"OTHERING" OF EAST AND WEST: (ANTI)ECUMENICAL VIEWS OF THE SERBIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH

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Abstract

Contemporary religious traditions are challenged by the concepts of "modernity" and "otherness"; at the same time, they pose various challenges to the "modernity" itself and significantly contribute to the general process of ideological "othering". This article will explore how present-day Serbian Orthodox Christianity perceives and deals with various categories of "others". Whether in secular or religious terms, the "other" has always been a source of deep internal controversies for the Serbian Orthodoxy. The spectrum of alleged opponents has been broad and has referred to the nonorthodox world in general, including modern Western concepts of capitalism and globalization, other Balkan faiths, as well as the liberal trends within Serbian Orthodoxy itself. On the other hand, the ecumenical orientation romantically expressed in the idea of Serbian Orthodox Christianity's playing the role of the "golden bridge" between East and West continues to be an integral and important part of the historical and theological background of Serbian Orthodoxy. The article will conclude by suggesting that Serbian Orthodox Christianity significantly contributes to the process of mutual ideological mirroring between "East" and "West" by making the incomprehensible Eastern-European "other" more renderable for the Western mind.

Introduction

In the contemporary world of multiple choices and opportunities, of sophisticated politics and armed conflicts, of general concerns for human and environmental rights, religions face a whole spectrum of new challenges. The urgent challenge for global pluralistic society is probably the imperative of the appreciation of "otherness," and its close corollary, the imperative of tolerance. Dialogue becomes the preferable option of communicating with the "other", despite the possible differences, antagonisms or conflicts. Religions are urged to step out of their spiritual enclaves and to take an active role not just in global conversation but also in resolving the broad scope of problems of the "secular" world. The questions of general interconnectedness and particular responsibility of religious traditions poses a dilemma to them: should they strive to reconsider their long-established standpoints and "update" their perspectives in order to meet the challenges of the modern world, or should they stay entrenched in their theologies rejecting the innovative social currents? The actual outcomes

depend on complex historical, cultural and political circumstances outlining each religious tradition in particular.

From another perspective, contemporary social sciences are grounded in the Western modernization paradigm; accordingly, they usually operate within the commonly accepted pattern of social development that suggests the tradition-change-transition-modernization model. Nevertheless, although convincing and coherent in theory, this model sometimes fails in practice for not being able to comprehend the significant differences between developments of the Eastern and the Western societies. The case of Serbian Orthodoxy Christianity at the turn of the 21st century can illustrate this thesis. This religion's stances on the local political situation and the global requirements of modern world often appear as perplexing and incomprehensible to the external, non-Serbian or non-Orthodox observers. As a result, the entire phenomenon of contemporary Serbian Orthodoxy poses a challenge to understanding to the Western scholarship.

This article will analyze the position of Serbian Orthodox Christianity, one rather unknown religious tradition deeply rooted in local culture, history and politics, within the modern secular and religious world. More precisely, it will explore how the contemporary Serbian Orthodox Church (hereafter "the SOC" or "the Church," with an upper case C) perceives and deals with various categories of "others", from other Christian and nonchristian religious groups and faiths, to abstract categories of "others" such as "the West" or "modernity." It will do so in order to highlight the general theoretical problems faced by particular religious traditions in contemporary pluralist global society. The article will not defend a certain theoretical position or propose a particular solution for this problematique. Rather it aims to articulate a critical analysis and understanding of a relatively unfamiliar religious tradition and its attempts to encounter the challenges of modernity.

The contemporary Serbian Orthodox Church appears as the focus of this article for two reasons. First, as it will be presented, the SOC reflects a perplexing ambiguity regarding the popular issues of religious dialogue, ecumenical cooperation, reconciliation and responsibility, on the contrary to some other Orthodox Churches which seem to have instantly recognizable standpoints and policies on these issues (e.g., the Russian Orthodox Church, appearing to be the most traditional one in the East, or the Romanian Orthodox Church which is more opened to ecumenism). This is certainly not to say that some kind of a comparative study of all these religious traditions would not cast brighter light upon the Eastern Orthodoxy in general and its position in the modern world; it should be welcomed in the future research. On the other hand, the article considers Eastern Orthodox Christianity, and accordingly Serbian Orthodoxy, as an important factor in the process of

"othering" that traditionally shapes the global East-West discourse. The interchange of ideological constructions between West and East also produces a specific backlash effect to the local religions: in order to adjust to popular political and cultural narratives, religions begin to, consciously or not, adopt the external discourses of "otherness" and to consider themselves in terms of received projections thus generating a phenomenon of *mutual ideological mirroring*. The analysis will be concluded by suggesting that without being able to understand Serbian Orthodox tradition in its own terms, it is impossible to properly understand the complex social and political reality of the contemporary Balkan region and Eastern Europe.

Methodological and Theoretical Framework

Serbian Orthodox Christianity has recently become the object of numerous academic and non-academic studies conducted by both local and foreign analysts. There are two common discourses framing these studies in the second half of the 20th century. The first discourse, related to the period before the 1990s, outlines the position of Serbian Orthodoxy within communist Yugoslavia; its central themes and concepts include the secularization, atheization and privatization of religion, the antagonism between the Church and the communist regime, and the concealed potential of the SOC as a catalyst of Serbian nationalism. The second discourse, which contextualizes Serbian Orthodoxy in Balkan affairs of the 1990s, is conceptualized around the desecularization and resurgence of religion, the politicization of the Church, anti-communism and ethno-clericalism. In both cases, profound and insightful analytical studies have been produced together with superficial and biased studies loaded with value judgments of either *Eurocentric* or *Orthodox-centric* character.

