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AGNOSTICISM AND ATHEISM AS AMORALISM AND ANTI- IDEOLOGICAL SOCIOPOLITICAL PARADIGM IN THE BALKANS, SPECIFICALLY IN BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

By Faruk Hadžić

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Abstract

The study investigates whether atheism in B&H is treated, a priori, as amorality and how this affects plural civic space. If religion is privileged, is it a politically dictated value system or pure ideology? Besides in-depth critical literature review, the author refers to a number of structural interviews focusing on both groups (theists and agnostic atheists) as a direct indicator of variability. 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. Theism, for many in the Balkans, 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. The number of individual needs, and the real impossibilities of their satisfaction, imply the necessary cooperation of the social community members. A believer who questions the possibility of an atheist's universal validity as a moral man denies the believers' chance of becoming a true believer.

Keywords: Agnosticism, atheism, theism, morality, plural civic space, Bosnia and Herzegovina, former Yugoslavia, ethnopitics, ethnoreligious ideology, stigma.

Introduction

This study investigates whether atheism and agnosticism in Bosnian society is treated, a priori, as amorality and how it affects plural civic space. If religion is privileged, then the

question arises: is a religion here, in these conditions, a politically dictated value system, or is it a pure ideology?

Ethnic, national, and confessional affiliation in the former Yugoslavia contribute to political radicalization. Due to new national state theoretical inadequacy, (i.e., nationalism as an ideology), religion is used as an instrument of socialization and legitimization of new national-political state subjects.¹ Nationalist sentiments were systematically created, committed to generating conditions in which the manifestation of ethnonationalism was the only desirable public pattern of behavior. Paradoxically, during Communism, there was emphatic contempt for people who went to a church or mosque and who celebrated religious holy days. The process of an abnormal nationalization of religions in Bosnia and Herzegovina (hereafter B&H) occurred in the 1980s and 1990s. The religious feelings and the far-right support resulted in a fighting attitude against socialism and the development of political religion, or religious policy.

Being an atheist in traditional regions, such as the Balkans, has become quite controversial after the fall of socialism. Among the European nations ruled by communist regimes in the twentieth century, B&H is one of the most religious and at the same time one of the least scientifically enlightened countries, according to research conducted by the non-profit, non-partisan organization Pew Research Center. In B&H, 94% of the population believe in God. It is in the top half of the most religious countries, led by Georgia with 99% and Armenia with 95% of the population who believe in supernatural beings.² If we talk about national intolerance, religious matrices are closely interconnected with the national exclusivity in the former Yugoslavian countries; they complement each other. In addition to religious intolerance between members of different faiths, religious intolerance towards atheists and the imposition of religious postulates and ideas, such as attitudes towards abortion or gender ideology, are increasingly pronounced in the Western Balkans by governing structures. It is required to declare themselves atheists, but today it is just the opposite. It is desirable to be a believer because it once was that a declared believer could not aspire to a higher position (because as a believer, a person could not be a member of the communist party). Thus, today an atheist is socially undesirable: "it is very likely that of the two unemployed women who applied for a vacancy, a believer gets the job of cleaner, not one who is known in her midst as an

¹ Faruk Hadžić, "The Politicization of Religion and the Sacralized Balkan Nations Regarding Bosnia and Herzegovina," *Occasional Papers on Religion in Eastern Europe*: Vol. 40: Iss. 7, Article 8, (2020):105, <https://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/ree/vol40/iss7/8>

² <https://www.pewforum.org/2017/05/10/religious-belief-and-national-belonging-in-central-and-eastern-europe/>, 2017.

infidel."³ However, a community should represent people's living framework—an "artificial" environment that they have created in one space and act together at one time. To act together means to satisfy life's needs and interests within a value system. Plural civic space draws its meaning and sense as a concern for the "rest of value," which remains uncovered, unrepresented, and inexhaustible in highly concentrated games of power. It is the one that should maintain the public as a political field and does not leave it to the commercial, political industry.

B&H ethnonational policies are policies of endangerment within vital national interests.⁴ The protection of the national interest is something like a non-aggression pact, like a social contract based on Hobbes' model: no one renounces their right to self-preservation but renounces the right to interfere in and prevent others from self-preservation. However, unlike Hobbes' theory, the place of the one who has the right to decide on behalf of all is vacant; to protect their national interest, each group is a hostage to the others. As a national collective's notion of its position, vulnerability closely corresponds to the antagonism that should be understood in society as an inevitable fact, but in political terms it means the destruction of the political. It implies the totalization of exclusivity, which abolishes politics as the art of balancing between inclusion and exclusion, opening and closing, and which is only one of the views of the notion of justice. Politics during the war of the 1990s was territorialized but delocalized; today we have a similar pattern.

