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HANS MOL’S SOCIOLOGY OF RELIGION: BETWEEN IDENTITY AND THE SACRED AS APPLIED TO BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

by Tomislav Tadić

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I. Introduction

The sociology of religion was defined in the second half of the twentieth century by what canonical literature and academic sociological circles commonly refers to as "the secularization debate." Although paradoxical, the secularization debate, which has generally implied suppression, attenuation, and the overall decline of religious influences within the public sphere, has also justified and determined sociology of religion as one of the most stable sociological disciplines. The discussion on secularization has had an autonomous trajectory for which we can say was anything besides comfortable and linear. Now, sociologists like Peter L. Berger, a founder and protagonist of the secularization thesis of the 1960s and 1970s, are openly and publicly giving up on their early theses and attitudes that reflected people living in an extremely secular society where religion is almost non-existent.

Consequently, the discipline faced the considerable task of transforming its basic concepts, which could only be solved by the creation of new concepts, to fulfill the content of
the discipline. This meant that sociologists had to redefine the terms on which the discipline rested on, such as: religion, identity, religious organization, clergy, church, etc., in order to understand and contextualize it from the perspective of a new awareness of time (J. Habermas).

However, the second half of the twentieth century for the sociology of religion was more than fruitful and to a greater or lesser extent, the setting of the theses and topic today serves as an inspiration to religiologists, anthropologists, sociologists and so on. Albeit, it should be noted that Thomas Luckmann, Berger's close associate from the 1960s, had questioned the anthropological conditions of religion in the influential study "The Invisible Religion," where he states that modern sociology of religion is in fact utterly uninspiring as it is reduced to an empirical discipline meant to explicate church-oriented religiosity, i.e. reduced to sociography of the church that in terms of methodology cannot be equated with religion. Here, Luckmann diagnoses the situation of the discipline rather pessimistically, noting that it is "regrettable, however, that the recent sociology of religion as a whole failed to continue the traditions of the classical sociology of religion and, in consequence, acquired the character of a rather narrowly conceived sociography of the churches."¹

In this regard, it should be noted that under the classical sociology of religion, Luckmann primarily had the works of Durkheim and Weber in mind in regards to how he thought the contemporary sociology of religion should correspond. Luckmann's warning indeed came to fruition; mainly theoretical writings crystallized throughout history and profiled as the classical heritage of the discipline. This objection, of course, does not diminish the value of empirical studies but shows that to a greater extent, their results are partial and incomplete.

On the other hand, theorists of rational choice (Rodney Stark, Roger Finke, William Bainbridge, etc.) have criticized the protagonists of the secularization theses precisely because of the overemphasis on theoretical studies and the evident lack of empirical material on which the theoretical studies were based.

Contributions to the reconfiguration of the discipline and the new setting of tasks of the sociology of religion were given by authors who have historically remained on the margins, but without whose contribution, certain ideas that are canonical for science could not be formulated. This paper deals with a non-canonical sociologist of religion, an author who with his thought potential, created the groundwork for strengthening the foundations of the "secularization debate," and made special contribution to the image of the situation of the discipline in the second half of the twentieth century, which may be viewed as textbook-worthy today.

In 1976, Hans Mol wrote a study called *Identity and Sacred: A Sketch for a New Social Scientific Theory of Religion* which synthesizes contributions and achievements of the sociology of religion from the perspective of the discussion of secularization. It led to understanding the sociology of religion in a completely new and authentic way, following and bearing in mind referent sociological trends that have emerged as an expression of time and of which we can especially segregate structural functionalism, social constructivism, symbolic interactionism, and social psychology. Mol indicates that the study *Identity and Sacred* serves as an expression of his many years of work in the discipline and that it has specifically shaped his ideas and views on the sociology of religion, which should be the primary result of the reflection on the secularization debate. The author also notes in the opening of *Identity and Sacred* that one should bear in mind that the experience of research
into religion is inseparable from the subjective, immediate and completely private attitude towards religion. Mol clearly recognizes his attitude has been shaped by his experience of emigrating from the Netherlands to New Zealand under the influence of the forthcoming Second World War and his experience of detention in the Gestapo camp in the Netherlands. Most of Mol’s academic career and literary opus was achieved in New Zealand, which enabled him to work in ethnographic research of the local totemic religions to a certain degree. However, his study, *Identity and Sacred*, represents an extremely complex theoretical work that showcases the experience of a mature author and the apparent clarity and undisputed knowledge of a scientifically, extremely complex matter like religion.

One could polemicize about whether the extensive study *Identity and Sacred* is a systematic work, just as in the framework of classical sociological discussion where the question of the systematic nature of Weber's *Economy and Society* was also raised. However, if we look at the literary and research work of Mol’s sociology of religion, the fact that a large number of his works were written in New Zealand should again be noted. In most of his other works, he deals with particular forms of local religious communities. His study, *Identity and Sacred*, is an exception of its kind, even a precedent, as it represents the theoretical shaping of the scope of the discipline to draw attention to the inconsistency and irrelevance of categories operated by the contemporary sociology of religion. We will return to this issue in a more complete manner in the second section of this paper. I will, however, mention some significant bibliographic works from Mol's literary oeuvre, to make it clear how the study, *Identity and Sacred*, thematically and methodologically differs from his other works. In 1966, Mol published *Religion and Race in New Zealand*; in 1971, he published *Religion in Australia: A Sociological Investigation*; and in 1982, "Trilogy F & F" *The Fixed and Fickle:*
Religion and Identity in New Zealand, The Firm and Formless: Religion and Identity in Aboriginal Australia, and Faith and Fragility: Religion and Identity in Canada were published. He has also published a number of other studies on intercultural interpretations of religion where his most significant book on this topic is Identity and Religion: International, Cross-cultural Approaches, published in 1978.

