Magdalena Lubanska

Muslims and Christians in the Bulgarian Rhodopes. Studies on Religious (Anti)Syncretism

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Managing Editor: Katarzyna Tempczyk
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Contents

Glossary of Religious Terms —— VII

1 Introduction —— 1
1.1 Research Method —— 5
1.2 Transliteration, Spelling and Terminology —— 7
1.3 Field Research and Methodology —— 8
1.3.1 Ribnovo —— 9
1.3.2 Satovcha —— 12
1.3.3 Garmen —— 13
1.4 The Respondents —— 14
1.4.1 Bulgarian-Speaking Muslims (Pomaks) —— 16
1.4.2 Orthodox Christians —— 26

2 Religious Syncretism: History of the Concept; the Subject of Research —— 32
2.1 Theories of Religious Syncretism: State of Research —— 32
2.2 Problems in Studying Muslim-Christian Syncretism in Bulgaria and South-Eastern Europe —— 40

3 *Komshuluk* (Good Relations Between Neighbours) and Ressentiment Against Members of a Different Religion —— 55
3.1 *Komshuluk* as a Cultural Strategy of Peaceful Coxistence —— 55
3.2 The Narrative of *Komshuluk* —— 59
3.3 The Limits of *Komshuluk* —— 72
3.4 The Ressentiment Narrative —— 77
3.5 "The Politicians are to Blame for All of This" —— 92

4 "Adat Orthodox Christianity" —— 96
4.1 *Kurban* in the Religious Life of Christian Respondents —— 99

5 The Muslims: "Adat Islam" and "Salafi Islam" —— 110
5.1 "Adat Islam" —— 113
5.1.1 Elements of Ritual Practices from the Orthodox Christian Calendar in the Religious Life of the Pomaks —— 122
5.1.2 Incubation in St. George's Church in Hadzhidimovo —— 131
5.2 "Salafi Islam" —— 142
5.2.1 Attitudes Towards "Adat Islam" —— 142
5.2.2 Attitudes Towards "the West" —— 161

6 Muslim Religious Narratives and Perceptions of Christianity —— 170
6.1 Christians as "Perjurers" and "Adam and Hawwa's Worse Children" —— 176
6.2 Worshippers of an "Inferior Book"? Muslims, Christians and a Dispute over God's True Word —— 190
6.3 Christianity as a Religion Based on "Misunderstanding" and "a False Cult of the Son of God" —— 197
6.3.1 The Heresies of the Apostle Paul —— 200
6.3.2 Narratives Questioning the Christian Cult of the Cross —— 202
6.3.3 The Pernicious Reforms of Pope Gregory I —— 207

7 Christian Narratives About Bulgarian-Speaking Muslims —— 209
7.1 "Purest-Bred Bulgarians" or "Conformists and Traitors"? —— 210
7.2 "Crypto-Christians" or *Poturcheni* ("People turned Turk")? —— 222
7.2.1 The Pomaks as Crypto-Christians —— 223
7.2.2 The Pomaks: *Poturcheni* ("People Turned Turk") or "People of the Orient"? —— 233

8 Christian Perceptions of Pomak Religious Life —— 241
8.1 Stories of Healing and Muslim Behavior in Christian Sacred Places —— 241
8.2 Muslim and Christian Rituals —— 251
8.3 "The Orthodox Christian Muslim" – the "Syncretist" from "Vodino" —— 262

9 Seeking Healing from Members of a Different Religion as a Case Against Religious Syncretism —— 278

10 Conclusions —— 301
10.1 ''Shallow'' Syncretism —— 301
10.1.1 Syncretism Resulting from Fear and Fascination with the Alien *Numinosum*: Visiting the Holy Sites of the Other Religion —— 303
10.1.2 Syncretism as a Symptom of *Komshuluk* —— 305
10.1.3 Syncretism as a Proselytizing Strategy —— 305
10.2 "Deep" Syncretism —— 306

Bibliography —— 309

Index —— 321

Glossary of Religious Terms

Local dialect versions of the terms as used in the Rhodopes are listed first.

Abdest (Turkish: *abdest*, Arabic: *wudu* or *tawaddu*) – ablution, ritual purification performed by Muslims before prayer, symbolizing a return to the primordial purity of Paradise.
Agnets – see Amnos.
Ayat/ayats (Turkish: sing. *ayet*, pl. *ayetler*, Arabic: sing. *ayah*, pl. *ay*) – literally "miraculous signs", verses of the Qur'an.
Akathist (Greek: *akathistos*) – 1) liturgical hymn dedicated to a Christian saint or saints, sung standing, 2) a church service during which akathists are sung.
Aksham (Turkish: *akşam*, Arabic: *al-maghrib*) – the time from sunset until the moment when the horizon is no longer visible; one of the five Muslim prayer times; Muslims in the Western Rhodopes believe this time to be particularly unsafe to people since *jinn* come out at this time.
Alehis salyam/aley selyam (Arabic: *'alayhi al-salam*) – literally "Peace be upon him"; a religious formula used when talking about a prophet mentioned in the Qur'an.
Amaliyka/amale (Bulgarian: *amulet*) – see *muska*.
Amnos – 1) the middle, cube-shaped portion of the prosfora bearing the letters "IC XC NIKA" (Jesus Christ Victorious) cut out of the prosfora when the sacrificial gifts are being prepared during the liturgy, 2) also, iconographic depiction of Baby Jesus lying on the diskos.
Archimandrite – head of a male Orthodox Christian monastery (igumen).
Arfe (Turkish: *Arefe* or *Arife*, Arabic: *'Arafah*) – the ninth day of the pilgrimage month believed to be the day of the absolution of sins. Muslims in Bulgaria use this term as an equivalent of the Orthodox All Souls' Day, however Arfe is celebrated not only during the Hajj but also two days before the Ramadan. Perhaps significantly in this context, there is a symbolic similarity between the name and the Arabic word al-A'raf (literally, "raised edges"), meaning a kind of Purgatory in Islam. Muslims in the Rhodopes believe that they can help the souls in Purgatory by sharing food (*mekŭtsi*, sweets) with neighbours on that day.
Ashure (Turkish: *Aşure*, Arabic: *'Ashura*) **–** a holiday celebrated on the 10th day of the Muslim month of Muharram, the first month in the Islamic calendar. Shi'ah Muslims celebrate it as a commemoration of the martyrdom of al-Husayn ibn 'Ali in Karbala. In the Sunni tradition, the holiday is celebrated in the post-Ottoman territories in memory of the saving of Nuh's Ark, which landed on Mount Ararat on that day. The remaining food supplies on the Ark (dried fruit, grain, nuts) were used to prepare a pudding. Muslims prepare a similar pudding (also called *ashure*) on that day and share it with neighbours to ensure health. This practice was popularized by the Bektashi order.
Azreti/hazreti (Turkish: *hazreti*) – honourable, blessed.
Baba (Turkish: *baba*, Arabic: *baba*) – literally "father", 1) figuratively – an older, respected person, 2) head of a dervish monastery.

Basmala – the abbreviation of Muslim prayer formula: *bi-smi Allahi al-Rahmani al-Rahim*, "In the name of God the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful". The opening utterance used in every Qur'anic surah (except the ninth) and every text written by a pious Muslim. The formula should be spoken before performing any work. In the Rhodopes, *dzhindzhiya hodzhas* also use this phrase for apotropaic purposes.

Bektashi Order – an Islamic Sufi order, very popular in the Ottoman Empire, established in the 13th century by a semi-legendary figure named Haji Baktash Veli of Khorasan in north-eastern Iran, considered the patron saint of the janissary corps. Bektashites did not observe Shari'ah law and adapted elements of pagan and Christian belief in their cult, provoking accusations of heresy from Sunni Muslims. The Bektashis did not pray in mosques, drank alcohol and had an egalitarian attitute toward women. They played an important role in spreading Islam in Albania, south-eastern Bulgaria and Macedonia. The order was banned by the Sultan in 1826, and again in 1925 by Atatürk. In the 1950s the order was revived in Turkey and (in the 1990s) in Albania.

Bida (Turkish: *bid'at*, Arabic: *bid'ah*) – introducing innovations or new elements to Islam.

Chasoslov (Horologion) – liturgical book with the fixed portions of the daily cycle of prayers.

Dervishes (Persian *darvish,* Turkish: *derviş,* Arabic: *darwish*) – literally "those who walk from door to door", mendicant Muslim monks; members of a Sufi Order, who have taken a sheikh or baba, head of a Muslim monastery or *teke* (Turkish: *teke*, Arabic: *takiyah*). Many Christian converts to Islam were dervishes. Dervishes belonged to different orders (Turkish: *tarikat*, Arabic: *tariqah*) such as the Mevlevi Order, the Bektashi Order, or the Malamiyya.

Devshirme (Turkish: *devşirme*) – literally "gathering". A system of compulsory conscription whereby Christian boys were pressed into service in the Janissary corps. In the Balkans the practice goes back to the 14th century (it was established by Sultan Orhan) and continued until the early 18th century. The Janissary corps was disbanded in 1826.

Diskos (Greek) **–** a paten, a gold or silver liturgical implement shaped like a small flat plate or disc on which the prosfora is placed.

Dyunya (Turkish: *dünya*, Arabic: *dunya*) – depending on the context, this world or "that" (the invisible other world).

Dzhanabu (Turkish: *Cenabı*) – a title of Allah: Great, Venerable, Mighty.

Dzhehendem, dzhendem (Turkish: *cehennem*, Arabic: *jahannam*) – hell.

Dzhehennet (Turkish: *cennet*, Arabic: *jannah*) – paradise, heaven.

Dzhindzhiya – an exorcist who frees people from the malign influence of *jinn*.

Evliya (Turkish: *evliya,* Arabic: sing. *wali*, pl. *awliya*) – a Muslim saint.

Farz (Turkish: *farz*, Arabic: *fard*) – religious duties imposed by Allah, the keeping of which brings rewards, and dereliction gets punished.

Gergiovden – St. George's Day celebrated on the 6th of May; the lamb sacrificed on Gergiovden (kurban) is the most important religious sacrifice of the year.
Giaour (local Musli variant: *kyaur/kyafir*, Turkish: *gâvur*, Arabic: *kafir*) – an infidel.
Hadis (Turkish: *hadis*, Arabic: *hadith*) – a story or narrative about an event from the life of the Prophet Muhammad; also, Muhammad's utterances on a given subject transmitted by an authoritative figure; hadiths provided the basis for the Sunnah; after the Qur'an, they are the second most important source of Islamic law.
Hadzh (Turkish: *Hac*, Arabic: *Hajj*) – a pilgrimage to Mecca; one of the five duties of every Muslim believer, a Hajj should be made at least once in the lifetime of every healthy Muslim who can afford to make the pilgrimage.
Hadzhiya (Turkish: *hacı*, Arabic: *hajji*) – a Muslim pilgrim travelling to Mecca. In Bulgaria, the term also means an Orthodox Christian who has made a pilgrimage to Jerusalem.
Haram (Turkish: *haram*, Arabic: *haram*) – that which is forbidden and punished, a religious transgression, sin.
Hidzhab (Arabic: *hijab*) – a kerchief covering the hair and the neck.
Hodzha (Turkish: *hoca*) – in the Ottoman Empire, an honorary title applied to representatives of the 'ulama, especially teachers. Nowadays the term denotes: 1) an Islamic teacher nominated by a mufti, or 2) colloquially, any Muslim notable for his great religious learning. Some *hodzha*s may perform the role of imams.
Imam (Turkish: *imam*, Arabic*: imam*) – literally "leader, one who proceeds, master". The leader of the Friday prayers in the mosque responsible for preaching sermons and performing Muslim rituals. Unlike Christian priests, imams are not seen as intermediaries between God and people.
Jinn (local Muslim variant: sing. *dzhin*, pl. *dzhins*, Turkish: sing. *cin*, pl. *cinler*, Arabic: sing. *jinni*, pl. *jinn*) – in Islam, these are believed to be supernatural creatures. Although jinn share certain qualities with humans (they eat, procreate and are endowed with free will), they are distinct from either humans or angels.
Kalimavka (dial. *kilimyavka*) – a tall, black hat worn by Orthodox priests.
Kitab (Turkish: *kitap*, Arabic: *kitab*) – book, the Qur'an.
Kurban (Turkish: *kurban*, Arabic: *qurban*) – 1) blood sacrifice, 2) sacrificial animal, 3) a meal made of a sacrificial animal.
Kurban Bayram (Turkish: *Kurban Bayramı*, Arabic: *'Id al-Adha*) – the most important Muslim holiday coinciding with the end of the pilgrimage to Mecca. On that holiday, pilgrims and all Muslim believers sacrifice lambs and share their meat during special meals.
Melekye(to), melekyeta (Turkish: *melek*, Arabic: *malak*) – angel, angels.
Mazhab (Turkish: *mezhep*, Arabic: *madhhab*) – a school of Islamic law.
Maslosvet – blessing of the myrrhon (oil) used in the sacrament of confirmation (*miropomazaniye*) or Extreme Unction. The blessing is performed on Maundy Thursday by patriarchs or metropolitan bishops.

Mirab (Turkish: *mihrap*, Arabic: *mihrab*) – a niche in the wall of a mosque indicating the direction of prayer.
Millet – an Ottoman administrative system whereby the population was divided based on its religion, abandoned in independent Bulgaria late in the 19th century and early 20th century; non-Muslim religious communities enjoyed legal and religious autonomy in the Ottoman Empire.
Miro (Greek: *myron*) – "scented oil" made of 57 aromatic ingredients using a base of olive oil, white wine, incense and essential oils.
Mirosvane/miropomazaniye – the anointing with the holy oil; in the Orthodox Church it follows directly baptism.
Muska (Turkish: *muska*) – an amulet prepared by *hodzha*, shaped like a little book with extracts from the Qur'an (or even a microscopic copy of the Qur'an its entirety), usually worn around one's neck in a special pouch; also known as an amale/amaliyka in the Rhodopes.
Mufti (Turkish: *müftü*, Arabic: *mufti*) – had of the Muslim community, an expert in Islamic law.
Muezzin (Turkish: *müezzin*, Arabic: *mu'adhdhin*) – a person who calls people to pray in a mosque.
Namaz (Turkish: *namaz*, Arabic: *salat*) – obligatory prayers performed by Sunnis five times a day. The prayer involves a series of precisely defined gestures called rekya/raka.
Nafs (nefsa) (Turkish: *nefs*, *nefis*, Arabic: *nafs*) – soul.
Nana – in Rhodope dialect a female Muslim healer.
Panihida – an Orthodox memorial service held daily from the day of death until the day of the funeral, and repeated on days with symbolic significance (3rd, 9th, 40th) and on the deceased person's anniversary of death, name day and birthday.
Peygamber (Turkish: *peygamber*) – a prophet named in the Bible or the Qur'an.
Plashchanitsa (Greek: *epitafion*) – a symbolic shroud bearing the image of Christ laid in the Tomb or the Lamentation upon the Grave. On Good Friday it is placed for adoration on a table in the middle of the church.
Prosphora/Prosphoron – from Greek: "gift", "sacrifice", leavened Eucharistic bread baked of wheat flour with water and yeast, shaped like a small round bun made of two disks-shaped pieces baked together symbolizing the divine and human natures of Christ. The middle portion is referred to as the Amnos (lamb).
Raya (Turkish: *reaya*, Arabic: *ra'iyah*) – literally "the herd": non-Muslim taxpayers in the Ottoman Empire.
Rekye (Turkish: *rükû, rekât,* Arabic: *rak'ah*) – special form of prostration in Muslim prayer involving touching the ground with one's forehead, performed on a special prayer rug.
Ramazan, Ramadan (Turkish: *Ramazan*, Arabic: *Ramadan*) – the ninth month of the Muslim calendar in which fasting is prescribed for all able adults between sunrise and sunset. Eating, drinking, smoking or sexual intercourse are forbidden during the period of fasting. Fasting during this month is one of the five pillars of Islam.

Ramazan Bayram (Turkish: *Ramazan Bayramı*, Arabic: *'Id al-Fitr*) – Muslims fast during the day in the month leading up to Ramadan Bayram, a holiday celebrated over 3-4 days with festive foods such as banitsa, kachamak or baklava, and visits to family members.
Rasul (Turkish: *resul*, Arabic: *rasul*) – an emissary of Allah sent to proclaim monotheism.
Razpeti petŭk (Bulgarian) **–** literally "Crucified Friday", Good Friday.
Sadaka (Turkish: *sadaka*, Arabic: *sadaqah*) – voluntary alms given to paupers, orphans or disabled persons.
Salam alaykum (Arabic: *al-salamu 'alaykum*) – religious greeting, literally "Peace be with you".
Samodiva (samovila) – rusalka, a harmful supernatural being.
Sevap (Turkish: *sewap*, Arabic: *sawab*) – a good deed.
Sevapliya, sevapliyka – a person performing good deeds.
Sirat (Arabic: *Al-Sirat*) – a bridge suspended over the pits of hell.
Syunnet (Turkish: *sünnet*) – 1) circumcision (Arabic: *khitan*), 2) Sunnah.
Sunna (Arabic: *Sunnah*) – tradition and religious duties imposed by the Prophet Muhammad; stories about Muhammad's life and utterances (hadiths), the second most important source of Islamic law after the Qur'an.
Sŭbor – a solemn congregation to celebrate a religious holiday, also a secular location, such as concert.
Shahada (Turkish: *şahadet*, Arabic: *shahadah*) – the Islamic creed, the declaration that "there is no god but God, Muhammad is his prophet".
Shirk (Turkish: *şirk*, Arabic: *shirk*) – idolatry, the most serious sin in Islam.
Teke/tekye (Turkish: *tekke*, Arabic: *takiyya*) – a monastery belonging to the Sufi order of the dervishes, headed by a baba.
Trebnik (Book of Needs) – a liturgical book containing the order of services and the accompanying prayers and blessings for different occasions.
Trisagion – a hymn to the Holy Trinity ("Holy God, Holy Strong, Holy Immortal, have mercy on us").
Tyurbe (Turkish: *türbe*, Arabic: *turbah*) – a mausoleum of a Sufi saint, believed to be a place where prayers are more likely to be heard.
Umma (Arabic: *Ummah*) – the Islamic community.
vakŭf (Turkish: *vakıf*, Arabic: *waqf*) – in the Muslim tradition, a pious bequest for charitable or religious purposes; an inalienable religious endowment of land, buldings or money made under Islamic law.
Vladika – an Orthodox metropolitan bishop.
Vechernya – a daily Orthodox Christian service held in the evening including a meditation on the history of salvation, from the creation of the world until the second coming of Christ.
Vodosvet – a blessing of water.

Yordanovden – The Day of the Jordan celebrated as the Epiphany in the Orthodox Churches. In Bulgaria the holiday is celebrated on 6 January.
Zadushnitsa – In the Orthodox Church, All Souls' Day is held on the Saturday before the Meat Lent Sunday (mesopustna), the Saturday before Pentecost, the Saturday before the Feast of St. Michael the Archangel; the Muslim Small and Great Arfe is held two days before the Bayrams (one day before according to Christians).
Zagovezni – celebrations roughly equivalent to Shrove Tuesday. The celebrations of Mesni Zagovezni (Meat Lent, from the third week of Lent) and Sirni Zagovezni mark the time in which believers first abstain from meat, and then also from dairy products and eggs as well. The respondent is trying to emphasize the important moments during Lent.
Zakat (local Muslim variant: *zekyat/zakat*, Turkish: *zekât,* Arabic: *zakat*) – obligatory alms, the duty of every Muslim; a tax to support poor people. One of the pillars of Islam. Equal to at least 1/40 of one's cash income.

1 Introduction

The book[1] looks at the beliefs and religious practices of mixed Muslim and Orthodox Christian communities in the Western Rhodopes in the context of popular attitudes towards non-coreligionist neighbours. The problem, which is of pressing importance locally, seems to be increasingly important in the global context of heightening conflicts with the world of Islam and the growing wave of Islamophobia. The study focuses on mixed Muslim-Christian communities whose historical experience is in some ways analogous to similar communities in Macedonia or Bosnia, primarily through the shared experience of several centuries of Ottoman rule, which left a lasting mark on daily life and culture, including the strategy of good relations between neighbours in religiously and ethnically mixed populations.

The book examines the role of religious syncretism in the social and religious life of Muslim-Christian communities in the Western Rhodopes. My interest is mainly on the origins and motivations of various beliefs and behaviors which at first sight may appear to be syncretic. I also look at syncretism in the context of anti-syncretic tendencies, particularly pronounced among Muslim neophytes and young members of the Muslim religious elite, who are not interested in the local forms of traditional Islam (which I call "Adat Islam"[2]), preferring instead a "pure" form of religion modelled on Sunni Islam as practiced in Saudi Arabia (which I refer to as "Salafi Islam").

This is the first study to look at syncretism in Bulgaria from this perspective. Reliable and unpoliticized research on Bulgarian-speaking Muslims has been available in Bulgaria since the early 1990s, however Bulgarian studies of Muslim-(Pomak)-Christian relations tended to skirt the questions formulated above (partly for

1 This book is a modified version of my doctoral dissertation published in book format as *Synkretyzm a podziały religijne w bułgarskich Rodopach* (2012) Warsaw: WUW (*Syncretism and Religious Divisions in the Bulgarian Rhodopes*). The translation of the book from Polish was funded as part of a Ministry of Science and Higher Education programme "Narodowy Program Rozwoju Humanistyki" (National Programme for the Development of the Humanities) in 2014-2015. My dissertation grew out of a research project conducted in 2005–2010 in the Gotse Delchev region. My field research was funded by the Polish Ministry of Science and Higher Education, Project NN 109176334, *Synkretyzm i antysynkretyzm religijny w świetle koegzystencji muzułmamów (Pomaków) i prawosławnych w Rodopach Zachodnich w Bułgarii* [*Religious Syncretism and Anti-Syncretism in the Light of the Coexistence of Muslims (Pomaks) and Orthodox Christians in the Western Rhodopes, Bulgaria*].

2 Later chapters contain a detailed discussion of the categories of "Adat" and "Salafi Islam", but I wish to emphasize that the "Adat Islam" and "Salafi Islam" are intended to provide a typological structure rather than a reflection of the full complexity of social realities on the ground. My categories conceptualize the religious attitudes of my respondents for analytical purposes, however I realize they are not sufficient to describe the full range of Muslim attitudes towards Islam and Christianity. For instance, the book does not focus on the religiously indifferent, non-practicing Muslims who form part of the local community. Still, I believe that the categories of "Adat" and "Salafi Islam" offer a useful insight into the process of religious change currently taking place in the Western Rhodopes.

ideological reasons), and were content to simply point out that syncretic phenomena were present on the ground (which tended to be implicitly presented as a good thing). In that case, syncretism is treated as a quality of folk religion: symptomatic of doctrinal ignorance, evidence of people clinging to surviving holdouts of pagan belief. In a sort of mental shortcut (which explains its unorthodox nature without having to probe into folk culture more deeply), syncretism in this way thinking is perceived as an inseparable quality of Bulgarian folk culture.

In a similar manner, comparative studies of the religious cultures of Muslims and Orthodox Christians are an under-researched area. Given the dynamic international situation influencing the life of the mixed populations of the Rhodopes, this is a research gap which urgently needs to be filled.

This book focuses on syncretism from a broad perspective in which it is treated as an ambiguous phenomenon through which a religiously mixed population is able to conceal and manage conflicting emotions through bottom-up cultural strategies ("strategies from below").

I was first inspired to think of syncretism in terms of adaptation strategies after completing a research project on folk soteriology in mixed Muslim-Christian communities in the central Rhodopes in the summer of 2002. My thinking was influenced by the theoretical formulation of the problem proposed by Rosalind Shaw and Charles Stewart in *Syncretism/Anti-syncretism. The Politics of Religious Synthesis* (1994). Shaw and Stewart propose a dialectical understanding of religious synthesis, which they treat as a product of opposing syncretic and anti-syncretic tendencies. In this perspective, anti-syncretism is antagonistic to religious synthesis: a tendency to preserve a distinct religious identity in a pure, "authentic" form, and to resist the influence of an outside religion perceived as a threat. Each of those processes may take place "from below" (through a bottom-up strategy, usually intellectually unexamined) or "from above" (through a planned and deliberate top-down strategy orchestrated by religious elites).

Syncretism "from below" may involve spontaneous and unexamined adaptations of external religious influence, leading in its extreme form to the emergence of a new local Muslim-Christian form of religious life. Anti-syncretism is a form of resistance against the assimilationist ambitions (symbolic violence) of another religion. It, too, may be spontaneous (taking place "from below") or orchestrated by the elite ("from above", in a top-down fashion). Depending on the particular agenda, a religious elite may throw its weight behind synthetic processes (syncretism) or "purifying" efforts (anti-syncretism). Unlike syncretism, which may be conscious or unconscious, anti-syncretism tends to be conscious and often intellectual.

Where syncretism functions as an adaptation strategy for peaceful coexistence I use a term proposed by Aleksander Posern-Zieliński (1987, p. 338–339) to distinguish between "shallow" (apparent) syncretism and "deep" (structural) syncretism. "Shallow" syncretism does not modify belief in any significant way; it finds expression in such religious practices as two religious groups visiting a shared holy place or using

the religious services of specialized members of the other religion (healers, *hodzhas*[3], priests). The functions of "shallow" syncretism may be varied and fluid. As Shaw and Stewart point out, it can even function as a form of resistance, appearing in tandem with isolationist and fundamentalist attitudes which could be described as anti-syncretic. The depth of this process (the difference between "shallow" and "deep" syncretism) can only be gauged through the lens of religious belief: on its surface, a cultural phenomenon may look like religious syncretism even though its actual (deep) structure of belief is diametrically opposed to such an interpretation. Accordingly, I regard beliefs expressed in the various local narratives as cultural evidence of the motivations underlying cultural practices, including those practices which at first sight appear to be syncretic. This book proposes to examine such practices more closely to reveal their deeper layers.

This perspective privileges belief (religious beliefs, elements of religious doctrine) over religious practice, a choice which may be questioned[4] in the context of the recent trends in the anthropology of religion with its shift towards an emphasis on the embodied and material dimensions of religious life, which relegate verbalized religious expression to a position of lesser importance. However, anthropologists need not, and perhaps even should not, follow theoretical fashions where those are flatly contradicted by the emic ways of thinking about the world. The book's emphasis on creed as the most important marker of religious syncretism seems warranted in the light of my research material. In situations where Muslims spontaneously invoke richly symbolic religious narratives or use sacred exegesis to explain the meaning of their own religious practice (or to discredit Christian practice), it is difficult to dismiss their beliefs as being less important than behaviors such as their sporadic visits to Christian priests or churches made for purposes of healing. Given the prevalent Muslim belief that Christians cannot be "saved", it would not be warranted to treat such practices as evidence of a deeply syncretic religious life in the Rhodopes. And conversely, it would be difficult to disregard the strong influence of Muslim religious culture on the Christian understanding of blood sacrifice, as revealed in the Christian explanations of the origins and significance of the so-called "vowed *kurbans*[5]" (Turkish: *kurban*, Arabic: *qurban*), a practice modelled on the sacrifice of Abraham (Bulgarian: Avraam,

3 Turkish: *hoca*. A colloquial term used to describe an Islamic teacher. My respondents use this term to address Islamic teachers who have been officially nominated by the mufti (to act as heads of Islamic communities and experts in Islamic law for a specific period of time) as well as other men who have either worked as Islamic teachers in the past or who are regarded as authorities in matters of religion. The term is also applied to imams. In the Ottoman Empire the term was used to address members of the '*ulama* (religious scholars), especially teachers (Todorova 2004, p. 494). For an explanation of the religious terms used in this book see *Glossary of Religious Terms*.

4 I am referring to the "Protestant bias" in anthropological definitions of religion, which has come under criticism in recent years. See also *Eastern Christians*... 2010.

5 1) blood sacrifice, 2) sacrificial animal, 3) a meal made of a sacrificial animal.

local Muslim variant: Ibrahim, Turkish: İbrahim, Arabic: Ibrahim) in which animals are sacrificed so that God may spare a human life. Christians treat this ritual as being more important than the Communion, which they regard as not particularly relevant to personal salvation or spiritual needs.

Relationships of power (dominance and subservience) are one of the dimensions of religious syncretism and anti-syncretism. In my research area relationships of power have historically gone through a series of major shifts. Muslims were the dominant group in the period of Ottoman rule, only to become marginalized after Bulgaria was liberated in 1878[6] (experiencing intermittent persecution under different regimes, including the Communists). Today, Bulgarians are the dominant group at the state level, while Muslims mostly predominate locally in the Western Rhodopes. Notably in this context, the Turkish minority party DPS[7] led by Ahmed Dogan has been a significant power in Bulgarian Parliament since the collapse of Communism, nimbly leveraging its votes for political advantage. Also, attempts to get a Pomak political party off the ground were reported in the media in the fall of 2008.

This book attempts to answer the question of syncretism and power: To what extent do power relations influence religious dialogue and potential criticisms of syncretism? Who gets to represent a religion in religious dialogue? In addition to identifying the dominant group (religious authorities) I also want to give voice to people who are not members of local elites because they often represent the hidden religious motivations of the local population (syncretism from below).

I do not address the broader nature of Islam and Christianity as syncretic religions.[8] Instead, I want to identify the pro- and anti-syncretic attitudes which organize the contacts between the religions and the religious cultures of selected mixed Muslim-Christian communities in the Western Rhodopes. My emphasis is on analyzing the symbolic dimension and the cultural function of syncretism to find out whether religious syncretism helps to integrate the two religious groups, or is perhaps a kind of pretence obscuring an underlying isolationist and anti-syncretic tendencies in the two religious. Do members of those communities engage in syncretic or anti-syncretic strategies in their relations with non-coreligionist neighbours? What do they think about their neighbours' religion, and what kind of narratives do they use to express their views? Do they adopt any religious practices from their non-coreligionist neighbours? How do they sanction such borrowed practices?

6 In 1912 in the Rhodopes.

7 Bulgarian: *Dvizhenye za Prava i Svobodi* (Movement for Rights and Freedoms).

8 Outside of the specific case of Islam and local Christian unity in the Western Rhodopes.

1.1 Research Method

My field research was conducted in local Muslim-Christian communities in the region of Gotse Delchev[9] (formerly Nevrokop) in the Western Rhodopes. My material is based on a selection of case studies. My respondents include members of the local functional elites[10], i.e. influential individuals who shape the relations between the religions, including the mayor of Garmen and his wife, Ahmed and Shurfe Bashev[11], mufti Aydin Mohamed (head of the Muslim community in the Gotse Delchev region), three members of Orthodox Christian clergy: Metropolitan[12] Natanail, Archimandrite[13] Grigoriy and one priest who wished to remain anonymous, eight *hodzhas*, the principal of the school in Satovcha and her husband (a religion teacher), five teachers, three local healers (one *dzhindzhiya*[14] and two female healers), female members of staff at the culture center in Garmen and a male member of staff at the culture center in Dabnitsa, and three female members of staff in the local council in Garmen.

The material in the book comprises data from field observations and 63 in-depth interviews in Bulgarian conducted in 2005-2009.

My methodology favors what Michael Herzfeld describes as "empirical reflexivity", an attitude where an ethnographic encounter (with all its limitations) is perceived through an imperfect interlocking of two different codes, with a multiplicity of different identities and conjectures (cf. Herzfeld 2001). Through reflexivity we are able to emphasize the meanings ascribed by participants to cultural practices as basic data points in ethnographic record. In my case, I attempted to identify the categorizing role of religion in relations between members of different religions: the specific beliefs and religious practices shaping attitudes towards non-coreligionist neighbours, the context in which they operate, and above all the meanings attributed to them by the respondents.

9 The town was renamed Gotse Delchev in 1951 to commemorate Georgi Nikolov Delchev a Bulgarian revolutionary. The local metropolitan see of the Orthodox Church retains the old name of "Metropolitan of Nevrokop".

10 I am grateful for suggesting this particular piece of terminology to Prof. Joanna Kurczewska, my tutor in the Faculty of Social Sciences at the Institute of Philosophy and Sociology, Polish Academy of Sciences (PAN). I presented early drafts of several chapters of my thesis in her seminar *National Cultures, Ideology and Politics: The Theory and Practice of Daily Life* in 2005–2008.

11 These are real names as the Bashevs are public officials identified by name in Bulgarian media.

12 The Metropolitan Bishop of Nevrokop.

13 Head of a male monastery.

14 Local term for an exorcist *hodzha* who helps people believed to have been harmed by *jinn* (local Muslim variant: sing. *dzhin*, pl. *dzhins*, Turkish: sing. *cin*, pl. *cinler*, Arabic: sing. *jinni*, pl. *jinn*) – in Islam, these are believed to be supernatural creatures. Although jinn share certain qualities with humans (they eat, procreate and are endowed with free will), they are distinct from either humans or angels.

Ethnographic field research involves an experience which could be described in the language of Gadamer's hermeneutics as "transposing oneself", i.e. imagining oneself in the situation of the other, an act which "consists neither in the empathy of one individual for another nor in subordinating another person to our own standards; rather, it always involves rising to a higher universality that overcomes not only our own particularity but also that of the other" (Gadamer 2004 p. 304), an experience Gadamer describes as a "fusion of horizons" (p. 305). In social science, such fusing of horizons can be interpreted as the effort to identify the emic categories used by the respondents, which can be used to unlock the interpreted material and translate it into the researcher's own etic terms. Our preconceived notions are tested when the answers supplied by our respondents force us to recognize our initial understanding as inadequate. In such a case, we need to revise it in terms of our experience (Hastrup 1995). In my case, such a moment of realization came when my conversations with Muslims led me to wonder what Christianity would be like if the apostle James, rather than the apostle Paul, had played a more formative role in its early stages (some Muslims, mostly *hodzhas*, described Christianity as a religion created by the apostle Paul). I think one of my Muslim respondents had a similar experience as he realized that the touching of the black stone when circling the Kaaba was not unlike the Orthodox cult of the icons – a reflection he quickly tried to suppress by insisting that any similarity between the two was spurious and only obtained "logically speaking".

Anthropological analysis is not a faithful and objective description of culture; it is a subjective interpretation seeking to identify those elements which participants in a given culture regard as significant. This is not to say that a limitless number of equally valid interpretations is possible; on the contrary, when we comply with the hermeneutical postulate to analyze *pars pro toto et totum pro parte,* the range of possible interpretations narrows down significantly. However, every researcher will have different ways of looking at the same social reality. The book contains a large number of passages quoted directly from my respondents in an attempt to show their ways of understanding and articulating the problems. By quoting extensively from my interviews I wish to lay open the basis for my conclusions. In formulating my questions I tried to negotiate them with my respondents in accordance with the values of ethnography based on dialogue and polyphony[15] (Clifford 1988, p. 51).

15 In terms of J. Clifford's typology of ethnographic authority I prefer polyphonic authority (represented by V. Turner and others) and dialogical authority (represented by K. Dwyer and V. Crapanzano, among others). I realize that each of those positions has its limitations. Dialogical authority does not change the fact that the egalitarian nature of the dialogue is often illusory since "a purely dialogical authority would repress the inescapable fact of textualization" (Clifford 1988, p. 43), whereas in fact it is the researcher who has the final say over which statements should be quoted, and in what context. Nonetheless, the anthropologist's main task is still to develop emic interpretations and translate them into anthropological terms.

My book does not aspire to what Clifford calls "a Flaubertian omniscience" or to ascribe subjective states to the culture I am describing (cf. Clifford 1988, p. 48). My analysis remains centered on specific situations and conversations in which I try, inasmuch as possible, to give voice to the people I spoke to.

The subject of the book frequently touches upon difficult religious and political problems, and much of the data has been anonymized to protect my respondents, but many of my respondents spoke as public figures and did not expect anonymity.

1.2 Transliteration, Spelling and Terminology

My transliteration from the Bulgarian Cyrillic alphabet into Latin is based on familiar and intuitive English equivalents (ш=sh, ч=ch, ж=zh, ц=ts, ю=yu). One exception is the special character *ŭ* for the Bulgarian letter ъ. However, I do not use *ŭ* in geographical names (which follow the Latinized spelling used in most online maps) or names of Bulgarian researchers and public figures (which reflect the forms they use in English publications and media reports).

The local dialect used in the Rhodopes, where I did my field research, contains numerous borrowings from Turkish and Arabic which are often difficult to trace or pin down. Historically, the culture of the region remained under Ottoman influence, and many of the terms used in the local dialect are borrowings from Turkish. This derivation is often reflected in their phonetic structure, even though their etymological roots often go deeper, extending all the way to Arabic or Persian etymons. Recent linguistic developments confuse the picture even further as young Islamic teachers are often trained in Arabic countries and import a lot of Arabic religious terminology into their communities. As a result, no single homogeneous transliteration system is possible, and a degree of variation has been retained in the book where meaningful.

To avoid complication, most of the Islamic religious terms follow the versions customarily used in English texts, which are usually based on Arabic. Because different transcription and transliteration systems are used in different English sources, I use a uniform simplified system unencumbered by specialised symbols, which I hope will be intuitive to English speakers without departing from the Arabic original (such as Sunnah, Shi'ah, Shari'ah, surah). Exceptions include those terms and proper names which operate in English almost exclusively in a modified form (such as muezzin, Kaaba, Mecca, Medina, al-Qaeda). Religious terms borrowed from Arabic or Turkish but relating to the local habitus or with no widespread English use (*hodzha, kurban, tyurbe, abdest*) are transliterated from Bulgarian. When appearing in the text for the first time, such non-English terms are accompanied by their Turkish equivalents in modern Turkish spelling and, where applicable, by their Arabic and Persian equivalents.

Depending on the context, names of Biblical and Qur'anic figures appear in English or are transcribed from Arabic in the simplified form. Given the subject of the book, a unified approach did not seem advisable; an English version would unduly favour

the Christian perspective (and the Hebrew perspective, as in the name "Ishmael"), and a uniformly Arabic transcription would skew the perception towards the Muslim perspective. This kind of linguistic intervention implies a symbolic appropriation as each version generates a different set of connotative, psychological and hagiographic tones, which elides the considerable difference between, say, the Christian figure of Jesus and the Qur'anic prophet 'Isa. In many cases my decisions were made on a case-by-case basis, guided by the context and the speaker's presumed intentions. Where such culturally contested figures appear in the text for the first time, I list the variant forms of the their names in brackets.

In interview transcripts, religious terms and proper names of Qur'anic figures appear in the local dialect of Bulgarian in keeping with the Bulgarian transliteration rules described above (e.g. the archangel Gabriel or the Muslim Jibra'il is transliterated as Dzhibrail in quotes from interviews). Where my Muslim respondents used both the Muslim and Christian variants to make themselves clear, I retained the dual variants in the quoted material.

The names of classical Muslim writers appear in simplified transcription from Arabic, with the exception of bibliographic notes and the bibliography, where the names follow the published version. To make it easier to identify such authors, the bibliography also includes the names in my simplified transcription. Names of contemporary scholars publishing in European languages appear in the versions used in their published works.

In material quoted from other sources, original published versions are adhered to throughout.

1.3 Field Research and Methodology

I conducted my research in several towns and villages in the region of Gotse Delchev in the communes of Garmen and Satovcha in the Western Rhodopes including Garmen, Satovcha, Ribnovo, Osikovo, Ognianovo, Dabnitsa, Hadzhidimovo, Breznitsa[16] and "Vodino"[17].

In the Ottoman Empire, Gotse Delchev (then: Nevrokop) was the only city located in the Rhodopes Range (Radushev 2005, p. 35), founded by Emperor Trajan (98–117 CE) to commemorate a victory over the Dacians in Dobruja (Radushev 2005, p. 35). Accordingly, the city was named Nikopolis ad Nestum[18], meaning "the city of victory on the River Mesta" (Radushev 2005, p. 35).

16 Located in the commune of Gotse Delchev.

17 The name has been coded to protect the respondent's privacy.

18 The ruins of the ancient city are located in Garmen, and have only recently been fenced off and come to be treated like a protected historical monument. The inhabitants of Garmen said that stone blocks from the ancient city were often used locally as building material in the construction of houses.

1.3.1 Ribnovo

My first research location was Ribnovo. Established in 1826, Ribnovo is located on the mountainside of Dabrash and has a population of ca. 3,000, making it the second largest village in the region of Gotse Delchev. In the 17th century the village was called Ribne (identified in Ottoman records as Ribna), and some of its inhabitants were Christian families. My respondents mentioned the fact that Christians used to live in Ribnovo, but the village had an all-Muslim population since the 19th century (marriages with outsiders are sporadic, and many inhabitants of Ribnovo are related).

The etymology of Ribnovo is unclear, and my respondents were unable to explain it. Although the name is outwardly similar to the word "fish" (Bulgarian: *riba*), the locals associate the name with a herb which used to grow in the area. They say that Ribnovo used to be located at the intersection of trade routes connecting Bulgaria and Greece. At 700 meters above sea level, Ribnovo is the last Bulgarian village before the Greek border.

Compared to other localities, Ribnovo is characterized by a large number of *hodzhas* (more than any other town or village in the Rhodopes) and religious conservatism.

Not many male inhabitants of Ribnovo (and almost none of the females) have a higher education. For fear of "corruption", families rarely consent to young women temporarily moving to cities on their own, but the situation is beginning to change. A local high school was opened in 1993 thanks to assistance from George Soros's Open Society Foundation (Otvoreno Obshtestvo), significantly improving the educational prospects in Ribnovo. In addition to the high school, the area also has a primary school, a kindergarten and two mosques.

My research in the area was greatly facilitated by the Ottoman Studies researcher Antonina Zhelyazkowa from the International Center for Minority Studies and Intercultural Relations (IMIR) in Sofia.

In Ribnovo I stayed in the house of the parents of the Mayor of Garmen who are senior citizens (the mayor lives in Ognianovo but was born in Ribnovo). This gave me a chance to observe the daily life of my hosts: the host performing ritual ablutions before prayer, the hostess praying on rug at home during Muslim prayer times, dinner served on rugs and newspapers spread on the floor (invited guests, the mayor and his wife were served food at the table), or the host playing the tambourine. During my stay at Ribnovo, my "gatekeeper" wore the traditional costume of a married woman (as she explained it to me, "out of respect for her mother-in-law"), but in her own town (Ognianovo) she wore "European-style clothes". Other women behave in the same way when they travel (especially to the capital). Otherwise they feel uncomfortable in alien surroundings when wearing the traditional costume, which makes them feel uncomfortable.



Photograph 1.1: Muslims resting on a bench. Main square, Ribnovo. Photographer: P. Carlucci

Almost all of the women wear traditional Muslim clothes: flower-patterned *shalvari* trousers in various colours and made of different fabrics (on special occasions young girls might wear plain, sequined *shalvari* made of satin), *zabradka*s or kerchiefs (kerchiefs worn by older women are white and tied under the chin to cover the neck and the hair; unmarried women wear bright colored kerchiefs with a colourful flower pattern, tied at the back of their heads to leave the neck exposed[19]), dark blue socks, long-sleeved tops (often sport sweatshirts), and (for married women) a *manto*, looking like a long-sleeved over-dress which replaced the traditional *feredzhe*[20]

19 There was a similar difference between Christian and Muslim women in the Ottoman Empire: Christian women tied their kerchiefs at the back of the head, Muslim women wore them tied under the chin (cf. Neuburger 2004, p. 125).

20 A broad, ankle-length over-dress with long sleeves and a collar. Some of my respondents reported that girls start wearing a *feredzhe* after her first period.

(Turkish: *ferace)* which were banned in Communist times. Unmarried women often wear tights and high heeled shoes with the *shalvari*. Males wear no distinguishable clothes, with the possible exception of a black beret worn by some men (during Communist times it replaced the *fez*[21]). Local shops are well-stocked with traditional clothes and fabrics.



Photograph 1.2: Muslim women in a shop in Ribnovo, 2005. Photographer: P. Carlucci.

On a few rare occasions I also met women wearing "Arab style" clothing, to borrow a term used by Kristen Ghodsee, who noted its increasing popularity in the region of Madan, where she did field research on the connections between post socialism, gender and modern Muslim religious life (Ghodsee 2010, 2, 162). Ghodsee notes that this style of clothing was often chosen for financial reasons as competing religious factions active in the area offered financial incentives to Muslim women in exchange for wearing "Arab" clothes (Ghodsee 2010, p. 175).

During my field research (especially in Ribnovo) I tried to dress inconspicuously in long, loose-fitting dresses with high necklines and long sleeves but my clothes still proved to be inadequate compared to the local standards. On one occasion, a local conservative *hodzha* pointed to me with his cane and said that it was improper for women to be parading around "naked". Being fully clothed except my head I found

21 Male headgear shaped like a truncated cone, worn during the Ottoman Empire.

that surprising before I realized that a married woman with her head uncovered was practically naked from the *hodzha's* perspective[22].

Ribnovo turned out to be a place of contrasts. The local cafés-cum-shops sold sugar in packaging featuring pictures of half-naked women, and televisions in private homes were often tuned to music channels, with music videos of sexy Bulgarian popstars constantly running in the background as a sort of unintended commentary on our discussions about the moral decline of the West: an irony blithely ignored by my respondents, who seemed to make no connection between their own entertainment, consisting as it did of gyrating women in various stages of undress, and the scrupulously covered local women.

Ribnovo is dominated by patriarchal values. As one Muslim woman told me, those values are guarded by older women (primarily mothers-in-law) and the local *hodzhas*. She complained about the double standards involved in a social arrangement where men keep women sheltered and isolated while they spend time away from Ribnovo meeting lovers in other towns. Local girls marry young, mostly at the age of 15 and tend to stay indoors after 9 o'clock at night while the man spend nights in bars to talk and, in some cases, to drink alcohol.

1.3.2 Satovcha

I conducted my fieldwork in Satovcha in 2005 in the company of my thesis supervisor, Prof. Magdalena Zowczak (Institute of Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology, University of Warsaw) and my sister, Pavlina Carlucci (who provided the photographic documentation). Our respondents were mistrustful and noncommittal, so establishing rapport was not always easy. Fieldwork began inauspiciously, with a failed attempt at interviewing the local imam[23], who refused to shake my hand[24] and initially did not turn up for the interview; when he finally gave us an interview, he was rather laconic. However, respondents in Satovcha provided me in the end with some of my key observations as long interviews in religiously homogenous groups made it possible for my Muslim and Christian respondents to reveal their hidden mutual fears (see Chapter 3). As the conversations circled around topics they found visibly painful, at times it felt like they were oblivious of my presence.

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22 According to the Bulgarian ethnographer D. Marinov, this expectation applied to all women in Bulgarian villages, particularly to married ones (cf: Neuburger 2004, p. 122).

23 Literally "leader, one who proceeds, master". The leader of the Friday prayers in the mosque responsible for preaching sermons and performing Muslim rituals. Unlike Christian priests, imams are not seen as intermediaries between God and people.

24 Obviously, offering to shake the imam's hand was a social solecism on my part.

My Christian respondents seemed warm and open but they did not feel competent to discuss religious matters, and indeed were often quite uninformed about religion, not being able to even narrate the story of Adam and Eve[25], and the "fall" of the first parents. They were disappointed that I was not collecting folk songs, as the Polish theatre company Gardzienice did when it had visited the area several years previously, leaving a strong, lasting impression on the local inhabitants. Wherever we mentioned the fact that we came from Poland, people were offering to sing their traditional songs or even, in one case, to enact the traditional ritual lamentations for the dead.

Muslims are in the majority in Satovcha, accounting for two thirds of the population (they also predominate in the local government). Christians explain the numerical advantage of Muslims with the fact that many local Christians migrated to central Bulgaria in 1944-1945. Local opinions about the area's past demographics vary, with each religious group overestimating the size of the other.

In Satovcha I stayed with the local school principal and her teacher husband, a family of Muslim neophytes.

Several conjectures exist concerning the etymology of the town's name. The first is connected with a vessel used in beekeeping (possibly a historical occupation in the area), known as a *sat* in the local dialect. Others have speculated that the name derives from the word "matchmaker" (Bulgarian: *svat*) or "wedding" (Bulgarian: *svatba*), corrupted to Satovcha in Ottoman times from the original Svatovitsa. According to my respondent, a Bulgarian teacher in the local primary school, some of the older inhabitants still use the former name Svatovitsa.

The local region is also known as Chech, which my respondents interpreted as "forgotten by the world". According to the Bulgarian historian Evgeni Radushev, Ottoman records mention a village named Chech[26] in 1478 (Radushev 2005, p. 433) which afterwards drops out of historical record, but that village was probably unrelated to the region and located near the village of Radibosh near Drama, Greece (Radushev 2005, p. 434).

1.3.3 Garmen

In the summer of 2006 and spring of 2009 I conducted my research in the Christian town of Garmen (the only Christian town in the local commune). I also conducted two interviews in Dabnitsa (located several miles from Garmen and inhabited by

25 Also referred to as Hawwa further in the book (in the local Muslim variant Havva, Turkish: Havva, Arabic: Hawwa) in keeping with Muslim tradition.

26 The site of the earliest conversions of the local population to Islam (Radushev 2005, p. 434).

Orthodox Christian Bulgarians, Turks[27] and Roma people) and several more in the mixed Muslim-Christian village of Ognianovo (formerly Fotovishta), famous for its healing mineral springs.

Today, Garmen comprises a quarter called Zagrade, formerly Chuflike (Turkish: Çuflike, Çiflike) and the new Garmen, which is located less than a mile away. Only ruins remain of the old Garmen, which used to be located on higher ground and away from the road (an unfavourable location which probably sealed its fate). The inhabitants of old Garmen were resettled to new Garmen in 1924–1948 (*Minaloto*... 2003, p. 30).

There are two conjectures concerning the name of Garmen. One etymology derives the name from the word "thunder" (Bulgarian: *grŭm*) as the local iron deposits supposedly attract lightning strikes. The other derives it from the name of an early settler, one "German" from Albania. The quarter in which German settled was supposedly known as Germanova, and ultimately the name came to be applied to the town as a whole, which was renamed Garmen.

Despite the conjectural presence of Christian Albanians/Arnauts[28] among the early[29] settlers in Garmen, the local inhabitants consider themselves pure Bulgarians: "if they built a church, that means they were Bulgarians". Still, some of the families in Garmen are believed to be descended from those early outsider settlers (*Minaloto*... 2003, p. 26). Some argue that Garmen predated the arrival of Albanian settlers.

Garmen is the seat of the mayor's office. The mayor, Ahmed Bashev, was one of my respondents and provided me with invaluable help. My local "gatekeepers" were two Christian women, Krasimira and her mother Sofiya. The ancestors of Krasimira and Sofiya built the local chapel of St. Nedelya/St. Kyriake after seeing the saint in their dream, and later unearthed an icon of St. Nedelya from the ground. Today, prayers are held in the chapel only on the feast of St. Nedelya and on the Feast of the Holy Spirit (which involves a ritual sacrifice of five rams).

1.4 The Respondents

The studied population comprised two religious groups: Bulgarian-speaking Muslims (Pomaks) and Orthodox Christians. Both groups are indigenous to the area.

I interviewed a total of 85 people including 40 Sunni Muslims, 41 Orthodox Christians, one Protestant and 3 atheists. 50 women and 35 men were interviewed.

27 Probably descended from the Yörüks who were settled in the area. According to the Angel Lazarov, Secretary of the Culture Center in Dabnitsa, the local population comprises 1,000 Turks, 350 Bulgarians resettled from Greece in 1927–1929 and around 500 Muslim Roma people.

28 1) Albanians, 2) soldiers in the Sultan's private guard.

29 It is not clear wherether all or only some of the settlers were Albanians. The inhabitants of Garmen are divided on this matter. Some respondents said the early settlers were refugees or runaways from Albania.

The respondents were mostly middle-aged or in their retirement age. Only several people were under the age of 30. Most of my older respondents (over 65 years of age), including *hodzhas* and one women I refer to as a *bula*[30], had elementary or primary education.

Most of the middle-aged respondents were college-educated or were pursuing college education (several people had a secondary education). College-educated respondents included the Mayor of Garmen, the Mufi of Gotse Delchev, the Bishop of Nevrokop, the archimandrite Grigoriy, four schoolteachers (two female and two male), a female school principal, a female kindergarten principal, two female civil servants, two secretaries of local culture centres (one male, one female), three *hodzhas* and one priest.

To protect the anonymity of my respondents, their names have been changed or abbreviated to initials, with the exception of people speaking on the record as public figures (Mayor Ahmed Bashev, Metropolitan Natanail, Mufti Aydin Mohamed). The following abbreviations are used in interviews to identify respondents: W (woman), M (man), Ch (Christian), M (Muslim).

During my research I had the impression that the religious life of the local Muslims was at a crossroads: on the one hand the local population preserves many elements of traditional religion (in the book I refer to this as "Adat Islam"), on the other hand they are subject to ideological pressures from "Salafi Islam", a global presence seeking to unify Islam worldwide by eliminating its local elements.

I was struck by the disproportion in the levels of religious knowledge in the two groups. Muslims are increasingly knowledgeable about matters of their faith, whereas the local Christians tend to know very little about their religion. The local Muslims also seem to be far more affected by the pressures of modernity on religious life, such preferring expert authority and written sources to the authority of elders. The standards of religious education are likewise higher among the Muslims. They often read the Qur'an, during Ramadan they listen to sermons preached in mosques by *hodzhas*, who are increasingly being trained abroad in places such as Macedonia, Saudi Arabia or Turkey. The local Muslims buy religious books (which are often sponsored by local Muslim associations), and even listen to recordings of Muslim sermons on CDs.

The following sections contain introductory information helpful in understanding the main ideas of the book. In the case of Pomaks, this includes topics such as the perspective of Bulgarian historiography on the processes of Islamicization and conversion to Islam, or the attempted state-sponsored assimilation campaigns, a traumatic experience self-described by Pomaks as "an open wound" in their collective identity and a significant experience in the context of religious syncretism and anti-syncretism.

30 T. Bringa defines a *bula* as a "female religious instructor" (Bringa 1995, p. 253). I choose this term because of the impressive religious knowledge of my respondent and respect she has among local population.

The religious life of Bulgarian-speaking Muslims is described in more detail in the later chapters. This reflects the nature of the collected material, as the two religious groups provided very different answers to the questions in my research plan. Although I posed the same questions to Muslims and Orthodox Christians, only the former replied almost invariably with religious narratives favorably contrasting Islam with Christianity, sharing a great deal of information about their beliefs and religious practices.

On the other hand, my Christian respondents had little to say on the subject of religion, whether their own or that of their Muslim neighbours. When questioned about the religious life of Muslims, they ignored comparisons between Islam and Christianity, and focused instead on the ethnic identity of the Pomaks. Although their narratives make it possible to draw conclusions about their attitudes towards Islam, they offer little information about their opinions about their own religious life. Unlike the Muslims, who tended to explain their religious practices in terms of elaborate symbolic religious narratives, my Christian respondents typically replied that they engaged in religious practices "for health". Based on my research material I conclude that the *kurban*, blood sacrifice, plays a crucial role in their religious life, next to beliefs connected with averting the evil eye and "fright".

1.4.1 Bulgarian-Speaking Muslims (Pomaks)

Bulgarian-speaking Muslims are referred to in the literature as Pomaks, Bulgaromahommedans or Bulgarian Muslims. In this book I use two terms interchangeably, Bulgarian-speaking Muslims and Pomaks. "Bulgarian-speaking Muslims", an appellation used by the German historian Ulf Brunnbauer (2007, p. 94) or the American historian Mary Neuburger (2004), seems to be the most politically correct term. Unlike the exoethnonym "Pomaks", it does not carry any pejorative connotations and is free of symbolic violence: it has no ideological implications and does not impose an ethnic identity on the group (unlike "Bulgarian Muslims", which presupposes that members of the group are Bulgarians).

However, given the widespread prevalence of the term "Pomaks" in the literature of the subject (particularly written in English and German), I do not reject it outright. In common with Mary Neuburger I believe that it is a handier term than "Bulgarian Muslims" or "Bulgaromohammedans"[31] (Neuburger 2004, p. 2). The latter term, proposed by the ethnographer Stoil Shishkov (1931) to emphasize the group's Bulgarian identity, is unacceptable because it not only presupposes that members of the group are Bulgarians, but also suggests that they worship Muhammad[32] rather than Allah,

31 For the local Christian uses of the term see Chapter 8.

32 The term "Mohammedan" was widespread in all of Europe, stemming from the misapprehension that the function of Muhammad in Islam was analogous to that of Jesus in Christianity (Said 1991, p. 102).

which would be an act of idolatry (Muhammad being only a prophet). Despite those two serious shortcomings, an updated form of the term ("Mohammeddan Bulgarians") continues to be used by some Bulgarian researchers (Raychevski 2004, Boneva 1994). The term was also criticized by my Muslim respondents, who are highly sensitive to any attempts at imposing a national identity on the group after experiencing the traumas involved in the "revival process" (*vŭzroditelen protses*)[33].

"Bulgarian Muslims", the preferred term used by modern Bulgarian researchers (Gruev, Kalionski 2008), suffers from the same defect. Pomaks, despite being an exoethnonym as well, is generally accepted in the literature where it relates to the indigenous local Slavic population professing Islam and found in Bulgaria but also Albania, Greece, Macedonia[34] and Turkey, with an estimated combined population of 500,000. At 150,000–200,000[35] (Mancheva 2001, p. 358), most Pomaks live in Bulgaria, mainly in the Rhodopes, with smaller dispersed groups in several villages of the central range of the Stara Planina between Lovech and Tetven (Mancheva 2001, p. 358). Pomaks profess Islam, which brings them closer to the Turkish population, but they speak the Bulgarian language[36], which places them closer to the Bulgarians. As demonstrated in the 1990s by Tsvetana Georgieva, a Bulgarian historian and Ottoman scholar, Bulgarian-speaking Muslims identify themselves as Turkish in the Western

33 I borrow this term from the Bulgarian sociologist E. Ivanova to describe the assimilation efforts orchestrated by the Bulgarian authorities in the period 1912-1918 (Ivanova 2002); the sense of the term is therefore broader than that commonly accepted in Bulgaria since its first use by Communist propaganda to describe the effort to assimilate Turks to a Bulgarian identity at the turn of 1984-1985. This "propagandist euphemism" (Gruev 2008, p. 11) presented the political and ideological assimilationist efforts as a "revival" of the Bulgarian national spirit which involved, among other things, forced changes of Arabic and Turkish names to Bulgarian ones.

34 Where they are known locally as "Torbeshes", an appellation perceived as pejorative by the local Macedonian-speaking Muslims, similar to the term "Pomaks" among Bulgarian-speaking Muslims. Etymologically, the word "Torbesh" implies opportunism, suggesting that the formerly Christian group gave up their religious identity and embraced Islam for a bag (*torba*) of cheese or flour (Lubaś 2011, p. 42). According to what I see as the most plausible interpretation, the term was used in the Middle Ages to describe Bogomil missionaries who carried banned apocrypha in their travel bags – this might suggest that the Torbeshes are descended from medieval Bogomils, a dualistic Christian sect.

35 There are no precise statistics about the size of the population. According to other data there were 270,000 of them in the 1990s (Norris 1993, p. XVIII). Writing about the same period A. Balikci puts the figure at 280,000 (Balikci 1999, p. 51). Based on 1989 data from the Bulgarian Ministry of Internal Affairs, U. Brunnbauer quotes the figure of 268,971, accounting for three per cent of Bulgaria's total population at the time, however 10 years later the Pomak population was estimated at 250,000 (Brunnbauer 1999, p. 36). Again, writing about the same period A. Balikci puts the number at 280,000 (Balikci 1999, p. 51). Given Bulgaria's negative demographic growth, the current figure is estimated to be somewhere between 160,000 and 240,000.

36 According to some theories, their dialect is the closest to the Bulgarian language in its "pure" form (Neuburger 2000, p. 182).

Rhodopes, and as Bulgarian in the Central and Eastern Rhodopes[37] (Georgieva 1995, p. 142). In my own research in the Western Rhodopes I never encountered Muslims who identified themselves as Turkish. Almost all of them emphasized that they considered ethnic identity to be secondary compared to their identity as members of the Ummah[38] or the collective community of Islamic peoples, even though they insisted they were taking their duties as Bulgarian citizens very seriously. According to Mary Neuburger, "[n]o Balkan Muslim identity is more contested, more wrapped in multiple intertwining twisted webs of myth and history" (Neuburger 2000, p. 181).

Unlike the literature of the subject, in which the term "Pomaks" tends to be treated as neutral (Zhelyazkova 2009), Bulgarian-speaking Muslims are ambivalent about it. This is connected with the most popular etymology of the word[39], derived from the word *pomŭcheni*, meaning people who have been "tortured" or "persecuted" (implicitly: by the Turks) when Bulgaria was part of the Ottoman Empire. Widely accepted by the local Christians, this etymology was part of official historiography in Communist Bulgaria (1944–1989). In this context, Bulgarian-speaking Muslims are discussed either as traitors who gave up their religion and national identity to save their lives, or as "purest Bulgarians"[40] who sacrificed their faith and accepted Islam to protect Bulgarian blood from Turkish miscegenation from rapes committed against Christian women (Karavelov[41] 1982, p. 305). In this interpretation, accepting Islam was a lesser evil, preferred to rapes which might produce "Turkish bastards". Shishkov argued that the Pomaks spoke the purest old Slavic dialect and were therefore "purest" Bulgarians (cf: Neuburger 2004, p. 40).

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37 Similarly, the Macedonian Torbeshes variously identify themselves in census data as Macedonians or Albanians (Bielenin-Lenczowska 2011, p. 271).

38 The Islamic community.

39 Researchers working in this field do not accept this etymology as certain. According to the 19th century German traveller F. Kanitz, the term is derived from *pomotsi*, literally "helpers", meaning the helpers or collaborators of the Ottoman army (cited in: Aleksiev 1997, p. 61). This etymology was also accepted by G. Rakovski (cited in: Raychevski 2004, p. 23). A folk etymology derives the term from the verb *pomavali se, pomamili se*, meaning people who allowed themselves to be "tricked" or "duped" (cf. Aleksiev 1997, p. 61). There is also a Greek etymology based on the term *pimion* (shepherd).

40 According to some theories, the Pomaks use the purest and most archaic form of the Bulgarian language. Stoian Raychevski writes that many experts in Slavic Studies confirmed this thesis of Iordan Konstantinov, suggesting that the language of "Bulgarian Muslims" in the Rhodopes and Macedonia is closest to the language used by Saints Cyril and Methodius, (important 9th century missionaries among the Slavic nations) and their students in the Ohrid School who created Slavic translations of the liturgical books (implicitly suggesting that saints Cyril and Methodius were Bulgarians) (Raychevski 2004, p. 21).

41 Lyuben Stoychev Karavelov (1835–1879), a Bulgarian writer actively involved in the Bulgarian National Revival (*Bŭlgarsko Natsionalno Vŭzrazhdane*). He received his college education in Russia and wrote in Russian, Bulgarian and Serbian. His best-known novel is *Bŭlgari ot staro vreme* (*Old Time Bulgarians*).

In spite of this complicated situation, some Bulgarian-speaking Muslims identify themselves simply as Pomaks.

There are several ideas concerning the ethnogenesis of the Bulgarian-speaking Muslim population[42]. The "Turkish" theory speculates about their Turkish-Kumanian descent and their migration to Western Thrace, the Rhodopes and the Pirin Mountains in the 11th century, classifying their language as a Turkish dialect. This theory minimises the importance of Christian presence in the area, arguing that they were a late arrival in 1912 after the Balkan wars[43].

Based on so-called "haematological data" obtained by researchers from the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, an alternative "Greek" theory proposes that the Pomak population was supposedly of a Thracian-Greek orign, indicating a "haematological affinity" of 50-70% between Greeks and the Pomak inhabitants of villages in the Greek Rhodopes (Zhelyazkova 1997, p. 37). This is an obvious example of science being misused to justify a naturalistic vision of the nation, where ethnic ties are based on blood kinship.

According to a third, unscientific theory, propagated in brochures distributed to Pomaks in the 1990s, the local population in the valley of the river Arda in the Rupchos region and in the upper reaches of the Vacha and its tributaries is described as *a(k)hreni* (according to one etymological theory, the word is derived from *ahŭr myusyulmani* – the last Muslims, Arabic: sing. *akhir*, pl. *akhirun* – ostatni), who migrated to Bulgaria, Macedonia, Albania and Bosnia before the Slavs and the Turks following instructions of Muhammad himself. In this theory, they were descendants of *peygambers*[44] – prophets sent by Muhammad to proclaim God's word (Aleksiev 1997, p. 62). According to this theory, which has no basis in scientific evidence, this group belonged to one of the Thracian or Slavic tribes which accepted Islam directly from Arab missionaries before the Bulgarian lands became part of the Ottoman Empire (i.e. between the 9th and the 12th centuries)[45]. This theory is particularly popular

42 On a point of minor historical interest we might also mention the "Polish" theory, published in 19th-century press, according to which the Pomaks were descended from a group of 100 Poles (men, women and children) who migrated to Macedonia and Thrace as a result of Turkey's wars with Poland, and converted to Islam to avoid persecution from Greek Orthodox clergy – in this theory, the term "Pomak" is derived from the word "Polak" or Pole. The theory was aired in "Bulgaria", a newspaper published in Constantinople (Issues 108 and 109 dated 1861, cited in: Raychevski 2004, p. 28). According to Raychevski, the newspaper cooperated with Bulgarian members of the Unicki church, an Orthodox community in Poland which recognized the authority of the Pope, who "maintained good relations with Polish emigrants and revolutionaries" (Raychevski 2004, p. 28, translated from Bulgarian).

43 It was published in H. Memişoğlu's *Pages from the history of Pomak Turks*, Ankara 1991 (cited in: Zhelyazkova 1997, p. 37–38).

44 Turkish: *peygamber* – a prophet named in the Bible or the Qur'an.

45 According to another version, their ancestors were criminals from Asia Minor interned in the Rhodopes, where they married local Thracian or Slavic women, explaining why their descendants speak Bulgarian (Lozanova 1998, p. 452–453).

in the Western Rhodopes (Radushev 2005, p. 149). Some of my Muslim respondents accepted similar theories, emphasising that it was Christianity rather than Islam that was introduced to Bulgaria by force.

According to Galina Lozanova, a Bulgarian folklorist and anthropologist, those theories about the origins of Islam in the Rhodopes get adopted by Pomaks to compensate for the "historical stress" of persecution experienced during the"revival process" and the social perception of the Pomaks as a population professing a "religion of slaves" (Lozanova 1998, p. 455). Such legends are perpetuated as forms of reinterpreting the past in such a way as to reject the idea of Islam as a religion imposed by force in a traumatic process.

The process of Islamic conversion in the Rhodopes and its causes are still elusive and riddled with gaps. Bulgarian historiography has speculated that a wave of colonization in the 15th-16th centuries (in which Ottoman migrant populations from Anatolia were resettled to Rumelia[46]) played an important part in the Islamicization of the local population. However, according to Antonina Zhelyazkova this migration did not cause any changes to the religious-ethnic composition of the occupied lands. Members of the Ottoman state apparatus remained primarily occupants and officials, with no assimilation on the part of the local populations (Zhelyazkova 1990, p. 141). "Given the large size of the Balkan territories, the extent of Ottoman colonization was not sufficient to cause Islamicization on its own" (Zhelyazkova 1997, p. 31).

According to Antonina Zhelyazkova, Islamicization in the Ottoman Empire was not caused by direct coercion; although some acts of violence had been committed in some historical periods, they were not as frequent as the Bulgarian chronicles would have it (Zhelyazkova 1990, p. 63). Until relatively recently, the most influential source in Bulgarian historiography offering evidence of the supposedly compulsory nature of the conversion of Bulgarian-speaking Muslims was the chronicle on the Turkish defeat of Chepino, ruled a revivalist forgery in the second half of the 20th century[47] (Zhelyazkova 1997, p. 51).

Modern Bulgarian historiography argues that many of the conversions were voluntary, if motivated by aspirations of upward social mobility[48] and by economic

46 Former Byzantine lands conquered by the Ottoman Empire.

47 Supposedly containing a record of forced conversion to Islam among the Pomaks in the Rhodopes in the 17th century, during the reign of Sultan Mehmed IV. The chronicle (supposedly written by a priest named Metodi Draginov from the village of Korova in the Western Rhodopes) was cited in textbooks and revivalist sources. It was revealed to be a forgery based on historical discrepancies in the names and dates of sultans and linguistic analysis (carried out in the 1980s by the Bulgarian historian of literature I. Todorov (Zhelyazkova 1997, p. 51). Todorov argues that the chronicle was forged by one Zahariev, a 19th-century Bulgarian patriot involved in the national revival movement, who based his forgery on an authentic source (Zhelyazkova 1997, p. 51).

48 The Serbian ethnologist D. Drljača speculates that the motives behind conversions to Islam in Serbia followed a similar pattern (Drljača 1997, p. 145).

factors, since Muslims were exempt from the *jizyah*[49] (local Muslim variant: *dzhizye*, Turkish: *cizye*, Arabic: *jizyah*) and aspirations of upward social mobility[50]. "The new convert immediately became the equal of any other Ottoman subject and could rise in the state apparatus to the highest level his abilities would allow, since all posts, bar that of sultan, where open to him" (Norton 2001, p. 187). Forced conversion applied to "blood tax" or *devshirme*[51] (Turkish: *devşirme*), in which Christian boys were converted to Islam and pressed into the Janissary corps or the Ottoman state apparatus. This practice features prominently in recorded Bulgarian folklore in the oral tradition in many areas of Bulgaria, including my research area. Religious propaganda also played an important part in the Islamicization process, with particular effect in those areas where Christianity was weak or unorthodox (influenced by Bogomil[52] and Paulician sects) (Zhelyazkova 1990, p. 63).

According to the Bulgarian historian and Ottoman scholar Antonina Zhelyazkova, Islamicization began with isolated individual conversions in the 16th century and gradually intensified over the 17th century (particularly in its second half). In the Rhodopes, the process continued until the 18th century (Zhelyazkova 1997, p. 52). In the Western Rhodopes, particularly in the Chech region located along the middle of the Mesta valley, the earliest isolated conversions took place in the third quarter of the 15th century[53] (Radushev 2005, p. 434). According to another Bulgarian historian Evgeniy Radushev, this coincides with the appearance of the semi-nomadic shepherd Yörük tribes[54] as the conversions occurred in villages and towns located along the shepherd migration routes along which they travelled with their herds (Radushev 2005, p. 439). More important to the Islamicisation process was the introduction of Ottoman

49 An obligatory tax levied in the Ottoman Empire on non-Muslim population, perceived as a form of subjection to the State.

50 The Serbian ethnologist D. Drljacha speculates that the motives behind conversions to Islam in Serbia followed a similar pattern (Drljacha 1997, p. 145).

51 In the Balkans, the practice of drafting boys into the Ottoman Empire's elite military corp of Janissaries dated back to the 14th century (it was instituted by Sultan Orhan) and continued until the early 18th century. In 1826, the Janissary corps was disbanded.