There is no coherent value system that would impose itself as general for the collective members and be subject to preservation through legislation. The cessation of the threat is the end of the collective, and members return to a natural state that now corresponds to Rousseau's preoccupation with himself and indifference to other members of the same collective, which leaves to the elites unlimited space to act in self-interest.⁵

Besides, three religious communities maintain the status quo or compete in clericalism, based on Bosnian earthly patriotism, instead of being the foundation and bearers of plural civic unity.

³ Lino Veljak, <http://www.glas-slavonije.hr/357463/11/Lino-Veljak-Nekad-se-od-nasih-karijerista-trazilo-da-se-izjasnjavaju-kao-ateisti-a-danas-je-pozeljno-da-se-izjasnjavaju-kao-vjernici>, 2018.

⁴ The Constitution defines Bosniak, Croat, and Serbs as a constituent people. In the B&H's ethnoreligious model, which is formed by agreement of the three constituent peoples, the demographic remnant is unconstitutional. For the most part, a mere constitutional decor appropriately enshrined in the last article of the Preamble of the discriminatory B&H Constitution. Therefore, the term "Others" in the formulation of "hybrid" identities is an unsentimental description of their position in this ethnoreligiously divided society. Faruk Hadžić, "Social and political exclusions within the post-Yugoslav ethnonational foundation in Bosnia and Herzegovina" in *Temida, Journal on victimization, gender and human rights*, Vol 24, Issue 1, (2021):2, in process of publishing

⁵ Svjetlana Nedimović „Politička filozofija političkih elita u Bosni i Hercegovini: eksperiment iz prirodnog stanja“ [Political philosophy of political elites in Bosnia and Herzegovina: an experiment from the natural state] *Okrugli sto, vrijednosni odnos političkih elita u Bosni i Hercegovini, prema Bosni i Hercegovini i Evropskoj uniji*, (Sarajevo: Institut za društvena istraživanja Fakulteta političkih nauka Univerziteta u Sarajevu, 2009), 149.

The significance of mentioning Serbia and Croatia in this study is directly related to B&H and its Constitution, which defines Bosnian Muslims (Bosniaks), Bosnian Croats, and Bosnian Serbs as constituent peoples. Historian Hrvoje Klasić believes that in Croatia and Serbia, it is difficult to distinguish politics (i.e., national from religious); and that the Croatian Catholic Church is more Croatian than Catholic, just as the Serbian Orthodox Church is more Serbian than Orthodox.⁶ Hence, one may conclude that Croatia is a country of extremely religious people. Statistics show that as many as 86% of the population declare themselves Catholics, 4.5% Orthodox and 1.5% Muslims, while only 3.81% declare themselves atheists.⁷ One Croatian study's findings indicate that members of non-religious and atheistic organizations perceive their position as stigmatized, and that they use various management techniques (passing, covering, selective, and voluntarily disclosure) to navigate through day-to-day life. The feeling of stigmatization and discrimination arises from the ubiquity of religion in the public space and the politicization of (non-)religiosity issues.⁸

This author maintains that atheism as a mass phenomenon is not a phenomenon of more recent, post-statist times, or as an individual and marginal phenomenon like today; it has always existed in communism in this region. If atheism originally arose out of disappointment in the faith and the ecclesiastic institution, theism in its modern form followed out of restrictions and disappointment in atheism and atheistic institutions in socialism. However, the way of transition from atheism to theism in this region is complex and debatable. Ivan Cvitković, a sociologist of religion, realized that after analyzing the role of religion in the war, that the issue was based on the shift from "vulgar atheism to vulgar theism." "Vulgar theism" in B&H, represents the absence of any sense of the need and values of the Other. It means that the Other is only rarely regarded as Ours, as mine, as if the other has no authentic life and is acknowledged only as He or She, as absence, and never as You, as a presence. Moreover, this is "a specific form of violence against people."⁹

The presupposition of atheism, in general, speaks of human freedom in social aspects. In the age of the enlightenment, it was considered whether an atheist society was possible,

⁶ Hrvoje Klasić, "Socijalistički Sisak i Katolička crkva" [Socialist Sisak and Catholic Church], *Antiquam Fidem- radovi sa znanstvenog skupa*, (2011):383-397

⁷ Pew Research Center, <https://www.pewforum.org/2017/05/10/religious-belief-and-national-belonging-in-central-and-eastern-europe/>, 2017.