We can therefore establish that the book, Identity and Sacred, does not correspond with the earlier and later writings of this author by content, theme, and methodology. In regards to all his writings, the study in question, which will be the focus of this paper, is the repository of thought reflection on theoretical sociology of religion and, according to Luckmann's instructions, points to the creative potentials behind the classical theory of sociology of religion, Max Weber and Emile Durkheim, as it has the aim of redefining, recomposing, deconstructing, and re-categorizing, the "zombie categories" (U. Beck) standard discursive and conceptual practice of sociology of religion.

In this context, Mol’s sociology of religion involves substantive and functional assumptions of religion where according to the author, the term religion should be interpreted as a "sacralization of identity" which is the central thesis of Mol's theoretical sociology of religion which we will discuss extensively in the next section of this work. In terms of presenting the definition of religion, the author derives it from one substantive definition that is modeled after one proposed by the classic sociologists of religion which was later transformed into a functional definition. Peter L. Berger recognizes the scheme in which we define religion that implies "movement from the substantive to the functional definition of

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Berger indicates that it is the standard to which every classical sociology of religion progresses with the objective of maintaining the notion of scientific objectivity. We could further discuss the different types and kinds of definitions of religion but this question requires its own study; therefore, it is particularly important for us to point out those characteristics in defining which are relevant in the context of Mol's sociology of religion.

In the fifth section of this paper, we will show, among other things, implications of “identity theory of religion” in the context of the post-war (1992-1995) society of Bosnia and Herzegovina to illuminate some aspects in which Mol's theory was hidden from dominant academic and political circles in this society.

II. Religion as a Sacralization of Identity: Remarks about the Character of the Discipline

As seen in the study, Identity and Sacred, Mol’s theoretical views on the sociology of religion confronts metanarratives (J.F. Lyotard) of the discipline (sacred, identity, religion, secular, moral, etc.) with the aim of pointing out the insufficiency and inadequacy of understanding them within the trendy explications of these phenomena, elaborating and constructing an entirely controversial stance on the character of this science, and which in the historically-contextual sense, is inextricably linked to the concept of "civil religion" by Robert N. Bellah elaborated in an essay in 1967, Civil Religion in America. At several places Mol indicates and emphasizes to what extent Bellah's concept of civil religion is important and how the so-called "revitalization of religiosity" can no longer be sought after in the vista of the traditional church-oriented religiosity, but in a completely new construct that can "oxymoronically be defined as secular religiosity." However, before we start to analyze the

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basic concept of Mol's sociology of religion, which is the concept of *sacralization of identity*, let’s point to an instruction by Bellah regarding the character of the sociological study of religion within which one can situate Mol's theoretical position. Here, Bellah concludes:

> Sociologists have undertaken three main types of religious study. They have studied religion as a central theoretical problem in the understanding of social action. They have studied relation between religion and other areas of social life, such as economics, politics, and social class. And finally, they have studied religious roles, organizations, and movements. This article is concerned primarily with the theoretical study of religion and secondarily with the relation between religion and the social structure.⁵

The study, *Identity and Sacred*, can be viewed on two levels: first, it represents the criticism of the current situation in the sociology of religion, and second, it provides a new paradigm for understanding religion and the religious in the modern world from the perspective of interpretation of *secularization as a new form of sacralization*. Certainly, this could be determined as controversial in Mol's hypothesis and is directly bound to Bellah's concept of civil religion. Of course, Mol believes that this reconstruction should be conducted at the front of the interdisciplinary (re)interpreting of the sociology of religion, and the understanding of the dual and ambivalent character of the object of its scientific research. It is particularly important to bear in mind the dual nature of religion within which inquiries related to traditional sociology of religion, and the inquiries that autonomously acquire meaning in Mol's paradigm of understanding of religion, are clearly delineated. Therefore, Mol recommends that *religion* in the scientific interpretation is differentiated and determined in two ways, which should, according to his instruction, be distinguished in the literary manner within the discipline and which would result in the bifurcation that originated from

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the understanding of religion and the religious as a complex *symbolic system* (C. Geertz) that operates with two different *universes of meaning* (T. Luckmann).

Thus, sociologists should phonologically and graphologically distinguish *religion1* and *religion2* as a technical and functional differentiation that allows the epiphany of all the other constructs within the discipline, and as a difference from which all uncertainties can be derived and considered in regard to the explanatory logic of the phenomenon that we inadequately precisely call *religion*. Sociology of religion should, according to Mol, be divided into the *traditional sociology of religion* which would focus its analysis on questions such as: traditional religious organizations, the relationship of traditional religious organizations to other social systems, church-oriented religiosity, the correlation between the national and religious, the relationship of orthopraxy and orthodoxy within the primordial, "national and universal" religions (Gustav Mensching), the problem of dialogue between religions, the problem of the relationship between religion and violence, the symbolism of traditional religion, the correlation between the economic and religious system, etc. All questions regarding the traditional sociology of religion, in other words, should be marked as *religion1* in order to avoid misunderstandings in the definition of religion. It is, therefore, a religion conceived "in a restricted sense, e.g. of as a special organization."