52 The Bogomils was a neo-Manichean gnostic sect which evolved in the Balkans for more than 400 years (10th-15th centuries) (Szwat-Gyłybowa 2005, p. 14). Some of the Bogomils who did not convert to Islam merged with the Paulician sect following the fall of Tarnovo in 1686, and later converted to Catholicism. Others were probably absorbed into the local Orthodox Christian population, perhaps secretly preserving their Bogomil beliefs (Szwat-Gyłybowa 2005, p. 27).

53 Everywhere else in the Balkans the process began at a later stage (Radushev 2005, p. 434). Ottoman tax records in 1464 mention 12 converts in Nevrokop (today's Gotse Delchev) and 42 more scattered among 19 villages in the region, accounting for 3.5% of the local population at the time (Radushev 2005, p. 438, 442).

54 Yörüks were partly nomadic Turkish tribes migrating from Anatolia to Rumelia as auxilliaries in the Ottoman army, some of whom began to settle in Rumelia in the 17th century. This group left a mark on the local toponymy, naming peaks, pastures, rivers and crossings. Names of villages remained Slavic even after most of the population converted to Islam (Radushev 2005, p. 53).

administrative structures in the region, which changed the local population's social and economic environment (Radushev 2005, p. 440). The 16th century[55] could be described as a period of mass conversions, often involving entire families (Radushev 2005, p. 441). In the second half of the 16th century, Muslims became a majority in the town of Nevrokop (today's Gotse Delchev) and accounted for 28% of the rural population (Radushev 2005, p. 444); in the 17th century, more than half of the local rural population were Muslims (Radushev 2005, p. 445). This process ended around 1720 with 80% of the local population professing Islam. Early in the 18th century, two-thirds of the local towns and villages were entirely Muslim or inhabited by mixed populations[56], a situation which continues to this day[57] (Radushev 2005, p. 447).

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Whereas in the Ottoman Empire Pomaks found themselves among the relatively privileged segments of society, the liberation of Bulgaria (1878[58]) brought dramatic changes. In 1912[59], Pomaks were compelled to convert to Christianity on the initiative of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church, Tsar Ferdinand and Geshov's cabinet. "As Bulgarian troops, themselves occupiers, euphorically 'liberated' the 'Bulgarian lands' from Ottoman occupation, they were accompanied by Orthodox priests who forcibly converted some 200,000 Pomaks from Islam to Christianity in hundreds of villages in Thrace, Macedonia and the Rhodope Mountains" (Neuburger 2004, p. 41). Those events occurred thirty-six years after Bulgaria's April Uprising of 1876, in which some of the Pomaks fought on the Turkish side (Genchev 1998, p. 385). The uprising involved many dramatic acts of violence[60], the most terrible of which was a slaughter of the Christian civilian population of Batak committed by the Pomaks. In 1913[61], the Pomaks "converted" to Christianity in 1912 returned to Islam and their traditional

55 Records from 1519 show that out of 120 including Nevrokop, 101 were inhabited by a mixed Christian and Muslim population, and only 19 were exclusively Christian (Radushev 2005, p. 441), accounting for 17.5% of the local population (Radushev 2005, p. 443).

56 Despite two plague epidemics in the 18th century which caused catastrophic demographic decline in the region (Radushev 2005, p. 447).

57 More than half of the villages in the Nevrokop region (Turkish: *kaza*) in the Ottoman Empire were located in today's Greece (Radushev 2005, p. 55).

58 The Rhodopes did not become part of Bulgaria until 1912.

59 The renaming campaign of 1912 which also involved forced Christianization of the Pomaks affected 200,000 people and involved forcing new converts to chew on a piece of pork to prove the sincerity of the conversion (Ivanova 2002, p. 13).

60 For instance, the inhabitants of Perushtitsa in the Rhodopes hid from Turks and Pomaks in a church. When church was shot at and set on fire, leaders of the uprising fighters killed their wives and children before committing mass suicide. As N. Genchev, fighters in other towns followed the example of Perushtitsa (Genchev 1998, p. 385).

61 On 29 September 1913, a peace treaty was signed in Istanbul guaranteeing religious freedom to Muslims in Bulgaria.

costume[62], and the new liberal government of Vasil Radoslavov allowed them to use their Muslim names again.

The 20th century involved several traumatic experiences to the Pomak population. In the 1940s, Rodina (Fatherland), an organisation formed in Smolyan in 1937, orchestrated a new wave of assimilation efforts. The language of political propaganda used in the campaign relied on a crude version of psychoanalysis, presenting Bulgarian-speaking Muslims as a group which "forgot" its Bulgarian roots because it was afflicted by a slave mentality. Lack of enthusiasm for voluntary name changes[63] was interpreted as evidence of Pomak "slave fanaticism", a state of false and repressed consciousness from which they needed (and subconsciously longed) to be "liberated". Bulgarian-speaking Muslims were seen as victims of Islamicization whose insistence to maintain a Muslim identity could only be explained by a failure to realize their "condition as victims".

The "enlightenment" efforts aimed at the Pomaks were calculated to "reawaken the Bulgarian national spirit" in a population that needed to be "reminded"of its Bulgarian roots. In this effort, they should be led by those Muslims who already managed to reawaken their Bulgarian spirit, i.e. Muslim activists who were proponents of the Bulgarian state (ironically, the idea was mandated in a top-down fashion, as Evgenia Ivanova rightly notes). At the turn of 1939-1940, the Pomaks were again banned from wearing traditional clothes, and in 1942 they experienced compulsory change of names. However, as Ivanova points out, Rodina activists often complained about the refractory character of the Pomaks who resisted the changes despite wearing European style clothes (Ivanova 2002, p. 47). Muslim clothes (like the fez, the *feredzhe*, or the *shalvari*), Turkish or Arabic names and Islam were treated as attributes of slavery[64], stigmatizing the Pomaks as victims of persecution and reminding of the Ottoman colonization of Bulgaria. Despite the differences of historical context, we might conclude that this official reaction to Turkish influence is not dissimilar to the way Nazis projected their anxieties onto the Jewish "other", seeking to rid themselves of "impurity". The assimilation tactics of Rodina were reused in later assimilation campaigns involving compulsory change of names (Ivanova 2002, p. 57).

62 As M. Neuburger notes, "Bulgarian assumptions dating from the nineteenth century about the barbaric and oppressive nature of the veil are based mostly on suppositions from outside the local context. In the Balkans there is no evidence that heavy veiling, especially of the entire face, was ever a significant practice among a large sector of the Muslim population" (Neuburger 2004, p. 118).

63 According to a Muslim belief, Allah on the third day of Ramadan Bayram (Turkish: Ramazan Bayramı, Arabic: 'Id al-Fitr) allocates good or bad fortunes to every name in the coming year. In this sense, new names rob people of their destiny on earth (Gruev, Kalionski 2008, p. 65).

64 Even though, as M. Neuburger notes, the regional variation in Bulgarian dress meant that the costume of Pomak women was not that different from fully covered Bulgarian women. This observation relates to the period predating the modernizing effects of the Communist (Neuburger 2004, p. 120).

The situation of the Pomaks changed after the Communist takeover as the Communists initially distanced themselves from the methods of Rodina. On 1 November 1945, Pomaks were allowed to use their Turkish names. However, in the following year the same Communist government conducted a census in which Bulgarian-speaking Muslims could only identify themselves as one of several approved options including "Pomak", "Rhodope Mohammedan", "Bulgarian" or "Other"[65]. "Turkish" was not available as an option. In 1948, the government began to implement a resettlement program to rid the country of its Turkish population[66], which it was hoped would facilitate Pomak assimilation. In 1953, changes were made to identity papers, reclassifying Pomaks (formerly described as "Bulgaromohammedans") as Bulgarians. In some towns, including Satovcha, where I did some of my research, Pomaks were not allowed to venture outside without their identity papers, even to visit a local shop or public well (Ivanova 2002, p. 65).

In 1959, a new campaign was launched banning Muslims from wearing traditional clothing (Bulgarian: *razferedzhavaneto*) which continued until the mid-1960s and affected not only Bulgarian-speaking Muslims but also other, smaller Islamic communities in the country (Gruev, Kalionski 2008, p. 28). Certain religious restrictions were introduced: circumcision or *syunnet* (Turkish: *sünnet*, Arabic*: khitan*) was banned[67], as was animal sacrifice or the *kurban* (Gruev, Kalionski 2008, p. 42). In 1964, a new renaming campaign was under way, which also affected Muslim Romas. The official tactic involved obtaining support from local activists who changed their names voluntarily (Gruev, Kalionski 2008, p. 53), but willing participants were not always easy to find. Mihail Gruev and Aleksei Kalionski note that no volunteers were found in Ribnovo - a town which plays an important part in my research project - which may have contributed to the local resistance to assimilation at the time[68] (Gruev, Kalionski 2008, p. 53). In the end, the government

65 According to the Bulgarian sociologist E. Ivanova, many of them chose this option (Ivanova 2002, p. 61).

66 A new resettlement agreement was signed with Turkey in 1969, however, less than 100 people in total migrated to Turkey on that occasion (Ivanova 2002, p. 67).

67 Circumcisions could only be carried out under the supervision of a doctor, which practically excluded Muslims (Gruev, Kalionski 2008, p. 37).

68 On 29 March 1964, a religious rebellion against the renaming campaign was sparked off in Ribnovo when a crowd gathered on the central square attacked the so-called "revival activists" with stones, hatchets and tree branches as they entered (Gruev, Kalionski 2008, p. 52). The activists and the accompanying soldiers started to flee. One of the soldiers was captured by the crowd and forced to wear a fez; a Turkish flag was hoisted on the minaret; "Christian teachers and their families were expelled from the village, and told that the village needed Turkish rather than Bulgarian teachers" (Gruev, Kalionski 2008, p. 52). The village became a leading pocket of resistance: night patrols were organized, and contacts were established with other Muslim villages and towns. The village cut itself off by severing the phone line and demolishing the bridge to Gotse Delchev (Gruev, Kalionski 2008, p. 53). After 1989, nearly all of the inhabitants of Ribnovo returned to their Muslim names.

backtracked, allowing Bulgarian-speaking Muslims to use the Turkish-Arabic names (Gruev, Kalionski 2008, p. 54).

After the failed effort in 1964, another renaming campaign was attempted in 1970-1974. Renaming took place as part of local ceremonies called *sŭbor*[69]. In addition to artistic performances and talks from members of the Komsomol, such ceremonies culminated in a mass renaming in which new identity papers were presented to individuals. Women's *feredzhes* were also removed as part of the "ritual" (Ivanova 2002, p. 97), symbolizing not only a break with Islam but also liberation from patriarchal bondage[70]. Renaming campaigns often provoked resistance in the local population, sometimes resulting in deaths (Barutin, Kornitsa), mass internment and lawless imprisonment. According to some data, 400-500 Muslims who objected to having their names changed were interned in the Belene labour camp (Gruev, Kalionski 2008, p. 77). In 1980–1984, a renaming campaign was held among the Turkish minority.

Since the 1990s, Pomaks may use their Muslim names and practice Islam freely. Some choose Christian names for pragmatic reasons since having a Christian name makes it easier to find employment abroad, mostly in Greece, Spain and the United States.

The collapse of Communism in 1989 made it possible to conduct reliable and transparent social research in the Pomak population, free from nationalist ideological pressure. Such research was conducted by number of centers including the New Bulgarian University in Sofia, the American University in Bulgaria (Blagoevgrad), the St. Kliment Ohridski University and the International Center for Minority Studies and Intercultural Relations (IMIR) in Sofia. No longer hampered by political doctrine, new interpretations of historical sources became possible.

The new research has dismantled the official historical interpretation in effect under the government of Todor Zhivkov, in which conversion to Islam in the Rhodopes was compulsory, with the "spilling of blood" as an ominous alternative. This martyrological approach has been debunked as an ideological iteration of one of the strongest Bulgarian national mythologems, namely the myth of Turkish oppression as a dark age responsible for Bulgaria's current political and cultural shortcomings (Gałązka 1992, p. 21–27). At the same time, there is a resistance towards explaining conversions to Islam in terms of economic incentives, an approach some believe to be a symptom of fadish obeisance to the multicultural idea, which is ultimately irreconciliable with nationalistic patriotism[71].

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69 *Sŭbor* is a solemn gathering, such as a religious feast or a secular occasion (e.g. a music concert).

70 Fashion shows were held to encourage Muslim women to wear European style clothes, use make up and visit hairdressers (Neuburger 2004, p. 132–133). The campaigns were presented as part of a modernization and emancipatory effort. The wearing of *shalvari, feredzhe* or *zabradkas* were treated as symptoms of resistance against the Communist regime (Neuburger 2004, p. 134).

71 One such admittedly eccentric voice is that of P. Dyulgerov, who was given the mission of popularizing his version of history by the late Baba Vanga, once a charismatic and popular Bulgarian

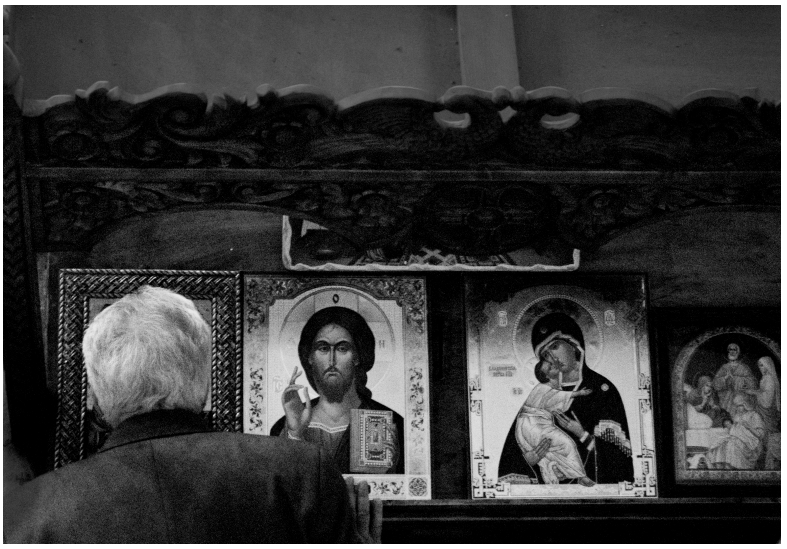
Today, Pomaks dominate in the research area in demographic terms. In Satovcha and Garmen, Muslims hold the most important elected positions, running as members of the Turkish party DPS or as independent candidates. It should be emphasized that some of the elected officials are Christians, often as a result of an intentional Muslim strategy which treats power-sharing as an element of peaceful coexistence. For instance, the mayors of Satovcha and Garmen are Muslims, but their deputies are Christians. Still, the local Christians complain that they are unable to elect their candidates to top jobs, given the numerical advantage of the Muslim population.

1.4.2 Orthodox Christians

The 20th-century experience of the Orthodox Christian population in the research area has been less complex than that of the Bulgarian-speaking Muslims. Consequently, the scholarly literature on the subject is much less extensive than that relating to the Pomaks. Notable exceptions include research conducted in the region since the 1990s by the Bulgarian foklorists Albena Georgieva and Vihra Baeva (Bulgarian Academy of Sciences). Baeva has published her results in books including *Razkazi za chudesa. Lokalna traditsia i lichen opit* (2013, 2001) or *Nishkata na zhivota. Mezhdu kolancheto na rozhba i Bogorodichniyat poyas* (2012) and many articles. Georgieva is the author of two books *Razkazi i razkazvane v bŭlgarski folklor* (2000) and *Folklorni izmereniya na hristiyanstvoto. Ustni razkazi i lokalna religioznost v rayona na Bachkowski Manastir "Uspeniye na Presveta Bogoroditsa" i na Hadzhidimovski Manastir "Sv. Velikomŭchenik Georgi Pobedonosets"* (2012) (Georgieva is not interested directly in the problem of religious syncretism). Georgieva has also co-edited a collection of folklore material which has been published as *Minaloto prez pogleda na nash entsi. Sbornik na folklorni materiali ot selata Garmen, Dabnitsa, Koprivlen i Pletena, Gotsedelchevsko*[72] (2003).

fortuneteller, who told him to "bring light to the lost souls, and to tell them how the Ottomans took the Christian faith by force and turned them Turk" (cited in: Dyulgerov 2000, p. 11). Concerning the recent publications concerning Islamicization, Dyulgerov said, "in recent years we've had some publications, people arguing that there was no Turkish oppression. Even the history textbooks describe this as "the Ottoman presence", writing of forced conversion to Islam as voluntary religious conversion" (Dyulgerov 2000, p. 14). Dyulgerov mentions dramatic events from the period using folk tradition as evidence, implicitly assuming that the tradition is accurate.

72 The book features practically no mention of religious elements relating to Orthodox Christianity, which is perhaps understandable given the paucity of religious narratives in the field relating to biblical figures and events, a fact I also note in my book.



Photograph 1.3: A Christian pilgrim venerating the icons in the monastery of St. George in Hadzhidimovo. Photographer: P. Carlucci.

Regardless of age, the biblical expertise of my respondents was extremely limited. Many of them were unable to say anything about Adam and Eve beyond the fact that they were the "first parents". The local religious knowledge seems to be limited to the theologeme of Abraham's sacrifice (though Abraham is not usually identified by name) and Jesus[73]'s (Bulgarian: Issus) death on the cross and resurrection. The respondents did not discuss God, to whom the older respondents refer as "Grandpa God" (*dyado Gospod*). By contrast, they were prepared to discuss freely many religious-magical practices which have no connection to Christianity, such as offering blood sacrifice (*kurban*) to saints in order to secure health and long life for a specific individual, sleeping in holy places as a healing practice, consulting *hodzhas* when harmed by Muslim *jinn*, visiting female healers who cast lead to dispel "fright"[74] or break eggs to avert *uram*[75] or the "evil eye". All of those practices are discussed at length in later chapters. This section will focus on the relationship between the faithful and the Orthodox clergy.

73 Later also referred to according to the Muslim tradition as 'Isa (local Muslim variant: Isa, Turkish: İsa)

74 Fear or fright caused by a traumatic experience, e.g. fleeing from danger.

75 The word is derived from the Turkish *uğrama*. In this case it means an ilness, especially paralysis, or stroke caused by *samodivas* (rusalkas) or other demons. Because the condition is believed to be caused by angry demons, the word may be etymologically related to the Arabic word *'uram*, meaning 'spite'. I am grateful to my colleague and Arabic scholar Joanna Musiatewicz for pointing this out.

My Orthodox Christian respondents described themselves as "unenlightened believers", "simple folk" or "Gypsies", meaning people whose grasp of the doctrine is random and fragmentary:

> G.: It's not like we're atheists, some kind of infidels or unbelievers, but we're not enlightened believers, either. We lack the education that each of us should have as a Christian. (Interview 23, W, Ch, Satovcha 2005)

> M.: Plainly put, we are like Gypsies. How much does a Gypsy remember?!... [In the church – M.L.] there are prayers, but I can't remember all of that because I don't go there often. (W, Ch, Interview 48, Garmen 2006)

The ties between my respondents and the Orthodox Church are loose: they do not regularly attend church on Sundays or take Communion, and they do not fast. Many of them have never been to confession. My respondents in Garmen actually insisted that confession was not available in their local church: those willing to confess have to travel to Hadzhidimovo or Gotse Delchev. In practical terms, my respondents never feel the need to do so, and argue that the requirement to go to confession is a recent introduction. To be able to partake of the Sacrament of Holy Communion, explained my respondents, one has to fast for two weeks in advance, but availing themselves of the Sacrament of Penance (commonly called Confession) is not required.

For his part, the local priest in Garmen complains about the fact that the locals are unwilling to go to Confession. Reportedly, he has only been asked twice to hear a confession. Only a single child goes to Communion on a regular basis (Interview 50, Garmen 2006).

My respondents explained that the reason they did not go to Communion lay in the harsh Orthodox fasts, which they were only able to observe partially (i.e. for several days rather than weeks). One female respondent (born in 1926) said that the last time she had been to Communion was when her mother carried her into the church for that purpose (Interview 48, Garmen 2006). The priest in Garmen reports that maybe a dozen members of the local congregation go to Communion at Easter or Christmas because the people "are more attuned to that which is of the devil than to spiritual things" (Interview 50, Garmen 2006).

My respondents explain that they do not go to church every Sunday because they cannot afford to buy the candles and votive gifts that need to be left in the church. The purpose of placing lit candles on candelabra or leaving votive gifts such as towels, blouses or socks is to ensure health for the worshipper or a loved one. My respondents regard those rites as more important than the Communion or participation in the liturgy:

> M.: We don't go every Sunday. Some people can afford it. I don't have enough money to go.

> M.L.: What do you need the money for?

M.: Why, I have to light a candle, I have to leave a little candle.

M.L.: And you can't do that without the money?

M.: When it's a holiday you need to buy a gift. You need money to go to church.

M.L.: What kind of gift?

M.: A kerchief, a shirt or other kinds of clothes, an apron, a shirt. (W, Ch, Interview 48, Garmen 2006)

When explaining their lax religious practice, respondents took part of the blame, but they also expressed their disappointment with the clergy, who they feel have been negligent for years. Perhaps one historical reason is that until 1870[76] the higher-ranking clergy members in charge of the official cult were recruited from the Greek elites and were perceived as outsiders by the common people, who found the Greek liturgy of the church incomprehensible (Georgieva 2009, p. 117). The lower Bulgarian clergy were, and still are, relatively uneducated and permeated with the same religious culture as the local communities.

During the Communist period, this was coupled with anti-religious discrimination in Bulgaria, which alienated people from their religious practices, a point they make when discussing the situation today.

Today, the priests have little rapport with the faithful, whom they tend to visit in their villages only sporadically (not even every Sunday), mostly on the feast of the patron saint of the local church[77]. With the exception of Satovcha, in all of the towns and villages I visited I found no respondents who felt positive about their local priests, whom they accused of negligence and laziness.

The problem of the "absent priest" in the local religious community seems to be endemic not only in my research area but also in Bulgaria as a whole. References to absent priests crop up repeatedly in the writings of Dimitar Marinov, a well-known Bulgarian ethnographer working at the turn of the 19th century, who wrote in *Narodna vyara i religiozni narodni obichai*: "On private holidays, i.e. those organised privately by a *zadruga*, the table is set and blessed by a priest. If there is no priest in the village or if he cannot come, he is replaced by old man and an old woman" (Marinov 1994, p. 347, translated from Bulgarian) or "The lamb was sometimes blessed in the absence of a priest, as in those cases where priests were few, and one priest worked in several

76 In that year an independent Bulgarian Orthodox Church was established.

77 A. Georgieva notes the same problem. Georgieva points out that this sometimes leads to a situation where the priest becomes replaced by a charistmatic lay member of the local community, as is the case in the village of Gubesht or Gorni Voden (Georgieva 2012, p. 123). Vihra Baeva makes a similar observation, adding that the charistmatic lay leaders are mostly older women who tend to stand in strong competition with the priests (2012, p. 170).

villages, and could not reach every village and say a prayer over a live lamb. Then, the blessing was performed by an old man or an old woman from the *zadruga*" (Marinov 1994, p. 608 translated from Bulgarian). It appears that little has changed since.

Unmotivated, negligent priests are another problem, often caused by low attendance in church. The priest in Garmen told me that he gave no sermons for that reason, and complained about the religious ignorance of the local community and its Communist past (Interview 50, Garmen 2006).

The problem of the loose ties between the believers and the Orthodox Church is also noted by Bulgarian researchers. Albena Georgieva writes that the believers are given the role of passive observers in church liturgy, made even more inaccessible by the abstruse language used in the liturgical texts (Georgieva 2012, p. 43), a situation which Georgieva argues pushes the faithful to seek alternative ways to the religious experience as most believers have learned to find spiritual support and nourishment in private practices (Georgieva 2012, p. 126).

Georgieva explains the disconnect between official and popular religion by portraying the clergy and the faithful as inhabiting different mental worlds. Georgieva argues that liturgy calls for a special pietistic attitude and worshipful devotion, humility and self-control – qualities which rural communities tend to perceive as a kind of impossible challenge or a chafing ideal dangerously bordering on hypocrisy. Accordingly, Georgieva points out, attending church services traditionally tended to be dismissed in rural communities as a predominantly female thing (Georgieva 2012, p. 44).

Georgieva clearly sides with the common believers and accepts their point of view of the clergy. This sense of reserve about the clergy in Bulgaria seems to be as deeply entrenched among the intellectuals as it is among the uneducated:

> V.: I believe the priest and the *hodzha* are lying. I believe in God, but I don't believe in them. I'm being honest. I listen to the things he sings or says, but he does not live by his word. (W, Ch, Interview 11, Osikovo 2005)

The respondent lists examples of priestly hypocrisy, such as failure to observe fasts. This negative perception of priests is also present in Bulgarian folklore, where priests are portrayed as hypocritical, lazy and greedy. Bulgarian proverbs say, "What's much to God is not enough to a priest"[78]; "It's never enough in a priest's eye"[79], "A trussed-up priest makes for a quiet village"[80], "Being a priest is the best occupation because you can fleece the living and the dead"[81], "Listen to the priest's words and ignore

78 *Na Boga e mnogo, za popa e malko* (Stoykova 2007, p. 223).
79 *Vse e malko na popovo oko* (Stoikova 2007, p. 223).
80 *Vŭrzan pop – mirno selo* (Stoykova 2007, p. 223).
81 *Popstvoto e naydobriyat zanayat – che i ot zhivi i ot martvi harach vzima* (Stoykova 2007, p. 224).

his actions"[82], "Never believe a *hadzhiya*[83] (Turkish: *hacı*, Arabic: *hajji*) or a priest"[84], "A priest is a shameless thing"[85], "The priest's son will be the first to turn Turk"[86].

82 *Na popa dumite slushaj, na rabotite ne gledaj* (Stoikova 2007, p. 224).

83 A Muslim pilgrim travelling to Mecca. In Bulgaria, the term also means an Orthodox Christian who has made a pilgrimage to Jerusalem. See *Glossary of Religious Terms*.

84 *Na hadzhiya i pop da ne vyarvash* (Stoykova 2007, p. 224).

85 *Pop sram nyama* (Stoykova 2007, p. 225).

86 *Popski sin naylesno se turchi* (Stoykova 2007, p. 226).

2 Religious Syncretism: History of the Concept; the Subject of Research

2.1 Theories of Religious Syncretism: State of Research

The first known use of term "syncretism"[87] appears in Plutarch's *Moralia* in a reference to the Cretan practice of putting internal differences aside in the face of external threats, a policy termed "syncretism" (chapter *De fraterno amore*, Moralia 2.490b). It is worth noting that the concept has political connotations from the very beginning: brotherly love is portrayed by Plutarch as a kind of political strategy aimed at maximising the chances of a group's survival. It is not clear whether the term in Plutarch was a pre-existing concept or a new coinage (Shaw, Stewart 1994, p. 3).

The term "syncretism" entered public debate during the Renaissance on a wave of interest in classical writings, particularly Plato and Aristotle, as it came to describe a synthesis of Christianity and classical Greek philosophy seen as an enriching substrate, particularly in the irenic approach of Erasmus of Rotterdam[88], which aimed at unifying competing schools of Christian thought (cf. Leopold, Jensen 2005, p. 15). This period brought the modern understanding of syncretism as the bringing together of conflicting or incompatible ideas (cf. Rudolph 2005, p. 69).

The irenic approach proved controversial, provoking suspicions and anti-syncretic fears among many conservative theologians[89]. This anti-syncretic sentiment became particularly heightened among German clergy in the 17th-18th centuries as a reaction to the activity of Georg Calixtus, a Lutheran theologian who worked to reconcile the different factions within Christianity and used the term "syncretism" in the sense of mixing and unifying different religions (Rudolph 2005, p. 69). The debates held at the time as part of the so-called "syncretistic controversy" touched not only on elements of doctrine but also on the problem of administering sacraments to members of different Christian denominations (cf. Shaw, Stewart 1994, p. 4). Many Lutheran theologians, such as Johann Konrad Dannhauer[90] or Abraham Calov, perceived

87 Etymologically related to the Greek term *syngkrasis*, something unique, peculiar or individual (cf. Shaw, Stewart 1994, p. 3). The current meaning of the term dates back to a 17th-century etymology derived from *synkerannumi* or mingling of incompatible things (cf. Rudolph 2005, p. 69; Usener, cited in: Leopold, Jensen 2005, p. 14).

88 This approach has been adopted in the modern ecumenical movement. Irenic ideas also influenced Jesuit missionary efforts (e.g. Francis Xavier in Japan or Matteo Ricci in China), which relied on controlled syncretism where Christianity was adapted to local cultural contexts (cf. Leopold, Jensen 2005, p. 16).

89 This was also reflected in the missionary work of Catholic and Protestant churches until the 20th century (cf. Stewart 2005, p. 265).

90 Author of a monograph on the history of syncretism, *Mysterium syncretismi detecti, proscripti et symphonismo compensati* (1648), which presents syncretism as a synthesis of heterogeneous things, initiated by Eve and the snake in Paradise.

syncretism as a pernicious muddle threatening to sow confusion, damage religion and lead souls to perdition (cf. Rudolph 2005, p. 69). The term "syncretism" was seen as "contentious term, often taken to imply 'inauthenticity' or 'contamination', the infiltration of a supposedly 'pure' tradition by symbols and meanings seen as belonging to another, incompatible, tradition" (Shaw, Stewart 1994, p. 1). Attempts to fashion such "pure" traditions[91] are caused by the need to essentialize the group (cf. Leopold, Jensen 2005, p. 3); in other words, they are constructs aimed at producing an idealized homogeneity in the interest of nativist ideology (Leopold, Jensen 2005, p. 21). Pascal Boyer, a cognitive anthropologist, notes the falsification involved in this kind of approach, which ignores the fact that "people do not live in simple cultural environments where an integrated 'cultural scheme'is shared by most members of the group and unambiguously displayed in various episodes of social interaction. More realistically, we must conceive that, at any time, cultural assumptions are available in many different variants. ... People live in cultural environments where constant undirected variation is the rule rather than the exception" (Boyer, cited in: Martin 2005, p. 288).

The next historical stage in the development of the concept occurred in the second half of the 19th century, when scholars of the Hellenistic culture used the term "syncretism" as a common denominator when referring to "disorder" or "confusion" of that culture (cf. Shaw, Stewart 1994, p. 4). In this sense, syncretism was perceived as a strategy of assimilation which the Roman emperors used in their conquests of new territories, and Hellenistic culture itself was seen as a mixture of Oriental and Western influence[92] (cf. Leopold, Jensen 2005, p. 20). In the evolutionistic anthropology of the time, the term was used to refer to historically and geographically distant societies.

In the 20th century, the concept of syncretism became fashionable in the social sciences, which viewed syncretism as a historical process[93] characteristic of all religions (including pointedly anti-syncretic ones). Joachim Wach pointed out that every religion contains a degree of syncretism in its prehistory (cited in: Van der Leeuw 2005, p. 98). Karl Rudolph argues that religions cannot develop without syncretism (Rudolph 2005, p. 80).

Syncretism also features in the thought of Gerard van der Leeuw, a representative of the phenomenological approach in anthropology. The term appears in his *Phänomenologie der Religion* (1933), a book which appeared in English in 1938 as

91 This was significantly influenced by Hegel's philosophy of history, which produced a preference for monolithic cultures in 19th and 20th-century historiography, treating heterogeneous cultures as "survivals" of older monolithic cultures (cf. Leopold, Jensen 2005, p. 21).

92 That was Hegel's understanding of the Hellenistic culture, accepted by many scholars including J.G. Droysen (cf. Leopold, Jensen 2005, p. 20).

93 Meaning a religion's development over time. In this case, syncretism is not a conscious principle organising the religious life of the community (cf. Baird 2005, p. 49).

Religion in Essence and Manifestation: A Study in Phenomenology[94]. Van der Leeuw uses the concept of syncretism to explain the transition from poly-demonism to polytheism. He devotes an entire chapter to this problem entitled "Dynamik der Religionen. Synkretismus" in which he argues that forms of religious practice are maintained as their meaning changes, a process he termed "transposition" (*Verschiebung*)[95]. For example, the meaning of the Holy Communion changes in Protestantism (relative to Catholicism) as the practice is preserved.

The term became popular in American anthropology[96], which took an optimistic view of syncretism in connection with the vision of America as a melting pot (cf. Shaw, Stewart 1994, p. 5). The term became conceptualised in the field of anthropology mostly as a result of Melville J. Herskovits's studies of acculturation processes. Herskovits, who was a student of Franz Boas, perceived syncretism in terms of salvaging cultural meanings, a major shift compared to the notions of confusion and deviation associated with the term in the first half of the 19th century (cf. Shaw, Stewart 1994, p. 6). Herskovits perceived synkretism as a form of cultural reinterpretation[97] (cf. Herskovits 1956, p. 554) in which "old meanings are ascribed to new elements or by which new values change the cultural significance of old forms" (Herskovits 1956, p. 553). Herskovits emphasized an emphasis on "identification as the syncretic process" (Apter 2005, p. 165). However, Rosalind Shaw and Charles Stewart have objected to Herskovitz's deterministic and teleological vision of cultural contact leading inevitably to acculturation[98], emphasizing that the dynamic may produce a range of other outcomes, including anti-syncretic attitudes (Shaw, Stewart 1994, p. 6).

Also important to studies of religious syncretism was the theory produced by the circle known as the Religionsgeschichtliche Schule, which placed syncretism at the

94 Gerardus van der Leeuw, *Phänomenologie der Religion* (1933). Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr. English edition: *Religion in Essence and Manifestation: A Study in Phenomenology* (1938). London: Allen & Unwin.

95 This is similar to M.J. Herskovits's diffusionism, which defines syncretism as a process of selective adaptation, assimilation and absorption of elements from a different culture (cf. Herskovits 1956, p. 540).

96 Until the 1950s, British anthropology perceived syncretism in negative terms, which Ch. Stewart connects with the colonial policies of the British Empire, as opposed to the ideology of the melting pot in the United States. The other countries in North America, Mexico and Canada, do not present themselves as officially a melting pot: Mexico is historically multicultural and in Canada the Multicultural Act of 1971 re-formed that country as an official mosaic.

97 His examples include the way African deities became identified with Catholic saints by populations of African descent in Catholic countries in the Americas (Herskovits 1956, p. 553, p. 557).

98 He saw syncretism as a stage in the process of acculturation whose dynamic he understood in terms of cultural borrowings which, before they create a new structure, are a kind of experiment in a new way of life. His concept of cultural borrowing is enmashed with Franz Boas's model of "pure cultures" (cf. Leopold, Jensen 2005, p. 145).

heart of the study of religion (cf. Martin 2005, p. 287). Researchers such as Wilhelm Bousset, Hermann Gunkel, Rudolf K. Bultmann, Hans G. Kippenberg and others rejected the normative theological interpretation of syncretism to reimagine it as a phenomenon through which clashing paradigms produce unique religions (Leopold, Jensen 2005, p. 22); in this sense Christianity, for instance, is treated as a synthesis of the Hellenistic and Judaistic paradigms. Writers from this school also drew the distinction between the canonical, clerical and objective form of religion ("religion") on the one hand, and the subjective and popular religious experience ("religiosity") on the other[99] (cf. Leopold, Jensen 2005, p. 22). The present book is focused squarely on the latter.

Jacques H. Kamstra continued the phenomenological approach to religion. He treated syncretism as an element in the dynamics of religion, "the coexistence of elements foreign to each other within a specific religion, whether or not these elements originate in other religions or for example in social structures" (cited in: Pye 2005, p. 59). He was mostly interested in "syncretism from within", i.e. taking place within a single religion as opposed to contact with other religions or what Pye calls "a kind of alienation within a religion" as certain elements of its structure survive despite having lost their original meaning (cf. Pye 2005, p. 61). Kamstra believed syncretism to be a typical product of humanity as such, rooted in Claude Lévi-Strauss's *la pensée sauvage*[100]. In this understanding, syncretism follows changes in social structure caused by alienation within a religion (cf. Rudolph 2005, p. 73). As the old syntheses disintegrate ("syncretism from within"), they are replaced by new ones (assimilation as as "syncretism from without"). Kamstra's concept has been criticised for its ontological treatment of syncretism as the process would logically have to reduce all phenomena to an undifferentiated mass, contrary to observation (cf. Rudolph 2005, p. 74). Extreme forms of syncretism include amalgamation (fusion) and identification; intermediary forms of syncretism include assimilation and symbiosis (cf. Droogers 1989, p. 10). This understanding of syncretism does not yield itself to ethnographic research, which is synchronous in nature, whereas a diachronic approach is necessary to be able to conclude whether we are dealing with amalgamation, identification or reinterpretation within a given community.

Instead, ethnographic research should primarily focus on identifying the emic categories with which the studied group expresses its own experience of religious syncretism and anti-syncretism. In my research, this experience is articulated in narratives about non-coreligionist neighbours and in the group's various explanations and value judgements relating to shared religious and magical practices, such as visiting shared healers or holy places.

99 According to K. Rudolph, this distinction is characteristic of a Christianocentric outlook, and should not be extrapolated to other religions (cf. Rudolph 2005).

100 Levi-Strauss's *bricoleur* is the ideal "syncretist" type (Leopold, Jensen 2005, p. 96).

Another important factor (as noted by Kamstra and others) is the distinction between conscious or deliberate syncretism on the one hand, and unconscious or naïve syncretism the other. Deliberate syncretism is intentional and reflexive (Baird 2005, p. 49, 52), naïve syncretism is random, naïve, spontaneous and vegetative (Leopold, Jensen 2005, p. 26, Colpe, cited in: Rudolph 2005, p. 81). To Kamstra, examples include Christianity, modern Buddhism in Burma and Caodaiism (Cao Đài) in Vietnam. Conscious syncretism is found, among others, in messianic, millenarian and mystical movements (such as modern Sufism), Zen Buddhism, Free Masons or Sikhism (cf: Rudolph 2005, p. 74).

Michael Pye[101], who engaged with the ideas of Kamstra, believes that studying must involve a focus on "the temporary ambiguous coexistence of elements from diverse religious and other contexts within a coherent religious pattern" (Pye 2005, p. 67). Clashing meanings from different contexts may produce one of three cultural solutions: 1) *assimilation* – when one meaning "extends" to eliminate the other, 2) the emergence of a *new religion* – a fusion of meanings which forms a new coherent pattern, or 3) *dissolution* – a "drifting apart of the two meanings" (Pye 2005, p. 66). According to Hendrik Vroom[102], this kind of coherence becomes possible in a semiotic "space" formed through religious contact, in which beliefs can be reinterpreted and symbolic incompatibility can become compatible (Vroom, cited in: Leopold, Jensen 2005, p. 92). Vroom believes that such reinterpretation is guided by the principle of avoiding incompatibility between beliefs (cf. Vroom 2005, p. 106).

This tendency to avoid incompatibility is supposed to be an intrinsic quality of human logic, however "[a]ccording to cognitive science, the human brain does not always discriminate logically among information that stems from different systems of thought" (Leopold, Jensen 2005, p. 92). Such processes can be better described in terms of the theory of conceptual blending[103], a system borrowed from linguistics but applicable to culture studies, developed by the cognitivist Gilles Fauconnier and the cognitivist and linguist Mark Turner[104], who focus on the importance of the imagination and complex unconscious thought processes in the creation of meaning (cf. Fauconnier, Turner 2003, p. 6). Those processes are responsible for the basic skills of the human mind, starting with the law of identity (A is A) or opposition between objects, to conceptual integration, where different concepts become blended to produce new meaning (cf. Fauconnier, Turner 2003, p. 6–7). Fauconnier and Turner

101 M. Pye criticizes J.H. Kamstra for his lack of an analysis of meaning, arguing that ambiguity is a more important category than alienation (cf. Rudolph 2005, p. 75).

102 H. Vroom defines syncretism as "the incorporation of incompatible beliefs from one religion by another" (Vroom 2005, p. 27). Vroom sees religious traditions as more or less fluid configurations of compatible beliefs steeped in "historical and hermeneutical processes" (Vroom 2005, p. 106). This definition is similar to the concept of deep syncretism by A. Posern-Zieliński as described in chapter 1.

103 With syncretism as its symptom (Leopold, Jensen 2005, p. 148).

104 They pursued a research programme in this area in 1992–1993 at the University of California, San Diego.

argue that this set of cognitive skills, underlying every aspect of human cognition, is responsible for most human achievements, including the origins of language, art, religion or science (cf. Fauconnier, Turner 2003, p. vi, 7).

At present, there is no scholarly unanimity on the concept of syncretism. Instead of a single universal definition there are numerous competing conceptualisations of religious syncretism. However, the fresh crop of new terms relating to processes of religious synthesis including "creolization", "bricolage", "amalgamation" (Kraemer 2005, p. 41) or "multiculturalism" (Peter van der Veer 1994, p. 209) has not been able to fully replace "syncretism" as a research concept. Rosalind Shaw and Charles Stewart have suggested that the concept should be retained where it relates to those religious and ritual phenomena which influence each other and combine two different historical traditions (cf. Shaw, Stewart 1994, p. 9–10).

There is a general agreement that the term syncretism describes "any mixture of two or more religions" which are in contact and influence each other (Ringgren 1969, p. 7). In this context, syncretism is seen as one possible reaction to the insecurity provoked by a confrontation of different religious systems: syncretism is what happens between the two systems to abolish the insecurity, eliminate borders and provoke competitive reactions between the systems (Berner, cited in: Rudolph 2005, p. 77).

Arguably, syncretism tries to reduce the cognitive dissonance caused by religious contact (though not all researchers agree that syncretism does in fact remove it). According to Robert D. Baird the term syncretism should be reserved for situations where conflicting and incompatible ideas or practices collide and become preserved to produce a new whole which is not compatible[105] (Baird 2005, p. 53). In this way of understanding syncretism, the term can only be legitimately used in situations where the product of the synthesis is not "a harmonious entity" (Baird 2005, p. 56).

A similar perspective can be found in the writings of Hendrik Vroom, who sees syncretism as a process through which a religious tradition incorporates incompatible beliefs and practices[106] into its main concepts (Vroom 2005, p. 26-35). This takes place at the peripheries of religion, in a semiotic space where formally incompatible beliefs become reinterpreted and reconciled to achieve coherence. In order to make that possible, the beliefs and practices of an existing religion are modified to make it possible to adapt the new beliefs (Vroom 1989, p. 27). This kind of reinterpretation is easiest in the case of beliefs and practices which are seen as marginal by the members of a given religion.

The difficulties involved in using the concept of syncretism are caused by the inability to separate subjective definitions from seemingly objective ones[107]

105 "Syncretism ... merely retains the conflicting elements without having successfully reconciled them" (Baird 2005, p. 53).

106 From the viewpoint of logic (Vroom 1989, p. 27).

107 When examined, they turn out to be subjective (Droogers 1989, p. 8). Even more radically, R.M. Hayden argues that only subjective definitions exist, which either favor the syncretic process

(Droogers 1989, p. 8). Objective definitions confirm that syncretism is a process of religious mixing without imposing value judgements on the phenomenon. Subjective definitions regard the process from the perspective of the religions involved and see it as legitimate or otherwise (Droogers 1989, p. 7).

Syncretism can be understood as a process of religious synthesis (syncretization, "interpenetration"[108]), its product ("result")[109] or both[110] (Droogers 1989, p. 13). Also, the question arises whether a given syncretic process is symmetrical or marked by relations of dominance (Droogers 2005, p. 224)?

Many researchers have pointed out the need to make a distinction between syncretism from below or from above (Marvin Meyer, Rosalind Shaw, Charles Stewart). Syncretism from below is a situation where religious synthesis is initiated by ordinary members of a community, taking place in an unexamined and unreflective way[111]. In this kind of syncretism meanings are created for personal use and exist outside of the context of political or cultural domination (Shaw). Accordingly, this phenomenon can be referred to as "grassroots" syncretism (Shaw, Stewart). Syncretism from above takes place when the elites of a population come up with syncretic strategies for the "benefit" of the group (i.e. for their own purposes). They impose their religious syntheses on others and claim the right to define cultural meanings. However, as Shaw and Stewart rightly point out, syncretism from above and syncretism from below should not be treated as reified types, and not all religious syntheses can be attributed to the upper or lower social strata, not to mention the fact that grassroots syncretism from below need not be unconscious or unexamined (cf. Shaw, Stewart 1994, p. 17-18).

(when formulated by proponents of multiculturalism) or criticise it (when formulated by people believing in the purity and authenticity of the original rituals facing challenges from external influence (Hayden 2002, p. 207).

108 A term used by some researchers interested in studying the process of religious synthesis itself (Droogers 2005, p. 224).

109 According to A. Droogers, this is where the extent of integration or synthesis is evaluated using concepts such as symbiosis, amalgamation, acculturation, metamorphosis, identification or dissolution (Droogers 2005, p. 224).

110 A. Droogers defines this as "religious interpenetration, either taken for granted or subject to debate" (Droogers 2005, p. 226).

111 The same applies to the division between conscious and unconscious syncretism, considered a key distinction by K. Rudolph. As mentioned above, Rudolph describes unconscious syncretism as a naïve, spontaneous, vegetative or popular phenomenon characteristic of national and ethnic religions of the antiquity, whereas conscious syncretism is a reflective endeavour combining religion and ideology (with examples such as manicures or Ryobu-Shinto in Japan (Rudolph 2005, p. 80). According to Rudolph, such classifications, though useful, should only be used for purposes of preliminary analysis as that the distinction between the religiously reflexive elites (clergy, theologians) and ordinary (unreflective) believers is a simplification. "[T]hese latter are not all passive receptors and objects of doctrinal teaching: they also form independent forms of religious tradition" (Rudolph 2005, p. 81).

According to André Droogers, the cultural meaning of syncretism will depend on the scholarly perspective, which can range from Marxist (Roger Bastide), symbolic, functional ("what syncretism *does*) to substantial ("what syncretism *is*") (Droogers 2005, p. 225).

According to the functional definition, coherence and social consensus are seen as a social norm, and the role of syncretism is to overcome ethnic and cultural contradictions to generate a new synthesis which ensures social coherence. This approach primarily emphasizes the social role of syncretism (Droogers 1989, p. 14).

In the Marxist model, conflict is considered the norm, and syncretism is seen as its (potentially repressive) opposite.

The symbolic approach, which is my preferred approach, perceives all the members of analyzed communities as creators of cultural meanings (Droogers 1989, p. 8; 2005, p. 218). In this approach it is not important which of those states is the norm; instead, the emphasis is placed on how people create and negotiate cultural meanings. From this perspective, syncretism is a kind of culture play[112] in which people engage using symbols, meanings and, above all, metaphors[113] (Droogers 2005, p. 230). "Metaphors offer a plethora of meanings and can be reinterpreted so that new meanings are continually added" (Droogers 2005, p. 219). According to Droogers, metaphors also play a key role in the syncretic process in that they provide explanations for events happening to believers (such explanations often involve metaphors derived from different sources) (Droogers 2005, p. 226). In this approach, religious syncretism is perceived as a means of transforming symbolic systems. Droogers emphasises that we need to consider the relationship between transformations to religious symbolic systems and relations of power which "produce" new religions (Droogers 1989, p. 8). "Power then refers to the capacity of certain people to control the behavior of others" (Droogers 2005, p. 220) who often "produce and protect the right metaphor" (Droogers 2005, p. 221).

Like Karl Rudolph, André Droogers emphasises the relationship between syncretism and social structure (Droogers 1989, p. 12, 2005, p. 227). In this sense, syncretism involves not only an exchange of elements between religions but also their adaptation to a new structural context, a procedure which often changes their meaning (Droogers 2005, p. 227). The reverse situation is also possible, in which similarities between metaphors, meanings or models may trigger syncretic processes (Droogers 2005, p. 227). These insights are compatible with the analysis of the

112 As well as a power game (Droogers 2005, p. 226).

113 Also metonymies, which belong to a single field (unlike metaphors, which combine two fields). The difference between a metaphor and a metonymy is a matter of perspective. An external observer's metaphor may be a believer's metonymy, partly reflecting the anthropological distinction between the *etic* and *emic* perspectives (cf. Droogers 2005, p. 220). A. Droogers uses the example of a believer who says that the Holy Spirit is wind, a comment which can be understood literally (metonymy) but which to an external observer will only be metaphorical (Droogers 2005, p. 220).

theorists and researchers mentioned previously, such as Michael Pye, Hendrik Vroom or Helmer Ringgren.

My perspective in this book is close to that of Rosalind Shaw and Charles Stewart (who did his research in Greece), in which syncretism is defined as a process of religious synthesis, analysed dialectically with regard to its opposite, anti-syncretism. "Syncretism has presumably always been part of the negotiation of identities and hegemonies in situations such as conquest, trade, migration, religious dissemination and intermarriage" (Shaw, Stewart 1994, p. 19-20). From this perspective, syncretism is perceived as an adaptation strategy of religious communities which share the same area and live side by side. Presented as an adaptation strategy, this understanding of syncretism corroborates the earlier observations that the process is not clear-cut and unambiguous. Shaw and Stewart believe that both syncretism and anti-syncretism may be involved in producing "authenticity" and identity (1994, p. 9). "Syncretism may be (or perhaps only looks like) a form of resistance, because hegemonic practices are never simply absorbed wholesale through passive 'acculturation'; at the very least, their incorporation involves some kind of transformation, some kind of deconstruction and reconstruction which converts them to people's own meanings and projects" (Shaw, Stewart 1994, p. 20). For this reason, it is worth examining the relationship between changes to symbolic systems and power relations. "Power plays an important role in controlling the access to meaning making" (Leopold, Jensen 2005, p. 154). This play/struggle over religious symbols (who owns them and who is entitled to control and transform their symbolic meanings) should be examined in terms of symmetrical and asymmetrical relationships and influences between religions (Droogers 2005, p. 220–221). In order to identify the strategies of religious synthesis, it is necessary to examine such synthesis as being positioned between religious adaptation and religious antagonism (anti-syncretism). Anti-syncretic attitudes are usually conscious and purposeful, aimed at protecting the purity and authenticity of religion through policing its boundaries (Shaw, Stewart 1994, p. 7).

2.2 Problems in Studying Muslim-Christian Syncretism in Bulgaria and South-Eastern Europe

The most useful source for studying Muslim-Christian (or Christian-Muslim) syncretism in South-Eastern Europe is Frederick W. Hasluck's classic *Christianity and Islam under the Sultans* (1929[114], reprinted in 2005) describing the mutual influence of Islam and Christianity in the Ottoman Empire[115]. Although Hasluck does not use the term

114 Published nine years after his death at the age of 42.

115 Hasluck spent most of his life (1899–1916) in Asia Minor.

syncretism in his work[116], his rich material containing instances of interreligious practices from the 19th and early 20th centuries can be productively examined in the context of the modern studies of Muslim-Christian syncretism in the Balkans. Hasluck's material can also be compared to modern examples in an attempt to answer whether the mutual influence of Islam and Christianity had actually produced a syncretic religion in the former Ottoman Empire, and whether this process is continuing or waning today.

Reading Hasluck, I realized that some of the claims to be found in modern scholarship concerning the supposedly problem-free nature of 20th-century Muslim-Christian syncretism in the Balkans find no confirmation not only in modern field research, but also in Hasluck's historical material[117]. Hasluck's book contains interesting instances of shallow syncretism, but not of deep syncretism. In this sense it is questionable to argue, as some scholars have done, that religious life in the Rhodopes had been syncretic in nature until as recently as the second half of the 20th century (cf. Popov[118] 1994, p. 116). For instance, Rachko Popov's descriptions of holidays celebrated by Muslims and Christians create the impression that he understands syncretism in practical terms as a coexistence of certain originally pagan beliefs in local Islam and Christianity (Popov 1994, p. 107).

Hasluck's book contains many descriptions of religious and magical practices shared[119] by Muslims and Christians as well as rituals connected with shared

116 Hasluck's book contains concepts such as "adaptation" or "amalgamation", which are interpreted as an element in the political strategy of the Bektashis, which was calculated to achieve assimilation rather than syncretism. Bekatshi Order is a Sufi order highly popular in the Ottoman Empire founded in the 13th century by the semi-legendary figure of Haji Bektash Veli, considered as the patron of the janissary corps; because members of the Bektashi order did not observe Shari'ah law and adopted certain pagan and Christian elements into their cult they were considered heretics by Sunni Muslims. Bektashis did not pray in mosques or abstain from alcohol and they had an egalitarian attitude towards women. They played an important role spreading Islam to Albania and north-eastern Bulgaria and Macedonia. In 1826 the order was abolished by the Sultan, and then banned again in 1925 by Atatürk. There has been a Bektashi revival in Turkey (since the 1950s) and Albania (since the 1990s).

117 Taken both from Hasluck's own material and from the work of other scholars and travellers. Disappointingly, in most cases it is not clear how the material was obtained (hearsay or direct observation). Accordingly, Hasluck analyzes the contacts between Muslims and Christians in the Ottoman Empire in terms of symbolic thinking and not actual cultural practices.

118 "It had preserved its syncretic character almost until the middle of the 20th century, expressed particularly clearly through the parallel existence of pagan and official Christian or Muslim elements. Many beliefs with their related ritual practices or fortune-telling magic, such as *Gergiovden*, *Enyovden*, *Dimirovden*, *Marta*, *Eremiya, Poganite dni* and *Todorova sedmitsa,* are pagan in character and provenance" (Popov 1994, p. 116, translated from Bulgarian).

119 Another factor in their development included the tolerant nature of Shi'ah and Sufi schools of Islam which were prepared to adapt Islam to local beliefs, notably the dervishes, the Kizilbash and the Bektashis. Dervishes (Persian: *darvish*, Turkish: *derviş*, Arabic: *darwish*) are literally "those who walk from door to door", mendicant Muslim monks; members of a Sufi Order, who have taken a sheikh or baba, head of a Muslim monastery or teke (Turkish: *tekke*, Arabic: *takiyyah* – a monastery

presence in the same holy place, each group interpreting such behaviors within its own religious paradigm and often engaging in symbolic appropriation, as is the case of Christian holy places becoming adapted to Muslim beliefs (or, less frequently, vice versa), a development which did not always involve actual administrative takeover[120]. Hasluck explains this phenomenon as a "natural desire to associate it [a holy place – M.L.] with the history of their own religion" (Hasluck 2005 , p. 12) and considers it "usurpation" (Hasluck 2005 , p. 54). For instance, Muslims took not only physical control[121] of Hagia Sophia in Constantinople, but also appropriated the Basilica in symbolic terms by arguing that the place had long been connected with Islam by events such as its sanctification by the prayers of Solomon or the help provided to Justinian's architect by the mystical figure Khidr[122] (Turkish: Hıdır/Hızır, Arabic: al-Khidr). Another story "connected the repairs after the earthquake of A.D. 538 with Mohammed himself. The dome, so ran the story, fell in on the day the Prophet was born, and could not be repaired till Ilyas/Elijah [Bulgarian: Iliya, Turkish: İlyas, local Muslim variant/Arabic: Ilyas], identified with Khidr, appeared to the Greeks and prescribed the use of mortar compounded of sand from Mecca, water from the well Zem-zem, and saliva of the Prophet" (Hasluck 2005, p. 11).

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belonging to the Sufi order of the dervishes) as their spiritual guide. Many Christian converts to Islam were dervishes. Dervishes belonged to different orders (Turkish: *tarikat*, Arabic: *tariqah*) such as the Mevlevi Order, the Bektashi Order, or the Malamiyya.

120 Mostly by dervishes, who used shallow syncretism to generate interest in Islam among Christians. Takeovers of Orthodox Christian monasteries usually involved conversions of the Christians to Islam (Zhelyazkova 1990, p. 60).

121 According to Hasluck, converting Christian holy sites to Muslim locations happened in one of three ways: "a) Occupation by force"; "b) Gradual and peaceful intrusion," in which case a formerly Christian holy place gets converted into a Muslim shrine and the Christian saint becomes identified with a Muslim saint (reincarnation) or is deemed to have been a crypto-Muslim, and "c) Re-occupation of an abandoned site" (Hasluck 2005, p. 58–60).

122 Etymologically often interpreted as meaning "the Green One". The figure of Khidr is not explicitly named in the Qur'an but it is traditionally assumed that he is referred to in Surah 18 (Al-Kahf or the Cave, 18, 59–81). Khidr is believed to have found the fountain of life and become immortal. Khidr met Musa/Moses [Turkish: Musa, Arabic: Musa] and joined him on his travels, surprising his companion with a series of perplexing actions such as damaging the vessel in which they were travelling, killing a boy playing with his mates or restoring a wall in a village where the travellers were not offered accommodation. In time, his perplexing actions are revealed to have been prompted by mercy and forethought. Because of his expertise in mystical knowledge, the figure of Khidr plays an important role in the Muslim esoteric tradition (cf. Dziekan 1997, p. 22). In Islam, Khidr is considered to be one of the "four immortals" alongside 'Isa, Ilyas (Elijah) and Idris (Enoch). In heterodox Islamic beliefs, the figures of Khidr and Ilyas are often identified (Hasluck 2005, p. 319–320) or believed to be friends who meet. Khidr can also be identified with other figures such as Alexander the Great or St. George (Bulgarian: Sveti Georgi) . According to F.W. Hasluck, the the two saints became identified with each other as part of a deliberate proselytising strategy on the part of heterodox Shi'ah sects, including the Bektashis (Hasluck 2005, p. 335). In Ottoman folklore Khidr was primarily "conceived of as a helper … especially of travellers" (Hasluck 2005, p. 320).

Hasluck also provides another example of a Christian place "usurped" (appropriated) Bektashi Muslims, namely the *teke*[123] of Domuz Dere near Keşan in Thrace, formerly a monastery of St. George (Hasluck 2005, p. 54). The site was taken over by Bektashis in the 1840s after an epidemic depopulated a neighbouring Christian village (Hasluck 2005, p. 520). It was visited by Muslims and Christians, but "the representatives of the two religions [did] not mix together more than is necessary" (Hasluck 2005, p. 520).

In the Bulgarian context, one example of Christians appropriating a Muslim holy place is the *teke* of Akyazili Baba[124] (Turkish: Akyazılı Baba) in the village of Obrochishte near Balchik in today's south-eastern Bulgaria. Demographic changes in the wake of the Crimean War reduced the Muslim presence, and the site became associated with St. Athanasius (Bulgarian: Sveti Atanas), apparently with no historical or archaeological basis[125] (Hasluck 2005, p. 91).

123 A monastery in to the Sufi order of the dervishes, headed by a *baba*. (Turkish: *baba*, Arabic*: baba*) – literally "father", 1) figuratively – an older, respected person, 2) head of a dervish monastery.

124 According to Austro-Hungarian ethnographer and archeologist F. Kanitz the *teke* was built by Sultan Suleiman II and burned down by the Russian army in 1829. According to Czech historian and Slavist Konstantin J. Jireček, before the Crimean War it was mostly Muslims who used the powers of Akyazili Baba, a saint who specialized in locating lost cattle. After the war, probably as a result of demographic change, local Christians began receiving supernatural assistance from St. Athanasius. People also visited the place to pray for healing, with a practice involving circling the saint's tomb in his slippers to cure fevers (cf. Hasluck 2005, p. 90–91). The name of the Muslim saint may be derived from his native village of Akyazı in Asia Minor or from *rakiya*, called *ak yazılı* by the Bektashis: the figure may have discovered *rakiya* or offered it to members of his Bektashi order as a test (Aleksiev 2005, p. 107).

125 After the Balkan wars the site was transferred to the Bulgarian clergy, and a cross was erected on the tomb alongside the Islamic crescent (Hasluck 2005, p. 92). F.W. Hasluck identifies the site as being originally Muslim (Hasluck 2005, p. 92). According to B. Aleksiev, a modern social anthropologist, Akyazili may have become identified with with St. Athanasius as a result of a popular weather saying which associates the feast of the saint with the beginning of summer (Athanasius is here, summer is here, Turkish: *Atanas geldi, yaz geldi* (Aleksiev 2005, p. 117). Aleksiev points out that the Turkish version of this weather proverb conflates the name of Atanas with the word *yaz* (through wordplay on Akyazili/yaz), which might explain why this particular Christian saint came to replace the Bektashi figure (cf. Aleksiev 2005, p. 117).



Photograph 2.1: The *tyurbe/türbe* (tomb) of Akyazili Baba in Obrochishte near Balchik. Photographer: M. Lubanska.

Once appropriated by a new religious group, such sites usually became centers of dual cult[126], worshipped by Muslims and Christians alike (each group claiming credit for the sites miraculous powers), with the difference between each group's saints being often in name only (Hasluck 2005, p. 81). In such cases, Muslim and Christian saints were identified with each other based on hagiographic parallels. For instance, Khidr was identified with St. George and St. Elijah (Hasluck 2005, p. 570), and Sari Saltik (Turkish: Sarı Saltık or Sarı Saltuk)[127] with George as well as St. Nicholas, St. Naum or St. Spyridon. In another example, Muslims and associate Khidr with the unnamed companion of Moses mentioned in the Qur'an, who gained immortality after finding the fountain of life (Hasluck 2005, p. 320). His feast is celebrated on the

126 F.W. Hasluck uses the term "ambiguous cult" (2005, p. 43).

127 Turkish: *sarı*, literally "yellow", "fair-haired"; a semi-lengendary 13th-century figure of famous miracle-worker. He was believed to have been a member of a mystical Muslim brotherhood, e.g. the Bektashis. Like Khidr, he is identified with various Christian saints including St. George, St. Elijah, St. Simeon or St. Naum. There have been various hypotheses about his actual name (Mehmed, Hızır) and origins; he was even speculated to have been an ascetic and a Christian monk (Aleksiev 2005, p. 19–58; Hasluck 2005, p. 429) and, like Khidr and St. George, a dragon slayer. In areas with mixed religious populations he was often surrounded by a dual cult. He is first mentioned in an account of the travels of Ibn Battuta, a 14th-century traveller. At that time his cult was popular in heterodox Muslim commmunities in the north-western coast of the Black Sea, particularly Dobruja, with his best-known mausoleum in Babadag. His cult also spread to Albania. In some legend he was sent by Haji Bektash to the Balkans as a missionary (Norton 2001, p. 168).

same day in early spring as St. George's Day (23 April Old Style, 6 May New Style). In addition to similar chronologies, the two saints are identified with each other because of symbolic parallels, both being known as dragon slayers. Hasluck identifies the probable origins of the identification of Khidr and Elijah in a Talmudic narrative of Rabbi Jochanan's travels with Elijah[128] to serve as the basis for the later Qur'anic motif of the travel companion of Moses (Hasluck 2005, p. 331–332).

According to a dervish narrative heard by Evlia Efendi in Kaliakra near Varna, another such saint, Sari Saltik, was a disciple of Khoja Ahmed and a companion of Haji Bektash (Turkish: Hacı Bektaş)[129], sent by Sultan Orhan on a missionary journey to Europe (among other locations, Sari Saltik visited the Crimea, Moscow, and Poland). "At Danzig [today's Gdańsk – M.L.] he killed the patriarch 'Svity Nikola', and, assuming his robes, in this guise made many converts to Islam" (Hasluck 2005, p. 429). According to another legend, "he ... delivered the kingdom of Dobruja from a seven-headed dragon, to which the two daughters of the King were exposed as victims". When a monk falsely claimed credit, Sari Saltik proposed an ordeal by fire in which the monk was burned to death, resulting in the king's conversion to Islam (cf. Hasluck 2005, p. 429–430). According to his own wish, parts of Sari Saltik's body were distributed among seven tombs[130], the seventh of which was located in Kaliakra and was famed for healings of Muslims and Christians (Hasluck 2005, p. 431).

Not infrequently, parallels between saints were emphasized by the dervishes administering a local holy site who hoped to attract a Christian *clientele*. Hasluck believes that this highlighting of similarities between Christian and Bektashi saints was a tool of deliberate Bektashi propaganda aimed at non-Muslim populations (Hasluck 2005, p. 335), as was the case with the *teke* of Haji Bektash near Kırşehir in Cappadocia, who became associated with St. Charalambos (cf. Hasluck 2005, p. 84). Haji Bektash's reputation as a saint who averted epidemics may have played a part[131]. Before the *teke* and its associated saint came to be associated with St. Charalambos, Archbishop Cyril had identified Haji Bektash with St. Eustace who, like Haji Bektash, miraculously exhibited on himself wounds the hunter had inflicted on a stag (Hasluck 2005, p. 85).

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128 In Turkish beliefs Ilyas is often conflated with Enoch (Hasluck 2005, p. 333).

129 Haji Bektash gave the name to the heterodox Bektashi Order, probably established in the 13th century in Anatolia. This order was very popular among members of the Janissary corps.

130 Those were located in Moscow, where he was associated with St. Nicholas (Bulgarian: Sv. Nikolay), Danzig, Bohemia, Sweden, Adrianople (with another tomb near Eski Baba east of Adrianople), Baba Dagh in Moldova and Kaliakra (in Southern Dobruja) (cf. Hasluck 2005, p. 430). According to Hasluck, the tomb located near Adrianopole was built on the site of an ancient Orthodox church of St. Nicholas and was frequented by Muslims and Christians (Hasluck 2005, p. 519).

131 St. Charalambos was believed to bring aid in epidemics. Haji Bektash was often identified with St. Charalambos in Macedonia (Hasluck 2005, p. 84, note 6).

As an alternative explanation, Hasluck mentions the popularity of the belief in the theory of metempsychosis, particularly among the Bektashis; as Hasluck points out "many thoroughly orthodox [Muslim] divines have considered Khidr and Ilyas the same person reincarnated at different periods" (Hasluck 2005, p. 72). In the same way, many Christian saints came to be regarded as "pre-Islamic" Muslims (Hasluck 2005, p. 72)[132].

Hasluck mentions a double cult relating to a tomb, no longer existing, in the cave of Kaliakra near Varna. Discovered by Bektashis, the tomb was visited both by Christians (as the tomb of St. Nicholas) and by Muslims (as the tomb of Haji Baba)[133] (Hasluck 2005, p. 51). Before that, the mausoleum was considered by Muslims to be the resting place of Sari Saltik, and Christians believed it to be the tomb of St. Nicholas[134] (Hasluck 2005, p. 431, 578).

A similar situation described the tomb of St. Naum in Ohrid, who was particularly famed for healing sleepwalkers. The tomb was visited by dervishes, who identified St. Naum with Sari Saltik; the site was venerated not only by dervishes (such as the abbot of the *teke* in Koritsa (Korçë)[135], but also by orthodox Sunnis, who believed it originally to have been an Muslim site later appropriated by Christians (Hasluck 2005, p. 70). Another site of dual cult was a tomb in a *teke* located between Skopje and Kumanovo in Macedonia, believed by Muslims to be the tomb of Karaja Ahmed (Turkish: Karaca Ahmet), and by Christians to be the tomb of St. George (Hasluck 2005, p. 582).

Similarly, Muslims believed that the healing spring in the mosque of Eyüp in Istanbul owed its healing properties to the Arab warrior Abu Ayyub, buried there, whom the visiting Christians associated with Job (Turkish: Eyüp, Arabic: Ayyub) or Samuel (Hasluck 2005, p. 82).

Probably the most interesting example is the *teke* in Mamasun near Nevşehir, once administered by dervishes. The site used to include both an altar and a picture of St. Mamas[136] (at the east end of the building), and a *mihrab*[137] (in the south wall): "There is no partition between Christian and [Muslim] worshippers, but the latter, while at the prayers, are allowed to turn the picture from them" (Hasluck 2005, p. 576).

In modern Bulgaria, sites of dual Christian-Muslim cult include Mount Kristov or the Church of St. Nicholas (Central Rhodopes) and the monastery of St. George in Hadhzidimovo (Western Rhodopes), as discussed in sections 5.1.2 and 8.1.

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132 In Islam, figures such as Adam and Eve or Jesus are recognized as Muslims.

133 Earlier, Sari Saltik, identified with St. Nicholas.

134 F.W. Hasluck speculated that it may have occupied the former location of an old church dedicated to St. Nicholas (Hasluck 2005, p. 434).

135 Hasluck got this information from a Greek abbot (Hasluck 2005, p. 583).

136 Obviously not a canonical Christian saint. His name is probably a back-formation based on the toponym (Hasluck 2005, p. 574).

137 A niche in the wall of a mosque indicating the direction of Mecca, faced by Muslims in prayer.

On Mount Krastov, both religious groups practice sleeping "for health", justifying the practice with different legends (Muslim or Christian, respectively)[138]. Muslims and Christians also visit the nearby Yeni-Khan with its tomb of a Muslim saint (Ivanova 2000, p. 108). According to Evgenia Ivanova, pilgrims treat the two sites in utilitarian terms, believing each site to cure different ailments, hence she refers to this phenomenon as "utilitarian" sacrality (Ivanova 2000, p. 125).

Notably, Hasluck pointed out already in the early 20th century that such places of double cult are evidence of religious amalgamation (syncretism) in appearance only; in fact, however, they indicate a process of strategic and selective adaptation, with assimilation as its hidden goal. Hasluck attributes this strategy exclusively to Bektashis: "The concessions of Bektashism to Christianity and of Christianity to Bektashism seem at first sight exactly balanced. Christian churches adopt fictitious Bektashi traditions and receive Bektashi pilgrims: conversely, Bektashi *tekes* adopt fictitious Christian legends and receive Christian pilgrims. But the apparent equality is only superficial. The ultimate aim of the Bektashi was not to amalgamate Christianity with Bektashism on equal terms, but to absorb Christianity in Bektashism" (Hasluck 2005, p. 586).

In addition to examples of holy sites surrounded by dual cults (which I consider to be instances of superficial syncretism), Hasluck gives examples of negative impacts for the new owners of such holy sites, which can be averted by reintroducing elements of the earlier cult or its trappings. Negative consequences of converting churches into mosques included events such as collapsing mosque domes (e.g. the church in Mersifun, Armenia), minarets being struck by lightning (e.g. the churches of St. John in Rhodos or St. Francis in Galata), earthquakes resulting in partial or total collapse of the building (e.g. the church of St. Sophia in Sofia) or unexplained deaths e.g. the Great Mosque in Aleppo (Hasluck 2005, p. 24). In the case of churches converted to outhouses such as stables, negative effects included unexplained deaths of animal. Robert M. Hayden mentions modern examples, such as the efforts made by the Albanian community in Zocishta to rebuild a local monastery and church after four Albanian men involved in its demolition developed mental health problems (Hayden 2002, p. 213).

With such negative consequences, Frederik W. Hasluck pointed out, holy sites, as it were, "exacted" syncretic behaviours after changing hands. Examples include adding temporary crosses during the construction of mosques (e.g. the mosque in Bulgurlu near Constantinople, erected on the site of an earlier church – Hasluck 2005, p. 31), or the singing of the *trisagion* (hymn to the Holy Trinity) by the muezzin in addition to the azan (in the Great Mosque in Aleppo – cf. Hasluck 2005, p. 24): the instruction to sing the *trisagion* was given by Zechariah to spare the life of future

138 For more information, see Atanasov 2000.

muezzins when two muezzins died in quick succession, and the third prayed to the saint asking to be spared (Hasluck 2005, p. 24)[139].

