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SERBIAN JERUSALEM:
RELIGIOUS NATIONALISM, GLOBALIZATION AND THE
INVENTION OF A HOLY LAND IN EUROPE’S PERIPHERY, 1985-2017

By Vjekoslav Perica

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ABSTRACT

According to beliefs of religious nationalism, a nation is a community of ancestors and descendants, dead and living, past and present. As such, it incorporates within its territory all past and present markers of nationhood, notably historic religious monuments as the physical evidence of the perennial existence of the religious and ethnic community that is, in the nationalist imagination, of the nation. Thus, the history of the shrines and monuments, as told in religious tales and preserved in the rituals, is the history of the nation. In many parts of the world, contesting claims to consecrated territories clash. The struggles evolve into holy wars between good and evil and angels and demons. The enmity cemented by religion does not end until demythologization of history or until one side or the other has been destroyed. At the same time, in a globalized world, narratives of ethnic and religious nationalisms are no longer isolated from each other as they used to be. In recent decades, they have observed each other and borrowed and influenced one another. The case under consideration comparatively observes the conflicts in Kosovo in the Balkan and in Israel-Palestine in order to critically examine the nationalist and religious politics behind the nationalist discourses on history and religion, the past and the present, and the sacred and the secular.
1. **Introduction**

Since the national self-determination debates at the Paris Peace conference a hundred years ago, the Balkans and the Middle East have become presumably the most instructive laboratories for students of nationalist struggles and unfinished nation-formation. A hundred years ago, two men of the hour, American President Wilson and Russian communist leader Lenin, proclaimed the “right” to national self-determination although no world leader to this day has elaborated who, when, and how to achieve it peacefully.\(^1\) Since then, various nationalist movements have become involved in territorial disputes often inciting regional wars.\(^2\) Wilson insisted on democratic legitimation for nationalist claims through plebiscites verified by the international community that would show the will of the majority population in often-contested territories. Well in advance of the Paris Peace conference, various nationalist movements, all of them referring to Wilson’s points and principles, had become involved in territorial disputes threatening regional wars. Seeking stability and making the new world order, the peacemakers at Paris deployed multinational peacekeeping forces in areas of nationalist conflict to buy time to study maps and books in history and anthropology to adjudicate contesting claims.\(^3\) Nationalist movements in conflict, particularly in imperial and colonial domains or within ethnically heterogeneous states with separatist-minded groups, have typically justified their claims to territory and sovereignty, either by an ethnic majority principle or by “historical rights” invoking earlier forms of autonomy, statehood, or cultural influence, or by various combinations of these principles.

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Managing the early post-World War I national self-determination claims and territorial disputes, Woodrow Wilson hoped to help the implementation of the majority principle if asserted through plebiscites and democratic elections showing the “consent of the governed” regarding the government under which they chose to live. In an international controversy that the U.S. press followed on front pages after the Great War, Wilson alienated hundreds of thousands of Democratic Party’s voters of Italian ancestry by rejecting Italy’s claims on the East Adriatic based on the historical rights.\(^4\) Italy first attempted territorial gains based on secret wartime treaties with the Allies, which Wilson had earlier condemned. Then, Italian representatives at the peace conference argued (correctly) that the tiny Italian urban communities with an evident tradition, archeology, and Latin influence dominate Dalmatian cities culturally over the Slavic majority population. Wilson nevertheless supported the Slavic majority’s claims and even sent in battleships to prevent Italian annexation of the disputed territory.\(^5\) Wilson saw the South Slavs as a potential and promising nation developing with western assistance and defending the West against communist Russia. He disregarded the particular ethnicities within the Slavic ethnic core, which continued demanding their own particular rights to national self-determination.\(^6\)

At the same time in Palestine, Britain and America did not back the Arab majority against the Jewish minority. On the contrary, the two world powers supported the Jewish minority with historic rights seeking to restore ancient statehood and claiming the territory marked by narratives, memories, and historic landmarks from the period of that ancient statehood and by memories of the long persecution of stateless Jews longing for the “sacred act of return” to their original homeland. Both Arab and Zionist representatives were invited to present their cases

\(^4\)“Dalmatian Coast Likely to be Slav; But Fiume May go to Italy in Settlement of Adriatic Problem – America is the Umpire,” *New York Times*, 02.02.1919; see Vjekoslav Perica, *Pax Americana in the Adriatic and the Balkans, 1919-2014* (In Croatian), (Zagreb: Algoritam, Mostar: Algoritam Stanek, 2015), p.35.

\(^5\) See the details in Perica, *Pax Americana*, pp. 33-117.

before the Paris Peace conference. Evidently, the idea of a “Jewish national homeland in Palestine” received support not only from Britain but also from Wilson and the United States.\(^7\) The Zionist movement could not win a plebiscite in Palestine so that the world powers allowed a precedent by recognizing the minority’s claims based on history, religion, and persecution while actually denying the right to national self-determination to the majority population.\(^8\) However, it seems improbable that either Wilson or Lenin anticipated a future for conservative and religious variants of nationalism. Although the former was religious and the latter atheist, both shared modernist and secularist understanding of nationhood. The two did not imagine nation as a perennial, mystical, and timeless sacred community of ancestors and descendants with a state that should incorporate all places of memory, former and present territories—as the dominant type of nationalism would a hundred years later.

Ever since then, the case of Palestine has exemplified a territorial conflict between the historic versus the majority rights and other disputes emphasizing history, memory, religion, and suffering. Eight decades later, a Serbian nationalist movement would argue that the Serbs are the Jews of the Balkans. An ethnic Serb minority of the Kosovo region, in conflict with majority ethnic Albanians, would claim the territory and statehood based on historic rights as evident from memories, religious rituals, narratives and monuments about Serb ancient kingdom in the disputed area. To make the Serb case even more similar to the Jewish, the Serb movement would also emphasize self-sacrifice and persecution of Serbs ever since the fourteenth century Ottoman conquest of the Balkans and particularly in the Second World War.

At any rate, since the peacemaking and boundary-drawing at the Paris Peace conference, the international conflict management had to deal with nationalist movements arguing over the

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\(^7\) Ibid., p. 59.

evidence of “who got there first,” who suffered more, and how state boundaries should be (re)drawn to carefully consider historic and sacred sites. Some recent studies found the cases of the conflicts in Israel-Palestine and the Balkans comparable and instructive particularly when observed in a wider global-comparative perspective.  

The conflicts of this kind, sometimes described as ethnic, religious, historical, or perennial, seem ancient although they are of recent origins. Even the crucial influence of religion is new. A hundred years ago, the world of Wilson and Lenin was probably religious as it always had been, yet religion was arguably less influential in international relations and public affairs. Yet, since the concluding decades of the twentieth century, religion has evidently influenced the remaking of the world order and the idea of the secular state. The secular ideologies that Wilson and Lenin represent have lost much of their appeal, while religion, culture and identity shape policies and strategies of state building and national development. The shift has occurred, as Samuel P. Huntington has suggested, at the end of the twentieth century in a de-secularized, post-ideological, and globalizing world with religious violence among the emblems of the new era.  


2. 1. Importing Serbian Jerusalem in World Affairs

The restructuring of nations in southeastern Europe is an unfinished process that has begun in the two last decades of the twentieth century. The destruction of the Yugoslav federation was not an incident but a longer process initiated by a massive nationalist movement that originated in the largest Yugoslav federal republic of Serbia that spread to Kosovo, Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina and elsewhere in the region. The Serb movement began by disputing autonomy of the Kosovo province in which ethnic Albanians, mostly Muslims, sought greater autonomy. The minority Christian Serbs opposed it, describing the Albanians as successors of the Ottoman oppressors. Kosovo Albanians, according to the allegations publicized in the 1980s, planned to expel Serbs and destroy their historic monuments, churches, monasteries, and historic sites commemorating a Serb medieval kingdom and the 1389 battle against the invading Ottoman Turks at the Kosovo field, both crucial for Serb national identity. The Serbian Orthodox Church was the first Serb institution that dared, as early as the 1960s, to publicize that Kosovo Albanians allegedly persecuted the Church and expelled the local Kosovo Serbs.13 The Kosovo dispute of the 1980s escalated into a wider regional conflict and several cycles of bloody ethnic and civil wars that involved several former Yugoslav republic and ethnic nations.14

Following the disintegration of Yugoslavia, the ethnic civil wars of the 1990s, seven new states eventually emerged in the area, including an independent Republic of Kosovo. After the Serb-Albanian war in Kosovo and the 1999-2000 NATO intervention paved the way to Kosovo independence, the United States established a major military base and maintained an international coalition to stabilize the region. The militarily weakened Serbia did not surrender. The Serbian Orthodox Church and nationalist parties intensified the propaganda about the alleged Albanian genocide, refusing to recognize Kosovo statehood and lobbied worldwide for recognition and defense of Serbia historic rights and Christian cultural heritage endangered by Albanian ethnic nationalism and a growing Muslim extremism. Unable to deny an overwhelming ethnic Albanian majority in Kosovo, Serbia claimed the territory on historical grounds. Kosovo is presented as the center of large kingdom under an ethnic Serb dynasty as well as a major regional sacred center surviving five centuries of Muslim conquest. The Church published an encyclopedia showing the well-preserved cultural heritage including several hundred churches, monasteries, cemeteries in Kosovo and Metohija (the first term denotes the Field of Black Birds, that is the historic battlefield of 1389, and the second the monastery-owned land).¹⁵ Church leaders hoped to keep the land with the monasteries within the Serbian state. Alternatively, the Church initially considered territorial partition (followed by annexation by Serbia of the most important monasteries) and autonomous status exempted from Albanian authority as for example the Patriarchate of Peć used to be during some periods of Ottoman rule. Since the 2008 proclamation of Kosovo independence, Serbia’s state and church leaders have more often referred to Kosovo as “Serbian Jerusalem” meaning “the holiest place” or “holy land,” leaving

other meanings and connotations vague until Patriarch Irenej espoused the comparison between Serbs and Jews as the most severely persecuted peoples.

In his 2017 Christmas message, the head of the Serbian Orthodox Church, Patriarch Irenej, stated: “We pray for the Crucified Kosovo and Metohija, the land that is our spiritual and national cradle, the land that the great bishop-poet Njegoš named “the grand tribunal of history.” As long as Serbs live, Kosovo lives also. Kosovo is soul of the Serb! For that reason Kosovo will always be Serb land, because our Golgotha and our Jerusalem are there!” The Patriarch mainly reiterated his 2015 Kosovo statement at a local religious festival: “For the Serbs, Kosovo is holy land, our Jerusalem, and our Palestine. Serbs have always defended their holy places. We will again protect our heritage in the Kosovo, by all our human resources and by all available means. If necessary, we will shed blood to defend what is ours, what our Lord has endowed to us.”

Since the 1980s, Serb Church leaders have only sporadically used the Jerusalem metaphor referring to Kosovo. The Patriarch Irenej, enthroned in 2010, promoted “Serbian Jerusalem” into a new dominant religious discourse.

