

Conclusion

European Modernity and Islamic Reformism among the Late-Ottoman and Post-Ottoman Muslims of the Balkans (1830s-1945)

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From the end of the 16th century the Ottoman Empire was in a state of political, economic and social decline. By the beginning of the 19th century territorial losses restricted its sovereignty to the region of the Balkans, the Near East and part of the Middle East and its central administration was unable to impose its authority on the state districts. Increased autonomy by non-Muslim *millets*, corruption and power abuse by state officials, cessionary moves by national movements and powerful Muslim warlords, such as Ali Pasha in western Balkans, were phenomena which characterized this period. The decline of the Ottoman state made necessary the introduction of reforms, while at the same time increased the bargaining power of powerful European states that wished to promote their own interests. These states interfered with the internal affairs of the Ottoman state and pushed for reforms with the aim that, through the introduction of reforms, they would promote new opportunities and better guarantees for existing interests. At the same time these states feared that a further decline in the Ottoman Empire would intensify political and military instability in the Balkans, which in turn could also threaten the security of Europe.

Driven by necessity and political pressure, in the early 19th century the Ottoman Empire introduced a series of political reforms known as Tanzimat reforms. Among others, these reforms aimed at strengthening further the self-rule of various non-Muslim groups and introduce their political equality to the Muslims under the concept of Ottomanism, i.e. the official recognition of a common Ottoman citizenship which presupposed political loyalty to the Ottoman dynasty in return for the provision of the same rights to all its members, be they Muslims or non-Muslims. In other words, the Tanzimat reforms abolished the traditional distinction of the Ottoman subjects to those belonging to the *ummah* or who are the *dhimmi* and regarded all of them as Ottoman citizens with the same political rights, providing that they would be loyal to the Sultan. Their long-term aim was to transform the Ottoman Empire from a 'backward', 'pre-modern' state, to a modern European one. However, the introduction of Tanzimat reforms intensified violence between Muslim and non-Muslim groups in the Balkans. Muslims perceived the increase of the rights of Christians as an insult to their religion and this, in combination with other reasons such as the easy accessibility of the people to the many stores of mutinies that existed in the region, the fact that majority of Christians were unarmed, the excessive number of soldiers in the region, in relation to their appalling living and security conditions, increased acts of violence in Macedonia and Kosovo, as Nadine Akhund and Eva Frantz show in this issue. Violence was further exacerbated by the wars in which the Ottoman Empire was engaged and the influx of Muslim refugees from territories which the Ottoman state had lost, who often channeled their fury for the loss of their own people and properties to local Christian groups who were protégée of the Russian and Habsburg Empires with which Istanbul was engaged in wars during the period in question.

In her paper Eva Frantz argues that the exacerbation of violence in the region of Kosovo solidified traditional identity patterns which had been sketched by the Ottoman millet system in the region in the late Ottoman period. She challenges arguments of classic Albanian and Serbian historiography which often traces roots of what they call as ‘traditional Albanian-Serbian animosity’ to this period. The author argues that, in the Tanzimat and post-Tanzimat period the patterns of violence were independent from confessional or ethnic factors. Violent acts were not motivated by a particular ethnic group towards the other. Instead it was driven from the prospect of material gain and status. Both Nadine Akhund and Eva Frantz agree that Tanzimat reforms were not welcomed by both Muslims and Christians because they were seen as responsible for the increase of violence and insecurity in the region. This was a climate which states such as Russia and Serbia, which had vested interests in the region and followed irredentist foreign policies, often exploited: they stirred up fears towards Muslims and encouraged secessionist movements among Christians. Nadine Akhund also claims that the Tanzimat reforms were mainly confined to infrastructure projects and provided little in terms of democratization and equal rights of access to the civil service for all ethnic and religious groups. In their papers, both Nadine Akhund and Eva Frantz introduce the issue of violence in the late Ottoman period, which has been little researched, particularly in relation to the influence of European modernity in the Balkans and change of collective identity patterns.

