

**Scapegoating and the Simulation of Mechanical Solidarity in Former Yugoslavia:
“Ethnic Cleansing” and the Serbian Orthodox Church**

Keith Doubt

Wittenberg University

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ABSTRACT

In this paper I use the concept of scapegoating to explain the ritualized character of “ethnic cleansing” after the break-up of Yugoslavia in the 1990s. I provide an overview of the political background behind these events, introduce the role and influence of the Serbian Orthodox Church, and analyze the collective violence known as ethnic cleansing through the concept of scapegoating. The Serbian Orthodox Church’s use of a scapegoat paradigm to incite violence created a pseudo-sense of solidarity among the Serbian people. Although this solidarity resembles Émile Durkheim’s concept of mechanical solidarity, I question the stability of this solidarity insofar as it is based on the negativity of war crimes and genocide. Implications for understanding collective violence in other areas such as the Middle East and Iraq are drawn by way of conclusion.

REFLEXIVE STATEMENT

My interest in the former Yugoslavia began in 1991. I was deeply disheartened by the disturbing reports of crimes against humanity. I started to organize sessions on Bosnia at sociology conferences in Canada and the United States. In 1998 I was invited to a conference on Democracy in Multi-Ethnic Societies and Human Rights in Konjic, Bosnia-Herzegovina, and then the Bosnian Paradigm International Conference in Sarajevo. I befriended scholars with similar interests. In Spring 2000 I received a Fulbright Lecture Award at the Faculty of Political Science, University of Sarajevo. I have published several books in this area, most recently Understanding Evil: Lessons from Bosnia and am currently co-editor with Omer Hadžiselimović of the interdisciplinary, bilingual, online journal, Duh Bosne/Spirit of Bosnia, which can be found at <http://www.spiritofbosnia.org>.

In the late 1980s, with the break up of the former Yugoslavia, the Serbian government provoked a sense of collective victimization among the Serbian people for what had happened to them at the hands of the Germans and their fascistic Croatian allies during World War II. Anywhere from tens of thousands to hundreds of thousands of Serbians were cruelly murdered, most notoriously at the concentration camp in Jasenovac. Serbian state-owned television showed the remains of victims in mass graves from World War II as they were ceremoniously exhumed and publicly displayed (Hayden 1994).

The trauma of this legacy, as noted by Robert Hayden (1994), was used by the Serbian government to incite support for the campaign of collective violence that ensued between 1992 and 1995 against the non-Serbian people who had been the Serbs' former neighbors, friends, and even relatives. Writing in September 1992, Hayden was prophetic when he observed that the adverse consequence of this violence would be felt not only by the non-Serbian victims but by the Serbian people as well:

This second consequence must be bitter for Serbs, who will some day be forced to confront a painful truth: the hidden histories that the Serbian government revealed and propagated in 1991-92 were used to incite Serbs into committing atrocities rivaling those of their earlier . . . tormentors. Because of these atrocities, the legitimacy of the Serbian cause has been lost, and the Serb victims of the 1940's, once honored dead, will be forgotten (p. 182).

Hayden presciently lamented the sacrifice that the Serbian government forced upon the Serbian people. The righteous inheritance that stems from the suffering of the Serbian people during World War II had now been lost. Hayden predicted that memory of this suffering will inevitably

be supplanted by the memory of the victims in post-communist Yugoslavia (Honig and Both 1996).

How were the Serbian people induced to sacrifice this historical legacy? What method of manipulation was used? What were the consequences of this manipulation for the Serbian people? This study describes the political background behind the activity euphemistically called “ethnic cleansing,” introduces the role and influence of the Serbian Orthodox Church, and then analyzes this state-inspired violence through the concept of scapegoating and its impact on the social solidarity of Serbian society. By way of conclusion, the study makes notable comparisons to other areas in the world.

POLITICAL OVERVIEW

The break-up of Yugoslavia in the early 1990s resulted in a complex web of collective violence that is difficult to explain in a limited amount of space. Unlike other communist countries in Eastern Europe, Yugoslavia under Josip Broz Tito had been a relatively open society with progressive social values. It was a multiethnic state that consisted of a federation of six republics—Serbia, Slovenia, Croatia, Montenegro, Macedonia, and Bosnia-Herzegovina (hitherto also referred to as Bosnia). Within Serbia, there were two autonomous provinces, Kosovo and Vojvodina, with large non-Serbian populations. In face of the growing hegemony of Serbian nationalism and the tyrannical actions of Serbia’s president Slobodan Milošević, who took power in the late 1980s and began to assume unconstitutional dictatorial powers, Slovenia and Croatia seceded from Yugoslavia in June 1991. This secession, stirred by Slovenia’s and Croatia’s own nationalist aspirations, was permitted by the Yugoslavian constitution (Silber and Little 1996).

