THE OPERATIONAL CODE ANALYSIS OF THE SERBIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH'S OFFICIAL POLITICAL DISCOURSE ON KOSOVO (2008-2019)

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Abstract

The Serbian Orthodox Church has been described in scholarship as having had a significant impact onto the social and political life of Serbia, especially since the wars of the nineties. With the coming of the age of the Internet and social science automation, however, more options have gradually become available to researchers in the recent years. For this reason, this article will tackle the official rhetoric of the Serbian Orthodox Church in relation to the sociopolitical with the assistance of social science automation. Forming an examination via the methodological lens of Operational Code Analysis, this article delves

into the Church's discourse on Kosovo, via heavy vetting of all official statements given on the website of the Serbian Orthodox Church. It also expands upon the initial methodology – Operational Code Analysis – to an analysis of an *institution with a uniform discourse,* which has so far not seen light in scholarly production.

Keywords: *Serbian Orthodox Church, Serbia, Kosovo, Operational Code Analysis, social science automation.*

INTRODUCTION

The importance and influence of the Serbian Orthodox Church (Ser-Cro. *Srpska pravoslavna Crkva,* hereafter: SPC) on Serbia's sociopolitical development has hardly been understated in scholarly research (Barišić, 2016; Malešević, 2005). From its influence in fostering the conflicts in the 1990s (Vukomanović, 2005, 2008), the SPC has been accepted as a key player within the realm of the social and political within the country. From 2004 to 2008, further establishment of the SPC as a relevant political instance within Serbia had occurred during the rule of the ultraconservative Vojislav Koštunica, and its influence became even more salient and visible. In Vukomanović's words, Koštunica's rule was 'probably the best that the Serbian Church could have hoped for in many decades since the end of World War Two. Koštunica offered a real symphony with the church; so it seems that whatever his government decided, the church would accept, and vice versa' (Vukomanović, 2008, p. 238). Perhaps Vukomanović's lexical choice was serendipitous in the

use of the word 'symphony', as one of the key components of Orthodoxy, relating to Church-state relations, is the concept of 'Symphonia', one which 'suggests that the religious and political authorities should work together in a symphonic agreement towards achieving the material and spiritual welfare of the faithful' (Leustean, 2011, p. 188). Ever since, the SPC has been taking an active role in the social and political life of the state, lobbying for its interests and entering public discourse when deemed necessary.

In this article, we have decided to tackle the official discourse of the SPC on sociopolitical issues, be they at the intra- or interstate level through the methodological lens of Operational Code Analysis, based on the official discursive production of the SPC, found on its webpage. The SPC has been chosen for analysis due to several reasons:

1. It has been and still is highly active within the political sphere;

2. It is understood by the majority of the population as a highly relevant institution within the country (Aleksov, 2008, p. 153);

3. It publishes official content regularly, and has been doing so since 2008.

The sociopolitical context

It is almost taken for granted within scholarly production that, 'given conservatism and indeed openly nationalistic position of the Serbian Orthodox Church, the most troubling development for the liberal-minded, Western-oriented local scholars/ analysts is its increasing social and political influence' (Falina, 2007, p. 505). This has been reported as a defining instance in most of Eastern Europe (in other words, the post-

Communist Eastern Europe), as 'the revitalisation of religion has been a dominant trend in the entire postcommunist world' (Aleksov, 2008, p. 154). In Falina's words, to be more precise, 'the church is not simply gaining more visibility, but it is actively involved in state affairs' (Falina, 2007, p. 505). V-Dem's analysis of the official impact of the Orthodox Church in Serbia is rather visible in the graph that describes religious consultation within the state since the beginning of the 20th century. As the graphs shows, there has been a sharp decline in state interest in religious advice since 1945, which was the end of World War II and the establishing of the Communist regime of Josip Broz Tito, when the Church (including the Catholic Church in Croatia and Muslim communities, on a broader, Yugoslav level) lost its influence. By the end of the 1980s, however (coincidental with the rise of Slobodan Milošević, who substituted Communism for nationalism), the increase in religious consultation was rapid and swift:
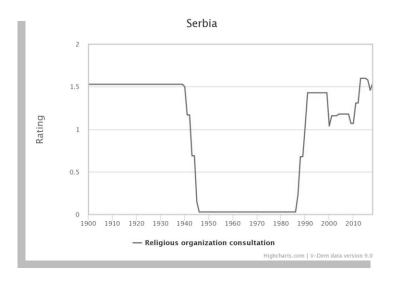

