THE ROLE OF THE SERBIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH IN THE KOSOVO CONFLICT: REFLECTIONS ON THE ROLE OF RELIGION IN INTRA-STATE CONFLICTS[1]

O PAPEL DA IGREJA ORTODOXA SÉRVIA NO CONFLITO DO KOSOVO: REFLEXÕES SOBRE O PAPEL DA RELIGIÃO EM CONFLITOS INTRAESTATAIS

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Abstract: It is possible to observe a strong link between religion and national identities in the Balkans. Hence, this article explores this relationship in the context of the conflict in Kosovo, concluding that the Serbian Orthodox Church played a role in strengthening Serbian nationalism in Kosovo, which intensified the facts that led to the conflict escalation and to the attacks against the Albanian Kosovars. This case can be analysed as an example of the role of religion in intra-state conflicts. The authors conclude that inter-faith dialogue should be taken into account in peace-building contexts. Based on bibliography related to this issue and with the study case as a method, the authors argue that inter-religious dialogue should be a relevant issue in peace-building debates.

Key-words: Kosovo. Religion. Orthodox Church. Identity. Conflict.

Resumo: Na região dos Bálcãs, é possível observar uma forte relação entre religião e identidade nacional. Portanto, este artigo explora essa relação no contexto do conflito do Kosovo, concluindo que a Igreja Ortodoxa Sérvia desempenhou um papel no fortalecimento do nacionalismo sérvio no Kosovo, que intensificou os fatos que levaram à escalada do conflito e aos ataques contra os kosovares albaneses. Este caso pode ser analisado como um exemplo do papel da religião em conflitos intraestatais. Os autores concluem que o diálogo interreligioso deve ser considerado em contextos de *peace-building*. Com base em bibliografia e com o estudo de caso como método, os autores argumentam que o diálogo interreligioso deve ser tratado como um tema relevante em debates sobre *peace-building*.

Palavras-chave: Kosovo. Religião. Igreja Ortodoxa. Identidade. Conflito.

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Introduction

This article aims to explore the topic of religion in intra-state conflicts by analysing the case of the conflict in Kosovo, focusing on the influence of religion and the Serbian Orthodox Church on the relationship between Kosovars Serbian and Albanian. Based on a literary review about the history of conflict, religion in the country and concepts related to the idea of collective identity, the authors propose the following question: how is it possible to analyse the relevance of religion as a variable on contexts of intra-state conflicts, through Kosovo case study?

Hence, the following hypothesis is raised: Considering the strong relationship between ethnicity, religion, and identity in the Balkans, it is observed that the use of symbolic and religious elements by the Serbian Orthodox Church, with the objective of influencing the perception of the Serbian population in Kosovo, regarding the Albanian population as a threat, collaborated for the perpetuation of the feeling of hostility. For this reason, religion is a highly relevant variable in analysis not only of ethno-religious conflicts, but also of intra-state conflicts involving ethnic groups belonging to different religions. In this sense, the authors argue that inter-faith dialogue should be included in peace-building processes, including religious institutions and individuals who represent them, on both sides, considering their prestige and influence over their respective religious communities. The main argument is, therefore, that religion should not be neglected in studies concerning intra-state conflicts where two or more parts belong to different religions.

The methodology selected for this study is based on the methodological categorisation proposed by Silvestri and Mayall (2015), specifically regarding their studies of religion and conflict, which consists of the following categories:

> Types of concepts (religious or not) that emerge in a conflict that is considered to be religious; The actor (religious or not) involved and those who use these concepts; The type of arguments (religious or not) that are used by actors identified in the use of the concepts (Silvestri & Mayall, 2015 p.12).

These methodological categories help in the study of a certain phenomenon (conflict) involving religion. According to Silvestri and Mayall (2015, p. 12), the category of religious concepts allows detecting "if a religious claim is central to a war" [...] or how a religious concept is appropriated for a non-religious cause, involving nationalist struggles and the control of territories and resources by a specific ethnic group or national"''. Nevertheless, the level relative to the supposed "actors" allows to distinguish which individuals are based on the premise that "there are situations in which religious concepts/claims may not be central to a conflict, and yet the conflict is considered 'religious' because prominent religious figures are involved".

