Religious Nationalism and Adaptation in Southeast Europe

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Introduction

Relating nationalism to other ideologies or cultural value systems is an enigmatic scholarly activity. The enigma lies in the kaleidoscopic nature of nationalism and the ease with which it adapts to philosophically opposed ideologies. Nationalism, for instance, often assumes ties to liberalism, even though it presupposes a strong commitment to a national community that transcends individualism. It accommodates conservatism fairly well despite nationalism’s modernizing mission, and it has often been paired with communism, regardless of the latter’s internationalist rhetoric. Finally, nationalism and religion often go hand in hand, despite their deep philosophical incompatibilities and asymmetries. For example, nationalist ideologies often encourage violence against outgroup members even where religious doctrines strictly prohibit physical force. Inherently local, philosophically poor, and limited in scope or outreach, nationalism lacks a belief in afterlife salvation or in creative intelligence as source of meaning behind the universe. Yet it frequently dominates identity construction, overshadowing the primacy of Christianity or Islam which are universal in their message of salvation.

This article examines the relationship of nationalism and religion in Southeast Europe. The question of how nationalism and religion adapt to the needs of each other has not been addressed adequately in the Balkans—or elsewhere. The article highlights this interplay and demonstrates how nationalist ideologies have adapted to the cultural context of the Balkans. By incorporating religious themes, Balkan national movements have triggered a cycle of mutually reinforcing adaptations turning adaptation itself into a key process of national formation. The article identifies the degree to which religion and nationalism have adjusted to serve political needs, new ideological waves, and opportunities for ethnonational expansion. Drawing on cases taken from the Balkans, the article goes on to evaluate the general implications for prominent theories of nationalism and religion.

Because of religious diversity and varying degrees of institutionalization and de-institutionalization of nationalism and religion, the Balkan experience is particularly relevant in analysing the process of adaptation of religious and national identities.
First, the three major religions—Christianity, Islam, and Judaism—have served as elements in national formation but not always consistently across cases. Second, religious cleavages do not necessarily coincide with linguistic boundaries, thereby allowing scholars of nationalism to compare and contrast theories emphasizing either the former or the latter in the formation of national communities. Third, the experience of Southeast Europe raises questions about patterns of adaptation and whether there are distinctive pathways in national formation between, for instance, “majority Muslim” versus “majority Christian” nations or between communist versus non-communist countries. Finally, there is considerable variation in the region with respect to institutionalization and de-institutionalization if one considers, for example, the Ottoman millet system, the post-Ottoman ecclesiastical institutions in Greece, the history of secularization and institutions aiming to preserve secular reforms in Turkey, the communist and post-communism transformation elsewhere in the Balkans, and finally the post-colonial experience in Cyprus.

Culture and Adaptation in Southeast Europe

Along with institutions and structures, cultural features and diversity have been important in national formation and adaptation in Southeast Europe. In Clifford Geertz’s words, culture is a historically transmitted pattern of meaning embodied in symbols, a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which people communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about attitudes towards life. It is dynamic in character and multidimensional by nature and has a variety of key influences on political outcomes. Through culture, people organize the world and themselves and locate the boundaries of the other and the self in an effort to make sense of others’ actions and motives. Certain aspects of culture, such as transnational religious solidarities, often “stand above the nation.” In Clash of Civilizations, Samuel Huntington makes religious communities his major unit of analysis, overestimating their importance in an era where the nation and the nation-state continue to play the key role in world politics. In the Balkans, one is likely to encounter religious or secular leaders who adapt or frame their arguments in Huntingtonian terms; nonetheless, these tend to be the exception rather than the rule.

For example, Greek and Greek Cypriot elites have framed their support to Milošević’s Serbia in Huntingtonian terms, emphasizing Christian Orthodox solidarity. This support continued even when the association with Milošević’s ethnic cleansing policies in Bosnia and Kosovo could have weakened fundamental interests and positions in Cyprus, particularly with reference to UN resolutions condemning actions by the Turkish government. Yet the same circles supporting Milošević did not extend this solidarity to the ethnic Macedonians of the former Yugoslav Republic. On the contrary, Church leaders both in Greece and Cyprus...
organized rallies against the “appropriation” of the name Macedonia and the symbols of Alexander the Great. The “common religious bond” between Orthodox Greeks and Macedonian Slavs was effectively disregarded even by the clergy themselves, while Skopje and Ankara were portrayed as a “joint threat for Hellenism” in an obvious contradiction to Huntington’s civilizational boundaries.16

As this article shows, for the most part, nationalism drives religion, not the other way around. As in many other parts of the world, transnational religious solidarity has not prevented the Orthodox peoples from fighting brutal wars over Macedonia, Thrace, and Dobrudja, while the Islamic faith has made little contribution in limiting warfare between Albanians and the Young Turks17 or among the Muslim societies in contemporary Middle East.18 More recently in the Caucasus, the Patriarchs of Russia and Georgia failed to avert the conflict between their countries in what was described by the international media as “the first war between countries with majority Orthodox Christian population since the Second Balkan war.”19

Likewise, denominational differences serve as important markers of identity formation even among populations speaking the same language, for instance between Croats and Serbs.20 The South Slavs are not an isolated exception—as is suggested by the case of Northern Ireland.21 Denominational differences could agitate more conflict than inter-religious conflict if Church hierarchies label outgroup members as heretics, thus mobilizing “anti-heretic feelings” among followers. Yet, in certain instances, denominational differences have been been significantly less salient, as, for example, between Alevites and Sunnis in Turkey.22 Despite their grievances, Alevites tend to vote primarily for Kemalist secular parties. The governing and predominantly Sunni Justice and Development Party (AK Party) has made considerable efforts to promote Alevite representation and interests; however, the party continues to be viewed with suspicion by secular Alevites.23

