

The Revival of Religion in Albania: A Comparison of Cham, Kosovar and Bosniak Attitudes toward Proselytization and De-Sunnification

Mentor Beqa
Ardian Muhaj
Ferid Piku

Abstract

This paper examines the recent history of religious development in Albania during the post-communist period. Second, it identifies patterns in the differentiated development of material and spiritual religious life among the region's religions, and the institutional and political reasons behind them. Third, it analyses the positions of Albanian Cham, Albanian Kosovar and Bosniak Sunni communities as they confront the post-communist pressures of proselytisation and de-Sunnification. Through historical and discourse analysis and unstructured interviews with individuals of different religious, ethnic and local affiliation, the paper reveals that religious, ethnic and local feelings are strong among all three communities. Attitudes toward proselytization attempts among Bosniaks, Cham and Kosovar Albanians, however, are more resilient than those of local Sunnis toward de-Sunnification. The weakening of religiosity among local Sunnis is in conjunction with an organised movement to construct a distinct Bektashi identity, although most Bektashis still identify as Muslim.

Key words: Bektashism, Bosnians, Chams, Kosovars, Proselytization, Sunni Muslims

Introduction

After five decades of systemic and systematic oppression and persecution of religious life, Albania is currently a laic parliamentary republic, in which the state guarantees religious liberties. The Constitution of Albania recognizes the equality of all religious communities, and the state is neutral in questions of faith. The Sunni Muslims (*myslimanët*), Bektashi Muslims (*bektashitë*), Catholic Christians, and Orthodox Christians are recognised as the four traditional religious communities. Others include Protestants (who are mostly associated with the Albanian Evangelical Alliance), Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormons, and Bahais.¹ After the 1990s, numerous Christian sects engaged in proselytizing activities in post-communist Albania. Various Christian missions preached their teachings in the traditionally Muslim country, which was isolated from the world for 46 years, from 1944 to 1990. As Lederer (1994) explains, "the market is now open for ambitious Western missionaries of all beliefs", who can freely engage with "the aborigines, most of whom could have no experience at all of religion as it was banned by law for twenty-three years".² The revival of Catholicism in Albania was mainly assisted by the Vatican, and even today many of the clergy who perform Catholic services are originally foreign nationals, mostly Italians. The Greek Orthodox Church provided special assistance to its Albanian counterpart, and since the reinstatement of religion liberties, the Archbishop of the Albanian Autocephalous Orthodox Church has been Anastasi, originally a Greek citizen. Various organisations from Middle Eastern countries have engaged in charitable missions to help build Islamic religious facilities and establish institutions that provide care to people in need. But not everyone is happy about the involvement of foreign missionaries and institutions, despite the assistance they have provided; some find the instrumentalisation of religion in geopolitical rivalries between state actors deeply concerning.

This paper looks at the recovery of spiritual and material religious life in Southern Albania. In particular it examines the reasons for the differentiated recovery of religions, and how the cultural, political and strategic environments have influenced this uneven development. It also observes the reactions of different groups to this development, with a focus on the reaction of Albania's Sunni Muslim Cham, Bosniak and Kosovar communities to the discernible proselytizing and de-Sunnification tendencies.

1 Jørgen Nielsen, et al, *Yearbook of Muslims in Europe*, Volume 2 (Leiden: Brill, 2010).

2 Gyorgy Lederer, "Islam in Albania", *Central Asian Survey*, 13:3 (1994), pp. 331-359.

Method

This paper is generally descriptive; it aims to identify and describe certain developmental patterns, without drawing explanatory conclusions about the phenomena it investigates. Its methodology is a combination of qualitative methods, including historical analysis, discourse analysis and unstructured interviews. We conducted twenty unstructured interviews, most of them in-depth, between December 2020 and May 2021, with people from different backgrounds. The sample was not intended to be proportionally representative, but to select participants who could offer significant insights about the phenomenon. For this reason, we selected members of the clergy, representatives of non-governmental organisations, researchers and lay people associated with Southern Albania's Bektashi, Bosniak, Cham and Kosovar communities.

Structure

The paper is divided into four separate, but integrally related, sections. The first provides an overview of religious demographics in Southern Albania, and the nature of Muslim orders prevalent in the area, particularly the spread of the Bektashis. The second reflects on the state and recovery of religious life in post-communist Albania, including the main trends in the development of religions, and the inequalities created between them. It also examines persistent proselytizing and de-Sunnification tendencies among Muslims, as a result of missionaries and activists. The third presents a brief history of the Bosniak, Cham and Kosovar communities in Albania, by outlining their settlement history and the patterns of their relations with local populations. The fourth and final section examines how these communities have reacted to the trends of proselytization and de-Sunnification. Although each group reveals its own idiosyncrasies, there are some common attitudes that mark religiousness as a means of individual and group self-preservation. The Social Identity Theory (SIT) framework is used to contextualise such manifestations.

An Overview of Religious Demographics in Southern Albania

Albania's embrace of Islam is a controversial topic, and in most cases the debate deliberately ignores historical, social and religious elements that are indispensable

to a holistic understanding of the spread of Islam throughout Albanian inhabited territories. Islam is not a foreign concept to Albanians; the country's geographical position means that it has had frequent contact with travellers, traders and Muslim personalities who have moved through its ports, markets, cities and streets for centuries. The Ottoman Empire's first contact with Albania dates back to the second half of the 14th century, but Islam remained a minority religion until the 17th century.³ It was initially embraced by the aristocracy (military commanders, beys, civil servants), then by the craftsmen and city dwellers, until it was eventually accepted en masse, by the majority of the population.⁴

Southern Albania is no different in this respect, although adherence to Orthodox Christianity continued among a significant part of the population. In cities such as Korca, Berat, Vlora, Gjirokastra, Delvina, Ioannina, Filati, Margëllëci, Ajdonati (Paramithia), and Preveza, the Muslim population was prominent, and the Islamic urban identity marked its development. These cities are now known for their mektebs and madrasas, and as the birthplaces of highly educated individuals, who served throughout the empire in diverse areas of state administration.⁵

The Istanbul Meshihat Archives keeps the biographies of religious officials from approximately 1850-1900, and these documents show that around 165 Islamic religious cadres originated from cities in of Southern Albania. After Istanbul, Gjirokastra and Ioannina ranked equal second in terms of the number of cadres (comprised of imams, mudaris, kadis, and other officials) they produced, and this sheds light on the region's active religious educational institutions and strong Sunni identity.⁶

Mystical missionaries and orders (tariqats) also played a significant role in the spread of Islam in the south of Albania. Through direct invitation, and the establishment of religious institutions (like tekke, zawiya, and makam) and religious and social services, they became an influential factor in the presentation of Islam to the local population, and of its subsequent embrace.

The Khalwati order is among the oldest and most widespread tariqats in the south of Albania, and it and its various branches established a considerable number of tekkes in Berat, Vlora, Gjirokastra, Delvina and Ioannina.

The Bektashi order occupies a special place in the history of religious affiliation in Southern Albania. It spread to the centres of Gjirokastra, Tepelena and later Kruja,⁷ assisted by the Janissary fighters, who largely belonged to the order.

3 Peter Bartl, *Myslimanët shqiptarë në lëvizjen për pavarësi kombëtare (1878-1912)* (Tirana: Dituria, 2006), pp. 42-105.

4 Xhafer Sadiku, *Midis perandorive dhe religjioneve* (Tirana: Ars & Academic, 2021).

5 Ardian Muhaj, *Nga Ballkani në Mesdhe. Shqiptarët prej Mesjetës në agimin e kohës së re* (Tirana: AAS, 2019).

6 Hümevra Zerdec, *Osmanlı Ulema Biografilerinin Arşiv Kaynakları* (Ankara: TDV Yayınları, 2007).

7 Albanian State Archives (AQSH), fond 483 (Bektashian Community), year 1929, file 3; Turabi, Ali, "La storia dei Bectasci (Setto musulmano), stampato a Tirana" (1929), p. 2.