The next section allows to identify the reasoning used by religious actors or not, who can use concepts (religious or not) (Silvestri & Mayall, 2015). In this way, the three-level analysis provides an analysis of the "degree to which religion is relevant to a given situation and, hence, identifying specific policy responses" (Silvestri & Mayall, 2015, p.12). That said, this article proposes an adaptation of these categories to the theme of this research, associating, therefore, the units considered as actors in the case of the Kosovo War.

The Serbian Orthodox Church as a social and political institution will be classified here as a relevant actor in the phenomenon to be analysed (both in the "individuals" and "groups" category), considering its role in the use of religion as an incentive to maintain the conflict. Although the war is not necessarily based on strictly religious issues, "religious factors play different roles in each situation" (Silvestri & Mayall, 2015, p.12), which justifies the study of religion in the Kosovo conflict. In this sense, it is possible to identify that religious concepts are associated with the use of ethnic-religious elements, assigning a (non-central) role of relevance in the conflict. Finally, the use of religion for "non-religious" purposes (e.g. territory and resources) can also be associated with the aforementioned categories (Silvestri & Mayall, 2015).

1. **Theoretical frameworks**

In this section, there are concepts relevant to the proposed discussion. It is necessary to bring theoretical concepts that facilitate the understanding of the context of Kosovo and the Balkans with regard to the relationship between religion and identity.

Initially, the theoretical framework of this work assumes the concept of "group identity" proposed by Seul (1999). Considering that a group can be understood as "a self-defined collection of individuals", the author starts from the logic constructed by Kelman (1998, p.16, apud SEUL, 1999, p. 556), which characterises the identity of a group as

> The members' shared conception of its enduring characteristics and basic values, its strengths and weaknesses, its hopes and fears, its reputation and condition of existence, its institutions and traditions, its past history, current purposes and future prospects.

Based on this understanding of what constitutes a group identity, Seul (1999) states that this identity – often preserved through forms of communication, whether written or not – is preserved independently of the individuals who make up the group. The concept of group identifies, therefore, dialogues with the idea of inter-group conflict. Nevertheless, according to the author, "the intergroup comparison process produces a competitive dynamic in which groups try to highlight their identities in relation to other groups" (Seul, 1999, p. 557).

In this context, religion contributes to the construction of identities through religious written and oral material, including "[…] among other things, myths, lores, songs and prayers" (Seul, 1999, p. 561). These concepts are relevant to this work as they provide a theoretical basis for understanding the ethnic and religious elements that make up the groups of both Serbian and Albanian Kosovars. Once the identity ideas of these groups are established and the role of religion as influential in the constitution of identities, the next topic aims to explore this relationship in a more specific way, that is, the relationship between religion and identity in the Balkans.

According to Perica (2004, p. 168), "[I]n all the successor states of the former Yugoslavia, except perhaps Slovenia, religion became the hallmark of nationhood". The author affirms the existence of an ethno-clericalism in the case of the Balkans, when mentioning studies on religious fundamentalism and "religious nationalism" (Perica, 2004, p. 214). In the author's words, "[k]ey components of ethnoclericalism are the idea of ethnically based nationhood and a "national church" with its clergy entitled to national leadership but never accountable for political blunders as are secular leaders" (Perica, 2004, p. 214-215).

It is possible, therefore, to observe the influence of churches and clergy in the formation of national identities in the Balkans region, so that ethno-denominational nationalism has been the main dominant force, regarding Balkan policies and societies in the last two hundred years (Bardos, 2013). The author conceptualises it as a "a sentiment in which a distinct group of people, recognizing themselves as such, strives to accumulate as much political, religious, military, economic, cultural, or educational selfgovernment as possible." (Bardos, 2013, p. 16). Hence, ethno-confessional identities are, for most of the population and are not related to the formal notion of politics (Bardos, 2013).

