Locating the Sacred:

Contemporary Materiality and Practice Related to Place-Making in Montenegro

EMIL BJØRN HILTON SAGGAU

Emil Bjørn Hilton Saggau is a research fellow at Lund University and Secretary General of the National Council of Churches in Denmark.

emil.bjorn_hilton_saggau@ctr.lu.se

The Orthodox Pentecostal celebration in Montenegro in 2005 marked a significant religious, cultural and political watershed in the history of the small republic. In the years before 2005, the ruling party, the Democratic Party of Socialists of Montenegro (hereafter DPS), slowly led the country away from its former alliance with Serbia towards full independence from the unstable remains of former Yugoslavia. A major roadblock in terms of gaining independence was the politically active Serbian Orthodox Church in Montenegro (hereafter SOC), which stressed the sustained close religious and cultural ties to Serbia. The church was supported by a majority of the Montenegrin population, and its attitude could possibly affect the outcome of the independence referendum announced in 2005. At this watershed moment, the SOC decided to build a chapel on the top of the mountain Rumija. A local legend foretold that on this summit, a church would one day rise from the stones having been carried to the top during a yearly pilgrimage. On the day of the 2005 pilgrimage, two Serbian military helicopters flew to Rumija from an airbase in Serbia. They picked up two pieces of a metal church constructed by the SOC in the city below the mountain. The local Orthodox community and their metropolitan waited for the helicopters at the summit, where they quickly assembled the chapel. The metropolitan blessed the foundation of the church and celebrated the first liturgy inside the metal construction. Thus, the foretold miracle had come true. A new church had been raised at the top of the Rumija mountain. The DPS-

led government was taken by surprise. The former Montenegrin deputy prime minister, Novak Kilibarda, wrote that the "church on Rumija was a stab with a bloody knife into the multiethnic being of Montenegro and it shook the very foundation of multi-confessional spirituality in the area above which Rumija proudly rises".[1]

The Rumija church is one of several reconstructions of holy sites across Montenegro where the SOC and the DPS-led government clashed during the period 2000–2020. These debates ignited by the "sacred" nature of the site were closely linked to the national and religious practice of place-making and materiality.[2] This article studies how the "sacred" is located through place-making and how materiality and practice constitute an essential feature of this process.[3] The analysis departs from Michel de Certeau's insight into what he has described as the "sociocultural localization of religious ideologies".[4] The article consists of three parts. The first is a short theoretical and methodological discussion, followed by an overview of the context in Montenegro. The main and last part of this article consists of an analysis of practice, materiality and place-making at two sites in Montenegro, and it ends with a final discussion.

History as "a Labour of Death"

Generally speaking, the place-making carried out by the SOC represents a historiographical endeavour relying on a close and selective re-reading of the Orthodox history of Montenegro. All SOC projects are accompanied by publishing books ranging from scholarly works on specific sites,[5] crosses and icons to biographies and more consumer-oriented coffee table books with glossy pictures of religious materiality.[6] This inevitably points to the crucial role of historiography when it comes to the place-making and shaping of the materiality of the sites, such as the church on Rumija mountain.

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1   The theoretical framework of this article originates from Emil Hilton Saggau, *Nationalisation of the Sacred: Orthodox Historiography, Memory, and Politics in Montenegro*, Berlin 2024, https://doi.org/10.3726/b21847, supplemented by a new material analysis of the two sites in question.

2   Novak Kilbarda, *Amfilohije i kosovski mit* (Eng. *Amfilohije and the Kosovo Myth*), Podgorica 2006, https://novakkilibarda.wordpress.com/ja-i-amfilohije/, accessed 2019-10-07.

3   In this chapter, "the sacred" is defined according to Rudolf Otto, *Das Heilige*, Breslau 1920. Otto has described the sacred (or holy) as the completely different (*ganz Anderen*) and based on its ability to create both negative fear (*tremendum*) and positive fascination (*fascinans*).

4   Michel de Certeau, *The Writing of History*, New York 1988, 134

5   Svetigora, *Саборни храм Светог Јована Владимира у Бару* (Eng. *The Saint Jovan Cathedral in Bar*), Cetinje 2016.

6   Gojko Perović (ed.), *U spomen i slavu Svetog Jovana Vladimira* (Eng. *In Memory and Glory of Holy Jovan Vladimir*), Cetinje 2016.

