



RESEARCH ARTICLE

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## Violent and Unethical Non-Violent Abuse of Faith and Ethnoreligious Sentiments in Southeast Europe: Religious Peace-Building?

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### Abstract

The article presents a theoretical and conceptual examination of religious violent and unethical non-violent behaviors, ethno-political and clerical synergism, and religious peace-building capacity. I argue that the phenomenon of religious/ethnic violent and non-violent interchangeability adopted by national political unethical behavior has adverse consequences on the post-Yugoslav social behavior and reconciliation process; religions should be a moral peace-building agency. The multiethnic/multireligious socialist Yugoslav society has been violently transformed into influential ethical and clerical cultures, producing antagonistic ethnonational societies sustaining pastoralism as potent identity manifestations of the social capital. War-period visual violence and emotions influenced violent behavior and policy within the discourse "our vs. their sacred ethnic land," creating an unbearable ease of creating fear and motivating violent antagonism and war crimes. The post-war antagonistic media rhetoric, visual antagonism, and abuse of faith adversely impact peaceful coexistence. Ethnic, religious, ideological, and political contextual factors are challenging to generate in post-conflict, divided Balkan societies. Fear of others, religiously distinct, is a category that's difficult to determine and prevent. Western-Balkan societies possess victimological and political mythical conventions, honoring ethnoreligious war victories, defeats, and agonies, maintaining hostility and revenge discourse. Historically, religions were misused to justify violence and maintain non-violence, unethical sociopolitical order, and negative peace. The ideologies of religious superiority intertwine with intensely dominant national perceptions, so belonging to the Serb, Croat, or Bosniak people is equated with Orthodoxy, Catholicism, or Islam. This entanglement is the groundwork for despondency and a hostile peace climate. Current clerical and ethno-political policies lead further away from conflict transformation, directing toward the renewal of monotheistic spirituality, cognition, and violence. Political involvement affects "authentic" religion. We should engage in all-inclusive theological and consensus approaches to demonstrate that religions are peace-building agencies, retrieving and revitalizing authentic morality criteria. Religious sentiments mobilize people more rapidly than other identities.

**Keywords:** clerical & ethnic, Western Balkans & former Yugoslavia, violence & non-violence, social capital, ethnonational leaders, peace and conflict, ethics.

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### Article Information

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## 1. Introduction

The notions of Southeastern Europe and the Balkans are often used interchangeably. However, the Balkan or former Yugoslavia wars have constructed different commonplace, timeworn, and enduring representations. In practical terms, we take issue with several patterns of narratives, such as the sensationalism of the media industry, the essentialization of collective memory, the securitization of imaginary threats, and the pacifist activism of normative transformations. It is our contention to argue that they historicize certain moments of rupture, which are subsequently used and misused to construct an anachronistic representation of Southeast Europe that may conceal hidden interests. Contrastingly, an alternative narrative that emphasizes a "history from below" as an apperception of the temporality of being can offer a revisionist approach that may show the futility of ahistorical accounts (Abazi & Doja, 2018). At the same time, religions played critical roles in social, political, and security processes. The multiethnic/multi-religious framework of former Yugoslavia was abolished at the beginning of the 1990s following episodes of one of the most destructive wars, genocide, and crimes against humanity on the European continent. The ethnoreligious identities were formed as part of ethnonational political projects. In the optics of the mimicry of unethical/corrupt power (Transparency International, 2020) in post-Yugoslav societies, the political language of ethical irresponsibility enables the continuous guidance of nationalized, ethnicized, and clericalized societies. All Western Balkan countries remain hybrid regimes, with a decline for Serbia and B&H, Freedom House report stated (European Western Balkans, 2022). Thus, regimes with elements of democracy and authoritarianism, with the disputable legislature, judiciary, and press freedom. In order to contribute to building a more peaceful social community and creating an optimal environment for the development of human potential, the Balkan states need to achieve a low level of corruption, a healthier business environment, and a more successful functioning government (Institute for Economics & Peace, 2019).

Any religious teaching can be abused. Even among Buddhists, in specific historical conditions, there was no harmful practice concerning members of other religions. The terrorists responsible for the 9-11 tragedies and all the deaths caused were Muslims who claimed to be acting in the name of God. On whether they followed Islamic teachings in any way, Sayyed Nasr (2003) answered:

No. In every religion, you have people with a sense of blind self-righteousness. When Oliver Cromwell was beheading Charles I, he thought he acted like an excellent Christian. Some people are blinded by their narrow, exclusivist interpretation of religion.

Moreover, these people think that they are faithful interpreters of Islam. Nevertheless, if you look at the Islamic world, the background from which these people come, even theologically, is a kind of heresy. I would not say I like to use the word "heresy" any longer, but they are at the very margin of the spectrum of Islamic thought, both Sunni and Shiite. They are not traditional, orthodox, mainstream Muslims by any means. The fact that there are small groups taking recourse to violence is not unique to Islam. There is such a pattern in India in Gujarat among Hindus, who have done pogroms of the worst kind, and also historically in Christianity. The trouble with these people is that they consciously try to use the name "Islam" for their cause. Rather than say, "We are Muslims who happen to be doing these things," they consciously try to use this as a kind of shibboleth — like, for example, the Protestants and Catholics of Ireland. They fight because of Protestantism and Catholicism but do not hold the Bible as a shibboleth. They are trying to use or feed upon the anger of a larger community that is very disgruntled and angry about the situation. Moreover, they are trying to siphon some of the energy and support for themselves (Nasr, 2003).

At the same time, we live in a visual age with a vast amount of visual violence. Ronald Blieker stated (Evans, 2022):

To be effective, terrorism has to do more than kill people: it has to inflict fear in those who experience the event and, perhaps more importantly, in those who witness it from a distance. It is a reason 9/11 was designed as a visual event and as a media spectacle: so that images could capture, circulate, and multiply the intended political message. Perhaps we can speak of violent visuals here: of a form of visual violence that insinuates itself into our collective consciousness and continues to shape — sometimes for years or even decades — how we feel and think about the world and, by extension, how our politics takes shape. What concerns me in particular about how we perceive visual violence, like 9/11, are the political attitudes and policies that emerge in response. In the immediate aftermath of the terror attack, a strong discourse of "us" versus "them" emerged, particularly in the US.

At the same time, during the disintegration of former Yugoslavia, visual violence in the media (mostly all sides) was a nuclear reactor for producing hatred, xenophobia, and fear (Klarin, 2006). The antagonistic discourses "We vs. Them - Enemies," "Our Religion vs. Theirs," or "Our Mono-ethnicized Sacred Land" were born at the end of the 1980s in former Yugoslavia. The media in the War turned into a war media and an utterly unequal war of an intense propaganda machine and democratic media. However, from the post-war period until the present-day, political communication has changed in media convergence, unlocking more sociopolitical space for Balkan radicalism (also in Visual form), emerging between contemporary and traditional media. Religions in the former Yugoslavia are reduced first to the nation and then to power. Thus, a specific (remarkably adverse) characteristic of the post-Yugoslavia states is that religions are identified with nations (majority). In this way, the confession is accepted as a political doctrine so that the national interest of former-Yugoslav ethnopolitics can be subordinated to the confessional one. During the dramatic disintegration of the former Yugoslavia, some religious communities/clergy encouraged the sacral-national government to devastate, kill, and rape with their religious blessings, the ideology of the complete removal of others by supreme authorities. The prominent role of the ruling elites, and the acquisition and consolidation of power, was the construction of national identity accompanied by great violence based on the most terrible, aggressive expression of the rebirth of nationality. Finally, such elitists and politics further encouraged religions to become nationally ideologized religions, i.e., intolerant religious ideologies (Hadžić, 2020).

According to Nasr, the history of all societies, religious or secular, is replete with similar examples of abuse. Human beings contain in their stumbled state the seeds of conflict and struggle and resort to aggression and War using every idea or ideology they have. The power to move people (Jusic, 2017). Many religious issues have emerged from globalization, such as secularism, individualism, religious radicalism, terrorism, and the growth of religious commerce. Theologians view religion as a universal that can adapt to contemporary social capital- an adequate solution is a requirement. According to Puhalo (2013) studies from the Balkan Region (e.g., Pantic, 1991; Corkalo & Kamenov, 1999; Sram, 2001) have shown that increasing distance between ethnic groups is associated with increased religiosity. Furthermore, Dusanic (2009) obtained similar results in his research in which religiosity negatively correlates with the acceptance of relationships with different social and ethnic groups. Moreover, Puhalo (2010) showed that religion stands on the path of reconciliation among the inhabitants of B&H, and research by Dusanic (2005 and 2007) and Smajic (2010) showed that religious individuals have strong national ties, authoritarianism, and ethnocentrism (Puhalo, 2013).