The developments in the late Ottoman period transformed the political map of the region and set many of the parameters which defined the post-Ottoman era. For instance, the way that Muslims were seen and treated by Christians had its roots in the views, perceptions, stereotypes and behavior patterns which were established during the late Ottoman period. A great segment of Balkan Muslims became minorities of Christian nation states whose political elites treated them as second class citizens. These elites often organized and ruled Muslim populations of their countries in similar ways to those that non-Muslim *millet*s were organized and treated in the late Ottoman period.¹ Furthermore, the late Ottoman *millet* system in many ways determined national identities during the late Ottoman and post-Ottoman era. Nicole Immig argues that constitutional documents at the time of the Greek revolution defined Greek nationality primarily in terms of religious affiliation. Such a definition is also apparent many years later. For instance, the obligatory population exchange between Greece and Turkey in 1923 was conducted on the basis of religious identity and not of ethnicity. In other words, Greek Orthodox of Turkey were regarded as Greeks – regardless of whether they were Greek-speaking, Turkish-speaking or of any other ethno-linguistic background – and thus were exchanged with Muslims of Greece who were equally regarded as Turks – regardless of their ethnic origin.²

In the post-Ottoman period, the political elites of the Balkan nation states continued the modernization project in which the late Ottoman state was engaged. The aim of these projects was not to improve the infrastructure of their countries. They also aimed to develop ‘modern’ states and societies which would escape their political and social maladies –which they regarded as remnants of the Ottoman past – and mirror those of the ‘modern’ and ‘progressive’ societies of the European mainstream in which they included states such as Britain, France, Germany, Austro-Hungarian Empire and Russia. The socioeconomic conditions for Muslims in these states were different from those in

the Ottoman period. In most cases, Muslims were religious minorities in states which emphasized their Christian character. This, together with discriminatory policies towards them, led a great number of Balkan Muslims to migrate to the Ottoman Empire. International historiography tended to interpret Muslim migration in terms of planned state strategies against Muslim populations, but this does not seem to be the case always. In her article, Nicole Immig argues that the emigration of the about 40,000 Muslims of Epirothessaly to the Ottoman Empire after the region's cession to Greece should be explained in terms of socioeconomic factors rather than the natural consequence of an executed plan by the Greek state that aimed to force Muslims out of the region. With her article, Nicole Immig opens two chapters for academic research which has been little investigated. The first is the effects of socioeconomic and political conditions of European modernity on the Muslim minorities of the Balkans. The second is the study of the political, economic and social life of the pre-1923 Muslim populations in Greece – those who in 1923 were forced to migrate to Turkey under the terms of the 1923 Lausanne Treaty.

Another subject that has been little researched is that of the process of the break up of the Ottoman “*ummah*” and the development of ethnic consciousness among its various ethnic components. In her article, Eleftheria Manta argues that ethnic consciousness of the Çams of Greece developed as a result of their reaction to policies of Greece, Italy and Albania in the 1920s. While much academic research has been conducted on the development of national movements out of the Ottoman non-Muslim *millets*, there are issues which are related to the development of national consciousness among the various ethnic components which constituted the *ummah* in the Ottoman Empire which have been little researched. For instance, the Çams of Greece: the organization of their communities, their relations to the Greek and the Albanian states, their economic and social lives are all open to academic research.

Balkan Muslims have been often received as pre-modern societies, remnants of an Ottoman past. These views were often used to justify many state discriminatory policies which were applied to them in the name of their modernization or integration into the societies of their countries of residence. For instance many of the discriminatory policies of the Bulgarian communist regimes towards the country's Muslims after the end of the 1960s were justified in the name of modernizing the country's Muslims. These policies were culminated in the campaign in the mid-1980s to forcibly change the Muslim names of all Bulgarian Muslims and replace them with Bulgarian ones. This decision was taken within the close circle of the Bulgarian communist leader, Todor Zhivkov, and was named *Vŭzroditelñia Protse*s (Regenerative Process).³ Despite these views, however, Balkan Muslims did not remain isolated from the developments of European modernity. In fact, they followed them in ways in which this relationship was either not noticed or was misunderstood. An expression of that relationship was Islamic reformist movements which appeared in many Muslim communities of the region and aimed to persuade Muslims to leave behind elements which made them look backward and pre-modern, and proceed to a series of reforms which would look more ‘modern’ and thus facilitate their integration into the changing political, economic and social conditions of their times. After all, many of the reforms which these movements supported were not totally foreign to the Muslim communities of the region, some of them have been introduced during the Tanzimat reforms and, since the 1920s, most of them were being adopted by Kemalist

Turkey, which in many way operated as a conduit of European modernity for the Balkan Muslims.

