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BOSNIA-HERZEGOVINA SINCE DAYTON:
CIVIC AND UNCIVIC VALUES

Edited by Ola Listhaug and Sabrina P. Ramet
Scientific Committee
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Rudolf Rizman, Paul Shoup, Milica Uvalič [Vera Vangeli]
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RELIGION AND SOCIETY IN BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

To talk sociologically about religion in Bosnia and Herzegovina is almost an impossible task, as there is not much space to research religious changes without talking more or less exclusively about the political aspects of religion or more directly about the religious involvement in war and post-war circumstances. I am certainly not claiming that it is not a matter of sociological interest to talk about the political aspects of religious changes, but I am claiming that a focus only on the political aspects of religious changes diverts our attention, both empirically and theoretically, from other aspects of religious change that are not of less sociological interest. This is in line with my arguments already expressed in various published works. For example, in a chapter about religion and values in Croatia, published in 2007, I claimed that religion, although having a large role in Croatian society, is only one among a number of factors shaping democratic development, a factor that should not be overestimated and cannot be regarded as the main factor influencing current and future democratic development. In another chapter, focusing on religiosity in post-Yugoslav states, I questioned the dominant line of interpretation of rising religiosity which consists of pointing out only turbulent social processes, and opted for an ethnography of believers. Furthermore, it is wrong just to label (new) believers as conformists, or as a simple product of political and social conflicts.


2 S. Zrinščak, “Anonymous Believers as a Sociological Challenge: Religions and Religious
implications. If the process of the politicization of religion and sacralization of politics is the process inside which the revitalization of religion is interpreted, then it becomes clear that the dominant theoretical point of interpretation is secularization theory. Quite simply, if current processes (such as revitalization of religion) do not correspond to a secularization trend, then, following this line of thinking, religious changes are suspect, anti-modern, not expected in Europe, etc. However, this interpretation ignores the fact that, if secularization theory is a valid theory, it can explain only West European socio-religious development, having in mind different modernization patterns and different religious changes in other parts of the world. Even if secularization is a valid theory for the European context it is so, as argued by many authors, only partly, as it cannot explain some other aspects of religious changes that coexist with declining religious participation. Here, I am particularly referring to the rising (or continuing) public role of religions and all the controversies around that. As religious changes cannot be reduced or understood only inside political aspects / processes, the same is true for the rising role of religion in the public sphere. Religion continues to be relevant for private life (even for a minority of the population) and has even become an unavoidable public factor. That can be understood as a trend opposite to modernization but also, and increasingly so, as a part of current social processes, in their different and contradictory aspects.

Still, the picture is far from being clear. As already noted, I am certainly not saying that religion is not tightly connected with ethnicity. However, the importance of ethnicity for social life goes beyond the social role of religion. Therefore, and in order to continue with my specific approach to religious change, I will first present sociological data about religiosity in Bosnia-Herzegovina, and will later try to interpret some major approaches to the issue of religion and war. In this dual endeavor, the main question will be what is the same and what is different about religion in Bosnia-Herzegovina in comparison to other post-communist as well as other European countries, and the main arguments will be: (a) the process of revitalization of religion in Bosnia and Herzegovina is in its nature and depth not very different from parallel processes in other post-communist


Graph 1. Belief in the existence of God, life after death and religious miracles, %


countries; (b) though religion is deeply connected with different ethnic groups and with the overall social process, the ethnicization of social and political life is only partly embedded in religion, and (c) therefore, it should be reconsidered what might be expected from religion and religious confessions as regards the process of finding political solutions for Bosnia-Herzegovina and to what extent.

1. Religiosity: a sociological approach

An approach which interprets religiosity on the basis of some usual indicators, such as confessional belonging, church participation, or the importance of God, suffers from many shortcomings, but can also offer a more or less objective view of different dimensions of religious belonging and can also provide a comparative perspective. Therefore, I shall present a sociological picture of religiosity in Bosnia and Herzegovina on the basis of available sources. In doing so, I shall point out differences among the different nations living in Bosnia and Herzegovina, i.e., Croats, Bosniaks, and Serbs, while other minorities will be put in category of “other”.