Still on the idea of ethno-confessionalism, it is possible to affirm that social and cultural elements are deeply linked to the construction of an identity (Bardos, 2013, p. 6), and taking it to the national level, it is possible to state that the ideational concept of nation exist *a priori* to the institution state (Woodward, apud Bardos, 2013). Furthermore, the author argues that the ethno-denominational context is a key factor when it comes to the way agents interact with the political environment that surrounds them, and to with the societal practices executed by those agents (Bardos, 2013, p.7). The term "ethno-confessional" is used in order to "emphasize the fact that, as Milorad Ekmečić has argued, nations in Southeastern Europe are based on religious ties rather than linguistic ones." (Ekmecic, apud Bardos, 2013, p.16).

Additionally, considering the purpose of this article, it is necessary to contextualise about religion in intra-state conflicts. Goldewijk (2007) argues that, in the debate regarding the role of religion in intrastate violence, there is a focus with regard to the classification of religion as being "source or fuel, a causal or determinant factor in conflict" (Goldewijk, 2007, p.42). Considering the proposal of this article, it is intended not to provide a correlation or causality relationship – in a strictly positivist sense – of religion as a causal factor in intra-state conflicts, but to understand the process on which symbols, myths, and other ethnic-religious elements contribute to analyse this type of conflict. In this sense, the authors will seek to associate the concepts presented so far – i.e., socially constructed identities – with the context of religion in the field of intrastate conflicts.

When dealing with the presence of religion in the field of intra-state conflicts, Fox (2014) mentions the existence of two definitions with regard to religious conflicts: the first refers to conflicts involving religious issues, while the second relates to conflicts waged by groups of different religions. Therefore, an approach seeks to explain the conflict based on its religious content, and this proposes the questioning to what extent the conflict may or may not be characterised as religious. On the other hand, Fox (2014) defines inter-religious conflicts as those in which the conflicting groups belong to religious, branches, or denominations of the same religion. Considering the outline studied by this article, the second concept will be applied to the context of the conflict in Kosovo.

Given the questioning of the extent to which religious factors can influence a conflict, Fox (2014) proposes a list of taxonomies regarding the level of religious influence that exists in each domestic conflict, divided as follows:

> (1) Ideological influences where religious ideologies and beliefs motivate actors to engage in conflict, 2) the use of religious institutions in the conflict. This can be to facilitate or mobilize for conflict as well as to inhibit conflicts and support conflict resolution, 3) the use of religious language and symbols to influence conflict. This includes support for or opposition to the conflict, 4) the influence of religious identity on conflict. None of these four categories is mutually exclusive (Fox, 2002; Fox, 2013, apud Fox, 2014, p.160).

Nevertheless, the categories mentioned above complement the argument also proposed by Fox (2000) when the author refers to the role of religious institutions in a domestic conflict. Fox (2000) argues that religion can act as a facilitator or inhibitor of conflicts, taking into account the capacity of religious institutions to organise groups of individuals. This organisation can happen, for example, by forming links between groups belonging to the same religion. In this sense, religious institutions can act in order to contribute to a political mobilisation (Fox, 2000). In addition to it, Fox (2000) also mentions the conservative character that exists in religious institutions and the fact that they have ties with governments that makes the interests of these institutions often convergent.

It is also necessary to mention the legitimacy provided by religion that can occur when religious institutions engage in political activities. Hence, the capacity of religious institutions to facilitate or prevent conflicts comes from their relationships, i.e., support

to government or opposition groups (Fox, 2000). It should also be mentioned the way in which religion facilitates conflict: On the one hand, "conflicts involving the defense of religious frameworks and guidelines for behaviour of those frameworks by definition contain elements of religious legitimacy" (Fox, 2000, p.16). On the other hand, "conflicts that have secular causes but that evoke the use of religious legitimacy can be transformed into religious ones" (Fox, 2000, p. 17). Hence, "once the religious legitimacy and religious institutions become involved in a conflict, the chance that religious issues will be inserted into it increases dramatically" (Fox, 2000, p. 17).

The analytical categories suggested by Fox (2000) will be applied in this analysis, since they are able to assist not only in the classification of a conflict as religious or not, but also in the understanding with regard to the degree of influence or religion in the conflict or general form. Therefore, even though, in the conflict, the ethnic aspect is more relevant than the religious one, religion can contribute to the increase of violence in a conflict motivated by ethnic issues.