Religious institutions often shape their historiographies with the isolation or marginalisation of other forms of history in mind. This is an important basic feature of SOC historiography, as it tends to seek to marginalise rival historiographical narratives, such as a Montenegrin nationalist narrative. The theoretical point of departure for this study is Michel de Certeau's (1925–86) theory of history and the social world, which is presented and discussed further below. De Certeau wrote a theoretical guide for studying historiography.[7] He explains that history is a labour that "aims at calming the dead who still haunt the present, and at offering them scriptural tombs".[8] History is not just a recording of the past but it also creates an order and justifies specific contemporary social structures and institutions, such as a church or a state. This order-making "promotes a selection between what can be *understood* and what must be *forgotten*".[9] The "labour" of historiography takes an outward form in the creation of symbols, periods, categorisations and other mental forms.[10] History originates from a place and is a part of place-making. The social, cultural and political world of this place determines the content of history. According to de Certeau, the "social world" determines the interpretation of the past due to the "current events [which] are the real beginning" of history.[11] De Certeau notes how "facts" speak of "choices" and "perspectives".[12] In his study, de Certeau proposes a methodological definition of historiographical studies of places by way of a guideline. The first point is that a study of historiography needs to be aware of both practice and discourse. Practice is here seen as social praxis, which is deeply linked to everyday activities, the performance of rituals and labour related to symbols, places, memories and other materials. De Certeau's second point is that history is related to certain bodies of text. In these texts, a "religious ideology" or the ideologies "already invested in history itself" exist. History "vacillates" between these two options: the social practice of history and the hidden discourse of religious ideology. In some cases, such as the SOC's place-making in Montenegro, both the *historiographical practice* and the *religious ideology* are at play. The material, textual and social forms of religion must be taken into account.[13] History is a "legitimation to

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7   de Certeau, *The Writing of History*; Inigo Bocken (ed.), *Spiritual Spaces – History and Mysticism in Michel de Certeau*, Leuven 2013.

8   de Certeau, *The Writing of History*, 2.

9   Ibid., 4.

10   Ibid., 11.

11   Ibid., 59.

12   Ibid., 21.

13   See conclusion at the bottom of page 30 in de Certeau, *The Writing of History*, 30. "Religion" and "religious" are in this chapter defined according to the functionalist approach. Detlef Pollack and Gergely Rosta summarise this approach: "The functional method relates

new orders of reason", as Graham Giles notes in an analysis of de Certeau.[14] Towards the end of the first chapter in *The Writing of History*, de Certeau writes: "Such is history. A play of life and death is sought in the calm telling of a tale, in the resurgence and denial of the origin, the unfolding of a dead past and a result of present practice."[15] History is a maker of a present-day identity that forged or forgot sites, practices and materiality in order to create or maintain a cultural order.

Sociocultural Localisation and Place-making

The point of departure for de Certeau is that the political, cultural and spatial forms of a given place frame what may be expressed and built – and what cannot. A study needs to address "*sociocultural localization of religious ideologies*".[16] De Certeau's theory of space is that a given place is turned into a space through social practice. Place-making is the practice of shaping a habitable space.[17] Practice, on the other hand, is an outward embodiment of a place. De Certeau underlines how social practice constitutes a defence of a certain religious order of power. Human place-making is undertaken in two forms, which allow for two sets of practices. A given place in time is first and foremost formed into a space based on the organised narratives that create a "strategy".[18] A strategy is an overlaying governing system derived from a certain order or institution. It may be a uniform system instructing the individuals in their practice. In contrast to the strategy, each individual has their own everyday practice, a "tactic". This everyday practice bends the rules and takes shortcuts.[19] De Certeau describes this in greater detail in his essays "Walking in the City" and "Ghost in the City", where a strategy is defined as a sort of mental form of infrastructure that can be used to shape both practice and places.[20] Strategy is what shapes a place and imposes a certain

religion onto a problem to which it is the solution. […] [F]unctional definitions seek to determine what religion does and achieves." Detlef Pollack & Gergely Rosta, *Religion and Modernity: An International Comparison*, Oxford 2017, 39, https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780198801665.001.0001.

14   Graham Giles, "The Concept of Practice, Enlightenment Rationality and Education: A Speculative Reading of Michel de Certeau's The Writing of History", *Educational Philosophy and Theory* 46:3 (2014), 255–268 [257], https://doi.org/10.1080/00131857.2012.753369.

15   de Certeau, *The Writing of History*, 47.

16   Ibid., 134 (emphasis in original).

17   Marian Füssel, "Tote Orte und gelebte Räume. Zur Raumtheorie von Michel de Certeau S. J.", *Historical Social Research* 38:3 (2013), 22–39.

18   Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven Rendall, Berkeley 1988.

