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The Imperative to Discuss European Islam: A Response to Grinell and Črnič

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Prompted by two recent articles in *European Review* about the place of Islam in Europe, this article argues for the importance of considering the variants of Islam in Europe that are autochthonous as opposed to connected with migration or immigration. The article discusses the specifics of the Crimean Tatars, Bosnia, Kosovo and Albania, and the Muslims of Georgia by way of illustrating how the issues around European Islam are far from being a marginal curiosity and, in fact, point to key issues in continental culture and politics in the twenty-first century.

The relationship between Islam and European culture has served as one of the most reliable sources of controversy both inside and outside of academic discourse for several decades now. These controversies, however, have generated far more heat than light in terms of our understanding of the religion–culture nexus in Europe. Both Klas Grinell and Aleš Črnič have made recent contributions to *European Review* on this matter (Grinell 2020; Črnič 2020), and in what follows I want to use those articles as a jumping-off point for a very broad discussion of European Islam, by which I mean an Islam that is distinct from the experience of migrations from Africa, Asia or the Middle East. In so doing, I want to be clear that I am not seeking to present European Islam as the 'good' variant in contradistinction to the scary, bad 'foreign' Islam that is defined by such migration to Europe. Rather, I want to present a few key examples of autochthonous European Islam in a way that makes it clear just how central to contemporary issues in European culture and politics such religious communities are. The presence of such communities on the European political scene is by no means more benevolent or constructive than that of Muslim communities whose origins are in recent migration. Rather, their issues are *different*, and are not usefully discussed as some sort of monolithic 'Islam in Europe'. But all too often writers on the Islamic presence in Europe engage in just such a discussion, one that cannot help but ignore such communities simply because their numbers are so small when compared with their coreligionists who trace their presence in Europe to recent migration. This seems to proceed from an assumption that 'Islam and Europe' is

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basically about immigration and autochthonous Muslim communities are more of an anthropological curiosity, best left to specialists of such matters. This tendency to minimize European Islam is a real problem, because it gives a partial view of both 'European' and 'Islam'.

A critique of this tendency could begin by pointing out that Črnič discusses this sense of Islam as external to Europe, but also explicitly acknowledges the fact that this 'externality' is an illusion. He writes, for instance, that

> European Muslims are quite obviously not only the modern-day refugees coming from the destroyed Middle East, nor are they only the second or third generation of immigrants from former European colonies: for centuries, Europe has been feeling their continuous, creative and fruitful presence. (Črnič 2020, 716)

But this is not obvious at all, at least not to someone following the discourse that could be broadly labelled 'Islam and Europe'. Such discourse is notable for the degree to which it generally ignores the presence of European Islam: that is to say, places such as Bosnia, Kosovo, Albania, Crimea or Georgia. I leave Turkey out of that list because I acknowledge that its status as a European country is not universally accepted; that seems wrongheaded to me personally (I definitely think Turkey is part of Europe) but in the interests of space I am inclined to leave it to the side. It would, by contrast, be very hard to find someone who would dispute that that Sarajevo is a European city, reject the notion that the Albanians are a European nation, wonder if Crimea is maybe part of Asia, or wonder why such a substantial proportion of Georgian society is so keen for their post-Soviet state to be admitted to the European Union. These are all very clearly parts of Europe. The first two of these locales are home to Muslim majorities; the second two have well-established Muslim populations that (like the Pomaks of Bulgaria, Greece and North Macedonia) are not connected to recent experiences of migration. Črnič talks about this explicitly, and spends some time with the Bosnian example. For the most part, however, discourse on Islam simply ignores places where Muslims are also irreducibly European, and proceeds from the assumption that 'Islam in Europe' is basically to do with immigration and legacies of colonialism.

The numbers that are involved here – around 6 million people in total – are by no means tiny, although in terms of the overall European population they might seem insignificant. After all, the Muslims of Bulgaria, Greece, North Macedonia, Bosnia, Kosovo, Albania, Crimea and Georgia combined are about as numerous as the total Muslim population of France. But that cannot be the only reason that 'Islam's presence in Europe as a migration topic' has become the dominant frame in contemporary academic and non-academic discourse. One possible explanation (suggested by a reader of an earlier draft of this paper) is that it is the western member states of the EU – especially France, Germany and the Netherlands – that have been the recipients of most recent immigration, and that it is these states who have long dominated the discourse around European politics generally. Thus, when 'Europe and Islam' is an issue, it is only logical (however unfairly) that the issues of France/Germany/ Netherlands should predominate. For the most part 'Europe and Islam' is indeed

