Can Mobile Phone Numbers Serve as Ethnic Markers?

And the Ethnic Division of Mobile Phone Companies in Bosnia and Herzegovina
Abstract

In Bosnia and Herzegovina mobile phone numbers can in some way reflect ethnicity. This study will describe how and why urban youth in Sarajevo, in their own stated reality motivate and perceive selection of mobile phone companies and mobile phone numbers in Bosnia and Herzegovina according to their ethnic group. The research questions are: How do urban youth in Sarajevo reason when they choose mobile phone companies? How do urban youth in Sarajevo perceive and understand consequences of the divide of mobile phone companies and numbers in Bosnia and Herzegovina? To what extent can mobile phone numbers be perceived as an ethnic marker?

By using qualitative interviews the results of the study is presented. Mobile phone numbers can serve as an ethnic marker, but it is not used by urban youth in Sarajevo to distinguish ethnicity. Finally, the thesis argues that an ethnic structure among mobile phone companies are discovered but even in this rigid ethnic structure people choose mobile phone companies of economic reasons rather than of ethnic implications.

**Keywords:** Ethnicity, Ethnic Group, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Ethnic Division, Qualitative Interview.
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1. Introduction

1.1 Ethnic Division in Bosnia and Herzegovina
The Dayton Peace Accord was signed in December 1995 and became the end of the long and tragic Bosnian war. The Dayton Peace Accord was not only a peace treaty, it was above all a constitution for the Bosnian people to live under in the future. It was designed by international experts, politicians and the three parts of the conflict (Bosnian-Serbs, Bosnian-Croats and Bosniaks) to work out how the state would be separated and formed (Chandler 2000:66-69). The new state of Bosnia and Herzegovina consists of two entities, Republika Srpska and The Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Republika Srpska is a largely a mono-ethnic entity were the Bosnian-Serbs are the dominant ethnic group. The Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina is structured in ten cantons, eight cantons are mono-ethnical and three multi-ethnical. The federation in mostly dominated by Bosniaks but in some cantons Bosnian-Croats are dominant. The border between The Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Republika Srpska was drawn along the frontier when the war ended in 1995. Just some minor adjustments were made (Fox & Wallich 1997:1).

The Bosnian Telecommunication companies were established in the late 90s and were from the beginning dominated by the three main ethnic groups of Bosnia and Herzegovina, one company for each ethnicity. This process started with the Dayton peace accord, where power was divided among ethnic lines. This divide starts in the constitution and runs through all levels of society (Chandler 2000:69). When the phone companies were established, just a few years after the war they were also divided by ethnic principles. When living in Sarajevo I heard jokes like “Who is this serb calling me?” and found out that in some way phone number might represent ethnicity.

In Bosnia and Herzegovina there are three companies providing mobile phone services: (1) BH-Telecom owned mainly by the federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, one of the entities. This company is governed by Bosniak officials (bhtelecom.ba) and the prefix is
061- (bhtelecom.ba). (2) HT:Eronet is owned mainly by the federal government and T-Hrvatski Telecom, a Croatian telecommunication company (ht.ba). The prefix is 063-.

(3) Telekom Srpske is the third company with the Headquarter based in Banja Luka, the capital of Rpublika Srpska, the other entity. The company was sold to Telekom Serbije in 2006 by Rpublika Srpska (telekom.rs). Based on the prefix of the number, it was in some way possible to categorize mobile phone users into ethnicity. Hence, the main focus is in what way phone numbers can reflect ethnicity and to investigate and explain how this phenomenon came into existence and what implications it might produce.

1.2 Aim and Research Questions
The first aim of the study is to describe how and why urban youth in Sarajevo, in their own stated reality motivate and perceive selection of mobile phone companies and mobile phone numbers in Bosnia and Herzegovina according to their ethnic group. As previously stated mobile phone numbers were in some way ethnically distributed after the war. Therefore this study will, at first check if this is actually the case today. The hypothesis is that it still exists. The purpose of the analysis is therefore to find out if and why urban youth today choose numbers after ethnicity.

The second aim is to get a better understanding of why the division of mobile phone number and mobile phone companies on ethnical premises actually occur and what implications it might produce.

How do urban youth in Sarajevo reason when they choose mobile phone companies?

How do urban youth in Sarajevo perceive and understand consequences of the divide of mobile phone companies and numbers in Bosnia and Herzegovina?

To what extent can mobile phone numbers be perceived as an ethnic marker?

In order to answer these three questions empirical data has to be acquired using qualitative interviews. The empirical data is then analyzed and put in contrast to theories of ethnicity.
1.3 Relevance to Peace and Conflict Studies
To research what civilians understand and perceive of the situation is interesting as in Bosnia and Herzegovina most information is about politics and politicians and that is a rather bleak picture. In politics there is a current status quo, still three months after the election in October 2010 no government has been formed (balkaninsight.com). But what about everyday life of the citizens, does any change occur there? In the concluding remarks in his article ‘Non-ethnic Condemnation in Post-War Stolac: An Ethnographic Case-Study from Bosnia-Herzegovina’ Kolind (2002:134) argues that more effort should be focused on everyday interaction among ordinary people rather than on political elites when building a democratic society.

Other studies about ethnicity has been conducted in Bosnia and Herzegovina such as Kolind’s study about ethnic condemnation in the Herzegovinian town of Stolac and the documentary movie “We are all neighbors” by Tone Bringa (1993) where the war basically enters, step by step into a few small Bosnian villages. The research that will be conducted in this study is original research since no study about the implication of the division of phone numbers and phone companies has been made before. Also, the study will deliver empirical material to be used in other studies.

1.4 Delimitations
With ‘urban youth’ people aged between 18-35 years are considered. This study will take place in Sarajevo and mainly focus on the situation in the town. The study has no aim to generalize its results to all of Bosnia and Herzegovina even though explanations of the mobile phone situation in all of the country will be conducted.

1.5 Outline of the Thesis
In the following chapter the method used in this study will be presented. A qualitative interview method will be presented using hermeneutic approach to science. In the third chapter the theory of ethnicity will be discussed in order to elucidate the notion of
ethnic marker. In the fourth chapter the empirical material from the interviews will be analyzed and processed. Finally, in the fifth chapter, a concluding discussion will be conducted and the results presented.
2. Method

As in all studies, what determine the method to be applied are the aims of the study. Then the method limits what will actually be taken into consideration in the study (Lantz 1993:24). The research questions are formulated to focus on perception and understanding of the respondent’s subjective reality. Hence, the study will be a qualitative one using interviews to collect data. A qualitative focus is the preferred option since it can reach deeper than a quantitative study. But, a quantitative study is the favorable choice when generalizations are sought (Lantz 93:16). As this study has no aim to generalizing a qualitative study is preferable. This chapter will first discuss the hermeneutic approach on perception and understanding, then the methodology of the study will be described and motivated. The end of the chapter will explain how the analysis of the study will be conducted.

2.1 Hermeneutic Approach on Qualitative Research

It was the god Hermes who delivered announcements from the gods to the people and the people had to understand and perceive the announcements received. In its origin hermeneutics was in theology the way to find meaning in biblical texts and the concept got its name from Hermes. It was more than the actual language in the text that was analyzed. The theologies using hermeneutics attempted to see the biblical texts in its original surrounding and environment, to understand the meanings of the texts in its original time and culture (Lantz 1993:26).

Since the study has a focus on understanding and perception of a specific phenomenon the approach is hermeneutic. Hermeneutics is the philosophy of understanding where perception is the main tool to be used in research. Through perception and understanding data is collected and it is only by the perception about the environment
and reality that understanding can be made. Hence, understanding and perception are in a dialectical relationship (Moses et al 2007:240-241).

The method of interviewing is a subjective task. By doing an interview an interviewer is exploring the mind and thoughts of a respondent. The respondent perceives and understands his experienced reality in a certain way which he then present and describe for the interviewer with the help of the language. Then the researcher with help of his understanding of the language perceives what the respondent is actually saying. Therefore, because it is a matter of someone else perception of his reality the study is of a subjective character, or of a subjective perception of a phenomenon (Lantz 1993:16).

2.2 Qualitative Interview
Since the subjective reality of the respondents that is interviewed is investigated in this study it is preferable to choose a qualitative method (Lantz 1993:16). Qualitative research interviews can reach deeper into the minds and thoughts of the respondents (Lantz 1993:26) and give a better understanding of the situation of mobile phone companies, particularly in Sarajevo, where the study will be made but hopefully to all of Bosnia and Herzegovina. I expect to get a variety of explanations for why people chose a specific number and cannot predict all the answers I might receive. A qualitative study is to be preferred because it can obtain a more nuanced picture of the phenomenon investigated. Also, there is space in a qualitative study for unexpected answers (Kvale 2007:12).

It is also advisable to choose a qualitative study where the focus is on understanding a particular phenomenon. The qualitative study is used because it provides more opportunities for specialization in different contexts and for understanding the various dimensions of the problem. The method itself is flexible (Kvale 2007: 10-11).

