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Krasniqi, G 2010, 'The 'Forbidden Fruit': Islam and Politics of Identity among Albanians in Kosovo and Macedonia' Paper presented at After the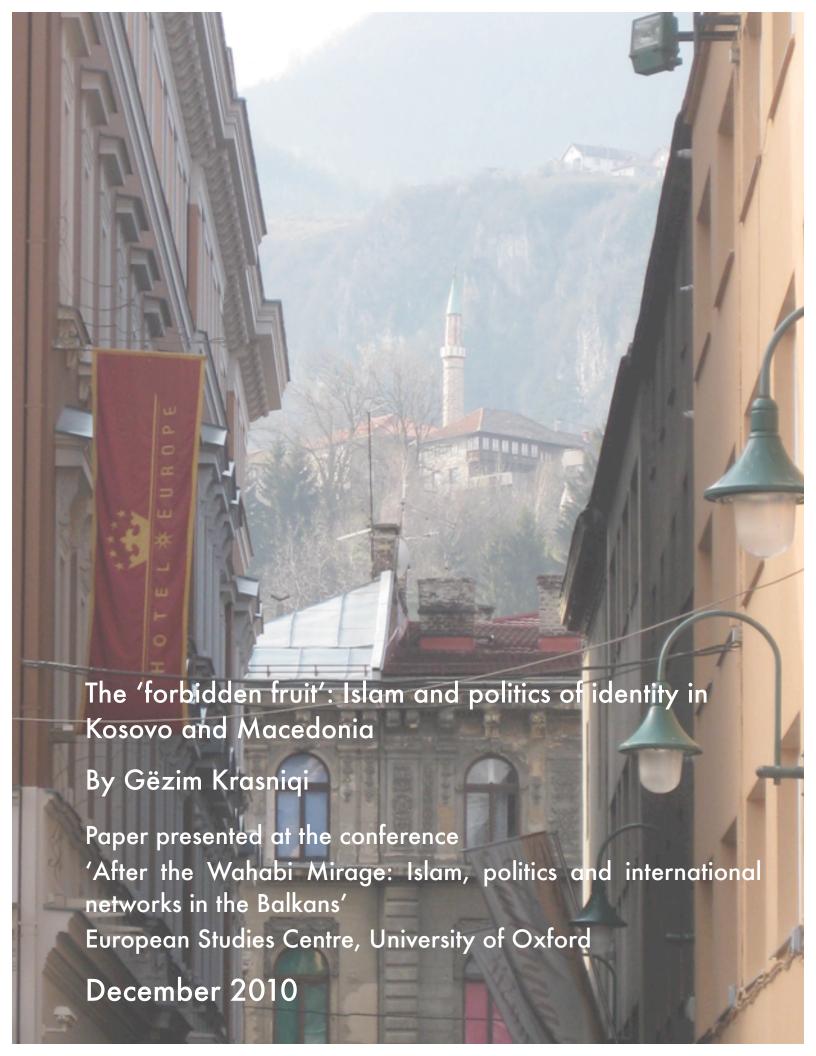 Wahhabi mirage: Islam, politics and international networks in the Balkans, Oxford, United Kingdom, 21/06/10 - 21/06/10, .

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The 'forbidden fruit': Islam and politics of identity in Kosovo and Macedonia

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Following the demise of Communism in the late 1980s, Southeast Europe embarked on a trajectory of immense political, social and cultural transformations. In former Yugoslavia, as elsewhere, this transformative process brought about the re-emergence of nationalism and the reappearance of religion in social and political life. Religion and nationalist sentiment were utilised by different national elites to shape and reshape national and state identities in order to suit their interests. Thus, the emerging relevance of religious institutions was considered to be part of the process of identifying a state with its core ethnic group. In cases where religious cleavages coincided with ethnic ones, they helped in deepening the gap between majorities and minorities, as the majority's religious institutions soon received a privileged status within the

emerging ethno-national states of the region. In accordance with the "logic of boundary-drawing discursive practice,"[1] religion was used in defining the group in opposition to 'the other' and in solidifying boundaries between in- and out-groups. Therefore, reference to religion often increased the gap between different communities of people and 'cemented' the categories of 'Us' against 'Them'.

Apart from this internal process of politicisation of religion, the fall of Communism created new opportunities for many 'faith-based' international organisations and agencies to get involved in the process of transforming societies and identities. Once the Communist state, known for its firm secularising policies, "withered away,"[2] Christian and Muslim organisations and agencies rushed in an attempt to fill the 'spiritual void' of post-Communism and exercise their influence in religious affairs. In the case of former Yugoslavia, many international religious organisations (often disguised as aid agencies) and networks from the Middle East and other Muslim countries entered into a competition to win the 'hearts and minds' of the 'forgotten European Muslims' in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Serbia, Kosovo, Macedonia and Albania. Nonetheless, their eventual success or failure in promoting often diverging traditions and models of religious practice largely depended and still depends on an interplay of several factors, ranging from internal identity dynamics within these societies to official state ideologies and state responses to external religious influence.

Thus, this paper depicts the interplay of religion and politics, as well as of external and internal actors among Albanian communities in Kosovo and Macedonia. It does so by asking the following questions: Do external Muslim actors (Arab, Iranian, Turkish) play a role in the formation of Muslim identities and religious institutions in Kosovo and Macedonia? How does the state respond to the involvement of different actors, especially those from the Gulf and Turkey? To what extent does the 'Islamic' reference impact on the foreign policy orientation of Kosovo and Macedonia? How do Albanians in Kosovo and Macedonia 'reconcile' their Muslim

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[1] Stef Jansen, "Against cultural anaesthesia: Identity, nationalism and modernity in former Yugoslavia," in Thanasis D. Sfikas and Christopher Williams (eds.), *Ethnicity and Nationalism in East Central Europe and the Balkans* (Aldershot, Brookfield, Singapore and Sydney: Ashgate, 1999), 283.

[2] Dejan Jović, *Yugoslavia: A State that Withered Away* (West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 2009).

identity with a widespread sense of 'pro-Americanism'? To what extent does Muslim identity play a role in perceptions of European Union policies and a future in the European Union? Before addressing these questions, however, it is important to briefly consider the role of religion in the formation of Albanian identity in the Balkans at the beginning of the twentieth century and the socio-political changes that characterised different Albanian societies in the Balkans following the fall of Communism.

1. Religion and identity formation among Albanians in the two Yugoslavias

Unlike most of the nationalisms that emerged in the 20th century in the Balkans, Albanian nationalism was a secular one. This was largely conditioned by history, reality in the Albanian inhabited lands at that time and, most importantly, future political considerations.[3] Albanian national(ist) leaders have traditionally avoided politicising religion because of the need to avoid internal divisions that would create dissent in the process of nation-building.[4] Albanians belonged to three faiths, Catholicism, Orthodoxism and Islam (inluding adherence to many Sufi orders present throughout the region) and historically they did not have their own religious representative institutions. Thus, unlike Serbs, Croats, Bulgarians, Greeks, Turks and others, Albanians did not have what George Theotakas called a 'national religion'. Instead, national and cultural leaders drew on common descent, ethnicity, and above all, language, to forge a common national identity. In such context, it is logical that Pasho Vasa's saying 'The faith of Albanians is Albanianism' became the banner of Albanian nationalism in the twentieth century. Certainly, religious allegiance was strong among many Albanians, including many political and military leaders of the Albanian national movement in the 20th century. This way, the secular-minded leaders had to try hard to convince some Albanian leaders from Kosovo—

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[3] For more on this see Gëzim Krasniqi, "Elementi fetar në identitetin kombëtar shqiptar," MM – Mixed Magazine, No. 10/12 (2005), 53-64.

[4] Shkëlzen Maliqi, "Religjioni dhe Politika," *MM – Mixed Magazine*, No. 1, (2004), 8.

such as Isa Boletini, whose loyalty to Islam and the Sultan was very strong[5]—to act against the Ottoman Empire.

Identity formation in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia

In the aftermath of the Balkan Wars and World War I (WWI), Albanians were territorially divided, with the majority of them living in Albania and the others mainly in the newly created Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, which changed its name to the Kingdom of Yugoslavia in 1929. Albanians—both Muslims and Catholics who at that time made up 70 and 30 per cent of the overall Albanian population, respectively—in Yugoslavia and other minority groups such as Turks, Germans, Hungarians were not seen as integral members of the new Yugoslav state (the very name of the state tacitly excluded Albanians and other non-Slavic peoples)[6] and were deprived of the resources to constitute itself as one. This exclusion was not limited to the naming of the new state, however. From the start, the state opted for the disempowerment of Albanians as a community through a number of policies such as confiscation of land and colonization of Albanian-populated areas by Serb and Montenegrin colonists; the closing down of Albanian language schools; and, equally importantly, the collection of arms. The closure of the Albanian-language schools, which Austria-Hungary had opened and supported during its short-lived occupation of Kosovo in WWI, was undertaken contrary to international legal obligations and domestic legislation. These schools, which had served as centers of Albanian national identity formation in Kosovo, were replaced with Serbian (inter-war Yugoslavia managed to establish centralized and unified primary education only in 1929) that were to turn Albanians in Yugoslavia into loyal citizens of the new state. Albanians and other Muslims, however, were allowed to pursue religious education in private schools, which would undermine the rise of their national self-awareness.[7] So, the state in general

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[5] See Nathalie Clayer, Aux origines du nationalisme albanais: La naissance d'une nation majoritairement musulmane en Europe (Paris: KARTHALA, 2007), 83.

