**Religion and Peacebuilding in Bosnia and Herzegovina:**

**The Role of Religious Leaders**

**Stipe Odak**

Dedication

To my parents

# Preface: A universe and an origami

“Even before I start this writing, I know I will not be able to do justice to the project.” – I said to one of my interviewees, just two days before the end of the second round of my field research in Bosnia and Herzegovina. There were simply too many encounters, details, and rich experiences, that simply did not seem translatable into the clear structures of an academic work.

It was a long journey. For the first time in my life, I visited all the regions of the country in which I was born and raised. It was a journey on which I had to change many of my initial conceptualizations and modify my research strategies, after each of the hours-long and often intimate interviews that I conducted.

It was a personal journey as well. During long night drives between cities, the sentences from my respondents as well as the passages from random books often came to my mind. One of them was the sentence from Nicolas Bouvier’s *L’usage du monde*: “On croit qu’on va faire un voyage mais bientôt c’est le voyage qui vous fait ou vous défait.”—I was not the only one who was making this journey; it was the journey that was creating and deconstructing me.

Besides new personal memories, there was one decisive change that I noticed both in my conceptualizations and my writing: a move from simplicity to complexity. While at the beginning, I had an impression that the topics I was researching were simple and straightforward, over time I have come to acknowledge to a greater extent their ‘thickness’ and complexity. Now, when I am finishing this project, I try to move backward, from complexity to simplicity, but the path has changed in the meantime. As Ricœur noted in his writings on hermeneutics, the innocence of the *première naïveté* cannot be regained. In the text that stands before you, I am seeking to reach the *seconde naïveté*—to offer as clear as possible interpretations of the phenomena yet be aware that there is always a certain surplus of meaning that will escape every conceptualization.

Another phrase that was constantly recurring in my mind was “the universe of meaning,” which I encountered for the first time in the title of Yuri Lotman’s famous study on semantics. It seemed to me that there was a striking parallel between the *accounts of the origins of the universe* and the *process of analytical understanding*. At the beginning, there is a simple, dense matter that explodes into innumerable particles and grows, driven by entropy, into increasing chaos. However, it is only within that ever-growing divergence of particles that symmetries arise; in singularity there are neither parallels nor asymmetries. All ‘ordered’ constellations and galaxies, geometrical patterns, and all fractal designs are detectable only inside a system that is less and less unified. Understanding seems to follow a similar paradigm. Simple ideas that I had at the beginning exploded into a myriad of subtle differences. But within those new complexities of meaning, I could see both parallels and differences, variations and similarities that I am about to present. Understanding, just like the universe, is ordered and chaotic at the same time.

A second image often entered my reflections. On September 23rd, 2016, Valérie, my promoter, Emmanuelle, my close colleague, and I met in Rue du Viaduc in Brussels to discuss the period before us and the way our research would proceed. Afterwards, I wrote one word in my research diary: Origami. One and the same sheet of paper can be folded and transformed in various forms. Similarly, the same body of data that I collected could have been presented in numerous ways. The whole book will be an extended practice of folding and unfolding, of taking a perspective and moving backward, with the aim of creating some meaningful models. My final hope is that, in the midst of the chaos, there lies a small origami.

So, now, let the universe explode!

A close up of a map

Description automatically generated

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About the Author

Stipe Odak is a university researcher focusing on the intersections of memory, religion, and conflicts. He was born in Ljubuški (Bosnia and Herzegovina), where he finished his primary and secondary education. He later graduated theology at the *Catholic Faculty of Theology*, and received BA and MA in Sociology and Comparative Literature at the *Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences*. Upon moving to Belgium, he finished MA and Advanced MA in Theology and Religious Studies and pursued his doctorate as a fellow of the *Fonds de la Recherche Scientifique*. In 2018, he received his Ph.D. in Political and Social Sciences from UCLouvain (Belgium) and a doctorate in Theology from KU Leuven (Belgium). He is a published poet and a member of *PEN International* center in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

# General introduction

In the Bosnian and Herzegovinian Oscar-winning movie *No Man’s Land*, the plot is organized around three actors who find themselves in a trench between two warring sides. The situation is aggravated by the fact that one soldier, Cera (Filip Šovagović) is lying on a specially modified bouncing mine placed in the middle of the trench. In the context of the movie, this bouncing mine serves as a symbol of the difficulties with identity of the inhabitants of that region. At the movie’s beginning, the camera follows a soldier who hides mines under the bodies of dead enemy warriors, explaining: “I invented this system. When his comrades come to pick up the body, the mine will explode, and they will all be damned.” The identity symbolized by the bouncing mine is therefore simultaneously a token of life and of death. It is precisely because of their participation in this shared identity that soldiers protect their own (dead and alive) members, but the action brings destruction to them all.

Between the two sides in the war, defined in opposition to each other, there is no communication. When, by chance, two soldiers (one Bosniak and one Serbian) end up together in a trench, they, after initial hostilities, discover that they share many things in common; they know the same people, and they both despise war. Interestingly, this communication occurs only in the space between the warring sides, in no-man’s land, the buffer zone between two borders that allows actors to relate. It is a small space of ‘emptiness’ that allows two individuals to transcend the boundaries of group identities and open themselves to the presence of the Other. The movie does not offer a resolution for the divisions. It nevertheless underlines the importance of the no-man’s land, of an encounter in a space where identity and belonging stop to be a reason to kill.

For years, the metaphor of no-man’s land intrigued me.[[1]](#footnote-1) Firstly, I wondered whether the title of the movie could serve as a synecdoche for the whole country. Could Bosnia and Herzegovina be understood as a no-man’s land in the form of a state, constantly divided between different (imperial, ethnic, national, religious) identities which nevertheless have managed to find a way throughout history to communicate with each other? Secondly, I was searching for a phenomenon that could function analogously to a ‘no man’s land’ during the conflict. Religion immediately came to mind. Symbolically, religion is a no-man’s land in the strongest possible sense because, at least in a theistic interpretation, it is not a human product but the result of divine revelation. At the same time, for many world religions, land and geographical borders do not represent any limits; religion transcends them and even puts their restrictions into doubt. Could religion be a way to draw a trench of free space between hostile sides, to make room for communication with the Other and different? With this question in mind, we start this journey.

## Background of the study: Religion, conflict, and peace

There was another side to the story. When I was starting this project in 2014, a new wave of religiously-inspired violence was taking place. An old question again became a common reference in public debates: “If religion is a part of the problem, can it be a part of the solution?” Religion did not appear to be a no-man’s land between the warring parties, a place of *contact* amidst divisions, but precisely the opposite—a barrier. It was frequently suggested that religion tends to incite new violence, support extremism, deepen existing divisions, and make negotiations and settlements more difficult. 2014 was also the year in which ISIS paramilitaries occupied large portions of Iraq and proclaimed a caliphate, thus bringing religious extremism and fundamentalism to global attention. Religion hardly seem to be the most likely *solution* to violent conflicts at that time.

However, having conducted the first phase of my interviews with religious leaders in Bosnia and Herzegovina, I had witnessed another reoccurring leitmotif—that *religion has to be a part of a solution,* not because it was not implicated in conflicts but *precisely because it was so often a part of the problem*. This stance suggested that every effective and contextually sensitive approach to conflict resolution and peacebuilding had to take the mechanisms that contributed to its framing, development, and potential decline seriously. Two contrasting pictures stood beside one another. On the one hand, we saw daily killings because of deeply held religious beliefs. On the other hand, it was also undeniable that religious individuals and institutions invested enormous effort in peacebuilding processes around the world and that they were particularly effective in resolving conflicts that initially had religious components. Additionally, polls conducted all around the word all pointed in the direction of increasing religiosity, thus suggesting that religion is and will remain an influential element in the lives of people and communities,[[2]](#footnote-2) for better or worse. To me, nothing seemed more pertinent to explore than the relationship between religion, conflict, and peacebuilding.

Besides personal curiosity, there were many signals that topics of religion, interreligious dialogue, and faith-based activities were moving towards the very centers of international politics, a trend particularly visible in the resolutions of the UN General Assembly (e.g., 56/6, 60/288, 61/211), the UN Security Council (e.g. 1456, 1624, 2178), the opinions of high-ranking politicians, and the establishment of special inter-disciplinary institutes dedicated to issues of religion, peace, and conflict (e.g., Tony Blair Faith Foundation in collaboration with the Harvard Divinity School; the International Center for Religion and Diplomacy; the US State Department’s Office of Religion and Global Affairs; and the UN Alliance of Civilizations). One could also detect a gradual shift from a violence-centered perspective on religion towards a more nuanced view of religion and faith, even when the topics of violence and terrorism were being discussed. This was especially visible when contrasting UN Security Council Resolution 1373, passed in September 2001 immediately after terrorist attacks in the USA, which emphasized legal and security measures, and the later Resolution 2178 from 2014, which explicitly stated that terrorism “will not be defeated by military force, law enforcement measures, and intelligence operations alone.”[[3]](#footnote-3) In the latter, religious leaders and their respective organizations are seen as factors that can counter conditions conducive to the spread of violence and confront extremist religious narratives.

Nevertheless, while much had already been written on the relationship between violence and religious extremism,[[4]](#footnote-4) the peace-making potential of religion was still underexplored.[[5]](#footnote-5) According to the *United States Institute of Peace*, traditional diplomacy has unduly neglected religious resources, despite the fact that religious actors have made a significant contribution in the mediation of numerous conflicts around the world.[[6]](#footnote-6) In recent scholarly publications, religion was termed “the missing dimension of statecraft”[[7]](#footnote-7) or the “missing peace [sic]”[[8]](#footnote-8) in international diplomacy. In calls for inclusion of religion in peace dialogues, it was stressed that religion has a rich potential not only for preventing violence but also in promoting and sustaining peace.[[9]](#footnote-9)

A crucial role in this process was often ascribed to religious leaders. In the 2002 *UN Report of the Secretary-General*, it was emphasized that religious leaders and their respective groups possess a culturally-based comparative advantage in conflict prevention. Using their moral authority, it is said, they have the ability to emphasize the common humanity of all parties and utilize non-violent ways of expressing dissent as an alternative to conflict.[[10]](#footnote-10) More recently, the chair of the UN Counter-Terrorism Committee, Raimonda Murmokaitë, expressed the opinion that religious norms and convictions constitute the backbone of many individual and communitarian identities and that religious leaders can play a pivotal role in increasing social resilience against violent voices.[[11]](#footnote-11) In short, religion and peacebuilding became very relevant topics. The aim of this project was to contribute to the ongoing debate, focusing more closely on the role of religious leaders in peacebuilding processes.

## Design of the study

Although the scholarship on religion, violence, and peace was growing quickly, there was one particularly visible lacuna—a lack of interdisciplinary research projects that combine perspectives of theology and religious studies with those of the social sciences. Furthermore, religion was often analyzed as a general factor in conflicts, with little sensitivity to differences between religious traditions.[[12]](#footnote-12)

This project therefore aimed to address that lack and situate the research strongly in both fields and, moreover, to focus on a specific geographical region. In that respect, the goal was to avoid one of the common tendencies in Conflict Studies—the tendency to treat religious traditions as abstract factors and so reduce them to an external, non-religious narrative.[[13]](#footnote-13) One of the principal reasons why religious leaders refuse involvement in dialogue initiatives is because of the fear that such an involvement would represent a forceful ‘secularization’ or ‘betrayal’ of their own traditions.[[14]](#footnote-14) Thus, the project was designed to combine both *internal* and *external* research viewpoints, i.e., describing phenomena ‘as participants see them’ and not shying away from theological concepts and doctrinal views, while at the same time comparing them with theoretical perspectives drawn from the social sciences. In other words, the *modus operandi* of this project is interdisciplinary, and its aims were to develop a hermeneutically comprehensive approach, sensitive to religious identities, but also credible from the standpoint of the social and political sciences.

Finally, since this approach was in many was novel, it seemed appropriate to start not with a ready-made theory but rather with empirical observations that could lead to a set of coherent findings deeply grounded in data.

## Geographical focus of the study: Bosnia and Herzegovina

Bosnia and Herzegovina, as a (post-)conflict society where religion still plays a major role in the public sphere, was chosen as a privileged research context. The cultural landscape of the area consists of various traditions, primarily Catholic, Orthodox, and Muslim (Islamic), which are in many ways intertwined with national and ethnic belonging.[[15]](#footnote-15) In the period from 1992-1995, Bosnia and Herzegovina witnessed a number of mass atrocities (with more than 100.000 war-related deaths[[16]](#footnote-16) and 2 million forcibly displaced people[[17]](#footnote-17)), which were followed by a challenging period of political transition to a democratic rule, often marked with political turmoil and division. The conflicts in the 1990s that coincided with the dissolution of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia were preceded by the traumatic experience of WWII, and collective memories of pain sometimes go back even to the period of the Ottoman occupation in the 15th century.[[18]](#footnote-18)

Therefore, the main research question was phrased in the following way: *In what ways can religious leaders of Christian and Islamic communities in Bosnia and Herzegovina positively contribute to the peacebuilding process?*

## Goals of the study

In line with the research questions, the goals of this study were threefold:

1. ***Descriptive***: to present the ways in which religious leaders who are actively engaged in Bosnia and Herzegovina view the major challenges related to peacebuilding and their role in them;
2. ***Analytical***: to compare participants’ perspectives, articulated through empirically collected data, with other relevant theories and views;
3. ***Synthetic***: to present a coherent model for understanding the role of religious leaders in peacebuilding processes and to articulate new concepts that can be useful for the theory and practice of peacebuilding.

Therefore, in each chapter I will first present the results from the field and conclude that section with an interim conclusion. In the second part I will bring those findings into conversation with other relevant theories. Finally, I will offer some concluding remarks and proposals.

## Epistemological positions

In this research, I take the ontological position of the *critical realism*[[19]](#footnote-19), which assumes that social structures and agents exist independently of the concepts applied to them. At the same time, I take the *constructivist epistemological* position, assuming that the experience and representation of the social phenomena are always guided by interpretative schemes and symbolic interactions.[[20]](#footnote-20) Maxwell summarizes this combined approach in the following way: “Critical realists thus retain an ontological realism (there is a real world that exists independently of our perceptions, theories, and constructions) while accepting a form of epistemological constructivism and relativism (our *understanding* of this world is inevitably a construction from our own perspectives and standpoint).”[[21]](#footnote-21) The combination of those two approaches implies that social phenomena are indeed enacted and understood through discursive practices but that those practices are neither independent from each other nor detached from social reality.

With respect to research procedures and theoretical inferences, I follow a narrative and interpretational approach in the tradition of qualitative research methodology. The method of the analysis could be best described as *abductive reasoning*. Unlike deductive reasoning, which starts with a general principle or theory and searches for a case that illustrates it, and inductive reasoning, which starts from observations and moves towards a broad generalization, *abductive reasoning* is an iterative process that starts with an incomplete set of observations from which it forms workable hypotheses that are subsequently modified in the light of new data.[[22]](#footnote-22) In other words, the study was neither designed as a test of a previously established theory nor as purely inductive research without previous input. Before the start of my fieldwork, I was familiar both with the research topic and the socio-political context of the region and thus had a set of implicit assumptions. However, I was letting my preconceptions be challenged and reevaluated in light of collected data.

Furthermore, my comments on theological position is in line with the hermeneutical turn in theological studies. I that sense, I assume that religious texts and traditions are constructed in dialogue with social context and that they need continuous re-interpretation in view of new social questions and challenges. Finally, at places where I offer some theological perspective, I follow the tradition of *contextual theologies*, which emphasize the importance of concrete social, political, and cultural contexts for theological reasoning and equally ask for greater sensitivity towards those elements. In a confessional sense, my theological articulations are primarily based on my expertise in Christian theology. In some instances, I also present certain elements of Islamic theology when elaborating on interviews with Muslims religious leaders. Those reading should, however, be further extended by specialists on Islamic theology and inter-religious theology.

## Methodology

The research followed the basic principles of the *Grounded Theory* approach. Grounded Theory was initially proposed by Glasser and Strauss to counteract two tendencies in Sociology—one that forcefully imposes theory on data and another which only presents findings without any attempt to place them in a more general framework. The Grounded Theory approach thus advocates *grounding* of theories in data in a systematic and organized manner in which a researcher constantly moves from observations to working hypotheses and then finally to a theory. [[23]](#footnote-23) It is important to note that, after Glasser and Strauss’s initial publication, Grounded Theory evolved in many different directions.[[24]](#footnote-24) In view of Bryant and Charmaz, Grounded Theory is not a single approach but a group of methods that share certain family resemblances.[[25]](#footnote-25)

The most important of those common traits are, according to Charmatz, systematic use of collected data for the purpose of developing a theory through a set of intermediate steps. Those include, first and foremost, development of theoretical categories through constant comparison of emerging hypotheses with collected data.[[26]](#footnote-26) My methodological approach shares those common traits of the Grounded Theory families. However, Charmatz also underlines that Grounded Theory approaches analyze “actions and processes rather than themes and structure.”[[27]](#footnote-27) In that respect, my position was different. Although I eventually aimed to come up with a model, I did focus on the description of specific topics in the way that participants saw and experienced them. In that respect, my study is closely aligned with the *phenomenological* tradition of qualitative research.[[28]](#footnote-28)

## Preparation and sampling

I conducted two rounds of field-work in Bosnia and Herzegovina: the first one from 15.09.2015 until 20.03.2016, and the second one from 22.08.2016 until 01.02.2017.

Participants were selected through *purposive sampling*. The sampling framework included all religious leaders officially affiliated with the Catholic Church, the Serbian Orthodox Church, and the Islamic Community residing and working in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Selection of respondents was guided by the *maximum variation* principle.[[29]](#footnote-29) In other words, the participants were initially selected in a way to represent variation in geographical regions, confessional belonging, age, level of education, personal involvement in war, and closeness to places of tragedies.[[30]](#footnote-30)

Potential participants were contacted directly and indirectly (via NGO workers or journalists who worked in the same area or via members of their congregations with whom I had previously established personal contact). Additionally, I used snowball sampling, in which I asked participants following their interviews to suggest potential participants. In the final phase of the field research, I used *theoretical sampling,*[[31]](#footnote-31) i.e., I selected participants with the purpose of explicating initial research categories until the point of *theoretical saturation,* when “no new properties of the category emerge[d] during data collection.”[[32]](#footnote-32) In practice, conducting interviews required a great deal of adaptability and trust-building, which I discussed at another place.[[33]](#footnote-33)

A significant advantage has been the fact that I am a citizen of the country and have spent a major part of my life in Bosnia and Herzegovina. At the same time, I am aware that being perceived as an ‘insider’ also brings risks of internal biases. For that reason, during the initial research, I have regularly discussed new concepts and findings with my research team and thesis supervisors to ensure the constant presence of an ‘external perspective.’

Due to the sensitivity of the research topics, all participants were granted full anonymity. Before the first round of interviews, the protocol was discussed with promoters and with two independent experts on methodology at the KU Leuven and UC Louvain. In order to give an informed consent, all participants were informed about the context of the research, the researcher’s organizational affiliation, and the objectives of the study. Privacy and anonymity were fully respected and maintained throughout. Finally, I conducted 75 semi-structured interviews[[34]](#footnote-34) in all regions of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Due to theological reasons, only males occupy leadership positions in the three communities, and, consequently, all my respondents were male.

Collected interviews were later coded[[35]](#footnote-35) by hand and, later, by using the qualitative data analysis software NVivo 11.[[36]](#footnote-36) After the initial round of coding aimed at discovering the most important concepts, I gathered codes under broader categories. Finally, categories were later connected in a model and narratively elaborated upon.

## Organization of the book

Immediately after the first round of coding, it was clear to me that the topic of peacebuilding was a very complex one and included equally challenging sub-topics that merited separate explication. Three of them were especially important: forgiveness, reconciliation, and memory. Each of them, additionally, had many layers of meaning and were in many ways interconnected. Since they were essential for the understanding of the peacebuilding, I decided to open the study with three chapters dedicated to those sub-topics.

The chapter on forgiveness addresses primarily internal and inter-group processes related to tragic events. The chapter on reconciliation focuses on inter-personal and inter-group rapprochement, symbolized through metaphors of *encounter* and *bridging dissonance*. Memory is discussed as a basis for both of these processes (because without memory neither forgiveness nor reconciliation can occur), but also as a separate topic that pertains to adequacy of representations of tragic events. Finally, the fourth chapter then assesses how concretely religious leaders can contribute to the peacebuilding process. In other words, the discussion will be guided by two major questions:

1. **What are the main challenges that religious leaders face when engaging in peacebuilding activities and how do they understand them? (Chapters 1, 2, and 3)**
2. **What are the concrete modes and strategies through which religious leaders act as peacebuilding agents? (Chapter 4)**

Since the chapters tend to be long, I have prefaced them with a concise list of the main arguments. Additionally, I have added several conceptual maps in the Appendix which can be used alongside the main text.

## Scope and limitations

Firstly, the study was based on non-probabilistic sampling, and so its conclusions, by definition, cannot be generalized to the whole population. The aim, however, was not to come up with statistical inferences but to represent a spectrum of different opinions on the topics to be explored. It is also important to note that the study primarily focused on the *positive potentials* of religious leaders to engage in peacebuilding. As it is made clear in many places, that does not mean that those potentials are always *actualized* in practice.

Secondly, the study was focused on a specific geographical region (Bosnia and Herzegovina), and on a specific group of people (religious leaders). Both of those choices bring inevitable limitations. Firstly, without further comparative studies, it is impossible to assess the applicability of the findings to other post-conflict settings and religious communities. In that respect, the project should be viewed as a case study that nevertheless offers some new theoretical concepts that can be later tested in other contexts.

It is also important to note that findings cannot be immediately generalized to all believers nor to all decision makers in religious congregations because it excluded two important categories: 1) female believers who, although not official religious leaders, are very active in peacebuilding activities in Bosnia and Herzegovina and 2) influential lay believers, for instance university professors or NGO workers, who also use their faith as an inspiration for peacebuilding. Further studies would be necessary to include those groups as well.

Thirdly, many of the topics that I have discussed throughout this book, such as forgiveness, memory, reconciliation, and peacebuilding already contain a significant amount of scholarship which would be difficult even to enumerate, not to mention comprehensively discuss. Therefore, the books and articles that I bring into the conversation are inevitably limited. I am aware that I have made myself vulnerable to criticism that I have omitted some essential works on each of the analyzed topics. Nevertheless, I believe that it was still valuable to discuss each segment in detail instead of presenting just the final model and seeing how it compares with other models. In this way, I believe, the discussion will be much more illuminating and fruitful, albeit subject to the predicament of selectivity. When choosing “dialogue partners,” I have aimed to include scholars and theories that have made a lasting impact on the field and those research articles that are based on large datasets and sound methodologies.

Fourthly, the primary sources for this study were interviews. By nature, interviews rely on the memories and perceptions of participants. In that respect, they are susceptible to inner biases, the effects of time, and the *interviewer effect*. Although I endeavored to preserve an open and non-suggestive attitude, it is certainly possible that participants were (intentionally or unintentionally) providing what they perceived as more socially desirable answers. In one way, that does not represent a major limitation since the focus of this study was the *positive* *potential* of religious leaders to contribute to the process of peacebuilding, but it is still possible that their responses did not always represent the situation accurately. When it was possible to do it while preserving the full anonymity of respondents, I verified the data through external sources. In other places, I offered my own critical evaluations. Clearly, this research should be read only as one piece of the puzzle, together with other relevant studies.[[37]](#footnote-37) Furthermore, already through my name, it was clear to participants that I was ethnically Croat, which is in the region connected with the Catholic confession. I was transparent with those facts whenever it came up. Although I did not feel in any moment that my identity influenced the openness of participants, it is still possible that a researcher of a different ethnicity could have received different answers.

Fifthly, theological analysis in this book is based on Christian theological approaches. When my respondents presented them, I referenced Islamic teachings as well, although I did not go further to engage in theological analysis from the position of Islam. However, many of the theoretical concepts that are presented can be applicable to both traditions and used as a common ground in interreligious dialogue.

## Technical and terminological notes

* Throughout the dissertation, I will use either the full name of the country (Bosnia and Herzegovina) or, if necessary, an acronym (B-H). I have intentionally avoided the use of the term “Bosnia” as a synonym for the country since it excludes one whole region (Herzegovina) and such a practice is sometimes perceived by inhabitants of that region as a sign of disrespect.
* One of the common terms employed during my interviews was “the Other” (*Drugi*), often used in the phrase “the Other and different” (*drugi i drugačiji*). The term can signify an individual or a group who is in some way different, but it can also mean the subject against which one defines oneself or one’s own group. To make the understanding clearer, in those places where “*drugi*” is used in a subjective sense (the second meaning), I have capitalized the English term and used “the Other” instead of “the other.”
* In certain places, I have used “religious servants” as a close cognate of “religious leaders” because in the original languages both the terms are “*vjerski službenici*” and “*vjerski vođe.*” Although semantically they do not mean exactly the same they, they were used interchangeably by the participants.
* I will frequently use the term “closed identity” for a type of identity which is inward-oriented, resistant to (self-)criticism, and characterized by exclusivity and insensitivity towards the Other. The term suggests that such an identity is based on a “closed narrative” of belonging, i.e., on a narrative which presents its legitimacy as self-evident and does not allow for external questioning.[[38]](#footnote-38) In practical terms, a closed identity is often manifested by a sense of group-superiority and reluctance to engage in dialogue with other individuals and groups.
* All quotes from the interviews are my own translations. I have tried to remain as faithful to the original text as possible. However, sometimes the idiomatic phrases and connotations cannot be preserved in English. Because of that, it was often necessary to add additional explanatory phrases, which I have placed in square brackets. On many occasions, participants have used the pronoun “he” in a general sense. I have retained it as in the original, but I call for a reader’s gender-inclusive interpretation. In those places where the original text allowed it, I have used “he or he,” “one,” or “they.”
* The ellipses in the text are marked as three dots in brackets whereas the silences in interviews are just marked with three dots. Therefore, the marks are the following: “(…)” and “…”.
* All names in the interviews were changed. Additionally, since many smaller cities or villages have just one representative of a certain religion, all places that could serve as identifiers were censored. I have left the names of places where there are many religious leaders, i.e., where it is not possible to infer the identity of the interviewee from just from the location.
* Shorter parts of this dissertation have been published in my previous works.[[39]](#footnote-39)
* For all Biblical quotes, I have used the New International Version.
* For all Quranic quotes, I have used the Sahih International version.

# Et maintenant, on va où? (The plan of the discussion)

Nadine Labaki made in international success with her movie *Et maintenant, on va où?* in which the plot revolves around a community that is at the same time very close and divided along religious lines. The movie follows the everyday life in a Lebanese village inhabited by Christians and Muslims, the life which is marked by both bitterness and closeness, both struggles and convictions that they cannot live without each other.

The movie’s opening scene shows a funeral procession. After that, the plot is narrated as a flashback, showing the sequence of the events that had led up to that moment. Only at the end do we discover that the body being borne by the villagers is that of a Christian boy Nassim, who was killed by Muslims from outside the village. Motivated by a desire to avoid further bloodshed, his mother first hid the murdered boy’s body in a well, pretending that he was simply sick and confined to his bedroom. The movie not only depicts at length her struggles with emotional pain and mourning but also her wish to restore the harmony of the divided village. The end of the movie returns to the opening scene – followed by the mourning women, the pall-bearers slowly step forward as they bear Nassim’s body to the graveyard for burial. When they reach the graveyard, they stop. The cemetery’s graves are separated into two sides, Christian and Islamic, and the pall-bearers hesitate, attempting to decide on which side to go.

The final scene is intentionally slow and splits the event of the funeral into two time-horizons. Metaphorically, the people in the funeral procession are themselves walking slowly towards their own deaths, a path common to all people, irrespective of religion. The graveyard, meanwhile, which does not represent death itself but a place where a community *commemorates* death, leaves the viewer with the question: “Et maintenant on va où?”

Labaki’s film leaves us with perplexing feelings about memory and suffering and with an impression of religion acting as both a cohesive and as divisive force, thereby asking further questions: What comes after the conflict?; Where do we go once the conflict is over and how do we ‘bury’ it?; Once when we bury it, how do we commemorate it?

Three topics are central to this problem: the notion of *forgiveness*, which Nassim’s mother inevitably encounters after his murder; the matter of *reconciliation* that is relevant not just to the individuals directly affected by the sad event but also to the broader community divided along identity-lines; and, finally, there is the question of *memory*.

After reading the introduction and the short outline of the research, the reader might also ask the question: “Where do we go now?” There were thousands of different ways that the data collected during the field-work for this study could have been organized. As a way forward, I invite the reader to join Nassim’s funeral procession from forgiveness over reconciliation to memory. In our slow journey, we will follow a path that was, to a great extent, determined by the flow of the data in my research. As you will be able to see, the *thickest* explanations were related to the notion of *forgiveness*, and so I am opening my discussion with that concept, which is complex and is sometimes difficult to grasp, often merging with other related concepts. One of these is *reconciliation*. The data for reconciliation is relatively *thinner*, partially because my respondents often spoke about this concept in relation to forgiveness. Even when my question explicitly asked about reconciliation, the answers would often include forgiveness, probably because the respondents assumed that the similarity or difference between them was clear or self-evident. The third and final part of this section will deal with *memory*, which is a condition for the possibility of forgiveness and reconciliation and also a result from those processes. We forgive because we remember the injury, and we reconcile only if we remember the division. However, the story also moves in another direction: our acts of forgiveness (or reconciliatory work) influence the modes and performances of the memories we construct.

We might find parallels to these proposed phases in the movie *Et maintenant on va où?* First, there is the question of forgiveness, which the memory of previous conflicts greatly influences. Nassim’s mother was, by the force of events, burdened by emotions and decisions that we would label ‘forgiving’ or ‘unforgiving.’ The second step involves a divided community. What kind of acts can be performed to unite it? Is a new death just another gravestone added to the already overcrowded graveyard of all the inter-group tragedies? Finally, there is the funeral procession, and there, in the graveyard, we are faced with a new question of memory: not of what happened before but of how to commemorate this new death.

In short, the first three parts will address the three most relevant challenges related to peacebuilding: forgiveness, reconciliation, and the memory of conflict as gravitational centers about which many other related topics, such as justice, revolve. As the reader will inevitably notice, these three organizational axes have significant overlaps. The fourth chapter will utilize a different organizational logic. Having established the main challenges to peacebuilding, I will then focus on agents, in this case, religious leaders.

Now a few words about the presentation of this topic and the chapter structure. As I already mentioned in the introduction, I will first try to ‘let the data speak’ and offer an overview that is as comprehensive as possible of the various notions of forgiveness, reconciliation, memory, peace, peacebuilding, and other relevant concepts that come from my data. I opted not to structure interviewee’s responses in a pre-defined conceptual grid. Instead, I will yield the floor, to the best of my ability, to the respondents, and let them speak. Although this approach will sometimes produce a strong *heteroglossia*, in my view their outpourings should not be subjected to our classifying instincts that desire clear matrices. Rather, this more dynamic approach will expose at least one reason why talking and dealing with this topic are challenging—because of numerous meanings they carry. The first parts of each section will thus provide a more descriptive presentation of respondents’ views and attitudes. At the same time, I have intentionally kept these descriptive parts as free of footnotes as possible, inserting only occasional remarks that are necessary for understanding the context. However, the second part of each section will extend my analysis in discussion with other relevant (although selected) theories. In the concluding parts, I will then offer some synthesizing remarks and conclusions.

Were I to produce a map of the ideas mentioned by the respondents, it would resemble Earth’s tectonic plates that overlap underground and they grind against one another and not the earth’s surface, on which clear boundaries can be drawn. However, a simplified ‘map guide’ might be to consider *forgiveness* primarily as an intra-personal endeavor that deals with a crime; *reconciliation* as a primarily inter-personal and inter-group activity directed to some form of a *community* (as opposed to mere *coexistence*); and the *collective* *memory* of conflicts, both as a legacy that preserves the tragedies that are important to a group’s identity and a pathology that can be a burden to the community and can serve to spark new violent conflicts.

Et maintenant, on y va!

# Chapter I: Forgiveness

The chapter discusses three different meanings of forgiveness: forgiveness as a legal dispensation of punishment, forgiveness as the individual management of hurtful emotions, and forgiveness as a spiritual state. Accentuating its procedural nature, the chapter suggests the use of the gerundive form ‘forgiving’ in lieu of ‘forgiveness.’ When discussing the difference between individual and collective processes of forgiving, the chapter makes a distinction between the original hurtful act and the representation of that act in the group's collective memory. Collective and individual forgiving, therefore, function differently and can even contain opposing imperatives. Introducing the South-Slavic term ‘zlopamćenje’ to illustrate an exclusionary form of memory resistant to self-criticism, the chapter outlines potentially dangerous use of tragic memories in political discourse. The term is contrasted with a religiously inspired idea of ‘prayerful commemoration’ as a way of commemorating past tragedies in an inclusive, non-vengeful way. Finally, the chapter contrasts Christian views on forgiving and unforgiving with the theories of Hannah Arendt, Jacques Derrida, and Paul Ricœur.

# The plan of Chapter I

**In the first, exploratory part of this chapter, I proceed as follows:**

1. Forgiveness will be elaborated as a concept with three major meanings:
   1. A legal dispensation of punishment that a victim (or victim’s relatives) can grant to an offender;
   2. The individual management of emotions, primarily resentment. From a religious perspective, this primarily means emancipation of those overwhelming emotions that can inhibit a person’s agency and inclination towards good;
   3. A spiritual state, similar to ecstasy, that can be neither induced nor controlled.
2. It will be shown that forgiving is not incompatible with seeking justice, but it is perceived in contrast to direct vengeance.
3. Forgiving will be further discussed in relation to memory and commemoration. In this respect, it will be demonstrated that forgiving is not only linked to the *original hurtful act*, but also to the *representation of that act* in the group’s collective memory.
   1. Thus, although primarily an individual act, forgiving will be presented in connection to social norms, values, and practices that are termed *collective frameworks of forgiving.*
   2. It will be demonstrated that memory of past crimes can be used as grounds for exclusion and vengeance. The concept of *zlopamćenje* will serve as an illustration of such memory.
   3. A new concept of *prayerful commemoration* will be suggested as a way of commemorating past tragedies in an inclusive and non-vengeful way.
4. It will be emphasized that forgiving is an ongoing process.
   1. Through the concept of a *residue*, it will be suggested that forgiving is never entirely finished.
5. The first section will conclude with a discussion of the theological grounds for forgiveness, its conditionality, and the binding status for believers.

(See: **Scheme 1.1** in the Appendix)

**In the second part, I bring my findings in discussion with:**

1. **Emotionalist theories on forgiveness.** Here it will be shown that the religious concept of forgiving includes rational judgements, but, at the same time, it cannot be reduced to these. Parallels will be drawn between those philosophical theories that differentiate various forms of forgiveness.
2. Three influential thinkers elaborated upon religious notions associated with forgiveness: Arendt, Derrida, and Ricœur. The discussion will primarily focus on the limits of forgiveness and the concept of the *unforgivable.*
   1. It will be shown that religious notions of forgiving, at least the Christian version, are linked to fundamental theological views on the nature of God and creation.
      1. While they do not deny the horrendous nature of such crimes as genocide, those theories do not define forgiving, either in relation to the measure of suffering caused by the crimes to be forgiven or to the human capability to grasp it.
      2. Therefore, it will be argued that the understanding of forgiveness as an act of grace does not need to be predicated on the notion of the “unforgivable” (contra Derrida and Ricœur).
3. Critical approaches to the forceful political imposition of forgiveness as a public virtue
   1. Here it will be argued that resentment can be understood as a virtue insofar as it rejects ideological projects of forgiveness that place an additional burden on the shoulders of victims.
   2. Yet, it will also be shown that, from the religious perspective, resentment cannot be understood as a virtue in its own right or a final goal of social life, but rather as a (sometimes necessary) stance in service of social justice.

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# “In those gently delicate moments of solitude”: On forgiving

In 1970, Simon Wiesenthal, the famous founder of the *Jewish Documentation Center*, stirred a broad intellectual debate with his book *The Sunflower*. As a former prisoner in five concentration camps as well as a loud advocate for justice and the legal prosecution of Nazi criminals, Wiesenthal uses this book to dive deeply into questions associated with forgiving. ‘The Sunflower’ is a personal account of an episode in which a dying Nazi soldier summons Wiesenthal to ask forgiveness for his crimes of the mass murder of Jews, forgiveness that Wiesenthal refused before leaving the room in silence. The book does not leave us in silence however but instead poses many questions, including: ‘What is the nature of forgiveness?’ ‘Who can grant it and when?’ ‘Should it be conditional or not?’ In the decades after the book’s publication, many intellectuals, moral figures, religious leaders, politicians, educators, and artists gave their views on the book’s final question: “What would I have done?”[[40]](#footnote-40)

Although the responses all address the same moral dilemma, they vary considerably. Reoccurring themes include the possibility of forgiveness through a proxy as well as its appropriateness and effectiveness, and the moral differences in the attitudes of *should*, *ought to*, *may*, and *could*. Wiesenthal’s book also illuminates another detail: how something that takes places in private can become a public matter, an issue associated with forgiveness on the global scale. Those shifts between the private and public spheres renders the subject even more profound and perplexing. Wiesenthal, for instance, emphasizes that “forgiveness is an act of volition, and only the sufferer is qualified to make the decision,” but even that very personal act of volition takes place in a setting where he feels that “the world demands that we forgive and forget the heinous crimes committed against us. It urges that we draw a line, and close the account as if nothing had ever happened.”[[41]](#footnote-41) The question mark placed above the idea of forgiveness casts a long shadow over our shared conceptions of what forgiveness actually represents and how it manifests itself. Is it an act of consolation, a ritual of coming together, a conversation starter, a psychological therapy, or an act of compassion? (The Dalai Lama quotes a monk whose greatest worry in a Chinese prison was that he would lose his ability to feel compassion for those who had imprisoned him). Or is it just an inherently deceptive ‘empty formula,’ as Primo Levi phrased it in his response?[[42]](#footnote-42) In any case, forgiveness remains an enduring enigma and, arguably, is situated at the very center of the circle of questions related to conflicts and their aftermaths.

Perhaps forgiveness is more than an enigma – it is a mystery. It is not complex in the sense of a difficult mathematical task that requires enormous computing power to arrive at a solution, but rather of a problem for which there is no one single solution, no matter the effort expended trying to find it. From whichever angle we approach it, there seems to be a surplus of meaning that escapes us. This difficulty is partly due to the many layers of the concept itself and, to an even greater extent, to the phenomenal broadness inherent in the concrete experience of forgiveness or the lack thereof. Saying that forgiveness *means* many things suggests that it can be defined, understood, and experienced in manifold ways, while also taking on different moral values depending on the situation. In other words, we speak of both the *signification* (what it means) and the *significance* (how much it means). The conversation that follows will necessarily involve both of these meanings.

Forgiveness, in this chapter, will essentially be linked to some form of *individual* agency and treated primarily as an individual activity. But this is not the whole story. In the same way as memory, in Halbwach’s conceptualization, always involves individuals but is perpetually embedded in ‘collective frameworks of memory,’[[43]](#footnote-43) I will argue that we can also speak about forgiveness and *collective frameworks of forgiveness*. The latter can be understood as social norms that include the relevant values and practices within which individual acts of forgiveness take place. Personal acts of forgiveness need not comply with those dominant norms and values – in some cases, the two are diametric opposites. A good example is Jean Améry’s defense of *unforgiving* (or resentment), which opposes what he saw as the dominant ethos of forgiveness.[[44]](#footnote-44) However, the point is that the individual acts of forgiveness (or the withholding of them) nevertheless influence the communications with social frameworks of forgiving, be it through affirmation, questioning, or refusal. The reason I group these factors together is to show how individual acts of forgiveness, although intimate, have social relevance and how something as personal as forgiveness is soon conceived of in collective terms (remember all those situations in which representatives of one collective ask forgiveness from another, or conversely, in which individuals say ‘I could never forgive *them*’). Unlike those authors who see the collective dimension of forgiveness as essentially bogus and misleading ‘theatre of forgiveness,’[[45]](#footnote-45) I adopt a different approach. For me, the collectivity of forgiveness is equally valid theoretically as is the notion of the collectivity of memory, and, in my analysis, the memory is precisely what links the two.

And now is the moment to abandon the word *forgiveness*.

Not entirely, of course, but abandoning it only in the sense of adopting a more precise specification. In many parts of the discussion, I will use the terms ‘forgiveness’ and ‘forgiving’ together to emphasize the continuity and process that is implied in the gerundive form of the latter. Reading and re-reading my interviews, I could not miss the recurring nature of many processes, both psychological and social, or of the interactions and mixed emotions that are all viewed through the prisms of religion, politics, and even that wide and undefined area known as ‘life.’ Thus, ‘forgiving’ seemed a more appropriate term capable of emphasizing those entanglements. However, since the great majority of all writings on forgiveness simply use the word ‘forgiveness’ (and very rarely use ‘forgiving’), there will be a few instances in the text where ‘forgiveness’ will mean both an event and a process. On the other hand, I will use the word ‘forgiving’ to emphasize the process and duration of the subject in question. But first, it is important to know what the words commonly signify.

In this chapter, we will first try to reconstruct the ‘universe of meaning’ related to forgiving, based on interviews with religious leaders. As we will see, the interpretation of the term and its related processes are anything but unified. We will observe some common patterns related to specific religious traditions, although, at the same time, many cross-denominational similarities and differences exist. This discussion, like many others in this book, will resemble the structure of a dictionary in which words acquire meaning by their relation to other words within networks of words. It will soon become apparent that ‘forgiving’ cannot be adequately understood without a dictionary-styled note: ‘see *forgetting.*’ One of the most salient elements in the religious view of this topic is in placing ‘forgiving’ in opposition to ‘forgetting,’ as phrased in the injunction to ‘forgive but not forget!’ However, when we jump to ‘forgetting’ – or, better stated, ‘*not-forgetting*’ – we must necessarily touch on two additional recurring subjects: *memory* and *commemoration*. The religious idea of forgiving, it will be shown, not only pertains to the level of individual emotions but also to acts of commemoration, sometimes expressed as ‘prayerful commemoration.’ This practice represents one of the links between the individual and the collective, between the spiritual and the practical, and between a moment of bliss and the routine of everyday life.

One reason for the plurality of meanings related to forgiving stems from the terminological plurality of scriptural sources on which religions have based their teachings. The holy books of Christianity and Islam offer several different terms that are commonly translated as ‘forgiveness’ in modern languages. M. Amir Ali explains the concept in Islam:

The concept of forgiveness in the Qur’an is expressed in three terms: (1) *‘afw,* used 35 times; (2) *sajhu,* used 8 times; and (3) *ghafara,* used 234 times. *‘Afw* means to pardon, to excuse for a fault, an offense, or a dis-courtesy, waiver of punishment, and amnesty. Examples of usage in the Qur’an are verses 42:40,[[46]](#footnote-46) 2:187 and 5:95. *Sajhu* means to tum away from a sin or a misdeed, ignore, etc. Examples of usage in the Qur’an are verses 2:109, 15:85,[[47]](#footnote-47) and 43:89. Ghafara or maghfira means to cover, to forgive, and to remit. Examples of usage in the Qur’an are verses 2:263,[[48]](#footnote-48) 42:37, and 43:43.[[49]](#footnote-49)

For forgiveness in the New Testament, Williams states:

The most common words denoting forgiveness in the New Testament are (1) *eleao* (and cognate nouns) -show mercy (78 times), and (2) *aphiemi -* release, discharge, put away (64 times). Another word used infrequently but in a striking way is *splanchnizomai.* Usually understood as “feeling sorry for” or “having compassion on” someone, it is derived from a word for “intestines.” It literally means to pour out one’s insides, one’s intestines.[[50]](#footnote-50)

Against the common notion that the religious understanding of forgiveness boils down to a spiritualized sermon on love and harmony, we can see that the foundational texts of Islam and Christianity describe a considerable array of processes that are nowadays simply understood as forgiveness. Although there is often an asymmetry between official theology and everyday practices, my interviews well reflect this plurality in the meaning of forgiveness. At the same time, important to mention is that the plurality of meanings evident in the interviews are not a bricolage of different opinions, in which each person favored one specific model over others. To the contrary, at stake here is the irreducible plurality of forgiveness, meaning that every respondent, without exception, used more than one meaning. In our discussion, I will present quotes from different interviewees that, in my view, well illustrate specific meanings of forgiveness. Additionally, the reader should be aware that respondents tended to shift from one meaning to another in the course of the same interview, for instance from a legal meaning to a spiritual one, but without negating the previous meaning. For this reason, questions such as ‘Is forgiveness conditional or unconditional?’ or ‘What is the relationship between punishment and forgiveness?’ cannot be answered simply. The responses to those and similar questions depended on specific conceptualizations of forgiveness. For example, while punishment and forgiveness in the strictly legal and punitive sense are seen as opposing options, these are compatible when forgiveness is understood as personal forbearance of vengeful emotions independent of legal proceedings.

The discussion will proceed as follows: In the first section, I will delineate the broad groups of meanings related to forgiving: 1) forgiving as an act of pardon, of amnesty, or of dispensation from criminal responsibility; 2) forgiving as an emotional process; and 3) forgiving as a spiritual state. Then, I will discuss some specific emerging questions: 1) the relationship between forgiving and memory and 2) the conditionality of forgiving. After outlining my research results, I will place my conclusions within a broader framework of philosophical, religious, and sociological theories on forgiving, thereby addressing three decisive issues: *human agency, forgiving*, and *unforgiving*, as well as the political significance of forgiving. Finally, in conclusion, I will present some potential contributions of religious conceptions of forgiving to our understandings of post-conflict social dynamics.

# I. Field-research findings: Delineating forgiveness

I met Hamza at a café in a shopping mall in his city. On the audio recording of our conversation, I could hear children playing, soft music, and lively chatter—a somehow incongruous background for our conversation, which dwelt on war and pain. We spoke for quite some time about forgiving and forgiveness. His attitudes towards them, revealed in short sentences and interrupted by many other observations, provided an interesting overview of their plurality.

Hamza’s first response was in line with Islamic teachings on murder, where forgiveness is just one of several possible responses of the victim’s relatives towards the perpetrator. He stressed the fact that forgiving is always tied to the original act and to the subject who has been directly affected. In the case of murder, the victim is dead, and nobody can offer forgiveness in his or her name. However, this is not the only injury for which forgiveness can be offered, since murder has broader effects that reach into the victim’s community. The injustices suffered by relatives of a murder victim are the loss of a valued family member and of an individual who filled a variety of social roles. Those affected by such a loss are entitled to withhold or to grant some form of forgiveness.

Later in our interview, Hamza moved to a different understanding of forgiveness, placing it among the emotions. At this point in our interview, possible legal actions became relatively unimportant compared to emotions and the manner in which these emotions are dealt with. Finally, when I asked him how and when forgiveness can be *felt*, he offered a deeply spiritual notion of forgiveness that takes place “in those gently delicate moments of solitude” during which a person feels a spiritual unity with God.[[51]](#footnote-51) Hamza’s answers illustrate, in an interesting way, three major meanings of forgiveness that I will discuss in more detail: 1) legal, 2) emotional, and 3) spiritual.

# 1.1. Punishment and forgiveness

Forgiveness as a legal consideration appears only in Islamic jurisprudence. ‘Forgiving,’ which in this first sense would be close to ‘pardon’ or ‘amnesty,’ takes place in a political and legal context as a decision that nullifies – in part or in full – the imposition of a retributive punishment. In other words, forgiveness is a performative act with public consequences that is the opposite of the full punishment prescribed by religious law. For Islamic religious leaders, this was usually the first meaning associated with the word ‘forgiveness.’ The respondents used the example of murder or manslaughter as a paradigmatic case for this kind of forgiving. In those instances, Shariah proscribes capital punishment, but, in addition to forgiveness, several other options are available to the victim’s family to choose from among (e.g., material or spiritual compensation in the form of fasting). In other words, although forgiveness is a possibility that is open to the family affected, it is not a religious obligation. Ahmed speaks about the Shariatic concept of criminal law:

If a person kills another person, the rule is to enact capital punishment (…) That’s the principle *ex officio*, so to speak, and such punishment is to be performed … [through an] … official ruling. Only one person or group of people can pardon him [the offender] so that he does not have to undergo capital punishment – members of the victim’s family. God desires the preservation of human life – because life is the greatest gift even if one is a murderer – and God always wants the perpetrator’s contrition [and]… salvation. (…) It [the decision to forgive] is transferred to the family. God is just, [stating]: “You can decide whether you want to forgive or not to forgive. If you forgive,” God says, “it is better for you.” What then does God do? He encourages forgiveness (…) [b]ecause forgiveness represents a superhuman act; stated more appropriately, forgiveness [is a part of] our continuous desire to reach towards God.[[52]](#footnote-52)

One of the scriptural supports for forgiveness that was quoted most, typically in the context of a ‘pardon’ or ‘amnesty,’ is when the Prophet Mohammed entered Mecca and offered amnesty to those who obeyed the new rule. In this specific context, forgiving means giving up one’s right to take ‘a life for a life.’ In Ahmed’s response given above, we see how his definition of ‘forgiving’ varies. Moreover, although Ahmed does not view forgiving an obligation, he clearly holds it in high esteem. Additionally, the negation of forgiveness is not hatred but full imposition of the punishment prescribed by legal authority. In that respect, acceptance of some form of conflict settlement is considered a duty, because vigilante justice and revenge are strictly forbidden for two primary reasons: 1) an reenactment of the same crime would make the victim (in the moral sense) comparable the offender and 2) this reenactment would involve innocent parties. As an example, Ahmed cited rape: if somebody’s daughter had been raped, revenge by the principle of a reenactment would mean a violation of the offender’s daughter, which is impermissible.[[53]](#footnote-53)

In the Christian context, the legal processes do not have such a strong theological significance as in Islamic jurisprudence. This difference is partially due to the fact that the canons of Church law, both Catholic and Orthodox, do not claim jurisdiction over the execution of corporal punishments.[[54]](#footnote-54) Penalties for grave offenses are always spiritual, irrespective of the external punishment, allowing the two to be separate. For Jakov, a Catholic priest from a Serbian-majority city in north-western Bosnia, forgiving and legal processes are completely autonomous:

But what does it mean to forgive, in the real sense of the word? (…) I [would be] glad if everyone who committed an evil act was caught, prosecuted, and, in the end, justly punished. Justice must be enacted on [such criminals]. (…) [However, that has nothing to do with forgiveness, either by God or by others. (…) Punishment for a crime has nothing to do with [the form of] forgiveness that I’m talking about. I [have no desire] to gloat over [someone else’s misfortune], whether I know them or not. (…) Punishment will not lessen the gravity of someone’s actions, but it will demonstrate that someone can’t do whatever they want without suffering the consequences.[[55]](#footnote-55)

As is evident from the quotation above, for Jakov, legal punishment plays a positive social role as a deterrent and corrective measure but differs from forgiving. Moreover, even when such legal measures are imposed, they should not result in some form of *Schadenfreude* over the regrettable destinies of the individuals being punished.

To conclude this section, forgiveness, defined in the legal sense that is present in Islamic theology, is conceived as the possibility of freeing offenders from the legal consequences of their crimes. The expression of forgiveness, therefore, is intended to have a public effect. ‘I forgive’ is interpreted as ‘I free someone from the punishment that would otherwise be enacted.’ However, merely voicing the words ‘I forgive’ does not necessarily signify a change in the speaker’s inner feelings towards the offender. For example, a murdered victim’s family deciding to forgive the perpetrator (that is, to free the murderer from the capital punishment prescribed by Shariah) does not imply that the family’s feelings towards the offender have changed from enmity to friendship. Viewed from the other side, we can also imagine a case wherein someone feels no emotional or spiritual distance from the offender anymore but nonetheless withholds the expression of forgiveness so as to correct the offender or to pursue some broader social good. In his answer to my question, Haris hinted at this difference: “This is what I suggest to believers as a form of forgiveness: when they are alone with God, that they forgive people, all people, regardless of their faith or nationality. (…) Because [the perpetrator] sinned, his sin can be forgiven but not forgotten.”[[56]](#footnote-56) Haris adds that future generations should have knowledge of what happened, and so the ugly crimes that members of one nation have committed should be documented and remembered. “I can sue somebody and still forgive him. I [forgive] him in my soul.”[[57]](#footnote-57) Apparently seeing no contradiction here, Haris stated that he would want the satisfaction of the offender’s crime being punished according to “this-world justice” and, for “the other-world justice, there is God!”[[58]](#footnote-58)

Therefore, when conceived of as a juridical category, the main domain of forgiveness is public order and justice, that is, a shared perception of rightful actions and relations. This perception is, however, just the beginning in the story of forgiveness because its most commonly used meaning does not pertain to the public sphere. What do the words ‘I forgive’ denote when they have no direct relevance to public order or when a victim never meets the person who wronged him or her, either because the wrongdoer remains unknown or appears only as part of a larger group? In such situations, forgiveness does not affect external affairs but belongs to the realm of intimate emotions or spiritual states, which will be the subject of our next section.

# 1.2. The emotional side of forgiving

Mirza told me he has always tried to live according to the spiritual principles of his faith. During the war, his family had lost their relatives, friends, their possessions. Still a child at that time, he had lost all his toys, and his mentioning of this loss stayed in my mind. At that time, Mirza’s family lived in one of the cities where large-scale mass killings of Bosniaks took place during the war in 1990’s. When the family later moved to a Bosniak-majority city in central Bosnia, the locals did not welcome them with much hospitality. At one point, Mirza asked himself as to why Serbs were killing and expelling them. The only answer he could come up with was: “[B]ecause we are Muslims.”[[59]](#footnote-59)

  In 1994, while Mirza was still at secondary school, the idea of violent Jihad became attractive to him. His experience made him aware of certain contradictons. His religious education contained messages that Islam was all about peace but, due to his traumatic experience, he was not able to understand them fully. The desire to avenge the injustice he had experienced as a child grew in him, and Mirza found justifications for those desires in the idea of violent Jihad.[[60]](#footnote-60) Confined to a concentration camp in 1992, he saw his teacher writing a list of names of those entering the camp. Moreover, his former neighbor was an officer who ordered the execution of a village’s entire population. Mirza then made his own list of people he wanted to kill. The turning point came after a religious service one Friday when he met a friend who described himself as a peacemaker. Mirza’s worldview soon drastically changed, and the idea of violence no longer appeared to him as a valid solution. The experience of forgiveness liberated him: “It was not the Serbs who deserved forgiveness… but me. I was the one who was suffering…. The moment I decided to forgive the Serbs for what they [had] done, I was freed.”[[61]](#footnote-61)

Mirza’s story is one of many in which forgiving appears as a way of overcoming the overwhelming emotions of resentment and hostility. Of course, emotions cannot be viewed as detached from cognition, that is, as isolated from one’s beliefs, assumptions, and judgements of the injury and of the offender. The victim’s current circumstances also play a role in the process of forgiving. Moreover, forgiving can also be a rational calculation. A person can, for example, ask: ‘Is it more beneficial for me to forgive or not to forgive?’ Although all the processes involved seem to provide rational *grounds* for forgiving they do not constitute *forgiving itself*. Therefore, I decided to treat these rational considerations as supportive mechanisms in the process of forgiving. By emphasizing emotions without detaching them from cognition, we can better understand, not the reasons for forgiving, but what individuals perceive as forgiving.

What makes emotional states so important in a religious context is not only the influence of these states on a person’s physical and psychological well-being but also their theological relevance. The anger and hatred that otherwise can be seen simply as undesirable emotions that negatively affect a person’s well-being are, in the context of religion, factors having spiritual significance. Therefore, the emotional/spiritual meaning of forgiving is understood through a concern for well-being and spiritual salvation, both of the victims and the offenders.

At the same time, linking forgiveness to emotions creates a composite image of introspection and voluntary activity. On the one hand, the question “How does it *feel* to forgive?” is tied to the notion of inner emotional states, while, on the other hand, there is a question of what is to be *done* *with the feelings* that arise after an injury. In this second case, the conceptualization of forgiveness about emotions is also linked to the voluntary dimension, that is, *dealing* with challenges related to forgiveness.

To reiterate this important point, emotions are not separate from cognitive elements,[[62]](#footnote-62) and the cognitive side can never completely control the emotions. Both parts, moreover, are susceptible to external influences, especially to that of time. However, the crucial detail in religious teachings on forgiving is that the process of forgiving must consist of being an *activity*, not just as an epiphenomenon arising as a side effect of some other process. One might legitimately ask: ‘If the passage of time, purely by coincidence, could produce the same effect as willed forgiving, would it have the same social, moral, and spiritual value?’ It seems that, at least in the context of religious teachings, a negative answer would prevail. Interviewee Marijan, for instance, saw forgiving as something “noble and good” and believed that such things “do not happen just by themselves; they result from someone’s efforts, those of an actual individual who assumes [the burden] because he sees it as something good and just, something that needs to be done.”[[63]](#footnote-63)

## 1.2.1. Forgiving as an emancipation from overwhelming negative emotions

With respect to emotions in the context of forgiving, one specific term takes precedence: *resentment*. Forgiving is most often understood as the forbearance or moderation of resentment and hatred. It has less to do with the question ‘How do I feel?’ than with ‘What can I do with my feelings?’ Sometimes surprising, the most influential *eloge* of resentment came from the pen of 18th century Anglican bishop Joseph Butler, who describes resentment as a passion that is a natural human reaction to injustice and a necessary factor in establishing justice. It only becomes negative when used for the wrong ends. Emotions – or passions, as Butler terms them – can stimulate one to fight for the right cause but can, at the same time, become a burden that reduces person’s ability to react differently (from natural instincts to vengeance).[[64]](#footnote-64) Thus, the basic notion of forgiving, in the context of emotions, could be best described as a form of emotional control in which a person moderates or transforms the emotions that form the natural response to an injury or injustice. The phrases most often used to describe the process of dealing with one’s emotional and spiritual states are: ‘to throw out the evil from oneself,’ ‘to liberate oneself,’ or ‘to free oneself.’ Slaven, for instance, states, “Forgiveness in our Christian sense would be liberation of oneself from oneself, from one’s own evil creatures that don’t leave one in peace (…) [Forgiving also means] accepting the Other in love although one has suffered a blow from him.“[[65]](#footnote-65) Slaven used an interesting phrase to describe forgiveness, as the “liberation [of] oneself from oneself,” thereby shifting the focus from the interpersonal and social sphere to the individual one. Forgiving, so to speak, figures as an act of emancipation from the almost instinctive reactions that are caused by suffering injury. Metaphorically, these mechanisms are sometimes seen as ‘chains’ that restrict a person’s agency by tying it to a single defining event or period: “Life must go on. We cannot remain trapped in the conflicts of the 1990s for the rest of our lives. If we want to live normally, with open hands as it were, and as people of freedom, we need to forgive; otherwise we will be captives of malice and hatred (…) If we want to liberate ourselves from the chains of evil and hatred, we have to keep forgiving people [who have injured us].”[[66]](#footnote-66)

As described in the passage above, the emotions of malice and hatred tie their victims to the past, so much so that subsequent actions of any kind refer primarily to past traumas. In that scenario, negative emotions cannot act as the impulse for positive change that Butler advocated but function instead as a basis for negative judgments and actions. In other words, forgiving is not in itself incompatible with all unpleasant emotions but only those that are seen as inherently limiting the human capacity for good. What seems to be a decisive factor in this differentiation is not the sensation of pleasure or discomfort the emotions bring but rather their *directedness*. In that respect, hatred is seen as a destructive emotion because it is ultimately directed at *a person as a person*, rather than at his or her actions. Anger, on the other hand, can be beneficial if directed against an unjust system and if it motivates people to envisage and act towards making improvements. In that respect, religious leaders can

[T]ry to emancipate [people who have suffered injustice], to educate... [and] inform them…, so that they [are not] possessed by… [emotions]. They [the victims] have the right not to hate but to be angry with the state that did not punish [the crimes] of the person who committed them], but they do not have the right to radicalize it transform it into uncontrolled, let us say, anger. Not even anger—I don’t have a word [to describe it] …. It is necessary to convert that hatred into [other] emotions [and], in the best case, to pray to God to guide [to the right path] that other person the wrongdoer].[[67]](#footnote-67)

Fra Luka told me that forgiveness is primarily a process of resolving things within oneself. Recalling a dramatic episode from the war when a man held a gun to his throat and threatened to shoot him, he explained that fear had naturally been present, but “in that moment, I did not hate that person.”[[68]](#footnote-68)

When explaining the necessity to forgive in the sense of controlling or moderating certain emotions, religious leaders tend to combine the therapeutic and religious benefits of forgiving, suggesting that whatever is spiritually destructive also has destructive consequences to physical health. Blago, a Franciscan from Herzegovina, states it in the following way:

We, priests, always say that it is necessary to forgive, based on the Gospel’s [teaching]. That is the hardest thing. (…) For purification of a person as a human being, it is of crucial importance to forgive a person who offended you or who committed a crime against my people, my brother, my son. A person cannot progress if he does not clarify that in himself. [Otherwise,] he limits himself, in effect killing himself – and that [inward state] can produce consequences to physical health.[[69]](#footnote-69)

As we can see, in view of religious leaders, the emotional dimension of forgiving can help emancipate and expand the personal agency of an individual that would otherwise be limited. The prevailing idea is that suffered harm triggers automatic emotions of resentment and hatred that overburden the person and prevent him or her from acting or feeling outside the narrow spectrum of the natural reactions to injury. The effect of the offense is not only that manifested in the *form* of emotions that one can experience but also in their *degree*. The religious argument would be the following: When a victim recursively feels only a limited range of emotions that negatively affect his or her physical and spiritual well-being, it is both morally and spiritually legitimate to help the person to moderate or even transform those emotions. The question, however, is how this can be done when emotions, unlike judgments, do not result from rationalization. The prevailing approach seems to involve the moderation of ‘negative’ emotions. The transformation of resentment and hatred felt towards those who caused an injury results in the sufferer exhibiting a basic care for the offender, as a member of a common humanity, while still deriding his or her injurious act. Such a situation can be fuelled by a desire for the offender to realize the depth of the offence and to change his or her demeanor.

This point becomes clearer when we link this discussion with another topic that is, in religious parlance, seen as both a decision and an emotion: *love*. It is immediately necessary to say that love in this context does not, of course, carry any romantic connotations but is primarily a notion of *filia,* the care for another person and his or her well-being regardless of background. *Filia* is a fundamental and ubiquitous element of Christian theology. Pavle explains that forgiving has a spiritual value only when it is permeated with love, and, accordingly, no Christian martyr could be a saint in the absence of love or without care for those who had wronged them:

In order to ‘be capable of paradise.’ one needs to be free, and to be free means to forgive. (…) The one who forgives is liberated from anger. But that is not just a passive state. (…) Love is active, requiring activity, and only through love can we reach salvation. Anyway, I understood it and experienced it that way. And I tell people that not a single saint (…) would be a saint without love. The is especially the case with martyrs. Not a single martyr would be a saint without love. We have concrete examples. I like to mention those from recent history [such as] Jasenovac and the old man Vukašin, who more than once responded to the executioner torturing him [to death] by addressing him as ‘son.’. Out of love, [Vukašin] desired to bring him back to the right path. [Vukašin] was not afraid of death and was not hurt by what [the executioner] did but by the fact that this executioner, the one who was killing him, was losing salvation. That is love.[[70]](#footnote-70)

We could conclude that the understanding of forgiveness in the context of emotions is essentially linked to two basic notions: emancipation from the limitations that hurtful emotions have imposed on a victim and care as an active principle guiding that activity. Forgiveness is both a *state* and a *willed activity* (emotional management), and those two aspects of it are inseparable. Forgiving, sometimes viewed as an obligation, remains nevertheless an ideal, an action that cannot be expected from everyone at every moment but as a practice to strive towards. To put it differently, the Abrahamic religions aim to preserve the *ideal* of forgivingness but with an acute awareness that the ideal might never be fully achieved and that most people need assistance with their pain, which is real, rather than sermons on ideals that often seem unattainable. Therefore, the pastoral care related to forgiving draws inspiration from *eschatological time*, from the final horizon of all humanity, which is in dissonance with the *social time* marked by events and with the *personal time* that is a function of individual experiences. Tragedies leave deep traces, both in social and personal time. Metaphorically speaking, they resemble black holes that concentrate time and space around them and follow events that are particularly painful. In some cases, a tragedy can be so deep that it eradicates all other time and subsists as a singular amalgam of history-present. In those cases, ordering someone to forgive would be naïve at best, or detrimental and humiliating for the victim, at worst. What is needed is a change ‘in the center of gravity,’ a gradual move and change that is understood as a ‘liberation’ or ‘emancipation’ from negative emotions towards a broadening of the horizon of freedom.

The effect of that change can differ in scope. Here, distinguishing between the different degrees of forgiving can be helpful. While, on the one hand, forgiveness is understood as an initial demonstration of goodwill to withhold revenge and forebear the desire to enact it, something we can call *minimal forgiveness*. On the other hand, *maximal forgiveness*, or forgiveness to the fullest extent, is difficult to determine. In the emotional sense, forgiveness involves the transformation of feelings towards the offender(s) in which the crucial detail seems to be some degree of concern for their well-being, termed *love for the enemy*. Again, this love acts according to the principle of differentiation between the offense and the offender. In the following section, we will explore another sense of forgiving that goes a step beyond emotional engagement towards the notion of spiritual states that are understood as a gift or experienced as a moment of bliss.

# 1.3. Forgiving as a spiritual state

I began the discussion with Hamza, who initially had a very pragmatic view of forgiveness, by emphasizing the necessity of public resentment and protest when one feels that the perpetrators of crimes go unpunished. However, when I specifically asked whether he would define a state in which a person feels no hatred and no desire to harm the perpetrator as a form of forgiving, he still said no. Our conversation proceeded as follows:

**Q:** When does the forgiveness take place?

**A:** [long silence] When we remember…. in those delicate, gentle moments of solitude, when we are closest to God, when we leave everything to God and immerse ourselves – we Muslims in *namaz* – or in a prayer (…) Those are truly 100% intimate moments when we become aware that He rules those lives, that He, after all, decided it that way, that He is the ruler of everything, that He will give both from His mercy and His love, and that I am also a part of that something, as well as the one close to me who was killed. (…)

**Q:** Does this mean that the moment people experience God’s closeness is the moment of forgiveness?

**A:** Yes, [it is in] the experience of God’s closeness, and in the moment when they feel that. Sometimes that will be during a prayer, sometimes [it is felt] in the breeze or, I don’t know, [during] a sunset, or when looking at a photo of that person. [It could also come] when you remember death and, for us Muslims, when remembering that we will meet again. Then the other one, the one who killed, becomes unimportant. I will reunite [with the victim] and we will be together in paradise. With God’s will, he [the victim] is already there.

**Q:** Can those intimate moments of God’s closeness come at any time, even when the perpetrator feels no regret?

**A:** Yes, they can. That is complete forgiveness… But they [those moments] go away, when we descend to the level of ordinary life. (…). Look, here is the catch, and you have to be very careful here – we cannot separate [ourselves] from our human side. When I say ‘human,’ I mean that which is imperfect or ungodly. At the same time, we cannot forget the spirit or soul; we Muslims would call it *Ruh*, and it is 100% divine. In those moments, it is that Ruh, that soul, which forgives – it is ready, it can forgive. But as humans, we calculate, we are not there… you know. (…) Every person has Ruh, a soul. Not the ‘humanist’ soul, the Freudian one, but the one that truly comes from God (…) Jesus was, according to the Islamic tradition, from the Ruh of God, conceived from the Ruh of God. Adam was animated by it. Without Ruh, he would just have been a robot. Therefore, it is Ruh – that what is divine in a person – that can level all [the pains and struggles]. But when we return, we return [from the vision] to what is ours, we return to *nefs*. Nefs is our human character, the [one that says:] ‘I would like more money, this and that.’ Like Smigel, you know from the Lord of the Rings! [*laughter*]

In the spiritual sense, forgiveness does not seem to progress in measured steps but, rather, is part of an unpredictable spiritual state which, like a moment of serendipity, occurs in very precious moments of spiritual practice. In that respect, it resembles ecstasy, a state of spiritual bliss that does not last very long but can serve as a basis for a subsequently different perception of reality. Therefore, Hamza’s conception of ‘true forgiveness’ is an exceptional moment in which ‘ordinary’ concerns are suspended. But there is a period before and after that moment of forgiveness, a flux of ordinary time that is not negated by the interruption of the supra-ordinary moment. That also means that the visionary state is necessarily counterbalanced by the weight of ordinary experience, in a swing between the human and divine levels.

This form of forgiveness is very intimate and, like other mystical experiences, is not fully communicable to others, much less to a collective. To some degree, it is seen as a gift and cannot be directly induced by individual efforts – it comes and goes, just like a moment of inspiration, invisible in its content but detectable as a trace of difference within the joint order of relations between human individuals and God. This spiritual understanding of forgiveness thus resembles the religious teachings on grace, which is the unmerited gift that can only be experienced and understood personally.

We will now explore the slightly different understanding of forgiving as a spiritual disposition that combines the notions of grace and effort in a process of forgiving, representing a complete change of thinking and behaving.

## 1.3.1. Forgiving as a comprehensive change in thinking

In my interviews with three Orthodox priests, I encountered a new theological term used to explain forgiving: *metanoia*. The priests connected the experience of forgiveness that occurs along with a profound change of mind and is reflected in the Slavic word *pokajanje* and in the ancient Greek word *μετάνοια*, This change of mind, in the positive sense, is a change of the whole lifestyle and involves the renunciation of bad habits and the practicing and maintaining of new and beneficial ones. These changes come about as the result of honest repentance and honest forgiveness to herald an entirely new way of life. According to Bogdan, that is “a foretaste of the Kingdom [of God], here on Earth. That is what Saint Paul saw and experienced as the Seventh Heaven. (…) Everyone has the right to withhold forgiveness and not to repent, but it means that his life here is already a foretaste of hell.”[[71]](#footnote-71) Forgiving in the sense of metanoia has a unified character that is expressed in acts, judgments, emotions, and imagination. It signifies at the same time the concentrated effort of an individual to do things differently and represents the final stage in the process of forgiving. As Miloš explained:

It is not easy to forgive. (…) In the mystery of contrition, we call that “metanoia” and “preumiti” [literally: “to change mind”]. Therefore, every person that has truly [experienced this fundament change] is able to forgive. [It comes in] that moment of inner ecstasy, of inner accomplishment [known as] *preumljenje* that makes us able to forgive. Otherwise, (…) we cannot forgive. We can forgive verbally, but [forgiveness that is merely] verbal differs radically from the true one. (…) It is very hard to achieve that, and the Church is the best witness to that. We in the various Churches cannot even forgive each other.[[72]](#footnote-72)

Miloš thus differentiated between the *true forgiveness* that comes as the result of a complete change in a person’s mental state and *verbal forgiveness*, which is a mere matter of words and is without any real substance, and finally the *desired forgiveness* that reflects a person’s efforts to deal with pain and negative emotions but does not necessarily result in peace. He later added that true forgiveness, as the expression of a profound inner change, manifests itself in a different perception of the offender. Miloš emphasized that it is very difficult, but not impossible, to reach this state. When a person has undergone this inner change, the results are visible in everyday life. Miloš describes people who have truly forgiven each other and who now live in harmony: “In those places where they haven’t [done so], they do not live with each other but next to each other, always with that invisible or visible line of separation, and can always explode into conflict.”[[73]](#footnote-73) Although Miloš mentioned that people who are deeply spiritual aim towards *true forgiveness*, this does not come automatically and is not a sign of spiritual superiority. As an illustration, he cited the example of how the various Christian churches have still not ‘forgiven’ each other for the split that has lasted for almost a millennium. Therefore, *true forgiveness* cannot be commanded but can be set as a goal, an aim to achieve the harmonization of inner states that brings peace within and outwardly manifests an attitude of amicability that is seen and felt as genuine.

In the preceding paragraphs, we have focused on forgiving in the spiritual and emotional context. We have already seen on several occasions that those processes, although deeply intimate and personal, are nevertheless a part of the social context. The link between the individual and the community or society seems to be forged by the mechanism of memory. Dealing with emotions and spiritual states is impossible without regard to memory because it is not just the original act that people are dealing with but the presence of that act in the memory of those who were involved and affected. In that sense, the most common phrase ‘forgive but not forget’ illustrates quite clearly the connection between the personal and collective. In the following section, our discussion of forgiving will thus turn to the problem of remembering and forgetting.

# 1.4. Forgiving, memory, and commemoration

The phrase ‘forgive but not forget’ appears almost as a rule among the people I spoke to. Regardless of a participant’s views on forgiveness itself, the importance of not forgetting seemed very salient. With just two exceptions, in which forgetting was viewed as potentially positive, the participants spoke in unison of their opposition to it. However, on closer analysis, we could again detect an inherent heterogeneity in the understanding of forgetting. The following are among the questions that arise from the responses: Are forgetting and forgiving related processes or are they independent? Is forgetting simply a failure of memory or could it have a positive effect? What does it mean to forgive but not forget? As forgiving was conceptualized in legal, emotional, and spiritual terms, the related notion of not-forgetting can be variously seen in terms of documentation and as the preservation of archives, as an emotional problem, or as a spiritual matter. In its basic sense, the second part of the imperative ‘forgive but not forget!’ is a warning against ‘erasure’ of the basic facts related to crimes, against the consequent denial of the suffering that took place, and the elimination of victims from the public discourse.

Easy to see is why this fundamental level of meaning is so important: recognition of past tragedies is perceived as an act in service of truth and also plays a vital role in shaping a society’s social memories, ethos, and identity. Tragedies forgotten are thus not an empty set that has never existed but, rather, are numerous histories emptied of the content. Therefore, respect for victims is the first reason for the insistence on not-forgetting. The second lies in the educative value of knowledge in helping the society avoid making the same mistakes in the future. Only *what is known* can be thematized, and, in this case, become a candidate for forgiveness. Knowledge of past tragedies does not invariably necessitate forgiveness, as the two are separate processes, but, rather, the awareness of past events is the prerequisite to adopting any attitude, including forgiving, towards these tragedies. However, lack of knowledge about a tragedy makes any discussion on forgiving difficult, if not impossible. For that reason, Pavle values the role of historians in documenting tragedies, while at the same time criticizing them for failing to do their job fully. When crimes are not known, Pavle believes, everybody is a victim in the sense that the dependent processes cannot even begin.[[74]](#footnote-74)

Simply focusing on documentation is, however, insufficient with respect to preserving knowledge of tragedies. Thus, ‘not forgetting’ is not only about the *facts* of past events but can also be understood as the refusal to allow the memory of pain to fade, as expressing emotional attachment to a specific cognitive content of memory. Unlike many events that can be a subject of interest for historians but that lack any organic link to the lives of communities, tragedies are certainly among those elements that define the identity and emphasize the inner cohesion of the community, its perception of other communities, and its relationships with these. The memory of a tragedy is not merely the mark of an event that took place once and is now finished forever but, rather, is a significant repository in the sphere of identity and self-understanding. This memory is more than a sign; it is a *signpost* that directs the path and makes a *caesura* between the time before and the time after the event. Those signposts, which result from unwilled suffering, cannot be created or removed at will or simply erased for the sake of convenience. In that respect, those memories are understood both as a legacy, something that must be preserved lest the whole identity collapse, and as a pathology that weighs heavily upon the present. Although, as Jakov stated, “It would be best that a person erases all traumas from his or her life. However, forgetting that would lead to the same [conflicts] is not good. (…) One needs to forget – to throw out all the negative emotions from oneself, but [also to] let reality remain reality.”[[75]](#footnote-75)

The problem is that the ‘reality’ represented by the past always remains distant to us. The reality of the past is always a ‘virtual’ reality, a world re-created through mnemonic practices. ‘I remember’ and ‘we remember’ are the creative blocks of reality that allow for forgiving, but, at the same time, these blocks are selective and heterogeneous elements that are neither completely mutually compatible nor necessarily conducive to forgiving:

In any case, in order to forgive something, one [first] needs to know about it. It seems to me that historians have not done their job fully. History is one big puzzle, and every people has its own, deeply embedded version [of history]. We are all victims of such a situation. We know history [only] to the degree that it was revealed to us or through personal experiences.[[76]](#footnote-76)

Forgiving deals with the past in a peculiar manner, recreating it as accurately as possible but also changing it. Only that which is remembered can be forgiven, and thus what is unremembered (or forgotten) is also unforgiven. At the same time, the process of forgiving transforms the bearing of the past on the present. The same remembered past that provides the reasons for forgiving can also provide reasons for not-forgiving. As Velimir noted, we can forgive only that which we know, but we know only “what is revealed to us.” Because of the selective and vulnerable nature of memory, remembering requires constant care, as will be discussed in more detail in the chapter on memory and in the final chapter on the possibilities of a Balkan contextual theology. In the following section, I will focus only on religious views of the links between memory and forgiving. The objective will be to find a model of remembering that takes into account the pain of the victims and yet does not completely reject the idea of forgiving.

## 1.4.1. The past weighing on the present

The room of interviewee Hrvoje was a meeting place for different cultures, the center of an imaginary compass placed at the divide between two different sides of history, a meridian repurposed into a small studio furnished with elements drawn from different styles and epochs. He sat opposite me beside his writing table, and, while we were talking, he was swinging the small letter opener he held. When our conversation touched on the difficult matters of memory and history, his movements slowed, suddenly taking on a symbolic value in my eyes. I remembered a sentence I had read somewhere – possibly from Nietzsche – describing how the past hangs over the present like the sword of Damocles. Suddenly the image became very real; although I listened to his words, I could not ignore the blunt metal knife that he kept in a delicate balance, the knife that could fall at any moment and disrupt the flow of words. The moment in which the sword of the past interrupts the present and the side on which it falls both constitute decisive events.

Speaking about the nature of transmuting aspects of the past into the present through the problematic process of forgiving, Hrvoje stated:

Often, we hear that one needs “to forgive but not forget,” which is, in essence, positive, at least in its original conception. However, that [saying] is sometimes misinterpreted (…) What does it mean to forgive if I [continually] return to the evil that was done to me, if I perceive all others through [the lens of] that evil? Perceiving through this lens other people, [older] generations, and perhaps even the progeny of those who did the evil – that does not constitute a positive way of performing not-forgetting. Forgiveness must include the memory itself, and it should *not forget* [only] so that the evil will not be repeated. (…) [However,] many people say, “Never more” (…) in the sense of “that should never happen to *us* again. [In the sense of:] We have to be powerful so that the evil never happens to *us* again.”[[77]](#footnote-77)

Hrvoje referred to the transformed resolution expressed in the phrase ‘never more such evil’ to ‘never more such evil to us,’ in which the general principle is changed into a group’s desire for self-protection. Although there is nothing wrong with self-protection in principle, what is problematic is the privatization of the suffering to a group in which self-protection (against real or imagined enemies) becomes the highest principle to justify similar crimes. In other words, the memory of suffering is transformed into vindictive memory, and the non-repetition of the event is transformed from a principle into a cause. The Past, in that case, is not a reason for forgiving but a resource of trans-generational blame and self-victimization, a wound that remains fresh and ready to be used at an opportune moment.

The potential problems that memory can cause also beg a further question: What would be an adequate form of remembering, and in what way should tragedies be commemorated so as to pay homage to the victims but without paving the way for new conflicts?

Here, *zlopamćenje*, a very important local term that cannot be adequately translated into English, can be very illuminating. A compound noun, *zlopamćenje*, which is formed from the words: ‘zlo’ (evil) and ‘pamćenje’ (memory), is the memory of a tragic event formed in such a way as to preserve and incite negative emotions towards a person or a group. It also connotes selectivity and exclusion. *Zlopamćenje* effectively means that the ‘evil of the Other’ is transformed into ‘the Other as evil’ and that past offenses become an obstacle to any future encounter. This form of memory is often transferred through generations.

Recounting the story of recursive crimes in the region near the Drina River, a highly positioned Muslim religious official asked the rhetorical question why is evil so strongly entrenched in some families and how and why do the grandfathers, fathers, and sons from one family kill the grandfathers, fathers, and sons in another, sometimes even using the same knife.[[78]](#footnote-78) Such strong antagonism obviously had a cause, and the lineage of such crimes had clearly been transmitted through the inter-generational memory of suffering that remained within the circle of offense and revenge. In a contrasting example, Goran described how his grandfather never revealed the names of his torturers to his children or grandchildren for fear of reprisals:

[F]orgiveness is, in principle, not to *zlopmatiti* [literary ‘to remember in an evil way’] some evils done to us. Simply put, we know what happened, but we do not want to *return [retaliate] by the same measure*. That is what forgiveness means to me. My grandfather, for instance, (…) had seven children – four sons and three daughters. He never wanted to point out, “Those are the people who raped and killed my mother and [attacked] my father, who had 14 wounds that day… and barely survived” (…) He never wanted to talk about that (…) although he knew who did it, precisely so as to allow for [future] reconciliation (…)[[79]](#footnote-79)

Memories of the past, which are a prerequisite for forgiving and reconciliation, can also form an obstacle to these goals. Damjan suggested that a sounder theological phrasing of the notion ‘forgive but not forget’ would be ‘remembering victims, forgetting evil.’[[80]](#footnote-80) In his view, however, the call to ‘forgive but not forget’ would be practically impossible if applied to all conflicts:

[I]f we want to be consistent when saying ‘forgive but not forget,’ why then would we stop with conflicts between nations? There were cases where Serbs were killing Serbs and Croats were killing Croats, [all] for ideological reasons. (…) Or [there were] conflicts within families. (…) If we were to implement [‘forgive but not forget’] (…) down to the individual level, we most likely wouldn’t be able to go out to the street [without meeting people we’d be blaming for something]. (…) In that sense, that [adhering to that principle] would completely destroy the community at its most basic, and I think [that would be] wrong.[[81]](#footnote-81)

Instead, Damjan suggested that the memory of tragedies should be constructed as the memory of individual victims, not as a list of acts that need to be accounted for. Velimir stresses something similar:

It is difficult to say to somebody who is close to a victim that perished or died: “You should forget him. Tomorrow, we move forward. Life goes on.” How could he forget? He will visit the graveyard [where his relative is buried] [and, in time] will start to slowly heal, to forget over time. The sorrow [over his loss] will [eventually] be forgotten, but the person lost will not. It is the same with us. We mustn’t forget certain observances and commemorations. We cannot cease acknowledging certain anniversaries and dirges. But by virtue of our visiting [these places of commemoration], we will slowly push away the revenge and anger, and we will forgive and forget. I think that is the key.[[82]](#footnote-82)

As Velimir noted, the victims of crimes cannot be forgotten by those who loved them, but the sadness and anger associated with their loss can fade with time. In his view, the spiritual commemorative practices (i.e., acts of remembrance) help victims to forget and, in so doing, put aside hurtful emotions and negative attitudes. When asked why public commemorations are sometimes used as occasions to call for revenge, Velimir replied that this is due to political involvement and emphasized the necessity of depoliticizing these events and encouraging religious leaders and ordinary people to be more closely involved with these events. In his view, the correct way to commemorate a tragedy is in a ‘prayerful commemoration’ [*molitveno sjećanje*]: “Prayer will bring peace to a soul [whereas a] speech from an impassioned politician certainly won’t.”[[83]](#footnote-83) Velimir’s skepticism with regard to politicians’ speeches indicates that words are capable of disturbing commemorative communication. His concept of *prayerful commemoration* implies that commemorations do not have to be grounded in words that are voiced, as prayer involves intervals of respectful silence in which even one’s mute presence speaks in a way that a political ideology cannot.

## 1.4.2. The graves that do not forgive

One of the most popular songs during the Homeland War in Croatia was “The graves will never forgive them (*Grobovi im nikad oprostiti neće*)” by singer Mišo Kovač, who was famed for his music, first in the former Yugoslavia and then later in Croatia. The song was first performed in 1991, at the time of the first war atrocities in Croatia. Both the lyrics and the video juxtapose previously peaceful landscapes with images of suffering and destruction. The refrain directly thematizes the acts of wrongdoers with the words: “The graves could never forgive them because of the innocent people losing lives, because of the youth, and the prayers to God [during which] sorrowful mothers kiss dead lips. The graves will never forgive them if human hatred does not accept love. The graves [hidden] in wheat will curse them for centuries. Croats will never forget them.”[[84]](#footnote-84)

What is interesting in this song is its choice of the carrier of memory – i.e., the graves. Although used metaphorically, graves of the victims can be an illuminating example to understand the mechanisms of forgiving and remembering. Typically, graves are not the subjects of remembering themselves but act, in every culture, as repositories of memory. In this particular case, they also stand as reminders of *that which will not be forgiven*. The line, “[the] Croats will never forgive them” in the last verse, shows how the graves serve both as reminders of the lives lost and, simultaneously, symbols of unforgiving.

Here we see how forgiving, although a personal and intimate act, is nevertheless socially conditioned. Although individuals ultimately decide whether to forgive or not to forgive, they nonetheless operate within *social frameworks of forgiving*. Those frameworks contain images that either impede or facilitate forgiving, elements that are considered ‘unforgivable,’ as well as the ethics related to those phenomena. Forgiveness thus constitutes not merely forgiveness of the original act but also forms a silent dialogue dominated by questions such as: Can I forgive something that the others in my group consider unforgivable?, Can my group forgive their group?; or even: ‘Can I forgive that which our *graves* cannot forgive? Forgiveness considers not only the closely involved actors who are alive but also, as we saw, the dead members of the community, the graves of these members, and the broader society. ‘Forgive but not forget’ or its opposite, ‘Never forgive, never forget,’ are not just statements about an individual attitude but are also presumptions about the dead and include an imagined future as well as the negotiations involved in the reconstruction of the past.

## 1.4.3. Forgiving as forgetting

We began our discussion with the notion that forgiving requires remembering and then turned to situations in which remembering the past could prove to be an obstacle to forgiving, especially when memory is constructed in the form of *zlopamćenje*. The newer concept of prayerful commemoration was introduced and is situated between those two extremes, thereby offering the possibility of an inclusive way of remembering past tragedies that is conducive to forgiving. We will now complete the circle by reflecting upon three proposals that suggest how the ‘ultimate horizon’ of forgiving (in religious sense) is not memory but *forgetting*.

In my conversation with Konstantin, I noticed that he appeared to view the statement ‘forgive but not forget’ with suspicion. He stated that ‘not forgetting’ might represent a decision to approach the whole process of forgiving with initial reservations. He contrasted ‘not forgetting’ with the evangelical statement that by “the measure you measure, you will be measured.”[[85]](#footnote-85) Thus, in his view, forgetting has a positive value and *complete forgiveness* includes forgetting. In my follow-up question, I asked him to clarify the meaning of forgetting in that context:

**Q:** What would, in that sense, be complete forgiveness? Obviously, when a tragedy happens, people cannot erase it from memory. What then would be that ‘sacred forgetting’?

**A:** [With respect to] sacred forgetting, since sacred memory exists, [so too does] sacred forgetting. [In my opinion], sacred forgetting would be to love the one we forgive or, [stated more precisely,] to be capable of loving the person [we forgive]. [This is possible] even when, due to our biological makeup, we cannot perform some sort of auto-lobotomy; memory includes, [whether we will it or not,] images from the past. [In summary,] I think that sacred forgetting is that love.[[86]](#footnote-86)

In the context of forgiving, *forgetting* is therefore used more as a metaphor. Although Konstantin referred to *sacred forgetting*, that form of forgetting does not pertain to the biological basis of memory and is not linked to the neurological process of recalling past events. To the contrary, *forgetting* in a spiritual sense means one’s ability to *love the enemy*. However, even that common phrase might be unclear. Used in this context, *love* has two essential meanings: 1) the abandonment of divisive emotions and 2) the acceptance of a spiritual commonality with the offender. Stated differently, *sacred forgetting* is not equivalent to oblivion but, rather, is a form of memory that is different from *zlopamćenje*,that is, treating some tragic event or act as decisive in order to judge and retaliate against an individual who injured us or against other individuals belonging to the same group.

Damjan’s appreciation of forgetting is based on different reasons. When he suggested the need for forgetting, he was referring to some form of passive forgetting resulting from choosing to ignore insults. Remembering someone’s insult or continually reminding that person of the insult, by saying, for instance, “Yes, yes, you did something to me,” does not constitute forgiveness. Instead, Damjan explains, although one cannot force oneself to simply forget past insults or injuries, one can refuse to attach importance to these: “And thus, if I do not [treat something as important], I will quickly forget it.”[[87]](#footnote-87)

Interviewee Marijan went a step further, suggesting that true Christian forgiving is an act of endless generosity that, once granted, should not be defined through remembering. For him, the attitude ‘forgive but not forget’ is “a very bad perspective [on which to base] a future life, [a bad way to rehabilitate] the Other and different, [who] is the offender. (…) We should forgive so that we truly forget the inflicted evil.”[[88]](#footnote-88) Therefore, forgiving without forgetting is,

A forgiving [made with deep reservations, i.e.,] a very conditional forgiving. It is as if [I said] “I will forgive you, but if you insult me one more time in the same way, I will punish you even more.” [Or, stated another way,] it means something like, “I forgive you, under the condition that you do not do that to me again. I will not take revenge now [for what you have done in the past]. I will not retaliate for this unless you insult me still one more time. [However, if you insult me again,] I will remember [the past and I] will [punish you] double.” (…) I think that that kind of forgiving is beneath a Christian’s dignity and that the Christian [who forgives] has to be a little bit ‘crazy’ in some sense. And here lies the strength of Christian ‘craziness’ – the world cannot do anything against it. In the end, I think that we are obliged to act like that as the Gospel compels us [to when it says]: ‘Forgive to be forgiven.’ We know how God forgives. Metaphorically, (…) [our sins are] like a sugar cube [thrown into the sea]. It melts and… simply disappears. That is how God forgives, and God does not remember what He has forgiven. I think that Christians should forgive people in that same manner and out of love for God, who forgave everybody. [[89]](#footnote-89)

Marijan thinks that Christian forgiving is ‘craziness’ according to standard accounts because it does not require even the memory of the injury. As such, he believes, it can only be grounded in strong religious convictions:

A Christian cannot seek support for forgiving in any civil or social laws or in sociology, economics, linguistics, ethnology, or folk customs but [only] in [his] own conscience and in Holy Scripture. So, forgiving [is a case of saying, “[D]on’t let your left hand know what your right hand is doing” [Matthew 6:3] and “Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful” [Luke 6:36]. I think that God forgives by forgetting sins.[[90]](#footnote-90)

Those three accounts of *forgiving as forgetting* provide a new insight into the relationship between forgiving and memory. Although Marijan, Damjan, and Konstantin emphasized the necessitude of *forgetting*, the respondents apparently understood it as not a complete obliteration of the injuries that had occurred but instead as a means to place the injury in a new, much broader narrative. As a result, the original insult would lose its significance just as the proverbial sugar cube would melt in the sea. Forgiving thus creates a different sort of light under which past insults ultimately fade beyond recognition.

# 1.5. Collective frameworks of forgiving

This section on memory and commemoration has offered us a way to connect the individual dimension of forgiving with the collective one. While the acts associated with forgiving are always enacted individually, these take place in the broader context of the norms, ideas, rationales, rituals, and commemorative practices that I have termed *collective frameworks of forgiving*. However, these acts should be understood not as larger-scale versions of individual forgiving but rather as qualitatively different social processes that accompany individual forgiving. My interviewees exhibited considerable suspicion towards collective forgiveness as defined in the first sense of amassed individual forgiving. Bojan, for example, claimed:

For me, the term collective [employed] in that sense is not fully acceptable because every person is one separate universe, and it is not important or fruitful, because [forgiveness should not be just an outward] form but rather an honest expression of one’s own heart. The question then arises as to whether we can achieve that with a hundred people [located] in one place without it’s being just a form. (…). A mass of people can always feel something [while caught up] in an ecstasy. [However,] everyone comprising that mass should reach that state via his or her own individual trajectory. If not, then it is just a form and serves no [real] purpose, and something that is positive today will turn tomorrow into something negative and [but expressed] with the same passion.[[91]](#footnote-91)

Instead of making a parallel case for forgiveness on the group and community level, the respondents emphasized the social processes that frame forgiving. Andrej stressed the need for “developing a conscience on the collective level” that would motivate forgiving, but, he cautioned, the act of forgiving would always remain on the individual level.[[92]](#footnote-92) Marijan expressed this as follows:

In the same way that guilt is individual, I think that forgiveness also has to be on an individual level (…) A collective can create a proper environment for someone to take that step or walk that path [and so] undergo that experience. [However,] that is not the experience of a moment but, rather, a path [to be walked over time] or a process of some kind. A collective, community, or society can encourage an individual [to walk that path] or to discourage that individual [from walking that path], which, of course, is an individual decision. (…) [To reiterate,] I believe that it rests upon an individual’s experience, decision, and effort. (…) [However,] the role of a collective is not unimportant [in the process of forgiving].[[93]](#footnote-93)

Therefore, the collective dimension of forgiveness might be described as a general orientation of society, an attitude that is pervasive through cultural means and everyday encounters, and is present in religious sermons and attitudes. People should be able to recognize forgiveness as the genuine wish of their religious leadership. Nedim stresses how

[t]hat collective [forgiveness], i.e., the communual forgiveness of one community by another, is very complex. A community is composed of individuals. Every individual has characteristics that are specific to him or herself, specific behaviors, and a specific relationship with [his or her] community. Collective forgiveness, if we can call it that, because I believe that there is never such a thing as fully collective forgiveness (…), is manifested in [such a] way that one community can become closer to another community (…).[[94]](#footnote-94)

One way of establishing a collective framework of forgiving is through public commemorations of tragic events. Commemorative practices conducive to forgiving would be constructed in such a way as to create a different narrative of the past, one that is inclusive towards people regardless of their ascribed nationality and based instead on their stance towards the tragedy being commemorated. In that sense, *collective forgiving* should be differentiated from political statements which, in the name of the public ‘we,’ announce forgiveness as a fact. In my research, respondents were generally very suspicious of public construction of victimhood and even public apologies that are not reflected in concrete actions. Such apologies can, at best, be supportive actions or positive models that can be emulated but do not qualify as acts of forgiveness by virtue of their mere utterance. In conclusion, the collective dimension of forgiving is best understood as a work of memory that constructs *collective frameworks of forgiving* and means remembering tragedies in a way that leaves a space for the Other to join the inner circle of memory, in a manner somewhat analogous to the structure of a prayer.

# 1.6. A residue of forgiving

Finally, one additional religious leitmotif related to forgiving merits mention: *fractured temporality*, or the inability to achieve a solidified temporal closure. As I have hinted previously, forgiving has a dual nature, appearing as both a long process and a sudden insight. No matter how it is viewed, the question remains as to whether these two aspects of the process are ever finalizable or if the process itself stretches out to infinity, in effect demonstrating a permanent need for forgiving.

I met Željko on several occasions before we met for an interview, just a day or two before my research trip was finalized. Many of his comments gave me a fresh perspective on the issues I was exploring. With respect to forgiveness, he alluded to an important concept as a “residue.” As I listened to him, there appeared in my mind the image of a thin, transparent piece of broken glass stuck in flesh. I remembered a video clip I had seen in which Martha Nussbaum spoke of how pain crystallizes in Mahler’s music.[[95]](#footnote-95) Crystallization of pain makes it appear *sharp* but also *fragmented.* With the shard, there was the idea of something invisible and foreign, indissoluble, something that can become completely assimilated by muscle fiber and continue to cause pain after many years.

That particular image suddenly gave me a different perspective on forgiving. Even viewing forgiving as both an act (a dot) and a process (a line) does not address its fragmentary nature, both on the surface and at a deeper level. What is missing is the notion that structures of forgiveness are fragile, no matter how substantial they appear to be or how deeply they reach. There follows an excerpt from Željko’s answer on forgiveness:

[I]s an extremely subjective category, an extremely personal category, similar to reconciliation, although both [forgiveness and reconciliation] could be enacted and suggested at an institutional level. (…) I believe that both are processes, meaning that both [continue throughout] life. (…) When one says ‘I forgave someone,’ one is astonished at how something unforgiven bursts from inside! That is why both are theological categories. God has the last word in all that, but not in the sense that we do not know what to do and so [leave] everything [up] to God. Rather, we have to do everything in our power, [even though we know] that there [will] always [be] a residue… of something that only God can forgive. Sometimes we cannot even forgive ourselves for something we did. (…) We cannot yell ideologically ‘You know what, you must forgive!’ (…) I cannot tell a women who was raped, ‘You should… [forgive the man who raped you]’ How could I do that? I know how it is in my own case. How many times I have gone to the altar, with certain people [in mind]. I tell you honestly – I am celebrating mass, and thinking about them, and – I swear – you would be shocked how sometimes uncontrolled rage boils up… I cannot say it is hatred… [but it is] something uncontrolled. [For instance,] a woman who was raped [may seem to] read in the eyes of her husband ‘He would not have done that to you had you not wanted it,’ even though he may not be actually thinking that, Imagine that! How could she [forgive the rapist]? Only God can. You cannot simply cure that. How could you?[[96]](#footnote-96)

Željko’s answer made me read the interviews again as I searched for the meaning of a *residue of forgiving* that consists of the pain and hurtful emotions left over from the original injury, even if they are not always apparent in everyday life. It lays precisely in that unchartered territory between will and the impossibility of acting, in the difference between forgiveness as the horizon and as a human process, between eschatological time and personal and social times. The *residue of forgiving* is not a part of religious language without reason. On closer reading, I noticed that this idea is strongly tied to that of human nature and of creation in general – not as a notion of sin, but as one of vulnerability and imperfection. Forgiving, no matter how deep and how broad, always carries a residue that, although possibly invisible, nevertheless remains and prompts us to understand forgiveness, not as a project but simply as a permanent condition.

# 1.7. Forgiveness: An obligation, a supererogatory act, a grace

Outlined meanings of forgiving presented previously herein connote different degrees of personal agency and carry varying grades of obligation at the same time. Let us first start with forgiveness as a spiritual state. As we could see from the interviews, the *spiritual feeling* of ecstasy is not something that is entirely a product of a person’s piety or willed actions. Such moments of religious elation are unpredictable and are seen more as a grace than a merit. In that sense, those experiences cannot be postulated either as an obligation or as a general model. When we speak about forgiveness in the *emotional sense*, we distinguish two elements – the willed element and the uncontrollable, spontaneous element. This spontaneous element is the transient and changing ‘feeling’ that can contain painful and less painful emotions dependent on many factors, the length of time that has passed since the painful event being one of the most important. Other factors, such as a feeling of security, the idea that justice has been achieved, and even contingent and short-term factors such as exposure to threats of a different kind – all of these can influence the emotional state in a way that is not easy to control. As we could see from the interviews, that element of *feeling* is something that requires acknowledgment, appreciation, and care, and it is not viewed as something that can be changed or controlled by religious command. After experiencing major injuries, one never loses the feeling of pain completely.

However, there is another side of the story related to emotions that I have explained as *emotional management*. In the traditional philosophical sense, that would represent some form of *moderation* of the passions or at least their redirection. For instance, indignation can be directed in many ways, and not all of them are seen as equally valid. It is precisely this directing of emotions towards good, this inner management, that religious representatives have in mind when they speak of emancipation from rage, liberation from evil, or not letting oneself be overwhelmed by feelings.

Some management of the attitudes and emotions that arise from suffering is, from the religious standpoint, very necessary. What differentiates religious and secular views is the idea that a victim, although innocent of the initial crimes, can be held morally responsible in his or her subsequent dealings with the consequences of the crime. To understand this point well, imagine the dual action of the original offense. Besides the harmful act which would undoubtedly be considered a ‘sin’ committed by the perpetrator, there is also the effect on the victim that is not sinful in and of itself but that can become fertile ground for sinful actions. In Asian theology, those two elements are called *sin* and *han*. While a victim is not morally responsible for the original act (sin), he or she needs to deal with the *han*, the negativity caused by the sinful act of the offender.[[97]](#footnote-97) Therefore, forgiving is most closely linked to *han*, that is, the effects of the offence on the emotional and spiritual domain of the individual, and – most importantly – on the person’s reactions and manner of dealing with these effects.

If we inquire about the aspects of obligation or duty in this sense, the religious duty would pertain to the will to engage with those emotions constructively. Typically, that involves forbearance of a desire for revenge and from finding pleasure in the suffering of the enemy. In other words, it is expected that, on religious grounds, the person resists the desire for revenge and accepts at least to engage with the inner consequences of the injury. In answers of my respondents, victims were not expected to express feelings of amicability towards the offenders or pass too lightly over the injuries done to them in a move towards reconciliation. There is much more sensitivity invested in this notion, and in some cases, there is a belief that expressions of amicability that are too hasty could be counterproductive. Therefore, even in a religious context, the presence of unpleasant feelings does not indicate the absence of forgiveness but reflects its procedural nature. A complete lack of resentment or hostility, although seen as an ideal, falls more to the supererogatory category of states that are positive but cannot be expected from everybody.

The *emotional sense of forgiving* is, at the same time, the one that creates most confusion because it is difficult to interpret what ‘I have forgiven’ or ‘I do not forgive’ means. Kenan, a young imam from the Podrinje region, described how he *did not* forgive his former schoolmates for turning against him during the war. However, he continues in the same breath, if he knew that some of them needed help or assistance, he would certainly provide that help. According to Kenan, he has not forgiven them. However, he also stressed that he has no desire to retaliate or even to gloat over any problems they should have. On the contrary, if he knew that any of them needed any assistance, he would certainly do his best to help.[[98]](#footnote-98)

When on many other occasions I asked my respondents how they would describe the state in which a person has no desire to retaliate and wishes no harm to a former enemy but still does not call that forgiveness – most of them viewed it as forgiveness *de facto,*[[99]](#footnote-99) although one might not give it that name. Of course, the answer is not a case of either/or. Perhaps the most helpful approach is to see forgiveness not only as a process that has a horizontal dimension of various meanings (legal, emotional, and spiritual) but that also has a vertical dimension of different degrees. In that sense, an initial stage of forgiveness would be a decision to refrain from acting upon a desire to retaliate, while the deepest dimension would include some form of care for the offender in what is sometimes described as love. In that way, we can better understand the tendency for religious representatives to speak not only about forgiveness but also about ‘true forgiveness’ or ‘forgiveness from the heart.’ This ultimate form of forgiveness is usually linked to religious belief, thus making management of emotions easier. Further, persistent inner work on the emotions leads to some form of habitus in which forgiving comes almost naturally. That state is, especially in Orthodox theology, described as *metanoia*, and signifies a profound change of one’s inner life.

When forgiveness was understood as a legal dispensation, none of my respondents saw it simultaneously as a religious obligation. If some victims decide not to file criminal charges, the action is seen in an ambivalent way. If the social life of the community suffers as a result of this decision, which hides the truth, such ‘forgiveness’ could be understood as negative and even as morally reprehensible.

Finally, there are certain differences between the Islamic and Christian notions of forgiving. Hamza, for instance, notes a difference in viewpoint on the corrective nature of punishment between Christianity and Islam, stating that Christianity has a more ‘optimistic’ view of forgiveness that can be, from his point of view, too hasty:

[Islam] is not like Christianity, [which states,] “If he hits you on one cheek, turn [the other],” although that is at the top [of moral hierarchy]. But I still think that Muslims, theologically speaking, do not have the right to do the same. Also, because God is the one who passes the final judgement and he [the perpetrator] is, after all, a perpetrator. (…) If everything else fails, what remains is praying for him [the offender]. A Christian would say immediately ‘pray for him’ or ‘love thy neighbor.’ No! Let him come to himself. (…) He needs to experience some social [sanctions and feel] despised at least. However, that should be kept under control because it [could be carried to an extreme]. (…) One should help him [the offender], at least, although despising him. We need to say, “I won’t drink coffee with you; come to yourself!”[[100]](#footnote-100)

While Islamic theology holds forgiving in high esteem, offering it as one of the possibilities, Christianity has much stronger requirements, emphasizing forgiveness as the prerequisite of a fulfilled religious life. The Christian notion of forgiveness has a stronger connection with the idea of reconciliation, especially spiritual reconciliation. Forgiveness is thus an inner movement that emancipates the individual and makes space for a new relationship at the same time. Importantly, reconciliation in that sense is not a restoration but a new relationship that is modelled on the New Testament narratives of forgiveness-reconciliation and forgiveness-unity, even when that contradicts the common morals:

I think that the theology of forgiving is really one of the bedrocks of the Christian identity and worldview. (…) Etymologically, our old words ‘praštanje’ [forgiving] and ‘oprostiti’ [to forgive], mean liberation. (…) That is to say, if we forgive somebody [for a wrong they have done us], we have liberated that person from guilt, that is, we have created a space for establishing a new relationship. (…) Therefore, forgiving is actually the liberation of the other as well as the liberation of oneself. A forgiving person, it is clear, is exposing himself or herself. A piece of folk wisdom states: ‘Only a fool has been bitten by a snake from the same hole twice.’ Folk wisdom thus is not too much in favor of forgiving. I think that Christians (…). in the theological sense, have to forgive, if that is in any way possible. [They should forgive] in the same way, or at least in a similar way, as God forgives.[[101]](#footnote-101)

# 1.8. The conditionality of forgiveness

The conditionality of forgiving creates a dilemma between two principles. On the one hand, forgiving cannot be conditioned on the fulfillment of justice because that would make a personal decision completely dependent on external factors. Miroslav Volf explains that situation succinctly:

If forgiveness were properly given only after strict justice had been exacted, then one would *not* be exceeding one’s duty in offering forgiveness; one would indeed *wrong* the original wrongdoer if one did not offer forgiveness. “The wrong has been fully redressed,” an offender could complain if forgiveness were not forthcoming, “and hence you owe me forgiveness.” But this is not how we understand forgiveness.[[102]](#footnote-102)

However, the question remains as to whether some factors should preclude forgiveness or make it undesirable. For Adis, forgiveness does have some preconditions. He gives the example of a car crash where somebody is injured without guilt. There, he says, what is important is not to ‘forgive,’ but for the person who caused the crash to apologize. For Adis, God forgives when the perpetrator begins to feel contrition. What often happens is that people stubbornly do not want to admit a mistake and yet “we [still] ask a victim to forgive.”[[103]](#footnote-103) To ask the mothers of Srebrenica to forgive without a previous apology by the perpetrators would, in Adis’ view, be nonsense. For him, the crucial step is that a perpetrator must first ask for forgiveness; otherwise there will be hypocrisy on all sides. Moreover, the ‘asking for forgiveness’ must take place both on the individual and collective levels. When I asked if it would be sufficient just to make that request publicly, he explained that it would not be. Rather, public apologies must be supported by acts that are manifestations of the person’s sincerity. He explains that “it is not enough to come and say, ‘I am sorry’ and [then] continue to act in the same way as before.” [[104]](#footnote-104) One needs certain demonstrations that the change is genuine. There are prerequisites for forgiveness because “God asked that it be so.”[[105]](#footnote-105) Once the perpetrator has fulfilled this condition, and received forgiveness, he or she should not commit any further injurious acts, says Adis, suggesting that protection from repeated crimes that should be implemented through actions, decisions, and rules that would serve as preventive measures and deterrents.[[106]](#footnote-106)

In Adis’s view, forgiving is an act that should be preceded by sincere apologies that are supported by acts which demonstrate a real change in the offender’s attitude, and a guarantee of non-repetition. He criticizes the tendency to force victims to forgive without asking anything of the perpetrator. It remains unclear who should make the first step and whether a general openness to forgiveness should also be dependent on the contrition of a perpetrator or can be done unilaterally.

For Haris, a young imam from Northern Bosnia, there is always some unconditional element in forgiving, although the whole process could have some conditions:

The one who first extends his hand is better than the one who accepts it. That was always the rule, not only in Islam but in all religions. As an imam and religious servant here, who is in contact with people, I always try – even when those difficult times are evoked when people were killed because of their faith – to draw people towards (…) forgiving each other. One does not need to forget. [On the contrary, injuries] should be remembered for the sake of future generations. But a believer needs to forgive another believer, regardless of his or her faith. One needs to forgive people in order to be forgiven. (…) There, in my view lies the generosity of the believer – he believes that God will forgive him if he forgives others.[[107]](#footnote-107)

On the other hand, forgiveness cannot be granted too easily since that could be detrimental not only to the victims but also to society at large. In Tarik’s words:

The hand of forgiveness has to be extended, not at any cost of course, but to those who deserve forgiveness and are also ready to forgive [so as to produce] a better future, not by sweeping their problems under the carpet but by admitting their mistake (…) My going back [to the past] and taking some ‘guard’ [a distance towards the Other], their going back [to the past] and taking some ‘guard’ [means a] more insecure future not only for us but also for our progeny. (…) [Therefore] the hand of forgiveness [should be extended to] those who deserve it and sharp words and a harsh attitude are due those who don’t deserve better. We simply have to make clear our opinion [of their actions] and insist till the end that [the offenders] were wrong and had made a mistake.[[108]](#footnote-108)

Interestingly, both Tarik and Haris used the metaphor of the extended hand. Although their positions seem to be opposed, they do not necessarily contradict one another. The decisive factor here is understanding the significance of an extended hand with respect to forgiveness, that is, whether it is understood as an openness to forgiveness or as a statement of accomplished forgiveness or whether it is understood as an inner attitude or as an external expression in which forgiveness has already been transmuted into reconciliation. So, while the first step of openness to forgiveness (availability) is most often seen as unconditional, the second step of forgiveness that coincides with reconciliation or the full community of life is not always understood as an ideal and may not necessarily be an available option. In some situations, this form of forgiveness is seen as unwise, premature, or even unjustified since it removes the distance that is sometimes necessary both for victims and offenders to come to terms with the past.

In several cases, my interviewees mentioned the type of forgiveness that is given with no reservation, in which there is no longer any desire for revenge, but at the same time, there is also no desire for interaction. When I asked about the factor that prevents interaction, the respondents highlighted precaution and *emotional distance*. This idea is supported by popular sayings, especially the adage describing cautious people bitten twice by the same snake. Although this adage originally comes from the Quran, it was also repeated to me by non-Muslim religious leaders, and it functions more as a popular saying than as a religious principle.

The ‘unforgiven’ aspect is thus the emotional distance that separates the offender from a victim. But, as a matter of fact, the distance is not experienced only by direct participants but also by their collectivities. In one way, this distance is necessary, as it allows for gradual forgiving. However, that distance itself can become permanent when linked with the conviction that crimes were not just expressions of individual corruption, but a manifestation of the ‘real nature’ of the other side. That contrast is clear in the answer of a Catholic priest from Western Herzegovina:

I never heard from anyone that there should be revenge, but I did hear that there can be no discussion with them [the Bosniaks]. You have to be alert because there will again be a moment when they will [attack] you. In a sense… you have to [distance yourself from them]. But I never heard from our people or, God forbid, from our preachers, that we should take revenge. I never heard that, and nobody thinks that.[[109]](#footnote-109)

While in this case again we might have the type of forgiveness that could be termed forgiveness *de facto*, without feelings of revenge, it still falls short of a true community of life, which might be understood as reconciliation in a maximalist sense. I will elaborate on this notion in the chapter on reconciliation, but for now, it is important to note that forgiveness does not always imply reconciliation, although in some conceptualizations, those two terms are inseparable, i.e., viewed almost as a single process with dual effects. Perceived in that way, forgiving is catalyzed by such processes as sincere public apologies, reparations, or fact finding, which are all relevant to reconciliation. In most cases, however, forgiving, especially its non-public form, is seen as something unconditional, as a decision based on a person’s inner needs or convictions. Such decisions can be facilitated by apologies and by the offender’s acts of contrition but are not dependent on them. When I asked whether forgiving should be dependent on apologies, Andrej responded: “No, absolutely not. There is the model of Christ the Lord (…) There was obviously no regret from His torturers, but He still forgave them. And there are many, many later examples of the saints who should, in my opinion, be models to us.”[[110]](#footnote-110)

# 1.9. Theological justifications for forgiving

## 1.9.1. Forgive as God forgives us

One of the specificities of the religious understanding of forgiveness is the theological isomorphism between God’s forgiveness and human forgiveness, which could be rephrased in the following way: We should forgive those who trespassed against us because God forgives us the numerous sins we commit daily. Although this maxim is voiced by Christians in The Lord’s Prayer, it is not limited to Christianity. The basis of such understanding is the idea that the human realm is sinful and that the world subsists only thanks to God’s mercy, according to which He continually *forgives*. Similarly, believers understand themselves to reflect the same principle—that forgiving can cancel out the effect of evil actions.

Stated differently, in the religious context, both Islamic and Christian forgiving is a necessary part of the human reality—human forgiving thus reflects God’s continuous forgiving. In that sense, forgiving can be seen as something entirely *natural*, something that belongs to the way that human relationships are ordered. At the same time, forgiving is understood as an act of faith that *overcomes natural human tendencies*. Forgiving does not lead a person into two separate realities but is believed instead to be an act in which the spiritual dominates the biological, instinctive part of the human personality. This element of forgiveness is important in understanding the modalities of religious forgiving more clearly. Because each act of forgiving is an instance in which the human ‘spiritual’ nature assumes dominance over the ‘natural’ desire of responding to an offence with another offense, through spiritual practice those separate instances of ‘overcoming natural tendencies’ turn into a form of *religious habitus*. The aim of religious life is, therefore, that the ‘spiritual’ part, initially seen in opposition to nature, becomes the *true nature*, or at least the dominant part. It follows that those who live deeply in faith find stronger reasons to forgive.

## 1.9.2. Forgiving and the belief in final divine justice

In addition to theological isomorphism, another distinctively religious element that acts as a support for the processes of forgiveness is the belief in final divine justice. Beyond earthly justice, which is imperfect and corruptible, stands God’s eternal justice that is, for religious believers, both impartial and perfect. Those two spheres are not completely separated since it is believed that earthly justice should reflect its divine counterpart. There is, at the same time, a strong belief that any acts that ‘escaped’ earthly justice will ultimately be judged fairly nonetheless, and therefore any avoidance of justice is only temporary. This assurance can be a source of comfort, especially with respect to frustrations over legal proceedings that are dropped due to lack of evidence, procedural mistakes, or a lack of political will.

A belief in divine justice, contrary to popular belief, is not necessarily a comforting vision of harmony. Aside from the eschatological visions of unity, it can also serve as the means by which unfulfilled punishment will finally be realized in the afterlife. Muhamed, an older imam from Central Bosnia, gave me a somewhat striking view of the afterlife as a place where justice is achieved in the way of fulfilling the proportional measure of suffering. He sees it as problematic when people who committed genocide deny it. Speaking about genocides, Muhamed states, “[J]ustice cannot be given in that case, because he who kills one person, is considered as having killed the whole world. Eichmann was killed, but only once. And what of the rest—the 5.999,999 victims still crying for justice?”[[111]](#footnote-111)

When Muhamed wants to appease those victims who are suffering, he quotes a verse from the Qur’an that reads: “Those that deny Our revelations We will burn in fire. No sooner will their skins be consumed than We shall give them other skins, so that they may truly taste the scourge. God is mighty and wise.”[[112]](#footnote-112) In this sense, he appeases believers that those who committed mass crimes will suffer the equal measure of their evils in the afterlife.

It is worth emphasizing that Muhamed’s view was not the predominant one among the Islamic religious leaders interviewed. Their most common response was to acknowledge the enactment of divine justice, but without specifying how or when this would take place. At the same time, the image of ongoing suffering after death is not limited to Islam. One of Gilles Deleuze’s strongest critiques of Christianity was based on the notion that it, under the pretext of love and forgiveness, simply postpones the punishment for the day of cosmic violence. In his critique, peaceful lambs eventually turn into carnivorous creatures that witness the expiation of their suffering in the afterlife through the eternal suffering of their former enemies.[[113]](#footnote-113) However, a stance of forgiving based solely on the belief that offenders will eventually suffer in an even greater measure contradicts the general tenor of forgiving which, as mentioned previously, goes so far as to require a feeling of care towards the offender.

# 1.10. Religious leaders and forgiving

When I asked him about forgiving, Fra Tomislav reacted strongly. He thinks his fellow priests are often “torturing people,” telling them all the time to forgive. He told me how a mother, whose son had been killed, once came to a confession saying that she could not forgive that. Visibly distressed, she said that one priest refused to grant her absolution until she did that. In their conversation, Tomislav discovered that she did not wish any evil on the perpetrator but could not forgive because she felt that would push her to act *as if* nothing had happened. Her feeling was that she was expected to behave almost “as if I was glad that they did that to my son.”[[114]](#footnote-114) Tomislav sees such a maximalist approach as un-Christian and even insulting to victims, who are asked to live in an unrealistic simulation of reality that includes no pain and no conflicts. Such a world, however, would also be a world without history where everything is forgiven because new relationships are forged *as if* conflicts had never occurred. While Tomislav does not deny that forgiving is one of the fundamental elements of Christianity, he nevertheless insists that it should be encouraged with much more care for individual situations.

Bojan detects a similar tendency among professional theologians and NGO workers. He explains how easy it is to keep theology neatly filed away in a cabinet, but how difficult it is to sit down and work with people who have lived through something like war tragedies. Moreover, at the same time, he emphasized that every person is different and cannot be expected to behave like a machine that can be turned on and off and ordered to act in a certain way.[[115]](#footnote-115) It bothered him when external actors perceive the Church as yet another NGO and thus fail to see her central mission:

Here in Bosnia and Herzegovina, we had many organizations from all around the world conducting projects. So many were fruitless, foolish projects that today have nothing to show for themselves. (…) You are conducting some project over a six-month period for which people should forgive those who killed their child, mother, or father! That is insane! (…) Forgiving is a process, and some people will not accept that till the end of their lives! A mother that lost her child – one piece of the world died for her, and she will carry that till the end of her life. And you know what is interesting – those who have suffered have more empathy for those of other nations or religions than those who have lost nothing. Based on my 20 years of experience, you will never have problems when you put those people, those who have suffered, together. The ones you can hear yelling – they have lost nothing, or if they did, they lack any emotions regarding the loss. This sounds ugly, but it is so. These people use their [personal losses] to make a good living. Victims cannot be used for building a future identity, nor should they be used as a currency, as money to buy something.[[116]](#footnote-116)

In order to preserve people’s agency, forgiving must always be the free decision of an individual. Slaven emphasizes that freedom to do otherwise is a prerequisite for forgiveness. Without this free choice, forgiving transforms either into an ideology or into a verbal statement made coercively under social pressure.

[In forgiving,] one should not be naïve or feel devalued or weakened. On the contrary, forgiveness should make a person feel strong, to feel that, [yes, he or she] *could* retaliate but chooses not to and that [he or she] is aware that forgiving is being done out of love [and so] is for a higher goal. In the end, that is what God demands from a person – not to retaliate, although there is the opportunity to do so. (…) There is no forgiveness without truth, and truth simply means facing reality instead of creating some fiction or myth about somebody or something. (…) This is easy when you are a minority – I will forgive you if you are stronger than me. But if you are stronger and you suffered an injustice from someone weaker and did not retaliate in the same measure – that is, in fact, the pinnacle of forgiveness. That is real forgiveness, the rest is just [a response to] social pressure. [[117]](#footnote-117)

The problem is how to reconcile religious teaching that treats forgiving as an obligation with the conviction that it has to be a free and autonomous decision or one that comes as an unmerited grace. There are three basic approaches: 1) Pastoral care for people should not be framed as a promotion of forgiveness as a project in and of itself, but rather as an explanation of how and why forgiving can have positive effects on individuals who have suffered injustice; 2) Pastoral care must involve sufficient sensibility towards the difficulties related to this process and respect for the role of time; and 3) what is considered to be religious obligation is not the end of the processs but just the initial motivation to deal with the consequences of the offence in a morally responsible way.

The role that religious leaders play in the process of forgiveness is a complex one, especially as: 1) They themselves are affected by questions of forgiveness; 2) They are the facilitators of forgiveness for others, and 3) They are symbols of the transcendental forgiveness that occurs on the supra-human level. What should be especially emphasized is their often-irreplaceable role in offering emotional and spiritual support for victims and in striking a balance between individual needs and public pressures. A crucial part of this pastoral care is in treating the individual needs of people with sensitivity, meaning that their actions should be aimed at providing support to victims and not replacing each journey of individual forgiving. As Pavle said: “I think that I, as a preacher, exert a positive influence on those who attend church. I explain things to them, instead of just preaching and saying ‘Oh, one should forgive’ and leaving them without any explanation of why [they should forgive].”[[118]](#footnote-118)

# 1.11. Interim conclusion: Dimensions of forgiving in a religious context

In Hamza’s initial exposition, he explained that forgiving can be linked to different things: the original hurtful act, the responsibility of the perpetrator, the rights and emotional states of the victim, and the collective status of both groups (their collective memories, ethos, emotional orientations, and mutual perceptions). One cannot, post hoc, change or prevent the original act that caused the suffering. Thus, forgiving is linked first and foremost to its consequences on the personal and collective levels. First, there is a general agreement that nobody can offer forgiveness on behalf of someone else, in the sense of waiving a perpetrator’s moral or legal responsibility or depriving a victim of his or her legal and moral rights, especially by interfering in their personal emotional states. So, in that sense, the principal actors in the process of forgiving are those who were directly affected by the original hurtful act.[[119]](#footnote-119)

As we could see, religious leaders emphasize the importance of emotions, warning against emotions that can lead to committing a similar crime (i.e., the desire for revenge) or emotions that can negatively affect the agency of the victim. Forgiving, in other words, is perceived as a form of ‘emancipation’ from emotions that are not seen as sinful, but rather as harmful. The focus on the individual level is quite understandable if we bear in mind that religious teaching on moral responsibility sees individuals (not collectives) as moral subjects. Thus, the teaching on salvation and the afterlife is closely linked to individual moral responsibility. It is no surprise that the concept of forgiving frequently appeared in the same context as salvation—not only of victims but also of perpetrators. Therefore, the emotional state of individuals affected by a hurtful act is framed within a broader discussion on salvation, and that is how we can read the emotional management of victims in which religious leaders encourage the abandonment of any desire for revenge while emphasizing the perpetrator’s need to ‘become aware’ of the consequences of his or her acts.

This is, however, just one level of the discussion. When we speak about the *collective dimensions of forgiving*, we first have to take into account what is actually at stake. Since the original hurtful act occurred at just one point in time, its consequences are not felt through its repetition, but rather through its representation or re-creation, both on the individual and collective levels. On the individual level, the management of emotions, tied to the idea of ‘emancipation,’ is thus directly linked to the experience of trauma. Spiritual and emotional emancipation, as we have seen, is viewed as the *unworking* of the mechanism of trauma that stems from the original injury. The original hurtful act, however, was not experienced by the whole collective, but only by those members who were directly affected by it. Nevertheless, the act is reconstructed and disseminated through the collective means of production as a painful collective memory and, in that way, it affects the social dynamics, norms, values, and emotional orientations of the group. By moving from the individual to the collective level, the *injury of some* becomes the *tragedy of many* and the *actions of a few* offenders becomes the *responsibility of many*. Two phenomena are here the most important: collective vindications and attributions of collective guilt. In the first case, a re-creation of the original act and its preservation in the memory are seen as a form of moral satisfaction for the affected group. Remembering is a way of paying homage to victims and constructing the group’s identity. In the second case, a re-creation of the original act is seen as requiring a collective answer of some sort. There are two extreme cases. In one, a collectivity uses a collective trauma as a shield against any criticism or even as a pretext for new crimes. In this response, the opposing group’s collective responsibility is transformed into collective guilt and possibly into a permanent collective intentionality (for example, when a whole nation is described as genocidal). In the second extreme case involving collective responsibility,[[120]](#footnote-120) the opposing group attempts to deny or downplay the original event to the level of irrelevance.

Thus, if we view forgiving through the prism of collectivity, we shift our focus from the *original event* to the *recreated event*, and forgiving then appears as an act linked to *commemoration*. Forgiving, in this context, neither denies the original act nor minorizes the perpetrators’ responsibility but instead asks: ‘How can one show due respect to victims in such a way as to avoid both collective victimization and collective demonization?’ The religious leaders’ answer seems to be to practice ‘prayerful commemoration.’ Important to note is that the adjective ‘prayerful’ does not pertain to the content of the commemoration but to its structure. *In other words, the key element is not to include prayers in the commemorative ceremony but to construct the ceremony so that its structure resembles that of a prayer.*

This approach appears as a highly innovative element as it highlights the importance of stepping out of the circle of the collectivity in both the vertical and horizontal dimensions. Although the content of prayers can vary greatly, they are always constructed in a dialogical form. When commemoration, one form in which collective memories can be structured, is understood as a ‘prayerful commemoration,’ it requires a certain opening or link, not only with other groups but, in a religious context, with eternity, a place beyond history.

# II. Theoretical perspectives on forgiveness

The *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* entry on forgiveness, co-authored by Paul Huges and Brandon Warmke, opens with the following definition:

To forgive is to respond in a particular way to someone who has treated someone badly or wrongly. Forgiveness is therefore a dyadic relation involving a wrongdoer and a wronged party, and is thought to be a way in which victims of wrongdoing alter both their and a wrongdoer’s status by, for instance, acknowledging yet moving past a moral transgression.[[121]](#footnote-121)

As we can see, forgiveness is understood in essence as a relationship between two parties. Stated more precisely, it is the reaction of a wronged party to the wrongdoer. In comparison to this dyadic model, my model of forgiving is significantly broader, having been expanded in two ways. Firstly, instead of focusing solely on the original hurtful act, there is also a mnemonic representation of that act. In that sense, forgiving is a two-way reaction that includes the moral evaluation of the original act as well as the representation of that act.

Secondly, as it was discussed before, forgiving is not just the response of a wronged party to the wrongdoer but also to the community to which the wrongdoer belongs and so is a reaction on the inter-communal level. The latter modification was made in order to explain those instances in which no apparent link exists between the wronged party and a member of the actual wrongdoer’s community, making the latter a subject for possible *forgiving*. What happens instead is a certain ‘transference’ of moral right and moral responsibility from the original dyadic pair onto a community, a transference that is possible through collective remembering and commemoration. When we encounter the attitudes expressed in statements such as: “Our people will never forgive them for what they did” or “I will never forgive the Croats/Serbs/Bosniaks,” we are no longer speaking about two individuals linked by a hurtful act but, rather, about a sociological and political stance. In those cases, individuals do not speak as wronged individuals but assume the collective voice of their community to address an event that happened in the past and yet still plays an important role in their collective self-understanding.

After such a long exposition of the many aspects of forgiving, any attempt to draw clear lines between ‘religious’ and ‘secular’ versions of forgiving would be unconvincing. It might be better to say that the contemporary notion of forgiveness developed under various philosophical and theological influences. Therefore, many elements within our model resonate with non-religious theories of forgiveness. One specific point of similarity is the emphasis on the importance of emotions. At the same time, certain specificities in reasons for forgiveness and ultimate horizons of forgiveness are specific to religious worldviews.

# 2.1. Emotionalist theories of forgiving

Authors who propose emotionalist theories of forgiving usually concentrate on a set of hostile or negative emotions, especially resentment, that should be overcome, abandoned, or forsworn. Furthermore, there is no consensus on the exact meaning or scope of those emotions and actions.[[122]](#footnote-122) Therefore, making broad distinctions between *minimal*, *moderate*, and *expansive emotionalism* would seem to be helpful. The first postulates forgiveness as the overcoming of a narrow set of retributive feelings, understood as motivated by a desire to see the offender suffer; *moderate emotionalism* assumes the abandonment of hostile retributive feelings and the emotional states (e.g., scorn and contempt) that accompany them, but not of all negative feelings; and, lastly, the proponents of *expansive emotionalism* see forgiveness as the overcoming of all the negative emotions felt towards a wrongdoer resulting from the injury, including even the milder ones such as sadness and disappointment.[[123]](#footnote-123) In many ways, these approaches resemble my models of religious forgiving, but differ with respect to the teleology of emotions. Both in Christianity and Islam, emotions and passions are not natural reactions but, rather, inner ‘movements of the spirit’ that should be judged dually—i.e., from the perspectives of personal and social well-being and of human salvation.[[124]](#footnote-124)

Another similarity is the focus on the inner engagement of emotions for reasons of moral appropriateness. Forgiveness is not merely a matter of overcoming distressing emotions (because that can happen for various reasons) but is a process of dealing with the legacy of injustice in a way that involves some inner struggle. Griswold explains how, in that sense:

Forgiveness is not simply a matter of finding a therapeutic way to ‘deal with’ injury, pain, or anger – even though it does *somehow* involve overcoming the anger one feels in response to injury. If it were just a name for a *modus vivendi* that rendered us insensible to the wrongs that inevitably visit human life, then hypnosis or amnesia or taking a pill might count as forgiveness.[[125]](#footnote-125)

Instead of stressing management of emotions, other authors focus only on an initial openness to overcoming negative sentiments. Since the same emotions can reoccur later on, Holmgren emphasizes a victim’s acceptance of the ‘appropriate attitude’ towards the offender that leads to the initial overcoming of resentment and builds a base for dealing with these emotions successfully should they reappear. In her view, genuine forgiving is a state that a victim should achieve and that cannot be rushed.[[126]](#footnote-126) Additionally, the difference between forswearing and overcoming emphasizes the difference between a voluntary decision and an inner process that can be influenced, but not completely controlled, by our decisions.[[127]](#footnote-127)

Regarding the modality of forgiveness, my notion of different degrees of forgiveness resembles Adams’s distinction between ‘performative forgiveness’ and ‘forgiveness from the heart.’[[128]](#footnote-128) While performative forgiveness is based on pragmatic reasoning in response to a formal apology and is usually related to smaller injuries, Adams gives an example of someone who decides not to press a civil suit against an offender after an apology has been given. As another example, she cites the everday exchange between strangers: “I am sorry” and “That’s ok.” In that respect “performative forgiveness focuses on externals (material compensations or behavior) and the formal structure of relationships, not on inner attitudes or feelings. After all, my verbal utterance may constitute an acceptance of your apology, but it cannot thereby effect an immediate change in my psychological dispositions.”[[129]](#footnote-129) On the other hand, forgiveness from the heart is a process that Adams links to the form of Christian prayer that involves a change of perspective supported by sustained spiritual exercises and typically leads to “many changes in feelings, attitudes, judgments, and desires.”[[130]](#footnote-130) In her model, Adams thus emphasizes the difference between the internal and external dimensions of forgiveness. In my conceptualization, this difference represents a horizontal dimension to which the vertical one is added, thereby nuancing degrees of both internal (‘from the heart’) and external (‘performative’) forgiveness.