Serbian political leaders, and particularly the new state diplomacy after the proclamation of Kosovo independence, borrowed the Jerusalem metaphor from nationalist writers and Church leaders. Aware of the disrepute of the Balkans as the infamous zone of conflict and the most backward periphery of which Western and Central Europe have long been ashamed, the new Serbian diplomacy espoused the Serbian Jerusalem metaphor as an explanatory and propaganda tool. The objective was to make Serbia and Kosovo seem more relevant in world politics by

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18 See Maria Todorova, Imagineing the Balkans, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).
suggesting parallels with the Middle East, Israel, and Palestine, as global issues of highest relevance and constant mass media attention. In 2010, foreign minister Vuk Jeremić said in an interview to the German media: “Serbia should not be forced to decide between EU membership and Kosovo … Kosovo has deep historical and spiritual meaning for the people of Serbia. In a certain sense, it is our Jerusalem.” On another occasion, in explaining the Kosovo controversy to an American audience, Jeremić stated:

We Serbs have an unbreakable bond with Kosovo. Here’s what Patriarch Pavle, who led our Church for almost twenty years said about Kosovo: “It is the wellspring of the Serbian spiritual tradition, and of our statehood; the heart and soul of our nation—indivisible and essential. That is why our forefathers consecrated its soil with thousands of beautiful garlands: adorning the land with magnificent churches and monasteries dedicated to the glory of God … Kosovo is our Valley Forge and Yorktown, our Alamo and Gettysburg, our Pearl Harbor and Iwo Jima—all rolled into one. It is in our dreams at night, and in our prayers in church. It is the ‘apple of our eye.’ It is our Jerusalem.”

The military loss of Kosovo and the massive exodus of Kosovo Serbs to Serbia invoked the mythical narratives and inspired the religious discourses in Serbian nationalism. The Church’s influence grew compensating for the weakened and corrupt state in a society devastated by wars, international sanctions, and failing post-communist transition. The Church offered the people a new history in which Serbia had always been a righteous party, while sacrifices and losses were only temporary and moral investment was needed for a future renewal. Anticipating post-war negotiations and diplomatic battles for Kosovo and other disputed territories across the Balkans, Serb leaders began explaining the historic rights to the world. For example, Alexandar Karadžorđević, the son of king Peter II ousted by Yugoslav communists,

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during the NATO bombing of Belgrade in 1999, sent a letter to presidents of the USA and France and to the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, emphasizing that,

“France, United Kingdom and the United States have been traditional allies of Serbia in the West. That makes me wonder has the use of NATO air strikes against Serbia been the only appropriate answer to the failure of diplomatic negotiations. In the two world wars, history has shown that my people does not respond favorably to ultimatums and pressures. Moreover, it should not be forgotten that Kosovo is a Serbian Jerusalem and a cradle of the Serbian state. The greatest sacred monuments, part of the Serbian heritage, are located in Kosovo … Kosovo is an inalienable part of Serbia and Serbs have the right to defend what is theirs …”21

Although it sounds appealing and seductive, the nationalist discourse about Serbian Jerusalem, like most nationalist manipulations with the past for present purposes, is an invented tradition. According to Hobsbawm and Ranger, the invention of tradition involves “modern nationalist practices of using ancient materials to construct invented tradition of a novel type for quite novel purposes … the new traditions use old materials, invent new language or devices, extend the old symbolic vocabulary beyond established limits …”22 Applied to the uses of the past about Kosovo, Kosovo is not, to begin with, a “cradle” of the Serbian nation. Neither medieval nor modern Serbia were founded within borders of present-day Kosovo. Modern Serbia developed in what is today northern Serbia at a lengthy distance from Kosovo and other southern regions. The memory and later state patriotic myth about the medieval empire and its downfall at the 1389 Kosovo medieval battle are narratives and practices of nation building inaugurated in

21 “Kosovo is Our Cradle and Our Jerusalem.” (Kosovo Je naša kolevka i Srpski Jerusalem), Telegraf online, 07. 04. 1999, http://www.telegraf.rs/vesti/politika/2062632-kosovo-je-nasa-kolevka-i-srpski-je-ruralim-ovo-je-kralj-srbije-
porucio-klintonu-bleru-i-siraku-tokom-bombardovanja-srbije.
the nineteenth century. Medieval Serbia, including both church and state, was founded in the thirteenth century in central Serbia, outside borders of the present-day Kosovo. Kosovo historically signifies the area of the later fourteenth-century imperial expansion of the Serbian state and temporary seat of the Church under Ottoman rule in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. In short, the new Serbian nationalism since the 1980s has invented and magnified the importance of Kosovo to the proportions of a Jerusalem and a holy land of the Serbs. The purpose of revitalizing the medieval narrative of the lost pride and revenge was the post-Yugoslav and post-communist mass mobilization of Serbs for the Greater Serbia project. In other words, as the contemporary political discourse would put it: making Serbia great again.

2.2. From Cradle to Golden Age: Imprecise Metaphors, Invented Traditions, Myths of Nationhood

Medieval Serbia originated in the early thirteenth century in the province of Rascia/Raška in present-day central Serbia. Almost a century later, the earliest Serb state later expanded to Kosovo (after the Field of Black Birds, later the Kosovo battlefield) and Metohija (denoting monastery-owned land) in the present-day Kosovo. This part of what would be later, when modern Serbia re-emerged at the northern capital Belgrade, called Old Serbia, is the actual “cradle” of Serbia. Because there, not in Kosovo, the princes and bishops of the Nemanjić dynasty established an independent kingdom and a self-governing Christian Church of the Byzantine rite and ruled there for more than a hundred years prior to the foundation of an imperial capital and a supreme church authority in Kosovo. The principal shrine and historic monument where the Church independence was proclaimed is the monastery of Studenica in the

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village Studenica, Commune of Kraljevo, Raška District, Republic of Serbia. Established in the late twelfth century by Stevan Nemanja, founder of the medieval Serb state, Studenica is the largest of Serbia’s medieval monasteries. Its two principal monuments, the Church of the Virgin and the Church of the King, both built of white marble, enshrine priceless collections of thirteenth and fourteenth century Byzantine paintings. UNESCO posted Studenica on World Heritage List in 1986, two decades before any of the Kosovo monasteries. Another key sacred historic monument from this earliest period of Serbian statehood is the monastery Žiča, located in the heartland of Serbia. Žiča lies at the distance of about 300 kilometers to the west from Priština, the present-day capital of Kosovo, and about 250 km from the Kosovo town of Peć (Ipek), the later seat of the patriarchate. At the Žiča monastery built by King Stefan of the Nemanjić dynasty and his son Sava, in 1219, a church council proclaimed an independent archdiocese of the Serbian Orthodox Church electing Sava as the archbishop. The Žiča monastery is the place of coronation of the first Serb ruler Stefan and six other Serb kings. There, the first head of the Church was enthroned. In short, the earliest and oldest, historically most important Serb monasteries are Žiča, Studenica and Sopoćani. Hilandar, the most important Serbian holy place outside Serbia, is in Greece, built atop the Holy Mountain Athos in Greece.

The four holiest and historically most relevant churches and monasteries, and the indisputably major saintly cult of the church’s founder and the state’s co-founder, St. Sava, are all located in Serbia outside Kosovo. Although there are hundreds of more or less preserved Serb historic monuments in Kosovo, only two, namely the old Patriarchate at Peć and the Dečani monastery,

24 See Medieval Monuments in Kosovo (UNESCO/NHK), https://youtu.be/5Q6DzpisSOM
possibly match the historical importance of the four holiest and oldest churches and monasteries of Old Serbia. The two, like the Gračanica Memorial Church at the Kosovo battlefield and other sacred historic landmarks of Kosovo, are relevant, yet they do not make Kosovo the place of the state’s origin and foundation or “cradle” of Serbia.

Most importantly, the old Serbia and its main shrines are associated with the highest Serb Orthodox saintly cult of Saint Sava (Rastko Nemanjić). Sava, the founding father of the state, church, and nation lived in Serbia, travelled to Jerusalem and Greece, died in Bulgaria, and probably never visited Kosovo. Sava mediated in dynastic feuds and obtained an independent church via diplomacy balancing between the Ecumenical patriarchate in Constantinopolis and Rome. Sava’s cult celebrates an independent statehood and church autonomy won by diplomacy. The oldest preserved portrait of Saint Sava as the first Serbian archbishop is a fresco from the Ascension church of Mileševa monastery, foundation of Serbian king Vladislav, 1222-1228. This monastery was Sava’s original burial place yet his major memorial temple was built in Belgrade commemorating Ottoman Turkish ritual burning of Sava’s relics in the sixteenth century. St. Sava is also the founder of what would be later described as a “Serbian Jerusalem”—a chapel and guesthouse for Serb pilgrims to the Holy Land.26

When the early Serbian kingdom was well established, the Church’s seat relocated to Kosovo, which signifies not the birth or foundation but the kingdom’s expansion into an empire. This stage developed under the emperor Dušan the Mighty who was the most powerful of all Serb rulers yet never became a saint of the Serbian Orthodox Church. The Church’s seat relocated to Peć (Ipek) in Kosovo exemplifies two things: first, the domination of Serbs over the neighboring Balkan peoples under Dušan the Mighty and second, the survival of some form of

Serb self-government under Ottoman rule. Imperial Kosovo is associated with the rise of Stefan Uroš IV Dušan, Dušan the Mighty, King of Serbia, 1331-1346 and self-proclaimed Emperor of the Serbs, Bulgars, Romanians, Greeks, and Albanians, (1346-1355). Incidentally, Dušan came into a conflict with the Church and was never canonized. After the Great migration of Serbs in 1690, the patriarchate relocated from Kosovo to northwestern Balkans under Austrian Habsburg authority. If Serbia could have two national “cradles” or founding centers that could be only the earlier described St. Sava’s medieval state versus modern Serbia. Modern Serbia was created at the new church seat at Sremski Karlovci (in the present-day Vojvodina), relocated to the new political capital of Belgrade when Serbia became an independent state recognized and expanded at the Congress of Berlin 1878. In the nineteenth century, the Serbian state revived in official patriotic rituals and through schooling, the mythical narrative about the 1389 battle at the Kosovo Filed and the downfall of the empire. The narrative about the Kosovo battle and the lamentations over the lost empire have been since commemorated on state and church holiday—Vidovdan or Saint Vitus Day. Out of these commemorations rose a nation building ideology seeking expansion and restoration of the size and power of the medieval empire.

There are several references to Jerusalem as the Christian Holy City and Holy Land (in the Middle East) in Serbian folklore and history. Yet none of these references could be taken as the precursor to the contemporary meanings and connotations of the phrase “Serbian Jerusalem” referring to Kosovo. First, there is a mention of Jerusalem in the epic narrative about the 1389 Kosovo battle to suggest that the heroic Prince Lazar received a divine message from the Holy

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27 On the eve of the 1346 coronation, Dušan raised the Serbian archbishopric to the status of a patriarchate, the highest religious authority in Eastern Orthodox Christianity. The new patriarchate moved to Peć, town in western Kosovo, (Pejë, formerly Ipek). The Archbishop of Peć was titled Serbian Patriarch, and his seat at Monastery of Peć became Patriarchal residence. Under Otoman rule, when Serbia virtually ceased to exist as a state, the patriarchate at Peć was recognized by Turkish authorities as an authority representing not only Serbs but all Christians in that part of empire.
Land. Second, as mentioned earlier, there is the chapel and pilgrim’s guesthouse that St. Sava had built in Jerusalem for Serb pilgrims and therefore a “Serbian Jerusalem” (in the Middle East, not in Kosovo). Third, there is the expression of a “Serb Golgotha.” Church leaders sometimes described the Kosovo battle in which most of the Serb nobility perished, and the subsequent life under Muslim rule as a “Serbian Golgotha.” A similar phrase, namely, “the Albanian Golgotha,” emerged out of the First World War. The Serbian army suffered heavy casualties as it retreated to Greece across the Albanian mountains. Commemorating the First World War as martyrdom and heroism of the Serbs comparable to the Kosovo battle, Patriarch Dimitrije Pavlović in 1918 used the phrase “Serbian Jerusalem” referring to the island Corfu in Greece where the Serbian army retreated during the war and recuperated for the liberation of Serbia. The Patriarch urged Serbs for holy journeys to the isle with memorials and military graveyard, like pilgrims go to Jerusalem.