After these secessions, the movement for independence within the republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina gained momentum as well. Bosnia was a multi-ethnic state composed of a 43

percent Bosnian Muslim, 30 percent Bosnian Serb or Orthodox, and 17 percent Bosnian Croat or Catholic, among other groups. It was a state that embraced its great cultural diversity. As such, it found itself increasingly at odds with the parochial and bigoted nationalism that was spreading throughout the former Yugoslavia. After seeking the counsel of various international organizations, including the United Nations, Bosnian leaders called for a national referendum on the secession question in March 1992. With a voter turnout of 64 percent, 98 percent voted in favor of independence. When President Alija Izetbegović subsequently declared Bosnia an independent state, the nationalist party of the Bosnian Serbs, the Serbian Democratic Party (SDS) (which did not represent all Bosnian Serbs), refused to accept the outcome. Radovan Karadžić, the SDS leader, threatened in parliament (on videotape) the imminent extinction of Bosnian Muslims.

Historically, Bosnians had established a civil order based on the assumption that Bosnia was more than “a collectivity of separate entities . . . [but] a historical entity which has its own identity and its own history” (Banac 1993:138-139). However, nationalist leaders in other Yugoslav republics sought to build nation-states based on an antithetical model grounded in the singular right of an exclusive ethnic group; they realized that they could not establish the nation-state they wanted without undermining the progressive Bosnia model (Mahmutčehajić 2000). Thus when Bosnia was formally recognized as an independent state, it was immediately attacked by Serbian militia and the Serbian-dominated Yugoslav Army stationed within Bosnia itself. Political forces from Serbia and Montenegro and later from Croatia agitated ethnic communities in Bosnia to turn against their “other” neighbors, which made the conflict look like a civil war. The goal of this military-political campaign, which came to be known as ethnic cleansing, was to partition Bosnia into ethnically homogeneous regions and divide the population that for centuries

had lived together in mixed and blended communities (Broz 2004; Donia and Fine 1994; Doubt 2000, 2006; Maass 1996; Malcolm 1996; Mahmutćehajić 2000; Silber and Little 1996).

The anti-Bosnian efforts were resisted by many Bosnian citizens from every ethnic group who had progressively and traditionally remained loyal to the ideal of a multi-ethnic state (Broz 2004). Bosnia, with its traditions of multiculturalism, had been a respected model for other republics. In the major cities of the republic, the number of bi-ethnic marriages had been close to 40 percent. Tito's vision of a progressive multi-ethnic society was internalized in Bosnia more than the other republics. Bosnians thought of themselves in terms of both their national identity as Yugoslav citizens and their ethnic identity, which for many was not mutually exclusive but mixed.

During the sadistic war that ensued in Bosnia between 1992 and 1995, close to a quarter of a million people were killed, a quarter of a million maimed, and a quarter of a million held in concentration camps. Two and a quarter million, half the population of Bosnia were driven from their homes (Broz 2002). People were forced to live in foreign countries or resettle in areas that were unnaturally made ethnically homogeneous. In a country of four-and-a-half million inhabitants, the human casualties and social costs of ethnic cleansing were thus immense, though arguably the most devastating impact was felt by Bosnian Muslims (Lockwood 1975)

The evil of ethnic cleansing was to eradicate as completely as possible the evidence of Bosnia's distinctive and multi-ethnic heritage. Not only communities (small villages, towns, and cities) with mixed and integrated populations, but also cultural institutions (libraries, mosques, churches, bridges, cemeteries, theological schools) that bore witness to Bosnia's compelling heritage were destroyed (Reidlmayer 2004). What happened in Bosnia was not genocide alone, but "sociocide," a vicious campaign to replace a complex, progressive, and open society with a simple, regressive, and bigoted one (Doubt 2000, 2006).

