

### SECTION III:

#### INTER-RELIGIOUS CONTEXTS AND COMPARISONS



## The Methadone of the People: Not all Theodicies are Sociodicies

### Introduction

In *The Bridge Betrayed*, Michael Sells famously criticised the inactivity of the international community in the face of humanitarian catastrophe and the trivialising news coverage of atrocities and genocide during the Bosnian war:

“There are no angels in this conflict’ has been a slogan used for the refusal to stop the killing as if angels, rather than human beings, deserve our empathy and support.” (Sells 1998: 133)

Sells’ critique is on point. The slogan he is attacking could not possibly be any more absurd, and Sells and others (e.g. Chandler 2000; Ramet 2002; Imamović 2006) have shown just how harmful these and similarly ill-informed and overly reluctant approaches to the conflicts during the breakup of Yugoslavia have been. Without taking anything away from Sells’ original message, I would like to divert this quote from its intended use albeit still in the context of the Bosnian war in order to illustrate another common form of banalisation, only this time not in regard to the victims of war but rather with respect to the ones who actually show these victims the empathy and support they undoubtedly deserve: the members of local religious non-governmental organisations (RNGOs) providing humanitarian aid during and after the crisis.

With respect to Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) and the Bosnian war (1992–95), religion is considered an important conflict factor, if only because early alliances between certain religious functionaries and the political opposition in Yugoslavia (Fetahagić 2012: 116) promoted the downfall of communism and subsequent rise of nationalist parties, who then used religious symbolism for the sake of nationalist agitation against religious out-groups, religiously grounded mobilisation, sacralisation of war crimes, and so forth promoting, eventually, a form of nationalism where ethnic separation, nationality, and religious belonging are inextricably convoluted (Mojzes 1998; O’Loughlin, Ó Tuathail 2006). Yet, there is also another side to religious practice in BiH. Both during the war and in its aftermath many

religious actors and activists have done their utmost to provide a counterpoint to the nationalist agenda, engage in interreligious dialogue, and provide shelter and aid to the victims of war. Curiously, however, their engagement is often misconceived as ‘not genuinely religious’ in nature.

This brings us to the topic of this book: does religion make a difference? I approach this subject by exploring the question, just how religious can a soup kitchen possibly be? There are plenty of secular humanitarian organisations that run soup kitchens, so the moral imperative to ‘feed the hungry’ (Matthew 25,35) is apparently not a unique feature of Christian charity. So, what does it take to make a soup kitchen genuinely religious?

In the following pages, I will try to tackle this tricky question by denying it a target. Instead of directly answering the question, I will focus more on the functional understanding of religion that underlies it, namely the tacitly accepted assumption that ‘genuine’ religions can never actively promote tangible regulatory, reformatory, or revolutionary contributions. First, I will explicate the line of reasoning that leads to this assumption; this explication will mostly focus on the work of Pierre Bourdieu as a modern representative, even though the basic ideas can also be found in many other scholarly works on religion (Weber, Marx, Feuerbach, and even Hegel). Then, I will firstly try to provide a theoretical counterpoint to the assumption by criticising its validity within the scope of the theory it originates from; secondly, I will show interview analyses of three local RNGOs providing humanitarian aid in postwar BiH (two Christian and one Muslim organisations) as empirical examples that directly contradict the assumption under scrutiny. In sum, this theoretical and empirical refutation aims to be a *nego majorem* of allegations against a merely ‘borrowed’ religious cause in humanitarian efforts. Albeit not the most elegant form of refuting an argument, this is hopefully more relevant to the overarching topic of specific religious capacities than a recipe for ‘genuinely’ religious soup. Not that I would be able to provide one after all, it is humans and not angels who get hungry, so it takes soup and not prayers to saturate their hunger.

## Religious conservatism

The aphorism “theodicies are always *sociodicies*” is prominently put forward by Pierre Bourdieu, who reasons that “questioning the meaning of human existence (...) is fundamentally a social interrogation of the causes and reasons for social injustices or privileges” (1991: 16). This observation has become eponymous of Bourdieu’s sociology of religion so much so that his

colleagues and heirs decided to use this stand-alone aphorism instead of an abstract for the back cover of the German edition of Bourdieu's collected papers on religion (Schultheis and Egger 2011). Interestingly, the underlying claim is not exclusive to Bourdieusian praxeology. On the contrary, it is not even an original insight of Bourdieu since he himself traces the argument back to Max Weber's studies on the 'theodicy of good fortune', and it does not take much imagination to go even further back and to recognise the basic idea as a permutation of the famous words in Marx's critique of Hegel:

"Religious suffering is, at one and the same time, the expression of real suffering and a protest against real suffering. Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, and the soul of soulless conditions. It is the opium of the people. The abolition of religion as the illusory happiness of the people is the demand for their real happiness. To call on them to give up their illusions about their condition is to call on them to give up a condition that requires illusions. The criticism of religion is, therefore, in embryo, the criticism of that vale of tears of which religion is the halo." (Marx 2000: 72)

