

April 2017

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Recommended Citation

Salih, Jusuf (2017) "Ethnicity, Religion and Violence in Bosnia-Herzegovina," *Journal of Global Initiatives: Policy, Pedagogy, Perspective*: Vol. 11 : No. 2 , Article 7.

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.kennesaw.edu/jgi/vol11/iss2/7>

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Ethnicity, Religion, and Violence in Bosnia-Herzegovina

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Abstract

The violence that erupted in the Balkans at the end of the second millennium made fierce enemies of people who had lived together in peace as neighbors, friends, classmates, and married couples. Nationalism, chauvinism, and religious fanaticism quickly grew stronger, leading to the disappearance of centuries-long harmony among its inhabitants. Among the reasons for the conflict were the experienced communist leaders who skillfully used religious slogans to advance their campaigns; also, religious leaders became close associates to political leaders with hopes that they would attain the religious rights denied and limited during the old governance. As a result, nationalism and resilient religious identities appeared as important elements of rhetoric of public figures. The last century ended with the dark events of two world wars and the Balkans as a center of ethnic and religious armed conflicts. The conflict in Bosnia-Herzegovina was the first major, post-Cold War-era test of the international community's ability to resolve ethnic conflicts. Its efforts were not effective in preventing a catastrophic war and establishing conditions for stable, long-term peace and stability once the war ended. As a result, Bosnia-Herzegovina has remained troubled by the contradiction between integration and partition. The tension between communities is still evident and powerful. Interfaith relations are also delicate. Memories of the war are still fresh, people have war traumas, and there is a fear that another war could break out anytime.

Introduction

“Communism is dead! Long live nationalism!” were the calls of the end of the 20th century. The contemporary Balkan conflicts, with their knot of ethnic, territorial, demographic, historical, and religious problems have surpassed positive hopes of what should have been a post-communist era. The region has endured a series of ethnic and religious-based hostilities and conflicts, including the largest and

bloodiest military clash in Europe since World War II (Friedman, 1996, p. 1). Therefore, in discussing the fruits of globalization, it is also important to underline wars and organized violence that occurred last century (Alexander, 2012, p. 159).

Violence of a nature very similar to that which is explored in this paper has unfortunately persisted into the present century. Brutal conflicts such as those in Syria and Iraq—often among people who share many values—continue to cast a dark and disturbing pall over modern human history. Such violence has not only resulted in the death of hundreds of thousands of innocent civilians and derailed efforts to bring peace and stability to the region, but also resulted in millions of refugees, forced to leave their ancestral homes in order to survive. This, in turn has led to political and economic strife among many European nations conflicted between protecting their borders and helping those displaced and marginalized by war and violence.

The focus of this paper will be religion, violence, and traumas in the last war in Bosnia-Herzegovina in the Balkans. I will discuss the relationship between religion and politics and the devastation that resulted from political rhetoric. I will also discuss the concept of victimization connected to centuries-old history as a tool to motivate masses and increase awareness of their national and religious identity. Nationalism and religious fundamentalism, very much related to the violence in the region, will also be discussed. I also will debate the role of media in gaining the support of masses and also in manipulating them. Ethnic cleansing, civilian casualties, and war disturbances are also part of the discussion.

The Balkans are at the crossroads of world civilizations, between Eastern and Western Christianity, between Latin and Byzantine cultures, between the remnants of the Hapsburg and Ottoman Empires, and between Christian Europe and Islamic Asia (Appleby, 2000, p. 64). Hence, the region's societies and cultures have been shaped and intertwined for centuries by Christian and Muslim empires and civilizations (Appleby, 2000, p. 68). Also, the importance of the region reminds us of the events that took place in Bosnia in 1914 that led to the beginning of the First World War. It was in Sarajevo that Gavrilo Princip assassinated Archduke Franz Ferdinand of Austria, triggering the Great War.

To better understand the multiculturalism of Bosnia-Herzegovina, it is necessary to note that the Bosnian Muslims are the only people in Europe, and possibly the world, who are nominally identified by their religion and not their language or ethnicity. Most are Slavs¹ converted during the five centuries of Ottoman rule in Bosnia (Glenny, 1992, p. 139). In this case, ethnicity and religion appear to be the indicators of the cultural identity by which social and political interests were defined (Appleby, 2000, p. 59). But it also shows that religion was the most important factor of national and ethnic identification shown during the hostilities (Appleby, 2000, p. 63). The social constructions of national identity are not unanimous and are subject to disagreements and discussions (Giesen, 2004b, p. 110), but for Bosnian Muslims, Islam was a basis for national identity (Appleby, 2000, p. 66).