THE ROLE OF THE SERBIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH

The Serbian government was not the only entity that instigated the pathos of ethnic cleansing. The Serbian Orthodox Church also played a key role in promoting popular sentiments that supported collective violence against non-Serbs. According to Sonja Biserko (2005), Director of the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Serbia and a Fellow at the Woodrow Wilson Center:

With Milošević's arrival in power, the Serb Orthodox Church was returned to public prominence in order to facilitate implementation of the Serb national programme. The Church played a very important role here, by fanning ethnic nationalism and hegemonic aspirations in the popular masses and by manipulating their religious and patriotic feelings (pp. 34-35).

Indeed, key clergy in the Serbian Orthodox Church were directly involved in this post-communist manipulation of the Serbian people, fueling what Sabrina Petra Ramet (1995) called *traumatic nationalism*:

When a nation both recalls its past as rife with suffering, catastrophe, and cataclysm, and views the world as threatening, the result is *traumatic nationalism*. In the years since 1986, Serbian nationalism has assumed a specifically *traumatic* cast, drawing its energy, by habit and by nature, from a reinterpretation of Serbia's history in terms of suffering, exploitation, pain, and injustice. Serbian nationalism has not always been traumatic in character; it has become so only as a result of successful elite manipulation (p. 103).

Norman Cigar (1995), a military historian and Balkan expert, explained the regressive character of the Serbian Orthodox Church's influence over the Serbian people this way:

The Serbian Orthodox Church also played a key role in forming the moral atmosphere surrounding the Muslim issue. Although its influence in society had weakened under Communist rule after 1945, by the late 1980's it was beginning to regain part of its lost position as a moral force which could shape popular attitudes among its followers.

Stressing the overlap of national and religious identity, the Church cast the subsequent war as a religious experience. . . . Rather than stemming confrontational tendencies among the communities in the former Yugoslavia, the Serbian Orthodox Church contributed significantly to their exacerbation, . . . highlighting the threat of Islam and in delegitimizing Islam's very presence as valid (p. 30).

The role of the Church as protector of the Serbian nation gave the Church increasing social control, and with this power clergy fermented a xenophobic and bigoted attitude toward Muslims in former-Yugoslavia. As the legitimacy of the state government declined, the Church's responsibility for the collective identity of the Serbian people and the moral direction the Serbian community increased.

Michael Sells (1988), a professor of religion, provides a historical perspective on why the Serbian Orthodox Church came to promote ethnic cleansing in the way that it did: "In Bosnia, the Serb Orthodox Church made the same mistake the Catholic Church made in Croatia during World War II; it became a servant of religious nationalist militancy" (p. 79). This statement could be made stronger today because in the 1990s the Church became not just the servant but the master of religious nationalist militancy. Serbia's President Milošević often deferred to the political will of

Church leaders, and when he did not—for instance, when he signed the Dayton Peace Accords in 1995—it cost him dearly.¹ In fact, Milošević's subsequent fall from power and arrest for the War Crimes Tribunal at the Hague was in large part due to the Church's abandonment of Milošević for having betrayed its aspirations for the creation of a Greater Serbia. The Dayton Peace Accords effectively stopped the completion of the Serbian nationalist project to carve out a Greater Serbia. Territory in Bosnia-Herzegovina, especially around the city of Sarajevo, which was seized through the violence of ethnic cleansing by the Serbian nationalist army, was returned to the federation of Bosnia-Herzegovina.

How did the Church's complicity in all of this come about? Mirko Đorđević (1996), a Belgrade intellectual who writes extensively on religion in Serbia, noted that the teaching of Father Justin Popović, a cloistered Serbian Orthodox priest under communist rule, significantly influenced the politics of the Church and its actions on behalf of nationalism.

In his writings, and through his own school of disciples, Father Justin powerfully opposed ecumenicalism. He warned that rapprochement among religions, especially Rome, poses “a persistent danger for the heavenly ark of our Church.” Many of his disciples attained high positions within the church hierarchy. . . . They would become the strongest church supporters of war (p. 28).

Father Justin was a dogmatist who articulated a theology that expressed a dread of others who were not one's kin. Serbian Orthodox piety became tantamount to intolerance toward other faiths. Branimir Anzulovic (1999) reinforced this inadequately understood point:

With the soaring of populism and nationalism in the late twentieth-century Serbia, anti-ecumenists—many of them Justin Popović's pupils, known as Justinites—became even stronger and filled key positions in the church. Instead of standing against the rising religious and ethnic intolerance among the Serbs, they have contributed to it (pp. 127-128).