Under conditions of misery, religion can provide solace and thereby ease the burden of suffering for the believer. The critique inherent to this observation is that taking comfort in religion simultaneously promotes acceptance and inaction because the religious symbolism obscures the real causes of said injustice. In consequence, religion becomes essentially a conservative societal force; solace and relief for the suffering individual stabilises the status quo. Once again, it is Bourdieu who addresses this effect in the most succinct words:

"In a society divided into classes, the structure of the systems of religious representations and practices belonging to the various groups or classes contributes to the perpetuation and reproduction of the social order (...) (1) the systems of practices and representations (dominant religiosity) that tend to justify the existence of the dominant classes as dominant and (2) the systems of practices and representations (dominated religiosity) that tend to impose on the dominated a recognition of the legitimacy of the domination founded on misrecognition of the arbitrariness of the domination (...). This contributes to the symbolic reinforcement of the dominated representation of the political world and of the ethos of resignation and renouncement directly inculcated by conditions of existence." (Bourdieu 1991: 19)

Building upon this explication of religion as an essentially conservative form of practice, Bourdieu goes even further when he addresses the controversies between priests and prophets,<sup>1</sup> i.e. the role of ostensibly revolutionary or reformatory actors who wield the power of prophetic discourse in order to challenge the established religious institutions as apologists of the status quo. He argues that “prophetic discourse has more chance of appearing in overt or masked periods of crisis” (Bourdieu 1991: 34): “In sum, the prophet is less the ‘extraordinary’ man of whom Weber spoke than the man of extraordinary situations” (1991: 35). However, according to Bourdieu, “there is doubtless no symbolic revolution that does not presuppose a political revolution” (Bourdieu 1991: 37). In this vein, revolutionary action is never a genuinely religious practice, and even though the challengers of the status quo “anxiously conjure up the spirits of the past”, the prophet uses merely “borrowed language” (Bourdieu 1991: 37) because of the necessity to challenge the priest’s *genuinely* religious narrative (and its stabilising function): theodicies are *always* sociodicies.

When the icons of modern sociology of religion and some of the most vocal critics of religion throughout history are in agreement that religion is essentially conservative and thus naturally opposed to progress, it is not surprising that we also encounter similar sentiments about the role of religion in society once we leave the ivory towers of our Universities. RNGOs who try to promote change in their respective societies often face accusations that resemble the aforementioned analyses: If a charitable religious organisation opens a soup kitchen for victims of war, their self-assessment as religious actors may be called out as a false flag because feeding the poor is not in itself a religious concern. After all, secular humanitarian actors also feed the poor. Similar to Bourdieu’s prophet, the religious justification of their regulatory cause appears to be merely ‘borrowed’, not genuine. And when this organisation chooses to offer soup and blankets for ‘widows and orphans’ (James 1,27) instead of microloans and computer courses for young entrepreneurs, they are called out for merely alleviating grievances instead of attacking the cause of these grievances. In this sense, religious actors working under unsustainable conditions that they are trying to overcome are either genuinely religious but secretly harmful, or they are helpful but secretly secular.

1 In Weber, the priest-prophet difference is a specific permutation of the church-sect dichotomy. Bourdieu uses the terms less strictly, and even interchangeably (e.g. “the opposition between the *church* and the *prophet*” (Bourdieu 1991: 22)).

As attentive readers will have concluded from the title of this paper, I disagree with this, and in the following I will try to show by the example of charitable religious organisations involved in the peace building process in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) that *some* theodicies are not sociodicies.

### From the church-sect dichotomy to religious field theory

As mentioned above, religious interpretations have gained enormous momentum during the breakup of Yugoslavia, the Bosnian war and its aftermath, and formerly communist societies in Southeast Europe have experienced a religious revival. Today, local religious actors claim to represent ideals of peaceful coexistence, intercultural dialogue, and reconciliation; however, religion simultaneously remains a conflict factor, not only because religious belonging, ethnicity, and nationality are inextricably convoluted, but also because of alliances between religious and political elites. In short, religion is a vector of both peace and division in BiH.

Even without going into the details of the turbulent power dynamics of the religious field in postwar BiH, it is understandable that this turmoil calls into question the adequacy of some characteristics of classical typologies of religious organisations. In particular, the assumption of a necessary relationship between religious complexity, exclusivism, as well as the contentual overdetermination of societal positions by specific types of authority is not apt for observations of the dynamics in the Bosnian peace process.