The history of religions records this relationship from the very beginnings of religious traditions, and the separation of religion and politics is considered the most outstanding achievement of modern times. Nevertheless, it is impossible to exclude religion from politics, and where this has been attempted, totalitarian regimes have emerged that have introduced surrogate secular ideologies instead of religion. Although over the centuries, millions of people have lost their lives because of religion, they have suffered equally and even more because of secular ideology, whether it was Nazism or communism, as the most prominent examples from the 20th century of attempts to create surrogate ideologies that were supposed to replace faith. Religious communities have been in politics in former Yugoslav nations (now seven independent countries) for almost three decades, especially during pre-election agitations and campaigns.

As much as religious leaders, in principle, distance themselves from supporting certain parties, lower-ranking priests, and imams either through sermons or simply by taking photos with politicians. Since they are spiritual shepherds by their vocation and should be role models for believers according to the teachings of all religions - they directly or indirectly suggest to the faithful whom they should vote for. Even in much more advanced democracies, and especially non-democratic regimes in the world of churches, religious communities, and leaders "prefer" political options (Kovac, 2018).

A specific (extremely negative) characteristic of the post-Yugoslav space is that religions are identified with nations (ethnicity). Religious identity was built before national identity. Hence the view that religious identity is the core of national identity (Cvitkovic, 2011). Nenad Miscevic anoints "vicious" nationalism in the Balkans. "Nationalism that explicitly rejects universalization" and the right to exist, and its exclusivity makes it extreme—and unhealthy—both for such nationalism and its neighbor (Miscevic, 2006). National and identity policies and the interests of regional ethnopolitics have discontinued the Yugoslav inter-cultural existence of the states' citizens. The pure homogenous ethnoreligious territories occurred after the wars.

Collective affiliation in such a psychological condition becomes a divine and metaphysical category, above which no one can be ready to sacrifice everything, even the lives of those who do not want to be part of intoxicated and insane patriotism. It is not only the case with national identities and loves for the "only and eternal homeland" but also with many other human affiliations. However, unlike other identities requiring exclusive loyalty, national identity does not recognize competition, let alone opposition (Bauman, 2010). The same matrix is associated with the religious identities of people in this Region who emphasize their religion as the only accurate one and, at the same time, disparage other religions. In religious and national terms, the Balkan historical space is so structured that it provides numerous and diverse opportunities for conducting religious institutions. In times of social crisis, both "religious and national" are more strongly present on the public scene, often in its most conservative forms.

The relationship between ethnonational policies, violence, and religion is visible in the Yugoslav wars of the 1990s, where the War in all national religions (Catholicism/Orthodoxy/Islam) found proponents of personal sacrifice for the good of nations. Belonging to a specific army and wearing religious symbols (rosary and cross), giving sure signs (raising two or three fingers in the air), or shouting messages of religious content (Allahu Akbar) did not presuppose that soldier and their commanders should know religious truths and dogmas. However, that made belonging to a particular denomination a pure-blooded national affiliation. In this sense, the responsibility of religious communities in the Yugoslav disintegration is unquestionable. They have contributed to the development of trivial ideologies that have outgrown mere respect for their people's material and spiritual goods

(Hadžić, 2020). The connection between religion and nationalism can intensify violence among members of different religious/confessional and national groups. Jaroslav Hasek addressed the behavior of the Catholic Church during the War.

The practice of mass confessions, prayers, and giving rosaries to soldiers before going to the battlefield are symbolic moves. Croatian soldiers who fought for the freedom of religion and national freedom with a cross around their necks as a symbol expressed their faith and nationality. Thus, the Catholic faith is an integral part of the identity of the Croatian people. (Marusic, 2011).

However, such identity excludes all soldiers who belong to another religion (Muslims/Jews/Orthodox) or do not belong to any (atheists/agnostics). During the War, the Serbian army had a religious practice; Orthodox Priests blessed soldiers before the battles, genocide, systemic rapes, and crimes against humanity.

There is no proof of religious superiority on such an understanding of one's faith, and thus no need to exterminate other religions. If we include the ethical paradigm, ethics differs from morality because it is an individual choice. Religious ethics know the answers to non-religious ethics: purely human answers to the question of what is good. *Religious ethics* are the moral principles that guide religions and set the norm(s) for acceptable behavior. The domain of secular studies has garnered less interest than that involving comparisons and contrasts between the non-religious and the religious in matters of ethics and morality. Indeed, strong stereotypes are projected onto seculars reflecting concerns about how morality can be achieved without religious influences. Secular attitudes and behaviors are examined in domains such as honesty, criminality, substance use, sexuality, prosociality, aggression, prejudice, helping, and altruism. Across these domains, a secular morality trend emphasizes individualism over group binding. General morality reflects reasoning over intuition and moral consequentialism over deontology among secular individuals (Zuckerman et al., 2016). Religious ethics does not abolish the accomplishments of religious ethics but strengthens and establishes the best of them by faith. At the same time, religion is an influential educator with its universal values. However, for too many believers, the hope of heaven and fear of hell forces them to be good. Therefore, many could be more genuinely ethical. In this way, every inquisition, crusade, or jihad justifies the very suspicion they refute. The superior behavioral practice carries his understanding only by slandering those he does not consider members of their race or religion.

South Slavic peoples suffer from two manias: they are sick of mania of persecution and greatness while constantly living in fear, fed by hatred and deception. In this specific form of social psychopathology, two seemingly incompatible concepts merge the mania of greatness and persecution. Nevertheless, unfortunately, many politicians, and people of science and spirit, feed these two forms of madness with Mephistopheles' persistence. Moreover, myths filled the horror of existential emptiness. Civilization has been declared responsible for decadence, disease, and perversion (David, 2019). This view was also congruent with the general political climate, which favored keeping the dispersed Serbian populations in one state as had been the case in Socialist Yugoslavia (Kaser & Halpern, 1998). Serbian troops withdrew from Kosovo, effectively ending the decade-long domination over the province. However, the Kosovo myth remained relevant in Serbian political discourse even with the end of Serb rule (Bieber, 2002). Above all, the myth represents historical continuity and enforces the consciousness of the ethnic or national community. Those initiated into and accept this created historical heritage feel strongly linked to their mythical ancestors. In Serbia, the projected effect is a spiritual kinship group sanctified by history and religion with eternal history. The ritual of



remembrance symbolizes the ethnic entity of Serbdom, being Serbian, and the fight for survival for many Serbs. An essential meaning of the Kosovo field is that survival does not depend on victory. Even a defeat can be mythologized as a beginning of a period of the never-ending struggle for survival; one's folk against all others: "Who cries out and denies that Kosovo is not Serbia, where our churches and monasteries as witnesses to history lie." (Colovic, 1994, as cited in Kaser & Halpern, 1998, p. 97). Weber's assessment that "the election campaign is not a fight for the future, but a reckoning about what happened in the past" proved correct in B&H (and the Region). The word "We" (Muslims/Catholics/Orthodox) is never pronounced as in the pre-election and election struggle (Cvitkovic, 2019).

B&H is the most critical former Yugoslavia multiethnic/multireligious discourse (some call it a "small" Yugoslavia). The politicization of religion began in the 1990s and led to the strengthening of folklore, manifesto, and decorative religiosity. As a form of political power, politicized religions are, psychologically speaking, unconscious non-faith, whether accepted or rejected by believers, which the "actor" necessarily instrumentalizes (Hadžić, 2021). There is the phenomenon that religious leaders often become active politicians, as is the case with Bosniak/Muslim religious leaders. In B&H, where the population is predominantly B&H Serb and Croat, those areas are characterized by Serbian/Orthodox or Croatian/Catholic awareness. Uninterruptedly, national flags of other countries (Croatian, Serbian, Russian, and occasionally Turkish and Saudi Arabia) and religious symbols exist. The reflection of B&H statehood (persistent sociopolitical issues and secessionism strategy) is questioned. Ethnic-religious quasi-states materialize in that condition of sociopolitical climate and awareness. The ethnicization and clericalization of the B&H soil began in the design of violent joint criminal enterprises and was carried out by parastate projects of Herceg-Bosna<sup>1</sup> and Republika Srpska-RS.<sup>2</sup> It strongly defended the preservation of the achieved effects. However, all people in B&H were Bošnjani (Bosnians)<sup>3</sup> historically, from the medieval B&H Kingdom and Ottoman Empire, until Austro-Hungarian rule. Until the end of the 19th century, B&H Catholics and Orthodox did not call themselves "Croats" or "Serbs." However, Bosniaks and the so-called "Serbo-Croat" political factor had no significant influence on B&H. Throughout the Middle Ages, the B&H Franciscans spread Catholicism among the Bosniaks of the Bogumil faith. In Ilija Garašanin's "Nacertanije" (1844), often called Chetnik's<sup>4</sup> "Bible," he calls the people of B&H-Bosniaks regardless of their religious affiliation. He talks about the program/strategy of "Serbization of Bosniak Orthodox." (Garašanin, 1991).

