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

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Since the fifteenth century, when the Ottoman control of the Balkan Peninsula was completed, a significant number of Muslims lived in this part of the world.[1] Although this region was exposed to Islam from the time when the Balkans were ruled by the Byzantines,[2] with the establishment of the Ottoman control, the number of Muslims increased substantially. During the Ottoman times, in some Balkan areas Muslims constituted the absolute majority of the population and in others a relative majority. Yet, in the peninsula as a whole, they were in the minority. Since Islam was the religion of the Ottoman dynasty, the founder and ruler of the Ottoman state, it enjoyed a special status. Although this status varied from time to time, in general, Muslims were formally regarded as first class citizens by the Ottoman state and, therefore, enjoyed the legal, social and economic privileges, such as the right not to pay a poll tax which the non-Muslim subjects of the Empire had to pay. These privileges often led a number of non-Muslims to either convert to Islam or become ostensibly Muslims while in secret keep practicing their old religion. They were known as 'crypto' members of the religion which they practiced in secret, i.e. crypto-Christians, crypto-Jews etc. Others, individuals and non-Muslim religious institutions alike, turned their properties into *waqfs*,[3] aiming to protect them from arbitrary policies of state authorities.

The Ottoman Empire was shaped by three traditions: a) the traditional Islamic concept of statehood; b) Byzantine elements; and c) the heritage of the Turkish origins of the Ottomans. The Islamic foundation of the Empire justified the strict division between Muslims and non-Muslims. The first belonged to the 'community of believers', known as *ummah*. This included a rich matrix of different ethno-linguistic groups in the Balkans whose religion was Islam: groups of people, mainly Turkish-speaking, who lived outside the region prior to its conquest by the Ottomans and moved there during the time of the Ottoman rule, or indigenous ethno-linguistic groups who were not Muslims originally, but converted to Islam during the Ottoman period either voluntarily – due to considerations of the political, social and economic privileges which Muslims enjoyed in this period – or by force.[4] The two recognized non-Muslim monotheistic religions, Christianity and Judaism, enjoyed the protection of the Islamic law as *dhimmi* (members of other 'religions of the Book') and as such enjoyed the official recognition, toleration and the right of self-governance on a wide range of religious and secular affairs. But, according to the same law, their status was inferior to that of the Muslim subjects.

Although alongside this vertical distinction between Muslim and non-Muslim subjects, other horizontal divisions into different social classes which cut across all religions, including Muslims, existed, such as that between the 'professional Ottomans – which comprised the members of the Ottoman political, military and religious elite, the representatives of recognized religions, etc. – and the *raya* (flock). For the vast majority of non-influential subjects of the Empire, Muslims and non-Muslims alike, religious affiliation never ceased to play an important role in the Ottoman period. Certain religions

specialized in certain occupations and not all professions were open to Muslims and *dhimmi* alike. The *dhimmi* had fewer rights and were governed by different laws. The non-Muslims were organized in self-governing units, which in much of the bibliography are referred to as *millets*,[5] administered by the respective religious hierarchy. During most of the Ottoman period, only Muslims served in the army, while until the 17th century when the practice of compulsory separation of boys from their families, their conversion to Islam and recruitment to the Ottoman service, known as *devshirme* (child levy) existed, only non-Muslims were subject to it.[6] That religious affiliation played an important role in the Ottoman state is also exemplified by the fact that during the Ottoman period population data were processed almost exclusively on the basis of religion, which among others shows that, for the Ottoman authorities, religion was seen as the main identity component.[7]

Throughout the Ottoman times, the Muslim populations of the Balkans consisted of three main distinct groups:

> a) local Islamized groups such as Slavophone Muslims (Pomaks: in the present-day Bulgaria, Greece, and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM); the Muslims of the present-day Bosnia-Hercegovina and the region of Novi Sad in Serbia), Albanophone Muslims (in the present-day Albania, Kosovo, Greece and elsewhere), Greek-speaking Muslims (such as those living in island of Crete and the western part of Greek Macedonia – known also as *Valaades*),[8] Vlach-speaking (such as those in the village Notia in the western part of Greek Macedonia),[9] Islamized Jews, known also as Donmedes, (in the present-day Thessalonica and Izmir);[10]

> b) Turkish-speaking Muslims who moved to the Balkans during the Ottoman rule and settled in cities or rural areas – this group also includes nomad or semi-nomad Turkish speaking groups which moved to the region during the same period and assumed various names that varied from one area to the other – i.e. Yürüks, Konjares;

> c) Muslim groups of different origin whom the Ottomans settled in the region at a given historical period (the Tatars in Dobrudzha, the Circasians various areas which nowadays are part of Greece, Bulgaria, Kosovo, FYROM etc) and d) the Romas (known also as Gypsies and *Tsiganes*) who lived a nomadic life across different areas of the region, some of them already living in the region at the time of the Ottoman conquest and others moving in later.

