Nationalism and the Political Use and Abuse of Religion: the Politicization of Orthodoxy, Catholicism and Islam in Yugoslav Successor States

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Nationalism and the Political Use and Abuse of Religion: The Politicization of Orthodoxy, Catholicism and Islam in Yugoslav Successor States

Religion has been a historical force in Balkan societies. It has defined social identities and has been used as a basis for national myths. Hierarchies of the Orthodox, Catholic and the Muslim communities in Serbia, Croatia, Slovenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Macedonia and among the Albanians have deliberately contributed to these myths, thereby acquiring a particular reputation. Religious beliefs have been superimposed on new ethno-national projects. Religious activists and church officials have joined battle for the de-secularization of society. The politicization of religion has been followed by the confessionalization of public life, guaranteeing privileges for the dominant denomination.

La religion est une force historique dans les sociétés balkaniques. Elle a façonné les identités sociales et a servi de base pour la création de mythes nationaux. Les responsables hiérarchiques des communautés orthodoxes, catholiques et musulmanes en Serbie, en Croatie, en Slovénie, en Bosnie et en Herzégovine, en Macédoine et parmi les populations albanaises, ont délibérément contribué à édifier ces mythes, ce qui a contribué à leur donner une certaine réputation. Les croyances religieuses se sont superposées à de nouveaux projets aux allures nationales et ethniques. Les militants religieux et le clergé se sont engagés dans une bataille visant la désécularisation de la société. La politisation de la religion a été suivie par la confessionnalisation de la vie publique, garantissant de ce fait certains privilèges à la confession dominante.

The conventional assumption of modernization theories has been that religious influence necessarily wanes with the growth of modernity. It has even been suggested that modern nationalism is replacing traditional religious identity. Witnessing today the "revival" of both religion and xenophobic nationalism, we know that the two identities are not mutually exclusive. They may in fact reinforce each other. It seems that the general crisis of the communist model of modernization has generated a moral crisis in which individuals and entire social groups seek spiritual comfort in religion. In reshaping the shattered bonds of solidarity and in redefining their group identity, people use the spiritual and cultural material available to them. They also use religious beliefs and historical memories, as well as existing or newly created religious institutions. Gurr asserted that religion is salient

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to ethnicity if it is a defining trait that sets a group apart in its own eyes and/or in the eyes of others (Gurr, 1993: 3–4). Religion may, as is the case in the contemporary laboratory of the Balkans, become part of the process of construction of new political identities.

Religions always played an important social and cultural role in Balkan societies, even when communist messianism suppressed their visible public manifestations. In the Yugoslav space three religions—Orthodox Christianity, Catholicism, and Islam—played historically major roles in shaping and reshaping ethno-national identities. The borderline dividing the Roman Empire into two halves, fixed at the Drina River (today's border between Serbia and Bosnia), later became the imagined frontier between Eastern and Western Christianity. This symmetrical religious picture of the Balkan peninsula was somewhat upset in the Middle Ages with the emergence in this central contact-zone of the "heretic" Bosnian (Bogumil) Church (Fine, 1975), and later with the massive conversion of Bosnians, Albanians and Bulgaro-Macedonians to Islam. Religious consciousness, of course, preceded modern ethno-national self-identification but the borderlines drawn between religious communities (often but not always coinciding with linguistic groups) in the Balkan space predetermined to a great extent the contours of Southern Slav ethno-national communities that were shaped later, even when their modern identities had been secularized.

The Serb Orthodox Church and "Greater Serbia"

Even before the definite collapse of the Yugoslav federation, the Serb Orthodox Church marked the political space of "Greater Serbia" by carrying across presumed "Serb lands" the earthly remnants of "Emperor" Lazar, the prince who was killed by the Turks at the battle of Kosovo back in 1389. In the 19th century the battle itself became the founding myth of the Serb expansionist project and was appropriated by the Karadjordjević dynasty. It became an integral part of the *četnik* (Serb monarchist) ideology during the Second World War and recently the battle cry of resuscitated Serb nationalism. The Milošević clique used the myth, the willing Orthodox hierarchy and the related religious iconography for ethno-national homogenization and popular mobilization. At the mammoth rally organized at Kosovo Polje in the summer of 1989, which brought together perhaps as many as half a million ethnic Serbs, Milošević's portraits were interspersed with icons, religious banners and crosses, and he openly threatened war on all those who might oppose his project.

