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*Hikmet Karčić*

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### Abstract

The Eastern Bosnian town of Višegrad became a area of interest for Serbian film-maker Emir Kusturica who, with the financial support of Serbia and Republika Srpska, started building an artificial town named *Andrićgrad*. This paper aims to deconstruct *Andrićgrad* through the analysis of its nationalist ethno-symbolism elements in the town.

Keywords: Bosnia, Visegrad, Emir Kusturica, Andrićgrad, ethno-symbolism

### Introduction

The use of mythology, tradition and symbolism in the formation of a modern nation state is called ethno-symbolism. One of the theorists of this school of thought is Anthony Smith. His central thesis is that the 'modern state cannot be understood without taking pre-existing ethnic components into account, the lack of which is likely to create a serious impediment to "nation-building". He views national identity as a close connection between nationalism, ideology and movement which also includes a specific language, sentiments and symbolism.<sup>1</sup> The central premise of "historic ethno-symbolism" is that myths, memories, traditions and symbols of ethnic heritage constitute the major elements that render nationalism uniquely powerful.<sup>2</sup> In this work, the idea of ethnosymbolism will be examined in the case of Republika Srpska (RS) – the Bosnian Serb entity within Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The regime in Communist Yugoslavia started losing its grip and fell into a crisis with the death of Josip Broz Tito in 1980. The Kosovo crisis and the massive crackdown on activists in Kosovo started in 1980. This was followed by economic crisis in the country. The Serb Academy of Arts and Science, with the blessing of Yugoslav President Slobodan Milošević and Serb Orthodox Church officials, wrote an internal plan on the creation of a Serb-dominated Yugoslavia or popularly known as Greater Serbia in 1985. The document was later leaked and published by media in Yugoslavia. After Slovenia and Croatia declared independence and fought brief wars in 1991, the Parliament of Bosnia and Herzegovina voted for a referendum to take place on 29 February 1992. A majority of the turnout voted for independence from Yugoslavia. The Serb Democratic Party with a overwhelming support of the Serb people started forming paralel institutions throughout Bosnia and Herzegovina. On 9 February 1992, the Serb Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina was declared. The Parliament of the Serb Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina was composed of democratically elected Serb Democratic Party members from municipalities and state institutions. On 6 April 1992, the Yugoslav Peoples' Army along with local Serb extremists and members of the Serb Democratic Party started an all out attack on non-Serbs throughout Bosnia and Herzegovina. The aggression lasted for three and a half years, resulting in ethnic-cleansing and genocide of Bosniaks in Eastern and Northern parts of Bosnia, now known as Republika Srpska.

Republika Srpska became an entity in the Dayton Peace Accords in 1995 and its entity lines were established in the Dayton Peace Accords in 1995 according to the front lines. Since the war ended, the Republika Srpska government was oriented towards Serbia. This policy changed

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<sup>1</sup> Anthony Smith, *National Identity*, (London: Penguin Books, 1991), 2.

<sup>2</sup> Nergis Canefe, „Turkish nationalism and ethno-symbolic analysis: the rules of exception“, *Nations and Nationalism* 8 (2), 2002, 133-155.

<http://www.arts.yorku.ca/politics/ncanefe/docs/Turkish%20Nationalism%20and%20Ethno-Symbolic%20Analysis.pdf>

as the Republika Srpska government tried to become politically and nationally independent. The Republika Srpska government and elites along with Serbian nationalists started to create a new Serb identity within Republika Srpska. One of the largest projects financed both by Republika Srpska and by Serbia is the building of *Andrićgrad* – an entire new town within the Eastern Bosnian town of Visegrad.

### The New Old Town

*Andrićgrad* ("Andrić's town") is an idea by Serbian film director Emir Kusturica to build a town as described in Ivo Andrić's novel *The Bridge over the Drina* – but without the Ottoman influence. Emir Kusturica is a famous film director who is currently living in Serbia. He was born in a communist Muslim family in Sarajevo and finished the famous Prague film academy. In the 1980's he received several awards for his films. In 1992, when the siege of Sarajevo started, Kusturica sided with Serb nationalists. In 1995, he filmed *Underground*, which is considered by many Bosniaks as a justification of the war and aggression on Bosnia and Herzegovina. Famous Bosnian writer Alexander Hemon said that it downplayed the atrocities committed and shows "the Balkan war as a product of collective, innate, savage madness."<sup>3</sup> Since the war, he has had heated quarrels with former friends and colleagues about the war. He is considered by a majority of Bosniaks as a traitor. In 2005, he constructed, with the help of the Serbian government and President Vojislav Koštunjica, *Drvengrad* (Wooden Town), where he filmed his film *Life is a Miracle*. It was in this village church that he was baptised and adopted the name Nemanja. About his religious and ethnic identity, Kusturica said: "My father was always saying we were Serbs," he says, "but I didn't pay much attention." Kusturica finally went to a library and confirmed that the Kusturicas had been Orthodox Christian Serbs until, a few centuries ago, a branch of the family converted to Islam when the region was under Ottoman domination."<sup>4</sup>