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a matter of recent migration for these westernmost member states. The cultures of eastern EU member states such as Greece or Bulgaria often come to seem quite minor in comparison. This is even more of an issue as 'Europe' comes to be synonymous in casual political discourse with 'the European Union'. Such conflation means that non-member-states such as Ukraine, Bosnia, Albania, Kosovo and Georgia come to seem very distant indeed. 'European Islam', then, is in some ways synonymous with 'Eastern Europe', all of whose concerns are so often ignored by both the EU and EU-centric commentators in favour of issues that are important to the 'core'. The most serious and rigorous contemporary scholarship is not deterred by such a western-centred vision of Europe, of course. Aziz Al-Azmeh and Effie Fokas' (2007) anthology *Islam in Europe* includes chapters by Xavier Bougarel and Dia Anagnostou on Europe's Muslim autochthons, and Jocelyne Cesari's (2015) *Oxford Handbook of European Islam* incudes substantial chapters on Greece (Evergeti *et al*. 2015), Bosnia, Albania, Russia (Dudoignon 2015) and Bulgaria (Zhelyazkova 2015). So this is not to say that these groups have been completely invisible; given that they number in the millions, they certainly shouldn't be.

What is more worrying is that all too often discussion of autochthonous European Islam seems to be something that only 'specialists' would deal with. What I would like to argue is that a full consideration of European Islam is essential for understanding contemporary Europe. Issues that define Europe's Muslim autochthons include most of the key political problems that face contemporary Europe: the emergence of civil rather than ethnic nationalism, the (sometimes creative) tension between secularism and nationalism, the (often destructive) tension between irridentism and federalism, and the accommodation of minorities with no separatist aspirations within a unified national identity.

Indeed, specialists understand well that a consideration of Europe's Muslims is far from being an arcane curiosity, and have often rallied against this sense. Francine Friedman's (1996) book, *The Bosnian Muslims: Denial of a Nation*, for instance, ends with a chapter entitled 'The Case of the Bosnian Muslims: Relevance for the Social Sciences', wherein she argues that 'the significance of the Bosnian Muslims graphically illuminates the importance of ethnicity in the political affairs of the international arena' (Friedman 1996, 235). I want to argue something similar in this article: regions with significant autochthonous Muslim populations are sites of significant tensions in contemporary European culture and politics; paying more attention to the situation of these European Muslims illuminates a great deal about where the continent is headed. Crimean Tatars have been overwhelmingly against the annexation of eastern Ukraine by Russian forces, and their experience of this conflict has been an important part of the search for a civic and non-ethnic expression of modern Ukrainian identity, an expression that is wedded to that country's EU aspirations. The experience of the Bosnian Muslims becoming a nation in Yugoslavia was a curious combination of religion and nationalism; it pointed the way towards a more complex and tentative vision of both secularism and nationhood. A comparative view of Kosovo, which originally sought republic status within

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Yugoslavia only to be plunged into the Balkan wars of the 1990s, offers an example of a seemingly religiously-motivated irredentist movement that may be more (or less) than it at first appears. Something similar is true of the Muslim population of Georgia, which can tell us a lot about how the accommodation of religious minorities can lead towards a republic that stops just short of federalism. None of these issues that I have just mentioned – civic nationalism and EU aspirations, secularism and nationhood, frustrated devolution that becomes separatist, pluralist as opposed to homogenizing versions of a republic – could be considered marginal in contemporary European Studies. Thus, I approach these problems not as a specialist in any of them (although I have spent time in Georgia) but rather as someone with a broad interest in European culture who believes that discussions of Islam have been too likely to ignore its European exemplars.

Crimean Tatars

Although the Republic of Tatarstan is actually part of the Russian Federation, there is also a substantial Tatar population in the Ukrainian region of Crimea, and that population tends to align very strongly with the Ukrainian state. Tatars in both Ukraine and Russia (as well as in Bulgaria, Lithuania and Romania) speak a Turkic language and are almost entirely Muslim (Sezai Özçelik (2020, 49) points out that 'there are Karaim Tatars, who belong to the Jewish faith'). Michael B. Bishku has recalled how, upon Russia's annexation of the Crimea in 1783,

> Tatars constituted 80 percent of Crimea's population, but now they make up only 13 percent due to periodic expulsions, the most recent of which took place in 1944, after the Soviet government accused the Crimean Tatars of collaborating with the Nazis. (Bishku 2017, 61)