Radmila Radić (1996), a Serbian sociologist of religion, identified not only the political but also the theological problem characteristic of the situation in Serbia today:

From the onset of the war in the territory of the former Yugoslavia, the church granted substantial moral and material support to the Serbian population in the territories where the war was being waged. . . . The church leadership maintained that the Serbian people were not the aggressors but the victims of the conflict, and that they, for the second time in their history, were confronting genocide. The church defended the war, characterizing it as defensive. It viewed the unification of the entire Serbian people as the only and final solution of the national question (it is important to remember that any other solution would have likewise fragmented the church itself). . . . As a national church which served the interests of its people before all else, the Serbian Orthodox Church remained faithful to its programme, in contrast to many other parties, groups, and individuals. The question which remains to be answered is whether the Serbian Orthodox Church's mission in this world consists of being a Christian or a national church, and whether a path based on the national option leads to the heresy known as philetism [an overemphasis on national identity over the unity of faith] (p. 272).

Radić's concluding question is crucial. Has the national mission of the Serbian Orthodox Church displaced its Christian mission? Today the Serbian Orthodox Church is as strong as ever in Serbia. This fact is especially true under Serbia's Prime Minister Vojislav Koštunica, who is more deferent to the Church's leadership than Milošević ever was. Sonja Biserko (2004) was prescient when she wrote, "Since the Serbian Orthodox Church is the only constant of Serbs' national identity, Serbs will never be able to join the family of modern nations unless the Church's role is thoroughly scrutinized" (p. 3). At this time, this scrutiny has not occurred in a thorough and concerted fashion.

THE SCAPEGOAT RITUAL

The scope of the Serbian Orthodox Church's involvement in genocide is broad and politically complex. I will therefore limit myself here to a set of sociological concerns that may be addressed by the concept of scapegoating or the scapegoat ritual. Scapegoating is of course Biblical in its origins and has religious connotations that attempt, as Émile Durkheim (1912/1965) noted, to divide the world into the sacred and the profane. The scapegoat is a metaphorical sacrificial object through which a community purges itself of its suffering. The trauma and guilt of the community are first projected onto a sacrificial goat. Then, when the goat is ritualistically extinguished, the community's trauma is expunged and the people are made pure. This is a process that first identifies and then dis-identifies with the object of hatred. The result is a deep-seated prejudice that can express itself through ritualized violence of the most inhumane variety that is undertaken under the guise of dogmatic religious righteousness (Allport 1983; Carter 1996; Colman 1995; Douglas 1995; Girard 1977; Tismaneunu 1998).

Scapegoating is hardly unique to former-Yugoslavia, but it occurred in a particularly forceful manner there.² In collusion with the Serbian government, the Serbian Orthodox Church

promoted the scapegoat ritual as the dominant cultural, social, and religious paradigm for inciting psychological and physical violence against non-Serbian human beings. In this way, the Church turned ethnic cleansing into a religious *aesthetic* of sorts (see Benjamin 2004), giving the Serbian people a chance to expunge the trauma of World War II that was repressed under Yugoslav communism. In the process their sense citizenship in a humane Yugoslav society was dissolved.

Although scapegoating may be understood as rational behavior insofar as it can be used to advance the interests of ethnic nationalism, ultimately it is dysfunctional for the nationalist group. Observers of the Bosnian scene have implicitly acknowledged this dysfunctionality for both the group as a whole and the individual perpetrators by noting the pathology inherent in the ritualized character of the violence carried out against the dehumanized victims (Cigar 1995; Ramet 1995, 1996; Sells 1998).³

One stark example that is representative of this dynamic is found in the release of the infamous Scorpion video through the efforts of the Serbian human rights lawyer Nataša Kandrić (Hemon 2005). The video records military police from Serbia called the Scorpions murdering five Muslim males from the Srebrenica region of Bosnia-Herzegovina in July 1995 as part of a campaign of genocidal violence that killed some 8,000 Muslim men and boys (Honig and Both 1996). People living in Serbia and Bosnia have viewed this video on state television. In a painstakingly slow manner, the video shows five men being taunted, degraded, mocked, traumatized, and, finally, slaughtered. The Scorpion police are shown taking five men off a truck, forcing them to lie in a ditch, and then marching them down a road to a grass field where they are shot with their hands tied behind their backs. After shooting three of the men, the Serbian military police untie the hands of the remaining two, who are ordered to carry the three bodies into the house. After dragging the bodies through a grass field into a house, these two men are shot and left with the bodies of the others. The video is a “snuff” film that is real rather than enacted.