I recall well-known Radovan Karadžić's words in B&H Parliament in 1991, before the War: "Do not think that you will not take B&H to hell and the Muslim people to complete extinction. 'Muslims' can not defend themselves if War happens here!" Besides the Republic of Srpska Entity (RS), whose complete political and military leadership were convicted for Genocide and crimes against humanity attempt to create an "ethnoreligiously" pure Croatian entity on the B&H territory ended with multiple ICTY verdicts for war crimes and crimes against humanity, against the entire political and military leadership of the "Herceg-Bosna" and part of the political and military leadership of Croatia for a joint criminal enterprise. The future social and political relations are contested because of historical revisionism and persistent denial of the ICTY convictions by Croatian leadership and B&H Croat political parties. After the verdicts (ICTY,

<sup>1</sup> It was an unknown geopolitical entity and proto-state in B&H, sanctioned in the (ICTY) as a joint criminal enterprise that committed crimes against humanity.

<sup>2</sup> It is one of the two entities of B&H. Acts of ethnic cleansing and genocide against the non-Serb populations profoundly reduced the numbers of other groups. Its founding and prominent political and military leaders were sanctioned in the ICTY.

<sup>3</sup> It means *Bosnians*. It is the archaic name originating from the Middle Ages for inhabitants of B&H, appearing as earliest as the 12th century.

<sup>4</sup> *Chetnik* is an expression used to denote members of the Serbian nationalist-chauvinist movement of Greater Serbia ideology.

case number IT-04-74-), Croatian president Grabar-Kitarovic stated: "No one, not even the Hague Tribunal, will write our history!" One of the Six convicted, Slobodan Praljak, drank poison in the courtroom. Moreover, the commemorations and Church masses were organized in Croatia and B&H. Among many Croatian highest-ranking politicians, (then) the chairman of the B&H Presidency, Dragan Covic, lit the candles for Six convicted war criminals.

### Figure 1

*In Zadar, Croatia, exhibition of a bizarre artistic painting of Praljak's suicide in the court of the ICTY, Hague Tribunal after the verdict.*



Note. Source: Bljesak.info, 2018. An art exhibition by Croatian painter Butic Davidoff in Zadar, Croatia, showed a bizarre painting. The painting portrays Praljak's shocking suicide by drinking poison in the ICTY Court in Den Hague Tribunal, Netherlands, after the verdict for crimes against humanity during the B&H war. The painting also contains religious symbolism (a Catholic Cross) in combination with the Croatian coat of arms, i.e., the Croatian chessboard.

The public education system in communism was hermetically sealed from any religious influence. It was generally expected that religion would soon disappear from private life in the way it was expelled from public spheres. In the post-socialist period, the secular level of society was utterly destroyed (religious education was introduced in schools, not the culture of religion; the influence of religious institutions on political life; participation of representatives of religious communities in political events; political speeches and messages of religious leaders at religious gatherings). Because never and nowhere is "education of consciousness," "mass consciousness," and they did not take their manipulation more seriously than in communist countries." (Grimm & Amstrong, 1982). The B&H phenomenon "Two schools under one roof" demonstrates it.<sup>5</sup>

After the wars in the post-Yugoslav countries, nepotism, systemic corruption, ethnoreligious suitability (the Bolsheviks called it "moral suitability"), and the so-called "Resourcefulness" (sophisticated forms of deception) led to inevitable success. Moreover, independent critical statements are associated with personal risks of being declared an internal enemy of the particular ethnoreligious community (Bajtal, 2018). Then, it is no longer a set of independent, thinking but uninformed communities — collectives that do not allow themselves the internal dynamics of life, including healthy conflicts. Croatia, an EU member and country with the highest GDP in the Western Balkans, and its national policies have caused the most extensive exodus of the population, reducing the tax base and jeopardizing pension health systems. A

<sup>5</sup> Schools in B&H are based on ethnoreligious segregation. Students from two ethnoreligious groups, Bosniaks and Croats, attend classes in the same building but are physically separated and taught separate curricula. Bosnian Serbs students/Orthodox have separate schools and curricula. Schools in B&H are based on ethnoreligious segregation.

recent survey in Croatia, the only Western Balkans EU member, shows that the main reasons for mass emigration are "an unorganized and corrupt state." (Juric, 2018). The genuine democracies were based on the explicit separation of three elemental powers: legislative, judicial, and executive. Since the common denominator for these three authorities is nothing but the law as the seat of freedom, it is easy to infer that this necessary separation has not always been smoothly accepted. Political realism states that politics is governed by objective laws rooted in human nature. Therefore, we must first "understand" humanity's standards to improve society and create lasting Peace. The societies that emerged from the disintegration of the former Yugoslavia have shown that they do not aspire to get beyond a state of conflict. The disputable rule of law is their profound election preference.

Peace reigns where the freedom of others is respected. Only an internally free man can enjoy Peace because he already lives in his heart. In Christianity, there are ten commandments of God; seven refer to man's relationship with others, which means that man was created to make new friendships, love and be loved, do good deeds, not spread hatred, and fight for Peace. From the point of view of the Jewish Torah, the pursuit of Peace is a fundamental principle on which Jewish law is based and does not support any form of violence other than saving one's own life. Islam invites people to get to know each other, starting from the fact that they have a common origin, so that Islam as a whole, humanity is considered one family. As the goal of creating people, Islam cites mutual acquaintance and rapprochement, as the Almighty says: "O people, from one man and one woman we create and divide you into nations and tribes to get to know each other. The most honorable in the sight of Allah is the one who pleases Him the most." (Holy Quran, 2021, Sūrah, Al- Hujurat, 13.) Islam was the first religion to call for "internationalism." Islamic civilization spread far beyond the extremes reached by Roman and Hellenistic culture and thus managed to take the positive elements of distant Asian civilizations, adopt them and weave them into its civilization. That is proof that Islam is against conflict because of territorial or national affiliation because it makes no distinction between races nor between this or that nation. Peaceful coexistence in Islam is based on religious rules because Islam is the only religion that recognizes opponents, guards their rights, and calls for mutual assistance and peaceful coexistence (El-Karavi, 2017).

A distinction must be made between negative and positive Peace for a closer understanding. Negative Peace is a state without war, and Positive Peace is a form of more complete and comprehensive Peace. In each term, Peace is always a process, a cyclical concept. *Peace-building* is a widespread phenomenon that is part of the interest in academia, activists, politics, and other social determinants. Peace is one of the significant categories of spirituality in general, and believers of every faith in the world inherit this spirituality. Incredibly, no systematic religion does not contain the idea of Peace, both internal and external, as an acritical way to draw closer to God. Peace-building is an ongoing process of shaping social relations. Nelson Mandela said: "It is not enough to talk about Peace; one must believe in it. It is not enough to believe in him; one must work for him. According to Institute for Economics and Peace-IEP (2022):

the term Positive Peace was first introduced in the 1960s by Norwegian sociologist Johan Galtung and has historically been understood qualitatively based on idealistic or moral concepts of a peaceful society. However, the distinguishing feature of IEP's work on Positive Peace is that it is empirically derived and, therefore, conceptually different from Galtung's version. Statistical analysis and mathematical modeling were used to identify the typical characteristics of the world's most peaceful countries. Therefore, it forms a critical evidence base to understand Positive Peace and avoids subjective value judgments related to systems thinking (IEP, 2022).



Defining "religious peace-building is challenging. The phenomena of "faith" and "peace-building, conflict transformation, and conflict resolution" are themselves fluid and broad. Thus, it can be poured into various frameworks and given different forms. Some sociologists of religion claim that religion is a social factor in disintegration, not just social cohesion. If we examine it from a historical perspective, the responsibility of religions in many unfortunate violent historical events is evident. The thesis of "just war," formulated by Augustine, which allowed people to judge the War's character, is disputable in the contemporary world. It is the challenge of meeting two concepts, "religion" and "peace-building," in one dimension that should not be separated. However, they are. For a long time, religions have been the only weighty element in social consolidation and justification activities of extended families, tribes, ethnic groups, cultures, and civilizations. It consistently and inevitably ended in a violent conflict. However, religions had an irreplaceable role in encouraging and empowering one's vulnerable position in conflict with those on the opposite side - the "enemy." Many conflicts, wars, antagonism, divisions, hatred, intolerance, xenophobia, fear, hostility, and aggressive behaviors apply to believers, religious systems, religious communities, religious institutions, and religious leaders. Religion plays a vital role in society (particularly Balkans) and can be essential in reconciliation, forgiveness, and non-violence. Together, through interreligious dialogues and educating citizens, we can do much to build Peace. Religions must become an instrument (not just hope) against violent and non-violent antagonism. They should cease to justify proactive misery and become peace-building instruments and moral agencies.

Hafiz Sulejman Bulgari, a Bosnian Imam and author, who has been living in Podgorica since 2016, claims:

Religious dignitaries should not allow relations between people to be disturbed due to political positions and personal interests. They should rise above that and focus on raising awareness, strengthening education and spirituality, and awakening virtues in citizens so that good and justice are a measure against all evil, regardless of whom it comes from. Interreligious relations should be developed even more through dialogue and cooperation to improve the state of the community and the common good. With our closure, we have no right to close the youth and the future generation to healthier views and better perspectives on life. Islam commands believers to dialogue, help, and cooperate with the followers of the Book and asks them to communicate and discuss with them most beautifully. Moreover, support one another in good behavior and awareness and do not support one another in sin and violence... (Nikolić, 2020).

