The Revival of Islam in the Balkans

From Identity to Religiosity

EDITED BY
AROLDA ELBASANI
AND
OLIVIER ROY
The Islam and Nationalism Series

Series Editors:
Umut Ozkirimli, Center for Middle Eastern Studies, Lund University
Spyros A. Sofos, Center for Middle Eastern Studies, Lund University

International Advisory Board:
Seyla Benhabib, Eugene Meyer Professor of Political Science and Philosophy, Yale University
Sondra Hale, Research Professor and Professor Emerita, Departments of Anthropology and Gender Studies, University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA)
Deniz Kandiyoti, Professor Emerita, Development Studies, School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London
Saba Mahmood, Associate Professor, Sociocultural Anthropology, University of California, Berkeley
Jørgen S. Nielsen, Danish National Research Foundation Professor, Center for European Islamic Thought, University of Copenhagen
James Piscatori, Head, School of Government and International Studies, Durham University
Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, University Professor in the Humanities, Columbia University
Bryan S. Turner, Presidential Professor of Sociology and Director, Committee on Religion, The Graduate Center, the City University of New York; Director, Religion and Society Centre, University of Western Sydney
Peter van der Veer, Director, Max Planck Institute for the Study of Religious and Ethnic Diversity, Göttingen
Nira Yuval-Davis, Director, Research Center on Migration, Refugees and Belonging, University of East London
Sami Zubaida, Emeritus Professor, Department of Politics, Birkbeck College

One of the main objectives of this series is to explore the relationship between Islam, nationalism and citizenship in its diverse expressions. The series intends to provide a space for approaches that recognize the potential of Islam to permeate and inspire national forms of identification, and systems of government as well as its capacity to inspire oppositional politics, alternative modes of belonging and the formation of counterpublics in a variety of local, national or transnational contexts.

By recognizing Islam as a transnational phenomenon and situating it within transdisciplinary and innovative theoretical contexts, the series will showcase approaches that examine aspects of the formation and activation of Muslim experience, identity and social action. In order to do justice to and make better sense of contemporary Islam, the series also seeks to combine the best of current comparative, genuinely interdisciplinary research that takes on board cutting-edge work in sociology, anthropology, nationalism studies, social movement research and cultural studies as well as history and politics. As research on Islam as a form of identity is rapidly expanding and as interest both within the academia and the policy community is intensifying, we believe that there is an urgent need for coherent and innovative interventions, identifying the questions that will shape
ongoing and future research and policy, and exploring and formulating conceptual and methodological responses to current challenges.

The proposed series is intended to play a part in such an effort. It will do so by addressing a number of key questions that we and a large number of specialist interlocutors within the academia, the policy community, but also within Muslim organizations and networks have been grappling with. Our approach is premised on our understanding of Islam and the concept of the nation as resources for social identification and collective action in the broadest sense of these terms, and the need to explore the ways in which these interact with each other, inform public debate, giving rise to a diversity of experiences and practices.

We would like to thank The Center for Middle Eastern Studies, Lund University, for their support in initiating the series.

Titles include:

Arolda Elbasani and Olivier Roy (editors)
THE REVIVAL OF ISLAM IN THE BALKANS
From Identity to Religiosity

E. Fuat Keyman and Sebnem Gumuscu
DEMOCRACY, IDENTITY AND FOREIGN POLICY IN TURKEY
Hegemony Through Transformation

Olivier Roy and Nadia Marzouki (editors)
RELIGIOUS CONVERSIONS IN THE MEDITERRANEAN WORLD

Spyros A. Sofos and Roza Tsagarousianou (editors)
ISLAM IN EUROPE
Public Spaces and Civic Networks
The Revival of Islam in the Balkans
From Identity to Religiosity

Edited by

Arolda Elbasani
Jean Monnet Fellow, Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies, San Domenico di Fiesole, Italy

Olivier Roy
Head of the Mediterranean Programme, Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies, San Domenico di Fiesole, Italy
To the tens of thousands Muslims in the Balkans who were killed only because of their religion
This page intentionally left blank
## Contents

**Acknowledgments** ix  
**Notes on Contributors** xi  

Introduction: Nation, State and Faith in the Post-Communist Era  
*Arolda Elbasani*  

### Part I The Prevailing Public Discourse on Islam  

1. Islam and Orientalism in Contemporary Albania  
   *Enis Sulstarova* 23  

   *Alexandros Sakellariou* 42  

3. Faith and Politics in Kosovo: The Status of Religious Communities in a Secular Country  
   *Jeton Mehmeti* 62  

### Part II Muslims’ Pursuit of Faith and Religiosity  

4. The Loudspeaker of Faith in the ‘Calm’ City: Islam and Urban Diversity in the Contemporary Balkans  
   *Jelena Tošić* 83  

   *Andreja Mesarič* 103  

6. The Multiple Voices of Bulgaria’s Unofficial Islamic Leaders  
   *Laura J. Olson* 122  

7. Love and Boundaries: Inter-Faith and Inter-Ethnic Relationships among Macedonian-Speaking Muslims  
   *Anna Zadrožna* 142  

8. ‘Holiness’ Constructed: Anonymous Saints in the Popular Traditions of Muslim Roma Communities in the Balkans  
   *Ksenia Trofimova* 163
## Contents

### Part III  Religious Beliefs, Public Arguments and Legitimacy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Rhetorical Strategies of Kosovo’s Imams in the Fight for ‘Women’s Rights’</td>
<td>Behar Sadriu</td>
<td>185</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Public Expressions of Bosnian Muslim Religiosity and Lived Faith: The Cases of Friday Prayer and Hijab</td>
<td>Julianne Funk</td>
<td>204</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Faith, Fatherland or Both? Accommodationist and Neo-Fundamentalist Islamic Discourses in Albania</td>
<td>Cecilie Endresen</td>
<td>222</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Conclusions</td>
<td>Olivier Roy</td>
<td>242</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Index</td>
<td></td>
<td>252</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Acknowledgments

The Islamic ‘revival’ in the Balkans has raised many eyebrows among mainstream politicians, but also academics, who tend to look at religion as a repository of ethno-national identities, and hence a risky ‘depot’ furthering conflict and deep-seated divisions among and between ‘national’ entities. This goes hand in hand with the re-awakened nationalisms of the 1990s and especially the securitization of Islam on the global scene – both top-down approaches that accord Muslims particular roles and attributes. What believers themselves think, and how they experience and articulate their faith, is often lost in grand narratives of nations’ imposed uniformity and the ethno-religious categories that they create and reinforce. In this book, we wanted to ‘give a voice’ to believers and thus shift the analytical focus from macro-political debates on Islam to Muslim actors, choices, practices, expressions and public pursuits of faith. In this endeavor, we received support from many sources.

We want, first, to acknowledge the empirically meticulous and hard work of our authors. In some ways, it was our contributors’ field-grounded experience and hands-on empirical expertise that informed the choice of the topics. As editors, we knew that we wanted to focus on religiosity and explore Islam in the Balkans beyond ethno-national markers. The empirical grasp and field experience of our authors gave us hints on how to tease it out and where to focus. This interaction and exchange between our conceptual ideas and concrete empirical research and data took place during an intensive two-day workshop on Localized Islam(s): Institutions, Ideas and Practices in the European Context (organized at the European University Institute in March 2014). Our colleagues – Xavier Itçaina, Anna Triandafyllidou, Gregorio Bettiza and Yelena Tošić – who discussed the papers gave us helpful clues on how to improve them as chapters. Philippe Schmitter and Jan Dobbernack read and commented on our introductory framework. Finally, Claudia Fanti took care of all our administrative exigencies and made sure we also enjoyed our working time in Florence.

Once we decided on what was to be done, the authors submitted at different rounds of revisions and ‘delivered’ at an impressive speed concurrently with summer breaks, intensive teaching periods, fieldwork and other commitments. We cannot thank them enough for being so
punctual and accurate in addressing all our demands for ‘one more revi-

sion!’ Beyond the hard work involved in writing their chapters, we were
impressed by some of our authors’ genuine efforts to spend extended
time periods in the countries analyzed, stay true to their sources and be
very cautious when interpreting the ‘voice’ of their subjects.

We owe special thanks also to the participants of the workshop on
Islam in Europe through the Balkans Prism (organized at the Faculty of
Islamic Studies, Sarajevo, in October 2013) from which some of the
chapters in this volume are drawn. The workshop encouraged prolific
debates on traits of Islam in the Balkans, and gave us a solid under-
standing of the state of the art. We were all touched by the amicable
atmosphere of our host institution, and particularly Dina Sijamhodžić-
Nadarević, Ahmet Alibašić and Harun Karčić who organized our stay in
Sarajevo.

Spyros Sophos has been a supportive series editor and responded
patiently to our questions. At Palgrave, Jemima Warren guided us
through the revision process and all the administrative issues. The
anonymous reviewers helped us to clarify and strengthen important
points in the volume, and the editing team has been extremely efficient
in refining the final product.

We also wish to acknowledge the role of the ReligioWest Project
based at the European University Institute and funded by the European
Research Council (ERC; FP7/2007–2013) grant agreement n° 269860 for
providing financial assistance that contributed to the completion of this
book. Thanks go also to Ciarán Burke, for his precious help during the
editing of the book, and Maria Elena Cau for managing the funding and
guiding us through.
Contributors

Arolda Elbasani is Jean Monnet Fellow at the Robert Schuman Center for Advanced Studies, Florence. She holds a PhD in social and political science from the European University Institute (EUI), awarded in 2007. Her research interests lay at the intersection of Islamic politics, state-church relations, EU enlargement, political corruption and comparative democratization with a focus on Southeast Europe and Turkey. Her articles have appeared in different journals including Politics and Religion, Democratization, Journal of Southern Europe and the Balkans and Sudosteuropa. She has also edited European Integration and Transformation in the Western Balkans (2013) and co-edited The Albanian Journal of Politics (2004–2008). Her most recent project investigates Muslims’ differential support for democracy in Albania, Kosovo and Turkey.

Cecilie Endresen is a postdoctoral researcher at the University of Oslo. She is a historian of religion and a Balkanologist, with a research interest in the dynamic relationship between religion and nationalism, particularly among Romanians and Albanians. Her current research focuses on the ethnic and religious identity changes among Albanians, predominantly among Muslim migrants who embrace Christianity in different ways. Her recent publications include Is the Albanian Religion Really ‘Albanianism’? Religion and Nation According to Muslim and Christian Leaders in Albania (2012); ‘The Nation and the Nun: Mother Teresa, Albania’s Muslim Majority and the Secular State’, in Islam and Christian–Muslim Relations (2014); and ‘Status Report: Albania 100 Years’, in Strategies of Symbolic Nation-Building (2014).

Julianne Funk is a lecturer at the University of Zurich and a research consultant for the Ecumenical Women’s Initiative in Croatia. Her MA and PhD theses (Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, Belgium) investigated religion, conflict and grassroots peacebuilding in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Her publications have investigated Bosnian Muslim and Mennonite Christian lived religiosity, coexistence and Muslim women believers in Bosnia and Herzegovina, ethno-religious identity and peacebuilding, Islam and reconciliation, and the dialogue between politics and religion. As a peace scholar-practitioner, she moves between her home in Switzerland and the former Yugoslavia, where she remains
engaged with local peacebuilding NGOs as a consultant and volunteer. Her current projects focus on Bosnian Islam, Balkan coexistence, diaspora, and the dilemmas of Islam and religiosity for secular Europe.

Jeton Mehmeti is Lecturer in Communication at the University of Prishtina and a senior researcher at GAP Institute, Kosovo. He holds a BA in communication and comparative religion from the International Islamic University, Malaysia, and an MA in public policy from the Central European University, Budapest. His broad research interests include public policy, religious pluralism and inter-cultural communication. He is the author of Tensions between Freedom of Expression and Religious Sensitivity: What Is Wrong with the Danish Cartoons? (2011). His recent publications particularly focus on public policies pertaining to Kosovo, including the state–religion relationship.

Andreja Mesarič is an independent researcher based in London. She previously held a research fellowship at the Centre for Advanced Studies in Sofia, and a research and teaching fellowship at the University of Ljubljana. She holds a PhD in anthropology from the University of Ljubljana (2011) and a diploma in Islamic studies from the University of Sarajevo (2007). Her research interests include Islamic revival in the Balkans, and gender and migration. She is currently involved with several voluntary sector projects working with refugees and migrant women in the UK. Her articles have appeared in the Anthropological Journal of European Cultures. She is currently working on a book on dress, gender and the Islamic revival in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Laura J. Olson is Associate Professor of Slavic Studies, University of Colorado, Boulder. She holds a PhD from Yale University, Slavic Languages and Literatures, awarded in 1994. She works in the areas of folk and popular culture, gender studies, minority studies and nationalism, and has a particular interest in revival movements. She is the author of Performing Russia (2004) and the co-author, with Svetlana Adonyeva, of Worlds of Russian Village Women (2012; winner of the Chicago Folklore Prize 2013). She is currently working on a book project on Islamic revival and folk revival among Slavic-speaking Muslims (Pomaks) in post-communist Bulgaria.

Olivier Roy is Professor and Head of the Mediterranean Program at the Robert Schuman Center for Advanced Studies, Florence. He was
previously a research director at the French National Center for Scientific Research (CNRS). Professor Roy is the author of numerous books on topics related to Political Islam, the Middle East, Islam in the West and comparative religions – Globalized Islam: The Search for a New Ummah; Today’s Turkey: A European State? and The Illusions of September 11. His best-known book, The Failure of Political Islam (1994), is a standard text for students of political Islam. His other widely read books, Secularism Confronts Islam and Holy Ignorance: When Religion and Culture Part Ways, offer new perspectives on the place of Islam in secular societies. He contributes to and is regularly interviewed by the press in a variety of countries.

Behar Sadriu is a PhD candidate in Politics and International Studies at the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London. He holds a BA in history focusing on the development of Islam and the Middle East, and an MA in the politics, security and integration of East and Southeast Europe. He has participated in various international conferences with papers on Turkey’s international relations and Islamic trends in Kosovo.

Alexandros Sakellariou is a postdoctoral researcher at Panteion University of Social and Political Sciences, Athens, from which he obtained his PhD in Sociology of Religion in 2008. His interests include politics and religion, church–state relations, religious communities in Greek society, religious freedom, religion and globalization, youth activism and civic participation, and right-wing extremism. His recent publications include ‘From Greek Orthodoxy to Islam: Conversion in Contemporary Greek Society and Public Self-Representation’, Journal of Muslims in Europe (2014); and ‘Religion in Greek Society: State, Public or Private?’ in Religion Beyond Its Private Role in Modern Society (2013). His current project focuses on forms of atheism in contemporary Greek society.

Enis Sulstarova is Lecturer in Sociology and Political Science at the University of Tirana. He holds a doctorate in sociology from the University of Tirana. His main fields of interest include nationalism and the politics of identity in modern Albanian history. Sulstarova is the author of four books (published in the Albanian language) and of several articles in English on public discourses of nationalism, Orientalism and European identity in Albania. Publications include I Am Europe! The Intellectuals and the Idea of Europe in the Years 1918–1939 and 1989–2006 (2012), and the third revised edition of the book Escape from the East:
Albanian Orientalism from Naim Frashëri to Ismail Kadare (2013). His current project, supported by the Gerda Henkel Foundation, Germany, analyzes the representation of Islam in public discourses and history textbooks in Albania.

Jelena Tošić is a visiting professor at the University of Bern and APPART-Fellow in Social and Cultural Anthropology at the University of Vienna. Her research interests include socio-cultural and religious diversity, (forced) migration studies and the anthropology of morality/justice/human rights in Europe, especially in the Balkans, and in the Middle East. Her current project explores legacies and patterns of socio-cultural diversity in the Albanian-Montenegrin borderland. She is the author of “‘Reimagining’ the Balkans. Diversity Beyond and ‘Straight Through’ the Ethno-National’, in The International Handbook of Diversity Studies (2014); and the special issue ‘Localising Morali- ties: Sociality, Economy and Temporality in SEE’, 2015 in the Journal for South East Europe and Black Sea Studies (co-edited with Sabine Strasser).

Ksenia Trofimova is a junior research fellow in Religious Studies at the Institute of Philosophy of the Russian Academy of Sciences. Her PhD thesis focused on the popular religious traditions of the Roma in the Balkans, and was based on intensive fieldwork in Serbia, Macedonia, and Bosnia and Herzegovina. Her current project analyzes transformations of popular religiosity in Romani milieus. Her broad research interests include cultural identity studies and cultural memory studies in light of religious practice and the development of religious communities. Her results are published in State, Religion and Church in Russia and Worldwide (2014) and Philosophy and Culture (2012) [in Russian].

Anna Zadrożna is a visiting researcher at University College London and a PhD candidate in Anthropology at Yeditepe University, Istanbul, where she holds a TÜBİTAK-BİDEB fellowship. She is currently working on her doctoral dissertation, which explores transnational relations between Macedonia and Turkey, focusing on the idea of ‘Turkishness’ as a nexus of memories, practices, politics and belongings. She has conducted extensive fieldwork in Macedonia, Turkey and Italy and has worked on diverse research projects since 2007. Her broad research interests include migration and belonging, Islamic practices
and beliefs, the anthropology of senses and emotions, gender, vernacular ontologies and state–individual relations, specifically in the Balkans and Turkey. Her most recent article ‘I Am Muslim but I Am a European One’ is published by the *Anthropological Journal of European Cultures* (2014).
Introduction: Nation, State and Faith in the Post-Communist Era

Arolda Elbasani

Introduction

The growing specter of Muslim migrants has triggered a bourgeoning research on processes of contestation, adaptation and manifestations of Islam in Europe. In contrast, the resurgence of Islam across the post-communist Balkans, the historical stronghold of Muslims in Europe, has gone largely unnoticed. If we heard about them, it was usually in the context of allegiances to the state, the rise of nationalism and violent conflicts brought to world attention by the media in the early 1990s. The violent dissolution of the former Yugoslavia has certainly sparked some academic interest concerning the Muslim communities involved, but the ferocity of the various conflicts has contributed to constraining research only to the most striking cases and particular moments in time (Poulton and Taji-Farouki 1997: 1). The occurrence of war and conflict has, moreover, left the exploration of the Islamic phenomena to the mercy of nationalism and post-conflict paradigms, which have essentialized religion in line with ethno-national divisions of the day (Henig and Bielenin-Lenczowska 2013). Consequently, mainstream research tends to analyze religious groups as a repository of clear-cut ethno-national identities, the ends of which are closely monitored by the state in the interest of imposing communal uniformity and charting well-defined criteria for inclusion and exclusion.

Meanwhile, the gradual normalization of the political field and the liberalization of religious conduct in the two decades since the collapse of communism have unleashed a myriad of new encounters between newborn Muslim believers and state-organized religious categories, as well as diverse modalities of ‘being Muslim’ across the region. Post-communist ‘ruptures’ – particularly the trends of secularization,
the incoming international influences, and participation within larger European normative spaces and networks – challenge, contrast and overlap with the static, one-size-fits-all ethno-national categories of the organized religious field. In this ‘open’ post-communist religious sphere, believers have the opportunity to search for faith, encounter many sources of identification, and are more apt to choose, replicate, but also resist and reinvent the state-led classificatory systems within which they maneuver. In this context, the new Islamic phenomenon is no longer only the bearer of ethno-national political alternatives but also a symptom of new spaces that cannot be confined within a particular territory, state, nation or any communal identity. Hence, as Bougarel suggests, it is necessary ‘to outline a new approach to Balkan Islam that stresses its internal diversity and recent transformations’ (2003: 346).

This volume focuses on the growing gap between top-down ethno-national categories of state-organized religious fields and believers’ diversified personal experiences, discoveries and formulations of faith. We are particularly interested in conceptualizing and empirically exploring the emerging mosaic of Islamic religiosity, defined here as the way an individual believer experiences his or her relation to religion and faith. Hence, we seek conceptually grounded and empirically informed analysis of the revival of faith in the post-communist era. The underlining questions of this book are: What are the new encounters of faith after the collapse of communism? How do believers navigate the spaces between organized religion and new-found alternatives to faith? How do they choose what it is to be a good Muslim? What importance does it gain in their post-communist lives and how do they pursue it in practice? And finally, where are we heading in this reconfigured relation between state-organized religion and believers’ faith?

Obviously, answers to these questions depend on the particularities of time and place, which have to some extent been taken into account in existing research through individual case studies. The added value and contribution of this collective volume is to tackle these questions from a comparative and analytical perspective, allowing us to embody the analysis of singular cases from the Balkans into broader theoretical and empirical findings on sources, patterns and modalities of the post-communist revival of Islamic faith. The book thus aims to go beyond the ‘state of the art’ in at least two ways: first, documenting and taking stock of the empirical mosaic of new-found Islamic religiosities; and second, generalizing emerging patterns in the dynamic relationship between faith, organized religion, state and nation across different Balkan countries. Ultimately, it aims to connect research on the revival
of Islam in the Balkans to broader and pertinent theoretical issues on
the relation between nation, state and religion, revival of faith in post-
communist societies, as well as the evolution and traits of Islam in the
larger European context.

This chapter opens the debate by challenging the existing research
and sketching a new analytical perspective that focuses on believers’
experiences and relations to faith. The first section critically unpacks
the existing literature on religion as a fixed ethno-national commu-
nal category. The second section outlines the mechanisms that sustain
the state-organized religious field and its underlying categories in the
post-communist era. This is followed by a short survey of new develop-
ments that challenge the official religious sphere and provide believers
with new opportunities, ideas and practices to pursue in their daily
practice. The subsequent section maps out expected trends in the post-
communist religious landscape. The final section explains the structure
of the book and summarizes consequent empirical chapters.

The following case studies analyze the experience of religiosity at
the intersection of the secular and the sacred, blending a variety of
global, international, regional and local processes. The findings pre-
sented herein suggests that Islam, as framed at the top-down political
level, remains an important marker of identities, but the experiences
of religiosity have increasingly become a more personalized individual
attitude, detached from organized religion and doctrinal official pre-
scriptions. Empirical chapters offer ample evidence of a certain misfit
between official Islam and other ‘suppliers’ of religion, while believ-
ers take ownership of their own local and individual ‘ways’ of being
Muslim. The concluding chapter relates and expands these empirical
findings to broader questions regarding the many actors who speak for
Islam, the role of foreign influences, evolving patterns of religiosity and
the dynamics and trends of Islamic phenomenon in Europe.

Islam as a national/ethnic marker

Existing research on Islam, similarly to that concerning other denom-
inations in the Balkans, is permeated by an implicit and sometimes
explicit assumption that religion serves to shape and demarcate clear
national/ethnic boundaries. Religion in general is reduced to an ‘ethnic
marker’, a crucial and divisive source of national identity. According to
Creed, scholarly privileging of ethno-national identities, at the expense
of local identities and localized forms of knowledge and practice, repre-
sents an ‘example of Balkanism par excellence’ (2011: 168). Insistence
Introduction

upon the role of religion in confining communal identities is particularly related to the march of national ideologies and the many vicissitudes of state-building processes in this part of the world.

The enmeshment, and often subjugation, of religion to politics of national identity became especially pronounced during the violent collapse of Yugoslavia. Political entities that resulted from the dissolution of the federal state structure all claimed to represent a dominant ethnicity identified with a specific religion, by effectively managing a transformation process that Verdery has called the ‘extermination of alternative identity choices’ (1994: 38). Yet, it was the appalling bloodshed and destruction in Bosnia-Herzegovina that brought worldwide attention to Muslim populations, their ethnic allegiances and nation and state formation process in the south-eastern corner of Europe. As an influential study puts it, ‘the Bosnian tragedy has made very clear the importance of examining the relationship between the Balkan Muslim communities and the states in which they live, as well as their self-definition in relation to these states’ (Poulton and Taji-Farouki 1997: 1). Then came Kosovo, another oft-discussed case of conflict that developed along ethno-religious lines, namely between Muslim Albanians and Orthodox Serbs. Subsequently, the unfolding conflicts in Macedonia drew new attention to hard-core divisions between Orthodox Macedonians and Muslim Albanians, both barricading themselves into opposing fronts. The unfolding battles for state authority, power, territory, and independent statehood in the 1990s, all made use of religious labels and symbols as crucial instruments for the reconstruction of a national ‘self’ against the opposing ‘other’ (Duijzings 2000: 157). All the while, churches and mosques became the major targets of destruction and embodied emerging political, ethnic and religious divisions.

For many, those events recalled the historical course of ethno-religious entanglement, imbroglios and conflicts of the state-building process in the post-Ottoman Balkans. Centuries of Ottoman rule, and its millet system of organization, whereby religion defined separate communal identities, nurtured a strong sense of belonging, which was determined almost exclusively by religion (Poulton and Taji-Farouki 1997). The weakening of the empire, in the 19th century, made way for competing European concepts of the organization of modern nation-state, and enabled the emergence of overlapping identities. However, even where religion was eroded by competing sources of identification, institutional legacies, allegiances and daily practices at local level helped to preserve the delineation of faith-based communities, which continued
to separate the emerging national units. This was particularly the case regarding the separation of Muslims from their non-Muslim neighbors.

In the age of state-building, these separate and somehow distinguishable communal identities were promoted, manipulated and usurped by political schemers in order to demarcate their nations, consolidate central state authority, reconfigure borders and, when necessary, wage wars against ‘others’. Modern state-making presses its subjects toward single identities: one cannot keep track of people who choose to be one thing at one point and something else at another. In the Balkans, similar to the ‘construction’ of ethno-national identities in Western Europe, ‘the self-consistent person who “has” one “identity” is the product of a specific historical process: modern nation-state formation’ (Verdery 1994: 37). As Todorova has famously argued, ‘the Balkans [have become] … European by shedding the last residue of an imperial legacy, widely considered an anomaly at the time and by assuming and emulating the homogenous nation-state as the normative form of social organization’ (1997: 177). Consequently, religion was taken out of the hands of the believers and subjected to various nation-state ideologies and political projects – secularism, patriotism, ethnic mobilization and state control – which had very little to do with faith itself. Attempts by national ‘entrepreneurs’, but also by centers of religious power, to agitate for clear-cut identities and the eradication of elements of blend and mixture were liveliest in border and composite areas, where ethnic and national loyalties were at their most fluid (Duijzings 2000).

Islam, as the dominant faith enjoying particular social and legal prerogatives during centuries of Pax Ottomana, became the backbone of political contention and social engineering in the process of re-imaging new national religious regimes after the dissolution of the empire. The predominantly Christian-Orthodox states that emerged from former Ottoman Balkan territories in the period 1829–1878 – Serbia, Greece, Romania, Montenegro, Bulgaria and Bosnia – identified themselves with the orthodox ‘millet’ in order to consolidate their statehood (Poulton and Taji-Farouki 1997: 25). Only Albania, which, given its multi-religious population, could not clothe nationalism with a single creed, promoted a new ‘ecumenical’ nation (Clayer 2008; Elbasani 2014). Regardless of their composition, all post-Ottoman Balkan states targeted their Muslim populations as a leftover of the Ottoman occupation, almost a traitor in the midst of the new nations in the making (Katsikas 2009: 539). Even Albania, the only Muslim-majority country, renounced its Muslim population as a synonym of Ottoman backwardness, and made such renunciation the central tenet of state-led
reforms aimed to catch up with ‘new European times’ (Clayer 2008). These legacies, ideologies and state-building strategies informed general state policies that were inherently defamatory toward Muslims: branding them as foreigners to be expelled; stigmatizing them vis-à-vis the dominant ethnic group; advocating measures of homogenization; or, at best, recognizing but merely tolerating them as an ethno-religious group. Muslim communities, for their part, found themselves struggling to carve a new place for themselves amidst non-Muslim societies, new nation state ideologies and antagonistic state policies, as well as the shifting fortunes of the European geopolitical order. Indeed, they have been at the very center of the biggest crises that have shaken the region during the last two tumultuous centuries of nation- and state-building processes.

Politically organized religious ‘Fields’: Legacies, categories and transmission mechanisms

Re-wakened nationalisms of the 1990s, and new politics of identity and statehood, which were certainly suffused with ethno-religious symbolisms and old historical interpretations, turned into the dominant lenses through which to interpret Islam also in the post-communist era. To quote the findings of a recent study, ‘the top-down driven hegemonic interpretation of... Muslim politics as trapped in the politics of identity and inter-communal ethno-religious nationalism prevails in the media, political debates and international community’s projects as well as in academic discourses’ (Henig and Bielenin-Lenczowska 2013: 2). Violence has a crucial role in solidifying self-fulfilling prophecies: ‘it makes reality resemble the ideological constructs that underpin the violence’ (Duijzings 2000: 33). Indeed, both during and for some time after the Balkan conflicts, the analysis of the Islamic phenomenon was left at the tender mercy of nationalism and post-conflict studies, which essentialized religion in line with ethno-religious splits of the day and ready-made nation-state categories.

Ethno-religious dichotomies often carried the active contribution of political elites to ‘nationalize’ but also ‘centralize’ and ‘manage’ newborn Islamic impulses within the framework of central state authority. Policies of nationalization-cum-etatization of Islam more than anything else served the worldly interests of using faith at the service of concrete political agendas (Hann and Pelkmans 2009: 1520). All modern states maintain boundaries by mastering clear criteria for inclusion and exclusion, but this was especially pertinent in light of the centralized
legacy of former communist regimes. Communist states, to a lesser or greater extent, had built up a highly centralized state machinery to appropriate and control all spheres of life including public religions but also intimate spheres of personal piety (Hann 2006). Succeeding post-communist states capitalized on the power of the central state apparatus to construct, select and use religious symbols as an anchor of political legitimacy. Institutionally, the state continued to closely control nations’ religious life by preserving a multi-tiered system of registration, according to several unilaterally revocable conditions (Stan and Turcescu 2011). State’s ‘management’ of Islam depended on the particular demographic and political context in each political unit, but the use of state muscles to discipline it remained the same. Balkan states were able to exert strong influence over religious life ‘[particularly] through the privileged status given to Orthodoxy… and through the close administrative and financial links existing between state authorities in charge of religious affairs and religious hierarchies’ (Bougarel 2003: 355). Communist-style centralization and modernization has, thus, bequeathed vestiges of largely interventionist and occasionally hostile state policies to the post-communist institutional formats of managing Islam.

Former communist ideological constructs have also spilled over into the post-communist formal arrangements of checking religion at the door of nation-states. Previous state intelligentsias – historians, linguists, ethnographers, writers, artists and students of Marxist ideology – supported by an overstaffed academy and generously funded by the communist state played a crucial role in this regard. In the words of Bougarel, ‘the Communist period favored the development of intellectual elites, who in turn became the standard bearers of new national aspirations’ (2005: 11). It was these former intelligentsias that articulated and jealously guarded their nations’ post-communist ‘cultural heritage’, completed with a pantheon of great thinkers, artists and heroes. Upon regime change in the 1990s, communist-era intellectuals took over key positions in the institutional reproduction of knowledge, generating what Gellner has typically dubbed as ‘diffusion of a school-mediated, academy-supervised [national] idiom’ (1983: 140). National ideas, privileging a past ‘golden age’ over the contemporary, were further transmitted through literature, historical accounts, and a coy ethnography often without any ‘obligation towards the social and material reality’ of the present (Carmichael 2002: 3). In the wide spectrum of revived Balkan nationalisms, Muslims were commonly viewed as a kind of ethnic ‘fifth column’, a leftover from a previous era, who could never
be integrated successfully into the planned modern nation-states. Consequently, any expression of Islam ought to be oppressed, kept out of politics and the public realm or placed under close state surveillance (Khalid 2003). The continuity of a nation’s ‘heritage’, facilitated through former communist intelligentsias and their oft-fabricated accounts of history, thus, contributed to enforce stagnant parameters concerning how history, nation and Islam merged or parted ways in the official memory of each political entity.

‘Official’ or government-sponsored Islam – an organizational concept, which refers to the creation of centralized religious hierarchies approved by the state – serves as yet another powerful interlocutor of transmitting politically conceived nationalized accounts of Islam (Bringa 1995: 199; Epkenhans 2011; Oktem 2011: 162–163; Elbasani 2015). Headed by a Chief Mufti, governed by formal statutes, and closely monitored by the state, central structures are acknowledged as the sole authority in governing all affairs pertinent to their ‘community’ of believers all across the Balkans. Even where pragmatic interests and ideological rifts have divided central structures, the post-communist state has made sure to remedy such problems and affirm the state-selected interlocutors. The religious hierarchy, in return, has helped to establish state oversight over the community of believers and worked to eliminate undesirable influences, often independent of the ‘community’ of believers (Ghodsee 2010: 19). By offering state benefits and co-opting the religious ‘establishment’, post-communist regimes have maintained an intricate relationship between politics and religious structures – the sovereign has retained the prerogative of intervention, Ulamas have been domesticated, and scholarship corrected. Central structures, thus, have more often than not been relegated to a subordinate role, remarkable chiefly for their support of government policies (Akiner 2003: 101–104).

Even where the national collective memories embraced Islam, the power mechanisms that entangle state structures, intellectual elites and religious hierarchies worked to enforce the discourse of national Islam(s) – Albanian, Bosnian, Kosovar and so on – which dominates the revival of faith in the post-communist Balkans. It is through this coalition of the powerful supported by the backing of state structures that political constructs of nation, history and tradition are perpetrated and reinforced in each country. These structures, in return, maintain and reproduce inflexible ‘boundary-drawing’ discursive practices on and within Islam itself. All the while, believers’ expressions of piety and observance, as well as referents of faith, are filtered through top-down categories that constitute the state-organized religious field. Defined at
the nation-state-level, post-communist Muslims are, thus, much more political, historical and cultural than religious and spiritual.

Securitization of Islam, and definition of ‘otherness’, easily taps into such dichotomous divisions that political categories assume and nourish: official or parallel, traditional or global, national or foreign, victim or threat, liberal or radical, and of course useful or harmful. The title of a recent book Rediscovering the Umma: Muslims in the Balkans Between Nationalism and Transnationalism says a good deal about mainstream perception of Islamic revival as being caught in between old ‘national’ and new ‘foreign’ categories (Elbasani 2013b). Not surprisingly, an important strand of research on Islamic revival in the Balkans focuses on ‘creeping’ foreign Salafist influences, interpretations which gained territory in the context of Balkan conflicts and particularly rising concerns on Islamic terrorism after 9/11 (Deliso 2007) and once again after the eventful creation of the Islamic State in 2014. Consequently, the revival of faith is further squeezed into either ‘nationally’ or ‘traditionally’ moderate and ‘externally’ radical interpretations, which capitalize upon notions of local Islam as being challenged by incoming foreign networks.

Resurgence of faith: Believers, choices and diversity in an enlarged religious space

This volume begins with the assumption that national classificatory systems, which delineate clear-cut ethno-religious identities and functions within a politically regulated ‘religious field’, provide a straitjacket to analyze believers’ recovery of faith after the collapse of communism. The top-down assignment of uniform political identities and communal terms of belonging in the process of nation-states’ search for uniformity is one account of the post-communist trajectory of faith. Another account is believers’ own search, selection and pursuit of various ‘identities’ on offer during the opening up of the religious space. The two levels are interrelated. Believers respond to the broad socio-political changes, which affect their personal and communal lives. As Eickelman and Piscatori remind us, ‘boundaries [of religious communities] are shifted by...the political, economic and social context in which these participants find themselves’ (1990: 4–5). Enrollment within communal identities becomes particularly strong during periods of war and violence, but also during periods of contestation and marginalization, which force believers to select where they belong.

Yet, the faithful are active agents who choose, resist and reinvent the broad classificatory systems within which they manoeuvre. Local rituals
and living practices function as a means of de-authorizing hegemonic perspectives that privilege collective memories and ethno-national identities (Creed 2011). Moreover, believers encounter different sources of identification, and select and weigh the importance of each according to a particular context and point in time. Mixed identity choices are particularly frequent in peripheral settings, where ecclesiastic organizations and state institutions are less powerful, and hence unable to reach and determine believers’ choices and experiences. As Duijzings suggests on the basis of his work in the border areas in Kosovo, ‘there is always friction between the ideal ethno-religious models or ideologies produced by states and religious regimes, and the social reality to which they refer’ (2000: 25).

The way Muslims experience and express religiosity in the new post-communist spaces has certainly proven more complex and heterogeneous that the neat national, ethnic, or other hegemonic categories to which they are subjected (Oktem 2011: 156). Anthropological studies furnish ample evidence of Muslims’ diverse ways of ‘being’ Muslim across different localities and moments of transition (Binga 1995; Duijzings 2000; Ghodsee 2010; Henig and Bielenin-Lenczowska 2013). Such localized living experiences of faith help shift analytical attention from centers of power and politics to the margins of religious lives, knowledge and practice. The more one moves out of and away from centrally controlled religious fields, the more one observes Muslim ‘anomalies’ – ethno-religious fusion, heterodox practices, cultural diffusion and plural forms of belongings and believing. Seen from the autonomous spaces of religious practice, piety and ritual believers’ experiences tend to be more fluid and less institutionalized, whilst identities are more ambiguous and situational. Although providing crucial insights into the localized forms of religious expression, current research is mostly confined to single case studies and particular moments of conflict and violence, thus lacking systematic comparative analysis of the long-term continuities but also ruptures of the resurgence of faith since the collapse of communism.

This collective endeavor aims to take stock of post-communist disruptions and emerging modalities of revival of faith in a comparative and analytical perspective. We thus go beyond the state of the art depicting ‘stable’ continuities within nationally organized religious spheres and instead analyze the current ‘interruptions’ and believers’ ‘recasting’ of Islamic lives across different cases in the post-communist Balkans. We identify at least three crucial breaks which help to reconfigure the ways in which Muslims in the Balkans grapple with their beliefs and the
salience they gain in their religious lives: (1) the imprint of decades-long socialist secularization, (2) the competitive market of religiosity and (3) the ‘EU-ization’ of the religious sphere. Such disruptions challenge the one-size-fits-all ethno-national formulas and point to new directions of recovery and resurgence of faith after the collapse of communism.

The imprint of socialist-style secularization

Decades of communist-style modernization, and the eviction of religion from the public arena, have led to a ‘[de facto] secularization of Balkan societies and a sharp decline in religious practice’ (Bougarel 2005: 11). Even where struggles for nationhood and statehood have reinforced Muslims’ identification with a core ethnic group, this has produced far from uniform re-Islamization of their identities in the sense of forging uniform practices, the discovery of a global *Umma*, or mass attendance of communal services. The few campaigns of re-Islamization led by particular political parties and religious institutions, for example, have sparked furious controversies in Bosnia-Herzegovina as well as in Albania (Bougarel 2003: 355; Elbasani and Saatçioğlu 2014). Ghodsee’s observation that Muslims in Bulgaria seem ‘prone to defining religion as an aspect of ethnic identity, rather than a declaration of a belief in the doctrines of a particular organized spiritual community’ charts what seems to be a recurrent phenomenon in many other cases in the Balkans (2010: 24).

Typically, more people self-identify with Islam and believe in God than those who attend religious services and serve religious prescriptions. Survey data on religious practices in the Balkans show convincingly that most people only attend important ceremonies at poignant moments in life such as birth, wedding and funerals (University of Oslo 2011). Religious observance is in sharp decline everywhere. Post-communist Muslims also appear strongly committed to confining religion within the private sphere – away from state institutions, schools, the arts and the public sphere more generally (ibid; Oktem 2011). The ‘return of religion’ thus fits rather well into what Roy describes as a shift from *religion* – as a coherent corpus of beliefs and dogmas collectively managed by a body of legitimate holders of knowledge – to *religiosity*, namely, self-formulation and self-expression of personal faith (2007: 7–8). Newborn religiosities seemingly evolve around individual choices and preferences, in a form of ‘pick and choose’ personalized discoveries of faith.
International influences

A second trend, which destabilizes the established religious field, and surfs the wave of personalized religious choices, hints at the emergence of the post-communist free and competitive market of beliefs. The liberalization of religious conduct and the opening of new channels of communication with the world have generated a vivid ‘marketplace’, where foreign encounters – foreign missionaries, migrants, students from abroad, humanitarian organizations and virtual Internet networks – effectively compete with established institutions and traditional ideas to win ‘godless’ souls (Solberg 2007; Tziampiris 2009; Karcic 2010). This is particularly important given that rich Arab associations have targeted Muslim populations in the Balkans as crucial ‘interlocutors’ to diffuse the message of Islam in Europe. These organizations have from early on provided much-needed financial resources – funds for building the necessary infrastructure, scholarships for students, Islamic literature and translations, plentiful religious missionaries and ample humanitarian assistance mixed with proselytization activities – to help local Muslims find the way to ‘pure’ faith. As a result, Arab-influenced doctrines, which propagate a de-territorialized pure Islamic code stripped of local anomalies, have emerged as a powerful feature of incoming new foreign influences in the post-communist era.

A substantial body of research highlights the alarming power of well-funded fundamentalist networks to affect indigenous practices and establish local networks (Deliso 2007). Incoming movements have occasionally infiltrated central institutions; made inroads amongst the uprooted and the poor; attracted groups suffering from the hardship of post-socialist economies; and lent a message of hope, morality and justice amidst post-communist corrupt political order (Blumi 2005; Ghodsee 2010). The overemphasized Salafist influences, however, have remained largely confined to specific moments of transition and small circles of believers. ‘[Radical Islamists] are minorities, which have managed to overcome their own marginality only when the escalation of political and ethnic tensions has allowed them to make use of the… frustraions of the Muslim populations’ (Bougarel 2003: 358). A new body of research shows that paradoxes and resistance that thwarted the diffusion of global Islamic movements have in fact pushed local communities to take ownership of their own familiar ways of practicing and pursuing religiosity (Karcic 2002). Additionally, organized communities and individual believers have both resorted to arguments drawn from the ‘moderate’ tradition of the past – a body of solutions that have developed from their country’s historical interaction with the
European institutions and ideas – to juxtapose the radical projects that have permitted the free and open market of ideas after the collapse of communism (Elbasani 2015).

**The Europeanization of the religious space**

A third factor, which disrupts and reconfigures the organized religious field, is Muslims’ participation in a broader European normative space, closely related to the ongoing processes of EU accession (Elbasani 2013a). The promise of EU membership to all countries in the Balkans has brought them into closer contact with the European project, and debates on what it means to be Muslim in the contemporary enlarged Europe. The asymmetrical nature of the EU enlargement process, whereby the EU sets the conditions and candidate countries need to comply in order to advance in the institutional ladder of accession, has created an additional EU-driven structure of restrictions and opportunities for Muslims in the Balkans to articulate their preferences and make their social and political claims in the domestic political arena (Elbasani and Saatçioğlu 2014).

On the one hand, EU-level debates on Islam, which are often intermingled with issues of enlargement fatigue, Christian heritage, problems of migration, issues of terrorism, and the uncertainty of Turkey’s accession, add pressure on Muslim believers to position themselves more strongly along the indigenous side of ‘European Muslims’. The term reflects a long history of Muslims’ own engagement with institutional templates and ideological frames emanating from the European continent (Clayer and Germain 2008). Yet, in the post-communist era, the term is now twisted to illustrate Muslims’ unwavering support for the post-1989 project of ‘return’ to Europe and the concrete process of EU accession framed by the Copenhagen criteria – democracy, the rule of law and the market economy.

On the other hand, Muslims across the Balkans have discovered that the EU’s democratic institutions and widely accepted citizenship rights provide them with a new window of opportunity to pursue and perform their religiosity in a more liberally regulated public sphere. Muslim communities, associations and believers have frequently mobilized the language of the EU’s norms and values – freedom of speech, opinion, conscience, property, and minority protection – to expand the range of opportunities in the domestic arena. To quote the position of an independent Muslim association in Albania, ‘Muslims…have a great need for the democracy and the human rights that our common continent has constructed in years’ (MFA 2008: 5). EU institutions and liberal
policies guaranteeing equal rights of citizenship are further perceived as a new international layer of protection against restrictive national institutions (Anagnostou 2007: 167; Ghodsee 2010: 177).

**Mapping out new trends in post-communist recovery of faith**

Given these ruptures in the nationally organized religious fields, we expect the ‘community’ of the faithful to be more scattered, heterogeneous and not particularly concerned with unifying itself or even being represented (Roy 2007: 68–69). Islam in the Balkans has arguably never been homogenous (Poulton and Taji-Farouki 1997). However, in the post-communist liberalized contexts and enlarged religious spheres believers have additional opportunities to select and borrow from newfound forms of religiosity. Lay believers’ chance of negotiation, personalization and mixing of beliefs promises to uncouple further the relation between lay ‘communities’ evolving religiosities and centrally organized forms of religion. Similarly to the evolution of Islam in Western Europe, new-found religiosities are increasingly personalized, mobile, weakly institutionalized, little concerned with theological interpretations, and often communitarian as a choice of belonging. All the while, the Islamic phenomenon is no longer the bearer of ethno-national alternatives and politically assigned prescriptions, but rather the symptom of new spaces that cannot be easily confined within a particular territory, nation or ethnic group.

The first task of our volume is to map out believers’ differential responses to post-communist challenges of the nationally organized religious spaces, and analyze how they adapt to swift changes, oppose rigid prescriptions, and envisage their own ‘local’ spaces. The empirical cases analyzed here provide evidence of different factors at work, and contextualize Muslims’ expressions and pursuit of faith in the locales where they operate. In this way, case studies from the region furnish in-depth idiosyncratic detail on localized versions of Islam coming of age and taking over the categorical divides envisaged at the nation-state level.

Besides exploring the emerging mosaic of Islamic religiosities, we seek cross-country parallels, and tease out explanations of the ways in which believers discover and experience their new-found faith. Ultimately, we aim to conceptualize post-communist trends of revival of faith, establish patterns and draw theoretical conclusions concerning where we are heading in the relationship between nation, state and faith, as well as traits of religiosity after the collapse of communism. To this end,
specific cases tackle the revival of Islam within a broader conceptual framework, incorporating sub-national, regional, European and globalized influences, which compete with official institutions and national ideas for market ‘shares’.

Outline of the book

The structure of the book aims to delineate and distinguish between different levels of re-discovery and re-definition of faith after the collapse of communism. Following this introductory chapter, which outlines the main issues and sketches our focus on religiosity, the empirical cases are divided into three main parts, each emphasizing separate ‘agents’, related explanations and modalities of revival of faith.

Part I focuses on top-down political visions, which generally conceive Islam as a disputed faith in need of state supervision and conjectural reformation in order to fit the ethno-religious fabric of respective nation-states. Chapter 1 by Sulstarova argues that public intellectuals in post-communist Albania have problematized the revival of Islam by employing orientalist stereotypes. Intellectual elites commonly juxtapose Albanians’ ‘European’ identity with the ‘imported’, ‘backward’ and ‘primitive’ Islamic baggage. Chapter 2 by Sakellariou outlines a similar account of contemporary panic about Islam in the case of Greece by focusing on the discourse of the Orthodox Church and the Golden Dawn party, the first a traditional and the second a modern agent. Both actors claim to represent and protect the Greek-Orthodox ‘core’ national identity against the Islamic ‘other’. In the last chapter in this section, Mehmeti offers an innovative analysis of the political ‘neutralization’ of Islam during the creation of the new Kosovar state. His analysis focuses on international community’s priorities in building a multi-national society, and domestic elites’ attempts to dismiss the identification of the Kosovar polity with Islam. All of the cases analyzed here, be they Muslim or Orthodox-majority, show that, at the macro level, Islam is perceived as the foe of nation-states’ collective ‘imaginaries’. Islam, in function of the envisaged national unity and its ‘substantive’ ethno-religious content, is commonly relegated to the margins of public and political life.

Part II of the volume brings together various case studies that shift attention to how believers experience, resist and reinvent such top-down classificatory systems during ‘everyday practice’, and according to contingencies of time and place. Tošić opens up this section by exploring what Muslims themselves perceive as ‘good’ and ‘bad’ Islam and
the various ways of ‘being’ Muslim in the context of an urban diversity regime in the north-eastern town of Shkoder in Albania (Chapter 4). In the following Chapter 5, Mesarič draws attention to Muslim believers’ engagement with the available political-religious discourse, and emerging personal faith(s), through analyzing pious women’s dress practices in Sarajevo. Chapter 6 by Olson follows a similar analytical route in analyzing how diverse piety movements – one traditional and the other influenced by Salafism – recast their relationship to Islam on the basis of personal choice, independence from official authorities and self-organized horizontal transmission networks in rural Bulgaria. The subsequent analysis by Zadrožna (Chapter 7) focuses on how Macedonian-speaking Muslims make sense of their faith, and maneuver within broad ethno-religious categories, when deciding about intimate marriage choices and love preferences. Such choices seemingly reflect socio-cultural binds and individual preferences, thus, challenging assumptions of clear-cut ethno-religious boundaries exacerbated by decades of ethnic conflict. In Chapter 8, Trovimova analyzes the syncretic practices of the worship of saints, evolving at the interplay between Sufism and ‘popular’ Islam, among Muslim communities of Roma in Southern Serbia and Macedonia. All the chapters in Part II show that post-communist believers have embraced a relational and negotiable conception of faith, while ‘living’ practices have developed in an increasingly detached manner from the organized religious field and the clear categorical ethno-religious confines set out at the nation-state level. Indeed, secular influences but also sub-national, European and foreign suppliers of religion have been effectively competing with organized religion and nation-state ideologies for the hearts and minds of post-communist believers.

Part III of the volume explores how Muslims engage with the public space and construct legitimizing arguments in order to justify their positions on crucial choices facing their post-communist polities, including contested issues such as women’s rights, religious pluralism and membership in the EU. In Chapter 9, Sadriu investigates selected Imams’ contestation of the public ban on the usage of the hijab in Kosovo – with the hijab being represented as a lofty form of morality, a universal human right, a religious commandment and part of Albanian traditional culture. Such legitimizing tropes mobilize the language of Islamic values on the one hand, and European and democratic values on the other. The next chapter, by Funk (Chapter 10), analyzes Muslim believers’ public pursuit of faith through the practice of Friday prayer and the use of the hijab in Bosnia-Herzegovina. Accordingly, believers’ choices
evolve at the intersection of individual and collective concerns and thus
go beyond simple dichotomies such as public and private, secular and
religious and believer and non-believer that characterize the centrally
organized religious field. The last chapter by Endresen juxtaposes pub-
lic arguments provided by different groups – the central organization of
the Sunni community, a Sufi subgroup of it, and a self-organized group
of Salafist imams – on contested issues of religious authority, nation
and religious other in Albania. The analysis, similar to other chapters
in this section, demonstrates that religious groups make use of local tra-
ditions, Islamic dogma as well as global patterns and ideas to position
themselves on different issues facing their post-communist polities. The
chapters here demonstrate that the faithful navigate between top-down
elite/state level discourses, broad frames of ethno-national identities
and diverse religious practices and sources of legitimacy, using inter-
changeably cultural-traditional, religious-conservative and liberal and
European-informed arguments.

The concluding chapter by Olivier Roy revisits the current state of the
art on the post-communist recovery of Islam in the Balkans in light of
the evidence gleaned from the empirical chapters. It also draws together
main empirical and theoretical findings and outlines some future prog-
noses on emerging Islamic religiosities and the evolution of Islam in
the Balkans and beyond. Going against the main thrust of the existing
literature, the concluding chapter emphasizes the diversity of Muslim
religiosities playing out at the local level and enacted by local agents –
individual believers, religious authorities and state elites. It is precisely
the newborn religious actors who contribute to recasting and reconsider-
ing the assumed relationship between religion, ethno-national identities
and culture framed at the macro-political level. The net outcome is the
emergence of autonomous faith communities, which embrace a reli-
gious attitude, strive for religious freedoms, and aim to put religious
norms into practice. The chapter also posits that this is not an insulated
phenomenon confined to the Balkans or the post-communist space,
but rather a broader trend in the era of globalized religious influences
and European-wide patterns of religiosity. Nonetheless, Balkan Muslims
deserve a particular place in the context of analysis of European pat-
terns, and the rise of the so-called ‘European Islam’, to the extent they
have long encountered and absorbed ideas and models emanating from
the European space – including models of separation of church and
state, rights attributed to religious minorities, appropriate pursuit of reli-
giosity and ultimately what it is to be a good Muslim in modern and
secular European societies.
Bibliography


This page intentionally left blank
Part I

The Prevailing Public Discourse on Islam
Introduction

The main slogans of the democratic movement in Albania during the years 1990–1992 were ‘Freedom and Democracy’ and ‘We want Albania to be like Europe’ – with good reason. ‘Europe’ was then and is still imagined in Albania to be the land of freedom and democracy. Achievement of EU membership is seen as the end of the transition process from a totalitarian, backward and ‘Eastern’ society to a free, democratic, progressive and ‘Western’ one. Under the spell of this idea of ‘Europe’, as the new telos which has replaced the failed socialist model, the political and cultural elites in Albania have constructed the political myth of the ‘return to Europe’. This is a feature which is common to other ex-communist states in Central and Eastern Europe, at least since the 1980s, when dissident intellectuals put forward the idea that communist regimes were not at the vanguard of historical progress, but were more akin to a modern version of Asian ‘Oriental despotism’. The political myth of the ‘return to Europe’ has served to legitimate and politically orientate the post-communist reforms and policies toward the gravitational centers in Brussels and Washington. The other side of the discourse about joining Europe was the ‘escape from the East’, which primarily referred not only to the recent communist past, but also to the historic ‘backwardness’, ‘mentality and ‘barbarism’ that the region
The Prevailing Public Discourse on Islam

had inherited from a more distant past. In the case of Albania's political myth of the ‘return to Europe’, the ‘East’ might be more appropriately termed the ‘Orient’ and it represents two intervals – five centuries of Ottoman rule and nearly half a century of the communist regime – between the European past and present of Albanians.

Since the early 1990s, within this essentialist discourse about ‘returning to Europe’ and ‘escaping the East’, Islam in Albania has been considered the main cultural heritage of the Oriental past. The revival of public practices and symbols of Islam is viewed with suspicion by many intellectuals, who worry about the image of Albanians in the eyes of Europe. In this chapter, by relying upon the critique of Orientalism by Edward W. Said (1979), I argue that Islam in the public and secular discourse in Albania is largely viewed as an outsider within Europe and as a possible inhibitor to the European integration of Albania. By contrast, Christianity is seen as an indicator of the European identity of Albanians and as a cultural facilitator to the integration of the country into the European Union (EU). Although alternative discourses about Islam exist in Albania, this local version of Orientalism is hegemonic amongst the cultural elite because of its association with the idea of ‘Europe’ and, consequently, it also frames the counter-responses. For instance, certain Muslim actors in the country present Albanian Islam as part of ‘European Islam’, which is tolerant and different from the radical Islam of the Middle East (Merdjanova 2013: 116–129).

The method adopted in this chapter is that of discourse analysis of texts by Albanian intellectuals and opinion-makers during the post-communist period. The rest of the chapter is organized into three parts. The first part consists of a theoretical discussion of the discursive construction of ‘East’ and ‘Islam’ as constitutive ‘Others’ within Europe. In the second part, through various textual examples, I present the political myth of the ‘return of Albania to Europe’, its Orientalist background, and the place it accords to Islam and Christianity in the national and European identity of Albanians. In the final part, I conclude the chapter by drawing attention to the essentialist and exclusionary nature of this myth, which forecloses the positive association of the Muslim identity with both the nation and ‘Europe’.

The narrative boundaries of Europe

Analyzing the narrative boundaries of Europe is a quest to understand how symbolic power helps to naturalize the ‘hard’ political borders of Europe that have been contested throughout history and that continue to be contested in the present, like the debate about the final borders of
the EU (Eder 2006). Given the wide cultural diversity within Europe, the negative definition of Europe (what Europe is not) arguably remains for many Europeans a much more straightforward answer to the question of European identity than any positive definition (Delanty 1995). The most common negative historical definition of Europe and the West has been drawn through its comparison to the ‘East’ and Islam (Said 1979). The roots of this divide extend to the medieval and early modern idea of Christian unity to counter the Muslim threat. In the 15th century in the humanists’ writings, a sense of a ‘European’ identity began to take shape in opposition to the Ottoman Turks: ‘The novelty was that Europe became the reference point for the “sense of uselessness” directed against the “Turk”. The notion of Europe and wars against the Turks were united in an action program of “chasing the Turk out of Europe”’ (Mastnak 2003: 208). What until then was presented as an opposition between Christianity and Islam now took on the appearance of a struggle between a superior ‘Western’ culture and political consciousness against the barbarian ‘East’ (Bisaha 2004). From this earlier historical attitude toward the ‘barbarians’ coming from the East, the Western elites during the Enlightenment developed the divide between the progressive, rational and secular European civilization on one side and the exotic, fatalistic and backward ‘Eastern’ civilization on the other side. This Orientalist discourse extended to other parts of the world through colonialism and imperialism (Said 1979), but also created imaginary divisions within the European continent itself. Thus, Eastern Europe and the Balkans were treated as liminal zones between proper Europe and Asia (Wolff 1994; Todorova 1997). After the Second World War, ‘Europe’ was once again equated with the West, because communism was the aggressive competitor and a continuous threat to peace, so that the Iron Curtain provided a political border to the free world. The end of the Cold War did not extinguish the Orientalist discourses in Europe.

‘The East’ is indeed Europe’s other and it is continuously being recycled in order to represent European identities. Since the ‘Eastern absence’ is a defining trait of ‘European’ identities, there is no use talking about the end of an East/West divide in European history after the end of the Cold War. The question is not whether the East will be used in the forging of new European identities but how this is being done.

(Neumann 1999: 207)

The post-communist Orientalism is revived in public discourses in Europe that deal with two issues: (1) Islam as the defining Other of
Europe and (2) the ‘Europeanization’ of former communist states. The first issue, that of Islam as a constitutive Other of Europe, is exemplified by the popularity of the thesis of a clash of civilizations between the West and Islam that was developed by Bernard Lewis (1990), Samuel Huntington (1996) and other analysts of international affairs. This thesis caught the imagination of many people in the West, especially after 9/11 and subsequent terrorist attacks by Islamic fundamentalists on European soil and the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq. The idea of a perennial clash with Islam has featured in the European public spheres in such a way that ‘it is difficult today to reflect upon politics in European countries or the European Union without reflecting upon its encounter with Islam’ (Göle 2006: 249). This becomes apparent when one looks at the debate about Turkey’s potential membership of the EU and at the question concerning the loyalty of Muslim immigrants to liberal European states. While Turkey in the last decades has shown determination to render itself eligible for EU membership, several voices within the EU have risen against such aspirations on the grounds that Turkey is not part of European history and civilization. The closer Turkey comes to the fulfillment of economic, political and legal criteria for EU integration, the more the Muslim religion is stressed as incompatible with Europe.

There are not too subtle indications that an outwardly secular Europe is still too Christian when it comes to the possibility of imagining a Muslim country as part of the European community. One wonders whether Turkey represents a threat to Western civilization or rather an unwelcome reminder of the barely submerged yet inexpressible and anxiety-ridden ‘white’ European Christian identity.

(Casanova 2006: 241)

The discourse on the European identity is again pronounced when the issue of Muslim immigration comes up. The majority of immigrants in countries like Germany, France and the Netherlands come from Maghreb states and Turkey, while in Great Britain there are a substantial number of immigrants of Pakistani origin. Their Muslim background was not so visible 40–50 years ago when as workers they were invited to Western Europe, but it has gained ground recently, turning into a collective designation for immigrants of non-European origin, as an ascribed homogeneous label to differentiate them from the ‘indigenous’ European population. It is no coincidence that in the countries of the EU, the anti-immigrant discourse joins an Islamophobic discourse that ‘seeks to explain ills of the (global) social order by attributing them to
Islam’ (Semati 2010: 266). This is most visible in the theories of the extreme right and some public intellectuals in Europe about a new and hidden barbaric invasion realized from the East through immigration and breeding by Muslims from the Middle East and Africa, whose aim is the emergence of an Islamic Europe, for which they have coined the term ‘Eurabia’ (Carr 2006; Orsini 2006). In this discourse, Islam is presented in a negative light, as the antithesis of European values like tolerance, secularism, multiculturalism, gender equality and as the nemesis of Western modernity in general. As demonstrated in Chapter 2 in this volume, some of the Christian clergy join in and give some legitimacy to this discourse propagated by the extremist and racist right, especially when, like in Greece, there is a strong symbiosis between the official religion or the established church and the national identity.