19   Claire E. Wolfteich, "Practices of 'Unsaying': Michel de Certeau, "Spirituality Studies, and Practical Theology", *Spiritus: A Journal of Christian Spirituality* 12:2 (2012), 161–171 [164], https://doi.org/10.1353/scs.2012.0031.

20   Philip Sheldrake, "Theorizing Christian Spirituality", in Ralph Kunz &

order, while tactics are the individual actions and practices that undermine or subvert the dominant strategies. The tactic, conversely, is a way to move around the strategy. Therefore, a tactic provides a means for marginalised actors to navigate and challenge the dominant power structures within a given place or to simply submit to it.

Following de Certeau, place-making is the "*sociocultural localization of religious ideologies*". The "localization of the sacred" thus requires, on the one hand, a place-making through materiality and practice, which, on the other hand, is heavily entangled with a certain religious ideology. The ideology is the strategy that shapes the place into a space. These "religious ideologies" represent a way of establishing an order and providing legitimacy for a political rule in the way it presents the past to its community. In the Montenegrin context, the SOC has from the outset of the wars in former Yugoslavia in the 1990s been closely tied to the rise of nationalism, and a number of studies have addressed this as a process of sacralisation of the nation.[21] Martin Schulze Wessel summed up this process as one in which "the sacralization of the nation means that the nation takes over the form of expression of religion".[22] This process, as Adrian Hastings points out, is not a one-way street. Hastings underlines how the idea of a nation draws on older traditions.[23] The link between religious faith and a nation is first derived from the impact of religion on the early expressions of the nation and, second, from the extent to which a religious community has interacted with what can be called the proto-nation. The process of the "sacralization of the nation" exists in a close dialectical relationship with a process of "nationalization of the sacred". This nationalisation process constitutes a concrete rebuilding of a strategic infrastructure of, to use de Certeau's terms, sacred materiality, spaces and practices, which enforce a certain "religious ideology". The analysis and discussion in this article, based on the SOC's

Rebecaa A. Giselbrecht (eds.), *Sacrality and Materiality*, Vienna 2016, 27–40, https://doi.org/10.13109/9783666570438.27; de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, 91–110; Michel de Certeau, "Ghosts in the City", in Michel de Certeau et al. (eds.), *The Practice of Everyday Life vol. 2: Living and Cooking*, Minneapolis 1998.

21   Vasilios N. Makrides, "Orthodox Christianity and State/Politics Today", in Tobias Koellner (ed.), *Orthodox Religion and Politics in Contemporary Eastern Europe*, London 2019, 235–253, https://doi.org/10.4324/9781351018944-14.

22   Martin Schulze Wessel, "Einleitung: Die Nationalisierung der Religion und die Sakralisierung der Nation im östlichen Europa", in Martin Schulze Wessel (ed.), *Nationalisierung der Religion und Sakralisierung der Nation im östlichen Europa*, Stuttgart 2006, 7–14 [7] (all translations by author).

23   Adrian Hastings, *The Construction of Nationhood: Ethnicity, Religion and Nationalism*, Cambridge 1997, https://doi.org/10.1017/cbo9780511612107; Caspar Hirschi, *The Origins of Nationalism – An Alternative History from Ancient Rome to Early Modern Germany*, Cambridge 2012, https://doi.org/10.1017/cbo9781139032551.

"localization of the sacred", is an attempt to show the dynamics between nationalisation and sacralisation – and how this determines the material, spatial and social practices related to a given infrastructure.[24]

This is underpinned by theories of pilgrimages, such as Edith (1921–2016) and Victor Turner's (1920–83) major theoretical works on pilgrimage. The Turners argued for a renewed focus on the agents and the *communitas* in studies of pilgrimage and place-making.[25] Pilgrimage formed sites through interaction, political opposition and limitation. Nor was pilgrimage not just a mere sign of the devout or an outlet of a structural system, but the pilgrim was something more, with both the power to establish or contest political and religious orders.[26] The pilgrims – and their rites, parades, liturgies and symbolisms – are part of the place-making of the infrastructure of the sacred and turn sites into embodiments of holiness. What constitutes the holy are the physical form, the architecture, the texts, the movement of pilgrims and the social and political practice (rituals, statements, etcetera) bound to the places. Without it, the significance of the site is lost – and a new place of worship is not constituted.[27] This is particularly relevant in the case of Rumija, as initially described. Here, we have a place where the pilgrims, who had walked to the summit, were crucial for the physical construction of the metal church and the rituals that mark it – and even more so due to the fact that the actual construction was ideologically and historically linked to the historical ritual. The pilgrims' creation of sites also represents a material practice. The pilgrims approve a strategy and religious order through their movement and actions, which contribute to the construction and maintenance of sacred spaces.

