DEPARTMENT OF BALKANIC, SLAVIC AND ORIENTAL STUDIES

MASTER IN POLITICS AND ECONOMICS IN CONTEMPORARY EASTERN AND SOUTHEASTERN EUROPE

TITLE:

Balkan Muslims and Modern Identities in Bosnia, Albania and Bulgaria

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UNIVERSITY OF MACEDONIA, DECEMBER 2012
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INTRODUCTION

In the public discourse on Islam, there is this introduction of terms marking the name of this universal religion with adjectives that refer to it, according to its geographical and cultural location, like ‘European Islam’, or ‘Turkish Islam’ etc. and that seems to be the result of the terminology transfer from Western religious studies, where there is a separation between ‘official’ or ‘normative’ religion on the one hand, and ‘folk religion’ offering interpretation and practice of a religion according to the specific forms of it, at a certain place or in a specific group on the other (Karcic 2006:1)

‘Folk religion’ is usually studied by anthropologists based on ethnographic data etc. In the case of Islam, anthropologists are interested in the process of socialization and symbolization in which Islam is performed in a certain local environment, so that understanding of this religion and the social-civil reality comes out of it (Karcic 2006:1)

The identity of the Balkans and people living within, is dominated by its geographical position because as an area it is found at the crossroads of various cultures. It has been a juncture between the Latin and Greek bodies of the Roman Empire, the destination of a massive influx of pagan Slavs, an area where Orthodox and Catholic Christianity met, as well as the meeting point between Islam and Christianity. As Maria Todorova mentions: “The Balkans have a concrete historical existence…. While surveying the different historical legacies that have shaped the southeast European peninsula, two legacies can be singled out as crucial. One is the millennium of Byzantium with its profound political, institutional, legal, religious, and cultural impact. The other is the half millennium of Ottoman rule that….and established the longest period of political unity it had experienced” (Todorova 2009:12)

“As the Balkan region was never a harmonious melting pot, the wars and revolutions that took place there never solved anything; to the contrary, they merely generated new sets of conflicts and nationalities were kept apart by their distinctive cultural characteristics and ferocious territorialism. The latter was fed by the bad blood of
perpetual feuds, as well as by legends about the glorious past...but still, many of the genetically diverse groups came to co-exist under the powerful cross of the Orthodox Church. They all hoped to share a common ethnic identity and tried to act like Greeks, who in their turn were strongly influenced by Slavs and Turks, all of whom were woven into the fabric of Balkanization [a word that appeared after the Balkan wars of 1912-1913, to describe the ethnic violence, political confusion, and arbitrary re-division of lands into new countries with unhappy people of different origins, culture, and religion (Grumeza 2010 :preface)]” (Grumeza 2010 :intr.xv).

Crucial as it seems, religion has been one of the most important factors for the history of the Balkans and for the construction of the identity of the Balkan peoples. According to Bradatan Costica, Islamisation in the Balkans which mainly took place during the period of Ottoman Empire, affected in an important way people’s national and cultural identities and their ways of religious practices. The history of Islamisation overall indicates that ‘bi-confession’ or in other words Crypto-Christianity – the case when one changes their faith officially but in fact believes in their old faith- is well known in the Balkans and this is the reason why many times conversion had only been superficial. In the Balkan Peninsula, Muslims have several different ethnic and national origins: Turks, Albanians and Slavic-speaking people, like Boshnjaks, Torbeshes, Gorans (borderland of Serbia, Kosovo), and Pomaks. (Bradatan 2011:http://h-net.msu.edu)

So, it would be more accurate not to speak of ‘Islam’ but rather use the plural form of multiple ‘Islams’ so that its heterogeneity, both from the aspect of practice and Muslims personal and collective identities is understood. So, we could easily notice that there are practices of ‘syncretism’ like staying at monasteries, lighting candles, taking consecrated water or asking for prayers and these are mostly present in mixed, Christian-Muslim neighborhoods. On the other hand, lately there has been observed (Bradatan 2011:http://h-net.msu.edu) really strong presence and impact of more ‘radical’ Islam or having its origin in the Middle East and which is imported by 'Arab missionaries, all kinds of media, or even locals as we are going to see later, who are educated in Q'uranic schools in the Middle East. This is the reason why, we
meet different patterns of Islam. Radical Islam is basically connected with 'islamophobia' that is spread all over the world and is differentiated with the one that is considered 'traditional' and is regarded as not 'dangerous' or even 'not true' Islam, or 'Crypto-Christianity' (Bradatan 2011:http://h-net.msu.edu). Last but not least, there is significant mobility of people in the region. Especially, increasing migration abroad causes numerous redefinitions of self-identities, life practices and worldviews of local people and ways of religious practice.

In the present essay, an effort is being made to describe how Islam in the Balkans has led to shaping through its presence as a religion, civil and even national identities, the factors that actually contributed and played the substantial role for the formation and the construction of these identities and also the ways through which Muslims in the Balkans have been performing their religious practices ever since Islam made its appearance in the area, and all this through a social and anthropological approach.

A brief historical overview is presented which concerns the appearance and conversion of Islam in the Balkan Peninsula, along with some words about the two most important school of thoughts of Islam the Sunni and the Shia Islam, and another aspect of Islam called the Suffi Islam, which is the one we mostly meet in the Balkans and it is rather a dimension of Islam that can be found in Sunni, Shia and other Islamic groups (http://www.bbc.co.uk).

The historical presentation of Muslim communities and the way they perform their religious practices in some of the most important countries of the Balkans follows, through an effort to look at the distinguishing features of each one of them.

Moreover, an effort is being made to present or even analyze the ways through which political and social powers managed to control and shape the present identities of Muslims in the Balkans, particularly in three countries of the Balkan Peninsula.
More specifically, we present the case of Muslims in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Muslims in Albania because they are the two most numerous Muslim groups in the Balkans, and finally the case of Muslim Pomaks in Bulgaria (as these latter are the ones who have attracted more attention, due to their specificity of origin, and have been accepting efforts of affiliation over their historical presence in the Balkans), i.e. the case of Bosniaks Muslims, the case of Albanian Muslims and the case of Pomak Muslims, since these ones represent some of the most interesting and most discussed Muslim Communities in the Balkans for reasons that will be explained later.
ISLAM AS A RELIGION

THE SUNNI AND THE SHIA SCHOOL OF THOUGHTS - SUFI ISLAM IN THE BALKANS

THE SUNNI AND THE SHIA SCHOOL OF THOUGHTS

According to Akbar Ahmed, Islam is composed of two major sects or better, schools of thoughts, the Sunni and the Shia. Today, roughly 85–90 percent of the Muslim world is Sunni while the rest is mainly Shia. On a theological level, these two sects show no differences— they both believe in the same God, Prophet, Quran, and the values inherent in Islam. Their differences are more of a political and sociological level and they go back to the death of the Prophet in 632 C.E. (Ahmed 2007: 44)

Shia belief originates in the question of who should have been the first political successor to the Prophet of God and born the title of first caliph, or head of the Islamic community he had established. Believers of Shia sect, also support that the Prophet’s son-in-law, Ali, was the rightful successor and not only a respectful personality—a wise scholar and brave warrior—but also the first male to declare his belief in the message of Islam. He became the ruler of Islam, but only after Abu Bakr, Umar, and Uthman—all three highly revered figures in Sunni Islam—had held the position and he is the father of the prominent Shia figure Hussein, who would be martyred at Karbala, in modern-day Iraq—a seminal event in Shia history and marked by massive pilgrimages to Karbala today (Ahmed 2007:44)

This first difference referring to the succession, developed into a sectarian schism under Umar’s rule, when the Persian Empire converted to Islam. The Persian brought to the Muslim world a lot of their customs and spirit of national pride. After having been defeated by the Arabs, they identified Ali in their new religion because this affiliation enabled them to retain a sense of superiority while seeing themselves as a persecuted minority within the world body of Muslims dominated by the Sunni. Over time, sociological differences seeped into religious observance, which affected rituals. The respect and status that Shia clerics enjoy in society is unmatched in the
Sunni sect, whose religious scholars have to compete with traditional leaders and with other leaders for a voice (Ahmed 2007:44-45).

Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini who was the leader of the Islamic revolution in Iran against the shah, was the one who after all came to represent everything that was opposed to Western modernity, in the view of people in the West and he pointed out, that Sunni and Shia have little to do with substantial theological differences. Rather, the blame lies with ethnic, sociological, and psychological factors (Ahmed 2007: 45).
SUFI ISLAM IN THE BALKANS

To go on now, with the Sufi dimension of Islam, according to Dr. Alan Godlas in his study “Sufism -- Sufis -- Sufi Orders Sufism's Many Paths” “Sufism or tasawwuf, as it is called in Arabic, is generally understood by scholars and Sufis to be the inner, mystical, or psycho-spiritual dimension of Islam. Today, however, many Muslims and non-Muslims believe that Sufism is outside the sphere of Islam. Nevertheless, Seyyed Hossein Nasr, one of the foremost scholars of Islam, in his article ‘The Interior Life in Islam” contends that Sufism is simply the name for the inner or esoteric dimension of Islam” (http://islam.uga.edu/Sufism.html)

According to Huseyin Abiva, “In the Balkans (as is the case in other Muslim lands) the past role of the Sufi tariqats (lineage fraternities) in the safeguarding and promulgation of Islam cannot go without notice. The Sufis of the Ottoman Balkans greatly enhance both to the development of an Islam of the intellectual arena as well as a ‘folk’ Islam of the village and countryside. Despite the fact that it has now been reduced to a mere shadow of a once immeasurable expression, the impact of Sufism can still be felt throughout Balkan Islam. The extent of this impression and its function in Muslim society can be seen through the number of tariqats that have operated in the region over the centuries (Abiva, 2009: http://bektashiorder.com)

The largest and most prevalent of these tariqats during the Ottoman period were the Khalwatiyyah and the Bektashiyyah. … once dominated the Ottoman Balkans throughout the 18th and 19th centuries. The Naqshbandiyyah, Qadiriyyah and Rifa’iyyah followed them in significance… As the Ottoman armies extended Muslim rule in the Balkans during the 15th and 16th centuries, dervishes of a range of tariqats trailed in their wake. These early Balkan Sufis frequently set up zawiyahs or hospices that served not only as symbols of Ottoman supremacy over a newly conquered area but as centres for the dissemination of Islam among the local population as well. Two of these distinguished zawiyahs were founded in the Bosnian city of Sarajevo immediately after the conquests of 1463. After a while, as the imperial administration became notably more entrenched and the Islamic
religious establishment further developed, *tekkes* were built to cater to the spiritual needs of the local population.

... the end of Ottoman rule in Bosnia-Hercegovina in 1878 did not, however, result in the end of Sufism in the area..... a number of Sufi shaykhs managed to establish new centres of influence in Bosnia. Similarly a few Bektashi *babas* from Kosova were in contact with the small community of Albanian Bektashis that inhabited Sarajevo (Ibid)

Following the conclusion of WWII and the setting up of communist rule over Yugoslavia, a period of general deterioration marked the all *tariqat* organization.

This prohibition continued in place until the early 1970’s. In 1974 the Community of Islamic Dervish Orders of the SFRY (ZIDRA) was created as an umbrella organization to advance the study and practice of *tasawwuf* (Ibid)

During the wars that racked Yugoslavia from 1991 to 1995, the *tariqats* and their followers played an active role in the defence of Bosnia’s Muslim community.

In Albania, the largest *tariqats* prior to the end of the Second World War were the Bektashiyah and the Khalwatiyyah. In the 1950’s harsh restrictions were placed on Albanian *tariqats* (and religion in general. By the time the ban on religion was rescinded in 1991, only the Bektashiyah and Khalwatiyyah had individuals who were shaykhs prior to the 1967 ban still living. The latter made attempts to restore itself in the country under the leadership of Shaykh Muamer Pazari, but the modern Khalwatiyyah *tariqat* holds a paltry rank in contemporary Albanian Sufism. The Bektashiyah was noticeably more fortunate. The headquarters of the *tariqat* was returned by the government (it was a home for the elderly in communist times), and the few remaining *babas* set about instructing once more” (http://bektashiorder.com/sufism-in-the-balkans-1).
BRIEF HISTORY OF ISLAM IN THE BALKANS

Ethnographic studies related to religion are usually somewhere between ethnocentrism and literalism and that is more intense in the case of Islam and consequently, they haven’t brought distinctive anthropological analysis to “bear successfully on the practical realities and political ideologies of religions” (Doja, 2000). On the contrary, the fact that historically, certain ethnic groups have had conflicts based among other reasons on their different religions, leads to this assertion that these groups will continue to fight over the centuries. Moreover, in the attempts to analyse and explain politics in the Muslim communities, emphasis is mostly put on formal resources as well as on institutions of state and society. That, naturally, leads researchers to overlook more subtle forces that are the basis for the civic order or sometimes the reason for the collapse of it. So, especially for the case of Muslims in the Balkans, the analysis of their societies is based on the processes of transition and major focus is trained on the failures of the states institutions and the destruction of centralized authorities, which are the basic characteristics of the area for at least two decades.

It is nothing but truth, that there are shared and mixed sanctuaries, as well as sacred places where different groups of people perform their religious practices, really often within the same space and time not only in the Balkans but in the whole Mediterranean area.

As a religion and culture Islam made its appearance and entry with the presence of the Prophet Muhammad ibn Abd Allah (ca. 570-632) in western Arabia, but after his death his successors called caliphs claimed political authority over the Muslim community and over that period, called the caliphate, it became a religious tradition and civilization of importance all over the world (Donner in Esposito 1999: 1)

The Byzantine (4th-15th centuries) and the Ottoman (14th-19th) Empire were multiconfessional and political constructs and they had less cultural homogeneity than their Western counterparts. So, from one side to the other, from the Balkans to Anatolia there was more than one religious group in the local communities.
The ‘Other’ was the neighbor with whom one exchanged, not always peacefully and never on an egalitarian basis (Lory 1985, Anagnostopoulou 1997, Weyl Carr 2002 in Albera, Couroucli, 2012).

The Balkan Peninsula had always been an area that had as main characteristic the ongoing population arrivals and exodus because of the turbulent history of the region and because of its geopolitical position in the midst of three continents. After the fall of the Roman Empire immigration and conquest waves have over the centuries shaped the population composition of this European soil. The Slavs in the 6th Century AC, the Bulgarians in the 7th and the Turks in the 14th one, have all constructed more or less modern ethno-diversity in the Balkans (Michaletos in web site http://rieas.gr).

“The former were able –after the conquest of Constantinople in 1453 AC- to create the Ottoman Empire stretching from modern day Saudi Arabia and North Africa, right up to the infamous “Gates of Vienna” or more specifically in Klagenfurt and the Styria province. During much of the previous 6 centuries, there have been massive conversions to Islam that formatted the existing Islamic enclaves in the Balkans. The fall of the Soviet Bloc in 1989 and the civil wars in Ex-Yugoslavia brought the remembrance of the religion wars that were a part of the Balkan history for the better part of the last Millennium” (http://www.hqda.army.mil/library/balkans.htm :Selective reading list on Balkan conflicts by the Pentagon library in Michaletos, http://rieas.gr)

As Hugh Poulton describes “because the Ottoman empire was ruled by Islamic precepts for most of its existence, the arrival of Islam in the Balkans through the Ottoman conquest was of particular significance. ...the empire was divided...but by religious affiliation- the millet system... Within the Islamic Ottoman state the millet system achieved a separation of the different religious groups, with specific regulations ... The millet system became established as the prime focus of identity outside family and locality, bequeathing a legacy of confusion in modern times between concepts of citizenship, religion and ethnicity...” and more importantly “... it
proved ideally suited to the transmission of the new ideology of nationalism intruding from the West...” (Poulton, Taji-Farouki 1997:16)

According to Poulton, “the Balkan Muslim communities are predominately Sunni. However, the essentially Shiite Bektashi Sufi sect has been widespread among Albanians....” and “following the Ottoman invasion, sizeable groups of indigenous inhabitants converted to the religion of their new rulers. These included the majority of the Albanians, the Pomaks (Islamicised Slavs) of the Rhodope mountains and Serbo Croat-speaking Slavs in Bosnia-Hercgovina and the Sandzak” (Poulton, Taji-Farouki :14-15)

In today’s Europe, a debate goes on that has to do with the role of Islam in contemporary societies and the ways that the European-Muslim relationship will develop into the 21st century. The Balkan Peninsula is an important area of Europe where a really considerable number of Muslim communities live with some of them being there for over 700 hundred years, since the era of the Ottoman Empire, although interactions existed among the Byzantines and the Arab Muslims before the arrival of the Ottomans in the Balkans.(Norris, 1994)

Nowadays, all Balkan states have Muslim minorities and in states like Bosnia-Herzegovina and Albania large Muslim populations, that are part of the social and political life of the respective states and most importantly have been often accused as acting like a “Trojan Horse” from powers of different origin that are willing to exercise influence in the area. Like Bashk im Iseni mentions in his article “National Identity, Islam and Politics in the Balkan”, there is a “complex relationship of the Balkans Muslim populations to religion and politics” that must be seen “in the light of the cultural and religious Ottoman heritage and of the minority political status that they have enjoyed as Muslims since their incorporation into the new Balkan States” (Iseni 2009: 1)
ISLAM IN BOSNIA-HERZEGOVINA

THE BOSNIAK MUSLIMS

Xavier Bougarel points out that due to the Yugoslav wars, the 1990s had as a central point the rediscovery of an ancient and autochthonous Muslim presence in Europe and more particularly, “Bosnian Muslims, have become the symbol of a European Islam that had been covered up by the Cold War and forgotten by Western Europe, as well as by the Muslim world”. “Bosnian, he goes on, are, undoubtedly, Europeans, and they have their own way of expressing their Muslim identity, but the notion of ‘European Islam’ often encompasses phenomena that are quite distinct, or even largely opposed to one another. For example, the *sufi* (mystic) or syncretistic practices present in traditional Bosnian Islam are of Ottoman origin. Meanwhile, the deep secularisation of contemporary Bosnian society, reflected by the frequency of mixed marriages and the widespread consumption of alcohol, is a result of fifty years of Communist modernization”. More generally, he goes on “the will to present Bosnian Islam as a sort of positive cultural exception sometimes entails a conception of this „European and tolerant“ Islam as homogeneous and *sui generis*...”[Bougarel 2007: 1 « Bosnian Islam as ‘European Islam’: Limits and Shifts of a Concept », in: Al-Azmeh, Fokas (eds.) 2007:96-124].