In 1982, 21 Serb priests and monks had signed an appeal sent to the state authorities in which they raised their voice in defense of the "spiritual and biological survival of the Serb people in Kosovo". Subsequently a delegation of bishops traveled to Washington to ask from the US Congress and State Department (what an irony!) an American political "intervention because of Kosovo" (Radić, 1996: 269–270). From then on, Church media, *Pravoslavlje* and *Glas crkve*, first rather cautiously, and as time passed, more and more aggressively, put themselves at the forefront of a campaign targeting

Kosovar Albanians. Local Serbs were allegedly victims of a systematic "ethnic cleansing" policy and of "genocide" in the ancestral cradle of their culture and state.

The Orthodox hierarchy and a number of priests took an active part in the wars in Croatia and Bosnia whose declared aim was to "gather all the Serbs in one state". Patriarch Pavle and his bishops toured the territories controlled by Serb forces, encouraging their siblings to defend their "ancestral lands". Priests blessed publicly known war criminals and found justifications for the blowing up of mosques and Catholic churches.[1] As recently as May 2001 the Orthodox hierarchy remained conspicuously silent when angry mobs of anti-Muslim protesters in Trebinje and Banja Luka, both in the *Republika srpska* (Serb republic), disrupted the ceremonies marking the beginning of the reconstruction of destroyed mosques. It is significant that the Ferhadija mosque in Banja Luka, built in 1579, was a historical monument, and that it was mined and razed to the ground on 7 May 1993 by the Karadžić militia, in spite of the fact that war operations were far from the city.

Finally, when Milošević put his signature on the Dayton Peace Agreement in November 1995, the militant faction of the clergy denounced him as a "traitor to the national cause" and began to support Karadžić's war-option. Because he abstained from their chorus, the same radicals demanded later the resignation of Patriarch Pavle. From then on, the Orthodox hierarchy was split between two factions: one with the Patriarch, seeking some kind of accommodation with the Milošević regime; and the radicals, who were more nationalistic than the regime, but who from time to time, as during the last Kosovo crisis and NATO's bombing of Serbia, blew into the same nationalistic horns. The most vociferous was Amfilohije Radović, the Metropolitan of Montenegro, who also categorically opposed the detachment of this federal republic from Serbia. On 26 November 2000, he presided at a church ceremony in Podgorica, glorifying the integration of Montenegro into Serbia back in 1918. It is not by coincidence that the ceremony was organized in the Federal Army House in the Montenegrin capital and was attended by a gallery of local pro-Milošević personalities.

To complicate internal fault-lines in the Serb Church, the radicals support the restoration of the Karadjordjević dynasty, but Pavle, for his part, did not attend the December 1999 meeting of the Serb opposition leaders in Szentendre, Hungary, with Prince Aleksandar, the heir apparent. The royalist camp has its internal problems, too: while Aleksandar, who is a British-educated gentlemen, tries as much as possible to avoid references to Draža Mihailović, his father's *četnik* War Minister, the latter is glorified by the radicals. Another figure in the pantheon of the radicals is wartime Bishop Nikolaj Velimirović, who was an outspoken fascist, or more precisely a *Ljotićevac*, as the pro-fascist Serb movement was called before and during the Second World War. Ironically, the Serb Resistance Movement (SPO) of Vuk Drašković, which declares itself royalist and glorifies Mihailović, is not on the best of terms with Aleksandar Karadjordjević. Draković adopted the wait-and-see tactics of his political idol and suffered a devastating defeat in the last elections in Serbia. His main rival is his godfather, Vojislav Šešelj,

the leader of the Radical Party, a self-styled *četnik vojvoda* (duke), but he is not much concerned with the question of monarchy. Indeed, his party was one of the four pillars of the "Red-Brown" power structure that ruled the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (FRY) until September 2000.