Nationalism is sometimes weakly associated with pre-existing ethnic or national identities of the distant past. The application of the nationalist principle in retrospect and the search for glorious yet unlucky ancestors is a common theme in Balkan national narratives. The adaptation of modern ideologies to fit pre-modern historical facts is not necessarily confined to this part of the world. In fact, much of the literature on nationalism has been devoted to refuting such claims, demonstrating that the alleged continuity between ancient and modern nations is rarely based on documented historical facts.24 Yet in some cases national historians are able to justify cultural and linguistic continuity, and elements of continuity representing contemporary attachments, claims, and emotions should not be rejected a priori.

Finally, one should consider regional and within-national cultural variation. Intra-national cultural differentiation is important for Balkan societies, since national communities are often more culturally diverse than their national ideologists are willing to acknowledge. This “within-nation” variation stems from geography and economic disparities among regions. On the one hand, Stavrianos points to the problems associated with intense efforts to adjust economically backward areas to
“western industrial civilization”; on the other, he links the Balkan emphasis on particularism to geography, noting that the mountain terrain has facilitated the survival of several cultural and linguistic groups over the centuries. 25

Balkan nationalisms adapted to “within-group” diversity either by adjusting ideological programmes to incorporate and glorify multiple traditions under the umbrella of nationalist revival or by eliminating differences through coercion and force. 26 Scholars often see ethnic conflict as the result of mutually exclusive ideologies and argue in favour of more inclusive forms of identity construction. 27 Ethnic conflict, however, has not always been the result of exclusiveness. It also derives from the attempts of nationalists to forcibly incorporate national minorities. In fact, the roots of many Balkan conflicts lie not in exclusion and oppositional nationalist programmes but in ambitious efforts to forcibly integrate and assimilate unwilling “half-others.” 28 The essence of the Macedonian conflict in the twentieth century, for instance, was not the exclusiveness of the Bulgarian, Greek, or Serbian nationalisms, but the involuntary incorporation of the Slav-speaking inhabitants of Macedonia into one of three competing national programmes. 29

Modernization and Religious Adaptation

Drawing on the influential work of Ernest Gellner, scholars often see assimilation and nation-building attempts as products of modernization and industrialization. 30 The Balkans, however, put Gellner’s theory of nationalism to a hard test. Gellner saw nationalism as a function of modern industrial society where the needs of skilled labour necessitated the development of cultivated, standardized, education-based, literate cultures. In traditional societies, identities are either horizontal, dividing people among social castes, or vertical, defining small communities. In an urban setting, language and culture replace village and tribal structures as the cement holding society together. 31 Industrialized societies become more mobile and more egalitarian. To meet their industrial needs, modern states, just like modern armies, provide thorough training for their “recruits”: literacy, numeracy, work habits, and familiarity with technical skills. This either creates a united homogeneous population or triggers reactionary nationalisms in minorities who face cultural/ethnic discrimination and are thwarted in their quest for upward social mobility. 32

Nationalism did not come to the Balkans because of industrialization; rather, it was linked to the uneven modernization and underdevelopment which resulted from the socio-economic backwardness of the Ottoman Empire and the proximity of the Balkans to the West. Although nationalist ideas penetrated areas or groups with closer contact to Western or Central Europe, the socio-economic fundamentals of the Ottoman world determined the nature of nationalism and profoundly affected the relationship between traditional religious values and modernity. 33 Gellner acknowledged that the Balkans contradict his general argument but argued that
Balkan nations such as Greece were generally susceptible to the “long shadow” of European nationalism and the diffusion of Enlightenment and Romantic ideas.  

Although the “long shadow” thesis appears convincing, Gellner’s approach downplays the mechanisms by which nationalist ideas turn into mass movements. In Balkan agrarian societies, for example, the process of adaptation was critical. More specifically, Balkan nationalists were not in a position to antagonize the Church and, in many cases, had to rely on the support of existing ecclesiastical institutions. Furthermore, adaptation by nationalist elites opened a space for religious institutions to adapt, thereby triggering a cycle of mutually reinforcing adaptation. For instance, the first members of Philiki Eteria (Friend’s Company) who were behind the Greek revolution of 1821 were primarily Greek merchants of the diaspora (see Figure 1). Yet a significant number—around 78 members or 8.7% of the organization—were clergy. The influence of the Church increased as the nationalist movement moved away from urban mercantile centres to the rural areas of the Balkan heartland.

**Religion and Nationalism**

Views on the organic relationship between nationalism and religion are not confined to the Balkans. Miroslav Hroch, Anthony Smith, and John Hutchinson all suggest that religion has played a decisive role in the formation of modern nations. Hroch acknowledges the need for linguistic or religious ties enabling a higher degree of social communication inside the group than outside it. He argues that ethnic identity is stronger when it is supported by ecclesiastical institutions and he records many instances in which clerics have played a role in the formation of small patriotic groups in Europe. For Hroch the key in the success of any agitation is that its argument at least roughly corresponds to reality as perceived by those to whom it is directed, a process that makes “inward ties” of language and religion extremely important.
Anthony Smith insists on the importance of pre-modern ties, including religion, in the formation of modern nations. He argues that “language, religion, customs and pigmentation are often taken to describe objective ‘cultural markers’ or differentiae that persist independently of the will of individuals…” He also points to cases of “dual legitimation” where nationalists integrate God and the state, cosmos and society, believer and citizen into thought and action. John Hutchinson introduces the concept of cultural nationalism, the response to a deep-seated crisis of identity and purpose within the educated strata of communities shaken by the impact of modernization on the traditional status order. Cultural nationalists “revive” a vision of the nation to redirect traditionalists and modernists away from conflict and unite them in the task of constructing an integrated distinctive and autonomous community, capable of competing in the modern world.

