

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union and the former Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY), religious practices are ostensibly on the rise. On the Balkan Peninsula, for instance, one often hears the term *re-tradicionalizacija* (re-traditionalization) – an expression that concerns the active propagation of religious values in the social sphere. The authors of our current *Euxeinos* issue examine the way in which religion returned to the public sphere by way of governmental institutions and non-state actors that influence Islam, and illustrate how underlying cultural traditions and the state shape an individual's relationship to god, and thus one's practice of the faith. The authors in the following issue illustrate each of these aspects with specific examples from Central Asia and the Balkan Peninsula.

As an all-encompassing faith, Islam permeates everyday experiences of practicing Muslims. Islam is, as is the case with Judaism, guided by orthopraxy – correct action – that transcends mundane activities as exemplified by, for instance, the *salat* (worship). Practicing Muslims initially declare their submission and testify their faith by way of reciting the *shahada*, and pray five times per day toward the direction of the *qibla* – the Ka'ba located in Mecca, Saudi Arabia. Besides the testimony and daily prayers, practicing Muslims pay *zakat* – almsgiving – observe *sawm* – also known as the fast during Ramadan – and perform the *hajj* – or pilgrimage to Mecca – so long as one is able to do so. Practicing Muslims perform these religious duties that are known as the five pillars in their observance of the faith. Given this emphasis on correct behavior, one might perceive Islam as static and

unchanging, but this is not the case.

The Balkan Peninsula illustrates the multifaceted character of the faith. Ever since the Ottoman arrival on the Peninsula, the most common school of Islam practiced in Southeastern Europe has been the Hanafi *madhhab* (school of thought, jurisprudence), which is considered the most liberal and flexible among the four schools of Sunni jurisprudence.<sup>1</sup> Sufi orders were widespread and added a layer of mysticism to local Islamic practices. Sufis, for instance, constructed shrines and tombs so as to mourn their dead, while believing that visiting these graves substitutes for *hajj* – pilgrimage to Mecca, Saudi Arabia – one among the above elucidated pillars of the faith.<sup>2</sup> In addition, Sufis practice Islam by focusing on their personal relationship to Allah that leads conservative schools, such as the Hanbali, to discredit Sufiism.<sup>3</sup> Islam, in other words, is practiced with a bewildering heterogeneity, and meshes exceptionally well with already existing characteristics that are dominant in local cultures and preceding religious practices, as previously stated by Leila Ahmed in *Women and Gender in Islam*

*(B)y definition, contributions from other religious traditions brought in by converts and the descendants of converts were discrete in that they were either unconscious or traceless, by deliberate*

1 Denny Mathewson Frederick. *An Introduction to Islam*. Pearson Prentice Hall: New Jersey. 195.

2 Sorenson S. David. *An Introduction To The Modern Middle East*. Westview Press: Boulder, Colorado (2008). 52.

3 Williams Alden *The Word of Islam*. University of Texas Press: Austin, Texas (2009). 109.  
King-Savić „History and Identity in the Sandžak Region“, <http://fmso.leavenworth.army.mil/Collaboration/universities/Sandzak-King-Savic.pdf>

*intention, to any tradition other than the Islamic. Similarities between prior customs and Islamic ones attest to the fact of Islam's having absorbed such traditions.*<sup>4</sup>

As such, Islam acquired and/or shaped existing cultural practices. Drinking alcohol, though frowned upon by ascetic followers of the faith, is common in Central Asia,<sup>5</sup> as was eating pork in the Balkans.

Cultural influences are often layered with, supplanted by, and/or channeled through governmental institutions, as was the case in the Soviet Union and the former SFRY. With the creation of the Soviet Union and the former Socialist Republic of Yugoslavia respectively, Islam faded into the background in both regions. And yet, Islam never vanished wholly, and remained central to the Balkan and Central Asian social fabric even though the Soviet and Yugoslav modernist projects variously restricted the learning of and controlled Islamic teachings, forced unsanctioned religious practices underground or else into the privacy of one's home.<sup>6</sup> In places where Islamic practices remained in the public sphere, they were labeled as cultural traditions and national identity markers.