In the context of the discussion on forgiveness as a duty, a virtue, or just an exceptional, graceful act lacking deontological connotations,[[131]](#footnote-131) the various forms of forgiveness I have presented fall within different categories. By the same measure, while the basic forbearance of revenge and retaliation is seen as an absolute obligation, forgiving in its maximal emotional sense falls into the category of Kantian imperfect duties, which, “[u]nlike perfect duties such as the obligation to justice or honesty, … allow for agential discretion over when and with respect to whom to discharge the duty.”[[132]](#footnote-132) At the same time, this approach does not exclude the conviction that continuous perseverance in acts that are seen as pro-social creates a certain habitus of forgiveness in the form of a disposition or virtue.[[133]](#footnote-133)

The way in which intrapsychic states are linked to social actions raises a different question. Baumsteiner, Exline, and Sommer differentiate two dimensions of forgiveness: the intrapsychic, which pertains to the mental state of the victim, and the social dimension of forgiveness, which signifies an inter-personal action between the victim and the wrongdoer. Therefore,

forgiveness may best be understood as having two dimensions: It is both an internal mental/emotional state and an interpersonal act. It can be a process that goes on entirely inside the mind of the victim, or it can be a transaction that occurs between two people, even without much in the way of inner processing. These two dimensions of forgiveness can be considered orthogonal: that is, they are in principle independent of each other, and so the actual social situation may contain either, or both, or neither.[[134]](#footnote-134)

By intersecting those two dimensions, the authors have constructed the four models of forgiveness. When an interpersonal act is not supported by the intrapsychic state, they speak of a ‘hollow forgiveness,’ in which the victim expresses forgiveness but does not feel it and may even continue to harbor resentment toward the offender. Although hollow, such actions are not necessarily disingenuous in possibly representing the victim’s commitment to initiating the long process of forgiving.[[135]](#footnote-135) Conversely, when interpersonal action does not accompany intrapsychic forgiveness, the authors speak of ‘silent forgiveness.’ In such cases, victims may no longer feel anger or hostility toward their victimizer but may decide against communicating that change for pragmatic reasons. For instance, they may fear that voicing forgiveness could remove the distance between them and the offender, thereby leading to further harm, as is often the case with abusive spouses.[[136]](#footnote-136) The other two models are far more straightforward. When intrapsychic forgiveness is followed by an interpersonal act, the authors speak of ‘total forgiveness,’ whereas they term the absence of both as ‘no forgiveness.’[[137]](#footnote-137)

The model of two-dimensional forgiveness is very useful because it distinguishes between mental states and social actions, thereby allowing for the possibility of a form of forgiveness that does not have to be communicated. In some occasions, communicating forgiveness is impossible (when an offender is dead, for instance). At the same time, this model does not require a full reconciliation since interpersonal actions can be much more discreet.

# 2.2. Games of forgiveness: Forgiveness more than calculation

The focus on emotional and spiritual states of forgiveness in religion, as already stressed, does not exclude the cognitive elements of judgment, calculation, and perception but views these factors as supportive processes to forgiving rather than as forming its essence. Comparing the religious and emotionalist accounts of forgiving with purely rationalist accounts delineates this preference. Game theory, for example, could be used as a heuristic instrument for assessing the rationality of forgiving. If we adapt the traditional prisoner’s dilemma to the dilemma of forgiving, in which players have to decide whether they can forgive non-collaborative behavior or not, some degree of forgiving seems beneficial. The traditional prisoner’s dilemma goes something like this: If both sides independently agree to cooperate, each side receives two reward ponts; if neither cooperate, neither receives a reward; but if one refuses to cooperate, while the other agrees, the cooperative player receives three reward points, whereas the other, who sought to exploit the benevolence of the non-cooperating party, receives nothing. Although the narrative and rewards can change, what makes the game interesting lies in how it models the problem of decision-making in the real world. People who need to enter into some form of common activity need to work out a strategy. Of course, if everyone was cooperative, the decision would be simple. However, there is always the possibility that somebody will exploit the goodwill of the other side and take everything. In the early 1980s, Axelrod[[138]](#footnote-138) made a computer simulation in which he could discern the best long-term strategy for ‘winning’ the prisoner’s dilemma game, after some iterations and exchanges. He solicited various people from different fields to submit their best strategies. Among all the models, some of them quite elaborate and complex, the winning strategy was quite simple: a benevolent form of tit-for-tat. In other words, the best strategy was to show co-operation at the start and then select further steps based on the reactions of the other side—if he or she cooperates, then cooperate; if not, then do not co-operate. Axelrod suggested the four qualities that made the tit-for-tat strategy the winning one: 1) it is nice because it starts with cooperation and continues with it until the other person cooperates; 2) it is provocable because it responds to the actions of the other side; 3) it is forgivable because it does not punish the other side for previous errors; and finally 4) it is clear and easy to understand. Axelrod subsequently created another simulation that allowed strategies to multiply depending on their success, and herein also the tit-for-tat strategy flourished.[[139]](#footnote-139) Therefore, based on the numerous computer simulations of the repeated prisoner’s dilemma, forgiving in the case where the former enemy changes his or her attitude to collaboration seems the most rational strategy. However, offering such an explanation to people who have suffered great injustice would prove simply unconvincing, if not insulting, focusing as it would merely on opportune outcomes and leaving aside the victims’ emotions and feelings. The point is that forgiving, although it can be seen as a rational decision, cannot exclude other ‘non-rational’ elements, primarily feelings and emotions.

# 2.3. Arendt and Levinas: Forgiving as the undoing of time and regaining of human agency

A significant element within the religious views on forgiving is expansion of agency and, in some way, the ‘undoing’ of the effects of an injury. In that sense, the religious views are similar to Levinas and Arendt’s theories of forgiveness. This retroaction of forgiving is already stressed in Levinas’ study on time. For him, forgiving (*le pardon*) is a movement against the irreversibility of time in which the person who pardons returns to the original act and transforms it into a ‘purified present.’ Unlike forgetting, which simply nullifies the links with the past, forgiving (*pardon*) preserves the past moment:

Active in a stronger sense than forgetting, which does not concern the reality of the event forgotten, pardon acts upon the past, somehow repeats the event, purifying it. But in addition, forgetting nullifies the relations with the past, whereas pardon conserves the past pardoned in the purified present. The pardoned being is not the innocent being. The difference does not justify placing innocence above pardon; it permits the discerning in pardon of a surplus of happiness, the strange happiness of reconciliation, the *felix culpa*, given in an everyday experience which no longer.[[140]](#footnote-140)

The notion of the Augustinian *felix culpa*, or ‘happy sin,’ means that reconciliation is not limited to the undoing of time. Time, which is neither a dead passage of events nor an infinite repetition, makes past events irreversible. Therefore, forgiveness does not return actors to some previous relationship but provides a new beginning modeled on the basis of the preceding experience of separation. Thus, it can establish a new relationship that can be even stronger than the original one.[[141]](#footnote-141) Levinas therefore places forgiving and reconciliation close together.

Arend’s ongoing concern is the ambiguity of human freedom that is, at the same time, most visible and most limited in human deeds. Those deeds are an expression of human freedom, but, due to the irreversibility and unpredictability involved, these make their author ‘guilty’ of consequences he or she could not possibly have foreseen. The meaning of a deed,

never discloses itself to the actor but only to the backward glance of the historian who himself does not act. All this is reason enough to turn away with despair from the realm of human affairs and to hold in contempt the human capacity for freedom, which, by producing the web of human relationships, seems to entangle its producer to such an extent that he appears much more the victim and the sufferer than the author and doer of what he has done. Nowhere, in other words, neither in labor, subject to the necessity of life, nor in fabrication, dependent upon given material, does man appear to be less free than in those capacities whose very essence is freedom and in that realm which owes its existence to nobody and nothing but man.[[142]](#footnote-142)

The only way out of this entanglement of freedom and non-sovereignty over one’s actions is the *faculty of forgiving*. This faculty, in Arendt’s eyes, is not a negation of human action, nor does the faculty of forgiving belong to a different order than ordinary human faculties, but quite the contrary, as the way out of the ‘burden’ of past acts lies in the “potentiality of the action itself.”[[143]](#footnote-143) The aim of forgiving is, therefore, a restoration of the human capacity to act freely, or—stated more precisely—an expansion of the possible degrees of freedom that would otherwise be limited to the consequences of past acts: “Without being forgiven, released from the consequences of what we have done, our capacity to act would, as it were, be confined to one single deed from which we could never recover; we would remain the victims of its consequences forever; not unlike the sorcerer’s apprentice who lacked the magic formula to break the spell.”[[144]](#footnote-144)

Arendt attributes the discovery of ‘forgiveness’ in the domain of human affairs to Jesus of Nazareth, contrasting the communal ethics of forgiveness to the Greek idea of morality, which is modeled according to the successful domination of self.[[145]](#footnote-145) In her reading of the New Testament, she underlines that forgiving is not a derivative faculty that flows from God to humans, but something that lies completely within human power: “Man in the gospel is not supposed to forgive because God forgives and he must do ‘likewise,’ but “if ye from your hearts forgive, ‘God shall do ‘likewise.’“[[146]](#footnote-146) Arendt turns the tables and places the locus of forgiving on human affairs, instead of in the spiritual realm. Unlike most of the commentaries that see human forgiving as an ‘imitation’ of God’s forgiving, her reading puts God in a position to imitate human actions – those that were forgiving will be forgiven.[[147]](#footnote-147) Arendt thus ties forgiving to the dynamics of human actions: “Only through this constant mutual release from what they do can men remain, free agents, only by constant willingness to change their minds and start again can they be trusted with so great a power as that to begin something new.”[[148]](#footnote-148) That expansion of human freedom, in her interpretation, happens already in the act of forgiving because it is, by its own virtue, a liberation from the otherwise natural and automatic reaction of revenge, which forces a person to re-enact the original offence; thus limiting his or her freedom to do otherwise.[[149]](#footnote-149)

Arendt, however, does not see forgiving as an absolute horizon. Discussing the notion of ‘radical evil,’[[150]](#footnote-150) she argues that the notion of forgiveness is intrinsically tied to punishment and that some crimes tare so striking in their magnitude that they can neither be punished nor forgiven in any meaningful way. The concept of ‘radical evil’ thus relativizes the political relevance of forgiving and places limits on what can be meaningfully forgiven. Derrida builds on this notion in the opposite way, stating that the only meaningful ‘object’ of forgiveness is that which cannot be forgiven—a paradox that removes forgiveness completely from the political sphere and places it within the transcendent one.

# 2.4. Derrida, Ricœur and the unforgivable

Derrida’s *aporia* of forgiving could be rephrased in the following way: if forgiving is the forgiving of something that is already forgivable, then the act of forgiving does not add anything to it; thus, a real forgiving can be only the forgiving of that which is unforgivable and which by definition cannot be forgiven:

It is necessary, it seems to me, to begin with the fact that, yes, there is unforgivable. Is this not, in truth, the only thing to forgive? The only thing that *calls* for forgiveness? If one is only prepared to forgive what appears forgivable, what the church calls ‘venial sin,’ then the very idea of forgiveness would disappear. If there is something to forgive, it would be what in religious language is called mortal sin, the worst, the unforgivable crime or harm. From which comes the aporia, which can be described in its dry and implacable formality, without mercy: forgiveness forgives only the unforgivable. One cannot, or should not, forgive; there is only forgiveness if there is any, where there is the unforgivable. That is to say that forgiveness must announce itself as impossibility itself. It can only be possible in doing the impossible.[[151]](#footnote-151)

Essentially, Derrida conditions a possibility of something on its non-existence or impossibility. If we remember the old omnipotence paradox which reads ‘Can God, as an omnipotent being, create a stone that God cannot lift?’ we can see many similarities in their line of reasoning. If the answer is yes, then God’s omnipotence would be defined by God’s impotence; and if the answer is no, then we would have a contradiction in terms. By the same token, stating that real forgiving is only the forgiving of what cannot be forgiven, i.e., first creating a stone so big that it cannot be lifted and then subsequently proclaiming the impossibility of making that effort as the only sign of the omnipotence. There are three problems with this argument. Firstly, the ‘unforgivable’ seems to be defined by the magnitude of suffering or evil that an act or a series of acts involves.[[152]](#footnote-152) This, however, does not have to be the case. As we could see in our previous elaborations, forgiving is not based on the cognitive or rational calculation of the size of the original act but rather on a complex process that involves volition, emotions, and even moments of spiritual bliss that cannot be controlled. That is not to say that the gravity of the injury has no function. Obviously, it is usually more difficult to forgive grave offences than minor insults, but it is not the gravity of the crime that determines one’s decision (or desire) to enter into a process of forgiving, and one can expect even less that wrongdoings can be objectively listed on a scale that goes from negligible to unforgivable.

Secondly, there is no reason to believe that only the existence of something that is ‘unforgivable’ gives meaning to forgiving. Although it sounds intuitive to assume that things obtain their meanings only if we perceive their opposites (for instance that life has meaning only in opposition to death or by contrasting visibility with invisibility), there are ideas, such as gravitation, that have meaning without experiencing its opposite. Although Derrida wanted to “begin from the fact that, yes, there is the unforgivable,”[[153]](#footnote-153) it is unclear in which circumstances that should be considered a fact. If one would try to warrant that qualification by referring to the magnitude of certain crimes, that would again merely be a value judgment in drawing an arbitrary line between acts that are forgivable and unforgivable. The originality of the act of forgiving is not therefore in the assessment of the magnitude of crime but depends on the will to make something that is *potentially* forgivable into something that is *actually* forgiven.

Thirdly, stating the following: “If one is only prepared to forgive what appears forgivable, what the church calls ‘venial sin,’ then the very idea of forgiveness would disappear. If there is something to forgive, it would be what in religious language is called mortal sin, the worst, the unforgivable crime or harm,”[[154]](#footnote-154) he

incorrectly represents the opposition between *venial* and *mortal sins* as the opposition between forgivable and unforgivable. In Christian teaching, the distinction between venial and mortal sin comes only from the way these ‘sins’ impact a person’s relationship with God—mortal sins, unlike venial ones, divert a person from his or her last end and destroy the principle of charity that unites an individual with God. However, both are, in the theological view, forgivable.[[155]](#footnote-155)

Another line of Derrida’s criticism attacks the political use of forgiveness and its imposition on victims in the form of a prescribed political program, such as one of national reconciliation or even the stating of forgiveness on their behalf.[[156]](#footnote-156) In that sense, Derrida places forgiveness in the sphere of ethical idealism, beyond any practical concerns and processes, “beyond the exchange and even the horizon of a redemption or a reconciliation.”[[157]](#footnote-157) However, criticism of the political imposition of forgiving should be treated as an issue separate from the discussion as to whether there are: 1) things that are unforgivable and, if so, 2) whether the forgiving of the unforgivable is the philosophical foundation of every possible forgiveness. Regardless of one’s position on any of these questions, one can still be critical not only of the very broad use of the term, which depletes the concept of its cognitive usefulness, but also of political ideologies that show no sensitivity towards the states and attitudes of victims. In other words, it would be too rash to say that ‘forgiving the unforgivable’ is the only possible horizon of meaning that guards forgiveness from political, ideological, and rhetorical misuse.

Lastly, it would be equally mistaken to believe that the ‘finality’ of forgiveness is necessarily a product of political interests, implying that ‘true’ forgiveness has to be unconditional and without teleology. Forgiveness, for Derrida, has no goals and no finality, since “[a] ‘finalised’ forgiveness is not forgiveness; it is only a political strategy or a psycho-therapeutic economy.” Forgiveness, in Derrida’s sense, requires “non-negotiable, an economic, apolitical, non-strategic unconditionality”[[158]](#footnote-158) and contains something that “exceeds all institution [sic], all power, all juridico-political authority.”[[159]](#footnote-159) Further, it is also “a forgiveness without power: *unconditional but without sovereignty*.”[[160]](#footnote-160) Although he nominally considers those two poles of forgiveness (the ideal and the empirical one) as “*irreconcilable but indissociable*” and “irreducible to one another, certainly, but … remain[ing] indissociable,” the ethical ‘hyperbolic’ vision serves as a foundation of meaning and a referential point.[[161]](#footnote-161)

The finality of forgiveness—if we can use that term—is first and foremost a reflection of the very mechanism of forgiving, not something added later as a superstructure. In other words, there is always some directionality in forgiving because the hurtful act that took place between a wrongdoer and a victim already had its directional intentionality. The *finality* of forgiving is therefore not perforce a political or pragmatic addendum, but the logical necessity of forgiveness that should be analyzed independently from its possible misuses. If Derrida states that ‘forgiving the unforgivable’ has no finality, no pragmatic concerns, no interests, and no conditions, could that be an activity at all? There must be at least a basic interest to react to something that is considered beyond forgiving (if there is such a thing). A completely unconditional and non-directed action could only be a state of nirvana without any interests or desires, including the desire to *forgive the unforgivable*. Thus, the only possible act with absolutely no political concerns is the attainment of complete mental isolation, both from personal desires and social attachments, and that is the only possible “ethics beyond ethics” that is “beyond laws, norms, or any obligation.”[[162]](#footnote-162)

My criticism does not in any way undermine the free decision of every victim on whether to forgive or not, or whether they find it appropriate to do so or not. I find it equally problematic to impose forgiving as a public act that must be imitated on the individual level. However, I do not agree that such opposition has to be based on the *aporia* of *forgiving the unforgivable*. As I mentioned earlier, those two lines of argument in Derrida should be assessed independently. If one were to consistently apply the notion that ‘true’ forgiveness consists of forgiving the unforgivable, we would simply be putting an additional burden of judgment on victims, creating a line on the horizon that is unreachable or, at best, merely an unnecessary mystification.

Concerning the notion of the *unforgivable*, Ricœur, in *Memory, History, Forgetting*, agrees with Derrida. He starts from St. Paul’s hymn in the First Epistle to the Corinthians, where it is said that love “keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.”[[163]](#footnote-163) From this, Ricœur concludes that forgiveness, which belongs to the same family as love,[[164]](#footnote-164) has no limits. In other words:

Now if love excuses everything, this everything includes the unforgivable. If not, it would itself be annihilated. In this regard, Jacques Derrida, whom I meet up with again here, is right: forgiveness is directed to the unforgivable or it does not exist. It is unconditional, it is without exception and without restriction. It does not presuppose a request for forgiveness.[[165]](#footnote-165)

There is a hidden jump in this interpretation, however, which is precisely the interpellation of the ‘unforgivable.’ Paul’s hymn does not operate within the dualist world of forgivable and unforgivable things, but simply within the one and same universe of creation in which both good and evil and both joy and suffering occur. Moreover, just as the idea of the benevolent God in the Bible is not predicated upon an image of the infinitely malevolent Antagonist, there is equally no division in things *forgivable* and *unforgivable*. Pauline love excuses everything, and that ‘everything’ includes the entire creation, without any division into spheres of forgivable and unforgivable. Stated differently, “everything” in Paul’s hymn should be interpreted as *everything* *simpliciter*, not a compounded *everything + unforgivable*. Although this distinction might appear as a minor detail, it holds crucial importance in the religious understanding of forgiving, which can be linked to the theology of creation. The idea of creation, in the Abrahamic traditions, is a holistic one, containing the entirety of existing things. Thus, the ultimate viewing angle is not the human experience in which faults appear as lesser or greater in size, but the scale of *eschaton*, in which time and space condense into a singularity. In that sense, it is redundant to view anything as truly ‘unforgivable’ because this would add something new to the already complete scale of creation. Derrida praises as ‘unconditional madness’[[166]](#footnote-166) the act of forgiving even the unforgivable, but that madness does not appear to be ‘mad’ enough. Just like a person doing skipping exercises, the Derridian madness of forgiving simply creates its own limit and then jumps over that limit into the unforgivable. Pauline ‘madness,’ if anything, is the madness of no-limit and no-division, of an endless abysmal dissolution of faults into redemption.[[167]](#footnote-167)

The latter notion resembles Jankélévitch’s thoughts on *infinite forgiveness.* In his essay *Should We Pardon Them?*, Jankélévitch vehemently opposes statutory limitations for crimes against humanity, stating that “[c]rimes against humanity are *imprescriptible*, that is, the penalties against them cannot lapse; time has no hold on them.”[[168]](#footnote-168) They are at the same time *inexpiable* because “this grandiose massacre [the Holocaust] is not a crime on a human scale any more than are astronomical magnitudes and light years. (…) One can do nothing. One cannot give life back to that immense mountain of miserable ashes. One cannot punish the criminal with a punishment proportional to his crime (…).”[[169]](#footnote-169) Criticizing calls for pardon in the situation where victims (who could grant a pardon) are dead and where there is no distress or dereliction on the side of those who were guilty, he strongly argues that “[p]ardoning died in the death camps.”[[170]](#footnote-170) However, aside of those practical limitations to forgiveness, in conclusion of his eponymous book, he still allows for a possibility of forgiveness which appears more like a miracle, or Pauline *madness*, beyond strictly rational calculation of proportionality. Thus, as one of the concluding remarks in the book, he states, “In spirit, if not in letter, all offenses are ‘venial,’ even the inexpiable ones. For if there are crimes that are so awful that the criminal who commits them cannot atone for them, then the possibility of forgiving them still remains, forgiveness being made precisely for such hopeless or incurable cases. (…) Which amounts to saying: there is an inexcusable, but there is not an unforgivable.”[[171]](#footnote-171)

## 2.4.1. Public theaters of forgiving

Derrida called the public manifestation of apology and asking forgiveness the “theater of forgiveness,” using the term in a metaphorical and pejorative way. However, I would suggest that the same term should be used in a completely literary sense to interpret the political manifestation of apologies and forgiveness. Just as a theater play is mimetic, but not necessarily a ‘fake’ representation of reality, political forgiveness is simply a staging of something that essentially happens in the individual sphere. It is theatric insofar as it mimics the structure of forgiveness that is centered on a hurtful act (or its symbolic representation). Those manifestations by themselves are not necessarily wrong, fake, or simply ‘simulacra.’ Their ‘truthfulness’ depends, as in every other representation, on their internal consistency—regardless of whether the phrases uttered have their meaningful place in the universe of relationships that a theater creates or not. The crucial element is the direction of the mimesis. It should be kept in mind that any political staging of forgiveness is the representation of something that essentially happens in the personal sphere. Simulacra occur when the direction is reversed, when one starts to expect that a personal forgiveness should mimic the political theatre of forgiveness, that is, when the representation is treated as a model of the original.

# 2.5. Against forgiving: resentment as a virtue

Brudholm offers a penetrating critique of the culture that uncritically promotes forgiveness as a moral virtue that leaves no space for the consideration that “some resentments may be justified and healthy, and some ruptured relationships may be utterly unworthy of restoration (…),”[[172]](#footnote-172) as Jeffrey Murphy puts it in his foreword to the book. Brudhold does not criticize forgiveness as such, but questions only the “hasty and uncritical endorsements of forgiveness.”[[173]](#footnote-173)

Brudholm’s analysis is, to a large degree, a reaction against the penetrating discourse of forgiveness that was detectable in the proceedings of the South-African Truth and Reconciliation Commission in which ‘forgiving’ victims are praised as good examples of virtuous citizens, while those who refused to forgive were seen merely as outliers who did not fully understand the importance of the whole project instead of subjects needing more individual treatment.[[174]](#footnote-174) Equally problematic for Brudholm is the whole religiously-toned narrative of forgiving that presents forgiving and reconciliation as the only alternative to revenge and reprisal, making it at the same time the only moral option:

This stark dichotomy of either forgiveness or vengeance-hatred-bitterness does not do justice to the actual spectrum of possible attitudinal responses between those two emotional poles. The rhetorical evocation of vengeance as forgiveness’s demonic other does not appropriately capture the position of victims who seek just legal prosecution and punishment of the wrongdoers. (…) One might even add that the rhetorical use of “revenge” or “vengeance” as the totally immoral, demeaning, and irrational alternative to forgiving is unfair to victims who might positively desire revenge, who consciously desire satisfaction of their vindictive passions directed toward the perpetrators. (…) There is absolutely no need to romanticize anger and revenge, but it is equally wrong to identify anger only with its excessive and bloody instances.[[175]](#footnote-175)

Brudholm’s arguments for the positive value of emotions that are traditionally seen as negative or immoral are based largely on the writing of French philosopher and Holocaust Survivor Jean Améry, whose refusal to forgive was a statement against “hollow, thoughtless, utterly false conciliatoriness” or “the pathos of forgiveness and reconciliation”[[176]](#footnote-176) that prevailed in the German public space as a dominant social norm after World War II. That hollow and false conciliatoriness for Améry was not only insensitive towards the scale of the tragedy but also socially irresponsible because it eventually leads to forgetting: “One should not and must not ‘let bygones be bygones,’ because otherwise the past could rise from the ashes and become a new present.”[[177]](#footnote-177) In other words, he reacted against specific *social* *frameworks of forgiving* by uncovering the virtuousness of resentment. For Brudholm, resentment can in some cases be justified and healthy, because it represents a legitimate dissent against the dominant culture that promotes a totalizing vision of blanket forgiveness.

The difference between Brudholm’s view and the religious views presented in my research lies in the understanding of the nature of resentment. While for religious leaders resentment primarily represents a transitory emotion that evolves either into vengefulness or constructive anger, Brudhold appears to understand it is a non-transitory, stable emotion in its own right. For religious representatives, the opposite of forgiveness is often revenge, which in the Abrahamic religions is never acceptable. Obviously, revenge is not the only conceivable alternative to forgiving but undeniably remains one of the possibilities against which forgiving is defined. Anger and indignation, as well as a reaction against the political culture of easy forgiveness, are not necessarily immoral from the religious point of view. In the interviews, we saw that forgiving, on the one hand, and reactions to the system that gave criminals an easy pass and indignation for the crimes they committed, on the other, are by no means mutually exclusive. These factors become problematic only in the moment when they overwhelm a person to such a degree as to endanger his or her social and emotional agency and, in a religious context, spirituality. However, even Brudholm does not argue for any form of anger. Distinguishing between resentment and *ressentiment* at the beginning of his book, he delineates the spheres of ‘acceptable’ or ‘good’ emotions. Whereas resentment for him represents “morally legitimate and socially valuable emotion,”[[178]](#footnote-178) *ressentiment* is a vile, irrational, and passionate spite, leading him to the following conclusion: “Whereas there is certainly a case to be argued for resentment, it seems nearly absurd to try something similar with regard to *ressentiment* or with regard to the moral standing of its holders.”[[179]](#footnote-179)

Finally, one has to stress that neither forgiving nor punitive measures are panaceas for injuries created by past tragedies. Both are attempts to re-establish social ties and can only be partially successful. All punitive measures prescribed by national or international courts for the most heinous crimes, which are usually prison sentences of less than 40 years, can also be seen as an insult to victims. However, in the same way that Brudholm opposed the discourse that represent forgiveness as the only viable alternative to social unrest, we should not be too hasty to see resentment as the only viable alternative to the ‘let bygones be bygones’ attitude.

# 2.6. Exorcising forgiveness from politics

Faced with the possibility of a misuse of forgiveness for political and ideological ends, for the undesired effect it can have on victims, and even due to moral objections towards political actors forgiving on the victims’ behalf, we might be tempted to abandon the use of the term ‘forgiveness’ in a political context altogether. There might be good reasons for avoiding the term, since forgiveness can easily obscure the role of political negotiation and pragmatic measures under vague and possibly mystifying emotional accounts. MacLachlan disagrees with this position, arguing not for eliminating the concept but rather for a more directed discussion on the different inter-personal, communal, and political models of forgiveness as well as the decisions and measures these propose:

[T]here is power in the language of forgiveness, accrued from its legacy in many of the religious, cultural and literary discourses of the western world. This power is potentially valuable and the functions I attributed to forgiveness – *relief, release and* *repair* – are very much needed in the aftermath of political conflict. We have at least aprima facie reason to keep looking for a workable definition of political forgiveness, even if that definition turns out to be more pluralistic and particularistic than some would like. Once we accept that forgiveness is already a multidimensional set of overlapping acts and practices, the appropriate questions shift from “whether political forgiveness?” to “which act of political forgiveness, if any, is appropriate here and now?” We can focus on how these different acts and occasions of political forgiveness intersect, cause and react with one another, which (if any) are most politically valuable in a particular situation, and how we can best understand the political grounds for these acts of forgiveness and the conditions under which they are morally, as well as politically, appropriate.[[180]](#footnote-180)

MacLachlan emphasizes that the “acts and policies of political forgiveness, even as enacted by a government or political body, need not be mandated victims’ forgiveness”[[181]](#footnote-181) and that “[t]he extent to which such political efforts will be interpreted as forceful or coercive will depend on the sensitivity and wisdom of the policy in place.”[[182]](#footnote-182)

Besides the evocative value of the terms, there are also good reasons to contrast and compare the various acts of forgiveness and to draw valuable lessons from the plural mechanisms and modalities of forgiveness. One of them is a broader perspective that includes not only intimate acts but also broader *collective frameworks of forgiveness*. Paying closer attention to the dynamics between the individual and the collective, we do not have to deny the ultimately incommensurable understanding of forgiveness that different groups and institutions have, but we can nevertheless acknowledge that personal acts are not isolated or detached from the public context. In MacLachlan’s words: “Failing to acknowledge the extent to which our interpersonal conflicts are politicized risks idealizing interpersonal forgiveness as a spontaneous, unmeasured act of utterly disinterested generosity, even while caricaturing political forgiveness: either as a radically illiberal effort to impose emotional states on large groups of people or as a cynical calculation of power.”[[183]](#footnote-183)

# III. Concluding Remarks

In this chapter, I have employed forgiveness to explore the primary topic motivating this research, the role of religious leaders in peacebuilding processes. By structuring and facilitating forgiveness, religious leaders can be instrumental in resolution of conflicts and dealing with their difficult legacy. However, such a perspective would veer between narrow and incorrect. First, religious perspectives on forgiving and forgiveness tend to concentrate on spiritual perspectives and visions of right and wrong, just and unjust. Moreover, these perspectives are unified only to a certain degree. The variation among them is significant and includes not only differences *between* religious traditions (in this case, Islam and Christianity) but also *within* them (i.e., between religious leaders that belong to the same tradition).

I have presented some theoretical distinction between forgiving as an act of justice, love, mercy, or even spiritual grace. However, as soon as we descend into the praxis of forgiving, those differences only rarely appear clear-cut. Metaphorically speaking, the experience of forgiving melts conceptual divisions and balances justice with mercy, voluntary decisions with involuntary inspirations, and states of exultation and ecstasy with periods of grievance and suffering.

In fact, religious views on forgiving can make an important contribution to social and political studies, especially to the domains of transitional and restorative justice, in retaining the strong link between forgiving and memory, coupled with the notion of a *residue*. If we analyze forgiving in connection with memory, we are no longer operating using the three-part model consisting of offender, hurtful act, and victim. Instead, the image of the original offense is kept in personal and collective memory, what expands forgiving towards the realm of politics and inter-group contacts. Not coincidentally, the religious vision of forgiving goes hand in hand with memory. If we recall that the founding narratives of the Abrahamic religions relate to sin and forgiveness, we can see that forgiving takes place in the form of a conversation between God and individuals and also as a dialogue between God and humanity as a whole. Within that context, forgiving transforms the original injury but does not completely eradicate its consequences. Against oblivion, a trace of the injury remains as a reminder of what was forgiven and also of what will ultimately (in the eschatological perspective) be forgiven. In an important sense, forgiving expands the perspective even beyond history, into the sphere of hope, without neglecting the embeddedness of people in their concrete social contexts.

That idea leads us to the second important contribution of this chapter—the notion of a *residue*. Although the theological grounds for forgiving have their roots in the vision of a harmonious humanity, that image of harmony serves as a *final horizon* of forgiving and not as its actual representation. The religious perception of forgiving, in fact, is not one of completion but of perpetual action. The processes of forgiving, in other words, are always incomplete, and every act of forgiveness has a residue of the ‘unforgiven’ that cannot be reduced any further. This situation should make us more cautious about attempts to treat forgiveness and forgiving as ‘mission accomplished’ and leads us to treat it instead as a delicate balance and an ongoing challenge.

The vision of forgiving expressed by religious leaders in Bosnia and Herzegovina can have profound theological consequences. The link between forgiving and memory is, as we have seen, often attached to the notion of the Other and different. In a country where conflicts occur cyclically and where the roles of victims and perpetrators shift, where fears of annihilation cause the impulsive production of programs of annihilation—in such a country, forgiving is anything but a fairytale. A painful lesson is that neither forgiving nor memory provide the straightforward salvific path. On the contrary, the experience shows that forgiving has to be ‘saved’ from *(too hasty and programmatic) forgiveness* and that memory has to be ‘redeemed’ from *(an exclusionary form of) remembrance*. These necessary processes were particularly visible in our discussions on commemoration, in which the obligation to commemorate victims collided with the fear of exclusion that results in new victims and where forgiving can easily appear as a mere self-rectifying narrative that breeds further feelings of exclusivity and moral superiority.

Here, we can see the important contributions that this analysis can give to the theological notions of forgiveness, especially its links to the alterity of the Other and different. Attention paid to a specific offence and a specific, painful Other stands in opposition to those theological notions of forgiveness that are overtly universalistic and abstract. What I have in mind is the discourse of universality that makes forgiving as easy and as undemanding as possible. Presented in that way, *acts of forgiveness* can act as a mask to easily hide any real responsibility. Forgiving in a universalist way is easy; saying “we do not hate anybody” is certainly much easier than pronouncing the name of the enemy and articulating the pains one feels. The same goes for asking forgiveness. Regretting ‘everything’ is, paradoxically, much easier than regretting a specific thing because when we regret everything, nothing comes to mind, and we are responsible for nothing. *Everything* stands on the same level of abstraction as *nothing*, and neither of those can be adequately comprehended, let alone analyzed and remembered. So, when a religious community asks forgiveness for ‘all the sins that certain members of their Church have committed’ or when another says ‘they do not hate anybody, but love the whole of humanity created by God,’ no dialogue is taking place, and no obligations result from any of these statements. *Forgiveness, therefore, is that specific act of engagement with an injury that lies as a single and specific painful spot between everything and nothing and that demands attention and care.* Although it seems inclusive, the shield of absolute terms is like a band aid placed, not on the wound itself, but on the mouth of the injured person, a shield of inclusivity behind which numerous tragedies remain unarticulated, silenced, and ultimately unforgiven. To be more precise, these tragedies are forgiven in general, but the particular cases are not known and thus are *forgiven-but-unforgiven*. In one of his more recent essays, Jürgen Moltmann, when referring to the forgiveness of sins, asks, “Who justifies victims?”[[184]](#footnote-184) He speaks about the silence that covers many injustices and abuses that are unvoiced by religious leaders or, more precisely, the failure to empower victims to articulate their injuries. Consequently, Christian rituals of forgiveness remain biased towards perpetrators and offenses. Rites that give voice to offenders are put in place, allowing offenders to come to terms with their trespasses but without adequate attention to the victims of the offenses. The basis of forgiveness, which involves the hurtful act and its representation, must first be acknowledged and rescued from the sweeping current of non-responsive abstraction. This prerequisite to forgiveness can neither be achieved by comforting the victim nor through religious narratives that sedate or provide a superficial sense of well-being but rather through engagement with concrete pains and the concrete and painful Other.

My later analysis will provide a more profound analysis of the theological model that memory and forgiving can help to create. For now, it suffices to draw attention to the notions of alterity and prayerful commemoration, with the concrete and painful Other as the reference point and the locus of forgiveness.

# Chapter II: Reconciliation

The chapter on reconciliation is guided by two major themes: the *encounter*, and the process of *bridging the dissonance*. Based on the interview data, reconciliation can represent: 1) inner harmonization (reconciliation with oneself), 2) an interpersonal process (reconciliation between individuals), and 3) an intergroup process (reconciliation between groups). In all of these cases, reconciliation is understood as an intentional and engaged process, not as an epiphenomenon of other factors. Furthermore, in contrast to the ‘banality of reconciliation’ - disengaged forms of virtue signaling ― it is accentuated that reconciliation implies a certain amount of discomfort that comes with the acceptance of responsibility for the past and orientation towards the Other (i.e., an individual or a group perceived in antagonistic way). In religious terms, reconciliation is fundamentally tied to the *belief in the possibility and meaningfulness* of reconciliation itself. The horizon against which that possibility is imagined is not some nostalgic past, but rather eschatological future. In the second part, the chapter presents different theories of reconciliation that vary from minimalist to maximalist and include, to different degrees, infrastructural, psychological, and spiritual conditions. Finally, a concept of the *Degree Zero of Reconciliation* is presented as a meaningful way of promoting reconciliation in a non-hegemonic way, even in sub-optimal conditions.

# The plan of Chapter II

**In the first, exploratory part of this chapter, I proceed as follows:**

1. Reconciliation will be elaborated as a complex concept that is based on two major processes: the *encounter* and *bridging of dissonance*. At the same time, there are three major levels of meaning:
   1. reconciliation as an inner harmonization (reconciliation with oneself)
   2. reconciliation as an inter-personal process (reconciliation with another individual)
   3. reconciliation as an inter-group process (reconciliation with another group)

Those levels are, under the religious perspective, interconnected.

1. Reconciliation will be presented as an intentional and engaged process, not as an epi-phenomenon of other factors (e.g., economic development) or as an imposed political decision.
2. I will show that, from a theological perspective, the basis of reconciliation is the *belief in reconciliation*, which is grounded in the theological principles of divine justice (Christianity and Islam) and God’s reconciliation with humanity (Christianity).
3. Additionally, through testimonies which speak not only about the responsibility of offenders to admit their guilt but also about the need of victims to create an atmosphere of acceptance, I will show that reconciliation is a process of silent negotiation that includes cognitions, judgments, and emotions.
4. The initial metaphor of reconciliation as an encounter will be further elaborated. It will be emphasized that, for the respondents, reconciliation is as follows:
   1. A *discomforting encounter* in which difficult topics are not avoided but are nonetheless approached with a basic amount of care
   2. An *encounter with a concrete painful Other* (contra abstract and overtly universalistic ideas about reconciliation)
   3. An *encounter in which the concrete painful Other is perceived as a ‘gift’ and ‘truth’* in the sense that:
      1. The painful Other helps a group to come to terms with difficult elements in its own past, especially those that have been suppressed or forgotten;
      2. The painful Other helps the group to remember differently, in a way that allows for elaboration of some common frameworks of memory between previously hostile groups.
5. The initial metaphor of *bridging the dissonance* will be further elaborated as follows:
   1. Achievement of an inner stability (among individuals and groups) so that they do not feel threatened by prospects of social reconciliation;
   2. Achievement of a certain amount of shared memories among divided groups which still allows for legitimate disagreements and differences in interpretation;
   3. Acceptance of historical facts regarding past events.
6. I will further show that religious leaders see reconciliation as a long-term process that needs to be coordinated between different social institutions. In that process, religious communities can offer moral guidelines and demonstrate leadership.
7. In the religious view, the final horizon of reconciliation is the eschatological future, which gives space for hope but nonetheless acknowledges the difficulties arising from history.

(See: **Scheme 2.1.** in the Appendix)

**In the second part, I bring my findings in discussion with:**

1. Theories which differentiate *reconciliation with something* and *reconciliation with someone.* While the first denotes passive acceptance of a given state of affairs, the second suggests an engaged process of inter-personal and inter-group rapprochement.
2. It will be shown that the term reconciliation has numerous meanings, due to the existence of different theoretical positions but also to the irreducible complexity of the term itself.
3. In presenting a spectrum between “minimalist” and “maximalist” theories of reconciliation, it will be demonstrated that they:
   1. Have different conceptions of what reconciliation requires (ranging from peaceful co-existence and basic cooperation to spiritual healing);
   2. Have different conceptions of the degree to which those infrastructural, psycho-social, and spiritual states are to be achieved.
4. I will then discuss how excessively high requirements for reconciliation (e.g., when reconciliation is ‘imposed’ on victims as the only option) create resistance.
5. Furthermore, I will argue that reconciliation is an ongoing process that is never entirely finished and that it is interconnected with other processes such as forgiveness and memory.
6. With respect to memory, I will show that memory can act both as an impetus and a barrier to reconciliation. The social conditions that are most conducive to reconciliation are those in which a sufficient degree of physical security, mutual trust, and moral consensus is achieved.
7. Finally, I will propose a new term “Degree Zero of Reconciliation,” to describe that, even in sub-optimal social conditions, speaking about reconciliation can still be meaningful. This concept will serve as a bridge between previously elaborated religious perspectives on reconciliation (especially the view of the “eschatological future”), and socio-political theories.
8. The Degree Zero of Reconciliation will be defined:
   1. In opposition to the idea of *perennial enemies*
   2. In connection to the concrete painful Other
   3. As a state that is ‘already there’ but ‘not yet entirely’

# Broken harmonium: On reconciliation

I vividly remember a story that a Catholic priest from the northern part of Bosnia and Herzegovina told me during the first phase of my field research in winter 2015. Giving a longer elaboration on the question of forgiveness, he made a point that it is “never a selfish act; through forgiveness, I want to help the other side.”[[185]](#footnote-185) At one point, he drew my attention to an old harmonium which was left in the rain before the church. Ivan explained that he keeps it there intentionally in order to intrigue people. The story began during the war in the 1990s when one of the members of the Serbian army took away the harmonium from the parish church. Decades afterward, a taxi driver brought it back with an unknown telephone number written on a piece of paper. As Ivan explains, the person who took it was nearing his death and through that gesture wanted to appease his conscience. This gesture might seem like an ordinary anecdote with a happy, *reconciliatory* ending, but it took an unusual turn. After a long reflection, Ivan decided not to call the telephone number, but rather the police. His intention was not to prosecute anyone, but just to send a message to the person who committed the original transgression:

They asked me if I wanted to bring charges against him. I said, God forbid, there are no charges. [...] Tell him that the vicar sends him greetings [...] If he has something bad [weighing on his] conscience [...], he will find a way to [get in touch] with me. Otherwise, he will never resolve it. This is a piece of garbage brought to me; this is a burden, I do not see any sign of remorse or humanity here, [any sign through which] he would say *I am sorry* [...] Tell him that I read this as his attempt to humiliate me again.’[[186]](#footnote-186)

What Ivan found problematic, it seems, was the desire of the transgressor to achieve reconciliation on his own terms and for his own benefit, i.e., just to appease his guilty conscience. In that sense, reconciliation was presented to Ivan as a *fait accompli*, something that can be simply announced, even through a proxy. We can see that such an act, despite potentially positive motives, can be understood by a victim as yet another humiliation. Ivan was left perplexed in his attempt to desire good for the other side and the sense of untruthfulness that an easily granted forgiveness would represent:

If somebody asked me “Do you forgive him?,” I would not know what that means. I can say that I do, of course I do, because I do not worry about that. But that is not forgiveness. Forgiveness cannot be just about taking away a burden from oneself. [Instead,] it is about the truth, about justice, about mercy, about the goodness of the other - I want that man to be saved.[[187]](#footnote-187)

In his elaboration of forgiveness, Ivan constantly emphasizes the principle of duality, something that brings it very close to reconciliation. Indeed, as the example shows, it is even difficult to differentiate between these two terms in an actual situation involving an injury. Interestingly, there is always some *banal* version of these terms, the version that almost necessitates the responses “of course I forgive” and “of course, I want to reconcile.” Ivan even described the desire of the offender to send the harmonium back as an automatic, mechanical reaction: “[I concluded] that he does not have any courage [….] A worm of unrest makes him do something mechanically to calm himself.”[[188]](#footnote-188) In other words, it was an instinctive response to personal distress and not to the distress caused by care for the other side, and that makes it ultimately a selfish act.

In reality, however, forgiveness and reconciliation are anything but banal, and it would be misleading to reduce them to a matter of instinctive *of course* responses. They require a serious engagement with the act and its memory, the recognition that the time itself is not sufficient to *heal the wounds*, and—if conducted in an insensible way—that both reconciliation and forgiveness could be seen as yet another oppressor’s project that leaves a victim helpless. In the end, the abandoned harmonium before the entrance of the church is a witness to these difficulties. These two symbolic elements—the church as a symbol of unity and a broken harmonium—stay separated.

# I. Field-research findings: Outlines of reconciliation

Ivan’s response draws some of the most prominent outlines of the concept of reconciliation among religious leaders—it is a dual process of coming together after a breach, a dialogical change of attitudes in which remorse and forgiveness play a major role. The attitudes towards reconciliation were driven by two main images: the *encounter* and *bridging the dissonance*. While the encounter accentuates the *dialogical* element of reconciliation, bridging the dissonance is related to both internal and external work. Bridging is thus a process of overcoming a dissonance that exists between conflicting identities *within* a person and community and also of incompatibilities *between* inter-communal memories.

The notion of reconciliation is a particularly complex one. In the introductory itinerary of the chapters, I situated forgiveness as primarily a personal endeavor, reconciliation as an inter-communal one, and collective memory as a dimension between them both. We saw, however, some cases which did not fit neatly into that classification. Recalling those interviews which described forgiveness in terms of an extended hand, we realize that forgiveness can also have elements of an encounter (similar to reconciliation). In this chapter, we will see opposite cases in which reconciliation can be understood as a personal endeavor to stabilize the inner dissonances *within* people as a phase before harmonization of dissonances *between* people/groups (thus becoming structurally similar to forgiveness). In other words, while, in some cases, forgiveness is understood not in a personal but in an inter-personal way, there are cases in which reconciliation can be understood as primarily a personal quest.

A reader could ask: “But how, then, are we to differentiate between forgiveness and reconciliation? If they are so intertwined, should not they be considered as a single process after all?” I would suggest the following rule of thumb: while forgiveness is the work of a single moral agent, reconciliation always implies some form of encounter between two or more entities, and some bridging of the dissonance between them. One can forgive someone in silence, but it is not possible to be reconciled to someone just in the privacy of one’s personal silence, without any contact with the Other.

Now comes the complicated part. As we will soon see, in one specific understanding of reconciliation, respondents mentioned the necessity to be reconciled “with themselves.” We have already heard about cases when people say that they cannot forgive themselves, but how are we to deal with the notion of being “reconciled to oneself”?

Forgiving is an activity that is directed to a wrongdoing, to a crime, the object of distress. We heard people saying, for instance: I cannot forgive myself for *something* that I did. Reconciliation, on the other hand, is directed to the Other side, it is a form of an encounter that aims to transform the abyss created by the painful event. When I reconcile myself with myself, I am still implying that there are ‘two of me,’ two images of myself that I want to harmonize in some way. In other words, it is some form of inner negotiation. Although those notions of “reconciliation” might be used in a metaphorical sense, I have decided to retain them in order to follow the data-based approach that I have adopted for this research. Nevertheless, the dominant notions on reconciliation will be the ones that involve different parties.

To summarize, the notions of reconciliation that will appear in this chapter are as follows: 1) Reconciliation in a sense of inner harmonization (within a person or within a group) - This notion is close to the one employed when people say that they want to ‘reconcile’ two divergent theories or ideas; 2) Reconciliation as an *inter*-personal endeavor that implies direct contact between individuals - This is the meaning that we encounter in a sentence such as “Mike have reconciled with Steve”; 3) Inter-group reconciliation that comes to mind when we hear about reconciliation between nations or previously opposed groups.

# 1.1. From inter-personal to inter-group reconciliation

Obviously the most intuitive notion we have is the second one because it resonates most with our personal everyday experiences. It goes without saying that individuals are the only moral agents capable of doing reconciliatory work. However, we immediately wonder about the link between inter-personal reconciliation and inter-group reconciliation, i.e., how does reconciliation move from an individual act to a social trend. The most common answer would be that the inter-personal and inter-group levels are connected simply by amassment—when the number of people who reconcile on their personal levels becomes significant, we can talk about an inter-group phenomenon. But here is another twist in the story. As we will see, the inter-personal and inter-group levels can be linked in a qualitative way, not just in terms of proportions. That link occurs when an individual *encounters* the *image of the Other* as a group member and not as a particular wrongdoer. That occurs, for instance, when someone offers an apology in the name of a group. These two levels (inter-personal and inter-group) can also flow in opposite directions. One of the most common objections to the concept of reconciliation is that reconciliation in some cases goes against every moral decency that we can imagine: Why would a victim of a war-rape ever be reconciled to her torturer, who killed her family before imprisoning her for months? Why would a person who lost her who family even think about reconciliation? Why would anybody propose such an abhorrent idea?

It is very easy to see the emotional and moral appeal of those question, and very few people would object to it. But, in my view, the conversation should not stop with that statement of moral indignation. Even if a person is *not* reconciled with a particular individual (and might never be), she can still work on the reconciliation of future generations. In Kantian terms, such a work would flow from a realization that reconciliation is a categorical, not hypothetical, imperative, that it obliges not from a specific, practical concern for circumstances of a particular individual but from a moral view of humanity as a whole. That is how a decision not to be reconciled with a specific person can coexist with a broader engagement on reconciliation. Take, for instance, this statement from Munira Subašić, president of the association *Mothers of Srebrenica*: “We want neither forgiveness nor reconciliation. All we want is each perpetrator’s name and surname and hence can be punished. It is a *shame* to talk about forgiveness while the main perpetrators who have killed our children and husbands still have not faced legal prosecutions.”[[189]](#footnote-189) At the same time, on another occasion, she said that “it is necessary to talk and have a dialogue, to establish trust among people in the Balkans to ensure a better and happier future. When we have trust, we will also have reconciliation.”[[190]](#footnote-190) Thus, Subašić rejected the idea of reconciliation with individual criminals but promoted reconciliation based on trust as a general social goal.

Reconciliation is, metaphorically speaking, the process of creating a middle ground in a space previously colonized by conflicts. It has also occurred to me that the etymology of the word might have influenced the way that my respondents understood its processes. In the South-Slavic languages, the word for reconciliation, *pomirenje,* has very different origins than in Germanic or Romance languages. It can be roughly translated as “to peace” in the sense of “going in the direction of peace” or “creating peace,” which has a very different sound than its English or French counterparts. *Pomirenje*, moreover, also has a different connotation from the other Slavic word *mirotvorstvo,* which is a literal translation of peace-making. The difference might seem very subtle or even unnoticeable, but to native speakers those two words sound very different. Although both actions are oriented towards peace, *pomirenje* is a specific work for peace through re-establishing a contact between the divided parties. At the same time, the word *pomirenje* has a stronger connotation of action, engagement for peace, a goal-oriented action, than a translation into English would suggest. Blago, for instance, admitted that one has to “work on reconciliation; it has to be encouraged. It is fact that time brings its own [changes], but in conversations with my faithful (…), they speak about that, and I speak about that – [that] we need to know how to forgive and be magnanimous because that it what our faith teaches us. (…) Politics needs to create healthy preconditions for that [to occur].”[[191]](#footnote-191) His testimony is illustrative of the conviction that reconciliation requires engagement with the Other. Although politics is important in creating the optimal pre-conditions, reconciliation itself can happen only through an encounter with the Other, but not just any form of an encounter but, rather, an encounter oriented towards the community. Hrvoje made the following comment about the communities in Bosnia and Herzegovina:

There is an exchange of economic and other goods, but I am not sure to what degree reconciliation has occurred. I am afraid that there is still much [left to be done] there. (…) [The decision to reconcile] cannot be decided at some [higher] level [that orders individuals]: “We are going to reconcile, and that must function in that way.” [Instead,] reconciliation has to happen from within people. People have to reconcile.[[192]](#footnote-192)

Stressing that reconciliation should be seen as a set of goal-oriented activities, I wanted to do one more thing—to detach reconciliation from a purely consequentialist reasoning. It is not merely through the examination of effects, I argue, that we determine reconciliation. True, reconciliation is indeed manifested through greater collaboration, different ways of social interactions, greater degrees of trust, and a set of other positive indicators of the inter-communal collaboration after a period of conflict. But, it would be a mistake to conclude that the presence of those indicators informs us that reconciliation has taken place. This statement, I am aware, will inevitably upset empirically minded scholars, who like to stipulate the presence of latent variables through their manifested indicators. My reasoning in this chapter will be a little different. The collected data made me understand reconciliation as a willed process, a desired encounter, a meeting with a readiness to engage in some form of mutual work. *This form of reasoning presents reconciliation as an internally directed movement towards some form of a community.*

The idea of a community might sound like a too high a bar to reach after a period of conflict. However, at the end of this chapter, I will also propose a specific liminal case of reconciliation that can in many ways resemble forgiveness because it can be done even unilaterally and even amidst ongoing conflicts, thus lowering the bar even below the greater part of other mainstream theories of reconciliation. For now, it will suffice to say that, by insisting on the fact that reconciliation must be aimed at and directed to a community, I want to stress that reconciliation should not be understood as a side effect of something else, but as a goal in and of itself. The difference is that reconciliation should not be conceived merely as an unintended consequence of some other factors, for instance, of increased trade between parties. Even if, as an unintended consequence of economic development, social conflicts would de-escalate and the situation between groups normalize, we could speak about collaboration or coexistence, but not really about reconciliation.

## 1.1.1. Dramaturgy of reconciliation

If we imagine reconciliation as a dramaturgy, we could see two actors engaged in some form of dialogue or dialogical actors that aim to resolve the barriers created by some previous conflict. As spectators, we would need to see that those actions are initiated by actors. Were there some third party or a chorus that simply announced: “You are now reconciled” or forced them into action, we would have good reason to be suspicious. It would be equally unconvincing to infer that they are reconciled simply because they are still on the same stage. Reconciliation, as I said, is visible through changes of actions and attitudes, but it is the conscious effort to reconcile that guides those acts, not the other way around. My respondents were skeptical about a notion of reconciliation that does not have any manifestable outcomes, but they were also suspicious about the idea that the change of structural conditions would, by itself, create reconciliation. In other words, neither socio-economic improvements guarantees reconciliation, but nor does the “reconciliation talk” or professed emotional change ensure that reconciliation has become deeply rooted. While economic optimism needs to take into account socio-psychological elements in order to be comprehensive, emotionalist positions have to include legal, political, and economic context in order to be coherent.

## 1.1.2. Reconciliation as a theory and practice

It is important to note, contra overtly optimistic views of reconciliation, that the metaphor of *the encounter* is not a neutral one but, to the contrary, is linked with another religiously-inspired image, that of a *sacrifice.* In that respect, the reconciliatory encounter is best seen as an initially discomforting event of coming-together, which requires a certain degree of sacrifices and concessions and which in turn leads to a gradual transformation of emotional and cognitive states among participants, fueling their orientation towards joint responsibility for the past. The latter element reveals the great importance of cognitive elements, presented by participants as a quest for *truth*, although not in isolation from emotional aspects. The images of the encounter and bridging of differences require us imagine some form of an exchange, negotiation, gradual changes in perception between the participants, similar to the hermeneutical process of the “fusion of horizons.”[[193]](#footnote-193)

To a large degree, the *when* of reconciliation is often indistinguishable from the *how* of reconciliation. To put it differently—it is often difficult to say whether we are talking about *methods of reconciliation* or *reconciliation as such*. Just like a language that is learned through speech, reconciliation is slowly built through its underlying processes—even if we do not reach the full mastery of language, we still speak it, even if we do not achieve our ideal of reconciliation, we are still participating in it. Language, although inherently a collective phenomenon, is still in every moment performed by individual actors who are in a silent consensus that coordinates their linguistic activities. Reconciliation is also a collective phenomenon performed by individuals, with the difference that they are consenting to develop (again) their shared language.

Finally, reconciliation is deeply dependent on the notion of time. Time nonetheless has a dual character—of *sacred time* and *chronological time*. Chronological time simply implies that reconciliation requires a continued and sustained engagement. Sacred time, on the other hand, delineates the *conditions of possibility* and the *final horizon* of the religiously inspired reconciliation. This notion is especially strong in Christianity, which propagates the idea that the founding event of reconciliation has already taken place within history and that it provides grounds for hope that reconciliation is indeed possible. At the same time, the final horizon of reconciliation is not the far future, but a point beyond history, a moment when all conflicts are unrooted from their chronologic extension, when history itself is reconciled. In that respect, there is a certain *belief in reconciliation*, which both proceeds and goes beyond individual acts of reconciliation, i.e., a transcendental notion of reconciliation inspires people to engage in reconciliation and gives them at the same time the ideal model to direct their actions.

Putting all those elements together, we could say that religiously conceptualized reconciliation is an encounter of the parties separated by conflicts, an encounter that is guided by the belief in the possibility of reconcilitation moderated by judgements of the other side’s actions and intentions, supported by emotions, and manifested as a dialogical process of bridging dissonances (emotional and cognitive) between the involved parties. The reconciliatory encounter is at the same time expansive and, although it starts on a micro level, it requires robust institutions and structural conditions of the society. In what follows, I will try to clarify those elements. Let me first start with a still somehow vague notion of the *belief in reconciliation*.

# 1.2. The belief in reconciliation as a basis of reconciliation

In religions that operate with that concept, reconciliation has profound importance. In Christianity, reconciliation is primarily an event between God and humanity. The founding message of Christianity is that God has reconciled humanity to Godself and that discord is not the driving force of the human condition. Reconciliation, which is a renewal of a relationship between God and individual, is thus conditional but secure—God never withdraws reconciliation to those who seek it in honesty. Islam does not have the same view of the history of salvation but nevertheless, sees reconciliation as a commendable act that will be rewarded by God.[[194]](#footnote-194) Both religions, however, have some form of reconciliation rituals. In Catholicism, reconciliation is part of the sacramental practice which is seen as a renewal of the relationship between God and an individual. In Islam, there are traditional rituals of reconciliation which have intercommunal dimension but are nevertheless religiously sanctioned.[[195]](#footnote-195) In both cases, there is some form of religious justification of reconciliation, based on the core axiom that reconciliation as such always subsists as a possibility, as long as there is a genuine desire to be reconciled.

It is for that reason that the basic element of trust, in the religious parlance on reconciliation, is not the trust among individuals but the trust in *reconciliation itself*, i.e., commitment to its possibility and the desire to make it stable and predictable. That tendency, however, is in contrast to the other conviction that reconciliation can never be guaranteed or ordered and that all human affairs are unpredictable and volatile. The prospect of reconciliation thus *reduces* and *induces* fear at the same time. It reduces fear because of the basic belief that reconciliation is possible (since it is sanctioned and desired by God), but it also creates an anxiety that the whole project of reconciliation might fail because of human imperfection and that the consequences of that failure might be worse than the initial state of division.

For Ivan, reconciliation is a process of coming together between the offender and offended sides:

The one who is more ennobled, i.e., godlier—I speak always as a believer – makes the first step. In order for reconciliation to occur, the other side has to [be willing to] make its own overture or to accept the [offer of an] encounter [from the other, i.e., the initiator]. That is a sign of [reassurance on the part of] the other side [i.e., the initiator], [communicating] that there is no need to be afraid. Yes, that person had sinned, but she should not be afraid – look, the other side shows you good will. Now, you should accept that in some way, saying: “Look, I am sorry.”[[196]](#footnote-196)

In Ivan’s view, the one “who is godlier” makes the first step, suggesting that there are religious grounds to initiate the process of reconciliation, to believe that it is possible. In that sense, *belief in reconciliation precedes the process of reconciliation*. However, the process itself is never completely determined. It is rather a form of silent negotiation, an exchange of signals of goodwill to reconcile and readiness to reciprocate. In Ivan’s model, the first step (the offer of reconciliation) is unconditional, it is a *gift*, but the final step (community) is conditioned upon acceptance of that offer and contrition. At the same time, contrition is shown if there is a perception that it will not humiliate the offender. Therefore, a signal of readiness to reconcile is returned by a signal of change. Both signals have a function to assure the other side that reconciliation will not be a pretext for humiliation, revenge, or reprisal.

We could see the illustration of this mechanism in a public interview that Orthodox Bishop Grigorije of Zahumlje-Herzegovina gave to N1 Television. Answering the question as to why he had not offered an apology to Bosniaks, he said that apology can be fruitful only when there is trust that it will not be met with malevolence and eventually result in even greater hostility. At the same time, his response offers an insight into the interwoven notions of forgiveness, asking for forgiveness, and the reconciliation that results from them:

The word “forgiveness” is one of the most valuable words. It is one of the most powerful things that religion brings, that Christianity brings to this world. To forgive somebody means to have space in one’s heart for that person. That is my sincere conviction, and that is how that word is translated from Greek. Therefore, if somebody would forgive me, that means that he should open his heart for me when I ask forgiveness. And when someone asks me forgiveness, I should open my heart for that person. But if I do not have a feeling that he will open his heart for me, so, this is what happens… I could say that word [i.e., forgiveness] in a formal way, but I do not want to pronounce it just formally, I never want to do it that way. If someone [from the Serbian side] said: “Forgive us, we did wrong” no matter where—in Sarajevo, Srebrenica, in Goražde, Višegrad — they would say [in response]: ‘Here you are! Come now to prison, you admitted it!’ That is not the way I have in mind. My way is ‘Come brother, let me hug you.’ But that does not happen, and then there is no sincere asking forgiveness nor is there mutual forgiveness. Instead, there is just insistence ‘they killed us here, we killed them there’ and so on (…) And in all that, there is one horrible political trick that a whole nation is being demonized because of the acts of some criminal (…) That is the generalization that can be catastrophic. I am afraid of that and I think that every step in Bosnia and Herzegovina must be honest, careful, rational, balanced, and it is very, very important that nothing is done in a fake way, especially that most valuable word forgiveness.[[197]](#footnote-197)

Bishop Grigorije explained how the perception of hands open for a hug (i.e., the prospect of reconciliation) is the crucial step that motivates both the admittance of guilt and forgiveness. In that sense, the order of forgiveness and reconciliation is even reversed since the prospect of reconciliation acts as a *safe space* which enables all other mutually directed movements. As we already elaborated in the previous chapter, forgiveness does not necessarily coincide with reconciliation. Forgiveness, namely, can occur as an individual act when the other side does not show any interest in mutual contact, or even when the other side is dead. Reconciliation, much more than forgiveness, is seen as a matter of mutual exchange, a silent negotiating practice in the field of emotions and perceptions. While the victim expects some form of apology or remorse, the other side expects a guarantee that those apologies will not be misused for collective blaming. For that reason, apologies are most often given when the perception is that they will accept and that some form of community will be re-established. In that sense, *trust in reconciliation* precedes *acts of reconciliation*.

# 1.3. Reconciliation as a discomforting encounter

The notion that reconciliation can start once when there is a belief that reconciliation is possible, coupled with a perception that it eventually will not make both sides worst off still does not mean that reconciliation is easy or without discomfort. On the contrary, since reconciliation always includes the Other (or better to say the *painful* Other), it can be either discomforting or superficial. The discomforting elements of that encounter are frequently related to elaboration of the painful memories, or—as respondents often put it—accepting the truth or facticity of the past.

For Željko, a Catholic priest, the ‘painful’ Other is the modus of truth and the truth itself. In his view, a reconciliatory encounter always has a revelatory potential—through unpleasant, but still a necessary encounter with the Other, participants become aware of the limits of their previously established ‘truths.’ In that sense, reconciliation without some degree of “healthy conflict” is, in Željko’s opinion, always fake:

Fake universalists and reconcilers do not like the truth, nor do they like conflicts. Sometimes, healthy conflict is necessary (…) We are the *truth* and a *gift* to each other. And the truth is liberating. It is critical. You cannot come sit with Serbs and say: “Now we are going to forget what you did”; and they will then forget [their tragedies] (…) One cannot forget what Ustashi did. You will not accuse me by doing that [i.e., by bringing up the truth about Ustashi/Croat crimes] (…) I am speaking about healthy conflict. I [speak from] experience. Why do those international organizations or NGOs not call me? – Because I want to tell the truth, and they do not like that – it shakes things too much. (…) They like the [feel-good appearances] and setups around those [fake apperances]. I don’t share their opinion because [their approach lacks] catharsis. You see, we have to enable each other a catharsis. That is why I keep saying that we are truth and a gift to each other. If we refuse to acknowledge [crimes] in our communities, then, in an honest encounter, the Orthodox person will tell me, “Look, those are things that members of your people did in Jasenovac, Dretelj, etc. Not you.” How liberating is that truth![[198]](#footnote-198)

First, let us notice that there was a silent switch in the views on reconciliation. The chapter started with an individual story of two people faced with a challenge of reconciliation. There was no way for Ivan to imagine reconciliation as a serious possibility when he was coerced into accepting a harmonium as if nothing happened. But Željko did not speak about his personal experience with someone, but about Croats and Serbs. Reconciliation in that sense does not deal with all particular Serbs and Croats that have mutual conflicts; it is rather a meeting of a person with a representative of an *excluded community*. That encounter with a *painful Other*, in encounter Željko’s view, has the potential to uncover unpleasant truths that the community wants to forget or suppress.

According to Željko, the absence of truth, of its acknowledgment and acceptance, has two negative effects—denial and the transference of guilt over generations. He sees national groups as communities that have a natural tendency to ignore things that could be seen as compromising their identity. Consequently, they have a positive bias to their past actions, manifested in a tendency to sanitize history of threatening elements. A corollary of that inclination is the inner homogenization of the group. In that respect, the painful Other is the carrier of an exiled, inconvenient truth back into the community. The process of coming to terms with the past is triggered by an encounter with the Other, but it at the same time happens via the Other. Neither of the participants in that process stays the same. Rediscovered truth, hence, recreates subjects of a renewed relation.

The particular *Sitz-im-Leben* of his statement are conflicts between Croats and Serbs. It is a situation in which each group has committed mass crimes against the other. But, one might ask, doesn’t this imply that in reconciliation there is always some mixed guilt between the parties? What if one side does not have a historical track record of violence against the other group?

If we pay closer attention to the previous statement, we can notice that Željko’s vision of the truth-oriented encounter does not operate just with mutual insults between the parties. Specifically, he mentions Jasenovac (a Croat-run concentration camp during the WWII where the majority of victims were Serbs), but also Dretelj (a camp near Mostar in the recent war where the majority of inmates were Bosniaks). Therefore, the encounter with the painful Other is not just an exercise in which each side would acquiesce some guilt just for the sake of artificial parity, some superficial “Yes, we both guilty here.” On the contrary, the meeting with the painful Other is a discomforting encounter which makes both parties uncover painful parts of their history (not just the mutual history). Yes, a part of that encounter is the discovery of the “suppressed facts” related to the past violence between the involved parties, but it also goes beyond that, towards other dark sides of the history; it helps each side to uncover their hidden or suppressed elements. However, just saying this might create an impression that reconciliation might be reduced to fact-finding. The story has one more layer that was already hinted in Željko’s syntagma of *the truth and gift*. What differentiates reconciliation from disinterested fact-finding is the element of care for the Other. Since the Other is the truth and a gift, the discovery of the truth is then guided by charity:

I do not think that one should immediately throw truth in [the Other’s] face. Some truths are painful, of course. That is why I refer here to one phrase from St. Paul’s Letter to Ephesians: ‘speaking the truth in love.’ That is to say, if there is only truth without love, that kind of truth is bitter, it is condemning, it is accusatory, it is heavy. If there is only love, as many civil associations assert with the principle ‘que bello stare insieme,’ how it is wonderful to be together, then it is biased, like when a parent loves a child too much and does not tell the child that he or she is wrong. That is how we are now functioning. Especially in our own ethnic group, [our guiding principle is] ‘Don’t [criticize]. He is ours. Don’t make public what is wrong. What will others say?’ Therefore, the theological stance would be those two principles—truth and love.[[199]](#footnote-199)

Let us pause for a moment and consider the coupling of the terms *truth*, *gift*, and *love*. In my interviews, the prevailing notion of truth was one of correspondence. Finding truth through reconciliation thus means bridging the dissonance between “what really happened” and “what we say in our groups that happened.” In that respect, the Other could be said to be the *carrier of the truth* to the community, thus a *gift*. But, as we could see, Željko’s phrasing was not that the Other is just the carrier of truth, but even more strongly – that the Other *is the truth* and the gift. We could very easily imagine that a collegial encounter with someone can help us to discover our limits and biases. But how can we imagine that perplexing statement that the Other *is the truth*, not just *the mean to reach the truth*? A meaningful way we can interpret that statement, I argue, is to understand reconciliation as the very order of reality. In Christianity, reconciliation between God and humanity in Christ is the central pillar of religion. But even in a broader Abrahamic tradition, we would not be wrong by saying that reconciliation is the purpose of history, that the whole movement of humanity is directed towards one final end when all the historical divisions will be ultimately reconciled. So, what does then happen in a moment of a reconciliatory encounter? In that moment, the accepted Other suddenly becomes a place of the correspondence—the encounter and the fundamental reality of humanity (reconciliation) are reflected in each other. If we understand the truth as a correspondence between contingent reality and the ultimate (i.e., eschatological) reality, it is precisely in the welcoming encounter with the painful Other that the truth is revealed.

The last element of love brings us back to the specificities of religious views on forgiveness from the previous chapter. An emphasis on love is a re-occurring theme in religious discourse on peacebuilding. Once again, love in this context does not represent any form of friendship or amicability, since both elements are the result of reconciliation, not its precedents. Love, therefore, is better understood as an element of care for the truth of the Other that allows people to go beyond immediate personal interests or the interests of their group. For Konstantin, the emphasis on “self-sacrificing love” in the process of peacebuilding is the biggest comparative advantage of religious communities over non-religious organizations. Not denying that many non-believers are equally or even more engaged in humanitarian actions, Konstantin mentions:

I think that [the Church] can formatively influence people so that they become true peace-builders, eccentrics, that is, people who do not behave according to the rules of this world, who are ready to work in Others’ favor even to their own detriment. That formation of the consciousness of people and of practical believers, directing their thoughts to (…) the Gospel, that is, self-sacrificing love and self-giving, that is their comparative advantage. Worldly establishments can hardly ever evoke that kind of sacrifice because doing so would be a fiasco according to the state’s values. Imagine that a state works to damage itself [i.e. work against its own interests]. On the other hand, religious life (…) offers more magnificent opportunities. [[200]](#footnote-200)

In short, religious views on reconciliation construe it as a form of a truth-oriented encounter, based on fundamental trust that reconciliation as such is divinely inspired. In that process, the presence of the Other is crucial. At the same time, reconciliation is a discomforting encounter that involves a certain amount of conflict that is nevertheless balanced with care for the Other to a greater degree than an immediate self-interest would require.

Although *love*, *gift*, and *sacrifice* were frequent keywords employed in religious views on reconciliation, they were certainly not constructed only as a set of positive and inspiring stories. Throughout my interviews, I noticed a certain form of aversion among religious leaders towards numerous reconciliation projects that do not have a strong resonance among people because they are seen either as superficial or as activities that primarily benefit project leaders and not communities. They complained that projects that are presented through keywords “multi-cultural” and “reconciliation” receive abundant international funding and support but have little success. According to Blago, that creates aversion among people because “people do not like when something is happening by force, [they don’t like] forced love. And people read that as such. People who act as ‘multi-culti’ [multi-cultural] professionals do not receive a lot of credit and trust with respect to their authenticity. Rather [the perception is that] they do it only for their own benefit and interests, and less from the sincere desire for reconciliation.”[[201]](#footnote-201) The skepticism towards those projects might stem from the perception that those who are involved in them do not sacrifice anything and are unwilling to engage in uncomfortable encounters. Instead, they are seen as people who are willing to substitute reconciliation for reconciliation-talk that avoids any form of conflict, resulting in a situation where reconciliation is reduced to positive but banal views.

# 1.4. Procedurality of reconciliation: Bridging the dissonance

When we have delineated the provisional contours of reconciliation, we can further inquire about its procedurality. Given that religious views on reconciliation presuppose a belief in its possibility, we can ask how it happens and where the locus (or loci) of the reconciliatory encounter is. In this section, the idea of bridging dissonance will be a useful guide. As I mentioned at the beginning, this can be seen as a harmonization of inner dissonances, as well as a mutual work on the obstacles between persons or groups.

## 1.4.1 Reconciliation as an internal harmonization

We have already seen one notion of *dissonance* in Željko’s interview – the refusal of the group to accept the truth of the painful past. A reconciliatory encounter was then viewed as a way of coming to terms with it. Another meaning of *dissonance* to be explored is the personal one, understood in an ontological sense of distance from one’s own core that affects the community. Reconciliation then implies two things: 1) reconciliation with oneself and 2) reconciliation on a broader social level. Those two levels are linked and influence each other. According to Miloš:

At least we, the churches, have to insist on reconciliation. First, we [individuals] have to be reconciled with ourselves. One is typically in discord with oneself, and, therefore, we have to first be reconciled with ourselves. When we are reconciled with ourselves, then with those near to us, we will be reconciled with the whole world. Because, to forgive is the most difficult thing to do, but that is, at the same time, the greatest adventure, and Christians, in particular, are called upon to do it.[[202]](#footnote-202)

In Miloš’s view, *individual reconciliation*, i.e., stabilization of one’s inner core, seems to be a preparation for the act of social reconciliation. Miloš did not elaborate on what reconciliation with oneself means. However, one can assume that, in a post-conflict situation, it would represent harmonization of dissonant self-images, such as ‘I, as a victim,’ ‘I, as a believer,’ ‘I, as a member of my nation,’ ‘I, as a citizen of a (multinational) country,’ etc.

In the second step, reconciliation pertains to *stabilization of group’s identity* in such a way that it does not becomes threatened with the outcome of reconciliation. Otherwise, if the feeling of a group’s self-worth is predicated upon the resistance to be reconciled, then the very project of reconciliation is bound to fail or lack in honesty. Finally, the third step of reconciliation means *going out* of the community towards the other community. This view was seconded by Željko who described the situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina twenty years after the war, as a period of sobering. It seems as if the end of the war created a mixture of disappointment and enthusiasm:

[Reconciliation] cannot be commanded by anyone (…) [N]ow we have entered a phase in which we are sobered [by the seriousness of what we face]. In essence, reconciliation now brings us back to our community. That is to say, before approaching the Other, one needs to see who is the other in one’s own community and then decide, can I forgive that other [within my community] and reconcile [with him or her]? Not enough is being done about that. [Instead,] we fall into the disappointment of inter-religious reconciliation, [the disappointment of] inter-ethnic reconciliation, and [the disappointment of mere] dialogue. And that is a sobering [experience], an impetus to return to our own communities and offer reconciliation from there towards (…) all communities (…) That brings us back to us, but we don’t want to do it—because we doubt even the possibility of it due to the desire that reconciliation be done quickly [and gotten over with]. Reconciliation is not an ideology; it is not a technique. It is spirituality—it springs from faith itself.[[203]](#footnote-203)

## 1.4.2. Reconciliation and institutions

As we could already conclude from previous testimonies on reconciliation, social justice, emotional states, and spiritual activities cannot be separated, and they sooner or later come back together. Željko, who highlighted the fact that reconciliation is a spirituality that “springs from the faith itself” nevertheless insisted that the process of reconciliation necessitates the devotion for truth and justice and that finally it must be institutionalized: “for reconciliation,” he said “individuals are important, because a single person within an institution which went astray has a great power,” but he also suggested that eventually, carriers of reconciliation must be institutions—families, political institutions and religious institutions.[[204]](#footnote-204) Religious communities, Željko argues, have enormous potentials, but they had often institutionalized hatred and gave their legitimations to political institutions. In that sense, the whole society falls into a vicious circle in which all institutions finally become ideologized by political profiteers. To put it differently, Željko puts a strong accent on the role of institutions, but since they are not playing their corrective role against the hegemonic politics, society first needs individuals who would bring institutions back to their track, but ultimately establishing reconciliation as a common horizon which does not die with a single person. Illustrating the importance of courageous individuals such as Willy Brandt, he says “we are waiting for [such] individuals in this country (…), but it seems like waiting for Godot.”[[205]](#footnote-205)

For Blago, institutional change is what fortifies reconciliation. He made a difference between “fragile reconciliation” and “durable reconciliation” with regards to its perceived durability. In Blago’s view, reconciliation in the sense of the absence of revenge and direct violence is already achieved in Bosnia and Herzegovina, but it is not a “durable reconciliation, and it can be ruined tomorrow, and it will be certainly ruined until the [political] situation is resolved. That is foundations for the survival of this state and this community. Until that is resolved, nothing is resolved.”[[206]](#footnote-206) He stressed the importance of political arrangements that would enable equality and equal political participations of all communities in Bosnia and Herzegovina as a necessary ingredient of durable reconciliation. Although reconciliation requires emotional transformations (Blago mentioned that there are already more “positive friendships and collaborations”[[207]](#footnote-207) than negative examples of inter-ethnic distance), those structures of emotions, in his view, still require political armature to stay resilient to future destruction.[[208]](#footnote-208)

Nedim, an imam from a small city in the Republic of Srpska also mentioned the importance of the socio-political arrangements. In his view, the strongest positive influence on reconciliations “would be if all forms of discrimination against a community that suffered violence, would be removed.”[[209]](#footnote-209) However, in his explication, he went a step further and insisted not only on removal of discriminatory legal provisions but also on the transformation of culture in the direction of greater acceptance. The ideal situation for Nedim would be when, besides structural discrimination, people would not feel any discomfort no matter where they live. That would entail free expression of their identity and religious belonging without fear that someone would provoke them or take that away from them.[[210]](#footnote-210)

Those interviews underlined two important things. One is that religious leaders do not see reconciliation as a purely spiritual endeavor. On the contrary, they insist on the importance of the political reforms and social institutions. But, secondly, they believe that religious institutions still have an indispensable role to play in that process. Igor, for instance, compared reconciliation to a train, identifying politics as “a traction engine both of reconciliation and progress, and the Church is the first wagon that follows the engine, providing spiritual and moral support.”[[211]](#footnote-211) The role of the Church, in Igor’s eyes, is to give “moral, spiritual, and cultural fuel” to keep the traction engine in motion.[[212]](#footnote-212) Moreover, as we saw from some of the previous interviews, religious institutions can play not only a supportive but also a corrective role in reconciliation processes by keeping it close to the people themselves (contra ‘reconciliation business’) and by discouraging overtly optimistic plans of reconciliation that do not take seriously the depth and complexities of tragedies.

# 1.5. Reconciliation and memory

While in the context of forgiveness I spoke about the transformation of memories of evil within an individual (liberation from *zlopamćenje*), in the context of reconciliation memory is related to the notion of a joint work. The painful Other is a reminder of what a community wants to forget, and a companion in the discovery of what is still unknown. Memory-work in the context of reconciliation thus appears as a dual process: 1) broadening of previously closed, uncritical group-memories through encounter with the painful Other – *remembering differently* and 2) creating a common space between those extended memories – *remembering (to a certain extent) together*. In the first case, the presence of the Other serves as a corrective against inner biases. The second case is an attempt to go from completely dissonant narratives to a state where remembering together is possible while allowing for legitimate disagreements. Those two processes of *internal* and *external* dealing with memory are, clearly, interlinked.

The work of memory in the context of reconciliation is, on the one hand, manifested as a liberation from negative *myths of the Other*, as a joint effort to discover the troubling sections of the unknown past, and as an attempt to create some common frameworks of memory. In the view of religious leaders, those processes would be largely facilitated by the joint work of independent historians. Still, it is worth emphasizing that just historical research does not guarantee that discovered facts would become a part of collective memory. In that respect, reconciliation can be seen also as a process that enables integration of historical facts into living memory of communities. That is not to say that facts should be modified in order to fit the reconciliation narrative, but – as it was explained earlier – reconciliation is precisely seen as a process that allows for acceptance of uncomfortable truth in a way that is neither destructive nor accusatory, but forward-looking.

## 1.5.1. A need for a historical commission

Interestingly, unlike social scientists who start with the position that every narrative is always relative, my participants repeatedly insisted on the notion of facts. They did not deny the fact that history in Bosnia and Herzegovina currently exists only as a set of three different stories written from the viewpoints of ethnic communities. At the same time, they saw such a situation as an aberration. Mirza suggested that historians should indeed show that there are three divergent stories, but that they should, at the same time, make people aware that they are all victims of such a situation.[[213]](#footnote-213) When I asked Velimir what the fundamental blocks of reconciliation and coexistence would be, he said:

[A]ll peoples who live on these territories have the same mentality and place much emphasis on history. We are all educated through history. If we try, as the Communists did, to sweep history under the carpet and to crush it while going towards some [supposedly] better future, we will make the same mistake, condemning our progeny to a new war. I think that we should begin [with the history of the region] before WWII and employ serious historians from all three sides to make an analysis of everything (…) It [would be] a long process, of course, but… Or to establish a common institute where all sides would agree on people who would [do the] work. But [we shouldn’t place] passionate idiots there, who would work under political directives, but, instead, those who would do the work professionally.[[214]](#footnote-214)

I mentioned to Velimir that some similar initiatives already existed, but that they were never accepted on a broader scale, and he said that the reason for that was transgressive involvement of politics: “I think that those things are again used for the purpose of daily politics. What is at stake here? How are elections won? They are won on the national platform, unfortunately. In the minds of most of the people, there is still this nationalist charge.”[[215]](#footnote-215) As an additional problem, he also mentioned the lack of true experts who would enjoy a good reputation among people. If there were such experts, Velimir said, “those newly composed politicians expulsed them from their local communities.”[[216]](#footnote-216)

Ljudevit, a Catholic friar from Herzegovina, shared the same opinion, i.e., that the joint expert initiative would be beneficial. Regarding the experts, he said that those should be respected in their own communities and perceived as not “*prilivoda*” (literally: the one who pours water from one vessel to another), i.e., not as someone who changes position according to convenience.[[217]](#footnote-217) Therefore, the majority of the respondents emphasized the role of trustworthy historians in establishing a common factual basis, not a narrative that would aim to achieve reconciliation by making everybody look equally guilty. Mirza, for instance, insisted that the solution should not be to put “everything in one bag” but to insist on historical facticity. [[218]](#footnote-218) In Ajdin’s view, things cannot be resolved by fabricated reciprocity in which all sides are equally guilty, but on objectively established truth.[[219]](#footnote-219) From his answer, it was clear that artificial division of responsibility in equal parts would not be a feasible way to reconciliation.[[220]](#footnote-220) According to Ljubo, creation of the “everybody is to blame” narrative is exactly the wrong way for the International Community to resolve the situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina.[[221]](#footnote-221)

In short, there was a broad consensus among religious leaders that reconciliation needs to be rooted in facticity and that attempts to bridge the gap between two parties by relativizing the gap itself constitutes a dead-end street.

One cannot forget that the issue of reconciliation and memory after the 1990s’ wars occurred against the background of the bitter experience of the Yugoslav period in which history was marred under the ideological project of supra-national reconciliation around the Communist idea of “brotherhood and unity” that had a stark ricochet in the period immediately before the war in 1990s. On many occasions during my interviews, respondents expressed the belief that the lack of critical dealing with past crimes during the Yugoslav period made possible the subsequent explosion of memories of suffering that were equally uncritical. In other words, the state-proclaimed reconciliation between former adversaries was not accompanied with the processes of independent historical research. As will be further elaborated in the chapter on memory, people were often afraid to share their testimonies with families. That negative silence and *reconciliation without confrontation with the past* was something that proved to be unfeasible in the long run.

# 1.6. Time of reconciliation

The main idea of reconciliation as an encounter that we operate with does not only suggest a closeness but also the distance. As I mentioned before, reconciliation is not an imposed endeavor, but a mutual *creation* and *negotiation* of the shared space, of a middle ground in which separation becomes transformed into a non-threatening distance. Distance, in this respect, is not necessarily a negative term; it can also be seen also as a ‘breathing space’ that gives enough autonomy to each participant to engage in the demanding process of an encounter. Distance is not just a spatial category. Time plays an equally important role in a chronological distancing that facilitates reconciliation.

For Ljudevit, what curbs reconciliation is precisely the lack of temporal distance: “Time for reconciliation will come only when a new generation arrives, those that were not direct participants in conflicts (…) [T]hey will surely be indoctrinated with what happened but, in some way, the feeling of pain that current generations carry will dwindle.”[[222]](#footnote-222) The natural passage of time is necessary to create positive preconditions for the reconciliation initiatives. Moreover, reconciliation itself requires patience, it is a long and dedicated process that cannot happen overnight nor can it be rushed, or as Hrvoje said: “it cannot happen ‘officially,’ it cannot be decided on some level that ‘we are going to reconcile and that must function that way.’ It simply must happen within people; people have to reconcile.”[[223]](#footnote-223) Mladen held that many of the reconciliation and peacebuilding initiatives were premature. He used as a metaphor a park, stating that decision makers should first let people walk certain paths and only subsequently pave those particular routes through the park. His point was that reconciliation should not be a top-down decision that immediately builds ‘roads’ of reconciliation and then expects people to travel those ‘roads.’ Instead, he was deeply in favor of bottom-up initiatives in which people should be encouraged to find their own ways of pro-social interactions, with support given to the most successful ‘routes.’[[224]](#footnote-224) Reconciliation, therefore, requires a ripe moment, but also time to bear fruit, time to see what works and what fails. Aside from the chronological time, we encountered another religiously specific notion of time in the chapter on forgiveness – the idea of eschatological time, which constitutes the ultimate horizon of reconciliation.

Damjan is a young priest from Herzegovina. I knew before our interview that he had lost parents during the war, and I took much effort to ask questions related to those times in a sensitive and respectful manner. Speaking about reconciliation, he did not fail to mention the importance of history, and tragedies remain its part. However, reconciliation conceived in a theological way, for him, happens as a certain detachment from history, when a tragic event finally becomes unrooted from a limiting particularity of a moment and transposed into a larger, cosmic perspective. He explained this on the example of an Orthodox temple built nearby a place of a large massacre over Serb population in the WWII:

[T]he temple is dedicated to Christ’s Resurrection, to the event that overcomes history, not to mention parts of history or ethnic divisions (…) Christ’s Resurrection pulls us out of history, out of the historical context, out of a current context. Needless to say, in cosmic relations, nation becomes irrelevant (…) Facts are facts, but above that particular history, no matter how bad it is, there is eternity.[[225]](#footnote-225)

Damjan has a very clear Christian view on history, but eternity as a final horizon of reconciliation was also present among Muslim respondents in the context of the Final judgment and settling accounts for history. Harun, for instance, mentioned that some crimes and some tragedies are so deep that they cannot be fully resolved through human affairs and that we should “let God level them.”[[226]](#footnote-226)

These theological views on time can make a fundamental change in the way how reconciliation is understood. One difference was already explained when I discussed the notion of *the Other as the truth*. The idea was that reconciliation stands as the final horizon of history, which gives it additional weight. In Christianity, that vision is even more radical and does not include just a general notion of transcendental reconciliation of historical dissonances, but something even stronger—a spiritual unity of former enemies. As we could see, Miroslav Volf based his influential book *Exclusion and Embrace* precisely on the image of embrace. But, this does not mean that the practice of the embrace is an easy one. When in 1993 Volf gave a public lecture on the importance of the reconciliation between the enemies, Jürgen Moltmann asked a very concrete question: “But, can you embrace a *četnik*?” Četniks were members of the Serbian royalist militia in WWII who committed a number of crimes involving Croats, and certain Serbian military units later embraced this name during the 1990s war. Volf answered “No, I cannot,” adding immediately “but as a follower of Christ I think I should be able to.”[[227]](#footnote-227) The “No” of his answer, however, is still different from a general “No” that would immediately discard such a possibility. By saying “No” and supplementing it with a theological “I should be able to,” he acknowledged the dissonance between the difficult reality and the ideal. His books later demonstrate that it is precisely the eschatological vision of the reconciled humanity (including former enemies) that enables the opening of the initial “No,” allowing for the possibility of inner development that eventually could transform the ideal into an actuality.

# 1.7. Obstacles to reconciliation

Many obstacles to reconciliation have already become evident in my previous discussion. At the beginning, we saw how the fear of failed reconciliation can impede reconciliation initiatives and how the perception of the ripe moment has deep significance. Obviously, ongoing discrimination and immediate physical threats that victims continue to experience are antagonistic to the very notion of the encounter that is free and dialogical. However, given that basic conditions of security and reciprocity are established, we can inquire what further obstacles to reconciliation could occur.

Fra Drago mentions the negative stereotypes that developed in family circles or mono-ethnic communities. He told me an interesting anecdote when he spoke with Muslims soldiers during the war and they told him: “We would forgive but Catholics don’t know how to forgive.”[[228]](#footnote-228) What shocked him was the fact that he had the same opinion about them, believing that Catholics know how to forgive but Muslims are not ready to. Although the topic in question was forgiveness, the consequences are immediately relevant to our discussions on reconciliation because the image of unforgiving Catholics/Muslims impacts negatively the perceived viability of reconciliation.

For Danijel, an important obstacle is artificially produced insecurity that elites create for purposes of ideological manipulation. In his view, they intentionally keep issues unresolved and unclear so that people also remain unreconciled: “The religious ideal of reconciliation will be difficult to implement in this territory. What will stop [these reconciliation plans] will be immature, and insufficiently experienced, [leaders], and, I would say, internally corrupted national politics.[[229]](#footnote-229) In his view, elites (among which he includes religious elites) ceaselessly exploit divisions as their symbolic capital since divisive politics can thrive only if there are perceived threats. Not without connection to the preceding notion, those fears are often heated through propagation of negative stereotypes and contrasting identities. What is curious to note is that Danijel, and many other respondents, believed that so-called ordinary people are ready to forgive and reconcile but that they are kept in place by national and religious elites.

## 1.7.1. Group loyalty as an obstacle to reconciliation

What inhibits the translation of the personal forgiveness to social reconciliation is often fear that someone would be betrayed, even that the Church as an institution would be let down by those believers who ‘rush’ to reconcile. As if the ‘unreconciled’ element serves as a bastion of identity, something that guarantees that “we are right” while “others are wrong,” a division that can easily slip into the contrast between good (us) and evil (them). Normally, one would expect that the situation is exactly the opposite—that people do not want to reconcile, against the advices of religious communities. However, it can also be the opposite case – that people do want to reconcile, but they are afraid that their actions would be disapproved by their religious establishemnts. As Fra Stanko said: “We are still closed in our sheepfolds. We are closed, and we keep people closed.”[[230]](#footnote-230) He gives an example of a Bosnian Franciscan who is often attacked in his own community as a Communist, Serbophil, or Slavophil, simply because of his ecumenical efforts. Stanko witnesses that, after meeting him, he realized that “he is just little broader than all the rest of us.”[[231]](#footnote-231) The situation is even more complex because religious communities are always nominally in favor of reconciliation, but when some concrete actions in that directions are undertaken, they can be seen as too hasty or suspicious.

Even without facing direct criticism from their religious communities, individuals can find themselves in a situation of auto-censorship, thus avoiding the risk of ‘reconciliative betrayal’ altogether. It is for that reason important to establish not just individual precedents, but a common religious ethos in which reconciliation is not seen as something detrimental to a group’s cohesion and identity. First, that step is crucial to religious leaders themselves—it happens in the form of a theological shift that is more receptive to dialogue. Secondly, reconciliation initiatives need to be supported by highly placed religious leaders. Thirdly, the change has to be transferred to the larger group of believers. Jovan, an Orthodox priest in Herzegovina, emphasizes precisely those elements:

I think that the Church should, in this moment of time, take responsibility, no matter how marginalized it is from other institutions. The Church should lead the people and be, as it was throughout history, a bastion of reconciliation. And [I believe] that a priest, a bishop, an episcope, whoever, should always be open for collaboration and dialogue. One should speak about dialogue, and call people to reconciliation and forgiveness, but with a great dose of honesty.[[232]](#footnote-232)

Jovan’s observation could also be read as an impetus for a different form of normativity in which the Church should be the “bastion of reconciliation,” meaning that it should first and foremost give a ‘shelter’ to those who want to reconcile and provide them support. From that perspective, reconciliation is not just an ephemeral phenomenon but the very basis of the Church’s mission, even when that mission displeases political elites that profit from divisions among ethnic groups.

# 1.8. Interim conclusion

One of the most common criticisms of the concept of reconciliation is related to its religious connotations. Since it originated in religious milieu—the argument goes—reconciliation inevitable carries mystical, unrealistic, and potentially negative connotations. It is assumed that religious actors project it on people as a religious duty, expecting them to conform their grievances to some religious utopia. The previous examples to the contrary suggest that such a stance is far too simplistic. We could see that the concrete evaluation of reconciliation and the related concept of forgiveness were very context-sensitive. What unifies them are convictions that reconciliation is never easy or banal. Instead, it is understood as a dialogical encounter which is based on a *belief in reconciliation* as a possibility, but without confusion between potentials and actual circumstances.

This does not negate the fact that religious ideas of reconciliation and forgiveness do aspire to some final state of adjusted and amicable relationships. However, it does not follow that reconciliation as the final horizon can be easily and immediately implemented into concrete historical reality. An assumption that those eschatological and temporal planes can easily coincide would be dishonest not only towards the specificities of a conflict, but also to religious teachings on the ultimate reality that is always viewed as something *in nuce*, and never fully established.[[233]](#footnote-233)

Although it is perceived as an engaged encounter, reconciliation nevertheless appears as a set of many interconnected processes. It is related to emotional and cognitive transformations; it involves spiritual discipline and self-sacrifice; it is initiated by individuals but aims to be stabilized through social institutions and collective ethos. In all those instances, the role of the Other is invaluable. The Other, perceived as a “gift and truth” is a partner in the process of rediscovering the past and constructing some common frameworks of remembering.

An important contribution of this project to both social studies and theology might be precisely the articulation of the reconciliation in the form of a *silently negotiated encounter*, oriented towards *bridging of the dissonance*, which includes emotional, structural, and spiritual factors. At the same time, *reconciliation as an encounter* underlines that reconciliation is always reconciliation with *someone* (contra those cases in which reconciliation is seen as a passive acceptance of the externally imposed political project).

Finally, I believe that duality of time in the religious notion of reconciliation (*here* but not *yet*) can also serve as an innovative way of conceptualizing reconciliation in a non-hegemonic fashion. In the second part of this chapter, I will present the idea of the “degree zero of reconciliation” as a possible solution to the problem that reconciliation can begin only if there is some initial belief in its possibility while at the same time it cannot and should not be externally imposed. It is not difficult to have belief in reconciliation once when there are sufficient signals of goodwill among divided communities. However, the concept of the *degree zero of reconciliation* would be a way to argue in favor of reconciliation even in the worst-case scenario where no such a belief seems to be warranted.

# II. Theoretical perspectives on reconciliation

In this section, I will present certain theoretical perspectives on reconciliation as a broader context within which my previous discussions can be contextualized. The discussion is divided into three parts. First, I will elaborate that the conceptual ambiguity of reconciliation stems from different concepts in relation to which reconciliation is being defined. Depending on the theoretical framing of the authors, they can vary from the mere absence of violence, over different emotional states, to collective spiritual conditions. Various understandings are thus not necessarily a signal of its problematic content, but rather a reflection of different legitimate ways of its conceptualization. Secondly, the distinction will be made between “reconciliation with something” and “reconciliation with someone.” While the first term indicates the acceptance of a certain state of affairs, the second one is understood in a relational manner. In praxis, these two understandings are often in contrast with each other. On the inter-group level, reconciliation *with someone* is often predicated upon justice, truth-telling, accountability, some forms of material and moral reparations, and guarantees of non-repetition. Without those elements, reconciliation seems impossible or even undesirable. My final argument will be that even in the absence of those elements, it might still be meaningful to speak about reconciliation in one specific sense. The new theoretical concept defined as the *degree zero of reconciliation* represents an initial positive step that enables reconciliation but still does not indicate its presence. The *degree zero of reconciliation* is defined against the idea of “perennial enemies” and it is understood as the acceptance that some form of common life with a specific group of people is possible in the future.

Before entering into any further discussion, it is first necessary to clarify the difference between two major ways in which the term reconciliation is used in a relational sense. They can be termed *reconciliation with something* and *reconciliation with someone.*[[234]](#footnote-234)

To reconcile, in the first sense (reconciliation with *something*), would mean to accept the given state of affairs as it is. A person can reconcile herself with the fact that she is terminally ill, or in a general sense, people must reconcile themselves with the fact that they are going to die one day[[235]](#footnote-235). Reconciliation is here a one-way process of acceptance of *something* that cannot be changed. A person who is *reconciled with* *something* is then motivated to give up the fight against it, the fight which seems futile anyway. Individuals who resist reconciliation often use the term in this very sense, conveying a message that they resist accepting a particular state of affairs that is being imposed on them.

On an entirely different note, *reconciliation with someone* is an engaged process that involves actors who are capable of moral responsibility. Reconciliation in this sense implies a certain breach in a relationship, certain disrespect of moral codes, actions against somebody’s dignity and consecutive actions that are made to redress it. In the context of a post-conflict situation, the challenge of reconciliation is therefore primarily related to the second sense, i.e., to *reconciliation with* *someone*. This form of reconciliation can still be subdivided according to the involved actors. The most intuitive case is the reconciliation on the *inter-personal level* (between two individuals) or, in some religious contexts, between God and humans. However, when we analyze reconciliation on the *inter-group level*, or *between an individual and a group*, things have very different dynamics. In the case of inter-group reconciliation, no direct contact is possible, and there is always some form of imagination involved.[[236]](#footnote-236) Even when political representatives do reconciliatory acts, the most they can offer is the cessation of violence that is under their control and change in their political rhetoric. Other than that, they can only promote a vision that members of their respective societies can either embrace or reject. Ultimately, every particular member of those societies has a chance to engage in reconciliation on person-person and person-group levels. This latter process requires certain changes in beliefs, attitudes, and projections of what the other people (*imagined* as a group) are capable of doing in a new situation of conflict.

# 2.1. History of use and the religious origins of the term

One of the reasons why the term reconciliation is both useful and confusing is its persistent use. People feel that the word is meaningful in the context of their interpersonal relations. The spontaneous meaningfulness of the term can at the same time cause a lack of clarity, especially when applied to a different context. Reconciliation was already a prominent concept in Hegel’s *Philosophy of Right,[[237]](#footnote-237)* and it was present in writing about German-French[[238]](#footnote-238) and German-Polish[[239]](#footnote-239) rapprochement after WWII. Its systematic use in political theory and practice, however, came rather late, largely due to the work of the *Truth and Reconciliation Commission* in South Africa.[[240]](#footnote-240) The work of the Commission was also influenced by the archbishop Desmond Tutu who saw reconciliation in connection to the idea of spiritual community, summarized under the term *Ubuntu*[[241]](#footnote-241)*.* From the 1970s onwards, a significant number of national commissions were established with *reconciliation* as one of their central goals.[[242]](#footnote-242) Although the concept of reconciliation is nowadays used in many disciplines, theorists generally acknowledge its religious roots.[[243]](#footnote-243) Philpott underlines an “elective affinity” between religion and reconciliation, arguing that it finds a particularly strong justification in religious texts, traditions, and rituals.[[244]](#footnote-244) This is not to say, however, that the heterogeneity in the understanding of the concept is only something that occurs in political theory. Religious visions of reconciliation significantly differ among themselves.[[245]](#footnote-245) Even within the same religious tradition, concepts such as grace, repentance, forgiveness, and justice create diverse constellations with the idea of reconciliation. Although theologians of Christian provenance agree that reconciliation in the fullest sense is the event between God and humanity, they vary in views as to what the analogical application of the term to the human reality requires.[[246]](#footnote-246) Moreover, their religious overtones do not mean that they tend to easily dispense with the search for justice. An illustrative example is David Bosch’s criticism of “cheap reconciliation” which means “tearing faith and justice asunder, driving a wedge between the vertical and the horizontal. It suggests that we can have peace with God without relationships. (…) Cheap reconciliation means applying a little bit of goodwill and decency to South African society, but this is like trying to heal a festering sore with sticking plaster or treating cancer with an aspirin.”[[247]](#footnote-247) So, despite his overreaching transcendental concerns, Bosch rejects too naïve versions of reconciliation in favor of a holistic engagement with vertical (transcendent), and horizontal (social) perspective.

Similarly, in the context of political and social sciences, the polysemy of reconciliation is visible in the theoretical framework within which reconciliation is placed. For instance, reconciliation in a legal-political framework can be seen as one of the components of transitional justice, whereas in other cases it can be conceptualized as a more permanent task of *coming to terms with the past* even in non-transitional democracies such as Australia, Canada, and the United States.[[248]](#footnote-248) It can also extend far back in history, as was the case with the Spanish acknowledgement that the 1492 expulsion of Jews was wrong.[[249]](#footnote-249) The aim of those public apologies seems to be establishment or reinforcement of some common moral norms. Some authors go even further, accentuating the spiritual notion of reconciliation that is linked to forgiveness and healing.[[250]](#footnote-250) One of the main differences in the conceptualization of reconciliation relates to the theoretical framework in which reconciliation is placed and the implicit expectations it purports.  Bashir and Kymlicka distinguish between three levels: 1) tools or techniques of reconciliation, 2) goals or purposes of reconciliation, and 3) theories of reconciliation. It is actually the third element, theories of reconciliation, “that attempt to provide a normative framework for evaluating the tools and goals of reconciliation, which include Christian theologies of forgiveness, human rights ideologies, and secular theories of nationalism or justice.”[[251]](#footnote-251)

These theories, of course, are not seen in isolation, but in relation to global trends in views on human societies and their changing conditions.[[252]](#footnote-252)

A broad distinction between theories of reconciliation could be made precisely according to the reconciliation goals that are aspired to. There, conceptualization vary from “minimalist views” which does not require much more from the cessation of direct violence and establishment of respect and basic cooperation, till the “maximalist views” which understand reconciliation in terms of forgiveness, trust, and healing, and mutual harmony.[[253]](#footnote-253) In Verdeja’s elaboration, minimalist approaches “formulate reconciliation as simple coexistence between former enemies, a basic agreement by different groups to accept the law rather than violence to resolve disagreements.” [[254]](#footnote-254) These approaches do not require transformative policies, material redistribution, or attempts to publicize the truth about the crimes and establish accountability. While the model might seem the most realistic from the perspective of political pragmatism, it risks playing into the hands of the perpetrators, who would like to ‘forget and move on’ without redistributing resources or access to power.[[255]](#footnote-255) Moreover, due to its focus on procedural justice, Verdeja emphasizes, they have little to say about inter-personal relations, emotions, and sentiments.[[256]](#footnote-256) For maximalists, on the other hand, “reconciliation occurs when perpetrators acknowledge responsibility, repent, and then are forgiven by their victims.”[[257]](#footnote-257) Those approaches are strongly influenced by theological notions of moral renewal and solidarity, and they often promote a return to a prelapsian state of agreement and harmony. Typically focused on personal acts of forgiveness and repentance, they cannot be easily translated into other social domains.[[258]](#footnote-258)

A similar classification is between “weak” and “strong” reconciliation that goes from non-violent interactions to complete transformation of relationships[[259]](#footnote-259) or “thin” and “thick” reconciliation.[[260]](#footnote-260) What constitutes the difference in the spectrum from *minimal* to *maximal*, or from *thin* to *thick*, is usually the inclusion of different components in that concept. Similarly, as Rosoux suggests, there is a whole spectrum of different reconciliation models between the minimalist and maximalist poles.[[261]](#footnote-261) Those in the *minimalist* hemisphere do not imply much more then mutual understandings between former enemies while those on the *maximalist* side perceive reconciliation as “a transcendental process that implies the truth, justice, and forgiveness.”[[262]](#footnote-262) This particular vision of reconciliation consequently determines the desired goals. Those in favor of minimalist versions aim at the establishment of peaceful coexistence tied with mutual respect, while the maximalist ones tend to operate with more spiritual notions such as those of harmony.[[263]](#footnote-263) In other words, views that lean towards the minimalist side of the spectrum emphasize the structural conditions of security, institutional arrangements, and cooperation in the fields of economy and politics. On the other hand, the maximalist side of the spectrum incorporates socio-psychological approaches that emphasize the progressive change in attitudes, beliefs, motivations, and emotions between former adversaries, as well as spiritual approaches that put forward the importance of collective healing and rehabilitation of both victims and offenders.[[264]](#footnote-264) When involved parties and potential mediators operate with different versions of the term, implementation of practical policies can lead to tension and resistance.[[265]](#footnote-265) It is important to note that those views are not necessarily normative, but they still attempt to answer the fundamental question: How to recognize that reconciliation is taking place in a post-conflict society?

In Clark’s view, what constitutes a problem with minimalist views is the fact that such visions of reconciliation are hardly distinguishable from mere coexistence, negotiated settlement, or negative peace, defined as an absence of violence. According to her: “[T]hin definitions [of reconciliation] encourage conceptual blurring by equating reconciliation with the related concepts of, *inter alia,* coexistence and co-operation. While coexistence and co-operation can certainly be viewed as indicators of reconciliation, the latter loses its specificity if it is merely seen as a derivate of these terms.”[[266]](#footnote-266)

In terms of operationalization, an important question is whether reconciliation is a conceptually useful term when presented only as a binary state (as an absence or presence of direct violence) or measured through a proxy (e.g., a degree of co-operation). Another obvious problem that needs to be addressed is whether there could be collaboration without reconciliation. When reconciliation is defined in terms of collaboration and exchange, the question becomes circular. For that reason, social-psychologists insist on a *thicker* term of reconciliation that envisages some change in attitudes, emotions, and behavior. For Bar-Tal and Bennik, reconciliation is the process that is not limited to political leaders, but it extends to the society as a whole, and goes

[B]eyond the agenda of formal conflict resolution to changing the motivations, goals, beliefs, attitudes, and emotions of the great majority of the society members regarding the conflict, the nature of the relationship between the parties, and the parties themselves. These changes take shape via the reconciliation process, promote the peace as a new form of intergroup relations, and serve as stable foundations for cooperative and friendly acts that symbolize these relations.[[267]](#footnote-267)

Accordingly, Bar-Tal and Bennik see reconciliation not as a program or event, but more as a goal that requires a long-term engagement, emphasizing the importance of the critical mass of people who accept reconciliatory attitudes. That is a signal that reconciliation is not just the *dream of a few*, but truly a dominant social trend. Kriesberg emphasizes that reconciliation between large-scale units can simultaneously have different degrees because “members of the units generally differ considerably in the kind and level of their reconciliation with members of antagonistic peoples. The reconciliation may be comprehensive and profound for many people or for only a few persons on each side. The proportions and status of such persons obviously have great significance for the likely stability of whatever accommodation may exist.”[[268]](#footnote-268)

Another ambiguous element related to reconciliation is how it is meant to proceed—while in some cases it is seen as a goal, in others, it is conceptualized as a process,[[269]](#footnote-269) sometimes in connection to different stages[[270]](#footnote-270) that can be manifested through reconciliation-events.[[271]](#footnote-271) Depending on the theoretical operationalization, authors sometimes see reconciliation as an instrument for some other goal or as the goal itself.[[272]](#footnote-272) The process of reconciliation can be further imagined as a linear development or a recursive and cyclical process[[273]](#footnote-273) that can include individuals, interest groups, and state-actors (usually divided into *bottom-up* and *top-down* approaches).[[274]](#footnote-274) Depending on the role of agency, reconciliation can be viewed as a quasi-spontaneous process that is self-generated or as a plan that has to be directed through various initiatives.[[275]](#footnote-275) This is related to the question of applicability: whether reconciliation can be presented as a process with salient elements that are applicable to most or all post-conflict societies or as a contextually-sensible idea that has a different resonance in various cultural settings.[[276]](#footnote-276)

Even in this short overview, we could see that the multiplicity of meanings related to reconciliation is a feature not only of political but also of religious language. However, that does not necessarily suggest their lack of usability. As with many other terms that have a broad scope, reconciliation can be envisaged in many different forms. What could move discussions further, I suggest, is its specification, rather than elimination. Even in the concrete political application of the terms, as Schaap suggests, certain ambiguity is not necessarily bad. From a more positive perspective, it can be conducive to a fruitful political debate:

If we had to agree on a definition of reconciliation before we could begin to reconcile, reconciliation would never be initiated. Yet a willingness to reconcile, enabled by the ambiguity contained within such a collective intention, might provide the basis for an overlapping dissensus in relation to which people can debate and contest the terms of their political association (…) In contrast, reconciliation becomes ideological when its meaning is over-determined. For it then tends to function as a meta-political ideal that disciplines conflict.[[277]](#footnote-277)

One way forward is to specify semantic dimensions along which the term is being developed, and the connections (both negative and positive), among them. Following the previous discussion, Table 1 summarizes some differentiation criteria along which the concept of reconciliation can be understood[[278]](#footnote-278):

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| DIMENSION | CONCEPTUALIZATION OF RECONCILIATION |
| *Content* | **Structural**: reconciliation as absence of violence, economic and political cooperation  **Socio-psychological**: reconciliation as a change in motivations, goals, attitudes, beliefs, and emotions  **Spiritual**: reconciliation as catharsis, forgiveness, healing, spiritual harmony |
| *Proceeding* | **Static**: state, locus, moment, event  **Dynamic**: reconciliation understood as a goal (to aspire to) that presupposed a long-term process  **Mixed**: reconciliation as a process; sometimes defined through discrete stages or critical moments, such as those of “ripeness”[[279]](#footnote-279) |
| *Actors* | individuals, civil groups, political representatives, political parties, international actors |
| *Aims* | **Reparative**: achievement of socio-economic equality through material, moral and institutional support (e.g., positive discrimination in employment and education) to an affected community  **Restorative**: restoration of social trust, restoration of unity between offenders and victims, restoration of the possibility of a common future, creation of new identities (this can also be interpreted as a way of *prevention* of future conflicts). |
| *Direction* | bottom-up, top-down |
| *Level* | inter-personal, inter-group, intra-state, international |
| *Incentive* | reconciliation as a spontaneous process vs. directed process  **Sources of incentives:** from outside, from inside (either from one or both groups) |
| *Teleology* | reconciliation as a goal in itself vs. an instrument to some other ends |
| *Applicability* | similar dynamics in all post-conflict situations vs. cultural-specific approach |

Table 1: Reconciliation – dimensions and conceptualizations

As was mentioned previously, the way in which reconciliation is conceptualized is also largely dependent on its related concepts. Its meaning, assumed goals, and tools are strongly influenced by specific forms of that relationality. Image 1 extends on Table 1 and drafts a possible way to understand the spectrum of different meanings that reconciliation acquires.

**RECONCILIATION**

violence vengeance isolation distrust hatred division discord

of violence revenge coexistence trust empathy friendship healing

Cessation of forbearance from

**retributive justice vs. amnesty**

**forgiving vs. unforgiving**

**memory**

Religious ideas

Philosophical/moral ideas

Political/sociological views

**peaceful structural conditions**

**conflictual structural conditions**

**pro-social emotions**

**divisive emotions**

**in contrast to**

**in relation to**

**spiritual states**

**spiritual states**

**?**

**Minimal/thin maximal/thick**

Image 1: A conceptual mapping of reconciliation

As we can see from the representation, different theories inform the ways in which reconciliation is related to peaceful structural conditions and pro-social emotions, andcontrasted to conflictual structural conditions and divisive (unfavorable) emotions.

The imagined spectrum could range from *minimal* reconciliation, which is little more than the cessation of violence, to *maximal* reconciliation, which includes pro-social emotions such as empathy, and even collective spiritual values, such as healing.

The upper and the lower zone depict some common concepts used in different theories of reconciliation. The upper zone contains those that carry favorable connotations, while the lower zone holds the terms with less favorable connotations. The middle zone comprises the topics of retributive justice, memory, and forgiving. These are placed between because different authors evaluate them differently. A good example is the issue of forgiveness. While some authors see forgiveness as a precondition for the development of pro-social emotions, others argue that it often has undesirable effects on victims of grave violence.[[280]](#footnote-280) A similar thing may be said about truth-telling. While in some cases, it can have beneficial effects on victims, in others it can lead to re-traumatization and can have negative consequences on their psychological health.[[281]](#footnote-281) Something similar can be said about the topic of memory and commemoration. Namely, it is difficult to say whether collective memory contributes to improvement of structural conditions and development of pro-social emotions or whether constant remembrance of tragedies feeds into divisive emotions of fear and anger.[[282]](#footnote-282) A better question might be: In which phase and in what way is a specific type of memory related to structural conditions, emotions, and spiritual states? In the following section, I will focus more specifically on certain types of resistance that stem from these ambiguities.

# 2.2. Resistance to reconciliation: From reconciliation with something to reconciliation with someone

In a 2003 interview to a newspaper *El Periodista,* Chilean sociologist Tomás Moulián stated the following regarding the question “Whether reconciliation in Chile is still on hold?”:

Absolutely on hold. I would say that reconciliation will never exist. Reconciliation is a bad word, to begin with. Reconciliation is a brotherhood. In other words, it is when two brothers divided by a conflict recognize their common lineage, that the same blood runs through their veins. But there is no same blood running through the veins of Pinochetists and anti-Pinochetists. The topic of reconciliation is fake, it is posed in a completely wrong way. What we have to learn is to live in tolerance, but I have no reason to love the torturer. No, that is a pure mystical illusion. It is a term from the theological language that has been displaced into political discourse. Yes, for practical and ethical reasons, we can say that we need to live in peace, in order not to repeat the carnages, the night of the Saint Bartolomeo (…) I am not a son of a disappeared nor have I any disappeared person in my family, but I do not reconcile with those who have tortured or killed the missing detainees. No, I do not reconcile myself.[[283]](#footnote-283)

What Moulián criticizes is the pressure to see reconciliation in connection with forgiveness and emotional closeness between perpetrators and victims. This is at the same time one of the most common criticisms of the whole concept. When understood in such a sense, reconciliation opens a number of doors to abuses in dealing with a legacy of violence. On the one hand, it puts a moral pressure on victims to grant forgiveness, creating a virtual division between *good victims* who are willing to concede and *bad victims* who are not ready to do that.[[284]](#footnote-284) On the other hand, it gives a social platform to political ideologues to use reconciliation as a cover for abuses, in a sense that “[d]ictators and war-makers pay lip-service to the value of reconciliation while aggression continues.”[[285]](#footnote-285) Moreover, a call for reconciliation can merely be a way to avoid legal sanctions and the linked processes of lustration or social exclusion. In line with the initial differentiation, it would be better to see this resistance to reconciliation as a special case, i.e., as a resistance to being reconciled *with* *something*, with a certain state of affairs, with programs or politics that protect the hidden interests of elites or place an additional burden on victims. Schaap makes an important distinction between reconciliation as ideology and politics:

In its ideological aspect reconciliation demands forgiveness from the victims of injustice as a condition of their recognition as free and equal co-members of the political community. As politics, in contrast, reconciliation would be predicated on gratitude that it is only due to a *willingness* of those formerly oppressed to forgive (in the political sense of being willing to countenance sharing the same political institutions with their former oppressors) that talk of reconciliation is possible at all. Such an awareness introduces a reflexivity into the politics of reconciliation in recognizing the right of those previously oppressed not to reconcile and hence the need to furnish reasons to reconcile.[[286]](#footnote-286)

Therefore, in his interview, Moulián rejected the ideological view that represented reconciliation as *mission accomplished*, demanding forced engagement into the construction of positive emotions between the divided groups. However, when he says that “yes, for practical and ethical reasons, we can say that we need to live in peace, in order not to repeat the carnages, the night of the Saint Bartolomeo,” he is already making a significant political concession. That is, he calls for a form of relationship which is not purely retributive. The invitation to live in peace in order not to repeat the carnage requires, by necessity, some form of positive imagination, some basic recognition of a possibility of a shared non-violent future.

In the strict sense, reconciliation, even in the context of retributive punishments, always involves some form of forgiveness (understood in the etymological sense of giving up something). To be more precise, except in cases of direct vigilante justice, the great majority of victims *gives away/forgives*the possibility of retaliation by the same measure, thus accepting the notion that justice can be achieved despite the obvious asymmetry in suffering.[[287]](#footnote-287) Practically speaking, victims must accept the reality that even the most notorious perpetrators will receive prison sentences which are usually less than 40 years for crimes that include mass-killings and unmeasurable amounts of suffering. They are thus legally obliged *to* *for-give* any other measure of punishment they might see as appropriate and delegate the exclusive execution of punitive measure to national or international courts. Of course, the reasons for this are quite evident—the private execution of justice would lead to anarchy and social chaos. At the same time, one must acknowledge that legal punishments always remain symbolic, and victims must *forgive* everything else. Punishments are presented as a symbol both to victims and society in general, with the aim to end the violence and establish peaceful existence in which no additional punitive actions will be executed.

Reconciliation *with someone*, one the other hand, can take various forms. However, it does not imply the necessity of a too easy dispensation of negative attitudes, even when such a stance is presented as politically opportune.

Such reconciliation thus needs time. First of all, in order to be reconciled with *someone*, that *someone* needs to be acknowledged and have a space to articulate his or her personal or communal identity. That is why de Gruchy emphasizes that, “Reconciliation has to do with the recovery, not the loss, of cultural and other identities, and at the same time the encouragement of multiple identities that build bridges rather than reinforce divisions.”[[288]](#footnote-288) What is important here is the realization that reconciliation with someone requires parity between the participants, otherwise the project of ‘reconciliation’ might just be a prolongation of the will of the oppressor. In situations where there is a great disbalance of power, it is first necessary to let the victim or the victim-group ‘recover’ their identity in order to achieve a sense of basic equality but – de Gruchy emphasizes – not in such a way that the restored identity becomes a reason for new divisions, instead serving as encouragement to build bridges. Only when people feel that their identity is recognized and restored will they be ready to take the position of the other. Only when they are able to tell their own story, we might say, will they be ready to listen to the story of the other side as well.

It is not a coincidence that art and story-telling (truth-telling) are often an important part of reconciliation processes.  In their article *Secret and Sacred Places*, De Bruyne and De Maeseneer analyze the role of theatre in processes of reconciliation. Using the example of Teya Sepinuck’s production of *We Carried Your Secrets* in Londonderry (Northern Ireland), in which the director first interviewed forty people about the period of the “Troubles” (a period of conflict in Northern Ireland between the Catholic and Protestant religious groups)’ and then engaged some of them in the process of the production. In citing this example De Bruyne and De Maeseneer demonstrate the importance of inhabiting the perspective of the Other.[[289]](#footnote-289) The innovative aspect of Sepinuck’s play is that the actors did not stick to their story but took part in telling the stories of the others while utilizing much care and responsibility.[[290]](#footnote-290) The most creative part of the process happened in silence, in the safe space of the rehearsal room where participants had the freedom (and responsibility) to experiment with the stories of the others.[[291]](#footnote-291) For authors, there is a striking parallel between that process and the Catholic sacrament of reconciliation which, before re-incorporation of a penitent into a community, allows for a confidential and silent time/space of the confessional.[[292]](#footnote-292) The authors additionally observe how popular culture has lost patience with ‘secrets’ and confidentiality, and similarly is also the case with mourning – the transitional period of detaching ourselves from the past while staying connect to it in some way.[[293]](#footnote-293) If we extend the structure of a theatrical play onto the entire process of reconciliation, we can see how important it is to allocate sufficient time and space for “secrecy,” i.e. non-exposure, and mourning. Before a public performance, participants of a theatrical play need to learn how to be comfortable with both their own stories and the stories of the Others. They need safe time and space to learn and experiment, otherwise, if they are exposed too quickly, the dominant emotion will be that of shame. Additionally, the element of mourning reminds us that reconciliation cannot be too hasty. That is why it is important to keep in mind that reconciliation is a process that can have different degrees of ‘thickness.’

In a realist sense, the most likely scenario of reconciliation between divided communities could be coexistence without violence, or *peace without reconciliation*, which does not assume cordial relations or confession of wrongs.[[294]](#footnote-294) This minimal version of reconciliation can accommodate even parallel lives of two communities that live next to each other, yet still not together. Their life in a state of so-called *negative peace* might be a result of negotiations that are not satisfactory to any side, but which nevertheless brought direct violence to an end. In such a state, it would be too naive to expect some joint initiatives related to the legacy of a violent past. Such minimal vision does not require any substantial emotional and spiritual life between the communities. The more maximalist views, for instance Appleby’s view of the *true reconciliation*, require a sense of community, and after a period of conflict, its most frequent prerequisites are “a process of fact-finding, acknowledgment of wrongs, accountability for those crimes, reparation and retributive justice, restorative justice and forgiveness.”[[295]](#footnote-295) Reconciliation understood in such a way “may actually stand in the way of minimal but real progress in negotiations within a retributive paradigm” that raises the question as to whether it is better “to strive for the limited but realizable modus vivendi than the Utopian state of ‘reconciliation’?”[[296]](#footnote-296)

A similar dilemma can be articulated in relation to memory. Strictly speaking, reconciliation and forgiveness are both predicated upon memory. An unremembered or unperceived offense does not require forgiveness and does not cause the kind of damage in a relationship that would ask for reconciliation. In Heinrich Böll’s essay *Der Preis der Versöhnung* the mentioned “price” of reconciliation is not the negative price of collective guilt that has to be paid as a form of punishment; it is a rather a price that has to cover the costs of reconciliation, and they are principally the memorial ones. Böll warns that the peace cannot be trusted. The machinery for the production of thoughts (*Meinungsmaschinen*) constantly produces banality, which threatens to push the horrors of the past into irrelevance. And, because of that, the reasons for reconciliation can easily sink into oblivion and fall prey to newly created interests.[[297]](#footnote-297) In another essay, *Warnung vor Herrn X.*, he describes precisely that sinister normalization of life that makes past evils, to a new generation twenty years in the future, as unreal as a fairytale.[[298]](#footnote-298)

Reconciliation, to put it differently, requires constant re-actualization of the *reasons* for reconciliation, which is a commemorative project. Reconciliation, for Böll, is not a synonym for peace, because peace has the mechanisms that can push reconciliation into irrelevance. Rather, reconciliation is a fragile project that must constantly be translated into the reality of everyday life, stressing that past terrors were real, that new terrors can always occur in seemingly peaceful routines, and that reconciliation in that respect stands as an arch that rests on the pillars of the past and future, both of which are necessary for its stability. However, more specific models of memory-work are, once again, dependent on theoretical approaches to reconciliation. Minimalist and maximalist views, in that respect, assume very different degrees of common engagement in elaboration of the past.[[299]](#footnote-299)

# 2.3. Reconciliation and memory

As was indicated in our schematic presentation, memory stands in a *gray zone* with respect to reconciliation. Instead of seeing it in a generic way, it would be better to ask what forms of memory can facilitate or impede which types of reconciliation. Without the scope to go into detail, I would just like to sketch four simple regimes of memory divided between the axes of victims-offenders and memory-forgetting (see Image 2, below).

**VICTIMS**

**OFFENDERS**

**FORGETTING**

**REMEMBERANCE**

**DENIAL**

Past crimes and victims are forgotten or have faded away. Denial of crimes.

**AMNESIA**

Offenders are forgotten or presented as exceptions. Denial of larger social responsibility.

**MORAL REPARATION**

Commemoration of victims serves as a form of moral reparation

**DETERRENT**

Reconciliation comes because memory of crimes serves as a deterrent to new potential offenders

Image 2: Regimes of forgetting and remembrance in relation to past atrocities

In the two upper squares, we have two forms of forgetting: forgetting victims (*denial*) and forgetting offenders (amnesia). The idea is the following: If terrors are denied or minimized, society goes on as if nothing happened—reconciliation wants to be achieved by ‘not bringing up the past tragedies.’ This is not to say that something like that is practically possible, but just to present the basic idea that links forgetting to the establishment of a social order. An example can be a denial of the Communist crimes in pre-1989 Eastern Europe regimes. In the long run, this form of memory-politics creates a schizophrenic situation of “knowing yet concealing; being informed but keeping quiet; wanting to forget but remembering; seeking good but doing wrong; wanting to be conciliating and rebelling.”[[300]](#footnote-300) This problem will be discussed more fully in the chapter on memory.

In the two lower squares, the past breaches are acknowledged as a first step towards reconciliation. Saying that, we only open a set of additional issues which ask about proper timing, modes, and ethical principles that can guide the “work of memory” (*travail de mémoire*).[[301]](#footnote-301) Especially, when understood in line with a *thicker* version of reconciliation “[t]he reconstruction of the past is a crucial part of reconciliation, because the collective memory of each side underlines each side’s version. The new beliefs formed in the reconciliation process should present the past in a balanced and objective way. This process requires a critical examination of the history of the conflict.”[[302]](#footnote-302)

Reconciliation is, in this way, organically linked to memory and, especially in the post-conflict situation, to the notion of truth that is discovered through memory,[[303]](#footnote-303) but it does not follow that the presence of a memory of past conflicts automatically leads to reconciliation. Memory can be evoked to create a barrier, with the argument that the past was so painful that no prospect of reconciliation seems feasible. On the other hand, that same memory can be a source of inspiration that reminds people that, without reconciliation, the horrors of the past could easily be repeated. While in the first case, memory is understood as a way to preserve the past (*against* reconciliation), in the second sense it is seen as a way to secure a brighter future (*through* reconciliation). This duality illustrates not only the diachronic character of memory, which involves both reconstruction of the past and imagination of a possible future, but also the complexities related to its moral and ethical aspects. The decision is often a matter of priorities which are either put on presentation of facts or social cohesion.

When memory is given priority, it is seen as an internal cohesive element of a community that has suffered, but it does not immediately imply any form of reconciliation. In certain cases, the group can share the perception that reconciliation might require certain compromises with regards to memory. Thus, the affected group might feel that their memory of past evils could be diminished in favor of political or diplomatic processes. Consequently, they might insist that the accent should be put on the memory of the affected community, not on reconciliation. In their view, the only way to ensure the non-repetition of evils is by *remembering correctly* without avoidance of difficult topics such as responsibility for the war, drawing clear lines between victims and offenders, etc. Memory, in this case, represents a certain border or limit to any prospect of reconciliation. In other words, reconciliation can take place only if the memory of an affected community is fully acknowledged, undisputed and accepted by the other side. A motto of this approach could be: *We cannot live together until we can remember together.*

On the other hand, memory of past conflicts can be seen as something that has primarily an *inter*-communal (not *intra*-communal) value. Thus, the argument goes, memory of past evils is valuable insofar as it leads to reconciliation between groups affected by former hostilities. Non-repetition of evils is ensured primarily through rapprochement of former enemies and development of social ties. Memory, in this sense, does not precede reconciliation but develops alongside it. The idea is to start with a process of reconciliation which allows for differences in memory, working with the assumption that they will get smaller over time. In other words, the rationale here is: *We should live together although we cannot remember together.*

None of these scenarios is fully achievable in its ideal-type form and the relationship between memory and reconciliation is better understood as a relationship between two dynamic phenomena than between two stable entities. That is to say, both of them have ‘gravitational centers’, but they are never fully centralized. In the previous interviews, we could see both trends. On the one hand, respondents insisted on the importance of historical facts, but, at the same time, they emphasized the need for establishing some common framework of remembering. The concept of *zlopamćenje* helps us see that remembrance of past tragedies, even if grounded in facts, can be antagonistic to any prospect of a common life. This happens when remembering is conducted purely as an inner-group effort and so is prone to biases and linked with the desire to revenge or retaliate for crimes. Reconciliation was thus seen as an encounter with the painful Other in which both parties gradually broadened their previously self-centered memories and created certain bridges between formerly incompatible regimes of *zlopamćenje*. Respondents also acknowledged that a post-conflict situation requires recognition of inevitable pluralities of memories. However, those pluralities should not be confused with disinterest (i.e., that each group has its own story), or with relativism (i.e., that all narratives of the past are equally valid). It is rather an invitation to partake in common engagement, discovering convergences based on facts and legitimate differences that arise from their interpretations.[[304]](#footnote-304)

In short, memory does not necessarily lead to reconciliation, but there can be no reconciliation without memory. Memory has both inclusive and exclusionary elements,[[305]](#footnote-305) and remembrance of tragedy, especially if done in an exclusionary way, can lead to isolation or the prolongation of silent hostilities.[[306]](#footnote-306) Thus both memory and reconciliation are to be understood as unfinished projects that can mutually inform each other. In the best-case scenario, memory can be a strong incentive for reconciliation. This is generally the case when collective commemoration includes unambiguous acknowledgment of guilt, affirmative remembrance of victims, expressions of remorse which are coupled with sincere desires for reparations, and clear orientation towards non-repetition. Reconciliation, in that case, can be imagined as a joint work to create a common stance towards history and its lessons. But the final question relates to the completely opposite situation where none of these positive steps are taken: Is it possible (or even morally permissible) to speak about reconciliation when the legacy of the difficult past is met with denial and rejection?

# 2.4. Degree Zero of Reconciliation or reconciliation in the worst-case scenario

As we can see, a commonly shared opinion among academics is that reconciliation (unlike forgiveness which can sometimes be unilateral) is a dual process with certain prerequisites, such as the establishment of physical security and equal statuses for both parties, acceptance of the moral responsibility of perpetrators, and willingness to sincerely engage in a process of rapprochement. The absence of some of those elements would render the whole process politically unfeasible, socially undesirable, or even ethically unacceptable. As was discussed earlier, reconciliation in such a situation could be perceived by victims as an additional insult, a moral burden that is placed on their shoulders against their will. Therefore, without some minimal engagement of the *other side* all prospects of reconciliation seem to fade.

Aside from the notion that small-scale initiatives could provide a seed for broader actions, very little discussion concerns what to do in a situation that seems very hostile to every form of reconciled life. This argument of small-scale grass-root initiatives that lead to broader actions, as a matter of fact, transfers the issue one step further, but the question still remains: Why would anyone, even on a small-scale, engage in the process of reconciliation if there is no visible will from the other side to do the same?