One of the most frequently-cited examples of supposed Muslim-Christian syncretism is using the help of the other religion in extreme situations (illness, drought, epidemics). Muslims and Christians did indeed engage in shared religious-magical practices when faced with threats to both communities. For instance, both groups participated in shared processions in places like Athens, Aleppo or Cairo (Hasluck 2005, p. 64), or, in the Balkans, in the village of Ibrahimovche near Skopje in Macedonia, where Muslims and Christians headed by a local *bey*[140] would visit the local Roman altar dedicated to Jupiter where they drank wine, poured libations of wine on the alter and prayed for rain, hoping to placate the local *jinni* inhabiting the stone (Hasluck 2005, p. 211).

Hasluck noted that both religious groups often believed that healing could be produced by holy water, certain religious icons or relics. Out of the numerous examples Hasluck lists in his books we could mention the Turkish community in Ürgüp (Cappadocia), who in 1908 reacted to an epidemic of cholera among children by asking the Christians to parade the relics of St. John "the Russian" through the Muslim quarter (Hasluck 2005, p. 440, 65): "During the procession the Turkish women threw costly embroidered handkerchiefs on the bier as offerings to the saint who, in answer to their faith, immediately put an end to the epidemic" (Hasluck 2005, p. 65). The inhabitants of Sarajevo ("Greeks, Latins and Turks") believed in a miracle-working picture of the Virgin located in Kurşunlu Cami (Hasluck 2005, p. 66). Near Skopje, there was a healing stone located in a church of the Apostles near the road between Preveza and Yannina: venerated by Christians, the site was also known for healings among Muslims (Hasluck 2005, p. 212). As Hasluck concludes, "throughout Turkey the frequentation of Christian holy places by [Muslims] is not conditional on the antiquity of the sanctuary in question or on any particular form of Christianity being professed in it. Nor is it to be put off by any cult practices theoretically repugnant to [Muslims], such, e.g. as involve the use of the cross or of pictures. Practically any of the religions of Turkey may share the use of a sanctuary administered by another, if this sanctuary has a sufficient reputation for beneficent miracles, among which miracles of healing play a predominant part" (Hasluck 2005, p. 68–69). Apparently, participation in such practices was not treated as a way to salvation but as apotropaic or healing practices. In particular, this applied to situations where the healing did not come from the saint of one's own religion: "In the case of saints, the attraction of healing miracles go far

139 F.W. Hasluck's informant assured him that the tradition of singing the *trisagion* (a hymn to the Holy Trinity: "Holy God, Holy Strong, Holy Immortal, have mercy on us") was still continued by the local muezzins (Hasluck 2005, p. 24). This is an illustration of enforced shallow religious syncretism.
140 Bey – lord, host, aristocrat, commander. A honorific used to address influential members of the Ottoman military and administrative hierarchy, also applied to rich or influential Muslims generally.

to overcome all scruples, and Greek no less than Turk admits the idea that, if his own saints fail him, an alien may be invoked"[141] (Hasluck 2005, p. 77).

When Christians, including members of clergy, fell ill, they invited emirs and *hodzhas* to "read [holy texts] over them"; an equivalent practice existed among the Turks: "if a common Turk has a horse sick ... he will have the Alcoran read over it, and, rather than fail, the law of Moses or the Gospel of Christ" (North, cited in: Hasluck 2005, p. 77).

Similar examples can be found in modern research including the English historian and writer Noel Malcolm or professor emeritus of Arabic and Islamic Studies at the University of London, Harry T. Norris. Norris writes that Western travellers noted cases in which infertile Turkish women visited Orthodox churches to drink holy water hoping to be cured of infertility (Heppel, Norris 2001, p. 7). Hasluck explains this by analogy to secular magic involving beliefs in objects and practices including earth taken from graves of saints, oil from holy lamps, candles or incubation (spending a night in a sanctuary); in doing so, Hasluck indicates the importance of sensory practices and the effectiveness of "binding" against illnesses and demons (Hasluck 2005, p. 263-5). The practice of sleeping in holy sites continues to be popular in the Rhodopes. At the same time, both religious groups feared the other religion's magical practices. For instance, the Turkish owner of one of the villages near Üsküp (Skopje) ordered that all stones bearing engraved inscriptions found in his lands should be thrown in the river, "all such being works of the devil and the cursed Giaour" (Hasluck 2005, p. 205).

Noel Malcolm in *Crypto-Christianity and Religious Amphibianism...* (2001), which focuses mostly on Albania, lists such examples of religious syncretism as visiting the tombs of dervish sheikhs by Christians, use of holy water by Muslims, participating in joint religious observances (Malcolm 2001, p. 94). Malcolm includes religious syncretism as the second form within his typology of religious amphibianism[142] characterizing the folk religion of the Balkans, where a number of pre-Christian and pre-Slavic practices ("divinatory, medical or apotropaic") are shared by Muslims and Christians (cf. Malcolm 2001, p. 94). According to Malcolm, the weakest form of amphibianism involves coexistence of religious groups with close social ties (culminating in the coexistence of different religious groups within a single family)[143]. This occasionally led to the "blurring of some religious distinctions" and symptoms of religious syncretism[144] as the next form of religious amphibianism (Malcolm

141 Where the intercession of a saint from a different religion brought healing, it was followed in some cases by conversion (Hasluck 2005, p. 77).

142 From the Greek *amphíbios* – "life of both kinds" (usually on land and in water).

143 Malcolm does not identify this situation as an example of crypto-Christianity because it did not involve practising two religions by each member of the family; instead, different members of the family were Christians or Muslims (Malcolm 2001, p. 92).

144 Other examples include the presence of the Muslim members of the family for the ritual of the *badnjak* (the chopping down of the Christmas tree) or, conversely, the presence of the Catholic part

2001, p. 93). In mixed families, mutual familiarity with different religious customs was frequently useful in pragmatic purposes contexts, such as being able to pass oneself off as a member of the other religion when travelling or giving Christian family members extra Muslim names to be used to one's advantage when a situation required it[145] (cf. Malcolm 2001, p. 93).

In this context it should be noted that there is a theory, popular in 19th-century Bulgaria and still enjoying some currency in the modern scholarship of Krasimir Stoilov, Stoyan Raychevski and others, which attributes the syncretic nature of the Islam practised by converts in the Ottoman Empire to their crypto-Christianity. The theory has come under serious criticism; the modern Bulgarian historian Strashimir Dimitrov notes its inaccuracies, which he puts down to incompetence, which has lead many Bulgarian scholars to regard as uniquely Bulgarian many qualities present in Islam from the very beginning. According to Dimitrov, such superficial parallels are then misinterpreted as being quintessentially Christian, leading to the hasty conclusion that Bulgarian-speaking Muslims are in fact Bulgarian converts and crypto-Christians (cf. Dimitrov 2002, p. 14).

At the same time, many scholars, myself included, agree with Noel Malcolm's observation that crypto-Christianity and religious syncretism are completely distinct phenomena, even if the latter made life easier for crypto-Christians (Malcolm 2001, p. 95). According to Malcolm, "a Christian who visited the *tyurbe* of a Muslim holy man to cure an illness was not pretending to be a Muslim; more importantly, a Muslim who had his children baptised may not have had any idea in his head of creating a secret Christian identity for them" (Malcolm 2001, p. 95-6).

The last form of amphibianism proposed by Malcolm is "theological equivalentism"[146], in which a community treats Islam and Christianity as alternative ways to salvation (Malcolm 2001, p. 96), embodied in the belief that everyone can be saved in his or her own religion. Malcolm mentions Muslim proselytisers who tactically insisted (on theologically equivalentist grounds) that the opposition between Christianity and Islam was negligible[147] in order to encourage conversion to Islam (Malcolm 2001, p. 96). This type of religious amphibianism is distinct from crypto-Christianity, which logically would have been "based on the idea that the two faiths were not really equivalent at all, but radically opposed, and that one of them (the secretly held Christian faith) gave salvation, while the other did not" (Malcolm 2001, p. 97).

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of the family during the Bayram celebrations, as noted by M. Barjaktarović in the first half of the 20th century in Albania (Barjaktarović, cited in: Malcolm 2001, p. 93).

145 Such extra Muslim names were given at birth (Malcolm 2001, p. 93).

146 N. Malcolm writes about Albania and Kosovo.

147 For instance, they insisted that the Gospels taught the principles of Islam (Malcolm 2001, p. 97).

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Based[148] on the work of ethnographers and cultural anthropologists who study the religious life of local Christian-Muslim communities in Bulgaria we might conclude that visiting healers belonging to the other religion (Christian clergy, *hodzhas*, female healers) or the cult of shared holy sites are studied only as an element of traditional (syncretic) religious life (cf. Georgieva 1995, p. 151–153; Georgieva 2003, p. 18; Zirojević 2003, p. 79). Such practices supposedly prove the syncretic nature of the local religion, defined as a mixture of Christian, Muslim and local traditional pagan beliefs which predate Christianity or Islam. Zirojević believes that one such "syncretic element" in Islam is the cult of saints' tombs, worshipped by Muslims and Christians to seek healing or to avert misfortune (cf. Zirojević 2003, p. 79). The same practices are regarded as religious syncretism by the Bulgarian historian Strashimir Dimitrov (Dimitrov 1987). According to Antonina Zhelyazkova, religious contact between Islam and Christianity in Bulgaria involved "a meeting of minds between representatives of the two faiths at shared holy sites where they got to know and influence each other. Rituals of slaughtered sacrificial animals to saints, which had penetrated both religions[149], led to grass-roots convergence rather than to confrontations between the purist forms of the two orthodox doctrines" (Zhelyazkova 2001, p. 285). According to Milenko Filipović, the dominating forms of belief in the Balkans are neither Islam nor dogmatic Orthodox Christianity, but rather their "folk" versions of both with strong common pagan elements that provided a basis of shared folk beliefs. All this contributed to a high degree of religious syncretism (Filipović, cited in: Roth 2006, p. 22). Noel Malcolm notes correctly that certain key distinctions can become blurred in "this new, complex, mixed-up, parti-col[o]red world of Ottoman religion, in which everything seems to have been merging into everything else in a sort of warm syncretist soup" (Malcolm 2001, p. 92).

As a result, syncretism appears to be seen as an inseparable quality of Bulgarian or Balkan Islam[150], but also a kind of vague shorthand which accounts for its unorthodox nature to evade its further examination (Gradeva, Ivanova 1998, p. 11). The factors which helped to produce the unorthodox Islam of the Balkans, with its departures from the official Sunni model, are identified as the local prevalence of more-tolerant Sufi schools of Islam (such as Bektashism), which sought to tolerantly adapt Islam to the local beliefs. Tolerance for local traditions is also characteristic of the Hanafi school of Islam which was predominant during the Ottoman Empire.

148 An earlier version of the following section was originally published in article format in Bulgarian (Lubanska 2009a, p. 63–78).

149 This observation that blood sacrifice became part of Christianity as such is obviously inaccurate, and in this context should only apply to the religious practice of Balkan Christians.

150 "In the Balkans, Islam finds expression in a specific syncretic culture originating on the basis of the Muslim religious complex and strongly influenced by the local Christian culture" (Gradeva, Ivanova 1998, p. 11, translated from Bulgarian).

The existing literature on this reality mostly identifies such healing practices as examples of syncretism, variously attributed to the non-orthodox beliefs of the Bulgarian Muslims arriving in Bulgaria or the non-orthodox nature of the local folk religion (cf. Georgieva 1995, p. 152). Such religious belief is regarded as pragmatic, only loosely anchored in the religious canon, indifferent to religious difference and unthinkingly open to the adaptation of alien beliefs, with syncretism being perceived solely as a process of religious mimicry. This is an overinterpretation not corroborated even by 19th-century material, as demonstrated by examples from Hasluck's studies.

The idea that syncretism in Bulgarian or Balkan Islam can be perceived as a kind of lack of concern about religious difference contradicts the evident insistence on preserving religious differentiation, as noted by scholars working both among Muslims and Christians in the region (Georgieva 1995, p. 144; Lubanska 2007d, p. 193). This presents a misleading vision in which a supposedly syncretic folk religion is contrasted with the implicitly anti-syncretic nature of the two religions in their canonical versions.

The results of this type of thinking can be seen where researchers confuse local syncretism with the analogous products of Islam and Christianity as religions derived from a common root. For instance, Tsvetana Georgieva refers to the belief in the same demonic creatures (often with a local pagan provenance) with the same functions but different names as an example of Islamic-Christian syncretism in Bulgaria (cf. Georgieva 2003, p. 17). However, this conclusion does not seem reliable as similarities in Christian and Muslim beliefs are often products of historical development involving numerous mutual borrowings, and therefore may not be connected with specific local traditions. Besides, such parallels may be superficial and apparent, serving to conceal the real differences between members of the two religious groups.

Generally similar beliefs indicate little more than certain shared areas between religions: areas which may or may not provide a point of departure for syncretic attitudes and processes. Such similarities were not shaped locally and should not be used to illustrate the supposedly syncretic nature of local Islam or Christianity. If anything, they may stem from the historical development of the two Abrahamic religions, both in the codified (Hebrew prophets mentioned in the Bible and the Qur'an) and uncodified variants (oral religious narratives about Adam and Eve) which recognize (in common with Judaism) the same patriarch and have a certain body of shared beliefs. Nonetheless, major differences are present in the deep layer; in the case of Islam and Christianity, they originate symbolically from their different versions of genealogical descent, with Muslims being identified as descendants of Isma'il/Ishmael (Bulgarian: Izmail, local Muslim variant: Ismail, Turkish: İsmail), born of the slave woman Hagar (arab. Hajar)[151], and Jews and Christians as descendants of Isaac, son of Sarah.

151 Hence the term "Hagarians", emphasizing Ishmael's birth from Hagar (Lamoreaux 2000, p. 10). This fictitious genealogy initially referred to the Arabs, which according to one folk etymology meant

I propose that we should move away from looking at syncretism purely as a characteristic of folk religion which leads to a blurring of religious boundaries, an approach I believe has lost its explanatory power and moves us away from, rather than brings us closer to, the religious relations between Muslims and Christians in the Rhodopes because it skirts questions about this specific process in the local Muslim and Christian communities in the Western Rhodopes. This approach mistakenly suggests that Muslims and Christians are unconcerned about religious difference because they believe in heterodox versions of Islam and Christianity based on us shared body of archaic pagan beliefs predating Christianity or Islam (which, according to some theories, the local population never fully embraced) and forge a kind of pagan Christian-Muslim religion[152].

Contributing to this mistaken impression are certain simplifications to be found in Bulgarian publications, resulting from a different research perspective. For instance, Tania Boneva's article on the "folk worldview" (*naroden svetogled*), which focuses on the beliefs of Muslims and Orthodox Christians in the Rhodopes (Eastern, Central and Western) often does not specify which beliefs are characteristic of Muslims, and which of Christians, often referring to both jointly as characteristic of the local population (Boneva 1994, p. 7, 8). At times, this creates the impression that we are dealing with a certain syncretic religion in which all specifically Christian or Muslim elements have been lost or become marginal. At the same time, a certain 19th-century slant seems to be informing the most recent literature by scholars such as Stoil Shishkov, Vasil Dechov, Hristo Popkonstantinov, Stefan Bobchev, and even luminaries such as Michail P. Arnaudov or Hristo Vakarelski (Tsaneva, Popov 1994, p. 5–6). Such material is selected in order to reconstruct a sort of imagined, ideal model of "traditional culture", as evident from the title of the volume *Rodopi. Traditsyonna, narodna, duhovna i sotsyalnonormativna kultura*[153] (1994) which contains the article by Boneva and the work of other researchers who openly embrace this perspective (Tsaneva, Popov 1994, p. 5).

Bulgarian researchers highlight the influence of folk Islam and folk Christianity on the peaceful nature of Muslim-Christian coexistence with its positive role as part of a system of good-neighbourly relations. We should mention the book *Vrŭzki na sŭvmestimost i nesŭvmestimost mezhdu hristiyani i myusyulmani v Bŭlgaria* (1995), and especially the article by Tsvetana Georgieva, "Sŭzhitelstvo kato sistema vŭv vsekidneven zhivot na hristiyanite i myusyulmanite v Bŭlgaria" (1995), in which

"people expelled by Sarah similar as the term "Saracens", so called "because Hagar has been sent away from Sarah empty (*Sarra-kenê*)" (Lamoreaux 2000, p. 10), or "Ishmaelites" – "descended from Ishmael (called Banu Isma'il or "the tribe of Isma'il" in Arabic – M.L.), going back to at least the first century BCE. In time, those terms came to be applied to Muslims in general (cf. Lamoreaux 2000, p. 10–11).

152 More moderate researchers write about two types of religious practice, pagan-Christian and Pagan-Muslim, where certain pagan elements are present n both religious groups (cf. Popov 1994, p. 116).

153 *The Rhodopes. Traditional, Folk, Spiritual and Social-Normative Culture.*

Georgieva argues that folk Christianity and folk Islam transplant old demonological beliefs onto new surroundings, mixing them with beliefs and rituals imported from elsewhere to create a certain "plastic module[154]" which upholds familiar traditions and admits innovation in a way that is comprehensible and convenient to Christians and Muslims alike (cf. Georgieva 1995 a, p. 152; 1995 b, p. 165). However, there is a shortage of research into the ways in which the Muslims and Christians themselves interpret the beliefs and practices comprised in the pattern, a project which I undertake in the present book. My research[155] demonstrates that the syncretic practices are mostly superficial and find no reflection in the religious beliefs of my respondents (Lubanska 2007a, p. 121–135).

The problem of cultural influence between those two religious groups lacks in-depth analysis from Bulgarian sociologists, anthropologists or historians[156] as published research on the regions inhabited by Muslims and Christians usually presents the two religious cultures in isolation. The rare exception to place the two cultures side by side, especially in the context of the influence of Muslim religious culture on Christian culture, are the publications of Florentina Badalanova Geller (Freie Universität Berlin) studying the ritual of the *kurban* and its connections with the Abraham/Ibrahim saga among Bulgarian Muslims and Orthodox Christians (2001, 2002a, 2002b, 2003, 2008a, 2008 b).

In this general context my book attempts to read, insofar as this is possible, the cultural meanings of religious syncretism in the context of religious relations between Muslims and Christians within a single local community. I am interested in the process of selection (conscious or otherwise) whereby certain beliefs and practices become incorporated into one's own religion (visiting shared holy sites by Muslims and Christians) or are rejected as threats to one's religious identity (such as Islam's prohibition against praying in front of any representation (i.e. icons) that would distract from a petitioner's focus from Allah).

154 This term seems rather vague: it is not clear what this pattern might comprise and how or by whom it is influenced.

155 It should be borne in mind that my research is not statistical or quantitative in nature, focusing instead on a qualitative analysis of the region of Gotse Delchev. Still, I believe it to be of value to analysts predicting the future of religious relations in the region.

156 A. Zhelyazkova called for such work in the early 1990s, arguing that it would promote a better understanding of the historical development of the Balkan nations (1990, p. 142). When I was working on this book the gap was still unfilled.

3 *Komshuluk* (Good Relations Between Neighbours) and Ressentiment Against Members of a Different Religion

Narrated 'A'ishah:
I said, "O Allah's Apostle! I have two neighbours and would like to know to which of them I should give presents." He replied, "To the one whose door is nearer to you."
(al-Bukhari Hadith[157] 3:460)

3.1 *Komshuluk* as a Cultural Strategy of Peaceful Coxistence

This chapter examines the relations between Bulgarian-speaking Muslims and their Orthodox Christian neighbours within the framework of two prevalent narratives concerning non-coreligionist neighbours. One narrative focuses on *komshuluk*[158], good relations between neighbours and in doing so reflects a cultural strategy developed by the local community; the other reflects a latent sense of mutual ressentiment harboured by Muslims and Orthodox Christians. Though only mentioned in conversations with co-religionists[159] and not reflected in current cultural practice (there are no active conflicts between the local Muslim and Christian populations), the ressentiment narrative offers a revealing insight into the motivations of my respondents, lurking in some cases under the outwardly correct relations with which they may be closely interconnected, as noted by Tsvetana Georgieva (Georgieva 2003, p. 28)[160]. This type of narrative gives voice to the mutual fears harboured by both groups, which are rooted in the collective memory (or postmemories)[161] of past violence including 19th- and 20th-century atrocities.

157 A story or account of an event from the life of the Prophet Muhammad, including Muhammad's sayings on a given subject, boosted by the authority of the reporting party; hadiths form the basis for the *Sunnah* and are the second source of Muslim law, after the Qur'an. Translation: *Hadith of Bukhari*, http://www.sacred-texts.com/isl/bukhari/bh3/bh3_457.htm

158 An affirmative term for neighbourly relations derived from Turkish (*komşuluk*). Perhaps significantly, Bulgarian has a neutral, Slavic term for "neighbour" (*sŭsed*), but this is used less frequently. According to the Bulgarian sociologist Ivan Hadziyski, the word *komshuluk* also used to refer to wicket gates separating neighbouring homesteads, which were always kept unlocked (Georgieva 2003, p. 9) unlike the tall, locked gates facing the streets, a familiar element of Ottoman architecture.

159 When asked directly whether they tend to keep such topics out of their conversations with non-coreligionist neighbours, the respondents said they "no longer did".

160 Ts. Georgieva does not use the term "narrative" but she talks about the two sides of the code of coexistence (Georgieva 1995, p. 153). Cf. Section 3.2.

161 See (Hirsch 2012). In an interview for Columbia University Press, Hirsch explains that post-memory "describes the relationship that the 'generation after' bears to the personal, collective, and

This ressentiment[162] or fear is not based on direct personal experience; it has been orally tranmitted within the community by elders or deceased relatives, and stems from each group's past experience. For Christians, this experience dates back to the period of Ottoman decline and struggle for Bulgarian liberation; for Bulgarian-speaking Muslims, such narratives focus on the period of the Balkan wars. Unlike the Christian stories, which are essentially carbon copies of images from Bulgarian martyrology codified in historical writings, the stories told by Bulgarian-speaking Muslims cannot rely on what Robert Redfield calls a "great tradition". Each side's narrative serves to impose a certain category on "the close Other" (a non-coreligionist neighbour), and reflects mutual attitudes of Muslims and Orthodox Christians. The two versions are structurally equivalent and comprise analogous components.

To interpret those narratives I analyze their context (specific interview situations, the identity of my narrators, whether the information is shared openly and freely, or perhaps hesitantly or inadvertently?) and their symbolic meaning. This kind of closely guarded and suppressed cultural content is of particular interest since it offers an insight into the hidden roots of cultural practice. It differs from the official version, and is shared on very rare occasions in long, repeated conversations. I never pressed my respondents for the withheld information nor did I impose my own interpretations directly, i.e. by not asking whether or not Muslims and Christians had ever committed atrocities against each other in the area.

Obtaining this cultural content required a cautious approach in which information shared in the early stages of interviews was treated with a grain of salt according to the principle that "practical logic ... is unaware of the principles that govern it" (Bourdieu 1990, p. 92). Accordingly, to engage in a practice, social actors (Bourdieu's agents)

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cultural trauma of those who came before – to experiences they 'remember' only by means stories, images and behaviours among which they grew up" (http://www.cup.columbia.edu/static/interview-marianne-hirsch accessed 23.09.2014).

162 The „revival process" in Bulgaria probably played an important role in generating the ressentiment. This might explain why such ressentiment is more palpable in Muslim-Christian relations in Bulgaria compared to the neighbouring Macedonia (cf. Lubaś 2011, p. 248). Based on his field research in Dolna Reka, Marcin Lubaś concludes that cohabitation is possible between communities of different religions in a form that is free from all ressentiment and "based on mutual acceptance as expressed through customs, mutual help in daily life and a positive opinion about the neighbours" (Lubaś 2011, p. 249, translated from Polish). To emphasize: my discussion of the influence of ressentiment on the dynamics of interreligious and neighbourly relations does not imply that all relations between neighbours of different faiths must necessarily have an underpinning of mutual ressentiment. Neighbourly relations may take on a range of different forms. Many of the Muslims and Christians are not just neighbours, they are also personal friends. However, I believe that friendships between non-coreligionist neighbours may be quite distinct from, and not mutually exclusive with, fears harboured in some historical circumstances towards neighbours of a different faith, reflecting differences in political interests. Accordingly, I devote an entire chapter to this problem.

must forget its social meaning. The social actors remain aware of the underlying reasons for the practice they engage in, however they keep such reasons hidden from themselves and from others. „It is the curse of objectivism that, here as in all cases, where it confronts collective belief, it can only establish, with great difficulty, truths that are not so much unknown as repressed" (Bourdieu 1990, p. 107).

My task involved deconstructing the social meaning of the practice of good neighbourly relations. Formulated in this manner, "objectivist critique is justified in questioning the official definition of practices and uncovering the real determinants hidden under the proclaimed motivations" (Bourdieu 1990, p. 108). According to Bourdieu, the perspective of a social actor (including the perspective of my respondents) will always differ from the objectivizing prospective of external observers who seek to impose a theoretical model on a given social practice[163].

Even where researchers succeed in actually discovering the motivations of social actors, their theoretical conclusions usually provoke resistance or caution from the actors in question because they may disrupt a social practice by bringing certain hidden meanings to the surface. Scholarly conclusions usually undermine the official interpretations which a group shared in order to conceal its true motivation. Knowing such officially sanctioned motivations, even where they are not actually true, is an important element of the cultural strategy practised by a group – in this case, the coexistence of neighbours professing different faiths, a practice stemming from cultural affinity and tacitly accepted by the social actors[164]. This affinity means that Muslims and Christians in the area know exactly which behaviours or topics of conversation will be acceptable in mutual interactions, and which should be kept out of the conversation:

> Z.: The Muslims and us, we live as neighbours. Perhaps there might be some things that get bottled up inside, but they're never discussed. We don't mention it, and neither do they. But life goes on, so far we have coexisted well... There are no tensions between us. (M, Ch, Interview 53, 2005)

By reconstructing the strategy of peaceful coexistence, practiced by both religious groups as a key element of the cultural affinity which brings them together, the

163 In Bourdieu's understanding of the problem, the practical sense (i.e. that which belongs to social praxis) never overlaps with objective truth or objectivising scientific theory on the subject (Bourdieu 1990).
164 According to M. Herzfeld, this category is "a reasonably effective heuristic device for locating the specific dynamics of cultural embarrassment and solidarity" (Herzfeld 2005 p. 34), defined as "a recognition of the deep sense of a shared fatality, something to be treasured precisely because it is at once in permanent and private, that seems common to virtually all intimacy" (Herzfeld 2005, p. 43). At the same time, "the content of cultural intimacy is ... highly labile. It shifts with the ideological winds of history, sometimes in wildly unpredictable ways" (Herzfeld 2005, p. 57). Therefore, "one decade's embarrassment may also become another's pride and joy" (Herzfeld 2005, p. 64). According to M. Herzfeld, "while particular social interactions are always, and necessarily, acts of self-reification, their content and form and both nevertheless perpetually in flux" (Herzfeld 2005, p. 77).

researcher runs the risk of rendering it less effective by revealing cultural content carefully kept under wraps by the local community in order to preserve the status quo. Where such strategies of silence[165] serve the good cause of peaceful coexistence, this becomes an ethical problem. Depending on who reads such research, such research can be turned to good or bad use, affecting the community. Ethnographic data will be put to a different use by an academic or by a politician looking for votes[166].

Incidentally, the strategy of silence[167] goes beyond relations with neighbours of different faiths, and aplies to relations with neighbours sharing the same faith as well:

> M.L.: Are there any obligations towards the neighbours in these parts? What does one have to do to stay on good terms with one's neighbour?
>
> M.: Well, you need to have peace in your heart. You mustn't hurt your neighbour, provoke him. Say, he comes to your house drunk and says something bad, then keep your mouth shut! Obviously, he'd never say anything like that when sober. So it's better not to say anything. You need to be patient, stay calm, consider your options. That's how I see it. Listen, I have those neighbours next door, there's nothing but a fence separating us. I can't complain or provoke them to say bad things, to be rude to me. And myself, I never open my mouth to say anything against them. That doesn't happen. We are good to each other. When I need something it's like, "Neighbour, could you please help me?" I can borrow things from her when I need them – rice or milk, or anything. If they have a cow, the woman will share [the milk – M.L.] with me. The point is, this has to be a mutual thing. They will share things with us even if they have to go hungry. I do the same. That's how we live in harmony with our neighbours." (W, Ch, Interview 35, Garmen 2006)

In this passage, the woman encapsulates the strategy of good relations in daily life, an approach where mutual assistance and restraint are used to avoid antagonizing

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165 As the Polish anthropologist Z. Sokolewicz notes, "silence plays an important social function, indirectly contributing to group cohesion (...). For instance, we may deem as positive those suppressed topics which may be involved in the process of socio-lies they should and gradual introduction of information to children, such as the information about sexual life (treated as a dangerous area subject to numerous taboos and requiring initiation) and many other social aspects of life" (Sokolewicz 2008, p. 79–80, translated from Polish). G. Szwat-Gyłybowa, a Polish Slavist, writes about this problem in more detail: "silence is a Janus-like phenomenon and cannot always be reduced to a psychological mechanism conditioned by individual or collective experience of repressing inconvenient content. As we know, suppression of topics in the social sphere is also associated with the strategies of dissembling and mimicry, theatricality of everyday behaviours, the necessary grain of hypocrisy in the workings of society which helps to generate such disparate phenomena as the cultural game of appearances (which at its best is designed to avoid hurt on the part of the addressee) and manipulation (calculated at gaining some kind of power over the addressee)" (Szwat-Gyłybowa 2008, p. 10, translated from Polish).

166 Not coincidentally, Bulgarian-speaking Muslims become a topic of debate before elections (cf. section 3.5).

167 I borrow this term from Z. Sokolewicz (Sokolewicz 2008, p. 81).

the neighbours. In the following section I offer a more comprehensive analysis of this phenomenon, focusing in turn on Muslim and Christian neighbours.

3.2 The Narrative of *Komshuluk*

When asked, "What is it like to live side by side", neither religious group reacted to the question as to something neutral or innocent. My respondents seemed familiar with the question, and their responses tended to fall back on the concept of *komshuluk*[168]. The importance of the concept of *komshuluk* for the coexistence of Muslims and Christians in culturally mixed areas of Bulgaria was first made popular by a research project headed by Tsvetana Georgieva and her team from the Center of Ethnology, Faculty of History, University of Sofia, carried out in 1993-1994 in the area of Asenovgrad, Razgrad, Zlatograd and Ruse. Georgieva noted that in ethnically mixed regions *komshuluk* was "a complicated and traditionally managed system of rules relating to ongoing personal and social contact between people belonging to different religious and ethnic groups" (Georgieva 2003, p. 9, translated from Bulgarian). According to Georgieva, all members of such communities understand the system, which is geared towards maintaining a peaceful coexistence by keeping the groups separate and respecting their ethnic and religious differences. The phenomenon, which can be found throughout the Balkans, is not confined to the heterogeneous communities of Bulgaria. Xavier Bougarel offers a similar view, explaining that the practice of *komshuluk* regulates the relations between neighbouring groups while preserving their structural distinctiveness (cited in: Hayden 2002, p. 206).

In addition to peaceful coexistence, the historian Klaus Roth lists three other models of coexistence which are not fixed but rather can fluidly replace one another (Roth 2006, p. 20)[169]. This fluidity of ethnic relations, marked by transitions from peaceful coexistence to conflict, is also noted by Tsvetana Georgieva, who points out that Good relations between neighbours are just one side in the code of coexistence[170],

168 The Slavic term *sŭsed* is also known in Bulgaria but all of my respondents used the word *komshiya*, which is used throughout the country.

169 The other two models (conflict-based and separation-based) are characterised by a lack of tolerance.

170 I believe *strategy* is an apter term than *code* since strategy implies an adaptable, context-dependent dynamics to social relations. In contrast, the term *code* implies a certain fixed matrix or structure to social relations, a kind of immutable given which is heritable, like genes. Accordingly, Ts. Georgieva's concept seems to be lacking the quality of uncertainty implicit in social relations. Social actors do not just simply perpetuate cultural conventions: they can also influence the course and form of such conventions or even discard them. I believe that good-neighbourly relations should rather be seen as a bottom-up cultural strategy developed by Muslims and Orthodox Christians over centuries of coexistence, which needs to be affirmed in everyday relationships of reciprocity.

the other being a climate for conflict (Georgieva 1995, p. 155). Georgieva does not provide a more detailed description of the traumatic side of the code or offer any examples (Georgieva 2003, p. 7), but social research yields many illustrations of the point. In the case of the Central Rhodopes in Bulgaria, this would include the examples in Evgenia Ivanova's 2002 book on the process of state-orchestrated assimilation campaigns aimed at Bulgarian speaking Muslims between 1912 and 1989, *Otchvŭrlenite 'priobshteni' ili protsesa, narechen vŭzroditelen (1912-1989)*, in which Ivanova cites Muslim and Orthodox Christian accounts from the 1990s. Such assimilation campaigns tended to destabilize the system of *komshuluk*, potentially preparing ground for a climate of ressentiment and adversarial acts against Muslims.

According to Ivanova's material, in some instances formerly close neighbours exerted pressure on their Muslims to change Turkish names to Bulgarian ones (Ivanova 2002, p. 99). The Norwegian anthropologist Tone Bringa discusses another, more traumatic instance of the principle of *komshuluk* being violated in a different Balkan region in *Being Muslim the Bosnian Way...* (1995)[171]. Bringa's description of a peaceful Catholic-Muslim community in a village near Sarajevo[172] is highly reminiscent of the situation I found in the Rhodopes. Nonetheless, the community was marked by conflict and oppression during the war of 1993-1995. The Muslims were expelled, and their houses were destroyed: "After I revisited the village in May 1993 and had seen almost every Muslim house destroyed and all the Muslims gone, it was very difficult to sit down in peaceful Cambridge and continue writing this book. Nothing of what I had earlier said seemed real or to matter. As the same time, however, it became even more important to write about the community and the lived that had once, not very long ago, existed. It had been a community where people treated each other with dignity and respect, and understood how to accommodate each other's cultural differences" (Bringa 1995, p. xviii).

Such examples are a testament to the fragile nature of *komshuluk* and its vulnerability to external political factors (cf. Roth 2006; Hayden 2013), leading to a situation where war can trigger physical violence between neighbours formerly living on positively fraternal terms. An illustration of the sometimes barbaric forms this took on in Bosnia can be found, among others, in *Love Thy Neighbour. A Story of War* (1996), a book by the American reporter Peter Maass. In a refugee camp for Bosnians in Split, Maass met people who told him about the persecutions they experienced at the hands of their neighbours of a different nationality or religion, often lifelong friends in peacetime. One of his respondents, a refugee from Foca, told him how "thirty-five

171 In 1987-1988 Bringa studied the Catholic-Muslim relations in a single Bosnian village shortly before the war which dealt a fatal blow to the rules of *komshuluk* and led to a disintegration of neighbourly relations in 1993, when the village was attacked by Croatian troops.

172 Given the tense political situation in the region at the time of publication Bringa does not identify the village.

men from his village were rounded up by Serbs from a neighbouring village and had their throats slit. ... They were killed by Serbs who had been their friends, people who had helped harvest their fields the previous autumn, people with whom they shared adolescent adventures and secrets, skinny-dipping in the Drina River on hot summer days, groping with the naughty girls of the village at night. All of a sudden, seemingly without reason, they had turned into killers" (Maass 1996, p. 6). Incidentally, this particular form of violence (throat-slitting) was often mentioned by my respondents where it formed an important motif in their narratives in recollection of dramatic events from the past that served as a foundation for the entire ressentiment narrative. My respondents tend to treat this particular form of murderous violence as a skeleton in the closet provoking fresh mutual fears every time it resurfaces in conversation.

The example of Bosnia raises the question: what kind of circumstances and internal dynamics must coincide to throw the centuries-old status quo so disastrously off-balance as to spur mutual enmity in people who have long enjoyed good relations? The conflicts in the former Yugoslavia in the 1990s and the islamophobic sentiment fuelled by the media in the wake of 9/11 must have had a negative impact on Muslim-Christian relations worldwide, including the communities discussed in this book. This is why it is important to examine the feelings and symbols surfacing in the narratives of my respondents: What is it that they say about the Muslim-Christian relations, past and present, and about their mutual prejudices? As Franke Wilmer notes, stories "contain the emotions of past experiences, including trauma, and collective memories, conjured up by warmongering political wizards in the present" (Wilmer 2002, p. 30). Hence, "to understand how states are created and destroyed we must understand the construction and deconstruction of the narratives that underlie them" (Wilmer 2002, p. 30). The same applies to the processes of emergence and disintegration in communities. In order to understand how this process plays out in the mixed population of the Western Rhodopes with their two religions, we need to deconstruct the narratives describing good relations between the religions in the region.

Evidence of peaceful relations between Muslim and Orthodox Christian neigbors runs counter to Samuel Huntington's radical vision of the inevitable and imminent clash of civilizations. As noted by the anthropologist Michael Herzfeld, it also seems to run counter to experience-based ethnological knowledge about cultural contact[173], which tends to be not so much hostile (*pace* Huntington) as ambivalent and highly

173 M. Herzfeld notes the misapplications of cultural ideas in political science, particularly singling out for his censure the ideas of Samuel Huntington as a kind of reprise of the 19th-century nationalism of the nation-state and an outlook where some cultures can be considered as "clashing civilizations" fundamentally incapable of mutual understanding. According to Herzfeld, such conclusions are belied by the experience of intercultural communication, particularly phenomena such as creolization or diasporas (Herzfeld 2005, p. 178).

dependent on political factors. Klaus Roth takes a similar position, arguing that the models of conflict and segregation are not a rule in South Eastern Europe, but rather the consequence of political events at national level (cf. Roth 2006, p. 21).

In my field research, respondents from both religious groups tend to take pride in their peaceful neighbourly relations, and emphasize their communal ties with neighbours of a different religion. They use phrases such as "we stick together", "they [Muslims – M.L.] are like our people", "we live like brothers", "we're all the same", "our life here together is very good":

> Sh.: Our life here together is very good. We're not threatened by events such as those in Bosnia. (M, Interview 38, Leshten 2006)

> They [Muslims] are like our people. We are together all the time, there are no divisions or anything like that. We're neighbours. We stick together all the time. (W, Ch, Interview 25, 2005)

In the Rhodopes, the roots of *komshuluk* as a positive unifying force are religious (this applies to Islam as well as to Christianity) as well as pragmatic (given how the locals are often reliant on assistance from neighbours). This pragmatism is often reinforced by religion, especially in Islam, which puts a special emphasis on the unique relationship with one's neighbour treated as a distinct category of person (similar to Christianity).

Compared with other religions, Muslims tend to believe that Islam fosters a uniquely positive sentiment towards one's neighbours, a belief which they attribute to the Qur'an and numerous statements from the prophet Muhammad arguing that people who have been negligent in their dealings with neighbours cannot hope to enter the Paradise. One of the most popular passages in the Qur'an discussing Good relations between neighbours occurs in verse 36, Surah 4 containing the words: "Be kind to parents, and the near kinsman, and to orphans, and to the needy, and to the neighb[o]r who is of kin, and to the neighb[o]r who is a stranger, and to the companion at your side, and to the traveller, and to that your right hands own" (4: 36). Muslims as well as Christians compare their neighbours to brothers, and emphasize the key role physical proximity plays in this special relationship: the category of neighbours includes everyone living within the distance of up to forty houses:

> *Hodzha* 1: Above all else, Islam is based on good relations between people. Such relations must be very close. Where it comes to neighbours, *Mohammed allay salaam*[174] says that neighbours include everyone within the distance of forty houses to the west, east, north, all those people are neighbours. (Interview 6, Ribnovo 2005)

174 Also pronounced as *aley selyam* in the local dialect (Arabic: *wa-'alayhi al-salam*, literally "peace be upon him"). A religious phrase used when mentioning prophets named in the Qur'an, particularly Muhammad.

> Your neighbour is more important than your loved ones. Your neighbour is the person closest to you. When it comes to the worst, your neighbour will come to your aid. Whenever we have a problem, the neighbour is there to help. (W, M, Interview 3, Ribnovo 2005)

> *Hodzha* 2: Your neighbour should be as important as your closest family. You have to respect your neighbour in every way .... Your neighbour is like your brother. The Qur'an actually contains special *ayats* [Turkish: *ayet*, Arabic: *ayah*] about your neighbour and how you should respect him, and so on. (Interview 19, Ribnovo 2005)

Hodzhas often cite the example of the prophet Muhammad and his life, which is also portrayed as the original source of the practice of Good relations between neighbours. In this sense, the duty of good relations derives from the tradition (Sunnah) or the religious duties imposed by Muhammad, and not the *farz*[175] (Turkish: *farz*, Arabic: *fard*) or the religious duties imposed by Allah himself. At the same time, Muhammad importantly received the teachings about the importance of Good relations between neighbours from the angel Jibra'il/Gabriel (Muslim local variant: Dzhibrail, Turkish: Cebrâil, Arabic: Jibra'il):

> Mufti: So, the Angel Dzhibrail came ... He came to the Prophet Muhammad and he went on for a long time about a Muslim's duties towards his neighbours; at one point, Muhammad actually thought... he wouldn't have been surprised to hear that neighbours should have the right of inheritance... [the right] to inherit from one's neighbour. That's how insistent he was about having a good relationship with your neighbour, and so on. (Interview 18, Ribnovo 2005)

To explain the unique importance of good relations between neighbours my respondents often cited those hadiths in which Muhammad shows respect to his neighbours. The most popular passage, cited on numerous occasions, tells the story of Muhammad's concern for a Jewish neighbour who was a real nuisance to the prophet, often leaving his rubbish in the prophet's yard. Muhammad never reproached him; when he came out one day and found no rubbish in front of his house, Muhammad immediately went to visit his neighbour, worried that he might be sick and in need of help. Muhammad's concern impressed his neighbour immensely, and he made a deathbed conversion to Islam:

> *Hodzha* 3: The Prophet himself practised this. The Prophet had a neighbour, a Jew who used to put rubbish in Muhammad's yard when he wasn't home. One day the Prophet was astonished to see no rubbish, and he concluded that his neighbour must be ill. He went to pay him a visit, to see his neighbour. The neighbour asked him, "How did you know I was not well?" He answered: "Every day you leave your rubbish in my yard, but I saw no rubbish today. I guessed you must be ill, so I came to see you." This is why [Muhammad's neighbour – M.L.] later converted to Islam. (Interview 17, Ribnovo 2005)

175 Religious duties imposed by Allah which; keeping those duties beings rewards, and dereliction is punished.

Examples from the life of the prophet Muhammad encapsulate the Muslim duty to show respect to your neighbour regardless of his religion.

When asked about their attitudes towards their neighbours, Muslims also highlight the soteriological aspects of good relations since the dealings with one's neighbour are part of the partial judgement over the soul of a deceased person which takes place in the grave, and involves a series of questions relating to one's life. The questions are posed by two angels named Munkar and Nakir[176]:

> S.: They say that when you move on to the next world, the first thing [the angels – M.L.] ask you about your relationship with your neighbour. (W, M, Interview 2, Ribnovo 2005)

> *Hodzha* 4: A Muslim must have the best of relationships with his neighbour, that's the first thing you get asked there [by the angels during the partial judgement in the grave – M.L.]: how about your neighbour, what was your relationship with your neighbour. That's because your neighbour lives closest to you. If you hate your neighbour you get punished there. (Interview 3, Ribnovo 2005)

Good deeds performed in order to win salvation in the next world are called *sevap*[177] (Turkish: *sewap,* Arabic: *sawab*) by Muslims.

The Christians likewise recognize good relations between neighbours as an intrinsically positive thing and provide numerous examples to that effect, however they are much less likely to invoke religious narratives. I encountered one exception, a comment made by the Archimandrite of Hadzhidimovo:

> Archimandrite Grigoriy: Neighbourly love is a duty, despite the fact that they are Muslims. When you see a Muslim's house on fire you have to put out the flames. You see him carrying timbers, you help him out, isn't that right? It's all about the commandment to love your neighbour, to love God and to love your neighbour as you love yourself. If we observe God's commandments we're never going to insult or injure a Muslim neighbour, quite the opposite. (Interview 27, 2005)

Christians tend to interpret the good relations with their Muslim neighbours in terms of affection and friendship rather than religious injunctions:

> K.: Personally, I have a lot of Muslim friends. I don't know if my mum told you that but I was born in Syrnitsa, which is predominantly Muslim. We've had Muslim friends in our family for a long time, ever since I can remember, and we felt they were as close to us as other Christians. They would come and visit us. My mum says they were really close to them, like parents. They helped her because she was alone. As long as I can remember we've had Christian friends and Muslim friends. (W, M, Interview 37, Garmen 2006)

The narrative of good relations between neighbours is corroborated by the mutual help and assistance practiced by respondents in their daily life, an instance of the

176 For more information on the Muslim belief in the partial judgement taking place in the grave see (Lubanska 2005).

177 A good deed.

famous Maussian principle *do ut des* confirmed daily through a series of routine and ritual neighbourly obligations; as a result, there is a need for symmetry in their mutual dealings.

For the local religiously heterogeneous community, ritual exchanges are a way of making their peaceful intentions known through messages confirming that both groups may rely on each other's help in daily life in tasks such as unloading hay, sharing of medicine, keeping a cow in your neighbour's cow shed, etc:

> V.: We help each other. They [the Muslims – M.L.] help me a lot and I'm very happy with those people. They helped me whenever I need it. I help them and they helped me.
>
> M.L.: Could you give me any examples?
>
> V.: For instance, when I bring the hay in and can't unload it, they come and help me. (W, Ch, Interview 11, Osikovo 2005)

Ritual exchanges of favors also take place as part of an individual's life cycle, from birth, when close female neighbours visit the mother and child several days after the delivery and bring food[178] (*ponuda*), until death, when non-coreligionist neighbours attend funerals or wakes in the deceased person's home. Such rituals are so important to my respondents that they are prepared to bend the rules of their own religion in performing them:

> M.L.: And you come to each other's funerals?
>
> F.: We do. Not all of us, but we do.
>
> A.: Religion forbids it, but we come all the same.
>
> F.: We live here together, and you simply have to be there.
>
> A.: Out of respect for the person.
>
> F.: We do, we definitely do....
>
> A.: For instance, when a [female] neighbour who's a friend dies, we'll spend the whole night sitting there.
>
> F.: Religion forbids it but people [expect it – M.L.]...

178 Including, among others, *banitsa*, a popular food in the Balkans made of thin layers of pastry (Bulgarian: *kori*, Greek: *filo*) layered with savoury filling, e.g. salty white cheese and oil and often formed into a spiral shape, pilaf (rice cooked with meat and vegetables), pears, apples and *kachamak* (corn porridge cooked and baked with salty cheese) (cf. Tsaneva 1994, p. 135).

A.: We're all people after all. What is religion, what kind of barrier is that, honestly?! How could I not come?! Of course I would!

M.L.: You don't come to the church but you do come to the cemetery, right?

F.: No, not to the cemetery, to the house.

A.: Oh yes! We go, to light a candle. For instance, when my husband died my neighbour spent the whole night sitting here. She spent the whole night here! Everybody comes to a burial, no matter if they're Bulgarian or Muslim!

F.: In these parts when a Christian dies, that Christian has a lot of Muslim friends. And the other way around, Muslims have Christian friends.

A.: They eat with one spoon.

F.: And the other way around, when a Muslim dies, they will have Christian friends. And they all come as well. (W, M, Interview 24, 2005)

It might be worth citing Marcel Mauss's observation that such relations of mutuality, though outwardly voluntary, are in fact obligatory, and neglecting them threatens "private or open warfare" (Mauss 1966, p. 3). Some of my respondents have made comments to that effect:

Hodzha 5: As a rule, every religion needs to be tolerant towards others.

M.L.: How exactly is that tolerance expressed?

H.A.: They shouldn't be snubbed. Say, a Muslim makes *banitsa* or *baklava*[179] and takes some to share with a neighbour who's Christian or Jewish, or whatever. If that neighbour does not accept it, they will feel unwanted. And you get an atmosphere of intolerance, something like hatred. But if you accept the gift, then you get an affinity between them, like between good neighbours. And you get mutual understanding, as required by Islam, rather than enmity or hatred. (Interview 26, 2005)

Apparently, the respondent realises that good relations between neighbours produce an affinity between people, whereas disruptions to the symmetries of *komshuluk* may provoke an immediate reaction from the slighted group. As a result, the principle of reciprocity which regulates the relations of the two religious groups may lead to a situation where each group is making a point of retaining a distinctive identity, increasingly presented in opposition to the lifestyle represented by the neighbour of a different religious faith.

When neighbours no longer exchange gifts, visit each other at important times in their lives or greet each other in the street, the neighbourly relations become less

179 A different type of *kori* pastry with a sweet filling consisting of nuts and syrup.

predictable and transparent. When both religious groups care to preserve the peaceful relationship they need a way of communicating this intention, a role played by the relationships of reciprocity, which is in turn postulated and upheld by the narratives of good relations between neighbours.

Positive relations between neighbours are a good which the local community aspires to in spite of the historical ressentiment existing between the two groups, and despite the fears that such relations might prove very fragile. Although good neighbourly relations have suffered ruptures as a result of traumatic historical events, they have always been restored.[180]

At the same time, both sides realize that participation in the religious practice of neighbours belonging to different religions serves no other purpose than to affirm the good relations between neighbours between them, and not to actually adopt it. Consequently, such participation in ritual is partial and does not extend to any rituals held in churches or mosques, respectively, or at the actual graveside:

> *Hodzha* 1: I lived in Pletena as an imam, and we had a few funerals in Satovcha. And when that moment came [i.e. when the funeral procession reached the gates of the cemetery – M.L.], they would split. They come with the dead person to that place, and then they part ways, because they believe that this is something they cannot do, that would bring them closer to us, make them like us. (Interview 10, Ribnovo 2005)

The relationship of reciprocity also includes practices such as exchanges of gifts and festive foods, mutual help of visits during important life events (childbirth, marriage, burial).

Such practices take place within the framework of the annual cycle of religious holidays. Muslims often offer meat and sweets to the Christian neighbours on the Muslim feast of Kurban Bayram (Feast of Sacrifice, Turkish: Kurban Bayramı[181], Arabic: 'Id al-Adha):

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180 Evidence of the revival of ritual exchanges of food in Bulgaria after the repressions of the Zhivkov era ended.

181 Sunni Muslims celebrate two holidays, Ramazan Bayram and Kurban Bayram, which are 70 days apart. In the month before Ramadan Bayram Muslims fast during the daytime abstaining from eating, drinking and smoking. Ramadan Bayram celebrations last for 3-4 days, with traditional foods such as *banitsa*, *kachamak* or *baklava*. Family members traditionally visit each other at this time. Kurban Bayram, the most important holiday in the Muslim calendar, lasts about a week. A white and unblemished lamb under six months of age is sacrificed in every home. Before the sacrifice, a *hodzha* reads a prayer over the lamb and covers the animal's head with a kerchief in commemoration of the gesture traditionally believed to have been made by Ibrahim over Isma'il. The lamb is often named after a living or deceased relative (in the former case the animal is killed on the first day of the holiday, in the latter – on the eve of the holiday. The blood of the animal gets collected into a vessel and buried in a hole in the ground. The blood is believed to have healing powers and some older women keep it for medicinal purposes (cf. Popov 1994, p. 115).

A.: Gergana is Christian. She's my friend. I come to her birthday, I greet her[182] at Easter and Christmas. She brings me sweets, I do the same for them during Bayram. (W, M, Interview 24, 2005)

Sh.: We live in Ognianovo, which likewise a mixed village. We don't treat our neighbours any different. How could you ignore a neighbour? During their holidays, Easter, they offer us lemonade. (W, M, Interview 2, Ribnovo 2005)

D.: We celebrate. When they are celebrating Bayram we visit them and they offer food to us. And during Easter we offer them eggs. We celebrate together. (W, Ch, Interview 38, Leshten 2006)

At Easter, Orthodox Christians offer Easter cake and red eggs to Muslims:

G.: You absolutely have to offer things to your neighbour, no question about it. Leave a neighbour out, and it doesn't count. That's what they say. It's like not having shared at all. It will have no effect. (W, Ch, Interview 23, 2005)

Both groups offer each other food during holidays dedicated to remembering the dead: orthodox Christian: *Zadushnitsa*, Muslim: *Arfe*[183] (Turkish: *Arefe* or *Arife*, Arabic: *'Arafah*):

S.: We have Arfe, that's what it's called. You hold an Arfe before each Bayram. I give food out to neighbours, people who are close to you. For two days you prepare the foods at home, and then you give out *mekŭtsi*[184] *and halva*. (W, M, Interview 2, Ribnovo 2005)

When offered food during the Muslim holiday of Arfe, Christians thank them using secular phrases, such as *Chestit praznik* ("Best holiday wishes") or *Blagodarya. Zhivi i zdravi da ste. Do godina pak da ni cherpite*! ("Thank you. May you be alive and well, and offer us more next year!"). Muslims do the same when offered food by Christians:

M.: They hold their celebrations for the dead (Odusha, Zadushnitsa)[185], [which they call – M.L.] Arfe. And they bring us *mekŭtsi*, *banitsi*, a little bag of everything. That whole part of the village that's close to us, they will bring something to offer us.

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182 Greeting neighbours in the street is another important element of the *komshuluk* system. Popular greeting may say things like, "Welcome! Where are you going?". The reply is, "Just taking a walk." My respondents complained about the influx of new inhabitants, who neglect to properly engage in this social ritual.

183 The ninth day of the month of pilgrimage, believed to be the day of the remission of sins. On that day pilgrims gather on Mount Arafat, ca. 20 km from Mecca. In this context, It seems symbolic that the pronunciation of the name for that practice is similar to the Arabic word Al-A'raf (literally, "raised edges"), meaning something like Purgatory in Islam. On that day Muslims in the Rhodopes believe they can help souls awaiting judgement by sharing food (mekŭtsi, sweets) with neighbours. They use the term as an equivalent for the Orthodox Christian holiday of All Souls' Day, which they celebrate not only during the Hajj but also two days before Ramadan Bayram.

184 A dish made of deep-fried yeast dough powdered with icing sugar.

185 In the Orthodox Church, All Souls' Day is held on the Saturday before the Meat Lent Sunday

M.L.: When you accept the things they offer, is there a special thing you say?

M.: We say it our way: *Da ste zhivi i zdravi* [May you be alive and well], may your house be always full, so you can share food with us again.

M.L.: When is Arfe, when do they hold it?

S.: At two points during the year we have our holidays, Christmas and Easter. They have Bayrams twice a year. One of those is Ramazan Bayram, the other is Kurban Bayram. They hold it before each.

M.L.: Arfe falls before each of those holidays?

S.: Yes. (W, Ch, Interview 34, Garmen 2006)

B.: I have a friend from Debren who used to invite me to come and visit her during Bayram. We went to visit. That's because we have friends from neighbouring villages, Muslims. They invite us over for their holidays, and we invite them over for Easter. On those occasions they make famous *mekŭtsi*. One day before Bayram they have a day for the dead. That's when they make those *mekŭtsi*. Arfe, I'm not quite sure what it's called. And they offer us the *mekŭtsi* here. Many of them work in Garmen and they bring it in bags and offer it to us. Just like we bring them Easter eggs and *kozunatsi* [Easter yeast cakes].

M.L.: When you share the *kozunatsi*, are there any special words you say?

B.: *Chestit praznik*.

M.L.: And when they accept it?

B.: They say the same. (W, Ch, Interview 51, Garmen 2006)

Similarly, when neighbours meet in the street during a religious holiday, Christian or Muslim, they also greet each other with the neutral phrase *Chesti praznik*. Specifically religious greetings, though familiar to members of each group, are not used. When uttered, religious phrases are often associated with certain gestures[186] which might lead to assimilation, an undesirable outcome for each of the groups.

Importantly, the respondents realize that such food sharing practices are subject to certain restrictions and must be done with tact to spare the other group's religious sensibilities. Christians believe it would be inappropriate to offer Muslims foods such

(mesopustna), the Saturday before Pentecost, the Saturday before the Feast of St. Michael the Archangel; the Muslim Small and Great Arfe is held two days before the Bayrams (one day before according to Christians).

186 At Ramazan Bayram exchange greetings while shaking with the person opposite. Younger people kiss the hands of their elders, who give them money (a practice called "giving a bayram").

as *kolivo* (sweet boiled grain)[187], which is given out as part of a religious practice performed for the dead, alcohol or pork:

> M.L.: When they come to visit, you don't serve them pork?
>
> S.: No, they know I would never serve pork to them. How could I take that sin on myself? That's just right. (Interview 35, Garmen 2006)
>
> M.L.: So, what kind of food do you offer them?
>
> V.: according to our tradition it has to be wheat, wine, but I never offer them wine or wheat [*kolivo* – M.L.]. I bring them sweets, *kiflichki* (crescent-shaped pastries), *kolachite,* as we call them. And they offer the same to me. There is a day when they celebrate Arfeto. When that happens, one day it is celebrated for the dead, and on the other day they celebrated for their living. They offer me food. For the living, they give *banitsa*, cakes, I don't know what else. (W, Ch, Interview 11, Osikovo 2005)

Far from being permanent, the rules of reciprocity are subject to constant modification. For instance, Christians, when they notice increased orthodox religiosity in their neighbours, are not always sure what kind of gift will be acceptable. One of my respondents before offering Easter eggs to her Muslim neighbours tried to find out whether or not her neighbours would be committing a sin in accepting them:

> G.: As a general rule, after painting the eggs I bring them to them [i.e. friends from a Muslim family – M.L.]. In fact, I recently asked them, I noticed they'd started to practice more, they're bowing [in prayer – M.L.] and do all those things that are required in their religion. They didn't use to do that until recently, so now I felt very awkward, bringing the eggs to them, because I didn't know if that would be a sin for them. So I asked them: "If it's a sin, I will not bring the food to share with you. I won't be offended, if you can't accept it just tell me." – "It's not a problem at all. It wasn't us who painted the eggs. They make us happy. The children will knock them together until they break, to see whose egg is the toughest, and they'll eat them. No problem at all. We didn't paint those eggs, and it won't be us eating them." (W, Ch, Interview 23, 2005)

I did not come across similar scruples in conversations with my Muslim respondents. This is probably because for Christians the problem of ritual impurity in foods only arises during times of fasting (when all animal products become impure).

Children seem to play an important role in the ritual offering a food between the two religious groups. Often it is the children in the family who offer and receive the food exchanged between neighbours practising different religions. This may also stem from the fact that adults tend to be busy on festive occasions and simply ask the children to do more errands for them:

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187 Christians believe that this might be inappropriate partly because this food is traditionally shared in churches after a panikhida (an Orthodox Christian memorial service), which Muslims do not attend.

M.L.: You said you offered food to Muslims, but how do you do that? Leshten is not mixed, is it? Does that mean you bring food to offer it to people in other villages, such as Gorno Drianovo?

D.: Well, it's Easter. We paint eggs. People from the other villages send their children to us as well, and we give them eggs, *banitsas*, yeast cake. (W, Ch, Interview 38, Leshten 2006)

Also, as indicated before, practices which might lead to religious syncretism (such as the knocking game played with the Easter eggs) are relegated to the children. This way they can be interpreted as play and not as a symptom of religious assimilation. Donations towards the building of places of religious cult (Orthodox churches or mosques) are another way of emphasizing good relations between the groups. In the case of Islam's, a donation for a sacred building is known as a *waqf* (local Muslim variant *vakŭf*, Turkish: *vakıf*, Arabic: *waqf*). One of the *hodzhas* emphasized the importance of *waqfs* during the period of Ottoman rule in Bulgaria, pointing out that Turkish sultans and beys would often erect Christian temples as a gift for the Christian *ra'iyyah* (local Muslim variant: *raya* Turkish: *reaya*, Arabic: *ra'iyah*)[188], frequently at the encouragement of their Christian wives:

Hodzha 1: Turkey is a state, Bulgaria spent 500 years under Turkish occupation, but what did Turkey do, what did it leave in Bulgaria in terms of historical monuments? All the Orthodox churches in Sofia and even beyond, in the provinces, including the monasteries built at the time, all that was built during Turkish occupation. I can even tell you about a certain fact. The Orthodox church in Bansko, that large church next to the road, those frescoes [in the church – M.L.] were financed by the Sultan. Not the Sultan, but the bey, as a gift to the Christians in Bansko! There were never any Turks [living] in that place. (Interview 10, Ribnovo 2005)

The *hodzha* went on to list the most important Christian sacred buildings in Bulgaria arguing that they were funded by the Turkish state as gifts:

Hodzha 1: The rich Turks held Bulgaria under Ottoman yoke for 500 years, but don't forget the good things they did. Such is the monasteries in the Rila monastery, Bachkovo monastery, the Church of St. Nedelya in the brown in Sofia and other churches. And in Rila monastery... Do you know the story of the monastery in Rila? ... It was built by a certain Turkish *bey* as a testament of his love for a very pretty Bulgarian girl. She agreed to marry him on the condition that he would build the monastery. (Interview 10, Ribnovo 2005)

Donations made to the sacred buildings of the other religious group must be seen as an element of the *komshuluk*, and not as signs of appreciation for the other religion as they entail no interest in treating the other religion as an alternative road to salvation.

188 Literally, "the herd": non-Muslim taxpayers in the Ottoman Empire.

3.3 The Limits of *Komshuluk*

The line separating religious syncretism, on the one hand, from simple respect shown to neighbours form a different religious group, on the other, by participating in their rituals, is mostly a matter of interest to the religious elites (particularly Islamic). The Islamic elites often interpret this borderline as fluid, which provokes concerns over potential assimilation, and leads to imposing limitations on the dealings between the Muslim population and the Christian neighbours. Shurfe, a local woman who accompanied me in my field research in Ribnovo in 2005, actually volunteered to query the *hodzhas* about the limits of good-neighbourly relations. During the conversations with two *hodzhas* she asked if she was allowed to light a candle by the body of a deceased Christian neighbour or hold wake in the house of her Christian neighbours. The *hodzhas* again invoked the example of the prophet Muhammad to explain that such practices were not acceptable. Showing respect to a neighbour from a different religion should be limited to a single subtle gesture and not involve participating in the rituals of another religion:

> Woman Sh.: Since we're talking about holidays, can I ask you a question? For instance, when I go to the funeral of a Christian who died... They have those candles, and they light them. So, if a light a candle, is that a sin?
>
> *Hodzha* 3: We're not allowed to do that. But there is this well-known story of the Prophet where a funeral procession was passing by and he stopped. And the Muslims who were with him said, "But that's a Jew". He said to them, "That doesn't matter. We have to respect his funeral". That means he has respect [for a member of a different religion – M.L.]. But in Islam, lighting candles may be considered as a bit of *shirk* [189]or idolatry. Because that's part of the Christian ritual and religion. And we shouldn't become like Christians. (Interview 17, Ribnovo 2005)
>
> *Hodzha* 1: I mean, if you light a candle to show respect for that person, then as a matter of principle the lighting of a candle is something that is not done in Islam, so you're doing something that's done by another religion. And that's *haram* – that which is forbidden and punished, a religious transgression, sin – M.L.], something that mustn't be done. But if you pray for that person your own way, as allowed by your own religion, then that's no problem. (Interview 10, Ribnovo 2005)

In this statement, the anti-syncretic attitude is presented as a better way of ensuring a continuation of the status quo and maintaining peaceful interreligious relations than outward imitation of neighbours professing a different religion. The *hodzha's* words are a clear example of the anti-syncretic thinking discussed in Chapter 2, where a term such as "mixed" is seen as a threat to authentic faith. This does not apply to situations where a Muslim prays the Muslim way in a Christian place of cult, but it does

189 Idolatry, the most serious sin in Islam.

apply when elements of a different cult become introduced into one's own religion. The argument is that religious synthesis may lead to a crisis in the community. This theory is reminiscent of Girard's interpretation of sacrificial crisis in which reactions by members of communities-in-encounters are similar to the point of becoming indistinguishable (Girard 1986).

The *hodzhas* perceive a dual threat to Muslims: one is the risk of temptation posed by a proselytizing Christian neighbour; the other is connected with a visit to a neighbour's house, which may pose risks of ritual impurity because a Muslim cannot be sure whether or not the meal offered by the neighbour contains forbidden foodstuffs, such as pork:

> *Hodzha* 1: You can help your neighbour when they fall on hard times, you can talk to them, you can eat together, but then again, that will depend on the kind of food as there are certain requirements...
>
> M.L.: Meaning, you shouldn't eat pork?
>
> H.1: Precisely. There are many other ways of acceptable coexistence, of living together. But you must on no account do more important things which would be acceptable in the case of a fellow Muslim. For instance, if they start inviting you [on a more regular basis – M.L.]. This is a problem that I discussed in the mosque a few minutes ago. If they say, "leave your God and come to me. Forsake your faith", especially if the person is a non-believer [*nevernik*], and they say, "Be like me". I mean, you mustn't follow him. When that happens you have to break off those ties. (Interview 6, Ribnovo 2005)

As suggested by this comment, the ties of affection between neighbours practising different religions may be severed as soon as they start posing a threat to religious orthodoxy. In the case of a conflict of interest, a Muslim must give priority to their own religion, family and fellow Muslims, and the needs of their non-Muslim neighbour must come second.

> *Hodzha* 1: When your neighbour is in need... I mean, when he needs help, then help him in every way you can. But you should on no account treat him as more important than your parent or a fellow Muslim. (Interview 9, Ribnovo 2005)

For the Muslims, priority is given to neighbours who are also relatives, followed by Muslim neighbours, followed by non-Muslim neighbours. This rule seems to stem from the Qur'anic passage cited above (Surah 4 verse 36):

> *Hodzha* 1: There are three types of neighbours: neighbours who are your kin, neighbours who are Muslims but are not your relatives, and non-Muslim neighbours. *Mahomet alehis salyam* says that we are bound by three obligations towards a Muslim who is a relative, two obligations towards a Muslim who is not a relative, and one towards a neighbour who is not a Muslim. (Interview 6, Ribnovo 2005)

F.: If your neighbour is a relative you have three obligations towards him. Treat him even better, help him with his work. Don't ignore his needs. Help him out.

M.L.: What about neighbours of a different faith? Do you have the same obligations towards him, or maybe not as many?

F.: Yes. There are obligations. Those are religious obligations to help him, and to treat him well. (Interview 16, Ribnovo 2005)

My respondents were unable to explain precisely the difference between a Muslim's obligations towards a neighbour who is a co-religionist and a neighbour who is a non-Muslim. It seems that the exact differences in terms of neighbourly duties between Muslim and non-Muslim neighbours are decided by each of the respondents on a case-by-case basis. All my respondents agreed that one's obligations towards fellow Muslims were greater but the specifics didn't seem to overlap. The different number of obligations should be treated as symbolic, indicating more care without identifying precisely what the difference might be.

In addition to reciprocity, Good relations between neighbours also involve other elements, such as steering clear of religious topics in conversations held by members of different religious groups:

F2: Those are topics you avoid.

M.L.: Meaning, you don't talk about those things?

F2: No, we don't, because we assume that Muslims and Christians may be friends without mixing their religions.

A: Let every frog stick to its own puddle. (W, M, Interview 24, Satovcha 2005)

At the same time, regular people tend to believe that good relations between neighbours represent an overarching good which cannot be threatened by religious cult, no matter how fervent or invasive in terms of daily habits:

G.: And they say, "No matter how hard we try to observe those religions or comply with the canons imposed by them, and no matter how different those canons might be, we must not grow apart. We'll stay united, and our mutual relations will remain unchanged." It doesn't matter that until yesterday my friend didn't use to rush out and leave at 1:30 to go pray and make bows, right? That now she can't be with me at 1:30. I simply adapt, and when we go out we leave the place together. (Interview 23, Satovcha 2005)

My respondents emphasized the need to remain separate with sayings such as the one quoted above, "Let every frog stick to its own puddle", meaning "Everybody minds their own business and we generally live like good neighbours", "We are separated by a single skin of an onion". The Muslims seem more intent on preserving the religious

boundaries, especially if involved with "Salafi Islam", which is more anti-syncretic than "Adat Islam".

Both groups realise that their differences are religious, and therefore find it safer to keep to themselves any opinions they might have about their neighbours' religion when talking to them. This is understandable in a situation where both groups tend to exclude the other group from the community of the saved in the next world.

