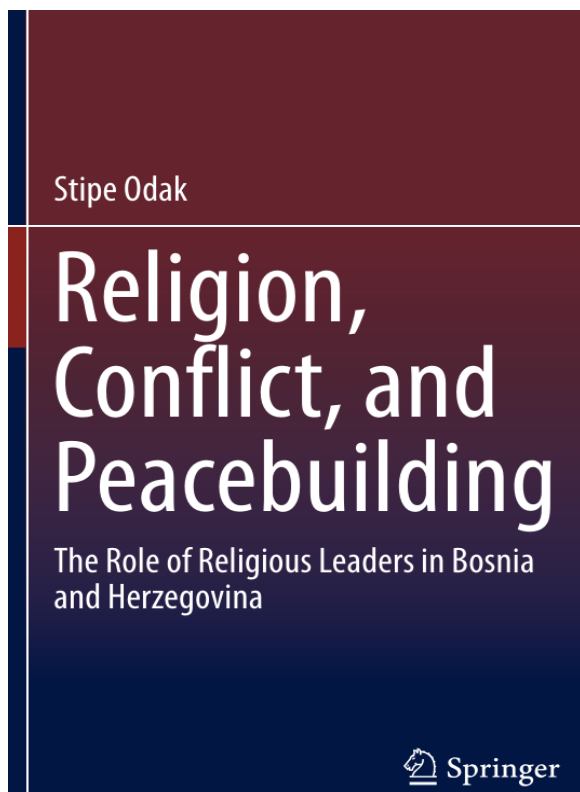


BOOK REVIEW

Religion, Conflict,
and Peacebuilding
The Role of Religious Leaders
in Bosnia and Herzegovina: A Review Essay



Author: Stipe Odak
Institut de Sciences Politiques Louvain (ISPOLE)
Université Catholique de Louvain - UCL
Louvain-la-Neuve, Belgium

Publisher: SPRINGER

ISBN 978-3-030-55110-0 ISBN 978-3-030-55111-7 (eBook)
<https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-55111-7>

BOOK REVIEW

Background of the Study

The book *Religion, Conflict, and Peacebuilding* by Stipe Odak explores the role of religion in conflicts and peacebuilding efforts, with a particular focus on Bosnia and Herzegovina. Odak, a scholar with a strong background in the study of religion and conflict, particularly in Southeast Europe, lends credibility to his analysis through his extensive research in this field. However, it is important to note that his views may be influenced by his regional experience, which could shape the perspectives and interpretations presented in this book.

In the context of rising religiously motivated violence in 2014, this book raises a critical question: Can religion be part of the solution when it is often seen as part of the problem? Many perceive religion not as a bridge between conflicting parties but as a barrier that fuels violence and extremism. Initial interviews with religious leaders in Bosnia and Herzegovina revealed a recurring theme: religion must be involved in the solution because it often contributes to the conflicts. This perspective underscores the importance of conflict resolution and peacebuilding efforts that account for the role of religion in framing, perpetuating, and potentially resolving conflicts. Additionally, the book presents two contrasting realities: ongoing violence fueled by religious beliefs and significant efforts by religious individuals and institutions in peacebuilding, particularly in resolving conflicts rooted in religion. Despite this, global polls indicate rising religiosity, suggesting that religion will continue to play a substantial role in people's lives, for better or worse. Given these dynamics, the relationship between religion, conflict, and peacebuilding emerges as a crucial area of exploration.

The book is organized into several chapters that delve into religion, conflict, and peacebuilding in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Odak systematically explores how religious leaders can either exacerbate or mitigate conflicts and how they can become agents of change in the peace process. Through case studies and in-depth analysis, the book identifies strategies employed by religious leaders to foster interfaith dialogue and promote peace. Key chapters discuss the political dynamics of religion in the region, interreligious approaches to conflict resolution, and the challenges faced in implementing faith-based peace initiatives.

Religion has been a significant factor in conflicts worldwide, as evidenced by the surge in violence in 2014 due to religious reasons, raising questions about religion's role in conflict resolution. While some view religion as a hindrance that fuels violence and extremism, there is a growing recognition

BOOK REVIEW

among religious leaders in Bosnia and Herzegovina that religion should play a role in resolving conflicts, given its involvement in both causing and perpetuating them (Basedau, Pfeiffer, and Vüllers 2016).

This book highlights a notable shift in the global political landscape, with an increasing focus on religious discourse, interfaith dialogues, and faith-based actions. This trend is reflected in resolutions passed by the General Assembly and the UN Security Council, views expressed by high-ranking politicians, and the establishment of institutions focused on religion, peace, and conflict. Discussions on violence and terrorism are evolving towards a more nuanced perspective on religion, moving away from the narrow view that associates religion solely with violence. This transformation is exemplified by UN Security Council Resolution 1373 of 2001, which emphasizes legal and security measures, and Resolution 2178 of 2014, which recognizes the influence of religious leaders and organizations in promoting violent and extremist ideologies.

This shift reflects a move away from the oversimplified link between religion and violence towards a more nuanced understanding of religion's impact on global affairs and conflict resolution. The references (Voeten 2005) and (Pratt and Richter-Devroe 2011) offer valuable insights into the operations of international bodies like the UN Security Council and their impact on legitimacy, peace, security, and the participation of women in conflict resolution, aligning with the evolving discourse on religion, peace, and security in contemporary global politics.