Intellectuals in the Balkans have followed a similar trajectory, integrating and adapting the modern with the traditional. For example, in the mid-nineteenth century Konstantinos Paparrigopoulos rehabilitated Greece’s Byzantine past, previously challenged by the first wave of Greek nationalists. Paparrigopoulos argued that Hellenism (or Greekness) contains both classical and Christian elements, the one complementing the other. Paparrigopoulos was inspired by Romanticism and particularly Johann Gottfried Von Herder (1744–1803) who saw nations as natural, perennial and permanent features of humankind. Other intellectuals, such as Nicolae Iorga in Romania, have played similar roles. Iorga built on Paparrigopoulos’ pattern, integrating the Byzantine legacy in Romanian historiography and claiming Romania as heir to Rome through Byzantium and Orthodoxy. In Turkey, Ziya Gökalp tried to reconcile his vision of Turan with the present reality of the Ottoman world and Islam. The process of adaptation is illustrative in the Turkish case. For Gökalp, the Turkish nation belonged at the same time to the Ural-Altaic group of peoples, to the Islamic Ümmet, and to Western internationality.

Common to these thinkers are their vigorous intellectual effort and sophistication in their incorporation of traditional values into their conception of nationhood. In the words of Eickelman and Piscator, traditions are “profoundly and consciously modified and manipulated under the guise of return to a more legitimate earlier practice.” Yet the accommodation of religion in modern nationalist narratives should not be understood as an effort to strengthen pre-modern transnational solidarity (in Huntingtonian or other terms) but as a way of further adapting nationalist doctrines to legitimize subsequent political realities and needs.

Religion and the Modern State

Religion has played an important role in the formation of modern national identities in the Balkans. Although negotiated by secular leaders, the exchange of population between Greece and Turkey in the 1920s took place on a confessional rather than a
linguistic basis. This meant that Greek-speaking Muslim Turks from Crete had to leave for Turkey to make space for Turkish-speaking Christian Greeks from inner Asia Minor. The exchange even included the Roma or other groups who were not ethnically Greek or Turkish but simply Orthodox or Muslim. Moreover, the South Slavs were divided along confessional lines that proved important in the formation of modern national identities, despite efforts by Balkan intellectuals to propagate Yugoslavism as the major political or national ideology. More interesting is the use of the term “Muslim” or “Bosnian Muslim” even for those Bosniaks who opted for atheism under communism. The communist authorities of the former Yugoslavia opted for this term because the single use of the terms Bosniaks (Bonjak) would have implied that Bosnia is the national homeland of the former and not the homeland of local Serbs and Croats as well.

A notable exception is the Albanian national movement where language overshadowed religious differentiations among Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, and Muslim Albanians. Leaders of the Albanian national movement in the nineteenth century used “Albanianism” as a form of religion to overcome religious divisions and foster national unity. Vasho Pasha, an Albanian who held a high position in the Ottoman administration, declared that the “only religion of Albanians is Albanianism.” He wanted Albanians of all religions and denominations to work together against their neighbours’ plans to expand into territories of the Ottoman Empire inhabited primarily by Albanians. Enver Hoxha used a similar slogan in 1967, stating “Albania is the world’s first atheistic state, whose religion is Albanianism.” Hoxha’s bid to wipe out religion was partly inspired by the Chinese Cultural Revolution. Nonetheless, the collapse of communism in Albania did not lead to rapid politicization or violence across religious lines. The endurance of the country’s transreligious nationalism could be attributed to a variety of factors including the denominational divisions among the “Muslims” and the religious characteristics of the Bektashi order resembling Shia Islam and representing around 20% of the population of the country in the early twentieth century. According to Arnakis and Bieber, Bektashim readily adopted other religious traditions, providing links and leadership for other denominations and religious groups in the country.

Elsewhere in the Balkans religious divisions have been important in the emergence and consolidation of national ideologies. To begin with, religion influenced national revolutions. The transmission of Western revolutionary ideas in the Balkans has led to uprisings, fought on both nationalist and confessional terms. The revolutions, in turn, have become points of reference for the assimilation of co-religious groups in the nationalist core, despite linguistic differentiation. Some Balkan examples include the Arbanites in Greece, the Kurds in Turkey, and the Vlachs everywhere among the Orthodox peoples. Even in the first “secular” wave of the Greek revolution, the role of faith appears to have been dominant; Orthodox Christians of Albanian (Arbanite) or Vlach descent identified with the Greek cause, even if they did not speak Greek. And the first Greek constitution in Epidaurus in 1822 stated that all the native inhabitants who “believed in Christ” were ipso facto Greek.
More important were the role and the power of ecclesiastical institutions in the *millet* system which allowed religious groups a degree of cultural and institutional autonomy within the Ottoman space. This institutional autonomy was later translated into separate educational systems as in colonial Cyprus under British imperial rule. For the most part, religious institutions adapted to the needs of modern nationalist movements and provided financial and human resources for the national awakening. In Bulgaria, the local clergy split from the Greek Patriarchy to adapt to the needs of a rising Bulgarian nationalist movement. The split was manifested in the creation of the Bulgarian Exarchate, the independent Church of the Bulgarians since 1870.

