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WAS THE BOSNIAN WAR (1992-1995) A FULL FLEDGED RELIGIOUS WAR?

Abstract

Pursuing from the definition of religious as one 'commanded by a deity', the author analyzes how the the Bosnian 1992-1995 War fares. In the cases of two of the three religious parties involved, the Islamic Community and the Serbian Orthodox Church, it is discernible that, for both the religious authorities and the flock, this was considered a religious struggle, whereas the Roman Catholic Church never committed itself explicitly in words. Deeds on the part of Catholic officials indicate that it also understood the War and the participation of its members as part of a religious endeavor, amounting to more than a benediction of the War effort. The War was articulately comprehended as religious in nature by combatants from all sides. There are also major consequences of the War pointing to its religious nature. Thus, the War can be considered as religious by most indicators, and issues of moral accountability do arise.

Key words: Bosnia and Herzegovina; Religious war; Islam, Roman Catholicism; Serbian Orthodoxy.

INTRODUCTION

It is often considered that religion, if not directly pacifist in its attitude, is at least predominantly contrary to war and that it is particularly so in modern times. Thus religion often recommends detachment from all worldly affairs, particularly from conflict and violence. For example, the *Bible* recommends, "...be at peace with one another" (*Mark 9:49*) on numerous occasions, and even in The *Quran* one can read "But if the enemy incline towards peace, do thou (also) incline towards peace" (*8:61*). Anti-war positions may be considered even more typical of today's Christianity. New concepts have evolved in Christian theology to promote this view.¹

Empirical evidence, on the other hand, does not support such a position. The history of Christian involvement in war is long and rich in incident. Early in the development of Christianity, a theological stance aimed at justifying war was drafted, its core being the concept of a 'just war' (*ius ad bello* and *ius in bello*). Classic statements include that by St. Augustine, who holds that "Those who act according to a divine command, or even God's laws as enacted by the state and who put wicked men to death have by no means violated the commandment, 'Thou shalt not kill'" (*De Civitate Dei*). In Islam, the *Quranic* notion of jihad has drawn notorious attention.

The War in Bosnia and Herzegovina (1992-1995) provides an interesting recent case-study. It came about as part of the dissolution of Communist Yugoslavia, but it remains a separate phenomenon, with particular features. It has attracted much scholarly attention, with some authors focusing on its religious aspects² Although these authors note the religious component, they fall short of defining it precisely.

¹ Glen H. Stassen, *Just Peacemaking: Ten Practics for Abolishing War*. (Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim Press, 1998).

² Paul Mojzes, *Yugoslavian inferno: ethno-religious warfare in the Balkans*, (New York: Continuum, 1994); Srđan Vrcan Vrcan, »The war in Ex-Yugoslavia and religion«. *Anthropos* (Ljubljana) 1994, 26, 155-168; Srđan Vrcan, »Seven theses on religion and war in the former Yugoslavia«, *The Public* 1, 1994, 115-124; Paul Mojzes, *Religion and the War in Bosnia*, (Atlanta, GE: Scholars Press, 1998); Mitja Velikonja, Željko Mardešić, Paul Mojzes, and Enes Zgodić, »The Role of Religions and Religious Communities in the Wars in ex-Yugoslavia«, *Religion in Eastern Europe*, 2004, 24; Samuel H. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of the World Order*, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1994); Sabrina Ramet. *Balkan Babel : The Disintergration of Yugoslavia from the Death of Tito to the War for Kosovo*, (Boulder, CO: Westview, 2002); Mitja Velikonja, *Religious Separation and Political Intolerance in Bosnia-Herzegovina*. (College Station, TE: Texas A & M University Press, 2003).

The main goal of this paper is to demonstrate that the Bosnian War can be considered a religious war, in spite of its being also a conflict with other characteristics, including foreign aggression. Numerous authors have come close to defining the religious aspect of the War but fall short of precision. Thus, Mojzes writes: 'Many [religious] individuals and groups have sanctioned and »sanctified« these wars.'³, whereas Vrcan, beside many other keen observations, writes that each religious party comprehended the War as a just one on the part of their institution and their flock⁴. Noone, however, defines the religious aspect in totality and without reservation.

For the purpose of this paper, the religious war will be understood in keeping with Kelsay's definition of religious war as one 'commanded by a deity' (2008: 542) and as understood by participants as having been ordered by forces of a higher order.

This article is divided into sections: addressing arguments against this War's being religious, followed by a section elaborating on the notions of religious war, one on the three actors and their positions, a section on the authorization by religious authorities, a section on experiencing the War, a section on the the epilogue of events and a conclusion.

ARGUMENTS TO THE CONTRARY

Both theoretical and empirical arguments may be advanced against this War being a religious one. Among arguments to the effect that the Bosnian War was not or could not have been a religious war, one should mention the insight expressed by the Bosnian sociologist Esad Ćimić, who held that a religious conflict would need to have aligned various Christians against non-Christians i.e. the Orthodox and the Catholics against the Muslims - which was not the case during most of the events during the Bosnian war⁵. This argument does not hold as a general dogmatic rule, since each religious identity is separate and particular, regardless of theological differences, which may be greater or smaller. Neither does it meet the empirical test. Orthodox-Muslim clashes did predominate in the beginning, with Catholic-Muslim ones following, and only at the end was there a picture to be seen, albeit unclearly, of two Christian sides fighting, predominantly jointly, against the Muslims. In fact, the picture was one of confusion if 'theological distances' are taken as a criterion.