The basic religious profile refers to beliefs in God, life after death and religious miracles. Belief in God is the most widespread article of faith as about 80% of all population believe in God. It is worth noting that the Graph 1 shows

---

6 In this first part of the sociological analysis I am using the data coming from the European Social Survey Project (SEESSP), conducted during January-March 2004. The data are used from questionnaire “B” which involved more than 3000 participants. I thank Albert Simkus who gave me access to the data.
Graph 2. Religious self-identification


percentages only for those who believe, thus including those whose faith may be weak. If we add this category (those who said they believe somewhat) then 92.3% of Croats and Bosniaks, and 88.5% of Serbs believe more or less in God. Belief in life after death and religious miracles is a little bit less widespread. The same distribution can be found in almost all European countries, as belief in God is the indicator which is usually the most widespread in comparison to other indicators of belief. Belief in life after death and religious miracles is less present among Serbs. This can partly be a reflection of their somewhat lower level of religiosity (belief in God is somewhat lower among Serbs than among Croats and Bosniaks), but also a reflection of different confessional traditions. That also means that small differences in religiosity could not be overestimated as they are connected with differences between different confessions. It is also visible that those in the category “other” tend to be less religious (that is also the case in other indicators), but as there are few members of other nations living in Bosnia and Herzegovina (according to estimates less than 1%), they do not make much difference in reality.

Graph 2 shows results of religious self-identification, i.e., answers to the question how religious a person sees him- or herself regardless of membership in a particular religion. The distribution of results is as expected and it basically follows beliefs in God and other articles of faith. The distribution of religious self-identification is similar in all three nations in Bosnia-Herzegovina, although Croats are a little bit more religious than either Bosniaks or Serbs.

Prayer outside religious services is another very good indicator of religiosity,
which shows how a person lives his or her religiosity, and how important it is in that person’s everyday life. Prayer outside religious services is usually considered to be an indicator which is to the least extent shaped by social conditions, but on the other hand it is a reflection of the overall social position of religion. Indeed, the prayer is in correlation with the level of religiosity: higher level of religiosity means higher level of prayer and vice versa. According to Graph 3, prayer is present in the life of population of Bosnia and Herzegovina: only 13.8% never pray and another 15.1% pray rarely, up to once or twice a year. Regular prayer (once a week or more) is the most present among Croats (51%), and significantly less among Bosniaks (31%), and particularly less among Serbs (15.3%).

In addition to the indicators of beliefs and religious orientation (religious self-declaration and prayer), confessional membership and religious service attendance are two other important dimensions. Graphs 4 and 5 indicate an overwhelming adherence to religious communities with more than 95% of the population belonging to one or another particular religious denomination. In that respect differences among the three major nations are marginal. That is to say that irrespective of other indicators of religiosity, the identification with religious communities serves as the basic social orientation. This is also an indication that belonging to a particular religion overlaps with belonging to a particular nation, or that national feelings are basically shaped by religious differences.

Religious service attendance has, in general, been recorded at a lower level than affiliation with a particular religion, belief in God, or religious self-declaration. Still, religious service attendance is very present, although with high and statistically significant differences among different nations. Regular attendance
Graph 4. Belonging to particular religion or denomination


Graph 5. Belong to particular religious denomination: distribution of particular denomination among all population

Source: SEESSP data, 2004

(nearly every week or more) is particularly present among Croats (43.6%), but significantly less among Bosniaks (26%), and Serbs (8.1%). Accordingly, 18.1% of Bosniaks and 12.5% of Serbs never attend religious services. When compared with affiliation with a particular religion and religious service attendance, it becomes obvious that, for about 15% of the population, affiliation with a particular faith fulfills a basic socio-ethnic orientation, and is not an indication of religiosity, because they never attend religious services. This is not so strange in the
European context, but the meanings of belonging in everyday life differ among different European countries⁷.

Graph 8. Attending religious services 1990, 2004


Graph 9. Changes of religiosity since 1990


Not only for Bosnia and Herzegovina, but also for other post-communist countries, the very relevant question is what has happened after the fall of commu-

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Religious person</th>
<th>Belonging to rel. community</th>
<th>Comfort and strength from rel.</th>
<th>Belief in God</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Atheist</td>
<td>Atheist</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>DK</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DK</td>
<td>DK</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>4.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: www.worldvaluessurvey.org


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>More than once a week</th>
<th>11.8</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Once a week</td>
<td>17.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Once a month</td>
<td>16.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Only on special holy days/Christmas/Easter days</td>
<td>27.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Once a year</td>
<td>6.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less often</td>
<td>7.0</td>
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<tr>
<td>Never practically never</td>
<td>14.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DK</td>
<td>0.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: www.worldvaluessurvey.org