In the 19th century, Sultan Mahmud II declared the Bektashis enemies and took harsh measures against them, which included ordering the destruction of their cult objects. Even though the Sultan's order was not fully implemented, the persecution of Bektashis continued.⁸ Following the disbanding of the Janissary Corps and the banning of the order in 1826, however, they gained a strong foothold in Albania and Greece. By then, many Bektashi babas and dervishes had fled to remote areas in the Balkans, far from the reach of the Ottoman government,⁹ but Sultan Majid (1839-1861) did not pursue them, and ordered them to be left in peace. Sultan Abdulhamid II was more suspicious, and sent his people to Albania to report on the spread of their teaching and the number of tekkes. But the Bektashis were not persecuted, and nor was any action taken against them.¹⁰ The order organised itself soon after Albania's 1912 secession from the Ottoman Empire, and by 1925, many old tekkes had been returned to operation and several new ones had been built.¹¹ Although Bektashism is still widespread in cities such as Skrapar, Përmet, Leskovik, Kolonjë, Tepelena, and Mallakastër, and has a significant presence in others, including Gjirokastra, Vlora and Korça, the idea that the Muslims of Southern Albania are mostly Bektashis is exaggerated, and stems from the fact that these regions have many historical tekkes and religious institutions of other sects, which today are either non-existent or non-functional.¹²

Further, the communist period not only physically erased religious institutions, but also weakened or dispelled the collective memory of religious affiliation, particularly regarding types of sect. This view is reinforced by the fact that areas such as Delvina, Libohova, Borsh and Gjirokastra, which are historically known for the spread of sects like Khalwati, and for the large number of imams they produced, are presented as Bektashi in the current perception. Under communism,

8 AQSH, fond 483, year 1929, file 3; Turabi, "La storia dei Bectasci", pp. 1-2.

9 For more on this topic see: Huseyin Abiva, "A Glimpse at Sufism in the Balkans". https://www.alevibektasi.eu/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=689:a-glimpse-at-sufism-in-the-balkans&catid=46:aratrmalar-ingilizce&Itemid=69; For a concise account of Bektashism in Albania see H.T. Norris, *Islam in the Balkans* (London: C. Hurst and Co, 1993). See also: H.T. Norris, *Popular Sufism in Eastern Europe: Sufi Brotherhoods and the Dialogue with Christianity and Heterodoxy* (London: Routledge, 2006); and Margaret Hasluck, "The Nonconformist Moslems of Albania", *The Moslem World*, Vol. XV, 1925, pp. 392-393.

10 AQSH, fond 200, file 44, pp. 3-4.

11 In the 1920s, Margaret Hasluck made a detailed study of the Bektashi in Albania, in which she noted that Bektashism was a powerful factor in Albanian history and politics; it conciliated the Christians enough to make them forget their age-long antipathy to Islam, yet itself remained a vital force within the religion.

12 The 1942 inventory of religious objects in the Vlora – Gjirokastrë area counted 140 mosques, 41 tekkes, 375 orthodox churches, 53 monasteries, and 4 catholic churches. AQSH, *Central Office of Statistics/Zyra Qendrore e Statistikës*, 1942, file 120, f. 79-82. There is a discrepancy that needs to be further investigated between recent statistics and data from the Ottoman state: according to the latter, the 140 mosques counted in 1942 was the number found in only two of Gjirokastra's six counties. According to data from 1880, Delvina county alone had 67 mosques, 2 madrasas, and 75 churches, and Përmet county had 69 mosques and 21 churches. AQSH, fond 200, file 25, f. 12, 35. Sami Frashëri, *Enciklopedia*. përkthyer nga Haki Sharofi.

the Bektashi tekkes usually survived better than the main Sunni mosques, due to their small size, often remote rural locations, and lack of obvious Ottoman symbolic meaning. When the ban on religion was lifted in 1991, the Albanian government returned the Bektashi headquarters, which had been used as a retirement home, to the community. Today, Bektashism can be best described as the religion of the countryside and villages, in contrast to Sunni Islam, which is largely an urban phenomenon.

In addition to the Bektashis, other mystical brotherhoods of dervishes have been present in Albania for centuries, including the Khalwati, Qadiri, Rifa'i, Sa'adi and Tijani. Each has its own tekkes, and all have good relations with the Bektashi, despite allegations that the latter tend to monopolise the mystical scene.¹³ These other Muslim orders are not well organised, however, and their religious objects are often confounded with Bektashi ones.

Sunni Muslims Confronting Proselytization

Religious demographics since the 1990s

Determining the number of followers of each religion in Albania is difficult and controversial, although it is indisputable that Muslims constitute the majority of the population. This was confirmed in the Albanian authorities' 1938 population registration, in which 70 percent of the population identified as Muslims, 20 percent as Orthodox Christians, and 10 percent as Catholics.¹⁴ Developments in the 20th century, however, in particular the communist repression of religions, impacted Albania's religious demographics. Data from INSTAT's 2011 census (see Table 1.1) show that 56.7 percent of the population identified as Sunni Muslims, 10 percent as Catholics, and only 6.75 percent as Orthodox Christians. Only 2 percent of the population declared themselves followers of Bektashism.

13 Nathalie Clayer, "God in the 'Land of Mercedes': The Religious Communities in Albania since 1990", in *Albanien: Geographie – Historische Anthropologie – Geschichte – Kultur – Postkommunistische Transformation*, P. Jordan et. al. (eds.) (Vienna: Peter Lang, 2003), p. 291.

14 <https://shqiptarja.com/lajm/matja-me-e-sakte-e-perqindjeve-te-perkatesise-fetare-qysh-nga-1938ta>.

Table 1.1 Resident population by religious affiliation (INSTAT 2011 Census)¹⁵

Religious affiliation	Resident population	Percentage of resident population
Total	2,800,138	100
Muslims	1,587,608	56.70
Bektashi	58,628	2.09
Catholics	280,921	10.03
Orthodox	188,992	6.75
Evangelists	3,797	0.14
Other Christians	1,919	0.07
Believers without denomination*	15,363	5.49
Atheists	69,995	2.50
Others	602	0.02
Prefer not to answer	386,024	13.79
Not relevant/not stated	68,022	2.43

* Persons who answered “I don’t belong to any religion, but I am a believer.”

The data show a reduction in the number of followers for the main traditional religions (with the exception of Catholics in Northern Albania). The number of Muslims (including Bektashis) dropped by about 11 percent compared to previous registrations; Christians saw a decrease of 14 percent, of which the largest was among Orthodox Christians, whose numbers reduced by 13 percent. This census has been strongly contested by the Orthodox Autocephalous Church of Albania, which claims the figures are “an obvious error, or more accurately an intentional lie”, and are “offensive not only to Orthodox Christians, who have been recognised since the beginning of the Albanian state as the largest Christian community, but all Christians”. Despite this strong reaction, the data reflect the new reality of religious demographics, although the distribution is contradicted by some more recent data¹⁶. There are many reasons for this demographic shift,

15 INSTAT (2011), “Censuri i Popullsisë dhe Banesave”, <http://www.instat.gov.al/all/temat/censet/censuri-i-popullsis%C3%AB-dhe-banesave/#tab2>, accessed 20 September 2021.