Islamic reformism clashed with Islamic conservatism which was mainly expressed through the Muslim clergy. The latter often discouraged the promotion of reformist agendas inside the Muslim societies and propounded an attachment to the Islamic tradition and the communities' political status quo as it had been shaped in the late Ottoman period. In cases when the Muslim communities were minorities in Christian nation states, they often forged political alliance with the state authorities. The latter often discouraged Islamic reformism which they saw as political movements which channeled Kemalist national ideas to Muslim populations of their countries and thus promoted Turkish nationalism that could transform Muslim religious communities of *millet*-type to national minorities and encourage secessionist movements among Muslims in the future, able to challenge state sovereignty. Post-1920s Greece and Bulgaria were two cases in which Kemalist reformism was in conflict with Islamic conservatism which was mainly expressed through the Muslim clergy.

In the case of Greece this conflict took place among the Muslim minority of Western Thrace which was exempted from the 1923 obligatory population exchange – as it did the Greek Orthodox of Istanbul and the two islands of Imvros (Gokçeaada) and Tenedos (Bozcaada). The Çams in Greek Epirus were not affected by that conflict since geographically they were remote from the developments in Turkey, and they felt ethnically and culturally kin to Albanian Muslims and thus were more influenced by the political and social developments in that country. At the beginning, Islamic conservatism gained the political support of the Greek state. It is noteworthy that due to this support a large number of high-ranking Muslim officials, around 150, from Turkey, including the *Sheikh-ul-Islam*, the highest religious official in the Ottoman Empire after the Sultan, sought shelter in Western Thrace during the 1920s and the beginning of the 1930s due to the political persecutions against Muslim conservatives by Kemalists in Turkey.⁴ The Greek state stopped the political support for Islamic conservatism in Western Thrace and forced the Muslim conservatives from Turkey, who had fled to Western Thrace to leave the country at the beginning of the 1930s, due to the policy of Greco-Turkish rapprochement in the 1930s which culminated with the signing of the Greco-Turkish treaty of friendship in 1932.⁵

In the case of Bulgaria, Anna Mirkova shows some aspects of the conflict between Islamic conservatism and Kemalist reformism in interwar Bulgaria. The author analyzes how this conflict was developed and the political agendas as well as the strategies by both sides on the issues of education and political control of the Muslim community councils. Anna Mirkova also assesses the role of the Bulgarian state in the conflict. Anna Mirkova provides an aspect in her analysis which has been little explored by academic research so far. This is the minority protection treaties conducted under the auspices of the League of Nations, which contributed to making national minorities an issue of competing national sovereignties and in the case of Balkan Muslims attempted to bridge two conflicting tasks: to advance individual rights, while at the same time uphold collective rights. This is to say that, in interwar Bulgaria, Bulgarian Muslims were regarded as Bulgarian citizens with the same rights with all other citizens, while at the same time Bulgarian Muslims were regarded as members of a minority group and, as such, were forced to participate in and be represented to the state by the Muslim minority

institutions as members of a collective group. Thus, Bulgarian Muslims had to attend specific schools provided for the Muslim minority and were expected to participate in specific minority institutions as members of the Muslim minority community

This framework created a series of problems which were to become apparent in due course. Under the framework provided by the post-Ottoman minority treaties, an ethnic Turk, member of the Bulgarian Muslim minority had to receive his education in schools which used the Arabic and not the Latin script as was the case in neighboring Turkey, a Muslim man had to wear the *fez* and a Muslim woman the *hijab* (veil), while their family and social life preserve a patriarchal structure, with pre-determined gender roles – in general women were regarded and treated as inferior to men. For a member of the Muslim minority to change this or opt out of this system, theoretically, there were two options: a) to change religion; b) to clash with this system. Kemalist reformists in Bulgaria followed the second option. They clashed with the system of minority structures as it was established in the post-Ottoman period in Bulgaria. In due time, they controlled the minority political organs and succeeded to pass educational and other reforms in line with the Kemalist reforms in Turkey. However, this left open the option of Turkification of the Muslim minority and misrepresentation of other Bulgarian ethnic groups such as the Slav-speaking Muslims (Pomaks) and the Roma. Inter-ethnic relations between Muslim ethnic groups in Christian Balkan states, political and cultural relations between Balkan Muslim minorities and Muslim Balkan states such as Turkey, Albania and Bosnia-Herzegovina, as well as the Arab world have been little researched so far.