³ P. Mojzes, 1994 126.

⁴ S. Vrcan, 1994 201.

⁵ 1998 132.

Historical experience in interpreting the meaning of religion becomes relevant here: many religious conflicts pertained to ephemeral theological questions, even though the conflicts were themselves major. The issue of *filioque* is and was such a one. Others maintained that the War was not a religious war, but an act of aggression on the part of the Serbian armed forces from Serbia proper⁶ and other authors aligned with the Muslim/Bosniak/Bosnian 'legitimist' interpretation), a position which introduces another level of analysis, that of international law. As Calic⁷ (2009) conclusively demonstrates, there was aggression.

Another way of denying that this was a religious conflict is by stating that the role of the confessions and religious communities was a minor, subordinate, supplementary one in their relationship to the political players, and instrumentalized by the latter⁸. Such a contention is difficult to prove. With the same plausibility one may entertain the opposite notion, as does Zgodić, who holds that in this case the 'political parties ha[d] become the extended arm of religious communities'⁹. Srdjan Vrcan, probably the most authoritative sociologist of religion in the region, assessed the situation as one of 'nationalist political strategies having obtained explicit religious legitimacies since the beginning of the Yugoslav crisis'¹⁰. Thus, he does not deny the religious nature of the conflict, but does not dwell upon whether or to what extent it is marked by power and originality it has. Furthermore, he seems to hold that, as the War evolved, its religious character became more pronounced, which some, but only some facts mentioned below would seem to corroborate. Finally, whether the religious dignitaries and the entire religious flock were instrumentalized by a political or intellectual elite need not in the end be decisive in assessing the prominence of religious dimensions of the War, if this instrumentalization truly took firm hold.

WHAT IS A RELIGIOUS WAR?

The term 'religious war' does not have the historical and intellectual standing to be compared with 'holy war' and 'just war'. In Jones's *Encyclopedia of Religion* (2005),

⁶ M. Velikonja et al. 25.

⁷ Marie Janine Calic, «Ethnic cleansing and war crimes, 1991-1995. Pp. 114-150 in *Confronting the Yugoslav Controversies. A Scholars' Initiative*. Ed. by C. I. and T. E. Emmert, (West Lafayette, IN (Purdue University Press, 2009).

⁸ M. Velikonja et al. 2003 25; Mojzes, 1998 27.

⁹ M. Velikonja et al. 31.

¹⁰ 1994 119.

'religious war' is mentioned routinely and on numerous occasions, usually without special explanation of the term. For example, it is mentioned within the context of Judaism as war, which 'is required as a moral and spiritual obligation'¹¹; it is also mentioned in denoting the Crusades, the XVI century European wars¹², and jihad is translated as religious war¹³. Finally, it is indirectly conceptually defined when the *Encyclopedia* claims that '[t]he development of explicitly religious wars changes the relationship between religion and violence: religion now is the very source of violence, at least in the reading of the actors themselves.'¹⁴. In a similar vein, Kelsay associates religious war with occasions where '*fighting is commanded by a deity*'¹⁵. This can only be interpreted as war being perceived as commanded by a super-natural authority.

The antecedents of the War are, of course, to be found in the form of an escalation of conflict between confessional and ethnic groups, with major voices instigating conflict, thus adding to the interaction of rising intolerance, and a constructed awareness of the impossibility of coexistence, but this author would rather underscore the escalation of mutual inter-group fears. It also surpasses the scope of this paper to analyze the social groups that were most active in this discourse. On the other hand, scholarship holds that modern wars are not predominantly caused by religious factors, but by economic motives. Thus in the same Jones's *Encyclopedia of Religion*, one finds the opinion that 'Among the most contemporary students of war, ideological factors are generally viewed as subordinate or epiphenomenal to material ones, religious and other forms of legitimation being understood as the convenient or even necessary means that serve to mask or mystify the acquisitive competition that is the primary motivation for armed conflict'¹⁶.

THE THREE ACTORS

¹¹ M. Juergenmeister, 'Nonviolence' Pp. 6646-6649 in *Encyclopedia of Religion*, edited by L. Jones, (Detroit: MacMillan Reference, 2005).

¹² *Encyclopedia of Religion*, edited by L. Jones, (Detroit: MacMillan Reference, 2005), 3557, 3929, 6036, 7282.)

¹³ *Encyclopedia of Religion*, edited by L. Jones, (Detroit: MacMillan Reference, 2005), 4614.

¹⁴ Fritz Graf, »Violence«, 9597. Pp. 9595-9600 in *Encyclopedia of Religion*, edited by L. Jones. Detroit: MacMillan Reference, Detroit (McMillan Reference, 2005).

¹⁵ John Kelsay, »Religion and religious war«, Pp. 536-543 in *The Blackwell Companion to Religious Ethics*, Edited by W. Schweiker, (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2008), 542.

¹⁶ Bruce Lincoln, »War and Warriors«. Pp. 9679-9683 in *Encyclopedia of Religion*, edited by L. Jones, (Detroit: MacMillan Reference, 2005) 9680; see also S. Van Evera, *The Causes of War: Power and the Roots of Conflict*, /Ithaca NY: Cornell University Press: 1999/).

