Albanische Forschungen 31

Cecilie Endresen

Is the Albanian's Religion really "Albanianism"?

Religion and Nation according to Muslim and Christian Leaders in Albania

Harrassowitz Verlag

© 2014, Otto Harrassowitz GmbH & Co. KG, Wiesbaden
ISBN Print: 9783447065610 — ISBN E-Book: 9783447190985

Albanische Forschungen

Begründet von
Georg Stadtmüller

Für das Albanien-Institut
herausgegeben von
Peter Bartl

unter Mitwirkung von
Bardhyl Demiraj, Titos Jochalas und
Oliver Jens Schmitt

Band 31

2012

Harrassowitz Verlag · Wiesbaden

© 2014, Otto Harrassowitz GmbH & Co. KG, Wiesbaden
ISBN Print: 9783447065610 — ISBN E-Book: 9783447190985

Cecilie Endresen

Is the Albanian's Religion really "Albanianism"?

Religion and Nation according to Muslim and Christian Leaders in Albania

2012

Harrassowitz Verlag · Wiesbaden

© 2014, Otto Harrassowitz GmbH & Co. KG, Wiesbaden
ISBN Print: 9783447065610 — ISBN E-Book: 9783447190985

Bibliografische Information der Deutschen Nationalbibliothek
Die Deutsche Nationalbibliothek verzeichnet diese Publikation in der Deutschen Nationalbibliografie; detaillierte bibliografische Daten sind im Internet über http://dnb.dnb.de abrufbar.

Bibliographic information published by the Deutsche Nationalbibliothek
The Deutsche Nationalbibliothek lists this publication in the Deutsche Nationalbibliografie; detailed bibliographic data are available in the internet at http://dnb.dnb.de

For further information about our publishing program consult our website http://www.harrassowitz-verlag.de

© Otto Harrassowitz GmbH & Co. KG, Wiesbaden 2012
This work, including all of its parts, is protected by copyright. Any use beyond the limits of copyright law without the permission of the publisher is forbidden and subject to penalty. This applies particularly to reproductions, translations, microfilms and storage and processing in electronic systems.
Printed on permanent/durable paper.
Printing and binding: Hubert & Co., Göttingen
Printed in Germany

ISSN 0568-8957
ISBN 978-3-447-06561-0
e-ISBN PDF 978-3-447-19098-5

© 2014, Otto Harrassowitz GmbH & Co. KG, Wiesbaden
ISBN Print: 9783447065610 — ISBN E-Book: 9783447190985

Table of Content

Acknowledgements IX

PART 1
Background 1

1.1 Preface 1
Introduction 1
Albanians and the religious issue. 2
Research questions 4
Overview of thesis 4

1.2 Material and method 5
Background 5
Fieldwork 6
Presentation of primary sources: persons and institutions 14
Technicalities, transcription, translation, and terminology 30

1.3 Theoretical framework 31
Introduction 31
The Study of Religion: a few notes on the discipline 33
Communities, identities, and boundaries as symbolic constructions 35
Nations as symbols, nationalism as discourse 37
Identities and otherness 40
Myths as boundary-drawing mechanisms 42
Summary 44

1.4 Identities in context 44
Introduction 44
Communities and boundaries before Albanianism 45
Albanianism before 1912: from linguistics to independence 47
Albanianism and the Albanian state 56
From totalitarianism to anarchy and integration 75
Summary 81

PART 2
Accounting for nation and religion 83

2.1 “The past” 83
Introduction 83
The Muslim community 84

© 2014, Otto Harrassowitz GmbH & Co. KG, Wiesbaden
ISBN Print: 9783447065610 — ISBN E-Book: 9783447190985

The Bektashi community 94
The Orthodox Church 96
The Catholic Church 100
Selective memories and religious divisions 109

2.2 "Religious tolerance" 115
Introduction 115
Conceptions of religious tolerance 116
On the origins of tolerance: tradition and forefathers 119
On cooperation and leaders 122
On the theological foundations for tolerance 127
Religious similarities 132
Religious tolerance as a key symbol 136

2.3 Salvation and theological differences 137
Introduction 137
Other theologies 139
Soteriological prospects 145
Religious newcomers and mission 151
Summary 155

2.4 Religious diversity in practice: family and life rituals 158
Mixed marriages 158
Cemeteries 164
Summary 165

2.5 Folk, faith, and fatherland 167
Introduction 167
The Muslim community 167
The Bektashi community 173
The Orthodox Church 177
The Catholic Church 186
Muslims and Others in "Europe" and the Balkans 191
Summary 197

2.6 Sharing the cake: space, symbols, power, and resources 200
Introduction 200
Places of worship 200
Public symbols and symbols in public places 204
Political influence and discrimination 213
Summary 215

PART 3
Myths and identities: one and many Albanianisms 219

Introduction 219
One national community: the ambiguous Albanianist template 220

© 2014, Otto Harrassowitz GmbH & Co. KG, Wiesbaden
ISBN Print: 9783447065610 — ISBN E-Book: 9783447190985

Shaping the different Albanianisms 222
1 The myth of religion as apolitical 222
2 The myth of the Albanians' religious core 223
3 The myth of religious tolerance 224
4 The myth of provenance 225
5 The antemurale myth 228
6 The Skanderbeg myth 231
Continuity and change 232
Conspiracies and suffering 234
The past as a moral template 236
Rivalry and proximity 237
Albanianism reconstructed 239
Towards a new civil religion? 239
Summary 241

Epilogue. Religion, nation, and Albanianism 243
Introduction 243
The Copernican turn of Albanianism 243
Overview of thesis 244
The symbolic construction of community 246
Othering, enemy images, and conspiracy theories 247

Bibliography 249
Primary sources 249
Secondary sources 253

Index 265

© 2014, Otto Harrassowitz GmbH & Co. KG, Wiesbaden
ISBN Print: 9783447065610 — ISBN E-Book: 9783447190985

© 2014, Otto Harrassowitz GmbH & Co. KG, Wiesbaden
ISBN Print: 9783447065610 — ISBN E-Book: 9783447190985

Acknowledgements

In writing the PhD thesis on which this monography is based, I have received support and advice from a number of people. My greatest thanks go to my informants in Albania and to Professor Peter Bartl, who gave me the opportunity to publish this book and who has been of invaluable support. I also want to direct a special thanks to my supervisor Professor Svein Mønnesland at the University of Oslo, and to the Faculty of Humanities and the Department of Literature, Area Studies and European Languages at the University of Oslo, for the opportunity to conduct this study and for financial support for the publication at hand. I am also greatly indebted to Professor Oliver Jens Schmitt, Professor Nathalie Clayer, Professor Anne Stensvold, and Dr Ger Duijzings. Moreover, I am most grateful to my friends and colleagues who have helped me, and to all the helpful and interesting people I have met in Albania – people too numerous to mention – who have all left their impression on the thesis. I also owe a very great deal to my mother Marit and my late father Knut for their unconditional support.