Figure 1: Religious organization consultation in Serbia, V-Dem

From and during the 1990s, during the reign of Slobodan Milošević, the SPC had made a 'grand comeback'. Before that period, its influence was deemed as 'marginal' (Bieber, 2002, p. 99). Since the late 1980s and early 1990s, however, Milošević had amassed comprehensive 'support of a Serbian Orthodox Church for his nationalistic ideology' (Erjavec & Volčič, 2007, p. 78). With his ousting after the 'October 2000 revolution', a slight drop in its influence could be seen, though by a small margin, after which the SPC's influence has soared yet again. With the election of the Serbian Progressive Party into power in 2012 – an offshoot of the warmongering Radical Party of the Hague inductee, Vojislav Šešelj – its impact onto Serbian politics and society can be said to have reached an all-time high. Religion was not only relevant among the population (i.e. the electorate), but within official state politics and policies. In Defreese's words, there is a 'close association between the Serbian state and the Orthodox Church' (Defreese, 2009, p. 261).

The Church's main vent into the political is by far (and almost exclusively) the topic of Kosovo. After its 'unilateral declaration of independence' (as it is commonly presented by the Serbian government, media, and the Church) in 2008, Kosovo has been a thorn in the side of Serbia's internal and foreign policy alike, as well as the source of much contention. In the SPC's *Weltanschauung,* Kosovo is seen as Serbia's 'sacred space' (Ejdus & Subotić, 2014), the location of the medieval Serbian state prior to the Ottoman invasion of the Balkans, and the heart and locus of Serbian identity and spirituality. The connection is further described by Bataković, who wrote that 'the Kosovo tradition became established as a popular legend under the auspices of the Patriarchate of

Peć (1557–1766), the restored Serbian Orthodox Church in the first century of Ottoman domination. The Legend of Kosovo gradually merged with popular tradition, taking on almost mythic proportions, and emerged as a cornerstone of modern Serb identity in the age of nationalism. For the average Serb today, the word Kosovo still stands for an ancient and sacred Serbian land, where Serbs have been systematically persecuted and expelled from, for being Slavic and Christian Orthodox, over the last three centuries, with the exception of recent periods of occasional, mostly communist-led Yugoslav and Serbian repression against the rebelled Albanians' (Bataković, 2012, p. 17). The SPC is among the first and foremost institutions who engage the discourse described in the quote above, and it does that often, and with vigor.

Methodology: Operational code analysis

Operational Code Analysis (OPCODE) was developed by Nathan Leites in the early 1950s with the goal of analyzing political strategies of the USSR Politburo (Leites, 1951, 1953), later to be further codified and modified by George, Walker, Schafer, and Young (George, 1969; Walker, Schafer, & Young, 1998), when George 'took Leites' complex, somewhat discursive study of Bolshevik strategy, and reorganized it into a tight framework of questions and answers, focusing upon the core beliefs that comprised the Bolshevik view of the nature of the political universe and the best way to advance Bolshevik interests within that universe' (Dyson & Parent, 2018, p. 85). For George, the Operational Code was understood as a 'prism that influences the actor's perceptions

and diagnoses of the flow of political' which 'influence the actor's choice of strategy and tactics, his structuring and weighing of alternative courses of action' (George, 1969, p. 191). In essence, thus, OPCODE tells us qualitative information about political players, divulged from a quantitative study of political discourse. It could be argued that OPCODE was Discourse Analysis before Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) developed as a methodological perspective (on CDA, see: Van den Broeck, 1986; van Dijk, 1995, 2015; Wodak, 2011, 2015); it however remains unexplained why discourse analysts have ignored this perspective. It can be argued – with much conjecture, though – that the mathematical procedures used within OPCODE could tend to put off a purely qualitative researcher. Be that as it may, since its inception for the singular purpose of the study of the Politburo, OPCODE has been used to analyze political players for decades, resulting in a number of scholarly articles (Adler, 2012; Dyson & Parent, 2018; Feng & He, 2012; Özdamar, 2017; Richter, 2016; Walker, 2011; Walker et al., 1998), as well as a selection of theoretical research works (Holsti, 1977; Schafer & Walker, 2006; Walker, 1990; Walker, Schafer, & Young, 2003).

According to the established coding scheme of Operational Code Analysis, as seen in Walker's *Evolution of Operational Code Analysis* (Walker, 1990, p. 405), there are five instances (and corresponding numerical indices) describing what is dubbed 'philosophical questions' (in which the object of analysis' *philosophy,* the *Weltanschauung* they subscribe to is seen) and 'instrumental questions' (wherein one tackles *the instrumental,* i.e. the questions of the means used to achieve goals):

Philosophical questions:

1. What is the "essential" nature of political life? Is the political universe one of harmony or conflict? What is the fundamental character of one's political opponents?