On the other hand, it is necessary to talk about *religion2* which implies that the concept of religion "is understood in a broad sense as the sacralization of identity," which would therefore mean that any aspect of human identity, anything with what we are able to identify, both individually and collectively, is sacralized and established as its own kind of religious system. When thoroughly observed, this would be Mol's basic hypothesis from which we

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7 Ibid.
unambiguously see the connection and similarity with Bellah's concept of civil religion. A differentiation similar to this one, but in a different context, is popularized in sociological literature by the Japanese-American sociologist, Joseph Mitsuo Kitagawa, whose interpretation is that there are two sociologies of religion, of which one is derived from religious studies (Religionswissenschaft) and the other from “traditional” sociology.

However, before analyzing the relationship between religion, identity and sacred, according to Mol, one should look at another methodological instruction of particular importance for the whole of his sociology of religion, which from the perspective of this study, represents the focal point of the critical approach to the structure of his ideas. In fact, in the introduction to Identity and Sacred, Mol notes:

This book is a sketch for a general, social-scientific, theory of religion. It is a sketch in the sense that is incomplete and needs further filling in and rubbing out. Yet it is also a sketch in the sense that it provides tentative, plausible, coherence. It is an attempt to integrate anthropological, historical, psychological, and sociological approaches to religion into one conceptual scheme. It is also a stocktaking of years of extensive reading, research, and writing in the field. If my own previous work occasionally occupies center stage, the reason is that this book grew out of a critical dialogue with that work. Hopefully, this book is an improvement! This study also argues that existing categorizations in the sociology of religion are either inconsistent (...) or irrelevant for a systematic, comprehensive, sociological approach to religious phenomena.

Here, Mol believes that the scientific (re)interpretation of religion must be played out on the ground of an interdisciplinary approach to this phenomenon, especially if we are talking about what we have defined as religion1. This would also pave way to what would arise in the years to follow, what one of the most influential anthropologists of religion, Talal Asad, the author of the study, Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity, call

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9 Ibid, ix.
“transformation in concepts that enable the transformation in practices,”¹⁰ because to Asad, the secular is also thought of as an epistemic category and not solely as a political doctrine. Mol remains entirely inconsistent to his own maxim, because ultimately, *Identity and Sacred*, when viewed purely methodically, reduces the criticism of structural functionalism, symbolic interactionism, and social psychology to the ground, and builds their own theoretical constellation that manifests itself as a "sacralization of identity" which is ultimately derived from the concept of *civil religion* by methodological mechanisms of the aforementioned sociological traditions. The complaint, therefore, is that there hardly is any trace of serious anthropological, historical, or purely psychological insights and to which some extent, could be justified by the argument that it is still a "draft" and consequently an *unfinished project* (J. Habermas).

III. The Mechanism of “Sacralization” of “Identity”

What, then, is the implication by this basic notion that religion is "the sacralization of identity"? In order to adequately explicate this construct, according to the author's view, we should first elaborate on the conceptual structure and the logic of the concept of "identity" and then explain the concept of "sacralization."

The need for identity in sociology and anthropology is interpreted as one of the most fundamental and evolutionarily speaking, important needs of the human species. Identity is, formulated in other words, the most pervasive structure in the history of humankind. Throughout cultural and social history, manifold determinations have differentiated in respect to which the identity can be built. From the perspective of his theory, Mol favors what

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according to him, is called the *theory of multiple identities*, which starts from the fact that people simultaneously identify with a number of different things that ultimately make their *Weltanschauung*. Social evolutionism is provided with the powerful instrument of social differentiation and scientifically shaped in the context of the systems theory and the social action theory (T. Parsons - M. Weber), and the image of continuity that is preserved by its history. Years later, it was adequately noted by sociologist, Anthony Giddens, as responsible for the emergence of complex theories of identity, of which the *traditional religious identity* is imposed upon and is offered as just one type present in the identity market that we can legitimately decide not to choose. Mol argues that it is a total misconception that primates, as part of their primordial community, do not have a strong need for identity. On the contrary, they identify themselves, or so to speak, by manifesting their identity in relation to the *territory* they inhabit and by the goods with which they use to supply the needs of the community. Territory means the *topos* of life and death, which represents the highest value of all.

In another form and some other cause, to this day, the culture of collective identification with territory has been passed down and inherited, given that the largest number of wars is still led in relation to the geopolitical and national infrastructure of the world, because this [nation] has in turn become unthinkable without the "territory understood as homeland." For Mol, the issue of *territory*, i.e. the question of belonging to a geography, is the question from which we should generally derive the sociological problem of identity. As a result, territory, for the primitive man, represents the *sacred* in the purest sense of the word. *Sacred*, in the categories determined by Rudolf Otto, is derived from the feeling of primal fear, horror, despair, as well as fascination and exhilaration, serving as *mysterium tremendum et fascinans*,

before which a man is nothing more than an ordinary mortal—or so to use Eliade's characterization, mere "dust and ashes."

The question of identity in a contemporary context, according to Mol, is by the process of differentiation now brought into a state of dispersion, fragmentation, instability, fragility and fluidity. In the 1960s, as part of his empirical research, sociologist, Kenneth Keniston, conceptually wrote this from the perspective of the concept of "commitment." Today, from the perspective of a relatively recent history, the main protagonist of the thesis of the fluid epoch of the modern era and the unstable structures of identity, which occur in the womb of such an image of the modern era, is sociologist Zygmunt Bauman.