Religion means reconnecting to the one from whom you have separated, a connection to the source. In Rousseau's work, *Obstacle and Transparency* indicates the breaking of the contract with foundation and originality, alienation from the transparency of a pure heart. As soon as there is a break, there is also an appearance, and the appearance is the suffering in which modern society lives. An intellectual is a free man from whom all men are safe. Illiterate people knew their attitudes could save the community at certain times, while educated people remained silent. An educated man is one from whom everyone is protected from evil. Most intellectuals merge with the political elites because they are afraid of tomorrow. They lack respect for the sacred and the secular. The one attached to the sacred neglects matter isolates himself from reality, exaggerates, and has the need to reach for the authority of force. The one tied only to the worldly again reaches for force, defending the material at all costs: murders, wars, disasters. The compromise is "gold." The body is the temporary address of the soul. Plato would state that we have forgotten the soul's identity, prioritizing various types of identity (national, religious, political, and economic). (Nikolić, 2020).

According to the positive peace report (2022), among the countries of the former Yugoslavia, Kosovo is ranked worst (77th) and, along with Nigeria and Pakistan, is rated as a country with a low state of positive Peace. Currently, post-war Yugoslav societies have disputable territorial, state-building, and peace-building issues; Dayton Peace Accords in B&H obstruction provision, Kosovo-Serbia concern, Croatia-Serbia relationship regarding the military action "Storm," - displacement of Serbs from Croatian territories, Albania-Macedonian case and Greece-North Macedonia disagreement. In addition, the Global Peace Index report states that the development of positive global Peace stops the spread of "fake information," political polarization, and tension between different social groups. (Institute for Economics & Peace, 2019). The year 2021/2022 in B&H was profoundly divided and faced the most significant political crisis since the signing of the Dayton Peace Accords. It included war rhetorics, army appearances, and a total blockade of state institutions. The crisis condition and hybrid conflict persisted in B&H, fearing minor or significant consequences and escalation.

How can the religious texts, values, and beliefs used to incite conflict be harnessed to promote peace-building and reconciliation? Religion may be used to contribute to violence or Peace in the following ways: Rituals are a powerful means of communication and allow for multiple interpretations. They can also reinforce the commitment to values in times of crisis. Myths translate complex problems into manageable cognitive structures – by providing a deeper meaning to what is happening to the community, they can redraw boundaries of legitimate behavior. Religious discourse can exert resulting truth claims: absolute, unchanging, and unarguable. Such exclusionism delineates sharp lines between ethnoreligious groups, Aspects of sacred texts may be simplified or de-historicized to support violent interpretation, legitimize War, or foster negative enemy images. Religious reinterpretation of political, social, economic, and cultural factors can reinforce a particular perspective of conflict and the enemy. Mobilized through ethnoreligious identity, the population may become a significant actor in an economic or political problem, conscious of their role and abilities. Religious rituals provide restoration, healing, reintegration, atonement, and forgiveness after trauma; reconciliation processes can utilize these. Religious peace-building can provide a spiritual basis for transformation, compensating for mechanistic conflict resolution models. Virtually all religious traditions incorporate ideals of Peace; positive interpretations of values, myths, texts, and images can be woven into the fabric of peace narratives as religious actors attempt to mobilize people toward reconciliation (Kadayifci-Orellana, 2009).

This study presents a theoretical/conceptual examination of the religious violent and unethical non-violent practices/behaviors, ethnopolitical and clerical synergism, and religious peace-building capacity in the post-socialist former Yugoslav societies. I argue that the phenomenon of religious/ethnic violent and non-violent interchangeability adopted by national political unethical behavior has adverse consequences on the post-Yugoslav social progress and reconciliation process; religions should be a moral peace-building agency.

General scientific methods will be used to analyze observed phenomena. Qualitative research relied on analytical, historical, comparative, descriptive, discursive, and content analysis methods. The paper begins with the theoretical and conceptual framework and applies content analysis. In addition, the study included an in-depth theoretical literature review and reference to "social relations" (chronological media and scientific records).

## 2. Violent Abuse of Faith and Ethnoreligious Politics

In the twentieth century, human civilization has achieved some of its most significant achievements in the technical, scientific, and other fields. However, it is also one of the cruelest times in humanity. Extreme beliefs in values such as nationalism, patriotism, statism, secularism, or religion can also lead to violence. One becomes unsettled by beliefs contrary to the reigning Orthodoxy and strikes out violently to protect communal values. Therefore, believing in something can also lead to violence and suffering. To put the argument to rest, it is not about whether one believes in something or nothing but how absolutist the position is. The rigidity of values that causes pain and suffering, what Nobel prize winner Amartya Sen calls "the illusion of singularity." Since 9/11, nihilism has become a favorite target to criticize and marginalize, yet its history and complexity lead to a more nuanced argument. Perhaps we should look at how nihilism complements Western belief systems—even Christian doctrine—rather than fear its implementation in ethical and moral discussions (Chambers, 2014). However, the germ of Nietzsche's nihilism crept into society. Civilization has lost its sense of holiness and the inviolability of every life. It was a demand that stood at the heart of all traditional religions, but the modern world will replace them with nation and capitalism. It would be wrong to accuse secularism or religion that they are solely blamed for the problem of violence in society. Religion and secularism are not inherently violent but can quickly be used to justify or implement violence mainly out of a desire for material gain and power (Cvitkovic, 2019).

Numerous parallel deities of War and warrior classes were discovered throughout the Indo-European historical space. It is the best interpretation of War, and religion—as standard creations—provides sociological functionalism. At the same time, for the second period, it is necessary to resort to theories of legitimation and ideologization. Why are the tremendous historical monotheistic religions more readily associated with the act of warfare than the elders did with polytheistic religions? The answer should be sought in the ubiquitous theological treatment of religious experience and neglecting its experiences (Jukic, 1994). When monotheism accepts exclusive nationalism, the God of monotheism transforms from the creator of all people and the creatures he loves into a selfish and violent idol of a particular nation. Thus, phrases like "God and the Croats," "heavenly Serbia," and other widespread slogans like the "three-finger"<sup>6</sup> salute, "U"<sup>7</sup> symbol and wearing Catholic religious symbols, Rosary and Cross, and shouting "Takbir Allahu Akbar" during the battles are forms of religiously infected or legitimized exclusive nationalism. Latinka Perović writes: "The problem of our people is that they are not religious. If they were religious and that distribution of values would be different, the price of human life would be higher, and there would be much less violence." (Cvitkovic, 2019). The followers of any religion are not only violent or only peaceful. They both often do not have to be conditioned by their religious identity. Religious communities are most often "involved" in war conflicts regarding the so-called identity conflicts in which religion is perceived as one of the elements of identity (Cvitkovic, 2019). The former Yugoslavia's mono-state media transformed before the conflict, replacing "dying socialist terminology" with demagoguery, irrationality, radical rhetorics, agony, destiny decisions, and "God-sent messages and roles" (Thompson, 2000) and framings of visual politics and emotions began to occupy socio-political consciousness of each ethnicity, nation, and religion in former Yugoslav countries. The aggressive collective mobilization began in the name of the nation and its faith.

<sup>6</sup> The Serbian salute that initially expressed the Holy Trinity was used in oath-taking and symbolized Serbian Orthodoxy.

<sup>7</sup> The central identification symbol for the Croatian fascist Ustaša WW2 regime.

**Figure 2**

*The Serbian Orthodox Church provided a "holy cover" for the activities of the nationalist political elite and Serbian military formations during the 1990s. The Patriarch Who Blessed the Genocide Convicted Criminals Karadžić, Mladić, and Arkan.*



Note. Source: Historiografija.ba, 2023. The Serbian Orthodox Church and Patriarch Pavle were sponsors of all crimes.

**Figure 3**

*A war Scene From one of the Brigades of the B&H Army, the so-called 7th Muslim Brigade. During the Parade in Zenica in 1994, Promotional Video displayed Islamic symbolism worn by B&H Army (Bosniak) soldiers.*



Source: Beautiful Bosnia, 2018

**Figure 4**

*Croatian Defence Council (HVO) Army emblems with Catholic Rosary and Cross. Croatian HVO committed war crimes and crimes against humanity in Bosnia and Herzegovina - International Tribunal for Former Yugoslavia, ICTY verdicts.*



Source: Bljesak, 2018



The most shocking illustration of clerically empowered violence happened a couple of days before the Srebrenica Genocide. The Serbian Orthodox Priest blessed formations "Skorpioni"<sup>8</sup> in the July 1995 ceremony. According to well known and documented facts "Skorpions" committed the mass shooting of "8372" unarmed Bosnian Muslim men and boys in Srebrenica in a couple of days. The Serbian Priest stated:

Pray to the Lord, Have Mercy, our most extraordinary God (...) give the loyal Serbian army strength in overcoming the "enemy nation," and God, force the all our opponent's nations to flee (...) for sure victory and always to show the enemies of the "Christian race" passionate and horrible punishment. (Mi Bosnjaci, 2021).