¹ In recent times, there are some voices that challenge this idea and say that Bosnian Muslims are in fact the descendants of ancient Illyrians and are not Slavic people.

Fundamentalism, Ethnicity, and War Trauma

Understanding the real reasons of violence might not be easy to explain. Perhaps people see in others some kind of abyss in which they stand (Taylor, 2002, p. 34) and they may also feel some kind of threat that motivates them to action. Feeling threatened prompts protection, which then leads to certain actions. Vamik Volkan describes the situations when one group feels threatened and senses the danger:

In our routine lives we are more concerned with subgroups under the tent: families or professional organizations, for example. Our relationship with our large-group identity, in ordinary times, is like breathing. While we breathe constantly, we do not usually notice it unless our ability to breathe is threatened, such as if we are caught in a smoke-filled house on fire. When the large-group identity is threatened, people under the metaphorical tent become like the people who are caught in a smoke-filled room. They become constantly aware of their large-group identities and become preoccupied with its protection and maintenance, even if this preoccupation leads to destructive acts. (Volkan, 2009, p. 140)

Ethnic identity is often seen as a reason for violence and is regarded as essential for a collective action (Eder, Giesen, Schmidtke, & Tambini, 2002, p. 38). People with strong national feelings describe their own communities as eternally given some indisputable rights (Eder et al., 2002, p. 43). Such feelings not only separate them from others, but also can lead them to see themselves as elevated above the others. Some of these ethnic groups hold a shared religion, and it is difficult to discuss religion without including ethnic identity. Therefore, ethnonationalists can be seen as a resolute category of people in both their ethnic and religious objectives. Believing that religion gives them a sacred legitimacy to their pursuits, ethnonationalists find justifications for promoting violence against others (Appleby, 2000, pp. 60-62).

But in some places, group identity primarily is defined either by religion or by ethnicity (Volkan, 2009, p. 140). Language is seen as the main carrier of group virtuosity, and when there is opposition to compromise to linguistic assimilation, conflict can result (Eder et al., 2002, p. 42). Many believe that religion has been the major reason for ethnic conflict in recent times. For example, conflicts in Bosnia, Palestine, and Northern Ireland have been described as religious, rather than mainly ethnic or national (Eder et al., 2002, p. 40).

These religiously motivated conflicts raise concerns among skeptics about religion itself: How can people believe in a good and omnipotent God with so much evil in the world (Taylor, 2002, pp. 52-53)? Seeing religion as a source of the violence, they argue for weakening the role of religion in society. However, some also argue that the strengthening of religious feelings in a more genuine way is what is necessary for a peaceful coexistence among members of different faiths (Appleby, 2000, p. 76). They argue that the decline of religion leads to the strengthening of ethnic ideologies that take the role of ethnic or civic religion, which leads to violence (Eder et al., 2002, p. 40). But the complexity about religion is: What are the boundaries, and who defines them?

People of certain ethnic identity will look to some religious indicators to unite (Taylor, 2002, 114-115), and religious language is the one around which they find it meaningful to arrange their moral and political experience (Taylor, 2002, p. 79). Therefore, religious differences can cause conflicts among ethnic groups with different religions (Eder et al., 2002, p. 41). Discussing religion in this context, Charles Taylor (2002) narrates the description of the religion made by William James:

The word “religion” as ordinarily used, is equivocal. A survey of history shows us that, as a rule, religious geniuses attract disciples, and produce groups of sympathizers. When these groups get strong enough to “organize” themselves, they become ecclesial institutions with corporate ambitions of their own. The spirit of politics and the lust of dogmatic rule are then apt to enter and to contaminate the originally innocent thing. (p. 6)

Religious values, in the extreme, can cause fundamentalism and zealotry, making people feel exceptional and superior. As a result, they start to build boundaries around themselves, embracing negative feelings and fear about people who live outside their borders (Volkan, 2009, p. 137). The survival, identity, and protection of the group become its primary preoccupations, and they can begin to feel entitled to hurt “others” and perceive them as a threat (Volkan, 2009, pp. 135-136). Being driven by fear or a sense of superiority, these groups create various hypotheses. When these assumptions become accepted theories without proper and adequate evidence, they can become moral precepts for life in general (Taylor, 2002, p. 44). And believing that they have a special relationship with the divine along with a stand to be apart from others may lead to violence particularly when “others” are perceived as threatening (Volkan, 2009, p. 125).

Although the term “*fundamentalism*” pertaining to religion was first used in the 1920s, the idea is almost as old as religion itself, for there have always been groups from different religions who exaggerated their religiosity (Volkan, 2009, p. 125). Volkan says that the mentality of these religious fundamentalists is preoccupied with keeping the opaque side of the light turned against the real world that is perceived as threatening and frustrating. They refuse to go between illusion and reality and attempt to keep illusion as their special reality (Volkan, 2009, p. 129). And they can be successful in motivating people since the most organized and socially sanctioned “*propaganda*” comes from religious organizations (Volkan, 2009, p. 130).