After the First Balkan War of 1912 when Serbia militarily acquired Kosovo, the Serbian state for the first time in history presented Kosovo to the world as a holy land of the Serbs in order to legitimize military conquest. Church historian Dimitrije Bogdanović (in a book published in the 1980s), argues that the idea of Kosovo as a holy land of the Serbs claimed by Serbia before the world powers, was articulated after three Balkan wars in 1912-1913. The 1913

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28 There is mentioning of Jerusalem in the Kosovo epic according to the following verses: “There flies, a grey bird, a falcon. From Jerusalem, the holy; And in his beak, he bears a swallow. That is no falcon, no grey bird; But it is the Saint Elijah. He carries no swallow; But a book from the Mother of God. He comes to the Tsar at Kossovo, He lays the book on the Tsar’s knees . . .” Quoted from Rebecca West, Black Lamb and Grey Falcon. A Journey through Yugoslavia, Introduction by Christopher Hitchens. (New York: Penguin Books, 2007), pp. 909-911.


international conference in London, seeking settlement for the post-war Balkans, heard the following claims based on the historic and cultural rights of the Serbian ethnic minority in Kosovo against the Albanian ethnic majority:

It was rightly said (in the Serbian Memorandum to the ambassadors of the European Powers in London in 1913) that this territory is a kind of "Holy Land" for the Serbian people… In the negotiations about territories and borders in Kosovo and Metohija at the 1913 conference in London, Serbia prioritized the historic, ethnographic, cultural and moral criteria. These include the continuity of the Serb statehood and culture in Kosovo. Therefore, Serbia emphasizes that the land on which stand the historic monasteries and shrines such as the Patriarchate of Peć, the Dečani monastery and the Orthodox cathedral at Đakovica, have always been a holy land for all Serbs. Hence, no Serb or Montenegrin government would cede the holy land of the Serbs to the Albanians or anyone else. On that point, the Serbian people will not make any concessions, transactions or compromise…³²

Yet, the London conference was by no means fascinated with the Serb sacred heritage and the mythical history in Kosovo, as Bogdanović implies. Neither did the Western powers take seriously the historic and cultural rights of the Serbs in Kosovo to endorse the annexation of Kosovo by Serbia. On the contrary, the world powers pursued Realpolitik by recognizing fait accompli established by Serbia’s military occupation of Kosovo. Concurrently, the London Conference (i.e. Britain and France), took into consideration Albanian nationalism and the Albanian ethnic majority in the neighboring parts of the Balkans, to recognize a newly established Albanian national state, the Kingdom of Albania.

The first published verbatim quote of the phrase “Serbian Jerusalem” referring to Kosovo as a holy land of the Serbs, is most likely a 1939 newspaper article by general Milan Nedić, the World War I hero and later the chief pro-Nazi collaborator presiding over a puppet regime in occupied Serbia. In June 1939, on the occasion of the 550th anniversary of the Kosovo battle, General Nedić wrote an article in the daily Politika about the Kosovo legacy as inspiration for

³² Dimitrije Bogdanović, Book about Kosovo (Knjiga o Kosovu). (Beograd: Srpska akademija nauka i umetnosti, 1986), p. 34.
the present. Nedić hoped for a massive resistance to the impending Nazi invasion, so he urged Serbs to invoke the example of the hero Miloš Obilić, the sultan’s assassin amidst the Kosovo battle. According to Nedić, “today, as dark clouds gather in the skies of Europe, we Serbs are yet again returning to Kosovo, Serbian Jerusalem, and the eternal fountain of our vital stamina, to smell the red flowers on the heroes’ graves and inhale the fighting spirit of Obilić.”

Nedić was no nationalist poet or writer; he was a military leader and he did not himself invent the “Serbian Jerusalem” metaphor. He probably borrowed it from sermons and speeches of the then increasingly influential religious nationalist and leading Serb theologian, later canonized saint of the Serbian Orthodox Church, Bishop of Žiča, Nikolaj Velimirović.

To summarize, “Serbian Jerusalem” exemplifies the nationalist practice of the invention of tradition. The contemporary Serbian nationalist movement, focusing on the struggle for Kosovo as seeking weapons in history, religion, and tradition, presented Kosovo as a “cradle” of the nation and the original sacred center where medieval Serbian state was founded. Present-day Serb nationalism intentionally disregarded or “forgot” the primacy of the historic center of the medieval Serbian state which was outside Kosovo, and dwarfed the unquestionably major Serb saintly cult of Saint Sava, worshiped as the Church’s founder, the state’s co-founder and the religious mystic, Christian pilgrim, diplomat, and peacemaker. By contrast, contemporary nationalism, planning for mass mobilization, war, and the replacement of Yugoslavia by a Greater Serbia, prioritized the memory of the medieval empire, the militant saint Prince Lazar and the avenger of Kosovo, sultan’s assassin Milos Obilić.

In addition to the invention of tradition, the contemporary Serbian nationalist movement operating within a globalizing world, espoused new religious practices such as notably religious

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33 Quoted from Ivan Čolović, *Death on the Kosovo Field*, p.317. General Milan Nedić (1877-1946), was sentenced to death as a Nazi collaborator and executed by the federal government of the People’s Republic of Yugoslavia.
nationalism. According to Roger Friedland, religious nationalism is “a set of discursive practices by which the territorial identity of a state and the cultural identity of the people whose collective representation it claims are constituted as a singular fact.”

Religious nationalism calls for a new theocracy. It is an anti-liberal and anti-secular ideology influential since the 1970s that rejects the modern secular type of nationhood as a de-secularized community organizing state and territory according to religion and myth. Thus, according to Peter van der Veer’s research on contesting territorial claims and religious monuments in northern India, “sacred sites are the physical evidence of the perennial existence of the religious community and, by nationalist expansion, of the nation. … The history of shrines, as told in religious tales, and established by archeological evidence, is the history of the nation.”

In the Balkans, religious nationalism, Dino Abazović explains, following the destruction of multiethnic Yugoslavia, assisted the formation of an ethno-confessional type of nationality and based on this service, wants to influence politics to decide on the model of statehood and nationhood particularly opposing ethnoreligious pluralism and secularism.

In sum, Kosovo is not Serbia’s “cradle” but it symbolizes Serbia’s pre-modern “golden age.” The discourse about the “cradle” of the state that integrated the people and paved the way to nationhood combines two archetype nationalist myths: myth of ancient origins, and myth of rise and fall. According to Pål Kolstø’s 2005 study on ethnic nationalist myths in the Balkans, the key nationalist myths of the Balkan ethnic nations are the myth of antiquity (ancient origins, deep historic roots of the nation), and the myth of golden age (the state’s rise and expansion and

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The recent nationalist discourse needed both constitutive nationalist myths, namely the myth of the nation’s “cradle” (ancient origins) and of the golden age of its expansion and glory followed by a tragic yet not forgotten downfall, for contemporary purposes of mass mobilization aimed at reframing collective identity and restoring the past glory preferably within the boundaries of the medieval empire. The invention of tradition and the material evidence of the sacred heritage and religious symbols from the nation’s golden age, have overall served well the purpose of the Serb mass mobilization for the destruction of multiethnic Yugoslavia. Regarding the restoration of the empire (in contemporary parlance called Greater Serbia), the results have been less successful. The Serb republic in Bosnia-Herzegovina seems as the only palpable gain. Croatia emerged from the 1991-1995 Serb-Croat war militarily strong and furiously anti-Serbian with its Serb minority largely “cleansed.” Kosovo eventually seceded from Serbia and the local Serbs have been largely “cleansed.” Although the sacred monuments are still there as reminders of the bygone empire and the enduring Serbia’s imperial ambitions, they could not prove that Serbs “got there first.” On the contrary, according to a number of impartial studies, the Albanians are presumably the indigenous residents of the Balkans, sometimes linked to the ancient Illyrians, whose ethnic name South Slavic nationalist movements had appropriated, settling in Kosovo and present-day Albania long before the Slavic migrations of the seventh to ninth centuries. However, the actual history is only one dimension of the Kosovo controversy. The Kosovo myth, as part of a “religion of Serbian nationalism” as Ivan Čolović describes it, have since the nineteenth century when Serbian secular and clerical elites began using it for state and nation-building, become an

autonomous socio-cultural phenomenon creating representations of the past or present that often contradict reality.\textsuperscript{39}

3. **Beyond the Holy Land: Inventing a Serbia-Israel Special Relationship**

The Serbian nationalist movement destabilizing Yugoslavia in the 1980s anticipated ethnic cleansing of Kosovo and subsequent all-Serb re-colonization of the “holy land.” In preparation, Belgrade media and nationalist leaders accused the majority Albanians of no less than genocide. It has been allegedly carried out by terror and expulsion of the Serb minority in order to create an ethnically homogenous Kosovo to eventually unite with Albania. Actually, Albanian nationalism did not have such an agenda at the time, but today it does have, as the consequence of the Serb assault. According to Belgrade propaganda, Albanians, mostly Muslims by religion, hate Serbs as Christians who defended Kosovo from the Muslim conquest since the mythical fourteenth century battle. The Albanians also allegedly envy Serbs on the well-preserved historic monuments, churches, and holy relics as powerful material evidence supporting territorial claims. The Serb nationalist movement of the 1980s created a state of siege in the minds of the Serbs, allegedly threatened by growing genocidal nationalisms in the neighboring peoples. In addition to the Albanian threat, Belgrade media and nationalist hawks alleged, an awakened Croat nationalism aimed at finishing the genocide against Serbs begun in World War II, while Bosnian Muslims, influenced by Islamic radicalism, wanted an Islamic state in Muslim-populated areas of the Balkans. To make the growing Serb fears worse, Croats and Bosnian Muslim national political, cultural, and religious institutions never explicitly condemned those legacies. As the Yugoslav communist control eroded, the renewed historical controversies

\textsuperscript{39} Ivan Ćolović, *Death at the Kosovo Field*, pp. 459-461.
pressured the quarrelling ethnic communities. The Croat pro-Axis regime in the Second World War indeed carried out a mass persecution of the Serb and Jewish minorities in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina and a revisionist nationalist denial rose within Croat nationalism responding to the pressure from Serbia.