In the video the Serbian police are seen laughing and snickering at their victims. The five victims, one of whom is a 16-year-old boy, are objects against whom the anti-Muslim prejudice of the Serbian militia and the anti-Bosnian ideology of the Serbian nation are projected.⁴ The ritualized violence “salves their fears and insecurities with the psychic balm of empowerment,” and they become wedded, even addicted, to the perverse power that they have over others (McCoy 2006:207).

Significantly, at the beginning of the video we see Serbian Orthodox priests blessing the men who carry out these murders before they enter Bosnia. This practice was common (Đorđević 1996; Sells 1997). Cigar’s (1995) commentary is pertinent to this point:

Serbian Orthodox Church has not only failed to condemn Serbian war crimes, but it has provided chaplains to the Bosnian Serb Army and offered encouragement for operations against the Muslims. Thus, Bosnian Serbs recruits recite their induction oaths before Orthodox chaplains, while Orthodox clergyman have blessed Serbian forces, such as the elite Panthers commando unit, which has been accused of committing numerous atrocities, before they set off on operations (p. 68).

Sells (1997) adds that by “offering the Serb warriors communion without requiring confession, the Serb Orthodox clergy . . . [sanctioned the massacre] as an act sacred in itself” and tantamount to baptism by blood (p. 43). The killings were framed as forced conversions in lieu of baptism by water and were deemed necessary by Church leaders to create a Greater Serbia. The pathological projection masked the immorality of the attacks against non-Christian populations, undermining the horrific reality of what was taking place.⁵

SVETOSAVLJE AND THE PROBLEM OF MECHANICAL SOLIDARITY

In the social sciences the concept of scapegoating is typically used to explain how a community may attempt to establish social solidarity, a meaningful and significant sense of interdependence among its members. Although not a sociologist, René Girard (1997) is the most persuasive proponent of this theory as it applies to the Serbian case. In order for members to feel secure and interconnected, they ritualistically commit violence against those who have been singled out. The anxiety in the group triggers a group need for scapegoating; its purpose is to relieve the group of its anxiety so as to establish a sense of solidarity and security.

Consider the creation of Republic Srpska, a “republic” within the state of Bosnia-Herzegovina, established artificially and solely through the signing of the Dayton Peace Accords as a way to stop genocide but, apparently, reward ethnic cleansing (see note 1). The status of Republic Srpska seems now to be a *fait accompli*; genocide proved to be an effective means of achieving a political goal. But, we might ask, can a society be created through the mass purging of inhabitants in order to create an absolute majority of one particular ethnic group in an area? Can a society brought into being through genocide ever become a viable and functional community?

The political position of the Serbian Orthodox Church is that the answer to these questions is emphatically yes. The Church argues that it is now necessary for the territory of Republic Srpska to secede from the state of Bosnia-Herzegovina and become a legally and internationally recognized part of Serbia. Moreover, the *de-facto* situation is that after the war Republic Srpska is indeed more a part of Serbia than Bosnia-Herzegovina. The ethnic cleansing of hundreds of thousands of Bosnian Muslims and Bosnian Catholics from villages, towns, and cities in this territory, which constitutes half of Bosnia-Herzegovina, makes the situation that currently exists morally reprehensible.

What was the situation in this territory of Bosnia-Herzegovina before 1992? For one thing, there were over 600 mosques in this region, humble but majestic structures built through the centuries with a distinct architecture. Traveling to the town of Trebinje in this area in 1937, Rebecca West (1948) reported:

We saw the town suddenly in a parting between showers, handsome and couchant, and like all Turkish towns green with trees and refined by the minarets of many mosques. These are among the most pleasing architectural gestures ever made by urbanity. They do not publicly declare the relationship of man to God like a Christian tower or spire. They raise a white finger and say only, "This is a community of human beings and, look you, we are not beasts of the field (p. 271).

Trebinje is now a part of Republic Srpska, where these mosques that West saw in 1937 no longer exist. They were all destroyed during the war after 1992, as was the case in all of the villages, towns, and cities in the territory now called Republic Srpska. With a degree of Serbian prejudice, West miscasts Trebinje as a Turkish rather than Bosnian town. However, she does accurately characterize the Bosnian significance of the minarets she saw, shared by Muslims, Christians, and Jews, with her statement: "This is a community of human beings and, look you, we are not beasts of the field." Indeed, not only cities but also small towns in Bosnia-Herzegovina were a blend of the major faith traditions: Islam, Serbian Orthodoxy, Catholicism, and Judaism. Despite international pressure, only a few of these 600 mosques in what is now called Republic Srpska have been rebuilt, and attempts to rebuild them have often led to violence. The nationalist leaders who planned and carried out the ethnic cleansing remain in control of the region. These leaders dread the revival of the society they ruthlessly murdered (Doubt 2006). They co-opt the good

intentions of the international community that seeks their cooperation in order to rebuild Bosnian society.

