

BALKANS – THE BRIDGE OF MONOTHEISTIC RELIGIONS

Summary

When analyzing any society, regardless of time and space, religion, identity, and politics are always relevant. Religion completes identity by giving it that sense of life (here and after) that connects man, constantly, with the Absolute, i.e. with God: religion and identity then become an important binomial which in every single act and event suggests a meaning which transcends them. Abrahamic religions, as the three largest monotheistic religions, should facilitate encounters between the faithful, rather than foment a cultural clash aided by ignorance and intolerance. World politics suggests that the problem of intolerance is particularly pronounced in relation to monotheistic religions, namely, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Structural antagonism and hostility to other traditions represent a breeding ground for unrest and extremism, which cannot go unpunished if we want to live in a peaceful society. Is religion one of the main causes of war? Or is it simply a means for inciting troops to attack, divide societies and plunder countries? The original cause of any war or conflict is complex and nuanced, and many factors are often at stake, including power, politics, ideology, money, territory, and identity. The mixture of religion and politics was, historically speaking, “very dangerous”, as is evidenced by medieval examples such as the Crusades, and today, history repeats itself, as demonstrated by the situations concerning Israel, Palestine, the Balkans and the Islamic State. This paper will seek to provide a better understanding of the identities and politics of the Abrahamic religions in the Balkans, including their points of convergence and divergence.

Key words: Balkans, conflicts, Cristianity, identity, Islam, Judaism, politics, religion.

INTRODUCTION

According to the testimony of Cicero, Plutarch, Seneca, and other ancient writers, in no single epoch was a people or tribe without any religious consciousness. As Plutarch wrote: “In traveling over the earth, you may find cities without walls, without literature, without the arts and sciences of civilized life, but a people without God, without prayers, without religious oaths, without religious rites, without sacrifices, is nowhere seen” (Plutarch, Adv. Colotem, c. 31). In dialogue *De Legibus (On the Laws)*, written by Marcus Tullius Cicero we can find: “And among human beings themselves there is no nation either so tame or so wild that it does not know

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that it should have a god, although it may be ignorant of what sort it ought to have” (Cicero, *De Leg.* I 24). Something similar can be found in Seneca’s 117 *Epistulae Morales ad Lucium*: “For instance, we infer that the gods exist, for this reason, among others – that there is implanted in everyone an idea concerning deity, and there is no people so far beyond the reach of laws and customs that it does not believe at least in gods of some sort” (Seneca, *Epist* 117:6). Most scientists in various fields agree that religion is a universal human phenomenon and that it has significantly affected the life of mankind, granting man a connection to something beyond himself, a connection to God. Etymologically, the word “religion” derives from the Latin word “religare” meaning “to tie or bind together” while modern dictionaries define religion as “an organized system of beliefs and rituals that focus on the supernatural being or beings” (<https://www.facinghistory.org/holocaust-and-human-behavior/chapter-1/religion-and-identity>).

Belonging to a religion means, above all, being a part of the community, and sometimes of the culture. All religions include rituals and scriptures that instruct their followers on how people should treat each other. Religion can be a central part of one's identity, which begs the questions: What is identity? What is the relationship of identity to religion? The term identity is widely used in social-scientific, academic disciplines, to explain the causes of many prominent social and cultural phenomena in the world. Identity is mainly based on one group which can be ethnic, religious, or national (Fearon, 1999: 4-5). People who have a similar ethnic and cultural background may have different group identities which can end up in conflict, such as Catholics and Protestants in Northern Ireland (<https://fountainmagazine.com/2014/issue-100-july-august-2014/perspectives-on-identity-and-religion-july-2014>). Group identity is especially strong among people who have historical, ethnic, or religious ties and feel that they are illegitimately denied basic needs. For example, Muslims living in different parts of the world, including remote places such as the United States or Indonesia, may simultaneously protest when they feel injustice against Egyptian Muslims (<https://fountainmagazine.com/2014/issue-100-july-august-2014/perspectives-on-identity-and-religion-july-2014>). Jewish, Christian, and Islamic history all share the same starting point, a faith in one God who created man “in his own image”. Those who believed in the one God found themselves between divine principles and historical circumstances. The history of Abrahamic religions (desert monotheism) is a history between true cult, true faith, and idolatry. If someone claims himself to be a Jew, a Christian or a Muslim, then he is able to access a religious experience and support within himself, and within his community, an identity, and he is thus involved in an historical trend (Košutić, 2015: 209).