16 In the 2020 Security Barometer, a survey conducted by the CSDG with the support of the Friedrich Erbert Stiftung, 61.7 percent of the sample identified as Sunni Muslims; 14.9 percent as Orthodox Christians; 10.1 percent as Roman Catholics; and 8 percent as Bektashi Muslims. In a survey conducted by Pew Research in 2010, 80.3 percent of Albanians surveyed identified as Muslim, and 18.0 percent as Christians: <https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2015/04/02/religion-projections-2010-2050/>, accessed 21 March 2021.

including the communist repression of religions, violent modernisation, mass post-90s emigration, and other factors that go beyond the scope of this study. According to the data, the greatest reduction in the number of believers occurred in Southern Albania, for reasons relating to specific historical and socio-political circumstances, and because the communist regime was more ingrained there. But the critical factor was the regime's criminalisation of religion. After Enver Hoxha's speech on 6 February 1967, all religious buildings (2172 in total: 740 mosques; 609 Orthodox churches and monasteries; 158 Catholic objects; and 530 tekkes, tombs, and other sites) were closed or demolished.¹⁷ Clerics were either forced to take on mundane work, or sentenced to death or prison. Religious schools were destroyed, so the education of a new clergy was impossible; religious books disappeared, and no didactic material for religious teaching remained. The communist regime exercised indiscriminate repression against all religions, influencing to a large extent the erasure of religious memory among certain generations of Albanians.

The unevenness of the religious revival

The spiritual, institutional and material revival of religions began in 1991, after the fall of the communist regime. Its immediate concern was to restore as much as possible of what had survived the purge of communism, and build whatever else was needed (i.e., religious buildings, the clergy, and the educational system) from scratch. The Catholic Church received help from the Vatican, which delegated a large number of clergymen from Italy. Most Catholic churches were built or rebuilt with financial assistance from the Vatican. The Autocephalous Orthodox Church received assistance to rebuild its clergy and churches from the Orthodox Patriarch of Greece, and the Muslim community was assisted by Middle Eastern countries and Turkey. Hundreds of young Albanians benefited from scholarships awarded by these countries.

Turkey has been active in the reconstruction of Ottoman-era mosques, especially during the last decade. It is estimated that there are now about 1815 religious sites in Albania, of which 1120 are churches and 780 are mosques and tekkes. Of the churches, it is estimated that 694 belong to the Catholic community, and 440 to Orthodox Christians.¹⁸ The three traditional religions have also opened

17 <http://www.panorama.com.al/cmenduria-e-komunizmit-me-tanke-e-eksploziv-si-u-shkaterruan-kishat-dhe-xhamite/>, accessed 17 November 2021.

18 <https://www.shqiperia.com/Shqiperia-ka-1668-kulte-fetare.13097/>, accessed 20 November 2021. This estimation is from 2012. New data show more than 800 operational mosques in Albania.

educational institutions, from kindergartens (for Catholics and Orthodox believers) to universities.

A number of studies have raised concerns about the construction of mosques, and this is also a persistent domestic discussion.¹⁹ The empirical data shows an inverted reality: Albania has nominally 40 percent more Christian objects than Muslim ones. The 2011 census data and the data on the construction of religious facilities show that Christians in Albania have about 5 times more religious facilities per head than Muslims. Albanian Muslims have been trying for more than two decades to obtain the right to build a large mosque in the capital, Tirana. The US State Department's International Religious Freedom Reports identified the fact that Albania's Muslims did not have a proper religious facility in Tirana as a violation of religious freedom. At the time of writing, the mosque (financed by Turkish Diyanet) is under construction, and is expected to open its doors this year. Further, the data on religious publications in Albania show more activity among Christians than Muslims. An umbrella keywords search in the National Library of Albania's online catalogue indicates a similar level of publishing activity between the two, but in relative terms Christian publications outnumber Muslim ones 3 to 1.²⁰ Among the 200 religious sites that have cultural monument status, only 20 are mosques and 13 are tekkes; the remaining 167 are churches, most of which belong to the Orthodox Church.²¹ During our research, we identified a significant number of mosques that are under serious threat of dilapidation, and for which there is a complete lack of care from state institutions (although the Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency [TIKA] is involved in the restoration of some old mosques). The most extreme case is the Vokopola Mosque, which is located in the centre of Vokopola village, near Berat. This mosque was built four centuries ago, and was used as a school in the early years of the communist regime, before being converted into a warehouse for storing agricultural products, in the late 1960s. Its current architecture has been altered from its original purpose, with the windows on its east and west and east sides blocked, and the minaret destroyed. Its interior has also undergone changes: the floor has been destroyed, and the walls have been whitewashed to erase any traces of previous frescoes or inscriptions. Drawings of crosses are also visible inside the

19 M. Vickers and J. Pettifer, *Albania: From Anarchy to a Balkan Identity* (New York: New York University Press, 1997); D. Pollack, I. Borowik, W. Jagodzinski (eds.) *Religiöser Wandel in den postkommunistischen Ländern Ost- und Mitteleuropas* (Würzburg: Ergon Verlag, 1998); M. Bickert, "Re-Sanctification of Space in Albania: The Case of Sunni Islam", *Balkan and Baltic States in United Europe: Histories, Religions and Cultures II* (Bulgarian Academy of Sciences: Institute of Ethnology and Folklore Studies with Ethnographic Museum, 2017).

20 A search with the keyword 'church' returned 3024 records, while 'Islam' and related keywords returned 3073.

21 <https://web.archive.org/web/20110706071224/http://kshk.gov.al/index.php?fq=brenda&g&j=gj2&kid=19>, accessed 17 January 2021.

mosque. This centuries-old monument is on the verge of destruction, and there is no commitment from the state to reconstruct it. The same is true of the mosque in the historic Borsh castle in Saranda county. Only a superficial reconstruction has been completed, which has damaged the originality of the building. H.M, a resident of Borsh village, told us: “It’s very good that you come and visit it, but no one is taking care of this wonder. Although the castle is one of the most visited tourist destinations, the mosque has been left in a miserable condition”²².

In some cases, like that of Karbunara village in Lushnja county, old mosques are appropriated and used by other religious communities. Mufti of Lushnja Gramoz Blliku says that despite his insistence, and that of the Muslim believers in Karbunara, the state has not taken any measures to return the mosque to the Muslim community, which is its legitimate owner. He says, “There is a tendency to neglect the rights of the Muslim community in the return and restoration of religious sites, and of properties confiscated during the communist regime”.²³ Although the Muslim community is the second largest landowner in Albania, second only to the Albanian state, only 20 percent of the properties it has claimed as rightful owner have been returned, while the rest have been restored and occupied as dwellings or facilities.²⁴ In the cities of Southern Albania, there are far fewer mosques today than there were before 1967, and those that do exist are in worse condition. Vlova, one of Albania’s biggest cities, is estimated to have had about 48 mosques, of which 11 were in the city itself, and the remainder were in surrounding areas. Currently, there are only 2 mosques in the city, and 9 in the countryside. In Gjirokastra, it is estimated that there were about 15 mosques in the city alone; currently only 2 are in function. Libohova had 7 mosques, but currently only one is being used by the community. The situation is similar in all other cities in Southern Albania.

A majority in the situation of a minority

Although Islam in Albania is non-political, moderate, loyal to the government, and fully respects the rules of European democracy, Muslims in the country are marginalised from political processes and public discourse²⁵. This raises

22 Authors’ interview with H.M. on 19 December 2020, Borsh, Albania.

23 Authors’ interview with Mufti of Lushnja Gramoz Blliku, 19 December 2020, Lushnja, Albania.

24 Albanian Institute for Legal and Territorial Studies (Instituti Shqiptar për Studime Ligjore dhe Territoriale), “Një studim gjithëpërfshirës mbi të drejtat e pronësisë të komuniteteve fetare në Shqipëri” (2016), <https://altri.al/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/Botimi-Te-drejtat-e-pronesise-te-komuniteteve-fetare-ne-Shqiperi.pdf>, accessed 20 November 2020.

