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RELIGION(S) AND IDENTITY POLITICS IN BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

Abstract: *The article examines the use of religion in identity politics by various political actors in Bosnia and Herzegovina during the 20th century. Religion was crucial in identity politics as the primary marker distinguishing different groups. Still, the specific social contexts and controversies of particular identity politics and (un)intended consequences played a more critical role. To shed light on these processes in various periods, the author relies on secondary sources and predominantly research of authors who adopted a critical perspective towards grand narratives about identity and focused more on external markers of religiosity. By elaborating these insights chronologically, the article counterweights the grand narrative of eternal conflicts based on the alleged homogenous identities, which still circulate in B&H society's public sphere.*

Keywords: *religion, identity, politics, ethnonationalism, Bosnia and Herzegovina*

РЕЛИГИЈА(Е) И ПОЛИТИКЕ ИДЕНТИТЕТА У БОСНИ И ХЕРЦЕГОВИНИ

Сажетак: *У чланку се анализира кориштење религије у политици идентитета од стране различитих политичких актера у Босни и Херцеговини током 20. века. Религија је била кључна у политици идентитета као примарно обележје разликовања група. Ипак, специфични друштвени контексти и контроверзе одређене политике идентитета и (не)намерне последице одиграли су важнију улогу. Да би приказала ове процесе у различитим периодима, ауторка се ослања на секундарне изворе и претежно истраживања аутора који су усвојили критичку перспективу према великим наративима о идентитету и више се фокусирали на спољашње маркере религиозности. Разрађујући ове увиде хронолошки, чланак даје противтежу великом наративу о вечним сукобима заснованим на наводним хомогеним идентитетима, који још увек круже јавном сфером босанскохерцеговачког друштва.*

Кључне речи: *религија, идентитет, политика, етнонационализам, Босна и Херцеговина*

Introduction

Identity politics is a "slippery term" very often used more as "a critique of certain political practice than as a coherent area of study" (Bernstein, 2005: 48).

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It refers to different forms of political mobilisation to achieve political goals, based on "making and remaking ourselves – and ourselves in relation to other" (Brunt, 1989: 151). The scientific literature on identity politics flourished during the '90s, mainly focusing on the ethnic identities emerging increasingly through violent ethnic conflicts (Bernstein, 2005: 48). When it comes to former Yugoslavia, the brutality of violent conflicts led to different explanations (and oversimplifications) of its causes (Jovic, 2001: 101). Some of them included even the sociobiological explanation of human aggressive instincts ("Hobbesian lines") (Eriksen, 2001: 48), while the "ancient hatred" argument was prevalent in media and political rhetoric (Jovic, 2001: 103). The widespread view is that cultural differences among people are the leading cause of conflict (Eriksen, 2001: 48), and the Bosnian war (together with the war in the Gulf and the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict) served as case studies in Huntington's book about the clash of civilisations (Ashraf, 2012: 524).

The main aim of this article is to show how authors who adopted a critical perspective towards grand narratives about identity explained the controversies of particular identity politics while evaluating the role of religion in a specific social context. I will focus on identity politics across distinct periods and regimes at the turn of the 20th century and throughout the 20th century, each with its own specific set of controversies that have led to violent exaggeration of the differences between the people of Bosnia and Herzegovina that continue until today. The main difference among the people was indeed their religions since the groups shared the common Slavic origin[2], spoke the same language where linguistic differences are more dialect variants of the same language, and lived and socialised together (Bringa, 1995: 10; Eriksen, 2001: 49). In many other contexts, a strong correlation exists between ethnicity and religion, both subjectively and objectively, mainly "by participation or membership in a religion that is characteristic of one's ethnic groups" (Oppong, 2013: 13). In Bosnia and Herzegovina, ethnonationalists used and abused religion to suppress the commonalities mentioned above and exploited religion as a holy and powerful tool in their hegemonistic projects (Appleby, 2020: 68).

"Our Goal is to Reach Our Past"

According to a philosophy professor at the University of Banja Luka, Miodrag Živanović (2021), one of the protagonists of the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina, said, "Our goal is to reach our past". Despite appearing to have nothing to do with common sense and quickly demonstrating the insanity of warlords in

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2   According to Ugo Vlaisavljević, this common Slavic origin of B&H constituent peoples as a proto-ethnicity "proved to be too abstract and poor, lacking any substantial cultural content" (2009: 84).

Bosnia and Herzegovina, underpinning the thesis that the war broke out because of the irrational ancient hatred[3], it pinpoints the origins of the conflict. They lie in the past, or more accurately, perceptions about the past among different groups, and religions have been guardians of various groups' distinctive consciousness for centuries. They provide a sense of continuity for the religious identities developed before the ethnic ones, and with the narrative of chosen people, they can reinforce notions of innate superiority (Fawcett, 2009: 9; Cvitković, 2011:19), which in extreme cases can and does lead to "fundamentalism and zealotry, making people feel exceptional and superior" (Salih, 2017: 92). The different groups in Bosnia and Herzegovina, as well as in the region, were profoundly shaped over centuries by Christian and Muslim empires and civilisations (Appleby, 2000: 68) and were involved in the struggle for group integration and maintenance of their own identity to survive (Beit-Hollahmi, 1991: 92).