As pointed out in studies of material religion, sites, architecture, crosses, icons, food or drink, etcetera are essential parts in the sacralisation of a given site. Birgit Meyer notes how such a practice represents "very concrete empirical questions about the specific practices, materials and forms employed in generating a sense of something divine, ghostly, sublime or transcendent".[28] An often overlooked part of de Certeau's view of place-making is

24   Emil Hilton Saggau, "Unblocking the sacred: New perspectives on the religious revival in South Eastern Europe", *Journal for Religion and Society in Central and Eastern Europe* 11:1 (2018), 39–55.

25   Victor Turner and Edith Turner, *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture*, New York 2011 [1978]; Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process*, London 1995 [1969].

26   For an extensive discussion on pilgrimage and theories of pilgrimage, see John Eade & Michael J. Sallnow, "Introduction", in John Eade and Michael J. Sallnow (eds.), *Contesting the Sacred – The Anthropology of Christian Pilgrimage*, Chicago 2000, 1–30.

27   John Eade and Mario Katic (eds.). *Pilgrimage, Politics and Place-Making in Eastern Europe*, Farnham 2014, 8–10.

28   Birgit Meyer, *Mediation and the Genesis of Presence – Towards a Material Approach to Religion*, Utrecht 2012, 22.

the relationship of his theory to the materiality of sites, places and religious practices in light of the material turn. In particular, as argued by Phillip Sheldrake, de Certeau's work on pilgrimage relates to the materiality of religion and spirituality.[29] Both pilgrimage studies and studies of material religion stress the close link between movement, limitation and differentiation (the pilgrimage) to the material form of the holy in a given place or revered item that invoke or are attached to a certain religious ideology. The pilgrim approves the strategy or challenges it through their practice (a tactic). The shaping of a place exists in-between.

The Rise of the SOC in Montenegro

Before turning to the SOC's efforts in Montenegro, a few words on the context might be in order. Montenegro was one of the former semi-independent republics of Yugoslavia and remained loyal to Belgrade throughout the first period of turmoil and wars in the 1990s – only to embark on its own way to independence between 1996 and 2006. In general, former Yugoslavia experienced a *desecularisation* of public space and political life in the 1990s. The SOC assumed a more and more confident position in the public, while it rebuilt and repopulated churches and monasteries.[30]

In Montenegro, the SOC was met with restrictions by the DPS-led government – for example, over the issue of national identity, language, property rights, education and the status of the church.[31] The SOC has since the year 2000 become the main political and cultural opponent to the DPS for people who treasure the ties to Serbia. The SOC in Montenegro embarked upon a grand reconstruction project, which resulted in several monastic complexes, churches and even two new cathedrals being built. This rebuilding of the SOC and its political Serbian-oriented position inevitably put it on a collision course with the growing Montenegrin nationalist DPS-led government. This conflict resurfaced in debates regarding the metal church on Rumija, but also in relation to other sites, such as the central monument dedicated to the Montenegrin prince-bishop, Petar II Petrović-Njegoš (1813–1851) on the mountain of Lovchen. These two mountains, Lovchen and Rumija, are within 50 kilometres from each other and perhaps represent the two major battlegrounds for Montenegrin national and religious identity.

29   Sheldrake, "Theorizing Christian Spirituality", 38–40.

30   Mirko Blagojević, "Desecularization of Contemporary Serbian Society", in Paul Mojzes & Walter Sawatsky (eds.), *Religion in Eastern Europe* 27:1 (2008), 37–50.

31   Emil Hilton Saggau, "The Revival of the Serbian Orthodox Church in Montenegro from 1990", *Sociološka Luča – Montenegrin Journal for Sociology* 13:1 (2019), 9–25.

The Making of a Religious Infrastructure

The metal church constructed at Rumija with the help of two army helicopters was part of a larger infrastructure built by the SOC in southern Montenegro. It consists of a larger system of churches, sacred springs and a new line of rituals, as I have described elsewhere.[32] The focus here is not on the project as a whole but on the summit and metal church itself.