⁸ Nikolina Bajić Hazdovac, "Representation of Non-Religious and Atheistic Identities in a Highly Religious Society - Croatian Case," *Occasional Papers on Religion in Eastern Europe*: Vol. 40 : Iss. 1 , (2020):1 <https://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/ree/vol40/iss1/6>

⁹ "The Contribution of Academician Ivan Cvitković to the Development of Sociology of Religion (on the occasion of his 75th anniversary) ", *Akademija Nauka i Umjetnosti Bosne i Hercegovine* [Academy of sciences and arts of Bosnia and Herzegovina,] Volume 13, (2020):194.

emphasizing the question of its degree of morality. So, it was not a question of whether such a society could exist but how it would look. In such a society, there are no religious institutions that subordinate man so that a person, free from God and the Church, freely organizes their life in the most appropriate way. For Marx, religion was a private matter for those who believed, which implies that it is a private issue and a question of freedom whether one will believe or not. The assumption is that everyone can have their own religion, which means there would be as many religions as there are people. Branko Bošnjak believes that, due to this, there would "follow a necessary turn so that in the spirit of religious institutions it would not be accepted. The legal notion of the private would mean that society has risen above it and does not want itself subordinated to the content of some eschatological belief." And further: "It could be said in general, depending on what kind of man one is, such is also the truth."¹⁰ The only and true meaning of atheism (according to Marx) is the struggle for human freedom. The author argues that religion has no monopoly on morality. Morality has no limiting aspect in practice and can be secular, which does not mean that it cannot be religious.

Can a person who does not believe in God and is not committed to any religion be a moral person? Why is it currently so disputable to be an atheist in the Balkans? Many data confirm that religiosity does not affect a person's moral profile, although, according to Paul Mojzes, the Judeo-Christian and Islamic religions show a profound requirement for a genuinely religious person to be moral or ethical. However, many war criminals, organizers of concentration camps, or post-Yugoslav capitalistic actors converted to religion in the process of illegitimate privatization in the 1990s.^{11 12} The same matrix is related to those labeled as war heroes, as often characterized during the former Yugoslav wars, or examples of those who display sacrifice and philanthropy. I maintain that there is little to no evidence that declared belief or declared atheism affects whether one will be moral, humane, or inhumane.

In many religions, the "sowing of doubt" is a mortal sin (except in liberal Protestantism, doubt is seen as a positive characteristic.)¹³ Those who doubt God become suspicious and spread it to others. Moreover, within the political sphere or with maintaining political power, it could be menacing to show understanding for nonbelievers, which may arouse some believers' wrath.

¹⁰ Branko Bosnjak, *Filozofija i kršćanstvo: racionalna kritika iracionalnog shvaćanja* [Philosophy and Christianity: A Rational Critique of Irrational Understanding], (Zagreb: Stvarnost, 1987), 421.

¹¹ Faruk Hadžić, "Post-Yugoslav spaces between defective democracies, authoritarianism, and kleptocracies," *International Affairs and Global Strategy*, vol. 86, (2020).

¹² Jovan Teokarević, *Democratization of the Balkan Postcommunist Political Systems, State and Democracy*, (Beograd: Službeni glasnik i Fakultet političkih nauka).

¹³E.g., Paul Tillich's *Dynamics of Faith*.

Method

This study included an in-depth scientific review of professional literature within the analytical and critical analysis methods. As a direct indicator of variability in real conditions, the author refers to qualitative research by in-depth structural interviews. The author focused on both groups (theists and atheists). The narrators participated alone, not within the group settings. The study included published interviews with four declared atheists and five additional participants, three females and two males, from ages 35 to 56. Four were practicing Muslims, and one was a non-practicing cultural Muslim.

