Unblocking the Sacred: New perspectives on the religious revival in South Eastern Europe

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ABSTRACT: Many studies of contemporary religion in South Eastern Europe link resurgent nationalism to the revival of religion, arguing that nationalism is grounded in religion and has taken over many former religious symbols, beliefs and rituals. This argument is a key feature of social science studies of religion in the region. In cases from the former Yugoslavia, focus on this type of connection between religion and nationalism has prevented a more nuanced description of the religious transformation of communities after the fall of communism. This article will discuss the pitfalls of such a simplification and how it is possible to nuance the study of religion in the South Eastern European context. This will be done through a critical review of studies of religion in Montenegro and an examination of the local badnjak Christmas ritual. This article aims to craft a revised analytical strategy the nuances the connection between religion and nationalism but also acknowledges religion as its own system.

KEYWORDS: Religion, Nationalism, South Eastern Europe, Montenegro, Serbia, Eastern Orthodoxy

The revival of Eastern Orthodoxy and nationalism

On June 28, 1989, the Serbian saint's day, Vidovodan, was celebrated at Kosovo Polje in Kosovo. The day marked the 500th anniversary of the battle at Kosovo Polje and the fall and death of St. Prince Lazar. During the celebration, then Serbian president, Slobodan Milošević, took the stage. Milošević gave what would come to be known as the Gazimestan speech, which marked the return of religion and nationalism—two sets of beliefs and practices that had been marginalized for decades by the communist authorities throughout South Eastern Europe. This marked the decline of the communist ideology and the beginning of a new era for nation-states and churches throughout South Eastern Europe. Milošević spoke of the Serbian nation, the Serbian state and the Serbian Orthodox Church as one unit in which ethnicity, identity and

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religion could not be separated and a historical unit upon which the Serbian state stood and depended.[1]

However, Milošević's speech at Kosovo Polje was not a turning point ushering in a new time of revival and reconnection between the nationalism of nations in existence before the communist take-over and the churches of these nation-states. The speech was rather a witness to how nationalism and religion had slowly become a new foundation upon which states, political elites, and ethnic groups would build their identity after communism. This process took place throughout the formerly communist-controlled Eastern European region from Moldova (Zabarah 2011) in the northeast to Croatia (Pavlakovic et al. 2001) in the southwest.

The region saw a revival of religious communities and national movements, which took place in different forms and at different speeds, before and during the political transition of these formerly totalitarian-controlled nation-states. These movements were quite noticeable in the former socialist federation of Yugoslavia, where the ruling authorities had relied on the creation of a common Yugoslav identity and an acceptance of local republics' ethnic identities to ensure a peaceful co-existence (Lampe 2000). The rise of nationalism and religion—as well as several other factors— challenged this federation and led to its dissolution amid wars, civil wars and the formation of new nation-states. Religious communities and national movements often formed opposition groups against the communist authorities, which added to the new prominence of religion and nationalism in the region (Clardie 2016, 18). Indeed, religion and nationalism were the counterpoints to communism in many states. The prominence of religion in the region was even further advanced by a series of political, social and economic initiatives, such as the Serbian revision of the laws on religion granting the Orthodox community access to funds, sites and a role in the new school system (Pollack and Rosta, 2017, 416).

In the early 1990s, the rise of nationalism and religion created stronger differentiation between the former Yugoslav republics, and these two forces came to be seen as the primary drivers behind the Yugoslav wars, as well as the main factors that caused an onslaught on civilians of different ethnicities and religious groups, according to several studies, such as those by Branimir Anzulovic (1999) and Michael Sells (1998).

This interpretation of the conflict in Yugoslavia has meant that the studies of religion, especially in Serbia, Montenegro and Macedonia, such as those by František Šistek (2010) and Milan Vukomanovic (2008), have focused, above all, on the connection between religion and nationalism. In these studies, it is argued that nationalistic movements use religion and the religious world-system to attain political goals. This is often referred to as "clericalization" of politics (Blagojević 2008, 39). This assumption and analytical point of view has become an all-encompassing departure into studies of religion, blocking a more nuanced picture of religion in the area and of the revival of its religious communities.

This article seeks to reexamine this assumption and point of view to religion—theoretically and through an in-depth study of a case from Montenegro—in order to underline the need to historically and sociologically understand religion in the former Yugoslav republics before any conclusion can be reached and to discuss how a more nuanced approach to religion in these states could be shaped. The entanglement of religion and the politics of nationalism often leads to an "easy avenue" of analysis, whereby religion is simplified and reduced to categories of nationalism without the proper contextualization of its religious practices, ideas and symbols.

This article consists of three parts. The first one is a short review of recent studies on religion and nationalism in Yugoslavia and Montenegro to highlight how religion has been

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[1] The full speech in Serbian is accessible here: http://www.pecat.co.rs/2011/06/govor-slobodana-milosevica-na-gazimestanu-1989-godine/ /retrieved 07.01.2017.

studied and theoretically framed, and how its connection to nationalism has been identified. The second part of the paper is a case study from Montenegro, exemplifying the blind spots and oversimplification that studies have made in relation to religion in this particular case. The final part is a discussion of how a more nuanced approach, called nationalization of the sacred, could be shaped and how such an approach would function.