Besides the multi-ethnic/linguistic character of the Muslim populations in the Balkans, the diversity of Islam in the region is also reflected on the different ways in which this religion was practiced. Thus, alongside the orthodox (Sunni) Islam – which was the religion of the majority of Muslims in the Ottoman Empire - were those who ostensibly were Muslims, but they practiced other religions in secret as well as the unorthodox (Shia'hs) and the heterodox Sunni Muslims, known as Sufis, who practiced Islam in ways

which were not accepted by the political and religious establishment of the Empire and because of this, they were often persecuted by the Ottoman authorities.[11] The most influential of those was the Bektashis, a Muslim order which comprised elements from the Shia'h Islam and other religions such as Christianity which rendered it familiar and often influential among non-Muslim locals. The latter often converted to Islam under the influence of the Bektashis and other heterodox Muslim orders that operated in the region.[12]

Despite their ethno-linguistic and confessional diversity, in modern times, Balkan Muslims have often been treated as a homogenous ethnic, or even national, group. For example, in post-1971 Yugoslavia, 'Muslim' was recognized as a national identification, while it was also possible to identify one's religion as 'Muslim' and one's nationality as something else. In addition, since the appearance of nationalism in the region, Balkan Muslims were often seen and treated as 'Turks' by non-Muslim nationals, regardless of their ethno-linguistic or confessional background. This was not so much because in some areas Turkish-speaking Muslims constituted the majority ethnic group of the Muslim population of that area and, therefore in the consciousness of the locals Islam was identified as the religion of Turkish-speaking groups. It was mainly the outcome of the influence of nationalism which appeared since the late 18th century, along with the system of administering the subjects of the Ottoman Empire in accordance to their religious affiliation as it was developed during the same period – known also as *millet* system – on the public consciousness of the Balkan Ottoman subjects. This is to say that during this period religious affiliation began to assume a national meaning and Ottoman *millets* were seen to set the boundaries of the emerging national communities– i.e. a member of the Greek-Orthodox Church (i.e. *Rum millet-i*) was seen as Greek, a member of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church (*Bulgar millet-i*) as Bulgarian.

By the same token, a member of the Muslim group was identified as a 'Turk' and not for instance as 'Albanian' because Turkish nationalism emerged earlier than the Albanian nationalism in the region, it developed in the major political centers of the Ottoman Empire in the Balkans and the Near East, including Istanbul, the Ottoman capital, which it claimed and therefore the modern Turkish state was regarded as the heir to the Ottoman Empire. This view was further strengthened by the fact that since the creation of modern Balkan nation states, the Ottoman Empire and later the Republic of Turkey appeared as the guarantors of the minority rights of most Muslim groups which became minorities of these states.[13] Furthermore, the Albanian nationalism was mainly developed along ethno-linguistic lines and regarded as members of the Albanian nation all Albanian-speaking people, regardless of their religious affiliation, unlike Turkish nationalism where Islam was an important badge of Turkish identity among Turks. Although a Muslim Albanian would have been considered a part of the *ummah*, the Muslim Albanians considered themselves as separate from the other Muslims of the Empire and despite the active participation of many Albanians in the administration, the regions which constitute the present-day Albania, Kosovo, western FYROM and Greek Epirus where large compact Albanian-speaking populations lived, remained peripheral to the Ottoman state, and Islam never succeeded in becoming as important for self-identification.[14] For the purpose of this special issue, whenever in use, the term Muslim has only a religious and not national identification.

Treating Muslims as a homogenous ethnic group was part of a series of changes which were inflicted upon Muslims since the late 18th century, mainly as result of the exposure of the Balkans to the political, economic and cultural influences of European modernity. The latter refers to the adoption of political ideas, such as the separation of the spiritual from the secular domains in social life, which had their basis in the Enlightenment and were developed in politically and economically powerful European centers of the time. It also refers to political projects launched by the Balkan elites and aimed to adopt these ideas, put them in practice and make their societies mirror those of the powerful European centers. One aspect of it was the growth of nationalism and the establishment of nation states which put the Muslims of the Balkans in a difficult position. Some identified themselves with the Ottoman Empire, others with the ruling national group. Still others – i.e. Albanian-speaking Muslims and Bosniaks (Slav-speaking Muslims who lived in the region of the present-day Bosnia-Herzegovina) engaged in building distinct national identities for themselves. Thus nationalism undermined the Ottoman millet system – the once unified *dhimmi* and *ummah* - and gave birth to the various national movements.