1. Agnosticism and Atheism as Paradigms of Amoralism

Currently in the Balkans, one must be a part of one of three ethnoreligious collectivities for societal acceptance, regardless of one's moral background. First, let us observe the term "individual" within the B&H community. The plural civic space is a central feature of a democratic society because it allows citizens to be an active part of the political sphere beyond elections. It should encourage governments to be transparent and accountable and highlight the limited freedoms and factors that contribute to social exclusion: discriminatory practices, unequal power relations, and institutional barriers that prevent access to public services and political participation. Politics of inclusion may imply the need to change the social "motherland," not just the expectation that marginalized groups must adapt.¹⁴ The development of a democratic society's institutions is considered a necessary precondition for freedom of human development and citizens' active participation in political life through a critical channel of influence on its free development. The lack of supranational and nonparty-based civic movements (gathered around the universal values of human and civil rights) negatively affects the resistance of those who do not share the ethnoreligious idea matrix that the government's ideological-interest in manipulation is in B&H.¹⁵ The independent critical statements are associated with personal risks of being declared an internal enemy of the particular ethnic community. Then it is no longer a set of independent, thinking, and mature individuals, but

¹⁴ Faruk Hadžić, "Social and political exclusions within the post-Yugoslav ethnonational foundation in Bosnia and Herzegovina," *Temida*, Journal on victimization, gender and human rights, 2021-No 1, (2021):2, in process of publishing

¹⁵ Faruk Hadžić, "Bosnia between the Dayton's peace straight jacket, development, and power centers' moral obligation; solicitation to Biden," *Small Wars Journal*, (2020):2

uninformed communities—collectives that do not allow themselves the internal dynamics of life, which includes healthy conflicts.¹⁶

The theologian, Drago Bojić,¹⁷ believes:

That in this society, which has been clericalized to the maximum, we should give as much space as possible in the journal, *Svjetlo riječi [Light of the Word]*¹⁸ to people who do not practice the Faith, who do not declare themselves as believers. It seems it is harder for those who do not 'count' as believers than in the previous system for those who practiced their Faith.¹⁹

So, Bojić further and 'blasphemously' states that the existing vulgar theism is worse than the vulgar atheism in the former Yugoslavia. Another Franciscan, Fr. Mile Babić, claimed that "the position of atheists today is approximately the same as that of theists in the former socialist system," and that "in a democratic state, members of all religions and worldviews, and that means both atheists and theists, must be equal before the state, state institutions, and laws."²⁰ Babić further, in the manner of spiritual pluralism and sufficient religious tolerance that does not characterize members of dominant religious figures in a position of power in B&H, says the following about atheists: "Despite the pressure of the majority, they remain faithful to their atheistic worldview. Their atheism is a credible attitude because they see that every day those who consider themselves believers do not live by their Faith; some even live as enemies of their Faith. Faith is an act of a person, not a collective."²¹ This attitude and moral uplift of atheistic credibility imposes itself as a total subversion in a society in which atheists are considered less moral because they do not have to be such, since they are not afraid of God's punishment.

It is my view that atheists are discriminated against by the very structure of B&H (since it is religiously equated with ethnonationalism), and B&H is very far from being a secular state.²² Those who do not belong to one of the three religious groups, or who do not want to show affiliation, are considered a foreign element; they cannot elect representatives and are

¹⁶ Drago Bojić, <https://www.tacno.net/sarajevo/drago-bojic-danas-je-teze-bit-ateist-nego-vjernik/> 2014.

¹⁷ Until recently a professor at the Franciscan School of Theology in Sarajevo, director of IMIC (International Multireligious and Intercultural Center) known to the general public as the former editor of *Svjetlo riječi* (Light of the World) who was fired because his editorial policy did not suit the authorities.

¹⁸ *Light of the World* is a Franciscan journal.

¹⁹ Drago Bojić, <https://www.tacno.net/sarajevo/drago-bojic-danas-je-teze-bit-ateist-nego-vjernik/> 2014.

²⁰ Alen Mujkanović, <http://www.prometj.ba/clanak/copy-paste/ateizam-u-bosni-i-hercegovini-552>, 2012.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Presidents do not swear each on their holy book, but for example, the former Bosnian Grand Mufti founded the political party and ran in the presidential election. These two segments seem totally unrelated. A mufti or clergyman should be able to run in a secular state, regardless of how the oath is sworn.

barred from running for office at any state level.²³ Moreover, insisting on the religious form and its "civic manifestation," supporting creativity in the form of proverbial multiculturalism and diversity, celebrating religious holidays in a specific local color, offering religious greetings from parliamentary rostrums, postage stamps, and the most often practiced absence from work during Friday prayers have become "normal" so that no one objects.