In addition to the concepts mentioned, it is relevant to include the theoretical approach of the Inter-religious Dialogue for Peace-building proposed by Merdjanova and Brodeur (2009), that takes into account a possible increase in "awareness about how to improve human interactions, locally and globally, recognising the importance of integrating religious identities into intergroup dialogue" (Merdjanova & Brodeur, 2009, p. 10). The concept can be understood is the following, for them:

> All forms of interreligious dialogue activities that promote as ethos of tolerance, non-violence and trust", based on three principles: "self-conscious engagement in IDP, self-critical attitude during engagement in IDP and realistic expectations regarding the IDP. (Merdjanova & Brodeur 2009, p. 25).

According to the authors, the first principle is based on the premise that individuals' religious identities must be taken into account since they are part of the conflict and, hence, needs to be addressed in the peace-building process, while the second refers to self-criticism with regard to the need to recognise the limitation and tendencies of each individuals. Finally, the last principle is characterised as "a long and uneven step-by-step process" (Merdjanova & Brodeur, 2009, p. 25). The authors (2009, p. 26) also state that "interreligious dialogue activities generally contribute to peacebuilding, even if the

actors involved are not aware of this broader aim". The concept of IDP will be taken up in the analytical section and in the final considerations.

2. Conflict historical context

Kosovo's history can be told by two narratives – usually opposed – and as in many nationalist movements, the groups draw on the past in order to build their conception of the nation and to justify their claims. In this sense, both the Serbs and the Albanians of Kosovo used a mythological and primordialism rhetoric in relation to local history as a way of mobilising their causes, therefore, some authors emphasise the need to adopt other perspectives when analysing the Kosovo issue (Bieber, 2003).

The presence of Serbs in Kosovo dates back to the great Slavic migrations in Europe, around the 4th century AD. Among the Slavic groups that settled in the Balkans – ancestors of today, known as Serbs, Croats and Slovenes – Kosovo was the region in which the Serbs were established between the 7th and 10th century (Daskalovski, 2003). Later, in the 12th century, during the period of the Serbian Empire, the region was integrated as part of it, being considered as the "heart of Serbia" (Milosevic, apud Daskalovski, 2003, p. 12). However, with the Turkish invasion, the Serbian Empire found itself in decline and the forces of the Ottoman Empire dominated it. The well-known Battle of Kosovo marked this period, a time when the Serbian Army faced the Ottoman armies in 1389 (Daskalovski, 2003).

With the Turkish invasion, the Serbs ended up migrating to the North. The Islamic religious character of the Ottoman Empire, together with the Serbian dispersions, were elements that resulted in the demographic changes in Kosovo – until then mostly composed of Serbs – and other regions, from the 18th century onwards. It is during this period that most Albanians – mostly Muslims – arrive in the region (Daskalovski, 2003).

With the rise of nationalist movements in the Balkans during the 19th century, the region was immersed in an international crisis, first resolved by the Treaty of Saint Stefano in 1878, and its subsequent revision, the Congress of Berlin, in the same year (Daskalovski, 2003; Jelavich, 1983). The Congress of Berlin is a milestone in the constitution of the Balkan states, recognising the independence of Romania, Serbia and

Montenegro, in addition to the establishment of an autonomous Bulgaria (Jelavich, 1983). In spite of this, none of the Balkan states was in fact pleased with the resolution of the Congress, and the Ottoman Empire – even with the losses due to the Treaty – had control of the "Macedonian, Thracian, and Albanian lands, and the island of Crete", each claimed by the Balkan nations (Jelavich,1983, p. 8).

From the Albanian perspective, they claim that since the middle of the 19th century, all territories occupied by Albanians, including Kosovo, were the target of the Serbian and Greek states. With the beginning of the Balkan Wars, starting in 1912, the region underwent a series of geographical changes, including the establishment of the State of Albania (Daskalovski, 2003). Albanian nationalists aimed at creating a "Greater Albania", which would incorporate all territories composed predominantly of them. However, due to the objection of the Serbs', Montenegrins, and Greeks, the Albanian State created, in 1913, was smaller than intended, including about 800 thousand Albanians. Between 700 and 800 thousand Albanian lived in regions belonging to other states, including Kosovo, annexed by the Kingdom of Serbia during that period, even with its majority Albanian (Juhàsz, apud Gulyás & Csüllög, 2015).

