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Morgan Oddie

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THE RELATIONSHIP OF RELIGION AND ETHNIC NATIONALISM IN BOSNIA-HERZEGOVINA

by Morgan Oddie

Morgan E. Oddie is a graduate student at Queens University, Kingston, Ontario, Canada.

Ethno-religious political cleavages have come to dominate the climate of modern global conflicts. Especially evident in the post-Cold War period of international relations, conflicts of nationalities and ethnic groups divided by historical struggle and parochial allegiances have replaced the ideological disputes that once dictated global geo-politics. Having disturbed Europe's past, nationalism remains a pervasive force, resulting in consistent clashes over disputed territory, notably in the countries which formerly constituted the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia in the Balkan region of South-eastern Europe. Particularly in Bosnia-Herzegovina, constructed (and in some instances, imposed) national identities based on religion contributed to conflict over the country's independence because of its compositionally diverse ethnic make-up in a generally linguistically monolithic region. While it may seem that cultural, political, and economic factors were more prominent than religious roots of conflict, ethno-religious nationalist identities 'religisized' politics, and thus portrayed social and political problems in religious terms. Religion is frequently of intrinsic importance in the development and maintenance of the national identity as a false absolute, and consequently, may provide sacral justification for acts of aggression, terrorism, and even genocide that would not normally be sanctified by the religion.

For the purposes of this paper, ethno-nationalism is defined as the situation "in which proportionately large, regionally concentrated peoples pursue independent statehood or extensive regional autonomy as their objective."¹ In the quest for self-determination, groups must define themselves as an actual or imagined community for the purposes of the unity of national identification. Members of ethnic groups usually see themselves as "natural categories" (as opposed to constructed) that have always been in existence, with myths of survival and struggle disseminated through multiple generations.² Ethnic identities in conflict are often viewed as kinship relationships between members because of attitudes and traditions of belief towards biological features and territorial location. The Primordialist theory of ethnic identity supports the commonly stated "ancient ethnic hatreds" as the rationale for war in the Republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina (this was used by members of the international community and by perpetrators of violence). The causes of the war, however, are many and varied, and the aforementioned argument is essentialist and oversimplifies the complex dynamics and the context which led to the conflict. This essay, instead, proposes the Constructivism theory of ethnic identity formation, which claims that ethnicity is the product of social processes rather than a cultural given, that it is made and remade, and is often chosen depending on circumstances rather than ascribed through birth.

Religion often plays a crucial role in ethnic definition, as many of the quarrelling nationalist groups are too similar in ethno-linguistic features to be separated by criteria other than religious affiliation. Religion is thereby utilized in a secondary function as a cultural characterization, rather than a purely spiritual alignment and religious community. This is especially true in the ethnic conflict of Bosnia-Herzegovina (hereafter referred to as BiH), with the Orthodox Serbians, Roman

¹ Ted Robert Gurr. "Peoples Against States: Ethnopolitical Conflict and the Changing World System," *International Studies Quarterly* 38 (1994): 354.

² Maya Miskovic. "The Construction of Ethnic Identity of Balkan Muslim Immigrants: A Narrativization of Personal Experiences," *The Qualitative Report* 12, no.2 (2007): 517.

Catholic Croatians, and Muslim Bosniaks. Bosnia was Yugoslavia's most ethnically diverse republic with approximately 44% Muslims, 31% Serbs, and 17% Croats (other minority groups like Jews and Romas were significantly diminished during World War II Nazi genocidal campaigns).³ Although Croatian and Serbian aggressors were fronted by local surrogates and Bosnian nationals took part in ethnic cleansing, it is important to stress that not all ethnic members were aligned with such policies. For example, approximately one third of Bosnians defending Sarajevo from siege were Serbian, and the commander of defense for the city was Serbian.⁴ The ethnic divisions in BiH that are explored throughout this essay are not homogenous, but it is important to analyze the relationship between the three larger ethnic communities, each defined by a distinct religious system as the main cultural distinguishing factor.⁵ Although the identities cannot be fully understood with reference only to Islam or Christianity, religion has to be considered instrumental in the shared history and locality among all of the groups in the specific Bosnian context.⁶ Prior to the conflict, there were few areas where any of these communities formed a compact bloc (particularly in urban areas with high rates of inter-marriage and historically multi-ethnic tolerant), and all of the communities spoke the same or a similar variant of the Southern Slav language.⁷ Ethnic composition was often not identifiably varied enough within the three groups to be definable in a manner other than religious affiliation (particularly with Bosniaks); subsequently fostering competing nationalist identities which attempt to coincide with the historic conflict of religious traditions. Victims in the systematic ethnic cleansing campaigns were mostly selected on the basis of their religion, a highly problematic characterization in some cases. When the target population had an identity that was not apparent from personal names; informants or public records (e.g. voter registration lists) were needed to select victims for persecution.⁸