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Religious person</th>
<th>Comfort and strength</th>
<th>Attendance – once a month or more</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>B&amp;H</td>
<td>74.3</td>
<td>72.0</td>
<td>45.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Croatia</td>
<td>85.2</td>
<td>82.2</td>
<td>52.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slovenia</td>
<td>70.2</td>
<td>48.1</td>
<td>30.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Macedonia</td>
<td>84.1</td>
<td>71.1</td>
<td>32.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Serbia &amp; Montenegro</td>
<td>73.9</td>
<td>64.4</td>
<td>18.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: www.worldvaluessurvey.org

nism. The higher public visibility of religion is a common fact, although it is not always clear if this rising public role has just been a reflection of rising religiosity or also (in higher or lesser degree) of other social circumstances. In that respect the comparison between 1990 and 2004 would be of interest. Religious service

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Religious person</th>
<th>Comfort and strength</th>
<th>Attendance – once a month or more</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>B&amp;H</td>
<td>74.3</td>
<td>72.0</td>
<td>45.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Czech R.</td>
<td>43.2</td>
<td>25.7</td>
<td>11.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hungary</td>
<td>59.0</td>
<td>49.4</td>
<td>17.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latvia</td>
<td>76.9</td>
<td>63.3</td>
<td>15.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lithuania</td>
<td>84.4</td>
<td>72.3</td>
<td>31.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poland</td>
<td>94.4</td>
<td>82.0</td>
<td>78.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slovakia</td>
<td>81.5</td>
<td>63.8</td>
<td>49.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: www.worldvaluessurvey.org

Table 5. A basic religious profile in Bosnia and Herzegovina and some Western European countries, %, 1998 + 2001.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Religious person</th>
<th>Comfort and strength</th>
<th>Attendance – once a month or more</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>B&amp;H</td>
<td>74.3</td>
<td>72.0</td>
<td>45.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Austria</td>
<td>79.5</td>
<td>62.0</td>
<td>42.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>62.1</td>
<td>55.3</td>
<td>34.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greece</td>
<td>79.7</td>
<td>76.3</td>
<td>33.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>85.8</td>
<td>71.5</td>
<td>53.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spain</td>
<td>59.0</td>
<td>54.4</td>
<td>35.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>38.9</td>
<td>33.2</td>
<td>9.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UK</td>
<td>41.6</td>
<td>37.4</td>
<td>18.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: www.worldvaluessurvey.org

attendance was somewhat less present in 1990 than it was in 2004 (Graphs 7 and 8), but differences are neither particularly large, nor consistent. Among Croats, 12.8% never went to religious services in 1990, and 8.2% did the same in 2004. Among Bosniaks, the percentages for non-attendance were the same in 1990 and 2004, while among Serbs, non-attendance was even a little bit higher in 1990 than in 2004. Also, regular attendance was more present among Serbs and Bosniaks in 1990 than in 2004. Although very interesting, the comparison between 1990 and 2004 does not tell a lot about the rising religiosity in post-communism, as in 1990 the fall of communism was already present, and religions were visible signs of a new social order. In that case, the comparison between a year
before the collapse of communism (for example, the mid- or even early 1980s) and a year in 2000s would be more illuminating. Graph 9 tells the same story. 22.3% of the population said that they were more religious in 2004 than in 1990, but 13% confessed that they were less religious in 2004 than in 1990. Almost 65% thought that their religiosity was pretty much the same in these two years.

Reliability as well as comparative aspects of sociological data are of crucial importance. The SEEESSP project (on the basis of which I have presented Graphs 1 to 9; see also footnote No. 6) certainly offer reliable data, but lack a comparison with other post-communist countries. Therefore, I shall use here the World Values Survey Data collected in 1998 and 20018. As there are some differences in indicators of religiosity between these two sources, in Tables 1 and 2 I firstly present basic data, which have been already presented and discussed in this chapter on the basis of the SEEESSP data. As should be clear, values of different indicators are somewhat lower in WVS than in SEEESSP data. However, the comparative aspects are here of more concern, which are evident from Tables 3 to 5. According to religious identification, Bosnia-Herzegovina is more similar to Serbia, Montenegro, and Slovenia, than to Croatia or Macedonia. However, concerning the other two indicators (whether religion gives comfort and strength, and regular religious service attendance), Serbia, Montenegro, and particularly Slovenia, have lower values, and even in Macedonia religious service attendance is significantly less widespread than someone might suppose on the basis of religious self-identification. In that sense, Bosnia and Herzegovina is more similar to Croatia than to other post-Yugoslav countries, as religiosity in these two countries seems to be more consistent. Those who are religious express that to a greater extent in various dimensions of religiosity than is the case in other countries.