Bauman's conclusion is that the basic motive of the contemporary epoch of the human era is "melting the solids," the fruitful optic from which Mol's intentions and thesis of a multiple identity can be seen, though Mol's intention is clearly far more modest than Bauman's "large narrative" of the epoch. However, Bauman talks about the "dissolution," but what is dissolved and soaked at the same time becomes a fertile ground from which an entirely new repository of "particles" or "residues" is derived, of which each and every one of those represents the means and source of the identification of the individual and the collective, implying the emergence of "new" forms of identity. Therefore, individuals and collectives can identify with a number of things. In other words, there is the symbolic location of identity from which we can sort out a series of direct examples, and the following listed are some of the author's authentic examples: "celibacy, sex, war, beauty, the sacred, the profane, reason, feelings, science, equality, women, nationalism, virginity, etc." Human individual and collective identities therefore appear as multiplied, pluralistic and diverse. Sociologist, Anthony D.

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Smith, states in the study, *National Identity*, that "the self is composed of multiple identities and roles--familial, territorial, class, religious, ethnic and gender"\(^{14}\)

Complications arise when the structure of identity is trying to be undermined and degraded by an external intervention in the form of coercion or compulsion in a way that crystallizes the sentiment that can be expressed in terms of a negative cult (Durkheim) as a prohibition relating to the experience of *touch*. In other words, identity *should not be meddled with* since it is perceived as a determining historical trajectory of the human species on an *individual* as well as a *collective* level.

In accordance with the above said, the question here is why is the role of identity in building sociology of religion so important to Hans Mol? Identity is so important to him that he names this entire theory, in one of his later texts below, the "identity theory of religion."\(^{15}\) It is because of this conception of identity that leads us to the statement that "sacralizing patterns exist outside of religion," which we identify in Mol's theoretical space, as *sacred* in the *referential sense*. *Sacred*, understood in this way, does not need to be orientated according to the traditional, church-orientated religiosity. In other words, if modern western society identifies with the *principles and world views of secularization*, that only means that new forms are sanctified that are relevant to the construction of the living world, meaning secular values are sanctified which implies that by the processes of secularization, understood in the conservative sense, sacralization processes did not suspend, as often interpreted, but they are intensified in relation to unconventional, unorthodox, and non-traditional forms, which can symbolically function as *religious forms*. It is possible to sanctify any identity: celibacy,

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ethnicity, ideology, etc. Any Weltanschauung can become the source of the Sacred and function as the Sacred. Thus, the process of secularization is, completely paradoxically, a process of sacralization.

The process of transformation of the secular plan into the sacred plan can be characterized by what Andrew McGreeley, who by Mol's understanding, calls "sacralizing tendency," which is historically present as a primordial structure incorporated into the essence of the human habitus. That means that a person in any time-space distantiation\textsuperscript{16} seeks to express him/herself with the unique experience of the Sacred irreducible to other types of human experience and in which the plausibility of Otto's thesis is seen that the Sacred is a category a priori, in which the religious experience manifests as a reality sui generis.

Therefore, if we interpret the sacred as an epistemological category immanent to human subjectivity from the perspective of secular patterns of life, and we seek answers to the question about its essential status in the contemporary age, we can establish that something like "a human without religion" or "empty secular creature" does not exist, but that there is a transformation, in the classical structuralist term, of one system plan of meaning into another system plan of meaning, a transformation in which the ontological plan of the secular translates and transforms into the plan of the sacred. Here, the secular starts to function as a surrogate for the hierophanic and theophanic in the traditional sense of these terms. This is how this issue is viewed by the phenomenology of religion of Mirce Eliade, which is particularly important to Hans Mol who argues in his core thesis: “But this nonreligious man descends from homo religious and, whether he likes it or not he is also the work of religious man. (...) In short he is the result of a process of desacralization. (...) For, as we said before, nonreligious man in the pure state is a comparatively rare phenomenon, even in the most

desacralized of modern societies. The majority of “irreligious” still behave religiously, even though they are not aware of the fact.”\textsuperscript{17}

The man of the contemporary epoch, ergo, expresses his religiosity with the \textit{sacralizing tendency} (McGreley) oriented towards the \textit{secular} space, which includes the plurality of the identity particles of which each may become and take on the function of the \textit{Sacred}. In other words, secular forms have a logical and ontological potentiality to become sacral forms.

However, the question is in which sense Mol understands "\textit{mechanism}" of sacralization of identity and how it needs to be addressed, i.e., like why is the \textit{sacralization of identity} an unthinkable category without the function which the notion, "\textit{mechanism}," provides us with? The term \textit{mechanism} here implies the existence of a number of components that interact with each other with the aim of producing certain structures which condition the existence and production of a certain whole. This could be literally interpreted with an analogy about the mechanical wristwatch, which implies the existence of a number of very complex components that are expected to function in perfect order compatible to one another and that show, to a smaller or larger but allowable deviation, the correct time as an unambiguous product. The construct of \textit{mechanism} allows us ultimately to translate secular forms into sacral forms, i.e., it provides us, as we have said before, with the existence of sacralized structures outside of the traditional religious discourse.

What, therefore, are the components of the "\textit{mechanism}" of sacralization of identity, and in what essential way does it form? Mol lists four elements necessary to sanctify a certain identity and in accordance to that, fulfills a specific reality with the \textit{sacral continuum}. Namely, it is about the elements of: "1) Objectification, 2) Commitment, 3) Ritual and 4)

Myth." Objectification implies the existence of a certain object which can be brought into a state of order, and then extrapolated to function "as if it is less vulnerable to contradictions, exceptions, and contingencies." Objectification could be, according to our interpretation, understood as the nucleus of sacralization, as it describes what is being sanctified and what will in the future, function as the source of the sacred. Objectification is a conditio sine qua non of the mechanism of sacralization. The mechanism of commitment literally means "a foci of identity;" describing the fact that we commit and why we commit. The mechanism of commitment implies a kind of nexus between the subject that sacralizes and adopts sacralized forms, and the object that is being sacralized and functions as the source of the sacred, henceforth taking on the assigned role of the sacred. The mechanism of ritual functions by the structural functionalist principle of "maintaining the pattern" of the structure, providing its pervasiveness with mutual ceremonial repeating, in which its focus is on the sacralized object.

