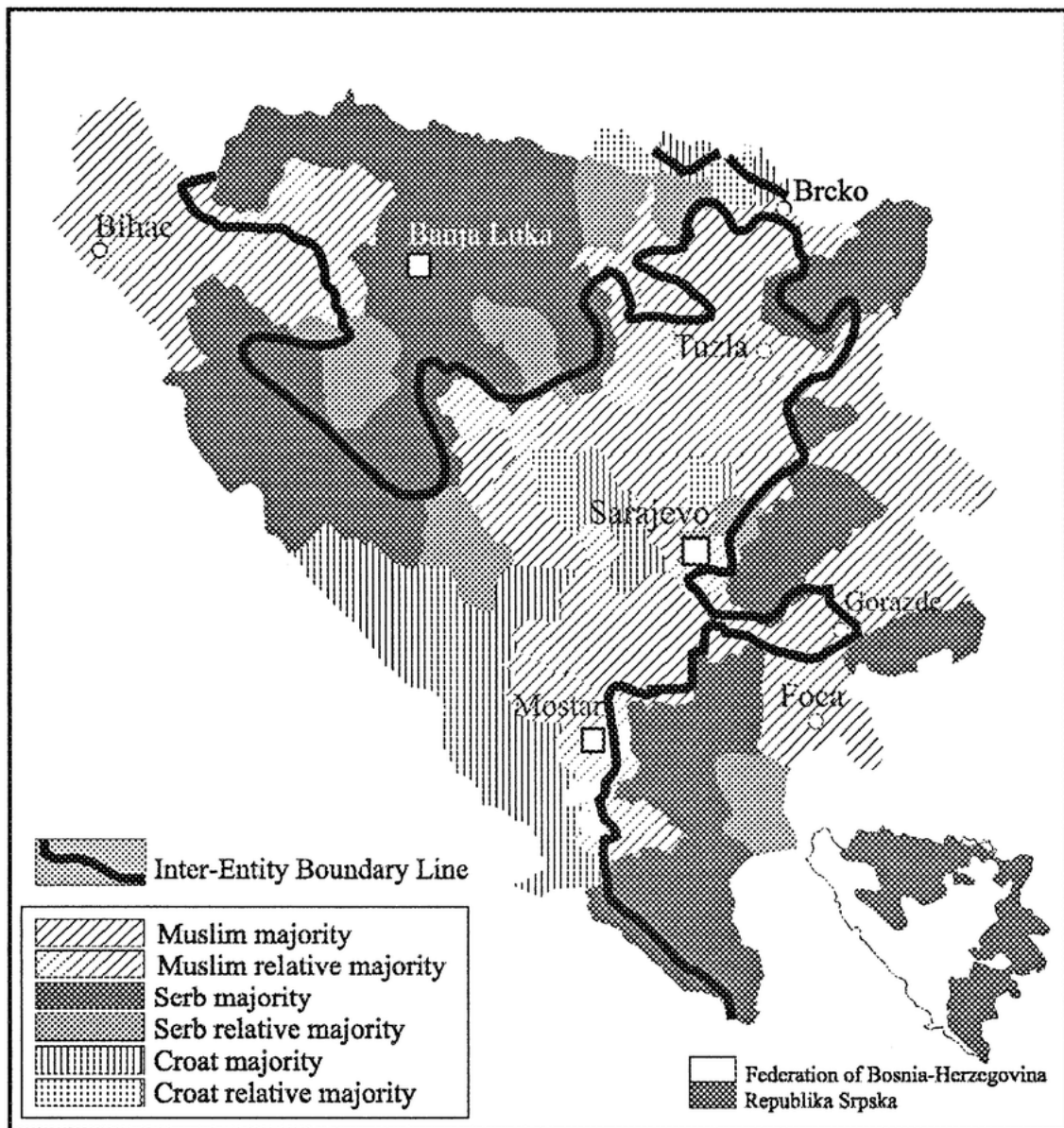
¹¹⁶ O' Ballance 1995; Cigar 1995; Uzelak 1998; Slack 2001

periphery and to a new nationalistic approach to Yugoslav history, conditioned also surely by the *"fin de siècle"* and the end of the Soviet experience and the consequent collapse of communist ideology. Thus, the picture that emerges is the one identified by Slack, where the mechanism of inter-ethnic competition was primarily initiated by a contest over resources, triggered by an economic crisis and terribly exacerbated by demographic changes. Given this, it is important to recognize how the data of demography and economics must be contextualized with a political perception of them; a Malthusian approach seeks to render these conditions-especially population growth correlated with resource scarcity-as a scientific pattern toward intergroup conflict, an approach that fails to take into account the importance of group politics and the sociology of conflict. A more correct analysis might recognize the "Malthusian squeeze" as an indisputable prodrome of conditions leading to conflict without, however, embracing the inevitability of it with an almost fatalistic approach. In the specific case of Bosnia, it is necessary to understand how and by whom this condition of growing population and scarce resources was interpreted and elaborated, in this case Serbian nationalists such as Milosevic, Radic or Karadzic, who saw in genocide the best way out of it. Counter-evidence of the demographic value of the conflict are its dynamics: the fact that the conflict in Bosnia was so terrible for the civilian population, which had in fact become the primary target of the armed forces of the contending parties is probably what distinguishes this conflict, but also the practically contemporary ones in Rwanda and Burundi from previous wars. The systematic attack on civilians is not this time identifiable within "total war" war strategies as could be found in the mass bombings of World War II; massacres such as those in Srebrenica were not dictated by war necessity as much as by the sheer will on the part of one group to physically eliminate the other. Understanding the demographic nature of the conflict in Bosnia

therefore means understanding its origins and dynamics, since this has been the main leitmotif of the actions of competing groups.

CHAPTER THREE

Figure 12. Ethnic groups geographical distribution before the War, Kostovicova 2004



On June 25, 1991, Slovenia and Croatia declared their independence from Belgrade, leaving the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and becoming two autonomous

states. If the Slovenian independence process took place all in all without any particular bloodshed, the same could not be said of the Croatian independence process. The immediate uprising of a strong Serb minority in the southeastern mountainous area of the country, the mountainous region of Krajina in the south and Slavonia in the east, which was absolutely opposed to the independence process and determined to remain tied to Belgrade led to the outbreak of violence between ethnic Croats and Serbs¹¹⁷. These minorities, organized politically under the name of the "Serb Republic of Krajina," under the leadership of Milan Babic, received full support from the Yugoslav Red Army, which essentially invaded the territory of the newly formed Croatian state, besieging cities such as Vukovar and Dubrovnik and staining itself with terrible crimes against the ethnic Croatian population. Given this dire situation, on February 29th 1992, the Bosnian government, led by president Alija Izetbegović, declared a referendum to enshrine its independence from a Yugoslavia in complete split the referendum, the result of which was a plebiscite in favour of independence, was systematically boycotted by 1/3 of the country's population, i.e., the entire ethnic Serb population¹¹⁸. On April 3 of the same year, Bosnia-Herzegovina declared its independence, for the first time in history since 1463. Three days after, on April 6th, the new Bosnian state had been recognized by the EC; the day after, on April 7th the independence of the 'Serbian Republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina' was stated, creating in fact a parallel state to Sarajevo. While the Yugoslav Federal Army had officially left the country and retreated to Serbia, numerous members of the General Staff, commanded by Serbian General Radko Mladic, remained in Bosnia to give military support to the newly-born secessionist republic¹¹⁹. At the same time, the military forces of the newly formed Bosnian state were also being organised, with a paramilitary force composed of 70% Muslim

¹¹⁷ Bougarel, Helms & Dujiginz 2007.