In geographic Macedonia, the presence of ecclesiastical institutions dominated by the Bulgarians (Exarchist), the Greeks (Patriarchist) and the Serbs (Serbian Church) contributed to the delay in the development of a local ethnic Macedonian consciousness. When the Macedonian Republic obtained federal status within the former Yugoslavia, its communist leadership “realized that religion and the church were central to national formation and key elements of each nation in the Balkans.” Although declared atheists, the communist leaders of Yugoslav Macedonia fought hard for an independent Macedonian Orthodox Church and attempted to revive the historic Ohrid archbishopric.

In Greece, religious leaders and official historiography downplayed the connection between ecclesiastical institutions and the Ottoman rulers. The process of adaptation required the invention of new traditions which emphasized resistance to the Ottomans. One such tradition concerned “secret schooling,” which portrayed the clergy as defenders of the language and customs of the Greeks under Ottoman rule because they secretly gathered Greek children to teach them. Until recently, the 1885/1886 painting by Nikolaos Gizys, “The Secret School,” decorated Greek classrooms, along with the 1996 Drachmai currency note, and schoolchildren recited a poem from that era.

Not surprisingly, given this history, when the Greek government decided to revise history books, the late Archbishop Christodoulos created a great deal of resistance. In a related incident, his counterpart in Cyprus warned that he would ask children to throw away “distorted” history books. Archbishop Christodoulos enjoyed unprecedented popularity among the Greek public, a popularity which often far exceeded that of the Greek prime minister or any opposition leaders. The Greek Church retained its popularity by making appeals to youth and by presenting itself as the guardian of the “endangered nation.” Both Mavrogordatos and Halikiopoulou emphasize the role of threat perception as a legitimization of the Church’s role in state affairs.

**Legitimating Religion in Public Life**

This point is reinforced in Cyprus between Greek and Turkish Cypriots although with some key differences across the communal divide. The Greek Cypriot clergy legitimize their position in politics by making references to the past. Archbishop
Chrysostomos II has argued that “political parties have a life span of 40 years while the Church has been with the people of this country for 2,000 years.” More importantly, ecclesiastical institutions in the island owned properties and resources which allowed them to preserve a role in daily affairs. Across the divide, the Turkish Cypriots are more secular, a development that puzzles scholars who see incompatibilities between Islam and secularism. Secularism among Turkish Cypriots could be explained by the primarily urban character of the community—as among Muslims in Bosnia and the early linkages to Kemalism in Turkey.

In other countries in Southeast Europe, schemes which legitimize the role of religion echo those found in Greece. The Serbian clergy have developed similar narratives in the post-communist era as defenders of tradition and national entitlements, particularly Kosovo. They also managed to lobby Orthodox Churches, particularly in Russia and Greece, for support during the Milošević wars. In Croatia, the conservative right-wing governments of the first half of the 1990 capitalized on “the return to tradition narrative” and the “building of a strong Croatian society” based on Catholic traditions and ethnic identity. In other Balkan countries, association with communist authorities restricted the role of churches in the post-communist era. In Bulgaria, for instance, there was a split within the Orthodox community between “reformists” and the communist-era clergy. Finally, in Turkey, the use of political Islam is legitimized by reference to the unity of the country, particularly the common bond between Turks and Kurds. The AK Party is currently the only country-wide party receiving significant support from all regions, including the Kurdish provinces. In the 2008 trial aiming at closing down the ruling party for violating secular principles, Kemalist judges were reminded that the closure of the only nation-wide party would be detrimental to the unity of the country—a major concern for the Kemalist establishment itself.

Throughout the twentieth century the complexity of legitimizing religion has been a focal point in Turkish politics. Religion has traditionally played a role in legitimizing the control of national centres over economically backward religious areas—an economic distinction which resulted from the uneven modernization of the Anatolian peninsula. Şerif Mardin posits a model of centre–periphery relations to explain how religion served as an instrument for cohesion among the Ottoman elites in the centre and an important link between the centre of the empire and its Anatolian periphery. The introduction of secular reforms in Turkey undid the religious bond between the elite and the masses and de-linked the centre from the periphery. The excesses of Kemalist ideology created a space for the return of religion, as manifested in all free elections in Turkey since the 1950s. At an electoral and substantive level, Adnan Menderes, Turgut Özal, and more recently Recep Tayyip Erdoğan have tried to adapt and synthesize religious and national principles in their political programmes, often triggering strong reactions from groups and power centres who fear a rising Islamic agenda in Turkish politics. The 2007 pro-secularism rallies in Turkey, which attracted millions of people, illustrate the strength of the Kemalist forces, particularly in the urban centres and professional circles including the judiciary, the
In contrast, the blending of religious and nationalist themes in Greece has been less controversial. In nineteenth-century Greece, the integration of Byzantium and Christianity in national ideology was relatively easy, as it served a number of practical purposes. On the one hand, it brought together conflicting views on Greek nationhood and produced an ideology that was accepted by almost all Greeks. On the other, this form of nationalism was more acceptable to the clergy and the Orthodox masses under the Ottoman Empire. Previous secular nationalist discourses did not gain the full acceptance of the head of the Orthodox Church. For example, Adamantios Korais emphasized the classical Greek heritage and urged modern Greeks to reach the glory of their ancient pre-Christian ancestors; his “revived” form of Hellenism had anti-clerical, anti-Byzantine, and anti-Patriarchical features. In his writings, he emulated Western thinkers of his times who stressed the importance of secular institutions. After the establishment of the Greek Kingdom in the 1830s, he argued successfully in favour of an independent Greek Church and the split from the Patriarchate in Istanbul. For Korais, the leading spiritual institution of a free Greece could not be subordinated to the ecclesiastical establishment controlled by the Ottomans rulers.73