The ‘Europeanization’ process of the former communist states in Europe is represented as a civilization slope that the Eastern European countries should climb in order to achieve the new global utopia of liberal democracy already cherished in Western Europe (Melegh 2006). Consequently, the EU–Eastern enlargement is seen as the extension of peace and progress to a region that represents Western Europe’s past: nationalism, ethnic wars, authoritarianism and under-development. Post-communist countries cannot negotiate the terms of ‘Europeanization’, but are obliged to follow the prescriptions of the EU, the IMF, and the World Bank if they truly want to achieve ‘democracy’, ‘capitalism’ and ultimately to become European. For some, ‘Europeanness’ is a given, while others must gain it by hard work in order to overcome and abandon their ‘Oriental’ instincts and cultural traits.

Partly in order to respond to the perceived and genuine material, technological and social backwardness of their countries vis-à-vis Western Europe, and partly to anticipate and respond to the perceptions of Westerners about them, the political and cultural elites in Eastern Europe have (re)constructed their national identities around a ‘lack’ of Europe. In the eyes of modernizing elites, their people lack certain positive characteristics of Western Europeans, and the cultural dimension of Europeanization precisely aims to fill that gap. Many in Eastern Europe adopted the Orientalist view that communism was something essentially non-European which was enforced upon them from Asia and threatened their national and European identity. Therefore, through following the EU’s framework of conditionality, they imagine that their countries are returning to their European home. This ‘return to Europe’ might be considered a political myth, in the sense
of a common narrative through which the members of a society can confer significance to their political condition (Bottici 2007). Nevertheless, we should not forget that we are mainly dealing here with elite-generated narratives that try to mold the everyday life of the people and (their) ‘popular’ culture. In a critical vein, this contemporary political and cultural phenomenon has been alternatively called ‘Eastern European Orientalism’ (Kovaˇcevi´c 2008), ‘self-Orientalization’ (Georgiev 2012) or ‘internal Orientalism’ (Neuburger 2007), because the Westernizing national elites see the common people as a whole, or certain groups therein, as being ‘European but not quite’, ‘Oriental’ and even ‘barbaric’. Although internal Orientalism coupled with Europeanization can constitute a means of self-criticism and a genuine effort to improve the well-being of society, it does not remove the essentialization of the differences between West and East, and it perpetuates the existing power relations between the two (Georgiev 2012: 77). The internal Orientalism of many public intellectuals in contemporary Albania is exemplary in this regard, because through the reworking of the myth of a ‘return to Europe’, the ‘Europeanization’ discourse joins that of Islam as the threat to the European identity of all Albanians.

The ‘return to Europe’ and Islam in transitional Albania

The myth of the ‘return to Europe’ and the process of European integration in Albania

The idea of the ‘return to Europe’ (or the West) in Albania has the features of a political myth that shapes the processes of post-communist transition and of EU integration. This myth assumes a perennial European unity and identity that has never existed and further supposes a primordial European identity of Albanians, which cannot be logically sustained by the simple fact that the Albanian nation, as an identity encompassing all the Albanians, came into being only in the second half of the 19th century, through the discourses of some Albanian intellectuals and politicians. Beginning with Albania’s independence from the Ottoman Empire and the modernization of Albanian society, they attributed to their nation a European essence in opposition to the Asian and debased character of the Turks (Sulstarova 2007: 41–66). Moreover, the Albanian version of the ‘return to Europe’ myth, like the versions of other nations in Eastern Europe, posits equivalence between the past and the present by means of a teleological argument. Accordingly, history moves toward greater European unity and progress and not being part of this movement means absenting one’s self from history itself. The myth tells that the main culprits for separating Albania from Europe
were the Ottoman invaders between the 15th and the 20th century and then the post-war communist regime until the early 1990s. In light of these two historical separations from Europe, the present aspiration of Albania to join the EU takes on a dramatic significance. The renowned Albanian writer, Ismail Kadare, upon his election in 1996 as an associate member of the French Academy of Moral and Political Sciences, addressed this body with these words:

The Albanians, the people I belong to, have lost Europe twice: the first time in the 15th century, together with all the other Balkan peoples, and the second time after the Second World War, when they fell under the Communist rule. I am not overstating the case when I say today that after the break down of Communism, the Albanians live with the anxiety of a third loss of Europe. This would be fatal to them, would be equal to their death.

(Kadare 2001: 83–84)

The myth of a ‘return to Europe’ is simultaneously a quest for a collective answer about a tormenting historical experience. If the Albanians today wonder about the meaning of preserving their distinguished culture throughout history, an answer is given, again by Kadare: ‘To keep the country anchored to the body of the mother continent, that was the main aspiration and the main mission of the Albanian culture’ (ibid.: 84).

In the political and cultural discourses in transitional Albania, the EU integration process is seen as the means of returning Albania to the ‘mother continent’, from which it had been forcefully separated. However, after more than 20 years of transition, to what extent has Albania advanced in fulfilling the criteria for EU membership? The initial enthusiasm and the fact that, since 1991, all Albanian governments have placed EU integration at the top of their agendas did not translate into a smooth ‘Europeanization’ according to the Copenhagen political criteria. The political elite of Albania served the myth of a ‘return to Europe’ to legitimize its rule internally and externally, while most of the time the same elite has been slow in implementing any political and juridical reforms that would inhibit its freedom of action and would penalize many of its corrupt activities. From the perspective of the EU, the political instability, the politicized state bureaucracy and the failure to fight corruption and organized crime have considerably slowed the integration process of Albania when compared to other countries in the region. In the framework of its strategy of pacification and stability in the Western Balkans, the EU has supported Albania’s integration process.
It has put greater emphasis on the reformation of the state bureaucracy, but positive results have been limited due to the unwillingness of ruling majorities to adequately implement the legal framework (Elbasani 2013). Nevertheless, despite the fact that Albania acquired the candidacy status in June 2014, the road ahead to full integration seems a long one; this fact is also compounded by the enlargement fatigue of the EU and the current financial crisis. As Albania approaches EU membership, many Albanians have become aware that this will be a long and difficult process, but their wish to proceed on this path has not diminished. The image of Europe might not seem as bright as before, but faced with the corruption and irresponsibility of political elites, for many, the integration process became the only way to prevent things from getting worse. As an Albanian political analyst put it, ‘the desperation within Albania fed the necessity for Europe. Now the integration is not seen much like a hope of improvement, as it is seen as the only way to stop degradation’ (Kajsiu 2012).

**Islam, the nation and politics in Albania**

Before looking into the cultural discourses about ‘Europe’ and ‘Islam’, I shall provide a short introduction to the historical presence of Islam in Albania. The Islamization of Albanians started with the Ottoman invasion in the 15th century and lasted until the independence of 1912. The majority of Albanians converted to Islam, but substantial Christian minorities remain to the present day: Catholic Albanians live in the north-west of Albania, whereas Orthodox Albanians are situated mainly in southern regions, but they are also present in the middle of the country, including the capital. Outside Albania, the dominant religion of the Albanians in Kosovo, Montenegro and Macedonia is Islam, and the number of Christian Albanians is much smaller. The Muslim Albanians of the region of Chameria in Greece were violently expelled to Albania at the end of the Second World War by Greek nationalist forces. During the Ottoman period, one would expect Albanian Muslims to be treated more favorably by the Ottoman central power, and this was true in most cases, but one should also keep in mind that, in some regions, Orthodox and Catholic Albanians that were able to resist Ottoman influences could carry arms like the Muslims, and could lead a mostly independent life, like, for instance, the tribes in the north-west mountains, the Himara region on the Ionian coast, or the Suli region near Ioannina (presently in Greece). In social terms, Muslim and Christian peasants were subjugated to the Muslim landlords, but the existence of rich Christian merchants besides the landowning class should not be
forgotten. Islam in Albania was not uniform, and various sects have been present there for centuries. Among the Islamic sects, the main one is Bektashism, which has strong Shia influences in its doctrine and currently has a separate organizational structure from the Muslim community of Albania, the latter being the main organization of the Sunni Muslims.

The Albanian nationalist movement in the late 19th century, called the National Renaissance, was characterized by an emphasis on the Albanian language, instead of on the religion. The verses ‘Do not look to the churches or mosques/The religion of Albanians is Albanianism’, by Vaso Pasha, became the central slogan of the movement. However, the reality was far from the ideals of the patriots, because religious cleavages had important effects upon the development of a supra-religious Albanian national identity (Clayer 2009). When the great powers of Europe drew the boundaries of the Albanian state in 1913, a substantial part of the Albanian population, most of them Muslims, were included in Yugoslavia and Greece, where they were relegated to the status of persecuted minorities. In their case, the interrelation between national and religious identities followed different trajectories compared to Islam in Albania.

Interwar Albania, the only state with a majority Muslim population in Europe (if Turkey is not counted), followed a secular stance, at the same time reserving for itself the right of regulation of, and interference with, religious communities. The Sunni Islamic Community proclaimed independence from the Ottoman Caliphate in 1923, and after the abolition of the Bektashi headquarters in Turkey in 1925, Albania became the world ‘headquarter’ of the Bektashi sect. The nationalization of both Muslim communities occurred in line with the nation-building policy of the state. After the Second World War, the communist regime persecuted religious institutions and subordinated them to its own aims and needs, principally the building of a socialist society. In 1967, it took the unprecedented measure of closing all religious institutions and forbidding all religious ceremonies and rituals. The new constitution approved in 1978 proclaimed Albania an atheistic country. Public religious rituals and activities were permitted in 1990, in the same year when the regime finally allowed political pluralism. Since then, the different religious communities have been rebuilding their spiritual and educational organizations amid transitional reforms in other spheres of the political and social life of Albania. The present constitution recognizes the freedom of religion in the country, the non-involvement of
the state in religious matters, the equality of religions, and gives various religious communities the status of legal persons (Article 10 of the Constitution of Albania). The latest population census was conducted in 2011 and, for the first time in several decades, included optional questions about ethnicity and religion. According to the Institute of Statistics that organized the census, 56.7 per cent of the population declared themselves to be Muslims (Sunni), 10.03 per cent Catholic Christians, 6.75 per cent Orthodox Christians, 2.09 per cent Bektashi Muslims, 0.14 per cent Evangelists, 2.5 per cent atheists, 5.49 per cent believers without specifying their religion and 13.89 per cent did not give a response to the question about religious identity (INSTAT 2011). Contrary to what happened in Albania under communism, the Albanians currently living in Kosovo, Macedonia and Montenegro have had an unbroken affiliation with Islam, as well as close links with Turkey, due to substantial and state-forced migration of Albanians to Turkey in the 1950s and 1960s. Given the political context in the former Yugoslavia, Islam has often served as a marker of Albanian national identity, in contrast to the Orthodox Christian Slavs, although religion did not play a mobilizing role in the conflicts of 1998–1999 in Kosovo and of 2001 in Macedonia (Merdjanova 2013: 42–49).

Does the religious revival in post-communist Albania in general, and the revival of the Islamic faith in particular, endanger in one way or another the Europeanization of the country, both in the broader sense of norm appropriation and in the more limited sense of EU integration? In a handful of studies devoted to the position of religions in transitional Albania, there are no strong indicators to validate such a claim. Despite the various activities of foreign religious communities and missionaries, Albania remains a secular country and most of the people do not frequent religious sites. An individualization of religion is evident now compared to the pre-communist period. Religion does not find a prominent place in public debates, although the representation and the symbolic power of religion remain important in the eyes of many Albanians (Clayer 2005). All religious communities and organizations have supported the processes of democratization and European integration, although the role played by them has been a modest one (Elbasani 2010). According to a study based on interviews with the top clerics of the main religious communities in Albania, the common denominator of their discourses on ‘Albanianess’ is that the ideal Albanian is a patriot, religious and at the same time a champion of religious tolerance; he does not mix religion with politics, he is pro-European, democratic and remains loyal to local and national traditions (Endresen 2010: 251). The
chapter in this volume by Tošić is an example that shows how ordinary urban Albanians adopt a relaxed and ‘calm’ attitude toward religiosity and religions, and that ‘excessive’ religiosity by some is perceived as ‘uncultured’ and foreign to the tradition and national character of Albanians (Chapter 4).

The Orientalist discourse of Albanian intellectuals

The most focal articulation of the myth of a ‘return to Europe’ is that of the public intellectuals, mostly writers, journalists, political analysts and literary critics. They have taken over the duty of the moral representation of the people against the corrupted political elite. By opposing culture to politics, they have argued that the Albanian culture has ancient European roots, and it belongs to the broader Western civilization. Operating with an essentialist conception of culture, they search for cultural explanations for the ‘non-European’ and ‘Oriental’ behavior of the Albanian political elite, and they find them in extra-European historical influences. This discourse of opposing the European roots of Albanian culture to non-European influences on the political elite has developed since the early 1990s in tandem with the globalized debates about the clash of civilizations, as demonstrated by the titles of some books published by public intellectuals: *The Line of Theodosius Reappears: Which Side Will the Albanians Take?* (Plasari 1992); *Searching for the Roots ... or the Return of Albanians to History* (Misha 1997); *The European Identity of Albanians* (Kadare 2006a); or *The Conspiracy against Freedom: Albania in the East-West Crossroad and the Challenge of Civilizational Reorientation* (Stefani 2013).

In various texts by Albanian intellectuals, ‘East’ or ‘Orient’ may stand for Asia, the Byzantines, the Ottomans, Turkey, Islam, the Middle East, Arabs, the Soviet Union, Russia, communism or China. It represents despotism, backwardness and social apathy, while ‘West’ and ‘Europe’ signify democracy, liberty, prosperity and development. Sometimes, ‘East’ is a negative historical spirit, mentality or influence, from which Albania is escaping at present, like in the following quote from the writer Ismail Kadare:

> The only thing that interests to me is the orientation and anchorage of Albania in the West. Albania is fed up with the East. For Albania the East is worse than it is for the Polish, worse than is it for the Czechs or for the Hungarians, because for Albania the East always means the Soviet East, Chinese East, Ottoman East... in other words,
The Prevailing Public Discourse on Islam

the East is a misfortune, a calamity. All the time, the Albanian culture, the Albanian aspiration has strived to cut the connections with the East.

(Kadare and Fernandez-Récatala 1999: 195–196)

The main ‘Eastern’ ‘other’ in the Albanian version of Orientalism is the Ottoman Empire. The half-millennium Ottoman rule is seen as the ‘Oriental’ period in Albanian history, and the Turks are considered as Asian colonists who polluted European blood. They also brought with them Islam, an Asian religion which was imposed upon the hitherto Christian culture of the Albanians, thus inhibiting the ‘return to Europe’ of the nation. For example, during a conference entitled The Catholic Clergy and the Principles of Western Democracy that was held in Tirana in 2004, the ex-ambassador of Albania to the Vatican City stated that:

Albania and the Albanian people are Europe and there are no forces that would make them to be otherwise. Maybe there is a minority that thinks differently and which is composed by the descendants of the old Asian colonists that came to Albania after the invasion of the Ottoman Turks; it is a minority that wants to be imposed to the overwhelming majority of Albanians, with whom they share the religion but not ethnicity.

(Kamsi 2004: 18)

From this quote, it becomes apparent that the European ‘belonging’ of Albanians is considered firstly as a primordial trait, and secondly as a community of common values and interests. The EU integration serves primarily as an affirmation of identity and this is why those who are imagined as being against the EU integration, or even Euroskeptics, are also imagined as being foreigners, who may have been assimilated into Albania, but are still averse to the natural European path of Albanians by blood. Typically those ‘foreigners’ are imagined as possessing ‘different memories and nostalgias’ (Kadare 2006b) from those of the Albanian majority.

The above quotation infers that the Albanian Muslims in general are Europeans, but the existence of the Orientals is valorized amongst the Muslim Albanians and not among the Christian Albanians. This brings us to the question of how the myth of the ‘return to Europe’ is linked to religious identities. In her study on the Muslim communities in the Balkans, Ina Merdjanova explains that this myth was often connected to
a rediscovery of Christian ‘roots’ for the nation after decades of official atheism under the communists:

Frequently, this symbolic return was framed as the reclaiming of the nation’s Christian roots and identity, sapped by the authoritarian regimes. Within this framework, Islam was re-described as the archetypal ‘Other’, and this left Muslims with the options to either reopen and develop further earlier narratives of the compatibility of Islam with European modernity and of their being ‘indigenous European Muslims’, or occasionally to ‘return’ to ‘Christianity’.

(2013: 118–119)

Nathalie Clayer, a senior researcher on Islam in Albania, has stated that the Muslims may nominally constitute a numerical majority, but their intellectual, social and political situation is that of a minority (2005: 22). Islam does not enjoy a high status among urban, mostly secular intellectuals and among the young generations who look to Western culture and lifestyles. It is sometimes stigmatized in the media as an Eastern, intolerant, patriarchal and backward religion, associated with the Ottomans in history and with terrorism in the present day. On the contrary, the Catholic Church and Protestant missionaries have tried to embody the West in the eyes of the Albanians (ibid.: 33–37). The fact that Albania is a secular country does not stop the political elite from capitalizing on Christian symbolism and downplaying the Islamic equivalent. The day Pope John Paul II beatified Mother Teresa, a Nobel Prize winner of Albanian descent, was proclaimed as a national holiday in Albania. Islamic symbols and images, however, are used in the political battle to attack the opposition. For example, the main political parties’ media outlets present photoshopped pictures of certain politicians wearing the turban, so as to make them resemble the well-known global images of Bin Laden (Hatibi 2005). This political discourse, which looks for Islamic symbols to represent the ‘anti-European’, reinforces the idea that Islam is not compatible with Europe and the European identity. The global war on terror is another motivation for the adoption of a discourse of securitization about the returning Albanian graduates from religious schools in the Middle East and about the Islamic charity foundations opened by foreign nationals from the Middle East (Bumçi 2004). As a consequence, religious and non-religious intellectuals in Albania have often categorized the tolerant way Islam is practiced in the country as ‘European Islam’ or ‘Balkan Islam’. This is a rhetorical strategy that simultaneously differentiates and homogenizes Islam along a
The Prevailing Public Discourse on Islam

continental/civilizational line: the tolerant and benign Islam belongs to Europe, and the radical and dangerous Islam, to Asia.

For those public intellectuals in Albania that see the ‘return to Europe’ as embodying a spiritual return to the European roots of Albanian culture, ‘unspoiled’ by the Eastern influence of the Ottomans and communism, the presence of Christianity, especially of Catholicism in Albanian history and culture, is the most valuable proof of the European identity of their nation. In the words of Kadare, ‘by being one of the first Christian countries of Europe, Albania, as a consequence, was a foundation ground for the European Western civilization’ (Kadare 1998: 32). Assuming a Christian identity for the Europe of today means that religious identities remain important in the process of European integration, and that they should be valued accordingly. In this respect, although in contemporary Albania the Catholics are a minority, the value of Catholicism as a national symbol is higher for Albanians than that of other religions. This is what Kadare explains to his interlocutor, the writer Denis Fernandez-Récatala, about religions in Albania:

For example Catholicism, with its headquarters in the Vatican – this specification might look exaggerated, but it is not inappropriate – is for us the open door towards the West, while Orthodoxy... seems a little away from it. Concerning Islamism, even if it is an inconsiderable danger for us, it is never a symbol of Europe.

(Kadare and Fernandez-Récatala 1999: 226–227, emphasis added)

Here we have a scale of Europeanness of three world religions. Although all three have a long historical presence on the soil of the continent, if ‘Europe’ equals ‘the West’, then Catholicism qualifies as fully European, Orthodoxy partially at best and Islam as non-European. It is interesting to note that in the quote ‘Catholicism’ and ‘Orthodoxy’ refer mainly to the religious doctrines, but ‘Islamism’ in the Albanian language might refer both to Islamic religious doctrine and to ‘political Islam’, in other words Islamic fundamentalism. Kadare’s association of Islam/Islamism with a possible danger is related to the non-European character of the religion. An emphasis upon Islam would distract the Albanians from their European path. In 1990, on the eve of Albania’s reinstatement of political pluralism, Kadare held a meeting with Ramiz Alia, the then first secretary of the Communist Party. During the meeting, he called for the re-establishment of religious freedom by assuring Alia that Christianity
will prevail in the country because of its association with European culture and ‘memories and nostalgia of the period before the coming of the Turks’. The turn toward Christianity would be a ‘great historical correction’ for the Albanian nation and would ‘speed up its union with the mother continent: Europe’ (cited in Clayer 2005: 35).

Besides being non-European, or non-Western, Islam is seen as being at the roots of Albanian Communism. Albanian Communism was one of the most rigid atheistic regimes in the world. From 1967 onwards, it banned all religious institutions and practices in the country, and many churches and mosques were demolished or utilized for other functions. Despite this, since the first years of political pluralism, it became common in the Albanian public sphere to attribute an Eastern essence to both Islam and communism. Some intellectuals even wrote that the communist leader Enver Hoxha had a hidden Islamic inclination or agenda for keeping Albania outside Europe. Kadare hinted at this through a literary allegory in one of his stories published immediately after the collapse of communism (Kadare 1991), and the expatriate writer Arshi Pipa (1993: 25–26) stated openly that Hoxha in his career was heavily influenced by the Muslim background of his family. The writer and literary critic Aurel Plasari (2005: 39) stated that ‘the anti-Europeanism of the dictator was intertwined with a latent anti-Christian complex’, stemming from his alleged sympathy for Islam. The jurist Spartak Ngjela (2006: 99–100, 106) has argued that the anti-Western and isolationist nature of Albanian communism is explained through Hoxha’s inclination toward the Islamic and Confucian collectivist mentality.

Not just Islamic fundamentalists, but also Muslim identity itself and state relations with other Muslim countries, including Islamic organizations and associations, are viewed with suspicion as being unacceptable and incompatible with integration in the EU (Elbasani 2015). Many public intellectuals have called into question the Muslim identity of the majority of the population, and they reject the labeling of Albania by foreigners as a Muslim country. When the first post-communist government made Albania a member of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC), there was an outcry from many intellectuals who thought that such a move would give the country a Muslim character and would jeopardize Albania’s bid for EU membership (Clayer 2005: 23). Voicing these concerns, Ismail Kadare in a conversation with the French writer Alain Bosquet said that if there was any foreign advice to Albania recommending that it become a member of the OIC, this might be a ruse for pushing Albania to Asia again (Kadare and Bosquet 1999:
Another Albanian writer residing in Paris wrote that Albania was deemed to be a ‘depot of Islamic munitions’:

Albania is knocking hard on the doors of Europe, while in reality she has entered into the Islamic League... Since some time ago, Albania is suffering from the band of a Muslim country, a band which we have stamped ourselves with a hot iron on her forehead... [Skanderbeg] fought against the Ottoman Turks for a quarter of century and has triumphed not only to save Albania, but also to become a barrier for the European Christianity.

(Tozaj 1995)

In order to remove the stigma of Albania as a Muslim country, the author called for a census which would declare that the Muslims are in fact a minority in the country (ibid.). We can see here how the criticism of a political decision is built upon fears of Europe (symbolized by Paris) and how it would view Albanians, and it is followed by a suggestion to discipline the country accordingly in order for Europe to look at it in a more positive light. In other words, Europeanization in part consists of discarding the annoying presence of Islam in Albanian public life and culture. The debate on the OIC has continued through the years and in February 2014 the Speaker of Parliament even refused an invitation to participate in a high-level event of the OIC. On that occasion, a spokesperson for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs announced that the status of Albania in this organization was still uncertain and needed to be clarified (MAPO 2014).

Conclusion

This chapter attempted to make the case that Orientalism has become a common-sense lens through which many public intellectuals in contemporary Albania conceptualize their nation standing in a crossroad between West and East. They describe the transition period as a struggle to escape from the pull of the Ottoman and communist traditions of the past in order to join the EU in the future. These intellectuals, among them the well-known writer Ismail Kadare, have developed the political myth of a ‘return to Europe’ to push forward the cultural ‘reunion’ of Albania with Europe, in the face of a corrupt political elite inclined toward Oriental despotism. The myth exerts moral pressure for the Europeanization of Albanian society, so that it does not lose the chance to be part of a Europe united in the common values of democracy,
freedom and progress. On the other hand, one consequence of the myth of a ‘return to Europe’ and of the Orientalist discourse in general is that the presence of ‘Islam’ in Albania is problematized as being a hindrance to joining Europe. While the importance of Islam in Albanian history and culture is downgraded, the Christian ‘roots’ of an imagined pre-Ottoman Albania are emphasized as a proof of the European identity of Albanians. Furthermore, Islam is presented as cultural or civilizational bedrock for the emergence of the communist totalitarianism in Albania.

Albanian Orientalism is based upon binary, homogenizing and essentializing concepts that cannot serve as a lens to adequately understand the complex political and social dynamics of Albania, offering little but a poor understanding of the contemporary global context (see Introduction). It is fed on similar discourses within the EU that construct ‘Islam’ as an adversary or enemy of Europe. As civic and social solidarities across state, national, ethnic and religious lines are being shattered in the EU under the pressure of the current economic crises, such exclusive discourses on the Islamic Other are gaining ground, and this is reflected in Albania in the form of an anxiety that ‘Europe’ will shut the doors to Albanians because of the Ottoman and Muslim heritage in their history and culture. The anxiety is also reinforced by the polarization in world politics caused by Islamic global terrorism and those responses that do not distinguish between the culprits of terrorist offences and Muslims at large. Therefore, the myth of a ‘return to Europe’ must be deconstructed not only in the name of an open Albanian culture that looks to its future in a multicultural and united Europe but also as part of ongoing emancipative attempts to overcome the prejudices and historical animosities throughout the continent and throughout the world.

Bibliography


Alexandros Sakellariou

Introduction

The presence of Islam in the West has caused continuous debates, especially after 9/11. Nowadays, millions of Muslims live in Europe, the US and Canada, but while for many people, Muslims are just another religious community, for others Islam is a major threat that imperils the Christian cultural heritage of the West, and calls into question the civic and political liberties achieved after the Enlightenment and the French revolution. Scholars and studies from a wide range of disciplines have tried to understand the presence of Islam in the West (Ramadan 2004; Roy 2006, 2007; Al Ahmez and Focas 2007; Jeldtoft and Nielsen 2012; Elbasani and Saatçıoğlu 2014; Elbasani 2015) and the reaction of the West toward Muslims (Gorak-Sosnowska 2011; van der Valk 2012; Cesari 2013; Gorak-Sosnowska 2014). Within this framework, Greece is an excellent case for the purpose of analyzing the phenomenon of religious panic about Islam, which constitutes the main subject of this chapter.

More particularly, the purpose here is, on the one hand, to examine how the Orthodox Church of Greece, a traditional agent that contributed to the formation of the national identity during and after the War of Independence against the Turks in 1821, reacts to Islam and its presence in Greek society by examining the public discourse of some of the higher clergy members. On the other hand, the chapter aims to examine the views of the neo-Nazi political party Golden Dawn, a modern agent that considers itself the protector of the national identity,
especially given the party’s increasing influence within the Greek society. By focusing on these discourses, I aim to present a dynamic account of the explanatory factors and related transformations of the existing anti-Islamic discourses throughout the years.

This chapter argues that these two agents express hostile attitudes toward Islam and Muslims because of the memories of 400 years of Ottoman occupation, and the Orthodox Christian identity of Greek society as constructed during the process of nation-state building, which led to the exclusion of the ethnic and religious ‘others’ (see Introduction). Another reason for this hostility is the arrival of many Muslim immigrants from Africa and the East, which exacerbated the vision of Islam as the civilizational ‘other’ that was already embedded in the existing discourses. These factors contribute to the creation of a religious panic concerning Islam, which feeds into the image that the Greek media reproduce about Islam and its radical forms around the globe.

Theoretical implications, the method and the material

Bearing in mind the discussion concerning moral panic (Cohen 1972; Thompson 1998; Goode and Ben-Yehuda 2009; Rohloff and Wright 2010), I call the fear of Islam, religious panic, a term that conveys cultural, moral, and also ethno-national panic. This kind of panic will be examined in its historical context and as a legacy that was transmitted from the early nation-state building of the Greek state after the liberation from the Ottoman rule up to the present day. In this way, I intend to highlight the strength of this stereotypical discourse, which leads to the construction of the ‘national self’ against the ‘other’, and which is similar to other cases in this volume, in particular, Chapter 1 about political orientalism in Albania. In this approach, the Orthodox Church represents the traditional form of religious panic about Islam, which is mainly manifested via encyclical letters and public speeches. Golden Dawn, on the other hand, represents the modern form, manifested via social media and the Internet as well as through grassroots mobilization, and which tends to be more aggressive.

The method that shall be applied to this material is the classic discourse analysis, based on thematic categories. Discourse contributes to the composition of the rules and regulations of social life as well as of relations, identities and institutions (Fairclough 1992: 65). Therefore, discourse has become a very important tool for social scientists in their efforts to study and understand society and social relationships. Discourse analysis treats a wide range of linguistic or non-linguistic
material: speeches, reports, manifestos, historical events and interviews as ‘texts’ and ‘writings’ that enable subjects to experience the world of objects, words and practices (Howarth 2000: 10).

The material used for the analysis draws on various sources. The material about the Orthodox Church of Greece comes mainly from its official website, www.ecclesia.gr, from its official journal, Ecclesia, and from encyclical letters and public announcements of some of the Greek Orthodox metropolitans who are against Islam. The material about Golden Dawn comes from the party’s official website, www.xryshaygh.com, and from the official website of the party’s youth division, which is called antepithesi (i.e., counter-attack), www.antepithesi.gr.

The analysis shows that the main category derived from the public discourse of both Church officials and Golden Dawn is that Islam is a threat to the West in general, and to Greece in particular. According to this vision, Islam is not compatible with Christianity and the West, and is destined to produce a clash of civilizations (Huntington 1996), an argument emphasized especially by Golden Dawn. This main category is further divided into the following themes: (1) The violent character of Islam; (2) Islam’s inferiority to Christianity and the West; and (3) Muslims’ quest for public space, especially in the context of building new mosques.

When analyzing the discourse of Islam, it is very important to bear in mind that both Church officials and Golden Dawn appeal to a wide public and that they influence great number of people. The Orthodox Church’s influence goes back in history and is related to its state links and the privileged place it enjoys within the Greek society. The vast majority of Greek people (more than 80 per cent) self-define as Greek Orthodox (although there are doubts about this figure). On the other hand, Golden Dawn has managed to augment its influence since 2010, and this is apparent in all subsequent elections, which rendered them the third largest power in the political field. Also, bearing in mind the historical context of nation-state building, the soil has been fertile for the re-production of stereotypes, and even aggressive attitudes toward Muslims. Nevertheless, even though some Orthodox metropolitans are linked with and present themselves as sympathizers of Golden Dawn, there are some differences between them. First of all, the Orthodox Church as an institution does not reject the Islamic faith. Some metropolitans and local officials have addressed aggressive sermons and encyclical letters to their flock, but they do not represent the Church’s official position. Golden Dawn, on the other hand, tends to regard Islam as a threat to the very existence of the Greek nation, state
and society. Furthermore, even the metropolitans that express views against Islam provide Muslim immigrants with food and shelter, while the Golden Dawn organizes food donations for Greek people only, and of course, only for those of an Orthodox persuasion (Koronaïou and Sakellariou 2013).

A history of state-building and the bifurcation of Islam in Greek society

When talking about Islam and Muslims in Greece, it is crucial to remember that Greece, like other regions in the Balkans (see Introduction), experienced a long period of Ottoman rule. This caused a serious trauma to the collective identity of the Greek people, which is still present in the collective memory of the nation. This was bolstered by ongoing conflicts between Greece and Turkey such as the Greco-Turkish war of 1897, the ‘Asia Minor Catastrophe’ of 1922, and the Turkish invasion in Cyprus of 1974, as well as more recent crises during the 1980s and 1990s. Accordingly, many Greeks, consciously or unconsciously, perceive Turks as the one and only basic enemy, which has always threatened Greece’s sovereignty and conspired against its freedom. Such interpretations of the Ottoman occupation have informed state policies that were inherently defamatory against Muslims: branding them as foreigners to be expelled, stigmatizing them vis-à-vis the dominant ethnic group and advocating measures of homogenization (as elaborated in Introduction). Religion and the Orthodox Church have also played a crucial role in the formation of a homogenized and uniform Greek national identity.

Beside the historical dimension, Greece includes substantial Muslim communities, which can be divided into two main categories. First of all, there is the Muslim minority of Thrace in Northern Greece. The region of Western Thrace in the north-eastern part of Greece is home to a significant population of about 120,000 Muslims, inhabiting the region together with a Greek Christian majority. Thrace’s Muslim community was exempt, along with the Greeks of Constantinople, from the mandatory population exchange between Greece and Turkey agreed in 1923 with the Treaty of Lausanne. Signed in the aftermath of Greece’s military defeat in Asia Minor, the Treaty includes a section on the ‘Protection of Minorities’, an agreement between the two countries containing a series of provisions to guarantee the rights of the minority populations. Even though the Muslims of Thrace are Greek citizens (they can vote, they serve in the Greek army, etc.), they face serious problems due to their religion, but also due to their national background, which, for the
majority of them, is Turkish (Tsitselikis 1999; Ktistakis 2006; Katsikas 2012). Many of them have internally immigrated to Athens, where they have lived for many years. This group of people represents ‘old’ Islam, which is visibly different from ‘new’ Islam, as epitomized by most recent waves of Muslim-origin immigrants (Tsitselikis 2011).

The second group is generally composed of Muslim immigrants, who, far from being a unified group, belong to different nationalities. Greek society was for many years a homogeneous society based on the Greek language, the Orthodox religion and a common cultural heritage. Although other religious and ethnic communities already existed in Greek society, their number was not high until 1991 when, after the fall of the communist regime in Albania, thousands of immigrants crossed the borders. Almost overnight, Greek society changed from one of emigration into one of immigration, a host country for immigrants.

Furthermore, in recent years, Greek society has faced an increase in immigrants from Bangladesh, Palestine, Iraq, Iran, Pakistan, Tunisia, Morocco, Algeria, Afghanistan, Syria and Indonesia (Triandafyllidou 2001; Imam and Tsakiridou 2003; Antoniou 2007; Triandafyllidou and Kokkali 2010; Triandafyllidou and Kouki 2013), to name only the most numerous groups of immigrants, who came to Greece crossing the nautical border with Turkey in the Aegean Sea, and paying high prices to people-smugglers. The vast majority of them are gathered in the Athens region, and the second largest group is in Thessaloniki. Native Muslims of the ‘old Islam’, however, generally do not have any relationship with the new immigrant population.

The actual number of immigrants in Greece is not certain. According to the last census of 2011, the foreign population that lives permanently in Greece, that is, those who have declared so during the census regardless of any official documentation (including European Union citizens), was 911,929 inhabitants. Some argue that nowadays, their total number surpasses 1,500,000 if one includes those that do not have a permit, and of course such persons were not counted in the last census. The census does not ask for religious affiliation. However, based on the nationalities found during the census, the Muslim immigrant population could be around 100,000–150,000 people. According to other unofficial calculations, Muslim immigrants number more than 200,000.

Muslims, both old and new, face two basic and common problems, especially those who live in urban areas of Athens. Firstly, they lack official places to pray and they are obliged to meet in warehouses or basements of buildings, and are thus treated as an invisible element within society (Sakellariou 2011). The construction of a mosque
in Athens has caused serious debates, not only within the Orthodox Church (Anagnostou and Gropas 2010), but also amongst political parties and in the press (Triandafyllidou and Gropas 2009). Secondly, there is no Muslim cemetery in Athens, and the relatives of the deceased need to transport them either to Northern Thrace or to the country of their origin, which, of course, is rather costly.

Yet, the public seems to be oblivious to their necessities. A survey on Greek views on Islam and Muslims conducted by a private company in 2010 found that Greeks had very little information on Islam: 77 per cent of the respondents knew nothing about Islam and 83 per cent of them have never read the Koran. The survey also confirmed negative attitudes: 51 per cent of the respondents believed that Islam leads to violence much more easily than other religions, 53 per cent considered that the relations between Islam and the West are bad or quite bad, 67 per cent answered that there is probably a clash between Islam and Christianity nowadays, and 55 per cent foresaw a clash between Christianity and Islam in the future. Comparing Christianity and Islam, 83 per cent said that Christianity respects women more than Islam, 73 per cent that Christianity is more peaceful than Islam, 64 per cent that Christianity created a greater civilization than Islam, 42 per cent that Islam has greater connection with politics compared to Christianity and 82 per cent that Islam is more dogmatic and cruel than Christianity. When it came to the context of Greece, 27 per cent believed that the country is threatened by Islam. Forty-six per cent disagreed with the construction of an Islamic mosque in Athens. Few years earlier, in 2006, 52 per cent were reportedly in favor of the construction and 34 per cent against and in 2009, 56 per cent were in favor and 29 per cent against.

Although Islam is present in the public spaces either through Ottoman era mosques or through personal contacts, Muslims have little access to the public sphere. They are treated as a hidden religious topography (Burchardt and Becci 2013: 12), as invisible, or as an outright threat.

The contemporary crisis and the rise of neo-Nazism

A third factor that should be taken into consideration in the analysis of the defamatory discourses about Islam is the current economic and socio-political crisis and the subsequent rise of neo-Nazism. The contemporary crisis has created a fertile ground for the rise of radical views and ideologies. Greek society has been suffering over the last four years from a strong multilateral crisis, which is not only economic, but also
social and political. By October 2013, the unemployment rate had risen to 27.8 per cent, and for young people (under the age of 25) it reached 59.2 per cent. The Labor Institute of the General Confederation of Workers in Greece estimated in its annual review of 2013 that the loss of income for wage-earners reached 50 per cent over a three-year period, while their purchasing power had decreased by 37.2 per cent.

This period of long socioeconomic crisis has also been marked by unprecedented political realignments, at least as far as the post-1974 period is concerned. Golden Dawn, a political force with a clear anti-immigration and anti-Islamic agenda, which remained marginal until 2009 (receiving just 0.29 per cent of the votes in that year's parliamentary elections), first managed to have its leader elected in the municipal council of Athens in 2010, and then achieved a significant electoral breakthrough in successive parliamentary elections in May and June of 2012. In particular, in June 2012, Golden Dawn obtained 6.9 per cent of the votes and won 18 seats in the Parliament. During the months following June 2012, Golden Dawn strengthened its notable presence on the streets and confidently propagated its ideas to a wider audience, whilst often drawing great public attention as a result of the controversial actions and the statements of its MPs, members and supporters. Amongst these actions were violent attacks against immigrants and attacks on immigrants’ houses and especially against Muslim places of prayer. This activity led to further political gains for Golden Dawn. Contemporary polls’ findings indicated that the influence of the party amongst voters had risen and stabilized at a level between 11 and 12 per cent. This influence was reflected in the European elections of May 2014, where Golden Dawn received 9.4 per cent of the votes, while at the local elections, the party managed to almost double its influence, receiving 16 per cent in some areas (e.g., in Athens).

Although other political powers and parties or minor groups have articulated defamatory speeches toward Islam, we focus on Golden Dawn because it is the main political power that airs such ideas and views today. It is also politically active in organizing rallies against the visibility of Islam in the public sphere, including events opposing the construction of a mosque in Athens. Before the rise of Golden Dawn, the Popular Orthodox Rally (LAOS) was playing a similar role. The party did not favor the construction of a mosque in Athens and in its program for the national elections of 2012 one could read: ‘We say yes to Orthodoxy . . . , we say no to the construction of an Islamic Centre in Athens’. LAOS, however, lost its appeal after its participation in the government in 2011–2012, and its supporters have now moved to Golden Dawn.
The aim of this chapter is to explain the debates about Islam and the dominant defamatory discourses, both past and present, under the prism of the historical past, but also of the contemporary crisis, in order to explore their variations and common trends.

**The orthodox church of Greece: Religious panic, public space and Islam’s cultural and theological inferiority**

Some of the metropolitans of the Orthodox Church have been outspoken against Islam, considering it a major threat for the West in general and for Greece in particular. One of the first actors that initiated such a public discourse of religious panic in modern times was Christodoulos, a dynamic and controversial figure (the Archbishop of the Orthodox Church from the years 1998–2008) during the war in the former Yugoslavia. His stances against Islam and Muslims were quite diplomatic while he was the leader of the Orthodox Church, but his previous writings, especially during the war in Yugoslavia, feature negative images that reproduce religious panic about Islam. According to Christodoulos, the Yugoslav war was a plan organized by the Vatican, the West and Turkey in order to form an Islamic arc in the Balkans and in the future, a Muslim state. He wrote several articles in Greek newspapers under the titles: ‘The Muslim Curtain in the Balkans’ and ‘The Volcano of Islamism: The Lava that “Burns” the Balkans’, to mention just a few. In these articles he advocated the formation of an Orthodox coalition in order to confront Islam, because according to him, ‘Islam is very powerful and threatening’ (Vassilakis 2006: 279–280). His discourse included two main elements: the danger of Islam and of Turkey; and the rise of Islam in Europe through immigration, even though Greece was not yet facing such a problem at the time.

More recently, Ambrosios, the metropolitan of Kalavryta, a region in Peloponnese, in his message for Christmas of 2013 wrote: ‘The message I want to send, is that Christian Greece is dwindling step by step, while Islam and its followers are gradually becoming stronger in our country! So, within no more than 20 years, in our view, Orthodox Greece will lose its Christian character and Islamists will be the majority’. Continuing his message, he added that:

We can celebrate, once more, Christmas time, but having in mind that this phenomenon [i.e. the celebration] will be minimized year by year and that Muslims will be presented as equal members of this country. In this way, what the President of Turkey, Turgut Ozal,
The Prevailing Public Discourse on Islam

once said, will be gradually implemented: ‘we will dominate Europe through the birth of Turks’. In a few years we will be foreigners in our land!…So, Greece is coming to an end. The Greek population is getting smaller, while the Islamists are growing very fast!

What is obvious from the above excerpts dating from the 1990s to the 2010s is that Islam is threatening Europe and Greece, and that this is related to the Turkish threat. Based on the fact that during the current crisis, the Greek state sold some hotel installations to Turkish businessmen, and given the steady increase in the number of immigrants of Muslim background in the last years, Ambrosios argues that ‘Muslims who today invade our country, tomorrow will be our bosses and we will be their servants!’.

From this discourse we can understand that past and present, that is, Greece’s relations with Turkey, the immigration issue and the current crisis, are interwoven in order to underline the imminent danger of Muslims in Greek society. Although such ideas were also present in the 1990s, the rise of the immigrants and the current crisis combine to make migrants and the religious ‘other’ easily scapegoated and blamed for every evil of Greek society.

The violent character of Islam

The Islamic threat that features in public debates is grounded on incidents that take place around the world and especially in Muslim countries, which are presented as another example of the Islamic danger and Islam’s brutality. Ambrosios, in another message of 2012, referred to the civil war in Syria and the killing of a Christian Orthodox priest by Islamists underlying the brutality of the incident: ‘Father Sotirios was butchered, blinded and strangled by Islamist rebels near Damascus’ (Ambrosios 2012). Apart from that, he mentioned the reactions of Muslims to the film ‘Innocence of Muslims’ in order to point out the violent and barbaric character of Islam. In his view, this is proved by the fact that the Koran includes Jihad and it leads Muslims to massacre non-Muslims, who are considered infidels (Ambrosios 2012). His great fear is that within 20 or 30 years Greece will be occupied by Muslims and it will become a Muslim country, though not through violent acts but due to their high birth rates, immigration, and mixed marriages between Muslims and Christians. For all of these things, he blamed all the prime ministers of Greece since 1981, and argued that they should be tried for treason. Such outcries about Islam and the danger of Greece becoming a Muslim country enter the public debate, and become a
common theme after every attack or incident involving Muslims in the West.

Another incident that made some metropolitans of the Church express their hostility toward Islam was the killing of Christian Copts in Egypt in 2011. Thereafter, the metropolitan of Piraeus, Seraphim, sent an encyclical letter arguing that ‘the character of Islam was always aggressive and this is proved by the criminal acts of Islamists even today. Sword and knife are considered a more persuasive means compared to preaching [for Islam]’ (2011).

According to these views, the violence of Islam has its roots in the holy book, the Koran, and this is another reason why Greece and the West should be aware of Muslims. According to Ambrosios (2012), ‘the Koran includes Jihad’, which, as he argues, means ‘massacre all the infidels’ and ‘incites people to butcher us Christians’. In the conclusion of his message he added: ‘Listen up one more time: Freedom is in a death track. Islam is coming!’

Seraphim has also repeatedly (2011, 2012, 2013) referred to the Koran in order to ‘prove’ the violent character of Islam. In an interview for the Reuters news agency, he argued that the Koran teaches violence, massacre and crime against every infidel and this is proved by what happened in Boston, Paris, London, Stockholm, etc.⁵ (Seraphim 2013). Consequently, people should be aware that Islam is a dangerous and violent religion that has no place within Greek society.

The inferiority of Islam

Islam is also seen as inferior to Christianity and incompatible with the Greek-Christian civilization, because it is not considered a true religion and Mohamed is not a real prophet. As written back in 1997 by an archimandrite, ‘during the centuries many false prophets existed, people not called by God, but by themselves. An example of such a false godsend prophet who was very successful…was Mohamed’ (Kastoris 1997: 51).

In 2010, the Greek government gave permission to the Muslims of Athens to celebrate Ramadan in a central square of the city. Seraphim (2010) in his encyclical letter argued that this was unacceptable and caused him real pain, because it was the first time since the war of independence against the Turks in 1821 that Muslims celebrated Ramadan in a Greek public space. He added that Islam is a fallacy and a human creation and it has nothing to do with the real God that was revealed in the Old Testament. In the previously mentioned interview with Reuters, Seraphim stated that Greeks should not forget that the barbaric
character of Islam is still the same, as during the 400-year Ottoman occupation and that the blood-rivers of the thousands of Greek martyrs should remind them of this. Furthermore, he argued that the true God does not force people to follow Him, meaning that Allah is not a true god since he mobilized violence in order to force people to follow him. This is another form of ‘theological’ criticism of Islam, since it implies both that it is not a true religion, and that Mohamed is not a real prophet.

The quest for public space: The mosque of Athens

In some of the clergy’s views, public space is only for the Orthodox Church. For them, at an official and visible level, the Orthodox religion is and should remain dominant. Other religions can, of course, practice their religious duties, but somehow invisibly and without ‘bothering’ Orthodox Christian predominance. The issue of the mosque, as we shall explain below, is the very epitome of the quest for public space. Indeed, a few Church officials have positioned themselves against the construction of a mosque in Athens. According to Ambrosios, ‘the construction of a mosque somewhere in Athens using state money, i.e. the money of the Greek Orthodox people, is just the beginning of the Islamic territorial domination against our country’ (Ambrosios 2013).

The Orthodox Church reacted vigorously against the possibility of the erection of a large mosque near the new airport of Athens, when such a proposal was discussed in early 2003, before the 2004 Olympic Games. The site for the mosque was situated in a region far from the city center, near the new airport of Athens and the land was allotted by the Ministry of Agriculture. After many discussions and the Orthodox Church’s interference, this law fell into abeyance. Archbishop Christodoulos on behalf of the Holy Synod sent a letter to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, arguing that: ‘The selection of the place near the new airport and the considered size of the installations [i.e. of the mosque] should be considered as causes of diffusion of the foreign visitors, who, upon their arrival in our Orthodox homeland will see immediately an impressive Islamic mosque’ (Holy Synod 2003).

The Greek Orthodox Church also did not accept the creation of a center of Islamic Studies in any region of Athens. It recognized the right of Muslims to have a holy place, without however making any specific suggestions in that direction: ‘It is acceptable that Muslim citizens should have their own place in order to exercise their religious duties, since our Church respects religious freedom’ (Holy Synod 2003). In a final
note, the Church stated that there would be many reactions from the citizens of that region, who would not want a mosque near their houses. Archbishop Christodoulos argued that the construction of a mosque is something indispensable but he strongly opposed the construction of an Islamic Centre (Tsatsis 2004: 51). After being asked in an interview if he agreed with the construction of a mosque in Athens, the Archbishop responded:

Our position is that none can forbid the believers of a known religion, like Islam, to practice their religious duties freely. . . . But we expressed our disagreement with outspokenness on the parallel construction of a Centre of Islamic Studies, because such a goal is superfluous, on the grounds that it surpasses the necessity of a place for Muslims to meet their religious needs. In addition, it is difficult to control its activities. (Christodoulos 2005)

It is also very interesting to note that the metropolitan of the region where the mosque was to be built also reacted to the construction of the mosque with the following statement, delivered on the occasion of the presentation of a demand by the citizens of his region for the immediate removal of the ‘rubbish dumps’ that function in their area:

If our government wants to show to the international community that we, as a society, are a modernized and civilized nation, it should firstly remove all the rubbish dumps from our region, which daily contaminate our lungs and humiliate our country internationally and after that it could construct the Islamic Centre, which contaminates our spirit and our history.

(Tsatsis 2004: 51)

Other metropolitans reacted to that statement, and characterized it as fundamentalist and representing extreme opinions (Tsatsis 2004: 51). Yet, others supported him. Another metropolitan, Anthimos of Thessaloniki, stated that ‘it is horrible that today almost 700,000 Muslims live in Athens’, and he added that they ‘are actually a problem for our country, since we are going to become full of Al Qaeda’s groupings’ (2010).

Apart from these statements on the part of Church officials, an editorial article in the official journal of the Church is very illuminating on its position toward Islam. In the latter, the editor castigates the Greek government, because of its acceptance of Saudi Arabian finance
for the construction of the Mosque. He demands that the Greek government ask for equivalent benefits, for example the construction of a large Orthodox temple in Saudi Arabia, in order to give permission for the construction of a mosque in Athens. Additionally, he wonders about the purpose of the cultural center and he hints that these kinds of centers all over Europe function as places of gathering and communication for every fringe, criminal and even terrorist personality. Finally, he connects religious fanaticism and fundamentalism with the forthcoming Islamic cultural center and he asks himself if good relations with the Arabic states are more important than the national interest and the security of the Greek people (Editorial Article, Ecclesia 2003: 593–594).

Seraphim has also vehemently argued against the construction of a mosque in Athens. In his public announcement about an attack against the Coptic Church in Egypt (2011), after describing Islam as a destructive cult and claiming that it is not compatible with the Greek constitution, he asks the Greek government to withdraw the law concerning the construction of an Islamic mosque, because of its unconstitutional content; otherwise the government will be held responsible for encouraging criminal acts by fundamentalist Islamists.

In spite of the above statements, the Holy Synod of the Orthodox Church has never taken an explicit hostile stance against Islam and Muslims on the whole, but it also has never punished or strongly disapproved these statements and announcements. Whenever an attack against Muslim immigrants has taken place, the Church distanced itself from the attacks. Prevailing anti-Islamic discourses among its high-level officials, however, have contributed to inspire, either willingly or unwillingly, the anti-Islamic tendencies of their followers. The voices against Islam and Muslims seem to have gained territory and to have influenced people by using the historical past and the current economic crisis, either directly or indirectly.

Golden dawn: Religious panic, public space and Islam’s cultural and racial inferiority

Golden Dawn is the second channel through which this manifestation of religious panic about Islam is taking place in contemporary Greek society. The party reproduces the image of a violent Islam that threatens the West, Europe and above all Greece, mainly through its websites. Furthermore, Golden Dawn members have literally been accused of attacking immigrants because of their skin color and religion, as well as attacking places of prayer for Muslims in Athens (Dama 2009: 43,
A first search on the party’s main website showed 379 results for ‘Islam’, 140 results for ‘Muslims’ and 234 results for ‘mosque’. Although these are not exclusive findings, it is clear that Islam is one of the main themes in the party’s ideological propaganda.

**Islam at our door – Ante Portas**

The threat of Islam is one of the major issues for the party. This threat, moreover, has biological as much as cultural parameters.

Asian peoples invade Europe threatening to alter the synthesis of its population. After that, the spirit of Islam and its traditions will dominate. Within a multicultural world the winner will be race, the population that will dominate over the other. Now, Muslims fight to dominate biologically and become a majority in Europe. The shrinking of the White World has been prepared. Unfortunately, Europe faces a serious situation.  

Islam is considered the Trojan horse through which a New World Order will be constructed. Jihad, with its 1400-year tradition, put its foot into Europe and, of course, into Greece and it is preparing to conquer the continent and our country. According to Golden Dawn, Europe faces the danger of Islamization through the rise of the Muslim population, and a lack of control regarding immigration; an opinion that, as we mentioned previously, many Church officials also profess.

Muslims in Europe have been doubled within one generation and by 2025 one third of the newborns will be Muslims. These numbers cannot be questioned. Today Muslims in Europe are a minority but very soon will be the majority. In Greece, if this rise of immigrants continues, Muslims will be around 30–50 per cent of the population within one generation….This settlement of other race, third-world, barbaric Muslims is the geopolitical weapon of American-Zionists in order to destroy the country’s national cohesion.

As a consequence, Golden Dawn presents itself as the only political force that will ‘clean up’ the country and will fight against the danger of Islamization.

**The violent character of Islam**

Golden Dawn also considers Islam absolutely violent in nature. Party officials use as an example the attacks of Muslim terrorist groups in Europe and around the world, as well as various incidents from Muslim
countries, something that Church officials also do, to make the point. The bomb attack in Volgograd, Russia (2013) triggered different debates on the ‘barbaric and horrific characteristics of Muslim fanaticism’.

Members of the party criticize multicultural societies, for example those in Scandinavia, especially after the eventful fights between second-generation Muslim immigrants and the police in Sweden in 2013 and argue that the multicultural model has failed. Accordingly, attempted multiculturalism will also lead to the loss of the Greek national identity. Parallel to mentioning bomb attacks, like that in Russia, or in Pakistan (2013), they strive to create a climate of fear through the use of the phrase ‘soon in Greece’, implying that we will soon mourn many deaths. Anything that happens in a Muslim country, from a rape or a murder, to violent acts in Syria, is used in order to produce panic in the society, through the use of words such as ‘massacre’, ‘Islamist cannibals’, ‘barbaric Islam’, ‘obscurantist Islam’, etc. Party officials frequently use the words ‘terrorism’, ‘terrorist’ and ‘terroristic’ in such a way that their audiences are easily influenced. For them, ‘the relationship between Islam and terrorism proves itself every day’.

Finally, they make ample use of the names of Islamic cities such as Kabul, Kandahar and Islamabad to make people afraid that with all these Muslim immigrants, eventually, Greece will become a Muslim country with all the drawbacks that such a transformation will entail: violence, killings, rapes and brutality. In the party’s discourse, the Muslims’ goal is to strengthen Islamic religious and cultural traditions, and their main weapon is Jihad. Muslims are further considered as uncivilized – they don’t respect women and human rights, and their education is only based on ‘the small green book with the golden letters on the front-cover, which leads them to extreme actions and terrorism, because for them, the Koran is the only real book and all the other are lies’.

The fight for public space

Public space and its protection is a high priority for the party. They have organized large demonstrations against the construction of the Islamic mosque in Athens and openly spoke against it, with their main slogan being ‘No, to an Islamic mosque, neither in Athens, nor in any other place’. They have also addressed parliamentary questions about the money that is going to be used for the construction of the mosque while ancient Greek temples and Greek Orthodox churches remain abandoned. In addition, they propagate the fact that many Orthodox churches in Turkey are in ruins or are turning into mosques.
Whenever Muslims gather to celebrate Ramadan in the central squares of Athens or in athletic stadiums, or the birth of the prophet Mohamed or Ashura in central city locations, party officials react and argue that it is not acceptable to allow Muslims to celebrate in public places. On the occasion of the celebration of Ashura they noted:

One more year, Piraeus has turned into Afghanistan. As usual during the last years, hundreds of Shiites from around Attica gathered in Piraeus in order to participate in Ashura… These hideous acts are not honorable for Greece, since these fanatic Islamists use knives and sharp blades in order to inflict injuries upon them in the very center of a large city like Piraeus.13

Members of the party consider that there is a clear difference, actually a chasm, between the Greek civilization and Islam. This is not only related to possible differences, but includes racist ideas and opinions, to the extent that Muslims are seen as biologically inferior. Hence, their suggested solution is that all of them, like all immigrants, should leave Greece as soon as possible, because they ‘contaminate’ the society and threaten its very existence: ‘This is enough! It is time to get our Homeland back. [Support] Golden Dawn, in order to clean up the place!’14

Conclusions

The analysis shows that both the Orthodox Church of Greece and Golden Dawn, a populist party with a high degree of influence amongst the people, work to reproduce religious panic about Islam. Yet, while Golden Dawn is wholly and aggressively against Islam, only limited sections of the metropolitan of the Orthodox Church are actively involved in anti-Islamic discourses. A second difference is that, while Church officials focus on the menace of Islam due to its violent character and its ‘theological’ inferiority, Golden Dawn suggests some kind of biological inferiority as well. For members of the party, violent attacks against Muslims are also not considered inappropriate, even when they take place covertly. Nevertheless, both specific Church officials and Golden Dawn members involved have the same views and reproduce the same kind of panic about Islam. Their discourse actually reproduces Huntington’s ideas on the clash of civilizations and adds some further biological characteristics to it. This rhetoric reflects the views of significant parts of the population. Such discourses are certainly not new. History is a parameter that should not be neglected, because many
generations have grown up having learned that Islam means Turkey and that Muslims are always hating and fighting Christians, and particularly Greece. In the current debates, Muslims should at least be invisible, if not expelled, and should not practice their religious rites in the public eye. The Greek state initially approved the propagation of such views through the Orthodox Church, which was the traditional agent. However, today, this top-down construction of national(istic) self-identity (see Introduction) is not only reproduced through the mechanisms of the Church, but has infiltrated into the population, and found its place mainly, but not exclusively, in the political party, Golden Dawn. Nevertheless, one should be careful to distinguish between prevailing anti-Islamic discourses driven by a limited number of actors on the one hand, and society at large on the other.

Notes

1. Until very recently history text books in secondary education presented the Ottoman Turks as the barbarians that ruled Greece for 400 years and the day that Constantinople fell, the 29 of May, is still commemorated by many groups (associations, political parties, etc.), as a day of sorrow, the day that the glory of the Byzantine empire was lost permanently.
2. The Orthodox Church of Greece is, according to the third article of the Greek constitution, the dominant religion in Greece.
3. This period signifies the fall of the military regime (1967–1974) and the restoration of democracy.
4. Even though Christodoulos passed away six years ago he is still considered an influential figure among other Metropolitans, theologians and, of course, political groups, especially of the right and the extreme right. It is very interesting that even though the current Archbishop, Ieronymos, is more liberal and progressive, his and other voices seem to be less influential. The fact is that the anti-Islamic voices in the Church are more active and noisy and this is certainly a crucial issue for the Church and the Archbishop to deal with.
5. He refers to the bombings at the Boston marathon (2013), the killing of the soldier in London (2013), the attack on another soldier in Paris (2013) and the clashes in Sweden between Muslim immigrants and the police (2013).
Bibliography


Cohen, St. (1972) Folk Devils and Moral Panics (Great Britain: McGibbon and Kee Ltd).


Websites

http://www.xryshaygh.com/ (The official website of Golden Dawn)

http://www.antepithesi.gr/ (The official website of the Youth Division of Golden Dawn)

http://www.ecclesia.gr/ (The official website of the Orthodox Church of Greece)
3

Faith and Politics in Kosovo: The Status of Religious Communities in a Secular Country

Jeton Mehmeti

Introduction

Kosovo represents an excellent example if one wants to examine how the international community and state elites are ‘engineering’ a state where religion is reduced to representing ethnic divisions. In a way, religion is ‘kidnapped’ on two occasions by the international community and the political elites, and used for political prerogatives that have little to do with faith itself. To better understand the case of Kosovo, one should take into consideration the historical political context of the creation of the state of Kosovo – the ethno-religious conflicts, historical legacies and divisions, politicization of religious communities, challenges of new statehood and especially the role of the international community in framing the state’s creation and then in recognizing it as such.