Studies of religion and nationalism in Yugoslavia

In his key study of religion and nationalism in the former Yugoslav republics, Vjekoslav Perica (2002, 6) claims that the formation of the ethnic "nations" (Croats, Serbs, Slovenes etc.) of Yugoslavia were based on an identification of links between religion and nationalism. This connection was forged in the 20th and 21st centuries by various religious institutions, scholars and state elites during the formation of the first Yugoslavia and its predecessor states. Perica argues that this connection was necessary in order for the political elites to legitimize their power in myths and achieve the subsequent sacralization of the nation-state. This new, sacred foundation of the nation secured the political elites' hold on power, and the population's support of the state—in Perica's terms, the church, nation and state became inseparable.

This interpretation of religion is primarily based on the functionalist approach to social phenomena, such as religion and nationalism, as Perica notes (2002, 6). The functionalist approach focuses on the function of religion and the nation within a specific political and cultural context and on how individuals or groups use these concepts to make sense of the world, accumulate power and legitimize the use of power. The functionalist approach is based on the notion that religion and nationalism gain prominence in a society to solve or answer a problem. An example is the belief in the afterlife, which in functionalism is seen as the answer to the problem of mortality. Therefore, religion is not defined by what it is (its content), but rather what it does or achieves (its function). In this way, functionalism leads to a reactive definition and interpretation of religion—religion needs to do something or achieve something before it can be studied. Functionalism, therefore, only paints a partial picture, as Detlef Pollack and Gergely Rosta note (2017, 40); however, the functionalist interpretation is nevertheless a suitable analytical tool to examine the former Eastern Bloc over the last thirty years. Functionalism is well suited to study religion empirically, because it highlights the social features of religion regardless of the religions inner logic.

    The fall of communism meant that the problems of identity, belonging and fulfilling everyday practical needs had to be re-defined and re-adjusted to a new world order where communism no longer had an iron grip on society. In such circumstances, the functionalistic analysis is able to grasp and nuances the relations between identity and religion. Religious communities rose to the forefront of the affected societies, and their offer of redemption or belonging was necessary once more. Therefore, religion and nationalism overtook the functions of communism, in the same manner as communism had overtaken many former religious functions almost half a century before (Pollack and Rosta, 2017, 39-40).

According to the functionalist approach, religion is a system of beliefs and practices that corresponds to a system of national beliefs and practices. Both of these systems of symbols, ideas and practices could support a group identity, such as the imagination of a collective community of a nation (Anderson 1998). The theoretical backbone of functionalistic studies of religion is the constructivist school of nationalism (Tomka et al. 2016, 81). Functionalism's

approach to nationalism is a constructivist one; a range of examples can be found in Pål Kolstø et al.'s (2014) anthology, which focuses on strategies for nation-building in the Balkans.

In constructivism, nationalism and religion are characterized by their social roles and interpreted as constructions of human imagination; in that sense, religion and nationalism are similar, and, therefore, religious practices and beliefs can correspond to national ones. Key differences, however, are their contextual and historical aspects. Religions, as organized and practicing communities, often transcend national boundaries and draw from older and deeper traditions. Religion, therefore, often has the aura of authenticity, which newer constructions lack. Nationalism, as Benedict Anderson (1998) points out, has grown out of religion and has "borrowed" its authenticity (Tomka et al. 2016, 83-85). In other words, nationalism sometimes uses religious practices and beliefs to claim legitimacy and authenticity as a true nation, as Andrew Hastings (1997, 187-188) shows in greater detail.

The notion that religion is more authentic builds on an assumption that religion and nationalism are not identical forms of a cultural system. Nationalism is a different kind of phenomenon, or a "*differentia specifica*," to quote Pollack and Rosta (2017, 36). Using this perspective, religion is irreducible because it has features that separate it from other human systems, such as the political principles of nationalism. A classic description of a unique religious feature is Rudolf Otto's (1920) description of "the holy" in his seminal work from 1917. According to Otto, "the holy" should be understood as a numinous and mysterious force that creates both fascination and terror in its spectators (*mysterium tremendum et fascinosum*). This force, which makes places holy or sacred, is a unique feature of religion. Meanwhile, nationalism, could be defined as a political principle based on a national identification or cultural similarity, as Ernest Gellner (1997) states in his classic definition.

Perica (2002, 6) works with a functionalist approach and is aware of the potential danger of his definitions of religion and nationalism, which leads to critical reflection on this issue within his work. However, Perica's description of the connection between nationalism and religion in Yugoslavia is echoed and retold—in a less reflective manner—through a vast body of literature on religion in the Yugoslav-sphere (e.g., Merdjanova 2000; Sells 1998; Kolstå 2014; Vukomanovic 2008; Anzulovic 1999; Mylonas 2006). The same connection between religion and nationalism outside Yugoslavia can be found in Daniel Payne's study (2007), where the approach is broadened to cover Eastern Europe in general. The aforementioned studies often reproduce or accept Perica's notion. As Daniela Kalkandjieva concludes in a 2011 study, such an uncritical assumption about the connection between church, state and nation/ethnic community need to be supported rather than assumed. Symbols, rituals, beliefs and ideas often have histories of their own that do not necessarily correspond one-to-one to a national narrative, as Kalkandjieva (2011, 2016) shows in her examination of the Orthodox idea of state-church relations. A function within one system of practice and belief is not necessarily directly transferable to another.

The point of departure for this article is that Perica and others' approaches to religion in Yugoslavia have prevented a deeper understanding of the concrete dynamics at play because, as Kalkandjieva (2011) warns, these studies have oversimplified the connection between religion and nationalism. The aforementioned scholars have come to see religion as a part of culture in broad terms and have, therefore, reduced the concept to an empty category. My main critique levied against these studies is that this reduction lose sights of religious function in a broader historical and cultural context. Studies of religion in Yugoslavia (Vukomanovic 2008; Anzulovic 1999; Mylonas 2006) have taken the functionalist approach too far in their study of nationalism and have skipped over the contextualization of social phenomena. This hypothesis is unfolded and tested in the present article by an examination of the case of Montenegro to determine whether it could be ascribed to the inherent problem in functionalism.