Importantly, each group knows offensive, derogatory terms for the other. The Christians may refer to Muslims as "Pomaks" (pronounced in a contemptuous tone). The Muslims may refer to Christians as *giaurs* (Muslim local variant *kyaur*, Turkish: *gâvur*, Arabic: *kafir*) – meaning infidels:

> M.L.: What kind of words do they use when they mean to insult you?
>
> G.: They call us *kyauri*. That's offensive.
>
> M.L.: *Kyauri*?
>
> G.: *Kyauri*. It's a kind of comeback. And it's enough to slight us...
>
> M.L.: Meaning, they use the word *kyaur* around here?
>
> G.: *Kyaur*. That's derived from giaour, and that's what they say it here in Satovcha.
>
> M.L.: In what sense?
>
> G.: In a negative sense. The meaning is pejorative. Not good. For a positive word, a positive meaning, they would call you a Bulgarian, a Christian. (W, Ch, Interview 23, 2005)
>
> S.: The Turkish word *kyaur* is essentially the same thing as Bulgarian. (W, Ch, Interview 35, Garmen 2006)

Another symptom of the isolationist attitude is the small number of mixed marriages[190]. The community accepts the mixed marriages in the community[191] but such unions are by and large not accepted by the families of the spouses, who often perceive their marriage as sinful. The Muslims believe it is sinful for a Muslim woman to marry a Christian man:

> M.L.: Why is it sinful for a Muslim woman to marry a Christian?
>
> F.: Allah gave us *dzhehendem* [Turkish: *cehennem*, Arabic: *jahannam* – hell – M.L.] and *dzhehenne*t [Turkish: *cennet*, Arabic: *jannah* – paradise, heaven – M.L.] When one of our girls takes a Bulgarian husband, she will go to their, you know, to *dzhehendem*. But if she loves Allah

190 For instance, in Satovcha, where I did my field research, there were six.

191 Burials are problematic as it is not clear which cemetery should be used.

> and feels some remorse, than she might go to *dzhehennet*. That's why it's a sin. It's the same thing for your girls marrying our bachelors. Except they are lucky. They will go to paradise. If she turns Turk, if she turns Turk she goes to paradise .... But then again, Musa, a different *hodzha*, says that a Muslim girl who marries a Bulgarian, if she marries a Bulgarian, than she will burn in the flames in the next world. She will stand in flames from here to here [the respondent makes a head-to-toe gesture] to burn that sin away. (W, M, Interview 12, Ribnovo 2005)

There were instances in the respondent's family of a Christian woman[192] who "gave up her faith" and changed her name to marry a Muslim man (she chose the name of her mother-in-law, Rafuz), and of a Muslim girl, the daughter of the respondent's cousin, who married a student enrolled in a Christian seminary school and changed her name from Ramze to Ereni. Several respondents mentioned the former example to me on various occasions, clearly taking pride in the fact. They remarked on how the woman was prepared to give up everything to become united with the man she chose. They emphasized the fact that the woman changed her name, wore their traditional clothes, observed her fasts and was more religious than some of the local women, and above all they pointed out that she had ensured salvation for herself:

> F.: If she wanted to have a pretty fiancé... She liked a boy, but his mother wouldn't let him. And she said: "I'm going to give up my name and everything". And now she's changed her name to Rafuz. And she is very pretty and very good. Oh, that is going to work in her favor.
>
> M.L.: And she became Muslim straight away?
>
> F.: Yes, as soon as her husband brought her here and they wrote down the name. She chose her name. And she chose the name of Rafuz, her mother-in-law. And the *hodzhas* says that it's not a sin when a Muslim man takes a Christian woman. He may convert her, turned her Turk. But if one of our girls takes a Bulgarian, he can't turn her Turk. (W, M, Interview 23, Ribnovo 2005)
>
> D.: My daughter-in-law's aunt lived in Ognianovo, she married a Pomak. As children they were neighbours and they fancied each other. They graduated from high school and university, and they got married. They're living in Blagoevgrad now ... Love knows no boundaries. (W, Ch, Interview 41, Garmen 2006)

In general, my respondents took a tolerant view of mixed marriages, saying like this respondent that "love knows no boundaries". But as a rule they would not be happy to see their own children marry outside of their faith:

> F2: We may be attracted to each other, we may be friends and have plans together, but when it comes to religion, it's something internal that's given to you.
>
> A.: Please, I forbid my daughter to marry a Bulgarian. I am absolutely opposed. That would be a huge mistake. I cannot allow a Muslim girl to become a Christian. No way. That's the biggest mistake. Or for you to find a Muslim man. No. (W, M, Interview 24, 2005)

192 The couple live in the village of Musovishte, which I did not manage to reach.

According to my respondents, such marriages are made difficult by the sensitive family situation where both families have concerns related to their salvation and their reputation in the community. Disappointingly, my repeated attempts to reach such converts were unsuccessful. For various reasons interviews proved impossible to arrange, possibly not entirely by accident. I had the sense that my respondents were reluctant to introduce the converts to me in order to safeguard their privacy and peace of mind.

In Garmen, different respondents on two different occasions shared a disturbing story of mob justice meted out by the inhabitants of Garmen upon an Orthodox priest whose daughter married a Turkish officer during the Ottoman rule:

> I.: And then some Turks arrived here in Garmen. A certain priest, we call him Georgi Shamanov, had a daughter. And she fell in love with a certain Turk, well, not so much fell in love as was raped, and he took her to his house, and she turned Turk. When they settled down in Debren, she lived with him, they had children. But her father met his judgment here for allowing his daughter to elope with a Turk. They asked him..., there's a place around here called St. Ilya. They asked him to hold a funeral service there, which he did. They'd dug a grave, and they threw him in the grave and buried him alive for letting her daughter marry a Turk. (M, Ch, Interview 40, Garmen 2006)

Attitudes towards mixed marriages probably change depending on historical circumstances. Peacetime marriages (in an independent state) are usually interpreted by the public as love marriages, whereas marriages in turbulent times may be interpreted as treasonous and opportunistic.

3.4 The Ressentiment Narrative

According to Max Scheler, ressentiment arises when powerful emotions "must be suppressed because they are coupled with the feeling that one is unable to act them out—either because of weakness, physical or mental, or because of fear. Through its very origin, ressentiment is therefore chiefly confined to those who serve and are dominated at the moment, who fruitlessly resent the sting of authority" (Scheler 1998 [2010], p. 6). "Thirst for revenge," Scheler argues, "is the most important source of *ressentiment*" (Scheler 1998 [2010], p. 5). Although I believe the term "ressentiment narrative" is warranted in the context of my research, this is not to argue that this sentiment underlies the relations between my Muslim and Christian respondents: it would be a mistake to analyze those relations without taking into account their good relations, just as it would be a mistake to analyze good neighbourly relations without realizing the mutual fears harbored by Christians and Muslims. Accordingly, the category of ambivalence seems key to understanding the mutual relationship.

In contrast to the narrative of good relations, the ressentiment narrative is "endogamous" and only reluctantly revealed to outsiders. It mainly consists of topics

and problems usually kept out of conversations with non-coreligionists. In contrast to the strategies for preferred patterns of coexistence, it reveals mutual fears about what the non-coreligionist neighbours might do if and when they achieved political or demographic dominance.

Although both the groups are indigenous, this enduring sense of ressentiment reflects the continued existence of contradictory memories of the past. Orthodox Christians preserve memories of forced conversion to Islam and the betrayal of Bulgarian-speaking Muslims, whereas the Bulgarian-speaking Muslim community preserves the memory of forced assimilation. Notably, the symbols actualized in ressentiment narratives are remarkably similar in both groups and have folk origins. Bulgarian national martyrology is based on folk motifs, such as chained victims (the subject of a folk song about Prince Marko), the yoke of repression or massacres. It portrays non-coreligionist neighbours as unpredictable potential aggressors, rather than the peaceful brothers portrayed in the public narratives.

Such narratives reflect the continued memory of past conflicts, implying that the conflicts might re-emerge cyclically if trust between the two groups were to erode. Often, the noumenal[193] nature of the events which triggered the ressentiment remains irresolvable as actual events blend with historical myth. Although the respondents identify the source of their narratives as oral transmission received from the elders, the narratives in structural terms seem to be colored by ideology and shaped by national martyrology. This particularly applies to a Christian narrative I heard in from a group of elderly Christian women (see below). However, there are many analogies between this and the parallel narrative told by Muslims. In both cases we are dealing with religiously homogenous groups. The Christians[194] mentioned the massacre in Batak[195] (1876) as an example of mutual conflicts which "very nearly" occurred in Satovcha:

> Woman 1: Now listen, there was a time when they were sharpening their knives to turn against us. We had [in this house – M.L.] an old woman, a relative. She told me that. They were sharpening their knives over there, we're telling you, there used to be stones there, and willow trees... And the Turks were sharpening their knives because they wanted to come here and make a massacre, to massacre our village. But...

193 I borrow this term from Ankersmit 2004, p. 382.

194 So long as there was a Muslim woman in the company the Christian respondents were telling me about the close ties and peaceful relations between neighbours. When the Muslim woman left, they changed the topic to the massacre in Batak and their fears.

195 This is a reference to a massacre of the Christian population of Batak at the hands of Bulgarian-speaking Muslims from the village of Barutin. Some of the victims were women and children who fled to a church for safety. The skulls of the victims kept in Batak are considered by Bulgarians to be national relics. For more information see *Batak*... 2007.

> Woman 2: Right, but they went to Batak instead, to massacre people [there]. If you went there you would see those things. Little hands and everything, they massacred tiny babies. They closed the church, and massacred all the people with knives.
>
> Woman 1: The church, the Turks closed the church and they would [kill] little children, men, women, everybody. There was blood in the yard and tiny heads... (W, Ch, Interview 25, 2005)

The connection which the old women made with the Batak massacre is unsurprising. The Batak massacre holds an important place in the Bulgarian collective memory (Baleva, Brunnbauer 2007, p. 5.) which "is not static or clear-cut; the process is subject to being updated and transformed as a result of historical change"[196] (Troeva 2007, p. 125, translated from Bulgarian). Batak is described as a "site of extermination", "a shrine" (Zahari Stoianov), or "the Bulgarian Golgotha" (Ivan Vazov) (cited in: Troeva 2007, p. 128). "Tens of thousands of people" visit the museum in Batak every day (Brunnbauer 2007, p. 91).

In the past, a painting entitled "The Massacre in Batak" (1893) by Antoni Piotrowski, a Polish painter, was treated as a reliable historical source, lending the event historical credibility alongside photographs by Dimitar Kavra's entitled[197] "Survivors of the Batak Massacre" (1876) and "The Historic Church After the Massacre in Batak (undated). Piotrowski's painting played a major role in the shaping of Bulgarian national martyrology, and was frequently reproduced in Bulgarian history and literature textbooks, which did not mention the fact that the painting was in fact a reenactment created by the painter, and could not be treated as legitimate historical evidence, a fact which got quickly forgotten (Baleva, Brunnbauer 2007, p. 5–6). According to Baleva and Brunnbauer, the painting was inspired by the reporting of MacGahan, an American who was a *Daily News* reporter, published in 1876.

Similar doubts have arisen about Dimitar Kavra's photographs. Recent research suggests that Kavra's two photographs were likewise staged reconstructions of the massacre, commissioned by Antoni Piotrowski, the Polish painter, who used them in his work on the painting. Recently, new findings have pushed the dating of the two photographs, which are currently believed to have been made between 1886 and 1888), and the original titles have come to light: the first photograph used to be called "A Reconstruction of the Massacre in Front of the School in Batak", the second "An Exhibition of the Mortal Remains in the Church of St. Nedelya in Batak" (for more on that topic see: Baleva, Brunnbauer 2007, p. 15-32). It should be added that those new findings did not meet with much enthusiasm among the self-appointed custodians of collective Bulgarian memory in the historical profession (Troeva 2007, p. 125).

196 This problem was tackled in a well-known and controversial Bulgarian-German research project, *Istoriya na sŭvremie i natsyonalni stereotipi v Bŭlgariya v svetlinata na mita za Batak*, headed by M. Baleva and U. Brunnbauer. For more information about the reaction to this project from various segments of Bulgarian society see G. Szwat-Gyłybowa (2009).

197 Formerly the photographs dated to the period of 1876-1878.

The massacre in Batak is an important locus in this collective memory, shaping the collective imagination of Ottoman occupation (Szwat-Gyłybowa 2009, p. 8).

The image of the Turk/Muslim/convert as a bloody henchman inflicting violence on Bulgarians, particularly Bulgarian women and children, was a frequent motif in the Christian narratives I encountered in the field:

> S.: The Turks were very evil. When they got hold of a woman, a Bulgarian woman, they would tear her apart [Bulgarian: *rozcheknat* – an ambiguous word possibly implying rape – M.L.]. (W, Ch, Interview 34, Garmen 2006)
>
> M.: The people gave up their faith suffering... Massacres, blood. People actually took refuge in a church believing they'd be safe in a holy place. But they were slaughtered...
>
> M.L.: Which church was that?
>
> M.: The one in Batak, the Batak church. There is a poem about one Bachko Kiro who realized the situation was hopeless, first he killed his child, then his wife, and finally he killed himself. There are bloody traces on the walls which are still visible. They were all slaughtered like chickens.
>
> M.L.: Who slaughtered them? Turks?
>
> M.: Turks. (W, Ch, Interview 33, Garmen 2006)

According to the narrative of the old Christian women, a Batak-style massacre could have taken place anywhere; as the Turks "were sharpening their knives", there was no way of knowing where the knives would be put to use. According to my respondents, various locations were considered before the assailants finally settled on Batak. At the same time, my respondents directed their fear of a possible repeat on the Pomaks. Structurally, the narrative is reminiscent of the painting.

As Ulf Brunnbauer writes (borrowing Pierre Nora's fashionable concept of "sites of memory" or *lieux de mémoire*): "sites of memory operate at different levels: not only talk do they about the history of a country, but they also give local communities a chance to weave their own histories into national history, combining the 'small', local history with the 'grand' history of the nation" (Brunnbauer 2007, p. 90–91, translated from Bulgarian).

At the same time it should be pointed out that the perpetrators of the Batak massacre were predominantly Bulgarian-speaking Muslims living in the villages around Batak. In this respect Brunnbauer is correct in identifying this fact as a particularly sensitive problem in historical texts, which was consequently blanketed in silence[198]; serious historiography published under the Communist regime in

198 This fact is not mentioned in the information in the Batak Museum (Brunnbauer 2007, p. 95). A. Vezenkov attributes this silence the fact that "unlike before the end of the 19th century, when it

Bulgaria actually argued that the Pomaks fought for liberation hand-in-hand with the Bulgarians (cf. Brunnbauer 2007, p. 95). 20th-century publications about the Batak massacre typically made no mention of the fact that the Pomaks came from the neighbouring villages. Instead, they identify the perpetrators as "Turks" or "fanatical Muslims" more generally (Vezenkov 2007, p. 113). Around Batak itself, the Pomaks are blamed for the massacre, whereas the general Bulgarian perception is that the massacre had been committed by Turks[199] (Troeva 2007, p. 127).

Importantly, although my respondents talked about "Turks", they discussed the massacre in Batak in the context of their relations with the Pomaks, identifying it as the source their fears. This reflects a fluid transition from a fear of the Turks to a fear of the Pomaks.

According to Evgenia Troeva, Bulgarian-speaking Muslims living in the Batak area interpret the Batak massacre as an act of revenge for the forced Christianization campaign of 1912 (sic!), whereas those in the region of Ardinsko deny their involvement (Troeva 2007, p. 126–127). Many years earlier, in 1876, Muslims from Peshtera interpreted the massacre as an act of retaliation for a macabre Christian atrocity who roasted Turkish babies on spits[200] (Robert J. More 1877, cited in: Troeva 2007, p. 126).

The Pomak accounts collected by Christo Popkonstantinov (1898) seem more plausible. Ten years after the massacre in Batak, Popkonstantinov's respondents from Konstandov, Banya (today part of Velingrad) and Dospat explained that the Pomaks were pushed to violence by fear caused by rumors that the inhabitants of Batak were planning to rise in rebellion as part of a planned war against Turkey, to be waged with the Russian and Serbian support (Popkonstantinov 1898), a development which would have caused justifiable concern in the Pomak population.

The stories of Bulgarian Christians being massacred at Turkish hands reflect and reinforce the idea of Ottoman domination among the Christian population. Another respondent, the metropolitan of Nevrokop, reported having actually seen bones with incision marks in a mass grave near Yakoruda, in a site discovered during archaeological excavations, which he believes is evidence of an atrocity committed against Christians which must have been hushed up by nefarious archaeologists in exchange for hush money:

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made sense that Muslims/Pomaks should have been involved in a massacre of Bulgarians/Christians, by the 20th century [after Pomaks had been recognized as Bulgarians – M.L.] the same observation becomes a terrible paradox: Bulgarians slaughtered Bulgarians" (Vezenkov 2007, p. 112, translated from Bulgarian).

199 One of my female respondents, a retired elementary school teacher, argued that the massacre was perpetrated by Turks against a Pomak population (Interview 33, Garmen).

200 As the author explains, an investigation into the crime had been launched but failed to confirm this version of events.

> Metropolitan Natanail: I've seen this with my own eyes, when they dug up those graves. One archaeologist took the money and said there had been no violence, that those were willing converts to Islam. What does he mean by that given how there were visible incisions on bones of adults and children?! A broken bone does not look the same as an incised bone. (Interview 62, Hadzhidimovo 2009)

The bishop regards the new historiographical perspective on the motives which triggered Christian conversions to Islam as opportunistic and contrary to archaeological evidence.

* * *

The fears voiced by my elderly Christian respondents are mirrored by some of the Bulgarian speaking Muslims from Satovcha, who harbour similar fears about the Christian neighbours. They tell similar stories of massacres inflicted by Christians on their ancestors. It would seem that the relations of reciprocity have their macabre counterpart in the institutions of revenge and violence, and the past can be reinterpreted in many different ways.

The Muslim stories of martyrdom as narrated to me in Satovcha invariably identified Bulgarians as perpetrators, either indirectly (as agents and supporters of forced assimilation of Bulgarian-speaking Muslims), or as actal murderers participating in a massacre. According to my respondents, such a massacre took place in 1912 in the Western Rhodopes, supposedly organised by the local Bulgarians to exterminate the local Muslim elites prior to a campaign of forced Christianisation in the same year:

> M.L.: Did the Muslims join the April uprising?
>
> Woman A.: At that time, what we call a *bashŭbuzuk* [Turkish: *başıbuzuk*- M.L.] had arrived. One way or the other, they came for... here in ... they came for those who belonged to the Muslim elites...
>
> M.L.: What does it mean, *bashŭbuzuk*?
>
> A.: An autonomous army, okay?
>
> Man H.: I can't explain that...
>
> A.: There were Muslims in it who were richer, smarter, more active. They took them all, our local Bulgarians did. They said they were taking them to a meeting. They went to that meeting and they were trussed up with ropes. There is a hill opposite called Bojnov Rid, that's where they slaughtered all of them. Fifty people standing in a row, all slaughtered.
>
> Man H.: That was in 1912. It's true.
>
> A.: My grandfather got slaughtered there. It was an evil thing that happened.
>
> H.: Seventy people trussed up and slaughtered here over a ditch!

A.: Right here, on that little hill, my grandfather and his brothers!

M.L.: Are they buried?

A.: No burials. They got thrown into a ditch!

H.: Yes, they're in some hole. All of them in some hole.

A.: It was the local Bulgarians who did that, our people!

M.L.: Meaning, the local inhabitants?

A.: The locals. Grandfather was slaughtered by our neighbours!

M.L.: In 1912?

H.: In the 12th year. (Muslims, Interview 29, 2005)

My respondents revisited this topic several times and were visibly emotional, expressing sympathy[201] for the victims:

Man H: Do you believe that the skies opened? [The respondent is quoting his conversation with another man – M.L.] – I do. – Did you see it? – I did. – Interesting, because they all prayed, those were *hodzhas*, people who knew the Qur'an, and they went there, praying. They were told there would be a meeting, a talk at the culture center. They were all gathered in one building.

M.L.: How many were slaughtered?

H.: Seventy people, seventy... The smart ones, the open-minded ones...

Woman A.: The more prominent ones, who knew..., because there was talk for them. You know, a talk, *rech;* it's *vajdis* in Turkish[202]?

H.: A lecture given before an audience.

A.: [The respondent speaks very indistinctly] and they slaughtered them there.

M.L.: But they said that it would be a talk?

H.: Yes.

A.: In the evening they took them to the culture center for a talk.

201 As K. Kaniowska notes, this is a distinguishing quality of post-memory which it characterizes as "a narrative about a narrative, as emotional (if not more) as the original one" (Kaniowska 2004, p. 21, translated from Polish).

202 Perhaps the respondent means "news" (in Turkish the word *havadis* means 'news').

H.: Like it was going to be a meeting.

M.L.: Meaning, they did that in the culture center?

A.: They told them to come. They got them all into one building. (Muslims, Interview 29, 2005)

One characteristic of postmemory narratives is the tendency to sacralize and exalt "unexperienced traumatic past" (Kaniowska 2004, p. 21, translated from Polish), a sentiment which is palpable in the following comment:

Man H.: At night it got terribly bright. That's why they say the skies opened ... I believe it because I've asked the Christians [if that was true]. I thought, maybe our Muslims are embellishing things a bit. Because my grandfather and my grandmother remembered. They told me about.

M.L.: What do you call this event around here?

H.: The slaughter. I don't know, the slaughter.

Woman A.: The slaughter of 1912.

H.: In 1912. I don't know why they slaughtered them.

A.: I don't know why. Our grandmother said...

H.: I ask Christians, elderly people..., and he told me, he said it quite clearly. (Muslims, Interview 29, 2005)

It is impossible to say whether or not the massacre in Satovcha is an actual historical event[203]. On the one hand, the event is located in a not too distant past, and relates to the life of the grandparents of my respondents, on the other hand that is not enough evidence to treat those accounts as factual. I have consulted Bulgarian scholars working on the Ottoman period but they were unable to resolve the historicity of the events of 1912[204]. But perhaps the factual truth of those narratives is not what matters. Ethnographers are more interested in the symbolic power and impact of such narratives, seen through the lens of social constructs and collective images rather than as historical facts. Accordingly, it makes sense to pose the question, what is the meaning behind the structure of those narratives and the analogies between the

203 According to Rosner, every account can be put into question and none enjoys absolute credibility (Rosner, cited in: Kaniowska 2004, p. 25).

204 Some historical sources provide evidence of massacres of Muslims being perpetrated in Bulgaria in 1913, lending credibility to the accounts shared by my respondents. H.T. Norris quotes a confidential letter to C. M. Warling, *chargé d'affaires* in Constantinople dated 17th of July 1914 from the British Consulate General in Thessaloniki reporting that "at the beginning of the Balkan War against Turkey many massacres of Moslems were carried out by Bulgars in various parts" (Norris 2006, p. xi).

two religious groups, with the changing roles of perpetrator and victim. In view of the above, such narratives can be categorized as *memorata*[205] (Tokarska-Bakir 2008, p. 121).

According to the Muslim accounts, the Christians gathered their victims (numbering fifty or seventy, depending on the version) into one place under the pretext of a meeting, then chained them on a hill (Bulgarian: *navŭrzani na edin sindzhir, tam na edin bair*) and slaughtered them. Aksime said that her grandfather and grand uncle were murdered on that occasion.

According to the narrative, the skies opened during this atrocity which scared the perpetrators who failed to finish off one of the victims, who only got killed the following day. The component elements of this narrative can also be found in Bulgarian folklore, such as the song *Gora i tri sindzhira robi* (*The Forest and the Three Ropes of Slaves*). In the song, a shepherd asks the Forest why it's all withered when it was green just the day before. The Forest explains that the cause of the withering is its compassion for rope-bound slaves who had been driven through it:

The first row, oh shepherd

Was all young girls.

When girls cry

The forest bends the treetops …

The second rope, oh shepherd,

Was all young women.

When women cry,

The forest loses its leaves.

The women cry and wail,

"Oh God, dear God!

Our little babes

205 J. Tokarska-Bakir defines a memorate as "testimony of individual experience shaped by the grammar of collective imagination" (*świadectwo indywidualnych przeżyć, uformowanych według gramatyki wyobrażeń zbiorowych*) (Tokarska-Bakir 2008, p. 121). In this case, the memorate bear no relationship to religion (in Propp's typology, the memorate is "a story with religious content" (Propp 2012, p. 26), but Tokarska-Bakir treats them as tales of collective historical trauma experienced by a religious group.

Left motherless in the morning,

Crying for their mothers, asking

If their mother is milking the cows?

...

The third row, oh shepherd,

Is all young lads,

When lads cry,

The branches in the forest wither" (*Gora*... 1965, p. 214)

Although the song talks about Christian slaves in Ottoman times, Muslims create analogous narratives of martyrology. Cohabitation in a geographical area not only promotes good relations between neighbours but also gives rise to monuments of martyrology for each religious group. In the case of Christians, this has become sublimated into an official site of national memory, in this case the museum in Batak. In the case of the Muslims, the site of memory is located on a hill in the outskirts and is not physically commemorated. Muslims, my respondents went on to explain, are a majority in the local government, but they are unwilling to erect a memorial to commemorate the atrocity for fear of antagonizing the Bulgarians. The postmemory of the event is passed on in oral form by the older respondents:

M.L.: Where exactly is the site of the slaughter?

Woman A.: At the end of the village, on the hill.

M.L.: Is this place somehow marked now?

Man H.: No, there is nothing. It's forgotten.

M.L.: Don't you want to put up a memorial of some kind?

A.: We don't.

H.: We all keep silent, nobody wants to do anything.

A.: We are afraid, what can we do?! They will come again.

H.: Nobody will care.

A.: We live together, we celebrate together, we drink together but we are afraid! This feels like living under a yoke. My grandfather was stabbed with a knife eighteen times. (Muslims, Interview 29, 2005)

Significantly, the narratives are almost identical in terms of structure and content but they differ greatly in terms of impact. The Muslim narrative remains marginal, relative to the Christian narrative. With no historical accounts or outward forms of commemoration it becomes relegated to the level of legend. The Christian narrative of the massacre in Batak becomes one of the variants of the official narrative of national martyrology. Despite the efforts of many modern historians who have attempted to rethink this element of Bulgarian consciousness as a myth rather than a historical account, the symbol remains deeply rooted in Bulgarian collective memory, and stubbornly resisting any debunking efforts.

The narratives express the latent fears which both group harbors for non-coreligionist neighbours officially treated as "brothers" and "people like us" in the *komshuluk* narrative because the neighbours could betray the ideals of good relations between neighbours if the political situation became volatile. Both groups expressed their fears in a very graphic way: the eighteen stab wounds mentioned by the Muslim woman, the slitting of throats in the narrative of the old Christian women. The Muslims continue to fear new assimilation efforts from the Bulgarians. One Muslim respondent said that they could no more become Bulgarians than an animal could become a member of a different species:

M.L.: So, your life with the neighbours, is it good?

Woman A.: It's a life...

M.L.: Are you afraid, all the same?

A.: We are afraid.

Man H.: We have a good life together, but, like she said, everybody was in favor of us becoming Christians.

A.: [So that we become – M.L.] one thing. But we resist that. Can you turn as sheep into a goat, or a cow into an ox?!

H.: The locals, all of the locals.

A.: You can't turn a cow into an ox, and we will never be Bulgarians. We've changed our faith.

H.: So now, when we sit together, we get no support from them, on the contrary.

A.: None.

H.: On the contrary.

A.: We sit on a bench, we start talking.... They are ready to trample us underfoot.

H.: They have a bad attitude. And they have this idea... I'm not sure if they can understand it... [The respondent shares his doubt with the women whether myself and my companions can understand the topics] from communist times.

A.: Not just communist times, they changed them [the names] already during fascist times.

H.: He said it. Leave us alone!

A.: We are being persecuted on a regular basis, Muslims in Bulgaria are. Regular persecution! That's what it's like! (Muslims, Interview 29, 2005)

The subject is obviously emotionally charged. My respondents revisited it several times and expressed their emotions using the same phrases:

Woman A.: Bulgaria always persecutes Muslims. Always. They want to make a single nation out of us.

Man H.: A nation, a single state, a single nation.

A.: But we don't want them. An ox can't turn into a cow, and a cow can't turn into an ox. (Muslims, Interview 29, 2005)

In view of the frequent official attempts of the Bulgarian state to assimilate the Pomaks in the past, the respondents are concerned that the pressures might repeat themselves:

Woman A.: Some time passes..., and it starts all over again... We can't get a moment's respite.

M.L.: Why is it like that?

A.: Persecution. They want to make Bulgaria ...

Man H.: In '12 they would change their names and they'd actually baptise Muslims. It wasn't just the names, either. Now it was just the names, that was a bit more gentle [Bulgarian: *posmekchavashto* – M.L.]. In the past, they used to summon them to churches, baptise them. They made attempts like that in [19]30, [19]40... Loads. In [19]73 everyone was affected, it was a mass thing. (Muslims, Interview 29, 2005)

The older female Orthodox respondents were concerned that the close relations with their Muslim neighbours might fall victim to a potential situation of armed conflict:

Woman 1: Now listen, let me tell you something. We live very well together. But if anything happens, God forbid, they will slaughter us like mice.

M.L.: What is it that could happen?

Woman 1: If there is a war, we'll all get slaughtered by the Pomaks.

M.L.: Are you afraid?

Woman 2: Of course we are. (Christians, Interview 25, 2005)

Considering the narratives of my Christian respondents, I suppose there must be a strong symbolic connection between the events of 1876 and 1912. Those events give rise to mutual mistrust and feelings of ressentiment in both groups. Each group believes the other to be capable of random acts of hostility and violence, and sees itself as a potential victim at the hands of the neighbours who can be easily manipulated by politicians. The question arises, where does the ressentiment originate?

It would seem that in both cases there is sent on stems from humiliation and grudges harboured for the other group on account of its violent past. For the Orthodox Christians, this probably stems from the "slavery complex" of the 500 years Bulgaria spent under Turkish yoke, a period believed to be the cause of Bulgaria's underdevelopment and the historical rupture separating the country from its Byzantine/Thracian/proto-Bulgarian roots (depending on a particular narrative). In this sense, the Pomaks are seen as an embarrassment: victims of Ottoman oppression who have "turned Turk". They are pitied for their victim status, but at the same time they are regarded as traitors who cling to the "faith of slaves". Perhaps this is why my respondents talking about the massacre in Batak cited many examples of the humiliations suffered by Bulgarians had Turkish hands and leading to the local population "turning Turk", which involved rapes of girls and pressing boys into janissary units. Two of my respondents cited the words of a song about forced conscription into janissary units, which they treated as a historical account:

D.: Aaah, we used to sing a song: "Mother, there are janissaries going from village to village, snatching male children and turning them into janissaries" [the respondent can't remember the exact words and paraphrases them – M.L.]. Generally, there are those accounts of children playing outside who were snatched by Turks and taken into Turkey. They were taught Turkish and pressed into service as janissaries, evil men. The boy came here to see his mother. He didn't recognize her and he wanted to... But he had some kind of birthmark, and the mother recognized her child. She said to him: "Don't kill your own mother! Your mother gave birth to you, and the Turks kidnapped you turned you into a janissary." And some things came back to him, the places where he used to play, and he saw that it was his own mother. They embraced and kissed. Then the Turks took him away, they took him into Turkey and killed him there. (W, Ch, Interview 41, Garmen 2006)

Woman 1: You know what, in the past they used to go around the area and snatch up boys: "The janissaries are coming, taking our sons away" [a snatch from a song – M.L.]. They would take boys and turn them into janissaries. They took a small Bulgarian boy in these parts, and when they showed up here [years later] he wanted to butcher his own father. He'd turned into a beast! He wanted to butcher him. It's in one of those songs...

Woman 2: He did kill him!

Woman 1: He killed his own father!

M.L.: Did he realize it was his own father?

Woman 2: He knew he was his dad, but he was a janissary now. Doing as they said... He was a monster.

Woman 1: A monster.

Woman 2: Completely callous. (Christians, Interview 25, 2005)

According to my respondents, Bulgarian girls would be kidnapped and raped, which meant they would "turn Turk":

Woman 1: We used to have this water well in the market square, the water used to come out of two pipes.

Woman 2: A spring.

Woman 1: A spring. And when a young girl came to fetch some water, the Turks would catch her and turn her Turk.

M.L.: Does that mean they would somehow convert to Islam?

All: Yes.

Woman 3: That was during the Turkish rule.

M.L.: So, how exactly did they turn the girls Turk?

Woman 1: Well, they turned them Turk, to make sure they'd be Turks. (Christians, Interview 25, 2005)

The respondents apparently treated rape and conversion to Islam as synonymous, as suggested by the phrase "the Turks would catch her and turn her Turk". They were reluctant to use the word "rape" because of its shameful connotations, and substituted the phrase "to turn Turk" as a synonym: "Well, they turned them Turk, to make sure they'd be Turks". When pressed for answers, they would add that "turning Turk" also involved wearing traditional Turkish clothes such as *shalvari* or *feredzhe*. The respondents several times emphasized that Bulgarians *yali sa mnogo mŭka* (suffered greatly at Turkish hands):

Woman 1: The Bulgarians suffered so much! So much! They would pick and choose the girls...

Woman 2: The prettiest ones. There was this movie where they locked them in some kind of cart, young girls, very young, and they "turned them Turk". Those were very evil times!

M.L.: So, what did they do exactly?

> Woman 2: Well, later they dress them in Turkish clothes, *shalvari* trousers and cloaks. (Christians, Interview 25, 2005)

The respondents repeatedly referred to literary sources, films and works of art which had shaped their postmemory.

Coming back to the subject of rape, they decided to add more details and explained that the women would be raped from behind, the most humiliating position for the woman. This way, the Turks are made to look like primitives, a constant threat to Bulgarian girls:

> Woman 1: If you'll excuse me saying that, they caught some women here. A woman told the story. And the Bobovlaiko would choose those best dressed ones, and told them to collect ears of wheat. Told them to collect the wheat naked, and they would be free to do their business from behind as they pleased. (Ch, Interview 25, 2005)

This reference to rapes committed by Turks on Bulgarian women should also be taken in the metaphorical sense as an expression of the humiliation experienced by Bulgarians under Turkish occupation, seen as a "contamination"of Bulgarian culture, bodies and souls by Turkish influence. Topics such as killings, rapes and kidnappings of Bulgarian women at the hands of Turks were obviously a popular subject in Bulgarian folk songs and national literature, were Turks tend to be portrayed as cruel and primitive barbarians:

> "The Turks enslaved to this land
>
> They loved the young
>
> They enslaved the old
>
> They butchered the little children" (*Turtsi*... 1963, p. 218)

Such motifs were present in school knowledge and were previously available in the history and literature textbooks which shaped the Bulgarian national martyrology. Such images reinforce in the Orthodox Christian population the idea that the ethnonym Pomaks referred to Bulgarian people "martyred" and "tortured" by the Turks who chose to save themselves by converting to Islam and "losing" their Bulgarianness:

> M.L.: Okay, but aren't the local Muslims Bulgarians?
>
> Woman 1: They are not Bulgarians. They are, just look here, *sine*[206]. We say that they have turned Turk. We have villages here such as Valkosel and others, Slashten. Another village, Fargovo,

206 Literally, "son", a customary form of addressing younger people by their elders in the Rhodopes irrespective of gender, a symptom of the patriarchal nature of the local culture.

> all of those people are Pomaks now. They've turned Turk, that's what we say. They all used the Bulgarian, now they've all turned Turk.
>
> Woman 2: They call them "Muslim Bulgarians". (Christians, Interview 25, 2005)

On the Pomak side, the hidden ressentiment comes from the way Bulgarians tend to regard their faith as an act of "turning Turk" and generally the "revival process" itself. Paradoxically, both ressentiment narratives are narratives of colonized populations: each group constructs them around its own "wounded identity": in the case of the Christians, the humiliation comes from the experience of Turkish occupation, in the case of the Muslims it stems from the experience of repression during the process of revival. Latent mutual fears are suppressed to protect the positive relationship. Whereas the good-neighbourly narrative presents Muslims and Christians as brothers, the ressentiment narratives presents them as monsters.

This seems to echo Max Scheler's observation that "It goes without saying that genuine moral value judgments are never based on ressentiment. This criticism only applies to false judgments founded on value delusions and the corresponding ways of living and acting" (Scheler 1998 [2010], p. 23).

3.5 "The Politicians are to Blame for All of This"

Although the narratives of both religious groups reveal mutual fears and feelings of ressentiment, they do not see this as an imminent threat to Good relations between neighbours, which are seen by both groups as a value in itself. Should a potential threat to peaceful relations arise, the respondents tend to hold politicians responsible:

> M.: We live well together, in human terms. There are no problems. The problems are caused by politics, by the government. (W, Ch, Interview 33, Garmen 2006)
>
> Mufti: Wherever there are Muslims, people live together... It doesn't matter if there are other religious communities living in their midst. They say, unless the politicians stoke up some conflicts, there will be no confrontation between us. All the wars, all those things are the work of politicians... (Interview 18, Ribnovo 2005)

This sentiment mirrors similar comments collected by Peter Maass from his respondents in Bosnia: "We are lived in Vishegrad like a big family, the Muslims and Serbs ... Everyone had mixed marriages. We never tried to find out who was a Serb or Muslim. We didn't look for differences. You know, it wasn't the people who wanted to fight. It was the politicians who prepared this stew, and now we can never go back" (Maass 1996, p. 11).

Some of my respondents did not doubt that politicians were capable of turning Bulgaria into "a second Bosnia" while others felt this was completely out of the question.

In general, the respondents realized that the historically changing relationships of power were capable of stabilising or unsettling the symmetry of mutual relations. In the Ottoman Empire, Muslims were in a privileged position compared to Orthodox Christians, a situation that became reversed in Bulgaria. Muslims still dominate in most local councils in the Western Rhodopes. This causes concerns among the Christians, a fact that Muslims realise[207]:

> A.: Now the Bulgarians are upset because our Muslims are in the majority: the mayor, the forester, Ayshe [the school principal – M.L.] are all Muslims. So now the Bulgarians are jealous. They are in power in Bulgaria now, so you get this kind of political jostling. (W, M, Interview 29, 2005)

Christians in the area tend to feel dominated by the Muslims (not only Pomaks but also Roma people, both in Garmen and Satovcha). They complain about their inability to get a Christian mayor elected:

> I.: When we follow the politics with [Ahmed – M.L.] Dogan[208], with this one and that. We see that they stick together.
>
> M.L.: Meaning, you vote for different people?
>
> I.: Our numbers are shrinking, theirs are not. That's why I said yesterday that we can't get our mayor elected, we Bulgarians. The numbers are not big enough. And it's going to be worse a few years down the line, when the Roma are in power. The Pomaks, they speak good Bulgarian and we can understand each other, but you can't understand a Roma. (M, Ch, Interview 43, Garmen 2006)
>
> Woman Y.: They enjoy all kinds of privileges but we don't, it's like we don't even have them...
>
> Man 3: Meaning, the Roma and the Muslims are supported by all kinds of foundations, and they get money from them. But we, we sometimes have to scramble just to put soup on the table or to buy bread... (Christians, Interview 53, 2005)

Politicians often exploit such fears in political campaigns. The emergence of ATAKA ("Attack"), a Bulgarian nationalist party which won parliamentary seats in the 2005 election, provoked fears among Muslims concerned about the rise of nationalist sentiment in the country.

I could witness this kind of political rhetoric in the spring of 2009 when a Bulgarian MP, Yane Yanev, representing the conservative party Order, Law and Justice (*Red, zakonnost i spravedlivost*, RZS) and Dimitar Abadjiev (independent) appeared on

207 In Satovcha the Muslims refused to rename a street named after a local Communist, a partisan named Shopov, for fear of antagonizing the Christians.

208 Founder and former chairman of the Movement for Rights and Freedoms (DPS. *Dvizhenie za prava i svobodi*), a centrist party in Bulgaria.

Bulgarian television to sound alarm about a process of Islamisation allegedly taking place in the Western Rhodopes ("Sutrin", 17 March 2009). The title of the program was, *Does Islam rule in the Rhodopes*? The politicians and the journalists repeatedly used the term "radical Islam" but were content to leave it vague and undefined. The politicians behind the furore showed no evidence in support of their alarmism even though they actually named some individuals they felt were responsible for the re-Islamization of the region, namely Ahmed Bashev (mayor of Garmen) and *hodzha* Murat Boshnak[209].

The furore was triggered by a ceremony celebrating the opening of a new sanitation system in Ribnovo, which involved a prayer in Arabic led by *hodzha* Murat, the teacher of religion in the local school. Media reports claimed that the *hodzha* demands to be addressed as Aga[210] (Turkish, "Lord") by his pupils, an allegation the *hodzha* dismissed. Importantly, the word *aga* has negative connotations in Bulgarian society, evoking the times of Ottoman rule, when the word was used to address high-ranking Turkish officials[211].

Yane Yanev and Ahmed Bashev later met with *hodzha* Murat in "Seysmograf", a TV programme (7 March 2009). The program escalated to a sharp exchange of views between the politicians. Apparently, Yanev notified Bulgaria's State Agency for National Security (DANS) that he received a death threat from Bashev, which led to Bashev and *hodzha* Murat's arrest; the men were released after six hours of interrogation.

The media broadcast the euphoric welcome given to Bashev in the market square of Ribnovo, where he was carried by the local inhabitants chanting his name. The mayor addressed the crowd from the pulpit, calling for calm and tolerance. Wrapped in a Bulgarian flag and holding an EU flag in his hand, Bashev was trying to create a media image of the Pomaks as loyal Bulgarian citizens with pro-European attitudes[212].

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209 Because the story was aired in nationwide media I take no steps to conceal his identity, especially as my book shows the respondent in a much more favourable light than the sensationalist media reports.

210 "A military honorific applied to officers of various ranks including the highest status officers from the janissary corps" (Todorova 2004, p. 469), the title later became applied to men of authority (Norris 1993, p. xiv).

211 On a family trip to Macedonia I heard a relative say that a Macedonian passing a Turk in the street would have to bow down and greet him with the words, "100 godini aga!" („May you live to be one hundred, Aga").

212 Ribnovo and Garmen began to attract media attention: television reports showed girls from Ribnovo wearing traditional clothes. Interviewers asked the girls whether they were forced to wear the traditional costume or take religious education in the school. Questions were raised whether headscarves were constitutional in Bulgaria. The head of the village explained that the clothes were "a matter of tradition in Ribnov, it had nothing to do with religious garb and wearing it is nothing wrong" (BTV Novini, 17 March 2009). A reporter, A. Chekimian, pointed out that other kinds of clothes were also warn in Ribnovo. The village head explained that the other type of clothes came from Arabia

I spent many hours taking to the mayor and watching him interact with family members and other people including non-Muslims, and I can emphatically deny that he is promoting radical Islam.

This short summary of the events in Ribnovo illustrate not only the impact of politics on the life of the community, but also the ways in which the media may shape community life. Ultimately, social sentiment seems to be guided by television anchors and reporters, and not by the invited guests such as sociologists, religious scholars or other experts. The opinions of the media personality Slavi[213] seem to be immensely influential – the opinions of social scientists, not so much.

* * *

My field research in the region of Gotse Delchev in the Western Rhodopes suggests that the strategy of peaceful coexistence developed by the two religious groups is a bottom-up cultural strategy which offers an antidote to the historical ressentiment harboured by both groups and prevents future bloodshed. Fulfilling one's obligations towards non-coreligionist neighbours quells mutual fears and proves the value of peaceful coexistence based on *do ut des* arrangements. Fears and concerns make the local community highly sensitive to (global, top-down) political change as a harbinger of ressentiment boiling over into hostilities. Whereas one code is predicated on the principle of symmetry (as expressed in the rule of *do ut des*) to guarantee peace, the other brings the threat of possible retribution for past bloodshed. Unless the situation becomes destabilized by political goading and general political deterioration, the arrangement seems stable.

in 1989 and was not related to radical Islam but rather with "the need to practice religion in the Qur'anic way" (BTV Novini, 17 March 2009). The Ministry of Education audited the schools in Ribnovo to check for irregularities. At the request of one of the inhabitants of Satovcha an education inspector named Ognian Sokolov audited the schools for irregularities in the teaching of Islam, and concluded that there was no evidence of tensions in the school where 40% of the staff were Christian and 60% were Muslim. An audit of the Ministry of Education conducted in the school in Ribnovo, focusing particularly on its teaching of Islam (BTV Novini, 18 March 2009), likewise confirmed that the school's teacher of religion, Murat Boshnak, held the necessary credentials from the Higher Islamic Institute in Sofia.

213 *Shouto na Slavi*, a popular talk show on Bulgarian state television hosted by Slavi Trifonov featuring interviews with celebrities and politicians. The programme's website contains a claim that Slavi Trifonov has been polled to be one of Bulgaria's top five most-trusted people: http://www.slavishow.com/index.php?cat=1&mid=100&id=5987 (19.01.2012).

4 “Adat Orthodox Christianity”

When asked why they cultivated certain rites, my Orthodox Christian respondents often replied that those were *adet* (Turkish: *adet,* Arabic: sing. *‘adah, pl. ‘adat)*[214] meaning tradition, an attitude in where, to borrow a phrase from Ludwik Stomma, a Polish ethnologist, customs are observed in order to “keep things as they are, which is as they should be” (Stomma 1986, p. 82). Although the Bulgarian word “tradition” [Bulgarian: *traditsiya*] is sometimes used as well, the Turkish word *adet*[215] prevails, indicating strong Ottoman influence[216] in the studied region. Accordingly, I refer to the local model of Orthodox Christianity as “Adat Christianity”, a term I prefer to the existing categories describing the unofficial forms of religious practice by Orthodox Christians[217], such as the Bulgarian *bitovo hristianstvo* (Russian *bitovoe pravoslavie*), or its more recent equivalent, the Bulgarian term *folklorno hristianstvo* (literally: “folk Christianity”), Orthodox Christian paganism[218], or the Russian and Bulgarian *dvoverie* (dual religion)[219].

Since they are stereotypes, such existing categories tend to obscure the actual beliefs and religious practices in question rather than make them conceptually clear. The nature of those beliefs was largely shaped by trying to reconcile religious values with the agricultural ethos. Because factors such as geographical isolation or the agricultural ethos no longer obtain to the same degree, the local models have changed, in some ways beyond recognition, since the days of the pioneering field research at turn of the 19th century.

Reconstructing the patterns of past influence between Islam and Christianity is a task for the historian of culture, potentially providing ethnologists with valuable

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214 The word *adet* is also used by Muslims living in Bulgaria, and the following chapter is accordingly devoted to what I call “Adat Islam”. The word is also known in other regions of south-eastern Europe which used to be part of the Ottoman Empire. One example is the work of a 20th-century ethnographer, J. Obrębski, on religion in the Macedonian region, which he defined as “the special privileges God gave to man in the mythical time of cosmogony, transmitted from generation to generation until the present time. Similar to *zakon* [law], *adets* are immutable and may not be pioneered freely by man” (J. Obrębski, unpublished Polish typescript kindly made available to me by Prof. Anna Engelking).

215 Although the word *hadet* (a synonym of *obichay*) does exist in colloquial folk Bulgarian, it is becoming less frequent except in the Muslim areas, a process which is part of the more general tendency of Turkish borrowings to fall out of use. My respondents used the word “tradition” as a synonym of *adat*.

216 This influence is usually passed over in silence by Balkan scholars, who often reject it or treat it as an embarrassment.

217 This problem is discussed at greater length in my article (2007b).

218 A term Obrębski used to describe the religious beliefs of Macedonians in Poreche, today used by O. Todorov and others (cited in: Minchev 2003, p. 15).

219 Defined as “competing pagan and Christian elements in cults of saints, and the cosmological and eschatological ideas of «the simple man»” (Minczew [Minchev] 2003, p. 13, translated from Polish).

insights. However, scholarship on the subject remains disappointingly patchy, making it difficult at present to establish firm points of historical reference. I noticed certain analogies between Muslim and Christian behaviors, but a closer analysis is not possible without a broader literature of the subject.

The analogies between Bulgarians and Turks or Pomaks in the Western Rhodopes, probably influenced by a history of cohabitation in the Ottoman Empire, include a belief in the "evil eye" with its related formulas, such as *Da te posere petela* (literally "May a rooster shit on you", *kokoshki sa go osrali* (literally "Chickens have shat on him", or *luk da si imash* (literally, "May you have onions/garlic"), a kind of counterpart to the Turkish-Arabic formula *ma sha' Allah* (Turkish: *maşallah*), colloquially pronounced *mashalla* (pronounced with a geminate /l/) or *mashala*[220], spoken aloud (or in one's thoughts[221]) in the presence of a person being complimented to avert migraine or the "evil eye"[222], which the well-wisher may cause inadvertently:

> M.L.: Is it possible to give somebody the evil eye without meaning to?
>
> K.: Yes. It's called "ill time". For instance, say, I like a person very much, I like the way that person looks, so I look at the person, and the older people would say this happened at an ill time. Then the person might get a headache, or start feeling heavy. (W, Ch, Interview 37, Garmen 2006)
>
> M.L.: When the Mohammedans[223] have something nice to say about a child they always say *mashallah* to ward off the evil eye. Do you say something similar?
>
> S.: we say, "May a rooster shit on you".
>
> M.L.: Is that something you're expected to say every time?
>
> S.: Well, you say that if you haven't seen the child before, when you see the child for the first time. (W, Ch, Interview 34, Garmen 2006)
>
> M.L.: Do people say compliments about babies?
>
> K.: The Pomaks say *mashallah*, we say, "May you have onions". On top of that people also spit, "Puh, puh, puh, may you have onions". (W, Ch, Interview 37, Garmen 2006)

220 When praising a child, my Orthodox Christian relatives in Prilep, Macedonia likewise use the term *mashala*, oblivious of its Muslim origins or its reference to Allah.

221 As my respondents explained, older people speak the word aloud, but younger people find this embarrassing and only say it in their head.

222 According to my respondents, the "evil eye" may also be caused by a compliment from a well-wisher. This may happen as a result of meeting that person an "ill" (unpropitious) time. Unlike the Orthodox Christians in the studied region (who use the apotropaic formulas alone), Muslim women who compliment other women also touch their intimate parts.

223 I follow my respondent in using this term.

By way of comparison, here are some comments from Muslims. According to *hodzha* Murat, a person who says *mashallah* pleads to Allah to bestow the attribute on the person in question. The *hodzha* admitted that the words also have an apotropaic function:

> *Hodzha* 3: *Mashallah* means, here is an attribute given by Allah. Then, the evil eye, the envious eye, cannot reach that person. You say *mashallah*, "Allah has willed it".
>
> M.L.: Who says that, the person giving the compliment or the person receiving it?
>
> *Hodzha* 3: The person giving the compliment, the speaker. I mean, you say those words to protect that person, in case you give them a jealous look or the evil eye. (Interview 17, Ribnovo 2005)

Obviously, the presence of post-Ottoman components in religious life does not exhaust the specificity of local Orthodox Christianity in the Western Rhodopes. Symptoms of its affinity to Christianity include, among others, the importance attached by my Christian respondents to Jesus as the Christ (primarily) and also to Mary [Bulgarian: Deva Mariya] as Mother of God and Christian saints, i.e. St. Dimitar (Bulgarian: Sveti Dimitar , St. George, St. Paraskeva and St. Nedelya). They have a sense that the saints are present in their lives – communicating their requests through dreams or granting healing to people incubating in their shrines (see Section 5.1.2). However, they know little about Christian doctrine – other than mentioned above – or liturgy. Their worldview includes the existence of pre-Christian beliefs (e.g. rusalkas/*samodivas* and vampires/*karakondzhuls*, see Chapter 10), but it is also marked by the influence of modern New Age trends, mostly discussed in narratives about visits to a Bulgarian fortuneteller, the late Baba Vanga.

Post-Ottoman components appear to exert a stronger influence in my research than New Age ideas. Unlike the latter, which are a relatively new development, the Ottoman Empire continued to influence local lives for close to 500 years, and the presence of Muslims in the area led to unwitting adaptation of certain elements of Ottoman practices and beliefs, particularly what they perceive as the most important of religious practices, namely the ritual of blood sacrifice (*kurban*). However, this process was too complex, and played out over too long a period of time, to make it possible to reconstruct the daily life and culture of the Orthodox population before and after the Islamicization processes in Bulgaria. The religious life of my Christian respondents today is a synthesis of those elements.

4.1 *Kurban* in the Religious Life of Christian Respondents

The influence of Ottoman Islam on the religious life of my Orthodox Christian respondents may be responsible for the importance[224] of blood sacrifice (*kurban*) as a central act of religious life, more important than Holy Communion. Although "the practice predates Islam in the Balkans", "the practice in the Balkans is older than Islam" (Hristov, Skimić 2007, p. 10), its continued prevalence in a population which accepted Christianity as the official religion under Tsar Boris in the year 864 may result from mimetic rivalry between Orthodox Christians and Muslims in a religiously mixed area. Christians may also be persuaded of a particular value and effectiveness of *kurban* in view of its major importance to Muslims. In the Balkans, both religious groups use the term *kurban* in any one of three senses: "it denotes the blood sacrifice, the sacrificial animal, the sacrificial feast and the ritual food" (Blagoev 2004, p. 324).

According to Goran Blagoev, a Bulgarian historian, and Yordanka Georgieva- Okoń, a scholar in Bulgarian and Turkish Studies at the Jagiellonian University in Kraków, Poland (in Polish transliteration: Jordanka Georgiewa-Okoń), the *kurban* in Christian dogma "denotes sacrifices made in God's name which no longer involve blood sacrifice. Old Bulgarian translations of the New Testament use the word *qorban/korvan* in the sense of a gift, a bloodless sacrifice to God" (Blagoev 2004, p. 29; Georgiewa-Okoń 2010, p. 70). In the Qur'an[225], the term is a borrowing related to the burnt offerings of Leviticus (Blagoev 2004, p. 29). It should be noted that the word "sacrifice" does not accurately reflect the meaning of the term *qorban* as it appears in the Torah, whether in the Latin etymological sense of making something holy (*sacrificio*) or in the colloquial sense of losing/surrendering something. Instead, the Hebrew word derived from the root *q-r-b,* to approach (Pecaric 2005, p. V–VI). In this interpretation, the idea of "approaching" or "drawing near" refers both to the taking of food or sacrificial animals into the Temple, and to the psychological process of a spiritual approach, essentially analogous to prayer as uderstood today (cf. Pecaric 2005, p. VI).

Probably to eliminate the association with the Hebrew word *qarab*, commentators of the Qur'an derive the word *kurban* from the Arabic *qurba* or kinship[226] (Blagoev 2004, p. 30). In this interpretation of the word still retains the semantic connection with the Hebrew *qarab,* Blagoev points out, because *kurban* nowadays refers to a sacrifice bringing a person closer to God (Blagoev 2004, p. 31). I believe that my Muslim and Orthodox Christian respondents alike use the word in this sense. Blagoev

224 The word *kurban* is an Ottoman import in Bulgaria (Hristov, Skimić 2007, p. 10), derived from "the old Hebrew *qorban*, transformed via Aramaic into the Arabic *qurban*" (Blagoev 2004, p. 28, translated from Bulgarian).

225 Y. Georgiewa-Okoń points out that the term only occurs in several Qur'anic passages in a general sense unconnected to specific theologies of blood sacrifice (cf. Georgiewa-Okoń 2010, p. 70).

226 In this context, the binding aspect of the sacrifice is emphasized in that it creates and strengthens family ties (cf. Blagoev 2004, p. 30).

notes that blood sacrifice, in obedience and poverty turn into meritorious service in this world and the next, still remains the most important way of forging bonds between people and God in Islam, and in the Balkans generally (cf. Blagoev 2004, p. 325).

The *kurban* rite is sanctioned by the figure of Abraham, who is considered to be the originator of this kind of sacrifice by Muslims and Christians alike[227], even if Abraham and his son (Isaac in the Christian tradition, Isma'il in the Muslim tradition) are not usually named[228]. Christian and Muslim narratives of Abraham's sacrifice differ from their biblical or Qur'anic sources: in traditional narratives, Abraham/Ibrahim makes a vow to sacrifice a son, if a son is given to him by God[229].

Muslims and Christians insist that vicarious sacrifice was made possible by Abraham/Ibrahim's experience after he was told to sacrifice a lamb (or a ram) instead of his child (Miltenova, Badalanova 1996, p. 212–213; Badalanova 2002a, p. 58). Had God not put a stop to the practice, the respondents believe they would still have to sacrifice their own children:

> *Hodzha* 4: If he [Ibrahim – M.L.] had not killed[230] his child, we would [still] have to kill our children as *kurban*. That's the origin of *kurbans*, they go back to Avram *alehis salyam* for us. (Interview 3, Ribnovo 2005)

To Muslims, animal sacrifice is a canonical practice with a direct connection to the holiday of Kurban Bayram held during the Hajj[231]; Christians primarily make animal sacrifices on 6 May (Gergiovden) (Miltenova, Badalanova 1996, p. 212)[232].

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227 In some regions of Bulgaria, songs about Abraham's sacrifice are sung as part of the *kurban* ritual (Badalanova 2002a, p. 57).

228 In folk songs, the name of Abraham is often replaced by Bulgarian names, such as Stoyan, Lazar, Ivan etc. as "in this way the Biblical narrative is transformed into folk-memory" (cf. Badalanova 2002a, p. 58).

229 In some versions, Ibrahim makes the promise unwittingly by promising to sacrifice that which is dearest to him (Blagoev 2004, p. 45).

230 The exact collocation in Bulgarian contains the word *zakolvam* (to slaughter), a drastic but technical term referring to the act of slaughtering an animal. In the ritual sense it implies a sacred aspect, where the sacrifice is calculated to minimize suffering, and to give eternal life to the animal. To reflect this nuance I use the more neutral word *to kill*.

231 The Hajj is the Muslim pilgrimage to Mecca. A "lesser" pilgrimage (called the *'umrah*) can be made at any time of year. The main pilgrimage (the Hajj proper) is held during the month of Dhu al-Hijjah (Arabic: *Dhu al-Hijjah*). Participants enact events from the life of Isma'il, Hajar and Ibrahim, and celebrate 'Id al-Adha, "Festival of the sacrifice", and sacrifice animals to commemorate Ibrahim's obedience. The Hajj is one of the five "pillars of Islam" or Muslim religious duties, and it must be made at least once in a lifetime by persons who are physically able to make the journey unless they cannot afford it (cf. Danecki 1997, p. 169–160; Dziekan 1997, p. 40).

232 Many Christians and Muslims believe that Abraham/Ibrahim had to sacrifice his son because it was customary on Gergiovden or Kurban Bayram, respectively (Blagoev 2004, p. 46). None of my Christian respondents made the connection between Abraham's sacrifice and God's sacrifice of Jesus.

Writing about religious life in the 20th century, Dimitar Marinov notes that making a *kurban* on that date held so much importance in some regions of Bulgaria (such as Sofia) that those who neglected to perform the sacrifice were not allowed to attend church (Marinov 1994, p. 606). To this day, Orthodox Christians believe *kurban* to be a canonical element of St. George's Day devotions; in this view, those who make the sacrifice should attend church on the day, and the lamb sacrificed on Gergiovden is the most important religious sacrifice of the year. The ritual takes a place of supreme importance in the religious imagination, with God and St. George being treated as being practically synonymous in certain Bulgarian folk songs and folklore[233] (cf. Miltenova, Badalanova 1996, p. 212).

For the sacrifice to be acceptable to God (or to the saint), both religious groups believe the animal must be without blemish and meet a number of other criteria:

> G.: The ritual [requires a specific type of] lamb, which must be white, it mustn't be black, it mustn't have horns. Horns are the symbol of the devil. So it must be still without horns. (W, Ch, Interview 23, Satovcha 2005)

In terms of differences pertaining to the ritual itself, Christians (unlike Muslims) distribute cooked, rather than raw, meat, and do not cover the lamb's eyes with a scarf[234]. In addition to ritual gestures enacting Abraham's sacrifice, Christians include gestures symbolizing the Christian tradition, such making crosses on children's foreheads with the lamb's blood[235], a gesture to bring health and a long life and to serve as a reminder of the fact that children are no longer sacrificed to God since the times of the cross and Christianity (cf. Miltenova, Badalanova 1996, p. 213).

Christians refrain from sacrificing animals on Wednesdays and Fridays (on those days animal sacrifice is replaced by "fasting" or meatless *kurban*[236], such as cooked beans), another example of Christian influence on the practice. Other examples include Christian symbols (a lit candle and church incense) used during the sacrifice.

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233 In this narrative, the father sometimes sacrifices his son to St. George rather than to God, and it is the saint who tells him to replace his son with a ram:
"God, give me a child,
A boy or a girl,
God, grant my wish
And give me a boy, Ivancho,
When Ivancho is grown,
I shall kill him as a *kurban*
On St. George's Day (...)" (cited in: Miltenowa, Badalanova 1996, p. 219, translated from Bulgarian).

234 This element of the ritual refers to Isma'il's request to have his eyes covered so he could be unaware of his father's approach; the boy was afraid he might otherwise struggle in panic and hurt himself, a blemish which would render his body unsuitable for sacrifice.

235 Muslims make dots of blood on children's foreheads for the same purpose (Blagoev 2004).

236 As was the case when I did my field research in Hadzhidimovo on the night of 5 May 2009.

My respondents also mentioned a practice in which the lamb's blood is buried under a rose bush (Interview 42, Garmen 2006).

In this context, probably the most obvious connection to Christian ritual (owing to its Eucharistic connotations) is the salt given to the lamb before the sacrifice. According to Dimitar Marinov, the salt offered to the lamb is a substitute for the Eucharist (Bulgarian: *komka*) (cf. Sarinov 1994, p. 608). My respondents were unable to explain the meaning of this element, and did not connect it with the Communion. However, in terms of oral transmission it is important to note the link between the Bulgarian word *agne* (lamb) and the liturgical formula of *Agnets Bozhiy* (Lamb of God) (cf. Badalanova 2002, p. 52). This semantic connection means that every lamb sacrificed as a *kurban* is seen by the faithful as an incarnation of the Lamb of God, and conversely, the Lamb of God is the sacrificial lamb[237] (Badalanova 2002a, p. 52). Yordanka Georgiewa-Okoń makes a similar point where she writes about the connection between the ritual of *kurban* and the rites of the Eucharist (cf. Georgiewa-Okoń 2010, p. 70).

Also notable in this context is the vivid Orthodox Christian iconography of Christ as the Lamb of God, or the so-called Amnos/*Melismos*[238], with its connotations of blood sacrifice. This kind of iconography developed in south-eastern Europe in the 11th century and may have influenced Orthodox Christian religious thinking. The scene appears in murals, usually as part of depictions of the Divine Liturgy[239]. In the center it has the Infant Christ on the altar placed on a *diskos*/paten similar to a prosphoron (Eucharistic bread),[240] and surrounded by angels officiating as High Priests, holding liturgical utensils such as a knife or a Communion spoon (Greek: *labida*), preparing to divide/fracture (Greek *melizo*) the Lamb of God. Sometimes a Seraphim appears in the center of the composition, officiating as the main priest. The image symbolically depicts the preparation of the gifts (the liturgical bringing of bread and wine to the altar), and it emphasizes the role of angels as actual participants in the liturgy.

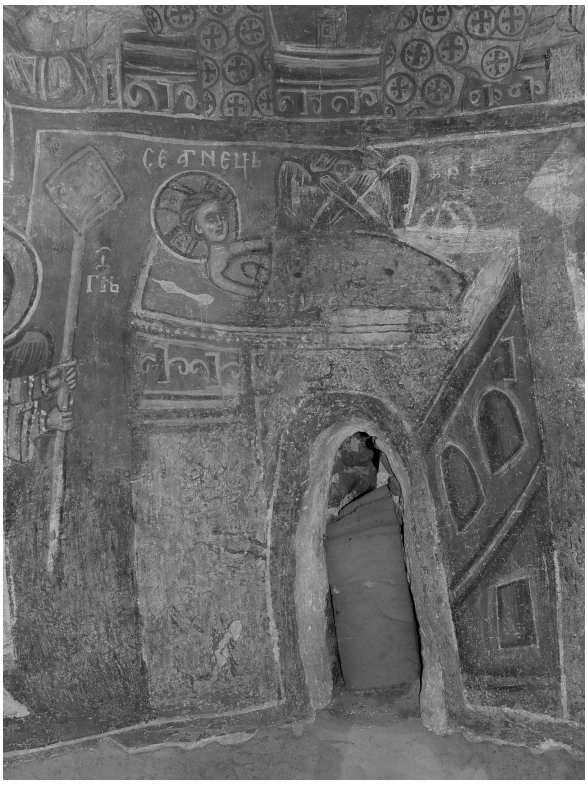
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237 According to F. Badalanova, this is indicated by other Bulgarian words used to refer to the *kurban* ritual, such as *obrok* (one of whose meanings is sacrifice), *cherkva* (temple, church), *krŭst* (cross), *molitva* (prayer), *sluzhba* (liturgy) (Badalanova 2002a, p. 52). My respondents did not use those terms. According to A. Ianov, who in the 1880s did field research in the Moriovo area, where kurban was made on the feast of Pentecost, "the local community even perceived the song of Abraham's sacrifice as the eqivalent of the Eucharistic mystery" (cited in: Badalanova 2002a, p. 57-58).

238 The act of dividing a *prosphoron* (a loaf of sacrificial bread) into little pieces, from the Greek *melizo* "to partition".

239 This scene is called "Divine Liturgy with Christ, the Lamb of God".

240 This square piece of the *prosphoron* is called the Lamb (*Amnos*). It is decorated with the Greek cross and the letters IC XC NIKA. In symbolic terms, the diskos encompasses the entire church: placed to the left of the Lamb is a piece of the *prosphoron* dedicated to the Mother of God, with more pieces below it dedicated to the religious authority. Below the Lamb are placed pieces dedicated to the living, with pieces dedicated to the dead below them. To the right of the Lamb are pieces dedicated to the saints, with pieces dedicated to the secular authority below them (placed at the same level as those dedicated to the religious authority).



Photograph 4.1: Melismos. A 15th-century church of St. Dimitar near Boboshevo in the Kyustendil province. Photographer: I. Vanev.

Although such analogies may go some way to explain the popularity of *kurban* sacrifice among Orthodox Christians in Bulgaria and in other Balkan countries, my field research did not yield enough evidence to support the conjecture that *kurban* might play the same role as the Eucharist for my respondents. In fact, church rituals, including the Holy Communion, are almost completely absent from the lives of my respondents, and their status is very much secondary to that of blood sacrifice (*kurban*). According to my respondents, taking Communion is not sufficient to obtain the gift of life, which can only be obtained by sacrificing another life:

> M.L.: The *kurban* is the most precious thing you can promise?
>
> Sofiya: Right, I mean, it's the spilling of blood. It's like giving blood. You can't make a greater promise.
>
> M.L.: Why do the saints want blood?

S.: Well, that's just how it is. If you want a healthy, living child, you must give a soul.

M.L.: Giving another soul is the only way?

S.: Yes.

M.L.: Does it have to be a lamb, or could it be a different animal?

S.: Around here, we only kill lambs. (W, Ch, Interview 54, Garmen 2006)

B.: Blood must be spilled for *kurban* to be real. When you make *kurban*, it becomes *kurban* when there is blood. You can't just buy a chicken from the shop and cook it, or a lamb, or anything. Then you distribute it for health, so you may live in good health. (W, Ch, Interview 51, Garmen 2006)

In this sense, the ritual of *kurban* is part of the archaic scheme of *do ut des* with its emphasis on tangible benefits (life, health, prosperity) on top of the spiritual connection with God or a saint.

Although blood sacrifice is not part of official Christian cult (as opposed to Muslim cult), the rite plays a major role in the religious practices of Orthodox Christians in Bulgaria, with Christian clergy often joining the faithful in the practice.

My respondents from Satovcha reported that the local clergy, headed by the *vladika*[241] actually hold the *kurban* ritual in the church itself (sic!) on the feast of the church's patron saint. Such a ritual was reportedly performed in the church of St. Nedelya in Satovcha as the priests roasted a large sheep and distributed 150 portions of bread and meat to the congregation. Only two of the priests ate the meat with the faithful; the bishop and ten other priests, who abstained from meat, had a separate fasting meal (fish, nuts and wine) prepared by the faithful.

The symbolic sacralization of the lamb involves a visit to the church, where the lamb is offered as a gift to the saint and a priest says a prayer over the animal. I saw Christians bringing live lambs to the monastery of St. George on 5 May (the eve of St. George's Day/ Bulgarian: Gergiovden) and 6 May, where they kissed an icon of St. George displayed by the side entrance to the church of St. George[242] in Hadzhidimovo.

241 An Orthodox metropolitan bishop.

242 This practice is also found in other regions of south-eastern Europe, including the region of Strumica in Macedonia (cf. Zowczak 2005, p. 210).



Photograph 4.2: A lamb being offered to St. George in the narthex of the church of St. George in Hadzhidimovo. Photographer: P. Carlucci.

The priest's prayer is another sacralizing element. My respondents identified the prayer with the ritual of blessing the lamb, but opinions differ between the higher- and lower-ranking clergy. The Metropolitan bishop ministering in Hadzhidimovo denied that such practices ever took place, and only conceded that prayers could be said over the prepared meat of the lamb.

However, Dimitar Marinov points out that lambs were blessed in Bulgarian villages not only after, but also before the sacrifice. This involved the burning of incense, often no involvement from the priest being required (cf. Marinov 1994, p. 608). In the absence of a priest, the ritual was performed by an old man who would turn to the east, make the sign of the cross three times, and incense the lamb three times. Lambs would need to be blessed before slaughtering, but because a priest would not be available to bless each animal separately, the animals could be brought into the church so that prayers could be said over several lambs at the same time (cf. Marinov 1994, p. 608). Once the animal was roasted, the priest would again say a prayer over the lamb and the ceremonial loaves, and the meat and the loaves were incensed one more time. In the absence of those elements, or if the bread and meat was not divided by the priest, the gifts were not considered properly blessed (cf. Marinov 1994, p. 612). For my Christian respondents the presence of a priest was no longer a matter of importance, and they often perform all the rituals on their own (with the exception of *kurbans* held to celebrate the feast of the patron saint of a church).

Although the ritual is incompatible with Christian doctrine, the faithful (and even some priests) treat the *kurbans* held by priests in churches (or those held at home but sanctioned by the presence of a priest) as confirmation of the link between *kurban* sacrifice and Christian cult. The higher-ranking clergy, who are aware of the

unorthodox nature of the practice, take a different view. When I talked about *kurbans* in Orthodox Christian tradition in Bulgaria with the Metropolitan of Nevrokop, he insisted that the problem was a matter of linguistic misunderstanding, as Christians use the term *kurban* in a different sense than Muslims do, meaning Christian *agape*[243] and not actual blood sacrifice:

> Metropolitan: In the Orthodox Church there are no *kurbans*. When we open the book we read it contains a blessing of the festive table, with the word *kurban* added in brackets. *Kurban* is a Turkish, Arabic word meaning "sacrifice". During Turkish oppression it was simply became adopted as the name [for the thing]. But the [exact] meaning of sacrifice differs from Islam. In our Orthodox Church it's a continuation of the ancient agape feasts. (Interview 62, Hadzhidimovo 2009)

Trebnik[244] uses the word in this sense in a blessing for a meal called *Panagia*[245]*, or a Blessing of the Table for Namedays and Holidays, Kurbans, Shared Meals and Other [occasions]* (*Trebnik*... 2002, p. 505). According to its formula, the priest blesses the meal and asks God, Christ, the Mother of God and the saint of that day for a healthy life for named individuals and for other inhabitants of the town or village.

In my opinion, this explanation (the faithful are simply unaware of the true nature of *kurban* as an *agape* feast) sidesteps the issue. In fact, the community-making aspect of *kurban* features prominently present in the ritual practice of my respondents, and the bonding is emphasized by a ritual sharing of the sacrificial meal. If anything, blood sacrifice is an ideal instance of community-making culminating in a sacrificial rite. Instead, it seems that the members of clergy are trying to modify the meaning of the word *kurban* in order to eliminate two of its meanings (the sacrificial animal and the sacrifice itself).

However, this stance is a recent development among the Bulgarian clergy, who until the recent decades used to participate in, and sanction the importance of, blood sacrifice. In 19th-century Bulgaria, the priest who performed the blessing of the food was entitled to receive the skin of the sacrificial animal and the ritual loaves, an arrangement known as the "priest's right" [*pravoto na popa*] which remained in force even where an elder deputized for the priest (cf. Marinov 1994, p. 347).

Kurbans are made not only on Gergiovden or Easter, but also on the feast days of local patron saints. In addition to those, a practice known as promised or "vowed"

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243 M. Głuszek noted similar explanations provided by members of Orthodox clergy, including Father Naum, Bishop of the Eparchy of Strumica in her field research in Macedonia in monasteries in the Strumitsa and Prilep regions in 2001 (Głuszek 2009, p. 42).

244 Book of Needs – a liturgical book containing the order of services and the accompanying prayers and blessings for different occasions.