Both Šešelj and Drašković had close supporters in the Orthodox hierarchy. This complicated the choices of Orthodox prelates, who were disunited on the question on which candidate they should bet. Their synod finally agreed to oppose Milošević's reelection but was unable to put all its weight behind a single alternative contender. A dissonant message came from the Episcope of Mileševa, Filaret, who publicly supported Milošević. Other prelates, however, supported the victorious candidate of the Democratic Opposition of Serbia (DOS), Vojislav Koštunica, who is, unlike Milošević, a known Orthodox believer. Koštunica is also a self-declared nationalist but, unlike Milošević, he was not previously a decision-maker, and was never involved in government affairs, or in criminal activities. Furthermore, he is not a royalist. With such a record, he attracted to his side an important segment of the electorate, which previously supported Milošević's war option but turned against him when the latter's policy provoked a series of disasters.

It remains to be seen how the highly politicized but disunited Serb Orthodox Church will navigate the coming uncertain period of transition. It has reasons for satisfaction, however, because the new government pledged to introduce Orthodox religious instruction into schools. This provoked a protest from the Helsinki Human Rights Board of Serbia, which asserted that

> . . . the inclusion of religious instruction into the school curriculum would mark the return of the Church from the sphere of personal to public life as a form of indoctrination, and only for one religion . . . This will cause children and parents to state their religious affiliation, which in conditions of lasting religious and national intolerance in Serbia can only create problems. (Statement of 21 November, 2000)

Cultivating further the public image of a true believer, Koštunica later went on a well-publicized pilgrimage to Mount Athos, where he spent a whole night praying in the Serb monastery of Hilendar. It was supposed to be a "strictly private" visit, but the new Yugoslav president was accompanied by 17 of his ministers. It was announced more recently that the new government is planning to introduce religious education in the army, police and in prisons.

Catholicism among the Croats and the "Sinful Structures" of the State

The Catholic hierarchy in Croatia had unresolved problems with the communist regime dating back to the Second World War and the ambiguous relationship of Zagreb's Archbishop Stepinac with the *ustaša* (Croat fascist) puppet-state. Alojzije Stepinac was only following the then prevalent policy of the Vatican and of Pope Pacelli[2] but he was perceived by the victorious communists as their ideological enemy, which he certainly was. He was arrested, judged in a mock trial, and sentenced to prison. With the Cold

War raging in Europe, he was made Cardinal, and was promoted into a symbol of resistance to communist rule. For Croat nationalists, especially from the diaspora, he became a martyr for the "Holy Croat Cause". Although the diplomatic relations between the new Yugoslav state and the Vatican were later normalized, the relationship between the atheist authorities and the local Catholic Church remained tense. The Catholic hierarchy, in both Croatia and Slovenia, proved to be less compliant than the Orthodox or Islamic establishments.

In 1978 Polish Cardinal Wojtyla was elected Pope and initiated Vatican's new Ostpolitik, the main concern of which was to improve the condition of believers in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, and to bolster the status of national Catholic Churches. Propagating a new ecumenical spirit, the previously self-centered local Catholic hierarchies opened to the public and initiated a dialogue with various sectors of the society, including Marxist intellectuals. Although the Yugoslav regime proved incapable of adapting itself to the new flexibility of the Catholic Church, it was forced to give concessions that included permissions for massive religious rallies and a relatively free religious press. These public liturgies often associated Croat national symbols with Catholicism, while the religious press voiced ethnic-religious grievances. When the communist regime was finally on the verge of collapse and when the first free elections were scheduled in Slovenia and Croatia, the Church put all its moral weight and logistical support behind anti-communist groups and parties. In both republics the League of Communists, whose local leaderships had already been taken over by reformers, was defeated. These electoral victories paved the way for the two republics' separation from the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and their political independence. The Vatican was among the first to give diplomatic recognition to the new regimes, which used the blessing of the Catholic Church to enhance their popular legitimacy.