Prior to the dissolution of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (hereafter referred to as Yugoslavia) and subsequent nationalist conflicts, the designation of Bosnian "Muslims" was primarily a cultural and not a religious one.⁹ As ethnicity was becoming more central in politics, Muslim national identity became officially recognized for those who did not identify as Serbs or Croats, but constituted the ethnic majority in BiH.¹⁰ The category of "Muslim" was created to offer nationhood to the group of Bosniaks and Slavic Muslims that would be comparable to that of the Croats and Serbs in Bosnia, but the term led to the contradictions of identity that remained unexplored in the duration of the ethnic cleansing. For instance, a non-observant or even atheist Bosniak with a Muslim name was considered to be a member of the "Muslim nation," while an observant Albanian Muslim was designated as a minority "Albanian" with no reflection of religion

³ Eric Marusen and Martin Mennecke. "Genocide in Bosnia and Herzegovina," *Human Rights Review* 5, no.4 (2003): 75.

⁴ John V.A. Fine, "The Various Faiths in the History of Bosnia: Middle Ages to the Present," in *Islam and Bosnia: Conflict Resolution and Foreign Policy in Multi-Ethnic States*, ed. Maya Shatzmiller (Montreal, QC and Kingston, ON, McGill-Queen's University Press, 2002), 15.

⁵ Tony Bringa, "Islam and the Quest for a National Identity in Bosnia," in *Islam and Bosnia: Conflict Resolution and Foreign Policy in Multi-Ethnic States*, ed. Maya Shatzmiller (Montreal, QC and Kingston, ON, McGill-Queen's University Press, 2002), 28.

⁶ *Ibid.* 32.

⁷ Géza Jeszensky. "More Bosnias? National and Ethnic Tensions in the Post-Communist World," *East European Quarterly* 31, no.3 (1997): 288.

⁸ Michael Sells. "Crosses of Blood: Sacred Space, Religion, and Violence in Bosnia-Herzegovina," *Sociology of Religion* 64, no.3 (2003): 309.

⁹ Peter Kuzmic. "On the Way to Peace in the Balkans," *Christian Century*, February 21 (1996): 201.

¹⁰ Fine, 12.

in the designated¹¹ name of the nationality.¹² Disconnect between religion and ethnic identification may be due in part to the restrictions on the expression of religion under communist regimes,¹³ as religion was considered the antithesis to “Brotherhood and Unity”.¹⁴ So, after forty-five years of communist Yugoslavia, it is unsurprising that religion played little role (at least in the public) lives of the three ethnic groups even though they all had their origins in religion.¹⁵ The role of religion in the Bosnian war has paradoxically been both obvious and invisible, with its victims and organizers identified by their religious tradition, while religious manifestations are simultaneously viewed as masks for deeper social, economic, and political problems.¹⁶