This study is a respondent investigation which means that the focus are the respondents themselves and their thoughts and perceptions of the environment surrounding them (Esaiasson et al 2004:254). As the focus is on thoughts and perceptions a hermeneutic approach are useful tool and indeed needed.
A respondent investigation can be categorized into quantitative interviews and qualitative interviews investigations. A quantitative interview is more like a survey where the interviewer asks the respondent a question and the respondent answers followed by another question. The same structure of the interviews will be used on all respondents. In a qualitative interview the interactive conversation between the respondent and the interviewer works as an important tool to reach to the respondent in order to get under the skin (Esaiasson et al 2004:254-255). In this study a conversation interview investigation will be applied.

Three main concepts to choose an appropriate method to a study are; the structure of the interviews, the aim of the study and the selection of respondents of a population (Esaiasson et al 2004:254-255). This study will be conducted with semi-structured interviews with open questions. Open question is not constructed to get a yes or no answer, but rather formulated as the respondents get an opportunity to explain their thoughts and meanings of the themes addressed. The aim of the study is focused on the respondent’s perception and thoughts about the division of the mobile phone companies and mobile phone number in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The selection of respondents will not be made randomly which would be needed in order to do a survey or a question investigation. A strategic selection will then be made (more on selection later). These are the main three reasons to choose a qualitative interview which will be semi-structured and have the aspects of a conversation interview investigation applied (Esaiasson et al 2004:254-256).

As in all qualitative interview studies the question of “how many interviews?” arise. Since this study is rather small one and there is not much time, the interviewer will be in Sarajevo for two weeks, the ideal number would be ten interviews. Eight interviews were finally conducted. But, the focus on number of interviews is in a way exaggerated. In the methodological book Doing Interviews Kvale gives a simple answer to that question: “Interview as many subjects as necessary to find out what you need to know.” (2007:43) Basically, enough interviews have to be made in order to fulfill the purpose and the aim of the study. If too few interviews are made it will be problematic to generalize and if too many interviews are done there will be too much material and data to analyze (Kvale 2007:43). The purpose of this study is not to generalize, rather,
the focus is to understand the situation with telecom companies in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The aim is to conduct approximately ten interviews and then there will be enough time to analyze the data collected.

2.3 Selection
The population of the study will be urban youth using mobile phones in Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina. The units in the population that will be analyzed are NGO professionals and NGO volunteers. This is a strategic selection as NGO professionals and NGO volunteers probably work for strengthening the Bosnian democratic and political society and are most likely to actually work against the ethnification of politics and contradictions between ethnic groups in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Hence the units of analysis are chosen from unfavorable conditions with regards to the research question of the study. If the study can prove that even in this unfavorable environment it might be possible to make a generalization regarding the whole population (Esaiasson et al 174-175,179). Although, as the study is using a hermeneutic approach, the aim is not to make generalizations. The focus is rather on understanding why a division of mobile phone number and mobile phone companies occur. Also, NGO professionals are more likely to speak English which is need, as NGO’s have to report to funders which is usually done in English. The interviews will be done in English as the researcher is not fluent in Bosnian.

The strategic selection will be implemented with a snowball approach. There will be a few respondents, just one or two in the first interview phase. Then a snowball selection will be used which means that the respondents will recommend people that fits to the population of the study. Those people will then be contacted in order to set up an interview (Esaiasson et al 2004:286). Then the network of the first respondents can be used to get more respondents willing to participate. Also it gives some randomness to the selection. It might be a problem to only choose people within the same network because they might be too similar to each other. But this is sought for since NGO professionals and volunteers will be the respondents in the study. As they are more likely to be acquainted with the concept of ethnicity they might understand the situation
of the division of mobile phone companies and give more interesting explanations. This is called the principle of intensity in the selection process. (Esaiasson et al 2004:287).

This qualitative study has no aim to generalize to the whole population of urban youth in Sarajevo. It rather aspires to find more abstract phenomenon as thought categories and possible perceptions of the world. If someone ask; why did you chose that phone number? There would be a limited amount of answers and explanations given to the question. The answers are sorted into thought categories. For one question there might be five different explanations, five different thought categories even if you ask 10 or100 persons (Esaiasson et al 2004:185).

This study seeks to find the different thought categories, the different possible perceptions of the phenomenon of segregated mobile phone numbers and mobile phone companies in Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina. As this study is a rather small one it has no aim to achieve theoretical saturation even if this would be the ideal outcome. By prove that the view categories subsists this study will bring empirical knowledge since the case of mobile phone numbers in Bosnia and Herzegovina is not researched before. Hopefully, this primary study might result in further research on this issue (Esaiasson et al 2004:186).

2.4 Ethical Aspects

A respondent interview is a level of professional impersonality, which means that no personal relation exists between the interviewer and the respondent. Sometimes it can be easier to open up to someone outside of your personal sphere such as family and friends. This situation tends to encourage trust. As humans are receptive for this trust and interest they might give very sensitive information to a researcher and become vulnerable (Gillham 2008:29). When meanings and perceptions are in focus, as in this study, such sensitive information will be useful, but a researcher has ethical lines which cannot be crossed. Awareness, sensitivity and planning are vital as not to cross the ethical borders. If the line is crossed, a therapeutic character of the interview might occur, that is not sought and might require extra work (Kvale 2007:16-18). If too personal information arouse such as family tragedy, scars of war and so forth the
interviewer will not focus second questions on those subject in order to direct the conversation away.

The respondents will before the interview occurs be informed about the overall purpose of the research. That will happen when time and place of interview occasion will be decided between the researcher and the respondent. A brief overall introduction will be held in the beginning of the interview to give more information about the research and to obtain informed consent from the respondent (Kvale 2007:27). Although, only a short briefing will be about the purpose of the study, because if the respondent know too much about the study it might affect the result. Even though enough information will be given so the respondent knows the big picture and the purpose of the interview. Based on that the respondent will be asked for informed consent to be a part of the study (Gillham 2008:31-32). This will both be done before the interview starts when the purpose is explained and again after the interview.

Risk and benefits of the participation of the study will be mentioned before the interview (Kvale 2009:27). Questions during an interview about ethnicity may be such a factor that could cause negative reactions. By, at first informing that such question might arise and secondly, as an interviewer, try to formulate open question where such information will be given indirectly by the respondent, the trust of the respondent will not be misused. Also, as a central aspect of this study is ethnicity, anonymity for the respondents is granted. An ethical principle of beneficence that will be acknowledged is that as little risk of harm of the respondent as possible will be taken (Kvale2008:28). Therefore there is no reason to question the anonymity of the subjects as ethnicity can be a sensitive theme.

After the interview more information will be given about purpose of the study to the respondent. Again the question of informed consent will be raised. If any of the respondents after the interview change his/her mind or felt misled the interview will not be used in the study and erased. All measures possibly will be used to avoid this situation. If the respondents are interested, they will be given the opportunity to read the transcription of the interview (Gillham 2008: 34). Regarding confidentiality, it is important as some data in this study will be sensitive and the respondents most likely want anonymity. Therefore the respondents will be informed that only the researcher
and the supervisor of the researcher will have access to the recorded interviews. Possibly, if necessary, even the discussant to the finished thesis and the person in charge of grading at the university will be given access to the recorded interviews (Gillham 2008:33). The study itself though, will be made public but anonymity in it is given for the respondents.

2.5 The Interview Situation

The interview situation is the time and space in which the interview will take place. The place is the room where the interview will be held and the location, size and interior of the room will affect the interview situation as well as the amount of time given to the interview. The time and place can both permit and prevent communication and it is therefore to acknowledge and take into consideration when setting up an interview stage (Lantz 1993:109).

According to Lantz (1993:11) it is important that the room for the interview situation is without disturbing noise, telephones and intrusions. But she later argues that sometimes could be possible to allow such disturbance and let the interviewer and respondent make the best of the situation.

The environment for the interview is an important way to get the respondents to feel more relaxed (Esaiasson et al 2004:294). For this study this must be the most important aspect. The most natural place for urban youth to have a conversation is of course a café. A café is a relaxed place where people meet and talk. Some disturbance might occur but the benefits for a natural conversation between the respondent and interviewer is preferable. Also, a café is an accessible place and coffee is an important aspect in Bosnian culture, not least shown in Nobel Prize winner Ivo Andrić book (1945) The Bridge over the Drina.

Before the actual interview starts enough time has to be given in order to create a positive interview climate. When ordering and waiting for coffee there will be time to ease the pressure and make a formal introduction. The recorder will be introduced and explained that it is an important tool for the researcher when analyzing the interviews. During the interview time for reflection should be given in order not to stress the
respondent and to maintain a positive interview climate. Also, sufficient time should be reserved for the interview situation. Time should not be limiting for the interview, to stop the interview on the grounds of there not being enough time is unprofessional (Lantz 1993:110). The interviews will take approximately 30 minutes and when reserving the interviews with the respondents at least an hour would be needed. There might be some disturbance and the quality of the recorded interview will not be as good as in a quiet room as the interviews are held in a noisy environment. That is taking into consideration when setting up the interview stage, a table in the corner not close to speakers would be one way to tackle it.