The War took place between *three main actors*: Bosnian Muslims/Bosniaks (institutionalized in the internationally recognized state of Bosnia and Herzegovina, 'the legitimists'), Orthodox Serbs (later politically organized into the Republika Srpska) and Catholic Croats (calling themselves the Croatian Community of Herceg-Bosna) (their official titles were susceptible to change during the War). There were also other minor participants within Bosnia and Herzegovina itself, including Fikret Abdić's units in Cazinska Krajina, who later called themselves the Province of Cazinska Krajina, although these were also Muslims, fiercely opposing and fighting the 'legitimists'. Thus, all parties took on a quasi-legitimate form, trying not to appear as either aggressors or rebels.

This issue cannot be properly understood without taking history into consideration. The history of religious pluralism in Bosnia and Herzegovina goes a long way back. Before Ottoman rule was imposed, during Medieval times, a Bosnian Church, of the Patharene (Bogumil) creed seems to have prevailed. This meant that the two major religious groups, the Catholics and the Eastern Orthodox, did not have a stronghold comparable to the ones the Serbs and the Croats had in the vicinity. Some take this to be the explanation for a relatively strong intrusion of Islam during Ottoman times. Ottoman times were characterized by a relative tolerance between Catholics, Eastern Orthodox, Jews (a group which has almost disappeared) and Muslims, in spite of a rule based on despotism. Ethno-religious strife among the groups became more evident during Austro-Hungarian rule (1871-1918)¹⁷. Relative harmony was typical of Tito's times, as well, during which the Muslims (Bosniaks) made further steps toward national establishment.

The issue of whether there was inherent hatred among these groups, as upheld by the Nobel prize writer Ivo Andrić, or inherent tolerance, as held by Donia et al. – remains open. One may assume that, as usual, both phenomena were present. In any case, such approaches do not lead to exploratory success in terms of our issue.

A basic fact pertaining to the nature of the War was, of course, that the three main religious groups coincided with ethnic groupings: thus the parties were Muslim

¹⁷ M. Velikonja, 2003; Robert J. Donia and John V.A. Fine, *Bosnia and Herzegovina. A Tradition Betrayed*, (London: Columbia University Press, 1994).

Bosniaks (40% of the population by the 1981 census, the last taken under normal conditions prior to the war, Savezni zavod za statistiku: 1991: 45); Roman Catholic Croats (18%), and the Serbian Orthodox (32%)¹⁸. Of course, at the individual level, not every one pertaining to an ethnic community considered himself also confessionally belonging and religious.

This coincidence of ethnicity and confessionality is not a chance circumstance, but one indicating that the formation of modern nationalism followed confessional lines in this environment, particularly during the 19th and 20th centuries. The Muslim Bosniaks were the last to form, both because of the negative Muslim attitude toward nationality and because the other two groups opposed their ethnic establishment. Thus the Census of 1971 may be taken as the demarcation when 'Muslims within the national meaning' were allowed to declare themselves as such¹⁹.

The fact that the parties were at the same time confessionally and ethnically defined does not mean that individual members of other groups did not join certain armed forces, usually as a result of coercion. The best known instances involve the Serb General Jovan Divjak, technically one of the leading officers of the 'legitimist' armed forces (pertaining to 'official Bosnia and Herzegovina', but in fact to the Bosniak Muslim faction only), and the convicted war criminal²⁰ Dražen Erdemović, a Croat, who served in the Serbian armed forces ('Army of Republika Srpska').

The three parties differed in terms of their power backing in the War, as the Bosniak Muslims (the internationally recognized state) could rely on the authority and power of the state, which had been officially declared, whereas the other two parties claimed *de iure* and *de facto* independence (Republika Srpska and the Croatian Community Herceg-Bosna) from this newly declared state²¹. The other two parties, particularly the Serbs, could rely on major military resources from the neighbouring national matrix states and powers, in contrast to the legitimists²²

¹⁸ There were numerous lesser ethnic groups, among which the main position was held by the 'Yugoslavs'.

¹⁹ Savezni Zavod za Statistiku, *Jugoslavija 1918-1988. Statistički godišnjak*, (Beograd:1991), 45.

²⁰ ICTY no. IT 96-22, <http://www.un.org/icty/cases-e/index-e.htm>. accessed to 15 June, 2009.

²¹ The referendum for the declaration of independence of Bosnia and Herzegovina took place on 1 March, 1992, and the declaration itself followed immediately, as did the first clashes (Ramet 2002 413-440).

²² S. Ramet 2002 440-469.

Other details of the War pertaining to its historical, political, legal and other dimensions, factors and circumstances are outside the scope of this paper, although very interesting.

AUTHORIZATION BY RELIGIOUS AUTHORITIES FOR ACHIEVING RELIGIOUS ENDS BY WAR

THE SERBIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH (SOC)

Mojzes, a knowledgeable source, holds that the 'the SOC seems to have played a most harmful role'²³ pursuing definitely from the of the War's tragic nature, causing immense suffering.

The SOC was rather explicit in its official stand on the War in Bosnia²⁴. The head of the SOC, Patriarch Pavle, reflected on the issue when he told the international intermediary, Lord Carrington, that 'Serbs cannot take part in any part of independent Croatia, as they have to be under the same roof with Serbia and all Serbian Krajinas (border regions, one of which was located in Bosnia – S.F.)...It is time to comprehend that victims of genocide cannot live together with their former and perhaps their future executioners.« He continued, »These co-nationals of ours, of the same faith and blood, are confronted by the following fateful choice: either they will, by the arms in their hands, win existence in the same state with the matrix of the Serbian people, or they will be forced to emigrate from this new Independent State of Croatia, sooner or later«. This is not a call to arms, but it is an explicit justification. The Patriarch legitimated the Serbian armed struggle, citing historical reasons. He also gave lip service to Christianity: »The Serbian Church wishes nothing else...but to be on the side of truth and justice, of universal Christian principles...«²⁵ The above words pertain directly to the war in Croatia, which preceded the Bosnian one, but they are just as valid, since the policy of the SOC towards Bosnia was the same, motivated by

²³ 1998 84.