This form of nationalism required an adaptation to local conditions which came decades later in the work of Paparrigopoulos, who emphasized religion and the unbroken continuity between ancient and modern Greece through Byzantium. Paparrigopoulos served as one of the two presidents of the Organization for the Proliferation of the Greek Letters and convinced the Greek government to offer financial aid to bishoprics under Ottoman rule. In a telegraph to the Greek prime minister, he supported this practice, as it gave Greeks the opportunity to “become the real masters of the Metropolises.”74 In following decades, the clergy played a dominant role in the ascendancy of Greek nationalism in disputed areas under Ottoman control, including Macedonia, Asia Minor and Cyprus.75 The role that churches played in the national liberation struggle subsequently justified their continuing presence in politics, even when a leftist government came to power in Greece in the 1980s, while Paparrigopoulos’ legitimization schema of interpreting Greek religious traditions and modernity has survived almost uninterrupted to this day.76

Religious Beliefs and the Limits of Adaptation

While religious adaptation is often a natural and expected reaction to new conditions, there are certain limits to the extent that religious doctrine can serve modern nationalist ideology. Religious doctrine often marks the distinction between religious beliefs and religion-as-identity-marker. On such issues as abortion, violence, or inter-communal reconciliation, faith and the perceived interests of the nation may not coincide.
An interesting example relates to the extent to which religion manifests adaptations on issues affecting abortion and war rape. During the war in Bosnia, Muslim clerics condoned abortions until the 120-day legal limit, while the Vatican refrained from its usual polemical stance and avoided referring to abortion by Catholic women in Croatia. Likewise, among the Greek Cypriots, abortion became de facto legal following rapes committed during the invasion of 1974. Greek Cypriot society was not ready to accept the result of rape, and in many cases Greek Cypriot men found it difficult to accept their raped wives. Archbishop Makarios, President of the Republic of Cyprus at the time, allegedly permitted these abortions.

Further to this, religious doctrines prohibit physical force and preach tolerance, often in contradiction to nationalist movements and revolutions. In the cases of South Africa and Northern Ireland, Nukhet Sandal emphasizes the role of clergy members in interpreting religious texts in a conciliatory manner, thereby delegitimizing violence, in mobilizing transnational or local networks to support peace and in gradually eliminating possible disagreements among clerics and the public on whether there are admissible “exceptions” in using violence and discrimination.

The picture in Southeast Europe is for the most part less positive. Even where official Churches took formal positions against violence or used ambivalent language, the local clergy openly condoned and even encouraged nationalism and violence. For instance, as early as the start of the nineteenth century, the Greek Patriarchy condemned the 1821 Greek revolution and tried to maintain a distance from violence. In 1872, it issued a statement condemning nationalism (ethnofyletismo). However, Greek nationalism gradually penetrated the higher and lower clergy in most parts of “unredeemed” Greece. For instance, the Bishops Germanos of Kastoria, Chrysostomos of Drama and many others actively promoted Greek national interests and organized resistance in Ottoman Macedonia. When the Ottoman government reacted to the actions of Germanos in Macedonia, the Patriarchate moved him to another bishopric in Pontus until the Greek-Turkish population exchange of the 1920s.

While religion has often been associated in this article with the dark side of nationalism, there are a number of notable exceptions. Religious peace makers during the wars in the former Yugoslavia contributed to the peace process, even when they were attacked within their own community. In Cyprus, a rare admission was made by the Bishop of Morphou Neophytos when he confessed that “nationalism is a sin and that the Greek Orthodox Church committed that sin.” Although he represents a refugee population, Neophytos leads a campaign in favour of reunification. Hailing from the youth organization of the Cypriot left, Bishop Neophytos emphasizes the common biblical roots and origins of Islam and Christianity. He builds ties with the Turkish Cypriot community, even organizing religious pilgrimages and ceremonies in his occupied cathedral in Morphou, often against the wishes of fellow bishops.

Nonetheless, the overall stance of the clergy in Southeast Europe is less than optimistic. Stories of condoning or even encouraging conflict are prevalent among all religious groups in the Balkans. Church leaders have failed to acknowledge war...
crimes committed by in-group members or to admit to the destruction of places of worship belonging to other faiths. Further, religious leaders continue to pay tribute to former war criminals. In the former Yugoslavia, religiosity was shown as the single strongest predictor of national intolerance, exceeding all other demographic and sociological variables. Overall, the capacity of nationalism to influence and frequently override religion—even its message of reconciliation and forgiveness—suggests the power that nationalism carries in the modern era.