September 2012 *Cecilie Endresen*

© 2014, Otto Harrassowitz GmbH & Co. KG, Wiesbaden
ISBN Print: 9783447065610 — ISBN E-Book: 9783447190985

© 2014, Otto Harrassowitz GmbH & Co. KG, Wiesbaden
ISBN Print: 9783447065610 — ISBN E-Book: 9783447190985

PART 1
Background

Oh Albania, poor Albania	*O moj Shqipni*
Albanians, you are killing kinfolk,	Shqyptar, me vllazën jeni t'u vra,
You're split in a hundred factions,	Ndër nji qind çeta jeni shpërnda;
Some believe in God or Allah,	Sa thon kam fe, sa thon kam din;
Say "I'm Turk," or "I am Latin,"	Njeni: jam turk, tjetri: latin;
Say "I'm Greek," or "I am Slavic,"	Do thom: jam grek, shkje disa tjerë,
But you're brothers, hapless people!	Por jeni vllazën, t'gjith more t'mjer!
You've been duped by priests and hodjas	Priftenit e hoxhët ju kan hutue
To divide you, keep you wretched,	Për me ju da e me ju vorfnue.
When the stranger shares your hearth side,	Vjen neri i huaj e ju rri n'votër,
Puts to shame your wife and sister,	Me ju turpnue me grue e me motër,
You still serve him, gaining little,	E për sa pare qi do t'fitoni,
You forget your forebears' pledges	Besën e t'parëve t'gjith e harroni,
You are serfs to foreign landlords,	Baheni robt e njerit t'huej,
Who have not your blood or language!	Qi nuk ka gjuhën as gjakun tuej
[…]	[…]
Wake, Albanian, from your slumber,	Çonju shqyptar, prej gjumit çonju,
Let us, brothers, swear in common	Të gjith si vllazën n'nji bes shtrëngonju,
And not look to church or mosque,	E mos shikoni kish e xhamija:
The Albanian's faith is Albanianism!	Feja e shqyptarit asht shqyptarija!

Pashko Vasa, c. 1878, in Bernard TÖNNES 1980, 56–57.
Translated from the Albanian by Robert Elsie

1.1 Preface

Introduction

The question of the relationship between nation and religion is at the heart of the religiously diverse Albanian society. To instil in people a national unity across religious boundaries has been a chief concern from the emergence of an Albanian national movement, epitomised in the 1878 slogan "[do] not look to church or mosque, the Albanian's faith is to be Albanian!" (Pashko Vasa). This project is an investigation of what the nation means to the people who in their vocation represent exactly what the Albanians have been urged to disregard: religion.

© 2014, Otto Harrassowitz GmbH & Co. KG, Wiesbaden
ISBN Print: 9783447065610 — ISBN E-Book: 9783447190985

Albanians and the religious issue

Albania is marked by an intricate political history, shifting religious policies, and a complex national identity. These factors are closely interwoven. From the 19th-century emergence of the idea that "Albanian" was a politically relevant category, various Albanian nation builders have envisaged what it means to be Albanian. Amidst diverse cultures, languages, empires, and religions, Albanian national identities have been carved out in a variety of ways among adjacent groups and identities and with emphasis on different cultural elements. With the establishment of a nation-state in 1912 and consecutive efforts to prevent it from dismemberment and disintegration, Albanian authorities have in more or less effective ways tried to construct, reinforce, and maintain a politically, socially, and culturally homogeneous concept of the nation.

A fundamental challenge to the Albanian nation-building project and the constructions of an Albanian national identity has been the religious diversity in the population. The Albanians were Muslims, Orthodox, and Catholics, and did not have any unifying institutions. Moreover, the respective religious communities were traditionally affiliated with external political powers with seats outside Albania. Within the Ottoman system, these religious boundaries had political, social, judicial, and cultural salience. The religious divisions also had a linguistic aspect because the communities used different scripts (Arabic, Greek, and Latin) and literacy was attainable only through Turkish Islamic, Greek Orthodox, or Italian Catholic education. Moreover, the religious boundaries had a regional and thus also dialectical side since the Orthodox community was centred in the southern parts of the Albanian-inhabited area and the Catholics in the north-west.

That such a heterogeneous group with so many conflicting bonds of allegiance would come to see themselves as members of the same "nation" was therefore not given. Neither was it achieved with the proclamation of an independent Albanian state in 1912. Instead, building and buttressing a nation-state and one national identity amidst other Balkan nations with a stark religious profile and a variety of ambitions in Albania was a thorny political issue which had only just begun. So was the construction of a common culture and a sense of unity among the different religious groups. In order to prevent the nation from falling apart along religious lines, which it to a certain extent did both during World War I and II, the central government did not only endeavour to secure the country's physical borders. Albanian politicians have also gone to extraordinary lengths to fortify the symbolic national boundary by coercing their members into similar meanings of what it means, and above all, should mean, to be an Albanian.

During all these years, secularism has been a tenet of Albanian politics, with which also the religious institutions have complied. Since the 1920s, they have been under pressure to emphasise their patriotic credentials and detach themselves from international religious structures, and religion has to varying degrees been associated with hostile, anti-Albanian forces. The most extreme expression of this was the anti-religious policies of the Communist dictator Enver Hoxha (1944–1985). Campaigns

© 2014, Otto Harrassowitz GmbH & Co. KG, Wiesbaden
ISBN Print: 9783447065610 — ISBN E-Book: 9783447190985

against religion had begun right after the Partisan takeover in 1944, but intensified as the state become increasingly totalitarian and isolationist. The proclamation of the world's first atheist republic in 1967 was followed by a constitutional ban on all kinds of religious practice and an almost total destruction of religious institutions with persecution, detention, and execution of religious leaders. Most of my informants have lived through this period, and some of them spent decades in prison or labour camps.

After the legalisation of religion at the end of 1990 and the collapse of Communism in 1991–92, religious life has been in a process of reconstruction. The Communist campaigns had decimated the number of clergy, and few Albanians had a theological education adequate to fill clerical functions in the religious hierarchies. Some of the pre-Communist religious elite who became the leading clerics in the early 1990s passed away within a few years, as have several of my informants and sources since my fieldwork.

The revival of religion in Albania has therefore led to a considerable internationalisation of the communities, in contrast to the policy pursued in the inter-war and the Communist period. Decades of disruption of religious life have prompted religious assistance from all the corners of the world, which meet with local traditions and rehabilitated pre-Communist institutions. The number of foreign clerics in the hierarchies is probably much higher than in the other Balkan countries. Theological studies abroad and seminars at home have slowly created a new religious elite which is gradually replacing the older generation.

At the same time, Albania is reintegrating itself in the world and undergoing profound social changes, with repeated economical and political crises, social upheavals, massive emigration, and what many would characterise as a cultural and ideological chaos. What is more, the wars and conflicts in the region in the 1990s have left profound marks. All this affects the way Albanians and outsiders think about the Albanian nation, as well as the role of religion within it.