Beyond destruction and loss of innocent people, religious or ethnic conflicts create traumas in people’s memories and these traumas do not go easily from their memories. In defining trauma, Jeffrey Alexander asserts that trauma occurs when the traumatizing event interacts with human nature. Because people need security, order, and love, if something abruptly undermines these needs, people will be traumatized as a result (Alexander, 2004b, p. 3).

Bernhard Giesen (2004b) describes trauma in more detail:

Birth and death represent ultimate ruptures and breaks in the web of meaning that catches the object of the world. They are like black holes we are unable to

experience directly and to speak about—the unspeakable origin of our human existence. Sometimes, however, external forces invade violently and unexpectedly the personal realm of our existence and remind us suddenly of our mortality. Later on, after a period of latency, we remember this shocking intrusion again and again, we revive it in our dreams, we talk about it, etc. We call this ruminating memory a “trauma.” (p. 8)

Traumas are a part of the violence that are deeply entrenched in people’s hearts and memories. These are tragedies, and people redeem them by experiencing them; however, despite this redemption, they cannot get over it easily. Rather, to achieve redemption, they sometimes feel compelled to dramatize and experience again and again the feeling of the actual trauma itself (Alexander, 2004a, p. 227).

The Beginning of War in Bosnia-Herzegovina

In the cold days of November 1989, after half a century of separation with the Iron Curtain, Europeans from the East and the West could look forward to building “the common European dream.” Rapidly, Eastern European nations left behind their old, monist political regimes and embraced democratic political systems. Liberty and democracy replaced suppression and totalitarianism. But at the same time, the communist bureaucracies throughout Eastern Europe were developing ways to adapt to the new conditions and preserve their privileges (Glenny, 2000, p. 635).

Since the French Revolution, the modern European nation-states tried to minimize the role of ethnicity by favoring political and juridical ties. But the concept of ethnos never disappeared (Eder et al., 2002, p. 55). The good example for this is Yugoslavia, which not only failed to solve problems of national identity based on communist ideals, but in fact worsened the problem. Yugoslavia, particularly after the death of Josip Broz Tito (1980), was not successful in keeping the national unity intact under its famous and widespread slogan of “Unity and Brotherhood” among its nations (Appleby, 2000, p. 59). Its populations sought to protect their national interests against other constitutive ethnicities of the country. Such transformational turmoil of the people gave rise to the Serbian president, Slobodan Milosevic (1941–2006), who reinvented himself as a chauvinist and a devotee of power (Glenny, 2000, p. 635).

Some argue that the main responsibility for the destruction of Yugoslavia lies particularly with the communist leadership that turned to mobilization of national chauvinism in order to create a popular base for their authoritarian rulings rather than face democratization, which became unavoidable in the late 1980s (Denitch, 1994, p. 185). And, since the mass media plays a crucial role in reaffirming the collective identity of communities (Eder et al., 2002, p. 74), these political actors used it effectively in order to mobilize the population for their own political aspirations. However, their nationalistic appetites had also the opposite effect. It generated fear in other nationalities who favored separation and independence from the Yugoslavian federation (Denitch, 1994, p. 185). Therefore, while communist leaders competed in the public arena for public legitimacy among their people,

issues raised by them became politicized (Eder et al., 2002, p. 90) and were seen as a threat by members of other ethnicities.

Yugoslavia could be considered a relatively new state since it first came into existence in 1918, after World War I. Initially, its name was the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes; however, after World War II, it became a federation of many nations. The word “Yugoslavia” means “land of the South (Yugo) Slavs.” The central part of Yugoslavia, which is a case of this article, was populated by three major groups (Serbs, Muslims, and Croats), all of which spoke the same South Slavic language called Serbo-Croatian until recently (Sells, 1996, p. 5). It was famously said during Tito’s (1892-1980)² time that Yugoslavia had six republics, two autonomous regions,³ five nations, four languages, three religions, two alphabets, and one party (Holbrooke, 1998, p. 26).

Since the religious extremists or nationalist demagogues create images of their people being victimized at some historical past by some “others” they can seek retribution. And a skilled politician can use such “victimization” feelings of the masses and abuse their emotive streams (Appleby, 2000, p. 69). There are many cases in which the religious marker is manipulated in order to mobilize people, and Milosevic provides one such example (Taylor, 2002, pp. 114-115). In 1989, on the 600th anniversary of the Serb defeat by the Turks at Kosovo, Milosevic went to the legendary battlefield and delivered an inflammatory and provocative speech before 1 million Serbs (Holbrooke, 1998, p. 26). That speech was a beginning of a new era that would eventually lead to an unreturned path for the future of the country leading to its destruction.