The ruling Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ) portrayed itself as the most faithful defender of "Croat Catholicism", which was *de facto* promoted into sole state-religion to the point that it antagonized religious minorities. During the first months of the war in Croatia, as a foreign observer remarked, the whole country was

> . . . gripped by something approaching hysteria, numerous demonstrations were held, during which rosaries were held along flags, and prayers and nationalist slogans, hymns and nationalist songs were mingled together. To the observer the connection between Catholic Church and nationalism in Croatia was open on display. (Palmer, 1996: 151)

It had devastating effects in ethnically and religiously mixed regions of Croatia, and even more so in neighboring Bosnia and Herzegovina, where the local electorate split along ethno-religious fault-lines but where the triumphant ethnocentric parties initially joined together in order to marginalize the multiethnic parties of communist extraction. Once this was done, ethnic conflict erupted and the allies of yesterday found themselves on the opposite sides of the barricades.

It was probably the atrocities of the war in Bosnia that finally prompted the Curia to re-define its relationship with the ''Holy Croat Cause''. The dilemma was self-evident: either the Vatican should accept that Catholicism may be used and abused by various ethnocrats and warlords for their selfish aims, and then accept its share of moral responsibility for committed crimes, or the Church should be separated from the State, any state, because Catholicism is supposed to be a transnational religion. The second option would help to avoid the repetition of past blunders, such as when the Vatican did not recognize the totalitarian character of Nazi and fascist regimes, and would enable the Church to extend its pastoral mission to all people, irrespective of their nationality, or even faith. John Paul II clearly repeated this message in summer 1994 when he visited Zagreb, but was probably understood only by a part of his audience, bishops and priests included.

Following the retirement of the conservative Cardinal Kuharić, the Vatican appointed as Zagreb's Archbishop Msgr Josip Bozanić, a more loyal defender of the ecumenical message adopted by the Second Vatican Council, who, in his first Christmas address, denounced the ''crimes of the [official] structures''. This statement was understood by many as a withdrawal of the Church's support from the ruling HDZ and from its narrow and aggressive nationalism. In spite of that, the Catholic establishment did not give away the privileges it had acquired in the new Croatian state because of its previous association with the HDZ. Catholic religious indoctrination remains practically compulsory in education and in the army, even after the electoral defeat of the HDZ in the last parliamentary elections. This prompted Peter Kuzmić, the Rector of the Evangelical Faculty in Osijek, to complain that such exclusive privileges are discriminatory towards children and people belonging to other religious communities, as well as to agnostics and atheists, underlining that such practices are incompatible with pluralist democracy. He added that he is afraid that ''the official Roman Catholic Church [still] perceives itself as a political partner to the government and as a peculiar spiritual policeman, not as a mother and teacher . . . acting on behalf of the well-being of all people'' (Kuzmič, 2000: 12).

In the last year before the death of Tudjman and the electoral defeat of the HDZ, the Kaptol (the seat of the Archbishopric of Zagreb) succeeded in distancing itself from the highly unpopular regime, but its influence did not wane with the passing away of the HDZ. The six-party coalition that took over did not dare to question the previously acquired monopoly of the Catholic Church. If Croatia was to become a real pluralist democracy this is a topic that would come to the agenda sooner or later. This probably prompted the bishops to turn against the new government, but the only ammunition they were able to find was old-fashioned nationalist rhetoric. In September 2000, they issued a declaration in which they practically accused the government of criminalizing the war for independence and once again raised the banner for the defense of the ''Holy Croat Cause''. The precipitating incident was rather banal: the arrest of few people suspected of war crimes against Serb civilians. Although the Poreć Declaration of the Conference of Bishops is ostensibly balanced, individual members of

the synod did not refrain from clearly expressing their views. Mile Bogović, Bishop of the Senj-Gospić diocese, publicly appealed to all political actors

> . . . not to take any initiative that may threaten the State and discredit the martyrs who fell for the Motherland [. . .] We expect that all those who now evaluate the War for the Motherland will have in mind the historical context of this War [. . .] the historical injustices to which the Croat people were exposed should not be forgotten [. . .] We regret that the recent capture of the indicted was carried on with such a demonstration of force [. . .] The aim of such demonstration was to frighten the nation. (Cited in Jurdana, 2000: 7)