The crux of our problem can be rephrased as a quest for basic ethical grounds that enable victims to engage in the process of reconciliation even when the opposing side remain disengaged. This quest, of course, should not go in the direction of re-traumatization of victims, and must look for some reasons—if there is any—that do not take away the active freedom of the injured side. Simultaneously, however, it should seek to re-establish the humanity of the perpetrator. This baseline, which can be termed the *reconciliation as a bare minimum* or the *degree zero of reconciliation* (DZR) is, in my view, the acceptance that there could be, in some closer or more distant future, a possibility of common life between previously antagonistic parties. The ethical reasoning that I propose is resistance against the creation of perennial enemies and the acceptance of the common humanity of all, including former enemies.

# 2.5. Degree Zero of Reconciliation in contrast to perennial enmity

In a very recent survey among Bosniaks and Croatian faculty students in Sarajevo (*N*=105) and Mostar (*N*=144), in Bosnia and Herzegovina, conducted in December 2016 and January 2017,[[307]](#footnote-307) one of the questions was related to the nature of the conflicts between the two mentioned groups. Respondents could choose on a scale ranging from “completely surprising historical exception” to “historical necessity that cyclically repeats, as it was in the past, so in future.” Around one-fifth of respondents (18.8% of Bosniaks and 21% of Croats) selected the latter option, understanding the conflicts as a historical necessity between the two groups, even though they have not previously had large inter-group conflicts.

Of course, this example is not sufficient to make generalizations, but their responses remain indicative of the problems that are still present even more than twenty years after the conflicts. Such a fatalistic view of *conflict as a historical rule* easily encroaches on other aspects of social life. For instance, if conflicts are viewed as a necessity, then peace can never be understood as something stable, but rather as a transitory phase between times of conflict.

Therefore, I argue that reconciliation at its bare minimum, or as its own condition of possibility, should be understood in opposition to the process of the creation of perennial enemies. Unlike an enemy who exists in the present and represents a threat to the current system, a *perennial enemy* is an enemy clothed in a shroud of quasi-eternity, always in the form of collectivity, and its actions threaten not only the present, but also the future. A perennial enemy stands in opposition to any form of reconciliation and it cannot bear an individual name. Instead, it carries a generic label onto which all *social sins* can be projected. Examples of perennial enemies include a Capitalist in the Communist ideology, a Jew in Nazi Germany,[[308]](#footnote-308) the West to the current ISIS. The danger of the same logic hovers over every post-conflict group. Decisive rejection of reconciliation thus opens a door to the possibility of creating perennial enemies, particularly after wars or conflicts. Take for instance the wars in Balkans. The bloody period of the 20th century gave an excuse for those who wanted to declare that, e.g., Serbs and Croats are perennial enemies (or Bosniaks for that matter) and that they cannot be trusted. Seen in that light, all peaceful periods that preceded conflicts are postulated as exceptions to the rule of perpetual hatred.

The DZR can thus be defined, in positive terms, as the acceptance of the common humanity of an enemy and the acceptance of the possibility of a common future. In negative terms, it can be defined in opposition to the idea of perennial enemies. However—and this is an important detail—the DZR still does not represent any positive degree of reconciliation itself; it is still not even the degree one. Nevertheless, it represents a framework, a scale, a possibility of existence in which reconciliation can grow. In the DZR, reconciliation is *already there* since it includes actions defined in positive and negative terms, but it does *not yet* represent any actual growth. However, it would be incorrect to take it for granted. The DZR does not exist by itself—it still requires some active engagement in attitudes, beliefs, and even behavior. At the same time, it is not to be equated with the notion of availability, since the DZR requires the availability for a very specific idea, not just availability in general. Availability, for instance, can be phrased in the following way: *I am available to help someone if he or she needs urgent help, but I will never accept the idea that we can live together. Our current social state is just a temporary arrangement that will last until the next chance to achieve ethnically pure areas*. Such availability does not represent even the degree zero of reconciliation. Thus, availability can be present even if the DZR is not there. On the other side, the DZR can exist even amidst the bloodiest conflicts, for instance among those who oppose dehumanizing war rhetorics. Therefore, the DZR is oriented towards *someone* who might be seen as a perennial enemy, and it is not a generic idea of a *happy future for all people*which is so abstract that it does not invoke any obligations.

The reason why the DZR can still be seen as a form of reconciliation is because it already represents reconciliation with a *specific someone*, and without it, no other forms of reconciliation are imaginable.[[309]](#footnote-309) Without some change in the image of perennial enemies there is no real possibility of imagining the end of circular violence, and every period of peace could simply be seen as a truce during which another conflict is prepared. This act of reconciliation, at the degree zero, is both actual and distanced. For a person who accepts it, it is just a beginning that signifies that reconciliation is *already here*, but *not yet achieved*. The DZR is, to conclude, an imaginative act that constitutes a vision, or hope. In that capacity, it is real as far as it forms the attitudes and decisions of a person.

# III. Concluding remarks: Broken harmonium and broken harmonies

In the first part of this chapter, I attempted to outline certain specificities of religious approaches to reconciliation derived from the interviews. Firstly, we noted a strong overlap between religious views on forgiveness and reconciliation. However, while forgiving was understood primarily as an individual process, reconciliation included the element of mutuality, although, as was also shown, religious leaders in certain cases operate under the notion of *reconciliation with oneself*, which represents an endeavor to reach a spiritual stability that prepares an individual for reconciliation with the Other.

From the religious standpoint, it was stressed, reconciliation is based on and preceded by *belief in reconciliation,* which is theologically anchored in eschatological visions of a reconciled humanity and, in Christianity, in the belief in Christ’s reconciliatory work. However, it was emphasized that these visions of an ultimately harmonious reality do not presume that reconciliation in concrete historical circumstances is easily achievable. On the contrary, the prevailing image was that of a discomforting encounter with a painful Other. In that encounter, the parties engage in some sort of silent negotiation about the past and the future. Insistence on the encounter with the concrete painful Other, who is *the truth and the gift*, thus shows that reconciliation can neither be an abstract activity that avoids or suppresses ‘painful’ elements of the past nor a proclaimed state that simply needs to be accepted. The notion of an encounter thus connected reconciliation to forgiveness and memory. In that respect, it was argued that reconciliation does not presume a too easy granting of forgiveness or acceptance of an apology. Using the opening example of the parish priest who resists such a view, it was emphasized that such a notion could lead to a certain banality of peace and reconciliation, which are banal precisely because they seem self-evident while in reality they do not create any form of moral obligation. Additionally, reconciliation and memory were conceptualized as mutually dependent processes. While reconciliation cannot be based on denial, through the notion of *zlopamćenje* it was shown that certain forms of memory can obstruct any prospect of reconciliation. This was further elaborated in the second part, where the imperative of “living together” was counter-balanced with the challenge of “remembering together.”

It is important to note that religious views on reconciliation are very pluralistic and involve both spiritual and practical elements, both personal and group efforts, and both religious and political institutions. At the same time, the red thread that connects them was a profound conviction in not only desirability but also the possibility of reconciliation, at least over a long-term perspective.

In the second part of this chapter, I engaged with certain philosophical and socio-political conceptualizations of reconciliation. By contrasting two terms—*reconciliation with something* and *reconciliation with someone*—I attempted to show that the concept of reconciliation can have different and even contrasting meanings. It was demonstrated that both religious and political views on inter-group reconciliation have an inherent heterogeneity which is, to a great extent, dependent on the theoretical frameworks from which it stems. By the same token, the theoretical conceptualizations of reconciliation assume specific *goals* and *tools*.

From the psycho-sociological standpoint, reconciliation is viewed as a long-term process that goes beyond structural conditions and aims at changing cognitions, emotions, and behavior. Most importantly, that change is always linked to specific forms of imagination—imagination of one’s own community (identity), of the other community, and of a perspective including a common future. Political processes that can support this change are often linked to a common search for justice, joint attempts to *come to terms with the past*, and establishment of mutual institutions and rituals that symbolize the transformation from hostility to friendship. It is much more challenging to ask whether in absence of such positive conditions it would still be meaningful to speak about reconciliation.

The final section of this paper answered this question affirmatively. The central argument was that, even in their absence, it is still meaningful to speak about the *degree zero of reconciliation*, which was contrasted with the idea of perennial enemies, a construct symbolizing a quasi-eternal division between groups and turning any form of peace into little more than a temporary truce. In positive terms, the degree zero of reconciliation implies acceptance of a common humanity between victims and perpetrators and affirmation of the possibility of a shared future. At the same time, the degree zero of reconciliation does not negate the previous arguments that the process of reconciliation requires engaged commitment. As the name suggests, the degree zero is just the opening measure of a scale that does not incorporate any positive degrees. It is just the basic acceptance that a common social framework might exist. The *degree zero of reconciliation* does not say that the utopian vision of harmony can overshadow a reality of a broken harmonium but suggests that the presence of a broken harmonium is not sufficient reason to deny the possibility of any harmony.

# Chapter III: Memory

The memory of tragedies, in this chapter, is presented both as a pathology and legacy. Tragic collective memories can serve as a bonding material between affected individuals who, through them, build solidarity and deal with the implications of the difficult past. At the same time, tragic memories can develop into mythical structures that resist critical evaluation, promote hostility, and impede intergroup dialogue. The latter is particularly the case when the original memories are transmitted in a non-integral way, covered with silence or social stigma. Additionally, the chapter analyzes religious influences on the construction of the memory of suffering, especially through the notion of martyrdom. Using the metaphors of ‘purification’ and ‘decontamination’ of memories, the chapter also discusses religious approaches to the challenges related to memories of tragedies. Empirical findings, based on interviews, are brought into discussion with theoretical perspectives that explain: 1) the pervasiveness of tragic events in collective memory, 2) ambiguity of collective remembering, and 3) transmission of tragic memories through non-verbal gestures and symbols. In contrast to theories that propose willful forgetting as an antidote to overt remembrance of tragedies, the chapter puts forward a concept of the ‘ecumene of compassion.’ The term ― based on the idea of religious ecumenism ― represents a basic understanding between different groups affected by tragedies, which nevertheless allows for some fundamental disagreements.

# The plan of the Chapter III

**In the first, exploratory part of this chapter, I will proceed as follows:**

1. The initial metaphor of a “scar” (proposed by David) will be used to illustrate the ambiguity of the painful memories that were by my respondents understood both as a legacy (something important that should be preserved) and a pathology (something that troubles).
2. The concept of “phantomic memories” will serve to explain the nature of family memories about events that were suppressed by the official Yugoslav regime. Those memories were usually transmitted through short emotional outbursts in family circles and even through symbolic gestures and silences.
   1. Although those memories were often incoherent and positively biased towards the group, they still had great emotional value for their recipients (thanks to their attachment to the family setting) and authority (because they were seen as a ‘suppressed’ or ‘hidden’ knowledge).
   2. The majority of respondents still harbored a degree of suspicion towards those forms of family memory, seeing them as “mythical” structures. The notion of the “myth” will be understood in a structural sense as a form of a narrative which: 1) simplifies historical complexities, 2) creates unwarranted continuities between historical events, 3) uncritically blames the out-groups and praises the in-group.
3. The importance of painful memories will be explained by its two major functions. Firstly, it is symbolic capital through which a group enhances its inner cohesion while simultaneously competing with other groups for the moral authority stemming from the experienced suffering. Secondly, it is used as a ‘lesson’ that helps a group to avoid experiencing the same suffering in the future.
   1. Both of these functions can take the form of legacy and pathology. Using examples in which the painful memories were used to create distance, incite revenge, or make preemptive attacks towards other groups, I argue that painful memories require constant ethical engagement.
   2. This duality will be further illustrated by examples in which religious symbols (such as the cross or ‘martyrdom’) can be (mis)used in relation to painful memories.
4. Religiously inspired engagement with the pathological aspects of memory will be presented as a ‘purification’ or ‘decontamination’ of memory. For religious leaders this includes:
   1. Encouraging independent historical research about past tragedies
   2. Accepting responsibility for the crimes committed by one’s own community and developing a sensibility for the suffering of other communities. This is done through:
      1. Openness to the Other
      2. Construction of commemorative practices in an inclusive way (i.e., as “prayerful commemorations”)
   3. Avoiding fatalistic views of the tragedies and looking towards the future. For this, the crucial element is a religious orientation towards “eschatological future,” which is, in Christianity, especially present in “liturgical memory.”

**In the second part of the theoretical discussion, I will bring these concepts into conversation with:**

1. Theoretical perspectives that explain the pervasiveness of tragic events in collective memory.
2. Scholarly views on the symbolic importance of painful memories (the aspect of memory as legacy), and its inherent dangers (the aspect of memory as pathology). Here, I will especially stress:
   1. The unifying potential of tragic memories
   2. Use of tragic memories as a form of alternative and/or supplementary justice in cases when standard punitive mechanisms are perceived as insufficient
   3. Use of tragic memories in war propaganda and in promotion of negative attitudes towards other groups
   4. Resistance to critical evaluation of a group’s tragic memories
3. Perspectives on transmission of tragic memories through silences and bodily gestures, even over generations.
4. Theories that deal with the ‘heaviness’ of past tragedies. Here, I will argue in favor of those approaches that reject the possibility of willful oblivion and/or erasure of a painful past.
   1. From the philosophical/sociological perspective, this will be emphasized and gathered under the notion of “coming to terms with the past.”
   2. From the religious perspective, the responsible confrontation with the painful past will be presented as an engaged encounter with the painful Other. The guiding concept will be “ecumene of compassion.”

(See: **Scheme 3.1** in the Appendix)

# I. Field-research findings: Even if I hate, I live!

“My dear Will: You must be healed by now. On the outside, at least. I hope you’re not too ugly. What a collection of scars you have! Never forget who gave you the best of them, and be grateful, our scars have the power to remind us the past was real.” – This is an excerpt from a letter written by the villain of the movie *The Silence of the Lambs* (1988), Hannibal Lecter, from his prison cell to the FBI agent who captured him. The scene dissects the ambiguity of scars, which constitute the marks of a tragedy, of undesired violence that has left traces on a human body. At the same time, such scars are witnesses of a past that otherwise might fade away.

David, a young Franciscan from Herzegovina, well-educated and exceptionally creative in his thinking, mentioned this quote during our interview, just a few days after Christmas in 2015. In his rendering, this scene looked quite different. Although he remembered it as a dialogue between a male and a female protagonist, the main message—that the scar proves that “the past was real”—remained the same. Later on, I thought how that moment of our interview functioned as an exemplum of memory itself, as an illustration of how cultural memes are transferred via numerous incarnations, always with small mutations due to the imperfection of memory, but with the salient core. At the same time, the duality of the scar kept me wondering about the solidification of pain in the form of memories and reminders. “*Healed from the outside, at least*,” the opening sentence of the letter, brings to light the central issue of this chapter—the pain that remains, preserved as a witness, even when the external wounds that caused the scars have healed.

The scar immediately reminds us of something undesirable, something that would, ideally, like to have removed. David, however, pointed to another aspect of the painful memory, as a *breathing space*. The scar’s ability to witness that *the past was real* is the crucial element that helps victims to reconstitute their understanding of the past. Scars possess an unusual duality. They are traces of an injury, a disorder, a consequence of wrongdoing; however, they can also be the only available pathways to the past. Even when past crimes are denied, forgotten by a society, or pushed into oblivion, scars remain as irrevocable traces. Hence, conservation of scars, preservation of the past as a corpse in the formalin of a painful reminder, is a way of preserving life through controlled disorder. Scars are a burden to victims, but they can at the same time be a way to preserve their dignity and maintain the coherence of their identities. For David, *unforgiving* is one of the strategies used for that purpose: “By unforgiving, I want to stay in a world that I do not want to leave. The feeling is – if we forgive, a world in which we want to stay will disappear. And once when we get out of that world, we practically stop remembering. (…) And that is why unforgiving is, for me, somehow a breath for life: even if I hate, I live!”[[310]](#footnote-310)

If scars would suddenly disappear, the ‘healing’ that had occurred would seem almost as violent as the injury that caused the scarring, i.e., it would be destructive towards the internalized past. David explained that people want to keep scars because they want to preserve the past. In that respect, unforgiving is a mnemonic act, resistance to an oblivion that might otherwise come with time. Remembering pain means living life. At the same time, it is undeniable that, while scars are tokens of the past’s veracity, they can also become narrow tunnels that allow only limited insights. Scars do not speak just about the past but are akin to indices or verbs that require subjects. In an attempt to preserve the actuality of a past act, people simultaneously modify their attitudes towards the present. Human action is thus never uni-directional but is, rather, an oscillation between action and reflection. According to David:

As Hegel said, philosophy is always late [in understanding historical conditions]; she is Minerva’s owl that goes out [only] at dusk. (…) In the same way, our life lags behind our words, and that delay will last throughout the whole of history, in the same way that thought is faster than an act, and an act is faster than the reconsideration of that act. We will always lag behind what we did (…) Our attitude toward life will permanently be [determined by what we keep] in memory.[[311]](#footnote-311)

He sees memory as an important source of motivation, both positive and negative, in people’s lives. Memory, says David, conditions future acts by framing them as reactions: “When you want to do something, you first go to the drawer of your memory. You see a person, [but] *a priori*, you look where did you see that person last time, did that person hurt you or helped you. Thus, everything is conditioned by memory, and then at a current moment we act based on memory.”[[312]](#footnote-312) Memory which motivates is, for David, also the main source of evil and sin. He stated that people, for that reason, “have to struggle with memory” and remain permanently vigilant that it does not deviate in a wrong direction. The same memory of pain that enables biological survival of an individual also has the potential to limit the scope of free action. He mentioned the calcification of painful memories around specific significant moments as if the pain associated with those moments has the power to produce a personal era that runs parallel to the socially shared time:

Maybe that’s stupid, but the whole of life is a confrontation with one moment (…) Every one of us has a moment in history [that is an] Archimedean central point [for their past]. In reality, people sometimes focus both present and future only on that moment and look at everything from that viewpoint. That moment becomes the central element of their life (…), and hence, [that] one moment overshadows their whole life. And then, in some sense, [people’s lives revolve] around that moment (…) but it [that moment] remains permanently in the past. I know from experience a few people who are burdened with one part of their lives, and everything begins from that moment [going forward]. [It is] like the birth of Jesus. They somehow count both their better and worse periods of life from that moment. And they measure every situation against it. That moment is the source either of complexes or of motivations (…) Our past will always be the source motivating us to solve something or the source of [our] complexes. People are somehow more prone to complexes than to the positive.[[313]](#footnote-313)

David’s interview constituted almost a compendium of questions related to memory and pain, often emphasizing restorative attitudes towards the past. Scars of memory are, in that respect, a personal memento, a souvenir. Although the content of such memories is unpleasant, weighing on the present moment, it is at the same time an instinct towards truth, a symbol that proves that the past was real. Painful memory is, therefore, *a legacy*.

But that is not its only characteristic. In David’s view, painful moments have something like a gravitational energy that pulls the present backward, and some events have sufficient power to become a reference point for all subsequent experiences. They motivate actions but, at the same time, frame them as permanent reactions. Deeds influenced by a memory of past suffering can easily become a mirror image of that suffering, a new act of violence which works as a pre-emptive strike. Therefore, the memory of pain is not just a legacy but also a *pathology*; it is both a source of life (“breath for life”) and a narrowing framework; it is a space of action between getting and losing.

With respect to the theological stance towards memory, David referred to the famous passage from the synoptic Gospels which states that those who want to save their lives will lose them, and those who lose their lives will save them.[[314]](#footnote-314) Losing painful memories, which often feels like ‘losing life’ for those who have suffered them, is at the same time a (painful) way of rediscovering *new* life. David’s discussion also hinted at a difference between two types of keeping a memory alive. On the one hand, an inability to forget a tragic memory comes as an *undesired* consequence of a traumatic event: *I remember even though I would like to forget*. On the other hand, there is a desired attempt to preserve memory by keeping it not only outside of naturally occurring forgetting but also beyond forgiveness: *I don’t want my memories of pain fade over time*. The latter, which is simultaneously a “gasp of life” and a potential source of limitations and new struggles, thus requires permanent vigilance. The scar is not just an ordinary symbol demonstrating that the past was real; it can also turn into a synecdoche of the past making people perceive all the events from that single perspective of pain.

Although David’s story of the scar began with an individual situation, it is equally applicable within the context of collective memory. However, while he did connect individual suffering with the notion of forgiveness, he noted that no analog action on the collective level was possible. Forgiving, which helps an individual deal with inner emotional pain, is therefore not replicable on a community level: “Nobody, not even a prime minister, can state, in the name of the people, ‘We forgive you.’ There is no collective forgiveness, but there is collective memory.”[[315]](#footnote-315) Recognizing this important difference, David did not delve more deeply into an analysis of what constitutes the similarity and difference between the two. In this chapter, I proceed precisely in that direction, asking what the characteristics of the collective memory of pain are, what are its contextual variables in the cases of Bosna and Herzegovina, and what would be the uniquely religious perspectives of that form of memory.

# 1.1. From individual to collective suffering

In the chapter on forgiveness, I mentioned the story of Mirza. To the question “why are they killing and expelling us?,” he was able to come up with only one answer: “because we are Muslims.” That initially motivated him to affiliate himself with the idea of revengeful jihad, prior to experiencing a life-changing event and becoming a peacemaker.[[316]](#footnote-316) Mirza rationalized his personal suffering as an instance of collective suffering and saw violent jihad as the only viable solution to it. His story is by no means isolated. Josip, for instance, subsumed the suffering of various individuals during the Yugoslavian period as a suffering of the Croatian people—as if there were no Croats in the Yugoslav leadership and as if all crimes were motivated by the collective component of identity: “We can say that Yugoslavia remained indebted to Croats and that those who wanted Yugoslavia for 70 years should apologize to Croats for a million or two of Croats who went to the diaspora, for Croats who did not have their state, who were constantly persecuted and, finally, for Bleiberg.”[[317]](#footnote-317)

The stories are illustrative of a background mechanism that allows for unification of different temporally and geographically detached sufferings into a single framework of common pain. In other words, wrongdoing is understood not as random and individualized but rather as systematic and directed towards a community.

What differentiates the collective memory of suffering and pain from individual suffering is its *transferable character*, including to those individuals who were not in any way directly affected by it. When we hear about a person being murdered in a city, we might empathize with the family of that individual, but their pain can hardly be “our” pain unless we construct some broader framework which aims to explain its nature in collective terms. For instance, if the murdered person is a person of color in the context of the Apartheid, that *individual’s* *pain* will suddenly become an additional piece in the broader mosaic of *collective suffering* under the oppressive regime. The collective memory of suffering is therefore always constructed as a memory of some form of systematic oppression of a community in which individual suffering exemplifies a broader suffering.

When a painful event becomes a part of a collective memory, the original actors do not have as great an effect on the ways in which it is remembered. In the process of transforming individual trauma to collective trauma, suffering and pain, so to speak, become socialized. For this reason, the typical figure of a suffering individual after the war is transmuted into the figure of a martyr.

# 1.2. The past was real: Reconstructing the past from scraps

Historians are often suspicious of collective memories, treating them as unrefined, unreliable, and inherently biased narratives that stand in opposition to history as an academic discipline. Although this stance has great intuitive appeal because it contrasts a pre-scientific explanation of the past with a systematic endeavor based on critical readings of the past, it fails to recognize that history itself is not free from ideological manipulation. This, of course, is not a blanket statement, because the scope and form of those manipulations depend largely on the social context within which historical research is undertaken. Needless to say, authoritarian regimes exhibit much larger amounts of ideological interference in the work of historians than is the case in democratic, pluralistic regimes. But even in the latter case, elements of history are silenced, not necessarily through direct censorship but in myriads of other ways—because a topic was too controversial at the time, because it contradicted acquired wisdom, or simply because it did not draw sufficient scientific attention. One needs only remember how many decades were required until the topic of Soviet crimes on German civilians during WWII entered the public discourse. Another example is the theme of a recent Danish-German movie entitled *Under Sandet* (2015), which tells the story of the former Nazi underage POWs who were coerced to clear landmines in Denmark without proper training or protection. Without a doubt, the situation is much worse when the regime actively pivots historical research into a specific direction, marking some topics as too dangerous to discuss.

“History is just a sequence, a trace of events,”[[318]](#footnote-318) Haris stated, almost in passing, while discussing the need of a comprehensive education in history to prevent future generations from repeating the crimes of the past. Nevertheless, this side-remark was very telling with respect to distrust in historical narratives, particularly those concerning Bosnia and Herzegovina and the broader region. History, which is meant to be a careful and critical reconstruction of past facts, was often perceived by my respondents only as a “trace of events,” and those traces, frequently unreliable and incomplete, are to be supplemented by additional sources, the most important of which is collective memory.

In the case of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the *mise-en-scène* of collective remembering is a certain malaise with official history. This must be understood in connection with the previous authoritarian regime, which maintained strict official narratives that did not allow for a plurality of opinions and memories, resulting in a situation in which family narratives kept a low profile and coexisted alongside official histories. Virtually all my respondents agreed that the Yugoslav period did not allow free discussion of all the crimes that occurred during and after WWII and that the official politics of memory aimed to hide some of them, particularly those committed by the members of the Partisan movement, which later became the Yugoslav army and the state regime. The attempt to ‘silence’ news of those crimes, as we will see, was not entirely successful. Instead of being erased, ‘unofficial’ histories were transmitted in family circles, accruing additional emotional weight and authority. As opposed to official histories, orally transmitted memories were repositories for events that could not be openly discussed. In many ways, past sufferings resembled a phantom, which is neither present nor absent, an uncanny silence that says nothing but cannot be ignored.

## 1.2.1. Phantomic memories

What happens when memories are buried but did not receive a proper burial? Euripides’ tragedy *Hecuba* opens with a monologue by Polydorus’s ghost. He, the youngest son of the Trojan king and queen (Pyram and Hecuba), had been sent overseas with gold to Polymestor, king of Thrace, who was supposed to protect him. However, as soon as Troy fell, Polymestor killed Polydorus, stole his possessions, and threw his body into the sea. Now, as a ghost, Polydorus appears in his mother’s dream, desiring a proper funeral so that he can enter Hades.

The myth of Polydorus is one of the first stories in the Western canon to speak of ghosts and of dead that cannot rest. Violently killed and thrown into the sea without the prescribed rites having been performed, Polydorus hovers between the worlds, requiring revenge for his violent death.

The myth can also be a useful heuristic tool to understand the problem of the collective memory of pain and suffering in Bosnia and Herzegovina. As will soon be evident from some of the testimonies reported herein, communities located there have undergone experiences that resembled an improper burial. Upon the establishment of the Communist government following the WWII, the memories of certain tragedies were hidden beneath the surface of the new ideology, which has yet to take root. In particular, these were memories that concerned the losing parties’ suffering or memories that were coded in a way that seemed overtly nationalist and thus threatening to the supra-national ideal of the Communist regime. A consequence of this suppression was the generation of some form of phantomic memory which, for a long time, existed only in oral transmissions. Like a phantom lacking physical substance but having a sensible presence, this memory continued to live although it ‘officially’ did not exist.

This is how Tomislav described learning about the Croats who fought for the Ustashi forces and were killed after the end of the WWII:

Sometimes we children could hear our elders speak of a house wherein young people had [simply] “disappeared,” [but] we didn’t know at that time where and how they had disappeared. They were just gone. (…) Then, on Christmas morning, when we visited homes, [we saw] on some of the tables wooden spoons set [on the table] in front of [empty] seats…. Later on, I would [then] hear that an uncle from [one of those homes] had disappeared and that the grandfather had ordered them [the members of the household] to [set a place at the table containing] a special wooden spoon for him [this uncle] on Christmas day. The meaning of the unused spoon was, “He [the uncle] was supposed to be sitting [here with us] this morning, but instead he is gone.” In some houses, there were three [of these spoons], in some four, and in still others there were more empty [places at the table] than there were occupied ones. To me, that meant “something had happened.” Later, as we were growing, we learned, little by little, [about] the Second World War, Ustashi and Chetniks, Partisans…. Then, in school, we’d be shown movies about Partisans. When we described these movies at home, we would hear a very different story from our older grandmas and grandpas, [who would say]: “Children, it wasn’t like that, but we cannot speak of it. They killed ten times more [of us] than we did of them.” This would burst from them sometimes, but then their spouses would nudge them with an elbow and say “Shut up!” In our family, a grandpa would be the one who would have [such] an outburst, and grandma would [be the one to nudge him] with her elbow, and, at other times, grandma would have the outburst and grandpa would say to her, “Shut up, old woman!”[[319]](#footnote-319)

What was not allowed to be articulated was nevertheless transmitted through silent images, loud absences, and even body language. In a context marked by such distrust towards the regime and general distrust among the population, it is not surprising that small pieces of information collected via scattered remarks had great value to those who paid attention to them. Reporting similar experiences of censored family stories, Tarik mentioned how, on two separate occasions, his mother attempted to tell him about a man who was horribly tortured but, on both occasion, his father intervened and prevented his mother from telling him: “(…) my mother never managed to tell the story until the end, [the story] about shoeing of some guy. A man was shoed alive the same way horses or oxen are shoed. What happened to him, I never knew because the father did not let her tell the story until the end.”[[320]](#footnote-320)

Very often, older family members did not want to speak about past tragedies because they were afraid that their stories would have negative effects on the children, as well as from fear that the children would tell these stories publicly and thereby expose the entire family to danger. However, as shown by Tomislav’s narrative, there occurred emotional outbursts of grievances, but all those outbursts were just detached pieces that lacked the larger context. Moreover, what was heard at home contradicted what was taught in school or said in public. Consequently, the two different versions of those memories (the public one and the private one) grew to be mutually exclusive and could not be integrated in any meaningful way. Instead, family interpretations and official views on the events competed for belief. When I asked Tomislav whether he had heard stories about crimes of Croats who had joined the Ustashi forces, he responded as follows:

It was certainly also mentioned that representatives of our people committed some crimes, but in the territories where I lived, those [the perpetrators] tended to be infiltrators among our people [i.e., among Croats] (…) Books were published on Communism, and these stated that Ustashi did this or that, but then I would hear from my late grandmother that the Ustashi never came here. Never. I knew that [for a fact]. My grandma would say: “Four of my sons were Ustashi. I know where there were (…). That is a lie.” Therefore, there were many lies that claimed the Ustashi did something, that they [didn’t]. That is one aspect (…) Another aspect is that there were some infiltrators among the Ustashi forces—scumbags, underworld figures, (…) even some Gypsies, or Roma, people. Moreover, many Muslims joined [the Ustashi forces]. It was prestigious to be in the Croatian Army at that time. Then, some Muslims who were not Croats and who wanted revenge against Serbs entered some of the villages and committed crimes while in Ustashi uniform. (…) So, in these territories where I lived, the majority of crimes were ascribed to those groups [of infiltrators]. But when Partisans wrote the books [later on], the [the offenders] were [said to be] Ustashi, and ‘Ustashi’ meant ‘Croat’ (…) But, to be honest, there were also [crimes committed by Croats] but in much lesser amounts. Also, it was not hidden that [someone who was a] Croat and Catholic in Ustashi had committed crimes. There were people like that. (…) [How could a] man who, the day before, had attended church, took the Eucharist, and prayed to God, [a man] who respects his close ones [friends and family] and respects God—[how could such a man have] put a knife in his belt and then gone off to slaughter a pregnant woman, all of which was later asserted [in Communist books]. Simply put, a man of such a constitution and from such a milieu could not have done that, and had he done so, we would have heard that from the elders (…)”[[321]](#footnote-321)

Tomislav’s response shows a tendency not only to fill the gaps in the narratives of the painful past but also to bridge the cognitive dissonance between family stories and official narratives. Although he did not deny that Ustashi forces committed crimes, he nevertheless went on to explain that they were often accused of crimes that they did not commit and that others (e.g., Communist Partisans) were to blame for even more deaths.

Stories narrated by family members received great authority because they were seen as bridges with a past that could not be openly discussed in public. At the same time, these stories were positively biased towards the deeds of the group. Family members who could not have possibly had a comprehensive insight into the events of the time nonetheless attained authoritative places as historical witnesses. Since there was no exchange between public (official) memory and (private) oral testimonies, there were no checks and balances that could correct their inherent inconsistencies. As we have seen, Tomislav placed great trust in the stories his grandmother and other elders told and so, when he was growing up, accepted these stories as accurate historical accounts. Concomitantly, he was extremely suspicious of the official narratives about WWII that were taught in schools or propagated in public media.

In Željko’s view, distrust towards official narratives was just factor that contributed to the uncritical vindication of the fascist, Ustashi ideology. Reflecting upon his memories of this period in the former Yugoslavia, Željko stated that distrust was generally very prevalent in the society:

There was a silence [concerning this]. [Although] there was [some] family remembrance, there wasn’t a lot, because of fear. That regime introduced a horror of distrust among relatives and infiltrated some regions with secret police and collaborators, causing distrust even to the level of the marital bed. So [crimes of the WWII] were not spoken of at all [but] were retained silently, as a memory. Thus, that period of war [WWII] was not discussed even within the Church—that was not permitted, but, generally speaking, there were also no calls for revenge. [[322]](#footnote-322)

After the regime change in 1990s, when it was becoming possible to question previous ‘official truths,’ the situation was, in Željko’s eyes, chaotic. Instead of a critical examination of the past, what surfaced were “revisions of history without any moral criteria, in which, for instance, Ustashi ideology was vindicated.”[[323]](#footnote-323) Željko made it clear that he believes that “research needs to be done on the vengeful system the Partisans and Communists established when they came [into power].” [[324]](#footnote-324) What seemed to bother him the most was the revisionism that was occurring. This revisionism vindicated the fascist Ustashi ideology under the pretext of opposition to Communism.

Family stories were, to my respondents, important in many ways. Firstly, they were containers of those elements of the past that were erased from the official narratives—especially crimes of the Communist Partisans during the WWII and later post-war Communist regime. Secondly, because of their exclusivity, and the authority of those that transmitted them (i.e., family members), those stories were assigned much greater emotional importance than they otherwise would, were they communicated openly. In this form, they represented rare and forbidden knowledge that united family members and members of the family’s ethnic group into a circle of solidarity that was additionally fortified by external threats posed by the state regime. Thirdly, scattered remarks about sufferings were not sufficiently clear to elucidate what had truly happened during WWII. Transmission of oral history happened on rare occasions and usually in short emotional outbursts that could only contain the most basic information—the subjects (*us* and *them*), the content of the suffering, and a sense of injustice. Fourthly, adopting a critical stance with respect to those stories was difficult for listeners because of their strong emotional appeal (family or group suffering), but that suffering was not properly balanced with empathy for others who had suffered at the hands of the group’s members. In his interview, Tomislav spoke at length of how he learned about the suffering of the Croatian people from his family members (e.g.., ‘our’ suffering), but then attributed the crimes of Croats mostly to “infiltrators” and not to ‘real’ Croats.

From an external perspective, the structure of those family narratives was of a story within a story. For instance, a family’s suffering, which, for instance, could include the loss of three sons who were Ustashi soldiers (Story 1) occurs within the context of Ustashi soldiers killing tens of thousands of innocent civilians (Story 2). Thus, from an external perspective, a need for a critical stance seems obvious—Story 1 must always be seen in connection to the Story 2, so that both forms of suffering can be contextualized.

From an internal perspective of family member, this seems not to be the case. Story 1 (our suffering) is not nested in the broader context of Story 2 (the broader suffering of Others) but appears mora like just one more instance in a linear narrative of continuous suffering of *our group* and *our sons.*

There can also be the third strategy – the one where ‘nesting’ of Story 1 (our suffering) into Story 2 (the other’s suffering) serves to relativize the suffering of the Other. This usually happens when crimes of in-group members cannot be denied, but through the ‘nesting’ and emphasizing ‘our suffering’ within it, these crimes become less noticeable.

A story that Velimir told me can serve as an illustration of how these three processes can take place. Speaking about a Serbian women he knew, Velimir said: “You know, in this war, many people lost their [entire] families. I know of [a woman] in Foča who lost in one day 27 members of her near family, [among those] women and children. Probably Muslims came in and killed everybody, burned the house… twenty-seven people. Now you have to tell that women not to hate.”[[325]](#footnote-325) The women’s story (Story 1) without doubt, is one of enormous loss. However, the broader context (Story 2) is that Foča, from the mid-1992s and on, was a center of some of the most heinous crimes committed toward Bosniaks. In the case of Kunarac-Kovac-Vukovic,[[326]](#footnote-326) ICTY documented systematic rapes, torture, crimes against humanity, ethnic cleansing, and murders of hundreds of civilians of Bosniak nationality, and that was only a part of the crimes that occurred there. Thus, the main question is how that story will be transmitted and commemorated, and there are three possibilities as to how this will be done: 1) as a nested story of genuine human suffering that in no way aims to relativize suffering of the Other, 2) as a linear story that shows only ‘our suffering,’ without any connection to suffering of the Other; b) as a nested story in which suffering of the Other is not negated, but the emphasis is still on ‘our’ suffering. Thus, depending on the way a story of suffering is transmitted determines whether it leads either to: 1) to acceptance of responsibility for the past crimes of the in-group while not negating the suffering of some of its members, 2) an uncritical insistence on the martyrhood of the in-group, or 3) an interpretative relativizing of the out-group’s suffering. The main problem with the family stories mentioned in the previous paragraphs is precisely the inability to connect Story 1 (i.e., family suffering) with Story 2 (i.e., the broader context of crimes and suffering in WWII). That was partially a result of the group’s biases, but also, to a larger degree, a consequence of a political system in which making these family stories public and connecting them with others was not possible. Instead, there were parallel regimes of private and public memories that opposed each other.

## 1.2.2. Memory as an authority, memory as a myth

As can be seen from the previous discussion, collective memory became authoritative largely because of the suppression by the state regime. In Bojan’s view after “about half a century of forbidding, half a century of creating false, unrealistic identities,” there came a period of post-Communist national revival in which “suddenly everyone witnesses something.”[[327]](#footnote-327) And since group identities cannot be detached from painful memories, previously hidden elements of the past were transformed into a public cause. But, as Željko warned, the memories of past suffering, especially family memories, were rarely properly articulated and even less critically elaborated. The inability to connect those family stories in a meaningful way to other narratives, in addition to their internal incoherence, made them especially prone to *mystification*. The word “myth” occurred occasionally during my interviews and it was always linked with the collective memory.

Hamza, for instance, was worried about widespread *myths* that seed distrust among ethnic communities in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Under that term he understood negative stories about the other ethnic groups that have strong appeal to people but little to none historical veracity. In his view, all groups need to undergo de-mythification in order to secure a better future for all.[[328]](#footnote-328)

Myths can be understood in one additional way—not as narratives that contain deliberate fabrication but as stories that: 1) overtly *simplify historical complexities* and, 2) *create continuities over historical discontinuities*. This was reflected in a group attitude that Slaven described as the attitude of “look what they do to us even today.”[[329]](#footnote-329) The *mythical* structure of memory encapsulated in that sentence makes suffering look like a continuous historical struggle emphasizing two main elements: 1) *us* versus *them* and 2) *they* did it before, and *they* still do it. In such a manner, a myth neglects historical mutation and simplifies complexities into antagonistic dualities. In that process, Communists can then easily be equated with “Serbs,” who were eternally against Croats (although the Communist party of Yugoslavia had many prominent ethnic Croats), Bosniaks can easily be seen as “Turks” (although Bosniak national identity is much more complex and has nothing to do with Turks in the ethnic sense), and Croats can them simply be viewed as a continuation of “Ustashi” (although Communist partisan fighters had many Croats, including the leader Tito).

Finally, myths can also be understood as narratives that exalt the group, presenting its history in the most favorable light while, at the same time, omitting its embarrassing elements.

I have to stress, however, that these forms of *myths* were, in most cases, met with suspicion by religious leaders, especially those of younger generations. Although religious leaders themselves sometimes tend to speak in a way that resembles the structure of myth, they are nevertheless aware that all groups need a more critical reading of the past and that memory is not just a legacy to be kept but also a dangerous and heavy weight that needs to be borne with care. However, this awareness remains most often an intellectual stance, a conviction in the back of a mind that does not wield sufficient influence to produce a profound questioning of the transmitted stories. Later in this chapter, I will speak more about ways to avoid *mythification* of painful memory in favor of compassionate inter-group commemoration of tragedies. First, however, let us take a step back and explore the purposes of transmitting the painful memories and the reasons for their importance as a legacy to the group members.

# 1.3. Purposes of memory: Carrying scars

The previous discussion pointed towards arguably the most important segment of the memory of suffering: community-building. Through the process of remembering, a community symbolically reconstructs its lost members and pays homage to their lives. At the same time, remembering is a bridge which links different historical periods in such a way that the suffering becomes bearable. Collective memory is therefore not only a process of discovery but also an effort to make sense of what has happened. While individual remembering can be an unwilled act, community memory is primarily an act of fulfilling an obligation, a moral duty. The following passage from my interview with Nedim illustrates this. Speaking simultaneously about individual and community memory, he differentiates between the two particularly visible in two details: while an individual victim “cannot allow herself the luxury of forgetting,” a community has “an obligation to remember”:

The pain of a person who experienced a tragedy, especially if the tragedy involved a close family member, is enormous. Trust me, even now, 20 years after those events occurred, when you sit with a mother who lost a child, you can still see tears in her eyes. Her pain is practically unmeasurable (…) She cannot allow herself the luxury of forgetting. Of course, we, as a community, have an obligation to remember those people. Of course, [we also have an obligation] to pray to the exalted God to forgive their sins and take them to Jannah, paradise. But simply, that memory of victims must exist, it simply cannot be erased because there is not a surgical procedure which would eliminate the pain that is, even now, felt by a mother, father, sister, brother, or spouse or by someone’s child, especially if the person lost was a victim of violence.[[330]](#footnote-330)

## 1.3.1. Memory as moral capital

Respect for victims is thus the basis of the communal ethics of remembering. However, such a form of memory should not be seen only as fulfilling a duty due to victims. In fact, it is the living who remember and for them the memory of suffering also constitutes the *moral capital* from which they draw the motivation for their actions. The term moral capital is very applicable here, since group memories often exist in a setting that resembles economic exchange or, stated more appropriately, *victimhood competition.[[331]](#footnote-331)*

Slaven, for instance, describes *Svjetlo Riječi*, a Catholic publication, which in 2006 published on the front page the image of the Muslim graveyards located in Srebrenica. The publication immediately drew many negative comments from within the Catholic community. Critics asked when the Islamic community was going to publish images of the crosses or when the Orthodox community would do something similar.[[332]](#footnote-332) In other words, they were not negating the genocide nor the suffering of the people of Srebrenica but instead were reacting out of fear that their suffering would ‘lose currency’ if they began promoting other communities’ tragedies. Thus, protection of inner tragedies is viewed more or less in the same way as protection of a market—inclusion of the sufferings of other communities would devalue their own suffering:

You know what the problem here is? The problem is that neither of the communities mentions their crimes. Every community mentions that it has suffered, that it has been a victim, and it communicates this view to its members. Nothing can preserve a community [so strongly] as can victimhood. What does it mean? It means the following: if you think critically that your community has committed crimes, then you are diminishing the power and the connective tissue that binds the members of your community together, by virtue of such thinking. Of course, such ways of thinking are not desirable and are unacceptable [for the community].[[333]](#footnote-333)

Similarly, after acknowledging the omnipresence of tragic memories, Mirza added that people are not ready to approach them in a critical or analytical way. In his view, “those things are simply sacred things”[[334]](#footnote-334) and every questioning produces public shaming. Memories of pain are thus seen as the property of a group, a value that is beyond questioning. Every questioning, even a benevolent one, is then viewed as a sign of disrespect, or even of immorality. Remembering tragedies therefore unifies the community, but it also gives it the opportunity to be ‘on equal terms’ with other communities that have also experienced tragedies. Although the content of the memory is undesirable suffering, the final product capitalizes on the loss and transforms it into ‘connective tissue,’ which is then protected by internal norms against self-criticism.

## 1.3.2. Memory as a lesson

Connected to the previous notion is the idea of suffering as a pedagogical lesson. Suffering is remembered not only to build community or to gain symbolic capital (which can also be done in many other ways) but also to learn something from that suffering. Among my interviewees, this was the most common notion of the uses of the past. Suffering has to be remembered, the argument goes, because new generations should have the opportunity of learning from it and drawing lessons as to how to avoid it in the future. The problem is that this notion is usually too general. Although collective memory of suffering tends to bridge different contexts of historical sufferings, in reality each new situation differs from the previous one. In that respect, often-used phrases such as “not to let history repeat itself” can be misleading. History never repeats itself—instead, *post hoc* we can draw analogies between different conflicts. At the same time, drawing lessons from history embodies much more ambiguity than the moral call for non-repetition of history would allow. Furthermore, lessons drawn from the memory of suffering tend to be lessons related to the periods of conflict but, as we see in the chapters on forgiving and reconciliation, it is not clear what would be effects of remembering conflicts in a peacetime period. In the following sections, I turn to the analysis of that ambiguity.

### 1.3.2.1. Snake that stings twice: Memory as a protection

Among my first interviews, I heard the story of the *snake that stings two times*. The uncanny imagery of that symbol was vividly inscribed in my memory, although initially I did not pay much attention to it. I first heard it from Harun, a middle-aged imam from a city near Sarajevo. In my post-interview notes, I wrote: “After this interview, I recalled the hadith that a Muslim cannot allow himself to be bitten by the snake from the same hole two times—how does that reflected on the life here?”[[335]](#footnote-335)

It was only later, when I heard it repeated by other respondents and not only Muslims, that I started to ponder the significance of the adage more deeply. The basic idea is very simple—a person should not allow himself or herself to be bitten twice from the same hole or bitten twice by the same snake. Although the linguistic variation seems minor, it can create a significant difference. With respect to the same snake-pit, one visualizes a collectivity that is always dangerous, not just an individual snake that can be encountered again.

Clearly, the moral lesson of the snake that bites twice or of the snake-hole that hides danger raises the possibility of attributing snake-like characteristic to a group and the suspicion that the nature of a snake-hole does not change: a snake that bit once will also bite the next time, and whatever lives inside the snake pit must be a snake. When I reviewed the interviews, I noticed that some of the interviewees recognized the inner danger that such a metaphor carries. This is Harun’s response to my question as to whether preserving memory should be a religious obligation:

**A:** By remembering, or carrying with them things that happened, people in some way fulfill one religious obligation—not to forget, not to let themselves be stung twice either by the same snake or by a snake from the same hole. And that is a religious obligation. Of course, that should not be the reason to create other evils. Rather, that should be so that [people] remember and [that they] always maintain a reserve and a distance. That is an obligation. Now, of course, when someone wants to misuse that for something bad, he can misuse those memories, among other things, as happened during the last war. They said, “This is revenge for [what] Turks [did]!” What do we have to do with the Turks? But that is an excellent example of the misuse of memory (…)

**Q**: You said that it is a religious obligation to maintain a reserve or distance. What do you mean by that?

**A**: Well, there is a hadith, a saying by the Prophet, that very clearly says that a Muslim should not let a snake from the same hole twice bite him twice. (…) That does not mean, of course, that one should be a snake, but rather that one should maintain sufficient distance so that … it [the snake] does not sting him again.[[336]](#footnote-336)

Already within his initial response, Harun had underlined that the same memory that serves as a protection could be misused for exactly the opposite purpose. The verse that Harun referred to is the hadith: “A believer not to be stung twice out of the same hole.”[[337]](#footnote-337) Moreover, his intuition about possible misuses was correct. The original context of the saying was the story of the event in Hamra al Asad, where the Prophet Mohamed refused to spare the life of one of the prisoners, Abu Ozza, who fought a war against him. The Prophet withdrew amnesty by saying that “a believer may not be twice bitten from the same hole.”[[338]](#footnote-338)

If we search where it appeared in recent years, we can quickly find it in a 45-minute Al-Qaida video from 2003, entitled *American Hell in Afghanistan and Iraq* in the following context:

Here, I say to those who do not enjoy some of these characteristics and who failed to carry out *jihad.* He who is not convinced of [the necessity of] killing should go away and not influence those who are convinced of [the necessity of] killing (…) This is because these young men are true believers, and believers are not bitten twice from the same hole, as our Prophet (PBUH) says. (…) They refuse to lick the boots of even princes and scholars over this. They believe that the integrity of Islamic law enjoys precedence over the safety of men regardless of how great they are.[[339]](#footnote-339)

The same phrase appeared in the 1996 *Declaration of War Against Americans*,[[340]](#footnote-340) and, in both cases, it suggests a distance towards the enemy and a call for revenge based on perceived oppression and past suffering. These cases demonstrate the relevance of Harun’s warning about the misuse of the memory of suffering.

Jakov, a Franciscan friar, used the phrase also in the context of preventing repetition of crimes, stating that “only a fool can be bitten twice from the same place,” but he immediately added, “we have to get rid of the negative things in ourselves in relation to that.”[[341]](#footnote-341) Recognizing the dangerous potential of the memory of suffering, Jakov emphasized that the remembrance of pain and suffering, seen in the theological way, must always involve “emptying” oneself of negativity. Here we have dual action—remembering evil and the self-critical assessment of inner evil tendencies that can arise from memory. Otherwise, the very memory that was meant to be a shield of protection can be transformed into a reason for destruction.

# 1.4. Memory as pathology

Throughout the discussion in the preceding sections of this chapter, I sought to emphasize the duality of the collective memory of suffering and pain presented as a compound of *legacy* and *pathology*. While on the one hand memory serves as a quest to discover the past, to establish bonds between members of a group, and to fulfill a moral and ethical duty towards victims, construction of the memory of suffering also contains many challenges that can transmute the memory into a cause for violence. We have already seen how this works in the example of a religious verse that stipulates caution towards previous perpetrators. If left unchecked, such memories of past struggles can become a motivation for new violence under the pretext of preventing strikes or of justified revenge. In this section, we will consider the *pathological* side of the collective memory of suffering, i.e., towards its pathological aspect.

## 1.4.1. Collective memories as hysterias

Vasilije was generally very suspicious of the collective aspect of tragedies. He insisted that the only real suffering is individual suffering and that collective sufferings are always some form of fabrication. His focus was on the direct causes of pains as experienced by concrete individuals. Collective traumas, on the other hand, constitute a form of a vicarious memory appropriated even by those who were not in any meaningful sense affected by the hurtful acts. According to Vasilije, time has opposite effects on individual and collective traumas. While individual pain fades with time, collective traumas are usually amplified over time, precisely because they are not dependent on the presence of direct pain. That, in his view, makes them dangerous:

**Q:** How do you, from a theological standpoint, look at those traumas of collective conscience? How, according to you, can one confront them?

**A:** Generally, I do not place a lot of trust in collective traumas. They are, at their core, fake. Individual trauma is real trauma. Collective traumas are always used [for something]; they have an earthly purpose. Collective traumas are much louder than individual ones (…) An individual trauma is a real trauma—the cry of a mother for her child or [a cry of] a child for its mother (…) Churches and religious communities can easily be drawn into some traumatic hysterias that are collective [hysterias]. The culture of remembrance is something else, and the Church has to solidify it. And she [the Church] has the responsibility for not transforming that culture of memory into hysteria. I think that is the main job of religious communities.”

**Q:** How do they carry out that job?

**A:** I do not know how[, but] I think [it] is very, very difficult. I do not remember any collective commemoration that did not contain some trace of hysteria, no matter where it took place. (…) To be honest, I was at one commemorative meeting without hysteria. (…) It took place year and a half ago in Prebilovci. And I would commend Vladika Grigorije (…) because he personally insisted. Without him, that would probably have turned into hysteria. He took care that flags were not carried, that the speeches made condemned no one, and that only sorrow was observed [and communicated]. It was truly magnificent. And surprising. Trust me, I am not used to that. [laughed].[[342]](#footnote-342)

For Vasilije, collectivization of trauma opens a way to ideological manipulation. In his view, trauma separated from its immediate recipients is inherently fake and functions as a simulacrum which, since its core is empty, functions as a screen for collective projections of uncontrolled emotions. He, interestingly, mentioned that Vladika Grigorije insisted that only “sorrow was observed,” illustrating his point that collectivities can only properly *observe* the sorrow, i.e., approach it from a respectful distance, but not appropriate it. Otherwise, when the sorrow is absorbed, it functions as land on which a flag of ownership has been placed.

For Mirza, another pathological aspect of tragic memories is their pervasiveness: “They are alive as if they happened yesterday.”[[343]](#footnote-343) He remarked that his city is so intersected with monuments to fallen soldiers that it feels “like you are walking through a graveyard.”[[344]](#footnote-344) So numerous are they that even the purpose of some is now unclear, but—he added—they are used intensively during election campaigns, when they *become* *important*. Mirza is a Bosniak who lives in a city with a Bosniak majority. However, he mentioned another city not so far away with a Serbian majority where some commemorations of Bosniak victims were impeached. Although he was generally critical of overt memorialization in his own city, he nevertheless spoke with disappointment about the inability to commemorate in other places. His final remark clarifies this stance: “In those places where we are endangered, there that [the commemoration] is important to us.”[[345]](#footnote-345) This remark brings us back to the very duality of the memory of suffering, which constantly oscillates between being a need and a burden.

Edin, an imam engaged in the community life in Eastern Herzegovina, complained about the commemorative tendencies in which “almost every street has their ceremony.”[[346]](#footnote-346) What Edin criticized, it seems, was the almost fractal character of memories of tragedies—they all follow the same pattern yet they endlessly multiply. Like Mirza, he recognized some underlying notion of *memory pollution* in the sense that the public sphere becomes too much saturated with commemorations, all organized according to same fashion with a standard set of religious and political pathos. However, it also seemed clear that not all people were equally involved in commemorative practices. There are certain gate-keepers, usually political leaders, who have the resources and infrastructure to organize commemorations, thus using them as their political platforms. The resulting situation is one of the moral confusion. While on the one hand religious leaders cannot refuse commemoration of innocent victims, they seem to recognize that participating in commemorations also constitutes unwillingly participating in political programs. What makes the situation even more difficult is the memory of the previous war, in which the memories of past sufferings were used as a resource for war propaganda.

## 1.4.2. Memory and war propaganda

Often, while was discussing with the interviewees the developments of conflicts within the territories of the former Yugoslavia, I had a strange experience of the fluidity of images. Pictures of war were flying from one time and space to another and, like transparent foils, overlaying each other seamlessly. One tragedy and collective trauma acted like a puzzle piece that fit seamlessly into the missing space in another tragedy’s puzzle, even though they were many decades or even centuries apart. Rosoux suggested the image of the Matryoshka doll to illustrate how one set of memories lives within another, all looking very similar.[[347]](#footnote-347)

This was particularly the case with the dark period of WWII. When I asked, in general, about the causes of the wars in 1990’s, my respondents, fairly consistently, mentioned economic causes, suppression of freedom under Communism, the political appetites of certain leaders, and foreign interferences. Those elements formed a causal background against which the Yugoslav theatre of war played out. However, when I asked about more proximate causes, about elements that fueled hatred, a much more prominent place was given to media, propaganda, and memory. For instance, Vasilije, an Orthodox priest from Foča, responded as follows:

**Q:** How did the traumas from the Second World War that surfaced during the 1990s influence later events?

**A:** They influenced them because they fueled homogenization. The 1990s war was understood as a continuation of unsettled accounts from the Second World War. I think it was presented to the public in that way, and was accepted as such.[[348]](#footnote-348)

The role of the collective memory of suffering in the ex-Yugoslav wars was one area of agreement among religious leaders. Hrvoje, a Franciscan from Sarajevo, provided an elaborate analysis of the role of memory in war, with all its inherent ambiguities:

I believe that the problem of memory is a big one and that it is difficult to resolve adequately. Of course, it is being broadly discussed as to how to remember properly and in a Christian way so that commemorating one’s own victims does not create new conflicts and new evils. Unfortunately, in our region, it [remembering] mostly means creating occasions (…) for new conflicts, and I think that played a large role for the Orthodox Christians. Unfortunately, there were memories of Orthodox suffering in the NDH [Independent State of Croatia], including camps and prosecution of the Orthodox population that was massive and very cruel. Historians say that initially the main ideology of NDH was anti-Serbian in essence, [leading to] [that population’s] experiencing great suffering. Let us just take one datum, which I read in one book. In the first year, I think from 1941 to 1942, around 200 Orthodox priests and three bishops were killed. Before the end of the war, around 490 Orthodox priests altogether were killed. That is an enormous number of people, an enormous trauma, a horrible wound that will never heal properly, and it has never been approached in an appropriate way. After the war, some form of amnesia occurred, as well as censorship and ideological interpretation. All that had horribly negative effects that could create the possibility for a new evil that, this time, they [Serbs] will have committed. Again, [they rationalized this], [approaching it] in a preventive sense of, for instance, “we have to defend ourselves from repetitions of Jasenovac or Jadovno.” Some fear was, in some aspects, justified, but many ideologues used that to create an atmosphere which, later on, made some other things [crimes] possible.[[349]](#footnote-349)

Željko, whose remarks about *zlomapćenje* were presented in previous chapters, stressed that even Churches lived in some form of “unarticulated forgiving,” meaning that memory of tragedies was, on the surface, treated as forgiven but was never actually fully articulated. He stressed that, nevertheless, memory of past suffering was never directly presented as a cause that required revenge, although it was later manifested in such a way:

I think that it [dealing with a painful memory] was very weak, that remembering was not elaborated. (…) Even what was not elaborated, but was carried as some form of historical contingency, or as some sort of a Christian response in the way of unarticulated forgiving—even that was forgotten. I do not believe that people were educated to seek revenge.[[350]](#footnote-350)

We have previously discussed the colluding effects of silencing and parallel family-histories that produced some form of semi-articulated narratives with many myth-like properties. However, as such, they were not sufficient in and of themselves to create political action. Although they encompassed the sentiments of resentment, distrust, and anger, they did not offer a blueprint for future violent action. It was only when political power, connected with military means, used those images in the context of a new ideological program that it was used to fuel collective mobilization. In this way, we can account for the assertion that the transmission of tragedies in families was not accompanied by direct calls for revenge but that memory was nonetheless very easily used as a basis for revenge once conflicts had escalated.

The absence of credible and generally accepted authorities facilitated the use of tragic memories to foment war. Since the previous regime was already viewed with suspicion and was, in addition, challenged by suppressed family stories, newly established national authorities (i.e., political leaders) had a free hand to mobilize those memories, almost free of constraint. Before the war in the 1990s, for Pavle, people were the ultimate victims of a combination of *mnemonic totalitarianism* (strong hegemonic control over past memories in the public sphere) and *mnemonic anarchy* (unarticulated and incoherent collective memories in the private sphere):

Many things were not processes, and they were then left … in some dark corner of history. Therefore, they are not known, and things that are not known are treated as if they never happened. Then they remain only in the domain of some personal story. We witnessed such situations in relation to the Second World War. The truth is not known in its entirety; it was not processed, and I am not just speaking about the Serbian people, but for all people, since crimes were committed against all peoples [i.e., ethnic groups] during the Second World War. They all suffered then. The Communist government hid that, shrouded it in a veil of secrecy. At the end, we became victims because we did not go through the process of identifying crimes and perpetrators. What was left were family stories. Every house had its own version of murder, or someone else’ murder, and [each house had] its own truth. And we are all victims. It was then easy to set us against each other when things [i.e., the war] started. We were all defending ourselves from something, that ‘alien evil’, that ‘monster’ that was coming to eat us.[[351]](#footnote-351)

Suppression and subsequent propaganda, paradoxically, went hand in hand. Pavle used the metaphor of a monster to describe the images of the dangerous Other in the year before the war that rose from divided family stories. One can critically ask how it was possible that an anomic situation in which “each house had its own truth” could lead to any coordinated action, but the answer might not be very complicated. Although some the segments of the stories were certainly very different, their main elements (i.e., the identifies of victim and of enemy) converged. Since the answer to the question of who the victim was remained the same—*us*—the other answers simply followed from that one. The structure of war propaganda, which typically contains only basic dualities and fear mongering elements, matched quite neatly the structure of clandestine-memories reduced only to those basic elements and morals cognizant with the analogy of the snake that could sting again.

Their *secret* histories had an enormous influence on people precisely because they were transmitted in a milieu marked by elevated social distrust. They constituted elements of *uncanny truths* in a context of an authoritarian regime. Once this regime collapsed and its ideology was finally denounced as *fake*,the only truth that was left was the partial truth of dualities and oppositions that the propaganda preceding the war conveniently echoed. At the same time, following the Second World War, the dominant ethos of victimhood was group-victimhood not individual-victimhood. In other words, individual suffering was not recognized, acknowledged, or valued as such. Instead, the primary suffering was the “suffering of the people.” Although today we are so familiar with the notion that “each victim is a story,” the memory of suffering that people spoke about in my research could be better described with the sentence “each victim tells a group’s story.”

# 1.5. Religion and the collective memory of suffering

Within the framework of religion, the memory of suffering is divided between the poles of universality and particularism. Suffering is one of the most prominent religious themes. While on the one hand it is very universalist, in the sense that human suffering is not distinguished according to the religious affiliation of the innocent individual, the very structure of religious rites makes the commemoration of suffering selective. That, to some degree, explains the problem that previously presented—that religious communities were not linking memory of suffering to revenge but were nevertheless drawn into the cycle of accusation and violence once the conflict started. Why then was the religious community unable to speak in a more universalist way about the importance of respect for human suffering beyond its own group, about the suffering of their former enemies?

## 1.5.1. Universal suffering in a particular way

It is important to note that neither Christianity nor Islam negate the importance of human suffering in general. However, with respect to its commemoration, a gathered community is not an assembly made up of individuals drawn from humanity in general but is instead a specific set of individuals sharing an apparent religious (and often ethnic) background. For that reason, rites intended to commemorate victims are conducted for the specific believers who demand and attend those services. Take for instance this conversation with Ljudevit:

**Q:** Are some historical tragedies transferred from one generation to another and commemorated in religious rites, for instance in pilgrimages?

**A:** Of course, they are. We have gathering masses where we commemorate all that suffered under the Turkish *zulum* (Turkish rule) and all that who suffered under Communist torture…. We celebrate our numerous heroes and martyrs who witnessed their faith, and some among them are saints, i.e., beatified. In that sense, yes, there are. We also remember the innocents from the Homeland War, those who gave their lives for freedom and the homeland. Also, for them masses are celebrated, and there are commemorations and events so as not to forget them.

**Q:** Did you personally conduct religious rites for victims of other national groups or not?

**A:** I didn’t. Nobody ever asked me to.[[352]](#footnote-352)

In his interview, he did not negate the historical tragedies of other communities in Bosnia and Herzegovina, but, in his role of a Catholic religious leader, he has ready-made tools and procedures to commemorate the tragedies of Catholic victims. Moreover, people who attend those services share the same religious worldview as the deceased and find such commemoration both natural and appropriate. If he wanted to offer a commemorative service for, let us say, Muslim victims in an exclusively Catholic surrounding, he would face a host of questions, for instance: How to do that? Would a Christian rite for Muslim victims be considered offensive? Would such an action have any positive consequences? Would there be anyone who would attend it? The situation would be the same for other religious servants. In that respect, the scope of people who can be commemorated in religious rites is already limited, despite the fact that the theological positions of both Christianity and Islam emphasize the equal value of all human beings as individuals created by God and do not distinguish between their suffering.

A possible way beyond this limitation would not be replacing religious ceremonies with non-religious ones, but rather extending the circles of empathy, and one way to do it would be through interreligious initiatives. The first high-profile activity of that kind in Bosnia and Herzegovina was implemented in April 2017, on the initiative of the Interreligious Council, when representatives of four major religious groups (Judaism, Islam, Catholicism, and Orthodox Christianity) visited four places that represent suffering from each group. In a TV interview after the event, the current presider of the Council, Orthodox bishop (Vladika) Grigorije, underlined the importance of the initiative and, at the same time, criticized the divisive use of religious symbols in commemorative monuments.[[353]](#footnote-353) Responding to a comment about excessive religious monuments erected in memory of victims but at the same time becoming expressions of spite, he stated:

I would dare to say that they are shooting [each other] with those symbols, and that is horrible. Yesterday during lunch after everything [i.e., after the visit], we were discussing what kind of monuments should be placed on those places we visited (…) Somebody said that, in Hiroshima I think, there is one plaque on the ground. After going through all the places where people were killed (…), you come to that stone, which is almost invisible, set into the floor. Everyone who wants to pay homage to the victims has to touch that stone with their foreheads. I thought how that was a genuine symbol. But if you were to erect a cross or something else that could be erected on the top of a mountain or hill, it would be as if your intent was to poke someone in the eye with [that symbol]. And that has nothing to do with what we call faith, religion, love, carefulness, or care for the other.[[354]](#footnote-354)

Grigorije’s remark demonstrates another issue related to religious commemoration of collective suffering—the use of religious symbols that, in theory, are meant to convey unifying messages for the opposite purpose. Jakov recalled a difficulty he faced one year when he had to participate in a commemoration of Croatian victims for which a monument in the shape of a cross was erected in the immediate vicinity of the village Ahmići where, in 1993, members of the HVO [Bonian-Herzegovinian Croatian Defense Forces] committed a mass atrocity on Muslim civilians. The local politicians invited him, but he managed to find a way to resist the appropriation of religious rituals for political purposes or for deepening of divisions between Bosniaks and Croats:

Before the mass, I had to bless the cross. Man, it was politics that erected it. And I had to do it [the blessing], (…) And only 200 meters above, one could still see a destroyed mosque, and there, above, Muslims had placed a monument for the victims of Ahmići. Moreover, the media were following this…. How to get out of that? [Or] should I [even try to] get out of it? A cross is a symbol of a sacrifice. Over 500 Croats, I think, died in the Lašva valley during the war, and seventy and something victims died in Kržančevo selo alone sometime around December 22nd, 1993. Then, immediately afterwards, in January, around sixty in Buhine kuće (…) I saw images of people—massacred, cut, tortured…. People heard the groaning of those who were tortured, and so on. It means that cross was not erected without reason. (…). I knew what I had to do in that moment…. [that was to say] what I always say: “Behind the cross nobody who has hatred inside, or a desire for revenge, should hide. A cross is a symbol of suffering, but also of a victory. But that victory is a victory over evil, primarily over evil in and of oneself. [A cross] is not evil (…) To make an atomic bomb in the shape of a cross and throw it at your enemies – the cross is not that! With a cross, a person should first and foremost conquer oneself, and, by doing that, he will conquer everything else, and so on.” I was [saying things] in that context. (…) But, I want to emphasize this: politics always wants a priest, a cassock (…), they always want him on their side to legitimatize both their good deeds and their crimes.[[355]](#footnote-355)

Religious commemorations have, by their very structure, two opposite dimensions: the transcendent (vertical) one and the communal (horizontal) one. They are, as a whole, based on the idea of an afterlife in which every innocent suffering is expiated and, in that respect, the specific ethnic or religious background of a victim is irrelevant. At the same time, the community which professes that belief is a community within a specific tradition that honors, primarily, its own victims. In that respect, the communitarian dimension can easily take pride of place over the universal one, particularly during the ceremonies that are not strictly religious and that do not take place in religious buildings per se but in public spaces yet still with the visible presence of religious representatives and religious symbols. As we can see from Jakov’s testimony mentioned above, a deliberate effort is needed to disentangle religious sentiments form ideological appropriation.

At the same time, successful religious initiatives that manage to broaden the circle of empathy and compassion can achieve a significant breakthrough in society. The best example is the previously mentioned initiative of the Interreligious Council, which was the first high-profile initiative of that kind in post-war Bosnia and Herzegovina and which received significant public approval.

In short, religious commemorations operate within a dissonance between a universalist theology and a particular pastoral mission. Their communal dimension makes them vulnerable for ideological appropriation, especially during public ceremonies in which religious symbols and sentiments intermingle with national ones. During those ceremonies, one can often witness transference of the sacred onto the community itself in a process in which dead victims become sacred symbols of collective suffering, *martyrs* of communal suffering. I turn to that issue in the next section.

## 1.5.2. Martyrs of communal suffering

Death itself, even the death of a religious individual, does not make that individual a martyr. Death for faith is a necessary but not sufficient condition for martyrdom. Someone becomes a martyr when his or her death is recognized and commemorated by a community. Martyrdom is, in other words, grounded in a certain form of collective memory. Martyrs do not remember themselves; instead, a community awards that status. As the medieval genre of *vitae* shows, lives of martyrs are constructed in a way that follows certain conventions and responds to the needs of the historical moments in which the mnemonic community resides.

Konstantin well described the historical transformations of the Christian notion of a martyr. In the early Church, a martyr was someone who witnessed faith against the political and social establishment of that time, even against ‘family, friends, and relatives. With respect to the political power of the Roman state, martyrs were betrayers. In the later, post-Constantine Church, Konstantin noted that the narrative of martyrdom had significantly changed:

Martyrhood, in essence, is [continues to be] suffering and death, but it is no longer something that represents the anti-world, (…) the resistance to everything that surrounds it. On the contrary, it is often a fight for an ideology, for people, albeit connected to some Christian elements. Thus, while we, on the one hand, recognize the similarities between martyrs from the 1th, 2nd, or 3rd centuries, those from 15th or 18th century would be more ethno-martyrs, national heroes who, with the Church’s blessing, conquered, defended, and spread the faith, etc., taking many heads off in the process. All that is romanticized in the *Lives of the Saints*, and [it is said that] a faithful emperor eradicated a heresy, for instance. However, that implies the loss of thousands of lives or the exiles of thousands of people. When it comes to understanding martyrhood, the original narrative is really somehow different.[[356]](#footnote-356)

In a follow-up question, I asked Konstantin whether the martyred death of someone is considered a source of grace itself or whether speaking about someone’s death serves as an inspiration for a community, making the narratives of martyrdom more important than the martyrdom itself. He said that the latter is often the case and that our tendency to romanticize the distant past can also create situations in which the narratives of martyrdom become a way of understanding religion itself:

[W]hen people start to retroactively attribute to Jesus characteristics of individuals who were later recognized as his followers, then we have a problem. If we start seeing Jesus as a nationalist, if we start looking at him through the prism of a certain period. It is not easy to resist [doing] that. We live in a certain context; we often think discursively (…), and I think that a great responsibility of the Church is to act as the hammer and chisel that continuously removes the layers of history from that golden statue.[[357]](#footnote-357)

The Islamic term closest to the Christian martyr is *shahid*, which is used to describe a person who died fulfilling some religious duty but is reserved most commonly for dead warriors. Enis explained the special religious honor that is attributed to *shahids*, people who died “defending their family, faith, honor (…) [I]f a woman dies during pregnancy, she is also considered shahid (…) With respect to faith, they have a special status; they are treated differently and are buried and prepared for burial in a special way.”[[358]](#footnote-358) He explained that, nevertheless, all others who did good deeds will also find their reward with God and that we humans cannot know their measure of good deeds.

Hamza, similarly, said that martyrdom is always a form of dedicated sacrifice which merits special respect. However, I wanted to know why people who sacrificed for peace in a non-combatant way, even dying while saving the lives of innocent people, are not recognized as martyrs. Even more important to know was why religious leaders do not give them space in their religious sermons. Hamza responded: “[T]hey [religious leaders] probably go by religious inertia, [giving] to people what they can more easily accept. They often pander to people, they pander. Now, you try to explain to someone… it is easier to take a [military] hero as an example [of sacrifice].”[[359]](#footnote-359)

For Konstantin, preferential bias for warriors in religious sermons and preaching signals an incorrect understanding of faith:

I think that the answer should be sought in in incorrect understanding of war, fighting, and sacrifice. The constant danger of the Church being adjusted to the world represents a temptation that is not easy to resist (…) The Church wants to be adjusted, to be populist, to be the people’s Church, and, in order to achieve that, she cannot be too provocative. But, to be generous towards Mother Church – I am usually harsh [laugh] – I think that those within the Church do not do that intentionally. They were simply not formed, or we did not form them in such a way, that they did not [learn to] put things in the right order. [Consequently], our values are not those primary values as presented in the Gospel (…) Today we have people who, to a large degree, do not understand the Christian message and deliver it to others through who-knows-what ideological filters, but… in good faith. I think that in ecclesial education, especially in theology, we often need provocative, controversial, and courageous people who would shake up the Church. As Rahner would say—shake up but do not destroy. It cannot be destroyed, of course, since it is not the product of human hands, but that human element [inside] needs to be purified continuously because that is the only way to put things in their right places.[[360]](#footnote-360)

The cult of martyrdom, as also do many other forms of collective memories of conflict, already carries the danger of ideological appropriation. The additional danger being the framing of ideological concepts in religious terms and enacting them through religious cults. In case of warriors, their actions are explained through the prism of collective motives. In collective memory, it does not matter what were their initial motives for fighting and whether they had any personal desires to fight or were just forcefully conscripted. When remembered, martyred warriors are said to give their lives courageously for their country, to die in sacrifice for others. The compound of warrior-martyr can then easily occupy religious reasoning so that fighting becomes a paragon (if not the only example) of martyrdom. People who died because they refused to obey unjust policies are in such an arrangement pushed into oblivion or non-existence. Here, we see the additional tension in the religious discourse, which continually propagates peace but prefers warriors for paradigmatic examples of sacrifice and self-sacrifice.

Konstantin and Hamza exemplified those who noticed this inner tension and described the preference for warriors as a form of adjusting religious logic to the logic of the group. Željko held a similar opinion. For him, it is difficult to promote, even in religious communities, the ideal of non-violent peace-work because:

[P]eacemaking is not something specific to humans, and it is [certainly] not their natural inclination. Humans are hunters, tending towards evil by nature (…) [In] peacemaking, a person must truly overcome himself. (…) It is entirely logical that a person who has suffered injustice should desire revenge. That is entirely logical, natural, and human. But to humanize oneself in the true sense [has to be done] through what I call the radical humanism of faith.[[361]](#footnote-361)

This points again to internal heterogeneity among religious community leaders. While sharing the same principles, their views on the justified use of violence, and the proper remembering of suffering, vary greatly. While many employ warriors as the paramount examples of self-giving sacrifice, there are those who notice the lacunas with respect to people who use non-violent means to achieve peace. As a result, the discourse about peace-making becomes pinned to the discourse about justified use of force to resist violence, demonstrating how the memory of suffering can narrow one of the basic ideas of the Abrahamic religion: the idea of peace.

The discussion about martyrs was just a part of the larger discussion on the inner challenges of painful memories. Memory can be biased, selective, reductive, dangerous, and ‘polluting’—as we can see from the previous testimonies. The logical question that follows concerns its balance and decontamination.

# 1.6. Decontamination of memory

In the preceding two chapters, I discussed the relationship between forgiveness, reconciliation, and the social frameworks of memory. While forgiving is primarily understood as a personal act, it is still not isolated from the ways in which a group constructs and treats certain painful memories. In a similar way, *reconciliation with someone* assumes at least two principal actors of reconciliation, and collective memories certainly have a bearing on the dynamics of these processes. Both forgiveness and reconciliation suggest a need for some form of engaged activities that mitigate the dangers inherent in memory production and transmission.

Throughout the interviews, I have noticed that participants have a firm understanding of the importance of memory. However, in their responses they did not discuss at any considerable length what are the precise mechanisms through which collective memory, as a social product, is constructed and modified. It was nonetheless clear that they emphasized two primary modes of memory production: the *cognitive element* of imagination and a *corporal element* of commemoration. Needless to say, that commemoration always includes some form of imagination and vice versa, but, in this way, they pointed to two key loci in which intervention into collective remembering is possible so that it remains faithful to the past (remains a legacy) but does not deviate into a cause for violence (becoming a pathology).

With respect to *imagination*, they spoke in both epistemological and therapeutic terms. The main idea was the following: remembering of things that are accusatory of a community serves as a corrective with respect to innate tendencies toward a positive inner-group and a negative out-group bias; unveiling the responsibility as well as the grief helps a community to reach a catharsis.

In the case of *commemorative practices*, the important concept “prayerful commemoration” was mentioned. It suggested that the memory of painful events should be constructed in such a way that it resembles the structure of a prayer. On the one hand, it meant that imagination that leads to memory should always posit an image of a painful Other that, one day, might be a member of the same community (making a link with reconciliation). On the other hand, the idea suggests a commemorative community in which the mere presence of the painful Other, even without any aim of reconciliation, serves as a counterbalance to exclusionary group biases.

Finally, there is the religiously unique notion of a *liturgical memory*, which is in this study specific to Christianity, in which memory is both an enactment of a religious doctrine and a symbol of a different form of remembering. As will become clearer later, liturgical memory is primarily anchored in the promised future while the past is constructed retroactively from that transcendental viewpoint. Liturgical memory is, therefore, in many ways related to the idea of reconciliation after the end of the history, but one important difference deserves note. Liturgy, in Christian doctrine, is not just a matter of a promise or hope for the time beyond history, but is a real enactment, here and now, of an eschatological community, i.e., of a reconciled humanity. In that respect, it is both an imaginative proactive and a participatory practice in which the memory of the past becomes fused with the memory that ‘comes’ from the future.

## 1.6.1. Decontamination of memory as knowledge and catharsis

The first notion of the purification of memory is related to the epistemological notion of remembering crimes that committed within the community. In that respect, Haris stated: “I, as a Bosniak, as a Muslim… wherever Bosniaks committed a crime against the others—also that crime should be remembered and pointed to. We should look historically at the facts that happened and know the reasons why they happened.”[[362]](#footnote-362) Some respondents suggested that a joint historical research that would be beneficial for remembering on the collective level in a similar way that would positively influence forgiveness on an individual level:

[W]e obviously did not pass through a catharsis, and we have unresolved relationships from before and from the fall of the Bosnian kingdom. Christians feel that as the end of that which was Bosnian, and Muslims see it as their liberation. So we do not agree there, and that was five or six centuries ago. [Then] we have the arrival of Austro-Hungary, where we also do not agree. (…) Gavrilo Princip is sometimes celebrated as a hero, sometimes as a terrorist. We have the Second World War, where also unresolved is who was what. Then [finally] the last war where we again did not resolve anything. One more time, things are unresolved – we neither have a winner nor a loser, but everybody won, all are defeated, all are heroes, all are war criminals (…) We did not pass through a catharsis; we do not have that purification to clearly place things so that we can build a future that is not burdened by uncertainties, but one where we will say “that is it.” In this way, what is the other’s is always a problem and mine are always good, even if he is a war criminal (…) Collective memory cannot be erased; it has to exist. Perhaps it needs to be purified, approached scientifically in the sense that facts are stated, no matter how crushing they are for the pride present in our collective memory – that our ‘kings’ were perhaps not so great, that every act was not triumphal but [instead] very different. So, perhaps, we need a purification of collective memory.[[363]](#footnote-363)

Although the idea of a consensus among historians sounds interesting, I am not sure that it would work seamlessly in practice. For instance, with respect to the acceptance of responsibility, Catholic and Muslim religious leaders emphasized primarily the need of the Serbian side to undergo a catharsis of accepting the largest criminal responsibility for the war and the highest number of crimes committed over other communities. When Orthodox respondents talked about the war, they mostly blamed the Communist regime for the rise of hatred and emphasized the need for all sides to come to terms with the past, stressing that Serbian victims in the last war are neglected while others are inflated.[[364]](#footnote-364) So, even though there was an institution with a mandate to produce a common framework of undoubtable facts about the war, it is not clear that such facts would prevail over narratives of group grievances, at least in the short term. At the same time, this is not to say that such a step is not worth taking.

Some respondents thus proposed a set of supporting actions that would mitigate the biases in the collective memories. Drago linked economic deprivation and ideological manipulation. He stressed that only poor people are fighting wars and get killed and that, at the same time, they are most easily mobilized for nationalist topics. It is perhaps the lack of economic resources that makes symbolic resources more valuable: poor people who have lost most during the war actually did not gain any profit aside of symbolic pride, and that symbolic pride is their greatest asset, which they do not want to lose, but it makes them vulnerable to manipulation:

Here, unfortunately, memory is fed by suffering, you know. We still did not reach the stage to understand that it [suffering] is suffering and that it was not good, regardless of the side. The other should not always be to blame, but to draw some values from the suffering of one’s own people to build peace. However, here poverty is a big problem. Poor people were who fought the war here (…) The reason why I am against the war is because poor people die. It could be by coincidence that someone rich dies, but the majority of dead from all sides, I think around 95%, were poor, were on the front lines (…) And today it is still easiest to level those nationalist charges against poor people. Why? Because they have nothing. They died in the war, and they are still fed with that nationalist [fervor]… that they will [achieve] something…. But poor people stay poor (…) Poor people are easiest to manipulate. Unfortunately, if there is another war, the poor will again die.[[365]](#footnote-365)

Drago thus insisted on the economic amelioration of the status of those most affected by tragic memories, which would make them realize the dreadfulness of suffering and manipulation and build some sense of solidarity with people from other groups that are in the same position. Aside from the economic factor, his program for the “purification of memory” included three major things: 1) admitting the crimes committed by one’s own group members, 2) accepting the suffering of the others, and 3) documenting not only crimes but also good deeds done by members of the other groups. In his view, the court in The Hague has a limited scope because it is based on the documentation of crimes while another extremely important part of war experience—the good of the Other—is completely ignored.[[366]](#footnote-366) Therefore, purification of memory, for Drago, requires both the acceptance of responsibility and the admittance of good. In addition, Drago looked favorably on the dialogical initiatives among different religious and ethnic groups but made it blatantly clear that communities are still not ready to accept them. Individuals who dare to step out of the group norm are often labeled as betrayers.

Slaven recognized the same problem and emphasized the importance of individuals who dare to go outside the closed circle of self-victimization and exclusion of the other. He argued in favor of an approach in which the canon for the memory of suffering is not loyalty to a community but human suffering, which was, in some cases, inflicted by members of the very community that was being persecuted. Almost all people I talked to admitted that there is no real freedom to mention the crimes committed by their own group. Andrej, a young Orthodox priest, for instance, replied as follows to the question of whether there is a freedom to be critical:

Of course not. Unfortunately, I emphasize unfortunately (…) Very little is being said about that, and very little is being done. That is the responsibility that nobody claims, the responsibility of every community (…) All [communities] stress their problems and their victims. I do not say that they should not, but we have *zlopamćenje* here. And if they would at least balance both, then that would be excellent. But that is not being done. Instead one goes from plus to minus, from minus to plus, from one extreme to another.[[367]](#footnote-367)

Andrej had the more moderate goal of at least achieving some *balance* in the evaluation of victims, instead of a consensus. For Željko, historical research by itself is not sufficient to achieve the goal of responsible remembering. He also suggested a change in moral assessment of crimes. What he finds problematic is the tendency, even when crimes are admitted, that a group does not measure their acts against comparable acts but instead compares the group’s’ ideals against the other group’s acts: “When the other is observed, his acts are judged by one’s shiny principles. It is not that practices are measured against practices. Within a political religion and zlopamćenje, that is fundamental. Only the evil of the other is remembered, one’s own evil is negated.”[[368]](#footnote-368)

Finally, speaking about the call of John Paul II for the purification of memory, Jakov underlined that it might indeed be a self-weakening act since the admittance of guilt could be perceived as a loss of moral credit. However, he saw it as something which is primarily important for the very community that dares to perform such an act:

To whom was the pope speaking? To whom? He was not speaking to the world nor to those who were most affected. Those people [the victims] knew that. He was saying to me, who does not know, who is not conscious, to me who can perhaps make some new mistakes. Public contrition means ‘I show it to you’ (.…) the pope did the only thing he could. He did it, although he knew that many would be triumphal because of that. However, many triumphed when Jesus was crucified on the cross, but he triumphs at the end with the Resurrection (…) I see that act as the act of Christ’s true vicar on the Earth.[[369]](#footnote-369)

Purification of memory for him is the *only right thing to do* within a community. His primary rationale was not the positive dialogical effects that might ensue (although they were not excluded) but the faithfulness to the very notion of Christian message in which apparent weakness is not seen as a defeat but as a courageous act. It is the knowledge and acknowledgment of the things the community wants to hide and forget that makes it spiritually healthier and more resilient to the repetition of the same mistakes in the future.

## 1.6.2. Decontamination of memory as a community and as compassion

Upon noticing the problems of selective and exclusivist memories which recognize only the suffering of one’s own group while remaining myopic with respect to the suffering of others, Konstantin emphasized the need for establishing a healthy relationship between the religious communities and the secular state, thereby granting equal status to everyone. That should be supplemented with a “before all, remorseful confrontation with the past” additionally it should include nourishment of compassion, which is “for the Gospel self-evident but still so absent from reality.”[[370]](#footnote-370) His phrase “remorseful confrontation with the past” provides a hint as to the additional ways in which the problems of selectivity, exclusivity, and bias, inherent in the collective memory of suffering, can be confronted. Konstantin based his idea of purification of memory on a parable commonly used to illustrate the virtue of charity, the parable of a Good Samaritan who crosses the established boundaries of a tribe and even religious purity laws in order to relieve the pain of an Other.[[371]](#footnote-371) Acknowledging the suffering of the Other, for Konstantin, is a way of establishing a basic human community, but more than that, it is a paradigm for remembering painful history. That stance goes against the common tendencies to stay within the circle of comfort by reducing the Other to a *comfortable Other*, i.e., accepting their alterity only insofar it does not make us uncomfortable. For Konstantin, the real Other is the challenging Other, the one that we would like to exile from our memory, to pass by, to ignore:

**Q:** [T]ragical events are often the source of rage and desire for revenge, and they can also acquire Christian and sacred overtones. How, in a Christian paradigm, would one construct the memory of the past?

**A:** It seems to me that one possible solution would be to accept, by virtue of being most profoundly inspired by the Revelation that came in the form of the Son of God, that a Christian’s duty is to think about the Other and to put the Other above oneself. That is by no means easy, but one should insist on that maximally. It is a matter of course that our sermons contain “love your neighbor.” One can hear that on every corner, but under the term “neighbor” one does not include ‘Samaritans.’ In other words, the perspective of the believers is not sharp enough to realize that the Other is someone truly other [radically different]. Instead, one is easily absolved [of responsibility] by not detecting that true Other but, instead, by being satisfied with [concluding] that the Other is the Other from our own community. (…) The truth is that one possible solution for the decontamination of memory is to pay attention to the Other, but honestly. In that way, one does not minimize the victims of one’s own people but also accepts the victims of others as one’s own victims. That consciousness about the unity of humanity, but not some mystical unity left for some future time but everyday, immediate unity, is something that the Church’s message should transmit to the world in a clearer and more radical way. I said already, the Church is certainly telling a nice love story about God and a human person, about God and the world, but it seems to me that [that message] does not reflect real life. One needs to love the neighbor [i.e., the close one], and we all say that, but nobody, or hardly anyone, is really loving n that way. It is because the neighbor [the close one] is only the one we recognize within our own corpus (…) Our whole life framework, relations that the Gospel suggests to us, as if they are reserved only for a specific circle [of people], and no rules govern beyond that circle, because they [those who are outside] are not the one we want to establish relationship with (…) [A] contemporary way of contextualizing the story of a merciful Samaritan would be to say that an exemplary father of a family, a priest, a nun passed by the sick man who was molested by the robbers and lied next to the road from Jerusalem to Jericho, but then the one who helped him was a gay, a transgender person, or a Chetnik in Croatian case, an Ustasha in Serbian case (…) We have lost nowadays a possibility to witness in such a way, but I think this is an answer to the question of how to resolve that painful memory that is somehow exclusivist. Our memory is only the memory of our wounds and sufferings. That is deeply unchristian. I did not hear that theologians and the Church speak a lot about that.

Konstantin spoke at length about the imaginative aspect of the community with the Other in which the mental presence of the Other and the different makes us more attentive to the wounds of our collective memory of suffering. Following the same idea of community, some other respondents placed an accent on commemoration.

Edin, an imam who had previously criticized the seemingly endless multiplication of commemorative practices, suggested a different form of commemoration that would at the same time be inclusive and innovative. In his view, commemorations of suffering should involve people from different ethnic groups and move from a standard static form towards more innovative commemorative practices that would have increased attractiveness to young people. Examples could be a memory-walk or a memory camp in the mountains. The idea of joint commemoration would not imply that the collective memories would, at the end of a commemoration, be the same. However, the mere presence of the Other (i.e., the painful Other) could act as a counter-balance to the otherwise tempting challenges of demonization and exclusion.[[372]](#footnote-372) For Edin, the presence of the Other is the physical presence in commemorative events while Konstantin spoke primarily about inclusive remembering, remembering that would take the Other into account, remembering which is intentionally made “impure.”

However, one could ask the question as to whether inclusion of the Other would require a mnemonic community to eliminate the idea of group victimhood altogether. Would such a form of memory resemble the previous Communist mode of remembering, which avoided the idea of specific perpetrators and victims, which ultimately failed to facilitate the process of coming to terms with the past? For Damjan, that does not need to be the case. It is not necessary to speak only about individual human suffering, but also about crimes of a regime, suffering of a group, the dangers that political systems can bring to their constituencies. However, the commemoration of victims should always be an open one, allowing for participation of all people, regardless of their ethnic/national identity.[[373]](#footnote-373) In other words, purification of memory does not require complete elimination of the notions of group or political responsibility, but it does require detachment of victims from current political interests that aim to create new divisions from an old division, to produce new political victims from old ones. Furthermore, commemoration of victims should have an inclusive form; theologically, it should be organized as a prayerful commemoration, that was already partially elaborated in the chapter on forgiveness. I will explore this notion further in the following chapter.

## 1.6.3. Decontamination of memory as a prayer

In several interviews that I conducted, the notion of “prayerful commemoration,” “commemoration as prayer,” or some similar formulation was advanced. Initially, I did not pay closer attention to that. Meanwhile, working on the notions of forgiving and reconciliation, this concept seemed very fruitful. Thus, it merits a closer attention.

The term “prayerful commemoration” can be understood in several ways. First, it can be understood very literally, *as a prayer (a demand) that calls for remembrance*. Bogdan referred to the passage in the New Testament when a criminal crucified next to Jesus says, “Remember me when you come into your kingdom.” For Bogdan, that form of prayer indicates that memory, even in the context of suffering, can be salvific. Bogdan contrasted that call for remembering in the form of a prayer to *zlopamćenje*, memory which “closes a person, destroys his heart, stones his heart, does not give him a chance of contrition, makes him incapable of forgiving and, at the end, does not let him a chance to be remembered by God in God’s kingdom.”[[374]](#footnote-374) Bogdan’s presentation could be as applicable to personal memory as it was illuminating for collective remembering since the mentioned scene is not just a matter of a single individual but is a part of a shared Christian religious tradition. Prayerful memory in this sense thus implies a recursive action of one person saying to another “remember me in such a way that we can be together.” On the individual level, such a form of memory can function as an apology, on an interpersonal level, as an expression of a desire for reconciliation, while on the collective level it functions as a paradigm of an interrupted memory in which the painful Other is understood in a very Levinasian way, in which the ethical imperative “do not kill me” becomes interpreted as “remember me.” The basis of this understanding is, indeed, the very Christian notion of a prayer in the paradigmatic example containing *Our Father*. Prayerful memory, or memory as prayer, thus always includes a painful Other as its integral part.

Recalling the conversation with Damjan in the section on reconciliation, we remember that he placed reconciliation behind history. He insisted on the notion that the theological principle of the Resurrection ultimately uproots events from history and places them on the horizon beyond particularity, outside the national and ethnic division.[[375]](#footnote-375) Employing the example of the Prebilovci memorial ceremony, he emphasized the inclusivity of the remembrance of victims, stating that participation was based exclusively on respect for human suffering and not on the nationality of the victims or of the commemorators. For that reason, the organizers asked participants not to bring national flags or insignia since that would limit the unifying potential of suffering. Therefore, in the second sense, a prayerful commemoration is a form of commemoration that mimics the eschatological reality which is open to all people. He described the commemoration in Prebilovci in the following way:

Let us say that it was a step forward from what happened in other Serbian, Bosniak, and other sites marked by suffering. That was a step forward, not as a vague theory but something we managed to situate in space (…) We offered a slogan, alluding to the etymological roots of the place, Prebilovci, “Where love abides, hate is no more”. [The slogan rhymes in the original]. Hence, if we wanted to commemorate that place of suffering, that place where love should rule eternally, where there cannot be hatred towards anyone. We asked that every person of good will, no matter who (…), that anyone can participate with pride if that person demonstrated a [respectful] approach towards the victims, and that person was not automatically marked as a criminal just because he was a member of a certain ethnic group. So, that has interest as an example of a situated theology, or at least of a desire for it not to remain merely a theory.[[376]](#footnote-376)

Similarly, Edin called for centralized commemorations that would be respectful towards the pain and status of the victims, but not in a way that created a barrier for other ethnic groups to participate in.[[377]](#footnote-377) Prayerful commemoration, interestingly, is defined by prayer not in the sense of religious formulas, but as a way out of the closed circles of both history and group belonging. *Prayerful* element is that which goes towards the other, which demonstrates respect in an inclusive way, but without falling prey to an abstract universality. *A prayer is a prayer for somebody particular and specific, but in such a way that the results of the prayer are beneficial to all.* In the following section, I turn to the Christian theological basis for that kind of commemoration.

## 1.6.4. Liturgical memory

Although all religious traditions are based on some form of foundational events that are remembered and commemorated, liturgical memory is specific to Christianity insofar as it represents a unique way of conceptualizing time, memory of suffering, and the purification of memory. In order to understand how it works, we have to go back to the foundational event of Christianity, which is the death, suffering, and Resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth. Although those events are situated in a specific historical period, they are also remembered as events which transcend history by establishing a unity between the past, present, and ultimate future. The central mechanism of that unity is a religious memory which finds its most explicit expression in liturgical celebrations. Both in Catholicism and Orthodox Christianity, liturgy is an event which, in some way, suspends the standard mechanisms of space and time. A community of memory, which gathers for a liturgical celebration, believes that it already participates not in the *foundational* event (as myth would have it), but in the *revealed* events of the time beyond time. In other words, the memory of the past foundational events is a channel towards a promised eschatological future. Liturgical time, we can say, is a fused time of *memory which looks forward*, not backward. Moreover, the liturgical place is a space in which eschatological relations are superimposed on the physical community. This is how Miloš, an Orthodox priest, presented the difference between ordinary memory and liturgical memory:

There is a big difference between liturgical memory and Eucharistic anamnestic prayers [on the one hand] and [ordinary] memory [on the other] because human memory is, by nature, connected to the past. Liturgical memory is already of the future (…) There is one prayer in the old Vatican liturgy, in *Missalum Gothicum*, that begins with “remembering Your second coming” and only then, interestingly, speaks about death and suffering [of Jesus Christ]. Hence, it immediately begins from eschatology; we remember first that what is for human *ratio* [reason] impossible [because, normally] we cannot remember something that has not happened, but only things that have taken place in history, in accordance with human categories. However, as Christians [we can] easily find an answer as to why and how that [anamnestic memory] possible. It is possible thanks to the grace of the Holy Spirit, which transcends the limits of the past, present, and future. In that way, both past and future become the eternal present in our liturgical experience. That is the liturgical anamnestic memory which we, Christians, who participate in Christ’s mysteries, experience and live. Other memories, profane [memories] outside the liturgical context, perhaps should not be called anamnesis, because it is always a memory of the past. However, I would invite us to reflect a little, so that we include in that historical memory also the memory of the future, for the sake of a happier future, so that our memory does not remain encapsulated and framed only within past tragedies. Instead, [we should] remember eschatologically, including the brighter future that awaits us (…) We remember Christ’s cross and resurrection, but we do not stop at that. We also remember His glorious second coming. If there were not that second one, we would not derive great benefit from remembering the first [coming] (…) All right, we remember, history records everything, but let us bring a little bit of eschatology into our life. Let us also remember those things that have not yet happened, what the Holy Spirit brings, and imagine a little brighter future.[[378]](#footnote-378)

As Miloš explained, liturgical anamnesis is not just ordinary memory, but a transgressive memory which re-reads the past from the position of a revealed future. From the stance of ordinary memory, anamnesis can be seen simply as an instance of hope that does not have any truth value because it cannot be measured against reality. In the religious context, however, it is precisely the religious revelation that has the ultimate truth-value. Both past and present are, in that sense, susceptible to mistakes and imperfections—we know them both in a reductive way where the knowledge of more important and less important things is always to some degree aleatoric. The revelation of the ultimate future, for religious believers, is, to the contrary, the knowledge of ultimate things. It belongs to history as an index which points to a different place, the place which, in turn, becomes enacted through a liturgical memory.

Another important characteristic of liturgical memory is its simultaneous coupling of pain and appeasement, suffering and resurrection. As Željko explains: “[R]eligious communities are communities of memory. Faith is also established based on a historical event, but that event was God’s act of grace. The cornerstone of Christianity is a resurrection, not a cross. The cross is not neglected, but the cross without the resurrection is an event signifying an earthly defeat, a catastrophic earthly defeat.”[[379]](#footnote-379)

The liturgical conceptualization of the sacred memory also serves as an inspiration for a Christian attitude towards non-sacred memories of tragedies. For Fra Danijel, the Christian approach to memory is driven by those two principles; it accepts the past (principle of responsibility), but it always longs for the future (it is *Zukunftswehig*).[[380]](#footnote-380) Danijel used a newly coined German word *Zukunfswehig*, and the choice is intriguing because the suffix *-wehig* (as in *Heimweh*—homesick) suggests a desire, not only an orientation towards future. In the same way a traveler can desire to travel even when stationary, the desire towards the future can remain even when the subject is deeply immersed in the past. Similar to the liturgical memory, it does not negate the past, but it does not stop with its acknowledgment either. In this perspective, the principle of responsibility is a directed principle, i.e., it is a responsibility for the future, which is ultimately a reconciled future.

# 1.7. Interim conclusion: Archaeology and genealogy

Imagine the following archaeologist dilemma: during the restoration of a religious object that had been destroyed during a war, you discover another religious object beneath that belongs to a different religious cult. Moreover, those two groups had waged war against each other. Which religion’s object will you reconstruct?

The story is loosely based on a real situation that occurred during the restoration of the mosque in Stolac. The local bishop Ratko Perić spoke against the reconstruction of the mosque, pointing out that beneath it were the fundaments of a Christian church and graveyard originally destroyed during the Ottoman invasion of Bosnia and that one violence cannot be ignored just because another violence followed it.[[381]](#footnote-381)

In many ways, this situation is paradigmatic for the process of reconstruction of collective memories of conflict. Since we previously saw that the situation in the former Yugoslavia, for most of its history, was one of distrust and insecurity, in which memories were ‘buried’ but which nonetheless remained present as phantoms and then later metastasized all spheres of life. Reconstructions of buried memories were in many ways similar to archaeological excavations, in which one layer was discovered under another, and—if it dug deeply enough or stopped early enough—each community would find its own destroyed fundaments. Moreover, as in every reconstruction, new creations only partially resembled history. The rest was filled in by the imagination of the group’s leaders based on the needs of the reconstructing group.

However, that process was not just an archaeological one. Memory works did not cease with the reconstruction of what was meant to be hidden. Once the memory of pain was reconstructed, the community could not have been able to stop there. Such memory is never neutral. Destruction and suffering are directed actions, and obviously a *reconstruction of content* would also require a *reconstruction of motivations*—who destroyed it and why. In that way, the archaeology of suffering was followed by its genealogy: *communities were not only in need of information about the suffering, but also in need of explanations of the events that led to it, and of knowledge about those responsible for it.*

Both of these processes suffer from the predicament of being exclusivist. Although it might be a trivial solution to say that each suffering should be respected by all, that is rarely, if ever, completely possible. Where historical discontinuities are imminent, where one destruction was followed by another, it is unreasonable to expect that all groups will remember all tragedies. However, even if the power to uncover only some painful memories is limited, a burning question remains: How to reconstruct?

In this chapter, we saw that the problem of painful memory is precisely the problem of reconstruction. While, on the one hand, the desire to remember is based on a basic human desire to know what happened, especially with respect to ones close to oneself, it is at the same time a process that carries many potential risks. The same memory that helps a community develop inner solidarity and construct a framework through which individuals can make sense of their scattered images of suffering is also a memory that creates external borders. The process of remembering (recollection) is at the same time a process of re-*membering* (bringing individuals into a group). It is nonetheless the process of *out-membering*, i.e., creating an imaginative community of Others different from us, Others who are the cause of our pain. Once, when the archaeological excavation of the traces of our pain is complete, the community cannot help but ask about the reasons for that pain, about the motives of the Others that caused their suffering.

Excerpts from testimonies that we have read demonstrate how the memory in question always swings between the two poles of *legacy* and *pathology*. Pathology was seen as the ability of the collective memory of suffering to become the cause of renewed violence. It is worth noting that such a deviation is most often an unintended consequence of remembering rather than a clear rationale. In other words, even if the collective memory of suffering is constructed with the best possible intentions, the final product can still deviate from the noble goals of learning from the past. As we could see with the ex-Yugoslav wars in the 1990s, the memory of previous crimes served as a fuel and the catalyst for new conflicts. One of the reasons for that was the political suppression of undesirable memories, which resulted in diametrically opposed narratives of family histories and official histories. Moreover, the narrative specific to the collective memory of pain resembled myth in the sense that it created *continuities of suffering* among otherwise *historically separate periods*, while at the same time it created *discontinuities* within otherwise *interconnected* groups. The final product of family histories was, therefore, a limited narrative constructed of scattered images and phrases with basic divisions among Us and Them, but which at the same time possessed great emotional value and authority.

Religious commemoration of suffering, as was indicated, suffers from similar limitations. Although, in theory, the religious approach to human suffering is universalistic, its practical implementation in a religious community is particularistic and suffers from the constant risk of becoming exclusivist. In short, the ethical challenge of the collective memory of conflict can be best understood through three types of vulnerability that are inherent in it: 1) vulnerability of reconstruction: the traces of the past are always limited, and the past can be lost or beyond reach; inner group biases affect how the past is narrated; 2) vulnerability of commemoration: commemoration of the past can become overwhelming for the present, while the symbols of the suffering can fall prey to ideological misuses; and 3) vulnerability of transmission: the painful content of memory can become detached from its original context, impoverished, or even completely lost.

However, this did not constitute the whole story with the religious approach to memory. As I tried to stress, religious leaders in many cases were deeply aware of the inner challenges and vulnerability related to the collective memory of suffering. The same memory that was intended to become a source of wisdom and a shield against future misuses can easily turn into a reason for violence, as the metaphor of the snake that bites twice illustrated. Religious responses to those challenges were both pragmatic and spiritual. While, on the one hand, an expressed need for a more “objective” approach to memory would entail remembering not only the group’s suffering but also its crimes, there were also suggestions as to how to organize commemoration and transmission of memory in such a way that it would preserve itself from the aforementioned pathological effects. In that sense, the idea of a *prayerful commemoration* suggested a dual extension of memory towards transcendence and towards the other communities. The stated idea of a collective remembering very much resonates with religious notions related to forgiveness on the individual level and inter-group reconciliation.

Furthermore, Christian respondents emphasized specificities of the fundamental Christian religious memory which is, itself, a memory of suffering construed in a way that looks forward to an eschatological future. Although the memory’s content is said to be suffering, the motivation for its transmission is the event of the Resurrection, i.e., of the salvific suffering. In that respect, some Catholic and Orthodox respondents indicated that the memory of the Paschal Mystery should be the reference point for other sorts of painful memories. As we saw in the section on memory as a community and the liturgical memory, the Christian theological view of remembering is deeply anchored in eschatological time. It is from that perspective that the painful past should be reconstructed.

In this chapter, I have also outlined several different ways of remembering tragedies. On the one hand, we can conclude that the sheer volume of historical tragedies made *not-remembering* impossible*.* The number of wars, tragedies, personal and group losses, and rise and fall of political regimes concentrated in the short period of a century and a half created by itself a certain surplus of meaning that cannot be ignored, even if people would have liked to forget them. In that sense, memory is a spontaneous side-product of historical experience filled with indices of suffering.

On the other hand, there is a very different source of memory—memory that was constructed not from the abundant clues but from ‘silences’. The stories about family histories that grew below the radar of official political narratives in Yugoslavia tell us about the importance of lacunas, suppressed stories that are nevertheless present in a phantomic way. Those are memories born out of ‘nothingness’; their presence was visible in conspicuous absences—unused spoons, unfinished stories that were silently speaking volumes. Those experiences illustrate another element of collective memories—their communicative character. What becomes collective memory does not depend only on the biological ability to recall events, but on the ways in which those events are transmitted, on interactions through which they are constructed. Often, their reference sources are just scarce images and chunks of information of dubious veracity, while the missing information is reconstructed as a scar tissue over the missing parts of the body of the past. The context of their development profoundly affects the value attributed to them. Family setting, especially in the context of distrust towards government, imbued memories with an additional authority, making them appear as similar to a family treasure that should be jealously preserved. For that reason, people might have an emotional attachment to a piece of memory they carry because of loyalty to their family members and so refuse to treat them in a detached, critical way. A good example of this is the memory of people who were members of the defeated forces during the WWII. On the level of grand historical movements, their role is the negative one, but in somebody’s personal history that abstract ‘one’ is often ‘the only one’—son, father, grandfather, mother. The consequence is a dissonance between emotional attachment and a feeling of loyalty, a desire to believe that one’s predecessors fought for a good cause, and the general historical stance of winners and losers. The latter notion made me emphasize the phenomenon of *nested memories*, i.e., memories of one suffering placed in the context of another suffering in which the sides of the victims and perpetrators were counter-balanced.

All these phenomena can occur, simply speaking, by their own inertia, without any noticeable effort on the side of those who remember. As we could see in some cases, people remembered events even though their parents and grandparents did not want them to do so.

At the same time, a different work of memory, the voluntary one, is inculcated through education and systematic activities that aim to give special importance to one set of events rather than to others. These activities derive from the imperative “Do not forget!” which motivates people to talk, narrate, produce, and re-produce what they deem are the most valuable lessons from the past. Since we are discussing memories of past tragedies, those lessons are often ambiguous and require significant ethical engagement, as was already indicated.

Finally, memory can also take a different turn. It can be an induced memory—not something that I remember myself, but something which can be awakened in the encounter with the Other. This memory is not the product of introspective reflection about ‘“what do I remember,’ but rather a dialogue articulated in the plea “Remind me!” Such memory comes as a gift from the Other. One can try to remind oneself of something, but that often remain unconvincing. It is through the Other that the reminder derives its power. Thus, the dialogical memory is amplified in its resonance with the Other. This was especially visible in the religious notions of prayerful commemoration and liturgical memory where a community acts as a carrier of sacred memories that serve to ‘correct’ the biases of historical ones. It is worth noting that, in the theological sense, the community of memory did not correspond to the ethnic or religious group. To the contrary, it was the presence of the painful Other, be it a symbolic presence in the imaginative work of memory or a physical presence during commemorations that figures as an essential dialogical partner that safeguards the community from becoming closed in itself.

Finally, in liturgical memory, we saw a very different understanding that reverses the order of time. This is a memory that works from the future, just like an extended telescope that communicates a reflective image backward in time from some other, more distant future place. The order of time is reversed, and what comes first as a viewing angle of memory is not the history, but the place beyond history, the eschatological spot from which the whole of history receives a completely different reading. That memory is the memory constructed as a hope and as a promise. The promise is a particularly good metaphor because it is something which is to be fulfilled only in the future, although it already has an effect on history. It is the promise that already makes it possible to remember differently; it turns the initial proposition “the scars tell us that the past was real,” into the reflective proposition, “the healed scars tell us that the past is not all there is.”

# II. Theoretical discussion

In the second part of this chapter, I will attempt to offer some theoretical views on the issues that we encountered in the preceding sections. After the initial illustration of the importance of past tragedies for the social and political life (sections 8 and 8.1.), I will present some theories that try to explain why past tragedies are so prevalent in a group’s collective memories (section 9 and 9.1). Furthermore, I will present views on the significance of tragedies for development of group solidarity and identity (section 9.2.), and discuss some cases in which memory appears as a form of symbolic justice (section 9.3), the topic that we hinted at in the chapter on reconciliation. Acknowledging the importance of memories, I will then turn to the inherent challenges present in its construction and transmission (section 10), stressing that tragic memories are transmitted not only through public communication, and commemoration, but also through silences (section 10.1.). The discussion will lead us to the conclusion that the memory of suffering is not just a legacy but also a heavy weight that needs some form of an answer (section 10.2). Eliminating the option of induced forgetting, the final section will try to offer some new religious perspective on a possible navigation between the duty of remembering and its precariousness.

# 2.1. Past returns in disguise: Memories of old battles in new wars

In June 1463. the last sovereign of the Medieval Bosnian Kingdom, King Stjepan Tomašević, was executed in Carevo Polje, near Jajce, after a short and unsuccessful fight against the dominant forces of the Ottoman ruler Sultan al-Fatih, the conqueror of Bosnia.

Those two rulers will meet symbolically *post-mortem*, more than five hundred years later. In June 1993 two armies fought near Travnik in Central Bosnia. On one side, there were 213rd Motorized brigade “Sultan Fatih” of the Bosniak-led Army of Bosnia and Herzegovina and, on the other side, was the 1st Battalion of Bosnian-Herzegovina Croat forces named “King Stjepan Tomašević.”[[382]](#footnote-382)

Although the war officially finished with the Dayton Peace Accord, symbolic battles continued. In May and June 2017, high school students from Jajce, the site of the original medieval battle, rose in protest against the segregation of students in children in separate Croatian and Bosniak programs. What was at stake was not just an administrative organization but also a host of identity issues. After a long controversy, the parody Internet portal *Karakter.ba* published an *Open Letter to King Stjepan Tomašević*, asking whether he had forgiven the Turks and how that would be relevant to the new school program.[[383]](#footnote-383) (He responded after a month, saying that he was still competing with Turks in the afterlife but this time in the video game *War of Tanks* where he is faring much better.)[[384]](#footnote-384)

Armies that fought in the 15th century symbolically confronted each other five centuries later thanks to the re-use of historical symbols aimed at boosting war morale. On the surface, it might appear to be a continuous line of separate memories of two ethnic groups flowing parallel to one another. In reality, recovery of old battles and divisions falls more into a category Hobsbawm calls “invented traditions,”[[385]](#footnote-385) in which continuity with the past resembles a confusing patchwork of visual and mnemonic elements. Nowhere is this clearer than in the medieval heraldic elements that were used during the 1990s’ war in Bosnia and Herzegovina. *Fleur de Lile*, a part of the Bosnian medieval (Christian) house Kotromanić were later incorporated in a war-flag of Bosnia and Herzegovina but gradually became used solely by the predominantly Muslim Bosniaks. In reaction, Bosnian-Herzegovinian Croats started to avoid its use at all costs, despite their battalions being named after kings who originally had it in their coats of arms. Željko Ivanković describes it as follows:

The flag [of the Army of BiH] that supposedly presented a link with Medieval Bosnia and which contained Anjou lilies that were stylized crosses of one of the traditionally most Catholic families in Europe—that very flag was carried by battalions such as “al-Fatih,” “Al-Mujahid,” “Hamza,” etc., whose main symbols [Ottoman invaders] denied Medieval Bosnia and destroyed its juridical and political continuity. On the other hand, they were attacked by [battalions] named “King Tvrtko” or “Stjepan Tomačević,” who would, as symbols of a link with [Medieval] Bosnia, by logic, be expected to use that flag. Bosniak-Muslims eventually declared it as the flag of Bosniak-Muslim people, and the lily, one of the more frequently used symbols of Western Christianity, suddenly became odious to Catholic Croats in Bosnia and Herzegovina, even when placed in the hands of Virgin Mary, not to mention of St. Antony or some lower ranking saints.[[386]](#footnote-386)

The memory of suffering, buried under the veil of time, was suddenly recovered on the eve of new conflicts, this time with a whole set of new “reconstructive” additions and elements that sometimes came from, historically speaking, completely opposite sides. Although a heraldic expert might be left confused by Anjou lilies decorating the uniforms of an Al-Mujahid battalion, those who were carrying them were by no means demoralized by the apparent lack of consistency. The strength of the tradition did not lie in its accuracy but in its acceptance. Even when the incongruity of symbols was directly noticed, the reaction was not their abandonment, but simply a creation of a new continuity, a new tradition, which posited that the Anjou lily was, in fact, *lilium boniacum* and that the French royal family took it from Medieval Bosniaks.[[387]](#footnote-387) One of the last echoes of that debate occurred in 2017, which brings us back to the school problem in Jajce that was eventually resolved in such a way that Bosniak and Croatian children were not segregated in different school but had the opportunity instead of attending different groups of “national subjects,” with the possibility of choosing a coat-of-arms that would decorate their final school diplomas—either a shield with red-and-white squares (resembling Croatian coat-of arms) or a shield with *Fleur de Lile*.[[388]](#footnote-388)

The case of Jajce represents a form of memory of conflict that goes back centuries in history but was nevertheless reactivated in new situations of struggles, bearing on the social dynamics even after the war’s confrontations had ended. Another case of mutual accusations of genocide between the Republic of Croatia and the Republic of Serbia demonstrated how the memories of suffering can become material before an international court.

# 2.2. Memory of conflicts on the international level[[389]](#footnote-389)

In July 1999, the International Court of Justice in The Hague received, on behalf of the Republic of Croatia, the *Application of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (Croatia v. Serbia)* in which the Applicant accused the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, represented by its legal successor, the Republic of Serbia, for breaches of the international *Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide* from 1948.[[390]](#footnote-390) Some ten years afterwards, the Republic of Serbia offered a *Rejoinder* before the same court, accusing the Republic of Croatia of violating the same convention.[[391]](#footnote-391)

The scope of criminal events presented in both cases covered the period from 1991 to 1995. However, for the explication of the crimes that took place during that period, both legal teams had to open the box of history, or to be more precise, repositories of collective memories of the conflict. One of the most interesting cases mentioned during the process was Jasenovac, the location of the greatest concentration camp that operated under the rule of the Independent State of Croatia during the Second World War and also the site of the greatest mass execution of Serbs, Jews, Romas, and political opponents of the system. Neither side denied the crimes that took place in Jasenovac. However, the Croatian court *Memorial* from 2001 aimed to demonstrate that the tragic memory of Jasenovac was manipulated in the years preceding the war in the 1990s in such a way that the number of victims was inflated by nationalist historians,[[392]](#footnote-392) disseminated through inflammatory newspaper articles,[[393]](#footnote-393) and even used as a tool for direct intimidation of the prisoners of war during the 1990s.[[394]](#footnote-394) In its legal response, the Republic of Serbia did not deny the misuse of past events by Serbian nationalists, but it stressed that the nationalist revival was not just specific to Serbia but also to Croatia within the same period.[[395]](#footnote-395) However, they insisted that the genocide of Serbs during the Second World War “left an indelible mark on the consciences of the Serbs in Croatia and elsewhere. The events leading to the conflict of 1991–1995 and the conflict itself cannot be understood without taking this into account.”[[396]](#footnote-396) In this way, they posited that the fear of a new genocidal prosecution of Serbia in Croatia was a reaction to the memory of the previous suffering, in which Jasenovac occupied a prominent place.

In a later *Reply*, the Republic of Croatia suggested not only that the number of victims was manipulated but also that the graphic representation of the crimes that took place in Jasenovac was an instrument that inculcated the desire for revenge among the members of the Yugoslav National Army who saw the mobile exhibition about Jasenovac entitled “The Dead Open the Eyes of the Living.” Matching the map of the mobile exhibition to the later instances of war crimes, the Applicant claimed the following:

[I]t is easy to see that these were the areas where genocidal acts were later perpetrated by the Respondent (…) The presentation and the exhibited material, including photographs, had a clear goal of connecting the crimes from WWII to the allegedly ‘separatist’ tendencies in the Socialist Republic of Croatia. Simultaneously, numerous articles in weekly journals intended for the JNA (e.g. Front, People’s Army) contributed to this notion from 1986 to 1991.[[397]](#footnote-397)

The final verdict of the International Court of Justice rejected both accusations of genocide. However, an analysis of the court proceedings clearly demonstrates that the memory of suffering can profoundly mark the relationships between the nations even decades after the original conflicts. As we can see, neither side disputed the existence of the crimes (although they did not agree as to the numbers of deaths). What was at stake was the *after-life* of the dead bodies, their preservation in memory and commemoration through museums and graphic representations. The moral of the court case is that tragic events can leave “an indelible mark on the consciences” but also that those traces can became a new tool of war propaganda, a renewed instrument of intimidation, a mechanism for mobilizing soldiers, a reason for enactment of new crimes (out of fear or as revenge), and finally a matter of mutual accusations for genocide before an international court.

# 2.3. Prevalence of suffering in collective memory

The testimonies reported in the first part of this chapter provide a clear indication that suffering constitutes a significant part of the collective memories of groups. Yes, the periods of peaceful common life were also remembered, but the dominant tone in the composition of memory was the tragic one. One reason for that is certainly the sheer number of tragedies that have taken places in the territories of the former Yugoslavia, coupled with frequent changes in political regime and general geo-political instability. At the same time, cross-national studies seem to suggest that tragedies are generally more remembered than positive events of progress.

In a survey conducted by Glowsky et al., the Second World War was identified as one of the most important historical events among participants from more than 30 nations.[[398]](#footnote-398) Similarly, in a survey from 1999 conducted in four countries (Australia, New Zealand, Singapore, and Hong Kong), Liu gave two assignments to participants: “Write down the names of the 5 people born in the last 1,000 years whom you consider to have had the most impact, good or bad, on world history,” and “Imagine that you were giving a seminar on world history. What 7 events would you teach as the most important in world history?”[[399]](#footnote-399) The analysis has shown that World War II was the most frequently mentioned in all four countries. At the same time, Hitler was the most frequent name in three of them. Moreover, 70% of all mentioned events were related to either war or politics, much more than to culture, science, the economy, and natural disasters combined. Despite many cultural specificities among countries, these findings suggest that some global memory of conflict, in turn, can reshape the understanding of one’s own national and personal history. In a similar study from 2005, performed on the more heterogeneous sample, the final results pointed in the same direction. World War II was named most frequently in all 12 samples, while World War I occupied second place. A number of other wars, such as the Vietnam War, the Gulf War (five samples), the War of American Independence, and the Crusades, were also frequently mentioned.[[400]](#footnote-400) A later study from 2009, conducted by Liu et al. in 12 other countries, yielded very similar results.[[401]](#footnote-401)

It is striking to see that across all cultures, wars and conflicts are the most commonly remembered events. With respect to “global collective memory” and “global identity,” we cannot deny that conflicts occupy a very significant place. But why is it that memory of conflict plays such an important role in the construction of collective memories?

## 2.3.1. Memory as a restoration and an education

At the exit doors of the *Yad Vashem Holocaust History Museum* is engraved: “Forgetfulness leads to exile; remembrance is the secret of redemption.” These words suggest that the roads towards exile and redemption can be very similar. The only difference is the direction in which one moves, and, moreover, moving towards restoration would be a blind walk if the original path had been forgotten. In a general human sense, it is this oblivion that impoverishes the future, making all ways equally unknown. At the same time, this inscription expresses something of the hope that contemporary societies place in collective memory—that the process of sharing the memory of past evils can, by itself, have both restorative and protective dimensions. That might be the reason why the adage “Never forget!” became a cultural mantra that has been repeated as a form of prayer that could eventually lead to salvation or atonement. It renders memory into a form of shield that is there to protect us from future perils. “Never forget” thus couples with “never again.”[[402]](#footnote-402) This is not to deny the fact that there are many very important reasons to keep memory alive. In ancient times, the worst punishment for a person was not physical torture but *damnatio memoriae*, their complete erasure from memory. Memory has always been connected with the presence of life, and, in the writings of people who have survived atrocities, forgetting is often described as a “second death.” Holocaust survivor Elie Wiesel writes: “For the survivor who chooses to testify, it is clear: his duty is to bear witness for the dead *and* for the living. He has no right to deprive future generations of a past that belongs to our collective memory. To forget would be not only dangerous but offensive; to forget the dead would be akin to killing them a second time.”[[403]](#footnote-403) In this respect, remembering can be seen as an ethical decision against the entropy of time. It is a counter-movement that transforms the inevitable transitivity through mental and cultural artifacts. In the specific case of painful memories, the act of remembering appears to be a restorative act, a process of continuation in place of violent rupture. In this view, collective memory protects life from imposed erasure.

Wiesel’s statement indicates that remembering goes beyond the decision to save an individual victim from his or her second death by forgetting. Remembering tragedies also has an educative dimension that is due to future generations and to humanity in general. The aforementioned cross-national surveys demonstrated that the tragedies of two world wars figured as some form of global reference. However, their mere presence in memory does not suffice to draw direct lessons from them since the analogies that can be made are many and the decisions to make them are inevitably influenced by group biases.

When we teach about the Holocaust, the Volf states, we make clear distinctions between Jews (victims) and Nazis (perpetrators), but in everyday situations it is not so easy to say who is a “Jew” and who is a “Nazi.”[[404]](#footnote-404) History offers many possible parallels, and the simple imperative to remember does not suggest which one we should draw upon. Conducting research on the attitudes of Americans towards the intervention in Iraq, Schuman and Rieger demonstrated that most respondents preferred to adopt a “Munich analogy” (if the Ally army had intervened earlier, Hitler would not have a chance to rise) rather than a “Vietnam analogy” (military intervention in another sovereign country was unsuccessful and damaging).[[405]](#footnote-405) That is in line with other studies that show the link between high in-group identification and bias towards historical memories. In a study from 2006 conducted in Canada, Blatz and Ross present a story about mistreatment of aboriginal children in order to check how it will be transmitted in a three-person chain, where one person remembers and tell the story to the next person. Participants heard about events that happened either in their home country (Canada) or in Australia. Researchers noticed that the change of the country in a narrative had effects on the ways people were retelling the story:

When the story was located in Canada, such errors were rare for the first person (who heard the original passage), but errors became increasingly common as the memory proceeded down the chain. Each person remembered the passage as slightly less damning to the Canada of today than the preceding person did. No similar changes occurred when the events were located in Australia. This study indicates that ordinary people, and not just political elites, alter historical memories to serve their current motivations.[[406]](#footnote-406)

Using the tragedies of the past, even in its historical rendering, seems to be a difficult lesson to digest, one that does not lead to such straightforward conclusions as one would desire. I will return to the dangers associated with memory in a later section. For now, let us turn to the third important role of tragic memories—its ability to keep the group together, to serve as a common language that helps them understand the reality of hurtful events.

## 2.3.2. Suffering unites – Memories of conflict and social identity

The idea of the unifying potential of suffering is by no means new. In his classical 1882 lecture at the Sorbonne, Ernest Renan envisaged a nation as a spiritual community unified by common views of the past and by the consent to live together in the present. In his view, memories of suffering have a more unifying potential than memories of triumphs because they create a common imperative and invest a polity with a sense of duty:

A people shares a glorious heritage as well, regrets, and a common program to realize. Having suffered, rejoiced, and hoped together is worth more than common taxes or frontiers that conform to strategic ideas and is independent of racial or linguistic considerations. “Suffered together”, I said, for shared suffering unites more than does joy. In fact, periods of mourning are worth more to national memory than triumphs

because they impose duties and require a common effort. A nation is therefore a great solidarity constituted by the feeling of sacrifices made and those that one is still disposed to make. It presupposes a past but is reiterated in the present by a tangible fact: consent, the clearly expressed desire to continue a common life. [[407]](#footnote-407)

What Renan imagines as a nation was a unity of consent, the will to stay together that he compared with the daily referendum (un plébiscite de tous les jours).[[408]](#footnote-408) However, if we allow the possibility that a nation could incorporate within itself more than one strong group identity (as is the case with Bosnia and Herzegovina), Renan’s statements concerning nations are applicable to these smaller mnemonic communities also. As Renan observes, suffering unifies and creates solidarity but, at the same time, obligates the group that commemorates it.

Turning a phenomenological eye to collective memories of suffering, we notice that these begin as the direct experience of a wrongdoing by a minority of group members but that this eventually becomes a shared mnemonic experience of many others. Palmberger employs the concept of “vicarious memories,” proposed by Jacob Climo, to denote memories originally linked to a personal tragedy but which eventually became a part of the public discourse and were therefore available for adoption by other group members who did not experience them directly but could still hold them with great emotional commitment. As Palmberger notes, “vicarious memories are often about traumatic events, such as genocide or a great defeat (…) It is less important when the event took place, than first how important it was for society (or parts of it) and its self-perception and second how far the event was actively promoted by those in power.”[[409]](#footnote-409)

Alexander’s theory of cultural trauma can help us understand why traumatic events are so deeply imprinted in the collective memories of groups, even without direct reference to the elites that promote those views. After having passed through difficulties that have left their mark on their group consciousness, collectives tend to develop solidarity relationships that help them to share their suffering. Defining the cause of this suffering and assuming moral responsibility for their members, communities strengthen the sense of “we.” However, besides creating positive effects for inner-group members, perceived suffering can also have an exclusionary character:

Is the suffering of others also our own? In thinking that it might in fact be, societies extend the circle of the we. By the same token, social groups can, and often do, refuse to recognize the existence of others’ trauma, and because of their failure they cannot achieve a moral stance. By denying the reality of others’ suffering, people not only diffuse their own responsibility for the suffering but often project the responsibility for the own suffering on these others.[[410]](#footnote-410)

Alexander correctly clarifies that trauma “is not the result of a group experiencing pain. It is the result of this acute discomfort entering into the core of the collectivity’s sense of its own identity.”[[411]](#footnote-411) One can imagine a horrific event wherein a whole group of people is executed. Although an unthinkable amount of pain would be involved, its associated cultural trauma could not be constructed if no one was left to remember it. Moreover, traumas are sometimes created around events that never actually occurred.[[412]](#footnote-412) The lack of a historical event does not make the collective suffering less real, however.

Alexander made an important observation that cultural trauma is not just any collective experience of pain and suffering by a group of people but instead is the pain that became coupled with the group’s identity. In that respect, cultural trauma is a pain that influences the fundamental sense of purpose that the group members share. In the view of Blatz and Ross, memories of past tragedies play the additional role of distinguishing one group from another. In other words, it is not just suffering that unites the members of a community; it is a *specific suffering* that makes a group unique: “Just as groups frequently represent their strengths and past glories as unique, they also emphasize the distinctiveness of their tragedies.”[[413]](#footnote-413) At the same time, they also remark that the principle of inclusion among group members carries inherent dangers of external exclusion:

The downside of memorializing historical injustices committed against one’s group is that such recollections can fuel bad feelings and intergroup hostility. Groups may fail to settle present conflicts because earlier grievances remain unresolved. The conflicting sides cannot put the past behind them as they attempt to deal with the present and future.[[414]](#footnote-414)

## 2.3.3. Memory as symbolic justice

Besides its restorative dimension related to individual human life, its educational dimension related to future generations, and its solidarity-building dimension related to a victim-group, memory of suffering can be a way of responding to the social needs for justice, as a communal reaction to the excessive nature of a crime that remains beyond proportional legal punishment and/or individual forgiveness. Memory is, in this sense, the only available tool for absorption of the inexplicable and unpunishable surplus of a tragedy. In one of his columns, United States-based author of Bosnian-Herzegovinian origins Aleksandar Hemon recalled his flight to Sarajevo on the very day on which the ICTY announced the conviction of Radovan Karadžić, military leader of the Bosnian-Serbs, for genocide, crimes against humanity, and violations of laws or customs of war. Upon landing in Sarajevo, he recalled the complaints of a desperate taxi driver concerning the asymmetry of criminal acts and sanctions:

“He dropped four million shells on our heads, and we had to shell ourselves!” the driver said. He abandoned the steering wheel at a street light in order to fully turn to me, grouped his fingers so as to represent a multitude, and cried, “Four million shells! He should be shot four million times!”

Karadžić will not be shot four million times, or even once. He was sentenced to forty years in prison, having been found guilty on ten of eleven counts, including the acts of genocide in Srebrenica, where more than seven thousand Bosnian Muslim men were killed by his forces.[[415]](#footnote-415)

Hemon continues the article with later reflections that occurred to him while walking in the city-center of Sarajevo, where he encountered a man who was dancing hectically without music:

He used to play loud techno music from a speaker, but then he started dancing with earphones, so no one can hear what makes him move. He’s not a Sarajevan, and spent the war as a refugee in Germany, but every time I stop to watch his performance, I realize that genocide has been absorbed into the very bodies of Bosnians. He dances ceaselessly, but never seems to reach the point of pleasure or release, stuck inside the same set of moves, like a whirligig. If it is true that trauma can change a person’s DNA makeup, Karadžić and his crimes have entered our genes, changing the way in which Bosnian bodies move, live, and breathe in the world. No human sentence could ever restore a reality, nor bring back the bodies, that would be free of him. Karadžić will die in prison, but his evil is going to live on inside us for many generations.[[416]](#footnote-416)

Hemon’s perception was that the excessive nature of the genocide and of its unpunishability became absorbed in masses of people, who connect themselves with the experience of the genocide.

When I say ‘unpunishable,’ I am differentiating it from impunity. The unpunishable part of genocide refers to its excessiveness—even when perpetrators are sentenced, no punishment can ensure full reconstitution of justice, as if the event itself overwhelms its restorative mechanisms. It creates a burden which is so great that it cannot be adequately represented but merely approximated.  Similarly, in her book *Reflections on The Deputy*, Susan Sonntag presented the Holocaust as “the supreme tragic event of modern times”[[417]](#footnote-417) that cannot be wholly accounted for. It was an event, states Sonntag, that puzzles by its magnitude, impact, and social force to such a degree that it escapes understanding: “This great event is a wound that will not heal; even the balm of intelligibility is denied to us.”[[418]](#footnote-418) When speaking of the “balm of intelligibility,” Sonntag suggests that some form of rationalization or explication could help to transpose it in such a way that it does not constantly hurt, that it remains behind us in a safe realm of history. But the tragic nature of the Holocaust breaks out excessively and cannot be contained within the dry facts. By the term *tragic event*, Sontag explains that she means the following:

I mean an event—piteous and terrifying in the extreme—whose causation is supercharged and overdetermined, and which is of an exemplary or edifying nature that imposes a solemn duty upon the survivors to confront and assimilate it. In calling the murder of the six million a tragedy, we acknowledge a motive beyond the intellectual (knowing what happened and how) or the moral (catching the criminals and bringing them to justice) for comprehending it. We acknowledge that the event is, in some sense, incomprehensible. Ultimately, the only response is to continue to hold the event in mind, to remember it.[[419]](#footnote-419)

Memory, in her view, is neither the most practical response to the tragedy nor the most pragmatic one, but it appears to be the only available option. It is memory that channels the tragic event in different modes of knowledge and art. Memory is therefore the only possible reaction to an excessive tragedy that would otherwise remain beyond institutional social representation.