“Print Capitalism” and Communication

On this point, Benedict Anderson provides an interesting account of the power of nationalism in relation to pre-modern religious identities. At the core of his argument is the idea of “print capitalism” which results from the technological ability to produce printed work in vernacular languages. Before nationalism, there were “religiously imagined communities,” such as Christendom, based on shared languages, such as Latin. Print and capitalism displaced the axiomatic grip of script languages and eroded the transcontinental solidarities of Christendom, the Islamic Ummah, and the rest. Moreover, printing in national languages led to the creation of monoglot mass reading publics and to distinct identity formations. In Europe, Latin lost the monopoly on print, and new works were published in the vernaculars. Books, newspapers, and novels in vernacular languages gave readers the idea that there existed, simultaneously in time, a group of readers like them who were consuming the same cultural manufactures. Print capitalism was the catalyst for the creation of modern nations; it created modern European identities out of the consumers of identical cultural products (e.g. newspapers and books in the vernaculars).

As Demaras and Baysal suggest, in Greek and Turkish printing there was also a qualitative change towards history and linguistic studies and away from traditional religious themes. Figure 2 presents print data from Greece (1700–1800) and Turkey (1775–1875) a few decades before the national revolution in Greece (1821) and Turkey (1908/1909). The histograms suggest that the moment of “national awakening” in each nation was preceded by an exponential increase in the production of books. The figures do not include the production of newspapers, plays, and pamphlets which also played a crucial role in the process of national awakening. In short, print publications have been instrumental in homogenizing identity and inciting national/patriotic feelings for sovereignty, national liberation, and egalitarian citizenship among nations in Southeast Europe.

In the late eighteenth/early nineteenth century, Greeks (Serbs as well) had a comparative geographic advantage over other Christian groups in the empire, not to mention the Ottoman rulers themselves. In fact, the Serbian and Greek enlightenment preceded the Bulgarian enlightenment by almost half a century and the Turkish by almost one century. The first Greek and Serbian newspapers were published in
Vienna in 1790 and 1791, respectively. Novi Sad in southern Hungary was long known as the “Serbian Athens” because of its contribution to Serbian culture and literature.93 The rich Balkan merchants who settled in the Habsburg lands displayed tremendous interest in the ideas of the European Enlightenment and embraced nationalist doctrines which emanated from the French Revolution. They returned to their regions, cities or villages, where they established schools, donated books, and sponsored the education of nationals abroad.94

The effects of education among the Greeks were particularly important because of the prestigious role of classical education in all European schools. The Greeks were soon aware of the reverence for the language and culture of ancient Greece throughout Europe. This rekindled their consciousness of their past and their position as the heirs of this civilization and language. Leading members of the Greek national movement were merchants or sons of merchants, such as Korais.95 Rhigas Phaireos, a merchant and a poet, organized a revolutionary plan against the Ottoman establishment.
that failed in its initial stage during the Napoleonic wars, while merchants and professionals from Odessa (now in Ukraine) were predominant in Philiki Eteria.

**The Political and Institutional Context**

In addition to their commercial advantage, Serbs and Greeks possessed autonomous ecclesiastical institutions. These institutions were largely anti-Western and anti-secular. The Patriarch of Constantinople, for example, prohibited under penalty of excommunication the reading of those works of Rhigas Pheraios that related to the Church. Nonetheless, the internal structure of the Church made it easy for nationalist movements to take control of its institutions. The Church was highly divided, and since 1467, rival factions have been bribing the Ottoman rulers for the positions of Patriarch. Stavrianos indicates that among the 159 Patriarchs who held office between the fifteenth and twentieth centuries, only 21 died natural deaths while in office; the rest were dethroned, abdicated, or suffered violent deaths. Given these divisions and the fact that the Church was simultaneously privileged and persecuted by the Ottomans, it was not difficult for Balkan nationalists to win allies within the ecclesiastical establishments.

The context and power-politics also explain, to a large extent, differences between “majority Muslim” versus “majority Christian” nations. As indicated in Figure 2, there was a delay in printing Ottoman Turkish, as compared to Greek. This could be partly explained by the geographic and trade advantage Christians enjoyed within the empire and the fact that as the dominant group in the empire, the Turks were less attracted to the idea of nationalism and a national state. Likewise, one could notice a delay in the development of national identities among Muslims in the Balkans—both Bosniaks and Albanians—which can be attributed to the fact that Balkan Muslims followed the official religion of the dominant political class of the Ottoman Empire and obtained high positions in the administration which mitigated their sense of alienation.

More importantly, religious beliefs among the Ottomans discouraged printing. According to Karpat, the non-Muslim minorities were free to sharpen their minds as long as they kept their place as second-class citizen subjects, while the Muslim “had his Koran, where all truths, first and last, were already spelled out.”

The decline of the empire, military defeat, and the loss of territory to the rising Christian nationalisms eventually forced the Ottomans to revise their view on printing. This led to the radical reinterpretation of the role of Islam in public life under the Young Turks and later under the leadership of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk. The Balkan refugees, including Atatürk, hailed from urban backgrounds and experienced modernization and secularism earlier than their co-nationals in the Anatolian heartlands; a division that was later institutionally entrenched in Turkish politics. Moreover, the association of religious and political leadership in the Ottoman Empire and the absence of strong formal religious institutions to resist change made Turkey’s
belated modernization one of the most rapid and impressive ones in the developing world. For his reforms, Atatürk used communication media to win over the public and argued that “indoctrination and information [were] very important, as important as the question of the army, and even more important than the army.”

In the twentieth century, national homogenization in Turkey was particularly successful with small minorities, such as the Laz in the Black Sea or non-Turkish speakers from the Balkans who lacked the space, institutional capacity and size to challenge the primacy of the Turkish language and nationalism. Kurdish, in contrast, despite institutional suppression in Turkey, has been enriched and is sufficiently developed to be a vehicle for modern political and literary discourse. As in the case of the Balkan nations, Kurdish diasporas have proved to be key in the process of providing resources for nationalist revival. Sweden and Germany are the main centres of action for the Kurds focusing on standardization of the language and publications in the Kurdish language. In Sweden alone there was an annual production of 40–50 books in Kurdish throughout the 1990s, half in Kurmanji.