Unlike the German Chancellor Otto von Bismarck, nobody calls in question the existence of an Albanian nation anymore, not even its historical adversaries. Albanians are about to become one of the most sizeable ethnic groups in the Western Balkans, with more political influence than ever. The legitimacy of the Republic of Albania is internationally uncontested, while the substantial ethnic Albanian populations in Kosovo and Macedonia have significantly improved their political status over the last decade. It is against this background I want to explore how the Albanians themselves think about their nation, religion, and above all, the relationship between the two.

According to the public rhetoric of both the political and religious leadership in Albania, "religion can never divide Albanians", "there have never been religious conflicts among Albanians", and "Albania is characterised by a unique religious tolerance". However, newspaper articles on "religious tolerance" often refer to disagreements between the religious communities, such as someone blowing up a cross, throwing a grenade into a mufti's garden or the yard of an Orthodox church,

© 2014, Otto Harrassowitz GmbH & Co. KG, Wiesbaden
ISBN Print: 9783447065610 — ISBN E-Book: 9783447190985

stabbing a Bektashi baba, or publicly insulting other religious communities. More to the point: If religion was never a problem, why was it so urgent for the Communists to eradicate it?

Research on religion among the Albanians has often been hampered by nationalist and Communist bias.[1] Against nationalist and Communist efforts to prove that religion is and has been a "superficial" phenomenon among Albanians, Nathalie Clayer, an authority in issues related to Albania's religious history, argues that the role of religion neither is nor has been marginal as a collective identity.[2] My assessment is that religion matters to Albanians, but the idea that it does not is an important part of their identity.

I have chosen to approach the question of the relationship between nation and religion by probing the attitudes of Albanian clerics, who formally hold defining power in religious issues. Ever since I first began to speak with and read about Albanian clerics in 2002–2003, I have been struck by the occurrence in religious discourses of words like "nation", "national", "Albanian", and so forth. That most of the religious literature I came across appeared to pay more attention to Albanian history and culture than to theological questions made me wonder. Why do the religious institutions appear so interested in "Albanian" issues? Why do they not use their newborn religious freedom to focus solely on spiritual and theological issues after so many years of censorship? Considering the fact that the surviving religious elite until the collapse of Communism were defined as anti-national, anti-Albanian, and almost exterminated, I ventured to study how religion and nation go together in their symbolic universes.

Research questions

The relationship between religion and nation is immensely complex in Albania. My focus is on the symbolic universes of the clerics, and my research questions are: While the concept of "Albanianism" arose as an effort to reconcile Albanians across religious divides, what does it mean to today's clerics? Is Albanianism a concept they identify with, and in what way? What does religion, or God, have to do with the nation? What does it mean to be Albanian? Is there any conflict between nation and religion? How and in what way are religious differences relevant? What do they think about interreligious relations in Albania? What can reinforce Albanian unity, and what obstructs it?

Overview of thesis

The book is divided into four main parts. Part 1 provides the background information and describes my fieldwork and material. It also gives an overview of my informants and the religious institutions they represent, which are the Muslim community, which includes the small Sufi orders; the Bektashi community, an

---

1 See e.g. the discussions of such research in WILMART 2005, SCHMITT 2010a, and CEKA 2010.

2 CLAYER 2005a, 2007, and 2010. See also RAPPER 2005 and 2008a and SCHMITT 2010a, p. 9.

© 2014, Otto Harrassowitz GmbH & Co. KG, Wiesbaden
ISBN Print: 9783447065610 — ISBN E-Book: 9783447190985

independent Islamic sect; the Roman Catholic Church in Albania; and the Orthodox Autocephalous Church of Albania. After that, I discuss my theoretical framework and explain my symbolic constructivist approach. The last chapter of part 1, “Identities in context”, outlines the background for the clergy’s discussion of religion and nation and explains how the idea of what the Albanian nation is, has been, and should be, has changed over time.

Part 2 is a presentation and analysis of the clerics’ views on themes such as the past, the concept of religious tolerance, salvation and theology, and religious diversity in practice. Another chapter describes their definitions of ethnic and national concepts, and the last one studies concrete disagreements and competition between the religious institutions. These six main themes are organised in separate chapters, although the topics overlap and my analyses are based on the information from the previous chapters.

The purpose of part 3, “myths and identities”, is to divulge the overriding symbolic demarcation between “us” and “them” in different contexts, and the comparison is more abstract than in part 2. In the epilogue, I summarise my findings.

1.2 Material and method

My research problem is the relationship between religion and nation in the clerics’ worldviews, and my method is to interview religious leaders, who are professionally engaged in questions of meaning and interpretation. Most of my written material in Albanian, such as newspapers, books, and religious periodicals, has been gathered haphazardly in Albania since my first trip there in 2001. The project is based on fieldwork, and the primary sources consist of formal Muslim, Catholic, and Orthodox leaders across the country, with whom I conducted formal interviews, mainly in 2005. In the end, I had interviews with clerics in Tirana and Elbasan in central Albania; Burrel, Shkodra, and Bulqiza in the north; and in Korça, Gjirokastra, and Saranda in the south. I also have a number of interviews from 2003–2004 which I have decided to use as additional primary sources. All in all, I have conducted around 27 formal interviews. In the following, I will the interviews and texts that constitute my material. I will also describe the fieldwork itself and discuss some methodological challenges, ethical issues, and my own role as a researcher.

Background

The Albanians who survived Communist persecution and are professionally engaged in reviving religion in this post-atheist society, constitute an exceptional group. Some of my informants received informal religious teaching in secrecy during Communism, often within the family. Others had studied theology and worked as clerics for a period before the ban on religion. In principle, the Muslim community was in a better position: Islam has traditionally been more egalitarian in terms of

© 2014, Otto Harrassowitz GmbH & Co. KG, Wiesbaden
ISBN Print: 9783447065610 — ISBN E-Book: 9783447190985

leadership and in theory than the Christian Churches, hence any male Muslim can in principle step in as prayer leader. However, also the Muslim community has clearly defined criteria for *ulama* (Islamic scholars) and requires higher education. For some of the Sufi orders, leadership is hereditary, hence sons of former sheiks would become legitimate new leaders. In spite of this, many positions in the hierarchy have been vacant.[3]

Fieldwork

Selection criteria and representativity

My focus is on the four religious communities that represent the formal successors of the pre-1967 institutions. These are the communities with a pre-Communist tradition in the country, which for all practical purposes are listed as "Albanian religions", and only them. These are the Muslim community of Albania (including the minor Sufi orders Rifai, Sa'adi, Halveti, and Tixhani), the Bektashi community, the Orthodox Autocephalous Church of Albania, and the Roman Catholic Church in Albania. My project is limited to their official representatives.

This choice has certain shortcomings, above all the obvious one that it excludes the other religious groups such as the Bahai and Protestant communities which also have a pre-Communist tradition in Albania,[4] and the many post-Communist religious newcomers which play a role in the revival of Albanian religious life.[5] The reason is that comparative study of four communities is challenging enough as it is, and giving a complete picture of Albania's religious scene is not my ambition.