The Rome-Byzantine split cut directly through the territory of the future Yugoslavia with the consequence of equating Serbs with Orthodoxy and Croats with Catholicism (Velikonja, 2003: 14). Since its emergence, the medieval Bosnian state was multi-religious with three Churches: the Bosnian Church, the Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church, with the Bosnian Church disintegrating as Islam came on the scene with the Ottoman conquest (Alibašić, 2019: 344). During the Ottoman period, Muslim Turks drew no distinction between religion and politics (Ware, 1997: 89), and the Ottoman *millet* system "made religions the basis of ethnicity and allowed non-Muslim religious hierarchies to manage their own affairs" (Okey, 2007: 8). With the decline of the Ottoman Empire, the position of non-Muslim populations worsened, with the spirit of nationalism emanating from Western Europe reaching the region as well (Mojzes, 2014: 16). However, this happened belatedly among the Muslim population who broadly identified with the Ottoman state, and did not need a separate ethnic tradition (Appleby, 2000: 65).

During the Austro-Hungarian rule in Bosnia and Herzegovina (1878–1918), imperial policy pursued the goal of modernising the backward country to legitimise the occupation (Okey, 2007: 24). Benjamin Kállay, Minister of Finance of Austria-Hungary and the *de facto* governor of Bosnia and Herzegovina during the twenty years (1882–1903) was aware that "the newly annexed region would need to be handled with care" (Giomi, 2021: 29). He pushed forward the creation of a unique Bosnian identity, with the idea that it "in turn would shatter the Croat and Serb designs on Bosnia and consolidate the Austro-Hungarian rule in the area" (Feldman, 2017: 106). Nevertheless, national sentiments had emerged, and different ethnic and religious groups demonstrated suspiciousness toward Austro-Hungarian intentions. Serbia, which had gained its complete independence at the Berlin Congress of 1878, backed up Serbs in B&H, and even the Catholics, who were

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3   According to the historian Dejan Jović, the hatred was neither ancient nor ever existent, "but had to be created before the war started" (Jovic, 2001 p. 103).

considered the most loyal group, "were becoming more and more attracted to the sirens of Croatian nationalism" (Giomi, 2021: 30). The primary strategy of the regime was to win over Muslim support (Okey, 2007: 59), but Muslim elite more and more realised that its survival in Christian-led Empire was at risk[4] (Giomi, 2021: 34). The Bosnian constitution (*Land Statut*) was adopted in 1910, and the 3rd and 4th articles of the *Land Statute,* "regulated the question of 'Bosnian-Herzegovinian' belonging" (Štiks, 2011: 248), and founded the Bosnian Council based on the confessional and curia principles (Simović, 2011: 331). Political parties that entered the Council had been established on ethno-confessional principles – the Muslim National Organization (*Muslimanska narodna organizacija)*, the Serbian National Organization (*Srpska narodna organizacija)*, the Croatian National Community *(Hrvatska narodna zajednica)* and the Croatian Catholic Association *(Hrvatska katolička udruga)* (Simović, 2011: 333, 334), this marking the religious and ethnical divisions in a political sense as well.

After WWI, Bosnia and Herzegovina lost its autonomy in the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (renamed Yugoslavia in 1929) (Štiks, 2011: 248). However, the "Turkish paragraph" of the Vidovdan Constitution (*Vidovdanski ustav,* adopted in 1921) guaranteed the preservation of its territory divided into six areas: Sarajevska, Bihaćka, Mostarska, Travnička, Tuzlanska, and Vrbaska-Banjalučka (Bandžović, 2020: 171). Specific religious practices within the legal system and article 109 of the Vidovdan Constitution contained a general proclamation that the family and inheritance affairs of Muslims be "judged by state sharia judges" (Karčić, 2005: 39). The Kingdom is supposed to be the homeland of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, who "were regarded as 'tribes' of the same 'three-named' people *(troimeni narod)*", while other Slavic and non-Slavic groups were not included in this formulation (Tomić, 2014: 274). While Croats and Slovenes initially supported the regime to defend against Italian, Austrian and Hungarian aggressive ambitions (Eriksen, 2001: 48), political centralisation caused their growing dissatisfaction, and especially members of the Croatian political elite criticised being treated as a tribe (Nielson, 2013: 35). Among Serbs, groups that mourned for the lost, the exclusively Serbian Kingdom were powerful, and the Serbian Orthodox Church, "frowned on this form of Slav unity because it included the Catholic Croats and Slovenes and the Muslim Slavs" (Appleby, 2000: 65).