245 A title of the Mother of God, popular among Orthodox Christians. In icons, *Panagia* is depicted as a full human figure turned to the viewer with her hands raised in prayer, a medal of Baby Jesus on her chest. The prayer is said to bless meals not only on her holiday but also on the feast days of other patron saints.

sacrifice (Bulgarian: *obrechen kurban*) is very popular in both religious groups. This custom is so important to my Christian respondents that they tend to define *kurban* as an animal sacrificed to fulfil a vow made to a saint.

Muslims make "vowed *kurbans*" exclusively to Allah; Christians make such vows to saints as well. The saint is chosen according to the feast day, depending on which feast coincides with the important life event in question, such as an illness or an accident. In such dramatic circumstances, people make vows to sacrifice a *kurban* in exchange for saving their lives or restoring the health.

Sacrifices made to a saint in exchange for the healing of a specific individual must be performed on every anniversary of an important date throughout the person's life. If the anniversary falls on a day of fasting, the sacrifice can be rescheduled by a short period of time. Parents make sacrifices on behalf of their children until they come of age.

The respondents believe that a failure to make the sacrifice in a given year may bring misfortune on the individual in question, and that the saint will warn the person and ask for his or her due sacrifice. Vowed *kurbans* are mostly private, but collective arrangements are also known (e.g. a whole village might promise to sacrifice animals on St. Elijahs' Day after praying to the saint for rain (Interview 41, Garmen 2006). Childless couples may also vow to make *kurban* in exchange for a baby, especially when one spouse has a dream about having children.

Building sacrifices are another category of *kurbans,* where the blood of a lamb is spilled as vicarious sacrifice for the spirit of a place to avert accidents on a construction site. Building sacrifices, too, involve the presence of clergy, and are sometimes practiced, in conspicuous contrast to Christian doctrine, when the foundations are laid for a new church. The sacrifices are made twice, first when the foundations are laid, and again when the structure is complete.

A traditional narrative traces the origin of building sacrifices to the supposed custom of immuring the wife of a building master (Bulgarian: *vgradena nevesta,* the walled-up woman) in the foundations of a bridge (or monastery) to propitiate the spirit of the place and to ensure the building would not collapse. This is a widespread belief, and the song *Vgradena nevesta* (The Walled-Up Woman) is known throughout the Balkans. There is no scholarly consensus about the song's origin, conjectured to be originally Indian, Greek, Serb, Romanian or Bulgarian (*The Walled-Up*... 1996).

The song, which has a number of variants, tells the following general story: builders working on a structure (a bridge, a monastery) are repeatedly frustrated as their day's work collapses at night. Finally, a master builder named Manol realizes that the mishaps will continue until the spirit of the place is placated. The builders conclude that one of their wives must be sacrificed, and agree to sacrifice the first wife who will bring the midday meal to her husband the following day. The men agree to keep the arrangement secret, but only Manol is true to his word and keeps silent. He attempts to delay his wife's arrival but the woman overcomes the various obstacles and comes to serve a meal to her husband. When she arrives, the men begin

to build a wall around her[246], which she takes for a joke. She does not realize the gravity of her situation until she begins to disappear behind the tall walls. The wife implores her husband to be spared but her entreaties are in vain. The woman curses the construction project, but the husband reminds her of their son, who will one day travel over the bridge. The woman revokes her curse and asks for two openings to be left in the wall so she can breastfeed her baby, barely a month old, which she does for a year.

In my research I heard an abbreviated variant, reported by the respondent as a biblical story. Interestingly, although the narrative makes no reference to animal sacrifice or to *kurban* as a replacement for human sacrifice, it seems to fulfil the same function in the local community as the saga of Abraham's sacrifice:

> M.L.: Why do people make *kurbans*, how old is this tradition?
>
> O.: Oh, it's biblical, as when a man gave up his son as *kurban*. There is a song, "Oh, Manol, master builder". Manol built three bridges. He builds them during the day, at night they all burn or collapse. Manol considers what to say to the master builders, and he says – "Tomorrow we shall wall up the shadow of one of our wives to make sure the bridge stays up". The others said nothing to their wives, only the master said: "Put on some nice clothes and come to the site tomorrow". The others never told their wives to come [to the site]. The master looks up and sees his wife coming. And he says, "She will be the *kurban*, there's no two ways about it!". He walled up her shadow, the bridge stayed up, they carried on building and his wife died.
>
> M.L.: When you wall up a person's shadow, that person dies, right?
>
> O.: Right. (W, Ch, Interview 42, Garmen 2006)

Importantly, the belief is also prevalent among Muslims, as mentioned by Goran Blagoev (2004). It may be a shared element of the indigenous tradition, surviving the arrival of Christianity and Islam.

Several competing theories try to account for the importance of vowed *kurbans*[247] among Christians and Muslims. Goran Blagoev offers two conjectures. He notes that parallels exist between this narrative and the prevalent motif of the vow to sacrifice the firstborn son, found in the Semitic tradition (cf. Blagoev 2004, p. 47) and predating Islam in the Balkans (Miltenova, cited in: Blagoev 2004, p. 47). The firstborn son was considered a gift from God; his sacrifice was an act of restoring him to God[248] (Blagoev 2004, p. 47). Similarly, Florentina Badalanova believes that the

246 In some variants of the song the woman sees tears in the eyes of her husband, who says he has lost his wedding ring in the building's foundations. The woman offers to look for it, and the building gets bricked up with her inside.

247 Notably, another Slavic word for sacrifice is *obiata*, etymologically related to promise.

248 G. Blagoev cites Exodus 22, 29.

theologeme of Abraham's sacrifice provided a model for its folk interpretations in *Slavia Orthodoxa*[249] (Badalanova 2002a, p. 52), and points out that certain components in the saga of Abraham as found in the Bulgarian folk tradition are closer to biblical or midrashic traditions than to the text of the Qur'an (cf. Badalanova 2002a, p. 64), or conversely, they make reference to rabbinical and midrashic texts and the Qur'anic tradition rather than to the Bible (cf. Badalanova 2002b, p. 23).

The alternative conjecture proposed by Goran Blagoev is that the motif entered folklore (probably Muslim folklore) via Islamic sources, notably the story of Muhammad's grandfather, 'Abd al-Muttalib, who asked Allah to give him ten sons and promised to sacrifice one of them at the Kaaba. Lots are drawn, and the youngest and dearest son of 'Abd al-Muttalib is chosen. On his way to the Kaaba the man is stopped by Kuraishites, who implore him not to go ahead with the plan or they will have to sacrifice their children as well (Blagoev 2004, p. 48). Blagoev encountered similar variants in Bulgaria, with Ibrahim rather than Muhammad's grandfather being stopped on his way by neighbours (Blagoev 2004, p. 48).

As noted by the Polish anthropologist Magdalena Zowczak, the story of Abraham (reinterpreted in the light of Islamic beliefs) plays a dominant role in southern Slavic nations in the understanding of the Christian Passover sacrifice, a parallel to *kurban* (cf. Zowczak 2005, p. 222). In borrowing the Turkish word *kurban*, the Christians also adopted the Ottoman exegesis of the sacrifice and the secular point of the practice (a life for a life). Statements from my Christian respondents about the *kurban* sacrifice contained only Islamic motifs attested in my research and in the literature, suggesting that the theologeme of Abraham's sacrifice is boosted in Christian narratives by the influence of "Adat Islam", itself rich in Judaic analogies. Rather notably, none of my respondents identified the exegesis of the *kurban* with St. George, despite the motif's popularity in the Balkans.

Regardless of the validity or otherwise of such interpretations, to my respondents the ritual of *kurban* (though only compatible with the Islamic religious canon) brings Islam and Orthodox Christianity together. In both religious groups the vow to make *kurban* is a reaction to life's most critical events, and the fact that *kurban* is practised by members of the other group is treated as proof of its validity.

249 F. Badalanova proposes the term *Slavia Orthodoxa* to describe Orthodox Christians speaking Slavic languages, and *Slavia Islamica* to describe Muslims speaking Slavic languages (Badalanova Geller 2008b, p. 2).

5 The Muslims: ”Adat Islam” and “Salafi Islam”

The religious practices and interpretations of Islam among the Bulgarian-speaking Muslims in the Western Rhodopes are changing, a development often noted and commented on by local Christians and Muslims. Young and middle-aged Muslims are moving away from the Islam of the earlier generation, favoring instead a Wahhabi-influenced model. In describing this transition, I refer to those two representations/native models of Islam[250] as “Adat Islam” and “Salafi Islam”, respectively.

As a concept, “Salafi Islam” (from Arabic *salaf*, meaning “that which is past” but also “ancestors” or “predecessors”), a class of fundamentalist religious movements rooted in orthodox Islam and seeking to remain faithful to mainstream Islamic thought and tradition. Such movements identify themselves with 7th-century Islam, which they seek to reconstruct for the modern times[251] (Ahmed 2007, p. 35–36).

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250 I borrow the term *native model of Islam* from the Muslim anthropologist Abdul Hamid El-Zein who argues that discussions of Islam should start with its native models, i.e. the ways in which Islam becomes articulated in a given social context, rather than its idealized textual interpretations such as those of Ibn Khaldun, D. Hume or M. Weber (cited in: Varisco 2005, p. 146) or even C. Geertz, who according to D.M. Varisco extrapolated from his observations made in Morocco and Indonesia to write about Islam in general (Varisco 2005, p. 146).

251 It is close to the term “Deoband Islam” introduced by A. Ahmed, an American anthropologist born in Pakistan. According to Ahmed, “Deoband” seems to be intended as an alternative to “Islamic fundamentalism” with its pejorative connotations. Although Ahmed does not treat the two models as synonymous, he believes that the Deoband ideology is similar to that of Wahhabi Islam. He counts the Saudis as the most notable representatives of Sunni Islam, and Iranians as representative of Shi‘ah Islam (Ahmed 2007, p. 71).

Ahmed defines Deoband, Ajmer and Aligarh Islam as predominant models of Islam practiced in the world today. The names of the models are based on three towns in India whose inhabitants have different interpretations of Islam and its relationship with other religions and the Western world. Given their strong Indian associations, however, I do not believe A. Ahmed’s terminology could be conveniently adopted in other countries of the world, especially to Muslims with no connections to India (Ahmed 2007, p. 71).

As far as the other two models are concerned, Ahmed identifies Ajmer Islam as pluralistic and tolerant of other religions, which it perceives as alternative ways to salvation. This model is inspired by Sufism and the mystical traditions of Islam (Ahmed 2007, p. 34), and mystics, such as Rumi, buried in Konya, Turkey, play an important role (Ahmed 2007, p. 33). The model tends to be found more frequently in Shi‘ah communities (Ahmed 2007, p. 46). In south-eastern Europe it is (or was) represented by dervishes and Sufi brotherhoods.

The Aligarh model is connected with the effort to reconcile Muslim tradition and society with Western modernity and parliamentary democracy; it is practised by moderate Muslims, such as the Arab televangelist ‘Amr Khalid (Ahmed 2007, p. 32, 41). One example is “Kalam Nawa‘im”, a weekly Arabic talkshow aired on MBC, in which female Muslim hosts discuss social problems and try to reconcile Islam with modern culture. Among those of my respondents I have had a chance to get to know better, the Mayor of Garmen, Ahmed Bashev, and his wife Shurfe, appear to be the best representatives of this model.

This model of Islam finds value in a blend of faith and reason, and takes a negative view of the Western world (Ahmed 2007, p. 40), which it believes is morally bankrupt and inferior to the Muslim world. Consequently, its attitude towards the Western world is defensive, though not necessarily predicated on the use of violent force (Ahmed 2007, p. 41).

The views of Muslims representing this model of Islam are reminiscent of the teachings of Ibn Taymiyyah (1263–1328), an Islamic jurist and theologian and a member of the school of Ahmad ibn Hanbal, who was the first to seek a return to the traditional Islam from the times of Muhammad and the first caliphs (cf. Danecki 1997, p. 91). He coined the concept of the *salaf* in reference to the early generations of Muslims whom he treated as models of religious life, and he rejected what he viewed as later deviations (Danecki 2001, p. 340). The ideas of Ibn Taymiyyah remain influential in the modern Wahhabi movement. The emphasis which some Muslims tend to place on the "purity" of their Islam[252] suggests many analogies with the ideas of Ibn Taymiyyah, and I believe "Salafi Islam" is the most fitting term to describe their perspective.

The term "Salafi Islam" (like "Islamic fundmanetalism" or "Wahhabi Islam" before it) is increasingly gathering negative connotations, especially in the media or popular culture contexts, and gets wrongly identified with the most extremist trends in modern Islam. I would like to emphasize that I use this term in the sense of a broader vision of Islamic renewal or return to the sources rooted in the Arabic-Muslim culture, but sometimes imposed or implemented in non-Arabic contexts**.** According to Mark Durie, "Salafism is not so much an organization, as a worldview and a way of deciding religious questions. Salafi Muslims may identify with one or another of the schools of Islamic law, but their preference is not to stray from the practices of the first generations. They delight in rejecting 'innovations' (*bid'ah*) introduced by later generations of Muslims (Durie 2013, http://www.meforum.org/3541/salafis-muslim-brotherhood). I treat "Salafi Islam" as a worldview and "a reform movement in the sense that it aims to bring Muslims back to the purity of Islam's origins. It is overtly anti-Western to its bootstraps because it opposes everything which is not based upon the 'best example' of Muhammad, and it explicitly rejects appeal to intellectual concepts associated with western thought, whether from economics, education, ethics or politics" (Durie 2013, http://www.meforum.org/3541/salafis-muslim-brotherhood). I am not alone in noting the emergence of this worldview among Muslims living in

A. Ahmed's different models of Islam should be treated metaphorically as ideal types intended to gain a better understanding of reality rather than to reflect it closely. According to Ahmed, the different models are present in Muslim communities worldwide, providing different answers to the challenges of globalisation (Ahmed 2007, p. 33), and they are subject to continuous cross-pollination.

252 With the obvious difference that Ibn Taymiyyah, who lived in the 13th century, sought to remove as impure the ideas of the Mu'tazilah school, whereas Salafi Muslims are trying to rid local Islam of the influence of the Ottoman Empire and of the Hanafi school.

Bulgaria. Antonina Zhelyazkova, one of the most respected experts on the problem, points out that "[w]hen young Muslims who have studied abroad return to Bulgaria as imams, they import into their communities Salafi influences, and often preach that the traditional local rituals should be abandoned as they deviate from the sources of Islam (Zhelyazkova 2014, p. 594). I discuss this problem in more detail in Section 5.2.1.

I also agree with Michał Moch, a Polish Arabic Studies scholar, that it is difficult to make a clear distinction (especially in 19th- and 20th-century Islam) between "fundamentalism", modernism or even a kind of "Westernization". All those movements and thinkers are involved in the process of Islamic renewal, and they often also fight for a renewal and renaissance of Arabic-Muslim culture. Some of the Salafis might be part of this tradition of renewal, and others might be Saudi Wahhabis with very different ideological roots" (part of an email correspondence, 12 November 2014).

***

Although this chapter distinguishes between two different perspectives on Islamic belief and practice, it should be noted that all of my respondents believed their particular interpretation or practice of Islam conformed with the Qur'an and the Sunnah, meaning that "the religion practiced is the right one or that it can be corrected to be so" (Varisco 2005, p. 148); they do not view it as a possible option among many.

Accordingly, the models I propose here are a matter of convention and, in common with all models, they reify the reality they describe, a situation which always involves a degree of symbolic violence inherent in reading things into people's worldviews. To counteract this tendency, I made efforts to validate my interpretations of the quoted passages by relating them to the entirety of my material in order to narrow down the spectrum of possible interpretations. By carefully analyzing my material already at the field research stage I hoped to arrive at accurate and fair conclusions; this said, people whose worldviews we try to express by mapping it onto our categories tend to resist such treatment. However, attempts to work out models of analysis in tandem with research participants are doomed to fail as the priorities of religious elites differ from those of social scientists. The former are wary of "dividing Islam" into subtypes and categories; in fact, they were trying to dissuade me from learning about Islam from the older people in order to marginalize "Adat Islam". Conversely, my intention was to describe the complex interplay of mutual relationships between the two models of Islam and their attitudes about Christianity. Notably, all respondents, regardless of their differences, tended to insist strenuously that Islam was a united thing, even though they were aware of the gaps between official doctrine and daily practice, as influenced by cultural factors.

For all their limitations, artificial categories are the only tool for describing social change and processes without falling into fictional writing. Also, categories developed on the basis of field observations and actual interactions with people tend to be less

dangerous than preconceived, off-the-shelf academic models which often run the risk of mistaking spurious, superficial analogies for deeper connections.

The differences I seek to identify by relying on categories such as "Adat Islam" or "Salafi Islam" are locally expressed by juxtaposing the teachings of old *hodzhas* and young *hodzhas*:

> I.: We might say that the difference between the older *hodzhas* and the younger ones is that the new ones are trying to make sure things are done properly. To make sure everything is as it should be. Whereas the older ones, they have this... how shall I put it, it's a bit like the dervishes of the past. He goes into a village, lives the Islamic way, sees their traditions and starts to cultivate them, make them part of Islam, and talk to people about Islam. (M, M, Interview 55, Breznitsa 2009)

"Salafi Islam" is currently the most dynamic model of Islam in the Western Rhodopes; one particularly influential group within this model includes *hodzhas* educated in various places who have a reformist approach to "Adat Islam", seeking to purify it of its local traditions. This group seems to have dominated the most important institutions which Clifford Geertz believed were involved in transmitting Islam, referred to as the "mosque-market-school complex" (Geertz 2012, p. 175). Accordingly, it plays a leading role in the process of shaping symbolic meanings.

5.1 "Adat Islam"

The first native model of Islam, which I refer to as "Adat Islam", is represented by older people (senior citizens and people approaching retirement), and it is related to the local traditional religious culture of the *longue durée* (in Braudel's sense). The term *adat/adet* means 'custom' and 'tradition'. The term is familiar to, and actually used by, the local-Bulgarian speaking Muslim community. For this reason, I prefer it to its loose synonym, "folk religion", an outmoded category which I believe obscures social reality by shoehorning it into a stereotype and, unlike the idea of *adat* religion, cannot be regarded as an emic category[253].

"Adat Islam" is for me a synonym for Post-Otttoman Islam, an amalgam shaped in the Ottoman Empire, mainly under the cultural influence of the Arabic Near East (particularly Egipt and Syria), Iran and Turkey, and local Balkan traditions (Heppel, Norris 2001, p. 6). Turkish folklore, also a major influence, is not significantly original according to Hasluck given the formative role of Persian, Semitic and even North African infuences in its emergence[254] (Hasluck 2005, p. 121). This kind of religiosity

253 See my detailed critique in Lubanska 2007b.

254 A factor he believed was responsible for the virtual lack of scholarly interest in Turkish folklore (Hasluck 2005, p. 121).

could develop within the Hanafi school, characteristic of the Ottoman Empire and tolerant of local traditions.

Although Muslims associated with "Adat Islam" are officially practitioners of Sunni Islam, their particular variety is different in that it places a lot of importance on the oral tradition and the world of Muslim beliefs not found in the limited textual corpus of the Sunnah. The oral tradition of "Adat Islam" supplements, and occasionally provides an alternative to, the Sunnah, and to a degree was also shaped by Shi'ite influence. The narratives of Bulgarian Muslims occasionally contain motifs which are parallel to Shi'ite written sources popular in the Ottoman Empire, such as the lives of prophets by al-Tha'labi, an 11th-century Iranian exegete writing in Arabic (Badalanova Geller 2008b, p. 95, 99).

"Adat Islam" is reminiscent the Balkan form Islam as described by Harry Norris[255], consisting in a certain way of life and identity choices rather than a coherent dogmatic system (Heppel, Norris 2001, p. 6), and whose distinctive features as defined by its practitioners are understood primarily in terms of moral imperatives such as hospitality, purity or generosity (Heppel, Norris 2001, p. 8). This lifestyle could be described as premodern in that it places major importance on oral tradition and authority of elders, and is dominated by direct face-to-face interactions. Those Muslims who were practitioners of "Adat Islam" tended to live their lives within a rather narrow *orbis interior* (they tend not to travel except for, in some cases, making the Hajj to Mecca), and they do not use the Internet.

Practitioners of "Adat Islam" hold onto memorized religious narratives transmitted orally across generations, a chain of tradition which in some families remained unbroken despite the difficulties involved in teaching and practising religion under Bulgaria's Communist regime. This tradition was generally perpetuated by particularly religious individuals, especially *hodzhas* who taught Islam to their relatives and closest associates. Particularly important in this group are *hodzha* 4 (born in 1926), *hodzha* 2 (born in 1925), and *bula* (born in 1933) of Ribnovo. In his private library, *hodzha* 2 preserves religious books in Old Turkish. He received his religious education from a number of *hodzhas*, notably an Istanbul-trained *hodzha* of Ribnovo who is no longer alive.

Compared to "Salafi Islam" (discussed below), "Adat Islam" attaches much importance to religious symbolism, often expressed through semantically dense sacred narratives. I understand this symbolism to be "vehicles for the expression and articulation of changing values in varying contexts" (Abdul Hamid El-Zein, cited in:

255 This said, Balkan Islam is itself losing its homogeneity as a result of globalising processes in religious culture; it combines characteristics of "Adat Islam" and of the increasingly popular Deoband Islam. H. Norris notes the growing influence Arab countries are exerting on Balkan Islam by financing religious courses for imams and new religious schools or *madrasahs* (local Muslim variant madrasa, Arabic: *madrasah* – school) (cf. Norris 1993, p. 8).

Varisco 2005, p. 147). In functional and symbolic terms, such narratives are not unlike Christian and Jewish apocrypha[256] and they used to explain the meaning of various Islamic religious practices such as the *kurban*[257], *ritual ablutions/abdest* (Turkish: *abdest*, Arabic: *wudu* or *tawaddu*), the five prayers of the day/*namaz* (Turkish: *namaz*[258], Arabic: *salat*), circumcision/*syunnet*, the covering of the body by women, voluntary and compulsory almsgiving, known respectively as *sadaqah* (local Muslim variant/Turkish: *sadaka*, Arabic: *sadaqah*) and *zakat* (local Muslim variant: *zekyat/zakat*, Turkish: *zekât*, Arabic: *zakat*), and moral obligations such as hospitality. The people I spoke with trace those practices back, mostly, to a prelapsarian existence in paradise or the life of the prophet Muhammad. Another group comprises narratives explaining the meaning of a religious or moral practice through didactic and moralistic exempla (usually taken from the life of the prophet Muhammad). Such statements vividly suggest that the religious symbols continue to be a "living" presence[259] for my respondents, immune to modern disenchantment and indicative of what Paul Ricoeur describes as a "primitive naïveté" and directness of faith (Ricoeur 1985, p. 69).

Irrespective of the type of Islam practised by my respondents, their central religious holiday is Kurban Bayram, celebrated on the third day of the Hajj to commemorate Ibrahim's sacrifice. On that day all the Muslims, including those not currently making the Hajj, sacrifice a lamb as a *kurban*. Compared to the followers of the Deoband model, practitioners of "Adat Islam" have a richer narrative tradition associated with the origins of this holiday, derived from the sacrifice of Ibrahim. In those narratives, Ibrahim is not always identified by name. "Adat-oriented" Muslims often referred to him as "a certain man who was childless" and adapt the narrative to their own *orbis interior*, claiming that the sacrifice itself took place "over there on the hill" that "there was a man of your faith here" (cf. Badalanova Geller 2008b, p. 69, 70).

In those narratives Ibrahim actually goes ahead with the sacrificial rite: he strikes his own son with a knife three times, but the son always remains unhurt. Incensed,

256 My respondents often make reference to non-Qur'anic narratives, Muslim legends which, like the Christian and Jewish apocrypha, are not part of Revealed Scripture (in this case, the Qur'an). Although they discuss events from the Qur'an, they also seek to satisfy pious curiousity about matters not mentioned in the Holy Book.

257 Muslims distinguish between different types of *kurban:* some are obligatory (when offered on Kurban Bayram), others become obligatory when promised to God *kurban,* and some can be offered in thanksgiving.

258 Obligatory prayers performed by Sunnis five times a day. The prayer involves a series of precisely defined gestures called *rekye* (Turkish: *rükû, rekât*, Arabic: *rak'ah*) (see *Glossary of Religious Terms*).

259 Meaning that Muslims who practice "Adat Islam" continue to be shaped by such religious symbols, in contrast to the way people have become emancipated from the influence of such symbols in the post-modern period. This is not to suggest their passivity: on the contrary, in order for a symbol to play a formative role, it needs to be continually re-read and reinterpreted. This rethinking and reinterpretation occurs during the telling of religious narratives in which the symbols play a leading role.

Ibrahim strikes a rock with his knife, and the rock splits into two. At this point, an angel comes down from heaven with a sacrificial ram. Before his sacrifice of Isma'il[260], Ibrahim had sacrificed not one but one hundred rams in his stead. However, in this narrative the ram only became acceptable as a sacrificial offering when Ibrahim put all his trust in God (Interview 3, Ribnovo 2005) to find fulfilment of God's promise (cf. also Badalanova Geller 2008b, p. 72).

In contrast to the official Sunni doctrine, some practitioners of "Adat Islam" treat the *kurban* sacrificed on Kurban Bayram as not just a repetition of Ibrahim's gesture, but also as a way of ensuring salvation in the next world. In this narrative, the sacrificial lamb will safely guide the deceased across a bridge, thin as a hair, suspended over the pits of hell:

> *Bula*: A *kurban* is a different thing. Once you kill the *kurban,* when you find yourself crossing the bridge, *sirat*[261], there is a bridge there. Those who are good, for them the bridge will be wide, and they will come through to the other side. But for those who did nothing on earth, [for those – M.L.] it will be thin as a hair, sharp as a razor, like a knife. You're walking and you're cutting yourself, right? Blood streaming down your legs... (W, M, Interview 13, Ribnovo 2005)

Other soteriological beliefs are similarly communicated by means of pictorial imagery. The angel 'Izra'il (local Muslim variant: Azrail), who comes to collect the souls of the deceased, manifests himself to good people as a figure with an agreeable face, and offers them a fruit "whiter than snow, sweeter than honey, softer than foam" (Interview 13), to which the soul clings in order to enter Paradise:

> *Bula*: He brings him a fruit. What kind of fruit is that? Whiter than snow, sweeter than honey, softer than foam. Do you know foam? Like in the sea. You eat it, and it's melting. Such is that fruit from Paradise. And [that person] is ready to lie down on his bed and die, and he is calm. No groaning, no panting. He's calm in his bed. And he takes out this fruit, and shows it to him, and written on its right side is the name of Allah. And when he sees that name of Allah, his soul leaves [the body] without a care in the world, and clings to this fruit. And he is not punished by this angel, Azrail[262] ..., he pulls out souls. But not his soul. His soul now clings to the fruit, and he carries it to Paradise, to *dzhennet*. (W, M, Interview 13, Ribnovo 2005)

To the sinners, the angel 'Izra'il shows a horrible face before pulling their souls out with iron hooks (Interview 13, Ribnovo 2005). Christians shared analogous narratives, except here it was Archangel Michael handling the sinful souls rather than 'Izra'il.

In "Adat Islam", beliefs relating to the torments of hell are connected with penitentiary theology and their resemblance to the Christian medieval concept that heaven and hell are actual locations rather than spritual states. In Islam, the prophet

260 According to the Islamic tradition, Ibrahim sacrificed his son Isma'il rather than Ishaq (Isaac).
261 Arabic: *al-Sirat* – a bridge suspended over the pits of hell.
262 In Orthodox Christianity, Archangel Michael serves as the counterpart to the angel 'Izra'il (cf. Lubanska 2005, p. 90–96).

Muhammad intercedes for the souls of the deceased, a role similar to that played by the Virgin Mary in Christianity[263] (cf. Lubanska 2005, p. 55–66), and both figures get to witness the suffering of the dammed:

> *Bula*: So, Muhammad, *aleyhi salyam*, sits down and begins to cry. His daughter comes in, and Ali, his son-in-law, a very learned man and close to him: "Why are you crying, *baba* [father – M.L.], you are a *peygamber*, a prophet?!" "When I was taken up to heaven I saw many, very many women suffering punishment in hell, *dzhehendem*". He actually saw all the prophets, [saw] the things that happened to people. "What is it that you saw that made you cry so much?". I saw women hanging upside down, tied by the hair, hanging like that." "How so?" "Because they wouldn't cover their hair [when they walked – M.L.] in the world, while they were in this *dyunata* [world, Turkish: *dünya*, Arabic: *dunya* – M.L.]. There was fire burning underneath. For every hair there is a snake climbing through the head and devouring those women. (W, M, Interview 14, Ribnovo 2005)

Characteristically, "Adat Islam" interprets the sphere of religious *praxis* in terms of symbolic and physical impurity, and frequently goes far beyond the precepts of Sunni Islam. In order to be saved one must preserve the purity of the heart, but also of all the senses and, above all, of all the body orifices. The heart is the most important, explained one *hodzha*, because Muhammad himself taught that a corrupt heart causes corruption in the entire body, and vice versa (Interview 19, Ribnovo 2005).

According to Mary Douglas, "The body is a model which can stand for any bounded system. Its boundaries can represent any boundaries which are threatened or precarious. The body is a complex structure. The functions of its different parts and their relation afford a source of symbols for other complex structures. We cannot possibly interpret rituals concerning excreta, breast milk, saliva and the rest unless we are prepared to see in the body a symbol of society, and to see the powers and dangers credited to social structure reproduced in small on the human body" (Douglas 1984, p. 116). Accordingly, Muslims attach great importance to protecting the body from impurities by exercising constant self-control and by assistance from others. Women in particular are deemed responsible for the image of the Muslim community. To the Muslims from the Western Rhodopes, controlling women's purity is more important than giving them an education. Apart from financial problems, often the only reason why Muslim women drop out of the educational system after primary school is that their parents are afraid to place them in a school outside of community control and far from a Muslim environment. Female purity is controlled not only by men but also by other women, e.g. by mothers-in-law who police their daughters-in-law, and mothers who police their daughters. In a casual conversation, one woman from Ribnovo told me that her husband, though he consented to her receiving an education in a different

263 There are apocryphal texts documenting her wanderings through the places of the torment of the damned (*Słowiańska*... 2001).

city, continued to control her life by denying her money and only doling out enough for her to buy a return ticket; she could not even afford to go to a cafe with her female friends.

To many of the Muslims I spoke to, the world is a source of potential moral contamination which can only be prevented through spiritual fortitude and strict control of the senses: the eyes should look away from impurity, the ears should ignore unclean speech, the hands should not touch unclean things and the legs should not carry one to places where corruption is likely. Those who keep their purity are saved, and their bodies do not decay after death (Interview 19, Ribnovo 2005).

The concept of impurity is invoked to justify the need for such practices as *abdest* (ritual ablutions before prayers), the covering of the body by women, or male circumcision. Those who neglect those things are physically and spiritually unclean, and consorting with such people may carry the risk of spreading the impurity. Contacts with non-Muslims require particular caution. Arguably, the concept of impurity also safeguards the community against religious syncretism by preventing assimilation.

Unlike the proponents of "Salafi Islam", who tend to justify circumcision in terms of "medical materialism" (Douglas 1984, p. 71) by invoking hygienic, medical or scientific standards, Muslims who practise "Adat Islam" tend to treat such practices as (unexplained) tradition or through etiological narratives, saying that the prophet Muhammad was born circumcised.

In the following statement, a Muslim woman justifies circumcision both in terms of tradition, which helps distinguish Muslims from non-Muslims, and hygiene, an aspect whose importance in Islam was emphasized by many Muslims:

> M.L.: Why is circumcision necessary?
>
> Sh.: To keep the Muslims different from the rest, that's how I see it. Well, that's what the religion demands.
>
> M.L.: Does it matter on what day it is performed?
>
> Sh.: No. And they also say that it's more hygienic [she laughs – M.L.]. In the Muslim religion many things are purely a matter of hygiene. Same thing with women. All the women here keep themselves pure, meaning they shave their armpits and sensitive places. It's a big sin, to leave this hair growing on the body. (W, M, Interview 2, Ribnovo 2005)

Another type of religious narrative explaining Muslim practices comes in the form of didactic parables. To explain the great significance of voluntary almsgiving in Muslim life, *Bula* from Ribnovo told me the story of a widow who shared her bread with a poor man, and unknowingly secured an extra forty years of life for her child, who was destined to be killed by a wolf (Interview 13). On occasion, references to an event taking place *in illo tempore* are made to explain natural phenomena, such as the cuckoo's forked tail (Interview 45, Dabnitsa 2006).

The religious narratives of the adherents of "Adat Islam" offer a matrix for a comprehensive vision of the world, often comprising a mix of epistemologal, emotional and moralistic aspects. They explain matters of religious ritual, but also the human spiritual and physical condition; separate stipulations are made for the female condition, women being generally viewed by some Muslims as inferior to, and less intelligent than, men as a result of the sin of Hawwa; Hawwa succumbed to Satanic temptation[264] and tasted the forbidden fruit of Paradise because she was dimmer than Adam and then gave it to the (still drowsy) Adam. For this transgression/ *haram*, people were expelled from Paradise and condemned to heavy toil, and women began to menstruate. In "Adat Islam", misogyny is explained almost exclusively in terms of the narrative of Hawwa's transgression, a narrative *hodzha* Mehmed considers shared story by Jews, Christians and Muslims:

> *Hodzha* 2: Well, in general terms, men are at a higher level.
>
> M.L.: And why is that the case?
>
> *Hodzha* 2: Why is that?! It would take a whole day to explain that. Well, it's just like it's written in the books. When Allah created the *azreti*[265] [Turkish: *hazreti*] Adam, he created Adam and he put him in the dzhennet, he put him in the Paradise, and he says to him: "Here. You've got everything. You can eat everything, make use of everything here. But there is one tree you can't eat the fruit of". This is in the Jewish books, and in the Christian books. And Satan stole in the garden, and he ate something from that tree. They committed *haram*, they ate of that tree. That's why today the *dzhanabu*[266] [Turkish *Cenabı Allah* - M.L.] Allah sent the ten commandments. And the woman who ate of that tree... [*hodzha* speaks indistinctly – M.L.], and that's the reason why women are behind, that they're lower down [in the hierarchy – M.L.]. And although you always get many male prophets, you never get female ones. Men get to be presidents, they get to be kings, they get to be sultans, but you never see that with women. With the women, Allah makes them sick every month. It all stems from that. (Interview 19, Ribnovo 2005)

Another group of narratives popular in "Adat Islam" touches on Muslim attitudes towards Christianity.

Despite having a rich narrative tradition which depreciates Christianity and other religions, the adherents of "Adat Islam" tend to exhibit a greater religious tolerance than Salafi Muslims in that they admit the possibility that people of different religions can be saved. This is illustrated in a parable about camels which remove bad Muslims into Christian graves, and good Christians into Muslim graves:

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264 In a reverse interpretation, Eve's intelligence became dimmed because she yielded to the temptation.

265 Honourable, blessed, literally meaning "honourable", "blessed".

266 Literally "Most High/Almighty", one of the descriptions of Allah.

> *Bula*: When we die, they put us in graves. You are Christians, we are Muslims. There are others, like Gypsies, Jews. Depending on one's religion everybody gets buried in a grave in the proper way, right? We shroud them in linen, Christians bury them in their clothes, the Jews, I don't know what the Jews do with them. Everybody is put separately in a grave, and if that was a good man, with a good character, if he gave alms, prayed to Allah and did his work... Here, here are the Christians: because if you want to do something to go to heaven... Then in that place, after they've taken you to the cemetery, angels come and assign people... They tie 90,000 camels. They take them and lead them to Muslim graves. And conversely, our bad people are taken by the camels from their Muslim graves and they get carried to your graves, Christian graves. And they deal with them. Those who are good are taken into Muslim graves, and those who are bad are taken into Christian graves. That's [how it is – M.L.] (W, M, Interview 14, Ribnovo 2005)

Interestingly, this belief is attested in Frederick W. Hasluck's classic work – Hasluck reports this belief in Monastir (today's Bitola, Macedonia). Hasluck also cites a variant heard by Gervais-Courtellemont in Mecca, which tells the story of camels seen moving bodies between the graves in the Al-Mu'alla cemetery. The first case describes a Christian princess who fell in love with a Moor slave and secretly converted to Islam: her body was found buried in a Muslim cemetery (Hasluck 2005, p. 73). Hasluck heard a similar story in Monastir. During a drought, the locals were praying for rain in a *türbe* (mausoleum), when the body the buried *hodzha* was found to have been replaced by that of a non-Muslim princess (Hasluck 2005, p. 73, 448).

Bula mentioned a specific example of such a "miraculous transfer"of the body by the camels, relating to a priest of Pletena who allegedly practised both Islam and Christianity. Though buried in a Christian cemetery, the priest was removed by the camels to a Muslim cemetery, an event which supposedly took place a mere forty years ago:

> *Bula*: And they gave him a Christian burial. And the Christians, you know, they come on the fortieth day to inspect the grave, they pour some liquids on the grave, they inspect the bones[267], I don't know what they do. They dig him up, pour vinegar [into the grave], I don't know. They went, they dug up the grave. He's not there. And when all the living men saw that the *hodzha* said: "Allah took care of him". Because he used to say the prayers. His sons said, "Five times a day our father bowed to pray the Muslim way. And he's not in his grave". And then an old *hodzha* said: "Allah has taken care of him. There are 70,000 camels moving people from Muslim graves to Christian graves, and from Christian graves to Muslim graves. They do that every day". (W, M, Interview 14, Ribnovo 2005)

She placed this event in her own *orbis interior* by locating it in Pletena, a village not far from Ribnovo. This kind of practice whereby events from the holy books become relocated to the *orbis interior* is a characteristic feature of "Adat Islam", repeatedly occurring in the narratives I heard.

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267 The respondent is referring to the second burial, a custom once practised by the Christian population of the Rhodopes which involved exhuming and reburying the bones of a deceased person.

This story is also interesting in that it inverts the narrative, widely accepted in the local Christian population, that the Muslims are in fact crypto-Christians. It describes the example of a crypto-Muslim or, more precisely, a person with a dual religious identity, Orthodox Christian and Islamic.

I discovered another story providing evidence of the belief in such miraculous transfers of saintly people. According to one Muslim woman from Satovcha, this is what happened with the bodies of a *hodzha* and an Orthodox priest who died at the same time:

> A.: A certain priest died, and a certain *hodzha*, too. I don't know how the priest and the *hodzha* died, I don't know what happened. But one night they decided to open up the *hodzha's* grave. They went, they opened up the *hodzha's* grave, and what do you want me to say, they found the priest in there. And in the priest's grave they found the *hodzha*. Go figure, what is a man supposed to believe?! The *hodzha* was very religious, and the priest was very religious. The priest swapped places with the *hodzha*. And that's that, believe what you like! Even though he posed as a Muslim, praying a lot, working, trying hard, he still ended up in Bulgarian[268] grave. And the priest went to a Muslim grave; like I say, you make a small mistake and you end up in the other religion's place. (W, M, Interview 24, Satovcha 2005)

As A. emphasizes, a small mistake may be enough to result in damnation as a non-Muslim, specifically a Christian, a term she treats as synonymous with "Bulgarian". Also present is a sense that human classifications often fail to overlap with God's because God makes decisions about human salvation according to his own criteria.

At a different point in our conversation, *bula*, who told the story of holy men being miraculously transferred to Muslim graves, unequivocally condemns mixing religions as a horrendously sinful practice. Inspired by a religious magazine she's read, *bula* interprets the disastrous tsunami which struck Indonesia in 2004 as an act of divine punishment for the mixing of faiths and the laxity of religious observance. On that occasion, this religious interpretation was reportedly corroborated by a sign as the name of Allah, written in Arabic characters, appeared in the ocean waves (Interview 13, Ribnovo 2005).

Picked up from a religious magazine, the story of Allah's name in the waves suggests that modern forms of proselytizing are being incorporated into "Adat Islam" under the influence of foreign religious press published in Bulgaria.

268 The local Muslims treat the words "Bulgarian" and "Christian" as synonyms.

5.1.1 Elements of Ritual Practices from the Orthodox Christian Calendar in the Religious Life of the Pomaks

The practices described in this section as well as the memories of practices past suggest that a sphere of shared rites used to exist in a not too distant past between the Christians and the Bulgarian-speaking Muslims in the region. Although this relates to religious practices closely connected with Orthodox Christian holidays (except for the Peperuda), the practices are disconnected from their theological and doctrinal meaning. They take place outside of church space, unsupervised by the clergy, and they seem related not so much to Christian cult as to the agricultural customs or what might be called the "agricultural ethos"[269]. As such, they should not be treated as symptoms of religious syncretism among the Pomaks; instead, they represent the most enduring ritual habits to survive the local population's conversion to Islam.

Conversion to Islam did not result in an instantaneous and automatic break with old rituals and beliefs. The decline of such practices is gradual, progressing in tandem with the growing religious consciousness of the Pomaks and their need to remain distinct from their Christian neighbours. Today, such practices tend to be referred to in the past tense. Where they survive in isolated cases, they are unmoored from a broader context and practised by individuals in a rudimentary format. Far more prevalent among other Polmaks is a generalised tendency to reject all rites which may be shared with Bulgarians as contrary to Sunni Islam (with the exception of the healing practice of sleeping in churches). A significant role in this break with old non-Muslim practices is played by young reformist *hodzhas* who seek to reform the local "Adat Islam". Perhaps this waning is compounded by the fact that Christians view the existence of such practices in the daily life of the Pomaks as evidence of their crypto-Christian identity, an interpretation the Pomaks reject.

A comprehensive list of all ritual practices past and present as practised by both religious groups falls outside the scope of this book, nor do I describe those ritual practices which were not mentioned by my respondents but are, or used to be, characteristic of a given religious feast[270]. I am not interested in the Peperuda, Trifon

269 I borrowed this term from M. Zowczak, where the agricultural ethos is connected with a specific lifestyle (Zowczak 2000, p. 5). In analysing it we have to take into account both the values related to the ways of making a living, and its characteristic esthetic preferences (Zowczak 2000, p. 5). Notably, Bulgaria preserved a very rich and vibrant folklore, in some regions into the mid-20th century. As Georgieva notes, the Orthodox Church did not even try to eliminate the existing practices in certain areas of life (such as weddings, funerals and some feasts), attempting merely to modify their interpretations or to incorporate them within Christian observances (cf. Georgieva 2012).

270 A rich ethnographic literature exists on the subject, however the rites related to a given feast tend to form a certain ideal type removed from the local contexts and unique differences of local communities. Summarising these facts involve extensive quotations from existing reference works, a tiresome solution from the point of view of readers that would contribute little to the analysis presented in this book.

Zarezan, Blagowets or Gergiovden as such: my focus is instead on the meanings and interpretations which accrue to such occasions in the thinking of my respondents, which I seek to analyze in the context of religious syncretism and anti-syncretism. I seek to illustrate those problems using examples provided by my respondents.

I collected the material about the Peperuda ("butterfly") rite in an interview conducted in Leshten in September 2006, where I asked whether the local community practiced a *kurban* against hail and drought[271]. The respondents said they no longer did, but in the past both the Muslims and the Christians used to hold Peperuda rites. A married couple from Leshten[272] said that the Christians continued to practice the rite until 1994, and a Muslim man from Dryanovo named Shukri said that Muslims continued to practice it until as recently as fifteen years ago (Interview 38).

The Peperuda does not have a fixed date in the calendar but is generally practiced in spring or summer in connection with the holidays of the season, such as St. Jeremy's Day (1 May), St. Athanas's Day (2 May), St. Nichola's Day (9 May) and Gergiovden and Enyovden (*Bŭlgarska*... 1994, p. 254). Donka of Leshten argues that moon phases play a role as well:

> D.: In this case, Shukri [addresses directly Shukri, another respondent – M.L.], when there is a full moon or when the moon is gone completely. (W, Ch, Interview 38, Leshten 2006)

The practices involved in this rite mostly include imitation magic accompanied by imploration for rain (Wakarelski [Vakarelski] 1965, p. 304). The central role in this rite is played by an orphan girl[273] aged 10-13, clothed in greenery (leaves, sprigs of lilac, etc). According to Michail Arnaudov, the ritual costume in the Gotse Delchev region also included a bone from an unknown grave and three to four live frogs (Arnaudov 1971, p. 176). As the peperuda, the girl would then circle the village in the company of other girls (*peperudarki*) singing songs calling for rain (God is also addressed in the rainmaking implorations).

According to accounts of Christians from Leshten, the rite would begin in the church. Whe priest would lead the girl clothed in green out of the church and indicate the direction of the procession (Interview 38, Leshten 2006), but the procession should generally turn to the right as this is a "blessed" direction "according to custom" (Interview 38, Leshten 2006).

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271 I took part in such a *kurban* in the Central Rhodopes near Chepelare in 2002. The *kurban* was organised by Muslims and involved Christian participants. All my respondents in the Western Rhodopes denied such practices ever taking part. In times of drought Orthodox Christians hold prayers for rain.

272 They are the only remaining members of the indigenous population. Because of its attractive typical Bulgarian National Revival architecture, almost all of the properties in Leshten have been bought up by Sofians.

273 This may also mean a first- or last-born child in the family; a child before sexual initiation (*Bŭlgarska*... 1994, p. 254).

Participation of clergy in such practices is somewhat surprising, especially given the fact that this particular rite proved to be the least acceptable to the Orthodox Church, as Hristo Vakarelski points out (Wakarelski [Vakarelski] 1965, p. 304). In exchange, the clergy introduced so-called *pokrŭsti/krŭstonoshe* ceremony, in which people walk in procession with a cross. Days of the Cross are held after the May and June devotions, which, too, have lost much of their popularity (cf. Wakarelski [Vakarelski] 1965, p. 304).

In the Muslim community, where religious elites were not involved in the rite, the custom was slightly different in that the Peperuda would leave a private house rather than the mosque. After that, respondents said, the rite looked the same; the girl would go from house to house in the company of other children, receiving various gifts (such as socks or handkerchiefs):

> M.L.: Could you compare those two? Because I know nothing about it. How do you [the Muslims] celebrate that, and how do you [the Christian]? Are there any differences?
>
> Woman D.: It's almost the same.
>
> Shukri: Well, I don't know. With us, they first dress up an orphan girl.
>
> D.: Yes, exactly, yes.
>
> Sh.: Then they dress her in a special costume and they go from house to house singing a song, *Sitna liyatna rositsa* [*Fine summer dew*][274].
>
> D.: Exactly.
>
> Man Sh.: They sing with her, and other girls... The whole group walks from house to house. They receive gifts. And if they collect any money, this money is given to the orphan girl. And they sing, and they wait. When the rain comes, it comes. (W, Ch; M, M, Interview 38, Leshten 2006)

Shukri adds that passers-by would catch frogs and keep them with their feet aimed downwards in another rainmaking practice (Interview 38, Leshten 2006).

Although those examples are fragmentary and do not provide a comprehensive reconstruction of the rite, I believe they are an important reconstruction attempt, especially occuring as it does in a mixed religious group.

It would have been interesting to compare their collective reconstruction with actual ethnographical observations of the rite as practiced by each of the religious groups. Particularly, it would be interesting to know whether the songs in the Muslim variant made the same kind of references to God[275] as those in the Christian variant,

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274 The song does not address God. It is a kind of incantation to bring natural bounty.

275 The songs cited by M. Arnaudov contain phrases like: "The butterfly flew away, it prayed to God: «(.) Give me, oh God, a dark cloud / may fine dew come down / may rye and *millet* produce crops / may

or would they have been modified and adapted – disappointingly, this question can be no longer answered through direct observation.

Other rites practised by both groups follow the cycle of Orthodox Christian holidays, however in different communities the same ritual practices may fall on a different holiday taking place at a similar time, coinciding with the same natural cycle of seasonal change. For instance, the custom of sweeping the house clean and burning the sweepings in front of the house to protect it from snakes, lizards and fleas is practiced in early spring, at a time when such pests are emerge from their hiding places: on Baba Marta[276] (1 March), on the Day of the Forty Martyrs of Sebaste (9 March) or Blagovets (the Feast of Annunciation, 25 March).

The Pomaks of Ribnovo sweep their houses clean and burn their rubbish on the Day of the Forty Martyrs[277], which they refer to as *Sisvet*. The name is probably derived from the name of the feast in Bulgarian, *chetirisi svettsi*[278] (where the last syllable of the word "forty" and the first syllable of the word "saints" combine to form the word *Sisvet*). Over time, the origin of this abbreviation was forgotten and is not known to its users today, including the *hodzha* of Ribnovo (Interview 10), who pointed out that the Muslims of Ribnovo were unfamiliar with the origins of the term but misinterpreted it himself as a reference to All Saints' Day (Vsi Svetii), a feast celebrated on 14 June in the Orthodox calendar (too late to hold rites connected with the early springtime stirrings of the natural world). Although the *hodzha* was trying to influence the inhabitants of Ribnovo to break off with this practice, he became nostalgic about his childhood, when his own mother celebrated the custom:

> M.L.: What about *Sisvet*?
>
> *Hodzha* 1: All Saints' Day. All the people get up in the morning. My mother used to do that, and all my sisters had to do that... I was the youngest, mother would tell my sisters to sweep everything clean, starting with the attic and ending on the ground floor, to sweep everything all the way to the entrance to get rid of the trash. The trash that wouldn't burn was thrown away. The trash that burned, it would be burnt in front of the... In the yard, or by the garden, so that the smoke that wafts through the house... To stop the vipers, the lizards, the snakes from bothering you at home. It's actually true, if you burn nothing but those sweepings those animals won't bother you in that year, and you won't come across them on meadows. (Interview 10, Ribnovo 2005)

orphans have food / the orphans, the little orphans (...)»" Bulgarian: "*Dai mi, Bozhe, temen oblak/Da zarosi sitna rosa/da se rodi zhito, proso/Da se ranyat siracheta/Siracheta, siromasi ...*" (Arnaudov 1971, p. 177).

276 This is a non-Christian holiday as Baba Marta is spring personified. According to one female Muslim informant, Baba Marta was a daughter of Adam and Hawwa (Interview 45).

277 In other towns and villages in the Rhodopes this is referred to as *Nevruz*, *Nifruz* (Vaklinovo, Sarnitsa), *Kŭrkchibuk* (Nedelino, Zhaltusha), *Mart Dukuzu* (Chakalarovo) (Popov 1994, p. 102). The same source identifies the name of the holiday in Ribnovo as *Sisvet*.

278 I am grateful to Prof. Ana Stoikova, a Bulgarian classical philologist, for pointing this out to me.

Such "unwelcome guests" are also chased away by ringing bells (or metal objects) throughout the house and yard, and by jumping over a fire. Certain formulas accompany the rites. The Turkish woman of Dabnitsa (see below) does that twice a year – on Blagovets and Gergiovden, celebrated on 6 May, at the turn of spring and summer), saying the words: *Gyule*[279]*, gyule mandalitse, ti na pole ya na bŭrdo, gyule, gyule mandalitse ti na bŭrdo, ya na pole*[280]:

> Turkish W.: people are very busy these days. Nonetheless, we still celebrate it all, write, you don't even take out your sewing needle. The day before you have to make *banitsa* with cabbage. In the morning you get up, keep the house. You take out the blankets, sprinkle them, use the mothballs and put it all away. Right, from the beginning, to this day I take a milk can. I have a fear of snakes, so I bang the can all over the house. I start with the attic, I come downstairs, banging away. I even come out of the house, I light a fire, because I saw my mother doing this. I light a fire in front of my door, and I jump over the fire a few times, saying: *Gyule, gyule mandalitse, ti na pole ya na bŭrdo, gyule, gyule mandalitse ti na bŭrdo, ya na pole*. That's what you do to drive snakes out of your house.
>
> M.L.: Do you, Christians, do the same?
>
> Man A.: We do the same thing, except that's during Blagovets.
>
> Turkish W.: Oh, I do that both on Blagovets and Gergiovden. (Turkish Woman, Muslim and Man A., Christian, Interview 45, Dabnitsa 2006)

It should be noted that this rite has a different significance for Turks then it does for Pomaks, because it is only in the former case that we are dealing with religious syncretism. The differences between the Turks and the Bulgarian Christians being more pronounced, the Turks are less intent on maintaining religious boundaries. Shohret, cited below, does not associate the word Blagovets with the Annunciation, however she treats this as a festive day on which *blago* (festive foods) are consumed. On that day, she eats *banitsa* with cabbage prepared beforehand, and she does not do any household chores.

Based on the respondents accounts, the conclusion seems to be that they celebrate the various customs and rites associated with Blagovets or *Sisvet* up to a point where they become identified as specifically Christian and contrary to their religion:

> M.L.: Do you have that holiday, *Sisvet*?
>
> F.: Yes, when *Sisvet* times I sweep the house clean, and we burn the trash in front of the house.

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279 *Güle güle!* – Turkish: goodbye, farewell.

280 Christians use similar formulas: "Children and adults bang sheets of metal and bells, and run around the yard and the house. This involves a special formula, Byagayte zhmii i gushteri. Dneska e Blagovets ("Run, snakes and lizards, it's Blagovets today") (*Kalendarni*... 2003, p. 11) or Byagayte vsichki zhmii i gushteri, na 40 razkracha ("Run, all you snakes and lizards, [and keep] forty paces away") (*Kalendarni*... 2003, p. 67).

M.L.: Why?

F.: Because in the summer you could find, say, a bug in your flour, or some kind of beetle. On Sisvet we burn [a fire] in front of the house to make sure Allah protects us from this … (W, M, Interview 12, Ribnovo 2005)

M.L.: Have you heard about a holiday called *Sisvet*?

Bula: We've been forbidden to do that…, We don't celebrate this holiday. We only have the bayrams, Arfe and Friday. Those are Muslim holidays. (W, M, Interview 13, Ribnovo 2005)

Hodzha 2: Bayram is our holiday. The first bayram, the second bayram. That's our holiday. (Interview 19, Ribnovo 2005)

Some Muslims also mentioned other days in the Orthodox Christian calendar which involved certain rites or practices. According to the *hodzha* of Ribnovo, the roots of vines should be covered with earth and dung in the period between Trifon Zarezan[281] (1 or 14 February) and Blagovets: performing such farm work after 25 March would result in a poor harvest. As the *hodzha* explains, his father adhered to this rule very strictly because it was tradition. He mentioned Christian families once living in Ribnovo, who he believes may have originated this custom:

M.L.: And what about Blagovets? What do the Muslims think about it? What is the point of that holiday?

Hodzha 1: Things related to Blagovets, that's things like… Like, this is to do with some kind of restrictions, such as those relating to vines. When you hear about Trifon Zarezan, then you have to prune [your vines – M.L.] by Blagovets, you have to be finished covering the roots. If you go and cover the roots after Blagovets, the grape harvest will be poor, things like that. This is not really about celebrating anything, it's just that some work should be performed within a certain period of time. And our people, older people, like my mother, my father, my grandfather… I remember my father a little, I was a young boy… About 14 years old, maybe 15, when he died. He didn't forbid those things, in fact he encouraged us, because this was obviously a legacy from his father… his grandparents, I don't know. And besides, many years ago there used to be… A former head of Ribnovo told me, he is an elderly man now… So, maybe there used to be some Christian families living here. Our head was a Christian, maybe all this is a legacy of that time…

M.L.: When was that?

H.M.: That was in earlier times… but I don't know anything about this. (Interview 10, Ribnovo 2005)

281 In Balkan Orthodox Christianity Trifon is worshipped as the patron saint of vines and winemakers. The saint was a vine grower and suffered an accident (he sliced his nose off with a sickle) (Popov 1994, p. 95).

The *hodzha* was not denying that his father synchronized his viticultural activity with Christian holidays, and that in doing so he was continuing an ancestral tradition. But unlike his father, who considered this sufficient grounds for performing the rite, the *hodzha* saw this criterion as immaterial. The other explanation (the influence of past Christian inhabitants of Ribnovo) is not clear: it is not clear whether this was an indigenous population which had resisted conversion to Islam or perhaps converted later than the rest of the families in Ribnovo, or perhaps they were migrants arriving from a different location. Notably, rites related to the agricultural ethos proved more long-lasting among the Pomaks than those related to Christianity. The rhythm of the agricultural rites continued to be tied to the Orthodox Christian calendar, however it should be noted that this calendar is divided into summer and winter seasons: the winter season begins on St. Dimitar's Day (26 October), and the summer season begins on Gergiovden[282] (6 May).

Rites connected with Gergiovden seem to be particularly long-lasting among the Pomaks. In Bulgaria, St. George is considered as one of Bulgaria's most important saints (*Bŭlgarska*... 1994, p. 78), a protector of shepherds and their herds. His cult in South-Eastern Europe goes back to the 5th century, where Gergiovden is considered to be on a par with, if not actually higher than, Easter. As the saying goes, "Hubav den Velikden, oshte pohubav Gergiovden" ("Easter is a beautiful day, but Gergiovden is even more beautiful") (Marinov 1994, p. 592). The holiday falls on the first day of summer, marking the start of the shepherding season.

In the words of Józef Obrębski (1905-1967), a Polish ethnographer, "As it stirs to life on St. George's night, nature reaches a pinnacle of flourishing. On that festive night nature also becomes imbued with the magical power, and mystical sense of wonder, and the adats related to St. George's Day deal primarily with the way people could harness that power for good or evil. On St. George's Day the voices of all birds become dangerous – they can break people. All plants – herbs, grasses, flowers, trees and shrubs – gain a wonderful power, healing and magical in parts, which may be passed on to people, animals, objects. On that night, all kinds of magic rites become particularly potent. For this reason, St. George's Night is the best time for engaging in practices of traditional medicine, magical or counter-magical" (Obrębski, p. 45).

Today, a blood sacrifice is made for St. George (unless the holiday falls on a Wednesday or a Friday, which are days of fasting) with the intention of securing good health. Until recently, most rites associated with this holiday were also connected with the well-being of farm animals (to boost their fertility and milk yields), but this aspect has waned in importance, at least in the Western Rhodopes. I heard that this is related to the abolition of the Shepherd's Day [*Den na Ovcharya* – my respondents claim that this was the name for the sixth of May celebrations in Communist Bulgaria].

282 Called *Hedrelez* (Turkish: *Hıdrellez*) by the Alevis. On that day the twin brothers Khidr and Ilyas meet once in the year. Khidr reigns over earth, and Ilyas reigns over water (Milcheva 2003, p. 102).

Christians and Muslims mostly associate Gergiovden with health concerns relating to oneself and to one's loved ones. The practices engaged in on that day are limited to making a *kurban* for the saint and sleeping in churches bearing his name. However, Muslims, including young ones, often remember many more rites being practised in their childhood. One of those was rolling in the morning dew before dawn on 6 May and gathering geraniums (*zdravets*) and other herbs for use in "healing" baths. There is an obvious semantic, and therefore symbolic, link between the Bulgarian name of geranium (*zdravets*) and the Bulgarian phrase "for health" (*zdrave*). Although the younger Muslims tend to reminisce about, rather than engage in, rites related to St. George's Day, they seem to talk about them with affection. The *hodzha* is no exception, even though today he is working hard to eradicate any vestiges of those rituals from the Muslim community of Ribnovo. The *hodzha* remembers healing practices performed on Gergiovden such as rolling on meadows at dawn, gathering geraniums and using them in the healing bath:

> *Hodzha* 1: As a child I didn't know about Islam. I did whatever my mother told me to do. For instance, on Gergiovden, on the evening before Gergiovden, meaning 5 May, yes on the evening of the fifth, I would get ready to make sure I could wake up around five next morning to go before sunrise and roll on meadows for health. I would roll around a little bit, and then go gather geraniums. (Interview 10, Ribnovo 2005)

Nefse, a Muslim woman from Breznitsa, still makes bundles of herbs and flowers on the eve of the holiday. She makes a separate bundle for every family member, tying a small identifying item (a bead, a coloured thread, etc.) to each bundle. Each bundle must contain an odd number of plants, and geraniums must be used (Interview 56, Breznitsa 2009).

On the same day, flower and herb bundles made by different women are carried to one place and kept the whole night in a dish filled with water. The following day the bundles are taken out, and the women sing songs of fortune-telling and good fortune (Interview 56, Breznitsa 2009).

Specific passages in each song are taken to apply to the owner of the bundle that's being picked out of water while the words are being sung. This rite is similar to *laduvane*, a wedding fortune-telling rite where flower bundles and a ring are left overnight in "silent water", and then used for fortune-telling by singing songs about marital happiness and the social standing of the married couple (*Kalendarni*... 2003, p. 46). This is how this practice is interpreted by a Christian woman of Garmen and a Turkish woman of Dabnitsa:

> Turkish W.: We used to have very nice celebrations on Ederlezi, even in my own day. We used to gather together, as girls. We would take a pot, put it under a rose bush and place objects inside, distinctive things such as bracelets, we would leave everything in the pot. Then we would cover one woman's eyes with a kerchief. She would poke around in the pot and pick out a person's item, and we were singing a song, how do you call that?... "Mŭni, mŭni, mŭnila."

M.: Fortune-telling.

T.W.: Yes. That's right. You give auguries, say, you'll get married this year, or that's what your boyfriend will be like. (W, M, Interview 45, Dabnitsa 2009)

Sofiya from Garmen mistakenly believed that the custom was only practised by Christians[283]:

S.: Right, the flower bundles, once you've made them, you put them in a vessel filled with water and leave them overnight under a rose bush. In the morning, before sunrise, we gather and we go there all together. And one of them is a "shamarika", she takes out the bundles and every woman recognises her own, and she says what's going to happen. Whether it's going to come true or not. You know, bachelor-related stuff. And on that day... She knows which bundle belongs to whom. When the fortune-telling is done, she takes the bundle. Then the next girl does the same, until all the bundles have been taken out, one for each girl. Those things are gone now...

M.L.: Was it just the Christians doing that, not the Muslims?

S.: Only the Christians. (Interview 33, Garmen 2006)

The practice of assigning a separate flower bundle to each member of the family, as Nefse does, may have evolved from this marriage fortune-telling custom, a local variation introduced in Breznitsa when girls of marriageable age (the original target group) had let the practice fall out of use.

The information about Gergiovden celebrations as shared by my respondents are fragmentary, out-of-context references to elements of certain rites. They generally identify the rites as connected with health concerns, neglecting to mention that the day is also important to shepherds and their herds: references to rites involving animals are sporadic and fail to explain the purpose of the rites, which was to prevent lactation problems and disease in cattle. The *hodzha* cited above only mentioned one health-related practice, the striking of cattle with green sticks (Interview 10, Ribnovo 2005).

This rite used to be part of the ritual in which cattle was let out to pasture before sunrise. According to a Bulgarian folklorist Tatiana Angelova Koleva, this was often a stick of red hawthorn, believed to prevent the "stealing"[284] of milk (cf. Koleva 1981, p. 52).

283 Muslims, too, use flower bundles for marriage-related fortune-telling and other purposes (Milcheva 2003, p. 104).

284 This kind of "theft" also applied to depriving cows of milk by magical means.

The Muslim woman of Ribnovo (cited below) mentions sprinkling milk over friends and unmarried young men and women swinging on swings. Although she was aware that Gergiovden was not a Muslim holiday she admitted that Muslims celebrated on that day, too:

> F.: Well, listen to me now. Gergiovden is a holiday for Christians, not for us. But our people celebrate, too. Unmarried girls swing on swings, and people pour milk over each other on Gergiovden. Maids swing on swings. That's what. (Interview 12, Ribnovo 2005)
>
> *Hodzha* 1: Then boys and girls gather throughout the day, they hang swings from large trees and they swing all day long. They eat, they drink, they celebrate.
>
> M.L.: Do Muslims and Christians celebrate together?
>
> H.M.: There are no Christians around here, but we used to celebrate that.
>
> M.L.: Even without the Christians?
>
> H.M.: Even without the Christians. (Interview 10, Ribnovo 2005)

Such statements confirm that Gergovdien practices unrelated to Christianity were performed both by Christians and Muslims. In fact, the latter often make no connection between the celebrations and St. George, or at least that was the case with some of the inhabitants of Ribnovo, who use a corrupted variant of the word, Gergiden.

The most robust Gergovdien-related custom in the area involves sleeping in churches named after St. George as a form of healing practice, which continues to be performed by Christians and Muslims alike.

5.1.2 Incubation in St. George's Church in Hadzhidimovo

The monastery of St. George in Hadzhidimovo (formerly Turkish: *Singartiya*) enjoys a special reputation among the holy sites of the Western Rhodopes as Christians and Muslims come and spend the night in the church hoping to be healed. The practice can be engaged in throughout the year, however the place attracts the highest number of pilgrims on the evening of 5 May, the night before Gergiovden, believed to be a time imbued with particular hierophantic and healing powers. With the exception of *hodzhas*[285], practically all of the people I spoke to admitted to having sought healing in that place at some point in their lives.

285 Some Orthodox priests insisted that the site is occasionally visited by *hodzhas* as well.

According to a legend narrated to me by the daughter of a former local priest, Trifon Semetchiev, the monastery was built on a field belonging to a Turkish owner after a miraculous icon of St. George was found in the ground. A chapel was built, followed by a church. The church burned down some 130 years later, but the icon was saved from the flames. Reportedly, Lyudmila Zhivkova arrived at the scene and helped procure building materials for the reconstruction. As a matter of general policy, however, the Communist government otherwise sought to obstruct the church's operations and made life difficult for the pilgrims and the local clergy (Interview 32, Hadzhidimovo 2005).

Today, the brick church remains unfinished. The church faces a courtyard flanked by a monastery providing accommodation to monks[286] and pilgrims. In the middle of the courtyard opposite the church there is a spring whose water is believed to have healing powers. I have also seen Muslims using the water for rinsing their faces.

The pilgrims arriving in this place believe that, irrespective of one's religion, healing can be obtained here from a variety of ailments both physical (paralysis, muteness, deafness, blindness and sterility) and mental[287] (madness, sleepwalking), as well as less serious problems, such as bedwetting in children.

The visitors did not know how far back in time the custom went: they explained that it was a legacy of the earlier generations, practised even under the Communist regime in Bulgaria, and that it had always been open to people of different religions.

According to custom, the decision whether to seek healing from a priest, a *hodzha* or a doctor can be resolved by means of a fortune-telling rite in which three marked needles are left overnight in a cup or a vessel filled with water; help should be sought from the party whose needle turns rusty:

> Eymi: See now, let's say I'm sick, I go to a doctor, he can't help me, I visit a *hodzha,* he can't help me either. So I go to a certain older woman, and she casts lead for me. And she says, "You take three needles, and put them in a coffee cup, just make sure the cup stands in moonlight. Put it on the windowsill and leave it sitting there overnight. The next day examine the needles, and see which one is rusty. You mark those needles [beforehand]: black thread for the doctor, white thread for the *hodzha*, red thread for the priest. Whichever needle turns rusty, that's where you need to get help. If it says "priest", you seek help from the priest. (W, M, Interview 57, Hadzhidimovo 2009)

I heard that explanation several times from different people. When the needle with the red thread turns rusty, this can be interpreted as a suggestion that a priest should be consulted (the priest will write down a prayer on a piece of paper, which is then worn around the neck as a talisman[288]), or that one should get a night's "healing

286 Only a few monks live in the monastery on a permanent basis.

287 St. George and St. Michael specialize in curing madness (cf. Hasluck 2005, p. 692). In my field research I heard many stories of people cured of insanity in Hadzhidimovo.

288 The grandson of one of my female Muslim pilgrim was wearing this kind of talisman around his neck during the interview.

sleep" in a church. The threads are not essential, needles of different lengths can also be used:

> Temenuzhka: You take three needles and you name them. The first one's for the priest, the second's for a *hodzha*, in any place you like.
>
> M.L.: Meaning, it has to be an actual name of a priest or a *hodzha*?
>
> Eymi: Yes. Exactly. You can take a bigger needle and a smaller one, or you can mark them with threads to tell them apart. In the evening you put them in water in some container. You put them in, and in the morning they turn rusty. Whichever needle turns rusty, that's where you need to go. (W, M, Interview 58, Hadzhidimovo 2009)

As part of participant observation in Hadzhidimovo on 5-6 May 2009 I tried to establish the exact practices which are engaged in, or avoided by, the Muslims. According to my observation they did not leave the church for the *vechernya*[289], however they just listened without taking an active part. They did not make the sign of the cross when the Christians did, they did not bow in prayer or pray aloud, and they did not join in the singing of songs. On the other hand, they chose to refrain from attending the liturgy held on 6 May (this observation was confirmed by Metropolitan Natanail and Archimandrite Grigoriy).

The difference between the Vespers and the liturgy on the following day is that the *vechernya* does not include the taking of Communion, which is the centerpiece of the liturgy on 6 May. This would suggest that Muslims avoid the liturgy because they realize it celebrates an event rejected by Islam, namely the death on the Cross and resurrection of Christ (Lubanska 2009b).

Inasmuch as possible I tried to ask Muslims about their motivations and ritual practices in Hadzhidimovo. However, it was not possible to interview everyone, and my choice of respondents was rather arbitrary, based as it was on the criterion of attire[290], by which I identified the Muslims in the crowd. I did not record all of my interviews. On occasion, I would quickly approach someone engaged in a ritual practice (such as a Muslim woman offering a lamb before the icon of St. George) and ask a few quick questions, writing the answers in a notebook. The interviews in Hadzhidimovo tended to be the shortest of my conversations in this book, some of them lasting for about five minutes. When asked about their motivations in coming to Hadzhidimovo, one Muslim woman mentioned the human condition, where one God stands above all:

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289 An evening prayer in the Eastern rite, equivalent to Catholic Vespers. See *Glossary of Religious Terms*.

290 Although I was mostly able to spot the Muslims in the crowd during my field research in Hadzhidimovo, this sampling method was not fully reliable, as some of them were Turks from Dabnitsa or visitors from a different region (like the Central Rhodopes), and not local Bulgarian-speaking Muslims. Also, not all Muslims, especially younger ones, wear the traditional Muslim costume.

> E.: We are all the same. God made us this way, some are small, some are big, slim or fat, or lame. You need religion to keep harmony among people. Not like when each person only thinks about themselves. (W, M, Interview 58, Hadzhidimovo 2009)

Others explained that they slept (Bulgarian: *prespivane*) in churches when they suspected that they have been afflicted by Christian/"giaour" *jinn*:

> Sh.: What's a person to do when a giaour dzhin has got you [she is arguing with a *hodzha*, saying that in such cases there is no other choice but to get help from non-coreligionists – M.L.] (W, M, Interview 17, Ribnovo 2005)

Sleeping in churches seems to be the most important of all the healing practices. Almost all of my respondents had an unwavering faith in its effectiveness. According to some, the practice must be performed on the night of 5 May for three consecutive years in order to be effective. Some notice that *hodzhas* are currently trying to ban the practice:

> Fatme: The *hodzha* won't let us go there. The *hodzha* says that coming to that place does us no good at all.
>
> M.L.: Why is that?
>
> F.: He says we should only pray to Allah. Pray only to Allah. (Interview 12, Ribnovo 2005)

Frederik W. Hasluck traced the origins of sleeping in churches to the fact that pilgrims often had no alternative accommodation, and the fact that healing powers were often considered to be at their most effective on the night before a holiday (Hasluck 2005, p. 694). Hasluck calls the practice "incubation": "in the wider sense ... incubation[291] means sleeping in a holy place with the intention of receiving some desired communication from the *numen* supposed to inhabit the holy place" (Hasluck 2005, p. 689). Those communications included healing, but also prophecy[292] or conceiving children[293] (e.g. women sleeping in the cave of the Seven Sleepers in Tarsus) (Hasluck 2005, p. 268). Some of my female respondents said they refrained from falling asleep in churches for fear of missing their prophecy.