Christian nationalists were faced with the problem of determining how Muslims, who were often numerous, fitted to their plans for constructing their own nation-states. On many occasions, these nationalists regarded Muslims as foreigners who had to be expelled. The best example of this was Greece which in 1923 exchanged the vast majority of the country's Muslims with Orthodox Christians from the Republic of Turkey with the aim of creating a religiously and ethnically homogenous state. Only Muslims of Western Thrace and the Albanian-speaking Muslims of Epirus, known as Çams, were exempted from the exchange – the latter after the diplomatic pressures of Albania and great powers such as Italy. In other cases, the Muslims were regarded as renegade members of the dominant national group who needed to be brought back into the fold. This is the case for Bulgarian, and to a lesser extent Greek, Pomaks who have been regarded as renegade Bulgarians and Greeks by Bulgarian and Greek nationalists respectively.

Another aspect of European modernity refers to the adoption of political ideas, cultural norms and values such as the separation of religious from secular domains in the social life, the downgrade of role of religion, including the *Shariah* law, in every day life, equality between men and women and the adoption of lifestyles close to those of the European mainstream – i.e. politically and economically powerful European states of the time. The adoption of these political ideas, cultural norms and values was deemed to make Balkan Muslims look less backward, more 'European' and 'progressive' and thus closer to the societies of the European mainstream. This distinction between modern and pre-modern, backward and progressive was a product of the Enlightenment and tended to identify as modern and progressive those ideas, norms, values and lifestyles which were in use by the societies of the European mainstream and as pre-modern and backward those ideas, norms, values and lifestyles which were in use outside it, including the Balkans. The influence of European modernity was channeled into the region during the Ottoman period, mainly through the 19th century Tanzimat reforms and the various national movements, but continued in the post-Ottoman period with post-Ottoman Islamic reformism. The latter refers to political movements of the post-Ottoman period aimed to promote European secular ideas and lifestyles and downgrade the role of religion among Balkan Muslim societies.

It is on the study of influences of European modernity on the Muslim populations of the Balkans that this special issue concentrates. It will focus on the first aspect of European modernity – nationalism. The development of nationalism and nationalist identities among Balkan Muslims has been examined elsewhere, including a special issue published by the *Nationalities Papers* in 2000.[15] The main focus of this issue is on European modernity in the form of the adoption of European cultural norms and values as well as the development of Islamic reformism by the Balkan Muslims in the late Ottoman and post-Ottoman period until the end of the Second World War.

For years, Balkan Muslims have been objects of discriminatory policies, persecution, and assimilation both because they did not fit the national plans of Christian nationalists of the region and being regarded as 'Turks' or 'Albanians' and, therefore, as kin ethnic or religious groups of neighboring countries – i.e. Albania, Ottoman Empire and the Republic of Turkey - with which Balkan Christian states such as Greece, Bulgaria and Serbia have often turbulent relations. At the same time, Balkan Muslims were often regarded by Christian national elites as 'backward', 'uncivilized' groups, 'left-overs' of an 'uncivilized', 'pre-modern' imperial Ottoman past who were left untouched by any influences of European modernity. For this reason, there have often been attempts to modernize them, even by the use of state force, as it happened with the Muslim society of Turkey during the 1920s and afterwards and the Muslim minority in communist Bulgaria, who were subjected to a 'modernizing' political campaign – which in the mid 1980s were assisted by Bulgarian military forces – and was referred to by the Bulgarian communist authorities as 'regenerative process'.[16] By the same token, Balkan Muslims were often the object of curiosity and scholarly investigation with the aim to examine the social status of Muslims in the Ottoman and post-Ottoman period, their minority status as well as their relations with the states in cases they constitute minorities and others.

Indeed, since the 1980s academic literature on the Balkan Muslims has grown. Monographs and academic articles have explored subjects as diverse as the legal and political positions of the minorities, demographic changes and identity, some of which fall within the scope of the subject of this special issue.[17] But academic studies have examined the impact of European modernity on the Balkan Muslims in a fragmented way, which mainly referred to the impact of nationalism and development of national identities among Balkan Muslims. They have paid little attention to the issue of influences by European cultural norms, values, lifestyles or, indeed the development of Islamic reformism in the Balkans, placed in a broad historical context that would include the Ottoman period, as this special issue does. European academic research has portrayed Balkan Muslims as pariah religious groups of a European periphery, namely the Balkans, which have remained to a large extent little or completely untouched by the political, economic and social developments in the European continent. Questions such as how Balkan Muslims received the Tanzimat reforms, how they were adapted to the changing socioeconomic environment of the Balkans as a result of the decline of the Ottoman Empire and influences of European modernity, the extent to which they followed the Europeanization projects launched by Balkan nation states in the post-Ottoman period, and the way in which political, economic and social reforms in Kemalist Turkey were received by them have not been addressed properly and it is towards this end this special issue of *JMMA* aims to contribute.