Briefly, the site was a renowned place devoted to the local Saint Jovan Vladimir (d. 1016) and part of a historical ritual on Pentecost described by a Russian anthropologist, Pavel Rovinsky (1831–1916), in 1888.[33] The core of the ritual was the pilgrimage to the mountaintop on Pentecost morning, where believers would carry stones in a procession behind a cross allegedly dating back to the period in which the saint was alive. The ritual itself ceased to exist during communist rule but was revived by the metropolitan in 1991, when local Orthodox Christians and Muslims, priest candidates and other members of the clergy resumed the ritual. According to a participant, the ritual culminated in the sunrise and the metropolitan's liturgy to the sound of gunshots in the air fired by the local population.[34] The former Montenegrin prime minister's remark that the metal church was a "stab into the multiethnic being of Montenegro" was related to the ritual and the history of the site, as a ritual in which Serbs, Albanians and Montenegrins across denominations and religious boundaries took part. The newly erected church, according to the DPS government, seemed to serve as a roadblock for this multi-faith celebration – as did the constantly appearing Albanian graffiti at the metal church.[35] However, the church was never removed by the state, and the dispute only escalated.

In 2010–11, a Montenegrin nationalist in parliament called for the dismantling of the church, to which the SOC metropolitan commented sharply in his 2010 Christmas sermon: "Whoever destroys the church, God destroys him and his descendants and the honourable cross will judge him" (Serb.: Ko sruši taj hram bog ga srušio i njegovo potomstvo i časni krst mu

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32   Emil Hilton Saggau, "The Forging and Forgetting the Cult of St. Jovan Vladimir in Contemporary Montenegro", *International Journal for the Study of the Christian Church* 21:1 (2021), 42–61, https://doi.org/10.1080/1474225x.2021.1939247; see also Djorde Pavicevic & Srdjan Djuriovic, "Relations Between Montenegro and Serbia from 1991 to 2006: An Analysis of Media Discourse", in Pål Kolstø (ed.), *Media Discourse and the Yugoslav Conflict: Representation of Self and Other*, Farnham 2009, 129–152.

33   Pavel Apollonovich Rovinsky, *Черногорія въ ея прошломъ и настоящемъ* (Eng. *Montenegro in its Past and Present*), Saint Petersburg 1888, 360–361.

34   Personal Interview, Montenegrin cleric 1, 2020.

35   Edmond Malaj, "The Cult of Saint John Vladimir Among the Albanians in the present Days", in Djodje Borozan (ed.), *The 1000th Anniversary of Saint Jovan Vladimir*, PodgociaPodgorica 2017, 239–252.

sudio).[36] The DPS government responded by putting the metropolitan on trial for "hate speech" and for insulting national feelings. He was convicted by the High Court in 2012 and was given a reprimand.[37] The metal church thus stands at the intersection of two opposing systems of order: the SOC and the DPS government. The perspective of the DPS government is perhaps not as strongly situated in a religious tradition as that of the Orthodox Church, but could rather be described as a civic religious part of Montenegrin nationalism. In a similar manner, the Lovchen monument is also located at the end of two systems. Here, however, the roles are reversed. The current modernist monument at Lovchen was put up in the 1970s with the help of local army helicopters after an older Orthodox chapel was removed. The older chapel was seen as a symbol and remnant of the Serbian-led royal dynasty of Karađorđević, which stood in contrast to the new communist rule. Instead, a modernist monument was put in place, which in every way possible represents a contradiction to an Orthodox understanding of sacred spaces.[38]

The crumbling of Yugoslav communist power in 1988 meant that the system of order – at Lovchen, the communist order – enforcing the material form of the space ceased to exist. The SOC picked up on this and unsuccessfully tried to reclaim the site from the state. The site is closely related to the memory of Njegoš, who has grown into a secular symbol of the Montenegrin state. The new Montenegrin state in the 1990s refused any Serbian claim to Njegoš, the site and his heritage. This conflict escalated in 2013 when the bi-centennial of Njegoš's birth was celebrated throughout Southeast Europe.[39] The SOC renewed their claim in 2013 through letters of appeal and even promoted Njegoš to sainthood the same year. The DPS government ignored the request and championed Njegoš as an embodiment of Montenegrin secular values and thirst for freedom, which they argued

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36   Quoted from RTV, 2011: "Amfilohije prokleo svakog ko sruši crkvu na Rumiji", http://www.rtv.rs/sk/drustvo/amfilohije-prokleo-svakog-ko-srusi-crkvu-na-rumiji_232416. html, accessed 2011-01-07. The statement was a direct reference to 1 Corinthians 3:17 ("If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy").

37   Kenneth Morrison, "Little church causes big trouble in Montenegro", Balkaninsight 21 Feb. 2011, https://balkaninsight.com/2011/02/21/little-church-causes-big-trouble-in-montenegro, accessed 2019-10-07.

38   Emil Hilton Saggau, "A Shrine for the Nation – the Material Transformation of the Lovćen Site in Montenegro", *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies* 20:5 (2017), 495–512, https://doi.org/10.1080/19448953.2018.1385934.