The Kingdom faced constant political tensions, especially among Serbs and Croats, the two largest groups, and "there was a constant drive for domination by each side" (Godina, 1998: 411). This led to the Muslim population in Bosnia and Herzegovina being caught between the interests and goals of the Serbian and Croatian political elites (Bringa, 1995: 13). King Aleksandar strived to create

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4   Noted Czech member of the Austro-Hungarian Reichsrat, Tomáš G. Masaryk, criticized the Kállay regime for not paying attention to the condition of Christian serfs on Muslim-owned estates, and for its attitude toward major confessions in B&H (Feldman, 2017: 111).

the Yugoslav nation to counterweight centrifugal tendencies and strengthen his rule, and he "believed passionately that his country could modernise itself only if 'tribalism' was abolished" and superseded by a superior and stronger Yugoslav identity (Nielson, 2014: 5). During his dictatorship from January 6th 1929 until September 1931, he mainly relied on state coercion to impose unitary identity (Nielson, 2014: 251, 252). In addition, nine Yugoslav governorates (*banovine*) were formed, named after a river to overcome different administrative traditions (Giomi, 2021: 140). After the king's assassination in Marseille in 1934, the efforts of creating "integral Yugoslavism" waned, leading to the creation of the Banate of Croatia in 1939, which incorporated a significant portion of the territory of Bosnia and Herzegovina (Velikonja, 2003: 146). Following the fascists' invasion, the Kingdom ceased to exist, and "armed resistance on ethnic and ideological grounds flared up so that the international war also becomes a civil war" (Mojzes, 2014: 20). Jews were the first targeted for extermination, followed by Roma and Serbs being exposed to mass expulsion, conversion to Catholicism and extermination in the areas under the control of the Croatian Independent State (Mojzes, 2014: 20). According to Šaćir Filandra, WWII found the Muslim population in disarray and without authentic leadership (1998: 158), where some of them joined either *Ustasha* or multiethnic partisan units, and also being victims of *Chetnik* forces (Mojzes, 2014: 21).

From Brotherhood to Disunity – Working Class Has Its Nation

During the National Liberation Struggle (*Narodnooslobodilačka Borba)*, the proclaimed goal of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia was not only the liberation from the fascist invaders but also the national liberation, especially of suppressed ethnic groups. According to Flere and Klašnjek, the communists in Yugoslavia did not have a uniform view of how to achieve that goal. They mostly followed Comintern's guidelines about the necessity of dismantling Yugoslavia (Flere & Klašnjek, 2019: 76), and in the proclamation from 1924, the Communist Party "condemned unitarism and Serbian bourgeois hegemony and asked for, among other things, Bosnian autonomy" (Štiks, 2011: 248). After the establishment of the second (socialist) Yugoslavia, the political elite, by using the constitutional model resembling the Soviet model of federalism, tried to settle ethnic issues. The founding documents of socialist Yugoslavia, defined at the second session of the Anti-Fascist Council for the National Liberation of Yugoslavia (AVNOJ) in 1943, ambiguously and imprecisely used the term people: both in an ethnic sense and as the people of the republics making up the future federal state (Štiks, 2011: 248). At the same time, based on Marxist ideology, the elite perceived the class as a more objective social identity and ethnic and national identities as a form of false consciousness that would gradually dissipate (Eriksen, 2001: 48, 49).

The unification of people in a Yugoslav nation was never an official policy of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia (Flere & Klašnjek, 2019: 76). The failure of King Aleksandar's project also "discredited future attempts to impose a Yugoslav identity from above" (Nielson, 2014: 4). In socialist period, a "Yugoslav" never referred to a person's nationality but only to its citizenship and, in some censuses, either to an ethnic minority or to an "undeclared" category (Bringa, 1995: 25). Vlaisavljević adds that in its very essence, besides being defined as a proletarian society, Yugoslavia was perceived as being composed of a cluster of ethnic groups (2009: 78–79), and the civic religion of Brotherhood and Unity[5] became a "constitutional value" (Godina, 1998: 413). In addition, the national key policies aimed at ensuring the ethnic representation in key positions, which was proportionate to the ethnic distribution in each Yugoslav republic (Mujkić, 2010: 96). Therefore, there was a continuity of ethnopolitics during socialism, and as Godina put it, what happened in the eighties was not the emergence of nationalism, as an ordinary view suggests, but a change in the status of Yugoslav nationalism (1998: 415), and constitutional changes gradually highlighted these very identities.