At the end of the Second Balkan War, Kosovostill remained within Serbian boundaries. However, with the outbreak of World War I in 1914, Serbian territory, including Kosovo – was occupied by forces from the Austro-Hungarian Empire and Bulgaria, a fact that continued until September 1918, when the Serbian was liberated (Gulyás & Csüllög, 2015). Later that same year, with the formation of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes – later known as Yugoslavia – Kosovo became part of it, despite the Albanian Government's intentions that the region be part of its state (Gypemànt, apud Gulyás & Csüllög, 2015; Kitanics, apud Gulyás & Csüllög, 2015).

The relationship between Albanians in Kosovo and Serbs in Yugoslavia was certainly hostile: On the one hand, Albanians did not want to be part of Yugoslavian territory and believed that the Serbian opposition had prevented previous attempts to be part of Albania. On the other, the Serbs saw the Kosovo Albanians as "invaders" of a land that they believed belonged to them. Hence, within the administration of Yugoslavia, the Serbian elite adopted a series of political and economic measures against the Albanian in Kosovo (Gulyás & Csüllög, 2015).

With the Albanian prevalence in the region, the Serbs began to use tactics of expulsion, death and colonisation of Albanian in order to reverse the ethnic composition of Kosovo (Daskalovski, 2003). According to Albanian authors:

> In the period between 1913 and 1939, 'flying detachments' of military and policemen acted to punish and massacre the population. From 1918 to 1938, the military burned and destroyed 320 villages with Albanian populations; only between 1918 and 1921 alone, they killed 12,346 persons, put 22,160 people into prison, plundered 50,515 houses and burned down 6,125 houses (Kosova Information Center, apud Daskalovski, 2003, p. 17).

In this way, hundreds of thousands of Albanians were expelled from Kosovo, between 1912 and 1941. Because of the actions of the Serbian government, the ethnic composition of the Albanian territories drastically changed: in 1912, Albanian represented 90% of the region, while in 1941 that number dropped to 70% (Daskalovski, 2003).

With the invasion of Albania by Italy, in 1939, and the dissolution of Yugoslavia by Germany and its allies, in 1941, the region underwent significant territorial changes: the conception of a "Greater Albania" was achieved, including the annexation of Kosovo. As a result, Albanians sought to retaliate against Serbian actions, expelling around 100,000 Serbs between 1941 and 1945, compared to the 75,000 Albanians who migrated to Kosovo (Gulyás & Csüllög, 2015). However, because of the end of World War II, Kosovo ceased to be part of Albania and became part of the newly proclaimed socialist Yugoslavia, later annexed by Serbia. Under the name of Kosovo and Metohija, the territory was considered as an autonomous region until 1966, and, in 1974, it obtained the title of "Autonomous Socialist Province", with its own constitution and the same rights as the other parts of Yugoslavia (Daskalovski, 2003).

Since the 1980s, expressions of Albanian nationalism have become more frequent. The pressure for Serbs and Montenegrins to leave Kosovo had increased and so had the number of cases of violence and aggression against Serbs. Albanian secessionist aspirations resulted in a series of protests in 1981, the aim of which was to make Kosovo a republic of Yugoslavia and then integrated into Albania. The protests were reprimanded, yet the pressure against the Serbs and Montenegrins remained, making the events in Kosovo lead to increased nationalism Serbian (Daskalovski, 2003).

Concomitantly, at the end of the decade, the political figure of Slobodan Milošević emerged in Serbia. His first action was, in 1989, to revoke Kosovo's autonomy, a fact that generated strong discontent on the part of Albanians in the region. In addition to not accepting such a measure, the Albanians, in search of greater autonomy, declared Kosovo's independence in 1990, electing Ibrahim Rugova as president in 1992. Based on the idea of peoples' self-determination, the Albanians believed that the international community would recognise independence from Kosovo, however, this did not actually happen, and the region remained a Serbian colony from 1989 to 1999 (Daskalovski, 2003).