The distinction between the "traditional" communities and the rest may seem artificial and contribute to reiterate the "special status" which the Albanians public

---

3 Apparently, all Catholic sees in Albania are now filled (cf. http://www.catholic-hierarchy.org/country/dal3.html). If correct, this represents an anomaly on a global basis as the lack of priests is often cited as a major challenge for the Catholic Church.

4 Protestantism has a longer tradition in the country than many Albanians are aware of. Since the end of the 19th century, there has been a Protestant community in Albania, which played a noteworthy role in the nation-building process. At the centenary of the Protestant pioneer and nationalist Gjerasim Qiriazi's death in 1994, representatives from Albania's other religious communities as well as the Speaker of Parliament attended the commemoration ceremony.

5 During the period of this study there were around 180 registered religious associations in Albania, approximately twice as many Christian as Muslim organisations. Some of them are umbrella organisations, such as the Albanian Evangelical Alliance, which covers 76 smaller organisations. Today, the Albanian Evangelical Alliance organizes less than a half percent of the population, but several US and European Protestant organisations are actively engaged in missionary activities and have 160 churches across the country. As in many other post-Communist countries, many Albanians believe the attraction of such religions, especially neo-Protestant sects, is their association with affluence and economic success and that new converts are motivated by materialism and a hope of escaping poverty. According to Nathalie Clayer (personal communication), their association with the promised "West" is an important factor in explaining their appeal, and she notes that in reality, more Albanians adhere to one of the new Christian communities than the Sufi orders.

© 2014, Otto Harrassowitz GmbH & Co. KG, Wiesbaden
ISBN Print: 9783447065610 — ISBN E-Book: 9783447190985

attribute to them. This is partly due to these communities' history of "Albanianist" concerns and their special relationship to the Albanian state after 1920.[6] The presentation of my material in part 2 will shed more light on this choice.

In order to make the project manageable, my criteria for informants were rigorous, or at least so I thought: my informants must be religious experts and professionals, with a clearly defined role in the hierarchy. They must be the formal representatives of the community in an area and with a normative theological function, in short, be "frocked", like bishops, priests, parish priests, muftis, imams, or sheikhs. I would not interview other religious functionaries, lay activists, people with only administrative positions, or self-proclaimed or unauthorised leaders. However, it was not always easy to tell the difference between "lay" and "religious" representatives.

Non-Bektashi Sufi orders do not seem to enjoy the same level of formal organisation as the Bektashis (in spite of rigid internal criteria for levels of religious initiation). A challenge was therefore the existence of competing Alevi associations, tarikats, and "illegitimate" sheikhs. I think this may be the case with the umbrella organisation *Drita Hyjnore* ("the heavenly light") and the Islamic Alevi community of Albania. However, it is not my task to decide their "authenticity". Since Sufi orders at any rate are hard to find and probably on the verge of extinction, I pragmatically include all information from self-proclaimed or "real" Sufi representatives as primary sources.

It was also hard to tell whether local imams, i.e. prayer leaders, really represented the Muslim community or not, since I am not fully aware of how the relationship between the regional mufti and the local imams formally works. Certain "imams" that I met may therefore have been leaders of small, informal, local groups of Muslim men and sometimes in opposition to the Muslim community and just using the mosque. All the muftis, however, were clearly defined in the Muslim hierarchy, with typical garb and *çallmë*, a white headpiece. In terms of the Orthodox and Catholic Churches, there is normally little doubt about a person's representativity and clerical status, although some claim that the archbishops prefer certain clerics to represent the Church in certain social contexts while hiding others more in the background.

Field and context

The main bulk of my fieldwork took place from September to November 2005. With my limited budget, I rented a car and drove around the country for six weeks,

6 CLAYER 2008, p. 128–129. A State Committee of Cults is responsible for the religious groups and regulates their relations with the state. The committee's mandate is to implement the constitutional right to freedom of religion, not to supervise religious activity. Its members come from the Islamic community, the Albanian Orthodox Church, the Catholic Church and the Bektashi community.

© 2014, Otto Harrassowitz GmbH & Co. KG, Wiesbaden
ISBN Print: 9783447065610 — ISBN E-Book: 9783447190985

searching for clerics, churches, mosques, monasteries and tekkes (Sufi lodges) as it was almost impossible to find concrete information and contact details beforehand.

My intention was initially to interview clerics as dissimilar as possible in terms of age, region, background, international experience, and place in the hierarchy. Besides, I wanted a good geographical spread so I could compare minority and majority situations, degree of mission, centre-periphery differences, and so on. I was particularly interested in talking to lower clergy such as village priests and imams, assuming that they would speak straight from the shoulder, have a fragmented knowledge of official doctrine, and in general be close to popular religion. Their superiors, conversely, would be well versed in theological discourse and have a more international, mainstreamed religious profile, I thought. In this way I envisaged a heterogeneous body of informants which would give me a good material for comparing localising and globalising tendencies in the religious discourse.

In practice, that project soon proved futile. Firstly, it was difficult to find that many clerics. In addition, there are not many religious buildings in Albania, and even before the Communist destruction religious infrastructure was weak. To my knowledge, the highest clergy in an area often covers a whole county or region alone, and villages rarely have any clerical presence. This basically means that there are few "village priests" or "village imams" in post-Communist Albania. When I occasionally met lower clergy, they were often hesitant to give formal interviews and redirected me to their superiors on the bishop or mufti level, i.e., the regional leadership. A positive effect of this was that I eventually interviewed many of most high-ranking clerics in the country.

Especially the lower clergy in the Orthodox Church in South Albania seemed reluctant to give formal interviews. I do not know why, but suspect that the Orthodox leadership is cautious to avoid ill-considered statements about ethnically or politically sensitive issues and prefer to handle such questions themselves. In agreement with these local priests, I have nevertheless used the information they gave me as a background, though leaving their names out.

A couple of local Muslim leaders were also unwilling to talk, but probably for a different reason. Perhaps they were unofficial prayer leaders and not on good terms with the Muslim community, or they might have been suspicious of me since some Muslim circles have come under a certain scrutiny by domestic and foreign intelligence, especially after 9/11, and the Socialist-led government (1998–2005) had also been eager to demonstrate that the country did not harbour Islamic "terrorists".

Often, I could not find any representatives of the communities even in the cities, at least not with only a couple of days to spend in each place. Also in regional religious centres the clergy could still be away most of the time, for instance because they were residing in another town. Accordingly, I could spend for instance seven hours on the road from Tirana to Kukës, driving into the mountain massif through the districts of Mirdita and Puka, stopping in the towns to look for Catholic priests, in vain, and continue to Kukës to see if I could get hold of the mufti, also in vain.

© 2014, Otto Harrassowitz GmbH & Co. KG, Wiesbaden
ISBN Print: 9783447065610 — ISBN E-Book: 9783447190985

Another practical problem was the frequent power cuts in that period. In November 2005, for instance, Shkodra had electricity only 4–5 hours a day, which often made it hard to read after sunset and charge my laptop. Besides, the standard of Albanian roads has improved immensely since that time. Today the time between the main cities is probably half of what it was back then.