As the selection of the study is urban youth in Sarajevo and NGO workers and volunteers are interviewed it is important not to get the official or the political correct answers (Esaiasson et al 2004:286). Hence the office of a respondent would not be a good environment because the respondent will possibly take a professional stance. By choosing a café instead of an office will ease this as it is not a professional environment but a personal and private milieu.

2.6 The Researcher

An important aspect of conducting interview is to acknowledge the role as a researcher and what consequences that will have on empiric data. The aim of the interview is to reflect the source and obtain as pure data as possible. An insight that the relationship between the interviewer and the respondent is of great value for the researcher, as the cooperation between them will affect the results of the study. The interviewer’s personality and actions during the interview affect the interaction of the interviewer and the respondent (Lantz 1993:14).

An interview is a conversation and a relation between two individuals. It is not a normal conversation since the interviewer asks the questions and sets the agenda, there is a distinct power asymmetry (Kvale 2009:14). The perceptions and analysis conducted are a result of the researcher’s pre understanding. This construct an implication as the expectations and norms of the researcher might influence the analysis of empirical data since such expectations limit the researchers understanding of the respondent.
It is important to see and understand the respondent’s social reality, how it is constructed and arranged. The character of the interview is more open than structured and the aim is that the questions asked in the interview have an open character (Lantz 1993:18). In this way the respondent can perceive the reality and the phenomena more freely. Hence, it is important that the interviewer has knowledge about the culture which has been obtained by living in Sarajevo in the spring of 2009. According to hermeneutics it is important to understand the given culture and time in which the phenomenon occur (Lantz 1993:26). Knowledge about the phenomena, in this case the situation of mobile phone companies and the ethnic segregation of the state of Bosnia and Herzegovina, is also of major help to understand the respondents and ask the right questions to obtain valuable data. This is also taken into consideration and efforts will be taken to achieve this.

Since this is a semi-structured interview study, the interviewer have to make quick decisions to produce relevant follow-up questions during the interview. These decisions will be based on pre-understanding and perception of the situation. The interviewer is an interpretive tool and bases the decisions on knowledge and experience (Lantz 1993:61). The interviewer has lived in Sarajevo and has a basic knowledge about the country and the political situation. That knowledge will be important both during the interviews, to understand the answers and in order to ask relevant follow-up questions and also in order to make the interpretation of the data collected valid.

2.7 Language and Transcription

According to linguistics, transcriptions is a transformation from one narrative form – the conversation, to another narrative form – the written text. The rules and culture in the different forms of communication differs and becomes obstacles in the transcribing process (Kvale 2009:92-93). A direct transcription of a conversation to a text will not be very readable. Pause, tone of voice and the body language is lost in the process and sounds as ‘eh’, oh’, ‘hm’, might look strange in a written text. Such information could be interesting in a linguistic study when the actual language is in focus (Kvale 2009:97).
But the focus in this study is on meanings and understanding. When transcribing the interviews such sounds will only appear where they make sense to the conversation. Also the word ‘like’ is commonly used and will just be left out when transcribing. Leaving the word ‘like’ out will not affect the meanings of conversations and will make the texts much more readable. This is one example of decisions made in order to make the written conversations more readable. Quotations will be used instead of edited version of the conversation by the researcher. This reproduces what the respondents actually are saying more truthfully (Gillham 2008:172).

Since neither the interviewer nor the respondents has English as their native language some grammar adjustments will also be made in order to make the transcriptions more readable. This will be made carefully but entire sentences will not be changed even if the grammar is wrong because it might change the meaning in the sentence.

2.8 Source Criticism

This study has a hermeneutic character where focus is on understanding. Because of this approach the study has no aim at generalizing. Since the subjective reality of the respondents is investigated the validity of the study will be how well the respondent will be reflected. The data and the results of the study have to reflect the source, in this case the respondents. Through that, validity is given and a deeper understanding of the investigated phenomenon will be obtained (Lantz 1993:17).

Whether the respondent’s perception of the world is true or false is not a question. The investigated themes are subjective. The challenge is rather to get close, to get under the skin of the respondent during the interview in order to reach to his thoughts and reach beyond pre constructed political correct answers (Esaiasson et al 2004:286). As the respondents selected are NGO professionals or volunteers they are presumably harder to reach to as they have a professional shell. The challenge is to reach beyond that in obtain their real thoughts and feelings.

Further, NGO personnel are probably more likely to work for democratization and against nationalism then the average Bosnian citizen. They will possibly not think that ethnicity matters, as other groups in the society, such as war veterans might.
acknowledge. That has to be taken into consideration when conducting the analysis. NGO personnel are used because they are available, speaks English and they are more likely to have more knowledge and can explain the division of mobile phone companies more thoroughly.

The secondary sources used in this study will be used in three ways; in the method part to strengthen practical reasoning on how the interviews will be conducted, to give an understanding of the context in which this phenomenon occurred and to give a theoretical discussion of ethnicity. The literature used in the method part thoroughly explains the qualitative interview process. Substantial reading about the history of the Balkans and particularly Bosnia and Herzegovina and living in Sarajevo provide critical awareness when referring to literature about the history and context explained in the thesis.

2.9 Interview Guide

An interview guide should both be dynamic and thematic (Kvale 1997:121-3). Thematically the interview guide has to connect the questions to the research problem of the study. Dynamically means that the conversation in the interview should be as natural as possible and the respondent should feel motivated and encouraged to give answers and create a flow in the process (Esaiasson et al 2004:290, Kvale 2007:57).

In the first part of the interview, easy questions of factual nature are asked in order to create a start in the conversation and create a positive interview climate. This will be important when more demanding questions about meaning and thoughts comes up later on. Questions like; where are you from? Can you tell me about your background? and when did you get your first mobile phone? will be used basically to create a good interaction between the interviewer and the respondent (Esaiasson et al 2004:290, Lantz 1993:63-64).

An important aspect to get the interview comprehensible is to ask the questions in a logical sequence (Lantz 1993:64). The first part of the interview will be constructed so the respondent can give a short chronological description of their background, where they were born, lived went to school and when they got their first mobile phone. To explain something chronologically is easy and logical.
The second part of the interview will be more demanding, focusing on the respondent’s perceptions and understanding of the phenomenon. Some examples of question that will be asked are: Why did you choose a specific number or mobile phone company? Have you thought about changing mobile phone provider? Why would you like to change company? Can you explain the situation with mobile phone numbers in Bosnia and Herzegovina? Can you explain national roaming? Obviously more demanding questions will be addressed. The questions will be asked in the order the interviewer find logical during the interview to get a natural flow. This is not a problem as this is a semi-structured interview method and it demands certain flexibility. All themes and pre designed questions will be addressed during the course of the interview (Lantz 1993:65).

An important aspect during the interview, especially in the second part is listening to the respondent’s answers. To connect the given answer to the theme of the study is important when formulating follow-up questions. The answers have many dimensions and the interviewer have to decide which is the most important to address. This requires quick decisions and is an art in itself. But by pre-understanding, knowledge about the local context and knowing what the study is all about follow-up questions would be an important tool to collect empirical data (Kvale 2007:63-64).

In the third and last part of the interview the respondents will be told a story about ethnic segregation. The story is about a Muslim boy who does not want to buy a guitar because the seller posted a “Serb number” on the billboard. Here the respondent’s perception of the story is tested and they are given the opportunity to analyze and comment whether this is the case in Bosnia and Herzegovina today or not. Finally a summary will be made by making a statement out of what the respondent answered. Then the respondent would confirm whether it is a true statement or not and then motivate the given answer. This is a last test to reflect the source in order to obtain good validity in the study (Lantz 1993:64-65).
2.10 Analysis of Interviews

When the transcription begins the processing of the empirical material also starts, at least mentally in the researcher’s brain. The very first focus in the analysis process is to identify the substantial parts of the interview, were something interesting and significant is stated, that can be interrelated to the research questions and research problem of the study (Gillham 2008:173). In this study the relevant substantial information given by the respondents will be categorized into themes connected to the research question in order to get a distinct structure to the analyzed material. This will make the analysis more understandable and easy oriented. This is usually called a category analysis (Gillham 2008:188).

The categories will be connected at the top level to the research question and at the sublevel to themes from the interview guide. Also, some unpredicted relevant data might be revealed and then a subcategory will be produced. Further, some data that has a certain uniqueness might appear and that data will then be put in an own category (Gillham 2008:190).

The analysis of the material is an interpretation process. Hence creation of the categories is a subjective task. Even if so, the basis of the categories is to work as a structure to present the empiric material as understandable as possible in order to bring light to what is actually sought for in the study. (Gillham2008:193).

In the analysis the respondents will be called Respondent 1, Respondent 2, Respondent 3 and so forth. I will not mark them as Bosniak 1, Croat 3 or Serb 2 as I do not think that the respondents interviewed would appreciate such a categorization. In Bosnia and Herzegovina some people call themselves as ‘others’ (which is quite a paradox) since they do not want to be ethnic labeled simply because of the politicization of ethnicity in the country. When the respondent’s ethnicity is important to understand or explain something interesting, then it will be used, but in that case it is not labeling, it serves a reason. Also female 1 or male 2 will not be used because such categorization is of no importance in the study, even though he or she might be used to refer to the respondents during the analysis.
3. Theory

To understand the division of mobile phone companies a theoretical framework has to be presented and discussed. The empiric data of the study will then be analyzed with the theory in mind. The first part of the theory will discuss the concept of ethnicity as it is a general theme in this study. The concept of stigmatization and ethnic symbols will be discussed to explain what an ethnic marker means.