Those theoretical perspectives help us to understand the insistence of this study’s respondents on the importance of memory. In their interviews, we could detect concern for human individuals, for groups, and for humanity in general. But, besides the educative and restorative dimensions of memory, there was also instances in which memory figured as the *instance of last appeal* for crimes that exceeded the possibilities of retributive justice, even within the standard scope of restorative imagination. Memory is therefore both an absorptive capacity and a willed act; it is simultaneously an undesirable force that changes the body (as Hemon stressed) and a last battleground over the meaning of the past. As was already hinted, each of these processes is plagued by inherent vulnerabilities that make memories of conflict ambiguous and challenging. I turn to these in the next section.

# 2.4. Challenges of Memory

A significant point of agreement among the study’s interviewees was the importance of the past tragedies that occurred during the renewed conflicts in the ex-Yugoslav territories during the 1990s. That conviction resonates well with the aforementioned recycling of symbols during the war, and mutual accusation on the international fora between two post-Yugoslav states in the post-conflict period. Although the memory of suffering, as we have already seen, had many socially important functions, it suddenly showed its dark side.

In his analysis of the use of past tragedies in Croatian and Serbian political propaganda, MacDonald noticed competition between the accounts of suffering, a strategy that transformed the feeling of victimhood into a political weapon:

By proving their own victimisation at the hands of Croatian enemy, Serbs portrayed their machinations in Croatia as self-defensive, preventing a ‘repeated genocide’ of Serbs. Similarly, for Croats, the massacre at Bleiberg demonstrated a pattern of Serbian genocidal aggression, followed by scheming, cover-ups and political dominance. Clearly, being a victim of a ‘holocaust’ carried tremendous moral and political weight, and each side was anxious to use such imagery to its fullest extent. (…) The reinterpretation of Serbian and Croatian history was extremely important. If actions in the 1990s were to be extensions of those in the 1940s it was imperative to prove that these earlier actions were horrific and genocidal. Each side, by proving its own ‘holocaust’ was able to convince its own people that they needed to defend themselves against the renewed horrors of genocide. At the same time, recalling the Second World War allowed both sides to deny the reality of Serbian–Croatian co-operation during the SFRY, leading to the view that its break-up was both inevitable and natural.[[420]](#footnote-420)

The wars on ex-Yugoslav territories, of course, are not the only ones in which past memories played an important role. In general, new conflicts rise against the background of past experiences (and perceptions) of suffering. Because of their deep relevance to the identity of the group, collective memories do not only transmit information about the past but also evoke emotions that can eventually act as a mobilizer for collective actions.[[421]](#footnote-421)

In his lecture entitled *History and Memory: Between the Personal and the Public* and delivered on the occasion of the 2014 Dan David Prize, Pierre Nora noted the crumbling of great historical narratives under the rising pressure of group memories. In his view, those “identity-based memories, which initially had an emancipatory, liberating dimension, finally took a rejectionist and accusatory character.”[[422]](#footnote-422) For him, the most telling example of such memories were those of formerly colonized people. Nora advanced the example of France, where official, unifying historical narratives ran parallel to the private memories of particular groups that did not manage to gain public recognition. Although Nora’s lecture echoes the main thesis of his monumental work *Les Lieux de mémoire,[[423]](#footnote-423)* this was, to my knowledge, the first instance in which he used the phrase “accusatory character” to describe the memory of oppression. Although he did not discuss the concept in detail, the phrase motivates us to further consider the duality of emancipation and accusation, which emerges with the articulation of previously suppressed memories. Viewing suppressed memories as counter-narratives, we might ask: What transforms memory from emancipatory to accusatory?

Accepting Nora’s distinction between official history and group memories, one can affirm that emancipation through memory represents an articulation of one’s “past voice,” i.e., interpreting the past in one’s own ‘words’, uncovering elements that have been suppressed. The element of suppression immediately implies that such memories would, to a large degree, involve past tragedies. Not any tragedies, however, not tragedies that occurred by chance due to natural catastrophes, but precisely those tragedies that were tied to the experience of suffering and pain. In that sense, the process of regaining one’s own voice links those tragedies to intentions, to a hegemonic program that requires an author. Consequently, the process of recovery is at the same time a process of investigation and, ultimately, of *accusation*.

Analyzing the post-Communist situation in Central and Eastern Europe, Bruckner emphasized precisely this duality of memory-work in the following words:

Recovering one’s memory is the first stage of freedom: emancipation is first of all the acceptance of one’s traditions, even if it is only in order to be able to detach oneself from them or to set them in a new context. Memory can also be used to promote not reunion but traumatism, to commemorate catastrophes that have befallen a people and for which they cannot mourn since they literally do not go away, they do not line up nicely in the warehouse of history; they continue to hurt many years after their occurrence. Then memory becomes a warning, the auxiliary of vigilance.[[424]](#footnote-424)

In his view, the memory of past tragedies can become too intransigent and in that sense, “less concerned with remembering the dead than with launching reprisals against the living. It will dig up obscure conflicts that go back to the dawn of time, it will re-ignite the tensions and exacerbate the animosity as if all of history were only a slow fuse that is destined to explode today.”[[425]](#footnote-425) When memory falls under too strong influence of resentment, Bruckner notes, it “degenerates into myth” with a tendency “to elevate the smallest crime to the height of a wholesale extermination.”[[426]](#footnote-426) In that way, the memory of past conflict becomes an inexhaustible resource that can legitimize any action as a proportional reaction to past insults.

The second problem that Bruckner mentions is the tendency to set up the Holocaust as the “Gold standard of terror” that makes all other tragedies look minuscule in comparison:

There is a way of ‘sanctifying the Holocaust’ (Arno J. Mayer), of making it into an event that is so closed on itself that we have not the least consideration for victims of other misfortunes. We seal up the dead of Auschwitz with their dreadful secrets and we push away everyone else. (…) The danger thus exists that the exclusive commemoration of Auschwitz would imply an indecent indifference to the calamities of the present.[[427]](#footnote-427)

In a similar fashion, Todorov defines two improper uses of memory as *sacralization* and *banalization*. The former takes places whenever a past event is presented as unique and *incomparable to anything else*. Todorov does not suggest that one should deny the historical specificities of certain events, but to articulate those specificities, one has to put an event in relation to other events. In *sacralization*, one does not compare but rather isolates an event, thereby preventing others who do not belong to the group from drawing a general lesson and so profiting from it. The other danger, *banalization*, does the opposite—it merges history into the present, confounding their differences. Todorov detects this tendency when groups involved in various conflicts around the world try to describe their sufferings as new Holocausts. What is necessary, according to him, is to engage in the “work of memory” (le travail de mémoire), which he sees not as a comparative but rather as an inductive endeavor. In that sense, the work of memory does not allow for a jump from one historical event to another on the basis of vague similarities between them but rather a development from a particular to universal. Particular historical events therefore should be judged against universal principles of justice, morality, and political norms. In Todorov’s view, the past is neither something that is simply repeated nor is it something that is reduced to a universal analogy. Instead, the past should be read in its *exemplarity*, and lessons drawn from past events should be legitimized in and of themselves and not because they resemble some other historical event.[[428]](#footnote-428) For him, memory grants identity to a group and can, like language, be put to bad and to good use:

Struck by Alzheimer’s diseases, an individual without memory loses their identity, ceases to be oneself. Equally, there are no people without common memory. To recognize itself as such, the group must choose a set of past exploits and persecutions that identifies it. The fact that recourse to the past is inevitable, does not imply however that it is always good. Memory is like language – an essentially neutral instrument that can be put to the service of a noble combat as well as the darkest projects.[[429]](#footnote-429)

In essence, both theoretical positions on the use of memory emphasize the need for memory but also warn against the construction of tragic memories in such a way that they become insular and exclusively serve the identity-politics of the group. The danger, to put it differently, emerges when the will for identity becomes inseparable from the will for power. Noting the dangers inherent in memories of conflict, Volf argued that an improper form of remembering can be even worse than the lack of memory,[[430]](#footnote-430) particularly when reference to past tragedies becomes a platform for new injustice:

There is a broad cultural agreement that we must remember major evils committed and suffered (…) Not to remember would be to fail the obligation of justice, either toward victims past or victims future (…) At the same time, we are becoming increasingly aware that memories of specific historical acts can be extraordinarily dangerous. When we want to justify our, at best, dubiously defensible actions, either to ourselves or to others, we cast our common history in a favorable light (…) Similarly, perpetrators make appeals to memories of past victimization in order to justify their present acts of violence. At the beginning of the Second World War, the Nazis appealed to the injustice of the Treaty of Versailles to justify their aggression against neighboring countries. In the hands of the perpetrators, the shield of memory turns into a sword. Memories are life giving; they can also be deadly. Significantly, it is the lifegiving power of memory—the fact that it can serve to honor the dead and protect the living—that, under certain conditions, makes it possible for memories to do their deadly work.[[431]](#footnote-431)

Memory is, according to Volf, “put to its most deadly uses precisely by those who have suffered in the past. A rather caustic Romanian aphorist, Emil Cioran, said: ‘Torturers are often recruited from martyrs not quite beheaded.’”[[432]](#footnote-432) The most severe vulnerability of the collective memory of conflict is its destructive potential to perpetuate the cycle of violence. Even with a genuine commitment to learns lessons from the past, we cannot be sure which analogies are appropriate and which are destructive.

Social construction of trauma that starts with a need for solidarity and a group’s attempt to give meaning to the traumatic experience can eventually become a defining feature of the group social life, saturating the cultural exchange with beliefs, rituals, and products related to these past tragedies. Furthermore, the protracted experience of violence, supplemented with the constant presence of the memories of suffering, can ultimately lead to what Bar-Tal calls “the culture of violence”:

Violence often escalates the level of intergroup conflicts; when it continues for many years, violence has a crucial effect on the society as the accumulation and sedimentation of such experiences in collective memory penetrates every thread of the societal fabric. The collective memory of physical violence serves as a foundation for the development of a culture of violence. In turn, the culture of violence preserves the collective memory of the human losses, as well as the perceived cruelty, mistrust, inhumanity and evilness, of the enemy. By doing so, it rationalises the continuation of the conflict and makes an imprint on the reality perceived by society members.[[433]](#footnote-433)

Externally, the memory of tragedy can lead to negative views of opponents, the delegitimization of their suffering, and skepticism about the possibility of mutual collaboration or even coexistence. All of these can provide a repertoire for new violence and postpone the resolution of ongoing conflicts. However, the negative effects of the improper construction of the memory of conflicts are also deeply detrimental to insiders, because they prevent group members from comprehending all the aspects of their identity shaped by past tragedies. These aspects include not only those that were suffered but also those that were inflicted, and thus the construction of the collective memory of conflict incurs the danger of a double closure: closure to the outside by exclusion of the Other and closure from the inside through self-justification and development of an identify based on victimhood. In that way, “[e]ach hurt experienced becomes bound into the process of self-justification, each hurt inflicted becomes rationalized as necessary for survival. Identity is forged and reshaped through the interpretation of events and experience, and the interpretation of events and experience is firmly located within that very identity.”[[434]](#footnote-434)

The overarching concern in this short overview was an ambiguity of the collective memory of conflicts. The group that suffered tragedies appears to stand in constant peril of being dragged into the same logic of violence that initially produced their situation. The process of remembering seems therefore to resemble a walk over an unstable bridge, which is at the same time the only path forward. Remembering enables the members of the group to regain their voice and reconstitute their identity, but the circle of solidarity and mutual understanding creates another set of dangers—those associated with selectivity, re-traumatization, and unselective exclusion of the members of the out-group.

The preceding analysis of the dangers pertinent to the process of construction and transmission of collective memories of conflict could create the impression that attention has to be paid to the cognitive processes of making analogies, manipulating with historical facts, inculcating certain visions of the past within the population, etc. However, it is important to note that transmission of memory can occur even without words, through meaningful silences and lacunas that are nevertheless equally influenced by emotional attachments to a group.

## 2.4.1. Memory through silence

The term “la teta asustada,” was coined by medical anthropologist Kimberly Theidon in her book *Entre Prójimos*.[[435]](#footnote-435) She conducted medical-anthropological research in Latin America among Quechua-speaking communities in Peru, where a large number of women experienced sexual violence in the period from 1980 to 1992 (known in the Quechua language as “The Difficult Times”). As Theidon explains, many women feared that their trauma would be transmitted to their children through the “milk of sorrow.” Furthermore, they were haunted by the fear that the children they had would be born ill or without the ability to love other human beings.[[436]](#footnote-436)

This example displays the deep awareness that sorrowful memories can be transmitted even without words. A number of studies have explored the devastating effects of trauma that spans generations.[[437]](#footnote-437) The effects of the original experiences cannot be easily healed. Historical trauma interrupts the normal social functioning of a community and manifests itself over many generations through such varying symptoms as depression, anxiety, substance abuse, alcoholism, loss of cultural identity, and mental, social and spiritual problems.[[438]](#footnote-438) According to the Aboriginal Healing Foundation, “[i]ntergenerational or multi-generational trauma happens when the effects of trauma are not resolved in one generation. When trauma is ignored and there is no support for dealing with it, the trauma will be passed from one generation to the next.”[[439]](#footnote-439)

Marianne Hirsch uses the term “postmemory” to describe the mental inheritance that is not acquired by direct witness but through “adoption.” The mediated nature of postmemory does not necessarily make its strength less binding. According to Hirsch, postmemory is a powerful form of memory “precisely because its connection to its object or source is mediated not through recollection but through representation, projection, and creation—often based on silence rather than speech, on the invisible rather than the visible.”[[440]](#footnote-440) Personal memories are always in most parts “forced” memories. People cannot choose what elements they are going to witness and see. Conversely, postmemory is always, at least in part, deliberate, acquired by “adoption.” Interestingly, in Kellermann’s research, children of people who have survived traumatic periods see the part of memory that is transmitted both as “legacy” and “psychopathology.”[[441]](#footnote-441) Therefore, it is not just the informative, publicly pronounced content of tragic memories that matters, but also the invisible shade of trauma that is communicated even through silences or gestures.

At this point in our discussion, we have noticed a number of ambivalent aspects related to tragic memories, as if its weaving inevitably contains both light and dark threads. At the same time, we have come to recognize the mnemonic mechanisms that are both socially controlled and beyond the individual will or institutional directives, as if the past is a reservoir of useful images and a heavy weight that cannot be moved, both a gift and burden, an inheritance and an inherited disease. The next two sections explore some possible responses to this duality. Starting with the notion of a *burden*, I will return briefly to the idea of redemptive forgetting as a way of its removal. My second pathway will be the opposite—instead of removing, it will suggest embracing the weight of the painful past. Obviously, this way of proceeding can easily bring as back to our starting position, where we analyzed the social importance of past tragedies. One heavy weight of the past might be comparable to Sisyphus’s stone. Instead of rolling up and down the same lane of positive and negative aspects of memory, I will instead finish with a possible way out, this time from a religious perspective. By doing so, I will draw some parallels with the testimonies that we read, but will also, at the conclusion, suggest some possible new conceptualizations based on my interviews.

## 2.4.2. The heavy weight of the past

It was Nietzsche who popularized the idea of redemptive forgetting. For him, there is nothing sacred in history that has to be preserved with devotion. In direct opposition to the ability to live, the burden of history weakens the creative energies and potential. According to Nietzsche, not only professional historians but the whole society of the late 19th century slipped into a collective apathy caused by historical fixations, causing “active and willed forgetting” to becomes equally as valuable as remembering.[[442]](#footnote-442) In the first thesis of his famous treatise *Über den Begriff der Geschichte*,[[443]](#footnote-443) Walter Benjamin provokes us with the perplexing image of the “angel of history.” The angel, explains Benjamin, fixes his eyes on the history that appears to us as a meaningful chain of events, but which, from the perspective of the angel, comes down to a single catastrophe. Thus, the storm of progress pulls the angel away from engagement with the wrecked burden before him.[[444]](#footnote-444) Discontent with the past and with history is acutely present in the philosophical and artistic works of the late 19th and early 20th century.[[445]](#footnote-445)

In his intriguing book *Les formes de l’oubli*, Marc Augé also turns to forgetting in service of life saying: “Il faut oublier pour rester présent, oublier pour ne pas mourir, oublier pour rester fidéle.”[[446]](#footnote-446) (We need to forget to stay present, forget to avoid dying, forget to remain faithful.) Although Augé concentrates primarily on unwanted memories, which can dull the vitality of life and transform it into complete boredom, there is an impression that forgetting can be deliberate, induced through the different forms of detachment from the past. In that sense, remembering becomes a form of cultivation, similar to gardening, which culls and eliminates unwanted plants.[[447]](#footnote-447) If we forget, the argument goes, we can live more fully. The problem, however, is that the first conditional in that sentence (*if* we forget) is too often only a conditional of possibility (*if we could only* forget).

There seems to be something in the character of traumatic memories that makes it impossible to forget them willingly or to suppress them politically. Aleida Assmann used the phrase “der lange Schatten der Vergangenheit” (a long shadow of the past) to describe the elements of history that refuse to be ignored or erased because they are those parts of the past that “hurt.” She notes the post-heroic turn in memory which shifted the focus from heroes to victims. In her words: “The universal image for this spell of a past that doesn't go away is the shadow. If we ask how long this shadow will last, Friedrich Nietzsche gives us an answer: What does not stop hurting remains in our memory.”[[448]](#footnote-448) Asking whether Germans will ever be able to step out from the long shadow of the past, which is primarily the shadow of National Socialism, she concludes that they will simply have to live with the lasting presence of the shadow, understood as the aftermath presence of the traumatic past.[[449]](#footnote-449) Assmann’s use of the “long shadow” imagery suggests that the end of the shadow is not like a line on a horizon that can be transgressed by a common consensus but is, instead, the long shadow, the presence with which one must learn to live.

Marie-Claire Lavabre used phonetically similar concepts of the “choice of the past” (*choix du passé*) and the “weight of the past” (*poids du passé*) to describe two ways of how past and present become interconnected. While in the first case we can speak about deliberate attempts to make a choice with respect to the past, selecting elements that suit current interests, the other elements of the “weight of the past” remind us that those choices are never fully free. It is precisely the weight of the past, the influence of past events, that forms the current positions from which we turn back in time and make choices.[[450]](#footnote-450) Lavabre makes an interesting addition by adding physicality (weight) to something that is, in and of itself, immaterial. That metaphoric addition suggests that the past, unlike imaginative stories, is not completely susceptible to change *ad libidum*. The weight of the past connotes some material-like resistance that places the past within the same gravitational living space of people as an active agent—while societies create the past, the past defines the societies.

The testimonies that we read support the fact that the suppression of memory can never be complete, let alone successful. It is important to note that a will to forget is not always just a characteristic of the totalitarian, hegemonic desire to control the present social relationships through the control of the past. It can come for a well-intended desire to protect children from traumatic images, as we saw in several interviews. However, erasures of tragic events from the collective memory, even when it is well-intentioned, can have highly problematic and unpredictable consequences. “What parents wanted to forget,” the Jewish saying goes, “children want to remember.” Cutting off memory, notes Schreiter, makes societies myopic, and suppressed contents can turn dangerously explosive, especially when they suddenly burst out, displaced from their original context. Youth who have been “protected” from dangerous memory face difficulties when they try to put their identity in the context of a history that has shaped themselves and their people.[[451]](#footnote-451) The problem is that, while traumatic sentiment is felt, it is at the same time hidden, invisible. Its transparency however, does not make it automatically non-existent. Like an untold story, it exerts its effects in the form of a negative language, an uncomfortable silence:

In an effort to spare the young from the horrific events of the Pol Pot years and the genocidal activities of the Khmer Rouge, parents and indeed the entire nation conspired to keep this history from the children born after the demise of the Khmer Rouge. Now that a Truth Commission is beginning its work investigating the events of the 1970s, efforts must be made to convince university students—born after those years—that such atrocities even occurred. Many of these students think this Commission is part of an international conspiracy to defame Cambodia.”[[452]](#footnote-452)

Obviously, the challenge of the traumatic memory of conflict lies in its potential to re-traumatize, to replicate itself again in new generations. When transmitted wrongly, or when it remains untold, it can have unwanted and dangerous consequences. Traumatic memory represents a body of unstructured thoughts and emotions that can be transmitted to others through many verbal and non-verbal ways. Its content is not completely manipulable but has some inner resistance (weight of the past). It is not entirely ignorable but has the *shadowy* (schattenhaft) presence in the social life.

The notion of the weight of the past serves well as a framework for understanding many testimonies that voiced the heaviness of collective tragedies but also criticized attempts to change them, censor them, or bury them under the carpet of a political project. This latter concern was influenced by a predominantly negative evaluation of the processes of coming to terms with the past in the former Yugoslavia. The shared view was that the suppression of tragic memories emphasized their importance and serviced the construction of nationalistic grievances once when the ideological cover started to crumble in late 1980’s. As Darko Đogo observed: “The Yugoslav experiment has shown that, if you constantly put religious and ethnic identities under the carpet, the dust will eventually ruin the carpet. The question also remains whether the powder you put under the carpet is just dust or gun-powder.”[[453]](#footnote-453) Memories of pain and suffering were proven to be the gun powder that initiated the subsequent uncontrolled explosion of memories that emphasized suffering absent any real ethical criteria, manifested in uncritical historical writings, fear mongering media pieces, as well as new (quasi)religious rituals such as publicized reburials of dead bodies or religious processions.[[454]](#footnote-454) The tragic past was like as a heavy Sisyphus’s stone that rolled back on those who were pushing it.

Renarrating the myth of Sisyphus, who constantly pushes his stone up the hill in an endless effort without teleology as a punishment for his deeds, Camus provokes us to imagine him happy.[[455]](#footnote-455) In a recent publication on historical responsibility, a group of Germanist scholars reinterprets this myth in the context of historical responsibility. Although the past is a burden that cannot be eliminated, the authors argue that it can be transformed into a “happy burden”:

Sisyphus is happy in his never-ending labors because he has finally discovered that meaning in his life is determined by him alone (…) Moreover, he is now fully aware of his ability to respond (…) It is the measure of his success, not in convincing others but in finally learning wisdom, that Sisyphus does not view his historical responsibilities as a life sentence but as an existential choice.[[456]](#footnote-456)

For authors, it is the principle of responsibility that transforms not the heaviness of the burden, but our stance towards it. The job becomes meaningful not by a vision of its end but by a reflective existential choice. In the following section, I will revisit this idea. But instead of transforming the heavy past through *existential choice*, the guiding idea will be its transformation through the *dialogical encounter* with the painful Other.

In his essay “The crisis of historical consciousness and Europe”*,* Ricœur proposes that “it is always possible to narrate the same events differently”[[457]](#footnote-457) but that change needs to rest on the active and critical confrontation with the past. Contrasting “mémoire-répétition” (repetition-memory) with the “mémoire-souvenir” (recollection-memory) he compares two different principles of memory – the first one which insists on one and the same narrative of the past, and the second one which lets itself be questioned and re-evaluated:

Repetition-memory resists criticism; recollection-memory is fundamentally a critical memory. One can thus understand that certain people suffer from an excess of memory and others from its failure. What some cultivate with morbid delight and what others flee with bad conscience is the same repetition-memory. The former would like to lose themselves in it, the latter are afraid of being engulfed by it. But both suffer from the same lack of critical memory; in particular, they do not accept the test of documentary history with its necessary phase of distancing and objectification.[[458]](#footnote-458)

At the same time, Ricœur insists – and this is the crucial detail – that opening memory to historical criticism is only the first step condition for “the healing of memory” (la guérison de la mémoire).[[459]](#footnote-459) The second, and the essential step, is letting oneself to be re-told by the Other:

We are the characters of the stories that others tell. (…) The most effective way of telling things differently is by going through the stories of others in order to understand ourselves, by reading our history with the eyes of historians belonging to peoples other than ours, or even to other great cultures that are different from those involved in the aforementioned weaving between the founding cultures of contemporary Europe. That is the immense task by which the therapy of European memory must be tackled. The exchange of memories that we just talked about consists a real migration and cross migration: we learn to transport ourselves in the memories of others and to inhabit their stories; we welcome, as migrants, the memories that nourish the historical conscience of the guests we receive at our home.[[460]](#footnote-460)

In the following section, I will continue this line of thought. I will try to show that responsibility can be understood not just as the existential decision of a hero (be it an individual or a collectivistic one) to accept a burden, *transforming it into a happy burden by virtue of his or her choice*. Instead, responsibility needs to be understood, I argue, in the sense of a *response*, as a responsive action to truth, which is made visible through the *response* to the painful Other and the ultimate Other.

# 2.5. Towards an religiously-inspired paradigm of responsible remembering: Ecumene of compassion

Reflecting the duality of commemorative actions and monuments, Ivan Šarčević, a Professor at the *Franciscan Faculty of Theology* in Sarajevo, suggested that the evil and the sacred, theoretically opposite concepts, are in practice often encountered together. Drawing a parallel between the words *symbolic* and *diabolic*, which share the same root but have opposing prefixes, he argues that the attractiveness of violence is due to its ability to combine the two, i.e., to be diabolic under the mask of the symbolic:

The greatest diabolicalness of evil hides in religious or generally sacred symbols. They are perverted from symbolic universal unity into diabolic violence. Evil operates with good, suffering, troubles, narrowed truths, fears, absence of criticism and self-criticism and thereby produces violence. The worst violence is clothed in garments, form of truth, goodness, and sanctity.[[461]](#footnote-461)

The real effects of such violence in Šarčević’s interpretation are dual: on the one hand, it represents itself under the pretext of good, and secondly, as such, it provokes a mimetic reaction: “Rare are those who resist evil under the mask of the sacred. The majority responds to evil by evil, by digging their own den and pulling their own diabolic darkness over its symbols. However, that is not a defense from others but a confirmation of one’s own evil and fear—of one’s own sources of violence.”[[462]](#footnote-462) That tendency of *diaballein* to hide under the *symballein* is not limited to the metaphysical realm but finds its reflection in material symbols. The author uses the example of crosses in post-conflict Bosnia and Herzegovina, which were erected as markers of defiance, re-purposed from a symbol of victory over death into elements representing division.[[463]](#footnote-463)

Collective hatred regularly feeds itself by real, and even more by exaggerated and invented historical sufferings. One hatred propels the other, so that Serbian and Croatian [self-]victimization in last two decades is without any lag, followed by the Bosniak (…) [I]n that way, the predominant identity of people in this country is become the victimological identity.[[464]](#footnote-464)

Self-victimization in Bosnia and Herzegovina is manifested as a concurrent excess of memory for one’s own suffering and of amnesia for the suffering of the Other, a tool for exoneration of responsibility, and a shield against criticism. Against that, Šarčević insists on a balanced move towards the community of compassion:

That is not to advocate some cheap community or quick reconciliation because, where reconciliation is quick or omnipotent, world becomes unjust, untrue, inhuman—one cannot live there. Here, a solidarity with others is advocated. Opening eyes for their suffering and concrete help—that is the birthplace of pluralism, and by the same token, of democratic future for this country. On the other hand, in apologetics of national and nationalistic territory, in irresponsibility for one’s actions, in emphasizing only one’s own misfortunes and negating the suffering of the Other - there is the birthplace of totalitarianism.[[465]](#footnote-465)

Šarčević’s answer to the heavy weight of memories is not their transformation through some sovereign decision of a subject or collectivity, but its opening. His insistence on the community of compassion highlights the importance of a being-together, of recognizing the pain of the Other as a legitimate and an equally valuable pain and, at the same time, of self-critical actions provoked by the realization that symbolic and diabolic actions often go hand in hand. Šarčević’s theology follows Johann Baptist Metz’s original concept of the *ecumene of compassion*. Although he acknowledges different religious views on the problem of suffering, Metz nevertheless suggests that the resistance to unjust suffering stands in the core of every religion. For him, suffering unites people in a unique way; it “inspires us to a new form of solidarity, of responsibility for the most distant stranger, since the history of suffering unites all men and women like a ‘second nature’ (…) It will not allow any peace or any freedom at the price of repressing the histories of suffering of other peoples and groups.”[[466]](#footnote-466) Since suffering is everybody’s “second nature,” it is, at the same time, a basis for global solidarity and an imperative for ecumenical religions to resist the social structures of the globalized world that are built on the suffering of innocent people.

I would suggest a different reading of the *ecumene of compassion* that comes from my interviews and is more in line with Šarčević’s position. Ecumene, in the most basic sense, represents the basic cell of a compassionate community between parties influenced by a former history of conflicts. Understood that way, ecumene is achieved through a *response* to the Other and so is a *responsible* being-together. Moreover, unlike community—and this is a crucial detail—ecumene suggests the irreducible duality of the Other. Ecumene is always a heterogeneous community. In the same sense, the goal of the ecumenical dialogue is not to achieve one world-religion but to enhance mutual understanding between religious communities that participate in it. *Ecumene of compassion* does not aim to unify all the pain into one whole but to recognize instead that the pain of the Other will always remain a mystery. This is in line with Martha Nussbaum’s conceptualization of empathic compassion. For her, those two concepts are separate. While compassion is a “painful emotion occasioned by the awareness of another person’s undeserved misfortune,”[[467]](#footnote-467) empathy is simply “an imaginative reconstruction of another person’s experience, whether that experience is happy or sad, pleasant or painful or neutral (…)”[[468]](#footnote-468) Empathy in other words does not imply that an empathic subject feels any negative emotions or compassion towards the victim, because “a torturer may be acutely aware of the suffering of the victim, and able to enjoy the imagining of it, all without the slightest compassion, for he regards the pain of the sufferer as a great good for him, and he believes that his purposes matter and that those of the victim do not.”[[469]](#footnote-469) Nussbaum thus conceptualizes compassion and empathy in very different ways and, while empathy can be important for compassion, it is not its prerequisite.[[470]](#footnote-470) Compassion, in her rendering, is driven not by empathy but by judgement.[[471]](#footnote-471)

However, we can perhaps focus not on empathy in general (which can indeed be used for sadistic purposes), but on the *compassion-driven empathy* in which *compassion* serves as a ruling principle of coming-together while *empathy* stands as a model of a community in which the alterity of the Other is preserved. The empathic principle is still the one that Nussbaum described:

[E]mpathy is like the mental preparation of a skilled (Method) actor: it involves a participatory enactment of the situation of the sufferer, but is always combined with the awareness that one is not oneself the sufferer. This awareness of one’s separate life is quite important if empathy is to be closely related to compassion: for if it is to be for *another,* and not for oneself, that one feels compassion, one must be aware both of the bad lot of the sufferer and of the fact that it is, right now, not one’s own. If one really had the experience of feeling the pain in one’s own body, then one would precisely have failed to comprehend the pain of another *as other*. (…) What is wanted, it seems, is a kind of “twofold attention” in which one both imagines what it is like to be in the sufferer’s place and, at the same time, retains securely the awareness that one is not in that place.[[472]](#footnote-472)

If we imagine that this attention does not remain neutral but is directed by compassion, we come to the idea of the “ecumene of compassion.” The interview data suggest another potentially fruitful idea—that the grounding principle of such *ecumene* would not be only judgment that the Other is equally important and that his, her, or their pain is genuine and equally valuable but also the insistence on the *visible presence* of that Other. Notice here that that imaginative element is only one segment of that *being-together*. There is another authority—authority of materiality, of a bodily presence that can lead to a more open form of remembering and commemoration. In my interviews, this was suggested by respondents who insisted on the importance of the painful Other as someone who brings the truth back to the suffering community by uncovering the blind spots of its undesirable past and, at the same time, uncovers the suffering as a shared “second nature.” But, as I already mentioned, that presence was not just the imaginative (cognitive) one. The insistence on the corporeal presence of the painful Other, even without any reconciliatory agenda, reaffirms the importance of an encounter, the performative strength of being-together, even in silence. The innovative project of Ivana Franović, which brought war veterans from different sides together, is a good illustration of this power. Franović mentioned that commemorative events related to the last war are, in all territories of the former Yugoslavia, frequently platforms of nationalist rhetoric. As a part of their project, her group experimentally began to bring, in silence, war veterans who fought on opposite sides to the commemorations of the other group. The result was the instant demonstration of a greater care for words and acts that were uttered during the ceremonies.[[473]](#footnote-473)

In short, the presence of the Other leads to a double opening, introducing the element of self-critical balance from the inside and extending the circle of compassion from the outside. Aside from that, the *ecumene of compassion* must preserve the alterity of the Other, precisely because otherwise the painful element of the Other that we want to eliminate or forget would be commodified to suit the needs of the group, thereby transforming the Other into a convenient Other. Finally, one other element needs to be addressed, and that is the otherness of the ultimate Other.

This element was present primarily in two notions: prayerful memory and liturgical views of history. If we could speak in the previous cases about transformation of memory as an *extension* towards the painful Other, we can now speak about *reframing* of memory through the ultimate Other, which is, in monotheistic traditions, God. This reframing does not change the content of the painful memories, but it presents it in a different light, adding to trauma the element of hope. It would be too hasty to discard hope as merely another *opium for the (suffering) people* that eliminates suffering by denying it. “Hope without remembrance,” as Moltmann insisted, “leads to illusion, just as, conversely, remembrance without hope can result in resignation.”[[474]](#footnote-474) The reframing I reference is not like a Great Flood that eliminates history to start a new world after this one has ended. Reframing of memory, as we could see especially in Damjan’s and Miloš’s interviews, puts the past in a radically different perspective. First, the notion of prayerful remembrance is a way of showing solemn and profound respect for the tragedy, but it also creates a certain distance, showing that remorse is not a re-enactment of a tragedy but its *meditation*. That thin space of silent distance is at the same time a space of opening, since the person who prays (commemorates) is not being subsumed into the dynamics of the original event.

Secondly, the notion of the liturgical memory shows that hope, in its Christian reading, is by no means a nice projection of best wishes. On the contrary, the central element of liturgical memory is an event of innocent suffering that *does not relativize history in its cruelty, but only in its absolutism.* Liturgical memory, in effect, detaches time from its natural habitat (history), and anchors it in the space beyond it. Time, in other words, flows forwards, but it is to be read backwards. The end of time is, in that respect, a hermeneutical key for reading the past, not the other way around. While liturgical memory preserves the past in its entirety, it does not conserve it, i.e., it constantly re-reads it from a radically different vantage point outside history, which nevertheless can be foretasted through a mnemonic ritual of liturgical celebration.

# III. Concluding remarks

When Winston, the protagonist of Orwell’s *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, raised a glass of champagne on the eve of the preparations for the Revolution, he offered a toast to the past. He, the employee of a state that constantly changed the past according to its current interest, desired some form of stability, some form of refuge from its everchanging nature. In his diary, he wrote a dedication: “To the future or to the past, to a time when thought is free, when men are different from one another and do not live alone—to a time when truth exists and what is done cannot be undone.”[[475]](#footnote-475) Winston’s unease was caused by the instability that a malleable past produces. All relationships that we have are dependent on the past. If we were unsure that the people around us were the same people that we had known yesterday, we would not be able to form any relationships, develop trust, or make promises. It is that past that gives credibility and gravity to our actions and grounding to our perceptions.[[476]](#footnote-476)

The entire discussion to which this long chapter has been dedicated concerned the importance of the past, especially tragic events that have marked a group’s memory and identity. Tragedies, although painful, were seen as a *legacy* that should be preserved. By constructing the memory of tragedies, groups develop frameworks of comprehension and solidarity.

Remembering in many ways resembles an archaeological endeavor. The first phase is always one of reconstruction, when the group tries to answer the question, “What really happened to us?” The recovery of this unknown or dispersed experience has an emancipatory potential because a group, through memory, recovers its past voice, the lost ability to tell its own story. But as soon as that answer is reached, it provokes another question, “Why did this happen to us?” and “Who did it?” The archaeology of tragedies then yields to the *genealogy* of tragedies that aims to see the intentions and causes behind tragic events. The emancipatory memory then easily becomes an accusatory one, with legacy carrying the danger of *pathology*.

In the initial part of this chapter, we saw that religious leaders are apparently aware of this duality. One the one hand, they emphasized strongly that groups and individuals cannot and should not forget painful events. On the other hand, they are aware that the same memories can be misused as the cause for new violence. Nothing illustrates this problem better than the adage about the snake that bites twice. The moral of this story is that people should work to prevent the repetition of the same tragedy. However, as one respondent emphasized, under the pretext of avoiding ‘snakes,’ people can become snakes themselves. That was a metaphorical way of saying that painful memories can be misused to justify new violence as a preventive strike against the other group, as a way of not letting oneself be ‘bitten again.’ In the second part of the chapter, I have made a connection between my interview-data and theoretical positions on the dangers of memory. Nora’s view on transformation of tragic memories from “emancipatory” to “accusatory” and Todorov’s warnings about “sacralization” and “banalization” of memories were very helpful to explain those processes. It was evident that construction of memory requires a constant self-critical stance and ethical engagement lest it slips into what Brucker calls mythologization.

The chapter later dealt with the question as to how to remember in a responsible way. If tragic memories can be potentially dangerous, one might be tempted to ‘erase’ some of them, eliminating them form the public discourse. In my interviews, we could see that such attempts of the former Yugoslav regime were not successful. Although certain tragedies were not publicly discussed, they survived in family memories. Without links to other forms of memories, they developed as closed, emotionally important family narratives that were rarely subject to critical assessment. Theoretical perspectives on trans-generational trauma helped us to understand how these can be transferred not only through verbal elaboration but also through gestures and silences. The conclusion was that the answer to potential dangers of memory cannot be the erasure of traumas or their suppression. Instead, the only viable solution seemed to be responsible dealing with the weight of the past (Lavabre) and the long shadows they have left (Assmann).

My suggestion, based on the interview data, is to understand this responsibility primarily as a *response* to the painful Other. The presence (both imaginative and physical) of the painful Other interrupts the closed memory-narratives. In my interviews, this was articulated under the notion of *prayerful commemoration*, which was understood as a process that opens the memory of tragedies in two ways. First it opens it towards the painful Other (allowing for participation of people who do not belong to the same ethnic/national group) and towards the eschatological perspective. In that sense, the final horizon of tragic memories becomes the eschatological moment, which reframes the tragedy in such a way that it prevents history from making it permanently tragic. This idea resonates well with Ricœur’s idea of telling the past differently by opening memory to historical criticism and by letting oneself to be narrated by the Other. Prayerful commemoration also resembles Šarćević’s notion of the *ecumene of compassion*, which insists on being-together as a form of compassionate empathy that respects the suffering of the Other while remaining aware that the suffering of the Other is not my suffering.

The religious idea of memory is therefore a different ‘toast to the past’—to a past that cannot be undone but that can be remembered differently and, when linked to the eschatological vision, lived differently.

# Chapter IV: Peacebuilding roles of religious leaders

The chapter discusses three different peacebuilding activities of religious leaders: 1) preventive (before conflicts), 2) reactive (during conflicts), and transformative (after conflicts). The *preventive* role comprises all activities related to the development of moral character and social ethics that promote non-violence. The *reactive* role includes activities related to humanitarian assistance, spiritual and emotional accompaniment, denunciations of crimes, and promotion of alternative social visions to those of group separation. Lastly, the *transformative* role (in the post-conflict phase), is inseparable from the challenges related to the legacy of past violence, especially those of forgiveness, reconciliation, and memory of conflicts, all of which can be used in hegemonic and exclusionary ways. Furthermore, the chapter analyzes the dissonance between the theological principles of peacebuilding and limited engagements of religious leaders, putting the focus on practical and moral challenges they encounter. As an illustration, the chapter discusses the fall of Communism in former Yugoslavia and the subsequent control over religious symbols and narratives that was divided between religious and political leaders. The final part of the chapter will present the *Square of religious influence*, a model that contains four interrelated factors through which religion influences social change: specific doctrines and beliefs, links with social identity and political institutions, modes of direct engagement of religious actors in social and political life, and ultimate visions of the world.

# The plan of Chapter IV

**In the first, exploratory part of this chapter, I present peacebuilding activities of religious leaders in three major sections (See: Scheme 4.1 in the Appendix):**

1. **Before the conflict**
   1. Here, peacebuilding activities will be described as *preventive.* They consist of education in religious doctrines and formation of moral character.
   2. Preventive activities are meant to make religious believers able to:
      1. Detect and resist misuse of religious symbols for ideological and political purposes;
      2. Work to develop social conditions that are conducive for peace.
2. **During the conflict**
   1. Peacebuilding activities will be described as *reactive*, because they are seen as a reaction to ongoing crises and misconduct. They consist of:
      1. Humanitarian assistance (reaction to grave living conditions);
      2. Spiritual and emotional assistance (reaction to people’s emotional and existential crises);
      3. Public criticism (reaction to war crimes and unjust political and social decisions).
3. **After the conflict (Scheme 4.4 in the Appendix)**
   1. Peacebuilding activities will now be described as *transformative* because they are focused on transformation of social conditions caused by wars. They consist of:
      1. Transformation of closed ethnic/national/religious identities, which are formed in an exclusivist way. (See: **Scheme 4.3** in the Appendix) With respect to theology, *opening* of closed identities is based on three decisive moves:
         1. Move from the idea of *elected nations* to *participative salvation*
         2. Move from the idea of *cleans lands* to *shared lands*
         3. Move from *coercive power* to *moral authority*
         4. Move from *zlopamćenje* to *ecumene of compassion*
      2. Transformation of inhospitable living conditions, especially in those territories that were subject to ethnic cleansings;
      3. Transformation of barriers related to forgiveness, reconciliation, and painful memories.
4. The chapter will then discuss the comparative advantages of including religious leaders in peacebuilding processes but also discuss specific constraints related to their position.
5. It will be demonstrated that religious leaders, in the processes of peacebuilding, experience a certain dissonance between theological ideas and practical constraints (primarily fears associated with loss of life, reputation, and public influence). That specific form of dissonance will be termed *theological dissonance.*
   1. The processes through which religious leaders try to find an optimal way of acting in a situation of *theological dissonance* will be described under the term *pastoral optimization.*
6. The chapter will also discuss some specific challenges that religious communities face in the post-Communist period.
   1. The phrase “Communism in reverse” will later be used to describe a situation in which religious leaders have regained public presence and influence while simultaneously losing control over religious symbols and narratives.
7. Outlining the differences in conceptualizations of peace and peacebuilding between religious and non-religious actors, it will be shown that:
   1. Religious understanding of peace is holistic and circular (it starts with a person and requires spiritual integrity);
   2. Religious leaders consider certain activities as essential to peace, but these activities are not included in current standard models of peacebuilding.

In the second part of the theoretical discussion, I will introduce theories concerning the links between religion, conflict, and peace. Using Aristotle’s notion of four causes (**Scheme 4.5 in the Appendix**), the starting premise will be that religion can be a factor differentiating conflict and peace via:

1. **Specific doctrines and beliefs (formal causes)**
   1. Against theories that directly connect scriptural texts and violence, it will be argued that religious mobilization (for both peace and violence) includes three interconnected elements:
      1. Doctrinal sources;
      2. Interpretations of those sources (guided by *religious hermeneutics*);
      3. Application of those interpretations in concrete situations (guided by *political theologies*).
2. **Links with social identity and political institutions (material causes). It will be shown that:**
   1. Overlaps between religious and other group identities (e.g., national and ethnic) can be exploited to mobilize for violence;
   2. Strong links between religious communities to political power hinder their ability to act in favor of socially marginalized and oppressed groups;
   3. Strong identification between religious and ethnic/national belonging prevents religious groups from seeing the *benefits of dialogue* with other groups and from re-discovering their own identity through encounters with the Other.
3. **Specific ultimate visions of the world (final causes).**
4. **Direct engagement of religious actors (effective causes).**

Furthermore, the chapter will discuss some specific challenges that religious communities in Bosnia and Herzegovina face in their peacebuilding engagement. Nationalism will be presented as the most important challenge. It will be shown that nationalism:

1. Can develop in different forms;
2. When linked with religion, can lead to ‘sacralization’ of political or ideological concepts that place contingent phenomena in a divine reality, thereby placing them beyond criticism.

At the same time, it will be shown that the tentative solution to religious nationalism in forms of universalism are problematic in two ways:

1. They do not show sensitivity to cultural values that are important to a group;
2. They can also evolve into violent forms.

The concluding chapter will suggest a move from closed identities to open identities based on the respectful dialogical encounter with the Other. Two concepts will be suggested in relation to dialogue:

1. ***The third skin***– If identity is understood as a second skin (covering the biological one), it will be argued that dialogue creates a new layer of belonging (a third skin) which differs from the previous two layers;
2. ***Theological sprezzatura***– As a way of engagement in interreligious dialogue in a respectful yet ‘natural’ and spontaneous way different from ceremony.

(See also: **Table 4.1** in the Appendix)

# Bridges with walls: Religious leaders as peacebuilders

The Divided Bridge was a peculiar construction that connected two sides of the river Thames, in Datchet near Windsor. After spirited disputes regarding finances, the two communities connected by the bridge decided to divide it in half and to build their parts separately. The bridge in its final form lasted from 1836 till 1848, when it was demolished. The Divided Bridge serves as a historical manifestation of the joining of two separate metaphors—the bridge and the wall. Often reiterated, the call to “build bridges, not walls” confronts its limitations in the bridge that simultaneously connected two sides of the river but divided two disputing communities.

Religious leaders are often compared to bridges that connect the transcendent and immanent dimensions and unite divided communities. The Roman pope still carries the title *Pontifex Maximus*, the supreme bridge-builder, not unlike many other religious leaders who see their mission as reconciliatory in nature, as aiming to bridge the dissonance within people and between them, within their own communities and between different groups.

But should we simply accept that image at face value, seeing bridges as something unequivocally positive and unproblematic? The situation seems more complex than that. In order to understand the role of religious leaders in the peacebuilding process, we have to ask ourselves one more question: What happens when bridges incorporate walls, when constructions that are meant to connect two sides also produce separations, when inner inhibitions counterbalance their unifying force?

In this chapter, I will bring together many threads from previous chapters. Focusing on the agents of peacebuilding, I will discuss the ways some religious leaders can act as bridges and their comparative advantages in comparison with other, non-religious peace-workers. However, we will also see that concrete circumstantial factors always influence the theoretical potentials of religious leaders to be motors of conflict transformation. While, on the one hand, they are subject to theological universal imperatives, on the other hand, they have duties to their concrete communities (which are not always receptive to theological ideals), they must act within time constraints, financial limits, and dependencies, they have fears and face threats, they have personal limitations, and they must deal with being marginalized, ignored, or simply not understood. At the end, what stands between potential and real outputs is the process of pastoral optimization, in which limited individuals aim to achieve goals in an imperfect world, simultaneously bridging not just one division but many, provoking criticism by making friends, excluding some by including others, and erecting walls by bridging gaps.

In the chapter that follows, we will try to cross the river over a divided bridge.

# I. Field-research findings: Three peacebuilding scenarios

The terms ‘peacebuilding’ and ‘conflict resolution’ are often used synonymously. However, if we look chronologically at the development of conflicts, we see that they can differ with regards to the background against which they are enacted. Transformation of conflicts always implies some immediate conflict, whereas peacebuilding does not necessarily do so. In many ways, peacebuilding can be viewed as a preventive activity with respect to conflicts.

When we consider the roles of religious leaders, they differ before conflicts, during conflicts, and in their aftermath. “War is a special situation” was a frequent *leitmotif* in my testimonies. War drastically changes social dynamics; it limits the scope of available actions; it shuffles social roles and it profoundly affects the psychological states of individuals and groups. It is therefore meaningful to divide this chapter accordingly. In that respect, before a conflict, religious leaders have a *preventive* role that is mostly manifested through the development of moral characters of individuals and the social resilience of religious communities. The degree of their success determines the ability of those groups to resist instrumentalization of religious symbols, narratives, and structures once the conflict starts. During the conflict, however, the scope of actions becomes limited and is primarily a *response* to an acute ongoing crisis. Finally, after the war, although there are no open conflicts, the situation is significantly different than prior to the war. Peacebuilding is now no longer a response to an immediate threat but rather is an arduous process of dealing with a legacy of violence, i.e. its *transformation*. As always, some of the activities (such as the development of open identities) can take place before as well as after conflicts, meaning that this division is not a clear-cut separation. Nevertheless, to better understand the dynamics of the religious agency, I will analyze the role of religious leaders in three key terms: preventive (before the conflict), responsive (during the conflict), and transformative (after the conflict).

# 1.1. Before the Conflict: Preventive role of religious leaders

Speaking about peacemaking, Dejan had an interesting observation: “In order to do one form of good, one has to do good everywhere (…)”[[477]](#footnote-477) He gave this as a response to my question as to whether some specific elements in faith particularly contribute to peacebuilding and appeared hesitant to divide particular religious elements that contribute to one or another form of good. In his view, both good and bad provoke similar deeds, suggesting that human actions are mutually related, i.e., that there is some underlying habitus or fundamental orientation towards good or evil which ties them together.[[478]](#footnote-478) Also, in the context of peacebuilding activities, Edin underlined the importance of developing not only social arrangements but also “human identities” that exhibit the value of tolerance, where the emphasis was on the education of tolerant people, not on the propagation of tolerance.[[479]](#footnote-479)

Both Dejan and Edin pointed towards one of the central elements of religious communities—the religious formation of individuals, which is rarely recognized as a form of peacebuilding. For religious leaders, however, this represents one of their most critical responsibilities. A frequently emphasized theme of this project’s interviews was that one reason for religion’s easy use for ideological and political purposes during the war was people’s lack of a proper religious formation during the period of Communist Yugoslavia. Although Mladen believed that the root causes of conflicts around the world are political, he nevertheless admitted that religion is also used as a tool for mobilization. The effectiveness of the political use of religion is due to the fact, said Mladen, that people know very little about their religious traditions. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, he claimed, people had (and still have) a traditional form of religiosity related to practical things and customs but lack real theological knowledge.[[480]](#footnote-480)

The underlying idea behind the peacebuilding effects of a religious education is that the formation of individuals creates the capability to detect what is genuinely religious and what is not. In other words, adequately formed individuals are expected to recognize that certain actions that are legitimized by religion may nonetheless seem unnatural or contradict their most profound convictions and act accordingly. A related conviction is that religiously formed individuals would be less prone to commit illegitimate war crimes and atrocities than those who are educated in a way that is at odds with religious principles.

According to Tarik, education is precisely the means by which religious communities can prevent conflicts and promote better understanding. In his view, the Communist system made religious communities rigid and closed, causing them to fail in their mission to educate. He described the formation in the former Yugoslavia as disciplining, not education, leading later to appalling consequences: “The absolute majority of those who participated in the war were disciplined, not educated. All those military and police officers, all of them were disciplined. They were disciplined in school, and when they would come home, then they were miseducated, in a nationalist way, without faith. Moreover, that produced people who were ready for genocides, crimes, and so.”[[481]](#footnote-481)

Vasilije’s view of the brutalities of war also pointed to failures in education or, to be more precise, too strong an emphasis on militaristic values:

**A:** In my view, what generated war to the largest degree was, of course, political conflict (…) There were differing visions among nations in which way to go. But the reason why it was so brutal, and why people took up weapons so easily was the militaristic education that we all went through. My father’s generation, even mine [generation], had an education that resembled the one in North Korea. You know, when you go to primary school, you assemble and disassemble guns during classes in the fourth grade. And that gun must fire eventually. We were putting gas masks on, we trained and played war. And when you play, you tend to get caught up in the game. Look, that lasted for 50 years, that militarism in education (…) I generally do not like militarism, perhaps I am a little bit too subjective, but when you have that military potential, a nation that is trained, it is to be expected that politicians will use that (…) In the end, there was much more war there than hatred.

**Q:** What does that mean exactly? The phrase “there was much more war than hatred” sounds interesting to me? Can you explain it?

**A:** Yes, yes ... That is to say that people did not hate—they liked each other. You remember those Yutel’s[[482]](#footnote-482)... or perhaps you don’t remember, you are younger... In Sarajevo, and all over Bosnia and Herzegovina, people were hugging—there will be no war! But once when the war starts, hateful scumbags come to the surface, and they are ready to use the situation, to commit crimes. As a matter of fact, once when a war starts, it does not need some hatred to fuel it. It can start even without hatred, [but] once it starts, those who do not hate become silent.

**Q:** In that sense, how was it possible for something that started without hatred to mobilize such a large number of people?

**A:** It was surely [possible]. That goes according to its own inertia. [There was] institutional mobilization, it was spontaneous. You get conscripted, and you go to war. If you run away, they burn your house. I repeat again: there was much more war than hatred.[[483]](#footnote-483)

It is interesting to note that, in the previous testimonies, religious education was understood in opposition to disciplining, nationalism, and militarism. Tarik and Vasilije seemed to imply that elimination of religious education from society does not immediately produce peaceful and tolerant individuals, as is often suggested by critics of religion. Instead, the absence of a religious formation opened the doors to other forms of ideological formation and a militaristic set of values which resulted in crimes when the war started.

Vasilije’s interview is particularly interesting because of his insistence on the notion that there was “much more war than hatred,” hinting that people in Bosnia and Herzegovina did not hate each other. This might seem at odds with his preceding statement, i.e., that people were conditioned to fight due to their militaristic training. However, he divided his answer into two parts: one part explained why the war started and the other one clarified why it was so brutal. The war started, he opined, because of irreconcilable political interests, but the environment that supported it was one of militaristic training that did not leave space for nonconformity. Once the war started, however, it had its own momentum, and those who opposed it either chose to be silent or were silenced. In other words, proper education would not necessarily have prevented the war from happening, but it would have influenced the manner in which it progressed.

In a similar vein, Boško stated that the conflicts were so bloody because generations were raised in atheism,[[484]](#footnote-484) automatically reducing the preventive possibilities of religious communities since they did not enjoy such a prominent place in public life as they do today. In Tarik’s words, positive messages of peace were sent from all three religious communities in Bosnia and Herzegovina but “the ears that were supposed to hear that were not educated in the spirit of faith.”[[485]](#footnote-485)

But, we might ask, in what way could a religious education be a preventive force against conflicts? Ilija, an older Orthodox priest from Brčko district, insisted on the importance of a religious education in school, which, he asserted, would contribute to greater humanization. Importantly, he stressed that religious leaders are nowadays better educated in Christian love than previously. He also implied that religious education in and of itself is not sufficient—adequately formed educators are also needed. At the same time, he did not merely argue in favor of any form of religious education but proposed a specific one – education that is free and capable of answering the challenges of the moment creatively.[[486]](#footnote-486)

Boško, who lives in the same region, also insisted on the importance of religious education but emphasized an education in the virtues. Through religious education, he said, religious leaders can “sow a good seed” among children, but these programs are too often focused on ephemeral things. According to him, educators should be selected carefully, but, at the same time, they should be granted creative freedom in their work.[[487]](#footnote-487) It is important to clarify that most of the teachers of religious education in the public schools of Bosnia and Herzegovina are still religious leaders, not lay theologians. However, the principle of centering religious education on education in virtues instead of cognitive formation is applicable not just in school classrooms but also in other forms of religious formation.[[488]](#footnote-488)

These testimonies suggest that the *preventive role* of religious leaders in the transformation of conflicts should not be seen as an ad-hoc activity but rather as a long, continuous, and persistent engagement with people. The underlying conviction is that religious interventions can only be effective if they can resonate with people and seem ‘natural’ and meaningful. That is, however, only possible if religion becomes a part of the character, if religious values become incorporated into people’s habitus, as virtues and perhaps even as broader worldviews.

One of the reasons why religious leaders insist on education in values is their view of human nature as fallible and imperfect. One consequence of this imperfection is a lack of moral persistence and a tendency to shift positions. The importance of education of moral character then becomes especially important in situations of crisis, when a great deal of moral courage may be necessary in order to act against prevailing social currents.

In Velimir’s words, “people are a wonder, both in a positive and a negative sense. They can go so far to become animals or reach the level of the greatest Samaritan and Christian, transform in a moment into either of those (…) It depends on what was sown in them, and what was planted in [their] heart.”[[489]](#footnote-489) Velimir emphasized the early Christian education and first instruction in faith that one gets at home. He stated that the success of his pastoral works depends on how much the message of faith resonates with believers. If those who are standing on the receptive side of the communication channel are not adequately prepared to hear it and interpret it properly, his message will not achieve its desired goal. This previous education becomes especially important in turbulent situations of war:

In war, both positive and negative things become apparent. The last war showed that people who were loyal to any denomination or faith had much better relationships among themselves than those who were not. Here is one small detail—in the last war, in 1942, my grandfather was saved from Ustaše by a Muslim neighbor. (…) In this war, my uncle saved his son from [Serbian] paramilitary units. But both of them were true believers.[[490]](#footnote-490)

An interview with Adis illustrates this point quite well. Initially, we had trouble setting a date for the interview, and I came to his city to speak with another religious leader who worked in the same building. When he heard me speaking in the hallway, he invited me into his office, and we had a very long and congenial conversation. Adis is an influential person in his religious community, has a very open attitude, and has a calm demeanor. He described how he was seriously injured in 1992 while in his early 20s. When he awoke in the hospital, he found that his injury would have serious, long-term consequences. Nevertheless, he said that he never fell into depression and that he could not foster hatred of those who had injured him. He looked inside himself, he said, and was unable to find hatred. When I asked him the reason that he could feel hatred, his reply was twenty-three previous years of a life in faith.[[491]](#footnote-491)

Adis’s comment suggests that a life in faith enables some form of continuity in good and that, even in the midst of conflict, it still prevents a sudden eruption of hatred and a desire for revenge. Similarly, Ivan suggested that individuals are, by their very nature, unstable and require a certain moral maturity that helps them sustain a correct orientation under challenging circumstances:

Look at that! A human is made of glass, of vapor, of nothing. [A human person is] so ephemeral, like a shadow, as if he was made of smoke or fog; in only a moment, he changes [into something] different, especially in such circumstances [that] sometimes causes a person to act wrongly. There will always be conflicts, lack of understanding, hatred among brothers within a family and among people and nations. How to stop that? I don’t know; there is no way…. The root of all evils is in wrong education and wrong direction.[[492]](#footnote-492)

Ivan’s elaboration made it clear that education does not mean just memorization or contemplation of religious propositions, which can all be just a comfortable exercise in abstraction. The real effects of being properly educated are, in fact, seen in real-life situations:

It is different [when you have never experienced] those [particular] circumstances…. while you are sitting in a warm room, listening to interesting lectures, and you have the leisure to reflect upon [theological lessons] (…) It is different when you face those circumstances that become life and [actual] relationships. [Then] that becomes an act, something alive, and it is not a letter, a word, or [something on] paper anymore.[[493]](#footnote-493)

There was yet another vital element in his response which echoed the idea that religious education is a long process that also depends on each individual’s personal situation. Besides religious instruction and experience, there is the notion of the moment in which a person reaches moral maturity. Instead of focusing only on the ‘right things to do’ within an abstract system, Ivan instead suggested that moral responsibility requires a specific form of prudence, an inner examination of readiness to face the challenges of the moment:

Jesus spoke about his moment: My hour has not yet come. When is that [moment]? Under which circumstances? How to act? (…) Here is an example, although an imperfect one. [Say] someone does not know how to swim but wants to go into a deep lake…. [One should say:] No, you shouldn’t [go into the water], you will drown, [because] you don’t know how to swim (…) [Y]ou need to know how to swim to enter the water. [Otherwise], we are dealing with ignorance, lack of familiarity, immaturity, and stubbornness.[[494]](#footnote-494)

Attitudes towards the importance of religious habitus are in line with the prevailing conviction that the understanding between two individuals who are believers but of different ethnicities is better than that between a believer and a non-believer of the same ethnicity. Ramiz explained that it is immediately possible to determine if someone is a believer because one can speak with that person differently—he or she interact carefully, not harshly, and without swearing, Ramiz says.[[495]](#footnote-495) For Zvonimir, the unifying element between believers is belief in the eternal life and, importantly, in care for believing conscience.[[496]](#footnote-496) Orhan also opined that speaking with those who are convinced believers is easier than with those who are just of the same ethnicity. In his view, people have a feeble knowledge of both their own faith and the faith of others, and that lack of knowledge provided the foundations of conflicts. “If we were real believers,” he said, “that would not have happened to us, and when it happened, we would have repaired it.”[[497]](#footnote-497) He criticized the tendency among people to view themselves as good Orthodox believers if they hate Muslims, or as Good Muslims if they hate Orthodox, thereby betraying an obvious lack of knowledge about the other and their own tradition. At the same time, Orhan had a broader vision of what a religious society should look like. It might sound surprising, but, as examples of real Islam, he used Norway and Austria, two paradigmatic countries where human rights and dignities are respected, although the level of self-declared believers is much lower than in Bosnia and Herzegovina.[[498]](#footnote-498)

In short, the way religious leaders can contribute to the prevention of conflicts is through the education of believers so that they possess sufficient knowledge of religious truth to be able to detect misuses of religious elements (cognitive education) and, even more importantly, by developing their moral character. In that sense, the study respondents noted mistakes of the Communist system but also failures of their own communities to educate believers who would stand by religious norms in times of trouble. Although many respondents commended the existence of institutionalized religious education, they nonetheless insisted on its orientation towards positive values of tolerance and acceptance. To them, religious education by itself is not a sufficient condition to create virtuous individuals; instead, it must be performed in a careful way and on a long-term basis in order to achieve its desired goals. Hamza specifically mentioned the need of breaking of negative stereotypes during religious education,[[499]](#footnote-499) but the majority of other respondents seemed to take for granted that education in faith cannot go together with the propagation of hatred towards other groups of people. Some however, such as Pavle, were skeptical about the success of religious education if it remains contained only within the curricular system.[[500]](#footnote-500) The religious formation of individuals is thus not limited to schools. Rather, continuous engagement is required, through personal interactions, family contacts, group gatherings, and other forms of inter-personal encounters. Through metaphors such as “sowing a seed” or “preparing a field,” the respondents emphasized the fact that the effectiveness of particular religious activities depends greatly on the ability of people to understand them, recognize them, and finally to implement them in their lives. When such preparation is lacking, it is extremely hard to propagate a message of faith, especially when circumstances require rapid action and quick response, as in war. We turn to these in the next section.

# 1.2. During the conflict: The time of confusion

In order to comprehend the modes of religious potentials of peacebuilding during conflicts, it is first essential to outline the scopes and limitations of such activities and the nature of the social changes that occur in parallel to conflicts. When we refer to the conflicts in Bosnia and Herzegovina, we must first recognize that they coincided with the fall of Communist systems throughout Europe (including Yugoslavia), which placed religious communities under a new spotlight and created an influx of newly converted or ‘returned’ believers. Not surprisingly, religious believers frequently describe that as a time of confusion. It was a specific form of confusion, however, one created by the simultaneous empowerment of religious communities, who were regaining their public influence, but losing control over religious symbols. Religious leaders were faced with the seemingly irreconcilable tasks of criticizing misuses of religious symbols and, at the same time, encouraging free displays of faith; of dividing religious identity from national belonging and taking care of communities for which those two descriptors almost entirely coincided. In addition, one must take into account less than optimal human resources, organizational capacities, and lack of adequate preparation for the pastoral work in the period of transition from a one-party system to democracy, not to mention the challenges of a humanitarian crisis coupled with the lack of financial and basic living resources.

Although all three communities faced significant difficulties, the interviews indicate that they were not on the same organizational level. While the Catholic Church already had significant post-Vatican II theological development and a significant number of priests and monks, the Islamic community found itself amidst the construction of a Bosniak national identity and a stronger institutional organization, while the Serbian Orthodox Church seemed to be enmeshed in problems associated with traditional neo-patristic paradigms and lack of human resources. At the same time, the fall of Communism took most within the religious community by surprise, although it was certainly something commonly desired.

## 1.2.1. The fall of Communism: Dreams come cruel

“Be careful what you wish for because you might get it” is one of the oldest cultural tropes and plays with the fact that people are often not adequately prepared to have their dreams fulfilled. This trope is present in numerous forms, ranging from mythology, literature, movies, comics, cartoons, and jokes. In one of its classical renderings, it goes like this:

A man catches a goldfish and wishes for riches, power, and a beautiful wife. The next morning, he wakes up in an opulent palace, surrounded by splendor, luxury, and obedient servants. A gorgeous woman comes into the bedroom and tells him: ‘Ferdinand, sweetheart, get up. It’s time we go to Sarajevo.[[501]](#footnote-501)

Konstantin’s description of the way religious communities faced the fall of Communism has a similar structure:

It is again paradoxical—the Serbian Orthodox Church, the Catholic Church, and the Islamic community, all wished for the fall of Communism and a change in the system, but based on what happened after the fall of that system, it seems like the Serbian Orthodox Church desired this fall constantly but did not believe that it would ever [actually] happen.[[502]](#footnote-502)

In some ways, the end of Communism was the “common dream” of religious communities, but the reality that ensued was something for which they were not prepared. One reason, it seems, was the fact that the war took many by surprise. Even after the first violent conflicts, it was still not clear what was going to happen and how long the conflicts would last. Harun, for instance, stated: “It is really difficult to explain, and it remains inexplicable to everyone whose thinking is wholesome how was it possible (…) that someone so quickly and with such a strong charge managed to create a situation in which people did those things to each other (…) That remains a phenomenon for which we will seek an answer for years to come.”[[503]](#footnote-503) Josip also described the strange mix of feelings – firstly euphoria that the old system was falling, and then suddenly a shift towards divisions and hostilities, a shift that remains perplexing.[[504]](#footnote-504)

The fall of Communism profoundly changed social relations in the former Yugoslavia. It represented not just a collapse of an ideology but also a reshuffling of social positions and spheres of influence and also—and this is a crucial detail—a change in control of symbolic values. As the only organized groups that were clearly anti-Communist, religious communities initially experienced a great comeback in the public sphere. As persistent critics of the system and perceived protectors of national identities, they had the initial authority to have a say in the broader process of a national and religious awakening. In that sense, they gained greater public influence, becoming social forces to be reckoned with. Danijel describes this process of the “coming out of the sacristies” in the following way:

In the period before the war, the Catholic Church especially and the Orthodox Church to some degree were reduced to sacristies [a synecdoche for religious objects and places]. These were reduced to their own space and given some form of conditional freedom, that of confessing faith. Within the sacristy, the Church had space, but what happened after the democratic changes? The Church suddenly appeared on the public scene and [in particular] on the grand public scene of politics, and then politics started to be created within sacristies. Church people [began to be viewed] as authorities for interpreting national history, for decisions of some the political parties. [Also,] at the beginning, in Bosnia and Herzegovina there were just three nations and three political parties (…)[[505]](#footnote-505)

Danijel clarified how the sphere of religious influence was extended from the small circle within the *sacristies*, i.e., from a small number of believers who observed religious rites even during Communism to the whole national/religious group. However, it was not only the case that religion entered the public sphere during that period. An opposite movement of *politics entering the sacristies* also occurred because previously non-religious political leaders quickly realized that they needed to adapt to a new state of affairs in which the old ideology of Communist supra-national unity and progress did not hold sway anymore. Consequently, while religions became immersed in public life, politicians moved towards the sphere of religious life. But, what initially looked like a melodramatic plot twist involving a double return (return of religion to public life and the return of ‘lost sons and daughters’ to religious communities) soon thereafter turned out to be much more dramatic than romantic. Although it might initially have seemed that closeness to politicians gave religious leaders the opportunity to influence their decisions directly, that was by no means guaranteed. As will soon become clear, a position of influence does not assure control. Social influence can be effective only if those who possess it can also freely determine when and how it will be exercised. When the latter element is lacking, a position of influence resembles the situation of monarchs who are controlled by regents—they have public legitimacy and appeal but no real power. Therefore, the crucial element was not the possession of the symbolic capital but the control over its flow. Ljudevit describes that complex nexus of religion and politics in the 1990s, when religious leaders did indeed wield social influence, but, at the same time, politicians were those who chose which particular religious leaders would have public appeal:

Religious leaders are, therefore, very significant and important, although not too crucial because once a war starts, parallel structures arise with individuals who set themselves up as, so to speak, greater popes than the pope. These then say: “We are the real protectors, and this [religious] leader betrayed us. His views are weird.” And in that way, they [the politicians] turn religious leaders into ideologues and strategists.[[506]](#footnote-506)

What he is pointing out is the control over the process of legitimization. While political leaders needed at least tentative religious support, they could marginalize those religious leaders not on the same wavelength and even bring into question their religious legitimacy through the skillful use of media or by questioning their political views. Marijan described one of the episodes from the early years of his priesthood as one of the most humiliating experiences of his pastoral life. He was preaching to a community comprised mostly of Croatian refugees who had escaped Northern Bosnia and come to Croatia. Although aware of the tragedies that the group had passed through, he managed to find a way, by drawing inspiration from the Gospel, to counteract permanent divisions with those who were responsible for their exile. During his sermon, he mentioned that inter-ethnic fights look, from God’s perspective, just like fights between two children who have decide that they will never again live together. In that respect, he stated that conflicts:

do not need to determine us, because we constantly live in some state of immaturity as we walk towards fulfillment, completeness, and *pleroma*, where we will be completed and humanized as people. That [completeness] is far ahead of us. Thus, we should not refer to our common negative experiences towards each other, but to seek what is positive—and that is something that our Lord Jesus Christ motivates us and even requires from us [to do] (…) I was very proud of my sermon.[[507]](#footnote-507)

Towards the end of the mass, a politician came to the altar and gave a speech which completely contradicted what he had said, discrediting Marijan’s views by stating: “The priest said those things in his sermon, but it is not like that (…) Let him speak whatever he wants; we know how it really is and how we are going to behave.”[[508]](#footnote-508) Marijan described it as an act of sabotage, which made him angry and left him shocked: “[I felt that] my legs were cut off below the knees at that moment. I feel it even now when I am remembering that, how I stood and felt quivers passing through my knees, I am feeling it even at this moment. I almost collapsed on the altar when he said that.”[[509]](#footnote-509) What shocked Marijan so much was the fact that even the most sacred place of the rite—the altar—was used for the purpose of nationalist “sabotage” of the Gospel’s values, discrediting all that he had said to people who had suffered a great deal. However, Marijan blames not only politicians but also priests for giving space to people who could easily destroy all the good work they, the priests, had been working toward:

We, priests, keep playing into their hands. We open space in our churches to, to be blunt, idiots, who can easily destroy all the good and beautiful things that we do. A great many of the things that we do, [for instance] pouring sweat and blood to work for reconciliation, they push like this [imitates the sound of falling] destroy in a second. There is something intelligent in that malevolence, something brutal, piercing, some, how can I define it…—*ingenium malignitatis*, *méchanceté* (…) We are not careful enough.[[510]](#footnote-510)

Marijan thus regrets the lack of carefulness by religious leaders too eager to open the doors of their churches to those who, in fact, could quickly destroy their long-term efforts in establishing fragile foundations for peace between communities.

At the same time, Marijan’s shocking experience illustrates how the new position of religion in the center of public life made its symbolic values available to all. As a matter of fact, many elements that were prerogatives of religious servants were suddenly freely available. Rites of entering Islam or Christianity, attendance of religious ceremonies, or use of religious symbols did not require any long initiation or effort. Although those elements were available also during Communism, they were not used, because they did not have the potential to bring political advantage. However, once their symbolic value grew, the situation changed dramatically. Bogdan depicts it in the following way:

In that turbulent period, the development of media and populism met. I listened to high-profile politicians who were losing elections and who received this advice from their counselors: “You have to go to church every Sunday to win elections.” Many uses and misuses took place, in both directions. Churches did not have space and priests and, in order to build a church, [the Church leadership] had to flirt with politics and politicians. Politicians [on the other hand] to escape from the cloak of Communism, had to atone [for their sins] in churches, at altars, and near bishops. There were definitely cases like that, and there will be such cases until the end of the world. It depends on what is cool, what is in vogue, what is popular at a given moment, and so on. But the Church definitely did not manage things well in that period because she went overnight from a phase of persecution and hiding [into a situation where] she had an incredible opportunity, which she did not use in the best way.[[511]](#footnote-511)

As evidenced by his statement, politicians seemed to be very savvy about the use of religion in their favor. I am not excluding the possibility of a genuine change in the worldview of political leaders in that period (although my respondents viewed that idea with suspicion), but, in any case, it was clear that they soon realized the potential that religious legitimacy carried and quickly learned how to use religious elements in political narratives. Father Nebojša, a young Orthodox priest, stressed that, to politicians, religion could be personally more or less important but that they did recognize how to put it to practical use. He made the very illuminating point that, to politicians, it is not a problem to destroy a church and then build a new one. His comment suggested that politicians, generally speaking, do not have deep respect for religion and religious symbols, but they nevertheless master the methods of gaining popularity among believers through use of religious symbols.[[512]](#footnote-512)

In short, the turbulent social and political changes that transformed the public status of religious communities coincided with their lack of resources, their organizational structures, and their responsiveness. Together with the social turmoil of war, this created a situation of confusion and lack of control, even over the most proprietary elements of religions—their symbols and narratives.

## 1.2.2. Religious war

One of the perennial questions in every conflict where groups of different religions are involved is whether the conflict itself is a religious conflict. That description can be misleading in many ways because it can mean a number of different things. The term “religious conflict” can, in its simplest sense, suggest that religion is the *meritum* around which the dispute has arisen or that religion played a decisive role in the construction of the conflict. On the other hand, it can simply mean that the participants in the conflict are affiliated to different religious groups or, in an even more basic sense, that religious symbols were used on the emblems of the warring parties, in the speeches of the political or military leaders, or privately by soldiers.

In a number of interviews, I asked my respondents very broadly whether the conflicts in Yugoslavia could be described as “religious war.” “It was not a religious war” was the unanimous agreement among my interviewees. They vehemently rejected the idea that religion was either the source or the main component of the conflicts. Drago said that the war was, to the contrary, “the war of nonbelievers,” since those who started it (he referred to the officers of the Yugoslav National Army) were not religious.[[513]](#footnote-513) Nevertheless, he did not deny that religious elements were, in one way or another, present during the conflicts. One mode of that presence was unavoidable, because there was almost complete overlap between the religious and national identities of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Drago explained that the reason why people speak about “religious war” could be simply the fact that 99.99% of the people in Bosnia and Herzegovina were affiliated to religion in one way or another.[[514]](#footnote-514) In that sense, *the war was religious*, because *participants were religious*, but that functions merely as a description of the participants, not as an explanation of the war’s causes. The identification with religion, however, was not always based on personal conviction but often derived simply from identification with a combined national/ethnic and religious identity.

Theologically speaking, such identification represents a problem because it reduces religious belonging to a group label. Drago offers the following example: “If a Catholic destroys something in an Orthodox Church, or an Orthodox in a Catholic Church, it doesn’t occur to him [the destroyer] that he is destroying something sacred, that something Christian is being destroyed. In his mind, he is destroying a symbol of Croatianess or Serbness, not something sacred.”[[515]](#footnote-515) He used the word “symbol” to denote something that is an impoverished marker, a concept without any substantial depth. In the mind of war criminals who destroyed religious objects, there was a simple equating of religious and national symbols and thus their fixation on religious objects. That betrays not only a lack of theological knowledge but also their reduction of religiosity to its visible objects and signs. During the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina, there were no forced faith conversions, which would represent a destruction of the inner religious freedom of individuals. The criminals were satisfied with destroying visible, external markers. Therefore, when religiosity becomes just a symbol of group belonging, as Drago described, it is placed on the same level as a material object or a visual sign—it is a symbol that merely describes the group, not the symbol that extends the meaning of the group belonging towards the transcendent realm.

Religion therefore became involved in the war through symbols which were, at the same time, promoted and destroyed. Harun described the period of the 1990s as “the faith euphoria” in which “all religious things were attempted to be dragged out [in public], when the entire living experience was meant to be religious as well. Of course, with the end of the aggression and normalization of social relations (…) that euphoria dwindled.”[[516]](#footnote-516) This comment hints towards the capabilities of religion to add additional value or weight to otherwise mundane projects and experiences. Although Harun rejected the possibility that the war was caused by religious disagreements, he still asserted that religious communities participated in evil. However, when I asked him to clarify what he meant, he spoke about the use of religion for mobilization and cited the inability of religious communities to resist such misuses as a failure:

**Q:** You just mentioned “participation of religions in evil.” What exactly did you mean by that, and why did that happen? Why was it so easy to drag religions into participation in evil?

**A:** Look, when you want to burn a blasting fuse, it is easiest to do it in the religious [domain]. That is where people are most sensitive. And those who were feeding it [i.e., who were fomenting war] knew that was the easiest, the shortest, and the most efficient way. In that respect, I think there were such misuses during the whole war in Bosnia and Herzegovina. (…) Of course, the one who wants to make problems sparks it where it is easiest to kindle a fire. And, in that sense, at the very start, there was ‘beating the drums’ of national and religious [feelings]. Surely, religious communities were supposed to defend themselves in that moment, … to counteract and to adopt a position opposite to [those efforts aimed at starting war]. I am not sure that all of them took that counter-position.[[517]](#footnote-517)

Konstantin expressed a similar view on the question as to why political leaders, former Communist officials, showed a sudden interest in religion and faith, answering as follows:

Well, they [politicians] did not have any difficulty seeing that faith was a very useful instrument and an excellent cohesive force. In addition, the authority of religious communities was beyond question. In the consciousness of people, it [religion] was something that was simultaneously fascinating and frightening. Such potential was extremely useful, as rulers have done for centuries. But when Church and faith put themselves in service to anything except God and His Word, that is always at the expense of faith. Faith is not growing there, but is losing the battle because it is being subordinated (…) I think that such a wrong interpretation of faith was pretty widespread (…) Moreover, it was difficult to divide things, and when the faith component in one people [nation] was connected to its epic tradition, such an interpretation of historical narratives could be used in favor of someone who wanted to gain power, creating a mighty force. It does not come as a surprise that everybody tried to use it to their own benefit.[[518]](#footnote-518)

There are two significant elements in Konstantin’s response. On the one hand, he noticed a direct, intentional use of religion for pragmatic reasons by political elites. That element explains why these elites were so interested in religion but still does not reveal why they were so successful in doing that, i.e., why it was so easy to convince people in the plausibility of their narratives, which placed religion in service to national goals. The second part of his answer addressed that problem. In his view, religion was a “mighty force” because it was already connected with the “epic tradition,” with folklore and customs in which national and religious identity go hand in hand. A fortifier between those elements was the memory of suffering that was revived in a way that supported political projects.

Sead shared the view that religion was a pragmatic instrument in the toolbox of political planning because of its strong appeal, but it was additionally useful because it offered a quick means to re-legitimize those who were, just a short time before, vehemently anti-religious. The dominant logic seemed to be one of visibility—as long as it was displayed, religion was not questioned by the broad masses of people. As we had a chance to observe, it was important to display religiosity to win elections and to maintain influence. In Sead’s words:

For politicians and people who knew what they wanted in Bosnia and Herzegovina or in this region [in general] (…), faith was a weapon they knew how to use to further their goals and to motivate people. They presented themselves as practical devout believers, while hiding the actual poverty of their inner feelings of faith, which they used for clearly defined, very base everyday goals—to stay in power. I believe that nation and state are even today two powerful weapons that manipulators in politics skillfully use as tools to enslave their own people.[[519]](#footnote-519)

In this explanation, the political use of religious symbols that began in the war continued afterward. Criticizing countless religious monuments in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Sead describes them as “external manifestations of the inner emptiness.”[[520]](#footnote-520) The practice of using emotional symbols for political purposes, according to him, is not new, only the set of symbols changed. While previously politicians had manipulated the Communist symbols of “social equality” and “proletariat,” new politicians changed the repertoire to religious elements: “now those [previous] symbols are replaced with others—cross, crescent moon, religious symbols, and religious ceremonies.”[[521]](#footnote-521) He believes that all religious communities “failed an exam” of delineating religious symbols from political interests. In his view, religions should not be excluded from the public square since they had been invited to give their contribution, but, at the same time, they should not be invoked as a “wild card” to win elections or achieve some other pragmatic goal.[[522]](#footnote-522)

Returning to the question of the usability of religion, we can say that religion had three useful characteristics: it was a readily available resource, it resonated well with people’s sentiments, and it gave additional weight to otherwise mundane projects. That was possible through the skillful use of religious sentiments for political interest. As Sead says: “You know, our Academic, Professor Enes Karić, while we were still studying, always emphasized that the most dangerous weapons are to be found in God’s books. The most lethal ideas, so to speak, the deadliest vocabulary, are in God’s books. At the same time, the noblest speech is also to be found in God’s books. What will be taken out depends on the heart of the person who approaches them.”[[523]](#footnote-523)

## 1.2.3. Getting attention, losing control

If we take into account all the complexities associated with religious communities at the beginning of the war in the 1990s, we get the impression that religious leaders were, to a lesser degree, in charge of the situation but much more so observers or participants, although we cannot deny that some, at least, could be characterized as accomplices. As we have seen, one reason was the significant change in the position of Church communities, which gave them much more public exposure but at the same time made them more dependent on public opinion and the activities of external, political actors who suddenly became ‘insiders’ in the form of converted believers. It would be, however, too easy to blame pragmatic politicians for all the adverse results of the synergistic closeness of religious and national identity. Thus, Marijan also accepted a part of the guilt on behalf of his own community for allowing the misuse of religious places and symbols. Hrvoje’s view was along the same line. Although he did not indict religious communities for the ideological preparation for the war, he did not exculpate them either. Religion was, in his view, also responsible for siding with those who needed its legitimacy and offering that legitimacy freely. Unlike some other forms of mobilization that had to be invented and practiced, the religious repertoire was readily available and already understandable to people. What helped was significant dispersion and confusion within religious communities, which were not ready to stand in opposition to such uses:

Of course, a conflict does not arise by itself. The conflict in Bosnia and Herzegovina was ideologically based. It is not only religious leaders that prepared for it—many others did [also]. It was prepared for by intellectuals, various writers, artists, politicians, but also religious leaders by siding with [them] and by giving up…. For me, that was, in essence, giving up the Gospel and siding with the national interests, with interests that were evidently against somebody. But in order to make that happen, one needs legitimacy; one needs to explain to people why it is moral and [even] normal to go to war and kill other people. Hence, religion, unfortunately, helped to legitimize the violence that was done towards the Other—because the Others did that to us and to prevent them from doing the evil again to us we have to get ready and attack them preventively. If we do not attack them, they will attack us. If we are not prepared, we will not be strong and powerful enough so that we do not experience again what happened to us in history; we have to act aggressively. Therefore, I think that religious leaders did, in that sense, act in the said direction. They, in some way, legitimized, justified, and provided ideological support. Of course, that was never done openly, it was never direct but always [undoubtedly] there (…) And that is their guilt.[[524]](#footnote-524)

Speaking about the situation in the Orthodox Church, Konstantin saw the problem as the naiveté of certain religious leaders, who were too keen to promote theologically questionable decisions. However, in his view, the naiveté of the Church was not innocent but rather was a problematic result of conformity:

At the root of all these, or almost all (…) of these problems, deviations, and incidents, there is, without doubt, the sin of immaturity, and, in this case, the sin of naïveté. The Church was not supposed to be so immature and naïve to such a degree (…) at [such] a critical moment of our history. And that immaturity did not come from [the Church’s] simple heart or poorness in spirit but, it seems to me, from her self-sufficiency, and, finally, vanity as in: “We are know best and will tell everyone what to do and how to do it.” The errors we made testify to the contrary. And, to stress once again, this is the case with the community I belong to, but similar, if not the same, examples can be found in other communities as well.[[525]](#footnote-525)

An additional reason given to explain the situation was the lack of organization and experience in a large and chaotic system that was no longer the one making direct threats and enacting oppression but was nonetheless equally challenging and volatile. When I asked whether religious leaders could have significantly changed anything once the war had started, Vasilije responded:

No, they could not have, because all our religious communities were on the low level from the perspective of personnel [i.e., the people working for them] (…) They did not have a structure and were on the margins for fifty years, especially the Serbian Orthodox Church and the Islamic Community. They were more a pretense of a religious community than a religious community in the real sense of the word. Those were remnants of religious communities. It [the Serbian Orthodox Church] did not have a basic structure. If you know that in the whole Sarajevo, where 250.000 Serbs lived, there were only three priests who did not come down from Bare, the graveyard where they buried people—what mission could they have had and what had they become? Those were not priests anymore but gravediggers. Mitropolit did not come here for years. Therefore, I wonder whether religious leaders existed at all in the time when the war was starting. I wonder for my community; I don’t know for others, but I do wonder for the Serbian Orthodox Church. Even where they [religious leaders] existed, those were some isolated people who feared UDBA [Yugoslav secret police], completely out of the world, asocial, scared; [they were] some ascetics who closed themselves off [from the world] and did not know how the world functioned. That is how I perceive faith communities from that period. Those communities are, from our [current] perspective, ridiculous. So just take the example of Sarajevo, not to mention other places.[[526]](#footnote-526)

To summarize the situation of religious communities at the beginning of the 1990s, we would need to mention three important structural factors: increased public presence and attention, loss of firm control over their symbols and narratives, and immersion in nationalist programs. All them reduced, to a large degree, the critical potential of those communities.

Besides those structural factors, however, additional personal elements prevented religious leaders from voicing stronger criticisms. One was pure biological fear for existence and the survival of one’s family which was, in a situation marked by conflict, often warranted. The second was fear of moral damage, loss of face in the community, fear of marginalization. Finally, there was also fear that peace talks might sound too naïve and unrealistic to listeners and consequentially fail to achieve any effect whatsoever. In addition to fears related to concerns for one’s physical and/or moral integrity, there were also concerns for the community—reluctance to criticize could damage the solidarity of the community and benefit the enemy, or direct criticism could, once again, push people away from the Church. We now turn to these concerns.

## 1.2.4. Unconvincing peace-talk during war

Velimir immediately warned me that, when considering the activities of religious leaders during the war, we have to place ourselves in a completely different setting:

War is a peculiar situation that is psychologically specific. We can now sit here nicely in peace and quiet, carefree, and philosophize *ad nauseum*. But, in a situation of tension, when adrenalin flows 24 hours in an organism, in a forest, in some pit during winter, around the fire, expecting a grenade to fall somewhere near, wondering whether you will live or die—[in those situations] one has an entirely different view of your surroundings, of everything, of the relationships between people (…)[[527]](#footnote-527)

In such extreme situations, it was objectively difficult for religious leaders to find a proper way to communicate a religious message while at the same time remaining realistic about the circumstances and audience receiving that message. “Nobody could then in ‘91…,” said Velimir, “nobody could come and say ‘Hey, people, it should not be done that way. Wait, guys, we are Christians.’ They would have killed me first. [he laughs] That was [the time of] passions, the national fervency was suddenly so high on all sides.”[[528]](#footnote-528)

As Zaim pointed out, speaking about purely spiritual things in a situation marked by the daily struggle for survival would not only have been incomprehensible but could have potentially put a religious leader in a difficult position:

After the war, many generals say that things should have been different, and it is easy to say [now] that doing it one way or another [would have been the best]. But what were you to do in Una-Sana Canton, which was hermetically closed for a thousand days—a bird could not enter or exit the canton—when there was a struggle for bare survival and bare existence, in the time when … I saw with my own eyes—people were paying 800 Deutschmarks for a sack of flour. If a religious leader were at that time to speak about purely spiritual things, he would surely not have been understood by his peers or by the people over whom he presided. Moreover, he would have placed himself in a very difficult position, [even] elicit extreme complications (…) Therefore, a war situation should be seen as a war situation (…).[[529]](#footnote-529)

It is, of course, important to differentiate between different ranks of religious leaders. Both Velimir and Zaim were referring to those individuals who were in direct contact with soldiers during the war, spending time with them on the front lines of battle. As they stressed, the very context limits the communication potential of a religious message. For instance, it would have been unrealistic to expect them to elaborate at length on the moral teachings of religion while sitting in a trench. Nevertheless, the ‘narrowness’ of the communication channel still does not absolve them from the obligation to act at least in some ways, to warn against the gravest breaches of moral norms such as torture, killing, and mistreatment of civilians, looting, and other forms of war crimes. During our conversation, Velimir said that they tried to accomplish this by distributing pamphlets among the soldiers.[[530]](#footnote-530) Other opportunities were individual counseling sessions or those rare occasions when they were addressing a group, e.g., during funerals or religious celebrations.

On the other hand, religious leaders occupying leading positions in the religious communities were in a different situation since they were not directly exposed to the risks of dying during battles. Below, Haris insists that the top leaders of religious communities did have influence and that they could have done more:

If leaders of religious communities had the desire and the will to sit together and talk, they would have agreed on much more. And nobody can tell me that (…) the Archbishop, Reisu-l-Ulama, or the Episcope of the Orthodox Church were not able to influence people in the political sense. Nobody can convince me of that. With their wisdom and intelligence, they could have done much more by simply stating the facts.[[531]](#footnote-531)

He further emphasized that their influence could have been positively wielded through collaboration among themselves and through direct influence brought to bear on national leaders. Drago also pointed out the importance of the clear stances of heads of communities. He mentioned a famous speech given by Cardinal Kuharić, at that time head of the Catholic Church in Croatia, in which he advised people against revenge, stating: “If my adversary burned my house, I will not burn his. If they burned your house, you should not burn theirs.”[[532]](#footnote-532) But, at the same time, he recognized that such a speech was possible only from a certain distance and that those leaders who were directly in touch with fighters were not in a position to do the same:

I am happy that the first man [of the Catholic Church] said that and that it then trickles down (…) But a guy [a priest] who was on the front lines, with soldiers, he simply could not have done that. He is also just a human. I wouldn’t say that they would have killed him, but they [certainly] would have expelled him. You know… the smell of gunpowder, blood… [it is a challenge] for religious leaders to preserve their dignity in such circumstances. Despite the fact that one cannot say those ‘cowardly’ words there [while with soldiers], one still has to find a method, perhaps an easier one, and a soldier still has to know that you are a religious servant and that you are against killing.[[533]](#footnote-533)

Since he was personally involved in the pastoral care of soldiers on the battle lines during the war, Drago was speaking from personal experience. While recognizing the limitations of pastoral interventions, he nevertheless underlined the significance of preserving a moral stance against violence, although tacitly: “[A] soldier still has to know that you are a religious servant and that you are against killing.”[[534]](#footnote-534)

In many ways, the moral stance against the war and killing was already a peacemaking activity. People trust religious leaders not only because they are *close to them* in everyday troubles but also because they perceive them as *distant from them* in terms of the fundamental life orientation towards the sacred and transcendent.

Although the concrete circumstance of death and destruction can severely limit the scope of religious leaders’ action, the ability to witness some different order, a refusal to equate religious ideas with the ideas of a nation or to sacralize violence, still stand as a viable option at their disposal. That was behind Damjan’s conviction that violence should never receive theological justification—even if the war is seen as just, there should be a fundamental opposition to violence as such, he stated.[[535]](#footnote-535) When that difference between religious and worldly order is wholly erased, religious leaders slowly start to lose their moral authority, even among their own constituencies. Luka, a Catholic priest in Northern Bosnia, told me an unusual anecdote from the war. A Serbian soldier stopped him and asked for help. The soldier killed one family while they were sleeping and that haunted him so that he could not sleep anymore. When Luka asked him why he did not go to his Orthodox priest, the soldier responded: “[H]ow could I go when he is just swinging branches [blessing soldiers with holy water] and sending us to war?”[[536]](#footnote-536) Luka also mentioned another situation during the war when he presided over a funeral with many people gathered. During the sermon, he spoke about Christianity, about seeking peace, emphasizing that there are things beyond human limitations. Afterwards, somebody came to him and said: “Father, thank you, I am only listening to craziness and war [these days], and we need this.”[[537]](#footnote-537) That person was expressing appreciation of a different narrative that a religious servant could offer, a speech that challenged the dominant war rhetoric, which was usually filled with charged sentences of hatred and distancing.

The moral of his statement was the following: even when religious leaders do not have the unlimited ability to speak about religious ideas because they are in the immediate danger of being put to death, they still have at their disposal some modes of action that can counteract the most extreme tendencies among the soldiers and even preserve (at least implicitly) religious ideas of non-violence. Such activities are always a compromise between what is desirable and what is possible. Velimir pointed out that withdrawal into religious quietism would have had even worse consequences: “It was war, and, of course, the Church supported her people. When your believer is going to fight a war in trenches, you cannot say ‘I am not interested that you are fighting a war,’ and then the day after that same guy goes to Goražde and kills the whole village. Of course, we had to be with our people and push them to pray more to God, to take the Communion, and all that.”[[538]](#footnote-538) His answer also suggests that the influence of religious communities on war is often invisible. While it is clear to see how irresponsible acts of religious leaders can further encourage people in extreme views, it is impossible to know what kinds of crimes would have been committed had these leaders been less engaged with soldiers in the fight. In other words, while it is easy to see the negative effects of mobilization, it is impossible to know the preventive effects that counseling against war crimes had.

## 1.2.5. Fear for survival

The previous interviewees have expressed the conviction that preaching peaceful messages that were too idealistic would not have achieved any resonance among people during the war, especially those experiencing extreme deprivation and soldiers involved in direct fighting. However, there was another line of concern—personal fear for their lives and the lives of their families. In this respect, the situation differed somewhat between religious communities. One Orthodox priest from Brčko District mentioned that, if he had been celibate like Roman Catholic priests, he could have engaged in public criticisms, but in his situation, he stated, “[W]e often sacrifice faith to save the family.”[[539]](#footnote-539) His colleague from the same region mentioned that one of the ways through which the Communist secret services sought to control religious leaders was by threatening their families. Besides random and long police examinations without apparent reason, he mentioned that he used to receive implicit threats in covert statements, e.g., that he should take care of his children because the traffic was intense.[[540]](#footnote-540) Similarly, in war, he said, they did not have the power to stop criminals because tensions were so high that it was easy to lose a life. At one point, he mentioned that he was “ready to give life for faith, but not to give it cheaply,”[[541]](#footnote-541) illustrating that there were two sides of the equation. Besides the judgments about moral desiderata, there were also calculations about probable consequences and side-effects, for instance—what would happen to the family, would one additional life lost help anyone, is it better to criticize the system openly and so risk marginalization or execution or to remain silent and inconspicuously do what was possible in the given circumstances but without demonstrating moral heroism. In the case of Boško, the latter was the case. He was trying to survive under the great emotional burden of witnessing war, abuses, and burying his own parishioners (343 parishioners in total), and, at the same time, he left clandestinely bread and milk in places where Croats and Bosniaks were imprisoned, hiding from his own people. Nevertheless, he still gave the impression that one could have done more. Thus, speaking about the influence of religious leaders on society, he opined that future religious leaders will be able to have a much more positive influence because “we [religious leaders of his generation] are partially tainted.”[[542]](#footnote-542)

War represents a specific situation not only because there are different norms of desirable and undesirable behavior, but also because of the sheer availability of weapons. Although religious leaders in the previous political regime feared the secret police and were interrogated and imprisoned without due process, they still did not expect to be murdered. However, during the war, there was fear among religious leaders that their open criticisms would be either silenced, sanctioned or that they would be killed. According to Velimir’s account, at the beginning of the war, the situation was almost anomic:

In [war], every fool has weapons. Someone to whom no public authority, no doctor, no psychiatrist would give permission to come near weapons, such a person is now armed to the teeth. And then you come to him saying: ‘Look, my friend, you mustn’t [harm] civilians, this mustn’t be done, or that.’ It happened—in Trebinje that fellow Aleksić was killed because he defended his neighbor, his school friend, from the paramilitaries. Various lunatics came here. You know how it works—when there is a dead animal somewhere on the road, various bloodthirsty vultures come. We had the most problems with paramilitaries; they slaughtered people. (…) Local people never or rarely did something like that. And you know what the worst thing was? Commanders and administrators were not able to do a thing. Whoever tried to oppose them [the paramilitaries] was killed. That happened here in [the name of the city censored] to one of the rich locals; he was a businessman before the war and saved his friend from the notorious Lukić. He [Lukić] was a sick psychopath. The guy bothered them, and [so] they killed him. That happened. And now, who is ready to say: ‘I will now sacrifice myself and my family, let myself be killed by some idiots because I defended somebody.’[[543]](#footnote-543)

He explained that there was simply too much at stake, particularly when those who had opposed the war commanders had gotten killed. Thus, for many, opposition seemed too high a price to pay since one could lose one’s whole family to protect someone, without any guarantee that at the end both won’t be killed. Thus, the final result of intervention could have been even more deaths (i.e., losing one’s family without saving a life), and the criminals would not learn any lessons.

The other side of the coin of staying silent was the disappointment of those who were abused by soldiers and expected at least some reaction from religious leaders. Domagoj, imprisoned in a detention camp during the war, mentioned two Orthodox priests who used to visit camp from time to time. One of them saw a soldier beating him and said to the soldier, “Please do not beat him in front of me” while the other priest used the occasion of his visit to the camp to give Domagoj a box of cigarettes, saying, “My people are Godless. They do not care a lot about us.”[[544]](#footnote-544) Although neither of those two priests could have done much to obtain the release of the detainees, Domagoj perceived their reactions very differently—the first turned his head away (he did not criticize beating, but just asked the soldiers not to do it in front of him) whereas the second attempted to preserve the dignity of the victims albeit through minimal symbolic gestures.

The fear of losing a life if acting or speaking against the dominant power were not unsubstantiated. Marijan recounts the example of fra Nikica Miličević, the guardian of the Franciscan monastery in Fojnica, and Ramiz Pašić, the chief imam from the same place, who tried to prevent the ethnic cleansing and crimes in their city, unfortunately with tragic consequences:

**A:** When our Fra Nikica with Pašić-effendi organized the meetings in Fojnica before the war, the two of them would walk through the city. They would walk up and down, everywhere—so that people could see them. One was wearing a habit [Franciscan robes] and the other *ahmedia* [Muslim religious robe]. An imam and a Franciscan walking through the city. Alas, they killed the Franciscan and the Imam probably also died. I don’t know what happened to him exactly.

**Q:** Who killed him? (…)

**A:** The Franciscan was killed by Muslim soldiers, but the bullet could have belonged to Croats as well. It did not suit Croatian politics that he was there (…)

**Q:** So, they walked during the war?

**A:** Yes, during the war, but also at the beginning of the war, before the conflict with Muslims arose in Fojnica in 1993. That [their actions] was unpopular at that time.[[545]](#footnote-545)

As a matter of fact, Ramiz Pašić died many years afterwards, in 2010, and not during the war, but that does not change the central point of the story—that it was dangerous, even to the point of losing one’s life, to persist in activities that resisted the dominant ideology of national hatred and separation between communities. Similar fates could befall those who dared to openly criticize crimes committed by the soldiers of their ethnic constituencies. When I asked Arsenije to what degree could religious servants speak out about crimes of their own nation to their community, he responded:

They can to some degree (…) It depends on his state, on the state of his listeners, on circumstances. I spoke, and I am still speaking publicly to my people. That is why a good many of the people who declare themselves to be believers, Christians and Orthodox, who attend Church, say they hate me—because I tell the truth about crimes that we committed. I told some of my people not to do that. I told them during the war. I told them: “Your grandfather can only be ashamed of what you are doing. He is spinning in his grave because you did something like that. I am ashamed, and my grandfather is ashamed, everybody is ashamed of your actions. That is not any form of heroism.” I told that. And look, I knew [the risks] of saying that—it is the same today. During the war I was twice exposed to a situation where they wanted to [kill me]. A man admitted that, he is still alive. His hand shook, he said. I told him: “You can kill me, but there will always be someone to warn you. Your conscience will warn you one day. You cannot kill the truth. You cannot kill God. God is the truth.”[[546]](#footnote-546)

Real cases of murder, as well as the experience of bullying and direct life threats, were apparently not just idle threats. Fear for basic existential survival and the life of one’s family certainly played a role in silencing certain religious leaders or making them less prone to speak out on behalf of innocent victims, maltreated prisoners, or fellow citizens, even when those actions happened immediately before their eyes. It is impossible to know the real motives of people, but the possibility of violence was, without a doubt, a significant factor that inhibited their critical stance. At the same time, we saw that some religious leaders, despite all threats, still managed to exhibit a great deal of civil and moral courage, acting in favor of those unprotected even when direct confrontation with members of their own community was required. However, besides the danger to life that they went through, there was another concern involved—the concern for their authority and their reputation in their community, which was at the same time the basis of their public activity. We turn to that in the coming paragraphs.

## 1.2.7. Betrayers

The third set of limitations was related to the fear of losing reputation among co-religionists, thereby risking social marginalization. Drago saw this as a mechanism of social inhibition that restricted many religious leaders from denouncing the war. According to him, the gravest social stigma in his region was the stigma of a betrayer: “In our region, betrayal is perhaps the worst characteristic, not stealing, not killing, [but betrayal]. If we want to defame someone, we say that he is a betrayer, and his community then condemns him.”[[547]](#footnote-547) He explained that there was a certain hierarchy of crimes. Some of them, such as stealing or killing in war, were viewed either neutrally or favorably in such a way that people would say for those who steal that they are adroit, while those who killed in war were considered brave. Being labeled a betrayer, on the other hand, was enough to suffer marginalization and condemnation. And, Drago stressed, this was not different for religious leaders. One reason why those social constraints were so tight, even with respect to religious leaders, were the close identifications of national and religious identity and, especially, their solidification during the war: “Unfortunately, religious leaders did not rise sufficiently above [the situation] because it was easier to stay in one’s own group than look for a new way, because that new way would mean betrayal (…)”[[548]](#footnote-548)

One example of religious leaders ostracized by their own communities was Father Golijan, an Orthodox priest from Vlasenica who saved the lives of two imams from his city, an act of moral courage for which he later suffered direct marginalization and considerable health problems due to which he lost his sight. In an interview on the portal *Blic*, he explained the situation in the following words:

The night before they called me, I had a dream in which I was in the hall of a mosque, and somebody threw a bomb there. I caught the bomb and threw it back, and it exploded outside. The next day, effendis [imams] called me to help them. They told me that they were hidden in the mosque’s basement. I calmed them, told them to take a shower, dress, and come outside. I went in a cassock to meet them and took them to the city hall thinking that, as a Serbian priest, I had some authority with the Serbian leadership (…) They treated me stiffly. I remember that a county president asked me: “Why are you protecting those effendis?” Soon after, a police car arrived and took them to the police station. I went [to the police station in] my Yugo [a car brand], entered the commissar’s office, and said: “Whatever you do to these people, do to me as well.” (…) They were on my soul and on my face, and my head [my life] is not more important than my face. They let one return to his village, and I took the other to Kladanj. When I returned, I experienced daily harassment. People turned their heads from me on the street, they condemned me publicly, spat at me, called me betrayer. The wider family condemned me, and even today there are occasional condemnations. But I do not regret because being human and preserving face is more important than keeping life.[[549]](#footnote-549)

He stated that, in his town, during the Second World War, many Serbs, including the Orthodox priest Dušan Bobar, were executed by Ustashi forces. Reflecting on a similar situation in which religious leaders were in both wars he said:

Although there was not a single effendi to protect their colleague [i.e., the murdered Orthodox priest], either because it did not enter their minds to do so or they did not dare—I do not condemn people—I still did protect two effendis fifty years after that. Because of that my God, Christ, does not condemn me. And if I broke the fate, and stopped the [vicious circle of] history, that is only something that I can be proud of. [[550]](#footnote-550)

Golijan emphasized the fact that moral acts should not be determined by the presence or absence of reciprocity (*quid pro quo*). Even though there were no Muslim religious servants during WWII to protect their Orthodox colleague in Vlasenica, he nonetheless felt obliged to act based on his own moral principles. Interestingly, he saw that as the only way to “break the fate” and “stop the history,” in the sense of starting an entirely new story, beyond endless accusations and distrust. Golijan thus understands his personal sacrifice during the war as a way to prevent future wars.

Enis explains that there was a certain “logic of events” that demanded religious leaders to side with their own community because, otherwise, they would remain completely unprotected—rejected by “theirs” and even perceived with suspicion by the “Others.” Helping individuals on the other side thus had to be done in secrecy:

**A:** When you look at it, the logic of events demanded you to stay on your side. You cannot say “I am remaining alone in [place censored]. I will not be with my people.” (…) Once the war started, when the army took control, in a state of emergency, it was very difficult even to think about that [helping the other side], not to mention doing it, because all that was interpreted differently.

**A:** How was it interpreted?

**A:** Well, it wasn’t interpreted as if you wanted to help someone; it was interpreted as a betrayal, of helping the other side (…) It was very, very difficult, on all sides (…)

**Q:** One had to hide?

**A:** Of course, one had to hide. And although there were some positive examples, they probably … no, not probably, but [I can say] with 100% [certainty] that it had to be done secretly.[[551]](#footnote-551)

One has to keep in mind that all clerics in Bosnia and Herzegovina are dependent on their communities. During Communism, they were not paid from the state budget but received their money to live on primarily from believers or foreign donors. This situation did not change much after the war. While they have access to some limited internal funds, they are still dependent on the direct support of believers, and—for more extensive projects—on civil authorities. Being called a betrayer, beside defamation of character, thus could entail loss of financial support. However, even if assigning the stigma of being a betrayer is an efficient way to silence critics within the community, it is nonetheless important to know who has control of the application of that stigma, or, to be more precise, how the social consensus around someone being a betrayer was developed. One way to understand these processes brings us back to the beginnings of this chapter, to the notion of religious formation. By definition, one can be a betrayer only if he or he is perceived as someone who has breached or abandoned some relevant norms. As the interviewees pointed out, the label was applied to those religious leaders who dared to challenge the dominant nationalist politics of strict separation between communities during the war or to engage in criticism of their own co-religionists or members of the same ethnic community who committed crimes. But, one might ask, in their capacity as religious leaders, which rule did they breach to render the stigma of being a betrayer so effective?

From a distance, it seems trivially easy to show, for instance, that the New Testament, in numerous places, promotes love for one’s enemy as a distinctive sign of Christian identity or that it sees self-criticism as a virtue. The same can be done with Islamic prescripts against the maltreatment of civilians or prisoners, with a strong emphasis on the care for neighbors regardless of their religious belonging. How come, one might then wonder, could the activities of protecting innocent civilians in war, of resisting demonizing the Other, of helping non-combatants to survive, how could such activities be perceived as a “betrayal” rather than as a fulfillment of religious requirements?

To grasp the answer requires acknowledgement that the interpretative community that attaches the label of betrayer was not the community of religious scholars but that of ordinary believers, who exhibited limited theological knowledge and not too extensive religious education. At the same time, when the control over religious symbols and narratives was not limited only to ‘sacristies’ (i.e., religious elites) but belonged to the masses of new believers, social and political opinion-makers felt authorized to pronounce judgments not only about *betrayers of the nation* but also *betrayers of religion*. One cannot forget that pressure is also placed upon community members to confirm commonchoices. Someone who *challenges* the actions of the community runs the risk of being labeled as one who *betrays* the community. Lower positioned religious leaders were, for understandable reasons, much more vulnerable to such accusations, but even the elites within religious communities were not immune from them. Ljudevit mentioned how cardinal Kuharić sent messages of peace, which were not always met with approval: “[Kuharić] said ‘If he burned your house, you should not burn his; if he killed your brother, you should not kill his.’ And in war that had a significant resonance [public impact]. However, it created aversion among some, who said: ‘Even the Church betrayed us, it does not let us fight war freely, but instead calls us to protect the enemy.’”[[552]](#footnote-552)

## 1.2.8. Both close and opposed

One additional element has to be taken into account—even when a religious leader could not allow himself to remain silent in spite of possible accusations of betrayal, he still had to take into account that opposition to political and military leadership would put at risk his ability to influence their further actions. Haris explained that religious leaders could exert influence on political leaders during the war, but the only way they could do so was by maintaining contact with them and so could never withdraw into complete opposition.[[553]](#footnote-553) In other words, even if such leaders knew that political leaders were using religion for nationalistic purposes, they could influence them only if they maintained some ties with them. Consequently, many religious leaders balanced criticism and involvement, maintaining closeness and opposition.

The testimony to the ICTY of Father Pervan, a Franciscan priest from Herzegovina who was in Central Bosnia during the war, is illustrative of this matter. During the examination, the Defender, Mr. Nobilo read a joint statement of the Catholic clergy in central Bosnia to which Father Pervan was a signatory. In that segment, war crimes were clearly condemned, together with the projects of ethnic cleansing:

MR. NOBILO: Q. I am going to read the text; the interpreters do not have the text in English. It is titled ‘Statement by the Catholic clergy from Central Bosnia.” “For 13 years of permanent presence and tradition, and out of the feeling of responsibility for our people, and before our people, gives us the right and makes it incumbent upon us to raise our voice. We feel it to be our duty to draw attention to both the Croatian and Muslim people that we condemn the tragic events which have happened in this region against the will of both peoples. Without intending to create policy or to decide upon any political system or alliance, we support the basic rights of every man living in this region, which is sacred to us. Immorality and crime do not bring any good to those who commit them, let alone to those who are subjected to them. The tradition of this unique region and people, especially of the Croatian people and its customs, is to respect every man and his freedoms, and to live in the spirit of tolerance and Christian love with all the people with whom we share the space, the spirit and the breath. Therefore, we demand that those persons in authority, either civilian or military, and all those who,’ in adverted commas, ‘in the name of the people, commit any acts which are contrary to those, and sow the seeds of fear and hatred should be isolated and uncovered in the name of the basic right of a life of freedom to every man. We recommend that truthful people from both sides, who enjoy the reputation and trust, found joint commissions which will visit our whole region and restore the confidence which has been seriously shaken. In an effort to stop all unwanted events, we call God’s blessing and wish peace and good will to all those who can hear this voice of protest, as well as to those who think differently.”[[554]](#footnote-554)

Pervan explained that the document was published in the period between two conflicts between Bosniaks and Croats in Central Bosnia, i.e., between January and April 1993, and the point of the document was to appeal to both civilian and military officials of the HVO [Croatian Defense Council] who could have stopped those conflicts.[[555]](#footnote-555) In the following conversation, Judge Jorda wanted to know whether, in their capacity as religious leaders, they sought to maintain a position of neutrality and later pointed to the fact that Fra Pervan, as a signatory of the previous latter, still appeared at a parade with nationalist insignia:

JUDGE JORDA: I understand that, but did you decide, for instance, with the imam, with the priest of the Orthodox religion, to preserve a certain degree of neutrality?

A. In the municipality of Kiseljak, there was no Orthodox priest, whereas there were Muslims, and I had good relations with their imams, especially with Mr. Setka and Mr. Aldo Halisovic. As soon as the war ended, I went to see him and we talked. I see him today as well. We wanted to maintain not only neutrality, but each in his own way, we would like to see heads cool. I said “Setka,” whereas the name is Seta.

JUDGE JORDA: From this standpoint of neutrality, we saw a video this morning in which you figured prominently with another priest during a parade, a parade which had a certain nationalist connotation, I assume. But do you think that your place was there, that you should have been there, and in a country where there was very strong religious feeling, don’t you think that, in view of the composition of the population, the church was certainly not expected to bear arms? What do you think about that?

A. Mr. President, Your Honours, at the parade, it was, in fact, a review, and I was invited. I was not wearing a uniform, nor did that enter my head. I never shot at anybody, nor would I. I was there as a guest, an honorary guest. In the course of 1992 and in 1993, as well as in 1994, my contacts with UNPROFOR were generally through priests, the priests and individual units and their spiritual leaders. All the people who attended the parade were Croats, and that does not mean that they were all Catholics. However, the vast majority of those people were Catholics, and I think today that it was better for me to have been present there amongst them so that I could have had a more positive effect on them and that I could have spoken about the principles of humaneness and Christianity.

JUDGE JORDA: I’m going to turn my question around. If you had not responded to that invitation, how would that have been interpreted?

A. Had I not responded to the invitation, they would not have looked upon it kindly. I could not have been punished for it, of course, quite certainly, but had I not turned up and responded to the invitation, I would not, later on, have been able to speak about what is good and what is bad.

JUDGE JORDA: This is rather interesting, what you are saying. You’re saying, actually, that the fact that you participated on one side gives you more right to speak about peace and neutrality. While this is open to discussion, you must admit that it seems to me that one would speak with much greater effect about peace in a community if one did not participate, even symbolically, in a parade?

A. Mr. President, Your Honours, it was the actual state of affairs of the time. Kiseljak, at that time, had an army, and even if there was not a single priest there, the fact would have remained that the

army was already there. I was not about to tell them, “Go back to your homes and leave that kind of business.”

JUDGE JORDA: I wasn’t saying that. Please don’t put something in my mouth that I didn’t say. I was not going to say that you would go all alone in your robe as St. Francis of Assisi. I was just asking whether the church had any place in a military parade when the war was in full swing and when certain things were about to be committed or had been committed. Anyway, I won’t dwell on that.[[556]](#footnote-556)

The exchange between Judge Jorda and Fra Pervan concerning the presence of a spiritual leader at a military review was rather brief, but, even this brief exchange was sufficient to demonstrate the difference between external and internal perspectives. While Judge Jorda suggested that “one would speak with much greater effect about peace in a community if one did not participate, even symbolically, in a parade,” Fra Pervan stressed that such an act would not produce greater influence but, on the contrary, complete loss of influence. The one particular sentence from the witness’s reply: “[H]ad I not turned up and responded to the invitation, I would not, later on, have been able to speak about what is good and what is bad” shows that it was imperative to keep some contact with the community, even if the priest was aware that those who organized the event might not be the best representatives of the principles he was fighting for. It is still open for a debate whether participation in a public review was the best way to maintain contact with the community or whether it could have been avoided. What is important to note is the search for ways to possibly be able to influence the community in positive directions even if some of soldiers’ acts needed to be condemned as crimes.

## 1.2.9. Mass psychology and peer pressure

One frequently omitted element in the consideration of the role of religious leaders during conflicts is the influence of mass psychology and peer pressure on religious leaders. Although it might be tempting to believe that representatives of religious communities live in a different symbolic order of things, they are in fact equally subject to the influence of circumstances just as other people are. They do possess a different education than the rest of the population and have certain privileges, e.g., legitimately avoiding direct fighting (since religious leaders, in most cases, are exempt from military conscription). However, that does not make them immune to the influence of the media and the mass psychology of fear and distancing from the Other. Jakov gives a sincere description of the struggle he underwent, admitting that he also fell victim to widespread fears and had to consciously fight these. Speaking about the situation of war, he said:

And then, of course, when things are set in motion, the first things that comes to the surface are negative passions, things that are not good. I remember the time when it all started. I remember how it was in [city censored], I remember it all. Something awakens in a person, and… (…) I was in [city censored], and I suddenly heard that [his home-town censored] fell. And [in that moment] you know nothing about your mother, brothers, sisters, … I am the youngest in the household (…) In one moment you fall under that [influence]. It seems to you that you are ready to take up weapons. I, a priest, ready to take up weapons! That comes to my mind. Thank God that I never acted in such a way. And, at that moment, I said to myself: “God forbid that a Serb show up at my door—I will kick him, I will beat him!” That is how you start to think. And then, then you stop for a moment, [and you say to yourself]: “Come on! Who are you? You came here; you were placed here for something else! [referring to his priestly vocation]”[[557]](#footnote-557)

He later explained how he had many Serb and Muslim friends in the city where he was located and how the difficult situation served to unite them. Nonetheless it was necessary to see how religious individuals, even those who were directly in contact with good people from the “other side,” still needed to resist the attraction of the divisiveness inherent in the logic of war. We should not ignore the second part of the story, in which Jakov described his inner struggle and willful resistance to accepting the dominant divisions. Had he truly committed crimes in his capacity of a religious servant, that would, without a doubt, leave a much longer lasting impression in people’s minds. This was apparent from the responses of Catholic and Muslim religious leaders, who most often felt that Serbian Orthodox Church did least to distance itself from nationalist projects. Almost without fail, they all mentioned support for nationalist commanders by several highly positioned leaders such as Vasilije Kačavenda. What left the strongest impression was one photo of Orthodox bishop Filaret Mićević, in his ecclesial garment, posing with an M-53 machine gun in front of a tank along with Serbian soldiers. Another notorious instance was the episode in which two Orthodox priests blessed the paramilitary group the Scorpions just several days before they executed six Bosniak civilians. The videotape was recorded by one of the affiliates of the Scorpions group, and it appeared at the 2005 trial of Slobodan Milošević at the ICTY. The same tape documents a religious rite, such ordinary activities of Scorpions members as washing teeth in a river, eating, having fun, and— just some few minutes afterward—killing six prisoners.[[558]](#footnote-558) The appearance of the tape created a significant stir within the entire region and is one of the reference points for criticism of those Serbian Orthodox priests who “blessed weapons.” My Orthodox respondents did not deny such events, but they always insisted that they were regrettable individual exceptions rather than a rule. Some stated that things were often misconstrued. Ilija, for instance, stressed that there were no prayers for blessing weapons, but only persons, i.e., soldiers.[[559]](#footnote-559) Some others, while not denying the crimes of the Serbian units, still tried to say that there was nothing negative in the prayer itself since it was meant to prevent crimes, not encourage them. Bojan took that route, stating that he would appear if soldiers called him to read a prayer because the aim of the prayer is to purify the hearts of those who are present:

[W]hen it comes to war, nothing is black and white. There are thousands of elements that have to be taken into account. (…) We [Serbian Orthodox Church] also had a situation here such that it was frequently said [about us]: ‘They blessed war criminals, there are tapes [that prove that].’ (…) I respond to them [critics]: ‘People, I beg you, read the prayer!’ (…) He [a soldier] calls you; he is going to war—what is the duty of any priest? Of course, I would go there to read a prayer that God protects his heart, that he stays normal, that he remains human.[[560]](#footnote-560)

Although Bojan wanted to say that the aim of the prayer was not to demonize the enemy but, on the contrary, to purify the hearts of soldiers from evil inclinations so that they did not commit crimes, the exact prayers from the aforementioned recording were not so benign. The recording does not show the whole religious ceremony, but there is a part that resembles the standard prayers of the faithful during the Eucharistic service, which says the following:

[Let us pray] that [God] does not give us to our enemies and adversaries, to destruction and depredation, but that [God] turns all their audacity into escape and that we break their muscles and that we trample them under our feet, [the feet of] the faithful, we pray to God.

[Response: God have mercy.]

[Let us pray] that [God] covers the face of the enemy with shame and fills their hearts with fear and horror, and that the angel of God expels them and wins over them, let us pray to God.

[Reponses: God have mercy.]

[Let us pray] that [God] puts a steel arc on the muscles of God’s faithful, and strengthens their muscles with the force of God’s power for victory and destruction of enemies and adversaries that are rising against the Serbian Orthodox people, let us pray to God.

[Reponses: God have mercy.]

[Let us pray] that [God] turns all our worries and sadness in this suffering into happiness and joy, and [that God] makes us, under the command of Slobodan Medić, all invincible to enemy’s attacks, let us pray to God.[[561]](#footnote-561)

As a matter of fact, not a single sentence in the whole prayer invokes God to purify the hearts of soldiers and protect them from committing crimes. One might object that prayers of the faithful are, as the name says, sometimes written by the faithful and not by the priests who preside over the ceremony. Although that is sometimes the case, it is improbable that members of an army unit wrote their own prayers. Even if that were the case, they were nevertheless read by the priest, whose concluding prayer was the following:

Bless and sanctify, so that it be to your faithful Serbian army for overpowering of the enemy’s people, and for secure victory, and that it [the Serbian army], protected by You, pushes the army of all our enemies into running, and that it always appears horrible and frightening to the enemies of the Christian progeny; and that it [the blessing] be to all your faithful Serbian soldiers who put their trust in You, reliable hope in victory, audacity, and power (…) Because you are the emperor of peace, the God who destroys weapons and gives hope to those who put their hope in you.[[562]](#footnote-562)

Later, when he was blessing the soldiers, he stated: “Be courageous, and let your heart grow in power, and let it win over enemies, by putting the trust in the Lord, in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit, Amen. Go happily, and come back home happily!”[[563]](#footnote-563)

*Fund for Humanitarian Law* from Belgrade later made a documentary about the same event. In the film, they show other parts of the same ceremony in which another priest gave an even more inflammatory speech. In fact, he wanted to recite from the heart an old epic *Poem of the Knight Laza*, but failed to reproduce it correctly. The original poem represents a war call to medieval Serbian soldiers in a fight against Sultan Murat. However, before reciting it, he added another verse “Brothers, Turks turned to vampires,” which aimed to connect the original context, in which medieval Serbs fought Turks, and a new context, in which Bosniaks ware presented as “vampirized Turks”:

Brothers, Turks turned into vampires. Brothers and gentlemen, selected heroes, our days come near. Turkish emperor Murat arrived at Kosovo and there rose a great battle against our empire. He occupied villages, fields, and cities, broke crosses on our churches. Dear brothers let us ask ourselves: if we are going to surrender, let it be known to all of us. Turks are not like other people; they are Asians with beastly characters.[[564]](#footnote-564)

Konstantin, one of my interviewees, did not try to apologize the actions of Filaret or the priests from the Scorpions tape. During our conversation, he insisted more than once that criticism of the Serbian Orthodox Church was justified. However, he did allow for more nuanced explanations of the possible reasons for such shocking acts, insisting that peer pressure might have influenced religious leaders to do or say things that they otherwise would not:

When you now, in the 2000s, see a recording of a priest who blesses a unit which, as we know, committed a crime after that blessing, that seems truly horrible, shocking, and distressing. But if we would try to put ourselves in the shoes of that priest at that moment, our view of the same event would be entirely different. If a young soldier comes to you and asks you to pray to God that he will comes back home happily—that is not at all problematic, to pray that anyone comes home happy. But when you, from a historical distance, know that those were not some holy and just warriors, but robbers and murderers, then it becomes horrible! That is a failure, a mistake, a sin that has to be confessed and admitted. However, one should not equate the priest who prayed with those who committed crimes because he [the priest] did that from his [naiveté](https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/naivet%C3%A9#English), and they did it from their malice. And those are not the same things. Although form the other hand, it is also problematic to justify such an act [the act of the priest]. It should not be justified even by this naivety that I mentioned. Very often that element of immaturity, we can call it also that way, was the cause of the things that damaged the reputation of certain communities including the Serbian Orthodox Church, and I am speaking primarily about her. Today, it is difficult to justify a photograph of someone who posed with a machine gun, even if he never shoot a bullet nor wanted to do so, but [did that because he] wanted to fit into a specific folklore, and wanted to be funny in a moment or to encourage soldiers (…) This is not an attempt to justify such things, far from that, but simply to shed light on one aspect that can perhaps help us to understand why such stupidities happened. Otherwise, you cannot comprehend that someone who was a priest, and who reflected for five minutes, could have agreed on such idiocy as the episcope Filaret did, who (…) created [problems] to many who did not have anything to do with that. Even today, that photograph is being presented and used to support critical voices about the Church, and rightly so, rightly so![[565]](#footnote-565)

Peer pressure, which is especially acute during a period of crisis and uncertainty, is not limited only to the period of the war itself. However, the actions of religious leaders done even unintentionally, under pressure of a group, can have lasting consequences.

The final example of peer pressure demonstrates its effectiveness even on a smaller scale. A recent *Al Jazeera* article entitled *The Chetnik priest: I’m still in a mood to kill*[[566]](#footnote-566) made headlines around the world and was translated, shared, and paraphrased by numerous media in the Balkans. The article tells the story of Vojislav Čarkić, a Serbian Orthodox priest who was engaged in the pastoral care of the Serbian army during the war in the Sarajevo neighborhood Grbavica. There, he was often seen wearing a military uniform. Although Vojislav is without doubt a nationalist who was not shy of using deprecatory terms for Bosniaks, many of sentences attributed to him in the *Al Jazeera* interview sounded too extreme to be realistic. Since their phrasing was such that it did not reflect the structure of the Serbian language, I became interested and asked the author of the article, Sara Manisera, whether she could send me the original tape. Thanks to the very kind and prompt response of the journalist, I was able to again hear the entire interview, which could best be described as a combination of peer pressure and inaccurate translation by the interpreter. Since the journalist did not speak Serbian, she relied upon the services of a local translator who was also a close friend of Vojislav. Throughout the interview, it was clear that the translator encouraged Vojislav to give extreme answers that would make a better (i.e., more sensational) story. For instance, at one point, the translator explains to the interviewer that he is provoking Vojislav to show off and say more extreme things “so that you can have something.”[[567]](#footnote-567) The sentence from the article title was one of his incorrect translations. At the beginning of the second minute of the original tape, Vojislav says, “I was a major of the Chetnik units, but I have evaporated [I have lost my strength], it is gone; but I am still capable [I still have power to] kill people like him [referring to the translator].” The interpreter, however, translated it as “I am still in a mood to kill” and laughed afterward. The final title of the published article then suggested that Vojislav was still in the mood to kill Bosniaks. To the follow-up question of the interviewer, which asked whether Vojislav had really ever killed anyone, he said “No one.”[[568]](#footnote-568) For some reason, the translator deemed it necessary to present the priest even in an even more extreme light than he already was, partly by translating with a relatively greater degree of liberty and partly by encouraging the respondent to speak negatively about Bosniaks while praising Serbian war criminals. As I said, Vojislav Čarkić unapologetically declared himself a Serbian nationalist, monarchist, and member of the Chetniks, and so he does not give any space to be considered as other than an extremist. However, his already intolerant views were even further radicalized by his friend/interpreter, who pressured him to give even more shocking answers to foreign journalists. In this light, it is not difficult to imagine that peer pressure might indeed be a partial reason for certain controversial photographs that later came to form a sizable obstacle between religious communities. At the same time, it shows how the effect of such actions can be long lasting and difficult to resolve.

## 1.2.10. Pastoral concerns

We need to add one more element to the equation of the scopes and limits of peacebuilding activities performed by religious leaders during the war and that is their central activity of pastoral care of their believers. Although some people criticize the sudden ‘conversion’ of previous advocates of Communism as sheer opportunism, Bojan held a different view. For him, that was a natural consequence of exposure to destruction and death. The situation of war makes people inquire about religion more since they have lost most of the other stable points of their lives. Within that perspective, religious leaders have a moral duty to respond to that call while simultaneously constrained by the lack of time and proper framework for adequate religious education:

That cannot be wrong. Why did people suddenly turn to ecclesial and religious communities? Because you had to, at once, resolve your personal question regarding death (…) Not because you wanted that or because you came to that point, but because you were forced—because you saw horrible deaths, people disappearing, people being killed. Therefore, at once, you have a grave need to resolve those questions in your head, the question of your existence. That is the reason why so many people went to Church—they did not have any other concrete thing to hold on to. They had been creating something for decades—houses, properties, they lived, had kids, grandchildren; and now there occurs an apocalypse where everything that you have been creating could disappear in a second. Even that is not so horrible as it was terrifying to see the face of evil and the face of death (…) At the same time, everything was happening quickly. A person in Belgium has a different need to go to a Church than a person here who felt and watched death and dissolution, not knowing what would happen to him the next day (…) Add to that different personalities, ways of existential adaptations, (…), add all possible derailments [mistakes], all possible[forms of] ignorance, flipped identities, and at the same time, we all became believers. But also add to that religious servants in all traditional churches and faith communities who questioned how to respond and whether they should respond at all. You see, [in that situation,] you do not have some conversation which goes like “now slowly, take this, take that….” What you have is a monstrosity—somebody is dying, saying “What is this? Help me!” It is an open question as to what degree we managed to give some response in that situation. (…) When there is a war, it is not easy, and nothing is black and white. There are thousands of segments that need to be taken into consideration.[[569]](#footnote-569)

Bojan’s view on religiosity as induced by difficulties was not an isolated opinion. Haris thought that “[p]eople returned more to faith during the war. In all that fear, people expected only help from God. Unfortunately, here, on the territories of the former Yugoslavia, faith is most manifested when we are in fear. When we do not see the solution anywhere else, we seek resort with God.”[[570]](#footnote-570) Nebojša also mentioned an adage “bez nevolje, nema bogomolje,” which, when translated freely, means “no worship without trouble.”[[571]](#footnote-571)

Religion was, in many ways, a reference point of stability in an otherwise chaotic situation; it was certainly a coping mechanism that helped people manage ongoing troubles and also a possible escape from the overwhelming conflicts that colonized all areas of personal and public life. Kenan noted that, during the war, people wanted to spend time with religious representatives. Religion grew in importance because it offered a different vision, security, a way out of their destructive everyday reality, a glimpse of hope: “when you feel craziness, you need something that goes beyond it.”[[572]](#footnote-572) He noted that people go through different phases when facing war. Initially, they have trouble accepting that the war is there, persisting in their belief that it would never happen. But then, when the war is there, they start thinking the opposite—that it will never stop. During that phase, according to Kenan, people feel vulnerable, and religion takes on its most potent influence.[[573]](#footnote-573) For Sead, faith, precisely,

represented hope for thousands who saw the death of their closest ones and saw destruction. I don’t know what remains to you except to hope that there must be a balance between good and evil. And for the majority, I believe, faith was the strongest argument to stay alive, no matter whether they were Muslims, Christian Orthodox, or Catholics. For politicians and those people who knew what to do with Bosnia and Herzegovina and these areas, religion was a weapon they could use quite well for their goals.[[574]](#footnote-574)

Bojan, Haris, Kenan, and Nebojša were referring to so-called ‘ordinary’ people, who *en masse* sought answers in religion because of their spiritual needs in a situation of distress. As Sead already hinted, there was yet another distinctive sub-group of professional politicians, mostly previous members of the Communist party, who correctly recognized the promotional and mobilizational potential of religion. In their eyes, religion was useful for pragmatic reasons. This is how Velimir put it:

That was fashion. In ’91, [religion] was fashionable among former Communists (…) They needed someone to advertise them. The popularization of the Church started. There was liberation from Communism; people started to go to Church, started to get baptized on a massive scale. (…) So, it was important for them [politicians] to be seen standing in the first row in the Church, shaking hands with a Vladika [an Orthodox bishop], with a priest, to be present in every situation. And I think that was the only reason. Were they ready to listen, everything would be different today.[[575]](#footnote-575)

Hence, religion was not only a resource of existential answers about the universal human questions of life and death but also a system of legitimation. The context of war is not without importance. The sudden sharpening of religious sentiments occurred in the period during which people required quick and digestible answers that would not deepen their existential crises even further. In that sense, religiosity that came about was within the ‘comfort zones’ of both individuals and groups. And since the war had already created demarcation lines along national and religious lines, the preferred type of religiosity was the one that confirmed national identity, enhanced the solidarity of a group, and resolved the ongoing crises within it, even at the cost of theological errors. It was not the case that religious leaders were unaware of what was happening—that religiosity of people was often superficial, and that religion became a useful instrument in the political arena. Nonetheless, that did not provoke any major reaction from the side of religious communities. The contradiction of *seeing* but *staying relatively silent* can be explained by the mixture of previously mentioned concerns and genuine pastoral care for people who, at the same time, expected not only personal help but also an enhancement of group solidarity. I asked Velimir whether religious leaders could resist those political misuses and say in some cases that they did not want to have anything to do with certain people, to which he responded: “It wasn’t possible. It wasn’t possible because one could not in such a [divided] situation allow fights between any organization [within one’s own community] (…) That would have been lethal in such an entrenched situation, and, because of that, one had to swallow many situations (…)”[[576]](#footnote-576) Some of those crimes that needed to be ‘swallowed’ for the sake of group unity were crimes committed by the paramilitary units that consisted of members from their own national corpus. Velimir clearly did not see such a silent stance as optimal. He described the situation among Orthodox priests at the beginning of the war as *wandering* and *improvisation*, but he believes that, given the correct circumstances, they did a lot to stop even greater crimes. Referring to the importance of religious education, he said that it is generally possible for him to convince his parishioners who regularly attend the liturgy that something should not be done because of a religious reason, but those who came to the church “to get photographed,” he said, would simply ignore such advice. His point was to show that no Solomonic solution was possible in a quandary of opposed imperatives of giving religious assistance and criticizing when that criticism would have been futile. The paradox of pastoral care for new converts during the war was the following one: *people need solid religious formation to accept criticism based on religious reasons, but if they hear the criticism straight away, they will not even begin the formation. However, until they become formed, it will already be too late to prevent them from doing crimes*. What is emphasized is a clash between temporalities, between the need for long-term formation and short-time response to the acts of killing. The role of religious leaders, seen from the theological stance, is the one of long-term involvement, although what is often expected from them are quick results and rapid reactions.