CHARACTERISTICS OF ABRAHAMIC RELIGIONS

Though the main characteristic of Abrahamic religions is monotheism, problems arise in the interpretation of scriptures and revelations, and according to theologian Hans King: “Judaism can be characterized as a religion of law, Christianity as a religion of love, and Islam as a religion

of prayer” (Küng, 2007: 13). However, the backbone of these religions are mercy and love and as such they represent the primordial determinants of the divine, for God is the epitome of immeasurable love and mercy. Therefore, unlike alienated love, humanity should be sustained by essential love: *ahab, agape* and *sadaqah*. In the Talmud it is written: “What is hateful to you do not do to your fellow” (Shabbat 31a) whilst in the Gospel of Matthew it says: “Do to others whatever you would like them to do to you” (Matthew 7:12). The Holy Book of the Islamic faith, the Qur'an, contains the similar entreaty: “None of you will believe until you love for your brother what you love for yourself” (Al-Bukhari and Muslim). An example of the identity of desert monotheism is Lessing's famous drama *Nathan the Wise*. The plot of this drama is set in Jerusalem on the eve of the Third Crusade. *Nathan the Wise* concludes that the essence of all relationships is actually a re-examination of one's own religious foundations, that is, identity as a solid and unchangeable component. With the parable of the ring, (more precisely three identical rings, one of which is the original family heritage, and the remaining two are faithful copies), Nathan answers the Sultan's question about the only true faith, allowing Lessing to identify the equal value of the three great religions, leading to tolerance and appreciation. Thus, all three religions represent the same values: love, justice, and peace. As with people, religions have never lived in isolation from each other. It is known that merchants, soldiers, exiles, sages, preachers, and other travelers have been moving around the Balkans for centuries, carrying their religious practices and traditions. Viewed from a cultural and religious standpoint, the roots of the Balkan peoples are as diverse as the rest of Europe. Hellenistic-Roman, “barbaric”, Jewish, Christian, and Islamic (Karlić, 2011: 752); all of these groups influenced the development of the consciousness of the South Slavs, the Balkan peoples, as well as their cultural identity, and one of the integral parts of that identity is religion. The interdependence of these religions is obvious and can be seen in many different cultures and civilizations across the globe. Practically no religion can be said to be completely autochthonous, so it is easy to recognize the influences of Jewish, Greek, Roman, and other religions in Christianity, just as it is easy to recognize the influence of Judaism and Christianity and pre-Islamic traditions in Islam, whilst as far as cultural practices are concerned, their influence has permeated to a great extent. The dialogue of religions is, in a way, present because ideas, beliefs and values have always been exchanged. The exchange implies that borders that are determined ethnically, racially, or politically, are still passable.

COEXISTENCE OF ABRAHAMIC RELIGIONS IN THE BALKANS

If we keep in mind the similarities of Abrahamic religions and cultures in the Balkans, we must inevitably wonder why so much hatred and intolerance exists within this geographical space? In the Greek records about the Slavs, it is said that *ἀκαταστασία* (disorder) and *αναρχία* (lawlessness) reign among them: “They are not in agreement with each other in anything;

when one agrees on something, the other immediately overturns their solution, because they all cultivate 'enmity' towards each other and none of them will obey the other" (Srećković, 1884: 42). The split and lack of inclination towards organized political life are the main reasons why the history of this race has such a sad course. At one point, when the Slavic peoples occupied half of Europe, it appeared that it would be different, that they would be the masters of Europe and decisively influence its history. Then came the division that definitively divided the Slavic ethnos (Bodrožić, 2011: 28). These divisions arose because of clericalism, nationalism, and fundamentalism; that is, when religious faith was placed in the service of limited interests (Šušnjic, 2015: 202). Stereotypes, prejudices, traditionalism, nationalism, authoritarian mentality, and anti-intellectualism are the ideas and movements that lead to misunderstandings, and ultimately cause religious intolerance. This is the only way to explain how people of the same ethnic origin, from the same village, could remain strangers to each other. In Bosnia, for example, there is almost no connection between the literary creation of Franciscan preachers, Orthodox monks, and Muslim dervishes, and if people lived almost house to house and had, for the most part, the same fate (Ćorović, 1921: 105).² Only natural disasters such as earthquakes or floods like the one described in Andrić's novel *On the Drina Bridge* could make members of different religious communities, at least for a moment, feel like people of the same destiny. Historical catastrophes did not bring them closer, instead, these events brought new doubts and deepened old hatred.