Examples of vulgar theism are innumerable. A cursory search of the portals in B&H leads to the following texts: "Aggressive atheism attacks;"²⁴ "Theory of evolution: science or hoax?"²⁵ "Why is atheism essentially illogical?"²⁶ and "The evolutionary burqa of atheism."²⁷ Furthermore, if someone refers to some illogical and inhumane procedure in, for example the Islamic communities, that person is automatically declared an Islamophobe or an aggressive atheist. Atheists are often equated with LGBTQIA+ minorities. Simultaneously, the survival of an "atheistic scene" in B&H is lacking. Moreover, some citizens equate atheists with communists, some even see them as a sect, and some believe that atheists hate believers. When interpreting the census results in B&H, devastating data on the rate of education and the number of illiterates were almost ignored, focusing on national and religious affiliation. In the census itself, along with the options to declare themselves as members of the three major religions, residents could also choose to be registered as atheists, agnostics, or not to declare themselves on this issue at all. Thus, the results showed visible persons who are considered non-religious or less religious, and persons who deviated from national policies that national and religious affiliation are closely linked to, i.e., meaning that belonging to a nation necessarily determines religious affiliation.

The basis of this kind of hypocritical, moral judgment and object paradigm can be pointed out through the International Criminal Tribunal data for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) in Hague, Netherlands. One hundred percent of their accused declared themselves as believers, not a single atheist. Chetniks, Ustashas, and the paramilitary divisions committed crimes solely by religious and national motivations. In contrast, during World War II, partisan crimes were political and far less intense. Moreover, the day before the liberation of Sarajevo in 1945, the

²³ Faruk Hadžić, "Social and political exclusions within the post-Yugoslav ethnonational foundation in Bosnia and Herzegovina", *Temida, Journal on victimization, gender and human rights*, Vol 24, Issue 1, (2021):2, in process of publishing.

²⁴ <http://www.islambosna.ba/agresivni-ateizam-napada/>, 2011.

²⁵ <http://bosnjaci.net/prilog.php?pid=50055>, 2011.

²⁶ <http://www.bosnjaci.net/prilog.php?pid=46074>, 2012.

²⁷ <http://bosnjaci.net/prilog.php?pid=50055>, 2013.

Ustasha took dozens of prisoners (arrested because they were Serbs), and executed them.²⁸ After that, the Bleiburg massacres happened.²⁹ The Bleiburg monument reads, "dedicated to innocent Croatian soldiers." However, many hardened Croatian war criminals lie there with the possibility that some innocent soldiers and civilians were among them.

Whether religious people are morally better than nonbelievers could be resolved by answering the question: are evil, violence, and inhumanity more visible in our times of growing theoretical agnosticism and practical indifference than in the centuries of unity between state and church? Thus, morality's question could only be resolved practically and not by doctrinal discussions of faith and agnosticism.³⁰ The particular norms by which moral actions are judged vary to some extent from individual to individual and from culture to culture (although some norms, such as do not to kill, do not to steal, and honor one's parents, are widespread). However, value judgments concerning human behavior are passed in all cultures, regardless of religious or non-religious affiliation.

With the public emphasis on non-religiousness and declaring oneself an atheist, life outside the framework of religion often caused unpleasant situations to Adi Smajlagić (27) from Maglaj (a town in B&H, Federation of B&H entity) and Igor Jokić (25) from Prijedor (a town in B&H, Republic of Srpska entity). While Igor's family was not overburdened with his religious beliefs, Adi's family found it difficult to accept his views. Both of them encountered criticism and negative comments from friends and acquaintances, and it was the wrong attitude of people who consider themselves believers that conditioned their attitudes about personal atheism. According to them, atheism in B&H is still a taboo topic.

People are convinced that religious faith is the source of morality and that someone who is not afraid of eternal punishment cannot be moral. Adi gives a picture of the society in which he lives as follows: "A few days ago, a colleague commented on the current government in Maglaj, believing that the left-wing party in power in the municipality cannot make the right decisions because most of them do not believe in God. Of course, because of such an attitude, which many believers probably shared here, I feel uncomfortable, marginalized," points out Adi. "I do not think there is marginalization concerning the majority, but there may be difficulties or at least some pressure from people who are right-wing and closely link national

²⁸ Slavko Dadić, *Posljednji Dani okupatorske tiranije u Sarajevu, Sarajevo u revoluciji, IV*, [The Last Days of the Occupying Tyranny in Sarajevo, Sarajevo in the Revolution], (Sarajevo: Istorijski arhiv Sarajevo, 1977), 181-195.