Islamic reformism was not restricted to Kemalist Turkey and Balkan Muslim minorities such as those in Bulgaria and Greece. It appeared in other areas of the Balkans. Two cases which are examined in this issue are those of Bosnia-Herzegovina and Albania. In the first, the region's political and cultural contacts with Western Europe – for a period, Bosnia-Herzegovina was also under the rule of the Habsburg Empire – brought it in touch with modern European ideas which were expressed through reformist Muslim individuals and movements. Islamic reformism in the inter-war Bosnia-Herzegovina was inspired by Kemalist reforms in Turkey, which in the eyes of the Bosnian Muslim reformists represented a 'success story' of modernization for the Muslim world. The argument of Bosnian reformists was that if Turkey which was regarded by Bosnian Muslims as the 'cradle of Islam' implemented a successful modernization project, why not Bosnian Muslims. Fabio Giomi points out that the agenda of Muslim reformists in Bosnia-Herzegovina was similar to that of Kemalist Turkey. It referred to the Muslims' dressing code – i.e. the abolition of the *hijab* for Muslim women and the substitution of the *fez* with the West European-style hats for men; education, with the introduction of the Latin script; the use of *waqf* properties for the real needs of the population; the elevation of the social position of women; and others. In particular, Fabio Giomi's article focuses on the reformist agenda and activities of a reformist Muslim association called *Reforma* in interwar Bosnia. The members of the association saw Western Europe as their privileged model of development which Bosnian Muslims had to follow. The reasoning for the adoption of political, economic and cultural reforms is provided in a published article in Roma, and cited by Fabio Gomi.⁶

The *Reforma*'s activities culminated with the convention of a congress of Muslim intellectuals which was held in Serajevo in 1928 and was organized by Gajret, the first Bosnian Muslim cultural association on the occasion of the 25th anniversary of its

founding in 1903. Although it had some impact on Islamic reformism in Bosnia-Herzegovina and many of its views were adopted by the congress of Muslim intellectuals, in due course, its activities petered out. In his article Fabio Giomi provides a number of reasons for this outcome. First, Bosnian Muslims were divided between pro-Serb and pro-Croat associations which were under the influence of Serbian and Croatian political elites and, therefore, there was no room for cultural unity of Muslims, as the Reforma propounded. Since many of the reforms were adopted by the congress of Muslim intellectuals, then its political and social dynamics faded away. In addition, 80 per cent of Bosnian Muslims could not read and write, had little or no education, remained under the influence of the Muslim clergy and the publication of Muslim reformists were of little use to them. Finally, Muslim reformists were openly pro-Kemalist and therefore united the Muslim conservatives with Serb and Croat nationalists, in direct opposition to them.

In interwar Albania a secularist project, close to the French system of *concordat* in the 19th century, was in progress by the state.⁷ Since the Ottoman period, in comparison to Sufism, Sunni Islam was not as influential in the territories which, after the Balkan wars, would be controlled by the Albanian state. The presence and influence of Tijaniyya, a north African brotherhood which appeared among the Albanian-speaking Muslims of western Balkans in the early 20th (century through contacts between Albanian-speaking and African Muslims during the annual pilgrimage to Mecca) was based on the fact that, unlike Sunni Islam, Sufism had firm roots in the region. In her article, Nathalie Clayer explores the development, the agenda and the activities of this influential Islamic movement which started as an opponent to the state-orientated Islamic reformist program and shows that Islamic reformism in the Balkans was not a natural development which followed a linear process. It provoked movements of religious revival – i.e. efforts to stop the penetration of secular ideas, or the implementation of any secularist project similar to that applied by the Albanian government – which aimed to preserve the religious character of Islam - which in some ways recall the appearance of counter-reformation movement in Roman Catholicism in reaction to the Reformation movements of Protestantism in 16th century Europe. In addition, the fact that in the 1930s prominent members of Tijaniyya were appointed to influential state positions and their agenda was accepted and promoted by the Albanian state in an effort to use religious revivalism as a tool against Communism – at a time when religious revivalism was not seen any longer as ‘religious fanaticism’ opposed to the Islamic reformist project of the state – shows that the picture of division between Islamic reformism and conservatism in the Balkans was more complicated than it has often been portrayed. Nathalie Clayer’s article shows that the issue of Islamic revivalism in the Balkans is open to research. With reference to interwar Albania, in particular, much of the academic research so far has focused on the secular politics of the Albanian King Zog towards Islamic religion – i.e. his efforts to place Muslim religious institutions under state control, reduce influence of Islam in Albanian society and the introduction of a civil code with the abolition of religious courts in 1928-1929 - but not on the subject of religious revivalism in the country, including Islamic revivalism.