According to the classic typologies of religious organisation (e.g. Weber; Yinger; Bourdieu), churches and ecclesia stand for inclusivist moral codices that are harmonious to the social status quo: As highly institutionalised organisations, their internal hierarchisation and comparatively big memberships are evidence of them successfully establishing their religious convictions in the overarching society. On the other hand, sects and other religious organisations with low complexity are taken to represent fewer people and exclusivist morals that are at odds with the status quo insofar as they are relatively young organisations that convey an avant-garde message challenging the religious establishment. However, while these assumptions correctly attribute levels of institutional complexity to higher memberships and establishing processes that take time, they fail to acknowledge the possibility of abrupt disturbances of these continuous processes, such as a major war. The religious field of BiH (Seibert 2010, 2018) shows a situation that is the polar opposite: The big historical religious communities, i.e. the Muslim Community, the Serbian-orthodox Church, and the Catholic

Church, are in a position of apology. After the perversions of the Bosnian war, the majority of the population views representatives of institutionalised religion as spoilers rather than saviors. In the perception of the religious audience, the more something *looks like* a national church (i.e. a religious body of high complexity), the more it is susceptible of aggressive nationalism (i.e. a bearer of political compromise rather than authentic religion).<sup>2</sup> Even though most, if not all, religious actors in modern BiH are taking a stance for peace, the image of a priest blessing weapons in recent history lingers on in the public perception of institutionalised religion. In consequence, this ‘credibility vacuum’ has provided ample opportunity for smaller, weakly institutionalised organisations (e.g. RNGOs) to gain a foothold in the religious field by promoting inclusivist ideas that criticise contemporary religious practices according to a ‘national key’. In this sense, in BiH’s unstable religious field the religious actors that Yinger deems “empirically unlikely or even impossible” (1970: 261) are literally the standard, whereas the organisations that conform to the assumptions of Yinger’s stage model are freak cases (two out of 15 actors).

On the one hand, this confirms Bourdieu’s interpretation of the prophet as a man of extraordinary situations, an expert who “borrows” religious symbols and prospers in situations where their capacity for “crisis ritualization” (Bourdieu 1991: 36) is in high demand:

“In fact, just as the priest is linked with the ordinary order, the prophet is the man of crisis situations, in which the established order see-saws and the whole future is suspended. Prophetic discourse has more chance of appearing in overt or masked periods of crisis affecting either entire societies or certain classes, that is, in periods where the economic or morphological transformations of such or such a part of society determine the collapse [sic], weakening, or obsolescence of traditions or of symbolic systems that provided the principles of their worldview and way of life.” (Bourdieu 1991:34)<sup>3</sup>

According to this reading of the controversy of orthodox churches vs. heretic sects, the prophet’s credibility should indeed rise in scenarios under duress, whereas the priest’s credibility should decline. Thus, the empirical data from BiH actually confirms Bourdieu’s observations on the func-

2 The actual involvement of religious bodies in nationalist discourse and in promoting the cause of war has not been nearly as evenly matched as the field positioning makes it out to be. Credibility, in this sense, is about *perceived* credibility, and certain field effects are yet another evidence of the assertiveness of relativism and consequential misjudgment in the aftermath of the war.

3 Weber *allowed* for ‘situational’ charisma, Bourdieu comprehends *all* charisma to be situational.



tioning of the religious field were it not for his ‘cosmological constant’ that defines religion *a priori* as a conservative societal force.

Now, there are three arguments against this cosmological constant: First, Bourdieusian field theory allows for ‘eminent heretics’ in other societal fields (explicitly the academic field and the field of cultural production) but not in the religious field. In field theory, scholars who reject the strictness of the code as resembled by the traditional *homo academicus* are functional equivalents to prophets who challenge the ritualised orthodoxy, and nowhere does Bourdieu suggest that academic or literary ‘underdogs’ are merely “borrowing language” from their well-established counterparts. In fact, the positioning of actors in the field of cultural production (Bourdieu 1983) even suggests the opposite.

Second, the argument that genuine religious discourse only occurs in complicity with the political status quo is borderline absurd if taken from an actor-centric perspective. If a Catholic priest from Rome boards a plane to visit the small parish in Banja Luka, his religious convictions do not magically become hypocritical between take-off and landing. In such a case as postwar BiH, it does not even make much sense from a structural perspective given that the current majority/minority-ratios (and, consequently, the structural makeup of dominant/dominated actors) are the result of ethnic cleansing campaigns during the war. It goes against the very basics of Bourdieu’s conceptualisations of the interplay of habitus and field to imply that forceful intervention could *ad hoc* alter the course of incorporated and objectified history.