The ritual implies "repetitive actions, articulations, and movements which prevent the object of sacralizations to be lost sight of." Ritual behavior could be characterized, viewed in the sociological sense, as the most important behavior because it involves action of the group, and through this common activity, it maintains its structure. The mechanism of myth allows the complementary and simultaneous existence of all the previous elements of the mechanism of sacralization of identity, because without a common mythical image of the world (myths about common [symbolical] origin and history, common [symbolical] belonging, common [symbolical] decay, common [symbolical] future, etc.), there is no

19 Ibid.
20 Ibid.
21 Ibid.
community of believers whose ultimate essence is to legitimize sacred as sacred, to evidently confirm that something functions as sacred.

IV. The Boundaries of the "Identity" Theory of Religion in the Contemporary Social Context

In the text, *The Identity Model of Religion*, Mol concretizes in which element the then new identity theory of religion" differs from other sociological approaches to this problem: “Identity theory is a theory which links religion to identity in order to provide a comprehensive frame of reference for the large amount of data about religion in the social sciences. The term “identity” has been chosen in preference to other concepts such as meaning, integration, interpretation of reality, order, security, and the like. It connotes “sameness,” “wholeness,” “boundary,” and “structure.” And these concepts in turn are crucial for the understanding of the function of religion for individuals as well as for groups, both in primitive and in modern societies.”

Indeed, when reflecting on the issue of identity in the socio-scientific perspective, it is realized that most of the problems that sociologists of religion encounter (especially in cross-cultural studies), occur in respect to an incomplete understanding of the term, identity, as it is exclusively interpreted in the history of sociology. We have shown that for Mol, an understanding of identity is the key to understanding religion and that it is enabled through the mechanism of sacralization. Therefore, we can almost talk about the existence of a triangulation: identity, the four-dimensional mechanism of sacralization, and religion as a form in which identity particles can be internalized, from which a three-level understanding of social reality can emerge (individual, group, society, and their manifold derivations), of which each of these can function as a potential sacralizing form.

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In this sense, these questions are posed: what are the limits of identity theory of religion, what are the limitations of the contemporary epoch of humanity in the midst of an almost unlimited number of "sacralizing potentialities"? How do we justify the existence of a large number of "surrogate religions?" Can the identity theory of religion help us understand the inconsistencies of the contemporary age, in which the leading terms used are phrases such as "civil religion," "nationalism as a religion," "political religion," "public religion," "secular religion," and so on? From this, it is implied that the so-called historical/traditional religions lose their importance and that their place is taken by the establishment of the "secular constitution" in the modern epoch by new forms of the religious which sacralizes any of the mentioned ideological structures. Is it possible to say that for Hans Mol chauvinism, nationalism, and fundamentalisms of various types are the boundaries of the identity theory of religion? To what extent then can Berger's project of "desecularization of the world," or Eliade's position on the sacred as a structure, and the modern human, and when considering that he needs the sacred as an existential, sanctifies the profane and be better viewed and understood from this perspective?

For Mol, the identity model of religion was supposed to represent a kind of a revolution in the way sociologists think and reflect on religion in a contemporary social context, and it was supposed to function as a model to illuminate how religion in various structural potentialities "penetrates into the social world." Since the question of identity is, understood in the anthropological sense, a substantial question of the human species, it is almost completely (self) understandable that the boundaries of the identity model of religion are based on the transformative process between the "healthy" and the "synthetic" identity.

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mentioned by Erik Erikson. Viewed principally, the above-mentioned triadic relation, a paradox, can at the same time function as a factor of socio-cultural integration and of socio-cultural disintegration, which is reflected in the consequences that the sacralized identity has on real social relations.

We are, therefore, interested in components of the so-called "synthetic identity," and it should be kept in mind that Mol directly takes this explanation from Eriksen and whose understanding, are explicated in Identity and Sacred as: "There are kinds of collective identities, however (such as class, nation, culture), which Erikson likes and which he therefore regards as leading to true identity, and others (such as extreme nationalism, racism, or class consciousness) which he dislikes and which he calls “synthetic identities.”

In order to fully understand which social practices stem from "synthetic identities," two dimensions of the "social theory of identity" need to be considered, which represent the two most general poles of configuration of the understanding of identity in classical, that is, conventional social psychology and which are reflected in the binary oppositions collectively/personally; publicly/privately; "mentally/ physically" (C. H Cooley) from which latent forms of shaping social reality may arise, and in the vocabulary of the sociology of religion, can be expressed by the differentiation orthodoxy/heterodoxy.

For us, given that we focus on pathogen, that is "synthetic" transformations of the "social theory of identity," two facts particularly come into consideration that are present in the contemporary world which represent an exclusive danger when being sacralized. Political and scientific discourse as spheres are particularly susceptible to sacralization, a textbook example from which the boundaries of "identity theory of religion" can be determined from the

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26 Ibid.
perspective of what we define as "synthetic identity." Generally speaking, each identity in one moment can be transformed from a "healthy" into a "synthetic" identity. There are a number of methodological instruments that we could use to argue such a thesis, given that we, as sociologists, are observing either an individual, social group, or the whole collective. However, if we have a philosophically conceived sketch of history in mind, it is clear that special fixation should be directed to the collective, i.e. social identities given that the whole history is more or less a history of "synthetic identities" (radical nationalism, chauvinism, totalitarianism, and other barbarisms).