Doubtless it is, that the wars that marked the area in the 1990s, influenced Bosnian Muslims in multiple ways, and resulted in the deconstruction as well as the reconstruction of their collective identity, as matters of political powers and nationalist interests as we will see, played crucial roles on that.

To start with some historical information, we should say that, as Bosnia was already a part of the Ottomans, back in 1463 and a mass conversion of the Bogomil Christian sect endured the existence of a large Islamic community in the state. This place was the epicenter of the Balkan Muslim life, since it was ideally placed in the centre of South Eastern Europe and had a viable and Muslim community. At this point, it has to be noted that the Bogomils were the most affluent class of Bosnia and their adherence to Islam constituted an initiative from their part to retain their privileges and rights under the newly formed dominion  (Michaletos 2012: http://rieas.gr).
In 1908, Bosnia-Herzegovina was annexed by the then Austria-Hungarian Empire and the idea of a united confederation of the Southern Slavs—Serbs, Croats, Slovenians—emerged. The creation of Yugoslavia after World War 1 didn’t give a solution to the religious and cultural differences between Catholics, Orthodox and Sunni Muslims. (Ibid)

The genocide during the 1992-1995, war brought as a serious consequence the internal migration, which literally divided the population into separate ethno-religious areas and later levels of returns in 2001-2002 slowed markedly in 2003-2004. Mosques, were destroyed by Serb and Croat armed forces. On the one hand, it is said that during the 90’s Mujahedeen from different Islamic states made their appearance and helped the Bosnian Muslims against both the Croatians and the Serbs. Stephen Schwartz notes, “Muslim Bosnia and neighboring territories also face growing Islamist extremism. Wahhabi missionaries, promoting the ultra-radical cult financed by Saudi Arabia, have come back to the Balkans after their expulsion from Sarajevo in the aftermath of September. Bosnian authorities acted then with admirable speed in cracking down on the Saudi High Commission for Relief of Bosnia-Herzegovina a center of al Qaeda activity” (Schwartz 2005:http://www.balkanpeace.org).

The Bosnian Muslims of the former Yugoslavia are now living in the independent state of Bosnia-Herzegovina, they are about 1.8 millions and the majority ethno-religious group in the state (44 percent of its population with Serbs making up 31 percent and Croats 17 percent [1991 census]). Because of the fact that all three groups have the same Serbian or Croatian linguistic tradition, what distinguishes Bosnian Muslims is mainly their religious affiliation (the Serbs are Eastern Orthodox Christians and the Croats are Catholic). Moreover, some dispersal of Bosnian Muslims has occurred to territory beyond the state (Gratton, http://www.everyculture.com). In Bosnia and Herzegovina, there are eight Muftis located in major municipalities across the country—Sarajevo, Bihac, Travnik, Tuzla, Gorazde, Zenica Mostar and Banja Luka. The head of the Islamic Community in Bosnia and Herzegovina is Mustafa Ceric.
As mentioned earlier, Islam spread to Bosnia–Herzegovina at the time of Ottoman administration, something that put the basis of the determination of basic characteristics of normative Islamic teaching and practice. The official religious and legal school in the Ottoman Caliphate was the Hanafi madhhab and it belongs to the Ottoman-Turkish cultural zone which basically gives strong position to a central government and is characterized of institutionalization of ulama into a strong hierarchical structure (ilmiyye teshkilati), the domination of Maturity teaching and Hanafi madhhab, the influence of the Turkish language and culture and also the demarcation of urban life style, art, architecture, daily routines, epic and lyric poems, etc (Karcic 2007: 4).

What is also worth mentioning is the elements of practice of inhabitants of pre-Ottoman Bosnia that have entered the religious observance of Bosnian Muslims, like going to different places which are regarded as sacred for supplication (doviste), praying in nature, celebrating the calendar of certain events which are considered important for agriculture etc. These practices are ‘Islamized’ rather than Islamic and they have a more customary tone (Karcic 2007:4).

The institutional framework of Islam in the region provides Muslims with Mosques to pray in, and also comprises of functions like leadership (imamat), interpretation of Islamic teaching and regulations (ifta) and Islamic personal law (qada) (Karcic 2007:5)

As already mentioned, in religious matters, Bosnian Muslims practice is similar to that of Turkish Muslims. Even after the establishment of the Communist government in the years after World War II, authorities tolerated Bosnian Muslim Religious observance and institutions something that was extended to Islamic schools, which could go on operating but only as supplementary and not a replacement for, the compulsory educational system (Gratton, Bosnian Muslims,http://www.everyculture.com).

We should also point out, that sometimes younger people need to express an increased identification with their ethnic heritage, mainly because of the national
religious revival that occurred as a result of the Bosnian war. There are a lot of Muslim women who have adopted Islamic dress styles not common, especially in cities, before the war.

Of course, the way Islam as a religion is performed, influences Muslims on all aspects of their life. In addition, we have to mention some characteristic areas of Bosnian living experiences, as described by Tone Bringa.

Tone Bringa, a British anthropologist, was the first foreign scholar granted permission to conduct long-term field research in ‘Dolina’ the pseudonym she gave to a village in central Bosnia with Muslim and Catholic population starting with it in 1987 and living the whole experience of the war that followed in the area in early 1990s.

That specific village did not have direct experience of the war until April 1992. Until then, villagers thought that only outsiders (ljudi sa strane) would provoke incidents, so they surprisingly found out that when these ‘outside’ forces arrived, some of their so far neighbors got involved in the killing of Muslims as well.

In her research, Tone Bringa, experienced all the changes of emotions that Bosnian Muslims went through, during the war that followed in early 90s and she wrote down how the so far co-existing neighboring communities of different ethnic and religious backgrounds changed and were destructed only to be reconstructed under new status, after the end of the killings which were motivated by factors other than the peoples themselves. The newly constructed communities of course, were now ‘built’ on suspicion and fear for the neighbor.

In Dolina, which was a mixed village inhabited by Muslims and Catholics, according to T. Bringa ...“settlements were interspersed throughout the village. However, this diffuse geographical and physical division did not necessarily mean that the two groups were more closely integrated as one village community.... The Muslim and Catholic communities interacted and cooperated as neighbors and co-villagers at secular times and in secular activities. At religious times, however, they separated
and their knowledge about each others' traditions at these times is scanty” (Bringa 1993:82)

Before the war, [the villagers of both religious communities would have their own customs and ways of living, based on their beliefs and principles, but at the same time they would respect their neighbors of the ‘other’ religious group. As one informant of T. Bringa said,” "we are Muslim because we do things differently from the Catholics and we do things differently because we are Muslim and not Catholic”.

Or. "This is the way they learned it," reflecting an ultimately tolerant and pluralist attitude towards the "other."

The villagers often concluded such comparisons by saying: "we have learned it this way and we are the way our surroundings (sredina) are." The idea expressed is that a person's socio-cultural environment shapes them, their behavior, and their values. However, this also implies that in a multicultural environment ethno-religious group values, and by implication group identity, may be easily influenced and weakened by the different customs and values of close neighbors” (Bringa 1993:83).

So, in general, in Bosnia people of different religion, ethnicity and even socioeconomic backgrounds used to live together and side by side, from town to town, village to village and even family to family, however, despite this and even though close friendship among them existed, they would hardly ever intermarry.

Before the war, Tito was the symbol of a unifying state and ideology of all Yugoslav citizens, but at the same time, he was the one that constructed a diversifying nationality policy that had created these two communities -- Croat and Muslim -- defined as narodi ('people' and 'nation') living in the territory of Bosnia-Hercegovina, all together with the narod of the Serbs who were in fact the Orthodox Christian community (Bringa 1996:8)

Affiliation with one of these three religious doctrines, i.e. Roman Catholic, Serbian Orthodox, and Sunni Islam means the belonging to a Bosnian nacija or officially narod. So, when we refer to Muslims of Bosnia-Hercegovina in the pre-war
Yugoslavia, the term “Muslim” refers both to a ‘nation’ (narod) and to a religious community.