Religious leaders were then in an unenviable position. One the one hand, they had to show pastoral care for all members of their constituencies, i.e., both *old* believers and *new* converts. On the other hand, they felt that they were accomplices in political marketing, often against their will. It would be wrong to say that all of that participation was unwanted. Some of the religious leaders willingly embraced closeness with the political establishment and did not find anything problematic in mixing the religious and political spheres. However, even those who did not desire such liaisons found it difficult to avoid them. What made the situation even more blurry was the fact that nationalism, for some people, was an entry ticket into the life of faith, as Konstantin explains:

[T]he connection between the religious and the national, which already existed among my people, reached in the 90s, I would say, its highest point. At the same time, it became caricatural. It also certainly happened, no matter how strange and unacceptable that sounds at first, that the national fervor and enthusiasm brought some people to the church door and that person then truly converted and became Christian. That was on the line of thought that Serbs are Orthodox and they should be baptized; they should burn incense, go to church, know some prayers, I don’t know what … Thus, that [nationalism] can be a net for capturing people.[[577]](#footnote-577) You cannot meet an average Joe except on the level where he is currently standing. Paul in Athens practiced the same method. But one should not, in any case, stay on that level.[[578]](#footnote-578)

What Konstantin alluded to was the inherent ambiguity of numerous situations during the war when something contrary to religion brought people closer to it and, subsequently, led them towards true conversion. While the discovery of religion was, from the perspective of religious leaders, certainly a good thing, the process that led to it was almost haphazard. In the cases he mentioned, people did not immediately discover religiosity as something that lies in the inner core of every human being. Their access point was much more mundane. What brought them “to the church door” was the package of folklore and national traditions in which religion plays an important role. From the theological perspective that represents less than optimal motivation for the beginning of the spiritual journey, many religious leaders nevertheless still did not wish to dismiss it. Instead, they saw it, possibly, as a minimal basis for further improvement.

Although generally critical about the strong links between religious and national identity, Pavle still recognized that “one had to keep those people in the Church,”[[579]](#footnote-579) referring to the newly converted. For that reason, “[Serbian Orthodox] Church kept that stance of being not too much against [not too critical]”[[580]](#footnote-580) This is where we clearly see the paradox of pastoral care in action. It seemed that they were concerned that, in such cases, people would again turn against them as they had during the previous system.

Clearly, the question then arises: At what point do those pastoral concerns become detrimental to the whole mission of the religious community; when does pastoral care turn into conformity? Even when individuals are war criminals, it is still possible to find some justification why too harsh a criticism is not appropriate. When stressed too much, pastoral care can then become an excuse for a comfortable silence. One such justification strategy among Christian religious leaders was the propagation of the preferential care for criminals. As Bogdan said, “The Lord tells us that the healthy do not need doctors, but the sick do. That is where the role of the Church is very important, if not the most important (…) Those who were condemned for the gravest war crimes had great need of a priest.”[[581]](#footnote-581)

Using the same principle, Bojan clarified that “it is necessary to condemn a crime, but when it comes to Christianity, it is impossible to condemn a criminal. I cannot condemn him. I can motivate him to change, to contrite, and can show him the right way. Can you condemn the apostle Paul?”[[582]](#footnote-582) He wanted to say that the Church cannot give up even on those who are the worst criminals. Even if the basic human impulse would prefer to isolate them, the argument goes, there still must be someone who would offer them a chance to change. The problem is that the mission of being sent to tend to those who are ‘sick’ and in need of a doctor is at risk of mutating into heroization of criminals. Even the second principle of “condemning crime, but not a criminal” very easily slips into a hybrid form of condemnation-care in which condemnation is so abstract that it does not create any discomfort among criminals, while the care is so concrete that the same people come to be seen as national heroes.

For this reason, Željko emphasized that the care for criminals can never be the excuse for relativizing their crimes. He warned precisely against the tendency to sanitize their deeds under the pretext of care for them as individuals in need: “They humanize criminals. They humanize criminals saying: ‘But he is also a human.’ Of course, he is. [But] when Jesus forgives people, [when the forgave] the criminal on the cross, he did not deny his evils. He did not tell him: ‘All you did was good’ as people here tell.” [[583]](#footnote-583) Because of such a lax attitude of religious leaders towards their crimes and wholehearted openness for their spiritual needs, the criminals “are becoming saints in some sense—national heroes and saints, without contrition.”[[584]](#footnote-584)

Željko’s comment is also a criticism of the covert strategies that used legitimate pastoral concerns and theological principles selectively, as a shield against more profound responsibilities. He explained how religious leaders tended to readily express care for criminals from their own ethnic groups while at the same time feeling much greater reluctance to demonstrate care not for the criminals but for the victims of the other side.

We can see here how the pastoral mission of religious communities that pushes them towards the people and expands their scope of care can, at the same time, be an inhibiting factor to the exercise of their other mission—the clear discernment of good and evil. The situation during the war was far from easy—it was even paradoxical to a degree because it required engagement with the waves of new believers and their criticisms; it demanded assistance in distressful situations, and some distancing from the actions of some of their believers; it required sustenance of some firm basis of the communal life and, simultaneously, differentiation between ‘good’ and ‘bad’ members. The result was very often wandering and improvisation. It is important to note that the theological foundations for pastoral care are indeed firm. Christianity especially has a long tradition of preferential care for the marginalized and rejected. The Church over the centuries has been a *refugium pecatorum*—a refuge for sinners. At the same time, those same principles that bring marginalized people (including the worst criminals) can be the source of marginalization of other groups. The most dramatic version of that is engaged care for criminals that is coupled with a complete lack of interest in the victims of those same criminals.

## 1.2.11. Battles over interpretation

One additional element relevant to the peacebuilding role of religious leaders during the conflict was the battle over interpretations of their canonic texts and traditions. The principal matter of concern during the war was undoubtedly the theological status of violence, its proper use, scope, and limits. However, as hermeneutics teaches us, interpretation never happens outside social context. The ways people read and re-read their religious texts is a response to the historical moments in which the interpretation takes place. Religious extremism, for instance, is therefore not just a random discovery of religious texts that contain elements of violence; rather, it is often the extreme context that motivates re-discovery of such (violent) elements. A good example of this is the contrast between two versions of Islam during the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina—the local population’s moderate version and the extreme version of the foreign Mujahideen fighters. Sead describes that situation as follows:

We came out from under a glass bell in which we protected ourselves from external influences (…). It was the first time that we could openly, publicly speak about faith. That is the first dimension—faith had certain expansions towards the outside, so to speak [faith entered the public sphere]. Secondly, during the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Muslims, unfortunately, met other and different interpretations of the faith in very bad circumstances (…) People who possessed very unstable personal religious experiences met [foreign] individuals who, in their eyes, had perfect answers for an extreme situation and then quickly fell under their influence. Consequently, the balance in one’s own traditional faith experience in Bosnia and Herzegovina was disrupted (…) There was an encounter with the most radical teachings of Islam because the conditions were the most radical. Today, people reflect [about faith] completely differently.”[[585]](#footnote-585)

Sead’s answer clarifies what the context of religious experience includes. On the one hand, he points to the social position of religious communities that were, initially, isolated and protected from engagement with the broader public. He apparently had in mind the Communist regime, which did not give a lot of public space to religions outside of small designated places of worship. However, important to note was an internal element of seclusion: “We protected ourselves from external influences,” Sead said, implying that believers and religious communities embraced their isolation, not letting themselves be challenged. Such a situation was ‘uncomfortable’ from the standpoint of public influence (which was low), but it was ‘comfortable’ in the sense that religious communities did not feel challenged to constantly re-actualize their faith. War changed those relationships in the most radical way—not only did it place religion under the spotlight, but the extreme life-threatening situations associated with the conflict required quick responses that had not been prepared for. Thus, the radically new context of war necessitated theological engagement, but religious communities who had lived in relative isolation were not prepared for such a difficult task.

Sead’s statement that “the most radical conditions” facilitated acceptance of “the most radical teachings” additionally emphasizes the influence of context on the re-interpretation of religious tradition. Suddenly, even the long tradition of open and moderate Islam in Bosnia and Herzegovina seemed, for many, unconvincing. That tradition was something lived and transmitted but not theologically deepened and reflected. Thus, the encounter between the moderate and radical versions of Islam was not the encounter of equal dialogical partners because local believers, in Sead’s view, lacked proper education in their faith. Consequently, for a certain number of people, the latter version suddenly seemed the correct one. As we have seen from interviews, other religious leaders complained that peaceful and ‘soft’ religious teachings simply could not have resonance during the war. Mirza’s previous personal statement of adherence to the radical teachings of Jihad due to a personal experience of loss and despite exposure to different interpretations in religious school also demonstrates how concrete grievances can overpower conciliatory religious teachings.

As is becoming clear, one vital peacebuilding role of religious leaders during the conflict lay in their teaching role, i.e., in the promotion of open and peaceful, yet meaningful and applicable, religious interpretations. The primary challenge was to find a way to be faithful to religious tradition while remaining relevant, despite the opposing social trends and under the threat of personal marginalization. Finding such language is, without doubt, very difficult, but, in the following statement, Jasmin claims that it is still possible and that it was possible (although not easy) even then:

I was the chief Imam in [city censored] during the war. I have live witnesses and recordings, on VHS tapes, of me speaking about tolerance. At that time, it was very unusual—if I can use that term—to speak about tolerance. However, I remember vividly when I said on the TV [city censored] that we can survive only if we remain tolerant. If somebody is destroying [our] place of worship, we cannot retaliate with the same measure because in that case, God would not help us. How would God help us if we are destroying temples in which his name is celebrated? I am glad that I spoke that way at that time when I was around 30 [years old] (…). There is no single sentence I am ashamed of. It was not the same case with everyone (…) Unfortunately, at that time, there were some people [i.e., religious leaders] who spoke very negatively, very aggressively about other people, other traditions, and so on. I did not belong to them, and I don’t even want to comment on their deeds. If they survived the war, I think they are ashamed of their words today.[[586]](#footnote-586)

### 1.2.11.1. Religion in war, war in religion

During one of my first doctoral presentations at an academic conference in 2013, I argued that religious communities need to engage critically both with the legacy of violence in their authoritative texts and in their traditions. My argument was given in rebuttal to *the denial* that violence as such exists in religion (advocated by the proponents of the “religions are just about peace and love” adage) and the *absolutization* of violence over the entire religious tradition (usually met under the “religions are inherently violent” aegis). During the ensuing discussion, one of the participants suggested a simple solution—why not simply remove the violent texts in the Bible?

To my initial surprise, the suggestion was completely serious, based on the idea that violent texts lead to violent actions and, *mutatis mutandis*, their absence means a more peaceful world. Besides the technical problem of censoring billions of printed and electronic Bibles, this suggestion would encounter another much more pressing problem, namely, that violence is not a matter so much of imitation as of interpretation. It is not very common that Jews and Christians are tempted to sacrifice their first-born sons because they read the text about Abraham. Violence, in fact, can grow from totally unexpected places. And that is the reason why struggles over interpretation cannot be made concluded simply by means of censorship or negation, but always in response to concrete uses of religious symbols in the context of violence.

None of the religious leaders that I have interviewed has gone so far as to state that violence was the constitutive part of their religious tradition, but their conceptualizations of the legitimate use of force differed. The struggle with violence was especially apparent with Christians, who, unlike Muslims, have for the central tenet of their faith the death of Jesus of Nazareth, who refused to employ force, even in self-defense. Some respondents strongly insisted on that fact, asserting that no theological support for any form of violence should ever be given. For them, even when it is realistic to expect that people will not passively suffer, there still remains an imperative for understanding violence within the framework of imperfection. Giving theological legitimacy to violence would be, in their eyes, tantamount to placing violence on a pedestal of virtue. Damjan’s response incorporates such a radically anti-violence interpretation:

[W]ith respect to the role of sacrifice in Christianity, I am personally much closer to the theory that violence should absolutely never be used. I do not think that a person who simply shows even a minimum of violence stops being Christian just by virtue of that act. But that person does lose that identity, especially when persisting in it [in using violence] and especially when that [violence] is justified theoretically. We always take as an example the life of Jesus Christ, and the only moment when he used ‘violence’ (…) still without hurting anyone physically, was when he pushed the traders out of the Temple (…) Therefore, we do not have a single theological basis for the use of violence (…) [T]here were cases when people in high positions, including theologians, claimed that the defensive war was good, and so on. That does not have any theological basis; it could only be treated (…) as a lesser evil. But I believe that one should never in practice resort to violence, and even less justify it theoretically.[[587]](#footnote-587)

He was thus categorically against the idea that violence should have any theological justification. He insisted on the example of Christ, who refused to use violence in self-defense and thus sees even a limited approval of violence as without basis in the Gospels. Damjan’s view can be rephrased as a desire to preserve a theological ideal from commodification to earthly reality. He insisted that every attempt to theologically legitimize violence becomes detrimental to the ideal itself and is ultimately harmful towards the theological reality it represents. Similarly, Pavle stated, “Violence is absolutely indefensible for me, and there are no just wars. Although some saints spoke about just war, this and that, there is no such a thing (…) The story about just war is not in accordance with the principles of the Gospel, and I am definitely categorical with respect to that—there is no such a thing as a just war.”[[588]](#footnote-588)

### 1.2.11.2. Hippies and warriors

Those who shared Damjan’s and Pavle’s view insisted on a strong reading of the New Testament passages which demonstrate the complete forbearance of the use of force, even for a just cause and even at the cost of one’s life. However, this was still a minority view. Most of the Christian religious leaders, both Orthodox and Catholic, believed that use of force in self-defense is theologically legitimate and even an expression of virtue. And now the importance of theological interpretation comes into play—when giving warrants for the use of defensive force, they did not use some explicit verses that approve violence or command defensive wars, since these are, in general, absent from the New Testament. As a matter of fact, theological justification, when given, was always based on the same verse from the Gospel of John that, on its face, has nothing to do with wars: “Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one’s life for one’s friends.”[[589]](#footnote-589) Bojan defends his position thusly:

The greatest gift of Christian living is to give one’s life for an other, right? (…) In that sense, justified defense of something or somebody is absolutely acceptable to Christianity. Therefore, we can have different interpretations, but Christianity is based on the link between the heart and soul and on the active movement towards salvation. (…) For me, all other stories are a hippy-commune—when we sit in some nice and cozy place, and then someone brings a guitar, and we sing how we love each other, and how God is great, and all the rest. But imagine for a moment a war, a horrible war, and a family, and people you love, and somebody comes to kill you. Sides are unimportant now—you go, and you defend yourself. Defense is your legitimate right. Christianity is not masochism; it is based on the fact that love is something that determines you, something that moves you. But it is not masochism. And all those masochistic interpretations (…) do not belong to Christianity (…) But of course, there is another possibility [that] I, as a Christian, I go to another part of the world to kill those who belong to another religion. That would be complete nonsense. That is both sadism and elitism—that only my faith confers salvation and that God created you, well, for nothing. That does not take into account that God created the other person also and that he [or she] has also the right to live. I have the right to defend myself. I have the right to give my life for another person.[[590]](#footnote-590)

Allowance for the use of force was never a straightforward admission of the violence as something good. It was exclusively seen as a lesser evil and a necessary strategy in cases where the life of the innocent was threatened. Such a position is completely understandable from the universal anthropological perspective. However, when it comes to religious and theological teaching, there still seem to be an inconsistency between the grounding in Christian texts, strongly emphasized by Damjan and Pavle, and practical rationalizations of the need for self-defense. I asked Miloš, a theology professor, how does he reconcile the approval of violence in self-defense with the fact that Jesus refused to use violence. I quote his long response in an almost unabridged form:

**A:** I do reconcile it because everything I say and everything I do must have support in the Gospel. First of all, the Gospel is above us. The very theory of the defensive war can be in those words [from the Gospel] that I mentioned, that there is no greater love than to lay down one’s life for one’s friends. And the most explicit expression of laying down one’s life for those close to us is a defensive war. In that sense, if someone attacks you, you have to defend yourself, but that does not justify violence. What does it mean? We spoke about that already—it is clear what a war is, and what an army is. An army fulfills its part, but the same army also has to have a [moral] codex [of behavior in war] (…)

**Q:** (…) Of course, Christ uttered the sentence “to lay down one’s life for one’s friends” before laying down his life, but he does not defend himself. It is important to me that you discuss that detail. In other words, he lays down his life for ones close to him, but refuses to use force. How to reinterpret that today when wars still exist?

**A:** First of all, we have to keep in mind who the Christ is and why he does not defend himself. He said: “Could I not call on my Father to send me thousands and thousands of angels who would fight against your soldiers?”, and so on. But (…) Christ’s suffering could not have been a defensive one. Why? Because he had to die according to prophecies, not to fulfill some justice, neither ours nor His, but to resurrect and glorify the human nature since, as we Christians believe, Christ was one hypostasis with two natures. (…) How would it otherwise be possible to save the human race from sin and death? You are a theologian, and you know the theory of necessity. Christ does not die because of [historical] necessity, but completely consciously, from his love towards the world and humankind, crucifying oneself for the world (…) Christ did not defend himself, he did not do so, in order to fulfill the words of the prophet who says, to quote let us say the 53rd chapter of Isaih “To fulfill all the justice, Son of God will be given to the hands of the sinners, they will crucify him, and he will rise the third day.” Therefore, Christ consciously knows that he is going to die, but he also knows what will come after his death. And he promises that in many places in the Scripture (…) Therefore, one should not equate those two things [Christ’s refusal of self-defense and human refusal to use force]. What would that mean? That we, using Christ as an example, should not defend ourselves and say [instead] that we surrender? What he [the Christ] did was, of course, a voluntary death for the world. That is important to say: vo-lon-ta-ry. (…) After all, God is from eternity; everything is possible to God (…) Christ’s death was aimed at unifying human nature with God’s nature, to destroy death by dying, and to grant resurrection to the weak [human] body, that is the meaning of his death. For that reason, one should not equate Christ’s voluntary death with armed conflicts and wars, or to put those things in opposition to each other, or to use it as an ideal model for us (…)[[591]](#footnote-591)

Miloš also distinguished between Catholic and Orthodox theology, stressing that Catholic theology had traditions imitating Christ (*imitatio Christi*), whereas Orthodox theology never emphasized that element of imitation to any great extent. For him, the single element of Christ’s death had no bearing on current conflicts, and Christ’s refusal to use violence does not provide any lessons relevant to the current conflict. His point was that it is not possible to compare a singular event in history, linked to the specific purpose of the salvation of humankind, with reoccurring events of violence and confrontations. In the latter case, it seems, death caused by the refusal to defend oneself would not have anything salvific value for anyone. To the contrary, in Miloš’s view, it would be a mistake to understand Christ’s death as a model that has to be imitated. Miloš’s argument was the following: not a *refusal to use violence*, but *defensive activities* are a human way to perform the greatest acts of love.

The problem, of course, is that the same objection to drawing direct parallels between Christ and humans could be made even in relation to the verse from the beginning of our conversation: “My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one’s life for one’s friends. You are my friends if you do what I command.”[[592]](#footnote-592) If Christ’s death was a singular event, and his act of the greatest love for his friends was in service of salvation, why would we draw parallels to the current situation, in which *dying in defense* of country, friends, or family suddenly acquires salvific value? At the same time, the very same chapter that he quoted, just a few lines later on, actually stresses the need of parallelism: “If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first (…) Remember what I told you: ‘A servant is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted me, they would persecute you also. If they obeyed my teaching, they would obey yours also.”[[593]](#footnote-593)

This long discussion was important to show that peacebuilding activities in the field of interpretations must count on a number of inherent complexities, inconsistencies, and ambiguities. There is nothing easier than to say that religion is about peace and not violence. But, as we saw, that is never the real issue. The real challenge is to grapple with the conundrum of *violence done in the service of love*, carrying in mind that those services of love have, in many historical cases, led to the destruction of the Other and different, as Danijel notes:

I hold that it is all right that a person cannot allow that another person kills him. In my view, the theory of the defensive war could be acceptable, if there were not so many wrong interpretations that sneak into it and then even an aversion towards others is explained as self-defense (…) Here, in our territories, everyone was defending their centuries-long hearths [houses]—some were defending centuries-long Serbian hearths [houses], some were defending their identities, some were defending the state. All were defending, but all were attacking all (…) [I]t is permissible, both from the logical and normal human point of view, to use the means for self-defense. However, if you do evil and violence towards others under the pretext of a just war, that is indefensible (…)[[594]](#footnote-594)

In one case, my respondent openly acknowledged the problem with the two divergent traditions—one of violence and one of a refusal to use force:

Such a person who stands on the defense lines of freedom, of people, of rights, even if he were a spiritual person, he could still be in a situation to take up weapons in one moment and go defend Vukovar, or his home, to defend it from a conqueror, from the one who denies all differences, rights, and freedoms. Or there could be a situation in which an ethnic community is endangered, when the homeland is endangered, (…) when the aggressor has to be stopped from doing evil, and so on. I am hesitating a little bit… It is a little bit paradoxical… Perhaps [I can put it] this way: Christ would never take a gun to defend Vukovar, I agree. He could have called angels form heaven to prevent his crucifixion, but he let it be done. But I think… Under the predicament of contradiction, under the danger of being in disagreement with Christ’s essential message, perhaps we can still imagine such a pious man of God defending the homeland. Those are also [things of] value—home and family. They are not anti-Godly values. (…) I am hesitating…. What would happen to us—did we betray Christ when we said, “We will defend Vukovar” or were we supposed to withdraw to Zagreb and then what? (…) I am hesitant to say if that [defense] is faithful to Christ’s message of peacemaking (…)[[595]](#footnote-595)

## 1.2.12. Putting the pieces together: The peacebuilding role of religious leaders during conflicts

In this section, we explored the scopes and limitations of religiously inspired peacebuilding during the war from the perspective of religious leaders. We could differentiate the three most relevant social limits: 1) the stronger presence of religion in the public space connected with the loss of control over sacred symbols, 2) fear for biological survival and loss of reputation, and 3) mass psychology of war and peer pressure. Supplementing these factors were three specific concerns of religious leaders that further limited their scope of action: 1) concern that their peace-talk during the war would be unconvincing, 2) pastoral care for the masses of newly converted believers with rudimentary religious educations, 3) concern that too direct and too strict criticism would totally undermine their ability to improve anything.

Far from platitudes that war is bad and peace is good, we have seen that concrete engagement with the difficulties of war often challenges religious leaders, making them resort to improvisation without any clear answers and strategies. There was certainly a *dissonance* between theological ideas of peace and non-violence, universal acceptance and benevolence, and practical difficulties associated with fears, concerns, and responsibilities. I have termed the strategy of overcoming this dissonance “pastoral optimization.” This principle is rather simple: to achieve the most within given limits. Of course, individuals always have very different perceptions of such limits. For some within the war, a limit was the possibility that they would be killed. For others, fear of loss of reputation among members of the same ethnic group was sufficient reason to be swayed. For still others, the only limit was transcendental justice, and they did not hesitate to voice criticism even at the risk of losing their lives.

Pastoral optimization had many forms. One became evident to me on an occasion when I was driving with Ljudevit, with whom I was acquainted before this project. He told me that he always ‘doses’ the criticism he gives. In paraphrase, he said something along the following lines: *If I said openly everything that I think, I would have a chance to say it only once, because people would not listen anymore*. In other words, he held that too direct a criticism of one’s own community would give critics a chance to label him a betrayer and thus delegitimize all his future statements. As a result, he takes care to use enough carrots and sticks, seeing that as an *optimal* strategy to change things for the better. I remembered this conversation later when I was re-reading participants’ explanations as to why they were not more open in their criticism of war crimes or why they still appeared at ceremonies that might have had nationalist connotations. The strategy was alwayssimilar—they were trying to optimize their influence by simultaneously maintaining closeness to their communities, viewing that as a form of some ‘measured’ criticism.

But how, we ask, did this strategy translate into concrete actions? First, it is necessary to clarify that pastoral optimization is a strategy used only by those who felt a *theological dissonance* between their ideas and possible actions. In every war, there are, of course, those religious leaders who do not see anything problematic in standing unapologetically behind their political leaders, no matter how cruel their actions. Therefore, pastoral optimization represents a need to overcome the troubles associated with the paradox of being sent as a peacemaker to the whole world and being concretely immersed within a particular community that committed smaller or greater crimes during the war. In practice, pastoral optimization during the conflicts appeared in three major forms:

1. *Preservation of certain moral distance towards war and killing, even in the most extreme circumstances*. We saw this practice among those interviewees who said that religious leaders should endeavor to remain as symbols of a different (transcendent) order, even in situations marked by division. This was visible, for instance, when Drago said that a religious leader should maintain such a demeanor that a soldier always knows that the religious leader is (at least in principle) against killing, even if assisting him in the trenches.
2. *Preservation of a different discourse*. Although there is a constant danger that talks about topics such as tolerance, peace, forgiveness, and spirituality can be seen as utterly unconvincing against the background of destruction and killing, it still seems a crucially important element of peacebuilding during the conflicts. Obviously, this cannot be done all the time and religious leaders need to find appropriate moments when it can resonate most strongly. Jakov mentioned such interventions during funerals or private talks. His story about the soldier who sought confession from a priest who did not promote war shows the importance of a different discourse and a different moral stance. Moreover, if religious leaders completely mimic the rhetoric’s of the war leaders, then there are no other institutions that can speak out with credibility about hope and justice, things that people value greatly.
3. *Spiritual and emotional assistance*. This category primarily comprises assistance with the existential anxiety that is particularly acute during the conflicts, when risk of death and destruction is imminent. A good example of this is individual spiritual counseling and even, on a broader level, the awakening of hope among people. In Kenan’s testimony, the reception of the war followed two extreme phases. After the initial denial, there was a period of desperation in which people felt that it would never end. Giving them some form of a “way out” from the despair constitutes an important contribution in preparing for the eventual peace. Here, religious leaders have to make tradeoffs between the necessity to stay faithful to their religious tradition, on which they ground their hope, and the risks of sounding too naïve or unconvincing.
4. *Criticism of crimes of their own group and misuse of religious symbols*. This is often difficult, given the risks for physical survival and reputation. It is nevertheless crucial for religious leaders to realize that such actions have lasting effects and that their full potential is visible only after the conflict. Those who were initially declared “betrayers” during the war often form the most valuable bridges between the communities once the conflict ends because they are living examples that one nation can never be painted with the same brush and that there are always individuals who are ready to side with the weak or defenseless. Secondly, differentiation between national symbols and religious symbols or, even more importantly, between religious symbols and crimes, is a way to ensure the legitimacy of religious communities as voices guided by principles that are higher than those of group solidarity. Since “criticism” might have connotations associated with distancing oneself from the community, in this case, it first and foremost implies reflexivity, a posture of involvement in the community life but without taking its rules, norms, and actions for granted. Thirdly, it implies invested interest in the community, i.e., the final aim of the “criticism” is not deprecation but the well-being of the community.
5. *Symbolic actions of solidarity and unity*. In order to exercise the role of a peacemaker, one does not need to confront political powers directly. Religious leaders have also at their disposal a repertoire of symbolic actions that are optimized to be significant but are not too provocative. An example can be a walk through a city with a representative of another faith, or simply staying in a city when the majority of others leaves. A good illustration for the latter was Petar, an older Franciscan who lives in Sarajevo. Towards the end of the interview, I asked him in what way did he consider himself to be a peacemaker. To my slight surprise, he recounted that he simply stayed in Sarajevo during the war. It took him, he said, a lot of spiritual struggle to stay there, chiefly because he had many chances to go abroad. Nevertheless, he views the decision to stay in very high esteem: “The crown of my life is that I stayed in Sarajevo as a Catholic priest, educating students and preaching to the community.”[[596]](#footnote-596)

The section on the importance of theological interpretation showed us that *pastoral optimization* would depend not only on a religious leader’s personality but also on the interpretive stance that the leader takes towards the religious tradition. Since violence most often does not seek justification in blatantly violent religious text, but—on the contrary—in texts on love and justice, it is also crucially important to find a theological language that would position peace truly in the center of their tradition.

In addition to those strategies, we should also add two additional roles of religious communities— humanitarian assistance and mediation in the resolution of conflicts. The first role is widely acknowledged. Religious communities often have the most developed distributive networks for humanitarian aid, and they are generally trusted as institutions that do not use those foreign sources to serve their own interests but are sincerely invested in helping people. Unlike many other NGOs, they are very rarely criticized for money laundering of humanitarian funds, and they remain involved with their communities even during the most severe conflicts. Jakov, who was involved in the work of Caritas, used that position to break the strict national barriers that were established by the logic of war. He insisted that they never differentiated between people according to nationality but shared their sources equally to Croats, Muslims, and Serbs.[[597]](#footnote-597) In that sense, he played the role of broker between communities. Moreover, since religious leaders are in touch with diverse social strata, they can also act as a connection between ordinary people and decision makers.

Finally, while in some other conflicts religious leaders can play the role of political mediators during negotiations (as it was the case with Mozambique), this type of engagement was absent in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Religious leaders nonetheless played at least the symbolic role of moral opposition by singing a common international declaration against the war, signed in November 1992.[[598]](#footnote-598) Of course, such high-profile activities are reserved only for those in the top hierarchical positions, while lower-level individuals still have at their disposal other joint activities but with less media attention.

In the next section, I will proceed from the period of the conflicts to the subsequent period when peacebuilding activities of religious leaders were conducted much less in response to direct existential threats and much more as *transformative* actions against the negative legacy of violence and division.

# 1.3. After the conflict

The chapters on memory, reconciliation, and forgiveness have offered insights into the peacemaking potential of religious leaders. In many ways, their role in those processes was related to non-exclusionary views of the Other, the former enemy. Importantly, religious leaders’ peacebuilding activities are subject to certain structural limitations—despite the fact that they operate under theologically universal views on humanity as a whole, they nonetheless work in specific communities with strong national ties. Thus, in the previous parts, we saw the frictions between *theological universality* and *pastoral particularity*.

Much of the previous discussion revolved around the *encounter* with the painful Other and the *bridging of internal and external dissonances*. Outlining the positive potentials of religious engagements, I at the same time warned against the *banality* of forgiveness and reconciliation under the cloak of universal acceptance that occurs whenever reconciliation or forgiveness is seemingly fulfilled through platitudes such as “of course we forgive,” “we are sorry for all crimes that might have occurred,” or “we desire peace and reconciliation for all.” Those and similar statements are most often just another way of preserving the status quo via promulgations that state intents but do not oblige anyone in any specific way. The other possibility, described as an encounter with the painful Other, required a much broader reading of one’s own history and the history of the other in a way that sees specific causes of pain and divisions. Hence, there was the second contrast between *abstract (universal) benevolence* and a *concrete encounter*.

When we speak about peacebuilding subsequent to conflicts, one thing is obvious—religious leaders cannot accomplish that alone. They can only contribute to it, together with policy makers, historians, lawyers, courts, cultural workers, intellectuals, and ‘ordinary’ people. At the same time, admitting and accepting the limits of one’s activities does not absolve religious leaders from action, nor does it give them a sabbatical until historians, courts, and other institutions have done their parts. In the end, peacebuilding is not a streamlined project with a unified schedule. Quite the contrary—it contains various activities, small and great, that eventually (and hopefully) converge together.

In the following section, I will explore some of those activities that the engagement of religion can enrich. Indeed, a significant amount of attention will be dedicated to the tensions between *universality* and *particularity*, as seen through the lenses of religious and national identity. Usually, such a discussion would be presented as a background story for peacebuilding. However, I will try to show that theological *engagement with identity*, in this case, is not just a preface but rather is itself a significant activity of peacebuilding.

## 1.3.1. Bosnian-Herzegovinian Bermuda triangle

The various post-conflict periods carry their specific challenges. These differ from wars insofar as no direct dangers threaten the physical existence of the population. Therefore, the issues at stake are not physical violence but, instead, their legacy, together with the practical and mental traces of the conflicts. These are not simpler to solve, however. “It is much easier to recover buildings and roads than human hearts,” stated Franjo, commenting on post-conflict challenges.[[599]](#footnote-599) The legacy of war is visible not only in destroyed building, infrastructure, a weakened economy, poverty, and divisions that are the consequences of protracted hostilities, but also in emotional distance, destruction of trust, absence of convictions that common life is possible, hardening of national and religious identities, and a general social climate of resignation or despair.

We noted that war left religious communities with specific problems—primarily the loss of control over religious symbols and narratives, as well as a reduced ability to speak out critically against the blatant crimes and misuses that took place in their communities or were committed by the members of their communities. Aside from that, war catalyzed solidification of religious and national identity, which led to precarious situations in which religious leaders had to *optimize* theological principles within practical constraints.

Identity has its bright aspects as well as its eclipses. It is an essential element of human existence, but it can also become an obstacle to a peaceful coexistence. In other words, the free expression of identity is a prerequisite for an encounter, but if the identity is itself too exclusive, it will prevent any possibility of being-together. Identity can be based on numerous forms of belonging, and it is not immediately apparent why religion and nationality should comprise two closely connected pillars of one’s identity. Thus, in order to make sense of what religion and nationality mean to the people of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and why they matter so much, a short detour is necessary. In what follows, I will try to show why the relationships between nationality and religion are much more complex than phrases such as “religion is above nationality” or “nationalism is bad” would lead us to believe.

There was one element of agreement among all my respondents—that religions have played an important historical role as generators and/or protectors of national identities. However, when I turned the question around and asked whether nations were also protectors of religious identity, responses were much more nuanced. The interviewees did not deny that, on the practical level, people felt more protected when their political leaders belonged to their own religion. However, the question had yet another layer, a theological one, and concerned whether proximity of national identity, political power, and religious identity had a positive or negative influence on religious life. To this, answers were often negative. Some of the previous examples demonstrated how proximity of political and religious spheres can be detrimental to religion because of the ‘profanization’ of its sacred symbols. Those wartime uses of religion were still, in no small degree, *external*—religious leaders now feel that political elites somehow co-opted religion for illegitimate purposes. However, it is also possible to approach the problem from the *internal* perspective of religious communities, asking whether strong proximity to national identity changed the very structure of their theological reasoning. In this second case, we do not deal anymore with something that happened outside the religious domain but deep within it.

Religious leaders who were critical of this link between the religious and the national saw it as a form of, metaphorically speaking, internal poisoning. An excellent example of that poisoning can be the ‘sacralization’ of land/territory which leads to theological reductionism. Let me illustrate the problem. Drago, a Franciscan from Mostar, lamented that the fight for territory is still the central struggle in Bosnia and Herzegovina: “Not the fight for better schools—we are far from that, or for something of a higher quality, but precisely for territory. People think ‘If I have my own enclosed territory, I will succeed in life.’ That, of course, leads to conflict. There is not so much space as we would want, but if we sat together and agreed, there would be enough.”[[600]](#footnote-600) He did not deny the importance of the territory but only criticized the excessive obsession with the territory that ultimately leads to neglect in all other spheres of life. Željko noticed that one of the negative effects of such absolutizing is reflected in religious life via reduction of eschatological hope to geographical categories:

[P]eople do not use the Gospel as guidance because here a nation occupies the place of God, especially a state, and that is best seen now: a state, a clean state, a monoethnic state or monoethnic entity, canton, or county—that is divinity, and everything should be sacrificed to it (…) Therefore, the eschatological hope descended. The socialist period with the Communist utopia of a classless society on earth was replaced by [the idea of] a clean territory, ‘our territory’ that would be emptied of others, where we would live, and everything would be ours. (…) The eschatological hope (…) descended into a national state, an ethnically pure state, and to achieve that state, one is ready to sacrifice even their own people.[[601]](#footnote-601)

Željko’s criticism went beyond the common humanitarian concerns related to ethnic cleansing because he also expressed his deeper theological concern over the effects of the obsession with ethnically clean territories. What Željko bemoaned was the fact that the “descent of eschatological hope” into the desire for an ethnically clean territory reduces the revolutionary potential of the hope itself; it weakens it by limiting its vision to the frontiers of a clean national state. To Željko, the problem was not too strong a religious optimism detached from reality but, to the contrary, that people satisfied their theological aspirations with the narrow goal of an ethnically clean state. When hope is linked to territory, broader theological visions of hope become perceived as unrealistic.[[602]](#footnote-602) The triangle of nation-religion-territory thus resembles the Bermuda triangle in which all other visions of the world disappear without a trace.

This triangle has the following sides: 1) the religion-nation side, influenced by the negative consequences of a historical development that has included exclusivism towards other groups and limitations of religious belonging to the national circle, 2) the nation-territory side, which has been influenced by the general development of nation-states in Europe but which has degenerated into projects of ethnic cleansing, and 3) the religion-territory side, strongly influenced by the experience of war, resulting in reduction of theological hope into earthly categories. (See: Scheme 4.3 in the Appendix)

## 1.3.2. Second skin: Challenges of identity

Novak described identity in an interesting way. He said that we are all born into an identity, which comprises a “second skin”[[603]](#footnote-603) covering our biological skin. This identity is constitutive of our being, something one cannot get rid of, something that enables life and protects it. At the same time, the image of a second skin is powerful and intriguing because we are left wondering about this skin’s nature and consistency —does it have different layers, and if so, how do they relate to one another; is there a “third skin” above it, and what would that consist of?

One layer of group identities in Bosnia and Herzegovina was undoubtedly created through the unification of religious and national narratives. Fra Ljudevit, a Franciscan from Western Herzegovina, explained the identities within the territories of Bosnia and Herzegovina in the following way:

We are, above all, marked by the religious dimension, and after the religious element, there comes the national dimension. Although the order is, for some people, reversed, so national comes first and then comes faith. (…) Those are the pillars on which it [identity] was developed. There are no others; there were no possibilities to grow up with different convictions. The identities of people who are believers are, of course, marked [by faith] entirely.[[604]](#footnote-604)

For him, religion and nationality were the two pillars of identity because they were, in his view, the only two symbolic systems available in which individuals could construct meaningful narratives about themselves. Historically speaking, there were other frameworks, including an imperial identity under, first, Ottoman rule and then later the Austro-Hungarian empire and a Communist identity during Second Yugoslavia. However, Ljudevit seemed to suggest that religious and national identities were the only two that had sufficient stability and appeal. That was especially true for religious identity, which was the only durable element in the otherwise rapid overturning of political systems. As Goran puts it:

Perhaps people’s national consciousness could not lean on anything else [besides religion], perhaps that is the strongest connection. One could have relied on the state, but our people did not always have a state, they were constantly suppressed. For some short periods, they all did have states, there were some ups and downs, but what saved them in the most difficult period, what saved some [elements of] national consciousness, at least I speak for Serbs, (…) was the Church, which played a big role in protecting the national identity through the faith life of individuals.[[605]](#footnote-605)

The views Ljudevit and Goran presented presuppose the decisive importance of religious identity in formation of national consciousnesses of the people in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The process, clearly, was not isolated from larger socio-cultural currents, such as the development of nation-states in Europe, beginning in the 19th century. According to Hrvoje, the merging of national and religious identities took place precisely in that period and, “until then, there was religious identity which contained national elements. Of course, religious communities were its main carriers, the main carriers of identity in general—of that which differentiates me from the Other, what constitutes my specificity, according to which I identify myself.”[[606]](#footnote-606) The “religious element that contained national elements” was, therefore, an embryonic version of later national consciousness.

Even though European national formation reached its peak in the 19th century, proto-versions of Bosnian-Herzegovinian national groups had been formed previously. Already in the Ottoman period, the administrative organization of the Empire in *millets* allowed for a certain degree of autonomy for separate confessional communities. Under the supreme Sultan’s rule, those communities were headed by their own religious leaders.[[607]](#footnote-607) Consequently, Muslims, Catholics, and Orthodox people in Bosnia and Herzegovina had already during the Ottoman period developed distinctive (and often antagonistic) group-identities. That meant that once the concept of “nation” solidified, it became useful to describe the already existing divisions based on confession. National belonging became, with time, so closely intertwined with religious belonging in the consciousness of people that they are still sometimes used interchangeably. Goran said that he heard any times that people use national and religious denominator interchangeably: “if you are Serbian, you have to be Orthodox. Of course, we know that, in essence, those things had nothing to do with each other.”[[608]](#footnote-608)

Ahmed explained that the Bosniak national identity was also grounded in a religious identity, but its official recognition came rather late, at the beginning of the 1990s. Initially, people in Bosnia and Herzegovina did not have an opportunity to declare themselves as Bosniaks since that category was not officially recognized. Until 1968, when the category Muslim (written with a capital M)[[609]](#footnote-609) became officially recognized as an ethnic group,[[610]](#footnote-610) people who were adherents of Islam in Bosnia and Herzegovina could have declared themselves as “Serbs of Muslim faith,” “Croats of Muslim faith,” or “Nationally undecided.” The term “Muslim” in the national sense was replaced in 1993 by the term “Bosniak.” Ahmed saw it in the following way:

[Bosniaks] in this territory were totally eliminated, not as a religious community, but as a non-existing people, as Undecided, which is not normal from the juridical angle—to say that you don’t know who you are, it is a form of rape. When in 1974 they were given the right to declare themselves, they were given an illogical label—while all the rest were declaring themselves by national labels, they were given a religious one [i.e., Muslims with the capital M]. To them, that was the closest label to identify with, to define themselves with. [That label] is acceptable from the perspective of faith, but it was unacceptable in the circumstances of that time (…) [It was] a term that was not placed within some ethnic or national state borders (…) In 1993. there was a new formation of Bosniak identity, and they [Muslims] now call themselves by the name Bosniak, which actually is a historical name. (…) [But] to every faithful Muslim, being Muslim is their principal definer. Every other can be used to the extent that it is necessary to maintain equal rights with others (…).[[611]](#footnote-611)

For Muslim religious leaders, the formation of national identity was similar to closing a *Gestalt*, answering the seemingly permanent open question of belonging to a politically defined group with a standing equal to two other large groups—Croats and Serbs. Still, even when the national label did not exist, it was a religious identity that preserved the distinctiveness of the group. Speaking about the generation of his father, Harun says: “That was the generation of Undecided, but religious elements protected [group belonging] (…). [T]hose who were more religiously grounded in Islam, they protected their national identity much better.”[[612]](#footnote-612)

Muslim-Bosniak identity also reflected a desire and a communal need to articulate themselves in their own terms, by phrases they deemed proper, as Armin explained, referencing the name of the language they wanted to call “Bosnian” and not “Bosniak” or “the language of the Bosniak people.”[[613]](#footnote-613) The difference might seem minor, but it caused boycotts and a four-year legal battle after a school in Srebrenica changed the name of a subject from “Bosnian language” to “Language of the Bosniak people.”[[614]](#footnote-614) Even though the second label can also be considered factually correct, Bosniaks tend to see it as an attack on their identity and, in the words of one parent who protested a similar decision from 2015, it was a decision that “insults our being, and we will not accept it.”[[615]](#footnote-615)

Religious and national identity are therefore closely intertwined because of their long history of joint development. Besides being the two most convincing frameworks to the vast majority of people, they were and still are an expression of the need for a group’s self-articulation and equality. Since religious identity is the older of the two, it is also perceived as a generator and protector of national identity. In the post-conflict phase, their ties were further strengthened through the experience of trauma which enhanced in-group solidarity.

### 1.3.2.1. Religious and national compatibilities

Even taking the historical circumstances into account, we are still left struggling with the question as to how inherently universal religions such as Christianity and Islam became so closely tied with the particular identities of ethnic groups or nations as they did in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The answer might lie at different levels of belonging. For virtually all my respondents, their religious and national identities were (at least in some form) compatible with each other. For one group of respondents, there was a synergic effect between the two. For instance, Ljudevit explained that “there are occasional conflicts between those two terms, but in principle, there are no [conflicts]. The national [aspect] defines your kinship, it is something where you belong as people, and the faith [aspects] develops you.”[[616]](#footnote-616) In other words, the national identity answers the question “What is the nearest large group I feel attached to?” while the religious identity answers the more fundamental questions of life, morality, etc. It is important to note that religious leaders indeed see those two elements as narratives of a different order. National identity was understood as something immediate, while religion was understood as something which gives answers to those questions beyond the scope of national identity—questions concerning morality, purpose, life, death, and the sacred. In that respect, religious identity rises above and beyond national identity, but here is the difficulty: although religion transcends a specific group, people experience the sacred almost exclusively within their national or ethnic circles. Very few people from Bosnia and Herzegovina had the chance to experience Catholicism, Orthodoxy, or Islam outside their ethnic groups, not to mention experience sacred in other religious traditions. That is, religion is *theoretically* above nation or ethnic group, but in *practical life* it is experienced almost exclusively inside them.

We could imagine the case where religion would be the answer to the question “What is the nearest large group to which I feel attached?” (i.e., religious affiliation would be the distinguishing characteristic of this group), but that answer would be so general that it would be difficult to reconcile it with people’s everyday experience. At the opposite extreme, in the case where national identity would be the answer to the question “What is my ultimate moral and spiritual orientation?”, the answer “Croat,” “Bosniak,” or “Serb” would be equally unsatisfactory. In general, it is not surprising that ethnic/national and religious identities tend to be closely intertwined and that religious leaders see them as supplementary answers to people’s basic questions. In other words, those two systems are seen (and throughout history have been) compatible. The same was not the case with Communism, which openly defined itself as incompatible with religion.

The prolonged presence of national and religious symbols, their compatibility with one another, and their durability have thus led to a practically automatic connection between the two. Several respondents, both Orthodox and Catholic, mentioned curious cases of individuals who called themselves Orthodox although they had never been baptized[[617]](#footnote-617) or made such comments as “In Russia, they are also Serbs,” meaning that there are Orthodox people in Russia.[[618]](#footnote-618) For them, Orthodoxy was something that came automatically, along with an ascription to Serbian identity. Both religious and national identity are in those cases simply inherited by birth. The same was true of many interviewees, who, at least occasionally, used the national and religious labels interchangeably. In that sense, the link between religious and national identity, which is by nature an arbitrary one, is perceived as automatic: *As soon as I answer the question of the group-belonging, I automatically get the answer of the religious belonging*.

This automatic link functions especially well when the answers given by a religious identity are either seen as the only ones that are available (i.e., there has been no contact with other traditions that could challenge them) or as “satisfactory enough” (i.e., religion and nationality inherited by birth give ‘satisfactory enough’ answers to the question of temporal belonging and afterlife, and, although some other interpretative system could exist, there is no need to explore them). In that sense, many people simply do not feel any need to challenge those elements of identity that they have ‘inherited’ by way of their birth or to problematize the links between them. Additionally, my respondents frequently admitted that most of their believers have traditionalist or even folkloristic religiosity, without any deep theological knowledge or desire to ponder upon theological questions. In speaking with Drago, I asked him how people manage to explain to themselves differences between theological teachings and their practices, to which he said:

Firstly, they did not do it. Questions are not asked. Here we have primarily biological questions, not theological. Very rarely does someone ask how things look from God’s perspective, from the perspective of the Gospel or Quran, where [in the Scriptures] we can find those places… (…) Things are reduced to biology: “We are endangered. We are going to disappear.” It is easier that way [without questioning]. Theological questions are far away from people.[[619]](#footnote-619)

In other words, people do not spend a lot of time thinking about theological questions and ruminating on the ultimate questions of life, including comparing the answers between different religious traditions. They are not continually inquiring about final truths but instead look for something that is satisfactory enough to explain the positions they currently hold.

### 1.3.2.2. Identity under threat

Drago’s last response introduces us to another vital element of religious-national synergistic links, and that is their solidification under external threats. Firstly, that was manifested as a resistance to the state-projects that aimed at establishing a single nation out of three distinct groups:

Many people ask why national and religious identities are so closely tied and why it is not acceptable here that someone is a Serbian Catholic, or Serbian Muslim, Orthodox Croat, Muslim Croat, or Orthodox Bosniak. Perhaps the answer lies in the continuity of, so to speak, forceful imposition and creation of one single nation. We had here in Bosnia and Herzegovina the first attempt by the Austro-Hungary to create a Bosnian-Herzegovinian nation (…) Then we had the Yugoslav movement, an attempt of creating a [single] Yugoslav nation, both in its monarchical form [during the Kingdom of Yugoslavia] and in the form of so-called liberal Communism [during Communist Yugoslavia]. (…) One can also mention (…) the Turkish [Ottoman] empire when the one who accepted Islam became a Turk automatically. Perhaps it has its roots there, and it continued in Austro-Hungary, through Yugoslavia, and into today.[[620]](#footnote-620)

The fortification of a religious-national identity seemed to be exceptionally strong during Communism, which adopted a negative stance towards both faith and pre-Yugoslav nations. Under those circumstances, these two melded and evolved, in combination, into a form of protest-identity. Ljudevit explained that visible religious signals, such as acceptance of the priest who came to bless the house, were, in Yugoslavia, a sign of a distinctive belonging: “Meetings with a friar, a [friar] coming to bless the house— those were significant at that time, in the period of Communism. The coming of a friar to your house was in the same way a public sign of to whom you belonged and in what you believed.”[[621]](#footnote-621)

Secondly, besides constituting resistance to nation-creating projects, the war itself created divisions along religio-ethnic lines which effectively solidified the connection between the two, which was, in addition, fed by hatred towards the outsiders and aggravated by an apparent lack of knowledge of both national and religious traditions: “Our identity was chipped, damaged,” starts Bojan, and continues:

When such an identity gets shaken, it finds its support in hatred. Because if you attack me now, me who says ‘I am Orthodox’ but don’t have a clue what that means, I do not have any other way of defending myself but by attacking you (…) When an individual or people more broadly are not secure in something, they look for support; they feel a need to defend their identity with hatred. Of course, you have variants [here] where national and religious identities are completely equated, [and] many stereotypes (…) For half a century that wasn’t a matter of conversation. From such [situations in] Bosnia and Herzegovina, we fell into a war, a horrible war. When that war ended, we started to discover the essences of faith; we started to realize what that faith that I have was supposed to mean. [We started to discover] what was a state, what was the Other, and what were the ways to order all those things. We have historical discontinuity that influenced the religious identity. If we lived in some other countries, perhaps that would not be so important. But we live in the Balkans where that is very important. Traditionally, originally, we used to say ‘we are what we are,’ but we did not have any knowledge what that meant.[[622]](#footnote-622)

The construction of identity, in short, was a defensive reaction against external threats, but as Bojan described, it was a superficial reaction since people generally did not possess any profound knowledge of the basic tenets of their traditions. When those seemingly secure but inherently shallow identities became shaken due to the war, they evoked violent reflexes, while the perception of external threat led to stronger inner cohesion. Father Jakov explains the link in the following way: “Both religious and national identity were feeding and protecting each other, because of the constant danger.”[[623]](#footnote-623) In the Catholic Church, that led to a specific mentality which he described as a “Church-fortress”:

We used to live in a model of the Church-fortress that had to be coherent (…) The Church in our territories had to be a fortress, had to remain internally coherent, to protect itself from external enemies that wanted to destroy her. Take just those five centuries under the Ottoman empire—Those who were not [coherent], they fell off and accepted Islam, following the path of least resistance, perhaps not even by force.[[624]](#footnote-624)

While one could find historical factors to explain the solidification of identities under direct external threat, important to note is that the absence of direct violence did not mean the cessation of a *perceived* danger. In Hrvoje’s view, that link between religious and national identity was natural, but it perverted itself into something negative in that moment when protection of identity transitioned into exclusion, or nationalism, resulting from obsessive protectiveness. He thus criticized the prolongation of the siege mentality, even when there were *de facto* no longer external threats.[[625]](#footnote-625)

Marijan describes the prolongation of the “fortress Church model” in the following way: “We priests, many of us, do not fare well in this post-Communist period (…) We have learned that our churches, parish offices, sacristies, parishes, monasteries, seminaries, are supposed to be bastions of not only faith but also Croatanness.”[[626]](#footnote-626) He asserted that, over many decades, the Church was the only institution that was capable of curating the national heritage. However, when that function was no longer needed, the Church preserved the habit of protecting the national identity, which, according to Marijan, is a much easier task than proclaiming the real message of Christianity:

There is a Croatian state now; there are institutions that take care of Crotianness and Croats. That is being systematically taken care of. The Church does not need any longer to be the bastion of Croatianness. Now the state takes care of that, the Croatian state, the Republic of Croatia, that is its exact purpose (…) However, we priests, we got used to waving flags, and we cannot break that habit. That obligates us to less. It is easier to wave flags and say “We Croats, we Croats” and “God and Croats.” That is easier and obligates us to less than to say “All human beings are brothers. Forgive us as we forgive. Do not lead us into temptation,” and so on.[[627]](#footnote-627)

As Marijan’s response indicates, the Church’s ‘siege mentality’ did not develop without reason. People experienced suppression, leading them to seek justice and recognition. The Catholic Church was, for decades, the protector of Croatian national identity because it was the only sufficiently organized institution which could undertake such a project. However, the same characteristics that made her the protector during previous times became a preventive cause for a more outreaching mission—the proclamation of the message of faith beyond the comfort zone of the national or ethnic community.

Another factor that contributed to this ‘fortress’ mentality was the fear of assimilation via inter-marriage. Since the two are, in the minds of people, virtually indistinguishable, they interpret mixed marriages as a change in ethnic belonging:

Even when I have a wedding where a Serbian Orthodox man is marrying a Croat Catholic woman and they decide to do it in the Orthodox Church, I do not insist that the bride change her faith. But that is understood tragically here, and her friends say: ‘She became Serbian.’ Even if she wanted voluntarily to become Orthodox instead of Catholic, the logic would require that she be Orthodox Croat. Here nationality is so much more important than religion, and religion is the confirmation of the national, so that they say: ‘She became Serbian’ Of course, it is the same the other way around, if a Serbian woman marries a Catholic, they automatically cross her out [exclude her] because ‘she became Croatian.’[[628]](#footnote-628)

When religious leaders who used to live in ethnically mixed places recalled their childhood, they tended to speak about a more or less harmonious life—they were in contact with others, but they were still aware of the differences. Identities were liminal: although there were a lot of contacts, even sincere cordiality, there were still some thresholds around institutions that were kept endogenous—marriage being the prime example. From his childhood in central Bosnia, Miroslav recalls many contacts among the various other ethnic groups, but he says that, at the same time, children were warned not to enter into romantic relationships with members of different religions.[[629]](#footnote-629) Similarly, Ljudevit remembers the following:

**A:** [P]people were saying that it is better to get married to someone of their own faith than with Muslims or Orthodox, to look for a spouse in your own flock. That is what I remember from childhood.

**Q:** Why was it so? Why do you think people were saying that?

**A:** They were saying that because people wanted in some way to protect themselves from assimilation, from the change of faith. It the way to protect one’s faith identity.[[630]](#footnote-630)

Religious and ethnic distance concerning marriage was thus inculcated in people from childhood. In this sense of ‘respectful distance,’ there was little difference between religions. Although mixed marriages are tolerated and neither religious tradition approves forced conversion through marriage, they are seen as impractical.[[631]](#footnote-631) When asked his opinion of mixed marriages, Hamza, for instance, replied: “Man, they are a complication.”[[632]](#footnote-632) In his opinion, the most prominent stumbling block within mixed marriages was apparently the children’s education. He observed that such marriages always require painful compromises—in which way the children would be educated, under which religious precept, and even the choice of name is a difficult decision in such situation.[[633]](#footnote-633) Additionally, people who enter mixed marriages are not viewed as bridges between two traditions but, rather, as not sufficiently rooted in either tradition. That is the reason why people, even those who are generally open to cooperation and dialogue, such as Hamza and fra Luka, still prefer ‘clear’ solutions of families where both spouses belong to the same religious tradition.

It is worth noting that the “fortress Church” model and fear of assimilation can also constitute a mobilization tool for violence. Ljudevit, who suggested that fear of assimilation is rooted in the area’s history of persecution, recognized later in our conversation that collective fear of assimilation and the perception of threat can equally become an instrument of violence:

**Q:** Another question related partially to identity, and partially to violence. What is, according to you, the main source of conflicts nowadays in the world?

**A:** The source of conflicts is, above all, [geo-political/economic] interest, and it was always like that (…) By arousing passionate feelings in them, they ‘harness’ people to work for their goals. In that sense, I think that interest has always started wars, insatiability, and desire to overpower others. You can achieve that by mobilizing religious and national [sentiments], so that people think “we are under threat, and we have to do that to protect our identity.”[[634]](#footnote-634)

To conclude, the solidification of the national and religious identity within the area was influenced by the historical experience of resistance to imposed *common* identities and to attempts at assimilation. The strongest contributing factor in the recent period was the war, when fears of assimilation or extinction were used to create propaganda. In turn, those fears produced violent reactions towards outside groups. The reactions were vehement, partly because of insecurity in inherited national and religious identity, neither of which was openly discussed, reflected upon, or critically assessed during the half century preceding the war. Consequently, one had an impression that the participants in the war belonged to three entirely different groups, cultures, and traditions, obliterating numerous similarities between them and their histories of mutual exchanges and contacts.

The final product of fears and conflicts are identities that are *closed* in a double sense: they are closed towards other groups (i.e., they resist having contact with them), and they rest on solidified links between ethnic/national and religious identity (resisting self-criticism and re-evaluation of those links). The following section will be dedicated to exploration of the ways to move from *closed* to *open* identities. But before that, it is important to clarify one more detail. The terms *closed identity* refers primarily to group-identities; it is a description of a dominant group ethos. However, this does not mean that all members of the group function on their individual levels in the same ‘closed’ way. As a matter of fact, experience and ‘performance’ of identity can vary greatly, depending on the circumstances.

Even during the war, when group-identities were sharply contrasted, divisions were not clearcut at the inter-personal level. Jakov’s story is full of elements illustrating those differences. He was born and raised in a town in northwestern Bosnia where the population was ethnically mixed. In 1992, after occupation by Bosnian Serbs, he was forced to flee and assumed a new pastoral position in central Bosnia, where he also distributed humanitarian relief through Caritas. Sometime later, Muslims from his hometown also came as refugees in the new city where he worked. Meanwhile, however, the Muslim-Croat conflict broke out, creating a situation in which three blocks warred. However, despite those group animosities, Jakov felt solidarity and a deep connection with the people from his town: “[At that time] Muslims were fighting against Croats, but Muslims from [hometown censored] were expelled by Serbs, and we met there in Muslim-majority territories in central Bosnia around [city censored]. And now, I am…. You are afraid of those Muslims [who were fighting], but you feel blood-bound with these [who came as refugees]. It seemed to me, as if I saw my closest blood relative. (…) They came, and we collaborated, we simply collaborated.”[[635]](#footnote-635)

Jakov’s experience shows that even in the phase of direct conflicts there was still a feeling of territorial identity, a sense of belonging to the same city, a feeling of strong relationships. While Jakov feared Bosniaks, who were fighting Croats, because the conflict was simply defined and felt in those terms at the moment, he could still, on a personal level, feel closeness with individual people who had suffered the same fate as he had. While the higher level of ethnic conflicts foreclosed the ability to communicate and collaborate, the lower level of interpersonal solidary allowed him to perceive Bosniaks from his hometown as blood relatives. Of course, those two levels were not independent, and Jakov went on to describe the inner perplexity that he felt.

One of the reasons why tragedies have such deep consequences is the loss of faith at the interpersonal level. Kenan, for instance, described the situation in which he alleged that his Serbian neighbors knew what was going to happen but refused to warn others. They just left their home one day without a trace, creating a fracture of distrust.[[636]](#footnote-636)

Damjan suggested that the reconstruction of relationships will have to start primarily, not at the level of ethnic groups, but rather from the level of the individual and of personal relationships: “It is the individual level that gives me hope. I see that in every step—from a taxi driver and shop assistant to friends that I have here.”[[637]](#footnote-637) He said he feared the ability of political mobilization to put all people in the same basket, as if they all thought the same way.

On the inter-personal level, it is much easier to combine different forms of belonging across ethnic and religious lines, e.g., regional identity, common cultural preferences, tastes, and so on—nothing prevents people mixing their group identity (religion, national, or any other) with any of the many other forms of identities. Zaim emphasized this when he said that we live in a period when individuals originate from many identities at the same time. While the prevailing identity-framework of the 19th century was the concept of the nation, identities in the current day and age are, in Zaim’s view, pluriform.[[638]](#footnote-638)

Therefore, one step towards effective peacebuilding is through rediscovering the importance of the individual level, which is already strongly present in religious traditions. Although religious communities create the surrounding for faith, its acceptance and living are always personal in nature. Christianity, Damjan said, “never succeeded as a collective movement, it always shined through individuals.”[[639]](#footnote-639) He later added that the examples of individuals show that “it is possible to rise above ethnic chains.” [[640]](#footnote-640) In his view, people who manage to do that “are the ideal of Christianity (…) I know examples from my personal life (…), and I am deeply convinced that it is possible to break those chains and act in a truly Christian manner.”[[641]](#footnote-641)

An important grounding for such an approach from the Islamic perspective can be the virtue of moderation, which Zaim interpreted as one of the central characteristics of Islam. In his view, it includes moderation towards God, oneself, and the other. The effects of moderation are twofold: firstly, it prevents people from overt certainty that they know God’s intentions (*contra* radical extremism); secondly, moderation towards oneself and the Other serves as a correction for exclusivism.[[642]](#footnote-642)

However, still important to note is that an emphasis on individuals does not mean negation of the importance of group belonging. It just aims at achieving the right balance between “ethnic chains” (ethnic absolutism) and atomization (complete detachment from the community). Now, we will turn to the question of how religious leaders can contribute to transformation of closed group-identities to open ones.

## 1.3.3. Playing marbles: Peacebuilding by reconstructing identities

The previous discussion illustrated both the importance of identities and their dangers. My respondents did not adhere to some binomial distribution of those who were *pro-strong-national-identity* versus *non-national universalists*. The reality was different—those who spoke critically about the dangers of nationalism did not deny the importance of national identity, culture, and tradition. Instead, they attempted to find the right mode of connecting the two, which is not exclusive. Jakov was perhaps the best example of someone who was proud of his Catholic and Croatian identity but at the same time critical of nationalism, honest about the multiple facets of identity in which a neighbor feels like a blood relative, and not threatened by the expressions of other people’s identities.

One of my starting hypotheses, before embanking on my field work, was the following: The more religious leaders are attached to their national identities, the less openness to other ethnic and religious groups they would tend to exhibit. Although my intuition was not entirely wrong, the situation was, as usual, much more complicated.

First, the hypothesis could be misleading if interpreted in such a way that attachment to national identity is considered to be negative and detrimental to expression of genuine faith. Such a conclusion could come from the reasonable assumption that the reformist potential of monotheistic religions lies in their universalist outlook, operating outside the limits of nations and ethnic communities. After hearing about the many constraints that attachment to a national group represents to believers, it could seem that the situation would be much better without that attachment. However, recalling the historical eras in which the idea of Latin Christendom caused disrespect towards indigenous cultures in newly colonized territories points to the hidden violence of universalism. Tarik drew my attention to the fact that the young Bosnian-Herzegovinian men that go to fight in Syria are not doing that because they are nationalist but precisely because they *lack* any attachment to their own particular tradition in favor of an alleged religious universalism.[[643]](#footnote-643) Respect and appreciation for the local context, in this case, would be an antidote to the absolutism of universalist violence.

Furthermore, the articulation of national identity was for many people a way to reconnect with their traditions and to have a sense of basic equality. Interestingly, Ahmed compared identities to the children’s game with marbles—when everyone has a marble, you also want one.[[644]](#footnote-644) I realized later how the playful image of a child who wants to have a marble in order to play with others is a strong metaphor expressing the need to possess something ‘of your own,’ but not in a way that would separate you but to be included in the game with the other children. Behind the desire for having, knowing, and expressing an identity, there is the desire for basic equality and respect. But, as always, the game can go horribly wrong—marbles can be broken, stolen, or damaged, leading to quarrels and disputes.

Secondly, my initial hypothesis was overly simplistic because it assumed that religious leaders exhibit the same pattern of behavior related to national and religious identity in all situations of life. This also had to be corrected. Tomislav, who is very proud of his Croatian identity, provides, perhaps, the best example for this. He narrated an interesting episode that occurred when foreign observers came to his office for a conversation. Tomislav lives in a city with a mixed, mostly Bosniak and Croatian population, where occasional struggles between the two communities still occur. His visitors assumed that he was simply a nationalist and offered their advice on how to improve inter-ethnic relations in the city. Soon after his conversation with these guests began, a Muslim woman with a child came to Tomislav’s doors, asking for a favor. He pointed out that he had guests, but they indicated that he should speak with her. She then asked him to bless her son, who had been having unrestful dreams. Tomislav responded that he did not wish to create problems for her since she was a Muslim, and yet she insisted. Upon receiving a blessing, she said shyly that she did not have anything to eat, and Tomislav immediately gave her some money. Since the translator had continued to interpret what was happening in the room, the visitors expressed surprise:

There was no more talk. They closed everything [notebooks] and said: “We cannot believe this. If you were setting this up, you could not have done a better job. We are really in shock that a Muslim woman came to you. Some Muslims complain that you hate everything that is Muslim from its origins, and you received her this way. And she asked your blessing, holy water, money to have a dinner, and you responded in such a way.” I said to them: “You see, you were here now, but it is not different [in other days]. An Orthodox man came to me yesterday. His woman has cancer, and I gave him my 200 Marks [currency], and I also did not have enough (…)’”[[645]](#footnote-645)

Tomislav certainly does not shy away from expressing his national identity publicly. The media sometimes present him as a hardline nationalist. But, as we could see, public image and interactions on the interpersonal level with members of other communities can differ greatly.

As shown by previous examples, taking pride in one’s own national identity need not be opposed to respect for other people’s identities, and it is much more difficult to think in terms of black-and-white images on the abstract level of communities than on the interpersonal level of encounters with the real members of different communities. It would thus be better to rephrase the question of identity and religious belonging in the following way: *under which circumstances and in which form can construction of a national and religious identity become a motor of peace instead of conflict.*

As Zaim already suggested, the main challenge is one of moderation. Speaking of negative and positive attachment to national identity, Franjo distinguished between haughtiness and pride. Haughtiness is, for him, always derivative; it constructs itself by degrading the other, while pride stands on its own feet. Accordingly, nationalism is dangerous when it builds itself at the expense of the other, i.e., when it rests on haughtiness rather than pride.[[646]](#footnote-646) Blago, on the other hand, distinguished between nationalism and chauvinism, in that nationalism denotes a love for one’s nation without hatred towards another’s nation, whereas chauvinism signifies a form of elitism and exclusivity that denies the value of other nations.[[647]](#footnote-647) Blago’s distinction resembles the one often made between patriotism and nationalism, which Ferid pointed to.[[648]](#footnote-648)

When attempting to find a means to the construction of identity which is also conducive to peace, we are thus navigating between the Scylla of closed and destructive identities and the Charybdis of vague and abstract universalisms. Both of them imply some form of violence. In charting the course between the two, I will focus on the particular contributions that religious leaders can make. Those activities can be broadly named as peacebuilding through reconstruction of a group’s identity on two main axes: 1) internal work with their own religious and national/ethnic groups and 2) external engagement with other groups. Those two axes will then be sub-divided into the following activities:

* Internal work: 1) stabilizing identity, 2) fighting prejudices, and 3) changing theological horizons from closed to open identity
* External work: 1) enriching identity through dialogue and 2) allowing for full expression of identity

### 1.3.3.1. Stabilizing identity

For Tarik, comfort with one’s own identity is required for engaged dialogue. New generations, he said, will possess a well-established self-understanding, of both their national and religious traditions, and that internal stability will provide the basis for better understanding in the future.[[649]](#footnote-649) His position was that insecurity with respect to identity leads to inner and external conflicts. Sead shared a similar conviction, opining that fears from the Other and different stems from being insecure in one’s own identity:

I teach my children that a church is God’s house, that they should be respectful when passing by it, that they can enter it and should not be afraid of what they will see there. There is no reason to be afraid—that only means that you are insecure about what you are. If you are not secure and if you do not have that inner peace and conviction that you are on the right path, then a hundred crosses or hundreds of [crescent] moons or minarets around you will be useless.[[650]](#footnote-650)

It might initially sound counterintuitive to say that a stronger grounding in one’s own identity increases one’s openness to others. Keeping in mind the previous discussion, we can see that stabilization has several implications: first, it means having a certain mental security. We could see this in the case of Bosniaks who spoke with regret about having to use the label “Undecided” for their national identity. Moreover, stabilization of identity means a security that comes with abandoning a siege mentality; it denotes a certain confidence that this identity will not be forcefully taken or lost through assimilation by another group or nationality. In that respect, stabilization is the opposite of fortification, which requires erecting walls in order to remain safe. In place of a form of safety arising from isolation, stability comes from maintaining a dialogue or contact with the others.

Religious leaders can certainly constitute an important factor in the stabilization of a group’s religious identity. The position of religious leader includes a thorough education in religious principles and also demonstrates that inner spiritual security is not as dependent on access to political power as it is to a feeling of confidence and familiarity with the relevant tradition. One interesting phenomenon that I observed during the field work for this project was the positive experience derived from being a minority. The vast majority of people who live as a religious minority said that this status confers significant theological advantages, regardless of the particular administrative difficulties associated with it (since organizing things is much easier in places with more believers). The advantages associated with minority status are due to the fact that it causes people to engage more reflectively with their tradition, instead of taking it for granted. Thus, being in contact with ethnic and religious Others confers benefits conducive to self-discovery and, potentially, stabilization of one’s inner core.

### 1.3.3.2. Fighting prejudice

Another important work on the plane of identity formation is deconstruction of prejudice, which views the Other as an enemy and views all members of the out-group as more or less the same: “Every day I tell children [in the school] ‘do not hate, not all Serbs and Croats are the same, good people are good people (…)’ I ask children: ‘Don’t you think that God created six billion and even more people for some reason? God did not create only me or only Muslims. There are reasons for that [plurality]. God was the one who gave that, dear Allah.’”[[651]](#footnote-651) As Damjan already hinted, the fighting of prejudice is correlated with the belief in individuals rather than in collectives.

One way in which religious leaders advance towards this goal is by encouraging their constituents to participate in inter-group meetings. That activity *ad intra* constitutes important preparation for activities *ad extra*—real encounters with the Others. Since social distance is frequently transmittable from one generation to another, this is especially important for younger people, who need exactly that kind of preparation and encouragement.

Goran in that sense says: “I am a witness of young people confessing that they broke some prejudices towards the Ohers during interreligious dialogues. They say, ‘thanks to socializing with them, I broke some prejudices, and I found a friend in that Other who is not of my faith and my nation.’”[[652]](#footnote-652) One of his colleagues works in a school that has a system “two schools under one roof,” meaning that children and teachers follow two special national programs with almost no mutual contacts, despite being in the same building. In this school, a teacher told Goran, children walk past one another without greeting each other. Once they go on an excursion together, they realize that it is possible to be together and talk to each other.[[653]](#footnote-653) Ferid argued that such a system, by itself, creates prejudices, the ill effects of which a lot of energy is needed to counteract. He illustrated this with the example of his children, prefacing his answer with a quote from a Saudi colleague, who was educated to nourish very exclusionary attitudes:

I will pass on to you a story from a friend of mine from Saudi Arabia; he is a great friend and colleague of mine. When he came here to Bosnia for the first time (…), he said something that is very dangerous. He said: “We were taught from childhood that only those with a Saudi passport would enter paradise.” Look at that; it means “all others are wrong, only we are right.” And what is that if not faith in service to politics, to a king, or to whomever you want (…) Dear Stipe, I have tried so hard here in [city censored] to inculcate in my children that they should not live with prejudice, but [prejudices are] simply imposed [on us] (…) My children go to a school that uses the ‘two schools under one roof’ model and this system separates them into ‘we’ and ‘they,’ and [the children] grow up that way. How to fight against that, how to tell them that this is not right (…)?[[654]](#footnote-654)

Ferid thus uses his intimate family circle to plant the seed of a different way of thinking, encouraging his children who are schooled separately from Croatian children to fight prejudice and live free of them. Family education and education of children through religious education programs are thus two important modes for fighting prejudice and division available to religious leaders. Another practical way of performing the same task is organizing visits to religious objects that belong to another faith:

When I was in [place censored], I used to take every generation of high school graduates to the largest mosque in the city, with the approval of the mosque’s imam, and he would provide them an hour of religious education there (…) I think that my graduates accepted that education gladly and were happy to receive it. Many of them told me that that was their first time in a mosque (…) That can be a way of getting to know the Other, because once you meet the Other, you see that everything is not so dark as you think.[[655]](#footnote-655)

Even simple activities can provide a means of practical peacebuilding via fighting prejudice and dissolving fears. They are especially effective when supported by an education that views plurality in a positive way. For making the step in that direction it is necessary for religious leaders to develop a firm theological base, an argumentation that explains why plurality is not merely an fact of life but something that carries its inherent value.

### 1.3.3.3. Theological foundations for the opening of closed identities

The path towards the stated goal comprises three primary activities that constitute the theological basis for opening closed national and religious identities:

1. Demonstrating that plurality is providential, i.e., that it is not just an accident but a desired part of the created world (the theoretical basis);
2. Learning from the positive experiences of plurality (the experiential and practical basis);
3. Reconstructing the theological horizon from exclusive electiveness to participative commonalities (the synthetic step).

These will be presented and discussed below.

#### 1.3.3.3.1. Providential plurality

What I say “providential plurality,” I have in mind the theological principle that views plurality not just as a matter of personal preference or convenience but as a theological principle encoded in the texture of creation. In other words, plurality is not just an accidental fact of the world, which could otherwise be homogenous, but an intentional aspect of the whole created reality. Discovering this theological principle can be an important stepping stone towards justifying positive heterogeneity among nations and peoples.

According to a view held by Sead, the Islamic revelation, even on the structural level, demonstrates an acceptance of plurality. He stressed that Qur’anic messages addressed not only to Muslims but also to other groups of people, including humanity as a whole: “[T]here are so many important messages (…) God addresses not only to Muslims but also to other humans, believers, members of other faiths (…), and even unbelievers. God addresses all and sends a message to all. And if God sends a message to all, then [in that way] he gave a message to me that I have to live with them [with many].”[[656]](#footnote-656) Even before reading the particular content of these theological messages, the plurality of addressants led him to the conclusion that he, as a religious servant, must accept that plurality is something that was meant to be.

Difference is a mystery, a secret language of creation that needs to be learned, not destroyed, suggested Ahmed. Like Hamza, Ahmed focused more on the contents that directly address plurality as something irreducible and as part of a plan of God’s intention to bring people together:

Mystery in difference! We humans tend towards sameness, but God bases the mystery of life and the mystery of social relationships on differences. God said: “We created you from one man and one woman, and divided you into different nations and tribes so that you can know each other.” Therefore, a difference needs to be a reason for us getting to know each other and not for separating us, that is, the difference should be a reason for connection, not division. (…) God says in the Qur-an: “If I wanted to, I could have created all people to be followers of one faith.” (…) [So then,] how can one assume the right to force someone else to be different or to be the same? There is no place for such behavior, no place for force; there is no place for sameness in the sense of all people being identical. We cannot do that because, had God wanted it, God would have done so.[[657]](#footnote-657)

Bogdan found a similar principle in Christianity. His positive view of plurality connects the story of the Tower of Babel and the New Testament’s views on unity. In that respect, he spoke about two forms of unity—one which he understood as natural and another one as false and unnatural. The narrative of the Tower of Babel, in his view, tells the story of an *unnatural unity*, which results from the hubris of equating unity with all-powerfulness. On the other hand, Bogdan noted, the New Testament achieves unity without removing any specificities regarding nations. The unity present there is a more fundamental form of unity based on a common mission, not a common appearance: “[W]hen people wanted, in a forceful, violent way, to come closer to God by building the Tower of Babel, God mixed their languages and blessed them as different, and He sent to them, [while they were still] different, his Only-Born Son to show them a way to become God-in-Election, in a natural way, human-divine-divine-human way.”[[658]](#footnote-658)

These positive theological views of plurality can help religious leaders develop a justification for refusing zealotry and appreciating differences. They can serve as a doctrinal “protection” from suggestions that other faiths or nations are something that ideally should melt into a single model of living. When plurality is understood not as a historical accident but as an intended form of creation, it carries a much greater weight, and its destruction implies destroying creation as such, acting against God’s will.

#### 1.3.3.3.2. Positive experience of plurality

Aside from doctrinal sources, a positive assessment of plurality stemmed from the experience of living in a religiously heterogenous country. Muslim respondents who had a chance to live in a homogeneous religious context (e.g., Saudi Arabia) still stressed their strong preference for the local, mixed context of Bosnia and Herzegovina:

**A:** I lived there [in Saudi Arabia] for seven years, and my children were born there. [While there,] I had practically everything I needed to have a good life. Stipe, to be honest, I had everything, but [at the same time] I had nothing. I came back here in 2003 to live and work because of something that is hard to define using ordinary words—because of *that* which Bosnia has. It has something that does not exist anywhere else. Now trying to answer that question… it is difficult to put emotion into words; when it is honest, hidden, profound, it is difficult to translate (…)

**Q:** Where does that specific attractiveness lie? On the one hand, Saudi Arabia is an entirely Islamic country, with a different legal framework. Here, on the other hand, the situation is much more heterogeneous.

**A:** That spirit… That atmosphere… The war created a lot of harm, but it did not manage to kill that spirit! It did not manage [to kill it]![[659]](#footnote-659)

I asked Hamza whether he would prefer to live in a predominantly Muslim country, under Islamic law, or in a heterogeneous place such as Bosnia and Herzegovina. He responded: “I like it more this way. God made it this way… look at this world how big it is!” [[660]](#footnote-660) He also referred to the Qur’anic passage, which says that Allah created different nations so that they may know each other. “Otherwise,” Hamza says, “we would be clones”[[661]](#footnote-661)

This is where it became clear how the attachment to a land, to a particular culture, or to a tradition does not need to be a negative thing. Especially if there is already something in that experience which demonstrates the possibility of a non-threatening pluralism, then the lived experience can be a hermeneutical lens for reading theological sources under a different light. Petar generally said that the source of his hope is the belief in God’s providence, and one of the elements of that providence is the multiculturalism of the country he lives in. For him, multiculturalism is not a coincidence, but rather something providential, something that must have its reason in God’s will.[[662]](#footnote-662) In a similar way, Hrvoje expressed the conviction that the very land he lives in represents some value, some paradigm that needs to be preserved despite its vulnerability to misuse:

I have some fundamental conviction in the value of some paradigms that are typical for Bosnia and Herzegovina—the multiculturalism [prevalent there] that has so many times been misused and wrongly interpreted. I believe it is a richness, an opportunity. I was always thought that those milieus that are heterogeneous, or mixed, are intellectually and spiritually fruitful (…) One should retain them; one should fight for them and promote them without giving up.[[663]](#footnote-663)

Living in a plural context is also a positive inspiration for more profound reflection about the value of one’s own tradition. Husein, an imam in a Catholic-majority Herzegovinian town, said that living with members of a different religion is an advantage in confirming one’s faith, in contrast to the quasi-automatic acceptance of “I live that way, because [people in] my surrounding live that way.”[[664]](#footnote-664) This was the case also with Mladen, a Catholic priest in an Orthodox-majority region, who said that he feels enriched because he has met individuals from different traditions. In his view, people are often burdened with collective categories. In a mono-ethnic or mono-religious community, inertia makes it is easier to be drawn to a community, whereas, in heterogeneous communities, people strive more to show what is significant and beautiful in their tradition.[[665]](#footnote-665)

### 1.3.3.4. ‘Natural’ plurality

It could be somewhat frustrating to the reader to attempt to understand what exactly the “specificity,” “spirit,” or “paradigm” of Bosnia and Herzegovina practically mean. It is equally challenging to articulate the answer clearly, and, in the concluding theological chapter, I will try to reflect more deeply upon it, putting an emphasis on the concept of “komšiluk.” My interviews were far from nostalgic ruminations about the sentimental values of the land or of local society. As we saw previously, many questions were related to war and its effects, making it impossible to ignore the negative aspects of the inter-communal life in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Despite all that, usually, towards the end of the interviews, I had the habit of asking two rather broad questions—one concerning the specificities of the land they lived in and another one about hope. The answer to the first was very often preceded by a period of reflective silence, as if there was something important, strong, and yet still inexplicable, which persists despite all the conflicts and hatreds. Since I was also a local, the interviewees felt that we shared some mutual understanding that did not need to (or that could not) be fully explicated. It seemed that there was something challenging in that *chiaroscuro* experience that could not be expressed other than through confusing opposites of light and dark. After the interview, in what I can now only recall from memory, Jakov stated: “So that’s us [people in Bosnia and Herzegovina]. We sit around the table and drink together. Then we slaughter each other. And then we again go drink together.”[[666]](#footnote-666) His point was that there is something more profound in attractiveness among peoples in Bosnia and Herzegovina which is overshadowed during the dark periods but eventually reasserts itself. Orhan said, in that sense, that the common life in Bosnia and Herzegovina is much older than in the rest of Europe, and it is so strong that even the most traumatic experiences, such as the one of genocide, cannot destroy it: “Our ‘together’ is stronger than anything.”[[667]](#footnote-667)

Analyzing the answers, I concluded that a useful concept to describe the positive experience of plurality in Bosnia and Herzegovina might be “natural plurality,” which suggests something spontaneous in the experience, something that does not come across as artificial, strange, forced, or unusual. My respondents often used Europe as their point of reference, suggesting that Europe’s plurality is relatively recent and much more artificial than that present in Bosnia and Herzegovina. It is important to note that by ‘plurality,’ they meant primarily religious plurality, since there are a number of states in Europe which have ethnically and linguistically heterogeneous populations.

This distinction between Bosnia and Herzegovina on the one hand, and Europe on the other was apparent in Sead’s answer. Although there are now large Islamic communities in Western Europe, Sead views them very differently, as something that does not fit seamlessly into the texture of society: “Stipe, we are the only Muslims in Europe that can offer such an experience [of ‘natural’ plurality]. You can immigrate 20 million [Muslims] into Germany, but that does not have any shape or form; that’s not it anymore.”[[668]](#footnote-668) In several places, he insisted on the need for preserving the plurality that grew so naturally in Bosnia and Herzegovina. As a Muslim, he strongly opposed the idea of an ethnically clean Muslim country: “If you emigrate Catholics from Bosnia, it will be over! This story that we tell will be over! (…) [If you do so] you will simply lose 300 hundred years of something that you would not be able to recover for the next 300 years (…)”[[669]](#footnote-669)

In Sead’s view, the plurality of Bosnia and Herzegovina is not simply a matter of statistical proportions that could be replicated in any other places in Europe if one were to transfer sufficient numbers of Muslims there. To the contrary, the latter would not have “any form or shape.” It is difficult to point to exactly where the difference lies, but it seems that there is an awareness of a certain *savoire-vivre* with respect to plurality which, if lost, would never be recovered. Such a loss, it seems, would irrevocably destroy ‘natural plurality’ and only leave a possibility of some future, ‘artificial’ plurality.

Hamza was, in that respect, very clear: “Bosnia should not be only for Bosniaks. Serbs and Croats should also live here. All should stay and live here. I would not be… I don’t know how I would be a Muslims when I would… I don’t know, that would be something beyond my… I would not be able to comprehend such Bosnia without all [ethnic groups]. That should [all] be preserved.”[[670]](#footnote-670)

One of the reasons for experiencing these differences as ‘natural’ certainly rests in the same mentality and cultural habits resulting from a long common history. Ohran, for instance, said: “We do not have anything particularly different except history which presses us, we were in essence always together, and we understand each other.”[[671]](#footnote-671) He gave an example of not only personal friendships but also collaborations, mentioning that, not long ago, churches and mosques were built together.[[672]](#footnote-672)

The West is only now facing the challenge of differences, said Nijaz, whereas Bosnia and Herzegovina have some “natural difference,” which has been present for centuries. That *natural* element is visible in the fact that “we are all authentic citizens”[[673]](#footnote-673) and, in that respect, these differences are not artificial. He emphasized that “artificial creations cannot last long, but we can, nobody could take that away from us.”[[674]](#footnote-674) For himself, he said that he “would not be able to live in a 100% Muslim environment.”[[675]](#footnote-675)

As an illustration of the durability of those *natural differences*, he mentioned people of Bosnian descent who were exiled to Turkey over 100 years ago but still come, once a year, to the region of Bijeljina to celebrate the Muslim holiday of Aliđun. Interestingly, that same day (2nd of August) is celebrated by the Orthodox Christians of that region as the holiday of Saint Eliah. That sense of attachment to certain rituals that have been preserved over five generations in exile, for Nijaz, speaks volumes about the deeply rooted heterogeneity of the country.[[676]](#footnote-676)

In a similar vein, Boško observed that people in Bosnia and Herzegovina experience differences as something positive, as a matter of pride, and hence these differences are not insurmountable obstacles. Nevertheless, he emphasized that there is still the challenge of knowing each other better.[[677]](#footnote-677) Therefore, the specifics of ‘natural plurality’ lie in the fact that it is not threatening and is not newly composed or externally imposed yet still contains some inner mysteries that cannot be easily deciphered, even by those who have experienced the different facets of life there, both negative and positive. Strangely enough, in the post-conflict period, that long legacy of natural plurality has had to be re-discovered. That was the point behind Ahmed’s answer, which ironically mentioned that Bosnia and Herzegovina have much longer traditions of plurality than Europe but, at the moment, have to be reminded from the outside of those things that it already knows:

[N]o matter how much it seems to us, or at least to some of us, as a problem, our uniqueness lies in [our] diversity and intermingling [of cultures]. There has been no such thing in Europe. Perhaps they have it more recently, but they have [traditionally] been nationally or religiously homogeneous communities. Europe does not have this mixture of Muslims, Christians, Catholics, Orthodox, and Jews living together as we have, for a long time, 500 years (…) Look at what is happening today—they push and teach us to learn what coexistence is, how to respect each other. They are moving in the direction where we are already and we obviously moved in another direction where they used to be.[[678]](#footnote-678)

Positive experiences of plurality, especially *natural plurality* as I have defined it above, are therefore a constitutive element of developing a theological base for interreligious dialogue and inter-community understanding. Such *natural plurality* can be a precious key to reading one’s own theological tradition in a different way. The practical experience of ‘natural plurality’ is, at the same time, a model and a theological place that require further articulation of that intimate form of plurality in which Other and different are not threats but precious assets that need to be discovered and preserved.

At the same time, it is important not to overtly romanticize the notion of plurality, which, in the case of Bosnia and Herzegovina, is still a mixture of positive experiences and traumatic memories. Nobody captured this better than Konstantin, who, after expressing generally positive views about the richness of the cultural and religious traditions in Bosnia and Herzegovina, concluded that the lived experience of plurality is indeed a beautiful thing, although its beauty is often a “bloody beauty.”[[679]](#footnote-679)

## 1.3.4. Peacebuilding by Reconstructing the Theological Horizon

Having outlined potential pathways towards the theological grounds for a positive appreciation of plurality, we come to the third step that follows from the previous two—the imperative of reconstructing the theological horizon in such a way that it respects the inherent need for identity and uniqueness but without denigrating the equal needs of the other groups. Development of such a theological paradigm is an attempt to escape what Damjan called “ethnic chains,” a move away from the constraining limits of nationalism.

### 1.3.4.1. From Elected nations to God’s people, from clean lands to shared lands

With a reflective view towards history, we can understand why nationalism represents such a serious problem for the religious communities in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Ahmed called it “the disease of the modern era,” asserting that “nationalism spoils every relationship.”[[680]](#footnote-680) It is true that nationalism is a defining problem in many societies, but Ahmed’s view of nationalism as the defining disease of the modern era reveals much about his local context, in which nationalism inevitably represents a challenge to all religious leaders. The central issue of their struggle with the modern era is not, as in some other societies, consumerism, gender issues, social (in)equality (although all these topics are nevertheless important), but instead—nationalism. My use of the word “nationalism” is primarily negative and indicates the overt attachment to one’s nation as the primary and supreme mode of being. The consequence of such an attachment is subjugation of all other forms of belonging, including religion, to the concept of nation. At the same time, that was the dominant meaning that my interviewees attached to the word, with the exception of those who distinguished chauvinism from nationalism, which then took on the positive connotations with chauvinism taking on the negative ones.

Some Orthodox respondents described such a negative form of attachment as “ethnophiletism,” which is, in the Orthodox Church, a heresy. For Pavle, nationalism represented a powerful force that enhances communal identity and a group’s internal cohesion. However, those effects that leave such a strong impression on people are problematic not only from the theoretical point of view but also from the practical, pastoral aspect. Pavle thinks that ethnoreligious communities are essentially weak communities. People driven by nationalism might fill churches, but they do not form a community. Instead, Pavle explains, they view religious institutions as their spiritual service, not as a place of growth: “Today many want to Serbianize the Christ [laughs] (…) [In the Republic of Srpska,] etnophiletism is very strong (…) Churches are full, especially for big holidays, but that community [congregation] is in essence very weak. Those people rarely know each other, and it is rarely the case that a community is really a community. That means that people attend church as some spiritual service; [they do not come to be] in a community, and to strengthen the community.”[[681]](#footnote-681)

Nationalism, therefore, has an unusual effect because it creates a strong imaginary attachment to a national community but in practice has two negative manifestations: from the inside, it leads to a weak religious community and from the outside, it creates distance to other groups. In Ahmed’s rendering, “people are suddenly forced to withdraw, as sheen into their own sheepfolds, and you stay outside, you look around—where will you go now, you have to go somewhere, and then you go to your own sheepfold, but you still await the shepherd coming and opening the doors so that you can all go out to a meadow to hang out together.”[[682]](#footnote-682) Nationalism, according to him, goes against the human desire to form a community with others; it imposes artificial limits where they are not supposed to be.

Those Muslim respondents who were opposed to nationalism emphasized that religious belonging to Islam, from the very beginning, was not constrained by any group or cultural limitations. At the same time, they acknowledged that the development of the distinctive Bosniak identity was not imaginable without a basis in the Islamic religion. Although those two statements seem contradictory, Ahmed explained it in terms of essential and inessential elements. National identity, although significant, is not in that respect essential for person’s life. Ahmed says:

I am as a Bosniak as much as I have brown hair and as much as I am white. Hence, that absolutely does not represent something else in my life; it does not represent something important because it will not be relevant at that moment [i.e., at the Last Judgement]. (…) For that reason, identity has some magic in the sense that you really belong to someone, that you are a part of a community, in the same way that you are a part of your family and are proud of it even though some people say that the family is not good (…) It is in our nature to be a part of a collective. You cannot be alone, [because] we are social creatures and that necessity pushes us (…)[[683]](#footnote-683)

As he explained, identity possesses some “magic” associated with belonging to someone, and there is a certain “necessity” that pushes people to identify with other individuals in such a way that they can feel pride and acceptance. Theological problems arise, however, when religious identity is subordinate to national identity to such an extent that it becomes almost automatic.

Novak, who previously described identity as a “second skin,” later in the conversation used another metaphor to describe the relationship between national and religious identities. Even though those two became indistinguishable due to historical circumstances, he suggested a difference between them that is not only descriptive but hierarchical. In that respect, he said that Orthodoxy should be a subject in a sentence whereas all other national specifiers should come afterward, as dependent descriptives, e.g., Orthodox Church in Serbia and Orthodox Christians in Russia instead of Serbian Orthodox Church and Russian Orthodox Christians, respectively. His aim was to show that the same Orthodox identity can be shared and contextualized but only if it remains the main carrier of meaning. Such an understanding, in his view, is common in the ‘higher circles’ within the Church’s hierarchy but is not prevalent among average believers.[[684]](#footnote-684)

Novak introduced, perhaps, a crucial issue related to identity—how can it simultaneously be broadly shared and partitioned. Granted that both Christianity and Islam have a universal appeal, beyond any national or ethnic divisions, this question has extreme theological importance. Although universality is at the heart of the monotheistic orientation, believers are never simply universal actors, personas without history or roots. Religious traditions grow as formations with a particular cultural flavor; they are revealed to concrete, historically situated individuals, and that historical context is not just an accidental element that can be dispensed with. But, we can ask, how do they relate to each other? When does the medium of religious contextualization harm the universality of religion? When does the ideology of universality start to desensitize people to concrete problems?

A way out of those constraints is through a decisive move from the idea of *electiveness* towards *communicative participation*, a move that allows for respect of one’s tradition and local context without denigration of the other group. Konstantin sees the potential for that in the rediscovery of the Biblical concept of election which is, unlike the nationalist one, much more porous. He emphasized that, in the Bible, “God’s people” is always one and singular, and this singularity contradicts the idea of elected nations. Moreover, belonging to God’s people is not marked by some genetic or cultural heritage. To the contrary, he said, “The concept of God’s people as described in the Old Testament is a reality that is open on both sides, and that is why Isav [a Jew] could fall out while Ruth [who was not a Jew] could enter it. Even then, it was not hermetically closed on the basis of genetic predispositions.”[[685]](#footnote-685) That idea was ever further developed in the New Testament, where “all nations became one, and that is very important to stress—there are no God’s nations, but only one people of God! That idea could, I think, be sobering for people in these territories”[[686]](#footnote-686) The “sobering idea” of “God’s people” as a singular concept that cannot be defined by selective or arbitrary criteria of nationality or ethnic belonging thus directly questions of the ideas of national exclusivity and self-ascribed special status.

Danijel tried to strike the balance between the two by insisting on a proper measure between religious and national belonging. Christianity, he said, does not require people to deny or abandon their specific cultural and ethnic identity, but the problem arises when people as members of a nation imagine themselves as elected and providential and hence better than others:

Jesus did not deny belonging to the Jewish people, nor did Francis of Assisi deny belonging to the Italian people (…) But, you see what nationalism of all kinds does—it transforms a nation into the messianic nation (…) and in that way, something secular is theologized, something that is, in and of itself, that is outside the realm of faith, is placed in the heavenly sphere (…) The problem starts when the national becomes theologized, that is, when it is placed in the divine realm.[[687]](#footnote-687)

In other words, there is no need to deny particular identities, but only to reject their ‘divinization.’ According to Daniel, a Christian identity can serve as a corrective element that can deconstruct the ‘divine’ dimension that was unduly attributed to national, cultural, or any other particular identity.[[688]](#footnote-688)

A number of interviewees believed that religion cannot be completely separated from the political sphere because that would mean distancing it from the world. Identities of political subjects and religious subjects overlap. As Bogdan said, one who is a believer is also a citizen. At the same time, if the national element dominates, then it silences the critical potential of religious actors.[[689]](#footnote-689)

Bogdan proposed a model for the relationship between nationalism and religion based on the texts of St. Paul. He started with St. Paul’s theological title “The teacher of people/nations.” That phrase can, in South-Slavic languages, have two distinct meanings, depending on the accent: the teacher of one people/nation (genitive singular) and the teacher of peoples/nations (genitive plural). For Bogdan, both meanings are illuminative. In the Epistle to Galatians, Paul deconstructs the distinction between Jews and non-Jews, thus removing segregation according to blood ties, and eliminates the distinction between Greeks and Romans, thus removing differences based on civil affiliation. In that sense, Bogdan explains, Paul is the teacher of all peoples. At the same time, in many places, Paul still addresses Jews specifically as Jews, and Greeks specifically as Greeks, respecting their heritage and acts as a teacher of a specific people. Paul thus does not deny his Jewish background and origins, even while deconstructing its theological determinism. Bogdan went even further, saying that the narrative of the Tower of Babel also speaks of God, who blesses *people as members of different groups*, opposing artificial unification. Therefore, the theology of unity which he advocates is the unity which *does not require destruction of differences, but, rather, the destruction of barriers constructed around those differences*. The prime example of that is the meeting of Jesus with the Samaritan woman who, in the context of the Gospel, belonged to an ethnic group that was considered ungodly and impure.[[690]](#footnote-690) That Gospel section offers a good illustration of Bogdan’s thesis since it describes an encounter in which a specific woman is not abstracted from her belonging, but that belonging has stopped being a barrier both in everyday contact and especially in divine worship.

Starting from another passage involving Samaritans, Jakov made a strong case for identity that remains permanently open, even towards those who are seen as radically different. He used the New Testament story of the Good Samaritan to show that all borders are, ultimately, irrelevant when one meets a person in need. We will recall from the previous chapter that father Konstantin used the same text to stress the need for acknowledging closeness and intimacy not only with those who are “comfortably different” but primarily with those who are radically, painful Others. Jakov, similarly, emphasized that the Samaritan man, someone whose identity was considered impure, helped a wounded person, whereas those who are obeying their religious commands, preserving their pure identities, would not feel any need to help—the ritual purity of priest and Levite would have prevented them from helping even a person of the same ethnic origins whereas the Good Samaritan managed to cross a much greater barrier. Jakov then stated his stance with respect to identity in strong words: “If my national identity stops me from approaching another person who is different, who is not the same as I—I wish I had none. It is better to be without it [identity], then without humanity.”[[691]](#footnote-691)

The theological move from nationalism thus requires the construction of a fundamentally different outlook on the nations and their roles in human history. While not negating their importance, my respondents tried to demonstrate that nations can provide only a starting point, not the final horizon of faith and salvation.

Recognizing the aforementioned problems, father Konstantin evoked the notion of “double citizenship” of religious believers, in which the heavenly citizenship should always have primacy. In his view, religions in Bosnia and Herzegovina have indeed played an instrumental role in the development of national sentiments, but the link between the two was ultimately harmful to the religion because it shifted the order of primacy and hence made a distinction between the “inculturation” of the Gospel (which is positive) and the situation in which religion enters into a servant-master relationship to national identities. For him, the religious communities in the Balkans most often did not know how to differentiate between the inculturation and the commodification of religion for political purposes.[[692]](#footnote-692)

Konstantin’s own experience of conversion might have contributed to his convictions about the importance of *heavenly citizenship*. The turning point of his life was his experience of the Orthodox liturgy, in which he participated for the first time at age 11, even though he had not yet been baptized. It was incomprehensible to him but still attractive and made such a deep impression on him that he decided to become a priest. His later priestly formation took place precisely during the war, when national differences took pride of place, whereas, for Konstantin, the main reference point remained the liturgical place, which represents a place and an identity beyond transient constraints.[[693]](#footnote-693) I have already mentioned the specifics of the liturgical space and time in our previous discussion on memory, reconciliation, and forgiveness. Perceived as a celebration that, although within time and space, represents the “time beyond time” and the “space beyond space,” liturgy can thus be an experiential gateway into different forms of identity, a temporally short but potent glimpse into the experience of “heavenly citizenship.”

Fra Luka, suspicious of the obsession with territories, posited that people should try to increasingly ignore “geographical territories” and invest their efforts into allowing people to enjoy fully their “spiritual territories” (such as culture, language, and tradition), no matter where they actually live.[[694]](#footnote-694) Just as others, he did not deny the importance of people’s birthplace and natural attachment to their surroundings, but he did criticize any attempt to establish ethnically clean territories in Bosnia and Herzegovina.[[695]](#footnote-695) Luka’s idea was innovative because it did not postulate the necessity of an identification between geographical and spiritual territories. In other words, political power over a specific geographical territory should be neither a sole guarantee nor an obstacle to enjoying the full freedom of cultural territories, i.e., people do not need to think that only their own, ethnically clean territory would make their culture viable.

In short, the broadening of the theological horizon beyond “ethnic chains” goes along two main axes. The first one requires abandoning the concept of exclusive electivity in favor of the idea that all nations are called to salvation and thus constitute a single unity of “God’s people.” Again, this does not require a promotion of religious relativism, i.e., the belief that all religions are equal. Such suggestions would, in fact, have the opposite effect on a religious leader, who would feel coerced into abandoning their beliefs in favor of a post-denominational spirituality or syncretism. What is required, however, is the acceptance of the fact that salvation is not the prerogative of a single religious community, even when its adherent sees his or her religion as a privileged way of salvation. This middle position between religious exclusivism and relativism indeed finds support in both Islam and Christianity. Dejan expressed it through the metaphor of a ship, which goes in a secure direction toward salvation. That secure path, Dejan said, does not negate that others might reach the same point also, using their own course, nor does it prevent mutual collaboration when those paths overlap. [[696]](#footnote-696) Thus, the first axis represents a move from the exclusivist notion of “God’s nation” towards the participative idea of “God’s people,” which is open even to those of different faiths and nationalities.

The second axis represents a move from the sacralization of the ethnically clean land towards the concept of a shared land which is imbued by providential plurality.[[697]](#footnote-697) The latter also opens a window towards the realization that fight for geographical territories is less important than a struggle for enabling people to develop and enjoy their “spiritual territories,” no matter where they actually reside at any given moment.

### 1.3.4.2. From power to authority

The third form of theological restructuring linked to the problem of nationalism can be best described as a move from power towards authority. In essence, that means detachment from the positions of political power based on coercion towards the persuasive power of moral or religious teaching, or—in the parlance of *Realpolitik*—from hard to soft power.

We could already sense the positive aspects of this move in the testimonies of religious leaders who live as minorities in ethnically and religiously heterogeneous settings. Such a life, the argument goes, helps people realize that religion is not a matter of automatism, but a life-decision that requires engaged reflection. There is yet another theologically important aspect of being a minority—detachment from the position of coercive social power. Damjan, in that sense, asserted that a position of disempowerment, usually connected with being a minority, is much more liberating for completing a theological mission:

I think that the Church is, in an essential sense, on the rise in places like this, which is a paradox. (…) I am usually happy when it loses real power because, in that way, it becomes what it [really] is. If we turn again, and we have to turn to Jesus—he did not engage politically, although some of his messages could, and did, influence the political reality of that time (…).[[698]](#footnote-698)

Thus, Damjan assigned a theological meaning to the position of the minority, connecting it with the Christian notion of being *powerful through disempowerment*. Its background conviction is that the position of social dominance, or a position of social privilege, exposes the Church to a temptation of political hegemony. Being in a position of power, religious communities can simply start acting as uncritical advocates of those who are in the grip of political power and forget the grievances of those suppressed and marginalized. The problem is that such a position can easily become viewed as equivalent to some sort of ‘natural’ order of things. Being in the position of a minority, on the other hand, provides an impetus to a different reading of one’s sacred texts and a reinterpretation of tradition. Developing his position, Damjan made a comparison between the Orthodox Church in Mostar and the Christian community from the early fourth century, when there were no persecutions and when Christians had attained a position of equality, but still no social privileges. In his view, that situation was the most beneficial for Christian development. He believed that the most fruitful milieu for religious life is even the one of “mild suppression.” By that term, he meant that membership in a religious community should not confer any privileges and moreover, that one has to make some small sacrifice while avoiding the masochistic apotheosis of suffering. In that respect, there would be no persecutions of the religious communities, but still, the membership in the community is not taken for granted, and it is not in any way socially advantageous.[[699]](#footnote-699) In other words, such an experience, distant from dominance and acceptance of vulnerability, enhances one’s own reflectivity about the religious elements which do not emphasize force or strength, but rather spiritual change.

This was in a similar vein with Danijel’s idea that, by distancing oneself from political power, religion can obtain a different form of power based on moral authority. Referencing the links between religion and violence, he explained that religious traditions have some small inner impulse for violence. That impulse, however, is not by itself sufficient to translate it from the space of religious hermeneutics to the political sphere, mainly because religious traditions already operate with inner mechanisms that are designed to tame violent human impulses by ethical prescripts which mandate love, tolerance, and compassion. The external violence thus arises when the weak inner impulse to violence that is present in religion becomes connected with external force. In Danijel’s model, we have a double translation—on the one hand, the religious impulse toward violence is detached from the broader religious context (which was meant to mitigate violence), and subsequently attached to the external means of force and domination. In the same process, the power of religious teaching changes from a moral authority to real-power, i.e., from *potestas* to *violentia*:

There is an interesting German word *Gewalt*, which signifies violence, (…) It is similar in meaning to the Latin *violentia*, meaning physical violence. This same word [in German] is equivalent to another Latin word—*potestas*, power. (…) I believe, if religion becomes some sort of institution of power, if it unifies with a political system (…) or if it and the political system begin to act together as one, then this alliance will kill people. Then it [religion] will become violent [or] … a reason for violence (…) The inner logic of those religions which posit [the existence of] the single God should not be a reason for violence. However, when that belief that already contains that small impulse to destroy everything that is different, everything that is *poli*- and not *mono*- (…), unifies with a power that derives [its authority] from secular, national, or tribal [characteristics] or from some other source and when we add to that the possibility of being endangered, [then it leads to violence]. (…) That source of violence could not have come from the inner logic of God, who reveals Godself to humans and who says ‘love your neighbor’ (…) or from the basic ethical precepts from the Meccan period of the Qur’an (…)[[700]](#footnote-700)

The third movement in the reconstruction of the theological horizon of open identity would thus be a move from violent force towards moral authority which, in some way, requires a form of a self-imposed exile into the position of a minority, even when a certain religious community has a strong domination.

Tomislav had an interesting twist on this problem. Speaking about future life in Bosnia and Herzegovina, he insisted on full equality of all people and nations in all respects, and, criticizing any form of majorization, he suggested as one of the solutions that “we all should become minorities.”[[701]](#footnote-701) From the statistical point of view, it is obviously impossible that all groups be minorities in a certain area, but the edge of his argument was not about numbers but about patterns of behaviors. When everyone behaves as a minority, then nobody dominates the common space, and everyone engages in mutual care and protection of the other group (no matter how big or small it was).

The move from *elected nations* towards a *participative salvation*, from *clean lands* to *shared lands*, and from *political power* to *moral authority* are thus three main axes for development of theological grounds on which the transformation of a closed identity *ad intra* might rest. Neither of them requires the abandonment of attachment to a specific culture or nation. On the contrary, I have tried to show that it was precisely an attentiveness to the specific local experience that led to the articulation of concepts such as “natural plurality” as something spontaneous and pre-existing, which echoes the theological principle of providential plurality. Rediscovery of these elements and their theological articulation (in different theological traditions), in turn, help religious communities attain comfort within their own religious identities, a degree of stability which is the only firm basis for an encounter with the Other and, consequently, an essential step in peacebuilding.

### 1.3.4.3. Identity peacebuilding ad extra: Enriching identity through dialogue

After defining three *ad intra* activities that religious leaders can perform within their own religious communities (stabilization of identity, deconstruction of prejudice, and reconstruction of theological horizons from closed to open identities), we can now move to their peacebuilding activities *ad extra*, completed in dialogue with participants of other faiths.

The primary form of dialogue that religious leaders can have is *interreligious dialogue*. The term does not imply that they always need to speak about religious topics, in fact, far from that. As we will see later in the text, interreligious dialogue can include the completely ordinary gestures of sharing a cup of coffee or taking a walk through a city. But what then, one might ask, makes those actions interreligious dialogue and not just ordinary activities? The differentiating element is that they are performed by people who are recognized as religious leaders of their communities, and that is especially effective in areas in which religious leaders are public personas and when their activities are closely observed.

This helps us understand the difference between, on the one hand, the “dialogue of life,” in which the religious component is not the explicit subject of the dialogue, but it is still visible through participants who are identified as religious believers and “theological dialogue,” on the other hand, when the topics of religious teachings are the subject of the conversation.

#### 1.3.4.3.1. Ordinary encounters

The respondents gave me a whole spectrum of different suggestions as to how dialogue can be performed. Some of them are the standard activities of common lectures, conferences, visiting religious objects of different religious communities, or joint engagement in social, humanitarian, and ecological activities—most of which are worthy of official note. But, aside from these, many activities fall into the domain of ordinary encounters that nevertheless have important peacebuilding potential. Activities from other categories can often feel more genuine, not just to observers but also to participants. Damjan, for instance, mentioned that religious leaders function much better in their everyday settings than within the framework of official interreligious councils:

We are simply not used to our meeting point being the Interreligious Council, to put it concretely. If it [interreligious dialogue] seems dishonest during some moments (…), it is because that was not our autochthonous way of communication. It [dialogue] [typically] appears outside, in some, more natural settings as when we call each other, drink coffee, collaborate on cultural [projects] or around some concrete work

or projects—not only around coffee but also around concrete and tangible things that are more important than coffee; [through those activities,] we create a framework [for dialogue] that is much closer to our culture and our previous historical relationships.[[702]](#footnote-702)

Drinking coffee might, at first, appear to be anything but a peacebuilding activity. However, this daily ritual of virtually every person in Bosnia and Herzegovina is powerful precisely because of its *ordinariness*—it suggests normality of life, that those who participate in it share some degree of trust and confidence. At the same time, unlike appearances in official ceremonies, drinking coffee is much more common and can be easily replicated. Tarik explained to me that it had taken three years for him to convince religious leaders in his city to come together for a coffee in one of the popular local venues. Although it took a lot of effort to convince the participants, against the advice of those who thought that it was too early for something like that, he insisted and realized later that the effects have been very positive: “We have sent a message that people positively interpreted, I analyzed that later. Ordinary people told me, ordinary citizens, ordinary farmers [reacted]: ‘Look, when they can do this together, why cannot I do it with my neighbor? Why would not I have a coffee or breakfast with my neighbor every morning in front of our houses or farms? If not every morning, then once a week or twice a month?’”[[703]](#footnote-703)

Drinking coffee together is perhaps the most recognizable everyday ritual in the region, but other forms of joint activities are numerous. Fra Luka mentioned going hunting together or organizing some leisure activities.[[704]](#footnote-704) Orhan was in favor of sports activities between religious leaders.[[705]](#footnote-705) The domain of the ordinary life is full of possibilities and, by participating together in them, religious leaders create a model that others can easily follow; they send a signal to ordinary people that they should not be afraid to do the same. Interreligious dialogue in the domain of ordinary life is very close to the grass-roots level, easily understandable and replicable.

Vasilije provided an example of peacebuilding that was even more intriguing. If I had to create a category for it, the one that would fit it best would be “silent dialogue of life.” As we will soon see, such activity does not even include direct conversation or a planned meeting, but rather something even more basic—getting used to each other. Towards the end of the interview, I asked him how does he see himself as a pacemaker, to which he responded:

**A:** You know, I consider myself a peacemaker when I walk Baščaršija [the central part of Sarajevo] like this, in a cassock. [laughs]

**Q:** That’s good, but explain to me in what way that is peacebuilding?

**A:** It is because it seems to me that we became estranged from each other. It is important that we get used to each other (…) I think that peace is, actually, a matter of habit—that I am here, that I am not a stranger, that I am your *komšija* [neighbor]. It is that.[[706]](#footnote-706)

The domain of ordinary life, everyday encounters, casual meetings, and even just the mere presence that shows “I am your neighbor” was very close to the heart of many of my respondents. On the other hand, they were very rarely focused on dialogue about pure theological topics. Luka even said that religious gatherings are practically the worst because ordinary people can much more easily connect around everyday activities.[[707]](#footnote-707) One of the participants in the interreligious dialogue confessed that even on the highest level they do not talk about strictly theological topics, but rather gather around common visions.[[708]](#footnote-708)

Aside of being more ‘natural,’ those ordinary encounters can arguably advance peacebuilding because they do not create great expectations among participants and, conversely, do not lead to great disappointments. If the aims of peacebuilding are overly ambitious, they can have an adversarial effect and discourage its participants. On the other hand, small gestures can be a way to encourage hope in positive outcomes but without a euphoria.

A logical reason for this might be the inherent limitations of the latter, which is due to the incommensurability of theological traditions. While it is still possible to argue that better knowledge of other people’s religious traditions can dispel ungrounded prejudices (for instance, that the Christian concept of Trinity is polytheistic), believers find it much more difficult to see how the knowledge of other faiths can supplement or extend the revelation that is already present in their own respective traditions. Omer, an imam in a relatively heterogeneous city and a promoter of plurality, mentioned those limits, referring to the Quranic surra “Kaf and Run,” which says: “To you yours, and to us our faith.”[[709]](#footnote-709) He further quoted Professor Enes Karić, who said that theologies are exclusive, but, regardless of that, moral values are shared. By extension, moral values are the shared ground for interreligious collaboration, and it is much easier to jointly collaborate on common values than to dialogue around mutually exclusive theological interpretations.[[710]](#footnote-710) In a similar way, Ante mentioned that the borders of dialogue are dogmatic statements which cannot be questioned.[[711]](#footnote-711) In other words, dogmatic statements are the basic principles of each faith that are not open to negotiation. Kenan was also in favor of interreligious dialogue, appreciated it because it helps to discover the values of the other side, but he rejected the possibility of any syncretism that would imply a mixing of religious traditions.[[712]](#footnote-712)

Supporters of interreligious dialogue never went so far as to say that, through interreligious dialogue, they can discover something ‘new’ that was not previously present in their own traditions. The furthest line that defenders of interreligious dialogue take is, it seems, the line of encouraged re-reading. In other words, dialogue illuminates those aspects of their tradition that were already *implicitly present* there but were neglected. Interreligious dialogue is thus a tool, a lamp, that helps them to see the other clearly and to illuminate insufficiently known elements of their own tradition. It is not, however, a new mode of theological inquisition that moves them beyond previously established limits of their faith.

In my view, both the dialogue of life and theological dialogue have their places and value. Although it is intuitively much easier to see how keeping company can have a greater appeal to people who are not bothered by the theological nuances between different religions, it is still important to realize that religious leaders can so casually spend time together partially thanks to the theological works that managed to find appropriate frameworks in which this dialogue could occur. As will become clearer soon, theological progress helps believers to feel not threatened by dialogue, and it comes useful as a protection against the criticism, especially to lower-positioned religious leaders.[[713]](#footnote-713)

This is not to say that theological dialogue should only be reserved to a small group of professional theologians, nor that it should take place only in a highly official setting. It still seems important to make an effort that even a “theological dialogue” happens as something ordinary, normal, and not just a niche activity for a selected audience. I witnessed a valuable example of this one night while I was conducting the interviews in Central Bosnia. Several religious leaders from different traditions organized a lecture, but in such a way that they engaged intensively with the audience members, who could ask questions that confused them in their ordinary life, e.g., what is the stance of Christianity on changing the faith in comparison to Islam. Honest answers from the respondents that were sufficiently comprehensible to ordinary people but still theologically grounded were a way to clarify common misconceptions about each other’s faith. Additionally, they made the effort to clarify how the dialogue did not diminish any of them, but on the contrary, it enriched them.

#### 1.3.4.3.2 Dialogue that comforts, dialogue that scares

Once we establish the positive potential of interreligious dialogue for peacebuilding, we are still left with a question as to whether it constitutes a religious obligation or is just a positive activity which is nevertheless optional. We can also turn the question around and ask: If it is a positive activity, what prevents religious leaders from acting more proactively on it.

Starting with the latter question, we come one more time to the factor of fear for reputation. Since dialogue can upset the status quo, it is immediately dangerous to those who prefer the current positions of divisions. Those who act against it can then be accused of being betrayers, and sanctions can come both from their believers and their religious superiors. This is how Andrej explained the reluctance of religious leaders to dialogue with others:

**A:** They are afraid of being condemned by people and because of that, there is still no dialogue, in my opinion. (…) There are certain religious offices that are open for dialogue, but older religious leaders are still not as open as younger ones are. And that is a fact, a reality.

**Q:** (…) It is interesting that you mentioned that. I have often heard that they [religious leaders] are afraid of being condemned.

**A:** Yes, yes, they are afraid that they will lose… not supporters, but believers, so to speak.

**Q:** Why is that happening?

**A:** Because of what we talked about at the beginning. Because we still have a strong national identity that is felt more strongly than the religious one.

**Q:** Is that perhaps perceived as a betrayal of one’s own community, if someone engages….

**A:** But of course. Exactly that. You put it well. It is exactly that—betrayal of the community, as well as loss of status as such. If there is a successful religious leader or politician with many supporters, probably those supporters would not like him because of that. That is why they always talk with reserve (…) What we have is usually reduced to a formality. I personally experienced that. I wanted [to engage in] some dialogue, but in conversation with my superiors, I received a clear message that I should not be involved in such things.[[714]](#footnote-714)

One strategy to accuse certain religious leaders of “betrayal” is to say that they prefer to dialogue with members of other religions than with his own co-religionists. At the same time, critics stress that interreligious dialogue should by no means be a priority in a leader’s pastoral work, but only something performed in addition to central religious activities, i.e., essentially a luxury. Since each monotheistic religion sees itself as a comprehensive system, it is not obvious to those critics why interreligious dialogue would be so valuable. The question in their minds is: “Why would anyone engage in a dialogue with members of another religion when we already have the fullness of truth in our religious tradition?” Thus, pro-dialogue religious leaders are sometimes accused of a lack of dedication to their own tradition. Therefore, in order to argue in favor of dialogue, religious leaders need to emphasize that interreligious dialogue is not merely a good ‘extracurricular’ activity within religious communities, but something that is in line with their calling. Hrvoje adopted that strong pro-dialogue stance, stating that dialogue is not just an obligation that flows from pragmatic concerns but the essence of religion, and that makes it imperative:

**A:** I believe that dialogue is also a religious obligation. I believe it belongs among the essentials of religion. Openness towards the Other, in my view, strongly belongs to the spiritual reality, to one’s spiritual profile. I do not believe, so to speak, in the spirituality or religiosity of a person who is not ready to [engage in] dialogue, who is closed in [his or her] exclusive thinking and in [his or her] world (…) That absolutely cannot be reconciled with the Christian understanding of spirituality (…) So that is why it [dialogue] is, in my view, also an imperative. Thank God, dialogue is something that the Church, I believe, will not give up. Since the Second Vatical Council, [the Church] officially, fully, and irreversibly made a decision in favor of the dialogical way. I am convinced that it is truly the Christian option, the Christian way, and that we will not give it up.

**Q:** You mentioned that it belongs to the foundations of Christian spirituality. In which way did you mean that?

**A:** A spiritual person cannot be closed within one’s own world (…) I think that going out to meet the Other is one of the key requirements of spirituality (…) The aim of spirituality is ecstasy, *ex-tasis*, going out of oneself. A person must move out and towards the Other, and that forms the basis of dialogue. A closed identity is necessarily impoverished; it suffocates and eventually dies; it does not have life in itself. Spirituality that does not go out of itself and that does not open itself to a person in that sense, I think such spirituality is not authentic and it is not Christian.[[715]](#footnote-715)

Therefore, Hrvoje insisted on dialogue as the basic structure of every spirituality. By extension, forms of spirituality that remain closed inside themselves eventually die out. In that respect, dialogue cannot be just a luxury—it is, rather, a basis of religious self-understanding.

The attitude of their superiors, as one might expect, seriously influences the involvement of lower-level religious leaders who would like to engage in such an activity. For that reason, Drago stressed the importance of foundational theological documents that the whole community accepts, and which can serve to legitimatize such acts. The situation of the Catholic Church is specific because it has one centralized teaching that is applicable to the church as a whole. In that respect, he mentioned the importance of the documents of the Second Vatican Council, which affirmed ecumenical and interreligious dialogue. Although the acceptance of dialogue at the highest level of teaching still does not guarantee that local superiors or believers would adopt a benevolent stance towards it, it is still a significant form of protection for those who “dare” to engage in it:

**Q:** Is there, from the theological standpoint, a duty of dialogue or can it be [seen as] an inessential luxury?

**A:** With respect to the Catholic Church, the main document is the *Decree on Ecumenism* of the Second Vatican Council. That is for us, Catholics, the main guideline (…) and, of course, the document on the relationship with followers of [other] religions [*Nostra Aetate*]. With respect to Catholics, I think we have a sufficient amount of theological literature, especially documents such as those of the Second Vaticanum. I really don’t know how the situation is with Muslims or Orthodox, but I think they should also have them. If they do not, they should create them (…) So, it is important that we have them, and once you have them, something will come out of them (…) It is important that those who dare to engage in dialogue can be protected in their surroundings, a document from the highest instance of the Catholic Church (…)

**Q:** The phrase “those who dare to engage in dialogue” stayed in my mind.

**A:** Dialogue is really a matter of daring to do it (…) Here we have a problem of groups that are colored nationally and religiously, and they have their own functioning mechanisms. In that sense, engaging in dialogue means leaving a group. Nobody likes that the group is weakened, and here the impression is that those who engage in dialogue are weakening their group. And the group does not let you communicate with others because, in that way, you are damaging the cohesion of your own group. So then, when someone who is on the fifth, sixth, tenth position in the hierarchy dares to do that, it is important for him to have those documents—that the first one in the hierarchy approves dialogue. You need to have some protection.[[716]](#footnote-716)

Now it has already become clear how theological development on the issue of interreligious dialogue has a tremendous impact on the everyday practices of religious leaders. Vasilije, Damjan, and Andrej, three Orthodox priests, also stressed the importance of theological developments in their Church in the last twenty years. Comparing the previous generations and current generations of theologians and religious leaders, they have noticed a significant change in the theological paradigm, i.e., that younger people are much more open to dialogue with other Churches and religious communities. Vasilije, in that respect, mentioned the importance of a stronger inclusion of Biblical studies in the theological curricula, while Andrej mentioned the move from the ritualistic understanding of liturgy based on the traditionalist approach towards a more spiritual understanding, which is at the same time more conducive to Church unity. To show that theology is not just an abstract discipline, Pavle provided his own example of how an encounter with theological literature changed his views:

In the beginning, I saw it [ecumenical dialogue] as something negative, but nowadays, I see it as something very positive and something that is needed. […] During five years of theological studies, I perceived the Church as a ‘guardian of the truth’ [laughs]. So, when the Church started to open up towards other religions and other faiths, I perceived that initially as something negative, something that would harm that guardianship of the truth. Of course, with time, I realized what a good idea that is. I like to read a lot, especially theological [works].[[717]](#footnote-717)

I asked him whether theologians that he read had influenced his studies, to which he replied:

[O]ur [Orthodox] writers opened my eyes to others, and then I accepted it. I don’t know to what degree you are familiar with Metropolit Ziziulas? In the beginning, he was received…[laughs] horribly: ‘Who is that guy? What is he doing?’ But when you start to read such a writer and such theologians, you see how much truth is there (…) Anyway, he influenced me the most. [In addition,] I started to read them [contemporary theologians], and they opened my eyes.[[718]](#footnote-718)

#### 1.3.4.3.3. Top-down and bottom-up of interreligious dialogue

Theological development is, therefore, a crucial internal element that helps religious communities effectively, systematically, and consistently engage in interreligious dialogue. In order to be effective, that development has to be accepted by highly positioned religious leaders and then implemented by leaders at the local level. In Damjan’s words, it is important to have the theological level, practical level, and institutional levels interconnected and with a clear orientation: “that merging between the ground level, the theological level, and the socio-political, institutional articulation—when that happens, that is a good thing. Until that moment, we are still wandering.”[[719]](#footnote-719) Andrej thus proposed that top-down and bottom-up initiatives should work simultaneously and meet in between:

It would perhaps be best to start from both the bottom and the top so that we can meet in the middle. That would be the best and the most realistic approach. We have cases where it is very good to start from the top. Among yours [the Catholics], you have a strong personality in Pope Francis, who is a leader and provides an excellent example by his goodness, moral life, and personal poverty and finds acceptance even among the Orthodox, who pay attention [to him]. Before [him], there was a certain animosity towards the Pope [among the Orthodox] (…) But there must be an initiative, also, from the local level; [otherwise,] there is no use for six thousand [religious] leaders who have good relationships among themselves (…) Hence, there should be an initiative from the local level, from local interreligious communities, but there should also be a dialogue at the top level that can serve as a model.[[720]](#footnote-720)

Top-level officials as leading examples give legitimacy and allow lower positioned religious leaders to engage in dialogues with less fear of possible sanctions. However, if there are only top-level initiatives, interreligious dialogue can easily devolve into a fashionable ceremonial activity that has no significance in the lives of believers. In other words, people can perceive it in a similar way to high-level politics, as something that should be delegated to heads of communities, something that has a diplomatic character, but not appeal for broader inclusion. While top-level religious officials can set precedents for lower positioned religious leaders, local leaders play a crucial role in concretizing and diffusing the effect of dialogue in the local context. The form of dialogue on those two levels can vary significantly. High-positioned leaders usually do not live in the same cities, and they rarely share everyday spaces. On the other hand, people who live in religiously heterogeneous places share many common concerns and interests. To them, interreligious dialogue, if successful, is anything but ceremonial. Both levels are indispensable, and leaders on both levels have their specific advantages and limits. While the top-positioned leaders are the ones who can influence the whole group and send signals to other groups, they rarely have everyday contact with believers. Lower positioned leaders, on the other hand, share ‘everyday reality’ with ordinary people and have more access to their private and intimate sphere of life, but they do not have authority to influence the religious group as a whole. Even when their engagement in peacebuilding is extensive and widely recognized, they can still be seen as exceptional visionaries and not as ‘typical’ representatives of their communities.

When instances of high-level intellectual development become accepted by a sufficient number of religious leaders, then one can speak about a change of the leading *trend*. Damjan described one such change in Orthodox-Catholic relations in Balkans:

Previously, it was simply taken for granted that there must be hatred and a wall and that was presented as the theological and practical template. That is absolutely not in vogue anymore. Nowadays it is simply démodé to do such things that used to define our relationship—not only from a [local] perspective but in general (…) There are more concrete examples where that improvement was put into practice.[[721]](#footnote-721)

Additionally, one cannot forget that the practice of dialogue itself facilitates dialogue. Some things are learned by doing and by being involved, and the effects are not limited just to the direct participants but also to those who are in close contact with them. Zvonimir explained how he modified his views about interreligious dialogue and Islam thanks to his fellow Franciscan friar, who was deeply engaged in it.[[722]](#footnote-722) Those who were direct participants in interreligious dialogue regularly expressed to me the beneficial influences that it had on them and their attitudes towards the Other. Moreover, they commented that the dialogue did not make their faith weaker but, on the contrary, made them more aware of the richness of their own tradition.

The concrete effect of interreligious dialogue is certainly dependent on the aforementioned theological developments and their implementation, but one cannot forget the personalities of individuals involved in it, another factor in its success. Adis said that he does not like the term “interreligious dialogue” because religions cannot have dialogues, but only the individuals who represent them.[[723]](#footnote-723) Commenting on the personalities of top-positioned religious leaders, Petar cited the large differences between individual bishops and muftis. While some were more pastorally oriented and open, others were closed or even unreliable, he stated.[[724]](#footnote-724) On the other hand, David, a very young Franciscan from Herzegovina, was not optimistic about the effects of ecumenical dialogue within his region. In his view, a significant obstacle is the face that religious leaders lack proper qualities that would enable them to act as ‘bridges’ between communities:

I realized, from practical experience, from those ecumenical [meetings], that ecumenism is, at least in these territories, a ‘fist in a pocket.’ (…) In my view, that is more “yada yada yada” than an expression of a real desire [for unity]. Just looking at the profiles of those people, I think that they are not capable and that they do not have the capacity to be ‘bridges.’ They are simply flying on the wings of that ecumenism, but, in reality, do not have the capacity to be people of reconciliation.[[725]](#footnote-725)

For successful dialogue, he emphasized the importance of education and the formation of believers.[[726]](#footnote-726) His comment takes us back to the beginnings of our discussion which stressed the importance of religious habitus and religious education. David made the point that ecumenism (and, by parallel, interreligious dialogue) should not be a matter of several enthusiastic individuals but a general social trend that would take roots in the collective conscience of people and create a certain resilience when situations turn violent:

No matter how many good things you collect through ecumenism, one night is sufficient to destroy it all. It is like a house of cards. The goodwill of some individuals can never [win over] the human dark side. (…) [T]here are times when people are decent, and there are times when they stop being decent. (…) In peaceful situations, everything is possible. But the strength of ecumenism should be assessed in extreme situations. A hundred peaceful situations, a hundred years of peace [do not count]; the final result is what matters—if there is one day of unrest, what would that situation of a hundred years look like?[[727]](#footnote-727)

Finally, we should also note one strategy of *pastoral optimization* that is present on the local level. Religious leaders are often criticized that they do not engage in interreligious dialogue on the level of local communities, even if a dialogue on the official level is established. Without doubt, many personal and situational reasons can explain that inconsistency. What has to be taken into account is whether religious leaders have the resources (primarily time) to engage in additional interreligious peacebuilding activities in addition to their regular pastoral duties. From my interviews, I realized that they are too often overburdened. Besides their ordinary religious duties, they also have to deal with many practical issues (administering the Church’s books, dealing with economic issues, engaging in renovation of sacral objects and building new ones, etc.) What aroused my interest was the comment of one priest, who said that they, unfortunately, are “more familiar with the prices of concrete and bricks than new theological currents,”[[728]](#footnote-728) due to their position, which causes them to play many roles. This lack of engagement is sometimes simply a result of priorities. As a matter of fact, only people in high positions or those who do not have direct pastoral duties (e.g., professors at theological faculties) have the advantage of dedicating themselves more frequently to interreligious dialogue. As a consequence, there is a lot of “official” dialogue, but few “local” dialogue initiatives. For that reason, some local religious leaders see those engagements simply as a “luxury” that they cannot afford.