The destruction of the Berlin Wall symbolically represented the finality of the failure of the Soviet communist experiment, and communist ideology began to be superseded by nationalist movements that led to declarations of independence of many former communist nations. Yugoslavia began to face difficulties prior to the dissolution of European communism, commencing with the death of the charismatic revolutionary leader Marshal Josip Broz Tito. The issue of religious-ethno nationalism was suppressed and Serbian hegemonic aspirations were undermined through Tito’s commitment to recognize separate state sovereignty and self-determination of the various Yugoslav ethnicities in a federal system.¹⁷ Marxism provided the unifying ideology under Yugoslav “Brotherhood and Unity” that attempted to eliminate ethno-religious nationalist sentiments that would result in separate communities. No popular leader emerged who was powerful enough to replace Tito, and the economy faced severe problems under the burden of accumulated massive foreign debt and widespread mismanagement of major industries, which led to increased unemployment and the deterioration of the standard of living to which the Yugoslav population had grown accustomed.¹⁸ Ethnic-based politics were discouraged and repressed under Tito’s regime (along with religion under communism), but the instability and insecurity of the country fostered the emergence of ruthless and nationalistic leaders like Slobodan Milošević in Serbia and Franjo Tuđman in Croatia (there were electoral victories of nationalist parties in most of the republics in 1990). Milošević quickly took control of the secret policy, while Tuđman passed laws that were openly discriminatory against the Serbian minority of Croatia. Both took control of public media for the dissemination of effective propaganda that aggravated fears and tensions between Croats and Serbs (including frequent mention of Croatian allegiance with Hitler’s Nazi regime).¹⁹ Propaganda out of both Zagreb and Belgrade demonized Muslims and claimed that the Bosniak ethnic party Stranka Demokratske Akcije (SDA) desired an Islamic republic²⁰ in BiH that

¹¹ This exemplifies the importance of how ethnicity is ascribed by others in addition to self-identification. Albanian Muslims would self-identify as part of the worldwide community of the Islamic *Ummah*, but are deemed separate from the Muslim cultural distinction applied in BiH.

¹² Sells, p 12.

¹³ Although Tito’s Yugoslavia guaranteed freedom of religion, public expression and religious national sentiments were explicitly prohibited.

¹⁴ “Brotherhood and Unity” was the popular slogan of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia which evolved into a guiding principle of the inter-ethnic policy to unite nations (Serbs, Croats, Muslims, Macedonians, Slovenes, and Montenegrins) and national minorities (Albanians, Magyars [Hungarians], Romanians, Bulgarians, and others) under peaceful federal coexistence.

¹⁵ Fine, p 13

¹⁶ Sells, p 309.

¹⁷ Francine Friedman, *Bosnia and Herzegovina: A Polity on the Brink* (New York, Routledge, 2004), 21.

¹⁸ Marusen and Mennecke, p 73.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ The SDA leader, Alija Izetbegović, was the only self-identified Muslim in party leadership, which was mostly secular and composed of ex-communists. Fears of a Muslim conspiracy were fuelled by Izetbegović’s 1969 *The Islamic Declaration*, which described a utopian Islamic society. It is however important to note that the book made no mention of

would persecute non-Muslims.²¹

Prior to the secession of Slovenia and Croatia from Yugoslavia in 1991, all of the Bosnian political parties (except the radical separatist wing of the Croatian nationalist party *Hrvatska demokratska zajednica Bosne i Hercegovine*²²) opposed separation from Yugoslavia, but were against the Serbian campaign for a stronger Yugoslav federation (i.e. constitutional changes that allocated greater federal government powers) instrumental as a Greater Serbia.²³ War in Croatia established patterns of ethnic cleansing, spawned some of the paramilitary units that engaged in conflict in BiH, and Croat atrocities were utilized by Serb propagandists to create fears among Bosnian Serbs that the violence would be repeated if BiH became independent.²⁴ In 1992, one day after the Bosnian referendum for independence, Serb forces erected barricades across the Sarajevo capital and the city came under siege, from which citizens suffered innumerable artillery attacks, sniping from the surrounding hills, deprivation of food, water, electricity, heating oil, and other necessities.

The culmination of the systematic ethnic cleansing was the 1995 Srebrenica Massacre of approximately eight thousand Muslim men and boys by Serb forces. Srebrenica has become synonymous with the worst post-World War II atrocity in Europe, but one cannot fully understand the war or specific events within the war, if one ignores the role that perceptions of the past played in victim and perpetrator interpretations of events. Nationalist myths and collective memories of distant historical events coincided with the living memories of more recent events. The massacres carried out by the Ustaše against Serbs in World War II and the Muslim attacks on Serb villages around Srebrenica in 1992 and 1993 were interpreted within a larger historical framework, however, the distant historical allusions were more common in order to explain and justify actions.²⁵ For example, General Ratko Mladić (one of the most important war criminals indicted for genocide sought by the Hague Tribunal until he was detained in May 2011) made references to the Battle of Kosovo²⁶ (1389) prior to commencing the attack on Srebrenica, and presented the take-over of the town as revenge for the defeat suffered by Turkish hands during the first Serbian Uprising (1804-1813).²⁷ He was quoted as saying,