²⁴ The SOC was openly criticised by numerous Protestant churches and agencies in the World Council of Churches for 'a sin similar to that of Deutsche Christen who gave support to Hitler's nationalistic policies' (quoted from Mojzes 1998 85).

²⁵ Patriarch Pavle, »Pismo Patrijarha Pavla britanskom lordu Karingtonu, predsedniku Međunarodne mirovne konferencije«, *Pravoslavje* 1991 576, 1.

the same rationale of the ideology of 'Greater Serbia', which proclaimed that all the Serbian Orthodox flock should live in a single state. On the eve of the commencement of hostilities in Bosnia, the Holy Council of Church Hierarchs, on January 17, 1992 communicated »that the SOC and the Serbian people never accepted the artificial and illegitimate AVNOJ²⁶ borders established without historical and ethnic foundation, established on the part of the Communist guerrillas under conditions of occupation and civil war«²⁷

Patriarch Pavle explicitly blessed the Serbian forces 'the defensive struggle during an imposed War' in July, 1994²⁸, as did many other SOC dignitaries.

The rationale for the active Serbian role in the Bosnian War is expressed from the point of view, there is legitimacy in Serbian military action of any type, since Serbs have historical experience allowing for 'preventive' action; every Serbian action is essentially a defensive one, regardless of form.

This statement basically follows Mazzini's revolutionary formula, 'One nation – one state. Only one state for each nation'. Although it is not surprising that the SOC could maintain such a position, as Serbs were a very scattered nationality within the former Yugoslavia, this formula was a successful mobilizational formula in the 19th century, one neither fully nor easily achieved in the 19th century, and completely out of line with events at the end of the 20th century.

The SOC position was expressed even more explicitly by Bishop Amfilohije in the early stages of the War when he – anticipating victory – cheerfully announced that 'God has given the Serbs a new chance to achieve their dream of living in one state.'²⁹

Similar optimism is expressed when he said in the same breath: 'God expects something great from this People, when He positions the People in the focus of world events. We need to endure, as the victory belongs to the innocently crucified'³⁰.

Bishop Amfilohije stated a year later, when the War was at its fiercest, that 'The War in Bosnia today is a struggle by our brethren in Bosnia and Herzegovina for priceless liberty and the honour of the entire Eastern Orthodoxy... Let God grant every

²⁶ AVNOJ 3 (Third session of the Anti-Fascist Council of National Liberation of Yugoslavia) was a provisional Communist-led parliament of Yugoslavia in 1945-6. The borders between the republics of the former Yugoslavia were never officially explicitly defined, though they were drawn up by a group of Communist officials led by Milovan Djilas.

²⁷ Sveti arhijerejski sabor Srpske pravoslavne crkve, »Poruka Svetog arhijerejskog sabora Srpske pravoslavne crkve«. *Glasnik: Službeni list Srpske pravoslavne crkve*, 1995 76 4-5.

²⁸ Srpska Pravoslavna Crkva, *Glasnik: Službeni List Srpske Pravoslavne Crkve*. Beograd 1994 75 5.

²⁹ Tanjug, »Hoće Bog nešto veliko od ovog naroda«, *Politika*, 1993 28539 8.

³⁰ Tanjug.

assistance and the power to withstand the pressures of the world, as our Lord Jesus Christ has already been victorious over such pressures³¹. These sentences come close to, but still fall short of Kelsay's understanding.

One of the rare instances of more theological attempts to contemplate the War occurs in the Second Theological-Philosophical Symposium during the Days of Sts. Cyril and Methodius, held in Cetinje in 1996, directly after the War's end³². The proceedings of this symposium deserve attention, both owing to the typical nature of the positions expressed, and because of the composition of the participants. Besides the most prominent SOC theologians and Bishops (Amfilohije Radović, Atanasije Jevtić), one finds numerous other authors, including the notorious Radovan Karadžić, the War-time president of Republika Srpska and presently an indicted war criminal. The nature of his activities could not have been unknown to the organizers at the time of the symposium.

The position of the SOC on the War usually emerges without direct reference to it. The favourite topics touching on the War are the imperfection of human nature, the special nature of morality during wartime, accentuation of the Serbian's Christ-like nature and a view of their history as one of Calvary. The struggles of Serbs against foreign domination are accentuated with reference to the 'Kosovo covenant' to avenge defeat and alleged treason during the Kosovo Battle of 1389.

At the symposium, one could hear such war-praising assertions, as '...we Christians are against this-worldly peace, because it is in »enmity towards God«, but we opt for war against the self-satisfied peace... The five year Fatherland War in Republic Srpska and Krajina cleansed our national soul, illuminated our Christian intellect, renewing our Covenantal conscience...' The final panegyric stated that 'Liberty is always achieved by the Holy Cross and by violence'³³ Here, Kelsay's definition is practically met.

