A generation ago, many social scientists regarded religion as an anachronism whose social, economic, and political importance would inevitably wane and disappear in the face of the inexorable forces of modernity. Of course, nothing of the sort has occurred; indeed, the public role of religion is resurgent in US domestic politics, in other nations, and in the international arena. Today, religion is widely acknowledged to be a key variable in candidate nominations, platforms, and elections; it is recognized as a major influence on domestic and foreign policies. National religious movements as diverse as the Christian Right in the United States and the Taliban in Afghanistan are important factors in the internal politics of particular nations. Moreover, such transnational religious actors as Al-Qaida, Falun Gong, and the Vatican have had important effects on the politics and policies of nations around the world.

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The Case of Former Yugoslavia and its Successor States

Edited by
Gorana Ognjenović and Jasna Jozelić
We would like to dedicate this book to all the victims in Southeastern Europe.
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Contents

List of Illustrations ix

Foreword: A Note on Sociology
Keith Tester xi

Preface: Politicization of Religion
Gorana Ognjenović and Jasna Jozelić xvii

1 Introduction: The Power of Symbolism
Gorana Ognjenović and Jasna Jozelić 1

2 Quo Vadis Vlachs? Project Čarnojević into the Twenty-First Century
Gorana Ognjenović 7

3 Ethno-religious Mimicry in the War in Bosnia-Herzegovina
Marjan Smrke 27

Nena Močnik 45

5 The Catholic Pledge in the Croatian Identity
Frano Prcela 67

6 Political Control and Religious Life at Narona: A Case Study from Antiquity
Adam Lindhagen 93
## Contents

7 Three Receptions of Bosnian Identity as Reflected in Religious Architecture  
   *Amra Hadžimuhamedović*  
   105

8 Kosovo as Serbia’s Sacred Space: Governmentality, Pastoral Power, and Sacralization of Territories  
   *Filip Ejdus and Jelena Subotić*  
   159

9 Nation, Religion, and Gender  
   *Zilka Spahić Šiljak*  
   185

Conclusion: Symbolism  
   *Gorana Ognjenović and Jasna Jozelić*  
   211

Notes on Contributors  
   213

Index  
   217
Illustrations

Figures

3.1  Basic relation between mimicry model and model imitation  29
3.2  Some possible distributions of mimicry roles in religious mimicry  31
3.3  Levels of religious mimicry  33

Tables

3.1  Basic options of mimicry relationships opened up among the three key protagonists—Catholic Croats (H/C), Orthodox Serbs (S/O), and Muslim Bosniaks (B/M)  36
Foreword: A Note on Sociology

Keith Tester

Europe was still being remapped when the conflict in the former Yugoslavia broke out. The collapse of the Berlin Wall had destroyed the old, taken-for-granted, bipolar distinction between them and us. All of a sudden it seemed possible for “Europe” to come together through the rebuilding of the bridges of the common culture and heritage, which the Wall had cut. This common culture was understood in either secular or market terms. It was marked by a capacity to work together tolerantly and to accept the truths upheld by others. Now, allegedly, we could all be cosmopolitans, freed of the constraints of politics and national differences. Religion was given a rather secondary role in this remapping. Where religion was noticed at all, it was identified as a tradition that some people still clung to but which would become of decreasing social and political significance in the new dispensation. If anything, religion was seen as little more than a peculiarity, a reminder of the roots of the common heritage to which we could now return, but in so doing, move on from the churches. Religion would be of little or no civic and therefore political significance. The war in the former Yugoslavia seemed to contradict all of these assumptions and conceits. Here was a conflict of remarkable brutality and deep intolerance in which religious affiliations and identities played a significant role. How could this be explained?

