

# What's in a Name?

## Ascriptions for Bosnian Muslims in the CIA-BICP Archive

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### Abstract

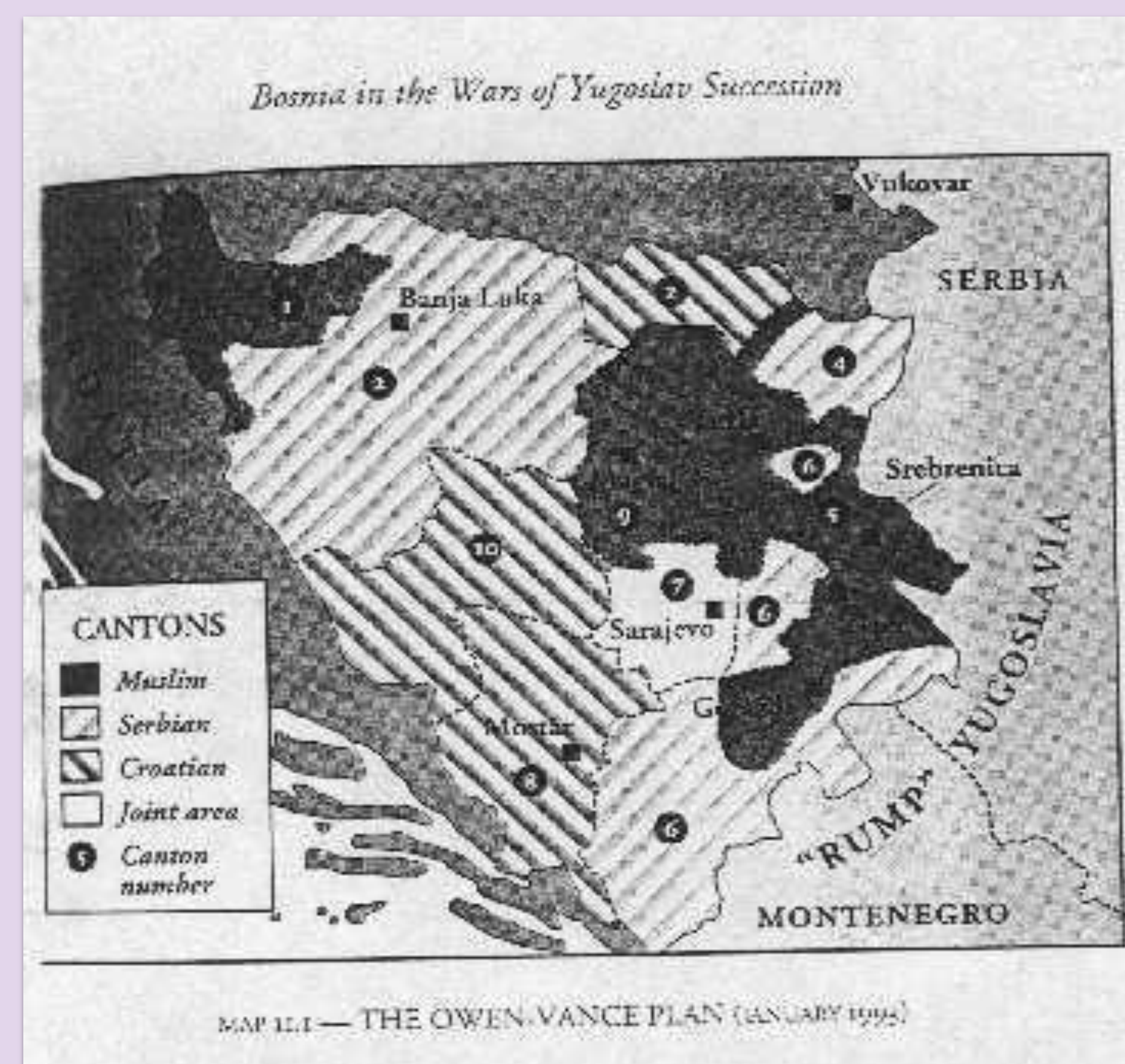
This analysis examines the subtle valences of the terms used to describe the players in the Bosnian War and how these terms changed parallel to the new partition plans, the Vance-Owen Plan, the Owen-Stoltenberg Plan, and the Dayton Agreement. Ascriptions contain a great deal of meaning that is not always explicit. Terminology carries with it both overt and implicit assumptions and associations that can reflect the speaker's mental model or analytic narrative. The recently declassified documents found in the CIA-BICP Archive provide an excellent demonstration of this phenomenon, as seen in the U.S. intelligence community's shift from use of the label "Muslim" to use of the label "Bosniak." Use of the label "Muslim" inadvertently feeds into Serbia's "stolen territory" myth, whereas the shift to use of the label "Bosniak" reflects the collective comprehension of the historical basis for this group's territorial holdings within Bosnia.

### Change of use in Archive

The first mention of the term "Bosniak" in the CIA-BICP documents occurs in the document for 1995-05-25. It is spelled "Bosniac" and is used in reference to the Bosniak-Croat federation which was formed in 1994 as something of a ceasefire agreement between the Bosniaks and the Bosnian Croats.

### "Muslims" until after 1996.

Use of the term Muslim to refer to the Muslims in Bosnia-Herzegovina conveys a religious affiliation of an individual to a group, one that could be distinct from a national affiliation. "Muslim" does not capture the full extent of the issue here, in that this is not simply a religious conflict, it is a conflict of nationalism and land holdings. In this case, the use of the label "Muslim" has unexamined implications, such as harkening to the derogatory label "Turk" used by Bosnian Serbs or Croats in reference to the myth that this group of Bosnians are descended from the Turkish invaders of the Ottoman Empire.



Robert J. Donia and John V. Fine Jr., *Bosnia and Herzegovina: A Tradition Betrayed*

### "Bosniaks" after 1995-05-25.

The term Bosniak implies a *national* affiliation, which can encompass a religious affiliation. "Bosniak" creates a cohesive identity for these people on par with the Bosnian Serbs or Bosnian Croats and lends an egalitarian air to the understanding of the complex relationships at work in Bosnia. Further, use of the label "Bosniak" signifies an understanding that this group has a historical basis in Bosnia and acknowledges their right to the territories they hold, rather than referencing the myth that they are descended from foreigners or invaders.



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### Ascriptions (Self vs. Other):

- "Bosniak"
- "Muslim"
- "Turk"
- "Poturice"
- "Balija"

### Implications

This analysis produces a number of long-lasting implications, not all of which are unique to Bosnia. The importance of language is certainly not restricted to this situation, but what happened in Bosnia and the information revealed in the CIA-BICP Archive present a sterling example of how the use of language can have serious unintended consequences. This is why onomastics and a more thorough understanding of ethnic and religious identity formation is important, especially in the case of Bosnia. Understanding the subtle nuances of language and the effect it can have on a situation or the people involved is essential to understanding how ethnic or cultural tensions of this nature can arise and be propagated, even unintentionally.

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