25 Rezart Beka “Islamophobia in the Contemporary Albanian Public Discourse”, in *Islamophobia in Muslim Majority Societies* E. Bayraklı and F. Hafez (eds.) (New York: Routledge, 2018).

the questions of why there is such concern surrounding the self-assertion of Muslims in public space, and why the reality is so distorted. The answers can be found in certain stereotypes (domestic and exogenous) constructed around Muslims, especially in relation to the cultural and political positioning of Albania in the Euro-Atlantic integration process. Lederer understood some decades ago that in Albania “to identify ‘Europe’ with democracy, the rule of law and respect for human liberties and rights is another widespread quasi-religious belief, not only among intellectuals”.²⁶

The recent national meta-narrative has revolved around “the political myth of the return to Europe” as Sulstarova puts it, or, as Dani describes, “Eurotheism”, in which Albanian identity is presented “as quintessentially European and Christian whereas the integration of Albania in the European Union is the fulfilment of the national telos”²⁷. The fact that the majority of Albanians are Muslims has been arbitrarily considered an obstacle on the road to Europe and the West, even though the Muslim population has shown great support for and commitment to EU integration. As Clayer states, the social and political statuses of Islam and Christianity have been practically inverted in the post-communist period, making the Muslim community a majority in the situation of a minority.²⁸ This has especially been the case since the turn of this century, when Islam came to be associated with fanaticism and terrorism in the media and public opinion of most Western countries, while Albanians were, on the contrary, eager to assert their belonging to the Western world after fifty years on the other side of the Iron Curtain.²⁹ As Endresen explains, this process seeks “to dissociate the nation symbolically and rhetorically from its Islamic legacy, outwardly seeking to reverse the historical Islamization process, and emphasizing the nation’s ‘Christian roots’ – all with the aim of legitimating Albanians as belonging to ‘Europe’ ”³⁰. E.P., one of our interviewees from the Muslim community in Gjirokastra, told us that although the situation is getting better, there is still prejudice toward Muslims.

26 Gyorgy Lederer, “Islam in Albania”, *Central Asian Survey*, 13:3 (1994), pp. 331-359. See also: Odeta Barbullushi, “The Politics of ‘Religious Tolerance’ in Post-Communist Albania: Ideology, Security and Euro-Atlantic Integration”, *Europe, the USA and Political Islam*, M. Pace (ed.) (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011); Arolda Elbasani, “Religion and Democratization in Post-Communist Albania: Is it Possible to Be Islamic, Democratic and European at the Same Time?”, *APSA 2011, Annual Meeting Paper* (2010).

27 Doan Dani, *Shpikja e Mesjetës: Vetja dhe Tjetri në Medievistikën Shqiptare* (Tiranë: Pika pa Sipërfaqe, 2016); Enis Sulstarova, *Islamizëm do të thotë lindje* (Tiranë: Pika pa Sipërfaqe, 2016).

28 Nathalie Clayer, “God in the ‘Land of Mercedes’: The Religious Communities in Albania since 1990”, in *Albanien: Geographie – Historische Anthropologie – Geschichte – Kultur – Postkommunistische Transformation*, P. Jordan et. al. (eds.) (Vienna: Peter Lang, 2003)

29 Gilles de Rapper, “Religion in post-communist Albania: Muslims, Christians and the concept of ‘culture’ (Devoll, South Albania)”, *Anthropological Notebooks*, Slovenian Anthropological Society, 14:2 (2008), pp. 31-45.

30 Cecilie Endresen, “The Nation and the Nun: Mother Teresa, Albania’s Muslim Majority and the Secular State”, *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations*, 26:1 (2015).

Local officials in peripheral towns, although not inherently malicious, try to conform to assumed normative expectations, according to which one should avoid identifying with Islam, even if it is not overtly considered the Other. E.P. says: “When we applied for the restoration of one of the mosques in the municipality, the officials politely asked us if we could avoid the construction of minarets. They think that if our city is identified with Islam, it will be bad for tourism”.³¹ This perception seems to have been internalized by officials and residents under the pressure of the aforementioned narrative, but it is not how European tourists themselves think. The mosque recently reconstructed by TIKA is among the most frequented tourist sites in the area. This suggests a discrepancy between Europe’s perceived and actual expectations.

Bektashism and its state politics

Gjirokastra Castle is one of the most important historical sites in Albania. It was built in the 4th century, and extensively improved by Ottoman Sultan Beyazid II in 1490. When you enter the castle, arrows direct you to the right, where about 50 metres inside the main gate there is a small building tucked into the castle walls, amidst a garden. It contains the remains of two Bektashi babas. On the wall is an inscription:

Over the centuries, the castle has been home to both Christian and Islamic communities, including the Bektashi Sufi order. Parts of the Islamic mystic tradition, Bektashism are noted for their liberal practices and tolerance for other religious faiths. Today, around a fifth of Muslims in Albania identify with Bektashism.

Gjirokastra Castle is a cultural monument, so every inscription is official, having been scrutinised and approved by the National Agency of Monuments. In this case, the inscription is discriminatory and incorrect. First, there is nothing that proves the liberal nature of Bektashism versus other traditional religions, especially in comparison with Sunni Islam. Second, there is no official data supporting the assertion that “around a fifth of Muslims in Albania identify with Bektashism”; the official registration shows the figure at two percent. Gjirokastra Castle is a monument to the monumental falsification of history, aimed at the de-Sunnification of public space. The castle is filled with Bektashi symbols, but Sunni Muslim objects have been erased. Old pictures show the mosque in the centre of the castle, but today nothing remains of it. All around the castle, and in Southern Albanian cities generally, there is a propensity to mark space with

31 Authors’ interview with E.P., 18 December 2020, Gjirokastra, Albania.

Bektashi religious objects. H.M., from the Muslim community in Delvina, says: “They’ve been very aggressive in building Bektashi objects, which does not worry us in itself, but in many cases they try to appropriate Sunni Muslim objects.”³² Sunni Muslim clerics see this as an organised project of de-Sunnification by distorting historical realities. Attempts to downsize Islamic influence by fragmenting and dividing them have a long history in Albania, dating from least the end of the 19th century.

Disagreements within the Muslim community have often been instigated by foreign actors, to encourage a kind of secession, or, failing all else, the disruption and fragmentation of Islam in Albania.

In the last quarter of the 19th century, diplomatic efforts intensified to deepen the schism among Muslims, presenting the religious difference between Bektashism and Sunni Islam as a difference in cultural and political force. Austrian Consul Johan Georg Hahn, French Consul Alexandre Degrand, and Austro-Hungarian Consul Theodore Ippen were among the first to mythologise Bektashism,³³ and according to Roberto Maroco Della Roca, they tried to use it to break Muslim unity.³⁴ As early as 1898, Austro-Hungarian consuls suggested this to their controlling authorities, and Consul Ippen directly suggested subsidising the Bektashis to influence the population through their dervishes, in Central and Southern Albania.³⁵ Clayer explains that “Westerners contributed to creating this image of the difference between Sunni and Bektashism, to which corresponded a series of contradictions: fanatical/liberal, Turkish/Albanian, Asian/European, etc.”³⁶ On 10 May 1900, the Russian consul reported to his superiors that he had gone to Elbasan and met with the beys. He said that books and newspapers were filled with hatred of the Greek clergy, because of their efforts to Hellenise Christian Albanians. The consul reported that leading Albanian personalities and writers had become “a blind tool in the hands of Austria”, and that they did not hold back from accusing Russia of wanting to Hellenise Albanians and exterminate their nation. The consul criticised the metropolitans, who did not separate Orthodoxy from Hellenism. He mentioned that the influence of the Bektashi sect was increasing daily, and spreading throughout Albania, adding: “This has not attracted enough attention [...] this sect deserves special attention”.³⁷ This tendency for secession was present even among the Bektashi clergy and some Albanian

32 Authors’ interview with H.M., 17 December 2020, Delvina, Albania.

33 Clayer, “God in the ‘Land of Mercedes’: The Religious Communities in Albania since 1990”, p. 437.

34 Roberto Morozzo Della Roca, *Kombësia dhe Feja në Shqipëri: 1924-1944* (Tirana: Elena Gjika, 1994), pp. 201-202.

35 Clayer “God in the ‘Land of Mercedes’: The Religious Communities in Albania since 1990”, p. 443.

36 Clayer “God in the ‘Land of Mercedes’: The Religious Communities in Albania since 1990”, p. 429.

37 AQSH, fond 143, year 1877-1912, file 1216, p. 55; *Kopje e raportit të konsullit të Rusisë në Rumeli e Shqipërinë e Mesme*, nr. 839, 16 maj 1900, nr. 46, Bitola (Manastir) 10 May 1900.