Other examples from Southeast Europe suggest that explanations routed in ethnic, linguistic, and religious features should be complemented by analysis of the political context. For instance, Montenegrins share closer geographic, linguistic, and even ecclesiastical ties with Serbia than do Greek Cypriots with Greece. In both cases, but particularly in Montenegro, ecclesiastical institutions aimed to maintain ties with Greek and Serbian motherlands; in both Montenegro and Cyprus religious and national leadership coincided under Petar Petrović Njegoš (1830–1851) and Archbishop Makarios III (1960–1977). The Church of Cyprus has been autocephalous since the third century and owing to its geographic isolation developed many indigenous ecclesiastical traditions specific to Cyprus, while Montenegro has had a strong state tradition primarily since the nineteenth century. Moreover, Montenegrins possessed strong traditions not only of belonging but also of leading Serbia, an element that historically mitigated their feelings of separateness. Yet the majority of Montenegrins came to identify themselves as a separate nation while the majority of Greek Cypriots retained a strong element of Greek nationalism in their national identity. In Cyprus, the combined effects of a threatened statehood and a fear of Turkey have preserved motherland Greek nationalism at the expense of island-wide identity. In Montenegro the failure of Yugoslav federal institutions and the experience of a series of wars contributed to the process leading Montenegrins away from Serbia.

Conclusion

“Big” theories of nationalism downplay security concerns, demographic variables, geopolitical fault lines and institutional capacity, or other contextual factors in the formation of modern nations. O’Leary makes a similar point when he analyses Gellner’s interpretation of nationalism, particularly its grievance component.
O’Leary criticizes Gellner’s emphasis on the effects of cultural humiliation and blocked social mobility and argues that the former underestimates the role of power politics in explaining which cultures become nations110 or which grievances lead to ethnonational mobilizations. Similarly, Smith’s emphasis on pre-modern linguistic and religious characteristics often fails to capture the competition for symbols and loyalties, particularly among smaller groups sharing similar characteristics and cleavages with neighbours.111 Finally, Huntington’s emphasis on civilizational boundaries fails to capture the power of competing loyalties and adaptations as well as the role of power politics and alliances that often transcend civilizational lines.

The Balkan cases mentioned above point out the degree to which adaptation is crucial to national formation. The cases support scholarly perspectives that see identities as subject to adaptation either because of internal political factors or external constraints and opportunities. Religious cleavages, linguistic boundaries, and political contexts are all important ingredients in the process of adaptation. In addition, “print capitalism” and uneven modernization have helped trigger the formation of national communities in the Balkans, with religious themes complementing nationalist ideologies at different stages, thus further legitimizing emerging forms of ethnic and religious nationalism. In the absence of political and economic modernization, Balkan nationalists have used religious cleavages and institutions, thereby preserving their role in the political sphere. Religious authorities have been readily available to play this role because of the absence of strong independent institutions, as in the case of Muslim communities, or in order to preserve institutional privileges, as in the case of Eastern Orthodox nations.

Delanty and O’Mahony describe this adaptation in the following way: “On the one side it [nationalism] is obsessed with the new but on the other the birth of the new must be based on the old.”112 In bringing together the old and the new the capacity to adapt was crucial and, as the examples of Southeast Europe suggest above, identity adaptations were not simply made for the sake of identity making; for the most part adaptations reflected and determined political outcomes. Moreover, in each case adaptation needed a legitimization scheme appropriate for those populations that nationalism aimed to unite and define. Throughout the past three centuries, the identification of religions with “endangered nations,” “return to tradition” and “national unity” themes has made further adaptation in the direction of pluralism, accommodation and pacifism more difficult. Yet as this article demonstrates, both nationalism and religion have a great deal of potential to adapt to new conditions and opportunities for reform.