However complex they might have been, the dominant—and certainly the Anglophone—answers to the question revolved around a shared and yet never explicitly
stated assumption. Religion was important in the conflict because the
former Yugoslavia was presumed to be backward and mired in intoler-
ant traditions. The former Yugoslavia was presumed to be insufficiently
cosmopolitan, and therefore insufficiently European. The traces of
Orientalism were never too far removed from these kinds of answers.
The historical involvement of the Ottoman Empire in “the Balkans” was
often emphasized, and consequently also offered a ready explanation
for a commitment to Islam in what was otherwise taken for granted as
“Christian Europe.” The Ottoman dimension was also often hinted at in
order to explain the brutality of the conflict—the rapes, concentration
camps, tortures, and sieges. But the local versions of Christianity were
themselves exoticized and thereby removed from what was presumed
to be the European mainstream. Orthodoxy was identified as a Slavic
incursion, and the Balkans’ version of Catholicism was identified as little
more than superstition of a kind that mainstream Europe had overcome
many years previously. For Anglophone Protestants, at least, the very
exoticism of the religious life in the former Yugoslavia—and indeed the
virtual incomprehensibility of much of it to the religiously unmusical
denizens of the secular world—was almost sufficient explanation of the
content of the conflict. In short, the conflict in the former Yugoslavia
was identified as something like a ghost from the past that mainstream
Europe, supposedly, and most definitely the Anglophone world outside
of Europe, had long left behind. If these kinds of understanding were
peculiar to barroom discussion, they would be dangerous and bad
enough. But their traces can also be found in the attempt by a leading
European intellectual to explain the conflict and the role of religion in it.
It is worth focusing on his comments because he is one of a very small
band of academics who have managed to find a place in the institutions
of power. Politicians and opinion-formers have listened to what he has
said, to quite an unusual degree. In his 1994 book, Beyond Left and Right,
Anthony Giddens offered some words on the conflict in the former
Yugoslavia. Giddens is to be applauded for quickly recognizing the
conflict as an important event that demanded a response by intellectuals
and, more specifically, by European sociologists. (After all, sociology
claims to be the analysis of contemporary social relationships and struc-
tures, and war is such a relationship.) Unlike many sociologists, Giddens
wrote something about this conflict. But he tended to make the conflict
relatively distant from his readers. What Giddens wrote made it possible
for us to believe ourselves to be rather superior to them.
Giddens explained the conflict as a throwback to a condition of untrammeled fundamentalism. First, he commented in the context of a discussion of the wider issue of male violence toward women: “The war in Bosnia…witnessed the systematic rape of Muslim women as a deliberate way of humiliating them—and as statements from those involved made clear, of humiliating their menfolk also.”¹ A page or so later, in the context of comments about ethnic and cultural difference, Giddens states that differences can no longer be ignored through strategies of separation, isolation, or exit from communication. Rather, differences now have to be confronted because we have all become dependent upon one another. For him, this mutual dependency and the daily confrontation with difference that it implies and involves can lead to the respect of cosmopolitan dialogue, but it can also lead to a degeneration of communication into mutual hatred, where the recognition of dependency creates fear and anxiety. In those circumstances, communication degenerates, and there is a retreat to old certainties, secure fundamentals:

I would define a degenerate spiral of communication as one where antipathy feeds on antipathy, hate upon hate…How else could one explain the events in Bosnia, and parallel happenings elsewhere? Fundamentalisms…are edged with potential violence. Wherever fundamentalism takes hold, whether it be religious, ethnic, nationalist or gender fundamentalism, degenerate spirals of communication threaten…Bosnia sits on a historic fault-line dividing Christian Europe from Islamic civilization. Yet one cannot produce a sufficient explanation of the Yugoslavian conflict only by reference to old hostilities. Those hostilities, when refocused in the present, provide a context; once conflict begins, and hate starts to feed on hate, those who were good neighbours can end as the bitterest of enemies.²

In the then-current edition of his Sociology textbook, Giddens made two other comments. First, Giddens wrote, “the conflict in Bosnia-Herzegovina…claimed 500,000 lives. Appalling though that figure is, the Bosnian conflict remained relatively local and confined.”³ Second, in the chapter on religion, he claimed, “the nation-state is no longer the main influence in international relations; rivalries and conflicts will therefore occur between larger cultures or civilizations. It is just such a conflict which was enacted in Bosnia…where the Bosnian Muslims fought against the Serbs, who represent a Christian culture.”⁴ The Croatians seem to have disappeared from this account, and strangely, Muslims appeared to have become the initiators of the violence. Giddens seems to
have read a different history of the conflict than anyone else. Moreover, it would be interesting to know how this statement can explain why “the Serbs who represent a Christian culture” were prepared to kill Croatians who also “represent a Christian culture”—and, of course, why Croatians were prepared to kill Serbs.

According to Giddensian sociology then, the conflict was about fundamentalism: the fundamentalism of men in their relationship toward women, the fundamentalism of religious groups toward one another. “What is fundamentalism? It is, so I shall argue, nothing other than tradition defended in the traditional way—but where that mode of defense has become widely called into question…Fundamentalism tends to accentuate the purity of a given set of doctrines, not only because it wishes to set them off from other traditions, but because it is a rejection of a model of truth linked to the dialogic engagement of ideas in the public sphere.”