When the UN Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) was deployed in 1999 along with NATO troops, a top priority, apart from their peace-making agenda, was to build a multi-cultural society composed of diverse ethnic and religious groups. The involved structures of international community were aware of the fact that the two parties involved in the conflict were of different ethnic and religious backgrounds, that the Kosovo Albanians, who are the majority ethnic group, were overwhelmingly Muslims, and that the Kosovo Serbs were Orthodox Christians. Although religion was not the driving force behind the war, it was an inseparable part of how the parties identified each other. The fact that religious monuments were a primary target during and after the war
supports this hypothesis. Therefore, measures were taken to keep religion away from the public sphere to the greatest extent possible. Today, Kosovo is a country, the foundation of which is built on secularism. The ‘founders’ of the new state envisaged (and effectively tried to create) a religious-free public space. The Ahtisaari proposal, a document upon which the Constitution of Kosovo was based, clearly states that Kosovo has no official religion and shall be neutral on questions of religious beliefs.

There are at least five different religious communities that live in Kosovo. The largest of them is the Islamic Community of Kosovo (organized under a central organization locally referred to as BIK – Bashkësia Islame e Kosoves), which claims to represent the majority of the population. The rest of the population mainly belongs to the Catholic Church, the Serbian Orthodox Church, the Protestant Church and the Hebrew Community. Despite the variety of religions, the government has made no effort to establish a ministry of religious affairs,1 or even a department responsible for religious matters. Yet, Kosovo has one of the largest governments in Europe compared to the size of population in terms of ministries, with 19 functioning ministerial departments. Unable to address their concerns to the government and receiving no financial support from the state, religious communities have been open to all sorts of support from their followers as well as from foreign governmental and non-governmental organizations. In most cases these foreign organizations operate unhindered by state structures.

This chapter will address the following questions: what is the degree of separation of church and state in Kosovo? Why is the current law on freedom of religion not only vague in its content but also ineffective in addressing the current problems? What are the consequences of governments’ religious ‘neutrality’? In addition, this study elaborates on how the international community has led the creation of a multi-national and multi-religious state. Further, we will show how and why the community of Serbs in Kosovo was given ample recognition and protection by the existing law.

The chapter proceeds in four parts. The first part provides a background of the ethnic and religious division between Serbs and Albanians during the course of history. The second part shows how the debate about religion and secularism has increased in Kosovo, and why this is a normal phenomenon in new democracies. The third part provides a chronology of legal provisions for regulating religion in Kosovo since 1999, with a specific analysis of the current law on freedom of religion. The chapter ends with a historical perspective of the organization of the
Islamic community, and shows how the largest religious community in Kosovo is affected by the status quo.

**Ethnic or religious divides?**

In opposition to the concept of secularism, Ger Duijzings does not see religion and politics as separate domains of human society; rather, he perceives them as intimately connected. To explain his view, he uses Mart Bax’s concept of religious regimes, which is defined as ‘a formalized and institutionalized constellation of human interdependencies of variable strength, which is legitimized by religious ideas and propagated by religious specialists’ (Duijzings 2000: 27). According to this definition, religious regimes can be regarded as formations of power and dependence operating at times in tandem with, as well as in opposition to states. Bax shows how the states and the major world religions have been connected with one another, from the relationship between the Roman Empire and Christianity, to Islam and the Arab expansion in Europe, to the colonial expansion of the European nations into America and Africa. None of this would have been as successful without the active support of religious leaders. There are many other examples that suggest that religious regimes play an important role in the process of state-creation and state-formation. However, the opposite is equally true. Bax suggests that from a long-term perspective, these interdependencies seem to exhibit a far from harmonious character. For instance, states try to incorporate (or destroy) churches and related religious regimes, but they never completely succeed. Religious regimes, in turn, try to make states dependent upon them by taking over functions from the state. Apparently, then, religious regimes and their secular counterparts constitute antagonistically interdependent configurations (Wolf 1991: 11).

Duijzings relates the concept of religious regimes to the Balkans case, where, due to the Ottoman millet system, political identities were defined in religious terms. According to this system, identities were determined by religious affiliation rather than ethnicity or language. In fact, according to Duijzings, ethnic identification in the Balkans still very much relies on religious affiliation, which is the reason why the term ethno-religious identity is frequently used. In the second half of the 19th century, the millet system was replaced by the European concept of the nation, with ethnic and national identity being at its center, and from this, the nationalist movements began (see Introduction). Religion continued to play an important role, however, as religious ideas and doctrines were important in articulating nationalist discourse.
The Orthodox churches, in particular, played a central role in many Balkan nationalist movements, while amongst the Balkan Muslims it would appear that the opposite happened, namely, a shift from a communal identity based solely on Islam to one where ethnicity became an important factor. Although religion continues to play an important role in group identification, in Kosovo’s case the conflict was a Serb-Albanian conflict, replacing the old confessional divide between Christians and Muslims (Duijzings 2000; Malcolm 2002).

According to Malcolm, the roots of the Serb-Albanian conflict, as much as Kosovo’s recent history, are determined by the events that took place between the years 1878 and 1914. A year after Kosovo was conquered and incorporated into Serbia in 1912, a memorandum was sent from Belgrade to the Great Powers, setting out three justifications for the Serbian rule in Kosovo: the ‘moral right of a more civilized people’; a historic right to an area which contained the Patriarchate buildings of the Serbian Orthodox Church; and an ethnographic right because at some time in the past Kosovo had had a majority Serb population (Malcolm 2002: xlvii). Malcolm challenges these arguments in a simple fashion. The first one, he says, was rapidly devalued by the actual behavior of the Serbian regime in Kosovo. Second, the seat of the Serbian Orthodox Church was not founded in Kosovo; it was moved there after its original foundation in central Serbia was burned down. Furthermore, the Patriarchate does not have any continuous history as an institution in Kosovo, and the Patriarch himself has tended to reside mainly in Belgrade. As for the ethnography, Malcolm provides a long explanation that ultimately dismisses the myth of the ‘Great Migration’ of Serbs in 1690, but nevertheless recognizes the existence of Serbs in Kosovo.

Indeed, the second and the third points, namely, the heritage of the Serbian Orthodox Church in Kosovo and the ethnography of the Kosovo Serbs, are two factors that have played a detrimental role in the way the Kosovo statehood was projected by the international community after 1999. The religious heritage of the Orthodox Church was regulated in an unprecedented manner, as will be shown here, while the small community of Serbs was guaranteed ‘extraordinary’ powers in political life, compared to the rights and privileges accorded to other minority groups. There is a huge mystery concerning the exact number of Serbs that have been living in Kosovo throughout the course of history. Due to the brevity of this study, we will only provide some general figures concerning their numbers that are of relevance today.

According to Judah (2008), the 1991 Kosovo census, which was organized by Serbs and was boycotted by Albanians, showed that there
were 214,235 Serbs and Montenegrins living in Kosovo. A large number of Serbs left Kosovo in 1999, some because they were frightened, some because they did not want to live in a territory dominated and administered by Albanians, and some because they were intimidated by Albanians. Thus, the number of Serbs decreased. To provide a rough number of Serbs that remained in Kosovo, Judah refers to data from the European Stability Initiative (ESI), a think-tank based in Berlin. ESI shows that five years after the war there were nearly 130,000 Serbs living in Kosovo, of whom around 75,000 lived south of the Iber River, that is in areas other than the North of Kosovo. However, according to the 2011 census, the number of Serbs residing in Kosovo was only 25,532. The 2011 census data do not provide a real picture because the census was completely boycotted by the Serbs in the North and partially by those elsewhere in Kosovo. Nevertheless, despite the census results, of all the non-majority groups recognized in Kosovo such as Turks, Bosniaks, Roma, Ashkali, Egyptians, and Goranis, Serbs are the largest community, and the most privileged one.

Mainly because of the Serb community and the existence of other minorities, Kosovo became a project where no-one would exercise any ethnic or religious supremacy. To create a multi-cultural society in a post-conflict country, triumphalism and nationalism had to be discouraged. For some scholars, like Milazim Krasniqi, the independence of Kosovo was an anti-nationalist project. He argues that the liberation of Kosovo came as a result of NATO’s intervention due to a ‘humanitarian crisis’ that was provoked by Milosevic’s regime, and became independent according to the Ahtisaari plan. Yet the plan envisaged the creation of a multi-ethnic state, which recognizes the Association of Serb Municipalities according to the concept of territorial autonomy and provides a special degree of protection to the Orthodox Church in Kosovo (Krasniqi 2014). Accordingly, Albanian nationalism is neither an essential part of the foundation of the new Kosovar state, nor a serious participant in its creation.

The lack of will to create an efficient public administration, the inefficiency of the judiciary, the high degree of corruption, the poor economic and social development, and the unreformed education and health system, all represent arguments that Albanian nationalism was never part of state creation. Krasniqi believes that true nationalism strengthens the nation and the state, and not the opposite. Further, he argues that Kosovo has been denationalized by the policies of UNMIK, Kosovo Force (KFOR), European Union Rule of Law Mission in Kosovo (EULEX) and other foreign and local agents, including the political elites
of post-1999, a number of local NGOs and media conglomerates, which are determined to protect Kosovo from any Albanian nationalism, and which will further contribute toward ‘Kosovarization’ of the society (Krasniqi 2014: 73–75).

Eventually, the project for creating an anti-nationalist Kosovo, with a multi-cultural society and with no ethnic or religious group having a sense of supremacy, was successfully implemented by the international community. Today, nationalist symbols are not present in Kosovo’s flag, the national anthem is a text free song, there is more than one official language, and there is no official religion in Kosovo. The latter element is clearly emphasized in the Constitution of Kosovo, which defines the country as a secular state.

The return of religion and the secularization dilemma

The Minister of Foreign Affairs has repeatedly emphasized that the State of Kosovo was built on three principles, which are also its crucial pillars: democracy, multi-ethnicity and secularism (Hoxhaj 2013). This is not only a political statement. There is a clear separation between the state and religion, and, whenever necessary, the government is quick to react with policies that would ban any religious interference in public life, especially in the public education system. In 2011, the parliament voted to ban Islamic headscarves in schools and to ban religious instruction in schools.

In his observation, Tim Judah states that Albanians, generally speaking, are a very secular people; however, ‘the overwhelming majority of Kosovo Albanians are of Muslim background’ (Judah 2008: 33). One may wonder how the secular spirit was so successfully imposed in a society the overwhelming majority of which declares itself as Muslim. Before we look for an answer, let us look at the definition of the terms ‘secular’ and ‘secularization’.

According to Al-Attas (1993), the term secular conveys a meaning with a dual connotation of time and location; the time referring to the ‘now’ or ‘present’ sense of it, and the location to the ‘world’ and ‘worldly’ sense of it. In other words, the term secular refers to the condition of the world at this particular time or period of age. Secularization, on the other hand, is defined as the deliverance of man, first from religion, and then from metaphysical control over his reason and language. It is ‘the loosing of the world from the religious and quasi-religious understandings of itself, the dispelling of all closed world views, the breaking of all supernatural myths and sacred symbols…it is man turning his
attention away from the worlds beyond and toward this world and this time’ (Al-Attas 1993: 17). According to him, secularization involves beliefs, politics and values. The first refers to the freeing of nature from its religious overtones, separating nature from God, so that a man may no longer regard nature as a divine entity, which allows him to act freely upon nature according to his needs and plans, and hence create change and ‘development’. The second refers to the abolition of sacral legitimation of political power and authority. And the third concerns the attitude toward values, meaning that the secular man must live with the realization that the rules and ethical codes of conduct which guide his own life will change with the times and over generations. This attitude is called ‘maturity’ and ‘evolution’.

This need for ‘evolution’ and for ‘maturity’, often imposed and promoted by political elites, has created confusion and debate in many Muslim societies where traditional and religious norms are strongly upheld. Kosovo was no exception in this regard. However, the secularization process in Kosovo did not begin in 1999 when the country entered a new political era. The origin of this process dates back to the days of the socialist Yugoslavia, when religion and religious actors were relegated to the background. According to Iseni (2009), in 1960s, important integration and modernization policies were implemented in some Muslim-populated areas of former Yugoslavia. This led to these populations’ rapid emancipation and secularization. The process gave birth to an atheistic political and intellectual elite, as well as to a radical marginalization of the Muslim religious clergy. Islam was thus reduced to the private sphere: worship practices, annual religious feasts and traditional ceremonies for weddings and deaths.

In the context of Kosovo, inherited atheist elites tend to adopt a harsh tone toward Islamic issues, especially during public debates on headscarves and religious instruction in schools. Public debates about religion, or more precisely about Islamic themes, have increased over the years in Kosovo due to the spread of mass media and increased access to the Internet. The debate about religion or issues related to religion is a common practice in democratic societies. Some scholars believe that as societies go through different stages of development, their concerns and priorities change and this may also change their attitude toward religion. This change in attitudes oscillates in a wide range, varying from orthodox, fundamentalist and radical to moderate, liberal and even indifferent. There is a possibility that with this change in attitude, the treatment of religions and their followers may also change (Zakaullah 2004).
Hence, open debates about religion are seen as a ‘normal’ process in democratic societies. In this line of argument, Iseni sees the religious revival in Kosovo and the return of Islam and religious practice in the public sphere as a normal change that has affected all post-communist and post-conflict countries (2009). Furthermore, for Iseni, these practices have not challenged the liberal tradition of Islam, its tolerance, or its cultural and political modernity (For a similar argument on Albania is Elbasani 2015). This is not to deny that after the end of the war certain Arab and Islamic charities and foundations have attempted to proselytize a more intolerant form of Islam among Albanians, but, for the most part, they have met with little success (Judah 2008: 33).

**Legal provisions on freedom of religion and religious communities**

According to the most recent national population census organized in Kosovo in 2011, the overwhelming majority of the population declared themselves as Muslims. Out of a population of nearly 1.8 million people, over 95 per cent of them declared themselves as Muslims, 2.2 per cent as Christian Catholics and 1.5 per cent as Christian Orthodox.\(^4\) In other words, 1,663,412 Kosovo citizens declare themselves as Muslims, 38,438 as Catholics and 25,837 as Orthodox. These are the official statistics that are both nationally and internationally recognized.\(^5\) These are indeed the three main religious communities in Kosovo. There are other communities too, like Protestants, Jews and the non-religious. The existence of many religious communities, much like the existence of many ethnic groups like Albanians, Serbs, Turks, Bosnians, Roma and other communities, gives Kosovo the status of a multi-ethnic and multi-religious state.

The character of the multi-ethnic society of Kosovo is not just a perception; it is something that has been well grounded in its constitutional and legal provisions since 1999. As a fundamental right, freedom of religion was guaranteed in all of these documents. The first document, called the Constitutional Framework for Provisional Self-Government in Kosovo, was enacted by the Special Representative of Secretary General Hans Hækkerup, the head of UNMIK, on 15 May 2001. Although not exactly a constitution, this important document guarantees all the basic human rights, including the right to exercise one’s religion.

Article 3.1 of the Constitutional Framework states that ‘all persons in Kosovo shall enjoy, without discrimination on any ground and in full equality, human rights and fundamental freedoms’. Further, Article
4.1 states that ‘communities of inhabitants belonging to the same ethno or religious or linguistic group (Communities) shall have the rights set forth in this Chapter in order to preserve, protect and express their ethnic, cultural, religious, and linguistic identities’. In addition, communities and their members were guaranteed the right to preserve sites of religious importance (4.4.f) and to operate religious institutions (4.4.n).

The second document to guarantee freedom of religion was the Constitution of the Republic of Kosovo, which was ratified on 9 April 2008, two months after Kosovo’s declaration of independence. The constitution prescribes that ‘the Republic of Kosovo is a secular state and is neutral in matters of religious beliefs’ (Article 8). However, freedom of belief is explicitly regulated in later articles. Article 38 states:

1. Freedom of belief, conscience and religion is guaranteed; 2. Freedom of belief, conscience and religion includes the right to accept and manifest religion, the right to express personal beliefs and the right to accept or refuse membership in a religious community or group; 3. No one shall be required to practice or be prevented from practicing religion nor shall anyone be required to make his/her opinions and beliefs public; 4. Freedom of manifesting religion, beliefs and conscience may be limited by law if it is necessary to protect public safety and order or the health or rights of other persons.

While in this article freedom of belief is guaranteed on the individual level, the following article regulates the rights of religious denominations concerning their internal organization and activities. Article 39 guarantees that:

1. The Republic of Kosovo ensures and protects religious autonomy and religious monuments within its territory; 2. Religious denominations are free to independently regulate their internal organization, religious activities and religious ceremonies; 3. Religious denominations have the right to establish religious schools and charity institutions in accordance with this Constitution and the law.

The state’s neutrality on religious affairs, sanctioned in article 8, is further emphasized by the fact that the constitution does not mention by name any of the existing religions in Kosovo. There was no objection from the people, or from the religious organizations representing them, to the fact that Kosovo was defined as a secular neutral state. There are five religious communities recognized by law: the Islamic Community
of Kosovo, the Serbian Orthodox Church, the Roman Catholic Church, the Jewish Religious Community and the Evangelical Church. However, the point being discussed here is with regard to the effective ‘neutrality’ of the state toward particular religious groups.

Of all the recognized groups, only the Serbian Orthodox Church (SOC) was accorded proper attention and a regulated status. A set of rights, privileges and immunities for the SOC was set forth in the Ahtisaari plan. This is the third important document, or the second if listed in a chronological order, that guarantees freedom of religion. This UN document upon which the statehood of Kosovo was founded and officially called the Comprehensive Proposal for the Kosovo Status Settlement of the Security Council was adopted in 2007. The document is referred to as the Ahtisaari Plan, as it was designed by the former Finnish president, Martti Ahtisaari. This document was designed to make Kosovo a multi-ethnic state. To avoid any religious favoritism, first and foremost, the plan demands that the Constitution of Kosovo affirms that Kosovo has no official religion and that it shall be neutral on questions of religious beliefs (UN 2007). However, Annex V of the Ahtisaari Plan, although entitled Religious and Cultural Heritage, in all of its six pages speaks only about the SOC. Here, the rights, privileges and immunities of the Church are defined, and there is a guarantee that Kosovo shall recognize the Serbian Orthodox Church in Kosovo, including monasteries, churches and other religious sites, as an integral part of the Serbian Orthodox Church seated in Belgrade.

This document also guarantees that the SOC will be free to receive donations and other beneficial support from within or outside Kosovo, and that the state shall grant customs duty and tax privileges to the SOC, in addition to those enjoyed by all religions in Kosovo, for the economic activities of the Church. The plan guarantees that all SOC monasteries, churches and other religious sites should enjoy security and physical protection by the Kosovo Police, while a selected number of these sites will have special protection through the establishment of Protective Zones. Any industrial and commercial constructions in Protective Zones, such as structures taller than the monastery, street construction, shops, public gatherings and entertainment, are prohibited, or the agreement of the SOC should be sought for such activities. Today, the territory of some of these zones is clearly regulated by specific laws, while access to some sites is limited up to 100 meters around their perimeter.

To ensure that Kosovo will fully implement the Ahtisaari Plan, the International Civilian Office (ICO) was opened in Kosovo. During its
mandate from 2008 until 2012, the ICO made sure that everything the plan foresaw was indeed turned into a law. Thus, all that was required by the Ahtisaari Plan with regard to the SOC was either integrated into the constitution or included in subsequent laws passed by the Kosovo Assembly: the Law on Special Protective Zones; the Law on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights of Communities and their Members in Kosovo; the Law on the Historic Center of Prizren; and the Law on the Village of Hoçë e Madhe. Before closing its office, the ICO declared that ‘Kosovo has implemented the terms of the Comprehensive Settlement Proposal’ (2012: 133).

Some Orthodox Church monasteries and churches date from the 14th century, and there is no doubt that they are a constitutive part of the cultural heritage of Kosovo. Also, it is clear that the minority rights are taken into account here, which is a recognized standard for any democratic society. However, neither the Ahtisaari Plan nor any other legislation protects or preserves in a similar manner other religious sites and monuments. There are mosques, for example, that were built in the 15th century by the Ottomans, the visibility of which is at risk, as commercial buildings are rising around them. Some of the old mosques are protected via the Law on the Historic Center of Prizren, but this is only at a local level, and does not include other Islamic religious sites at a national level. Speaking of Kosovo’s Islamic heritage, the rebuilding, restoration and protection of Islamic monuments have never been of particular interest for the state authorities in the same manner as the SOC.

Islamic heritage in general has received meagre legal attention although such heritage was severely damaged during the war. The International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) documented that, of 498 mosques that were in active use, approximately 225 of them were damaged or destroyed by Serbian military during the years 1998–1999. Much of this damage was clearly the result of the attacks directed at mosques: explosive devices planted in the mosque or inside the minaret, artillery aimed at the minaret or fires started in the mosque. In some cases, anti-Albanian and pro-Serbian graffiti were written on mosque walls. At least four of these mosques were built in the 1400s, another four in the 1500s. The former, as well as a 15th-century hamam, an 18th-century madrasa, many Sufi shrines, libraries and archives of Islamic heritage, inter alia, were all destroyed. After the war, some mosques were rebuilt or repaired with donations from foreign governmental and non-governmental agencies. Apart from Turkey and Arab countries, which were the main donors, Western countries and
institutions also offered major contributions. For example, the Italian government financed the rebuilding of two mosques in Peja, Harvard University rebuilt one of the main mosques in Gjakova, and the Jews of Kosovo financed the rebuilding of a mosque in Gjakova (Hamiti 2010: 45).

To be sure, it was not only the Islamic heritage that was affected during the war; Orthodox heritage too became a target, but the latter happened after the war. The ICTY document shows that close to 80 Orthodox Churches and monasteries were damaged and destroyed between June and October 1999, half of them suffering serious structural damages or complete destruction. The major medieval Orthodox shrines, however, were under guard by KFOR and were not affected. Roman Catholic architectural heritage was not spared either, although the damage was on a much smaller scale compared to the former categories. The International Crisis Group Balkans Report stated that ‘[t]hese acts of reciprocal vandalism seemed motivated on both sides more by the desire to eradicate the evidence of the other’s presence in Kosovo than by religious fanaticism’ (2001). The multi-ethnic harmony was challenged once more in 2004, in an inter-ethnic riot between Serbs and Albanians in Kosovo, which ended with 19 people dead, nearly a thousand injured and many churches and mosques damaged.

The vague law regulating religious affairs

To date, the legal status of the remainder of religious organizations is not defined, and the only existing law that speaks about religion is the 2006 UNMIK Law on Freedom of Religion in Kosovo. This law in general speaks about freedom to express one’s religion and freedom of religious association, and while it repeats the fact that there is no official religion in Kosovo, the Law recognizes five religious groups in Kosovo, namely, the Islamic Community, the Serbian Orthodox Church, the Roman Catholic Church, the Jewish Religious Community and the Evangelical Church. The law appears very broad, and has received a lot of attention and criticism for failing to properly regulate the status of religious communities.

The Institute on Religion and Public Policy has identified at least five problems that the Law on Freedom of Religion in Kosovo fails to address (2006). First, the law does not address a critical aspect of freedom of religion, namely, the right of religious communities to acquire legal form and to attain access to legal entity status in order to carry out the full range of their legitimate activities. According to the institute, the
impact of this law cannot be truly assessed until the issue of registration and legal entity status is clarified via legislation and regulation. Without entity status, religious communities cannot really function, even at the most basic level. The institute warns that religious communities encounter discriminatory legal obstacles to acquiring or renting a place of worship, financially supporting clergy and other religious personnel, entering into contracts necessary to carry out religious activities and protecting their rights legally. Second, to ensure that pluralism is respected and that discrimination does not occur, the institute suggests that it would have been preferable not to have specified the five faith traditions, so that other religions will not be treated unequally under the law. Further, the analysis suggests that various provisions in the law are vague, raising the danger that they could be interpreted in a manner that could significantly affect the protected rights of freedom of religion and belief. Finally, the institute argues that certain terms need to be better defined, in order to prevent arbitrary interpretation.

Although the law was adopted in 2006 when Kosovo was under UNMIK administration, eight years later the Kosovo government has not succeeded in amending this law, which is at best vague, and at worst ineffective. So far there have been a few efforts to change the law. The government has included a draft law, amending and supplementing the Law on Religious Freedom in Kosovo, in its legislative program on four occasions, in 2011, 2012, 2013 and again in 2014. In 2012, when the draft law was sent to the parliament for its first reading, the government decided to withdraw the bill for further modification. According to the government’s 2014 legislative program, the new draft law is scheduled to be adopted in 31 October 2014.9 Yet, with the change of government after the June 2014 elections, it is very unlikely that the law on freedom of religion will be modified by 2014.

Thus, under the current legal provisions, of the five recognized religious groups, only the status, organization and economic affairs of the Serbian Orthodox Church are regulated. One may regard this as double religious standard on the part of the new Kosovo state, something that may jeopardize the peaceful coexistence amongst religious communities and the relationship with the government. However, one should also consider that this was an external solution, prescribed by the international community, to protect a minority that was thought to be in danger. On the other hand, the legal vacuum has mostly affected the largest religious organization, namely, the Islamic Community of Kosovo.
The Organization of the Islamic Community of Kosovo (BIK)

The history of the Islamic Community of Kosovo within the state, and its model of organization, provides a classic case of how historical heritage and models have preceded legal developments. This institution was created according to the centralized model of the former Yugoslavia, and today is considered de facto, if not de jure, a partner of the state in managing Islam. BIK serves as a hub for the organization of the religious sphere. It operates and controls religious education despite the lack of a legal framework. Indeed, BIK has repeatedly asked the government to adopt the new law on religious communities, which would finally define its legal status and potentially provide financial support from the state budget to them.

Before we analyze the organization of BIK today, it is worth examining its history, preceding models and institutional templates. For over four decades, BIK was part of the Islamic Religious Community (IRC) of Yugoslavia, a centralized body created in Sarajevo in 1947. The IRC was created with the blessing of the state, and in return, it contributed in the creation and maintenance of the socialist project. This is evident in the resolution of the IRC, which was adopted in the first Sarajevo meeting. Kasumi (1988) has identified three important issues for Yugoslavia as a whole and for Kosovo in particular as outlined in the resolution: the involvement of the IRC in removing the scarf and the veil, the clergy’s involvement in propaganda for the socialist system of collectivism, and the combating of those forces which are directed against the state unity. The campaign for removing the scarf and the veil was carried out in the entire territory of Yugoslavia, including Kosovo. The agents of this change were the political and social organizations, as well as the religious clergy and the imams. The latter were responsible for explaining the religious norms concerning removing the scarf and the veil, something they deemed as not constituting an Islamic obligation. There were people within the IRC who held a more conservative view, who opposed this project and who wished to undermine the development of good relations between the federal state and religious communities, but their number was negligible (Kasumi 1988). Another joint activity between the state and the IRC during that period was the huge propaganda machine to motivate Muslims to contribute in the economy by engaging in agriculture. These examples show a tandem of cooperation between the centralized state project and religious organizations, which is related to Bart’s concept of religious regimes.
In fact, as Bart suggests, there are certain commonalities between religious and secular regimes. They both contribute in the sphere of social organization and cultural orientation, both develop policies toward nation-building and community building, both contain structures for internal control and external defense, and both have expansionist tendencies as both try to extend their territories and exert their influences over other sectors of society. There are also a number of striking differences between them. A major difference, according to Bart, lies in the source of their power, as states have gained effective control over the means of violence and taxation, whereas most religious regimes have lost control over these vital power sources (Wolf 1991).

The legal status of the religious communities was regulated with the 1946 Constitution of Yugoslavia, according to which all religious communities are treated equally. Although the constitution foresaw a clear separation between the state and religious communities, Article 25 nonetheless stated that the state can provide material assistance to religious communities, although the state is not obliged to do so. However, if the state decides to help one religious group, it will do so without breaching the principle of justice to all. In addition, the state does not prohibit religious organizations from collecting financial aid (Kasumi 1988: 72).

However, there were other laws that did not favor the development of religious organizations. According to the Law on Agricultural Reform and Colonization, adopted in 1945, vast territories of land belonging to religious institutions suddenly became state-owned land. The state not only confiscated land from religious institutions, but also other material goods that were profitable for religious institutions, such as houses, schools, shops, inns, and mills. The idea was to weaken the economic power of religious institutions and, with it, their influence on the people. The Islamic Community of Kosovo, the material wealth of which, according to Kasumi, at that time was smaller compared to other religious groups, suffered particularly from such reforms. Afterwards, the Islamic Community was unable to pay most of its imams, especially in rural villages. There, paying imams was left to the discretion and courtesy of villagers. Over 60 years later, many imams in villages still encounter the same payment method.

In 1953, the Basic Law on the Legal Status of Religious Communities allowed them to create their own syndicates. In 1977 all the socialist republics of Yugoslavia adopted new laws regarding the legal status of religious communities. In 1993, the Islamic Community of Kosovo declared its independence. Since then, BIK has been developing its
independent organizational and administrative infrastructure. BIK operates according to its own constitution, and has a 27-member assembly, which elects the head of BIK, who also serves as the mufti. Under a hierarchical system consisting of 26 local councils, BIK manages all religious duties in the territory of Kosovo, including the overseeing of 660 mosques. In terms of education, BIK runs the Faculty of Islamic Studies, where, since its opening in 1992, more than 110 students have graduated. The madrasah Alauddin, which has operated since 1951 and has served as a professional secondary school where around 2,000 students have graduated, is also under BIK administration (Hamiti 2010). In addition, BIK has a department for publications, a department for women, a department for youth, and a department for charitable donations. Despite being the representative religious organization of the Muslim community, with over 2000 employees, BIK still operates as an NGO, due to the lack of a clear law that would define its legal status. The organization has actively campaigned for a new law that would regulate the legal status, duties and privileges of religious organizations.

The legal status of religious organizations is regulated in all EU member countries. The Venice Commission, of which Kosovo is a member, has already a few guidelines for reviews of legislation pertaining to religion or belief (2004). With regard to the registration of religious organization, the commission suggests that registration of religious organizations should not be mandatory per se, although it is appropriate to require registration for the purposes of obtaining legal personality and similar benefits. With regard to state financing, the commission suggests a model of direct financing and a model of indirect financing for religious organizations. Indirect financing includes benefits that come from tax exemptions and tax deductions, while the direct form of financing includes: paying salaries (or providing social benefits) for clergy; subsidizing religious schools; allowing organizations to use publicly owned buildings for meetings; and donating property to religious organizations.

Conclusions

According to the concept of religious regimes, where religions and the state sometimes go in tandem with one another and sometimes in opposing directions, one can conclude that in Kosovo’s case, there is a mixed situation. While the Orthodox Church has constantly opposed the Kosovo government, BIK and the Catholic Church have shown a great degree of cooperation with the state. BIK has been a major player
in disseminating the state’s message to Muslims concerning the promotion of tolerance and reconciliation with other groups, as well as preventing Muslims from participation in global conflicts like the one in Syria. However, the state’s failure to address BIK’s requests for a better legal status may jeopardize this partnership in the long run.

Although the freedom of religion is firmly guaranteed in the Constitution of Kosovo, the law that regulates the status and activities of religious communities in Kosovo needs to be amended. The current Law on Freedom of Religion, apart from providing some basic rights for religious communities, has failed to cover some critical aspects related to their functioning. There is an urgent need to modify this law in order to address at least three important issues: to regulate the legal status of religious communities, to regulate their financial functioning, including potential state financial benefits, and to regulate the status of the clergy.

Under the current legal provisions, only the status of the Serbian Orthodox Church appears to be well-defined and its activities, including its financial activities, well regulated. While the government keeps postponing legal amendment, leaving the rest of the religious communities under the status quo, the functioning of the latter becomes more difficult. This, too, increases anger and frustration, and may even jeopardize the peaceful coexistence between religious communities and the secular government.

Notes

1. European countries have different names for their Ministry of Religious Affairs, such as Minister of Worship (France), Minister of Religion (Serbia), Ministry of Education, Religious Affairs, Culture and Sports (Greece), etc. (Wikipedia).
2. According to the Kosovo Constitution, 20 seats, of the 120 seats of the Assembly, are guaranteed for Kosovo minorities. Ten seats are guaranteed for Kosovo Serbs and the rest are distributed to other six recognized minority groups. Serbs are also guaranteed one Minister and two Deputy Ministers, but their actual representation in Government is much higher.
3. According to the 2011 Kosovo Population Census, over 95 per cent of the population declared themselves as Muslim.
4. Since the 2011 census was boycotted by most of Kosovo Serbs, who predominantly belong to the Orthodox Church, the exact number of Christian Orthodox is unknown.
5. The organization of the census was based on Law no. 03/L-237 on Population and Housing Census and census data were recognized by EUROSTAT and the European Union Office in Kosovo, available at http://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/kosovo/press_corner/all_news/news/2012/21082012_01_en.htm.

7. A post-war survey ‘The Destruction of Cultural Heritage in Kosovo 1998–1999’ was submitted to the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY) as evidence for the trial of Slobodan Milosevic.


9. In many of the legal systems of OSCE participating states, there are two or more levels of legal status available to religious organizations for carrying out their affairs. The first level includes what can be called ‘base level’ entities. These include entities that religious associations can use to acquire rudimentary forms of legal personality that are sufficient to carry out their affairs, but typically lack significant additional benefits. Beyond the base level are a diverse range of often very country-specific ‘upper tier’ entities, which are eligible for direct and indirect financial benefits from the state, and various other privileges. For example, in countries such as Italy and Spain, which have a system of agreements with major churches or with federations of religious associations, significant benefits flow from being eligible to participate in a state agreement, and not all religious organizations are eligible to do so. In Germany, a number of benefits, as well as heightened prestige, flow from achieving status as a public corporation (Körperschaft des öffentlichen Rechts). In Austria the ‘recognized’ churches have more privileges and greater public status than ‘publicly registered belief communities’ or than religious communities that have not been recognized (OSCE 1999: 29).

Bibliography

Part II

Muslims’ Pursuit of Faith and Religiosity
This page intentionally left blank
In the far distance, as if through an acoustic veil, I can hear the muezzin calling for the evening prayer. Due to its conspicuous and iterative perfection, the call is easy to identify. It is the recorded *ezan* coming from the Ebu-Bekr mosque. In earlier times, as there were no loudspeakers on the minarets, while walking through the street Philip Shiroka – one of the streets of the Catholic quarter, Truma – one could most probably hardly hear the *muezzin* at all. His chant would have been lost in the acoustic ‘order’ of this city, which has accommodated different sensory and temporal religious life worlds for a long time.

(Fieldnotes 28.5.2012, Shkodra, Albania)

**Introduction**

In this chapter, I explore various ways of ‘being a Muslim’ in a contemporary urban context within the Balkans through the prism of diversity. My main thesis is that in order to be able to grasp the contemporary practice of Islam in Shkodra – the north Albanian city where I conducted my fieldwork – one must consider the particular dynamics of the local urban diversity regime (Grillo 2010). Of particular interest to me is its

---

I would like to thank the following colleagues for their feedback and constructive critique: Arolda Elbasani, Sabine Strasser, Xavier Itcaina, Tilmann Heil, Rosie Gant, Raul Acosta, Thomas Kirsch and the members of his Anthropological Colloquium at the University of Konstanz.
Muslims’ Pursuit of Faith and Religiosity

underlying moral order, which is comprised of beliefs and values providing guidelines for ‘right and proper conduct within and between diverse populations’ (Grillo 2010: 1). Only through the prism of diversity and its ‘moral grounding’ – the historically developed mode of living (with) differences in this particular urban setting – contemporary ruptures and debates among the Muslims of Shkodra about the ‘good’ (and ‘authentic’) Islam can become comprehensible. Furthermore, it will thus be possible to trace why these debates most notably revolve around the issue of ‘perceptibility’ of religion in the urban space.3

In a nutshell, being a ‘good’ Muslim in Shkodra means that one is, first, an ‘urbanite’ (Alb. qytetar), or ‘Shkodranee’ (Alb. Shkodran). This ‘urban habitus’ is best expressed through the emic notion of ‘calmness’, which, as I argue, represents the moral core of Shkodra’s diversity regime. ‘Calmness’ implies a generally ‘contained’ posture – as well as a correspondent reluctance vis-à-vis any kind of ‘over-pronounced’ or ‘excessive’ expressions of, inter alia, religious belonging – and, moreover, is viewed as being the basis of peaceful (religious) coexistence.

My approach builds on two anthropological insights on religion from the seminal work of Talal Asad. The first is that religion cannot be isolated from other realms of society (Asad 1993). Accordingly, this chapter deals primarily with the interrelation of religious belonging, social status and the urban habitus or, rather, the ideology of ‘urbanity’, including reflections on gender relations. This holistic and intersectional perspective in analyzing a ‘Balkan case’, which has avoided relapsing into violent (religious) conflict, enables a critical reassessment of socio-cultural dynamics, and thus goes beyond the hegemonic essentialization of religion according to ethno-national belonging (see Introduction).

Asad’s second insight refers to the inappropriateness of the Eurocentric, hegemonic, sharp division between the ‘religious’ and the ‘secular’, and hence results in a call for explorations beyond this ideological conceptual divide (2003). While taking into account the emic differentiation between ‘believers’ (Alb. besimtar) and ‘non-believers’ (Alb. jo besimtar/ateist) – itself an expression of the hegemonic ‘urge’ to unambiguously identify (non)belief – my primary focus is on exploring the contemporary diverse ways of ‘being a Muslim’ in Shkodra. In doing this, I also join Benson Saler (2009) in acknowledging the ‘pointlessness’ of trying to define clear boundaries between ‘religion’ and ‘non-religion’.

In the first part of the chapter, I will explore the legacy and the actual religious diversity in Shkodra. The second section analyses the inner
diversity of being Muslim in the context of the moral order of ‘calmness’, a historical and theoretical analysis of which will be given in the third section. Focusing on a crucial aspect of the latter – the ‘contained’ expression of religion as a key aspect of peaceful religious coexistence – I will conclude the chapter (the fourth and fifth section) by exploring debates and ruptures among the Muslims in Shkodra. These are concerned with the issue of the perceptibility of Islam in the urban space, and reveal a boundary between the ‘good’ and ‘authentic’ Shkodran Islam and a new, ‘foreign’ and ‘fanatic’, religious practice.

Tracing the legacy and the present of religious diversity

Shkodra, a prime example of a former Ottoman border town – often referred to by its inhabitants as the unofficial capital of Albania and the ‘bastion’ of the urban middle class – was a prominent target of the totalitarian regime of Enver Hoxha. One aspect of the socialist legacy – of ‘fatal relevance’ for inquiries into religious belief and practice – is the period of imposed atheism (1967–1990). Regardless of religious belonging and individual devoutness in the narratives of the Shkodranese, the totalitarian legacy figures as a traumatic period of the destruction, not only of religion, but also of the urban way of life, crucially characterized by the peaceful accommodation of religious and sociocultural diversity.

Like other religious communities in Albania, the Muslim Community was exposed to an increasing level of control by the state, culminating in the request to ‘instill’ in citizens the loyalty to the Hoxha regime and the state even before the ban on religion (Elsie 2010: 203). Indeed, the Grand Mufti of Shkodra was one of the clerics executed by the regime for refusing to comply with these demands (ibid.). His execution – as well as many stories about imprisoned Islamic believers from Shkodra – was often used by my interlocutors to illustrate the claim that the Muslims of Shkodra were ‘favored’ targets of the totalitarian regime.

While the everyday mnemonic practices (e.g. narratives, jokes, genealogies) are a clear expression of the traumatization meted out by a totalitarian ‘all-pervading’ state, one of the few positive attributions to the post-socialist state – generally perceived as corrupt and chaotic – is the re-instatement of religious freedom. However, there is also a strong reluctance among the population to be identified as an ‘Islamic’ state. An illustrative example in this regard was Albania’s entry into the Organization of the Islamic Conference in 1992, which engendered strong critique from Albanians from all religious denominations (Elsie 2010:
This attitude resonates with the reluctance of the Muslim population in Shkodra to embrace new forms of Islamic practice, often identified as too pronounced and ‘fanatic’ (see also fifth section).

The newly garnered religious freedoms in the local urban context of Shkodra have generated a process of religious revitalization – including both mutual respect and competition between the three main religious communities. A milestone within the context of the return of religion in the case of the Catholic community was the visit of the Pope and Mother Theresa to Shkodra in 1993, which not only had a strong impact on the image of the Catholic Church in Shkodra, but clearly re-established the town’s role as the regional center of Catholicism. In the case of the Albanian Orthodox community, the revitalization was strongly connected to the support of the Archbishop based in Tirana and resulted in the construction of a new Orthodox Christian Church in the center of Shkodra.

In the case of the Sunni Muslim community in Shkodra, the end of the ban on religion led to the reestablishment of the local Islamic organization (Myftinia Shkodër), with Faik Hoxha as the first new mufti. Having spent 23 years in prison as a cleric, Faik Hoxha was a crucial and oft-mentioned figure in narratives concerning both the suppression and the revival of Islam in Shkodra. As in other parts of Albania and the Balkans, the Islamic revival in Shkodra also featured the rebuilding of mosques, all (but one) of which were destroyed by the Hoxha regime. The only mosque ‘spared’ – the old Lead Mosque in the former city center (Xhamia e Plumbit) from the late 18th century – figures as another crucial narrative reference concerning Shkodra’s special role within the Islamic revival in Albania. Indeed, it was precisely in the old Lead Mosque where the first post-socialist Grand Mufti of Albania, Hafiz Sabri Koçi, performed the first public prayer in Albania after the religious ban had been lifted in November 1990. The establishment of ‘Turkish’ schools – with a strong element of Islamic education, gender division and compulsory veiling – as well as the related influx of Islamic charities and the formation of a new transnationally educated and connected clerical elite were further aspects of the Islamic revival in Shkodra as much as elsewhere in Albania (Elbasani 2015).

Of special relevance in this chapter is the presence of Islam in the urban space in the shape of public prayers, Iftars, and diverse religious celebrations. A related and prominent aspect of the new ‘perceptibility’ of Islam is the transformation of the local urban soundscape in Shkodra through the loudspeaker-amplified, taped, call for prayer. Although not comparable with the complex impact of the ‘ethical soundscape’ created by recorded sermons marking the Islamic revival (Hirschkind
2006), the amplified *ezan* represents a crucial rupture in the local urban soundscape in Shkodra, and ignites debates on the ‘proper place’ of religion in the urban space.

As hinted at in the introductory quote, the recently transformed urban soundscape crosses cuts another manifestation of religion in the urban space. Already in the very first days of my fieldwork, a common reaction to my address – ‘Oh, so you live in the Muslim part of town’ – revealed to me the implicitly religiously based spatial organization of the city. In spite of the frequently mentioned socialist top-down strategy of internal urban migration, with the aim of ‘mixing’ the city quarters – this crucial aspect of the Ottoman legacy (Sugar 1977: 74) has remained relevant up to the present day. As revealed through everyday conversations, the spatial manifestation of religious boundaries was both seen as a given (historical) ‘fact’, and as a permeable and flexible spatial order. Moreover, this model of everyday life, with these implicit and non-rigid boundaries between religious communities, was often used to explain and illustrate the ‘calm’ character of Shkodra and its inhabitants. Religious coexistence was often portrayed as an active social practice of mutual respect in the context of the shared urban space. In this spirit, while we were once listening to a young Muslim woman talking about her positive experience of living in a Catholic neighborhood – where everyone respected the other religious community by mutual visits for religious holidays – Lirije, an accountant in her 40s, concluded: *Po, natyr-isht, janë qytetarë!* (Yes, of course, they are urbanites!). This comment can also be read through the notion of *komshillek* (neighborliness) – widely used throughout the Balkans – denoting the Ottoman legacy of a peaceful (inter-communal and interreligious) coexistence on the micro-urban level and hence also a ‘moral environment’ (Sorabji 2008: 102).

A further crucial dimension of social order in Shkodra – based on religious belonging and strongly ‘unsettled’ during socialism – is that of marriage practices. Although the present is marked by a preference for faith-based endogamy – a model that was hegemonic prior to the spread of religiously mixed marriages during the ‘atheist’ period – mixed marriages simultaneously serve as a standard argument for the ‘calm’ character of Shkodra’s inhabitants and its most essential dimension – peaceful interreligious coexistence.

**The ‘calm’ city**

The recurrent term I encountered during my fieldwork, by which citizens of Shkodra described both themselves and their city, was that of ‘calmness’ (Alb. *qetësi/njerezit e qetë*). ‘The Shkodrani are calm people!’.
‘Calmness’ – the ‘metaphorical argument’ continuously reappearing throughout narratives, urban myths, life-stories and interpretations of everyday interactions – can be seen as comprising the ‘habitus’ of the ‘peaceful and tolerant urban dweller’ (Alb. qytetar) insofar as it unifies an inner attitude and behavior grounded in an ‘urban socialization’.\textsuperscript{18}

Religion is one of the crucial reference points of these narratives of ‘calmness’. The following urban myth, which I encountered during my fieldwork – relating to a type of event happening all over the Ottoman Balkans at the beginning of the 20th century (Clayer 2011) – is an accurate illustration of the ‘calmness’ of the Shkodranese, most notably represented through the peaceful accommodation of religious diversity

Once someone, who was not from Shkodra, threw a pig’s head into the Ebu Bekr mosque. These were turbulent times. But the people stayed calm. The voices were not raised. The people of Shkodra understood that this was an external provocation. The head was removed from the mosque and everything was cleaned. The Bishop and the Imam got together right away and decided to span a chain of light between the minaret and the church tower.

(Interview\textsuperscript{19} with a historian, Merzuk (65), 19.12.2011, Shkodra, Albania)

In this standard narrative, the moral order characterizing the local regime, and embedded in the metaphor of ‘calmness’ becomes understandable through memorized social practice. In particular, ‘calmness’ means first and foremost that one does not react to provocations – always said to be external – and that one does not raise one’s voice. Rather, a Shkodranee stays peaceful in the face of potential conflict and – as such – embodies the value of ‘calmness’. Becoming loud, conversely, would entail giving into provocation – in this case possibly accusing the members of other religious denominations of having ignited a conflict.

According to this moral blueprint, ‘calmness’ – with ‘loudness’ as its corollary – also figures as an essential social boundary maker. Indeed, loudness – often directly associated with a potential violent posture – is particularly ascribed to the rural population from the mountains (Alb. Malesore) and the Roma (Alb. Gabel or Magjyp). In this sense, the moral concept of ‘calmness’ can be seen as a variation of the urban–rural discursive dynamics in the Balkans (Bougarel 1999; Jansen 2005; Stefansson 2007). Generally marked by an Orientalizing grammar (Baumann 2004), the urban habitus normatively stands for being ‘cultured’, ‘modern’ and
‘peaceful’, while the rural folk are rendered as ‘lacking culture’, being ‘traditional’ and ‘violent’ (Bringa 1995).

In line with this discursive image of the calm ‘urbanite’, is a general sense of participation in, and contribution to, the city’s economy, which is clearly revealed through the narratives of members of migrant families. The primacy of ‘calmly’ accepting and incorporating one’s affairs into the urban socio-economic and governance structures – as opposed to ‘standing out’, for example, through ‘showing off wealth’, or disrupting the urban economy through violence – is a crucial aspect of being an ‘urbanite’ (Alb. qytetar). A contemporary example is the considerable reluctance citizens of Shkodra express toward the currently emerging ‘Malesor’ neighborhoods on the city margins, which are, inter alia, perceived as constituting a ‘too visible’ display of wealth. The reference to blood-feuds (Alb. gjakmarrje) in the middle of the urban space serves as another narrative ‘constant’ of rendering the Malesori incompatible with the urban ‘calmness’ characterized by a peaceful and participatory attitude.

Of specific interest to the illumination of Shkodran ‘calmness’ as a variation of the discourse of ‘urbanity’ in the Balkans is the focus on a ‘moderate’ practice of religion. In terms of Islam, Shkodra is indeed comparable to the case of Muslims of Sarajevo, particularly in terms of their self-identification as ‘European’ Muslims in a ‘cultural sense’ (Stefansson 2007: 62; see also next section). Accordingly, (rural) newcomers are seen as a threat to the peaceful urban cultural and religious pluralism, due to allegedly being more prone to a more ‘fundamentalist’ religious practice and belonging (ibid.: 68).

In ‘genealogical’ terms, ‘calmness’ can be traced to different aspects of the Ottoman legacy of ‘governing’ urban diversity. A combination of clear boundaries – embodied for example in the urban order of the city along mahalla based on religious and guild membership – and the loyalty and contribution to the common urban economic space represented the Ottoman ‘recipe’ of peaceful urban coexistence. Religious pluralism and tolerance – including the primacy, but also the ‘permeability’ of Islam – and participation in city life (as opposed to tension and conflict) were the main markers of the Ottoman urban habitus. Accordingly, the overall inclusive historical pattern of incorporating migrants and refugees into Ottoman cities (Lafi 2011) – based on their social status, but also the potential and willingness to contribute to the city’s economy – reveals the importance of the Islamic-grounded moral practice of charity, Ottoman ‘pragmatism’ and the impact of reforms.
While the urban myth outlined, dealing with ‘provocation’ through ‘calmness’, clearly illustrates the strength and durability of the Ottoman legacy at the beginning of the 20th century, under the socialist-totalitarian regime, which included an attack on urban values – an ‘urbicide’ including socio-economic as well as material aspects – the habitus of ‘calmness’ has transformed. It can be seen to have been ‘adapted’ to specific modes of survival within a surveillance state. In this sense, aspects of contemporary every-day social practices and ‘social customs’ – such as jokes, the unpopularity of ‘pointing the finger’ at someone or something or the ‘non-refusal mode’ of social interaction – can be read as transformations of ‘calmness’ due to living under totalitarianism.

Islam as the locus of diversity and social marginalization based on ‘urbanity’

How does the moral concept of ‘calmness’ – being constitutive for inter-religious ‘urbanity’ – figure when we look at the Muslim community in Shkodra in particular? The ongoing process of Islamic revival in Shkodra includes both a wide diversity of manifestations of ‘being a Muslim’ as well as a debate about a ‘good’, ‘adequate’ and ‘authentic’ practice of Islam. Moreover, it will come as no surprise that the vertex of this debate is centered precisely on the issue of ‘calmness’ in its diverse dimensions, and in particular, in terms of the perceptibility of individual and collective religious practice in the urban space.

Apart from going beyond the religious-secular binary (Asad 2003), I hold that the constant emic reference to religion as a locus of diversity makes religion in Shkodra in general – and Islam in particular – a favored space of diversity, also in terms of the personal ‘design’ of faith. This observation resonates well with the crucial theoretical insight that there is no clear boundary where ‘religion’ ends and ‘non-religion’ begins (Saler 2009: 164) and that religion hence represents a ‘graded category the instantiations of which are linked by family resemblances’ (ibid.: 168).

Of particular interest for the case of Islam is the reference to the individual relation to God, which I repeatedly encountered in conversations with Shkodran Muslims. This not only relativizes the also ‘active’ emic differentiation between believers (Alb. besimtar) and non-believers (Alb. jo-besimtar/ateist), but also serves as an explanation (or legitimization) for the ‘inner’ diversity of religious practice by Shkodran Muslims. A concurrent explanation is the reference to the impact on imposed
atheism, the aftermath of which is characterized by a process of individually and gradually learning Islam and incorporating religious practice into daily life (see also next section). Finally, this pronounced tolerance for the variety of ‘being a Muslim’ in Shkodra is perfectly in line with – or rather can be considered as another manifestation of – the moral concept and practice of ‘calmness’. The unlikelihood of pointing the finger at or openly criticizing ‘non-believers’, however, has its limits. As will become apparent, the ‘calm’ urban habitus appears incompatible with an ‘over pronounced’ and ‘loud’ practice of Islam.

When living and socializing in Shkodra – especially during religious celebrations or Ramadan – one constantly encounters a variety of ‘pick and choose’ personalized forms of ‘being a Muslim’ (see Introduction). Apart from declared atheists celebrating religious holidays or declared believers who have never been to the mosque, in Shkodra one is confronted with a wide range of constellations of self-images, practices and claims of ‘being’ a Muslim. In this section, I analyze this diversity through brief ‘ethnographic portraits’, and elaborate on the intersection of social marginalization and religious practice in Shkodra.

‘In the Koran one can read the truth about everything. Everything that science said or will say is already revealed in the Koran. Think of artificial insemination, for example! The Koran says that a child can be born of a man and a woman together, but also separately!’ (Fieldnotes 17.5.2012, Shkodra, Albania). Although one might think this view comes from a Muslim believer who is familiar with the Koran, Sidrit²⁷ – a middle-aged shopkeeper – has never been to the mosque, and his knowledge of the Koran relies exclusively on the History Channel.

Ndricim, a waiter in his 50s who declares himself a Muslim, never goes to the mosque, drinks alcohol and eats pork, yet complied with the Ramadan fast. While never complaining, although visibly exhausted during the seemingly endless August days, he would explain to me: ‘That’s simply how it is done. I always observed the fast. My mother is fasting, how could I possibly not?’ (Fieldnotes 28.7.2012, Shkodra, Albania).

‘Negotiations’ regarding belief in the context of daily necessities and gender roles were particularly illuminating in helping me to grasp the complexity and transformations of being a Muslim in contemporary Shkodra. Serveta, an employee in her 50s who had never visited a mosque or had any religious socialization, suddenly started using the ‘correct’ way of referring to the Prophet.²⁸ In spite of her openness to her husband’s gentle persuasion to familiarize herself with the Koran and start visiting the mosque, at home, her husband’s religious ‘turn’
Muslims’ Pursuit of Faith and Religiosity

often led to irritation, as revealed in the following conversation: ‘You can’t go around in front of me when I am reading the Koran! Do you know at all what this is that I am holding in my hands? You can’t just walk by it!’ While gently rolling her eyes at her husband’s complaints, Serveta commented: ‘Where am I supposed to go? I have to iron, tidy up and go around. I am not addressing you at all! What am I supposed to do? Jump over it?’

Blerta, a clerk in her late 20s, and Sidrit, an entrepreneur in his early 30s, members of a close circle of friends, both self-identify as Muslims. While never having been to the mosque or intending to read the Koran, Blerta would however clearly prefer a Muslim for a husband. Sidrit – having recently read the Koran several times, though not visiting the mosque – often criticizes Bektashism (his father’s religious belonging) as an ‘impure’ form of Islam while stating that there is only ‘one Islam’.

Ibrahim, a member of the Serbo-Montenegrin minority in Shkodra, identifies as a ‘Shkodran’ and as a ‘Muslim Serb’. While regularly reading the Koran and attending the Friday prayer, he explicitly demarcates his way of being a Muslim from that of his relatives living in a close-by village and identifying as ‘Podgorican’ (see note 31). Without explicitly condemning their ‘fanatic’ practice – at times legitimizing it by the fact that they went on Hadj, Ibrahim holds that their religious practice (characterized for example by praying five times a day, wearing long beards and short trousers, insisting on strict veiling practices for women, etc.) is far too pronounced for the urban context of Shkodra (see also next section). ‘I am not like them. I pray and go to the mosque only on Friday’. I recall Ibrahim ‘excusing’ his relatives as they once ran out from the restaurant where we were having dinner in order to perform the sunset prayer (Fieldnotes 15.9.2012, Shkodra, Albania).

Cross-cutting these very briefly sketched dynamics and illustrations of ‘being a Muslim’ in Shkodra are social stratification (and migration-related) aspects. For example, a specific fragment of Shkodra’s Muslims is comprised of two segments of the urban population, with a migration-based identity, which has inscribed itself into the local diversity regime through vernacular terms of belonging. As is often highlighted in narratives, both the so-called Ulqinak – migrants from the harbor town Ulqin, who, due to their urban background, more easily entered the realm of the Shkodran middle class – and the so called Podgorican – who either settled in the surrounding villages or joined the working class in the quarter Rus – are considered to have been more pious than the average Shkodran Muslims. Metush – a historian in his late 50s – and his mother Saferja – who came from Ulqin for marriage almost 70 years
ago – remembered how Saferja’s father decided not to stay in Shkodra after all. In this example, the issue of ‘over-pronounced’ visibility of religious belonging proved to be crucial. Namely the ‘Islamic appearance’ of Mehmet – an Imam in Ulqin – wearing a beard and special clothes was viewed to be too radical and too pronounced for Shkodran tastes.

Again another segment of Shkodra’s Muslim population is comprised of the local Roma, who themselves are divided between the population referred to as Egyptians (Alb. Egyption or Magjyp) living on the urban outskirts, and the population (referred to by the negative term Gabel) living in a slum-like neighborhood near one of Shkodra’s bridges. As already mentioned, these segments of the population are, as a rule, denied the status of a ‘qytetar’ – embodying ‘calmness’ – and are instead portrayed as loud and potentially violent. Even the Egyption – who themselves use the ‘urbanity’ discourse to demarcate themselves as more urban than the allegedly non-sedentary Gabel, and who are indeed more included into the hegemonic urban realm – are marginalized in terms of their Islamic religious practice. In particular, their neighborhood across the old market which – as it is often stressed by Egyption representatives with the aim of clarifying their urban status of qytetar – used to be the center of old Shkodra harbors a teqe of the Rufai order, which actively practices the Zikhr. Although tolerated as a local form of Islam, this heterodox Islamic practice – like the community’s members – is marginalized and considered a ‘deviation’ by the Sunni majority for potentially being too loud and violent. In this context, the issue of ‘calmness’ versus ‘loudness’ clearly figures as the main discursive tool of exclusion and demarcation.

Within the diverse meanings attributed to ‘being a Muslim’ in Shkodra – cross-cut by an ‘othering’ of particular communities’ religious practices based on social stratification – there are two significant contemporary ruptures among the Muslim inhabitants of Shkodra. While both can be described as connected to the issue of perceptibility of religion, one rupture represents an internal divide while the other demarcates Shkodran Islam from ‘external’ influences.

**Debating ‘perceptibility’ among the Muslims of Shkodra: The inner divide**

The first rupture can be best described as one dividing the Muslims of Shkodra into those who are critical of the new forms of presence of Islam in the urban space and those who welcome them as a manifestation of Islamic revival.
Apart from a general openness to interreligious marriages, the first ‘way’ of ‘being a Muslim’ in Shkodra is most notably characterized by a standard critique of any ‘over-pronounced’ form of religious practice. In other words, a ‘contained’ religious practice is seen as locally authentic, since this entails the manifestation of the historically grown ‘calmness’ as a guarantee of peaceful religious coexistence. The crucial importance of this aspect of ‘containment’ — that anything too pronounced is seen as a threat to the local way of life and coexistence — is most clearly manifested in the critique of the loud *ezan*, as illustrated by the following field notes-fragment:

Hamdi describes himself as a secularist, an intellectual, a Muslim, a non-Atheist and a non-believer. The most important thing in his life is to be free. While we are drinking coffee in the Grand Hotel Europa the call for prayer starts. ‘Do you hear this?’, says Hamdi visibly irritated. ‘It should be forbidden that the Imam calls for prayer through a loudspeaker! He can sing in the mosque and on the minaret, but why use a loudspeaker? Why does everyone in the city have to hear this? Imagine you live next to a mosque. I mean I respect people who are believers and pray, but why does everyone have to listen to this five times a day? This is a provocation!’.

(Fieldnotes 28.5.2012, Shkodra, Albania)

Beyond being a variation of the ‘classical’ secular argument of seeing religion as a part of the private realm, this critique of the loud call for prayer can also be read as representing reluctance vis-à-vis novel and unauthentic manifestations of local Islam in general. Further recent transformations of Islamic practice critically highlighted in a similar manner are: the locally unauthentic ‘foreign’ or ‘Arab’ style of the newly built mosques; public prayers; veiled women, whose number is perceived as steadily rising; and a related spread of alien forms of Islam, which will be further elaborated in the next section.