Among statements from the Symposium, one can find many to the effect that the modern world is morally debased, which is also manifested in wars, this being 'a consequence of Godless Communist ideology' or of 'wars being without justice, as

³¹ Srpska Pravoslavna Crkva 123.

³² Ratko Mladenović and Jovan Čulibrk (Eds.), *Jagnje Božije i zvijer iz bezdana. Filozofija rata*, (Cetinje: Svetigora, 1996).

³³ Milorad Arsenijević, in R. Mladenović and J. Čulibrk, 234).

American ones are³⁴, but there are no direct statements about individual acts or misdeeds, particularly not those committed by members of their own flock. One of the few SOC prelates demonstrating some awareness of the responsibility of this Church was the Metropolitan of Zagreb and Ljubljana Jovan, who stated in 1996 that 'individuals from the SOC were, aware and unaware, introduced into the dangerous war game by way of manipulation' where extra-ecclesiastical intellectuals (writers, the circle around the Serbian Academy) truly defined policy³⁵. The active and almost vanguard SOC position in defining the goals of warfare comes close to sufficing for the other two confessional parties, also with historical memories of injustice and tragedy, to comprehend the War in religious terms³⁶. However, the other two actors were far from playing reactive roles.

Today it is clear that in this War peaceful instruments for the settlement of claims were not exhausted and that these SOC prelates (with the exception of Jovan) invoked reasons for waging War with too much ease, or with little or no grounding, exposing themselves to possibly even more blame than they deserve. Amfilohije's words in particular can be considered without hesitation as ungrounded war-mongering. The Orthodox concept of apophasis and justice to be found in God only, human justice being questionable, cannot be considered excuses for these positions.

THE ISLAMIC RELIGIOUS COMMUNITY OF BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

To comprehend the role of the Islamic Community, it should be recalled that Islam and any particular Islamic religious community (such as the Islamic Religious Community in the former Yugoslavia and later the Islamic Community in Bosnia and Herzegovina) are not organized in a church type organization. Their organizational

³⁴ Amfilohije Radović in R. Mladenović and J. Čulibrk, 269.,

³⁵ quoted from Mirko Tomanić, *Srpska Crkva u ratu i ratovi u njoj*, (Beograd: Krug, 2001), 17.

³⁶ All nationalities and religious communities are likely to speak, through the mouths of their ideologues, of being particularly tragic in fate and self-sacrificial in behavior. For Muslims, see, e.g. Mustafa Imamović, *Historija Bošnjaka*. Sarajevo: Preporod, 1998), Mašanović in Mojzes (ed.) 145-9. For Croats, see e.g. Franjo Tuđman *Bespuća povijesne zbiljnost: rasprava o povijesti i filozofiji zlosilja*. Zagreb: Hrvatska sveučilišna naklada, 1994, who stressed the ante-murale nature of the position of Catholic Croats and their tragic fate in confrontation with larger nations (first the Hungarians and later the Serbs).

For Serbs, an entire ideological circle of ideas on the tragic nature of Serbdom was present, including their martyrdom for the establishment of Yugoslavia, the bad deal they got in that state, particularly as to internal borders, the unjust nature of economic redistribution, the anti-Serbian position on the part of Communists before and after they came to power, Tito included, and ideas on the messianic nature of Serbian history as a whole; for a critical overview, see Popov 1996.

structure is more complex, not bureaucratic in Weber's meaning with a rationally ordered hierarchy. The complexity includes branches, traditions, orders, schools in the educational meaning, schools of thought, brotherhoods, endowments, as well as autonomous laymen and spiritual leaders, not to speak of historical and spatial variation in association with the state. This allows for lay individuals to attain great authority and charisma in the religious sense.

A special place in the formation of its position and that of its flock, but particularly in comprehending the Muslim position in Bosnia and Herzegovina, was played by Alija Izetbegović. Although he was a lay person, his impact carried great religious authority. Thus, an Islamic individual had a particular impact upon events in Bosnia. On account of his book, *The Islamic Declaration*, he was sentenced by the then Communist authorities for enemy propaganda and spent years in jail. He was to become the first elected President of the Presidency (collective head of state) of Bosnia and Herzegovina within the then Yugoslavia in 1990 (still within the Yugoslav set of institutions), continuing his mandate as head of state after independence. The other two nationalities understandably comprehended his book as a program for the future Bosnia and Herzegovina, despite his current pronouncements. He was regarded not only as a martyr, but almost as a prophet, 'next to Mohammed', and his having received the King Fahd medal for the promotion of Islam was regarded as confirmation of such a conviction³⁷. This is not sufficient direct support for the War in Bosnia as being a religious one on the part of Muslims, but it does lend some indirect and tangential support. It helps in our understanding of how the other two ethno-confessional parties may have comprehended the conflict in religious terms from the initial stages, the book having appeared in 1990.

In the *Islamic Declaration*, Izetbegović hypothetically pictures a state based on Islamic principles, stressing its superiority and purity as a religiously homogenous society. *The Declaration* does not much provide a particularly detailed plan for a purely Islamic state. Written in 1970, first published in 1990, it speaks of the need for the state to be fully based on Islam in all walks of life, without details being spelled out too clearly. Islam is regarded as superseding religion, 'a unity of faith and law, education and force, ideal and interest, spiritual community and state, voluntariness

³⁷ Velikonja, 2003 278.

and coercion³⁸. Never does it say to which state it is to be applied, although that may be evident, Izetbegović being a Bosnian. Its particular features may be found in promoting the idea of Islam allegedly being in line with the republican form of government³⁹ and speaking of a future Muslim world federation⁴⁰.