Kusturica's scorn towards Islam and the Ottoman empire is visible from his official statements regarding the building of *Andrićgrad*. He claims that the Balkans did not go through the Renaissance because they were a part of the Ottoman empire during the period. The aim of *Andrićgrad* is to bring back what was never there – Renaissance. As Kusturica put it: "This town needs to pacify, to bring back time to the end of the middle age and beginning of the new age when on this lands, because of the Ottoman empire, Renaissance did not come to be."<sup>5</sup> The basic concept of *Andrićgrad* is a physical recreation of the Visegrad of Andrić's novel. This has the aim to serve as an imaginative backdrop to help visitors understand and appreciate the history and culture of the town and surrounding area. Kusturica goes on to say that *Andrićgrad* is everything that the Ottoman empire and the Austro-Hungarian could have built but did not.<sup>6</sup> The official tour guide in *Andrićgrad* states: "Because of the Ottomans, we were deprived of Renaissance and now we will return *Andrićgrad* to that epoch."<sup>7</sup> The entire loss which is claimed that Visegrad had because of the Ottomans is being built for future generations to see what they could have had: "At the entrance to the caravan-saray is the Byzantine Palace, followed by what Austria could have built but did not, and what the Ottomans could have built but did not. Finally, towards the main square, which is a kind of classicism, which was supposed to occur during the kingdom between the two World Wars, a street will be built with parts of the Renaissance, which could have been built by Austria."<sup>8</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Dan Halpern, „The (Mis)Directions of Emir Kusturica“, *New York Times*, 08.05.2005, accessed on 15.12.2015, [http://www.nytimes.com/2005/05/08/magazine/08EMIR.html?pagewanted=2&\\_r=2](http://www.nytimes.com/2005/05/08/magazine/08EMIR.html?pagewanted=2&_r=2)

<sup>4</sup> Dan Halpern, „The (Mis)Directions of Emir Kusturica“

<sup>5</sup> SRNA, „Andrićgrad dijagonala renesanse“, RTV, 27.06.2011, accessed on 15.12.2015, [http://www.rtv.rs/sr\\_lat/region/andricgrad-dijagonala-renesanse\\_261012.html](http://www.rtv.rs/sr_lat/region/andricgrad-dijagonala-renesanse_261012.html)

<sup>6</sup> Ena Kukić, „Grad za vješanje“, *Puls demokratije*, <http://www.pulsdemokratije.net/content/grad-za-vjesanje>

<sup>7</sup> Jasmina Rose, „Srpski nacionalisti izgradili Andrićgrad“, 21.05.2014, accessed on 15.12.2015, DW, <http://www.dw.de/srpski-nacionalisti-izgradili-andri%C4%87grad/a-17651455>

<sup>8</sup> Official website of Visegrad Tourism Board, <http://www.visegradturizam.com/latinica/andricgrad>

Vidovdan or St. Vitus Day has a very special place in the history of the Serbian people and the Orthodox Christian faith. St. Vitus is celebrated by Orthodox Christians but is also considered the day when the Battle at Kosovo Polje in 1389 between the Ottomans and medieval Serb army. Micheal Sells explains:

The portrayal of Layar as a Christ figure, Kosovo as a Serb Golgotha and Muslims as the evil brood of "cursed Hagar" was to be found in sermons and chronicles. However, the Kosovo legend, as a story that would fix Slavic Muslims as Christ killers and race traitors, was still not fully realized.<sup>9</sup>