"Four religions live on this narrow, hilly and scarce piece of land. Each of them is exclusive and strictly separated from the others. You all live under one sky and from the same country, but each of these four groups has the center of their spiritual life far away, in another world, in Rome, in Moscow, in Constantinople, Mecca, Jerusalem or God knows where, but not where one is born and one dies. And each of them believes that its good and its benefit are conditioned by the damage and backwardness of each of the other three faiths, and that their progress can only be to its detriment. And each of them has made impatience the greatest virtue, and each expects salvation from somewhere outside, and each from the opposite direction (Andrić, 1992: 245)."

The Balkans have the misfortune of being the border between East and West. "Peoples living on the border, between two great kingdoms, are rarely loyal to anyone, and always ready to betray" (Crnjanski, 1981: 80-81). This is also the reason that religious and ethnic identities are "often unstable and poorly defined, and that shifts and transfers of identity often take place" (Dejzings, 2005: 47). It is also noticeable that any change in ethnic identity is conditioned by a change in confessional affiliation. Historically speaking, the Balkans have always been the border, a fact that remains un-

² I wanted to highlight that the people, who live in neighbourhoods, in houses that back onto each other, are not close due to religious divide, and act as if they do not share the same fate.

changed in certain ways even to the present. Cultural and political borders in the Balkans were established even before the arrival of the Slavs, when the Roman Empire was divided into two parts in 395 CE the border in the Balkans mostly coincided with the Drina River), and that border deepened with a church schism in 1054 CE, whilst there were further changes with the Ottoman invasion of the Balkans (Kumpes, 1992: 17). Religious conflicts over the centuries have significantly affected the modern picture of interfaith and interethnic relations, between Islam and Christianity, on the one hand, and Orthodoxy and Catholicism, on the other. In addition to these conflicts, it is worth mentioning the persecution of Bogumils in the medieval Serbian state, as well as the conflict between Catholicism and the Bogumils (Bosnian Church) (Kumpes, 1992: 19).

RELIGIOUS CONFLICTS IN THE BALKANS

Conflicts most often manifested themselves as attempts at conversion and assimilation. The former Yugoslavia is often cited as a textbook example of the recurrence of religious conflicts in the late 20th century. For seventy-three years, Yugoslavia was one country with peoples who mostly spoke the same language, lived together, and seemed to differ from each other only in religion. It is not surprising that these facts are connected with other conflicts between the followers of different religions that prevail elsewhere in the world, and with the “awakening of the religious” and the development of fundamentalism of all kinds. The communist regime expected that the decline of religiosity would be accompanied by a reduction in national antagonisms that were believed to be associated with it, which turned out to be a complete underestimation of the importance of identity. It is obvious that the conflicts were primarily national, with every nation wanting to be the master of its own territory, and to realise its statehood and identity. Thus, in the early 1990s, religion returned to Bosnia and Herzegovina “at the big door”, which led to a change in the political role of religion and religious communities, whose influence on political, educational, and cultural life, and especially on the media, increased significantly (Abazović, 2009, 48–50). Ivan Markešić believes that the German historian Wechler's understanding of the four Old Testament ideas that nationalism managed to secularize even after their transfer to domestic traditions, which can be applied to Croatian, Bosniak and Serbian nationalism in Bosnia and Herzegovina. This refers to the adapted experience of the “chosen people”, of the “promised”, “holy land”, of the deadly hostility of the adversary who could prevent the “chosen people” from entering the promised land and of the historical mission of the “chosen people” (Wechler, 2005: 34–35). That is, its leader should fulfill