2. What are the prospects for the eventual realization of one's fundamental political values and aspirations? Can one be optimistic or must one be pessimistic on this score, and in what respects the one and/or the other?

3. Is the political future predictable? In what sense and to what extent?

4. How much "control" or "mastery" can one have over historical development? What is one's role in "moving" and "shaping" history in the desired direction?

5. What is the role of "chance" in human affairs and in historical development?

Instrumental questions:

1. What is the best approach for selecting goals or objectives for political action?

2. How are the goals of action pursued most effectively?

3. How are the risks of political action calculated, controlled, and accepted?

4. What is the best "timing" of action to advance one's interests?

5. What is the utility and role of different means for advancing one's interests?

According to Schafer and Walker, 'philosophical beliefs are external attributions that the leader makes about the political universe and other actors in the political universe', whilst 'instrumental beliefs are internal

attributions that the subject makes regarding his or her own best approaches to political action' (Schafer & Walker, 2006, p. 31). The abovementioned questions are then analyzed via a series of calculations (Walker et al., 1998) and turned into specific indices (P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, I1, I2, I3, I4, I5a-f). Each index has a particular range and explanatory power.

P1 – *The nature of the political universe*. Index range: -1.0<P1<1.0. A lower score would indicate that the subject of the study sees others as more hostile, while a higher score pertains to a worldview in which others are friendlier.

P2 – *Optimism vs pessimism*. Index range: -1.0<P2<1.0. The P2 index describes how the subject would perceive the intensity of others' actions. Closer to -1 is the pessimistic end, while nearing towards +1 would indicate optimism.

P3 – *Political universe predictability*. Index range: 0<P3<1.0. Describes 'whether the subject sees others acting in consistent, predictable ways' (Schafer & Walker, 2006, p. 33). The subject will perceive less predictability with lower scores, and more predictability with higher scores.

P4 – *Historical development control*. Index range: 0<P4<1.0. This index will reply to the question of how much will the research subject see themselves as being in control; 'Low scores indicate that the subject sees the locus of control residing more with others while higher scores indicate that the subjects sees self as having more control' (Schafer & Walker, 2006, p. 34).

P5 – *Role of chance*. Index range: Index range: $0<P5<1.0$. The larger the index, the greater the role of chance is seen within the subject's discourse.

I1 – *Strategy direction*. Index range: $-1.0<I1<1.0$. More utility will be attributed to conflict actions towards the negative end of the spectrum, while the positive end will see more utility within cooperation.

I2 – *Tactics intensity*. Index range: $-1.0<I2<1.0$. The utility of hostile tactics will be indicated towards the negative range of the scale, and cooperation towards the positive.

I3 – *Risk orientation*. Index range: $0<I3<1.0$. Lower scores indicate that the subject is risk averse, higher scores that they are risk acceptant.

I4 – *Action timing importance* (shift propensity). Index range: $0<I4<1.0$. The index describes 'the propensity to shift between words and deeds represents another aspect of timing in the way a leader calculates, controls, and accepts the risks of political action. Leaders who show a low propensity to shift between words and deeds are relatively acceptant regarding the risks associated with the direction of the distribution. A higher shift propensity indicates a more risk-averse orientation toward the undesirable outcomes of submission or deadlock' (Walker et al., 1998, p. 181).

I5a-f – *Utility of means*. Index range: $0<I5<1.0$. Describes the subject's beliefs about the practical utility of a variety of tactics. It is divided into six indices (I5a, I5b, I5c, I5d, I5e, and I5f): I-5a *Punish*: The sum of all self utterances coded as "Punish" divided by the sum of

all self utterances; I-5b *Threaten*: The sum of all self utterances coded as "Threaten" divided by the sum of all self utterances; I-5c *Oppose*: The sum of all self utterances coded as "Oppose" divided by the sum of all self utterances; I-5d *Support*: The sum of all self utterances coded as "Support" divided by the sum of all self utterances; I-5e *Promise*: The sum of all self utterances coded as "Promise" divided by the sum of all self utterances; I-5f *Reward*: The sum of all self utterances coded as "Reward" divided by the sum of all self utterances.

OPCODE has been developed in order to study primarily political leaders as individuals. Nevertheless, the approach offers no hindrances whatsoever for the study of political or politics-engaging groups and institutions, especially – such as is the case with the SPC – when they *produce uniform discourse*. As was mentioned in the subsection above, the SPC does indeed engage in a uniform, nationalist and religious rhetoric, and was witnessed to have been doing so ever since the nineties. This uniformity allows the OPCODE approach to tackle the discursive production of an *institution* as much as that of an individual.