The comparison between Bosnia and Herzegovina and other post-communist as well as other Western European countries shows in general much greater variations. These variations are visible among countries, and among indicators in each country. Tables 4 and 5 also show that there is not much sense to speak in general about post-communist countries and about Western European countries. Just to put forward a very obvious example: concerning religiosity, the Czech Republic and Sweden are much more similar than the Czech Republic and Slovakia, although they are quite different in terms of other social development facts. To go further and on the basis of these indicators it is not possible to speak simply about secularization in Western Europe, and revitalization in Eastern Europe, though the revitalization is much more present in post-communist countries. All

8 See: World Value Survey at www.worldvaluessurvey.org [last accessed on 10th October 2009].
Table 6. Religious communities can give answers to, %, 2001.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Moral problems</th>
<th>Problems of family life</th>
<th>Spiritual needs</th>
<th>Social problems</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>46.2</td>
<td>29.8</td>
<td>60.5</td>
<td>23.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>43.2</td>
<td>58.9</td>
<td>30.5</td>
<td>63.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DK</td>
<td>10.7</td>
<td>11.3</td>
<td>9.0</td>
<td>13.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N=1200

Source: www.worldvaluessurvey.org

in all, Bosnia and Herzegovina is among the most religious European countries, but the level of religiosity is certainly not exceptionally high (there are European countries with higher levels of religiosity), i.e., Bosnia and Herzegovina is not so different from some other countries, both Western and Eastern, in which the level of religiosity is somewhat higher than the European average.

Going more in the direction of the social functions of religiosity, it is interesting to see how people evaluate the possibilities of their religious communities, ranging from their ability to give answers to spiritual need, through moral problems, and problems of family life, to social problems (Table 6). Obviously, the possibility of fulfilling spiritual needs is acknowledged, but the level of acceptance for other issues is much lower. While it is not a surprise to see that religious communities are not able to offer answers to all social problems, it is interesting to see that the answers to moral problems that communities can offer, are acceptable for only 46% of respondents. The question therefore remains if and how religions influence the moral values of people.

In order to further check the reliability and comparability of data it is worth noting that the research done by Swedish sociologist Kjell Magnusson and analyzed by Croatian sociologist Srdan Vrcan found also differences between Croats and Bosniaks, but stressed those differences to a great extent\(^9\). In a word, Croats are much more religious and much closer to the Catholic Church than Bosniaks are to Islam and the Islamic community. Vrcan concluded that Bosnian Islam and the Bosniak Muslim population have been more affected by secularization than Croatian Catholics, and that Catholicism in Bosnia and Herzegovina had made a better traditional background and cultural soil for the direct politicisation of religion and for confessional homogeneity than Bosnian Islam.\(^10\) However, the question remains: to what extent it is possible to interpret the level of religios-

---


\(^10\) *Ibidem*, p. 194.
ity in terms of social conditions, or to what extent the level of religiosity can offer a soil for the politicisation of religion and for confessional homogeneity.

2. Religious changes in the context

Situating religious changes in context means at least two things. One is to evaluate the changes from the point of view of change in other more or less similar countries, but also to evaluate change from the point of view of wider global social change. The other important thing is to understand change at the particular place over a longer period. What has happened in Bosnia and Herzegovina after the collapse of communism in respect to the situation before 1990? Were the changes in religiosity bigger, or more radical than in other post-communist countries?

Some indications of the first meaning have been already offered. The general observable trend in numerous post-communist countries is the trend toward a revitalization of religion. Revitalization has occurred both at the level of individual religiosity, level of identification with churches, and at the societal level, mainly visible in a new public social role of (mainly traditional) religions. However, this general trend has different patterns in different countries, and there are also some notable exceptions. The Czech Republic, Eastern Germany (i.e., the territory which once corresponded to the German Democratic Republic), and Estonia can be included among the most secular European countries. Even more, some recent publications state that we can neither claim that religion has disappeared in Eastern Europe, nor state that there is a universal tendency toward a religious revitalization in the region. Other mainly national factors (denominational distribution, church-state relations, modernization, or specific events) are relevant and contribute to the complexity of the picture. For example, the comparison of church attendance between early 1990s and 2000s shows that it grew in the majority of countries, although not in all, and particularly in countries that already had a high church attendance rate. Figures in brackets indicate changes in church attendance in some of the countries: Bulgaria (+6%), Croatia (0), East Germany (+3), Hungary (+1), Poland (-1), Romania (+15), Russia (+6). At the same time trust in the Church shows very different trends: Bulgaria (+31%), Croatia (-), East Germany (-15), Hungary (-11), Poland (-12), Romania (+16), Russia (+2). Yet, the completely new public role of religion is a fact differently but significantly present in all countries.