Özçelik (2020, 45) notes that 'the Soviet Genocide of the forced deportation (*Sürgün*) has played a significant role [in shaping] the Crimean Tatar national identity'. One important aspect of this national identity, then, is the degree to which it emerged in opposition to Soviet identities and their successors in contemporary Russia. Writing of the period just after the collapse of the Soviet Union, Ivan Katchanovski (2005, 878) states that 'Crimean Tatars expressed anti-Russian and anti-Communist political preferences', and this set the stage for later alliances with Ukrainian nationalism. Describing the election that first brought Viktor Yushchenko to power, Katchanovski goes on to qualify the Tatar alignment with Ukraine, writing that,

> cooperation between the Medzhlis [*sic*; the Tatar representative body] and nationalist/pro-Ukrainian organisations was a marriage of convenience that resulted from mutual anti-communist and anti-Russian orientation. Some Crimean Tatar organisations, which were much less influential than the Medzhlis, advocated separation from Ukraine. (Katchanovski 2005, 881)

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A full-on separatist project has indeed been a fairly marginal part of Crimean Tatar politics in the post-Soviet period; in contemporary Ukraine, devolution has been the order of the day. This is, of course, distinct from the situation of a place such as Kosovo, although I think we will see that matters there are not so simple, given how intertwined with the persistence of Yugo-federalist models the (officially non-irredentist) independence movement has been. Overall, we will also see that the relevant comparison is with the situation of Muslims in Georgia, which I will show is marked by a minority that has, by and large, sought greater inclusion within the nation (as opposed to erasure via assimilation) and not separation from it. Indeed, Crimean Tatar distinctiveness is inscribed in legislation; Özçelik (2020, 46) notes that 'The Ukrainian parliament… recognized the Crimean Tatars as [an] indigenous people on [20] March 2014' in legislation that also inscribed the authority of the Mejlis. Thus, the Tatars within the Ukrainian state are guaranteed an arm's length relationship with the national government, in much the same 'inside but distinct' manner we will see in the Adjara region of Georgia.

What, one might reasonably ask at this point, does any of this have to do with Islam? This devolved relationship draws our attention to the inherently complex nature of Ukrainian identity, a complexity that is reflected in the country's religious demographics. Although Ukraine is majority Orthodox-Christian in the familiar eastern-European fashion, that tells a fairly small part of the story. If *The CIA Factbook* is to be believed,

> the vast majority [of the population of Ukraine] – up to two thirds – identify themselves as Orthodox, but many do not specify a particular branch; the OCU [Orthodox Church of Ukraine] and the UOC-MP [Ukrainian Orthodox – Moscow Patriarchate] each represent less than a quarter of the country's population, the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church accounts for 8–10%, and the UAOC [Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church] accounts for 1–2%. (Central Intelligence Agency 2020)

Simply saying 'a majority of Ukrainians are Christian' is thus correct but unilluminating. The country is much less religiously unified than it may appear from the outside, and assumptions that it is the site of a simple and monolithic ethnic-religious identity to which Muslims can only serve as an awkward exception doesn't do justice to the mosaic of Ukrainian identity. Nobody should be surprised, then, that the modern national identity has instead been in search of a workably *civic* or *political* rather that ethno-religious form. This is just the kind of identity model that should be able to accommodate a large Muslim community, and so it has been with the Ukraine of the post-Soviet period, most especially since the post-Maidan period. Indeed, it is tempting to see this as one of the few bright spots of the 2014 Russian invasion of the Crimea. Alina Zubkovych has argued that,

> largely [as a] consequence of the experience of Euromaidan, the annexation, and subsequent intimidation by the occupation authorities, the category of 'being Ukrainian' in Crimea is reflected not only in ethnonational terms, but also through citizenship, language and 'Ukrainian schools' experiences. (Zubkovych 2020, 101).

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She dubs this process 'banal multiculturalism', a form of civic identity that becomes second-nature in a national community whose members accept the reality of the community's diversity and proceed with efforts towards social cohesion accordingly.