The 1953 Constitution of Bosnia and Herzegovina used the abstract, formless concept of the working people, while the basic provisions of the 1963 Constitution used the term people in both the ethnic and political sense (Mujkić, 2010: 97). Ethnic when referring to the three peoples of Bosnia and Herzegovina and political when referring to the people of Bosnia and Herzegovina with people in other Yugoslav republics (Mujkić, 2010: 97). Ethnicization was continued by the 1961 census that allowed Muslim Slavs to declare themselves as Muslims, followed by the 1968 constitutional amendments that mentioned them as a constituent nation, which was finally confirmed in the last Yugoslav constitution of 1974 (Štiks, 2011: 265)[6]. In that way, they became the only constituent people in socialist Yugoslavia "to use a religious designation for ethnic identity" (Spahić-Šiljak & Funk, 2018: 109). The growing federalisation of the country, reaching its peak in the 1974 Constitution, influenced, to a certain degree, everyone's orientation toward their "own" republic, as well (Tomić, 2014: 276). In public political discourse after the 1974 constitutional changes, the country was more

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5   According to Vlaisavljević, "since an ethnic community is by definition, at least in its vital sense, a fraternal community, the inter-ethnic brotherhood forged in the resistance to the foreign aggressor suggests that the foundations of the Socialist society were themselves ethnic or at least the ruling ideology strived to suggest so" (2009: 79).

6   According to Bringa, some Yugoslav officials and intellectuals hoped that the "nationally undefined" Bosnian Muslims would form the spearhead of a Yugoslav nationality. Muslims comprised the largest number of "declared Yugoslavs" in the census, but the number of Muslims calling themselves "Yugoslavs" fell dramatically in 1971 when they were given the right to call themselves "Muslim" (Bringa, 2004: 173). Still, Bosnia and Vojvodina had the highest number of declared Yugoslavs, due to ethnic heterogeneity, more extensive social mixing and intermarriage (Sekulic, Massey & Hodson, 1994: 84).

often referred to as a "federation" rather than Yugoslavia, and instead of "Brotherhood and Unity", communitarianism (*zajedništvo*) took the central place (Flere & Klašnjek, 2019: 81). The constitutional changes mentioned above provided the political elites of each republic with economic and symbolic resources to strengthen their position within the complicated system of power-sharing[7], especially after Tito's death and the subsequent crises in the system (Linz & Stepan, 1996: 369). In his book *Yugoslavia as Unfinished State,* Zoran Đinđić argues that federalism in a country where the logic of socialist revolution was still in power could only be rhetorical, functional as a symbol, but practically irrelevant. This left space for federal units to fill the void and seek their socio-political basis by relying on identity politics (Đinđić, 2010: 33, 36-37). Bosnia and Herzegovina was an exception – it did not have a clear majority and was "not defined as the 'national home' of one particular *narod*" (Bringa, 1995: 27). Being the only constituent people in socialist Yugoslavia without their republic, and having no mother country elsewhere (contrary to Serbs and Croats living in Bosnia and Herzegovina), Muslims, "were the only people truly interested in maintaining the Bosnian state and its borders" (Abazović et al., 2007: 8).

Contrary to ethnic (and national) identities, the officials of socialist Yugoslavia more or less suppressed religious identities. Sociologist of religion Abazović adds that official ideology treated religion dichotomously during socialism in Yugoslavia. On the one hand, as anachronous and retrograde, and its leaders anti-revolutionary, while on the other hand, as part of the historical and cultural heritage of the South Slavic peoples (Abazović: 2014, 38). According to some theologians, religion became highly politicised because the state apparatus pushed it violently into the private sphere by political means and control (Djogo, 2011: 106). Still, during specific periods and for "courting the West", Yugoslavia also increased religious tolerance in comparison to other socialist countries (Perica, 2013: 38). For example, the number of locally educated Islamic intellectuals and graduates from several Middle Eastern countries increased, and it came to the establishment of a new female section of the Gazi Husrev Begova madrasah and the Faculty of Islamic Theology (later renamed the Faculty of Islamic Studies) (Karčić, 2010: 523). Tito's international nonalignment policy also opened space for cooperation with Islamic countries and instrumentalised Yugoslav Islamic community leaders in backing up foreign policy (Perica, 2002: 80).

Despite that, denominational religion offered a ready-made organisational structure for disseminating diverse messages, including ethnic ones, taking on the role of a *volkskerk* – church of people (Fawcett, 2000: 8). Therefore, religions

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7   The economic system of workers' self-management also reinforced particularistic orientations (Sekulic, Massey & Hodson, 1994: 87). As Jović notes, due to the anti-statist ideology of self-management, Yugoslavia was truly the only socialist country in which the state, in accordance with communist ideology, "was in the process of withering away" (2001: 105).