The date 28 June was crucial in modern day Serb history such as the assassination of the Duke Franz Ferdinand in 1914 in Sarajevo which started the First World War. Siding with Serb nationalist history, Emir Kusturica started off building *Andrićgrad* on 28 June 2011 with a large manifestation involving politicians from Serbia and Republika Srpska.<sup>10</sup> The official opening of *Andrićgrad* was also on St. Vitus day - 28 June 2014 which was again attended by a large number of Serb academics and politicians including Serb Patriarch Irinej, Serbian Ministers Ivica Dačić, Aleksandar Vulin and Nikola Selaković, Prince Aleksandar Karađorđević, Republika Srpska President Milorad Dodik and others.<sup>11</sup>

There are currently two statues in *Andrićgrad*—a statue of Ivo Andrić and Petar II Petrović Njegoš. Njegoš was a Prince in Montenegro but most famous for his writing one of the most influential works in Serbian literature and a national myth about the massacre of Serbian converts to Islam (*poturice* – those who became 'Turks') called *The Mountain Wreath*. This literary work was used by Serb extremists in dehumanizing Bosniaks and justifying the crimes committed throughout modern history. Sells explains:

Njegoš's drama opens with Bishop Danilo, the play's protagonist, brooding on the evil of Islam, the tragedy of Kosovo and the treason of Vuk Branković. Danilo's warrior's suggest celebrating the holy day (Pentecost) by 'cleansing' (*čistiti*) the land of non-Christians. The chorus chants: "The high mountains reek with the stench of non-Christians." One of Danilo's men proclaims that struggle will not end until 'we' or the Turks [Slavic Muslims] are exterminated. The references to the Slavic Muslims as 'Turkifiers' (*Poturice*) or as 'Turks' crystalizes the view that by converting to Islam from Christianity, the Muslims had changed their racial identity and joined the race of Turks who killed the Christ – Prince Lazar. Throughout the Bosnian genocide of 1992-1995, the Serb nationalists and Serb clerics referred to Bosnian Slavic Muslims as 'Turks', even though all political ties with Turkey ended with the demise of the Ottoman Empire after World War I.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Michael A. Sells, *The Bridge Betrayed: Religion and Genocide in Bosnia*, (California: University of California Press), 39.

<sup>10</sup> The opening ceremony was also attended by the Imam in Visegrad Hasan Skorupan, who is originally from Priboj, Serbia. Soon after, he was sacked from his post in Visegrad by the Mufti of Goražde Hamed Efendić. Bosnian and Republika Srpska media gave a lot of attention to this case. For more see: N. Janković, „Imamu greh srpska himna“, 04.08.2011, accessed on 15.12.2015, <http://www.novosti.rs/vesti/naslovna/aktuelno.69.html:340505-Imamu-greh-srpska-himna>

<sup>11</sup> Tanjug, „Svečano otvoren Andrićgrad“, Blic, 28. 06. 2014, accessed on 21.08.2015, <http://www.blic.rs/Vesti/Drustvo/476727/Svecano-otvoren-Andricgrad>

<sup>12</sup> Sells, *The Bridge Betrayed: Religion and Genocide in Bosnia*

The monument dedicated to Petar II Petrović Njegoš was uncovered by Matija Bećković – a Serb intellectual, who is a member of the Serb Academy of Arts and Science, a strong supporter of Radovan Karadžić and a Srebrenica genocide denier.<sup>13</sup>

On the anniversary of the First World War a mosaic dedicated to Gavrilo Princip and the *Mlada Bosna* group along with a statue of Gavrilo Princip was opened in *Andrićgrad*. Serb political elites such as Serbian President Aleksandar Vučić and Republika Srpska President Milorad Dodik both refused to attend the one hundredth anniversary commemoration of archduke Franz Ferdinand's assassination in Sarajevo and instead attended the unveiling of Gavrilo Princip's mosaic in *Andrićgrad*.<sup>14</sup> The placement of Gavrilo Princip and uncovering the *Mlada Bosna* mosaic can be viewed as Smith's explanation that with such ceremonies families who lost their members in war and other national disasters will draw their example and the strength of purpose and spirit will inspire them to similar heroism.<sup>15</sup>

The main financiers of this project are the RS government and the Serbian government. This creative partnership is perhaps the key to understanding what *Andrićgrad* is really about – *Andrićgrad* is an ideological construction. The aim of building a new town is to give an alternative version of Višegrad's past that provides historical and cultural legitimacy for its present and future ideological plans. On 28 June 2012, Vuk Jeremić, the then Foreign Minister of Serbia attended the uncovering of Ivo Andrić's statue in Višegrad and said: "Denying the myth that the Drina is an Iron Curtain, are our lives. This river today is not a line of separation but a bridge and a link."<sup>16</sup> Jeremić was referring to the Drina river as the border between Bosnia and Serbia. One of the aims of the Serb nationalists in the nineties was eliminating this border between Serbs. Another mosaic located in *Andrićgrad* shows a tag-of-war being played by Republika Srpska President Milorad Dodik, Emir Kusturica and several other figures while Serbian tennis player Novak Đoković and Yugoslav author Branko Ćopić are looking on. This mosaic clearly shows an attempt to combine Yugoslav and Serb political, cultural and sport figures as a joint force winning a tag-of-war against the unseen enemy.