3.1 Ethnicity, Ethnic Symbols and Ethnic Markers

3.1.1 Ethnicity

One of the first to use the concept of ethnic group was Max Weber. According to Weber (1922:56) an ethnic group has a subjective conception of their common ancestry which can be derived from either physical attributes customs or both, or it could also be a group that shares a collective memory of both colonization and migration. Blood relationship among its members is of no importance for an ethnic group. Stier (2009) gives a similar definition; an ethnic group is constructed with a consciousness of itself and a definition of itself as a constant ethnic group through time. The consciousness and the definition of the group is based on history, the past, myths and folklore. Thus, an ethnic group has a conception of a common ancestry and a collective perception of itself as a people. Whether the history and myth is true or not is of less importance (Stier 2009:104).

Ethnicity is the contact between ethnic groups that defines them as culturally different from one another. In order for ethnicity to exist, contact between two groups has to exist. Even though they are culturally different and no contact exists there is no ethnicity. Ethnicity obtains its meaning through interaction (Hylland Eriksen 1999:284-285). Ethnicity is also defined as dichotomizations, by defining what you are not you are actually defining what you are yourself (Stier 2009:105). Ethnicity provides systemic distinctions between ‘us’ and ‘them’ between insiders in the group and
outsiders not belonging to the group (Hylland Eriksen 2002:19). The ‘us’ generate an ethnic solidarity that is created in social and political processes. In tense situations where competition between groups takes place this increases further (Hylland Eriksen 1999:291). Also, this dichotomization creates stereotypes of the ‘other’ in order to categorize in a complicated social universe. Stereotyping is the creation and consistent use of giving certain aspects such as behavior or appearance of ‘other’s’. This creates cultural distinctiveness between social groups (Hylland Eriksen 2002:23-25). Thus it might be understandable to think that the greater the culture differences are, the less ethnicity matters. This is actually not the case, in fact it is the opposite. If the ‘other’ resemble ‘us’ in culture, language, customs etc. ethnicity is usually of more importance as it is harder to distinguish the different ethnic groups (Hylland Eriksen 1999:284). This was certainly the case during The Bosnian war as Croats, Bosniaks and Serbs share a lot of culture, language and customs.

In this notion ethnicity circumscribe to individual identification and belonging to a social group. The concept of ethnicity is used in different ways; to be the main concept in the ethnicity research field, to be equated to ethnic group (Weber 1922:56), to be the contact and interaction between ethnic groups (Hylland Eriksen 1999:284-285) and to determine individual identification to a social group (Hylland Eriksen 2002:19, 23-25, Stier 2009:105).

3.1.2 Context Situational Ethnicity

In different situations ethnicity can be displayed in different ways depending on the contextual situation. Even switching ethnicity would be possible as long as the ethnic categories and stereotypes would be fulfilled (Hylland Eriksen 1999:286). In the article: Non-ethnic Condemnation in Stolac, Kolind (2002) explains how Muslims or Bosniaks in Stolac pictures Croats. In different contexts the Croats are categorized differently. The Bosniaks attribute a condemnation of the ethnic category and rather describe the Croats as town members or something else without an ethnic connotation. Hence, Kolind argue that people can maintain and build enduring social relations even if the environmental context is infected with ethnic and political dichotomization. Finally he state that more effort should be focus on everyday interaction among ordinary people rather than on political elites when building a democratic society (2002:134).
3.1.3 Ethnic Symbols

According to Tosh (2006) collective self-identity is created when a social group interprets experiences and events over a specific time. It could be a common interpretation about a nation’s creation or about a significant event that evolve through time to become symbolical. The symbolic status confirms the collective group’s self-identity and gives a hint about the common aspiration of the social group. Social memory reflects the social group’s collective popular understanding of the past. Certain places, symbols or rituals tend to become more significant since the historical consciousness passed on from generation to generation have such an effect. Through those places, symbols or rituals the group could then mobilize against threat from outside the social group (Tosh 2006:3-5). Even though Tosh never mention the concepts of ethnic or ethnicity, social group can be replaced with ethnic group based on the definition elucidated above. In this context places, symbols or rituals would also be ethnic and will from here on be called ethnic symbols (even though it is a place or ritual, they all act as symbols for the ethnic group).

One ethnic symbol from the Balkans would be the gusle, a old medieval instrument. In the article: Who Owns the Gusle? Ćolović (2002) explain how the gusle has emerged as a political symbol. In symbolic political communication, the gusle has been used to legitimate ruling of the people. The gusle would be the voice of the people in the form of ethnic, social, national or class identification. It was used as a symbol to legitimate rebellion against empires such as the Austro-Hungarians and the Ottoman Empire (2002:59-63). After the destruction of Yugoslavia different national groups in the Balkans have tried to make the gusle ‘their own’ national symbol (2002:59-63, 72-76). Another cruel example concerning the power of ethnic symbols during the Bosnian War is the physical destruction of other’s cultural heritage in order to affirming one’s own (Lovrenović 2002:118).

3.1.4 Ethnic markers

The aim of this theoretical discussion is to explain and define the notion of ethnic marker in this study. An ethnic marker is not a stigma as it does not have any discredited implications. Nor is it an ethnic symbol since it has not obtained any culture
value. Even though it could be used as a stigma in a certain context and obtain cultural meaning through time. But that will transform the ethnic marker to either stigma or a cultural symbol. Basically, it is a phenomenon that could mark ethnicity of an individual without any connotation. The ethnic marker is a generalization and has not to be perfectly correct about all individuals in a population but, would work in a majority of cases. Such an example in Bosnia and Herzegovina would be names. If you are named Emir, Ibrahim, Azra or Fatuma you would be considered Muslim or Bosniak. Ethnic marker is more similar to stereotypes but is just a certain aspect of it, just of the phenomenon of stereotypes. And stigma would have a bad connotation. Hence, ethnic marker is something neutral that can reflect ethnicity.
4. Results

Eight interviews were conducted in Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina in late November and early December 2010. In this chapter the empirical data from the interviews will be categorized and presented.

In order not to create any confusion; Mobis, M:tel or Telekom Srpske are the same company. HT:Eronet, HT:Mostar or just Eronet is also the same company. BH-Telecom could also be called BH-mobile and are the same company as well.

4.1 Motivation of Choice

This part will be about how the respondents motivate their choices and reason when they pick phone companies and phone number as their operator.

4.1.1 Choice of Mobile Phone Number and Mobile Phone Companies

In the end of the first phase of the interview after a conversation is settled and a good atmosphere is created the respondents were asked to tell how they got their first phone. Since the respondents are youth, between 15-35 years of age, today most of them were teenager or in their early twenties when they got their first mobile phones. Most of them got it as presents or from relatives abroad. Then they were asked what mobile phone company they chose as their operator. Here follows one answer:

No, because it was actually in the beginning for Bosnia and you have from 1998 it was a big boom of mobile phone, not earlier. So you could only choose BH-Telecom for your region because it was not like now. You can have every card. So it was not a political statement that I chose BH-Telecom. (Respondent 1)
What respondent 1 explains is that in the beginning when telecommunication entered the Bosnian market, in his region there were only one choice of mobile phone companies. Then, respondent 1 points out that it was not a political decision. The meaning of that statement is that he did not pick BH-Telecom because he is Muslim.

Respondent 5 tells that he got his first phone in 96-97 after the war, just when the telecommunication business started in Bosnia and Herzegovina. He also says that there were only one option.

I think at that time, I’m not sure now, but I think that there was only one option because it was only one company, BH-Telecom. But after maybe one year or two years, I think the company from Republika Srpska also had one company like Mobis. So I think I had opportunity on that time, but I’m not sure. I know that the BH-Telecom was the first one. (Respondent 5)

Respondent 5 is not totally sure but says that there was only one company and that BH-Telecom was the first telecommunication company. He also explain that around a year later, there were also a mobile phone company in Republika Srpska. Sarajevo is not located in Republika Srpska even though some suburbs are part of that entity. Sarajevo is the main administrative city in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Respondent 3 and respondent 2 explains that when they got their first mobile phone there where only one company.