Throughout history, Bosnian families have examples to present of families where brothers may belong to different religious communities due to the fact that they co-existed. The decision of the religion one would follow was sometimes the result of the need to declare a certain occupational identity or was due to certain political and social reasons. Even the last names of Bosnians would often describe a profession of social status or an honorary title like beg (bey; which for Muslims consist of a Turkish rather than a Slav word), and also first names would indicate ethnoreligious background.

Muslim population is mainly occupied with rural economy. Their traditional, patrilocal, extended farm households (zadruga) belong to a type which rather regulat and common to ethnic groups in the Balkans. The family members contribute to their collective economy, with the heavy agricultural labor mainly by males. In the cities, Bosnian Muslims are occupied in the craft production and are strongly present in civil-service posts.

Kinship is mainly patrilineal. Traditionally, the tie among brothers, and perhaps first cousins as well, was of great importance as it leads to creation of the ‘zadruga’. The establishment of fictive kin ties through sponsorship roles is also limited; the only occasion for which a sponsor is recruited is the "first haircut" rite of passage for male children. The family generally chooses the sponsor from outside of the Muslim community, so that this ritual provides the occasion for forming alliances with non-Muslim neighbors. Marriage among Bosnian Muslims is endogamous. When a marriage occurs between a Bosnian Muslim and an "outsider," that outsider is generally a Muslim of another ethnic group. In rural areas, marriage to a non-Muslim is unusual. Polygyny, though practiced prior to its prohibition by state law, was rare (Gratton in web site http://www.everyculture.com/Europe/Bosnian-Muslims.html).

The role of women in Bosnian Muslim societies is tied to the historical position of women in Bosnia in general. As the country went through four different political
systems since 1900s, starting with the Hasburg Empire through the Yugoslav kingdom, almost forty years of communism under Tito, and ending with the current multiparty system, the women traditionally moved into their husband’s parents’ house accepting his authority. A strong patriarchal expectation remained even in the 20th century. In her famous journey through Yugoslavia in 1937, Rebecca West described how the illiterate women of Bosnia had to wait on their husbands to eat up and work until they drop. But as R. West noted “I will eat my hat if these women were not free in the spirit”. During the wars that followed with the first one the World War II and later the civil war in Yugoslavia, these spirits had the chance to be occupied with different than their usual works and ironically became in a way freer than they used to be. They mostly participated in everything that would lead to survival especially during the latter war and several Muslim women got educated and worked outside the house, but in general in their culture «homemaking tasks are generally considered unmanly, and familiar responsibilities remain significant obstacles for women in the workplace, including the political sphere» (Denich, 1977) something which stands for the current years and with great differences among rural and urban women.

Of course, the image used for Muslim women of Bosnia is the one of a victimized and powerless woman and a ‘rural and/ or religious Bosniak - “Bošnjak”- a historical term whose meaning has, according to anthropologist Tone Bringa, been heavily debated especially in the immediate pre-war situation (Bringa 1996:34-36) woman wearing head scarves, as symbols of (Bosniak) national suffering or identity (Helms 2003), which has led to negative stereotypes of them. However, according to informants of the research that Emira Ibrahimasic made by interviewing Bosnian women, many women still wear the characteristic veil-symbol of Islam on their heads, despite the breakdown of familial and social networks and that, is sometimes the result of the need to feel protected, to show respect to Allah, to make a political statement in their society which recovers from the latest civil war (Ibrahimpasic 2007-2008:5-6). However and over all, what comes out as a conclusion is that Bosnian Muslim women don’t think that differences in the ways one expresses their religious beliefs
matter so much and that for the restoration of their country what is needed is ideas and determination (Infoteka 1999; Stiglmayer 1994).

The conclusions that are revealed by what has been said, is that in the state of Bosnia-Herzegovina, before and after the wars of the 1990s, the religious community of Muslims have been constructing their identity under the strong influence not only of the principles of their faith of Islam itself, but of the political powers of the area which were based on the “typical feature of multi-ethnic socialist states (such as the USSR, Yugoslavia and China)”, that, was the prominent role of the State in defining nationalities within its borders, and “in objectifying that identity, through conferring nationality status, or contesting the group’s ethnicity, by refusing recognition” (Gladney, 1991:76, in Bringa :85). In the Yugoslav multi-ethnic and socialist federal state, "nationality policies" were one of the tools by which the state legitimated and strengthened its structure and thus its power......in socialist regimes it is the state that does the imagining; the people can only contest, resist, or acquiesce (a tradition which many ex-communist nationalist leaders have upheld more fiercely than ever)” (Bringa 1993:85).

As Bugarel says “...until December 1995, Islam was largely considered as a taboo issue within the Bosnian Muslim community (Bougarel L’Islam et... 1998:106-116). While Serbian and Croatian propagandas referred to all Bosnian Muslims as ‘fundamentalists and ‘mujaheddins’, Bosnian Muslims themselves put their hopes in a foreign military intervention, and tried therefore to appear as the unanimous defenders of democracy and multiculturalism. The end of the war, on the contrary, sparked an outburst of grievances and disagreements....At the same time, political power in the Muslim-held territories was being monopolised by the Party of Democratic Action (Stranka Demokratske Akcije – SDA), a nationalist party created by the representatives of a pan-Islamist stream that first appeared in the 1930s and reorganised in the 1970s. The will of the SDA to re-Islamise the national identity of Bosnian Muslims actually resulted in a paradoxical ‘nationalisation’ of Bosnian Islam. Meanwhile, the party’s efforts to re-introduce certain religious prohibitions in everyday life came up against the multiform resistance of a largely secularised
society. ... Since 1996, the transformation of Bosnia-Herzegovina into a *de facto* international protectorate has limited the room for manoeuvre of the SDA leaders, suggesting this time an equally inevitable and spontaneous „return to normality”. In any case, the internal diversity of Bosnian Islam, the issues and cleavages along which this diversity is structured „and the agency of Bosnian Muslims themselves have been largely ignored” [Bougarel 2007:3 in Al-Azmeh, Fokas (eds) 2007:96-124]

After the civil wars, people were also strongly under the influence of the political parties that were trying to gain control of the area and as T. Bringa points out: “The Yugoslav constitution of Bosnia-Hercegovina stated (as does the revised and unfinished 1992 constitution) that it is the state of equal citizens and nations of Bosnia-Hercegovina: Muslims, Serbs and Croats and members of other nations and nationalities living in it. The Muslims are in other words the only nation in the former Yugoslavia which did not have a republic as their *de jure* national home, although 86% of the members of the Muslim nation were Bosnians. Although there are also people outside Bosnia-Hercegovina who identify themselves as members of the Muslim *narod/nacija* (e.g Muslims in Serb Sandzak) the Muslims are culturally and historically rooted in Bosnia, where their historical, cultural and religious experience has been different from that of their Catholic Croat and Orthodox Serb neighbors. However, the absence of an institutionalized, ideologically and legally established link between the (Bosnian) Muslim nation and the territory of Bosnia-Hercegovina leaves the Muslims without legitimate claims to a national state when competing within a nationalist discourse dominated by Serb and Croat territorial claims” (Bringa 1993 :87).
ISLAM IN ALBANIA

THE ALBANIAN MUSLIMS

There have always been a powerful presence of popular religion amongst Albanians, despite the fact that sometimes it has been misinterpreted, and its characteristics have rarely been regarded as deriving from traditions of resistance to more modern forms of religious life (Doja 2000 :424)

In Albania, the collapse of the former socialist regime was followed by serious political, social and economic transformations. In 1990, the revival and the rehabilitation of religion was one of the primary measures being taken in order for the general crisis to be defused and this revival turned out to be more complicated than in other countries of the Eastern Block due to all these years of official atheism, the multi-confessionality and the existence of a Muslim majority of the country.

Albanians are often in bibliography referred to as atheists or people who are indifferent and tolerant towards religious issues (Clayer 2003:2) There are a lot of myths concerning religion in the country mainly because of the problem of multi-denominationalism that Albanians deal with and the whole national identity building process.

Since its creation in 1913, Albania is the only Balkan country that has a majority in terms of Muslim citizens. Officially 70% of the population of the lands included within the frontiers of the new State is Sunni Muslims, even though there are considerable segments of non-practicing secular ones and others that belong to various mystical brotherhoods (Nathalie Clayer 1990). The Catholics approximately 10% of the population are concentrated in the North-western part while the Christian Orthodoxs around 20% are in the Southern part of the country. The main reason for this majority is the extended conversion during the Ottoman Empire.