The Serbian Orthodox Church supports the continuation of the situation in Republic Srpska that serves its political interests, and it exhorts political leaders to defer to its will, which leaders must do if they wish to remain in power. What is the theological reason for this position? *Svetosavlje* is the word that the Serbians use to speak of a positive, enlightened side of Serbian nationalism. One principle of *svetosavlje* is that there can be no happiness for individuals themselves without the happiness of the people to which they belong (Lukić 2001).

Svetosavlje represents what Durkheim (1893/1964) called mechanical solidarity in contrast to organic solidarity. With mechanical solidarity, the substance of the collective determines the character of the individual. Think of an Amish community in the United States: the substance of the Amish tradition determines the character of its individuals. This sense of interdependency between a community and its members is a guiding principle of Serbian nationalism. In contrast, with organic solidarity the character of the individual determines the substance of the collective. Organic solidarity arises, as Durkheim noted, with the division of labor. The more refined the specificity of an individual's occupation, the more sophisticated the society itself. The solidarity of Yugoslav society prior to ethnic cleansing had been more organic than mechanical. In theory as well as practice the distinctive heritages of its ethnic communities did not detract from the solidarity of the whole. Instead, the distinctive natures of different ethnic groups, especially in Bosnia, contributed to the overall character and vibrant nature of the society (Banac 1993).

Thus one way to characterize ethnic cleansing in post-communist Yugoslavia is to say that it represented a concerted effort by nationalist politicians and religious leaders to transform the organic solidarity of Yugoslav society into the mechanical solidarity of a particular ethnic group. In Jeffrey Alexander (1988) terms, the Serbian Orthodox Church changed the "terminal" group of

the Serbian people; the terminal group was no longer Yugoslavia but rather Greater Serbia. This transformation was quintessentially anti-modern as it moved from a civil order to a primordial order rather than from a primordial order to a civil order.

A society built on mechanical solidarity is one in which the community comes before the individual, where the well-being of the community takes precedence over the development of the individual's personality. Herein lies the principle for the notion of *svetosavlje* (Lukić 2001). What holds together the Serbian people as a national community is the mechanical solidarity of the people as a community over the organic solidarity of the people as individuals. As Durkheim (1893/2003) said, "at the moment when this solidarity exercises its force, our personality vanishes, as our definition permits us to say, for we are no longer ourselves, but the collective life" (p. 40). When the Serbian Orthodox Church insists on a Greater Serbia, it encourages Serbian people to think no longer of themselves as individuals but as Serbians. This mentality lent itself to the conduct of ethnic cleansing, while at the same time the conduct of ethnic cleansing constructed this mentality (Doubt 2000).

Is *svetosavlje*, however, a positive example of what Durkheim means by mechanical solidarity? On the surface, the answer is yes. What holds the Serbian people together is the solidarity of the nation over the solidarity of people as individuals; the Serbian Orthodox Church makes itself the guardian and guarantor of this solidarity. Underneath, however, the answer is no because Serbian nationalism represents a *negative* solidarity in that it has been established through war crimes, crimes against humanity, and genocide. Such negative solidarity cannot produce integration by itself because there is nothing affirmatively specific about it. Insofar as the Serbian Orthodox Church defines itself in a solipsistic manner, independently of not only civilization but also of Christianity, its claims for what it can positively contribute to society are insubstantial. As Mirko Đorđević (1996) explained:

The Serbian Orthodox Church is undergoing one of the most difficult periods in its long history. Incapable of sowing the seeds of real Christianity, it has tilled the worst of its inheritance. Although overflowing with spiritual culture, its dogmatic precepts have brought it into conflict with the flow of current civilization. The spirit of salvation which brought the Christian church into the world in the first place has been replaced by the ideology of nationalism (p. 30).

The Serbian Orthodox Church used the scapegoat ritual to create a pseudo-sense of mechanical solidarity qua nationalism that it romantically wishes to recover from the past and dogmatically preserve for the future. Because scapegoating, however, is inherently negative in its consequences, scapegoating cannot positively integrate the community.