Key Points

The book *Religion, Conflict, and Peacebuilding: The Role of Religious Leaders in Bosnia and Herzegovina* explores the involvement of religious leaders in peacebuilding and conflict transformation efforts in Bosnia and Herzegovina (Silvestri and Mayall 2015). The author employs the theoretical notions of "theological dissonance" and "pastoral optimization" to elucidate the dynamic relationship between moral values and practical constraints. This work is highly regarded as a significant resource for theological and social academics, particularly those interested in peace, conflict, and justice.

In a related study by Frederick et al. (2023), the impact of role differentiation among clergy members on pastoral burnout and job satisfaction is examined. The research suggests that pastors with higher levels of role differentiation exhibit more transformational leadership styles, enabling

BOOK REVIEW

effective self-regulation to manage emotional responses to conflict and maintain positive relationships with congregants, aligning with the themes in Silvestri and Mayall's work.

Odak's book provides a comprehensive examination of how religious leaders contribute to peacebuilding and conflict transformation processes in Bosnia-Herzegovina. Previous research by De Juan, Pierskalla, and Vüllers (2015) explored the pacifying effects of local religious institutions, highlighting how vertical contact within these institutions facilitates conflict resolution by enabling religious leaders to address communal grievances and coordinate peace efforts. Integrating this perspective offers valuable insights into how religious leaders engage with local communities to promote peace and reconciliation (De Juan et al. 2015). Owen and King (2019) also present an evidence-based framework for assessing dominant risks in religious peacebuilding practices, which could enhance the efficacy of peacebuilding initiatives.

Compared to other works, such as *The Ambivalence of the Sacred* by R. Scott Appleby (2000) or *Islam, Secularism, and Liberal Democracy* by Nader Hashemi (2009), Odak's contribution is more specific with its geographic focus. Unlike these broader works, Odak provides a concentrated analysis, allowing readers to grasp the nuances of the role of religion in a specific conflict context.

Critical Evaluation

One of the book's strengths is its comprehensive methodology, combining interviews with religious leaders, analysis of religious texts, and empirical case studies. Odak provides valuable insights into the role of religion in conflict and peace, particularly within Bosnia and Herzegovina. However, the book could benefit from a more critical analysis of potential biases in the approaches of religious leaders and institutions involved. Additionally, while the book contributes significantly to conflict resolution and peacebuilding literature, its narrow geographic focus may limit its applicability beyond the Balkans.

Odak uses comprehensive data to examine the involvement of religious leaders in promoting peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Yet, the author could improve by including more precise and up-to-date information on religious leaders' roles in addressing religious and cultural gaps and fostering peace. By incorporating diverse case studies and applying multidisciplinary methodologies, the analysis could be further enriched.

BOOK REVIEW

Conclusion

Religion has the potential to aid in resolving conflicts, but it is crucial to comprehend and manage this role effectively. Religious leaders play a vital role in bridging religious and cultural disparities and promoting peace. The book *Religion, Conflict, and Peacebuilding* thoroughly examines the intricate relationship between religion, conflict, and peacebuilding in Bosnia and Herzegovina, emphasizing the influence of religious leaders in conflict resolution and peacebuilding efforts.

Although there are areas for further development, such as critical analysis of biases and expanding the findings beyond the Balkan context, this book remains a key resource for academics and practitioners interested in the intersection of religion, conflict, and peacebuilding.

References

- Appleby, R. Scott. 2000. *The Ambivalence of the Sacred: Religion, Violence, and Reconciliation*. Rowman & Littlefield.
- Basedau, Matthias, Birte Pfeiffer, and Johannes Vüllers. 2016. "Bad Religion? Religion, Collective Action, and the Onset of Armed Conflict in Developing Countries." *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 60(2):226–55. doi: 10.1177/0022002714541853.
- De Juan, Alexander, Jan H. Pierskalla, and Johannes Vüllers. 2015. "The Pacifying Effects of Local Religious Institutions: An Analysis of Communal Violence in Indonesia." *Political Research Quarterly* 68(2):211–24. doi: 10.1177/1065912915578460.
- Frederick, Thomas V., Yvonne Thai, Scott E. Dunbar, Richard Ardito, Ken Eichler, Kristen Kidd, Julianna Carrera, and Mimi Almero. 2023. "The Effects of Role Differentiation Among Clergy: Impact on Pastoral Burnout and Job Satisfaction." *Pastoral Psychology* 72(1):121–42. doi: 10.1007/s11089-022-01052-w.
- Hashemi, Nader. 2009. *Islam, Secularism, and Liberal Democracy: Toward a Democratic Theory for Muslim Societies*. Oxford University Press, USA.
- Owen, Mark, and Anna King. 2019. "Enhancing the Efficacy of Religious Peacebuilding Practice: An Exploratory Evidence-Based Framework for Assessing Dominant Risks in Religious Peacebuilding." *Religions* 10(12):641. doi: 10.3390/rel10120641.
- Pratt, Nicola, and Sophie Richter-Devroe. 2011. "Critically Examining UNSCR 1325 on Women, Peace and Security." *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 13(4):489–503. doi: 10.1080/14616742.2011.611658.
- Silvestri, Sara, and James Mayall. 2015. *The Role of Religion in Conflict and Peacebuilding*. London: The British Academy.

BOOK REVIEW

Voeten, Erik. 2005. "The Political Origins of the UN Security Council's Ability to Legitimize the Use of Force." *International Organization* 59(03). doi: 10.1017/S0020818305050198.