The members of clergy I spoke to, the Metropolitan of Nevrokop (Gotse Delchev) (Interview 62) and Archimandrite Grigoriy (Interview 27) trace this custom back to night vigils during which the faithful used to pray to God and sing akathists[294]. In

291 F.W. Hasluck wrote that incubation was equally frequent in Muslim and Christian holy places (Hasluck 2005, p. 267).

292 To receive prophecy from Amfiaros, incubation was practised in ancient times in Oropos and other places (Hasluck 2005, p. 268).

293 I regard infertility cures to be part of the broader category of healing.

294 Liturgical hymns dedicated to Christian saints during which the congregation remains standing.

the absence of competent leadership, the vigils turned with time into the practice of sleeping in the church.

Gergiovden is a popular time for incubation not only in Hadzhidimovo, but also in other local churches named after St. George or other saints.

This practice is not limited to Bulgaria, and can be found in other countries of South-Eastern Europe. Glenn Bowman, who conducted his research in Macedonia, noted that the day after Gergiovden Muslims came to the Church of St. Nicholas in Makedonski Brod with its tomb of the Muslim holy figure of Hidir Baba or Khidr, the hero of stories reminiscent of the Christian stories of St. Nicholas (Bowman 2010, p. 201). Some engage in the practice for healing purposes, others do it in order to venerate the saint (Bowman 2010, p. 206). The Polish anthropologist, Karolina Bielenin-Lenczowska mentions another shared place of cult in Macedonia, the monastery of St. Jovan Bigorski, in which Muslims as well as Christians have been known to experience healing (Bielenin-Lenczowska 2009, p. 49–50). Healings of people practising other religions are a popular element of local legends about miraculous places.

***

I consider the Muslim practice of incubating in St. George's Church in Hadzhidimovo as a symptom of superficial syncretism in that it does not involve adapting the cult of St. George or Muslim participation in the church ritual. Although the Muslims do take part in some of the practices, they always emphasize that such involvement is selective and incomplete. I agree with Glen Bowman[295] that we are dealing with sharing certain practices or locations rather than with true syncretism, especially given that it does not involve changes to religious identity (cf. Bowman 2010, p. 208).

In the light of my material, Muslims have a sense of a distinct religious identity. They discuss it openly, and it leads them to limit their participation in Christian rites. In some cases, the boundaries defining things which are "not done" were fluid, and seemingly self-imposed by individuals. Where one person might categorically reject a certain practice as being incompatible with Islam, another person might engage in it, believing it to be similar to certain Islamic rites. This is the case of the *kurban* offered by a Muslim woman in Hadzhidimovo on Gergiovden:

> M.L.: Do you pray in front of Sv. Georgi?
>
> Woman A.: Well, we do pray... U-huh. All of your Bulgarians leave their *kurban* there, cooking the *kurban*, eating, drinking.
>
> Man H.: She's referring to us... You're confusing everything... You're in too much of a rush [rebuking Aksime – M.L.]. We don't do any of this. We go, we sleep, we pay, we leave a lev each.

295 Bowman's research was conducted in a different location and a different mixed holy site, but his observations are in many ways analogous to mine as described in this book.

A.: And I make a *kurban*. (Muslims, Interview 29, Satovcha 2006)

While the Muslims do not took part in the liturgy or receive Communion, ritual-like behaviours such as like kissing the icons or lighting candles remain a matter of dispute to, at least some of the Muslims:

M.L.: When you come there, do you light candles?

Man H.: No, we don't light candles, no...

Woman A.: We did.

H.: But we shouldn't. You shouldn't light candles. You shouldn't, no ...

A.: We have white candles. Yours are yellow. Ours are white.

M.L.: What do you mean, white?

A.: White...

M.L.: You light candles...?

H.: Thick ones. Same as your people.

A.: There was a time when we had no electricity in the mosque, and we did that.

M.L.: When was that?

H.: But that was for lighting, and these are used in churches.

M.L.: And did you bring those white candles for Sv. Georgi?

A.: We did. (Muslims, Interview 29, Satovcha 2006)

The fact that Muslims do not light candles does not mean that they do not bring them into the church:

D.: We don't light them. We mustn't do that.

M.L.: So you don't?

D.: So we didn't. We don't do that sort of thing. We would leave them unlit. Just so they're there. (W, M, Interview 4, Ribnovo 2005)

Some of the Muslim visitors claimed they never kissed icons, others admitted to making an exception for certain icons, mostly those depicting religious figures recognized in Islam, such as 'Isa and Mary/Maryam (local Muslim variant: Miryem, Turkish: Meryem),

before which some Muslims may light candles or leave coins. Kissing the icon of St. George or lighting candles in front of it remains problematic. Some of my female respondents argued that St. George was one of the acceptable icons, others disagreed:

M.L.: Do you pray here?

Eymi: Well, we are Muslims.

M.L.: You just sleep here?

E.: Oh, yes. We come to Miryem [as pronounced in the local dialect – M.L.] That's right. We kiss her and we stay there.

M.L.: The icon... Is it just Miryem?

Temenuzhka: Oh, yes, you need to kiss other icons as well, you need to kiss them.

M.L.: And do you light candles?

E.: And you might light a candle. Lighting candles is not quite all right in our case, but those who want to, let them do what they like.

M.L.: But you don't kiss the icon of Sv. Georgi?

T.: No. Because we're Muslims. (W, M, Interview 58, Hadzhidimovo 2009)

Woman 7: We light candles.

M.L.: Before all the icons or...?

K.: Before Sv. Georgi and Miryem.

M.L.: Only those two?

K.: Us Muslims, yes, I don't know about the others ..

M.L.: You light candles. Do you kiss the icons or not?

K.: Those who want to kiss them, do.

M.L.: Is it ever the case that Muslims who leave candles also kiss icons?

K.: Those who want to kiss them, do. (W, M. Interview 60, Hadzhidimovo 2009)

Muslims lighting candles in church had also been seen by Archimandrite Grigoriy, who spent several years working in Hadzhidimovo (Interview 27). Some of my Christian female respondents reported that their Muslim female friends would sometimes ask them to light a candle "for health" on their behalf.

Unlike Christians, the Pomaks refrain from making the sign of the cross (nor do they ever cross themselves in front of icons), and they do not bring loaves of bread into the church for blessing. Christians put such loaves containing slips of paper with prayer intentions in front of the iconostasis, and then hand them out in front of the church as part of a healing ritual. Like Christians, Muslims bring into the church clothes of friends or relatives who could not come to the monastery. It would appear that the clothes - as with people - can "incubate" in churches, and are believed to have a healing power when worn after spending a night inside the church. As far as I know, the Muslims keep such clothes with them instead of placing them in front of icons or hanging them from a crucifix. Clothes, as well as household objects and money, can also be brought as gifts. One Muslim woman I met said that those were gifts for St. George:

> Woman A.: Well, then. When we went to Sveti Georgi, I took a shirt for him, I took some socks for him...
>
> Man H.: Yes. Household items, some clothes. You can take some money as well. But candles are not permitted to Muslims. (Muslims, Interview 29, Satovcha 2005)

Popular votive gifts include towels or even bedsheets that have been slept in in a church.

Although some Muslims do make a connection between Hadzhidimovo and St. George, the saint seems to be of secondary importance to Muslims, who are motivated primarily by a belief in the efficacy of the healings taking place in the church.

Only Christians shared stories which were specifically about St. George. The Muslims did not invoke any Muslim saint to explain the healing powers of the place, even though such dual-cult practices are characteristic of many holy places in South-Eastern Europe (cf. Hasluck 2005; Bowman[296] 2010, Hayden 2002, 2013). In view of Hasluck's findings, potential candidates could include Khidr and Ilyas together with Sari Saltik, with whom St. George was identified. However, only two of my Muslim respondents referred to the holiday by its Muslim name, Ederlezi (etymologically derived from the names of Khidr and Ilyas, two Muslim saints), explaining that the holiday fell on the same day as Gergiovden, or that it was actually the Muslim name for Gergiovden:

> I.: In Islam, two men are mentioned, Hizŭr [Khidr – M.L.] and Ilyas. According to some stories, they met on that day. Theologically speaking, they are men, because there are no saints in Islam. There are people who have lived good religious lives, and the Highest has raised them a step

296 Bektashi Muslims who visit the church of St. Nicholas near Makedonski Brod claim it to be the final resting place of their own saint, Khidr Baba. The stories of Khidr Baba are similar to the Christian stories of St. Nicholas. According to archaeological data, a Muslim *teke* (a Bektashi monastery) used to occupy the current location of the monastery (Bowman 2010, p. 201).

> higher. They don't die, they live in a different dimension. The same applies to Isa, Jesus. According to Islam, Jesus didn't die, he wasn't crucified. He was raised to the second heaven. (Muslim, Interview 55, Breznitsa 2009)
>
> Angel: Okay, so why is it called Ederlez?
>
> Turkish W.: Because everything turns green. Winter ends, and spring comes. (Muslim, W, Interview 45, Dabnitsa 2006)

However, beyond this fragmentary information such statements failed to contribute more to my research. There were no stories about the two Muslim saints or their potential connection with the healings at Hadzhidimovo. There seems to be no symbolic rivalry over the figure of the saint or the sanctity of the holy place, probably because the Muslims visiting the monastery are Sunnis, not Bektashis. Unlike the latter, who recognize a rich pantheon of Islamic saints similar to that of Christianity, the Sunnis only recognize those figures which are mentioned in the Qur'an (like 'Isa or Maryam, but not St. George). Unlike the Bektashis, who are receptive to the idea of there being many ways to salvation (a belief which results in a more syncretic attitude towards other religions),[297] the Sunnis believe that salvation can only be achieved inside Sunni Islam. In the case of Hadzhidimovo, I suppose Muslims are less interested in St. George than in the healing properties of the location itself – the popularity of the place depends predominantly on its reputation for producing healings:

> M.L.: Generally speaking, do you believe in Sveti Georgi?
>
> Woman 5: We do, how could we not? They are one and the same for Muslims and Christians. We don't know exactly who Sveti Georgi is. (Muslims, Interview 57, Hadzhidimovo 2009)

This indifference to the figure of St. George does not apply equally to all Muslims, some of whom personally offer lambs in front of his icon displayed in front of the entrance of the church. Importantly, getting healing sleep in the church and offering lambs are seen as two different things. As one Muslim woman explained, "That depends on the promise you've made... I promised to offer a lamb. Somebody else might have promised to spend the night here" (unrecorded interview). Those unable to offer a lamb of their own can make a symbolic donation to the church, usually 10 levs, asking for the intention to be written down, and then offer a lamb previously offered by another person. Such lambs are kept in a small pen in the church courtyard, looked after by specially appointed men who give out lambs to people who have made donations. When the lamb has been offered to the icon, it is returned and put back in the pen, to be given to another "donor". When the lamb is being offered, another man holds

297 Although, as I have mentioned above, they often treat it as an element in a strategy aimed at getting new converts.

its head, making it touch the icon St. George (specifically, St. George's horse) three times. When I asked about the meaning of offering a lamb to St. George, the people I asked explained that they did this for healing purposes: "If you offer something to St. George, he might give you health in return". This suggests that the rite operates on the universal principle of *do ut des* as described by Marcel Mauss.

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According to Robert M. Hayden, interactions taking place in a holy place between vistors of different religions are peaceful until one group is convinced of its dominance or both are subject to an overriding power (Hayden 2013, p. 324; 2002; 2014). However, disturbances to this power relationship provoke a sense of threat or even hostility in the other group sharing the place, which may become appropriated or destroyed (Hayden 2002, p. 205; 2013, p. 324, Hayden, Walker 2013, p. 402;). As Hayden writes, "Obviously if people are living intermingled they 'tolerate' each other, in the sense of not trying to drive each other away. Yet this does not necessarily mean that they thereby have a 'tradition of tolerance' in which they respect each other's beliefs. They may instead be constrained from expressing hostility against each other" (Hayden 2013, p. 323). Hayden refers to this phenomenon as "antagonistic tolerance", derived from the Lockean negative concept of "enduring the presence of the other but not embracing it as long as one group is clearly dominant over others" (Hayden, Walker 2013, p. 402). This kind of tolerance is a product of necessity, underpinned by constant vigilance which leads to acts of violence as soon as the power relationship gets thrown off its former balance.

Hayden writes that his research model is inspired by his reading of Hasluck and "explains long-term patterns of relationship between members of groups which identify themselves and each other as Self and Other communities, differentiated primarily on the basis of religion, residing in close proximity or even intermingled but rarely intermarrying" (Hayden, Walker 2013, p. 401). This is a thesis I cannot entirely agree with, unless we replace the term "antagonistic tolerance" with Hayden's original and subsequently discarded coinage, "agonistic tolerance"[298] (Hayden 2002, 2013). The concept of agonistic tolerance implies two aspects of coexistence which become noticeable in a religiously mixed environment: 1) agonicity or rivalry between religious groups over prestige and recognition[299], and, less obviously but more poignantly, 2) agony, in the sense of a reminder that the religious tolerance developed by coexisting groups should never be taken for granted and, given the wrong geopolitical circumstances, might easily come to an end with disastrous consequences. Muslims

298 I wish to thank Prof. Robert M. Hayden for an inspiring exchange of correspondence in which we discussed this problem (21 and 22 October 2014).

299 Without this recognition, Charles Taylor rightly points out, it is impossible to discover one's own identity. This process is always a product of negotiation and dialogue, "partly overt, partly internalized, with others" (Taylor 1991, p. 47).

and Christians in the Rhodopes appear to be aware of this possibility when they share stories of their past conflicts (namely the massacres occurring at the turn of the 19th and 20th century). Many of their behaviors, such as the apparently syncretic religious practices or good relations between neighbours, are largely calculated to maintain that awareness. Tolerance is not a given: it is a task requiring care and committment on both sides. The term "agonistic tolerance" is also preferable to "antagonistic tolerance" in that it is more inclusive: it does not presuppose a negative affect towards the Other but rather a more general attitude of social actors in a multiconfessional milieu struggling to maintain religious autonomy. Moreover, agonistic relations between religions may also occur between groups which tolerate each other in Mill's sense of "embracing the Other" (Hayden 2013, p. 323; Hayden, Walker 2013, p. 400).

For instance, the dervish custodians and administrators of "holy places" described by Hasluck did not promote antagonistic tolerance. The takeover of Christian religious sites was an obvious statement of dominance, but that does not imply that their tolerance and recognition of Christianity were insincere, especially since their pro-syncretic religious doctrine treated Christianity as one of the ways to salvation (Hayden 2013, p. 323).

In my opinion, the term "antagonistic tolerance" needlessly restricts the range of emotions and scenarios characterizing interactions in a mixed religious environment. Unlike antagonism, which presupposes hostility, agonicity can be fueled by various forms of social sentiment. I agree with Hayden that the nature of such agonicity can be fruitfully studied by examining the phenomenon of "competitive sharing" in shared holy sites, which should be treated as "indicators of political dominance, or challenges to it" (Hayden 2013a, p. 413). At the same time, our analyses should not disregard exceptions and atypical situations. How can the concept of antagonistic tolerance account for a situation in which Muslims make financial contributions to build a church (a practice known in the Ottoman Empire as *waqf*)? My fieldwork in Bulgaria yielded many stories of Turkish donators who funded the construction of churches to express gratitude for miraculous healings, or graves of Turks buried in a Christian monastery. Obviously, such stories cannot always be relied on as straightforward historical evidence, but they do raise concerns about the accuracy of modelling religious dynamics according to the concept of antagonistic tolerance.

In this context it is worth mentioning another writer on this subject, Galina Valtchinova, who studies the religious cult in Krastova Gora in Bulgaria. Valtchinova points out that the sharing of a holy place by different religious groups is possible "as long as the unmediated contact with the divine prevails and is experienced as an inclusive moment ... But the place regularization – and especially the introduction or multiplication of institutional intermediaries – is a step toward the exclusion of the other" (Valtchinova 2012, p. 87). Glenn Bowman's most recent publications seem to be develop similar ideas, emphasizing the influence of the institutional religious authorities on the poetics of holy places: "Here too the role of religious authorities – and those who claim to be religious authorities – in various sites differs widely,

and can – sometimes depending on the respect accorded them, or not, by local populations – either open sites to diversity ... or purge them of all but those they deem orthodox (Bowman 2012, p. 5).

These insights seem accurate. Much depends on the attitude of concrete religious elites towards syncretic religious practices, including the cult of shared holy places. After all, elites tend to be specialists in cultural objectivisation. It is worth asking, do such elites share a uniform worldview? Who is the significant Other in opposition to whom they define themselves? Where do their ideological inspirations come from? How do geopolical changes affect their attitudes towards non-coreligionists? I believe that it is more promising to take a closer look at religious elites than to look for a universal model[300] to explain relations between religious groups who recognize the same holy places. In the case of the Western Rhodopes it seems that the elite representing "Adat Islam" favors it, or at least find a precedent which warrants it; elites connected with "Salafi Islam", who shape their religious identity in opposition to Ottoman and Christian influence, tend to view them unfavorably and have an anti-syncretic attitude.

5.2 "Salafi Islam"

The term "Salafi Islam" is not an emic category: Muslims in the Rhodopes use the term "pure Islam" (*chist islyam)* instead, thus essentializing Islam as a certain ideal form of belief and religious practice, free from heterodoxy and religious syncretism. In their opinion, "pure Islam" is the form of Islam practised in the seventh century, whose essence remains enshrined in the Qur'an and the Sunnah; today, this form of Islam is adhered to most closely in Saudi Arabia, and can be adapted locally in Bulgaria. According to Salafi-oriented Muslims, the same form of Islam should be practised worldwide. They tend to dismiss "Adat Islam", a form of belief which they wish to reform by purging it of accretions contrary to the Sunnah, which they referred to as *bid'ah*[301]. Negative attitudes of Salafi Muslims towards liberal culture seem to play a major formative role in the emergence of "Salafi Islam".

5.2.1 Attitudes Towards "Adat Islam"

Salafi Muslims in the Western Rhodopes do not believe in many paths to salvation in Allah, claiming instead that "pure Islam" offers the only way to achieve salvation.

300 Although admittedly it is tempting to accept Hayden's category of competitive sharing as universally applicable to places of dual cult of stains in religiously mixed areas.

301 Introducing new principles, innovations to Islam (Danecki 1997, p. 52).

The attitudes of young *hodzhas* towards religious syncretism are reminiscent of the German clergy in the 17th and 18th centuries, who saw syncretism as a dangerous blend of pure tradition and external impurities. In this light, the *hodzhas* perceive all religions and traditions other than the ideal form of Islam as contaminations resulting from religious syncretism. As Charles Stewart notes, "wherever syncretism occurs, or has occurred, it is usually accompanied by a parallel discourse which might be termed meta-syncretic: the commentary, and registered perceptions of [social – M.L.] actors as to whether amalgamation has occurred and whether this is good or bad" (Stewart 2005, p. 282). In simpler terms, syncretism provokes a discussion among religious elites. In this section I give an account of the specific aspects of this discussion among the local *hodzhas* and educated Muslims.

According to this group, "Adat Islam" contains many accretions which are alien Islam. This attitude, which goes against the Hanafi school of Islam popular in the Ottoman Empire, is reminiscent of Protestants objections to the corrupting excesses of folk Catholicism. They are critical of what they perceive as a number of errors in "Adat Islam" corrupting the Sunnah[302], i.e. the form of religious practice taught by the prophet Muhammad. They are similarly critical of other forms of Islam which depart from their understanding of the religion, such as Sufi brotherhoods.

This attitude is more characteristic of Wahhabi Islam, with an understanding of Islam so narrow that its adherents "would not even consider Islam's mystics or other sects to be proper Muslims" (Ahmed 2007, p. 71).

The elites which shape "Salafi Islam" criticized the post-Ottoman nature of "Adat Islam", arguing that it has been shaped by traditions passed down unthinkingly from generation to generation[303], often departing from their narrow vision of Islamic orthodoxy:

> *Hodzha* 1: Back then [in the times of the Prophet Muhammad – M.L.] Muslims were very devoted to Allah. Today things are very different. There are more Muslims who are religious as a matter of tradition, not conviction. These are two very different things, to be a Muslim out of conviction or because you inherited the religion. Two different things. Here in Ribnovo, you might say that seventy or eighty per cent of the people obey the tradition. My mum is a Muslim, and I am a Muslim, but this is far removed from the proper form of Islam. (Interview 10, Ribnovo 2005)

Salafi Muslims believe that their religious practices are rooted in a tradition which is far more ancient than those of the older generation in the Western Rhodopes because it survives unchanged since the times of the prophet Muhammad[304]. Consequently,

302 Which serves as a supplement to the *farz*, or religious commandments given by Allah.

303 Some anthropologists adopt a simiar perspective. As El-Zein notes, some "anthropologists tend to reduce local practice to superstition and syncretism that distort the assumed pure essence of the religion" (cited in: Varisco 2005, p. 151).

304 Obviously, this conviction is part of a certain imagined tradition on which Deoband Islam is based.

they would like to see their tradition replace the *adats* in the local community. They compare Muhammad to a mirror in which all Muslims can see their reflection:

> *Hodzha* 1: Because Muhammad is our mirror, there is nobody else. There is no imam, no Islamic scholar who can be a mirror to the Muslims. The Prophet Muhammad is our mirror. And we must be like him in terms of how we serve with our bodies, how we behave, how we say our prayers. We have do things like he did them. (Interview 10, Ribnovo 2005)

According to Sunni Islam, the Sunnah, which together with the Qur'an forms the legitimate and normative source of faith, comprises all of the teachings (hadiths) and practices of Muhammad:

> *Hodzha* 3: I can add something about *abdest*. One day when the Prophet was doing his abdest, he said, "Allah told me to do *abdest*". And he showed how to do it. The second time he performed the abdest twice. When he washed the parts of his body twice he said, "This is how you perform the abdest, the reward for which is double". And when he washed them the third time... Meaning, three times, he said, "This is the *abdest* of *peygambers* and of all the Prophets, for which the reward shall be greatest". Meaning, he showed people how to perform abdest.
>
> M.L.: And Muhammad was shown that by Dzhibrail?
>
> *Hozdha* 3: Of course. He showed him many things. How to say the prayers, how to perform the *abdest*. He corrected his mistakes and listen to him learning the Qur'an. In every Ramadan month[305], once in every year, he came during the month of Ramadan and listened to him studying the Qur'an. And he corrected his mistakes if there were any problems. (Interview 17, Ribnovo 2005)

The reform-minded *hodzhas* contrast the local form of Islam, which they perceive as "corrupt", with the Islam practised in Saudi Arabia, allegedly a perfect reconstruction of the original religious practices of the prophet Muhammad:

> *Hodzha* 1: But the Arabs have a different order from us, and we realize that, and many young people realize that because they read books, but we can't introduce this to the older people because they don't have this knowledge, and we might end up with contradictions on our hands. (Interview 10, Ribnovo 2005)

Adapting Arabic models to a Bulgarian setting might be seen as a form of religious syncretism, a problem I only mention briefly and in passing because the focus of the book is on the processes of religious synthesis between Islam and Orthodox Christianity in the Western Rhodopes.

305 Muslims in the Rhodopes rarely used the Arabic term "Ramadan", usually preferring the Persian-Turkish word "Ramazan".

Similar processes have been observed in different parts of the world, e.g. by Mariane Ferme in the Mende community in Kpuawala (Sierra Leone), where one of the imams after making a pilgrimage to Mecca "he had worked to make religious and ritual practices in Kpuawala conform to his ideal of 'good' Muslim behavi[ou]r in the larger Islamic world, and particularly in what he saw as its conceptual and spatial centre – 'Mecca'" (Ferme 1994, p. 28). This means that Muslim religious elites in the Rhodope Mountains are not alone in their ambition to unify Islam worldwide. The "Salafi Islam" imposed by the Muslim elites introduces a level of problematic complexity to the relationship between Islam and the local traditions. Certain practices, once regarded by the community as integral to its religious life, are now deemed worthless, and tradition is made to clash with religion. And conversely, the elites see tradition as an accretion of pagan or non-Muslim rituals obstructing local adoption of true Islam as practised in Mecca:

> M.L.: Right. If you could explain... What do you mean by shamanism? In what sense do you use that word?
>
> *Hodzha* 6: It's paganism. Paganism.
>
> M.L.: Right, so it's one and the same thing. These two words can be used interchangeably?
>
> H.6: Yes.
>
> M.L.: And here in this area, in Satovcha, other any Muslims..., Other any Muslims who lapse into paganism?
>
> H.6: Yes. For instance, casting lead is paganism.
>
> M.L.: And making *muskas* [Turkish: muska – M.L.][306], isn't that the same thing?
>
> H.6: It's almost the same thing. Amulets, *muskas*, it's the same thing. Shamanistic stuff.
>
> M.L.: Meaning, the *nanas*[307], they'd use that kind of thing? But you said you did that, too?
>
> H.6: No, not the *muskas*. I do things which are compatible with Allah's commandments. I do what the *rasul*[308] [Turkish: *resul*, Arabic: *rasul* –M.L.] did. (Interview 30, Satovcha 2005)

When asked, the same *hodzha* admitted that there were Muslims who practised Christian customs, which he considered shamanistic, but he was unwilling to discuss the subject further. As he said:

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306 An amulet or amulets, also referred to in the Rhodopean dialect as *amaliyka/amala*.

307 Traditional female Muslim healers.

308 An emissary of Allah sent to proclaim monotheism.

> *Hodzha* 6: Well, I don't know exactly. I can't tell you because I have a strict framework, and I'm trying to stick to it and not to go outside of it. (Interview 30, Satovcha 2005)

This "framework" is "pure" Sunni Islam. Salafi Muslims seem alienated from the "Adat Islamic" lifestyle and from the local traditional religious culture, and alienation produced by the secularisation and religious persecution under the Communist regime in Bulgaria which created a rupture in the transmission of local religious traditions. In Communist times, such Muslims were mostly religiously uneducated, and what little they knew was transmitted orally by the earlier generations. The traditions fell by the wayside or were continued in secret. Some of those Muslims were party members under Communism, when they claimed to be atheists.

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It seems that those Muslims who practised "Salafi Islam" make a hasty judgement in juxtaposing the local traditional Islam, as taught by the older *hodzhas*, and the "pure Islam" which they teach and consider more compatible with the truths revealed to the Muslims. Upon closer examination, many of the narratives functioning in "Adat Islam" cannot be dismissed as mere "old wives' tales"spun by the local culture[309]. On the contrary, many such narratives are analogous to the lives of prophets recognized in Sunni Islam (*qisas al-anbiya*). Although written lives of the prophets would seem to be a fitting kind of text for the religious elites, they are not unfamiliar to the young *hodzhas* she received their religious education not only in Bulgaria but also often in Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Macedonia or reject. In common with other representatives of "Salafi Islam", their teaching invokes solely the Qur'an and the hadiths. When I discussed this with one of my respondents, he agreed with me and admitted that the stories told by an old *hodzha*, which he used to dismiss as "fairytales", turned out to be long hadiths and considerable feats of memory (Interview 55, Breznitsa 2009).

However, this did not affect his overall opinion about the educational standards among the Muslim elites in the Western Rhodopes. According to Isa, quality religious education was available until 1913, when the local lands belonged to the Ottoman Empire and the *hodzhas* were trained in Istanbul. For him, the period 1913–1990 was marked by religious ignorance, when the *hodzhas* did not even understand the texts they were reading in mosques (Interview 55, Breznitsa 2009).

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309 Even though the status of the oral tradition is lower than that of scriptural narratives contained in the Qur'an, the Torah or the New Testament, it should be borne in mind that holy scriptures are nothing but codified oral tradition or codified folklore (Dundes 1999, p. 12). Also, "people raised in a culture dominated by the oral tradition, even if they never read the Bible, may have a fuller understanding of its symbolism than those who got to know it through writing. This can be explained by the specific nature of oral transmission with its dominance of imagery over concepts and synthetic thinking over analytic thinking, the former being a natural environment for religious symbolism" (Zowczak 2000, p. 7, translated from Polish).

Another person to draw attention to this period of falling standards in Muslim religious education was the Blagoevgrad Regional mufti, Aydin Mohamed:

> Mufti: I mean, the best way to learn religion is [to learn it] from people who studied it themselves. I mean, for one hundred years the people in Bulgaria had no access to information, they just passed on whatever they'd learned from their grandparents. They didn't study, for instance, it wasn't like they learned separately about the different part of Islam. They didn't sit down to learn something, so if you want information about Islam in the authentic sense, the things in the Qur'an, you must look for those [people – M.L.] who studied it somewhere. And if you want to hear stories, legends etc., then you should look for older people. Or if you're interested in superstition, legend, if you want people to tell you fairy stories about Scheherazade, then it's the older people you want. (Interview 18, Ribnovo 2005)

My respondents in this group perceive the form of Islam promoted by the younger *hodzhas* as more adequate, and criticize "Adat Islam" for its syncretic approach[310] to the local traditions and for its heterodox nature:

> I.: That's how I know that there are certain similarities with the sayings of the *hodzhas*. We might say that the difference between the older *hodzhas* and the newer ones is that the new ones are trying to make sure things are done properly. To make sure everything is as it should be. Whereas the older ones, they have this, how shall I put it, it's a bit like the dervishes of the past. He goes into a village, lives the Islamic way,[311] sees their traditions and starts to cultivate them, make them part of Islam and talks to people about Islam. (M, M, Interview 55, Breznitsa 2009)

The young local religious elites generally have a patronizing attitude towards "Adat Islam", dismissing it as provincial. Older members of the community unwilling to reject their tradition are seen as particularly problematic: the younger elites realize that it is not possible, or even advisable, to abolish all of the *adats*. Consequently, they focus their efforts on educating the faithful about the threats of religious syncretism. The main idea is to achieve a renewed form of local Islam where the Muslims refrain from practising the holidays of other religions and, in time, of rituals amounting to *bid'ah*. In terms of non-Muslim holidays, Gergiovden seems to be the biggest problem for the *hodzhas*. To eradicate this holiday, the *hodzhas* point out the links between the holiday and St. George, a connection which the *hodzha* believes escapes the faithful (at least in Ribnovo), who use a corrupted form of the holiday's name, *Gergiden*, a meaningless word which obscures the connection to the Christian saint. Instead, the holiday is associated with the beginning of summer, and is therefore seen as traditional/*adat* rather than religious:

310 The belief of Salafi Muslims that they are free from syncretic tendency is obviously misleading: by adapting the model of Islam taught in the madrasas for a local context they are engaging in a syncretic effort of a different kind.

311 The meaning of this statement is not clear.

> *Hodzha* 1: There's just one date that's without question celebrated by some of the people in Ribnovo, and that's Gergiovden. They've renamed it to Gergiden, but in truth this is Gergiovden. Some people say, "we used to do that on Gergiovden in the past, we would let our sheep out to pasture"... and so on. I don't know the details, I'm not involved with such things ... So I tell him, "It's not Gergi den, it's Gergiovden". "So that means it's Gergiovden?!" You see, they're inadequate. He has this idea... because the word is corrupted, he has a different idea. (Interview 10, Ribnovo 2005)

The *hodzhas* discuss the problem of Muslims celebrating non-Muslim holidays in special sermons in which they discourage such practices, branding them as *shirk*, the sin of idolatry. They use a variety of approaches, for instance they argue that it is pointless to engage in less important practices where the truly important rites connected with the holiday take place in the church and are alien to Muslims:

> *Hodzha* 1: When I told them about Gergiovden, right, I... In the mosque I would give them whole lectures on the subject, talking specifically about those things, and people saw sense, they realized it made no logical sense. If you don't go to church, you don't practice the most important part. You only use the holiday, but the most important part is to go there and join in... uuum... Like the Christians do in church, to light a candle and pray... they have those procedures of theirs. They [the Muslims – M.L.] don't do that, but they celebrate the elementary, less important part. That's a mistake. (Interview 10, Ribnovo 2005)

As shown in the previous section, it is not quite true that Muslims take no part in church rituals (some of them light candles and kiss the icons at Hadzhidimovo). However, the *hodzha* tries to present the holiday as an element of Christian cult, which Muslims should reject wholesale as idolatrous. The division proposed by the *hodzha* – distinguishing between the more important practices (taking place in the church) and the less important ones (which I refer to as "adat practices") – represents an approach to religion which is characteristic of orthodoxy or intellectual rationality, but has nothing to do with the outlook of people actually involved in such "secondary" rites. Moreover, even for many Christians such rights are often more important than the sacraments. Not many Christians receive Communion on that day, however most of them offer lambs to St. George and eat the *kurban*.

Also, many older Muslims and Christians attach the most importance to those rites practiced on St. George's Day which are part of an ancestral tradition, regardless of whether or not they are doctrinally sound in Christian or Muslim theology. This was pointed out by my respondent Isa, who observed the two differing attitudes towards Gergiovden among the Muslims: Salafi Muslims reject this holiday as having nothing to do with Islam, but the practitioners of "Adat Islam" consider it important because the day was celebrated by their ancestors (Interview 55, Breznitsa 2009). According to the *hodzha*, the holiday of *Sisvet*/the Forty Martyrs is a similar case in point:

> *Hodzha* 1: Meaning, if you tell them that it's not *Sisvet*, because that's what they call it, *Sisvet*. If you tell them that it's not actually *Sisvet*, that the word comes from all saints, all saints, he will say, "Oh, really? Is that actually so?" You see, at some point in the past he... The thing is, that

> Christians all around, and things gradually creep in. And he says, "But is that actually so?!". And if that's the case, he begins to reject this idea. In fact, he knew what it was connected with, and he did that because he saw people doing it in Osikovo, he saw people doing it in Skrebetno, and there is a Christian village opposite where they do the same. And if you explain to him the meaning of this, but it's not about *Sisvet*, but All Saints, then he starts thinking, and actually admits his mistake. (Interview 10, Ribnovo 2005)

The *hodzha's* comment that the Muslims fail to realize the meaning of the holiday scenes seems correct, especially given his inaccurate etymology derived from "All Saints". At the same time, the sermons exert a certain influence over the local community, who begin to realize and argue that this is a Christian holiday, not a Muslim one.

One of the *hodzhas* disapproved not only of Muslims incubating in churches, but also doing the same in *tyurbeta*[312] [Turkish: *türbe*, Arabic: *turbah*] frequently found in the Central and Eastern Rhodopes:

> M.L: Okay, what about *tyurbeta*?
>
> *Hodzha* 6: *Tyurbeta* are exactly the same.
>
> M.L.: But they're Muslim tombs, aren't they?!
>
> H.6: *Tyurbes* are Muslim?! They're Muslim in popular opinion only. They're pagan. See, we have a tyurbe here, a remnant from shamanistic times. You can go and look to see that this tyurbe is a remnant from shamanistic times... irreligious times. A tyurbe is a tomb. Can a dead person help you? How can he help you?
>
> M.L.: And what about *evliyas*[313] [Turkish: *evliya,* Arabic*:* sing. *wali,* pl. *awliya* –M.L.], aren't they...?
>
> H.6: Evliye... there are no auliyas in modern times. (Interview 30, Satovcha 2005)

Tyurbes were places of cult where Muslim saints or *evliyas* were venerated (Lozanova 2000, p. 156). The hodzha cited above does not recognize those figures as saints, an appellation which he believes only applies to Qur'anic figures.

I heard a similar interpretation from another *hodzha*, who compared the cult of *evliyas* venerated in mausoleums to the Orthodox Christian cult of icons. In the following comment he makes a reference to the Alevis, an Islamic sect where images of saints are placed in their türbes and candles are lit in front of them:

> *Hodzha* 3: More than that, the lighting of candles probably isn't rooted in Islam. But the lighting of candles is practised by some Muslim sects. Have you seen Demir Baba teke? Those Alawites go

312 A mausoleum/tomb of a Sufi saint, believed to be a place where prayers are more likely to be heard.

313 A Muslim saint. As G. Lozanova notes, the Christian saint cannot be described as an *evliya*; *evliyas* must be members of the Muslim community (Lozanova 2000, p. 155).

> and light candles there. And in the same way, they have icons inside. This is prohibited. This has nothing to do with Islam. (Interview 17, Ribnovo 2005)

This shows that anti-syncretic attitudes in the young Muslim elites are aimed not only against Muslims engaging in local Christian rites but also against Muslim sects. They perceive the most serious danger in those things which may undermine the core of Muslim spirituality that is strict monotheism. In this respect, Christianity with its cult of the Holy Trinity, is regarded with great suspicion. The Christian cult of the saints and the belief in the healing power of "holy places" are considered particularly idolatrous and "shamanistic" or pagan, regardless of whether these things are practised in Islam or in Christianity:

> *Hodzha* 6: They come and sleep. That's shamanism. Who helps... He who gives illness, gives health as well. Who is it that gives us food, who gives us our senses, our eyes, our eyesight, our health and our strength? Who gives us all those things? God gives them to us. And if God wills it, you... I mean, if you have a problem, that's God's will. It's not the will of a mosque. (Interview 30, Satovcha 2005)

Another *adat* the *hodzhas* would like to see abolished as *bid'ah* is the Turkish custom of saying prayers for a deceased person 52 days after their death:

> *Hodzha* 1: This is *bida* a novelty.
>
> M.L.: A novelty?
>
> H.1: It's an *adat* which is not compatible with Islam. In Islam, what's the meaning of the fifty-second night?! The fifty-second night, according to some scholars, I've read it somewhere, but it's not confirmed, it's not guaranteed... That's one man's body decays in the grave. At such a time Islam prohibits... To be precise, not prohibits, prohibits is too strong a word... Does not recommend doing things that make life difficult for a Muslim. In Islam, Allah says there is no coercion in religion. In the sense that if a man does not have enough money to set the table for the guests and say the prayers for the dead person, then that's a certain coercion, which is not permitted in Islam. You can say your prayers or perform your rites whenever you can, and not at a time when you have to borrow money to do that. That's not an Islamic practice. (Interview 10, Ribnovo 2005)

Unlike the *hodzhas*, who consider the rites performed on the fifty-second day as a matter of indifference to personal salvation (because the custom was not introduced by Muhammad), the practitioners of "Adat Islam" put them on a par with other rites necessary for salvation. On that day they not only pray, but also make a blood sacrifice (*kurban*) for the salvation of the deceased, an offering which may also be made on Kurban Bayram. A failure to do so may prevent the soul of the deceased person from successfully crossing the bridge suspended over the pits of hell, whereas those for whom prayers were said on that day can cross the bridge without a problem riding a horse or a lamb:

M.L.: Why do the local people offer a *kurban* for a deceased person?

F.: Now listen to me, we make a *kurban*, so that [the person – M.L.] can find a horse in the next world, a horse. When we go to be judged, across the bridge, there is a bridge there. See, you spend three thousand years walking on that bridge. Three thousand years walking uphill, three thousand years walking on level ground, three thousand years coming down hill. That's thousands of years! A bridge. But if a *kurban* has been sacrificed here, that person will cross that bridge like a lightning. They will be carried [as fast] as a lightning! (W, M, Interview 12, Ribnovo 2005)

Salafi Muslims consider this custom to be incompatible with Sunni Islam:

I.: People around here mostly sacrifice a *kurban* when somebody dies, a mother, a father, a grandmother... On the first Kurban Bayram [after the death – M.L.] we sacrifice one for the deceased person. But you don't have anything like that [in Islam]. In Islam there is a duty to sacrifice an animal, if you can afford it. But there is also a different kind of *kurban* – if you've made a vow. That's what she said [the Isa's wife], they went to a church, they had a problem. [They made an oath], that, if that problem is solved, they would make a *kurban*. But this thing that appeared here, the making of a *kurban* after a person's death, that's a corrupted practice.

M.L.: Do you mean, not every sacrifice of a lamb is a *kurban*, just those sacrificed on that holiday?

I.: Only on the holiday, if [the lamb] was promised. Because in Islam, intentions matter – why do you sacrifice the animal. You sacrifice the animal with a certain intention in mind, to make a *kurban* and to hand it out to others. (M, M, Interview 55, Breznitsa 2009)

Some of the *hodzhas* who officially promote "Salafi Islam" are prepared to make *muskas* (amulets) unofficially, and, when asked, say prayers fifty-two days after the death of a deceased person[314]:

I.: Here [in Breznitsa – M.L.] we don't make *muskas*. I know they make them in Gotse Delchev.

M.L.: Were they made in the past?

I.: As a rule, you shouldn't make some. But they're more... How should I say it. When someone's got into harm's way, then the *hodzha* agrees to make one.

M.L.: Those young [*hodzhas*], do they make *muskas*, too?

314 Some Muslims believe that on that day the decaying body separates itself from the bone, causing enormous suffering to the deceased person who needs help of his or her loved ones in the form of relief-bringing prayer. This is connected with the belief that the soul does not become separated from the body until that moment, and continues to suffer with the body until the separation is complete (Lubanska 2005, p. 129).

I.: Yes, yes, all of them. There's one or two in every area, making the *muskas*. (M, M, Interview 55, Breznitsa 2009)

To the reformist *hodzhas*, certain local departures from the Sunnah are of secondary importance, including those relating to Muslim prayer techniques, such as the number of bows/*rekyes*[315] made during prayer. As one *hodzha* explains, those practising "Adat Islam" bow too much when praying:

Hodzha 1: When people come to a mosque to pray... to say the prayers... Especially on a Friday... Um... We make sixteen of those... They're called *rekyes*, bows. Whereas Muhamad, the Prophet Muhammad didn't bow sixteen times on a Friday. He didn't bow as much. ...

M.L.: Why sixteen times?

H.1: That's a big subject. That was introduced by the Ottomans, and it goes against Muhammad's Sunnah. (Interview 10, Ribnovo 2005)

According to the *hodzha*, what matters to the Muslims who make the "wrong number of bows" is conformity with ancestral tradition rather than compatibility with Islam. However, changing the habits of the local population is not a priority for the reformist *hodzhas* because the wrong number of bows is not so much sinful *shirk* or idolatry, but rather an Ottoman innovation or *bid'ah* not found in the Sunnah.

In this sense, the efforts to reform the local Islamic practice involve not only eliminating pagan practices connected with the Christian liturgical calendar, but also eliminating those religious practices which are found in the Ottoman Empire but not in the Arabic countries, which the *hodzha* believes are closer to the Sunnah.

The *hodzha* believes that the popularity of apotropaic astrology and talismans (*muskas*, *amaliykas*) in "Adat Islam" is a product of Ottoman influence. He used to take a personal interest in astrology until one day in a mosque in Sofia he met a fellow Muslim who sharply disapproved of such practices as a form of magic, a criticism the *hodzha* encountered again when receiving his religious education in Saudi Arabia:

Hodzha 1: You couldn't find a book like this among the Arabs. Most books about those things are in Turkish.. ... Later, when I went to Saudi Arabia, I learned more information about the subject. Magic is serious *haram*. (Interview 10, Ribnovo 2005)

According to the *hodzhas*, the most important religious transgression resulting from magical practice is a failure to put one's trust in God as people turn to objects or other persons (*hodzhas*, traditional female healers), which amounts to *shirk* because the Qur'an instructs the faithful to turn to Allah in all problems:

315 Special form of prostration in Muslim prayer involving touching the ground with one's forehead, performed on a special prayer rug.

M.L.: And the Qur'an... a small book of the Qur'an?

Mufti: It doesn't matter what it is. I mean, you don't put your trust in the Highest. You put your trust in the object. Say, you forget to take it with you when you leave the house. You get up in the morning, have a bath and forget to take it. Now, what's a person going to do? I mean, say, that person goes to Sofia. Does that mean he has to come all the way back and collect this thing or he might get sick?! I mean, this shows that this is *shirk*, that this is idolatry. You put your trust in that thing, and not in the Highest. (Interview 18, Ribnovo 2005)

On top of that, the act of walking into a toilet with a talisman on one's body makes a Muslim guilty of another sin, namely that of defiling the Qur'an. Also, the young *hodzhas* disapprove of such practices because they regard them as inferior and superstitious forms of religious life.

Some compare *amaliykas*/*muskas* to Christian icons[316], treated in an animistic manner as items intrinsically endowed with a power that can be tapped by people in need. According to the *hodzhas*, a Muslim who puts his trust in *amaliykas* becomes like an Orthodox Christian who venerates icons, disregarding the fact that an icon or an *amaliyka* is that most a vessel or vehicle of divine grace.

In the following statement, two perspectives clash: that of an ordinary Muslim woman and that of a *hodzha*. The former sees no conflict between believing in Allah and wearing *amaliykas*, which she believes are God's gift to mankind. By contrast, the *hodzha* considers them idolatrous: those who engage in such practices are deluding themselves that physical objects are capable of providing protection, and also get duped by peddlers of magical items. The *hodzha's* perspective is reminiscent of the "Protestant bias", whereas Shurfe is trying to get the *hodzha* to approve of her physical need to carry a "holy/magical item" about her body. I consciously refrain from describing Shurfe's needs as typical of "Adat Islam" because this kind of physical approach to religious practice is not limited to this type of religiosity.

316 It is important in this context to point out that the Palamite theology of the Orthodox Christian Church makes it much harder to dismiss the gesture of kissing a religious icon as evidence of naive sensualism (cf. Czarnowski 1956, p. 92). According to the 14th-century concepts of Gregory Palamas, God is transcendent and unknowable but his energies (grace) are imminent and present in icons as a kind of stream of divine grace reaching the believer (Lubanska 2007b, p. 16). Most ordinary believers are unfamiliar with this concept, however two options must still be taken into account in analysing religious attitudes of Orthodox Christians: 1) the believer identifies the iconic depiction with the saint (*non-differentiation*) – a category inspired by Hans Georg-Gadamer and developed in Polish anthropology by Tokarska-Bakir (2000), the believer feels that the icon is, to use Gadamer's term, "an ontological event" which "occupies the same ontological level as what is represented" (Gadamer 2004, p. 135), but is nonetheless not identical (por. Lubanska 2007b, p. 16). In the case of Orthodox Christianity, the sensory experience of the icon remains well within the limits of canonical belief with its sense of being affected in a real way by divine grace, or even its belief in the apotropaic powers of such items. By way of contrast, the placing by Muslims of trust in *amaliykas*, treated as apotropaic items, is incompatible with Sunni Islam.

Importantly, the *hodzha* also condemns as *shirk* the invoking of God's name when averting the evil eye or giving people *amaliykas*:

> Sh.: Yes, but you don't... Because you believe in the *amaliykas* you're wearing... But you believe in Allah all the same [she explains to the *hodzha* that wearing *amaliykas* does not mean that belief in Allah becomes less important – M.L.]
>
> *Hodzha* 3: But that means you have a certain respect [for those things].
>
> Sh.: It's Allah's things that protect you, the things Allah said.
>
> H.3: That is to say, this *muska*, and this amulet, they're seen as a small icon, and it... people expect it to provide some kind of help or benefit, and so on. This is strictly forbidden. There are things like that. Sellers make them to sell and make money ... What I mean is, you're making something to rank on a par with Allah and you make him an accomplice. Allah will help me, but that's ... *shirk*. It's an unforgivable sin in Islam. There is no greater sin in Islam than *shirk*. It's the one sin Allah won't forgive. *Shirk*. There is an *ayat*... in the Qur'an [to that effect], meaning that Allah really says he will not forgive a person who gets familiar like that. (Interview 17, Ribnovo 2005)

Some of the *hodzhas* connected with "Adat Islam", though less radical, are similarly disapproving of *amaliykas*, though they approve of traditional female healers[317] provided they directly invoke Allah to help the suffering person. A similar requirement applies to *hodzhas* and doctors:

> *Hodzha* 2: ... More than that, there are certain women who have a special relationship with Allah, we call that baene [chanting healing chants]. But in order to have this kind of relationship with Allah, the woman says, "O Allah, I wish this man was given help. O Allah". Those are special words to do that. Those three things are permitted. The doctor, *hodzhas* and traditional healers are permitted, however they must all have a relationship with Allah. "I'm a doctor but there is a God above me. I want to... I'm going to perform surgeries, but I'll do that with God's permission". (Interview 19, Ribnovo 2005)

To protect oneself against the evil eye, *jinn* and harmful magic, the *hodzhas* mentioned Qur'anic suras 113 (*al-Falaq*, *Daybreak*) and 114 (*An-Nas*, *Mankind*) should be recited as a protective measure. Allah revealed the suras to Muhammad in similar circumstances, and these should be sufficient to Muslims seeking protection, although a deeply religious person who reads the Qur'an on a daily basis should be generally immune to harmful magic.

"Adat Islam" comprises practices the *hodzhas* dismiss as superstitions, although their precise conclusions on what is and what isn't a superstition may vary. For

317 Generally speaking, *hodzhas* have mixed feelings about such healers, depending on whether they use the Qur'an or magical formulas, the latter obviously being frowned upon.

instance, reciting the formula *mashallah* and belief in harmful magic is acceptable to some and strongly condemned by others:

> Mufti: I mean, this is nothing but superstition. It's superstition and people should not believe in it. Say, somebody says, "Somebody's performed magic on you". And I say: "I don't believe that." They can cast a hundred *uroki* on me, I don't believe that and I don't feel like that's even a thing. I mean, you can talk someone into believing those things, and they'll be done for. You talk him into believing he's had bad *uroki* done to him [he was bewitched – M.L.], and he believes that, even if it's not true, he starts thinking about it and... that person ends up in a mental institution. (Interview 18, Ribnovo 2005)

Salafi-oriented Muslim respondents renew their religious life by adapting new models of faith, imported from Arabic countries, particularly Saudi Arabia, considered to be the mother country of "pure" Islam. In the words of the Dutch journalist and writer Ian Buruma and Israeli philosopher Avishai Margalit, "Saudi Arabia is today the prime source of fundamentalist, puritanical ideology, affecting Muslims everywhere, from North Africa to Indonesia" (Buruma, Margalit 2005, p. 135). The Saudi form of Islam, dominated by the Hanbali school[318], is seen as more correct than the variety promoted by the Ottoman Empire and connected with the Hanafi school[319]:

> *Hodzha* 1: in Turkey, parts of Syria, parts of Iraq, Jordan. And likewise all of the Balkan Peninsula, they're almost all of them Hanafi Muslims. You get Hanafis in Albania, Kosovo, Bosnia, Macedonia and many other places. But mostly in the former territories of the Ottoman Empire. The Empire imposed this *mazhab*[320] [Arabic: *madhhab* – M.L.] and wherever it reached, it introduced this kind of Islam, Hanafi Islam. Because, if you take the method of saying the prayers, they have this term, this set of prayers which is adapted to army personnel. Whereas in Saudi Arabia the understanding is a bit different in terms of learning the rites, reciting the prayers. The people are freer because they know exactly, they know exactly how the Prophet Muhammad acted, whereas around here you can meet people recite their *namaz*, their prayers, in a way that is somewhat corrupted... (Interview 10, Ribnovo 2005)

Unlike in the Ottoman Empire, where the Sunnah became corrupted in a variety of ways including the prayer technique, argues the *hodzha*, in Saudi Arabia the prophet Muhammad continues to remain the one and only role model for the faithful. To emphasise the break with the Ottoman influence, some Muslims in this group have given up the traditional Turkish costume to replace it with Saudi-style clothes, though this seems to be a marginal phenomenon. Among the Muslim women I talked to there

318 Adherents of Ibn Hanbal (780–855) who rigorously respect the Qur'an and the Sunnah and reject any reforms of the law (Danecki 1997, p. 82).

319 Adherents of the legal school of Abu Hanifa (699–767), characterized by legal rationality and a tolerant attitude towards other religions (Danecki 1997, p. 82).

320 A school of Islamic law.

was only one such person, the wife of one of the *hodzhas* (she got the Saudi clothes from her husband, who for two years had studied theology in the country).

Salafi Muslims believe that there exists a single normative model of Islam applicable throughout the world, identical to that practised in early Muslim society (Akbar 2007, p. 34). They wish to replicate it in their own environment and to educate their children within this model. When asked what Bulgarian Islam was like, one *hodzha* denied that there was such a thing as "Bulgarian Islam":

> *Hodzha* 1: There is no Bulgarian Islam.
>
> M.L.: Well, that's just a name I came up with...
>
> H.1: Nobody calls it that. You have to think of Islam as a religion, it doesn't matter if it's Bulgarian, Turkish or Syrian. (Interview 10, Ribnovo 2005)

Hodzha went on to explain that there was "only one Islam", despite the manipulative distinction being made in Bulgaria between traditional and fundamentalist Islam. He believes the former to be a heterodox model, often conflicted with the requirements of religion and consequently unacceptable:

> *Hodzha* 1: There is only one Islam, there is no doubt about that. But some wants to present it as traditional, others as fundamentalist. They want to point out those due forms, and present traditional Islam is more acceptable in Bulgaria, and fundamentalist Islam as unacceptable in Bulgaria. They say the fundamentalist one, the fundamentalist variety, is harmful to others, something I personally find unacceptable. What does that even mean, fundamentalist Islam? The idea is to go back to the fundamentals of Islam, to go back to the life of the Prophet Muhammad and examine his life, his dealings with people; to revisit the fundamentals of your religion. Then you realise that he did not encourage suicide or hatred. They see that all those things that people attribute to the fundamentals of Islam is contrary to the truth. That's why they say it's better to profess traditional Islam, whereas traditional Islam is based on tradition and is actually not always compatible with the religion. (Interview 10, Ribnovo 2005)

Although the *hodzha's u*nderstanding of fundamentalist Islam is limited to the kind of Islam that comes back to its fundamentals (or the so-called "pure" Islam), he realises that the term has much broader connotations[321]. It should also be pointed out that although the Salafi Muslims associate their preferred model of "pure" Islam exclusively with the Qur'an and the Sunnah, in practical terms the model seems to be influenced by the Wahhabi form of Sunni Islam. As Harry Norris notes, "in Bulgaria, among both

321 According to B. Tibi, this translates into a politicisation of religion: fundamentalists care little about the religious experience, merely coopting it as a vehicle of their totalitarian ideology (cf. Tibi 1997). This does not seem to apply to my respondents. None of them formulated any political goals, and all of them seemed to be committed to the cause of religious education of Muslims in the Western Rhodopes along a model which they believed was Islam from the times of Muhammad.

Turks and Pomaks, mosques are being restored and rebuilt, and increasing support, especially financial, is being sought from Turkey and Saudi Arabia in order to build madrasas and finance training courses for imams" (Norris 1993, p. 8). Increasingly, Islamic education is being provided by *hodzhas* educated abroad.

In addition to the influences identified by Norris, the growing impact of "Salafi Islam" in the Western Rhodopes is the result of religious propaganda translated from Arabic or Turkish, available in the form of cheap (occasionally free) brochures and Internet content. Available in Bulgarian translation are books by writers including Huseyn Hodzha/Hüseyin Hoca[322] (2005), I.A. Abu Harb[323] (2004), Abdullah ibn Abdulhamid/'Abd Allah ibn 'Abd al-Hamid (1997) or Maurice Bucaille (2004). Such books are distributed free of charge in mosques or sold in local bookshops and groceries.

Only some of that literature, published by several outlets, has the approval of Bulgaria's chief muftiate (Glavno myuftiystvo na myusyulmanskoto izpovedaniye v Republika Bŭlgariya). One of the religious textbooks (Al Abdulatif Abdulaziz Muhammad/'Abd al-'Aziz Muhammad Al 'Abd al-Latif 1999) was financed by a grant from Sheikh Sulayman ibn 'Abd al-'Aziz al-Rajhi and the Tayba Foundation. The Bulgarian government's website[324] identifies the foundation as an institution promoting higher religious education in Jordan, an option used by some Bulgarian-speaking Muslims who are members of the Society for Islamic Development and Culture (*Obedineniye na islamsko razvitye i kultura*) which the foundation established in 2004.

Many of the books do not indicate the publisher. The books I have browsed or received from my Muslim acquaintances are not representative of the full spectrum of the problem, and the following comments should not be treated as a comprehensive and reliable analysis of popular religious literature, but certain observations can be made. As mentioned above, some of the books attempt to present Islam as compatible with modern science. In *The Short Illustrated Introduction to Islam* by Abu Harb (*Kratko ilistruvano vŭvedeniye v islyama*, 2004), Chapter I, entitled "Evidence for the Truth of Islam", contains a section on "The Holy Qur'an and the development of the human embryo", arguing that Surah 23: 12–14 is compatible with modern medical knowledge (Abu Harb 2004, p. 10). The Surah describes a stage in embryonic development when the embryo is similar to "a clot of blood" which develops into a "clinging clot". Abu Harb explains that the Arabic word *'alaq* – translated into Bulgarian as *sŭsirek*, meaning a seed or germ of flesh, can be translated in three different ways: 1) a leech, 2) a clinging thing, or 3) clotted blood. According to the author, the option 1) is a reference to the fact that the embryo draws blood from the mother, similar to a leech (Abu Harb

322 http://www.way-to-allah.com/bul/documents/Priznatsite_za_chasa.pdf (12.12.2011).

323 The book was translated into Bulgarian from English: *A Brief Illustrated Guide to understanding Islam*, Houston, Texas: Darussalam 1996.

324 http://old.government.bg/cgi-bin/e-cms/vis/vis.pl?s=001&p=0178&n=149&g= (11.2009).

2004, p. 10), and goes on to provide a similar analysis on other usages from the Qur'an relating to embryonal development. The section on "The Holy Qur'an and the origins of the Universe" focuses on a passage from Surah 41: 11: "Then He lifted Himself to heaven when it was smoke", allegedly a passage showing remarkable compatibility with the discoveries of modern atomic physics, a fact which supposedly astonished a world-famous modern scientist, Dr. Alfred Kröner[325] (Abu Harb 2004, p. 11). The rest of the chapters are constructed according to the same logic of interpretation. To quote just the titles, they touch on the Qur'an and subjects such as the brain (p. 20–21), seas and rivers (p. 21–24), deep seas and internal waves (p. 24–26), clouds (p. 26–31), or Commons from scientists regarding the scientific wonders of the Qur'an (p. 31–36).

In contrast to Muslims connected with "Adat Islam" (who primarily rely on sacred narratives that explicate the human condition by symbolic means), Salafi Muslims set great store by the supposed "scientific accuracy" of the Qur'an and the various historical justifications for its authenticity. They emphasise the fact that the Qur'an was written in the times of the prophet Muhammad[326], unlike the Torah and the Gospels which, having been composed a long time after the deaths of Musa and 'Isa, were naturally corrupted by humans. Another influential source in Bulgaria is a book by Maurice Bucaille, *La Bible, le Coran et la science* (1976), published in a Bulgarian translation by the Chief Muftiate of Bulgaria as *Biblyata, Koranŭt i naukata* (2004). The book, which has had a number of editions in Bulgaria, examines the Hebrew Scriptures, the Gospels and the Qur'an in the light of modern science to reveal the Qur'an as scientifically correct. A chapter in Bucaille's book, "Contradictions and Improbabilities in the Descriptions", reveals numerous discrepancies in the four Gospels to dismiss them as false and to prove the truth of the Qur'an (2004, p. 121–132). The book devotes a chapter to the activities of the apostle Paul who, as a founder of Christianity, distorted the teachings of 'Isa. Many such writings are kind of "catechism" for the educated, such as al-Nawawi, *Gradinite na pravednitsite*[327] (2008), translated from Arabic by Prof. Tsvetan Teofanev (Bulgarian translator of the Qur'an and a convert to Islam) or Osman Nuri Topbaş's *Islyamŭt, forma i duh* (2009), translated from Turkish. Unlike the brief brochures aimed at a diverse readership, these books are more ambitious studies on Islam and were familiar to some of the Muslims I met (such as I. and his wife F., interviews 55 and 56, who had read them).

Such books are an approachable and ostensibly scientific introduction to Islamic rituals. Accordingly, Salafi Muslims tend to invoke so-called scientific arguments when discussing the meaning of such rituals (medical materialism). For instance, the

325 Based on a cherrypicked televised quote, myth (which Alfred Kröner denies) persists on Youtube (see for instance: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ClHuG880pqU).

326 In fact, this occurred at a later date as the written text was collated ca. 650 during the reign of Caliph Uthman.

327 The Gardens of the Righteous (Arabic: *Riyad al-Salihin*).

great importance of ritual purity in Islam is explained in terms of hygienic concerns, a modern category, suggesting that although Muhammad demanded purity as a religious ritual, the practical concern was to protect Muslims from germs in dirt. To corroborate this interpretation, a *hodzha* recounted an example from the times of the prophet Muhammad: a Christian physician arriving in a Muslim community in Egypt found himself jobless given the high standards of health achieved thanks to the practice of *abdest* and good nutrition habits. When he realised the health benefits of Islam, the physician converted (Interviews 18 and 10, Ribnovo 2005):

> Mufti: In the times of Muhammad a man came from Egypt, he'd heard a city-state was being built there, a physician, and he said, "I'll go and make money there", that is to say, he wanted to work there for a living. He went there and stayed for a month. There were no sick people, none of the Muslims got ill. So he asks them, he says, "How do you live?" – he cries. "I want you to explain your ways to me. I've been without work for a month, nobody gets sick". That's when he found out that purity was half of the faith. He says, "Right, that's one thing. Now, how do you eat?" – he says. "I mean, if you keep pure, that's 80% of the diseases taken care of," he says. "Now the food, what do you eat?". And they said, "We divide the stomach into three parts. One is for food, one is for water, and one part must remain empty so people can breethe freely". And he said, "There's no work for me here, I'm leaving this place." (Interview 18, Ribnovo 2005)

Similarly, the *hodzhas* argued that circumcision was introduced by Muhammad rather than Allah (and was therefore part of the *syunnet* or Sunnah rather than *farz*, and that the procedure protected the faithful from sexually transmitted diseases by reducing the risk of infection:

> M.L.: So, what's the point of circumcision?
>
> Mufti: Oh, right. Circumcision. When there is a male child, the circumcision... That's something that the Christians and the Jews do as well. It's obligatory with the Jews and the Muslims. This is a matter of hygiene. I mean, this is not *farz*, this is Sunnah. It's recommended but it's not obligatory. But it's very important from the point of view of hygiene and... I mean, with uncircumcised people... uncircumcised people get venereal diseases more often than circumcised people do.
>
> M.L.: Old people say that circumcision is also practised because Muhammad was born circumcised?
>
> Mufti: Yes, that's true. I mean, I have nothing to add. (Interview 18, Ribnovo 2005)

According to some of Muslims, Islamic practices such as male circumcision or prohibition of pork consumption are dictated by concerns of health and hygiene rather than religion. They argue that pork consumption leads to high blood pressure, high cholesterol and twenty-three other diseases. The animal was created by Allah as fodder for other animals, not people. In fact, even the Bulgarians living in Dabnitsa do not raise pigs:

Turkish W.: This leads to disease[328]. This is scientifically proven. I've read that in Bulgarian books. It's not even tasty, anyway.

M.L.: What kind of diseases?

Turkish W.: High blood pressure, cholesterol. Many different ones. No Bulgarians in Dabnitsa even raise pigs, maybe two families at most! They mostly slaughter calves. (Muslim, Interview 45, Dabnitsa 2006)

Another reason why some Muslims believe circumcision is beneficial is that some Christians undergo the procedure for medical reasons. According to my respondents, the obligation of circumcision was claimed to be particularly beneficial in the Mediterranean climate which favours bacterial growth and various infections.

Compared to the older generation, Salafi Muslims tend to have a much less elaborate understanding of the symbolic aspects of rituals. Their explanations ignore symbolic details, such as the placing of a kerchief on the head of a sacrificial lamb. Instead, they are over more general nature and do not contain as many narrative components:

F2: Since this is principally a custom dating back to the Prophet Ibrahim, I don't know if you've heard of it? He was childless for many years. And when they were old, he dreamt for three nights that his wife would get pregnant. She was in quite an advanced age. That she would bear him a son named Ismail.

M.L.: Yes.

F2: And then, after the wife had given birth, he saw in a dream that he had to sacrifice his son, that he had to slaughter him in the name of Allah. That's how it started, the slaughtering of the *kurban*.

M.L.: But he didn't slaughter him?

F2: No. Then Allah said, he passed the trial, and from now on a *kurban* would be slaughtered [an animal will be sacrificed instead of a child – M.L.] (W, M, Interview 55, Ribnovo 2009)

328 Such explanations seem to be "not so to explain as to provide pious commentary" (Wasilewski 1989, p. 25). The literature of the subject contains a number of interpretations. M. Douglas writes that unclean animals tend to be creatures of mixed categories which fail to adhere to the logical order of the world, meaning either imperfect members of their own class or entire classes which violate the universal order (cited in: Wasilewski 1989, p. 26). Sheep, which are even-toed ungulates, provide the model of a "clean" animal in Judaism and Islam. Consequently, unclean animals will fail to meet those two characteristics. For instance, pigs are the only even-toed non-ruminant and the only non-ruminant among even-toed animals known in the near East (cf. Hunn, cited in: Wasilewski 1989, p. 33). According to J.S. Wasilewski, another criterion making certain animals are considered unclean is the failure to adhere to the principle of paradisal harmony and respect for life (cf. Wasilewski 1989, p. 40), which makes all meat-eating animals unclean (Wasilewski 1989, p. 40).

When asked about the meaning of *abdest*, the same Muslim woman said it was done in preparation for prayer, but made no reference to the story of Adam and Hawwa as narrated in a similar context by *bula* of Ribnovo, for instance[329]:

> M.L.: Why is it that *abdest* involves the washing of hands, feet, those parts of the body?
>
> F.: To make them pure. When you, say, take a shower, you get washed, you get washed, and in the same way *abdest* makes you clean, to prepare you for *namaz*, for prayer. That's the point of *abdest*. (W, M, Interview 16, Ribnovo 2009)

As explained by Fatme, the only point why women cover their bodies is to protect themselves from the lustful male gaze and thus ensure a more comfortable experience when leaving the house (Interview 16, Ribnovo 2009).

5.2.2 Attitudes Towards "the West"

The West is an important point of reference for "Salafi Islam", and it is perceived as a civilisation posing a threat to the morality of a religious person, expressed the most fully in Islamic spirituality. The puritanical ideology of Salafi Muslims is largely built on opposition to Western values, which to my respondents prioritize the narcissistic inclinations of individuals over divine commandments or the common good. The occidentalism[330] of some of the Muslims I talked to is mostly focused on the United States as perceived as the quintessential West. The Muslims voicing occidentalist moods were mostly *hodzhas* and neophytes criticising the Western lifestyle. Perhaps importantly, this is currently free of threatening implications: "not liking Western pop culture, global capitalism, U.S foreign policy, big cities or sexual license is not of great moment: the desire to declare war on the West for such a reason is" (Buruma, Margalit 2004, p.5). To Muslims I spoke to, the truly significant issue is the need to reform local Islam and fashion it into a puritanical religion faithful to the Qur'an and

329 I quote *bula* extensively in Section 6.1.

330 I realise that concepts such as "the West", "Occidentalism" and "Orientalism" are vague. This is why I use them as emic categories used by my respondents. I define Occidentalism with I. Buruma and A. Margalit as a counterpart to Orientalism; a complex of negative beliefs and stereotypes about the West (2004). Islamic Occidentalism in the Western Rhodopes as discussed in this book is only one current within Occidentalism. As an ideal type, the term Occidentalism was born in the West, primarily in Germany, in the writings of German nationalists in the 1920s and 1930s, but also Nazi writers (E. Jünger), German philosophers of culture (O. Spengler) and sociologists (O. Sombart). Occidentalism juxtaposed the Western metropolis as a Moloch, or a Babylon against rural life with its idealized uncorrupted and authentic moral values (Buruma, Margalit 2005). In this sense, Occidentalism "is a phenomenon that reflects anxieties, fears and prejudices of mostly urban intellectuals who feel displaced in a world of mass commerce" rather than the ideology of oppressed villagers (Buruma, Margalit 2005, p. 34).

the Sunnah. Accordingly, they construct an opposition between their preferred form model of religiosity on the one hand, and the local traditions or the Western values on the other. "Even today with the resurgence of Islam most devout Muslims are not political Islamists so as advocates of enforcing public morality. They yearn for what they see as traditional way of life, which they identify with Islam. Even if they have little idea what the ideal Islamic state should look like, they care deeply about sexual mores, corruption and traditional family life. Islam, to the believers, is the only source and guardian of traditional collective morality" (Buruma, Margalit 2005, p. 128).

Some Muslims perceived the West as a remarkably expansive source of anti-morality, continually spreading to new areas, and bringing novelties predicated on a concern for personal financial prosperity, effectively nullifying existing moral norms. In this perspective, embracing Western models is a sure path to spiritual destruction, replacing religious faith with stimulants such as drugs, alcohol or sex:

> *Hodzha* 1: You cannot reject everything that goes on in the West. But there are things that we really should just leave to them, such as "being single". In the West, people only care about surviving on their own, they have no interest in other human beings. In Islam, this is forbidden. In Islam, this is condemned. Also, in the West, you may remember, perhaps you didn't live in Bulgaria at the time, but when the West came, it brought with it drugs, large-scale prostitution. It brought with it competitive wealth building. (Interview 6, Ribnovo 2005)

According to this *hodzha*, fashion is particularly affected by the promotion of such "anti-culture"[331], which is given over to indulging one's animal instincts. Fashion is directed primarily at women, with adverse moral effect:

> *Hodzha* 1: Just look at the fashion runways, from what I've seen, and I often watch it to see the direction fashion is taking worldwide. This..., At the end of the day, widest fashion have to always expose the whole body to everyone's view?! You can be stylish and covered up, you can be wearing the prettiest fabrics made in today's... world. To have that, and to cover up the body... and to look dignified in society, and to take a place of honor. (Interview 7, Ribnovo 2005)

According to my respondents, women are a microcosm reflecting a society's morals. Unlike Islam, which grants moral protection, Western society treats women as "the temple prostitutes in the service of Western materialism" (Buruma, Margalit 2005, p. 134).

The need to cover up the female body is explained by the specific nature of male sexuality, which makes exposed female flesh an irresistible temptation. A kerchief helps men to see the woman for the spiritual being she is, whereas an uncovered head makes her only a sexual object. When covered up, the woman safeguards the honour of her husband and family, otherwise she defiles her own body, putting it in plain sight of all the men who immediately start fantasising about her:

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331 This term is used by Ph. Rieff, an American critic of liberal culture (Rieff 2006). For a more detailed discussion see (Lubanska 2008, p. 365–387).