In an open letter addressed to the President of the Republic, Stipe Mesić, full of personal insults (see Jurdana, 2001: 7), the Provincial of the Dominican Order Fra Prcela was even more explicit in denying that the Croats had committed any war crime during the recent conflicts. Unfortunately, he is the same Church official who in December 2000, celebrating in Split a holy mass commemorating the death of Ante Pavelić, the quisling leader of the Second World War Croatian state, declared that "there is no Croat, no hero, such as was Ante Pavelić" (cited in Potočnjak, 2001: 10). It should be remembered that the *ustaša* regime, presided over by Pavelić, proceeded with the physical extermination of all Jews and Gypsies in wartime Croatia, and was responsible for huge numbers of executions, deportations and forced conversions to Catholicism of ethnic Serbs. Meanwhile, the isolated Msgr Bozanić traveled to Belgrade and, propagating the ecumenical message, fraternized with Kir-Pavle, the Serb Patriarch. This was perceived by some Croat Catholic intellectuals as pure hypocrisy.[3]

The bishop's attack on the center-left government coincided with the vociferous protests and demonstrations of war-veteran associations and extreme-right, even fascist groups; and, not surprisingly, with a declaration from the diminished HDZ against the new course of the actual government. They all denounced the government for its "servile" attitude toward The Hague Tribunal for War Criminals, allegedly persecuting and prosecuting "Croat knights" (identical arguments are used in Serbia against the prosecution of indicted Serbs, among whom is Milošević). The inclusion of the Catholic hierarchy into this campaign is certainly not accidental, but a premeditated political strategy. The Church has exposed itself as the leader of the rightist bloc, which is now trying to destabilize the center-left government. The government, and particularly the social democrats, are being accused of "bolshevik" leanings (Pleše, 2001: 3). Another blunder?

A New Militant Catholicism in Slovenia

The Slovenes are no less Catholic than the Croats but, unlike the latter, they have not had since their independence a philo-clerical and all-powerful governing party such as the HDZ. Until recently they had an enlightened archbishop, Šuštar, who did not press for the radical clericalization of public life. Also, except in short intervals, they had center-left or center-right governments, which defended with fair success the secular character of the state.

Everything changed with the promotion of Msgr Rode to the archbishop's see of Ljubljana and with the crisis of the liberal government of Janez Drnovšek. The center-right coalition that shortly took over pushed forcefully for the imposition of the (Catholic) catechism in state-run schools and for the restitution of ecclesiastical property.

Although the center-right coalition suffered internal fragmentation, Rode's militant approach was successful. The Catholic Church won unprecedented concessions in education and extracted from the Constitutional Court a ruling which will allow it to regain its property nationalized by the communists. This is significant, because before nationalization the Church was the biggest single landowner in Slovenia. Of course, Rode put all the moral authority of the Church behind his right-wing favorite in the parliamentary elections of October 2000, the Slovene People's Christian Party, but this did not attract more than 10.33% of the votes.

Although the electorate turned away from Msgr Rode's political favorites, the archbishop has reasons for satisfaction. First of all, it will be difficult for the new liberal-led government to revoke the privileges given to the Church, and it is not at all certain that Drnovšek is willing to confront the powerful Catholic establishment. Second, during the the visit of Pope John Paul II to Slovenia in 1999, the small Catholic nation was awarded its first saint (Anton Martin Slomšek, 1797–1868), and Msgr Rode is working hard to get another one (Frederik Barada, 1800–1862). Finally, if after the consolidation of recent acquisitions he is rewarded with a cardinal's hat (never worn by a Slovene), he could be promoted to a higher position in the Vatican hierarchy (Vasović, 2000).

The Revival of Islam in Bosnia and Herzegovina

As for the Bosnian Muslims, or Bosniaks (*Bonjak*) as most call themselves, it should be remembered that they were probably the most secularized ethnonational group in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The rather misguiding appellation of "Muslim" was cultural, not religious. Communist authorities preferred to use this term, because the alternative "Bosniak" would have implied that Bosnia is their national territory, and not the homeland of local Serbs and Croats as well.