Renaissance intellectuals. There was a widespread fear at the time among the country's Renaissance elite that Albanian territory would be partitioned between the Empire's successor states: Serbia, Montenegro, Greece and Bulgaria each had territorial claims, and considered the Muslim Albanians 'Turks', a view that was shared even by the elite of the European Great Powers. Eminent Albanian thinker Faik Konica, whose connections with Austro-Hungarians were well known, elucidated this in his 1909 article, "A Short Notice to the Mohammedans".³⁸

Casting Bektashism and Sunni Islam as conflicting entities with cultural and political differences, did not, however, correspond to the Albanian reality at least until the beginning of the 20th century. Despite this, secessionist tendencies continued throughout the 20th century. Stavro Skendi states that after World War II, the communists "while ostensibly satisfying the Bektashis' desire for independence, succeeded in accentuating the Sunni-Bektashi conflict".³⁹ It seems that the intention was not to favour the Bektashis, but to divide and weaken the Muslims. As previously discussed, attempts to instrumentalise Bektashis to weaken Islam has been a persistent practice in Albania's recent history.⁴⁰

The historical Background of Albania's Bosniaks, Chams and Kosovars

The dissolution of the Ottoman Empire was accompanied by a mass displacement of local Albanian Muslim populations from their own lands, as a result of massacres and forced eviction by the newly created Balkan nation states, mainly Serbia and Greece.⁴¹ The occupation of Bosnia by Austro-Hungarian forces in 1878 forced many Bosniaks to migrate to other countries, and some settled in Albania's Shijak region, between Tirana and Durres.⁴² During and after the Balkan Wars (from 1911 onwards) many Muslims were forced to leave Kosovo, Bosnia and Montenegro because of discrimination in the newly founded Kingdom of Yugoslavia. They settled in Albanian cities, like Tirana, Durres, Shijak, Fier and

38 Faik Konica, "A Short Notice to the Mohammedans", quoted from Gyorgy Lederer, "Islam in Albania", *Central Asian Survey*, 13:3 (1994), pp. 331-359.

39 Stavro Skendi, "Albania", quoted from Gyorgy Lederer, "Islam in Albania", *Central Asian Survey*, 13:3 (1994), pp. 331-359.

40 The most bizarre step was by communist Prime Minister Mehmet Shehu, who proposed that Bektashi Muslims in Albania appoint an Orthodox Christian head. This did not materialise, however, because the regime had more radical ideas and projects through which to erase every trace of religion in the Albanian population.

41 For a general overview, see Justin McCarthy, *Death and Exile: The Ethnic Cleansing of Ottoman Muslims, 1821-1922* (Princeton, N.J.: The Darwin Press, 1995).

42 Shoqata Boshnjakët e Shqipërisë, *Ardhja dhe Integrimi i Boshnjakëve në Shqipëri* (Tirana: Toena, The Association Boshnjakët e Shqipërisë Zambak, 2001), p. 12.

Shkodra.⁴³ The *muhaxhirs* from Kosovo have a history of fleeing to Albania to escape Serbian persecution, especially in periods of open conflict such as the Balkan wars, the 1920s, the 1940s and the last Kosovan crisis in the 1990s. During and immediately after World War I, Muslim Albanians were pressured to leave Chameria (Çamëria) through various intimidation tactics, open violence and ethnic cleansing. At the end of World War II, as a consequence of massacres and genocide, the Muslim Chams left Greece and spread throughout Albania.⁴⁴ The majority settled on the outskirts of Vlora, Fier, Durres and Tirana. Shijak's Bosniak community lives mainly in the neighbouring villages of Borakaj and Koxhas. Some Bosniaks from these settlements subsequently settled in Durres, and in 1924, in the Fieri region's Libofsha village, where the majority have linguistically assimilated.⁴⁵ The Bosniaks who settled in the city of Shkodra were subsequently attached to the Muslim community of muhaxhirs, who are now known as Podgoriçani, and form an important part of the city's demographic composition.⁴⁶

Among the *muhaxhir* communities, only the Bosniaks are recognised as an ethno-cultural minority, while Chams and Kosovars, although considered *muhaxhirs*, are originally Albanians.⁴⁷ The Kosovar community was politically active in the period between the World Wars, but ceased its political representation and activities in Albania after the installation of the communist dictatorship in 1945.⁴⁸ Today, the region of Chameria is located mostly in Greece. It is approximately 10,000 square kilometres in size, and most of its Greek parts fall under the prefectures of Thesprotia and Preveza. A small part of Chameria is located

43 This topic has been researched extensively, especially by authors from Albania and Kosovo. The most recent contribution is: Beqir Meta et al., *Historia e Shqipërisë në shek. XX, vol. I, II, III* (Tirana: Akademia e Studimeve Albanogjike, 2019).

44 For a detailed account, see: Beqir Meta, *The Cham Tragedy* (Tirana: Sejko, 2007). For a comparative perspective see Martin Baldwin-Edwards, Riki van Boeschoten and Hans Vermeulen, *Migration in the Southern Balkans: From Ottoman Territory to Globalized Nation States* (Netherlands: Springer, 2015). The 18,000-20,000 individuals who survived the genocide fled to Albania. Five years later, only 77 Chams were registered in Greece's 1951 census. On the history of the Chams of Greece during the interwar period and the 1940s, see: Georgia Kretsi, "The 'secret' past of the Greek-Albanian borderlands. Cham Muslim Albanians: Perspectives on a conflict over historical accountability and current rights". *Ethnologia Balkanica* (6, 2002), 171-195; and Miranda Vickers, *The Cham Issue: Where to Now?* (Defence Academy of the United Kingdom, Conflict Studies Research Centre, 2007).

45 Klaus Steinke and Xhelal Ylli (2013), *Die slavischen Minderheiten in Albanien (SMA). 4. Teil: Vraka - Borakaj* (Munich: Verlag Otto Sagner), pp. 137-139.

46 Some Bosniak families in Shkodra changed their surnames to Boshnjaku, while others simply adopted the suffix 'iqi': i.e., Piraniqi, Striniqi, Nikshiqi.

47 http://www.savjetministara.gov.ba/saopstenja/saopstenja_predsjedavajuceg/default.aspx?id=19494langTag=en-US, accessed 14 November 2020. In 2017, Albania officially recognized eight national minorities, adding Bosniak and Egyptian for the first time. <https://balkaninsight.com/2017/09/28/albania-to-adopt-the-first-law-on-minorities-09-27-2017/>, accessed 14 November 2020. On 13 October 2017, Albania passed the Law on National Minorities, which recognized nine minorities, including Bosniak.