Last, and most importantly, the evaluation of religious semantics is based on the presumption that the hegemon of the religious field dictates the rules of engagement for the whole religious ‘expert game’, and that the other ‘players’ have to conform to these rules at least to a certain extent lest they would be excluded from the game.<sup>4</sup> Bourdieu deems the prophet’s language to be “borrowed” from the priest because he assumes the church, rather than the sect, to be in the hegemonial position. However, according to his own explanations on prophetic discourse (see above), the position of the hegemon is subject to conjectural changes as well. In BiH we see a religious crisis situation that already lasts for an extended timespan from the struggles for religious freedom in the late period of Yugoslavia, throughout

4 For instance, the religious *nomos* in Germany is largely dictated by the prototype of the big Christian churches. In consequence, there are constant calls for a ‘churchification’ of Islamic communities because, both in the public eye and in the interplay with other societal fields, this is deemed the ‘proper’ form of religious organisation.<sup>1:59</sup>

the Bosnian war, and up to the current situation of critical international dependency. Since prophets present more adequate interpretations of the sacred during crises, they (rather than the priests) come out on top of the religious 'expert game' in BiH. The basic functioning of field dynamics stays the same: the hegemon still dictates the field's rules of engagement. However, due to the loss of credibility of institutionalised religion, the historical communities no longer find themselves in the position of the hegemon; in BiH, it is the priests, rather than the prophets, who have to conform to their counterpart's dictate largely a thorough moralisation of religious issues in the face of war atrocities, which forces representatives of 'national' religions into a state of constant apology. In short, the presumption of religion being essentially conservative seems to obstruct the view on the "empirically unlikely": If we ignore the *a priori* exclusion of sects with high credibility and churches with low credibility in his writings about religion, everything else about Bourdieu's reinterpretation of Weber still holds up and is indeed applicable to the case of BiH.

### The ethos of religious peace builders

To take a closer look at the actual content of the relationship between theodicy and sociodicy, we will focus on three centric actors from BiH: the Catholic pastoral organisation *Caritas* (Caritas Biskupske Konferencije BiH, henceforth: Caritas), the Muslim charity organisation *Merhamet* (Muslimansko dobrotvorno društvo Merhamet, henceforth: Merhamet), and the *St. Sava Youth Community* (Svetosavska omladinska zajednica, henceforth: SOZ).

In this respect, 'centric actors' refers to their relative positioning within the dynamics of the religious field as collective actors, they received moderate credibility scores in our surveys and they are moderately complex organisations, which means that they fall to neither extreme in the dominant/dominated controversy. All three actors are humanitarian organisations involved in various charitable projects in BiH (though SOZ runs projects almost exclusively in the Republika Srpska), and each of them represents one of the three big religious and ethnic communities in BiH.

The data on these actors are from the project, 'The ethos of religious peace builders', run jointly by Bielefeld University and the Center for interdisciplinary postgraduate studies (CIPS) at the University of Sarajevo.<sup>5</sup> The

5 [https://www.unibielefeld.de/\(en\)/theologie/forschung/religionsforschung/forschung/schaefer/konflikt/projekt\\_ethos.htm](https://www.unibielefeld.de/(en)/theologie/forschung/religionsforschung/forschung/schaefer/konflikt/projekt_ethos.htm) <https://www.nomos-elibrary.de/agb>

overarching sample of qualitative interviews consists of 90 complete interviews with an average length of about 53 minutes (79 hours in total). These interviews were analyzed using HabitusAnalysis, a methodological approach to Bourdieu’s notion of *habitus* as a “system of dispositions” (Bourdieu 1990: 59) constituted by “cognitive and motivating structures” (Bourdieu 1990:56) that utilises the model of the praxeological square (Schäfer 2003, 2009, 2015) in order to classify relevant terms in the interviews as operators of practical logic according to their underlying logical relations. For Caritas and Merhamet, seven interviews were conducted, and five for SOZ. In total, this sub-sample includes 5285 primary codes connected in 2536 quotations from 19 interviews. Of these, 51 were omitted for privacy reasons. The codebooks are available online (Seibert 2004a; 2004b; 2004c).<sup>6</sup>

Figure 1: sample overview

|          | CODES      |            |            |            |        |       | QUOTES | INTERVIEWS |
|----------|------------|------------|------------|------------|--------|-------|--------|------------|
|          | NEG<br>EXP | NEG<br>INT | POS<br>EXP | POS<br>INT | [Priv] | TOTAL |        |            |
| CARITAS  | 548        | 310        | 455        | 397        | 17     | 1727  | 666    | 7          |
| MERHAMET | 582        | 278        | 631        | 402        | 23     | 1916  | 996    | 7          |
| SOZ      | 355        | 257        | 476        | 543        | 11     | 1642  | 874    | 5          |
| TOTAL:   | 1485       | 845        | 1562       | 1342       | 51     | 5285  | 2536   | 19         |

In short, the central identity-forming transformations of the three actors are about *aid and relief*. They diagnose the central problems and crises as *Vulnerable social groups*, and *War and Poverty*; they try to overcome said problems by seeking refuge and guidance in the *Church* (Caritas and SOZ) and *True faith* (Merhamet) in order to foster *Charity* (Caritas and SOZ) and *Humanitarian work* (Merhamet). The central strategic transformations of Caritas, Merhamet, and SOZ are about *regulation*. The good practices of *Charity* and *Humanitarian work* find their purpose in acting as a makeshift arrangement for the shortcomings of a defective and corrupt *Government*