Apart from the above-mentioned obstacles, my fieldwork went smoothly, above all due to my generous informants and the general Albanian sociability. All practical challenges were totally counterweighted by the generosity, hospitality, and support showed by the local population, who often are eager talk to foreigners and to make up for their country's problematic reputation. In practice, this means that a researcher, or most foreigners, in general will be met with an incredible degree of hospitality, goodwill, and an open-minded and friendly curiosity about foreigners. I have always been amazingly well received in Albania, and practical challenges are counterbalanced by social goodwill. It rarely took me more than a day to meet with a bishop or mufti, even though it was hard to get any information about the local leadership beforehand. Many of the clerics were easy to get in touch with because I had met with them previously. Sometimes they gave me points of contact to their religious colleagues in other regions, which would open doors for me when I arrived. At the end of the day, I conducted interviews with every cleric I met who was willing to give a formal interview on behalf of his community.

Interviews, questions, and sources of error

My research situation and reception have obviously had an impact on both my methods and findings. In spite of several years of studies of and work experience in Albanian cultures in the Balkans, an outsider, in my case a native Norwegian, will probably never reach a complete understanding of the various social and cultural contexts and references. On the other hand, this has some advantages.[7] Although I am bound to come across as a foreigner who speaks Albanian in a strange way, I am one of the very few non-Albanians who speak it. This gives me access to Albanian literature and allows me to discuss virtually any topic with Albanians. Besides, my

7 In my experience, being a woman may have been advantageous when doing research in this kind of patriarchal society. I am convinced that not being a Western *male* reduced the chances of me being conceived of as a foreign "spy", for instance. There was not any harassment, and nobody expected me even to try to follow the traditional Albanian gender patterns. On the contrary, it seems a cultural obligation to help a single, female foreigner travelling alone. None of the muftis practised gender segregation, and as far as I recall, none of them refused to shake hands with me, but the Muslim community has at any rate discouraged such customs since the 1920s. The late leader of the Muslim community, Sabri Koçi (d. 2004), was quoted as saying that women "should dress modestly, but if men are tempted they can protect themselves by closing their eyes" (Koçi quoted in WILLIAMS 2000; see also CLAYER 2008.) In general, Albanians respect people with higher education, and many told me I was a person *me kulturë*, "with culture". The notion of having *kulturë* also has other associations such as being cultured, civilised, urban, refined, and modern, as opposed to fanatic, rural, brutish, and so forth. (See RAPPER 2002 and 2008a.)

© 2014, Otto Harrassowitz GmbH & Co. KG, Wiesbaden
ISBN Print: 9783447065610 — ISBN E-Book: 9783447190985

background as a historian of religion also enabled me to conduct interviews with clerics using religious terms and references with which many lay Albanians are not familiar.

The interviews were semi-structured. I did not ask everybody the same questions and did not follow any particular order. Instead, I attempted to get their comments to events or issues that were similar in character. I considered it important to keep up the positive atmosphere during the interview and let the clerics speak rather freely. The order of the issues depended on how the interview developed. When time allowed, the interviews covered all the topics I wanted: Albania's religious history, religious tolerance, interreligious affairs, religion, state and the public sphere, local disputes and traditions, the social management of religious diversity, national culture, regional issues, and international relations. In most cases, I could just lean back and listen since my informants were talkative and picked up important issues by themselves. Depending on the area, I sometimes asked them to comment upon concrete local problems or incidents I knew from media reports, such as property disputes, disputed symbols, or alleged discrimination, topics I expected them to have an opinion on. In this way, the interviews became quite different, yet comparable. A noteworthy feature was that in the short interviews, the leaders displayed a more positive attitude to the other religious communities. In the long interviews, critique of the religious others sometimes became more apparent after a while. In the clerics' texts, many of them speeches, there are hardly any negative references to others, obviously because many of these speeches have been held when the communities in various contexts have participated at each others' arrangements. However, I do not consider this a weakness since the leaders' official views and public rhetoric are an important part of this study.

I presume that my informants talk differently to me as a young, female, Western outsider than to their religious brethren or to other Albanians. In my view, my outsider status proved an advantage because it made me a "neutral ear" with no stakes in local disputes or religious questions. In addition, people have a tendency to confide in me, possibly because I show interest and do not look particularly menacing. I believe there was a good atmosphere during the interviews and mutual personal sympathy. Sometimes I was taken aback by the clergy's openness considering the fact that they had a dictaphone in front of them and knew they would be quoted. I am therefore deeply grateful and humbled that they shared their time and views with me, and I hope that none of them will regret their cooperation if confronted with their own quotations or my analysis.

The insider-outsider problem, reductionism, and methodological atheism

The scholarly approach to religion influences the analysis of my material, but also the fieldwork situation and my informants' understanding of me, my role, and my approach to them.

© 2014, Otto Harrassowitz GmbH & Co. KG, Wiesbaden
ISBN Print: 9783447065610 — ISBN E-Book: 9783447190985

Bruce Lincoln emphasises that to practise the scholarly endeavour of the Study of Religion implies to "insist on discussing the temporal, contextual, situated, interested, human, and material dimensions of those discourses, practices and institutions that characteristically represent themselves as eternal, transcendent, spiritual, and divine".[8] This means that I disregard the dimension which the clerics' themselves consider most important, and upon which their very profession is based. As a scholar, my ambition is to redescribe and reproduce the informant's own "native" categories and descriptions in a universal, academic language.

Nonbelievers and outsiders do not and cannot accept the "religious reality" of his/her informants.[9] This is related to the concept of "methodological atheism", which many scholars of religion, including myself, consider the ideal approach. This does not mean that the researcher cannot have his or her own religious convictions, but must endeavour to put them in brackets while studying other religious ideas in order not to conflate them with one's own. Accordingly, one should think that researchers with no personal interest in religious questions would have an advantage since no other religious ideas would potentially disturb the interpretation of the material. Still, this is easier said than done in post-Communist countries. Given decades of aggressive anti-religious campaigns, the word "atheist" has different connotations to me and my informants. For instance, they sometimes use "atheist" as a pejorative for people who lack respect for other people, are selfish, criminal, dishonest, and so forth. I, however, reckon myself as an "atheist", but in the sense that I am a nonbeliever with absolutely no interest in otherworldly affairs, do not accept religious truth claims, and do not belong to any religious community. Besides, I do not nurture any communist sympathies.

With this in mind, I was extra careful to calibrate my words if the clerics asked about my own religious affiliation, and I basically tried to avoid or circumvent the question. The main reasons were that I did not want my informants to perceive me as a hostile person, nor did I want them to wittingly or unwittingly adapt their answers to my views. Furthermore, I assumed that when they asked about my religion, they were curious about religion in Norway, many assuming that it is a Catholic country. Consequently, I sometimes answered "most Norwegians are Lutherans", "we have a state church", or "traditionally, most Norwegians are Christians, but few attend church". To Muslim leaders I made it clear that I was not a Christian and did not have any special sympathies in that direction. When I was asked directly, I wanted to be both sincere and polite and therefore answered in a way that would make me the one who should feel embarrassed and not the informant, for instance by euphemistically admitting "I am afraid I do not have much talent for being religious…", and so on.