“on the sacred ground of the future nation-state, so Croatia became the 'lobby of Christianity', and Kosovo 'Serbian Zion', i.e. 'Serbian Jerusalem', while Bosniaks became the 'primary people' of Bosnia, and Croats and Serbs, immigrants, thus establishing a distance from others: Croats to Serbs and Bosniaks, Serbs towards Croats

and Bosniaks, and Bosniaks towards Croats and Serbs, although Muslim believers in Croatian and Serbian nationalist ideologies are ethnic Croats, namely ethnic Serbs. Thus, the 'promised land' becomes a homeland to which nationalism determines the precise boundaries within which the ancestral land is soaked in the blood of ancestors and the place where folk culture and language developed. Thus, the defined boundaries of the 'promised' land that the 'chosen people' should own in this way must never be forgotten (Markešić, 2008:532)."

The close connection between denomination and national identity is a feature common to all countries in the region. When we say that the population is "Orthodox", "Catholic" or "Islamic", it is in itself considered that the religion in question is not necessarily considered a faith and a personal commitment, but rather a sociological phenomenon, as understood by Emil Durkheim and Max Weber; a hereditary affiliation to a community defined by a traditional relationship with a particular religion. First of all, the Orthodox churches are "autocephalous", limited to only one people; but with other religions in the Balkans (Catholicism and Islam) a similar situation can be observed to some extent. The religious affiliation of the Balkan Peninsula, largely separated from the religion itself, tends to be equated with devotion to the nation. Orthodoxy considers itself the original religion, the original Christianity from which Rome inexcusably deviated and which Islam subjugated by force. The accusations against Catholicism date back to the crusade against Constantinople in 1214 CE, the Counter-Reformation, and the "unification", all the way to the massacre of Serbs by the Ustashas in the Second World War. The rule of Islam meant five centuries of slavery under the "Turkish yoke", but the main event was the battle of Kosovo (1389 CE) where the Church awards holy character: "Kosovo, eternal secret"; the unworthiness of the conversion of Serbs to Islam, including the poetic epic and drama of Bishop Petar Petrović Njegoš "Gorski vijenac" (Mountain Wreath) (1845), raises extermination of Islamic conquerors in order to maintain the Serbian being, even under the Turkish yoke³. In Kosovo, a Serb always faces the same opponent: Muslims, whether they are the Turks of six hundred years ago or today's Albanians. Medieval popes, according to some legends, blessed the old Croatian kings, because they believed that Croatia was a messenger of Christianity against the Turks, whilst the Franciscans and the Jesuits have played a great role in the cultural and spiritual life of Croatia for centuries. Croatia, as a nation, considers itself the defender of the West against the Balkan barbarians, either the Turks of yesterday, or the Serbs of today. At the heart of the national myths of the emerging Balkan nations was the metaphor of the "Turkish yoke," which presents Turks as dangerous intruders whose worldview, including

³ One of the most important contemporary writers in the former Yugoslavia, Miljenko Jergović, says: "To claim that Njegoš is a "genocidal poet" is meaningless. „As much as there is "genocide" in Gorski vijenac", Jergović notes, that there is three times more "anti-Semitism" in the great Shakespeare". Historian Vukota Vukotić says for the BBC in Serbian: that it is important to study Njegoš's personality and work in a temporal context, and any tearing is a desecration of the work".

religion, is fundamentally incompatible with the cultural sensibilities of the Balkan peoples. As Marija Todorova puts it, “the belief that the Ottoman Empire was a religiously, socially and institutionally alien imposition on autochthonous Christian medieval societies” (Todorova, 1997: 62) can be considered the main reason for the emergence of national mythologies in the region. In a period of definitive break with the Ottoman past, local convertors to Islam were perceived, at best, as apostates whose loyalty to the land of their ancestors was questionable, and at worst, as traitors who deserved to be decisively eliminated, to continue on the path of modernity and progress.