²⁹ Bleiburg is a town in Austria near the border with Yugoslavia known for a war crime at the end of World War II when Tito's partisans committed mass murders over captured soldiers of defeated armies and civilians who accompanied them in an attempt to surrender to the Western Allies.

³⁰ Lino Veljak, "Agnosticizam i vjerski indiferentizam," *Diacovensia: teološki prilozi*, 21, 2, (2013): 237-249.

and religious identity," said Igor. He points out that "today many people, whether believers or not, criticize society's non-secular nature and the religious community, towards which a large part of the funds from public budgets is directed."³¹

Fedja Stukan, an actor from Sarajevo has been declaring himself an atheist for years. He answers the question of whether he and like-minded people face prejudice:

A considerable mass of people here have not even met someone of another nationality, let alone met an atheist. Religious officials are most responsible for this because they spread hatred towards all minorities, including atheists. It has been going on for thousands of years, but in the last 20 years, we have only two or three from various religions that advocate reconciliation, tolerance, peace, breaking down prejudices against any minority. We are also rich with those four who propagate it.

When asked if he have an ugly experience because of all these, Fedja Štukan half-jokingly answers:

Apart from one thousand death threats, rape, and slaughter of my daughter, I did not have any significant problems. I received my first threats when I was doing trials against the war in Iraq. They spoke as you have as an atheist doing trials against the killing of Muslims in the world. Later it went through a peace installation when I was placed on a statue of Jesus Christ because I received many Catholic believers' threats. Then it went after a multi-religious adult film. I made a petition against the award to Bosnian Muslim Grand Mufti Mustafa Cerić, which he did not deserve in any case. That is why I received over 500-600 threats. I cannot say that I had big problems because of that. A few days after the petition I wrote, I got a permanent job. I cannot say that my atheism is to blame for something that is happening to me.³²

Due to his beliefs, the young journalist Mirza Ajnadžić was called "Antichrist" in one discussion. Mirza also likes to defend himself from this kind of prejudice, he says, with a laugh: "It is even funnier to me on the one hand and very interesting on the other because I like to argue. I think it is very healthy to argue; the only thing that matters is how someone makes the arguments—are they funny, or can we talk about those arguments?"³³ Prejudice against atheists and agnostics can be viewed analogously from the perspective of believers' position in the age of socialism. Thus, we can observe this as the verification paradigm of 40 years of prejudice against theists in this region. With the collapse of that system, the sanctity of faith and nation has been inaugurated, especially these three constituent peoples, where one ethnicity concurrently implies faith.

³¹ Dalibor Kraišniković, <https://zamisli.ba/zivjeti-kao-ateista-u-nesekularnoj-bih/>, 2017.

³² Marija Arnaudović, <https://www.slobodnaevropa.org/a/ateisti-na-marginama-drustvenog-zivota/24943063.html>, 2013.

³³ Ibid

Given that the Balkans is permeated by nationalism that has nothing to do with religion but is closely tied because of ignorant people, atheists may be un-affirmed by some segments of society. Thus, for example, when applying for a job and related to high-level corruption, people who are not members of a religious institution may have fewer rights or are known to be classified as "other" citizens. In the West, in countries that are more religiously oriented, this may also be because the church plays a significant role in society. People who are not members of the same Faith may accept believers of another faith more easily than atheists per se. Such a thing can be related to a phenomenon based on the similarity of people, i. e., people prefer people who are similar to themselves and their lifestyle, and religion is part of their lifestyle (A.B., 35, female, a post-doc research fellow, from Zenica, B&H, currently working in Switzerland, non-practicing Muslim).

"Society is nationalistic. Moreover, atheists are less valuable in this society. Furthermore, a priori they are deprived of every opportunity for social affirmation and perspective in this incoherent society. For employment and other things, society wants to animate them in every way" (B.A, male, 45, a lawyer from Zenica, B&H, practicing Muslim).

I completely agree with the thesis. In our 'secular' state, where religion permeates every part of society, being an infidel is not easy. Primarily, ethnicity is so closely connected with religion in our country, so if you are not a believer, you automatically fall out of one of the three Torahs [religions]. Unfortunately, it is also true for morality because we do not believe in the inner human moral compass, but the threat of hell/aspiration to heaven. There has been a higher percentage of atheists in Norway for the last few years than theists, but they are more moral and polite, as can be seen by the society and social order which is a model for many. We are the black hole of Europe, but it does not matter; we must be all great believers, *mashallah!*" (E.K., female, 35, an English language teacher, from Zenica, B&H, currently living in Norway, practicing Muslim).