Montenegro: Religion as the hallmark of nationalism?

Since the fall of communism, religion in Montenegro has mainly been studied within the social sciences, as is the case for many other former Yugoslav countries. Most seminal and contemporary studies of Montenegrin society are focused on the transition of Montenegro from a Yugoslav republic to an independent state in 2006, such as those by Kenneth Morrison (2009) and Florian Bieber et al. (2003). Those studies touch on religion as a political matter. In other social science studies (Džankić 2014a; Pavicevic et al. 2009), religion is analyzed, but only in relation to the newly-formed independent Montenegrin ethnic identity or the political divide between the pro-Serb-unionist and the pro-Montenegrin-independence movements. A few studies in Serbian and English deal with the socio-religious context in Montenegro (e.g., Bakrač 2011, 2012; Bakrač et al. 2013) or focus on the local Muslim community (e.g., Kajoshaj 2010; Pačariz 2015), but they are descriptive and deal mostly with the social and legal setting of religion in Montenegrin society.

Only a handful of internationally published studies directly address the majority religion, Eastern Orthodoxy (Kube 2012; Džankić 2013, 2014b; 2016; Šistek 2010; Morrison 2015; Zdravkovski et al. 2014). A common denominator for studies of Eastern Orthodoxy in Montenegro is that they seem to be extensions of Perica's (2002) landmark study and approach to religion. This means that they explain and examine religion through the context of the functionalist and constructivist theories and conceptions of nationalism. A noticeable study that departs from this trail is Alice Forbess's work (2013), which is an anthropological study of the Eastern Orthodox communities in Montenegro. However, Forbess's main focus is not on religion per se, but rather on the connection between religious charisma, the image of heroic clans and the state-building process, as seen from an anthropological angle; religion becomes a charismatic power rather than an explanation for nationalism due to Forbess's focus on the practices of communities and individuals.

A series of studies (Kube 2012; Džankić 2013, 2014b, 2016; Šistek 2010; Morrison 2015; Zdravkovski et al. 2014) seem to base their analyses of religion on the functionalist approach due to the personal relationships between religious community leaders and political parties, non-govermental organizations (NGOs) and/or state institutions. This entanglement enabled close personal and institutional connections between the Montenegrin political elite and the local, unrecognized Montenegrin Orthodox Church, as well as between the local Serbian Orthodox Metropolitanate, its charismatic leader, Metropolitan Amfilohije (Radović) and the pro-Serbian elite in Montenegrin politics (Morrison 2009). Since these social and political relationships were so visible (see Saggau 2017a), it is an obvious choice for scholars to focus on the relationship between religion and nationalism. A key example is Stefan Kube's (2012) study in which he discusses the sacralization of the state in Montenegro. Kube quickly reaches the conclusion that the competition between the two Orthodox communities in Montenegro (the Serbian and Montenegrin one) can be linked back to competition between a Serbian-oriented nationhood and a Montenegrin one. The issue of religious conflict and the process of sacralization is distilled down to an issue of nationhood and a political question about whether Montenegro should be independent of Serbia. The personal and institutional alliances in Montenegro determined the content of Kube's analysis and overshadowed the concrete religio-social dynamics at play.

The connection highlighted by Kube is correct, but his analysis fails to grasp the whole story. In particular, his description uncritically caters to the nationalist-oriented political elites in Montenegro who seek to portray churches as agents of the nation rather than as religious communities (Saggau 2017a, 13-15). The conclusions made by Kube and others (Džankić 2013, 2014b, 2016; Šistek 2010; Morrison 2015; Zdravkovski et al. 2014) support the image of religion and Eastern Orthodoxy in Montenegro as a symbolic continuation of nationalist and political

in-fighting. Accordingly, religious institutions are deprived of their religious features to become political organizations, religion as a category of meaning is emptied and its beliefs and practices are turned into a national or externally religious system. Such a conclusion seems to take the constructivist and functionalist approach too far and does not consider the cultural and historical contexts. Instead, religion is seen as a phenomenon that can only function within a national political system.

A case from Montenegro

This section discusses a specific case from Montenegro to reveal how the blurring of the border between religion and nationalism could block a deeper understanding of religion. The case examines the practices and beliefs connected to a specific ritual, known as the badnjak [bădɲaːk], which is known throughout South Eastern Europe and the Slavic parts of Christendom. This widespread Christmas practice consists of a burning of a log to commemorate the birth of Christ, accompanied by either a local family ritual or a ritual performed by a priest. Badjnak was discouraged in Montenegro and throughout Yugoslavia during the communist period, but, since the early 1990s, it has become a central part of the Christmas celebration, especially among Eastern Orthodox believers in Serbia and Montenegro.