Skeptical that the peaceful movement for independence Rugova had not brought a resolution beneficial to the issue of Kosovo Albanians radical Kosovars have chosen to develop a military organisation called Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA), in order to win their demands for through armed struggle (Daskalovski, 2003). At the same time, with the end of Yugoslavia, a series of conflicts broke out in the territories of the former republic, including the Bosnian War, concluded by the Dayton Agreement, in 1995. Kosovar Albanians believed that the similarities with the Bosnian conflict – the ethnic question and the search for sovereignty and self-determination – would bring them Dayton-guaranteed status, however, the Kosovo issue was not addressed by the agreement, and the Kosovars were once again neglected by the international community (Guzina, 2003).

The KLA began, in 1997, a series of attacks in Kosovo, including the kidnapping of civilians and the murder of Serbian and Albanian officials who believed they were linked to the Serbian Government. It was then in 1998 that relations and co-existence between the parties involved in the Kosovo issue became unsustainable: Between February and March, the Serbian Police, with the Yugoslav military support, clashed directly against the KLA in the Drenica region. Using artillery, helicopters, and armed vehicles, Serbian forces destroyed by Milošević only worsened the situation, transforming the KLA's insurgent force into a powerful liberation army (Guzina, 2003). The Serbian Police continued the attacks on the villages, forcing the displacement of tens of thousands of people. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for

Refugees (UNHCR), by the beginning of August 1998, some 200,000 Kosovars had been displaced (Judah, 2008).

In the subsequent months of 1998 and the beginning of 1999, it became clear that the conflict between the Kosovo Liberation Army and the Serbian forces could end up turning into a complete ethnic cleansing of Kosovar Albanians. Attempts to intervene and resolve conflict by international organisations – such as the United Nations (UN), European Union (EU), and Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) – flaws were shown, in particular with the non-compliance of the parties, especially Serbia (Roberts, 1999).

At that time, NATO officials gave Milošević an ultimatum, starting that if he did not reach an agreement to end the conflict, that air strikes against Serbian military targets would occur (Alexander, 2000). In February 1998, representatives of the conflicting parties and the Contact Group – made up of the United States, Russia, Britain, France, Germany, and Italy – met to reach an agreement, but without success. After a last and failed attempt by Richard Holbrooke to reach an agreement with Milošević in March, the US, and the European allies authorised NATO's intervention in Kosovo (Hoagland, apud Alexander, 2000).

On 24 March 1999, NATO began air strikes against Serbia. It is estimated that, since the violence began, more than a million Albanian Kosovars have been expelled from the territory and more than 500 villages have been devastated (Kifner, apud Alexander, 2000). After just over two months of bombing, Milošević finally accepted an agreement on the issue of Kosovo, brokered between NATO and Russia (Erlanger, apud Alexander, 2000). Among the requirements:

> The main demands in that plan were an "immediate and verifiable" end of violence and repression in Kosovo, the withdrawal of Serb military and police forces from the province, the deployment of 50,000 foreign troops under the U.N. flag, the safe return of all refugees to their homes, and the establishment of an "interim administration" for Kosovo to be decided by the U.N. Security Council to ensure conditions for a "peaceful and normal life for all the inhabitants" of the province (Erlanger, apud Alexander, 2000, p. 30).

Hence, since 1999, Kosovo has been assisted by the presence of the United Nations (UN) in its territory. The mandate of the United Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) was established based on United Nation Security Council Resolution

1244, in 1999. The mission aims to promote stability in the Western Balkans region. Kosovo has declared its independence since February 2008, being recognised by more than 100 UN member countries. UNMIK remains active in the region to this day, operating under Security Council resolution 1244 (UNMIK, n.d.).

3. The role of the Serbian Orthodox Church in the Kosovo Conflict

In order to analyse the role of the Serbian Orthodox Church in the Kosovo conflict, it is necessary to return to the concepts presented in the theoretical framework. The Serbs' relationship with the Orthodox Christian religion is one of the main elements of Serbian national identity, as mentioned by Perica (2004) when referring to religion as a landmark of national identities, in addition to the concept of ethno-clericalism in the Balkans. Furthermore, since religious institutions are capable of moving social groups, as Fox (2000) states, it is possible to observe the ways in which the Serbian Orthodox Church used a national myth and narrative in order to directly influence on the conflict in Kosovo. It is possible to say, therefore, that the core of Serbian identity itself is inter-wined with the Serbian Orthodox Church (Judah, 2008).