¹¹⁸ Williams 2004

¹¹⁹ Calic 2019

Bosniaks, which was supposed to defend the Bosnian territory from any armed invasion by an army that was officially 'Yugoslav' but in truth remained solely composed of ethnic Serb troops and officers. Even more complex was the situation of the Croatian group residing in Bosnia, which oscillated between loyalty to Zagreb and Sarajevo: on 18 November 1991, the Croatian Community of Herzeg-Bosnia was proclaimed, with Mostar as its capital, in order to protect Croatian interests against Serbian plans¹²⁰. In 1992, following Bosnia's independence, the Bosnian-Croat militia was the first force to confront the Serbian advance in the country, in the meantime the army of the newly formed Bosnian state was being formed. However, 1993 saw the confrontation between the Bosnian Croats and Bosnians, with the former fighting for reunification with Croatia and the formation of an 'ethnically pure' Croatian state that would also include the territories that had historically belonged to the Bosnian Croats, where fighting developed especially around the city of Mostar¹²¹. The Vance-Owen plan concerning the creation of a new Bosnian state composed by ethnically homogeneous and proposed by Western countries in 1993 to resolve the ongoing conflict gave the Bosnian Croats the ideal pretext to begin their campaign of ethnic cleansing against Bosniaks¹²². The conflict in Bosnia officially lasted from 6 April 1992 to 14 December 1995, with the ratification of the Dayton Accords that sanctioned the birth and final recognition of the Federal Republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina by the Croatian leader Franjo Tudjman, the Bosnian Muslim leader Alija Izetbegovic, and the Serbian leader Slobodan Milosevic. The final tool of the war that consumed Bosnia from 1992 to 1995 is still provisional and is the subject of political debate to this day, where the factions involved accuse each other of inflating the figures to their own advantage; the most reliable estimates conducted by the RDC (Research and Documentation Centre Sarajevo), estimate a total

¹²⁰ Burg 1999

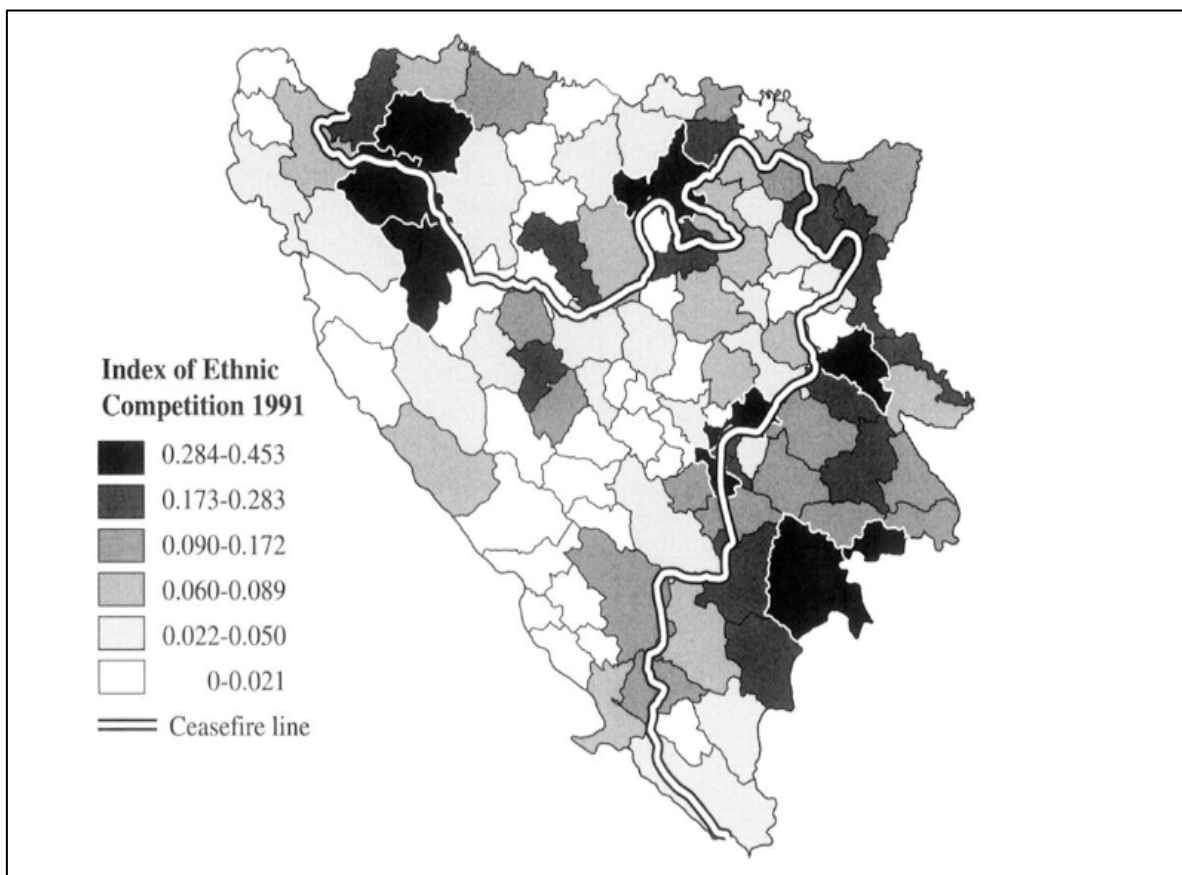
¹²¹ ICTY 2000

¹²² *ibidem*

of 101.040 individuals killed, including 38.239 civilians, most of them Bosniaks, and 57.701 military and police forces. The UNCHR estimates how 2,2 million people were forced from their homes, splitted in half between refugees and internally displaced people, in what was the first genocide the European continent has witnessed since World War II¹²³. This chapter will analyse the serious demographic situation that the new Bosnian state has been forced to face since 1996, a condition that continues to this day and, as almost thirty years ago, takes on vital political consequences for the future of Bosnia and, consequently, for the entire Balkan region.

3.1. The demographic and socio-politic aftermaths of the conflict

Figure 13. The 1995 Ceasefire Line between Muslim-Croat Forces and Serb Forces and the Index of Muslim-Serb Ethnic competition as provided by Slack 2001



¹²³ ICG 1997

War, in its essence, is synonymous with destruction: what or who is the target to be destroyed and by whom can often give us the existential dimension of a given conflict, determining its nature; the number of casualties and the number of human beings, means, states involved can be useful to carry out a classification of the conflict and to determine its intensity. Determining the dynamics of the conflict and the manner in which it was conducted by victors and vanquished helps to understand, among other things, the objectives of it. In the case of the conflict in Bosnia, the objectives can be deduced from the war dynamics, the categories involved, the scale of the conflict and vice versa: the war in Bosnia was a war aimed not at defeating the opponent but at destroying him completely, physically, culturally and spatially. This conflict produced the massacres of Srebrenica, Sarajevo, Mostar, and Banja Luka, where civilians were the first category involved and whose elimination or replacement was aimed at creating ethnically pure zones.