> *Hodzha* 5: The word *hidzhab*[332] [Arabic: *hijab* – M.L.] means Muslim costume. Because Allah commanded it, it has to be worn. The point is, should everyone be free to see my wife's body, which I see?! Which is better? I mean, you give yourself, and you give what's inside you, to just one man. Not to everyone in the street, not for every man to look at you! Which is more valuable and precious?! (Interview 26, Satovcha 2009)

On the one hand, this presents men as being hardly in control of their lusts, and on the other it shows women as the mental equivalent of a child. Repeatedly, my respondents emphasized that women were psychologically much weaker and not able to control themselves when unaided. To corroborate this theory, some of my respondents mentioned tendencies observed in the West, where an imbalance between the number of men and women coupled with the requirement of monogamy produces moral degeneration, with unmarried women becoming lovers of married men, lesbians or marriage breakers, leading other women astray. According to the *hodzha* who expressed this view, Islamic polygamy would be preferable to Western monogamy from the female point of view as it would provide more women with physical and moral protection. It is understood that, left to their own devices, unmarried women, so-called liberated women, become sexually profligate:

> *Hodzha* 1: Having two wives is better than having twenty lovers. Do you understand?
>
> M.L.: Yes.
>
> H.1: That's why with the Christians...
>
> M.L.: It's better to have one, and to have no lovers...
>
> H.1: Yes, but they are very uninhibited. You see this tendency worldwide, there are more women than men. So what do those free women do? Either they should get married... A woman with a woman, this is a thing that happens. Or, obviously, when a man finds a woman nicer than his own wife, she will inevitably take her husband away. No doubt about that. Or that man, even if he doesn't leave his wife, he'll have 20-30 lovers, as is the case in the West, in the East, and everywhere in the world. (Interview 7, Ribnovo 2005)

On top of sexual profligacy and material greed, there is also general interpersonal frigidity, which the *hodzha* views as another problem of the Western civilisation (Interview 9, Ribnovo 2005).

In politics, the defining characteristic of the Western world is hypocrisy, expressed in the division of people into categories despite official protestations of human equality. For instance, according to Blagoevgrad Regional mufti, Aydin Mohamed, the European Union and the West (or to be more precise, their politicians) are biased against Muslims, barring them from different rights and opportunities on account

332 A kerchief covering the hair and the neck.

of their religion. As an example, he mentioned Turkey's difficulties in becoming a member of the EU despite the country's economic prosperity (Interview 18, Ribnovo 2005).

According to my respondents, no country's policies are as badly riddled with hypocrisy as the United States (popularly referred to as "America"). Among the Salafi Muslims, one of the most popular anti-American narratives is a conspiracy theory whereby the 9/11 terrorist attacks, falsely attributed to Muslims, were in fact instigated by American politicians trying to turn the world against Islam and to shore up support for their political manoeuvrings (Ahmed 2007, p. 21):

> *Hodzha* 3: I'm sure you know how many thousands of people are there every day in those towers. Why?
>
> Pavlina Carlucci: Many thousands.
>
> H.3: How many?
>
> M.L.: I don't know exactly.
>
> H.3: About 50,000. And how many victims were there? Two, three thousand. Even though the buildings went down immediately. How is that possible? (Interview 17, Ribnovo 2005)

According to some of my respondents, al-Qaeda is being used by the Americans as a pretext for implementing politically advantageous goals and military campaigns, often concealing prosaic objectives, such as access to oil supplies. Not coincidentally, bin Laden (Usama ibn Ladin) had been trained by the Americans and was still at large at the time of the field research (2005):

> *Hodzha* 3: Al-Quaeda is an American product. Everyone knows that. So far no one has been able to prove that the attacks on America were carried out by al-Kaida (Interview 17, Ribnovo 2005)
>
> M.L.: You mean, the people from al-Qaeda are not Muslims [i.e. their actions are un-Islamic – M.L.]?
>
> Mufti: What I mean is, al-Qaeda is a cover-up. I mean... I don't know. I mean, al-Qaeda is like a pretext to justify their... I mean, bin Laden, everyone says he was trained by America, bin Laden was. I mean, that means something. Where is bin Laden now? Is it really that hard to find him and to put him behind bars?! (Interview 18, Ribnovo 2005)
>
> *Hodzha* 3: I think that man [bin Laden – M.L.] doesn't even exist. I think everyone has doubts whether he even exists. But I don't know. The world's greatest power with all those ultramodern... They can't catch him, why is one man so... [elusive]. Where could he be hiding?! (Interview 17, Ribnovo 2005)

In longer conversations it often emerged that the anti-American attitudes of my respondents were connected with their anti-Semitism, which Akbar Ahmed identifies

as a characteristic of "Deoband Islam" (cf. Ahmed 2007, p. 22). The United States is perceived as a country ruled by a Jewish financial elite hostile to Muslims. According to *hodzha* Murat, this explains why so many people were away from the World Trade Center on the day of the attack. Similarly, a mufti felt that attributing the attack to Muslims was a political conspiracy and a media hoax designed to deceive the masses. The mufti described how a similar conspiracy could be hatched by politicians in Bulgaria by framing around Muslim travelling on a coach from Gotse Delchev to Sofia:

> M.L.: Are you saying that America was behind the terrorist attacks?
>
> Mufti: Yes. I mean, it's just not possible that 3000 Jews worked in those skyscrapers and none of them died. I mean, there were 3000 Jews working in those skyscrapers. At the time of the attacks, not a single Jew was at work that day. Meaning, those politicians, perhaps even Muslim politicians from America... They have done really well out of it... I mean, let me give you an example. For instance, if they wanted to start a war in Bulgaria, there is a coach going from here to Sofia. And there are always Muslims travelling on that coach. I mean, you get those people here. Not one coach goes to Sofia without some Muslim on it. Now in Bansko, where almost everyone is Christian, if they blew up the coach there, the people in Bansko would say, that Muslim was a kamikaze. Though it would be nothing... nothing... I mean, that's how they foment conflicts. They cast a shadow over Muslims, and that's exactly what they did in America. I mean, that's what happened in Europe. People, the common masses, they believe it was Muslims who did that... The politicians... I mean, they know it wasn't the Muslims. They believe that Muslims couldn't do such a thing. I mean, a Muslim who's killed a person goes to hell for eternity. If he killed that person. Which is to say, a Muslim couldn't do it.
>
> M.L.: You mean, those people ...
>
> M.A.: This means the whole thing was staged. Those people were paid to do that. (Interview 18, Ribnovo 2005)
>
> *Hodzha* 3: That's not all. If you look at the percentages, how many Jews were there, you will see that the Jews stayed home from work in large numbers. (Interview 17., Ribnovo 2005)

The same respondent argued that then-president George W. Bush promised to the Jews that the territories of the former Mesopotamia would be Christian [sic] again. In his opinion, the Jews had the greatest influence over electing American presidents and were capable of removing inconvenient politicians from political life, as was the case of Bill Clinton, who became the victim of a conspiracy involving Monica Lewinsky:

> *Hodzha* 3: According to my information, Bush specifically, this is what we say in the schools, higher up..., he made a promise that the former Mesopotamia would be Christian again.
>
> M.L.: Who did he promise that?
>
> H.M.: The Jews.

M.L.: Why?

H.3: Because it's already a fact. I don't blame the Jews for being... they have those... capabilities. We know well that they appoint the president in America. We know that America gives them 4-5 million dollars every year. Why doesn't America give this money to poor countries?! We know what's going on in Somalia. We know what's going on in the countries of southern Africa. We are witnessing thousands of children starving to death every day.

M.L.: You mean, he promised Mesopotamia to the Jews?

H.3: No, not to the Jews. What was once Mesopotamia will now be restored. It will be Christian again. We know that it used to be [part of] the Roman Empire, Byzantium and so on. The lands of Syria, Lebanon, Palestine, Iran... All that used to be one [political] entity. How much of that is true and how much is false I cannot say, I can't say this is 100% certain. We saw what happened to Clinton. How they pulled the trick with Monica Lewinsky on him. It was the Jews who did that to him. Whose fault is it, that he is weak?! If he was a good Christian he wouldn't have done that, right? (Interview 17, Ribnovo 2005)

Similarly, the respondents from this group considered terrorism to be a made up problem engineered for political purposes (again, anti-Semitic attitudes are at play as the Jews are specifically blamed for this). The politicians are not consistent in the way they use the term "terrorism" because the same actions can be described as acts of terrorism or wars for human rights depending on political expediency:

Hodzha 3: We see that now in England, terrorist attacks happening in England. We see mosques on fire. Houses collapsing. Isn't that terrorism?! The worst thing is that Jewish companies are doing the exact same thing here right now. Those big ones. I'm not talking about the nation, which... We are talking about those at the top, the very top. They are doing the exact same thing now. They compel people, they say one thing is terrorism and another thing isn't. They say people in Iraq are civilian casualties. (Interview 17, Ribnovo 2005)

Hodzha 6: Today's terrorism, as the Jews are presenting it, the idea is to create conflicts between different social groups and to bring about war in the world, called the apocalypse. Do you understand? (Interview 30, Satovcha 2005)

The respondents are so offended by the fact that Islam gets identified with terrorism in the West that they tend to repress the existence of terrorist attacks motivated by Islamic ideology, a fact they account for in one of three ways. According to the first interpretation, mentioned above, such attacks are perpetrated by people paid by the West. It seems that Western Islamophobia[333] triggers a sense of ressentiment in

333 This is largly due to the fact that Islam is excluded from the narrative and representation of Europe by Europeans (Asad 2003, p. 172). For instance, the historian M. Wintle believes that Muslim immigrants cannot describe Europe as their home because they were not shaped by experiences such as life in the Roman Empire, Christianity, the Enlightenment, or the industrial revolution (Asad 2003, p. 166). Also, Talal Asad points out that Islam is treated by Europeans as a kind of deficient "quasi-

the respondents, heightening occidentalist moods and fostering various conspiracy theories in which all evil things have their origin outside the Ummah, in America, seen as the very heart of the West.

Another theory is that the attacks are perpetrated by desperate people in desperate circumstances, usually Palestinians whose families have been murdered by Jews (Interview 18, Ribnovo 2005).

Sometimes the respondents attribute such attacks to people who are not suited to represent Islam because they have perverted its true meaning; they are like "black sheep" in a herd. The respondents consider it unfair that the West can blame all members of a religion for the actions of a single person or group (Interview 26, Satovcha 2005).

The respondents reject the image of Islam as a religion promoting suicide and terrorist attacks as unfair, and they have a need to present Islam as a religion in which forced conversion is not permitted, and eternal salvation cannot be achieved by killing people or committing suicide.

> *Hodzha* 3: Terrorism is strictly forbidden in Islam. Islam has nothing to do with terrorism. Islam absolutely... God's emissary, when he fought wars, before every battle he would say, "Spare the women, spare the children, spare the old women and old people, do not burn houses or cut down trees". In terrorism all those things are always present. The Qur'an says, "Do not kill yourself". A kamikaze does just that. He kills himself. Because he says to himself, since they killed his children there is nothing else he can do but kill himself. This means he is not content with his fate, as ordained by Allah. Islam strictly condemns that. (Interview 17, Ribnovo 2005)

> *Hodzha* 6: Islam is not terrorism ... Islam is mercy. If there was no Islam, there would be no life on this planet. Islam is the link that brings balance to nature. Islam is mercy. Let me say that again: mercy. When a man lives in harmony with himself, he will live in harmony with the people around him, and with God. (Interview 30, Satovcha 2005)

> I.: Speaking of the Islamic ways, first of all Islam categorically forbids suicide. He who commits suicide goes straight to *dzhehennet*. No paradise for him. A religious Muslim can't commit suicide because he knows where he would end up.
>
> M.L.: He can't commit suicide, even for Islam?
>
> I.: He can't. He can't, precisely because of Islam. He may do that in the way of Allah, when a *dzhihad* [*jihad* –M.L.] is proclaimed and so on. But in a quiet village, you can't just come in the evening and set a place on fire, that's simply not allowed. Secondly, he who kills one man, it's as if he's killed all mankind on earth. Those two rules, edicts, ensure that no Muslim can do such a thing. (M, M, Interview 26, Satovcha 2005)

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civilization", which may have transferred certain valuable elements into Europe but did not actually produce them. This is the interpretation of the Hellenistic legacy of Islam which Europeans claim as their own (Asad 2003, p. 168–169). Also, Islam is presupposed to be innately hostile to Europe, for which it is the primary alter (Asad 2003, p. 169).

When discussing terrorism, I asked my respondents about the rules of jihad. The respondents pointed out that one's struggle with weakness is the most difficult *jihad* in a person's life:

> *Hodzha* 3: *Dzhihad* is only permitted when you've been attacked and you have to defend yourself. That's the first thing. Besides, dzhihad has a deeper meaning … *dzhihad* does not just mean armed struggle… *Dzhihad* is a struggle with yourself, a struggle with your own experiences. I mean… That's the deep meaning of the word *dzhihad*. Not taking a rifle and shooting people. (Interview 17, Ribnovo 2005)

> *Hodzha* 5: *Dzhihad* can be interpreted as an inner struggle. Struggling with oneself, one's sufferings and desires. (Interview 26, Satovcha 2005)

> I.: *Dzhihad* has become a terrible word in our time. It causes fear, anxiety, terror in the world. Whereas *dzhihad* is something I am waging on myself, that's *dzhihad*, for four years now. I am waging a *dzhihad* with my family. I am waging a *dzhihad* with her [he points to his wife – M.L.], with my parents. I'm a never-ending *dzhihad*. (M, M, Interview 26, Satovcha 2005)

The idea that the inner struggle is one's most difficult *jihad* is described as coming from the prophet Muhammad, spoken after his men described a battle as the hardest battle they had fought in their lives:

> I.: When the Prophet Muhammad came back from battle, and they were all settling down to rest, exhausted, tired, they said "But *rasul* Allah [emissary of Allah – M.L.] this was the hardest battle in our life. And we won it from that moment". He turned back and said, "listen. We've won a battle, but another major battle awaits us." They say, "*Rasul* Allah, what do you mean?". "A great jihad awaits each of us, a *dzhihad* against oneself. We have to overcome ourselves to become firm believers". (M, M, Interview 26, Satovcha 2005)

Although the different types of religious belief described in this chapter are represented by different respondents, sometimes they coincide in the worldview of a single person. Some of the utterances and behaviours suggest that young people remain partly immersed in "Adat Islam", and older people have absorbed some of the teachings of the younger *hodzhas*.

Sincretic and anti-syncretic attitudes coexist in "Adat Islam" because the model is the product of many centuries of peaceful coexistence were different religious groups have learned to preserve its own religious boundaries. Although this chapter has primarily emphasised the superficially syncretic attitudes and non-Muslim-friendly soteriology of "Adat Islam", this model in the Western Rhodopes should be considered in conjunction with narratives depreciating Christianity.

As this material suggests, the good-neighbourly relations (*komshuluk*) is potentially threatened not only by the political situation, but also by the growing imbalance between the increasingly diplomatic Islam of the *hodzhas* and educated Muslims and the heterodox Islam of the older generation. In the Islamic community this shifts the center of its values: the point of reference is no longer the mixed local

population but rather the community of orthodox Muslims predestined salvation. Caused by anti-syncretic processes and imported foreign models of Islamic belief, this tendency may lead to a situation where the "shared", traditional cultural background no longer unites the two communities.

6 Muslim Religious Narratives and Perceptions of Christianity

> *As for the Christians... The Christians, well, please don't be offended but they are deluded. They are deluded to believe in the cross, and in azreti Isa. Azreti was created, Miriam is his mother.*
>
> (Interview 3, Ribnovo 2005)

One simile in particular came up repeatedly in my field research, namely the idea that the difference between Islam and Christianity was very small, "as thin as an onion skin". Initially, I presumed this was an off-the-cuff metaphor, coined in reply to my ethnographic querying, but the simile seems to be more established. One female respondent, Shukri of Gorno Drianovo, attributed it all the way back to the prophet Muhammad:

> M.L.: What are the differences between the Bible and the Qur'an?
>
> S.: The difference? Let me give you an example from the times of Muhammad. When he began to spread Islam and the idolaters expelled him from Mecca to Medina, Christians welcomed him in Medina. They asked him, why did you get expelled by the idolaters, what kind of religion are you preaching? He began to answer them. And they said, the difference between Christianity and Islam is like an onion skin. It's so small. So, there aren't any important differences. (M, M, Interview 38, Leshten 2006)

Fanny J. Blunt[334] recorded the same metaphor in a sermon given by a 19th-century *hodzha*[335] who told his congregation, "O true believers, open your purses every one of you, and give largely to the poor and needy! Refuse no charity either to Muhammadans or Christians, for they are separated from us only by the thickness of the skin of an onion" (Blunt 2005 [oryg. 1878], p. 160). The metaphor was presumably an established foundational element of local[336] religious tolerance aimed at bringing the two religious groups together and defusing their potentially destabilizing differences. The image of an object as small and insignificant as an onion skin[337] neutralizes the fear of religious conflict. Why fight over an onion skin, the metaphor implies, if the

334 A British consul's daughter married to another consul, Blunt spent twenty years living in European and Asian parts of Turkey in the second half of the 19th century.

335 F.J. Blunt does not identify the location but the context suggests the semon was preached in Dobrudzha.

336 As a matter of conjecture, the metaphor may plausibly be known in other religiously mixed communities in the former Ottoman territories, possibly even quite far-flung ones. This is suggested not only by the 19th-century accounts of Fanny J. Blunt but also by a similar account recorded M. Lubaś in Western Macedonia, a fair distance from my research location (Lubaś 2011, p. 228).

337 Christians use the same simile.

core of the Abrahamic tradition is shared by Muslims, Jews and Christians alike, even though it is obscured by a thin layer of outward practices. Each of the religions considers itself to be the true heir of the tradition (and its competitors to be usurpers) to create "symbolic boundaries" which "are necessary even for the private organizing of experience. But public rituals which perform this function are also necessary to the organizing of society" (Douglas 2003, p. 53).

According to Florentina Badalanova, the oral tradition in the Balkans can be seen as "an implicit bridge between different confessional patterns and as a verbal paradigm of popular faith" (Badalanova 2001, p. 37), which Badalanova believes to be an alternative to the canonical and apocryphal texts of the Old and New Testament and of the Qur'an (Badalanova 2001, p. 52), suggesting a history of hidden cross-pollination between the Jewish, Christian and Jewish-Muslim oral variants (cf. Badalanova 2001, p. 37; Badalanova 2002a, p. 63). The influence of Judaism and Christianity on Islam can also be found outside of the Balkans, going back to Islam's formative period in the Arabian Peninsula where, as Marek Starowieyski[338] speculates, the Ebionite variant of Judaeo-Christian theology probably played a major role in the process (Starowieyski 2003a, p. 246). According to Galina Lozanova[339], narratives and stories of biblical origin must have infiltrated early Islam through the influence of Christians and Jews converted to Islam in its early centuries, mainly through oral transmission. Such narratives featured "Old Testament prophets and wise men, Jesus Christ and the Apostles, martyrs and monks. At first the stories were spread by Jews and Christians, and later also by itinerant folk singers[340]" (Lozanova 2008, p. 15, my translation). The connections with the Jewish and Christian traditions are also apparent in some religious Islamic writings, such as al-Tabari's[341] *Tarikh al-Rusul wa-al-Muluk* (*A History of Prophets and Kings*, known as *The History of al-Tabari*[342]) or al-Tha'labi's *Lives of the Prophets*.

338 Marek Starowieyski is a Catholic priest and a well-known Polish theologian and patristic scholar, editor of Poland's best-known multi-volume edition of Christian apocrypha.

339 Galina Lozanova is a folklorist and researcher from the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences specializing in the Muslim oral narrative tradition in Bulgaria.

340 In Arabic: *qisasi* (storyteller).

341 Al-Tabari (838–923), an Arab historiographer and theologian of Persian descent, author of many books of commentary on the Qur'an collectively known as *Tafsir al-Tabari* and *History of the Prophets and Kings* (*Tarikh al-Rusul wa-al-Muluk*), also known as *The History of al-Tabari*. This monumental history of the world from its beginning until 915 is a remarkable achievement for a single scholar. For al-Tabari, the different strands in his writing formed a coherent whole since the Arabic Muslim culture of the day did not make a clear-cut distinction between Islam and historiography. Al-Tabari does not engage polemically with his historical material (creation of the world, the prophets, ancient Arab history), and often uses the hadith structure to communicate information about historical or religious events (Bielawski 1995, p. 175–176).

342 This historical and religious story has a hadith-like structure in that it contains a chain of narration or *isnad* and the text proper (*matn*), and the author relies on texts from *isra'iliyyat*, a body of narratives originating from the Jewish and Christian tradition.

Ultimately, the chronology and origins of the metaphor remain a matter of conjecture: was it coined by Muhammad, or perhaps by Ottoman *hodzhas*, to serve as an instrument in the Empire's policy of peaceful religious coexistence? And if so, which faction coined it – was it first proposed by a religious writer and adopted locally, or was it invented by a local *hodzha* and gained wider currency? The metaphor was noted in the field by myself and by Fanny J. Blunt writing 200 years ago – a coincidence or a case of cultural *longue durée*?

We cannot be certain, but as ethnographers we may look for answers to different questions – how does this metaphor (mostly used by Muslims) relate to other aspects of the daily coexistence of Muslims and Orthodox Christians in the Western Rhodopes?

Taken literally, the metaphor seems to imply that the two religions are united by a single canon, their differences being very much a matter of secondary importance. This is a false impression, as my respondents make clear in more in-depth conversations. Like the protestations of brotherly love between Muslims and Christians discussed in the earlier chapters, the metaphor is another way of upholding good relations between neighbours who are members of different religious groups.

The metaphor contains a positive message of religious tolerance between religious groups, which is underpinned by a desire to protect group boundaries and by a mistrust of the (still sporadic) mixed marriages, as suggested by another local proverb, "Every frog knows which puddle it belongs in". The narratives below have been chosen to illustrate what Muslims tend to make of the Christian "puddle", and why they are not too eager to join them in the same puddle.

***

Muslims in the Rhodopes must relate to Jews and Christians as members of the youngest monotheistic religion and inhabitants of a religiously mixed area. Their narratives about Christians and Christianity tend to vary depending on the model of Islam they embrace (Adat or Salafi) and the personal level of competence in matters of religion. Those less knowledgeable have no understanding of circumcision or baptism, other than the fact that the two practices mark the religious identity of members of a given group.

More competent respondents, particularly those who embrace "Adat Islam", primarily emphasize the religious boundaries between Islam and Christianity by presenting Christianity as a religion based on human error, distorting revealed religion. In doing so they invoke events from sacred narratives which function as norms or models for interpreting reality. One important element in such narratives involves demonstrating Islam's superiority to Christianity, which for Adat Muslims mainly applies to the symbolic sphere. By way of contrast, adherents of the Salafi model invoke the classic seventh-century Islam as the ideal model.

The contrast between Islam seen as the religion of salvation and Christianity seen as a religion based on a corrupted misunderstanding of revealed truth seems particularly important to Bulgarian-speaking Muslims, who feel the need to validate their religion in the eyes of Christians. The Muslims realize that their Christian neighbours consider

them to be converts and flawed Muslims, which often boosts their levels of religious committment relative to their Christian neighbours, who by and large embrace their religion unthinkingly. Unlike the local Christians, who consider their religion to be an element of tradition and think little about its doctrines, Muslims tend to take more interest in the study of Islam. As a group, the Muslims have experienced historical or political prejudice and mistreatment, and must work harder to ensure their religious identity is recognized.

Regardless of their preferred model of Islam, Muslims in the Rhodopes claim that their beliefs and practices go back to the Qur'an. Salafi Muslims, whose religious life is strongly based on the written word, treat the Qur'an as synonymous with the written text (some *hodzhas* intersperse their comments with passages from the Qur'an in Arabic). By contrast, Adat Muslims, whose religious life is dominated by the oral tradition, treat of the Qur'an in a much broader sense. "At the same time, each storyteller is convinced that his tale is 'the true one', believing that it springs from the Holy Koran itself, and repeats the sacred utterance of Muhammad word for word" (Badalanova 2001, p. 48). *Hodzhas* often prefer to cite direct passages from the Qur'an rather than to interpret them in their own way. In our conversations they often cited the same passages twice, first in Arabic and then again in Bulgarian, in an attempt to shore up the orthodoxy of their beliefs, which they are afraid of perverting or corrupting. This also applies to those respondents who have no first-hand knowledge of the Qur'an, and only know it from *hodzhas* or other people.

Still, many such beliefs are not fully compatible with the written Qur'an in that they venture outside the scriptural canon or motifs analogous to the rich historical-religious writings[343] and folk literature in Arabic and Turkish, to Christian apocrypha, Midrash, Haggadah and, notably, lives of the prophets (*qisas al-anbiya*). Particularly influential texts in the latter category seem to include lives of prophets by al-Tha'labi, al-Tabari and al-Rabghuzi, a 14th-century Turkish writer from Western Turkistan, who was familiar with the writings of the former two (cf. Badalanova Geller 2008b, p. 99)[344].

Florentina Badalanova proposes the valuable insight that just as the Christian communities in the Balkans have two Bibles (the canonical scriptural text and the folk Bible), similarly the Muslims have two Qur'ans – one based on the canonical Arabic text, and one complemented with biblical and pseudo-biblical narratives (Badalanova 2001). According to Florentina Badalanova, some of the motifs and elements present in the Balkan oral tradition are very archaic, containing elements which are parallel

343 My respondents usually fail to realize those similarities and assume that their religious narratives come exclusively from the Qur'an.

344 In her most recent book (2008b), F. Badalanova Geller analyses Muslim beliefs about the creation of Adam and Hawwa collected in the village of Gorno Kraishte in 2005. Badalanova notes the connections between her material collected from Bulgarian-speaking Muslims and the material collected by J. Knappapert among Egyptian Muslims, and the various lives of the prophets by al-Tha'labi, al-Tabari, al-Rabghuzi.

to the so-called Ur-hypertext[345], i.e. the proto-narrative which predated the oral and written fabric of scriptural narratives in the Jewish, Christian and Muslim traditions (Badalanova 2008a, s. 162). The thesis is impossible to verify: the trajectories of those narratives cannot be retraced, and it is difficult to establish whether the oral narratives found in the Rhodopes today are products of a synthesis of Qur'anic elements with other sources[346], such as commentaries on the Qur'-an (*tafsir*), histories (*tarikh*) and lives of the prophets (*qisas al-anbiya*), but also midrashic texts and hagaddas, the Christian Bible and the Torah – or whether they actually "remember the prototext" which served as a matrix for all those sources[347] (Badalanova 2001, p. 47). Badalanova believes that all the different layers of the prototext "have functioned throughout centuries independently, yet coherently bound, still evidently retaining certain inner, clandestine links of mutual interdependence, despite of the different languages and dialects through the means of which they were transmitted" (Badalanova Geller 2008b, p. 100). I suppose that narratives parallel to lives of the prophets were not self-generated in the Rhodopes from an original ur-source (or its variants) transmitted locally down the generations, but rather were popularized by the religious elites. A fruitful contribution to the question of provenance could probably come from looking at the historical period of the parents and grandparents of my respondents who shared narratives similar to lives of the prophets: a future interdisciplinary research project into late 19th-century popular religious literature in the Ottoman Empire and early 20th-century popular religious literature in Bulgaria might yield the answer to the question whether lives of the prophets were popular at the time in the general population (or at least familiar to a smaller group of readers).

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In my material, my respondents' religious narratives serve primarily to explain the symbolic meaning of the group's religious rites and injunctions, and also to point

345 F. Badalanova believes that such elements, communicated orally by Muslims and Christians in Bulgaria, predate those contained in the Holy Scriptures (Badalanova 2002b, p. 35), the Bible itself being one of the later transformations of the Ur-hypertext (Badalanova Geller 2008b, p. 7). "Unlike their written counterpart, these unwritten Holy Scriptures were extant in many oral versions. Some of them were first registered during the 19th century and published in a number of ethnographic and folklore collections. Anthropological field research in the region of Eurasia indicates that traces of these texts can still be found in indigenous oral traditions; furthermore many new versions can be encountered. These may either reflect canonical or apocryphal accounts of the Bible, or Qur'an and Hadiths, or offer alternatives to them, thereby revealing a previously unknown, cluster of folklore texts related to the Holy Scriptures" (Badalanova 2008 b, p. 7).

346 M. Starowieyski points out that the connections between the Qur'an and the Apocrypha (whether direct or indirect) are beyond doubt, and their contents may have originated in tradition or folklore (cf. Starowieyski 2003, p. 170–180).

347 In the case of legends of the Bible prophets and heroes the latter explanation is particularly likely since "orally transmitted folklore such as proverbs and legends can survive relatively intact for centuries with no help from written sources" (Dundes 1999, p. 10).

out the other religion's inadequacy. The narratives explicate the meaning of Muslim religious practices necessary for salvation such as *kurban, namaz, syunnet*, *abdest* and the covering of the body, and to depreciate Christian practices such as the belief in Jesus Christ as the Son of God, the cult of the Holy Trinity, the sign of the cross or the veneration of icons. In this sense, they are like mythical narratives, "sacred tale[s] about past events which [are] used to justify social action in the present" (Leach, cited in: Badalanova 2001, p. 51).

Some Muslim respondents tell long narratives explaining the origins of Muslim and Christian religious practices. In those narratives Islam is presented as a religion intended by God at the dawn of time (i.e. since Adam and Hawwa[348]) and perfectly suited for human needs – unlike Christianity, a religion corrupted by Satan and the teachings of the apostle Paul. In my area of study Muslims tended to invoke two themes in this context: the creation and lapse of Adam and Hawwa, and the sinful humanity in the days of Nuh/Noah (Bulgarian: Noy, Turkish, Arabic and local Muslim version: Nuh). Their narratives sacralize Islam (as the only pure religion which accurately reflects the revealed truth), and desacralize Christianity (as a corrupted quasi-religion), depicting Christians as people who perform false religious gestures based on a misunderstanding of the revealed truth, which the Gospels preserve in a corrupted form. This is combined with a strong need to distinguish themselves from Christian neighbours, who serve as an important reference point. By practising their own religious rites, non-Muslims throw into question the evident nature of Muslim religious practices, prompting a search for explanations which could safeguard the continued existence of a separate Muslim identity. Such explanations are almost never discussed in mixed religious company: Muslims and Christians tend to leave religion and politics out of their conversations. The comments discussed in this chapter were all made in religiously homogenous groups.

Although I am primarily interested in how Muslims use the symbols which position their religious belief vis-a-vis their Christian neighbours, I tried to paint a broader canvas to include the accompanying religious narrative in which such symbols are embedded because such symbols also symbolize the sphere of the sacred (Cichowicz 1985, p. 25) and must be analysed in the religious contexts identified by the respondents to reduce the risk of misreading. To paraphrase Paul Ricoeur, I treat the religious narratives of my respondents as a special symbol embedded in a closely woven narrative tissue. Ricoeur would probably refer to such symbols as myths, i.e. "symbols developed in the forms of narrations and articulated in a time and space". For instance, "exile is a primary symbol of human alienation, but the history of the expulsion of Adam and Eve from Paradise is a mythical narration" which becomes elaborated by the introduction of human characters within time and place and embellished with fantastical episodes: according to Ricoeur, this closely

348 Hawwa is not identified by name in the Qur'an.

woven narrative tissue is crucial to myth" (Ricoeur 1967, p. 18) (though given the anachronistic ring of the term "myth" I propose the term "religious narrative" as a more neutral alternative in this book).

Although the chapter contains comments by both Adat and Salafi Muslims, the former predominate because my key aim was to distinguish between the basic themes with which Muslims stake out the symbolic boundaries which put them apart from Christians.

In my material, this boundary-making process involves several themes which present Christianity, variously, as: 1) a religion which has broken the promise made by the souls in Paradise, and which abandoned the rituals introduced by Adam and Hawwa, 2) a cult of a false book, 3) an idolatrous cult of the Son of God, initiated by the apostle Paul, or 4) a cult of material objects, a form of sinful iconolatry.

6.1 Christians as "Perjurers" and "Adam and Hawwa's Worse Children"

The Muslim narrative of Adam and Hawwa serves to validate the importance of Islam as the oldest and truest of religions, and to depreciate all other religions, Christianity in particular. The present study of the beliefs of Bulgarian-speaking Muslims concerning the creation of Adam and Hawwa is not the first of its kind; the problem has been explored by Galina Lozanova in her book *Sŭtvorenyeto v ustnata traditsiya na bŭlgarite myusyulmani* (2008) and an earlier article, *Sŭtvorenyeto na Adam i Havva v narativnata traditsiya na bŭlgarite myusyulmani* (1999). Similarly, Florentina Badalanova's paper *The Biblie in the Making: Slavonic Creation Stories* (2008a) and book, *Qur'an in Vernacular* (2008b), are rich sources of material on the subject. However, the narrative variants in those publications are presented in a different context and from a different critical angle. In the present chapter, the narrative of Adam and Hawwa is discussed with regard to questions of ritual ablutions before prayer, the reading of the Qur'an, and the circling of the Kaaba.

I heard the Muslim narrative of Adam and Hawwa from several respondents. The longest version was narrated by *bula*, a *hodzha's* daughter born in 1933 in a mixed Muslim-Christian village of Gospodintsi. After getting married at the age of 16 *bula* moved to Ribnovo where she has lived since. Unwilling to attend a Bulgarian high school, she dropped out of school after completing her primary education. Her elder sister[349], who studied medicine in Gotse Delchev and qualified as a medical doctor, tried to talk *bula* out of dropping out, but *bula* saw continued education as a threat to her religious faith, and chose to live her life according to the will of Allah. She

349 The incident sparked an argument between the sisters, with *bula* tearing up her sister's diploma to make a point about her own unwillingness to stay in a Bulgarian school.

believes that the locals in Ribnovo respect her for her religious knowledge, which is comparable to that of a *hodzha*; she helps the locals by "writing down" prayers for them, so I refer to her as a *bula*. *Bula* claims to have received a sign in a dream in which her husband's deceased female cousin gave her a portrait of an angel carrying *bula*'s prayers for other people. *Bula* says that her extensive knowledge of Islam is based on the Qur'an and stories told by her father, who "used to read her various Muslim books" which he had translated into Bulgarian. With one exception[350], *bula* was unable to identify those books by title (Interview 14, Ribnovo 2009).

I suppose *bula* may have been referring to various lives of the prophets as her narratives contain many parallels with that source (for instance, cf. al-Kisā'ī[351] 1997, p. 23–55).

Bula's narratives contain motifs such as the creation of Adam and Hawwa, the creation of human souls, and the effects of eating the forbidden fruit, which identify the origins of Muslim religious practices and validate the relative perceptions of Islam and other religions.

To an extent, my respondents' narratives of Adam and Hawwa were compatible with the Qur'an, which mentions events such as the creation of Adam and his wife (3: 59, 7: 11, 15: 28, 38: 75–76[352]), the angels bowing to Adam and Iblis (Satan) refusing to fall prostrate (2: 33, 7: 11, 15: 30–31, 17: 61; 18: 50, 20: 116, 38: 73–4, 76), the expulsion of Satan from Paradise (15: 34, 38: 77), Allah forbidding the first parents to eat the fruit of the forbidden tree (2: 35, 7: 19), the creation of humankind and its declaration of faith in Allah (7: 172), Iblis vowing revenge on people (15: 39, 38: 83), seducing the first parents (7: 20), the eating of the forbidden fruit (20: 117–121). The Qur'an is laconic about those events (for instance, it simply says that Satan "brought" people "out" of paradise and "stripp[ed] them of their garments", cf. 2: 36, 7: 27, 7: 22, 20: 121), but many Muslim religious writings offer detailed accounts of those events, complete with detailed descriptions of Adam's food, the name of the wife created from Adam's rib and Iblis's attempts to infiltrate Paradise and seduce the first parents, leading to their fall. Unlike the Qur'an, such narratives split the blame between Adam and Hawwa (Adam is half asleep, not fully aware of the fact that he is eating the forbidden fruit; Hawwa bears more blame because she is inherently more susceptible to sin and manipulation).

This idea is not fully compatible with the Qur'an, where both parents are blamed, but Adam bears more of the responsibility: "Then Satan whispered to him saying,

350 *Budilnik na myusulmanite*, published (according to my respondent) some twenty years ago. Disappointingly, the respondent could not show the book to me as she had loaned the book to someone.

351 Muhammad Ibn 'Abd Allah al-Kisa'i (13th century) was one of the better-known authors of lives of prophets.

352 Unless they are colloquial paraphrases, all quotations from the Qur'an in this book follow Arthur John Arberry's 1955 translation *The Koran Interpreted*, available online at http://web.archive.org/web/20071219022352/http://arthursclassicnovels.com/arthurs/koran/koran-arberry10.html).

'Adam shall I point thee to the Tree of Eternity, and a Kingdom that decays not?' So the two of them ate of it, and their shameful parts revealed to them, and they took to stitching upon themselves leaves of the Garden. And Adam disobeyed his Lord, and so he erred" (20: 120–121). Those versions which put most of the blame on Hawwa are probably based on the book of Bereshit (Genesis), Christian apocrypha and Jewish midrashic narratives.

Adam and Hawwa are discussed in commentaries on the Qur'an (*tafsir*), histories (*tarikh*), lives of the prophets[353] and, to a much lesser extent, in hadiths. The most famous collection of hadiths by Muhammad Isma'il al-Bukhari (810–870)[354] only mentions elements connected with the creation of the first people[355], leaving out the fall of Adam and Hawwa and the consequences of eating the forbidden fruit.

According to Wilson B. Bishai, Muslim writers writing about Adam and Hawwa were probably inspired by *The Life of Adam and Eve*[356] (5th-6th c.)[357], a Syriac text entitled *The Cave of Treasures* (6th c.)[358], and the Coptic text *The Encomium of Theodosius on Saint Michael the Archangel* (possibly composed in the 6th century) (Bishai 1971, p. 125–128). Presumably, the Slavic apocrypha known in Bulgaria including *A Word on Adam and Eve* (*Slovo za Adam i Eva ot nachaloto do svŭrŝeka*, 10-11th c.), *On the Sea of Tiberias* (*Za Tiveryadskoto More*, probably 11th-12th c.), *A Word from John Chrysostom on How Michael Vanquished Satanael* (*Slovo na sveti Ioan Zlatoust za tova kak Mihail pobedi Satanata*, the earliest known copy dates back to the 16th century), and *The Beginning of the World* (*Pochetiye svyeta*), 17th-century manuscript from the Ivan Vazov Library in Plovdiv, probably composed in Bosnia in Bogomil circles (cf. Minczew [Minchev] 2006, p. 26) were indirectly influenced by those sources since they are compilations of earlier texts supplemented with passages composed in Bulgaria (Minczew [Minchev] 2006, p. 3). Given the heterogeneous nature of beliefs concerning Adam and Hawwa, however, it is difficult to identify the different layers or their origins with any degree of certainty.

The narrative elements in my respondent's story of the creation of the first parents as well as her description of their transgression and its consequences betray significant similarities to elements found in Islamic literature. The associated element

353 In the Islamic tradition, Adam was the first man and the first prophet.

354 A Sunni Islamic scholar of Persian descent regarded as the greatest collector of Muslim traditions. His *Sahih al-Bukhari*, a selection of hadiths, is regarded by Sunni Muslims as an authentic source of hadith traditions. Al-Bukhari also laid down the rules for classifying hadiths and ascertaining their credibility (cf. Danecki 1997, p. 54).

355 It mentions, among other things, the creation of woman out of Adam's rib, which is not found in the Qur'an (4: 55: 548, 7: 62: 114), and Adam's remarkable height of 100 feet (8: 74: 246, 4: 55: 543).

356 Also known as *Vita Adae et Euae*.

357 The oldest known copy is an Arabic source from the 11th century (Budge 1927, p. 1); the text is available online at http://www.sacred-texts.com/chr/bct/index.htm (20.12.2011).

358 Containing numerous borrowings from the *Life of Adam and Eve* (Budge 1927, p. XI).

of the first defecation caused by the eating of the forbidden fruit (leading directly to expulsion from Paradise) was not widely found among my respondents[359], and the local *hodzhas* do not in any way consider it to be part of "high" Islamic literature.

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In the Muslim oral tradition and in non-Qur'anic literature - inspired by Judaeo-Christian legends, Adam is created out of dust (earth), and Adam's wife is made out of one of his ribs. The narrative says that Adam long remained inanimate[360], like an effigy or a statue. According to different versions, Adam remained in this state for varying periods of time ranging from 400,000 years (cf. Lozanova 2008, p. 51), 70,000 years (cf. Lozanova 1999, p. 285), 40 years (al-Tha'labi *Lives of the prophets*, cited in: Badalanova 2008, p. 98–9) to 40 days. Adam's soul, which is created later, enters the body gradually so that Adam can gain self-knowledge about his worthlessness because as a being fashioned out of earth (as opposed to angels, who are made of fire):

> *Bula*: Then he pressed on his lower back and he made a soul. [At first] he only placed the soul in his head, so he could see and witness that he was made out of earth. The soul was only in his head. So, he's looking, looking through his eyes, and sees that he's all made of earth. Then he gave him a soul [that came] down to the lower back, and his stomach tightened: he's hungry, but he can't eat. There is no soul in his legs, so he can't walk. He should walk on his legs now, but there's no soul in his legs. (Interview 14, Ribnovo 2005)

The same motif was recorded by Galina Lozanova in the village of Debren near Ribnovo, though her material does not mention Adam's unsuccessful attempt to walk: "The soul comes further down, and he, Adam can see himself transforming, earth into... When the blood reaches him, he can move his arms, [extend them] down, down, all the way down to the big toe ... Adam's soul reached up to here [the neck – G.L.], and he sneezed it out and said, 'Thank you, you created me'" (2008, p. 57 [my translation]).

According to Leigh N.B. Chipman, the belief that Adam made unsuccessful attempts to walk before his soul could animate every part of his body is only found in the Muslim tradition and refers to the Qur'an, verses 17: 11, 21: 38 (Chipman 2001, p. 5–25). My respondent's narrative likewise contains an element where all souls are created out of Adam's body by "press[ing] on his lower back":

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359 Similar variants of this narrative have been noted by other researchers, including Rachimov, who worked among Tajik Muslims (cf. Wasilewski 1989, p. 187).

360 The Bible also mentions the fact that Adam was first formed "of the dust of the ground" before God breathed the breath of life into his nostrils and he became "a living soul" (Genesis 2, 7, King James Version). The Bible does not explain how long Adam remained inanimate, a problem discussed in many apocrypha, which often claim that man had been somehow tampered with, and deformed by, Satan when left unattended by God (Holy Bible, 1611).

> *Bula*: And when he pressed on his lower back, all the souls came out like sparks from a fire, like tiny lights out of a fire. In this way, out came all the souls of all the people, the souls of those living today and [those of] the dead, sine [literally: "son", a form of address used by elders when talking to younger people] [until] the Flood. All the souls came out of his lower back. And Allah said, it is written, he said to the angels: make a bow. And they did, only Satan refused and [Allah] expelled him from *dzhennet*. (Interview 14, Ribnovo 2005)

This motif, though present in the Qur'an (in the passage about the souls created from Adam's loins, 7: 172) has not been attested to date within the oral tradition of Bulgarian-speaking Muslims (cf. Lozanova 2008, p. 72) or in other Muslim religious narratives about Adam. It is also analogous to the kabbalistic belief that all human souls come from Adam as the "primordial man" (Adam Kadmon) in whom "all worlds are reflected" (Unterman 1997, entry for "adam kadmon"). One prevalent idea in Jewish legend is that the souls of all the generations were created along with Adam's soul and are stored in the seventh of the heavens, awaiting incarnation (Ginzberg 2005, p. 56). In *bula*'s version this happened in Paradise, whereas Islamic writings tend to say that the souls were extracted from Adam after his expulsion from Paradise: as Allah struck Adam's lower back (or, in a version attested by Galina Lozanova, simply his back), all of humanity issued out of Adam's back, the people small as ants, and professed their belief in Allah by reciting the *shahadah*[361] before returning to Adam's loins:

> *Bula*: And this is what he said to the little souls: "Will you observe my commandments, as I announce them one by one? Will you say the prayers? Will you study the Qur'an? Will you do that?" And the souls made the promise. All right, then. Our souls had made the promise, but we aren't keeping that promise. This is why we will be punished, this is the reason. Because we made the promise. The soul promised to keep Allah's commandments, and now it does not. Christians, Gypsies, Jews, Muslims. Even Muslims, many of them, aren't keeping the promise. Many of them aren't. They will be punished. You find believers among Christians and non-believers among our people. (Interview 14, Ribnovo 2005)

> *Hodzha* 6: 50,000 years ago, before Allah, God, created the earth and the seven heavens, he created your soul and mine. Perhaps our souls were together back then. Do you understand what I'm saying?! Then God asked us the question: "If I create you and send you to earth to live there as a test, will you keep my injunctions and prohibitions?" At that point your soul said, "I will, my God. I will, my God". All the souls said the same thing, they said yes. "We will keep your commandments". 50,000 years ago, before God created the Earth and the seven heavens, in an unknown space, we don't know where it is. Do you understand? At that time God posed the question to you. And what is it that we're doing today?! What are we doing?! (Interview 30, Satovcha 2005)

361 According to some traditions, only the souls standing to Adam's right side recited the *shahadah* (the Islamic creed, the declaration that "there is no god but God, Muhammad is his prophet"); those on his left did not, and were condemned by Allah (cf. Weil 1863, p. 39). An English translation is available online at http://www.sacred-texts.com/isl/bkt/bkt04.htm (19.02.2012).

The belief that Islam is a religion of all the human souls is an elaboration of a motif from the Qur'an, according to which all human souls had promised to embrace monotheism: "And when thy Lord took from the Children of Adam, from their loins, their seed, and made them testify touching themselves, 'Am I not your Lord?' They said, 'Yes, we testify' – lest you should say on the Day of Resurrection, 'As for us, we were heedless of this,' or lest you say, 'Our fathers were idolaters aforetime, and we were seed after them. What, wilt Thou then destroy us for the deeds of the vain-doers?'" (7: 172–173). According to Galina Lozanova, this view is expressed in an often-quoted hadith (which I also heard in my field research) that every child is born a Muslim (which Lozanova interprets as essentially meaning a monotheist) but may be raised in a different religion by its parents (cf. Lozanova 2008, p. 72).

Other narrative elements, not found in my respondent's version, can also be found in Muslim religious literature, identifying Islam as a religion assigned by God and going all the back to the beginnings of humanity[362]: the *shahadah* (the Muslim confession of faith) is written on Allah's throne, Adam's head and his heart are fashioned out of earth collected at Mecca[363], Adam sees the light of the prophet Muhammad in heaven, Adam and Hawwa are hailed as Muhammad's parents; when the soul fills Adam's body completely he sneezes, praising God with the Muslim formula *al-hamdu li-llah*[364].

My respondents' narrative also contains a Jewish element found in the oral tradition of Bulgarian-speaking Muslims (cf. Unterman 1997, p. 13), where the Angels bow down to Adam, but Iblis "waxes proud" and refuses to do so. For his refusal to prostrate himself, Iblis is punished by God and expelled from Paradise (2: 34, 7: 11). Filled with regret and envy, Iblis plots to enter Paradise and deceive Hawwa.

As in Judaism or Christianity, Iblis tempts Adam and Hawwa with the fruit of the forbidden tree. The Qur'an does not mention the name of the forbidden tree or describe the temptation scene; there is no mention of the snake, and the whole event is enigmatically referred to as a "slipping" from paradise (2: 36)[365]. To satisfy pious

362 My Christian respondents did not make a point of Christianity's superiority over Islam, which they could have done by citing such analogous Christian apocryphal narratives as *The Sea of Tiberias*, where Christianity is presented as the religion God originally intended to be the religion of salvation: "He put Adam to sleep and took a rib from him and created a wife for him. And God asked Adam 'Adam, what did you see in your dream?'. And Adam said, "God, I saw the apostle Peter in Rome being crucified with his head down and {I saw} the Apostle Paul in Damascus. I saw John in Edessa and You, God, in Jerusalem on Golgotha being crucified on a cross and pierced with a lance in Your rib'" (a passage from the apocryphal *The Sea of Tiberias,* translated by Florentina Badalanova Geller from a 16th-century Russian redaction, see Badalanova Geller 2011, p. 120).

363 In Jewish versions the location is identified as Mount Moriah or Jerusalem.

364 Praise God / thank God.

365 "Then Satan caused them to slip therefrom and brought them out of that they were in".

curiosity, more details are provided elsewhere in non-canonical Islamic legends like *qisas al-anbiya* (al-Tha'labi 2002, p. 49), showing clear analogies to *The Cave of Treasures*, except in the latter Satan additionally asks other creatures to take him into Paradise, including various birds, the elephant, the lion, the hyena, the wild boar and a mysterious animal called Taman (Budge 1927, p. 65–66).

In those legends and oral narratives of Bulgarian-speaking Muslims, Satan gets into Paradise by attempting to bribe the guards: the peacock[366] or the serpent, identified in my respondent's version with the *lamia*, a mythological monster[367]. Satan first promises immortality to the peacock (by showing it the tree of immortality or, in my respondent's version, by telling him three secret words) in exchange for letting him in, but the peacock sends Satan back to the serpent/*lamia*. The serpent/*lamia*, a guard of Paradise and a friend of Hawwa[368]. is the only creature in Paradise who agrees to smuggle Satan into Paradise in her mouth or belly[369]. Before being punished by God for her conspiracy she was the queen of the animals, a creature of extraordinary beauty. Hidden in the *lamia's* mouth, Satan impersonates her to deceive Hawwa:

> *Bula*: "Havva, we have been great friends, but there are three things you don't know, and I must tell you about them. There is a certain tree here, she says, and you were told not to eat of its fruit. But there is a man there who, like you two, was created in Paradise" – we call that *dzhennet*, you

366 According to K. Tisdall, the peacock is a Zoroastrian influence, where he symbolised evil (Ariman, cited in: Lozanova 2008, p. 99).

367 The word *lamia* is originally Greek. In Greek mythology, Lamia is known as a lover of Zeus and a female ruler of Libya who turns into a monster and murderer of children and young men after the jealous Hera kills her children. Lamia was imagined to be a hybrid with a female head, animal limbs, a tale, wings and a scaly body. In Bulgarian mythology, the *lamia* is usually a serpent-like creature believed to bring hailstorms and bad harvests (Benovska-Sabkova 1995, 60-61). As my material suggests, the *lamia* may also be associated with the serpent of Paradise (Bulganian: *zmiya*). In Bulgarian, the words for snake (zmiya) and *lamia* are both feminine, so the serpent is a plausible female friend for Eve.

368 The commentator Heronymus (4th century) identified the Greek *Lamia* with Lilith, initially Adam's first wife, later a night monster and baby-snatching demon (Graves, Patai 1964, p. 68). Unlike Eve, she was not created from Adam's rib but from filth and sediment (while Adam from pure dust), so they were almost equals. According to some Hebrew myths, "Adam and Lilith never found peace together; for when he wished to lie with her, she took offence at the recumbent posture he demanded. ‚Why must I lie beneath you?' she asked. ‚I also was made from dust, and am therefore your equal.' Because Adam tried to compel her obedience by force, Lilith, in a rage, uttered the magic name of God, rose into the air and left him" (Graves, Patai 1964, p. 65-6). Lilith is presented as a kind of archetypal feminist in this narrative, and Lamia, Lilith's friend, need not be a friend of Eve. The motif of admitting Satan into one's body, expressed through a story of Satan being smuggled into Paradise in the mouth, can be treated as a symbolic story of *lamia's* voluntary possession which turned her into a tool of Satan as her desire for secret knowledge outweighed her loyalty to a friend/rival (either sexual or intellectual, hoping to possess Satan's secret knowledge). Interestingly, in al-Tha'labi's lives of the prophets the serpent is a friend not of Hawwa but of Iblis, whom he smuggles into Paradise in his mouth, similar to my respondents' narrative (al-Tha'labi 2002, p. 50-51).

369 In other legends she does it unwittingly (cf. Lozanova 2008, p. 98).

call it Paradise [a clarification from the respondent – M.L.] – and he eats of that tree, and he's been there forever. He's been in *dzhennet* these three thousand years, eating of that tree. "You can come along if you like, you'll see that the man is just like you two, and he eats of the tree, living for eternity in *dzhennet*, in Paradise". All right then, but when they reached the tree, he came out of the *lamia's* mouth and turned into a man. Being a melyeke, an angel, he can turn into anything. A man, an animal, anything.

M.L.: But how do you know all that? Is that in the Qur'an, too?

Bula: All this is in the Qur'an. An angel can turn into anything, an animal, a man, anything at all. So, he's turned into a man, and he's walking around the tree, and sits down. (Interview 13, Ribnovo 2005)

An iconographic depiction known in Bulgaria shows a snake with a human head coiled around a tree (for instance, an icon in the church in Arbanasi shows a human head sticking out of the snake's mouth).

Apocryphal writings explicate the motif: "So the devil appeared in Paradise in the form of a serpent called the beautiful virgin as she was created with a female head" (*Początki*... 2006, p. 28 [translated from Polish]). In other apocryphal writings, Satan hides in the snake's mouth or belly, rather than turns into a serpent:

Hodzha 4: This Satan enters the serpent's belly. Because Satan can take on any form he likes, a *melekyeto* [Turkish: *melek*, Arabic: *malak* – angel – M.L.] can turn into anything. (Interview 3, Ribnovo 2005)

"At that time in the Paradise the serpent was the most reputable among animals and the most handsome. The serpent went out of Paradise for a walk, Satan from the very beginning hated that good in mankind, and Sotona turned himself into a worm and crawled to the serpent and said to the serpent' "Eat me". It [in the Old Church Slavonic the noun depicting serpent is feminine – F.B.] ate the worm and took it into Paradise. The serpent then coiled araound the forbidden tree and Sotona started calling out from the serpent mouth" (*The Sea of Tiberias*, see Badalanova Geller 2011, p. 122). However, my respondent's narrative can serve as a possible exegesis of the scene, where Satan leave's the serpent's body near the tree and appears to Hawwa in a human form to tempt her:

Bula: [Satan – M.L.] sat under the tree, and when they drew near, the serpent and *azreti* Havva, they look, and they do indeed find a man under the tree. "I am human like you, created three thousand years ago, and I am here. I was forbidden [to touch] this tree, but I eat of it and I live here eternally. Go on, have some. You were told not to eat of the sweetest tree. Pluck [a fruit] and taste how sweet it is[370]. And Havva[371] plucks one, and eats it. "All right, let me go to my husband,

370 G. Lozanova mentions a similar element in a narrative told by her respondent, Moarem Pahedzhi from the village of Debren: "This is the sweetest apple, bite it" (cited in: Lozanova 2008, p. 100).

371 Possibly for my sake, the respondent alternated between the Arabic and Bulgarian versions of the name, which she uses interchangeably. F. Badalanova had a similar experience (Badalanova 2008a, p. 106).

and tell him to have some, too". He was sleepy, but he got up. He went and when he ate it... What is it that you find here, in a man's [throat]? [the respondent points to her larynx]? That's because of the apple[372].

M.L.: Why did he listen to her?

Bula: He was sleepy, he was asleep and didn't realize it was [the fruit] of the forbidden tree. But he realized he had committed a sin.

M.L.: You mean, he didn't realize she was giving him a fruit from the forbidden tree?

Bula: Exactly. (Interview 13, Ribnovo 2005)

Rather than impersonate a human being, the Satan of Muslim legend and Christian apocrypha takes on the form of an angel[373] or an angel with a face of a man (to convince Hawwa that he had turned into an angel after eating the fruit of the forbidden tree[374]). According to other variants known in the Balkans, Adam did not finish the fruit: this element appears in the well-known apocryphal text *The Beginnings of the World* (*Początki... / Pochetiye svyeta*) where Adam bites the apple and, remembering God's words, chokes on the fruit. The eating of the forbidden fruit makes Adam and Eve sinful and naked (*Początki...*, p. 29):

Bula: They can be small, they can be large, they can turn into anything. So, he enters *dzhennet* and begins to persuade Adam to pick a fruit from the tree and eat it. All right, but he refused. So he persuaded the woman. A woman is more amenable [to persuasion], he talked her into that. "This is the prettiest tree. He forbids you to eat of it. Go on, have some, taste it". She took some and tasted it. "Azreti" Adam was asleep, and she woke him up. "Get up and taste this, just look at this comely tree. And she gave him some [fruit]. "Here, taste it, it's delicious". He took a bite, and immediately realized that Allah had forbidden them to eat of it, that he would be punished for this. As he swallowed, a piece stuck in his throat here. Women don't have this, but he had this bit stuck in his throat. He was trying to spit it out and hide it from Allah. (Interview 13, Ribnovo 2005)

According to al-Tabari, Adam tasted the forbidden fruit after drinking wine provided by Hawwa, who had realized Adam would never have done that while sober (al-Ṭabarī 1989, p. 279).

372 Ayshe from Satovcha identified the forbidden fruit as an olive.

373 (Cf. *Słowo*... 2006, p. 32, 42).

374 The Qur'an either does not identify the tree at all (7: 19) or refers to it as "the Tree of Eternity" (20: 120). In al-Tha'labi's it is called "the tree of immortal life" or "the tree of eternal life" (al-Tha'labi 2002, p. 50-51) and in al-Tabari, "the forbidden tree" (al-Ṭabarī, 1989 p. 129).

In other words, Islamic legends primarily blame Hawwa for the original sin[375], which explains why the religion places the most demanding religious duties on women. This interpretation is not compatible with the Qur'an, which splits the blame between Adam and his wife.

I also encountered another variant of the narrative, in which only Adam ate of the forbidden tree, and was expelled from Paradise alone:

> M.L.: But what happened after he followed the call and God...
>
> A.: God punished him, expelled him from the garden of Paradise.
>
> M.L.: And what about Havva?
>
> A.: Havva was not [expelled]. She committed no sin, she did not bite [the fruit] or ever did anything impure. He was the only one chased out the garden of Paradise. There's something else but I don't know ...
>
> M.L.: You mean, she stayed in Paradise?
>
> A.: So I heard. Perhaps there was more to it, but I've forgotten it. It's an old story, my grandmother told it to me. (W, M, Interview 24, Satovcha 2005)

In *bula*'s narrative, Adam and Hawwa eat the fruit and react with immediate horror. Adam is more fully aware of the consequences of their transgression. Contrary to the version in the Qur'an, all of humanity inherits the blame in her narrative: after the first parents eat of the forbidden fruit, those parts of the body which caused the transgression must be ritually cleansed:

> *Bula*: He became awake, came to his senses and realized that it was the [forbidden] tree [they were eating from]. "Hey, what have we done! *Haram*". He made a gesture with his hand, like this [the respondent clutches her head]. We wash our hands because they picked [the fruit] of that tree. We rinse our mouth because they ate it. We clean our noses because the nose smelled [the fruit] of the tree. This is the point of *abdest,* to cleanse oneself of all sins before prayer.
>
> M.L.: Do you wash the nose as well?
>
> *Bula*: Yes, three times.
>
> M.L.: And why the head?

375 According to my Muslim respondents, this is because of Eve's stupidity. "He could never have deceived a man. A man has nine times the amount of sense that a woman does. It says so in the Qur'an" (Interview 13, Ribnovo 2005). Cf. the material collected by G. Lozanova (Lozanova 2008, p. 100).

> *Bula*: That's because he said, "Alas, what have we done!" *Haram*! So. That's why you need water. For our ears, because we listened to Satan, and for this bit here, above the eyes, because we stared. And the ears, like so [demonstrates – M.L.], all the way to the back of your neck. And you say this. You perform *abdest* so that all the sins fall away, and then you can say your prayers without sin. So Allah accepts it. (Interview 13, Ribnovo 2005)

Because Adam and Eve's defilement affects all of mankind, Christian prayers are inferior because they involve no *abdest* to guarantee ritual purity through the gestures which, to Muslims, symbolically restore the edenic purity of the worshipper's body and spirit[376]. The motif of ritual purification by immersion in water is also known in Jewish legends[377], and in *Slovo za Adam i Eva ot nachaloto do svŭrŝeka* (cf. *Słowo*... 2006, p. 42).

The Qur'an does not posit a link between Muslim religious practices and the sin of the first parents, and refers to ablutions as a precondition for prayer in unrelated passages (Suras 4: 43, 5:6, and 22: 29): "O believers, when you stand up to pray wash your faces, and your hands up to the elbows, and wipe your heads, and your feet up to the ankles..." (5: 6).

According to my respondent, sin brought about the spiritual and corporal shame of human physiology. Unlike all previous foods, the fruit of the forbidden tree led to defecation, a symbol of impurity and sin[378]. From this moment on people, unlike angels, became impure (al-Ṭabarī 1989, p.108, Badalanova 2008, p. 102; Wheeler 2004). Because there "must be no faeces in Paradise" they were expelled (al-Ṭabarī 1989, p. 108).

Another respondent, Ayshe of Satovcha, said that Adam needed to urinate after eating the forbidden fruit (an olive in her version). Adam tried to hide and met God, who asked him about his unpleasant body odor. Adam failed to confess his sin, and was duly punished:

> A.: He ate that olive and went to take a pee, to relieve himself. He kept walking and walking, looking and looking, he disappeared into some hiding place. But God came and said, "Adam,

376 Ablutions are closely connected with the prayer which follows, and which can be considered part of it. As a form of contact with the sacred, Wasilewski points out, prayer should be wrapped in the same kind of ideal reality as the mythical time of beginning (cf. Wasilewski 1989, p. 76–77), so the obligation to perform ablutions before prayer sets the scene for a model, sacred situation untainted by any impurity (cf. Wasilewski 1989, p. 44, 8).

377 Adam realised that Eve would be unable to mortify her body. As penance he told her to "[a]rise, and go to the Tigris, take a stone and stand upon in the deepest part of the river , where the water will reach as high as thy neck. And let no' speech issue forth from thy mouth, for we are unworthy to supplicate God, our lips are unclean by reason of a forbidden fruit of the tree" (Ginzberg 2005, p. 87).

378 Importantly, the new generation of young *hodzhas* in the Western Rhodopes dismiss this element as a worthless local folk tradition, without realising that it appears in al-Tabari, who quotes it on the authority of Abu al-'Aliyah (al-Ṭabarī 1989, p. 108, 280; cf. also Wheeler 2004, p. 89–119).

what's that unpleasant smell?". "It's nothing. There's no unpleasant smell". Then he punished him. He expelled him from the garden of Paradise. I don't remember what happened next. (W, M, Interview 24, Satovcha 2005)

In *bula*'s version, the attempt to conceal the physiological effects of sin produced hair on the head, in the armpits and around the genitals, leading to another religious duty being imposed on the first parents. Her version treats hair as the most impure part of the human body, a kind of stigma caused by the eating of the forbidden tree and a remnant of the faecal matter Adam and Hawwa rubbed into parts of their bodies when trying to conceal their shame:

Bula: Now, after they'd sinned, they needed to relieve themselves. Unlike the fruit they used to eat [before – M.L.], which never made them go. So, what should they do? It was a clean place, such things were unknown ... so they took this thing, and started rubbing it into their heads, under the armpits, around their intimate parts... That's why it's sinful today, hair is [a product] of sin. A woman's hair shouldn't be seen. The woman ate a whole fruit and started rubbing it into her head, into her armpits, around her intimate parts. And her husband here, below the head, that's why they shave now to get rid of it. That's why it's sinful to show your hair. For every hair a woman exposes, a serpent will [torment her] in *dzhennet*, in hell. (Interview 13, Ribnovo 2005)

Similar narratives were recorded by the Bulgarian folklorist Evgeniya Mitseva in the village of Chernoglavtsi (Shumen province) in 1987 and by Florentina Badalanova in the village of Gorno Kraishte near Blagoevgrad in 2005:

...Then God said to Adem [one of the local variants of the name, probably from Turkish: Âdem-M.L.], and Havva, "You can eat from everything here, but you shouldn't eat the wheat from the wheat-tree!", [which is the ear of grain] from which we now make bread. Because, when you eat it you have to go to the toilet, yet there [in Paradise] there were no toilets. So far so good, but Sheitan said to Eva first of all, "Eat from this, see what it tastes like." Eva ate; so far so good. But then Eva also said to Adam, "Eat from this wheat, see what it tastes like." As soon as Adem ate, he immediately felt [that he had done something he should not have done], because God had said not to eat [from the wheat]. He caught himself "here" [storyteller indicating his Adam's apple], and now men have a bone there which women lack. Having eaten, they needed the toilet. Where could he go? He had a hat on his head, didn't he? I don't know what it was like then, but he hid whatever he could [storyteller indicating his face and armpits and groin]. This is where body hair grew. This is why Adem has a beard while women don't; Eva didn't do that [touching her face], knowing that her hands were dirty. (AIF, No. 4, recorded by Evgenia Mitseva, cited in: Badalanova Geller 2008b, p. 13-14. All explanations in the square brackets in this passage are from the original source)

And they are from a tree. But He had ordered [beforehand], "Don't eat from this tree!" because then they will defecate, they will relieve themselves. And then they ate from this tree and they relieved themselves, and they put some [of their excrement] here [gesturing: under one armpit] and then here [gesturing: under the other armpit] and here [gesturing: between their legs] and hair grew there. Hair grew [here and there] on us [i.e. mortals] and He chased us away, Allah chased them away from Paradise. (Gorno Kraishte 2005, cited in: Badalanova Geller 2008b, p. 11; All explanations in the square brackets in this passage are from the original source)

As Badalanova explains, "The idea that pubic hair and armpit hair are bodily representations of the Fall and loss of innocence is further related to vernacular interpretations of purification customs. This is why the removal of body hair during certain Islamic rites and ceremonies (including suicide attacks) is considered to be one of the means of re-acquiring Eden-like purity" (Badalanova Geller 2008 b, p. 102, n. 35).

In *bula's* narrative, Eve, who was deceived by Satan and swallowed the fruit in its entirety, exposed herself to more physiological and spiritual impurity[379]:

> *Bula*: Those things are *haram* to women but not to men. For a woman, it's sinful to expose her hair. And she can only expose her hands up to here. We, women, have to be covered[380], because it was a woman who gave rise to *haram*. She ate a fruit of that tree. (Interview 14, Ribnovo 2005)

Hawwa also showed less remorse than Adam, who made a futile attempt to cleanse himself by spitting for thirty days, hoping to spit out the food his wife had tricked him into accepting. This explains why "the Turks" fast for thirty days[381]: ritual defilement serves to provide an explanation for the origins and significance of the Ramadan.

According to some Muslim sources, Hawwa's menstruation was another consequence of the original sin; in this interpretation, menstruation is an echo of the body ejecting the pips of the forbidden fruit (cf. Lozanova 1999, p. 293). In *The History of al-Tabari*, menstruation is explained as a form of divine punishment on Hawwa after she "caused the tree to bleed" by plucking the forbidden fruit. As an additional punishment, some of Hawwa's intelligence was taken away, and she had to labour in childbirth (Al-Ṭabarī 1989, p. 278–281).

Implicitly, the eating of the forbidden fruit is connected with the first parents' sexual initiation (Adam and Hawwa realize that they are naked). In folk tradition, this passage is given a literal interpretation: Adam and Hawwa physically "shed" a kind of prelapsarian epidermis, similar to hair or fingernails. In my respondents' narratives, hair is believed to have been formed out of faecal matter, representing the most impure aspects of humanity. Hair removal is seen as a hygiene procedure to remove the "effects of sin", and the obligation to cover or shave one's hair implies religion's social control over sexuality.

In other ethnographic material collected in Bulgaria, hair is sometimes treated as a remnant of prelapsarian skin rather than a product of lapsarian impurity[382]:

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379 Some Muslim legends say that Adam had more of the fruit.

380 As my respondent goes on to explain, Adam and Eve covered the nakedness with fig leaves because other trees of Paradise refused to give them leaves.

381 AIF, no 69, Blagoevgrad, recorded by E. Mitseva.

382 In my respondents version, fingernails and toenails rather than hair are the remnant of the skin of Paradise. This belief can be found in Jewish legends and in the Qur'an (7: 22), in tafsir (Arabic: *tafsir*) of al-Tabari in lives of the prophets by al-Tha'labi (Wheeler 2004). Al-Tabari adds that the genitals

"Yes, that's what the serpent told me, if we bite the fruit we'll see God. And so he was persuaded. When they took a bite, their hair fell away; they clutched their heads, and the hair on their heads stayed on, and in the armpits, where they pressed [their arms against the body]. Wherever they covered themselves, the hair remained" (Lozanova 2008, p. 293, translated from Bulgarian).

A Bulgarian scholar recorded a similar element in the late 1970s in the Orthodox Christian community in Hadzhidimovo:

> He goes and plucks from that tree – and just as we used to have hair all over the body, all that fell off. Only here, in the hidden places... See, here in the armpit, down below, here [pointing to the armpoit and below the groin – D.D.]. She became embarrassed and covered her head like so... [hides her intimate parts with both hands – D.D.]. She wore a kerchief... only here the wool stayed, and we became naked. Before that we had pelts, too. (AIF, no. 75, Hadzhidimovo 1979, recorded by D.D. – translated from Bulgarian)

This coexistence of narratives which take diametrically opposed perspectives on human hair results from cultural ambivalence about hair, a body part which resists easy categorization: hair is a liminal thing, which can be treated as sacred or impure in different contexts.

In my respondents' narrative, Adam and Hawwa's sexual initiation has another ritual consequence, namely the need to perform ritual ablutions after intercourse. Failing to do so would be a sin, whether to Christians or to Muslims:

> M.L.: Can you tell me what else they [Christians] have failed to accept?
>
> *Bula*: They've failed to accept... if you will forgive me, but when a man and a woman come together, they take a bath afterwards, because it's sinful. They [Christians] haven't adopted that [practice]. They go to take a bath on Sundays. (Interview 13, Ribnovo 2005)

The notion that Christians only wash on Sundays probably stems from the respondent's mistaken belief that hygiene forms part of Christian religious practice (as a precondition for visiting a church), as is the case in Islam. The presumed fact that Christians appear to only engage in that practice on Sundays suggests bodily and spiritual impurity.

The narrative told by my respondent from Ribnovo (which provides most of the material in this analysis) seems to be based almost entirely on motifs known in the Islamic tradition as early as the 8th-10th centuries. It is not clear whether this stems from the oral tradition, old Ottoman religious writings (kept at home by some of the older *hodzhas*, who pass down their contents in mosques) or modern sources

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were blocked by nails covering them, which is why Adam and Hawwa did not realize they had them (Wheeler 2004). This element is echoed in the prohibition to cut one's hair, pare one's fingernails or use perfume when performing the Hajj (Wheeler 2004).