6 Throughout this whole analysis, I am referencing results from my much more comprehensive analysis on religious credibility in postwar BiH. In this sense, this article is a focussed revisitation of *Religious credibility under fire* (Seibert 2018). Henceforth, I abstain from referencing this book individually because such references would be ubiquitary and thus trivial.

that fails to address the needs of *Vulnerable social groups*, and that promotes *War and Poverty*.<sup>7</sup>

All interviewees contrast their problem assessments by recourse to religious values. With respect to their religious convictions, the common theme in all interviews is the insistence on a principle of non-violence, as per the religious *nomos*. As members of humanitarian organisations, the interviewees are not subject to as much scrutiny as direct representatives of an episcopate or rijaset; however, they still work within confessionally-aligned organisations, and therefore are at least somewhat associated with those. In consequence, all interviewees though some more in-depth than others elaborate on their idea of religion in contrast to common allegations (unprompted in the interviews) of complicity in war atrocities. All of them respond in a very similar fashion, namely by distinguishing between ‘true’ religion, which they deem decidedly non-violent and apolitical, and ‘false’ religion, i.e. self-proclaimed believers who are either misguided or malevolent and merely pretending to be Christians or Muslims.

“I think that, that, simply because here, most people in BiH... people ... people who are angry, they simply have no real idea what religion is, and what it is that each of the three biggest religions in BiH represent. (...) It is tolerance, love for the other man, and so on. [<sup>2</sup>*Mbm...*,<sup>2</sup>] And there are people who simply, ... people ... people are somehow lost and don’t have, don’t see, and they turn to some other things and simply have a wrong view ... view of religion. If they came back to the basic things (...) I think they are far, far (...) It would be much easier, there simply would not have been so much hatred, and, and things which were directed against one another.” (Frist-Caritas 7:10.47)

“That is, (...) all that is low in man emerged over the course of this war. Well, and several people who profess themselves as believers (...) they aren’t actually believers. [<sup>2</sup>Q: *Mbm...*, *mbm...*,<sup>2</sup>] Because a man who can kill another because of his religion, because of his way of life, well, a personal thing that’s unthinkable! But, see, it happened. (...) Not only in this war but in all wars.” (Frist-Merhamet 2:31.39)

“If he believes in God, he will not do (...) because he fears God, he will not do something bad to another. So, you have, for example, the crimes that took place in Bosnia and Herzegovina, eh... it wasn’t done, eh..., it wasn’t a devout man who did those crimes. Those who don’t go to church, those who don’t go to the mosque, ... they don’t know and aren’t even interested in the church or God, and at that moment then you have a situation where one behaves like an animal.” (Frist-SOZ 3:17.30)

7 Words that are *italicised* and Capitalised denote specific semantic fields in the interviews, i.e. a set of logically equivalent and semantically similar terms that is allocated in relative proximity to the prototype example that simultaneously functions as the name of the respective semantic field. The interviews were analyzed in the original Bosnian/Croatian/Serbian; all translations used in this article were done by the author.

This conceptualisation of religion leads back to the problem of theodicy: The notion that (true) religion is inherently peaceful and therefore innocent with respect to the ongoing problems in BiH prompts explanations for violence and harm that occurred *despite* religion. Here, most interviewees argue that harm stems, first and foremost, from a *deficit* of true religion. Relevant operators from the interviews are, amongst others, *Manipulation of religion*, *Instrumentalization of religion*, *Abuse of religion*, *Degenerate religion*, *Lack of conviction*, *Lack of principles*, *No rule of law*, *Ignorance*, as well as anti-religious concepts and actors (e.g. *Communism*, *Scapegoating*, *Media*, and *Secularists*). By extension of the principle of non-violence, according to these interviewees, harm does not merely occur *despite* but actually *against* religion. In consequence, ‘true’ religion is depicted as being at odds with the current situation and the status quo. Religion appears as a force for change and progress.

Going one step further, it is interesting how this approach to theodicy relates to sociodicy: None of these actors advocate revolutionary action (because revolutions tend to be violent, which once again contradicts their guiding principle of religion being inherently peaceful); rather, they focus on regulatory and reformative practices. So, even though most interviewees are rather blunt when it comes to criticism of the social problems in BiH, they still take a moderate approach they are, after all, centric actors in the power struggle of the religious field in BiH.

Thus, on the one hand, their core message is that things have to change, which can hardly be interpreted as a ‘sociodicy’ in the stricter sense of a justification of the status quo. All interviewees are in agreement about the fact that the status quo is unjust and unsustainable. On the other hand, however, the advocated means to achieve this change at least presuppose that the status quo actually allows for productive reforms (and not necessarily revolution), so there is still that consoling element of ‘hang in there’, which critics of religion have pointed out as the reason why religious obfuscation tends to undermine consequential progressive action.