Figure 14 The new Bosnian State after the Dayton agreement in 1995



Since the ratification of the Dayton Accords on December 14, 1995, the guns have fallen silent in Bosnia-Herzegovina and the region has regained peace, understood at least as the absence of conflict. The new Bosnian state, whose capital remained Sarajevo, has a surface area of 51 209 km², covering all the territory that had historically belonged to Bosnia since the time of the Socialist Republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina. It is configured as a federal republic, consisting of three main entities, the Republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina, consisting mostly of the territories originally composed by Bosniaks and Croats majorities, in the western half of the country, and Republika Srpska, a federal entity of the country covering the eastern regions of Bosnia, historically inhabited by ethnic Serbs, and the Brcko district, formally under the

sovereignty of both federal entities and under the protection of the international community. If one of the goals of the conflict was to create ethnically homogeneous areas, the current arrangement of the country shows that at least in part this goal has been achieved, the work of ethnic replacement, by killing or forcing Serb, Croat, or Bosnian minorities from their homes, has resulted in the two fractions of the country, whose borders reflect the front line at the time of the Dayton Accords, being homogeneously composed of each other. Since the first official census conducted by the Bosnian state was only produced in 2013, the only relevant demographic data we can use is the 'unofficial' census conducted by the UNHCR in 1996¹²⁴; from this it is clear how the conflict has resulted in: the presence of millions of internally displaced people and outdoor refugees due to the ethnical persecutions, the natural decrease in population due to the war events -violence against civilians and the physical destruction of the welfare state- and the explosion of the outdoor migration phenomenon, which reaches hundreds of thousands. With regard to refugees and internally displaced persons, the UNHCR survey estimates that in 1996 there were still 815.000 Bosnian refugees, a number that confirms a positive trend compared to 1,2 million refugees in the immediate aftermath of the Dayton accords, but which nevertheless denotes a dramatic situation; of these 815.000, 315.000 were settled in Germany, 253.000 in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia - i.e. in Serbia and Montenegro – and 160.000 in Croatia; to this figure must be added 750.000 internally displaced persons, of whom 450.000 in the Federation of Bosnia Herzegovina and 300.000 in Republika Srpska, a figure that also represents a slight relief compared to the previous year's situation¹²⁵. The phenomenon of homogenisation also affected the return of refugees to foreign countries and in the relocation of internally displaced persons, the UNHCR report shows that of the 164.000

¹²⁴ ICG 1997 ; UNHCR 1999

¹²⁵ *ibidem*

internally displaced persons who returned home in 1996, 154.000 Bosniaks, Serbs and Croats who returned who found their household, chose to settle in a zone which their ethnic group would be the majoritarian one, while only 10.000 individuals chose to settle in zones where their ethnic group would not be the most numerous one¹²⁶. This was due to both fear of possible repercussions from the dominant group and obstructionism imposed by the federal authorities themselves, both BiH and RS. One cannot fail to consider how the Dayton accords were not just a mere mapping operation: they were an external operation of rationalisation of an extremely complex mosaic, which from theory to practice resulted in the involuntary displacement of hundreds of thousands of people to a new home, when this could have been guaranteed to them¹²⁷.

Table 14. 1996 UNHCR's census

Ethnic group	Total	BiH	RS
Bosniaks	1,805,910 (46,07%)	1,773,566 (72.5%)	32,344 (2,2%)
Serbs	1,484,530 (37,88%)	556,289 (22,8%)	1,427,912 (96,8%)
Croats	571,317 (14.58%)	56,618 (2,3%)	15,028 (1%)
Others	58,196 (1,47%)	58,192 (2,4%)	N.A.

Regarding the net decrease in population, the UNHCR census concluded that there were 3.919.953 inhabitants in Bosnia-Herzegovina, or 457.080 individuals less than in the last Yugoslav census conducted in 1991. This net decrease is largely influenced by the number of persons who died or went missing during the conflict, which the DRC estimates at 101.040. According to Pasalic estimates, the final tally of citizens lost from Bosnia between deaths, unborn children and migration is 1.135.966 residents, about

¹²⁶ *ibidem*

¹²⁷ Giordano 2018

25,95% of the population recorded in 1991¹²⁸. The UNHCR census results confirm the phenomenon of ethnic homogenization caused by the war: whether it was due to physical elimination, the coercive abandonment of their homes by millions, or the failure of refugees in other countries to return to their original lands, the situation shows that in the aftermath of the war, the two Bosnian federal macro-entities were now composed almost entirely of their respective constituent ethnic groups, namely Croat and Bosnian for BiH, Serb for RS. This would also have entailed important political consequences in the country's political future: indeed, the Bosnian federal system envisions how the two federal entities jointly elect the country's main legislative assembly, the House of Representatives. This is due to the fact that political parties emerging from legislative elections have a deep ethnopolitical component, which is reflected in their electoral program, pitting the various interests of different ethnic groups against each other; this poses the conditions of very frequent political *impasse* and crisis.

¹²⁸ Pasalic 2012

Table 15. Vital statistics in Bosnia-Herzegovina in 1991 and 1996.

Year	<i>Live births</i>	<i>Deaths</i>	<i>Natural change</i>	<i>Crude birth rate (per 1000)</i>	<i>Crude death rate (per 1000)</i>	<i>Natural change (per 1000)</i>	<i>Total fertility rate</i>
1991	64.769	30.680	34.089	14,8	7,0	7,8	1,87
1996	46.594	25.152	21.442	22,0	7,5	6,4	1,88

Analysing vital statistics, we see that between 1991 and 1996-first year of operation of the statistical office of the new Bosnian state, the FZS-the decline in births can be estimated at 28,06%, consequently affecting the natural exchange rate, which in turn decreases by 37,1%. In other words, we observe how the conflict has essentially accelerated the slowing down of the population, either by physically eliminating it or by placing it in a position where it is unable or unwilling to produce new children. The consequences of the conflict were also economic and material: by the year 2000, Bosnia's GDP had shrunk by the 20% from prewar levels, and the country had not been able to embark on a path of economic recovery as it did in the immediate post-World War II period, having to base its reconstruction program almost entirely on foreign funding and aid¹²⁹. These funds, bestowed mainly by Western governments such as the

¹²⁹ TPT 2009; Kreimer 2000; Calic 2019

U.S. or international organizations, were directed largely to BiH, thus leaving RS in even worse economic backwardness. According to the World Bank half a million homes were completely destroyed as a result of the war; damage in Sarajevo alone amounted to 18 billion USD¹³⁰. In addition to this, there was the backlash to the country's health system, which was systematically destroyed due to the conflict, this led to a resurgence of diseases, as well as the inability to adequately treat the most fragile groups. In addition to the physical, economic and material damage, the psychological damage suffered by the Bosnian population as a result of the conflict must also be added; systematic exposure to massacre, violence, rape and psychological terror has left Bosnian civil society of all ethnicities in a state of suspicion and interethnic mistrust that clashes with the ethnic-consociative system that constitutes the country.

3.2 Today's Bosnia demographic condition

These conditions have set in place for Bosnia an extremely complicated situation, which to date is far from being resolved. Since the country's first official census after the end of the conflict was conducted only in 2013, the only sources we can rely on are vital statistics recorded by the FZS and projections made by academics.

¹³⁰ TPT 2009; Kreimer 2000

Table 16. Vital statistics of Bosnia in 2007 and 2013

Year	Live births	Deaths	Natural change	Crude birth rate (per 1000)	Crude death rate (per 1000)	Natural change (per 1000)	Total fertility rate
2007	32.801	34.392	-1.591	9,4	9,8	-0,5	1,35
2013	30.551	35.379	-4.828	8,8	10,2	-1,4	1,30