As the Serbian nationalistic feelings reached their peak after this speech, nationalism brought annihilation and grief to Yugoslav people. As George Orwell illustrates, a nationalist categorizes people and assumes that “whole blocks of millions can be confidently labeled ‘good’ or ‘bad’” (Elshtain, 1996, p. 51). A nationalist also insists that no other duty must be allowed to override or even challenge the duty to their society. Moreover, a nationalist expresses his need for more power, because he fears that others may have it more (Elshtain, 1996, p. 51). Therefore, Bosnia was not a simple Balkan anomaly, but an intense development of national breakdown under the leadership of political manipulation and misgovernment (Maass, 1996, p. 273).

As a result of the decline of old regime and being unable to maintain Serb-dominated Yugoslavia, Serb nationalists wanted to keep their dominance. Supported by the country’s military, their plan was also to integrate the Serb population living outside Serbia into a so-called greater Serbia. Croat nationalists also were trying to unite the Croat-majority areas of Bosnia-Herzegovina into a greater Croatia (Appleby, 2000, p. 67). Other nations’ populations were not as big as Serbs and Croats; therefore, their main objective was only acquiring independence and protecting their own integrity.

² The ultimate leader and ruler of Yugoslavia after the end of the World War II until his death in 1980.

³ Yugoslavia was a federation of six republics and two autonomous regions: Serbia, Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Macedonia, Montenegro, Slovenia, Kosovo and Vojvodina.

Before the war, some argued that Yugoslavia had been perhaps the most successful experiment in building a multinational and multicultural federation in Europe since World War II (Denitch, 1994, p. 1). But this successful testing was converted into the most dreadful actions of violence in post-war Europe. The country was drastically impoverished with a deteriorated economy. Tens of thousands of talented young people left the universities, institutes, and research centers in pursuit of better lives in different parts of Europe (Denitch, 1994, p. 193).

The construction of boundaries in most cases is linked to institutional domain that represents the public perspective (Giesen, 2004b, p. 11). The political institutions are required to act responsibly, and when this is not followed, ethnic conflicts can arise. Moreover, when these institutions favor and provide means for one group to articulate its demands (Eder et al., 2002, p. 49), it can lead other groups to distance themselves from and lose trust in these institutions. Hence, all units of the Yugoslavian federation desired to separate and reject being under the hegemony of others. Bosnia also sought the separation, and in October 1991, the European Community announced that Bosnia-Herzegovina would be granted recognition as an independent state once it had passed a referendum of its citizens (Glenny, 1992, p. 162).

Bosnians held a referendum between February 29 and March 1, 1992, and the majority voted for independence. On April 7, 1992, Bosnia-Herzegovina was officially recognized by the United States and most European Community countries. In May 1992, Bosnia was admitted as a full member of the United Nations. The war began in April 1992, when Serb forces crossed the Drina River⁴ from Serbia and laid siege to the cities of Zvornik, Visegrad, and Foca. By mid-April, all the country was involved in war (Burg & Shoup, 1999, p. 129).

The Bosnian people did not want the war, and in Sarajevo, the capital of Bosnia-Herzegovina, they conducted massive demonstrations against the war. But snipers opened fire on the crowd, killing many civilians, and in the following days, the Yugoslavian National Army (JNA) units began to shell Sarajevo from hillside. The insensitivity of the shelling and sniping from the surrounding hills showed the courage of the Sarajevans under siege, who gained sympathy around the world for their determination to stay and live under constant attacks (Burg & Shoup, 1999, p. 133). This situation showed that the shared language of people of Bosnia-Herzegovina were not enough to overcome discrimination based on their religious differences (Appleby, 2000, p. 63).

The Yugoslav army had been the major aggressor in alliance with the leadership of Serbia (Denitch, 1994, p. 8). At the beginning of the war in Bosnia-Herzegovina, the civil population did not have an organized structure for defense. Ordinary citizens, including some gangs, played an important role in its defense. Some say that Sarajevo's survival in the early days of the fighting was due to gangs and others who assumed responsibility for the resistance and defense of the city. Serb forces surrounding Sarajevo had little experience in urban warfare, while the groups that protected Sarajevo were in their element (Burg & Shoup, 1999, p. 138).

⁴ Drina is a river that divides Serbia and Bosnia-Herzegovina.