39   Bojan Baskar, "The Third Canonization of Njegoš, the National Poet of Montenegro", in Jón Karl Helgason & Marijan Dović (eds.), *Great Immortality Pages*, Leiden 2019, 269–293, https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004395138_014; Andrew Baruch Wachtel, "How to Use a Classic: Petar N. in the Twentieth Century", in J. Lampe and M. Mazower (eds.), *Ideologies and National Identities: The Case of the Twentieth-Century South-East Europe*, Budapest 2004, 131–147.

was evidenced by his somewhat controversial literary legacy. On Njegoš's birthday, the prime minister of Montenegro staged a large celebration at the monument, which was broadcast in the entire country. This celebration was devoid of any form of SOC presence.[40]

The Role of Materiality and Practice

In both cases, materiality and practice are key for understanding how the two opponents, the SOC and the DPS government, tried to solidify and enforce their "religious ideology" through a *sociocultural localisation*. In the following section, the analysis digs deeper into how materiality and practices are related to the history of the sites, which forms the sociocultural background.

Place-making at Mountains Using Army Helicopters

The most significant part of the place-making of both sites is that army helicopters were used to construct both locations. This construction practice highlights two aspects of the sites. They are difficult to access by ordinary construction workers, and they are visible from afar. This turns the construction into an extraordinary effort, but also one that is highly visible. The construction work constitutes an attestation to the resources and the power of the institutions behind the space, which have chosen difficult, but symbolic sites to mark their physical control of space. Furthermore, the construction of both sites follows an already established Orthodox tradition. Orthodox monastic communities generally seek out isolated and inaccessible sites as their place of worship in order to be closer to God. The area is referred to as the "Montenegrin Jerusalem" due to the large concentrations of monastic complexes in the mountain range.[41] The two mountains are centres of this local ecclesial tradition, where the inaccessible mountains are primary sites for "locating the sacred" in Orthodox place-making. This process has turned them into a specific habitable space for either the SOC or the DPS. Both ritual and discourse are closely tied to this space. This space provides a site at which the "religious ideology" can be played out and made into a physical form.

Rituals

The two places are marked by the rituals and religious celebrations associated with them. These religious and civic religious rituals enforce and

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40   Saggau, "A Shrine for the Nation".

41   Alice Forbess, "Montenegro versus Crna Gora – The Rival hagiographic Genealogies of the New Montenegrin Polity", *Focaal – Journal of Global and Historical Anthropology* 67 (2013), 47–60, https://doi.org/10.3167/fcl.2013.670104.
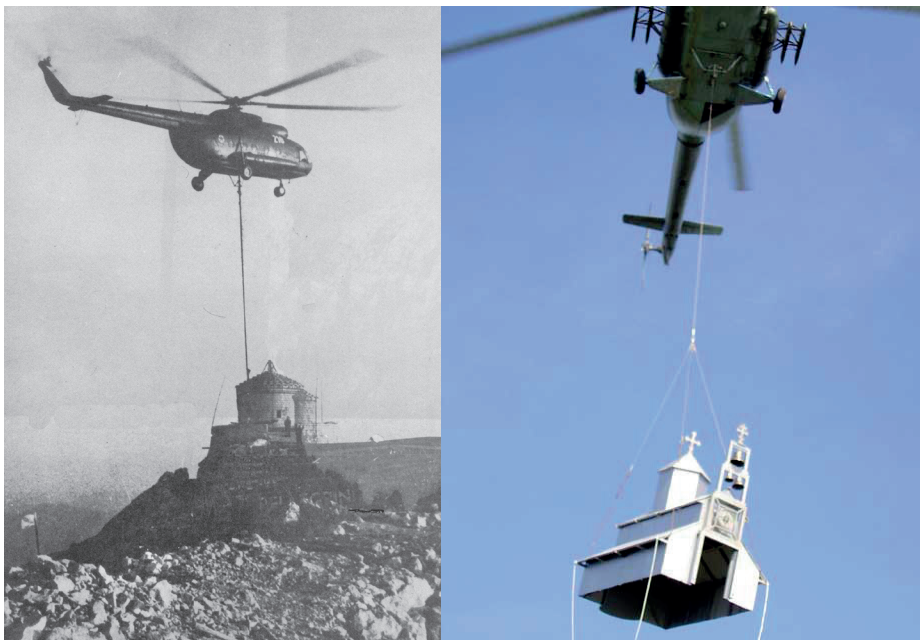
Figure 1 (left). A helicopter destroying the roof of the chapel at Lovchen in 1974. Photo: SOC archive. Figure 2 (right). A helicopter carrying the metal church to Rumija in 2005. Photo: Wikimedia commons.