Table 17. Bosnia's fertility rate from 1951 to 2022

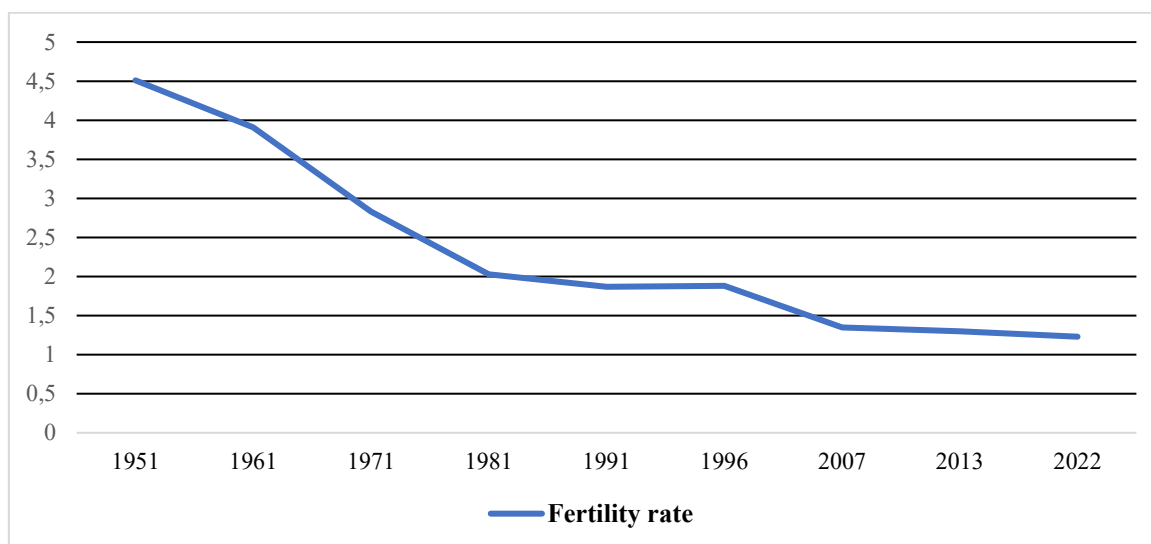
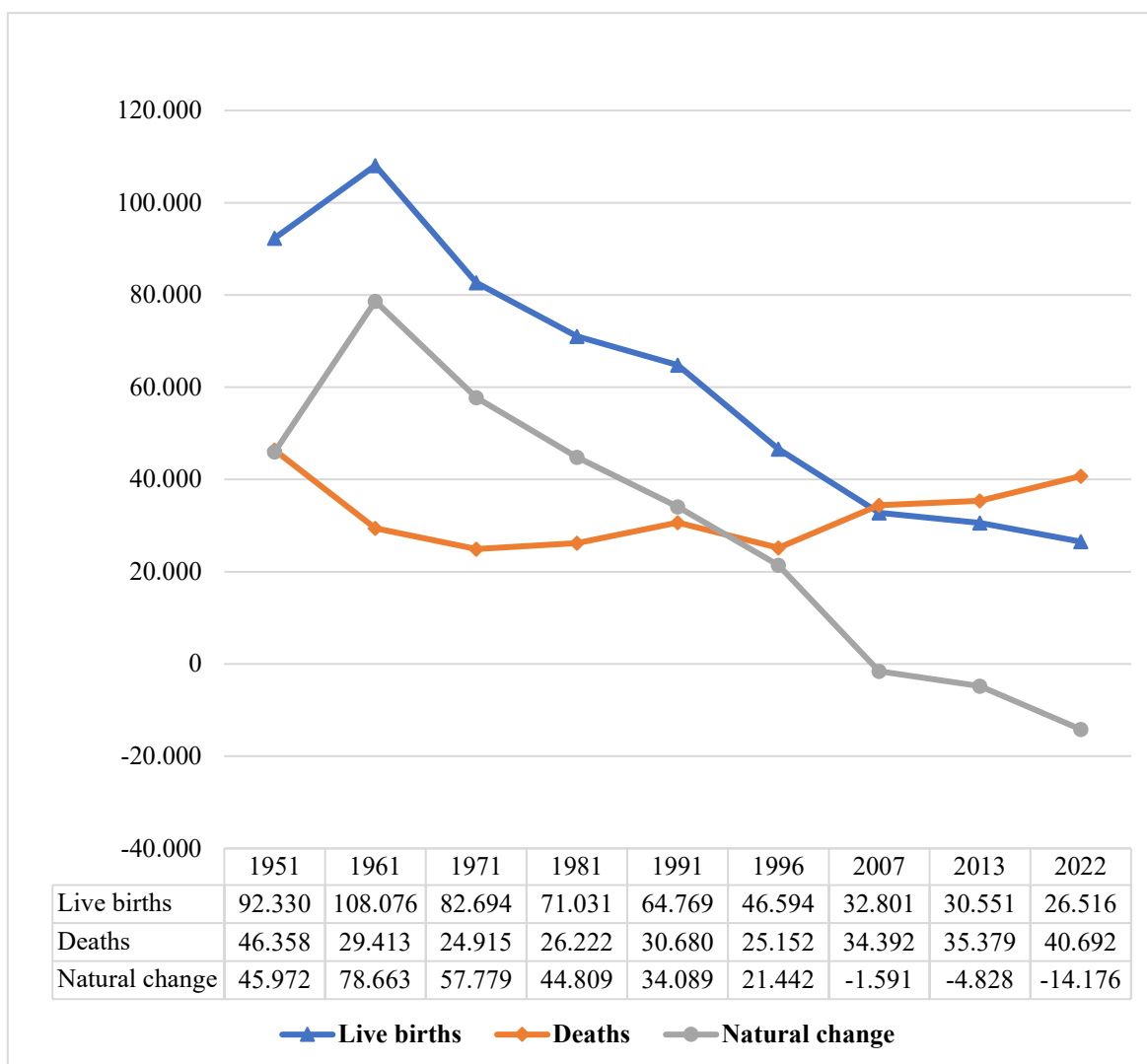


Table 18. Bosnia's natural change decline from 1951 to 2022



As data show, Bosnia's demographic free-fall has shown no sign of stopping, despite the slight relief provided by the return home from 1996 onward of some of the refugees who fled to foreign countries¹³¹ and to the natural rebound phenomenon of postponed unions and births at the end of the conflict¹³². However, with the final exhaustion of those two trends, in 2002 for the Serbian part of the country, and in 2007 for the Croat-Bosniak one¹³³, the whole Federation definitely re-entered into its depopulation process. We can therefore track the switch from demographic stagnation and the start of the