A number of extensive and credible studies have already been undertaken, attempting to clarify the vast social implications this religious tradition has had on the cultural and political situation in the Balkan region. Each of these studies emphasizes a specific issue or problematique, such as the relations between the Serbian Orthodox Church and the state (Alexander 1979; Ilić 2005; Radić 2000), the role of the SOC in Balkan conflicts (Popov 2000; Velikonja 2001; Johnson and Eastwood 2004), fundamentalist tendencies within the SOC (Mylonas 2003; Perica 2002), or the SOC's standpoints on the issues of human rights, religious freedoms and ecumenical dialogue (Vukomanović 1999, 2001; Clapsis 2000). However, no particular study approaches the outlined problem from the perspective suggested above, namely, concentrating on contemporary Serbian Orthodoxy within the discourse of "otherness". The reality of contemporary Serbian Orthodox Christianity cannot be exclusively studied from either the perspective of an insider or the perspective of an external analyst. Seemingly clearly positioned by their

personal engagement or physical and epistemological distance, both of them are actually exposed to the subtle but immense influence of a process of ideological "othering" that traditionally takes place on the relation between what is called "East" and "West". Vague constructions themselves, "East" and "West" come to be actualized through the process of constructing each other as irredeemable "others" in historical, cultural and cognitive ways.

Without the intention of becoming an overambitious study, this article hopes to bring some fragmented academic viewpoints together and to offer one more possible perspective for approaching the issue of religion and modernity. In order to achieve that goal, the article will combine research from primary and secondary sources. This material will be analyzed within the theoretical framework of general concepts like "modernity" and "otherness". A brief theorizing on the role of religion in defining boundaries as well as the major religious strategies of dealing with the "others" will also include a special remark on two particular strategies that Serbian Orthodoxy employs in dealing with the "others": "phyletism", a tendency of the Orthodox churches to get involved in nationalist politics, and "ecumenism", also a distinctive feature of Serbian Orthodoxy. These operative concepts will be applied to analyze Serbian Orthodoxy in the contemporary socio-political situation.

From Phyletism to Ecumenism: Religious Responses to "Others"

The philosophical issues of "others" and "otherness" are essentially related to various identity polarizations and actual struggles. In his article "A Preliminary Challenge: Borders or Frontiers?," Srđan Vrcan explores the potential for national, ethnic and religious identities to act as key ideological carriers of "otherness". He argues that contemporary boundaries between ethnoreligious groups often lose their geographical character; on the contrary, by becoming a matter of *ideological* distinction and territorialization, they attain the character of *symbolic frontiers*. The role of these frontiers is not just to separate groups of people of different origin, language or culture but to separate entirely different worlds: a world of order from a world of disorder; a world inhabited by superior beings from a world of the inferior; a civilized world from a non-civilized (or barbarian) one.[1] Although in this process boundary lines become less visible in a physical geographical sense, the "other" on the other side of the line never loses its character of absolute "otherness". A *stranger* on the other side of the frontier is still an *enemy*, although sometimes he is difficult to pinpoint: the Other can be "everywhere and nowhere, internal as well as external, highly visible and

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[1] Srđan Vrcan. "A Preliminary Challenge: Borders or Frontiers?," *Social Compass* 53 (Vol 2, 2006): 217-218.

barely discernible, to be defeated here and now as well as in the distant future—but invariably suitable for extermination".[2]

Religion is one of the major factors in defining and maintaining ideological boundary lines: by means of what Vrcan calls "symbolic occupation" and "symbolic de-contamination",, religions contest ideological territory. Serbian Orthodox Christianity can serve as an example of how religion contributes to creating and reinforcing boundaries and frontiers and how this symbolic battle might have real consequences. Being seen itself as either a distant or familiar "other", Serbian Orthodoxy has responded with its own understanding of the issue of "otherness": its small enclave has been seen as both symbolically and actually isolated from the rest of the religious and secular world. The internal conviction in its absolute "otherness" is expressed through the idea of Serbian Orthodoxy situated on the western frontiers of the entire world of Eastern Christianity. The frontier quality of boundaries is achieved, as Vrcan asserts, by raising the existing cultural differences to ontologico-anthropological or "Grand history" level. Serbian Orthodoxy has contributed to this fact in two ways: by insisting on the distinction between two genuinely different worlds; and by emphasizing its divine mission and eschatological goal.[3] While the rhetoric of divine legitimation has provided an

unimpeachable credibility for this concept, the interpretation of historical and political circumstances has provided a guideline for its realization by fashioning the actual relationships with various "others".

Although religions traditionally depict "others" as "schismatics, infidels or as uncivilized"[4], their actual responses vary from elimination, through assimilation, to toleration and cooperation with others. Ivan Cvitković, a sociologist of religion, presents three sociological models of interreligious and interconfessional relations: (1) exclusivism, a model based on a sharp distinction between one's own religion that is "right" and "true", and all the others, that are "false", a model which "fortifies religious boundaries and possibly leads to deterioration of other religious groups"; (2) inclusion, a model that refers to an idea of a "single world religion [that] ignores differences in the interest of a general sense of community"; and (3) pluralism, a model that emphasizes a full respect and understanding for beliefs of "others", the attitude which is promoted by the World Council of Churches, World Religions for Peace, and various Interreligious Councils.[5]

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[2] Ibid., 217.
[3] Ibid., 219-220.

[4] Ibid, 221.
[5] Ivan Cvitković, "Interreligious Relations in a Multicultural Society," in *Religious Dialogue in the Balkans: The Drama of Understanding*, ed. Milan Vukomanovic and Marinko Vucinic (Belgrade: Belgrade Open School): 29-41.