Originally in the nineteenth century, the ritual was a family one, in which a log was selected on Christmas day and burned in the evening. In the 20th century, the ritual became a public one that was often celebrated in large Orthodox cities across the Balkans. In Montenegro, a log is burned in front of the Monastery of Cetinje, which is the center of Orthodoxy in Montenegro, and most families from the city attend. This practice might date back to the Montenegrin Kingdom before World War I. Traditionally, the burning of the log is overseen by the local Eastern Orthodox Metropolitan. The ritual can best be described as a large bonfire at which traditional Montenegrin epic songs are sung, accompanied by the guslar, a Balkan guitar. It is not a strict ritual and has kept some of the characteristics from the original family ritual. The attendees often engage in small-talk or conduct business and kids play while their parents go back and forth on the streets during the burning of the log. It is very informal, which is typical for outdoor Orthodox gatherings in the Balkans. At the ritual, the priest often gives a short speech or sermon ending with the distribution of hot locally-brewed brandy, wine or tea, along with food, as an informal symbol of the Eucharist.

In the early 1990s, during the rise of Serbian nationalism across the Balkans, the Serbian Metropolitan, Amfilohije, took the seat reserved for the Metropolitan of the Serbian Orthodox Church in Montenegro. Serbian flags and traditional Serbian songs were, therefore, at the forefront of the event. In opposition to Amfilohije, a group of citizens in Cetinje began having their own log burning ritual, just a few hundred meters away, in front of King Nikola's palace, which was the home of the last Montenegrin king. At this badnjak, Montenegrin flags were displayed and traditional songs of the Montenegrin clans were sung. As such, the badnjak ritual became a public display of Montenegrin citizens' support or opposition to Metropolitan Amfilohije. Since the formation of the canonically unrecognized Montenegrin Orthodox Church in 1993, the badnjak at Nikola's palace has been overseen by the leader of that church (Morrison 2015). Today, the ritual is more of a public manifestation of the strength of the two parties, rather than a religious rite and could be better described as a political demonstration—with flags, songs and speeches from religious leaders—taking place around a bonfire. The presence of armed police and occasional confrontations between the supporters of the two churches have also changed the atmosphere of the event. However, regardless of the political

content, the center of the event is still the burning of the log as a symbol of a tree from Paradise, which sparks hope about the birth of Christ.

Kube (2012), Morrison (2015) and Šistek (2010) explain this yearly event and display of Montenegrin and Serbian symbols as a point of departure in the discussion of religion in Montenegro. Kube simply notes (2012, 116, 130-131) that the background for the competing badnjak celebrations is the rebuilding of Montenegrin and Serbian nationhoods. The same point is reached by Šistek (2010, 1), who calls it "a clericalization of nationalism" (as his articles title) underlining that the clerics are merely seen as agents for two opposing nationalist movements. Morrison (2015, 110-111) notes that the ritual is used by each party to display their belonging to a Serbian and Montenegrin nation, and that the Serbian Orthodox Church claims the event as a "Serbian tradition." Kube (2012), Morrison (2015) and Šistek (2010) have valid points, but they never dwell on whether the display of national belonging is all there is to say about the event. There are also several open questions: Why is this tradition, place and form used by the nationalist movements? Are the displays only about bolstering the nationalism of the Montenegrins and the Serbians? What is the content of this ritual (practice) and the belief system attached to it? Why is it so important that the two opposing groups recapture the ritual as theirs?

Part of the answers to the question on the central importance of this ritual can be found much deeper in Montenegro's religious and cultural heritage. Badjnak and Christmas have religious and cultural meanings that reach beyond any other rituals, events or practices in Montenegro. The reason for this dates back to Petar II Petrović-Njegoš (1813-1851), who ruled the land as both its secular and religious leader, as his family had done since the 16th century. Njegoš was also a well-known poet, and his most famous work is the epic, "Gorski vijenac" (The Mountain Wreath, 1847). The work is about his forefather, Danilo I, and the clansmen of Montenegro and tells the tale of how, during Christmas, they "cleansed" Montenegro of all Muslim Montenegrins who did not renounce Islam (the event is often referred to as the Montenegrin Vesper). The tale is told as an allegedly historical event, and it has been interpreted as the event that secured Montenegro as an Orthodox land and paved the way for the region's independence from the Muslim Ottoman Empire (Roberts 2007, 132-136). The epic has a few lines about badnjak, where the ritual is mentioned as the least a Slavic family could do in order to honor the Christian and Slavic traditions. Njegoš (2007) writes:

> *Let flare the Serbian Christmas log [badnjak]*
> *Pain gaily too the eggs for Eastertide;*
> *Observe with care the Lent and Autumn Fasts,*
> *And for the rest—do what is dear to thee! (859-863)*

In the epic, badnjak was the benchmark for being an Orthodox Slav. It became a central cultural cue, since "The Mountain Wreath" was added to the standard curriculum throughout both the royal and socialist Yugoslavian state; the epic was considered a source of inspiration for ethnic chauvinism and ethnic cleansing, as well as for thoughts about freedom and liberty (Pavlovic 2001; Wachtel 2004).

Christmas in Cetinje, Montenegro, also holds more recent historical memories. During the 1918 holiday, a group of Montenegrins revolted against the Belgrade army, which had taken control of the land after the collapse of the Austrian Empire and wouldn't allow the last Petrović king to return to his capital. The uprising in 1918 is known as the Montenegrin civil war, which ended when the Montenegrin rebels were heavily defeated by the Belgrade army. The same year marked the end of Montenegro as an independent country, which meant that the Montenegrin Orthodox Church was dismantled soon after and turned into a part of the Belgrade Patriarchate (Roberts 2007, 324). The Christmas uprising of 1918 and the Montenegrin civil war have significant political symbolism today and are currently used as reference points

in parliamentary discussions between pro-Serbian and pro-Montenegrin officials (Tanner 2017). The Montenegrin civil war is also closely related to current strife between the Serbian Orthodox Metropolitanate and the canonically unrecognized Montenegrin Orthodox Church, because the latter's status and the debate on its ownership rights to property now belonging to the Serbian Orthodox Church have their roots in the aftermath of the war.