Violence and Collective Memory in Bosnia-Herzegovina

The animosity between Muslims and non-Muslims did not emerge during this particular war; as stated before, its roots date back to 1389 and the battle between the Ottomans and Christian armies in Kosovo. The Serbs, among others who fought the Ottomans, lost the war, and the spread of Islam in the Balkans began in the region. This victory also signified centuries long ruling of the Balkans by the Ottomans. In the latest war in Bosnia, Serb nationalists saw an opportunity for revenge they waited 600 years for. Serb nationalists used the martyrdom of the Serbian Prince Lazar at this battle as a central component of the ideology of “ethnic cleansing.” In their commemoration of this battle, Prince Lazar is portrayed as a Christ figure with disciples, one of whom is a traitor. The Turks were regarded as Christ-killers, and the Judas figure becomes the ancestral curse of all Slavic Muslims. This perception can also be seen from Miroslav Jevtic, an academic from Belgrade:

Because of this (the battle of Kosovo and the conversion of Bosnians to Islam), the hands of the Muslims who are with us are stained and polluted with the blood of their ancestors from among the inhabitants of Bosnia at that time, namely those who did not embrace Islam. (Sells, 1996, p. 24)

Thus, Bosnians feel prey to genocide-legitimizing propaganda that showed them as “race traitors and apostates” (Appleby, 2000, p. 79). As a result of the Serbian loss of the Battle of Kosovo, the sense of national domination and oppression, the sense of virtue in suffering and struggle, was deeply interwoven with the religious belief and loyalty. This creates a feeling of belonging to a group, and moral issues of the group’s history tend to be implied in religious categories (Taylor, 2002, p. 78). This shows that memory provides an important area for imagination and is an important way of creating a space in which people reflect upon and imagine their identity (Giesen, 2004b, p. 9).

Collective memory at once creates heroes and victims and remembers them as the triumphant or traumatic embodiment of collective identity (Giesen, 2004b, p. 10). But memory also can be linked with cultural traumas. Outlining a theory of cultural trauma, Alexander (2004b) highlights:

Cultural trauma occurs when members of a collectivity feel they have been subjected to a horrendous event that leaves indelible marks upon group consciousness, marking their memories forever and changing their identity in fundamental and irreversible ways. (p. 1)

The lost wars create a sense of anger, and the memories about the past guide visions about the future (Alexander, 2004b, p. 3). The social structures of collective identities are not unanimous, nor are the ways of remembering the past. They are prone to disagreements and debates; they vary based on life experiences and differ from generation to generation (Giesen, 2004a, p. 112). Remembering is associated with special places and times, and the collective identity is powerful within religious

communities that bring the people together for annual celebrations (Giesen, 2004b, p. 27). The nationalist myths emphasized the centuries-old war against the Ottoman Turks; Bosnians were transformed into the legendary Turkish enemy and made to pay for the years of Turkish dominance (Denitch, 1994, p. 184). Religion, therefore, was a very powerful force to motivate masses and break the long history of peaceful coexistence among the ethnically and linguistically identical Croats, Serbs, and Bosnian Muslims.

The ethnic identification can spread rapidly, capturing people in processes of which they may have very little understanding and no control (Eder et al., 2002, pp. 162-163). The mass media are effective in spreading the propaganda. The last century is full of examples of people who claimed in the media that they were damaged and traumatized by some ethnic or political groups that are commonly regarded as hostile “others” (Alexander, 2012, p. 13). Pictures and images in the media are particularly powerful, as repetition can turn images into icons (Giesen, 2004b, p. 104). The Serbian media played an important role in motivating the population against the Bosnian Muslims.

The importance of the public propaganda for influencing public identity is enormous and creates ways of constructing an institutional order (Eder et al., 2002, p. 133). Since the public communication is open to all, it offends some people and flatters others, and this can intentionally be planned to have such effects (Eder et al., 2002, pp. 105-106). Mobilizing the hesitant and undecided for a common cause is a principal goal of public propaganda. Sometimes this type of publicity takes the form of a crusade that appeals to supposed common ethical convictions among the members of one group (Eder et al., 2002, pp. 134).

Because national identity does not necessarily demand identification with the state only (Appleby, 2000, p. 59), and when threats from the outside world become excessive, people with religious conservatism may seek the company of others of the same faith (Volkan, 2009, p. 133). Hence, the impact of the war extends globally; people from various parts of the world come in order to help their “brothers in faith.” The waves of such activities in Bosnia-Herzegovina were also powerful and aided in weakening and damaging the fragile interfaith relations and deepening mistrust among people.