In the ethnopolitical framework, the ethnic, interrelated with the religious, is perceived as primary. It is how ethnicism, ethnocentrism, ethnonationalism, ideological, and political matrices of defining life in the B&H social community are created. However, civic unity, or mutual human solidarity, is based on organic elements "from below" through existential-interest connections within the civic value framework. Religious-national kitsch is no longer the primary belief, nor the genuine religious need for God, but experience, publicity, and manifestation. It has now become a kind of fashion.³⁴ Thus, the result is that ethics and morality are questioned. Moreover, atheists' position in B&H is in many ways similar to the non-constitutive category of "Others." Thus, the Dayton Constitution shaped ethnic-religious exclusivism and an unconstitutional "hybrid" identity.

³⁴ Besim Spahić, <https://www.slobodnaevropa.org/a/ateisti-na-marginama-drustvenog-zivota/24943063.html>, 2013.

2. Agnosticism and Atheism as an Anti-ideological Sociopolitical Paradigm

When one hears an ethnic nationalist ardently defending their views and beliefs, and at the same time, fiercely exaggerate in every way; whether they glorify their own or degrade others, one of many questions arises. Do they do so out of personal motives because their personality dictates that they speak so and behave accordingly, or do they express ethnic-nationalist views under the pressure of certain external circumstances?

Dejan Kecmanović notes that "the appropriate external circumstances, the exceptional personal inclinations of individuals towards ethnonationalism similar to the behavioral pattern, and the group mentality that is not foreign to any man, ethnonationalism is marked by specific myths, collective memories, value systems, and traditions."³⁵ Moreover, within the Dayton Peace Accords and its Constitution, 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, taboos, holy place, which paralyzes politics and deprives it of meaning and purpose.³⁶ This mechanism of Dayton's irrational "defense," as a rationalized derivative of its initial denial, is called reactive formation in psychology. Phenomenologically and psychoanalytically, more precisely, the reactive formation is a unique, specific form of repression. As there is also the phenomenon of reactive formation on reactive formation, this one formation disguise gives rise to others.³⁷

In political life, ethnocracy replaces democracy, special ethnopolitical totalitarianism replaces national (state) political orientation; and ethnopolitics, biopolitics, and populism grow unstoppably against democratic politics. The most important feature of this approach is undoubtedly creating a discourse of "naturalness," supported by different, mostly pseudo-scientific, or mythopoetic narratives of a particular nation. The goal of naturalness discourse is to devalue alternative discursive patterns as "utopian" or "abnormal." It is a kind of naturalistic delusion of the dominant ethnopolitical discourse."³⁸

Two narrators, Sefika (56) (a Bosnian literature teacher from Ključ, B&H), and Nathaniel (39) (a lifeguard from Sarajevo, B&H), born as Christian Orthodox, currently living in Norway expressed their point of view in the following way:

³⁵ Dejan Kecmanović, *Etnička vremena* [Ethnic times], (Beograd: Biblioteka XX vek, 2001), 65.

³⁶ Faruk Hadžić, "Bosnia between the Dayton's peace straight jacket, development, and power centers' moral obligation; solicitation to Biden", *Small Wars Journal*, (2020):2

³⁷ Esad Bajtal, *Psihosocijalni kontekst političkih elita u BiH* [Psychosocial context political elites in BiH]. Okrugli sto, vrijednosni odnos političkih elita u Bosni i Hercegovini ,prema Bosni i Hercegovini i Evropskoj uniji,(Sarajevo: Institut za društvena istraživanja Fakulteta političkih nauka Univerziteta u Sarajevu, 2009),136.

³⁸ Faruk Hadžić, „The political psychology of extremism; "naturalness" of the phenomenon in the Western Balkans," *Technium Social Sciences Journal*, vol. 11(1), (2020):257.

Radical changes took place in the Western Balkans countries in the early 1990s: the disintegration of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, the formation of nation-states, and the struggle for affirmation. As religious values were neglected in the socialist system, religious centers became national centers in the Balkans. Religion creeps into all pores of society, and a strange relationship is created towards it, which is ideologically charged. Yes, I believe that there is a sign of equality between religion and ideology in the countries of the Western Balkans (S.K., female, 56, Practitioner Muslim).