[6] Hugh Poulton, "Macedonians and Albanians as Yugoslavs," in Dejan Djokić (ed.), *Yugoslavism: Histories of a Failed Ideas 1918-1922* (London: Hurst & Company, 2003), 126.

[7] For a detailed analysis of the education and identity issues among Albanians in Kosovo in the inter-war period see Denisa Kostovicova, *Kosovo: The Politics of Identity and Space* (London and New York: 2005), 34-39.

followed a two-track strategy. Firstly, Muslims, who were considered to be the remnants of the much-hated Ottoman Empire, were stimulated to migrate to Turkey.[8] Then, the remaining Muslim population was urged to emphasise religion over nationhood as the main layer of their group identity. This was part of the state's official ideology of 'Yugoslavism' that recognised religious differences alone.

Additionally, state policies addressing religious affairs prevented the unification of Yugoslavia's Muslims under one religious authority. Until 1929, all Muslims of Bosnia-Herzegovina and other ex-Habsburg territories were placed under the supreme authority of the office of the *Reis-ul ulema* in Sarajevo, while the supreme Mufti in Belgrade headed the Muslims of Serbia and Montenegro.[9] Only in 1930 was a new law on the Islamic Religious Community passed, uniting Muslims in one Independent Islamic Religious Community (*Samostalna Islamska Verska Zajednica*). The 'Supreme Religious Council of Elders' (*Vrhovno versko starešinstvo*) led by the *Reis-ul ulema* was transferred in Belgrade, with two *ulema* councils (*Ulema-medžlis*) in Sarajevo and Skopje that represented Muslims of the former Habsburg territories and 'South Serbia', respectively. In 1936, as part of the state's concession

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[8]   Migration of Albanians from Kosovo, Macedonia and Montenegro to Albania and Turkey, which had started already during the Balkan Wars, continued throughout the interwar period. Thus, in line with various proposals and memoranda for expulsion of Albanians from Yugoslavia, representatives of the latter, after almost three years of direct contacts with Turkey, signed on 11 July 1938 the "*Convention on regulating of emigration of the Turkish population from the region of Southern Serbia in Yugoslavia*" which obliged Turkey to take 40,000 families (a family was defined as 'blood relations living under one roof') of "Turks', receiving a payment from Belgrade of 500 Turkish pounds per family. As far as the numbers are concerned, figures of Albanian emigrants range from some 25,000 (according to official Yugoslav data, in the period 1927-1939, some 19,279 ethnic Albanians went to Turkey and 4322 in Albania) to 250,000 (Albanian sources). However, according to Malcolm, 90,000-150,000 is a reasonable number. See: Noel Malcolm, "Is the complaint about the Serb state's deportation policy of Albanians between the two World wars based on myth?" in Anna Di Lellio (ed.), *The Case for Kosova: Passage to Independence* (New York: Anthem Press 2006), 61; Hikmet Oksüz and Ülkü Köksal, "Emigration from Yugoslavia to Turkey (1923-1960)," *Turkish Review of Balkan Studies, 9* (2004), 45-50; "In Search of Homeland? Muslim Migration from Yugoslavia to Turkey 1918–1941," *Currents of History* (Tokovi istorije), issue: 12 (2008), 56-66.

[9]   Radmila Radic, "Religion in a Multicultural State: The case of Yugoslavia," in Dejan Djokic (ed.), *Yugoslavism: Histories of a Failed Ideas 1918-1922* (London: Hurst & Company, 2003), 199.

to Bosnian Muslim leaders, the office of the *Reis-ul ulema* was taken back to Sarajevo. The state policy was one of cultural and linguistic assimilation. In their initial attempts to assimilate the Albanian minority through state-sponsored schools, the first Yugoslav state brought to Kosovo and Macedonia Bosnian Serb-Croat-speaking Muslim teachers[10] and replaced the Albanian *mullahs* (Muslim teachers) and *imams* who had embraced the cause of education in Albanian.[11] In the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, hence, Albanian Muslims became a 'double minority'. They were both a linguistic and ethnic minority, dominated by the south-Slavic majority on one hand and Bosnian Muslims on the other.

Religious authorities of Yugoslavia generally promoted the highly formalised Islam preached and practiced by *imams* from the religious schools of Sarajevo. They were, however, exceedingly hostile toward Sufi orders, missionaries and their lodges (*tekkes*), which were particularly widespread in Kosovo and Macedonia. These places served as hubs of illegal Albanian-education and repositories of Albanian nationalism. However, despite state attempts to create loyal Muslim citizens in Kosovo and Macedonia by instilling a de-Albanianised religious awareness, it is difficult to claim that religion was the main component of identity of Yugoslavia's Albanians. Despite their everyday religious practices and their nostalgia for the Ottoman Empire, Albanians in inter-war Yugoslavia clearly distinguished themselves from their Slavic neighbours mainly on the basis of language and ethnicity. In terms of political representation, they mostly supported the Islamic League for the Defense of Justice (*İslam Muhafaza-i Hukuk Cemiyet*), known in its Turkish form of *Cemiyet* (*Xhemijet* in Albanian and *Džemijet* in Serbian). The League had been established in 1919 by a number of Albanian, Turkish and other large, influential Muslim landowners from Kosovo, Macedonia and the Sandjak. Albanians supported *Cemiyet*, which in essence was a religious party, for it was the only possible way to channel their political will. After the ban of *Cemiyet* in 1925, the other Muslim party in Yugoslavia, the Yugoslav Muslim Organisation (YMO) (*Jugoslovenska*

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[10] Hugh Poulton, "Macedonians and Albanians as Yugoslavs," 127.

[11] Denisa Kostovicova, "'Shkolla Shqipe' and Nationhood: Albanians in pursuit of education in the native language in interwar (1918-41) and post-autonomy (1989-98) Kosovo," in Stephanie Schwandner-Sievers and Bernd J. Fischer (eds.), *Albanian Identities: Myth and History* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2002), 161.

Muslimanska Organizacija) with its centre in Sarajevo, failed to gain support among Muslims in Kosovo and Macedonia. This incidence alone could be taken as a clear indicator of the lack of feelings of a common identity based on common religious bonds among the Slavic and non Slavic Muslims in Yugoslavia.[12]

Identity formation in Socialist Yugoslavia

State-sponsored attempts to 'Slavicise' Islamic institutions in Kosovo and Macedonia did not abate after World War II with the creation of the socialist Yugoslavia. The status of the Islamic Community and the *Reis-ul ulema*, which were not functional during the war, was restored after the war (in 1947) under the control of Bosnian Muslims. Between 1957 and 1958, the Islamic hierarchy was reorganised, leading towards a decentralisation of religious affairs in Yugoslavia. The office of the *Reis-ul ulema*, the Supreme Assembly of the Islamic Community (*Vrhovni sabor Islamske zajednice*), and the Supreme Islamic Council of Elders (*Vrhovno Islamsko starešinstvo*) were based in Sarajevo. The Supreme Assembly was the highest organ and it was comprised of delegates from the Supreme Assembly of the Republic of Serbia (based in Prishtina), the Republic of Montenegro (based in Titograd), the Republic of Macedonia (based in Skopje) and the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Slovenia and Croatia (based in Sarajevo).[13] In the case of Albanians, Serbian authorities in the SFRY tried to use religion to undermine the Albanian national cause. The aim was to strengthen the religious component of identity among Albanians to the detriment of the ethnic one. To weaken their position further, in the late 1940s and early 1950s, Yugoslav authorities took measures to encourage Albanian Muslims in Kosovo to declare themselves as 'Turks' and subsequently urge them to migrate to

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[12] Aydin Babuna, 'The Bosnian Muslims and Albanians: Islam and nationalism,' *Nationalities Papers 32:2* (2004), 298.

[13] Srđan Barišić, 'Institucionalizacija Islamskih zajednica nakon raspada SFR Jugoslavije,' *Filozofija i Društvo 2* (2008), 118.