The international community was not very successful in stopping the war in Bosnia-Herzegovina. Politicians lectured that negotiations should continue, and special envoys and diplomats were sent to find solutions, but their efforts had no results. Bosnian people were caught up in a game that they couldn’t manage (Friedman, 1996, p. 225). In the turmoil following the Soviet Union’s collapse, the West was probably unable to commit the resources for an expansion sufficient to stop the war (Friedman, 1996, p. 225). But, if there had been a stronger determination to stop the war, the international community could have pursued alternative policies. Military threats, stricter sanctions, and even military actions could have effectively stopped the hostilities (Denitch, 1994, p. 195).

Bosnia’s president, Alija Izetbegovic, and his multinational government did everything in their power to avoid the war: they attempted to defuse potential areas of conflict; they refused to arm their people; they tried to act in accordance with the advice of the European Community (Bennett, 1995, p. 245). Moreover, the support

from the Muslim world was slow partially because some Muslim leaders viewed Bosnians as not good enough in their practice of Islam (Sells, 1996, p. 39).

The country was also filled with refugees who had fled their homes in war zones either by force or by fear of the consequences that they would face if they remained home. Bosnian Serbs enjoyed substantial military superiority as well as logistical and political support from Milosevic (Glenny, 2000, p. 644). Mass killings occurred in every occupied area; even when captives thought they were being released, they were often disabused of their hope. For example, on the Vlasic Mountain, groups of Bosnians who had been freed from the Trnopolje camp were stopped by Serb soldiers and murdered (Sells, 1996, p. 20). In the Banja Luka region, the site of the infamous concentration camps Omarska, Trnopolje, and Manjaca, Serbs sent eviction notices to non-Serbs, forcing Catholics and Muslims to sign forms stating that they agreed voluntarily to leave their homes. Those who hesitated to sign faced harsh consequences, including being killed (Appleby, 2000, p. 70).

Among the burned institutions was Sarajevo's Oriental Institute, which had one of the largest collections of manuscripts in the region; it was reported that thousands of irreplaceable manuscripts of Bosnia's history from the centuries of Ottoman rule were destroyed. Bosnia's National Library had more than 1 million volumes (Sells, 1996, p. 25). Art, manuscripts, and historical sites that had existed for centuries were destroyed. In many cities, the religious monuments of different faiths, built next to another as symbols of religious tolerance, were not spared (Sells, 1996, p. 25). In many places, the religious temples were leveled and turned into parking lots or parks. Legal documents of people who lived in these areas vanished as well (Sells, 1996, p. 3). Even hospitals were targets. The Kosevo Hospital, the biggest hospital in Sarajevo, was habitually bombed during visiting hours. One of Sarajevo's ironies became people saying you could be injured while visiting an injured friend at the hospital (Maass, 1996, p. 140). Kosevo Hospital became a symbol of resistance.

The situation of the refugees was depressing. Refugees had to walk days and nights in the cold mountains of the Balkans through mine fields, without food, alone in the wilderness. Peter Maass described one refugee camp in the city of Split in nearby Croatia. He said he was terrified by the story of a woman he met who came from Foca to Split with her two children, a daughter, seven, and a son, five. The distance between these two cities is only six hours' drive, but she had to walk 45 days to arrive to safety. She could walk only in evenings, under hidden cover, from one village to another, in order to find shelter (Maass, 1996, p. 4).

A short time after the war started, major towns in northwest Bosnia, once home to Muslim majorities, were devoid of Muslim populations. Many were killed, kept in concentration camps, or deported. The method of deportation was confirmed by Stojan Zupljanin, the police chief in Banja Luka, Bosnia-Herzegovina's second-largest city: he stated that they "arranged 'safe transportation'" for people who wanted to emigrate (Gutman, 1993, p. 37). With more than 1 million Bosnians left homeless, passenger trains full of deportees were waiting at the borders of the former Yugoslavia for willing host countries. According to eyewitnesses, the first

two trains, carrying thousands of deportees from the town of Kozarac, passed through Banja Luka (Gutman, 1993, p. 37).

On July 12, 1995, when Serbian forces took over the city of Srebrenica, which was under the protection of the United Nations, the Bosnian Serb general, as he entered the city, announced that he was “presenting this city to the Serbian people as a gift” (Holbrooke, 1998, p. 69). He added, “Finally, after the rebellion of the Dahijas [Serbian volunteers, brave soldiers] the time has come to take revenge on the Turks in this region” (Holbrooke, 1998, p. 69). Over the next week, the largest single mass murder in Europe since World War II took place (Holbrooke, 1998, p. 69). More than 8,000 Bosnian men were killed. All of this was done in a “safe area,” announced and protected by the UN. The rest of the city’s inhabitants, mostly women and children, were sent as refugees to other parts of Bosnia.