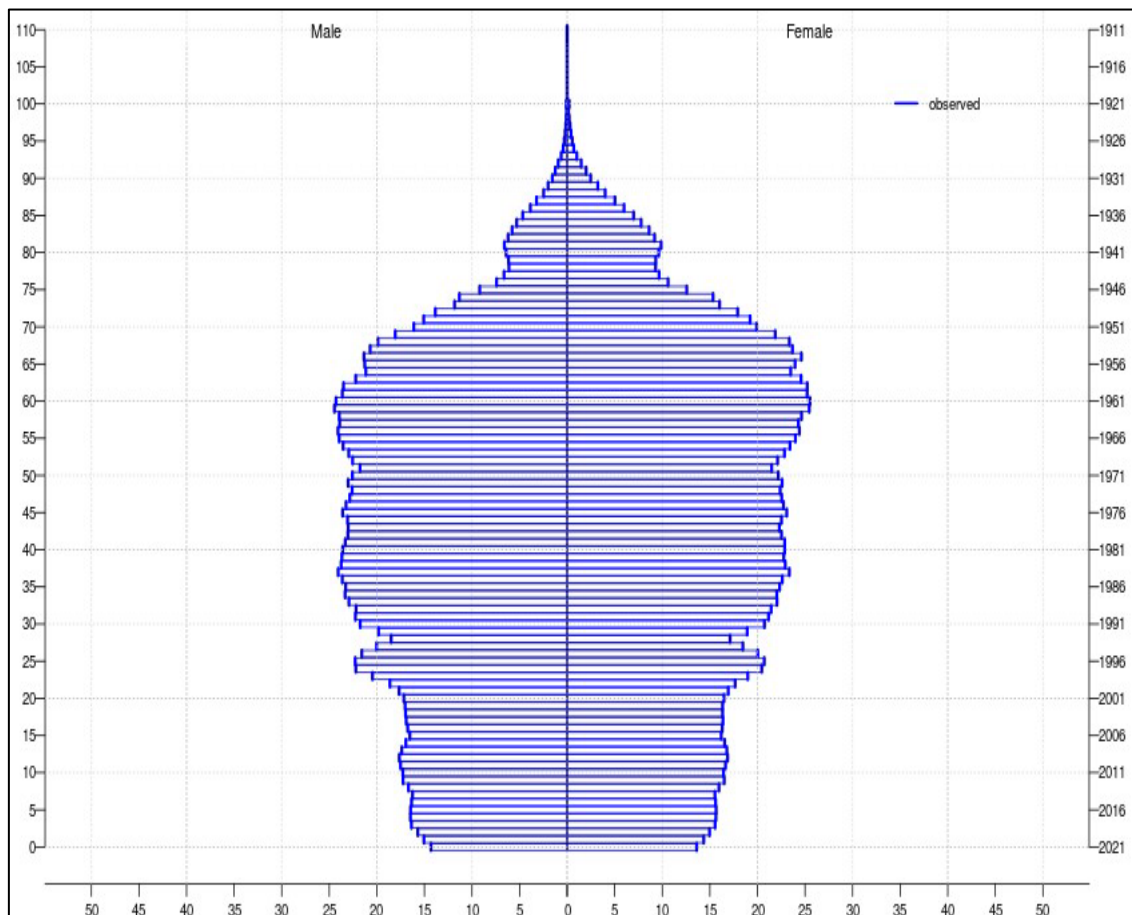
¹³¹ Pasalić 2016

¹³² Jinks 2017

¹³³ Tanović 2014

proper population decline to 2007; since then, the vital statistics present a combination of an increased mortality rate among the adult population compared to the pre-war period and also a lower birth rate, composing a picture reminiscent of other European nations that underwent a regime transition in the post-Cold War context¹³⁴. The demographic decline is being influenced not only by the births decrease but also by the deaths raise due to a very pronounced population ageing.

Table 19. Bosnia Population pyramid in 2022 as provided by UNDESA



The demographic pyramid shows in fact how individuals between 30 and 44 years of age make 22,3% of the total population, the 45-59 cohort 24% and those between 60

¹³⁴ Kazimov et Zakharov 2021.

and 74 years old make the 17,6%; while only 13.3% of the population is aged between 0 and 15 years¹³⁵. The country is thus suffering the effects of an increasingly older population without reaching the adequate replacement rate. At the current rate, PRB forecasts estimate that the population of Bosnia will reach 2.9 million by 2050¹³⁶; the population over the age of 65 accounts for 18% of the country's total population, with an age dependency ratio¹³⁷ of 49%¹³⁸. On the other hand, these statistics, especially the age dependency ratio, present a better figure than other Balkan countries such as Serbia, where the percentage is 54%, 57% in Croatia and 56% in Slovenia¹³⁹. However, this percentage has already risen compared to 2016, when it had set at 44%, forecasts indicate a gradual increase in line with regional and macro-regional trends in Southern Europe¹⁴⁰. In addition to that, some other issues come at stake: it is necessary to consider how still according to the FZS data the average life expectancy for men and women is lower, 73 years for men and 78 years for women, than Slovenia and Croatia, where the average is respectively 84 and 80 years for females and 78 and 75 years for males. Lower numbers are reached only by Serbia, which present a life expectancy of 78 years for women and of 70 years for males¹⁴¹. This aging population is not being replaced, the crude birth rate shows 9 births per 1.000 people, and the fertility index is one the lowest in the World, displaying only 1,25 children per woman¹⁴². Applying the demographic transition model, the country turns out to be in the middle of the transition between the third and fourth stages, where the majority of the population is made up of "baby-boomers," those born between the 1950s and 1960s, individuals who will soon

¹³⁵ UNDESA 2022

¹³⁶ PRB 2023

¹³⁷ As defined by the World Bank: "Age dependency ratio is the ratio of dependents--people younger than 15 or older than 64--to the working-age population--those ages 15-64"

¹³⁸ UNDESA 2022, WorldBank 2022

¹³⁹ World Bank, 2021

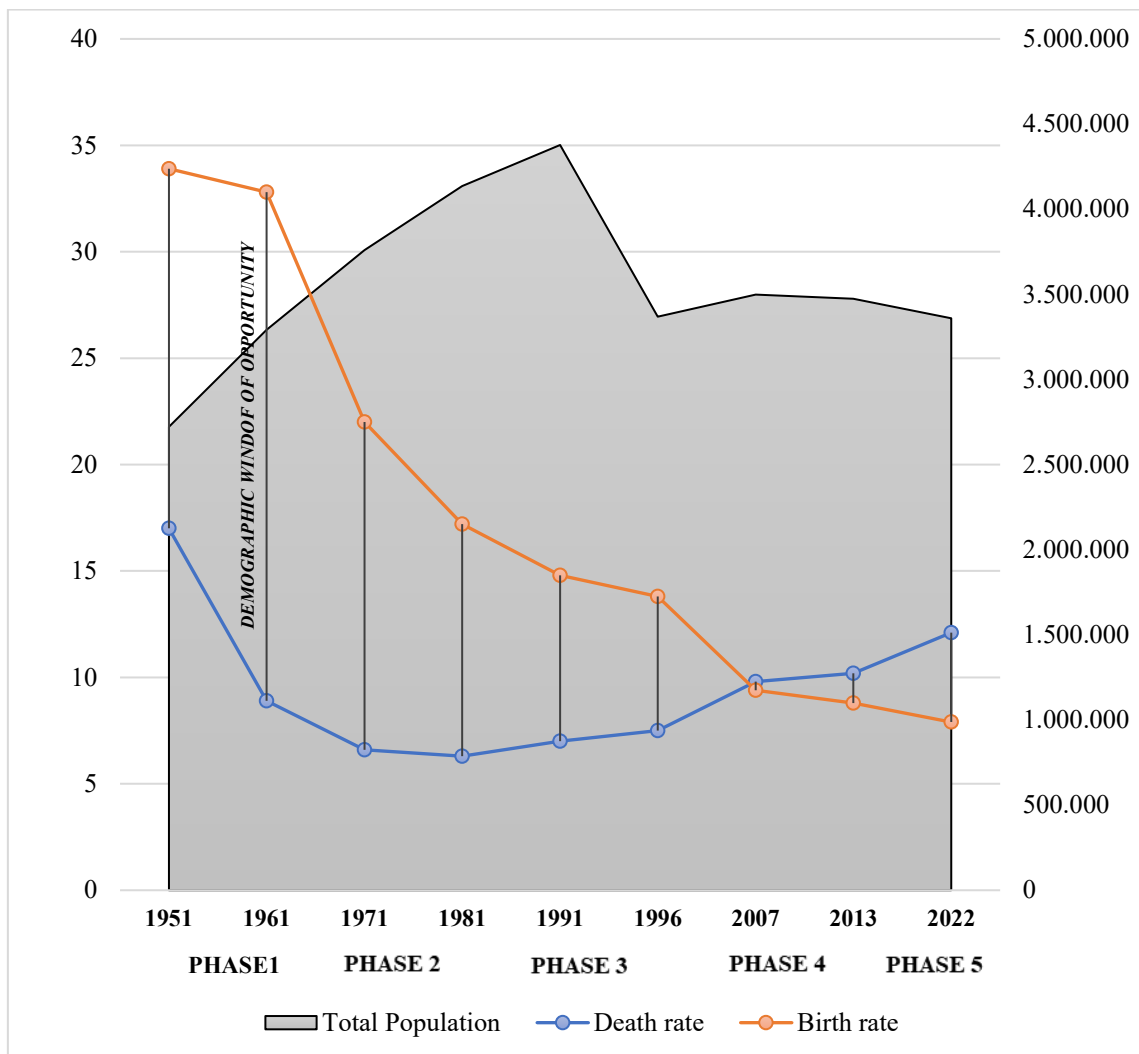
¹⁴⁰ Giordano 2017

¹⁴¹ World Bank 2021

¹⁴² World Bank 2020

enter retirement age and thus move from being service producers to service demanders, the fact that this population is not replaced to the same extent by people born between the 1980s and 1990s can only result in negative economic and social consequences for the country. As much as this trend is definitely common globally, also affecting neighboring Mediterranean countries such as Italy and Spain and more distant realities such as Japan, this phenomenon takes on particular gravity when applied in a context such as Bosnia's. In that sense, the incidence of the conflict in this trend is evident as an "accelerator" of it in the form of the rise of migration, net demographic losses and further decline in the birth rate.