Turkey, in accordance with an agreement signed between Yugoslavia and the Turkish Republic.[14]

The Yugoslav policy toward Albanian Muslims had a most detrimental impact on the fabric of Albanian society: It severely damaged a long tradition of religious syncretism among Albanians, mostly practiced by various Sufi orders. In the name of secularisation and socialisation, Sufi *tekkes* in Bosnia were officially banned, and "mystic orders"[15] in Kosovo were persecuted by state authorities. In fact, some of the *tekkes* were turned into cultural monuments protected by law and were open for visitors. Thus, the century long Albanian tradition of practicing Islam "in ways unique to the region, practices which included the synthesis of a number of local forms of spiritual traditions which ultimately evolved into complicated rituals in which Muslims and local Christians often shared the same spiritual site,"[16] was severely damaged as a result of the Yugoslav state authorities' and the Islamic Community of Yugoslavia's attempts to 'mainstream' Islam. As a result, by the end of 1998, the Albanian population in Kosovo and Macedonia was homogenised in terms of the religion, with *Sunni* Muslims accounting for over 90 per cent; Catholics shrank to 4-5 per cent and only few Orthodox Albanians remained. The number of Catholics decreased mainly because of the emigration, whereas a considerable number of Orthodox Albanians were assimilated.

In sum, throughout the first and second Yugoslavia, the religious identity of Albanians was repeatedly reshaped as a result of wider political developments in the Yugoslav space. However, despite state attempts to create an Islamic identity that superseded ethnicity, religion, though an important layer, remained subordinated to national identity and consciousness of most Albanians. The complex and problematic relation of Albanians with the Bosnian Muslims who

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[14] Aydin Babuna, 'The Albanians of Kosovo and Macedonia: Ethnic Identity Superseding Religion,' 69-70.

[15] Only in 1974, when Kosovo became an autonomous province of Serbia and constitutive element of the Yugoslav federation, an association of *dervishes* from Kosovo came to surface from the underground. For a detailed analysis of the Sufi orders in Kosovo see: Ger Duijzings, *Politics and Identity in Kosovo* (London: Hurst, 2000).

[16] Isa Blumi, *Political Islam among the Albanians: Are the Taliban coming to the Balkans?* KIPRED Policy Research Series, Paper No. 2 (Prishtina, 2005), 2.

controlled Islamic institutions in Yugoslavia – largely conditioned by the anti-Albanian attitude of the latter – is a useful indicator for the position of religion in the hierarchy of identity layers among Albanians. However, this does not imply that religion was not an important factor in self-identification of Albanians in Yugoslavia and affirmation of their 'otherness' vis-à-vis Orthodox Serbs and Macedonians. In a way, religion and ethnicity had become intertwined.

2. Parting company: Albanians in Kosovo and Macedonia after the fall of Communism

Following the fall of Communism and the subsequent dissolution of the SFRY (Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia) in 1992, Albanians in Yugoslavia were divided into two new independent states, Macedonia and the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, comprising of Montenegro and Serbia, which included Kosovo. Most of the nations experienced a revival of religion and religious institutions in political life. This was not only due to the collapse of Communist ideology—known for its hostility toward religion—but also because Yugoslavia's emerging nationalisms in the 1990s were suffused with religious discourse. Ultimately, this led to what Roland Robertson called, the "politicization of religion and religionization of politics"[17]. For Albanians in Kosovo and Macedonia, this new reality also meant new identity dynamics and the transformation of the organisation of their religious life within their respective polities. In terms of religious institutions, the dissolution of Yugoslavia at the same time signposted the end of the dependence on the *Riyaset* (office of the *Reiss-ul ulema*) and control from Sarajevo. This newly found independence in terms of religious organisation soon also led to the emergence of differential trajectories of Islam and politics in Kosovo and Macedonia.

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[17] Cited in: Srdjan Vrcan, "Faith and State: the exemplary case of former Yugoslavia," *Transeuropeennes. Religions in Politics*. 51-63. 61

2.1 Religion and politics of ethno-national mobilisation in Kosovo in the 1990s

On 23 March 1989, the state of Serbia revoked Kosovo's autonomous status that had only been granted in 1974. This step was marked by a far-reaching and active campaign of ethno-national mobilisation among both Serbs and Albanians. In Serbia proper, the Serbian Orthodox Church—surely one of the main pillars of the Serb identity and sense of collective belonging—took on an active role in the country's political and social life. Often, its priests were at the forefront of nationalist campaigns throughout the territory of former Yugoslavia.[18] On the verge of the war in Bosnia, nationalists as well as Church officials re-activated the notion of Serbs as the defenders of 'Western civilisation and Christianity' against the Islamic threat, initially manifested by the Ottoman Empire, and more recently by Bosnian Muslims and Albanians.

Massive political and military presence of the Serbian state in what had been the autonomous province of Kosovo galvanised Kosovar Albanians into massive protests. These protests went beyond resistance against the Serbian policies and soon resulted in the creation of an impressive political and social movement known as the "parallel society" or the "phantom state"[19]. Religious institutions in Kosovo, both the Catholic Church and the Islamic Community of Kosovo, became part of the Kosovar Albanian movement and took a role in the efforts to unite Albanians in Kosovo and transcend inter-group differences. One of them was the 'Action for reconciliation', which aimed at the termination of blood feuds. It was led by an Albanian Catholic intellectual, Anton Çetta, who succeeded in resolving more than 2,000 feuds (half of them involving death)[20] in the period 1990-1992. Apart from blood feuds, Ger Duijzings has emphasised the role of religious leaders in settling disputes, pacifying and integrating rural

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[18]　For a detailed analysis of the role of the Serbian Orthodox Church in creation of the modern Serb national identity see Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Serbia, *The Serbian Orthodox Church and the new Serb Identity*, Belgrade (2006).

[19]　Tim Judah, *Kosovo: War and Revenge* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2000), 61.

[20]　Howard Clark, "Have Albanians been against a peaceful solution to the question of Kosova's autonomy?," in Anna Di Lellio (ed.), *The Case for Kosova: Passage to Independence* (New York: Anthem Press 2006), 86.

society.[21] In all these actions, the goal was that of integrative nation-building. Albanian political elites in Kosovo forged group homogeneity by eradicating diversity and multiple identities, and thereby created an atmosphere where only clear-cut identities would be accepted. The homogenisation process, which perpetuated linguistic and regional differences as well as religious conversions, did not affect Albanians alone—it affected those groups which were seen as 'religious and ethnic anomalies' within the context of Albanian communities, such as Turks, Gorani, i.e. Slavic Muslims, Roma, Turkophone Albanians especially in Prizren, and Slavophone Albanians in Rahovec, etc.[22] There was a strong pressure on these groups to identify themselves with the main stream. Caught between the lines, these smaller ethnic, religious and linguistic groups were often pressured to choose a side and 'pledge allegiance' to either Albanians or Serbs. In general, it was either linguistic or ethnic proximity that determined one group's affiliation. The fact that there were two school systems, one run by Albanians and one by Serbs, put parents of children from these communities in a difficult position of choosing what they thought was best in terms of their children's education.

The 1990s witnessed a revival of religion in Kosovo, most impressively demonstrated through the resurgence of *Sufi* orders and their lodges. Yet, for most Albanians, the religious cause was subordinated to the national one, both in Catholic and Muslim communities. Despite repeated claims of Serbian nationalists, the Serb-Albanian conflict, which erupted in the armed conflict of 1998-99, was not religiously motivated—it was a conflict with a clear ethno-national bias. Even at the pinnacle of war, the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) refrained from enlisting Islamist militants from the Arab countries and other Muslim countries.[23] This relative distance to the Islamic *umma* and the insistence on a Western orientation were also present in other Albanian organizations, such as the Democratic League of Kosovo (*Lidhja Demokratike e Kosovës - LDK*). The LDK was the first post-Communist party of Albanians in Kosovo established in December 1989, and it was the cornerstone of the Kosovar Albanian parallel society in the 1990s. Together with Albanian intellectuals, the LDK did everything to

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[21]   Ger Duijzings, Religion and the Politics of Identity in Kosovo, 126.

[22]   Ibid., 24.

[23]   Tim Judah, Kosovo: War and Revenge, 175.

demonstrate their Western orientation. It was an unwritten rule that the first deputy-president of the party should be an Albanian Catholic. Other examples of the inter-religious cooperation to the benefit of the national cause and demonstration of their Western orientation include the initiative to form a Christian Democratic Party[24] (with mixed Muslim and Catholic members), rallying around Catholic symbols, such as Mother Theresa, and attending Catholic ceremonies.[25] This counter-intuitive initiative was meant to convey a strong symbolic message of Albanians as a people united in its struggle for freedom and statehood.

Following the dissolution of socialist Yugoslavia, the Supreme Council of the Yugoslav Islamic Community for Serbia, which was based in Prishtina, changed its name to the Islamic Community of Kosovo (*Bashkësia Islame e Kosovës – BIK*), thus taking full responsibility of organising Muslim religious life in Kosovo. BIK functioned within the framework of the self-styled 'Republic of Kosovo' and as part of the 'parallel society'. Despite its claims to the restitution of properties (mostly land) it had owned before nationalisation by the Communists in the 1940s and 1950s, it had to struggle with serious obstacles posed by Serb authorities. Nevertheless, in 1992, BIK managed to establish the Faculty of Islamic Studies in Kosovo with Albanian as the language of instruction.[26] This faculty became the most important institution in the educational promotion of a traditional understanding of Islam with a strong Albanian rooting.