As briefly described above, the cultural and religious meaning of badnjak in Montenegro and in Cetinje, in particular, draws on deep traditions, which explains the unanswered questions in Kube's (2012), Morrison's (2015) and Šistek's (2010) studies. The fullness of the meaning of the ritual is found in the religious and cultural history of Montenegro, which has shaped the scene onto which the nationalist struggles of today are played. This religious history and how it has been retold are central to understanding how nationalism uses the religious system of practices. As Tomkas et al. (2014, 83) note, in reference to Turner (2006), the religious system has a certain depth that political systems—such as nationalism—lack. The religious phenomenon of ritual needs to be understood as a function within certain historical and cultural contexts before its function within the political system can make sense. Christmas in Montenegro is not only a religious event celebrating the birth of Christ, but it is closely intertwined with Eastern Orthodox history and related to the religious and political fate of the region. Christmas in Montenegro marks the birth of Christ, as well as the Montenegrin Vesper, the Montenegrin civil war and the central status of Njegoš. Therefore, it is perhaps the most important holiday for commemorating the Montenegrin past.

Traditionalism, revivalism or a new religion?

The badnjak ritual also points to a socio-religious structure that serves as the basis for other perspectives on religion in Montenegro. Perica (2002) notes that religion in Yugoslavia was more of a public display of belonging than a personal belief kept private. In this view, religion is a public affair that could be defined in functionalist terms as the practices of "belong, behave and belief" (Akongul 2016, 145). Displays of belonging and behaving at public events are religious practices as much as a national ones—and ones that occur regardless of the personal beliefs of the individual participants.

Badjnak displays a certain set of religious belonging and behaving practices that are noticeably separate from national ones. Badjnak, in Cetinje, despite its centuries-old history, is a revived and transformed ritual. The traditional ritual was performed in one place, but it has been transformed into two rituals in the same city by the opposing Montenegrin and Serbian movements, who refuse to perform a united ritual. Thus, the tradition has been disturbed and turned into something new. The newly invented features of the ritual point to the "novelty" of the two Churches involved in these events. Both organizations have experienced significant transformations during the past thirty years: the Serbian Orthodox Church changed from being a marginalized community to a central and influential societal actor, while the Montenegrin Orthodox Church was revived. Therefore, it makes sense to religio-sociologically examine whether these organizations can be considered "new" revivalist religions. Such organizations are often characterized as adolescent and act in similar patterns because they are both new and religious (Barker 2013). Such communities are often small in number, focused on person-to-person interactions and led by a charismatic leader. Organizations of this type are often highly unpredictable and their core members are often very enthusiastic (Barker 2013, 14). The uncanonical Montenegrin Orthodox Church fits well into this category socially due to its small size—approximately 5,000 core believers and a handful of churches—and its relatively recent establishment, but its content should be labeled as "revivalist" (Saggau 2017a, 49-50). The Serbian Metropolitanate in Montenegro, a semi-autonomous organizational part of the Serbian Orthodox Church, has traits that correspond with new religions, such as enthusiastic

core members and a central charismatic leader, but it has many more members than a typical new religion, estimated to around 40 pct. of the population of Montenegro, and a strong and long established infrastructure of churches, clerics, etc. (Saggau 2017a, 35-36, 38-40). To some extent, the novelty of the Badjnak ritual reflects the revivalism present in both the Serbian and Montenegrin Orthodox Churches.

Specifically regarding badnjak, both Churches display the same socio-religious structures. First, each Church has incorporated national songs, flags and symbols into its version of the ritual to highlight the differences between the two rituals and the two communities. The national flags and songs play religious roles—apart from their national ones—because they mark the differences between the two seemingly identical rituals. Second, both the Serbian and Montenegrin flags use traditional crosses in their national flags. The Serbian cross and the Montenegrin cross each signify a different, deeply religious tradition. The Serbian cross is a state symbol for Serbia and was used by its royal house. Traditionally, the cross is golden-yellow, with four Cyrillic "c" letters between its arms. Meanwhile, the Montenegrin cross was the symbol used by the medieval dukes of old Montenegro and the Montenegrin Metropolitanate under the Ottoman Empire. It looks similar to the traditional Maltese cross and is traditionally white on a red background. Each cross also refers to a national symbol of either the Serbian or Montenegrin saints.

In addition, both versions of the badnjak ritual reinforce each other because neither Church can step down and let the other one take possession of the tradition. The two rituals preserve the need for charismatic leaders and enthusiastic core members who will turn up every Christmas. Badjnak, thereby, has become symptomatic of religiosity in the Balkans and reveals how religion has been put to the forefront of the cultural renegotiation of identity in the region. At the same time, the two rituals are basically the same and their function is to secure a path between Montenegro's former system of religious beliefs and those of its new communities. In that view, badnjak is a religious gateway to history and its function is to answer the very core question of identity and belonging. The ritual in itself holds the numinous power to fascinate and terrify (Otto 1920), which both communities seek to control. The burning of the log is still the center of the ritual and not the national flags.