However, the ‘other side’ of the portrayed internal rupture among the Muslims of Shkodra — comprised of persons often explicitly referring to themselves as ‘practicing believers’ as opposed to ‘merely’ members of the Muslim community — as a rule does not share the same reluctance regarding the transformed ‘perceptibility’ of present-day Islamic practice in Shkodra. New mosques — although not denying their non-local ‘style’ — are commonly seen as welcome, and indeed magnificent, successors to the smaller and more ‘grounded’ Ottoman-style mosques destroyed by the Hoxha regime. These buildings are thus perceived as a
sign of a desirable Islamic revival. Moreover, certain forms of visibility of Islamic practice in the urban space are endowed with a very positive connotation. A prominent example of such a practice is the public Bajram-prayer, marking the end of the Ramadan, which has been held in the street next to the biggest mosque in the city for the last few years. However, as well as being contested among the Muslim population of Shkodra, this manifestation of the transformation of Islamic practice has led to a ‘competition for visibility’ in the urban space, most notably with the Catholic community of Shkodra. As I was once sitting, having my ‘regular’ coffee with Visar – a Shkodran Muslim in his late 30s – a loudly singing procession of Franciscans passed our café. Visar commented, with a unique mixture of understanding and sarcasm: ‘You see, since there is the public Bajram-prayer, the Catholics are seeking to be more visible too’ (Fieldnotes 6.4.2012, Shkodra, Albania).

Another prime example of this ‘visibility competition’ is the debate on the Mother Teresa statue, which was placed in the center of the city in direct proximity to the main mosque. In spite of a request from the representatives of the Muslim community to transfer the statue to the entrance yard of the Catholic cathedral – since it represents a Catholic symbol and thus not the city of Shkodra as a whole, let alone its Muslim population – the communal government decided against moving the statue.

The argument of Islamic revitalization – of which ‘perceptibility’ is seen as an integral aspect – by a part of Shkodra’s Muslims is seen as a ‘righteous’ return to religious practice after decades of destructive atheism. This is often expressed through the notion of ‘learning’ as expressed by Drini, a young historian in his late 30s. Drini – considering himself a believer in the state of ‘learning’ – characterizes Shkodra-Muslims as a community in an initial phase of the process of learning: ‘With the opening of Albania, also the religion came here…you accept and step by step you may arrive at some point, but for me this is the present condition, we are learning the religion at the moment, we are at the start of learning’ (Interview with Drini (37), 8.11.2011, Shkodra, Albania).

Rejecting the ‘fanatike’: Private and socio-historical demarcations

Common to both sides of the divide – even though practicing believers are in favor of an Islamic revitalization including the aforementioned forms of religious ‘perceptibility’ and on-going transnational
connections\textsuperscript{34} – is a rejection of a radically visible Islamic practice seen as strongly divergent from the local urban practice of ‘calmness’. This second Islam-related rupture in Shkodra – manifested as ‘taking ownership’ of faith by marking specific external influences as alien and inappropriate (see also Introduction) – can also be read through the notion of authenticity, which is always ‘closely related to the relationship between an inner state and an external expression’ (Fillitz and Sarris 2012: 14). The emic term one encounters in narratives and everyday interactions referring to ‘over-pronounced’ practices of Islam is \textit{fanatike/besimtare fanatike} (fanatic/fanatic believers).\textsuperscript{35}

A myriad of impressions, encounters and stories negatively refer to this new and alien Islamic practice and its over-pronounced ‘perceptibility’. Almost comprising a ‘genre’, the ‘sudden-transformation-narratives’ about friends, neighbors and relatives are omnipresent among the Muslims of Shkodra. ‘I suddenly recognized his blue eyes’, remembered Helga – a young interpreter in her late 20s – while she recalls how she recently realized that the full-bearded man wearing three-quarter trousers entering the same bus was her former schoolmate (Fieldnotes 11.11.2011, Shkodra, Albania). As was known in her circle of friends for some time, the timid young man, after having left for Tirana to study, had suddenly become a pious believer and married a completely covered woman from the countryside. Again, the discourse postulates that a too-pronounced perceptibility of religion is not authentic, and is not compatible with the value of ‘calmness’. Veiled and especially completely covered women are as a rule not held to be from Shkodra, and are often ascribed a ‘rural’ or ‘foreign’ origin.

It does not come as a surprise that there is a pronounced reluctance to open up the private realm of the family to this novel form of Islamic practice. The marriage preferences of young Muslim women in Shkodra are thus also going through a transformation related to the appearance of a new form of ‘being a Muslim’ in the urban space. Sidita – a non-practicing young Muslina – although preferring a Muslim for husband, unhesitatingly states that she would rather marry a Catholic than a too pious Muslim. In a similar way, Bashkim – who is meanwhile desperately looking for a Muslim husband for his daughter – fully complies with one aspect of her ‘pickiness’ (that he otherwise nags about). Namely, Lirije has recently ‘disqualified’ an otherwise interesting ‘candidate’ for very particular reason: ‘He simply went to the mosque far too often’ (Fieldnotes 3.4.2012, Shkodra, Albania). Bashkim’s related narrative about his pious neighbor (most of the time living as a migrant in Vienna) brought about an indicative
characterization of Shkodra and its ‘authentic’ Islam. After having recalled how shocked he was by a Bajram-visit at his neighbor’s home – where his wife was immediately led to the women’s quarter of the house and he himself was repeatedly advised to ‘also start living according the Islamic order’ – Bashkim concluded: ‘This is foreign to us. It comes from Saudi Arabia and there is money involved! We are Europeans. We don’t need this here!’ (Fieldnotes 3.4.2012, Shkodra, Albania).

However the ‘fanatic’ practice of Islam is not always located as ‘external’ and ‘alien’. As revealed by historical narratives on families and the way of life in Shkodra, a more visible and pious practice of religion does indeed appear as an integral part of the religious life in Shkodra. Yet, here it is ‘othered’ as well. Apart from ascribing the more ‘pronounced’ and ‘fanatic’ practice to historical migrants (such as the Podgorican), social status and gender figure as the crucial reference points of ‘othering’ specific modes of ‘being a Muslim’ in Shkodra. Namely, a myriad of narrative-historical accounts collected during my fieldwork primarily trace the emergence of an educated, ‘modern’ Shkodran urban middle-class, whose daughters would not wear a veil and who would have the opportunity to gain a holistic education. Here, a more liberal stance toward gender relations figures as a marker of social status and ‘urbanity’. The family narrative by Mirsad, a lawyer and communal employee, clearly exhibits this line of argument. While talking about his mother, Mirsad continually highlighted the fact that she did not wear a veil and received her education at the Catholic Stigmatine Girl’s school, which – unlike the local madrasas – provided children not only with a religious, but also a general education. The following narrative about Mirsad’s mother’s wedding photo transcends a family and individual biographical narrative space. It can be considered exemplary of the often-highlighted significance of the existence of an urban Muslim middle class. Namely, Muslims who reject female-coercive religious practices are portrayed as being the basis for urban interreligious tolerance and coexistence.

At that time women from some Muslim families would never be unveiled – especially not in front of a camera. But my mother was not from a fanatic family. Families like ours comprised the basis of the harmony among the three religions in Shkodra. Their members were educated, they had the adequate – economic and cultural – level necessary for tolerance.

(Interview with Mirsad (67), 18.12.2011, Shkodra, Albania)
Along these lines, wearing a veil and receiving a holistic education as a woman is seen as a sign of not being ‘fanatic’, and instead embodying the urban moral value of ‘calmness’ considered as the basis for interreligious tolerance, and hence peaceful coexistence.

Conclusions

By applying the lens of diversity – in terms of intersections of most notably religion, social status, ‘urbanity’ and gender – to a specific urban context in the Balkans, this paper argued that explorations of the transforming Islamic belonging and practice must include an analysis of the entanglement of legacies and the present as well as situating religion within broader socio-economic dynamics.

Accordingly it has been explored how the ‘moral grounding’ of the local urban diversity regime – embedded in the emic notion of ‘calmness’ claimed to be the basis of ‘urbanity’, entailing peaceful coexistence in a highly diverse and migration-affected urban setting – figures as a discursive instrument of inclusion and exclusion. As has been shown with regard to the religious realm, and Islam in particular, ‘calmness’ ‘translates’ both into a pronounced ‘tolerance’ to a variety of individual practices of ‘being a Muslim’ – actually transcending the (existing emic) differentiation of the religious and the secular – and a reluctance toward any ‘over-pronounced’ perceptibility of religion in the urban space.

The specificities of the local diversity regime that have been outlined – although featuring debates and divisions on the issue of the ‘good’ and ‘authentic’ practice of Islam – provide an example of an urban setting featuring pronounced transformations of religious practice (after totalitarian atheism and in the midst of transnational influences), while at the same time (re)claiming a sense of ‘authenticity’ and ‘continuity’ for a historically rooted modus of ‘accommodating’ difference.

Notes

1. The reference to Fieldnotes throughout the text includes the ethnographic field diary kept during the following two fieldwork periods in Shkodra: November and December 2011; and March–October 2012.
2. With reference to Foucault’s notion of the discursive formation, Grillo defines the diversity regime as ‘principles underlying the configurations of diverse populations’ (Grillo 2010: 13) and ‘giving diversity a specific direction’ (ibid: 16). Regimes are to be understood as processes, as constantly ‘in formation’, rather than as static phenomena (ibid.: 16).
3. The overarching notion of ‘perceptibility’ enables me to refer to relevant aural and visual dimensions of faith beyond the ‘hierarchy of the senses’ (e.g. Bull and Back 2003).

4. According to the latest census, the core urban area of Shkodra has 77,075 inhabitants (INSTAT 2013: 84).

5. While being considered the center of Catholicism in Albania (47.19 per cent of the population), almost 45 per cent of the population of the district of Shkodra self-identify as Muslims (44.84 per cent Sunni Muslims, 0.07 per cent Bektashi and a minority of Rifa’i). Orthodox Christians comprise the smallest part of the population (0.38 per cent) (INSTAT 2013: 39).

6. For a more detailed account of the diversity configuration in Shkodra, see Tošić (forthcoming).

7. The structure of the Sunni Muslim Community in Albania established in the 1930s (four Grand Muftis in Tirana, Shkodra, Korça and Gjirokastra) was the basis for the post World War II division into four districts with a Grand Mufti for each (Elsie 2010: 203). Along with the Sunni majority, Albania was and is one of the centers of the Bektashi community.

8. Albania is the only state in the Balkans with a Muslim majority.

9. This diversity of religions in Shkodra is a feature of the wider context of religious pluralism in Albania, in which – as opposed to other cases in the Balkans – religion as a rule does not figure as a marker and instrument of ethno-nationalism (see also Introduction).

10. On this occasion, the Great Cathedral in Shkodra was inaugurated.

11. A further and ascending Orthodox Christian community – embodied by a newly built church in the village of Vraka, 7 km from Shkodra – is inextricably linked to the emergence of minority claims and organizations by the community of the ‘Serbo-Montenegrins’.

12. The overarching state-level organization in Albania is the Islamic Community of Albania (Alb. Komuniteti Mysliman i Sqipërisë) based in Tirana.

13. As in other parts of the Balkans, most of the new mosques – such as the central mosque in Shkodra – are commonly referred to as ‘foreign’ mosques, due to their non-Ottoman appearance and the financial basis of their installment.

14. This practice set in after the ban on religion was lifted in 1990.

15. In Shkodra the word ‘komshiu’ denotes the ‘neighbor’, while ‘neighborhood’ is usually referred to as ‘lagje’ (or ‘mëhallë’).

16. One of the reasons for a genuine openness toward mixed marriages is the simple fact that – since it is literally never questioned that religious belonging has to be inherited along the male line – the practice of mixed marriages is perfectly in line with the hegemonic patriarchal ideology.

17. A reiteratively highlighted fact is that two current religious representatives in Shkodra – the Imam and Orthodox Priest – are both children of a mixed marriage and as such literally embody the local pattern of peaceful interreligious coexistence.

18. The ideology of ‘calmness’ crucially intersects with of a prominent middle class discourse in Shkodra – the discourse on so-called ‘old urban families’ (Alb. familje e vjeter) (see Tošić forthcoming).

19. The notion ‘Interview’ refers to recorded, transcribed and anonymized conversations conducted during my fieldwork (see note 1).
20. For a more elaborate historical grounding see, Tošić (forthcoming).

21. In the 19th century in the course of reforms aiming at creating ‘European-style’ urban governance (Sahara 2011: 26), administrative bodies such as the city council emerged, yet still religious tolerance and parity featured prominently as one of the main axis of power distribution and representation (ibid.: 32).

22. This became especially relevant when – starting in the 18th century – the ‘Muslim character’ of the Ottoman city started to change due to the arrival of Christian traders and craftsmen (Sugar 1977).

23. In the course of the Tanzimat-reforms – instead of status (e.g. nobility) – primarily property and fiscal capacity (Lafi 2011: 21) became prime ‘coordinates’ of the urban incorporation of migrants.

24. The core of the Ottoman urban order – the old bazar – was destroyed; internal migration measures led to the ‘mixing’ of the religious boroughs, imprisonment and extermination of the cleric and urban elites, etc.

25. When conducting fieldwork in Shkodra, one soon encounters references to the Shkodran ‘tradition of jokes’ – humor Shkodran – which is often used to illustrate precisely the calm urban habitus of expressing critique and tension in an acceptable and non-conflict-generating way.

26. One of my earliest ethnographic insights is the unlikelihood of being explicitly refused when asking for a favor (a contact, a source, attendance at a social event, etc.) in Shkodra. Read through ‘calmness’, this practice of entering social obligations, while already being aware of future non-compliance, is about avoiding an explicit ‘no’ as a potential basis for tension.

27. In addition to changed personal information, all names of my interlocutors have been anonymized.

28. Sallallahu alayhi wasallam.

29. This quote can also be read as religious practice serving as the means to legitimate male passivity and thus the patriarchal gender regime, and in that way, negatively ‘moralize’ female efficiency and problem-orientation with reference to religion as ‘ingratitude’ and ‘Impatience’.

30. Ulqin (Mn. Ulcinj), a harbor with an Albanian Muslim majority, was ‘granted’ to Montenegro through the Congress of Berlin in 1878. Shortly thereafter, a significant number of Albanian Muslim families (or parts of them) – most notably well-off families of sailors or entrepreneurs – left for Shkodra.

31. The term Podgorican, literally people that came from Podgorica, the present-day Montenegrin capital, refers to Slavic-speaking Balkan Muslims heading toward the core lands of the shrinking Ottoman Empire at the end of the 19th century of which a huge number settled precisely in Shkodra.

32. The Zikhr/Dikhr – as an ecstatic form of loud repetitive prayer – sometimes includes a ritual penetration of body parts.

33. Here it is also interesting to mention that there has been a citizens’ initiative asking for the curbing of both the loud call for prayer and church bells.

34. These are primarily manifested in the aforementioned new mosques and ‘Turkish’ schools, but also through the education-related migration of the Muslim elite (most notably to Turkey, Egypt and Saudi Arabia).
35. Unlike, for example, in Montenegro (or Bosnia), the term ‘Wahhabi’ or ‘Salafi’ is not present in everyday conversations concerning the novel form of Islam in Shkodra.

36. The claim that families embodying the ‘unauthentic’ Islamic practice do receive money was a ‘standard statement’ during my fieldwork.

Bibliography


Muslim Women’s Dress Practices in Bosnia-Herzegovina: Localizing Islam through Everyday Lived Practice

Andreja Mesarič

Introduction

Islamic revival in Bosnia-Herzegovina¹ is usually read in one of two ways: as a political utilization of religion in the pursuit of nationalist ends or as a manifestation of a global spread of radical Islam. However, by focusing on the everyday experiences of people living this revival, we can observe a complexity of Islamic discourses and practices that individual believers relate to in a variety of ways. While religion in Bosnia had undeniably been co-opted for political purposes, the Islamic revival contains an unmistakable religious dimension that has been documented as early as the 1980s (Sorabji 1989). For a significant number of Bosniaks, Islam is more than a cultural identity. It is personal faith that guides them in their process of becoming a particular kind of self. This complex relationship between political discourses and faith in the Balkans is explored in detail in the Introduction and dealt with throughout the chapters in this volume. What this chapter contributes to the discussion is an account of how individual believers interact with political, cultural and religious discourses in their daily lives. It is based on ten months of ethnographic fieldwork conducted in Sarajevo during several trips between 2005 and 2010, where I spent most of my time visiting a variety of Islamic spaces and talking with women who identified as believers.

The chapter takes a closer look at how the everyday lived practice of ordinary Muslims not only represents or reflects a local variety of Islam but rather actively contributes to the localization of Islam. It pays
particular attention to dress and highlights its generative and transformative potential. When the topic of Islam in Bosnia first caught my interest, I wanted to explore the symbolic potency of Muslim women's veiling. But what I found was far more interesting. Dress is not only about symbolic communication. It is not only about saying; it is also about doing. What matters are not dress codes but dress practices. If we are interested in identification rather than identity (Hall and du Gay 1996), embodiment rather than the body (Csordas 1994) and spatialization rather than space (van Loon 2002), we also need to look at the meaning of dressing rather than items of clothing. Shifting our focus from structure to agency leads us to observing dress not as an object but as a choice, process and a gendered bodily practice (Entwistle and Wilson 2001). This essay therefore looks at how dress as an everyday lived practice serves to construct, maintain and transform different visions of Islam in Bosnia.

The chapter sets out by outlining the factors that influenced how Bosnian Islam was shaped as a political and cultural idea. It focuses particularly on the role of alternative ways of practicing Islam that Bosnia has increasingly been in touch with since the 1990s and the effects of the global war on terror. Bosnian Islam is constructed as tolerant and compatible with European values, seemingly reconciling the division between Islam and the West. However, the casting of Bosnian Islam as a European Islam, contrasted with a backward and threatening Eastern Islam, often does more to reproduce Orientalist dichotomies than to undermine them (cf. Bougarel 2007; Helms 2008; Chapter 1 in this volume). The chapter goes on to contrast this conceptual binary of Bosnian and Eastern/Arab/foreign Islam with the lived practice of ordinary believers. Along the way, it looks at different sources of Islamic knowledge available in contemporary Bosnia and deals with the Islamic establishment's struggle to maintain authority over religious matters. Focusing primarily on women and young people, it discusses how believers experiment with different interpretations and ways of practicing Islam. It explores how they maneuver the plurality of Islamic discourses and spaces in Sarajevo and looks at the transformative potential of everyday practices. The chapter concludes with a discussion of how dress practices figure in transforming space and in creating different visions of Bosnian Islam.

Creating Bosnian Islam

Bosnian Islam is commonly understood as being characterized by moderation and compatibility with Western democratic values. It has been
highlighted as a possible basis for developing a European Islam attuned to Western modernity that would be recognized as their own by Muslims across Europe (Bougarel 2007; Moe 2007a, 2007b). The tolerant nature of Bosnian Islam has been attributed to various, sometimes contradictory, influences. Some of the most commonly cited factors are an Ottoman legacy of religious tolerance, a strong Sufi tradition, adherence to the Hanafi school of law, syncretic vernacular Islam, and a legacy of socialist secularism. Tradition is salient in defining Bosnian Islam and there is a strong emphasis on its historical presence of over 500 years. However, this narrative tends to neglect the internal heterogeneity of Muslim beliefs and practices in Bosnia that changed over time and varied across different sections of society. Islamic modernist ideas that came to dominate Bosnian religious institutions in the 20th century differed greatly from the Islam that first arrived to the region in the 15th century. Furthermore, Islamic scholars (ulama) would often disagree on religious and social issues. A particularly relevant example is the ulama’s diverging views on women’s veiling in the 1920s and 1930s (Karić 2003; Bougarel 2008; Giomi 2009). During the same period, both modernist and conservative ulama also criticized syncretic vernacular beliefs and practices (Bougarel 2008) that are now often seen as an important influence on Bosnian Islam’s tolerance and moderation.

Looking for historical influences allows for only a limited understanding of Bosnian Islam. Observing it as a political and cultural idea can be more illuminating than viewing it as a set of beliefs and practices. Despite the emphasis on centuries of tradition, the notion of Bosnian Islam as we know it today formed relatively recently. This process was similar to developments across the post-socialist Balkans (cf. Elbasani and Saatçıoğlu 2014; Elbasani 2015). Above all, Bosnian Islam draws its legitimacy from its ‘localness’. That is why tradition and historical continuity are so central to its definition. The emphasis on proving that Bosnian Muslims are native to the region was particularly vital during the 1992–1995 war at a time when Serb and Croat nationalists were portraying Muslims as a foreign Turkish remnant. During this time, the term Bosniaks (Bošnjaci) replaced the name Bosnian Muslims, which had been the official ethnonym for Bosnia’s Muslim population since the 1960s (Sorabji 1989: 13–15; Bringa 1995: 27–29). This move was intended to further strengthen the Muslim population’s claims to indigeneity (Hečimović 2008). It was also crucial to portray the local version of Islam as tolerant in order to secure Western support and ensure that the conflict will not be explained through the lens of Islamic extremism. Placating a Western audience continues to be a factor today, with the promise of EU membership on the horizon.
Another important element contributed to how Bosnian Islam would be shaped as a concept. It formed partly in response to alternative Islamic discourses and practices promoted by a variety of international Muslim humanitarians and fighters. Consequently, attributes ascribed to Bosnian Islam represent the opposite of what is perceived to be characteristic of an imagined and unitary Eastern or Arab Islam. Tolerance became its primary feature in contrast to an inherently threatening Eastern Islam. Unsurprisingly, the rift between Bosnian and foreign Islam gained added prominence after 9/11. With Bosnia being located on a supposed clash of civilizations’ fault line, choosing a side was imperative. The Bosnian government closed down several NGOs on the suspicion of terrorism (Kohlmann 2004: 219–220; Moe 2009b: 153–155). Numerous aid workers and former combatants had their Bosnian citizenship revoked and were deported to their countries of origin or handed over to US authorities. Many of these actions were criticized by Amnesty International and the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights as human rights violations (Moe 2009b: 130–137; Li 2010).

The discourse of Bosnian Islam lent itself well to positioning Bosnia on the side of Western civilization and non-extremism. This view was reinforced by the writing of many Western journalists, policy consultants and academics. Around the time when I first started my fieldwork, several Sarajevans recommended I read Stephen Schwartz’s book *The Two Faces of Islam* that had just been translated into Bosnian. It turned out to be paradigmatic of what I later came to know as the ‘good Muslim/bad Muslim’ discourse (Mamdani 2004). This is what it had to say about Bosnia:

This beautiful, tranquil Alpine country, only an hour by air from Vienna and Rome, was an unknown laboratory for the development of an indigenous European Islam, of a kind unseen since the fall of Granada in 1492. Its traditions were pluralist, and Bosnian Communism had combined economic development with neutrality toward Islam, which shielded the populace from any threat of Wahhabi or other extremist appeals. Bosnia, in other words, was poised to create a truly modern Euro-Islam.

(Schwartz 2002: 169–170)

Others have used a similar discourse. Juan Carlos Antunez, who has written extensively on Salafism in Bosnia, draws heavily on the vocabulary of Bosnian Islam when he writes: ‘Bosnian Muslims have nurtured a tradition of Hanafism for over 500 years by following a moderate and open
version of Islam: rich in tradition, tolerant to other communities and attuned to Western values’ (2009: 112). Many authors construct a stark distinction between tolerant Bosnian Islam and extremist Wahhabism. They also stress their respective localness and foreignness by using terms like ‘imported’. Kenneth Morrison’s briefing to the Defence Academy of the United Kingdom, for example, claims that ‘Wahhabism is an import into the Balkans, and stands in stark contrast to the traditional strains of Islam in the region’ (2008: 2). According to Evan Kohlmann’s book on the mujahideen that fought in the Bosnian war, ‘the relaxed and scholarly European Islam developed in Bosnia was absolutely opposed to the harsh tenets of Wahhabism and Salafism that the Arab-Afghans desperately sought to export elsewhere. The clash between local Islam and foreign fundamentalist Islam was critical’ (2004: 230).

This kind of distinction between a moderate and tolerant, West-friendly Islam and an extremist, violent Wahhabi or Salafist Islam is not limited to Bosnia. It has become widespread globally after 9/11 among non-Muslims and Muslims alike. Mahmood Mamdani (2004) has aptly described it as the discourse of ‘good and bad Muslims’. It entails pitting an extremist Islam of foreign fighters and missionaries against tolerant local traditions. Rootedness in Bosnian soil is therefore just as critical to the definition of Bosnian Islam as its tolerance. The location – or dislocation – of the Islam in question is just as important as its message. Darryl Li (2010) has introduced the concept of ‘Muslim out of place’, when writing about deportations of former fighters and humanitarians in Bosnia. He draws on two different sources when coining this phrase. The first is Mary Douglas’ concept of ‘matter out of place’ that theorizes the understanding of dirt as dangerous to social order. The second appears in the memoirs of Edward Said where being ‘out of place’ is a state of separation from home that can condition new forms of subjectivity. The mujahideen in Bosnia are seen as being out of place, as not belonging there. There is a danger connected to this out-of-place-ness that can only be neutralized by returning them to where they belong, by deporting them to the places they came from. Li understands the very term ‘foreign fighters’ as significant because it conceptually separates deracinated, fanatical and violent Arabs from local Muslims whose tolerant disposition should be nurtured (2010). The understanding of Salafism as a foreign threat is so entrenched that even contemporary tensions tend to be framed as a conflict between Salafists and local Muslims. This effectively ignores the fact that it is ‘locals’ that constitute the vast majority of people with Salafist beliefs. It also overlooks Bosniaks’ internal heterogeneity.
The relationship between Salafism and Bosnian Islam is all too often oversimplified. We can observe its complexity on the example of two mundane practices, dress and alcohol consumption. These are both gendered practices. Dress is largely debated in relation to women and alcohol consumption is still much more acceptable among men, especially when it comes to heavy drinking (cf. Sorabji 1989: 113–114). Perhaps due to their complementary gendered nature, these two practices are often used to evidence the tolerant nature of Bosnian Islam. Many Bosniaks see liberal attitudes to dress and alcohol as a mark of being modern and European (Helms 2008). Western media reports during the war also liked to emphasize the fact that most men drink and most women do not cover their hair as evidence of the liberal and Westernized nature of Bosnia’s Muslims. At the same time, these were some of the practices that faced the harshest criticism from the mujahideen for being un-Islamic. Looking at these two examples, the explanation of the conflict between foreign missionaries and locals as one between Salafism and a Sufi or Hanafi tradition clearly falls short. Hanafism is no more open to drinking than any other school of Islamic law and the predominant forms of Sufism in Bosnia, unlike certain Sufi orders elsewhere, do not condone drinking or other practices normally characterized as haram (Sorabji 1989: 160; Karčić 2009: 125). Face veiling that is often seen as a Salafist import had been practiced by certain sections of Bosnian society well into the 20th century. Moreover, many saw it as a symbol of Bosnian Muslim identity (Mesarić 2011: 58–108). It first started declining under Habsburg rule (1878–1918) but only disappeared from practice in the 1950s as a consequence of enforced state secularism (Milišić 1986, 1996, 1999; Radić 2005; Donia 2006: 218–220).

Most Bosniaks view Salafism, or Wahhabism (vehabizam), as it is more commonly known, as a foreign imposition. But there is a marked distinction between the view of Western security forces on the hunt for terrorists and the way most Bosniaks experience Salafism. Although Salafism is often linked to Saudi Arabia, it is a heterogeneous transnational phenomenon with a global following. Western political elites therefore become anxious at the sight of Muslims, who seem to lack strong ties to any locally defined version of Islam. Conversely, the majority of Bosniaks see Salafism as a localized form of Islam that they define culturally in a similar manner to Bosnian Islam. It is variously termed Eastern, Arab, Saudi or occasionally ‘desert’ Islam. It is commonly understood as an expression of a localized Arab culture, a traditional form of Islam characteristic of the Arabian Peninsula or sometimes the wider Arab Middle East. Accordingly, that is where many of my interlocutors believed it should stay. There is a popular saying
that advocates of a moderate Bosnian Islam like to use when explaining why ‘Arab’ Islam cannot take root in Bosnia: ‘A palm tree cannot grow in Bosnia any more than a plum tree can in Arabia’.

Their issue is not only with the strictness of Salafism as such. Salafism is deemed to be inappropriate in the Bosnian context because it is seen as incompatible with Bosnian-cum-European culture. Many of my interlocutors tried to demonstrate this with the example of face veiling. Regardless of whether they explicitly referenced culture as a concept or simply spoke of a practice or idea ‘not being ours’, the cultural essentialization involved in the process was very similar (Mesarič 2013). Enisa, who had herself been wearing hijab since her teens, was one of many women and men I spoke to that found *niqab* (face veil) inappropriate in Bosnia. ‘Well, I think that it’s not practical for our climate, for our culture, nor is it necessary, because the goal of veiling is for a woman to somehow protect herself, to not attract attention to herself’. In Enisa’s view, wearing *niqab* in the Bosnian cultural context defeats the purpose of veiling precisely because it attracts attention instead of deflecting it. There is a place and time for *niqab* and it is not modern-day Sarajevo. This was also highlighted by Aida, another of my interlocutors: ‘I think that’s something that the Bedouins, those in Arabia, in the desert, I don’t know, that they wore some sort of face veils. They veiled completely and wore black’.

Women’s dress is of great significance in the struggle over the definition of Bosnian Islam. The vast majority of Bosniak women, including many practicing Muslims, do not cover their hair. Still, the number of women who wear hijab increased significantly in the past two decades (Chapter 10; Helms 2008). The practice of veiling is most commonly referred to as *pokrivanje* (covering). The headscarf is called *marama* or *mahrama*. The latter term has stronger Bosniak connotations since vocabulary that is shared with Serbs and Croats is often distinguished as Bosniak by an added ‘h’ sound. We can also find women who veil their face. Their number is very low, but the practice is extremely controversial. The *niqab* is often referred to as *zar*. This term originally denoted a particular type of dress that included a black face veil and was worn primarily by urban elites during the first half of the 20th century (Beljkašić-Hadžitedić 1990, 1998; Bajić 1996). *Hidžab* and *nikab* as Bosnian versions of the terms hijab and *niqab* came into wider use relatively recently but are commonly used among women who themselves practice these dress styles.

Even if in today’s Bosnia many support the idea that Bosnian Islam is the way to go, people’s ideas of exactly what constitutes that Islam vary. Some understand it primarily as a question of cultural heritage
and tradition while others also emphasize its religious significance and the importance of personal piety. While most Bosniaks would agree that the *niqab* is something that falls outside the scope of what is considered Bosnian Islam, opinions on the hijab differ. Many understand the fact that most Bosniak women do not cover their hair as part of Bosnia’s moderate tradition and perceive new veiling practices as a foreign import. On the other hand, an increasing number of Muslims who emphasize the importance of Islam as a guiding principle in their daily lives see veiling as firmly rooted in Bosnian tradition.

The multiple sources of Islamic knowledge and authority in contemporary Bosnia

Differing opinions on the nature of Bosnian Islam are paralleled by the variety of actors on Bosnia’s fragmented religious market (cf. Moe 2009a). The body officially charged with managing Islamic affairs in Bosnia is the Islamic Community (*Islamska Zajednica*) – IC. It is headed by the *reisu-l-ulema* (head of the ulama). This post was first introduced in 1882 as a result of Habsburg colonial policies that aimed to sway Bosnia’s Muslims away from the influence of Ottoman religious authorities (Karčić 1999a; Karčić 1999b: 123–126; Bougarel 2008: 317). In its history, the IC underwent several structural transformations and name changes. Although Bosnian-dominated, it had been responsible for the religious affairs of all of Yugoslavia’s Muslims for much of the 20th century. It re-formed as a Bosnian institution in 1993 (Hećimović 2008: 191; Moe 2009a: 107). While the IC’s power had never been absolute, the emergence of new Islamic actors and competing discourses in the 1990s significantly weakened its position (Bougarel 2001). Consequently, it undertook different measures to assert its authority over Islam in Bosnia. The IC’s constitution adopted in 1997 states adherence to the Hanafi school of law in matters of religious worship or *ibadat* (*ibadet*) (Karčić 2009: 122–123; Moe 2009a: 106). It also references the Islamic tradition of Bosniaks (*islamska tradicija Bošnjaka*). This is a phrase IC officials prefer to use instead of Bosnian Islam, since the latter could be interpreted to contradict the religion’s universality (Karčić 2009: 122–123). In 2006, the IC also passed a resolution that aimed ‘to protect the authenticity of the centuries-old tradition’ of Islam as practiced in Bosnia. It urged imams and other religious professionals to be more consistent in their interpretation of Islam ‘based on the Qur’an, Sunna and our Bosnian-Herzegovinian experience’ (quoted in Hećimović 2008: 198; see also Moe 2009a: 106). Most Muslims in Bosnia recognize the IC as a ruling
Islamic authority. However, many are critical of it as too bureaucratic and detached from believers (see Chapter 10). While it is valued as a body connecting Bosniaks, its religious significance has been diminished by the appearance of other Islamic actors.

As explored by Elbasani in Introduction, and demonstrated by several chapters in this volume (particularly Chapters 3, 6 and 11), Islamic revival is commonly accompanied by a move from institutionalized religion to individualized religiosity, a distinction between nominal Muslims and believers, and a dispersion of religious authority (see also Eickelman and Piscatori 2004; Roy 2004; Mahmood 2005). Alternatives to the IC come in various forms. Salafist groups are the most infamous and they are implicitly the primary target of statements that invoke local Islamic traditions. There are several Turkish neo-Sufi groups present in Bosnia, although they have limited influence on religious practice. The Gülen movement has opened several schools, Süleymançis run student accommodation facilities and Nurcus are present mainly through publishing. They emphasize a common Ottoman heritage and Hanafi tradition and therefore have a good relationship with the religious establishment (Solberg 2007, 2009). The IC is also on good terms with Iranian organizations, despite the lack of a similar historical link. These organizations largely focus on intercultural exchange. Despite this, several of my Sarajevan interlocutors were suspicious about their hidden missionary agenda, especially since some of them also hold lectures on Islamic topics.

However, the main challenge to the IC’s power does not come from foreign missionaries, nor does it only come in the form of easily identifiable others such as Salafists. Even though fringe activity is what attracts most public attention, the biggest challenge to the IC’s monopoly over Islamic teaching and practice comes from actors much closer to the mainstream. There are numerous civil society organizations whose interpretations of Islam are not necessarily very different from those of the establishment. They have stepped in to fill the gap created by the IC’s inability to engage with particular target groups, especially women and young people (Moe 2009a: 107). It is therefore not surprising to hear Belma, a woman in her early 20s, explain her decision to seek Islamic knowledge elsewhere:

If you want to learn about Islam at the mosque, the hodža will only speak to you during Ramadan, and if he happens to be ill, not even then. And on top of that, he repeats the same thing every year. I can’t keep listening to what I’ve learned in maktab. I want more.
There are numerous women’s NGOs with religious underpinnings that offer lectures and courses on different Islamic issues as well as create opportunities for peer-to-peer religious education. Nahla (Helms 2003) and Kewser (Spahić-Šiljak 2007) are two of the biggest players, but there are many smaller women’s groups as well as gender non-specific organizations that offer programs for women (Hodžić 2008). Youth associations, student unions and informal youth groups organize religious talks and discussions. Sociability is an important aspect of these gatherings. What appeals to young people is not only the opportunity to socialize with peers but rather to socialize with like-minded peers in what they see as a moral environment. In addition to public events, people organize informal discussion groups held in private homes that rely on personal networks with an emphasis on horizontal transmission of knowledge (cf. Chapter 6).

**Maneuvering the plurality of Islamic discourses, practices and spaces**

Many believers are eclectic in their search for Islamic knowledge. They frequent a variety of mosques, faith-based NGOs and other Islamic spaces such as tekkes that are normally perceived to be on opposing sides of the divide between Bosnian and Eastern Islam. Several women I spoke to explained this as making the most of every opportunity to expand their knowledge of Islam. Visiting a particular space or taking part in a particular activity does not necessarily mean that one sees themselves as part of a community (džemat) attached to that space. Women attend religious lectures, courses, discussion groups or other religious activities for reasons that are not always narrowly linked to how they understand and practice Islam. One might want to acquire a certain skill, such as reading the Quran, and will choose the most convenient option on offer, regardless of whether the teacher’s interpretation of Islam is identical to theirs.

Despite this flexibility in believers’ lived practice, the distinction between Bosnian and foreign Islam persists in the popular imagination. It also has a spatial dimension, as was pointed out to me by Meliha: ‘Sarajevo is somehow divided. In Alipašino, you have the Wahhabis, because it’s close to the Fahd Mosque and cultural center, that’s their hub. There are also a lot of women who wear the niqab living there. And in the old town you have the dervishes and the medresija’. Sarajevans normally use the term Wahhabis (vehabije), a name with strong pejorative connotations, when speaking about Salafists. Alipašino
Polje is a socialist-era housing estate located on the Western outskirts of the city. It is widely seen as Wahhabi territory because of a large mosque and cultural center that were built there with Saudi financing in the 1990s. The King Fahd Mosque hosts Salafist preachers and discussion groups that attract many Salafists, although it is also frequented by other local residents. This area is contrasted with the old Ottoman quarter, the čaršija, and its adjacent residential neighborhoods called mahalas, traditionally inhabited by Muslims. The Ottoman quarter hosts several important mosques and other religious institutions as well as spaces of Islamic sociability and consumerism such as cafés, clothing boutiques and bookshops. An event that took place in February 2007 made this spatial division particularly clear. The imam of one of Sarajevo’s oldest mosques, the Emperor’s Mosque (Careva džamija), prevented a group of men led by Salafi preacher Jusuf Barčić from entering to attend prayers. The group did not leave until intervention from the police and the incident was widely reported in the media. With its Ottoman architecture and location in the ‘Bosnian’ part of town, the Emperor’s Mosque stands as the contrast to the King Fahd Mosque, which symbolizes Wahhabism and epitomizes architecturally unfamiliar mosques that appeared across Sarajevo’s suburbs over the past two decades. Although they were never popular, the Salafists caused an unparalleled stir because they entered a space they do not normally inhabit.

However, these divisions are not as entrenched for all believers. Especially for younger Muslims, these spatial boundaries can be rather permeable. Belma tried explaining the differences among Sarajevan Muslims while we were sitting in a café in central Sarajevo. Initially, her narrative seemed to follow a familiar pattern. She told me ‘the city is divided into two parts, the Sufi and the Salafist part’, with Sufis being shorthand for all that is traditionally Bosnian in Islam. She even gestured in the direction of the Ottoman Quarter and the western suburbs when speaking about Sufis and Salafists, respectively. Yet, not much later in the conversation, she added: ‘There are several contentious issues between them [Sufis and Salafists]. I usually avoid talking about these issues because I’m in contact with both of them’. Vahida expressed similar views on how many young Muslims experience different interpretations of Islam in Bosnia: ‘There are these two groups: traditional, I mean Islam always sort of, it never disappeared in Bosnia, and a maybe slightly more radical [Islam] that can offend some people. While us, young people, sort of balance between the two’.

Many believers experiment with different interpretations and ways of practicing Islam. They can draw selectively from different Islamic
discourses and practices, and sometimes adopt them situationally. This fluidity and flexibility in believers’ behavior also means that a person’s understanding of Islam is not always as easily discernible from her dress choices as one might expect and why these choices can change over time. After all, being a believer is not as much a state as it is a process. The performance of ritual prayer (namaz) is a particularly pertinent example of how believers’ practice can change contextually. A very common complaint about Salafists one can hear in Sarajevo is about the way they perform the five daily prayers, a core practice of religious worship. The main differences consist in Salafists standing with legs further apart during prayer, so that their feet touch the feet of their neighbors, and raising their hands more frequently than is the case in the Hanafi form of ritual prayer established in Bosnia. They also do not raise their hands while reciting dua (dova) or supplication.

Jasmina, who herself performs the Hanafi form of prayer, explained these differences as a manifestation of the variety of Islamic practice around the world:

The worst thing about this is that Muslims themselves, Bosnians, Bosniaks, don’t know how people pray elsewhere around the world. They just don’t know that it’s different everywhere…. There are five accepted ways of praying, a hundred per cent accepted, and the Messenger Mohammad prayed in four, five ways…Now, it’s a matter of our conservatism to reject a different way [of praying] that is just as accepted in Islam [as the Hanafi form].

Contrary to Jasmina, many Sarajevans regularly highlight these differences as a mark of the Salafists’ otherness. Although small, their importance is heightened by the ability of ritual performative behavior to express political differences (Mahmood 2005). On the other hand, I have met several women who performed prayers differently depending on where and who they were praying with, alternating between both of these versions of namaz. These women’s acts can therefore be seen to thoroughly undermine the rigid ‘us’ vs. ‘them’ perception of domestic(ated) and foreign Islam and the spaces associated with them.

Speaking of Islamic spaces, we should not neglect the ways in which believers distinguish between religious and secular spaces. Sarajevo’s Islamic character has increased greatly over the past few decades. The building of new mosques, especially in residential neighborhoods, is seen as a prime example of this public re-emergence of Islam and is often
viewed as an enforced Islamization by its critics (cf. Bartulović 2013). But for many believers, building a mosque is not sufficient to transform an area into an Islamic space. Sajma complained about the un-Islamic character of one of Sarajevo’s residential neighborhoods despite the fact that two new mosques were built there: ‘I like it better at the čaršija. In Grbavica there’s no cafés that don’t serve alcohol like there are at the čaršija. I don’t want to sit in a café with a Preminger or Heineken sign hanging over my head’.

Cafés that do not serve alcohol are mostly concentrated in and around the Ottoman quarter. They serve as an important marker of the čaršija as an Islamic and not only a Muslim space, a space inhabited by believers and not only nominal Muslims. They are often referred to as Islamic cafés (islamski kafići) and are linked to an entire moral universe. As with religious youth gatherings, these places provide an opportunity for young people to socialize with like-minded peers in a public gender-mixed environment that is nonetheless considered morally acceptable. Guests and staff in these cafés greet each other with religious greetings such as selam alejkum and Allah emanet and not with conventional secular greetings. They also do not use traditional Muslim greetings such as merhaba (hello), sabah hajrola (good morning) and akšam hajrola (good evening). These greetings used to mark certain urban and rural spaces as Muslim (Sorabji 1994: 112; Bringa 1995: 56) but do not have a religious significance. For Sajma, as for many other believers, it is the daily inhabiting of a space in a morally correct manner that makes it Islamic. People actively transform space through a process of spatialization (van Loon 2002) and this is often achieved by mundane everyday practices (Low and Lawrence-Zúñiga 2003). Although the čaršija and the surrounding areas are heavily marked with Islamic architecture, much of it centuries old, it is primarily the way this space is used by believers in their daily lives that ensures its Islamic character.

**Dressing local Islam**

Dress is another example of a mundane practice that can serve to transform space. In this context, dressing local Islam refers to the active localization of Islam through dress practices. When we observe dress not as a material object but rather as a process and a gendered bodily practice (Entwistle and Wilson 2001), we can understand its transformative potential. One thing people point to when talking about the new Islamic character of Sarajevo, whether they see that in a positive or negative light, is the relatively recent reappearance of veiled
women on city streets. In 1950, Bosnia was the first Yugoslav republic to ban face veiling (Milišić 1986, 1996, 1999; Radić 2005; Donia 2006: 218–220). Soon after, similar laws were adopted by other Yugoslav republics with Muslim populations, namely, Serbia, Montenegro and Macedonia (Kačar 2000; Achkoska 2004; Chapter 9 in this volume). The wearing of headscarves was never prohibited but women who continued to do so were discriminated against, especially in the job market. The practice was also confined to particular spaces. Women who normally wore headscarves removed them when travelling from rural areas to towns and cities (Bringa 1995: 61–63) or from Sarajevo’s predominantly Muslim residential mahalas to the city center (Sorabji 1989: 70–71). Headscarves were stigmatized as backward and rural, associated with being a peasant (seljak). This culturally embedded concept does not refer as much to a person’s means of making a living as it does to his or her perceived lack of culture and education (Stefansson 2007; Bartulović 2013; Chapter 4 in this volume). Rural areas were and continue to be stigmatized as uneducated, uncultured and primitive. This partly explains why women would not wear headscarves in urban spaces. However, urban city centers with their open public squares and government buildings also represented the pinnacle of secularity. The reappearance of veiled women in these spaces from the 1990s onwards then not only disrupted boundaries between rural and urban, but also boundaries between religious and secular. When observed from the perspective of dress as an active process, the presence of veiled women in public spaces is not a consequence of a top-down Islamization, but rather one of the means that facilitated the process of the public re-emergence of Islam. It was the presence of dressed gendered bodies that transformed those spaces, and this is one of the reasons some Sarajevans find the hijab so problematic.

Dress has a similar role in defining different visions of Islam in Bosnia. Differences in dress are not simply a reflection of the differences between a clearly defined Bosnian and Other Islam. Dress plays a crucial role in constructing these differences and in maintaining, or transgressing, the boundaries between different definitions of Islam. Although Islamic dress practices have more to do with personal piety than identity politics, they can play a role in enacting the kind of Islam a believer considers appropriate for the society she lives in. Many women I spoke to make decisions about what they wear based on the stage in their personal process of becoming and being a believer, and on what they deem appropriate attire for the place they live in. They
often explicitly reference culture and tradition when explaining why they wear hijab the way they do, or why they do not wear it at all (Mesarič 2013).

Dress plays an active role in establishing a particular kind of Bosnian modernity. During the time of socialist Yugoslavia, headscarves were not only stigmatized as backward (i.e. not modern) but were also thought to be unattractive (Sorabji 1989: 115). Even though this perception has been weakened by the increasing number of younger women wearing new, fashionable styles of hijab, this stigma persists to a considerable extent. Therefore, we can understand women’s efforts to wear their hijab fashionably not only as a matter of personal taste but also as a way of resisting the stigma of backwardness and peasantness. The link between fashion and modernity is reinforced by the lack of two separate terms to denote ‘modern’ and ‘fashionable’ as the word moderno is used to signify both meanings. A younger generation of women is creating a new modern and urban localized Muslim identity and claiming an equal stake in Bosnian modernity. Selma’s story makes clear how fashion can serve a greater purpose:

I have a friend, who used to be a model. And she also decided to veil, she stopped modelling. And then we thought, let’s make some designs, let’s put on a fashion show for veiled women to show everyone that being veiled (pokrivena) doesn’t mean being dead. That a woman, who wears a headscarf, can be nicely and fashionably (moderno) dressed.

Despite many women attempting to shed the stigma of backwardness and peasantness, the relationship between urban and rural identities is ambivalent rather than straightforwardly antagonistic. After all, traditional rural dress – a grandmother in baggy trousers (dimije) and light, patterned headscarf (šamija) – forms part of the quintessential image of traditional Bosnian Islam just as much as dervishes. It is precisely this image that is usually summoned in order to refuse legitimacy to face veiling and other dress practices seen as foreign.

Depending on context, Bosnian Islam can therefore take the form of traditional dress, modern styles of hijab, and going bareheaded (or cabrio as one of my interlocutors put it). Niqab, on the other hand, is clearly positioned as non-Bosnian, regardless of the fact that many saw face-veiling as a symbol of Bosnian Muslim identity throughout the first half of the 20th century (Mesarič 2011, 2013).
Conclusions

Despite an increase in the number of women who wear the hijab that occurred over the past few decades, veiling is far from being a prevalent practice in Bosnia. Many Bosnians disapprove of this relatively recent trend, and many of those are Bosniak, rendering nationalist sentiment a somewhat limited tool in explaining attitudes toward veiling. Yet, even though veiling is often seen negatively or at least ambivalently, its acceptability varies depending on the form it takes and its Bosnianness factor. Even though traditional veiling can be stigmatized as backward, nobody denies its Bosnian credentials. Things get trickier when headscarves appear on younger women in urban spaces. Although many see this as perfectly in line with the Bosnian way of going about religion and life, there are those who see this as a foreign imposition and ‘something new’, especially as it is normally linked to new, individualized forms of religiosity. However, people’s discomfort is strongest when it comes to face-veiling, a practice that is perceived to not only signify a foreign influence but also signal a terrorist threat.

In the secular mainstream, Islam is accepted best when it is reduced to custom and cultural identity, while religiosity that forefronts piety and distinguishes between nominal Muslims and believers is likely to raise suspicion, especially in conjunction with highlighting Islam’s transnational dimension.

To fully understand the complexities of how Islam becomes localized, we need to focus not only on religious, political and media discourses but also on the everyday lived practice of Muslims. In order to make sense of the plurality of the contemporary Islamic landscape, we need to look not only at the suppliers in Bosnia’s fragmented religious market but also at the consumers and the ways they interact with the religious discourses on offer. My interest in women’s dress was prompted by its use as a symbolic resource in defining different visions of Islam, and in identifying these visions as either home grown or foreign. However, what I found was that dress is not only a symbolic marker but also a dynamic process actively involved in localizing Islam. If identity does not exist until it is enacted through repeated performances (Butler 1990), the identity of being a Muslim the Bosnian way (Bringa 1995) can only be maintained by a sufficient number of people getting up in the morning and going about their daily lives the Bosnian way. The fact that people have different understandings of what this Bosnian way is does not diminish the importance of its daily enactment. The relationship between dress and localized Islam is therefore not one of
representation. Dress actively contributes to the localization of Islam, and it is the agency of ordinary Muslims that drives this process.

Notes

1. Henceforth Bosnia.
2. The names of all of my interlocutors have been changed.
3. Hodža is synonymous with the word imam, however, it can sometimes have pejorative connotations and has disappeared from official use.
4. Maktab (mekteb) is a supplementary school offering basic religious education to children.
5. Sufis.
6. Madrasa students. Madrasas in Bosnia are run by the IC. Although they offer religious education, much of their curriculum is comparable to secular high schools.
7. At the time of fieldwork, these were also the only two mosques in Sarajevo where women could attend Friday prayers (džuma).

Bibliography


Bartulović, A. (2013) ‘Nismo vas?!’ Antinacionalizem v povojnem Sarajevu (Ljubljana: Faculty of Arts, University of Ljubljana).


Karčić, F. (1999b) The Bosniaks and the Challenges of Modernity: Late Ottoman and Habsburg Times (Sarajevo: El-Kalem).


The Multiple Voices of Bulgaria’s Unofficial Islamic Leaders

Laura J. Olson

Introduction

Islamic religiosity in Bulgaria has taken root at the intersection of globalization, newly won religious freedoms, and Islamophobic nationalism. An Islamic piety movement among Bulgarian Muslims (Pomaks) is attracting believers who seek a new kind of Islamic knowledge, distinct from official religion or the folk Islam passed down by their elders. While leaders of this movement have been repeatedly accused of fomenting radical views, their goal is not to create a Bulgarian caliphate ruled by Sharia law, or to ‘convert’ masses of Muslims to what is called locally ‘radical Islam’ (political/violent Islam). Rather, their aim is for Bulgarian Muslims to develop and refine personal habits of belief and practice – to actively renew and reconstruct their relationship with Islam. The result is a new practice of faith that emphasizes personal choice, independence from centralized or traditional hierarchies, and horizontal transmission through self-organized social networks (see Introduction). This ‘new Islam’ is not without controversy, however – both inside and outside the communities.

Within the communities, there are distinct differences – and tensions – between the newly pious and those for whom Islam is primarily a cultural identity. A statistical survey of 864 Muslims conducted in 2011 by a team from New Bulgarian University found that 32.2 per cent of Pomaks (28.5 per cent of Muslims in general) called themselves ‘deeply religious’, and 11.5 per cent believe that there is only one true religion (another 20 per cent say there is only one true religion but admit certain basic truths in the other world religions). On the other side of the coin, 64.4 per cent say they never pray. Yet many Bulgarian Muslims perform their ‘Muslim’ identity through
adherence to Islamic calendar and life-cycle rituals: 78.2 per cent circumcise their boys and 85.1 per cent observe Muslim burial customs (Ivanova 2011, 2014). Despite the predominance of ‘cultural’ rather than religious Muslims, sociological research shows that Muslims comprise one of the most pious ethno-religious groups in Bulgaria (Eminov 1997: 68). According to both ethnographic and statistical evidence, the level of Islamic religiosity is growing in Bulgarian Muslim towns and villages.³

At the level of national discourse, the role of Bulgarian Muslims in Bulgarian culture is a particularly fraught one, which touches on Bulgaria’s construction of itself as a European nation. The myth of Islam as a backward, anti-European force within Bulgaria has a long history, dating back to post-Ottoman independence (Neuburger 2004). In the post-communist period, since the government has viewed the Bulgarian Muslim minority as Bulgarians who were forcibly Islamicized by the Ottomans, the dominant view has been that they properly ‘belong’ to the inherently Christian Bulgarian majority. Thus, they have not been recognized as a minority (unlike the Turkish and Roma Muslim minorities) and have not received concomitant privileges and rights (Rechel 2008, 2007).

The contemporary version of Bulgaria’s Islamophobic, Orientalist myth specifies that in the post-communist period, Islamic revival among Pomaks has been imported wholesale from the Middle East, through the efforts of Arab organizations with ties to terrorism. At present in 2014, both government and media are propagating and further entrenching this myth. To be sure, Islamic revival has been funded by Arab organizations through locally registered businesses and charities (Ghodsee 2010: 142–155), and many of the younger generation of Bulgarian Islamic teachers studied in Saudi Arabia and/or Jordan (Ghodsee 2010: 151–153). But while foreign (in contemporary Bulgarian parlance, ‘Arab’) influences may indeed be felt in Bulgarian Muslim villages, the forms of revival that are currently being practiced are diverse outgrowths of the processes of post-communist Islamic reconstruction. Rather than being simply imported or implanted, Islam has evolved in situ, and today’s Bulgarian Islam is richly multi-voiced. The goal of this chapter is to take a micro-level look at two approaches toward Islamic teaching and show how they fit into the broader picture of Pomak culture and cultural/political/religious activism. I begin by sketching this context at the macro-level, looking at the nation-wide processes that affect Islam: Islamophobia (persecution of Islam) and globalization.
Islamophobia and the Bulgarian Muslim minority

In interviews, Bulgarian Islamic activist leaders said that their mission was both made harder and more urgent by the prevailing Islamophobic climate in Bulgaria, which entered the mainstream culture as a discourse especially following 11 September 2001. The government and media are the main perpetuators of this discourse.

The Bulgarian government has repeatedly signaled its equation of Islamic activism with violent political Islamism. Starting at least a decade ago, the government has spied on, harassed, and attempted to convict Islamic leaders who do not follow in the path of officially sanctioned Islam (Metodieva 2014). Most recently, in September 2012, 13 imams were arrested and charged in Pazardjik District Court with spreading radical Islam in Bulgaria. The trial against them came to a close on 19 March, 2014: all 13 were convicted of preaching antidemocratic ideology and sowing religious hate. The prosecution maintained they spread literature with a Salafist ideology, met with foreign Wahhabi representatives, and took a firm line on religious questions in the community (for example, insisting on conformity with Islamic burial rites and refusing to bury Muslims with non-Muslim names). The trial has been decried by Bulgarian Muslim leaders and other observers as an attempt to discredit Islamic leaders, scare Muslims, and divide Muslims and Christians in the country (Girginova 2014; mediapool.bg 2014; Metodieva 2014).

News reports, produced not only by nationalist cable television stations such as SKAT and Alfa but also mainstream media, constantly rekindle fears that Islam’s flourishing or growth is synonymous with importation of foreign, radical, violent ideologies. Journalistic accounts have asserted that the economic poverty and historic isolation of local populations predisposes them to acceptance of Wahhabi Islam; news articles have stated that whole villages are being ‘converted’ by force (Deliso 2007; Bulgaria News Agency 2009). Few who use the term ‘converted’ stop to consider what it means to ‘convert’ from Islam to Islam.

According to multiple verbal accounts, discrimination is widespread and goes unacknowledged by government leaders. Hate crimes (often graffiti and vandalism of mosques) and anti-Islamic protests occur frequently (e.g. vesti.bg 2011; blitz.bg 2013; Georgiev 2014; plovdiv24.bg. 2014). The populist-nationalist political party Ataka, founded in 2005, which uses anti-Muslim rhetoric, has emerged as one of the four most powerful players in the Bulgarian political scene (Ghodsee 2008).
Muslims’ differential responses

In view of this situation in post-communist Bulgaria, some Bulgarian Muslims have chosen to assimilate to the mainstream culture by converting to Christianity or re-taking non-Muslim names to avoid identification as Muslims. Others have taken the opposite stance. Ethnoreligious consciousness is growing, spearheaded by an activist Bulgarian Muslim intelligentsia. This activism falls into two parts: one subgroup is promoting Pomak ethnic identity, while the other works to revive, promote, and reconstruct Islam. Both groups are using online social media to make and maintain connections and networks, educate, attract new constituents, and organize and memorialize events. While they often share constituents, attend some of each other’s events, and connect on social media, the two groups do not overlap in their goals. Leaders of Islamic revival adhere to the Islamic ideal of unity in the ummah (Islamic community) and most are against what they consider nationalistic movements. Nonetheless, where cultural or secular events support and promote an Islamic identity – such as for a visit of dignitaries from Turkey – religious leaders do participate actively.

If religious activists have been spurred to action by Islamophobia and nationalism, they have similarly surfed the waves of Europeanization and globalization. Muslims living within a context of Western commercial and popular cultures needed to make choices about their own and their children’s dress, livelihood, education and mores. They have had to choose whether to become consumers of this culture or find alternative paths; which cultural influences to accept, and which to reject. In a sense, many of the communities studied for this paper have struck a balance between closedness and openness: they turn inward, rejecting certain outside influences (Ivanova 2012), but also selectively outward, seeking connections with other Pomak communities and Slavic-speaking Muslims in the Balkans. Globalization and mass communication have been powerful tools for Muslims who wish to renew their faith: these cultural processes have facilitated a stronger connection to the global ummah and access to Islamic resources. Bulgarian Muslim religious leaders have established and continue to maintain ties with Islamic groups from Western Europe, the Balkans and the Middle East.

Opening to the greater Muslim world has resulted in significant fragmentation of religious authorities within Bulgaria (Merdjanova 2013). The state-sanctioned hierarchy of official religion comprises one set of authorities, while other, non-traditional leaders cultivate their
influence through foreign connections and by networking both in person and on social media. New channels of communication, primarily through the Internet, have allowed not only leaders but also constituents to pursue their own knowledge and interests regarding Islam. Islam in Bulgaria has become not only more fragmented but also more egalitarian and accessible.

Both closed and open, local and global, these communities are in a state of cultural and ideological flux. In the next section, moving to a micro-level viewpoint informed by field research, I describe the economic, social and religious changes as these communities become more embedded in European modernity and global Islam.

‘Old’ and ‘new’ in post-communist Bulgarian Muslim villages

The villages of my fieldwork are communities of Bulgarian-speaking Muslims in the Gotse Delchev, Velingrad, and Smolyan areas of Southern and South-Western Bulgaria, ranging in size from a few hundred to about 5000 inhabitants. Most of these are historically farming communities, practicing small-scale multi-generational agriculture (vegetables, potatoes, tobacco and animal husbandry). Since about the second half of the 20th century, the range of livelihoods has gradually expanded to include textile work (sewing with machines), construction and service professions. Today, with high unemployment in their villages, many Bulgarian Muslims are ‘circular migrants’, living and working in other EU countries or Turkey for part of the year. Thus, despite the communities’ tendency to ‘closedness’, the migrants bring back to their villages European or Turkish tastes and sensibilities along with their wages. Village brides now keep their traditional hand-woven dowries in mothproof chests while purchasing modern, imported furniture and textiles for their homes. Weddings and high school graduations are not only rites of passage, but also opportunities to display one’s status with elaborate Western fashionable clothes and a (rented or borrowed) late-model luxury car. Cell phones and Internet are ubiquitous in villages and cities alike; many young people use Facebook for social networking and to increase or bolster fame and reputation. While a few young people choose to devote themselves to Islam, the majority view secular higher or vocational education as a ticket to greater prosperity. For those young people, along with these goals goes a desire for assimilation – to not seem Muslim and, therefore, different than the surrounding population. Indeed, the desire to assimilate can sometimes seem like an
economic imperative, as young people conclude they ‘won’t be hired’ (outside the village) if they are identifiable as Muslims by name or dress.