What this boils down to is the degree to which the Muslim presence in Ukraine is what points the country *towards* Europe, not away from it. The Ukrainian crisis of 2014 has been popularly presented as a struggle between a westward-looking component of the country and its eastern-looking fringe; that is to say, between Ukraine as an aspiring member of the EU or Ukraine as a part of Russia's 'near abroad'. Focusing on the Crimean Tatars' anti-Russian tendencies and widespread attachment to the Ukrainian state can help us see the moment of Maidan in a somewhat more nuanced way. What was at stake in the conflict in Russia can be seen as two competing visions of diversity. Ethnic Russians form a majority in Crimea, and so it is logical to see the annexation as part of a general conflict between Ukrainians and Russians, especially since this is also the widespread understanding of the conflict in the Donbass region, where ethnic Russians are a minority. But ignoring the presence of Islam in Crimea also means ignoring a more nuanced understanding of the Ukrainian situation. Rather than a familiar Russia-or-no conflict, what we can see there is a tension between (1) a fragile state struggling towards the norms of national identity that are closer to an EU-led version of political citizenship and variable accommodation of multiple minorities, and (2) a global superpower of increasing internal instability which is using ethno-religious tensions to shore up a threatened regional hegemony. The indigenous Islamic communities of Ukraine are very clearly on the side of (1), and this should be of interest to those engaged with contemporary Europe, both because such conflicts are becoming more numerous as the years go by and because this positioning shows just how aligned the interests of Muslims are with an emergent European modernity.

Bosnia and Herzegovina

The situation is quite different for what is quite possibly the most widely known European Islamic community, the Bosnian Muslims. They are as widely known as they are, of course, because of the Yugoslav wars of the 1990s, where they attracted so much sympathy from western observers because of the way that Sarajevo especially seemed to embody a certain idealism around multicultural belonging. But aside from incidents of foreign fighters coming to Bosnia to defend co-religionists, Islam itself has been curiously absent from discussions of those Yugoslav wars, which many scholars and journalists covering the region tended to describe as a series of ethnic conflicts rather than religious ones. This is the mirror image of the way the conflict in Northern Ireland has been widely understood: as a conflict between Catholics and Protestants rather than between those who consider themselves Irish and those who consider themselves British, which I believe to be the more accurate understanding. I hold that religion as such is of nearly no importance

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in Northern Ireland. It is not disputes about the true nature of the Eucharist that have fuelled the violence there; that violence has been fuelled by differences in national identity. In Bosnia, on the other hand, it is necessary to discuss *both* national and religious issues in order to understand what is going on there. It is a case study in the way that national identities and religious practices do indeed interact, and in this way is quite different from conflicts in Northern Ireland or, for that matter Ukraine, two regions where intra-communal strife (as I have tried to argue above) has been much more about differing conceptions of citizenship rather than religious identity as such.

The place of the Bosnian Muslims in the Yugoslav federation gives a good sense of the issues at play here. Explaining the early days of that federation, Friedman (1996, 151) recalls that 'Muslimness would serve as an ethnic-identifying, but not all-encompassing, personal marker.' Under Ottoman rule, Bosnian Muslims were a *millet*, and Aydin Babuna (2004, 288) argues that 'the *millet* system, in which religion and nationality were often synonymous, affected the Bosnian Muslims more than the Serbs and Croats and religion would play a more dominant role in their national development'. That importance of religion, though, is only relative to Croats and Serbs, where the fact of their Catholic or Orthodox majorities was near-irrelevant in determining their place in the Yugoslav federal system. Xavier Bougarel (2003, 5) argues that 'The Communist Party of Yugoslavia . . . during the second world war restored Bosnia-Herzegovina as a specific territorial entity and recognised the existence of the Muslim community, though without specifying whether this was a religious or national community'. This ambiguity would define the relationship that Bosnian Muslims would have with the Yugoslav state, so much so that Babuna concludes his article by recalling of the Bosniaks that 'in 1968 they were recognized as "Muslims in the national sense"' and that 'the term "Muslims in the national sense" continued to cause confusion concerning the existence of a distinct Bosnian Muslim nation' (Babuna 2004, 312). Ahmet Alibašić's entry in the *Oxford Handbook of European Islam* describes Islam there as 'thoroughly nationalized', going on to say that 'it is often difficult to say where Islam stops and national culture begins. Sometimes it seems that Islam is at the service of Bosniak nationhood as much as the other way around' (Alibašić 2015, 439). It is not difficult to see why this 'national' qualification of 'Muslim' would be confusing over the long term, but it is essential for understanding the kind of Islamic community that emerged in Yugoslavia (one that is different, as we will see, from the one that emerged in Kosovo).