48 <https://shqiptarja.com/lajm/fier-spahiu-ccedil-am-euml-t-e-kosovar-euml-t-br-t-euml-pap-euml-rfaq-euml-suar-n-euml-parlament>, accessed 14 November 2020.

in the southernmost part of Albania, around the Konispol area. The region then stretches southwards along the coastline of the Ionian Sea, all the way down to the Gulf of Arta, which did not become part of Greece until the turn of the 20th century. Elsie and Destani explain the implications of this for the Chams:

When the Greek forces took possession of Chameria and southern Epirus in the Balkan War of 1912, The Chams suddenly found themselves in Greece, cut off from the rest of Albania. In the following decades, in particular the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s, the vast majority of the Chams were expelled from Chameria and now live for the most part in southern Albania and Turkey.⁴⁹

Since their expulsion to Albania from 1945-1946, during the country's isolation under the communist dictatorship, Albania ignored the Cham issue for over 45 years. Since the 1990s, however, the issue has come to the foreground of diplomatic relations between Greece and Albania. Greece's current position is to deny not only all atrocities, but also the existence of the ethnic Albanian Chams, and thereby any rights they may have to compensation or restitution. The Greek state says there is nothing to discuss, and over the last thirty years has threatened to return all Albanian economic migrants who work in Greece, and to vote against Albania's accession into the European Union.⁵⁰ The Cham community has been politically active since the 1990s, and is the base of one of the few political parties with a continuous representation in the Albanian Parliament.⁵¹ This large influx of Muslim *muhaxhirs*, mainly of Albanian and Bosniak origin, from Kosovo, Montenegro, Greece and Serbia, has become a considerable part of the population of some regions, especially Fier and Shijak. There are no direct and precise demographic data, but indirect data and other documents indicate that the majority settled in the lowlands between the Shkumbini and Vjosa Rivers, because of the abundance of arable land.⁵² These were also regions populated mainly by local Muslims and Orthodox Christians. The three *muhaxhir* communities are all Sunni Muslims, and are now fully integrated into Albanian society. With the fall of the communist regime and reinstatement of religious rights, many

49 Robert Elsie and Bejtullah Destani, *The Cham Albanians of Greece: A Documentary History* (London: I.B Tauris, 2013) p. xxxiv. See also: Azem Kovaci, *Causes of the Destruction of the Cham Albanian Minority in Greece During the Second World War* (Tirana: Ars & Academic Publishing, 2021); and Sherif Delvina, *Low Albania and Cham Issue* (Tirana: Euroindija, 2003).

50 On 24 February 2018, Reuters reported that after two rounds of talks between the foreign ministers of Greece and Albania, Greece's Foreign Ministry "categorically denied statements by Albanian officials that the Cham issue had been included in the talks. It is one thing for the Albanian side to want to raise the issue and another for the issue to be accepted for discussion," Benet Koleka, Albania's Chams want Greek apology for wartime expulsion <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-albania-greece-chams/albanias-chams-want-greek-apology-for-wartime-expulsion-idUSKCN1G8000> accessed 24 November 2020.

51 Beqir Meta, *Minoritetet në Shqipëri 1912–1944* (Tirana: Academy of Albanian Studies, 2013).

52 According to a report represented to dictator Enver Hoxha in 1979, there were around 4,000 Kosovars in the Fieri region: <http://www.panorama.com.al/dokumenti-i-vitit-79-cpo-ndodh-me-camet-dhe-kosovaret-ne-fier/>, accessed 24 November 2020.

proselytization and de-Sunnification movements took place around and among the Muslim population. The impact of these *muhaxhir* communities as strongholds of Sunni Islam is visible in the city of Fieri, which is the third largest city in Albania, after Tirana and Durres. The city's central mosque was built in 2005, and is the biggest in Albania.

Bosniaks, Chams, Kosovars Confront Proselytization

How did Sunni Muslims respond to the 'cultural inquisition' of proselytization and de-Sunnification? Did they respond equally throughout southern Albania, or were there distinct patterns of reaction? Our hypothesis is that the Cham, Kosovar and Bosniak Sunni communities demonstrate better in-group cohesion when confronting proselytization and de-Sunnification. To observe the phenomenon from both in-group and out-group perspectives, we measured the behaviour of 'newcomers' and locals, using objective indicators such as mosque attendance and religious knowledge. We then interviewed local people and people from the aforementioned communities to measure their perceptions. The attitudes recorded were in accordance with Social Identity Theory (SIT), according to which belonging to a group defines an individual's identity to some extent. SIT describes this as "that part of an individual's self-concept which derives from his knowledge of his membership in a social group (or groups) together with the value or emotional significance attached to that membership".⁵³ It holds that this identity self-categorization, combined with the search for a positive social identity, produces social comparison with relevant out-groups, which aims to positively differentiate these groups from individuals in the in-group.⁵⁴ Social identity is a complex and dynamic phenomenon, wherein self-conception interacts with a person's social identification by others. In the Bosniak, Cham and Kosovar communities, we found religious and ethnic/local identity to be the most important traits of individual and group identity. Although each of the communities has its own individual and group idiosyncrasies, they all see religion as part of their historical identity, which differentiates them to some extent from the local population. This is also how indigenous local populations have historically perceived them.

53 H. Tajfel, "Social categorization, social identity and social comparisons", *Differentiation between social groups*, H. Tajfel (ed.) (London, UK: Academic Press, 1978), p. 63.

54 H. Tajfel and J. C. Turner, "An integrative theory of intergroup conflict", *The social psychology of intergroup relations*, W. G. Austin & S. Worchel (ed.) (Monterey, CA: Brooks/Cole 1979), pp. 33-47.

Bosniaks, Chams and Kosovars are more religious: Out-group perceptions

There is a widespread claim of weak religiosity among Albanians (especially Muslims), which is often used as an explanatory framework for religious coexistence and tolerance. This claim relates to the nature of Albanians and their historic relationship with religion, but it is ambiguous and untestable. ‘Religious tolerance’ in this sense is more of a political myth than an empirical reality, and although there are no open religious conflicts in Albania, interactions between religious communities have their peculiarities. Another interpretation sees the country’s ‘weak religiosity’ as linked to the oppression of religion by the communist regime. Pollack (1998) puts forward two arguments: there is a significant mismatch between religious self-proclamation and actual attendance of religious services in post-socialist countries; and the higher the degree of religious suppression during a communist regime, the lower the religious affiliation in the subsequent transitional period.⁵⁵ Although Pollack did not study Albania specifically, both his propositions resonate in the Albanian reality, especially among local inhabitants in the country’s south. Our interviews with local Muslim clergy indicate that even though there is an increase in the attendance of religious services (especially among the youth), the majority of communities do not practice religious rituals. H.M, a Muslim activist in Vlora, says: “There is widespread ignorance of religious matters among the local Muslim population. We are to blame, because we as an organisation representing the Muslim community have been very slow to meet peoples’ spiritual needs”. The interviews also revealed that despite a widespread and committed tendency for individuals to self-proclaim as Muslim, their knowledge about religious practices was superficial, and sometimes confused. Many had real difficulties distinguishing to which group they belonged. A resident on the coast, near Saranda, told us: “I am a Muslim. We have a tekke. People go there every Friday and pray to the holy land”. This kind of religious syncretism is frequently present among locals, and according to most clerics and residents, it is a result of religious oppression during the communist period. This is a key distinguishing factor between the local population and the *muhaxhirs*, with the argument that Bosniaks, Chams and Kosovars, being small and compact communities, responded differently to the oppression and found religion to be a self-protecting institution. There is a widespread perception among locals that these groups are ‘better’ Muslims, meaning that they show more knowledge of

55 Detlef Pollack, “Einleitung: Religiöser Wandel in Mittel und Osteuropa”, in *Religiöser Wandel in den postkommunistischen Ländern Ost- und Mitteleuropas*, Pollack, D., I. Borowik, W. Jagodzinski (ed) (Würzburg: Ergon Verlag, 1998), pp. 9-52.

religious practices, and have a higher attendance rate at religious services. Mufti of Lushnja Gramoz Blliku confirms this view: “Kosovars and Chams are more devoted to religion. They are generally strict in their attendance of religious services”.⁵⁶ E.M, an official of the Vlora Muslim Council, adds: “Chams are the pillar of our jamaat. Even though they are a small minority in society, they make up the majority of our jamaat”.