Witnesses to the violence have focused on individual cases in order somehow to touch people’s feelings and increase awareness about the war. A reporter noted that after the second Sarajevo market massacre on August 28, 1995, a Bosnian child turned to her mother, saying, “Mommy, I’ve lost my hand,” as her mother, herself significantly wounded, moaned, “Where is my husband? I’ve lost my husband” (Sells, 1996, p. 142-143). After the Serb army shelling of a Sarajevo suburb in 1992, a reporter wrote of a young boy found next to his dead mother, repeating, “Do you love me, Mommy” (Sells, 1996, p. 142). Also, after the Srebrenica shelling massacre of 1993, in which the Serb army opened fire on a group of civilians waiting to be evacuated by the UN, an official with the High Commission for Refugees told of a young girl who had half of her face blown away. He said her suffering was so intense that he could do nothing but pray that she would die soon, which she did (Sells, 1996, pp. 142-144).

Among those who were able to see and write about the war was journalist Peter Maass. He described the violence he witnessed as traumatic and tragic scenes of the war.⁵ He recounted the city of Visegrad after its fall into Serbian hands, saying that all of the doors of the houses were open with their contents destroyed, dried blood splattered on the walls. Anything valuable had been demolished or taken. Maass also reported about the discussion he had with the executive mayor of the city, who denied ethnic cleansing, saying that the civil population left voluntarily (Maass, 1996, pp. 8-9).

Massacres were carried out in many locations, including the Drina River Bridge at Visegrad; the Drina Bridge at Foca; the stadium at Bratunac; and at schools, stadiums, and roadsides throughout Bosnia-Herzegovina. The famous Visegrad Drina Bridge,⁶ built in the 16th century, was used for nightly killing “sport festivals.” After being tortured, victims were thrown off the bridge, and the captors

⁵ Peter Maass’s book on the conflict in Bosnia, *Love Thy Neighbor: A Story of War*, was published in 1996 by Alfred A. Knopf, and a paperback edition was published in 1997 by Vintage. It won The Los Angeles Times Book Prize (for nonfiction) and the Overseas Press Club Book Prize, and was a finalist for several other literary awards.

⁶ This bridge was also a title of the famous novel *The Bridge on the Drina* written by Ivo Andric (1892-1975), the winner of the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1961.

tried to see if they could shoot them as they tumbled down into the Drina River (Sells, 1996, p. 26).

One of the most dreadful actions of the war was the rape of women. The acts of rape were committed systematically as a weapon to degrade women, some of whom were left pregnant and forced to carry and deliver their children. Among the victims were many teenage girls. Victims endured various abuses and psychological pressure to feel powerless in the hands of their rapists (Sells, 1996, p. 21). Rape occurred in public buildings and private houses behind closed doors; to increase the level of humiliation, also it happened in front of others (Gutman, 1993, p. 157).

The International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia in Hague was the first international tribunal since Nuremberg to prosecute those who violated human rights and committed war crimes in the Balkan wars (Alexander, 2012, p. 85). Serbian leader Radovan Karadzic, one of the accused, rejected any possibility that his army raped women. He claimed that such accusations were false, that rapes occurred on only a few occasions at the hands of lone maniacs. But many international institutions confirmed that rape had been pervasive (Gutman, 1993, p. 158). In March 2016, he was found guilty of genocide and war crimes against humanity and sentenced to 40 years' imprisonment.

There are no precise data on the displaced people, but estimates range between one-third and two-thirds of the total population. The number of people expelled from their homes in the Serb-occupied areas of Bosnia is usually placed between 700,000 and 1 million. According to an official study of the national health organization of Bosnia-Herzegovina, every other citizen of the territory of the Bosnian Federation as of the end of 1994 was a refugee (Burg & Shoup, 1999, p. 171).

The End of the War and Instituting of Peace

Three events showed the world the magnitude of the Bosnian crisis and its centrality to the growth of the international community's involvement in the conflict resolution: the bread line massacre of May 27, 1992; the Markale market massacre of February 5, 1994; and the second shelling of the Markale marketplace on August 28, 1995 (Burg & Shoup, 1999, p. 164). The death toll was 68 on the morning of Saturday, February 5, 1994, when a mortar exploded in the middle of Markale, the main outdoor market in Sarajevo, packed with people buying food (Glenny, 2000, p. 646). Media-generated pressure and the threat of a massive influx of refugees into Western Europe finally forced the international community to take on a more active role in the conflict (Bennett, 1995, p. 239).

The international community regarded Milosevic as the main reason for these atrocities. President Bill Clinton emphasized that the Balkan crisis could not be understood or tolerated as something inevitable based only on centuries-old enmities of its people. He highlighted that these murderous atrocities were "systematic slaughter," carried out by organized political and military power under Milosevic (Alexander, 2004a, p. 247). In 2001, when Milosevic was arrested and sent to the war crimes tribunal at the Hague, President George W. Bush recounted "chilling images of terrified women and children herded in trains, emaciated

prisoners interned behind barbed-wires, and mass graves unearthed by the United Nations investigators,” all traceable to Milosevic (Alexander, 2004a, p. 249).