The collection of articles in this issue, analyze various aspects of the influence of European modernity on different Muslim communities in the Balkans. The aim of this issue is to contribute to the study of this subject rather than offer an exhaustive analysis of it. This is a subject which also concerns Muslim societies outside the Balkan region.

However, while in Muslim societies, such as those in India, the Middle East, and Africa, European modernity was experienced through colonial submission to European powers, in the Balkan context, European modernity was mainly experienced through political, economic and cultural contacts which Balkan nation-states have had with Europe, or through the political, economic and cultural contacts of the Ottoman Empire/Turkey with Europe. There are many questions on the subject which are still open to academic research. For example, the questions of counter-reformism or Islamic revivalism in the Balkans have not been properly explored, the development of counter-nationalist movements among Balkan Muslim minorities; gender relations; the management of Muslim *waqf* properties; the impact of agrarian reforms in the interwar and post- World War II Balkans and their impact on Balkan Muslims; the influence of political movements such as agrarian movements and communism in Balkan Muslim societies; political economic and cultural movements among Balkan Muslims and Muslim societies outside the Balkans such as the Middle East and North Africa; and many others. All these questions show that the shape which European modernity has given to Balkan Islam needs further investigation.

¹ S. Katsikas, “*Millets in Nation-States: The Case of Greek and Bulgarian Muslims, 1912-1923*”, *Nationalities Papers*, Vol. 37, No. 2, 2009, pp. 177-201

² D. Petzopoulos, *The Balkan Exchange of Minorities and Its Impact on Greece*, London: Hurst, 2002, pp. 54-60, 61-71. The only exception to that principle was the exemption from the 1923 obligatory population exchange of Çams who the Greek authorities also wanted to deport to Turkey – they did send some of them – but they were finally exempted under pressures from Albania and the Great Powers, particularly Italy. For more details see E. Manta’s article in this issue and E. Manta, *Oi Mousoulmanoï Tsamēdes tēs Ēpeirou (The Muslim Çams of Epirus)*, Thessalonikē: IMXA, 2004, pp. 25-43

³ W. Hoepken, “From Religious Identity to Ethnic Mobilization: The Turks of Bulgaria before, under and since Communism”, in *Muslims Identity and the Balkan State*, H. Poulton and S. Taji-Farouki (eds), London: Hurst, 1997, pp. 54-81; B. Simsir, *The Turks of Bulgaria (1878-1985)*, London: K. Rustem & Brother, 1988, pp. 198-206; A. Eminov, *Turkish and Other Muslim Minorities in Bulgaria*, London: Hurst, 1997, pp. 128-138

⁴ S. Soltaridēs, *I Istoría ton Moufteion tis Dytikis Thrakis (The History of the Muftis Offices of Western Thrace)*, Athens: Nea Synora- A.A. Livanis, 1997, pp. 197-200

⁵ One of the political preconditions by the Turkish side during the negotiations for the signing of the 1932 Greco-Turkish treaty of friendship was that Greece stops supporting Islamic conservatism in Western Thrace and force the 150 religious officials who had fled to the region from Turkey to leave Greece.

⁶ As cited in Fabio Giomi’s paper.

⁷ The French system of *concordat* was characterized by the ‘laïcité’ of the state, the recognition of some religions, the interference of the state in religious affairs, and the integration of religious institutions into the life of the nation state.