The Serbian Orthodox Church, as national institution that pioneered the contemporary Serbian nationalist movement as early as the 1960s, contributed to the movement’s momentum in the 1980s. The Church released two major publications covering the Kosovo theme and the theme of genocide against Serbs in the Second World War, particularly at the concentration camp Jasenovac in northern Croatia. In 1987, an illustrated encyclopedia cataloged several hundred historic monuments, archeological sites, graveyards, medieval churches, and the provinces of Kosovo and Metohija. The editors presented the monuments as invaluable yet unprotected Serb heritage that the Albanian enemy aims to destroy. Again, Albanian nationalism back then did not have such plans but it does have these plans today. Regarding the Croat genocide theme, from 1986-1990, the Holy Synod of the Serbian Orthodox Church released several publications about Croat fascist Ustasha movement’s concentration camps. The theme

44 *Eternal Memory - Jasenovac, the Place Soaked in the Blood of Innocents*, with summaries in English, on the fiftieth anniversary of Martyred Jesenovac and of the seventh anniversary of the Consecration of the new Church of
was neither forbidden nor neglected under communism; yet, the new Serb nationalism offered reinterpretations from the vantage point of the earlier suppressed ethnoreligious nationalism. Now the newly discovered chief motive for the Croat Ustasha genocide was not the influence of the Nazi-fascist ideology and proven Ustasha’s ties with Mussolini and Hitler, but the incitement from the Vatican as the historic nemesis of the independent-minded Serbian Orthodox Church which the Vatican allegedly attempted to convert into a Uniate Church.\footnote{See the details in \textit{Balkan Idols}, chapter 9.} The inventor of this thesis was the Bishop Nikolaj Velimirović, later canonized saint of the Serbian Orthodox Church. As an émigré anti-Yugoslav activist in the United States, Velimirović in the 1950s spoke and wrote about Ustasha genocide in the Second World War. He explained it as the crime motivated by religious hatred and envy between the two fraternal peoples, as in the biblical story of Cain and Abel—the Orthodox Serbs likened to the latter and the Catholic Croats to the former.\footnote{Ibid.} Velimirović concluded that Croats, because of the communist atheistic rule and the influence of Ustasha in their ranks, have never properly repented. Hence he proposed a Temple of Atonement to be built at the Jasenovac concentration camp memorial site as a place for interfaith pilgrimages after the fall of communism and reconciliation of the Churches (provided the Catholics repented). Yet, in consequence of the Serb-Croat war of 1991-1995, post-war Serbia and Croatia wrote new histories that cemented the conflict.

A prominent contributor to the new discourse of Serbian nationalism was, among others, Enriko Josif, a Yugoslav intellectual of Jewish background and co-chairman of the national Jewish Association. Josif, an anti-Catholic, blaming the Vatican for not opposing the Holocaust, had introduced in public discourse a parallel between the Jasenovac concentration camp and

\footnote{OCCASIONAL PAPERS ON RELIGION IN EASTERN EUROPE (DECEMBER 2017) XXXVII, 6}
Auschwitz. The Serbian Orthodox Church utilized his ideas such as the following: “One of the horrible spiritual crimes is the fact that what happened to the Serbs was hushed up in the whole world. This is a postwar continuation of the horrible crime … The worst service to the West, and particularly to the Roman Catholic Church of the Croats, was to hush up the religious and biological crime of genocide committed against the Serbian people during World War II. In the name of Christ and Christian love, the head of the Roman Catholic Church should have raised his voice and condemned the eternal sin of Cain. This should be done as soon as possible.”

Serbian secular and clerical nationalists further developed the Serb-Jewish parallel. A version of the Serbo-Jewish parallel came from Serb Orthodox priest Žarko Gavrilović: “the Serbs are the greatest martyrs of humankind …,” because, “no other people in the world, except the Jews, have suffered so much for their faith and nation …” Writer Dobrica Ćosić, a former Yugoslav communist who broke up with the party over the Kosovo controversy, as an emerging chief ideologue of contemporary Serbian nationalism, stated in a 1983 interview, “the Serb is the new Jew at the end of the twentieth century.” Ćosić claims to be the first to propose a territorial partition of Kosovo between Serbia and Albania. In one of his last interviews before his death in 2014, he argued that he had been proposing the partition of Kosovo between Serbia and Albania for more than four decades but nobody took it seriously. According to another source, Ćosić published a blueprint for partition of Kosovo as early as 1994 in the Italian journal for

48 Quoted in Balkan Idols, pp.124-125.
49 Ibid.
50 Quoted in Balkan Idols, p.124.
geopolitics, “Limes.”

Subsequently, Serbian nationalist leaders proposed to the Alabamians and the international community, several plans for partitioning Kosovo.

History since the emergence of those partition plans, as well as earlier analogous experiences, has shown that territorial settlements in the Balkans never worked out without war and ethnic cleansing. Dobrica Ćosić was by no means the only one among Balkan ethnic nationalist to consider partitions. Two other prominent nationalist separatist leaders such Bosnian Muslim lawyer Alija Izetbegović and Croat historian Franjo Tudjman developed similar plans from the perspectives of their respective ethno-confessional communities. As early as 1970, Izetbegović secretly published (and was later jailed for that by a Yugoslav court) a blueprint for partition of Yugoslavia proposing the model of the partition between India and Pakistan. The historian Tudjman published in 1981 a paper predicting fragmentation of a number of European nation-states into smaller ethnically homogenous units, which he considered “natural” and all other types of nationhood artificial. Tudjman predicted triumphant separatist movements and partitions not only in the Balkans but also in Western Europe. In his subsequent works on genocide, Tudjman even drew analogies between Serbian and Israeli nationalism to argue that Serbs and Jews invented myths about their nations’ collective suffering and persecution in which they magnified the actual number of victims. In a revised U.S. edition of this book, Tudjman, then president of Croatia, softened these allegations in order to improve Croatia’s international reputation as a newly founded nation.

52 “Partition of Kosovo is the Ultimate Goal of Serbia” (“Podela Kosova krajnji cilj Srbije”), Blic online, Belgrade, 01.10. 2008.
54 Alija Izetbegović, The Islamic Declaration (Islamska deklaracija), Sarajevo: Bosna, 1990.
Arguably, the year 1985 was the moment of the invention of the idea of “Serbian Jerusalem” as the parallel between Kosovo and Israel behind which unfolds the Serb-Jewish special relationship as two martyr-nations persecuted by Nazis and Muslims in the past and present. The inventor of this “Serbian Jerusalem” is the writer Vuk Drašković a former communist-turned ethnic nationalist. Like Dobrica Ćosić or Slobodan Milošević, Drašković used to be a senior Yugoslav communist official deserting the party for allegedly not protecting Serb national rights within the federation. In 1985, Drašković published an open letter to Israeli writers outlining a new history according to which Serbs and Jews have suffered and were hated and martyred as independent-minded, being faithful to their identity, religion, and tradition. According to Drašković, Serbs are the thirteenth lost and the most ill-fated tribe of Israel; the archeological traces of the ancient Serb and Jewish kingdoms can be found in the two holy lands of Kosovo and Israel-Palestine; Kosovo is therefore “Serbian Jerusalem.” The five centuries of Serb stateless life under Muslim Ottoman Turkish rule Drašković describes as “the Babylonian Captivity,” and the Great Migration of Serbs from Kosovo as the biblical Exodus, etc. Drašković also informed Israeli writers that Yugoslav Jews and Serbs shared the same fate in World War II as victims of genocide carried out by Croat and Bosnian Muslim pro-Nazi and fascist ethnic militia. Drašković implies that Serbs and Jews have the same common enemies today as they had in the Second World War and must help each other.57 Twenty years later, appearing on a television show in the Bosnian Serb republic, Drašković claimed that in the 1980s he had invented “that Serbian Jerusalem metaphor.”58

In his letter, Drašković reinterpreted history borrowing from the past whatever he could use in the present. He, for example, omitted to inform the Israeli public opinion that a wartime Serbian pro-Nazi puppet regime under General Nedić and the native Serb fascist Dimitrije Ljotić, helped the Nazi occupiers annihilate Serbia’s Jewish population. Actually, Drašković led a political party that proposed rehabilitation of Nedić as a hero of anti-communist struggle. In addition, Drašković probably borrowed the “Serbian Jerusalem” phrase referring to Kosovo from Nedić’s 1939 article published in the Belgrade daily “Politika” while the original inventor is most likely the religious nationalist Bishop Velimirović, yet another Drašković’s hero.  

The nationalist media in Serbia, borrowed and expanded Drašković’s metaphors and parallels, such as the following 1986 article: “The Jews … people who have been for nearly 2000 years denied by European states to serve in the military and choose military professions, have today one of the best organized and best armed, also perfectly trained and best combat-ready military forces in the world. The Israeli army’s superiority has been successfully tested in wars they won against far more numerous enemy armies. This is what kind of military force Serbia needs today in order to protect Kosovo Serbs and Orthodox Christian shrines from the Muslim threat …”  

In short, by the outbreak of the Balkan wars of the 1990s, the Serbian Jerusalem and Serbia-Israel parallels have become additions to the new discourse of contemporary Serbian nationalism.

Students of Serbian nationalism observed the impact of the “Serbian Jerusalem” idea and the comparisons between Serbs and Jews. Analyzing these narratives in the context of the disintegration of Yugoslavia and the Balkan wars of the 1990s, political scientist Jasna Dragović-

59 Quoted in Čolović, Death on the Kosovo Field, p.317.
60 Mirko Klarin and Raul Tajtelbaum, Israel in a Verbal Civil War (Izrael u verbalnom gradanskom ratu), (Beograd, 1986), pp. 10. Quoted according to Vladimir Veljković, “Kosovo is a Serbian Jerusalem” (Kosovo je srpski Jerusalim,” Peščanik, 28.11.2015; http://pescanik.net/kosovo-je-srpski- jerusalim/.
Soso noted that, “Kosovo allowed the Serb nationalist intelligentsia” … “to adopt the role of guardians of both national and universal values—the vision of Kosovo as the ‘Serbian Jerusalem’, a holy land of an inestimable importance to national identity.”\(^\text{61}\) Similarly, social anthropologist Marko Živković wrote: “The ‘Jewish trope’ … was one of the most important of …the elements of Serbian national narratives, especially in linking the central Serbian myth of Kosovo to the more recent cycle of narratives that focus on the Ustasha genocide against Serbs during the Second World War.”\(^\text{62}\)

The discourses on Serbian Jerusalem and the Serb-Jewish comparisons reached a pinnacle during the Serbo-Albanian war in Kosovo (1998-1999) and the NATO bombing of Serbia in spring of 1999. Under the nationalist Slobodan Milošević (1987-2001), a Belgrade-based organization named “Serb-Jewish Friendship Society” served as the regime’s lobbying tool in Israel and the United States. Founded in 1987—the year when Milošević took power, and controlled by Milošević’s secret police, the society mobilized several thousand members in Serbia, Israel, and the United States. Klara Mandić, a retired Belgrade dentist and Holocaust survivor, served as the society’s president and chief spokesperson. Joining the vehement campaign against Marshal Tito’s legacies in Serbia, the society attacked the pro-Palestinian course as one of hallmarks of Tito’s foreign policy urging Milošević’s Yugoslavia and Serbia to upgrade relations with Israel. The society appropriated the Serbian Jerusalem discourse using it to defend the Serb territorial claims and Milošević’s repressive policies in Kosovo. During the Serb-Albanian war of 1998-1999 in Kosovo and the NATO bombing of Serbia, a society’s American representative addressed Jewish-American audience with the following ideas:


\(^{62}\) According to Zivkovic, “The Wish to be a Jew.”
As you know, Serbs compare Kosovo to Jerusalem. Yet, to the Serbs, Kosovo means even more than Jerusalem to the Jews. Kosovo is also the Serb Masada. There was a battle at Kosovo in 1389, the Serbian kingdom’s last stand against the Ottoman Empire in which many thousands of Serbs—every Serbian soldier in the battle—were killed. In many ways … the Balkans are like the Middle East, when neighbor is fighting neighbor. A common saying there is, "It’s me against my cousin, and my cousin and me against the world."  