The concept of ecclesiastical racism or ethnophyletism is related to the first model of interreligious relations. The term "phyletism" (Gr. *phulē*: race, tribe) was coined by the Holy pan-Orthodox Synod of Constantinople in 1872. The Synod condemned the establishment of a separate Bulgarian diocese that was primarily based on ethnic identity instead of the principles of Orthodoxy. The Bulgarians were excommunicated for the newly defined heresy of "phyletism".[6]

The national or ethnic principle, present in the organization of the Eastern Orthodox churches, manifests itself in a tendency of the Orthodox churches to get involved in nationalist politics. This kind of religious nationalism, which Vjekoslav Perica names *ethnoclericalism*, is grounded in the idea of an "ethnically based nationhood and a 'national church' with its clergy entitled to national leadership but never accountable for political blunders as are secular leaders". Both antiliberal and antisecular, ethnoclericalist religious institutions appear as opponents of the principle of separation between church and state. They consider the concepts of religious liberty, equality, and secularization as "alien" and "unnational", while the clergy, as well as the chief saints and cults, are seen as naturally belonging to the dominating ethnic group. On the level of the state, ethnoclericalism is not only concerned about local politics; it also insists on involvement in foreign political affairs. Ideally, the symbiotic coalition of clerical and non-clerical elites is meant to maintain a country's foreign policy by seeking to build a sort of "Huntingtonian cultural alliance"; from the perspective of ethnoclericalists, concludes Perica, the "clash of civilizations" is the inevitable outcome of ethnic and religious diversity.[7]

Acting as both an ecclesiastical concept and political ideology, ethnoclericalism produces a mutual dependence of an ethnic church and an ethnic state, and, in the final instance, contributes to the transformation of an ethnic community into a nation. A strong homogenous church and a strong homogenous state are both seen as necessary to protect the ethnic or national community from the alleged external threat. As the threat is identified as permanent and general, protection also needs to be resolute and explicit, which basically means the

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[6] For more information, please see "Eastern Orthodoxy," in *Encyclopædia Britannica*. Encyclopædia Britannica Premium Service, 2006, <http://www.britannica.com/eb/article-60470 > (August 5, 2006), and Archbishop of Kenya and lrinoupolis Makarios, "Ethnic Identity, National Identity and the Search for Unity 'Receive one another as Christ has received you to the glory of God' (Romans 15:7)," World Council of Churches, Commission on Faith and Order, 2004, < http://www.wcc-coe.org/wcc/what/faith/kuala-docs13-makarios.pdf > (Aug 5, 2006).

[7] Vjekoslav Perica, *Balkan Idols: Religion and Nationalism in Yugoslav States* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 215-218.

ethnic or national church attains the role of a "guardian" of the community. Due to their "survivor nature", notes Perica, these churches do not act as liberal but as "authoritarian-minded and centralized organizations capable of organizing resistance against an outside threat and maintaining stability inside the community".[8] The community itself, under the great manipulative power of such politics, adopts anticipated animosities and defines a whole spectrum of alleged enemies, whether symbolic or real.

On the other hand, as a common strategy of the pluralist model of interreligious relations, the ecumenical movement appears as an antithesis to the model of phyletism or ethnoclericalism. The ecumenical movement originates in Christianity as an attempt at overcoming and healing the Christian schisms that historically divided this religion along various doctrinal and political lines. Georges Florovsky, a prominent Orthodox theologian, points out that the so-called "ecumenical problem", the pursuit of interchristian reconciliation and reunification, is essentially related to the task Christianity has to perform in the modern times, that is, rediscovering the sense of Christian responsibility and taking an active role in addressing social justice issues. In other words, this idea implies that Christianity needs to be "put into action" here and now, in any time and any situation. It should not be just an observer or commentator on human history and world problems; it needs to "unify, to speak with one voice to the present political, social or international situation".[9]

This sort of socially aware and practically oriented ecumenical movement faces various obstacles and doubts. Although the 20th century is broadly called the "century of ecumenism", the sole term "ecumenism", as with all the other "–isms", gives way to an easy generalization; it often indicates a trendy rhetoric that actually lacks the real intention of "walking the talk".[10] On the other side, traditional differences between particular Christian denominations are not easily overcome. First, although most agree that "reunion, even in the realm of 'practical Christianity' is an ultimate goal", it is very likely that deep theological consensus cannot be achieved immediately. And second, Florovsky questions, is it possible for "true Christian unity [to] be restored by agreement on *secular issues*?".[11]

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[9] Georges Florovsky, *Ecumenism I: A Doctrinal Approach*. In Collected Works of Georges Florovsky, vol. 13, ed. Richard S. Haugh (Vaduz: Buchervertriebsanstalt, 1989), 22-23.

[10] Rev. Georges V. Tsetsis, "The Bilateral Dialogues of the Orthodox Church (Problems and Opportunities)," in *Essays on Ecumenism,* ed. Anton C. Vrame and Cory Dixon (Berkeley, CA: InterOrthodox Press, 2003). 7-17.

[8] Perica, *Balkan Idols*, 215.

[11] Florovsky, *Ecumenism I,* 19-24.

It is important to distinguish between two types of ecumenism that both strive to regulate interdenominational competition: these are "moderate" and "radical" (i.e. "pure") ecumenism. As Newman notes, the major aim of "radical" ecumenism is not to eliminate competition between separate denominations by unifying them together into a single denomination, "the Christian Church", but to eliminate interdenominational competition by replacing it with something of a "different order".[12] To be more precise, he asserts that "churches cannot unite [in finding a *doctrinal consensus*] because they would die"; the solution is to find a new, *secular line* of collaboration and unification. On the other hand, "moderate" ecumenists suggest that kind of "friendly competition" between denominations should be established in order to achieve a common doctrinal minimum for cooperation. In that voice, the first assembly of the World Council of Churches in Amsterdam in 1948 acknowledged the need of each religious denomination "to find the right relations between confessional and ecumenical loyalties".[13] However, in spite of good prospects, an open disagreement between the Orthodox and the Protestant understanding of the ecumenical problem took a place at the WCC in New Delhi in 1961, when the Orthodox declared they didn't want to discuss the prospect of reunion "on Protestant terms".[14]