### Figure 5

*The Serbian Orthodox Priest Blessing Serbian Soldiers in the Ceremony, a Couple of Days Before They Committed Genocide in Srebrenica, July 1995*



Source: Danas, 2009

National identities built and consolidated with such confessional exclusivism (associated with ethnicity) manifested themselves as extremely impermeable and inflexible, and the rivalry between their national projects was almost irreconcilable. This form of nationalism maintained a firm position in these societies' political processes (Hadžić, 2020). The inter-ethnic reconciliation and the restoration of political pluralism in the Western Balkans have been operating since 1995. A strong clerical/national conservatism is created to reduce political pluralism while renewing the old war rhetoric. Under the international community, "armed struggle" is incomprehensible, particularly in B&H or Kosovo. However, it takes on ideologically sophisticated but psychologically transparent forms of peace stalemate.

The Bosniak/Bosnian Muslim political and military leadership has no responsibility for war crimes against humanity during wars or hundreds of verdicts in ICTY. However, there has been substantial confusion between political, religious, ethnic, and national identity in the leading Bosniak political party, SDA, at the beginning of the 90s. It is important to note that the Bosniaks were forbidden from using the historical name "Bosniaks" in the Austro-Hungarian and Socialist Yugoslavia period, reducing them to Muslims. At the same time, there was no Bosniak collective activity for change and adaptation. Muhamed Filipovic, a Bosnian academic, 2019 recalled talking to Alija Izetbegović<sup>9</sup> in the early 1990s. Alija Izetbegovic asked: "Explain

<sup>8</sup> A Serbian paramilitary unit involved in war crimes in Croatia, B&H, and Kosovo. "Kosovo War", 2023.

<sup>9</sup> He was the first president of the B&H Presidency, lawyer, Islamic philosopher, and author, founder of the SDA party.



to me, Professor, how you came up with the national concept. The most important thing for me is that I am a Muslim; I do not have a national feeling; I could live in Sudan and Pakistan if I were in a Muslim environment. "How do you see it, and how did you come to the view that we are a nation?" Muhamed Filipović tried to explain by telling him:

There is a big difference between the political and religious context. You can be a religious Muslim in any environment and on any meridian, and you feel perfect and comfortable either as an individual, an individual, or as a group of people you have identified. Nevertheless, you can only be a member of one national group concerning where that nation exists, where its litter is, where it was born, and where it developed. That is one moment. The second point is that if I do not have a national feeling, then I should not deal with national politics, and in our country, politics cannot be religious. Politics must be national simply because, in Europe, history has taken the form of the emergence and development of nations and nation-states. (Hajdarevic, 2022)

An individual can change his religious beliefs numerous times but remain a member of the same nation, particularly in the Western world. In this sense, balancing Bosniaks with Muslim identity has been inaccurate. Moreover, this ethnic/religious/national identity confusion of Bosniak ethnopolitics influences the present-day impression of other "competition" Serb/Orthodox and Croat/Catholic ethnopolitics.

Serbia, under its ruling fascism sui generis in the 90s, the people have become a power in itself, the ethnic immediacy of the national awareness. It was declared that Serbia was and must be where Serbs live and the country where Serbs are buried. The Serbian force was founded on violence and expansion to enclose those of the Orthodox faith. This territory would be cleansed of inferior religions/races regardless of existing civilian institutions. In such circumstances, from the ideologically designed ethnoreligious convention, a territorially insatiable Greater Serbia launched its aggressive, clerical fascist, genocidal wars across Yugoslavia. Based on ideological violence, the historic hegemonic ethnoreligious ambition (Greater Serbia) has significant consequences for contemporary Serbian society. It fails to free itself from the past. The genocide denial/genocide honoring, "Noz, Zica, Srebrenica"<sup>10</sup> could be seen in football stadiums, even in Greece (Orthodox faith). It carries tremendous collective guilt for the brutal Balkan wars, crimes against humanity, and impoverished Serbian society materially and spiritually. Slobodan Milosevic's well-known phrase, within the sacrificial policy: "No one is allowed to beat you except your/Serbian Police," is a paradigm of radical manipulation. Intending to prevent the production and maintenance of false public awareness is an inevitable consequence of ideologized ethnoreligious collectivism.

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<sup>10</sup> "The Knife, The Barbed Wire, Srebrenica" - a Serbian chauvinist hatred motto that praises and honors the Srebrenica genocide of Bosniaks and supports genocide-convicted criminals. Periodically "BićeRepriza!" ("There Will Be a Repetition!") is added to the motto, celebrating the mass killings and threatening a future genocide.

## Figure 6

*The Greek Football Fans put up the insulting fascist and xenophobic Banner "Knife, Wire, Srebrenica" during the B&H-Greece Football Match for Euro 2018. "Knife, Wire, Srebrenica" is a "common" fierce phrase that glorifies the Genocide of Bosniaks in Srebrenica in July 1995.*



Source: Kurir, 2016.

On the occasion of the "disputed"<sup>11</sup> Statehood Day of the Republika Srpska (RS), B&H, the (RS) Entity President Zeljka Cvijanovic, member of B&H Presidency Milorad Dodik, Serbian Prime Minister Ana Brnabic and Serbian Patriarch Porfirie addressed the audience. Serbian Prime Minister Ana Brnabic stated that RS was created on genocide but on genocide against the Serbian people, which was planned and implemented in detail in the 1940s, with a clear intention to continue and end 50 years later. "I believe they would complete the "job" and exterminate the Orthodox faith." Serbian Patriarch Porphyry stated that Serbs' identity in today's RS and B&H is a Christian/Orthodox identity that commits to the evangelical value system. The Patriarch expressed that Serbian tennis player Novak Djokovic, Orthodox Christian and Serb, was detained in Australia because

"he wanted his freedom and did not accept that freedom and models of way and life are imposed on him. Therefore, let us not allow others, no matter how well-intentioned, to force us into their models of everyday life and Peace. Peace today is a word that is used more than any other word, and it is mostly used by those who produce tools of death daily." (B92, 2022).

Thus, post-Yugoslav countries adhere to their history and build a victimological tradition, honoring their defeats and sufferings that feed resentment, hatred, and revenge. Those processes are marked by ethnopolitical and clerical ideologies carried by current politics.

<sup>11</sup> B&H's Supreme Constitutional Court ruled that celebrating RS Statehood is discriminatory to other ethnic groups in the country due to ethnic cleansing and genocide.

**Figure 7**

*Scenes from Marketing and Promotional Video of Celebration of "Disputed" Republic of Srpska (RS) Day, Banja Luka, 2022*



Note. Source: Savez Nezavisnih Socijaldemokrata, 2022.

*Left panel:* Speech of Patriarch of Serbian Orthodox Church in Banja Luka, Bosnia and Herzegovina, 2021.

*Middle panel:* Highest ranking Bosnian Serb and Republic of Serbia political and clerical elite in Banja Luka, Bosnia, and Herzegovina, 2021.

*Right panel:* Republic of Srpska (RS) Army and Law enforcement marching in Banja Luka, Bosnia and Herzegovina, 2021.

RS Army, RS President Zeljka Cvijanovic, member of B&H Presidency Milorad Dodik, Serbian Prime Minister Ana Brnabic, Serbian Patriarch Porfirie and other highest ranking Serbian religious - Orthodox officials; Religious, ethnic, national - political symbolism.

The ideology of secularism, which accepted violence as its expression, caused a counter-effect in the 20th century, and many movements appeared that would fight against the persecution of religion in private spheres. However, fundamentalist groups emerged almost everywhere Western-type secularism was introduced because religion and politics in these societies were inseparable. The main driver of these groups is the fear that a secular society will destroy their faith.

### 3. Non-Violent Unethical Abuse of Faith

Despite sociopolitical changes, there are still various forms of influence of religion and priests on politics. Influences on the voters' choice to whom the party will give its vote; sprinkling "holy water" on everything; the blessing of the political cornerstones; collusion with power structures due to material interests (Cvitkovic, 2019). There are no longer at the center of theological but political views on religions in contemporary sociopolitical life. The extent to which religion can be misused for pre-election purposes in former Yugoslavia countries is best demonstrated by the attitude of politicians towards sacred space and religious feelings. The consecration of a church or the opening of a mosque is often used for political promotion. In public space, the image of a politician as a protector of religion and tradition is created (Kovac, 2018).