Polarization and the alleged incompatibility of the Islamic and Christian worldviews prevailed in most Balkan countries, with the significant exception of Albania, where different religions reconciled under an ethno-national umbrella. In Serbia, Greece, and Bulgaria, and to some extent in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the status of Muslims became especially uncertain at the beginning of the 20th century, when the Ottoman Empire collapsed. As provocatively documented by Justin Mc Carthy's research from 1821 to 1922, more than a million Muslims were expelled from the Balkans, including territories that would later be within the borders of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes (Mc Carthy, 1995). Many died in the wars, some died of starvation and disease, and the surviving exiles mostly settled in Anatolia and the Levant and the culmination of their suffering was a notorious crime in Srebrenica. Similarly, the (mostly Sephardic) Jews that were expelled from Spain in 1492 found legal refuge in the regulated Ottoman Empire. The history of the Jewish nation is one of a wandering torment, “drawing on itself all defeats”. With their faith and way of survival, they created a tradition of suffering and hope. They were beaten, tortured, and killed, between two ideological fires: Christian clericalism and Islamic fundamentalism, and they suffered especially during the Second World War in the Jasenovac concentration camp together with Serbs and Romani people.

The last war in Bosnia and Herzegovina (1991–1995) found advocates of personal sacrifice for the “welfare of the nation” in all national religions (Croatian Catholicism, Serbian Orthodoxy and Bosniak Islam). Croatian defenders laid their lives on the “Altar of the Homeland” with a rosary around their necks, Serbian fighters died “for the honorable cross and the Orthodox faith”, and Bosniaks fought with shouts of “Allahu Akbar” (Allah is great) (Markešić, 2008: 532). Whether the events in the Balkans from the 1990s until today confirmed Kunte's thesis on the complete replacement of God by the Nation, the religious community with the national one, is a question that cannot be easily answered. The blame for the suffering of the war was transferred not only to the rival nation and religion, but also to God because it was precisely out of “love” for God, out of the desire to free as much space as possible from unbelievers and to give it to true believers (Muslims, Catholics, Orthodox) it was necessary to expel and kill infidels. Proponents of the thesis of the existence of a structural connection between the national and the religious believe that one need not delve too far into the past to determine that the nation now occupies the po-

sition that God once held in the life of an individual. The line between the national has blurred considerably with the religious (Markešić, 2008: 537). When the conflict starts, it is impossible to avoid national identification on the ground. It would be absurd, as we have seen, to attribute religious motives to the conflicts in the former Yugoslavia. The differences, which were originally denominational, have long since been transformed into national oppositions, including believers and non-believers. However, the religious symbolism that has always surrounded these identities has not ceased to act tragically, to the dismay of religious communities, as it is politics that cause conflict rather than true religious ideology.

IS IT RELIGIOUS TOLERANCE POSSIBLE BETWEEN RELIGIONS IN THE BALKANS?

The historical connection between religions and nations, especially in the Balkans, is deeply rooted in history, complex and diverse, and it can only be broken by clearly distinguishing countries, historical periods, religions and avoiding those hasty generalizations that serve hatred so well. If, for example, war depended on faith, then there would never be war, because faiths are, as a rule, faiths of peace. Otherwise, due to the lack of connections with the world, an excess of self-awareness and self-limitation has been created because we are held in a fist by worn-out characters from our past and present, people of lower or mediocre spiritual condition and petty happiness, who do not allow us to rise to a higher level of experience, knowledge and valuations: our institutions are full of former people!⁴ They do not believe in universal values and norms, which means that they do not have eyes for the true greatness of the spirit. Because, as much as one man interacts with other people, he is a man due to carrying the experiences, knowledge, and values of those he meets. This is the key reason why tolerance should not be determined in the old way, when it means to suffer, give in, allow, bear, and endure another. The other can be our inner voice, our neighbor, fellow-man, a man of another nation, religion and culture: he becomes an integral part of ourselves. That worldly man has absorbed all human differences and feels free from the prejudices of those who celebrate the sameness, a man of only one dimension, one-mindedness. Preserving and defending universal values and norms does not mean denying local values and personal experience. Above the differences that divide us are the common values and norms that connect us. When the spirit reaches the height of universal truth, all that is special and individual remains in its place. Sublime universal values and norms can hardly be rooted in the limited collective experience of traditional communities.

In believing in tolerance, we cite as an example the position of Mirza Mesic, who in the magazine *New Presence*, from 2011 writes: “We know very well that 85% is common to Christianity and Islam, but somehow there is always intolerance about those 10–15% difference and I tell you they can convey their personal experience of Islamic-Christian relations.