The badnjak ritual also reveals a historical pathway and highlights the various cultural and religious traditions in use—which are lost when the ritual is only interpreted as a nationalist display. This pathway and the ritual's numinous power are of great importance to both Churches, but more so for the unrecognized Montenegrin Orthodox Church. In the Montenegrin Orthodox Church's own magazine, badnjak is used as a central point of reference to connect the Church's recent history with Montenegro's history and the history of Christendom. In a recent article (Lucindan 2015), the Montenegrin Orthodox Church reports on its badnjak in the Montenegrin city of Kotor. In the article, a speech given at the event by the leader of the church is cited; the leader binds the ritual together with the spirit of Christmas and the birth of Christ. In the speech, Christ is remembered by how he was judged, humiliated and crucified, which, the religious leader comments, is "a similar fate our homeland has experienced, Montenegro!" (Lucindan 2015, 18, Author's translation). The suffering of Christ is used here as an analogy for the suffering of Montenegro and the Montenegrin Church's community. In this example, the badnjak ritual is used as a sacred bridge through which the experiences of the community, the historical fate of the state of Montenegro and Christ are bound together. The ritual reinforces the belief that the community's suffering corresponds with Christ's suffering. The ritual and the preaching during the ritual not only represent an entanglement of religion and nationalism, but also a binding of the sacred image of Christ, the sacred ritual of his birth and his body (the church) to a specific nation. Thus, the religious system of meaning—here, the sacred numinous power—takes on a national meaning.

Re-approaching religion in Montenegro

Behind the recent revival of religion in the Balkans, a multitude of nationalization projects are visible, as Pål Kolstø et al.'s (2014) anthology shows. These projects are necessary because the formation of the southern Slavic nations, such as the Illyrian or Yugoslav ones, have failed. The nationalization projects of today provide an opportunity for empirical study and concrete identification of the sacred within nationalism, as well as underlining the differences between the two.

A contemporary example of how the sacred has been nationalized can be found within the unrecognized Montenegrin Orthodox Church, which is often very direct in its claims on parochial churches in the heartland of Montenegro. Its claims are often based upon the argument that the temples were built on land owned by a specific Montenegrin clan. The Montenegrins (a broad category), therefore, own the sacred sites, rituals and materials on their land, and the church buildings should either be restored to their Church or at least made the property of the new Montenegrin state (Lucindan 2012a, 32, 2012b, 74-75). In one article, the Church writes, "substantial, original and factual church property in Montenegro is clearly Montenegrin, and not Serbian property" (Lucindan 2013, 46, Author's translation).

This sort of national claim on the sacred—here, churches—could be labeled, as an ecclesiology of kinship, because the organizational and governing structure (the ecclesiology) of the church is based on kinship. This structure seems to reach beyond the modern organization of states and even nationalism. According to this logic, the sacred and physical natures of sites are bound to a specific kinship within a clan; therefore, the sacred has been nationalized through its physical form.

This ecclesiology builds on an argument that claims that it is part of a much more genuine tradition of allegiance in Montenegrin society, than national allegiance. It is said that allegiance to kin and clans—rather that ethnicity and states—is a more "natural" form of loyalty in Montenegrin society (Forbess 2013). The point is not that Montenegro is still a tribal society, but that the sacred plays a vital role in the original clan structure of Montenegro. In this context, allegiance to a church is interpreted as equal to allegiance to family—loyalty through blood to clan and church. Belonging to a clan also means belonging to a specific church. In today's world of politics, this sentiment is transferred from clan and family onto the nation, which, in turn, is based on the archaic structure of governance. Therefore, the nation-state is interpreted as a prolonging of the clan-based Montenegrin state, marking an evolution from allegiance to the sacred (a church) to kin or the clan to modern day nation-states.

What is at play here and in other post-Yugoslav states is not just a new form of an imagined community; sacred sites, rituals and materials are integrated and nationalized into parts of the older societal structure in new ways (e.g., Ivekovic 2002). One central argument, which is often used in Montenegro (see Sekulović 2010) and elsewhere in the broader Eastern Orthodox world, as noted by Payne (2007), is that the nationalized church and its system of beliefs is an embodiment of the local church, which is a theological concept used as the cornerstone of the Orthodox ecclesial structure. Today, the idea of the local church has been adopted by ecclesial and political elites as a type of theological whitewashing of nationalization. Originally, the concept was that the local church was a physical building, a community and an organization, which became integrated into Orthodox Christendom through rituals. The concept of the local church was initially bound to family, because the very idea of "ecclesia" (a congregation) was, in its biblical form, bound to a specific household and its family. This idea also exists in Western Christendom, as Cavanaugh notes (2011, 7). The theological concept of the local church has been transformed into a political or national concept, whereby the local church is stripped of its ecumenical and transnational implication, and the meaning of the term "local"

is interpreted as "national." Today, the sacred church is integrated into local politics through kin and clans in such lines of argument as the ones used by the Montenegrin Orthodox Church.

Nationalization of the sacred

Studies of religion in Montenegro and, in particular, those related to badnjak all lead back to the question of how religious social phenomena and praxis can be analyzed without reducing them to merely political or nationalist endeavors. Mainstream studies about religion in Montenegro are not nuanced and thus block the exploration of additional theoretical perspectives, which could expand or nuance the understanding of religiosity, as exemplified in the article's case-study. Nuances, such as the theological, transnational, social or historical elements that might contradict the reduction of the Serbian and Montenegrin Orthodox Churches into vehicles of national politics, are not presented or reflected in the literature. In fact, the main problem with the traditional theoretical approach to religion in the literature is, as Michel de Certeau argues, the belief that a "*single model* (here, a political one) can *in fact* explain a society in its totality" (Certeau 1988, 120). Such an approach, according to Certeau (1988, 120), builds on an anthropological postulate, whereby a modern society contains both civilized and savage elements, and the civilized elements are given a dominant position and used to categorize or interpret all other elements. In this example, the politics of a state are given a dominant position, as the "essential" element of modern states, and "savage" religion is then categorized according to this (Certeau 1988, 120-122). Given this framework, politics is an essential feature of civility and modernity, and religion is seen as the opposite. Religion is categorized beneath politics, along with economics, culture and urban development. Certeau argues that such an approach is not nuanced, because a society advances through "a plurality of heterogeneous but combined developments" (1988, 121).