I informed my informants that my purpose with the meetings was scholarly research and that I met with all the communities, but I did not notice any change of

8 LINCOLN 2000, p. 118–119.
9 SEGAL 1983, p. 99.

© 2014, Otto Harrassowitz GmbH & Co. KG, Wiesbaden
ISBN Print: 9783447065610 — ISBN E-Book: 9783447190985

mood after such information. Neither did they change their tone of voice when they talked about the other communities. Indeed, the fact that I was an outsider displaying a relatively sympathetic attitude to their traditions, although not affiliated with any of them, possibly made my informants speak their mind more freely, knowing that they did not have to worry that they may insult my religious feelings. However, in my material ulama are generally less critical to "Christianity" and Christians than the Orthodox and Catholic clergy are to "Islam", but I think that has more to do with the religious history in the area than with my presence.

Other ethical considerations

When I introduced myself to my informants during my fieldwork in 2005 and 2006, I gave them my card and explained my project. I told them that I was working on my PhD thesis on religion and interreligious relations in Albania and therefore interviewed leaders from different communities. I emphasised that I would interview them in their capacity as clerics, and that I would record it, quote them, and use the material in academic publications. For those I had met on previous occasions in the capacity of political monitor for the EU in Albania (EUMM, 2003–2004), I made sure to stress that my role had changed and that I now was nothing but an independent academic. Others I had met when doing research for a report on Muslim-Christian relations in Shkodra for the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) in 2003.

Initially, I wanted to use only the interviews from 2005–2006 as primary sources. Well into the project, I nevertheless reconsidered this stance and decided to supply my study with other interviews with clerics, conducted in 2002–2004 for the MFA/EUMM without the purpose of being used in a PhD thesis. Today, the information from those interviews is mainly preserved in my memory, as well as a few scattered notes. Even though I will use the relevant points from these interviews that I remember clearly, these sources constitute a marginal part of my material, yet important for my overall understanding of the field.[10]

10 A few notes to clarify my use of this material: Regarding my reporting for the MFA, I informed the clerics that I was an academic conducting research on interreligious relations in Shkodra as commissioned research for the MFA. These interviews were conducted in Albanian, and I took notes and taped them with an old dictaphone, none of which I have kept. Since the purpose with these interviews was originally academic research, I do not have scruples recycling what I recall from these interviews in a new academic context. Moreover, I am sure the clerics wanted to convey their views, and I do not repeat anything they told me off-record. The same is the case with the interviews I did as an EU monitor. The EU Monitoring Mission was an open and diplomatic mission, whose task was to gain information about the reality in the field, a point which we always made clear to our informants. Its purpose was practical analysis of any issue that could potentially have an impact on the political or security situation and could be useful background information for EU foreign policy. Given the many rumours at the time about Muslim fundamentalists, Wahhabist infiltration, and Balkan countries harbouring Muslim terrorists, in combination with a general lack of knowledge about religion in the Balkans and my own personal interest in the field, I decided to take the opportunity and meet with some of the Muslim leaders and hear their views about "Europe", EU integration, democracy, internal

© 2014, Otto Harrassowitz GmbH & Co. KG, Wiesbaden
ISBN Print: 9783447065610 — ISBN E-Book: 9783447190985

Even though I have the impression that the clerics in 2005 and 2006 understood my project and knew what they were doing and must be reckoned as "informed informants", in retrospect I think I could have made myself clearer. Given the lack of traditions for critical analysis in Albanian academia, my informants might have assumed that I would take their analyses of history, society, and politics at face value. I could therefore have explained that I was not simply going to refer their views, but subject them to academic scrutiny, deconstructing, comparing, and contextualising everything they said. Ideally, I could also have informed them that academic formulations may be alienating to the informant. However, I did not.

I have no privileged access to the hearts and minds of my informants, and my explanation of their worldviews is not more authoritative than their own. Frankly, I am not sure whether I would feel persuaded by the analyses of my own views and statements made by a foreigner who spoke broken Norwegian. Besides, knowing that some of the elderly men have undergone gruesome experiences, which I have no possibility of understanding other than intellectually, in some way it feels disrespectful to "dissect" their views. However, critical analysis is my academic duty, and empathy is a part of my motivation.

People might be insulted by critical analyses of what is holy to them. Nation and religion are issues which universally stir up great emotions, and I study the relationship between them. Especially statements about Islam can stir controversy, although I doubt that will be the minefield I am about to step into, even though I clearly point out some ideological disagreement within the Muslim community which stands in contrast to assertions like "Islam is one".[11]

In any case, stepping on people's toes is hardly evitable when writing about political or religious issues. Any academic statement has the potential of being taken completely out of context and politicised. I have myself already been cited, wrongly, for instance in support of the view that "Albanians as a people are not religious and do not have a history of religion".[12] It also happens that journalists confuse direct and indirect speech, for instance by presenting my informants' points of view as my own, which may become extremely problematic if perceived as a value judgement.

---

conflicts in the Muslim community, their relations to the other communities, property disputes, and so on. Accordingly, I met with some ulama on local and national levels, often with an interpreter and with an international colleague present. Also back then, the informants were official representatives of their communities and interviewed in that capacity, and they were eager to convey their views and show that they were pro-Western, pro-democratic, pro-EU, and pro-NATO. I have not used any of the reports or the EUMM assessments of the information gained. The EUMM closed its mission in Albania in 2006 and the whole mission in the Balkans in autumn 2007. All in all, to use some points that I remember from these meetings does not harm the EUMM or the EU, and I am convinced that the informants do not mind. With all this in mind, I do not have any ethical objections to use also such information as a primary source.

11 Faik HOXHA 2003.

12 By the signature "Georg Katriot" [sic] in connection with a debate on the internet about the Mother Teresa statue in Shkodra and "Islam" among Albanians. According to "Georg Kastriot", other views (which I actually have) are due to "Turkish propaganda".

© 2014, Otto Harrassowitz GmbH & Co. KG, Wiesbaden
ISBN Print: 9783447065610 — ISBN E-Book: 9783447190985

The Albanian reception of the Swiss historian Oliver Schmitt's historical study of Skanderbeg[13] and medieval Albania is a particularly vivid illustration of the politicisation of academic works. Schmitt was for instance accused of having denigrated the Albanians[14] and of zealously presenting historical events and persons in a negative light.[15] The newspaper *Sot* published Schmitt's university address and urged its readers to contact him directly. Moreover, the prominent novelist Ismail Kadare called the translator, Ardian Klosi, a "national traitor". When Klosi was awarded a prize for the translation, Prime Minister Berisha instructed the Minister of Culture not to shake his hand.[16] In my view, this controversy, which is still ongoing, can be explained by Schöpflin's due observation that when a community's myths are under attack (or in this case, under academic scrutiny), "the community in question will feel itself assaulted",[17] and in particular by a prevalent Albanian reluctance to study their own culture and history critically.[18] Deconstructing the myths of Skanderbeg, religious tolerance, and Mother Teresa, as well as the relationship between nation and religion in Albania, as I do, clearly has the potential to provoke, although that by no means is my intention.