Back then I think that it was the only thing you could get in Sarajevo. We didn’t have any companies, you know now we have three of them. Back then it was not like that as far as I remember, for mobile. (Respondent 3)

No no no, when I got my telephone it was only BH mobile company. Maybe there were others but I didn’t know about them. But I guess they didn’t exist. (Respondent 2)

Respondent 3 got her first phone in 2003 and argue that at that time in Sarajevo you could only get BH-Telecom. Respondent 2 tells that she was 16 years old when she got her first phone. As she is 24 years today that must have been in 2002-2003. She only knew about BH-Telecom. Respondent 7 also got her phone in 2002 or 2003. She says:
I don’t remember, I don’t think so. I don’t remember. I think this was the only option because it was a new thing so I think they were the only one providing that services here. (Respondent 7)

She is not too sure about it but she confirms the others claims that BH-Telecom was the only option. She is then asked if she means here in Sarajevo and she confirms that. Respondent 8 however gives a more convincing answer when asked if he could pick another company than BH-Telecom when he got his first number:

I don’t think so, that it was possible at the time, no, for sure not. I mean it would be earn if I could have another company to be too expensive and too problematic to use it or to pay the bills and everything at the time it was probably not possible. And I’m not sure whether they existed because I got it when the mobile phone started here and I think that BH mobile was the first one actually to introduce mobiles, I’m not sure that the other companies had the mobiles when I started. (Respondent 8)

He is then asked if he explains the situation for all of the country or only for Sarajevo and answer as follows:

In the country, in Sarajevo definitely there was no other company, that for sure. But even if I would get it, I’m not sure whether Eronet and Telekom Srpske had mobiles at the time when I bought mine. (Respondent 8)

Respondent 8 got his first phone around the year 2000-2001. He is very convinced that BH-Telecom were the only possibly option in Sarajevo at that time. When respondent 8 speaks about the bills, that it would have been too problematic, it is not that easy to understand the meaning of that statement. But later on in the interview he comes to the same topic and explains it further:

…because at that time 2000 you had to…it was very hard to register a phone number. It was very hard to get a phone number. And basically I think that... That person had to have a permanent residence in Republika Srpska to have a M:tel mobile number. Because that was the only way to pay the bill at that time. Because I, you know, when I registered for my number there were no foreigners that could get BH mobile nor the people that lived for instance in Republika Srpska. That it was very hard for them because then they would have to deposit a lot of money to
get the number because it was not sure that they would be paying the bill. (respondent 8)

What respondent eight means is that you had to be registered as a resident in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina to be able to obtain a sim-card and to be a customer of BH-Telecom. This was because of the current billing procedure. BH-Telecom was strongly connected to the BH post service. To pay the bills you had to go to the post office (bhtelecom.ba). In the last sentence he says that it is not sure that the bill was going to be paid if the customer was from the other Entity. Because of that money has to be deposited in order for an individual resident of Republika Srpska to obtain a BH-Telecom phone number. Evidence of residence in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina had to be presented in order to administer a billing address.

As Repulika Srpska is mainly mono-ethnic, approximately 90% are Serbs (Fox, Wallich 1997:1) this could be understand as a discrimination of Serbs. That is a complete misunderstanding since many Serbs live in Sarajevo and they could get a number from BH-Telecom if they could prove residence in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

All of the six respondents above argue that in Sarajevo BH-Telecom was the only option in the beginning of the 21th century even though all of them are not as convincing as respondent 8. The two other respondents that not yet been mentioned moved to Sarajevo in 2008. Respondent 4 chose BH-Telecom because it was the most available and you could buy it anywhere. She explains when the other telecommunication companies entered the market:

They don’t care. Before I think they would care. Because it would bring some negative implications but I’m talking two years back, when these companies emerged on the market. (Respondent 4)

Then she is asked if she means in Sarajevo and she answers:

Yes. They were not here, they were not present on the market… (Respondent 8)
She moved here 2008 and still by that time BH-Telecom was the only company present on the market in Sarajevo. Respondents 6 also moved to Sarajevo in 2008. She explains how she “inherited” her number or sim-card from a friend of her boyfriend. Basically there was no option to choose phone numbers in Sarajevo before 2008 as BH-Telecom was the only provider. But as mentioned above new companies started to emerge on the market. Also how the respondents understand this situation will be discussed in the next subcategory, 4.2. First something more about choice will be presented.

4.1.2 Reasons of Changing Provider

After having gone through what company and number they picked when the respondents got their first phone the follow up theme was about thoughts of changing provider and what reason they would have for changing mobile operator. Respondent 1 and respondent 2 both have BH-Telecom and give a similar explanation:

Yes, I’m actually thinking about switching to another mobile phone operator because it’s much cheaper for me for example with my girlfriend to talk it’s on weekend for free and then you have 100 SMS for free etc etc… (Respondent 1)

Yes of course, I have been thinking about it lately. You know when you talk a lot. /…/ Yes, and I have now and I want to talk more with him because when I talk to him with BH-mobile it’s really expensive. 5 mark [ca 25 kr] in one day. So I will find Eronet sim-card because it’s really cheap. You can pick one number.

(Respondent 1)

As both of them are in a relation another company then BH-Telecom have a package which would make it much cheaper for them to call to each other. This is an economic category since the two of them are looking for better deals to fit their current situation in order to save money. Respondent 3 had BH-Telecom but lost here phone

“I lost my phone and I was kind of lazy to maybe ask for my number that I had because I could do that. And I didn’t do that. And again my mother bought me a telephone which was combined with this sim-card from M:tel. It was on sale so that was why she bought it. It wasn’t so expensive.”

(Respondent 3)
The respondent does not make the decision and then her mother steps in and pick a phone for her which she describe as a good deal. This is also a economic category as she explains the reason for picking that number was an economic decision. Respondent 4 when asked if it is cheap to call with BH-Telecom says:

No, it’s expensive. I think I could possibly switch but the options that I looked into were not much better, they were almost the same so I gave up looking for a better provider. I was actually recently looking into this, because I need a new phone. My phone is really old, the model of the phone and I was looking through the possibilities to get a free phone. To get a phone for five marks [ca 25 kr] and to sign a contract with somebody that would offer me something similar to the American system of the telecommunications. Because in America they have very good deals, you can take as many minutes you want, 400 minutes for 20 dollars or something. I was looking for that kind of thing here but I didn’t find anything of that kind yet but I’m hope it’s coming. (Respondent 4)

She was looking for a suitable economic package that would decrease here costs and also get a phone cheap if she signed a contract. But she could not find anything like that. This is as well economic reasoning. Respondent 6 tells that she and her boyfriend used a Mobis number which was a different provider than they had before.

Me and him [her boyfriend] we used a different number for a while that’s the Mobis number. Because I spent a lot of time in Belgrade so we used it because it’s cheaper to use it. Like when he’s in Bosnia and I’m in Serbia or whatever. (Respondent 6)

As her family are from Belgrade and she moved to Sarajevo in 2008 she explain how the Mobis or M:tel company gives better package and actually that you can call for free to people who have the Serbian mobile phone operator operating in Serbia. This is also a decision based on economic principles, she picked another number that had better deals for her needs.

It’s the same company. Srbija Telekom bought Republika Srpska Telekom so basically now it’s the same company. Since they became the same company they have these arrangements so you can pick a number and call for free and stuff like that. (Respondent 6)
She then explains the reason for why it is actually possible to call for free, even to another country. The reason is to provide a good service for their customers.

Respondent 5 also speak about networks:

Ok, now I think before that because that BH-Telecom covers with its network this area, you know better than other companies. Now, maybe I have better opportunity to choose another company, I’m still a customer of BH-Telecom. Now I have like maybe better opportunities to choose Eronet or M:tel but like many people when I’m calling them have the same, they are on the same network, so it’s cheaper for me to call them if they are on the same network. I don’t have problems with Eronet or other companies; no, it’s not about that. I’m thinking on the way that you choose what is the best for you at the moment. (Respondent 5)

At first he states that BH-Telecom cover the Sarajevo area better than other companies before. He means before Eronet and M:tel enter the mobile phone market in Sarajevo as they were not present earlier. He also state that companies have discounts to their customers to call other customers using the same provider. This is common even in Sweden in order to make related individuals, such as families or companies, all in one social sphere to have the same operator and then get a discount.

What is revealed is that when the respondents are asked about changing mobile operator most of them had thought about it or even done it. The reason for the change would in all cases be because of economic principles, they looked for better deals, to save some money. Respondent 7 says that she never really thought of changing but when she explains her dissatisfaction with the service of BH-Telecom she tells she did get another number:

…But I was unhappy, particularly, a year and a half ago, when I…one of my friends went to the United States and I couldn’t text them. So I had a problem with text messaging and at that point I actually got a new number from a different provider to be able to text that person./*...*/ From M:tel. I got their number. Unfortunately the card expired because I didn’t use it for three months. However I was really unhappy with the service so I went and even complained. (Respondent 7)
She actually did pick another number for a while but as she did not use the number and it expired. This is another category than economic reasons; she picked the number because she was unhappy with the service. Hence, two categories are recognized; either changing of economic reason or because of dissatisfaction.