## Theodicy and sociodicy in postwar BiH

HabitusAnalysis employs the praxeological square to translate terms from natural language into operators of practical logic, the underlying (and largely implicit) dispositions guiding social agency in accordance with an actor’s know-how and competence in regard to their social framework. The praxeological square is essentially a permutation of the square of logical opposition (Parsons 2012) insofar as the four positions of the square are intercon-

nected via basic logical relations (contradiction, contrariness, sub-contrariness, subaltern opposition; different terms in the same position are logically equivalent). *HabitusAnalysis* describes terms as either negative or positive (bad or good), either an experience (of the interviewee) or an interpretation (i.e. how the interviewee interprets their experiences); the four classes *negative experience*, *positive experience*, *negative interpretation*, *positive interpretation* thus are technical shorthand for the logical relations of the classified terms vis-à-vis one another. At its core, this prerogative on logical relations allows for a pragmatistic reassessment of natural language, that is, a reassessment according to the use of specific terms: For instance, two interviewees may both speak about justice, and they may even both use the same word 'justice', but for the first interviewee *Justice* links to *Retribution* whereas for the second it links to *Forgiveness*.

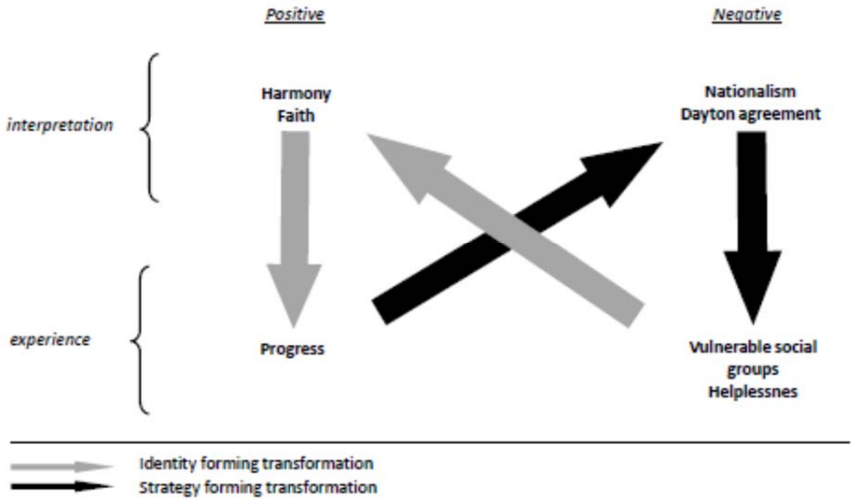
The reason for this short digression into methodological roots is that the application of *HabitusAnalysis* on the 19 interviews in our focus allows for a logically positivist reevaluation of the relationship between theodicy and sociodicy. Specifically, it reveals an oddity in respect to the praxeological classes of terms denoting the actors' reformatory propositions terms like *Progress*, *Change*, and *Advancement*, and furthermore their relation towards *Hope*, *Optimism*, *Serenity*, *Enthusiasm*, as well as, quite literally, *Faith*. At first glance, there is a catch: these terms are scattered throughout the positions of positive experience and positive interpretation, and identical words convey utterly different logical contexts.

Simply put, the interviewees observe a plethora of structural problems, and consequently they advocate practices that promote social change. Simultaneously, they complain about lackluster engagement, irresponsibility, and ignorance among those affected by these problems, and they argue that this mentality must change. Not surprisingly, all interviewees are in accordance although their narratives differ substantially with regard to the relationship between mentality and life situation. We can showcase these differences by contrasting two praxeological squares taken from the collective analysis of Caritas interviews,<sup>8</sup> both focussed on the operator *Progress* and its strongest (i.e. most common) logical relations.

8 The respective praxeological squares for Merhamet and SOZ (centred around the terms *Progress* and *Change*) look remarkably similar, with the only major differences being that the operator *Harmony* is exclusive to Caritas; for Merhamet, the second-most important (in this context) operator of positive interpretation besides *Faith* is *Science*, for SOZ it is *Devotion*. Also, the members of Merhamet do not use the wording *Charity* and instead refer to *Humanitarian work* and *helping each other*.