The Serb-Jewish Friendship Society shared the fate of the Milošević regime. After Milošević’s fall and arrest by the Hague war crimes tribunal, Mandić was murdered in 2001 in Belgrade under mysterious circumstances. However, the small Serbia’s Jewish community was not the same as the Serb-Jewish Friendship society. Actually, most Yugoslav intellectuals of Jewish origin openly backed Serbia’s resistance against Milošević. For example, internationally acclaimed authors Danilo Kiš, Filip David, and Oskar Daviço, among others, contributed with statements and writings to the anti-Milošević opposition in Serbia. Likewise, the Yugoslav sociologist of Jewish origin, Laslo Sekelj argued that the Milošević regime was essentially anti-Semitic insofar as its supporters involved a number of outspoken anti-Semitic right-wing nationalist and racist groups including the zealots of the Serbian Orthodox Church.

Israeli public opinion followed and occasionally commented on the parallels and ideas coming to the Middle East from the Balkans. Some Israeli circles showed sympathies to the Serb cause in the Balkan wars of the 1990s, yet, the State of Israel supported the United States that found Serbia chiefly responsible for the war and massive human right violations in the Balkans. Regarding the Arab population in Israel, they supported Bosnian Muslims and condemned the Serb atrocities in Bosnia-Herzegovina. For example, during the Bosnian war, Israeli government

came under pressure from its Muslim population to accept Bosnian Muslim refugees. Consequently, a group of Bosnian Muslim refugees found shelter in Israel, including a later popular Balkan hip-hop artist Edo Maajka.66

However, as U.S. Balkan policies paved the way to Kosovo’s secession from Serbia and an independent Albanian republic, Israel supported Serbia’s effort to block Kosovo’s statehood. In Israeli perspective, the Kosovo secession would encourage Palestinian Arab separatism in Israel. In 2006, the writer Vuk Drašković, now serving as Serbia’s foreign minister, visited Jerusalem and managed to obtain Israeli promises not to recognize independent Kosovo. In Israel, Drašković received a warm welcome. According to the Jerusalem Post, “Drašković as Serbia’s foreign minister (described Kosovo) as the ‘Serbian Jerusalem’ because of its central place in Serbian history and religious tradition. Drašković said the parallels between the experiences and treatment of Israel and Serbia by the international community should draw the two countries together. Drašković … will be visiting Jerusalem's Old City, Nazareth and Galilee … will meet with representatives of the Orthodox Church but not Palestinian officials.”67

With proclamation of Kosovo independence nearing, an Israeli journal called for caution warning about foreign policy precedents that might apply to the Palestinian Arabs’ long quest for statehood: The so-called "Serbian Jerusalem": Kosovo is not just a part of Serbia but also "the cradle of its nationalism and culture." If the "Serbian Jerusalem" is taken away from it, why should "Al Quds" not be taken from us in the future and become the capital of the independent

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66 According to the New York Times, “Arabs in Israel and in other parts of the Middle East have been castigating foreign governments for not aiding Muslim refugees from Bosnia. Mayors of Arab villages here at first welcomed the Israeli decision to accept a group of Bosnians, but some later reversed themselves, apparently under pressure from the Palestine Liberation Organization and other Arab groups … We have reached the conclusion that this is an operation aimed at improving Israel's image, which has been tarnished by the Palestinian deportations,” said Ahmed Tibi, spokesman for a committee of Arabs who were initially planning to help settle the refugees in Arab communities.” Stephen Kinzer, “Israel Accepts 84 of Bosnia's Muslim Refugees,” The New York Times, 18.02. 1993, at http://www.nytimes.com/1993/02/18/world/israel-accepts-84-of-bosnia-s-muslim-refugees.html.

67 The Jerusalem Post, 5. 11. 2006.
Palestine? The danger of Islam: The establishment of Kosovo will award a prize to a violent ethnic-religious minority, whose leaders have ties to the Mafia and to the global jihad. Recognizing them will increase Islamic influence and will strengthen anti-Semitic and anti-Israeli opinions in Europe. …The Kosovar analogy does not resemble the Israeli-Palestinian situation Jews (or at least some of them) are willing to compromise in Jerusalem whereas the Serbs are refusing to relinquish "their heart and soul." “Today Serbia—tomorrow Israel: Israel must oppose the perception whereby a political and territorial conflict can be ended by means of an external, imposed solution and without the support of both sides to the conflict. If not, who will guarantee that in the future Israel will not have a solution with the Palestinians imposed upon it?”

Since 2008, Kosovo has become an independent state recognized by several dozen nations yet not by Israel and countries fearing separatist nationalist movements (e.g. Spain). Kosovo Albanians tried to emulate the Serb tactics of wooing Israel using the motive of common suffering. In 2013, Kosovo Albanian politician and former Prime Minister Enver Hoxhaj visited Jerusalem in a hope to convince Israel to recognize Kosovo as a sovereign nation. The Jerusalem Post reports, that according to Hoxhaj “there are some similarities between Kosovo and Jews in terms of their suffering,” yet the journal concludes,” despite Kosovo’s open admiration for Israel, Palestinian unilateralism and ties with Russia make recognition of the Balkan state difficult for Jerusalem.”

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69 “Israel-Kosovo Relations Marked by Shared Sympathies, Hampered by Identity Politics,” The Jerusalem Post, 27.02.2015.
A number of Israeli scholars and Western researchers of Israel and Jewish issues have noticed the manipulation with the Holocaust and the uses of the Jews in the Balkan conflict. Concurrently, the Simon Wiesenthal Center maintained a special focus on the Balkans reporting on anti-Semitism, historical revisionism, and right-wing nationalist extremism in all former Yugoslav states. Israeli scholars showed particular interest in the neo-fascist tendencies in post-Yugoslav Croatia and in the new radical Islamism in Bosnia-Herzegovina. The Simon Wiesenthal Center noticed Croat government’s tolerance of neo-fascism and anti-Semitism. Israel and several EU countries filed protests with the Croatian government after numerous anti-Semitic public statements and denials of the Holocaust. In April 2016, the United States dispatched to Croatia Ambassador Nicholas Dean, the State Department’s special envoy for Holocaust issues who pressured Croatia’s president Kolinda Grabar-Kitarović to make a television appearance condemning Croat Ustasha crimes in World War II and calling for a better education about the Holocaust in Croatia. When the 2015, a right-wing Croatian party returned to power, Ephraim Zuroff, historian and Wiesenthal Center’s representative in Eastern Europe wrote about “the return of evil in Croat history.” The World Jewish Congress announced an


73 “The President of the Republic, Kolinda Grabar-Kitarović, received the Special Envoy for Holocaust Issues from the United States State Department, Nicholas Dean,” Official webpages of the President of Croatia, 11. 04. 2016, [http://predsjednica.hr/objava/1/1/880](http://predsjednica.hr/objava/1/1/880).

international conference on Holocaust in World War II Croatia, the Ustasha concentration camp Jasenovac, and the recent Croatian historical revisionism. However, no Israeli or any other Western observer of contemporary Croatian politics, have observed that the Croatian right-wing nationalist parties, much like their counterparts in Serbia, admire the Israeli army and policies of the State of Israel against Arabs in Palestine. For example, Croatia’s newly appointed commissioner for veteran affairs addressed his supporters in these words: “With the Church and God on our side we can succeed! Croatia’s role model will be Israel!” Another member of the new Croatian cabinet, the leader of a far-right party, argued in a TV interview: “we are like Israel, Croatia lives in a strange surrounding … there is danger of new wars with Serbia …”

In sum, political manipulations with the Holocaust and various “uses of the Jews” are neither new nor surprising practices on the part of religious extremists, nationalists, and historical revisionists. Regarding the recent Serbian nationalism’s strategy aimed at the making of a “special relationship” with Israel as an ally of post-Yugoslav Serbia capable of assisting Serbia in the acquisition of Kosovo and fighting Muslims and neo-Nazis elsewhere, the effort has produced ambiguous results. Only some private Jewish circles and individuals took the risk of involvement with the worldwide discredited Balkan nationalist politics. Regarding the government, Israel would show cautious support or sympathies for some initiatives, provided it would not contradict interests of the State of Israel. Finally, there is another reason why Serbia could never fully succeed in the making Israel a close ally and that reason is called Russia, never a friend of Israel. Abandoning Marshal Tito’s politics of balancing between Russia and the West,

Serbia restored the old Slavic brotherhood with Russia. Concurrently, each of the new Balkan states breaking out of Yugoslavia sought its respective “kin country” internationally. The term come from Samuel P. Huntington who describes post-Cold War international alliances as cultural or civilizational alliances with a crucial role for religion (e.g. the Orthodox Christian Russians and Serbs; Bosnian Muslims and Turks; Catholic Croats and the Vatican, etc.)78 Thus, at least at the symbolic level, in ceremonial discourses and Church relations, the new post-communist Russia-Serbia romance has been one of most remarkable features of post-communist Eastern Europe where everyone except Serbia continued to hate Russia. In reality, as Veljko Vujačić shows in a recent comparative study of Russia and Serbia, in the post-communist phase the two repeated the learning about their similarities as well as differences.79

4. From a Balkan Affair to the Clash of Civilizations

“Sacred sites are the physical evidence of the perennial existence of the religious community and, by nationalist expansion, of the nation ... The history of shrines, as told in religious tales, and established by archeological evidence, is the history of the nation.”

—Peter Van Der Veer, Religious Nationalism, 1994

A “cosmic war” is an imagined battle between metaphysical forces- good and evil, right and wrong, order and chaos- that lies behind many cases of religion-related violence in the contemporary world. These transcendent spiritual images have been implanted onto the social and political scene, magnifying ordinary worldly conflict into sacred encounter...

78 Huntington, The Clash of Civilizations, p.28.
Let there be an endless struggle ... Let there be what cannot be ... On the grave, flowers will grow ... For a distant future generation ...

—Prince-Bishop of Montenegro Petar II Petrović –Njegoš (1847)

“Serbian Jerusalem” at face value looks a folk or pop cultural product, although it came “from above,” invented by the new post-communist Serb elite. Initially known only by close observers of the downfall of Yugoslavia, the phrase gained currency internationally during the NATO Balkan intervention and ensuing diplomatic battles over Kosovo independence. Although the metaphor and the Serb-Jewish comparisons are brainchildren of secular nationalists, the influence of religion has continuously increased since the movement’s origins. Often criticized for sectarian tendencies and an excessive ethnocentrism, the Serbian Orthodox Church in a post-communist globalizing world, welcomed the internationalization and globalization of the Kosovo controversy. Like the former communists turned-nationalists seeking the same utopian thinking and authoritarian state they got used to yet only under different symbols and expressed by different discourses, Balkan clerical nationalists found the Jerusalem parallel, the Jewish analogies and comparative genocide, eye-opening global perspectives. Accordingly, the post-communist Serbs disillusioned with Yugoslavia and seeking a new identity, could be re-imagined as one of the most righteous, holy, and martyred nation in the world. In addition, global and comparative perspectives helped a regional affair in the notorious European periphery to become a global issue. Concurrently, from the Yugoslav collapse and the Balkan wars to the first decade of the twenty-first century, Serbian religious nationalism merged with a global resurgence of religion discovering new challenges and rivals in the rising fundamentalisms,
public and radicalized religions. The Serbian Church’s espousal of the discourse on Serbian Jerusalem and the Serb-Jewish analogy reached a pinnacle under the Patriarchate of the ardent religious nationalist Irenej Gavrilović enthroned in 2010 and has advanced ever since ignoring critics from some clerical and secular circles.