The sharp distinction that exists today between Catholic, Protestant and Orthodox ecumenisms can be better understood after presenting some major Eastern Orthodox perspectives on this issue. By participating in the Pan-Orthodox Conferences since the 1960s, Orthodox Churches entered into official theological dialogue with several churches and denominations "in order to create better mutual understanding between the churches, gradually to remove past condemnations and achieve visible unity in one faith".[15] However, a problem arose with the assertion of some Orthodox theologians that the Orthodox Church is "*the* Church" and "only *true* Church"; following this line of thought, Christian reunion can be acceptable only as a "universal conversion to Orthodoxy". On the other hand, they admit that "the *true* Church is not yet the *perfect* Church".[16] Finally, the Third Pan-Orthodox Conference in 1986 came up with a moderate and inclusive policy: "Orthodox participation in the ecumenical movement does not run counter to the nature and history of the Orthodox Church. It constitutes the consistent expression of the apostolic

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[12] Jay Newman, "The Case Against Ecumenism: A Classic Canadian Argument," in *Pluralism, Tolerance and Dialogue: Six Studies,* ed. M. Darrol Bryant (Waterloo, ON: University of Waterloo Press, 1989). 24.
[13] Ibid., 35.

[14] Florovsky, *Ecumenism I,* 153.
[15] Tsetsis, "The Bilateral Dialogues," 7.
[16] Florovsky, *Ecumenism I,* 134.

faith within new historical conditions".
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Permanent Orthodox dilemmas regarding the doctrinal legitimacy of ecumenism and the role of Orthodoxy in interreligious and ecumenical dialogue are reflected in the case of Serbian Orthodox Christianity to a great extent; yet, there are some significant distinctions related to its specific historical, cultural and political background that need to be more precisely addressed.

The SOC's Construction of the Other: "Ex Oriente Lux!"[18]

The involvement of the Serbian Orthodox Church in various forms of interreligious cooperation, especially in global ecumenical projects, has been generally fashioned by two key factors: first, by Eastern or Serbian Orthodox perceptions of abstract "others" such as the "West" and *"Europe"*, and second,

by its historically-established conviction in the existence of eternal "friends and foes", such as particular ethnoreligious groups and nation-states. Relationships between Serbian Orthodoxy and particular religious and secular groups have always been fashioned by the Church's perception of the Serbian mytho-historical past and her relations with the nation state. The SOC has employed a dramatic interpretation of Serbian national history in order to define its imagined sphere of influence and reinforce its boundaries. In this interpretation of Serbian history, the Church identifies victimhood and martyrdom as distinctive qualities of the Serbian national 'Being', even divinizing them as celestial values.[19] This section will analyze the ideological predispositions, actual responses and future prospects for ecumenical dialogue as seen and performed from the perspective of the contemporary Serbian Orthodox Church.

The boundaries of Serbian Orthodoxy have been largely shaped by the epochal schism of the two Christian churches, Eastern and Western. Serbian Orthodoxy responded to this religious (and consequently political and cultural) division by choosing epithets such as *atheistic, nihilistic, anti-national, foreign, modernist, prowestern, liberal, left-wing*, etc, to describe the antithesis of the typical Serbian Orthodox Christian, a description that is best summarized in

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[17] Decision of the Third Pan-Orthodox Conference, in Emmanuel Clapsis, *Orthodoxy in Conversation: Orthodox Ecumenical Engagements* (Geneva and Brookline, MA: WCC Publications and Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2000), 2.

[18] "No one remembers sun rising on the west!…Ex oriente lux!," Metropolitan Amfilohije said on June 4, 1990. In Metropolitan Amfilohije Radović. *Vraćanje duše u čistotu: Besjede, razgovori, pogledi* [The Return of the Soul to Immaculacy: Narrations, Conversations, Perspectives], 2001, <http://www.mitropolija.cg.yu/dvavoda/knjige/aradovic-dusa.html#_Toc528381699> (June 23, 2006).

[19] Vrcan, "A Preliminary Challenge," 220.

the concept of "anti-nature": According to this rhetoric, blurring "natural" boundary-lines by mixing "our blood and alien blood", that is, by incorporating the "anti-nature" into the "nature" through ethnically mixed marriages, is to blame for increased animosity in the Balkans. [20]

Within the discourse of the Serbian Orthodox Church, the "West" and "Europe" are usually associated if not completely equated. Although both categories have been traditionally seen through the skeptical lens of Serbian religious nationalism, new criticisms have emerged from the pen of radical Serbian theologians Justin Popović and Nikolaj Velimirović. In his book *Orthodoxy as a Philosophy of Life* (1993), Archimandrite Justin sees Western or European culture as a "Faustian culture" and accuses it of being entrenched in human instead of divine values. European man became the "measure of all things, both visible and invisible" and while man thus declared himself God, humanism, the "architect of modern society", turned Europe into the "factory of idols". "Europe", says Popović, "doesn't suffer from atheism, but from polytheism"; it is the embodiment of "resurrected fetishism" and "cultural cannibalism". [21]

Contemporary right-wing Serbian Orthodox theologians have embraced Popović's criticism of Western culture. Their rhetoric cynically plays on modern discourse by stripping popular phrases out of their broader contexts, overturning their meaning or giving them new connotations. In this manner, "freedom of choice" becomes the freedom of choice between "bad and worse"; the "new world order" becomes the "pact with devil" that unites public and secret power structures such as the United Nations, the World Bank, the Red Cross and NGOs; the "international community" is ruled by freemasons; "general conflicts, wars, hungers, revolutions, epidemics" are "benefits of modern times", and people with "jungle-law ethics" and "ultramodern technology" will continue to come as God's punishment of Western Europe which has "abandoned the path of Christ". [22] References to alleged Machiavellian amorality, Orwellian dystopia and Nietzscheian nihilism are almost unavoidable in recent theological texts. [23]

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[20] Ivan Čolović, *The Politics of Symbol in Serbia: Essays in Political Anthropology* (London: Hurst & Co, 2002), 25.