Despite the large Muslim majority, Islam was not recognized as an official state
religion. In the society, Sunni Islam was even undermined because of three main factors: First of all, the unity had to be obtained on the ethnico-national level, and not on the religious level, because of the important proportion of Christians.

The second reason is that the Bektashis had already begun to form a force which had distances from the Islamic community and the third reason was the secularist trend that existed among intellectuals and officials of Muslim origin who had studies with Western ideas (Clayer 2003:3-4).

Politically, there was sometimes the open will to have a representation of every religious community. For instance, for the period between 1920 and 1925, the Regency Council had four members: a Sunni Muslim, an Orthodox, a Catholic and a Bektashi.

After the Communist regime was established in 1944, a fight against religion started like in other Eastern countries: the autonomy of the religious Communities was severely hindered and many religious leaders were killed or imprisoned until in 1967, something totally new happened and that was that religion was totally banned, even in the private sphere. Meanwhile, Enver Hoxha’s regime fought for the strengthening of the national identity but without raising the identities of the communities like family, regional and religious identities. For instance, the mixed marriages remained rather rare, except among the urban elite. However, a change occurred in the balance of power between religious communities, numerically, as well as politically and socially. The undermining of Islam and of the Muslim identity was obvious and with the destruction of the traditional power, Muslims ended up losing an important part of their political and social supremacy. Moreover, the communist elite came mainly from the South of the country, predominantly Orthodox and Bektashi.

The collapse of the communist regime brought about extremely radical changes: political competition and the opening of the country. It also strengthened the idea of an “Albanian space” with the “brothers” from Kosovo and “Macedonia” (Clayer 2003:7), but at the same time, the predominantly rural structure of the population remained as it was, as well as the principle of solidarity networks which were linking members of the same family, the same village, the same region and the same religious communities. So, since 1990, a new religious scene with relations among
the religious communities has emerged. With the opening of the country there were missionaries of all kinds, Muslims, Christians, Bahais etc. The evolution of the religious scene was the result of the influence of people, religious and political authorities and foreign networks and missionaries. Religion in Albania now seems to be both marginal and central. There is an individualization of the faith, but it is still important in collective representations and on the political scene. National affirmation is necessary for all religious communities, as well as the assertion of an international dimension. The whole procedure of reconstructing the religious scene depends on old and at the same time new elements and on local, national and international actors (Clayer 2003).

After the new status that the state acquired, religion showed its importance but still on the social identity and on political levels. That is why the reaffirmation of a Muslim identity is more a demand for an estimation of a socio-political status, than a religious affirmation *per se*. On the other hand, rejecting Islam is reinforced by the social opposition between the city dwellers and the villagers and mountaineers who are immigrating *en masse* to the cities.

Since 1992, Albania is a member of the Islamic conference, an intergovernmental Muslim organization. The case of the Islamic Community is complicated, because there are different forms of Islam. There is a contradiction between the Islamic Community and the Bektashi Community and also a competition between Bektashis and other mystical brotherhoods like the Halvetis, Kadiris, Rifais, Sadis, Tidjanis, etc., with the Bektashis dominating the “mystical scene”. At the same time different Islamic groups arrive from other countries (Clayer 2003:15).

After Marxists were inverted and democratic forces became powerful, Albania’s atmosphere was again ready for the religious activities of Muslims and Christians. The Alazhar muftis were the first informers who came into Albania. The Muslims of Albania are the Sunnis, the Bektashis and the Alawites. About 55 percent of the Muslims are Hanafites and 45 percent of them are the sect of Sufis. Sufis know themselves Shiites and are related to the Prophet's family and respect Imams.

A parenthesis describing the Bektashi Order follows before we go on.
---The Bektashi order

After Islamic conversion, an important role in maintaining the Albanian collective identity and ethnic boundaries was played by the coexistence of two very different forms of Islam. According to Albert Doja “Sunni Islam merged with the state government. Religious supervision by the ecclesiastical authorities was reinforced by the leadership of the Sultan himself in the role of Caliph, who would send firmans – for example in 1842 – on specifically religious matters, such as observing prayer. The mosque was a place preserved for communications of the state. On the other side, amongst the ideologically opposed Shiite and Sufi movements, one must note the existence of the Bektashi Order (Bektâchiyya), which was a religious Muslim brotherhood, and at the same time, an initiatory sect derived from duodecimal shiism, which spread during the 14th–16th centuries from the Caspian Sea in Anatolia” (Doja 2000:413). The Bektashi were politically important during the Ottoman Empire. They had a really close relationship with the Janissaries, whom they constantly encouraged and dominated by traditionally providing their religious guides. “In the face of economic, social and ideological upheaval, the most radical mystics adopted an attitude symptomatic of rupture and, when the Janissaries revolted in 1826, and were subsequently put down by force, the Bektashis immigrated to Albanian territory, which became their main centre” (Doja 2000:413). Bektashis are followers of ‘Haj Baktash’, a believer of the Prophet of Islam and Shiite’s Imams. They are the most important religious organization in Albania. Bektashi people are the majority of Muslims in Albania and they are Shiites who follow the Haji Vali party. The Bektashi order of dervishes created a separate religious group right after the beginning of the 1920s because they had a strong heterodox doctrine and because of the fact that they played a really significant role in the development of the Albanian nationalism and they had a great number of followers. Baktash was Iranian and from Neishabour and Anvar Khaje was Baktashi himself. Bektashis are not Shiites, but like the Shiites they give a central place to Ali, the son-in-law of the Prophet Muhammad.

At the local level, the social organization of every of the Albanian Bektashi has a teqe as a center, which is like a Sufi lodge that is like a monastery offering an educational
setting for monastic life and the basic teachings and principles of Islamic mysticism. It also offers shelter residents, dervishes, travelers and other visitors and each Bektashi lodge is led by its own spiritual leader addressed as baba which in the Albanian language it literally means father, who is responsible for all the decisions of the lodge and the community it serves.

‘Today, the use of the Bektashi tradition acquires more secular characteristics of Protestant morality’ (Mahmood 2009, in Tsibiridou& Mavrommatis under publication) since the adoption of the orthodox Sunni version aims at fostering or strengthening the national consciousness (Turkish), not only as a process of coercion, but as a process of a desire for progress on the part of a marginal minority that is attracted to, and imitates the dominant standards of the Modern national Turkish identity. Furthermore, capitalist modernization processes that indirectly devalue nature and whatever comes from it, are co-responsible too for the degradation of the Bektashi tradition. (Tsibiridou , Mavrommatis, under publication).

Moreover and as far as their genealogy is concerned we have to mention one of their distinguishing characteristics which is the harmony they support between humans and nature, which is based on the Al wahdad al wudjust i.e. the unity of being one of the Sufi principals, fundamental of the Bektashi knowledge. The Bektashi tradition has been transformed in a social context of minoritization process and inclusion/exclusion of social subjects from different types of power due to the continuous rationalization as orthopraxy of Muslim practices and their adjustment to the form of the Modern Turkish Sunni version (Tsimpiridou, Mavrommatis, under publication).

However, their old practices which were related to agricultural activities and allowed people to be in close relationship with nature or other traditions like the woman– shaman or therapist who had the same power as the Bektashi healers (muskadji) are being abandoned (Tsibiridou 2000) or transformed due to influences coming from different factors and the whole modernization process. ---
To go on with Islam in Albania we should mention that Khalvatieh is the second most important sect after Baktashieh, it relates to Hassan Basri. They believe that Imam Ali is the moral leader of Hassan Basri and there are also the Qaderieh, the Refaieh, the Naghshbandieh and the Khalvatie.

Kavajë and Shkodër, which were former strongholds of the Sunni Islam – and also stronghold of Catholicism for the second, were cities where the first demonstrations against the communist regime took place. Mountainous and rural areas, like Luma and Tropojë became overpopulated during the 1970s and 1980s and suffered economically more than others. The group of the Çamémigrés, driven out of Greece at the end of the Second World War and for whom Islam was an important identity marker, was also politically marginalized. So, the expression of a Muslim identity for populations like these ones is a necessity as it reveals the rehabilitation of their collective identity, family or regional and also the need to raise their political status. For all these demands the new political force led by Sali Berisha, who was a Muslim himself, used regional and political solidarity to ensure the support of a theoretical majority. So, he worked for the revival of Islam and also the promotion of the patriarchal system, which is really strong in the Northern Albania. He also favoured the Islamic Community, supporting for example in order to avoid a straight separation from the Bektashi Community and to have links with the external Muslim World. All this political game had as a result the ‘revival’ of Islam and its values and through it the strong link between the religious and ethnic or national identities. This tendency became stronger in the public sphere with the political swing over (Clayer 2003).