As mentioned, the clerics' frankness on tape sometimes surprised me, and given the politicisation of statements described above, I have contemplated leaving out some of the harshest descriptions of religious others. I have nevertheless concluded that my informants were sufficiently informed, and it is not my task to censor them. One must also keep in mind that Albanians, like other people in the region, might have another level of callousness both in using and receiving strong characteristics of opponents than for instance a politically correct Norwegian (at least the terms of abuse pouring down in the Albanian Parliament suggest that Albanians are more robust in this field.) However, I am careful to use conservative translations, shun sensationalist interpretations, and to balance negative characteristics with the positive attitude to each other which they also express, since the latter is just as conspicuous as the critique.

Presentation of primary sources: persons and institutions

I will now present my primary sources, that is, my informants and their texts, as well as quotations in the media. But first a few remarks about the availability of texts. After I finished my fieldwork and later arrived in the last phase of writing this dissertation upon which this book is based, information from and about Albania has exploded. (This is also the case with reliable studies of Albanian culture, history, and religion.) Before 2008, it was hard to find any texts by Albania's religious lead-

13 SCHMITT 2008a.
14 MARKU 2009, p. 9–15.
15 LLESHI 2009, p. 47.
16 I am grateful to Ardian Klosi and Oliver Schmitt for updating me on this issue. See also ROBELLI 2009.
17 SCHÖPFLIN 2002, p. 26.
18 See e.g. LUBONJA 2005.

© 2014, Otto Harrassowitz GmbH & Co. KG, Wiesbaden
ISBN Print: 9783447065610 — ISBN E-Book: 9783447190985

ers on the internet, only occasional quotations in the newspapers, most of which had poor online versions. Recently, however, the Bektashi community, the Orthodox and the Catholic Churches, and the Muslim community in Shkodra have made functional homepages with access to relevant literature, a substantial amount of speeches, religious periodicals, and other publications, including archives with earlier volumes. Also the Muslim community had a very good online version of *Drita Islame* for a while. Lately, many interviews with clerics have also been posted on YouTube. This means that the access to religious material is radically different from most of the period I have been working on this project. I cannot at the last minute take all this new information into consideration, so my analysis is based on the material at hand. However, it is still hard to find such things as practical, administrative information online, or any biographical details about clerics who are not top level.

The Muslim community

The full name of Albania's Muslim community is *Bashkësia Islame e Shqipërisë – Komuniteti Musliman*. Before 2005, the name was *Komuniteti Musliman*, which seems to be what people still call it, including my informants. I therefore use the translation "the Muslim community".

Even before the Ottoman arrival in Albania, there had been sporadic contacts between the local population and foreign Muslim individuals, but it was first with the Ottomans that Islam entered the area in an institutional form.[19] In Ottoman times, the Islamic leaders in Albania were by and large natives, which meant a great degree of continuity with local traditions in spite of the Islamisation process. Initially, Islam was primarily an urban phenomenon, and ulama belonged to the highest and most privileged strata of society. Their main function was Islamic indoctrination, and they enjoyed respect and exerted considerable influence on the public opinion. Islam's loss of political supremacy in independent Albania altered ulama's socio-political role, although their influence on political affairs in inter-war Albania may have been underestimated.

Its Muslim majority and traditional ties with the Ottoman Empire notwithstanding, Albania has not had any ethnic Turkish minority, and Albanian Muslims were autochthonous. In order to accentuate the Albanian element and distinguish themselves from the Turks in independent Albania, the Albanian Muslims, with active involvement by the state, in 1923 arranged "the first Mohammedan Congress".[20] A "National Muslim Alliance" was established, and soon after, Albania formally detached itself from the Caliphate, the Sheik-ül-Islam

19 EGRO 2010, p. 14. This article describes the historical organisation of the religious communities in Albania. For a historical overview of the Islamisation of the Albanians and the historical role of Islam in the Albanian society and politics, see also BARTL 1968, POPOVIĆ 1986 and 2010, GAWRYCH 2006, CLAYER 2006b, 2007, and 2010. For an analysis of how this issue figure in Albanian identity debates, see CLAYER 2005b and 2006b.

20 CLAYER 2008, p. 129.

© 2014, Otto Harrassowitz GmbH & Co. KG, Wiesbaden
ISBN Print: 9783447065610 — ISBN E-Book: 9783447190985

in Constantinople. Under pressure from the secular government, a new "Congress of Albanian Sunnis" in 1929 confirmed their independence and made some decisions which were considered radical by Muslims abroad.[21] Albanian became the ritual language. To assure national control of the Islamic institutions and highlight the community's Albanian character, it was decided that the grand mufti must be of Albanian origin three generations back on both sides. In spite of some protests from ulama of the conservative Islamic stronghold Shkodra, the reforms were approved without much ado. The post-Communist Muslim community readapted these statutes.

Within the Muslim community, which was headed by reformists and modernisers, the Albanianist line became dominant,[22] and the Quran was translated in 1921.[23] Ahmet Zogu's advisor, Salih Vuçitern, who intermediated between the state and the Muslim community and supported the Ahmadiyya ideas, was also influenced by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk.[24]

Towards the end of the 1920s, the Muslim community approved new statutes, which were based on the 1928 Constitution. According to these, the community was to promote religious freedom, secularism, equality among religions, brotherhood among Muslims as well as among Albanians of different religions. It should also encourage Muslims to adapt to modern civilisation[25] and rescue them from "the swamps of age-old apathy in which they are immersed".[26] The political backdrop to the quest of a "European" Islam was to justify the Muslims' place in Europe given the scenario of deportation to Anatolia.

The opening of the Plumbi Mosque in Shkodra in 1990 marked the rebirth of Muslim life in Albania in public. In January 1991 the government recognised the Muslim community, which soon moved its centre from Shkodra to Tirana. Sabri Koçi was elected head of the Muslim community.[27] He also represented Albania in the European Council for Fatwas and Research that was established in Western Europe in 1997, but the Albanian representation did not become permanent.

21 PUTO 2009, p. 472.

22 Cf. CLAYER 2004. In this, the Ahmadiyya Society of Lahore played an important role. These Indian Muslims, whom many "Orthodox" Muslims consider heretics on a number of issues, in particular the finality of prophethood, had intense proselytism in Europe and promoted a reformist Islam which suited the inter-war political leader Ahmet Zogu's modernising ambitions.