[21] Archimandrite Justin Popović, *Svetosavlje kao filosofija života* [Orthodoxy as a Philosophy of Life] (Valjevo: Manastir Ćelije, 1993), <http://www.svetosavlje.org/biblioteka/Duh ovnoUzdizanje/Svetosavlje/Svetosavlje06.ht m> (June 27, 2006).

[22] Hieromonk Srboljub Miletić, "Dijaspora, međucrkveni odnosi i vaseljenske hipoteze" [Diaspora, Interchurch Relations and Ecumenical Hypotheses]. N.D. <http://www.svetosavlje.org/biblioteka/Knji ge/Dijaspora.htm> (July 3, 2006).

[23] For example, according to archimandrite Justin Popović (1993), after going through the stages of atheism and anarchism, the Western civilization is condemned to end up in nihilism.

Serbian Orthodox theologians offer elaborate interpretations of the opposition of the "Orthodox East" to the "European West". As Srđan Vrcan notes, there are two supposed reasons for this: first, the European West had never understood the genuine meaning of Christianity; and second, the European West had distanced itself from Christ through its rationalism and humanism "in a Godless manner".[24] Metropolitan Amfilohije Radović expressed this standpoint in a nutshell: "The West is preoccupied and besieged by the Earth. That is why it does not think of Heaven. And that is why it is such an enemy to us today. There is no God among them. There is no heavenly kingdom there".[25] Today's Serbia, a thorn in the side of the "extortionist-atheistic and demonic international community, which is driving peoples into the New World Order"[26], needs to cautiously reconsider its contemporary position and future directions. Radović laments Serbian destiny[27] but he also calls for a national uprising and the defence of "genuine Jerusalem-Mediterranean Europeanness" whose representatives and guardians are the Serbs:

> The Serbs are today also the guardians of the rarest and most important civilizational values, the values of the heart and spirit. In the soulless world of modern materialism and rationalism, in a civilization of false material well-being and cowardly pacifism, they prevail in the struggle for the ideals of the fighter, simultaneously dear to nature and sacred. In that struggle they do not fear death, for without death there is no national resurrection. [28]

While Radović's view of Serbian Orthodox boundaries goes beyond the question of geography and engages the dimensions of history and culture, Nikolaj Velimirović's vision enters the realm of metaphysics. The romantic perception of the Balkans as the border area between East and West and as the historical "guardian of the gate" is, in Velimirović's understanding, an oversimplification. The Balkans are only physically *between* East and West; they can be seen as a "healthy man between two sick ones", both of which are "cursed" and "bedeviled". However, from a transcendental perspective, asserts Velimirovic, the Balkans are neither "East *or* West", nor are they "*between* East and West"; they are *above* both of them.[29]

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[24] Vrcan, "A Preliminary Challenge," 220.
[25] As quoted in Čolović, *The Politics of Symbol in Serbia,* 39.
[26] Ibid., 9.
[27] "Anyways, at this historical moment we *are* in Europe and there is no other place to go. We've been shaped by Europe, even by its plague of Marxism and communism. We were the guinea pigs of Western European ideologies. When we embraced the Western European ideas – everything turned wrong", says Metropolitan Radovic, in Radović. *Vraćanje duše u čistotu,* 2001.

[28] As quoted in Čolović, *The Politics of Symbol in Serbia,* 8.
[29] Bishop Nikolaj Velimirović, *Iznad Istoka i Zapada*, Separat iz sabranih dela episkopa ohridskog i žičkog Nikolaja Velimirovića

Whether between, above, or beneath East and West, there is no doubt that the Balkans have been an area of unceasing turmoil. Attempts by the three largest religious populations (the Orthodox, Catholics and Muslims) to define and stabilize their mutual relationships are centuries old, and, over time the concepts of "natural friends and foes", or "eternal allies" versus "eternal enemies", became spontaneously entrenched in common public mentality as well as in official state and ecclesiastical politics. All sides searched for the help of their coreligionists, who suddenly became "ancient" if not "eternal allies". As Velikonja notes, the Orthodox Serbs were dreaming of a so-called *Orthodox Circle* (a union of all countries with Orthodox majority), the Bosnian Muslims discovered a "long-lasting friendship" with Muslim (Arab) countries, while the Catholic Croats

(1880-1956) [Above East and West, An excerpt from the collected works of Nikolaj Velimirović, a metropolitan of Ohrid and Žiča (1880-1956)]. (Dizeldorf, Nemačka: Projekat Rastko, Biblioteka srpske kulture na internetu "Bogoslovlje", N.D.). Faithfully following the logic of Saint Nikolaj Velimirović, the recent Church's publication *Pravoslavlje* declares that "Orthodox Catholicism (on the contrary to Roman Catholicism) is neither *Eastern* nor *Western,* but CENTRAL […] as the truth of God's Church does not depend on geography", in "Pravoslavni i novi svetski poredak" [The Orthodox Order and the New World Order], in *Pravoslavlje* 940 (15.05.2006).

turned to the Vatican and Western (Catholic) countries.[30]

These mythical religious alliances came as a product of similar kinds of mythical religious conspiracies. As for Serbian religious nationalists, a world conspiracy plotted by Germany, the Vatican and the Jewish-controlled Western media[31] was responsible for most of the problems Serbia has had with its neighbors or with the international community. Aside from facing the "Pope's servants" (Italy, Austria and Germany) and the conspiracy of "Western Powers", Orthodox Serbia has had to deal with another threat: the so-called Green Transversal (Ankara-Tirana-Sarajevo) which refers to the conspiracies of Islamic fundamentalists and alleged plans of Islamist control over the Balkans. Particularly in the early 1990s, the Bosnian Muslims were often labelled as "jihad fighters, mujahidins, janissaries, brothers in fez", whose "final ambition was to turn Bosnia into a state modelled on the Qur'an, an Islamic fundamentalist state, or a Libyan-style Jamahiriyah in which non-Muslims would become slaves".[32]

[30] Mitja Velikonja, "In Hoc Signo Vinces: Religious Symbolism in the Balkan wars 1991-1995," *Religion in Eastern Europe* XXI (5, 2001).
[31] Vladimir Tismaneanu, *Fantasies of Salvation: Democracy, Nationalism and Myth in Post-Communist Europe* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), 96.
[32] Velikonja, "In Hoc Signo Vinces," 2001.