Back to power, the Socialists got down to dismantle the « Islamic networks » of Sali Berisha and there is also this promotion of the Bektashi Community as another strong form of Islam which led to the weakening of the Sunni Islamic Community. Moreover there is this trend to make of Bektashism a “progressive thought”, “a symbol of spiritual service with nobility of soul turned to people, for the spiritual quietness, for peace among people, for fraternity and kindness”(Nuri Çuni, Tomor, o mal i bekuar *Tomor, o blessed mountain !) (Tiranë 1999), a “bridge between Islam
and Christianity”, a national product or simply a channel of Albanianism (Clayer 2003:21).

Another important factor according to historical evidence is the role of the language in the formation of the modern Albanian nation and although the religious division of Albanian society could not obstruct the national union of the Albanians, it also prevented the Islamic religion from becoming a unifying factor. Albanian culture, the feeling of common kinship and, particularly, as mentioned above the Albanian language became the central elements of Albanian nationalism (Skendi 1967: 469). Although some observers (Lederer 2001: 17) support that the Albanians seemed to have lost any belief in organized religion during the long communist rule of Enver Hoxha, several statistics show that religion is still an important social factor in Albania (Clayer 2000:403). Continuity of Muslim traditions can be seen in the countryside, (Frances Trix 1994: 533-550) and in the 1990s important population movements took place from rural and mountainous areas to the cities in central Albania like Tirana, and from Albania to Greece, Italy and other countries.

Ethnographic material described in Gilles de Rapper’s article- BLOOD AND SEED, TRUNK AND HEARTH: KINSHIP AND COMMON ORIGIN IN SOUTHERN ALBANIA and collected during long-term fieldwork conducted in the district of Devoll from June 1995 to September 1996, and during later and shorter stays in 1998, 1999, 2000 and 2003 may present some important elements about Albanian Muslim communities as Devoll is mostly inhabited by Muslim Albanians.

Devoll is a district (rreth) located in South-eastern Albania, on the border with Greece and it consists of forty-two villages distributed around its centre.

As mentioned before most of the Devollis are Muslims, with a minority of Orthodox Christians. Muslims and Christians live in separate villages or, in case there are a few mixed villages they live in separate neighborhoods. They hardly ever intermarry and, although they live peacefully, their relations are characterized by stereotypes and suspicion. As in most parts of Albania, even when the level of religious practice is low, people are nevertheless aware of their religious affiliation and origin.
The word *fis* is used all over Albania and in Southern Albania it is often heard with the meaning of “kin” designating three generations of patrilineage which is one of the effective social units based on kinship together with the house (*shpi*).

Patrilineal descent is expressed by the concept of ‘blood’ (*giak*) and so they share common physical and moral characteristics. Marriage ‘within blood’ is not allowed and there is this tendency to marry not too far away but better in the village and certainly inside the religious community. Wives come to live in their husband’s house. Daughters receive a dowry (*paje, prike*) and sons receive land (*si rregull vetem djemte*). Every son, except for the youngest who usually inherits the paternal house, is free to leave the house after their marriage (Rapper 2009:1-7).

Neighboring houses are usually inhabited by families connected by patrilineal ties. As for the age of marriage the Albania ethnographer Bajram Mejdiaj has written that in the Muslim regions in central and southern Albania, age marriage is low.

To sum from what has been written above it is rather obvious, that for the case of Albanian people “the dominant elite and foreign powers attempted to impose a greater interiorization of religion by the strict control of the processes of exteriorization, in other words by imposing a formal liturgy and worship on people considered to be uneducated. These people were therefore in need of beliefs and practices which would more adequately reflect their ways and basic needs, and thus of mechanisms of projection suitable to them, and developed by them, by which they could express a subconscious knowledge collectively and socially, which might have been censored by the educated, foreign and dominant culture” (Doja 2000:425).
**ISLAM IN BULGARIA**

Bulgaria has three major Muslim minorities; Turks, Gypsy Muslims and Pomaks.

Bulgaria has a Muslim minority in the southern regions bordering with Greece and Turkey. According to Marushiakova & Popov, the Turkish minority in Bulgaria was the result of an isolated community that emerged after the war between Bulgaria and Turkey in 1877-1878 that marked the end of Ottoman rule in the area, and consisted of the Turks that now remained in the new ‘foreign state’ separate from the development of the mother state. After the establishment of an independent Bulgarian state, the Ottoman Empire and Bulgaria signed several treaties to guarantee the rights of their respective Bulgarian and Turkish populations in the territories of each country. Turks who stayed in Bulgaria kept their properties and they had their places of worship, schools, newspapers. They were also divided into districts, headed by a Mufti and including Turks and Pomaks (Slavic speaking Muslims) as well. Bulgarian state policies referred to minorities, were defined after the restoration of the Bulgarian state in the aftermath of the Russian–Turkish war of 1877–1878.

Some Turks and Pomaks who did not want to accept the new reality, left Bulgaria. The number of emigrants in the period from 1878 to 1912 was estimated to be about 350,000. The Pomak population of the Rhodope Mountains, did not accept the existing new political realities. During the Balkan wars (1912–1913) more Turkish emigrated from Bulgaria leaving the former territories of the Ottoman Empire, which had become part of Bulgaria.

The Communist regime in Bulgaria after 1945, initiated measures that forced Muslims -mainly Turkish- to immigrate to Turkey. In the 1980’s alone 300, 000 of those were to flee Bulgaria. The percentage of Muslims in the country is more than 10% playing an important role on the political climate of Bulgaria. The existence of a well established Turkish-Muslim minority in Bulgaria has proved to be one of the main reasons for the Greek-Bulgaria rapprochement in the mid-70’s and continues up to date.
In the analysis that follows, we talk about the case of Muslim Pomaks of Bulgaria, as they are among the most discussed population of Muslims in the Balkans, and like Eminov points out, “... Pomak identity has been tied to nationalist discourse, since Bulgarian independence from Ottoman rule in 1878,...and consequently, there is... strong 'relationship between nationalism and ethnic diversity in a modern nation-state” (Eminov 2007:1). Moreover, Eminov goes on “claims to a particular identity are malleable, open to modification, reformulation and replacement .... Identities are socially constructed through performance, political struggle and compromise. They may be used as strategies by which to adapt to a variety of social situations and to produce and support effective self-concepts. The durability of an identity is therefore contingent upon its ability to provide security, social status, and economic benefits for its members. If there are more attractive alternatives, then individuals may take advantage of these alternatives by modifying, even changing, their identity” (Eminov 2007:5).

**Pomaks of Bulgaria**

In general, the paradox of the Pomak fate lies in their in-betweenness which has made them both the object of desire and source of a security threat. They were both claimed as co-nationals or potential traitors by this multitude of Balkan nations (Neuburger 2004). As Neuburger indicates, Pomaks “were perceived as a gray zone, ripe to be painted white or black by the pretenders to their national wills.” (Neuburger 2000). Hugh Poulton defines Pomaks as “Slavic Bulgarians who speak Bulgarian as their mother tongue, but whose religion and customs are Islamic” (Hugh Poulton 1993: 111).

Historically, Bulgaria, Greece, and Turkey have contested the identity of Pomaks, each country claiming them as their own.

To start describing the case of Pomaks of Bulgaria, we have to say a few things about the area they live in. Their communities are traditional and placed in the Rhodope
mountains in Southern Bulgaria from Mesta River valley in the west to the Haskova-Kurdzali line in the east and a small number of them live around the Lovec on the northern slopes of the Balkan mountains (Eminov 1997). There is an ongoing debate related to the origins and true identity of Pomaks that never ends due to conflicting security and national interests of Bulgaria, Turkey and Greece. The Pomak population in the area is called both as “Bulgarian Mohammedans”, “Bulgarian Speaking Muslims” or “Pomaks” with the last term generally used in derogatory meaning. The name Bulgarian Mohammedans is referred in the official and legal terminology to reflect the Bulgarian historical thesis that the Pomaks used to be Slavic Christians that were subject to forced Islamization in the past (Todorova, 1998).

Traditionally, Pomaks of Bulgaria were stockbreeders and agriculturalists. During the communist regime the transhumant nomads were settled down and a lot of them were occupied with tobacco farming and in construction and mining trade because the state had undertaken an aggressive industrialization program. Nowadays and after the collapse of the construction and mining sectors of the economy in the Rhodopes, there is a process of deindustrialization that makes some Pomaks go back to traditional agriculture and stock breeding, while a lot of them are leaving their villages to find jobs in other places or even abroad. Like mentioned before, between 1878 and 1945, the characteristic factor of the area was the changing governments and political conditions. The Pomaks, like the rest of the Muslim community, received inconsistent and controversial treatment something that led to confusion as far as their social status and future is concerned (Apostolov 1998; Brunnbauer 1999; Georgieva 2001). The modern Bulgaria, was established on the principle of ‘one nation, one state’. The Bulgarian nationality was constructed along linguistic as well as religious lines, meaning that to be Bulgarian meant to speak Bulgarian and belong to the Bulgarian Orthodox church having as a result that Muslims were estranged as well as other religious communities like Catholics and Jews (Poulton 1997; Todorova 1996; Mancheva 2001).