The need to invent new-old symbols and culture was explained by Smith:

...even where a nation-to-be could boast no ethnic antecedents of importance and where any ethnic ties were shadowy or fabricated, the need to forge out of whatever cultural components were available a coherent mythology and symbolism of a community of history and culture became everywhere paramount as a condition of national survival and unity. Without some ethnic lineage the nation-to-be could fall apart.<sup>17</sup>

The building of *Andrićgrad* has an aim to form a new identity with a combination of new and old, in most cases – borrowed identities, mythology and consciousness.

An important institution in *Andrićgrad* is the Andrić Institute whose aim is to promote the Serb alphabet and language. The director of Andrić Institute stated, "We can find few companies which names are written in Cyrillic. Also on newsstands can find few newspapers printed in Cyrillic ... There are books in Cyrillic, more than newspapers, but I would say not enough. It is an indicator of the status of the Serbian language and Serbian language in the Serbian national

<sup>13</sup> U Andrićgradu otkriven spomenik Njegošu, Blic, 29.11.2013, accessed on 21.08.2015, <http://www.blic.rs/Kultura/Vesti/423746/U-Andricgradu-otkriven-spomenik-Njegosu>

<sup>14</sup> Gianluca Mezzofiore, „Franz Ferdinand Assassination: Serb Leaders Boycott Sarajevo Ceremony to Unveil Gavrilo Princip Tribute in Andrićgrad“, International Business Times, 27.06.2014, <http://www.ibtimes.co.uk/franz-ferdinand-assassination-serb-leaders-boycott-sarajevo-ceremony-unveil-gavrilo-princip-1454487>

<sup>15</sup> Smith, *National Identity*, 162-163.

<sup>16</sup> Nikola Janković, „Godišnjica gradnje Andrićgrada: Otkriven spomenik nobelovcu“, Novosti, 28.06.2012, accessed on 21.08.2015, <http://www.novosti.rs/vesti/naslovna/reportaze/aktuelno.293.html:386201-Godisnjica-gradnje-Andricgrada-Otkriven-spomenik-nobelovcu>

<sup>17</sup> Smith, *National Identity*, 42

environments.” In order to strengthen the awareness that the Serb language should be "at the center of national being and culture“ is one of the aims of the Andric Institute.

The importance of language is considered a key element in national identity. According to Smith nationalism as a language and symbolism begins as an élite phenomenon in which intellectuals play a preponderant role. A nationalist language and symbolism is broader than an ideology or ideological movement. Nationalist symbolism connects ideology with the "mass sentiments" of wider segments of the population, through slogans, ideas, symbols and ceremonies:

Notions of autonomy and authenticity and symbols of self-reliance and of natural community (for example, re-enactments of resistance events, or symbols of landscape and historical monuments or of local products, crafts or sports) exemplify the fusion of cognitive and expressive aspects and the links with wider sentiments and aspirations.<sup>18</sup>

The only religious building in *Andrićgrad* is a Serb Orthodox Church interestingly dedicated to Holy Prince Lazar and the Martyrs of Kosovo. Prince Lazar was the was a medieval Serbian ruler who took part in the Battle of Kosovo in 1389 against the Ottoman army under the command of Sultan Murad I. The myth of the Kosovo battle is most important for Serb Orthodoxy and for Serb national identity. The opening of the Church was attended by high-ranking Church officials. The role of the Church in this case is both social and spiritual. The statue of Njegoš is located in front of the Church. Here a interwine of common myths and common ethnic origins can be noticed. This combination of Njegoš, a Prince-bishop and poet with Prince Lazar is in fact a fusion of poetic legend and inspiring myths of resistance to Ottoman Turkish tyranny.