This is not to say that the result of that optimization is the best one—perhaps the dialogue should be in some cases be viewed as an absolute priority—but to provide a more complete picture of constraining factors that play a role in the practice of interreligious dialogue. In that respect, it is important that third parties, who often ask why religious leaders do not engage more extensively in peacebuilding (having in mind usually public activities), take into account the practical limits of their positions and adjust their expectations, which, if set too high, can lead to mutual distrust and disappointment.

#### 1.3.4.3.4 Dialogue with no artificial sweeteners

Finally, we can turn our attention to characteristics of communication in interreligious dialogue. Damjan mentioned the need of a certain spontaneity, or naturalness.[[729]](#footnote-729) Zvonimir and Adis, however, stressed the importance of the right measure and of sensitivity not to offend other participants in the dialogue.[[730]](#footnote-730) However, a third element counterbalances the second one—the need for honesty. Without it, the dialogue can transition into a superficial ceremonial gathering.

Orhan, an imam who lives in one of the cities where great massacres took place, noted certain topics that are systematically avoided during conversations: “They would like to close it, in the sense of ‘let bygones be bygones,’ but it is important to clarify the things (…) When we talk, we can talk about everything except about those things that happened.”[[731]](#footnote-731) One great obstacle are thus interpretations of the past that are still very divergent.

In conversation with Nebojša, a young priest who takes care of a very small Orthodox community in a Muslim-majority city, I came to the realization of how difficult it is to balance honesty with respect and sensitivity. He spoke about the discomfort that he feels when he is invited to interreligious gatherings because they are often, to a great extent, dedicated to the war tragedies in which the Serbian side is presented as the only perpetrator. Nebojša prefers not to be present because, he said, even when presented with crimes on the Serbian side that are historically correct, it is still discomforting for a representative of a religious community to feel exposed and targeted.[[732]](#footnote-732)

Dejan suggested some prudent, middle way of conducting a dialogue. In his eyes, it was important to say openly what you think, what bothers you, and these can often be sensitive due to differences in faith traditions and even in opinions. Remaining silent, he said, had not been shown to be a good practice. At the same time, being open and honest still requires certain wisdom.[[733]](#footnote-733) In other words, it is essential to be open and transparent about one’s beliefs but still search for those interpretations in one’s own traditions that will not lead the dialogue to a dead end.

Humor is a specific technique that can move a dialogue forward, relax the atmosphere, and even build trust. Zvonimir told me, with great enthusiasm, a joke that one Serb had told him: “If you come to visit us, I can guarantee you that not a single hair will fall from your head… But I cannot guarantee for the head itself.”[[734]](#footnote-734) Humor definitely belongs to those culturally specific elements that are characteristic of the whole region. Humor is a greatly appreciated element in interpersonal communications, but its effectiveness, of course, largely depends on the personality of the speaker and interlocutors. During the second round of my research, I visited one conference with religious leaders present and what started as one participant’s attempt at telling a joke ended up with confused looks some five minutes afterward.

To conclude, to enhance the chances for success of interreligious dialogues, one has to take into account theological developments, contextual factors, and the characteristics of real-world individuals. The best-case scenario would include the development of theological doctrines that open space for a dialogue and the coordinated actions from top-down and bottom-up levels of religious communities. An unavoidable part of these actions is the education of the religious base about the value of dialogue. However, with respect to the characteristics of communication, honesty shines as a crucial element. Still, it has to be balanced with a certain amount of prudence in order not to close the dialogue prematurely. Humor, in healthy amounts, can also be an important strategy of trust building and moving things forward.

### 1.3.4.4. Allowing for the full expression of differences

We have now covered both internal and external elements related to the reconstruction of identity. At this point, we might conclude with the question of public expression of different identities. Essentially, it is a question of the public space—should the public space be reserved for the expression of commonalities or particularities?

At one point, Dejan said that “identity creates a tendency towards self-fulfillment” and that understanding can provide a good starting point for this discussion. Identity, construed in that way, is not just something that can be possessed privately or in small circles without any interference with different identities. Quite the contrary, his phrase was a concise definition of identity as something which tends to be seen, acknowledged, and recognized. It was precisely the struggle for articulation and visibility that made religious and national identity so historically important.

Tarik provides a good example of someone who is constantly faced with the question of visibility of identity. He is an Islamic religious leader in a Serbian-majority city, in the area where strong identity construction based on traumatic memories caused mass killings and destruction during the war. In a post-conflict situation, one can imagine two different approaches. One approach would require removal of all irreconcilable specificities in favor of constructing a common core of public life. The idea behind this argument is to construct the minimal common base that can be shared by all, and, in that sense, incompatibilities always create unnecessary obstacles to dialogue, especially religious differences, which are often non-negotiable. The other approach would be the one of maximal expression of differences, where the common core is not built around the least common denominator of shared expression but around a common degree of acceptance of differences. Tarik was firmly in favor of the second approach:

I think that, if necessary, all who are present here today [we were in a café] should know who I am and who you are. Therefore, if I have a need to manifest something that is a part of my identity, nobody anywhere should be ashamed to do that. I am what I am, and others should be ready to accept it, but I should also be ready to accept others the way they are. That is the basis; that can be the basis for the sound construction of a better tomorrow, of a better life for nations, faiths, and religions in this territory. Never, certainly never, will people in this territory pray the same way, speak the same language, or say that they speak the same language, and one should not spend energy on [fighting against] that. The energy should be spent on making people speak *their* language better, write better in *their* language, to contribute in a better way to the society, to the company in which they work, to let us altogether love the state in which we live (…).[[735]](#footnote-735)

Instead of reducing identities to some common core, Tarik thus believes that maximizing opportunities to express differences leads to a better life and future. Commonalities for him are not the end-point but just a starting point for a conversation that leads to a better articulation of differences. He seems to be suggesting that only identity lived in fullness can provide the means of developing more tolerance for each other. The same idea perhaps inspired Vasilije to walk through the city in his religious garments, sending a message that there is a need and a desire to accept each other in fullness, not just partially.

We could have noticed the echoes of this stance in the chapter on reconciliation, a manifestation of which was seen through removal not only of discrimination but also in the transformation of mental images that would make those who are different feel uncomfortable. Moreover, the desire for external expression of identity must also be seen against the background of the previous political system, which tried precisely to develop a common core Yugoslav identity, which never became strongly rooted among people.

## 1.3.5. Peacebuilding by reconstructing of life

Exploring different elements of identity reconstruction, we have hopefully already expanded our understanding of what peacebuilding activities involve. Sometimes even everyday actions, such as sharing a coffee, can change the flow of events in a positive way and be a motor of peace. In this section, I will focus on another, perhaps even more basic role of religious leaders as peacebuilders—their dedicated presence in communities affected by war events. Imagine an ethnically cleansed region where removal of people was meant to be permanent. In such a case, just the return of a sole religious leader and performance of religious rites would represent a powerful statement that neither he nor the people are ready to give up. Take, for instance, this statement of Tarik, who returned as a religious servant to the region of Podrinje, where some of the worst atrocities took place during the war:

I wanted to make my contribution [to peacebuilding] by being an active imam for ten years. As a religious servant, I have actively participated in renovation and reconstruction of the complete infrastructure of the Islamic Community in [place censored]. Everything was destroyed (…) [W]e reconstructed what war criminals, in essence, wanted to [destroy permanently] (…) One needs faith for that (…) That [faith] inspired us who understand the role of God as an almighty Creator in human life. A number of us who are from this region tried and still try to make their contribution to the reconstruction of life and coexistence in these territories that were envisaged to be cleansed of the Other and the different.[[736]](#footnote-736)

Tarik explained that his peacebuilding activity was performed by merely being an imam in his community and that that act was a reaction against the previous project of division and separation. Apparently, in his case, what was returned also included a number of infrastructural works, such as reparations of religious objects. But even in cases where this was difficult or impossible, the presence of religious leaders gives hope to people that they are headed in a better direction. It is a strong signal of investment in a community. Since administrative units of religious communities tend to be stable and not dependent on temporary humanitarian projects, people perceive their presence as a clear sign of dedication to the community life. This is how Ivan described his first contact with a place where he was appointed as a priest:

When I arrived in [place censored], my previous parish, everything was overgrown, destroyed, or burned. It wasn’t even possible to find the church, its ruins, or even its fundaments. I didn’t even know where the church had been (…) [A]round you are just some pathways. I did not know whether there were people or animals passing by. There were no cars, and trees were above, with hornets, wasps, whatnot. You feel some discomfort, some anxiety, something… you don’t know… you would prefer not to be there, not to see that at all; you wish that [the parish] hadn’t been offered to you. But then, soon after those first moments, something happened to me, something that I perceived as a challenge. I said: ‘I am not leaving this place!’[[737]](#footnote-737)

Walking some half a kilometer further, he saw a couple in front of their house. Since Ivan was dressed in civil clothes, they did not know that he was a priest. The conversation that ensued illustrates well how the presence of religious leaders is significant to people, even when there is no available infrastructure (Ivan lived during his first years there in a camping trailer or slept in other people’s homes):

I did not introduce myself as a priest (…) I said I was someone who wanted to help them. They understood that in a sense of a humanitarian worker (…) They told me that they did not have a parish priest there. I realized that they were Catholics (…) I asked whether they preferred me to bring a convoy of material goods for reconstruction to build houses or a parish priest. They answered readily: a parish priest! Why?—I asked. “If we had a parish priest, he would take care of the rest,” they said.[[738]](#footnote-738)

Ivan’s story was similar to stories of the other religious leaders who returned to places that were destroyed during the war and where returnees were a minority. Such a move meant accepting a big risk, not to mention personal and family discomfort. Orhan was very young, recently married, when he decided to go in such a place, aiming to show that life was possible. Since all the prospects of life seemed very pale, he explained that “only faith can motivate you for that.” At the same time, one could feel that such a dedicated move resulted in a very strong intertwining between his personal life and the evolution of the city, something symbiotic that he described using the words “you are built in every brick, in every detail.”[[739]](#footnote-739)

Many religious leaders who come to a place where they are a minority deeply appreciate the assistance of other religious leaders whose ethnic group is the majority in the given place. That is an example of how the pastoral presence and interreligious dialogue of life merge. Edin, for instance, had a difficult time coming to a region where almost no Muslims were left after the war. Moreover, he was not raised in that area, and so even the mentality of the people was very different from the one in his previous environment. An additional aggravating factor was a long shadow of tragic memories between Bosniaks and Serbs that occurred during the Second World War and the 1990s war. Edin’s presence constituted a great encouragement to the Muslim and Bosniak community. What helped him was a practical expression of care by his colleagues from the Serbian Orthodox Church (the Serbian Orthodox are the majority there), who took steps to show that they supported him and that they were available to help him. This care was sometimes expressed through ordinary actions. On some occasions, they would simply invite him to a family dinner, and on others, they brought food for the workers who were renovating objects of the Islamic community. All those activities, although not directly theological, had a very important effect on the Serbian population. In return, Edin also invested effort into de-escalation of possible conflicts. At one time, the house of a Muslim returnee was burned. Such an instance of a hate-crime, amplified by the media, would typically be sufficient to impede the inter-community dialogue for years, serving as yet another example of the supposed impossibility of a common life. What changed the situation was the common decision of both Orthodox and Islamic religious leaders to show up immediately next morning at the place of the crime, expressing support for the returnee before the cameras arrived.[[740]](#footnote-740)

During my research in northwestern Bosnia, I had the privilege of sharing lunch with the head of the local Muslim community. He emphasized how important it is that a religious community in the position of the majority makes the first step towards the religious minorities in the local area. In that way, they not only display sensitivity towards the problems that they (as a majority) might not be facing but also set an example to political leaders as to how care for minorities is possible. This resonated well with the interview of a Catholic priest in a city in central Bosnia, where Catholics are a minority.[[741]](#footnote-741) Dalibor commented how good collaboration with the local Islamic community affected the collaboration with local political authorities, who showed considerable support for their needs. An Orthodox priest from the Podrinje region corroborated this. To my question, “In which way can religious leaders be the ‘motors of peace’ on the local level?” he responded: “I can tell you that we really did that in the previous years. Recently, we had a meeting with the mayor concerning the county budget, and, of course, he insisted, and we insisted on calling the [representative] of the local Islamic community (…) [We did not want to] let them be neglected. I wanted to give a part of the county budget to them also. Because my colleague in [place censored – a Bosniak-majority city] also received the means to renovate the Orthodox Church, to renovate this and that.”[[742]](#footnote-742)

In short, peacebuilding as a reconstruction of life involves various actions that demonstrate care, belief, and dedication to a community. In territories from which people were forcefully expelled, even the presence of religious leaders can have an enormous impact on the normalization of life, especially if supported by coordinated actions with the representatives of the majority religion in that city or region.

## 1.3.6. Peacebuilding by coming to terms with the past

Coming to terms with the past comprises many diverse activities that I presented in the previous chapters. It involves support for the “purification of memory,” support for historical commissions, and acknowledgment and acceptance of responsibility. We have already discovered a theological basis for a different form of reconciliation and remembering that acknowledges the past but makes an opening for the Other—construction of memory as a prayer, the ecoumena of compassion, and a zero-degree of reconciliation were some suggestions. However, religious leaders can use one additional powerful tool for the same purpose, a tool which is more direct and straightforward—acknowledgment of crimes of their own community and expanding the idea of moral courage.

These might sound rather simple and self-evident, but I have decided to include them in this chapter because one needs to understand the aforementioned structures of fears of rejection and sets of dependencies to understand why these actions are often being avoided. In that respect, acknowledgment of crimes is inseparable from a different formation of the national-religious identity.

The idea, in theory, seems very simple—since religious leaders have weekly access to a large number of believers and often good connections with opinion leaders from their own communities, they could use their influence to acknowledge those crimes perpetrated by members of their own communities that are still commonly denied. Such an activity would, at the same time, be a service to truth and a service to a community weighed down by the pressure of its unacknowledged past. Furthermore, theological grounds for such actions seem unambiguous. Husein mentioned that a way of helping people to overcome evil is to “call evil by its name.”[[743]](#footnote-743) Bogdan voiced a common Christian reference to the saying, the “truth will set you free.”[[744]](#footnote-744) In theory, it seems that there is an obvious imperative of truth-telling which helps individuals and community to recover from their evil. But why does this happen so rarely?

A sentence from Ilija’s interview illustrates quite well this inner struggle between the need to tell the truth and staying silent: “It is most important that religious leaders speak about crimes directly, but I hope that God will forgive me that I am so weak.”[[745]](#footnote-745) This is one instance of *theological dissonance* that religious leaders need to grapple with—resorting to some sort of auto-censorship in lieu of truth-telling.

One reason for that is the expectation of a reciprocal action from the other side. David saw admittance of their own crimes by each community as the best recipe towards that goal.[[746]](#footnote-746) But in that noble idea already lies one part of the problem—what happens when the other side is perceived as hesitant or unequally keen to admit its crimes? Let us focus for a second on my conversation with Haris, who favored the idea that religious leaders should speak about crimes committed by their own communities. He said in that respect: “If all sides would admit and point to the crimes (…), we would all be pleased. And every group has members who did what they were not supposed to do. (…) Is it better that the consequences [of those actions] fall on the individuals than on the collective, the whole group of people?”[[747]](#footnote-747) Haris was clearly in favor of admittance of guilt and acknowledgment of crimes, promoting individual responsibility as a way of avoiding collectivization of guilt. My follow-up question asked what should be the correct action in a situation where the other side does not admit its crimes. This is how the conversation went:

**Q:** Let us say that others do not admit the crimes [of their own members]. What should be done in that situation?

**A:** Stay silent. Why expose your nation, yourself and your nation, [to the label of] wrongdoer when the other hides its perpetrators. Then, the impression would be that only [the one who admitted to crimes] was guilty of everything (…)

**Q:** Some people would certainly call that ‘external morality.’ ‘I will not do something until the other side does it’?

**A:** Bravo! As long as [the other side] remains silent, I will also remain silent. Again, that is to a large degree due to the inadequate religious education of our believers.

**Q:** But, according to religious principles—if the situation is such that the other side does not want to admit [to crimes], does religion still require you to admit the crimes of your own community or not?

**A:** No. Because of the labeling that would occur.

**Q:** Because of labeling?

**A:** Because of labeling. In other words, I can admit everything that Bosniaks did and show to Bosniaks the bad things they did. But we have two more sides [Croats and Serbs]—what bad things did they do? Who was the wrongdoer in [city censored]? If I labeled my people as wrongdoers and others remained silent, one would get the impression that others did not commit any wrongs. And that final impression would be completely erroneous. For instance, in [city censored] there are 200 missing people, Bosniaks and Catholics. And if Bosniaks and Catholics pointed to their people who committed crimes while the third side [the Serbs] refused to point to theirs, the impression would be that only Bosniaks and Catholics committed crimes in [city censored] and that Orthodox did nothing. (…) [It can work] only by joint acknowledgment, [done] in an honest way.[[748]](#footnote-748)

Luka thought along a similar line when he stated that “it is difficult to admit your partial guilt before somebody for whom you think is [entirely] guilty.”[[749]](#footnote-749) In the case of the 1990’s wars, my Catholic and Muslim respondents feared that such a stance might lead to a certain ‘equation of guilt,’ an impression that all sides were equally responsible whereas, in their view, that was not the case, and the Serbian side had the most responsibility for the conflicts.

As we can see, the virtuous idea that every side should admit its own crimes could be very difficult to implement if all sides would not cooperate. The additional problem is that those requirements for admitting to crimes could then stretch back in time immemorial. For instance, Catholics might stay silent about their crimes until the Orthodox side admits what they did during the last war, while their Serbian counterparts decide to stay silent until Catholics clarify Croatian crimes during the Second World War or until the Muslim side does the same, and so on. The result of this mutually dependent moral expectation is, very often, a spiral of silence in which fear of being labeled outweighs the imperative of truth.

But even were the risk of a wrong picture of the past arising from the unilateral admittance of crimes is a reason to remain publicly silent, there is still enough room to motivate self-critical reflection *within their own communities*, during meetings attended exclusively by members of the same ethnic and religious group. What is then the justification for staying silent, even during these private gatherings?

One reason is a practical one—fear that they do not know the situation sufficiently well, which makes them abstain from giving judgments for fear that they might condemn innocent people. One such case was Blago, who was in favor of condemning all people responsible for crimes, but who was not sure whether some Croatian officials condemned at the ICTY were really responsible for the crimes with which they were charged.[[750]](#footnote-750) This uncertainty is, to a degree, due to a lack of familiarity with the legal institutions of international criminal law, which conflate individual responsibility for crimes with command responsibility:

Should those Croats who committed crimes be condemned? Absolutely! I am always for that! (…) But the question is whether those [who were condemned at the ICTY] were really the people who committed crimes (…) It is beyond question that someone should have been condemned, but I doubt that Dario Kordić, for instance, ordered certain crimes and that he should be condemned because of those crimes. Or, I don’t know, Blaškić. I repeated, I was not here in that period to know whether Dario Kordić really ordered someone “go, do that, and stay silent,” I don’t know that. But, as far as I know, they did not prove that he had any personal responsibility and [thus] they condemned the wrong person.[[751]](#footnote-751)

Ramiz said that he does not like to enter into those topics because there is a big chance of a mistake, since many things remain unknown.[[752]](#footnote-752) This point is slightly different from the previous one, because it pertains to those religious leaders who avoid the whole topic of crimes because of insufficient familiarity with the facts. The only problem is that this can also be used as an excuse to learn more about the evils that happened or as a pretext for not saying anything. Even where restraint from judgment is a preferred strategy, it should be consistently applied to all relevant situations—if condemned criminals cannot be singled out because things are unknown, then those who are praised as war heroes should not be used by religious leaders as models of courage because many things concerning them are unknown as well. The problem arises when only the first part of the rule is applied.

Secondly, other constraining concerns are linked to the reactions of believers and superiors. Nebojša, an Orthodox priest, admitted that there is no such a thing as freedom to criticize the crimes of one’s own community. If one would dare to do that, people would immediately react and ask: “Who are you to say that?” thereby playing the victimhood card immediately and evoking the suffering of their own community. An additional strategy is to call on the moral sensitivity of the religious leader, confronting him with the question “Who are you to judge them?” Financial dependence on the community and lack of a “strong background” in the hierarchy are additional factors that reduce the readiness to criticize. As a result, Nebojša said: “We all know, but we remain silent.”[[753]](#footnote-753) Dejan explained that freedom to criticize exists (it is possible to do so), but its exercise would elicit criticism from the side of the believers. Thus, one has to take into account whether such criticism will create divisions among the faithful and, because of that, he thinks that it is sometimes better not to voice any judgements.[[754]](#footnote-754) David attributed silence about crimes to the strong links between religious and national identities as described previously:

**Q:** Do you feel, for instance, that you have freedom to say that [criticism] at all?

**A:** You cannot, you cannot. Simply, you are burdened with unfree people. (…) Yes, you can try [to do it] at the individual level, but to say it publicly… I mean, you can do that, but you will pay a terrible price for doing it—[the price of] being ostracized and such things. Or your freedom of speech will be taken away. As Kierkegaard said: “Before, when you wanted to kill a person, you assassinated him, but nowadays, if you want to eliminate someone, you simply ridicule him.” That is to say—as soon as they ridicule you, you are done. Laughter is today an instrument of murder.[[755]](#footnote-755)

Giving examples of two Franciscans who suffered sanctions within their own religious communities after voicing criticism of the Croatian political establishment, Domagoj showed that these fears are not groundless.[[756]](#footnote-756) Haris, who spoke about the mechanisms of reciprocal silence, said that the only thing that a religious leader can do is to mention crimes in their prayers, but not publicly: “They do not have freedom! [to mention crimes publicly in their own communities] I mean, they have the freedom to mention that in their prayers, that is what they can do…. But there is a public judgment which is, unfortunately, the worst judgement.”[[757]](#footnote-757) Nedim, a young and publicly engaged imam from Northern Bosnia, explained that the fear of collective stigmatization results in silence or very general condemnations:

In Bosnia and Herzegovina, cases of criticism are rare; people generally keep that to themselves. They condemn them; obviously, nobody is glad that such things happened (…) Those things are criticized in a general sense, but direct criticism of a [concrete] event is rare, probably because of the fear of stigmatization that might result. That is why it [criticism] is so rare within religious communities.[[758]](#footnote-758)

In short, religious leaders, although generally in favor of truth, still hesitate to condemn the crimes of their own communities even if they know them. The most serious reason is fear of repercussions, but there is also a concern that such an action would label the whole community or close the doors to those who are sinners and who are thus most in need of pastoral assistance. But if the space for direct criticism is limited, perhaps an alternative way of condemning crimes would be to promote the idea of moral courage and to praise and set forth those individuals who performed commendable acts during the war as war heroes, even though they were not warriors and did not fit the image of warriors. This seems to be the strategy that Pavle promoted as he describes in the following:

Shortsightedness—that is the state of conscience of people, of the nation, and of those who are members of the Church. I personally stress those examples [of moral courage] when I hear about them. And I am proud that a member of my family stepped forward, as Srđan Aleksić or prota Golijan did. There are certainly such examples, on all sides (…) In a concrete situation, I speak about that. But… it is complex. As a priest, I speak about love. Now, somebody will say ‘That is abstract.’ But I always refer to something concrete. And (…) I also teach myself to love. I don’t know. I would probably also step out [for someone, as Srđan did] in some concrete situation. I don’t know. (…) That requires courage. One must be free to give up one’s life at any moment and work in service of peace (…) I preach. As a priest, I preach and speak out about those values. I often say—in that horrible moment of temptation (…), when I can lose even my life, I still have to stand in defense of the Other, regardless of who that person is and what that person is like. And I call [upon] my believers to do the same.[[759]](#footnote-759)

Pavle’s final concern was not the concrete well-being of the community, not the survival and protection of the group, but the “Day of Judgement,” the moment outside of history when one’s morality is not measured by loyalty to a community but by the ability to provide the proper answer in service of peace at any given moment. Unfortunately, even this alternative strategy of promoting examples of moral courage is still rare, and, as Hamza previous pointed out, religious leaders simply prefer to give in to inertia and focus on warriors, rather than peacemakers, as examples of moral courage.[[760]](#footnote-760)

## 1.3.7. Peacebuilding by engagement with the issues of forgiveness and reconciliation

It would be redundant to repeat all the ways in which forgiveness, reconciliation, and memory can be understood, achieved, constructed, and promoted. It will suffice to say that engagement with these does not have to be directly thematized and advertised as such. As a matter of fact, touting “reconciliation” is often counterproductive as it is perceived as “multi-cultural professionalism” and lacking any real conviction.[[761]](#footnote-761) Besides spiritual and moral counseling, promotion of compassion for all victims, development of *prayerful commemorations*, and work on the encounter with the painful Other, there are many other smaller and seemingly insignificant activities which work in the same direction. Andrej’s interview is illuminative because it shows how even the simple act of emphasizing beauty can be understood as reconciliatory and peacebuilding acts:

I truly work on reconciliation (…) by emphasizing the beautiful and not the ugly. Look, I cannot tell myself ‘Forget the ugly things that have happened.’ But let us try to emphasize what is good, so that good becomes the basis of everything (…) There is something beautiful in everyone. The Lord created us in His image, and we received God’s likeness. Everyone carries the beautiful within themselves. Let us put that in the first place, let us emphasize that. What would things be like if Christ had not done that? (…) Christ is truly the model in everything.[[762]](#footnote-762)

Another form of peacebuilding at the intersection of forgiving, reconciliation, and memory is emphasizing the goodness of the other side, of courageous individuals. The most famous example of this is the initiative of the *Righteous among the nations*. Drago went even a step further, suggesting that a “museum of good” be built to preserve all the good acts performed during the war: “[T]he point is not to record the good things you [your group] did, but the good things of the other side.”[[763]](#footnote-763) In his view, such a project would not receive adequate support because both the local community and the international community are fixated exclusively on crimes. He emphasized the good done by ordinary people. Those people most often did not have the courage to confront their war leaders or soldiers directly, but they still tried to find some small way to help in difficult situations.

Promotion of goodness of people is one such small contribution that religious leaders make. I will thus conclude this passage by fulfilling one mandate given to me by Jasmin during his interview: “[D]ifficult things happened here, and people can still speak normally about that, speak with love about the future. That is something that I would like to plead with you, as a researcher (…)—to write about that. Write about the goodness of these people! Bosnia and Herzegovina is full of God’s people. Write about that. Let these be my final words.”[[764]](#footnote-764)

## 1.3.8. Building peace by building hope

Jasmin’s final words from his interview revealed one frequently overlooked element of peacebuilding that can be performed by religious communities—nourishing hope in people, hope that things can be better, even if justice for crimes that have been committed can never be entirely meted out. The problem with the aftermath of war is not just material destruction but the destruction of dreams and perspectives, a certain apathy and loss of trust—towards other people, but even more generally, loss of trust in systems and even in life itself.

Religious communities emphasize both of the following aspects in their traditions: human justice, which is very important and falls within the scope of ethics, and the theological virtue of hope, which exists even when there is no earthly justice or when justice cannot possibly be done. Drago mentioned that “waiting for justice” can be an excuse for not doing anything or for a paralysis that fixes people in place: “Perhaps it is easier to wait for justice when that means that I do not need to move, and I justified my status of not doing anything by that. One needs to seek justice, one needs to look for justice (…) but [the challenge is to] give an injection of hope to people. (…) That should certainly also be the duty of religious communities.”[[765]](#footnote-765) By giving people an “injection of hope,” religious communities can help them recover the sense of agency that can otherwise be crippled by the experience of injustice. Hope does not represent a giving up or an alternative to justice, but the motivation to persist in life and, with believers, the belief that pain, suffering, and injustice will not have the final word.

Grounds for this hope were common among the interviewees from different religious communities. Those consisted primarily of theological beliefs in God and the conviction that God’s justice will ultimately prevail. Husein, for example, said that the source of his hope is the belief in the Day of Judgement when “nothing will remain hidden.”[[766]](#footnote-766) Moreover, he stated that he has hope in God’s mercy, which saves humans, and that a genuinely faithful believer cannot rejoice in his own salvation and the destruction of the other. Belief is, in his view, something that brings optimism to life.[[767]](#footnote-767) Dejan spoke about the “optimism of victory” that is also grounded in the belief of the final triumph of God over demons, death, sin, and evil that does not yield to pessimism. He describes his hope as the “Christocentric hope,” explaining that its source is not a set of events but the person, Christ. In that respect, he said, the right question is not *what*, but *who*, gives him hope.[[768]](#footnote-768)

Hope appeared throughout the interviews as something that persists despite all difficulties. It has an unusual characteristic of being both an *attitude* of looking forward and an *emotion* of optimism. In some way, it is inexplicable, and Adis described it as a transcendent dimension of life which substitutes the obvious lacks in this world. He said that the main source of hope for him is the persistence of hope itself, presenting it as something that does not remove imperfections but still helps people to achieve fulfillment in spite of these imperfections.[[769]](#footnote-769) Jakov also said that the shape of his hope comes from his faith in Jesus Christ and the victory of good, where “not a single sacrifice will be futile, although they seem and have seemed to be futile.”[[770]](#footnote-770) Hope is, therefore, something that fuels his motivation to persist in the good even without expectation of direct results: “I cannot give up my brother who chose the wrong path. I cannot give up. If I gave up on him, I would give up on myself and on everything I believe. Thus, only faith [gives me hope]. But the true faith, not the faith which says: ‘I will be awarded for this.’ Faith is not a trade. It is giving up yourself.”[[771]](#footnote-771)

It was interesting to observe that my closing question “What gives you hope?” elicited very different answers from my respondents. There were those who explained the theological basis of their hope, elucidating the trust in God’s justice and goodness as the permanent basis of their worldview and inspiration. But there were also those who presented not their ultimate grounds of hope but situations in life through which hope becomes manifested. Very often that was hope in people who had left a positive trace in their lives. In that sense, Tarik said: “What gives me hope are thousands of people I have met, I have talked with, and with whom I have shared attitudes. Only that can provide hope for all of us in this period of hopelessness.”[[772]](#footnote-772) In most of the cases, the spark of hope was placed in “younger generations,” who might manage to move away from the fixations and obsessions that have bothered their predecessors. Miloš connected belief in young people with their different formation, which is based on faith, in contrast to the older generation’s formation:

Young people, the next generations, give me hope. I hope, when we die out—I can talk about my generation, you are certainly younger than me—that the generations that come after us will be free from all types of prejudice, that they will be capable and ready to live together and not next to each other (…) [T]he greatest advantage is that our churches are full of young people who listen to the word of the Gospel. I hope that it is the same in other [communities]. [I hope] that, when this state rests on young people, the seed of evil will finally be rendered infertile (…)[[773]](#footnote-773)

Surprisingly, some interviewees were less optimistic about the formation of young people in the faith community and more confident in their ability to access more balanced information and be exposed to positive civilizational trends. Haris, for instance, mentioned the exposure of the younger generation to the West. Although he saw that exposure as a mixture of good and bad influences, the final sum will, in his view, be positive even if this comes at the cost of less religiosity:

Since younger generations come into contact with the experiences that the West offers—unfortunately, often negative ones; they take positive ones to the lesser degree—I hope that experience will have a [positive] influence on them in the future. Perhaps we will lose a lot, in faith, but we will supplement that with [their] humanity (…)—that they will be people who will not hate others because of their faith or nation.[[774]](#footnote-774)

Pavle also expressed hope in the general advancement of civilization, which is slow but moves progressively in a good direction: “Regarding the state and laws, if we do not have the will for that, if the Bosnian state does not have will, then Europe will impose those standards. And that is good and positive. And that gives me hope—that civilizational currents flow in a positive direction.”[[775]](#footnote-775)

Giving hope to people can be done in many different ways—by encouragement through direct contact, by the promotion of positive stories, by offering an inherently good vision of the world despite all its imperfections, by making people aware of the good potential they have. Andrej saw the importance in affirming the world, counterbalancing the negativity and fears spread through the media:

Despite everything that happens, all the influences [we are subject to], the secret services, and all we get through the media, I still hope for the best. In the same way, I hope all people will be saved, despite everything, because God’s mercy is indeed great (…) In this world we bring peace, and peace will truly live, (…) At the same time, I think that we should raise the awareness of people that they have peace in themselves and that that is the way of constructing peace (…) God always directs us (…) Even if we stay silent, we have that harmony that we can show to people through a good example, a good demeanor, and they will be saved, I am sure. They will. That is my hope (…) Faith is, like emotion, a relative thing. Sometimes one has it more, sometimes less. But it will be fine. Write that as a conclusion: ‘It will be fine.’ [laughs][[776]](#footnote-776)

This passage from his interview reveals that peace and hope can be done ‘silently.’ Often, it is sufficient to have the right demeanor, a peaceful attitude towards the world and other people to achieve change. For David, that can be done by releasing them from unnecessary burdens and demonstrating that life itself, even without any great achievements, still has immense value:

I think that today it is most important to direct people to [value] the small things. Depression and boredom are so prevalent today because people are occupied with, in quotation marks, “big things” (…) One definition [of a human] of Saint Francis says: “He was a creature,” and that is the best definition I have heard. He only wanted to be a creature. And I have a feeling that, nowadays, people have lost their sense of how to be human. What pushes me forward in my life is the [desire] to find a love for which I could say: “This is love.” (…) Purity. Pure love—that was what Faust called “the pure moment,” I [would like to experience this so that I could] say: “It is worth living for this.”[[777]](#footnote-777)

Finally, in some cases, interviewees said that they have hope because people in their country always managed to get through, even among the most difficult travails. They spoke about the beauty and the natural and human resources of their country, but also, and, perhaps most importantly, about the vitality and goodness of the people so that life and death are “not just statistical data.”[[778]](#footnote-778)

# 1.4. A holistic idea of peace

The religious understanding of peacebuilding has a very broad interpretation. Peace is one of the central religious concepts of both Islam and Christianity. Ahmed explains that “peace is a general term that encompasses peace with oneself, peace with those around you (…) Islam comes from that word [peace] (…) Being a Muslim ethologically denotes a person who carries peace. When I come to see you, or when a Muslim greets a Muslim, we give the same greeting as in Church: ‘Peace be with you.’”[[779]](#footnote-779) Peace, in his view, is a holistic term that includes all spheres of life, but is not just something experienced or passively perceived. As Ahmed indicated, in a religious view, peace can be felt, carried, and transferred. It is important to keep all those elements in mind in order to have a firmer understanding of the basic logic of religiously-inspired peacebuilding.

Adis began with the same premise, i.e., that the name “Islam” comes from the Arabic root for “peace” (consonants SLM), and strongly emphasized the spiritual component thereof. In his view, standard peacebuilding activities of mediators and activists are incomplete because they deal only with consequences, whereas, for him, peace starts with inner reflection, as a state that comes from the awareness that God is present. Thus, he added, a person who is at peace with God radiates that peace to her surroundings, and other people enjoy spending time with such individuals.[[780]](#footnote-780)

Ante’s views were similar. Ante is a Franciscan priest from Herzegovina who mentioned that Christ’s first words upon resurrection were: “Peace be with you.” He believes that religious leaders should follow that message, but, in order to do so, they should transmit it adequately. The message of peace that stays with people, he said, should be kept simple. For Ante, it is important to approach a person, to ‘touch’ the positive elements in him or her. At that moment, he says, even an enemy stops being an enemy.[[781]](#footnote-781)

For religious leaders, peace essentially includes an internal spiritual dimension. The idea that was often expressed was one of isomorphism between the inner spiritual state of peace and external effects of peacebuilding. In some sense, even the very basic state of *being at peace* with oneself and God seems to qualify for social peacebuilding. Although that might sound counterintuitive, the idea was that finding peace is not something that can be hidden. People who possess peace in some way radiate it, even lacking any particular “peace talks” or “peace acts,” whereas, on the other hand, people who are professionally engaged in peacebuilding can fail to achieve any lasting effects of peace without that inner spiritual component.

## 1.4.1. Concentric circles of peace

A very prominent idea that naturally follows from the previous discussion regarding the understanding of peace involves concentric circles—starting from oneself and then encompassing one’s family, professional community, and local community, working outwards to include ever broader groups. This concept requires us to modify our idea of what peace represents and how it is built. Placing emphasis on the spiritual aspects of peace, religious leaders suggested that peace of the soul is the essential prerequisite of any other peacebuilding activity. Only when a person is at peace with oneself, can that person be a peacemaker within the broader society. When I asked Velimir how he see himself as a peacemaker, he responded as follows: “In my view, peace means a peaceful conscience. If I am at peace with God, if I am in peace with myself, if I corrected some things that created unrest, then that peace can be transferred to other people, even if I do not say a single word.”[[782]](#footnote-782) He mentioned that even just a simple smile can be sufficient to give peace to people. For Velimir, peace is the essential act of love: “If Christianity is love towards God and neighbor, then that love is transferred further through peace.” [[783]](#footnote-783)

Adis said that his peacemaking consists of bringing peace “to souls and living spaces.”[[784]](#footnote-784) In his view, the whole project of peacemaking is “at the end, returned to me, to an individual being that has to order things [in himself].”[[785]](#footnote-785) It is important to clarify that they did not atomize peace completely to the level of individuals but that they posited individuals as the prime carriers of peace. From this inner peacefulness, peace then flows in a form of a community-building:

Peace can be built only by approaching an individual person, by developing [literally: building] individual people, one by one (…) By changing a person, you change the society because God says in the Quran that God will not change the state of a people until the people [within that society] change themselves. And that change has to flow from myself; [then] from myself and my immediate circle, that is, my family and other people who I influence; then the second circle of friends, cousins, and the rest; the third circle of neighbors. And you influence people in [all] those circles to create peace.[[786]](#footnote-786)

The emphasis on inner peace suddenly clarifies why religious leaders understand the general mission of religions as a mission of peace, even when they do not perform any ‘visible’ and measurable peacebuilding activities. In their view, even spiritual work that brings peace to an individual soul qualifies as peacebuilding since true peace cannot be hidden—it is contagious, and it spills over onto the community. “Islam is peace,” said Ferid, “and if Islam managed to bring peace to your heart, it would easily pass to another heart.”[[787]](#footnote-787)

Husein tied the idea of peacemaking with the main pillars of Islam. First, he emphasized that there is an inner agitation in every person. It was not a society that pushed Cain to kill his brother, he said, but Cain himself. Since there is this inner agitation, the call for prayer (*ezan*) is a call to calmness, away from the agitation of human life. The call for prayer says: “God is the greatest, come to prayer, come to salvation.” Prayer is also performed according to strict rules, it requires coordination, suggesting that people are sent to each other. Every movement in the prayer, Husein explains, has a message as to how to organize life on peaceful fundaments. In other words, the daily prayer, as one of the pillars of Islam is a peacemaking activity since it counteracts the distress caused by daily life and inner agitation. Secondly, fasting, as another pillar, expresses gratitude towards God. It creates, at the same time, a deeper sensitivity to those who do not have anything, suggesting that it is necessary always to protect the dignity and life of another person. The element of solidarity is further emphasized by *zakat* (tax), while the holy pilgrimage (*hadj*), where everyone is dressed in the same way, illustrates the equality of all before God.[[788]](#footnote-788) In short, Husein’s view on peacebuilding rests deeply on the primary pillars of the basic Islamic code of behavior.

Christian respondents often mentioned Christ’s message, “Peace be with you,” as a reference to the centrality of peace to everything else in this religion. That, of course, does not lessen the importance of the work with the collective in the service of peace, but it does point to the importance of such activities as prayer and liturgy, which are commonly omitted from indices of peace-actions but which are, for religious servants, the central and most important activities in that respect.

# 1.5. Not by activity alone

The previous discussion was necessary to stress that religious leaders share something specific in their perceptions of peace and peacebuilding. Although they do not deny or neglect the value of standard peacebuilding activities through economic development, public outreach, education, etc., they still attempt to show that peace is, from their perspective, more than that. Communication-problems can occur when religious organizations and individuals are placed into pre-existing schemes of peace-work which are not sufficiently sensitive to their main mission. As Bojan emphasized, the Church is not an NGO but an organization that accepts the importance of practical social engagement but nevertheless grounds itself in something above and beyond it.[[789]](#footnote-789) Vasilije wanted, at the same time, to strike a balance, explaining that, in his view, the good work of different people engaged in peacebuilding should be recognized because:

We reduce it [peace] somehow on some transcendent level because we define peace in overtly transcendent terms. I think that everyone who wants to build peace in a concrete way performs an evangelical duty. All that [NGO work] might look like careerism and commercialization, and many of those organizations have profited from their quest for peace, but, nevertheless, that nonetheless comprises an articulation of some human [and] divine attempt to achieve peace. I do not have anything against that; I do not feel aversion to such initiatives.[[790]](#footnote-790)

There are two opposite extremes. While on the one hand, we can talk about reduction of peace to the practical level of activities with defined aims, strategies, and goals, Vasilije underlined another tendency—the reduction of peace to transcendental ideas. He did not deny that peacebuilding can become just a matter of profit, but still, he valued the underlying longing for peace as something positive and even as an expression of a divine mission.

It is important now to outline some convergences and disagreements among theological disciplines and the social sciences. Judged by the standard of social science, it would be difficult to put religious leaders’ spiritual actions in standard boxes of peacebuilding activities. Besides some common agreements around caritative actions and community engagement, theology and the social sciences operate under fundamentally different paradigms of peacebuilding. What is central to a religious leader—spiritual activities and religious rites—simply cannot meet the standard needs of measurable activities and outcomes. While theologians do not question the value of active engagement and care, they still make an effort to preserve the notion of peace as a spiritual phenomenon, something that is built not only through pragmatic engagement but also via seemingly non-utilitarian activities, for instance, Andrej’s work to emphasize what is beautiful. Therefore, to have a complete view of what religious peacebuilding means and represents, we have to maintain almost a kaleidoscopic image of peacebuilding reality as simultaneously visible and invisible, practical and contemplative.

One anecdote can serve to illustrate this well. After an international conference in Sarajevo dedicated to reconciliation, I met Željko, who is engaged in public life in Bosnia and Herzegovina. He mentioned that religious communities tended to neglect one of the most important dimensions of life—pointing to beauty. Although I was at first surprised by his reaction, I gradually understood what he wanted to say. Throughout the centuries, religious communities served as cultural centers, especially through their care for the written word, architecture, ecology, spiritual development, etc. All those activities were seeking inspiration in something that transcends ordinary utilitarian concerns; they were ways of transforming the perspective of reality, expanding the scope of vision. The mission of peace, therefore, manifested itself in many forms—peace meant being in a sacred space protected from persecution, peace meant serenity experienced by being in a different framework of space and time (what Foucault calls *heterotopias[[791]](#footnote-791)*), peace meant catharsis, peace meant introspection through meditation and spirituality. Therefore, work on all these activities was viewed as a contribution to peace, as a work of peace. It is a dimension which cannot be measured in the strictest sense, but, at the same time, it is something that, according to Željko, even religious communities start to forget.[[792]](#footnote-792)

Finally, it is worth noting that peace is not just a set of predictable actions. Instead of building paved roads of peacebuilding, Mladen suggested looking at those places where people naturally walk and only pave them afterward.[[793]](#footnote-793) He was referring to the futility of numerous peacebuilding strategies that are too inflexible to accommodate the small invisible instances of peace that occur in seemingly ordinary events. With many respondents in Bosnia and Herzegovina, I have noticed that there is some feeling of fatigue related to the role of NGOs and international bodies who engage in the process of peacebuilding. Even when they saw these efforts as positive, they still felt that some other dimension was missing, something more organic or spontaneous. They had difficulties, however, in articulating this. Then, some weeks later, I discovered a book by Yehuda Amichai, an Israeli poet, and one poem reads:

Not the peace of a cease-fire, not even the vision of the wolf and the lamb, but rather as in the heart when the excitement is over (…) A peace without the great noise of beating swords into ploughshares, without words, without the thud of the heavy rubber stamp: let it be light, floating, like lazy white foam (…) Let it come like wildflowers, suddenly, because the field must have it: wildpeace.[[794]](#footnote-794)

The concept of *Wildpeace* can help us to see that peacebuilding is not just a painful process of continuous effort but something that grows even when all those efforts fail, like a wildflower beside the paved road of big plans and strategies, as something that comes suddenly “because the field must have it.”

# 1.6. Comparative advantages of religious leaders as peacebuilders

We cannot close this discussion without pointing to some of the comparative advantages of religious leaders in the peacebuilding process. These depend on the position that religious institutions occupy in a given society. For instance, it is not the same if virtually all members of a society declare themselves to be believers or if religious affiliation in very low. The stark contrast will also be felt in societies where religious organizations have traditionally been perceived as institutions of power, close to political centers (e.g., post-Soviet Russia, pre-revolutionary France), or if religious organizations have played a role in a resistance and have fought for the oppressed classes (e.g., the Catholic Church in El Salvador). Thus, religious institutions can play the most decisive role in those societies in which they have a sizable base of believers, particularly if they are, at the same time, perceived as uncorrupted institutions who side with the marginalized and oppressed.

In Bosnia and Herzegovina, religious leaders have a comparatively good starting point because religious affiliation is very high. (According to the last census from 2013, around 98% of people belong to a religious denomination, and 97.45% of these belong to the three largest groups: Islam, Catholicism, and Orthodoxy).[[795]](#footnote-795) At the same time, trust in religious leaders as public figures is also very high. What then are their comparative advantages to other institutions and public figures?

## 1.6.1. Advantage of moral authority

Their first comparative advantage is their position as moral authorities. Besides the standard secular and humanist paradigm, they can draw on the richness of their traditions to find additional support for peacebuilding actions. For Konstantin, Christian teaching makes a significant difference because it motivates people to make sacrifices even when these act against their immediate personal interests or the interests of their group:

**Q:** What would be their comparative advantage relative to some other political or non-governmental actors? (…) What is it that religious communities can offer that others cannot?

**A:** When we are talking about the Christian community, I think that it can form [educate] an individual in such a way that [he or she] becomes a true peacemaker, someone who does not act according to worldly values and who is ready to work for the benefit of others even at [his or her] own cost. That is a comparative advantage—the forming of the conscience of people and of practical believers, directing their thoughts onto the path set forth in the Gospels, [a path that emphasizes] self-sacrifice, love, and self-giving. I think that the order of this world, in all its expressions, rarely can and rarely does promote that form of sacrifice (…) Imagine [what would happen] if a state would work against its own interests, whereas the life of faith motivates unlimited sacrifice. In that sense, there are magnificent opportunities at a believer’s disposal. It is at the same time paradoxical that there are people in this world who are not believers, but whose heroism in the field of humanitarian work can be at least on par with those of believers (…) But, in order not to speak too broadly, I think that the comparative advantage of the Church is in the fact that it can ask the impossible from people. Not only that it *can* [ask that]. That is, in my view, one of her duties.[[796]](#footnote-796)

Ferid gave an example of religious leaders who were the only ones capable of stopping the blood vendetta among families in Albania that had been going on for centuries. He saw a documentary which made it apparent that families who were waging long bloody wars finally managed to forgive each other, thanks to the mediation of a religious leader:

[H]e was standing there in the uniform of the Islamic community, and a father and another father (…) were hugging, crying, and forgiving one another in front of him. The religious servant played the crucial role there. We [religious leaders] can do that because they [people] look through us to God—[or perhaps it’s better to say that] they view God through us (…) That is the power of faith and of a religious leader, [whether it be] an [Orthodox] priest, a [Catholic] priest, or an imam. We can play the key role because only faith can calm the passions (…) Only faith can enable a person to say: “Let God resolve that. From our side, we forgive.”[[797]](#footnote-797)

Belonging to another framework besides the national one, religious leaders thus have the advantage of representing an authority which is not grounded only in ‘the social contract.’ As Ferid said, their moral authority lies in the fact that people “see God” through them. What is more, religion as a separate supra-national system gives them the ability to preserve a different form of morality, which is not based on the direct interests of a (national/ethnic) community. Operating with a much broader perspective of time, history, and justice, they could (in theory) move one step back from the ongoing obsessions of their national and group interests. Of course, in practice, there are no guarantees that religious leaders would truly use these potentials. And, just as many others, they can equally fall prey to nationalism, thus losing their “prophetic voice” of critical discernment.

## 1.6.2. Large degree and broad scope of influence

A second important characteristic related to their position is the ability to encounter a large number of people on a continuous basis. Since religious services are scheduled on a cyclical basis, they have continuous access to people through preaching and pastoral work. At the same time, their public speeches people generally treat with greater reverence than those of nonreligious actors. Haris said, in that sense, that he can do more from his pulpit than politicians because he can count on the fact that people respect him.[[798]](#footnote-798) Jasmin explained that the great advantage of speaking to people also carries a great responsibility for the spoken word:

Look, every person that speaks publicly has influence. The advantage of speech in sacral objects is that everyone has to listen (…) In that sense, public speaking requires serious responsibility (…) and care. (…) That is why I say that all religious servants from all congregations are honored, God has granted us the honor of public speaking. At the same time, we have enormous responsibility for what we say. In comparison to politicians, we do have an advantage in a sense, but the responsibility is nonetheless enormous.[[799]](#footnote-799)

One thing that is important but not immediately obvious from these interviews are the characteristics of people who attend religious services. Unlike most other gatherings, which are focused on one social strata or group of people, religious services are attended by participants from all social groups, both low and high. In that respect, religious leaders have a unique ability to be mediators not only between different religious groups but also between different social groups within their own constituencies. Boško suggested to the politicians in his city to include religious representatives on the advisory board because they know “the pulse of the people” much better than do politicians.[[800]](#footnote-800)

## 1.6.3. Close engagement with people on a permanent basis

Religious leaders’ greatest peacemaking asset, by far, seems to be their close interaction with people, on both joyful and painful life occasions, and their permanent dedication to their communities. We have previously seen how the mere presence of religious leaders in a community can bring hope and optimism and encouragement to stay and invest in the place they live. That dedication to the community is manifested through personal and intimate contacts with people, which is another unique quality of their vocation. As Pavle explained, personal communication provides the means to send the strongest message: “I can send the strongest message only in (…) personal communication, in personal relationships, not in some general… through some lectures, some speeches, etc.”[[801]](#footnote-801) Ahmed developed this thought further, saying that, for him, closeness to people is not only *an* *instrument* for peacebuilding but precisely the way of bringing peace:

[M]y way of life with people here is, I would call it, an infiltration. Entering into every pore of life is my way of creating peace. Stipe, here I am a high-school teacher, a sportsman, a farmer, I am everything, just to become close to people. [I take them], step by step, to the right path (…) Trust me, peacebuilding for me is nothing extraordinary, just honesty and openness to people.[[802]](#footnote-802)

This closeness to people plays such an important role in the religious mission that Hrvoje, a Franciscan from Sarajevo, described the gradually increasing distance of religious leaders from the people as the greatest sin of religious communities in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Despite the fact that he started his response with believers, he made it clear that he understands his mission in a broader sense to include all citizens, regardless of their background:

**Q:** What, in your opinion, is the greatest sin of religious communities in Bosnia and Herzegovina?

**A:** I don’t know, that is a difficult question to answer now… What is the greatest sin? … Perhaps some sort of… I don’t know; I am trying to find the right word to formulate it somehow…. Some sort of perhaps overt distance, a too large distance from an actual believer. (…) In my view, one of our advantages—a great closeness to people—is disappearing or is being gradually reduced. I see that as a great failure and even a great tragedy, if you like. I don’t know whether it is a sin, but it is also a sin in some sense—that un-closeness with people, with their lives, life conflicts, questions, problems (…) To be clear, I do not consider here just members of my own community, but people in general, concretely—all citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina, because I feel that I am sent to all of them in some way.[[803]](#footnote-803)

At the same time, this very intimate and close connection of religious leaders to their communities, which is their greatest advantage, might at the same time be their stumbling block. Bearing in mind that some peacebuilding activities require criticism of their own communities, they might feel reluctant to address those problems for fear of being labeled, losing their authority, or even being directly sanctioned. If this closeness is too strong, religious leaders themselves can lose their distance and behave just as additional echo chambers of their nationalist politicians. On the other side, those who do want to offer a different vision of a common life need to fight current problems as well as “spoilers” of their work, the most important two of which are divisive political rhetoric and the media, which often act in tandem. This is how Danijel put it:

Religious communities define things nicely. All of them will, for instance, in the Interreligious Council or public meetings, say that we need to live together, with each other, truly together, and not next to each other in separate [ethnic] groups (…) What stops that nice, idealized talk from being put into practice is politics (…) It is the goal of politics to break some religious-like future of these territories, which requires coexistence and asks for reconciliation, and so on. They [political elites] want the walls back.[[804]](#footnote-804)

Since media are often just an extended hand of politics, it is not a surprise that the dominant narratives are those of fears and division. The effect of that is, according to Boško, that “children in eighth grade hate more than those who were shooting at each other.”[[805]](#footnote-805)

# 1.7. Interim conclusion: Religious leaders between fires

In this chapter, we saw different forms of peacebuilding that religious leaders can engage in. It was clear from the beginning that the scopes and limits of these forms largely depend on the cultural context. When I say *context*, I mean first of all the specific geographical-cultural context of the country without which it would be difficult to understand why certain issue (such as identity) is so important and why then theological reconstruction of identity can be considered a peacebuilding activity. Aside from that, I also had in mind the specific context determined by the greater or lesser presence of violence. Normally, when we speak about peacebuilding, we teleport ourselves automatically into the period ‘after’ the conflicts. However, there is no fixed ‘before’ or final ‘after.’ I tried to show, to the contrary, that peacebuilding should not be understood only as a *post-hoc* activity. David’s words reverberate in my mind—hundreds of peaceful years are useless if one day of conflict can destroy them. I wanted thus to demonstrate that peace*building* is not just a work of *re-building the ruins*, but also, development of strong fundaments—to use two building-related metaphors. That idea resonated with religious leaders’ notion of formation and education. They saw the war, in part, as a result of deficiencies in religious education, shortcomings in developing religious resilience and proper moral character among believers that would, even in the case of war, be capable of opposing virulent nationalism, ideological use of religious symbols, and war crimes. One important contribution of this perspective for the theories and practice of peacebuilding could be a renewed interest in moral education and character education, which is often absent from the toolkits of peacebuilding strategies. Clearly, an open question for a separate discussion remains as to which form of moral and character education would be proper for a given society and, furthermore, who and in which framework would be legitimate to teach it.

Once again, the success of this form of peacebuilding will largely depend not just on the will and capabilities of religious communities, but also on the socio-political context of a given society. As we could see, a lot of the preceding discussion could not be adequately understood without knowledge of religious communities under Communism and in the post-Communist period. Almost complete absence from the public sphere made them, for decades, absent from the area of common decision-making and limited the sphere of their influence to religious settings and private households (at least to those who were ready to publicly identify themselves as believers). The lack of religious freedom certainly made religious communities turn against such a system, dreaming its collapse. That dream eventually came true but, it turned out, with many elements of a nightmare.

## 1.7.1. Beginning of conflicts: Communism in reverse

One word dominated the descriptions of the period of the early 1990’s—confusion. What took place, it seems, was not just a confusion over political legitimacy, causes of war, eruption of violence, but also a confusion that appeared in the very heart of the religious life. The transference of powers that took place on the grand scheme of history, where the Communist one-party system gave way to young multi-party democracies and where the state-planned economy was meant to be replaced by free market models, had an unusual reflection on the life of religious communities. While under Communism, religion, often considered as an “opium of the masses,” was kept safely distant from public life, it still had a certain ‘sovereignty’ in the inner circles of religious congregations. As we could see in the interviews, being a believer at that time in many cases carried a stigma of suspicion or was performed as a protest identity against the system.

The grand return of religion on the public scene, described before as a ‘coming out of sacristies’ initially seemed like a great liberation from an oppressive system. It carried, however, another danger, which could be described as an ‘opium of freedom.’ Feeling that Communism was collapsing, religious communities suddenly experienced freedom. Paradoxically, their understanding of freedom was quite limited to the notion of freedom from direct political suppression. What was not taken into account was freedom *from* mental constraints/stereotypes/fears/unnatural attachments and freedom *for* broad and creative public engagement that did not need to be a replica of national programs. Parallel to the awakening of religious sentiments, the mass return of believers, both to the Church and to their nation, created new sets of social norms and patterns of desirable discourse that were a motor of positive discrimination towards those individuals in religious communities that conformed to them and silenced those who thought differently. At the same time, the previously inaccessible domain of sacred rituals and symbols suddenly became appropriated both by real converts and opportunists, who recognized the mobilizing potential of religion and the symbolic value that it could bring.

I have described the stated process in another place as “Communism in Reverse.” [[806]](#footnote-806) Within the Communist grand scheme of history, religion was considered a counter-revolutionary force, conservative protector of the status quo, an illusion that offered only temporary relief, in other words, a notorious ‘opium’ for great masses of exploited people. Consequentially, religion was marginalized into departments of private lives, viewed as a social factor but not as a motor of progress. The Communist ideology, at least nominally, required the abolition of private property. Religion, however, was a ‘private property’ that citizens were allowed to have, insofar as it remained private. The situation varied country by country and decade by decade, but there were always some forms of double-lives among the population that remained largely religious at home and non-religious in public. After the collapse of Communism, a reverse process took place—public properties became privatized while religion became socialized. It was something like *Communism in reverse* in which private and public elements changed places. Once, when the old ideology collapsed and religion went ‘out of sacristies,’ everybody felt entitled to declare themselves ‘religious’ and put religious labels on his or her projects, including those of war crimes and ethnic cleansing. Previous ‘private owners’ of religious life, i.e., religious leaders and convinced believers, suddenly felt immersed in a tsunami of renewed religious identities. While on the one hand, they were happy to enjoy a newly discovered freedom of public expression, on the other they realized soon afterward that the public exposure of religion makes it vulnerable to various forms of misuse.

Most of my interviewees described that period of transition as a time of confusion, raised emotions, and mixed feelings. They could clearly see that there was something ‘fake’ in that sudden religious revival, considering that previously convinced Communist officials changed their rhetoric overnight, using religious overtones as an effective means of mobilization and legitimatization for their ideological projects. The chains of a solitary chamber were quickly replaced with the chains of public opinion. Taking away public means of expression did not destroy religion, and that was the Communist fallacy. On the other hand, providing religious communities with public platforms does not necessarily make religion stronger, and that is the post-secular fallacy. Experiencing both the oppressive privatization and the subsequent ‘publicization’ of religion, my interviewees often realized that the public space is not a place of salvation; if anything, it is a temptation for one’s religious autonomy.

In short, I used the phrase “getting attention, losing control” to say that increased public presence came to religious communities at the cost of losing control over the very center of their institutional work—religious symbols and narratives. The mutual rapprochement between the spheres of religious and national identity coincided with the beginnings of the war, which further catalyzing their coupling, almost to the point of indistinguishability. If we add to that a shockingly high number of casualties in a very short time, international isolation, and a large degree of disorganization in both the civil, military, and religious organization, we start to form a picture of what “chaos” really meant.

Peacebuilding activities of religious leaders were in such a setting limited not only by practical constraints but also mental ones. Even when they witnessed wrongs and felt a theological obligation to react, they felt constrained by fears for their physical integrity, public reputation, and degree of influence. I called that state *theological dissonance.* The strategies of responding to *theological dissonance* I termed *pastoral optimization.* Their dilemma was often the following: “Is it better to state things clearly, no matter what, or search for the best possible solution within given limits?” The answers were, to a large degree, a matter of personal assessment. We saw examples of religious leaders who concluded that it is moral to give one’s life for a good cause “but not give it cheaply” and also those who risked their own life and reputation to do what they deemed worthy.

Obviously, it would be unreasonable to expect that all religious leaders would be ready to do extraordinary acts of courage in the face of an immediate threat. Nevertheless, even when the scope of action is limited and when risks are high, there are still some important peacebuilding actions in which religious leaders can play a decisive role. The most obvious one is humanitarian assistance, distribution of food, clothes, and medical supplies to endangered groups. But there are also other important activities, such as resistance to misuse of religious symbols and narratives in order to preserve a certain distance from war-imposed divisions. Moreover, as some respondents emphasized, it is still important to preserve certain moral stature that witness a preference for peace and nonviolence, even amidst direct destruction. For them, it was important to show that religious representatives were almost the only voices that were left to give a different view of the world, to give people emotional comfort and confidence.

Many activaties done during the war were also preparation for the period that came afterward. In that sense, religious leaders who managed to maintain contact with other communities, even in a limited way, later became important bridges between the communities. All those types of activities can be performed in numerous ways, e.g., through observance of a different discourse to that of war propaganda, a discourse that makes room for hope and understanding of the relationships that go beyond simple black-and-white schemes of events. They can be enacted through direct personal contact, public declaration, or even as symbolic actions, such as a simple common walk through a city that was meant to be divided.

Finally, another possible facet of religious peacebuilding is impossible to measure. We saw it when Velimir explained why it was better to stay with soldiers even given the price of certain auto-censorship. He suggested that the continued engagement of religious leader was the factor that actually prevented many crimes that otherwise would have happened. The logic is the following: although the war was bloody and horrible, it would have been even worse had it not been for the engagement of religious leaders. This might be correct, but since it is impossible to know the alternative scenarios of ‘what would have happened if,’ we can still treat it as another *possibility* of peacebuilding by prevention.

## 1.7.2. After the conflicts

Prolonged violence has effects which are felt not only during the conflicts but also for a long time afterward. One of its most challenging consequences is the fortification of in-group identities against out-groups. Because of that, *theological reconfiguration of closed identities* becomes a significant form of peacebuilding. That process includes several intertwined actions. The first of them was termed *stabilization of identity*. It involves, on the one hand, a firmer grounding in one’s own religious tradition but also the dissolution of fears that processes of mutual rapprochement or reconciliation are detrimental to one’s own identity and sense of value. The premise was that only stabilized identities could feel comfortable enough to engage in dialogue and start the process of mutual enrichment. This does not suggest the giving up of a group’s unique characteristics, but rather their reconfiguration in a way that is open to the Other and different. One of the biggest challenges in this respect is the status of the suffering of the Other and demonstration of solidarity. Practically, that involves an interreligious and inter-group *dialogue of life*, visible in many forms, and also being engaged in work in the fields of forgiveness, reconciliation, and memory.

In order to make this step firm and convincing, religious leaders need, besides goodwill, to rediscover and construct theological elements in their traditions as pillars on which interreligious dialogue can firmly rest. As we could see from the interviews, ideas matter! It was often the encounter with new theological currents or changes in theological paradigms that decisively influenced people who engaged in dialogue with others. I have outlined the three most important theological moves that have the potential to interrupt closed identities: 1) the move from the idea of *exclusive electivity* towards *participative salvation*, based on the rediscovery of *providential plurality*, 2) the move from the divinization of the land and ethnic/national belonging towards inclusive concepts of *God’s people* and a *shared land*, and 3) the move from *coercive power* towards *moral authority*. We should add to them the previously described move from *zlopmaćenje* to *prayerful commemoration* and *ecoumena of suffering*. Those steps are essential, and they go against the dominant post-conflict narrative of “us versus them,” which has a low tolerance for affirmative actions towards “them.” Peacebuilding activities were sometimes very simple and ordinary—meeting for coffee or walking through the city. However, the power of those simple actions lies in their ability to be easily imitated and replicated. Religious leaders, in that sense, can act as senders of signals for other members to do the same.

In addition to transformative work in the arena of group identities, we also saw the importance of religious leaders in the *reconstruction of life* following conflict. Sometimes their sheer presence was sufficient to instill hope and optimism in people. Perhaps the greatest comparative advantage of religious leaders is their long-term dedication to their communities and their generally cordial relationships with people. In that respect, they are important mediators not only *between the (religious/ethnic) communities* but also *between different (economic/social) groups within their own community*. Additionally, they have the advantage of operating with rich religious traditions that give them moral authority and a chance to inspire people to go beyond their immediate interests or the interests of their group in the service of peace. Closely related to that is their mission of hope. Both during the conflicts and after them, there is a danger of defeatism and passivity. Thus, giving people grounds for hope can be an extremely valuable and unique contribution that religious leaders can give to the broader peacebuilding process. Finally, if they manage to find a way to encourage their constituencies to face the legacy of the abuses committed by members of their own communities, they can greatly facilitate the process of *coming to terms with the past* and developing *common frameworks of memory.*

## 1.7.3. Just enough

It was also clear, in the previous discussion, that those positive potentials are rarely achieved. Faced with the dissonance between their theological imperatives and practical limitations, religious leaders engage in the processes of *pastoral optimization*, thus making tradeoffs between what is desirable and what is achievable within given limits.

The same comparative advantages of their closeness with their communities and their status as moral figures can lead religious leaders either to a certain myopia towards crimes of their own community or towards auto-censorship. We could see how this often includes practical interpretations of their religious texts that have for its goal to prove that the use of violence is theologically justified.

One of the problems is that every conflict involves a great deal of smaller conflicts and that judgments about wars are always fragmented. When religious leaders say that their people are fighting a *just* war, it seems that they do not understand justice as a general principle that transcends their current inclinations or biases. It is more that they are saying that the war in question is simply *just enough*, i.e., that there are *enough* reasons to justify certain actions or ideals of their constituencies and, conversely, that their pastoral engagement in support of them is warranted. I stressed actions and ideals intentionally because the latter can serve the purpose when *actions only* become too difficult to defend. We can detect that reasoning whenever people say something along the lines of “yes, our people did commit some crimes, but they were just fighting for a higher ideal and so their crimes were regrettable but still understandable.” At the same time, the scope of evaluated acts can be framed in such a way that it allows for positive judgment even in the face of any evidence to the contrary. A good example is Vojislav Čarkić whom I mentioned previously in the context of the *Al Jazeera* interview. He is an Orthodox priest, born and raised in Sarajevo. During the war, he was in charge of the pastoral care of Serbian soldiers in the Sarajevo neighborhood of Grbavica. In a public interview to RTVIS television, he said that he was simply defending his own parish in Sarajevo and that he did not go to fight in some other territories.[[807]](#footnote-807) In other words, he *just* fought for what was his territory against the Bosniaks from the same city. Nothing was said, however, about the fact that Sarajevo was under siege for almost four years. In Vojislav’s eyes, he was doing a *just* duty of self-defense. However that can only be a just duty if completely isolated from the moral assessment of what was happening outside his neighborhood. When the war on the larger scale does not seem *just,* it can at least be *just enough*.

What prevents religious leaders from being more persistently vocal in the condemnation of war (aside from existential threats and concerns for their reputation and authority) seems to be moral *gerrymandering* in which there are always enough reasons to find some justifications.

Of course, there are also endless instances in which religious leaders condemn war in a nonbinding abstract sense, stating that war and sufferings are not good, using truisms that nobody would oppose anyway. What I have in mind when I stress the need for self-criticism is a more specific discernment of wrongdoings and an expression of concern for all communities, not just their own people. It is banally easy to say that war is bad, but it takes enormous moral courage to say that all the justified fears and concerns of their own co-religionist or ethnic members are still not sufficient to justify mobilization of the population for organized violence. It is extremely easy to express care for *all people*, but it is very difficult to do it for a concrete painful Other.

## 1.7.4. Measuring the invisible

Another potentially valuable contribution of this chapter is sketching peacebuilding activities which are, from the perspective of religious leaders, crucially important but remain unacknowledged from an external perspective. Usually, under peacebuilding, we understand specific activities which in a detectable and measurable way strengthen social institutions and the rule of law, increase human rights, and empower the citizenry. What first comes to mind are development programs, various forms of counseling and outreach, educational activities, and some mechanism of transitional justice. However, peacebuilding activities of religious leaders only partially overlap with these sets of actions and processes. Although their goals might be the same—peaceful, stable, and non-violent social relations—the understanding of what peacebuilding activities entail and how they are done contain some specific elements. Sometimes, for instance, peacebuilding activities of religious leaders do not differ in any way from their standard religious activities related to religious rites. Thus, one has to accept that there are fundamental differences in the way peace, and consequentially peacebuilding, can be conceptualized. The principal conviction of religious communities is the existence of a transcendent, spiritual reality which is integrally bound to the world in which we live and act. For that reason, activities such as daily prayer or spiritual service for peace constitute something vital. Those—for religious leaders’ fundamental peacebuilding activities—do not fit neatly into standard models of peacebuilding. In that respect, it is important to stress that religious communities have both *visible* and *invisible* modes of acting. However, their contribution is usually recognized only if they do exactly the same activities as other social groups—when they participate in education, in charity, when they offer public apologies, etc. One cannot deny that all those activities are positive, but they occupy only a small scope of the spectrum of religious activities and religious vocation. On the other hand, activities that they deem central, those related to the spiritual growth of people, are rarely, if ever recognized as contributions to peace, unless they are once again delivered in the form of a public lecture or some other ‘familiar’ activity.

It is also important to recognize that peacebuilding for religious leaders is not an epi-phenomenon of disconcerted actions. On the contrary, it is a holistic notion that unifies all areas of life. Related to this is the notion of concentric circles of peace in which peace ‘flows’ from the individual towards the outside, encompassing firstly small groups and then larger and larger areas of society. In that respect, spiritual development of individuals is of crucial importance—it is based on the idea that the state of inner peace is a necessary prerequisite of all other peacebuilding actions.

Finally, it is also important to acknowledge the notion of spontaneity, both with respect to peace and peacebuilding. Peace, to some degree, is unpredictable and cannot be contained in schematic planning. It can grow as a form of uncultivated *Wildpeace* even from activities that seem secondary and non-utilitarian—e.g. from emphasizing beauty and motivated presence.

# II. Theoretical discussion

After the presentation of a model of religious leaders’ role in peacebuilding in previous sections, this part will situate the relationships between religion, conflict, and peace within broader theoretical discussions. The proposed model was based on the inductive approach and thus is closely linked to the specific context of Bosnia and Herzegovina. At the same time, it is not limited to the local situation and many of its elements (e.g., chronological dimensions, concepts of *theological dissonance* or *pastoral optimization*) can be applied to other post-conflict societies in which religion constitutes a highly relevant social factor. Since similar models of religiously inspired peacebuilding are generally rare, a comparison just with other models would leave many important questions about religion, conflicts, and peacebuilding unaddressed. For that reason, I will try to integrate a number of different studies that are relevant to individual aspects of my model.

Interviews presented in the previous discussion provided insights into the many ways in which religious elements and actors can be associated with either conflict or peace. However, an underlying assumption of all of them was a link between something *specific* in religious traditions or religiosity of people and the prospects for peace or violence. In other words, the basic premise is that certain forms of religious involvement can *make a difference*, i.e., *cause a positive change*, in a conflict situation.

# 2.1. Causes: Things that make the difference

Sometime before Greek philosophy, Greek tragedy recognized causes as the true form of knowledge. What was *tragic* in the fate of a tragic hero in ancient Greek theatre was to witness the effects of actions without also learning the causes that led to those effects. Sophocles, a century before Aristotle, developed a whole trilogy dedicated to the hidden factors that define human reality—hidden, but nonetheless real and implicated in the messy interplay of social norms, individual desires, and uncontrollable elements of nature. On the other hand, Aristotle’s philosophy of knowledge influenced the course of Western scientific inquiry for the centuries to come. Real knowledge, according to Aristotle and some of his pre-Socratic predecessors, was the knowledge of causes.[[808]](#footnote-808) Many centuries later, inspired by the pioneering work of Judea Pearl and Thomas Bayes, statistical experts developed increasingly sophisticated procedures to uncover “latent” variables based on probabilistic dependencies.[[809]](#footnote-809) All those attempts were driven by the intuition that events do not occur “before our eyes” simply by chance, unrelated to each other. Instead, there seem to be “ties” between them, something that Hume called “the cement of the universe,” a conceptual material that makes our understanding of events coherent.[[810]](#footnote-810)

The central question of causality—what are causes in themselves—is still debated, partly because of its sheer complexity and partly because of incompatible philosophical views on the nature of reality itself. Let us take an example: If I accidentally dropped a glass on the floor and it broke, did I cause it to break? Alternatively, perhaps we could say that the cause of the break was the fragile structure of the material from which the glass was made—had it not been made of glass but instead of plastic, it would have survived the drop. Or perhaps the real cause was a set of overall conditions—bad lighting in the room and a recently cleaned floor that caused me to slip and drop the glass? Furthermore, could something genetic have caused weakness in my right arm and consequently made me unable to hold the glass firmly? Moreover, if the glass falls only once, we might ask whether we can speak about “causes” or whether we need to establish observable patterns before claiming their existence?

  Those introductory questions serve to illustrate the difficulties involved in discussing questions of causality, even with respect to the very simple event of a glass being broken. The situation becomes even more involved when we attempt to analyze causes within the social and political realms. A straightforward strategy to mitigate the conceptual problems would be to avoid the notion of “cause” altogether, in favor of some other term that seems much more content-neutral (“correlation” would be a good candidate). However, the concept of causality appears so important to human understanding that avoiding it completely would seem quite difficult. Even when alternative terms are employed, some scholars argue, the change is frequently just a linguistic one.[[811]](#footnote-811)

## 2.1.1. Religion as a source of change

Perhaps because of its apparent omnipresence, causality has long been treated as a religious concept. In medieval philosophy, causality was a central concept related to the existence of God, who was understood to be the “cause without cause,” the “unmoved mover” of the universe. Modernist philosophy bifurcated into a stream that retains God’s presence as a necessary precondition to an understanding of change (Malebranche, Descartes), while the mechanistic philosophers do away with the notion of teleology privileging observable patterns of regularity (Hume, La Mettrie).[[812]](#footnote-812) Turning the tables, this chapter asks not “how can causality be understood in a religious sense?” but rather “how can religion be understood in a causal sense?”

With respect to religion and causality, causal candidates seem abundant. Sometimes the causal link between religion and conflict (or its resolution) is presented as a link between religious *beliefs* and collective *actions*; at other times, this link is seen in terms of psychological mechanisms, i.e., in terms of an *absolutist mindset* and *social exclusion* (referring to religion as a divisive power).[[813]](#footnote-813) At still other times, it is seen in terms of religion’s ability to *frame* existing conflicts in a narrative of cosmic battle,[[814]](#footnote-814) as a link between religious *rituals* and social *cohesion,*[[815]](#footnote-815) or in terms of a relationship between religion and a global ethos[[816]](#footnote-816) or between religion and civilization.[[817]](#footnote-817) As we can see, the narratives can vary from the micro-level (individual religiosity) to the global level of civilizations.

Even those random and anecdotic examples suffice to show that causality of religion can be understood in many ways. In the previous section, the roles of religious leaders were described in relation to different phases of conflict as *prevention*, *reaction*, and *transformation*. Elaboration of these elements then drew our attention to relevant links between religious identity and ethnic/national identity, to political power and social position of religious communities. Clearly, understanding of those links demands a broader conceptualization of causality than the common one of direct, observable links between causes and effects would permit. In this section, I will thus elaborate further on the proposed theoretical model in an attempt to connect the level of religious ideas and beliefs to structural conditions and social action. For that purpose, I will use Aristotle’s fourfold notion of causality which, besides being influential, is comprehensive enough to contain the different elements of religiously inspired peacebuilding.

When I speak about peacebuilding and conflict transformation in this section, I will on some occasions use the word “religion” for the sake of simplicity, because a number of other scholars use it in this way. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that “religions” always imply agents, people who adhere to them and who are ready to act in a certain way (at least in part) because of convictions related to their religions.

## 2.1.2. Resuscitating Aristotle: Four causal factors

In an important work entitled *Causation in International Relations*, Kurki emphasizes the need to move from Hume’s theory of causality, which has had a profound influence on the modern scientific understanding of causes and effects. With its focus on observable regularities, Hume’s philosophical legacy has, according to Kurki, reduced the notion to “moving,” effective causes thus impoverishing previous pluralistic causal models.[[818]](#footnote-818) Kurki thus argues for the rediscovery of Aristotle’s notion of four causes that can be interpreted in such a way as to provide a more comprehensive view on a number of complex problems:

On the basis of the Aristotelian system, we can still hold on to the notion of ‘active’ causes (efficient causes) while conceptualizing these causes in relation to final causes and, crucially, within a ‘constitutive,’ or causally conditioning, environment understood through material and formal causes. The notion of a formal cause allows us to understand the causal role of ideas, rules, norms, and discourses. Instead of treating these as non-causal, as has been the tendency in much of interpretive social theory, these factors can be seen as ‘constraining and enabling’ conditioning causes of social action. The Aristotelian conceptualisation also allows us to understand the causal role of material resources and properties: instead of treating them as ‘pushing and pulling’ forces, or of ignoring them, they are conceptualised as ubiquitous but ‘passive’ conditioning causes. Crucially, the Aristotelian philosophy requires us always to embed different types of causes in relation to each other and thereby to concentrate causal analysis on the complex interaction of different types of causes. This allows us to steer clear of theoretically reductionist accounts, whether materialist, idealist, agential, or structural.[[819]](#footnote-819)

Kurki does not argue for a return to Aristotle’s metaphysics nor does she completely follow Aristotle’s original division of four causes. Her main point is that the social sciences would benefit from a broader understanding of causalities, removed from the grip of when-A-to-B thinking, in order to bridge the division between “causal” and “non-causal” approaches, and between different scientific disciplines.[[820]](#footnote-820) The implications of Kurki’s proposal are especially important for the understanding of religion. Instead of focusing only on one element of religiously inspired peacebuilding, we would profit from a combined approach which, besides *effective* causes, would acknowledge *formal* causes (such as ideas and beliefs), *material* causes (such as the social position of religious institutions and their links to coercive power), and *final* causes (such as the sources of inspiration for religious peacebuilding). Following Kurki’s suggestion and applying them to the relationship between religion and peacebuilding, I would rephrase the four guiding questions in the following way:

* According to which design/vision? (*formal cause*), i.e., What is the role of ideas and theological models in religiously inspired peacebuilding?
* Under which conditions? (*material causes*), i.e., In what ways do the social positions of religious institutions and of religious leaders influence religiously inspired peacebuilding?
* How? (*efficient causes*), i.e., What are religious leaders’ practical modes of engagement, including their comparative advantages, in peacebuilding?
* For what purposes? (*final cause*), i.e., What ultimate vision of the world motivates religious leaders to engage in peacebuilding?

Throughout this book, we could see the relevance of all these questions and the different constellations in which they appear. One of the important contributions of this project is the situation of religious peacebuilding in the broader social, ideological, and political context. Instead of viewing religion as an abstract factor, it insists on a contextualized, socially embedded view of religious actors involved in peacebuilding processes. In other words, it does not accentuate just one ore several elements in religious traditions, but treates religion as a “causal field”[[821]](#footnote-821) that, in communication with other causal fields, makes a difference in a given society.

I should add one more disclaimer: I do not suggest that Aristotle’s concept of four causes is either the only one or the best organizing principle for every discussion about the relationships among religion, conflict, and peace. Therefore, the previous questions should only be understood as useful heuristic tools rather than the only possible classification. [[822]](#footnote-822)

The central element in my model was termed the *transformation of closed identities to open identities*. It represents the conceptual link between engagement with a legacy of crimes, reconstruction of life, and a view towards (the ultimate) future via hope. Furthermore, the essential activity of religious leaders in the model is the *change of theological paradigms related to identity*, which comprises moves from electivity towards participative salvation, from (ethnically) clean lands to shared lands, from coercive power to moral authority, and from *zlopamćenje* to *ecoumena of compassion*. Each of these elements could be discussed at length on its own merit. However, even on a meta-level, my model suggests that beliefs and ideas, theological paradigms and models, are of crucial importance in every conceptualization of the links between religion and peace (or violence). Hence, I will first discuss the role of religious beliefs and concepts (formal causes), then proceed to a discussion of structural elements (material causes), and end with an analysis of the importance of global visions (final causes), as presented in Scheme 4.5 (see the Appendix). Practical modes of engagement of religious leaders (effective causes) will not be discussed separately but integrated into each of the previously mentioned parts.

# 2.2. Formal causes: Importance of beliefs and ideas

## 2.2.1. Making good bad

The famous physicist Steven Weinberg provoked a great deal of controversy with his oft-quoted sentence, “With or without religion, good people can behave well and bad people can do evil; but for good people to do evil—that takes religion.”[[823]](#footnote-823) What made the statement so controversial was the alleged link between religion and “bad things.” Referring to critics who pointed out that some of the most notorious tyrants were not religious, Weinberg concedes in his book, *Facing Up*, that Hitler, Stalin, Mao, and Pol Pot were indeed not religious but that they were by no account “good people,” implying that their evil acts could be explained by factors of their personalities, that is, just as good character can explain good acts, the acts of Hitler and company can be explained by their corrupted character. However, in Weinberg’s view, religion has the power to reverse the natural tendency of good people to do good things into a tendency for evil: “In saying that it takes religion for good men to do evil I had in mind someone like Louis IX. By all accounts, he was modest, generous, and concerned to an unusual degree with the welfare of the common people of France, but he was led by his religion to launch the war of aggression against Egypt that we know as the Sixth Crusade.”[[824]](#footnote-824)

Weinberg, interestingly, did not discuss whether there is anything that can make bad people do good things (religion is often credited for integration into society of former criminals and social outsiders) or whether religion can also make good people behave in a better way, thereby reinforcing their tendency toward good actions. But let us pause for a moment to reflect on the following puzzle: What is it that makes people do bad things in the name of religion, assuming that those actions can be ascribed to something more than their innate character?

Sam Harris, a vocal critic of religion and frequent political commentator, argues that the problematic element consist of the core beliefs of specific religions. Viewing the conflicts in the Balkans together with Palestine, Northern Ireland, Kashmir, Sudan, Ethiopia and Eritrea, Sri Lanka, Indonesia, and the Caucasus, he concludes: “In these places, religion has been the *explicit* cause of literally millions of deaths in the last ten years (…) Give people divergent, irreconcilable, and untestable notions about what happens after death, and then oblige them to live together with limited resources. The result is just what we see: an unending cycle of murder and cease-fire.”[[825]](#footnote-825) The argument here seems to be that a particular element of religion, i.e., *belief* *in life after death*, leads to violence. In his response to Fareed Zakaria, who claimed that the total failure of political institutions in the Arab world was a primary cause of the rise of Islamic fundamentalism, Harris said that

‘[T]he rise of Islamic fundamentalism’ is only a problem because the *fundamentals of Islam* are a problem. A rise of Jain fundamentalism would endanger no one. In fact, the uncontrollable spread of Jainism throughout the world would improve our situation immensely. We would lose more of our crops to pests, perhaps (observant Jains generally will not kill anything, including insects), but we would not find ourselves surrounded by suicidal terrorists or by a civilization that widely condones their actions.[[826]](#footnote-826)

Harris, to put it differently, does not side with the scholars who account for violent religious fundamentalism by reference to difficult economic and social situations. Fundamentalism, Harris argues, becomes problematic only when the sources to which believers adhere in a fundamentalist way promote violence. The *fundamentals* of a religion, its basic prescripts, are thus the decisive factors that explain religious violence. In that sense, Jainism, a religion opposed to any use of violence, would not represent any danger when observed in a fundamentalist way. This claim, after Harris had proposed it, was discussed on many Internet fora. It seems compelling because it does not locate the source of violence either in a specific (fundamentalist) mindset nor in socio-economic problems but, rather, in the beliefs that distinguish one religion from another. But is it really the case that ‘fundamentalist’ Jains would never resort to violence? One Jain published the following on the Internet forum “Quora” (grammatical mistakes are kept as in the original):

In Jainism each and  everything is considered at the microscopic level. So according to jainism if you kill a human or a mosquito or a dog or a bacteria, its one and the same thing because you are killing a living being. So in Jainism nonviolence means minimum damage done to the environment while doing an action. To be more clear i would say choosing a way to perform the action so that you kill minimum number of living beings(as even you keep your foot on the ground you kill millions of them). So almost every rule in Jainism revolves around the very same principle. Now coming to the original question about a jain joining armed forces , our religion teaches us to do our ‘karma’ which should be in the interest of your society/country/ mankind. So jainism doesn’t forbid us to kill someone (including other living beings ) because its going to happen anyway even while you are breathing. It teaches us to keep the killings to a minimum level. So if you are serving in the armed forces to defend your country, you are defending more lifes than you are killing. So it is a justifiable act.[[827]](#footnote-827)

This particular *justification* hardly differs from a standard utilitarian view.

From the historical perspective, it is true that Jainism has rarely been implicated in violence. Nevertheless, one famous example of a Jainist ruler who engaged in fighting was Rani Abbakka Chowta, the queen of Ulal, who fought against Portuguese colonizers in India in the 16th century. Clearly, Harris could argue that the person who posted on the Quora thread was not a real ‘fundamentalist,’ i.e., that he did not sufficiently understand the teachings of Jainism and that further exploration would make him realize that his justification of violence was wrong. However, proponents of many other religions use the same argument when saying that literal interpretation of their scriptures is only the first step in the long process of discovering the ‘real’ message, which is purported to be peaceful and spiritual. Therefore, without denying the role of foundational texts and ideas in the development of attitudes, interpreting those foundational texts can result in new conclusions that are seemingly diametrically opposed to conclusions that we had when taking the texts at face value.

Pursuing a different way to explain religiously motivated violence, Hector Avalos argues that there is no ‘real’ version of any religion and that ideas of a *right* and *wrong* religion can only lead to further conflict. He mentions that, soon after 9/11, President Bush attempted to counter a “hijacked” version of Islam by promoting its original, peaceful meaning. Similarly, national security advisor Richard Clark saw a need to promote the “real Islam” against al-Qaeda and other terrorist movements that operate with the wrong Islam.[[828]](#footnote-828) Their views on religion, states Avalos, were essentialist in the sense that they distinguished between right and wrong beliefs, thus suggesting that the solution to violence lies in replacing ‘wrong’ beliefs with ‘correct’ ones. At the same time, Avalos points out, those statements were accompanied by direct military interventions, which seemingly disregarded the possibility of structural and cultural causes of religious grievances.

For Avalos, the core of the problem is a different one. He proposes the *Scarce Resource Theory* to explain how religions can motivate violence through the framing of perceptions. According to this theory, the perception of scarcity is the leading motivator of violence. Even though scarcity of resources can result from economic relationships or natural phenomena, Avalos insists that the *perceptions of scarcity* influenced by religion are, in the case of the Middle East, “every bit as powerful as oil.” [[829]](#footnote-829) The problem with religiously created scarcities lies in the fact that they do not have to be real—a belief in them makes them real. Thus, “[r]eligion can create conflict and violence when it creates scarce resources of such perceived value that people are willing to fight and die for them. The scarce resources are a necessary factor in violence when the loss of those valued scarce resources is thought to be imminent or when someone else attempts to acquire those scarce resources.”[[830]](#footnote-830) At the same time, since those ideas of scarcity are postulated by reference to supernatural beings, they cannot be easily dispelled:

Since religion is based on belief in the existence of supernatural beings, it follows that religion is working from unverifiable premises or conclusions when it speaks of the supernatural. That is to say; we cannot verify the existence of anything supernatural. Thus, religious beliefs cannot be subject to public scrutiny, even if they often claim to be based on empirical evidence. However, as with scarcities that are real, the scarcities generated by religion require only belief in them in order to ‘exist.’[[831]](#footnote-831)

Similarly, Juergensmeyer suggests that re-interpretation of struggles in the theological framework can quickly lead to an impasse that can be resolved only by destruction of an enemy. Religious concepts, such as one positing a “cosmic war,” put a trans-historical spin on this-worldly conflicts, rendering them unresolvable in any other way than through the complete elimination of the antagonist. Conflicts framed in such a way are “ultimately beyond historical control, even though they are identified with this-worldly struggles. A satanic enemy cannot be transformed; it can only be destroyed.”[[832]](#footnote-832) The problem with the spiritualization of violence is, ultimately, its transposition from social laws and limitations into the divine realm controlled only by the higher authority. Therefore, religiously inspired terrorists can wage battles even if they are detrimental to their pragmatic needs for stability and security.[[833]](#footnote-833)

Thus, two proposed sources of violence related to religion are *religious texts* and *religious interpretations*. However, it seems necessary to add one additional element to explain why religious people who adhere to certain religious sources or interpretations decide to *enact* those beliefs publicly or impose them by violent means. Clearly, we can imagine the case of a deeply religious people who hold negative views about the world around them but, instead of resorting to violence, decide to live in private isolation or closed communities. The third element that connects religious ideas to public engagement is one Toft, Philpott, and Shah term *political theology*, which they define as “a matter of how religious actors think and promulgate their ideas.”[[834]](#footnote-834) The authors stress that the ideas on which religious actors base their political activities significantly determine the form of their actions:

To say that political theology matters is to say that a religious actor’s political stance is traceable, at least in part, to this set of ideas. Motivated by these notions, religious actors have undertaken to support, oppose, persuade, protest, rebel against, and sometimes pay very little attention to, political rulers. Religious actors arrive at their political theologies through reflection upon their religion’s texts and traditions and its foundational claims about divine being(s), time, eternity, salvation, morality, and revelation. Contemporary circumstances, however, matter as well. In any particular context, political theology translates basic theological claims, beliefs, and doctrines into political ideals and programs.[[835]](#footnote-835)

In their book, the authors stress that religious ideas cannot and should not be reduced to structural factors:

To some, it might seem obvious that ideas matter. Yet it is striking how often both scholars and the media treat religious ideas and motivations as a by-product of some ‘underlying’ force presumed to be more fundamental and compelling, whether it is economic deprivation, personal greed, stunted opportunity, resentment against colonialism, or a backlash against globalization.[[836]](#footnote-836)

In that respect,

[R]eligious belief is powerful, autonomous, and not simply the by-product of nonreligious factors. Ideas shape politics. A religious actor is more likely to engage in certain forms of political activity (to lead or join a movement for democracy, for instance) the stronger it holds doctrines that favor those activities (a political theology that prescribes liberal democracy, for instance). It is important to understand that religious actors often arrive at their ideas before they undertake political activities and that these ideas, in turn, lead them to undertake these activities.[[837]](#footnote-837)

In my interpretation of religiously inspired peacebuilding, I have tried to show that those three elements—religious *texts*, *interpretations* of these texts, and *theological models*—should be analyzed together and viewed as an integral whole. While some religious *texts* can offer strong justification for non-violence, other can seem to be diametrically the opposite. It is religious *interpretation* that makes sense of these dissonances, melding them into a coherent whole. The hermeneutics that guides the interpretation can also vary. While some currents insist on a single correct meaning of texts, other schools of interpretation are open to other semantic possibilities. Finally, those interpretations require also a certain model of social agency. Believers who accept either violent on non-violent interpretations still need to know what do with them, i.e., how to promulgate them in an optimal way. Those answers lie at the heart of *political theologies*. No matter how strong someone’s beliefs are, it is that third element that suggests what to do with those beliefs and how to behave towards the Other who does not adhere to them.

We saw an example of these links in the segments of my model that offered a theological grounding for a move from closed to open identity. Firstly, the paradigm of open identity was based on the *scriptural* sources that promote plurality as a part of the divine providential plan. Secondly, giving preference to those passages instead of others was a specific type of *interpretation* in which the guiding principle was the one of peace and respect. Finally, it was also stressed that the new paradigm requires a move from coercive power towards moral authority, which is a form of *political theology*.

It is worth noting that my respondents did not explicitly discuss all those links between sources, interpretations, and theologies. My impression was that they perceived them either as self-evident or simply as ‘correct’ or ‘natural’ ways of living religion. Funk-Deckard, in her research conducted in Bosnia and Herzegovina, pointed out that her interviewees often distinguished themselves between “true believer[s]” and those who called themselves believers “for [their] own interests.”[[838]](#footnote-838) True believers are characterized as those “known by their goodness and respect, their moral integrity” and contrast with those who use religion opportunistically “for personal gain.”[[839]](#footnote-839) At the same time, those who considered themselves true believers also thought that true beliefs were distinct from wrong beliefs:

True belief, as expressed by believers from different religious traditions, does not depend upon one’s religious tradition or institution. All religions teach the same core ideas of respect, honesty, fairness, kindness, etc.—elements of ethics that allows for a heterogeneous society to live together. My respondents claimed that all religions have these core values which seem to constitute some if not all of the shared and recognizable element of belief or faith.[[840]](#footnote-840)

Thus, people who consider themselves “true believers” assume that attitudes such as respect, honesty, or support for a heterogeneous society are “true” or self-evident. However, such a stance is already a specific interpretative choice that puts certain values, such as peace, justice, mercy, forgiving, and respect, as central or the most important to their traditions.[[841]](#footnote-841) I will address those processes in the following section.

## 2.2.2. Making bad good

One cannot ignore that peaceful and harmonious places of religious traditions stand in the same normative frameworks as other, much less peaceful passages. Thus, aside from the imperative to uncover peaceful traditions, religious actors still need to grapple with the challenge of demonstrating that peaceful elements have primacy over violent ones. This step falls within the scope of theological hermeneutics. Clearly, the problem is not new, and the debate about the peaceful and violent passages is as old as the religious traditions themselves, although each of them have different views on the nature of divine revelation, its transmission, and its status. The dominant approach in Catholicism, at least from the Second Vatican Council, has been the contextually sensitive approach to sacred Scriptures that recognizes their divine inspiration but takes personal traits of the biblical authors, as well as cultural and historical elements, as constitutive parts of the revelation. Interpretation, thus, has to take into account not only the Biblical passages in their literal sense and in relation to other Biblical texts but also in the perspective of historical circumstances, cultural norms of the time, and theological programs of biblical authors.[[842]](#footnote-842)

With respect to the so-called dark passages, i.e., Biblical passages that explicitly present violence and destruction as an action authorized by divine will, Botha mentions a number of interpretative strategies. “Loyalists,” those that still accept the normative value of Biblical texts, interpret the seemingly contradictory passages by establishing a “hierarchy of truth” in which certain principles (those of human dignity, for instance) provide the context within which other passages should be read. Among them, Botha lists the following approaches: advocates of the *universalist and essentialist approach* argue that certain texts are timeless and universal (e.g., those that describe universal human dignity) while some others were meant to be applied only in a specific historical situation and, as such, are no longer relevant; the *compensatory strategy* aims to compensate for those texts which, for instance, do not see men and women as equal with those that emphasize strong female characters; the *contrast strategy* suggests that many perplexing passages were meant to be applied in a fundamentally different culture and thus cannot be easily translated to the current time, which has a contrasting set of values; the *redemptive strategy*, similar to the compensatory strategy, seeks to “redeem” the texts from their internal confines (e.g., patriarchy) by seeking the inner counter-oppressive elements and retelling them from the position of victims.[[843]](#footnote-843) Aside from these “loyalist” strategies, Botha mentions another scholarly tradition that argues that Biblical texts do not have the clearly expressed norms of human dignity that are prevalent in contemporary culture. In their view, theologians have a responsibility to articulate those norms, starting from the position of the contemporary understanding and only subsequently “correlate” those values with Biblical texts.[[844]](#footnote-844)

Bennett proposes an approach to the scriptures based on the open acknowledgement of the problem, i.e., admitting the presence of passages that seem to condone violence. However, he insightfully remarks that eliminating all violent passages in sacred scriptures by claiming that these are human additions while preserving all peaceful passages by claiming that these are all divinely inspired runs the risk of being selective and, more importantly, unconvincing to millions of people, who believe in the divine inspiration of their scriptural sources in their entirety. “It can not be denied,” argues Bennett, “that Christians, Muslims and Jews have found justification for violence in their scriptures. The argument that such justification always represents a misinterpretation of scripture may be difficult to sustain, although in this writer’s opinion a case can be made for this.”[[845]](#footnote-845) Instead of dismissing violent and vindictive passages of the Holy Scriptures as illegitimate or mere allegories, Bennet postulates the “higher principle,” which is the central referential point of religious hermeneutics. In light of this higher principle, all other passages can be seen as legitimate parts of a scripture describing the incremental progress of God’s involvement with a broken humanity.[[846]](#footnote-846) That higher principle in both the Bible and the Qur’an, according to Bennett, is the principle of peace:

My suggestion is that both the Bible and the Qur’an contain a higher principle, the principle of peace. This relates to the ultimate concern of these scriptures. No passages exist that describe the end of God’s purposes as a world of war, conflict and injustice. Both scriptures, when they point towards the future that God intends for the world, extol peace. The end-time descriptions of the Hebrew Bible contain the much cited words that swords will be beaten into ploughshares and spears into pruning hooks (Isa. 11:6-9; Mic. 4: 3) while the Qur’an describes Islam as the ‘abode of peace’ and Muslims as those who do what is right and refrain from what is wrong (10:25; 3: 110). In addition to the higher principle of peace being the unambiguous end-time goal of God’s purposes in these scriptures, it resonates with what many people believe to be the ideal condition for human life.[[847]](#footnote-847)

Bennett’s view is in line with the old notion of divine pedagogy that is present in the Catechism of the Catholic Church,[[848]](#footnote-848) which says that God’s revelation to humanity was gradual and attained its perfection in the person of Jesus Christ. The basic idea is that God’s involvement with humanity was not a one-time event but a progressive mutual involvement in which God’s plans and nature became increasingly clear. As per Bennett, the same is the case with the principle of peace, which was revealed gradually, in accordance with humanity’s state of development:

[W]orking with human material and respecting human freedom, God chooses to work with humanity as humanity actually exists. God enters history through intervening in the lives of those whom God chooses to serve God’s-self. In a world of violence, God has to deal with violence. God could have declared that violence was absolutely evil but this would not have resulted in peace. Until humanity was ready to accept the truth of the higher principle, a lesser principle, that of war as a qualified good, was needed.[[849]](#footnote-849)

While this might sound like an apologetic excuse for the lack of clarity in the Holy Scriptures, Bennett asserts that this is not only the case with religions. Analyzing the development of secular ideas of peace, he shows how the current notions of peace, propagated in the UN Charter and the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, represent a positive evolution in contrast to previous notions, such as the Pax Romana or Pax Britannica. The contemporary notion of peace, which is inextricably coupled with fundamental human rights and holistic views on human existence, thus demonstrate an immense progress in the collective consciousness of humanity and resonates much better with scriptural passages on peace than did previous notions of peace, which were based on military domination.[[850]](#footnote-850) In short, Bennett’s suggestion for dealing with violent scriptural passages is based on two main ideas: 1) God’s engagement with humanity should be understood as an incremental revelation in which certain principles, due to human imperfection, have required an extended period of collective maturity to become clear and 2) peace, unlike war or violence, has a strong scriptural justification to be understood as the higher principle and the ultimate goal of humanity, thus meriting pride of place in religious hermeneutics. Juergensmeyer interestingly notes that even the passages related to conflict and war have peace as their final horizon: “[V]irtually every religious tradition has projected images of tranquility that are even more profound and unifying. It is, after all, for the sake of the tranquil and universal ideal of sacred transformation that one struggles in the battles of a cosmic war. In a curious way, then, the goal of all this religious violence is peace.”[[851]](#footnote-851)

Coming to terms with the ‘dark passages,’ or as Martínez de Pisón terms them “toxic texts,” is also necessary to show the readiness of religious communities to assume responsibility for their histories’ less bright sides and to distance themselves from violence. Martínez de Pisón generally argues for a “re-integration of religion into public life”[[852]](#footnote-852) because religion is, in his view, “crucial in the process of building up a culture of justice, equality, and peace.”[[853]](#footnote-853) But Martínez de Pisón’s also makes it clear the process of re-integration is not without obligation for religious communities. In order to contribute to the common goals of social, political, and environmental justice, religious communities must overcome “the detrimental link that exists between religion and violence when religion is used to justify or excuse violence.”[[854]](#footnote-854)

In short, the importance of religious interpretations for our discussion is visible mainly in the ways in which foundational religious elements (i.e., sacred scriptures and traditions) are ‘translated’ into practical engagements for peace. While on the one hand sacred symbols can be used to frame a situation in such a way that it leads to conflicts (for instance, by creating the artificial perception of scarcity), they can also provide a reference point for those who wholeheartedly work for peace. As Gopin points out, the process of interpretation and entanglement of religion, peace, and violence is deeply complicated:

There is an infinite set of possibilities associated with religious institutions and their behavior in terms of peace and violence. I never cease to be amazed by how the seemingly most violent religious institutions or texts in history give way over time to the most exalted values and moral practices. At the same time, the most pacifist foundations of a tradition can be turned toward the service of the most barbaric aims. It all seems to depend on the complex ways in which the psychological and sociological circumstances and the economic and cultural constructs of a particular group interact with the ceaseless human drive to hermeneutically develop religious meaning systems, texts, rituals, symbols, and laws.[[855]](#footnote-855)

I have tried to show that the difference between those two forms of engagement cannot be explained only by reference to one single element of religious traditions (e.g., certain violent passages). Instead, religiously inspired violence and peacebuilding are the result of a number of interrelated steps that include not just selection of convenient sources but also a comprehensive approach to interpretation and contextualization. As several of my respondents argued, the violence that is present in religious traditions themselves cannot be ignored, yet it does not have to constitute the defining element of religious identity. What is required is engagement with those conflict-inciting elements in a way that does not discard religious traditions altogether but establishes a set of central principles that nonetheless hold appeal to religious believers. Obviously, religious leaders play the crucial role in that project because they have the highest legitimacy and authority to propose and disseminate new theological models across the community.

# 2.3. Material causes: Religion and socio-political conditions

Having analyzed the role of religious beliefs, i.e., the elements that give “form” (formal cause) to peacebuilding, it is necessary to shift our attention to the *material* conditions. What I have in mind under that notion are the social conditions of religious communities that are conducive either to peace or violence. As was previously noted, my model proposes distancing of religious communities from positions of coercive power as an important step towards open identity, which is at the core of peacebuilding. In that sense, religious identity is seen as independent from other forms of group identity, most importantly of ethnic and national identities. This is in line with empirical studies, which suggest that religious communities are at their most effective in the struggle for justice when they maintain a certain “moral exterritoriality” to political systems,[[856]](#footnote-856) adopting theological positions that warn against too strong a commitment to dominant local cultures or political ideologies. Volf, for instance, warns that uncritical translation of cultural values into religious values, especially within the context of conflict, leads to partisan behavior of religious communities in favor of their cultural groups. In that respect, “[s]uch sacralization of cultural identity is invaluable for the parties in conflict because it can transmute what is, in fact, a murder into an act of piety.”[[857]](#footnote-857) Thus, the links between religion, culture, nationality, and ethnic group in my models are by no means inevitable.

Some authors scale the links between religious and group identity up to the civilizational level, and this is the topic of the next section.

## 2.3.1. Clashing identities

In a 1993 article in *Foreign Affairs*,[[858]](#footnote-858) Harvard professor Samuel Huntington proposes a theory that, over the subsequent year, became one of the most controversial attempts to explain world conflicts in the post-Cold War period. He further elaborated on this theory in his 1996 book *The Clash of Civilizations and The Remaking of World Order*.[[859]](#footnote-859) In Huntington’s view, although ethnic and tribal wars would continue within the context of civilizational groups, civilizational clashes would dominate the new global political order:

In this new world, local politics is the politics of ethnicity; global politics is the politics of civilizations. The rivalry of the superpowers is replaced by the clash of civilizations. In this new world the most pervasive, important, and dangerous conflicts will not be between social classes, rich and poor, or other economically defined groups, but between peoples belonging to different cultural entities. Tribal wars and ethnic conflicts will occur within civilizations. Violence between states and groups from different civilizations, however, carries with it the potential for escalation as other states and groups from these civilizations rally to the support of their “kin countries.”[[860]](#footnote-860)

Huntington predicted that “bloody clashes of civilizations in Bosnia, the Caucasus, Central Asia, or Kashmir could become bigger wars.”[[861]](#footnote-861) Citing Vaclav Havel, Huntington further suggested that future conflicts would not be sparked by economic factors or ideology but by culture and that “the most dangerous cultural conflicts [would be] those along the fault lines between civilizations.”[[862]](#footnote-862) Critics sometimes fail to recognize that Huntington did hold, to a certain degree, an ambivalent view of culture, suggesting that culture can be both a unifying and a divisive force. However, in line with his main premise, he hypothesized that culture could be a unifying force *only* within a framework of civilizational similarity:

In the post-Cold War world, culture is both a divisive and a unifying force. People separated by ideology but united by culture come together, as the two Germanys did and as the two Koreas and the several Chinas are beginning to. Societies united by ideology or historical circumstance but divided by civilization either come apart, as did the Soviet Union, Yugoslavia, and Bosnia, or are subjected to intense strain, as is the case with Ukraine, Nigeria, Sudan, India, Sri Lanka, and many others. Countries with cultural affinities cooperate economically and politically. International organizations based on states with cultural commonalities, such as the European Union, are far more successful than those that attempt to transcend cultures.[[863]](#footnote-863)

Some of Huntington’s predictions, such as that concerning the rapprochement between the two Koreas, have been shown to be inaccurate. Nonetheless, the general hypothesis has had long-lasting appeal, partially because it has offered a global theoretical view of conflicts. Unlike numerous other case studies, Huntington’s theory incorporated many local conflicts into larger, macro-scale conflicts. According to Huntington, the crucial link between the local and the global level is culture or, to be more precise, the concept of civilization, which he defines as “the broadest cultural entity” and, simultaneously, as the “broadest level of cultural identity people have short of that which distinguishes humans from other species.”[[864]](#footnote-864)

Huntington enumerated seven or eight civilizations: *Sinic* (encompassing the common culture in Chine and Chinese communities in Southeast Asia), *Japanese*, *Hindu* (concentrated in the Indian subcontinent), *Islamic* (spread over many distinct cultures in the Middle East, North Africa, Southeast Asia), *Western* (with major components in Europe, North and Latin America, Australia, New Zealand), *Latin American* (considered either as a distinctive civilization different from the West because of a separate economic development and the presence of indigenous cultures otherwise erased from Northern America), and possibly *African* civilization (potentially cohering into a civilizational unit in Sub-Saharan areas).[[865]](#footnote-865) In some classifications, he also adds *Slavic-Orthodox* civilization as a separate one.[[866]](#footnote-866)

In addition to many characteristics that can define a civilization, such as norms, customs, and values, its “central defining characteristic,” according to Huntington, is religion.[[867]](#footnote-867) Since the primary source of conflicts is civilizational, by implication, such conflicts would be based on religious differences and would most often occur in places where civilizations meet, i.e., so-called “fault lines”: “Cultural communities are replacing Cold War blocs, and the fault lines between civilizations are becoming the central lines of conflict in global politics.”[[868]](#footnote-868) Because such conflicts flow not from transient disputes but from fundamental civilizational incompatibilities, fault line conflicts are, according to Huntington, long and highly violent, marked by two additional characteristics which differentiate them from other types of communal wars:

First, communal wars may occur between ethnic, religious, racial, or linguistic groups. Since religion, however, is the principal defining characteristic of civilizations, fault line wars are almost always between peoples of different religions (…) Second, other communal wars tend to be particularistic, and hence are relatively unlikely to spread and involve additional participants. Fault line wars, in contrast, are by definition between groups which are part of larger cultural entities.[[869]](#footnote-869)

Huntington criticized scholars who, in the case of the former Yugoslavia, downplayed the role of religious differences between ethnic groups and interpret them according to the Freudian notion of ‘narcissism of small differences’ while pointing to past periods of peaceful coexistence and a high rate of intermarriages. In his view: “That judgment, however, is rooted in secular myopia. Millennia of human history have shown that religion is not a ‘small difference’ but possibly the most profound difference that can exist between people. The frequency, intensity, and violence of fault line wars are greatly enhanced by beliefs in different gods.”[[870]](#footnote-870) Thus, he viewed the Bosnia-Herzegovina conflict “between Croats and Bosnians” as occurring “directly along the fault line between the West and Islam.”[[871]](#footnote-871) Or, similarly: “In the former Yugoslavia, Russia backs Orthodox Serbia, Germany promotes Catholic Croatia, Muslim countries rally to the support of the Bosnian government, and the Serbs fight Croatians, Bosnian Muslims, and Albanian Muslims. Overall, the Balkans have once again been Balkanized along the religious lines.”[[872]](#footnote-872)

References to Bosnia and Herzegovina appeared relatively frequently throughout Huntington’s work, suggesting that it had a rather significant influence on his theory. Unfortunately, this work paid little to no attention to the specifics of this conflict, especially to those elements that did not fit his theory of civilizational conflict. As a matter of fact, the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina yielded a number of different alliances. For the majority of the war, Catholic Croats and Muslim Bosniaks fought together against the Serbian party. On a more local level, coalitions were formed according to pragmatic needs. Aside from divisions along ethnic and religious lines, there has also been a long history of conflicts between Muslims and Bosniaks in northwestern Bosnia, who, together with Bosnian Serbs, fought against Muslims under the command of Sarajevo.[[873]](#footnote-873) Viewed from this perspective, the conflict in Bosnia and Herzegovina did not fully corroborate Huntington’s theory.

In general, Huntington’s view on the possibilities of peaceful coexistence between the Christian West and Islam is pessimistic. The conflicts between Islam and Christianity, he says, “flow from the nature of the two religions and the civilizations based on them.”[[874]](#footnote-874) They are, according to Huntington, simultaneously a result of different views on the separation of religious and political domains (present in Western Christianity but absent in Islam) and similar but competing for theological concepts.[[875]](#footnote-875) In short, unless one civilization changes fundamentally, the conflicts—he predicted—would remain the defining characteristic of the relationship between Islam and the West: “So long as Islam remains Islam (which it will) and the West remains the West (which is more dubious), this fundamental conflict between two great civilizations and ways of life will continue to define their relations in the future even as it has defined them for the past fourteen centuries.”[[876]](#footnote-876)

## 2.3.2. Huntington challenged

Huntington’s hypothesis was later challenged on many grounds. Henderson and Tucker, for instance, demonstrated that the probability of inter-state conflicts in the immediate post-Cold War period (1989-1992) was not associated with the civilizational membership of the states.[[877]](#footnote-877) In an even more comprehensive study, Gartzke and Gleditsch empirically tested Huntington’s thesis of the “clash of civilizations” on a large set of conflicts following the Second World War. Using data from the *Militarized Interstate Dispute* (MID) database Version 3.0 and the *Uppsala Armed Conflict data*, they created a comprehensive set of dyads that represented all inter-state conflicts between 1950 and 2001. The analysis makes a strong case for a nuanced view of cultural identities. As Gartzke and Gleditsch indicated in the title of their paper, culture and identity can constitute the “ties that bind and differences that divide” in numerous ways. Contradicting the common wisdom that cultural differences make conflict more likely, supplemented with Huntington’s theory that religion will be the core cultural identifier in the post-Cold War international order, they demonstrated, to the contrary, that linguistic, ethnic, and religious similarity actually make conflicts more likely:

Dyads that share the same language or same dominant ethnic group are significantly more likely to have a dispute. Moreover, the positive coefficients for language and ethnic group are larger than the negative coefficient for the religion. Adding up the terms we find that two states that shared all these ties would have about 1.5 greater odds of conflict than two states without shared cultural ties.[[878]](#footnote-878)

Analyzing inter-state conflicts according to religious divides, they discovered that the highest probability of a dispute, everything else being equal, is “for dyads with two Buddhist states and mixed dyads where the dominant group in one state is the second largest in the other.” [[879]](#footnote-879) As a matter of fact, conflicts between two Buddhist states are 2.5 times more likely then conflicts between mixed dyads (i.e., between two states with different dominant religions).[[880]](#footnote-880) On the other hand, “Christian and Islamic states are not particularly prone to conflict, save for the period 1985–91. For the post-1992 period, an Islamic and a Christian state are less likely to fight than two Islamic states, and about as likely to have a dispute as two Christian states.”[[881]](#footnote-881) Thus, the results “lend little support for the alleged prevalence of conflict between Muslim and Christian states, save for the period 1985–92 or around the end of the Soviet Union and the break-up of Yugoslavia.”[[882]](#footnote-882)

This valuable cross-national study suggests that the analysis of conflicts should focus more on the specific position of religious communities on the majority-minority line, especially because the study’s findings indicated that “dyads where a majority group in one state is the second largest group (minority) in the other state are especially prone to conflict.”[[883]](#footnote-883) In that respect, religion seems less a source of an essentially civilizational clash but a specific model for framing the grievances of a population and the mobilization of cross-national support.

If we move from the inter-state to the state level, a number of studies have shown that religiously inspired violence should be observed in connection with the social conditions of political, economic, and social oppression. Religion, of course, can be on both sides of the equation. While some religious communities can fuel divisions, thus causing cultural violence, other can use their religious language and identities to mobilize for a fight against the perceived violence. Scholars mostly agree that religion is an especially potent source of mobilization when religious identity overlaps with other structural divisions, e.g., those along ethnic, national, or economic lines. In that situation, it becomes either an additional fortifier of in-group/out-group divisions or the central coordinating factor for other forms of identities.[[884]](#footnote-884)

In 2013, *The Institute for Economic and Peace* conducted an analysis of 35 major conflicts that erupted globally during that year and concluded that religion played a role in 21 of them but was not the single cause of conflict in any of them.[[885]](#footnote-885) The conflicts in which religion figured as one of the leading factors were those located in north and western African countries and in Middle Eastern countries where religious militant group wanted to depose the government and introduce a new system based on Sharia law.[[886]](#footnote-886) The authors referred to the fact that the great majority of people in the world are still religious and that conflicts, even when they do not have religious disputes as their bases, are perceived as religious by association: “When parties to a conflict are divided on religious adherence, the conflict often becomes framed as religious even though the parties have originally fought over other issues. As the majority of people in the world adhere to some religious beliefs, it is unsurprising that many conflicts are interpreted as having a religious element. It thus does not always follow that religion is the cause of conflict.”[[887]](#footnote-887)

According to the analysis, statistical indices of religiosity are not good predictors of conflicts and “economic inequality, corruption, political terror, gender and political instability have a much more significant connection with the levels of peace in a country than any of the tested religious traits.”[[888]](#footnote-888) At the same time, factors such as religious freedom are an important political element to be taken into account when levels of peace around the world are being assessed.[[889]](#footnote-889) Full democracies “have the best average performance in peace and the lowest levels of religious restrictions and religious hostilities. Less regulation of religion reduces the grievances of religions, and also decreases the ability of any single religion to wield undue political power.”[[890]](#footnote-890) The researchers conclude that simple identification between religion and either peace or conflict do not have empirical backing and that a more holistic view of the problem is needed:

Assessing whether religion is a vice or virtue for conflict does not allow for a nuanced understanding of its relationship with peace. Instead, a more holistic view of peace is needed. Whilst the relationship between religion and peace has some significance, there are many other factors which have greater explanatory power. Government type appears to have a much more significant connection with peace, and religious freedom, than religious characteristics. That is not to say that religious characteristics, like the absence of a dominant group and religious diversity, do not correspond with higher peace. Rather, there are other features which are more significant that are not related to religion.[[891]](#footnote-891)

The study is revelatory in many ways, but, of crucial importance, it clearly distinguishes between religion and “other features (…) that are not related to religion” among which are government type, the level of corruption, gender equality, political terror, and economic inequality.[[892]](#footnote-892) The underlying conviction seems to be that religion is to be restricted to the sphere of private beliefs while work concerning type of government, economic equality, religious freedom, and social justice should be done independently of those convictions. On the other hand, a large number of case studies, compiled and published in the book entitled *God’s Century*, showed that it was precisely religious leaders and organizations that had a significant role in a number of democratic movements around the world—among 78 analyzed cases, religious actors played a leading role in 30 of them and a supporting role in an additional 18.[[893]](#footnote-893)

## 2.3.3. Not all conflicts are created equal

Fox’s analysis, based on the *Minorities at Risk Phase 3* database, showed that neither civilization nor religion is the primary factor in ethnic conflicts. The analysis suggested that other variables, such as “discrimination, repression, and mobilization often have a greater impact.”[[894]](#footnote-894) The findings are consistent with those of previous studies published by Fox, which have demonstrated that religion constitutes an important factor in only a minority of conflicts.[[895]](#footnote-895) At the same time, it is stressed, for those conflicts which *do* have religious dimensions, religion cannot be overlooked: “[W]here it is an important factor, religion can have a significant impact on a conflict, especially when isolating the influence of certain aspects of religion, including religious institutions and religious legitimacy.”[[896]](#footnote-896)

In a recent 2016 study, Basedau, Pfeiffer, and Vüllers used logistic regression on data from a new *Religion and Conflict in Developing Countries* dataset that contains indicators from 130 developing countries to analyze in which ways religious elements can increase the likelihood of intra-state armed conflicts. The authors hypothesized that religion can be a mobilizing force for violent collective actions in two different ways: through the religious structure of the population and through religious practice. In the former, the demographic structure of a population exhibiting a strong overlap of religious and other identities (such as ethnic, national, or economic) and polarization between religious groups creates what the authors termed an “opportunity“ for conflict since antagonistic groups can be more easily identified, divided, and mobilized. In the second case, grievances over the position of the religious community and justification of violence by theological elites provide a “motive” for collective actions.[[897]](#footnote-897)

Noting that different types of conflicts involve different mechanisms of religious mobilization, the authors distinguish between *interreligious* and *theological* armed conflicts as follows:

An *interreligious armed conflict* is one wherein warring factions differ in terms of their religious affiliation. (…) Such interreligious conflict is not necessarily fought over theological ideas; rather, it may just be the expression of underlying tensions existing between identity groups due to their secular incompatibilities such as in terms of power or wealth (…)

*Theological armed conflict* refers to an incompatibility over religious ideas between the state and the rebel group, such as regarding the introduction of religious law or over a particular state religion. A typical example of this is the demand of certain Islamic groups for the introduction of Sharia in a hitherto secular state (…) A theological conflict requires that at least one side has explicit theological goals that differ from those of the other conflict party.[[898]](#footnote-898)

Their analysis showed that, in the case of interreligious armed conflicts, the most important factor is the overlap between religious and other group identities. When such an overlap is present, the likelihood of conflict increases dramatically, i.e., “an interreligious conflict onset becomes around six times likelier when ethnic and religious—or religious and regional identities—run parallel to each other. Religious practice also plays a role, but these effects are less intense in terms of both significance and magnitude.”[[899]](#footnote-899) Religious calls for violence play a vital role in both types of conflicts, but they are much more important in *theological* conflicts: “Calls for violence by religious leaders almost double the odds of onset in interreligious conflicts and make theological conflict more than four times likelier.”[[900]](#footnote-900) Interestingly, the factor of economic development plays a role only in interreligious conflicts, but when theological issues are at stake, it has negligible influence: “Theological conflicts are the least economy-driven ones: neither oil exports nor growth nor even income per capita (GDP per capita), are significant (…) Apparently, then, theological conflicts are not about the economy; they are about ideas.”[[901]](#footnote-901)

In short, the role of religion in conflict depends heavily on the nature of the conflict. If the central issues at stake are intergroup disagreement of a non-theological kind, then the presence of religion increases risk when it overlaps with other forms of group identity, such as ethnic, national, or religious: “When these identities run parallel, and possibly are amplified and dichotomized through economic and political inequalities, fertile ground for conflict emerges. The relationship between ethnicity and religion, in particular, deserves closer inspection, both from the angle of religion and of ethnicity.”[[902]](#footnote-902) Religion, in those cases, acts as an amplifier and further divider between in-group and out-group members. However, when the conflict is being fought around theological concepts, for instance between the secular or religious organizations of a state, then demographic and economic factors play a small to insignificant role, and the crucial element becomes the religious justification of violence.[[903]](#footnote-903) Due to problems associated with the systematic omission of variables that measure type of polity (i.e., measure the level of democracy and the years since the most recent regime change), the authors called for further research.[[904]](#footnote-904)

Using data from the U.S. State Department’s *International Religious Freedom Reports* from 2001, 2003, 2005, and 2008, Muchlinksi tested precisely the influence of the polity and the likelihood of religious violence, as measured by the number of killings due to religious belief.[[905]](#footnote-905) He showed that religious killings are almost entirely absent from both autocratic regimes and consolidated democracies, whereas these types of killings do occur in anocratic regimes.[[906]](#footnote-906) While democracies reduce the risk of violence by offering religious and civil freedoms, autocratic regimes keep the violence in check by repressive mechanisms which, once they start to weaken, open a window of opportunity for religious violence:

The unstable and anarchic nature of anocratic states provides a perfect environment for outbreaks of religious violence. As the repressive apparatus of former authoritarian states begin to decay, the opportunity costs of engaging in violence decrease. Simply put, it becomes less likely that violent groups will be punished for their violations of human rights. Whether it is because of historical animosities, or simply opportunistic targeting, religious violence is highest in anocratic states simply because such states lack the corrective mechanisms to halt the spread of violence once it is underway. Aggrieved religious groups may mobilize violently to redress their grievances as they perceive a window of opportunity to do so when the likelihood of punishment remains low. Other religious organization may simply decide to engage in violence because they view other religious minorities as threatening or heretical.[[907]](#footnote-907)

In short, it is not religious grievances by themselves, but religious grievances that are connected with a window of opportunity, that lead to violence: “While grievances potentially fuel the desire to mobilize violently, politically and economically weak regimes can do little to stop violent mobilization. For these reasons, religious violence, like civil violence, is more likely to occur in anocratic regimes.”[[908]](#footnote-908)

## 2.3.4. Religious leaders and identity overlaps

In this short overview, I focused primarily on studies conducted on cross-national data and on different databases. The main conclusion to be inferred from these studies is the following: Religion and religious identity are not the sole elements in the creation of conflicts. The type of polity, economic situation, level of corruption, balance of power—all those elements have to be taken into account when explaining as to why certain conflicts occur. However, in those conflicts in which religion is implicated, it needs to be taken seriously in the prospect of a peaceful resolution. The most common scenario is the one in which religion is a co-defining factor of the identity of the parties in the conflict. Thus, peacemaking efforts are more fruitful if the religious elements of the conflict are not ignored but are engaged seriously.

Understanding the nature of conflicts helps to determine what the most potent role of religion could be. We already have a hint from the previous discussion that religious leaders play an especially important role in resolving those conflicts in which grievances are framed with religious symbols and where theological issues are at stake. Bokern differentiates between several dimensions of peacebuilding. In the first case, religious believers collaborate with other NGOs but without a strong emphasis on their religious backgrounds. In the second case, state dignitaries or religious people make explicit references to religious values, but they do not hold official positions in their religious communities. In the third case, official representatives or representative bodies of religious communities are engaged in the resolution of conflicts with religious dimensions. Although all three forms have their important values, Bokern concludes that “only the third seems to be of crucial importance for building peace in clashes involving religious identity.”[[909]](#footnote-909)

The crucial advantage of religious leaders, according to Carter and Smith, is the ability the include the spiritual and emotional components in the processes of negotiation through an authoritative appeal to their spiritual traditions:

Most important of all, and more than anyone else, religious leaders can knowledgeably appeal to disputants on the basis of their spiritual beliefs and shared values. In conflicts involving religious differences, religious leaders can speak directly and authoritatively to disputants’ beliefs. In conflicts that are not overtly about religion, religious leaders may appeal to common moral standards and values, to spirituality, or to the superordinate goals of peace and justice. By interjecting a spiritual dimension into negotiations, religious leaders can elevate them to a higher level. By appealing to values, they can help inspire disputants to move beyond their own positions and look more broadly at their responsibility to end their dispute and the suffering it inflicts.[[910]](#footnote-910)

Johnston, the founder of the *International Center for Religion and Diplomacy*, who researched the role of religion in foreign policy for over a decade, came to a similar conclusion. He emphasized that, “in certain situations, particularly those involving identity-based conflicts, faith-based diplomacy can break down walls of hostility that are otherwise impervious to the efforts of traditional diplomacy. Faith-based diplomacy, simply put, is diplomacy that engages religious values in bridging differences between adversaries.”[[911]](#footnote-911) On the other hand, “faith-based diplomacy” can play an important role in those conflicts in which religion is not implicated, primarily in the capacity of third-party mediation.[[912]](#footnote-912) Therefore, religious leaders can either play a peacebuilding role as involved parties in the conflict, transforming it from the inside, or as external moral authorities that can act as impartial and trustable mediators.

A number of other studies have recognized those different roles. Harpviken and Roislien[[913]](#footnote-913) name the potential roles of religious leaders as ‘The Liaison,’ ‘The Representative,’ and ‘The Coordinator.’ The Liaison is an outsider who helps the conflicting parties establish a common ground. A good example of such work is the community of Sant’Egidio, which has been perceived in a number of conflicts around the world as an impartial organization with high moral integrity. The Representative, on the other hand, shares the identity of one of the implicated parties, as was Abdul Ghaffar Khan, who was involved in negotiations between the local population in the former North-West Frontier Province and the British colonial power.[[914]](#footnote-914) Finally, The Coordinator shares the identity and adheres to a religious normative system familiar to both parties in the conflict. An example was the commission of Muslim Sunni scholars who, in 1998, tried to coordinate the settlement between the Afgan Taliban and the Northern Alliance, both of which share the same Sunni tradition but with significant differences. At the end, the commission of religious scholars was not entirely successful because it was perceived as too closely associated with the Taliban.[[915]](#footnote-915)

Based on the work of Adam Curle, Paul Lederach has elaborated the roles and approaches that are most effective during different phases and structural conditions of a conflict. The crucial variable that needs to be considered is the balance of power between the parties. In situations exhibiting a serious imbalance of power, the most important role is that of advocacy, which helps the suppressed group voice its legitimate concerns and gain power. When relationships become more balanced, the more appropriate role then becomes one of assistance in negotiation.[[916]](#footnote-916)

In addition, my study proposes that the same people can play different roles on different levels. While someone can be a *coordinator* between the warring groups of the same identity on the local level, that person can also act as a *representative* in an interreligious council and, potentially, as a *mediator* in an external conflict. Moreover, regarding the role of power imbalance and advocacy, I would argue that one crucial element needs to be added: self-critical reflection. In the case of, for instance, British colonizers and Indian protesters represented by Gandhi, it was easy to see the power imbalance. However, in civil conflicts, the line between advocacy for greater equality and fear mongering can be much more difficult to draw. In a number of recent instances of terrorism in Western Europe, the feeling of oppression has apparently been relevant, but the majority of suicide-terrorists are typically not the ‘poorest of the poor’ or members of extremely marginalized populations but often have higher than average economic and educational levels. Even when there are legitimate concerns about the structural oppression of one community, projects of religious advocacy must still take into account the imminent dangers associated with using memory or religious symbols in such a way that violent confrontation seems to be the only viable option.

We can say, in conclusion to this section on *material* causes, that the analysis of religion and conflicts needs to take into account the interplay between religious content and social context on the local, state, or regional level, much more than on the civilizational level. Conditions especially conducive to conflicts are those in which religious identity overlaps with some other group identity, in a situation of oppression, especially when an oppressed minority in one country forms alliances with co-religionists who are the majority in neighboring places. Such overlapping identities do not necessarily lead to conflicts, but the likelihood (or the risk) of such conflicts is higher, especially when religious leaders frame grievances in religious terms. In such situations, two sorts of coupling take place. On the one hand, there is a coupling of *religion and group-identity* (most often ethnic or national), and, on the other hand, there is coupling between *religious elements and grievances*, which can lead to negotiation deadlocks.[[917]](#footnote-917)

In my interviews, both of these couplings were relevant. It was clear that, for the interviewees, one of the central challenges for religious leaders was a too strong linkage between religion and nationalism, while concerns about equality and rejection of the idea of ‘sacralization’ of territory or state were also voiced. The peacemaking role of religious leaders, reflected in my section on the “reconstruction of life,” involves concerns for such practical conditions as economic inequality or any other form of discrimination. Obviously, this involves advocacy for social justice on behalf of oppressed communities and engagement for democratic values. At the same time, a path towards peacebuilding requires distancing from overtly politicized engagement of religious leaders. Studies of Abazović and, more recently, Wilkes and collaborators clearly show that residents of Bosnia and Herzegovina are against political engagement of religious leaders,[[918]](#footnote-918) while still viewing them as one of the three most trusted groups in the state.[[919]](#footnote-919) A number of local authors, as well as international scholars, have voiced similar suggestions—that religious leaders should distance themselves from too close an association with politics while still remaining socially engaged.[[920]](#footnote-920) A large degree of resentment among my respondents was due to the loss of ‘prophetic’ power of religious leaders, who were ‘bribed’ into a political alliance which, as a part of a deal, made them turn a blind eye to political manipulations and abuses. On the other hand, there was a clear need to ‘stabilize’ identity in the face of radicalization threats, an outcome that cannot happen without political engagement.

Our previous discussion suggests that one of the largest difficulties confronting religious leaders can be rephrased in the following way: *How can they engage politically without falling prey to the particular interests of ethnic, national, or ideological communities, thus forgetting their more universal mission?* On the one hand, the act of service of peacebuilding would seem to constitute a withdrawal of religious leaders from the political sphere, especially in those places where the associations between ethnic, national, and religious identities are two strong. On the other hand, many crimes and conflicts took root because religious leaders did *not* engage themselves sufficiently when they were expected to, e.g., because they were silent about oppressions and discriminations, because they preferred the comfort of abstract religiosity to a difficult and risky involvement with real people and communities.