While Yugoslavs were responsible for creating the conflict, the international attempts to halt the fighting were farcical (Bennett, 1995, p. 236). But with the threat of military deployment and the portrayal in the Western media of the deaths of tens of thousands innocent people as genocide finally pushed Serbia to participate in peace talks (Alexander, 2012, pp. 80-81). These atrocities were seen as contemporary forms of genocide and ethnic cleansing (Alexander, 2012, p. 151), collective victimization and icons of innocent suffering (Giesen, 2004b, p. 45). After more than three years of fighting, the leaders of Serbia, Croatia, and Bosnia-Herzegovina signed the Dayton Peace Accords on November 21, 1995. Based on the Contact Group plan, which gave the Bosnian Federation 51% of territory and the Republika Srpska 49%, Dayton brought the fighting to an end. That was a significant achievement of the international community (Glenny, 2000, p. 651).

Present and Future

The failure to prevent war does not belong solely to political institutions; the religious leadership of Yugoslavia did not take any active or preemptive role, and did not succeed in leading their own people toward nonviolent practices of religious activism. They were not successful in advocating values that religions share: peace, healing, and reconciliation. It cannot be assumed that this was because of their unwillingness; however, reasons could have included insufficient programs for education in emerging conditions; political ignorance; and limited experience in organized and institutional interfaith relations (Appleby, 2000, pp. 74-75).

As Volkan (2009) says, even during *ordinary times* when there is no imminent threat to one group's security, a religious organization can build psychological borders around themselves that separate them from others (p. 136). Probably this can describe the current situation among people in the Balkans. Although there is no imminent threat for clashes today, the tension between communities is powerful. Memories of the war are still fresh, and people fear that another war could break out anytime. Therefore, the role of political and religious leaders is crucial to ease these tensions and strengthen their relations. Communication is vital to such situations between people, particularly when religious convictions become elements that point to an enemy from outside of the community (Eder et al., 2002, p. 105).

Ethnoreligious conflicts increased after the world wars (Appleby, 2000, p. 58) and are marked with ethnic groups' requests for acknowledgment of their "nationhood," aspiring to establish political independence in order to secure their rights and values (Appleby, 2000, p. 59). The Balkans were at the center of the most violent ethnic and religious conflicts in Europe since World War II (Friedman, 1996, p. 1). Moreover, the fighting in Bosnia-Herzegovina was the first major, post-Cold War-era test of the international community's ability to resolve ethnic conflicts. Its efforts were not very successful in preventing the war and establishing peace and stability once the war ended. As a result, Bosnia has remained troubled

by the contradiction between integration and partition (Burg & Shoup, 1999, p. 388).

Obstacles remain for promoting the peace. Among the internal problems of the Balkans today is that people who are politically responsible for the violence are still in power. They not only deny their involvement in war crimes, but they accuse others of mass murder by transferring bodies of unidentifiable victims to the media. For example, although the atrocities in Srebrenica cannot be disregarded, the involvement of parties is still an issue of public debate and revision that need to be addressed (Giesen, 2004a, p. 150). There is hope, however, of the internal and international pressure to discredit and exclude wrongdoers among the influential and powerful people. Still, it's difficult to expose all the offenders, who hide behind a hypocritical façade (Eder et al., 2002, p. 135). Communities must admit that some of their own members were perpetrators who violated the principles of their own identity. Such reference to the past can be traumatic (Giesen, 2004a, p. 114), but facing it can open the path of reconciliation and peace.

Confession of guilt should not be seen as some kind of inconvenient and distressing responsibility of political rhetoric. On the contrary, it provides the only way of getting the recognition of national identity beyond reclaiming some rights and false justifications (Giesen, 2004b, p. 153). Alexander emphasizes an important issue, saying that today, East and West, North and South, must learn and share the experiences of one another's traumas and take vicarious responsibility for others' afflictions (Alexander, 2004a, p. 262).

Today, the modern moral order of mutual benefit and the ideals of fairness and mutual respect of each other's freedom are as strong among youth as they ever were (Taylor, 2002, p. 89). This makes us hopeful for a better future, not just in the Balkans, that we do not see innocent people suffer and go through traumas of warfare. But also we should be alert and take seriously any kind of political or religious rhetoric that can result in violence toward others. Ignoring these early signs and not dealing with them properly at the time of their emergence can make us blunder again, resulting in damaging religious and ethnic relations.

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