There is a political/securitization view of Islam globally. Radical leaders and populist parties are strengthening. "The suicide wave is moving through the "Western world," which is 'experimenting with a big swap program," during the inauguration ceremony in 2022, Hungarian president Orbán referred to a conspiracy theory popularized by far-right that elites organize the replacement of European populations by Muslim immigrants. "This program wants to replace Christian children who are on the way to disappearing with migrants from other civilizations." (Beta, 2022). The migrant crisis brought more restrictive Balkan right-wing policies and has stimulated radical religious nationalism narratives and xenophobic intolerance. The Bosnian Serb leader Milorad Dodik stated to numerous media:

The migrant crisis is a civilizational occupation of Christianity, and B&H has been offered as a refugee "parking lot" for Muslim extremists. We in B&H have a serious problem. They do not see it in (Muslim) Sarajevo. Our people are afraid of migrants. (Hadžić, 2020).

In formulating and interpreting ethical rules and ethics theories, we can reflect on ethical issues or how ethics occurs in practice. Ethics is personal responsibility shown in action. However, ethics is connected at the same time universally. Ethics is related to the general (or universal) ethical good. Today's discussion of ethics is related to humanity's fundamental issues, as Glover (2008) demonstrates. However, they are not empirical research, even if they impact empirical and practical issues. Glover's subtitle refers to him as a moral history in the world, not historical philosophy. Glover shows that catastrophes caused by human actions are products that are not isolated individuals but interactions. People who do not understand each other, hate one another, obey others, and fear others. It arises in the interaction of people, especially in the context of human security- freedom from fear, wants, and indignity. In "Politics without a conscience tends towards criminality," Helmut Schmidt distilled the variety of motivations that might guide political leaders, such as reason, law, Peace, and religion, into his guideline. "For me, the final authority remains my conscience, although I realize there are many theological and philosophical opinions about the conscience. The word was already used in the time of the Greeks and Romans. Later, Paul and other theologians used it to mean our awareness of God and God's ordained order and, at the same time, our awareness that every violation of this order is a sin. Kant described the conscience as the awareness of an inner court of justice in man (Kissinger, 2015).

Dayton's Peace Accords political system in B&H became the "sacred letter" of political elites, preserving the status quo and lacking qualitative changes, maintaining political-interest structures and hybrid conflicts. It is utterly independent of differences in their proclaimed political-ideological goals. At any point in any political process in B&H institutions concerning any issue or problem, politics can face a wall of "vital national interest" as absolute inviolability. This holy place paralyzes politics and deprives it of its meaning and purpose. The threefold ethnonational values protection (i.e., Muslims/Orthodox/Catholics) is like a non-aggression pact, as a social contract implies the totalization of exclusivity, abolishing politics between inclusion and exclusion. This mechanism of Dayton's irrational "defense," as a rationalized derivative of its initial denial, is called reactive formation in psychology. Phenomenologically and psychoanalytically, reactive formation is a unique, specific form of repression. There is also the phenomenon of reactive formation on reactive formation, and disguise gives rise to others. Psychology, as phenomenology and ontology of the spirit, in its essence, is an "unmasking" science. It shows precisely the masked side of civilizational and existentially destructive activities of powerful ethnopolitical elites (Bajtal, 2010). Consequently, all post-Yugoslav states have massive issues with systemic corruption. For example, according to Transparency International's latest report, B&H is among the most corrupt countries in Europe, on the brink of chaos (Hina, 2022).

The contradictions between the proclaimed value basis of the political system and the dominant values in the real social life of the post-socialist Yugoslav countries also influenced the changes in the sphere of education. However, new program-political commitments and normative regulation of educational activity are obtained in clerical education under the principles of liberal-democratic doctrine. Political projects continued after the War, and segregation among ethnic groups continued only through education, within the discriminated educational phenomenon of "Two schools under one roof" in B&H. (Hadžić, 2020)

There are those borders, we do not agree, and we do not want to be in touch," says a high school student from Mostar, adding that he was never on the Old Bridge out of fear because, as he says, "someone will recognize that he is a Croat/Catholic and get into a fight." (Radio Slobodna Europa, 2015).

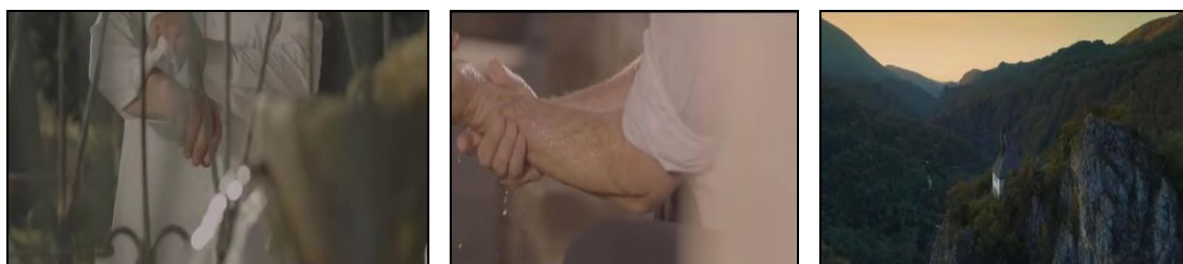
Four students express such an opinion. The same student states that he can recognize a "Muslim" crossing the bridge by "speech, movement, clothing, facial texture, and darker skin." (Radio Slobodna Evropa, 2015).

This approach's most crucial feature creates a discourse of 'naturalness,' supported by a nation's different, primarily pseudo-scientific or mythopoetic narratives. Naturalness discourse aims to devalue alternative discursive patterns as utopian or abnormal. It is a kind of naturalistic delusion of the dominant ethno-politics. (Hadžić, 2020).

By content and discourse analysis of numerous ethno-political power abuse and criminal affair (2020), in the "secret" audio, the religious words were spoken by political actors: "If God (Allah) gives" - 3 times, "Hairli"<sup>12</sup> - 3 times, "There will be Hair"<sup>13</sup> - 2 times, "Allah gives Nafaka"<sup>14</sup>," and harsh swearing language. In nine minutes, the political concept of a partocracy is presented, including internal party elections defrauding with an inclusive clerical paradigm. Moreover, one of the objectives is the illegitimate government employment of a graduate "Islamic pedagogue," one of the affair actor's wives. Asim Sarajlic, Bosniak SDA party deputy president, stated: "I am the SDA party general staff manager and "first" to President Bakir Izetbegovic. "God Willing," as soon as the government is established, we will get into that story." (Cazin.net, 2020). The sociopolitical reality manifests the clerical and intoxicated ethnonational leaders' criminal power ordinariness of unethical and amoral materiality – extremely defective democracy. Party's well-known post-war slogan was "In our country, in our religion/faith." Based on the above, the current legal-political doctrine of the most authoritative Bosniak party is significantly undemocratic, nepotistic, illegitimate, unethical, and amoral. According to Islamic regulations, Islam insists that a society must be led by justice and trust in every respect. Therefore, Islam seeks social justice and legalism.

### Figure 8

Scenes from Promotional Video Political Campaign of SDA Party B&H /named SDA SAFE



Note. Source: Stranka Demokratke Akcije BiH, 2022.

Left panel: Preparing for Wudu/Islamic washing ritual before praying; Middle panel: Taking/performing Wudu; Right panel: Unique Bosnian Mosque on the hill. Promotional Political campaign of SDA Party B&H; the marketing Video presentation, 2022 B&H Elections; Islamic Religious and Ethnic – political Symbolism.

<sup>12</sup> Arabic - Honest; good, valid; happy.

<sup>13</sup> Arabic - Good, goodness; benefit, happiness; a good deed, a public building built by an individual as his gift to the community; endowment.

<sup>14</sup> Arabic: Nafaka is everything a person uses, whether halal or haram, beautiful or ugly.



Fra Ivo Markovic from the Franciscan Theology in Sarajevo, about the political instrumentalization of religion and endangering the faith itself, notes:

Our politicians have discovered that religion is most potent where people pray. They run into parish congregations to poison what little faith is left for the elections. National parties increasingly use institutions (places where the faith is lived: in mosques and churches) to reach the very life of faith through them. Moreover, there they offer their programs, and they come to pray that the prayer leaders greet them and put them in an egotistic place from where they suppress God himself. There is one terrible reciprocity: the more substantial the institution, the weaker the faith. At the highest institutional level, there is little faith. National parties reduce faith and religion to national identity and are sinning-committed by destroying faith as the core of human existence that should produce consciousness, self-awareness, the meaning of life, and the value system. They now destroy that faith and produce an eclipse of mind, fear, and endangerment, reducing man to instincts. (The Bosnian Times, 2018).

Consequently, there is no civic unity or mutual human solidarity based on organic elements "from below" through existential-interest connections within the civic value framework. On the contrary, there is an inhuman, daily political unity on the scene, achieved by the Clergy and ethnic manipulation "from above." (Bajtal, 2018).

There is the phenomenon that religious leaders often become political leaders, as is the case with Balkan Muslims. The former B&H Grand Mufti, Mustafa Cerić, and Serbian Sandžak Mufti Muamer Zukorlić (member of the Serbian Parliament) were candidates for the B&H and Serbian Presidency. However, given that overall ethnic policies are practiced as clerical policies, it conveys sociopolitical uncertainty. The media reported on Sandzak Mufti's polygamy and authoritative luxury lifestyle (Markovic, 2016). In addition to the adversity of the politicization of Islam/Political Islam, religious polygamy conflicts with Bosniak historical/cultural traditions-Bosnian Muslims are among the most liberal Muslims globally (Pew Research Center, 2013).