This puzzle resembles mathematical equations that have more than one correct solution. In all periods of Christian and Islamic history, there were religious individuals who responded to similar challenges by withdrawing into spiritual isolation, as well as those who stood in the front lines of revolutions. However, between those two extremes, there were many other possible options. The optimal form will, once again, depend on the concrete factors relevant to the conflict.

## 2.3.5. Moral authority: Move from coercive power

One of the chief mechanisms in my model was the move from coercive political power towards moral authority. However, it is first important to emphasize that the notion of “moral authority” can have many different meanings. In my elaboration, it signifies a form of influence based on the perception of trustworthiness, impartiality, and moral integrity that enables religious leaders to engage socially, based on religious concerns for peace and justice, even at the cost of political marginalization. Moral authority is thus based on the appeal of religious arguments, not on influence derived from the institutional power that a religious community enjoys because of historical prestige or strong links with social elites. The concept of moral authority is thus rooted in a very specific notion of influence, one which resonates with contemporary theological trends that emphasize the ‘soft’ power of example and persuasion in lieu of the ‘hard’ power of coercion and pressure. Moral authority is also a form of influence that is not triumphalist in the sense of supremacy but, rather, is dialogical and respectful.

Anna Grzymała-Busse holds a diametrically opposite conceptualization of “moral authority.” For her, moral authority is the ability of a church to influence society in matters beyond religious observance. Such “moral authority,” as would be expected, increases if the fusion between church and national identity is high: “Where the church shield[s] the national, patriotism [becomes] inseparable from religious loyalty (…) In turn, the more nation and religion [fuse] as a popular identity; the more churches [gain] *moral authority* in politics: the identification of the church with national interests, rather than with interests that are purely theological.”[[921]](#footnote-921) When the church enjoys “moral authority,” Grzymała-Busse explains, politicians have church preferences in mind when formulating policies and they are more sensitive not to offend religious sentiment while the church, in turn, has the power to frame policies as moral issues even if these do not have doctrinal significance. They have considerable influence on the political situation through direct access to politicians and political bodies and by indirect influence.[[922]](#footnote-922) In that sense:

[T]he fusion of national and religious identities on the societal level is a form of religious nationalism that gives rise to and fortifies a church’s moral authority — and when that authority is great enough, it becomes a potent political resource that can be parlayed into institutional access, or shared control of the state. Churches with lower moral authority do not have that option and either rely on coalitions or have no influence at all.[[923]](#footnote-923)

Grzymała-Busse is correct in stating that the fusion of religious and national identities enhances the influence of churches on political institutions. However, it is debatable whether the lack of that power can be described as no influence at all. Viewed from a larger perspective, one can argue that too close a link between religious and political institutions can lead to a revolt against religious institutions, especially if they were complicit with political structures during totalitarian regimes. My concept of “moral authority” is, therefore, much closer to Leonardo Boff’s understanding of authority, which is in line with the Greek concept of *exousia*.

In his book *Church: Charism and Power*, which is considered the foundational work of the “theology of liberation,” Boff criticizes the institutional links of the Church with political powers that grew progressively after Christianity became the official religion of the Roman Empire. Over time, the exercise of power “followed the patterns of pagan power in terms of domination, centralization, marginalization, triumphalism, human *hybris* beneath a sacred mantle.”[[924]](#footnote-924) On the other hand, Boff argues, because of its links with institutional power, Christianity too often remained silent with respect to social injustices and misuses, thus legitimizing the political establishment.[[925]](#footnote-925)

When allied with political power, Boff maintains, the Church becomes opportunistic and, instead of criticizing injustices, it becomes preoccupied with its institutional survival, even amidst totalitarian regimes, sacrificing or silencing, if necessary, even its own members who raise their voices against injustices.[[926]](#footnote-926) Boff’s proposal is a radical distancing of the Church from the position of power and a return to the most fundamental New Testament goals of liberation and freedom. That move requires renunciation of political power (*potestas*) in favour of *exousia,* i.e., authority that comes from the concrete engagements with people: “The *exousia* of the apostles, yesterday and today, is not only a diaconal authority of preaching and transmitting the message but also of building up and defending the community.”[[927]](#footnote-927)

Interestingly, my respondents often expressed the advantages that being a religious minority, distanced from political influence, can have with respect to the spiritual maturation of believers. Studies have shown the importance of religious minority groups in peacebuilding processes. Brewer and Higgins, for instance, suggest that religious minority groups—understood as smaller denominations among world faiths, smaller wings of otherwise majority denominations in a given country, or non-established churches—figure in a number of case studies “as leading examples in peacemaking, for they have less to lose and the most to gain from involvement with peacemaking.” [[928]](#footnote-928) Their status as a minority, in the authors’ view, “can place them outside the mainstream, leading to feelings of strangeness from the majority and to empathy with other minorities, or of being in a similar position to the victims of communal violence.”[[929]](#footnote-929) At the same time, their minority status has certain drawbacks because it “can also be associated with limited material and cultural resources, restricted social capital and legitimacy, a low profile in or exclusion from the political sphere, and hostility and oppression from members of the majority religion (…).”[[930]](#footnote-930) In contrast to them, majority religious groups enjoy greater material and symbolic resources, but those benefits can at the same time be constrained with respect to peacemaking work: “Established religions, tied to the state and linked to the majority population’s sense of nationalism, find it difficult to mount challenges to the regime or to exclusive forms of ethnonationalism.”[[931]](#footnote-931)

What was, in my view, missing from their model was a discussion of the different possibilities derived from being a minority or a majority. First, note that being an established religion is not necessarily synonymous with being “majority.” All three major religious traditions in Bosnia and Herzegovina are well established, but their majority-minority status depends on the region. In other words, each and every one of them can be a minority and a majority, not forgetting that each contains very minor groups of followers, such as Adventists or Sufi Muslims. Secondly, although minority status does motivate a group to reflect more profoundly on its theological tradition instead of taking these for granted, the re-discovered theology is not guaranteed to be one beneficial for peace. If we consider isolated Wahhabi-inspired Muslim groups in Bosnia and Herzegovina, which are, without doubt, a minority, we can clearly see that a relatively small number of members or a position on the social and political margins is not by itself a sufficient condition for peacebuilding engagement of religious communities.

My research suggests a somewhat different view. While I agree with the claim that religious communities must distance themselves from coersive power, I propose that minority status should not be defined only on the basis of statistical data. Minority, I suggest, can be understood in a more symbolic way as a permanent attitude of religious communities towards power. Recalling the interviews of Damjan, who suggested that Christianity does best when it constitutes itself as a minority or recalling Tomislav’s suggestion that “all should be minorities” allows us to grasp the underlying logic, i.e., that *being a minority* requires a fundamental reconfiguration of a religious community’s self-understanding, such that it emphasizes moral authority rather than political, institutional or economic power. In that sense, even in the places where a certain religion is demographically dominant, there is a way to act as a corrective to power and to analyze the situation from “the margins” in solidarity with other oppressed groups or in service of truth and justice even if that goes against the prevailing social narratives.

## 2.3.6. Political engagement without politicking: Promotion of values

One often forgotten peacebuilding potential of religious communities (and especially of religious leaders involved in education of believers) is their engagement in the creation of a different social climate, construction of appropriate frameworks for forgiveness and reconciliation by promotion of values and education of moral character.[[932]](#footnote-932) My model recognizes this work as important both before and after a conflict.

In a very comprehensive cross-national study on 36 democracies, Ben-Nun Bloom and Arikan demonstrated, using the datasets from the fourth and fifth wave of the *World Value Survey* and multilevel path modeling, that the influence of religion on democracy is largely mediated through values. In other words, religious beliefs that are positively correlated to “traditional” and “survival” values (in opposition to “rational” and “self-expression” values, as defined by the Inglehart-Welzel dimensions) have a negative effect on both abstract support for democracy and support for democratic procedures.[[933]](#footnote-933) The findings were, according to the authors, “robust in terms of the mediating effects of values among the adherents of the world’s major religious traditions.”[[934]](#footnote-934) The study demonstrates that a positive or negative effect of religious actors on democracy will, to the greatest extent, depend on the values that religious leaders foster among their believers. When religious traditions promote values such as conservation, social conformity, respect for authority in opposition to openness for change, tolerance, individual autonomy, and self-expression, the result will be an increase in negative attitudes towards democratic values and procedures.

It is difficult to deny that religious traditions have a rich potential for peacebuilding, but the main challenge is moving this from the state of *potential* into that of *actual*, as Carter and Smith note: “The world’s religious traditions, each in their own way, offer a rich abundance of insight and guidance for the promotion of peace. The challenge (especially for the secularized Western world) is to bring religious beliefs to the political agenda for constructive and practical effect.”[[935]](#footnote-935) They find the basis for religiously inspired peace-work in the basic moral rules and values that are shared among religions, such as the adherence to the “Golden Rule” and promotion of such values as justice, honesty, nonviolence, forbearance, self-discipline, and compassion. However, they also note that those positive elements are often limited to the in-group, leading them to conclude that their extension to out-group members is the critical step in the direction of peace:

That the world’s religions profess so much in common is an optimistic fact. Common ground and shared goals, conflict theorists agree, are precursors to peace. And while most of the prescriptions from the world’s religions were originally directed to coreligionists to settle their own differences peacefully, the same principles are available to be applied to conflicts between members of different faiths. That is a crucial point. Expanding the community to which religious principles and virtues are applied is critical to the achievement of world peace.[[936]](#footnote-936)

The authors call for coordinated actions between political, non-governmental, and religious actors. The major advantage of the latter group lies in their ability to detect early signs of conflicts and then intervene in their management and resolution. Via different modes of intervention, ranging from the setting of a personal example to direct involvement in negotiations and crisis assessment, to assistance in grievance handling and healing, religious leaders can assist in all phases of conflict prevention and resolution.[[937]](#footnote-937)

## 2.3.7. Emotions and imaginations

A vital connection between values and peacebuilding actions seems to be the *imagination* of a different social order than the one which led to conflict. Lederach, in that respect, defines moral imagination as “the capacity to imagine something rooted in the challenges of the real world yet capable of giving birth to that which does not yet exist. In reference to peacebuilding, this is the capacity to imagine and generate constructive responses and initiatives that, while rooted in the day-to-day challenges of violence, transcend and ultimately break the grips of those destructive patterns and cycles.”[[938]](#footnote-938) Conflicts, especially those that are protracted and deep rooted, Lederach reminds us, deeply damage social relationships and create their own patterns that need to be deconstructed and broken.

Peter C. Coleman opens his book, *The Five Percent: Finding Solutions to Seemingly Impossible Conflicts*, with the bold thesis that five percent of every type of conflict reach the state of intractability and that they arise in all form of human relations.[[939]](#footnote-939) Although there are obvious differences between types of conflicts (e.g., between a family dispute and a protracted war), Coleman argues that there are similarities in their basic characteristics and dynamics. All those conflicts are long and costly; they become increasingly complex over time, coinciding with simpler and dualistic perceptions among participants. In them, history exerts considerable power over current relationships, short-term thinking overshadows long-term perspective, and they all exhibit resistance to mainstream conflict-management strategies.[[940]](#footnote-940) Coleman insists that, under “perfect storm conditions,” virtually every conflict can become intractable. Thus, it is not *only* the nature of the conflict (or its duration) that defines its intractability.[[941]](#footnote-941) However, in a later explication, he lists 57 “essences” of intractable conflicts, organized around the elements of group identity, power relations, social structures and processes, emotional states, and inter-group attitudes. Summarizing the list, Coleman states that intractable conflicts are “often about non-negotiable issues and important identities and intense emotions and past trauma and hidden agendas and power and instability.” Aside of these elements, Coleman adds an important insight that intractable conflicts are “all situations where the people involved tend to share an *illusion of free will,*”[[942]](#footnote-942) which means that the intractable conflicts develop over time their own logic that shapes the acts and thought of the disputants and in fact constrains their agency. This reflects the fact that the conflicts last too long, often in such a way that “most disputants and stakeholders involved in the conflict want it to end but cannot seem to make that happen.” In its final phase, the perception of participants is transmuted, and the complexity of the conflict collapses into a simplified “us versus them” narrative.

Coleman offers a number of practical suggestions as to how to move beyond this intractability, but the crucial one seems to be the acceptance of a different way of thinking and employment of an approach that goes beyond the stated common patterns of dualistic thinking, oversimplification, and generalization. Thus, movement from intractability requires a set of moves in conflict-resolution strategies such as the following:

From ‘this is all very simple’ to ‘it is in fact a very complicated situation.’ (…) From a focus on matters of general principle to concrete details in the conflict. (…) From concerns over defending one’s identity, ideology, and values to concerns over obtaining accurate information regarding substantive issues. (…) From ‘they (out-group) are all alike (evil)’ to ‘they are made up of many different types of individuals.’ (…) From ‘we (in-group) are all similar (saintly victims)’ to ‘we are made up of many different types of individuals.’ (…) From immediate short-term reactions and concerns to longer-term thinking and planning.[[943]](#footnote-943)

In light of the fact that protracted conflicts create their own dynamics of factors that seem to be mutually reinforcing, we can even better appreciate the *creative thinking that challenges them*. It is not without reason that Lederach considers moral imagination to be “the art and soul of building peace,” as it is stressed already in the title of his influential book. Moral imagination is not only a practical process of finding out-of-the-box solutions, but first and foremost an inspiring process. Not denying the importance of knowledge and skills, Lederach believes that the wellspring of peacebuilding “lies in our moral imagination, which I will define as the capacity to imagine something rooted in the challenges of the real world yet capable of giving birth to that which does not yet exist.”[[944]](#footnote-944) His main thesis is that transcending violence “is forged by the capacity to generate, mobilize, and build the moral imagination.”[[945]](#footnote-945) Imagination, furthermore, should not be confused with fictional speculation. On the contrary, it requires a close familiarity with the problems of violence, yet it does not entrap itself in their limitations:

Stated simply, the moral imagination requires the capacity to imagine ourselves in a web of relationships that includes our enemies; the ability to sustain a paradoxical curiosity that embraces complexity without reliance on dualistic polarity; the fundamental belief in and pursuit of the creative act; and the acceptance of the inherent risk of stepping into the mystery of the unknown that lies beyond the far too familiar landscape of violence (…) [W]e must set our feet deeply into the geographies and realities of what destructive relationships produce, what legacies they leave, and what breaking their violent patterns will require. Second, we must explore the creative process itself, not as a tangential inquiry, but as the wellspring that feeds the building of peace.[[946]](#footnote-946)

In the context of protracted conflicts, Daniel Bar-Tal emphasizes the significance of hope. Especially when conflicts are protracted, the automatic cognitive mechanisms of fear easily override hope.[[947]](#footnote-947) Following LeDeux’s discovery of emotional responses which bypass the thinking process, Bar-Tal stresses that fear is not just a response to an immediate danger but is also an emotional mechanism that can be activated via a “programmed system that allows unconscious reaction processing, which deals with danger in a routine way, regardless of intention or thinking (…) It reflects a mechanism of adaptation that automatically protects life and homeostasis, but may operate irrationally and even destructively at the moment it is invoked.”[[948]](#footnote-948) Consequently, a prolonged experience of fear is linked with higher alertness to threatening cues, overestimation of dangers, selective retrieval of information, avoidance of risks, and adherence to a known situation.

Bar-Tal emphasizes that hope, unlike fear, requires higher cognitive processes that include mental representations of future events, goals, and mechanisms to achieve them—processes that require creativity and flexibility. Even though both fear and hope are primarily understood as individual emotional reactions, Bar-Tal posits “collective emotional orientation,” which suggests that societies, just like individuals, can develop a specific “cultural framework” in which certain emotions are more emphasized than others: “The society provides the contexts, information, models, emphases, and instructions that influence the emotions of its members.”[[949]](#footnote-949) It is important to stress that collective emotional orientation is established not as mystical emotions that emerge from the society as a collective body, but through standard mechanisms of socialization:

So from their early age, society members are socialized to acquire the culturally approved emotional orientation. They learn what cues to attend in order to feel a particular emotion, how to appraise them, how to express the emotion, and how to behave in accordance with it (…) This learning is also done, beyond the family setting, via political, educational, and cultural mechanisms, including mass media and other channels of communication.[[950]](#footnote-950)

At the same time, collective emotional orientations are detectable in public discourse, texts, ceremonies, films, plays—cultural products and expressions of collective sentiments.[[951]](#footnote-951) The problem with fear, especially after experiences involving protracted conflicts, is that it is often contagious and easily spread among a society’s members, who detect its signals through empathetic mechanics and share them still further.[[952]](#footnote-952)

The negative consequences of the “collective fear orientation” is the so-called *freezing* of beliefs, adherence to established responses to fear that are warranted by positive selection of warning signals based on past experience and equally fixed mechanisms of response, often through violence. The final product of a collective fear orientation is thus a “vicious cycle of fear, freezing, and violence.”[[953]](#footnote-953)

This section offered an insight into the ways religious leaders can engage practically in peacebuilding by nourishing values and collective emotions. Importantly, by promoting values such as non-conformism, tolerance, and orientations (such as hope), they do not only change emotional states of individuals but, as studies show, can fundamentally influence people’s attitudes towards social conditions and their willingness to mobilize for worthy causes. Furthermore, religious communities are particularly apt at changing collective emotional orientations from fear towards hope because they are essentially oriented towards a positive vision of the (ultimate) future and the hope that is grounded in it, despite all the opposing signals of injustice, conflict, and violence. I will return to this in the section on the final cause, but let us first address one more means of engagement by religious leaders that scholars recognize as vital in religiously inspired peacebuilding: interreligious dialogue.

## 2.3.8. Interreligious dialogue: Meeting the Other

In a very comprehensive study conducted in a number of countries in the Balkans, Merdjanova and Brodeur present ways in which interreligious dialogue can be a peacebuilding tool. Their basic premise is that religion can be a *conversation starter*: “Contrary to the evocative warning of Richard Rorty that religion turns into a ‘conversation-stopper’ for people of different religious backgrounds, we, as scholars of religion and as practitioners of interreligious dialogue, see religion-related issues as a good starting point for important conversations between people of different worldviews.”[[954]](#footnote-954)

The focus of their study was a specific form of dialogue that involves the explicit acknowledgment of religious identities but in a reflective and self-critical way, open to the specificities of the dialogue partners:

We, therefore, define interreligious dialogue for peacebuilding (IDP) as all forms of interreligious dialogue activities that foster an ethos of tolerance, nonviolence, and trust. Our theory of IDP is constituted on the basis of three principles: self-conscious engagement in IDP, self-critical attitude whilst engaged in IDP and realistic expectations towards IDP results. The first principle of self-conscious engagement in IDP refers to the need to be aware of the fact that one’s religious identity is actively involved in the dialogue process that contributes to peacebuilding. The second principle of self-critical attitude while engaged in IDP points to the importance of being critically aware of our own biases and limitations. Such attitude opens others to mirror our own behavior, thereby increasing the chances for a more honest dialogue. The third principle calls on the need to be aware of the fact that IDP is a long and uneven, step-by-step process. It is directly related to Marc Gopin’s fundamental notion of ‘incremental peacebuilding.’ Together, these three principles constitute a foundation towards a theory of IDP.[[955]](#footnote-955)

The main role of religious communities seems to be their engagement in reconciliation that, the analysis suggests, is primarily based on a responsible involvement with the process of coming to terms with the past, beyond negative myths of the Other yet with readiness to express repentance for the crimes of one’s own group.[[956]](#footnote-956) Following Panikkar’s[[957]](#footnote-957) distinction between “dialectical dialogue,” which concerns the exchange of rational opinions, and “dialogical dialogue,” which pertains to persons and personal relationships, Merdjanova and Brodeur argue that both dimensions are important and irreducible and, furthermore, that they should be kept together:

On the one hand, the reduction of dialogue to only its dialectical expression leads to the unfair imposition of judgment onto others, with possible implications for reproduction of unjust power dynamics (…) On the other hand, the reduction of dialogue to only its dialogical expression can lead to in-depth understanding of others without cooperation with them on matters related to political and social exigencies, and even to daily community living. The first attitude carries the risk of prompting universalist impositions on the assumption of an alleged unity behind a particular aspect of reality. The second can result in individual relativist apathy and collective stagnation based on a perception of endless and irreconcilable diversity.[[958]](#footnote-958)

Interreligious dialogue thus necessitates rational communication and exchange of opinions, but it also has an interest in the identity of the dialogue partner and basic goodwill and empathy.[[959]](#footnote-959) The dialogue itself can take many forms. Similar to the distinctions between the dialogue of life and theological dialogue that arose from my interviews, the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue differentiates in its document *Dialogue and Proclamation* four, non-hierarchical forms of interreligious dialogue:

*a)* The *dialogue of life,* where people strive to live in an open and neighborly spirit, sharing their joys and sorrows, their human problems and preoccupations.

*b)* The *dialogue of action*, in which Christians and others collaborate for the integral development and liberation of people.

*c)* The *dialogue of theological exchange,* where specialists seek to deepen their understanding of their respective religious heritages and to appreciate each other’s spiritual values.

*d)*The *dialogue of religious experience,*where persons, rooted in their own religious traditions, share their spiritual riches, for instance with regard to prayer and contemplation, faith and ways of searching for God or the Absolute.[[960]](#footnote-960)

While religious leaders play the most important role in the “dialogue of theological exchange,” they can simultaneously engage in all those forms of dialogue.

# 2.4. Final causes: Different worldview

We come, at the end, to the *final causes*—global visions through which religions can contribute to peacebuilding. In a number of places in the previous chapter, we could notice the reoccurring presence of the eschatological vision in which religions are not concerned only with the past or present. Instead, the main anchor of their identities is the eschatological vision of justice, reconciliation, and salvation. In that sense, it is the *final vision* that inspires engagement in a still ‘broken’ world. The element that links this final vision and the current moment is hope. In my previous discussion, I presented Bar-Tal’s argument for the change of a given society’s collective emotional orientation from fear to hope. But hope, especially for religious leaders, has its source in beliefs about the ultimate future that is already present in the form of a promise.

Moltmann sees eschatological hope not as a “loosely attached appendix” but as the very essence and basic orientation of the entire Christian experience.[[961]](#footnote-961) Rooted in the final vision of the redeemed world, hope is at the same time the cause of dissatisfaction with present injustices[[962]](#footnote-962) and the source of happiness and consolation that stands in opposition to hopelessness and despair.[[963]](#footnote-963) Moltmann, as a Christian theologian, does not speak just about any form of hope or eschatology but about the one firmly grounded in Christian narrative concerning the resurrection of Jesus Christ.[[964]](#footnote-964) The importance of hope lies in its ability to provide reasons for human actions. In Moltmann’s view, meaningful action “is always possible only within a horizon of expectation. Otherwise all decisions and actions would be desperate thrusts into a void and would hang unintelligibly and meaninglessly in the air.”[[965]](#footnote-965) Thus, for believers, eschatological hope provides a *meaningful* framework within which they can continually engage in the service of justice and peace, despite many apparent obstacles. A religious grounding in hope does not mean, however, that the only possible way of practicing it would be in the sectarian way. To the contrary, Moltmann stresses that the ultimate Christian vision of the salvation must also be understood as “shalom,” the Old Testament concept signifying holistic peace, which motivates Christians to work for the well-being of the whole world and not just their own spiritual salvation. To state it differently, work on salvation grounded in eschatological hope “does not mean merely salvation of the soul, individual rescue from the evil world, comfort for the troubled conscience, but also the realization of the eschatological *hope of justice*, the *humanizing* of man, the *socializing* of humanity, *peace* for all creation.”[[966]](#footnote-966) Thus, religious missions in the world of today, Moltmann suggests, can succeed only if they can “infect” people with hope.[[967]](#footnote-967)

Viewed from an interreligious perspective, arguably the most influential ways of offering a different global vision in service of peace have been attempts at creating a global ethic. An influential Catholic theologian, Hans Küng, formulated the need for religious engagement in peacebuilding in the following way: “There will be no peace between the civilizations without peace between the religions! And there will be no peace between the religions without a dialogue between the religions (…) There will be no new world order without a new world ethic, a global or planetary ethic despite all dogmatic differences.”[[968]](#footnote-968) While a global ethic might initially sound like a purely philosophical project, Küng saw it as an endeavor in which religions play an indispensable role:

So we need to make a distinction between what can be communicated by ethics as a purely human ethic on the one hand, and what can ultimately be communicated only by religion, in its decisive elements a deeply rooted and at the same time rational trust in God, on the other. It is a delusion to think that modern society will be held together by the Internet and globalized markets, by economic and social modernization. A universal spiritual culture on a technological basis is not in sight. Rather, all over the world a new quest for identity and a reflection on one’s own tradition is in process.[[969]](#footnote-969)

Küng believed that only religion, and not universal ethics in and of themselves, can provide “a comprehensive horizon of interpretation” of both positive and negative life experience and “communicate an ultimate meaning of life even for nihilists who are in despair in the face of the inevitability of death.”[[970]](#footnote-970) He expressed his view succinctly in the following passage:

No ethic in itself, but only religion can guarantee values, norms, motivations and ideals and at the same time unconditionally make them concrete (…) No universal ethic, but only religion, can create a home of spiritual security, trust and hope through shared rites and symbols, through a picture of history and a vision of hope (…) No universal ethic, but only religion, mobilize protest and resistance against unjust conditions, even when such protest and resistance seems to be fruitless, or frustration has already set in.[[971]](#footnote-971)

Küng’s case for the irreplaceable role of religion is a mixture of normative positions and pragmatic arguments. Although there are many strong indicators that religions (still) have the unique ability to mobilize people, that ability will undoubtedly change over time. His first two arguments, however, only work on the assumption that people do accept the existence of an “ultimate meaning” and the feasibility of its articulation. Küng clearly does not pit religion and ethics against one another and stresses the complementary relationship between the two,[[972]](#footnote-972) but the argument for the “uniqueness” of religion might still sound like a narrative of superiority. Religions do indeed offer comprehensive answers to the questions of origins and the final goal of human history, but one cannot assume that others see those answers as sufficiently convincing or warranted. Instead, a stronger argument might be that religions are, for the majority of people around the world, an indispensable interpretative framework that helps them to find *additional justification* for ethical precepts and spiritual and *emotional consolation* in established rituals and rites that are more specific than common civic ceremonies and *answers* to the questions that go beyond the scope of shared human ethics.

This proposal is compatible with the general outlook of Küng’s book. His aim was to propose principles of a global “elementary morality” that can then be further built upon in every specific cultural and religious tradition.[[973]](#footnote-973) The theoretical basis for this proposal was Michael Walzer’s concept of elementary ethical standards, which can be expressed only in a basic, ‘thin’ way, but further enriched (‘thickened’) by additional cultural content: “What is meant here are moral concepts which have a minimal significance and are indicated by a ‘thin’ description: in other words, this is a ‘thin’ morality, the content of which, of course, enriched in the various cultures, appears as a ‘thick’ morality in which every possible historical, cultural, religious and political view conies to be involved, depending on place and time.”[[974]](#footnote-974)

The Proposal of Global Ethics thus seeks to find the “smallest possible basis for human living and acting together”[[975]](#footnote-975) that would still have global appeal for acceptance and further development and would not, in contrast to the discourse of human right, be perceived by some as a Western project.[[976]](#footnote-976) Thus, the search for those common elements is essentially inductive, based on the analysis of the common norms in religious traditions that have survived the test of time (they are not deduced from abstract philosophical principles nor developed only through discursive language-games[[977]](#footnote-977)). At the center of that project stands the Golden Rule of humanity expressed in many different ways but always based on the notion that people should treat others the way they themselves want to be treated. This main precept was further elaborated by the InterAction Council in “four irrevocable directives,” which read:

* Commitment to a culture of non-violence and respect for all life: the age-old directive: You shall not kill! Or in positive terms: Have respect for life!
* Commitment to a culture of solidarity and a just economic order: the age-old directive: You shall not steal! Or in positive terms: Deal honestly and fairly!
* Commitment to a culture of tolerance and a life of truthfulness: the age-old directive: You shall not lie! Or in positive terms: Speak and act truthfully!
* Commitment to a culture of equal rights and partnership between men and women: the age-old directive: You shall not commit sexual immorality! Or in positive terms: Respect and love one another![[978]](#footnote-978)

Global ethics have implications for various spheres of life, and Küng offers a number of explications with respect to politics and the economy. The topic that of special importance for this study is, of course, the religious contribution to peace. Küng’s general attitude is as follows:

Despite all the failures, religions can make a decisive contribution to peace, if they perceive and utilize all the potential for peace that lies within them. There are fundamental motivations in each of the great religions to contribute not only towards personal inner peace but also towards the overcoming of aggression and violence in society.[[979]](#footnote-979)

However, he quickly notes that religious engagement for peace is possible only if there is peace between religions. The first step in that direction is confidence and trust-building between religions, the processes in which religious leaders and representatives play the most important and indispensable role.[[980]](#footnote-980) At the same time, religions are invited to collaborate with other institutions that work for the same goal and be responsive to breaches of commonly held principles.

In opposition to religious justifications for hostilities, crimes, and negative stereotypes, the task of religions is “to sharpen the conscience against all politically ideological fanaticism.”[[981]](#footnote-981) In crisis situations, they “must help to prevent crimes against humanity and the environment being committed—as often happens—by members of their own faith with an appeal to religion. They must reinstate their tradition of respect for human dignity and solidarity with all that lives and exists.”[[982]](#footnote-982)

Against those who are ready to resort to the language of violence, religions “should be ready for reconciliation and prepared time and again to take the first step.”[[983]](#footnote-983) Moreover, religions have a responsibility to counteract religious intolerance, and religious representatives and leaders in particular “should courageously contradict all who claim to have served their own religion by ethnic and cultural cleansings. They should resolutely resist violent cleansings of whole cities and regions. And they should create possibilities for the encounter, so that religious multiplicity is not experienced as a threat but as an enrichment.”[[984]](#footnote-984) In contrast to stereotypical representations of the Other, “they should persistently ensure that the other side gets a chance to present itself, so as to be able to describe the conflict and its resolution from its own perspective.”[[985]](#footnote-985) In the case of conflicts, they additionally “have the duty to identify offences against international law, even when these come from their own ranks, indeed particularly then.”[[986]](#footnote-986) Finally, with respect to forced conversions, they “should oppose such practices and fight against them, especially in their own sphere. The test for religious freedom is the freedom of others!”[[987]](#footnote-987)

In the previous four sections, I have tried to situate my model of the role of religious leaders in peacebuilding within the context of a broader theoretical discussion on the relationships between religion, conflict, and peace. Using Aristotle’s concept of four causes as an organizing principle, I have attempted to show the interrelatedness of beliefs, ideas, structural conditions, concrete actions, and global visions. The emphasis of my model is on the theological reconfiguration of too close ties between religious and other group identities, not from an abstract external position but from the theological traditions themselves. Since the majority of the previous discussions dealt with large cross-national studies, it may still be unclear how the proposed conclusion reflects particularly on the local level of Bosnia and Herzegovina, where religion is tied not just to any “group identity” but to specific national/ethnic identities situated within a specific historical context. In what follows, I will try to contextualize the most important issue of closed identities in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

# 2.5. Religion, conflict, Bosnia and Herzegovina

Scholars generally agree that the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina was not a “religious war” in the sense that it was not initiated by religious disputes. At the same time, they generally acknowledge that religion played a significant role in those conflicts. However, the perception to what degree and in which way religion was involved in the war varies significantly. Perica, for instance, claims the following:

The three largest religious organizations, as impartial foreign and domestic analysts, have agreed, were among the principal engineers of the crisis and conflict. Western analysts noticed religious insignia on the battlefield, prayers before the combat and during battles, religious salutes, clergy in uniforms and under arms; elite combat units labeled ‘the Muslim Army’ or ‘Orthodox Army’ accompanied by clergy; massive destruction of places of worship; forms of torture such as carving religious insignia into human flesh; and so on. Foreign ‘holy warriors’ came to engage in a global “civilization clash” on the Bosnian battlefield.[[988]](#footnote-988)

Perica thus sees “religious organizations” as *engineers* of crisis and conflicts but the passage enumarates very different forms of religious ‘presence’ in war. When it comes to clear crimes such as “massive destruction of places of worship,” and “carving religious insignia into human flesh,” that can be hardly attributed to religious organizations, lest they decreed them to soldiers as a religious obligation (which is not likely since both torture or destruction of religious objects go against religious prescripts). On the other hand, some of the mentioned activities (e.g. prayers) are things that believers do in many other situations of life. There were indeed instances where religious servants appeared under arms, as was the case with the Orthodox bishop Filaret, but those cases were more exceptions than the rule. Finally, none of the religious communities ever went so far as to proclaim a “holy war,” and the self-proclaimed “holy warriors” from Arabic countries, as the proceedings from the ICTY show, clashed not only with members of other religions but also with many members of the local Muslim population in Bosnia and Herzegovina.[[989]](#footnote-989)

Brajović claims that religion played one of the *most important roles* in the conflicts in Bosnia and Herzegovina, but he fails to explicate in which way and how: “Clearly, there has been a religious dimension to the Balkan conflicts. National divisions correspond closely to differences in religious identities. Religion has played, if not a crucial, then at least one of the most important roles in the conflict in Bosnia.”[[990]](#footnote-990) The impression is that religion was implicated in war by the close association between religious and national identities, which then only points to structural factors, not to incitements to violence based on religious doctrines or the “crucial” role of religious actors in an escalation of hostilities.

Others, such as Peter Kuzmič, believe that “the genesis of the war was ideological and territorial, not ethnic or religious,”[[991]](#footnote-991) while Powers, similarly, concludes, “The conflict erupted out of the failure of the Yugoslav idea, a failure in which cultural, political, economic and other types of factors were far more prominent than religious ones.”[[992]](#footnote-992) In his view:

Religious and cultural factors clearly are present in the war. But the explanatory value of these factors is limited. First, the religious dimension of these cultural conflicts is often exaggerated. Despite deep differences, religious leaders themselves do not define the conflict in religious terms. Not only are most of the main political and military leaders not motivated by religion, but the general population exhibits a relatively low level of religious affiliation, especially in the case of Bosnian Muslims and Serbs.[[993]](#footnote-993)

One common point of agreement among scholars is that religious communities were not involved in the conflict in the same way and to the same degree. The causes of these differences were different levels of theological development and openness to ecumenism,[[994]](#footnote-994) differing socio-political positions of ethnic communities, as well as different degrees of religious organizations.[[995]](#footnote-995) Another point of agreement among scholars is that, following the collapse of Communism, during and after the war, religious and national ideas became strongly affiliated.

## 2.5.1. Facing the past with a mask

With respect to the challenges of facing a difficult past, scholars generally hold negative views about the readiness of the faith communities in Bosnia and Herzegovina to deal responsibly with the legacy of crimes, especially crimes committed by their own communities. Velikonja, for instance, states that the “only aspect of the interpretation of the atrocities that all religious communities agree about—and with which, like Pilate, they wash their hands—is that the blame lies with the ‘opposite side’ or with the ‘former regime.’”[[996]](#footnote-996) Similarly, Clark claims that, “broadly speaking, faith communities in B-H view and approach the past through the prism of ‘chosen trauma,’ defined by Volkan as ‘the shared image of an event that causes a large group (i.e., an ethnic group) to feel helpless, victimized and humiliated by another group.’ This is a distorting interpretative framework that is not conducive to creating consensus and harmony among B-H’s faith communities.”[[997]](#footnote-997)

My research has not fully corroborated these claims. Views on crimes among religious leaders were selective and incomplete, and, in that respect, did not differ markedly from the general attitudes of the population. However, this selectivity cannot be said to make religious leaders perceive the past only through their “chosen trauma.”[[998]](#footnote-998) One clear example of this were crimes committed in Srebrenica, which no single participant in my study denied, although some Orthodox participants did question the numbers of victims involved, also noting the unrecognized Serbian victims from neighboring places. Another example were crimes committed in Ahmići that were perpetrated by Croats. Two interviewees who explicitly mentioned these crimes did not deny their occurrence, although one did question the command responsibility of the military superiors involved. The prevailing attitude among religious leaders was that certain individuals from their ethnic group did commit crimes and that they should be duly persecuted, but that the fight of their ethnic group was, overall, legitimate.

Cohen’s magisterial work *States of Denial: Knowing about Atrocities and Suffering* identified three types of denial: 1) literal denial, wherein facts or the knowledge thereof are denied; 2) interpretative denial, wherein the raw facts are not denied in a literal sense but are assigned a different meaning from the apparent one (e.g., when torture is termed ‘moderate physical pressure’); and 3) implicatory denial, wherein neither facts nor conventional interpretations are refuted, but only psychological, moral, or political implications that conventionally follow from them (e.g., when people rationalize their decision to not get involved by saying ‘It’s got nothing to do with me.’).[[999]](#footnote-999) I would like to suggest another category that, in my view, describes more precisely the general situation with the process of coming to terms with the past among the religious leaders in Bosnia and Herzegovina—*controlled reciprocal acknowledgment*. We see this mechanism at work in certain respondents’ suggestions that their religious communities should not publicly acknowledge the crimes of their own group until others do the same because the result would be a skewed and negatively biased view of the past. Another pillar of this mechanism rests on the genuine lack of knowledge about the entire scope of the crime and support for an impartial historical commission that would investigate the events of the war *lege artis*.[[1000]](#footnote-1000) Consequently, certain high-profile crimes (i.e., primarily mass executions and prison camps) are already well known and are rarely denied, while for the rest, each group is most familiar with crimes committed by their own community. One can perhaps argue that there are elements of interpretative and implicatory denial here, but one cannot overlook a strong resentment for the *lack of common acknowledgment* of crimes on all sides. Thus, at least in theory, the preferential orientation is not for silence but for common acknowledgement.

When judging the processes of coming to terms with a difficult past, we must take into account the temporal factor. As Obradovic-Wochnik demonstrates with respect to Serbia, the state of acceptance and of acknowledgment of crimes changes over time. In her view, “Strategies of denial are not end-products of a failure to acknowledge events such as Srebrenica as atrocities, but are the first steps in their acceptance as such. The presence of strategies of denial suggests that a reframing of an event is taking place, and this is often the case if the initial event is seen as undesirable, morally wrong and a ‘counterpoint to culture.’”[[1001]](#footnote-1001) Thus, the relationship between denial, acceptance, and acknowledgment might be much more complex than a clear division of either/or might suggest.

Finally, my study also demonstrated that religious leaders differ significantly among themselves. Their acknowledgment (or lack thereof) of crimes was not just the result of their status as religious servants but also of their general education level, personality, age, theological views, and wartime experiences. We can recall the difference between Slaven, who proudly pointed out that the commemoration of the Bosnian Franciscan Community’s official publication placed photos of Muslim graves on its front page, and some members of his congregation who found that inappropriate save if other religious communities did the same.

I do not deny the existence of religious representatives who deny any guilt on their side, but my data do not support the conclusion that they constitute more than a minuscule minority at most. Generally speaking, religious leaders do acknowledge that some members of their communities committed crimes, and they acknowledge certain well-known war crimes while displaying a much greater familiarity with the particular crimes and abuses suffered by their own communities. At the end, is it reasonable to expect religious leaders to have a comprehensive knowledge of crimes and atrocities when even state institutions and independent research centers still do not have comprehensive databases of war crimes and when only a small number of experts operate with sufficient knowledge to speak about crimes on all ethnic sides? Besides the obvious recommendations that religious leaders (as well as other public figures) should educate themselves more fully about past atrocities and that they should foster a self-critical approach among their constituencies, we should also recognize that there might never be the “consensus and harmony among BiH’s faith communities” that one author desired.[[1002]](#footnote-1002) As in every other post-conflict society, there will always be disagreements, perhaps even profound ones, concerning past events. Thus, it might be more fruitful to advance responsible attitudes toward the past while accepting that the knowledge of the past will remain limited and, in parts, contested.

## 2.5.2. Different perspectives on peace and peacebuilding

One conclusion following clearly from this study is the very different approaches to peace and peacebuilding between religious and non-religious actors, primarily secular NGOs. The first and major difference is the general worldview that determines the focus of the peacebuilding work. While religious actors, from the very beginning, operate with the notion of a spiritual reality that is intrinsically linked to the material world, non-religious peacebuilding programs avoid any language that assumes a supernatural sphere.

The second difference follows from the first—spiritual transformation of an individual is, for religious leaders, an essential component of peacebuilding, even when its influence on broader social and political structures is not immediately apparent. Although these leaders also assume that spiritual change causes individuals to behave and think differently, these changes are often manifested in small, everyday gestures that do not fit neatly in the evaluation grids of peacebuilding programs. Together with a group of collaborators at the *Institute for Conflict Analysis and Resolution*, Tamara Pearson d’Estree developed an “exhaustive and descriptive” list of criteria for evaluating Interactive Conflict Resolution activities that contains four major categories: 1) Changes in thinking, 2) Changes in relations, 3) Foundations for transfer (of new discoveries to participant’s communities), and 4) Foundations for outcome/implementations (of results outside the closed circle of participants).[[1003]](#footnote-1003) Although the criteria employed are quite robust for a number of conflict-resolution activities, to what degree they are applicable to religious activities is subject to uncertainty, particularly when the central religious categories of spiritual development are not even mentioned.[[1004]](#footnote-1004) Similarly, while religious leaders view their spiritual and liturgical activities as an important contribution to peace, Sterland and Beauclerk, in their analysis of the role of faith communities in Bosnia and Herzegovina, concluded that liturgical activities are basically a distraction from the ‘real’ spiritual education: “Faith leaders have generally neglected the type of spiritual education that could have prepared congregations to fulfil principled, value-based roles in post-war social rehabilitation. Instead the focus has been largely liturgical, insular and antiquated.”[[1005]](#footnote-1005)

Of course, I do not propose a sudden shift of focus from a non-religious to a religious conceptualization of peace and peacebuilding since that would only aggravate the problem by introducing even more criteria. What I suggest is, first and foremost, a recognition of the fundamental differences in worldviews and starting positions between religious and non-religious peacebuilding activities. This recognition does not mean that, suddenly, the space of mutual collaboration would shrink. To the contrary, a very significant overlap between common values and shared goals would without doubt remain. However, recognition of uniqueness of each side would help to reduce mutual misunderstandings, avoid confusion, and adjust expectations. In Bojan’s interview, we could detect his annoyance at approaches that treat religious communities as NGOs with a specific agenda. Mirza described one event that describes well the differences in understanding between religious and certain non-religious actors. Mirza’s city has a mixed choir composed of participants from different religions. On occasions that include large ceremonies, this choir sings in religious objects throughout the city, performing songs appropriate for the celebration that is taking place. Once, the choir was singing Christmas songs in a Catholic Church on the occasion of the Catholic Christmas. After the concert, a representative of one international organization complained that the choir sang only Christian songs, although it branded itself as an interreligious choir. Mirza tried to explain that the interreligious component did not mean that the choir, on every occasion, sings songs from *all* traditions. Instead, it shows respect by singing Christian songs for Christmas and Muslim songs for Eid.[[1006]](#footnote-1006) The conversation did not proceed in the most cordial tone because of the participants’ very different understandings of what peacebuilding in general, and interreligious peacebuilding in particular, entails. The representative of a foreign foundation was obviously looking for a visible demonstration of “interreligiousness” and “tolerance” manifested through the choir’s repertoire, while, for the members of the choir and its leaders, the focus was on the shared spiritual component and dialogue, which do not necessitate an enforced display of differences on every occasion.

Another defining difference involves, in general, the scope of peacebuilding activities and their planning. For funding organizations and many NGOs, peacebuilding is primarily a project whereas religious leaders simply see it as a part of life and their vocation. Although this gives them an opportunity to commit themselves more thoroughly to their communities, even without financial resources and visible short-term results, religious leaders also can exhibit a lack of professionalism and know-how. This, again, does not mean that one approach is necessarily better than the other but, rather, calls for an honest recognition of differences that is crucial for mutual understanding and, eventually, improved collaboration. Sometimes, even when these differences are nominally recognized, they still seem to be minimized. For instance, in his paper on the evaluation of interfaith programs, Garfinkel emphasizes the following:

Although some peacebuilding projects emerging from faith-based organizations closely resemble secular peacebuiding efforts, in most cases the religious orientations of the organizations and individuals involved shape the peacebuilding they undertake. For example, religious mediators often make very explicit use of religious language and texts, such as prayer, when addressing conflict. This spiritual element encourages looking beyond one’s personal interests toward a greater good.[[1007]](#footnote-1007)

Although the differences in approach are well defined, what remains undiscussed is a potentially differing view of whether peacebuilding is a “project” or not, and what either option entails. According to Garfinkel, one important element of such a “project” is that it continually undergoes evaluation:

[E]valuation must be an integral part of a program from inception, with program management actively involved in identifying what information it needs to make good decisions and, later on, on what it needs to interpret and apply the evaluative data. Over time, the understanding accumulated through evaluations like these will expand knowledge of the actual and potential roles of religious organizations in international peacemaking.[[1008]](#footnote-1008)

One cannot deny the importance of project evaluation which, according to Garfinkel’s and Esteel’s suggestion, involves evaluation on the micro, mezo, and macro levels, on the axes of promotion, application, and sustainability.[[1009]](#footnote-1009) Still, it is reasonable to ask whether religious leaders would have the will or resources to invest in these evaluations when, as we have seen, they rarely have time for more than basic activities (e.g., recall how Pavle complained that they better know the price of the sand than new theological currents because they have to invest for a large portion of time in building and renovating religious objects).

Another relevant difference is in the way that external observers perceive the influence of religious leaders and their links with political power. As Merdjanova and Brodeur exoress:

Major religious communities in post-war Bosnia, for example, saw themselves as powerless while the international community tended to perceive them as invested with authority and influence because of their intimate connection to their respective national communities. For example, religious leaders in Bosnia have often been perceived as yielding political power.[[1010]](#footnote-1010)

My research revealed that religious leaders hold very different views on the degree of their influence; they frequently stressed that their impact depends on their audience and the situation. With respect to direct influence on political decisions and events, they generally perceived their influence to be very small. On the other hand, they see their leverage with respect to moral and ethical questions as much greater. Sterland and Beauclerk, for instance, claim the following: “With rare exceptions, the contribution of official church channels to peacebuilding in the Balkans has been disappointing (…) Through highly influential in the political arena, faith leaders have focused more on such worldly concerns as their legal and constitutional status, the return of former wealth in land and property, with a great deal of attention to the church building and re-building programmes.”[[1011]](#footnote-1011) First, religious leaders are assumed to be “highly influential,” but where and in which ways they are influential is unclear. As Vanja Jovanović, one of the members of the Interreligious Council of Bosnia and Herzegovina, mentioned a televised discussion, the very fact that, for more than 20 years after the war, religious communities did not manage to obtain restitution for their property nationalized under Communism directly contradicts the claim that they have large political influence.[[1012]](#footnote-1012) In addition, from the perspective of countries in which religious communities enjoy legal protection and secured financing, concerns for “legal and constitutional status, the return of former wealth in land and property” might appear to be trivial “worldly concerns,” but, from the local perspective, in which many religious leaders until recently did not even have basic health insurance due to their legally undefined status, that engagement might be much more important. During his interview, Sead drew my attention to the fact that financial independence of religious communities from the state would give them much more space to be critical of political misuses. In his view, there is no need to receive income from the state but only to have returned what was forcefully taken from religious communities during Communism.[[1013]](#footnote-1013) When religious leaders heavily depend on the financial support of local political leaders, Haris pointed out, one is often forced to choose between physical survival or principles.[[1014]](#footnote-1014) In that sense “the return of the former wealth” would be important to have a greater degree of autonomy and freedom (including the freedom to criticize political authorities). The story can, undoubtedly, go in another direction, in which religious leaders enter into some sort of an alliance with local political leaders or work in rich parishes, but, once again, that does not mean that this situation can be generalized to all other communities.

My aim here is not to argue in favor of one option or another or to exculpate religious leaders from their responsibilities but rather to point to perhaps too hasty judgments about complicated matters such as the political influence of religious leaders or the hierarchy of their concerns. One thing, however, seems to be a matter of general agreement, and that is the close connection between religious and ethnic/national identities during the largest part of the recent history of Bosnia and Herzegovina. The period of war, if anything, only served to solidify the ethnic-religious links inside the communities while simultaneously making divisions between communities larger. Thus, it seems necessary that religious leaders in Bosnia and Herzegovina work on reconfiguration of the relationship between the national/ethnic and the religious identity. However, this, once again, might seem at odds with another role of religious communities—to stabilize the identity of their believers. Thus, the challenges that religious leaders face are the following: remaining close to their communities while preserving autonomy; engaging in the political arena without falling prey to politics; nourishing one’s cultural and national identity without promoting nationalism. I will now turn to these challenges.

## 2.5.3. Census Fidei: Nationalism and beyond

The most recent population census in Bosnia and Hercegovina provides insight into some unusual minority religions—there were 3.989 members of the “Serbian” religion (more than *Jehovah’s Witnesses*, Adventists, Protestants, and Greek Catholics combined), 411 of the “Bosniak” religion (including an additional 154 of the “Bosnian” religionists), with 275 followers of the “Croat” religion.[[1015]](#footnote-1015) It would obviously be unreasonable to expect that those individuals genuinely address their prayers to their nations or perform Croatian/Bosniak/Serbian religious rites in contrast to others who do it in the Catholic/Islamic/Orthodox way. Rather, they do not differentiate between the latter and former trinities, as if these are just two manifestations of the same essence, i.e., two forms of the same substance. The aforementioned 4.829 believers—unlike Jedis, Pastafarians, and other intentionally mocking religionists—stand out as a symptom of a deeper problem of mental identification between national and religious belonging. Obviously, those groups of people do not represent a majority opinion, but they still serve as an important symptom. The obvious question is: How two monotheistic religions with a strong universalist, supra-national appeal become identified with particular, national identities? The answer would require a long, elaborate discussion involving historical, social, and political factors. Here, I will not present the chronological placement of nationalism and debates about its origins[[1016]](#footnote-1016) but will focus primarily on the Catholic[[1017]](#footnote-1017) stance towards religion and national/ethnic identity and a possible way out of the universalist-particularist dilemma.

### 2.5.3.1. Good, bad, and ugly: Many faces of nationalism

Just like the servants of the Many-Faced God of the Island of Bravos from the popular series *Game of the Thrones*, nationalism is capable of taking on an almost unlimited number of faces (it still remains to discover whether all of them are just masks placed in the service of Death, as the series indicates). Depending on the theoretical stance from which nationalism is defined, it can appear as a form of inclusive admiration or as a destructive form of exclusivism. When defined in a positive sense, nationalism is seen as an expression of appreciation for tradition and a desire for a social framework that insures a group’s flourishing and protection. In the negative sense, it is viewed as a totalitarian and destructive way of organizing reality through categories of superiority and inferiority. The confusion is exacerbated by nationalism’s frequent use in a minimal sense of respect as a cultural and/or political arrangement that can hold pluralistic communities together (liberal-culturalist version) and sometimes as a maximalist ideological program based on the concept of innate specificities (ethno-nationalist version). Those views can be further sub-classified according to their stance on the degree of self-determination, territorial, and political sovereignty that a nation should enjoy.[[1018]](#footnote-1018)

The distinctions that my interviewees made between nationalism and patriotism (or nationalism and chauvinism), sometimes linking them to the difference between pride and haughtiness, are often present in debates about civic identity. One common distinction between the ‘positive’ and ‘negative’ forms of attachment to a community is expressed as the contrast between patriotism and nationalism.[[1019]](#footnote-1019) While patriotism, as per Grosby, signifies a commitment to the well-being of one’s country with considerable tolerance for legitimate differences between individual citizens of that country and openness to compromise, nationalism implies internal homogeneity and external hostility:

When one divides the world into two irreconcilable and warring camps—one’s own nation in opposition to all other nations—where the latter are viewed as one’s implacable enemies, then, in contrast to patriotism, there is the ideology of *nationalism.* Nationalism repudiates civility and the differences that it tolerates by attempting to eliminate all differing views and interests for the sake of one vision of what the nation has been and should be.[[1020]](#footnote-1020)

### 2.5.3.2. Extended nationalism: Going beyond one’s native land

Despite a significant variance between theories of nationalism, one frequent theoretical tendency is to link nations, as imagined communities,[[1021]](#footnote-1021) to a specific territory that is imbued with meaning, based on shared collective memories.[[1022]](#footnote-1022) However, in his famous 1945 essay, Orwell goes one step further and defines nationalism not only as identification with a nation but also in an extended sense as blind competitive allegiance to a group driven by a desire for power:

By ‘nationalism’ I mean first of all the habit of assuming that human beings can be classified like insects and that whole blocks of millions or tens of millions of people can be confidently labeled ‘good’ or ‘bad’. But secondly—and this is much more important—I mean the habit of identifying oneself with a single nation or another unit, placing it beyond good and evil and recognizing no other duty than that of advancing its interests (…) Nationalism, in the extended sense in which I am using the word, includes such movements and tendencies as Communism, political Catholicism, Zionism, Antisemitism, Trotskyism and Pacifism. It does not necessarily mean loyalty to a government or a country, still less to one’s own country, and it is not even strictly necessary that the units in which it deals should actually exist.[[1023]](#footnote-1023)

The main point of distinction between nationalism and patriotism for Orwell is neither the degree of love for the chosen entity nor a form of admiration, but the element of power and the desire to impose one’s worldview on others. In that sense, nationalism is always aggressively expansive, characterized by strong bias and self-deceptiveness.[[1024]](#footnote-1024) Consequently, in Orwell’s view, nationalism is not a reflection of real power and influence in the sense that a person aligns herself with the strongest side and takes the side of history’s winners. On the contrary, a nationalist first chooses his or her side and then selects the appropriate history to justify the presumed superiority of that choice: “Every nationalist is capable of the most flagrant dishonesty, but he is also—since he is conscious of serving something bigger than himself—unshakeably certain of being in the right.”[[1025]](#footnote-1025)

For Orwell, unlike many other commentators, nationalism is inherently unstable and is not necessarily linked to country of origin. As he explains, sometimes the most fervent nationalist leaders come from the periphery or even a foreign country to those they glorify, as was the case with Stalin, Hitler, Napoleon, Disraeli, and others.[[1026]](#footnote-1026) Orwell also describes “re-transference” of loyalty when a previously detested object becomes an object of worship and vice versa: “The bigoted Communist who changes in the space of weeks, or even days, into an equally bigoted Trotskyist is a common spectacle. In continental Europe, Fascist movements were largely recruited from among Communists, and the opposite process may well happen within the next few years. What remains constant in the nationalist is his state of mind: the object of his feelings is changeable, and may be imaginary.”[[1027]](#footnote-1027) In that way, “transferred nationalism” substitutes for an inability to exercise a nationalist desire on the most proximate community; in other words, to seize control of and impose your way of government on the nearby community. What remains stable, however, is selectivity driven by a desire for power, and joy in that choice. Nationalism is, one might say, not just a specific way of organizing reality but of bending it. Like light in the vicinity of a black hole, a previously fixed constant of history falls prey to the gravitational density of the nationalist mindset: “Actions are held to be good or bad, not on their own merits, but according to who does them (…) The nationalist not only does not disapprove of atrocities committed by his own side, but he has a remarkable capacity for not even hearing about them.”[[1028]](#footnote-1028)

To be possible, nationalism eventually requires a dissolution of individuality into collectivity, an invisible transubstantiation of the personal into the collective self, a ritual in which the ultimate focus of personal articulation is the first person plural: “The abiding purpose of every nationalist is to secure more power and more prestige, *not* for himself but for the nation or another unit in which he has chosen to sink his own individuality.” [[1029]](#footnote-1029)

### 2.5.3.3. Nationalism as a collective body of dead individuality

In his polemic collection of essays, *The Anatomy Lesson*, Danilo Kiš expands on the stated notion and dissects the body/corpse of nationalism in its *we* and *me* parts. For Kiš, nationalism is a state of mind that produces an equivalent state of affairs; it is “paranoia—collective and individual paranoia. As a collective paranoia, nationalism is born out of fear and envy. But above all, it appears as a result of an individual’s lost consciousness. Therefore, collective paranoia is nothing else but a summary of many individual paranoias brought together to a level of paroxysm.”[[1030]](#footnote-1030) What specifies nationalism, according to Kiš, is the combination of an empty individuality and a Messianic mission:

Obsessed with that secret, semi-public or public mission, our Mr. X becomes a man of action, a national tribune, a pseudo-individual. And now, when he is brought down to earth, to his own size, when he is isolated from the faceless crowd and removed from the post where he has placed himself, or where others have placed him, we have before our eyes an individual without individuality, a nationalist, Cousin Jules. He is the same Jules Sartre wrote about, Jules who is no one in the family, a nil, and whose only virtue is to turn red whenever the word ‘Englishmen’ is mentioned.[[1031]](#footnote-1031)

In Kiš’s rendering, nationalism is nothing more than an “ideology of banality”[[1032]](#footnote-1032) based on the lack of any profound knowledge of one’s own culture and of foreign cultures, with kitsch and folklore as its preferential artistic forms. It is a negative category that acquires its meaning only through comparison with the Other, who is always at least a degree worse:

Nationalism is therefore and, above all, a negative spiritual category, because nationalism is based on and lives by denial and on denial. We are not those people who they are. We are the positive pole; they are the negative one. Our national values, our nationalistic values, have some function only if we compare them with others: we are nationalists, but they are worse than we are. We slaughter (only when we have to), but they slaughter even more than we do. We are drunkards, but they are alcoholics. Our history is accurate only in relation to theirs. Our language is pure only if compared to theirs. (…) The nationalist is not afraid of anyone, “anyone but God,” and his god is made on his own terms and in his own image-his pale Cousin Jules.[[1033]](#footnote-1033)

Nationalism,Kiš concludes, is “ideology and anti-ideology at the same time,”[[1034]](#footnote-1034) and it suppresses genuine individuality, replacing it with a superficial social being born out of envy and fear. We could say that nationalism is a mass phenomenon, but not a social phenomenon, provided we understand social life to be a participative activity of individuals. In Kiš’s view, it is a social life deprived of innovative participation. If variation is allowed, then it is ephemeral, just like coloring in a coloring book in which all the forms and shapes are already printed, and the coloring book itself is mass produced and distributed. The psychological profile of a nationalist is the profile of an individual whose individuality is phrased in collective terms, while his collectivity is determined in negative terms with respect to another collectivity.

### 2.5.3.4. Cosmic battels in the courtyard: Religious nationalism

The coupling between religion and nationality seems like the old Biblical genus of Nephilim, the progeny of the “sons of God” and the “daughters of men” (Genesis 6). While religion purports to derive from the divine source, nations are inherently human products constrained by intrinsic limitations of history. From a theological perspective, even the concept of an ‘elected nation’ does not cross the frontier of historical contingency because its sanctity is always predicated upon obedience to God’s commands. In other words, the elected nation’s sanctity and electivity are reflections of its compliance with the divine plan, not the expression of their collective essence, as the Old Testament testifies in many places. If we move towards prophetic writings, we can see a gradual shift towards universality. Jerusalem, which is at the same time the very center of the Israeli Kingdom, is pre-shadowed as a place of universal worship (Isaiah 2). Jesus’s transgressive attitude towards precepts of national purity and later Paul’s famous proclamation of no-borders between Jews and gentiles (Galatians 3:28) seem incompatible with any form of closed identity. However, as the previous discussion on the importance of sources, interpretations, and political theologies showed, links between social and religious factors are much more complex.

Having studied the phenomena of nationalism and related identity politics, Brubaker[[1035]](#footnote-1035) correctly asserts that these relate to religion in many ways. Specifically, he identifies four major analytic approaches to this issue. The first approach treats religion and nationalism as analogous phenomena. The roots of this idea can be found in the works of Emile Durkheim, and Carlton Hayes asserts the intrinsic link between group-belonging and religious feeling. Thus, nationalism is akin to an intrinsically religious phenomenon because it incites similar emotions—feelings of awe and faith in some eternal power and a set of specific rituals, symbols, and narratives. Pursuing a somewhat different approach, however, Brubaker does not define nationalism as something religious but instead sees both religion and nationalism as analogues strategies for organizing (i.e., “making sense” of) the world, framing social relations, and making political claims. Viewed from this perspective, religion and nationalism are structurally similar in relation to private and public life, even though their specific beliefs, organizations, and roles are frequently very different. Secondly, he tries to explain the rise of nationalism through the influence of religion. In this respect, religion is either facilitating or directing the development of nationalism. One can take as an example the rise of Protestantism and its influence on nationalism in Europe and North America. On this account, religion is seen as an extrinsic phenomenon that can explain the genesis and development of nationalism. Thirdly, he treats religion and nationalism as intertwined. This is especially visible when national and religious boundaries coincide with each other or when religious identity is used as an identity marker to separate one ethnic or national group from another. Another form of intertwining occurs when religion provides resources for nationalist discourse that deal with the identity, mission, and destiny of a certain nation, both in the public and private spheres. The exchange can also proceed in the opposite direction, towards a nationalist inflection on religion.  In the latter case, supra-national religions (such as Christianity and Islam) acquire a typically nationalist outlook.

Despite numerous examples that can be found to illustrate the use of religious images in nationalist rhetoric, Brubaker observes that some important methodological problems relate to the scientific study of the interconnection between the two. Specifically, the use of religious images might have merely the character of a metaphor or a catachresis; representations of a nation are heterogeneous and change over time, meaning that religious images do not have to be substantial element therein; and, finally, one would have to pay attention to reception because even non-religiously framed nation-talk can be interpreted as religious on the “reception” side. Finally, he posits a specific form of *religious nationalism* as a distinctive alternative to *secular nationalism*. According to Friedland, nationalism is a program characterized by “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.”[[1036]](#footnote-1036) Specific to religious nationalism, according to Brubaker, is that the joining of state, territory, and culture is achieved primarily by a focus on traditional family and gender roles, and sexuality, i.e., in the background of nationalist policy is “the distinctively religious content of programmes for the ordering and regulating of public and private life, rather than on the religious inﬂection of political rhetoric or the religious identities of those involved in political contestation.”[[1037]](#footnote-1037)

While many conflicts around the world might use religiously based identity-markers, the conflict itself and the public claims of its exponents might even contradict religious principles. This definition of religious nationalism pertains to movements that want to unify territory, state, and culture by religious means. Therefore, the sole fact that certain religious movements aim to gain influence within a nation-state, as per Brubaker, does not suffice to qualify them as religious nationalists, neither does the fact that they have a certain collective source of legitimation different from that of a nation.[[1038]](#footnote-1038)

A salient element in conflicts having an ethno-religious component seems to be the transference of ‘sanctity’ from one realm to another, often through combined use of nationalist and religious images. Angelo Bartolomasi, Italian first military bishop, experienced firsthand how military language appropriates religious terms. During the period of the First World War, he wrote in his notes:

To express strong and sublime sentiments during the war, recourse is had to ecclesiastical, liturgical language.

Someone who dies for the fatherland is called *martyr*.

The *Patria*, the cause and ideals for which we are fighting are called *holy*.

We celebrate at the *altar* of the motherland.

We invoke *hell*, as the supreme punishment for those responsible for war.

We exalt *faith* in the destiny of the fatherland.

We desire the *baptism* of enemy fire.

We inflict *excommunication* on the proponents of neutrality.

The soldier’s bread is called *Eucharist* (D’Annunzio).

The *10 Commandments* are invented for hatred of the enemy.

The battles of Podgora and San Michele... become *Calvaries*.

The medical officers and women nurses, a *Priesthood*.

But when even so much as a mention is made of religion and Christianity in official documents, recourse is had to vague formulas: noble sentiments, religious duties and sentiments.[[1039]](#footnote-1039)

In other words, religious lexemes are placed in an ideological grammar in order to create a sacrosanct language of a nation. In his analysis of the conflicts in the former Yugoslavia, MacDonald attempts to show the importance of Biblical images in the construction of collective identities, especially through three dominant tropes: 1) Covenant, divine election/chosenness, 2) Fall/persecution, and 3) Redemption. MacDonald thus argues that prevalent myths concerning the *divinely elected nation that is perpetually persecuted but will ultimately be redeemed* had a significant influence on the development of nationalism in Serbia and Croatia.[[1040]](#footnote-1040) At stake here are neither some inner violent element of religious teaching that lead to violence nor individual characteristics, but rather a broader process of construction of collective memories and group identities in which religious symbols are used to form the structural backbone of a national narrative.

When too strong links between religion and nationality are established, it is difficult to disentangle political interests from transcendental concerns. As a consequence, things that are not sacred in themselves becomes sacralized, e.g., a land becomes a sacred land, a nation becomes an elected nation. What takes place is a *secondary sacralization* of world affairs, which can occur only if the *world as a whole* has been, from the religious perspective, emptied of theological value. In other words, sacralization of a nation, land, or territory is a form of funneling in which cosmic visions are poured into the smaller ‘portions’ of more reachable entities. Ultimately, the hierarchy of ‘sacred’ things is reversed, and, in cases of religious nationalism, experience of the sacred seems to be derived not from spirituality but from the nearest ‘sacred’ object, i.e., a nation (as Kiš said that the god of a nationalist is “made on his own terms and in his own image—his pale Cousin Jules.”[[1041]](#footnote-1041)). When nation and deity come as a union, it does not surprise that people adorn God with national attributes that can provoke a negative reaction, such as the Sarajevo graffiti “God is a Serb, and because of that we believe in Allah” in reply to Karadžić’s proclamation “God is a Serb.”[[1042]](#footnote-1042)

### 2.5.3.5. Divided loyalties: Christianity and nationalism

The famous anti-war slogan “Imagine que la guerre éclate et que personne n’y aille!” (“Suppose they gave a war and nobody came”)[[1043]](#footnote-1043) illuminates one of the central prerogatives of modern nations—a monopoly over violence and mobilization for coordinated use of force. What makes wars possible is not just an immediate threat but also an obligation to defend the fatherland (also known as motherland), based on a sense of loyalty. Military actions are therefore a mixture of coercion and free will, of external enforcement and internally induced sense of duty. Believers of any religion have some form of dual belonging in the ‘City of God’ and ‘Earthly City,’ as Augustin puts it. However, the legislations of those two ‘cities’ are not always compatible, as is the case with a sense of loyalty also. It is not surprising that the early Christian community was suspicious towards occupations that were, by definition, an expression of strong loyalty to the ‘Earthly City.’ The 12th canon of the Council of Nicea in 325, for instance, describes lapsed Christians who took back their military careers in less than flattering terms of those who “returned, like dogs, to their own vomit.”[[1044]](#footnote-1044) The obvious problem of Christian soldiers in a non-Christian political system was a dispersed loyalty that put them in situations in which they could not reconcile their activities of earthly goals and divine commandments.

The earliest Christian history were not marked by conflicts that could be called national in the contemporary sense, although there were already visible regional differences between, for instance, Antioch and Alexandria and even some example of proto-national consciousness, as was the case with Armenia.[[1045]](#footnote-1045) The dominant political framework for over a millennia was the supra-national one, with the slow digestion of the awareness of national specificities, yet always with a link to the universal perspective of Christianity/Christendom. Recognition of nations as distinctive units under temporal government was expressed through papal titles to kings (such as the title of Rex *christianissimus* or *Roi Très-chrétien* given to the French monarch), in papal arbitration between nations (such as that of Alexander VI between Spain and Portugal on division of new-found territories),[[1046]](#footnote-1046) and recognition of national protector saints (e.g., canonization of Stanisław as patron saint of Poland).[[1047]](#footnote-1047) The complex history of the Reformation, the rise of conciliarism and some form of national Churches, as well as a gradually stronger legitimation of power in secular terms are all predecessors to modern versions of nationalism that reached its full development in the 18th and 19th centuries. Although each historical period varied significantly, the prevailing question was still one between loyalty and love of one’s country and the Christian universal vocation.

For Thomas Aquinas, love of nation is discussed under the title of piety, a virtue which is an expression of charity towards the human community of birth and socialization. In his view, human beings are indebted to their community for the good they receive, and thus this form of love is an expression of good compatible with charity towards God.[[1048]](#footnote-1048) In Aquinas’s model, love for one’s country is just a natural extension of love to one’s parents. However, that piety has to be moderated, and this means giving what is due. When the limit on what is due is transgressed, what is essentially virtue turns into vice:

[T]he act of every virtue is limited by the circumstances due thereto, and if it overstep them it will be an act no longer of virtue but of vice. Hence it belongs to piety to pay duty and homage to one’s parents according to the due mode. But it is not the due mode that man should tend to worship his father rather than God, but, as Ambrose says on Luke 12:52, “the piety of divine religion takes precedence of the claims of kindred.”[[1049]](#footnote-1049)

Therefore, the distinction between virtuous love of one’s country and negative attachment is based on the idea of moderation. While attachment, respect, and charity from one’s own surroundings are seen as natural and laudable, their excessive form articulated as a sense of superiority over other groups is considered excessive and morally wrong. The criticism of the latter was especially articulated in papal documents from the 20th century, particularly in the period when the extreme versions of nationalism rose in Italy and Germany. However, it is important to note that nationalism, in papal documents, has not been criticized only as a motor of war but also as an axis of social oppression, economic exploitation, and an obstacle to international collaboration.

#### 2.5.3.5.1. Nationalism as a source of economic and social oppression

In 1931, on the 40th anniversary of *Rerum Novarum*, Pius XI promulgated the encyclical letter *Quadragesimo Anno*. Concerned with growing global economic inequality, he criticizes “economic nationalism,” which is together with “international imperialism” a basis of economic supremacy and exploitation.[[1050]](#footnote-1050) In 1939’s *Summi pontificatus*, Pius XII warns in a similar way that “legitimate and well-ordered love of our native country should not make us close our eyes to the all-embracing nature of Christian charity.”[[1051]](#footnote-1051) Paul VI in *Populorum Progressio* from 1967 sees nationalism and racism as significant obstacles to “creation of a more just social order and to the development of world solidarity.”[[1052]](#footnote-1052) *Popularum progression* detects nationalism in cultural and economic domination over the weaker state with no sense of solidarity among nations.[[1053]](#footnote-1053) Several years later, in *Octogesima Adveniens*, under the subtitle *Right to Emigrate,* Paul VI also reprimanded marginalization of emigrant-workers in foreign countries, calling for overcoming nationalism in favor of social sensitivity.[[1054]](#footnote-1054)

#### 2.5.3.5.2. Nationalism as a form of idolatry

*Non Abbiamo Bisogno* from 1931 and *Mit Brennender Sorge* from 1937 are the two most direct attacks of the totalitarian state and its supporting ideology of national divinization. The first letter that was written as a reaction against Mussolini’s restriction of Catholic associations spoke about “Statolatry” as an “ideology which clearly resolves itself into a true, a real pagan worship of the State”[[1055]](#footnote-1055) while the latter encyclical, written on the topic of the Church and the German Reich, strongly underlined the universality of the Christian message and mission, stating, “None but superficial minds could stumble into concepts of a national God, of a national religion; or attempt to lock within the frontiers of a single people, within the narrow limits of a single race, God, the Creator of the universe.”[[1056]](#footnote-1056) *Mit Brennender Sorge* also spoke about divinization of nation in terms of paganism[[1057]](#footnote-1057)—a *topos* that will find later reflection in the writings and addresses of John Paul II. In his 1994 address to the diplomatic corps accredited to the Holy See, John Paul II delivered a sharp criticism of nationalism, dubbing it a “new form of paganism.” Taking a step further, he stated that nationalism stands in direct opposition to the universalism of Christianity and that nationalist instrumentalization of religious sources attacks its very core: “it is as it were wounded in its very heart and made sterile.”[[1058]](#footnote-1058)

#### 2.5.3.5.3. Nationalism as an obstacle to peace

The third most dire consequence of nationalism is as an impediment to collaboration and trust among nations. In 1959, the Cold War was in full swing. In his Christmas message, John XXIII underlined the importance of peace and the constant abuse of that word. Division of the world into two blocks was in his view an “abnormal condition”[[1059]](#footnote-1059) and a blatant error in search of peace. In anticipation of international peace, it is thus necessary “to overcome certain erroneous ideas: the myths of force, of nationalism or of other things that have prevented the integrated life of nations.”[[1060]](#footnote-1060) Such a division obviously sets the scene for winners and losers, about which it is no longer possible to collaborate in mutual interest. Divisive nationalism, often termed “exaggerated nationalism”[[1061]](#footnote-1061) or “narrow nationalism”[[1062]](#footnote-1062) is seen as inherently negative and antithetical to “true patriotism,”[[1063]](#footnote-1063) which is neither antagonistic to collaboration and solidarity nor inimical to cultural diversity. This brings us back, once again, to the topic of balance between an appreciation for particularity and the universal mission of the Church. In that line, *Orientale Lumen* remarks: “[I]f we wish to avoid the recurrence of particularism as well as of exaggerated nationalism, we must realize that the proclamation of the Gospel should be deeply rooted in what is distinctive to each culture and open to convergence in a universality, which involves an exchange for the sake of mutual enrichment.”[[1064]](#footnote-1064)

#### 2.5.3.5.4. Splitting a baby: Universalist quasi-solution

If nationalism represents a constant danger to religious praxis, one can ask whether universalism might not be a way out. Are universalist theological models that disregard cultural specificities a remedy to theological balkanization? Is one universal language a solution for a linguistic cacophony, *one ring to rule them all* a solution for many circles of belonging? Is one universal morality and one universal set of values and beliefs a salvific path out of particularist divisions?

In a purely speculative sense, this might initially sound like a good idea, but if we remember the long history of cultural suppression that impeded Christian missions and reduced indigenous traditions to problematic superstitions, we cannot be so optimistic. The problem is that every universalism is always pronounced by particular subjects; it is always just *too particularly* universal, a specific set of ideas and interests that camouflage themselves in universalist *uni*-form.

The call for universalism, even universalist convictions, can thus have very different faces. Research into the history of oppression, subjugation, and terror will yield examples of despotic nationalists, ethnic war-lords, and tribal leaders but also of universalist and anti-nationalist ideologues. In 1958, Mao Zedong addressed the CCP leadership stating, “Classes will be eliminated first, then states will be abolished, and finally nations will disappear. This will be the case for the whole world.”[[1065]](#footnote-1065)

Recall the interview with Tarik, who stressed that it was actually loyalty to the violent version of Islamic universalism with no respect for the local root that motivated young people from Bosnia and Herzegovina to fight for ISIS.[[1066]](#footnote-1066) Unrooted universalism that carries no respect for any specificity, except for its own elements that it deems ‘universal,’ can be no less dangerous than narrow nationalism. Indeed, the remnants of Palmira were not destroyed by Syrian nationalists, but by those who perceived their ideology to be universal and to be ultimately forced upon the world as a whole. A closer look would reveal that such a universality is not much different from the extreme nationalisms we discussed previously, since both operate with a presumption of superiority and will for power. Ironically, we could perhaps speak about universalist nationalism, i.e., about particularism with universalist ambitions. Thus, the problem with extreme nationalism is not its rootedness into a culture or its appreciation of its context but rather a tendency to make that appreciation a virtue. The problem with extreme universalism is its blindness to its internal particularities, which makes it insensitive to the external particularities of other groups.

# 2.6. Contextual thinking—Irreducible core of pain

Both exclusivist nationalism and abstract universalism represent easy solutions, simple answers to a complex question. While the complexity is, in the first case, resolved by negative dualism we/they, the second solution erases the particularity altogether. While nationalism sees particularity as the only solution, abstract universalism throws it into a Heraklian river of permanent flow.

Condemning nationalism, especially religious nationalism, can, from a theological standpoint, be almost a banal task. We could proceed with little effort re-echoing the well-rehearsed phrase that Christianity, as God’s universal message to humankind, can never be subsumed under particular interests and that such projects unmistakably represent an aberration and a sin, or quoting some of the aforementioned documents. But, if the critique of nationalism is so easy, there still remains the question: Why is it that we have an increasingly strong need for contextual theologies, embedded in the concrete living circumstances of particular groups of people, while at the same time feeling repulsion towards any notion of grouping implied under the term ‘nation’? In other words, why is contextual theology good and nationalism bad when both are based on an appreciation of a specific culture and tradition?

A possible answer might lie in the will for power. While contextual theologies start from the position of pain, nationalism starts form the position of dominance. Even when it mentions pain and suffering, it uses them as a legitimation of its superiority, as a ‘license to kill,’ as permission to subjugate. In nationalist theology, death is not a hermeneutical key that allows for an understanding of the suffering of other humans but a lesson in how to do it properly next time, how to “strike the last blow.”[[1067]](#footnote-1067)

Both closed nationalism and abstract universalism seem to have, metaphorically speaking, selective pain receptors. In the first case, only the pain of one’s group is recognized, while in the other case pain becomes invisible from the detached position of abstract systems (apathetic universalism) or legitimized only insofar it complies with the prescribed system of ‘universal’ recipes (particularistic universalism). For that reason, Moltmann advocates theological descent into particular “vicious circles of death,”[[1068]](#footnote-1068) which constitutes a confrontation with real oppression and an experience of situated liberation. The irreducibility and specificity of pain are therefore the basis of the care for particularity; the universality and unavoidability of pain are the fundaments of empathy and compassion.

In other words, both nationalism and abstract universalism[[1069]](#footnote-1069) are essentially insensitive systems that do not leave sufficient breathing space for individuality. Finally, we might ask—what would be the way out of universalist-particularist limitations. The answer might lie in the renewed attention to an encounter, so often stressed in my interviews. Željko gave an interesting statement in which he said that, after conflicts, people must detoxify themselves from their evil memories and prejudices through an encounter with the Other.[[1070]](#footnote-1070) That attitude transforms the idea of the *toxic other* into *other as a chance for our own detoxication*. In an encounter, one has a chance to enter into a different reading of oneself or, to use a textual metaphor, to proofread the sentences that constitute the previously closed narrative of purity and perfection. At the same time, an encounter with a concrete Other re-sensitizes us to the concrete pain of the Other, making it difficult to escape into the numbing heaven-lands of abstract harmony. Thus, the recognition of the pain of the Other seems to be the first and crucial step out of the equally unattractive options: destructive closure and dilutive abstraction. That step does not require a refusal or negation of one’s own identity or cultural specificities, but a hospitable extension of the space for the identity of the Other.

## 2.6.1. The problem of an adjective

The whole problem of universality and specificity can be described as a quandary involving an adjective. As a grammatical tool, this form of speech more closely defines a subject; it takes it out of a generality and puts it into a context by describing and specifying it. National adjectives are no exception—they channel the meaning of a general belonging towards a specific one, but at the same time, they limit the circle of belonging. But what does the meeting of a specific adjective and a universal noun mean? How do unusual compounds of words, such as “Croatian Catholic” or “Serbian Orthodox” or “Bosniak Muslim,” resonate? Do those national adjectives constitute just a descriptive tool, similar to “red” in “a red car” or do they constitute more of a possessive adjective, such as “her” in “her car”? How broad can an adjective be?

In his intriguing 2007 essay *Seductiveness of national adjectives* (*Zavodljivost nacionalnih pridjeva*), Ivan Šarčević closes the text with the question: “Is there a place for others in an adjective?”[[1071]](#footnote-1071) The essay focuses precisely on national adjectives placed next to denominational nouns and the effects these produce. Analyzing the movement of German Christians (Deutsche Christen)[[1072]](#footnote-1072), an organization which sided with Hitler’s project in the early 1930s, Šarčević argues the following:

Adding an adjective *German* to the noun *Christian* did not merely signify an acceptance of the inculturation of the Christian faith in German space, culture, and spirit. It was both formal and a real negation of everything that Christianity meant. And it was a double negation through not only loss of autonomy but also through siding with a criminally exclusive Arianism. (…) *German Christians* negated all that Christianity in itself is—a universal offer of sense to all people, regardless of their race, nationality, language, and conviction.[[1073]](#footnote-1073)

The quandary of an adjective is the dilemma between identity and closure. It is a question of the free space that an adjective leaves after it specifies a group. The margins of an adjective are never clear, but their seductiveness resides in their seemingly undisputed power to set clear boundaries. Identity boundaries, however, are not akin to land boundaries, where visible landmarks naturally divide territories, but more a cognate of frontiers set on a sea, with currents flowing underneath, permanently mixing currents, with just an arbitrary line between free sea and territorial waters. Therefore, nationally determined Christians or members of some other universally oriented religion could either mimic cartographers, who constantly draw lines of separation, or navigators, who flow to their boundaries only to discover the breadth of the territories behind them, aware that a shoal cannot be the place of their self-realization, yet also aware that it is impossible to build a community on the open sea. Similarly, Šarčević criticizes two extremes of exclusivism and universality:

Reduction to one, and artificial erasure of differences is in this country characteristic for not only of pretentious politicians and ideologues but also of those intellectuals and spiritual leaders who, in that unity, imagine some celestial terminological construction or the uniformity according to their conviction, what we could call “unity my way.” So, no matter how more fatal nationalist exclusion, religious fundamentalism, and fanaticism were though the history of this country, leaving behind countless dead, cleansed territories and displacements, an artificial uniformity equally conditions masks on the faces of the people, limitation of freedom and it aggravates solution for the complex society and the state. We are not supposed to become the same to live together.[[1074]](#footnote-1074)

In the area of interreligious dialogue, there is a constant temptation to not take the difference seriously. While people can easily love and tolerate the abstract Other, who is “in her core” the same as we are, it is the irreducible difference that makes us simultaneously powerless and powerful, testing our abilities in a limited space that needs to be shared and negotiated, with no exit strategy into a zone of comfort where everything becomes the same. Criticizing such tendencies, Šarčević states, “In that theatre of masks there are always those who shout from the rooftops, aggressively or sycophantly, that we are all the same, that tolerance and love are realities that erase differences not realizing that tolerance and love, justice and mercy live out of differences.”[[1075]](#footnote-1075) He denounces a strategy that he terms the “taming of differences”[[1076]](#footnote-1076) (*pripitomljavanje razlika*), in which differences are disciplined according to someone’s biases and preferences. Taming is perhaps the best word to describe the tendency of such a quasi-universalist perspective because differences are treated in the same way as are domesticated animals that need to be trained until we reach the point where the differences, just like beloved pets, come when people call them and obey their orders. Sometimes the differences can be ‘difficult,’ asking for a certain degree of sacrifice or endurance. Abstract universality ultimately desires sameness according to one’s own image. The way forwards, according to Šarčević, is the one of humbleness, based on the acceptance of the limits of our knowledge and favorable to the understanding of the other the way they understand themselves.[[1077]](#footnote-1077)

Orthodox Bishop Grigorije argued that religious communities in Bosnia and Herzegovina have to move towards the concept of open communities, accepting the open ontology as the basic premise of being. For him, openness is the only way of existing in an authentic way, while “every closure is ultimately dying.”[[1078]](#footnote-1078) On the question whether Bosnia and Herzegovina constitute a sufficient framework for all people who live there or whether they should make their own little frameworks and little republics and closed ghettos, he responded, “No matter where you live and no matter what kind of identity you have, you have to be open for the other. And my whole faith lies in that. And my theology is that we should be stand in fear from one another, that our life should not be in shrinking from one another, but a capacity to live for another and with another.” [[1079]](#footnote-1079)

# III. Concluding remarks

In this chapter, I presented a model describing the role of religious leaders in the peacebuilding process. Using the chronological perspective, I outlined three scenarios of religious peacebuilding: *preventive, reactive,* and *transformative* with respect to conflicts.

The *preventive* aspects focused on the formation of individuals and, more broadly, their education in religious literacy and morality. The aim of this formation is to inculcate a certain knowledge set and values designed to make individuals more responsive to the acute needs of the moment and resilient to popular mobilization via religious symbols. The sets of values and the kinds of knowledge to be promoted through this formation is apparently of great importance.

During the conflict itself, *reactive* activities were emphasized as ways to address dire humanitarian crises, crimes and misuses, and clear-cult divisions between “us” and “them.” Finally, the *transformative* role of religious leaders after conflicts comprised a set of activities related to forgiveness, reconciliation, and memory, which at the same time converges around the problem of *closed identities*. Another essential *transformative* role of religious leaders consisted of giving hope and providing support in seemingly desperate situations. In that respect, the activities of religious leaders touch not only the surface levels of ongoing problems but also structural social problems and cultural orientations.

Faced with the situation in which they feel the conflict between their theological principles and care for themselves and their communities, religious leaders experience *theological dissonance.* The answer to that situation is explained through processes of *pastoral optimization*, in which religious leaders seek the optimal way of working for peace given emotional, physical, economic, and other constraints.

In the theoretical discussion, I stressed that the links between religion and peace should be conceptualized in a much more complex way than the too commonly used A-causes-B model allows. Using Aristotle’s division into four causal factors as a starting point, I examined how religious ideas, socio-political conditions, ways of engagement, and final visions (worldviews) are relevant for the understanding of religiously inspired peacebuilding.

Moving from a more general discussion to the local level of Bosnia and Herzegovina, I presented certain differences in religious and non-religious perspectives on peace and peacebuilding. It was argued that recognition and acknowledgement of these differences can lead to a better understanding between religious and non-religious actors and, potentially, to a more fruitful collaboration. A substantial part of the discussion was dedicated to the problem of nationalism which, in the Bosnian-Herzegovinian context, seems to be a dominant challenge. The tenor of the argument was that nationalism, especially its religious versions, affirms a group’s uniqueness in two detrimental ways—by denigrating the Other and by ‘sanctifying’ a political ideology and thus placing it beyond criticism. However, it was also stressed that a solution to that problem cannot be just abstract universalism, which suffers the same problem of insensitivity towards uniqueness and irreducible differences of oneself and the Other.

On many places, the importance of encounters with the Other, especially the “painful Other” was emphasized. Such encounters require a basic recognition and acknowledgement of the pains and grievances experienced by those on the other side of the conflict and also acceptance of these others’ continued difference, which could be discomforting. However, the two sides in an encounter—and this is an important element—must not only affirm their specificities but also develop something new in the space between, something that can grow, develop, be nourished, and finally change their self-understandings as well as their relationship. I would like to propose a new term for this new layer created *over* the personal and group identities, that is constructed in a mutual encounter with the Other—the ‘third skin.’

If we view our biological skin as our ‘first skin’ and the identity constructed through *identification* with those similar to us as our ‘second skin,’ then the product resulting from the inter-personal and even inter-group dialogue with the Other should, I propose, be viewed as our *third skin*. Dialogue with the Other, especially the painful Other, creates a new layer of our personality that we do not necessarily want to integrate into our identity. It is something that we do not attach “inside us” but to the new space that arises between ourselves and the Other. This third skin is not biological, of course, and we could simply neglect it and live without it. Many people who decide to live in communities without any contact with the painful Other can go on perfectly well with their affairs. Thus, the third skin can be very easily dispensed with, a characteristic that makes it both unique and fragile. Nevertheless, my argument is that, if created, the third skin can serve to enrich our personality, providing a different perspective on our chosen *identity* and deepening it through an encounter not with the *similar* but with the *dissimilar* and hence the painful.

The second important set ideas that was left in search of a concept was the oft-expressed desire among my interviewees to have encounters with the Other in a ‘natural,’ spontaneous, unforced manner. Employing the term ‘natural’ always raises suspicions concerning normativity. Especially with respect to social interactions, defining what is natural and what is un-natural or artificial can be difficult. With respect to, for instance, interreligious dialogue, ‘natural’ would certainly not indicate a lack of preparation or nonchalant talk without any concerns. On the other hand, it would also not suggest a talk that is too ceremonial and formal and thereby appearing to be staged or, at the very least, exceptional. To rephrase the notion of naturalness differently, I would propose a concept that comes from a rather unusual place—a medieval Italian manual on etiquette—*la sprezzatura*. In his influential book *The Courtier*, Baldassare Castiglione defines *sprezzatura* as “a certain nonchalance, so as to conceal all art and make whatever one does or says appear to be without effort and almost without any thought about it.”[[1080]](#footnote-1080) He provides an example of a singer who, although exceptionally well trained, intentionally sings some tones with a slightly higher or lower pitch to make them sound less mechanical and effortless. For Castiglione, *la sprezzatura* is the basic principle of mannered behavior, a gracefulness that does not boast about itself. Applying the notion of *sprezzatura* to peacebuilding would signify work on peace lacking overt self-referencing, an engagement which is captivating and compelling, based on much knowledge, yet not appearing calculative or overly ambitious.

With those short statements of conclusion, we arrive at the end of our exploratory journey into the elements of religiously inspired peacebuilding with a focus on the role of religious leaders. My discussion went back and forth between individual, personal narratives and abstract theories of religion, conflict, and peace; between social sciences and theology. Its general aim, however, was to develop a contextually rich set of findings, and I hope that I have, at least in part, succeeded in that. One question is still left to be addressed, more in the form of a theological coda following a long melody: Keeping in mind all that has been said and recognizing the central importance of developing an open identity in an encounter with a painful Other, what would be its starting point in the Balkans region, intersected with so many hopes and sufferings?

# General conclusion

*Over time, we learn how to deal with beginnings….*

From the start, this study was admittedly ambitious. It was designed as an inter-disciplinary inquiry into roles of religious leaders in peacebuilding processes. Using the combined approaches of the social sciences and theology, it aimed to offer a nuanced and context-sensitive insight into, first, the complexities related to peacebuilding and, second, the specificities of a religiously inspired approach to it.

Because of that, it had a hybrid form. It combined two theoretical perspectives (Social Science and Religious Studies) and three approaches (descriptive, analytic, and synthetic). My aim was threefold: to present phenomena, as faithfully as possible, as participants saw them; to assess those in light of the other approaches to peacebuilding; and, finally, to offer some concluding remarks and present new ideas. In that sense, chapters of this book included descriptive parts (based on the interview data), analytical parts (in which the initial descriptive findings were brought into discussion with other theoretical approaches), and synthetic parts (in which I offered my conclusions and proposals of novel theoretical concepts that can be fruitful for further research on the topics in question).

My research started with immersion in interview data. It soon became clear that “peacebuilding” is a complex set of activities which, in the case of religious leaders, vary from spiritual deeds and religious rites, over practical and emotional assistance to individuals and groups, to public advocacy. All those activities, the study shows, are dependent on the nature of the conflict and its development, as well as on the historical, social, and cultural circumstances in which peacebuilding takes place. Chapter 4 presented these in great detail. Peacebuilding activities, we could see, often involve concepts such as forgiveness, commemoration, trust, justice, and reconciliation. Since each of these concepts is complex in its own right, it was thus necessary first to elaborate on some of them. For that reason, Chapter 4, which presented a model of peacebuilding activities, was preceded by three chapters on forgiveness, reconciliation, and memory, which analyzed in depth what those concepts (and concepts related to them) represent to the people I interviewed and how those understandings overlapped or differed from other, religious and non-religious perspectives.

The study finally elaborated a model which described three forms of peacebuilding activities of religious leaders: *preventive* (before conflicts), *reactive* (during the conflict), and *transformative* (after the conflict). It also offered theoretical concepts of *theological dissonance* and *pastoral optimization* to explain how theological ideals are, in practice, counterbalanced with practical concerns for survival, reputation, and well-being of the groups to which religious leaders feel attached. Within that general framework, the study also offered a number of other theoretical concepts related to specific sub-domains, e.g., *zlopamćenje,* prayerful commemoration, ecumene of compassion, and Degree Zero of Reconciliation.

Finally, as a form of conclusion, I would like to offer seven suggestions for further research:

1. **Strong interdisciplinarity:** The study demonstrated a need for truly integrated interdisciplinary studies of religion and peacebuilding. It was clear in many places that the studied phenomena cannot be properly understood if one does not take into account their theological conceptualizations. Good examples in this study were the understandings of peace and peacebuilding. While social or political scholars tend to focus on visible activities and measurable outcomes, religious leaders (and believers in general) have an additional perspective that sees spirituality as an essential dimension of peace and, consequently, of peacebuilding. My aim is not to advocate for an entirely new, unified approach, which would create a novel research methodology. To the contrary, my call for interdisciplinarity advocates precisely the opposite; it recommends respect for the specificities of both theology and the social sciences, but it promotes research that would involve a strong grounding in both domains and bring them into the conversation. The aim of such an approach would be to present the places of convergence/divergence (among the disciplines) and offer new concepts and paradigms that could make the dialogue even more fruitful. In other words, I suggest an interdisciplinarity that strongly emphasizes the *inter-*  while respecting the specificities of the *disciplinarity*. I find this especially important in the study of religion because, otherwise, there is the constant risk that fundamentally important elements of studied phenomena will be overlooked or referenced only in an anecdotal way. Furthermore, since this study represents only one case study, it has obvious limitations. This further interdisciplinary research applied in other geographical areas would be especially useful to assess the generalizability and limitations of my findings.
2. **Renewed interest in ‘spiritual’ topics:** Related to the previous notion, I suggest a renewed interest in topics that are often avoided in scholarship on peacebuilding and conflict resolution because of their theological overtones. The fear is that introduction of theologically loaded terms such as hope and love (not to mention ‘God’) would create the following problems: 1) it would bring empirically unverifiable concepts into academic scholarship and 2) it would, in practice, deepen divisions and slow down or even impeach peacebuilding processes. Both concerns are understandable and valid. However, in certain conflicts (especially those that already contain strong religious components) avoidance of such topics can reduce the understanding of what is at stake, of why certain things are contested, and of why they matter so much to the members of the sides within the conflict. In some cases, those elements can be so central that their avoidance in the peacebuilding process can make the prospects of stable peace unviable. This is especially the case when the involved parties feel that they cannot articulate their concerns and positions only in ‘secular,’ non-religious terms (remember the meanings of the “sacred land” for the Israeli-Palestinian conflict). Therefore, when religion and peacebuilding are at stake, I would suggest the inclusion of those topics both in theory and practice. However, this suggestion should be interpreted in connection with the previous one calling for an interdisciplinary approach and thereby acknowledge both the similarities and differences between the various perspective. Concretely, with respect to the topic of peace, it seems unfruitful to present religious and secular paradigms either as the same or as diametrically opposite. Instead, religious activities could be seen not as an alternative, but rather as complementary and supportive practices to, for instance, human rights and the rule of law. On the other hand, valuable conclusions brought by social scientists and peace practitioners can help religious communities to reassess their own position and limitations.

1. **Respect of irreducible pluralities of studied phenomena:** The study showed how peace and peacebuilding are extremely complex concepts that, additionally, incorporate many other multi-layered concepts such as forgiveness, reconciliation, and memory. For further studies, I suggest, first, to uncover and present a semantic plurality of those concepts and, second, to respect their irreducibility. Even when certain understandings of these concepts might seem contradictory or difficult to integrate into a study’s general model, I suggest that they be respected and accepted as such. A good example of this was the understanding of reconciliation. Although I generally suggested that reconciliation primarily represents an inter-personal and inter-group process, my data contained another notion that did not fit into that general scheme. That notion was “reconciliation with oneself.” Although relatively infrequent, it was nevertheless present in the interviews and so represented an outlier in data. Although a researcher might be tempted (as I was) to exclude that notion from the analysis, I realized that such a move would represent the too forceful imposition of pre-conceived models and categories on reality. Instead, my proposal is to preserve even those notions that seem to create ‘noise’ within data and to use them as possible starting points for further analysis. Another notion that seemed ‘unusual’ in my study was the notion of memory as a symbolic justice, which I will elaborate below as a proposal for further research.
2. **Renewed interest in memory:** The study demonstrated that memory (especially collective memories) is an essential and unavoidable component in research on conflict resolution and peacebuilding. Therefore, I would suggest a stronger inclusion of this topic in peace and conflict studies, including the related domains of transitional and restorative justice, and international relations. Furthermore, the study showed that memory and commemoration should be understood as inherently ambivalent phenomena that have elements of both *legacy* and *pathology*. Contemporary interest in memory and the rise of memory studies already show a positive development in this direction.

Two topics that, based on my study, seem especially fruitful to explore further are:

* 1. *anamnesis* (religious memory) and its connection with painful memories in the context of religious rites (e.g., liturgical celebrations). As we could see, religious conceptualizations of the world and universe have interesting views on time and memory. Often, the order of time is reversed, and the past is re-framed from the perspective of the (ultimate) future. The central research question here would be how religious memory transforms and reframes tragic events, especially in the context of religious rites that represent an enactment of a different (eschatological) reality.
  2. *memory as an alternative and/or supplementary form of justice*. My section on memory as symbolic justice provided some basic insights into how communities can construct memories as a symbolic form of justice when they have been affected by inexpiable crimes (such as genocide). The idea here is that certain crimes are so grave that justice for them can never be enacted through standard punitive or non-punitive mechanisms. Memory in that respect serves as a reminder of the limits of justice but also as its alternative and/or supplementary form. It can also serve as a field of resistance to political strategies that aim to impose reconciliation and forgiveness as unquestionable social goals. The main research question here would be: in which ways can lived and transmitted memories function as a supplement and/or alternative form of justice when standard mechanisms of justice are perceived as insufficient, partial, selective, or hegemonic.

1. **A balanced approach to ethnic and national identities:** The book demonstrated how identity, especially when it is constructed in an exclusivist way, can be an engine of conflicts and a barrier to peacebuilding. This is especially the case with identities that are constructed around too close links between ethnic/national and religious belonging. At the same time, it was shown that *universalism* as a strategy of eliminating attachment to ethnic/national and local religious communities in favor of more abstract belonging could be equally problematic and, more importantly, ineffective. One common theme among researchers of religion in post-conflict settings can be phrased as follows: If only religious leaders would focus on the universal human values rather than on their particular congregations/ethnic groups, they could play an important role in peacebuilding processes. My analysis did not deny the fact that fixation of religious leaders only on the interests and values of their own group are detrimental to every aspect of peacebuilding. At the same time, it demonstrated that the universalist suggestions have two major flaws:
   1. It does not take into account that religious leaders have obligations to concrete, culturally specific communities and that the universalist discourse would be unconvincing, at best. Instead, my suggestion is that religious leaders need to find a way to show appreciation for the uniqueness of their actual communities while equally respecting the uniqueness of the Other. Only from that position can they speak convincingly about universalist values. The order is crucial here. If we start from the universal values of *humanity as a whole*, we cannot infer specific cultural values of communities. For instance, it would be impossible to deduce the concrete value of the concept of *komšiluk* if one’s starting position were the universal one. On the other hand, if one starts from a culturally specific value, one can inductively climb towards a more universal value and see, in this case, how *komšiluk* can serve as a fruitful metaphor for *unity that contains irreducible pluralities*, even on the most universal level imaginable—that of the eschatological community.
   2. It does not take into account that universalist discourse can be a way of avoiding the encounter with the concrete, painful Other. As was demonstrated in several places, it is much easier to apologize “for all crimes” and grant forgiveness to “all,” than to assume the responsibility of acknowledging the community’s specific misdeeds and their legacy.
2. **Modest and balanced policies:** Political decision-makers and NGO workers involved in peacebuilding would profit from a more balanced approach with respect to the peacebuilding activities of religious leaders. My study showed a number of misunderstandings between and very different perceptions of religious leaders and external actors (scholars and NGO workers in particular). The assessments by religious leaders and external actors of the others’ influence on political leaders, priorities in peacebuilding, and social positions are in many cases erroneous. Generally speaking, religious leaders perceived their role as important but much less decisive than external actors believed it to be. Additionally, religious leaders regretted that their communities were perceived as yet another NGO, without concern for their theological specificities and practical limitations (e.g., limited time resources due to the nature of their job, which involves financial and administrative activities). Thus, I suggest that political decision makers and NGOs attempt to view religious leaders as valuable partners that, in some cases, have unique advantages to further peace. At the same time, that partnership should involve a re-evaluation of mutual expectations and an honest estimation of what can be achieved together where perspectives differed. Such an approach promotes active collaboration but guards about disappointments that can ensue from unreasonably high expectations.
3. **Renewed interest in contextual theologies:** My final chapter serves as an open call for the further or alternative elaboration of Balkan contextual theology. From the theological perspective, the socio-cultural context is not understood as a *normative* dimension, but rather a semantic background against which theological theory is articulated. In other words, context is seen not as something that *gives sense* to theology but as a space in which theological discourse *makes sense.* In that respect, it calls for a more profound analysis of the concrete challenges present in the Balkans. Many of them—such as trans-generational guilt, the re-occurring experience of genocides, ‘vicarious’ identities—can be very stimulative for theological elaboration, especially in view of perennial theological questions on the nature of evil and suffering, theodicy, and religious plurality. This is at the same time a suggestion for the elaboration of theologies in other contexts.

*…but we never learn properly how to deal with the ends.*

Every large project becomes a personal journey and an emotional investment, and it is rather difficult to write the final words and so conclude it. Instead of bringing it to an abrupt end, I thought that it might be easier to finish with a *Lullaby*. It is an unusual one, written by Mak Dizdar, a historiographer of the earliest Bosnian-Herzegovinian epigraphy and one of my favorite poets. The *Lullaby* he wrote for his son is, at the same time, a ballad about the land (Bosnia and Herzegovina) filled, since its beginnings, with suffering and hope, the place where “one does not live only to be alive / Here one lives to die / Here one also dies / In order to live.”

**Lullaby**[[1081]](#footnote-1081)

How delicate and fragile you are

And how beautiful and pure

Like every child when born

Your hair silken and bedewed

Like the leaves of a plant’s young stem in April

Your lips are rose buds still undeveloped

Hands the blue intimation of dawn

Legs as though you have none, you poor thing

Those are two lilies for caressing only

So how will you come into the world so tiny

So unguarded

That is why we shall never part, my darling

Never shall we say good-by

Never body of my body

Soul of my soul

Never

I know

You will carry me in your heart

For I gave you my heart and everything around my heart

You will carry me as long as you will

Greet the birth of day

And the appearance of stars

As long as you will be, greet the budding treetops

And grieve the falling leaves

You will live even when your eyes close

You will live in your children

In your children and the children of their children

You will live

Live

It will be known we were moments of being

A grain of sand in the shoal

A spark in the fire

A blade in the grass

Of eternity

How delicate and fragile

You are

And you must live

You must live among people, yet you have no words

You must live among wolves, yet you have no teeth

And how will you discern a man from a wolf

A wolf from a man

Your hands are the blue intimation of dawn

With them you need to grapple

To do battle in skirmishes

With serpent miracles in which the dragon dwells

So let them grow quickly

Let them grow stronger and even more quickly

Your legs are two delicate lilies for caressing

And I will ask you with dew from my most beautiful flower

I will tell to you the most beautiful story

Of this and that other world

That you be ready for sweet

Dreams and for sleeplessness

In the heart of tight circles

In the thorns of long

Roads

Your lips are young buds

I will feed you water from the beak of a swallow

That you grow teeth to curse the fiend

That you coo for the good-hearted guest

It is wise to be silent in life

But if you speak a word

May it be as heavy as every truth

May it be said for man

You came here

Where it was most unwelcome to come

Here where it was most insane to arrive

Here where it was most heroic to appear

Because here one does not live only to be alive

Here one lives to die

Here one also dies

In order to live

Now is the end of the song

Now are my words completed

Sleep

Sweetly

We will never part my darling

Never body of my body

Never soul of my soul

Never

Because you need

To continue your life

It is good you continue life on earth

Mak Dizdar

And now are my words completed.

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Ante (Roman Catholic Church), January 19, 2016.

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15. For a broader socio-political analysis, see: Siniša Malešević, *Identity as Ideology: Understanding Ethnicity and Nationalism* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006).; Vjekoslav Perica, *Balkan Idols: Religion and Nationalism in Yugoslav States*, *Religion and Global Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).; Paul Mojzes, ed., *Religion and the War in Bosnia* (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1998).; Sabrina P. Ramet, *The Three Yugoslavias: State-Building and Legitimation, 1918-2004*, *Woodrow Wilson Center Press* (Bloomington, IN, Chesham: Indiana University Press, 2006).; Slavica Jakelić, *Collectivistic Religions: Religion, Choice, and Identity in Late Modernity* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2010). [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
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17. UNHCR, “Returns to Bosnia and Herzegovina reach 1 million,” http://​www.unhcr.org​/​afr/​news/​briefing/​2004/​9/​414ffeb44/​returns-​bosnia-​herzegovina-​reach-​1-​million.html, accessed August 11, 2019. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. After the fall of the medieval Bosnian Kingdom in 1463 to the Ottoman invaders (the region of Herzegovina fell 20 years later), the religious, demographic, and administrative organizations of the region drastically changed. The main social divisions were between Muslim and non-Muslim (primarily Catholic and Orthodox) populations. The religious status brought with it differences in political status and social privileges. Following the gradual decline of the Ottoman Empire, Bosnia and Herzegovina came in 1978 under the joint jurisdictions of Austria and Hungary, a situation that lasted till the end of WWI. Austro-Hungarian rule was characterized by relative economic development and attempts to create a multi-ethnic state, against rising movements that advocated a common South-Slavic identity and state. The latter idea eventually prevailed, and Bosnia and Herzegovina were incorporated after WWI in the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, ruled by the Serbian dynasty of Karađorđević. That period was marked by constant struggles for political autonomy and power, especially between Croatian and Serbian factions. The situation escalated in 1928 with the assassination of leading Croatian politician Stjepan Radić in the state parliament in Belgrade, which was followed by large public demonstrationsm and the king’s decision in January 1929 to proclaim a personal dictatorship (that lasted until the new constitution in 1931). At the same time, the king decided to name the state the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. The reactions to his rule were especially strong in Croatia, where a new revolutionary organization, Ustaše, was established. Its leader, Ante Pavelić, co-organized with the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization the assassination of King Aleksandar I during his visit to Marseilles in 1934. Until WWII, the Kingdom of Yugoslavia was at the edge of collapse. A few years before the war, two leading politicians from the Serbian and Croatian sides, Dragiša Cvetković and Vladko Maček respectively, reached an agreement in 1939 that led to the establishment of a partly autonomous region Banovina Hrvatska within the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. The Banovina included parts of the Yugoslav Kingdom having a Croatian ethnic majority, and thus also a substantial part of what is contemporary Bosnia and Herzegovina. The agreement did not last long because the Kingdom of Yugoslavia was occupied by the Axis forces in April 1941, and the Yugoslav royal government went into exile in London. Soon after, Ante Pavelić became the head of the newly proclaimed Independent State of Croatia – a Nazi-allied puppet state that included the majority of the territories of the current Republic of Croatia, the entirety of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and some parts of the contemporary Republic of Serbia. The new regime was notorious for its genocidal policies (especially against Jews, Romas, and Serbs, who were, at the same time, the largest victims of the regime). The three most famous warring factions during WWII were Ustaše/Ustashis (militias units under the direct control of the regimes of the Independent State of Croatia, which consisted mostly of Croats, including Muslims who were considered ethnically Croats), Četniks/Chetniks (an militia movement under control of Draža Mihailović that officially proclaimed alliance with the Yugoslav royal government, but in practice collaborated with the Axis forces, aiming to achieve a greater Serbian state; Chetniks committed a number of mass crimes, primarily against Croats and Muslims), and Partizani/Communist Partisans (an ethnically heterogeneous movement under the leadership of Josip Broz Tito, which were common enemies of both Chetniks and Ustashis and yet were also guilty of a number of crimes against civilians who were seen as fascist collaborators). The latter faction eventually became victorious and a core of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, which was proclaimed in 1945 as a federation of six republics, including Bosnia and Herzegovina. The new state, especially at the beginning, had a repressive one-party system with a strong socialist component. The aim was to create one unifying Yugoslav identity superseding previous ethnic and national divisions. Although significantly more liberal than other Communist regimes in eastern Europe, Yugoslavia was still lacking a number of basic freedoms typical of democratic regimes, e.g., freedom of the press, economic freedoms, and multi-party elections. Moreover, open discussion about the crimes that took place during WWII, especially those committed by Partizans, was absent from the public sphere. The regime also persecuted and marginalized all individuals and groups that were perceived as ethnic-nationalists or enemies of the regimes. Religious communities and individuals were also under constant supervision. The first signs of the state’s dissolution became particularly apparent after the death of Josip Broz Tito in 1980. The conflicts eventually led to war. Fightings were first concentrated in Slovenia (for a very short period), and Croatia. From 1992, they moved primarily to Bosnia and Herzegovina, which had three major ethnic groups: Serbs, Croats, and Muslims (in 1993 Muslims embraced the term “Bosniaks” as their ethnic name). At the beginning, Bosniaks and Croatians fought together against Serbian forces. In 1993, further conflicts escalated between Croats and Bosniaks, thus creating a situation of war of all against all. What additionally complicated the relationships was the inter-Bosniak war when the Autonomous Province of Western Bosnia was proclaimed in 1993. Even though the population of the Province was majority Muslim, it sided with the leadership of B-H Serbs and against the Bosniak leadership in Sarajevo. The Croat-Bosniak war ended in March 1994 with the signing of the Washington Agreements while the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina ended with the Dayton Peace Agreement, signed in November 1995. For further details see: Ramet, *The Three Yugoslavias*; Sabrina P. Ramet, *Thinking About Yugoslavia: Scholarly Debates About the Yugoslav Breakup and the Wars in Bosnia and Kosovo* (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005).; Ivo Banac, *The National Question in Yugoslavia: Origins, History, Politics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2015).; Ivo Banac, “What Happened in the Balkans (or Rather Ex--Yugoslavia)?,” *East European Politics & Societies* 23, no. 4 (2009), https://doi.org/10.1177/0888325409346821.; Charles W. Ingrao and Thomas A. 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21. Joseph A. Maxwell, *A Realistic Approach for Qualitative Research* (London: SAGE, 2012), 5. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Cf. Kristian Philipsen, “Theo Building: Using Abductive Search Strategies,” in *Collaborative Research Design: Working with Business for Meaningful Findings*, ed. Louise Young and Per V. Freytag (Singapore: Springer, 2018), 50–52.; Komalsingh Rambaree and Elisabeth Faxelid, “Considering Abductive Thematic Network Analysis with ATLAS-ti 6.2,” in *Advancing Research Methods With New Technologies*, ed. Natalie Sappleton (Hershey PA, Hershey PA: Information Science Reference, 2013), 173–74.; Alina Bradford, “Deductive Reasoning vs. Inductive Reasoning,” https://​www.livescience.com​/​21569-​deduction-​vs-​induction.html, accessed August 11, 2019 [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Barney G. Glaser and Anselm L. Strauss, *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research* (Chicago, IL: AldineTransaction, 2006 [1967]).; Kathy Charmaz, *Constructing Grounded Theory: A Practical Guide Through Qualitative Analysis* (London, Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2006). According to Charmaz, *Grounded Theory* was a response to the almost complete dominance of quantitative methods in the social sciences during the 1960s. The dominant scientific paradigm of the time was influenced by positivism, which stresses the objectivity of the researcher, falsification of theories and hypotheses, replication of experiments, development of unified research procedures and instruments for quantifiable measurements. Against such a background, qualitative methods were criticized as “impressionistic, anecdotal, unsystematic, and biased.” In such context, Glasser and Strauss’s book “aimed to move qualitative inquiry beyond descriptive studies into the realm of explanatory theoretical frameworks, thereby providing abstract, conceptual understandings of the studied phenomena. (…) [It] provided a powerful argument that legitimized qualitative research as a credible methodological approach in its own right rather than simply as a precursor for developing quantitative instruments.” Charmaz, *Constructing Grounded Theory*, 5–6. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. Some of the most influential programs are presented in: Barney G. Glaser, *Doing Grounded Theory: Issues and Discussion* (Mill Valley, CA: Sociology Press, 1998).; ‎Anselm Strauss and Juliet M. Corbin, *Basics of Qualitative Research: Techniques and Procedures for Developing Grounded Theory* (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE, 2014).; Charmaz, *Constructing Grounded Theory*; Adele E. Clarke, *Situational Analysis: Grounded Theory after the Postmodern Turn* (London: SAGE, 2009). [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
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27. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. Thomas S. Eberle, “Phenomenology as a Research Method,” in *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Data Analysis*, ed. Uwe Flick (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE, 2015). [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. Irving Seidman, *Interviewing as Qualitative Research: A Guide for Researchers in Education and the Social Sciences*, 3rd ed. (New York: Teachers College Press, 2006), 52–54. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. Data about potential participants were collected through publicly available channels (primarily though official lists of religious communities). Additionally, based on the publicly available data, I constructed my own interactive maps of war crimes and mass tragedies in Bosnia and Herzegovina. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. Charmaz, *Constructing Grounded Theory*, 100–101. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. Ibid., 12. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. Stipe Odak, “Hidden Lives of Big Ideas: Untold Stories of Scientific Discoveries: (TEDx UCLouvain),” https://​www.youtube.com​/​watch​?​v=​iJWTbvqnT\_g, accessed August 11, 2019. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. 26 from the Islamic Community, 28 from the Roman Catholic Church, and 21 from the Serbian Orthodox Church. One interviewee who was working as an imam before meanwhile changed his job. Since he is still involved in peace-work, I decided to include him as well. All interviews were conducted in the participant’s mother tongue, and they were simultaneously tape-recorded and extensively documented in a research journal. Audio recordings were later processed in the Adobe Audition software. Since most of the interviews were conducted in public places (usually cafés), thirteen interviews were re-constructed based solely on written records because the audio files were, even after advanced audio-processing, inaudible or corrupted. Out of 62 audible interviews, the 40 that were considered the most important were transcribed in full. Other interviews were coded based on the written records. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. Saldaña defines a code as “a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data.” Johnny Saldaña, *The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers* (London, Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE, 2009), 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. In my approach to the analysis, I have primarily used QUAGOL suggestions as a guide. See: Bernadette Dierckx de Casterlé et al., “QUAGOL: a Guide for Qualitative Data Analysis,” *International Journal of Nursing Studies* 49, no. 3 (2012). [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. It is important to stress that I did not interview only those religious leaders who, in my view, had more ‘positive’ inclinations to peacebuilding, and more ‘open’ attitudes to other ethnic/national/religious groups. On the contrary, I have intentionally interviewed people of different age, background, and different theological and socio-political positions. However, this study is not a historical analysis of the actual involvement of religious leaders in peacebuilding during the war, nor is it an overview of their public activities after the war. My research is based primarily on the attitudes and beliefs that participants shared with me during two rounds of interviews that I conducted. Thus, it is certainly possible that the attitudes they expressed in private do not reflect their public image or their publicly voiced attitudes entirely. Further research based on internal archives of religious communities, private records, and public media records would be an important supplement to this study. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. See: Lieven Boeve, *Lyotard and Theology: Beyond the Christian Master Narrative of Love* (London, New York: Bloomsbury, 2014), 21. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. Stipe Odak, “A Wounded Body that Seeks Redemption: Towards a Theological Metaphor for Understanding Collective Memory of Conflict,” *Louvain Studies* 38 (2014).; Stipe Odak, “The Crucified God in a Crucified Region,” *Concilium: International Review of Theology*, no. 1 (2015).; Stipe Odak and Andriana Benčić, “Jasenovac—A Past That Does Not Pass: The Presence of Jasenovac in Croatian and Serbian Collective Memory of Conflict,” *East European Politics and Societies* 30, no. 4 (2016), https://doi.org/10.1177/0888325416653657.; Stipe Odak, “Dies Irae: The Role of Religion in Generation and Resolution of Collective Memory of Conflict” (Faculty of Theology and Religious Studies, Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, 2013). [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. Simon Wiesenthal, Harry J. Cargas, and Bonny V. Fetterman, *The Sunflower: On the Possibilities and Limits of Forgiveness* (New York: Schocken Books, 2008), (Ebook). [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. Maurice Halbwachs, *Les cadres sociaux de la mémoire* (Paris: Mouton, 1976). [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. For an extensive examination discussion, see: Thomas Brudholm and Valérie Rosoux, “Unforgiving: Reflections on the Resistance to Forgiveness After Atrocity,” *Law & Contemporary Problems* 72 (2009). [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. Jacques Derrida, *On Cosmopolitanism and Forgiveness*, *Thinking in Action* (London, New York: Routledge, 2001), 27–28. [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. ## وَجَزَاءُ سَيِّئَةٍ سَيِّئَةٌ مِّثْلُهَا ۖ فَمَنْ عَفَا وَأَصْلَحَ فَأَجْرُهُ عَلَى اللَّهِ ۚ إِنَّهُ لَا يُحِبُّ الظَّالِمِينَ - “42:40. “And the retribution for an evil act is an evil one like it, but whoever pardons and makes reconciliation - his reward is [due] from Allah. Indeed, He does not like wrongdoers.” – All quotations are taken from: “The Noble Qur'an,” https://​quran.com​/​?​local=​en, accessed August 11, 2019.

    [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
47. وَمَا خَلَقْنَا السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضَ وَمَا بَيْنَهُمَا إِلَّا بِالْحَقِّ ۗ وَإِنَّ السَّاعَةَ لَآتِيَةٌ ۖ فَاصْفَحِ الصَّفْحَ الْجَمِيلَ - 15:85. And We have not created the heavens and earth and that between them except in truth. And indeed, the Hour is coming; so forgive with gracious forgiveness. [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
48. ## قَوْلٌ مَّعْرُوفٌ وَمَغْفِرَةٌ خَيْرٌ مِّن صَدَقَةٍ يَتْبَعُهَا أَذًى ۗ وَاللَّهُ غَنِيٌّ حَلِيمٌ - 2:263. Kind speech and forgiveness are better than charity followed by injury. And Allah is Free of need and Forbearing.