One way to build upon Certeau's critique of the simplification of religion in functionalist theory, could be to re-approach the events, concepts or sites studied without a single analytical agenda, but rather with a dialectical approach. Such an approach must preserve religion as a system of practices and beliefs, but, at the same time, be sensible to how that system spills over to the political system of nationalism. Certeau argues that each system needs to be understood in its own terms—distinct from each other—and then the connection between practices and ideologies (the passage between the two systems) can be examined. The first step in an approach would be formed in relation to the social or personal problems that religion or nationalism tries to solve individually—and how the religious or nationalist practice reflects this. The second step would be to look at how the two systems function together when integrated into a single system. Basically, the argument is that a religious system seeks to solve problems internally, but the religious system could be adopted by (or integrated into) a nationalist system to solve problems in that sphere—such as lack of authenticity, political legitimacy and credibility.

This type of approach could be used to examine Klaus Buchenau's (2012) well-balanced studies of religion in South Eastern Europe. Buchenau (2012, 61) notes that the former Yugoslav states all experienced an increased "Sakraliserung der Nation" (sacralization of nations) during the early 1990s. Buchenau's concept of sacralization is based on the notion that a nationhood, needs religion to bolster and strengthen its claims of authenticity and historical legitimacy. This concept of sacralization is also used by Milan Vukmanović (2008) in his depiction of the Serbian Orthodox Church's political role in contemporary Serbian society.

The process of sacralization is a social one, whereby the nation uses religion to create an aura of authenticity. It draws from the sacred wells of religion and re-uses symbols, sites, texts or other materials. National movements and political elites use religion in this way to bolster their power through the use of religion; thus, religion is adopted to solve a national

problem. In his study, Buchenau article (2012) describes how this process took place in Serbia in the crucial period in the 1990s as part of the mobilization for war. The British historian, Adrian Hastings (2007, 187-188), provides a more concrete identification of the inner dynamic of the process by which religion is used to shape national formations. Hastings (2007, 187-188) identifies the core religious factors that could be activated to sacralize a nation. He argues that these factors are the various use of early traditions, events and heritage that go beyond the immediate present. Hastings thus identifies how nationalistic political movements can use religion. This labeling of nationalism use religion in Buchenau's works, as "sacralization", builds on concepts borrowed from the analysis of the differences between political religion and politicized religion, such as the study by Emilio Gentile (2006).

In both Buchenaue's and Hastings's theories, the analytical focus is on the integration of religious functions into nationalism; therefore, their studies still preserve the main functionalist method of the mainstream studies of religion in Montenegro. This mainstream functionalistic approach is still that religious phenomena are interpreted as part of a specific form of nationalism or nationhood. The categorization of religion in the mainstream studies still takes its analytical point of departure from nationalism.

A more nuanced picture is created when a reverse analytical strategy supplements Buchenau and Hastings's assertions. This reverse perspective could be labeled as a *nationalization of the sacred*. The emphasis here is on how sacred and religious phenomena exist independently and are only moved into the national realm through the use of political force or power. This categorization originates in the realm of religious practice and moves into the realm of nationalism. The sacred also has forces of its own (e.g., its numinous power to terrify and fascinate) that exist outside of the political realm.

Glenn Bowman (1993) has already coined the term, "nationalization of the sacred," in a study of the conflict in Israel and Palestine—a context with some similarities to that of the Balkans. Bowman argues (1993) that sacred sites can be called on in the imaginative process of a community. Bowman draws heavily on Anderson's (1998) concept of nationalism as an imagined community, but applies it to the process of rebuilding, restoring and occupying a sacred space or material. The sacred (e.g., saints or badnjak) exists in itself, but takes on a new function in political terms when it is called upon by national agents to serve their agenda. From this perspective, religion—characterized by its outlets, including sites, praxis and communities—is itself a phenomenon and not a proxy. Religion has been functioning in human society long before its adoption by nationalist agents; it is crucial to understand and analyze its original function in order to interpret why it is used in nationalism.

To understand the analytical approach based on the concept of nationalization of the sacred, it is important to understand how religious praxis, or belief, is adopted, contested or captured by a national movement and why it makes sense historically, culturally or religiously for social and collective movements to take possession of specific rituals. This line of thinking highlights the transnational potential or universal nature of sites, ideas or practices, which can only be forcefully adopted by a specific system of nationalism. Bowman's approach paves the way for a much needed focus on the transnational historical contextualization of rituals and beliefs.