It would be fair to say that throughout the 1990s, religious identity and institutions were utilised by political and religious leaders to achieve political and national cohesion. The ethnic and linguistic commonalities that bound Albanians together, as well as the threat coming from the Serb state, helped to supersede religious differences between Catholic and Muslim Albanians. In the 1990s, no Kosovar Albanian political party or association of any importance rallied around Islamic symbols, let alone a language of Islamic fundamentalism "as an ideology

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[24] On the other hand, no other Albanian political party showed an Islamic orientation, neither in name or in program.

[25] Howard Clark, *Civil Resistance in Kosovo* (London, Sterling: Pluto Press, 2000), 66.

[26] See the official web page of the Faculty of Islamic Studies in Pristina: < http://www.fsi-ks.org/index_files/themelimi.htm >

that seeks to re-establish the religion of Islam as a political system in the modern world"[27] in opposition to the Serbian regime. Religious motives—in this case Muslim ones—did, however, play a role in defining and constructing the self-image of many Albanians in opposition to the Serbian (Orthodox) 'Other'. Yet this Islam was a 'Popular Islam', not an Official Islam; it was a "widespread and spontaneous expression of a religious inclination that is a mixture of conventional wisdom, local culture and personal piety."[28] This development was also conditioned by the overall isolation of Kosovo and its population throughout Serbian rule in the 1990s, an isolation that largely meant immunity from external religious influences.

Following the escalation of the conflict in Kosovo from 1998 to 1999, more than 850,000 Kosovar Albanian refugees escaped or were deported into neighboring countries and hundreds of thousands of others were internally displaced persons.[29] The armed conflict proved fatal to the material religious culture of Kosovo. According to the Islamic Community of Kosovo, approximately 200 of the more than 600 mosques in Kosovo were damaged or destroyed during the war, along with Sufi lodges and Islamic schools (*Medreses*), archives and libraries.[30] It was the sheer scale of the human rights violations being committed in Kosovo that led to the military intervention of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (FRY) in spring 1999. On 10 June 1999, after 78 days of the NATO campaign in the FRY, the UN Security Council adopted Resolution 1244 which obliged the FRY to begin and to complete a verifiable phased withdrawal of all military, police and paramilitary forces from Kosovo. Thus, thanks to the NATO intervention, Kosovo started a transition to democracy and self-governance under the United Nations administration. Due to the leading role of the United

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[27] Youssef Choueiri, "Islam and Fundamentalism," in Roger Eatwell and Anthony Wright (Eds.). *Contemporary Political Ideologies. Second Edition* (London and New York: Pinter, 1999), 255.

[28] Ibid., 257.

[29] UNHCR, Country operation: Federal Republic of Yugoslavia at glance, Global Report. (Geneva: UNHCR, 1999).

[30] Andrew Herscher, "Is it true that Albanians are responsible for an orchestrated campaign to destroy Kosova's cultural heritage in modern times?" in Anna Di Lellio (ed.), *The Case for Kosova: Passage to Independence* (New York: Anthem Press 2006) 41.

States of America in the NATO intervention in Kosovo, the liberation of Kosovo is largely accredited to the US and its leading politicians of the time, such as former President Clinton and Secretary of State Albright. This image of the US as the savior of Kosovar Albanians played a crucial role in increasing pro-Americanism among Albanians in general.

Kosovo in the post-1999 period: The Globalisation of Islam in the context of UNMIK

The establishment of an international administration in Kosovo in 1999 under the United Nations Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) paved the way for an invasion of various aid organisations from all around the globe. Thankful to the international community and above all to the NATO states for having come to their aid, impoverished and devastated Kosovars tended to welcome anyone who would assist them in reconstructing their homes and their country. With the international community lacking a coherent policy to address the needs of the people, the latter were left "at the mercy of international, 'faith-based' organisations that claim to represent their best interests."[31] Moreover, the new administrators of Kosovo (UNMIK), failed to fully understand the complex picture of religious life and identity in Kosovo, including the rich traditional local habits and idiosyncratic practices. Decision makers and administrators used an oversimplified tableau that divided people into a matrix of two fixed, homogenous and colliding identity groups: According to this view, the majority Albanians, who were seen as Sunni Muslim stood against the minority Serbs of Orthodox faith. Approaching issues of religious identity and heritage through this dichotomy had a series of devastating effects for Kosovar Muslims, as will be discussed below. It also suggests that many international administrators were often led by their ignorance and their prejudices against the region in general and Islam in particular.

Indeed, followers of a more radical form of Islam, commonly referred to as 'Wahhabism'[32], had established a presence and become active in the Western Balkan region in the aftermath of the dissolution of Yugoslavia. Whilst radical Islam first spread in Bosnia as a

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[31] Isa Blumi, Political Islam among the Albanians: Are the Taliban coming to the Balkans?, 2.

[32] So-called after its spiritual leader, Muhammad b. 'Abd al Wahhab (1703-1792), which aimed to invigorate Islam by sweeping away corruptive and sinful practices. See Youssef Choueiri, "Islam and Fundamentalism," 265; Isa Blumi, *Political Islam among the Albanians: Are the Taliban coming to the Balkans?*, 10.

residual effect of the war, bringing aspects of the Islamic world previously unknown to the Muslims in the Balkans, it soon spread through other countries of the region, namely Serbia, Montenegro, Kosovo and Macedonia.[33] The arrival of foreign faith-based organisations and charity groups after 1999 marked the first 'face-to-face' meeting of Kosovo's Muslims with radically different forms of 'Islam'—missionaries from the Gulf who preach a much more conservative and fundamentalist form of Islam, known also as 'Wahhabism'. With the permission of UNMIK[34], several Saudi-based humanitarian agencies such as the Saudi Red Crescent Society, the International Islamic Relief Organization, the Muslim World League, the World Assembly of Muslim Youth and numerous private Saudi charitable organizations, which were operating under the umbrella of the Saudi Joint Committee for the Relief of Kosovo and Chechnya (SJCRKC), arrived in post-war Kosovo to fill in the 'spiritual vacuum' and meet the material needs of Kosovo's Muslims.[35] During the refugee crisis in Kosovo in 1999, the SJCRKC airlifted and shipped more than 45 million dollars in relief supplies to refugee camps in Albania, set up and operated a hospital, 15 health centres and 15 ambulances (including a medical team of 385 doctors, technicians and administrators), as well as 12 schools, and constructed 38 temporary mosques.[36] The committee also arranged for the repatriation of the refugees from camps in Albania to their homes in Kosovo.

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[33] Kenneth Morrison, *Wahhabism in the Balkans*. Defence Academy of the United Kingdom, Balkans Series 08/06 (2008), 1.

[34] The UN administration in Kosovo even praised the work of the SJCRKC in providing relief assistance to citizens. In a message sent to the Kosovo-based regional bureau of the SJCRKC, Thomas Mataisi, Head of the UN Administration's Office for Non-Governmental Organizations, said that "the Saudi Committee played a significant part in efforts to relieve the humanitarian crises in Kosovo and Albania by supporting health, social service and construction projects and the settling of refugees at temporary camps." See *Kosovo's U.N. Administration praises Saudi Relief Committee,* 25 May 2004, available at: < http://www.saudinf.com/display_news.php?id=1958 > [last accessed 5 November 2010].

[35] Isa Blumi, Political Islam among the Albanians: Are the Taliban coming to the Balkans?, 1.

[36] See *Saudi Arabia,* Volume 16, Number 3 (1999). Available at: < http://www.saudiembassy.net/files/pdf/publications/magazine/1999-fall/COVER.htm > [last accessed 5 November 2010].

Kosovo's post war reality, characterised by a weak or non-existent system of government and state institutions, and the disregard shown towards the enormous needs of the devastated rural areas, created the ideal ground for the success of Saudi-funded organisations. Many such organisations took a major role in the provision of food and health services to the population, which they often used to spread religious education. They also supported the reconstruction of destroyed or disused mosques and the building of new ones throughout the country. A case in point is the Hadum mosque complex in Gjakova dating from 1595 and devastated by the Serbian army during the 1999 war. In July 2000 Saudis, who had taken over the refurbishment of the mosque, began removing its centuries-old gravestones and also demolished the remains of the library that could have been restored. Only after enraged local Albanians protested, NATO troops barred the Saudis from the Hadum mosque rehabilitation project.[37] The newly built mosques were not only different in style from the Ottoman architecture of older Kosovar mosques, but their imams, frequently connected to these organisations, also began preaching a Salafi form of Islam, which had little in common with the 'Popular Islam' and Official Islam in Kosovo. Specialised Koranic schools were opened as well. The Islamic Endowment Foundation (IEF), which operates under the umbrella of the SJCRKC, established and actively supports more than 30 specialized Koranic schools in Kosovo's rural areas.[38] As a result, a small number of young girls and women took to wearing the *niqab* (the Saudi-inspired full body and face veil), while small groups of young men began to grow long beards.