12 Ibidem, p. 72.
Religious changes in the post-communist period are partly a product of a specific post-communist development, but wider global social and religious changes cannot be ignored either. It is not proper to evaluate religious changes in the post-communist era or in specific countries without acknowledging very different processes in other parts of the world, and which are not captured adequately by secularization theory. Of particular relevance is here José Casanova’s approach, which refines secularization theory by stating that the process of functional differentiation is a global social trend, while the decline of religion and the privatization of religion are just historical options, not processes which necessarily accompany functional differentiation. Another relevant approach might be one which finds many signs of a global spiritual revolution, i.e., not the decline of religion but its transformation in more spiritual directions.

An undertaking to compare religiosities before and after the dissolution of Yugoslavia is a more difficult task. Sociological research on religion in socialist Yugoslavia was rather rare and not consistent. There are two issues which I find important – when revitalization started and how revitalization corresponded with other social changes – although I cannot say much about them for the territory of Bosnia and Herzegovina. What can be confirmed is the different level of religiosity of different nations. Research on youth conducted by Vrcan in the mid-1980s revealed that Croats, Albanians, and Slovenians (youth) were more religious than members of other national groups in Yugoslavia, and Macedonians and Muslims were somewhere in the middle, while Serbs, Montenegrins and those who identified themselves as Yugoslav were the least religious. Similar findings came from the research done in 1998 in Bosnia and Herzegovina – Croats were the most religious, Serbs the least, while Muslims were in the middle. To illustrate that further, 55% of Croats, 37% of Muslims, and 18% of Serbs said in 1988 that they were religious. 88% of Croats were Catholic, 82%

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13 J. Casanova, op. cit.
15 Muslim was the official name of Bosniaks during the former Yugoslavia and in this research the category of Muslim appear both as nationality and religious affiliation. Differences between these two categories were marked by initial letter: “Muslim” meant ethnic affiliation, and “muslim” religious one.
of Muslims were members of the Islamic community, and 76% of Serbs were Orthodox. Interestingly, to the question does being a Serb mean being Orthodox, a Croat mean being Catholic, and an ethnic Muslim mean being a religious Muslim, about half of population of all three nationalities agreed\(^\text{18}\).

On the other hand, empirical research confirmed, at least for Slovenia and Croatia (where we had more systematic sociological research), that the revitalization of religion started already in the 1980s, not only after the collapse of communism\(^\text{19}\). The interpretation offered already at that time was that rising religiosity was both an indicator and a reflection of the crisis of the political system (Roter), but also that rising religiosity was a part of a social regeneration against totalitarian political power (Tomka)\(^\text{20}\). In that way religion was viewed as a necessary part of the social changes in the late communist and early post-communist periods. However, it is very hard to say when the revitalization trend started to be present in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Available empirical research does not give a straightforward answer and, indeed, did not pay much attention to observable signs of a new public role of religions, although some public discussions about “rising religious fundamentalism” in socialist Yugoslavia indicated that role.

The need for contextualizing religious changes is obviously a need which has many barriers, particularly political / ideological ones. Different researchers have viewed communism in different ways. The next illustration is in that respect an interesting one.

In an account about religious developments in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE), Irena Borowik sorted out five reasons for distinguishing CEE from the rest of Europe while discussing the role of religion: (1) Christianity arrived later than in the West; (2) this is the area of the parallel existence of Latin and Orthodox Christianity; (3) religion was consolidated at the same time and was an important factor of nation and state-building process; (4) the influence of strong anti-religious and anti-democratic communism; and (5) religion as a part of total social transformation after the collapse of communism\(^\text{21}\). In his introductory chapter about the development of sociology of religion in ex-Yugoslav countries, Dragoljub Đorđević accepted the first three reasons, but rejected the fourth and


fifth, at least for the Yugoslav successor states. He claimed that the Yugoslav political system was not as atheistic as were the systems of other communist countries, and that religion was, during the process of dissolution of Yugoslavia, a part of negative, not positive social processes, meaning mainly on the connection between religion and the country’s meltdown. I personally do not support Đorđević’s arguments. Yes, the political system of socialist Yugoslavia was somewhat different from those of other communist countries. Yugoslavia was somewhat more liberal and more open to the West. During the 1960s, Yugoslavia partly reformulated its relations with the Churches and particularly with the Holy See. Still, Yugoslavia never stopped being an undemocratic, atheistic state, although ways of employing that were somewhat different from other CEE countries. Even in the late 1980s, Zdenko Roter, one of the most prominent Slovenian sociologists of religion, spoke about believers as second-class citizens in Yugoslavia. Also, religion was a prominent part of the social fabric after the fall of communism. These changes had positive sides (the fall of communism, democratization of countries, complete and widely welcomed social transformation), as well as negative sides (religion supporting the violence or not supporting the full democratization). Therefore, while socialist Yugoslavia had some specificities and had treated religion better than was the case in other countries, it was in general not so different from other communist countries. A person delivering a speech about the role of religion in post-communism should not forget this fact.