It is nonetheless worth noting that several Serb religious leaders and intellectuals refused to accept “Drašković’s metaphor,” its meanings and accessories. They found it inappropriate, confusing or at least awkwardly applied. Thus, the Serbian Patriarch Pavle (1990-2009), indicated that if there existed such a thing as “Serbian Jerusalem,” it should be about the saintly Church’s founder St. Sava and his original gravesite at the Mileševo monastery (which is in central Serbia and therefore, geographically, outside Kosovo). In other words, Jerusalem as metaphor denotes the holiest place—for the Serbs that must be the memorial site dedicate to the holiest among the saints, namely Saint Sava, therefore either the original gravesite at the Mileševo monastery or the Memorial Saint Sava temple in Belgrade. Similarly, the Serb religious scholar Mirko Đorđević, argued that because of the strong influence of secular nationalism on religion and church in Serbia, the main cult of St. Sava to inspire the faithful as a wise but not warlike statesman, diplomat, and peacemaker, was intentionally overshadowed by the cult of Prince Lazar martyred in the Kosovo battle of 1389 who symbolizes war and sacrifice. According to Đorđević, the Serbian Jerusalem discourse is not a religious but a quintessential nationalistic idea that invokes the emperor Dušan the Mighty and the old Serb imperial dream of state expansion across the Balkans restoring borders from the fourteenth century. Indeed, Bishop Teodozije of Raška-Prizren invoked Dušan’s empire in a sermon held in April 2011 at the historic city of Prizren in Kosovo, which used to be Emperor Dušan’s capital: “The city of

Prizren is our Jerusalem and our Constantinople. It used to be imperial capital of Tsar Dušan the Mighty with its holy shrines and its beauty to which the Serbs return while returning to Kosovo.”

Yugoslav writer Mirko Kovač, in his collection of essays on Serbian nationalism noted yet another interpretation of the Serbian Jerusalem metaphor. In a tourist guidebook to northwestern Serbia, Kovač found description of what the people allegedly call “Serbian Jerusalem,” namely the new pilgrimage site at the monastery Lelić in the hills overlooking the town of Valjevo. In recent decades, Serbs have begun paying tribute to two radical Serb clerical nationalists. Namely, the Lelić monastery is the burial place for two relatively recently canonized Serbian saints, both ardent religious nationalists, Bishop Nikolaj Velimirović and Archimandrite Justin Popović. Celebrated today as anticommunists and great Serbs, their fundamentalist, anti-Semitic, and anti-Catholic teachings have become increasingly influential in contemporary Serbia not only in church circles but also in intellectual life and public schools. They represent the new Serbian nationalist elite, responsible for the invention of discourses such as “Serbian Jerusalem,” and other ideas and myths that dragged Serbs and the neighboring Balkan peoples into the wars to the 1990s.

Concurrently, while the Serb nationalist elite argue over the best application of the Serbian Jerusalem metaphor and how to export it to the global political marketplace to Israel, the United States, EU, and elsewhere; the re-traditionalized Serbian society embraces the theme in folk music and popular culture. Thus, folk singer Milomir Miljanić Miljan, in his popular tune “Serbian Jerusalem” released in 2014, laments over the destruction of Serbian shrines and suffering of the Serbs in Kosovo and Metohija. Among the comments to the video, reads the

83 Mirko Kovač, Elite that is Worse than Mob (Elita gora od rulje). (Zagreb: Fraktura, 2009).
following: “Serbia is going to be like it was in the age of the Dušan the Mighty Empire. Imperial Serbia!!!”

After the 2004 Albanian militants’ damage of the Serbian Church’s property and monuments in Kosovo, the Belgrade government successfully lobbied the United Nations for the protections of the Serbian medieval shrines and monuments. In 2006, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) released the following statement: “The World Heritage Committee decided to extend the site of the Dečani Monastery by adding to it three groups of churches, the Patriarchate of Peć Monastery, Gračanica Monastery, and the Church of the Virgin of Ljeviša. The site is now to be known as Medieval Monuments in Kosovo. The extended property, mainly dating from the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, was also placed on the List of World Heritage in Danger due to difficulties in its management and conservation stemming from the region's political instability. The Committee requested that the State Party (Serbia) work with UNESCO programs, with the United Nations Mission to Kosovo (UNMIK), and with the Provisional Institutions of Self-Government in Kosovo in caring for the site. The four edifices of the site reflect the high points of the Byzantine-Romanesque ecclesiastical culture that developed in the Balkans between the thirteenth and seventeenth centuries with its distinct style of wall painting. The Patriarchate of Peć Monastery is a group of four domed churches, on the outskirts of Peć featuring series of wall paintings. The thirteenth century frescoes of the Church of Holy Apostles are painted in a unique, monumental style. Early fourteenth century frescoes in the church of the Holy Virgin represent the appearance of the new so-called Palaiologian Renaissance style, combining the influences of the eastern

Orthodox Byzantine and the western Romanesque traditions. The style played a decisive role in subsequent Balkan art.”

Since 2013, the Serbian church and state, have furthered the internationalization of the Kosovo controversy emphasizing cultural diplomacy and using the Church’s connections abroad. After a 2013 “Serbian Medieval Cultural Heritage Exhibition” at the House of Commons of the British Parliament in London, UK, a church and state-sponsored world tour presenting the Serb nationalist perspective on the Kosovo controversy, moved to the United States. After presentation of the sacred heritage of Kosovo in New York City in January 2015, the Library of Congress in Washington DC hosted a high delegation of Serbian Orthodox Church dignitaries presenting a new English-language monograph “The Christian heritage of Kosovo and Metohija: the Spiritual, Historical and Aesthetic Heart of the Serbian People.” The speakers at the event were Bishop Maxim of the Western American Diocese of the Serbian Orthodox Church in North America, Bishop AtanasiJEvtić from Serbia, and Archbishop Demetrios, Primate of the Greek Orthodox Church of America. The Bishop AtanasiJEvtić, one of leading clerical zealots in the Balkans, urged “brothers Americans to understand better the cause and support the struggle for the endangered heritage of the Christian civilization.” He stated:

In 2016 came the crown of Serbia’s imitation of the State of Israel’s policies in Palestine. The Belgrade regime initiated the construction of settlements for Serbs originally from the province who emigrated or have been expelled to Serbia by the Albanians. In March 2016, the government of Serbia’s Office for Kosovo affairs, announced a plan to relocate in Kosovo of 20,000 Serbs from Serbia through a project for the construction of new settlements in the northern Serb enclaves of Kosovo, but also in

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87 The Christian Heritage of Kosovo and Metohija: The Spiritual, Historical and Aesthetic Heart of the Serbian People, Bishop Maxim (Vasiljević), editor-in-chief, Dušan T. Bataković, chief contributing editor, published by the Episcopal Council of the Serbian Orthodox Church in North America, (Los Angeles: Sebastian Press, 2014).
88 This author attended the event at the Library of Congress on 10. February 2015.
ethnically cleansed areas including the traditionally Albanian-populated south. The first Serb settlement labeled “Sunny Valley” is planned in the northern Serb enclaves of Zvečan and Mitrovica. In June 2016, Serbia’s state-run news agency announced that the Serbian government Office for Kosovo-Metohija … laid the cornerstone for a residential complex for returnees to the Kosovo-Metohija municipality. The complex … to become home to around 1,500 returnees named Sunny Valley, is expected to have 300 housing units and other buildings … the start of construction works marks the 17th anniversary of the start of the Serb exodus from Kosovo in 1999 … not a project of hatred against anyone, but a project of love for our own nation, aimed at alleviating the consequences of ethnic cleansing, bloody expulsions and extermination of Serbs in Kosovo …”89

Kosovo Albanians view Serbia as an imperialist and colonizing force of the past and present. According to a western analysis of recent Balkan affairs, “authorities in Kosovo have intensified their criticism against the settlements project, which consists of the construction of 300 homes in the North of Kosovo. According to them, the project which is funded by the Serb government is political and it aims at changing the structure of population in the north of Kosovo.”90 According to recent announcements by the Kosovo Albanian-dominated government, the settlement is an unlawful activity and dangerous politics that must be halted.91 Meanwhile, the construction continued and new ethnic clashes were reported around the Serb shrines in Kosovo celebrating Christian holidays and Serb anniversaries.

Concurrently, the Serbian Orthodox Church organized pilgrimages to the holy land of Kosovo, a new practice in Serbia’s culture and history. These patriotic tours of parishioners and lay activists affiliated to the Church, visitors from the Serb diaspora, tourist groups, military and police recruits, and school students, toured the historic Kosovo battlefield and the monasteries. Attacked sporadically by Albanian extremists, the new Serb pilgrims and settlers helped the

continuous nationalist mobilization in Serbia. Apparently, the Israeli Settler Movement and the Israeli government’s construction of Jewish homes in occupied territories, have inspired Serbia’s new Kosovo strategies. Overall, the dominant Serbian interpretation of the meanings of Jerusalem, the Holy Land, and the history of mass persecution based on religious identity, have been rather narrow, secularized, and politicized. Evidently, Serbian nationalism has become essentially much closer to the post-1967 Israeli religious right and rightists Zionist groups, then to the broader spiritual and cultural meanings of the Holy city and the Holy Land as world’s heritage and places of encounters among civilizations.

In sum, after losing wars in Kosovo and Croatia, while partly gaining only in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Serbian nationalism kept the regional focus by emphasizing memory and identity battles and diplomacy. Now that the new status of Kosovo as a holy land of the Serbs has been well established in Serbian post-Yugoslav collective identity and domestic politics and exported on a global political scene, Patriarch Irenej, in the following three recent statements has summarized the meaning of Kosovo for the Serbs today and what is to be done accordingly.

First, “Kosovo is not a geographic space but a holy land without which Serbia cannot exist.” Second, “Serbia simply cannot surrender or give away Kosovo in a territorial exchange or as a gift to anyone under any circumstances, Kosovo has always been ours and will remain ours.” Third, “Kosovo is at present an occupied Serbian land. It cannot be traded, partitioned or recognized as a foreign land but only liberated and returned to Serbia.”

94 Blic online, 11.07. 2012, www.blic.rs/vesti/politika/patrijarh-kosovo-nije...nego.../et9sh0.
95 Vestisrs online, 20.03. 2013, https://www.vesti.rs/Kosovo/Patrijarh-Irinej-Ni-priznanje-ni-podela
To implement this strategy, the Serbian government pursues political and cultural diplomacy while the Church wages a holy war of its own in the Kosovo Republic while also seeking and receiving support among friendly churches such as notably the Russian Orthodox Church, the Orthodox Christian Patriarchate at Jerusalem, and the Orthodox Church of Greece. This does not mean that Serbia has totally abandoned armed battles and wars for Kosovo. For example, according to a publication titled *Handbook for an Orthodox Soldier* issued in 2012 by the Serbian Army, “the (Serb) Orthodox soldier’s duty is to secure the places of worship and establish stable conditions under which the Orthodox priest can celebrate the bloodless sacrifice to the Glory of Our Lord for the sins of the people and his own …”97

Kosovo’s present statehood has been a result of a combination of factors including the advancement of Albanian nationalism in Albania, Yugoslavia and subsequent Balkan ethnic struggles, and foreign interventionism. The United States and NATO established near the Kosovo town of Uroševac/Ferizaj, the largest military base in Eastern Europe, Camp Bondsteel. The grateful Albanians posted a massive bronze statue of President Bill Clinton in the Kosovo capital city of Priština and of Woodrow Wilson in the capital of Albania Tirana honoring the idea of U.S. assistance to small nations’ self-determination. Tirana also named streets and plazas after the two Bush presidents and, most recently, the Albanian town of Sarranda added a statue of the U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton. Concurrently in Serbia, anti-Americanism has grown as well as pro-Russian sentiments.