provided values and resources for political elites to use in filling the void resulting from the loss of legitimacy of the system and the declining adherence to socialist values among the population. An open religious revival started in the last two decades of socialist Yugoslavia when the Catholic Church organized events, jubilees and mass gatherings – Great Novena, a series of events that began in 1975 and concluded in 1984, marking 13 centuries of Christianity among the Croats, during which ethno-nationalistic messages were also sent (Perica, 2013: 36). The claimed appearance of Virgin Mary to six young villagers in the Herzegovinian village of Međugorje shortly after Tito's death in 1981, was interpreted as, "a sign that past national sins—such as Croat acts of genocide during World War II—had been forgiven", and the Virgin Mary became the Queen of Croats, their protector and advocate (Winnika-Lydon, 2013: 21). The Serbian Orthodox Church openly entered the political arena after 1981 Kosovo protests, when ethnic Albanians had demanded more robust autonomy and the status of a republic (Subotić, 2019: 86). Soon after that, "leading priests and theologians expressed their concern about the 'necessity of protecting the spiritual and biological being of the Serbian people in Kosovo and Metohija'" (Subotić, 2019: 87). The peak of this process occurred in 1989, on the occasion of the 600th anniversary of the Battle of Kosovo, when according to epic poems the Serbian people deliberately had chosen the Kingdom of Heaven over the earthly kingdom and became a "celestial people" *(nebeski narod)*. The central figure of the Kosovo epic is Prince Lazar, killed by Turk conquerors in the battle and "transformed into a Christ-like figure, even enjoying a last supper with his knights' before the battle" (Moe, 2006: 262, 264). The building of one of the world's largest Orthodox Church *(Hram Svetog Save)*, announced in the '80s, marked religious resurrection as well (Flere, 1990: 99). The ethnic concerns of the Orthodox Church were oriented towards other parts of the country as well, especially in the campaign of exhumation and reburial of Serbian victims of the Independent State of Croatia throughout 1990 and 1991 (Subotić, 2019: 88). In 1989, the Islamic community finally dared to follow the two churches, beginning with the so-called "rebellion of imams" against high ranked pro-regime religious officials of the Islamic community (Perica, 2013: 39). Under the regime, the spiritual life of Muslims was under the control of the Islamic Community of Yugoslavia, transformed into a state apparatus and infiltrated with collaborators of the government (Karčić, 2010: 522). The Muslim movement also initiated a revisionist approach regarding the five centuries of Ottoman rule (Kecmanović, 2007: 7), arguing that Turks brought advanced civilisation to Bosnia (Perica, 2013: 39). Many Serbs and Croats embraced narratives that equated the Muslims with Turks, mocking them as "traitors" of their Christian heritage (Appleby, 2000: 67), ignoring that Muslim Slavs also organised rebellions during the Ottoman rule (Alibašić, 2020: 350). For this reason, some Islamic scholars especially underlined

that Muslims could rely only on themselves and based their quest for identity on their distinctiveness as Bosnian Muslims, a term coined by the controversial intellectual Mustafa Busuladžić, who had been prosecuted and killed after WWII for cooperation with the fascist aggressors (Dizdarević, 2010: 35). Both then and now, Islam was the crucial element for the ethnic survival and self-definition of Muslims, with different identity layers integrated to preserve distinctiveness and survival in unfavourable conditions (Dizdarević, 2010: 32, 33).

The memories of each group's martyrdom in different periods were invoked by each of them (Salih, 2017: 96) and, as Vlaisavljević underlines, the entire capital of symbols and meanings has been invested in religion, which therefore played a significant political role in the period of ethnic resurrection (2003: 102). After Tito's purge of party liberals and ethnic-oriented communists in the '60s and '70s, clergy took the leading role in reaffirming ethnic/national identities (Perica, 2002: 55). The parts of the country where different religions and ethnic groups meet (such as Bosnia and Herzegovina), provided fertile soil for identity politics that single out and overstress differences among people (Cvitković, 2013: 45).

In the period when socialism started to lose its legitimacy, people increasingly turned to religion, or religious nationalism, as the new ideology soon conquered the hearts and minds of people. Religious rhetoric expressed mourning for the endangered essence of ethnic beings, in this way preparing the ground for new martyrdoms (Mujkić, 2010: 135). An increase in religiosity thus ensued, and from the 1970s to the 1980s, the number of people who consider themselves religious doubled, and the number of atheists significantly decreased (Blagojević, 2005: 224-225). However, significant differences could be seen regarding territorial-national variables. Albanians, Slovenes and Croats were the people with the highest level of survey respondents who declared themselves as religious (more than 50%), while Serbs, Muslims, and Montenegrins were much less religious (Blagojević, 2005: 226). Interestingly, the level of religiosity of certain (religious) groups depended on the territory where they lived. Muslims outside B&H were more religious than Muslims living in B&H, Serbs living in central Serbia were less religious than Serbs in Kosovo, and Albanians living outside Kosovo were more religious than Albanians in Kosovo (Blagojević, 2005: 225). This shows that when a group was a minority, its members tended to be more religious. Considering the growing ethnic (and religious) tensions, it is no wonder that minority/majority status was an important determinant of religiosity. Confessional identity also increased among nonreligious people (Flere, 1990: 90, 91). The coincidence of ethnic and confessional expression was the most pronounced in the Serbo-Croatian language area in the relations between Serbs, Croats and Muslims, less so between Croats and Slovenes, Croats and Hungarians, or Serbs and Montenegrins (Flere, 1990: 92).