Thus, the specifically religious nature of Bosniak claims to difference cannot be ignored, but nor can religion alone serve as a validation of such claims. Indeed, scholars often point to the degree to which the degree of religiosity has served as a means to distinguish Bosnians (and other Yugoslav Muslims) from migrant 'outsiders'. Jevtić, for instance, recalls the post-war suspicion of 'a new wave of religious believers who have embraced a version of Islam commonly associated with Saudi donors and some of the Arabs who fought in the 1992–95 war' (Jevtić 2017, 56). Ironically, an important marker of a distinctly European Islam was that it was not 'too Islamic'. There was always 'something else' besides religion

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that justified the status of Bosnia-Herzegovina as a republic and de facto cultural homeland. That 'something else' could be defined as ethnic or national identity as the situation demanded, but the inclusion of religion in the matrix had the effect of rendering communal belonging inherently complex and arguably elective in some way (since one must choose to accept a religion in a way one does not necessarily choose an ethnicity). What emerged in this 'Yugo-Bosnian compromise' was a sense of national identity that was multifaceted and tentative in a way that was sharply different from the Serbian and Croatian versions that were found both at and within its borders. It was a version that also, in retrospect, seems to anticipate the more flexible and open-ended concepts of national identity that would become widespread in twenty-first century Europe.

This Yugoslav experience of 'Bosniakness' has an echo in the forms of Islam that were and remain widespread in the republic itself. A recurring theme in the academic literature about Bosnian Muslims is the open and moderate version of Islam that is indigenous there; even when scholars disagree with this, they address it directly and often wind up validating it in some way. In a broad survey of Bosnian religious practice, Alibašić (2007, 3–4) writes of 'Secularized Muslims' and 'Civic, non-violent Islam' as characteristic. In the *Oxford Handbook of European Islam*, Alibašić (2015, 438) writes that 'Bosnian Islam is essentially democratic, meaning participatory, inclusive and pluralistic'. David Bruce MacDonald writes that,

> It is clear from historical accounts that the Islamic faith espoused in Bosnia-Hercegovina was rather liberal… what the historian Peter Sugar has described as 'a variety of European or rather Balkan folk-Islam,' which included baptism, icons to prevent mental illness and other non-Moslem characteristics. (MacDonald 2002, 231)

Arolda Elbasani and Jelena Tošić write that,

> Anthropological studies on the Balkans furnish ample evidence of different ways of 'being' Muslim … The more one moves away from centrally organized religious 'fields,' the more one observes Muslim 'anomalies' – ethno-religious fusion, heterodox practices, cultural diffusion, and plural forms of belonging and believing. (Elbasani and Tošić 2017, 504)

Bougarel's contribution to the Cambridge University Press anthology *Islam in Europe* tries to complicate this picture, finishing with the statement 'we might conclude that there are many Islams in Europe, but that a "European Islam" does not yet exist' (Bougarel 2007, 121). But he can see the roots of this sensibility; concluding a section on an important liberal-inflected theologian active in the 1990s, he writes that 'Despite the war, Fikret Karčić's concern to reconcile Islam with Western modernity and to encourage its individual, rather than its collective expression, remains intact' (Bougarel 2007, 105). Bougarel discusses more chauvinistic figures, but in so doing he is clearly complicating what has come to be the common understanding of Bosnian Islam. Zora Hesová is also sceptical of this broad 'Euro-Bosnian Islam' semi-consensus, writing that she wishes 'to question the idea of a "progress towards liberal Islam" as being too straightforward' (Hesová 2019, 128), and discusses the

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presence in Bosnia of more radical, neo-Salafi groups, some of which were Saudi-funded (Hesová 2019, 134). But again, even she mentions that following some of these groups' successes, Bosnia's Islamic Community 'has since initiated a series of programs for imams and, with the help of Norway… and the EU, for youths to promote moderation, the Bosnian tradition and its European orientation' (Hesová 2019, 136).

This was likely an imperative given the widespread unhappiness that these kinds of foreign entanglements have led to in Bosnia. Jana Jevtić, for instance, writes that,

> Middle-class Muslims, who are mainly those close to the pre-war, 'good, old family' end of the spectrum, perceive this manifestation of Islam, often dubbed 'Wahhabi,' as an attack on their *national identity*, shared beliefs, and practices, as well as on their own religious identity. (Jevtić 2017, 61; emphasis added)

We will see a very similar dynamic at work in Kosovo. As during the Yugoslav period, it is difficult to see where Islam ends and national identity begins, but in Bosnia both 'national' and 'Islam' are inseparably, fundamentally European: that is to say, rooted in the experience of a continental territory, generally hostile towards entanglements with foreign fundamentalisms, and for the most part consistent with European-led idealism around openness, individual sovereignty, pragmatic moderation, etc. The point that I made with regards to the Crimean Tatars stands for Bosnians as well: the 'Muslim fact' is what points the country *towards* Europe, not away from it.