The first praxeological square (figure 1) can be read as follows: The core grievances (negative experiences) described by the interviewees are the problems of *Vulnerable social groups* and the feeling of *Helplessness* in the face of their problems. *Vulnerable social groups* means victims of war, children and elderly, disabled people, and persons living in poverty in short, all the 'clients' whom the interviewees as functionaries of Caritas are trying to help. And *Helplessness* connotes the desperation of a humanitarian aid worker who sees much more people in need of help than their prospective budget can possibly account for. These grievances are contrasted by *Faith* and *Harmony* (positive interpretation), two core tenets of the interviewees' religious beliefs that also come up in other contexts during the interviews. *Faith* simply means trust in God, i.e. the belief that even bad events have a purpose and that, ostensibly, senseless suffering is not all that senseless; *Harmony* is closely related to this insofar as it connotes the idea of a (divine) balancing of imbalances, often expressed in aphorisms like 'you can't have the good without the bad'. From these two religious principles, the interviewees derive their (former and anticipated) achievements and successes (positive experience), namely cases and projects where they indeed managed to promote substantial *Progress* in BiH. Insofar as this square position also depicts self-positioning and esteemed practices, it illustrates their self-perception as agents of change, i.e. the 'ground personnel' that foster the balancing of imbalances. As such, they perceive an antagonism towards the causes and roots of their grievances (negative interpretation), the ideology of *Nationalism* that tore BiH apart and the *Dayton Agreement* that perpetuated the ethnic division of the country. Both of these are literally seen as the antithesis of *Progress* *Nationalism* as recourse to pre-Yugoslav (or even tribalist) mentalities, and the *Dayton Agreement* as a reactionary covenant that eternalised the outcome of ethnic cleansings in the constitution of BiH.

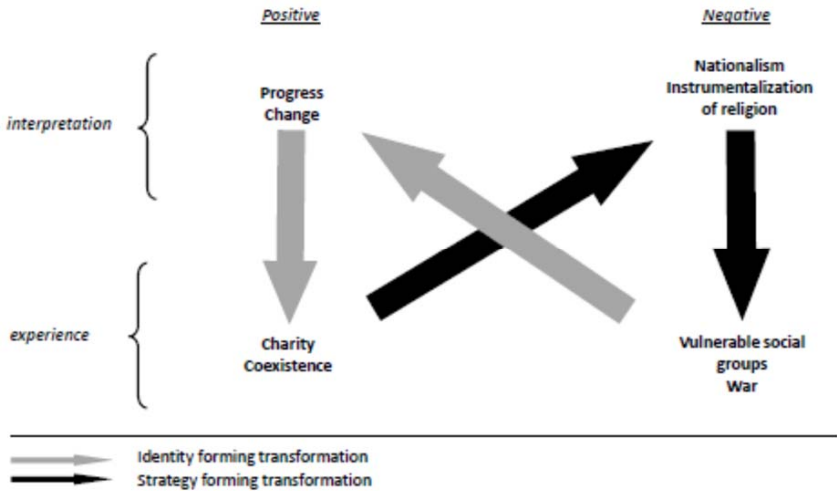
Figure 1: Theodicies are sociodicies



The second praxeological square (figure 2) looks similar, but there are a couple of crucial differences. Right from the outset, the grievances (negative experience) are analogous to those in the first square: *Vulnerable social groups* is the core term, only now it is more prominently associated with the *War* and all kinds of atrocities that made most of these people vulnerable in the first place. The causes for these grievances (negative interpretation) are also very similar, with *Nationalism* once again being the prime suspect, only now more closely associated with the *Instrumentalization of religion* for nationalist propaganda that promoted the cause of war. However, while the negative side shows merely another emphasis yet otherwise stays the same compared to the first square, the positive side is altogether different: *Progress* and *Change* (positive interpretation) no longer refer to esteemed practices and events (experience) but to the conditions and ideas behind them (interpretation). Here, *Progress* and *Change* both denote valuable improvements with a wider scope and connote the belief that change is a purpose in itself, that the future will hold improvements over the present because it occurs according to God's plan and thereby fosters the Christian practice of *Charity* and a situation of peaceful interreligious and interethnic *Coexistence* (positive experience). In short, *Progress* and *Change* are the conditions for *Charity* and *Coexistence*.



Figure 2: Theodicies are not sociodicies



If we compare these two squares with a focus on the position of *Progress* as consequent of a conditional relation in the first and as antecedent of a conditional relation in the second, we can observe two rivaling views even within the same sets of interviews: On the one hand, the detrimental situation is perceived as the result of poor attitudes and, consequently, having faith in God is supposed to foster palpable improvements in society. On the other hand, the opposite line of causality suggests that progressive improvements are needed in order to justify positive practices. Basically, the actors see that bad mentality and bad conduct go hand in hand but while they agree that both mentalities and conducts need to change; their analyses differ fundamentally in regard to the question of where to position the lever. Consequently, even though the arguments for reformative practices seem well-aligned at first glance, the religious functionaries in BiH are sending mixed signals. Insofar as the argument boils down to ‘If people have faith, then the objective situation will improve’, the religious promise of salvation takes a form that reconciles theodicy and sociodicy. The gist of this message falls broadly within the type of religious contribution that has been criticised as the soothing message (“opium”) that salvation will come if only people have faith: Insofar as a positive mentality takes precedence over social change for the better, it inevitably calls for putting on a brave face during dire circumstances, thereby making pressing issues appear less

acute and implicitly suggesting that the dire situation already bears the seed for improvement. If, on the other hand, the argument is that, ‘if the situation changes, people will become more charitable’, theodicy and sociodicy are disparate. Here, *Progress* and *Change* are not the goal but rather the path to salvation, and consequently there is no way to talk the talk without actually walking the walk. This message contains no element where a religious narrative would imply solace or consolation in the face of injustice and thus actually promote or obscure the status quo by means of a mere promise of eventual salvation and as such, it would be a best-case example of an expression of “subversive faith” (bhs.: “subverzivna vjera”), as Marković (2008: 113) calls it.