The Serbian philosopher, Radomir Konstantinović, in an un-translated work titled *Filosofija palanka* [*Provincial Philosophy*], described the same pattern from the viewpoint of literary criticism when he wrote that the “entire Serbian Romanticism, especially in its final period, is imbued with the fear of man outside the kin” (Konstantinović cited in Anzulovic 1990:80). The ideology of the Serbian Orthodox Church today reflects what Konstantinović called Serbian Romanticism more than it reflects Christianity. The more the Serbian Orthodox Church defines the Serbian nation through a negative relation to others—whether these others are Catholics, Lutherans, Muslims, Albanians, Europeans, humanists, or whatever—the less the unity of faith integrates the Serbian community. Radić (1996), as noted earlier, referred to this problem as the heresy of philetism, something that historically the Serbian Orthodox Church has itself resisted (Đorđević 1996).

But the Serbian Orthodox Church today embraces the nationalist point of view not just exclusively but absolutely. Its historical suffering is depicted as so unconditional that it requires, as Alan Blum (1982) observed, “the rejection of philosophy, compassion, and research” (p. 80). Viewing itself as a martyred pariah, the Church monopolizes “the interpretation of suffering” as it claims the exclusive right to explain both the character and the conduct of the Serbian people.

CONCLUSION

It is important to put the preceding indictment of the Serbian Orthodox Church in broader perspective. There is a danger in demonizing the Church as historically aberrant, which is something to be avoided for both historical and moral reasons. The linkage between religion and nationalism through an elite’s sensationalizing of the scapegoat ritual can occur in every faith tradition. In the Middle East, the Palestinians are scapegoats for Zionism. As Palestinian scholar Edward Said argued, the Palestinian’s homeland became the sacrificial goat, not just for the creation of Israel but also for the collective guilt of the European countries that failed to intervene to stop the Holocaust. Palestinians were forced to give up their homeland to provide “living room” for the Jewish nation. This sacrificing of the Palestinians and their human rights still occurs today, in part because the weight of the guilt from the Holocaust, in which six million European Jews were murdered, is so heavy to bear (Mueller 2001).

In the United States, the religious right has become powerful in part through the scapegoating of gays and liberals so as to simulate a powerful mechanical solidarity within its community. The September 11 attacks and the trauma it created has made the American people vulnerable to the manipulation of scapegoating.⁶ The hundreds of thousands of civilian lives lost during the current wars in Afghanistan and Iraq are, in a way, scapegoats for September 11. It is difficult to otherwise explain the general indifference of the U.S. population toward not only the

deaths of U.S. soldiers but also the deaths of non-combatants in Iraq and Afghanistan, for which the U.S. government and its military are directly responsible.

The administration under George W. Bush has used the mechanism of scapegoating to morally confuse the American public to gain support for its political objectives. Just as the Serbian people will some day have to confront the painful truth of the genocide in Bosnia-Herzegovina that was carried out in their name, the American people will have to confront the painful truth of the hundreds of thousands of deaths in Afghanistan and Iraq, who were innocent human sacrifices for September 11. No other logic explains the Congressional and popular support that the Bush administration has received for so long for these wars.

Karl Marx (1844/1995) is famous for his assertion that religion is the opium of the masses. This study offers a new twist on this axiom. Scapegoating, not religion, is the opium of the masses, and through history different religions have “pushed” the opium. While the masses have become quickly addicted, scapegoating is good for neither the masses nor religion.

The task is to provide the repudiation of scapegoating, the antidote to its opium effects. Durkheim’s observations are once again germane. In his essay “Individualism and the Intellectuals,” which is a critique of the scapegoating ritual during the Dreyfus affair in France that marked the end of the nineteenth century, Durkheim (1973) wrote:

And since each of us incarnates something of humanity, each individual consciousness contains something divine and thus finds itself marked with a character which renders it sacred and inviolable to others. Because each individual is sacred and thus inviolable to others, scapegoating is . . . necessarily taboo (p. 52).

The principle holds even for the most abhorrent among us because no individual or group can accept the scapegoating of another. When people are persuaded by this principle and internalize it, they are able to recognize that moral unity in society can be obtained only when the state itself defends this conviction. This moral unity, moreover, is the strongest form of social solidarity obtainable (Dworkin 1977).