In addition, like the Crimean situation, these issues of Euro-Islam are not simply of specialist interest. To return to my Northern Ireland analogy, we can see in the experience of Bosnia the degree to which religion and national identity are *actually* intertwined. The distinct (moderate, non-proselytized) variant of Islam afoot there reinforces national identity not only in the way that it signifies difference from neighbouring groups or minorities (especially Serbs and Croats) but also in the manner in which its specific religious qualities (namely Macdonald's or Elbansani Jelena Tošić's interest in syncretic approaches or Alibašić's 'Civic, non-violent Islam') strongly echo national experiences (such as those of Bosniaks within the federal systems of both Yugoslavia and modern-day Bosnia and Herzegovina). This in turn could serve as a much-needed push to reflect on sectarian conflicts such as Northern Ireland, perhaps by way of challenging my flippant formulation about the Eucharist and considering, for instance, how strains of either Catholic communalism or Protestant belief in individual salvation do or do not reinforce the Nationalist or Unionist cultures of the six counties. These considerations should be of interest to those engaged with contemporary Europe, as factional conflicts that many assume would resolve themselves in time (such as the one in northern Cyprus) have wound up being very long lived indeed.

Kosovo and Albania

Although commentators generally point to Kosovo's similarly liberal or 'European' variant of Islam (see for example Blumi and Krasniqi (2015, 487 and 498–499,

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or Hamiti 2017, 41), I would argue that the religious situation there is important for different reasons. Like Bosnia, both Kosovo and Albania are European countries with Muslim majorities. And like Bosnia, it is a sense of moderate religiosity that has historically marked these Muslims as distinctly European and different from a somewhat xenophobic sense of 'outsiders'. Echoing the situation in Bosnia, Jeremy Walton and Piro Rexhepi (2019, 157) point out that 'In Macedonia and Kosovo alike the "fanatical" Muslim who falls prey to "Arab" indoctrination is frequently classed and racialized as poor, uneducated, and backward'. This sense of 'Balkan moderation' has begun to shift in recent years, with Isa Blumi and Gëzim Krasniqi (2015, 509) noting that in both Albania and Kosovo, 'Decades of foreign influence and tireless underground work have allowed religious extremists to establish a foothold in the Balkans while growing with the cooperation of international radical networks'. But while Kosovo and Albania have been the site of some recent excursions into a proselytization-led greater religiosity, I cannot see a compelling case that this 'tireless underground work' poses a serious threat to the secular nature of the relevant state formations, nor do these tendencies seem to be meaningfully feeding any irredentist movements. Rather, the Islam afoot in Albania and Kosovo alike informs the daily life of local Muslims much in the way that Orthodox Christianity informs the daily life of Ukrainians, or Catholicism in Northern Ireland: as a source of cultural cohesion and a matter of individual practice, without defining the authority of government or other state formations in significant ways.

But Albania, in contrast to Kosovo, has a demographic situation which means that one key comparison, especially as pertains to interactions with other religious groups, is Ukraine. Blumi and Krasniqi (2015, 478) also note that that, 'As members of the Orthodox, Catholic, and Evangelical Christian, as well as Sunni, various Sufi, and Shi'a Muslim spiritual traditions, Albanians are often considered unique among the ethno-national groups of the Balkans'. Kosovo, on the other hand, is defined by an Albanian–Serbian split, with the former accounting for about 95% of its population, but the 2% or 3% of the population which identifies as Serbian being important because of the ongoing refusal of neighbouring Serbia to recognize their former province's independence. Kosovo's declaration of independence in 2008 followed several earlier unsuccessful declarations, first from Serbia but not from Yugoslavia (July 1990), and then from Yugoslavia itself (September 1992). Although the second declaration was recognized by Albania (basically the only country to recognize Kosovo's independence at the time), it is by now fairly clear that this was not the beginnings of an irredentist movement. Despite the fact that both share a substantial Islamic population, there is very little recent history of such tendencies on either the Kosovar or Albanian side. The persistence of Kosovo within variations of Serbia and Yugoslavia for nearly a century (it was annexed by the Kingdom of Serbia in 1913) greatly weakened cultural ties with Albania. Linguistic ties remained, of course, but these have not proven strong enough to lead to a sustained movement towards a

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'Greater Albania', recent tweets from pop stars notwithstanding.[1] Given the conditions that pertain in contemporary Europe (as opposed to the Ottoman regions of the early twentieth century) this should come as no surprise. Overall, following Sujit Choudhry (whose 2019 article places Kosovo alongside Quebec and Catalonia) I would hold that in Kosovo's case it is crucial to look *beyond* Islam to see it for what it is: a small European country looking for independence from an overly-centralizing larger state, by devolution if possible, by independence if necessary. In this way Kosovo, like Catalonia, is much closer to Scotland – a country that has no more wish to unite with Ireland than Catalonia has to unite with Andorra, despite strong cultural and/or linguistic ties – than it is to Albania. An autochthonous European Islam is unusual, without a doubt, but it is not so unusual that any countries where it is to be found must logically wind up unified, even if they share ethnic or linguistic ties.