War in the Nineties - Identitarian Riders of the Apocalypse and (Post) Dayton Identity Pinnacle

The role of religious communities in the wars in former Yugoslavia is still disputed. Indeed, the conflicting parties attacked each other's cultural and sacred heritage in Bosnia and Herzegovina (Perica, 2002: 3), and ethnic cleansing and killing were grounded in religious symbolism (Sells, 1998: 19). Religious symbols were worn by the armies in conflict, certain signs were used (raising two or three fingers in the air), and messages of religious content were shouted (*Allahu Akber*), but all this, "did not presuppose that soldiers and their commanders should know religious truths and dogmas" (Hodžić, 2020: 110). According to Sells[8], the destruction of the religious Other was also based on extrinsic criteria. Some Muslims, as the most targeted group of the war, defined themselves as Muslim by the Islamic testimony of belief in one deity and Muhammed as their messenger; some observed the required fast during Ramadan or the prohibition of pork and alcohol, some were unobservant, and many were atheists (Sells, 1998: 14).

The overlapping between religious and ethnic identities is nevertheless undisputed. The devastating consequences of that were so evident that it almost requires no explanation (Kristić, 2011: 43). In the period immediately before the outbreak of the war, confessional (collective) identities were encouraged, and religion was a tool for the political legitimisation of the conflict (Abazović, 2014: 39). Despite the complexities of measuring religiosity (Blagojević, 2009; Kuburić, 2015), it is easier to define religious identity than an ethnic and national one. According to Cvitković, someone is Muslim if he/she completes five Islamic obligations, but determining "Bosniakhood" and consequently "Croathood" or "Serbhood" is a matter of dispute (Cvitković, 2013: 16). Since ethnic belonging can be used very flexibly (Fawkes, 2002: 7) and some aspects of ethnicity, such as cultural practices (and boundaries), are never clear-cut (Eriksen, 2010: 42), religious and ethnic identities become linked, and religious symbols are used as cultural and symbolic capital to firm and reaffirm ethnic identity and make differences even more distinctive (Velikonja, 2003: 291).

According to Perica, the Serbian Orthodox Church has long played the role of the quasi-political institution as the embodiment of the ethos of the Serbian people (2002: 6). The cults of ethnic saints, among whom there are many rulers and politicians, are very strong. Sociologist of religion Cvitković claims that it is difficult to meet an Orthodox priest who is more Christian than Serb (2011: 19). Before the outbreak of the war, the SOC disseminated messages in its statements that "Serbhood grew on Orthodoxy" and that, "Serbs who stopped being Orthodox stopped being Serbs" (Subotić, 2019: 88). Ethnicisation of Catholicism

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8   Sells (1998) underlines that Muslims in Bosnia and Herzegovina were target of the systematic and the most brutal form of violence and ethnic cleansing, which culminated in the Srebrenica massacre.

among Croats started in the second half of the XIX century in Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, and yet Croatian Catholics had to wait as late as the 1970s, for the first native Croat saint (Perica, 2002: 59). Staring from that period, the Catholic Church in Croatian discourse has often been called the Church of the Croat People ("*Crkva u Hrvata*"), which became more and more highlighted with the breakup of Yugoslavia and the fall of socialism, while the ascendance of President Tuđman was perceived as the coming of the second Messiah (Appleby, 2000: 68). The role of the Islamic community in similar processes was belated, in reaction to the equating of religious and national identities among other communities in new circumstances[9] (Barišić, 2007: 35). After the outbreak of the war in the 1990s, leaders of the Islamic Community insisted on a discourse of tolerance and multiculturalism, one might say on separation between religion and ethnicity and/or nation. However, moderate leadership was removed from their positions in 1993, which was also the consequence of the fact that lower levels of institutionalised Islam in Bosnia became closer to the groups propagating political Islam and the Party of Democratic Action (SDA) as the leading political party of the B&H Muslims, whose founder and first president was Alija Izetbegović, author of the controversial *Islamic Declaration* (Perica, 2013: 40). The SDA, in its platform called for a multiethnic B&H, but its rhetoric and symbolism "were dominated by Bosniak and Islamic imagery" (Bringa, 2004: 176).

