



## **Identity sameness and piracy in ethnic conflict: the case of Bruce Lee in the post-war re-symbolization of Bosnia and Herzegovina**

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The large-scale ethnic homogenization of Bosnia and Herzegovina that took place between 1992-95 was accompanied by a systematic process of domicide, in which material symbols of ethnic 'other', pan-Slavic and cosmopolitan identification were expunged. This paper considers the role of re-symbolization in Bosnia's post-war reconstruction, with a specific focus on how new material symbols of identity often become sites for the expression of violent post-war emotions. Based on the case of the mounting and subsequent destruction of a monument to late Chinese-American martial artist Bruce Lee in the central Bosnian city of Mostar, I explain why cosmopolitan rather than ethnic identity symbols tend to provoke the most extreme reactions. Drawing on and developing economic anthropologist Annette B. Weiner's concept of 'inalienable possessions', I argue that the post-war mounting of such objects is often regarded as a form of identity piracy in which that which was once commonly possessed is now split and ethnically exclusively appropriated. In so doing the paper redresses a dominant assumption in much anthropological and development-sector thinking on identity, conflict and reconciliation. Identity difference, such as that wrought by the ethnic-nationalisms that supplanted Communism as the legitimate discourses of state in Central Europe, undoubtedly causes conflict. However, rarely, as many scholars have suggested, is the extreme emotional intensity of that conflict either an expression of repressed ethnic activism or a modern process of ethnic boundary drawing. Rather, often, it emanates fundamentally from the identity samenesses that differentiation disrupts.