“Here we are in Srebrenica on July 11, 1995. On the eve of yet another great Serbian holiday, we present this city to the Serbian people as a gift. Finally, after the rebellion against the *Dahije* [local Turk janissary leaders], the time has come to

BiH, and the country did not fit the criteria of his description (i.e. he claimed that the Islamic utopia could only be successful in a primarily Muslim country – a claim that supported Croat and Serb propaganda of non-Muslim persecution and potential genocide).

²¹ Fine, p.15.

²² The HDZ was elected in Croatia in 1990 and instigated the war for Croatian independence against Serb forces.

²³ Steven L. Burg and Paul S. Shoup, *The War in Bosnia-Herzegovina: Ethnic Conflict and International Intervention* (New York, M.E. Sharpe, 1999), p.70. Serbs constituted a population majority in Yugoslavia and argued that they should control the federation, as Serbia was the largest Yugoslav republic and the ethnic group was present in all of the republics. Greater Serbia was the product of nationalist ideology that proposed the union of all Serbs in one state, reuniting the territory of the 14th century Serbian Empire that existed prior to Ottoman invasions.

²⁴ Fine, p.14.

²⁵ Ger Duijzings, “Commemorating Srebrenica: Histories of Violence and the Politics of Memory in Eastern Bosnia,” in *The New Bosnian Mosaic: Memories and Moral Claims in a Post-War Society*, ed. Xavier Bougarel, Elissa Helms and Ger Duijzings (Burlington, VT, Ashgate Publishing Company, 2007), p.143.

²⁶ The Battle of Kosovo is particularly important to Serbian history, tradition, and national identity because it is considered the instrumental battle between the Serbian army and the invading Ottoman Empire that allowed the Ottomans to take full control of the region.

²⁷ *Ibid*, p.142.

take revenge on the Turks of the region.”²⁸

The collective memory and trauma of the massacre has had a lasting impact on the Bosniak community in terms of closer religious affiliation and in some instances, reluctance to commit to the reconciliation process.

Atrocities were committed by all parties involved in the conflicts, first with Serbian-led and Croatian-led ethnic cleansings, and then, with the subsequent retribution taken by Muslims after the civil war. It is a mistake, however, to regard the clashes within the framework of the Christian West defending against the onslaught of religious fundamentalism in the East. This conception aligns with Edward Said’s Orientalism and the denigration of non-Western cultures through perpetuated stereotypes (see Said, 1978), particularly by the media covering the BiH conflict, but also by perpetrators. For example, Tudjman became notorious for his extreme nationalism as manifested in his crude vision of Croatia as the bolster and fortification for Europe against the barbaric forces of the East – primarily Islam, and to a lesser extent, Orthodox Christianity.²⁹ The lagging intervention of the United States and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), which finally occurred mostly through air strike bombing campaigns, has frequently been seen as the triumphing of the developed West over lawlessness commonly found in Eastern countries. Some Bosniak Muslims believed that the extended period of war lacking international intervention was due to religious divides, one religious leader reported that, “Europe wouldn’t remain uninvolved if Christians were being attacked and destroyed in the same way.”³⁰ There were also many Muslims from the international community who encouraged solidarity of political Islam, or nationalist Muslim lobby groups to pressure European governments to intervene in the conflict.

The genocide³¹ is often cited as having resulted in a widespread Islamic revival among the population, which is still evident today. Although some argue that there was a process of ‘Islamicization’ before the war with co-operation in the Non-Aligned Movement and with oil producing countries of the Middle East, there has been a notable increase in open religious allegiance in the post-war period.³² Since the massacre, an increasing number of mosques and *madrasas* (Islamic schools) have been built, including the multi-million dollar King Fahd complex. The issue of religion in education and the visibility of religious symbols in the military have been particularly contentious because of the potential for marginalization of secular Muslims and threat to reconciliation process with Serbs and Croats.³³ Although outward signs of religious devotion were virtually unseen prior to the ethnic wars, public displays of religious symbolism, for example men and women in full religious dress, are now very common. Historical connections of Islam in Bosnia date back to the fifteenth century with the conquest by the Ottoman Empire, but despite the extensive history, Bosniaks were described as having “moderate Islam” prior to the modern conflicts, where religious devotion was private and adherence to mandates like *wajib salat* (the obligatory aspects of daily prayer as a pillar of Islamic practice and worship) was relatively liberal.³⁴ Even with the relatively secular nature of Bosniak Muslim life, many in the global *Ummah*

²⁸ Sarah Wagner, *To Know Where He Lies: DNA Technology and the Search for Srebrenica’s Missing* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), p.41.