There are many possible explanations for the phenomenon of the secularization of these Muslims, but I will cite only two: first, they are predominantly an urban population living traditionally in ethno-religiously mixed surroundings (the exception is western Bosnia, where they represent a compact rural group) and because they were urban they had benefited the most from communist modernization; second, they were separated physically and culturally from the rest of the Muslim world for more than 100 years. On the other hand, those among them who remained practicing believers knew that the Quran categorically commands the protection of other monotheistic communities. Therefore, it is not by coincidence that Orthodox or Catholic church buildings located on Muslim-held territories are still standing, while more than 1200 mosques in Serb or Croat-held territories have

been blown up. However, the war which was imposed on the Bosniaks and of which they were the main victims, gradually changed their attitudes.

In Bosnia, we witnessed a process of rapid de-secularization of the three ethno-national identities, and the Muslims are no exception. Alija Izetbegović, the first president of the internationally recognized Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina, started his political carrier as an Islamic thinker. His intellectual and political activities were penalized by the communist authorities: in 1949 he was sentenced to five years' hard labor for his association with an illegal "Young Muslim Organization", and in 1983, together with 12 other Muslim intellectuals, to 14 years' imprisonment. A lawyer by education, he published *Islam Between East and West* in 1983 (Izetbegović, 1989), a work expressing ideas along the lines of neo-fundamentalist thinkers such as the Pakistani Maulana Mawdudi and the Egyptian Said Al-Qutb. In this book he advocated the establishment of an Islamic society, with its own laws, where Muslims are the majority and in which non-Muslims would be treated as "protected minorities", not as full citizens (incidentally, Milošević and Tudjman were publicly offering the same type of "protection" to ethnic minorities in Serbia and Croatia). When pluralism was introduced in Bosnia, Izetbegović was among the founding members of the Party of Democratic Action (SDA), which adopted a moderate and secular public program, and won the majority of Bosniak votes.

With the dissolution of the Yugoslav federation, the coordinating body previously including all Islamic religious institutions of the SFRY, known as the Muslim Religious Community (*Muslimanska vjerska zajednica*), also disintegrated and new religious communities for each of the successor states were created. Nevertheless, a Reis Ul-Ulema[4] now heads only the Islamic Community of Bosnia and Herzegovina. During the three-year war that engulfed Bosnia, he and his *ulemas* played important roles as go-betweens for the internationally recognized but Muslim-dominated Sarajevo government, and various Islamic states and international organizations. Indeed, the only outside material and financial support Izetbegović's SDA and government could get initially came through formal and informal Islamist networks. Through the same channels arrived foreign Muslim volunteers, among them a few dozen "Afghans", but their total number was never more than 500–600.[5]

Amid the sufferings of war, people increasingly look for spiritual comfort in their religion, and so did the Bosniaks when exposed to a real genocide.[6] Religious hierarchies often use the "God-given" opportunity to reassert their authority over respective ethnic communities. Islamic religious manifestations became public, probably for the first time since the 19th century. The female veil, which had not been seen for a few decades, reappeared. The wartime Muslim mayor of Sarajevo even banned the public consumption of alcohol, but was unable to enforce his decision.

Although the association of the SDA with the local Islamic establishment remains as close as ever, the Bosniak party is now trying to expose to the public its secular face. Advocating officially a "multiethnic" and "multicultural" Bosnia, but in practice appealing to the Bosniak/Muslim electorate only, it finds itself in an awkward situation. Probably because of that, it lost

some ground in predominantly Muslim regions to the multiethnic Social Democratic Party (reformed communists) in the last parliamentary elections. The traumas of the recent past are obviously still present, and Bosnia and Herzegovina remains for the time being a country divided into three ethnic homelands, each with its own exclusive religion.