Table 20. Different phases of demographic transition in Bosnia



Regardless of the process of urbanization that began in the 1980s and which has led to a gradual depopulation of the countryside in favor of expanding cities, the major urban centers of the country such as Sarajevo, Tuzla and Banja Luka still do not present sufficiently desirable living conditions for many of their new citizens, especially the ones who received a higher education who then consider to migrate, reflecting the brain-drain trend started in the 70s but on a larger scale¹⁴³. Regarding migration, what has really changed on this side since the 70s it's the variety of categories involved in the outflows: no more only highly educated individuals but also blue collars and less educated individuals. Exits between 1991 and 2013 were estimated at between 500.000 and 800.000 individuals, approximately 11% of the country's population before the conflict¹⁴⁴. In summary, the country seems to be in a grim peculiar situation, presenting a mixture of negative phenomena typical of different countries: while on the one hand we see a substantial rate of emigration out of the country, which it is an indicator of a developing country, in which the youngest and most educated inhabitants still do not consider it worthwhile to invest in their future¹⁴⁵, this is neither accompanied by a phenomenon of migrant return nor by a birth rate high enough to replace migration, on the other hand, the migration phenomenon itself produces its consequences in lowering the birth rate given the composition of the female population that emigrates, which is overwhelmingly composed of young people -in 2021, 85.000 Bosnians are estimated to have left definitely the country, doubling the latter year's numbers¹⁴⁶

¹⁴³ Pasalić et. al. 2017

¹⁴⁴ Ibreljić 2006, Valenta 2013

¹⁴⁵ Goerres, Vanhuyse 2021

¹⁴⁶ Freedom House, 2022.

3.2.1. The 2013 Census and current ethnic distribution

In October 2013, the FZS conducted its first census of the Bosnian population, the first official count of the inhabitants of the Bosnian state since 1991. This census, finally published in 2016, implied that for the first time an official count had been conducted on the numerical and territorial distribution of the various ethnic groups in the country, not without generating political consequences since this is still not recognised by the political authorities of the RS since it shows that the majority of individuals in the country declare themselves 'Bosniak Muslim'.

Figure 15. Ethnic majorities in the different municipalities of the country according to the 2013 Census, where green shows the Bosniak majority, red the Serbian majority, blue the Croat majority, provided by FZS (2016).

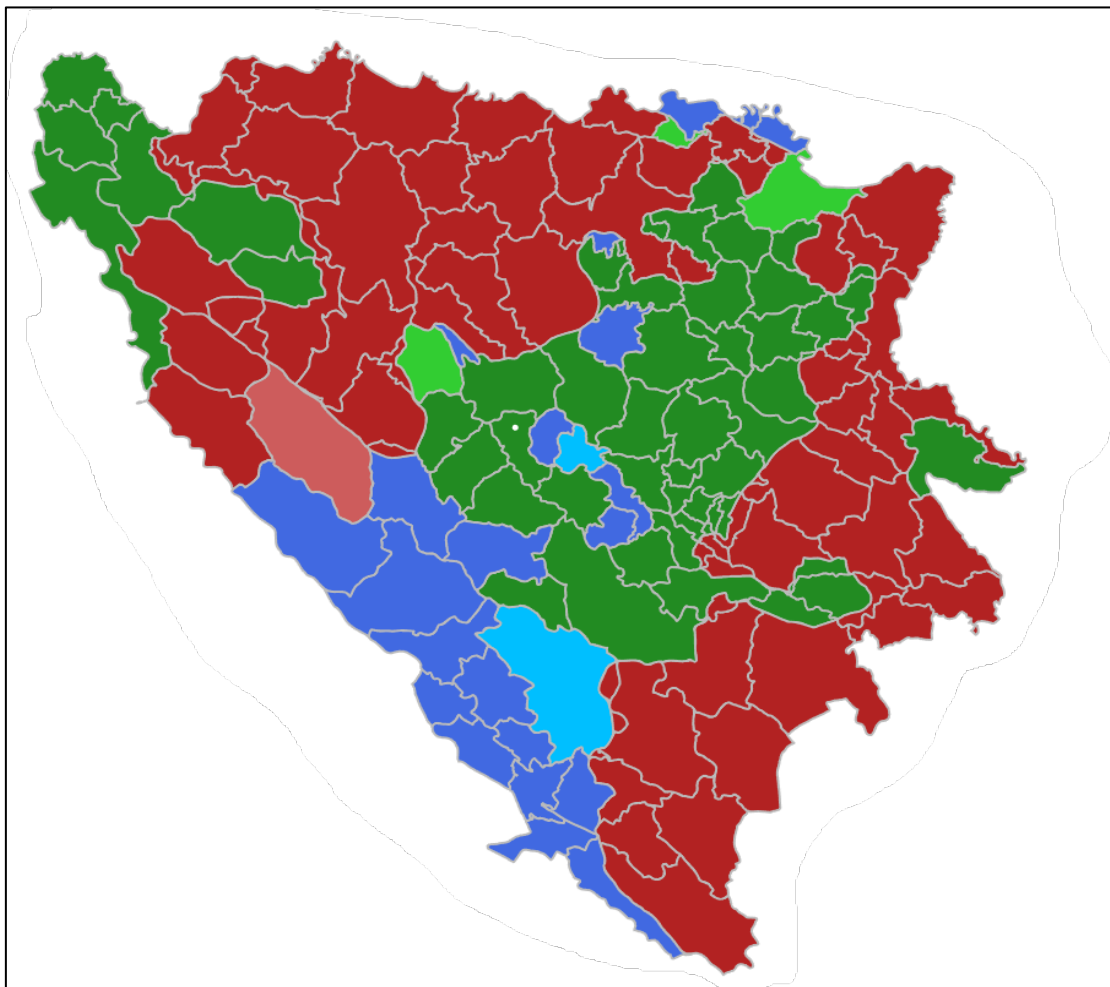
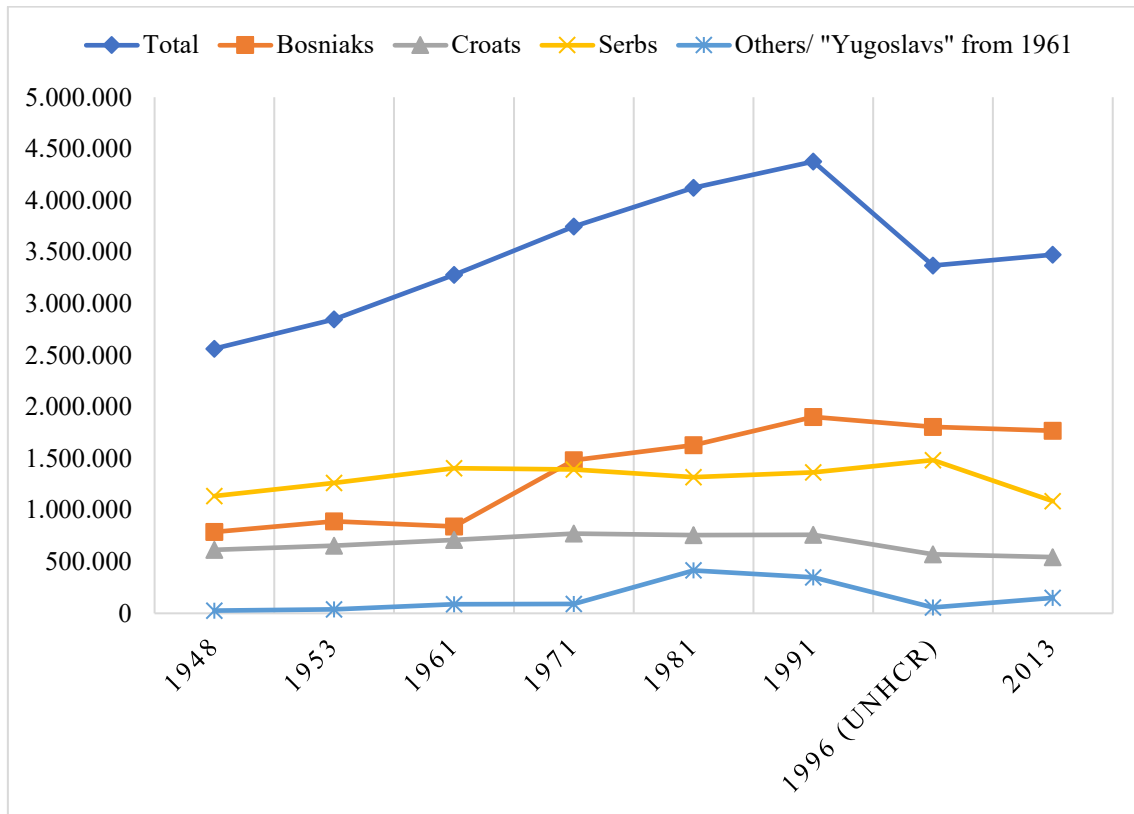