3. Religion, war, conflicts

The last paragraph of the previous section refers to even more complicated tasks of understandings and evaluating the position of religion inside the war and post-war development. I am trying here to summarize arguments presented by different authors. The authors discussed certainly do not constitute a full list of relevant literature, but have been influential in researching the religious involvement in conflicts.

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23 I have to say here that some of my colleagues whom I appreciate very much do not support my arguments and are more inclined to accept those presented by Đorđević.


The crucial question is if and how religions (churches) were connected with war(s). The first part of the question is easily solubile. There are almost no sociological/political science analyses which claim that religion was not to some extent involved in the war. Everyone and everything were touched by the war, particularly in Bosnia and Herzegovina, religion and churches included. The second part of the question reveals significant differences among different authors.

Let us start with Enzo Pace whose interest is in general how and why religion enters wars. Which conditions have to be in place to transform a religious speech from peace and love to the marking of differences between us and them. Pace included Bosnia and Herzegovina in his analysis of similar cases in different parts of the world. And the answer is certainly not straightforward. Religions in general become connected with wars, or become a part of war strategies/events, when they become a language of particular identity politics, when they become a repertoire of symbols used by different social and political actors about endangered identity and enemy faces which endanger that identity. The politics of identity is for him the political and social movement which tries to affirm the existence of common values, and asks for their complete transformation in rules that govern a particular society. If conflict is a necessary mode for political goals, then the play between memory and identity is important. On the other hand, memory is an essential part of religion. Therefore, the reconstruction of collective memories cannot go without religion. Religion watches the destiny of nation, watches the sacral symbols of its identity, it offers a rhetoric about continuity of collective memory. Religion is a powerful regulator of collective memories. It is able to be transformed into the strategic resource for political goals. Religion can create a sacred space inside which an endangered identity can defend itself from an external Enemy. In such a case religion is a communication agent which justifies all means against an Enemy, violence included.

However, the crucial issue is “endangered identity”. Why and how some political groups feel endangered and how it happens that these feelings become transformed into violent conflicts. Religion, suggests Pace, is not an answer, or it is only partly. The complex political and sociological analyses have to be put in place, and in the case of Bosnia and Herzegovina, it includes the socio-political (including ethnic, religious) analysis of the former Yugoslavia period, not forgetting economic aspects of the life and the fall of Yugoslavia. Pace clearly said – and this is an undeniable fact – that Yugoslavia failed because of political and eco-

27 Ibidem, pp. X-XI.
28 It has to be stressed that it is my own reading of Enzo Pace writing. The same should be said for other authors presented here.
onomic reasons. Religion was, therefore, not a cause of its collapse, although it contributed to that result. The identity of different nations was built on the basis of the authority of memory, which was hidden for a long time. Religions were crucial inside the work of reconstruction of collective memories, although that reconstruction has to be viewed inside the context of the communist treatment of religion. Up to the time when conflict was political, the religious dimension was suppressed. In connection with the growing rate of violence, religion became more important, it fed the previously forgotten memory in order to give strength and moral support to war discipline. Religion came as the last necessary collective effort to give a meaning to the conflict and violence, concluded Pace.30

The sociological approach used by Pace has, I think, a double level. At the first level the ability of religion to create and sustain memory and identity has to be acknowledged, understood, and further analyzed. Religion is, indeed, as claimed by French sociologist Danièle Harvie-Léger, (a) the chain of memory on the basis of which an individual believer becomes a member of community – a community which gathers former, current, and future members, and (b) a tradition (or collective memory) which becomes a basis for the existence of this community.31 Only after this first level, involving the profound sociological analysis of particular social circumstances, can one describe how this ability can be transformed into concrete social and political actions. Jakov Jukić, a Croatian sociologist, claimed in a similar way that the connection between religions and wars, despite the truth that both have been present in society from the beginning of history, has still to be analyzed.32 The functional approach, which for Jukić is the most suitable for polytheistic and archaic societies, although is also very dominant in explaining current social processes, simply understands that religion plays the same role inside war circumstances as it plays in society in general. Indeed, religion eases human lives, it provides the most effective help in different distresses of human life, gives meanings, facilitates social adjustment. In a word, it is an effective answer to different social and individual crises. Consequently, religion is involved in wars and other violent conflicts. In monotheistic times, however, the war is not just (or predominantly) a ritual play as it was in polytheistic societies. The difference between polytheism and monotheism is that the latter brings a truth into the religion, and accordingly brings exclusivity into the society. Therefore, another emerging approach is the approach which insists on legitimacy: religion justifies wars. Still, the varieties of roles, functions, or abilities of religion lead to the necessity, it has to be stressed once again, for recognizing