The war in Bosnia and Herzegovina resulted in more than 100,000 deaths, 2,000,000 refugees, or internally displaced persons and half of the people's homes were devastated (Thomasson, 2006: 11). The peace agreement did stop the war, but also embedded ethnopolitics in the very political system (Mujkić, 2007: 112). Constant political and economic turmoil in the post-war period also contributed to the creation of exclusive ethnic and national identities (Mulalić & Mulanović-Adilović, 2018: 93). National myths are still powerful, especially since they coincide with the "living memories of the most recent events" (Oddie, 2012: 37).

The Dayton Peace Agreement cemented the divisions among different groups, with Annex IV becoming the B&H constitution that introduced a model of multiethnic statehood and collective equality of B&H constituent peoples: Bosniaks, Serbs and Croats, guaranteed, among other things, by ethnically based political participation and, veto mechanisms (Štiks, 2011: 246). The B&H Constitution refers to the vital interests of constituent peoples. Still, it does not define them,

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9　According to Filandra, Bosniak articulation throughout modern history, when nationalism appeared as a significant political force, was reactive, not proactive, due to the impossibility of an exclusive connection to Bosnia and Herzegovina as a territory and the nonexistence of their own bourgeoisie or political entity able to articulate a clear national identity (Filandra, 1998: 22). Filandra especially underlines the fact that landowners (*begovi*), a stratum of decaying feudal system occupied the leading position in the political parties representing the interests of Muslims, during the Austro-Hungarian Empire and Yugoslav Kingdom.

providing fertile soil for various abuses of ethnic rhetoric (Mujkić, 2007: 115), placing religious symbols in the focus of the social imagination of each group (Tomić, 2014: 279). Constituent peoples are "defined" by naming the constituent groups, presupposing that they are homogenous segments, whereas the so-called national minorities and ethnically undecided citizens, subsumed in the discriminatory category Others (*Ostali*), are an exceptionally heterogeneous segment (Banović, 2015: 252). The result of the war is the equation of ethnicity and territory, which solidified ethnic and nationalist struggles for power (Mujkić, 2010: 140). Namely, before the war, 80% of municipalities did not have an absolute ethnic majority (Pejanović, 2017: 70). The 2013 census clearly showed that territorial homogenisation was one of the results of the war, resulting in 2/3 of the municipalities having an absolute ethnic majority (Pejanović, 2017: 70). In towns without a clear majority, there have been problems in mutual communication, without which there can be no dialogue and true coexistence (Cvitković, 2012: 115). Some efforts were to improve mutual communication, especially by faith-based civil society organisations and, to some extent, by the Inter-Religious Council, established soon after the war by the four traditional churches and religious communities (Alibašić, 2020: 351, 352). The work of its local branches is successful in towns where they exist, such as Mostar, Zenica, and Sanski Most (Zotova et al., 2021: 265).

The Law on Freedom of Religion and Legal Status of Churches and Religious Communities adopted in January 2004 privileges the position of "traditional" churches and religious communities while simultaneously "recognises the multi-confessional character of the country by granting all religious communities equal rights and obligations, without discrimination" (Alibašić, 2020: 348). Traditional churches and religious communities enjoy many privileges, including those of the social security and retirement systems. In contrast, others face problems in registration and return of the property nationalised during socialism (Cvitković, 2006: 59). The political power of religion is confirmed in the school subject of confessional religious education, based on normative theology and haphazardly implemented for pupils who are in the *de facto* minority position in certain territories (Popov & Ofstadt, 2006: 103). The cult of the sacred past is transmitted by and through religions and incorporated in secular institutions such as *Krsna slava* in Republika Srpska, where every institution celebrates its protector saint, and in the claims raised by the Islamic community about Friday noon prayers, food norms, and dress code in public institution (Alibašić, 2020: 349).

The overlapping between ethnic and religious identity relies upon religious symbolism and growing religiosity among people (Norris & Inglehart, 2004: 121). Trust in traditional churches and religious communities is much higher than in the state, state institutions, media, European Union, and political parties (Kuburić, 2012: 31–34), which has been repeatedly reconfirmed. In addition, religious

collectivisation "attaches greater importance to ethnic identity than to bonds of faith and worship" (Velikonja, 2003: 291). It involves constant self-perceived collective victimhood and heated disputes over identity. Bosniak politicians, intellectuals and religious officials "refer to their name to be in continuum with the medieval terms Bosnians (or *Bošnjani*), using this terminological similarity to claim that Bosnia and Herzegovina is their kin-state and that it should be unitarily established" (Ljubić & Marko, 2011: 161). From such argumentation, Serbs from Bosnia and Herzegovina are considered the Orthodox part of the Bosniaks (Kecmanović, 2007: 60), and subsequently Croats the Catholic part. On the other side, Serbian and Croatian nationalists continuously insist that "Bosnian Muslims do not exist as a nation, and rather that this identity should be understood as a layer of Serbian or Croatian national identities, like Serbians or Croats of Islamic faith" (Ljubić & Marko, 2011: 161).