23 POPOVIĆ 1986, p. 24.

24 CLAYER 2004, p. 7–8.

25 POPOVIĆ 1986, p. 24–26.

26 Vuçitern quoted in CLAYER 2004, p. 7.

27 Koçi was born in Librazhd in 1921. At the age of ten, his family moved to Shkodra, where he began his religious studies with the top ulama in the city. Afterwards he worked as an imam in Shkodra, Kavaja, and Drisht until 1966, when he was sentenced to 22 years in prison by the Communists on charges of turning the youth against the regime. In 1986 he was released and worked in construction until 1990 when he took up religious activities in Shkodra.

© 2014, Otto Harrassowitz GmbH & Co. KG, Wiesbaden
ISBN Print: 9783447065610 — ISBN E-Book: 9783447190985

The institutional structure of the Muslim community of Albania is largely equivalent to Albania's political structure, with central, regional, and district levels. Each region is divided into several districts, normally three, each district is headed by a *mufti*, a scholar of Islamic jurisprudence.[28] The mufti controls all the Islamic activity within a geographical area, *myftinia*. By and large these myftini correspond to the 36 districts in the country. On the regional level, the highest Muslim leader is the zone mufti, who heads a council of 5–10 persons.

In the capital, the Muslim community's executive organ is elected for a tenure of five years. The Presidency consists of a chairman, two deputies, and directors, and functions as a sort of government. The highest authority is the decision-making General Council (*Këshilli i përgjithshëm*), which has regular meetings twice a year.[29] It comprises 90 members, including the muftis, the community's directors, and some intellectuals from each region. Its members direct the section of Islamic Call, control and revision, education, and of mandate and statutes. Candidates for the post of leader of the Muslim community must comply with certain standards: Islamic education, work experience, and fluency in another European language and in Arabic. The candidates must also have a "morally impeccable character".

The Muslim community edits the monthly publication *Drita Islame* ("Islamic Light"), and at least some of the myftini have their own publications. There is not yet any institution in Albania for higher Islamic education, only *medreses*. According to its statutes, the community's official school of Islamic jurisprudence is the Sunni *Hanafi*, just like in Ottoman times.

In 2003, Salih Tivari, a senior official of the Muslim leadership, was killed in his office, but the crime has never been solved. Albanian media related it to a power struggle within the Muslim community, allegedly between radical young imams educated in the Middle East and the old guard of moderate ulama.[30] In reality, the crisis was far more complex and involved funds and property, and the conflict cannot be reduced to a battle between "traditional" and "radical" Islam.[31]

Even though the Albanian Muslims, in contrast to the other countries in the region, were an ethnically homogeneous community, their internal cultural and geographical divisions have been and still are considerable.[32] For instance, the Muslim community formally includes the country's (non-Bektashi) Sufi orders. These I will refer to as *tarikats* and their leaders as *sheikhs*, in contrast to the *ulama* which will refer to the muftis.

---

28 In the Ottoman Empire, the mufti was an important office, responsible for Islamic jurisdiction within a district and also for the promulgation of secular laws.

29 ÇAUSHI 2005; "Organizimi dhe funksionimi i Këshillit të Përgjithshem", http://www.kmsh.al/keshilli-i-pergjithshem.html.

30 See e.g. DERVISHI 2003.

31 CLAYER 2006a, p. 338–339.

32 CLAYER 1990; MOROZZO DELLA ROCCA 1994, p. 19, 33–34.

© 2014, Otto Harrassowitz GmbH & Co. KG, Wiesbaden
ISBN Print: 9783447065610 — ISBN E-Book: 9783447190985

If my Muslim informants' backgrounds are representative, it seems that professional involvement in Islam in Albania often "runs in the family", since many of the ulama have other Muslim clergymen a generation or two back.

Interviews

AGIM DUKA, zone mufti of Elbasan. Interview (recorded) at a restaurant in Elbasan. Duka, probably in his forties, has studied Islam in Pakistan and been among the most active ulama in the debate about the return of property from the state to the communities. I have interviewed him before, in the spring of 2004.

AHMET ÇAUSHI, zone mufti of Dibra, which includes Peshkopi, Bulqiza, and Burrel. Member of the General Council and was for a period of time its leader. In that capacity he in 2007 was in disagreement with the head of the Muslim community, Selim Muça, over the issue of Mother Teresa on the identity cards (see chapter 2.6). Has close contact with the Turkish Islamic organisations in Peshkopi. Interview for EUMM and other informal chats in winter 2003–2004, as well as a follow-up interview in 2011 in which he confirmed his earlier statements. Ahmet Çaushi is the uncle of Bashkim Çaushi, and his son is active in Islamic affairs in Peshkopi.

BASHKIM ÇAUSHI, zone mufti of Gjirokastra, which includes the districts of Gjirokastra, Tepelene, and Përmet. Interview (recorded) in his office and in a bar. Member of the General Council of the Muslim community and the Board. Çaushi is probably in his forties and started to study Islam at home in 1988. He has also studied theology in Riyadh in Saudi Arabia, and is currently studying Islamic history in Albania. His family is originally from the district of Dibra.

BASHKIM BAJRAKTARI, zone mufti of Shkodra (2003–2006). Interview (notes) in his office in 2003 and 2005. Born 1970. The Muslim community in Shkodra describes Bajraktari as a devoted religious man from a strongly Muslim district, who during the ban on religion learnt Islam in secrecy from his parents. From 1993 to 2000 he studied at the department of philology at the Sharia Institute at the University of Medina. He is considered very formal and does not like to give interviews, but I find him friendly. Bajraktari replaced Faik Hoxha in 2003 and has by the other communities been considered a hardliner with a negative impact on interreligious cooperation in town. In autumn 2006 he was removed from his position, officially for unsatisfactory administration but probably also due to the controversies in which he was involved with the other communities in Shkodra and with the Muslim leadership in Tirana.

BLEDAR MULLAJ, imam, Saranda. Probably in his thirties. He cancelled the scheduled meeting three times but eventually borrowed my dictaphone, left, and came back with a monologue on religion in Saranda. He had a beard and did not shake hands with me, which possibly indicates support for a stricter version of Islam with stronger emphasis on gender segregation. Mullaj is now mufti of Saranda.[33]

DORIAN DEMETJA, head of the section of Islamic Call (*drejtor i Drejtorisë së Thirrjes në Islam*) of the Muslim community. Interview (notes) in his office in Tirana. Only notes because he wanted to be better prepared if recorded on tape. Demetja was born 1977 in Tirana and went to the Esat Pasha medrese in Istanbul 1992–1996. According to the community's new homepage, he has studied Arabic for a year and theology at the University of Marmara from 1997–2001.[34] He also speaks Turkish, English, and Italian, has edited several books, and frequently writes articles in *Drita Islame*. After 2005 he has continued his studies in

---

33 "Myftinitë e Shqipërisë", http://www.kmsh.info/myftinite.html.

34 "Drejtoria e Burimeve njerëzore", http://www.kmsh.info/drejtorite/14-drejtoria-e-burimeve-njerezore.html.

© 2014, Otto Harrassowitz GmbH & Co. KG, Wiesbaden
ISBN Print: 9783447065610 — ISBN E-Book: 9783447190985