29 E. Pace, op. cit., p. 56.
30 Ibidem, p. 80.
multiple religious possibilities. Religion can have both a disintegrative and an integrative role\textsuperscript{33}. However, the crucial integration role of religion could be realized only in premodern societies. Modern societies are characterized by functional differentiation where each subsystem functions in line with its own rules. Integration and disintegration impulses in modern and postmodern societies are the results of the interaction of very different social systems; and religion is just one among them. Functional differentiation together with pluralization just prevents religion from having the general integrative role. Religion can play an important role but, it should be emphasized, it is neither a \textit{conditio sine qua non} for social cohesion in contemporary societies, nor is it a crucial factor for social disintegration. One can say that the rising public visibility of religion calls that claim into question. However, I am relying on an approach by Casanova who sees the compatibility between functional differentiation and the continuing role of religion, both at the private and public level\textsuperscript{34}. The consequences for studying the Bosnian case are clear, but not less simple. The role of religion is conditioned by the degree of modernization of society, but also other specific social features, and the public influence has to be studied among other factors of social development, not less important.

Still, religion’s political role is a fascinating subject. Similarly to E. Pace, Mitja Velikonja carried out a complex historical analysis of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the analysis which is a precondition for explaining the current events\textsuperscript{35}. As Pace had written earlier, Velikonja stated that the most recent war in Bosnia and Herzegovina was more a classical war of aggression with clear geopolitical goals rather than a civil or religious war\textsuperscript{36}. That does not prevent him from seeing the powerful involvement of religious organizations in the war. Religious organizations contributed to exclusion, hate, and intolerance. The religious connection with politics contributed to religio-nationalist mythical constructs. The development and manipulation of myths were crucial, and religion strengthened those myths. The most important were those of the “chosen” people, the mythologizing of important religious and national figures from the past, the demonization of the enemy church/nation, the condemnation of the preceding period of history, etc\textsuperscript{37}. Velikonja has also stressed the necessity to see complexity not only in today’s events, but also in history. Simple constructions which contrast today’s intolerance with an idealistic vision of historically embedded tolerance are simply wrong. Also, the situation of Bosnia and


\textsuperscript{34} J. Casanova, \textit{op. cit.}

\textsuperscript{35} M. Velikonja, \textit{op. cit.}

\textsuperscript{36} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 292.

\textsuperscript{37} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 259.
Herzegovina is not unique in the world today.

Connections between religion and nationalism seem to be of great interest for many scientists, and even a main channel for the study of the role of religion in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Dino Abazović focused on religious nationalism which can be defined by (a) politicization of religion and sacralization of politics, (b) the supremacy of the collectivity upon individualism and aggressive distinction to others and different, (c) totalitarianism and extremism, (d) an alternative vision of social order, and (e) radical changes of place and role of members in society. The concept of religious nationalism leads him to analyze concrete political actions of fractions of different religious communities. Religious nationalism is also connected with the slow democratization of society, and is partly reflected in problems that other religious communities, which are not traditional, have in realizing their constitutionally guaranteed rights. Abazović also tried to see how current processes correspond to dominant modern trend of secularization, although he acknowledged that secularization is an extremely complex phenomenon. Still, religious renewal and religious revitalization are for him dominant processes, and a context for analyzing both the role of religion and possibilities for future social development.

A similar approach is taken by Ivan Markešić, a keen observer of the Bosnian situation, who focuses on processes of the “sacralization of nation”, and “ethnicization of religion”, as the main socio-religious processes in Bosnia-Herzegovina during transition. Interested in finding acceptable solutions for current social and political crisis, he identified across “confessional nationalism” as a prominent barrier to interethnic cooperation.