This paper written as an Introduction to the special issue, provides an overview of the context in which the Muslims operated in the Ottoman period; offers a general profile of the Muslim populations in the Balkans; and charts the meaning of the terms 'Balkan Muslims', 'European modernity' and 'Islamic reformism'. Another paper written as a short Conclusion, appears at the end of this issue, and draws the various threads of the articles of this special issue together. The main body of this issue comprises seven academic papers by distinguished academic specialists on the Balkan Islam. Some of these papers were originally presented at a panel of an international conference held in Paris from 3 to 5 July 2008, entitled: 'Empires and Nations' and organized by the Association for the Study of Nationalities, in collaboration with the Institute de Sciences Politiques in Paris. These essays address seven different Muslim communities at different periods which extend from Ottoman Tanzimat era in the early 19th century (1830s) to the end of the Second World War (1945). The choice of this period is justified by the fact that the influence of European modernity in the Balkan region was huge and due to this influence the entire political, economic and social landscape of the Balkans changed during this period.

All the papers examine various aspects of the influence which European modernity has exercised on Balkan Muslims which have been little explored in the past. Nadine Akhund examines the impact of the Tanzimat reforms on the Muslims of the geographic region of Macedonia in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, which was divided between three administrative districts (known as *villayets*) –Selanik, Manastir and Uskub. In particular, the author analyses how these reforms influenced every day life and social status of Muslims in the region, as well as their relations with non-Muslim populations in Macedonia. Along the same lines, Eva Frantz analyses how during the same period the introduction of Tanzimat reforms in the region of Kosovo exacerbated violence and its impact on reconstructing group identities, including those of Muslims. Both papers analyze aspects of the influence of European modernity on the Balkan Muslims within the context of the Ottoman Empire and thus provide the necessary historical background to understand developments of that influence in the post-Ottoman period, which is the focus of analysis of the remaining five essays in this special issue. Nicole Immig shows how socioeconomic changes in Greek Epirothessaly at the end of the 19th century, led the vast majority of the around 40,000 Muslims who lived in the region after its annexation to Greece, to migrate to territories controlled by the Ottoman Empire. Eleftheria Manta examines the development of ethnic consciousness among the Çams of Greece from the early 1920s to the aftermath of the Second World War and their relations with the Greek state. The last three papers in this issue focus on the study of Islamic reformism in the interwar Balkans. Nathalie Clayer explores the influence of *Tijaniyya*, a North-African brotherhood, on the Muslim society of Albania. Fabio Giomi examines the development, activities and the social impact of a reformist Muslim organization known as 'Reforma' in the Muslim society of Bosnia-Hercegovina. Finally, Anna Mirkova explores the conflict between reformists and conservatives in the Muslim society of Bulgaria during the interwar period.

Editing this special issue has been an interesting and challenging task, which I would not have been able to accomplish without the help of many people. I wish to thank the *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs* for accepting to publish the papers which this issue includes. In particular, I wish to acknowledge the valuable support of three people in the

journal, to whom I wish to express my sincerest and warmest thanks: Dr Saleha Mahmood, Director of the Institute and Chief Editor of the *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*, who has been very keen and encouraging from the very beginning. She assisted me in many ways during this project; Dr. Hassan Abedin, Associate Editor of *JMMA,* whose valuable advice and guidance helped me to plan, organize and proceed with the whole task, and Zulekha Pirani, Assistant Editor of *JMMA,* for her really valuable support in putting the manuscript of this issue together. I wish also to extend my gratitude to John S. Latsis Foundation which has been funding my research on the post-Ottoman Greek Islam in the last two years, as a research fellow of the Department of History and Archaeology of the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, and a visiting lecturer of the Department of History, Goldsmiths College, University of London, as well as of the Department of Russian and Slavonic Studies, University of Nottingham. I could not but extend my gratitude to all the contributors to this special issue, which would not have been completed without their papers, as well as to the organizers and the selection committee of the conference 'Empire and Nations', held from 3 - 5 July 2008 in Paris and organized by the Association for the Study of Nationalities and the Institute de Sciences Politiques of Paris, where an earlier version of some of the papers of this special issue were presented. My students and colleagues at Goldsmiths College, University of London, and the University of Nottingham have always been a tremendous source of inspiration and encouragement in the course of my research so far, including this project, and, therefore, I also wish to thank them here. This issue is dedicated to Saleha Mahmood and her team for their assistance with this project as well as for their tireless efforts to promote research on the –often misunderstood- Islamic world.