Islam among the Albanians

Although the majority of today's ethnic Albanians, scattered between Albania, Montenegro, Kosovo, Macedonia, Greece and Turkey, are Muslims, it was estimated long ago that about 20–25% are Orthodox and about 5–10% Catholics. The Kosovar and Macedonian Albanians are 90% Muslim. In contrast with other Balkan nations, religion did not play a significant role in the shaping of Albanian ethnic awareness in the 19th and 20th centuries. This can perhaps be explained, first, by the fact that clan/tribal ties often cut across religious dividing lines and that kin solidarity always preceded any other form of loyalty. Second, common historical memories, linked to the heroic deeds of presumed common ancestors, transmitted in various ways from generation to generation, tended to minimize religious differences. Third, among the Muslim Albanians, who were converted to Islam in the 14th century, heterodox Sufi orders, combining beliefs and practices belonging to different religions, including Christianity, played historically important roles.

Unlike Sali Berisha, former Albanian president, who enrolled his country into the Islamic Conference in 1993, the current political leaders of Kosovar and Macedonian Albanians have taken great care not to identify their organizations with any religion. It was and is still important for them to avoid any reference to Islam, because that could: (1) threaten their own power-base among the non-Muslim Albanians (Christians and atheists); (2) induce their Orthodox neighbors, Serbs, Montenegrins, Slavo-Macedonians and Greeks, to join forces in order to combat the presumed ''Islamic danger''. To the dismay of their would-be supporters in the Muslim world, they have adopted an unequivocally secular discourse. That, of course, does not mean that secular nationalism is *a priori* less xenophobic and more moderate.

Albanian secular nationalism in Kosovo was initially defensive, and Ibrahim Rugova, the longtime leader of the Kosovars, was and still is a moderate nationalist. That is not, however, the characteristic trait of some younger Kosovar politicians issued from the Kosovo Liberation Army, who mix xenophobic and ''Marxist-Leninist'' discourse with tribal/patriarchal ideas of justice. Unfortunately, after being the victims of harsh oppression and massive campaigns of ethnic cleansing masterminded by the Milošević regime, a number of ethnic Albanians turned against their helpless Serb and Roma neighbors. Even potential symbols of ''foreign oppression'', Orthodox churches and monasteries, were attacked and those that survived are now heavily guarded by KFOR peacekeepers. At the same time, new mosques and *medresas* (Quranic schools), built with Saudi and Gulf money, are mushrooming all over Kosovo and western Macedonia.

During the inter-ethnic conflict that recently erupted in Macedonia, ethnic Albanian irregulars attacked a number of Orthodox churches. Slavo-Macedonian mobs in their turn attacked a number of mosques, often with the open support of government and Church officials. Some of the 55 damaged Islamic buildings (*AIM*, Skopje, 7 October 2001) were targeted by government troops.

The Macedonian Salad

"When the freedom and defense of our people cannot be achieved with other means", wrote Kir-Stefan, the Patriarch of Ohrid and Macedonia, in an open letter in June 2001, "then we should get rid of those who endanger our lives and who are trying to split our homeland" (cited in Latifi, 2001: 1). Kir-Stefan was referring specifically to the military operations of the self-styled (Albanian) National Liberation Army. These operations, as well as the retaliations of Macedonian security forces, induced the foreign power-brokers, the representatives of the European Union and of NATO, to mediate between the two sides and ultimately to impose a compromise solution.

This compromise required the amending of the existing Constitution of the FYR of Macedonia and a number of laws, with the aim of establishing more balanced relations between the Slavo-Macedonian and ethnic Albanian communities (the latter representing 23% of the total population, according to the last official census). Among other amendments, paragraph 19 of the Constitution, that gave a privileged position to the Macedonian Orthodox Church (MOC), had to be changed. This was vehemently opposed by the Orthodox hierarchy and led to a public exchange of insults between the MOC and the Islamic Community of Macedonia (Latifi, 2001: 2). When the amendments were finally adopted by the parliament, Kir-Stefan declared that "the Church does not interfere with politics but it is forced to defend its dignity, status, position and role in the Constitution, even by publicly humiliating treacherous deputies" (cited in Stojanovska-Icevska, 2001: 5). In an article published in the Skopje daily *Nova Makedonija*, Bishop Agatangel accused President Boris Trajkovski (a Methodist) personally of being the ringleader of an alleged "Protestant conspiracy". Petar, the bishop of the MOC in charge of Australia, where an important expatriate Macedonian community resides, elaborated the same conspiracy theory by affirming that "during the last two years, Macedonia has been attacked not only by Albanian terrorists, but also by large number of sects which, supported by Methodist Boris Trajkovski, have already entered our schools, mailboxes, families, and even the army barracks" (both citations in *RFE/RL Balkan Report* 6/3, 11 January 2001).