A tacit 'mosque war'—i.e. competition between traditional practitioners and Imams and Salafi ones over the control of the mosques in Kosovo—began after 1999. On 9 January 2009, for instance, a group of nine Albanians belonging to a Wahhabi sect severely beat the Muslim Mullah Osman Musliu while he was entering a mosque in a village in central Kosovo.[39] Mullah

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[37] Stephen Shwartz, 'The Arab Betrayal of Balkan Islam,' *The Middle East Quarterly*, Volume IX, Number 2 (Spring 2002) : 43-52.

[38] Isa Blumi, Political Islam among the Albanians: Are the Taliban coming to the Balkans?, 15.

[39] United States Department of State, *2009 Report on International Religious Freedom - Kosovo*, 26 October 2009, available at: < http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/4ae8612d91.html > [last accessed 10 June 2010].

Osmani warned that Wahhabi militants were planning to take over local mosques in his region and also criticised the head of the Islamic Community of Kosovo, Naim Tërnava, for not standing up against Wahhabism. In another case, in the spring of 2010, the local authorities of Skenderaj in central Kosovo closed down a mosque in Morina village and deported its self-proclaimed imam, Xhemajl Duka. Duka, a citizen of Albania, who worked in Kosovo for almost a decade outside of the BIK jurisdiction, is suspected to have promoted non-religious activities associated with Islamic fundamentalism.[40] Claims of Islamic fundamentalism in both cases are difficult to verify and they may also be part of the power dynamics within the local communities in Kosovo. Because of the heavy symbolic weight it carries, the term 'Wahhabi' often seems to be used in cases of conflicts of interest for the purpose of discrediting one's opponents.

Toward a 'Political Islam' in Kosovo?

Despite the increase of the number of foreign faith-based organisations and religious networks in Kosovo and their efforts to influence religious identities, one could hardly speak of the consolidation of 'Political Islam' in Kosovo or even of an imminent Islamist domination. Constitutionally, Kosovo is a secular state and is neutral in matters of religious beliefs. The Kosovar Constitution[41] guarantees freedom of belief, conscience and religion, including 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 (Article 38). Likewise, the Republic of Kosovo ensures and protects religious autonomy and religious monuments within its territory (Article 39). Besides, none of the major political parties of Albanians is affiliated to Islam. The only political party that is often identified as an Islamic party is the Party of Justice (*Partia e Drejtësisë* – PD), founded in 1999. This party, which in 2007 could not enter the Kosovar Parliament (it had around 10,000 votes), is promoting the preservation of local (religious) tradition. According to its political program, the PD is based "on principles of conservative

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[40] Linda Karadaku, 'Kosovo deports self-proclaimed imam, closes mosque,' *SEETimes*, 11 March 2010, available at: < http://www.setimes.com/cocoon/setimes/xhtml/en_GB/features/setimes/features/2010/03/11/feature-03 > [last accessed 3 November 2010].

[41] The Constitution of the Republic of Kosovo. Available at: http://www.assembly-kosova.org

democracy… and on the values of national and religious identity"[42]. The party declares its opposition to any extremist ideology that contradicts international conventions on human rights and engages in the promotion of religious tolerance in Kosovo. In terms of its declared goals, the PD is probably much closer to Christian democratic tradition in Western Europe than to Islamist movements in the Arab world. In terms of the regional politics, however, it promotes closer ties with Turkey.

Ever since the emergence of the first Albanian political parties in Kosovo, the latter applied the strategy of rapprochement with Kosovo's Western allies as an antidote to the politicisation of Islam in Kosovo and to religious fundamentalism. Certainly, both the secular character of Albanian nationalism and strategic political calculations of the political elites in Kosovo condition these developments. Kosovo's late President Ibrahim Rugova, who showed great sympathy toward the (Christian) West and provided extraordinary support to Kosovo's Catholic minority, championed this policy more than anyone else. Rugova and other politicians did everything to undermine the role of Islam in politics in Kosovo, sometimes to extremes. Dreaming of an Albanian identity that is European, Kosovo's political leaders have often gone too far in suppressing and undermining the Islamic layer of Albanian identity. An interesting case in point is an international incident that occurred in 2003 that shows how Islam has been suppressed even to the point of becoming a taboo. It happened when the OSCE Mission in Kosovo invited representatives of Kosovar institutions, including Parliament and Government, to a working visit to Germany. When the delegation discovered that their interpreter would be an Albanian OSCE employee wearing a headscarf, they cut their trip short as a sign of opposition[43] To the Kosovar delegation, this behaviour was unacceptable, conveying a wrong message to the West and a 'false' representation of Albanians' 'real' identity. On the other hand, for OSCE officials, the interpreter, Besa Ismaili, was free to express and practice her religion. In

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[42] See the Political Program of the Party of Justice, available at: www.drejtesia.org.

[43] See Beqë Cufaj, "Ferexhja që prishi vizitën," [The headscarf that cancelled the visit] *Koha Ditore*, 28.11.2003. Available at: < http://www.stublla.com/Shqip/Fjala_lire/ZefAhmeti/Shkrimet001/November/bekiYmeri/LARG-FANATIZMIT.htm > [last accessed: 12.06.2010].

this case, "[t]he religious factor disturbed the dominant nationalist meta-narrative on Kosovar Albanian identity"[44].

In a more recent case, the Ministry of Education adopted an Administrative Instruction (No. 6/2010) that introduced a ban on headscarves in public elementary and secondary schools. As a result, some headscarf-clad girls were prevented from entering their schools in different locations, upsetting many Muslims in Kosovo. On 18 June 2010, these Muslims organised a rally in Prishtina, the capital, which was attended by some 5,000 women wearing headscarves and by bearded men. This protest, which was the biggest one organised in Kosovo against religious discrimination, attracted considerable media attention both locally and internationally. Speaking to a journalist from Reuters, one of the organisers of this protest who heads the Orphans' Charity in Prishtina warned that if there is no solution, "we may organise violent protests and even block roads"[45]. Another smaller protest was organised in October. On the other hand, although BIK opposed the ban and promised to take the case to the Constitutional Court of Kosovo, it opposed these protests, calling for institutional means of solving the problem. Certainly, both cases are symptoms of a growing tension between a rather conjectural tendency of 'self-negation' (to convince Europeans that Albanians are not really Muslims) and the increasing role of Islam in Kosovar society and politics.

As far as behaviour towards foreign interference is concerned, Kosovo's institutions and their supporting states did almost nothing to control the flow of foreign aid networks. Even after 9/11, various NGOs from the Gulf were left unhindered in their activities. The only change was the one in popular perception, with people beginning to look at these foreign NGOs with greater suspicion.[46] The situation is almost the same in the aftermath of Kosovo's independence. One

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[44] Vjollca Krasniqi, "Imagery, gender and power: the politics of representation in post-war Kosova," *Feminist Review 86,* (2007), 18.

[45] Fatos Bytyqi, "Headscarf ban upsets devout Muslims in Kosovo," *Reuters*, 24 June 2010, available at: < http://www.reuters.com/article/idUSBYT428644 > [last accessed 1 November 2010].

[46] Albanian moral support and sympathy for the US after 9/11 has become even stronger. So, in 2009, reacting to the news that a man from Kosovo was among a group of suspected terrorists arrested by US authorities, media, civil society organisations and individuals from all regions and religions in Kosovo 'lynched' their compatriot and expressed their sorrow for this cowardly act against a "nation to whom Albanians owe their freedom and

important factor is that now, as then, Kosovar institutions[47] have limited capacities to control the flow of people and ideas in Kosovo.[48] This leaves enough space for foreign intervention.

Islam and foreign policy orientation of Kosovo

Religion influences Kosovo's foreign policy orientation in a very unusual manner. Suffering from an unexplainable complex of inferiority and driven by the need to align itself with the 'free and democratic world', Kosovar leaders have been wary of any tendency to bring Islam into the political space. Most striking is that Kosovar leaders utilise and politicise the religion of the minority, that is Catholicisim, and undermine Islam, the religion of the majority. As a local commentator put it, "Catholicism, the religion of less than 10 per cent of the Albanian population of Kosovo, is being marketed politically in attempts to show a perceived cultural shift of Muslim Kosovars towards the West, mediated by Catholicism"[49]. It all started with the use of Mother Teresa's figure in the form of portraits, statues and street names, and continues today with the erection of a huge Catholic cathedral in the centre of Prishtina, which, not surprisingly, will carry her name. Kosovar leaders are using the resurgent Catholicism, referred

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state." Readers' comments on the news are available at: < http://www.koha.net/index.php?cid=1,22,22240 > [last accessed: 13.06.2010].