*Andrićgrad* is closely connected with Mehmed Pasha Sokolović's Bridge which is a clear case of high-jacked monuments and memories. This bridge built in the 15th century is being used by Emir Kusturica for the promotion of his new town. Official delegations being brought on the brigde are shown a view of *Andrićgrad* and told how a Serb-converted to Islam, Mehmed Pasha Sokolović built the bridge in honour of his hometown.

Montenegrin journalist Andrej Nikolaidis called *Andrićgrad* the "Disneyland of Serb nationalism“ and he draws a parallel with Macedonia's new cultural politics of monument building transforming Skopje into what Nikolaidis calls "Aleksandrograd“.<sup>19</sup>

## Rewritten History

Before the war, the municipality of Visegrad had a population of 21,000 persons, of which 63% were Bosniaks and 32% were Serbs. On 6 April 1992, when Visegrad was attacked from across the nearby border with Serbia by the Yugoslav People's Army (JNA), 65% of the town's residents were ethnic Bosnian Muslims, or Bosniaks. A few months later, only Serbs remained. The demographic transformation had been brought about by a campaign of terror aimed at eliminating the social, political, economic and cultural presence in Visegrad of its Bosniak population. During World War II and during the aggression in 1992, it was a popular site of mass murder by local Serb policemen and soldiers. The victims – now called Turks – were brought to the bridge, slaughtered, and their bodies thrown into the Drina River. It is estimated that between 1,500 and 3,000 Bosniaks were killed in Visegrad during 1992-95. On at least two occasions, Bosnian Serb soldiers and policemen took part in burning victims alive. The Trial Chamber in the case of Milan and Sredoje Lukic said:

In the all too long, sad and wretched history of man's inhumanity to man, the Pionirska street and Bikavac fires must rank high. At the close of the twentieth century, a century

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<sup>18</sup> Smith, *National Identity*, 73

<sup>19</sup> Andrej Nikolaidis, „Disneyland srpskog nacionalizma“, Al Jazeera Balkans, 29.06.2014, accessed on 15.12.2015, <http://balkans.aljazeera.net/vijesti/disneyland-srpskog-nacionalizma>

marked by war and bloodshed on a colossal scale, these horrific events stand out for the viciousness of the incendiary attack, for the obvious premeditation and calculation that defined it, for the sheer callousness and brutality of herding, trapping and locking the victims in the two houses, thereby rendering them helpless in the ensuing inferno, and for the degree of pain and suffering inflicted on the victims as they were burnt alive.

According to demographic expert Ewa Tabeau, when the war started, "Visegrad was inhabited by almost twice as many Muslims as Serbs, and that, in 1997, Serbs made up 95.9 per cent of the population and the Muslim population had dropped to below one per cent."<sup>20</sup> Today, the Bosniak population in Visegrad is below 5 per cent.

### Conclusion

*Andrićgrad* is a clear example of how new national identities and nationalities can and are being built. A town built on a combination of Roman, Greek and Byzantine architecture, along with borrowed national identities like Njegoš, Prince Lazar and Princip, and modern-day Serb heroes like tennis player Novak Đoković, aims to create a new Serb identity in Republika Srpska. Kusturica claims that building *Andrićgrad* is "a fight for survival" and an aim "to bring dignity back to Visegrad."<sup>21</sup> The next projects announced in *Andrićgrad* is the production of a film based on Ivo Andrić's novel *The Bridge over the Drina* and a play under the same title to be produced by the La Fenice Theatre in Venice. The case of *Andrićgrad* is a good example of top-down myth-making, or better yet an attempt to do so. Here religious and national elites use nationalism as a form of culture - an ideology, a language, mythology, symbolism and consciousness – with the aim of developing something they did not have. The development of common ethnic memories and myths help mobilize masses and provide them a sense of belonging. In this case, the myths of sacrifice and war prove successful and effective.

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<sup>20</sup> ICTY, Milan and Sredoje Lukic Judgement, 20 July 2009, 24

<sup>21</sup> Sveltana Tadić, „Emir Kusturica: Andrić grad borba za opstanak i budućnost“, Glas Srpske, 03.01.2013, accessed on 21.08.2015, [http://www.glassrpske.com/novosti/vijesti\\_dana/Emir-Kusturica-Andric-grad-borba-za-opstanak-i-buducnost/lat/105140.html](http://www.glassrpske.com/novosti/vijesti_dana/Emir-Kusturica-Andric-grad-borba-za-opstanak-i-buducnost/lat/105140.html)