Source selection, in this case, is fairly straightforward. We have centered on the official discourse of the SPC, found on their webpages. Source vetting has been administered to remove texts relating to the canonical and ecclesiastical, leaving only those statements that directly confront a social and/or political issue. Having in mind that Profiler Plus works exclusively with textual production in the English language, this issue has been tackled by simply going to the English version of the site.

Analysis and discussion

As is commonly done in Operational Code Analysis, the dataset (containing all statements relating to the political, comprising 12553 words) has been split into two phases based on the leadership of the Church. Phase 1 – the shorter period within the available discursive production – is during the time of Patriarch Paul (*Patrijarh Pavle*), i.e. until January 2010. The second phase is during Patriarch Irenaeus (*Patrijarh Irinej*), who still holds the key position within the Serbian Orthodox Church. The results are shown in the table below.

Political statements of the SPC, OPCODE data table:

Political and Instrumental beliefs	Phase 1	Phase 2
P1	0.5556	0.152
P2	0.2778	0.0147
P3	0.2	0.0844
P4	0.0357	0.1497
P5	0.9929	0.9874
I1	0	0.3636
I2	0	0.1288
I3	0.4	0.219
I4	1.0	0.8763
I5a	0	0.0102
I5b	0	0.0136
I5c	0.0179	0.0238
I5d	0.0179	0.0816
I5e	0	0.0034
I5f	0	0.017

Although Phase 1 is significantly shorter (one needs to keep in mind that this research has assembled *all* topically relevant official statements), some key moments are easily identified. Patriarch Paul's rule indicates a significantly stronger belief in the friendliness of the political universe (P1 = 0.5556), with a fairly strong positive value. This corresponds to the popular image of the late Patriarch, who is in public memory remembered as the 'meeker', 'soft-hearted' Church primate (RTS, 2009), known as such in popular memory, where the media had painted him as even doing his house chores on his own (D.K., 2018), even though he was known to have given an icon as a gift to the war criminal Radovan Karadžić (Ðorđević, 2010, p. 47). Another key instance is seen in the P5 value, which is the indicator for the role of chance. Having in mind its extremely high value in both phases, it would be indicative to speculate that a religious organization would attribute a high role of chance to politics, parallel to its preternatural belief in the powers above that cannot be controlled or handled by the common man. The crux of this investigation, however, lies in Phase 2, and the Church leadership of Patriarch Ireneaus.

With Phase 2 – the Patriarch Ireneaus of the Serbian Orthodox Church – a larger amount of quantifiable date is available, and consequently, a higher amount of information is divulged. The first difference is the lower P1 value (P1= 0.152), indicating a diminishing in the belief of the friendliness of the political sphere by a whole 0.4. This is seen within the SPC's rhetoric on the topic of Kosovo, which declared its independence in 2008, only to be followed by protests and active foreign policies aimed at not having the fledgling state internationally recognized by all the

governments since 2008. Indeed, the SPC under Irenaeus has engaged into a bitterer, unfriendly rhetoric; the SPC's official proclamation in 2015, for instance, compares the problems Kosovo is facing to that of those caused by no other than the Islamic State:

'We feel obliged to draw your attention to the fact that what is currently happening in the Middle East, particularly in the territories controlled by the so called Islamic State (ISIS)— massive persecution of the people and destruction of cultural heritage— represents in many ways the continuation of what happened in Kosovo and Metohija, particularly from 1981 until today. The fact that the most important Serbian Orthodox sites are still under armed police protection and the Monastery of Dečani is still protected by KFOR soldiers, particularly after last year's Islamist graffiti, offers clear evidence that the Serbian Orthodox heritage in Kosovo and Metohija is still at serious danger, exclusively from Kosovo Albanian extremists who find inspiration in the „ideals" of the so-called Kosovo Liberation Army and today, regrettably, more often in fanaticism of radical Islam' (Serbian Orthodox Church, 2015).

The minimal difference between Phase 1 and Phase 2 in the P5 index is barely of any statistical relevance, and would not be expected to change, as the SPC continues to be a religious institution under any leadership, and the beliefs in the higher power that is out of 'our' control were expected to be found.