[47] Kosovo inaugurated its Security Council only in 2009 and a new National Security Strategy still has to be approved. See Besa Beqiri, "Kosovo Security Council is inaugurated," *SETimes*, 12.02.2009, available at: < http://www.setimes.com/cocoon/setimes/xhtml/en_GB/features/setimes/features/2009/02/12/feature-02 > [last accessed: 15.06.2010].

[48] Occasionally, the Kosovar Police managed to arrest people suspected for connections with religious radical groups. One such action was undertaken in May 2010 when 5 people were arrested in Prizren for illegal possession of weapons. Kosovo media reported that the arrested persons are part of the radical Wahhabi branch of Islam and that they were part of the humanitarian organisation "Sinqeriteti" or "Sincerity". See Petrit Collaku, "Kosovo Police Arrest Five in Large-Scale Raid," *Balkan Insight*, 24 May 2010. Available at: < http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/main/news/28313 > [last accessed 01.06.2010].

[49] Besnik Sinani, "The Politics of Islam in Kosovo," *New Kosova Report*, 03.03.2008. Available at: < http://www.newkosovareport.com/20080302689/Views-and-Analysis/The-Politics-of-Religion-in-Kosovo.html > [last accessed: 10.06.2010].

to as "cultural baptism" by the Bishop of the Catholic Church in Kosovo, as a European political ID card.[50]

In line with this strategy, Kosovo's leaders have consistently shown signs of hesitation in establishing closer ties with predominantly Muslim states, especially those in the Gulf. Though in desperate need of being recognised by more states, Kosovo has been hesitant to approach member states of the Organisation of the Islamic Conference[51] and those from the Arab League. It would not be exaggerated to say that this reluctance is rooted in the fear of being labelled as a 'Muslim State'. However, in an unusual recent move, the Kosovar government has decided to appoint the former Mufti of Kosovo, Rexhep Boja as its *Charge d'Affairs* in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. This might be an indication that the Government is actually acutely aware of the influence of Kosovo's religious leaders in the 'Muslim world' and tends to use this influence for immediate political gains.

Nevertheless, Kosovo's partner states with a Muslim majority are Albania (seen as the kin state by many Kosovar Albanians) and Turkey.[52] The existence of multi-level ties—historic, political, religious, personal (built as a result of migration in the twentieth century)—between Albanians and Turkey make the latter an important actor and ally. Turkey has increased its diplomatic and cultural presence in Kosovo since 1999. It has been one of the first countries in the world to recognise Kosovo's independence and provides considerable political and economic support. This enhanced cooperation has created suitable conditions for a higher

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[50] Ibid.

[51] Not a single institutional leader in Kosovo, apart from the Party of Justice leadership, has ever mentioned the possibility of applying for membership in the OIC, at a time when Albania, with a lower percentage of Muslims and with stronger and more organised Catholic and Orthodox communities, is a member of the OIC.

[52] Relations between Albanians and Turkey have been seen either through the nationalist romantic point of view ('five centuries of Ottoman oppression and yoke') or through a more religious-based perspective that sees Turks as religious fellows and natural allies of Albanians (against the Orthodox neighbours in the Balkans). This is part of a broader and longer debate on Albanian identity. One such recent debate (2006) was between Rexhep Qosja (an academic from Kosovo) who argues that Islam is an indistinguishable part of the Albanian identity and that Albanians' religion does not contradict their Western orientation and Ismail Kadare (the most famous Albanian writer) a proponent of Albanians' (Christian) European identity.

presence and increased activity of Turkish cultural, educational and faith-based state agencies and NGOs, such as TIKA (Turkish International Cooperation and Development Agency), *Diyanet* (the Presidency of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Turkey), and other organisations and educational institutions which are part of the Gülen Movement[53] network. Just in 2006, TIKA implemented 32 different projects in Kosovo.[54] Many of the religious and cultural objects representing Ottoman heritage in Kosovo are reconstructed with funds from TIKA and the Turkish government. In a recent visit to Kosovo, Turkey's Prime Minister opened the Fatih Mosque (built in 1461) in Prishtina, which was reconstructed by Turkey.[55]

Albanians see Turkey as their traditional ally and an ally of the West, above all, of the US, making Turkey a 'trustworthy' partner of Kosovar Albanians in their efforts to create a modern European state and identity. Undoubtedly, this opens up the space for an easier penetration of Turkish organisations into Kosovar society. It seems that this space is being filled effectively through investments in education, through the publication and dissemination of books and other religious materials. The proximity of the Turks to the forms of Islamic tradition

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[53] The 'Gülen Movement', which has been continuously spreading its educational activities in more than 130 countries in around 20 world languages, began formally in Kosovo on 1 October 2004, through the Foundation for Education and Culture 'Atmosfera', initially in Prizren and since 2006 in Pristina, where it is based now. Among other things, it has been significantly contributing to interfaith dialogue in Kosovo. For a detailed analysis of the activities of the 'Gülen Movement' and its role in increasing the interfaith dialogue in Kosovo, see Jeton Mehmeti and Sadik Mehmeti, "The Need for Interfaith Dialogue in Kosovo. The Contributions of Gülen Movement," presented at *The fifth International Conference on Islam in the Contemporary World*: *"The Gülen Movement in Thought and Practice",* Louisiana State University, 6-7 March 2009.

[54] For more see the official site of TIKA: < www.tika.gov.tr >.

[55] Speaking at a ceremony held to re-open the mosque, Erdogan said that the Ottoman heritage just in Kosovo was almost more than the cultural heritage in all of Anatolia, with the exception of Istanbul. He added that "such works are the signs of our brotherhood. We will boost together and continue to progress on our path". In his two-day visit in Kosovo, the first one of a Turkish Prime-Minister, he also opened the Sultan Murat Hudavendigar Tomb Culture and Promotion House and paid a visit to Prizren where he received a very warm welcome. Moreover, speaking at a press conference after the meeting, Kosovo's Prime Minister Hashim Thaçi and Turkey's Prime Minister Erdogan referred to one another as 'my brother'. *See Joint press conference by Prime Minister of Republic of Kosovo Hashim Thaçi and Prime Minister of Republic of Turkey Recep Tayyip Erdogan*, available at: < http://www.kryeministri-ks.net/?page=2,9,1713 > [last accessed 5 November 2010].

in Kosovo and the highly positive image of Turkey among Albanians ease the former's exercise of influence. At a time when short-term political considerations (especially the ones related to the consolidation of the state of Kosovo internationally, a field where Turkey is giving a substantial contribution) dominate the public opinion and debate, much criticism has not been expressed towards the Turkish presence as some form of neo-Ottoman domination.

2.2. Religion and politics in Macedonia: the 'clash of civilisations'?

After the declaration of its independence in 1991, Macedonia went through a peaceful and gradual process of democratisation, coupled with a policy of ethnic and religious privileging of the majority, which resulted in a state controlled by the Macedonians, that is by the Slavic speaking Orthodox majority. Unlike in other former Yugoslav republics, independence came without violence and armed conflict, but nevertheless involved an exclusive nation-building process. The so-called national homogenisation process had already begun in the 1980s, and intensified after the declaration of independence. The principal concern of nationalising elites was the role of the Albanian minority. Constituting almost one quarter of the overall population, Albanians in Macedonia and their political leaders insisted on the status of 'constituent people' in the country. For the political elites of the Macedonians, however, effective control of the state was seen as a precondition for the building of a homogenous Macedonian nation-state and a distinctive Macedonian identity. The institutionalisation of this ethnic and religious dominance was legalised with the adoption of a new constitution in 1991, which defined Macedonia as a "national state of the Macedonian people, in which full equality as citizens and permanent co-existence with the Macedonian people is provided for Albanians, Turks, Vlachs, Romanics and other nationalities living in the Republic of Macedonia", and speaks of "the Orthodox Church of Macedonia and other religious communities and groups"[56], thus underpinning a privileged treatment for the religion of the majority.

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[56] The Constitution of the Republic of Macedonia, 17 November 1991. Available at: < http://www.servat.unibe.ch/law/icl/mk00000_.html > [last accessed: 15.06.2010].

The position of Albanians was downgraded significantly.[57] From being a nationality in the SFRY, they were demoted to a 'national minority' in the new state of Macedonia and felt threatened by the Orthodox majority in the state-led campaign of reinforcing the fragile state and national identity. Like in other Orthodox-majority states in the region, religion came to play a decisive role in the definition of modern national identity. The revival of religion and a more prominent role of the Macedonian Orthodox Church in the public sphere created a "popular belief that there is no significant ethnic context outside religious identity"[58]. Especially under the right wing government in Skopje, the Orthodox Church of Macedonia received a very privileged treatment, reminiscent of the alliances between 'the altar and the throne'.