4.1.3 Affection to the Number

Later in the interview Respondent 7 is asked if she could see herself with another mobile phone provider. She tells:

Yes. I would like to leave my number because I’m very addicted to my phone professionally. So the number is, ok I’m used to it but it’s also important for me to the people from seven years ago to have my contact. But otherwise I mean, I wouldn’t mind changing the company. I think M:tel even offered leaving the same number if you change the provider. So they offered for example, if you become their client they will make your number stay. But I never investigated the options. And I’m also bound by BH-Telecom two years, I have a contract for the next two years. (Respondent 7)

She explains that the number is very important to her professionally. As she is a freelancer in her profession old contacts are important as they might lead to new business opportunities and because of that it is important not to change her contact information. This category would be called a professional affection to her phone number. Earlier in the interview she reveals another kind of affection when pointed out that she had been persistent keeping her number for nine years:

Yes, and I love my number./…/ because it so easy, it’s so many eights. (Respondent 7)

This is another category and another reason not to change number. I would call this category an emotional affection to the phone number. Respondent 8 also has a certain affection to his number:

Money. If there would be somebody…the problem with… if you…there are different answers to this. If it would be a substantial change in the amount I would be paying for my minutes then I would consider even a number change. But if it
would be something…that I could kind of…I wouldn’t change number if it would be less important to me changing in the amount I would be paying. Given the current situation that we can’t change the companies with keeping our numbers. So basically that’s not an option anymore, so basically now it would depend on what company offers you better, I mean better…whatever. (Respondent 8)

At first he states that money would be the reason for changing numbers. But he argues that in order for him to change number a big cut in his cost for mobile phone use would have to be needed. He is also a professional and it is relevant for him to keep the number because of his network of business. He also explains that if you switch company you will not be able to keep your old number. Respondent 1 also touches this:

So I’m thinking about to switch. The problem is that I had for nine years this number./…/ I have to switch everything. It’s not like in Germany when you can switch the mobile phone company and keep the old number. (Respondent 1)

He does not really explain why he do not want to switch number but it states he had it for nine years so it must be some kind of nostalgia. Then he confirms that you have to change number in order to chang mobile operator. But Respondent 7 state a contradiction:

I think M:tel even offered leaving the same number if you change the provider. (Respondent 7)

Hence, it is rather unclear whether this is actually possible as contradicting statements are made. If it is possible it is a rather new thing as it was not possible a year back when the researcher lived in Sarajevo. Two categories are presented, a professional affection and an emotional affection to the phone number. If it is not possible to change number a structure exist which keeps individual feeling affection either emotionally or professionally for their phone numbers.

4.2 Divide of Mobile Phone Companies and Mobile Phone Numbers

What we have seen is when these urban youth got their first phone and first number there were actually only one company available in Sarajevo and that was BH-Telecom. As one of the respondents explains, other (M:Tel, HT:Eronet) telecommunication
companies emerged on the market in Sarajevo in 2008. How could it be like this? Still there were other mobile operators on the telecommunication market in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

4.2.1 The Respondents Perception and Understanding of the Divide of Mobile Phone Companies

Respondent 8 gives a brilliant description on explaining how she perceives why you could only get BH-Telecom in Sarajevo even in 2008.

We basically have three major telecom companies; one is BH-Telecom, the other one is, I don’t even know what it’s called now, I don’t think it’s called Telekom Srpske anymore because it was sold…M:tel, and the third one is HT:Eronet. Basically they are connected to different parts of the country because the country is divided by ethnic criteria. After the war so are companies because they are connected to territory which is perceived as ethnically determined. So you have one entity having one company, this is Republika of Srpska. And the other one, since it ethnically mixed, Croats and Bosniaks, you have BH-Telecom which is connected to Sarajevo which is also perceived as dominantly Bosniak environment, and you have HT:Eronet which is based in Herzegovina in Croatian, mostly Croatian populated areas. So you basically have, you do have relation with ethnic territory and phone companies. (Respondent 6)

She explains that there exist other telecommunication companies in Bosnia and Herzegovina and that they are dominated by different ethnic groups. The ethnic groups are also connected to a certain territory. She explains how she understands the general situation of the divide of phone companies in Bosnia and Herzegovina. She point out that she is not the one saying this by using “which is also perceived”. As she is a NGO professional she is very careful in this topic. Still she gives a good general explanation of the telecommunication market in Bosnia and Herzegovina. After the previous statement Respondent 6 is asked, in a way to repeat and confirm her statement, if there is a connection between territory and companies and she says:
Well, that’s a fact. It’s not something you really not have to investigate in because you have, they are based in towns which are connected to these territories, that’s the first thing; secondly they have their, what do you call this, transmitter, they have better coverage in those territories where they are based… (Respondent 6)

The three companies are connected to what is perceived as ethnic territory. BH-Telecom is connected to the Bosniak part of the federation, HT:Eronet is connected to the Croat part of the Federation and M:Tel is connected to the other entity, Republika Srpska. Hence she understand the situation as a connection between ethnic group and the actually company. One ethnic group has one company. Then in the second statement she also describes an implication of that. The companies have constructed their networks on territory perceived as ethnic related to the company. As she says they have better coverage in those areas. When asked why it is more expensive in Bosnia and Herzegovina Respondent 7 gives this statement:

Because of monopoly. There’s no free market, I mean, there are monopolies and you exactly know who is where and whom provide for whom./…/ Well, BH-Telecom had monopoly for a long time in the federation, and then M:tel or Telekom Srpske before that had in Republika Srpska, and then there was Eronet in the Croatian part of Bosnia and Herzegovina so basically in Croatian part of federation. And those three companies are present. However there are no companies coming from abroad. And telecom as such is not open for market competition. General sector of telecom and those services is not open. Now there are new companies, both for the internet and for the mobile phones that are trying to enter the market. And legislation is also problematic because, according to legislation the monopoly are fine and they have not been privatized. I think that once actually the legislation changes and the market opens the prices will drop in all three telecom companies. (Respondent 7)

She also describe that the companies had some connection to different part of the country. By that she states that it was a monopoly situation a couple of years back. She can identify some slightly changes in the market but she states that telecom business is not open and legislation further increase that. When asked why the companies are bound to different territory she gives the following explanation:
Like everything else. Republika Srpska and The Federation have their things in their territories. I mean, it’s a political thing definitely, definitely a political thing. And then you have people who will you know, not opt for Telecom Srpske back then specially because it’s a Serbian company, or they will not opt for BH-Telecom because it’s a Bosniak company, which is ridiculous. What has proven to be true is that, for example this year, especially from the time M:tel started their market strategy people started to care less about it, because of the services that are better or cheaper. (Respondent 7)

At first she states that Republika Srpska and the Federation have their different things in their own territory, by that she means that the entities have the companies in their territory. She perceives it as a political thing that the companies are separated. She then explains how some people would not choose certain companies since Telecom Srpske is a Serbian company or BH-Telecom a Bosniak one. She argues that, back then, people would not pick certain companies because the companies have an ethnic connection, not chose the ‘others’ companies. But then, she explains that some change occurred in Sarajevo since M:Tel become an actor in the telecommunication market. People would rather opt for choice based on economic reasons rather than ethnic.

Respondent 1 touches upon the same theme when describing:

At that year I was not think of mobile phones divided but now I can see it’s a classical monopoly market for them because they have laws for only three mobile phone operators here in Bosnia and they are ethnic, of course. You have HT-Mostar, Telekom Republika Srpska and you have BH-Telecom… (Respondent 1)

He is then asked if he can see any political agenda behind this division and gives the following explanation:

In the beginning, of course. So everything was divided. Not only telecom operators you have this electricity company that was also divided in three. All strategically, important companies were divided in three. Telecom electricity, of course you have them bigger factories that was also divided for example in Mostar. Aluminium [a company] is still ethnic clean. There works only 98% Croats and only 2 % Bosniaks and Serbs. So you have still this continuity but I think in the future with
privatizing of the companies that everything will disappear. Just like that with national prefix of all companies. (Respondent 1)

He explains how the whole country was divided and when he says in the beginning he means in the beginning, after the war. He gives other examples of industries that were also ethnically separated. This he understands as a classical monopoly market since there were laws that regulated the actors in the mobile phone market and it could only be three, one company for every ethnicity.

Respondent 8 explain how he understands the situation:

Everything was distributed that way after the war./…/ …basically none of them was actually implemented, nor the electrical one, nor the telecom one. I think the oil one, not the oil one also. So basically that’s one of the part of the Dayton Agreement where we didn’t fulfill what was written in the agreement. (Respondent 8)

He explain that according to the Dayton agreement all major public infrastructure were supposed to be emerged into one company for every field of operation, one oil company, one mobile operator. Then he explains how the companies became three in the first place:

Yes, according to Dayton agreement all these public companies or the infrastructure public companies should be emerged into big corporations and they haven’t actually./…/because that was…I mean…that was the situation that existed. They provided infrastructure during the war. /…/…and that’s how it remained after the war, they were providing infrastructure to them and that’s the way it remained. They formed the companies during the war everything was already set. I mean, they had the managing…there were three companies on different sides during the war and basically just after the war they remained. The only question was, they were not formed after the war. Telecom companies were formed, but they were basically formed within the postal-telecom companies that existed during the war. (Respondent 8)

He explains that during the war infrastructure existed and that is when the companies emerged. The Bosnian War was endured for four years and during that time the areas controlled by either fraction, the Serbs, Bosniaks or Croats, had to
have some kind of infrastructure. He explains that it is here in the first phase the partition and creation of the structure with ethnic companies starts. Basically the different fractions had to provide infrastructure for the citizen living in the territory they held.