Within the villages, I observed tolerance in practice in everyday life, as traditional, Western and new Islamic practices combined. For example, at traditional round-dances done to electronic renditions of traditional Pomak songs, girls wearing various fashions of Islamic covering (hijab) did not keep themselves aloof from their co-villagers wearing Western dress; they stood arm and arm, and danced together. In a different Muslim village a very pious woman who was the mayor’s assistant (and wore a headscarf to work, unlike other professional women in the village) both attended traditional weddings, and regularly officiated secular wedding ceremonies. In the same village, pious women and girls were dedicated and active in their choice of a religious livelihood and in their self-expression. They studied just as hard and seemed just as motivated and ambitious as their peers who were seeking to become doctors or teachers. In short, despite tensions over Islamic belief, the communities were not ‘split’, and neither tradition nor Western culture was excluded.

The ‘new Islam’ was not always accepted with open arms in these communities. There were tensions between those who had accepted a new form of Islam and those who were curious but afraid, such as a handful of my acquaintances who were ‘cultural’ Muslims but also had some level of belief. They wondered, would this new iteration of their traditional religion tell them that everything they practiced was wrong? Would it try to change their traditional rituals, to which they were deeply attached? Would it criticize their lifestyles? Additionally, there were conflicts between younger religious leaders who sought a purified Islam and older hodjas who did things the traditional way. To some of the younger leaders, the Grand Mufti and his representatives leaned too far in the direction of traditional Islam.

The Islam that middle-aged and older people had grown up with was based on oral culture, not Islamic literacy. As Kristin Ghodsee has described, Islam in socialist Bulgaria, like Islam in Soviet Central Asia, ‘remained part of the fabric of everyday cultures, rather than an objectified system of beliefs distinguishable from local custom’ (2010: 14). Transmission followed traditional vertical paths of elder to younger. By contrast, the ‘new Islam’ is often passed horizontally, and is extremely heterogeneous (Ghodsee 2010: 14). Despite this process of objectification, the traditional Islam of local embodied practices remains part of the background, chosen to varying degrees by individuals, not rejected wholesale, but sometimes given a secondary role and/or practiced only selectively.
The reasons for pursuing and passing on Islam in its reconstructed form are as varied as the people who choose the path. Among those who did not grow up with a religious parent (i.e. no direct transmission), some are initially drawn by curiosity due to their inherited consciousness of being Muslim. Many people in these village communities lack specific or definitive knowledge about Islam or Islamic rites and prohibitions (Ghodsee 2010: 155); yet they grow up with a feeling and consciousness of being Muslim, and a sense that this is essential to their group identity (Ivanova 2012). Drawing upon this feeling, local imams and other teachers work to bring a spark of desire for knowledge. The spark is transmitted not only directly and intentionally through teaching, but also indirectly, among members of the same generation, and through the popularity of cultural artifacts such as videos, songs, blogs, and ‘posts’ shared through social media.

Below, I illustrate some of the Islamic processes at work today by comparing the work of two unofficial village-based leaders, a woman and a man, who exemplify the broad range of approaches to reconstructing Islam. The middle-aged woman leader is fond of emphasizing choice and a self-driven journey; in her classes she welcomes a multiplicity of sources and authorities. She is building a community of female believers and women who choose to devote their lives to Islam. By contrast, this male leader is one of the younger generation of Islamic activists, and has a significant following of both men and women of all ages. In his teachings he follows a methodology which bases its understanding of the religion on authenticated sources from the divine revelations of the Prophet or from those close to the Prophet. He highlights the self-contradictory elements of traditional Islam, and advocates a simplified and purified practice based on historically authenticated textual evidence. The dominant transmission mode of this network is through the student-teacher relationship, and the means used to disseminate the methodology (and expand the network) include informal meetings and in-person and videotaped lectures (Wiktorowicz 2005: 211–213).

**Teaching tolerance and choice**

In a large Muslim village, near Velingrad (about two hours’ drive south of Sofia), a small group of women has been meeting weekly in the rebuilt old mosque, on Saturday afternoons, since 1998. When I attended their sessions in 2012–2013, between 40 and 50 women attended regularly to learn about Islam. They ranged in age from teenagers to older women
in their 60s and 70s; the majority looked to be in their late 50s and 60s. The leader, Aishe, born in 1966, lacks a formal higher education but she is the daughter of a religious dissident and the wife of a high religious official. Her authority originates largely in her high status as the wife of a mufti, but she also gains it by quietly offering herself as a model and compassionate guide for those seeking Islamic faith. In January 1998, she had just been on the Hajj, so she was inspired to share what she had experienced there. It was Ramadan, on the night of Qadr. As Aishe told me, because of the belief that Allah will give a person whatever he or she prays for that night, ‘the whole village attends – little girls, big girls, young brides, older women’. There was a lecture about religion – but only on that night. Some of the girls approached Aishe and said, ‘We would like more explanation about religion! We want to learn more!’ The group began to meet on Saturdays for discussion and prayer (namaz).

At the beginning, we were few. The girls who had expressed their desire, and a few other women – we were seven-eight…ten or 12 at the most…and it started…People had a lot of questions, because they did not know anything. Basic things. I mean: prayer (namaz), keeping of vows (ibadet), fasting, and other things, like charity and hajj.

Aishe not only had to explain the basics of Islamic practice to her co-villagers, she also had to overcome enormous prejudice against Islam. She named the communist legacy and the association of Islam with terrorism as impediments. Aishe saw part of her job as countering this view, showing young women how Islam could work in their modern lives. Her inclusive style seems to arise from this goal to recoup Islam’s reputation – the more people who participate, the broader appeal the group will have.

Aishe emphasizes not so much Islamic literacy, but talking and social connection as the keys to attracting and maintaining members:

We explain everything in detail…How a person should order one’s life in order to feel happy here, how to raise one’s children well, how to get along well with family members, how to get along with everyone…We really don’t miss even one Saturday. If anyone is absent, everyone misses her. After that we really feel like a family, close, friends. We really are close.
Thus, her sessions both articulate and perform ‘how to get along with everyone’. In her teaching, Aishe continually focuses on tolerance within the Islamic community, which she sees as a core Islamic value. Certainly, she has seen the community drawn to disagreement due to the varying levels of Islamic observance among the population. For example, in one session, during the question and answer period, someone raised the issue of incorrect observance by Roma Muslims (about 5 per cent of the population of the village is Roma). Aishe strongly warned the group not to question anyone else’s observance. She directed them to concentrate on their own lives and behavior, and never to make critical comments to anyone. The only one we all must answer to is Allah, she said. Tolerance also was the theme during discussions about women’s dress and the celebration of holidays, discussed below.

In order to accomplish the goal of including everyone and fostering a feeling of community, Aishe’s sessions in a downstairs study room of the mosque are casual and open to any girls or women (no matter how they are dressed in everyday life), and often include sharing of a food treat, such as candy. She practices a decentered style of teaching:

I am not the only one [who explains]. After that, other girls participate, and other women, everyone who has [something] or who has learned something. Recently now, the Internet is very…gives possibilities, everyone has heard some kind of news, connected with a given example from the lives of Muslims. Do you understand? It simply stimulates us to do good. That’s all.

The Internet is both a source of negative propaganda about Islam, and a convenient pedagogical tool, which allows laypeople to have access to texts and information. Aishe’s encouragement of self-guided study among her students was evident during the six sessions that I attended in fall, 2012 and spring 2013. One of the young members (21 years old) who had just come back for vacation from her studies in Turkey was asked to contribute, and she gave her impressions on the theme for the day, humility. Another time, a middle-aged woman gave a presentation she had prepared on the subject of the day – fate – and read a list of 99 names of Allah, all from a hand-written notebook. During other sessions, a middle-aged woman read articles from the magazine Miisulmani (published by the Grand Mufti’s office). At another session, Aishe showed translated films: for example, a translated English-language documentary about Yvonne Ridley, a Christian woman who converted to Islam after living for ten days in captivity.
with the Taliban (Ahsan 2007). Like the sessions themselves, the film offered an opportunity to be inspired by another person’s faith.

In encouraging others to lead, Aishe diminishes the importance of textually authenticated divine sources and foregrounds practical daily life as well as the connection of the group with the teacher and the connection of group members with each other. She implicitly offers herself as a model with whom the participants can identify: a woman with very little formal education who nevertheless has a solid foundation in Islam. In her own speeches (at least when I visited) Aishe did not read from prepared notes or script and did not mention specific sources. Although those who contributed usually did read from written texts, they usually did not specifically name their sources, either. Once, Aishe mentioned the importance of reliable sources when a 14-year-old member of the group ended her retelling of various verses from the Qur’an about Judgment day with a retelling of a Hadith.6 Aishe said, ‘I haven’t read it, I haven’t heard it. I can’t say I have ever encountered this. If a person said it, and the person knows the Hadith well, then we can be sure. But if there is not reliability, then we can’t be sure’. By mentioning sources only when they seem inaccurate, she portrayed sources as necessary, but hidden underpinnings of the discussion. In general, her discourse was not reasoned argument, but rather heartfelt explication and transmission. She was interested not in exclusion of incorrect sources and practices, but in inclusion of as many and as varied sources as possible.

The practice of including participants taught that they, too, could serve as teachers. Each member who shared her thoughts on the theme of the day became, if briefly, a public figure and a role model for others. Perhaps the most successful part of the class, judging by audience participation, was the question and answer session, where local women could ask for clarification on real-life problems. Two of the mostly hotly discussed topics were Islamic dress and holidays.

A discussion about holiday observance demonstrated the tensions in the community over differences between old and new Islam. On 20 October 2012, just before Kurban Bairam, one of the older women asked a question about which many of the women became very emotional. At issue was the day on which to slaughter a sheep for Kurban. The woman said she had heard that sheep were supposed to be slaughtered on Friday, and wondered if it was true. This was controversial because Thursday had previously been announced as the day of the holiday: the mayor’s office and school were to be closed on Thursday. Aishe said that she did not know, and explained that all Muslims worldwide were supposed to slaughter at the same time; the woman who works
for the mayor’s office said that it would be easy to find out through the media which day was for sacrificing. When I later told this to the friends with whom I was staying, they were convinced that I had misunderstood this discussion. However, afterwards they ascertained I had understood correctly. My friend said, ‘it never used to be like this’; this is one of the things that people do not like about the ‘new type of Islam’. Previously, there was only one authority; now, people were getting information from abroad via the Internet, and there were contradictory sources. Indeed, on Thursday it was difficult to find a person to come and read the prayers over the sheep before slaughter. Paradoxically, increased connection with the global ummah meant a fracturing of Islam for those used to the traditional oral transmission and single authorities.

The issue of proper dress for girls and women was another hot-button issue, which brought questions from Aishe’s group members. Aishe put to rest local disagreements about whether girls’ showing décolleté was acceptable. She advocated tolerance and personal choice: a parent can guide her children, but cannot force them to do things a certain way. If one is not the girl’s parent, one should not criticize them for how they are dressed. At the most, if one is a family member, one could make a mild comment calling her attention to a different way of dressing.

In an interview, I asked Aishe about the wide range of local dress styles, from Western urban clothing to hijab. While teenagers often wore tight fitting jeans and tight or revealing tops, the traditional fashion of local married women included bright floral scarves imported from Turkey, and knee length flowered-print dresses over pants or sports pants. Some of these women wore mantı – thigh-length blue or brown overcoats similar to lab coats. Aishe herself wears a hijab style consisting of long geometric-print scarves of silken material (pinned at each side to cover her neck and lower chin), long dresses or skirts, and long loose fitting overcoats in navy blue and beige.

Aishe: How shall I say … A person dresses according to the level of her belief. So, there are Muslim women who fasten their scarves here [under the chin] … [they show] a décolleté [because the scarf does not cover the upper chest]. For them, there is no problem in that, but for me, there is a problem …

Q: You don’t like the bright, shiny styles of the local headscarves?
Aishe: I don’t like it a lot … I, too, am from an area where they wear such bright ones. But I don’t like them very much … And sometimes, when you’re wearing black or something dark, especially if
you are young, they [local people] will say: ‘Why? You are [too] young!’ I like that, I am always for choice.

Q: I have seen young girls, too, in dark colors.

Aishe: Yes. One of the things about religion is that when the color of your clothes is dark, the body outline is not so visible. So that is one of the…how shall I say…of the choices a Muslim woman makes. White is not forbidden, colors are not forbidden. But everyone has the right to choose. A girl who dresses like that [in dark colors] is saying, ‘I want to dress like this!’ Do you understand? But there are very modern [Muslim girls, women] – they put on a headscarf, they wear pants and for example a tight shirt, which absolutely is not a problem.

Throughout the interview and during her teaching, Aishe stressed personal choice, which would be based upon the ‘level of belief’ of an individual. She accepted different levels of beliefs and did not exclude some as being ‘non-Muslim’. Girls and women did not have to dress like her in order to learn from her. However, the girls and women who taught Islam in her classes and in ‘Qur’an-course’ classes for children eschewed Western and local styles, like Aishe, although they did not dress like carbon copies of her: in minor details, each expressed her own style.

Year-round courses like that taught by Aishe, focusing upon the practice and philosophy of Islam for adult women, are not common, but there are a few avenues for adult women wishing to learn about Islam. One is lectures, taught by both male and female guest teachers, and sometimes advertised as exclusively for women. These sermons, held in mosques or community centers, are often videotaped and placed on YouTube and other online video sites, so that they are accessible to all; they are shared in Facebook groups, on personal Facebook pages, and on blogs in order to increase their reach.

Teaching scriptural-based devotion

Among the popular lecturers is Husein Hodja (born in 1975), imam of the village of Pashovo in the Velingrad region. Hodja studied Hadith at Islamic University of Medina in Saudi Arabia, and has gained a following in several places he regularly visits, including eight or ten villages in the West Rhodope area as well as in London, Hungary and Spain. His active lecturing practice helps him to support himself, the mosque and his charity work. Through his lecturing, he has helped to change the tenor of Islamic practice among his followers. His legitimacy and
status was evident at the opening celebration of the rebuilt mosque in the mountain village of Pashovo, Velingrad region, on 30 June 2013. Two or three busloads of female followers attended the celebration from the towns of Dospat and Surnitsa; they had organized their visit in support of their teacher. One could distinguish his followers by their dress: they wore various versions of hijab, which were quite distinct from local dress. Hodja also has male followers who are more difficult to identify visually. Although he gives lectures for men and women, for this paper I only had access to videotaped lectures in which the audience consisted of men (unseen, but heard).

Hodja is a skillful lecturer and often follows a style based upon storytelling – comparing the lives of the Prophet and his companions with contemporary life. For example, in a lecture on hijab, he gave a detailed retelling of the story of Muhammad’s wife Aisha being accused of adultery. He emphasized the inner strength of Aisha, 18 years old at the time, who, after her honor was cleared through Allah’s intervention, was able to tell her husband he should come to her to apologize. He stressed that even she, the most favored wife of Muhammad, was tested by God. We should take an example from her: ‘You see, the greatest woman, the wife who cared the most for Muhammad...and you see what a test Allah has given her. And where are we after so many years? We walk about undressed (razgoleni), we walk here and there...without considering that we are believers’ (Hodja 2011b). In other words, Bulgarian Muslims had been given a test through the challenge of their faith (communism, Islamophobia), but had not emerged morally pure, as did Muhammad’s wife. They needed to strive toward higher models.

In addition to giving examples for moral righteousness from the Qur’an, he also uses a Socratic method of questioning, providing information and then asking leading questions. He described the proper sources for Islamic rituals and holidays, rejected Bulgarian/Ottoman interpretations, and asked his audience to distinguish along with him whether there was a basis for using sources later than the first four centuries of Islam. For example, in a lecture on biđa‘at (innovations in Islam) he gave the example of mevlid (mawlid) which is the celebration of the Prophet Muhammad’s birthday, and in Bulgarian Muslim villages is also used for the celebration of moving into a new home, the birth of a child, or leaving for the Army. Hodja called the celebration of birthdays haram, and said that the Prophet explicitly stated he did not want to be made into a son of God (like the Christian Christ). Hodja explained that the text usually recited for such occasions, a poem by Süleyman Çelebi, an Ottoman prince of the 15th century, was actually the origin
of this celebration. It was not celebrated during the first four centuries of Islam. He asks: ‘What does a poem that describes the birth of the prophet have to do with a soldier? I ask you, what is the connection? Is there a connection?’

*Answer from audience*: None

‘None… What is this unique thing that is good for everything? It’s not from the *Sunna* (Muhammad’s practice), nor the *Sahaba* (companions of Muhammad), nor the *ulema* (scholars), but it’s made up by Süleyman Čelebi, a regular poem’.

Hodja described two recent scenes he observed when the local *hodjas* and the Grand Mufti were reading the poem by Čelebi for *mevlids*. During such event, one of the ‘great *hodjas*’ knew the Čelebi poem by heart, and only pretended to read it from the printed text, but made ‘ten mistakes in 19 letters’ while reading the 36th chapter of the Qur’an, Sura Ya Sin. ‘Allah preserve us! Which is more important, the words of Čelebi or the words of Allah? (*Answer from audience*: Čelebi! *General laughter*). Ehhh! (spreads hands in gesture of resignation)’ (Hodja 2011a).

As in this example, Hodja’s method of analyzing contemporary religious observance was to set religious principles from the Qur’an and contemporary Bulgarian Islamic practices side-by-side in order to show that the latter were absurd. Audience participation, then, consisted in confirming the speaker’s opinion. It is important to note, however, that while Hodja is critical of the *mevlids*, according to his own account he and other young preachers do attend them. Although he might wish his constituents to choose a new, informed Islamic viewpoint over tradition, he knows that tradition is part of their lives and part of the reality of Balkan Islam.

The place of tradition in Islam is constantly debated by many in the Bulgarian Islamic community. On Internet discussion boards such as *Da opoznaem Isliama* (Let us get to know Islam), a closed Facebook group with 11,770 members as of July 2014, tradition is one of the most frequently discussed topics: participants express varied points of view both critical of and accepting of the place of magic and mysticism, traditional Balkan rituals and celebration of other cultures’ holidays. While Hodja is not active on such forums, some of his friends, colleagues, and constituents are, and their participation shows openness to and encouragement of debate about what Islam should look like in 21st century Europe.

In regard to European contemporary life, Hodja used a more pointed rhetorical tactic in his lecture entitled ‘Woman – The Pearl of Islam’
Muslims’ Pursuit of Faith and Religiosity

(Hodja 2011c). Here, aspects of Western culture that have become ubiquitous in Bulgaria were not deemed absurd but intentionally harmful to Muslims. In this lecture, Hodja did not urge tolerance, but exhorted his audience to adapt their behavior to avoid influences that could destroy a Muslim family. He listed the many ways in which ‘the West wants to ruin our women’ in Bulgarian culture, such as: television (especially soap operas and advertisements which showed partially naked women), education (especially sending one’s daughter abroad to study), celebration of ‘others’ holidays’ in school (such as Christmas), graduation ceremonies, promotion of ‘ruined women’ (pop singers) as the ‘stars of Bulgaria’ (a marketing campaign by one of Bulgaria’s most prominent music labels, Payner), and beauty parlors. Hodja made clear that he viewed these as not simply neutral phenomena of modern life, but campaigns aimed specifically at ruining Muslim women. He used the technique of de-familiarization, adopting a naïve point of view in order to make such ordinary Western phenomena as televised shampoo commercials sound strange: ‘In broad daylight! In broad daylight! This is the fashion that is being spread among us’.

He depicted Western culture as not only harmful but also as lacking knowledge about Islam. He derided Western European feminism, specifically ‘strikes for the rights of women’ (which he deemed as ‘strikes to undress [Muslim women] (da gi razgolaya)’, and the West’s ‘fierce attack on Islamic dress’. He explained that the West misunderstands Islamic dress when it calls it ‘an Islamic symbol’. ‘It is not a symbol but an ibadet (vow) towards Allah azza wa jal (may his majesty be exalted). A Christian can live without a cross, but a Muslim woman cannot live without a covering. Why? Because she can’t take it off. If she does, she isn’t a Muslim’.

Significantly, while depicting the West as inhospitable, ignorant, and even hostile to Islam, Hodja did not advocate community isolation, restriction of access or mobility, or the like. He tacitly acknowledged that Bulgaria exists within the European cultural and economic system and in a globalized world. Like Aishe, Hodja emphasized choice. For men, the most important life choice was the choice of a wife: they should carefully choose their wives for their level of religiosity, if they wanted to be ‘calm’:

If you take the most beautiful woman in the village, but there is no Islam in her, if you have to travel two or three years to Austria, will you sleep calmly? What do you think?
Audience member: Not likely
Not likely, it will almost never happen. But when there is Islam, that woman will not fear her husband, but will fear Allah azza wa jal (may his majesty be exalted). You will sleep calmly in Austria, because she knows that there is an observer who follows her every step. Isn’t that right? … Travel wherever you want in the world, that wife will educate your child. That wife will be happy when you come into her house.

(Hodja 2011c)

In the scenario presented here, choice is a man’s prerogative. For women and girls, a limited range of choices is available. If she wishes to remain Muslim, she must cover herself and avoid the aspects of the Western world that erode belief. One cannot escape Western culture, but one can limit the degree to which it will impact family life.

From a Western feminist perspective, Hodja’s scenario severely curtails women’s freedoms, but pious women that I spoke to in Bulgaria always depicted their veiling as an active choice, akin to all the other choices they make in their personal lives. Indeed, they, too, spoke of the difficulty of navigating family life in Western society, where media images (especially of women) expose their children to non-Islamic moral standards.

New Islam: Islamic values in European modernity

Hodja and Aishe might be said to occupy opposite ends of an imaginary spectrum in what I have been calling the ‘new Islam’. Hodja emphasizes correctness of action as a measure of belief (orthodoxy); Aishe is tolerant of differences, including ‘different levels of belief’, within Islam. Yet both would be termed proponents of ‘Arab Islam’, or ‘new Islam’ by some Muslim neighbors, and likely, ‘Islamic fundamentalists’, or proponents of ‘radical Islam’ by surrounding Bulgarians. Within those labels, it is important to see how underlying philosophies, approaches to sacred textual traditions, generational belonging and personal styles yield divergent approaches within Bulgarian Islam. Both may be seen as activists, and both belong to the Hanafi Sunni Islamic school. But Aishe’s approach exemplifies the openness and tolerance of traditional Hanafi Islam (Haghayeghi 1995: 80; Froese 2005: 492), while Hodja’s understanding of Hanafi thought rejects any innovations introduced after the founder Abu Hanafa. Hodja’s may be described as a morality-based, non-violent, pietist Islamism (Hegghammer 2009: 259).
The teachers are united by their desire to describe and enact a reality-based value system for their constituents. They speak of, perform and embody their own vision of Islamic values so as to allow their students, adult and young adult Bulgarian Muslims, to make informed choices in the context of a chaotic world. They wish to make sure that Muslims do not take the path of least resistance dictated by a cultural climate inhospitable to Islam. In order to truly be a Muslim, they teach, one must carve out one’s individual path with pride in one’s heritage, belief, and lifestyle choices. Such goals in religious leaders may be typical of a period of social upheaval and transition, and are characteristic of religious revival with an orientation toward piety.

As much as it might be tempting to ascribe contemporary Bulgarian Islamic piety to passive constituents ‘brainwashed’ by rich Saudi charities (as even some Muslims maintain today), it is clear that choice — informed by deeply personal and shared life experiences, aesthetic and social considerations, habit and desire for novelty — guides Muslim believers’ actions. The performance of that choice every day by Muslims can be observed in their everyday and holiday practices, in the multiple versions of dress chosen by women, and in the increasingly popular Islam-oriented use of the Internet. In the global, liminal space of the World Wide Web, Bulgarian Islamic believers find not only pop culture temptations but also religious inspiration and information. There, Aishe’s students find material to share, Hodja’s video lectures receive from a few hundred to a few thousand views, and Islamic philosophy and practices are debated on blogs and discussion forums with thousands of participants. This modern Islam, then, is egalitarian and multi-voiced, a mix of new and old, personal and public.

Notes

1. There is no single good way to refer to Bulgaria’s endogenous non-Turkish/non-Roma Muslims. ‘Pomaks’ is preferred by many ethnic activists today, but many Islamic activists do not favor it. In this article, I use both terms interchangeably.

2. Muslims comprise 10 per cent of Bulgaria’s population (577,139 out of total population of 5,758,301). Natsionalen statisticheskii institut, 2011; the exact population of Bulgarian-speaking Muslims is not known, but estimates put it at 200,000–300,000 (Todorova 1997, 70–71; Neuberger 2004, 2–3; Zelengora 2013).

3. See Ghodsee (2010); Ivanova (2012); and my own research, which consisted of five and a half months’ fieldwork with Bulgarian-speaking Muslims in 2012–2013, funded by National Council for East European and Eurasian Research (NCEEEER), American Councils for International Education (ACTR/ACCELS) and University of Colorado.
4. See in particular claims of Father Boyan Saruev to have converted ‘thousands’ of Bulgarian Muslims to Christianity (Bairiamova 2000). Ivanova (2012) found little evidence of active Christian piety among the converted.

5. To be sure, official Islamic leaders themselves were often split into ‘camps’ during the first 20 post-communist years (see, for example, Terziev 2004; Ghodsee 2010; Merdjanova 2013).


7. The poem is called Vesilet’ün Necat, more commonly known as Mevlid-i Şerif. It was written in Turkish in 1409 by Süleyman Çelebi (1351–1422) in Bursa.

8. I have not yet done in-depth interviews with his women followers themselves; I will develop this area in my future research.

Bibliography


Love and Boundaries: Inter-Faith and Inter-Ethnic Relationships among Macedonian-Speaking Muslims

Anna Zadrožna

Introduction

It was inseparable love, we had happy days
Until my mother said: she’s not for you my son
What a mother you are, dear mother, tell me
I loved her endlessly, now you’ve separated us

(Sait & Idoli, Nerazdelna Ljubav)¹

Throughout the Balkans, songs with lyrics that talk about love are widely popular. Like that quoted above, many of them tell the story of a desirable, passionate relationship hindered due to familial disagreement. ‘Nerazdelna Ljubav’ caught my attention because it was a local production, recorded by the low-budget band, whose pieces are very popular, particularly in the western part of the Republic of Macedonia.²

It is clear that the song is more than just an artist’s illusion. Narrating a very realistic story about oppressed feelings and illicit love, it reveals the tension between familial tradition and individual desires, implying the significance of collectivity.

I gratefully acknowledge organizers and participants of the conference ‘Islam in Europe through the Balkan Prism’ organized by the ReligioWest project (EUI) and the University of Sarajevo. I owe special thanks to Arolda Elbasani for her insightful and pertinent remarks, which contributed to this essay. I am also grateful to Karolina Bielenin-Lenczowska, Ciarán Burke, Burçin Kahraman, Milijana Mladjan and Murat Somer for their thoughts provided at different stages of this paper.

142
In this chapter, which results from ethnographic research regularly carried out amongst Macedonian-speaking Muslims\(^3\) in the western part of the Republic of Macedonia and northern Italy,\(^4\) I aim to explore how different perceptions and practices of love relationships reflect broad group boundaries (Barth 1998: 10). Boundaries can emerge at various levels, namely, class, social, ethnic, national or religious. They persist due to continuing polarization, by including and excluding individuals from an imagined group of ‘we’. Particular categories, however, are not fixed and isolated, but constantly intertwine and interact (Chapter 4), rendering the concepts of ‘we’ and ‘the others’ rather intricate and fuzzy.

Having been subjected to various geopolitical regimes\(^5\) and competing political powers, Muslims in Macedonia have continuously negotiated their ethno-national identifications alongside politically determined categories. The ethno-religious conflict between Macedonians and Albanians, which escalated in 2001,\(^6\) flared up existing ethno-religious divisions (see Introduction), but also divided Muslims themselves. The system of quotas, which emerged after the conflict to regulate the transmission of cultural rights among legally recognized groups (Skarić 2004), contributed to the politicization of Muslims, imposing ethno-national categories upon them.

Nonetheless, everyday conversations and practices reveal that Macedonian-speaking Muslims concurrently fit into and escape all ethno-national labels. Referring to Albanians as oppressive or savage, they self-identify as Turks or praise the latter, however many do not speak Turkish. Due to the ethno-religious nature of Macedonian nationalism (see Introduction), they commonly ‘otherize’ ‘Macedonian’, and discard it as an exclusively Christian identity label that reflects the national propaganda of 1990. Usually labeled Torbeši,\(^7\) they commonly discard this nomenclature as offensive (Oran 1994; Svetieva 2004; Dikici 2008; Bielenin-Lenczowska 2009), and their daily practices display a multiplicity of identifications, even concerning a single person or family members. Although ethnic, national or religious belonging can be practiced and manifested in manifold ways and contexts, boundaries become explicit when making important life choices, for example establishing a family and choosing a future partner. In a society where many marriages are still arranged, choice of one’s marriage partner represents a social issue. Hence, deep insights into the nature of spousal choice help us to understand the mechanisms perpetuating ethnic boundaries and their relationship to religion or class (Nave 2000: 330). This study, however, goes further, examining not only marriage preferences, but also a wide spectrum of love relationships, including those disapproved of and
secret in nature, addressing the issue from a deeper level of feelings and emotions. As I will demonstrate in the following passages, ‘we-ness’ con-
ditions the ways in which people deal with their emotions and feelings, shaping local patterns of what ‘love’ is and how, and to whom, it should be felt.

In the course of my fieldwork, I have regularly encountered the term Naši, which simply means ‘ours’ (Svetieva 2004). Here, I aim to examine various meanings of who are the ‘ours’, the ‘we’, and how this categorization is reinforced and maintained within and beyond other ethno-national categories. I will argue that ‘we-ness’ emerges at the intersection of cultural similarities, social ties and local belonging, but also patterns of emotions and feelings, being more intimate than categories determined by religion or ethnicity. It reflects the most exclusive form of cultural intimacy (Herzfeld 1996), nurtured by intergenerational continuity and repetition of rites, patterns of behavior, and social roles.

The mountain villages of Western Macedonia

Western Macedonia, a mountainous region bordering Albania, resem-les a mosaic composed of villages inhabited by various ethno-religious groups. In some villages, Muslims live next to their Orthodox Christian neighbors, visiting each other and joining others’ feasts and celebrations (Bielenin-Lenczowska 2009; Lubaś 2011). In others, Muslims are the only residents, since most Christians have migrated to cities, enjoying greater privileges in the labor market (Hausmaninger 2005).

Although chains of mountains and sheer and curvy roads create spa-
tial distance, limiting everyday contact with neighbors, villagers are not isolated from the outside world. Men, who enjoy greater freedom of movement than women, regularly meet in village cafés, travel to the cities nearby to do business, or socialize with their male friends. Families go to weekly bazaars in towns, and travel to touristic destinations during the weekends. Women visit their neighbors and relatives, or talk with them via Facebook or Skype. Youth temporarily move out to study in the capital Skopje or other cities, and come back to the villages enriched with the knowledge acquired outside of their community.

Since the local job market is restricted to the public sector or risky and barely profitable private enterprise, Muslims have engaged in labor migration for generations, mainly working in construction, frequently abroad. Such labor migration, in Macedonian called pečalba or gurbet, is still the main means for Muslims to make their livelihood. It has occurred following two main patterns. Initially, it consisted
of exclusively male migration, which deeply influenced family life. Whereas men spent many years abroad, surrounded by different people and values (Bielenin-Lenczowska 2008, 2010a, 2010b; Pieszczyk 2009), women were waiting for their husbands for months and years, with children growing up without the presence of their father, with interaction based only on short and occasional contacts. Subsequently, whole families started to emigrate abroad (iselenije), following changes in the laws and possible opportunities. Since the 1990s, men started to migrate to Italy, eventually bringing their wives and parents with them, and thus resettling abroad.

Pečalba and emigration have impacted both upon those who left, and those who stayed behind, separating families and bringing in not only goods and clothing, but also social remittances (Levitt 1996), patterns of behavior, thoughts, ideas, and views about life (Zadrožna 2013). As I shall elaborate further, it also acquainted emigrants with different gender patterns and roles, opening new channels for communication and possibilities to see and meet ‘others’, who sometimes come from totally different cultural contexts.

Despite foreign influences, what maintains the social fiber is the local tradition (tradicija), which merges regional customs (adet) and vernacular Islamic practice. In the post-communist space, local ‘ways’ of being Muslim may take various forms, from syncretic practices to secularism (see Introduction). Yet, although personal religiosity becomes detached from organized religion, it remains a collective rather than individual issue. For the majority of my informants, local beliefs and customs, shared and practiced between generations, have replaced religious orthodoxy. As ‘cultural Muslims’ (Kurzman 1998), they might find commonalities with their Christian neighbors, but are still different, something that manifests itself when investigating local perceptions of relationships and love.

Marriage and tradition

‘It is a Muslim rule, that you have to get married: to take a husband, or wife, and to believe in God (Gospod). It is written in the Quran, that one should not be friends with unmarried, those, who don’t want to get married. And with unbelievers’. Marriage, one of the crucial rites of passage, is certainly not an individual affair, but rather a kin issue. In past generations most marriages were arranged, and parents and grandparents may still decide to choose a future spouse for their children, even making the agreement (pravaat
dogovor) when they are still very young. The path toward getting married leads through well-envisaged customary steps. The boy’s family should send a matchmaker (strojnik), who will pay a visit to the girl’s family. Among customary set phrases spoken while drinking coffee, strojnik will put forward the marriage proposal. If the girl and her parents accept it, they will set the engagement date, and the wedding, which is not only a rite of passage, but also an opportunity to display wealth and prestige (Bielenin-Lenczowska 2010b), which will be organized within a year.

In general, a future marriage partner should be a Sunni Muslim raised according to the local Muslim tradition. As Fuat says: ‘it just must be relationship with a Macedonian Muslim, an Albanian Muslim, or a Turkish Muslim’. It is clear, however, that he did not refer to religiosity, or nationality, but to the local belonging.

Although, considering the idea of ummah – an Islamic community – ethno-nationality should not matter, many families prefer not to give their daughter to a certain village, family, or ethnic group. Macedonian-speaking Muslims often claim, for instance, that they would eagerly accept a Turkish groom, but not necessary an Albanian one, explaining that, ‘if you give your daughter to an Albanian family, she may lose everything: our culture, our language, and her children will not even speak Macedonian; Albanians are just so much possessive and bossy’. Accordingly, villagers prefer their children to marry a Macedonian-speaking Muslim, or a Muslim from their village. Relationships with other Muslims, for example Macedonian Roma, or Moroccans whom migrants encounter abroad, are not desirable, because they are ‘much different from our Muslims, having different culture, customs and tradition’.

What often clinches the final choice of a marriage partner is a sense of belonging to the imagined group of ‘ours’ (naši), who share common religious practices, language, tradition, culture, customs, or a general sense of belonging. In a mountainous area where villages are several kilometers from each other, the term ‘ours’ may refer to the closest neighbors, family friends or kin. As Ertan (22 years old) reveals: ‘It’s not very well seen here if you have a girlfriend from far away, because if you take a wife from far, they think that something must be wrong with you, that you couldn’t find a wife close by’.

Being from ‘far away’ here connotes more than merely spatiality. It actually refers to the notion of otherness: being different, ‘the other’. Considering everyday practices and customs, for example, some villages nearby may be described as ‘different’, even if seemingly inhabited by the same linguistic or ethnic group. Such distinctions, customarily
drawn, may relate to variations in homemade meals, folk costumes, or wedding ceremonies. While subtle for some, they may become substantial for others, leading them to refrain from approaching adjacent villages when seeking a serious relationship.

Being ‘naš-a’ (our), in turn, means being similar, familiar, homely and predictable. Among shared customs and traditions, acknowledgement of gender roles and family hierarchy is crucial, which is key to a harmonious marriage. Whereas a man is expected to be a breadwinner, providing for the whole family, women become responsible for the household, and are accorded a role of tradition-keepers. It is a patrilocal society, and when a young bride moves in, she is expected to be a good housewife (domakinka), who will respect and take care of her husband and parents-in-law (Svetieva 2000), and raise her children accordingly. Her focus should be on family and home, not on career. She should behave in a way that prevents a woman from undesirable exposure, avoid contacting strangers, or walking around without a reasonable purpose (šeta) for fear of being gossiped about (ozboruvanje), because ‘it is a shame, when people talk’.

Marrying a child to a family, with whom one is acquainted, therefore has both social and economic implications. It keeps the family ties coherent and harmonious, and enlarges the kin network. Moreover, wealth is not an individual issue, but rather relates to family property. Those who respect the tradition receive a great deal of support: the family will finance their education, help them to find a job, and give precious gifts or money. It applies both to the villagers and migrants. As Onur explained: ‘Here everything is done by the family (familijarno), and for the family, not like in the West. You cannot do anything alone. How would you manage? There is a common saying, that it is easy to break one matchstick, but you cannot break the whole package’.

Acting against one’s parents’ wishes, in turn, would bring about a risk of being excluded from the family, or even from the community. The risk of being left with no means, no land and no support prevents practices of individualism, creating a network of familial interdependence. Whereas choosing a partner from among the ‘ours’ would empower all family members, marrying a stranger would challenge and jeopardize local rules and imperil the whole community. Most villagers would therefore never consider marrying a ‘stranger’, even if they fall in love. Moreover, as I will argue, local ways of normalizing ‘love’ also become prerequisites for ‘true love’ (vistinskata ljubav) to appear.
A Christian bride would not bake good bread

‘You can have a Christian friend, to pay him a visit, or to visit his grave after he dies, but only if he is a believer… but the relationship between two of different faiths is not proper, not good. And it won’t last long’.19

When asked about interreligious relationships, most of my interviewees said that they would never approve of their child (or their parents would not approve of them) marrying a non-Muslim. Although the Quran allows men to marry women who belong to the religion of a book (i.e. Christians or Jews), it is believed that such unions would cause serious troubles in the future. Most villagers believe that a non-Muslim woman cannot become a good housewife (domakinka): she wouldn’t know how to cook the local food, such as jufki, burek, pita, bread, or take care of a house properly. Another important issue is the proper upbringing of the children: their religious education and the respecting of traditions. As Marcin Lubaś has concluded:

Formulating objections to the marriage between an Orthodox and a Muslim, interlocutors rarely recalled general, abstractive rules and prohibitions of their religions. More likely they would refer to the practical difficulties of living in a hetero-religious relationship… for instance, discrepancy of religious rites and customs existing in both religions.

(2011: 209)20

The condition for the acceptance of an interfaith marriage is that one of the partners – preferably the woman – converts so that they can follow one tradition. To be accepted by the family, a woman should convert to local Islam, thereby changing her faith and adapting to customs, and learning the local cuisine, household tasks, or a language, if she is a foreigner or comes from a different ethnic group. It applies both to the relationships in villages and abroad. An Italian woman, for instance, can be admitted as an Italian bride (Italijanska nevesta), if she also is eager to change her lifestyle and culture, to become just like ‘ours’. Still, whereas religious conversion of foreigners is usually interpreted as a proof of the truthfulness of Islam, Macedonian Christian converts’ religiosity is assumed as superficial, and it is believed that one day they may wish to return to their primary faith.

There are stories (or one tale with many different adaptations) about an interfaith couple whose illusionary happiness falls apart after a fatal discord concerning whether to perform circumcision or not. In this
story, the couple split up and the boy stayed with his Muslim father, who played the role of a guardian of the faith, and consequently protected patrilineal continuity. Accompanying narratives usually focus on self-discrepancy and the never-ending dilemmas that a child of an interfaith couple would certainly face. Other anecdotes talk about a convert woman who, after years of marriage, suddenly wanted to baptize her child, or required a bishop to receive an unction. The story ends with her husband and sons warning her that she should bear the consequences of her previous choice, and respect the Islamic tradition. Although presumably these stories contain a grain of truth, such stories are intentionally narrated to warn against interreligious relationships. By polarizing the actors and highlighting troubles and difficulties, they talk about the ‘other’ as a distant stranger, who should be avoided.

Interfaith marriages are therefore marginal – in terms of frequency – but still represent a regular exception from the norm.\footnote{It is usually a union between a Muslim man and a Christian woman who converts. Both partners may also decide to drop any religious practice at all. This would often happen during the communist period in Macedonia, like in case of Hasan and Svetlana (Lubas 2011: 211–213). She was an Orthodox Christian, and he was Muslim, but both were communists and declared atheists. They got married without any religious ceremony, and named their children regardless of Christian or Muslim tradition. Their last will was to be buried together, in their own piece of land, a forest meadow. However, the white gravestones visible at the outskirts of the village are not commonly perceived as memorials of deep love. Although their children are very much appreciated and respected, few would follow their steps, saying that ‘living without faith and tradition is not good’.\footnote{Accordingly, both families are usually strongly against an interreligious marriage, and the couple finally breaks up. ‘Othering’ always works both ways, and many Christian Macedonians perceive Muslim tradition not only as different from their own, but also as backward (zaostanata), especially when considering gender polarization. Thus, they would never ‘give’ their daughter to a Muslim village, even if she were deeply in love. By establishing a relationship against the will of both families and customary norms, one would risk exclusion from the family or even from the community (zaednica). Such a couple would be stigmatized, constantly gossiped about, ostracized, and thus left on their own. Even in multi-religious villages, where Christians and Muslims often become close friends, Christians are not ‘ours’ when it comes to marriage. For that reason, many Muslims would never take an interfaith marriage seriously, convinced that it would end one day.}'}
Secret dating, shame and elopement

In our village, my sister fell in love (zasakala) with someone from another village. They really fell in love with each other. And let me tell you how it works: he comes to the village, and walks around the house. He will walk around (šeta), and walk around…if she wants they will talk, and get to know each other…. If her mother agrees, they will give her [to him]. If not, she may run away with him, if she really is in love.23

Young people will find every possible way to date secretly, as shown in the story preceding this paragraph. While being fond of each other (zasaka), they will survey common friends or relatives to get the other’s contact details: nowadays a phone number, Facebook, or Messenger address, while billets and notes were sent by children in the past. Although religious and traditional principles prohibit extra-marital inter-gender contacts and sexual affairs, ‘the soul wants’ (duša saka), as the saying goes. The rule is to be prudent, to remain unseen and avoid rumors and shame. It applies particularly to women, whose ‘innocence’24 is valued, and may enable future marriage, if previously questioned, or may consequently lead to a marriage, if a girl was seen with a boy.

Secret relationships among Muslim villagers indeed often result in a marriage. Every year, many young couples decide to elope (begat),25 even if already engaged to someone else. Although some families try to separate the lovers and prevent elopement, most commonly, such disapproval is superficial or temporary. If, for some reasons, the traditional path to marriage cannot be followed (for instance, if a girl is pregnant), the family may prefer to allow the lovers to elope. Furthermore, they might ‘compensate’ the tradition: a groom would have to symbolically ‘return’ a girl to her home and then marry her again, organizing a wedding party, or they would make a lavish celebration of Name Day, or Circumcision (Sunnet) for their newborn child. As Tone Bringa has argued, elopement might even be the most common form of marriage, decided upon beforehand and resulting from long lasting courtship, which is already known about by most of the family (1995: 126–131). Even if there is a serious familial disagreement, such a marriage is socially accepted, because both partners belong to ‘ours’.

If lovers are serious about each other, their cousins and common friends may support them, not only acting as messengers, but also helping to organize secret meetings and providing an alibi, even for
sexual relationships. Accordingly, a blind eye is turned to engaged couples. Although religious orthodoxy forbids having a sexual relationship before *nikah*, no one would really condemn a pregnant bride, if she was previously engaged. As Suada, 41 years old, explains:

Some people had sexual relationships (*imalo odnosi*) even before marriage… One woman used to go out with a man (*odela so maž*), secretly, and do everything, but she loved him and they knew that they would get married, so I would cover for them. Another young woman, similarly, was meeting with her fiancé and got pregnant. She realized it late, so they could not organize wedding (*svatba*)… In the past it was shameful. Nowadays, a pregnant bride dances on her wedding. One should be ashamed, not to dance. But young people today have no shame. Everyone does what one wants… they always did, but they had more shame.

For the villagers, shame is the most powerful factor that regulates their everyday life. Prerequisites for a sexual relationship, or a marriage, are very rational, deriving from reasonable, not from abstract or religious rules. What is crucial is not the idea of virginity and purity, but very realistic possible consequences, like pregnancy. Not fear from committing a sin, but fear from being seen and gossiped about. Following the distinction proposed by Ruth Benedict (2005: 223), it is a ‘shame culture’, which relies on external sanctions for good behavior, not an internalized conviction of sin, such as that prevalent in guilt cultures. The main difference between shame and guilt derives from the presence of an audience, who would ridicule those who disobey local norms. Even if the audience stays silent, a fear of being ridiculed is strong enough to subordinate one’s behavior. Accordingly, one may feel free to challenge norms and rules if it is ensured that everything will remain unseen and unspoken.

**Extramarital relationships: Love and lust**

The power of shame consequently weakens when unseen by the ‘ours’. For that reason, if searching for a romance only, one may travel to other villages and cities, or try to involve himself in a relationship with a foreigner, whose family might not insist on marriage if the romance comes out.

During the old pattern of migration, when men went to *pečalba* alone, many of them ‘had’ a foreign woman (*imale žena strankinja*) for example
Italian, German, Czech, or Ukrainian. Since many village couples had not performed a civil marriage, but only a nikah, a man could even marry a foreigner while abroad, explaining that it was a necessary step to obtain a residence permit. These relationships could continue even until retirement. As Mehmet, 43 years old, reveals:

Two hundred per cent [of men] have women there. Those, who went abroad many years ago, alone, live with foreign women (strankinji), just as a wife and a husband, but mainly without marriage. But when he gets old, he will come back here, and he will leave that woman behind. What will he do there, after retirement? And he surely won’t bring her here. He will come back here and live with his wife again. What else could he do?

In many situations such ‘double life’ was silently approved of, while a man sent money home. Several elder informants openly told me about their son’s double life, approving of it as a natural consequence of his lonely life abroad. Moreover, a man sacrificed himself for his family, leaving his home, parents and homeland. Even if a man has been neglecting his wife and children for years, his past would still be silenced after he comes back home. Since divorce and remarriage are considered as shameful, his wife will wait for her husband to come back, whereas her youth will leave her. In turn, if a man decides not to hide his extramarital affair and, for instance, to divorce and start a new life, he risks exclusion from his closest kin. His parents may choose taking care of their daughter-in-law and grandchildren over sentiments toward the son who has shamed them and failed in performing his societal role. Accordingly, many men would choose not to break up the family ties and try to maintain both, namely, the romance(s) and the marriage.

The recent pattern of migration – when whole families move abroad, transferring social networks, tradition and customs with them – restricted men’s freedom, limiting extramarital relationship to hidden love affairs, liaisons or flirting. Yet, it also generated the second generation of migrants who grow up in multi-ethnic and multi-religious surroundings, and to some extent ‘Italianize’ themselves, thereby becoming foreigners (stranci) for the villagers left behind. Many young Muslims, similarly to those studying in Macedonian cities, simply fall in love and secretly date ‘others’, and boys are even often given an unspoken permission to enjoy various ‘adventures’ (adventuri). Still, most of them marry a villager, explaining that their parents would never accept a foreigner.
Married at a relatively young age, with a partner from the village, many young men function in two worlds: a traditional familial home-life, and a ‘modern’ city life outdoors. This internal discrepancy transmits to the emotional sphere, creating the space for double standards, implemented in order to comfort contradictory family expectations and their own desires. As a result, many young people – mostly men – engage in relationships with foreigners, never amounting to a marriage. After establishing a marriage that conforms to the expectations of their parents, their double-life continues. Numerous extra-marital relationships, illicit romances or encounters are assumed as being shallow enough not to jeopardize their marriage and family.

Those unable or unwilling to live double lives after marriage break all existing ties with foreigners, even deleting their Facebook accounts. Others – and these are very exceptional cases – venture into a relationship with a foreigner, challenging their family ties, or trying to adjust to traditional values, like in the story of the Italian bride. But while the odds are that a marriage between a Muslim man and a convert to local Islam would be accepted, a union of a Muslim woman with a non-Muslim contradicts Islamic orthodoxy. I have not heard of male conversion during my research, but noted a few cases when women ran away with an Italian lover, breaking their family ties. In general, however, girls avoid pre-marital relationships with strangers, knowing that such a marriage would not be accepted, even if they elope.

Although women are in general less likely to involve themselves in premarital or extramarital affairs, it does not mean that they never do so. It is certainly less common, and is more difficult to manage, especially if one is already married. Moreover, like in most societies, sexual restrictions are considerably greater for women than for men (Pasternak et al. 1997: 176–177). Double standards are also very common in societies where mother–son bonds are strong, or where customs provide for sexual restrictions on women, especially between marriage partners (ibid.). Yet, what is particularly interesting and specific for this case of study is not the facts concerning extramarital practices, but the ways they are perceived and justified, especially in the context of religious orthodoxy.

Among common justifications I have heard from men was that they simply cannot resist their desire, because their ‘soul wants’ (duša saka) more than a friendship if they meet an attractive girl. Subsequently, many men say that inter-gender relationships are presupposed to be sexual, recalling a Quranic principle, according to which when a man and a woman are alone, they are accompanied by Satan, whose power may make them unable to resist their desire, and thus lead to sin.
There is also a common belief in men's hyper sexuality – contrasted to women's restricted sexuality – often explained as 'natural' and specific for their gender. Some of my Muslim interviewees suggest that men have greater sexual needs than women and non-Muslim men, explaining that it has been already considered as an Islamic right to have four or seven wives.28 The local lore changes wives into lovers, portraying men as subordinated by their own 'natural' desire, and so justifying the sin. Others, in turn, half-joke that Muslims must have many women because they are Turks,29 attributing hyper-masculinity to their Turkish roots.

Extramarital relationships with non-Muslim women are often considered as permissible and acceptable. First, non-Muslim women are imagined as free, independent and modern, and thus desirable and adorable lovers. Second, a non-'our', especially if far from home, is expected to use her 'freedom', involving herself in numerous, non-bonding romances and affairs. As a foreign researcher travelling alone, I was constantly suspected of having secret affairs with local men, and the refusal to do so was deemed suspicious. Why would one not use her freedom (koristi sloboda), if there was no-one to control her? As I have elaborated before, local morals are shaped by shame, not guilt, and individuals who behave differently – for example involving themselves in open male–female friendships – are judged accordingly.

Nonetheless, despite being involved in premarital or extramarital relationships, the majority of men would never consider marrying a non-Muslim woman. Although some of them declare their readiness to become ‘modern’ and to give their children more freedom, they usually think about themselves or their sons, but not women, wives or daughters. Provided with greater agency, they enjoy their sexual freedom, testing various relationships, and explaining that they ‘cannot satisfy their needs within marriages’30 (Czyżewska 2009: 66–67). Some of my male informants justify themselves by blaming their wives for not being attractive, not modern, and uneducated, and positioning themselves as victims of the local tradition. Yet, they still expect their wives to be modest housewives. Paraphrasing one of my female informant's remarks, ‘they are not capable of a partnership relationship. Even if they fall in love with a businesswoman, they still expect her to cook, clean, do the washing, and they wouldn’t lift a finger’.

Different kinds of love

The song opening this chapter suggests tensions between norms and feelings, portraying individuals as trapped in familiar ties and unable
to decide independently. As I have shown, however, whereas some conform to their parents’ will, others are ready to elope or to establish an interfaith marriage regardless of customary norms, constrains and unpleasant rumors. Although ‘culture affects how people define love, how susceptible they are to love, with whom they tend to fall in love, and how their love relationships proceed’ (Kim and Hatfield 2004: 175), different propositions offered by various cultures may be arbitrary, but ‘are not all that arbitrary’ (Spiro 1984: 337). An individual may therefore accept or reject cultural propositions, not only by acting against them, but, more importantly, by not internalizing them as a universal truth. Moreover, I argue, the song refers to the particular state of ‘being in love’, rather than to ‘true love’.

Exploring manifold ways of depicting love relationships and contexts where ‘love’ was recalled during my research, I found differentiations similar to those described within the literature (Jankowiak and Fisher 1922; Dion and Dion 1996; Kim and Hatfield 2004; Hatfield and Rapson 2011; Jankowiak 2013). The distinction between ‘true love’ (vistinskata ljubav) and ‘falling in love’ (sakanje) corresponds with differentiation between passionate love, also called ‘infatuation’, ‘being in love’ or ‘romantic love’,31 and companionate or companionship love, both considered as universal emotions, but differently related to time and marriage expectations in various cultural contexts (ibid.). In the Macedonian language, the words ljubav (love, devotion), sakanje (love, desire), saka (to love, to like, to want), and zasaka (to fall in love) are all obviously contextual, and may have different connotations. Typically, the verbs zasaka and saka refer to subsequent stages of the state of being in love, suggesting that the attraction and passion are of a temporary character. Nouns, which are more stable, describe deeper feelings, and if proceeded by the adjective ‘real’ (vistinski/a), they may depict the imagined ‘true love’, which is unique and ideally for life, as illustrated in the citation: ‘you can fall in love (zasaka) with one or another, but it is not the “true love” (vistinskata ljubav)’.32

There is a common assumption that passionate love can lead to marriage only in individual, ‘modern’ societies. Yet, this does not apply to my field of study. As I have demonstrated, there is a culturally accepted route that leads from passionate love to marriage, namely, elopement. Still, this only applies to those whose marriages do not violate the tradition. Running away with a lover is an individual choice, but it is a socially accepted form of personal individualism, paraphrasing the distinction,33 as suggested by Dion and Dion (1996: 14–15). Consequently, the ‘true love’, the one ‘for life’, should be associated with marriage.
It should ideally emerge between an already married couple, which also corresponds with Islamic rules, or at least lead to marriage, like in the case of elopement. Nevertheless, the ‘true love’ should be felt for someone with whom such a union is possible. As culture affects not only with whom individuals tend to fall in love, but also what kind of love they tend to feel for whom, I argue that most of my informants would not really expect ‘true love’ to happen within a relationship with zero possibility of marriage. They could feel fascinated, flirt, have a romance, but they would never consider it ‘true love’.

Despite some claims, that within arranged marriages ‘love with one’s spouse was next to impossible’ (Lindholm 2006: 12), different kinds of love – including so-called passionate love – can appear even between an arranged couple, who were married when love was certainly not the main motive for an alliance. For many women I interviewed, their husband was the first man with whom they had a relationship, and they were very excited about getting married. Sevim, for example, told me the following story:

Love? When they simply told me: we will give you to Husni, I didn’t love him (ne go sakav). I didn’t even know him, there was no loving (sakanje) those days. I had no idea about him, who he was, I didn’t know him, and when I heard his name, I felt so strange. Thereafter, we got engaged, and after that, we started to secretly see each other.

In the following conversation, she revealed that they started to get to know each other step-by-step. She described different kinds of emotions which she experienced during their meetings: at the beginning feeling ‘strange’ (ćudno), ashamed, and then enthusiastic, lovesick, and passionate. After several years of harmonious marriage, she could not imagine a day without him.

Certainly, gender plays a role in perceiving and internalizing the patterns of love, which should be also distinguished from simple ‘lust’ (Hatfield and Rapson 2011). Men are more likely to get involved in extramarital relationships, but it does not mean that they do not love their wives: when asked if they do, they sometimes confirm such feelings. I suggest that the sexual polarization and double standards described in the previous passage also translate to the emotional sphere: men might be more likely to practice polyamory34 (not only polygamy, to some extent justified in patriarchic structures), and not to see discrepancies between various relationships and ‘true love’, practicing different kinds of love at the same time. On the other hand, some of them may love
their families, but not their wives as individuals. It may be also acknowledged that not every individual is able to experience all kinds of love (Lindholm 2006).

Conclusions

Notwithstanding being involved in various premarital and extramarital relationships, Macedonian-speaking Muslims rarely get married with non-Muslims or people regarded as overly different (e.g. Roma Muslims, or Muslims from outside the Balkans). Aware that getting married properly, with someone who would blend in with the family, holds the kin together and prevents the community networks from shrinking, they mostly conform to the customary rules, and choose a marriage partner from among the ‘ours’. Yet, their choices should not be perceived as merely the pragmatic and logical consequences of local traditions. Marriage also maintains group boundaries, because individuals internalize vernacular ways of perceiving, experiencing and embodying different kinds of love. Ethnic ‘we-ness’ would therefore refer to an imagined sense of belonging to a community, in which members share common descent, memories and destination, language, ritual regulation of life, or sexual relations (Weber 1996: 52–56), but also cultural patterns of emotions and feelings. As I have shown in this article, perceptions and practices of ‘we-ness’ and otherness may be considered at an even more intimate level than ethnicity: ‘our’ may refer to one’s kin, close acquaintances, or inhabitants of the same village. Another level of intimacy is being ‘just like ours’ (isti kako nami). It can refer to Muslims who live in the villages nearby, to particular ethnic groups, evolving to all Muslims from Macedonia, or from the Balkans. The key is to ‘have a similar culture’ (ima ista kultura), tradition and lifestyle, which applies, at most, to family models and gender roles. Religion is central, but not the only prerequisite in creating the ‘we-ness’, because ‘our Muslim’ is a local conception of being Muslim. Consequently, the ‘ours’ is not a stable category. There is no one, coherent ‘set of ours’, but rather groupings of different extents, emerging from intersections of commonalities and different levels of intimacy. Their boundaries constantly blur and overlap.

Furthermore, different kinds of migration and access to media have opened doors to different worlds, and the villagers find values from different sources: taken from their parents, observed outside the villages, or learned abroad. Migration and globalization have also contributed to the array of available cultural propositions of what ‘love is’ or ‘should be’, bringing in notions of collective and personal individualism.
(Dion and Dion 1996), differently internalized amongst settled villagers and migrants. The low incidence of interfaith marriages certainly reflects a low tendency toward personal individualism, commonly linked with Western values and modernity. Subsequently, the prevalence of extramarital relationships with foreigners maintains group boundaries: whereas love affairs and illicit romances, which migrant men are involved in, are not expected to result in a ‘true love’, they bolster internal gender polarization, and religious bias.35 Already Safka Zinovieff has linked liaisons with nationalism and class division, arguing that Greek kamaki, who hunt for foreign women in touristic areas of Greece, ‘are expressing antagonism, and taking symbolic revenge as members of unprivileged social and economic class and disadvantaged European nation’ (Zinovieff 1991: 219). Finally, it is worthy remarking that both in Macedonia and abroad, villagers and migrants constitute a minority group when assessed on an ethno-religious basis. The constitutive ‘other’ comes from the majority group, which may contribute to practices of ‘othering’, and thus hinder integration.