    [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
49. Mark S. Rye et al., “Religious Perspectives on Forgiveness,” in *Forgiveness: Theory, Research, and Practice*, ed. Michael E. McCullough, Kenneth I. Pargament and Carl E. Thoresen (New York, NY: Guilford Press, 2001), 21. [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
50. Quoted in: ibid., 20. [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
51. Hamza (Islamic Community), November 21, 2016 [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
52. Ahmed (Islamic Community), November 4, 2016. [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
53. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-53)
54. Although, for instance, the newest edition of the Codex of the Canon Law of the Catholic Church still envisages the possibility of capital punishment is some extreme cases, it is generally seen as outdated and is never performed by Church officials. See section 2267 of the Catechism of the Catholic Church: “Assuming that the guilty party’s identity and responsibility have been fully determined, the traditional teaching of the Church does not exclude recourse to the death penalty, if this is the only possible way of effectively defending human lives against an unjust aggressor.” “Catechism of the Catholic Church,” http://​www.vatican.va​/​archive/​ENG0015/\_​INDEX.HTM, accessed August 11, 2019 [↑](#footnote-ref-54)
55. Jakov (Roman Catholic Church), November 29, 2015. [↑](#footnote-ref-55)
56. Haris (Islamic Community), November 29, 2015. [↑](#footnote-ref-56)
57. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-57)
58. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-58)
59. Mirza (Islamic Community), November 24, 2016. [↑](#footnote-ref-59)
60. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-60)
61. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-61)
62. This idea is confirmed by new studies on human cognition which suggest that emotions are not opposed to rationality but that emotions and intellect often work together in a synergetic way. See, for instance: Eyal Winter, *Feeling Smart: Why Our Emotions are More Rational Than We Think* (New York: Public Affairs, 2015). Also Baumsteiner, Exline, and Sommer speak about the intrapsychic dimension of forgiveness, which “involves states and processes inside the mind of the victim” and where “[t]he emotional dimension of forgiveness is probably mediated in most cases by cognitive processes, such as framing the transgression so as not to seem so bad, or making oneself understand the perpetrator’s point of view.” Baumeister Roy F., Julie J. Exline, and Kristin L. Sommer, “The Victim Role, Grudge Theory, and Two Dimensions of Forgiveness,” in *Dimensions of Forgiveness: A Research Approach*, ed. Everett L. Worthington (West Conshohocken: Templeton Foundation Press, 2008), 85. [↑](#footnote-ref-62)
63. Marijan (Roman Catholic Church), October 5, 2016 [↑](#footnote-ref-63)
64. Joseph Butler, “Fifteen Sermons Preached at the Rolls Chapel: Sermon VIII. Upon Resentment and Forgiveness of injuries - Matt. v. 43, 44.,” http://​anglicanhistory.org​/​butler/​rolls/​08.html, accessed August 11, 2019; Joseph Butler, “Fifteen Sermons Preached at the Rolls Chapel: Sermon IX. Upon Resentment and Forgiveness of injuries--Matt. v. 43, 44.,” http://​anglicanhistory.org​/​butler/​rolls/​09.html, accessed August 11, 2019. [↑](#footnote-ref-64)
65. Slaven (Roman Catholic Church), November 19, 2015. [↑](#footnote-ref-65)
66. Haris (Islamic Community), November 29, 2015 [↑](#footnote-ref-66)
67. Hamza (Islamic Community), November 21, 2016. [↑](#footnote-ref-67)
68. Luka (Roman Catholic Church), January 28, 2016. [↑](#footnote-ref-68)
69. Blago (Roman Catholic Church), September 6, 2015. [↑](#footnote-ref-69)
70. Pavle (Serbian Orthodox Church), November 21, 2016 Similarly, Andrej: “It is difficult to say to a mother who has lost a son, to call her to forgiveness. But people of strong faith still model themselves on Christ, on Jesus Christ the Lord, who forgives from the cross when they torture him, [and] kill him. (…) The same is the case with Saint Stephan and others who pray for their enemies. Not only do they forgive, but they also show them love, and pray for them.” Andrej (Serbian Orthodox Church), December 1, 2015. [↑](#footnote-ref-70)
71. Bogdan (Serbian Orthodox Church), November 6, 2016. [↑](#footnote-ref-71)
72. Miloš (Serbian Orthodox Church), October 6, 2016. [↑](#footnote-ref-72)
73. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-73)
74. Pavle (Serbian Orthodox Church), November 21, 2016. [↑](#footnote-ref-74)
75. Jakov (Roman Catholic Church), November 29, 2015. [↑](#footnote-ref-75)
76. Velimir (Serbian Orthodox Church), January 24, 2017. [↑](#footnote-ref-76)
77. Hrvoje (Roman Catholic Church), October 15, 2015. [↑](#footnote-ref-77)
78. Adis (Islamic Community), October 20, 2016. [↑](#footnote-ref-78)
79. Goran (Serbian Orthodox Church), November 19, 2015. [↑](#footnote-ref-79)
80. Damjan (Orthodox Church), November 4, 2015. [↑](#footnote-ref-80)
81. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-81)
82. Velimir (Serbian Orthodox Church), January 24, 2017. [↑](#footnote-ref-82)
83. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-83)
84. “Grobovi im nikad / Oprostiti ne mogu / Zbog nedužnih ljudi / Koji život gube. / Grobovi za mladost / I molitve Bogu / Gdje žalosne majke / Mrtve usne ljube. / Grobovi im nikad / Oprostiti neće / Ako ljudska mržnja / Ljubav ne prihvati. / Grobovi u žitu / Vjekovima klet će / Zaboravit nikad / Neće ih Hrvati.” For the video clip, see: “Miško Kovač: Grobovi im nikad oprostiti neće,” https://​www.youtube.com​/​watch​?​v=​KejrtizJFsg, accessed August 11, 2019 [↑](#footnote-ref-84)
85. Matthew 7:2. [↑](#footnote-ref-85)
86. Konstantin (Serbian Orthodox Church), December 8, 2016. [↑](#footnote-ref-86)
87. Damjan (Orthodox Church), November 4, 2015. [↑](#footnote-ref-87)
88. Marijan (Roman Catholic Church), October 5, 2016. [↑](#footnote-ref-88)
89. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-89)
90. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-90)
91. Bojan (Serbian Orthodox Church), December 15, 2015. [↑](#footnote-ref-91)
92. Andrej (Serbian Orthodox Church), December 1, 2015. [↑](#footnote-ref-92)
93. Marijan (Roman Catholic Church), October 5, 2016. [↑](#footnote-ref-93)
94. Nedim (Islamic Community), December 1, 2015. [↑](#footnote-ref-94)
95. VPRO, “Of Beauty and Consolation: Episode 7: Martha Nussbaum,” https://​www.youtube.com​/​watch​?​v=​z7jvmddhgK4, accessed August 11, 2019. [↑](#footnote-ref-95)
96. Željko (Roman Catholic Church), January 30, 2017. [↑](#footnote-ref-96)
97. Andrew S. Park, “Sin and Han,” *The Living Pulpit* (1999). [↑](#footnote-ref-97)
98. Kenan (Islamic Community), October 20, 2016. [↑](#footnote-ref-98)
99. It means that victims have resumed their normal everyday activities and that they have overcome the initial distance from normal life but have never openly discussed the specificities of the insult, pain, apology, or remorse associated with the wrong done them. According to Enis: “It is human to forgive (…) A person has to continue to live. I am here. This is my example. I am here in my [city censored]. I drink coffee. I put petrol in my car. I buy things in a shop. So, based on those reasons [of injury] I was not supposed to do anything, but here I am. I do all that, as if to say, ‘I live normally’.” Enis (Islamic Community), October 6, 2016. [↑](#footnote-ref-99)
100. Hamza (Islamic Community), November 21, 2016. [↑](#footnote-ref-100)
101. Marijan (Roman Catholic Church), October 5, 2016. [↑](#footnote-ref-101)
102. Miroslav Volf, “Forgiveness, Reconciliation, & Justice: A Christian Contribution to a More Peaceful Social Environment,” in *Forgiveness and Reconciliation: Religion, Public Policy and Conflict Transformation*, ed. Raymond G. Helmick and Rodney L. Petersen (Philadelphia, PA: Templeton Foundation Press, 2001), 41. [↑](#footnote-ref-102)
103. Adis (Islamic Community), October 20, 2016. [↑](#footnote-ref-103)
104. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-104)
105. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-105)
106. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-106)
107. Haris (Islamic Community), November 29, 2015. [↑](#footnote-ref-107)
108. Tarik (Islamic Community), January 23, 2017

     A similar view was voiced by Ahmed: “[F]orgiveness is necessary, but it will come only after sincere repentance and through asking forgiveness. (…) The one who committed misdeeds should rise above [him/herself], rise above his ego and confess [his crimes] (…) That is the only way to achieve normalization, to establish humane relationships, to [restore] the equilibrium], and to re-establish balance, because there must be atonement, which leads to material and spiritual satisfaction.” Ahmed (Islamic Community), November 4, 2016. [↑](#footnote-ref-108)
109. Ivica, November 4, 2015. [↑](#footnote-ref-109)
110. Andrej (Serbian Orthodox Church), December 1, 2015 [↑](#footnote-ref-110)
111. Muhamed (Islamic Community), October 5, 2016. [↑](#footnote-ref-111)
112. Qur’an 4:56. [↑](#footnote-ref-112)
113. Gilles Deleuze, “Nietzsche and Saint Paul Lawrence and John of Patmos,” in *Essays Critical and Clinical,* by Gilles Deleuze (London: Verso, 1998).. Also: Miroslav Volf, “Janjci mesožderi?: O kršćanskoj vjeri i nasilju u suvremenom svijetu,” *Društvena istraživanja* 3, 2–3 (1994). [↑](#footnote-ref-113)
114. Zvonimir (Roman Catholic Church), November 4, 2016. [↑](#footnote-ref-114)
115. Bojan (Serbian Orthodox Church), December 15, 2015. [↑](#footnote-ref-115)
116. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-116)
117. Slaven (Roman Catholic Church), November 19, 2015. [↑](#footnote-ref-117)
118. Pavle (Serbian Orthodox Church), November 21, 2016. [↑](#footnote-ref-118)
119. Since conflicts and acts of violence can have a dispersive effect, it is difficult to clearly identify the direct victims of a certain act. In the case of a transgenerational trauma, it is even more difficult to say whether later generation are in any way ‘directly’ affected by the events that their parent, grandparent, or even distant relatives suffered. In this context, I focus on those who were direct participants in the original hurtful act, not on those who have directly (or less directly) suffered because of its consequences. [↑](#footnote-ref-119)
120. Here, responsibility is used in a Jasperian sense, as an inter-communal response of acceptance of political liability without moral guilt or personal blame. See: Karl Jaspers, *The Question of German Guilt* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2001). [↑](#footnote-ref-120)
121. Paul M. Huges and Brandon Warmke, “Forgiveness,” https://​plato.stanford.edu​/​entries/​forgiveness/​, accessed August 11, 2019. [↑](#footnote-ref-121)
122. Griswold, for instance, agrees with Butler that forgiveness requires forswearing revenge since saying that someone is forgiven while still planning to take revenge on that person is inconsistent. However, he clarifies that forgiveness does not exclude a victim’s insistence “that judicially determined punishment be carried out.” Charles L. Griswold, *Forgiveness: A Philosophical Exploration* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 39. Moreover, he clarifies that forswearing resentment as a form of deliberate moral hatred does not require abandoning all negative emotions related to the offender or the injurious event: “One may forgive, but still feel sorrow in regard to, or disappointment with, the offender. Or I may be depressed by what you have done; but overcoming the depression is not necessarily forgiveness (if, say, I do not think you intentionally aimed to injure me). Forgiveness does however mean overcoming negative feelings that embody and perpetuate the key features of resentment, feelings that very often accompany resentment – such as contempt and scorn – *insofar as* they are modulations of the moral hatred in question.” ibid., 41. [↑](#footnote-ref-122)
123. For the division between these three types of emotionalism, see: Huges and Warmke, “Forgiveness.” For instance, Griswold’s reading of Butler suggest that forgiveness is “first and foremost the forswearing of revenge, and secondly, of the other abuses of resentment.” Griswold, *Forgiveness*, 33 Murphy’s reading of Butler seems to be broader and leads him to conclude that the inner change in feelings is “the overcoming, on moral grounds, of the intense negative reactive attitudes that are quite naturally occasioned when one has been wronged by another—mainly the vindictive passions of resentment, anger, hatred, and the desire for revenge.” Jeffrie G. Murphy, *Getting Even: Forgiveness and its Limits* (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 13. Those divisions are not mutually exclusive, and forgiveness that includes abandonment not only of resentment but also of other ‘negative’ emotions can vary by the degree to which those emotions are expressed. Discussing the case of even the most cruel and unrepentant criminals, Murphy argues that it is morally virtuous to grant them basic human rights and treat them as having human dignity. Even more, he considers them as candidates for forgiveness, which is understood in terms of moral humility as the abandonment of “total loathing and shunning.” However, he immediately clarifies that forgiveness in that sense has degrees of moral decency and that forgiveness shown to a grave criminal offender must be balanced with care and respect for victims: “Having opened the door enough to allow some forgiveness for even the unrepentant general, I remain reluctant to open it all the way. Loathing and shunning are matters of degree, after all, and my extending some human fellowship to the general that goes beyond the mere respect of his basic human rights does not have to be without limits. Without significant limits, indeed, extending fellowship to the general might be disrespectful to victims and their legitimate grievances. I cannot, for example, imagine myself saying (or even thinking) this to the mother of the boy murdered by the general: ‘I agree that what he did was really terrible and I feel your pain, but I really cannot let that interrupt my project for the general’s reclamation. So you can expect to see me playing tennis with him and inviting him to the tennis club’s restaurant on a regular basis. I know that you are a member too, and I am sorry for any pain that this may cause you.’” Jeffrie Murphy, “The Case of Dostoevsky’s General: Some Ruminations on Forgiving the Unforgivable,” *The Monist* 92, no. 4 (2009): 575–76. [↑](#footnote-ref-123)
124. The religious concerns for salvation are sometimes criticized on the grounds that they can lead to a too hasty ‘forgiveness’ which, in turn, comes close to excusing or condoning the crimes and offenders. Griswold discusses the case of a murder of ten Amish girls in Nickel Mines, Pennsylvania, in 2006 by Charles Roberts. The murderer killed girls to show his anger at God for the death of his firstborn daughter nine years before. Immediately after killing the Amish girls, Roberts killed himself. The reaction of the Amish community drew a lot of attention because within several days, some members of the murdered girls’ families announced that they had forgiven Roberts; they went to console his family, attended his funeral and even gave some financial support to the shooter’s family. In Griswold’s view, this was not a case of what he calls “imperfect forgiveness,” which can be unilateral, but more a desire to move on and, in consequence, move closer to excusing the crime: “This is as close to instant forgiveness and “moving on” as one could possibly imagine. (…) What of the place of self-righteous anger and sympathetic resentment on behalf of the murdered children? (…) What of the problem of condoning—through instant “forgiving”—so evil a deed? We might go even further: how could this be forgiveness, if forgiveness has any tie to the forswearing of resentment? It would seem that the Amish ideal is proleptic, universal, and unconditional forgiveness and the forswearing of anger altogether, such that not only is all past evil but also all future evil forgiven. The goal is apparently a life entirely free from moral anger no matter what. While this looks like a case of imperfect forgiveness as I understand the phrase, insofar as the offender need take no steps whatsoever to qualify for complete forgiveness—and leaves no indication of being capable thereof—substantively it may not be a case of forgiveness at all, so much as of excusing, or forgetting, or of not feeling moral hatred.” Charles L. Griswold, “Debating Forgiveness: A Reply to My Critics,” *Philosophia* 38, no. 3 (2010): 461, https://doi.org/10.1007/s11406-010-9245-x. [↑](#footnote-ref-124)
125. Griswold, *Forgiveness*, xiv. [↑](#footnote-ref-125)
126. Holmgrem in that respect claims: “In order to fully respect ourselves, we must work towards developing the most appropriate attitudes we are capable of. We have seen in this section that forgiveness will be our response to the wrongdoer if we recognize her full worth as a person. To respect ourselves we will also want to free ourselves of resentments and move on to all the joy and happiness we can experience. Likewise, in order to fully respect morality, we must work towards developing a morally appropriate attitude to? wards the offender. If the arguments presented here are correct, we must therefore work towards unconditional genuine forgiveness. And finally, in order to fully respect the wrongdoer as a moral agent we must recognize her intrinsic worth as a person. We must therefore regard her with respect and compassion regardless of her performance on some moral scale. However, even though unconditional genuine forgiveness is required by these three forms of respect, it is still properly classified as a virtue rather than an obligation.” Margaret R. Holmgren, “Forgiveness and the Intrinsic Value of Persons,” *American Philosophical Quarterly* 30, no. 4 (1993): 351. [↑](#footnote-ref-126)
127. Marilyn M. Adams, “Forgiveness,” *Faith and Philosophy* 8, no. 3 (1991), https://doi.org/10.5840/faithphil19918319. [↑](#footnote-ref-127)
128. Ibid., 294. [↑](#footnote-ref-128)
129. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-129)
130. Ibid., 294–95. [↑](#footnote-ref-130)
131. There is a broad philosophical debate on whether forgiveness can be seen as a moral duty. In his influential work from 1982, David Heyd argues that not all acts of forgiveness are obligatory, although all acts of forgiveness are morally good. In that sense, those acts which are not seen as a moral duty have the status of supererogatory acts (something that is not a duty but is still positive and desirable). See: David Heyd, *Supererogation: Its Status in Ethical Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982).. The virtue-ethics approach sees forgiveness as a laudable and stable attitude. For Downie, “that readiness to forgive is a virtue and unwillingness to try to forgive a vice.” R. S. Downie, “Forgiveness,” *The Philosophical Quarterly* 15, no. 59 (1965): 133, https://doi.org/10.2307/2218212. Such general statement can be met by objections that in some cases, readiness to forgive demonstrates the lack of due sensitivity to the original injury which creates a difficult situation in which an effect of a virtuous act is morally reprehensible. Downie offers an answer by pointing out that: “it is not readiness to forgive which constitutes the moral offence in the situation described: it is undue sensitivity to injury which is morally offensive.” ibid., 134. Holmgren, who also follows the virtue-ethical approach to forgiveness, argues for the “unconditional genuine forgiveness” stating that such forgiveness is “ always morally appropriate for the victim who has completed the process of addressing the wrong (or who does not need to do so), whereas maintaining an attitude of resentment toward the offender until he has met certain conditions is not.” Margaret R. Holmgren, *Forgiveness and Retribution: Responding to Wrongdoing* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 65. The genuineness of forgiveness is conditional upon six steps that a victim has to make: recovering self-esteem, recognition of the wrongness of the act, acknowledgement of true feeling, assessment of the potential future risks, possible expression of victim’s feelings to the perpetrator, and a decision whether the victim wants to seek restitution or press criminal charges. ibid., 59–62. Roberts, on the other hand, differentiates between the disposition to forgive (thus speaking about “the forgiving person”), and specific acts that such a person is inclined to do. Robert C. Roberts, “Forgivingness,” *American Philosophical Quarterly* 32, no. 4 (1995). [↑](#footnote-ref-131)
132. Huges and Warmke, “Forgiveness.” [↑](#footnote-ref-132)
133. For instance, Pettigrove criticizes the act-focused approach to forgiveness and argues that it should also be discussed in the context of character: “The standard account of forgiveness has focused on forgiving agents for wrong acts. This is hardly surprising, given that the ethical discussion for most of the last century was similarly act-focused. However, an act-focused account leaves insufficient room for failures of character. (…) Quite often the actions to which we respond with anger, resentment, and the like, provoke these responses because of the way they fit into larger patterns within the lives of the persons who perform them. These larger patterns tell us something about what matters to the persons with whom we interact and about the extent to which we are among the things that matter to them.” Glen Pettigrove, *Forgiveness and Love* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 52. [↑](#footnote-ref-133)
134. Roy F., Exline, and Sommer, “The Victim Role, Grudge Theory, and Two Dimensions of Forgiveness,” 86. [↑](#footnote-ref-134)
135. Ibid., 86–87. [↑](#footnote-ref-135)
136. Ibid., 89. [↑](#footnote-ref-136)
137. Ibid., 89–90. [↑](#footnote-ref-137)
138. Robert Axelrod, *The Evolution of Cooperation* (New York: Basic Books, 2006). [↑](#footnote-ref-138)
139. See: Evan T. Pritchard, “Decision-Makin Theory and Research,” in *Encyclopedia of Sociology*, 2nd ed., ed. Edgar F. Borgatta and Rhonda J. V. Montgomery (New York: Macmillan Reference USA, 2001), 596. [↑](#footnote-ref-139)
140. Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority* (Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press, 2007), 283. (Italics in original). [↑](#footnote-ref-140)
141. Ibid., 284–85. [↑](#footnote-ref-141)
142. Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 233–34. [↑](#footnote-ref-142)
143. Ibid., 236–37. [↑](#footnote-ref-143)
144. Ibid., 237. [↑](#footnote-ref-144)
145. Ibid., 237–38. [↑](#footnote-ref-145)
146. Ibid., 239. [↑](#footnote-ref-146)
147. Ibid. There is, however, a certain inconsistency in Arendt’s interpretation. First, she stresses that the Gospels give humans the ability to forgive while God is doing “likewise,” but only a few lines later she states that God’s actions in the Last Judgment are not “characterized by forgiveness but by just retribution.” ibid. It is thus not clear how God can simultaneously do “likewise” in the case of forgiveness, while not engaging in forgiveness. [↑](#footnote-ref-147)
148. Ibid., 240. [↑](#footnote-ref-148)
149. Ibid., 241. [↑](#footnote-ref-149)
150. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-150)
151. Derrida, *On Cosmopolitanism and Forgiveness*, 32–33. [↑](#footnote-ref-151)
152. Ibid., 34–36. [↑](#footnote-ref-152)
153. Ibid., 32. [↑](#footnote-ref-153)
154. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-154)
155. Arthur C. O'Neil, “Sin,” http://​www.newadvent.org​/​cathen/​14004b.htm, accessed August 11, 2019 [↑](#footnote-ref-155)
156. Derrida, *On Cosmopolitanism and Forgiveness*, 41–51. [↑](#footnote-ref-156)
157. Ibid., 38. [↑](#footnote-ref-157)
158. Ibid., 54. [↑](#footnote-ref-158)
159. Ibid., 50. [↑](#footnote-ref-159)
160. Ibid., 59. [↑](#footnote-ref-160)
161. Ibid., 51. [↑](#footnote-ref-161)
162. Ibid., 34–35. [↑](#footnote-ref-162)
163. 1 Cor. 13: 5-7. [↑](#footnote-ref-163)
164. Paul Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 467. [↑](#footnote-ref-164)
165. Ibid., 468. [↑](#footnote-ref-165)
166. Derrida, *On Cosmopolitanism and Forgiveness*, 39. [↑](#footnote-ref-166)
167. His cosmic vision of boundless redemption is, for instance, visible in his epistle to Romans: “For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time.” (Rom 8:20-22) [↑](#footnote-ref-167)
168. Vladimir Jankélévitch, “Should We Pardon Them?,” *Critical Inquiry* 22, no. 3 (1996): 556–57. [↑](#footnote-ref-168)
169. Ibid., 558. [↑](#footnote-ref-169)
170. Ibid., 567. [↑](#footnote-ref-170)
171. Vladimir Jankélévitch, *Forgiveness* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 156. For a discussion on the difference between Derrida’s and Jankélévitch’s understanding of the “unforgivable”, see: Aaron T. Looney, *Vladimir Jankélévitch: The Time of Forgiveness* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2015), 159–64. [↑](#footnote-ref-171)
172. Jeffrie Murphy, “Foreword,” in *Resentment’s Virtue: Jean Améry and the Refusal to Forgive,* by Thomas Brudholm (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2008), ix. [↑](#footnote-ref-172)
173. Thomas Brudholm and Thomas Cushman, *The Religious in Responses to Mass Atrocity: Interdisciplinary Perspectives* (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), x. [↑](#footnote-ref-173)
174. Thomas Brudholm, *Resentment’s Virtue: Jean Améry and the Refusal to Forgive* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2008), 28–34. [↑](#footnote-ref-174)
175. Ibid., 29. [↑](#footnote-ref-175)
176. Ibid., 77. [↑](#footnote-ref-176)
177. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-177)
178. Brudholm and Cushman, *The Religious in Responses to Mass Atrocity*, 12. [↑](#footnote-ref-178)
179. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-179)
180. Alice MacLachlan, “The Philosophical Controversy over Political Forgiveness,” 8, https://​philpapers.org​/​archive/​MACTPC-​2.pdf, accessed August 11, 2019 [↑](#footnote-ref-180)
181. Ibid., 9. [↑](#footnote-ref-181)
182. Ibid., 11. [↑](#footnote-ref-182)
183. Ibid., 23. [↑](#footnote-ref-183)
184. Jürgen Moltmann, “Opraštanje grijeha… a tko opravdava žrtve?,” in *Opasna sjećanja i pomirenje: Kontekstualna promišljanja o religiji u postkonfliktnom društvu*, ed. Srđan Sremac, Zoran Grozdanov and Nikola Knežević (Rijeka: Ex libris, 2012).. [↑](#footnote-ref-184)
185. Ivan (Roman Catholic Church), November 26, 2015. [↑](#footnote-ref-185)
186. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-186)
187. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-187)
188. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-188)
189. Quoted in: Sabina Čehajic, Rupert Brown, and Emanuele Castano, “Forgive and Forget? Antecedents and Consequences of Intergroup Forgiveness in Bosnia and Herzegovina,” *Political Psychology* 29, no. 3 (2008): 351–52, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9221.2008.00634.x. [↑](#footnote-ref-189)
190. Večernji list, “Majka Srebrenice: Nikolić je trebao reći da je počinjen genocid!,” https://​www.vecernji.hr​/​vijesti/​majka-​srebrenice-​nikolic-​je-​trebao-​reci-​da-​je-​pocinjen-​genocid-​544878, accessed August 11, 2019. [↑](#footnote-ref-190)
191. Blago (Roman Catholic Church), September 6, 2015. [↑](#footnote-ref-191)
192. Hrvoje (Roman Catholic Church), October 15, 2015. [↑](#footnote-ref-192)
193. Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (London, England: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013), 317. [↑](#footnote-ref-193)
194. See for instance: “وَجَزَاءُ سَيِّئَةٍ سَيِّئَةٌ مِّثْلُهَا ۖ فَمَنْ عَفَا وَأَصْلَحَ فَأَجْرُهُ عَلَى اللَّهِ ۚ إِنَّهُ لَا يُحِبُّ الظَّالِمِينَ - And the retribution for an evil act is an evil one like it, but whoever pardons and makes reconciliation - his reward is [due] from Allah . Indeed, He does not like wrongdoers.” (Quran: 42:40) [↑](#footnote-ref-194)
195. For the sulh and musalaha rituals in Islam, see: George E. Irani and Nathan C. Funk, “Rituals of Reconciliation: Arab-Islamic Perspectives,” *Arab Studies Quarterly* 20, no. 4 (1998).; Daniel Philpott, *Just and Unjust Peace: An Ethic of Political Reconciliation*, *Studies in Strategic Peacebuilding* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 160–63. [↑](#footnote-ref-195)
196. Ivan (Roman Catholic Church), November 26, 2015. [↑](#footnote-ref-196)
197. “N1 Pressing: Vladika Grigorije (6.1.2016),” 00:47:15-00:50:06, https://​www.youtube.com​/​watch​?​v=​OwgTHipO4Mg, accessed August 11, 2019 (My translation) [↑](#footnote-ref-197)
198. Željko (Roman Catholic Church), January 30, 2017. [↑](#footnote-ref-198)
199. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-199)
200. Konstantin (Serbian Orthodox Church), December 8, 2016. [↑](#footnote-ref-200)
201. Blago (Roman Catholic Church), September 6, 2015. [↑](#footnote-ref-201)
202. Miloš (Serbian Orthodox Church), October 6, 2016. [↑](#footnote-ref-202)
203. Željko (Roman Catholic Church), January 30, 2017. [↑](#footnote-ref-203)
204. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-204)
205. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-205)
206. Blago (Roman Catholic Church), September 6, 2015. [↑](#footnote-ref-206)
207. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-207)
208. It is important to note that participants did not always have compatible views as to how a just political arrangement of the country should look. While Catholic and Muslim religious leaders often criticized the very existence of the Republic of Srpska, Orthodox respondents were much more reserved regarding the constitutional reforms. According to one highly-positioned Catholic leader, the war “ended with the American power, but neither peace nor equal rights were established. And now Church has to say: that is injustice. The Church cannot reconcile itself with legitimation of ethnic cleansing.” Franjo (Roman Catholic Church), September 26, 2015 Some other Catholic leaders were of the opinion that a further federalization into three entities with one nationality dominant in each would be a way towards a better future. For instance, Branimir’s rationale was that reconciliation cannot be forced and that it would be much better if everyone should have their “own house,” into which they would then invite others, instead of being pushed into a common household. House, in this context, was just a metaphor for an autonomous administrative unit within Bosnia and Herzegovina. Branimir (Roman Catholic Church), November 4, 2015. [↑](#footnote-ref-208)
209. Nedim (Islamic Community), December 1, 2015. [↑](#footnote-ref-209)
210. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-210)
211. Igor (Serbian Orthodox Church), November 29, 2016. [↑](#footnote-ref-211)
212. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-212)
213. Mirza (Islamic Community), November 24, 2016. [↑](#footnote-ref-213)
214. Velimir (Serbian Orthodox Church), January 24, 2017. [↑](#footnote-ref-214)
215. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-215)
216. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-216)
217. Ljudevit (Roman Catholic Church), September 18, 2015. [↑](#footnote-ref-217)
218. Mirza (Islamic Community), November 24, 2016. [↑](#footnote-ref-218)
219. Ajdin (Islamic Community), February 23, 2016. [↑](#footnote-ref-219)
220. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-220)
221. Ljubo (Roman Catholic Church), January 4, 2016. [↑](#footnote-ref-221)
222. Ljudevit (Roman Catholic Church), September 18, 2015. [↑](#footnote-ref-222)
223. Hrvoje (Roman Catholic Church), October 15, 2015. [↑](#footnote-ref-223)
224. Mladen (Roman Catholic Church), January 8, 2016. [↑](#footnote-ref-224)
225. Damjan (Orthodox Church), November 4, 2015. [↑](#footnote-ref-225)
226. Harun (Islamic Community), October 24, 2015. [↑](#footnote-ref-226)
227. Ibid., 9. [↑](#footnote-ref-227)
228. Drago (Roman Catholic Church), November 7, 2015. [↑](#footnote-ref-228)
229. Danijel (Roman Catholic Church), November 14, 2015. [↑](#footnote-ref-229)
230. Stanko (2016/01/28), January 28, 2016. [↑](#footnote-ref-230)
231. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-231)
232. Jovan (Serbian Orthodox Church), December 24, 2015. [↑](#footnote-ref-232)
233. According to Kriesberg: “Processes of reconciliation between large entities such as peoples and countries are unending; whatever kind of reconciliation is attained is not permanent. Changes in the reconciliation achieved between peoples occur years, decades, or even centuries after an inter-communal accommodation has been imposed or mutually reached.” See: Louis Kriesberg, “Reconciliation: Aspects, Growth, and Sequences,” *International Journal of Peace Studies* 12, no. 1 (2007): 1. [↑](#footnote-ref-233)
234. Kriesberg also makes a similar distinction: “One meaning of reconciliation is to bring people back into concord with each other; but another meaning is for people to acquiesce or submit to existing circumstances.” ibid., 7. See also the initial distinction made Radzik and Murphy in: Linda Radzik and Colleen Murphy, “Reconciliation,” https://​plato.stanford.edu​/​entries/​reconciliation/​, accessed August 11, 2019. [↑](#footnote-ref-234)
235. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-235)
236. This is to say that no direct contact between two groups (as groups) is possible. It is, of course, possible to have representatives of two groups come together. However, even in that case, one does not directly see two groups in contact with each other, but only their representatives. Thus, the contact between two larger groups (e.g., nations) is left to the moral imagination. [↑](#footnote-ref-236)
237. Paulin Manwelo, “The Theme of Reconciliation in Political Philosophy,” *Promotio Iustitiae* 3, no. 103 (2009). [↑](#footnote-ref-237)
238. Hanns Bücker, *Abbé Stock: Ein Wegbereiter der Versöhnung zwischen Deutschland und Frankreich* (Basel: Herder, 1964). [↑](#footnote-ref-238)
239. Ludwig Zettl and Franz Olbert, *Deutsche und Polen: Dokumente zur Versöhnung*, trans. Aktion katholischer landsmannschaftlicher Jugend (Eichstätt: Funk, 1969). [↑](#footnote-ref-239)
240. Radzik and Murphy, “Reconciliation.”. [↑](#footnote-ref-240)
241. Johnny B. Hill, *The Theology of Martin Luther King, Jr. and Desmond Mpilo Tutu*, trans. J. D. Roberts (New York, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 107. [↑](#footnote-ref-241)
242. The exact number of commissions varies, depending largely on the inclusion criteria. The Transitional Justice Database Project identifies “900 mechanisms (trials, truth commissions, amnesties, reparations, and lustration policies) used from 1970-2007.” When using a filter for “Truth Commission,” there are 58 responses, starting with the Pakistani Truth Commission (1971) and ending with the Guatemalan Commission from 2007. It is not possible to infer how many among them had reconciliation as their goal. See: Leigh A. Payne, Tricia D. Olsen, and Andrew G. Reiter, “Transitional Justice Database Project,” http://​tjdbproject.com​/​, accessed August 11, 2019 On the other hand, Hayner identifies at least twenty-one official truth commissions established since 1974 under different names. Not all of these commissions had reconciliation as their goal. As illustrative cases of those who did, Hayner mentions the Chilean, El Salvador, and South African truth commissions. Her list excludes short-lived, too narrow, and politically controlled initiatives that failed to make a larger social impact. See: Priscilla B. Hayner, *Unspeakable Truths: Confronting State Terror and Atrocity* (New York, London: Routledge, 2001), 14. Using different criteria than Hayner, Freeman lists 28 truth commissions. See: Mark Freeman, *Truth Commissions and Procedural Fairness* (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 318–25. Brown mentions almost “90 Truth Commission-related activities around the world” out of which 30 commissions satisfy the five following criteria: “truth, reconciliation, preventing recurrence, reparation and healing (as well as an additional emerging criterion, participation)”. See: Terry M. Brown, “Truth and Reconciliation Commissions: An Emerging Issue for the Anglican Communion,” 1, http://​apjn.anglicancommunion.org​/​media/​53597/​truth\_​and\_​reconcilation\_​commissions\_​terry\_​brown.pdf, accessed August 11, 2019 It has to be stressed. However. that the claimed goals did not necessarily coincide with the real activities and the effect the truth commissions actually had. They can have many practical limitations, work under political pressures, or even serve as a “public relations exercise aimed to appease an international community that has become increasingly demanding in the areas of truth and justice”. See: Freeman, *Truth Commissions and Procedural Fairness*, 19. [↑](#footnote-ref-242)
243. Kristina Hellqvist et al., “Apology and Reconciliation in Western Europe,” in *International Handbook of Peace and Reconciliation*, ed. Kathleen Malley-Morrison, Andrea Mercurio and Gabriel Twose (New York: Springer, 2013), 302–3. See also a number of contributions in: Raymond G. Helmick and Rodney L. Petersen, eds., *Forgiveness and Reconciliation: Religion, Public Policy and Conflict Transformation* (Philadelphia, PA: Templeton Foundation Press, 2001). [↑](#footnote-ref-243)
244. Daniel Philpott, “Religion, Reconciliation and Transitional Justice: The State of the Field,” *Social Science Research Council Working Papers* (2007): 4–5, accessed November 10, 2013., http://kroc.nd.edu/sites/default/files/workingpaperphilpott.pdf. [↑](#footnote-ref-244)
245. For various religious perspectives see for instance: Jerald D. Gort, Henry Jansen, and H. M. Vroom, *Religion, Conflict and Reconciliation: Multifaith Ideals and Realities* (Amsterdam, New York: Rodopi, 2002). [↑](#footnote-ref-245)
246. Religious origins of reconciliation do not mean that it has to retain its religious connotations within the political context. Atria criticized precisely the tendency to assume that the terms of reconciliation, because of its religious origins, carries the same meaning in the political realm: “There is something in virtue of which religious and personal and political reconciliation are all related notions, but they mean different things, and these differences make all the difference.” See: Fernando Atria, “Reconciliation and Reconstitution,” in *Law and the Politics of Reconciliation*, ed. Scott Veitch (London: Routledge, 2016), 35. See also the criticism of “cheap reconciliation” in: Volf, “Forgiveness, Reconciliation, & Justice,” 35–36. Similarly, a Catholic theologian Scott Appleby recognizes the tension between reconciliation, understood as a concept of renewing relationships among former enemies, and reconciliation which has to be implemented as a political program. See: R. S. Appleby, “Toward A Theology and Praxis of Reconciliation,” *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 39, 1-2 (2002): 133. [↑](#footnote-ref-246)
247. David Bosch, Process of Reconciliation and Demands of Obedience. Twelve Theses, quoted in: John K. Livingston, *A Missiology of the Road: Early Perspectives in David Bosch’s Theology of Mission and Evangelism*, *American Society of Missiology monograph series* (Cambridge, Eugene, OR: James Clarke & Co; Pickwick Publications, 2013), 330–31. See also: Volf, “Forgiveness, Reconciliation, & Justice.”. [↑](#footnote-ref-247)
248. For the differentiation, see: Radzik and Murphy, “Reconciliation.” In the context of transitional justice, Parmentier places reconciliation together with truth, accountability, and reparation related to the past crimes and violations. See: Stephan Parmentier, “Global Justice in the Aftermath of Mass Violence: The Role of the International Criminal Court in Dealing with Political Crimes,” *International Annals of Criminology* 41 (2003): 203. [↑](#footnote-ref-248)
249. Kriesberg, “Reconciliation: Aspects, Growth, and Sequences,” 2. [↑](#footnote-ref-249)
250. Cf. Yehudith Auerbach, “The Role of Forgiveness in Reconciliation,” in *From Conflict Resolution to Reconciliation*, ed. Yaacov Bar-Siman-Tov (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004).. For Lederach, reconciliation aims at establishing stable peaceful relationships and some vision of a common future. Reconciliation is, at the same time, envisaged as a place where Truth, Mercy, Justice, and Peace meet. Although spiritual virtues, for Lederach, they are manifested in the political arena. Reconciliation thus represents a social place where people come together, but also a locus where their concerns about past and future meet, tied with the virtues of truth, mercy, justice, and peace. See: John P. Lederach, *Building Peace: Sustainable Reconciliation in Divided Societies* (Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace Press, 1997), 25–31.

     Speaking about the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, and responding to the question of Bobby Muller on the importance of punitive legal measures, Tutu said: “Your concept of what constitutes justice is retributive justice. That’s not the only kind of justice. We believe that there is restorative justice. The application is heard in an open hearing, not behind closed doors; television lights are on the applicant, (…) That public appearance constitutes a public humiliation which is, if you are looking for punitiveness, a punishment. But we didn’t think that was where we wanted to end. We were looking for healing, and it’s probably an African concept of our understanding of penology. What is the purpose of justice? The purpose is ultimately the restoration of a harmony.” Quoted in: Jeffrey Hopkins, ed., *The Art of Peace: Nobel Peace Laureates Discuss Human Rights, Conflict and Reconciliation* (Ithaca, NY: Snow Lion Publications, 2000), 104–5. [↑](#footnote-ref-250)
251. Depending on the prescripts of the reconciliation-framework, Bashir and Kymlicka explain that various accents are places on both *goals* (e.g., “nation-building, individual and collective healing after trauma, the pursuit of justice in its various forms (retributive, restorative, distributive), the consolidation of the rule of law, and democratization”) and *tools* that could help in achieving them (e.g., “reparations and compensation, apologies, commemorations and memorials, truth telling, rehabilitation, and amnesties”). See: Bashir Bashir and Will Kymlicka, “Introduction: Struggles for Inclusion and Reconciliation in Modern Democracies,” in *The Politics of Reconciliation in Multicultural Societies*, ed. Will Kymlicka and Bashir Bashir (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 12. [↑](#footnote-ref-251)
252. Kreisberg, for instance, differentiates four main aspects of reconciliation: units engaged in reconciliation, its dimensions, degrees, and the symmetry of each aspect. Depending on specific circumstances, those aspects come in different formations, exhibiting “patterns of reconciliation” which depend not only on the internal dynamics between the affected parities but also on the global trends, e.g. growing awareness of human rights, increasing intern-dependence between states, changes in material conditions and communication. See: Kriesberg, “Reconciliation: Aspects, Growth, and Sequences,” 2–12. [↑](#footnote-ref-252)
253. Valérie Rosoux, “Portée et limites du concept de réconciliation Une histoire à terminer,” *Revue d’études comparatives Est-Ouest* 45, 03-04 (2014): 25–26, https://doi.org/10.4074/S0338059914003027. [↑](#footnote-ref-253)
254. Ernesto Verdeja, *Unchopping a Tree: Reconciliation in the Aftermath of Political Violence* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2009), 12. [↑](#footnote-ref-254)
255. Ibid., 13–14. [↑](#footnote-ref-255)
256. Ibid., 18. [↑](#footnote-ref-256)
257. Ibid., 14. [↑](#footnote-ref-257)
258. Ibid., 16–19. [↑](#footnote-ref-258)
259. Marc H. Ross, “Ritual and the Politics of Reconciliation,” in Bar-Siman-Tov, *From Conflict Resolution to Reconciliation*, 200. [↑](#footnote-ref-259)
260. Kazuya Fukuoka, “Forgiveness,” in *The SAGE Encyclopedia of War: Social Science Perspectives*, ed. Paul Joseph (Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications, 2017), 643–44. Crocker differentiates three versions of reconciliation on the spectrum between “thinner” and “thicker.” The first one is just “simple coexistence,” which is achieved when former enemies do not kill each other but instead comply with the law. The middle version involves some form of reciprocity and respect between previous adversaries, i.e., readiness to collaborate on matters of common concern and negotiate policies, although with possible disagreements. Finally, the third version involves comprehensive common vision, mutual healing, or harmony. See: David A. Crocker, “Reckoning with Past Wrongs: A Normative Framework,” *Ethics & International Affairs* 13 (1999): 60, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1747-7093.1999.tb00326.x. [↑](#footnote-ref-260)
261. Rosoux, “Portée et limites du concept de réconciliation Une histoire à terminer,” 25–26. [↑](#footnote-ref-261)
262. Ibid., 26. [↑](#footnote-ref-262)
263. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-263)
264. Ibid., 25. [↑](#footnote-ref-264)
265. Ibid., 37–38. [↑](#footnote-ref-265)
266. Janine N. Clark, *International Trials and Reconciliation: Assessing the Impact of the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia* (Abingdon, Oxon, New York: Routledge, 2014), 42. (Italics in original). [↑](#footnote-ref-266)
267. Daniel Bar-Tal and Gemma H. Bennink, “The Nature of Reconciliation as an Outcome and as a Process,” in Bar-Siman-Tov, *From Conflict Resolution to Reconciliation*, 12. [↑](#footnote-ref-267)
268. Kriesberg, “Reconciliation: Aspects, Growth, and Sequences,” 2–3. [↑](#footnote-ref-268)
269. Valérie Rosoux, “Reconciliation as a Peace-Building Process: Scope and Limits,” in *The Sage Handbook of Conflict Resolution*, ed. Jacob Bercovitch, Victor Kremenyuk and I. W. Zartman (London, Thousand Oaks, Calif.: SAGE, 2009), 559. [↑](#footnote-ref-269)
270. Tamar Hermann, “Reconciliation: Reflections on the Theoretical and Practical Utility of the Term,” in Bar-Siman-Tov, *From Conflict Resolution to Reconciliation*, 46–47. [↑](#footnote-ref-270)
271. William J. Long and Peter Brecke, *War and Reconciliation: Reason and Emotion in Conflict Resolution* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2003), 152–53. [↑](#footnote-ref-271)
272. While in some cases, reconciliation can be seen just as a tool or an instrument for some other goal (e.g., stable peace), other see it as a goal in itself. For Appleby, reconciliation is the very way of reality, and the only mode of living that corresponds to the theological image of creation. In that sense, “[R]econciliation is more than a political expedient or means to an end; it is the end.” See: Appleby, “Toward A Theology and Praxis of Reconciliation,” 138. On the other hand, even in a purely socio-political context, reconciliation can attain different pragmatic and/or moral aspects. Gardner-Feldman emphasizes that the difference between the German nouns *Versöhnung* and *Aussöhnung*, both of which are equivalent to the English term ‘reconciliation.’ While the first conveys the philosophical/emotional aspect of reconciliation, the latter concerns the word’s practical/material dimensions. According to Gardner-Feldman, both of them have been present in German reconciliation attempts towards other countries. While in the case of Poland and France, the process of reconciliation developed in pragmatic-instrumental terms, the one with Israel and the Czech Republic was more deeply interwoven with history and moral issues. See: Lily Gardner Feldman, “The Principle and Practice of ‘Reconciliation’ in German Foreign Policy: Relations with France, Israel, Poland and the Czech Republic,” *International Affairs* 75, no. 2 (1999): 334, https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-2346.00075. Those two aspects emphasize dominant tendencies, but in practice they cannot be completely separated. See: Ross, “Ritual and the Politics of Reconciliation,” 199-201. [↑](#footnote-ref-272)
273. See: Ronald Kraybill, “From Head to Heart: The Cycle of Reconciliation,” *Conciliation Quarterly* 7, no. 4 (1998). [↑](#footnote-ref-273)
274. For the top-down approaches and the role of leadership, see: David Bargal and Emmanuel Sivan, “Leadership and Reconciliation,” in Bar-Siman-Tov, *From Conflict Resolution to Reconciliation.*. For the limits, see: Olga Botcharova, “Implementation of Track Two Diplomacy: Developing a Model of Forgiveness,” in Helmick and Petersen, *Forgiveness and Reconciliation.*. For the importance of bottom-up approaches in stabilization of peace and enhancement of ethnic cooperation, see: Scott N. Romaniuk, “Overcoming Ethnic Hatred: Peacebuilding and Violent Conflict Prevention in Divided Societies,” in *Peace Psychology in the Balkans: Dealing With a Violent Past while Building Peace*, ed. Olivera Simić, Zala Volčič and Catherine R. Philpot (New York: Springer, 2012).. [↑](#footnote-ref-274)
275. See: Hermann, “Reconciliation: Reflections on the Theoretical and Practical Utility of the Term,” 42–48. [↑](#footnote-ref-275)
276. Hermann, for instance, calls for development of more culturally-sensitive models of reconciliation, which would take into account the political ethos of different societies. One possible difference is between demotic and elitist/authoritarian political cultures which prefer opposing directions of political initiatives (bottom-up vs. top-down). The political culture also determines how certain modes of post-conflict behavior will be interpreted, while in some cases apology and asking for forgiveness could be seen as a sign of strength and, in other cases, could be interpreted as an expression of collective weakness. See: ibid., 58–59. [↑](#footnote-ref-276)
277. Andrew Schaap, “Reconciliation as Ideology and Politics,” *Constellations* 15, no. 2 (2008): 251, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8675.2008.00488.x. [↑](#footnote-ref-277)
278. The majority of distinctions are mentioned in: Rosoux, “Reconciliation as a Peace-Building Process: Scope and Limits.” [↑](#footnote-ref-278)
279. Zartman developed the theory of ripeness in relation to the initiation of negotiation processes in situations of a mutually hurting stalemate. The term is sometimes used in other contexts as a concept that denotes a favorable moment for advancing a project. See: Karin Aggestam, “Enhancing Ripeness: Transition from Conflict to Negotiation,” in *Escalation and Negotiation in International Conflicts*, ed. I. W. Zartman and Guy O. Faure (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 272. For the application of the term to the process of reconciliation see: Valérie Rosoux, “Is Reconciliation Negotiable?,” *International Negotiation* 18 (2013). [↑](#footnote-ref-279)
280. This is especially the case when forgiveness is imposed on victims as a program that they must accept. See: Brudholm and Rosoux, “Unforgiving: Reflections on the Resistance to Forgiveness After Atrocity.” [↑](#footnote-ref-280)
281. See: Hayner, *Unspeakable Truths*, 2; Karen Brounéus, “Truth-Telling as Talking Cure?: Insecurity and Retraumatization in the Rwandan Gacaca Courts,” *Security Dialogue* 39, no. 1 (2008), https://doi.org/10.1177/0967010607086823. [↑](#footnote-ref-281)
282. Daniel Bar-Tal, “Collective Memory of Physical Violence: its Contribution to the Culture of Violence,” in *The Role of Memories in Ethnic Conflict*, ed. Ed Cairns and Micheál D. Roe (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002).. [↑](#footnote-ref-282)
283. My translation, in the original: “¿Está pendiente el tema de la reconciliación entre los chilenos? Totalmente pendiente. O sea, yo diría que la reconciliación no va a existir nunca. La reconciliación es una mala palabra, en primer lugar. La reconciliación es la hermandad. Es decir, son dos hermanos separados por una lucha, pero que reconocen su linaje común, que reconocen que la misma sangre corre por sus venas y la misma sangre no corre por las venas de los pinochetistas y de los antipinochetistas. El tema de la reconciliación esfalso, que está absolutamente mal planteado. Lo que tenemos que hacer es aprender a vivir con tolerancia, pero por qué voy a amar al torturador. No. Eso es una pura ilusión mística. Es una palabra del lenguaje teológico desplazada al lenguaje político. Sí podemos decir que necesitamos vivir en paz, por motivos prácticos y éticos, para no volver a repetir las carnicerías, las noches de San Bartolomé. No soy hijo de un desaparecido ni tengo un desaparecido en mi familia, pero no me reconcilio con los que mataron a los detenidos desaparecidos o los que torturaron. No, no me reconcilio.” El Periodista, “Tomás Moulián, sociólogo: Pinochet revela un Chile maladito,” http://​www.elperiodista.cl​/​newtenberg/​1435/​article-​36146.html, accessed January 2, 2017. [↑](#footnote-ref-283)
284. See: Brudholm and Rosoux, “Unforgiving: Reflections on the Resistance to Forgiveness After Atrocity.”. [↑](#footnote-ref-284)
285. Radzik and Murphy, “Reconciliation.”. [↑](#footnote-ref-285)
286. Schaap, “Reconciliation as Ideology and Politics,” 258. [↑](#footnote-ref-286)
287. See on this notion: Volf, “Forgiveness, Reconciliation, & Justice,” 38–41. Also: Kriesberg, “Reconciliation: Aspects, Growth, and Sequences,” 7. [↑](#footnote-ref-287)
288. De Gruchy, John W., *Reconciliation: Restoring Justice* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2002), 30–31. [↑](#footnote-ref-288)
289. Paul de Bruyne and Yves de Maeseneer, “Secret and Sacred Places: The Role of Art in Processes of Reconciliation,” 2, https://​lirias.kuleuven.be​/​bitstream/​123456789/​368657/​1/​De+Maeseneer+and+De+Bruyne+Final+Draft.pdf, accessed August 11, 2019 The article has been published also in a print form: Paul Bruyne and Yves de Maeseneer, “Secret and Sacred Places: The Role of Art in Processes of Reconciliation,” *Concilium: International Review of Theology*, no. 1 (2013). I am using the page numbers from the electronic version. [↑](#footnote-ref-289)
290. Bruyne and de Maeseneer, “Secret and Sacred Places,” 2. [↑](#footnote-ref-290)
291. Ibid., 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-291)
292. Ibid., 3–5. [↑](#footnote-ref-292)
293. Ibid., 5–6. [↑](#footnote-ref-293)
294. Appleby, “Toward A Theology and Praxis of Reconciliation,” 134. [↑](#footnote-ref-294)
295. Ibid., 133. [↑](#footnote-ref-295)
296. Ibid. In his further elaboration, Appleby remains in favor of reconciliation understood in a fuller sense with an important caveat—it must be re-conceptualized in such a way that it is sensitive to the concrete context of a post-conflict situation. The minimalist concept of peace is, in his view, inadequate “because it forfeits the advantages of reconciliation—the repaired and renewed relationships that are essential to the reconstruction of political life, the economy, and a strong civil society.” ibid., 135. Importantly, Appleby does not place reconciliation primarily in the field of politics, but in culture which includes religion and faith-traditions. [↑](#footnote-ref-296)
297. Heinrich Böll, “Der Preis der Versöhnung,” in *Cena pomirenja: Der Preis der Versöhnung,* by Heinrich Böll (Beograd: Fondacija Heinrich Böll, Regionalna Kancelarija za Jugoistočnu Evropu, 2008), 55–57. [↑](#footnote-ref-297)
298. Heinrich Böll, “Warnung vor Herrn X.,” in *Cena pomirenja: Der Preis der Versöhnung,* by Heinrich Böll (Beograd: Fondacija Heinrich Böll, Regionalna Kancelarija za Jugoistočnu Evropu, 2008).. [↑](#footnote-ref-298)
299. Rosoux, “Portée et limites du concept de réconciliation Une histoire à terminer,” 26. [↑](#footnote-ref-299)
300. Paz Rojas Baeza, Breaking the Human Link: The Medico-Psychiatric View of Impunity, in: Charles Harper (ed.), Impunity: An Ethical Perspective, Geneva, WCC 1997), p. 91, quoted in: Donald W. Shriver, Jr., “Long Road to Reconciliation: Some Moral Stepping-Stones,” in *After the Peace: Resistance and Reconciliation*, ed. Robert L. Rothstein (Boulder, CO: L. Rienner Publishers, 1999), 209. [↑](#footnote-ref-300)
301. Valérie Rosoux, “De l'ambivalence de la mémoire au lendemain d'un conflit,” in *Questions d'histoire contemporaine: Conflits, mémoires et identités*, ed. Laurence van Ypersele, *Quadrige. Manuels* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 2006), 215–20. [↑](#footnote-ref-301)
302. Yaacov Bar-Siman-Tov, “Dialectics between Stable Peace and Reconciliation,” in Bar-Siman-Tov, *From Conflict Resolution to Reconciliation*, 74. [↑](#footnote-ref-302)
303. A famous anti-Apartheid activist, Father Michael Lapsley said: “First we are asked to sacrifice justice. Now, in the name of reconciliation, some ask that we sacrifice truth. The burden of truth will not disappear. We demand to know. This much is not negotiable.” Quoted in: Charles Villa-Vicencio, “The Burden of Moral Guilt: Its Theological and Political Implications,” *Journal of Church and State* 39, no. 2 (1997): 237. [↑](#footnote-ref-303)
304. See: Odak and Benčić, “Jasenovac—A Past That Does Not Pass: The Presence of Jasenovac in Croatian and Serbian Collective Memory of Conflict,” 819–21. Also: Rosoux, “De l'ambivalence de la mémoire au lendemain d'un conflit,” 217–18. [↑](#footnote-ref-304)
305. Jeffrey C. Alexander, “Toward a Theory of Cultural Trauma,” in *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity*, ed. Jeffrey C. Alexander et al. (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2004).. For a reflection of good and bad uses of memory, see: Tzvetan Todorov, “Ni banalisation, ni sacralisation: Du bon and du mauvais usage de la mémoire,” *Le Monde diplomatique*, April 2001. [↑](#footnote-ref-305)
306. In Bar-Tal’s view, violence influences the construction of collective memories that penetrate every segment of life and support the creation of a culture of violence: “Violence often escalates the level of intergroup conflicts; when it continues for many years, violence has a crucial effect on the society as the accumulation and sedimentation of such experiences in collective memory penetrates every thread of the societal fabric. The collective memory of physical violence serves as a foundation for the development of a culture of violence. In turn, the culture of violence preserves the collective memory of the human losses, as well as the perceived cruelty, mistrust, inhumanity and evilness, of the enemy. By doing so, it rationalizes the continuation of the conflict and makes an imprint on the reality perceived by society members.” See: Bar-Tal, “Collective Memory of Physical Violence: its Contribution to the Culture of Violence,” 84. [↑](#footnote-ref-306)
307. The survey was conducted by the author, Stipe Odak, and Sabina Čehajic-Clancy in January 2017. [↑](#footnote-ref-307)
308. cf. The notion of the eternal Jew, der ewige Jude in the Nazi propaganda. [↑](#footnote-ref-308)
309. A good question can be whether the DZR represents a form of *reconciliation with something* rather than *reconciliation with someone* since it is a form of imagination, a form of acceptance of a certain vision. Of course, to the degree that it represents an acceptance of a certain image, it is an acceptance of *something*. However, that *something* is not just a generic state of affairs, but a vision of a specific *someone*. What differentiates *reconciliation with something* from *reconciliation with someone* is engagement with a specific person or group. In the first case, reconciliation was understood as a quasi-fatalistic acceptance of a certain state of affairs imposed on people. In the second case, we talk about engagement with a specific someone, and that engagement can vary in degree from minimalist to maximalist. Therefore, the DZR ties with the second case, since it always assumes a very specific someone. [↑](#footnote-ref-309)
310. David (Roman Catholic Church), December 29, 2015. [↑](#footnote-ref-310)
311. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-311)
312. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-312)
313. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-313)
314. Luke 17:33. [↑](#footnote-ref-314)
315. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-315)
316. Mirza (Islamic Community), November 24, 2016. [↑](#footnote-ref-316)
317. Josip (Roman Catholic Church), September 29, 2015 He mentioned this in the context of the question related to the “purification of memory.” He expressed his suspicion towards the concept because there is, according to him, too much politicking involved. In his view, not all groups are equally guilty. For him, Croats are too often accused and should not be asked to continue apologizing for historical tragedies while the others do not acknowledge the suffering of the Croatian people. [↑](#footnote-ref-317)
318. Haris (Islamic Community), November 29, 2015. [↑](#footnote-ref-318)
319. Tomislav (Roman Catholic Church), November 6, 2015. [↑](#footnote-ref-319)
320. Tarik (Islamic Community), January 23, 2017. [↑](#footnote-ref-320)
321. Tomislav (Roman Catholic Church), November 6, 2015. [↑](#footnote-ref-321)
322. Željko (Roman Catholic Church), January 30, 2017. [↑](#footnote-ref-322)
323. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-323)
324. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-324)
325. Velimir (Serbian Orthodox Church), January 24, 2017. [↑](#footnote-ref-325)
326. For the details see: International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia, “Kunarac et al. (IT-96-23 & 23/1),” http://​www.icty.org​/​case/​kunarac/​4, accessed August 11, 2019. [↑](#footnote-ref-326)
327. Bojan (Serbian Orthodox Church), December 15, 2015. [↑](#footnote-ref-327)
328. Hamza (Islamic Community), November 21, 2016. [↑](#footnote-ref-328)
329. Slaven (Roman Catholic Church), November 19, 2015. [↑](#footnote-ref-329)
330. Nedim (Islamic Community), December 1, 2015. [↑](#footnote-ref-330)
331. Cf. Jean-Michel Chaumont, *La concurrence des victimes: Génocide, identité, reconnaissance* (Paris: Découverte, 2010). [↑](#footnote-ref-331)
332. Slaven (Roman Catholic Church), November 19, 2015. [↑](#footnote-ref-332)
333. Drago (Roman Catholic Church), November 7, 2015. [↑](#footnote-ref-333)
334. Mirza (Islamic Community), November 24, 2016. [↑](#footnote-ref-334)
335. Harun (Islamic Community), October 24, 2015. [↑](#footnote-ref-335)
336. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-336)
337. See: Sunnah.com, https://​sunnah.com​/​bukhari/​78/​160, accessed August 11, 2019. [↑](#footnote-ref-337)
338. Thomas P. Hughes, *Dictionary of Islam* (New Delhi: Asian Educational Services, 1955), 21. [↑](#footnote-ref-338)
339. Osama Bin Laden and Brad K. Berner, *Jihad: Bin Laden in His Own Words: Declarations, Interviews, and Speeches* (New Delhi: Peacock Books, 2007), 211. [↑](#footnote-ref-339)
340. Fawaz A. Gerges, *The far Enemy: Why Jihad Went Global* (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 149. [↑](#footnote-ref-340)
341. Jakov (Roman Catholic Church), November 29, 2015. [↑](#footnote-ref-341)
342. Vasilije (Serbian Orthodox Church), September 18, 2016. [↑](#footnote-ref-342)
343. Mirza (Islamic Community), November 24, 2016. [↑](#footnote-ref-343)
344. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-344)
345. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-345)
346. Edin (Islamic Community), December 8, 2016. [↑](#footnote-ref-346)
347. Valérie Rosoux, private communication. [↑](#footnote-ref-347)
348. Vasilije (Serbian Orthodox Church), September 18, 2016. [↑](#footnote-ref-348)
349. Hrvoje (Roman Catholic Church), October 15, 2015. [↑](#footnote-ref-349)
350. Željko (Roman Catholic Church), January 30, 2017. [↑](#footnote-ref-350)
351. Pavle (Serbian Orthodox Church), November 21, 2016. [↑](#footnote-ref-351)
352. Ljudevit (Roman Catholic Church), September 18, 2015. [↑](#footnote-ref-352)
353. This falls into a broader debate about the appropriateness of religious symbols. The most famous controversy has been the location of a Carmelite monastery and a cross near Auschwitz I. Cf.: Geneviève Zubrzycki, *The Crosses of Auschwitz: Nationalism and Religion in Post-Communist Poland* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 178–83. [↑](#footnote-ref-353)
354. “N1 Pressing: Vladika Grigorije (26.4.2017),” 00:25:20-00:26:47, https://​www.youtube.com​/​watch​?​v=​Tv2tm-G-bJo, accessed August 11, 2019 In original: “Ja bih se usudio reći da se ti ljudi gađaju tim simbolima i da je to strašno. Baš smo jučer na ručku nakon svega pričali o tome kakva bi trebalo obilježja stavit na ova mjesta na kojima smo bili (…) U Hirošimi, čini mi se da je netko ispričao, da ima jedna ploča na zemlji. I sve to prošeš gdje su ubijeni (…) onda dođe taj čovjek do tog kamena koji je na zemlji koji je, malte ne nevidljiv, i svaki ko hoće da se pokloni tim žrtvama dužan je da dodirne čelom taj kamen. Ja sam pomislio da je to u stvari pravi simbol. Ali da podigneš krst na vrh planine ili križ na vrh brda ili, ne znam ni ja šta još se može da podigne gdje, to u stvari kao da želiš da onom drugom nešto zabodeš u oko. A to nema veze sa ovim što zovemo vjera, religija, ljubav, pažnja, briga za drugoga.” [↑](#footnote-ref-354)
355. Jakov (Roman Catholic Church), November 29, 2015. [↑](#footnote-ref-355)
356. Konstantin (Serbian Orthodox Church), December 8, 2016. [↑](#footnote-ref-356)
357. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-357)
358. Enis (Islamic Community), October 6, 2016. [↑](#footnote-ref-358)
359. Hamza (Islamic Community), November 21, 2016. [↑](#footnote-ref-359)
360. Konstantin (Serbian Orthodox Church), December 8, 2016. [↑](#footnote-ref-360)
361. Željko (Roman Catholic Church), January 30, 2017. [↑](#footnote-ref-361)
362. Haris (Islamic Community), November 29, 2015. [↑](#footnote-ref-362)
363. Slaven (Roman Catholic Church), November 19, 2015. [↑](#footnote-ref-363)
364. Velimir (Serbian Orthodox Church), January 24, 2017. [↑](#footnote-ref-364)
365. Drago (Roman Catholic Church), November 7, 2015. [↑](#footnote-ref-365)
366. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-366)
367. Andrej (Serbian Orthodox Church), December 1, 2015. [↑](#footnote-ref-367)
368. Željko (Roman Catholic Church), January 30, 2017. [↑](#footnote-ref-368)
369. Jakov (Roman Catholic Church), November 29, 2015. [↑](#footnote-ref-369)
370. Konstantin (Serbian Orthodox Church), December 8, 2016. [↑](#footnote-ref-370)
371. Cf. Luke 10: 25-37: On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. “Teacher,” he asked, “what must I do to inherit eternal life?” “What is written in the Law?” he replied. “How do you read it?” He answered, “‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind’[a]; and, ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’[b]” “You have answered correctly,” Jesus replied. “Do this and you will live.” But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?” In reply Jesus said: “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he was attacked by robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead. A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, brought him to an inn and took care of him. 35 The next day he took out two denarii[c] and gave them to the innkeeper. ‘Look after him,’ he said, ‘and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.’ “Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?” The expert in the law replied, “The one who had mercy on him.” Jesus told him, “Go and do likewise.” [↑](#footnote-ref-371)
372. Edin (Islamic Community), December 8, 2016. [↑](#footnote-ref-372)
373. Damjan (Orthodox Church), November 4, 2015 (Check) [↑](#footnote-ref-373)
374. Bogdan (Serbian Orthodox Church), November 6, 2016. [↑](#footnote-ref-374)
375. Damjan (Orthodox Church), November 4, 2015. [↑](#footnote-ref-375)
376. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-376)
377. Edin (Islamic Community), December 8, 2016. [↑](#footnote-ref-377)
378. Miloš (Serbian Orthodox Church), October 6, 2016. [↑](#footnote-ref-378)
379. Željko (Roman Catholic Church), January 30, 2017. [↑](#footnote-ref-379)
380. Danijel (Roman Catholic Church), November 14, 2015. [↑](#footnote-ref-380)
381. For a chronology and discussions about the event, see: Luka Pavlović, “Mostar: Prilog dijalogu između kršćanstva i islama,” https://​www.md-tm.ba​/​clanci/​mostar-​prilog-​dijalogu-​izmedu-​krscanstva-​i-​islama, accessed August 11, 2019. [↑](#footnote-ref-381)
382. See: Željko Ivanković, *Identitet i druge opsesije* (Rijeka: Ex libris, 2012), 111. [↑](#footnote-ref-382)
383. Karakter.ba, “Otvoreno pismo kralju Stjepanu Tomaševiću: Šta ćemo sa ovim srednjim školama u Jajcu?,” http://​www.karakter.ba​/​drustvo/​450-​otvoreno-​pismo-​kralju-​stjepanu-​tomasevicu-​sta-​cemo-​sa-​ovim-​srednjim-​skolama-​u-​jajcu, accessed August 11, 2019. [↑](#footnote-ref-383)
384. Karakter.ba, “Kralj Stjepan Tomašević odgovorio nakon mjesec dana: Neće biti nove škole!,” http://​www.karakter.ba​/​drustvo/​466-​kralj-​stjepan-​tomasevic-​odgovorio-​nakon-​mjesec-​dana-​nece-​biti-​nove-​skole, accessed August 11, 2019. [↑](#footnote-ref-384)
385. “[A] set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behaviour by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with a suitable historic past”. See: Eric Hobsbawm, “Introduction: Inventing Traditions,” in *The Invention of Tradition*, ed. Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 1. [↑](#footnote-ref-385)
386. Ivanković, *Identitet i druge opsesije*, 120 (My translation) [↑](#footnote-ref-386)
387. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-387)
388. Radio Slobodna Evropa, “Srednjoškolci u Jajcu ostaju zajedno: Vlasti odustale od nove škole,” https://​www.slobodnaevropa.org​/​a/​srednjoskolci-​u-​jajcu-​ostaju-​zajedno-​u-​klupama/​28560287.html, accessed August 11, 2019. [↑](#footnote-ref-388)
389. Parts of this sections have been published in the following article: Odak and Benčić, “Jasenovac—A Past That Does Not Pass: The Presence of Jasenovac in Croatian and Serbian Collective Memory of Conflict.”. [↑](#footnote-ref-389)
390. International Court of Justice, “Application of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (Croatia V. Serbia): Preliminary Objections: Summary of the Judgment of 18 November 2008,” http://​www.icj-cij.org​/​docket/​files/​118/​14913.pdf, accessed August 11, 2019. [↑](#footnote-ref-390)
391. The complete written proceedings can be found on the following page: International Court of Justice, “Application of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (Croatia V. Serbia): Written Proceedings,” http://​www.icj-cij.org​/​docket/​index.php​?​p1=​3&​p2=​3&​k=​73&​case=​118&​code=​cry&​p3=​1, accessed August 11, 2019. [↑](#footnote-ref-391)
392. Republic of Croatia, “Case Concerning the Application of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (Croatia V. Serbia): Memorial of the Republic of Croatia,” Volume 1, 39, http://​www.icj-cij.org​/​docket/​files/​118/​18172.pdf, accessed August 11, 2019. [↑](#footnote-ref-392)
393. Cf. Newspaper article “Nuclear Bomb in Hand” (“Atomska bomba u ruci”) *Pobjeda,* 27 September 1991: “Don’t fool yourself into thinking that a truce of some kind can be signed and that the Serbian people in Krajina can go through another genocide. There will be no more Jasenovac! We will not be sheep. We will be, most of all, wolves!” Quoted from: Republic of Croatia, “Case Concerning the Application of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (Croatia V. Serbia): Memorial of the Republic of Croatia,” Annexes, General Annexes; Volume 4, 98, http://​www.icj-cij.org​/​docket/​files/​118/​18182.pdf, accessed August 11, 2019. [↑](#footnote-ref-393)
394. C.f. Annex 31, Witness Statement of K. M.: “I was imprisoned on 2nd September 1991 (…) on Sunday 6th October 1991 at 1300 hrs, taken by bus in which there was 27 prisoners, to Begejci. (…) During the journey, we had to sit facing the front side, and if someone moved, he would get beaten. All the way, they threatened us that we were going to the new Jasenovac, that they would kill us.” Quoted from: Republic of Croatia, “Case Concerning the Application of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (Croatia V. Serbia): Memorial of the Republic of Croatia,” Annexes, Regional Files; Volume 1, Part 1, 107, http://​www.icj-cij.org​/​docket/​files/​118/​18174.pdf, accessed August 11, 2019. [↑](#footnote-ref-394)
395. Republic of Serbia, “Case Concerning the Application of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (Croatia V. Serbia): Counter-Memorial Submitted by the Republic of Serbia,” Volume 1, 145, http://​www.icj-cij.org​/​docket/​files/​118/​18188.pdf, accessed August 11, 2019. [↑](#footnote-ref-395)
396. Ibid., 144. [↑](#footnote-ref-396)
397. Republic of Croatia, “Case Concerning the Application of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (Croatia V. Serbia): Reply of the Republic of Croatia; Volume 1,” 50–51, http://​www.icj-cij.org​/​docket/​files/​118/​18198.pdf, accessed August 11, 2019. [↑](#footnote-ref-397)
398. David Glowsky et al., “A Global Collective Memory? Results from a Quantitative Pilot Study,” *Comparativ* 2 (2008). [↑](#footnote-ref-398)
399. James H. Liu, “Social Representations of History: Preliminary Notes on Content and Consequences Around the Pacific Rim,” *International Journal of Intercultural Relations* 23, no. 2 (1999), https://doi.org/10.1016/S0147-1767(98)00036-4. [↑](#footnote-ref-399)
400. James H. Liu, “Social Representations of Events and People in World History Across 12 Cultures,” *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology* 36, no. 2 (2005), https://doi.org/10.1177/0022022104272900. The study was done on a student population from Britain, France, Germany, the United States, New Zealand, Australia, the Philippines, Malaysia, Japan, Singapore, Taiwan, and Hong Kong. [↑](#footnote-ref-400)
401. This time the same methodology was followed in China, India, Russia, Brazil, Indonesia, East Timor, Turkey, Poland, Hungary, Ukraine, Spain, and Portugal. James H. Liu et al., “Representing World History in the 21st Century: the Impact of 9/11, the Iraq War, and the Nation-State on Dynamics of Collective Remembering,” *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology* 40, no. 4 (2009), https://doi.org/10.1177/0022022109335557. [↑](#footnote-ref-401)
402. Cf. Miroslav Volf, “Love’s Memory: Redemptive Remebering,” 75, http://​www.ptsem.edu​/​uploadedFiles/​School\_​of\_​Christian\_​Vocation\_​and\_​Mission/​Institute\_​for\_​Youth\_​Ministry/​Princeton\_​Lectures/​Volf-​Redemptive.pdf, accessed June 10, 2013. [↑](#footnote-ref-402)
403. Elie Wiesel, *Night* (New York, NY: Hill and Wang, 2006), xv, Translated by Marion Wiesel, accessed April 17, 2014. (italics in original) [↑](#footnote-ref-403)
404. Volf, “Love’s Memory,” 75. [↑](#footnote-ref-404)
405. James H. Liu and Denis J. Hilton, “How the Past Weighs on the Present: Social Representations of History and Their Role in Identity Politics,” *British Journal of Social Psychology* 44, no. 4 (2005): 550, https://doi.org/10.1348/014466605X27162. [↑](#footnote-ref-405)
406. Craig W. Blatz and Michael Ross, “Historical Memories,” in *Memory in Mind and Culture*, ed. Pascal Boyer and James V. Wertsch (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 228. [↑](#footnote-ref-406)
407. Original in French available at: Ernest Renan, “Qu'est-ce qu'une nation ?,” section III, http://​classiques.uqac.ca​/​classiques/​renan\_​ernest/​qu\_​est\_​ce\_​une\_​nation/​qu\_​est\_​ce\_​une\_​nation\_​texte.html, accessed August 11, 2019. [↑](#footnote-ref-407)
408. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-408)
409. Monika Palmberger, “Making and Breaking Boundaries: Discourses and Memory Politics in Bosnia and Herzegovina,” in *The Western Balkans: A European Challenge: on the Decennial of the Dayton Peace Agreement*, ed. Milan Bufon (Koper: Založba Annales, 2006), 531. [↑](#footnote-ref-409)
410. Alexander, “Toward a Theory of Cultural Trauma,” 1. [↑](#footnote-ref-410)
411. Ibid., 10. [↑](#footnote-ref-411)
412. Ibid., 8. [↑](#footnote-ref-412)
413. Blatz and Ross, “Historical Memories,” 230. [↑](#footnote-ref-413)
414. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-414)
415. Aleksandar Hemon, “In Sarajevo, A Dancer in the Dark,” http://​www.newyorker.com​/​news/​news-​desk/​in-​sarajevo-​a-​dancer-​in-​the-​dark, accessed August 11, 2019. [↑](#footnote-ref-415)
416. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-416)
417. Susan Sontag, *Against Interpretation and Other Essays*, *Penguin Modern Classics* (London: Penguin, 2013), 124. [↑](#footnote-ref-417)
418. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-418)
419. Ibid., 125. [↑](#footnote-ref-419)
420. David B. MacDonald, *Balkan Holocausts?: Serbian and Croatian Victim-Centred Propaganda and the War in Yugoslavia* (Manchester, and New York: Manchester University Press, 2002), 177–78. [↑](#footnote-ref-420)
421. Patrick Devine-Wright, “A Theoretical Overview of Memory and Conflict,” in Cairns and Roe, *The Role of Memories in Ethnic Conflict*, 16. [↑](#footnote-ref-421)
422. Pierre Nora, “History and Memory: Between the Personal and the Public,” 00:10:23-00:10:43, https://​www.youtube.com​/​watch​?​v=​5Zemgzzmg80, accessed August 11, 2019. [↑](#footnote-ref-422)
423. Pierre Nora, *Les lieux de mémoire* (Paris: Gallimard, 1984). [↑](#footnote-ref-423)
424. Pascal Bruckner, *The Temptation of Innocence: Living in the Age of Entitlement* (New York: Algora, 2000), 247. [↑](#footnote-ref-424)
425. Ibid., 248. [↑](#footnote-ref-425)
426. Ibid., 249. [↑](#footnote-ref-426)
427. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-427)
428. Todorov, “Ni banalisation, ni sacralisation,” 10–11. [↑](#footnote-ref-428)
429. Ibid., 10. (My translation. In original: “Frappé par la maladie d’Alzheimer, l’individu sans mémoire perd son identité, cesse d’être lui-même. Il n’existe pas non plus de peuple sans mémoire commune. Pour se reconnaître comme tel, le groupe doit se choisir un ensemble d’exploits et de persécutions passés, qui permet de l’identifier. Mais de ce que le recours au passé est inévitable il ne s’ensuit pas qu’il est toujours bon. La mémoire est comme le langage, un instrument en lui-même neutre, qui peut être mis au service d’un noble combat comme des plus noirs desseins.”) [↑](#footnote-ref-429)
430. Volf, “Kako ispravno pamtiti zlodjela: o sjećanju žrtava i počinitelja,,” 22 [↑](#footnote-ref-430)
431. Miroslav Volf, “Love’s Memory: The Role of Memory in Contemporary Culture,” 59–60, http://​www.ptsem.edu​/​uploadedFiles/​School\_​of\_​Christian\_​Vocation\_​and\_​Mission/​Institute\_​for\_​Youth\_​Ministry/​Princeton\_​Lectures/​Volf-​Redemptive.pdf, accessed June 10, 2013. [↑](#footnote-ref-431)
432. Quoted in: Volf, “Love’s Memory,” 80–81. [↑](#footnote-ref-432)
433. Bar-Tal, “Collective Memory of Physical Violence: its Contribution to the Culture of Violence,” 84. [↑](#footnote-ref-433)
434. David McMillan, “Rewriting Our Stories: Narrative, Identity and Forgiveness,” in *Forgiving and Remembering in Northern Ireland: Approaches to Conflict Resolution,* by Graham Spencer (London: Continuum, 2011), 169. [↑](#footnote-ref-434)
435. Kimberly S. Theidon, *Entre prójimos: El conflicto armado interno y la política de la reconciliación en el Perú*, vol. 24 of *Estudios de la sociedad rural* (Lima, Perú: IEP Ediciones, 2004). [↑](#footnote-ref-435)
436. Paola Ugaz, “Entrevista exclusiva con Kimberly Theidon, la antropóloga que estudió el mal de “la teta asustada,” http://​www.terra.com.pe​/​noticias/​articulo/​html/​act1659267.htm, accessed August 11, 2019. [↑](#footnote-ref-436)
437. Researchers use different terms, such as “multi-generational,” “trans-generational,” or “cross-generational” to describe the process of trauma transmission over a single generation. Despite the methodological difficulties that are involved in the investigation of traumatic effects that cannot be linked to an immediate cause, there are clear indications that psychological and social problems of the “second generation” cannot be simply coincidental. Cf. John J. Sigal and Morton Weinfeld, “Control of Aggression in Adult Children of Survivors of the Nazi Persecution,” *Journal of Abnormal Psychology* 94, no. 4 (1985), https://doi.org/10.1037/0021-843X.94.4.556., Irit Felsen, “Transgenerational Transmission of Effects of the Holocaust: the North American Research Perspective,” in *International Handbook of Multigenerational Legacies of Trauma*, ed. Yael Danieli, *The Plenum Series on Stress and Coping* (New York: Plenum Press, 1998)., Joseph Lowin, *Hebrewspeak: An Insider’s Guide to the Way Jews Think* (Northvale, NJ: J. Aronson, 1995). Besides this diachronic expansion of trauma, Dixon speaks about “peripheral victims” of a trauma, which are generated through indirect involvement with catastrophic events. Cf. Penny Dixon, “Vicarious Victims of a Maritime Disaster,” *British Journal of Guidance & Counselling* 19, no. 1 (1991), https://doi.org/10.1080/03069889108253586. [↑](#footnote-ref-437)
438. Cynthia C. Wesley-Esquimaux and Magdalena Smolewski, *Historic Trauma and Aboriginal Healing*, *The Aboriginal Healing Foundation Research Series* (Ottawa: Aboriginal Healing Foundation, 2004), iv. [↑](#footnote-ref-438)
439. Aboriginal Healing Foundation, *Program handbook*, 2nd ed. (Ottawa: The Foundation, 1999), A5. [↑](#footnote-ref-439)
440. Marianne Hirsch, “Surviving Images: Holocaust Photographs and the Work of Postmemory,” *The Yale Journal of Criticism* 14, no. 1 (2001): 9–10, https://doi.org/10.1353/yale.2001.0008. [↑](#footnote-ref-440)
441. Natan P.F. Kellermann, “Transmission of Holocaust Trauma,” 5, http://​www.yadvashem.org​/​yv/​en/​education/​languages/​dutch/​pdf/​kellermann.pdf, accessed May 11, 2013. [↑](#footnote-ref-441)
442. Friedrich W. Nietzsche, “On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life,” in *Untimely Meditations,* by Friedrich W. Nietzsche, ed. R. J. Hollingdale (Cambridge, and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 63. [↑](#footnote-ref-442)
443. Cf. Andreas Huyssen, “International Human Rights and the Politics of Memory: Limits and Challenges,” *Criticism* 53, no. 4 (2011): 129. [↑](#footnote-ref-443)
444. Cf. Walter Benjamin, “Über den Begriff der Geschichte,” in *Erzählen: Schriften zur Theorie der Narration und zur literarischen Prosa,* by Walter Benjamin (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2007), 133. [↑](#footnote-ref-444)
445. For an overview, see: Hayden V. White, “The Burden of History,” *History and Theory* 5, no. 2 (1966), https://doi.org/10.2307/2504510. [↑](#footnote-ref-445)
446. Marc Augé, *Les formes de l'oubli* (Paris: Payot & Rivages, 1998), 122. [↑](#footnote-ref-446)
447. “Se souvenir ou oublier, c’est faire un travail de jardinier, sélectionner, élaguer. Les souvenirs sont comme les plantes : il y en a qu’il faut éliminer très rapidement pour aider les autres à s’épanouir, à se transformer, à fleurir.” ibid., 24. [↑](#footnote-ref-447)
448. Aleida Assmann, *Der Lange Schatten der Vergangenheit: Erinnerungskultur Und Geschichtspolitik* (München: C. H. Beck, 2007), 279. (My translation. In original: “Das universale Bild für diesen Bann einer Vergangenheit, die nicht vergeht’, ist der Schatten. Wenn wir fragen, wie lange dieser Schatten wohl noch anhält, finden wir darauf eine Antwort bei Friedrich Nietzsche: Was nicht aufhört weh zu tun, bleibt im Gedächtnis.”) [↑](#footnote-ref-448)
449. “Verstehen wir unter ‘Schatten’ die nachwirkende Präsenz der traumatischen Vergangenheit, so werden wir mit ihm leben müssen.” Ibid., 278. [↑](#footnote-ref-449)
450. Marie-Claire Lavabre, *Le fil rouge: Sociologie de la mémoire communiste* (Paris: Presses de la Fondation nationale des sciences politiques, 1994).; Quoted in: Rosoux, “De l'ambivalence de la mémoire au lendemain d'un conflit.”. [↑](#footnote-ref-450)
451. Robert Schreiter, “Establishing a Shared Identity: the Role of the Healing of Memories and of Narrative,” in *Peace and Reconciliation: In Search of Shared Identity*, ed. Greg Hoyland, Kim, Sebastian C. H and Pauline Kollontai (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008), 10. [↑](#footnote-ref-451)
452. Ibid., 9–10. [↑](#footnote-ref-452)
453. Darko Đogo, “Would a Wall of Separation Help? Constitutional Position and the Social Role of Religious Communities in Bosnia-Herzegovina,” *Danubius* 32 (2014): 70–71. [↑](#footnote-ref-453)
454. Cf. Katherine Verdery, *The Political Lives of Dead Bodies: Reburial and Postsocialist Change*, *The Harriman Lectures* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999). [↑](#footnote-ref-454)
455. Albert Camus, *Le mythe de Sisyphe* (Paris: Gallimard, 1942), 47. [↑](#footnote-ref-455)
456. Andrew S. Bergerson et al., *The Happy Burden of History: From Sovereign Impunity to Responsible Selfhood* (Berlin, New York: de Gruyter, 2011), 31. [↑](#footnote-ref-456)
457. Paul Ricoeur, “La crise de la conscience historique et l'europe,” 3, www.fondsricoeur.fr/uploads/medias/articles\_pr/la-crise-de-la-conscience-historique-et-l-europe.pdf, accessed August 11, 2019. [↑](#footnote-ref-457)
458. Ibid. (My translation. In original: “La mémoire-répétition résiste à la critique; la mémoire-souvenir est fondamentalement une mémoire-critique. On comprend alors que certains peuples souffrent d’excès de mémoire et d’autres de défaut de mémoire. Car ce que les uns cultivent avec une délectation morbide et ce que les autres fuient avec mauvaise conscience, c’est la même mémoire-répétition. Les uns aiment s’y perdre, les autres ont peur d’y être engloutis. Mais les uns et les autres souffrent du même déficit de mémoire critique; en particulier ils n’acceptent pas l’épreuve de l’histoire documentaire avec sa phase nécessaire de distanciation et d’objectivation.”) [↑](#footnote-ref-458)
459. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-459)
460. Ibid. (My translation. In original: “Nous sommes les personnages des récits que les autres racontent. (…) C’est la façon la plus efficace de raconter autrement: passer par le récit des autres pour nous comprendre nous-mêmes, lire notre histoire avec les yeux d’historiens appartenant à d’autres peuples que le nôtre, voire à d’autres grandes cultures que celles qui ont participé au tissage évoqué plus haut entre les cultures fondatrices de l’Europe contemporaine, voilà la tâche immense à laquelle doit s’atteler une thérapie de la mémoire européenne. L’échange des mémoires dont nous venons de parler consiste en une véritable migration, et migration croisée: nous apprenons à nous transporter dans les mémoires des autres et à habiter leurs récits; nous accueillons comme des migrants les souvenirs qui nourrissent la conscience historique des hôtes que nous recevons chez nous.) [↑](#footnote-ref-460)
461. Ivan Šarčević, “Manje spomenika,” in *Zečevi, zmije i munafici,* by Ivan Šarčević (Sarajevo: Synopsis, 2014), 44. (My translation) [↑](#footnote-ref-461)
462. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-462)
463. Ibid., 45. [↑](#footnote-ref-463)
464. Ivan Šarčević, “Muke po identitetu,” in *Zečevi, zmije i munafici,* by Ivan Šarčević (Sarajevo: Synopsis, 2014), 56. (My translation) [↑](#footnote-ref-464)
465. Ivan Šarčević, “Srebrenica - simbol paradoksa,” in *Zečevi, zmije i munafici,* by Ivan Šarčević (Sarajevo: Synopsis, 2014), 60–61. (My translation) [↑](#footnote-ref-465)
466. Metz, *Faith in History and Society*, 102. [↑](#footnote-ref-466)
467. Martha C. Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought: The Intelligence of Emotions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 301. [↑](#footnote-ref-467)
468. Ibid., 302. [↑](#footnote-ref-468)
469. Ibid., 329. [↑](#footnote-ref-469)
470. Ibid., 333. [↑](#footnote-ref-470)
471. Ibid., 321. [↑](#footnote-ref-471)
472. Ibid., 327. [↑](#footnote-ref-472)
473. Ivana Franović, “Ratni veterani u procesu konstruktivnog suočavanja s prošlošću,” https://​nenasilje.org​/​publikacije/​pdf/​articles/​Ratni\_​veterani2015.pdf, accessed August 11, 2019. [↑](#footnote-ref-473)
474. Jürgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God: The Cross of Christ as the Foundation and Criticism of Christian Theology*, 1st ed. (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1993), ix. [↑](#footnote-ref-474)
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476. For an inspiring reflection on this episode from Orwell’s novel, see: Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1996), 233–74. [↑](#footnote-ref-476)
477. Dejan (Serbian Orthodox Church), November 4, 2016. [↑](#footnote-ref-477)
478. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-478)
479. Edin (Islamic Community), December 8, 2016. [↑](#footnote-ref-479)
480. Mladen (Roman Catholic Church), January 8, 2016. [↑](#footnote-ref-480)
481. Tarik (Islamic Community), January 23, 2017. [↑](#footnote-ref-481)
482. Yutel was a Yugoslav TV channel. [↑](#footnote-ref-482)
483. Vasilije (Serbian Orthodox Church), September 18, 2016. [↑](#footnote-ref-483)
484. Boško (Serbian Orthodox Church), January 29, 2016. [↑](#footnote-ref-484)
485. Tarik (Islamic Community), January 23, 2017. [↑](#footnote-ref-485)
486. Ilija (Serbian Orthodox Church), January 30, 2016. [↑](#footnote-ref-486)
487. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-487)
488. Boško (Serbian Orthodox Church), January 29, 2016. [↑](#footnote-ref-488)
489. Velimir (Serbian Orthodox Church), January 24, 2017. [↑](#footnote-ref-489)
490. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-490)
491. Adis (Islamic Community), October 20, 2016. [↑](#footnote-ref-491)
492. Ivan (Roman Catholic Church), November 26, 2015. [↑](#footnote-ref-492)
493. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-493)
494. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-494)
495. Ramiz (Islamic Community), October 18, 2016. [↑](#footnote-ref-495)
496. Zvonimir (Roman Catholic Church), November 4, 2016. [↑](#footnote-ref-496)
497. Orhan (Islamic Community), February 23, 2016. [↑](#footnote-ref-497)
498. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-498)
499. Hamza (Islamic Community), November 21, 2016. [↑](#footnote-ref-499)
500. Pavle (Serbian Orthodox Church), November 21, 2016. [↑](#footnote-ref-500)
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503. Harun (Islamic Community), October 24, 2015. [↑](#footnote-ref-503)
504. Josip (Roman Catholic Church), September 29, 2015. [↑](#footnote-ref-504)
505. Danijel (Roman Catholic Church), November 14, 2015. [↑](#footnote-ref-505)
506. Ljudevit (Roman Catholic Church), September 18, 2015. [↑](#footnote-ref-506)
507. Marijan (Roman Catholic Church), October 5, 2016. [↑](#footnote-ref-507)
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510. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-510)
511. Bogdan (Serbian Orthodox Church), November 6, 2016. [↑](#footnote-ref-511)
512. Nebojša (Serbian Orthodox Church), October 14, 2016. [↑](#footnote-ref-512)
513. Drago (Roman Catholic Church), November 7, 2015. [↑](#footnote-ref-513)
514. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-514)
515. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-515)
516. Harun (Islamic Community), October 24, 2015. [↑](#footnote-ref-516)
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518. Konstantin (Serbian Orthodox Church), December 8, 2016. [↑](#footnote-ref-518)
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524. Hrvoje (Roman Catholic Church), October 15, 2015. [↑](#footnote-ref-524)
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527. Velimir (Serbian Orthodox Church), January 24, 2017. [↑](#footnote-ref-527)
528. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-528)
529. Zaim (Islamic Community), November 23, 2016. [↑](#footnote-ref-529)
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531. Haris (Islamic Community), November 29, 2015. [↑](#footnote-ref-531)
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535. Damjan (Orthodox Church), November 4, 2015. [↑](#footnote-ref-535)
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538. Velimir (Serbian Orthodox Church), January 24, 2017. [↑](#footnote-ref-538)
539. Ilija (Serbian Orthodox Church), January 30, 2016. [↑](#footnote-ref-539)
540. Boško (Serbian Orthodox Church), January 29, 2016. [↑](#footnote-ref-540)
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550. Ibid. (My translation) [↑](#footnote-ref-550)
551. Enis (Islamic Community), October 6, 2016. [↑](#footnote-ref-551)
552. Ljudevit (Roman Catholic Church), September 18, 2015. [↑](#footnote-ref-552)
553. Haris (Islamic Community), November 29, 2015. [↑](#footnote-ref-553)
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555. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-555)
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557. Jakov (Roman Catholic Church), November 29, 2015. [↑](#footnote-ref-557)
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560. Bojan (Serbian Orthodox Church), December 15, 2015. [↑](#footnote-ref-560)
561. “Srebrenica-Skorpioni, Strijeljanje Bosnjackih civila juli 1995 Komplet operacija!,” https://​www.youtube.com​/​watch​?​v=​1U2\_pFnne50, accessed August 11, 2019 (My translation) [↑](#footnote-ref-561)
562. Ibid. (My translation) [↑](#footnote-ref-562)
563. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-563)
564. Fond za humanitarno pravo, “Dokumentarni film Škorpioni,” https://​www.youtube.com​/​watch​?​v=​nqsDRw04Z6U, accessed August 11, 2019 (My translation) [↑](#footnote-ref-564)
565. Konstantin (Serbian Orthodox Church), December 8, 2016. [↑](#footnote-ref-565)
566. Sara Manisera, “The Chetnik priest: 'I'm still in a mood to kill',” http://​www.aljazeera.com​/​indepth/​features/​2016/​04/​chetnik-​priest-​mood-​kill-​160425134050156.html, accessed August 11, 2019. [↑](#footnote-ref-566)
567. Sara Manisera, Email to Stipe Odak, April 11, 2017. [↑](#footnote-ref-567)
568. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-568)
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577. He refers to the New Testament parable of apostles, who are called “fisherman of people.” (Cf. Matthew 4:19) [↑](#footnote-ref-577)
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579. Pavle (Serbian Orthodox Church), November 21, 2016. [↑](#footnote-ref-579)
580. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-580)
581. Bogdan (Serbian Orthodox Church), November 6, 2016. [↑](#footnote-ref-581)
582. Bojan (Serbian Orthodox Church), December 15, 2015. [↑](#footnote-ref-582)
583. Željko (Roman Catholic Church), January 30, 2017 Dejan (Serbian Orthodox Church), November 4, 2016. [↑](#footnote-ref-583)
584. Ibid. ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-584)
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586. Jasmin (Islamic Community), November 23, 2016. [↑](#footnote-ref-586)
587. Drago (Roman Catholic Church), November 7, 2015. [↑](#footnote-ref-587)
588. Pavle (Serbian Orthodox Church), November 21, 2016. [↑](#footnote-ref-588)
589. John 15:13. [↑](#footnote-ref-589)
590. Bojan (Serbian Orthodox Church), December 15, 2015. [↑](#footnote-ref-590)
591. Miloš (Serbian Orthodox Church), October 6, 2016. [↑](#footnote-ref-591)
592. John 15: 12-14. [↑](#footnote-ref-592)
593. John 15: 18-20. [↑](#footnote-ref-593)
594. Danijel (Roman Catholic Church), November 14, 2015. [↑](#footnote-ref-594)
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596. Petar (Roman Catholic Church), October 4, 2016. [↑](#footnote-ref-596)
597. Jakov (Roman Catholic Church), November 29, 2015. [↑](#footnote-ref-597)
598. The declaration was signed by His Holiness Patriach Pavle (representing The Holy Synod of the Serbian Orthodox Church), H.E. al-hajj Jakub efendi Selimoski (Rais Ulema of Sarajevo), H.E. The Most Reverend Vinko Puljic (Archbishop and Metropolitan of Sarajevo), and Rabbi Arthur Schneier (President, Appeal of Conscience Foundation). Among other things, the Declaration stated the following: “In the name of our spiritual and moral responsibility, in the name of the Islamic Community, the Serbian Orthodox Church and the Croatian Roman Catholic Church, but above all in the name of God’s justice and love—in the name of dignity of both, the human being and the human community—taught by the Orthodox and Roman Catholic Christians on the basis of the Holy Bible, by Moslems on the basis of the Koran—we unanimously and in total unison, launch this appeal for peace, this cry to God and to men, this cry of suffering and hope from the bottom of our souls. We are addressing this appeal in the first place to all the faithful in Bosnia and Herzegovina, to orthodox Christians, Roman Catholics and Moslems, and to all political leaders and all our unfortunate people, Serbs, Croats and Moslems. (...) We emphatically state that this is not a religious war, and that the characterization of this tragic conflict as a religious war and the misuse of all religious symbols used with the aim to further hatred, must be proscribed and is condemned. (...) Crime in the name of religion is the greatest crime against religion. (...) We propose the alternative to hatred, destruction, pogroms and inhumanity, an alternative worthy of men and of our faith in God: it is peace, justice, the dignity of the human being, tolerance and reconciliation—love for mankind for all time and eternity.” See: Appeal of Conscience Foundation, “Berne Declaration,” http://​www.appealofconscience.org​/​d-​578/​declarations/​Berne%20Declaration, accessed August 11, 2019. [↑](#footnote-ref-598)
599. Franjo (Roman Catholic Church), September 26, 2015. [↑](#footnote-ref-599)
600. Drago (Roman Catholic Church), November 7, 2015. [↑](#footnote-ref-600)
601. Željko (Roman Catholic Church), January 30, 2017. [↑](#footnote-ref-601)
602. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-602)
603. Novak (Serbian Orthodox Church), November 30, 2015. [↑](#footnote-ref-603)
604. Ljudevit (Roman Catholic Church), September 18, 2015. [↑](#footnote-ref-604)
605. Goran (Serbian Orthodox Church), November 19, 2015. [↑](#footnote-ref-605)
606. Hrvoje (Roman Catholic Church), October 15, 2015. [↑](#footnote-ref-606)
607. For an more extensive discussion, see: Mitja Velikonja, *Religious Separation and Political Intolerance in Bosnia-Herzegovina*, No. 20 of *Eastern European Studies* (College Station, TX: Texas A&M University Press, 2003), 58–63. [↑](#footnote-ref-607)
608. Goran (Serbian Orthodox Church), November 19, 2015. [↑](#footnote-ref-608)
609. South-Slavic languages use capital letters for national categories, but lower-case letters for confessional groups. Thus “Muslim” was used for members of an ethnic group and “muslim” for adherents of Islam. [↑](#footnote-ref-609)
610. The decision was initially adopted in 1968 by the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Bosnia and Herzegovina. The new national category of “Muslims” was later included in the Yugoslav Federal Census from 1971 and in the 1974 Yugoslav Constitution. [↑](#footnote-ref-610)
611. Ahmed (Islamic Community), November 4, 2016. [↑](#footnote-ref-611)
612. Harun (Islamic Community), October 24, 2015. [↑](#footnote-ref-612)
613. Armin (Islamic Community), November 14, 2015. [↑](#footnote-ref-613)
614. Srđan Mišljenović, “Sud uveo "Bosanski" jezik,” http://​www.novosti.rs​/​vesti/​planeta.300.html:​696435-​Sud-​uveo-​Bosanski-​jezik, accessed August 11, 2019. [↑](#footnote-ref-614)
615. BN Televizija, “Jezik bošnjačkog naroda, a ne bosanski,” http://​www.rtvbn.com​/​355225/​Jezik-​bosnjackog-​naroda-​a-​ne-​bosanski, accessed February 10, 2018. [↑](#footnote-ref-615)
616. Ljudevit (Roman Catholic Church), September 18, 2015. [↑](#footnote-ref-616)
617. Similar cases were reported about Croats working abroad, who called themselves Croats (meaning Catholics) when they were in other countries, whereas it was not so with Bosniaks since the term ‘Bosniak’ itself became popular relatively recently. [↑](#footnote-ref-617)
618. Miloš (Serbian Orthodox Church), October 6, 2016. [↑](#footnote-ref-618)
619. Drago (Roman Catholic Church), November 7, 2015. [↑](#footnote-ref-619)
620. Bogdan (Serbian Orthodox Church), November 6, 2016. [↑](#footnote-ref-620)
621. Ljudevit (Roman Catholic Church), September 18, 2015. [↑](#footnote-ref-621)
622. Bojan (Serbian Orthodox Church), December 15, 2015. [↑](#footnote-ref-622)
623. Jakov (Roman Catholic Church), November 29, 2015 [↑](#footnote-ref-623)
624. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-624)
625. Hrvoje (Roman Catholic Church), October 15, 2015. [↑](#footnote-ref-625)
626. Marijan (Roman Catholic Church), October 5, 2016. [↑](#footnote-ref-626)
627. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-627)
628. Bogdan (Serbian Orthodox Church), November 6, 2016. [↑](#footnote-ref-628)
629. Miroslav (Roman Catholic Chruch), November 25, 2015. [↑](#footnote-ref-629)
630. Ljudevit (Roman Catholic Church), September 18, 2015. [↑](#footnote-ref-630)
631. In the Catholic Church all forms of inter-marriage are tolerated if a dispensation by the local bishop is obtained. In the Orthodox Church, marriage with a non-baptized individual is not allowed, while in Islam male Muslims are allowed to marry non-Muslim women, but not the other way around. [↑](#footnote-ref-631)
632. Hamza (Islamic Community), November 21, 2016. [↑](#footnote-ref-632)
633. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-633)
634. Ljudevit (Roman Catholic Church), September 18, 2015. [↑](#footnote-ref-634)
635. Jakov (Roman Catholic Church), November 29, 2015. [↑](#footnote-ref-635)
636. Kenan (Islamic Community), October 20, 2016. [↑](#footnote-ref-636)
637. Damjan (Orthodox Church), November 4, 2015. [↑](#footnote-ref-637)
638. Zaim (Islamic Community), November 23, 2016. [↑](#footnote-ref-638)
639. Damjan (Orthodox Church), November 4, 2015. [↑](#footnote-ref-639)
640. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-640)
641. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-641)
642. Zaim (Islamic Community), November 23, 2016. [↑](#footnote-ref-642)
643. Tarik (Islamic Community), January 23, 2017. [↑](#footnote-ref-643)
644. Ahmed (Islamic Community), November 4, 2016. [↑](#footnote-ref-644)
645. Tomislav (Roman Catholic Church), November 6, 2015. [↑](#footnote-ref-645)
646. Bogdan (Serbian Orthodox Church), November 6, 2016. [↑](#footnote-ref-646)
647. Blago (Roman Catholic Church), September 6, 2015. [↑](#footnote-ref-647)
648. Ferid (Islamic Community), January 18, 2017. [↑](#footnote-ref-648)
649. Tarik (Islamic Community), January 23, 2017. [↑](#footnote-ref-649)
650. Sead (Islamic Community), January 20, 2017. [↑](#footnote-ref-650)
651. Hamza (Islamic Community), November 21, 2016. [↑](#footnote-ref-651)
652. Goran (Serbian Orthodox Church), November 19, 2015. [↑](#footnote-ref-652)
653. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-653)
654. Ferid (Islamic Community), January 18, 2017. [↑](#footnote-ref-654)
655. Blago (Roman Catholic Church), September 6, 2015. [↑](#footnote-ref-655)
656. Sead (Islamic Community), January 20, 2017. [↑](#footnote-ref-656)
657. Ahmed (Islamic Community), November 4, 2016. [↑](#footnote-ref-657)
658. Bogdan (Serbian Orthodox Church), November 6, 2016. [↑](#footnote-ref-658)
659. Ferid (Islamic Community), January 18, 2017. [↑](#footnote-ref-659)
660. Hamza (Islamic Community), November 21, 2016. [↑](#footnote-ref-660)
661. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-661)
662. Petar (Roman Catholic Church), October 4, 2016. [↑](#footnote-ref-662)
663. Hrvoje (Roman Catholic Church), October 15, 2015. [↑](#footnote-ref-663)
664. Husein (Islamic Community), January 20, 2016. [↑](#footnote-ref-664)
665. Mladen (Roman Catholic Church), January 8, 2016. [↑](#footnote-ref-665)
666. Jakov (Roman Catholic Church), November 29, 2015. [↑](#footnote-ref-666)
667. Orhan (Islamic Community), February 23, 2016. [↑](#footnote-ref-667)
668. Sead (Islamic Community), January 20, 2017. [↑](#footnote-ref-668)
669. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-669)
670. Hamza (Islamic Community), November 21, 2016. [↑](#footnote-ref-670)
671. Orhan (Islamic Community), February 23, 2016. [↑](#footnote-ref-671)
672. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-672)
673. Nijaz (Islamic Community), January 30, 2016. [↑](#footnote-ref-673)
674. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-674)
675. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-675)
676. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-676)
677. Boško (Serbian Orthodox Church), January 29, 2016. [↑](#footnote-ref-677)
678. Ahmed (Islamic Community), November 4, 2016. [↑](#footnote-ref-678)
679. Konstantin (Serbian Orthodox Church), December 8, 2016. [↑](#footnote-ref-679)
680. Ahmed (Islamic Community), November 4, 2016. [↑](#footnote-ref-680)
681. Pavle (Serbian Orthodox Church), November 21, 2016. [↑](#footnote-ref-681)
682. Ahmed (Islamic Community), November 4, 2016. [↑](#footnote-ref-682)
683. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-683)
684. Novak (Serbian Orthodox Church), November 30, 2015. [↑](#footnote-ref-684)
685. Konstantin (Serbian Orthodox Church), December 8, 2016. [↑](#footnote-ref-685)
686. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-686)
687. Danijel (Roman Catholic Church), November 14, 2015. [↑](#footnote-ref-687)
688. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-688)
689. Damjan (Orthodox Church), November 4, 2015. [↑](#footnote-ref-689)
690. Bogdan (Serbian Orthodox Church), November 6, 2016. [↑](#footnote-ref-690)
691. Jakov (Roman Catholic Church), November 29, 2015. [↑](#footnote-ref-691)
692. Konstantin (Serbian Orthodox Church), December 8, 2016. [↑](#footnote-ref-692)
693. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-693)
694. Luka (Roman Catholic Church), January 28, 2016. [↑](#footnote-ref-694)
695. Ibid. He used the word *Lebensraum*, it its negative connotation, for those attempts. [↑](#footnote-ref-695)
696. Dejan (Serbian Orthodox Church), November 4, 2016 Dejan said that the comparison was origianally proposed by the late Patriarch Pavle, the former head of the Serbian Orthodox Church. [↑](#footnote-ref-696)
697. For a similar argument in the Palestinian context, see: Munther Isaac, “From Land to Lands, From Eden to the Renewed Earth: A Christ-centred Biblical Theology of the Promised Land” (Middlesex University, 2014), accessed April 8, 2018, http://eprints.mdx.ac.uk/13711/1/MIsaac\_thesis.pdf. [↑](#footnote-ref-697)
698. Damjan (Orthodox Church), November 4, 2015. [↑](#footnote-ref-698)
699. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-699)
700. Danijel (Roman Catholic Church), November 14, 2015. [↑](#footnote-ref-700)
701. Tomislav (Roman Catholic Church), November 6, 2015. [↑](#footnote-ref-701)
702. Damjan (Orthodox Church), November 4, 2015. [↑](#footnote-ref-702)
703. Tarik (Islamic Community), January 23, 2017. [↑](#footnote-ref-703)
704. Luka (Roman Catholic Church), January 28, 2016. [↑](#footnote-ref-704)
705. Orhan (Islamic Community), February 23, 2016. [↑](#footnote-ref-705)
706. Vasilije (Serbian Orthodox Church), September 18, 2016. [↑](#footnote-ref-706)
707. Luka (Roman Catholic Church), January 28, 2016. [↑](#footnote-ref-707)
708. Franjo (Roman Catholic Church), September 26, 2015. [↑](#footnote-ref-708)
709. Omer (Islamic Community), January 8, 2016. [↑](#footnote-ref-709)
710. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-710)
711. Ante (Roman Catholic Church), January 19, 2016. [↑](#footnote-ref-711)
712. Kenan (Islamic Community), October 20, 2016. [↑](#footnote-ref-712)
713. Drago (Roman Catholic Church), November 7, 2015. [↑](#footnote-ref-713)
714. Andrej (Serbian Orthodox Church), December 1, 2015. [↑](#footnote-ref-714)
715. Hrvoje (Roman Catholic Church), October 15, 2015. [↑](#footnote-ref-715)
716. Drago (Roman Catholic Church), November 7, 2015. [↑](#footnote-ref-716)
717. Pavle (Serbian Orthodox Church), November 21, 2016. [↑](#footnote-ref-717)
718. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-718)
719. Damjan (Orthodox Church), November 4, 2015. [↑](#footnote-ref-719)
720. Andrej (Serbian Orthodox Church), December 1, 2015. [↑](#footnote-ref-720)
721. Damjan (Orthodox Church), November 4, 2015. [↑](#footnote-ref-721)
722. Zvonimir (Roman Catholic Church), November 4, 2016. [↑](#footnote-ref-722)
723. Adis (Islamic Community), October 20, 2016. [↑](#footnote-ref-723)
724. Petar (Roman Catholic Church), October 4, 2016. [↑](#footnote-ref-724)
725. David (Roman Catholic Church), December 29, 2015. [↑](#footnote-ref-725)
726. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-726)
727. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-727)
728. Andrej (Serbian Orthodox Church), December 1, 2015. [↑](#footnote-ref-728)
729. Damjan (Orthodox Church), November 4, 2015. [↑](#footnote-ref-729)
730. Adis (Islamic Community), October 20, 2016; Zvonimir (Roman Catholic Church), November 4, 2016. [↑](#footnote-ref-730)
731. Orhan (Islamic Community), February 23, 2016. [↑](#footnote-ref-731)
732. Nebojša (Serbian Orthodox Church), October 14, 2016. [↑](#footnote-ref-732)
733. Dejan (Serbian Orthodox Church), November 4, 2016. [↑](#footnote-ref-733)
734. Zvonimir (Roman Catholic Church), November 4, 2016. [↑](#footnote-ref-734)
735. Tarik (Islamic Community), January 23, 2017. [↑](#footnote-ref-735)
736. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-736)
737. Ivan (Roman Catholic Church), November 26, 2015. [↑](#footnote-ref-737)
738. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-738)
739. Orhan (Islamic Community), February 23, 2016. [↑](#footnote-ref-739)
740. Edin (Islamic Community), December 8, 2016. [↑](#footnote-ref-740)
741. Dalibor (Roman Catholic Church), January 20, 2017. [↑](#footnote-ref-741)
742. Velimir (Serbian Orthodox Church), January 24, 2017. [↑](#footnote-ref-742)
743. Husein (Islamic Community), January 20, 2016. [↑](#footnote-ref-743)
744. Bogdan (Serbian Orthodox Church), November 6, 2016. [↑](#footnote-ref-744)
745. Ilija (Serbian Orthodox Church), January 30, 2016. [↑](#footnote-ref-745)
746. David (Roman Catholic Church), December 29, 2015. [↑](#footnote-ref-746)
747. Haris (Islamic Community), November 29, 2015. [↑](#footnote-ref-747)
748. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-748)
749. Luka (Roman Catholic Church), January 28, 2016. [↑](#footnote-ref-749)
750. Blago (Roman Catholic Church), September 6, 2015. [↑](#footnote-ref-750)
751. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-751)
752. Ramiz (Islamic Community), October 18, 2016. [↑](#footnote-ref-752)
753. Nebojša (Serbian Orthodox Church), October 14, 2016. [↑](#footnote-ref-753)
754. Dejan (Serbian Orthodox Church), November 4, 2016. [↑](#footnote-ref-754)
755. David (Roman Catholic Church), December 29, 2015. [↑](#footnote-ref-755)
756. Domagoj (Roman Catholic Church), January 29, 2016. [↑](#footnote-ref-756)
757. Haris (Islamic Community), November 29, 2015. [↑](#footnote-ref-757)
758. Nedim (Islamic Community), December 1, 2015. [↑](#footnote-ref-758)
759. Pavle (Serbian Orthodox Church), November 21, 2016. [↑](#footnote-ref-759)
760. Hamza (Islamic Community), November 21, 2016. [↑](#footnote-ref-760)
761. Ljudevit (Roman Catholic Church), September 18, 2015. [↑](#footnote-ref-761)
762. Andrej (Serbian Orthodox Church), December 1, 2015. [↑](#footnote-ref-762)
763. Drago (Roman Catholic Church), November 7, 2015. [↑](#footnote-ref-763)
764. Jasmin (Islamic Community), November 23, 2016. [↑](#footnote-ref-764)
765. Drago (Roman Catholic Church), November 7, 2015. [↑](#footnote-ref-765)
766. Husein (Islamic Community), January 20, 2016. [↑](#footnote-ref-766)
767. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-767)
768. Dejan (Serbian Orthodox Church), November 4, 2016. [↑](#footnote-ref-768)
769. Adis (Islamic Community), October 20, 2016. [↑](#footnote-ref-769)
770. Jakov (Roman Catholic Church), November 29, 2015. [↑](#footnote-ref-770)
771. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-771)
772. Tarik (Islamic Community), January 23, 2017. [↑](#footnote-ref-772)
773. Miloš (Serbian Orthodox Church), October 6, 2016. [↑](#footnote-ref-773)
774. Haris (Islamic Community), November 29, 2015. [↑](#footnote-ref-774)
775. Pavle (Serbian Orthodox Church), November 21, 2016. [↑](#footnote-ref-775)
776. Andrej (Serbian Orthodox Church), December 1, 2015. [↑](#footnote-ref-776)
777. David (Roman Catholic Church), December 29, 2015 [↑](#footnote-ref-777)
778. Husein (Islamic Community), January 20, 2016. [↑](#footnote-ref-778)
779. Ahmed (Islamic Community), November 4, 2016. [↑](#footnote-ref-779)
780. Adis (Islamic Community), October 20, 2016. [↑](#footnote-ref-780)
781. Ante (Roman Catholic Church), January 19, 2016. [↑](#footnote-ref-781)
782. Velimir (Serbian Orthodox Church), January 24, 2017. [↑](#footnote-ref-782)
783. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-783)
784. Adis (Islamic Community), October 20, 2016. [↑](#footnote-ref-784)
785. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-785)
786. Ahmed (Islamic Community), November 4, 2016. [↑](#footnote-ref-786)
787. Ferid (Islamic Community), January 18, 2017. [↑](#footnote-ref-787)
788. Husein (Islamic Community), January 20, 2016. [↑](#footnote-ref-788)
789. Bojan (Serbian Orthodox Church), December 15, 2015. [↑](#footnote-ref-789)
790. Vasilije (Serbian Orthodox Church), September 18, 2016. [↑](#footnote-ref-790)
791. Cf. Michel Foucault, “Des espaces autres. Hétérotopies,” https://​foucault.info​/​documents/​heterotopia/​foucault.heteroTopia.fr/​, accessed August 11, 2019. [↑](#footnote-ref-791)
792. Željko (Roman Catholic Church), January 30, 2017. [↑](#footnote-ref-792)
793. Mladen (Roman Catholic Church), January 8, 2016. [↑](#footnote-ref-793)
794. Yehuda Amichai, *The Selected Poetry of Yehuda Amichai*, ed. Chana Bloch and Stephen Mitchell (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2013), 88. [↑](#footnote-ref-794)
795. Agencija za statistiku Bosne i Hercegovine, “Popis: Etnička/nacionalna pripadnost, vjeroispovijest, maternji jezik,” http://​www.popis.gov.ba​/​popis2013/​knjige.php​?​id=​2, accessed August 11, 2019. [↑](#footnote-ref-795)
796. Konstantin (Serbian Orthodox Church), December 8, 2016. [↑](#footnote-ref-796)
797. Ferid (Islamic Community), January 18, 2017. [↑](#footnote-ref-797)
798. Haris (Islamic Community), November 29, 2015. [↑](#footnote-ref-798)
799. Jasmin (Islamic Community), November 23, 2016. [↑](#footnote-ref-799)
800. Boško (Serbian Orthodox Church), January 29, 2016. [↑](#footnote-ref-800)
801. Pavle (Serbian Orthodox Church), November 21, 2016. [↑](#footnote-ref-801)
802. Ahmed (Islamic Community), November 4, 2016. [↑](#footnote-ref-802)
803. Hrvoje (Roman Catholic Church), October 15, 2015. [↑](#footnote-ref-803)
804. Danijel (Roman Catholic Church), November 14, 2015. [↑](#footnote-ref-804)
805. Boško (Serbian Orthodox Church), January 29, 2016. [↑](#footnote-ref-805)
806. See: Stipe Odak, “Children of a Postsecular Age,” https://​theo.kuleuven.be​/​en/​research/​goa/​goa-​blog-​page, accessed August 11, 2019 [↑](#footnote-ref-806)
807. RTVIS, “Naši ljudi: (Interview with Vojislav Čarkić),” https://​www.youtube.com​/​watch​?​v=​VYrf6VVkuuc&​list=​RDVYrf6VVkuuc&​t=​9, accessed August 11, 2019. [↑](#footnote-ref-807)
808. Sarah Broadie, “The Ancient Greeks,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Causation*, ed. Helen Beebee, Christopher Hitchcock and Peter Menzies (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009). [↑](#footnote-ref-808)
809. Richard Scheines, “Causation,” in *New Dictionary of the History of Ideas*, ed. Maryanne C. Horowitz (Detroit, MI: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 2005), 286.; Stathis Psillos, “Causality,” in Horowitz, *New Dictionary of the History of Ideas*, 278. [↑](#footnote-ref-809)
810. Mackie later employed the same term as the title of his influential book on causality. Cf. J. L. Mackie, *The Cement of the Universe: A Study of Causation* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980). [↑](#footnote-ref-810)
811. Revolting against such strategies in his encyclopedic entry on causality, Blalock writes: “The notion of causality has been controversial for a very long time, and yet neither scientists, social scientists, nor laypeople have been able to think constructively without using a set of explanatory concepts that, either explicitly or not, have implied causes and effects. Sometimes other words have been substituted, for example, consequences, results, or influences. Even worse, there are vague terms such as leads to, reflects, stems from, derives from, articulates with, or follows from, which are often used in sentences that are almost deliberately ambiguous in avoiding causal terminology. Whenever such vague phrases are used throughout a theoretical work, or whenever one merely states that two variables are correlated with one another, it may not be recognized that what purports to be an ‘explanation’ is really not a genuine theoretical explanation at all.” See: Blalock, Hubert M., Jr., “Causal Inference Models,” in Borgatta and Montgomery, *Encyclopedia of Sociology*, 255. [↑](#footnote-ref-811)
812. Psillos, “Causality,” 272–74. [↑](#footnote-ref-812)
813. Martin E. Marty and Jonathan Moore, *Politics, Religion, and the Common Good: Advancing a Distinctly American Conversation About Religion’s Role in Our Shared Life* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 2000). [↑](#footnote-ref-813)
814. Juergensmeyer, *Terror in the Mind of God*. [↑](#footnote-ref-814)
815. Harvey Whitehouse and Brian McQuinn, “Divergent Modes of Religiosity and Armed Struggle,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Religion and Violence*, ed. Mark Juergensmeyer, Margo Kitts and Michael K. Jerryson (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013).. [↑](#footnote-ref-815)
816. Hans Küng, *A Global Ethic for Global Politics and Economics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998). [↑](#footnote-ref-816)
817. Samuel P. Huntington, “The Clash of Civilizations?,” *Foreign Affairs* 72, no. 3 (1993). [↑](#footnote-ref-817)
818. Milja Kurki, *Causation in International Relations: Reclaiming Causal Analysis* (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 6–7. [↑](#footnote-ref-818)
819. Ibid., 12. [↑](#footnote-ref-819)
820. Ibid., 13–14. [↑](#footnote-ref-820)
821. Mackie advances John Anderson’s idea of a causal field against which a cause and effect are seen as differences. Analyzing what people usually mean when they speak about causality, Mackie identifies a tendency to emphasize the elements that make a difference, i.e. those elements that trigger some uncommon course of events. Mackie, *The Cement of the Universe*, 35. [↑](#footnote-ref-821)
822. Pires, for instance, offers a different distinction between material or interpretational causal factors. Both of them can be further analyzed on a level of particular events and a level of social structures. See: Alvaro P. Pires, “Recentrer l’analyse causale?: Visages de la causalité en sciences sociales et recherche qualitative,” *Sociologie et sociétés* 25, no. 2 (1993): 194–95, https://doi.org/10.7202/001561ar. [↑](#footnote-ref-822)
823. Steven Weinberg, *Facing Up* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), 231. [↑](#footnote-ref-823)
824. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-824)
825. Sam Harris, *The End of Faith: Religion, Terror, and the Future of Reason* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2005), 26. (Italics in original) [↑](#footnote-ref-825)
826. Ibid., 148. [↑](#footnote-ref-826)
827. Quora, “Are there any scenarios, in which Jainism justifies violence?: What if 'violence' is the only means to self-survival and self-sustenance (Think World War II)? Or, what about joining the armed forces - an inherently 'violent' profession. Do Jain religious texts make an exception for such cases?,” https://​www.quora.com​/​Are-​there-​any-​scenarios-​in-​which-​Jainism-​justifies-​violence-​What-​if-​violence-​is-​the-​only-​means-​to-​self-​survival-​and-​self-​sustenance-​Think-​World-​War-​II-​Or-​what-​about-​joining-​the-​armed-​forces-​an-​inherently-​violent-​profession-​Do-​Jain-​religious-​texts-​make-​an-​exception-​for-​such-​cases, accessed May 8, 2016. [↑](#footnote-ref-827)
828. Avalos, *Fighting Words*, 374. [↑](#footnote-ref-828)
829. Ibid., 104. [↑](#footnote-ref-829)
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831. Ibid., 103. [↑](#footnote-ref-831)
832. Juergensmeyer, *Terror in the Mind of God*, 217. [↑](#footnote-ref-832)
833. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-833)
834. Toft, Philpott, and Shah, *God’s Century*, 16. [↑](#footnote-ref-834)
835. Ibid., 27. [↑](#footnote-ref-835)
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865. Ibid., 45–47. [↑](#footnote-ref-865)
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914. The authors note that the involvement with one party can seem problematic from the standpoint of neutrality and trust. They suggest that the crucial element is the balance of power and the credibility of a representative: “A broker whose identity is the same as that of one conflicting party, but who is at the same time obliged to stand at the fringes of the conflict and forward understanding of the ‘Other’, faces the risk of being seen as a traitor amongst his or her group of belonging and consequently lose credibility, while at the same time the broker may potentially have problems in gaining the necessary confidence of the opposing conflict party. However, as the Ghaffar Khan example illustrates, the problems of credibility for the broker may be reduced when he or she is identified with the weaker party in a highly asymmetrical conflict. Vice versa, if the broker is identified with the stronger party, it is likely to be difficult to build confidence within the weaker party, hence it may be better to identify a broker who is either neutral or associated with the weaker party.” ibid., 26. [↑](#footnote-ref-914)
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1003. Quoted in: Renee Garfinkel, “What Works? Evaluating Interfaith Dialogue Programs,” *Special Report*, 7–8, https://​www.usip.org​/​sites/​default/​files/​sr123.pdf, accessed August 11, 2019. [↑](#footnote-ref-1003)
1004. For a broader discussion of the need of including spirituality in decision-making processes in politics, see: Douglas M. Johnston and Jonathon Eastvold, “History Unrequited: Religion as Provocateur and Peacemaker in the Bosnian Conflict,” in Coward and Smith, *Religion and Peacebuilding.*; Johnston and Sampson, *Religion, the Missing Dimension of Statecraft.*; Douglas Johnston and Brian Cox, “Faith-Based Diplomacy and Preventive Engagement,” in Johnston, *Faith-based Diplomacy.*. [↑](#footnote-ref-1004)
1005. Bill Sterland and John Beauclerk, “Faith Communities as Potential Agents for Peace Building in the Balkans: An analysis of faith-based interventions towards conflict transformation and lasting reconciliation in post-conflict countries of former Yugoslavia,” 33, https://​www.kirkensnodhjelp.no​/​contentassets/​c1403acd5da84d39a120090004899173/​2008/​faith-​communities-​balkans.pdf, accessed August 11, 2019. [↑](#footnote-ref-1005)
1006. Mirza (Islamic Community), November 24, 2016. [↑](#footnote-ref-1006)
1007. Garfinkel, “What Works? Evaluating Interfaith Dialogue Programs,” 5. [↑](#footnote-ref-1007)
1008. Ibid., 6. [↑](#footnote-ref-1008)
1009. Ibid., 9. [↑](#footnote-ref-1009)
1010. Merdjanova and Brodeur, *Religion as a Conversation Starter*, 128. [↑](#footnote-ref-1010)
1011. Sterland and Beauclerk, “Faith Communities as Potential Agents for Peace Building in the Balkans,” 33. [↑](#footnote-ref-1011)
1012. Pink TV BiH, “Zabranjeni Forum-Fratar, efendija i paroh u BiH (07.01. 2016),” https://​www.youtube.com​/​watch​?​v=​IDKbUhXLG24, accessed August 11, 2019. [↑](#footnote-ref-1012)
1013. Sead (Islamic Community), January 20, 2017. [↑](#footnote-ref-1013)
1014. Haris (Islamic Community), November 29, 2015. [↑](#footnote-ref-1014)
1015. Cf. Table 5: “Stanovništvo prema vjeroispovijesti i spolu”, in: Agencija za statistiku Bosne i Hercegovine, “Popis,” 5. [↑](#footnote-ref-1015)
1016. Some of the important theoretical stances are: Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2009).; Anthony Smith, “From the Ethnic Origins of Nations,” in *The Collective Memory Reader*, ed. Jeffrey K. Olick, Vered Vinitzky-Seroussi and Daniel Levy (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).; Benedict R. O'G Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London, New York: Verso, 2006).; E. J. Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism Since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality* (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992).; Miroslav Hroch, *Social preconditions of National Revival in Europe: A Comparative Analysis of the Social Composition of Patriotic Groups Among the Smaller European Nations* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000). For an overview, see: Steven E. Grosby, *Nationalism: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).; Paul Lawrence, *Nationalism: History and Theory* (Harlow: Pearson Longman, 2005).; Philip Spencer and Howard Wollman, *Nationalism: A Critical Introduction* (London, Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE, 2002). [↑](#footnote-ref-1016)
1017. For Orthodox perspectives, see for instance: Pantelis Kalaitzidis, “Challenges of Renewal and Reformation Facing the Orthodox Church,” *The Ecumenical Review* 61, no. 2 (2009), https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1758-6623.2009.00014.x.; Pantelis Kalaitzidis, *Orthodoxy and Political Theology* (Geneva: World Council Of Churches, 2012).; Teuvo Laitila, “New Voices in Greek Orthodox Thought: Untying the Bond between Nation and Religion,” *Journal of Contemporary Religion* 30, no. 3 (2015), https://doi.org/10.1080/13537903.2015.1081482.; Daniel P. Payne, “Nationalism and the Local Church: The Source of Ecclesiastical Conflict in the Orthodox Commonwealth,” *Nationalities Papers* 35, no. 5 (2007), https://doi.org/10.1080/00905990701651828. [↑](#footnote-ref-1017)
1018. For an overview see: Nenad Miscevic, “Nationalism,” https://​plato.stanford.edu​/​entries/​nationalism/​, accessed August 11, 2019. [↑](#footnote-ref-1018)
1019. Other distinctions view patriotism as an expression of a moral duty in contrast to nationalism, which is an expression of natural instinct; according to the degree of ‘love’ one has for one’s community, where nationalism represents aggressive, uncritical, and exaggerated love, in contrast to a moderate and an unhostile patriotic stance. Finally, some distinguish the two phenomena according to the object of identification—patriotism refers to *patria* (Latin: country) whereas nationalism implies a nation in the ethnic or cultural sense. For the distinctions, see: Igor Primoratz, “Patriotism,” https://​plato.stanford.edu​/​entries/​patriotism, accessed August 11, 2019. [↑](#footnote-ref-1019)
1020. Grosby, *Nationalism*, 17. [↑](#footnote-ref-1020)
1021. Anderson defines nations in the following way: “[I]t is an imagined political community—and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign. It is *imagined* because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion (…) The nation is imagined as limited because even the largest of them, encompassing perhaps a billion living human beings, has finite, if elastic, boundaries, beyond which lie other nations. No nation imagines itself coterminous with mankind. The most messianic nationalists do not dream of a day when all the members of the human race will join their nation (…) It is imagined as *sovereign* because the concept was born in an age in which Enlightenment and Revolution were destroying the legitimacy of the divinely-ordained, hierarchical dynastic realm (…) Finally, it is imagined as a community, because, regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation is always conceived of as a deep, horizontal comradeship. Ultimately it is this fraternity that makes it possible, over the past two centuries, for so many millions of people, not so much to kill, as willingly to die for such limited imaginings.” Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 5–7 (Italics in original). [↑](#footnote-ref-1021)
1022. Grosby, *Nationalism*, 10–13; Ross Poole, “Nationalism,” in *Berkshire Encyclopedia of World History*, ed. William H. McNeill and Jerry H. Bentley (Great Barrington, MA: Berkshire, 2005), 1135. [↑](#footnote-ref-1022)
1023. George Orwell, “Notes on Nationalism,” http://​www.orwell.ru​/​library/​essays/​nationalism/​english/​e\_​nat, accessed August 11, 2019. [↑](#footnote-ref-1023)
1024. *“Nationalism is not to be confused with patriotism.* Both words are normally used in so vague a way that any definition is liable to be challenged, but one must draw a distinction between them, since two different and even opposing ideas are involved. By ‘patriotism,’ I mean devotion to a particular place and a particular way of life, which one believes to be the best in the world but has no wish to force on other people. Patriotism is of its nature defensive, both militarily and culturally. Nationalism, on the other hand, is inseparable from the desire for power.” See: ibid. Italics in original. [↑](#footnote-ref-1024)
1025. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-1025)
1026. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-1026)
1027. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-1027)
1028. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-1028)
1029. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-1029)
1030. Danilo Kiš, “On Nationalism,” *Performing Arts Journal* 18, no. 2 (1996): 13. [↑](#footnote-ref-1030)
1031. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-1031)
1032. Ibid., 14. [↑](#footnote-ref-1032)
1033. Ibid., 14–15. [↑](#footnote-ref-1033)
1034. Ibid., 16. [↑](#footnote-ref-1034)
1035. Rogers Brubaker, “Religion and Nationalism: Four Approaches,” *Nations and Nationalism* 18, no. 1 (2012), https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1469-8129.2011.00486.x. [↑](#footnote-ref-1035)
1036. Roger Friedland, “Religious Nationalism and the Problem of Collective Representation,” *Annual Review of Sociology* 27, no. 1 (2001): 386, https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.soc.27.1.125. [↑](#footnote-ref-1036)
1037. Brubaker, “Religion and Nationalism: Four Approaches,” 13. [↑](#footnote-ref-1037)
1038. Ibid., 3–15. [↑](#footnote-ref-1038)
1039. Quoted in: Lucia Ceci, *The Vatican and Mussolini’s Italy* (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2017), 57. [↑](#footnote-ref-1039)
1040. MacDonald, *Balkan Holocausts?*, 15–20. [↑](#footnote-ref-1040)
1041. Kiš, “On Nationalism,” 14–15. [↑](#footnote-ref-1041)
1042. Quoted in: Mile Stojić, *Jutro u Pompejima* (Zagreb: Durieux, 1998), 103. [↑](#footnote-ref-1042)
1043. The phrase has unclear origins. It is often attributed to Bertolt Brecht, while some commentators trace its origins to Carl Sandburg. See: Quora, “"What if they gave a war and nobody came?",” https://​www.quora.com​/​What-​if-​they-​gave-​a-​war-​and-​nobody-​came, accessed August 31, 2017. [↑](#footnote-ref-1043)
1044. Kalatzis explains that canon 12 was not the universal prescription but had a specific application to the Christian members of the imperial guard who, under the Licinius prosecutions of Christians, have returned to their previous military posts that they had previously abandond, not willing to offer sacrifices. See: George Kalantzis, *Caesar and the Lamb: Early Christian Attitudes on War and Military Service* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2012), 190. [↑](#footnote-ref-1044)
1045. Steven Grosby, “National Identity, Nationalism, and the Catholic Church,” accessed July 13, 2017. [↑](#footnote-ref-1045)
1046. Bede Jarrett, “Papal Arbitration,” http://​www.newadvent.org​/​cathen/​11452a.htm, accessed August 11, 2019. [↑](#footnote-ref-1046)
1047. Grosby, “National Identity, Nationalism, and the Catholic Church.”. [↑](#footnote-ref-1047)
1048. *Summa theologiae* 2a2ae, 101.1. See: Thomas Aquinas, “The Summa Theologiæ of St. Thomas Aquinas: Question 101. Piety,” http://​www.newadvent.org​/​summa/​3101.htm, accessed August 11, 2019. [↑](#footnote-ref-1048)
1049. *Summa theologiae* 2a2ae, 101.4. See: ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-1049)
1050. “Free competition has destroyed itself; economic dictatorship has supplanted the free market; unbridled ambition for power has likewise succeeded greed for gain; all economic life has become tragically hard, inexorable, and cruel (…), two different streams have issued from the one fountain-head: On the one hand, economic nationalism or even economic imperialism; on the other, a no less deadly and accursed internationalism of finance or international imperialism whose country is where profit is.” Pius XI, “Quadragesimo Anno,” sec. 109, http://​w2.vatican.va​/​content/​pius-​xi/​en/​encyclicals/​documents/​hf\_​p-​xi\_​enc\_​19310515\_​quadragesimo-​anno.html, accessed August 11, 2019. [↑](#footnote-ref-1050)
1051. Section 49: http://w2.vatican.va/content/pius-xii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf\_p-xii\_enc\_20101939\_summi-pontificatus.html. [↑](#footnote-ref-1051)
1052. Paul VI, “Populorum Progressio,” sec. 62, http://​w2.vatican.va​/​content/​paul-​vi/​en/​encyclicals/​documents/​hf\_​p-​vi\_​enc\_​26031967\_​populorum.html, accessed August 11, 2019. [↑](#footnote-ref-1052)
1053. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-1053)
1054. “We are thinking of the precarious situation of a great number of emigrant workers whose condition as foreigners makes it all the more difficult for them to make any sort of social vindication, in spite of their real participation in the economic effort of the country that receives them. It is urgently necessary for people to go beyond a narrowly nationalist attitude in their regard and to give them a charter which will assure them a right to emigrate, favor their integration, facilitate their professional advancement and give them access to decent housing where, if such is the case, their families can join them ([11](http://w2.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/apost_letters/documents/hf_p-vi_apl_19710514_octogesima-adveniens.html#11)). Linked to this category are the people who, to find work, or to escape a disaster or a hostile climate, leave their regions and find themselves without roots among other people. It is everyone’s duty, but especially that of Christians ([12](http://w2.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/apost_letters/documents/hf_p-vi_apl_19710514_octogesima-adveniens.html#12)), to work with energy for the establishment of universal brotherhood, the indispensable basis for authentic justice and the condition for enduring peace (…).” Paul VI, “Octogesima Adveniens,” sec. 17, http://​w2.vatican.va​/​content/​paul-​vi/​en/​apost\_​letters/​documents/​hf\_​p-​vi\_​apl\_​19710514\_​octogesima-​adveniens.html, accessed August 11, 2019. [↑](#footnote-ref-1054)
1055. Pius XI, “Non Abbiamo Bisogno,” sec. 44, http://​w2.vatican.va​/​content/​pius-​xi/​en/​encyclicals/​documents/​hf\_​p-​xi\_​enc\_​29061931\_​non-​abbiamo-​bisogno.html, accessed August 11, 2019. [↑](#footnote-ref-1055)
1056. Pius XI, “Mit Brennender Sorge,” sec. 8, http://​w2.vatican.va​/​content/​pius-​xi/​en/​encyclicals/​documents/​hf\_​p-​xi\_​enc\_​14031937\_​mit-​brennender-​sorge.html, accessed August 11, 2019. [↑](#footnote-ref-1056)
1057. Ibid., sec. 13. [↑](#footnote-ref-1057)
1058. John Paul II, “Address of His Holiness John Paul II to the Diplomatic Corps Accredited to the Holy See,” sec. 7, https://​w2.vatican.va​/​content/​john-​paul-​ii/​en/​speeches/​1994/​january/​documents/​hf\_​jp-​ii\_​spe\_​19940115\_​corpo-​diplomatico.html, accessed August 11, 2019. [↑](#footnote-ref-1058)
1059. John XXIII, “Christmas Message of Pope John XXIII,” https://​w2.vatican.va​/​content/​john-​xxiii/​en/​speeches/​1959/​documents/​hf\_​j-​xxiii\_​spe\_​19591223\_​christmas.html, accessed August 11, 2019. [↑](#footnote-ref-1059)
1060. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-1060)
1061. For “exaggerated nationalism” see: John Paul II, “Centesimus Annus,” sec. 17, http://​w2.vatican.va​/​content/​john-​paul-​ii/​en/​encyclicals/​documents/​hf\_​jp-​ii\_​enc\_​01051991\_​centesimus-​annus.html, accessed August 11, 2019; John Paul II, “Tertio Millennio Adveniente,” sec. 27, https://​w2.vatican.va​/​content/​john-​paul-​ii/​en/​apost\_​letters/​1994/​documents/​hf\_​jp-​ii\_​apl\_​19941110\_​tertio-​millennio-​adveniente.html, accessed August 11, 2019; John Paul II, “Redemptor Hominis,” sec. 15, http://​w2.vatican.va​/​content/​john-​paul-​ii/​en/​encyclicals/​documents/​hf\_​jp-​ii\_​enc\_​04031979\_​redemptor-​hominis.html, accessed August 11, 2019; John Paul II, “Apostolic Letter Orientale Lumen,” sec. 7, https://​w2.vatican.va​/​content/​john-​paul-​ii/​en/​apost\_​letters/​1995/​documents/​hf\_​jp-​ii\_​apl\_​19950502\_​orientale-​lumen.html, accessed August 11, 2019 Also, Pius XI already in 1929 criticizes “spirit of nationalism which is false and exaggerated” which causes excessive interference of the State into private and spiritual affairs: Pius XI, “Divini Illius Magistri,” http://​w2.vatican.va​/​content/​pius-​xi/​en/​encyclicals/​documents/​hf\_​p-​xi\_​enc\_​31121929\_​divini-​illius-​magistri.html, accessed August 11, 2019; Pius XI, “Divini Illius Magistri,” sec. 49. [↑](#footnote-ref-1061)
1062. “self-sufficiency and narrow nationalism” is mentioned in: Paul VI, “Message of the Holy Father for the World Social Communications Day,” par. 4, http://​w2.vatican.va​/​content/​paul-​vi/​en/​messages/​communications/​documents/​hf\_​p-​vi\_​mes\_​19680326\_​ii-​com-​day.html, accessed August 11, 2019 In his letter to the people of Poland, John Paul II states that “narrow nationalism or chauvinism” has nothing to do with the love for the country. See: John Paul II, “Letter of His Holiness John Paul II to the People of Poland,” par. 5, https://​w2.vatican.va​/​content/​john-​paul-​ii/​en/​letters/​1978/​documents/​hf\_​jp-​ii\_​let\_​19781024\_​polacchi.html, accessed August 11, 2019. [↑](#footnote-ref-1062)
1063. In his address to the United Nations in 1995, John Paul II stated that “Nationalism, particularly in its most radical forms, is thus the antithesis of true patriotism.” What differentiates the two is the respect towards the other. While patriotism never seek progress at the expense of the other, nationalism is based on the contempt for other cultures and other nations, and can give rise to totalitarianism. See: John Paul II, “The Fiftieth General Assembly of the United Nations Organization: Address of His Holiness John Paul II,” sec. 11, https://​w2.vatican.va​/​content/​john-​paul-​ii/​en/​speeches/​1995/​october/​documents/​hf\_​jp-​ii\_​spe\_​05101995\_​address-​to-​uno.html, accessed August 11, 2019 [↑](#footnote-ref-1063)
1064. John Paul II, “Apostolic Letter Orientale Lumen,” sec. 7. [↑](#footnote-ref-1064)
1065. Minglang Zhou, *Multilingualism in China: The Politics of Writing Reforms for Minority Languages, 1949-2002* (Berlin, New York: Mouton de Gruyter, 2003), 41. [↑](#footnote-ref-1065)
1066. Tarik (Islamic Community), January 23, 2017. [↑](#footnote-ref-1066)
1067. Girard on the circularity of violence says the following: “Only violence can put an end to violence, and that is why violence is self-propagating. Everyone wants to strike the last blow, and reprisal can thus follow reprisal without any true conclusion ever being reached.” René Girard, *Violence and the Sacred* (Baltimore: Hopkins University Press, 1979), 26. [↑](#footnote-ref-1067)
1068. Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, 329. [↑](#footnote-ref-1068)
1069. It is important to note that I differentiate the positive view of universalism and reductive universalism. Positive universalism is not inimical to specificities and, as Berdyaev notes, it coexists with personalism: “The universal is not at all the same thing as the general, the in-common. The general signifies an abstraction derived from the concrete wholeness and to it are applicable numeric categories (…) The universal is a positive and concrete unity, whereas the general is a negative and abstract unity. In its application to the national problem this signifies, that universalism, affirming the spiritual oneness of mankind, is a positive and concrete unity, including within it all the national individualities, whereas internationalism is an abstract unity, denying these national individualities. Nationalism is the obverse polarity of internationalism and as such it is a lie. Nationalism is a revolt of particularism against universalism, which then becomes understood exclusively, as the general and the abstract.” See: Nikolai A. Berdyaev, “Polytheism and Nationalism,” http://​www.berdyaev.com​/​berdiaev/​berd\_​lib/​1934\_​391.html, accessed August 11, 2019. [↑](#footnote-ref-1069)
1070. Željko (Roman Catholic Church), January 30, 2017. [↑](#footnote-ref-1070)
1071. Ivan Šarčević, “Zavodljivost nacionalnih pridjeva,” in *Zečevi, zmije i munafici,* by Ivan Šarčević (Sarajevo: Synopsis, 2014), 8. [↑](#footnote-ref-1071)
1072. German Christians (*Deutsche Christen*) was a movement that proclaimed compatibility between National Socialist Principles and Christianity but required censorship of the Old Testament in order to purify it from overtly Jewish elements. They existed alongside advocates of a completely different form of Christianity, gather around the *Confessing Church* (*Bekenennde Kirche*), which saw the allegiance between nation and religion as an aberration. The same religious tradition that moved some to align with a national ideology inspired others to vehemently react against it. For German Christians, see: Doris L. Bergen, “Deutsche Christen,” in *Antisemitism*, ed. Richard S. Levy (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2005).. [↑](#footnote-ref-1072)
1073. Šarčević, “Zavodljivost nacionalnih pridjeva,” 7. (My translation) [↑](#footnote-ref-1073)
1074. Ivan Šarčević, “Jedinstvo "trojice" Abrahama,” in *Zečevi, zmije i munafici,* by Ivan Šarčević (Sarajevo: Synopsis, 2014), 11. (My translation) [↑](#footnote-ref-1074)
1075. Ibid., 11–12. [↑](#footnote-ref-1075)
1076. Ibid., 12. [↑](#footnote-ref-1076)
1077. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-1077)
1078. “N1 Pressing: Vladika Grigorije (26.4.2017),” 00:21:55-00:22:00 (My translation) [↑](#footnote-ref-1078)
1079. “N1 Pressing: Vladika Grigorije (6.1.2016),” 00:15:50 - 00:17:20 (My translation) [↑](#footnote-ref-1079)
1080. Baldassare Castiglione, *The Book of the Courtier* (New York: Norton, 2002), 32. [↑](#footnote-ref-1080)
1081. The text, in Keith Doubt’s translation is available at: Mak Dizdar, “Lullaby,” http://​www.spiritofbosnia.org​/​volume-​10-​no-​3-​2015july/​lullaby-​2/​, accessed August 11, 2019. [↑](#footnote-ref-1081)