Fundamentalism therefore is the opposite of cosmopolitan tolerance. It is an undesirable attempt to shore up an identity that is being drastically challenged and unraveled by the processes of globalization, post-traditionalization, and reflexivity. Giddens believes that these processes are the main and dominant trends of the present, and he defines them.

Globalization: “I define it as action at a distance, and relate its intensifying over recent years to the emergence of the means of instantaneous global communication and mass transportation.”

Post-traditionalization is the direct result of globalization, and “a post-traditional order is not one in which tradition disappears—far from it. It is one in which tradition changes its status. Traditions have to explain themselves, to become open to interrogation and discourse.”

Reflexivity: “In a detraditionalizing society individuals must become used to filtering all sorts of information relevant to their life situations and routinely act on the basis of that filtering process.” This means that “in a post-traditional order, individuals more or less have to engage with the wider world if they are to survive in it.” Of course, this raises the interesting problem of how individuals are able to survive in the world when they are denied the means of engagement. Reflexivity does not fill an empty stomach. Similarly, there is the methodological problem, which Giddens glosses, that there is no necessary linkage whatsoever between an ability to “filter information” and an ability to act.

Inevitably, all of this has implications for how Giddens understands the role and the meaning of the individual and identity. As he says,
“The self, of course, has never been fixed, a given, in the manner of external nature. To have a self is to have self-consciousness and this fact means that individuals in all cultures actively shape their own identities.”

Elsewhere, Giddens has defined self-identity as “the self as reflexively understood by the individual in terms of her or his biography.”

The Giddensian conclusion is clear; insofar as the conflict in the former Yugoslavia was a product and expression of fundamentalism, it was atavistic and had no proper place in the tolerant world and the cosmopolitan Europe that is emerging out of globalization, post-traditionalization, and reflexivity. Furthermore, the participants in the conflict are implicitly identified as different than the reflexive selves generated by, and flourishing in, the contemporary world. Inasmuch as we who read people like Giddens must be such reflexive selves, then it becomes valid, by this argument, to identify the participants in the war in the former Yugoslavia as different than us in a very fundamental way. They are not like us, and little else needs to be said.

The logic of the argument seems to be that any community that resorts to what Giddens defines as “fundamentalism” is not up to the challenges and needs of the present. Such a community is not at all like the reflexive citizens who can embrace “an ethics of a globalizing post-traditional society [which] implies recognition of the sanctity of human life and the universal right to happiness and self-actualization—coupled to the obligation to promote cosmopolitan solidarity and an attitude of respect towards non-human agencies and beings, present and future.” It is this ethics that is reflected in Giddens’s comments on the conflict. What he is saying is that the conflict can be reduced to two sorts of fundamentalism, which are themselves indicative of a refusal to practice cosmopolitan toleration and demonstrate lack of respect for others.

In this kind of approach, religion is both a sign of, and a justification for, fundamentalism. There is no need to tackle the content of religion, nor, indeed, to seek to analyze precisely how religion might relate to politics. This is why the chapters in this volume are of such importance. They do go into detail and show the processes and contradictions of religion when it is implicated in a conflict. The chapters in this volume avoid large but largely meaningless terms such as “fundamentalism” and indeed uncover the warp and weft of the detail. They undermine the easy answers and inspire thought rather than taking cover under the safety of easy—fundamentalist—answers.
Notes

2. Ibid., p. 245.
4. Ibid., p. 459.
6. Ibid., p. 4.
7. Ibid., p. 5.
8. Ibid., pp. 6–7.
9. Ibid., p. 223 (emphasis added).
Preface: Politicization of Religion

Gorana Ognjenović and Jasna Jozelić

Quo vadis?
Romam vado iterum crucifigi.

The Constitution of Tito’s Yugoslavia, Chapter V, which addressed the rights and duties of its citizens, also contained Article 25, which prescribed the state’s relationship to religion as an institution.