Georgia and Adjara

If understandings of the conflicts surrounding Kosovo's independence seem to overemphasize the presence of Islam in the region, the widespread understanding of Georgia's problems with breakaway regions (and the 2008 war with Russia that was fought over them) and the rise of ethnic nationalism are notable for the way that they can obscure that presence. Although Georgian Muslims can be found in many parts of the country (Tbilisi's mosque is found in its multicultural Old City, just up the hill from the main synagogue), they are concentrated in Adjara, a small Black Sea region just on the border with Turkey. In all, Adjara is about 40% Muslim. It was, like Abkhazia, an Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (ASSR) during Soviet days, and so was attached to the SSR of Georgia with special autonomy privileges. But after over a decade of post-independence rule by the local strongman Aslan Abashidze, a period marked by a 'hands off' approach from the Tbilisi of the early post-Soviet period, the government of Mikhail Saakashvili was able to dislodge this leader and fully regularize Adjara's place within Georgia via an agreement over devolution.

The regularization of Adjara within the post-independence Georgian state has also led to a regularization of Muslim identity within Georgian citizenship, something that has had some unhappy by-products. On one hand, it is clear that Muslim Adjarians are Georgian, as opposed to a minority nationality (which are much more numerous in Georgia than is generally acknowledged, including Armenians, Azeris, Greeks, and Turks, as well as indigenous groups which are found in no other states, such as the Mingrelians, the Svans, etc.[2]). This has long been recognized in Adjara

1. See BBC News' coverage of the tweet from British singer Dua Lipa (whose parents were born in Kosovo) regarding the 'autochthonous' quality of Albanians in the Balkan region: https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-53483451.
2. I am leaving aside for the moment the presence of Abkhazians or Ossetians in this 'mosaic', because of the ongoing strife in the breakaway regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, over which the war with Russia in 2008 was fought. It is worth noting that the independence of these regions has never been recognized by more than five or six states at any given time.

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itself. Jessica Preston (2016, 5) writes that 'Adjarian people continued to have a strong sense of Georgian identity throughout the uncertain 1990s', that is to say the period of strongman-rule by Abashidze. Thomas Liles has argued that,

> For the most part, Muslim identity has never been particularly strong even among older members of middle class society in upper Adjara … This segment of upper Adjara's population tends to place national identity above Islam and in many cases does not view the spread of [Christian] orthodoxy in a negative light. (Liles 2012, 9)

Giorgi Sanikidze's chapter on Muslims in Georgia follows this analysis in a way that also recalls understandings of Islam in Bosnia and Kosovo. He argues that 'On note cependant beaucoup d'innovations parmi tous les peuples musulmans de Géorgie', observing that Muslim gravestones feature portraits as well as writing in Georgian, Russian and Azeri, and that 'La polygamie n'était pas répandue en Adjarie' (Sanikidze 2009, 281).

But if Adjarians by and large accept a Georgian identity, there has been some disagreement on the degree to which Georgians as a whole see indigenous Muslims as Georgian. In a 2004 working paper, Sanikidzé and Edward W. Walker (2004, 5) write that, 'Today, the country's "traditional" confessions (Orthodox and Catholic Christianity, Armenian Gregorian Christianity, Sunni and Shiite Islam, Judaism) are widely accepted, even by most Georgia nativists, as legitimate elements of Georgian society and history'. But by 2016 Preston had come to a very different understanding; in the wake of several anti-Muslim incidents, she wrote that 'the term "Georgian Muslim" has been rejected by a majority of the Georgian population' (Preston 2016, 1). I'm not sure I accept that premise, but if this is true then the reasons may ironically have as much to do with the rise of a more open-ended view of Georgian-ness than with Islamophobia as such. Contrasting the treatment of Azeris (who are mostly Muslim) and Adjarians in Georgia, Alter Kahraman has argued that it is actually Azeris who are somewhat better off in terms of religious tolerance: 'Muslim Ajarians, especially their places of worship in public spaces, are less tolerated, unlike the case of Azeris, who have no chance of becoming "proper Georgians"' (Kahraman 2020, 309). Many Georgians consider Muslim citizens to be *ethnically* Georgian, and thus tend to hold them to a standard of cultural conformity (which for nativists and cultural conservatives alike includes adherence to Orthodox Christianity) that seems inappropriate for 'non-Georgians' such as Azeris, who are accommodated, but as outsiders. This squares entirely with Johnathan Wheatley's assessment that 'looking at some of the rhetoric from the Georgian leadership, it is hard to escape the conclusion that the cultural markers that are to define the new "civic" Georgia are to be predominantly ethnic Georgian' (Wheatley 2009, 130). Adjarian Muslims, unlike the Abkhaz or Ossetians, have always spoken Georgian; unlike the Azeris or Armenians they have no other national home than within Georgia. Thus, the reasons that they can be read as 'ethnically Georgian' seem, ironically, to be entirely *civic*: based on language and territory.