In both Central Asia and the Balkans, Muslims are considered as such by way of parental confessional identity. One is, in other words, born a Muslim, never mind

the nature of one's observance of the faith. Mariya Y. Omelicheva illustrates this feature in the present issue with her example on the *Instrumentalization of Islam in Central Asia*, and states that Central Asians consider an individual a Muslim by "virtue of their birth" into a Muslim family. A similar conflation of ethnic and religious identity defined Muslims in the Balkans. Government officials of the Socialist Yugoslav Republic did not consider Bosniaks a titular nation, but as 'Yugoslavs of undeclared nationality'. In the 1961 census, Muslims were able to declare as '*Muslimani u smislu naordnosti*' (Muslims in terms of national character, ethnicity), and as national *Muslimani* (Muslims) in the 1971 census. However, Bosniaks were not considered a *narod* – a separate national entity - until 1993<sup>7</sup> when Muslims of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Sandžak area declared themselves as Bosniaks.

And yet, the collapse of the Soviet Union and SFRY did not herald an end to governmental intrusion in religious affairs, as illustrated by all authors in the present *Euxeinos* issue. Politicians still seek to influence and shape the faith to fit the current 'security discourse', or to legitimize governmental institutions as demonstrated by Alisher Khamidov and Omelicheva. Considering the present governmental intrusion in religious affairs, one might discern a continuity in how governments seek to influence religious affairs in Central Asia and the Balkans. Yet, there are not only domestic, but also foreign actors who influence and shape Muslim practices.

Turkish institutions play a vital role in the lives of Muslim communities in both Central Asia and the Balkans. Among the most

4 Ahmed, Leila. *Women and Gender in Islam*. Yale University Press: New Heaven and London (1992). 86.

5 David W. Montgomery and John Heathershaw, „Islam, secularism and danger: a reconsideration of the link between religiosity, radicalism, and rebellion in Central Asia“, *RELIGION, STATE & SOCIETY*, 2016 VOL. 44, NO. 3, 19.

6 David W. Montgomery and John Heathershaw, „Islam, secularism and danger: a reconsideration of the link between religiosity, radicalism, and rebellion in Central Asia“, *RELIGION, STATE & SOCIETY*, 2016 VOL. 44, NO. 3, p. 203

7 Tone Brंगा, *Being Muslim the Bosnian Way – Identity and Community in a Central Bosnian Village*, Princeton University Press (1995): 24 – 28.

prominent of them are the TIKKA (the Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency), the *Diyamet* (Presidency of Religious Affairs), and the Gülen movement.

As a governmental organization, the TIKKA supports infrastructural, social, and cultural projects in the Balkans and Central Asia, but also in the Maghreb area, and the larger Middle East. The mission statement of the TIKKA organization goes hand in hand with Ankara's 'strategic depth' policy, thus illustrating Turkish regional aspirations that are based on, in part, a common linguistic and religious identity. Dino Mujadžević and Xhabir Hamiti give us greater insight into Turkish practices in Bosnia & Herzegovina and Kosovo, especially as they relate to the Ottoman heritage, and how Muslims contend with and navigate the above-illustrated mixed messages from foreign and local actors.

The *Diyamet* is another officially sanctioned governmental institution of Turkey with a presence in the Balkans and Central Asia, as well as in Western European states. *Diyamet* representatives were variously

accused of spying on the activities of Muslim communities, especially their suspected following of 'Gülenists' as documented by Ahmet Erdi Öztürk in the present *Euxeinos* issue. Öztürk demonstrates how Turkish authorities utilize religion at once as a regulatory tool and legitimizing instrument for domestic and internationally oriented purposes.

Islam is a rich and multifaceted religion that evolves in tandem with political and cultural traditions. The authors of the present *Euxeinos* issue offer valuable insight into how internal and external influences, cultural aspects, and governmental institutions shape Muslim communities, and how individuals navigate these forces in their observance of the faith in Central Asia and the Balkans.

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8 RGOW 2/2017: „Islam in Zentralasien und Südosteuropa“, *Ökumenisches Forum für Glauben, Religion und Gesellschaft in Ost und West G2W*, available at <https://www.g2w.edu/zeitschrift/aktuelle-ausgabe1362-rgow-2-2017-islam-in-zentralasien-und-suedosteuropa>