Despite the efforts of the elites to determine a specific way of thinking (Kordić, 2006: 194), the national name Bosniak is not universally accepted since some identify as Bosniaks, some as Muslims and some as Bosnian and Herzegovinian (Jović, 2013: 138). To foster homogenisation, the Islamic Community was involved in the campaign *Bitno je biti Bošnjak* (It Is Important to be Bosniak) before the 2013 Census and invested resources to mobilise (their own) people to identify as Bosniak, who practised Islam and spoke Bosnian (Cooley, 2019: 1071). The campaign opposed the civic campaign "Be a citizen – For a B&H without discrimination!" (*Budi građanin/građanka – Za BiH bez diskriminacije!*), and along other exclusive campaigns indeed 'won': 96.3% of the population identified with the constitutive people (50.1% declared as Bosniaks, 30.8% as Serbs, and 15.4% as Croats) (Colley, 2019: 1079)

Politicians from the Republic of Srpska constantly reaffirm the Serbian Orthodox Church as the cornerstone of Serbian people and strive for an increased presence of the Church in society (Popov-Momčinović, 2008:130). In January 2016, Serbian Patriarch Irinej stated that the Republic of Srpska "was established on Divine truth and justice" (Alibašić, 2020: 357), confronting the messages constantly appearing among Bosniak politicians of the morally and legally disputed status of the Republic of Srpska, including the claims of the discriminatory character of its very name. Leaders of the Catholic Church spread the message of conspiracy against Catholics in Bosnia and Herzegovina, asking for help from the Holy See and the Republic of Croatia (Ljubić & Marko, 2011: 162). Even though religious representatives seem to be less involved directly during the elections, contrary to the periods when they openly suggested to voters how to cast their ballots, this is the result of the fact that almost all political parties, regardless of their position on the ideological spectrum, use the same ethno-nationalistic logic (Ljubić & Marko, 2011: 161, 162).

On the other hand, the research about the processes of reconciliation based on in-depth interviews with 77 critical actors from both secular and religious spheres showed that the opinion "that religious communities should deal only with religion was expressed by a large number of religious and other actors" (Zotova et al., 2021: 216). Most Catholic and Orthodox priests, imams, and theologians stressed that common human values present in monotheistic religions could and should contribute to reconciliation processes (Zotova et al., 2021: 113). However, some emphasised that religion protected the nation while highlighting the importance of universal values. It remains questionable to what extent religious leaders merely preach and to what extent they practically work on reconciliation and transitional justice, which is necessary because it involves not only a legal but also a moral dimension (Knežević & Popov-Momčinović, 2013: 7). In this regard, representatives of religious communities in B&H very often think that their religions are peaceful *per se,* which leads to their disinterest in building capacity and providing training in the field of peacebuilding (Spahić-Šiljak & Funk, 2018: 112).

Nonetheless, the nonviolent nature of monotheistic religion cannot be taken as a given. Cvitković warns that universalistic messages of monotheistic faiths lead to the construction of the self-image of Muslims, Catholics, and Orthodox in this area as bulwarks and guardians of universal, supranational religions. Instead, they must recognise they are here for themselves and become open toward the Other, accepting and respecting it (Cvitković, 2013: 49).

Conclusion

This paper showed that religion played the most crucial role in politics in various periods in Bosnia and Herzegovina, especially throughout the 20th century when the significant political changes started. To strengthen and legitimise political order and administrate differences in multicultural B&H society, officials developed diverse identity politics, and the secondary sources used in this article shed important light on the nuances of each analysed period. The difficulties in fulfilling the goals of specific identity politics (especially more integral ones that reached for the shared identity – Bosnian or Yugoslavian) stem primarily from the equation of religious and ethnic identities, which remained even during the socialist period and one-party system that suppressed religion in one way or another. Each period had deep controversies, and the failed identity projects played their part during the growing political tensions and mutual misinterpretations. Religion, as the only stable marker of group differences, became a powerful tool of ethnonationalist projects, and religious leaders played not only a passive but also a proactive role in these processes. In the most recent period, mainly through the policy of selective memory and various forms of cooperation with political leaders from

their ethnic groups, religions played a vital role in accumulating and producing the symbolic capital that served further divisions solidified in the Dayton Peace Agreement. At the same time, various initiatives focused on the peace potential of monotheistic religions and cooperation with civil society. Such initiatives, however, are not sufficiently visible and only partially institutionalised, in contrast to the divisions firmly established in constitutional settings and constantly invoked by politicians who extensively use identitarian and mythological matrices and abuse religious symbols. However, neither identities nor boundaries between different groups are clear-cut, for they exist not *within* but *between* the groups through communication expressed differently and depending on specific social contexts (Eriksen, 2001: 46). Since religions share the same sky and the same territory in Bosnia and Herzegovina, they will hopefully be used more as a tool to promote cooperation and equality of all citizens, instead of conflicts and divisions.

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