⁴ A person, especially one formerly popular or influential, who continues in their field after their popularity or effectiveness has peaked and is now in decline.

Christianity can never endanger me, if there is a church on every corner that rings and gathers believers – it cannot endanger my faith. I would like you Christians to feel the same way, surrounded by Muslims. As a Muslim, I will always fight against all those who endanger Christians. I say this from the global perspective of events because there is not such a balance of power in Croatia. Who is right, may dear God judge and decide; it is clear that it is my right to prove that my faith is right, and I consider, modestly, that we do not endanger each other, but we are endangered by incompetent politicians, corrupt professors and immoral individuals, so there is not enough just dialogue, but joint action of believers of all faith” (Mešić, 2011: 199-205). Regarding national and religious conflicts, Jimmy Carter also expressed his position: “It is obvious that people all over the world want an end to bloodshed and suffering. But what prevents their leaders from going and sitting at the negotiating table? Each conflicting party believes in the correctness of their reasons, and some of them are ready to face death instead of changing their attitudes, convinced of what they are doing, thinking that in that way they are doing God's will” (Clark, 2012: 168).

Simply put, the conflict in the Middle East (as in the former Yugoslavia) is a struggle of national identities as well as a struggle for control of territories. The conflict is largely colored by historical, religious, strategic, political, and psychological issues that hinder a long-term solution. Each side in the war wants recognition, acceptance, independence, sovereignty, and territorial identity. All parties to the conflict do not officially recognize the existence of the other, and the mediators for dialogue are not always with good intentions, so the support of external allies is mostly sought. Each side fears complete destruction or complete denial by the other, and this concern is fueled by a history of violence and hatred, during which each side has tried to eliminate the other, vigorously uttering the unique and exclusive merits of its own cause. Opposing forces tend to become even more radicalized by a combination of their own arrogance gained from any “victory” and non-recognition of defeat. In any confrontation, those who already do so always remember them and cultivate contempt for each other. Insecurity breeds paranoia and this leads to the ultimate concern that prevents any shift to mutual recognition or alleviation of hatred: the threat of extinction and the loss of identity as a people. In order to see the inhumanity of war, it is necessary to dehumanize our opponents, which is in itself a violation of the principles of all religions. When opponents are characterized as being outside of God's grace, their lives lose all value. The one who places landmines denies themselves personal responsibility, and years later, a foreigner, who is often a child, is mutilated or killed. Bombs or rockets are launched from a great distance, an act which usually goes unpunished, and the number of victims and their identity are left only as a statistic. Indeed, the present age is challenging and disturbing for those whose lives are filled with true faith based on kindness to one another (NATO bombing of Serbia in 1999 and innocent victims). It is a cruel irony when suicide bombers take the lives of innocent people through distorted theological understandings, believing that it is all God's will. With terrible

brutality, neighbors killed neighbors in Europe, Asia, and Africa. By carefully studying the history of each nation individually, it is possible to find a solution.

One of the first sins was fratricide, when Cain killed Abel: “And the Lord said unto Cain, Where is Abel thy brother? And he said, I know not: am I my brother's keeper? And God said, What hast thou done? The voice of thy brother's blood. yea, thou art cursed from the earth unto me: and now art thou cursed in the earth, which hath opened her mouth to receive thy brother's blood out of thy hand” (Genesis 4: 9–11). The blood of the ancestor Abraham, God's chosen one, still flows through the Arab, Jewish and Christian veins, and so many centuries behind us are soaked in brotherly blood, which makes it impossible to understand the heritage of the respected patriarch Abraham in the Middle East (Clark, 2012: 167). Despite theological differences, all major religions have a common duty to promote tolerance. With strong and just leaders, Jews, Christians and Muslims can come to terms and alleviate human suffering as well as foster peace in both the Balkans and the Middle East. The Abrahamic religions, as the three largest monotheistic religions, should facilitate encounters between their faithful, rather than foment a cultural clash aided by ignorance and intolerance. Structural antagonism and hostility to other traditions is a fertile ground for unrestrained extremism, which cannot go unpunished if we want to live in a peaceful society.