Durkheim demonstrates how the problem of social order cannot be resolved without embracing individual human rights. According to Durkheim (1973:50), the social contract serves the interests of the individual and society equally: “Not only is individualism distinct from anarchy; but is henceforth the only system of beliefs which can ensure the moral unity of the country” (p. 50). How can it be that individualism and the moral unity of the country are simultaneously affirmed? Durkheim argued that a state may never accept scapegoating as a way to establish social order because “[t]here is no reason of State which can excuse an outrage against the person when the rights of the person are placed above the State” (p. 46). Durkheim predicted that whenever society “tolerates acts of sacrilege, it abdicates any sway over men’s minds” (p. 53). The failure to respect this principle of governance explains the spiral of violence in not only former-Yugoslavia but also Israel’s oppression of the Palestinians, France’s colonization of Algeria, Russia’s suppression of Chechnya, and the U.S. occupation of Iraq, among other bleak situations in the world. Again, when a state “tolerates acts of sacrilege, it abdicates any sway over men’s minds” (p. 53).

The dichotomy of mechanical solidarity and organic solidarity may be a false dichotomy. It is not only possible but also desirable for a community to contain both types of solidarity simultaneously and interdependently. The problem of liberal democracies and their promotion of a free-market in a global economy is that they idealize the individuality inherent in organic solidarity. The good of mechanical solidarity in traditional societies is unrecognized and

denigrated as regressive and undeveloped. While organic solidarity, as Durkheim said, represents the advance of civilization, it is not necessarily an enlightened solidarity with respect to the self-understanding of humanity itself. In contrast, the problem of nationalism is that it idealizes the unity of mechanical solidarity. The good of individuality and respect for human rights are sacrificed. Nationalism fails to recognize the unity found in diversity and multiplicity. It wrong-headedly assumes that unity can be expressed only as singularity. For this reason, nationalism of the type promoted by the Serbian Orthodox Church can be said to be a “sociocidal” force.

ENDNOTES

¹In 1995 the Dayton Peace Accord ended the violence of ethnic cleansing in Bosnia-Herzegovina but divided the country into two entities: a Serbian entity constituting about half of the country called Republic Srpska and a federal entity where Bosnian Croats and Bosnian Muslims primarily live. Although many Bosnian Serbs live in the federal entity with Bosnian Muslims and Bosnian Croats (and did so during the war), it remains extremely difficult for Bosnian Croats and Bosnian Muslims to return to their homes and former communities in Republic Srpska, which is controlled by the nationalist leaders and ideologies responsible for the war crimes against the Bosnian people.

²Given the cultural diversity of the area, it has become convenient for nationalist politicians from every ethnic community to promote scapegoating behavior that turns one group of people against another (Tismaneunu 1988). Albanians today, for example, scapegoat Kosovo Serbs for the oppression and injustices that Kosovo Albanians suffered as a community under Milošević’s rule in the 1980s and 1990s. The international community has had trouble preventing this ethnic violence that attempts to drive Kosovo Serbs from Kosovo, the spiritual home of the Serbian Orthodox Church.

³As an analytical concept, scapegoating, even if pathological, may be understood in the Weberian sense as an ideal type. As Max Weber (1978) wrote, “For the purposes of typological scientific analysis it is convenient to treat all irrational, affectually determined elements of behavior as factors of deviation from a conceptually pure type of rational action. . . . Only in this way is it possible to assess the causal significance of irrational factors as accounting for the deviations from this type” (p. 6).

⁴I would argue as well that these five men became lightning rods for the antipathy that the murderers feel toward not only their victims but also toward themselves for having participated in the anti-Muslim atrocities. In Freudian terms, the pathology of the perpetrators’ actions entails the projection or transference of the group’s intolerable self-hatred onto an external other. The transference occurs in a perverse manner because the self-hatred is so unshakable.

⁵Although the nationalist Serb leader Karadžić has been indicted for the crime of genocide by the International Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia, he remains free following the war that ended in 1995, finding safe haven in various remote Serbian Orthodox monasteries. The unwillingness and inability to bring Karadžić to justice is a most egregious guilt that the international community shares with the Serbian Orthodox Church. In Republic Srpska and Serbia today, popular culture canonizes Karadžić. Children sign rhymes that glorify the war criminal, and the Serbian Orthodox Church considers sanctifying him.

⁶For an account of September 11 as part of the general phenomenon of cultural trauma and national identity, see Neil J. Smelser (2004).

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