Notes

1. The song can be found at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ViI6gF4rUXI. Lyrics have been translated to English by the author.
2. There has been an ongoing dispute over the term ‘Macedonian’ between the Republic of Macedonia and Greece. Since 1993, the internationally recognized name of the state established in Vardar Macedonia (the region) is FYROM (the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia). Here, however, I use the term ‘the Republic of Macedonia’, which reflects the emic perspective. For more on the Macedonian ‘question’, see Cowan (2000).
3. Muslims whose mother language, or at least the second fluent language, is Macedonian.
4. Thanks to a grant from the Polish Ministry of Science and Higher Education led by Dr. Karolina Bielenin-Lenczowska (University of Warsaw) titled ‘Transnational ties, social and ethnic relations within the context of Macedonian Muslims’ migration from Macedonia to Italy’, as well as author’s own research.
5. After the Balkan Wars, Western Macedonia subsequently belonged to Kingdoms of Serbia and Yugoslavia, Socialist Yugoslavia, and the Republic of Macedonia established in 1991.
7. Torbeši are often identified with other Slavic speaking Muslims, i.e. Gorans and Pomaks.
8. They work as drivers, teachers, and civil servants, or own a private business, i.e. a construction company, a café, a grocery, etc.
9. By vernacular, I understand a popular, non-institutional Islamic practice, living Islam, which is locally shaped, and voiced by individuals in specific contexts (Flueckiger 2006: 2).
10. All my informants belong to Sunni order.
11. Interview, woman, 40 years old.
12. By kin I understand extended network of family members and relatives, with its hierarchy, customs and tradition.
13. Whereas such statements reflect Macedonian national stereotypes and politicization of Muslims (see Introduction), many Macedonian-speaking Muslims have Albanian relatives or friends.
14. Interview, man, 35 years old.
15. Interview, woman, 35 years old.
16. Migrants earn much more than white collar workers can legally obtain in Macedonia. Thus, many families privilege their sons to specialize in one of a number of blue-collar occupations abroad rather than engaging in bookish intellectual pursuits.
17. Most women do not work, also because of unemployment.
18. *Esramota, koga zboruvat.*
19. Interview, woman, 41 years old.
20. Translated from Polish by the author.
21. I estimate an average of two to four interreligious marriages in a village (see also Lubaš 2011: 206–207).
22. Org.: *ne e dobro da zivees bez vera, bez tradicija.*
23. Interview, man, 25 years old.
24. I use the notion of ‘innocence’, not ‘virginity’, to highlight the importance of social opinion and shame (Schneider 1971).
25. Usually a woman ‘runs away’, for it is enough for a girl to spend a night outside the home to elope.
26. A Muslim marriage ceremony performed by an Imam.
27. Sexual intercourse is referred to as *odnos* (*ima odnos:* to have sexual intercourse) or *vodenje ljubav* (to make love), which may also mean a liaison.
28. A common explanation says ‘five during the peace, seven in times of war’. Still, many Islamic scholars highlight that the Islamic right to polygamy is conditional, explaining that polygamy was based on societal and economic, but not sexual reasons (Abu-Lughod 2007; Anwar 2007).
29. Many villagers say that they come from Yörük nomads, or Ottoman soldiers, who ‘came and Turkicized Slavic women’.
30. Arguably, according to Islamic beliefs, the sexual taboo does not refer to marriage relationship.
31. Some authors distinguish between romantic and passionate love, describing the first as a state when ‘idealization of the partner and idealization of the experience’ play a crucial role (Dion and Dion 1996: 7).
32. Interview, man, 25 years old.
33. They suggest that to understand cultural meanings of love, we should distinguish between personal and collective/societal individualism and collectivism (Dion and Dion 1996: 8).
34. By polyamory I understand the possibility to love more than one person at a time, and to experience different kinds of love. I differentiate it from polyamory as an ideology, which assumes living without deception or betrayal, when multiple relationships meet with both partners’ consent (White 2004: 17).

35. Foreign women are often labeled as ‘Christians’, regardless of their confession.

**Bibliography**


8

‘Holiness’ Constructed: Anonymous Saints in the Popular Traditions of Muslim Roma Communities in the Balkans

Ksenia Trofimova

Introduction

‘This is a Muslim place. Now they (shrines – K.T.) appear in many places’.

(Field Data 2011c)

During the past few years, while I was studying the specificity of religious activity in different Sufi groups among local Romani communities in Serbia and Macedonia, I stumbled upon numerous private and public shrines (tekiya¹ or turbe²) devoted to the ‘saints’ (babalara). They were regularly visited by local believers. Some of these places of worship appeared spontaneously, and were continually developing in my presence. This practice, arising from the declared religious experience of communication with the saints in dreams and visions, is seemingly integrated into the everyday religious practices of the Romani districts (mahalla). Thus, I had a unique chance to observe a local phenomenon of frequent vision experiences, which reflects the transformation processes on the level of vernacular religiosity in ‘the effervescent atmosphere of the post-Communist period’ (Albera 2012: 228).

This chapter will analyze the practice of pilgrimage (ziyarat) in the form of worship of saints (awliyā) and their mausoleums, which still

---

I would like to thank my colleagues Jelena Tošić, Arolda Elbasani, Alexander Knysh, Carmel Daher and Natalia Dmitrieva for their helpful comments and suggestions.
remains an integral part of ‘living’ Muslim traditions in the Balkans. Much of the entire cult is expressed in visiting sites – which are important in terms of beliefs related to significant religious or public figures – and consists of performing certain rituals there. The practice of veneration of saints takes different local forms, which, depending on the range of factors – social, political, religious – present a variety of discursive fields. Current research distinguishes between the so-called official (associated with the scholarly traditions) and vernacular forms of practicing of faith, pilgrimage and the cult of saints. Yet, such practices – being a rural as well as an urban phenomenon – are typically framed as ‘popular’ Islam or ‘popular Sufism’, which evolves at the interplay between Sufism and ‘popular’ Islam (Norris 1993; Biegman 2009). Such interpretations reflect the inner multilayered structure and ‘syncretic’ character of this practice, formed by the interaction of different religious traditions within similar cultural contact spaces.

The neighboring areas of Southern Serbia and Macedonia, which spatially limit my research, should be considered as a cultural boundary space, or following Ger Duijzings, a ‘peripheral’ space, where identities become fragile and the pattern of cultural borders bears a dynamic character (Duijzings 2000: 2). The coexistence of different cultural traditions, as well as the complications of the religious map within these changeable socio-political and cultural units, results in an evolution of diversified choices and experiences of faith, which is visible through the observation of everyday practices (see Introduction).

Among the different local contexts and variations of attendance of the graves of saints, I focus here on practices observed in current Romani milieus. Pilgrimage to holy sites as an element of Muslim Romani traditions features in different studies of the customs of particular Roma ethno-cultural groups. One prominent Serbian ethnologist, Tihomir Djordjevic mentioned Romani groups visiting a grave of Imer baba a day before St George’s day in his field notes. He noted that Roma had attended this pilgrimage with their own banner decorated with citations from the Qur’an (Đorđević 1984a: 378). However, most research consists of fragmentary descriptions of this practice rather than detailed observations of the peculiarities of performing festivals as well as occasional rites, associated with the semantic field of ‘illness and recovery’. Notes about pilgrimages to mausoleums of legendary, religious and popular figures further provide helpful information on specific features of local traditions or cultural portraits of Roma Muslim communities (Xoraxane Rroma). Tatomir Vukanović, in order to focus on a variable character of celebration of St. George’s day, provided an example of a visit by
Roma pilgrims to the grave of Sultan Murat, who had been killed in battle in Kosovo (Vukanović 1983: 233). Marushiakova and Popov made a short description of the pilgrimage of a group of Roma to the tomb of Bali-efendi or Ali baba (as he was named by them) (1993: 164). They also explained that ritual activities are performed on the day of St. Iliya (Ilinden) both at the tomb of a Muslim saint and in the church of St. Iliya situated nearby (ibid.).

Despite the fact that Romani religious culture in the Balkans historically developed via contact and interaction with other religious traditions in the area, and Romani districts constitute a part of an urban landscape, the continual and spontaneous emergence of newly built shrines seems to be an exclusive feature of Roma communities. My observation of the rituals performed at holy sites and the process of veneration of the saints is therefore contextualized within the religious culture of ethno-cultural Roma minorities, as well as within the broader spatial framework of Romani districts located in Balkan cities. The broad aim of this paper is to trace the reproductive pilgrimage practice, which makes up a crucial part of local ‘traditional’ Islam.

The theoretical basis of my research refers to Talal Asad’s arguments on the discursive nature of Islamic tradition (Asad 1986: 14). Following this theoretical framework, I will dwell on how various actors involved in the practice of worship of holy sites interpret beliefs and actions generating different meanings of religious experiences. I will also follow the argumentation employed by John Eade and Michel Sallnow, which defines shrines as places able ‘to absorb and reflect a multiplicity of religious discourses’ (1991: 15).

Taking into account the fact that popular traditions have complicated multilayer structures, and that their semantics are formed by various narratives, which replay and supplement one another, the primary goal of this paper is to draw up the general rhetoric about this cult by analyzing the reconstruction of an image of a saint and a holy site. In this context, the key discourses, which reflect not only the content attributed to this cult, but also the traits of its permanent transformation, become visible through an examination of the narratives that surround this practice and the decoration of a shrine.

The first part of the chapter provides a summary of Muslim culture developed in Romani milieus. The next section turns to the content of the cult, and traces some of the patterns of its development in the polyphonic religious space through the examination of different kind of narratives. The process of construction of Muslim rhetoric of the cult is shown in the third section via a rough description of the decoration
of the holy site as well as by outlining meaningful elements of the ritual process. The ways in which the Muslim rhetoric of this practice is contested and negotiated within the present confessional discourses spread by local religious authorities constitute focal points of the last section. In the conclusion, I will summarize a number of general analytical points and make assumptions concerning the specificity of the reproduction of the practice of pilgrimage and its place as a ‘traditional’ element within the heterogeneous Muslim culture.

Muslim culture among the Roma communities

The Muslim culture, as it is presented nowadays in the Romani milieu, is quite heterogeneous. First of all, it contains a broad layer of popular religious culture, namely, the so-called folk mythology, which combines beliefs and rituals derived from local traditions, and includes a range of pre-existing beliefs and rites. Second, it preserves and develops local Sufi traditions (Sunni Sufi traditions, Bektashi order), which are institutionally represented by official and non-official organizations. The rise of a Sufi stream among Roma Muslim communities dates back at the end of 19th century with the advent of the first lodges in Macedonia and Kosovo (Duijzings 2000; Field Data 2011a, 2013a, 2013b). The influence of local Sufi teachings and practices upon the beliefs and practices developed in the Romani communities varies according to the social and cultural context, as well as to the extent of dissemination of these traditions in the respective regions. Third, in recent decades, a tendency toward conversion and confessionalization within the institutional framework of Sunni Islam is visible through the current activity of missionaries, as well as those involved in religious education and youth activities. This process results in the reconfiguration of religious networks (jamaats) and the education of new generation of social agents (imams, ritual specialists, believers who spread the teaching).

Romani districts are usually situated within the boundaries of the cities and villages (Prizren, Kosovska Mitrovica, Gjakova (Kosovo); Kumanovo, Skopje (Macedonia); and Nish (Serbia)), which in turn are centers of religious activity of different Sufi orders. My field research was conducted in several mahalla(s): in Nish and Leskovac (Southern Serbia) and in Skopje (Macedonia). The population of each of the districts mentioned is heterogeneous: it consists of the so-called old-residents as well as newcomers, who migrated during the last century and especially in recent decades from Kosovo and surrounding areas. While Muslim Roma represent a religious minority in predominantly Orthodox Southern
Serbia, they form a large community among the Muslims in this area. In Skopje, where the number of Muslims gets closer to that of Orthodox believers, Roma Muslims make up a part of the broad Muslim community. According to local religious authorities, Islam was developing in the Romani milieu here due to the participation of Roma in the activity of Sufi organizations. Later on, it proceeded inside the Romani districts with the opening of places for meetings and ritual performances (*semana*). Today the confessional map of Romani urban settings is even more complex. The missionary, educational and ritual activity is shared between the representatives of different religious trends. However, the Muslims, as well as the followers of various neo-Protestant denominations, constitute the most visible communities. Therefore, Romani *mahalla* represents a space of neighborhood, where mosques are situated in immediate proximity to Sufi lodges and *semana(s)*, as well as houses of worship.

The Muslim communities divide between the followers of the ‘orthopraxy trend’ and Sufi groups. The religious practice of the latter may be characterized as introspective, because it embraces a narrow circle of members and their families. As for the external circle of the inhabitants of the Romani districts, the dervishes and their sheikhs occasionally figure as ritual experts and healers. At the same time, the spreading of Islamic knowledge is generally associated with the activity of communities of believers and their leaders, who seek to free the local habitus of religious practice from the elements of ignorance and innovations, often associated with Sufi traditions. The institutional diversity is supplemented by a layer of ritual specialists, who perform certain rites involving the life-circle (funerals) and healing ceremonies. Regarding the confessional diversity of *mahalla*, it is worth mentioning that the public space here figures as a space of visible manifestation of religious ideas and performing of practices. The performance of rituals, as well as theological debates, is not hidden in a private space, but is frequently carried out in public.

**Narratives on babalara and the ambiguity of the image of a saint**

The holy site and, in particular, the tomb (*turbe*) within the local beliefs is regarded and functions as a meeting point and a place of communication of different religious actors. The place is marked by the presence of a personage who is regarded as a saint, and a series of interactions, which are mediated by his figure. Even if the shrine represents a cenotaph, it
is first and foremost an embodied space, which highlights the charisma of the figure of the saint. The place belongs primarily to the saint. I was frequently told that saints are wandering around and looking for the ‘appropriate’ house where they can stay. These nomadic saints settle in certain places and stay there for a certain period (from several years to several centuries), being ready at any time to break the tie and leave the ‘shelter’. Thus, the saints look for their place in a lived-in space. The popular nature of such beliefs, which implies a fluidity of images and combinations of interpretations, raises a question: what image do the saints assume in the popular mythology of a Muslim community? The question raised here becomes more significant, if we bear in mind that the narratives about the saints, especially in the context of ‘peripheral’ practices in the cultural boundary spaces, refer to the negotiation of cultural interaction and cultural hybridization. Such narratives manifest themselves in the making of confessionally homogeneous or mixed spaces (Popov 2008; Albera 2012: 228–232).

**Baba**

The shrines built in Romani districts are devoted to the personages commonly defined as ‘people of God’ (Rom. *Devleske manusha*; Serb. *Bozji ljudi*). They are often described using only collective naming, for example ‘they’, ‘saints’ (*evliya*),¹ *babalara*, and rarely in singular form – *lacho manush* (Rom. a good man) or ‘*baba*’.⁵ The use of impersonal designation, on the one hand, arises from an absence of personal names in the tradition itself. On the other hand, it results from the effort to conceal personal names and to resort to the use of euphemisms that is typical in cases of popular beliefs. Commonly, narratives contain generalized names. In some cases several personal names such as Ali baba, Haydar baba or Husayn baba, which belong to the well-known Islamic mythological figures are mentioned and, as it seems, are used as a substitute.

Here are these *babalara*, our *tekiye*, our people – Muslims, they are sent by God, every week they gather in the house, as we say, gather in the house. . . . These people, who are here in the *tekiye*, these old women, old men, they are their people. How to explain to you, we say – *babalara*.

(Field Data 2011b)

Numerous interpretations depict an image of a deceased person, who stands close to God, acts according to His will, and, from time to time,
returns back to the space of living people. As for the traditions examined here, a saint is mostly a male image. Meanwhile, in several cases I was told about the saints that are connected to one another by family ties, for instance – couples of a brother and a sister, or a husband and a wife.

According to the overall repetitive narration, the saints appear to the householder or someone from the family in dreams and visions, thus revealing their presence (Dikhlum e baba ano suno (Rom. ‘I’ve seen baba in a dream’)) and make some demands (which can be expressed in an aggressive way) in exchange for further patronage. The list of requirements consists of invariant motifs: to found a shrine, to keep it clean and to make regular offerings. Moreover, even if the ‘guest’ maintains his or her silence, or the dream contains only a view of the shrine, the fact of the dream itself leads to the worship activity.

From one of the common descriptions, the saint is portrayed as an unnaturally tall man with a white beard, wearing a cap (fez) on his head. The saints appear holding the Qur’an and beads in their hands, as well as wearing, as it is highlighted, traditional white (identified as Turkish) clothes (salwars), and a headscarf which covers the head.

How to say, she looks young, like you see, like she is 16 years old. She wears a headscarf as before, as in tradition. She is dressed, you know, in our clothes. She is dressed in this manner like a true Muslim …I dreamt about both the brother and the sister. And they hold Qur’an in their hands. They did not utter a word, nor did I. (Field Data 2011c)

At the same time, they may look like common people and from time to time ‘visit their families’.

On the one hand, the image of babalara may be inexpressive, and lacks confessional connotations. On the other hand, this confessional neutrality can be surmounted, due to the range of details, which denote the Muslim nuances of the portrait of the saint. They outline the Muslim identity of his figure and represent those markers of sanctity, which prevail in local popular beliefs. Such a range of details is in fact rather limited, and derives from the key-motifs contained in the hagiographies of ‘individual’ saints, who have personal names and who are known according to the narrative, as historical, legendary figures. As a whole, various hagiographical motifs, which form an image of a saint in popular mythology, are reflected fragmentarily in popular beliefs in the Romani milieu, and this has a certain impact upon the construction of a portrait of the saints, namely, their personal traits – it simplifies
and washes them out. As to the hagiographical motifs in narratives on babalara, they do not contain descriptions of any distinctive individual features. In this way, they repeat the basic well-known existing motifs of popular and ‘written’ religious tradition, and create an abstract and collective image of the saints. Repeatability of the unified motifs deprives such image of unique traits, thus bringing it close to that of the rural, or, as they are also metaphorically depicted in researches, ‘anonymous’ saints. For the purposes of comparison, in some of the popular beliefs recorded concerning the Pomaks in Bulgaria, the saints can take the form of the will-o’-the-wisp or a religiously erudite person (a hodja) wearing a red cap (fez), and a wanderer with a green beard that reminds one of an image of Hizir (Lozanova 2001: 161).

The Muslim features of the image of babalara, which at the same time serve as evidence of their piety, can be traced in the descriptions of their appearance and actions. Along with the reproduction of a ‘traditional’ image of a Muslim, which is preserved in cultural memory and may be referred to as an image from the ‘golden’ pious past, it seems that, generally, the current ideas of what the saints look like are based on the perception of the appearance of the well-known spiritual authorities, dervishes and local ‘true believers’. As a whole, their appearance becomes similar to that of a Muslim man or woman (living in a town or in rural area) and is typical for the beginning of the 20th century. Some of the features bring these descriptions close to the image of a dervish or even a sheikh.

Also some of the requirements given by babalara in dreams and visions (for instance, to let them pray during the night) reflect the widespread beliefs about the saints, therefore, the personages mentioned above would be identified as Muslims (Field Data 2011d). Moreover, such kinds of messages emphasize piety of the spirit and, therefore, are usually explained within the ‘saintly’ model, whereby the anonymous guest is automatically considered a saint. It is worth mentioning here that the saint’s confessional identity and the traits that highlight his saintly status are outlined by reference to the past. The image of a ‘true’ and stubborn Muslim herein pointedly appeals in narrations to the ‘tradition’, and this ‘traditional’ model of a ‘true’ believer is put in the past (‘as it was before’). The tradition itself is not limited to social and cultural boundaries of local Romani communities, but is represented in a wider context. Such marks of belonging to the community (‘our people’), emphasizing a collective religious identity, refer to a wider Muslim tradition, developed in the Ottoman past in the local cultural space, and are rooted in the cultural memory.
**Stopan (saibiya)**

Meanwhile *baba* is not the only personage-mediator, who appears in dreams and visions and who is regarded as a patron and given his own locus, where veneration is regularly held. The local ‘lived’ popular mythology tells us about a multitude of figures, who follow people during their lives, as well as after death and, to some extent, share space with them. The religious polyphony of the Romani districts is visible at a spatial level through neighboring sites reflecting the cult activity of different orders. Close to the holy sites, where the saints are gathering, a small private shrine for ‘*stopan* of the house’ is built. *A.*, a declared Muslim from a religious ‘mixed’ family, explains for whom he lights a candle every Thursday in the corner of his backyard:

> See, every house has its own *saibiya*. He appears to someone and he has a white long beard and wears a red-and-white cap (*fez*) on his head. Like a Turkish one. It depends on how you see him. Here, these *stopan*(s) are Muslims, they order me to keep the place clean.
> (Field Data 2013c)

*Stopan* (Bulg.) and *saibiya* (from Turk. *sahip* – an owner) are personages, belonging to the inferior level of South-Slavic mythology and associated with the ‘owner-spirits of the place’. They present themselves as the deputies of the place and establish a strong connection with the people living there or moving in there. The way these personages are regarded is avidly presented in the sacrificial offering ceremony, which is usually held when the building of the house is begun and after the construction is completed. In some local traditions, regular ceremonies of upholding the connection with these spirits and preserving their good faith are also observed (Georgieva 1983: 197–221; Plotnikova 2004: 232–240). Such elements of popular religious culture are preserved and widely spread in Romani traditions (Jašić 2001: 52–53; Petrovski 2002: 26; Zlatanović 2007: 73–78). These beliefs figure as a non-confessional stratum of popular mythology. Nevertheless, seemingly, they are embedded in a confessional (in this case – local Muslim) mythological pattern.

The semantic ties between the *babalara* and *stopan* become visible at the level of their images, the means of communication with them (in a dream) and the choreography of ritual practices. In spite of containing various scenarios of actions associated with a certain local tradition, these rituals include similar elements and form parallels (Jašić 2001: 52–53; Pamporov 2006: 318–319; Zlatanović 2007: 73–78).
for a house’ (*Zijafet za kuću* or, as it is also known, *kurban za kuću*) is a ritual performed after a new house is built. It can be conducted in a confessional way or by using some of these elements. I observed this ritual in the city of Nish, and the family that organized it was closely related to a local sheikh of the Kaderiyya order. The householders insisted the ceremony to be performed according to the requirements of Islam, and therefore, one of the local Imams – dervishes of a *Rifayya* brotherhood – was called upon to hold the ritual. During the ceremony the participants sit in a circle on the floor and, at the end of the recitation of *mevlid*, they touch the center of the tablecloth spread in front of them and repeat the prayers of the Imam. Afterwards, the Imam explained to me that the last prayer was made to the *babalara* – the ‘people’ that stay in every house to protect them (Field Data 2014b).

In spite of the frequently similar motifs that exist within these beliefs, they actually represent different segments of the local mythology. For example, the figure of the saint is generally distinguished from that of the owner-spirit in the stories. However, I have discovered several cases where these two characters are closely identified and have become synonymous with each other. These parallels show the potential for further overlapping of the original images at the level of belonging, and the existing practices integral to the tradition and to being Muslim (see Introduction).

**Visionary experiences and patterns of interpretations**

I have already pointed out that the visionary experience represents an invariant motif in narratives. A dream is often regarded as a kind of ‘miraculous’ communication, and therefore its interpretation serves as an instrument of legitimation of practices (Vrazhinovski 1998: 143–148; Felek 2012). The interpretation of the visionary experience plays a significant role here, since it originates in the semantics of the images, which are relevant to the existing living tradition and are, therefore, sanctioned by it. In this context, it is important to trace the idea of the status of this ‘guest’ throughout interpretations of these dreams and visions.

**Dreams, Sufi influences and local authorities**

In 2011 a new holy site appeared on a narrow street of Stocni Trg mahalla in Nish. R., a woman in her late 40s, who was neither religious nor a participant in religious ceremonies and customs, decided to build a shrine. As I learnt from her, she had dreamt of this shrine
whilst suffering with a long-term disease and, upon building the shrine, had recovered significantly. The shrine was decorated in an image of an ‘uncovered’ grave (Mikov 1999: 187–220), situated nearby, known as a place of miraculous healing and hierophany. Candles were lit in a corner, and a pot with water was placed herein. A wall was decorated with an image of Kaaba and several towels, which figured as a gift to the site. According to the vague explanation provided by R. and her neighbor, the place was not devoted to the saints, but the saibiya.

I returned to this shrine a year later. A small building decorated with the attributes of local Sufi mausoleums had emerged in this place. The corner was remodeled by way of mihrab, beads were hung on the wall, and there were more images. Semi-confessional decoration was supplemented with a narrative about saints and a prophetic dream. R. had become a caretaker of the holy site. She covered her hair while entering this building and asked visitors to do the same. The discourse had acquired confessional traits, and indicated the potential influence of different religious actors – caretakers of the shrines and official spiritual authorities. Regardless of my expectations, these changes had not been directly determined by the influence of the female caretakers of the similar private shrines, but by a local Sufi sheikh, who gained authority despite his criticism of such practices. Although R's Muslim practice is limited to her activity in the tekiya as well as private prayers, the transformations point to confessionalization. The presence of different ‘traditional’ discourses observed in the milieu provides a possibility of choice of interpretations of such a visionary experience. These interpretations may vary between the ‘demonic’ explanation (when the personage is recognized as an owner-spirit) and the ‘saintly’ one (when the narration speaks about the saints and contains numerous confessional elements). In this case, the interpretation of the dream was transformed under the influence of Sufi discourse, transmitted by one of the local spiritual authorities.

**Individual interpretations of the sacred**

The semantic frames of the subject of the narration permit the choosing of ties (similarities) and parallels, which correspond with existing patterns of apprehending and actualizing information.

One of the younger relatives of A. was disturbed by the conversation about the owner-spirit and other sorts of beliefs, when A. had started to describe his experience of meeting the spirits of the deceased. Judging by the content of his arguments, and the verbal form of their expression, it became clear that this young man regularly attended the mosque.
Muslims’ Pursuit of Faith and Religiosity

(during Friday prayers), listened to lessons and tried to develop himself in his religious practice. Whereas he interpreted the stories told by A. in terms of ignorance, stressing on the poor religious education in the milieu, the trajectory of his argumentation crucially changed when saibiya was in question.

This is the truth! I see them. Once I saw him walking in the street. He looks like an ordinary man. But no one else saw him! I have a birthmark, here (he shows his heel). Everybody, who has the same one, is allowed to see these spirits.

(Field Data 2013d)

It is obvious that this scenario exemplifies a phenomenon of selective inclusion and exclusion of elements in the construction of individual forms of religiosity. The rise of religious education in this case leads to the formation of at least two simultaneously appreciated normative discourses. Both are based upon socially accepted consensuses of the interpretation of a single experience of the sacred apprehended as traditional. These religious discourses supplement each other in a living practice and are involved in a common semantic context.

The construction of holy sites

After a shrine is founded, it becomes the focus of veneration and communication with ‘people of God’. Generally, those persons who receive a message from the saints are considered to possess a peculiar knowledge, and, as a result, are given a set of social and religious statuses within the community. The mediator becomes a participant in ritual performances, a knowledge keeper and its spreader, and a caretaker of the shrine. Such statuses, due to the vague patterns of their roles, do not constitute a kind of complete informal institution, but rather represent a cognate picture, a process of development and inclusion in the structure of ritual specialists of the community.

The foundation of the shrine usually addresses the motifs of a regional Muslim tradition related to the mausoleums of the saints (Đorđević 1984a: 140, 1984b: 128, 381; Popovic 1996). Some of the shrines are founded on the place of the old burial sites, which can be found in the districts built close to the neglected Muslim cemeteries. The place may also be chosen due to objects, which clearly denote the presence of the tomb. For instance, parts of a gravestone or remains that can be found while the foundation of the new house is laid. For example, one of the sanctuaries in Topana mahalla in Skopje was founded at a site where a
part of a tombstone had been discovered. Meanwhile, the other types of shrines are not directly relevant to the places of burial, and are founded as a result of communication with the saints.

The influence of ‘traditional’ images may be traced through the decoration of the shrines; their Islamic nature and ‘holiness’ is reflected and manifested through the reproduction of their attributes, which resemble the mausoleums of Bektashi saints or Sufi lodges (or a \textit{semana}). At the same time, a sort of privatization (or ‘nativization’) can be observed. Besides the Islamic objects that possess Christian symbolism are used, and therefore share the same space. I have frequently noticed images of the Virgin Mary, which remain from the pilgrimages to the Catholic or Orthodox monasteries and churches.

The ritual objects are often accepted and sanctioned by the interpretations of the dreams, but other mechanisms of legalization can be used as well, such as, for instance, reference to the authority of a local religious leader or the belief in efficacy of usage. The shrines founded within the public, shared space of Romani districts, including the religious identity of the objects used in decorations and rituals, provide these loci with certain symbolic features and religiously mark them. Together with the appearance of the shrines, the Muslim boundaries within the districts become visible.

A place of belonging is narrated through the visibility of confessional belonging, and traditional continuity is manifested through some of the ritual actions. Following the widespread vernacular tradition, Thursday and sometimes Sunday are the days confined for veneration of the shrines and the saints (they are described as ‘their days’). The preparation for the central phase of the ritual begins a day before the ritual and consists of purifying practices that refer to the Muslim discourse. It is worth mentioning that despite the fact that the visitors constitute a multi-confessional community, the range of orders and prohibitions include certain private instructions related to the representatives of other religious traditions. Basically, it is forbidden for Christians to cross themselves, and all visitors use white ‘Muslim’ candles to light the fires. Such kinds of symbolic demarcation of boundaries of religious traditions within the shared ritual practice are typical for the so-called ‘mixed’ pilgrimages or veneration of ambiguous holy sites, where the cult space is contested, and different confessional discourses are negotiated (Albera and Couroucli 2012).

Commonly, the ritual bears an individual character. As I could notice, the actions are common to all the visitors, and the confessional traits are rarely emphasized. Such kind of visual ritualistic minimalism does
not regulate the inner side of the practice performed within the borders of a ‘Muslim place’. Thus, and this is common to many types of popular shrines, despite the complex of orders and prohibitions which serve primarily as a marker of confessional belonging of the site, there is, nevertheless, a flexibility of confessional borders.

**Contestation and integration of practices**

The worship of *babalara* and the holy sites is simultaneously private and public, individual and collective. It opens debates about its normativity and authenticity, and becomes an element in the construction of various images of Muslim practice in frames of coexistent and in several cases competitive confessional discourses.

The veneration of ‘anonymous saints’ meets with an ambivalent and often negative treatment on the part of religious leaders who accomplish their religious activity in Roma communities. Their discussions are mainly dedicated to the question of the authenticity, legitimacy and normativity of the existing ideas and practices.

In its present form, the cult of local saints is openly criticized by Sunni imams. The worship of these figures has become an object of numerous debates between the believers and their spiritual authorities. During the lessons held by imams, they intend to interpret the widespread motif of a prophetic dream in a ‘literal’, that is, confessional sense. In this context, the illegal nature of the practices is stressed. Meanwhile, the ‘myths’ are dispelled: the image of the saint undergoes some changes and is equated by imams with a genie, whereas the dreams lose their prophetic features. Finally, it is frequently repeated that such kind of ideas and rites are created under the influence of popular tradition and some heterodox trends (in this case Sufi orders) (Field Data 2011e, 2013a). The ideas and practices related to the ‘anonymous saints’ attract the attention of the local Sufi leaders, who belong to the Roma milieu and accomplish their religious activity in this way. Since the spiritual teachers are possessed of all kinds of education and their ideas are developed under heterogeneous influences, their interpretations of such questions result in various discourses.

On the whole, the local Sufi leaders stress that the beliefs and practices performed only for ‘anonymous saints’ are illegible, since they are not sanctioned by the ‘common tradition’ and are disapproved of by the leaders themselves. For this reason, this cult exceeds the bounds of their influence. It is also evident that their estimation of the extent of correspondence between certain beliefs and the ‘common tradition’
would depend on the individual interpretations made by the religious authorities, thus expanding or constricting the flexible boundaries of ‘common Islamic tradition’ in its local form. It is worth mentioning that the contestation of this practice results in the creation of a narrative of a specific form of Islam for the Romani milieu. This narrative constructs an image of an alien form of practicing faith, which is localized within the borders of *mahalla* as an ethno-cultural space. ‘There’s no Islam in the *mahalla*. . . . It’s always hard to work in the *mahalla*. They [Roma] always have something of their own’ (Field Data 2014a, 2014b).

The veneration of the saints can obtain recognition in cases when the shrine includes the tomb of *baba*, and the narrative describing the ritual dream is told. Meanwhile, the practice is negated if the holy site is associated with those personages who are imagined as wanderers and whose status among the saints – as it is assumed by religious authorities – is dubious. Consequently, the presence of this boundary phenomenon is sanctioned, and its correlation with the ‘normative’ Islamic tradition is regulated by referring to the distinctive ‘traditional’ motifs and their present functioning. In spite of the sanction that a visionary experience confers upon an individual to reproduce this cult, the appearance of informal leaders (caretakers of the shrines), who share their knowledge and implant the ‘illegal’ ideas and practices, is condemned by Sufi authorities. In general, it is not the appearance of ritual specialists that is of much interest, since such rituals are adapted according to traditional interpretations, but their increase within a single taken community. This process could result in the transformation of the role played by these new ritual specialists.

The formation of the opinion expressed by the sheikh depends on the specificity of social and cultural context, in which a visible distance between the Romani community and the macro society can be pointed out. The position of the religious leader (the sheikh), whose authority is frequently limited within the boundaries of a certain milieu, would be determined by his assessment of the community culture with which he identifies himself, and the comprehension of the role he plays in its development. Therefore, the opinion shared by the religious leader and his activity with the believers is variable. It may be traced directly through the acceptance or negation of the practice, or indirectly through participation in the founding of new shrines, through the sharing of knowledge, as well as through the instruction in proper performance of rituals, in particular, the ordering and execution of actions during the pilgrimage to the mausoleums. However, the knowledge is partly transmitted, and on the whole, depends upon the level
of education received by the sheikh himself, as well as on its specificity. This then results in the creation of various types of interpretations and the ‘contamination’ of ideas and meanings.

Conclusions

The practice of worshipping ‘anonymous saints’ can serve as a model for the examination of one of the possible mechanisms of the existence and modification of living traditions in a multicultural and poly-ethnic environment. It seems convincing that one of the possible schemes of development of the present practice reflects the process of transfer of the tradition of veneration of saints from the broader shared multi-ethnic and multicultural space to the more narrow, mono-ethnic mahalla where it is then transformed in the cult of ‘anonymous saints’.

It can be assumed that, in this case, the localization of tradition results, in some way, in a process of cultural privatizing. By this process I mean an enclosing of the generally accepted and performed practice within the boundaries of religious culture of the Romani community. At the same time, unlike the processes of formation of national and cultural identity of Balkan nations, the privatizing of religious practice does not lead to the nationalization of the cult. The holy sites serve as cult places and private spiritual centers, thus integrating the local Romani community of believers. At the same time, they do not accept the role of space of accumulation and formation of national memory, which may be compared to the process of nationalization of the saints and holy sites elsewhere (for instance, Ajatovica in Bosnia and Herzegovina). In Romani religious culture, such kind of nationalization is visible due to the cult of St. Bibija – a Romani saint – a trend that is developing now within the Orthodox discourse (Popov 1996; Acković 2004).

The shrines therefore do not serve directly for the development of the ethnic rhetoric. In this sense, they represent a kind of a platform for the cultural development of cultural self-determination of believers in the given cultural space, but nevertheless do not serve as a ‘nation’s spiritual space’ as distinct from some other sacralized places like cult buildings or cemeteries (Čolović 2011: 117).

While possessing a syncretic contamination of images and meanings, the tradition of worship of the ‘people of God’ exists within the dominant Islamic discourse, although the sites are visited by people of different confessions. The popular shrines, due to their visual decoration
and partly due to their semantic specificity, confessionally mark the space of the districts. Therefore, they seem to express the confessional identity of the community, its integration into the religious life of the macro society, as well as demonstrating historical and cultural continuity. Meanwhile, the intention of belonging to a wider tradition meets either resistance on the part of those spiritual authorities who are seen as its ‘official’ representatives, and who regard such practice as a specific religious phenomenon of the Romani milieu.

As mentioned, the practice of veneration of babalara is a reconstitution of a tradition of pilgrimage to the mausoleums of the saints, and continues to be influenced by the local Sufi traditions. The cult is still in the process of establishment, as may be seen from the mosaic nature of the image of the saint, as well as the variable content of the social role of ritual specialists-caretakers of the holy sites. In this context, the cult is open to various influences and serves as a platform for forming, retaining and transforming confessional discourse used by the representatives of certain Islamic movements.

Notes

1. Tekiya (tekija (Serb., Maced.), teqeja (Alb.)) – one of the popular broad naming of different kind of holy sites – holy springs, tombs, monasteries and Sufi tekkes. In this paper I would distinguish the term tekiya denoting a popular shrine and a tekke (Turk.) – a place of religious gatherings of Sufi brotherhoods.

2. Türbe (Turk.) – in Ottoman funeral architecture – a tomb decorated with a mausoleum and built for distinguished persons and spiritual authorities.

3. For instance, ‘Sveta stolica I kruna na islamskata erenlerska tarikatska zayednica vo Makedoniya’ in Skopje which is officially registered and nominally unites numerous Sufi lodges founded in predominantly Roma milieu.

4. Evliya – Turkish form from Arabic awliyā (Sing. walī), which means a ‘saint’. This term is generally used to designate both a single saint and the saints in general.

5. Baba (Turk.) – father. It is commonly used as a form of honorific address to an older man, or to one who has a high social position. In the religious aspect, this epithet turns up in Sufi discourse to denote a religious teacher, but also a dervish. It also serves as a part of a place name, and is frequently associated with Bektashi order. Baba (babo, Voc.; babalara/babalara – pl.) is additionally used in some of the Romani dialects (of ‘Turkish Roma’) to address an old man (a father). Meanwhile, in everyday vocabulary it has well-defined religious connotations.

6. Despite a variety of details, the existing narratives are created around invariant motifs, which demonstrate the bonds between local traditions and the nature of changes in beliefs and practices (Đorđević 1984a: 125–143; Đorđević 1984b: 127–141; Lozanova 2001: 143–153, 174–178, 220–236; Alexiev 2005).
Bibliography


Field Data (2011a) Author’s personal communication – Man, Roma (70), Muslim, Literate, Sheikh, Qadiriyya Tekke, Niš (Serbia).

Field Data (2011b) Author’s personal communication – Woman, Roma (60), Muslim, Literate, Ritual Specialist (Serbia: Funeral Rites Niš).

Field Data (2011c) Author’s personal communication – Woman, Roma (70), Muslim, Leskovac (Serbia).

Field Data (2011d) Author’s personal communication – Man, Roma (40), Muslim, Literate, Caretaker of the Shrine, Leskovac (Serbia).

Field Data (2011e) Author’s personal communication – Man, Bosnian (Bosnjak) (31), Muslim, Literate, Senior Imam, Niš (Serbia).

Field Data (2013a) Author’s personal communication – Man, Roma (31), Muslim, Literate, Imam, Rifayya Tekke, Skopje (Macedonia).

Field Data (2013b) Author’s personal communication – Man, Roma (60), Muslim, Literate, Sheikh, Halwetiyya Tekke, Skopje (Macedonia).

Field Data (2013c) Author’s personal communication – Man, Roma (50), Muslim, Literate, Skopje (Macedonia).

Field Data (2013d) Author’s personal communication – Man, Roma (30), Muslim, Literate, Skopje (Macedonia).
Field Data (2014a) Author’s personal communication – Man, Roma (31), Muslim, Literate, Imam, Rifayya Tekke, Skopje (Macedonia).
Field Data (2014b) Author’s personal communication – Man, Roma (50), Muslim, Literate, Imam, Niš (Serbia).
This page intentionally left blank
Part III

Religious Beliefs, Public Arguments and Legitimacy
This page intentionally left blank
9

Rhetorical Strategies of Kosovo’s Imams in the Fight for ‘Women’s Rights’

Behar Sadriu

Introduction

This chapter aims to give an account of how Islam is read and recast by important religious figures in the case of Kosovo. The way Islam is articulated by a selected pool of popular imams can be related here to the idea of different ‘modalities of revival’ that followed the collapse of communism in the Balkans (see Introduction). Such choices reflect important ‘breaks’, which have affected Muslims in this part of Europe, all of which are relevant to this present chapter: the legacies of state-enforced secularism; the opening up of a free market of religiosity whereby new forms of communication and actors begin to take authority away from the state-sanctioned authorities; and lastly, the impact of the EU accession process. To begin unpacking these issues I look at how imams in Kosovo navigate between important trends outlined in the Introduction, particularly the trends toward secularization, international influences, and impact of European normative spaces, by focusing on their critiques of state-led attempts to ban the hijab in public schools.

In the first section of this chapter a short introduction to rhetoric and discourse will be given, in order to provide the necessary theoretical and methodological tools for the subsequent analysis. Rhetoric here refers to the ways in which one persuades and how we make arguments, whilst also keeping in mind not just the words and reasons for or against, but also the emotional references we make, the identities and wider social phenomena we evoke. In the second section I give the context of the current hijab ban controversy in Kosovo, while in the third I introduce the three imams, used as conduits to assess some of the issues raised.
The three imams were chosen for two main reasons. The first was due to their popularity, something gauged via their online popularity on social networking sites such as Facebook and YouTube. The second criterion was whether they had publicly engaged with the hijab ban debate in Kosovo. The three imams are Shefqet Krasniqi, Ekrem Avdiu and Enis Rama. All three imams are highly educated and have appeared on a host of talk shows and in the print media. Due to a lack of material on the topic, I have had to rely largely on Imam Krasniqi’s public pronouncements. He is by far the most prolific of the three under consideration (and also the most publicly recognized). His views have been assessed from four videos and three pieces of written material. Imam Krasniqi’s views were supplemented by two audio lectures and a written article from Ekrem Avdiu, along with one piece of audio material from Enis Rama.

In the last section I give a broader analysis of how the data can be interpreted in light of the two main questions: how do imams in Kosovo legitimize the place of Islamic norms and practices in Europe? And, what can this tell us about how they view their own ‘European’ identity as Muslim Albanians (bearing in mind their own particular historical experience)? This analysis places primacy on the actors themselves and takes what they say seriously, while at the same time situating legitimizing arguments within the larger framework of Islamic ‘revival’ in Europe after the fall of communism.

This chapter reveals that Albanian imams rely on four main types of arguments when contesting the hijab injunctions in Kosovo: the hijab represents a lofty morality that is being attacked by an ignorant elite with an often vague agenda; the hijab is a universal human right, guaranteed by the civilized world; it is, moreover, a universal religious (not necessarily only Islamic) commandment; and lastly, it is defended via recourse to a conservative understanding of Albanian culture. The analysis suggests that selected imams, though willing and enthusiastic about adopting a pro-liberal and European discourse, are often also willing to adopt more conservative religious arguments to press for their claims. Unlike Turkey and Albania – both also marked by strictly secular regimes – Kosovo has its own particular historical experience which has given rise to a more assertive religious elite (for a comparison of religious movements in Turkey and Albania, see Elbasani and Saatçioğlu (2014)). A contextualized approach of this particular experience is necessary to account for the nuance of differing Muslim elites’ choices when confronting different scenarios; in this case, what they perceive as religious discrimination.
Discourse analysis

Discourse analysis is a broad set of research traditions focused on all forms of language ‘in use’, be it via speeches, interview material or written texts, and encompasses many different research approaches (Gill 2000; Wetherell et al. 2001). The basic premise is that language is not neutral, but an active process of ‘constructing social life’ (Gill 2000). It is the ways in which we talk about speech, conversations and other forms of communication. Some approaches focus on ‘speech acts’ (how we communicate meaning), with others focusing on the broader setting wherein ideas are conveyed and embedded – both with the aim in mind of discerning a broader narrative of which they are part of. Discourse analysis also concerns the ‘mutual constitution’ of subject and object and allows for an appreciation of how the power of language can work to impress upon the audience an understanding of social reality. This chapter borrows from the approaches devised in discourse analysis, and diverges from concerns purely related to the content and organization of the text, with more of an emphasis on discerning the actor’s particular attitudes to specific cases (Gill 2000: 174–175). Moreover, discourse is more than just what is being said, but is also concerned with battles around how knowledge is constituted in a society and the context in which such knowledge is produced (Jørgensen and Phillips 2002: 5). Power is thus crucial here, since discourse often relates to what society views as ‘true’; also of importance are the mechanisms used to validate such truths and therefore, what may legitimately be construed as relevant and ordinary (Burr 1995: 4). Such is the relevance of discourse, wherein political, religious or other types of actors use it to declare what is correct (via a narrative), acceptable, up for debate, the terms of the debate – all with the aim of describing ‘reality’.

This present study uses primary source material to distinguish the key features and terms of reference used by Albanian imams when arguing for the right to wear the hijab in public schools. This necessitates that I discern the ways in which imams frame their arguments, what sorts of rhetorical tropes are relied on and how they argue for what is right and wrong.

Crucial to persuasion is rhetoric, a skill used to make others understand our viewpoint; it is ‘epistemic’ in the sense that it can shape realities. One of the earliest writers on rhetoric, Aristotle, defined the rhetorician, ‘as someone who is always able to see what is persuasive’, in the sense that he/she can relate the correct tropes in ‘every given case’ (Rapp 2010). The different rhetorical strategies adopted help to identify the nature of coexistence among religion and politics in a climate
marked by – in theory at least – a political elite’s adherence to liberal norms and values. Such an analysis will help us to better understand a number of other issues, such as the ways in which the Islamic elite recognize their place in Europe and the importance they place on being ‘from Europe’ into discussions about religious freedoms. This will become relevant when I trace the key events triggered by the administrative order (emanating from the Kosovo Ministry of Education) in 2009, which many school head teachers interpreted as a blanket ban on the hijab.

Added to this analytic, discourse approach is the novel research agenda centered on the idea of *rhetorical coercion* (Krebs and Jackson 2007: 55). The focus of such an approach is not on what people really believe (as this is not readily discernible) but rather on what they say and how they respond to different arguments. This relates to the power of speech acts (broadly construed) to impress upon the listener a deep urge to comply with what the speaker wants. The speaker, given the platform to reach a wide audience, has a few fundamentals or ‘commonplace terms’ that are important to a society and he/she may seize on and strategically deploy to garner support (Mattern 2005; Jackson 2006; Goddard 2010). Some examples of these include notions such as ‘the West’ or ‘the Albanian nation’ (Alb. *kombi shqiptar*). Such rhetorical tropes are used by imams in Kosovo to protest the hijab injunctions.

**The hijab**

Over the past few decades, there has been a proliferation of academic research on Muslims in Europe. Muslim attire has become one of the most prominent topics amongst this wide range of scholarly activity in recent years. From a legal perspective, Muslim attire (particularly the hijab and the face-veil [*niqab*]) has forced scholars to reassess principles and practices of secularism and state–society relations (Lewis 2007; Davis 2011; Grillo and Shah 2012; Chaib and Brems 2013). Other scholars have debated the link between the banning of Muslim dress and the rise of Islamophobia (Ismail 2011; Brems *et al.* 2012; Chakraborti and Zempi 2012). For those academics, this debate is novel and provides an opportunity to test theories, conduct case studies and debate the general state of European democracy in relation to minority rights. Such debates, moreover, are seen as confined to ‘Western’ Europe and make no reference to discussions in the Balkans and experiences there. Or as a study on the face veil bans in France and Belgium notes, ‘The origins of the *European* move to ban face-veiling may be traced ultimately to France in 1989’ (my emphasis, Grillo and Shah 2012). As is obvious
then, the geographical limits of Europe are placed squarely within what is commonly referred to as ‘Western Europe’.

In many ways Europe’s relationship with Islam is viewed by many scholars as a relatively new phenomenon following waves of migrations (mainly from Asia and Africa) in the second half of the 20th century. The historical experiences of Europe’s indigenous Muslims are underrepresented and under-analyzed. Indeed, state policies that placed injunctions against Muslim attire were implemented in parts of Europe much earlier than the more well-known cases in the 1990s and 2000s. For example, a 1947 assembly in Kosovo (then a province of Yugoslavia) outlined plans to outlaw the niqab, or full face-veil (Alb. peçe/ferexhe) and by 1948 dozens of Communist Party members were sacked because they had refused to comply. Many women who resisted were made jobless (Bamja 2009: 258–265). According to one study, 20,000–30,000 women were forced to remove their veils from 1947 to 1950 (Bamja 2009: 260). The law stipulated fines for those who wore the niqab specifically – it did not impose general prohibitions on all face-coverings. Imprisonment and/or fines were also stipulated for those who forced others to wear it. Complementing such draconian measures was a PR-stunt involving senior imams touring Kosovo and giving fatwa (sing. fatwa) that the niqab was not part of the Islamic tradition (Bamja 2009: 263; Grillo and Shah 2012). Many opposed the ban: some women would go out only at night; others would cover their faces with the hijab; still others would remove their daughters from public schools. With such historical experiences in mind, it is obvious that the niqab-ban is not new to Europe, and many of the same justifications for banning Islamic attire given during the communist Yugoslav-era are now being used in some European countries. Such legacies of state repression of Islamic forms of dress have, to some extent, shaped the reaction to the current hijab debate in modern-day Kosovo. Historicizing the relationship between Islamic dress and state repression of it is necessary to properly understand the sorts of rhetorical tropes relied on by (contemporary) Kosovo imams (in this case three Albanians, all male) to press their demands against injunctions currently in place for hijab-clad girls attending public schools.

The first question to consider is: what place does the hijab have in Kosovo? From the historical perspective of Muslims in Kosovo, the hijab was certainly an omnipresent feature in the not too distant past. Though it is not widely worn among Kosovar-Albanian women today, it is fair to say that the vast majority of women over the age of 60 still use the hijab, with many choosing to wear the full jilbaab when leaving their
home (Bamja 2009: 255, endnote 685). However, during the communist period there was a sharp decline in the number of women wearing the hijab. As noted above however, before a Yugoslav-wide ban was imposed the *niqab* (or full face-veil) was also practiced among some Muslim women in Kosovo, particularly in urban areas (Bamja 2009). The current controversy over the hijab ban in Kosovo, and the focus of this chapter, begins in 2009 with an administrative order emanating from the office of then education minister, Enver Hoxhaj. The order placed a blanket ban on all ‘religious symbols’ in public schools – including the hijab. Minister Hoxhaj cited the secular constitution as the basis for his decision along with the idea that Kosovo ‘is a secular state and is neutral in matters of religious beliefs’ (Bytyci 2010). Alternative readings of secularism were, on the face of it, not available to Hoxhaj at the time. This may represent, as Elbasani noted in Introduction to this volume, continued state attempts in the post-communist period to discipline religion and the legacy of the communist period which has ‘bequeathed vestiges of…largely interventionist and occasionally hostile state policies onto the post-Communist institutional formats of managing Islam’. The debates which came to the fore after the move by the government, moreover, appear to be linked to a long standing debate (also present in many ‘Western’ European countries) about the key principles and features of secularism and state-society relations (Kuru 2009). Such theoretical considerations aside, the administrative order meant the very real prospect of many girls being forced out of school. Indeed, debates around hijab bans often miss the voice of the women concerned, as well as the impact on human rights (Chaib and Brems 2013). What remains more concerning even today however is that the ban is wrongly construed by Kosovar women as a nationwide legislative ban, whereas in reality legal scholars have stated that it is merely part of a sub-legal set of administrative orders sent down from the Education Ministry to the governing boards of local schools. The Constitutional Court has not ruled on the matter.

Sporadic protests have taken place in Kosovo to oppose the administrative order. The biggest of these, in 2010, saw over 5000 people take to the streets (Bytyci 2010). International news outlets have also picked up on the issue, with Al Jazeera running a story on the most recent victim of the ban, Njomza Jashari, expelled from school in Ferizaj in 2013. The hijab issue becomes important every time the new academic year begins, and has become even more significant before the 2013 winter municipal elections in Kosovo.
Imams, for their part, have relied on different sorts of rhetorical tropes when contesting the hijab ban. For this current research, a number of different strategies to compile the data coming from these debates were considered. These included taking individual imams’ responses and analyzing them separately or discerning the common terms of reference and themes that the imams relied on, and then interpreting these in relation to the main research questions. However, a more fruitful approach developed as I began analyzing the data. I would rely on two broad questions when sifting through the data: what arguments are used to attack the hijab ban? And what methods are promoted as necessary to combat the ban? To account for the questions raised in the introduction of this chapter, I analyzed audio and written material from three prominent imams in Kosovo. Speeches were transcribed, read, re-read (and then re-read once more) to find answers to the two main questions set out at the beginning: How do imams in Kosovo view the place of Islamic cultural norms and practices in Europe? And what can this tell us about how they view their own European identity as Muslim Albanians (bearing in mind their own particular historical experience)?

The imams

The first of these is Dr. Shefqet Krasniqi who began his higher-education studies in 1986 in Medina (Saudi Arabia) at the famous Islamic University, graduating six-years later. Having completed his MA degree in 1996 he then went on to write his PhD, finishing this in 2001 in the field of fiqh, or jurisprudence. He is currently imam at the main, 15th century mosque in the city known as ‘Mehmet al-Fatih’. He holds two weekly question-and-answer sessions on a local TV station, as well as on a popular online radio station and also lectures at the University of Prishtina. He writes weekly for many newspapers. He also takes questions through Facebook, and answers them via an online YouTube show every week. He has been a member of the ‘International Organization for Muslim Scholars’, based out of Kuwait, since its founding in 2010. He has translated many works from imminent Islamic scholars into Albanian.9 His Facebook page has 120,000 ‘likes’.10 Moreover, research conducted by a marketing company, hired to look into the feasibility of an Islamic-themed television show on one of the main TV stations in Kosovo, revealed that Shefqet Krasniqi has almost double the pulling-power of other leading personalities in Kosovo.11

The next imam is Ekrem Avdiu, from the city of Mitrovica. He was born in Kosovo and completed his university education in Medina in
the field of hadith studies (1997). He returned to Kosovo during the 1998–1999 war with Serbia and was a captain in the Kosovo Liberation Army (UÇK), commanding a small force of between 60 and 70 soldiers. He is a hafidh, and has completed postgraduate studies in Lebanon. He is a prolific translator of many works from Arabic into Albanian. One of the most popular imams in Mitrovica, if not the whole of Kosovo, he is particularly renowned for his eloquence.

The youngest of the imams is Enis Rama. Finishing an Arabic degree in Jordan, he also studied the Islamic sciences under one of the most famous, prolific and influential Islamic scholars of the 20th century – Muhammad Nassiruddin al-Albani (Brown 2007: 417–431). After this, Rama enrolled at the Medina University in Saudi Arabia, where he studied Hadith. In 2006 he finished his postgraduate studies in Cairo, specializing in usul al-din (the principles of religion). Rama also translates works from Arabic into Albanian and is very popular, particularly among the younger generation. He also hosts a question-and-answer session on YouTube and regularly appears on TV and radio.

**Beginning to debate the hijab-injunctions in Kosovo**

In 2010, a few weeks after the hijab ban was being protested against and discussed heavily in the media, Krasniqi appeared on a talk show to debate the ban. Two government ministers and a young lady who wore the hijab were also present. Krasniqi contended, first and foremost, that the hijab was a universal religious phenomenon, thereby explicitly arguing that the ban was illegal, since it impaired the right to practice one’s faith. The hijab, Krasniqi argued, is something found in all sacred texts, and an issue of personal freedom. He further argued that ‘in Europe’, Muslims – though a minority – have more rights than Albanians (in Kosovo). Such a view was echoed again in the summer of 2011, when Krasniqi dedicated a Friday sermon to the issue of the hijab ban. From the minbar, he declared as follows:

> There is hostility against Islam – [by] the enemies of the religion and enemies of the state…Above all the veil is being attacked because they are used to seeing women naked; their souls, their hearts and their eyes cannot stand seeing our daughters covered up, that these women are defending their honour and identity.

In the opening segment of the lecture, Krasniqi begins with the idea that Islam is being attacked in Kosovo. By linking an attack on Islam to an
attack against women in society, Krasniqi is framing the argument as one between pious and moral people and evil and immoral Islamophobes. Such a dichotomy serves the main purpose of pressing the congregation to pick sides: either the side of morality or immorality. Similarly, a 2012 op-ed by Ekrem Avdiu titled Shamia – symbol, detyrim dhe test (The Hijab – Symbol, Obligation and Test) begins with an alarming tone, as he remarks that the hijab ban represents ‘a high point’ of anxiety for the Muslim community (Avdiu 2012). Rama, commenting on the incidents of January 2013 when high-school student, Njomza Jashari, was expelled from a school in Ferizaj, argues that since a lot of students took to protest Jashari’s exclusion, this shows one of two things: either that the ban is being imposed from people outside of this nation or that people from within ‘want to hurt this nation’.15 In the same way, Avdiu had begun a 2011 Friday sermon with the idea that ‘some people – not just individuals – but groups… are interested in aggression towards Muslims and aim to change the religious identity of the masses’.16 The religion, Avdiu argues, has become part of Albanian identity, though he equally argues that it is everybody’s right to become a Muslim – or to become a Jew or polytheist or atheist – since ‘God has made them free to choose’.17 Avdiu argues that the hijab is compulsory, though he ‘does not force any to wear it’ before urging the congregation to be firm and ‘uncompromising’ when it comes to such religious obligations. As these short extracts show, the hijab debate brings to the fore many of the tensions between the rising religiosity of the youth and a seemingly defensive political elite (Chapter 3).

Albanians, Islam and the hijab as a universal religious garb

Another important idea for these imams is the universality of the hijab. Such a strategy of linking the hijab to other religions (and to morality) may be interpreted thus: those who oppose the hijab are not only immoral and against an established universal practice, they are also opposed to the general normative moral framework of the masses. ‘We have this religion, mentality, identity, tradition… the hijab is one of foundations of the religion (deen) it is a fundamental of the shari’ah. It is not a symbol. It is a marker of her morality’, Krasniqi concludes from the minbar in 2011. In the same speech, he argues that:

The hijab is not an Albanian, Turkish or Arab invention, but [has been around] since the time of Eve – peace be upon her… women
have always been covered, since the time of the Israelites […] to the time of the Christians: the Qur’an legitimized the hijab – it did not invent it – it legitimized a pre-existing phenomenon [that existed] from the pharaohs, to India to Rome.18

The imam’s narrative is a flurry of historical and symbolic imagery: the hijab is linked to the idea of tradition, tradition is inexorably linked (for Albanians) to Islam, and Islam is linked to morality. In this way, Krasniqi weaves together religion and Albanian national identity. That Krasniqi relies on the religious imagery of Eve and also the Qur’an to argue for the hijab’s legitimacy should not surprise us: the setting is, of course, a mosque in the center of Prishtina on the holiest day of the week for Muslims. The link being made here is between morality and the perpetuation of such a morality from the time of the first humans. The hijab’s universality is attested to by its existence in other religions and – by referencing the Qur’an – Krasniqi is ridiculing the claim that the hijab is a foreign garb, while simultaneously establishing the primacy of the scripture in terms of legislative authority.

This idea is pressed further as Krasniqi also acknowledges the hijab as not just a Qur’anic, but also a constitutional right, though the latter is not timeless or sacred, since ‘if it does not guarantee this [right], then we must change it’ because the identity and norms of a society are ‘untouchable’. Krasniqi is presenting the congregation with an established ‘truth’ (read: the hijab is a universally established norm); that the criteria for recognizing this is easily discernible (read: via recourse to the Qur’an). Moreover, by beginning with the idea that Islam is under attack, that the hijab pains only immoral people, that it is anyhow a universally practiced norm, Krasniqi is describing to his congregation how he sees society as currently formed. Ekrem Avdiu also links similar tropes, arguing that it is ‘ironic’ for a hijab-injunction to be proposed by the Ministry of Education at the same time as the US State Department released its annual report singling out Kosovo as a transit for people trafficking and prostitution (Avdiu 2012). Meanwhile, he argues that those who wear the hijab are always singled out for their good manners and good academic grades (Avdiu 2012). Rama, for his part, weaves together different historical material, arguing that Muslims have in the past often been accused of not allowing females to attend school. Now that they want to go to school, they are being forced out of it, making it ‘clear who does not want Muslims to be educated’.19
The hijab as a universal human right

Such imagery and symbolism used by the imams when pressing their claims help us explore some of the ideas that they have about their place in the world. It is arguable that the three imams do not attempt to set themselves and the religion (since they are for most the representatives of the religion) as isolated from the rest of humanity. Frequent references to the universality of the hijab attest to this. Moreover, there does not seem to be a marked shift in the discourse of the imams when addressing different audiences (the Friday prayer congregation or national television audience). For example, in an article written in August 2013 titled  

A po monopolizohet shamia  (Is the hijab being monopolized?), Krasniqi implores his audience to understand the important point that the hijab is not just a Qur’anic imperative, but a universal religious law. Krasniqi quotes from the Hindu, Buddhist as well as Old and New Testament scriptures, before quoting the two well-known verses pertaining to the hijab in the Qur’an (Surah Nur: 24/31 and Ahzab: 33/59). In this way, the idea of covering the hair is intimately linked to traditional religions. This serves two purposes: it reinforces the idea that the hijab is not something strange or alien to mankind, while simultaneously strengthening the argument that outlawing it is a form of religious discrimination. The reference to subcontinent religions is even more interesting as these are perhaps more distant to Europe than the Abrahamic faiths, and in one reading it may appear that Krasniqi is accusing the hijab detractors of being not just anti-European, but even anti-civilizational.