Figure 16. Bosnia's 2013 Census

Ethnic group	Total	BiH	RS
Bosniaks	1.769.592 (50,11%)	1.562.372 (70,4%)	171.839 (14%)
Serbs	1.086.733 (30,78%)	56.550 (2,5%)	1.001.299 (81,5%)
Croats	544.780 (15,43%)	497.883 (22,4%)	29.645 (2,4%)
Others	150.649 (1,47%)	102.415 (4,6%)	25.640 (2,1%)

The final result of the census shows a population of 3,551,754 million individuals, or 825,279 fewer individuals than in 1991, a decrease of -18,85% This figure only officially confirms the indications given to us by previous statistics, about a Bosnian population that has gone from stagnant to sharply declining, due to the war. The focus of this census, however, is on ethnicity; for while on the one hand the BiH statistical agency, the FZS has calculated that Bosniaks now represent the dominant ethnic group in the federation, its counterpart in the RS still refuses to recognize this census as valid, accusing the statistical agency in Sarajevo of counting Bosniaks living abroad as residents of the country.

Figure 17. ETHNIC DISTRIBUTION AND POPULATION (1948-2013)



Moreover, ethnic affiliation continues to be closely linked to religious affiliation, with the number of Bosniaks corresponding almost entirely with the number of Muslim believers, the number of Catholics with the Croats, and the number of Serbs with the number of Orthodox believers, and consequently serving as a defining element of an ethnic identity that is still very strong and overriding the recognition of a common membership in a shared Bosnian community. Proving the majority of one ethnic group in the country would mean a necessary revision to the consociative model of the country's political structure, designed to ensure a fair distribution and separation of powers among three more or less equivalent ethnic groups. The issue of population is thus also translated into a political issue in this way, since there are no cross-party parties in the country that can unite the interests of all three ethnic groups in their political program, presenting themselves instead as carriers of the interests of a particular target group. The political situation should also be interpreted in light of the

fact that the country does not have a final constitution: the 1995 constitution, drafted under the U.S. auspices in the context of the Dayton Accords, was intended to be a temporary document, pending the formation of an appropriate constituent assembly to ratify a final document, which as of 2024 has yet to happen.

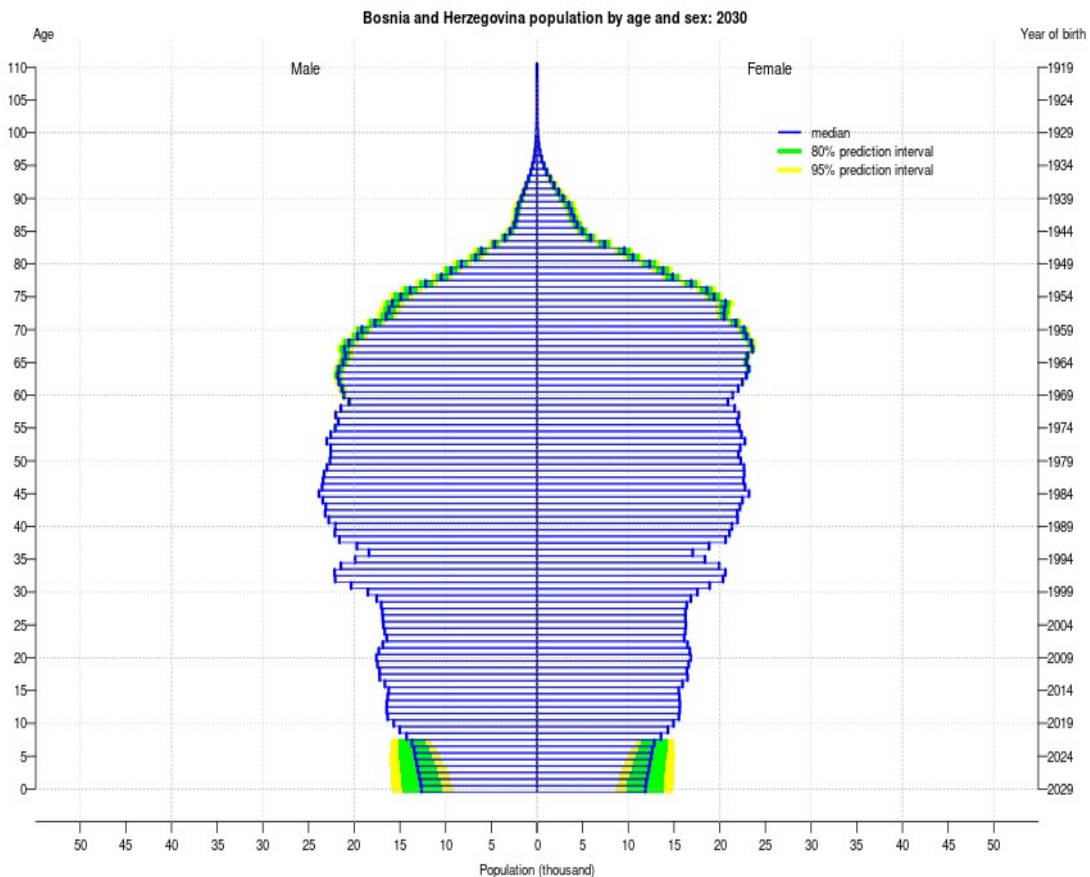
3.3. Possible outcomes for Bosnia's future.

The aforementioned conditions depict an uncertain outlook for the future of Bosnia, whose future it's going to be heavily shaped by this fragile socio-economic situation. There are still no data which show signs of a possible demographic recovery: to date, the country witnesses a significant reduction in marriages and, consequently, in births, due to the awareness by the young Bosnians of the country's difficult socioeconomic situation¹⁴⁷ where children (0-15 years old) remain the most fragile category consistently suffering higher poverty rates than the general population; namely the 30,6% of the 23.4% country's total population¹⁴⁸.