The concept of religious revitalization, i.e., the concept of desecularization was dominant also in writings of the Croatian sociologist Srdan Vrcan. It can even be said that he influenced a lot of other scientists, particularly those on the territory of the former Yugoslavia. Being very critical of the political role of religion he built his theory on a kind of mixture of Robertson’s concept of politicization of religion and sacralization of politics, and the sociological theory of

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41 S. Vrcan, Vjera u vrlozima tranzicije, cit.
secularization. Secularization theory is for him the starting point of evaluation. He also acknowledged other social processes that explain the war events, but evaluates the role of religion in post-communism and particularly in the former Yugoslavia as anti-modern, traditional, conservative.

Vrcan’s sociological writings can be viewed as a bridge to another dominant line of interpretation which particularly analyzes political actions of mainly traditional confessions in Bosnia-Herzegovina and in these concrete political actions sees the crucial cause of conflicts and crucial preconditions for peace and tolerance. Although there are important differences among the following authors, a common feature that connects them is a view which can be labeled “blame religion”. I particularly refer here to Marjan Smrke, Paul Mojzes, Vjekoslav Perica, and Michael Sells. For different reasons or on the basis of different explanations, religions/churches figured in their writings as the main political actors responsible for conflicts and wars. The same argument can be put another way: if religions were not manipulative, then we would not have had wars. Mojzes and Perica are in that respect very similar, while Smrke has a fairly original approach. He develops a concept of religious mimicry. Since the collapse of communism religious mimicry has become widespread – and mimicry in general “refers to those activities preformed by an individual or various social groups which aim – by way of simulation and dissimulation – is to increase the possibility of success (or reduce the possibility of a failure) in a given social (as well as natural) environment”. If Perica states that religion is one of the major forces of conflict in our world today, then Smrke explains the mechanism inside the mimetic (mis)use of religion. Similarly, Sells conclusion is very clear: “After the cold war, religions have become central conduits of conflict. Their conflict-based paradigms have become repositories of power for the perpetuation of violence, claiming of territory, and rewriting of the textuality of the land itself.” For Sells, Serb and Croat nationalists who were at the same time Orthodox Christian and Catholic nationalists (largely supported by their Churches) have to be blamed, while Islamic militancy also played a role, but a lesser one, as it was largely reactive.

45 V. Perica, op. cit., pp. V.
4. Conclusion

In view of the foregoing, I can simply state that it is not possible to formulate any simple conclusions. Obviously, if anything is clear, it is that my main intention has been to depict the complexity of the situation and actors involved. In that respect, a sociological approach has different purposes.

First, my sociological approach has acknowledged a connection between religion and ethnicity, a fact that religions have shaped different nations, culturally and socially, historically and today. Second, it has acknowledged a political involvement of different confessions in recent events. Religion, simply, is a social and a political fact, and its involvement in social processes is obvious. However, thirdly, I have stressed that social processes have multiple causes. To say that religions are the prime causes of unpleasant social processes means that social processes are not understood, whether one speaks of local processes or global processes. Or, as argued by Slavica Jakelić, “In addition to examining the relationship between religion and violence within its historical contexts, the study of the ways in which religion can induce or justify violence should also occur within the larger study of collective identification, and not solely within the context of «religious nationalism».” Therefore, fourthly, an alternative analysis of different dimensions of religions has been presented in this chapter, as well as an account of the complex role played by religion in contemporary societies, not only in the Yugoslav successor states, or even only in post-communist societies. Finally, I have emphasized a comparative outlook. Similarities and dissimilarities between different cases help us to understand what is unique, and what indeed is not.

The analysis has to be continued. This chapter has not offered a picture of church-state relations in Bosnia-Herzegovina, and has not analyzed religion in relation to values. That would help in uncovering future trends which is, once again, only partly shaped by religious feelings and social and political aspects of existence of confessional communities.

47 S. Jakelić, “Religion, Collective Identity, and Violence in Bosnia and Herzegovina”, in The Hedgehog Review, Vol. 6, No. 1, 2004, pp. 51-70. Only after this chapter was written, and just before submitting the final version, I have become aware of the work of Slavica Jakelić, which is in some important aspects similar to my approach. As I, Jakelić thinks it is wrong to conclude that religions reinforced the nationalists’ call to arms or weakly resisted them because they were collectivistic, and that the dominant approach in the literature does not appreciate religion as a form of identity next to and not reduced to national identification. However, she goes on (and I find that also very important) by distinguishing different categories of collectivistic religions in Bosnia and Herzegovina and their different positions towards violence, as well as their different peace-making potentials. See also: S. Jakelić, Collectivistic Religions. Religion, Choice, and Identity in Late Modernity, Ashgate, 2010.