²⁹ Sells, p.316.

³⁰ Imam Senad Agic. “A Bosnian Muslim Speaks Out: An Interview,” *Christian Century*, August 9 (1995): p.745.

³¹ In 2007, the International Court of Justice affirmed the 2004 ruling of the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia that the acts committed at the Srebrenica Massacre constituted “genocide” as per the legal definition as outlined in the 1948 United Nations Convention of the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide.

³² Tony Bringa, p.32.

³³ Fine, p.19.

³⁴ Bill Bilefsky. “Islamic Revival Tests Bosnia’s Secular Cast,” *New York Times*, December 26, 2008. http://nytimes.com/2008/12/17/europe/27islam.html?_r=1 (accessed June 7, 2010).

interpreted their Muslim identity in terms of the larger connection with the religious community. The hesitation of the international community for intervention may have resulted in more Islamic extremists who began volunteering to fight in BiH, and some Islamic states (particularly Iran) provided arms and advisors.³⁵ As the war proceeded, some Muslims began to embrace the idea of an Islamic nation-state, and there was a declining tolerance seen among some religious leaders.³⁶ Dr. Mustafa Cerić, the Grand Mufti (*reis-ul-ulema*) of BiH, has on occasion publicly suggested that all Serbs share the blame for what the Serb separatists perpetrated, and later in the war found an audience for his circulated religious magazines and newspapers, from which he began a campaign against mixed marriages.³⁷

Aside from the role religion played in the victimization of Bosnian wars, it also played an additional role in the motivation and justification of violence tied to the ethno-nationalism of the perpetrators. There is a common thread in religious violence: perpetrators possess worldviews that justified to themselves the need for brutality to defend their faiths and have committed beliefs that what they are doing will result in a radically new social and political order.³⁸ Theories such as *jus ad bellum*, or just war, allow ambiguity in interpretative measures taken by religious adherents. The criteria lacks a strict ethical framework, and requires only a just cause, proper authority, right intentions, reasonable chance of success, proportionality, and it must be a last resort. Relativism is easily engaged by any religion within the ambiguous structure, thereby justifying any war sanctioned by religious adherents. Although mainstream denominations have isolated the religious nationalism and violent acts as “untrue” religion, the acts of the Croat and Serb nationalists were based on religiously informed ideologies and constructions of differences by Catholic and Orthodox Christian nationalists. With strong nationalist personalities, like Croatian President Franjo Tudjman, the role of the Catholic Church in the ethnic cleansing has been less acknowledged,³⁹ but religious acts of violence were sanitized by virtue of their part in a religious template of myth and history.⁴⁰ Croat Catholic nationalism was centred upon the public campaign for the canonization of Cardinal Aloysius Stepinac, who was held in high esteem by Catholic Croat nationalists for his opposition to the Yugoslav communist regime’s attempt to control the church. His persecution made him a hero to the Croats, but he was loathed by Serbs and Serbian clergy for his suspected support of the Croatian Nazi puppet government in World War II, and his failure to take a strong public stance in defense of those persecuted at the hands of the regime, including Serbs, Jews, and others.⁴¹

Growing concerns about the rapid growth of Muslim minorities in the Balkans culminated in the 1980s with the increasing decentralization of society, when Serbian elites were confronted with post-communist democracy and fears of the Balkans acting as a frontier for Muslim penetration into Europe to realise fundamentalist aspirations of global rule.⁴² Serbian nationalism in Bosnia was catalyzed by the perception of the threat posed to Serbian community and cultural heritage by the Muslim Albanians in Kosovo, in particular. Unrealized fears and pre-emptive

³⁵ Stephen R. Goodwin. “From UN Safehavens to Sacred Spaces: Contributions of Religious Sodalities to Peace Building and Reconciliation in Post-war Bosnia and Herzegovina,” *Studies in World Christianity* 9, no.2 (2003): p.172.