Pomaks argued to be true Bulgarians, and that their Muslim faith was the result of forced conversion. Measures of assimilation were taken despite the obvious cultural features of Pomak life, which separated them from the majority. Since distinctive
Pomak habits were either determined by religion or expressed in form of religious rituals, eradicating all signs of Islamic culture was the foremost aim of assimilation. Turkish–Arabic names, Muslim prayers and holidays, religious rituals, and traditional dresses of women as well as men banned and replaced by Bulgarian/Orthodox ones. (Gradeva 1998; Eminov 1997; Poulton 1997) Until 1942, the Bulgarian policy has been placed somewhere between religious tolerance and cultural assimilation. They deprived the Pomaks of their right to marry Muslim of a different ethnicity and this prohibition was related to marriages between Pomak and Turkish Muslims. Pomak Muslim students could not attend Turkish minority religious schools. Moreover, in 1937, government founded an organization called Rodina (meaning Motherland) that had as its main aim to integrate the community of Pomaks into the Bulgarian nation. According to others, the organization used the same methods of assimilation and integration of the Pomaks, which later were implemented by the communist regime (Stoianov 1998: 86; Todorova 1998: 476).

All these culturally aimed policies were left during the Second World War with tolerant policies towards ethnic and religious minorities, until after the April plenum of the Central Committee of the Communist Party (1956), when another conversion campaign was carried out by the government. The communist regime, did not break the cycle of continuous change of policies and controversy. In the first years, the ethnic and religious rights of Pomaks were restored. The names changes were reversed and religious rituals could be performed openly. In 1948, some thousands of Pomaks were evicted from the Bulgarian-Greek border area of the Rhodopes and resettled to Northern Bulgaria. Pomaks were also deprived of their right to self-identification. In 1951, the Communist regime invalidated the data from the 1946 census; since it was found that a considerable amount of Pomaks indicated “Turkish” as their nationality. For the rest of the 1960s, Politburo engaged in devising measures for preventing Tatars, Gypsies, and Bulgarians, professing Islam, from identifying themselves as Turks. (Todorova 1998; Zhelyazkova 1997) The most comprehensive forced assimilation campaign against the Pomaks took place in 1972-1974. The Pomaks were chosen as an example for ‘Rebirth Process’, which was eventually extended to the Turks. Their names were erased again but Pomaks went on using their Muslim names, and practice Islamic rituals at home and among
kinship. Therefore, the response of Pomaks were to isolate themselves and solidify their community (Zhelyazkova 1997; Demetriou 2004).

During the period that followed the Communist regime, and although the Turkish minority was gaining their rights rapidly, because of pressure asked by Turkey in international arena, Pomaks could not benefit legally and affectively from this emancipation. At this point, the Pomak minority sought to collaborate with the rising Turkish minority groups who were politically mobilized. An actor with strong influence was a political party called Movement for Rights and Freedoms which was a secular organization that fought for legal protection in conformity with international law, political rights, an opportunity to participate at all levels of administration as well as a protection for their cultural and linguistic identity. At the same time the MRF portrayed itself as loyal to Bulgarian sovereignty to solidify its position and yet it remained an overwhelmingly Turkish organization with significant contribution to turkification processes of the Pomaks (Manka 1995; Zhelyazkova 1997; Demetriou 2004). Pomaks were merged into the Turkish movement so that they would attain their religious rights and minority. It was no sooner than the end of 1990s and early 2000s, that the Pomaks showed signs of ethnic consciousness and that was basically caused by Bulgarian efforts to reallocate sources accessible to Pomaks with the hopes of EU membership. Cultural and social investments to Pomak lands and population started slowly the emergence of more pronounced Pomak identity (Koksal 2004).

So, it is crystal clear that the Pomak community in Bulgaria is characterized by great differentiation (Karagiannis 1997 in Krasteva-Blagoeva), and for all the above mentioned and other reasons some of them consider themselves as Bulgarians, some others declare themselves as ‘Bulgarian Muslims’ and others maintain the historical model of integration with the Turks.

Data collected by a research of Krasteva-Blagoeva in the village of Chepintsi, a region of Roudozem in central Rhodopes which is inhabited by Pomaks, and the town of Karjali in Southern Rhodopes show the differences between Pomak Muslims on the one hand and Turkish Muslims on the other, populations living in different
social status. Ethnic and religious identities stemming from culture express their conscious differences in all parts of everyday life including clothing, religious architecture and rituals, family relations and so on.

Coming as a result of the post-communism period, religion became one of the symbols of the transition of Bulgarian society from totalitarianism to democracy including at the same time a return to the tradition. As the return to religion for the Eastern Orthodox Christians is mostly associated with the personal freedom and the personal choice, for the confessional minorities in Bulgaria this is an expression of group self-identification and self-expression (Elchinova 1999: 8).

One of the main symbols of Islam was the mosque that reappeared as the symbol of the revival of Islamic faith. The advent of the mosques as architectural stress and the visual domination of their minarets over Muslim villages and neighborhoods was considered prestigious in the eyes of local believers (Blagoev 1993: 83). Local communities have a silent competence among them trying to have the largest and nicest mosque as it represents the symbol of religiousness like the one in the village of Turun, region of Smolyan, built on a hill with its big minaret with three sherfets (a balcony on a minaret - the imam calls the so-called izan or ezan -an appeal to people to pray from it) to be seen from a distance.

Used as a means to secure their collective identity the reversal to religion of the Pomaks becomes a mainstream of their self-consciousness. According to data collected by Kratseva-Blagoeva in her research in the village Chepintsi which has been mentioned earlier, Pomaks tend to believe that Arabs are the true bearers of Islam, as the Prophet had created it and they generally behave using characteristics of life of the Arab states. The ideological basis of these trends is used to support that Bulgarian Muslims were the first ones that adopted Islam in the Balkans and it is a way to save them from the historical ‘guilt’ of betraying the Christian faith. Arab missionaries have ‘easier’ work to do with Pomaks as they are more isolated than Bulgarian Christians and Turks. Turk Muslims actually live having constant influence and contact with Turkey and this is the reason why they confess a moderate Suni
Islam (Krasteva-Blakoeva in Symbols of Muslim Identity in Bulgaria: Tradition and Innovations)

More recently new Pomak religious leaders have appeared. They are educated and have studied in Saudi Arabia, and they are among the few who are able to understand the Koran, and in a way they have replaced the imams-adherents of traditional Islam. According to their beliefs traditional Islam professed by the community has been modified under the impact of the Turks who have imposed customs of their religious system like honoring of the turbe and teke (a tomb of a Muslim saint around a teke is built i.e. the dwelling of the community of Dervishes, typical of Shiite Islam, but with the impact of different orders of Dervishes it is also included in the traditional culture of Sunni people in Turkey and in the Balkans), and the making of amulets and the organizing of Mevlid (literally ‘mevlyudu-sherif’, which is a holiday for the birthday of Prophet Mohammed with readings of his life). The new leaders also reject some characteristics of traditional Islam lifestyle and behavioral stereotypes coming out of it. For example, they reject taking pictures because they believe that those who have themselves photographed will be punished after death in the outer world. Religious leaders are the ones that form a circle around them, a circle of their own and by that circle they set the norms of behavioral rules in the community and they directly reject those who do not obey and accept them (Ibid).

According to Krasteva-Blagoeva in her study “Symbols of Muslim Identity in Bulgaria: Traditions and Innovations”, Pomaks are poorer and this fact makes them send their children to religious schools. Their vulnerable identity makes them more susceptible to foreign influences. Women rarely go to mosques in order to pray because according to their beliefs they disturb men prayers, so they usually pray at home. They also wear the veil on their head something which one of the most visible expressions of Islamic affiliation and some of them take it down when they go to the town. Moreover, the traditional kerchief was substituted by the Arabic kerchief which covers the head and the shoulders but leaves the face open-hijab. Another expression of classical Islam is also obvious in their names. There is this trend of
ignoring the old names which are being replaced by Arabic ones and this causes disagreements with the elderly people, a fact that is more general for other aspects of life as well. Younger people are trained to read the Koran and pass the annual exam on the Koran, the so-called *hatim*, which is more like a holiday for the whole community.

Another research from the Institute of Philosophical research chose the region of the East Rhodopi mountains to collect information about the context of the importance of religion in the formation of ethnic identity and the existence of a collective community. The so-called Pomaks in the area (Smolyan, Haskovo, Kardzali) present themselves as Bulgarians who confess Islam and least of them as Turks. Younger people live under the influence of post-modern values and despite the spirit of the patriarchy they feel and behave quite freely on issues of marriage. Religious customs mix with suspected pagan folklore holidays which are celebrated together by the religious communities in Bulgaria. The state in general, does not pay much attention to the Pomak population and has given Turkey their responsibility. Like mentioned before due to poverty parents have to send their children to religious schools, which ensure full boarding and education performed in Turkish, a language that most of the children has never spoken before, as the Bulgarian language is the one that most of the Pomaks use, a fact that once was used as a criterion to include them to the Bulgarian ethnicity. Because they have no alternative they get higher education in Arabic educational centers and when they go back to Bulgaria they impose new ways of prayers and have conflicts with the older generations the way we described earlier.