Of course, religion is a kind of politically dictated system. *Bošnjani*-Bosniaks³⁹ existed before Islam arrived in our area, such as the most famous Bosnian church. However, today Bosniak is a synonym for a Muslim, and in my opinion, it destroys our state and identity. I am a Muslim, but I distance myself from 'Bosniakism' because Bosniaks should be all people regardless of religion, at least that was the case before (N.S., male, 39, Practitioner Muslim born as Orthodox, currently living in Norway).

Thus, socialist ideological collectivism was replaced by the mass ethnic-clerical loyalty in which, again, there is no place for the individual, that is, for citizens with their human desires and rights. Multinational, and grounded citizens (gathered around the universal values of human and civil rights), such as atheists, have no place within the government's ideological political ideology.

According to Esad Bajtal, it is like every ethnic prejudice to "glorify one's own" or "degrade others," i.e., to do both simultaneously. Instead of arguments and reason, the narrator refers to mythology, tradition, or some other a priori pattern of (re-)evaluation of others. Furthermore, all this would not be disputable if, without coming to the level of practical life relations, it remained in the sphere of verbal exchanges.⁴⁰ However, humankind's bloody history draws its inhumane trace precisely from racial, ethnic, religious, and other prejudices (greed, selfishness, jealousy, arrogance, and many other moral evils), a regular inventory item of all human communities from the ancient times to the present day.

Deliberately and politically targeted, there is an abuse of faith for nefarious purposes. In the name of the faith thus understood, measured not by the "heavenly" but by today's political clerical standards, we are witnessing the stigmatization and discrimination of atheists and agnostics.

³⁹ The archaic name originating from the Middle Ages, for inhabitants of Bosnia.

⁴⁰ Esad Bajtal, "Pacifikacijski potencijali civilnog društva" [Pacification potentials of civil society], *Zbornik Orbis*, (2006):1.

Conclusion

In regard to the question of theism or atheism, freedom must mean the possibility for everyone to think in their own way, take (or not take) a particular position, and make judgments. The essence of an open and liberal society should be that every idea can be critically discussed, resulting in the individual's right to property and dignity, and other rights. All collectives need to allow for differences among themselves and allow for a dialogue of opinions. Everything else leads to unanimity, depersonalization of people.

When states begin defining citizens primarily by their belonging to an ethnic or religious group, discrimination and stigmatization are immediately apparent. In a democracy, members of all religions and worldviews, including atheists and theists, must be equal before state institutions and laws. The ideological ethnonationalism has metastasized into a social organization's daily political discourse that produces uncritical subjects to B&H's three constitutive ethnic governments. It imposes an exclusive definition of the ethnoreligious collective as the only appropriate form of sociopolitical organization. Theism in the ideological form, transformed from a *sui generis* socio-cultural phenomenon into a sociopolitical phenomenon. Spiritual usurpation has moved into the realm of identity.

When one religion stands out as unique, then its members gain advantages inaccessible to others, starting with education, employment, and social prejudices against the religious or non-religious Other, in this case, atheists and agnostics. Prejudice gains momentum. Yet it is necessary to hear the voice of the Other, especially if it is the voice of those who suffer. The state should be secular, neither religious nor atheistic. There should be neither a state church, a mosque, nor should there be state atheism. However, in this system of relations, the state must establish an equal attitude towards all, regardless of what their attitude is toward religion or atheism. The B&H Constitution obstructs creating a plural civic identity and hypostasizes the collective political mentality. Vulgarism and atheistic stigma became an integral part of everyday life. In a nationally and religiously divided society, such as B&H, the exclusion of those who are different is socio-politically conditioned, so it is not surprising that atheists are viewed within this matrix. Therefore, it is necessary to expose all the internationally imposed concepts, which result in the systematic destruction and denial of Bosnia's national identity and state.

I maintain that a believer who questions the possibility of an atheist's universal validity as a moral man avoids the believers' chance of becoming a true believer. It is a devastating fact that spiritual usurpation passed into the realm of identity prevailing in B&H today. The fundamental issue is that the loudest atheist "defenders" are some believers who do not absorb

themselves into the three national interest political model's advocacy power-sharing and maintaining status quo, nor agreeing to their participation in this form of sociopolitical representation.

The number of individual needs, and the real impossibilities of their satisfaction, imply the necessary cooperation of the social community members. This willing consent to communion should be manifested in the experimental paradigm of life as solidarity, consent, and cooperation—in short, a crystallized awareness of the needs for joint action.

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