³⁶ Fine, p.16.

³⁷ Ibid. p.19.

³⁸ Mark Juergensmeyer. “The Worldwide Rise of Religious Nationalism,” *Journal of International Affairs* 50, no.1 (1996): p.3.

³⁹ Sells, p.316.

⁴⁰ Juergensmeyer. p.16.

⁴¹ Sells, p.316.

⁴² Paul Mojzes. “Orthodoxy and Islam in the Balkan: Conflict or Cooperation?” *Religion, State & Society* 36, no.4 (2008): p.408.

striking motivated the subsequent actions taken against Muslim Bosniaks, including the heinous war crimes. The Serbian instances of religiously motivated nationalism were much more overt than the Croats. The Orthodox Christian Church openly supported the acts of aggression against the others, and soldiers were even blessed before and after their atrocities by Serbian clergy with emphasis on referencing Hrebelijanović Lazar, a fourteenth century Serbian prince and martyr of the Church.⁴³ There were, however, public statements made by Orthodox clergy decrying the violence of the war and calling for increased policing, while the Serbian Orthodox Church was simultaneously denying large-scale violence and organized rapes, and claimed their own victimization through Croat genocidal initiatives, and publically and privately promoted expulsion of Muslims from their homes.⁴⁴ The Orthodox clergy now rejects all accusations that the Church actively caused or supported the Bosnian War, despite well documented facts.⁴⁵

Shrines, mosques and Muslim-identified structures, including the Aladza mosque, widely considered the jewel of Balkan Islamic architecture, were destroyed during the ransacking of cities. The systematic destruction of the institutions of cultural monuments has been proposed as circumstantial evidence of the Serbian desire to destroy Bosniak Muslims as an ethnic group (referring to genocidal intent as defined by ICTY).⁴⁶ During reconstruction efforts, many Muslims were attacked and beaten by the Serbs, and politically, the legitimacy of the initial structure was often questioned (i.e. if it should not have existed in the first place, there is no need to rebuild it now that it has been destroyed). After nationalists cleansed a town, all of the streets would be renamed after heroes from Serbian national mythology, and soldiers would receive medals in the name of those heroes.⁴⁷ Although the Serbian government made an official apology for the 1995 Srebrenica Massacre, voting patterns show that the population is still polarized in its opinions about its wartime past and the atrocities committed, largely due to the remaining nationalism in a large portion of Serbs.⁴⁸ When the most important Serbian institutions like the government and Orthodox Church deny or qualify the genocide, it sends a message that confirms the image of civic-minded people as traitors to the nation.⁴⁹ Peace-building and reconciliation efforts have been further challenged with the appearance of an increasing number of extreme nationalist and neo-Nazi youth groups who have appropriated the powerful symbolic apparatus of Serbia's violent nationalism in the 1990s to lend credibility to their claim of being bearers of true patriotic values.⁵⁰

The division of conflict termination has two distinct parts: stopping the killing by putting down weapons and separating forces; and, making peace by removing the incentive for reengaging in war by changing the critical perception that the war could resume.⁵² The first part of the conflict

⁴³ Sells, p.314.

⁴⁴ Goodwin, p.174.

⁴⁵ Tania Wettach. "Religion and Reconciliation in Bosnia and Herzegovina," *Religion in Eastern Europe* 28, no. 4 (2008): p.12.

⁴⁶ Marusen and Mennecke, p.74.

⁴⁷ Sells, p.314.

⁴⁸ Reuters. "Serbia Apologizes for the 1995 Massacre," *New York Times*, (March 30, 2010) <http://nytimes.com/2010/03/31/world/europe/31serb.html> (accessed June 5, 2010).

⁴⁹ Sarah Corraei, "Nationalist Violence in Post-Milosevic Serbia: Extremist Right-Wing Youth Groups as Instruments of Intimidation of Civic-Minded Individuals and Organizations" in *Transnational Terrorism, Organized Crime and Peace-Building: Human Security in the Western Balkans*, ed. Wolfgang Benedek, Christopher Daase and Vojin Dimitrijević (New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), p.344.