As far as the Albanians in Macedonia were concerned, the post 1991 period was experienced as a time of insecurity both in terms of their national and their religious identity, as both Albanian ethnicity as well as Islam were deemed incompatible with the Macedonian elite's vision for a national Orthodox Macedonian state. In this context, religion and ethnic identity were merged into a single cause that needed to be fought for and defended. Nathalie Clayer argues that the fusion of the national and religious identities seems to be a reaction of the Muslim Albanian minority against the Orthodox Macedonian majority under specific social and political conditions.[59] Since Albanians in Macedonia comprise the biggest Muslim group in Macedonia, with Turks, Roma, Gorani and Muslim Slavic Macedonians accounting for the rest, they felt they should be the front-runners in the battle with the state for an equal status of Islam within the state. In reality, relying on the tradition established under Communism which 'reserved' a privileged position for the Slavic Muslims in the Islamic Council, the Macedonian state has made attempts to keep under control the Islamic Religious Community of Macedonia, either through the appointment of a Slavic Macedonian as its head, or through the creation of an

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[57] Ljubica Spaskovska, 'In Search of a Demos: Transformations of Citizenship and Belonging in the Republic of Macedonia,' *CITSEE Working Paper Series, 2010/11* (CITSEE, 2010), 7.

[58] Ugo Vlaisavljevic, "Ethno-politics and the Divine God," *Transeuropeennes. Religions in Politics.* 91-106.

[59] Cited in Aydin Babuna, 'The Albanians of Kosovo and Macedonia: Ethnic Identity Superseding Religion,' 83-84.

alternative organisation.[60] However, a Muslim Albanian has led the Islamic Religious Community since 1993, when the latter became independent from the Islamic Community of Yugoslavia. A provocative attempt against the Islamic Religious Community was the creation of a separate 'Muslim Religious Community' by former Sarajevo *Reis-ul ulema*, Jakub Selimoski, who is Slav Macedonian.[61]

In the spring of 2001, an Albanian guerrilla group, the National Liberation Army (NLA), engaged in armed conflicts with the Macedonian security forces. NLA demanded full legal, political and religious equality (a partner nation status) for Albanians in Macedonia. After months of sporadic fighting, which claimed hundred of lives, Albanian and Macedonian political representatives under external pressure (mostly from the NATO and the European Union) signed the 'Ohrid Framework Agreement'. This agreement paved the way for major political reforms that improved the rights of the Albanian minority in Macedonia. As far as the religious factor is concerned, during the 2001 conflict, the relations between the Islamic Community of Macedonia and the Macedonian Orthodox Church deteriorated further because both organizations acted as religious wings of the rival ethnic groups.[62] After the conflict, in an attempt to reduce the privilege of the Macedonian Orthodox Church, Albanians demanded that the Islamic Religious Community be mentioned besides the Orthodox Church in Article 19 of the new constitution as one of the country's religious communities. The demand was fulfilled.

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[60] Even before the dissolution of the SFRY, Macedonian authorities, under the pretext of the threat of assimilation of the non-Albanian Muslims, have urged Slavic Muslims to form separate religious councils. Fearing assimilation of the small Muslim minorities (Muslim Slavs, Turks, Muslim Gypsies) by the Albanians, the Macedonian authorities set up a Torbesi (Muslim Slav) association and a Republican Community for Cultural and Scientific Events of Macedonian Muslims in the 1970s. The same logic was followed in the late 1980s, when some circles in Macedonia initiated the creation of cultural and political associations of the Egyptian communities, considered by many to be Muslim Roma. See Clayer as cited in Aydin Babuna, 'The Albanians of Kosovo and Macedonia: Ethnic Identity Superseding Religion,' 84.

[61] Gyorgy Lederer, 'Contemporary Islam in East Europe,' 15. Available at < http://www.nato.int/acad/fellow/97-99/lederer.pdf > [last accessed 6 November 2010].

[62] Aydin Babuna, "Albanian National Identity and Islam in the Post-Communist Era," *Perceptions*, *Volume VIII* (September-November 2003), 17.

However, in late 2001, a series of meetings took place between high-ranking representatives of the Macedonian Orthodox Church, the Islamic Religious Community, and other religious communities, culminating in the formation of The Council for Inter-religious Cooperation in Skopje in 2002.[63]

Generally, in the interim between Macedonia's independence and the conflict in 2001, the Macedonian Orthodox Church experienced a faster recovery as an institution and played a more influential role in the re-organisation of the religious life relative to the Islamic Religious Community, predominantly as a result of preferential treatment received from the state. In contrast, the Islamic Community was faced with often-insurmountable obstacles in gaining control over mosques, religious schools and other real estate, which it had owned and managed before the appropriation under the Yugoslav Communists. The eventual autonomy of the Islamic Religious Community of Macedonia in 1994 did not establish a strong institutional foundation, but it did lead to an association of the Community with the Albanian struggle. Ever since the Albanians administered the Islamic Religious Community, its mostly apolitical 'battles' with the state were reformulated as a struggle of Albanians for equality within the state of Macedonia.

Global discourses of the 'war on terror' and external influences

The 2001 conflict in Macedonia was not primarily about religion. Yet with the global effect of the 9/11 bombings, religion would eventually become the key element of distinction, also in Macedonia. Islam became politicised by both the state and by the Albanian community, albeit in different ways. During the Albanian insurgency in 2001, the Macedonian state had already made an attempt to imbue an Islamist and fundamentalist character in the Albanian leadership and tried hard to prove that the National Liberation Army (NLA) had ties with Islamic groups in the Balkans and elsewhere. After the 9/11 events, this discourse was much easier to launch in Europe and the US. As elsewhere, Macedonian politicians sought to capitalise on the 'war on terror' and thereby strengthen their position vis-à-vis Albanians. Almost a year after the end of the conflict in Macedonia, in March 2002, the Macedonian

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[63] Paul Mojzes, 'Orthodoxy and Islam in the Former Yugoslav Lands,' *Teme*, Vol. XXXI, (No. 4), 797.

Ministry of Interior announced that it had executed seven foreign militants of a terrorist group that "was in the area with the aim of attacking vital installations, Macedonian officials and the embassies of Germany, Great Britain and the US in Skopje"[64]. The police also said that they had found uniforms of the disbanded ethnic Albanian rebel group, the National Liberation Army, and video footage was shown in support of the claim. Before long, a rather sad truth was revealed—the seven victims were not terrorists, but illegal migrants who were transiting Macedonia to reach the EU. Even after this tragic event, the Macedonian state and security apparatus has appropriated 'anti-terrorism' discourse in order to portray the mostly Muslim Albanians with suspicion. Evocative of Samuel Huntington's concept of the 'clash of civilisations', nationalist Macedonian circles tended to draw a line of essential difference between the 'right side' and the 'wrong side', with the Albanians occupying the latter.

As far as the Albanian parties in Macedonia are concerned, none of them has a religious affiliation, even though they have constantly attempted to control the institution of the Islamic Religious Community. Nevertheless, various requests coming from Macedonia's Albanians, deemed to be national in their essence, often assume religious connotations, largely because the contested nation-building of the Macedonian majority is deeply intertwined with the re-emergence of Orthodoxy. A case in point is the ongoing debate on the urban revitalisation project 'Skopje 2014', which foresees the erection of a series of historical monuments in the city centre, together with a new church.[65] Outraged by what they see as an attempt by Orthodox Macedonians for the symbolic appropriation of the landscape and territory, Albanian NGOs and the Islamic Religious Community have reacted by demanding permission to rebuild an old Mosque, which had been destroyed decades before by the Yugoslav state (before WWII). Since religious and ethnic cleavages in the case of Macedonians and Albanians more or less correspond with one another, politics and religion are easily confounded.

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[64] BBC, *'Foreign militants' killed in Macedonia*, 2 March 2002, available at: < http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/europe/1850501.stm > [last accessed: 15.06.2010].

[65] This is a continuation of the project of the Macedonian state began in late 1990s—after the coming to power of the right wing party (VMRO)—to place as many landmarks as possible to prove the Macedonian and Orthodox character of the capital city. A case in point is the erection of a 66 meter cross, known as the 'Millennium Cross', on the top of Skopje's surrounding mountains, overlooking the city.

Another important factor of Muslim Albanian identity in Macedonia is a result of its interaction with neighbouring Kosovo, the channel through which the external influence of Muslim organizations reached Macedonia. With the Kosovo war in 1999, many faith-based aid agencies arrived in Macedonia to provide help for Kosovar refugees. Later on, they spread their activities in Macedonia where several Saudi-funded mosques have been built in the Albanian villages. As a result, a power struggle seems to have begun within the Islamic Religious Community between the moderate mainstream and the radical (Wahhabi) wing. Whilst leaders of the Islamic Religious Community in Macedonia do not deny the presence of the Wahhabis in the country, according to the more moderate Muslims, the Wahhabi sect now controls five mosques in Skopje.[66] Earlier this year, the Islamic Religious Community has suspended Ramadan Ramadani (who rejects any accusation of radicalism), as imam of the Isa Beg mosque in Skopje and prohibited him from organizing prayers, claiming that he is the leader of the Wahhabis. After this incident, Sylejman Rexhepi, the head of the Islamic Community, accused the radicals of wanting to distort the image of Macedonia's Muslims and urged the government and the international community to take radical measures against the Wahhabi groups on the rise in the country.[67] Despite the fact that the presence of Wahabbis in Macedonia is undeniable, these claims and counter-accusations might as well have political connotations. Major political parties representing Albanians in Macedonia, the Democratic Union for Integration (*Bashkimi Demokratik për Integrim – BDI)* and the Albanian Democratic Party (*Partia Demokratike Shqiptare – PDSH*) have been engaged in a struggle for control of the Islamic Religious Community of Macedonia for years. The latest developments in the Isa Beg mosque in Skopje might be part of this political struggle for control as well.