According to Mol's understanding, the Modern Age was the epoch in which Kant's "Copernican Revolution" also meant the revolution of the formative transformation of the phenomenological experience of religion, that is, the transformation of the form of religious experience in a way that transforms transcendence from the unreachable, unthinkable abstract principle grouped around the concept of a deity, into a completely thinkable, logically consistent order that is complementary and consistent with all criteria of human rationality. It was, therefore, a mere transformation of one corps of meaning of the sacred to another corps of meaning of the sacred. Nature, ultimately, becomes god while the dogmatic, historical, religious God leaves the human historical experience. Rational laws of nature begin to function as sacral, which are quite paradoxical, as in the end, they turn out to be equally irrational as the dogmatic theological principles. In other words, scientific discourse begins to deify and functions as a source of the Sacred. In a strict sense, it was the "theological determinism that was replaced by scientific determinism." 27

Modern Age sacralization of the scientific discourse is accompanied by the sacralization of, for sociology, a far more interesting phenomenon—the phenomenon of politics. The sacralization of the phenomenon of politics created a historical space for the emergence of so-called "political religions," or as we might say in the somewhat harsher vocabulary of the "conservative revolutionary," Carl Schmitt, the emergence of "political theologies." We will keep to the term "political religion," whereby it is thought of as a selective sacralization of certain political doctrines and ideologies, which in historical terms occur as very closed groupings aimed at imposing its Weltanschauung, regardless of the consequences and with the goal of establishing political dominance, bearing in mind the unbreakable link between political action and social power, stemming from Weber’s understanding of these terms.

The sacralization of political ideologies and doctrines results in the emergence of an especially dangerous type of "synthetic identity," stemming from the fact that to legitimize themselves, such identities assume Schmitt's figure of the "enemy" as necessary for establishing and maintaining the social order, which is historically installed by the principle of ethnic cleansing, aggression, annexation, concentration camps, etc. Political religions historically had the function to provide in the social order: 1) "the political functions as omnipresent," as one that is present in every aspect of social structure and completely irreplaceable from industry and real politics to culture and art, and to 2) provide that "the sovereign can create a political community only by identifying enemies, reconciling his citizens by excluding others."29

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29 Ibid, 192.
Mol recognizes at least three problems when it comes to political religions: their legitimacy, their maintenance, and their content. If political religions function on the principle of apotheosis or the deification of political systems and, if from Machiavelli and Rousseau, those are perceived as a source of political integration of the social community, is it then possible to find some aspects that would damage the seemingly stable moment for establishing social control as in the case in political religions. Mol notes two facts regarding this problem. The first is the possibility that it can "come to a partial sacralization which leads to a functional retention."30 This leads us to the other fact that is reflected in the performance of the so-called "nomical function of religion"31 and that is that the "internal political sacralisation of subsystems cannot very easily and elegantly supply us with situations when our fragile identity: anxiety, death, injustice, etc., comes to expression."32

From this, the view emerges that political religions fail to conduct the so-called "complementing function," reflected in the fact that religions are able to integrate and legitimate the rest, residuum, which inevitably exists in the life of every man and before which, the true fragility and imperfection of the human being manifest, and comes to light in situations of loss of loved ones, survival of deep traumas, or as expressed in the phrase of Karl Jasper, meeting with "borderline situations" in respect of how the world appears as shock, trauma, rupture, gap, etc., and religion as a symbolic system that is able to lead such situations into order, supply them with meaning, and reduce, to a certain extent, the experience of trauma itself. Bronislaw Malinowski, for example, in this nomical and symbolical function of religion, has seen the essence of rites as cathartic rituals. For Mol, political religions are being limited by individual human fates and their plots and denouements. However, on the social

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30 Mol, Identity and the Sacred, 121.
32 Mol, Identity and the Sacred, 120.
and economic plan, their impact is extremely important, strong and almost unavoidable in the constellation of modern complex societies.

The example for the strong impact of political religions, and their mutations and distortions in the contemporary world, can be particularly found in a highly complex society of post-war Bosnia and Herzegovina. We will look into this question in the next section.

V. Post-Dayton Bosnia and Herzegovina in Distortion Mirrors of “The Mechanism of Sacralization of Identity”

Following the 1995 Dayton Peace Agreement, the BiH society, positioned in the sociological optics, can be characterized by multiple internal deviations, contradictions, anomalies, fragmentation or, generally speaking, unstable "multiple political and cultural programs of the modern world."33 Yet, the post-Dayton BiH society could most clearly be expressed with a determinant encompassed with the phrase: "sacral discourse of nationalism." The analysis of political religions so characteristic for Bosnia and Herzegovina, through the field of totalitarian ideologies, leads us to the inherent ambivalence and the characteristics of the same in the context of the historical understanding of political religions within the space of which those face the organized traditional religions. It should be kept in mind, which we will try to show in this section, that Mol's theory of religion as "the mechanism of sacralization of identity" can be used for explication of the ways in which the construction of "sacral discourse of nationalism" was carried away and that this is exactly one of the reasons why, inter alia, his theory was hidden and unpopular in the wider academic space.