Bosniaks, Chams and Kosovars and are more religious: In-group perceptions

The out-group perception of Bosniaks, Chams and Kosovars is in accordance with the in-group perception and our own observations. Although there are differences between the three communities, most out-group perceptions about them as ‘practicing Muslims’ are accurate. During our interviews, we found that, to varying degrees, they had better knowledge of religious doctrine and practice, and were more dedicated to attending religious services. L.N., a Fier businessman of Kosovar origin, says: “We are all Muslims, and do our best to follow our Prophet’s teachings. My grandfather came here in the 1930s, and we have kept our religion ever since. Even when Enver Hoxha outlawed religions, my grandfather and my father fasted secretly”. This is even more evident among the Bosniak community in Libofsha, who identify as Bosniaks and Sunni Muslims simultaneously, although most of them are linguistically assimilated. What is intriguing is the discrepancy between local populations and the *muhaxhirs* in relation to Sunni identity. There have been two main theoretical positions on changes in minority identification over time. First, in line with broader assimilation theory, it has been argued that identities tend to converge, as minority gives way to majority identification. Counter to this are a range of arguments that indicate a heightening of minority identity, even if its type changes. Here, the persistence of identity claims is not symbolic, but is rooted in responses that lean toward the local context or broader global trends.⁵⁷ This is, however, largely dependent on contextual specifics. As has been asserted, religion has in many cases been the bedrock of nation-building, and even today “it is difficult to separate a number of national identities from their religious matrices”.⁵⁸ This seems to be the case with the Bosniak community,

56 Authors’ interview with Mufti of Lushnja Gramoz Blliku, 19 December 2020, Lushnja, Albania.

57 Lucinda Platt, “Is there Assimilation in Minority Groups’ National, Ethnic and Religious Identity?”, *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 37:1 (2014), pp. 46-70.

58 William Safran, “Language, Ethnicity and Religion: A Complex and Persistent Linkage”, *Nations and Nationalism*, 14 (2008), pp. 171-190.

where religious and ethnic identities have become intertwined. This distinguishes the community from the local population, and protects it from assimilation. The Chams and Kosovars are in a different situation, because even though they have a distinct social structure, they share an ethnic identity with the local population. In this case, alongside religious devotion as an independent factor, local identity and the historical memory of the origin and customs of the forefathers play a major role. This is evident in in-group organisation, especially among Kosovars. The secularisation process has had a lesser influence among this community, which still manifests traditional social institutions. This is visible among Kosovar communities throughout Albania. Indrit Vokshi, a researcher from a community of Kosovars who settled in Mamurras in Northern Albania in the 1930s, says: “Kosovars have preserved the traditional structure of social organisation, and this has kept in-group solidarity alive”⁵⁹. Vokshi believes that identification with the traditions and customs of its place of origin has given the Kosovar community pride in its local identity, and the strength to survive as a group distinct from the rest of the population. He adds, “One important distinctive element is religion, which is widely practiced among Kosovars. The majority of imams in the Mamurras region are of Kosovar origin, although Kosovars make up just a fraction of the region’s Sunni Muslim population”. According to Vokshi, the Kosovar community has a stronger affiliation with its national and religious identity.

Conclusions

Religions in Albania were subject to unprecedented systematic and systemic repression by the communist regime. The restoration of religious freedoms in the early 1990s was a historic moment, but at the same time it exposed the immense damage that the regime had done to the material and spiritual elements of religious life in Albania.

Religions in general, and Islam in particular, faced extreme challenges to recover in a situation of complete institutional and infrastructural desolation. Catholic and Orthodox Christians received immediate financial, organisational, and educational assistance from the Vatican and the Greek Orthodox Church, respectively, but Muslims faced a new challenge: the proselytization efforts of various Christian sects and nonreligious groups, and the revival of de-Sunnification, which sought to construct a distinctive Muslim identity associated with the Bektashi order. Although Islam has recovered substantially during the last three

59 Authors’ interview with independent researcher Indrit Vokshi, 19 May 2021, Shengjin, Albania.

decades, these trends have left traces that are evident even today, especially in Southern Albania.

The Bosniak, Cham and Kosovar *muhaxhir* communities, scattered throughout Southern Albania, are an exception. They have responded better to proselytization and de-Sunnification efforts, by retaining an enduring affiliation to their religious, national and local identities. In contrast to the local population, where family, group and community ties were severely damaged by the secularisation process, these relationships are still evident in the three *muhaxhir* groups. For these communities, religion is fundamental to maintaining group solidarity, while distinguishing them from the local population.

Bibliography

- Abiva, Huseyin "A Glimpse at Sufism in the Balkans". https://www.alevibektasi.eu/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=689:a-glimpse-at-sufism-in-the-balkans&catid=46:aratrmalar-ingilizce&Itemid=69
- Albanian State Archive (AQSH), fond 483 (Komuniteti Bektashian), 1929, file 3.
- Albanian State Archive (AQSH), fond 200, file 44.
- Albanian State Archive (AQSH), fond Zyra Qendrore e Statistikës, 1942, file 120.
- Albanian State Archive (AQSH), fond 200, file 25. Sami Frashëri, *Enciklopedia*, përkthyer nga Haki Sharofi.
- Albanian State Archive (AQSH), fond 143, 1877-1912, file 1216; *Kopje e raportit të konsulli të Rusisë në Rumeli e Shqipërinë e Mesme* nr. 839.
- Albanian Institute for Legal and Territorial Studies, "Një studim gjithëpërfshirës mbi të drejtat e pronësisë të komuniteteve fetare në Shqipëri" (2016), <https://altri.al/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/Botimi-Te-drejtat-e-pronesise-te-komuniteteve-fetare-ne-Shqiperi.pdf>, accessed 20 March 2021.
- Baldwin-Edwards, Martin, Riki van Boeschoten and Hans Vermeulen, *Migration in the Southern Balkans: From Ottoman Territory to Globalized Nation States* (London: Springer, 2015)
- Barbullushi, Odeta, "The Politics of 'Religious Tolerance' in Post-Communist Albania: Ideology, Security and Euro-Atlantic Integration", in *Europe, the USA and Political Islam*, M. Pace (ed.) (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011)

- Bartl, Peter, *Myslimanët shqiptarë në lëvizjen për pavarësi kombëtare (1878-1912)* (Tirana: Dituria, 2006)
- Beka, Rezart, "Islamophobia in the Contemporary Albanian Public Discourse", in *Islamophobia in Muslim Majority Societies*, E. Bayraklı, F. Hafez (eds.) (New York: Routledge, 2018)
- Bickert, Matthias M., "Re-sanctification of Space in Albania: The case of Sunni Islam", in *Balkan and Baltic States in United Europe: Histories, Religions and Cultures II* (Bulgarian Academy of Sciences: Institute of Ethnology and Folklore Studies with Ethnographic Museum, 2017)
- Biezais, Haralds, *Religious Symbols and their Functions* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1979)
- Bilewicz, Michal, and Klebaniuk, Jaroslaw "Psychological Consequences of Religious Symbols in Public Space: Crucifix Display at a Public University", *Journal of Environmental Psychology*, 35 (2013), pp. 10-17.
- Braybrooke, Marcus, "Christians and People of Other Faiths", in *Islam and Global Dialogue: Religious Pluralism and the Pursuit of Peace*, Roger Boase (ed.) (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005)
- Clayer, Nathalie, "God in the 'Land of Mercedes': The Religious Communities in Albania since 1990", in *Albanien: Geographie – Historische Anthropologie – Geschichte – Kultur – Postkommunistische Transformation*, P. Jordan et. al. (eds.) (Vienna: Peter Lang, 2003)
- Dani, Doan, *Shpikja e Mesjetës: Vetja dhe Tjetri në Medievistikën Shqiptare* (Tiranë: Pika pa Sipërfaqe, 2016)
- Delvina, Sherif, *Low Albania and Cham Issue* (Tirana: Euroindija, 2003)
- Elbasani, Arolda, "Religion and Democratization in Post-Communist Albania: Is it Possible to Be Islamic, Democratic and European at the Same Time?", APSA 2011, Annual Meeting Paper (2010)
- Elsie, Robert, *The Albanian Bektashi: History and Culture of a Dervish Order in the Balkans* (London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 2019)
- Elsie, Robert & Bejtullah Destani, *The Cham Albanians of Greece: A Documentary History* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2013)
- Endresen, Cecilie, "The Nation and the Nun: Mother Teresa, Albania's Muslim Majority and the Secular State", *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations*, 26:1 (2015)