The Islamic Community of Macedonia has received donations from different Islamic networks, such as the Islamic Bank of Development, mainly through its links with the

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[66] Konstantin Testorides, "Radical Islam on rise in Balkans," *Associated Press*, 19 September 2010, available at < http://hosted.ap.org/dynamic/stories/E/EU_BALKANS_RADICAL_ISLAM?SITE=ORROS&SECTION=HOME&TEMPLATE=DEFAULT > [last accessed 5 November 2010].

[67] Associated Press, *Macedonia: Moderate Muslims seek help against sect*, 20 September 2010, available at < http://enuws.com/macedonia-moderate-muslims-seek-help-against-sect-ap > [last accessed 5 November 2010].

humanitarian organization 'el-Hilal'.[68] However, recent conflicts within the Islamic Community in Macedonia have raised concerns about the rise of more radical Islam in Macedonia. On the other hand, the Macedonian state, overall, has kept a closer eye on the activities of foreign organisations, mainly because of the fear of radicalization of Muslim communities and further destabilization of what has been a rather fragile country throughout the 1990s and 2000s. To this end, the Macedonian state has also intensified security cooperation with Israel.[69] Nevertheless, nationalist Macedonian circles have made attempts to use the alleged 'Islamic threat' to instil fear in the public and to legitimise their anti-Albanian stance via Europe and the US.

Despite Macedonia's Orthodox nation-building process, and especially after the resolution of the tensions between the Albanian minority and the Macedonian state, Turkey became a key actor in Macedonia, enhancing cooperation between the two countries. Consequently, the number of Turkey-based organisations increased their presence in Macedonia in the realms of religion, culture and education. This presence coincided with the increased role of Turkey in the Balkans, yet preceded it in part by Turkey's policy to keep Greece's regional politics in check. However, one should note that both parties, Albanians and Macedonians, view Turkey as an ally, but not as a mutual one. Macedonia sees Turkey as a counterbalance to Greece's ambitions towards Macedonia. On the other hand, Albanians historically saw Turkey as an ally against their Orthodox neighbouring states.[70] The Islamic and Ottoman heritage in Macedonia remains a source of disagreement between Albanians and Macedonians. Albanians,

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[68]   Aydin Babuna, "Albanian National Identity and Islam in the Post-Communist Era," 16.

[69]   High officials of both states have exchanged visits and have openly spoken about the threat from Islamic terrorism in the Balkans. See Alsat, *(S)ka Al-Kaeda ne Balkan?* [There is(no) in the Balkans?], 17.01.2010, available at: < http://alsat-m.tv/lajme/vendi/22306.html > [last accessed: 15.06.2010].

[70]   As a reaction to Turkey's increased influence in the Balkans (outlined by the Foreign Minister of Turkey, Ahmet Davutoglu, in a speech in Sarajevo last year) many Albanian intellectuals from Kosovo, Macedonia and Albania have expressed their suspicion toward Turkey's new foreign policy and its implications in the case of Albanians. Some view it as a 'Neo Ottomanism'. See Arbën Xhaferi, "Sfida osmane," *Gazeta Shekulli*, 13.10.2009, available at: < http://www.shekulli.com.al/2009/10/31/sfida-osmane.html > [last accessed: 16.06.2010]; Prio Misha, "Neo-otomanizmi dhe Shqipëria," *Gazeta Shekulli*, 22.02.2010, available at: < http://www.shekulli.com.al/2010/02/22/neo-otomanizmi-dhe-shqiperia.html > {last accessed: 16.06.2010].

on the other hand, consider the Ottoman heritage to belong to them as the biggest Muslim population and as people who have used it for religious purposes for centuries. On the other hand, the Macedonian state insists on the fact that the Ottoman heritage belongs to all its citizens as a cultural heritage and to Macedonia's tiny Turkish minority. Turkey's claims to this heritage might alienate Albanians in Macedonia, whose primary concern is to improve their national status and position within the state.

Conclusion

This paper has addressed the interplay between Islam and politics and internal and external actors among Albanians in Kosovo and Macedonia. It argued that Islam has never been allowed into the political space, despite occasional attempts to politicise it and utilise it for political and nationalist expediency. This relative absence of Islam from the political sphere is due to a specific social and political context, and due to a historical experience which forced Albanian nation-builders to de-emphasise religion. Nevertheless, differences do exist. One can depict a higher presence of Islam among Albanians in Macedonia, for reasons related to their position as a minority within an Orthodox majority country that is undergoing a process of reaffirmation of religion as an essential pillar of an emerging Macedonian national identity. It is precisely this factor and the overlap of religious and ethnic identities that imposes a higher level of religious assertion among Albanians in Macedonia. In terms of foreign policy orientation, however, Islam remains Albanians' 'forbidden fruit' for they see it as incompatible with modern European identity, to which they aspire sometimes so desperately. The widespread pro-Americanism, which is both conjectural and structural, and EU support among Albanians does not promise optimal conditions for growth of radical Islamic movements. Nevertheless, it is obvious that recently Islam is playing a bigger role in both politics and society among Albanians in Kosovo and Macedonia.

In every case, it is the overall political and social context that shapes the development and transformation of identity, and in this context, religious identities as well. In the case of the Albanians and Islam, the growing foreign influence after the dissolution of Yugoslavia has left considerable traces in the region and has introduced followers of traditional forms of localized

Islam to a new and radically different form of Islam known as Salafism or Wahhabism. The appearance of long beards and *niqab*[71] are a clear expression of this influence. Although it is obvious that the spread of this reactionary and austere interpretation of Islam in the region has become visible after the dissolution of the SFRY, it is an extreme exaggeration to speak of "[t]he coming Balkan caliphate"[72]. The fact remains that both Kosovo and Macedonia are oriented towards EU membership. As such, it is not in these states' interest to see their Muslim populations radicalised. This does not mean, however, that various international networks of faith-based organisations and Islamist fundamentalists will not make any further attempt to spread their influence and eventually change the face of Islam in the region. It is undeniable that Wahhabis are present in the region, including in Kosovo and Macedonia, and that there are centres where radical brands of Islam are preached. However, the simple fact of their existence does not necessarily mean that Wahhabism is becoming a trend in the region.

As far as Turkey is concerned, the state is a close ally of both Kosovo and Macedonia and this status provides for more opportunities for Turkey-based organisations to operate in the Balkans. Turkey's constitutional secularism makes it a more credible ally in the eyes of the Balkan countries, in addition to the common links from the Ottoman past. This way, one can speak of an increasing role for Turkey in the Balkans—as a protector not only of Muslims, but also of smaller nations more generally, like in the case of Macedonia. It remains to be seen how these countries will react to Turkey's newest foreign policy vision of having 'zero problems with neighbours' and how it will reflect on the spread or religious and cultural organisations from Turkey in the Balkans.

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[71] In recent years one can observe a (rather slight) increase in the number of young girls who wear *hiqab* (headscarf), especially in Kosovo. However, contrary to *niqab*, which is a relatively new occurrence among Albanians, the headscarf has a longer tradition associated with the patriarchal culture dominant especially in rural areas.

[72] Title of a book published by Christopher Deliso in 2007. The author argues that the threat of radical Islam to Europe and the West comes from the Balkans and its Muslim dominated countries, which are being used by Wahhabis as a "hub from where to challenge Europe". See Christopher Deliso, *The coming Balkan caliphate: the threat of radical Islam to Europe and the West* (Westport and London: Praeger Security International, 2007).

Finally, a problem, both practical and analytical, is the use of the term 'Wahhabi' to describe anything that is different from the local tradition of religious practice. Or, even worse, the term is often used by local people to discredit opponents in occasional power struggles within the Islamic Communities in Kosovo and Macedonia. Therefore, it is essential that the whole complexity of 'Wahhabism', both as doctrine and transnational movement, be placed in the context of the globalisation of Islam and its effects in various regions of the world, including the region of the Balkans. Without a critical appraisal of this complexity, long beards and *niqab* on the streets of Prishtina and Skopje do not tell us much about the role of Islam in everyday life and the spread of 'Wahhabism' in the Balkan region as a whole.