CONCLUSION

The mixture of religion and politics in history has been “very dangerous”, as seen in the Middle Ages, with examples such as the Crusades, and history repeats itself today, such as Israel, Palestine, the Balkans, and the Islamic State. “Of everything that a man raises and builds in his life, nothing is better and more valuable in my eyes than bridges. They are more important than houses, holier than temples. Everyone and everyone is equal, useful, always built meaningfully, at the place where the greatest number of human needs intersect, they are more persistent than other buildings and do not serve anything that is secret or evil” (Andrić, 1992). One of the most common motifs in Ivo Andrić's work is the bridge motif. Bridges as a force, bridges as an unbreakable connection, a connection between generations and time. A lasting connection that lives in the consciousness of many peoples, that connects them and makes them unique. That was exactly Andrić's goal – to show with such symbolism that all nations are the same, all are one. He showed religious equality and tolerance in his most famous works, mostly in those in which he deals with the symbolism of bridges – in the novel *On the Drina Bridge* and in the short story *Most na Žepi*. In his works, there is no split between religions, they are all connected by the aforementioned symbol – bridges. For Christians, the path to God will always include the cross, for Jews the Jewish Bible and the Talmud, and for Muslims the Qur'an will always include faith in God. Jews, Christians, and Muslims do not have another God in mind when they talk about their God. The possibility of peace always exists: if we try to imagine the com-

mon arrival of all, i.e. Jews, Christians, and Muslims, to a lecture on the spiritual journeys of our peoples, as well as the journeys of ourselves, we can individually deepen our understanding and care for each other.

Imagine a similar lecture at the table with the ancestor Abraham, where thinking about the same things could help us confirm all our traditions through our own teaching. This imaginary table with Patriarch Abraham, as a gathering, can intentionally direct and encompass, not only the intellectual exchange of interfaith dialogue, but also the deep exchange of our prayer life and our various spiritual journeys, in order to heal this sick world. Namely, according to the ancient tradition, we know that Abraham lived with Sarah and Hagar, and their tent as a symbol of Bedouin mercy was open to travelers from all over the world. From these directions, the wisest, most pious, and most cultured Jews, Christians, and Muslims, as well as other traditions and communities should be gathered, who should talk about the unity and peace of long-unhappy humanity right there, at the source. Christ himself respected members of other nations and cultures, as the following examples from the New Testament tell us: the healing of the centurion's servant, the Greeks who came to pray to God, the story of the merciful Samaritan, the meeting with the Samaritan woman at the well of Jacob, in the city of Sychar, an encounter with a Canaanite and Christ's disposition and openness to everyone regardless of religion and nationality.

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БАЛКАН – МОСТ МОНОТЕИСТИЧКИХ РЕЛИГИЈА

Резиме

Када се анализира било које друштво, без обзира на време и простор, религија, идентитет и политика су увек актуелни. Религија употпуњава идентитет тако што му даје онај осећај живота (овде и после) који повезује човека, сваког тренутка, с Апсолутом, заправо са Богом: религија и идентитет тада постају важан бином, што у сваком поједином деловању и догађају даје значење које их превазилази. Аврамистичке религије као три највеће монотеистичке религије треба да допринесу сусрету, уместо што подстичу сукобе култура, углавном пропраћене незнањем. Светска политика указује на то да је проблем нетрпељивости посебно изражен у вези са монотеистичким религијама, односно, јудаизмом, хришћанством и исламом. Структурни антагонизам и непријатељство према другим традицијама је погодно тло за неопузданост и екстремизам, што не може да остане некажњено ако желимо да живимо у мирном друштву. Да ли је религија један од главних узрока рата? Или је то једноставно, средство за под-

стицање трупа за напад, поделе друштава и пљачке земаља? Изворни узрок било којег рата или сукоба је сложен и нијансиран, а често су у питању многи фактори, као што су власт, политика, идеологија, новац, територија и идентитет. Мешавина религије и политике у историји је била „веома опасна“, што се видело још у средњем веку, са примерима попут крсташких ратова, а историја се понавља данас, попут примера Израела, Палестине, Балкана и Исламске државе. Овај рад ће настојати да што боље сагледа идентитет и политике аврамитичких религија на Балкану, као и њихово подударање и размимоилажење.

Кључне речи: Балкан, идентитет, ислам, Јудаизам, монотеистичке религије, политика, религија, сукоби, хришћанство.