And yet, the move to embrace this minority within a big tent of 'Georgianness' has the potential to obscure or deny the specifically religious elements of the culture

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of Georgian Muslims, and thus also obscure the diversity of European Islam. Another Irish analogy is in order, but this time a southern one. The embrace of southern protestants within a post-independence Irishness, something that seemed entirely in keeping with the republican idealism that made this independence possible, has often minimized or suppressed the very real differences (both cultural and religious) that defined this community. Protestant Irish culture had a hard time being considered 'Irish' in the first decades of the independent State because, like Muslims in Georgia, southern protestants *were clearly Irish* and thus many people would assume that they should basically be Catholic, in the manner that they would not assume of migrants from Scotland who, for some residents of the independent State, might not stand much chance of becoming 'proper Irish'. A studied *de jure* neutrality in terms of national identity often obscures and thus reinforces the *de facto* dominance of a specific religion-nationhood nexus: Catholicism in the case of Éire, Orthodox Christianity in the case of Georgia. This seems to be part of what is in play in some recent conversions to Orthodox Christianity; Mathijs Pelkmans' 2010 article describes Adjarians' conversions from Islam by noting that,

> Some new Christians seemed more interested in the image of Georgian Orthodoxy than in its spiritual or doctrinal knowledge. In conversion narratives the Georgian nation figured particularly prominently, such as when an elderly male convert expressed his exaltation of finally having been 'baptised Georgian'. (Pelkmans 2010, 110)

That is a secular response, of sorts, inasmuch as the specifics of religious practice seem to have little relevance. But this is a kind of semi-secularism that is hardly consistent with the imperatives of a pluralist approach to national identity. Civic nationalism is not always as pluralist in practice as it appears to be, and the experience of Islam in Georgia provides an example of these sorts of unintended consequences with implications for everyone interested in the evolution of national identity in religiously diverse European countries.

Conclusion

I have been trying to show throughout this paper that European Islam is very much a matter of *European* culture, rather than the bi-product of migration that so much contemporary discourse seems to assume it is. Not to put too fine a point on it, it is imperative to recognize that Islam is a European religion, just as much as Christianity and Judaism are. The larger argument I have been making, however, has to do with the broad contours of European Studies itself. European Islam needs to have a more prominent place in discussions of European culture because anyone examining its key elements is also engaging with issues that are at the core of key tensions in contemporary Europe. Some of this importance has to do with religious practice as such; in Bosnia, Kosovo and Albania, traditions of theological moderation are a key part of the local identity formation in all three places, and this has clearly had a strong effect both on social cohesion and the reliably secular nature

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of the state itself, two issues of crucial importance in contemporary European politics. Some of this importance has to do with the ways that Islamic minorities have accepted the national identities of recently independent states; we can see in both Ukraine and Georgia that this is highly complex and not at all reducible to simplistic conflations with greater recognition of minority communities or the fostering of separatism. Indeed, in Georgia and Ukraine, the opposite has been the case; in both countries it is majority-Orthodox communities that have been the site of violent, Russian-allied separatism. The integration of Adjarian Muslims into Georgian identity has not been perfect but nor has it led to violent struggle; their experience leads us *towards* a more civic or territorial approach to Georgian nationalism, as that of the Tatars seems to be pushing Ukraine *towards* Europe.

Arguments that assume Islam in Europe to be about immigration from outside of Europe herself are thus a problem and not only because they are inaccurate – although they certainly are, given the reality of the communities I have talked about here as well as others (such as the Pomaks) which I have not had space to deal with. Such arguments are a problem because they represent a missed opportunity to engage a number of key problems in European culture today: the possibilities *and* pitfalls of civic nationalism in religiously diverse states; the way that specific religious distinctions impact cultural and political patterns; and the degree to which, sometimes, religious distinctions actually are not the primary motivations for political alignments. Speaking as someone who considers himself a generalist in European Studies, all of this seems much too important to be left only to the specialists.

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