



Review: [Untitled]

Reviewed Work(s):

Religion and the Politics of Identity in Kosovo by Ger Duijzings
Julie Mertus

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Religion and the Politics of Identity in Kosovo. By Ger Duijzings. New York: Columbia University Press, 2000. xii, 238 pp. Notes. Bibliography. Index. Photographs. Maps. \$27.50, hard bound.

This is a fascinating, original contribution to the literature on identity politics in the Balkans. A cultural anthropologist, Ger Duijzings is interested in a bottoms-up approach to exploring social and political life—that is, “uncovering the important local dimensions of larger events” (210). The tools of participant observation and a focus on marginal activities at the grassroots level of social life assist Duijzings in making important observations about the nature of identity and the role of religion in conflict and cohesion in Kosovo.

“This is not the book I intended to write” (ix), Duijzings tell us in the preface. His doctoral research in the early 1990s considered what seemed to be a stable community, Letnica, a Catholic, ethnic-Croat enclave near Macedonia. The conflict in the former Yugoslavia interrupted his plans, when nearly the entire Croat population of Letnica became refugees in Croatia. This resulted in the end of the population Duijzings planned to study, but the beginning of a more interesting set of ethnographic case studies. The strongest studies consider examples of identity development in Kosovo that are overlooked by most western scholars: Albanian dervishes and the revival of popular sufism; the emergence of “Egyptians” as an identity group in Kosovo; joint Muslim/Catholic pilgrimages and ambiguous sanctuaries; and crypto-Catholicism. “My choice of topics has been led by intuition rather than by any preconceived concept” (ix), Duijzings admits. Nonetheless, the resulting work is less haphazard than Duijzings suggests. Four main themes are woven throughout the work, making it a coherent whole.

First, identity formation is a dynamic and imperfect process. Each case study illustrates how identities may be overlapping, ambiguous, and changeable over time. Several of the studies demonstrate the incomplete nature of identity conversion. People in Kosovo change their ethnic identity or convert to another religion without completely forgetting the legacy of previous identities. Their belief systems are thus based on unconscious and unreflective fusion and borrowing.

Second, religion plays a complex role in the development of group identities. Most identity scholars consider religion as an identity marker that divides one group from another. Duijzings reminds us that even Albanian nationalists at one time attempted to use religion as a marker. These attempts failed because Albanians are divided into at least three, or, as Duijzings suggests, possibly four, religious traditions: Muslim, Catholic, Orthodox, and Bektashi. Duijzings’s work is particularly strong in demonstrating that Balkan Islam is not a monolith but is instead manifested in a complicated variety of expressions, giving rise to a number of identities.

Third, the story of Kosovo is one not only of conflict but of coexistence and symbiosis, particularly in the field of religious life. Instead of creating neat divisions between groups, religion has actually served to blur differences and to create community across ethnoreligious boundaries. “Muslims and Christians of different ethnic backgrounds have visited each other’s sanctuaries, worshiped each other’s saints and ignored the evident theological objections of religious orthodoxies” (2). Duijzings examines pilgrimage as a laboratory of identity, where one can see both fission and fusion at work. He also explains the history of crypto-Catholicism in Kosovo as a concept that united Albanians, making Islam and Christianity both part of their common identity.

Finally, identities are political constructs. Duijzings persuasively argues that “the formation and transformation of ethnic and religious identities is determined by wider political developments” (22). The state and religious regimes play crucial roles in identity formation. Instead of regarding religion and politics as separate domains, Duijzings sees them as intimately connected formations of power. In peripheral societies like Kosovo, political and religious elites find particularly fertile ground for manipulating ethnic identities. Throughout his work, Duijzings illustrates how Kosovo can be seen as a frontier society in which group boundaries are more fluid and less institutionalized.

That Duijzings’s work was completed before the bombing by the North Atlantic Treaty Organization does not diminish its importance. “It is sad that the book now bears testimony to a world that may have ceased to exist” (xii), Duijzings laments. Yet, it is the kind

of rigorous and original analysis found in this book that will lead to greater understanding of the communities that have taken their place and their prospects for the future.

JULIE MERTUS
American University

Degraded Capability: The Media and the Kosovo Crisis. Ed. Philip Hammond and Edward S. Herman. Foreword, Harold Pinter. Sterling, Va.: Pluto Press, 2000. x, 222 pp. Notes. Bibliography. Index. Tables. \$19.95, paper.

The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) started its bombing campaign against the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia on 24 March 1999; it lasted 78 days. The media presented this campaign as an epic battle between good and evil in which “enemies have been demonised and the Western powers have been lionised as heroic saviours of the world” (4). This book, in the words of its editors Philip Hammond and Edward S. Herman, sets out to “challenge the received wisdom, subjecting both the war, and the media coverage it received, to critical scrutiny” (1).

The book is divided into three comprehensive parts: the first deals with the background to the Kosovo crisis, including the disintegration of Yugoslavia; the second part focuses on the media coverage and the media construction of the Kosovo crisis; and the third part examines the ways the conflict was represented in different countries around the world.

In part 1, Diana Johnstone examines how the United States, under the guise of “humanitarian intervention,” pursued its own geostrategic interests and facilitated its global dominance. David Chandler places the disintegration of Yugoslavia in the decade from 1989 to 1999, arguing that it culminated in the Kosovo crisis. He also argues that outside intervention in Yugoslavia’s disintegration often worsened the conflict and “acted to intensify and institutionalize ethnic and regional divisions” (30). Mirjana Skoco and William Woodger discuss the role of the International Criminal Tribunal for Former Yugoslavia, and Peter Gowan explores the diplomatic context and the reasons why the war was really fought, uncovering the complex relations between the United States and other NATO countries and Russia.

In part 2, Richard Keeble looks at what he terms the “manufactured” wars of the 1980s and 1990s, arguing that such wars are media spectacles and that the war against Yugoslavia was to set the stage for NATO’s celebration of its fiftieth anniversary by ensuring a symbolic victory. The vilification and demonization of Serbs and the role of the media in building the image of “new Nazis” is analyzed by Mick Hume, who also shows how NATO politicians were only too eager to embrace the comparison between wars in the former Yugoslavia and the Holocaust. In their second essay, Mirjana Skoco and William Woodger examine NATO’s sophisticated media strategy, involving restrictions, manipulation, and misinformation, which may be seen as a type of covert censorship. Goran Gocic presents the Yugoslav media’s point of view and outlines how the Yugoslavs fought the information war on television and the internet.

The third part gives an extremely interesting overview of the media coverage of the Kosovo crisis in different countries around the world. Seth Ackerman and Jim Naureckas show not only how the United States media covered the bombing of Yugoslavia itself but also give us a clear picture of how the crisis was constructed. The next chapter, by Edward S. Herman and David Peterson, deconstructs CNN’s image of delivering unbiased news by illustrating its unconditional acceptance of NATO’s briefings and their language, frames of reference, choice of the facts, rewriting of history for the purpose of supporting the war. Herman and Peterson conclude that “overall, CNN served as NATO’s de facto public information arm during Operation Allied Force” (120). By showing how similar United States and British mainstream media were in reporting on the Kosovo crisis, Philip Hammond points out that NATO’s main propaganda weapon was atrocity stories, which in turn provided “a retrospective justification” for the bombing. John Pilger introduces us to