NOTES

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1. Hutchinson and Smith, Nationalism, 3; Norman, “Theorizing Nationalism (Normatively),” 51.
3. Anderson, Imagined Communities; Greenfeld, “The Modern Religion?”
4. The article uses the terms “Balkans” and “Southeast Europe” interchangeably and it covers in varying degrees majorities and minorities in Albania, Bulgaria, Rumania, Turkey, Greece, Cyprus and the successor countries of the former Yugoslavia.
5. For this process of adaptation and relevant cases see, for instance, the work of Hroch, Social Preconditions of National Revival in Europe; idem, “Real and Constructed”; Magocsi, “Adaptation without Assimilation”; idem, Of the Making of Nationalities there is No End; Laitin, Identity in Formation; Stefanovic, “Seeing the Albanians through Serbian Eyes”; Rossos, Macedonia and the Macedonians.
7. Ibid.
8. Frazee, The Orthodox Church and Independent Greece, 1821–1852; Arnakis, “The Role of Religion in the Development of Balkan Nationalism.”
12. Geertz, The Interpretation of Cultures, 89.
15. Michas, Unholy alliance.
16. For instance, in a demonstration in 1992 Archbishop Chrysostomos I of Cyprus proudly declared that on Macedonia and Cyprus: “… he [Alexander the Great] would re-emerge from the Greek earth, victorious soldier, and would avenge all enemies…” This speech and others were later reproduced in high-quality-paper volumes. Douflas, Macedonia, 13.
18. Eickelman and Piscatori, Muslim Politics.
21. Whyte, Interpreting Northern Ireland; Walker, “‘Ancient Enmities’ and Modern Conflict.”
23. Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, *Turkey*.
27. For a related critique see Kymlicka, “Misunderstanding Nationalism.”
28. Stefanovic, “Seeing the Albanians through Serbian Eyes.”
31. Ibid.; for a comprehensive summary and a critique of Gellner’s approach, see Smith, *Nationalism and Modernism*.
33. On this point see also Mouzelis, “Ernest Gellner’s Theory of Nationalism”; Kitromilides, “The Dialectic of Intolerance.”
41. Ibid., 34; for a relevant discussion of Hroch, Smith and Hutchinson see Loizides, “Religion and Nationalism in the Balkans.”
42. See Paparrigopoulos, *The History of the Greek Nation*; Demaras, *Konstantinos Paparrigopoulos*; Gourgouris, *Dream Nation*, 144–45; Augoustinos, *Consciousness and History*, 15–16, 17. Konstantinos Paparrigopoulos (1815–1891) was the most prominent figure in nineteenth-century Greek historiography. The main theme of Paparrigopoulos’ history was the unbroken continuity between ancient and modern Greece through Byzantium. See Loizides, “Religion and Nationalism in the Balkans,” fn. 19. For more on Paparrigopoulos see idem, “Re-framing Modern Greek Nationalism.”
43. Herder introduced an organic conception of nations and treated them as the eternal and central agents of history. Most national intellectuals in Eastern Europe (including Paparrigopoulos) emulated Herder’s ideas in their writings and tried to identify and “revive” the perennial features of their ethnic groups in language, history, and folklore. See Sugar, “External and Domestic Roots of Eastern European Nationalism”; Payne, “Nationalism and the Local Church,” 832. From the 1960s onwards, though, most Western scholars have seen nations as modern constructions. This intellectual wave was not welcome by most Greek scholars who favoured a primordial view of nationalism. The most extreme example was a Greek academic who illegally collected blood samples of Thracian Pomaks in order to prove that they are descendents of an ancient tribe which fought with Alexander the Great; see Demetriou, “Prioritizing ‘Ethnicities,’” 106.
44. Pearton, “Nicolae Iorga as Historian and Politician.”
46. Eickelman and Piscatori, *Muslim Politics*.
49. Iveković, “Nationalism and the Political Use and Abuse of Religion,” 530.
51. Ibid.
53. Ibid.
55. Pollis, “Intergroup Conflict and British Colonial Policy,” 589; Kizilyurek, Cyprus.
56. Crampton, A Concise History of Bulgaria, 65–75.
58. Ibid., 240.
59. Ibid.
60. Angelou, Secret School.
65. For two different versions of this argument see Huntington, The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order; Gellner, Conditions of Liberty; idem, Encounters with Nationalism, 85–91.
67. Stefanovic, “Seeing the Albanians through Serbian Eyes.”
68. Štulhofer et al., “Croatia.”
69. Sakallioglu, “Kurdish Nationalism from an Islamist Perspective.”
70. Mardin, “The Just and the Unjust”; idem, “Center Periphery Relations.”
73. Chaconas, Adamantios Korais; Kitromilides, “‘Imagined Communities’ and the Origins of the National Question in the Balkans.”
75. Ibid.
76. Gourgouris, Dream Nation, 144.
78. Papadakis, Echoes from the Dead Zone, 8.
79. Georgiou, “Cyprus.”
80. Sandal, “Religious Actors as Epistemic Communities in Conflict Transformation.”
81. Kitromilides, “‘Imagined Communities’ and the Origins of the National Question in the Balkans.”
82. Todorova, Imagining the Balkans, 215.
84. Sevgül Uludağ, “Bishop of Morphou Neophytos: ‘Nationalism is a Sin and the Greek Cypriot Orthodox Church has Committed this Sin,’” Yeralti Notları, 17 April 2003 <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/balkanhr/message/5374> (accessed 23 February 2009).
85. Ibid.
86. Iveković, “Nationalism and the Political Use and Abuse of Religion”; Perica, Balkan Idols.
87. Hodson et al., “National Tolerance in the Former Yugoslavia.”
88. Anderson, Imagined Communities.
89. Ibid., 36.
90. Ibid.
91. For data on Greece see Demaras, Greek Enlightenment, 30; for data on Turkey see Baysal, Müteferrikadan Birinci Meşrutiyete kadar Osmanlı Türklerinin bastıkları kitaplar, 26–53.
93. Stoianovich, Balkan Worlds, 195, 295.
94. Ibid.
95. Chaconas, Adamantios Korais.
96. Stavrianos, The Balkans since 1453, 151.
97. Ibid., 150.
98. Bieber, “Muslim Identity in the Balkans before the Establishment of Nation States.”
100. Ibid.
101. Ibid., 270.
103. Van Bruinessen, Agha, Shaikh and State; McDowall, A Modern History of the Kurds.
106. Stefanovic, “Seeing the Albanians through Serbian Eyes”; Loizides, “Ethnic Nationalism and Adaptation in Cyprus.”
107. Ibid.
109. Kizilyurek, Cyprus; Loizides, “Ethnic Nationalism and Adaptation in Cyprus.”
111. Smith, Theories of Nationalism.
112. Delanty and O’Mahony, Nationalism and Social Theory, 24; see also Brychta, “Revisiting the Debate on Political Modernization in Japan and Turkey.”

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