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33 S.N Eisenstadt, „Multiple Modernities“ (Daedalus, 2000): 129, 1
During the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the religions’ characteristic of the area have emerged, strengthened, and (re)established themselves, particularly Roman Catholicism, Islam, and Orthodox Christianity, and their roles in the construction and perpetuation of the living world of social and cultural reality and identity, the design of which bears great influence today. If you look at the fact that in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries we work and talk about the "revitalization of religion," this thesis should not surprise us. However, when bearing in mind the role that religious communities have played in terms of institutionalized religions, in the critical moments related to the survival of Bosnia and Herzegovina as a sovereign, autonomous, and internationally recognized state and legal entity, their role and relation to reality as an expression of time should very much surprise us. What can be expressed as a principal position is that religious communities have generally pursued a policy of extreme retrogression, disintegration, fragmentation and sacralization of all those forms which, from the nature of what was being done, do not fit the mold of universal religions. Under the nomination of "universality," many "particularities" were created that were the source of the most terrible suffering in Europe after World War II, hence their being special targets of war and the interests of the opposing sides embodied in the form of churches and mosques.

Even almost thirty years after the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina, we are witnessing a situation where, as a manner of speaking, the main indicators a group of people who are typically shifted the blame by others for the suffering and horrors of war, can be reduced to mere statistics on destroyed religious facilities. This is best seen by analyzing the media space, which itself is almost entirely corrupted by political entities, both print and electronic media, from whom we very often hear phrases expressed in terms of: "they destroyed so many
of our mosques" and "they burned so many of our churches" or "we did not burn churches while they set fires to our mosques," and so on. These phrases are frequently used, mostly in the sphere of politics, as a source for political legitimacy of evil and systemic indoctrination of "hatred towards the other" that is almost always, just like with Carl Schmitt, portrayed as the enemy.

Bosnia and Herzegovina therefore serve as a quality example, with authentic examples of activities of political religions pursuant to form and the principle of imagining and projecting the other and those who are different as the enemy in the recent history of Europe. The lamentable destiny of Bosnia and Herzegovina lies in the fact that the tensions that have risen during the years of war have instead of simmering down, continued to simmer thirty years after the fact, representing the source of a society that is growing more divided by the day. For example, while the entire European community in the twenty-first century tended to lean towards the abolition of borders, the Bosnian society is now leaning in the opposite direction, i.e., it is leaning towards deeper and sharper borders even in situations where those may only be "imaginary" (Benedict Anderson).

The issue of the political religions of Bosnia and Herzegovina can be seen through the prism of "the mechanism of the sacralization of identity" from the scientific point of view on two levels. First, it understands a role that can be expressed in the form of "political instrumentalization of institutionalized religion" which is implemented and misused by the leading national elite, and on the other hand, the nationalism itself as a kind of authentic political religion (mostly associated with the modernist project). Therefore, such a sociological ambivalence can precisely be defined as an authentic experience of religious
sense" recognized for the BiH model, which is reflected in a two-way sacralization of usually theoretically differentiated phenomenon, of religion as an institution on one hand, and nationalism as an ideology on the other.

In this sense, what we have in Bosnia and Herzegovina, following the signing of the peace agreement in 1995 in Dayton, is the progressive emergence of the so-called political Islam, political Orthodoxy, and political Catholicism which have appeared at a time when the social order, in its original sense, was threatened and "suspended" (Schmitt), and when "fragile frame of identity" were undermined, usurped, and completely devastated. By the nature of things, traditional religions, or what Hans Mol includes in the term Religion1, appear as repositories of symbolic meanings and symbolic resources that can permanently fix personal, group, and collective identity. The identity that has, certainly, emerged as the most controversial was the national identity, which was expressed and shaped in the form of ancient phrases about the supposed national issue and the fate of the nation. This thesis can be formed in the belief that: "Religious communities (and religion) were the most important source of resistance to the former socialist regime that had an impact on almost all social structures (institutional and cognitive), and that there was no other force of similar size and effect as well as that, along with everything else, it was also a source of preservation and transmission of national culture and its immanent value."

It is important to again point out the fact that the early post-socialist period (from the beginning of the 1992-1995 war), at the level of BiH society, was marked by a strong "ethnicization of the sacred" and "sacralization of the ethnic," hence national ideologies sought (and found) support in religious doctrines with the aim of establishing a new ruling

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35 Mol, Identity and the Sacred, 55.
establishment, and to that effect, there is no difference concerning the three largest religious communities in BiH (Islamic, Orthodox, and Roman Catholic).\(^{36}\)

The argument for nationalism as a religion in the light of its role in the construction of identity, in theory, can most directly be found in classical and paradigmatic study of Carlton J.H. Hayes’ work, *Nationalism: A Religion*, which shows that through language and historical tradition, nationality is formed and that "religious sense" refers to it when, with the processes of modernization and secularization, the impact of the decline of traditional religions in the European context comes to the forefront. It is this insight of conjuncture that orients us towards Mol's "identity theory of religion" and its ambiguity in the Bosnian social context. Hayes first speaks about the modernist transformation of communism as a political religion into nationalism, then makes the point that if it is rudimentary, it becomes objectified in the form of *tribalism* and has two elementary components as generators of emotional and euphoric mobilizing of the masses: (1) linguistic affiliation or (2) religion.

The Bosnian example has turned out to be a true example of Mol's thesis in the sense that in situations of great social crisis, the collective identities get degraded and questioned, and only religion can be seen as a source of current stabilization of the socio-anthropological habitus. The issue that is characteristic for BiH society is, as mentioned above, the two-way action of the mechanism of the sacralization of identity, which is certainly a sociological precedent, as it refers to the sacralization of the national and the nationalization of the sacred and that results in the construction and continuous exaltation of ethno-religious sacral discourse that permeates the totality of BiH society.