The support of the rest of the Orthodox world appeared to be a crucial counterbalance to all these alleged enmities. Although the separation of the American and Macedonian Orthodox churches from the SOC came as a shock in the 1960s, cooperation with sister Orthodox Churches (primarily the Greek, Russian, and Romanian Church) commenced around the same time with the Pan-Orthodox Conference held on the island of Rhodes in 1961. This conference gathered all Orthodox churches for the first time since the Council of Nicea in 787 CE and diplomatically presented Orthodoxy as a "bridge between Rome and the Protestant Churches".[33] At approximately the same time, the traditional Serbo-Russian friendship was restored by the first visit of the Serbian Patriarch to Moscow in 1956. In the words of Serbian Orthodox delegation members, they felt "not like guests, but at home, brothers of one blood, one faith and one spirit".[34] The Russian Patriarch soon visited the Serbian holy land of Kosovo and was spectacularly welcomed. Some time later, Serbian Patriarch Germanus pointed out that he and Russian Patriarch Pimen shared similar views about "the need for a mutual defence of Orthodox peoples against the West and other threats such as Islam and communism".[35] Since the 1970s, Russia

has emerged as Serbia's principal ally, and the Russian Church has been taken to be a major supporter of the SOC's foreign and national policy.[36]

(Anti)Ecumenical Preferences of the SOC

In 1968, the SOC decided to join the World Council of Churches, which seemed to be one of the most significant decisions the Serbian Orthodox Church has ever made. Even communist President Tito approved the Patriarch's attempts to "strengthen friendship with other countries" through that participation.[37] However, the general participation of the Orthodox Churches in the WCC has been questioned ever since. Constantine D. Mouratides, a

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[33] Stella Alexander, *Church and State in Yugoslavia Since 1945* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 273.
[34] Ibid, 256.
[35] Ibid., 159.

[36] One of the most illustrative examples of this conviction happened during the NATO bombing of Serbia in the spring of 1999. While Western democracies supported the bombing, the Russian Orthodox Church provided symbolic and spiritual help for its Balkan coreligionists The holy icon of the miraculous Madonna of Kazan immediately arrived in Belgrade as well as the patriarch of Moscow and all Russia, Alexei II. Regarding the NATO decision to start bombing Serbia on Orthodox Easter, Patriarch Alexei II commented: "They are not Christians, they are barbarians," in Douglas M. Johnson and Jonathon Eastwood, "History Unrequited: Religion as Provocateur and Peacemaker in the Bosnian Conflict," in *Religion and Peacebuilding,* ed. Harold Coward and Gordon S. Smith (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2004). 213-243.
[37] Alexander, *Church and State in Yugoslavia,* 250.

prominent Greek theologian, characterized the WCC as "grotesque, preposterous, and destructive of Orthodox canonical order and Holy Tradition", as "an admixture of things that cannot be mixed" and "a grotesque monstrosity which constitutes the greatest snare of the Enemy in the history of the Church Militant of Christ".[38] The antiecumenical voices rose immediately in the SOC. The influential archimandrite Justin Popović soon published in Greece a radical antiecumenical book, *An Orthodox Appraisal and Testimony* (1974) in which he condemned every kind of global ecumenical movement, whether from Geneva or Rome. He emphasized that the SOC is "the only true and credible spiritual force capable of accomplishing the ideal of Christian unity".[39] For Popovic, the joint prayers and ecumenical meetings between "the Orthodox and the heterodox" are simply impossible because the heretics (i.e. Roman Catholic bishops and priests, Protestant pastors, and "even women") give blessings.[40] The decision of the Fifth Pan-Orthodox Consultation in Geneva (1968) that the Orthodox Church should consider itself as "an organic member of the WCC" caused even bitterer resentment.[41] In this way,

almost before it even started its real ecumenical engagement, Serbian Orthodoxy semi-officially declared ecumenism to be a dark power, and the World Council of Churches "the world hodgepodge of the heresies and heretics that is endeavoring to divert the Holy Ark of the Orthodox Church from her redemptive mission".[42]

The last decade of 20th century also saw a significant uprising against the ecumenical movement in Serbian Orthodoxy. There were two particular but related motives for this. First, traditional Orthodox animosity towards Catholicism embodied in the idea of a global "Vatican Conspiracy" against Serbs was revived and strengthened by the Balkan wars of the 1990s. Consequently, the 1991 Pan-Orthodox symposium in Kiev, named "Roman Catholicism and the Orthodox World" sent the following message to the pope: "Your Holiness, the Orthodox peoples will not be intimidated by the alliance between you and the powerful international forces. Amen".[43]

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[38] "The Greatest Snare of the Enemy, The World Council of Churches: The World Hodgepodge of Heresies," 1990, 1. <http://www.synodinresistance.org/Theo_en/E3a4012Popovic.pdf> (April 13, 2006).

[39] As quoted in Perica, *Balkan Idols,* 257.

[40] "The Greatest Snare," 6.

[41] "We reject thereby the Orthodox Theanthropic Faith, this organic bond with

the Lord Jesus, the God-man, and His all-immaculate Body; [we reject] to become "organic members" of a heretical, humanistic, man-made and man-worshipping assembly, which is composed of 263 heresies, each one of them spiritual death! As Orthodox, we are "members of Christ." Our "organic" connection with the World Council of Churches, is nothing other than a revival of the atheistic worship of man and idols," said Justin Popović (ibid, 7).

[42] Ibid, 2.

[43] As quoted in Perica, *Balkan Idols,*159.