support the space as a habitable one for a certain group adhering to the "religious ideology" of the site. The metal church at Rumija is founded as the end point of a pilgrimage ritual mentioned above that occurs on Pentecost, which can be dated back to at least the late nineteenth century but might be a remnant of older religious practices. The ritual centres around the legend about the church and site attached to the cult of Jovan Vladimir.[42] The current ritual, however, represents a revival of the older one, which is part of the greater SOC rebuilding project. The pilgrims have in the Rumija case been the source for the physical reconstruction, as their movement has served to attest to the "sacred" nature of the site. However, this pilgrimage is not a bottom-up process. It was launched by the local metropolitan, who also oversaw the construction of the church.[43] Hence, both the physical building and the pilgrimage form part of an overarching strategy of the SOC to claim, mark and define this site – and thus the entire area. This is not entirely without historical justification since the ritual is based on previous practices. The strategy is a process of revival and rewriting

42   Saggau, "A Shrine for the Nation".
43   Svetigora, *Саборни*.

EMIL BJØRN HILTON SAGGAU

history. This reinvented practice, and the sacred site it relates to, thus also offers a point of departure for the local reading of the history regarding the cult of Jovan Vladimir, which now needs to support the pilgrimage and the new space. The present practice defines the "unfolding" of the past and the recreation of a "tale" that is both a "resurgence" and a "denial", as de Certeau describes such a process.[44] The pilgrimage, as inclusive as it might be from the perspective of the SOC, is viewed by other ethnic and religious groups as a "denial" of their joint history.[45] The pilgrimage and the site now constitute a boundary towards other ethnic and religious groups. The situation is somewhat different at the Lovchen site. The monument was built in the 1970s in the aftermath of the debates concerning the heritage of Njegoš during a jubilee festival. The site already offered a symbolic and habitable religious space, but in this case for the SOC. The demolition of the chapel in 1974 was thus an attempt to enforce a different "religious ideology" at this site, which the later DPS government picked up on.[46] It should be noted that almost everyone in the DPS leadership used to belong to the league of Montenegrin Communists, which ruled prior to the 1990s (there were not any clear breaks in the country's ruling elite until the DPS lost the election of 2020).[47] Hence, the DPS leadership in one sense carries on the preservation of the site as a state site at which the civil religion of the Montenegrin state was played out. The celebration of Njegoš in 2013 revealed the various layers at play here. The celebration was a salute to the Montenegrin state, its independence and in particular its distance to Serbia proper.[48] This alienation of the "Serbian" is an essential part of the DPS's political programme for an independent Montenegro. This, however, entails an alienation and boundary vis-à-vis the SOC, which has close ties to Belgrade. The celebration in 2013 thus assumed a particularly secular form, where SOC clergy was not invited to the "party". Religious symbols were replaced by Montenegrin state symbols and traditional folk customs. The civil religious ritual at the site in 2013 revealed how the DPS government still supervises, maintains and enacts a certain practice enforcing a specific understanding of the site, which "denies" the SOC access. The DPS government continues to create a discourse that places the site, its "history" and the heritage of Njegoš in a civic Montenegrin discourse. The state continues to sacralise the nation

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44   de Certeau, *The Writing of History*, 47.

45   Pavicevic & Djuriovic, "Relations Between Montenegro and Serbia from 1991 to 2006"; Malaj, "The Cult of Saint John Vladimir Among the Albanians in the Present Days".

46   Baskar, "The Third Canonization of Njegoš, the National Poet of Montenegro"; Wachtel, "How to Use a Classic".

47   Kenneth Morrison, *Montenegro – A Modern History*, London 2009.

48   Saggau, "A Shrine for the Nation".

Figure 3 (above). The monument at Lovchen. Photo: Wikimedia commons. Figure 4 (below). The metal church at Rumija vandalised by Albanian graffiti. Photo: SOC twitter profile.

EMIL BJØRN HILTON SAGGAU

through rituals and symbols, whereas the SOC nationalises a sacred space at Rumija in order to prevent the presence of other religious and ethnic groups.

The Monuments

The physical appearance of the monument reveals the same two different strategical "religious ideologies". The Lovchen monument is a modernist building inspired by classical temples and stripped of any references to Orthodox architecture. It is an artistic vision of a new system of order, which the Yugoslav communist and DPS governments interpreted as their own political and cultural order.[49] The metal church at Rumija follows a more traditional Orthodox architecture. The church is structured around a classic type of road church or chapel, which can often be found along mountain roads in Southeast Europe. This minor religious building provides a space for religious services but is not a significant construction – unlike the larger infrastructure of SOC religious sites below the mountain summit in and around the city of Bar. However, it is still a concrete manifestation of an SOC presence at a former multi-religious site.