Religion in Kosovo plays an important role. For Orthodox Serbs, the region has an intense religious significance, full of symbolic; sites, being considered as the Jerusalem of the Serbian Orthodox Church and the nucleus of the Serbs (Johnston, 2003). The region has a significant relationship with Serbian Nationalism; and revolves around a specific event: The Battle of Kosovo of 1389, whose event gives rise to the Serbian myth (Bieber, 2011). As evidenced by Bieber (2011, p. 97), despite the existence of other myths in Serbian history, "[t]he rich and diverse histories around him have done peculiarly well to explain, contextualize and justify a multiplicity of developments since the emergence of the Serbian national movement in the early 19th century".

Despite the myth recognising the victory of the Ottoman army, the Serbian/ Christian side emerged as the "spiritually winning" side (Lauer, apud Bieber, 2011, p. 96). According to the Kosovo myth, Prince Lazar of Serbia could choose to establish a divine or earthly kingdom, and to choose the first, he resigned victory in exchange for an everlasting kingdom to the Serbian people, becoming a martyr. Additionally, without

a doubt, "the Serbian Orthodox Church has particularly celebrated this divine and spiritual dimension of the myth" (Redjep, apud Bieber, 2011, p. 96).

The Serbian Orthodox Church played an important role in the creation and preservation of the Kosovo myth, recognising the figure of Lazar as a saint after the battle (Djokic, 2009). After the protests of Kosovar Albanians in 1981, the issue of Kosovo was resumed on the Serbian agenda, and the Orthodox Church went on to defend Serbian national identity in the region and revive Kosovo (Bieber, 2011; Johnston, 2003). During this period, the Serbian Church began to speak about the threat of "Muslim fundamentalism" and the danger they faced in relation to Albanian violence, warning about the need ideas of Serbs living in Kosovo. This fact contributed to the growth of ideas of Serbian victimisation and nationalism, placing the Orthodox Church once again as "protector of the Serbian nation" (Johnston, 2003, p. 184).

Since Orthodoxy was the element that preserved Serbian identity during the Ottoman Empire, the interests of Serbian nationalism have been in line with the Serbian Orthodox Church (Johnston, 2003). The movement caused by the growth of Serbian nationalism in the late 1980s – incorporated into the revival of the Kosovo myth – favoured the consolidation of the new-comer to power, Milošević. The president, then, took advantage of the mobilisation for the 600th anniversary of the Battle of Kosovo, in 1889, to use the mythological narrative in favour of his interests, which until then had been aligned with representatives of the Serbian Orthodox Church (Bierber, 2011). Therefore, the Kosovo myth was used, by the Milošević government and the Orthodox Church, as a way of creating a narrative in which Serbian nationalism was under threat from "barbaric forces" (Duikzings, Kühle& Lautsen, 2006, p. 20).

The analytical categories proposed by Fox (2014) can be associated with the case of the Serbian Orthodox Church. In this way, each applied category will be related to the corresponding performance by the institution:

(1) The first category concerns ideological influences or beliefs and their use as an incentive to conflict. This case can be seen in the behaviour of the Serbian Orthodox Church in relation to the use of Kosovo's mythological narrative, considering it the core of Serbian identity. The role of the Church, although subjective, was able to encourage its faithful to hostile behaviour towards

Albanians through the promotion of nationalism. As religion is considered one of the founding pillars of both individual and national identities, religious institutions use symbols in a way not only to move social groups, but also to build the idea that the Serbian Orthodox Christian identity was in danger.