The state guarantees citizens their freedom of conscience and freedom of religion. The church is separate from the state; religious communities whose teachings do not work against the Constitution, are free to conduct their activities and religious rituals. Seminaries are free but under the state's surveillance. The abuse of church and religion for political purposes is forbidden, together with political organizations based on religion. The state can financially assist religious communities.¹

With this starting point, the AVNOJ² presidency passed a law on May 25, 1945, which prohibited the provocation of national, racial, or religious hatred and conflict.³ Another legal paragraph in reference to the position and function of religious communities in Yugoslavia, passed before the new Constitution, was the state law concerning the organization of the state and republics’ commissions for dealing with the questions related to religion as an institution.⁴ State and religion were separate institutions. School and religion were separate institutions.
In Tito’s Yugoslavia, three amendments to the constitution were made (in 1946, 1963, and 1974). The changes made were not essential when it came to the constitution’s relationship to religion as an institution, or the work of religious communities within society. All three guaranteed the freedom of conscience and the practice of religion as basic to the realization of freedom of all citizens in the socialist community. Religion was looked upon as a private affair and treated as of no importance to the state. The Constitution of 1946 prescribed the freedom of religious schools under the overall surveillance by the state. The Constitution of 1974 cleared up the previous ambiguity by clarifying that religious schools were permitted only as seminaries. All three constitutions prescribed the right to ownership of property for all religious communities and declared the “abuse of religion for political purposes” as being an “abuse of religion against the constitution.” Until 1974, freedom of religion was prescribed on a state as well as a republic level. The amendment to the constitution in 1974 prescribed freedom of religion in the constitutions of the autonomous regions of Kosovo and Vojvodina also. In other words, there was no ban on religion prescribed in all three editions of the constitution of ex-Yugoslavia.

Therefore, it was a great surprise when, at the beginning of the 1990s, what was referred to in the West as “freedom of religion” apparently arrived in Yugoslavia’s successor states. In daily practice, this meant that every single one of these earlier constitutional bans was systematically broken. Religious organizations had put on political hats and they took over important roles of influence in our society on many different levels: as moral guards of the nations (each religion for its own), as educators (by becoming a part of the regular schooling), and a mobilizing agency for all the different kinds of political goals one could have imagined on the territory of ex-Yugoslavia at the end of the twentieth century in Europe. The people of Yugoslavia were told by the individual state and religious leadership that new and unprecedented “freedom of religion” was the result of a democratic development in the area. Finally, one could practice one’s religion, which, they claimed, was banned in Yugoslavia. At the beginning of the 1990s and prior to the conflict, this resulted in religion being (falsely) identified with nationhood and used to mobilize people for the battles of independence and for the bloodshed that followed. After the wars were over, religion and the newly gained nationhood (some voluntary and some less voluntary) were used to justify all of the misdeeds committed prior to, during, and after the bloodshed. All sins
were forgiven, and people were ready to enroll into the European Union, while suppressing quite a few reasons why one of the worst bloodshed in Europe ever occurred in the first place.

Today, 23 years later, well into the twenty-first century, all ex-Yugoslav successor states are more or less bankrupt. People are miserable, and religious institutions, despite certain signs of decline and internal decay, have never had more power and control over the lives of the individual. It is important to remember here that the individual nation states, young democracies, under the safe dominance of their religious institutions, underwent this process in the course of 20-odd years, which is by any measure a very short period in the life of a nation.

Therefore, it should not be a surprise to anyone that discussions about the nature of the 1990s’ conflicts and postwar developments in ex-Yugoslavia are still very much in progress. The boundaries of what was earlier considered possible have been stretched drastically. The stretching of boundaries of what previously was a well-established terminology for describing what was possible (or not) resulted also in a considerable blurring of a definition of a “religious war.” The blurring continued to the point where the conflict had all the necessary aspects of a religious war without actually being precisely that. In laymen’s terms, this means that because something looked like a duck, walked like a duck, and sounded like a duck, still one could not inductively conclude that it was a duck! Why?

As in any well-told story, there are fine lines that define the number of aspects in a debate that have to be recognized when making the final judgment about the nature of the matter at hand. The final result of an analysis is always dependent on how willing and able someone is to see and take into consideration the relevant details. The two volumes we present here offer such nuances necessary for an improved understanding of what really happened.

Notes

1. УСТАВ ФЕДЕРАТИВНЕ НАРОДНЕ РЕПУБЛИКЕ ЈУГОСЛАВИЈЕ (1946), ГЛАВА V, ПРАВА И ДУЖНОСТИ ГРАЂАНА, Члан 25.
2. Anti-Fascist Council for the National Liberation of Yugoslavia
Acknowledgments

We would like to thank Marie Hulleberg for her tireless efforts to perfect our English.
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