- Hasluck, Margaret, "The Non-Conformist Moslems of Albania", *The Moslem World*, 15 (1925)
- INSTAT (2011). *Censuri i Popullsisë dhe Banesave*, [http://www.instat.gov.al/all temat/censet/cen susi-i-popullsis%C3%AB-dhe-banesave/#tab2](http://www.instat.gov.al/all temat/censet/cen%20susi-i-popullsis%C3%AB-dhe-banesave/#tab2).
- Ivanišević, Alojz, *Re-Sakralisierung des öffentlichen Raums in Südosteuropa nach der Wende 1989* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2012)
- Lederer, Gyorgy, "Islam in Albania", *Central Asian Survey*, 13:3 (1994), pp. 331-359.
- Koleka, Benet, "Albania's Chams want Greek apology for wartime expulsion", <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-albania-greece-chams/albanias-chams-want-greek-apology-for-wartime-expulsion-idUSKCN1G800O> accessed 24 November 2020.
- Komiteti Shteteror per Kultet (State Committee for Cults), "Religious building with 'Cultural Monument' status", <https://web.archive.org/web/20110706071224/http://kshk.gov.al/index.php?fq=brenda&gj=gj2&kid=19>, accessed 13 February 2021.
- Kovaci, Azem, *Causes of the Destruction of the Cham Albanian Minority in Greece During the Second World War* (Tirana: Ars & Academic Publishing, 2021)
- Kretsi Georgia, "The 'Secret' Past of the Greek-Albanian Borderlands. Cham Muslim Albanians: Perspectives on a Conflict over Historical Accountability and Current Rights", *Ethnologia Balkanica* 6 (2002), pp. 171-195.
- McCarthy, Justin, *Death and Exile: The Ethnic Cleansing of Ottoman Muslims, 1821-1922* (Princeton, N.J.: The Darwin Press, 1995)
- Meta, Beqir, *The Cham Tragedy* (Tirana: Sejko, 2007)
- Meta, Beqir, *Minoritetet në Shqipëri 1912-1944* (Tiranë: AAS, 2013)
- Meta, Beqir et al., *Historia e Shqipërisë në shek. XX, vol. I, II, III* (Tirana: Akademia e Studimeve Albanogjike, 2019)
- Morozzo Della Roca, Roberto, *Kombësia dhe Feja në Shqipëri: 1924-1944* (Tirana: Elena Gjika, 1994), pp. 201-202
- Muhaj, Ardian, *Nga Ballkani në Mesdhe. Shqiptarët prej Mesjetës në agimin e kohës së re* (Tirana: AAS, 2019)
- Nielsen, J. Akgönül, S. Alibašić, A. Maréchal, B. Moe, Ch., *Yearbook of Muslims in Europe, Volume 2* (Leiden: Brill, 2010)

- Norris, Harry T., *Popular Sufism in Eastern Europe: Sufi Brotherhoods and the Dialogue with Christianity and Heterodoxy* (London: Routledge, 2006)
- Norris, Harry T., *Islam in the Balkans* (London: C. Hurst and Co, 1993)
- <http://www.panorama.com.al/cmenduria-e-komunizmit-me-tanke-e-eksplziv-si-u-shkaterruan-kishat-dhe-xhamite/>
- <http://www.panorama.com.al/dokumenti-i-vitit-79-cpo-ndodh-me-camet-dhe-kosovaret-ne-fier/>
- <https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2015/04/02/religious-projections-2010-2050/>
- Platt, L., "Is There Assimilation in Minority Groups' National, Ethnic and Religious Identity?", *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 37:1 (2014), pp. 46-70.
- Pollack, Detlef, Irena Borowik, and Wolfgang Jagodzinski (eds.), *Religiöser Wandel in den postkommunistischen Ländern Ost- und Mitteleuropas* (Würzburg, Ergon Verlag, 1998)
- de Rapper, Gilles, "Religion in Post-Communist Albania: Muslims, Christians and the Concept of 'Culture' (Devoll, South Albania)", *Anthropological Notebooks*, 14:2 (2008), pp. 31-45.
- Sadiku, Xhafer, *Midis perandorive dhe religjioneve* (Tiranë: Ars & Academic, 2021)
- Safran, W., "Language, Ethnicity and Religion: A Complex and Persistent Linkage", *Nations and Nationalism*, 14 (2008), pp. 171-190
- http://www.savjetministara.gov.ba/saopstenja/saopstenja_predsjedavajuceg/default.aspx?id=19494&langTag=en-US.
- Steinke, Klaus and Xhelal Ylli (2013), *Die slavischen Minderheiten in Albanien (SMA). 4. Teil: Vraka - Borakaj* (Munich: Verlag Otto Sagner)
- Sulstarova, Enis, *Islamizëm do të thotë lindje* (Tiranë: Pika pa sipërfaqe, 2016)
- Shoqata Boshnjakët e Shqipërisë, *Ardhja dhe Integrimi i Boshnjakëve në Shqipëri* (Tirana, Zambak, 2001)
- <https://www.shqiperia.com/Shqiperia-ka-1668-kulte-fetare.13097/>.
- <https://shqiptarja.com/lajm/matja-me-e-sakte-e-perqindjeve-te-perkatesise-fetare-qysh-nga-1938ta>.
- Tajfel, H. "Social Categorization, Social Identity and Social Comparisons", in *Differentiation Between Social Groups*, H. Tajfel (ed.) (London: Academic Press, 1976)

- Tajfel, H., and J.C. Turner, "An Integrative Theory of Intergroup Conflict", in *The Social Psychology of Intergroup Relations*, W. G. Austin, S. Worchel (eds.) (Monterey, CA: Brooks/Cole, 1979)
- Vickers, M. and J. Pettifer, *Albania: From Anarchy to a Balkan Identity* (New York: New York University Press, 1997)
- Vickers, Miranda. *The Cham Issue: Where to now?* (London: Conflict Studies Research Centre, 2007)
- Zerdeci, Hümeýra, *Osmanlı Ulema Biografilerinin Arşiv Kaynakları* (Ankara: TDV Yayınları, 2007)

Obnova religije u Albaniji: Poređenje čamskih, kosovskih i bošnjačkih stavova prema prozelitizaciji i desunifikaciji

Sažetak

Ovaj rad prvo ispituje nedavnu historiju vjerskog razvoja u Albaniji tokom post-komunističkog perioda. Drugo, rad identifikira obrasce u diferenciranom razvoju materijalnog i duhovnog vjerskog života među religijama u regiji te institucionalne i političke razloge koji iza toga stoje. Treće, rad analizira poziciju albanske čamske zajednice, albanske kosovske zajednice i bošnjačke sunitske zajednice dok se one suočavaju s postkomunističkim pritiscima prozelitizacije i desunifikacije. Kroz historijsku i diskursnu analizu te nestrukturirane intervjuje s pojedincima različite vjerske, etničke i lokalne pripadnosti, rad otkriva da su vjerska, etnička i lokalna osjećanja jaka u svim trima zajednicama. Stavovi prema pokušajima prozelitizacije među Bošnjacima, Čamima i kosovskim Albancima, međutim, otporniji su od stavova lokalnih sunita prema desunifikaciji. Također smo otkrili da je slabljenje religioznosti među lokalnim sunitima u sprezi s organiziranim pokretom za izgradnju posebnog beктаšijskog identiteta, iako se većina beктаšija još uvijek identifikiraju kao muslimani.

Ključne riječi: beктаšizam, Bosanci, Čami, Kosovari, prozelitizacija, sunitski muslimani