“I say in jest, they [the religious officials] care for the dead, we take care of the living.” (Frist-Merhamet 2:28.45)

Remarkably, there are no public disputes about this fundamental difference in BiH: Everybody agrees that both the prevalent mentalities and the objective status quo are, *in toto*, bad, and that they should be changed. Even in our interviews, we cannot detect a particular pattern in regard to the primacy of (apprehended) causalities among the three focus groups; both lines of reasoning are present in each group, and although the strategic focus varies slightly (for instance, field workers are more eager to depict structural problems as causes than as results), the inter-group differences are smaller than the intra-group differences. The implicitness of the underlying ambiguity of the direction of causation, which, after all, was only revealed by an in-depth analysis that methodologically focusses on logical relations, leads us to assume that it flies under the radar of the actors themselves. In this vein, it must also be noted that it is, as far as considerations on factual correctness go, basically a case of hen and egg (or: being and consciousness).

## Conclusion

In sum, we have seen that there is a cosmological constant that permeates not only Bourdieu’s approach to religion, namely the a priori assumption that religion has to be a conservative force. A corollary of this assumption is that progressive efforts by religious actors are misconceived as either areligious in nature albeit with “borrowed” religious language or merely symbolic and thus an obfuscation of the real societal problems, to which religion even contributes by providing such an obfuscating symbolism. We have argued that this cosmological constant leads to inconsistencies within its own theory of origin, <https://doi.org/10.5771/3783748907933-169>, at the very least counterintuitive if taken

from an actor-centric perspective, and that its justification rests on the specific (albeit common) case of a stable religious field with a well-established church constituting the monopoly of religious capital. Then, we have presented the case of BiH, a society with an unstable religious field, and although we did not develop the full model (Seibert 2010, 2018) here, we have briefly explained the most important reasons why the historical religious communities are currently occupying subdominant positions in the religious field of BiH. Against this background, we have used the example of three local RNGOs (Caritas, Merhamet, SOZ) to show that an in-depth HabitusAnalysis of interviews with their representatives reveals two rivaling lines of causality with respect to their understanding of *Change* and *Progress*. The first line of causality depicts tangible societal development as the result of improved mentalities, whereas the second describes it as the condition for charitable practice; the first resembles a mindset where theodicy and sociodicy are unified (a case where the cosmological constant holds true), the second where they are disparate (and thereby refute the cosmological constant). Yet, the same actors working within the same structures and on the same projects justify their efforts by recourse to both lines of causality and in both lines, the operator *Progress* is closely linked to other operators with a strong religious connotation (*Faith* and *Charity*, respectively). Hence, not only does there not seem to be a single reason that in fact justified the cosmological constant, there are good reasons to reject it.

What does all of this mean for religious contributions in areas like humanitarian aid, peace building, development assistance, and so forth? Of course, it does not mean that soup kitchens are a specifically religious contribution. However, what is or is not specifically religious rests by and large on the definition of religion that we apply to the practices under observation. With respect to BiH, postwar efforts in interreligious dialogue (such as the work of the Interreligious Council) might be a best-case example for *specifically* religious efforts in peace building. However, under the assumption of the cosmological constant, interreligious dialogue in a religiously divided society would have to be seen both as a case of “borrowed language” (because the division itself has a religious connotation) and as a largely symbolic and therefore possibly obfuscating effort that does not provide as tangible results as more mundane humanitarian programs.

Thus, it was not by chance that I have chosen the example of three more hands-on humanitarian RNGOs to provide a counterpoint to the allegation that religion is conservative by definition: With respect to progressive religious efforts, the cosmological constant is all-encompassing, and it leaves no room whatsoever for contributions that are both progressive and gen-

uinely religious. To object to this assumption by the example of facilitators of interreligious dialogue would have meant attacking the cosmological constant at its weakest point; by showing that it does not even hold up with respect to the directorate of soup kitchens, we were able to see that it does not even hold up where it seems strongest.

In conclusion, the reevaluation of the relationship between theodicies and sociodicies is a cautionary tale about the huge influence of our tacit assumptions when we try to field such questions for the specific contributions of religions in humanitarian efforts. If our own presumptions categorically exclude religious actors from contributions that lead to tangible successes, religious contributions will either be false flag operations or merely symbolic by necessity. The argument was never about soup; it was about the question of whether the notion of a ‘genuinely religious soup’ was any more misguided than the notion of ‘genuinely secular soup’.

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