In sum, Serbian nationalism has labored to “upgrade” the Kosovo controversy from an ethnic conflict in Europe’s periphery into a global affair comparable to Palestine. As the ethnologist Ivan Čolović has observed, the Kosovo myth is a state building project rather than

merely a folklore narrating the medieval battle and Church liturgy commemorating the canonized warriors. Since the nineteenth century, Čolović notes that the Kosovo narrative has evolved into an elite-constructed ideology and eventually imposed on the people as a religion of sorts in which the nation and state are worshiped as holy icons. 98 Čolović goes on to argue that the national ideology using Kosovo as its banner is not an immutable mythology or tradition but a changing material revised as it suits the state and church elite, and will be revised further to adjust to the new globalizing world. In such a new world, according to Čolović, such ideologies and cultures of memory cannot as earlier coexist separately and isolated from one another; hence there will be more interactions among them including emulating, borrowing, and mutual influences. 99

Understanding recent changes of the discourse about Kosovo also requires observing the post-communist and post-Yugoslav contexts. The new recent religious nationalist discourses have become striking features of post-communist, re-traditionalizing, and de-secularizing, earlier atheistic and anti-tradition modernizing societies. Unwilling to give up the privileged social status, the elites of former regimes publicly used the new symbols, discourses, tropes, and metaphors indicating the return of religion and tradition. The adoption of the religious nationalistic discourses and the pretense of religious conversions have routinely served the former communist elite to preserve the privileged social status and confirm identity mutation. As noted earlier, many leading post-communist nationalists used to be prominent communists. Some attempted religious conversions, other faked religiosity, and some simply used religion for political gains while remaining atheistic and openly cynical to which many religious leaders

98 “Ivan Čolović, Nation and Religion are Being Forced upon Us from Above as Things Most Sacred” (“Ivan Čolović: Nasilno nam nameću naciju i veru kao svetinje”), Novosti, 11.06.2017.
99 Čolović, Death on the Kosovo Field, p. 462.
responded favorably provided it served their clerical interests and the nationalist ideology they consecrated. Thus, the Croat nationalist historian and Holocaust denier Franjo Tudjman, was a retired Yugoslav communist army general turned into an ardent ethnic nationalist who made the Catholic Church the actual co-ruler of the state he founded and made himself president. Likewise, Slobodan Milošević, the communist-turned nationalist, as leader of post-communist Serbia could not hide his despise for religion and clergy yet always posed before TV cameras in the company of the Patriarch during every election campaign. Also, the chief Serb nationalist ideologue, the writer Dobrica Ćosić, was once a member of the Communist Party Central Committee. He never openly converted to the Serbian Orthodox Church yet worshiped in a zealously religious fashion the Kosovo myth and all that Kosovo symbolizes in Serb nationalism.

Not to mention that the Serb nationalist writer Vuk Drašković, who claims to have invented the “Serbian Jerusalem” metaphor, used to be a senior Yugoslav communist official, Chief of staff under the (Croat) head of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia in the 1970s. Likewise, the current popular leader of Russia, Vladimir Putin, the former communist secret agent, justifies the Russian 2014 annexation of Crimea, in a religious nationalistic language emphasizing historic rights and drawing parallels with Jerusalem. Putin asserted that Crimea has “sacred meaning for Russia, like the Temple Mount for Jews and Muslims,” and that Crimea is “the spiritual source of the formation of the multifaceted but monolithic Russian nation … It was on this spiritual soil that our ancestors first and forever recognized their nationhood.”

The second, post-Yugoslav context, unveils several new small European nation-states succeeding a large nation that during the Cold War era acquired the influence and reputation in international relations comparable only to European empires such as Austria-Hungary or Ottoman Turkey at its heights. After the ethnic nationalist euphoria and wars of the 1990s, these

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100 Paul Coyer, “Putin's Holy War and the Disintegration of the 'Russian World,'” Forbes, 4.06. 2015.
new post-Yugoslav states woke up to grow increasingly frustrated as political and economic dwarfs, struggling transitional states discredited by the International War Crimes Tribunal sentences and exhausted by the prolonged nationalist strife and instability. The invention of “Serbian Jerusalem” is an example how these new post-Yugoslav small, isolated, and sect-like states vied for relevance, seeking way out of isolation and inferiority. The inventors and practitioners of the “Serbian Jerusalem” and similar new nationalist discourses, hoped to convince their domestic as well as foreign audiences of a greater importance in domains of culture, history, religion and ideas, purportedly exceeding the country’s actual size and modest economic and military potential. Similarly, Serbia’s nemesis Croatia, invented (with a little help from the United States) an international initiative labeled The Three Seas Initiative. Presenting the Initiative to Russian president Vladimir Putin, Croatia’s president Kolinda Grabar-Kitarović described Croatia as “a state small in size of its territory and population yet distinguished by its talents, ambitions, and new original ideas such as The Three Seas initiative aimed to bridge the chasm between Old and new Europe.”

However, the new reality, after the disintegration of united Yugoslavia as a sizeable European country with a notable influence in the Third World, has unexpectedly dwarfed the small post-Yugoslav nations in a globalizing world. Nevertheless, their nationalist elites do not even think of abandoning the key tenets of their ideologies including notably the exaggeration of their importance in the world. According to historian Pål Kolstø’s study on nationalist myths, Serbs, Croats, Bosnians, and other small peoples of southeastern Europe have in common what he terms antemurale myth, that is, mythologized historical narratives portraying them as small in

size yet achieving great heroic and exceptional deeds and service in defense of the Western civilization.\textsuperscript{102} Thus, both Serbs and Croats claim to have protected Christian Europe standing in the first line of defense against the Muslim invader from the Middle East. Similarly, Serb nationalism views Serbia as the principal initiator and the most heroic participant in the First World War. Contemporary Serbian nationalism also finds a continuity of the Serbs’ sacrifice for Christian Europe in defense against an aggressive Islam, from the 1389 battle at the Kosovo Field to the wars in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Kosovo in the 1990s.\textsuperscript{103} The post-Yugoslav Serbia, Croatia, and other successor states of former Yugoslavia, except perhaps Slovenia, are internationally insignificant, impoverished, depopulated, struggling states with corrupt ineffective governments. While in Yugoslavia during the Cold War, they took for granted the international reputation and influence that Marshal Tito’s regime had acquired which was lost once Tito’s nation ceased to exist. After Yugoslavia, the new small ethnic nations’ inferiority complex has worsened and the exaggerated religion and myth function as survival kits for life in sect-like societies with a hostile and arrogant world paying no attention to them or even despising them. Their identities changed and the pride once bolstered by the secular modernizing and worldly Yugoslavia, turned into the pre-modern peasant mentality of small ethno-confessional communities hating the neighbors while seeking approval from the significant international political and religious authorities, states, nations, and empires.

Today, a presumably most useful role for Serbia, Croatia, and Bosnia in international relations may be to deter and discourage separatist and secessionist movements. In other words, ethnic separatists and religious nationalists worldwide should cease their efforts unless they risk ending up like Serbia, Croatia, Bosnia and other pathetic leftovers of Yugoslavia. Pope Francis,


\textsuperscript{103} See Huntington, \textit{The Clash of Civilizations}, pp. 286-290.
Barack Obama, and several other world leaders, have recently warned of the risky separatist nationalism manipulating temporary euphoria without realistically anticipating the consequences. In 2014 and 2016, Pope Francis spoke about the danger of a “balkanization of Europe and the world,” commenting on separatist tendencies in Scotland, Catalonia, and the Brexit.104

In present-day Serbia, for example, the nearly four decades of the nationalistic pressures on society created some kind of a permanent state of siege, turning the one-time open and worldly modernizing society into a sectarian and backward state in Europe’s periphery. Yet, according to the Serbian nationalist regime and its allied national church, the worse the situation gets, the greater becomes the influence of the new religious nationalism keeping them in power. The Church teaches that remedy is an endless struggle and self-sacrifice, as lessons learned from the Kosovo myth and Serbia’s sacred history. Church zealots often refer to the Prince-Bishop of Montenegro Petar Petrović II-Njegoš according to whom collective self-sacrifice is necessary and losses are only temporary, because, “there is no Resurrection without death,” hence, “Let there be an endless struggle … Let there be what cannot be … On the grave, flowers will grow … For a distant future generation …”105

The philosophy under consideration prevailed in Serbia during moments of crisis, under foreign occupation or in wars. For a foreign observer, even in the case of the most sympathetic visitors to Serbia like British novelist Rebecca West, some features of “Balkan mentality” are appalling:

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104 In a 2014 interview, Pope Francis spoke about secessionism in Catalonia and Scotland. The breakup of nations, the pontiff said, worried him but Spain and Britain would expectedly avert the tragedy of balkanization unlike the former Yugoslavia. Yugoslavia’s disintegration, said the pope, was unavoidable because “the cultures that made up that country were so diverse they couldn’t even be stuck together with glue” (“Pope Voices Fears over Scottish Independence,” The Telegraph, 13.06. 2014). Again, the pope discussed the balkanization theme in the wake of “Brexit,” a referendum potentially balkanizing both Britain and the European Union. “No to balkanization because it is a threat to the EU,” said the pope according to the world’s media releases, (Vatican Insider, 26.06. 2016).