Nonetheless, the freedom enjoyed ‘in Europe’ is a much more common theme for the imams. Such a perspective on how imams view Europe may be contrasted with that offered by Enis Sulstarova (Chapter 1) and his discussion on the ways elites in Albania try to essentialize Albanian identity by employing Orientalist stereotypes about Islam. In late 2010, Krasniqi goes as far as to urge other panelists on a talk show discussing the hijab ban to ‘look to Europe’ and the rights enjoyed by Muslims there. In 2012, when another incident involving girls forced out of school had occurred, Krasniqi implored his audience to fight for their rights, ‘the rights of Europe’. The hijab ban and the issue of its universality also draw other candid references to Europe. In 2011, Avdiu argued that restrictions on the hijab make Muslims in Kosovo ‘feel like outsiders in our own homes – [though] we haven’t come from Mars, from Africa or Asia, we are [from] here’. This ‘here’ undoubtedly
refers to Europe, as the reference to other continents suggests. The idea of being ‘here’ in Europe implies that these Albanian imams do not attempt to set themselves as belonging to anywhere outside of Europe. In that way, they do not see ‘Europe’ as antithetical to Islam. Another fascinating insight into such perceptions is given in terms of the mechanisms these imams advocate as necessary in the fight to lift the ban; as Krasniqi argues, ‘We must use all possible pressure mechanisms – that are peaceful, with our rights, the rights of Europe’. 23

Protest strategies against hijab restrictions

As we can see from above, the aim of discourse is undoubtedly ‘to do things’ (Gill 2000: 175) and shape an audiences conception of ‘self’, be it in terms of identity or belonging to a particular place; to shape how people make sense of their social and political experience. In essence, Krasniqi and the other two imams attempt to describe reality, while loading it with the normative principles they deem important. Terms such as ‘tradition’, ‘historical’ and the symbols used to reflect the hijab’s significance are part of a larger discursive battle over the true meanings of both being secular and where Muslims in Kosovo should look for inspiration in their daily lives.

Such a strategy may be observed, for example, when two girls – recently removed from schools due to the hijab – phoned in to a live lecture by Krasniqi and asked what the Islamic Community of Kosovo (BIK) should do about their removal from school. 24 BIK has an ambiguous relation with the government (yet unregulated by law), as explained by Jeton Mehmeti in this volume (Chapter 3). Before responding to the main question, Krasniqi comments that Kosovo’s political elite lacks direction, their actions are ‘swinging in whichever direction the wind takes them’ and that they cannot be called communists, ‘neither democrats, Muslims, disbelievers – [they are] nothing’. Krasniqi contends that Muslims must pressure the government via all available mechanisms, including mass protests. Those with ‘even a fraction of Albanian or Islamic identity’ should come out in force, Krasniqi argued, as the aim of the hijab ban was to ‘unclothe’ Albanians from their ethno-religious identity. The hijab, as previously described, is presented again as an integral part of Albanian tradition with the ban symbolically representing the uncovering or the removal of a main element of Albanian identity.

In a similar vein, Ekrem Avdiu also describes the hijab as intrinsically linked to the issue of identity; the hijab is the ‘last line of resistance’ for
Albanians and if this line was to fall, there would hence remain ‘nothing important for us left to defend’ (Avdiu 2012). Such an ‘attack’ is linked to the post-Second World War era and the anti-religious policies pursued by the communists. Communism is seen as the great evil of the 20th century, an ideology which has no place in Islam, whereas ‘Europe’ is presented by the imams as more tolerant and presenting greater opportunities for Muslims to gain their rights.

Indeed, this right to wear the hijab is seen as inalienable and the ban as necessarily warranting a response. The imams provide solutions by way of recourse to international legal conventions against discrimination in education. In a 2013 article, written after much belaboring over religion by Kosovo’s top politicians – with one parliamentarian leaving her party as a result – Krasniqi argued that the hijab was being manipulated and used as a political tool (Krasniqi 2013a). Arguing against the ban, Krasniqi cites the UNESCO Convention against Discrimination in Education 1960, Kosovo’s Constitution (Article 38, specifically Paragraph 3) and the laws on Freedom of Religion in Kosovo (LAW NO. 02/L-31) (Krasniqi 2013a). Avdiu, for his part, congratulates Muslims for protesting in 2012, and urges them to continue using the varied ‘democratic mechanisms’ to oppose the ban, such as debate, petitions and protest. Because the issue is one of ‘flagrant discrimination of Muslims in Kosovo’, another mechanism suggested is to sue and seek international court arbitration if necessary. Rama, commenting this time on the Njomza Jashari case, also points to legal debates, arguing that the issue at hand is one of judicial interpretation and that it is not the prerogative of the school’s director to interpret the law. Rama also supports student protests, arguing that it is a right guaranteed by the constitution. Arguing for a broad-based civic engagement ‘in the spirit of brotherhood, unity and working together between people and government for this problem to be solved once and for all’, Rama’s response is highly charged with key emphasis on the idea of universal democratic rights pertaining to religion and minorities. Krasniqi, in another interview published in 2011, argues (perhaps ironically since imams are often presented as anti-Western) that his desire was for Kosovo to be ‘exactly like America’, ‘free’ and ‘democratic’, not to have laws which are oppressive (Krasniqi 2011a). Krasniqi argues that to be secular does not equate to denying the rights of any particular community, and that he only wanted religious freedoms to be respected ‘no more than they are among religious minorities in England and America’ (Krasniqi 2013b).

The data here suggests that Kosovar imams recast European models to suit their particular agenda in ways that go against common accounts
of traditional Islamic religious leaders. Modern techniques of political organization and recourse to international legal norms point to this fact.

Indeed, with the reference to the US and other countries defined as typically ‘Western’, the imams are trying to point out the absurdity, in their eyes, of a hijab ban in Kosovo where over 96 per cent of the people are Muslim. Citing both the universality of the hijab in terms of religious dogma, and its place in other Western societies, is a strategic rhetorical move designed to justify the right of hijab and silence critics according to their own terms: those who oppose such opinions can only be ‘oppressive’ and ‘anti-democratic’, or worse still – ‘anti-Western’, ‘anti-European’ and ‘anti-American’. The many references to rights enjoyed in other parts of the world, as well as the universality of particular human rights enshrined in international conventions, are part of the panoply of rhetorical strategies employed by Kosovo imams to press for greater rights. Islam is not placed in a vacuum, but is considered part of a larger global civilizational culture including European ‘civilization’. More specifically, frequent references to Judeo-Christian traditions and examples of the rights enjoyed by other Western countries are a clear indication that Kosovo imams see Islamic cultural norms and practices as firmly in tune and compatible with being ‘Western’ and ‘European’.

Conclusion

In many ways it is unsurprising that we find religious figures in Kosovo making reference to ideas which are now part of what Introduction of this volume called the ‘broader European normative space’. One function of this chapter was to see how such ideas are impacting local (public) debates in the context of Kosovo. What emerges from our study of Kosovo is a religious elite in tune with global developments and willing to employ a range of tactics to push for their own claims and agendas. With this in mind, this chapter began by noting that the issue of women’s rights, particularly Muslim women’s attire, has become a lively topic of debate among many different scholars in Europe over the past decade. What is often missing in such debates is an accurate positioning of such issues in their proper historical and socio-political context. The banning of Muslim forms of dress is nothing new, as the experiences of European Muslims in the Balkans many decades before show. Indeed, current injunctions against wearing the hijab in public schools in Kosovo have brought to light many complex issues in the ongoing debate about Islam in Europe. For one, it has allowed for a careful reading of how imams, the religious and intellectual elite of the
Muslim community, situate themselves and their beliefs in relation to ‘European’ ideas.

This chapter reveals that Albanian imams in Kosovo have successfully appropriated the prevailing liberal democratic norms pertaining to religious freedoms and minority rights found in many European countries. Similar research pertaining to Turkey and Albania has also found comparable trends (Elbasani and Saatçıoğlu 2014; Elbasani 2015). I say successfully because many of the arguments relied on by the imams are frequently cited by other countries inside Europe against the banning of the hijab in public schools, with one notable example: France (see also Rorive 2009: 2672–2673). Indeed, France remains the archetype of a secular regime for many Muslim-majority countries, from Tunisia to Turkey and Albania.

What was unsurprising in this research was the fact that the three imams relied on a conservative religious discourse that presented the hijab as the pinnacle of a woman’s morality. However, they would more frequently draw on the notions of constitutional rights, personal freedoms and the right to education found in international legal conventions to argue against the legality of the hijab injunctions in Kosovo. This suggests either an instrumental use of liberal norms and values (on the part of the imams) to press their demands, or a deeper sense that there is no fundamental tension between Islam and such norms. Whatever the case may be, these three imams, at least, appear to have both mastered pluralist vocabulary while not desiring to entirely emulate ‘Christian Europe’ (regarding religious beliefs); something that the Albanian political elite has tried to do but failed to accomplish on both fronts (Todorova 1997: 45–46). The reference to Maria Todorova should not be lost to the reader, as it is precisely this that she criticized post-communist Muslim elites in the Balkans of failing to accomplish. Perhaps this confirms what Tariq Ramadan has argued: that Muslims can be ‘modern’ without necessarily being ‘Western’ (2001).

This chapter has shown that imams in Kosovo are willing to debate using the current framework of democratic rights and values dominant in Europe and the EU. Nonetheless, at a more general glance of Muslims in Europe, it should be noted that a pervasive Islamophobia remains in the media across all the Western Balkans, mirroring similar trends in the rest of Europe. Media in the Balkans often disregard careful analysis of what imams really propagate, and print (by now) banal headlines about the impending threat of ‘radical Islam’ in the Balkans. Such approaches may be contrasted with that taken by Olson in her sensitive study of
renewed Islamic activity in Bulgaria (Chapter 6). The threat to stability is in fact only exacerbated by the alienation and unwillingness of the political elite to engage in discussion and full deliberation more sincerely with religious figures who obviously still hold sway in society. What is more, arbitrary and unilateral implementation of laws which restrict religious freedoms, such as the hijab injunctions in Kosovo discussed here, will only serve to isolate young girls further and deepen the rift among different segments of society.

Notes

3. Generally speaking, a familiar line of argumentation with regard to the hijab ban centers on three arguments: women’s rights, security, and social cohesion. This, of course, is the perspective of those who want a ban – again denying that such a ban has had precisely those effects on veil wearers, such as denying her rights, increased attacks and social exclusion, see Chaib and Brems (2013).
4. A fatwa is a religious opinion, though often misrepresented; a fatwa is not always binding or incumbent upon the Muslim to follow.
5. Whether the niqab is obligatory (fard) is a matter of debate among the fuqaha. Nonetheless, it undoubtedly remains a part of the Islamic tradition.
6. It was not possible to gauge the opinions of female Islamic scholars, though there has been lively debate inside Kosovo with many women in the past and is worthy avenue for future research.
7. Presumably, the ban did not make its way to the Serb-majority municipalities, where the influence of Orthodoxy in the curriculum is a salient feature of the post-1990s. For a general introduction to the role of the Orthodox Church in Serbia, specifically in the education sector, see Kaurin and Morgan (2013).
8. An ‘ideal type’ example would be to say that ‘passive secularism’ is a characteristic of the US system whereas an ‘assertive secularism’ is the norm in France and Turkey.
9. These books have ranged from those themed on the lives of the prophets, to the preferred form of tajweed (or recitation), to more high-level academic works, such as extracts from his PhD Transmissions of Abu Hanifa from Hasen Bin Zijad Eluluij, his illustrious student and qadi of Kufa. Dr. Krasniqi is a Hanafi scholar, posing a slightly embarrassing problem for elements of society that criticize foreign or ‘imported’ Islamic traditions in the post-war context.
11. Dr. Krasniqi has drawn over 2.8 million views on YouTube, compared to 1.5 million for Mr. Thaci. Other statistics reveal that out of Kosovo’s four main television programs, viewings spiked when Imam Krasniqi was featured. For example, the popular ‘Target’ show on the main carrier, RTK, draws an average audience of 24,000 people – spiking to over 100,000 when Imam Krasniqi was invited. Needless to say, he is by far the most famous imam not just in Kosovo, but the entire Albanian speaking world, see: http://www.olive.entertainment.com.al/.

12. Meaning he has committed the entire Qur’an to memory.


Bibliography


Public Expressions of Bosnian Muslim Religiosity and Lived Faith: The Cases of Friday Prayer and Hijab

Julianne Funk

Introduction

The last few decades of Islamic life in Bosnia-Herzegovina (BiH) have been described as a revival, in which Islam has become more visible, active and accessible, in great part due to the changes to the Bosnian Muslims’ ‘collective’ identity and the threat to their survival during the recent war. BiH’s Muslims have evolved as a group from members of the majority in the four centuries of Ottoman rule to a distinct minority ethnic group (distinguished by their religion) under the Habsburg regime, and eventually became a constituent nation in the plurinational Yugoslavia. The 20th century communist Yugoslav policy of marginalizing religion meant that Muslim believers remained part of society, but they tended to take a civic-oriented or ‘secular’ stance toward ‘others’. While Islam in this time was, for the majority, ‘boiled down to a vague cultural affiliation which had almost lost its practical elements’ (H. Karčić 2011), the 1990s war brought an increased incentive to fortify the character and traditions of the group, Islam being the most essential. A presumed Muslim identity made numerous residents targets of aggression and violence, causing many to assume this identity more securely and explore its meaning, while others experienced existential crises through which they found spiritual answers in Islam.

During this revival, certain pan-Islamic political agendas have transformed collective ethno-religious identity into something much more nationalistic in the last two decades (Bougarel 1999). For example, confessional religious education in public schools solidifies collective
identity, while instruction in personal aspects of faith (e.g. virtuous behavior and spirituality) remains in the more private spheres of family and mosque. BiH’s religious elites’ frequent political opportunism has produced skepticism for many about the Islamic Community whereas one can still find the more traditional, non-extremist ways of being Muslim in ordinary believers’ religious attitudes and practices (Bringa 1995; Funk 2013).

Personal faith and collective ethno-religious expressions are nevertheless continuously interacting, providing rich material which re-entangles the simplistic binaries of public/private, religious/secular and believer/non-believer. The legacy of communism means that ‘public concerns have dominated private expressions of faith…[and] private expressions are often used to articulate public concerns’ (Elbasani 2014), making these binaries largely irrelevant. Instead, the categorical boundaries are blurred, and many religious practices inhabit both realms. As a postwar conflict setting in which religion plays a key role in determining party positions, the categories of religious and secular as well as believer and non-believer are interwoven.

This inductive, emic study therefore seeks to describe the dynamics of Bosnian Muslims’ ‘lived religion’ today: an ‘ever-changing, multifaceted, often messy – even contradictory – amalgam of beliefs and practices that are not necessarily those religious institutions consider important’ (McGuire 2008: 4). Data comes from three years of personal observation, most of which was spent in the predominantly Muslim Sarajevo, through online surveys and personal communication with contacts across Bosnia-Herzegovina. The chapter seeks to convey the indigenous logic of two key Muslim practices: attendance at Friday prayer (džuma namaz in Bosnian) by men, and women’s choice to wear hijab (the headscarf or marama). These examples are simultaneously personal (and often considered private matters) and blatantly public (i.e. visible and accessible). Both have increased in the last two decades as part of religious revival and are contextually provocative. Both also tend to be labeled and stereotyped such that they are oversimplified and frequently misrepresented.

Following this introduction, the chapter briefly explains religious identification in BiH today according to two dimensions – personal believer identity and collective, ‘ethnic’ (nacija) identity – in order to frame how believers recast faith through their actual practices at the intersection of these various contextual inputs. Thereafter, the chapter explores the two examples of Friday prayer and hijab in everyday life, demonstrating how individual faith decisions and
behaviors interact with the evolution of the collective’s ethno-religious narrative(s).

Religiosity and Bosnian Islam: Believing and belonging

Two faces of religious identity in BiH co-exist within individuals and groups and often overlap, but can be distinguished (Funk Deckard 2011). The personal aspect, or ‘believer identity’, is due to a person’s decision, whereas the collective aspect, what could be called ethno-religious identity, is given at birth and is beyond the individual’s power to substantively change. The latter is attributed by heritage, family and society whereas the former is individually chosen. Sociologist of religion Grace Davie coined the phrase, ‘believing without belonging’ (2007) referring to a trend in Western Europe to believe in basic tenants of the ancestors’ faith (e.g. God, hell, heaven), while not participating in organized religion (except at birth, marriage and death). In BiH, therefore, a majority of individuals both believe and belong, though with (often generationally) differing attitudes; young people may believe in Davies’ more ‘secular way’ but valuing belonging due to the war’s consequences, while older generations may still experience faith to be private, thereby having a conflicted relationship with religious belonging. ³

Believing – Personal faith

The experience of Islamic revival in BiH has not only meant ‘an increase in religious observance and public visibility of Islam but also … a shift towards a religiosity that emphasises an opt-in system to becoming a Muslim … a conscious decision to be(come) a believer’ (Mesarić 2013: 13). About 80 per cent of people in BiH consider themselves believers, according to most of my respondents, although believers’ ‘understand-ing[s] of that identity varies from those, the observant, who practice the five pillars of Islam, including the daily prayers, and the non-observant, who fulfil the daily obligations of those pillars only from time to time, or in their own ways, or believe in God though without ritual’ (Spahić Šiljak 2012: 254). Therefore, let us consider the core elements of Islamic practice – the five pillars – as they are applied in BiH.

The first pillar, *shahada*, or testimony of faith, is essential: every time a Bosnian Muslim prays, she says these words which attest her faith in one God and his Prophet. The second, praying five times daily at particular, set times (*salaat*), however, is a daunting task and is rarely achieved by Muslims in BiH. Third, charitable giving is a cultural norm in BiH and it is common for residents to give some coins to the poor who beg on
the street, although Islamic law regarding *zekat* – obligatory tithing of a certain part of one’s property to those in need – and additional rules prescribed from the Islamic Community imply that more is required than everyday, public generosity. Fourth, while a small percentage of Bosnians fast from first light until sunset during the holy month of Ramadan (*ramazan*), there is an age-old respect for this practice prompting many non-fasters to restrain from public eating and drinking during this holy month. *Hadž*, fifth, is not common since it is expensive (and not required if one is financially incapable), but the author knows a fair number of *hadžije* (the title given to returned pilgrims) and many others who intend to go someday.

One who knows these practices can quickly notice that each of these pillars has a private and a visible and accessible side, a personal and communal, and even a potentially political, aspect. *Shahada* and *salaat*, usually in the home, are sometimes said in the mosque or in larger settings. *Zekat* is primarily private, except perhaps when given institutionally; advertisements promoting giving *zekat* to the Islamic Community have been posted prominently in public spaces and on TV during Ramadan in past years in BiH. Ramadan, similarly, as an individual task and personal commitment, is nevertheless not totally private since it is a month-long, all-day endeavor. And since non-fasters often behave in public solidarity, the impression of greater observation is possible and politically manipulable. Finally, *hadž* is an individual decision and journey but grows increasingly collective and public (and potentially political) as one approaches Mecca, where millions come together for the epicenter of collective Muslim religiosity. It may also be a useful metaphor for this study – where the individual and collective, public and private, personal and political collide in one phenomenon.

Perhaps due to most people being ‘believers’, certain additional categories are also used to describe differences in this milieu in BiH: old, new and true. ‘Old’ believers refer to those who were religious all their lives, including during the difficult years under communism when being a believer barred one from better and secure jobs. ‘New’ believers, by contrast, are a result of the post-communist re-awakening. While some of the newbies are accused of converting for ‘their own interests’ – meaning for political alignments and/or financial gain – many found faith due to soul-searching in the ‘existentially fraught climate’ of war and its aftermath, where individuals ‘remembered’ their religious heritage and found answers in their own ‘lost’ traditions (Maček 2009: 161). ‘True’ (*pravi*) belief in the Bosnian context is ‘backed up by proper [Muslim] behavior’ (Alibašić 2014) – acts in line with the tenants of the faith
tradition. These categories once again blur the boundaries of the binary ‘religious/nonreligious’

**Belonging – (Ethno-religious) collective identity**

Ethnicity is what binds one group together as distinct from others (Ruane and Todd 2004). However, ethnicity is a ‘thin’ category requiring other ‘cultural stuff’ as its content to make ‘the dense, thickly meaningful, often highly affective practical category’ (ibid. 218). In Bosnia-Herzegovina, the ethnic group’s most significant cultural content comes from religion, and therefore religious contents are also endowed with ethnic associations. This ethno-religious identity was generally private in BiH until nationalism took the thin concept of ethnicity and combined it with the meaningful content of religions to mold a political concept and ideology. Thus, ethnicity in BiH is a box with primarily religious contents over which the nation has painted a design in its own colors.5

Unless one explicitly distances oneself from religion, it is even more difficult to distance oneself from national identity.6 A young Bosnian woman, a devoted Muslim, nevertheless adamantly disassociates herself from Bosniak national identity,7 which, she expressed, came without her concession or input; she proudly claimed to be ‘other’ on the recent BiH census.8 While some individuals separate their own identities in this way, they must fight against being categorized without their permission. Others are distressed at the ‘merging of these two identities as inseparable…because the ethno-national elites in power, for political purposes, perform checks of “authentic” and “genuine” Bosniacs and Muslims’ (Spahić Šiljak 2012: 204).

Collective Muslim identity is generally tied to institutional affiliation with the Islamic Community of BiH, and is mediated by local religious congregations (džemati) and leaders; while many express skepticism about the elite Muslim leadership, local leaders are widely trusted.9 Bosnian Islamic collective identity is notably high during the month of Ramadan and the two Bajram (or Eid) holidays. As these are widely culturally celebrated, they are more easily linked with national sentiments than more intimate religious ceremonies performed at home or in mosque.

The two aspects of Bosnian religious identity pointed out in this section have also appeared in two important Bosnian scholars’ characterizations of local Islam. Enes Karić explains Bosnian Islam as a common culture, or a collectivity that embraces many understandings and practices of Islam, without ‘any political or ideological fiat on what
the “true Islam” is’ (cited in Bougarel 2007: 109). This means it cannot be legitimately monopolized or owned by one group or interpretation. Fikret Karčić (2006), a Muslim legal scholar, on the other hand, focuses on Islam as individual faith, accordingly also seeking to separate religion from politics, and therefore to free Bosnian Islam from political complications: he sees shari‘a not as a law for the Bosnian state but as ‘an individual code for practising Muslims’ (cited in Bougarel 2007: 102). As such, the presence of both collective and personal Islam is apparent in the local literature, including a tension between them.

**Two cases of publicly lived faith: Friday prayer and hijab**

**The practice of Friday prayer in BiH**

Friday prayer replaces the noon prayer on that day and it is obligatory for all Muslim men who must gather in the džemat (congregation), whereas the other prayers can be done alone. Unlike men, women are not required to participate, but in BiH, women are additionally not allowed/welcomed, although Islam does not actually prohibit women’s attendance. De facto, Bosnian and Herzegovinian mosques on Fridays at noon tend to be full (including the women’s spaces) to the point of discouraging male attendance.

Thirty per cent of Muslims in BiH say they attend prayers at the mosque, more than half of which go to Friday prayer (16 per cent of all Muslims in BiH), while only 10 per cent said they never attend mosque (The Pew Forum 2012). Half of my own survey’s respondents are regular attendees of Friday prayer, most of whom have attended their whole lives; since the large majority are younger than 35, they have been of an age for attending only during and after the war. These regular attendees attributed a wide range of reasons to their own and others’ attendance, but ‘Islamic obligation’ is by far the most agreed upon reason (around 90 per cent), with ‘spiritual reasons’ and ‘to hear the sermon’ (vaz) equally popular as the second principal reason. Most non-attendees thought that others’ attendance at Friday prayer might be due to ‘religious obligation’, while the second-most perceived motivation was tied between ‘spiritual reasons’ and ‘personal interest’. One respondent specified the latter as ‘getting ahead in state firms’, a refrain heard usually in reference to sitting in the front row (where one can be seen by all) at the mosque, though this was more frequently mentioned in the past (as discussed below). On the other end of the motivational spectrum, a Bosnian Muslim colleague told me that he started attending Friday prayer at a young age because he ‘felt a need to connect
Religious Beliefs, Public Arguments and Legitimacy to [something] higher’ and he continues going ‘for the same reason’ (Omanović 2014).

Vaz is the speech or sermon given in the mosque by the imam and on Fridays it is special, preceding the prayers and delivered from the minbar, a platform with stairs leading up to it. The vaz is about issues of general interest and it is therefore often the place where the imam instructs men on communal life, social and political topics. Some themes I have specifically noted (from a friend recounting the sermons to me over a one-year period) are: care for the environment (including relatives and neighbors as well as ecological surroundings); a balance between spiritual values and material things; the social power (socijalna moć) of or within a community (the importance of cooperating, acting in solidarity and joint action within Islam); maintaining good relations with one’s neighbors; charity for the poor; and the value of fasting during Ramadan.

Male Muslims from practicing families in BiH often begin to go to Friday prayer during adolescence. One Bosnian told me this is natural when a boy ‘comes of age’ (perhaps 11–12 years old) but another said older, around 15–16 years of age. One imam told me this ‘depends on when they begin to feel God’; however, there is no prescription of age in the Qur’an. Like Friday prayer, there are two other prayers required for male Muslims, although not prescribed in the Qur’an: holiday prayers on each of two bajram holidays (e’id al-adha and e’id al-fitr). However, at least in BiH, this expression of religiosity – attending required prayers – is considered a personal choice, and is not something forced. The same imam explained this to me: ‘in Bosnia nothing seemed to be farz, an obligation by God…we somehow choose everything. It is an obligation but we do it as our free choice’ (Omanović 2014). The issue of personal choice becomes even more pronounced when discussing the hijab.

Friday prayer as public–private: Political manipulation and non-judging

Friday prayer in BiH is public insofar as it follows the audible call to prayer (ezan) from the minaret, gathers men to perform ablutions, often visibly in a courtyard, and then assembles them to pray either inside (as a collective) or outside (observed by passersby). At the central mosque in Sarajevo, the event is also broadcast over loudspeakers and people gather around to listen and watch. Attending Friday prayer, therefore, while it is a primary individual responsibility for the believer and therefore aligned with the personal believer’s identity, is nevertheless also an act within a (ethnic, Bosnian Muslim) collective, and
is currently used within BiH for alignment with the particular Bosniak national identity.

Attendance at Friday prayer, as with other rituals, provides a sense of belonging to a group (one of Maslow’s five human needs). One oversimplified tale about Friday prayer is that men attend it in order to demonstrate their religious piety, which simultaneously symbolizes being both a true Muslim believer and true member of the Bosniak nation. In previous years (mid-2000s) I was often told that attending Friday prayer, rather than proof of piety, was often misused for political show and betterment; this story seems to have faded, however, likely due to a realignment of the primary Bosniak political party away from an explicit Islamist position. Whatever the intentions behind attendance at Friday prayer, increased frequency is observable in the past years, along with other religious behavior such as Muslim greetings (e.g. selam alejkum [peace be with you] instead of dobar dan [good day] and allahimanet [go with God] rather than doviđenje [goodbye]).

The overlap of these behaviors with political alignment is problematic for Bosnian Muslim believers who do not identify with the nation or with party-based nationalist agendas. Islam instructs (and Bosnian Muslims reiterate) that no one besides God may judge who is really a believer. As such, the existence of religious posturing has been expressed to me many times but without pointing fingers. In effect then, the ‘hypocrites’ get away with their ruse, while the ‘true believers’ are potentially lumped in with the hypocrites, nationalists and other extremists. The danger of this, beyond the injustice, is their misrepresentation in the international media and in scholarship, both of which have a direct effect upon donor and foreign policy toward BiH. Many (sometimes ridiculous) accounts have been written about Islamic fundamentalists (so-called wahabis) in BiH, on the one side, as well as clear international norms to avoid engaging overtly religious persons in ‘secular’ initiatives such as promoting human rights and civil society development.

As an outside observer who has gained the trust of some local Muslim believers, I have been most impressed by their resilience, especially that of ‘old believers’, given these currents. There is a general lack of bitterness and a rather generous spirit that seems to welcome all who seek within Islam. This might be because they believe even those with the ‘wrong’ intentions may still find the right path through participation in the community and its faith practices. Take for example one such believer, whose words capture many of the elements described above:
In the war and after the war, a lot of people started to go to mosque or to church here. The ‘need for God’ was on such a high level. In [those] … extreme conditions and dangerous circumstances, after a sort of atheistic Communism, it is very normal to try to find an ‘exit’ in religion/s. … [O]ne of great things in Islam (probably it is the same in every monotheistic religion) is that no one, except God, can say who is a believer and who is not. People did the best that they knew or could. I was just afraid that my good friend … [would accept] an extreme … interpretation of Islam …. I obviously do not have the best capacity to understand that because my faith in God, my expression of religion and my attendance in the mosque are almost the same in 1981, 1991, 2001 and … 2011. Whatever, we are all different.

(Džidić 2011)

The practice of wearing the hijab in BiH

The hijab or headscarf has its own particular appearance in BiH. Bosnian Muslim women who wear the hijab wrap it tightly around the head, making sure that no hair is visible (this is different from the niqab which covers the face). In urban centers like Sarajevo, it is common to see hijab tied in a variety of fashionable styles, with often colorful, silky fabrics and in skillfully coordinated patterns. This is quite in line with a general societal appreciation of and concern for appearances. In less urban areas, this degree of fashion is less likely. After the hair is covered (the essential part), how much of and how tightly the neck and ears are covered varies from one Muslim woman to another. A woman who wears the hijab also covers her arms and legs and usually wears loose clothing – most often including a tunic that is long enough to reach her thighs.

The Bosnian style of covering (pokrivena) is different from, for example, the increasing number of Turkish covered women in Sarajevo, most of whom are young students. The latter tie the scarf more loosely around the face, although the hair is also completely covered. Traditionally in BiH, Christian women (now mostly old women, usually from villages) have also worn headscarves, though in a different style and color (usually black) than Muslims. Today, covered Muslim women are still a small minority of the female population in BiH, but seem to be slowly increasing. One notices the concentration of covered women around madrase, Islamic high schools, where the veil may be required; in the old Ottoman part of Sarajevo, Čaršija, it can be just as common to see a woman wearing the hijab as to see one uncovered.

To be covered is a decision and commitment, but it refers not only to the outer, visible state. It implicates ‘a woman’s entire manner
of conduct...and even state of mind’ (Mesarič 2013: 14). As one of Mesarič’s Bosnian interlocutors expressed, ‘[a] hijab...[is a] curtain, over the inner and the outer. The outer, namely to cover what God has ordered, but in an inner sense, to cover your mistakes, to cover your shortcomings, to not be envious, to not lie and so on. That’s the true meaning of [the] hijab’ (ibid.). Most commonly, it seems, this ‘piety practice’ of hijab arises ‘after a careful consideration of the decision’: ‘I decided to wear hijab when I was ready to show that I was a Muslim woman’ expressed my colleague (Šeta 2008: 38 in Spahić Šiljak 2014: 22). Another colleague who wore a hijab for five years and then removed it (because of family pressure as well as a dislike for presumptions made about her) perceives herself now as an uncovered-covered *muslimanka* (Muslim woman), or one who veils herself on the inside but not the outside.

But wearing the hijab ‘not only symbolizes [the maturity of] Islamic character but also serves as a means of building it’ (Mesarič 2013: 15). Spahić Šiljak notes: ‘[t]he statements of women...indicate that the internal ethical and moral evolution precede[s] the performance of the wearing of the hijab. However, this is not always the case, and some women who accept hijab as a religious duty expect to understand its meaning through the performance’ (2014: 201–202). Wearing the hijab may be a means of spiritual development through the physical self, by embodying virtues, especially modesty and shyness (as outward forms of piety); these outward forms are intended for internalizing inner qualities. Indeed, some women have ‘discovered another dimension of their religion and faith’ through wearing the hijab: it can be ‘a way to become closer to God and as a permanent reminder of their obligations toward God and other Muslims’ (Spahić Šiljak 2014: 200). Remembering that each woman who wishes to pray *salaat* (Muslim prayer) should first perform ritual washing and cover her head, Spahić Šiljak donned the hijab because she ‘wanted to be with God in constant prayer’ (2014).

The majority of those I surveyed do not wear, nor have they ever worn, the hijab. A large majority of these (68 per cent) said most women (in BiH) wear hijab for spiritual reasons, whereas many (36 per cent) also said they did so because of an Islamic obligation; although for some, as Đermana Šeta has pointed out, spiritual reasons might also be the same as an Islamic obligation. This aligns with the general opinion within BiH that the headscarf is not an obligation for Muslim women (except during prayers). It seems that ‘most women in BiH do not wear hijab because they do not find it relevant to their faith and since hijab does not count among the five pillars of Islam’ (Spahić Šiljak 2014). Many Bosnian Muslim women today feel ‘that the fact that they do not cover
their hair does not make them any less of a believer, and [see] veiling as something that is not compatible with the time (modernity) and place (Europe) they live in' (Mesarič 2013: 20). It is possible that this idea (a ‘secular’ Islamic perspective) is due to the stigma that the hijab has carried in this society for decades. With the modernization process during the Austro-Hungarian Empire, the traditional hijab was viewed as oriental with the connotation of backwardness. During socialism, covering was outlawed in public and thereby became associated with not only backwardness, but also with rural life and thereby was unattractive to urbanites. Today, post-socialism, ‘new veiling practices have the additional stigma as being seen as foreign as well as not quite normal, at least not “our” kind of normal’ (ibid.; see also Introduction).

For those who wear or have previously worn the hijab (a very small minority of women in BiH), however, it is much more likely to be perceived as an obligation. The vast majority of covered women in my survey claimed they do/did so primarily as a religious obligation (88 per cent), then for spiritual reasons (63 per cent) and a few because it feels better to wear it. Therefore the hijab may be motivated out of this paradoxical-sounding combination of personal choice and religious duty. Frequently the survey answers emphasized the importance of the woman’s decision: ‘I believe that most important is the woman’s will, no matter whether she wears the hijab or not. Insofar as she does it by her own will it is the right choice’ wrote one uncovered Sarajevan.

**Hijab as public–private: Political manipulation and misconceptions about Islam**

When asked the open question ‘what do most people in BiH think about the hijab?’, a large majority of uncovered women consider public opinion to be indifferent, non-distinguishing or tolerant, citing this as a normal form of religious expression and/or Bosnian life; this might be very different if more of my respondents came from Republika Srpska, however, where very few Muslims live. Spahić Šiljak’s research confirms that Bosnian ‘Muslim women understand Islam as an important part of their culture, but most are secularized Muslims who do not observe religion on a daily basis. They perceive religion as a private matter’ (2014: 197). On the other hand, most covered Muslim women perceived public opinion about the hijab in categories of either positive/favorable or negative/unfavorable; few found people indifferent or neutral to this practice. Unlike ‘cultural Muslims’, there is a small segment ‘of dedicated observant Muslims with hijab who are supposed to serve as paradigms for other Bosniak Muslims,’ says Spahić Šiljak (ibid: 18). It is not too
surprising, then, that those experiencing life ‘under the veil’ would have a heightened sensitivity to public opinion about the hijab, possibly due to positive and negative encounters.\(^{14}\)

Two uncovered Sarajevans did, however, express displeasure in their perception of some women’s use of the hijab as a ‘fashion accessory’, referring to an external motivation rather than to a respected personal religious devotion. One of these woman gave her critical opinion that ‘70 per cent of the total population who wears hijab wear it as a fashion accessory’. The other wrote:

> It is not necessary for women to wear hijab to demonstrate their religious belonging. Earlier, women were religious as well and went to mosque, but they were not covered in the same numbers as is the case today in our region. In some cases, hijab serves particular women as only a fashion accessory, which I think is also inappropriate for this area because it is automatically equated with religious affiliation.

This critique is similar to those made against men who attend Friday prayer in order to be seen – that is, for the purpose of reputation, stature and advancement at work, a highly critical though increasingly rare opinion.

Spahić Šiljak points out two key issues regarding the hijab in the public sphere, according to her research on Bosnian women: political manipulations related to nationalist ideology and misconceptions about Islam as a religion. Regarding the former, ‘Muslim belonging in Bosnian stories is constructed… in relation to other religions/nations, [which is] taken in favorable or unfavorable ways’ (2012: 203). Like the attendee of Friday prayer, these stories related to Islamic affiliation connect the covered woman to a particular collective, and often not just a religious one, but also a nation – the two identities become equated. Covered Muslim women are:

marker[s] of the internal and external boundaries of the Bosniak nation. They are considered true believers and keepers of morality among Muslims, and through wearing the hijab, have the power to form clear boundaries between Muslims and non-Muslims and sustain the code of conduct (haya’) that accompanies the hijab.

(\(\text{Spahić Šiljak 2014: 206}\))

As such, their religious behavior is more visible than ‘simply’ a personal expression of faith, because they play a role for the collective.
However this is not without its pitfalls, as one uncovered Sarajevan woman expressed: ‘[i]t is very difficult to consider the situation of hijab and covered women in [this] post-conflict community – some people see it as a sign of faith and others of nationality. At the end of a day, I feel that in BiH decisions about hijab are individual and each has her own reason’. Further, Mesarič reminds us of ‘the importance of understanding contemporary veiling practices in the context of personal piety and of not reducing “the veil” to a religious, ethnic or political symbol…[;] by understanding the Islamic revival as more than a utilisation of religion for political purposes…’ (2013: 13).

A covered woman is thus a symbol: her public expression of personal faith externally identifies her as a Muslim, no matter her reason for covering, her beliefs or her practices. As a symbol of Islam, covered women may receive the brunt of the misconceptions about their religion. While BiH has a multi-religious history in which many people did become familiar with the ‘others’ and their traditions, even a ‘tolerant’ society is not immune to the stereotypes of Islam as backward and (covered) Muslims as extremists/fundamentalists. Interestingly, with one exception, those who voiced these stereotypes in my survey regarding the views of the majority of people are themselves covered, revealing again that covered women may be more sensitive to these opinions than those who do not cover: ‘most of people think it is primitive and that most of the women who wear hijab are less educated’; ‘I believe that most people in BiH don’t think constructively about hijab. Many people see it as an added burden and something backward’. A third expressed that: ‘unfortunately, I think the majority [of people] think that women do not wear the hijab voluntarily’ voicing the stereotype that Muslim women are forced to cover. However, as Amina Wadud wisely observes:

In reality, the hijab of coercion and the hijab of choice look the same. The hijab of oppression and the hijab of liberation look the same. The hijab of deception and the hijab of integrity look the same. You can no more tell the extent of a Muslim woman’s sense of personal bodily integrity or piety from 45 inches of cloth than you can spot a fly on the wall at two thousand feet.

(2007: 220)

Nevertheless, ‘many [Bosnian Muslim women]…construct their Muslim identity in terms of opposition to…misconceptions that exist about Islam, particularly its impact on women’ (Spahić Šiljak 2012: 203). For example, Spahić Šiljak’s informant claimed ‘[w]henever people say Islam is rigid I always respond from my knowledge that we
all read and interpret the Qur’an the way we want’ (2012: 205). My ‘uncovered-covered’ colleague took me under her wing to learn first-hand and experientially about Islam. As I can testify, personal contact and dialogue serve to combat such stereotypes.

The ‘Bosnian way of being Muslim’, as Bringa has called it (1995), is very specific. Many Muslim societies would not consider veiling a question of personal choice, as they tend to in BiH, much less reject face veiling outright as not ‘our custom’. I would not expect to hear a covered woman say that it is not important whether another Muslim woman is covered; rather ‘it is important what is in her head and not on her head’ (Spahić Šiljak 2012: 209). How many Muslims in other Islamic societies would feel more comfortable in a society that includes believers of other faiths than without them, as is the case in the now ethnically segregated BiH? Despite the revival of Islamic practice in the last 20 or more years, many of the women surveyed believe their society is largely blind and indifferent to the hijab. However, as my survey and other literature has shown, while many may wish this to be the case, and for many it may indeed be so, the hijab still carries stereotypes and associations not intended or desired by the believer who wears it. Instead, the hijab seems to be the most controversial of the visible markers of Muslim identity in BiH’s public realm (Spahić Šiljak 2014).

Conclusions: Negotiating private and public expressions of faith

This article has explored local or lived Islam(s) in Bosnia-Herzegovina through the specific cases of Friday prayer and the hijab. Both cases are expressed in public, while also usually constituting personal faith decisions: a fascinating interaction of religious duty and spiritual incentives. While Friday prayer emphasizes the need to be present in the community in order to hear a variety of instructions (religious but also social, cultural, political), the hijab is more about an individual, bodily practice that reflects the woman’s spiritual development. In the former, these Islamic virtues (as well as other perspectives/agendas) are taught through the vaz, while in the latter, such virtues are learned by the practice of embodying them.

While this article sought to explore the challenges and dilemmas of the enmeshment of personal Islamic religiosity with the public realm, Muslims generally find ways to combine their personal/private faith with their social lives (see Introduction). They spontaneously negotiate competing values and needs, often incorporating oppositional
realities. For most believers it is not acceptable to hide or stop expressing either personal or public faith simply because these are misused or misunderstood.

However, I wonder if this negotiation may not be easier for those who carried Islam through the socialist period of religious marginalization, and who therefore have more experience of adapting to changing rules and norms. One colleague, a ‘traditional’ believer, gets to the heart of the matter of the daily negotiation of personal faith and public life:

In everyday life I try to be more civically oriented which means that I do not exhibit or I exhibit few things connected to Islam…. Why? Because more than half of the people living in BiH are not members of Islam and no counter-effect should be produced that would divide us from each another. This does not mean that I renounce a single positive part of Islam in my daily life. Islam is in me, Islam helps me to more easily approach others … [since] God is one. To me, the public and private [aspects of Islam] are complementary. I do not love to stand out [by making] too much of an accent on faith in [this] postwar state because I can awaken fear and anxiety in others.

(Džidić 2014)

If all believers lived in such a way, it is unlikely that the challenges described in this chapter would be so prevalent, simply because public invisibility of faith practices avoids the manifestation of certain challenges. Perhaps this is one reason why ‘old’ believers sometimes express skepticism about ‘new’ ones: the new ways of living faith after the war are quite different than the old, traditional and understated ways. However, BiH still carries a current of the former mutual respect and tolerance, often called suživot, which was likely stronger when the country was more ethnically mixed. As Merdjanova posits, ‘[a]pparently, local lifestyles, dominated by “an understanding of Islam as a matter of ethics, aesthetics, and cultural heritage, rather than as a detailed and rigid code of conduct” coupled with the acceptance of the secular state and secular laws, could be reassuring to non-Muslims’ (2013: 122, herself quoting Moe) not only in BiH, but in the broader context of Europe as well.

Notes

1. Two online surveys were conducted in February 2014: one for men on the topic of Friday prayer and one for women on the topic of hijab. Most
respondents were young Sarajevans (20–34 years old). All translations are by the author with the generous assistance of Emir Slatina.

2. The cases are not comparable as indicators of religiosity. Friday prayer is an obligation for all Muslim men (with varying degrees of religious observance) and practiced once a week, whereas hijab is considered voluntary but is a daily practice of observant believers and is seen as a special mark of religiosity and spiritual devotion.

3. I am thankful to Adis Merdjanović for this point.

4. I am referring to the more common understanding of ‘old believers’, which is tied to longevity of memory rather than recent discussions about the Salafi (so-called wahabi) converts who claim to be the real old believers with their conservative dress, beliefs, and practices. Thanks to Ahmet Alibašić for this point.

5. Thus, while religious, ethnic and national identities can be mutually supportive, resulting in some (apparent) overlap of their roles and boundaries, they cannot be equated. BiH residents distinguish between them at the institutional level. Ethnic identity seems to mediate between the two during elections, although the majority claim their opinions are not represented by any party, feeling disenfranchised by and disconnected from politics (UNDP/Oxford Research International 2007).

6. This research and article focuses on people who call themselves Muslims, although there are plenty of atheists as well as many cases of ‘mixed marriages’ in BiH, which blur the categories of religious belonging.

7. Since the 1960s, Bosnia’s Muslims have used ‘Muslim’ (with a capital letter) in a national (political, legal) sense and ‘muslim’ (with a small letter) in a religious sense. The former was relabeled ‘Bosniak’ during the war; however, Bosniak identity has become more partisan than many Bosnian Muslims agree to.

8. BiH is legally composed of three ‘constituent’ people – Bosniaks, Serbs and Croats – ‘along with Others’ (states the Preamble to the Constitution), who therefore have unequal political rights.

9. Seventy-three per cent of BiH respondents expressed some or a lot of trust in ‘religious institutions’ (the highest rating for any institution in BiH) according to Gallup Balkan Monitor (2008).

10. Thanks to Ahmet Alibašić for this point.


12. Stories from the war about women’s efforts to maintain their dignity, despite the duress of their circumstances, demonstrate this significance: washing regularly despite the constant shortage of water in Sarajevo; using a common soap to bleach hair; much-appreciated care packages containing makeup and hair dye; or the Miss Besieged Sarajevo beauty contest, which was held during the middle of the war (1993). Today, the (Iranian-funded) Kewser organization holds a cultural festival during which Muslim women ‘present stylish hijab dresses, and they also organize a fashion show every year to give Muslim women a chance to show their creativity and beauty within the “boundaries” of Islam’ (Spahić Šiljak 2014, 200).
13. These women made up 36 per cent of the total surveyed women, although the survey likely drew a larger percentage of women who wear the hijab than is representative of society, given its focus.

14. For this reason, I also surveyed personal experiences of or witnessing verbal or physical harassment due to hijab, revealing that this seems a rare occurrence in BiH. Only a few covered women recounted personal experiences of verbal harassment.

Bibliography

Alibašić, A. (2014) Personal Communication with the Author by Email (6–7 July).
Džidić, E. (2011) Personal Communication with the Author by Email (25 January).
Džidić, E. (2014) Personal Communication with the Author by Email (15 August).
Elbasani, A. (2014) Personal Communication with the Author by Email (10 June).
Introduction

How do ‘new’ and ‘old’ Islamic actors in contemporary Albania define religious legitimacy, the nation and religious otherness? This chapter uses Olivier Roy’s analytical distinction between accommodationism and neo-fundamentalism as a compass to navigate through Albania’s complex religious landscape by exploring different sets of beliefs promulgated by a selection of Islamic groups (2010). These are the Muslim Community of Albania, which represents ‘official Islam’ (see Introduction), and ‘mainstream’ Sunni Muslims, who are typically accommodationist. I also analyze a Sufi subgroup thereof, which is equally accommodationist, but in a slightly different manner. As a neo-fundamentalist counterpoint, I explore the ideas of a competing organization composed of Salafi imams.

Accommodationism means that the bond between religion and a specific territory and culture of origin is tight. In this context, ‘culture’ refers to Albanian historical tradition and the language-based, secular nation-building project engineered by modernizing state elites since the early 20th century. Neo-fundamentalism, conversely, is a globalized form of religion that emphasizes the gap between faith and culture. As such, it represents a reformatted, exportable form of religiosity,

This chapter is part of my postdoctoral research, financed by the Research Council of Norway. I am grateful to Arolda Elbasani, Nathalie Claye, Anne Stensvold, Christian Moe, Susanne Olsson, Carool Kersten, Anne Ross Solberg and Gianfranco Bria for their comments.
which stands in contrast to cultural ethno-national ways of being Muslim. Neo-fundamentalist religious identity is faith-based, and seeks to ground itself solely upon explicit religious norms, at least in principle. Accordingly, these believers make their religiosity visible through a global uniform of religious markers detached from the surrounding culture.

In the Albanian Islamic context, the theoretically informed labels, neo-fundamentalist and accommodationist, roughly correspond to the ‘Albanianist’ versus the ‘Salafist’ forms of Islam. To some extent, this resonates with mainstream distinctions adopted in Albania and in the Balkans (see Chapter 5). A popular Albanian term for Muslims associated with neo-fundamentalist forms of Islam is ‘fanatic’ (fanatik) (see Chapter 4). Accommodationism is commonly related to ‘old’ forms of Islam, which may be deemed as local, rooted, and European as well as tolerant and moderate. Neo-fundamentalism, conversely, refers to certain ‘new’ forms of Islam, namely, those perceived to be imported, transnational, alien, ‘fanatic’ and a threat to local religious customs. This cultural distinction between which are deemed acceptable and unacceptable forms of Islam is often politicized and securitized (see Chapter 1; Barbullushi 2010). As I will show, the association between neo-fundamentalism and violence is not necessarily correct, and the Salafi community under scrutiny here can be defined as pacifist and purist (Wiktorowicz 2006). These two formats, moreover, clash and merge together as different local actors seek to recast and legitimate their respective positions.

In the following sections, I will analyze key terms and features of three different groups. First, Bashkësia Islame e Shqipërisë – Komuniteti Musliman (The Islamic Community of Albania – the Muslim Community, in the following abbreviated AMC) is the largest Muslim organization and the formal successor of the pre-atheist AMC, which has traditionally represented the majority of Albania’s Muslims. Since the early 1920s, the community has been nationalized, and has been put under pressure by the secularist political elites to work for ‘Europeanisation’, ‘modernization’ and the strengthening of the national state (Clayer 2008). The AMC itself is a heterogeneous umbrella organization, comprising various religious forms, from small Sufi orders to individuals with neo-fundamentalist leanings. What is under scrutiny here, however, is the community’s official, top-down discourse, arguments and rhetoric. Second, Tarikati Halveti, the Halveti order of the Pazari sheikh family in Tirana (abb. HOP) is one of the many offspring of Halvetism (Halvetiyye or Khalwatiyya), and is one of the Sufi orders under the AMC umbrella.
Present in the Balkans since the 16th century, this form of Sufism was once quite influential, but today is marginal, with a weak organizational basis and few followers. Third, *Lidhja e Hoxhallarëve* (The League of Imams, LI) is a relatively new Islamic association, a network of imams and preachers evolving in opposition to the AMC. Through extensive use of social media, the imams issue fatwas, emphasize personal piety and correct worship, inspired by the official Saudi Wahhabi doctrine. Typologically, the league’s form of Islam is Salafi (Wiktorowicz 2006).

Compared to the two first accommodationist groups, which tend to identify with the surrounding culture, the LI’s neo-fundamentalist imams feel religiously alienated from – and even threatened by – Albanian culture. In Roy’s words, they feel that ‘old’ Muslims who are not ‘reborn’ belong to the ‘secular – or even pagan – world’ and ‘worship false gods’ (2010: 7). To accommodationists like the AMC and the HOP, neo-fundamentalists appear ‘incongruous, even fanatical’ (ibid.).

My intention is not to reify this constructed perception, or to hierarchize different religious positions, but rather to analyze and contrast accommodationist and neo-fundamentalist perspectives, in order to show that religion in Albania represents a mixture of cultural influences and global religious patterns. I will focus particularly on how organizational leaders conceptualize and recast religious legitimacy, the nation and religious otherness in their own publications. ²

**Islam and Islams**

Notwithstanding its Muslim majority and traditional ties with the Ottoman Empire, Albania never had an ethnic Turkish minority, and Albanian Muslims were autochthonous. Today, around 70 per cent of Albania’s population define themselves as Muslims in one way or another (IPSOS 2011), while a quarter are Christian (Orthodox and Catholic).³ Almost all say they believe in God, but few are practitioners. Of the Muslims, more than 25 per cent never attend religious services and only 1.8 per cent practice religion daily. Eighty-five per cent do it less than once a month and only in connection with family rituals or social celebrations, a pattern similar to that of Christian practice in Western Europe. Yet, there is a huge difference between neo-fundamentalist and accommodationist interpretations of Islam and Muslim identities.

Until the legalization of religion in 1990, Albania’s communist regime had formally eradicated and banished all forms of religion from Albanian culture, society, politics and private life. ⁴ This means that all
current Islamic traditions in Albania are, in some sense, reconstructed, at least on their institutional and public side.

Islam in Albania has always had a mosaic character, with many different Sufi traditions in addition to ‘mosque Islam’. Cultural and geographical divisions and reconfigurations of Muslim networks make the Islamic situation complex even when it comes to the institutional side. The Muslims, moreover, have increasingly become part of global Islam and are influenced by international developments. Missionaries, new religious groups, and the Internet have provided access to a wide variety of religious forums and non-institutionalized competing authorities, with a proliferation of Islamic outlets on the ground and in cyberspace. While communal identities remain strong (Clayer 2005a; IPSOS 2011), the general situation is one of conflict over sacred authority, fragmentation of interpretations, and new, emerging forms of religiosity.

Since the turn of the millennium, the pluralization of Islam has become more institutionalized. Alongside a myriad of Internet-based hubs in Albania, like IslamShqip.com, which gathers ethnic Albanians in the Balkans and in the diaspora, there is a range of Islamic networks, NGOs, journals and publishing houses. These include The Albanian Institute of Islamic Thought; the Iranian Rumi; Ardhmëria; the Turkish Sufi Cultural centre ‘Progress’; and Prizmi of the Fetullah Gülen movement. There are, in short, many new ways of ‘doing religion’ (Brekke 2012).

The AMC is the institution, which, since the early 1920s, has been the ‘official supplier’ of Islam (see Introduction) for the majority of Albania’s Muslims. Over the last decade, the community has strengthened its links with Turkey. The influence from the Turkish Fethullah Gülen movement is strong, and the newly elected leader of the AMC (March 2014) has been closely affiliated with Gülen institutions since the early 1990s. In any case, the authority of the AMC is challenged by alternative Islamic competitors, and its social support is fragile (Bougarel and Clayer 2013: 285).

The groups under scrutiny here ‘appeal to some constructed authentic past and sources in order to legitimate their particular regime of truth’ (Hughes 2008: 111). Divergent interpretations of the surrounding culture and local traditions bring these intra-Islamic skirmishes over authenticity and legitimacy to light: the Halvetis maintain that ‘true Islam’ is represented by local and national Islamic traditions and regard established authorities as transmitters of genuine Islamic knowledge, in addition to sacred scripture. The LI, in comparison, looks to the Quran and Hadith and theological authorities in modern Saudi Arabia in their search for legitimate authority.
Accommodationist discourses: The Muslim Community

The AMC claims to represent the majority of Albania’s Muslims. Since Islam’s loss of political supremacy in independent Albania (1912–1913) and its national institutionalization in the 1920s, the AMC has been closely intertwined with the Albanian nation-building project (cf. Introduction). In order to accentuate the Albanian element and to distinguish themselves from the Turks in independent Albania, Albanian Muslims, with active involvement on the part of the state, formed a national alliance in 1923 that soon detached itself from the caliphate. The purpose was to exert social control, to shape loyal citizens and to strengthen patriotic feelings (Clayer 2008). To highlight the community’s national character, Albanian became the ritual language. Toward the end of the 1920s, a series of reforms that were considered radical by many foreign Muslims were approved and new statutes were adapted, in spite of some protests from conservative ulama. The community was defined as a promoter of religious freedom, secularism, equality among religions, and brotherhood among Muslims and among Albanians of different religions. It also encouraged Muslims to adapt to modern civilization.

From the communist takeover in 1944 onwards, the AMC was first turned into an obedient political tool before all of the institutions were abolished in 1967. The opening of the Plumbi Mosque in Shkodra in 1990 marked the rebirth of a Muslim public life in Albania. In early 1991 the AMC was reorganized by a core of old leaders and presented itself as the successor of the pre-communist centralized religious hierarchy.

The post-communist AMC readapted the inter-war statutes. While the political backdrop to the quest of a ‘European’ Islam in the inter-war period was to justify the Muslims’ place in Europe, the post-communist elites have consensually embraced the goal of Albania’s Euro-Atlantic integration (Elbasani 2013).

Sources of religious legitimacy and the national question

The AMC describes itself as a historical ‘engine in the promotion of the highest Islamic and patriotic values’ (AMC 2013: 99), and the leadership swears to faithfully implement the Quran and ‘develop a feeling of love and faithfulness for the religion and for the fatherland’ (AMC 2014). For all practical purposes, the AMC can be considered a centralized Islamic hierarchy approved by and collaborating with the state (Elbasani 2015).

Ulama who are associated with the AMC are eager to present themselves as pro-Western and European, and they associate Islam with
modernity and progress and stress Islam’s compatibility with democracy, human rights and ‘European values’. Like 92.9 per cent of the population (IPSOS 2011), they think European integration is a positive thing (Elbasani and Saatçioğlu 2014). There is no sign of a reorientation toward the Middle East or toward Islamic countries and cultures. Instead, the AMC describes the nation as a ‘link between the Islamic world and Europe’: a ‘Muslim majority’ with a ‘Western spirit’, a ‘Western vocation’, and ‘Western ethnic origins [sic.’ (Balla 2011).

The community often uses the motto ‘for faith and the fatherland’. Patriotism is seen as Sunna: ‘to be a patriot means to be a believer. If you are not a believer, you are not a patriot’ (Muçi 2005), and ‘Love for the fatherland is from religion’ (Smajli 2013: 14). The community is proud of its legacy of religious tolerance, or of the Albanians’ ‘great cultural heritage of harmony and inter-religious cohabitation’ (AMC 2012a: 3). Such formulations show active support for the state, its parliamentary system and secular constitution.

Related ulama highlight the ‘importance of vatan (Turk./Alb. “Fatherland”), defense of the atdheu (Alb. “Fatherland”) and protection of the kombi (Alb. “nation”-civic and ethnic)’ (Duka 2005). Further, salvation is associated with religious tolerance and patriotism. The mufti of Korça, Qazim Muçi, argues that the Quran and the Hadith show that someone who is killed while protecting his komb and vatan becomes a ‘martyr’: ‘Everyone has his own faith and we should not interfere, but when it comes to national questions, we must be united. That is the Quran, that is Islam’ (Muçi 2005). In this line of argument, Muçi defines patriotism as a religious duty and explicitly states that heaven is not reserved for Muslims (ibid.).

**Religious others**

The AMC repeatedly asserts that religious diversity is theologically acceptable and a social necessity. Tolerance and diversity are held in high esteem, with reference to social realities and Islamic values, considered a national treasure and an Albanian contribution to peace and security. With such constructions, the AMC takes the role of ‘good Muslims’ who represent tolerant local, yet universalist, traditions. This is not only a legitimizing strategy to maintain political and popular support but also to dismiss religious competitors.

Religion is largely seen as a private matter and a personal choice, and statements like ‘everyone has their religion, and one should not interfere with that’ (Çaushi 2011) are common. The idea that religion should never ‘cause division’ is often backed up with reference to Sura
2:256, ‘no compulsion in religion’ and 109:6, ‘to you your religion, to me mine’.

A typical formulation is that Islam and the Quran teach us ‘to pay respect to, honour, and appreciate the members of other religions’ (Bajraktari 2005a). ‘Religious tolerance’ is linked to the strict monotheistic vision of Islam: there is only one God, therefore all human beings are God’s creations. As the argument goes, the Quran instructs Muslims to be ‘tolerant, generous, compassionate and communicative with members of other religions’ (Kruja 2012: 46).

The AMC repeatedly seeks to demonstrate ‘religious tolerance’ in practice, particularly when the clerics attend ceremonies of the other communities and receive others at their own. The coverage of top-level attendance at such events is also part of this Albanianist, accommodationist discourse. A typical example is the mediatized iftar where the Muslim leader prayed that God would ‘bless our people, country and nation’ (AMC 2012b: 12). In such contexts, ulama pose joyfully side by side with the Catholic and Orthodox leadership, as well as the Bektashi community. In comparison, there are no Bektashi or Christian guests at the official iftar of the LI.

The AMC is also reluctant to criticize alternative Muslim practices like the Sufi veneration of tombs. Whereas community publications emphasize the need for ritual obligations, they simultaneously acknowledge practical difficulties and legitimate exceptions, and ulama often emphasize that Islam is there to help people and to make their lives easier.

The Halveti Order of the Pazari family (HOP)

One of the Sufi orders under the AMC umbrella is the Tarikati Halveti (the Halveti order), which has been present in the Balkans since the 16th century. Historically, Halvetis played an important social role, were close to the ulama and sat comfortably with the patriarchal Albanian family system (Clayer 1994: 335). The sheikh’s charisma gave him a role as an advisor in other social spheres, and the hereditary succession created influential sheikh families.