Icons and Images

The Lovchen monument is stripped of religious symbols. At the centre of the monument, there is a statue of Njegoš. The statue lacks the usual religious symbols that may be expected in any depiction of an Orthodox metropolitan of Montenegro. Rather, the metropolitan Njegoš is presented as a statesman and poet deep in thought, whose only symbol is the Montenegrin cap – a feature of Montenegrin folk costume. Above him rises a one-headed eagle. This eagle is the symbol of the republic, unlike the classic imperial and Orthodox two-headed eagle. It is a display of a generic Southeastern European leader. The situation looks different at Rumija, where the so-called Jovan Vladimir cross and icon represent an essential feature of the site, the pilgrimage and the material culture around the site. The cross can be dated back to at least the nineteenth century but is said to be a specific cross mentioned in the older hagiography of the saint – despite this cross being constructed out of wood and the present one, used in the ritual, being made up of some sort of metal. The cross of the saint is depicted at the top of the metal church and the cathedral below the mountain, which are bound together by the ritual and pilgrimage, where the cross is carried from bottom to top. The cross is thus not a generic one, but a highly symbolic cross with a history of its own. The saint is also depicted with this cross on

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49   Saggau, "A Shrine for the Nation"; Wachtel, "How to Use a Classic".

an icon inside the cathedral and in the tourist examples in the local religious souvenir shop next to the cathedral. The SOC has also promoted an icon of Njegoš, as a saint, which contains references to similar those at Lovchen. In these Njegoš icons, the saint does not hold a cross, but rather a prototype of the chapel that was destroyed in 1974. The icon thus points back to the religious space existing before the mausoleum – and perhaps towards what might one day return. Through the symbolism and materiality of the icon, the SOC seeks to contest the DPS's claim to Lovchen. To make things more concrete, the SOC has rebuilt the older chapel in Bar close to one of its main cathedrals in order to physically remind the faithful of what should have been standing at Lovchen instead of the mausoleum.

Conclusion: Weak Spot or Position of Strength?

The analysis of the material culture and the related place-making at the two sites in Montenegro underlines the process of "*the sociocultural localization of religious ideologies*", as de Certeau phrased it. Both sites contain a physical and material localisation of certain systems of religious thought, which have taken form with specific references to a system of strategical infrastructure, symbols and discourse. The cross at Rumija serves as an example of a material localisation. The cross holds meaning due to its reference to the saint's hagiography and due to its role in the historical ritual at the site recorded in the late nineteenth century. The use of the cross of Jovan Vladimir by the SOC localises the discourse of the hagiography in the material, and through the pilgrimage it becomes a spatial practice reshaping the site. This process is one of differentiating and marking certain orders – known or forgotten. The DPS government in the same way seeks to promote a different perception of sociocultural order. The DPS argues for a Montenegrin nationhood (an order) through materiality, rituals (performance) and text (speech). This order is used to make spaces for the order and secure that it is known, while the challenged order is forgotten. The SOC seeks to create and counter the DPS government by resorting to a different narrative and a kind of place-making that includes rituals, objects and discourse. Each one is a system of strategic infrastructures that tell ordinary Montenegrins what to believe, do and think about themselves. In a sense, both of these rival systems seek to enforce and strengthen their positions in Montenegro through the same practices, but the process reveals that neither the SOC nor the DPS has prevailed. Any reconstruction process, and the related place-making, is constantly undermined by the other side, but also by rival systems (the Albanians who paint graffiti at Rumija, to just mention one). Place-making is in this case the creation of sacred sites imbued with weak-

nesses. Their habitability as a sacred space depends on the ritual upholding the sites, supervision of the material world and constant enforcement in discourses. The sociocultural localisation not only requires rebuilding, but actually a constant pilgrimage – a "communitas" – that supervises and supports the strategic infrastructure or else it might fall into pieces. ▲

SUMMARY

This article examines how the "sacred" is located through place-making, materiality, and ritual practice in contemporary Montenegro, focusing on two contested sites: the metal church on Rumija and the Lovchen monument. Drawing on Michel de Certeau's theory of the sociocultural localization of religious ideologies, the study analyzes the the Serbian Orthodox Church (SOC) in Montenegro shaping of national and religious identities. This procees entails material symbols, spatial strategies, and ritual performances to assert physphical control of nationhood and sacred heritage. The findings reveal that these sacred spaces are sustained only through continuous ritual, symbolic reinforcement, and political contestation, making them sites of both strength and vulnerability.