An understanding of how this ethnic division of mobile phone companies was created in the first place has here been presented. The respondents perceive the division of the mobile phone companies as ethnic and also some respondents state that it was a political inspired division. Further, there is territory considered ethnic and the Dayton Agreement with the institutional division of the country with the aim to create areas where certain ethnic groups were in majority (Chandler 2000:66-67) add to this consideration. Also, as explained by some of the respondents, the mobile phone companies considered ethnic companies build their network in areas considered ethnic territory. Of that reason, the companies themselves or their officials must have been considered companies connected to a certain ethnic groups. This further adds to the monopoly that some respondents described.

4.2.2 National Roaming and Prices between the Mobile Companies
In Bosnia and Herzegovina there is a concept called national roaming. When asked about national roaming respondent 6 gave the following explanation:

Basically it’s when you enter the territory where your companies coverage is low and you have to use the other company, because of those, what did you call them, antennas. When you don’t have it in the area where you are and you use another company’s network you will get charged for roaming. It’s a small fee, it’s not as if you crossed to another country but they do charge a bit. And this was apparently decision of Radio…RAK is the short for the regulatory agency for telecom communications on state level, which regulate all this. It was their decision, they explained it that it was need for the companies to provide better service. They had to charge their…waves. (Respondent 6)

She explains that if you are using another provider’s network since your signal for your own provider is too low, you will be charged a fee. Also, she states that this was done
by RAK, an institution in the Bosnia state. Hence, this was a political decision (biznis.ba). This creates a certain structure. If you live in territory considered ethnic, and telecommunication companies considered ethnic, expanded their networks to areas considered ‘their own’ in many areas of the country, as a result of the ethnic divide after the war (Fox, Wallich 1997:1), there would only be one signal from one company, especially on the country side. Then you would have to pick the number which is considered connected to the area you live in or otherwise be charged for roaming, a small fee but they charge a bit as respondent 6 mentioned.

Yes, it exists, it’s separating and they don’t have any agreement of that, this three operators to give a lower price because it’s in their interest to keep… I think it’s that to keep their national background, from BH-Telecom etc. etc. and not to get… ehh… don’t know… I think it’s not in their interests to have this agreement to get lower prices. For example for me it’s the same to send you a SMS to Sweden on your Swedish number as it is to send to Eronet or Mobis, it’s the same price. (Respondent 1)

Most of the respondents also describe that were telecommunication were expensive in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Especially if you compared prices to other Western European states. As an example, respondent 1 describes how expensive it is to call to other companies. He understand that as he states; “…to keep their national background.”. He connects the companies to a national background, as ethnic companies. The meaning of the statement is that the companies intentionally charged more in order to keep their customers which he perceives as ethnically connected to the company.

To charge a higher fee if your calling other than your own provider is not a unique phenomenon. It exist in Sweden too and is basically a way to try to make customers within the same network, such as family or in a company, to all use the same provider. Hence, the companies offering lower cost within their network. Respondent 1 means that the phenomenon could also be used to keep a network, as an ethnic group, to stay in the same company.
4.2.3 New Actors on the Mobile Phone Market in Sarajevo

For actors considered from one ethnic group to enter the market of territory considered ethnically belonging to another ethnic group is not an easy task in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Respondent 4 explains this as follows:

I can tell you another example. For example my father works for business which coming from Republika Srpska. And they are making cakes. They have production of cakes and bakery products. The guy hired my dad who is of different nationality. Basically of purpose to reach to this market because when my dad is going to business meetings and his name is … he would have a better entry to the market. If the guy himself send someone from Republika Srpska here he would probably get rejected and refused, his products would probably not be as well accepted as they are now with my dad representing them. This is not a prejudice, this is how it is. My dad is the only Muslim in the company and he is working as a salesmen manager for the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, so this is interesting. That was a strategic move, to hire someone who would…you know. (Respondent 4)

As have been presented before, BH-Telecom were the only actor on the telecommunication market in Sarajevo until 2008. Then M:tel and HT:Eronet entered the market but as respondent 4 states above, it would probably be a difficult task. When respondent 7 is asked if the three companies was divided over the country she replies:

They used to be really divided now not so much. Because of the prices. I think that BH-Telecom is the worst one. Right now, because they use to be the only ones on the market when Eronet started their campaign, all of a sudden you had a lot of people having Eronet in Sarajevo. And then M:tel started, even better then Eronet, we now have a lot of people who opt for M:tel here. (Respondent 7)

She describe BH-Telecom as the worst company since it was the only one before, she connects it to monopoly. Then she describe that as soon as the other actors entered the market a lot of people opted to change provider. She is then asked if this was because of the prices and she replies:

Because of prices and because of the market competition and because of marketing, advertising, you know different things. So they have their own strategies and there are actually someone, invested a lot of money in M:tel
obviously. Their strategy was really good and their overall campaign was, wow, amazing. (Respondent 7)

She perceives M:tel successful mainly because of great marketing, she is really thrilled about their campaign. Also they offered good deals. Respondent 3 also add to the successful marketing tools of M:tel:

They are using basically, majority of people are using BH-Telecom. But M:tel got those, they first started to sell mobile and sim-cards together. (respondent 3)

As well as Respondent 1:

I think that will be, because all of this, telecom operators are still so, only BH-Telecom is public. Everybody buys it he(operator) want to spread his market and he don’t want only to be connected to this national group. Of course you can see it right now as Mobis [M:tel], from Republika Srpska are privatized, they make marketing here and they are sponsors for concerts. For example one big singer Zdravko Čolić was here and his general sponsor was Mobis [M:tel]. And they, with every ticket they gave sim-card, they gave it as a present. When you buy a ticket you get this. It was a marketing trick. (Respondent 1)

Respondent 1 perceives the privatized company of M:tel as not wanted to be connect to the national group as he states the company wanted to spread its market. He explains this by also confirming that M:tel have a good market strategy. Respondent 4 explains how she perceived how people reacted when M:tel entered the market in Sarajevo in the first phase:

…When they, first entered the market people were repulsed and they didn’t want this number because it was from somewhere else. But once they offered better deals I think people started worrying much less about it. It’s building a brand. Has a lot to do with building your brand in a new territory. (Respondent 4)

If respondent 1 explained how M:tel would like to spread its market, to make money, respondent 4 explains that people wants better deals, to save money. She also state that at first when the company entered the market people were repulsed, but she describe that a change in perception of the company occurred since they offered better deals. Respondent 3 describes when this changed as follows:
In Sarajevo it was for two years we have M:Tel for example, before we didn’t have it. That’s a thing because we had only BH-Telecom. People still have BH-Telecom, because it was the first service that you could buy and they bought it and got used to it and now you have a situation that you have two more companies and all of them are fighting on the market. And that’s why you have…I don’t think that people are buying some specific because of the national thing but the rather buying it buy price. For example my mom, she didn’t bought… even though my mom…she’s a bit fascist…I don’t know…she’s a regular…I don’t know how to explain it to you…she is like regular citizen of this country. She suffered a lot, she doesn’t love all Serbs but no matter all those things she bought M:tel. That’s why I can’t get an image that some people buys it belongs to some nation, ethnicity, what ever. (Respondent 3)

At first she describes that earlier BH-Telecom had monopoly in Sarajevo. Then she explains the structure, since most of the people already had BH-Telecom they opt to stay with the company, basically she perceives BH-Telecom to already have a rigid base of customers. Then she states that she thinks people not chose companies after ethnic premises, the rather pick them because of economic reasons. Then she tells the anecdote about her mother as she even describe as a bit fascist, as she explains she is probably more nationalistic. Even though she explain that ethnicity matter to her mother, her mother bought her a phone from M:tel, the company perceived as connect the Republika Srpska, or the Serbs.