Schmidt's "On the Ethos of Politicians" can be a productive stimulus to reflect on the Western Balkan ethnopolitical quandaries. Schmidt's appeal to conscience as the supreme instance, the commitment to Peace, reason, and tolerance, and the open contempt of politicians who mix religion with politics (Schmidt, 2007). In essence, it represents enlightenment and conscientious politics. The moral and political conscience can be a stronghold for the Balkan's ethical matters - incorporating religion and genuine ethics. An essential requirement for a fundamental connection to values and norms characterizes man. However, it is challenging for a man to overpower himself and grow morally. A person must balance what is acceptable following ethical obligations.

However, what do visual representations of War and Peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina look like, how can post-conflict peace-building be achieved and promoted through creative approaches, and what are the potential challenges and limitations in realizing postwar peace-building through creative approaches? Based on primary qualitative visual data and interview data generated on the photographic exhibition of 'War of Memories' curated in 2017 by the Centre for Non-Violent Action, a civil society organization working on the theme of postwar peace-building in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) and Serbia, findings suggest the creative initiatives can play a positive role at the individual level, but their translation into macro-level sustainable social Peace is challenging, as long as the structural impediments to Peace, prevailing unequal ethnic power relations and ethnicized social and political ordering of the society remain unaddressed (Jeremic & Jayasundara-Smiths, 2022). Furthermore, by analyzing numerous media narratives and visual presentations in the B&H, we have the existence of we have ethnoreligious and ethnopolitical symbolism and uncritical idioms: "the Muslim side,

Muslim government, Serbian/Orthodox New Year, Serbian forests, Muslim-Croat/Catholic federation, Muslim-majority municipalities, Muslim intellectuals." (Karabegovic, 2017; Srna, 2020). The total clerical ethnicization of public consciousness enabled the most comprehensive open support for any unethical practices committed in the name of the "people." The media conveniently declared that "three juveniles of Roma ethnicity killed Mrs. Spasojevic of Serbian nationality." Therefore, the crime should be given a religious, national, racial, and even segregation dimension. They write: "A priest killed out of greed committed by two Bosniak and one Croat juvenile," "Criminal of Croatian nationality," "Serbian nationality," "Orthodox," and so on (Aljazeera, 2013). It has contaminated the consciousness of young generations, representing tribal political doctrine with elements that produce antagonism, anxiety, and violence. Thus, divisive ethnonationalism/ethnoreligious rhetoric and disagreements continue to permeate the sociopolitical climate, hampering democratic progress. Media and public communication practices are determined by and contribute to social stagnation. Personal or collective egoism and national exclusivity essentially deny the universality of the message of monotheistic religions.

The B&H Constitution obstructs the creation of a plural civic identity, hypostasizes the collective political mentality, and stigmatizes atheism and agnosticism in everyday life. Spiritual usurpation has moved into the realm of identity. The ideological ethnonationalism has metastasized into a social organization's daily political discourse that produces uncritical subjects in all three constitutive ethnic governments. For many in the Balkans, theism has transformed from a *sui generis* sociocultural phenomenon into a sociopolitical phenomenon. The loudest "defenders" of atheism are some believers who dissent from the three national interest political model's status quo. A believer who questions the possibility of an atheist's universal validity as a moral man denies the believers' chance of becoming true believers (Hadžić, 2021). Indeed, for some atheists, the existence of evil in the world was the cause of their denial of God. If, according to them, God existed as a model and defender of morality, how could and how can he allow so much evil? Many Jews, because of the Holocaust, have 'denied God and lost their faith (Havel, 2013). Contrarily, the genocide and ethnic cleansing strengthened Bosniaks in their faith. According to the 1991 census, 316 only 1% of Bosniaks did not declare themselves believers. In 2013, even 0.99% declared themselves Muslims more than those who self-defined as Bosniaks (Cvitkovic, 2019).

Regardless of moral and legal constraints, the cult of unification abandons democratic autonomies with violence or non-violence. Thus, the outcome is the formation of ethnoreligious, threatening collectivity (tribal identity) and the decline of the community.

#### **4. Religious Peace-Building and Positive Peace**

Religion is performed and serves the victorious antagonistic and violent ideal. Thus, defeating the enemy. Some even associate religion with the human biological urge to maintain social cohesion and order. Therefore, any religious peace-building should start from itself and fundamentalism in their communities. Attacks on other fundamentalisms outside their religion further provoke the tamed conflicts and create a peace stalemate and negative Peace. A critical guideline for believers or peacebuilders in the B&H context is to bring faith to the forefront of justice, truth, reconciliation, non-violence, and active advocacy for positive social change because of the unquestioning belief that this is the essence of God's word for humanity. The task of religious communities is to eradicate the seeds of evil accumulated in clerical/ethnic wars and post-war hybrid conflicts.

Ethno-religious conflicts involve groups where religion is integral to social and cultural life, and religious institutions are representative, possess moral legitimacy, and mobilize potential. Where conflicting groups define themselves along ethnoreligious lines, religious identity can create sharp distinctions between parties and increase group mobilization. Other distinguishing factors include the high civilian casualties (suicide bombing, ethnic cleansing) and actions "legitimized" by religious language, texts, and images. Such conflicts are also often intra-state; religious leaders may attack incumbent governments in communities with long histories of tension and suffering from post-colonial deprivation or political or economic instability. Understanding how religious traditions, identities, and religious-cultural elements contribute to a culture of violence is critical. Policymakers should note that identifying key events and analyzing how they are perceived is vital to understanding motivators for violence. Faith-based actors are well-placed to mediate, advocate, observe, educate, and engage in interfaith dialogue. Perceived as legitimate and credible, they have a common framework for discourse and access to financial, institutional, and human resources within their faith community; identifying religious institutional sites which uphold non-violent values and empowering them financially, technically, and through training can contribute to peace-building and outreach, both into the immediate community and to a wider network of initiatives across the social, political and economic spectrum (Kadayifci-Orellana, 2009).

Changing the way of thinking among actors in the post-conflict period is extremely important for strengthening Peace and dialogue. The motive of better education also justified the introduction of confessional instruction in schools. Religious education has not reduced prejudice against members of other nations, ethnicities, and religions. Moreover, no aspect of marginalization, discrimination, and violence (equality/equity) in the contemporary world has not decreased. The healthy anti-politized development and influence of religious institutions and clerics enforced by ethical, moral, and constructive secular politics can support progression on the issues to advance human security and social and economic goals according to each religion's moral principles and values. Just as religion can be misused to justify violence, with its entire value system, it is and should be an essential instrument for building Peace. Religious feelings can mobilize people faster than any other of their identities. Thus, they are often used to mobilize people for War and justify violence (Jusic, 2017). However, that fact (that religion has the incredible power to change people quickly and effectively) can represent valuable potential in promoting non-violence/reconciliation/peace-building/conflict transformation in conflict-affected communities and societies.

One of the historical testimonies that confirms the principle of peaceful coexistence in Islam and proves that tolerance is also one of its foundations, as well as forgiveness when it can be punished, is the case when Caliph Umar ibn al-Khattab, r.a., entered Jerusalem. It is a shining example of peaceful coexistence because the rule of peaceful, religious, civilizational, and cultural coexistence was confirmed. Namely, Caliph Umar then entered Jerusalem, so he was welcomed by the Patriarch of Jerusalem and toured parts of the city with him, and they entered the Church of the Resurrection. Then, when the time of prayer came, Omar told the Patriarch that he wanted to worship, so he replied, "Worship where you are." However, Omar was in the center of the church (El-Karavi, 2017). That juncture can be transmitted to B&H. Sarajevo can be anointed as the "European Jerusalem." In only one street in Sarajevo, the visitor will see a mosque, a synagogue, an Orthodox, and a Catholic church. Most B&H cities have been places of multiethnicity and multireligious interaction for over 500 years. Instead of frequent violence and post-conflict antagonism, the Balkan Muslims/Orthodox/Christians can be the paradigm

of Peace. Moreover, they can be a link between Eastern Islam and Western Christianity. St John Chrysostom stated:

"How great punishment must they deserve, who, far from themselves forgiving, do even entreat God for vengeance on their enemies, and as it was diametrically transgressed this law; and this while He is doing and contriving all, to hinder our being at variance one with another? For since love is the root of all that is good, He, removing from all sides whatever mars it, brings us together and cements us to each other." (Adminincom, 2004)

One of the unchanging principles of Islam is that Islam affirms the dignity of man because he is a man. On the Day when we call all the people with their leader, those whose Book is given in their right hand will read their books, and they will not be in the slightest bit of injustice (Holy Quran, 2021, Sūrah, Al-Isra, 70.) Islam strives to establish relations between people and for the human family to branch out and spread across the earth in order to know each other; as the Almighty says: O people, We create you from one man and one woman to nations and tribes we divide you to get to know each other. The most honorable with Allah is the one who fears Him the most (Holy Quran, 2021, Sūrah, Al-Hujurat, 13.) Muhammed, s.a.v.s., is a perfect example. He applied the concept of peaceful coexistence. As a result, the state is established in a way that encompasses the rights of all its citizens and spreads the principles of cooperation and understanding among all Muslims and non-Muslims (El-Karavi, 2017). Islam calls for Peace. It proclaims the holiness of the human person as one of the most outstanding holinesses.