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From this arises the paradox of Bosnian identity: Bosniaks are identified as Muslims, Croats are identified as Roman Catholics, and Serbs are identified as Orthodox. Ethnicity, then, implies a religious affiliation and *vice versa*. Hence, this results in nominal growth of religiousness in Bosnian society, while a similar argument cannot be provided for issues related to religious participation and practice. To make matters worse, the political entities, which are viewed as legitimate representatives of their peoples, assume the right to declare themselves the guardians of "Islam", "Roman Catholicism," and "Orthodoxy," and their ultimate and authentic interpreters. In the wake of these insights, it is clear why contemporary sociologists of religion, like Daniele Hervieu-Leger and David Martin say "that the context of the war in the Balkans is the context of religious war" and interpret it against the background of "the rise of ethnic religions."37

Mol’s *identity theory of religion* and the *mechanism of sacralization of identity* appear here as instances through which it is possible to adequately elaborate and shed light on the nature of Bosnian society in the post-traditional sociological context with a focus on the issue of construction of collective identity within the framework of which the "social reality of religion" (Berger) occupies a crucial place, and where it is ultimately possible to recognize the form of symbiotic unity of institutionalized religious organizations and "nationalism as a specific type of social fact and social action."39

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38 Ibid.
VI. Conclusion

Hans Mol's sociology of religion is a kind of unconventional tendency for the understanding of religion in its scientific perspective positioned in the center of what is probably the most attractive issue among sociologists of religion, which is the issue of secularization. Unlike the mainstream theories of secularization of the 1960s and 1970s of the twentieth century, Mol's theory of secularization serves as a regulatory instrument for perceiving the actual ranges of the very processes of secularization itself, and theories that have arisen in the context of sociology in respect to secularization as a dominant topic. The history of the sociology of religion showed that the discussion on secularization is a fundamental question, and for Malcolm Hamilton, the understanding of secularization is a thing of the definition and interpretation of religion per se. What is it, then, that makes Mol’s theory of religion "unconventional" and yet so important?

Mol’s hypothesis on religion, as we develop it, can be summarized as follows:

1. Religion is "the sacralization of identity" and in the middle of this hypothesis is the idea of "multiple identities," which implies that religion1 and religion2 should be phonologically and graphologically distinguished (traditional religious organizations in relation to what occurs as a result of the thesis about "sacralization of identity": any identity particle that can function as a source of the Sacred.)

2. The "sacralization of identity" should be understood as a mechanism that has its four components: objectification, commitment, ritual, and myth.

3. The "sacralization of identity" through its mechanisms enables the sacralization of secular spheres of life which brings the discussion closer to ideas "of nationalism as an authentic

religion of modernity" and the concept of "civil" and "political" religions. This brings us to a differentiation between what we hypothetically might call biodynamic identity which is opposed by "synthetic" collective identities of E. Eriksen.

4. Hans Mol's theory of religion is firmly linked to the presumption of the existence of surrogate forms of traditional religions which will on the level of idea vigorously oppose authors such as Talal Asad, David Martin, and William T. Cavanaugh, who consider religion as a whole to be irreducible to any similar experience, but not denying the fact that there are experiences in their practices that ideally imitate and simulate religion.

5. Mol's theory of religion can be applied to the unique and authentic socio-anthropological context of Bosnia and Herzegovina, which can be used to illuminate one type of self-understanding of this highly complex society created after the Yugoslav wars. Understanding the sociological case of Bosnia and Herzegovina teaches us about the possibility of the complementary existence of bidirectional types of political religions in the same society and explains the role of religion in the process of construction of the collective identity.

6. In the broader context, Mol’s sociology of religion should be positioned in the discussion about secularization and perceived from the perspective of the atmosphere of creation of a "theory of secularization" actively guided in the 1960s and 1970s of the twentieth century.

   In the final analysis, the consequences of the "identity theory of religion" can be interpreted by what José Casanova would call the model of "the deprivatization of religion" in the modern world. It is reflected in what he recognizes as a variant of the American social model, which is reflected in the decline of church-oriented religiosity, the strengthening of denominational religious organizations, and the general individual faith that wants to exercise a strong intervention in the public sphere and branch itself through all its constituent elements.

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This issue is, therefore, about the need of sacralized secular forms, which from the perspective of the consequences of their actions, may equally want to transform the public sphere as this has been done by traditional religious organizations and all the structures that have expressed sacralizing potentialities. Of course, it should be noted that here, Casanova's thesis on "deprivatization of religion," is used in a somewhat altered form from its original form.

For Hans Mol, the "identity theory of religion" reconciles two forms which Habermas would later understand as necessary preconditions for the construction of a complete theory of society: the lifeworld, on one hand, and the world of social systems, on the other. Mol, therefore, shows how religious forms operate on an individual as well as on a group and social level.

Finally, it should be noted that, sociologically speaking, the character of understanding religions, starting from what they are in their traditional form and moving towards their surrogate forms, radically transformed in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. The transformed character of religiosity requires a transformation in the scientific methodology where we are trying to capture the complex socio-ontological, epistemological and socio-anthropological granulations which form such a divergent term as religion. The importance of the theoretical interventions of Mol, from the standpoint of the history of sociology, lies in recognizing the reconstructing form within the discipline that needs to synthetically and polythetically understand the phenomenon which it explores. In a sense, this line exactly can be considered a fundamental uniqueness and a concrete contribution to the sociology of religion as one of the tendencies which aims for scientific explication and analytically-critical reconstruction of what we encompass with the term religion.