What has been presented is that even though the structure with territory perceived as ethnic, companies perceived as belonging to ethnic groups and that BH-Telecom had all of the market, a monopoly, M:tel succeeded in establishing themselves as a mobile phone operator in Sarajevo. As explained above the respondents have argued that people did not make their choices of ethnic reasons. People rather opt for the cheapest companies, or the ones offering the best deals. They based their decisions on economic reasons.
4.3 Mobile phone Numbers as an Ethnic Marker

As presented in the introduction, the mobile phone companies have different prefixes. Respondent 7 explains this:

…061- and 062- is BH-Telecom, 063- and 064 I think, is Eronet and then 065- and 066- is M:tel. So you know, I mean when someone calls, you know which provider it is. But it’s the same thing anywhere. (Respondent 7)

The companies established themselves in areas considered ethnically belonging to them as the companies was considered connected to an ethnic group. Because of this people connected the prefix of the number to ethnicity. Respondent 4 explains it:

I’m not meaning this but I know that that’s the rumor. I found out that, when you have this kind of number it’s not cool if you’re not that kind of nationality. For example if someone is calling you 066- you think that it’s a Serb. If someone is calling you from zero something that’s…[one word unrecognizable]…something, I don’t know. I think that how it was a year ago. If someone would call from 066 number, oh my god that was really bad. You mustn’t be affiliated with those Serbs if you’re not a Serbian. (Respondent 4)

Respondent 4 describe that if you are of a certain ethnicity you, at least until a year ago, should have the same number affiliated with the company connected to your ethnicity. She states that you should not be affiliated with those Serbs in that time. She makes a dichotomization between the Serbs as the ‘other’ and the Bosniaks as ‘us’. She confirms that the numbers were connected to ethnicity as she perceives 066- an M:tel number, as a Serbian company. She describes that ethnicity, at that time really mattered as you were somehow bound to have ‘your’ ethnic company. She then describes that compared to a year ago change might have occurred:

I think now…a lot of people are looking for good deals and now it’s not anymore as it used to be. But a year and a half ago it was more like that. You would not go to that company as you feel awkward to have it. Now, I see my friends who maybe didn’t want that before, now wanting it because it’s cheaper, because it gives better service or because it gives them more minutes to talk or something. (Respondent 4)
What she means is that what was previously awkward, to have a company ‘belonging’ to another ethnicity, has changed since now the companies established themselves and offers good deals and better service. When this ‘other’ company first entered the market it was considered a Serbian company. Something has changed in how the company now is perceived by respondent 4. Either it is not perceived as a Serbian company anymore or a kind of socialization has occurred, the company has become accepted because it is actually doing real competitive business in a market that was earlier considered a monopoly market ruled by BH-Telekom, The company perceived as Bosniak dominated. When respondent 1 is told a story, some ten years old, about a teenage boy that did not buy a guitar because the seller had a M:tel number he gives the following explanation:

Yes…eh… don’t know I’m in this circle of friends and my family, we are not nationalistic. We are not nationalistic; we don’t look at this because we are friends from all people, ethnic groups. I know that that thing happens here and I know that discrimination is like in every other social interaction there is nationalistic tendencies, of course like telephone companies. But I cannot, that’s for me stupid people. There is this capitalistic phrase: Money don’t know any borders. If it’s for him cheaper to buy this in Republica Srpska why don’t go buy it. (Respondent 1)

He tells that he is not nationalistic and would not make a decision based on ethnic criteria. Even though he acknowledge that such things happens, that people based their decisions on ethnic reasons. Respondent 7 gives the following answer when told the same story and is then asked if she can see ethnicity in the number:

Less and less. I’m telling you the situation changed maybe, maybe two years ago with Eronet or even three years ago with Eronet, two years ago with M:tel. Now there are people in the city who will have various numbers. However…yes, this is something I’m surprised with, because it can happen. 063, oh, this is someone from Herzegovina calling, so it does happen. Because people opt for their national company… like national… nationalistic these days, ethnic company which is..yes, it’s ridiculous just like everything else. It’s not only with mobile phones, the switch that we have to make. That’s why we vote for same nationalistic parties here and obviously we had a shitty situation because nobody thinks, ok, let’s vote for something else. That is something that I do understand. I mean, I do believe you
that that story happen and it can still happen, probably. But when it comes to economy and free market and general market competition, I think it’s stronger then the nationalist ideas. Especially now since it been ten years since that story, especially now. So people, maybe ten years ago would not buy a car from someone who is a Serb if they are Muslim, but today they will. I don’t care I want a good price for my car, I will buy the car. So the situation is slightly changing even though it’s still present I would have to say. (Respondent 7)

As explained before, mobile phone companies were perceived as connected to areas which were perceived as ethnic territory. Because of this the companies were perceived as connected to ethnic groups. Then the companies expanded on their territory perceived as connected to the company. Also, the numbers could be identified to belong to certain companies as the companies had different prefixes. This situation creates that the number can in some way reflect ethnicity. But, what is interesting is that since ‘other’ companies, M:tel and HT:Eronet entered the Sarajevo telecommunication market the respondents perceive that change has occurred in the reasons for taking decisions. Now, the respondents perceive people to make decisions based on economic reasons rather than ethnic ones. Another interesting aspect is that even though numbers can serve as an ethnic marker, none of the respondents acknowledged that it was actually used. As respondent 7 argues, the numbers can reflect ethnicity less and less in Sarajevo. That is because M:tel and HT:Eronet has entered the market and that makes people change companies every day. With time, numbers cannot be an ethnic marker at all even though the companies might still be considered ethnic if the situation stays the same.
5. Conclusions

In total eight respondents were interviewed, one Serb, one Croat and six Bosniaks. All of them used BH-Telecom, perceived as the Bosniak telecommunication company, except for one Bosniak who used M:tel, the company perceived as a Serbian corporation. As presented almost all of the respondents had thought about changing provider or at some point had another provider but still after two years of competition between BH-Telecom, HT:Eronet and M:tel on the market in Sarajevo almost all of the respondents stayed with BH-Telecom as BH-Telecom were the only provider before 2008 in Sarajevo. One of the respondent had M:tel and she is a Bosniak. She explained that she got the phone from her mother even though she describes her mother as a bit fascist meaning that she thinks ethnicity matters. Her mother opt for signing a contract with the M:tel operator and get a phone for free, an economic decision.

In 2008 new actors were able to enter the telecommunication market in Sarajevo. M:tel and HT:Eronet entered the marked and by doing good marketing and offering fair deals they gained market shares. How could this be possible in this rigid structure? Basically, all that matters to the respondents are economic reasons when choosing telecommunication companies, as stated by all of the respondents. M:Tel and HT:Eronet succeeded and the formula were marketing and fair deals. All that matters, at least to the urban youth in this study, was economy. The decision were not taken by ethnic reasons, they would chose the company that offered the best deal for their needs.

How can this be understood? Do the respondents opt for BH-Telecom because most of them are Bosniaks even though they state something else? I do not believe so. I would argue that it is the structure produced by the ethnic division of mobile phone companies that make them stay with their old provider.

The ethnic segregation or power-sharing, of the Bosnian government creates a structure of ethnic divide within the country. That divided runs from the constitution on state-level all the way to mobile phone companies in Bosnia and Herzegovina. As explained by one of the respondents; during the war the three different fractions provided
infrastructure and held certain territories that then become considered to be ethnic related. It is when the structure of ethnic divide, in the first phase is produced. Then with the Dayton Agreement and the new constitution this ethnic divide become further concreted as the Dayton Agreement implement constitutional power-sharing even in the election process (Chandler 2000:69).

By dividing the companies by ethic lines and create three companies every ethnicity would have one company and that would be a way to balance power. Then, by building up networks, only in your ‘own’ areas considered as ethnic territory would avoid political competition (political since the companies were governed by their own ethnical elite) and that would also be a way to balance power. If no competition takes place power is irrelevant. This created the monopoly market and the division of mobile phone companies in Bosnia and Herzegovina. HT:Eronets market were in Croat dominated part of the Federation, BH-Telecom in Bosniak dominated part of federation and M:tel in Republika Srpska.

Hence, a very rigid structure was produced. By introducing concepts as; national roaming, to charge extra if you have to use another companies network and to have much higher tariffs if you call another than your own network further add to this structure. This was a political decision by RAK, the telecommunication institution on state-level (biznis.ba). Since you already would be in a monopoly market and new actors enter it will just give you extra costs if you switched company as it was more expensive to call other companies. Also, as explained, there might be an affection to the number itself, either professional or emotional. Two of the respondent argues that they needed the same number as they had their own business. If you cannot keep your number when switching company would further strengthen the structure as people would stay with their old company.

Another trivial possibility would be that the respondents stayed with the old company of laziness; basically they have not made any decisions regarding changing number or provider. They might have thought about it as all of them states, but have not looked into it.
Even though I would argue that the structure retains customers to their ‘own’ company. In Sarajevo the respondents stay with BH-Telecom because they are in a network of friends and families were most of them uses BH-Telecom. Then, it becomes profitable to have BH-Telecom. Because of earlier monopoly BH-Telcom has the biggest market shares in Sarajevo but it slightly changes as M:tel and HT:Eronet entered the market.

Further, the respondents acknowledge that mobile phone numbers can serve as an ethnic marker to some extent. But, they do not acknowledge that it is actually used as an ethnic marker and none of the respondents had experienced discrimination because of their number. Although, the respondents are NGO volunteers or professionals and are believed to be more moderate and tolerant then average. If war veterans were interviewed they would probably state that ethnicity matters, A Bosniak war veteran would probably have BH-Telecom as provider if ethnicity matters to the veteran, totally opposite to NGO professionals or volunteers. Regarding selection, NGO professionals and volunteers were used to give broad understanding of the phenomenon.

This study, even though a limited and preliminary one, has showed that the phone numbers can serve as ethnic marker. But, further research, preferable a quantitative study could provide knowledge to what extent phone numbers can serve as ethnic markers. It would also be interesting to do a similar study to other groups or in other towns in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Finally, I would argue that this change in the Bosnian telecommunication market is a good indicator that positive change in attitude occurs in Sarajevo. The political situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina mostly is a rather bleak one, least not shown by the division of mobile phone companies. But as normalization occurs I believe that everyday decisions by urban youth are not based on ethnicity, they make rational decision such as economic reasoning when choosing mobile phone companies.
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