¹⁴⁷ Jinks 2017; Gekić 2020

¹⁴⁸ UNICEF 2020

Figure 18. Population Pyramid in 2030



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 United Nations, DESA, Population Division. *World Population Prospects 2022*. <http://population.un.org/wpp/>

In the coming decades, the process of population aging will continue without any hint of a reversal of understanding, making the population over 45 to be the majority in the country, where the classes of over 65 will have largely surpassed those under 15. This condition represents an extremely heavy burden on the social structure of a state, whose welfare budget must largely be diverted to care for the elderly, diverting it from funds that might have been used to incentivize new births, thus not solving the causes of declining birth rates¹⁴⁹. Because of general aging, the country does not enjoy the benefits of outsourcing for developing countries since it does not have a large enough pool of young, medium-skilled population to convince foreign companies to move their

¹⁴⁹ Giordano 2023

plants there, as can happen in Serbia. Young Bosnians thus find themselves with little incentive to remain in their home country, preferring to move to countries where their skills can bear more fruit. The demographic decline it is then not going to end. Population decline and general aging is just one of the "existential dilemmas" of Bosnian demographics: where the country's ethnodemographic and consequently political framework again seems to be a source of centrifugal and potentially destructive tendencies for the existence of the state itself. In fact, the country's ethnic-political divide seems to be growing wider and wider: the war in Ukraine has further ignited and tensions between communities in the country, where RS leaders have openly challenged the consociative model in the name of greater autonomy, a prelude to a process of full-fledged political separation. These centrifugal drives produce two main negative effects: first, they increase the degree of interethnic tension. Indeed, as we saw in the case of the SFRY breakup process, a crucial role was played by the various political interest groups who based their claims through a process of revocation and exaltation of History in order to construct a political rhetoric that justified xenophobic ethnic nationalism on the basis of historical contingencies. This must naturally make us think of the feeling of "encirclement" perceived by the Serbian minority in the early 1990s. While in fact, on the one hand, Belgrade has made important steps toward overcoming the ideological, political, and cultural parenthesis of Milosevic, on the other side of the border, in Banja Luka-the capital of the RS.-the situation is significantly different. RS civil society is still heavily imbued with historical revanchism and still looks at history in much the same way as it was interpreted thirty years ago; the RS leader himself, Milorad Dodik, is the primary bearer of Serbian particularist sentiments. On the other hand, a second consequence of this situation is how the authorities of the two federal entities have not established a sufficient level of coordination in various areas, the case of the 2013

census conducted by the FZS and not recognized in RS is emblematic but the examples of lack of coordination between the two entities are numerous -also due to the failure to complete the constitution-. leaving numerous gray areas where corruption and crime can infiltrate. Today, Bosnia has a systemic and widespread level of corruption in any state apparatus, from media to education to political dynamics¹⁵⁰. This situation of economic and demographic recession, further worsened by the COVID-19 pandemic, threatens to have tremendous consequences for the country, especially with regard to the already trembling inter-ethnic balance between Serbs and Bosniaks. After all, recent history has clearly shown us how from the stability of Bosnia derives the stability of the whole Balkan region, making it an issue of European importance. It is necessary that in the future European support does not fade and that it succeeds in putting the country in a position to foster economic and demographic recovery. Ambitious social policies are needed in the short term to redress this situation: empowerment of female labor, subsidies for young Bosnians who decide to return from abroad and a welfare plan for young couples wishing to start a family may be starting points.

CONCLUSIONS

This work has covered 400 years of history: this may seem a sidereal magnitude, especially when trying to give answers to recent and dynamic events such as the demographic balance of a territory. However, what I have come to realise during the elaboration of this paper is that, while 'Demography is not destiny', it is definitely capable of shaping it depending on its direction and the cosmetic interpretation made of it. The study of demography is not only instrumental in understanding the inter-ethnic, social and political dynamics of a region as heterogeneous as Bosnia-Herzegovina, but

¹⁵⁰ Freedom House 2022

is absolutely necessary; any reading, even a historical one, that ignores the importance of population change, in its numbers and composition, cannot be said to be complete. It would not be possible to understand the evolutionary process of the dynamics between the different ethnic groups if one is not fully aware of the triggers that dominate these relations; to demonstrate how the weight of demography in an absolute sense and its use as a tool of propaganda and political manipulation in the different historical phases of Bosnia, and especially in the context of the civil war of 1992-1995. Can demography be used as a tool? The answer is yes, it can be used as a tool to manipulate newly acquired territories as the Ottoman rule in the region has shown us. through the forced migration of individuals in order to carry out a process of religious conversion that to this day makes Bosnia-Herzegovina a Muslim-majority state, it can be an economic and administrative tool, as the Austro-Hungarian initiative of conducting blanket censuses in the region and importing German immigrants into the region shows us. Controlling demographics can also be a tool for controlling population and its naming from a legitimizing point of view, as the case of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia has shown us and ideological, as showed us by the management of the ethnic labels by Tito. The increase or decrease in a region's population is not an end in itself phenomenon, it has with it causes-often remote ones-and direct consequences as much in the social fabric as in the political process. One can say "*would the war in Bosnia-Herzegovina have broken out anyway without the ““demographic overtaking”” of the Bosniak population over the Serb one?”*" probably yes, but this demographic indicator, and especially its rhetorical interpretation and manipulation, made possible the justification of the conflict and extermination in a programmatic and ideological key. Demographics proved to be the key within which it was possible to read centuries-old dynamics, where individuals born and lived under the socialist atheism of 20th century Yugoslavia sought answers to their

own sacred national causes dating back to the days of the Ottoman Empire. We have shown how demography is a science capable of answering questions that one would approach with a methodology traditionally reserved for other branches of the social sciences, such as conflict analysis and political science: the interpretation of demographic data and its application within the political mechanism can consistently tie in with the social constructivist approach promoted by Alexander Wendt or Peter Skink, where the objectivity of realism comes to lesser extent in the face of the sharing among individuals of "shared values." Each phenomenon in being in reality is subjected to a value and cultural analysis and interpretation as a result of which that phenomenon is classified as positive or negative; in other words, the "shared values" shared by a given group of individuals about an objective fact imply its declination within a political program. With respect to demography this can help us understand the mechanism of the "Malthusian Trap" and how traditionally a negative value is spontaneously associated with population growth, triggering definite policy reactions, as precisely in the case of the policy program that emerged from the 1986 SAOS Memorandum. Bosnia-Herzegovina thus proved to be a textbook example with respect to the political application of demography. The demographic perspective is also crucial beyond political theory, but also in the application of sociological models relating to the study and analysis of conflicts. Demographic dynamics influence the distribution of the balance of power between the various ethnic groups, which is even more important in such a heterogeneous context as Bosnia. However, this work has also shown how demographic phenomena simultaneously determine and are determined by a country's socio-cultural conditions. The analysis and interpretation of demographic trends is therefore something that does not only focus on historical-political discourse but also directly affects individuals in their daily lives, which, of course, translates into political

aspirations and demands; the roots of Bosnia's current recession are also to be found in its demographic trends over the past four decades, which in turn set the conditions for a lack of economic recovery after the civil war: to understand how the economic crisis triggered a demographic crisis that in turn caused a political crisis is to understand the importance of demographics. Working on this paper, I hope I have succeeded in emphasising how crucial it is not to limit oneself to a one-dimensional approach to the social sciences; complex realities require complex analyses and the multidimensional problematisation of their dynamics. In conclusion, I believe that this demographic approach is also functional in order not to fall into the trap of an individualism that is so pervasive in our contemporary western culture; while recognising the crucial importance of the individual -especially if he or she is a political decision-maker and able to make historical decisions based on his or her perception of reality- this work strongly underlines how crucial it is to emphasise the importance of the social group in defining the dynamics at the meso and macro level. The academic-theoretical and political approach should therefore try not to lose sight of the importance of civil society too in the analysis or implementation of policies, which move away from a political bargain focus or shift to a decision maker level and focus on a bottom-up dimension, more relevant to a civil society context, which has indeed proved successful in cases where it has been applied in post intra-state conflict, including Bosnia.

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