(2) The second category refers to the use of religious institutions themselves, that is, their ability to influence conflict. A study of the history of the conflict in Kosovo demonstrates the mobilisation of Serbs and Kosovo Serbs promoted by the Serbian Orthodox Church, together with the government of Slobodan Milošević. In declaring itself as the "protector of the nation", the Church establishes the type of leadership that Bardos (2013) refers to when mentioning ethno-confessionalism. Following this logic, "ethnoconfessional identities are fixed, one-dimensional and 'exogenous' to politics. In this view, culture and society take on much more independent and important roles in determining identities" (Bardos, 2013, p. 6).

(3) In addition, there is also the use of religious symbols and language, which can help both to advance and to inhibit conflict and to reach (or not) a resolution. In terms of material symbols, Serbian churches and cathedrals in Kosovo are seen as the legacy of the Serbian nation for centuries. Nevertheless, the Serbs' relationship with Kosovo's own territory must be taken into account, a place that, according to the national imagination, would have been the scene of a battle defining Serbian identity – i.e. The Battle of Kosovo, as mentioned by Johnston (2003).

(4) Finally, Fox's (2014) last analytical category consists of the use of religious identity in conflict. Considering all of the above, it is possible to argue that the use of the Serbian identity was explored by the Serbian Orthodox as a socio-political institution and it contributed to maintain, or even to the progress of, the conflict from the moment it strengthens the Serbian national front identity to the Albanians, who would be regarded as religious fundamentalists and, therefore, a threat to the Serbian nation.

The application of the concepts provided by Fox (2014) allows inferring some conclusions. The analysis of this article is not intended to classify the Kosovo conflict

as religious; instead, it sought to demonstrate the important role of the Serbian Orthodox Church in this context, amid the complexity of this conflict. When analysed in the light of the theoretical approaches presented, the case of Kosovo reveals the level of influence of the Serbian Orthodox Church and religion in general, in the conflict, considering that all through the case of Kosovo, it is possible to perceive a context in which the concepts presented in the theoretical framework of this article are related to empiricism. The concepts of group identities and ethno-confessionalism – associated with Fox (2014) categories, can be observed in the analysis performed.

Throughout the history of the conflict, the Church was able to mobilise groups, reinforce local identities, by mythological narratives, intensifying nationalism and contributing to the maintenance of the conflict. As Kühle and Laustsen (2006) argue, the Kosovo conflict must not be reduced to the mythological dimension established by the Church's role in the conflict; should also not be overlooked, since, according to the authors (2006, p. 28), "Serbian priests and monks were among the first to spread the idea of an alleged *jihad* campaign by fundamentalist Albanians to remove Christianity Serbian Orthodox of Kosovo".

That is why the authors of this article propose the Interfaith Dialogue for Peace-building, established by Merdjanova and Brodeur (2009), as a point to be considered related to the solution of intra-state conflicts in which there is an agency of actors belonging to distinct ethnic – religious groups. Based on the assumption that churches, as social and demonstrated, it can be inferred that their members must be included in peace negotiation processes. In the case of the Kosovo conflict, this initiative can already be seen with the OSCE's role in promoting tolerance and cultural diversity through inter-faith dialogue (OSCE, 2017).

The institution's attitude is in line with the proposal of Merdjanova and Brodeur (2009), since the authors themselves argue about the need to build trust between the communities involved through the IDP. OSCE considers promoting inter-religious dialogue, tolerance, and mutual respect as "one of the main areas of activity for the OSCE Mission to Kosovo, which has been working to train young people to better understand local cultural heritage and religious" (OSCE, 2017, n.p.).

Conclusion

This article sought to demonstrate the role of religion in the field of intrastate conflicts through a case study of the role of the Serbian Orthodox Church in the Kosovo conflict. Applying theoretical approaches to the historical context of the conflict, it is concluded that, although religion was not the main element of the conflict between Serbs and Albanians in Kosovo, the Church acted intensely with regard to the promotion of subjective and ideological elements, promoting the strengthening of Serbian nationalism and building the image of the Albanians as a threat to the nation.

It follows, therefore, that the Serbian Orthodox Church was as a relevant actor in the conflict in Kosovo, and this case may illustrate the importance of religion for conflict resolution. By analysing the influence of religion in Kosovo's case, it is possible to argue that inter-faith dialogue should be considered to other cases concerning groups belonging to different religions in intrastate conflicts.

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