This dialectical approach, suggested here, could be applied to the case of Petar Petrović Njegoš's Mausoleum, a monument in the Lovchen mountains, which has been studied in detail (Saggau, 2017b). This became the center of a heated debate on its ownership during Njegoš's bicentennial in 2013. The Serbian Orthodox Metropolitanate contested the Montenegrin nationalization of the site, because the Montenegrin state had occupied it and prevented the Church from using it as a religious site. In the eyes of the Serbian Metropolitanate, the nationalism of the Montenegrin government blocked the sacred nature of the site. The Metropolitanate justified its position by asserting the site's religious sacred value independent of Montenegrin

culture, politics or nationalism. This is an example of how the sacred nature of a space could be highlighted to prevent the nationalization of the site. In contrast, the Montenegrin government was—and still is—deeply invested in the sacralization of the Montenegrin civil-religion of this sacred site, which is clearly a sacralization of the nation. In the government's view, the sacred site provides a stage for a civil-religious ritual that can bolster Montenegrin nationhood and be used to create a deeper cultural system of references for this form of nationalism. Thus, Montenegrin nationalism drinks from the sacred well of the site in order to borrow its power to make spectators terrified or fascinated.

In this case, two opposite interpretations are displayed. On the one hand, the site is being used by the government to sacralize the Montenegrin nation, while, on the other hand, the site and the ritual of sacralization are contested by Serbian Orthodox Metropolitanate as a nationalization of the sacred. In summary, the function of this sacred site is overtaken by the Montenegrin political system and that claim is contested by a concerned religious institution, the Serbian Orthodox Metropolitanate, which seeks to preserve the site's function within a religious system.

THE HISTORY OF THE NATIONALIZATION OF RELIGION

The nationalization of the sacred is not a new process and has already been thoroughly studied. The nation-building processes throughout Europe and the Western world in the 18th and 19th centuries are filled with relevant examples, as noted by Cavanaugh (2011). During this period, several nation-states slowly assumed parts of religion's former role in these societies, also adopting its sacred sites, symbols and heritage. Many sacred elements slowly merged together with nationhood, so it has become almost impossible to separate them; in Cavanaugh's concluding words (2011), the holy has migrated from church to state.

Perhaps the most apparent example of this in South Eastern Europe is the Greek Orthodox Church, which was founded as part of the contestation of the Byzantine dream of a universal Roman and Christian culture. The nationalization of the Orthodox Church in Greece, which had been part of the Byzantine mainland, contradicted this universalism. Today, the Church is an embedded part of Greek nationhood (Willert 2014). Another example is the emergence of the Bulgarian Exarchate in the 19th century and the subsequent condemnation of "phyletisme" by the Orthodox Council of Constantinople in 1872. Theologically speaking, and regardless of the various historical power struggles between the Bulgarians and the Greeks, this condemnation was targeted directly at the nationalization of religion, which, ultimately, was the end goal of the institutional process that the independence of the Bulgarian Exarchate had put into force (Kalkandjieva 2016, 121). Both examples illustrate institutional processes linked to the formation of nationhoods, revived nations and separate independent states.

Besides institutional mechanisms, nationalization of religion or sacred elements can take other forms. Nationalization can take place in relation to a sacred site, as described by Bowman (1993) and illustrated by the above examination of Njegoš's Mausoleum (Saggau 2017b). This type of nationalization can take several forms, ranging from restoring a church in the image of a new nation to rebuilding the site in order to support a new nation to occupation of the site. Each of these are physical processes that can secure the sacred site within an imagined community. These processes also attest to the fact that the site bears a religious value in itself, regardless of the nation—a value that reaches beyond one nation and has to be cut off or molded in order for one nation to secure the site within its national belief system.

In the former Yugoslav republics, this process of nationalization has not been as coherent and stable as in many other places in Europe. This is largely why to the Yugoslav republics'

late independence from the Ottoman or Habsburgian powers, as well as the shifting formation of nations and republics in the region throughout the 20th century (Jelavich 1983a, 1983b; Lampe 2000). In contrast, Greece and Bulgaria have had more stability and coherence. Today, the Bulgarian Orthodox Church's organization, churches and clergy are considered to be Bulgarian by almost all Eastern Orthodox Churches, unlike during the condemnation of the Bulgarian Exarchate in 1872. Meanwhile, the Montenegrin Orthodox Church is officially unrecognized and its validity is contested by almost all other traditional Eastern Orthodox Churches.

Conclusion: Ways of nationalization

As argued above, nationalization of the sacred can be seen across South Eastern Europe. By addressing the nationalization of the sacred, studies of religion will become more nuanced and better able to grasp the depth of religion in the 21st century. This can be done through contemporary studies of a) how nationalization is carried out by political and ecclesial elites, b) which system of ideas and practices is used, c) which cultural and historical contexts are relevant and d) what purpose the nationalization serves. This article has used this approach to examine several cases and has referred to several literature studies already applying this approach. This article has also illustrated four nationalization processes:

1. the use of institutions
2. restoration, rebuilding or occupying sacred sites or buildings
3. recovering or claiming saints or sacred materials (crosses, etc.)
4. the use of other societal structures of governance, such as the ecclesiology of kinship

Milošević's Gazimestan speech at Kosovo Polje in 1989, as mentioned before, is a clear example of several of these processes. The speech was an attempt to use the numinous power of the Kosovo Polje site and the saint Lazar for the mobilization of the Serbs in favor of the Milošević's political agenda. It strengthened the Serbian Orthodox Church and its institutions throughout Yugoslavia and drew heavily on traditions predating the communist era. These processes turned Kosovo Polje into a national monument worth defending; in other words, religion was used as a means of national mobilization by social agents.

The "Balkan idol," as Perica calls the sacralization of nations in Yugoslavia, could only be realized because there were sacred symbols, rituals, ideas and organizations that had been nationalized in advance. The sacralization of nations requires a sacred source. No one is going to kill for the telephone company—the un-sacred nation-state—as Cavanaugh asserts (2011). The state and the nation need the sacred to secure their eternal existence.

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