N O T E S

[1] For the purpose of this special issue the term Balkans refers to the territories which are today part of the following countries: Albania, Bulgaria, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM), Greece, Kosovo, Montenegro and Serbia.

[2] F. Bieber, "Muslim Identity in the Balkans before the Establishment of Nation States", *Nationalities Papers*, Vol. 28, No. 1, 2000, pp. 14-15

[3] *waqfs* were properties which were donated to Muslim holy or charitable institutions under the terms of the dedications document (*vakfiye*) generally used in the Balkans which guaranteed the donor and its heirs enjoyment of the property's income in perpetuity and obliged them to make a small annual payment to the Muslim institution, which the latter used to cover its every day maintenance and expenses.

[4] For a brief review on the issue of conversion to Islam in the Balkans see, F. Bieber, "MuslimIdentity in the Balkans",*op. cit.*, pp. 21-24.

[5] For a different view on *millet* see P. Konortas, "From Tâ'ife to Millet: Ottoman Terms for the Ottoman Greek Orthodox Community", in *Ottoman Greeks in the Age of Nationalism: Politics, Economy, and Society in the Nineteenth Century*, Dimitri Gondicas and Charles Issawi (eds.), Princeton: Darwin Press, 1999, pp. 169-179; S. Katsikas, "*Millets* in Nation-States: The Case of Greek and Bulgarian Muslims, 1912-1923", *Nationalities Papers*, Vol. 37, No. 2, 2009, pp. 177-201

[6] Hugh Seton-Watson, *Nation and States: An Enquiry into the Origin of Nations and the Politics of Nationalism*, London: Methuen, 1977, pp. 143-6

[7] J. McCarthy, "Muslims in Ottoman Europe: Population from 1800 to 1912", *Nationalities Papers*, Vol. 28, No. 1, 2000, pp. 29-43

[8] A. Vakalopoulos, *Istoria tou Neou Ellēnismou* (History of Modern Hellenism), Vol. 4, Thessalonikē: Stamoulēs, 1980; Th1980, pp. 89-92; F.W. Hasluck, *Christianity and Islam under the*

Sultans, edited by M. M. Hasluck, Mansfield Centre, Conn.: Martino, 2006, p. 526; A. Popovic, *L' Islam Balkanique: Les Musulmans du Sud-Est Européen dans La Période Post-Ottomane*, (Balkan Islam: The Muslims of Southeastern Europe in the Post-Ottoman Period) Berlin; Wiesbaden: Osteuropa-Institut an der Freien Universität Berlin: In Kommission bei O. Harrassowitz, 1986, p. 126

[9]   A. Vakalopoulos, *Istoria tou Neou Ellēnismou* , (History of Modern Hellenism), *op. cit,* p. 89

[10]   Hasluck refers to them as Dunmedes. See F. W. Hasluck, *Christianity and Islam under the Sultans*, *op. cit.,* p. 474

[11]   One such organized persecution was conducted in 1826, under the rein of Sultan Mahmud II, when a number of sanctuaries belonging to heterodox Muslims (*tekkes*), mainly of the *Bektashis* order were either destroyed or closed down. F.W. Hasluck, *Christianity and Islam under the Sultans*, *op. cit.* pp. 565-567.

[12]   E. Zeguinis, *O Bektasismos sti D. Thraki: Symvoli stin Istoria tis Diadoseos tou Mousoulmanismou ston Elladiko Xoro (Bektashism in Western Thrace: Contribution to the History of the Diffusion of Islam in Greece)*, Thessalonikē: IMXA, 1988

[13]   The only exception here is the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes and later the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY) in which Albania assumed the role of guarantor or 'patron-state' of the Albanian-speaking people, including Muslims.

[14]   P. Mentzel, "Introduction: Identity, Confessionalism, and Nationalism", *Nationalities Papers,* Vol. 28, No. 1, 2000, p. 9; F. Bieber, *Muslim Identity in the Balkans*, *op. cit.,* p. 19

[15]   *Ibid.*

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

[17]   See for example, H. Poulton, *The Balkans: Minorities and States in Conflict*, London: MRG, 1993; H. Poulton and Taji-Farouki (eds.), *Muslim Identity and the Balkan State*, *op. cit.*; H. T. Norris, *Islam in the Balkans: Religion and Society between Europe and the Arab World*, Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1993