If someone acts dishonorably, it does not necessarily mean he is dishonorable. However, a dishonorable person got involved, who does not like everyone's honor to be respected. A believer must respect every person, even the one who attacks his honor. Therefore, the believer must analyze his condition and the causes that led him to such behavior. Furthermore, we will quickly discover that ignorance is the cause of conflict, attack, and insult, especially inherited hatred. It is transmitted because of the past, wrong assessment, and unclear insight into the meaning of the human task. The leading cause of the disease of sadness and fear, which destroys today's society, is precisely the attachment to the past - thus, on the one hand, one falls ill with the disease of sadness for the past, but it also creates the disease of fear for the future. We need the presence and the awareness that man changes every second until he finds his original. We do not like his unoriginality and pretense, and there is a cure for that too. I always like to remind myself and others of the tradition in which it is narrated that the teacher of the world, Muhammad, Peace, and blessings be upon him, said: "Help your brother - the one who does wrong and the one who is wronged." Those present, amazed, said that it is clear to them that one should help the one being wronged, but why and how to help the one doing the wrong? "Help him not to do injustice again," said the Prophet." (Nikolić, 2020)

Because Peace and insistence on it have no alternative, we must hear messages of Peace, coexistence, ethics, morality, and the rule of law in diversity and non-violent conflict resolution from religious leaders because of religions throughout history. Nevertheless, unfortunately, the former Yugoslav societies have often been abused as a means of homogenizing people in the fight against others and differences- "the enemies." History has shown that the teachings of the same religion can be used to raise people to unprecedented levels of humanity and commit horrific crimes in the "name of God." It is evident in all religions and all historical epochs. Justifying violence and crimes that people commit to each other by God's will and His consent has proven to be a favorite recipe for people of faith to escape moral responsibility and clear their consciences of crimes and violence against other people. However, if we concentrate on Islam, Islam's historical legacy and tradition have never been woven as a uniform and monotonous conception (Jusic, 2017). Religions should cease to justify proactive misery. Thus,

through sacrifice, openness, modesty, fighting against poverty, humanity, harmony within oneself, and Positive Peace.

Within the Institute for Economics and Peace (IEP) model of Positive Peace, Human beings encounter conflict regularly — whether at home, at work, among friends, or on a more systemic level between ethnic, religious, or political groups. Nevertheless, the majority of these conflicts do not result in violence. Instead, conflict provides the opportunity to negotiate or renegotiate to improve mutual outcomes. Conflict provided it is non-violent, can be a constructive process. Some aspects of society enable this, such as attitudes discouraging violence or legal structures designed to reconcile grievances. Systems theory first originated while attempting to understand better the workings of biological systems and organisms, such as cells or the human body. Through such studies, it became clear that understanding the individual parts of a system was inadequate to describe a system as a whole, as systems are much more than the sum of their parts. Human beings' consciousness is more than the sum of our parts. Extending these principles to societal systems is a paradigm shift, allowing for a complete understanding of how societies work, how to manage their challenges better, and improve overall well-being. This approach offers alternatives to the traditional understanding of change. The nation-state comprises many sub-systems, including the individual, civil society, and business community. Moreover, the nation can be seen as a sub-system of the international community, in which it builds and maintains relationships with other nations and international organizations. Finally, the international community forms a sub-system of several natural systems, such as the atmosphere and biosphere. From a systems perspective, each 'causal' factor in any system does not need to be understood. Somewhat, multiple interactions that stimulate the system in a particular way negate the need to understand all the causes. Processes can also be mutually causal. For example, as corruption increases, regulations are created, changing how corruption is undertaken (IEP, 2022).

Similarly, improved health services provide a more productive workforce, which provides the government with revenue and more money to invest in health. As conflict increases, the mechanisms to address grievances are gradually depleted, increasing the likelihood of further violence (IEP, 2022). Regardless, the former Yugoslavia countries are among the worst worldwide by Corruption percentage index, and B&H is one of the worst European countries (Transparency International, 2022). Structurally manipulative and nepotistic ethnopolitical processes and the idiom "protection of vital national interests" in B&H demonstrate the institutionalization of postwar ethnoreligious conflict. In a "constitutively" manner, the ethnopolitical arrangement is reduced to a struggle over territory. It directly territorializes and divides B&H into ethnoreligious areas. It reduces the rule of law framework, the country's integrity, and sociopolitical, economic, and critical human security progression. The ethnoreligious conflict of "vital national interest" undermines the country's economic system (Hadžić, 2022).

Many religions teach that killing an innocent man is tantamount to killing all of humanity. However, the realization remains that while believers accept that the scriptures are the literal word of God, or at least inspired by God's providence, they are still interpreted by people who have always found ways to reach and desecrate. In addition, there is no doubt that the interpreter's historical, political, social, economic, and cultural context and the time in which the sacred text is interpreted leave a trace of the interpretation itself. The historical experience evidences it according to which sacred texts, traditions, psalms, and verses are often extracted from the textual context or from the time context they were created to serve to mobilize the masses. This phenomenon was also possible because myths and sacred traditions present



complex issues as simple and understandable images that anyone can comprehend but can only be easily manipulated if there is good intention and consistency in interpreting and living the faith. Hence the obligation of each believer individually, but also of official religious institutions, to watch over the teaching of their faith and not to allow it to deviate from its essence. It is not easy to know who is more responsible in this regard, each religious community and the official authorities of the faith. For the interpretation of the text to be valid, it must, in most religious systems, have the legitimacy usually given to it by the Clergy/official religious authorities (those who enjoy the followers' trust). Hence, official religious communities and authorities must dedicate themselves to promoting peace/non-violence.

## **5. Conclusion**

Ethnic/religious/ideological/political contextual factors are challenging to generate in post-conflict divided societies, i.e., former Yugoslavia. Historically religions were misused to justify violence and maintain non-violence, unethical sociopolitical order, and negative Peace. However, it should be an essential moral agency for building Peace with its fundamental values. Coexistence in the former Yugoslavia is not only possible but the only human value and objective. Therefore, we should engage in all-inclusive theological and consensus approaches to demonstrate that religions are peace-building agencies, retrieving and revitalizing authentic morality criteria. However, religious sentiments mobilize people more rapidly than other identities. Accordingly, it should be the foundation for critical democratic awareness/the rule of law/positive peace/moral enlightenment/amicability. War-period visual violence and emotions influenced violent behavior and policy within the discourse "our vs. their sacred ethnic land," creating unbearable ease of creating fear and motivating violent antagonism and war-crimes. The post-war antagonistic media rhetorics, visual antagonism, and abuse of faith adversely impact peaceful coexistence. The essence of true Peace as shared humanity comes from the notion of the Divine. Therefore, it is an integral part of the Balkans as a historical metaphor for location and a bridge between religions. However, Balkan societies possess victimological and political mythical conventions, honoring ethnoreligious war victories, defeats, and agonies, maintaining hostility and revenge discourse.

The ideologies of religious superiority intertwine with intense dominant national perceptions, so belonging to the Serb/Croat/Bosniak people is equated with Orthodoxy/Catholicism/Islam. This entanglement is the groundwork for despondency and a hostile peace climate. The comprehensive inclusive ethnicization/clericalization in B&H infiltrates religious proportions in social and political dynamics. Current clerical and ethno-political policies lead further away from peace-building and conflict transformation, directing to the renewal of monotheistic spirituality, cognition, and violence. Considering interreligious interaction for more than 500 years, the Balkan Muslims/Orthodox/Christians/Jews have the foundations to evolve into a peace paradigm instead of frequent violence and post-conflict antagonism. The essence of religion is truth/justice/peaceful coexistence/ethics/morality.

The multiethnic/multireligious socialist Yugoslav society has been violently transformed into influential ethical and clerical cultures, producing antagonistic ethnonational societies sustaining pastoralism as potent identity manifestations of the social capital. Within acknowledging moral and political obligation, religious identity identifies with ethnicity, and commitment to a particular religion benefits politicians who often use religion as a political and socioeconomic instrument. Political involvement affects "authentic" religion. The B&H

educational segregation shows obtrusive indoctrination with elements that produce hostility, resulting in inevitable violence based on historical contingencies. Fear of others, religiously distinct, is a category that's difficult to determine and prevent. When the national political illegalities degenerate, the traditional ethnoreligious election behavioral practice decline, and more consequential initiatives within liberalism and the rule of law forces can originate.

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No conflict of interest.

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