Phase two is furthermore indicative of a small, yet visible diminishing in optimism (by almost 20%), from P2=0.2778 to P2=0.0147. The SPC

under Irenaeus has been tackling the abovementioned issue of the independence of Kosovo, which might have played a role in the lowering of optimism. A large amount of the official statements that have been analyzed directly or indirectly discuss Kosovo. In 2018, the Message of the Holy Assembly of Bishops on Kosovo Metohija was published by the SPC, stating:

> 'Kosovo and Metohija, from our standpoint, is neither a question of national ideology or mythology nor, even less, of mere terminology, but represents the very core of our being and existence as a church and people, without which we will be lost in the overall process of globalization and secularization. The prosperity of Serbia cannot be built on the disintegration of that which represents the cornerstone of its identity, history and statehood' (Serbian Orthodox Church, 2018b).

The pessimism is clearly seen in the paragraph above, which bemoans the potential loss of the 'very core of our being' in the process of 'globalization and secularization', wherein Serbia's 'prosperity' will 'disintegrate' as the 'cornerstone of its identity, history and statehood' that Kosovo represents to the SPC is lost.

Since we see that I1=0.3636, it could be somewhat counterintuitive to see that a softly cooperative rhetoric is being propounded by the SPC. This is indeed seen in the textual production of the Church, wherein it oft asks for international cooperation and help on the case of Kosovo. Bishop Teodosije wrote in 2018, stressing the importance of international cooperation:

'After the armed conflict, our Diocese was an active participant in the inter-ethnic dialog and cooperated with international representatives, making tremendous efforts to protect our people and our holy sites. Regrettably, despite all our endeavors around 200.000 of our people were forced to leave their homes in the time of "the internationally granted peace", many villages, our cemeteries were devastated and 150 churches destroyed. Nevertheless, we did not give up the dialog. Under the sponsorship of the Council of Europe, since 2005 we reconstructed a number of our churches and monasteries as well as the Seminary of Sts. Cyril and Methodius in Prizren. Upon invitation of the Government of Serbia in 2008, we took part in the negotiations in Vienna, where we agreed important principles for the protection and future of our people and the holy sites in Kosovo and Metohija' (Serbian Orthodox Church, 2018a).

Even though the Serbian Orthodox Church had been supporting the armed conflicts of the 1990s (Tomanić, 2001), this had been ignored by Bishop Teodosije, who was now stressing the inter-ethnic dialogue 'after the armed conflict', including international actors such as the Council of Europe and the negotiations in Vienna.

Somewhat expectedly, the high I4 index (I4=0.8763) speaks about the lack of willingness of the SPC to take risks, which coincides with the lowering of the I3 index from 0.4 to 0.219, while the I2 index describes a minimally cooperative tactics. The lack of risk-taking willingness could be explained by the very stress and importance that the SPC attributes to Kosovo, indicating that the risk-averse rhetoric should

arguably serve to diminish potential negative outcomes; in other words, the Serbian Orthodox Church is 'playing it safe', at least up to a certain extent. The low P4 value – indicating a minimal positive vision of the locus of control – would be able to be described in this context as an *attempt* of control; the attempt, however, has resulted in failure, as Kosovo will arguably never again be an integral part of the Serbian state, even for all the attempts of its government, media, and the Church, to reverse its independence.

Conclusion

The OPCODE analysis on the pages above shows a politically active Serbian Orthodox Church that has, under the scepter of Patriarch Ireneaus, engaged in political rhetoric primarily concentrating on the Kosovo issue, wherein a diminishing in the belief in the friendliness of the political universe and a lower optimism could be seen as its defining instances. This comes as not much of a surprise, having in mind the SPC's stance on Kosovo. Its declaration of independence could not be seen as 'friendly' from any aspect, and the lack of optimism seen in the analysis can further be explained by the continuous lack of success of the Serbian state (to which SPC's interests align) in its diplomacy towards the goal of undoing Kosovo's independence. Since 2008, the number of states that have recognized Kosovo as an independent state has been steadily growing, and at the time of the writing of this article, has reached 113 (Be in Kosovo, 2019). In other words, the Serbian Orthodox Church has been fighting windmills for over a decade, and the lack of its success is seen in its official discourse.

A further point of relevance is a purely methodological one, and it concentrates on the extension of Operational Code Analysis to uniform-discourse institutions. When presented with institutions that produce ideologically uniform rhetoric – especially in cases in which the institution does represent a specific ideology that unites its members (and especially its leadership), such as a religious organization – OPCODE can function as a valid methodological point of reference for sociopolitical analysis. This opens a wide avenue for research into a number of institutions that relate to the political or *are* political *per se,* provided that the *uniformity* of their discourse can be verified. We are hoping that this paper will enable other scholars to engage in OPCODE analysis of institutions, going beyond single political leaders, as OPCODE is prone to do.

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