On the Sheep’s Field I had seen sacrifice in its filth and falsehood, and in its astonishing power over the imagination. There I had learned how infinitely disgusting in its practice was the belief that by shedding the blood of an animal one will be granted increase; that by making a gift to death one will receive a gift of life. There I had recognized that this belief was a vital part of me, because it was dear to the primitive mind, since it provided an easy answer to various perplexities, and the primitive mind is the foundation on which the modern mind is built. This belief is not only hideous in itself: it pollutes the work of love. It has labored for annulment of the meaning of Christianity, by insinuating itself into the Church and putting forward, by loose cries and the drunkenness of ecstasy, a doctrine of the Atonement too absurd to be set down in writing.106

In a similar vein, Serbian literary critic Miodrag Popović deconstructs the Kosovo myth in the 1970s anticipating it as the fuel for new conflicts. He finds that Serbian nationalism fuses “the real popular liberation and national emancipation struggle, with the surviving pagan instincts and drives, such as revenge, torture, slaughter, sacrificial rituals and the symbolic communication with heroic ancestors, thus indicating that the human society under consideration harbors untamed mythical impulses and archaic behavioral patterns …” and concludes:

This kind of archaic, pre-modern, or simply, “barbaric” behavior, might have served the purpose of community survival at some points in history, yet, if and when the mythical archaic thinking becomes a lasting mental attitude, collective mentality or national culture, institutionalized as a major national patriotic myth and a key collective identity component, it may become fatal to the people incapable of resisting its pseudohistorical spell. The contemporary nationalist intellectuals, captives of these myths and pseudo histories, are not like the early Western European romantic nationalist poets; they present the contemporary thought and the spirit of modern man running the risk of witnessing a new Kosovo, facing the intellectual and ethical defeat.107

In a final analysis, the above described nationalist discourses and invented traditions obscure the nation-building failure, social decay and longstanding conflicts that the nationalist elite have created. Both Serbia and Kosovo are nearly failed struggling states. Serbs as well as Albanians from both Kosovo and Albania join the regional waves of mass migration to Western

106 West, Black Lamb and Grey Falcon, p. 914.
Europe leaving many areas in the Balkan macro region virtually deserted.\textsuperscript{108} Concurrently, an extremist Islamism advances in Muslim areas of the Kosovo, Macedonia, the Sandak and Bosnia-Herzegovina.\textsuperscript{109} Imported mainly from Saudi Arabia and other conservative gulf states, Kosovo Islamism, according to a \textit{New York Times} report, recruited 314 Kosovars, including two suicide bombers, 44 women and 28 children—who have gone abroad to join the Islamic State, the highest number per capita in Europe.\textsuperscript{110} According to an analysis based on a study of Kosovars fighting in the war in Syria, their motives include young people’s lack of employment and opportunities for normal life in their own country combined with the influences of ethnic nationalist and militant Wahhabi and Jihad ideologies.\textsuperscript{111}

Since 2004, Albanian nationalists in Kosovo have sporadically attacked Serb monasteries, clergy, pilgrims and visitors. The international peacekeepers of the NATO-led Kosovo Force (KFOR) protect the Serb enclaves from Albanian extremists. The Serbian Church asked for a permanent exemption from the local civilian administration, yet KFOR terminated the operation entrusting the guard duty at the Serb monasteries and churches to the local Albanian authorities. The move angered Serb nationalists and their Russian supporters.\textsuperscript{112} At this writing, Kosovo is formally a sovereign nation and even an EU candidate. Yet, five out of 28 EU member states do not want to recognize Kosovo’s independence for the same reasons as Israel, that is, to discourage secessionist movements such as in Catalonia, Scotland, and Palestine.

\textsuperscript{108} “More than 43% of the population has left Bosnia Herzegovina,” \textit{Al Jazeera Balkans}, 2. 02. 2017, \url{http://balkans.aljazeera.com/vijesti/iz-bih-otislo-43-posto-stanovnistva}.


\textsuperscript{110} Carlotta Gall, “How Kosovo Was Turned Into Fertile Ground for ISIS. Extremist clerics and secretive associations funded by Saudis and others have transformed a once-tolerant Muslim society into a font of extremism,” \textit{The New York Times}, 21.05. 2016, \url{http://mobile.nytimes.com/2016/05/22/world/europe/how-the-saudis-turned-kosovo-into-fertile-ground-for-isis.html?_r=0}.


\textsuperscript{112} “Serbian Monasteries Endangered by Transfer of Guard to Kosovo Police,” \textit{Православие.ru}, 9.08. 2010, \url{http://www.pravoslavie.ru/english/38619.htm}.
The Serbian Orthodox Church under Patriarch Irenej, approves the comparisons between Serbs and Jews hoping for the support that Israel receives from the West and also to emphasize what Marko Živković describes as the narrative of “eternal victimization.” In order to update and “globalize” the victimization theme, the Church compares the suffering of the Serbs not only with the Holocaust but also with Turkish genocide against Armenians in the First World War. In August 2016, at a rally commemorating a massive Serb refugee movement from Croatia to Serbia and Bosnia at the end of the 1991-1995 war, the Patriarch Irenej stated:

Today we remember the suffering of our people at hands of the Croat military and police in the operation “Storm” in August 1995. The aim of that crime was to expel Serbs from the provinces, towns and villages where they lived for many centuries and to cleanse Croatia from Serbs and Orthodox Christianity. Thus continued the terror against Serbs in Croatia from the Second World War. Then, we remember, in the Croat fascist Ustasha state Serbs were murdered in concentration camps … the Ustasha regime even set up a concentration camp for Serb children with more than 120,000 innocent child victims, most of which died from hunger and thirst … Only Jews and Armenians, besides Serbs, have seen such a Golgotha …

The Serbian Church leader has repeated the Armenian analogy several times since. Thus, in October 2017 during his visit to the Serb Republic in Bosnia-Herzegovina, the patriarch made the following statement, triggering protests from the Bosnian Islamic Religious Authority:

Wherever Serbs live, there is Serbia: not just in Serbia proper but in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Vojvodina, Montenegro and other places. All Serbs, wherever they live in the world, should unite in the thinking about our people’s glorious history… The twentieth century was so glorious yet tragic for the Serbs, that human history never recorded such a grave suffering of a people. It seems that the suffering of the Serbs exceeded the gravity of the calamities of Jewish and Armenian peoples…

The patriarch’s reference to the Armenian genocide, along with the familiar Serb-Jewish analogies, is the most recent update to the victimization theme and the Church’s adjustment to a

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113 Marko Zivkovic, “The Wish to be a Jew”, p. 69.
globalizing world. The Church welcomes recent resolutions and pronouncements on the Armenian genocide from the Vatican, Germany, France, and eleven other EU members.\textsuperscript{116} Apparently, the Church of Serbia is hoping for a similar international recognition regarding genocide against Serbs during the Second World War in the wartime Croat pro-Nazi state. Pope Francis has recently initiated a conference on this controversy between representatives of the Croat Catholic and Serb Orthodox Churches but the effort discontinued without an agreement.\textsuperscript{117} The two countries and their churches repeatedly tried to invite Israel as a judge but Israel abstained. However, the Yad Vashem institution has twice denied petitions to give the Croat Cardinal Stepinac—the church leader and the chief military vicar during the Ustasha state, whom the Church wants to canonize for sainthood, the title “Righteous among the Nations.” In the meantime, the image of an eternally suffering and morally righteous Serbia has been tarnished by Serbia’s role in the Balkan wars of the 1990s. By now, it has been determined by international war crimes tribunals and independent human rights groups that a large number of Serb political and military leaders committed war crimes and ethnic cleansing against Bosniak Muslims, Croats, and Albanians.\textsuperscript{118}

According to Serbian nationalism’s efforts to address the world’s audience, it seems no longer the notorious “Balkanist” and orientalist phenomenon endemic in the notorious European

\textsuperscript{118} For example, in the Bosnian war alone (not to mention the wars in Kosovo and Croatia) specifically during the 1992-1995 siege of Sarajevo, the Bosnian Serb army killed 13,000 people including 5,000 civilians and 1,500 children, mostly Muslims. In addition, at the town of Srebrenica in 1995, the Serb army executed 8,000 prisoners of war, all of them Muslim men. From 2003-2016, the United Nations War Crimes Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia based in The Hague, The Netherlands, sentenced to prisons terms from 20 year to life, nine Serb senior military and political leaders found guilty of war crimes, crimes of genocide and crimes against humanity. Overall, most of the 160 indicted and sentenced for war crimes in the Balkan wars of the 1990s belong to various Serb military, paramilitary, and security forces. See United Nations, The International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY), http://www.icty.org/en.
periphery. Instead, contemporary Serbian religious nationalism as well as the neighboring ethnic nationalisms in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina follow the pattern of the new global religious nationalism in a changing de-secularizing and globalizing world. The struggles over historic monuments and holy places representing nothing less than the entire past and present of nations and civilizations effectively influenced politics and government, mobilized masses, and drew international attention. The crucial role of religion and manipulations with history create an autonomous dimension of the conflict appearing as “eternal,” “ancient,” and not merely abut land but about “identity,” “soul,” etc. This aspect of the conflict, regardless of whatever pragmatic political solutions—even most radical such as partitions—in most cases precludes a complete resolution. When conflicts involved disputes over historic sacred monuments and consecration of land, resolution seems practically impossible. The controversy over “Serbian Jerusalem” shares a number of similarities for example, with the Hindu-Muslim conflict over the historic mosque/Hindu temple at Ajodhya in the 1990s, and the Jewish-Arab clashes since the 1960s over the Temple Mount in Jerusalem.\(^{119}\) The most recent efforts by the inventors of the “Serbian Jerusalem” idea aim at presenting the Kosovo conflict in the global context. Accordingly, holy places such as Kosovo (in the Balkans) and Jerusalem (in Palestine) are major battlefields in an ongoing global “clash of civilizations.” In order to prove the thesis, two recently produced French and Serb documentary films highlight the Albanian attacks on the Kosovo medieval churches and monasteries.\(^{120}\) Author of the Serbian documentary “Kosovo: A Moment in Civilization” (Belgrade, 2017), Boris Malagurski, explains: “the script writer, a


young Christian theologian from Belgrade, suggests to the viewers that the Kosovo theme is not a local affair but concern for the entire Christian civilization … therefore the medieval monasteries of Kosovo must be defended and the Albanian Kosovo Republic blocked from becoming a member of UNESCO …”121

Overall, the Kosovo battle is itself a metaphor rather than an episode or a historical moment denoting a process that changes forms and dynamics and is far from complete. Nationalist elites seeking world’s attention have engineered its recent internationalization and globalization drawing comparisons with internationally better-known issues they found analogous. Religious nationalists today view globalization as an opportunity as well as imperative to upgrade local and regional conflicts as global clashes and present them on the world stage using increasingly the technological innovations of the global age. Religion is as ever an ambivalent force in history and society. While religious activists engage in humanitarianism, peacemaking, and conflict resolution, religious nationalists simultaneously labor in the opposite direction. Although religion per se tends to de-secularize and consecrate reality not to mention mythologizing history, in some cases it may aggravate and cement conflicts. They often make resolvable conflicts “eternal.” As Mark Juergensmeyer argues, religion often complicates, magnifies, and cements cultural, territorial, and political conflicts that may be resolved without the religious meaning and influence. “When a struggle becomes sacralized,” Juergensmeyer argues, “incidents that might previously have been considered minor skirmishes or slight differences of understanding are elevated to monumental proportions… Those who had been simple opponents become instead cosmic foes. The process of satanization can transform a worldly struggle into a contest between martyrs and demons. Alas, this

inescapable scenario of hostility does not end until the mythology is redirected or until one side or the other has been destroyed .”

To conclude, as noted in the introduction to this article, from the First World War and the Paris Peace conference to the present, the idea of national self-determination has remained highly attractive yet unarticulated and difficult to implement. The centennial of national self-determination unveils a history of conflicts over who, when, and how claims the right to national self-determination and how to redefine state borders and territory in former imperial domains or ethnically heterogeneous states with separatist movements. The examined case of Serbian nationalism in Kosovo paralleled by nationalist discourses to Israel-Palestine, exemplifies presumably the most complex and troubled cases. The conflict arises from contesting territorial claims between movements claiming territory in which it constitutes a majority of the population, against movements seeking nationhood that fuses religion and nationality, while justifying territorial claims by religious myths, invented traditions, and sacred historical monuments. When a nationalist rivalry involves holy lands, religious identities, and religious myths as key elements of national ideologies, such conflicts, to invoke Winston Churchill’s quip about the Catholic-Protestant conflict in Northern Ireland, will be resolved on Doomsday.

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