It is not difficult to imagine that, under the circumstances of the existing uncertainty in Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1990, with fear being disseminated, these words, coming from a then prominent politician and later president of Bosnia and Herzegovina, could be understood as a battle-cry for the establishment of a purely and fundamentally Islamic state in Bosnia. This was completely at odds with the then multiethnic and tolerant social reality of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

These statements also contribute somewhat to 'setting the stage' for the War in a religious framework. They were not directly stated by a religious prelate, but Izetbegović was regarded almost as a religious martyr for having been in prison, and among Muslims, lay persons may have spoken with greater authority, since there was no hierarchical church organization.

Moreover, during the War itself, we note two events indicative of the Islamic Community's position on the War. First, there are the words of the highest Islamic Community authority, Reis-El-Ulema Mustafa Cerić, who stated: 'It will be difficult to convince Muslim Bosnians that what is happening to them is not a continuation of the Crusades waged against Islam and Muslims by Europe...'⁴¹ (let alone that it was not religious, anti-Islamic in nature). In the next year Cerić went further and said '...the defense of the country of Bosnia is now a holy issue for every (Islamic) believer.'⁴² A similar statement was given by the Ryaset (the highest Islamic collective body in Bosnia)⁴³ Although possibly understood as reactive, these words both reflected and further contributed to the articulation of the religious nature of the War. They may also coincide with Vrcan's assessment of progressive articulation of the religious nature of the war, during its course. Lower level imams in direct communication with believers asserted the Islamic concept that dying in war for Allah

³⁸ Alija Izetbegović, *Islamska deklaracija*, (Sarajevo: Bosna, 1990).

³⁹ A. Izetbegović 29.

⁴⁰ A. Izetbegović, 50-51.

⁴¹ Mustafa Cerić, *Islam ovjde i sada*, (Sarajevo: Press centar armije BiH, 1994) 29.

⁴² M. Cerić 31.

⁴³ M. Cerić 126.

was a special honour and that becoming a 'shehhid' would take the militant directly to the precincts of paradise⁴⁴ ..

The second clear indication of the position of the Islamic Community towards the War is to be found in a deed, an activity doing where participation is a religious undertaking. In the official Bosnia and Herzegovina Army in 1993, a special combat unit was composed of imams only⁴⁵. This was also a case of authorisation on the part of the clergy by setting an example.

Thus, on the part of the Islamic Community, one does not hear of the War being waged by Muslims as a religious endeavour but of its being imposed upon them as a religious conflict. This (particularly the comprehension of Izetbegović's book on the part of non-Muslims) suffices for the War's comprehension in religious terms. Combined with other circumstances, one may conclude that Kelsay's terms have been de facto met.

THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH (RCC)

'It is not easy to find explicit claims of the Roman Catholic complicity with war efforts with the Croats. It is clear, however, that Catholic leaders were most effective in producing an enormous amount of information material, with their interpretation of events...'⁴⁶. Mojzes also notes, in another paper, that the RCC in Croatia and Bosnia 'gave signals to the Serbs that their lives [were] endangered...'⁴⁷ by supporting a particular political party and by taking stands on the linguistic issue (whether Serbian and Croatian are a single language). Mojzes, finally, singles out the 'hypocrisy' of the Roman Catholic Church (RCC)⁴⁸. This still falls short of meeting the definition of religious war.

Most of the official Catholic pronouncements stated the unfortunate nature of the war, its being imposed on Catholics and the sufferings of Catholics⁴⁹. Catholic prelates even condemned the war crimes committed by members of their own flock, although in a general way (Cardinals Puljić and Kuharić in 1993, quoted in Velikonja 2003:

⁴⁴ M. Cerić 101.

⁴⁵ Reported by I. Cvitković, *Konfesija u ratu*, (Sarajevo-Zagreb: Svijetlo riječi-Oči u oči, 2004) 25-6

⁴⁶ Mojzes, 1994 89.

⁴⁷ Velikonja et al. 20.

⁴⁸ Velikonja et al. 23.

⁴⁹ Metropolija Vrhobosanska, Vrhbosna, Službeno glasilo biskupija metropolije vrhobosanske. Sarajevo, 1994 5).

271). The statement closest to supporting the War effort can possibly be found in the ascension speech by the Bishop of Mostar in 1994, when he mentioned, among other issues 'I extend my fraternal encouragement to the brave defenders of our people and country'⁵⁰, thus unconditionally endorsing the Catholic war effort as such.

Notwithstanding the fact that, if the other two religious parties were involved directly, it was almost impossible for the Catholics not to view the War similarly, i.e. in religious terms, there are some data on direct complicity and perception of the War in religious terms.

Thus, a survey carried out by I. Cvitković in 1993, the central part of the war effort, among Croatian militants of the King Tvrtko Brigade in Bosnia, indicated that 18% of the militants confirmed that their current armaments had been blessed by Catholic priests⁵¹.