Halvetism in the Balkans has numerous offspring. The discourse described here is that of HOP – Sheikh Ali Pazari’s tarikat at the tekke (Sufi lodge) in Tirana, which he claims is the asitane, ‘mother tekke’, of Albania’s Halvetis (Pazari 2006). Ali’s father and his predecessor Muamer Pazari are both portrayed as central in the Sufi revival in the 1990s, but the community is probably very small and the Pazaris’ leadership
is not recognized by other Halvetis. As a member of the AMC, the HOP has internalized the Albanian nationalist paradigm and follows an accommodationist Islamic discourse (cf. HOP 2006).

**Sources of religious legitimacy**

Like other Sufis, HOP emphasize personal devotion to God and perceive themselves as keepers of divine, esoteric knowledge, based on mystical interpretations of the Quran. The idea is that the heart should be constructed upon *Sharia*. The believer submits himself to the spiritual and moral authority of a sheikh and follows particular ritual techniques in order to discover ‘the truth’. Religious insight is transmitted through an intermediary charged with *baraka*, an Islamic concept which refers to special religious power or a blessing from God. This is particularly important in Sufism and in many popular forms of Islam.

To HOP, *baraka* is hereditary, and the sheikh’s authority is recognized through the line of succession that goes back to the founder of the order. This, in turn, is believed to trace back to Imam Ali, whom the Halvetis consider the origin of the tarikats. Sheikh Pazari’s tarikat now casts itself as Alevi, or ‘affiliated with Ali’. A hallmark of Halveti worship has been the now largely abandoned practice of *halva*, or spiritual retreat (Clayer 1994), a practice attributed to the Prophet himself.

Sheikh Ali states that he is the 15th sheikh in his family, which he claims has a 400-year-old history as guardians of the tekke in Tirana (Pazari 2006). The tekke, rebuilt after atheism by his father, includes tombs of the former sheikhs, *turbes* (cf. Chapter 8), believed to emit *baraka*. The *turbes* illustrate the sheikh’s spiritual genealogy, and physically demonstrate his charismatic authority. This gives Islam a particularly local dimension, and literally territorializes Islamic authority and values.

The HOP emphasize that ‘our supreme authority is the Quran’ (Pazari 2006). Well aware that the Halveti worship may be a red rag to fundamentalists, the Pazaris stress its Quranic basis. Sharia, which they define as the ‘rules as they are in the Quran’, are seen as the solution to social ills.

**Nation: Faith and fatherland**

To HOP, patriotism means ‘gratitude to our Creator’ (Pazari 2006), and the concern for ‘faith and the fatherland’ is ascribed to a Hadith. Sheikh Muamer is described as one who wholeheartedly ‘cultivated the Albanian land’ to build *tekkes* and *turbes* (HOP s.a.1). Sheikh Ali claims that the tarikat not only is among the oldest in Albania, but was
influential in each corner. Tirana is conceptualized as a center of this spiritual activity and of nationalist zeal.

Sheikh Ali is keen to highlight his grandfather’s role during the declaration of independence and his father’s revival of the tarikat after the atheist ‘massacre’ of religion (HOP s.a.1). In his view, God gave the 1990s revival’s leader Sheikh Muamer ‘the role as spiritual missionary in Albania’, where his ‘sacrifice’ and belief in ‘God, the Quran and the Prophet’ made him ‘nurture his people with the light of faith in the love of God’ (HOP s.a.1). Respect for the territory where one lives reflects ‘God’s will’, and nation-builders will be rewarded by God (HOP s.a.2). Also here, we see how the national and territorial aspects are considered religiously significant.

**Religious others: Sharia and anti-Islam**

In the 16th and the 17th century the Balkan Halvetis were part of the Ottoman colonization program, the ‘champions of Islam’, protecting orthodox Sunni Islam against heresy (Clayer 1994). This was also a period of ‘Sunnitization’. Today, the tarikat has a relaxed attitude to religious plurality, which is seen as a national asset and described as ‘beautiful flowers that beautify the earth of the heavenly seat, and they all melt in the beauty of the great God’ (Muamer Pazari in HOP 1994). The theological explanation is that God has placed human beings ‘on the highest altar of His creation’, therefore ‘love and respect’ for other people is the same as for God himself (HOP s.a.2).

The tarikat stresses its Alevi identity and defines all the other tarikats as Alevi too (HOP 1994). In connection with Sheikh Muamer’s initiative to create one center for all Alevi tarikats in the country in 1994, he emphasized that all the Alevi tarikats are ‘spiritual brothers’, free to practice their rituals in accordance with the teachings of their respective pir. Those who act against that must answer before God (ibid.). Like many other Albanian Muslims, he sees religious differences as manmade and ‘political’. This attitude is also detectable in his critique of those Muslims he calls ‘Salafis’ and ‘Wahhabis’:

They come here with their small things, like the \( \frac{3}{4} \) long [ankle-length] trousers, make the believers spend all their time on these small things and forget the belief in God and his Prophet. If they are going to spend all their time on the \( \frac{3}{4} \) trousers, grooming their beard, [use] *miswaks* to brush their teeth, and tell [people] that that [something] is sin, *halal* or *haram*, they confuse people.

(Pazari 2006)
With this, the sheikh is probably referring to the forms of religiosity propagated by groups like the LI who condemn local customs and see it as their Islamic duty to correct the conduct of other Muslims.\textsuperscript{9} To the sheikh, this is not true Islam:

Instead of giving people the purpose of their existence, they make them deal with details. But that is a mistake... The leaders of these movements have a clear mission..., to destroy Islam, among the people and in the eyes of others, so other people see Islam as something terrorist and not as something pure and peaceful.

(Pazari 2006)

Sheikh Ali asserts that Islam should help people and never instigate conflict.

**A neo-fundamentalist discourse: The League of Imams (LI)**

The League of Imams (LI) promotes a form of Islam inspired by official Wahhabi Islam of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, where many of its members have studied. As an institution, the LI came into being in 2010 after many imams with so-called ‘Salafi’ or ‘Wahhabi’ orientations had been purged from the AMC.\textsuperscript{10} In spite of that, several clerics who studied theology in Saudi Arabia in the 1990s, and who have expressed some neo-fundamentalist leanings, remained in the AMC, sometimes at the level of mufti. Seemingly, these are sons or grandsons of ‘old’ ulama or they have other family connections in the AMC. One may therefore speculate whether the imams of the LI might be theologians without such connections, and that nepotism to some extent informs the LI’s rejection of the AMC as ‘clannish’ (LI 2012). If so, the LI’s embracing of neo-fundamentalist beliefs is possibly related to such social and institutional factors.

**Sources of religious legitimacy**

The LI sidesteps the traditional Albanian forms of religious leadership represented by the AMC. Lamenting the fact that they have neglected the voice of young imams, the LI accuses them of installing a ‘religious dictatorship’. In this way the AMC is portrayed as an instigator of social conflict and intra-Muslim strife (fitna) (LI 2012). The LI members display rather intimate knowledge of Islamic texts and see themselves as ‘carriers of Islamic knowledge’ and of ‘God’s word’, and therefore believe they are qualified to provide the people with necessary guidance and education
(LI 2012). They also present themselves as ‘social activists’ (Pelari 2013) and religious guides to the ‘authentic’ religious sources. A central tenet of their public discourse is that Muslim behavior must always be governed by knowledge and rules based on sacred scripture, not on culture and tradition.

The religious role models are the Prophet and his companions. The time of the Prophet is imagined as one of perfect submission to God, before Islam started to decline, being distorted by innovations, and Muslims became ignorant of their religion. To the LI, the Prophetic Sunna is found in the authentic Hadiths, which are believed to teach Sharia in detail. When issuing an opinion, the imams adduce specific hadiths from al-Muslim (d. 875) and al-Bukhari (d. 870).

The LI offers Albanian translations of Arabic texts, primarily by Saudi religious authorities. These are also the source of many of the LI’s fatwas (religious edicts). The imams answer questions of licit and illicit behavior on topics ranging from child rearing, the economy, and DNA testing to martial arts and toothpaste. In comparison to the accommodationist communities, the LI looks to theological authorities in Saudi Arabia, such as the former leader of the Council of Senior Ulama, Abd al-Aziz Ibn Baz (1910–1999), the Saudi permanent Fatwa Commission, the Islamic Fiqh Academy in Mecca, and the former director of the Islamic University of Medina, Sheikh Jahja Ibrahim El-Jahja.

Nation and state

The imams are skeptical of political attempts to transform Islam to serve secular, political goals or to be blended with local culture. At the same time, the LI addresses Albanian-speaking Muslims in Albanian and instructs them to respect the state where they live and obey its laws. An explicit ambition is also to be supported by the state, not to overturn it. To this end, the LI wants to be in charge of a religious reform, which will change the Albanian society and culture. This is envisaged to happen through ‘the penetration of the theologian in society, concretely in every family through pupils’ (Pelari 2013). The idea is that such a change should be faith-based and that it should take place under the leadership of the LI, through civil society.

The LI sees its form of Islam as an alternative to a morally corrupted society that imposes liberal values that undermine religion. Through its emphasis on traditional ‘family values’, the imams de facto promote conservative, patriarchal gender roles, which pertain to the traditional Albanian culture. Liberal values and laicism are seen as a sinful demand for ‘freedom from God’. This is interpreted as a Western invention
together with democracy, human rights and concepts of individual freedom. Such arrangements are considered inappropriate for the Arab and the Muslim world, due to fundamental differences between the values of these societies and the West (Topulli 2013a). The LI’s construction of Albanians ‘as a people’ emphasizes the Albanians’ ‘Islamic, Eastern culture’ (ibid.), which challenges AMC’s definition of the nation as ‘Western’ and ‘European’. While such a rejection of ‘Western values’ is typically Salafi, the references to national character in such contexts are normally an accommodationist feature.

Like many other neo-fundamentalists, the imams feel threatened by the surrounding society’s ‘atheist, pornographic, materialistic, secular culture’ that worships ‘money, sex or man himself’ (Roy 2010: 7). One principal concern is the alleged ‘agenda’ of the LGBT rights movement, interpreted as an attack on the ‘strongest point of the religious communities, the moral’ (Kruja 2013). Sexuality is neither a private matter nor a basic human right, according to this view. Furthermore, there are no homosexuals in Albania because ‘religion, the nation, the family and the morale are sacred to us’ (ibid.). In this context, then, Albanian culture is not un-Islamic or anti-Islamic, but rather a valuable, conservative, patriarchal tradition. The nation is even described as ‘sacred’, and the other religious communities are portrayed as allies. In the case of homophobia, the distinction between neo-fundamentalism and accommodationism is hard to maintain.

Unlike the other communities, the LI considers Islam not only as a solution to social problems, but also as the only legitimate alternative. In order to change ‘our bitter social reality’ and build a ‘dignified’ future, it is urgent to implement ‘our ideas’ (Pelari 2013). Still, the LI does not cast itself as a political actor. The imams do not recognize any current Islamic state or leadership as legitimate representatives of the global ummah. This is one of the reasons for their theological rejection of contemporary jihadism and other kinds of violent response to perceived injustice.

It is typical of neo-fundamentalism that assertive believers show strength and flag values through orthopraxis and visible symbolic markers detached from culture, like hijabs, beards, ankle-length trousers – exactly those markers criticized by the Halveti sheikh. The LI aspires to transform society by restoring Islamic values at the individual level through the creation of pious persons and faith-based conduct, speaking to Muslims as individuals. The idea is that in a world that is out of balance, you cannot control the world, or the behavior of other people, only your own religiosity and maximize your chances of salvation
in the areas you are able to control such as food intake, clothing and prayers. The emphasis on ritual perfection as the road to salvation is presented as rewarding for the individual. Worship is, according to this view, a personal responsibility that affects you and your relationship with God. Merely belonging to Islam does not help, because belief must be activated individually. In terms of salvation, the nation is irrelevant.

**Religious others**

Like other neo-fundamentalists, the LI members perceive the gap between themselves and non-practicing, culturally religious Muslims as deep. A characteristic is the focus on the boundary between ‘authentic’ Islamic values and the surrounding culture, which is considered part of an ignorant, idolatrous, doomed world (Roy 2010: 7). As a response, the LI wants to create a purified religious space where every aspect of Muslim life is governed by faith. This means following the Prophetic Sunna ‘rigorously’ (Tërniqi 2013b). The conduct of the pious forefathers, the first Arab Muslims, should serve as a model, from prayer postures to dress code, dietary requirements and personal hygiene. Those who refuse to follow the rules as laid down in the Sunna will ‘burn’ (ibid.).

Negligence of ritual details is considered hazardous because it creates loopholes for evil forces. The LI’s interpretation of religious duty is much stricter than that of their counterpart, the AMC. For one to be on the safe side and to prove that one is worthy of salvation, the LI, therefore, encourages extra worship, beyond the regular rituals. With the generally relaxed attitude to religious obligations among Albanian Muslims, this kind of ritualism contributes to setting the neo-fundamentalists apart.

In contrast to the AMC’s religious tolerance as laid out in the Quranic dictum: ‘You have your religion and I have mine’, the LI highlights that the rest of the Sura (109, Al-Kafirun, ‘the Unbelievers’) condemns the infidels for wrong worship (LI 2013). Otherwise, the LI pays less attention to the existence of other religions than the AMC, whose promotion of Islamic values often actively refers to Islam’s engagement with religious others.

In the LI’s public discourse, critique of contemporary Christians is rare and indirect. Characteristically, nationalist anti-Albanian or anti-Muslim policies of Serbs and Greeks (Christians) are presented as anti-Islamic. This is very similar to the AMC’s discourse and is probably an influence from Albanian nationalist ideology. Sometimes the imams describe the West as ‘pagan’ due to its pagan, Greco-Roman heritage. In general, Christians and Jews are treated as rather irrelevant. When the two are mentioned directly, they are normally defined as monotheists
with ‘holy books’. Anti-Semitism is not a prominent feature. In certain cases, the other religious communities figure as allies against what the imams see as the corroding effects of secularism.

Diversity of any kind – be it cultural, theological or ritual – is a problem for the LI. Its members’ aim is to prevent intra-Islamic strife and to ‘protect’ the believers from ‘deviant sects and faiths’ (LI s.a.2). To this end, they promote what they see as the one and only truth. Such calls for Islamic unification are part of a ‘muscular discourse aimed at reforming non-Salafi Muslims’ (Haykel 2009: 36) and a neo-fundamentalist attempt to format Islam in a globalized world. In general, the LI seems to consider the ‘un-Islamic’ practices of other Muslims as the most pressing problem. One example is a fatwa stating that sharing a meal with Christian neighbors at their house is acceptable as long as the food is halal and if correct worship can take place. In comparison, a Muslim must not have iftar at a Bektashi place.

The LI’s discourse on Muslim others sets them apart from the religious tolerance of the AMC, which condones the worship at the graves of Sufi masters. To the LI, however, this is one of the worst abominations: shirk – idolatry. As the LI completely rejects the idea of intermediaries between man and God, the imams see it as one of their principal tasks to stop the veneration of tombs, which they consider idolatrous.

The LI also considers Shi’ism, which they pejoratively call a ‘Rafidi sect’, a deviation from pure Islam and partly shirk and kafir (LI s.a.1). The argument is that the historical relations between an ‘absolute Sunni majority and Shia minority’ always have been catastrophic, everywhere. The imams therefore see it as their God-given responsibility to ostracize and isolate Iranian Shias and any of their ‘satellites’ in Albania (ibid.). No names are mentioned, but it is likely that the condemnation comprises Alevis.

The LI primarily directs its attention to other forms of Islam and other ways of being Muslims. To define themselves as the representatives of ‘true’ Islam is essential to the imams’ construction of Muslim identity. This is part of a neo-fundamentalist impulse to police the boundaries of Islam because the categories of haram and halal are, from a neo-fundamentalists’ point of view, no longer culturally given (Roy 2010).

The imams emphasize that their mission is peaceful. Muslims must avoid any charges of extremism, fanaticism and radicalism, and they reiterate that they must combat such destructive tendencies. To follow the Prophet means to be ‘mild, patient and wise’ and never to allow ‘verbal or physical revenge’ (Topulli 2013b). Individual morale is in
focus: a pious Muslim must see ‘oneself first’ in order to correct one’s own behavior, rather than that of others (ibid.). Those guilty of deviant worship should receive explanations, not insults (Tërniqi 2013a). One may argue that this represents a Salafi form of religious tolerance and to some extent another accommodating tendency in the plural Albanian context.

Conclusions: Localization and delocalization

With their emphasis on local traditions and territory, the AMC and the HOP are clearly ‘embedded in national state and parochial settings’ (Kepel 2004: 1–2). Because of this, they illustrate a combination of ‘Islamic universalism’ and ‘national state particularism’ (Lapidus 2001: 1–2). The LI, in contrast, has more in common with a deculturalized, globalized Muslim identity that transcends traditional political boundaries.

Although the LI’s target audience is Albanians and its field of mission is Albania, the LI represents a ‘socially disembedded’ and ‘detraditionalized’ form of religiosity (Göle 2006: 124–126). For the LI, Islam is not a cultural given, but something that must be ‘gained’ by each individual believer. With an emphasis on individualism and civil society, the LI seeks to ‘re-Islamize’ the behavior of other Muslims, to reconstruct a pure form of religion and make private faith publicly visible. In their view, one cannot be a true Muslim through heritage or social identity – one has to behave as one; to act as a Muslim. Following the cultural norms and local religious traditions is insufficient; intense worship and attention to concrete, religious details is essential. Because of this, the LI exemplifies how neo-fundamentalists are ‘moving into new life spaces’, like the Internet, the wardrobe and the bathroom (Göle 2006: 126–127).

In stark contrast to the HOP and the AMC, who find spiritual inspiration in the national past and who insist on continuity and compatibility with local culture and tradition, the LI does not promote local norms and values. The HOP, which even finds religious authority at home with the forefathers in the mausoleum, inside the house, is LI’s local antagonist. In this way, the HOP represents a particularly territorialized form of Islam because religious authority is literally embedded in the ground – baraka is in the house.

Thus, the LI feels surrounded by a system that undermines true religion. As a civil society actor, not associated with the state and secularist ideology, the LI has more theological autonomy than the AMC. Its
legitimacy is not based on any official office, but is found in merits, textual studies, theological training and ‘in their own activism’. This amounts to what Göle refers to as ‘displacement of authority’, and a subjective right to decide ‘what is licit and illicit in Islam’ (2006: 125). Unlike the AMC’s accommodationist position, the LI seeks to unify and to standardize Islamic practice and values according to explicit religious norms, not traditions. This is why references to sacred scripture permeate the discourse.

With their emphasis on Albanian traditions, culture, history, language and commonalities with religious others, the AMC and the HOP represent an accommodationist position, which grounds religion in culture and sees the latter as a prerequisite for the former. This idea is summarized in their slogan ‘no fatherland, no faith’. Vocalizing this position, the HOP explicitly distance themselves from neo-fundamentalist forms of Islam. Like many other Sufis, the HOP are especially wary of Salafi influence since the latter define their sanctities as anti-Islamic and their worship as *shirk*.

Typologically, the LI has more in common with global Salafism than with other forms of Islam in Albania. The imams represent a critique of traditional Albanian Islam as cultural compromise and religious corruption. As a response, the LI propagates a de-culturalized form of Islam, with an emphasis on orthopraxis and on calling individuals to ‘true’ Islam. Other neo-fundamentalist characteristics are ‘the attitude of urgency, a certain zealousness and gravity in the approach to religious behavior, and the urge to preach in order to communicate an important message about the religious responsibilities of co-religionists’ (Brekke 2012: 98). This means a rejection of common Muslim practices. To Albanian accommodationists, however, fundamentalist forms of religiosity disturb interreligious relations and potentially threaten the relationship between religion, nation and state. Furthermore, they perceive Salafism as an influence that jeopardizes the Albanians place in Europe (Endresen 2014b).

The Halveti sheikh’s critique of the ‘Wahhabis’, as he calls them, illustrates an accommodationist critique of de-culturalized neo-fundamentalism: the problem with ‘Wahhabis’ is that they, from his point of view, detach religion from Albanian culture, introduce alien customs, emphasize religious differences and focus on visible details. To the HOP, these practices are un-Islamic, but to the LI, they are essential.

Ironically, what makes many Albanians suspicious of the LI’s suggested form of de-culturalized Islam is not only that their practices are
‘alien’ to Albanians, but that they are culturally ‘Arab’. This is similar to the way many Bosniaks define Salafism culturally, as a localized ‘Eastern’, ‘Arab’, ‘Saudi’ or occasionally ‘desert’ form of Islam that cannot grow in Bosnia any more than a plum can in Arabia’ (see Chapter 5).

In the same vein, one may argue that the LI’s integration of elements of Saudi Arabian culture and ideology makes it accommodationist in that perspective, compared to the ‘Albanianist’ HOP and the AMC. The latter two forms of Islam have undergone a long process of ‘disassociation from their cultures of origin’ (Roy 2007: 61) by being de-Arabized, Turkified, replanted among Balkan Christians, and later translated, Albanianized, modernized and transformed into a kind of pro-Western, ‘European’ kind of Islam (Elbasani and Saatcioglu 2014).

The LI has also acquired an Albanian character, even though its religious markers are perceived as ‘un-Albanian’. The imams are born and raised in Albania; they speak to Albanians, in Albanian, and operate an organization within the Albanian legal framework. There are also indications that they are adapting a more lax attitude to religious differences, at least to non-Muslims. The anti-Semitic and anti-Zionist rhetoric that flourishes among Salafis in the Middle East seems to be de-emphasized in its Albanian version. As such, one may argue that the LI as an institution has begun to become accommodating. At the same time, there are also neo-fundamentalist elements in the AMC, although these voices are rarely heard in official discourse. The case of Albanian Muslims is similar to how many Bulgarians who chose an Islamic-centered life perceive the difference between ‘new Islam’ and ‘heritage’ as a mix of choices, rather than as a conflictual split (see Chapter 6).

Notes

1. What Roy coins ‘neo-fundamentalism’ is more or less what Brekke (2012) and many other scholars call ‘fundamentalism’. Its Islamic forms are sometimes labeled ‘Salafism’ or ‘neo-Salafism’. The relationship between ‘Salafism’ and ‘Wahhabism’ is also complicated by different definitions. The terms above are also in popular usage, often in a pejorative way, with varying associations. The format does not allow a proper terminological discussion. Acknowledging the conflicting academic usages of the term, I use Roy’s terms to categorize the groups and to define the neo-fundamentalists in question as Salafis in accordance with Wiktorowicz’s (2006) definition.

2. My data consists of Albanian written and oral sources collected during a series of fieldworks in the country between 2003 and 2013. My primary sources are in-depth interviews with high-ranking representatives of the Muslim Community, media statements and the community’s own publications like Drita Islame and Zani i naltë (www.zaninalte.al, www.kmsh.al). As for the Halveti community, I use an in-depth interview with Sheikh
Ali Pazari in Tirana, conducted in 2006, and a homepage dedicated to his father, Sheikh Muamer Pazari (1929–2003), which features his speeches and is maintained by the Pazari family (www.shehmuamerpazari.com). Regarding the Imams’ League, I have studied their online journal *Lidhja* (www.lidhjaxoxhallareve.com), which addresses a variety of issues and is signed by the editors and a few other male activists, and I have also studied their speeches with the league’s signature as posted online.

3. Religious percentages are a sensitive topic in Albania and are heavily disputed (see Endresen 2014a).

4. In spite of that, alternative ‘Islam-Albanian’ identities challenged the official national identity as atheism started to emerge toward the end of the 1980s (Clayer 2005b).

5. See also Jazexhi 2013.

6. *Zani i naltë* is the community’s ‘scientific and cultural journal’, which, under the supervision of the head of the Muslim Community (Selim Muça 2004–2014), publishes articles within the various academic disciplines such as sociology, psychology and history as well as in Islamic theological studies such as *tefsir*, *hadith* and *fiqh*.


8. Muamer’s attempt to unify the tarikats was probably an effort to stand together to revive Sufism, to restore the *turbes* and to reopen the *tekkes* after the communist destruction. Disagreement on leadership seems to have put an end to the process.

9. Confer the critique of Salafist purists as ‘scholars of trivialities’ or ‘scholars of toilet manners’ (Wiktorowicz 2006).

10. I am grateful to Olsi Jazexhi for this information.

11. When it comes to abortion, the league is more liberal and pragmatic than are the Vatican and many fundamentalist Christian groups.

12. However, there is a certain historical precedence for the use of both hijab and niqab among Albanians (Chapter 9).

**Bibliography**

AMC (2012a) *100 personalitete shqiptare të kulturës islame* (Tirana: Komuniteti Musliman).


Muçi, Q. (2005) Interview with the author. 1 November, Korça, Albania.


Websites

www.kmsh.al (The official website of the Muslim Community of Albania).


www.zaninalte.al (The official website of Zani i naltë).


http://www.lidhjahoxhallareve.com/l/category/gazeta/ (The official website of Lidhja).

www.shehmuamerpazari.com (Halveti webpage maintained by the Pazari family).
Mainstream research sees religion in the Balkans as intrinsically linked with ethno-national identities. Serbs, Greeks and Bulgarians are Orthodox, Bosnians and Albanians are Muslims, Croats are Catholics, and religious minorities are to be understood mostly as ethnic minorities. Of course, things are more complicated, especially when it comes to the assumed homogeneity of the Muslim community: if Kosovars are Muslims, Albanians are divided between at least three religious communities (Muslims, Catholics and Orthodox), there are Macedonian-speaking Muslims (Torbesi), Bulgarian-speaking Muslims (Pomaks), Serbian- and Montenegrin-speaking Muslims, and many other groups for whom religious, linguistic and ethnic markers do not correspond to the dominant classification. However, until now, this complexity has been dealt with mainly by anthropologists; there is a rich anthropological literature exploring these groups, usually considered as ‘sub-units’ or isolated pockets that have a problem adjusting to the macro-polarization around religion and national identity: Pomaks in Bulgaria, Tatars in Romanian Dobruja, Romanis here and there, etc. The category used to understand their religious practices is that of ‘cultural Islam’ ‘folk religiosities’ and often ‘syncretism’. Thus, ‘local’ Islam usually means cultural Islam.

The problem is that this approach often misses how local actors contribute to reconstituting the presumed link between religion and culture, and the broad ethno-national communal categories into which they are forced. This is particularly relevant in the context of the post-communist opening up of the organized religious sphere, which confronts religious actors with different, sometimes contradictory and sometimes competing, sources of influence – both internal and foreign, both regional and global, both official and informal, both organized and individual, and both secular and sacred.
The chapters in this book, written by young researchers with hands-on research experience on the field, shift the focus of attention from ethno-national identities and macro-polarization of religion to the reconfiguration of the organized religious field, alternative actors, and resulting practices of Islamic religiosity. In line with an emerging research agenda on ‘lived’ religion, the book promises to provide ‘a shift of perspective, an alternation of gaze, a change of subject and a more critical approach . . . . A fresh look at what may be obscured when implicit models of “real” religion are left unexamined’ (Dessing et al. 2014: 11). The chapters, thus, supply cutting-edge, empirically informed analysis on the contemporary breaks and re-imagination of the organized religious field across the post-communist Balkans. They also offer fresh new conceptual thinking, and push our understanding of religion in new directions particularly with regard to the role of foreign influences; the many actors who speak for Islam; macro-political frames of nationalisms; emergence of autonomous faith communities; and trends within broader evolutions of Islam in Europe.

‘Disturbing’ foreign influences

Given the existing framing of religion within broad ethno-national ‘traditional’ or ‘cultural’ categories, any changes in religious practices and beliefs are too often exclusively linked with foreign influences that have penetrated the Balkans since the 1980s, and especially after the post-communist liberalization of religious conduct in the 1990s. Islamic religious revival seems to be linked with transnational Islamic movements, and is commonly divided into two main trends: (1) Salafism, either in an institutional form, largely sponsored by Saudi Arabia, or in a radical form, driven by informal networks, including individual imams and militant missionaries; and (2) the neo-Ottoman model, sponsored by Turkish official State structures (Diyanet) or non-official institutions (such as the Gülen networks). This may explain why political scientists seem to have taken little interest in the complexity of the religious field and the changes that affect it at the local level, except when such changes play out at the macro-political level and manifest themselves in the more grandiose shapes of national identities, ‘Islamic threats’, or regional balances of power.

Political science in general concentrates on the ‘macro’ dimension of religion, and often resuscitates the strategic use of religious affiliations by foreign states: the oft-discussed references to the Ottoman Empire made by Turkish former Prime Minister Tayyip Erdoğan, the
revival of Russian patronage over Orthodox nations by Vladimir Putin, the creation of new Orthodox patriarchates, the massive amount of aid provided by Saudi Arabia to strengthen its hold on endogenous Muslim communities in Europe, etc. External actors, like Salafi religious preachers and missionaries, militant NGOs (Gülen schools), or cultural or religious activities sponsored by foreign states (TIKA for Turkey, or the OIC), are seen as reinforcing the already existing ethno-religious divides and reframing those as a geo-strategic, regional and broad civilizational confrontations.

Local Islam is thus often opposed to ‘global’ Islam and pan-Islamist trends. Local or traditional Islam is seen as ‘moderate’, liberal, tolerant and indigenous, precisely because it is supposed to be less ‘religious’ and more ‘cultural’, whereas global Islam is perceived as alien, fundamentalist, and possibly intolerant and radical (Salafism). Local Islam is presented as being ‘embedded’ into a local culture, with syncretic elements often borrowed from other religions such as Bektashism, Sufism and local folk traditions. In such accounts, Islam lacks dynamism and agency: as if it represented the rear-guard fight of a traditional local community. There is an interesting convergence here between anthropologists, political scientists and politicians, extolling ‘good’ indigenous Islam against ‘bad’ and foreign, Arab or Turkish, Islam.

This process of ‘externalization’ of Islam, which entails its disconnect from ethno-national identities and cultural roots, could take different forms that could even seem contradictory. It all depends on who speaks for Islam. In this book, we looked at three different levels, each involving different actors with different perspectives on the recasting of faith and its external components: (1) state authorities, (2) Islamic institutions and (3) local individual actors – lay believers but also informal authorities such as self-proclaimed imams or Islamic teachers. The former two, which often work closely to protect the traditional line, endeavor to project revival of faith as ‘foreign’ and alien to the national identity, thus antagonizing many ‘born-again’ Muslim citizens. The latter attempts to promote a local, but not a cultural Islam, and tries to ‘purify’ religious practices from both the local ‘traditional’ customs and the foreign imports. By detaching themselves from official authorities, they constitute autonomous faith groups or pious communities striving for a fusion of religiosity and rights, faith and freedoms, practices and identity choices. In all cases the result is the recasting of Islam as a mere religion and not as an identity.

This book contrasts and juxtaposes the dominant top-down state-driven discourse on Islam, with believers’ own localized experiences
and practices of faith, and shifts the analytical focus to the latter. All of the empirical chapters provide ample evidence of the huge gap between homogenous ‘political’ religions framed in the name of the nation and believers’ diversified experiences of religion in their daily lives.

**Framing Islam in the name of the nation**

Nationalism as a group identity, which mimics an ethno-religious essence, and implicitly or explicitly excludes alternative groups who may inhibit the same space, has been the most influential ideology shaping Balkan politics since the creation of post-Ottoman independent states. As Introduction in this book explains, Islam has been at the very midst of and, in a way, the main victim of, national ideologies. Every expression of faith that did not easily fit into state’s uniform vision of its subjects has been exposed to misnomers ranging from enemies of the planned nations to remnants of a bygone era, odious renegades and foreign agents. Consequently, ambivalence toward Muslims has been a recurrent and structurally inbuilt feature of Balkan nationalisms, and has reappeared in full force during the post-communist nationalisms of the 1990s.

The chapters in the first section of the book elaborate upon how macro-political debates in different countries frame *religion* into clear cut ethno-national categories, and commonly distinguish Islam as the threatening national ‘other’. Per this vision, Islam is widely perceived as undermining whatever constitutes the ‘substantive’ core of the nation-state unity as it is portrayed in official accounts of oft-fabricated collective histories. The first empirical chapter of the book reveals that political and intellectual elites in Albania problematize the post-communist revival of Islam as the backward ‘other’ of an otherwise ‘European’ and ‘ecumenical’ collective identity. The second chapter on Greece similarly provides evidence that both the Orthodox clergy and the populist Golden Dawn party rely on anti-Islamic discourse to protect the Orthodox ‘core’ of national unity commonly defined against the Ottoman/Turkish Muslim ‘other’, or officially articulated memories of the Ottoman experience. The next chapter on the current political engineering of the new state of Kosovo shows that Kosovar elites have opted to sideline and marginalize the role of the Islamic community in favor of a multi-ethnic national-building approach that is effectively supported by powerful international actors who are actively involved in the creation of the new state. All of the chapters in the first section, thus, document that mainstream political elites, or at the very
least, crucial sections thereof, have embraced a unitary understanding of the nation, which seeks to exclude and often demonize public expressions of Islamic revival. Other chapters in this book confirm widespread Islamophobic tendencies amongst mainstream political and intellectual elites in countries such as Bulgaria (Chapter 6) and Macedonia (Chapter 7). Operating within the dominant ethno-national paradigms, political elites have also commonly insisted upon defining the substantive features of ‘traditional’ good Islam, which is typically framed in the context of the culture, history and social ‘particularities’ of each nation-state. Such ‘official’ understandings of Islam serve to set the borderline between the politically acceptable and non-acceptable, or, to put it another way, domestic and foreign, local and global, and ultimately, good and bad, Islam.

This book also supplies innovative empirical evidence of the existence of official accounts and mechanisms of transmitting the ‘traditional’ line of Islam(s) across the region. As conceptualized in Introduction, the chains of transmission work top-down – political elites set the broad frames, intellectual circles provide suitable historical narratives, and organized religious communities diffuse and transmit the official line through hierarchical organizations that collaborate with state structures. As extensions of secular regimes, centralized Islamic communities, each based near centers of political power in Sarajevo, Kosovo, Albania, Skopje, Sofia and so on, possess the necessary organs – for example, the faculty of Islamic Studies, the network of Madrasas as well as intellectual, publication and humanitarian activity nets – to consolidate and distribute the traditional vision of Islam across centrally organized networks. They also paradoxically support a strong separation of ‘Church’ and State, indeed a fundamental feature of ‘traditional’ nationally defined Islam(s) across the Balkan space. Most chapters in this book provide evidence of a clear pattern of organized religious hierarchies trying to keep religion within the scope of traditional/national confines – showing support for a unitary understanding of the nation in Albania (Chapter 11); promoting the Bosniak Islamic tradition (Chapter 5); or protecting the collective identity of Bosniaks (Chapter 10) in Bosnia-Herzegovina; preaching the ‘old’ traditional way in Bulgaria (Chapter 6); and even condoning the veneration of saints practiced among different Sufi communities, particularly Roma communities, in Serbia and Macedonia (Chapter 8).

The trend of ‘objectification’ of religion vis-à-vis the national concerns is strengthened by policies of secularization implemented by most post-communist Balkan states at one point or another. In particular, the
Muslim-majority polities in Albania and Kosovo have devised a policy of ‘detaching’ Islam from the envisaged national identity and defining it as an imported oriental religion that has merely been superficially connected to the European national culture. By ‘externalizing’ Islam, Albania and Kosovo defined their state and their society as ‘secular’ and looked down upon practicing Muslims as some kind of minority faith community, who must fight for the right to express its religion in the public sphere, including the right to wear the veil.

There are also reluctant actors. In Greece for example neither the local ‘Turkish’ minority nor the state wants to disconnect religion from their fixed ethno-national roots, guaranteed by the Treaty of Lausanne (1923): the Muslim minority is defined as a ‘Turkish’ minority, with its own courts in a specific territory (Thrace), while Orthodoxy is supposed to be the religion of the ethnic Greeks. Indeed, this is also the case in other Orthodox-majority polities, where Islam is almost exclusively related to the status of minority ethnic groups. However, two new actors also play a role here. First are the Muslim migrants, who cannot and do not want to integrate into the local ethnic minority and therefore request the recognition of a purely religious Muslim community, which should be allowed to build mosques where they need them. Second, and more important, is the European Union, which slowly pushes for the definition of religious freedom as an individual human right, and which has gradually obtained from the Greek government the removal of religious identities from state ID cards. Certainly, incoming ideas from the more religious Muslim world or the more democratic European Union disturb the nationally organized religious ‘fields’ and related secular regimes. The book shows convincingly that the top-down framing of religion has been under pressure from alternative suppliers of faith, and what believers choose to absorb from new coming ideas. These incoming influences have been a crucial new feature of believers’ discovery and recasting of Islam, and emerging faith communities in the post-communist era.

Localized faith communities

Opposing a local cultural Islam to a foreign more fundamentalist Islam misses the in situ religious reconfigurations, particularly the emergence of local ‘faith communities’, where members of the ethno-national groups or local sub-groups endeavor to build a community of believers within a larger group of ‘cultural Muslims’. The empirical chapters in this volume explicate in detail how local actors make sense of, and
effectively build up, new and diversified communities of faith at the intersection of religious, cultural and ethnic factors.

Some local individual actors strive to understand Islam as a religion and not as a culture; they are local pious people who organize meetings, prayers and classes without seeking any form of institutionalization and organized authority. They do not necessarily reject the concept of a local Muslim culture, they do not consider less observant neighbors as ‘infidels’, they just want to ‘purify’ and specify the religious norms. They want to define a religious attitude toward the world that does not merely consist of ‘belonging’ to a cultural group, but rather of incorporating religious norms and values in their own daily practice. These actors are not insulated bearers of traditions: they have access to Internet links, to international religious publications, and might go abroad to study, make pilgrimages, attend conferences, etc.

All chapters in the second and third section show local actors and communities of faith coming of age and taking ownership of their acclaimed religiosity in practice. Olson particularly shows that piety movements embracing a new kind of Islamic knowledge and experience are attracting the faithful and becoming popular in Bulgarian towns and villages (Chapter 6). Sadriu’s chapter also argues that individual imams in Kosovo navigate through traditional arguments as well as doctrinal religious sources in order to legitimate their positions on the rights of women to wear the hijab (Chapter 9). Mesarič’s account of female dress codes in Sarajevo similarly argues that believers maneuver through a plurality of Islamic discourses and multiple sources of knowledge in order to articulate a position on the wearing of Islamic dress (Chapter 5). Funk's chapter further explicates the individual and collective entanglements of ‘lived religion’ in the post-communist and post-war Bosnia (Chapter 10). Perhaps more controversially, Tošić argues that being a good Muslim in the context of Shkodra, a town in Albania, means first and foremost ‘wearing’ an urbanite calmness which stands in contrast to excessive expressions of religious belonging and religiosity. Indeed, in this particular context, class and social status are more important than the ethno-national ‘substance’, or even pure religious criteria, in defining good Islam (Chapter 4). Zadrożna’s study of love relations among Macedonian-speaking Muslims shows how religious and identity boundaries are replicated, but also contested in a deeply divisive ethno-national context (Chapter 7). The diversified picture of Islamic discourse in Albania, as studied by Endresen, fits well into the region-wide emergence of plural Islam(s) coalescing around alternative accommodationist and neo-fundamentalist discourses, or indeed a
mixture of both (Chapter11). If there is a common finding among the many diverse routes to religiosity explained here, it is that believers’ embracing, expression and practices of Islam are increasingly personalized, mobile, weakly institutionalized, and collective as a choice. This diffracted picture of local religiosities contrasts with the uniform prescriptions of nationally organized religion and the ethno-national static categories it builds upon. Indeed, as Introduction of this volume hints, the experience of religiosity has increasingly become a more personalized and individual attitude, which reflects the contemporary religious ‘breaks’ within organized religion and rather evolves detached from organized official schemes.

Ultimately, the ‘de-ethnization’ and ‘de-nationalization’ of Islam does not necessarily mean a ‘de-culturation’, but a recasting of the connection between religious, cultural and political markers; it opens up the ‘religious sphere’, by making faith an individual choice, a set of personal beliefs and practices distinct from traditional culture and customs. If there is any ‘religious revival’, it is not working in favor of any kind of pan-Islamism. It simply contributes to making religion more autonomous politically, institutionally and ideologically.

**Traits of European Islam**

In some way, Muslims in the Balkans have been European for centuries – they have closely observed European models of ‘civilization and progress’ and accommodated themselves to European secular templates and ideological innovations that informed different stages of the creation of post-Ottoman nation-states. Moreover, given the de facto mixture of ethnic and religious subjects that constituted all Balkan states, Muslims were historically confronted with the challenge of having to live with and make sense of the existence of other religious and ethnic groups, sharing the same space with them, under different regimes, from Ottoman rule, to the Habsburg Empire, to modern secular democracies, passing through communist atheism. Even when they fought during the various Balkan wars in the 20th century, they struggled mostly for survival, not for the conquest or the creation of a caliphate. Finally, they welcomed enthusiastically the intervention of NATO and the EU in the recent wars of the 1990s. Even in the context of war and genocide in Bosnia, Muslims proved to be generally peaceful and tolerant, although the war triggered a certain re-Islamization and politicization of their ‘national’ identity. Historically, then, Muslims have proved to be malleable and adaptive citizens of the secular state, across different
national groups and political regimes in the region. Indeed, since the creation of the post-Ottoman Balkan states, political elites, leading intellectuals and Muslims themselves have asked, and sought answers, on the most appropriate forms of organization, articulation and public expression of Islam in the midst of European ‘civilization’, a debate which has appeared only very recently in other ‘Western’ European countries.

Many Muslim leaders in the Balkans claim that Western Europe is ignoring them, or the solutions they have sought for decades, while trying to define what European Islam could be like. They are looking at a new horizon to expand their religious ‘findings’ and ‘innovations’: Europe. They want to contribute to shape a ‘European Islam’, distinct from both restrictive ethno-nationalist and foreign-supported pan-Islamic movements emanating from Turkey or Saudi Arabia. Nevertheless, it is true that the European governments and institutions never contacted the Muslim authorities in the Balkans on such crucial issues such as the training of imams, the teaching of Islam in schools, or other concrete ways to adapt to a secular society. The separation of church and state, accommodation of religious minorities, adapting religious practices like the fast, the veil and the religious diet to a plural religious environment are issues that are much debated in Western Europe, but that have already found some solutions, at least tentative answers, in the Balkans. In a nutshell, Brussels and the European states, but also academics working on ‘European Islam’, never realized that the Muslims in the Balkans might offer some answers to the ‘problem’ of how to be a faithful Muslim in a modern, European and secular society.

The misunderstanding is based on the misperception that Islam in the Balkans is an ethno-national marker and the misconception that any ‘European’ Islam should be necessarily liberal and proceed from a theological reform. In this book, we tried to dispel the first misperception. The misperception of course concerns also the Muslims in Western Europe: they are still studied in the wake of the sociology of immigration, as if they also constitute an ethno-cultural community. The fact that the same trend of autonomization of Islam as a mere religion is taking place among second and third generations of Muslim migrants is not acknowledged (Roy 2004). As the case studies in this book suggest, we need to adopt a ‘de-ethnicized’ grid of analysis to understand how the Balkan Muslims have proceeded to recast their religious beliefs and practices in a secular environment, how they have been able to build religious institutions by themselves, either centralized (the Islamic Community in Bosnia), or on a congregational basis, in a more ‘protestant’ approach. All cases of faithful studied in this book indicate that religious
leaders, groups and lay believers break out of ethno-religious parcels they are supposed to fill in the historical constructs of nation and ‘we-ness’. These local experiences would also be very useful for analyzing and understanding the revival of Islam in Western Europe.

The second misconception is that of the need of a theological reformation of Islam. It should be stressed, first of all, that a reformation is not necessarily ‘liberal’. Neither Luther nor Calvin were liberals. Secondly, a conservative faith community is not necessarily radical, in social or political terms. The ‘return of the sacred’ which has long been observed in the West did not produce more liberal forms of religion, taking into account the expansion of evangelical Protestants, ultra-orthodox Jews, or a more conservative Catholic Church after the election of Pope John Paul II. Whatever the modalities of the religious affirmation in the West, it is clear that the issue is never about theology, but about practices. We don’t need a ‘liberal’ religion, but we need tolerant believers (the Protestants became liberal in the 19th century through their practices, not by reforming Luther). What is at stake is ‘religiosity’, perceived as the way the believer experiences and expresses his or her faith, and not theology. The liberal Muslim ‘theologians’ who are greeted both here and there by the Western media have little impact upon the real Muslim populations and ‘living’ Islam(s). Muslims are more in quest of a redefinition of norms, as seen by the success of the ‘fatwa’ business, and the transformation of values inherent in the process, thereby turning the religious norms into universal values. Ethics and social life are the real concerns of modern Muslims: they look for a concrete answer to the challenge of modernity and secularism, and not for an abstract theological debate. Further, the Muslims of the Balkans could bring their rich and diversified living experiences, strengthened by their credentials of being both loyal citizens and true believers, to the new generation of European Muslims, a generation that is looking for models that neither its forefathers nor the country of their ancestors could provide.

Bibliography

accommodationism, 222–3, 233
al-Bukhari, 232
al-Muslim, 232
Alaoudin (madrasah), 77
Albania
   Albanian Muslim Community (AMC), 223–29, 231, 233–8
   Bashkësia Islame e Shqipërisë–Komuniteti Mysliman, 223
   Bektashi, 31–2
cultural heritage, 227
discourse on Muslim others, 235
ethnicity, 224–5, 227
European identity, 24–8, 33, 35–6, 39, 223, 226–7, 233, 238
European integration, 24, 29–30, 32, 36, 223, 226–8
faith, 229–30
fatherland, 229–30
Grand Mufti of, 86
Halveti Order of the Pazar family (HOP), 223–4, 228–30, 236–8
historical presence of Islam, 30–1
independent Muslim associations, 13, 226–36
Internet-based hubs, 225
interwar, 31, 226
Islamic fundamentalism, 37, 225
League of Imams (LI) in, 235–8
legalization of religion, 224–5
legitimacy, 225, 231–2
Lidhja e Hoxhallarëve, 224
localization, 236–8
modernization, 23, 25, 27–8, 35, 223, 225–7, 238, 249–51
multi-religious population, 5
nation and state, 232–4
nationalism, 5, 24, 26–8, 30–3, 35–6, 39
neo-fundamentalism, 231–4
iftar, 228
Orientalism in, 24–6, 28, 34, 38–9, 43
Ottoman rule, 24–5, 28–31, 33–6, 38–9
patriarchal tradition, 233
public intellectuals, 15, 27–8, 33, 36–8, 245
religiosity, 231
religious legitimacy, 222, 226–7, 229
religious others, 227–8, 234–6
religious revival, 24, 32, 237
return to Europe, myth, 23–4, 27–9, 33–4, 36, 38–9
secularization, 246
Shkodra’s special role, 86
status of legal persons, 32
Ulama’s, 226–7
Albanian Institute of Islamic Thought, 225
Albanian Muslims, 30, 34, 146, 224, 226, 230, 234, 238
Alevi identity, 230
antithesis, 44
anti-Islamic, 43, 48, 54, 57–8, 124, 138, 230, 233–4, 237, 245
anti-Semitism, 235, 238
anti-Zionism, 238
Arab Islam, 106, 109, 137
babalara, 163, 167–72, 176
Balkans
   ethno-national categories, 242, 245–7
   European models, 89, 249–50
   foreign influences, 243–5
   Halvetism, 228–30
   identity choices, 9–11
   Muslim culture, 247–9
   Muslim leaders, 250
   nationalism, 7, 245
   post-communism, 1, 6, 8, 10, 243
   religious policies, 6–9
### Index

---

**secularization**, 1, 11, 67–8, 185, 246–7  
*see also* Roma communities  
being a Muslim, 83–4, 90–4, 96–8  
Bektashi, 31–2, 92, 166, 175, 228, 235, 244  
*Bosnia*  
Da opoznaem Islama, 135  
dress practices, 115–17  
European identity, 104–9  
faith-based NGOs, 112  
hijab in, 109–10, 117–18  
Islam in, 103–10  
Islamic knowledge, 110–12  
Islamic Religious Community (IRC), 75  
*see also* Bosnia-Herzegovina;  
Bosnian Islam  
*Bosnia-Herzegovina*  
Bosnian Islam, 104–10, 117, 206, 208–9  
believer identity, 206  
collective identity, 208–9  
European integration, 104–9  
ethnicity, 4, 205–6, 208, 216–18  
Friday prayer, 209–14, 217  
hijab in, 16, 214–17  
Islamic revival in, 103, 204, 206  
lived practices, 103–4, 112, 118  
Muslim practices, 205  
nationalism, 204, 208, 211, 215–16  
personal faith, 206–8  
re-Islamization campaigns, 11  
religiosity, 206–7, 210  
veiling, 104–5, 108–10, 116–18  
*Bośniaks*, 66, 103, 105, 108, 110–11, 114, 238, 246  
*Bulgaria*  
activist leaders, 124–5  
European identity, 123, 125–6, 135–7  
European integration, 123, 126, 135–7  
hate crimes, 124  
Islamic leaders, 122–8  
Islamic revival, 123, 125  
nationalism, 122–5  
Pomak culture, 122–3, 125, 127, 170, 242  
religiosity, 122–3  
teaching scriptural-based devotion, 133–5  
teaching tolerance, 128–3  
Bulgarian Islam, 123–4, 135, 137–8  
*Catholic Church*, 35, 63, 71, 73, 77, 86, 251  
Christian Albanians, 30, 34  
communism, 1–2, 9–11, 13–15, 25, 27, 29, 32–3, 36–7, 106, 134, 185–6, 197, 205, 207, 212  
dressing, 104, 115–17, 132  
dźuma namaz (Friday prayer), 205  
*ethnicity*  
exclusion criteria, 1, 6, 24, 43, 98, 131, 149, 152, 174  
inclusion criteria, 1, 6, 98, 131, 174  
interfaith marriage, 148  
minority group, 204, 242  
national identity, 1–5, 10–11, 14, 17, 43, 84, 143–4, 146, 208, 223, 242–3  
religious groups, 6, 9–10, 15–16, 32, 39, 43, 46, 62, 64, 123, 125, 158, 196, 204–5, 223, 244–51  
violece, 6, 9–10, 47, 51–2, 56, 76, 89, 204, 223  
ethno-religious groups, 4, 6, 9–10, 15–16, 62, 64, 123, 143–4, 158, 204–6, 208, 245, 251  
*European integration*  
enlargement, 13, 14, 27, 30  
Enlightenment, 25, 42  
European Islam, 17, 24, 35, 104–7, 226, 249–51  
European modernity, 35, 126, 137–8  
European Muslims, 13, 35, 89, 198, 247, 249–51  
identity, 15, 25  
religiosity, 17  
Western culture, 25, 35, 127, 136–7
Europeanization, 13, 26–9, 32, 38, 125

Index

ezan, 83, 87, 94, 210

Fahd Mosque, 112–13

Fatwa, 189, 200 n. 4, 224, 235, 251

Foreign Islam, 104, 106, 112, 114

Gülen movement, 225

International influences, 2, 12–13, 185

Salafis/Salafism, 9, 12, 16, 17, 160–9, 111–14, 124, 223–4, 230, 231, 233, 235–8

Wahhabis, 112, 230, 237

globalization, 122–3, 125, 157

Greece

Ante Portas, 55–6

anti-Islamic discourses, 42–3, 48, 54, 57–8

bifurcation of Islam, 45–7

ethnicity, 45

European identity, 46, 48, 158

Golden Dawn, 42–5, 48, 54–7

inferiority of Islam, 51–2

mosque of Athens, 52–4

neo-Nazism, 47–9

Orthodox Church, 42–5, 47, 49, 52, 54, 56–8

racial inferiority (Islam), 54–5

religious panic, 43, 49–50

violent character of Islam, 50–1, 55–6

Gülen movement, 225

Hadži, 207

Hadžije, 207

Halač, 230, 235

Haram, 108, 134, 230, 235

Hodja, Husein, 133–8

identity

collective, 45, 204–5, 208, 246

communal, 2, 65

cultural, 103, 118, 122, 178–9

ethnic, 11, 125

European, 15, 24–6, 28, 34–6, 39, 186, 191, 195

Islam

externalization, 244

misperceptions, 250–1

nationalization-cum-etatization, 6, 245–7

official, 8

resurgence of, 1

revival of, 2, 15, 86, 217, 245, 251

securitization, 9

self-identify, 11

transformation of values, 251

Islam in Shkodra, 83, 86

Islamic Conference (1992), 85

Islamic Fiqh Academy (Mecca), 232

Jahja Ibrahim El-Jahja, Sheikh, 232

Jews, 69, 73, 148, 234, 251

Jihadism, 233

Kosovo

Albanians in, 62–3, 65–7, 69, 73

Ahtisaari proposal, 63, 66, 71–2

communism, 185–6, 197

concept of secularism, 64–9

Constitution of, 63, 67, 70–2, 197

Constitutional Framework for Provisional Self-Government, 69

ethnicity, 66–7, 69, 71, 73

European integration, 185–6, 188–91, 195, 197–9

European Union Rule of Law Mission in Kosovo (EULEX), 66

Faculty of Islamic Studies, 77
freedom of religion, 69–73
Hebrew community, 63
hijab in, 16, 185–6, 188–98
imams, 16, 185–6, 188–91
International Civilian Office (ICO), 71–2
Islamic Community of Kosovo (BIK), 63–4, 70, 73–7
law of religion, 73–4
Montenegrins, 66
nationalism, 64–7, 69, 71–4
NATO’s intervention, 62, 66
non-majority groups, 66
Protestant Church in, 63
Religious and Cultural Heritage, 71
Republic of Kosovo, 70
Serb-Albanian conflict, 65–6
Serbian Orthodox Church (SOB), 63, 65, 71, 73–4, 78
Serbs in, 62–3, 65–6, 69, 73
state’s creation, 62
2014 legislative program, 74
UN Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK), 62, 66, 69, 73–4
women’s rights, 185–200
Kosovo Force (KFOR), 66, 73

LGBT rights movement, 233
living practices, 10, 16
local Islam, 9, 86, 94, 107, 111, 115–17, 148, 153, 208, 242, 244

Macedonia
elopement, 150–1
ethnicity, 157
European integration, 158
extramarital relationships, 151–4
interreligious relationships, 148–9
labor migration, 144–5
love relationships, 154–7
marriage tradition, 145–7
nationalism, 143–4, 146, 158
pećalba or gurbet (labor migration), 144–5, 151
secret dating, 150–1
shameful activities, 150–1
socialization, 144
mahalla, 89, 163, 166–7, 172, 174, 177–8

marama, 109, 205
medresija, 112
migration, 13, 32, 65, 87, 98, 144–5, 151–2, 157
modernity
Bosnian, 117, 214
European, 35, 126, 137–8, 227
political, 69
Western, 27, 105, 158
mujahideen, 107–8
Muslim Albanians, 4, 30, 34, 186, 191
Muslim citizens, 52, 244
Muslim communities, 1, 4, 6, 13, 16, 31, 34, 45, 164, 166–7, 244
Muslim migrants, 1, 247, 250
Muslim women, 96, 132, 136, 154, 190, 212–16

namaz, 114, 129, 205
nationalism
ethnic-divisions, 1–5, 10–11, 14, 17, 43, 84, 143–4, 146, 2–8, 223, 242–50
European integration and, 27
in 1990s, 1, 6–7, 245
Islamophobia and, 122, 125
millet system, 4–5, 64
National Renaissance, 31
nation-states and, 7–9, 15, 249
post-Ottoman, 4–5, 123, 245, 250
state’s vision, 31, 76, 222, 226, 245
top-down, 2–3, 6, 8–9, 15, 17, 58, 87, 116, 223, 244–7
we-ness, 144, 157
neo-fundamentalism, 222–3, 233
new Islam
actors in, 110
in Bulgaria, 122
hijab in, 127, 132
holiday observance, 131
Islamic values, 137–8
in Sarajevo, 115
niqab, 109–10, 112, 117, 188–90, 212
non-Salafi Muslims, 235
Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC), 37–8, 244
organized religion, 2–3, 16, 145, 206, 249
Fatwa Commission, 232
state-, 1–3, 8
Orientalism
in Albania, 24–6, 28, 34, 38–9, 43
Orthodox Christians, 32, 43, 52, 62, 86, 144, 149
otherness, 9, 114, 146, 157, 222, 224
people of God, 168, 174, 178
popular Islam, 16, 164
Prizmi, 225
Progress (Turkish Sufi Cultural centre), 225
Protestants, 69, 251
public intellectuals, 15, 27–8, 33, 36–8
public schools
hijab in, 185, 187, 198–9
niqab-ban, 189
religious education, 204
religious symbols, 190
radical Islam, 9, 12–3, 24, 36, 43, 47, 68, 93, 96, 103, 113, 122, 124, 137–8, 199, 226, 235, 243–4, 251
see also Salafi Movement
Ramadan, 42, 51, 57, 91, 95, 111, 129, 199, 207–8, 210
religiosity
‘calm’ attitude, 33, 136
cultural Muslims, 247
definition, 2
exportable form, 222–3
faith communities, 17, 243, 247
fanatic practice, 54, 56–7, 73, 85–6, 92, 96–8, 107, 223–4, 235
free market, 185
individualized, 111, 118, 145, 174, 217, 233
Islamic, 86, 93–6, 114, 127, 129, 133, 135, 145, 206, 217, 235, 237
level of vernacular, 163
Macedonian Christian, 148
Muslim believers, 1, 13, 16, 138, 204, 211
neo-fundamentalism, 248–9
new forms, 11, 14, 225, 231
patterns, 3
pious Muslims, 96, 236, 248
in post-communist states, 10
pursuit of, 12–13, 17
religious conduct, 1, 12, 243
youth, 193
revival of Islam, 2, 15, 86, 217, 245, 251
resurgence of faith, 9–11
Roma communities
anonymous saints, 163, 170, 176, 178
babalara narratives, 166–70
cult of local saints, 176–8
ethnicity, 164–5, 177
heterodox trends, 176
individual forms of religiosity, 173–4
local tradition, 166–7
religious culture, 163–6
shrine construction, 174–6
stopan (saibiya), 171–2
Sufi influences, 172–3
Rumi; Ardhmëria (Iran), 225
salaat, 206–7, 213
Salafi Movement, 113, 222–4, 231, 233, 235–7, 244
Sarajevo
European identity, 89
Friday prayer, 210
hijab, 116
niqab, 109
Sufis and Salafists, 113–14
Turkish women, 212
Wahhabis, 112
women’s dress code, 16, 115
Second World War, 25, 29–31, 197
secularism, 5, 27, 63–4, 67, 105, 108, 145, 185, 188, 190, 226, 235, 251
Serbian Orthodox Church (SOB), 63, 65, 71, 73–4, 78
shahada, 206–7
Sharia law, 122, 229–30, 229–32, 232
Shkodra
being a Muslim in, 91–4, 97
‘calm’ character, 87–90
Catholics, 86, 95
European identity, 97
‘good’ Muslim in, 84
heterodox practice, 93
Hoxha, Enver’s regime, 85
Islamic practice, 86, 93
Islamic revival, 86, 90
Muslim population, 95
practicing believers, 94
Serbo-Montenegrin minority in, 92
three religions in, 97
urban diversity regime, 83–5
veiling in, 96
SKAT (cable TV), 124
St. Bibija (Romani saint), 178
Sufism, 16, 108, 164, 224, 229, 244
Sunnī community, 17, 31–2, 86, 93,
137, 146, 166, 176, 222, 230, 235
Sunnitization, 230

Tarikatı Halveti, 223, 228
tekiya, 163, 173
terrorism, 9, 13, 35, 39, 56, 106, 123,
129
turbe, 163, 167, 173, 229

Ulămas, 8
Umma, 9, 11
UNESCO Convention against
discrimination in education
1960, 197

veiling, 86, 92, 104–5, 108–10,
116–18, 137, 188, 214, 216–17
Venice Commission, 77

Wahhabis, 112, 230, 237
Wahhabism, 107–8, 113
Western media, 108, 251

Xoraxane Rroma (Roma Muslim
communities), 164

zar, 109
see also niqab
Zekat, 207