Secondly, the antiecumenical movement developed a theological critique of the concept of "common minimum for unification".[44] Eventually, in 1997, 280 monks and 40 priests of the Serbian Orthodox Church released an "Appeal against Ecumenism". Largely based on statements from Archimandrite Justin's 1974 antiecumenical study, this appeal argued that interfaith ecumenical dialogue was a "weapon of Western missionaries' proselytism".[45] The Holy Synod of the Serbian Orthodox Church suggested that the other Orthodox Churches consider withdrawal from the WCC. Reasons for this included: 1) the unacceptable "*unity in faith* as a prerequisite for the *general Church unity*"; 2) the increasing influence of secularism; 3) the majority of Protestant communities in WCC and the majority voting system; 4) the enforcement of religious syncretism over Orthodoxy; 5) the introduction of nontraditional ministries; 6) the affirmation of the "so-called rights of the sexual minorities and the legalization of homosexual relationships in matrimony by the Church" etc.[46]

Today, although the Serbian Orthodox Church is still present in WCC, there is nothing close to official consensus regarding its future. Indeed, skepticism about interreligious cooperation surprisingly affects the Pan-Orthodox as well as global Christian ecumenical projects. Elaborating on his fear that the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople is developing a hidden agenda for becoming the "Mother Church" or the "Orthodox Vatican", Bishop Srboljub Miletić reverts to the old conspiracy theories: "There is no doubt that these tendencies will be backed up by the global international powers", says Miletić.[47] As proof he points out that even so-called "conferences" and "congresses" are an "artificial form of gathering", they are Western products completely alien to the Orthodox tradition. Under the disguise of popular concepts such as "partnership" and "equal participation", globalists strive to annihilate distinctions and "put everything into the same sack".[48] Accordingly, in constant oscillation between its ostensible ecumenical, antiwar position, and its true support of the ethnonationalist political powers, the pendulum of the Serbian Orthodox Church's official policy apparently inclines towards the radical nationalist pole.

It would be difficult to pinpoint the particular external causes for this model of Serbian Orthodox exclusivism. The five-century Ottoman oppression

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[44] Fr. John Meyendorff stated: "Our essential responsibility in the ecumenical movement is to affirm that true Christian Unity is not unity on the basis of common minimum between denominations but a unity in God," in Vladimir Vukasinovic, "Towards New Ecumenism," 1999, <http://www.iskon.co.yu/4/ekumenizam_e.html> (April 14, 2006).

[45] As quoted in Perica, *Balkan Idols,* 181.

[46] Vukasinovic, "Towards New Ecumenism".

[47] Miletić, "Dijaspora, međucrkveni odnosi"

[48] Ibid.

certainly contributed to the lack of some key concepts of modernity, such as the Protestant Reformation, the Age of Enlightenment, or the principle of church and state separation. In addition, as Daniel Payne assumes, the lack of understanding of concepts of individual faith, personal autonomy and individual human rights is the hallmark of the ethos of Eastern Orthodox political culture in general.[49] From the internal perspective, the SOC's responses to the various issues of modern and everyday life are deeply rooted in the philosophy of universal struggle and the omnipresent enemy. A general fear that the Serbian nation can be "diluted" by the increase of the level of ethnic diversity results in the sense of threat; accordingly, the concept of Serbian Orthodoxy as an endangered enclave appears as a consequence of a constant need to defend its imagined borders.

Finally, what can one conclude about Serbian Orthodox (anti)ecumenical preferences? On the one hand, new challenges posed to the Serbian Orthodox religious institutions (issues such as democracy, pluralism, tolerance, protection of ethnic and religious minorities), are unavoidable demands of the modern world. Although the countermodern orientation of the SOC is deeply rooted in what Peter Berger calls a "nostalgic desire to restore structures of premodern world of order, meaning and solidarity",[50] referring to the traditionalist societies in general, the modern imperatives of socially engaged humanism, such as global responsibility, dialogue and reconciliation, simply cannot be ignored any more. On the other hand, there is a certain ecumenical tendency: as Metropolitan Artemije of Raška-Prizren laconically observes, "the Serbian Church is certainly up for a dialogue; however, the scope of that dialogue is not defined".[51] Unfortunately, the "undefined scope of the dialogue" basically means that not much progress has been made since the mutual condemnation between the Catholic and Orthodox churches in 1054. Metropolitan Artemije explicitly admits that the removal of anathemas between the Catholic and Orthodox churches in 1965 was just an "individual move of both Ecumenical Patriarch Atinagora and Pope Paul VI that was primarily supposed to bring them a personal prestige and the image of peace-promoters".[52] For certain officials of the SOC, this historic ecumenical event seems to be irrelevant: the Great Schism is still valid and it will remain

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[49] As quoted in Angela Ilić, "Church and State Relations in Present-day Serbia," *Religion in Eastern Europe* XXV (2-3, 2005): 55.

[50] Peter L Berger, *Heretical Imperative: Contemporary Possibilities of Religious Affirmation* (Garden City, NY: Anchor Press, 1980), 22.

[51] "Srbija je proćerdala ceo XX vek," Intervju sa episkopom raško-prizrenskim Artemijem, ["Serbia Wasted the Whole 20th Century", An interview with Metropolitan of Raska-Prizren, Artemije]. *Danas* (6-7 Jan 2004), translation mine.