Despite evasive words on the part of the Catholic clergy, particularly its higher echelons (of which only written evidence is to be found), the wearing of rosaries by Croatian militants was promoted and organized by the Catholic Church. The parish priest from a Herzegovina village distributed over 1000 such sets of beads. The wearing of rosaries was not a spontaneous event of popular religiosity. In the Croatian military newspaper (published in Croatia, but distributed in Bosnia as well, among Croat militants), the theologian and then Croatian official Dr. Adalbert Rebić wrote, 'With rosaries around their necks, our defenders went to the defense of the homeland and saved their lives in a miraculous way by the protection of the Virgin' (quoted in Cvitković 2004: 129) (Serbian militants wore Byzantine style crosses).

The benedictions and the rosaries are good examples of direct Catholic involvement, though complicity was never officially confirmed. It cannot be held that full confirmation of Kelsay was found in this case, because of the lack of a direct call by the official Catholic Church.

EXPERIENCING THE WAR AS A RELIGIOUS ENDEAVOR

⁵⁰ Metropolija Vrhbosanska 137.

⁵¹ Cvitković 124.

On the other side of the religious dignitaries and officials, the common religious flock of confessional members are to be found. They were the ones to bear the direct misery of the War. We do not have sufficient information on how they perceived, comprehended and experienced the War as to religious terms. However, Vrcan, who spent the War in the direct vicinity, can be given credence: 'The Croatian fighters do not wear HDZ⁵² signs, but Catholic crosses, the Serbian ones not Milošević's photos but Orthodox crosses, Moslem fundamentalists and mujahedins kill under the slogan of Allah⁵³, indicating a religious perception of the War and the religious meaning of the militant undertaking.

Serbian fighters sang: 'God is a Serbian, heaven is ours!'⁵⁴ similarly Bosniak fighters: 'For whom [do we fight]? For Allah? Against whom? Against the Wallach⁵⁵!'. In a survey done during the War, 75% of the Croatian combatants declared that they believed 'God was on their side'⁵⁶.

Similarly, popular folk songs, which had long been in popular practice in the region, from the time of War contains direct religious symbolization. For example, a Muslim Bosniak folk poem of the time reads, in liberal translation: 'In the holy jihad rests our salvation! To jihad, to jihad, let us all go! The green banner flies with pride, the Islamic brotherhood let us join us, we hold contempt for death and let us all join together in the battle'⁵⁷!⁵⁸.

One figure who came to prominence at the time as a war effort mobilizer among Serbs in the capacity of a singer of quasi-epic songs was a certain Baja Mladi Knindža, who sang (in liberal translation): 'We have a lion's heart, we defend Eastern Orthodoxy. In Krajina⁵⁹, Orthodox candles will never cease to burn^{60,61}, implying that

⁵² HDZ (*Hrvatska demokratska zajednica* – Croatian Democratic Union), the dominant political party in Croatia at the time, most instrumental in attaining independence, led by the late President Tudjman, with an arm of the Party inside Bosnia and Herzegovina, as well as mobilizing Croatians.

⁵³ S. Vrcan 1994a 164.

⁵⁴ I. Cvitković 72.

⁵⁵ The Wallachs are an ethnic group in the Balkans. Its nature and limits are subject to considerable some dispute. Here the denomination is used for Serbians in a denigratory sense.

⁵⁶ I. Cvitković 129.

⁵⁷ In the original: 'U svetom džihadu leži naš spas! U džihad, u džihad pođimo svi! Gordo se vije zeleni stijeg, islamsko bratstvo neka nas veže, prezrimo smrt i pođimo u boj.'

⁵⁸ Sead Trhulj, *Mladi muslimani*, (Sarajevo: Oko, 1995), 57.

⁵⁹ Krajina designates the land Serbians claimed to the west of the borders of Serbia proper, which was partly populated by Serbs (in Bosnia and Herzegovina and in Croatia), and which became the main stage of the War.

⁶⁰ In the original: 'Mi imamo srce lavlje, mi branimo Pravoslavlje, u Krajini pravoslavne sveće nikad ugasiti neće.'

⁶¹ Quoted in Ivan Čolović, *Bordel ratnika: folklor, politika, rat*, (Beograd: XX vek, 2000) 172.

the Serbian Orthodox pay traditional respect to their dead by lighting candles and that they will retain the lands of Krajina.

On the Croatian side, somewhat earlier, in 1992 when the Yugoslav Army technically still existed, a popular chant in a rhyme traditional to both Serb and Croat mountain people (*deseterac*), went 'Let it be known to the Yugo-Army, that Croatia will win the War, as Holy beings side with us, whereas they [the adversary] are with (have accepted among themselves) the damned ones^{62,63} , implying that the Yugoslav Army engaged Serbian informal units, whom they imputed to be demonic figures.

Such symbolization cannot be considered as simply instrumentalizing religious motives, something common in war. In the case of this War, in the historico-cultural background of at least two actors, there is a sacralisation of one's ethnic group. 'There is a traditional interpretation of national history as a kind of sacred or quasi-sacred martyrology (in Serbian Orthodoxy) or Calvary (in Croatian Catholicism) of the entire nation, resulting primarily from an (alleged) dedication of the respective nation to religious beliefs and sacred values'⁶⁴ .

Although God as commander is never invoked directly, many of these concepts - 'Holy beings' siding with 'us', 'God [being] on our side', considering one's confession as the cause being defended, invoking holy war, included all parties in the popular understanding of the War as religious, quite within or close to Kelsay's definition.