Concluding Observations and a Question Mark

Religions, effectively excluded from public life under communist rule, seem to be re-emerging from the partly forgotten past. Religions, churches,

mosques, priests and imams have been reintroduced into the public arena and integrated into official power structures in Croatia, in Serbia and in ethnically designed Bosnian cantons. As mentioned above, until recently the MOC enjoyed a privileged position in the FYR of Macedonia.

Religion has apparently filled the vacuum created by the delegitimation of the communist project and provided an integrating framework for post-communist societies that have problems defining their new identities. Religious beliefs are associated with new ethno-national projects, to which they have brought a feeling of historical continuity with the pre-communist past. Religious symbols, banners and icons have appeared in mass political rallies, giving legitimacy to pro-independence movements and their leaders. Even prominent former communists, as illustrated by Tudjman's appropriation of Catholic symbols, have played the religious card. Orthodox and Catholic priests have been called to bless newly elected parliaments, national flags, and coats of arms, and to preside over state-sponsored ceremonies. Less visible in the beginning, Muslim imams in Bosnia have also joined the bandwagon. At least in this stage of our development, religions have been extremely politicized and we are witnessing a process of religionization of politics, which is not a phenomenon restricted to the space of Yugoslav successor states only (Robertson, 1989). In an effort to reconquer the social space that was denied to them by the previous atheist regime, religious activists and church officials are engaged in a battle for the de-secularization of society.

Gertrude Himmelfarb described the contemporary superimposition of religion and nationalism as "the dark and bloody crossroad" and remarked that in defiance of our expectations we are today "confronting a lethal combination of nationalism and religion—and not in one region but all over the globe" (Himmelfarb, 1993: 56). However, wars in the Balkans have nothing to do with traditional "religious" wars, although "a factual ontologization of the existing social, political and cultural differences" (Vrcan, 1994: 418) has contributed to the legitimation of political violence and ethnic cleansing practiced by all aggressors. Of course, religions have always been used and abused for political ends, even in the most advanced liberal democratic countries. They are apparently the most enduring means to the legitimation of political power.

NOTES

[1.] The most outspoken were bishops Atanasije and Irenej, as well as Iguman (head of monastery) Filaret. While in Bosnia, Filaret even wore military fatigues and was photographed holding a kalashnikov.

[2.] The Pope recently beatified him. The move sent ambivalent signals to the public.

[3.] See, for example, the comment by I.Z. Čičak in the weekly magazine *Nacional*, no. 254, 28 September 2000.

[4.] Literally meaning "chief ulema" (Sunni cleric), a unique institution created by the Austrian authorities, who ruled Bosnia and Herzegovina until 1918. Later on,

the newly created Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (Kingdom of Yugoslavia) recognized the institution and communist authorities in the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia did the same.

[5.] At the same time, a similar number of non-Serb ''Orthodox'' volunteers, mainly Russians and Ukrainians, fought in the ranks of local Serb militias. However, the Muslim-dominated Bosnian army also included an unknown number of Arabs, mainly Palestinians, who had previously studied in Sarajevo, had married locally and established their families in Bosnia, and were not perceived as ''foreigners''. Indeed, many of them had acquired Yugoslav citizenship.

[6.] It is estimated that 278,000 people were killed between 1991 and 1995 in Bosnia and Herzegovina, 148,000 of them Bosniaks (*Hrvatska ljevica*, 1–9 September 1996; *Dnevni avaz*, 16 May 1999).

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