[52] Ibid.

valid until the "heretical Churches" fully embrace the Eastern light. Also, the Serbian Orthodox Church has been mostly passive either in attempts to seriously contribute to the development of the human and religious rights in Serbia, or in willingness to accept any kind of responsibility for the local and global social conditions. Although that situation has recently started to change on the level of the Church's rhetoric, awareness of the principles and imperatives of modern times does not on its own mean that they can be easily put in practice. Some concrete programs and actions whose goals are the protection of democracy, human rights, minorities' rights and respect for religious pluralism need to be started, according to Milan Vukomanović, "on the local, grassroots level".[53] It is usually more significant and much easier to attain some concrete and more visible results in this way than on the level of the national or international institutions, commissions and bodies. At the same time, the question of responsibility should not be linked only to the participation in a concrete wrongdoing, "but also to indifference, silence and closing one's eyes to the moments when a moral person should condemn a misdeed or crime".[54] The recent positive moves of the SOC towards the new understanding of "others" seem to overcome the old "friends/foes" concepts; having in mind that the actual power of the SOC to contribute to war, or peace, should never be underestimated, such recent moves can hopefully redirect the future politics of the Serbian Orthodox Church into a direction of a more inclusive politics.

Conclusion: In the Funfair House of Mirrors

At the end, it seems essential to revise again the discourse of "otherness" that actually outlines this case-study and provides us with a tool of comprehending the SOC within a more general picture, the one of ideological and culture perceptions interrelating what is called "East" and "West". In the Western perspective, the Eastern-European "other" carries particular ambiguity. As Andrew Hammond notes, after the Eastern European revolutions of 1989, Eastern Europe actually ceased to exist as a geopolitical unit and cultural concept; nevertheless, it remained as an imagined space not yet completely detached from the old Cold War discourse.[55] Today, Eastern Europe is conceptualized around notions of "violence, cruelty, irrationality, backwardness, clannishness, mafia-style criminality, [and] mass migration westwards" that can be summed up in a single term:

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[53] Milan Vukomanovic, "Religion, Conflict, Reconciliation," in *Inter-religious Dialogue as a Way of Reconciliation in South-Eastern Europe*, Milan Vukomanovic and Marinko Vucinic (eds.) (Belgrade:Cigoja stampa, 2001), 27.
[54] Ibid., 26-27.

[55] Andrew Hammond, ed, *The Balkans and the West: Constructing the European Other, 1945-2003* (Aldershot and Burlington: Ashgate, 2004), xii.

"balkanism".[56] Apparently, Eastern Europe, particularly the Balkans, does not carry romantic connotations usually present in the Western perception of an "exotic other." On the contrary, instead of being described as the "lost paradise," the Balkans are seen as the "black hole of modern Europe" which is yet to be enlightened and civilized.[57]

As it is simultaneously perceived as both a familiar and a distant "other", a "strange neighbor" and an "absolute stranger", the Eastern-European or the Balkan "other" is hardly renderable into the modern Western political, academic and popular discourses. Referring to the Balkan states, John B. Allcock notes that "even though it has by now become obvious that there is no possibility that the Humpty Dumpty of Yugoslavia can ever be put together again, it is still something of a challenge to know how to refer to that space" (2000: xiv).[58] Indeed, "that space", with its troubled

past and troubling present, poses a great conundrum to the social analysts today; it also opens Pandora's box of misreadings and generalizations.

Back to the issue of religion, Eastern Orthodox culture is, beside feudalism, Communism, authoritative power systems and limited modernization, one of the major factors that actually fashion the concept of "that space". As one of the most influential organized religions in the Eastern European region, Serbian Orthodoxy plays a great role in the process of mutual "othering" of East and West. Being amidst the continuous interchange of Western and Eastern European discourses, it contributes to that process in three ways. First, by traditionally insisting on the ultimacy of an alleged civilizational and spiritual gap between the East and the West, Serbian Orthodoxy strengthens the existing polarizations and keeps "that space" as an isolated enclave: by perceiving the West as the absolute other, it ascribes to itself the character of absolute otherness. Second, being itself frequently seen in negative light, Serbian Orthodoxy responds with an unconscious adoption of these external projections; reinterpreted on the local level, these projections create a powerful negative discourse of what one is *not,* becoming in that way an essential part of the Serbian contemporary ethnoreligious identity. And third, the process of the East-West "othering" seems to situate Serbian Orthodoxy in a sort of ideological funfair house of mirrors. On the one hand, this Eastern Orthodox religious

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[56] Ibid., xiii.

[57] As Andrew J. Pierre, a member of the US Institute for Peace, ponders about the destiny of the Balkans: "In the aftermath of the Kosovo conflict, Southeastern Europe is at a crossroad. Today's historic opportunity is to create a zone of security and stability in a region that has known little of either. Otherwise, the Balkans will become a permanent black hole in the heart of Europe," in Andrew J. Pierre, "De-Balkanizing the Balkans: Security and Stability in Southeastern Europe," US Institute for Peace. Special Report No 54, 1999, <http://www.usip.org/pubs/specialreports/sr990920.html> (Aug 2, 2006).

[58] Allcock, *Explaining Yugoslavia,* xiv.

tradition appears today as not exclusively "Eastern" any more; by being constantly present in the both the Western space and the Western mind, Serbian Orthodoxy becomes an integral part of a Western cultural, historical and intellectual context.[59] On the other hand, in responding to the Western conceptualizations, Serbian Orthodoxy reflects those constructions back to the West. By indicating and criticizing their misconceptions, it possibly contributes, intentionally or not, to the Western's comprehension of what Allcock names "that space".

Finally, this article suggests that the better understanding of "that space" should not be seen as significant just for the future of "that space" itself; in some further instance, it could improve the understanding of complex patterns of identification, representation and global power relations. These patterns can be identified not only in the sphere of the global politics but in the academic world too. The Balkans are just one of "those spaces" that do not easily fit the grand theoretical schemes of the Western scholarship. Lucid and coherent in their abstract speculations, modern social sciences often fail to fully comprehend the actual diversity of social phenomena; instead, they strive to adjust reality to ideal models. It can be suggested at the end that, by being

more self-critical and "other"-sensitive, the Western scholarship could develop more productive understanding of the non-Western phenomena.

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[59] Anton Ugolnik, "Tradition as Freedom from the Past: Eastern Orthodoxy and the Western Mind," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 21 (2, 1984): 228.

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