EPILOGUE

Finally, one can judge the War by its consequences. The study of this is mainly beyond the scope of this paper. The following outcomes, however, deserve mention:

- the mass exodus of members of the major groups to new settlements within ethnically and confessionally homogenous areas of their own group, a major change in comparison with the picture before the War of indiscriminate residential mixing;
- the establishment of two peculiar territorial-political units within Bosnia and Herzegovina, a Serbian (Orthodox) one (Republika srpska) and one composed

⁶² In the original: 'Jugo-vojska mora znat, Hrvatska će dobit rat, uza nas su svetinje, a s njima su prokletinje.'

⁶³ I. Čolović 208.

⁶⁴ S. Vrcan 1994a 168.

of (Catholic) Croats and (Muslim) Bosniaks, but in practice also separating the latter two groups within this entity (Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina⁶⁵)⁶⁶ - a rise in a more absolute type of religious identity within all groups concerned, with the possible exception of Catholic Croats⁶⁷, where it had already previously been marked. The particular change to be noted is among Muslims, where not only was lax Islamic faith and practice replaced by stricter codes, but a definite influence of Wahabis and conservatives began to be noted⁶⁸. Readiness for religious dialogue and tolerance have, of course, almost vanished. Religiosity in these regions is not a private, intimate affair, but a public and political one⁶⁹.

This goes beyond Kelsay, lending further support to classification of the War as religious.

CONCLUSION

Although one can hold that Kelsay's definition has not technically been met, the summation of indications yields a picture of a war with definite religio-confessional substance. Clear support for Huntington's general contention on the Bosnian conflict has also been found.

Officials of the three groups did endorse and promote belligerent activity on the part of the flocks, and these promotions, endorsements and blessings could have had no other effect but to instigate and enflame the war efforts. This effort goes beyond the usual legitimization of wars on the part of the religious authorities; it builds into the essence of the War, although other components also exist (beyond the scope of this paper). This effort was most prominent and active among the Serbian Orthodox religious dignitaries. Religion thus introduced a dimension of ultimate (divinely sanctioned) morality into the War efforts. Along with Kelsay, one may hold that a

⁶⁵ This well may be contrary to the intent on the part of the international community when imposing the Dayton Accords, that ended the War, with instruments built in to heterogenize the two 'entities'.

⁶⁶ See S. Ramet 2002 471-494.

⁶⁷ Among the Croats, Cvitković's survey found that 43% members of a Croatian military unit declared that they had become more religious during the War. (Cvitković 2004 130).

⁶⁸ E. Ćimić, I. Cvitković.

⁶⁹ I. Cvitković, 188.

deity - and a monotheistic one - was present, active and possibly even 'commanding' the effort, in the comprehension of the ordinary believer and combatant.

Although the SOC may have been the first to undertake such activity and definitely was the most explicit in carrying it out, all three sides undertook such activities, only traces of which are to be found today in documents, since many activities were not advertised. Thus the SOC bears possibly the greatest blame for inflaming war in an explicit manner.

The flock, the rank and file of combatants, the ordinary people, as we have demonstrated, also experienced the War as one with pronounced religious identity issues. The issue of religious identity was in the forefront.

The stands analyzed do suffice to term the War a religious one, as commanded by a deity, in perception. War being a totally destructive phenomenon, blame goes to those who instigated such an understanding – the Serbian prelates, and all those others following them. Such an understanding of Christianity and of religion in general is at odds with trends in Christianity advancing a just peace, peace-making, ethical peace, bearing in mind the suffering and destruction war brings about⁷⁰. In fact, here the words of Burke apply fully: 'Just warriors seek to enshrine their isolated and partisan advocacy as moral truth, to steal for themselves the tragic vocation of the judge rather than submit the decisions they exonerate from blame to international structures...'⁷¹

The globalisation of the world, with the creation of more functional interconnectedness and even functional unity in all spheres of life, is paralleled by varied cultural reactions, among which not the least is to be found in ethnic, confessional and other types of parochialism and unconditional and absolute clinging to one's cultural, particularly religious identity, which may dominate and attain aggressive form and extent at times of crisis and challenge. It is questionable whether a cosmopolitan and general humanist orientation remains in force beyond ordinary times and 'good times.' Accordingly, this author doubts that we have truly entered a new civilization of generalized values, with human life prized as such a value. In critical situations, one returns to the basic, primary group and a clan-like sense of

⁷⁰ Glen H. Stassen, *Just Peacemaking: Ten Practices for Abolishing War*. (Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim Press, 1998).

⁷¹ Anthony Burke, »Just war or ethical peace? Moral discourses of strategic violence after 9/11«. *International Affairs*, 1998, 80.

commitment. The Bosnian case may not have been an exception and anomaly, as has already been pointed out by Huntington and Vrcan.

The issue of religious identity was in the forefront of events, of motivation, and particularly of legitimation (which itself was more precarious in the face of media propaganda wars and of the questionable authority of particular leaders); thus we may be close to being able to characterize it as a war with a prominent religious substance, although not in the same category as the Crusades or the Thirty Years' War. Identity issues in the forefront bring about irreconcilable situations into politics and religious identity politics even more so. The issue of religious roots may be inherent to the nature of monotheist religion. As Parenti writes : 'The Judeo-Christian god of the Holy Bible...is ferociously vindictive, neurotically jealous, intolerant, vainglorious, materialistic, unforgiving, punitive, sexist, racist, xenophobic, homophobic, sadistic, chronically violent, and a mass murderer.'⁷²

⁷² Michael Parenti, »God's fundamentalist politics: A radical view)«. *New Political Science*, 27, 2005, 406.

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