To sum up, we should say that the main issue about the Pomaks communities is the origin of their collective identity. Efforts have been made to be recognized as Bulgarians based on linguistic criterion by the Bulgarian state on one hand, the fact that most of them are Muslims give reasons to Turks to claim that they are Turks on the other hand. As Eminov mentions, “most Bulgarian scholars have mainly used linguistic evidence to claim them as their own. Since Pomaks speak a Bulgarian dialect with numerous ancient Bulgarian constructions, it is argued that they must be
of Bulgarian origin.... Turkish scholars have dispensed with linguistic and cultural arguments and have emphasized the religious affiliation of Pomaks. They are Muslims; therefore they must be of Turkish origin (Eminov 2007:9).

Yulian Konstantinov et al. support that due to different historic “interruptions” in their lives during the twentieth century, it is almost “impossible to penetrate into Pomak identity and its way of thinking . . . When they are asked as to their identity, Pomaks practically always tend to hesitate. Some people prefer to utter the word ‘Pomak’ only in a subdued manner, just like the word ‘Gypsy’ or ‘Jew’ elsewhere” (Konstantinov, Alhaug and Igla, "Names of the"..., 46 in Eminov 2007:13). Some Pomaks, in an attempt to support an identity separate from both Bulgarian and Turkish, have resurrected myths of their own ancient origins.
CONCLUDING REMARKS

According to Tone Bringa, “Different people have different ideas about what decides what kind of person one is or what category of people one belongs to. National or ethnic identity is dependent on ascription (i.e. self definition) and description (i.e. definition by others) (Bringa 1993:81). “People locally define and construct their identity according to their own experiences and perceptions, in interaction with and in relation to members of neighboring groups, and in relation to official state definitions” (cf. Harrell, 1990 in Bringa 1993 :81).

Muslim communities in the Balkans have some common characteristics. As a part of the ruling majority within the Ottoman Empire they had been practically excluded from the process of nation-building of the Balkan nations, and when they found themselves in the position of minorities in the newly formed nation-states for sometime these groups retained a fluid consciousness which displayed the characteristics of a millet mentality (Todorova 1998: 475; Karagiannis 1999; Anagnostou 2005b).

The processes of differentiation and self-identification of Muslim communities took part in conditions of systematic pressure from “above” (exercised by central and local authorities).

The Muslims of Bosnia-Herzegovina have been the centre of interest of scholars, locally and internationally, particularly due to their strong bearing in the Ottoman Empire and beyond, as we have already mentioned, and this together with the more recent facts (the 1992-1995 wars) that marked the area have attracted scholarly attention (e.g. Pinson 1996, Friedman 1996, Bringa 1995 etc. (http://www.oxfordbibliographies.com).

Karić sets in opposition „the Bosnian way of living Islam as a faith, a culture, a civilisation, a source of inspiration and a spiritual identification … the tolerant affirmation of all the traditional and –why not say this – Bosniac ways of living Islam

However, like T. Bringa points out..."in Bosnia "Muslim" is also a cultural identity which does not depend on what you do, on performance or religious devoutness, but is rather a sense of belonging to a community of people with whom one shares certain experiences (Bringa 1993:86).

As far as the Albanian state is concerned, because of the communist legacy of Enver Hoxha, who in 1968 declared Albania an atheist state, the society has been highly secularized. The Albanians are often regarded as people who are indifferent on religious matters as well as tolerant. Like Vaso Pasha (Albanian writer, poet and publicist of the Albanian National Awakening and Governor of Lebanon from 1882 until his death) has successfully declared: “The religion of the Albanians is Albanianism.” However, the truth is, that the whole national building progress identity is the main reason we have this image of the Albanians. As mentioned earlier, the fact that despite the large Muslim majority was not enough to lead to the recognition of Islam as the official state religion is due to three factors as Nathalie Clayer mentions: “First, the unity has to be obtained on the ethnic-national level and not on the religious level, because of the important proportion of Christians. Secondly, the Bektashis began to form a force distinct from the Islamic community. And lastly the secularist trend existed among the intellectuals and officials of Muslim origin who had studied in the West or in the Ottoman capital where Western ideas had penetrated (Clayer 2003: 4). Scholar interest on Albanian Islam began in the past few decades, concentrating mostly on the Shi'ite Bektashi and Sunni communities(http://www.oxfordbibliographies.com) The whole issue on Muslim religious matters in Albania lies between the effort of different actors to modernize Islam according to ‘Euro-Islam’ needs and the ones who try to maintain the ‘traditional’ type of Islam.

In the case of Muslims in Bulgaria, the fact that the state policy was different towards Turks and towards Pomaks played an important role. As a result, their identities had gone through changes which gradually took them away from the
original model of identification according to the confessional belonging. At the end of the 20th century the empirical surveys registered two separate cases: Turkish minority with clearly displayed ethnic identity and Bulgarian speaking Muslims whose identity – according to most of the existing analyses– was too complicated to be marked with a single label.

The Muslims of Bulgaria have a complex ethnic and religious makeup. The two main communities are the Pomaks (Bulgarian Muslims) and the Turks, though there is a substantial Muslim Roma population as well. Because of the nationalist policies of renationalization and assimilation, both communities have suffered oppression and discrimination in modern times. Recent studies by Bulgarian (Eminov 1997, Georgieva 2001) and foreign authors (Neuburger 2004) shed light on these cultural and historical processes and on intercommunal relations (http://www.oxfordbibliographies.com)

Particularly for the case of Pomaks one could say, that what can come as a result is something already mentioned and that refers to the fact that the state of vacillation is related with the effort of a search of a more prestigious identity and identification with one of the two bigger communities: of the Bulgarians or of the ethnic Turks. However, the vacillating identity, can be regarded as one kind of identity. Bulgaria’s economic problems play a serious role to the further complication of the picture.

It is easily understood that religion has played an important role in the whole history of the Balkan Peninsula. Like elsewhere, people are influenced by their religious beliefs and they adopt a lifestyle that follows these beliefs and do not oppose them. Islam in the Balkans has been a catalyst in the historical facts of the area. Muslim communities have themselves been organized according to the circumstances of each specific area of the Balkans and have led to the construction of civil societies which are basically influenced by the principles of Islam.

As we have seen, overall, we can come to the result that religion leads to the construction of identities that are formed by a lot of crucial factors that interact. Ethnic identifications are strongly attached to religious identities. Cultural
communities are also linked to religious identities. Although globalization and modernization have brought radical changes in traditional ways of living, the impact of certain religious principles remains present in the expression of different aspects of life in the Muslim collective societies in the Balkans and although religion is only one of the factor among many other that contributes to the development of this sense that one belongs to a larger group, it is by no doubt an identity marker that divides one group from another, while at the same time it strongly unites its members.

As mentioned in the study of Anjum Ovamir, ‘Islam as a Discursive Tradition. Talal Asad and its Interlocutors’ (Anjum 2007 in Tsibiridou & Mavrommatis, under publication:1), ‘religious symbols acquire their meaning and efficacy in the real life through social and political means and processes, in the form of coercion, discipline, institutions, and knowledge, is intricately involved’ ( Anjum 2007:.680 in Tsibiridou & Mavrommatis ,under publication: 2) and as Anjum goes on “the Islamic discursive tradition is therefore understood as a historically evolving set of discourses, embodied in the practices and institutions of Islamic societies and hence deeply imbricated in the material life of those inhabiting them” ( Anjum 2007: 662 in Tsibiridou & Mavrommatis, under publication: 2).

Consequently, “paying attention to a discursive tradition is not to essentialize certain practices or symbols as being more authentic but to recognize that the authenticity or orthodoxy of these has to be argued to its own criteria. Nor does it mean to take the natives or practitioners of the tradition for their word and give up one’s own notion of rationality, or ignore the material conditions within which the discourse take place and focus merely on cultural factors”( Anjum 2007: 662 in Tsibiridou & Mavrommatis, under publication :2).And like Albert Doja supports, “...the concept of collective identity – religious or ethnic – cannot be selfexplanatory..... The prominence of collective identity in ethnic labelling is evident amongst other possible means of identifying people. It is only when this label is attached,when ethnicity is emphasized by the very act of selecting a label, that
cultural behaviour, religious practices and values seem ethnic almost as a matter of course [Doja 2000: 422 in Critique of Anthropology, volume 20(4)].


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