⁵⁰ Ibid, p.345.

⁵¹ For example, in 2006 a group of political extremists tried to interrupt the screening of *Grbavica*, a film about a woman who was raped during the Bosnian War by Serbs. Consequently, the film was shown in Belgrade in a single session.

⁵² Friedman, p.59.

cessation was accomplished through the Dayton Accord which created a transitional government and partitioned the BiH into two territories (both measures were meant to be temporary, but are still in effect). Some have argued that the separation essentially created a homogenous Serbian entity in the Republika Srpska, which was one of the main goals of the Serbian forces.⁵³ Regardless of the effects, the Dayton Accord effectively ended the physical war. Unfortunately, because of its effects, it negatively contributed to the conflict resolution and peace-building process by legitimizing ethno-national separation and guiding post-war discourse based on this premise.⁵⁴

Religion has played a crucial role in the formation of nationalist identity, and has provided justification for many heinous acts committed by all parties. Frequently, official representatives of religious institutions portray their own group as the main victims of war, and neglect to discuss or question the culpability of responsible parties from their group, which has been detrimental to peace and reconciliation.⁵⁵ Although the aforementioned instances of nationalism are still exceptionally prevalent in BiH (and most of the other former republics in the Yugoslav federation), there are religious leaders and theologians engaging in analysis and dialogue in attempts to reconcile the divided communities. Supported by international dialogue and conflict management, inter-religious and political negotiations are trying to resolve issues caused by the nationalist divide that has made cohabitation in BiH virtually impossible.⁵⁶ During the 1990s, there were meetings between the heads of religious communities in the former Yugoslavia, and an Interreligious Council of Bosnia-Herzegovina was created with the help of American Ambassador Swanee Hunt after the 1995 Dayton Peace Accord.⁵⁷ With the increased capacity for ecumenical cooperation, Muslim, Catholic, and Orthodox leaders were able to condemn the violations of human rights and appeal to the international community with a united front. Many of the denunciations of the war by united community leaders have acknowledged that religious fears and symbols have been manipulated and abused by ultranationalists for their own ends, but have downplayed the role of religious differences or religious nationalism in fomenting the conflict.⁵⁸ By moving away from inflexible dogma and liturgical formalism, multi-religious communities may harmoniously work towards greater peace, but reconciliation needs a willingness to forgive and to ask forgiveness as a basic precondition for permanent peaceful coexistence from all parties.⁵⁹

The legacy of the Bosnian War was the precision with which the target ethno-religious group was sought out and systematically destroyed. It is clear that the nationalist identities that developed in Bosnia-Herzegovina in the post-Tito period of Yugoslavia were greatly influenced by historical religious affiliation. Although religion was not a pervasive force in pre-war everyday life, it aided the construction and maintenance of exclusive national identities. Religion and ancient ethnic hatreds were not the primary causes of the conflict, as this is an over-simplification of complex historical, economic, political, and social causes. In order for there to be long-lasting peace and reconciliation in the region, there must be dialogue between the conflicting parties, and religious leaders need to aid in the facilitation of community transition in the case of settlement. If there remains to be a preoccupation with identity and difference, Bosnia and all of the Balkan states will be unable to repair the fragmented concepts of identity by unmasking the false

⁵³ Goodwin, p.172.

⁵⁴ Wettach, p.1.

⁵⁵ Ibid, p.15.

⁵⁶ Mojzes, p.418.

⁵⁷ Ibid, p.411.

⁵⁸ Gerald F. Powers. "Religion, Conflict and Prospects for Reconciliation in Bosnia, Croatia and Yugoslavia," *Journal of International Affairs* 50, no.1: p.223.

⁵⁹ Wettach p.15.

perception of primordial identity universalism. The gulf between the ethno-religious communities cannot be overcome solely by force, but needs to be bridged based on post-nationalist efforts that encourage the reintegration of multi-ethnic tolerance that was once characteristic of the region. Optimistically, the future of the Balkan communities will consist of unity for the achievement of the common desire of all of the states to be integrated into the European Union. Local and international efforts for the goal will be aided by the support of each of the religious traditions together.