(e.g. Muslim press), the latter possibility probably being the least likely of the three, as Muslim journals tend to be mouthpieces for "Salafi Islam".

My respondent's idea that certain religious practices could be traced back to the sin of the first parents and its consequences is incompatible with orthodox Islam, which does not accept the concept of the original sin. Elements such as *abdest* (understood as cleansing those parts of the body which became contaminated by eating the forbidden fruit) or the origins of human hair and the obligation for females to cover their hair to conceal it from other people's gaze (supposedly as a result of the stigma of the forbidden fruit) are not popular narrative components in stories about Adam and Hawwa. They are not mentioned by Galina Lozanova or Leigh N.B. Chipman in the comparative studies of Jewish and Muslim folklore or by Gustav Weil. However, they can be found in the writings of such well-known Muslim writers as al-Tabari and al-Tha'labi.

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The explanation for ritual ablution as offered in this narrative is an interesting example of how religious diversity can be dealt with in an area marked by mixed Islamic and Christian influence. Muslim ritual is validated by its identification with the sacred event, and Christianity is portrayed as incomplete and deficient. The narrative portrays Christians as people who have "forgotten" the promises they made in Paradise and the foundational religious events which lie at the heart of religious practice. By failing to perform ablutions, Christians bear the mark of sin at all times, and can never hope to achieve the purity of Paradise. Their religion is deformed, a twisted and incomplete "empty gesture".

6.2 Worshippers of an "Inferior Book"? Muslims, Christians and a Dispute over God's True Word

> *For the Christian this universal Word is appropriately identified with Jesus of Nazareth. For the Muslim it is the Quran as conveyed through Muhammad* (Nasr 2000, p. xviii)

According to Seyyed H. Nasr, the Qur'an is to Muslims a central theophany of Islam (Nasr 1998, p. 43), equivalent to the theophany of Christ in Christianity[383]. Rollin

383 I agree with S.H. Nasr that "One could, of course, make a comparison between Islam and Chrisianity by comaring the Prophet to Christ, the Qur'an to the New Testament, Gabriel to Holy Spirit, the Arabic language to Aramaic, the language spoken. In this way the sacred book of one religion would correspond to the sacred book of other religion, the central figure in one religion to the central figure in other reiligion and so on. But in order to understand what the Qur'an means to Muslims and why the Prophet is believed to be unlettered according to Islamic belief, it is more significant to consider this comparison from another point of view". Therefore Nasr writes that "The Word of

Armour notes this analogy: "the exalted status of the Qur'an becomes clear if one asks for the Islamic parallel to Jesus. The answer is not Muhammad but the Qur'an. Muhammad is a prophet and, like Paul or Mark of the New Testament, a human being, inspired but not divine, a person who announces a holy revelation. The Qur'an, however, is the divine revelation itself, the eternal Word of God in human language, just as Jesus in Christian teaching is the eternal Word of God in human form" (Armour 2002, p. 14).

For Muslims, God's grace operates through Word (the Qur'an)[384], while for Christians it works mostly through Image (as in the case of icons). At the same time, in terms of religious practice, both objects are treated in a sensory manner: the act of kissing an icon (Orthodox Christians), carrying a piece of paper with verses from the Qur'an or rinsing one's face with water in which such a piece of paper had been submerged (Muslims) may bring healing from various physical and psychological conditions.

To an even greater degree, the same seems to apply to the black stone in the Kaaba whose cult is in some ways analogous to the cult of icons in Orthodox Christianity. As with the icons, the faithful have special sensory relationship with the object, coupled with a belief that by touching it they are accessing a different dimension of reality. This is what the *hodzha* refers to in the following passage:

> *Hodzha* 1: The Kaaba is a building the size of a house, like a square, and there is this black stone attached to one of the corners; it's not an earthly stone, it's a stone from heaven.
>
> M.L.: And it's attached to one of the walls?
>
> H.1: Yes. On the side, in the corner. All comers may touch it and kiss it. If you can't kiss it, you can touch it. If you can't touch it, you just reach out in its direction. Every time you make a circle around it.
>
> M.L.: Why?
>
> H.1: Because it's a heavenly stone, a divine stone ... I don't know exactly.
>
> M.L.: In which case it would seem to me that it's very much like an icon.
>
> H.1: Logically speaking, yes. (Interview 10, Ribnovo 2005)

God in Islam is the Qur'an, in Christianity it is Christ. The vehicle of Divine Message in Christianity is Maryam Mary, in Islam it is the Soul of the Prophet. The Blessed Prophet must be unlettered for the same reason that the Virgin Mary must be a Virgin" (p. 32). Accordingly, in the following sections of the book I mention examples of such comparisons I encountered in the Rhodopes.

384 In "Adat Islam", this also applies to the Qur'an as Word materialized, as evidenced by the practice of wearing *muskas* (special passages of the Qur'an) to protect oneself from malign supernatural powers.

The *hodzha* admits that there might be an analogy between the Muslim cult of the black stone in the Kaaba and the cult of religious icons, but he points out the many differences:

> *Hodzha* 1: No, you don't expect anything from it, you just venerate it because it's not an earthly stone. You don't say any kind of prayers in front of it. The prayers... when you are circling the Kaaba you only ever pray to Allah. You might see people who have circled the Kaaba and have put their hands on the stone to pray, but someone always comes up to say, "Don't do that! This can't help you. The stone can't help you. Pray to the Highest, you are in a place where your prayer is most likely to be heard. But you shouldn't pray to the building". Because there are people who come and cling to the building, they pray to the building. As if they thought the Highest was inside... (Interview 10, Ribnovo 2005)

At the level of local re-interpretation by people from different religious groups, analogies between the religions are more schematic, mostly based on superficial observations of the religious practices of neighbours. One of the most frequent analogies I discovered involved the Gospels and the Qur'an.

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According to my Muslim respondents, the Qur'an is the only book to accurately reflect revealed Truth. The Qur'an describes itself as a book unto which God "has not assigned ... any crookedness" (18: 1)[385]: the most perfect of books, the only book untainted by human interference. The Qur'an frequently mentions its superiority to all earlier books (cf. Suras 3: 3[386], 7[387], 23, 110; 4: 82; 6: 59, 89, 154, 156; 8: 196; 9: 111; 10: 37, 38; 14: 64).

According to a *hodzha* from Ribnovo, a massive effort of scholarship once confirmed that different Arabic texts of the Qur'an were perfectly consistent with one another:

> *Hodzha* 2: In the 19th century, they had gathered in Munich 40,000 Qur'ans from all over the world. This writer and that, and that, they all spent fifty years working on [those books]. Everything had been retained, and there were no changes. It's all kept in an archive in Munich to this day. (Interview 19, Ribnovo 2005)

According to the mufti (head of the Muslim community) in Gotse Delchev, the Qur'an could only retain such pristine textual purity by divine providence:

> Mufti: I mean, Allah is the one who sent the Qur'an and he has safeguarded it. I mean, not one dot has changed in the Qur'an for 1400 years. (Interview 18, Ribnovo 2005)

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385 Praise belongs to God who has sent down upon His servant the Book and has not assigned unto it any crookedness (18: 1).

386 "He has sent down upon thee the Book with the truth, confirming what was before it, and He sent down the Torah and the Gospel aforetime."

387 "It is He who sent down upon thee the Book, wherein are verses clear that are the Essence of the Book, and others ambiguous."

The fate of the earlier sacred books and of the Qur'an is in God's hands: "God blots out, and He establishes whatsoever He will; and with Him is the Essence of the Book" (13: 39).

Muslims believe that the prototype of all the divinely revealed books, known as the Mother of the Book (*Umm al-Kitab*[388]), exists in heaven: "This [Qur'an] could not have been forged apart from God; but it is a confirmation of what is before it, and a distinguishing of the Book, wherein is no doubt, from the Lord of all Being" (10: 37); "And We have sent down to thee the Book with the truth, confirming the Book that was before it, and assuring it" (5: 48). The fact that "the Book" is referred to in the singular suggests a belief that an archetype exists, which is reflected in all other sacred writings, all of which except the Qur'an have been lost, distorted or squandered by humanity.

According to one *hodzha*, Allah sent instructions on religious worship to every tribe on earth, initially contained on several pages, and then, once the earth had been fully populated, in four consecutive books:

> M.L.: What kind of book did Adam receive?
>
> *Hodzha* 1: *Tasalfah* [the respondent speaks indistinctly. The word is probably related to the Arabic root *salafa* (to precede) as the book of Adam was supposedly the first book revealed by God – M.L.]. Just a few pages that his tribe needed. I mean, the earlier prophets had been sent [several] pages [each], but finally, when society had grown, four books were sent, one after another. But Allah used to send pages to every tribe, showing people how to live, how to be useful to each other and to society. (Interview 10, Ribnovo 2005)

My respondents believe that the Qur'an alone contains the revealed Truth and preserves fully the most valuable elements from the earlier scriptures. For this reason, God intended the Qur'an to serve all worshippers of the revealed religions, including Christianity. With the arrival of the Qur'an, the Christians were faced with a choice: they could either persist in their erroneous evangelical doctrines or embrace the message of the Qur'an and convert to Islam. From that moment, says a *hodzha* from Ribnovo, the word "Christian" came to mean a person who "doesn't believe in the Qur'an":

> *Hodzha* 4: A *melekyeto* came to him and said, "Write this down, this, and this, and this." He couldn't write, but he learned to write. He learned to write, and the Qur'an came down. The Qur'an came down over a period of 23 years. And then those who believed in the Qur'an became Muslims, and those who don't believe in the Qur'an are now Christians. (Interview 3, Ribnovo 2005).

At first the *hodzha* referred to anyone who did not accept the Qur'an as an infidel. When I asked him if the "People of the Book" were infidels, too, he retracted his

388 The Qur'an; *Kitab* (Turkish: *kitap*, Arabic: *kitab*) - a book.

statement and narrowed down the meaning of the term *kyafir* (giaour)[389] to nihilists (Interview 3, Ribnovo 2005).

My respondents mostly used the word *kyafir* in the sense of "non-believer", a concept which does not include Christians or Jews, who are "People of the Book". However, the same respondents claim that non-Muslims cannot be saved:

> *Hodzha* 5: It's simple, that's what it says in the two ayats[390] I quoted, if you're not a Muslim, you're one of the losing ones. And that's that!
>
> M.L.: You mean, they lose, as in, they won't go to Paradise?
>
> H.5: Yes.
>
> M.L.: That's terrible.
>
> H.5: Yes, that's exactly what it says in the Qur'an. There's simply no two ways about it. (Interview 26, Satovcha 2005)

Adat Muslims take a different view, arguing that the ultimate decision about human salvation is with Allah.

In the Qur'an, Christians are described as those who "took the compact" but had "forgotten a portion" of it (5: 14), so God "stirred up among them enmity and hatred" (5: 14). The Qur'an contains more references to Jews (4: 44) (4: 46), but my respondents mostly talked about Christians in a similar way, blaming the four evangelists for departing from the original Gospel as they left out important passages and added passages of their own. This chaos is evident in the discrepancies existing between the different Gospels:

> *Hodzha* 2: Christianity had become corrupted by people who believed they knew Christianity, but wrote other things. … When you read the four Gospels for yourself, I mean you or anyone, you will spot discrepancies. There is no such thing in the Qur'an. (Interview 19, Ribnovo 2005)

One reason the Gospels are spurious, argued my Muslim respondents, is that they were written several decades (or, according to the mufti, 300 years) after the Ascension of Jesus (Interview 18, Ribnovo 2005). As a result, they are a mixture of truths and falsehoods, some of them heretical:

> *Hodzha* 2: The book of Jesus Christ was lost, and nobody knows what happened to it. I mean the real book. After it was lost, four Christian men undertook to write a Bible each. But those four Bibles don't agree. One says one thing, another one denies it. Why? Because they contain additions. And Allah sent to the Prophet all those things from all the books he had sent to the

389 A godless person, an infidel, a non-Muslim.

390 (Arabic: sing. *ayah*, plural *ay*, Turkish: *ayet, ayetler*).

> [earlier] prophets, and brought them all together in the Qur'an. And he said, here, [this is a book] for the Muslims and for the Christians, and for the Jews, it's for everyone. (Interview 19, Ribnovo 2005)

According to the lives of prophets, the church hierarchy had selected four Gospels, turning a blind eye to their "discrepancies" and lack of orginals (al-'Amili 2008, p. 477).

Bula from Ribnovo argued that the book that 'Isa had taken to heaven was actually the Qur'an, except Christians called it the Bible. In this sense, it was simply an earlier version of the Qur'an:

> *Bula*: He is alive in the second heaven, actually, I don't know. He rose up, with the *Kitab* [book – M.L.]. His book was *Indzhil*, Christians call it the Bible, but we call it the Qur'an *Indzhil*. (Interview 13, Ribnovo 2005)

The book of the Gospel/*Injil* (local Muslim variant: *Indzhil*, Turkish *İncil*), which 'Isa had always carried around and kept in his heart "since the cradle", was the only thing he was permitted to take from this world. This is why Muslims dislike the written Gospels, which they consider to be forged and corrupted versions of the heavenly original.

Translations of the Qur'an present the same danger as the texts revealed previously: once it is translated, a book is no longer sacred because the word of God has been corrupted by the word of man, and does not deserve the same kind of respect as the Qur'an in its original Arabic. Some of the Qur'an's hidden meanings are only accessible in the holy language, and may get lost in translation. This applies to all translations, because translation not only suffers from the loss of hidden meanings but also distorts the literal sense. The book remains perfect only in the original Arabic version, the "language of God"[391]. This is why every Muslim should know the Qur'an (or at least parts of it) in Arabic.

> *Hodzha* 1: The Arabic language is much richer than Bulgarian. Sometimes several Arabic words have one common equivalent in Bulgarian. When a man reads a literal translation of the Qur'an, it often sounds like the same thing gets repeated several times over... but in fact it's not the same thing. You have to read between the lines, but for that you need to know more about Islam. To check the explanation of a given text if you're interested. (Interview 10, Ribnovo 2005)

From an early age, Muslims learn Arabic prayers from the Qur'an, which are used as formulas leading to salvation. The dead must recite them in the next world[392], and

391 (39: 28): "an Arabic [Qur'an], wherein there is no crookedness" (42: 7): "And so We have revealed to thee an Arabic Koran, that thou mayest warn the Mother of Cities and those who dwell about it" (43: 3) "... behold, We have made it an Arabic [Qur'an]; haply you will understand. Indeed, We have made it an Arabic Qur'an that you might understand!"

392 For more on that subject see Lubanska 2005.

they get asked which book they had served. In "Adat Islam", this belief ties in with a magical way of looking at words, i.e. the belief that uttering certain formulas can predictably cause or prevent certain outcomes[393].

In this belief, two angels during the partial judgement ask the deceased person lying in his or her grave which book and which prophet they had served. The questioning takes place in the cemetery soon after the burial; the *hodzha* standing by the graveside feeds the correct answers to the deceased person, but it is up to Allah whether or not the dead person can hear them. Those who cannot provide the correct answers are struck by the examining angel:

> *Hodzha* 4: When we take a dead person [to bury him or her] in the cemetery, and we place that person in the grave, two angels come and ask him which religion he had practiced – Muslim, Islamic? What did he believe? Did he believe in Allah or Muhammad? What did he believe in? If that person can answer, he does. Once an answer is given, no more questions are asked. If he doesn't answer, an angel comes. But before he can answer, the *hodzha* stays and tells him what to say. He tells the deceased. Because he wakes up in the grave. He wakes up. He feels around. Until he realizes he's in his grave. Then the angels come. And the *hodzha* reminds him of the correct answer. And if he was a believer, Allah will let him hear the right answer. But if he didn't believe in his lifetime, he's not going to believe there.
>
> M.L.: Does the *hodzha* say those things quietly, or can the people hear it is well?
>
> H.4: Well, people listen to what he says to the deceased person, to the correct answer … They ask him what he believed in, Allah or something else, which prophet. A true Muslim will say: "My faith is Islamic, Allah created me". But when he can't provide the answer, an angel comes who can't see or hear. He strikes you in your grave. One strike and you become like earth [dust – M.L.]. But God creates you anew. And so you suffer your punishment until the end of the world. Bad air reaches him, bad air. Those who only believe in Allah are given a garden, the garden of *dzhehennet*. And he enjoys it until the coming of the flood. (Interview 3, Ribnovo 2005)

Unable to supply the correct answers, Christians cannot rely on a *hodzha's* help in their partial judgement, and so they cannot enter Paradise. Their book proves useless as a tool of salvation.

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393 As already mentioned, even well-intentioned compliments must be followed in Ribnovo by the formula *Mashallah* (literally meaning "God's will" or "God willed it"), which is used to invoke divine protection. The formula emphasizes the speaker's good intentions and averts misfortune, a belief connected with a fear of the "evil eye". I have been told that blue-eyed women are considered the most dangerous in this respect. Children, who are particularly vulnerable to the evil eye, wear protective red thread around their wrists.

6.3 Christianity as a Religion Based on "Misunderstanding" and "a False Cult of the Son of God"

> *Indeed, he who associates others with Allah - Allah has forbidden him Paradise!*
>
> (Qur'an, 5: 72)

To my respondents, the erroneous belief that 'Isa is the Son of God is one of Christianity's biggest blunders:

> Sh.: That's the difference, [Allah – M.L.] "neither begets nor is he born". Nor is he like any of his creatures. That's where the differences come in. God cannot have a son. (W, M, Interview 6, Ribnovo 2005)

> *Hodzha* 5: If God had a son he would, as a matter of principle, have to die for his son to take power. I'm talking about general rules here. Trying to find some logic in this. But how can God... I just can't wrap my head around that, how could God have a son?! (Interview 26, Satovcha 2005)

To my Muslim respondents, 'Isa is not the Son of God but the greatest prophet before Muhammad. As do Christians, Muslims believe in his virginal conception, however in the Muslim tradition he was begotten by the angel Jibra'il[394] and not by the Holy Spirit. The Qur'an contains a laconic reference to this belief: "We sent unto her Our Spirit that presented himself to her a man without fault" (19: 17). My respondents explained that the conception occurred as the angel breathed on Mary's legs or touched her lower back:

> *Hodzha* 4: And he arrived, and he pricked her in the back with his wing, and she got pregnant. That's why your people say that azreti Isa is a bastard. Meaning, he has no father and no mother, and so they call him a bastard. But he is no bastard. He was created by Allah, because the *melekyetu* brushed against her back, and she became pregnant. Those are Allah's mysteries, and no-one can get to the bottom of them. And when he was born, he got to believe in Allah. And he started preaching that there is one Allah, telling people to believe. (Interview 3, Ribnovo 2005)

> *Bula*: This is what our Qur'an says about Isa *peygamber*. He was conceived in his mother's belly without a father. He doesn't have a father. She got pregnant by the angel Dzhibrail. He breathed on her legs, and she conceived Isa, you call him Jesus. And when he started preaching, they didn't accept that. Christians didn't accept that even though it had been foretold that they should accept [faith] from him. (W, M, Interview 13, Ribnovo 2005)

Hodzha 4 is certain that the belief in 'Isa's miraculous conception is characteristic of Islam and not shared by Christians, who consider 'Isa to be a "bastard" (an illegitimate child). His narrative about the mystery of 'Isa's conception contains elements not

394 In accordance with Allah's will.

present in the Gospels which can be found in lives of the prophets, such as the detail that the angel Jibra'il breathed on Maryam's dress at the level of her chest, and his breath penetrated all the way through to her womb (Al-'amili 2008, p. 456): "'How shall I bear a son,' replied Mary, affrighted, 'since I have not known a man?' 'It is even so,' replied Gabriel. 'Did not Allah create Adam without either father or mother, merely by his word, Be thou created? Thy son shall be a sign of His omnipotence, and as His prophet, restore the backsliding sons of Israel to the path of righteousness.' When Gabriel had thus spoken, he raised with his finger Mary's robe from her bosom, and breathed upon her" (Weil 1863, p. 252–253).

The conception of 'Isa is not the first time the angel Jibra'il becomes involved in the creation of a human being: according to lives of the prophets and oral narratives of Bulgarian Muslims, the same angel had played a part in the creation of man in the beginning of the world, when God sent him to fetch a handful of dust, out of which man was later fashioned (al-Tha'labī 2002, p. 44). The angel Jibra'il in Islam performs a function similar to that attributed to the Holy Spirit in Christianity, with the important difference that angels are not divine beings, and therefore the son begotten by Jibra'il is not God.

According to my respondents, 'Isa had the Gospel "written in his heart" already in his mother's womb, a belief referred to in the Qur'an which says 'Isa will "speak to men in the cradle" (3: 46; 5: 110).

Muslims believe that 'Isa worked miracles as an adult, however they do not attribute them to his divine nature. 'Isa is considered to be a less perfect prophet than Muhammad, who remains in the seventh heaven, closest to God, whereas 'Isa is only in the second heaven. According to a female respondent, this is because 'Isa transgressed in taking a needle to heaven, an act which betrayed a sinful attachment to material things:

> *Bula*: He was meant to be taken up to a higher heaven but they found a needle on him. That's why [in the end] they kept him in the second heaven, because he had taken a needle to heaven. I mean, you shouldn't take anything to heaven on high. But there was a needle stuck right here in his coat.
>
> M.L.: Isa's coat?
>
> *Bula*: Yes. They meant to take him higher up, but they left him in the second heaven because they'd found the needle on him, [a thing of] this world. You're not supposed to take anything there!
>
> M.L.: Why did he take it?
>
> *Bula*: In order to do something. To use it for some purpose. (W, M, Interview 13, Ribnovo 2005)

'Isa carries to heaven an object connected with human labour and the hardships of this world, both of which are unknown in Paradise because they are a necessary evil

and a consequence of the fall of the first people. As such, the needle could not enter heaven because it posed a threat to its community and harmony (Wasilewski 1989, p. 125).

Christianity's biggest errors were produced by the doctrines contained in the Gospels of Mark, Matthew, Luke and John along with the teachings of the apostle Paul, including the doctrine that 'Isa was identical to God and the cult of the Holy Trinity. The rejection of trinitarian dogma by the Muslims, who dismiss it as a human invention, is rooted in the Qur'an[395]. My respondents stated that Christians were in a state of *shirk*/idolatry, a grave sin castigated in the Qur'an on numerous occasions (3: 64, 4: 116), particularly in 5: 72–73: "They are unbelievers who say, 'God is the Messiah, Mary's son.' For the Messiah said, 'Children of Israel, serve God, my Lord and your Lord. Verily whoso associates with God anything, God shall prohibit him entrance to Paradise, and his refuge shall be the Fire; and wrongdoers shall have no helpers.' They are unbelievers who say, 'God is the Third of Three. No god is there but One God'."

Another passage in the Qur'an, interpreted by Christians as a passage from the Gospel according to St. John (J 15, 26)[396], is reinterpreted in the Islamic tradition as an announcement concerning the coming of the prophet Muhammad: "And when Jesus son of Mary said, 'Children of Israel, I am indeed the Messenger of God to you, confirming the Torah that is before me, and giving good tidings of a Messenger who shall come after me, whose name shall be Ahmad'" (61: 6). Józef Bielawski, a Polish Arabist and scholar of Islam, notes that the verses reflect the etymological meaning of the name of Ahmad/Muhammad ("highly praised"), which lends itself to confusion between the Greek words *parakletos*[397] (*Paraclete*), literally meaning "called to one's aid" or "advocate"[398], and *perikletos,* which means "highly praised". According to Bielawski, this verse is an obvious echo of the Gospel of St. John (14, 16-17 and 16, 7), "And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter [Paraclete], that he may abide with you for ever; even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him"[399]; "Nevertheless I tell you the truth; It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you".

395 M. Starowieyski identifies the influence of Ebionite theology on Islam (Starowieyski 2003, p. 246).

396 "But when the Comforter [Paraclete] is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, he shall testify of me" (KJV, J 15, 26).

397 In J. Bielawski's Polish translation of the Qur'an, *perikletos* (*Koran* 1986, p. 937).

398 The Holy Bible (King James Version) (1611).

399 The passage continues: "but ye know him; for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you. I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you. Yet a little while, and the world seeth me no more; but ye see me: because I live, ye shall live also. At that day ye shall know that I am in my Father, and ye in me, and I in you" (KJV: J 14, 17–19).

The Qur'an contains strong anti-trinitarian sentiment relating to this passage (4: 171): "People of the Book, go not beyond the bounds in your religion, and say not as to God but the truth. The Messiah, Jesus son of Mary, was only the Messenger of God, and His Word that He committed to Mary, and a Spirit from Him. So believe in God and His Messengers, and say not, 'Three.' Refrain; better is it for you. God is only One God. Glory be to Him – That He should have a son! To Him belongs all that is in the heavens and in the earth; God suffices for a guardian".

My respondents regard the belief in the Holy Trinity as heretical and incomprehensible even to the Christians themselves:

> *Hodzha* 1: I've talked to many people, honestly! And they are very confused. Very! Honestly, as an outsider... when they're watching TV, they say, "What's the big deal, whether you believe in God or in Allah, it's all one and the same thing". But it's not. Those two simply don't come together. You can't say you believe in God, and God is Jesus Christ. I believe in Allah and I say that Jesus is a prophet! Can you see the difference?! You can. It's an enormous difference. "He neither begets nor is born". And I'm not going to start thinking, "What is his place?" "What is his image?", and so on. But he says, "He is God, born of a mother, and he walked on earth, he used to go to the toilet same as we do", right? Jesus Christ lived for 33 years.
>
> M.L.: It's very hard to say that God has two natures.
>
> H.1: Exactly, it makes no sense. (Interview 6, Ribnovo 2005)

Muslims who condemn the belief in Christ's divine nature often quote the passage from the Qur'an that God "has not begotten, and has not been begotten" (112: 3):

> Man H.: He did not rise from the dead. Now take the resurrection. The Qur'an says he has not risen from the dead yet.
>
> M.L.: Why do the Christians say that he has?
>
> H.: That's the Christian error. A human being like you or me cannot be God. Isa and Muhammad are, like you and me, human. And you know what the Qur'an says, "has not begotten, and has not been begotten", God hasn't. And Muhammad or Isa were born, born of mothers. What does that mean? That they are like you and me. You can't be God, and I can't be God. (M, M, Interview 29, Ribnovo 2005)

6.3.1 The Heresies of the Apostle Paul

According to the local narratives, the heretical idea that 'Isa had a divine nature and was crucified comes from the activities of the apostle Paul, who intentionally spread the idea in an effort to oppose Christianity:

> *Hodzha* 2: He got a group of people together, and started saying that Isa was Allah. And to another group he said Isa was Allah's son, that's how it was. To another group [still] he said that Isa was a messenger, and he [the apostle Paul – M.L.] disappeared. And they all got together, say, and they began to say, "Isa is Allah's son", and others, "Isa is Allah". They started fighting with each other. Some said he was Allah, others said he was Allah's son, a third group said he was a prophet. That's how it all became tangled up in Christianity. But in fact Isa is a created man, azreti Isa and Allah are different persons. That's how barbarity became part of Christianity. (Interview 19, Ribnovo 2005)

I asked *hodzha* Mehmed how he knew it was the apostle Paul who introduced the Christian cult of the Holy Trinity, and he showed me a handwritten book in Ottoman Turkish entitled *The Garden of Believers*. Disappointingly, the title page was missing so the name of the author and the publication date are unknown.

Similar anti-Pauline elements can be found in lives of the prophets by al-'Amili: "The story of Luke is even weirder than that of Matthew and Mark, and he was a physician from Antakya (Antioch) and he didn't see the Messiah at all and he was taught the [C]hristianity from Polos (Paul) which was a fundamentalistic [J]ew against the [C]hristians and he didn't see the Messiah in his life and used to harm [C]hristians, and they said that he found out that it's of no use to harm the [C]hristians while he needed them so he preteneded to be one of them and showed that he believed in the Messiah and he claimed that he had an epileptic fit and the Messiah showed himself for him and touched him and ordered him not to harm the christians, and since that time he believed in him and the Messiah sent him to spread his gospel, and talking about him would be long and bad to hear, and he legalized for them to eat the carrion and the wine drinking and that he knew that faith only is enough to servive without doing anything, and the writing of the gospel of Luke was after that Mark wrote his own and that was after the death of Peter and Paul" (Al-'amili 2008, p. 477).

Anti-Pauline sentiment is also found in propaganda pieces popular in some Islamic circles, such as the *Gospel of Barnabas*[400], or in more recent books and articles posted on the Internet. One was pointed out to me by Ayshe and Izmet, a married couple of teachers from Satovcha who are Salafi Muslims. When asked about St. Paul, they recommended to me the second edition of *Bibliyata, Koranŭt i naukata*, a book by Maurice Bucaille (2004) available in the local bookshop[401]. The book contains a separate chapter devoted to the apostle Paul, *Historical Reminder: Judeochristianity*

400 Starowieyski argues that this pseudoapocryphal became an element of Islamic propaganda to attract the attention of Christian scholars of Islam, both theoretically (as a demonstration of the connections between Christianity and Islam) and practically (to counteract its propaganda effect) (Starowieyski 2003a, p. 247).

401 The book was published by Bulgaria's Main Muftiate in 2004 (2nd edition), and is available in English as Maurice Bucaille, *The Bible, the Qur'ān and Science: The Holy Scriptures Examined in the Light of Modern Knowledge*, translated by Alastair D. Pannell and Maurice Bucaille, Islamic Call Society, Tripoli, 1976.

and St. Paul, in which Paul is portrayed as the founder of a new faction within Christianity (existing today), locked in a struggle with the orthodox Christianity of the apostle James which it ultimately supplanted, as suggested by the fact that the Council of Jerusalem in 49 A.D. exempted Christians from "circumcision and other Jewish observances" (Bucaille 2004, p. 76).

A religious education teacher, Izmet from Satovcha, said:

> Izmet: [St. Paul] introduces new things, producing a contradiction between what we might call the two schools, orthodox Christianity and the new elements Paul introduced into Christianity. But I would need to find out more about these things to discuss the major points. A man ought to know about those things. (Interview 26, Satovcha 2005)

The Pauline version of Christianity abolishes the observances which the human souls in Paradise had vowed to keep, and which later became reaffirmed in the Qur'an.

The accusation of religious negligence directed at neighbours of different faith implies that they cannot be saved, a fact deliberately glossed over in silence by both religious groups. The Muslims believe that 'Isa taught those ritual observances, and, by abolishing them, Paul discredited Christianity in the eyes of Islam (and Judaism) by turning it into a completely different religion where faith and charity are pitched against Law.

Anti-Pauline ideas are not limited to "Adat Islam" or Muslim propaganda literature aimed at Salafi Muslims. The problem seems to touch on the heart of the difference between the two religions, and currently receives attention from different social groups. The questions it poses can be treated as a rejuvenating influence in Christian religious tradition, provoking reflection on what an alternative Christianity might look like had it been modelled along the lines of the teachings of apostle James.

6.3.2 Narratives Questioning the Christian Cult of the Cross

The cult of the cross is another example of Christian idolatry, introduced by Satan in the times of the prophet Nuh, who persuaded people to put crosses on the graves of dead prophets, ultimately leading to the emergence of the Christian cult of the cross:

> *Hodzha* 1: Those Christian crosses are a lie. This goes back to Nuh, that's where the lie began. There had been five people before him, before Nuh. And they were exact [meaning: orthodox – M.L.] before God, they believed right. And one by one, one by one they died. Nehub, Nehud, Nesra [lists the names of the prophets – M.L.]. I would have to look that up in a book. And they believed well in Allah, and [they believed] in that religion, in those books. One by one they were lost, they died. And people wondered what to do. Because there were no leaders, no one to replace them. And Satan appeared among them in human form: "Let me tell you what you should do to make things easier!" ... He came to deceive them, to have them put crosses on the graves of those five men. "If you respect them so much go there and pray to them", and it is written that floods came and all those things were lost. But Satan, who is powerful, found a way.

> He found those things [buried] in the sand, and reintroduced them, he gave them to some people and invited them to believe. Azreti Isa did not permit that, absolutely not. But people believed, they put them on churches and so on. (Interview 19, Ribnovo 2005)

This mistrust of crosses is connected with the iconoclastic sentiment of Islamic religious culture, and with its rejection of Christ's crucifixion. My Muslim respondents told me that Christ did not die on the cross[402], but a lookalike was executed instead, possibly Judas or another associate whose face God changed to look like 'Isa.

> *Bula*: It wasn't Jesus who got crucified, it was his friend Judas. Allah gave his face to Judas. He was caught. (W, M, Interview 13, Ribnovo 2005)

> Sh.: They make the sign of the cross because Jesus was apparently crucified, they're even showing this film in the cinemas[403], but he wasn't crucified, and that's why they make the sign of the cross today. They make the sign of the cross. (W, M, Interview 13, Ribnovo 2005)

According to *hodzha* Mehmed, the fact that Judas was crucified instead of 'Isa is confirmed by the fact that two mothers were looking for their lost sons at time: the mother of 'Isa and the mother of Judas:

> *Hodzha* 1: They caught him and crucified him. They did what they had to do. All right, but then you get two mothers looking for their sons. Isa's mother and that other one's mother. When they lost their way...
>
> M.L.: They lost what?
>
> Woman Sh.: One of them disappeared, right? Angels raised him up to heaven.
>
> M.L.: And the other one was a lookalike.
>
> W.Sh.: The other one was a lookalike, so it stands to reason, since both are gone, that means angels had taken Isa up to heaven.
>
> H.1: And then they crucified their friend, and made a Tomb of God, or whatever they call it, it's total baloney, but that's how it is. That's how they were duped. (Muslims, Interview 19, Ribnovo 2005)

According to Marek Starowieyski, the belief that Jesus was replaced on the cross by a man who looked like him is a docetic idea: people assumed that Jesus had been

402 Cf. Surah 4: 157: "...and for their saying, We slew the Messiah, Jesus son of Mary, the Messenger of God' – yet they did not slay him, neither crucified him, only a likeness of that was shown to them. Those who are at variance concerning him surely are in doubt regarding him; they have no knowledge of him, except the following of surmise; and they slew him not of a certainty – no indeed".
403 Probably referring to *The Passion of the Christ* directed by Mel Gibson (2004).

crucified but what they actually saw was an apparition or possibly another person crucified instead of Jesus: Simon of Cyrene, Jesus ben Pandera (misidentified by Judas, one of the Twelve) or Judas himself (cf. Starowieyski 2003b, p. 176).

This belief can also be found in lives of the prophets[404] or in the Gospel of Barnabas (*The Gospel*... 1907), a pseudepigraphical work composed by Muslims in Spain[405]. The narrator claims to be a disciple of Jesus[406], one of the few people (including the mother of Jesus, John and his brother James) who remained faithful to his teachings and did not believe in his death on the cross (*The Gospel*... 1907). According to the Gospel of Barnabas, Jesus hid from Judas and the soldiers in a house together with the other apostles, and he was raised to heaven by angels on God's command (a detail also present in the narratives of my respondents). Judas was made to resemble Jesus, leading to his arrest and crucifixion. Again, this detail is also found in lives of the prophets (Weil 1863, p. 259).

In addition to the erroneous belief in Christ's crucifixion, the Christian cult of the cross also involves a misinterpretation of a gesture Jesus made just before his assumption[407] when he stretched out his arms to complain to God that they would not squeeze through the opening God made for him in heaven. Seeing his outstretched arms, the apostles assumed it was part of his prayer, an expression of the cult of the cross[408]:

> *Hodzha* 4: Icons, icons are strictly prohibited, people mustn't believe in them. The cross, that Jesus Christ they carry around in churches, that's absolutely forbidden in the w Qur'an. When you pray to a cross there is nothing the cross can do to help you. If you pray to Allah he will help you. But when you look at a cross, you're praying to that cross. You're praying to Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is human, like us! And when they wanted to crucify him and kill him, destroy him, God took him up to heaven. God told him, "Go on, Isa", he said, "Rise up to heaven, and be freed from your people who are out to kill you". He looked up, and he saw a little opening up there. And he says, "But 'rabbi' [Arabic: *rabbi* – my Lord/my God!] my head can squeeze through. But this arm, and this, how can my arms squeeze through?!". And the people who were with him, when they saw that, they started making the sign of the cross, like he did.

404 Cf. also Weil 1863, p. 263, a passage which talks about 'Isa giving up the ghost and dying for three hours, after which time the angel Jibra'il raised him to heaven through an opening in heaven.

405 Fr. M. Starowieyski points to recent research to suggest that the book presents the life of Jesus in keeping with the teachings of Islam because it was written by Spanish Moriscos (crypto-Arabs) (Starowieyski 2003, p. 246–247). Much earlier, a book by P. Beskow (1979) speculated that the work might have been written between the 14th and the 16th centuries by a former Italian Christian who converted to Islam (Beskow 2005, p. 31–37).

406 The only surviving version of the work was written between 1300 and 1349. It plays an important role in Islam as a propaganda piece (cf. Starowieyski 2003, p. 246–247).

407 I use the word "assumption" rather than the Christian concept of "ascension" because in the Islamic tradition 'Isa was raised up to heaven according to Allah's will rather than by his own power.

408 The local Muslim interpretations are silent about any connection between the sign of the cross and the Holy Trinity.

M.L.: So, he gestured to show he couldn't squeeze through? [The respondent makes the sign of the cross when quoting the words of Jesus – M.L.]

H.4: "My head can squeeze through, but this arm, and this, how can they squeeze through?" Allah commanded him and gave him strength. And he rose up to heaven. And he is alive now.

M.L.: Meaning, you believe that Christ was taken up to heaven?

H.4: That's what we believe. And one day he will come come back to earth. When the end comes, he will come down. (Interview 3, Ribnovo 2005)

Hodzha 4: And from that moment, Christians have been making the sign of the cross. We believe in one Allah and nobody else. There are no crosses on our mosques. Just look. There are no photographs there, nothing. In churches there are crosses and photographs. There's Mary and her children. Those are all lies. (Interview 3, Ribnovo 2005)

To my respondents, the idea of kenosis or the self-humbling of God, who became human to save humankind through his death on the cross, seems to be the most incomprehensible element in Christianity. They view the famous patristic idea that "God became man so that man can become God" as a heretical notion which amounts to rejecting Islam. Accordingly, this central element of Christian faith is vehemently rejected and depreciated.

Sh.: How could the Highest expose his prophet to so this kind of torture, and take him away afterwards?! If anything, Why not take him away beforehand? What's the point of making him suffer?! (W, M, Interview 10, Ribnovo 2005)

Seyyed H. Nasr points out the scale of this problem: "the most difficult aspect of Christianity for a Muslim to understand is the significance of the cross. Generally, a Muslim cannot understand why a Christian bows before the cross, carries it and in moments of distress makes the sign of the cross. From the other side Christians face the same difficulty vis-à-vis this 'magical' aspect of the Qur'an which Muslims carry with them and recite to gain support and protection" (Nasr 2000, p. 41).

In the Rhodopes, this depreciation of the cross is probably caused not only by Islamic theology, but also stems partly from the gnostic legacy of Bogomilism, of which the Pomaks are sometimes supposed to be continuators[409] since, according to one theory, they are descended from Bulgarian neo-Manicheans. Galina Lozanova noted a belief among the Muslim population in the Central Rhodopes, according to which Jesus ('Isa) himself will put an end to the cult of the cross in the final days:

Isa will destroy the cross and kill the pig. This, too, is a Muslim belief. (Hamid Imamski, cited in: Lozanova 2000, p. 69, translated from Bulgarian)

409 Related to the concepts of Pomak ethnogenesis discussed in Chapter 1.

According to Muslim legend, this spectacular gesture was announced by Jesus when he was taken up to heaven and stood before his mother, Mary. He said, "at the approach of the last day, I shall be sent again upon the earth, when I shall slay the false prophet Dadjal [Dajjal][410] and the wild boar (both of which cause similar distress in the earth), and such a state of peace and unity shall ensue, that the lamb and the hyena shall feed like brothers beside each other. I shall then burn the Gospel, which has been falsified by ungodly priests, and the crosses which they have worshiped as gods, and subject the whole earth to the doctrines of Mohammed who shall be sent in later times" (Weil 1863, p. 259).

> *Hodzha* 1: I mean, Isa ascended to heaven and we're awaiting his return, that's what our books say. There will be ten omens, and one of them is, what's the word, resurrection. There will be a flood. This is one of the ten omens. And then he will return to Syria, and thousands will be waiting for him. (Interview 19, Ribnovo 2005)

As with the beliefs concerning Adam and Hawwa, my respondents' beliefs about Jesus are meant to validate Islam as the religion God had always intended for mankind. In this view, Adam, Hawwa and Jesus are figures who had been systematically preparing mankind for the coming of Islam. In the legend of Adam and Hawwa, Islam is prefigured by their actions (ablutions, the covering of the body) and by the narrative of the promise the souls had made in Paradise. In Muslim narratives, Jesus paved to the way for Muhammad, just as the Christian narrative holds that John the Baptist paved the way for Jesus. However, it will be Jesus, not Muhammad, who will play an important role in the time of the Apocalypse by defeating Dajjal and lending support to Muslims:

> *Bula*: It is written, "When he comes down from heaven, he will let them know that they believed in God, they believed in Jesus". But he wasn't God, he was a prophet. And he is alive in heaven. He will come down, and there will be signs, before the flood comes he will come down here, alive. He will get married ..., He's not married, he will have two children, and he will be praying somewhere in the mountains, and his soul will be taken away from him. He will fight here with Dajjal, the infidel, and he will win. And he will point the way to the Muslims as our *peygamber*. But there will be no more *peygambers*, prophets. Ours was the last. It is written in the *Kitab* that ours was the last, there are no more prophets. (Interview 13, Ribnovo 2005)

Practically each of Isa's actions after coming down to earth will expose Christianity as a false religion, from his secular lifestyle (marriage, children)[411] to his victory over Dajjal and his support of Muslims.

410 The Antichrist, one of the signs of the end in the Islamic tradition.

411 This brings to mind Martin Scorsese's *The Last Temptation of Christ* (1988), which suggests that such a decision would amount to abandoning the act of redemption in the Christian sense.

6.3.3 The Pernicious Reforms of Pope Gregory I

To my respondents, Christianity is a religion based on a false understanding of the sacred, bearing the original taint of the sin of *shirk* and stemming from a long series of misunderstandings, which to my respondents are foundational to Christianity. The major foundational events of Christian history are reinterpreted as reprehensible incidents in which Christians strayed permanently from the path of salvation. Christian sacred history becomes mere heresy, a belief my respondents openly incorporated into biblical narratives.

There is also another way of reinterpreting Christianity as a false religion, which focuses on the reforms of "Pope Gregory". According to *Hodzha* 6, Christianity was a legitimate religion until "Pope Gregory" (presumably Pope Gregory I) pushed through a series of reforms which dealt a lethal blow to Christianity by merging it with paganism, leading to persecutions of true Christians:

> *Hodzha* 6: That's why Christians used to be true believers. They used to be true believers. But when Pope Gregory came, he started persecuting orthodox Christians and killing them.
>
> M.L.: Why?
>
> H.6: He wanted money, he wanted authority, he wanted power, but he didn't know..., I mean, he forgot the fact that he was mortal. This was a time of big problems for mankind.
>
> M.L.: Pope Gregory?
>
> H.6: Pope Gregory.
>
> M.L.: Why did he expel Christians?
>
> H.6: Because they prayed to God, not to idols. Not to shamanism, like that Ilinden [St. Elijah's Day– M.L.] yesterday, not to shamanism.
>
> M.L.: Is Ilinden shamanism?
>
> H.6: Ilinden is a shamanistic holiday, a pagan holiday. So is Sveti Georgi. Those are made-up heroes, from the pagan times, do you understand? (Interview 30, Satovcha 2005)

Notably, the respondent does not distinguish between Roman Catholicism and Orthodox Christianity, and uses the Orthodox celebrations of St. Elijah's Day or St. George's Day to illustrate the supposedly shamanistic/pagan consequences of Pope Gregory I's reforms. Cleansed of the pagan "additions" introduced by Pope Gregory I, the *hodzha* believes that Christianity would be essentially identical to Islam:

> *Hodzha* 6: Pope Gregory mixes it all up. Shamanistic holidays and Christian holidays. Do you understand?

M.L.: You mean, he was the one who made that mess?

H.6: He made all that mess, and the problem is still unsolved.

M.L.: So, you mean, pure Christian faith is like Muslim faith?

H.6: Yes, both are one thing.

M.L.: Does pure Christian faith even exist any more, or is it gone because of Pope Gregory?

H.6: It's gone. That's why God... that's why... I mean, Jesus says... I think it's Psalm 35 in the Bible where he says: "And a second Messiah will come after me, and you must follow him". That's what it says in the Bible, in Psalm 35, in the chapter on "Judaism". Read verses 25 to 40, something like that... I'm not sure, maybe it was Psalm 33. It speaks of Muhammad. It says: a new messiah will come after me, and you must all follow him. (Interview 30, Satovcha 2005)

The vague and unsubstantiated reference suggests that the *hodzha* is not very familiar with the Bible, and is probably referring to a passage from the Gospel of St. John about the coming of the Paraclete (15, 25), reinterpreted in Islam as a foretelling of the coming of Muhammad (see above).

***

In terms of religious concerns, Muslims in the Western Rhodopes are strongly preoccupied with validating Islam as a religion superior to Christianity. At the same time, they treat religion as the most important criterion distinguishing them from Bulgarians. The local Muslims seem to think of communities through the lens of Ottoman *millets*[412] rather than in ethnic or national terms.

Muslim narratives (whether in Adat or Salafi models) regard the foundational events of Christian sacred history in terms of misunderstanding and misinterpretation, portraying them as human inventions unrelated to the will of the monotheistic God. In this vision, Christianity not only holds no attraction for Muslims but also, given its polytheistic and idolatrous elements such as the trinitarian creed or its cult of the Son of God, is seen as downright dangerous. This suggests an anti-syncretic attitude, even if some of my respondents (those who embrace the Adat model) accept that some good Christians may be saved (cf. stories of good Christians being taken by camels to Muslim graves, and the bodies of bad Muslims being found in Christian graves).

The next chapter looks at the attitudes of the local Christians towards the Bulgarian-speaking Muslims.

412 A system of limited self-governance for confessional communities in the Ottoman Empire, abolished after the liberation of Bulgaria at the turn of the 19th century.

7 Christian Narratives About Bulgarian-Speaking Muslims

Unlike many Muslim narratives about Christianity and Christians, Christian comments and interpretations do not typically rely on sacred or mythical narratives. When explaining the origins of Christian rituals, Christians include no references to events taking place *in illo tempore* or in biblical times, and Christian attitudes towards Islam are not expressed in terms of the foundational events or figures of Christianity. Most of my Christian respondents appeared to be largely uninterested in Islam (some were barely familiar with the name of Muhammad); Christian interests were mostly centered around the identity of Bulgarian-speaking Muslims, namely whether or not they were actually Bulgarians.

Although some of the narratives questioned whether Bulgarian-speaking Muslims could be legitimately considered Bulgarian, those were in the minority; most narratives emphasized the supposed Bulgarian identity of Bulgarian-speaking Muslims. Bulgarian Christians are generally ambivalent about Bulgarian-speaking Muslims, a group they regard as something as a taboo topic (in the sense proposed by Mary Douglas as "a matter out of place", Douglas 2001, p. 41). This reflects the fact that the Pomaks cannot be easily classified as members of the Bulgarian nation. They are described by Christians as "Bulgarians turned Turk" (*poturcheni*): people who, though not actually Turkish, are not baptized and therefore cannot be considered Bulgarian. Both groups seem to regard baptism as the necessary precondition for Bulgarian identity and treat the terms "Christian" and "Bulgarian" as interchangeable. If mentioned at all, the concept of a Bulgarian Muslim identity usually takes the form of the endoethnonym "Bulgaromohammedans" (*Bŭlgaromahomedani*).

This ambivalence of my Christian respondents about their Muslim neighbours can be explained in terms of the specific nature of social identity, which Marilynn B. Brewer argues involves reconciling the opposed psychological needs of assimilation and differentiation (Brewer 1999, cited in: Brown, Zagefka 2005, p. 56). Depending on which of those needs becomes pre-eminent, Christians tend to come up with narratives which either affirm or bring into question the Bulgarianness of the Pomak population. Affirmative narratives describe the Pomaks as a familiar local group which shares a number of characteristically Bulgarian qualities; in this perspective, the Pomaks are seen as crypto-Christians. The negative narratives present the Pomaks as an eastern (Ottoman) population, a people "turned Turk".

Interestingly, Christians who are willing to ponder Pomak identity seem passive and uninterested in examining their own religious identity, which they take as a given. Unlike Muslims, Christians do not tend to see the other group as an "Other", in relation to whom they need to define their own identity.

The comments made by Christians in this chapter must not be treated as sources of reliable information about Muslims; if anything, they are a source of ethnological

information about the Orthodox Christians themselves. As Joanna Tokarska-Bakir writes, "the qualities attributed by a group to the Other are antithetical to an idealized image of one's own group. In this sense, stereotypes yield data about the stereotyping group, its culture and historical period, and not about the stereotyped group. The exact qualities incorporated into a stereotype are shaped by social change and historical circumstance. Some are results of actual interactions and individual experience, but stereotypes can also be perpetuated, revived or shaped by messages containing a culture's fantasies, regardless of whether the [stereotyped] group is present in that society or not"[413] (Tokarska-Bakir 2008, p. 56–57, translation from Polish). In the material discussed in this chapter, stereotypical opinions about the Pomaks are largely shaped by folklore, particularly by folk songs telling the story of Bulgarian people "turned Turk" or heroically resisting this fate under Ottoman rule.

7.1 "Purest-Bred Bulgarians" or "Conformists and Traitors"?

One immediate ethnographic problem in discussing Bulgarian-speaking Muslims with Christians involves the naming conventions. The choice of a particular ethnonym out of the several possible options entails a considerable amount of information about the speaker's attitudes towards the group and the depth (or otherwise) of critical reflection on the relations between the groups. Recent democratic changes have pushed some ethnonyms to the margins in everyday speech as they become replaced by more politically correct equivalents. Some seem to be going out of use altogether. My respondents use ethnonyms such as *Pomatsi*, *Bŭlgaromahomedani*, *Bŭlgari mahomedani* or, sporadically, *Bŭlgaromyusyulmani*. Although Muslims may occasionally use some of those terms for purposes of self-identification, they are all essentially exoethnonyms.

Another term attested in my field research is *kadŭna/kŭdŭna* (Turkish: *kadın*)[414], meaning a Turkish woman or a Bulgarian-speaking Muslim woman.

> S.: Actually, they are kŭdynite.
>
> M.L.: Does that word mean anything?
>
> S.: Well, it means they're not Bulgarians, they're more like Turks. But they're not Turks. They're Bulgaromohammedans.

413 Tokarska-Bakir is referring to the ideas of L. Gilman in *Difference and Pathology. Stereotypes of Sexuality, Race and Madness*, Ithaca–London 1990, p. 16–29.

414 Literally, "woman, matron, lady". Since the late 17th century the term came to include harem (Arabic: *harim*) women who had given birth to the Sultan's children (Todorova 2004, p. 480).

M.L.: But you said they were not Bulgarians?

S.: They're not. Maybe their great-grandmothers were Bulgarian, but they'd got turned Turk... We spent five hundred years under Turkish occupation.

M.L.: Do they realize that that's the case?

S.: How could they not?! People talk about it, you can read about it in books. Nowadays a very simple person might perhaps not have read about it, but they would have heard about it somewhere. (W, Ch, Interview 35, Garmen 2006)

My female respondent takes it for granted that books are a conclusive authority on the identity of Bulgarian-speaking Muslims, their own opinions in the matter being very much of secondary importance.

The term "Bulgaromohammedans" seems to be the most popular ethnonym denoting Bulgarian-speaking Muslims and one that is an "experience-near" concept[415] (Geertz 1983, p. 57 to the respondents. Etymologically, the word is derived from the name of Muhammad but some respondents seem unaware of the fact, and they fail to realize its political incorrectness. They describe Bulgarian-speaking Muslims as "Bulgaromohammedans" when highlighting their Bulgarian identity as opposed to that of other Muslims living in Bulgaria:

M.L.: Why are the Pomaks called that?

M.: Because they're Pomaks. (W, Ch, Interview 34, Garmen 2006)

M.L.: But why do young people call them Muslims and older people I asked called them Mohammedans? Why is there such a difference?

K.: I don't know why. We say "Muslims" because they embrace the Muslim religion. They say Mohammedans because in practical terms Pomaks are Christians "turned Mahommedan" (pomohamedancheni)[416]. They've known that for a long time, and I guess that's why they use the term, I don't know. I've never thought about it. (W, Ch, Interview 37, Garmen 2006)

M.L.: But why do they recognize Muhammad? Do you know anything about him?

S.: No, I know nothing about Muhammad. I know the name Muhammad. There are such [names – M.L.] (W, Ch, Interview 35, Garmen 2006)

415 A concept used by respondents "naturally and effortlessly to define what he or his fellows see, feel, think, imagine, and so on" (Geertz 1983, p. 57), borrowed by Geertz from the psychoanalist H. Kohut. Although my responents have gained more awareness about terms like "Pomaks" or "Bulgaro-Mohammedans", they continue to use them out of habit in colloquial interactions: the terms are "experience-near" and persist even though the speakers are aware that this group would not choose to describe itself in such terms.

416 My respondents use the term in the sense of "Islamicization", a term they never use.

My respondents are familiar with the term "Bulgaromohammedans" and continue to use it even though they are aware that the word has been fading out of use since the collapse of Communism in Bulgaria. Some Christians use no ethnonyms at all when referring to Pomaks, simply describing them as "Muslims" (a choice mostly preferred by the Bulgarian-speaking Muslims themselves):

> M.L.: I'd like to understand how the local Muslims came here?
>
> Y.: So, maybe they've been here for a long time, for centuries. And we've always been a mixed community. But back then we didn't call them "Muslims", they used to be called "Bulgaromohammedans". And we lived together. I've lived in such areas ever since I can remember ...
>
> M.L.: They're no longer called "Bulgomohammedans" today?
>
> Y.: Today, in democratic Bulgaria, they're not called Bulgaromohammedans, they're called Muslims. But it doesn't matter. People can use any name they like. You can practice any religion you like. You can believe whatever you like, this is... A person's individual choice. Whatever you like. (W, Ch, Interview 28, Satovcha 2005)

In casual interactions, the term "Muslims" is quite recent and the least frequent. It is regarded as vague and ambiguous because it applies to the Turkish minority as well.

Though less popular, the enthnonym "Pomaks" is also used, though Christians seldom use it in the presence of Bulgarian-speaking Muslims as some Muslims regard the word as offensive. Most Christians seem unaware that Pomaks resent the term, which implicitly characterizes their group as a victimized population coerced to embrace "the religion of slaves". Not all of my Christians respondents agreed with this perception. According to the respondent quoted below, the etymology of the word implies solidarity with, rather than contempt for, the supposedly victimised population:

> M.L.: And when... when you use the word "Pomak", do people take offense?
>
> G.: They do. Some of them do. It's... do you know which ones are offended? Again, it's those older ones, it's people who don't know the etymology of the word "Pomak", who don't know that it's... that it derives from the word "tortured" (pomûcheni)... In fact, the word is not derogatory at all. On the contrary. It has certain positive connotations: those are people who need help, people who deserve sympathy. They don't understand that. They just know that the word "Pomak" is offensive, and that's that! (W, Ch, Interview 23, Satovcha 2005)

The same respondent, a school teacher of Bulgarian, associates the word "Pomak" not with forced conversion to Islam, but to the persecutions suffered by the local population during the „revival process", enacted under the Communist government of Todor Zhivkov:

> G.: The word itself has no insulting connotations, it connotes things like agony, suffering. A "Pomak" means a tortured person, a person who's gone through an ordeal. And those people may well have suffered more in the revival process than their ancestors did when they faced conversion to Islam. That's how I see it. My parents or the old people I've spoken to never mentioned any massacres, deaths or torture in Satovcha in the period when some of those people were converted to Islam. Which means that people were free to choose. (W, Ch, Interview 23, Satovcha 2005)

This comment is symptomatic of changing perceptions of the local historical experience, reflecting Bulgaria's democratic transition and the recent changes to the country's language and history curricula.

In the case of my Christian respondents, the term "Pomak" is usually linked with statements concerning the group's conversion to Islam, a fact which gets interpreted in one of two different ways. One interpretation sees conversion in terms of symbolic defilement: "turning Turk" is an act of shameful conformism, a sign of moral weakness and, according to some, shrewd self-interest: the Pomaks are people who allowed themselves to be "turned Turk" – unlike the ancestors of my Christian respondents, people with a strong moral backbone who successfully resisted the lure of conformism and profiteering.

Such ideas about the choices of ancestors threatened by Islamicization are mostly based on Bulgarian folklore, whose heroes often choose death over religious conversion. Educated or not, many of my respondents were able to quote passages from folk songs to support their arguments. College-educated people could quote specific songs and identify them by title; older people with a primary education (7–8 years) or an elementary education (four years) tended to unwittingly conflate various songs, which they treated as sources of absolute historical truth. Folklore, as the Bulgarian scholar Olga Todorova notes, "foklore is a highly dubious source of historical reconstruction"[417] (Todorova 2004, p. 245), but ordinary people tend to find folk stories far more attractive than the dispassionate scholarly analyses of religious conversion patterns shaped by factors such as economic self-interest or upward social mobility.

One such vivid passage quoted to me by a female teacher of Bulgarian in Satovcha comes from the folk song, "Davash li, davash li, Balkandzhi[418] Jovo"[419], in which the hero choses mutilation over marrying his sister off to a Turk:

> G.: "Do you, oh do you give up, Balkandzhi Jovo, the beautiful Yana, so she accepts the Turkish faith? Hey, commander [Bulgarian: voyvodo], I give up my eyes. I do not give up Yana for the

417 This is not to say that there were no acts of forced conversion to Islam: such cases existed but were sporadic, as attested in the historical record from the Ottoman and post-Classical Ottoman period which also contain occasional hints of violence (cf. Todorowa 2004, p. 245).

418 Highlander.

419 My respondent explained that the story was also discussed in Bulgarian classes by mixed groups containing Bulgarian-speaking Muslims.

> Turkish faith ["Davash li, oh, davash li, Balkandzhi Jovo, hubava Iana na turska vyara? - More voyvodo, ochi[420] si davam, Iana ne davam na turska vyara!"] (W, Ch, Interview 23, Satovcha 2005)

Another story of martyrdom popular in the area tells about a young girl who failed to realize that a group of Turkish men was drawing close because she was braiding her hair: rather than suffer sexual assault, the girl threw herself down from a high rock, an incident which supposedly gave the name to the nearby town of Pletena ("braided"). The story is also treated as illustrative of the way in which Islam was imposed on the local population in the Rhodopes. My respondent treated the story with a pinch of salt and described it as a legend, but she narrated the story with a straight face, and pointed out to me the exact spot from which the girl jumped to her death, treating the story as a historical source:

> M.L.: How do they [the Pomaks] view it? Do they know how they came to be Muslims, or are there different versions?...
>
> G.: Maybe they do. Maybe they do. But I think there's no... I mean... There is a local legend about Pletena and how people were being turned Turk. About Pletena. A pretty maid... A very pretty maid who had long hair down to her feet... So, they realize that some Turks are coming, they're entering the village in order to turn people Turk. She was combing her hair at that moment, and her mother says, "Braided or not, we need to get up and flee, the Turks are here." So, off she went, but the Turks were already in her house, now, you can see those rocks above Pletena, and she throws herself from those rocks. That's how Pletena got its name. Braided or not, she throws herself down... That's one of the versions. (W, Ch, Interview 23, Satovcha 2005)

When she finished, the respondent corrected her narrative, clarifying that no historical accounts of forced conversion to Islam existed in the region.

> G.: So, this actually survives in legend, the Turks, the girls running away from them. But in fact there's no historical evidence of any compulsion in the area. There was none. It's not like, say, Batak – with massacres and so on. There was none of that here. I'm guessing the locals are softer in spiritual terms. They're more willing to submit than to resist. You don't get this strong spirit of struggle around here, quite on the contrary. On the one hand that's a good thing, on the other hand, not quite. But at the same time they're very strong in terms of character. They are hospitable, very hospitable. (W, Ch, Interview 23, Satovcha 2005)

By contrast, my older female respondents had no doubts about the account's veracity:

> M.: There is a village next to us called Pletena. When they [Turks] came, a pretty girl climbed a rock overhanging the river, it happened high up in the mountains. Well, not exactly in the mountains, but it's a mountain village. When she realized the Turks were gaining on her... because the

420 In a different variant, "glava si davam", "I give up my head" (life).

thing is, she had this long hair, and she was braiding it. She was at home, standing in front of the mirror. In the morning, her mother noticed some Turks near the house, and she said, "[Whether your hair is] braided or not, daughter, we must flee". [Told her] to forget braiding her hair. They left the village, and there was a high rock there. I don't remember what happened to the mother, but she [the long-haired girl] jumped off the rock rather than be turned Turk.

M.L.: Is that why it's called Pletena?

M.: That's where the name comes from. (W, Ch, Interview 33, Garmen 2006)

Iordan I. Ivanov cites this version of the story in his *Mestnite imena v gotse-delchevsko* (1996). Ivanov dates the events to the 17th century (cited in: Radushev 2005, p. 151), which is when the village allegedly changed its name, but this claim is not corroborated by historical sources. The name Pletena can be found in the earliest known records from the Nevrokop region, which mention Pletena, a village with ten Christian households, in 1444 (cf. Radushev 2005, p. 153). A different Ottoman source (1464–1465) lists inhabitants of Pletena whose names suggest a Bulgarian community (Radushev 2005, p. 153). Records from the 1530s mention thirty-one Christian families and eight first-generation Muslim families living in Pletena (identifiable as first-generation Muslims because the males are referred to as "son of Abdullah[421]) (Radushev 2005, p. 153). The village of Pletena disappears from official records in the 17th century as its population becomes all-Muslim and therefore exempt from per capta tax (*jizyah*).

Concerning the folk etymology of Pletena, Olga Todorova notes that "in contrast to Orthodox Church literature from the Ottoman period, which mostly focuses on male «*pomyusyulmanchvaniya*» [conversions to Islam] or attempted cases of enforced «*pomyusyulmanchvaniya*», Islamicization – compulsory or voluntary – in our oral folklore is mostly present as regards women" (Todorova 2004, p. 269, translated from Bulgarian). Conversion of males does not appear in folk narratives, which Todorova attributes to the fact that conversions of women posed a greater threat to social structures and human relationships. Women who converted to Islam "became permanently unavailable to Christian males" (Todorova 2004, p. 270, translated from Bulgarian). The problem that did not affect men, as Muslims were allowed to marry Christian women under Islamic law.

In contrast to the idea of conversion as a stigma and a product of moral pusillanimity, my respondents are also familiar with a heroic vision of that phenomenon, which appears in Anton Donchev's well-known novel *Vreme razdelno* ("Time of Parting", 1964). The novel, which is required reading in Bulgarian schools, presents a Christian priest who has to make a decision whether to accept conversion to Islam, and decides to side with life. Ludmil Staikov made the book into a film (*Vreme na nasilie*, [Time of Violence]), notoriously used as a propaganda tool during the „revival process" in the 1980s.

421 An assumed patronymic given to new converts in the Ottoman Empire.

Similar to the folk songs, Donchev's novel shapes the Bulgarian post-memory of conversion to Islam in the Rhodopes. The decision to convert is portrayed in the novel as an act of heroism intended to protect Pomak women from rape, and thus to preserve the purity of Bulgarian blood. In this logic, conversion becomes the only way to preserve Bulgarianness (*bulgarshtina*). Accordingly, many of my respondents regard Pomaks as pure-blooded Bulgarians, a view which attests to the continuing popularity of this view, which goes all the way back to the ideas of Lyuben Karavelov, a 19th-century writer and national activist[422]:

> M.L.: What's the difference between "Muslims" and "Mohammedans"?
>
> M.: The difference is that the latter are Bulgarians who were turned Turk. They never gave up their language, which essentially proves they're Bulgarian, they speak Bulgarian. But they accepted the Turkish faith. As a result, until quite recently they used to wear Turkish clothes, *shalvari*. Things are different now.
>
> M.L.: You mean, we could describe the Turks as Muslims, but the Pomaks are Mahommedans (mahomedani)?
>
> M.: Yes. The former are pure Turks. (W, Ch, Interview 33, Garmen 2006)
>
> M.: They're stubborn people. They put up resistance when being turned Turk, but they failed. But to me they're still probably the purest of Bulgarians. (W, Ch, Interview 33, Garmen 2006)

This narrative is very closely tied to the idea that Bulgarian-speaking Muslims are in fact crypto-Christians, a subject to which I turn in the following section.

This recognition of the "purely" Bulgarian identity of Pomaks is not innocent on the part of my respondents: outwardly a mark of approval, this perception puts a symbolic claim on that group by negating its distinct identity. The evidence Christians cite in support of this claim includes shared customs and shared descent (cf. Bokszański 2005, p. 75), conservative rituals (preserved from time immemorial in an almost unchanged form), anthropological qualities (purity of blood caused by endogamous marriage arrangements in the local population), and purity of language (which is free from foreign borrowings and preserves many archaic forms).

> E.: They have preserved family traditions much better than we have. They are subject to shared family laws. Those tends to be more interesting among the Pomaks, if you want to study Bulgarian traditions and customs, you should go and visit the Bŭlgaromahomedani. (W, Ch, Interview 37, Garmen 2006)

422 In Karavelov's view, those who allowed themselves to be "turned Turk" avoided rape and kept Bulgarian blood pure. My respondents did not offer this interpretation but they refer to Pomaks as "pure Bulgarians" (or even "the purest Bulgarians").

V.: Say, a small child is born and I want to visit my [female] neighbour with a povoika[423]. Our people do that too, but the Muslims make a much bigger point of keeping this tradition. Frankly, Muslims do a better job of keeping those traditions than we do. Even today, our people wouldn't do that sort of thing around here. When my neighbour's younger daughter-in-law died, the whole family gathered, she was 39 years old.

M.L.: Why?

W.: Because they have more respect for the family than we do. (W, Ch, Interview 11, Osikovo 2005)

The fact that many Muslims have Bulgarian surnames like those used in the Christian population is also treated as evidence of their Bulgarian identity:

Woman R.: They're Bulgarians like us. They're Pomaks, not Turks.

Man I.: They have surnames like ours.

R.: Um, we don't talk much. Just the necessary stuff...

I.: You get [people named] Ushotsi living here and you get [people named] Ushotsi living in Debren. You get [people named] Uzunovtsi here, and [people named] Uzunovtsi in Debren.

M.L.: Why are those surnames the same?

I.: Because they used to be Bulgarians. Do you get it? Except they were turned Turk during the Turkish period, get it? Us, they couldn't turn Turk.

R.: They are Bulgarians, not Turks. They're Mohammedans, Bulgarian Pomaks. (Christians, Interview 40, Garmen 2006)

The idea that the Pomaks were an indelibly Bulgarian population "turned Turk", i.e. branded with a shameful stigma crying to be removed, was first made popular in 19th-century Bulgaria as a political pretext for liberating the Rhodopes from Ottoman rule (Brunnbauer 1999, p. 41). The notion continued to exert an influence in the 20th century, and was deployed in politically motivated assimilation campaigns aimed at the Pomak population (see Section 1.3.1.). An element of the official national canon for almost a century, the idea is connected with the belief that the Pomaks were forced to convert to Islam, a stubborn historiographical myth which persists despite the new historical evidence emerging since 1989. It seems that personal opinion (shaped by daily coexistence) has mixed with competing historiographies, ideologically motivated and promoted by the Bulgarian state in a top-down fashion in different

423 Also: *ponuda* – a custom in which female friends and neighbours bring food to a woman after childbirth.

historical periods: the traditional narrative of Turkish oppression (with elements like massacres of Christian communities or forced conversion to Islam suffered by the Pomaks) and the post-1989 narrative of Turkish presence and voluntary conversions in the region. My respondents appeared to be conflicted about this discrepancy, and were not certain which was the more reliable one:

> G.: What I meant was... Before 1989, people didn't talk much about the Turkish oppression. After 1989, people like the DPS and their kind tried to show the truth, or to distort it, I honestly don't know where the truth lies. Was there really any Turkish oppression? After all, we do have all that historical evidence, this many people slaughtered, this many women raped. The case of Batak alone is enough to prove that there was oppression. But after 1989 they say there was no Turkish oppression; there was "Turkish presence" instead. But there's a world of difference between Turkish oppression and Turkish presence! (W, Ch, Interview 23, Satovcha 2005)

> M.: The way I had to teach this, it's called "Turkish presence" these days, and I taught it *according to* the textbook. (W, Ch, Interview 33, Garmen 2006)

On repeated occasions my respondents made ironic comments about the Pomaks as a group and criticized their identity choices. They emphasized the fact that Pomaks, who identify themselves as Turkish, tend to quickly lose their enthusiasm for Turkish culture when they actually have to learn Turkish. Similarly, some Pomaks reportedly dream of emigrating to Turkey, but they return to Bulgaria when faced with indifference in their adopted country. According to one respondent, Bulgarian-speaking Muslims complain about being treated as second-class citizens in Turkey, no better than Roma people:

> M.: In the past they were turned Turk, accepted the Muslim faith. So, they said, we can convert, but we'll keep our language. So now they believe in Allah, the Muslim way, but they've kept the language, they speak Bulgarian. They don't speak Turkish, they don't know a word of Turkish. Well, these days they tend to nag their kids, trying to get them to study Turkish, but that's like we used to study French... My daughter says they're offering Turkish classes in Debren but there's no interest, they've all dropped out. They can't memorize the vocabulary, there are no Turks locally, just Bulgarian-speaking Pomaks. Um, they have a few words, like *makar* or *demek*[424], right? Big deal. (W, Ch, Interview 42, Garmen 2006)

> Margarita: "They think the locals will be welcome if they move there", she says. "They call them Gypsies" – she says. – "They have no respect for them". (Interview 42, Garmen 2006)

Some respondents claimed the Pomaks were suffering from an inferiority complex, believing that their Christian neighbours regarded them as unsophisticated rubes. When they come to visit a Christian, the respondent argued, Pomaks tend to act in a tense and awkward manner for no reason at all:

424 Both words are actually used in colloquial Bulgarian throughout the country.

M.: When you come and visit ... I don't know what it is between us and them, maybe they have some sort of complex, like they're somehow inferior to us. You really have to make an effort to loosen them up (...).

M.L.: Why would you say they have a complex like this?

M.: Well, they feel unsophisticated.

M.L.: Why?

M.: I really don't know. You go and visit, and their houses are squeaky clean, and she [a Muslim female friend of the respondent – M.L.] wants to have the same kind of things that everybody else does, just look at Nada, how spacious her place is. Their houses are like palaces.

Dinka: A *konak*[425]. (W, Ch, Interview 42, Garmen 2006)

The respondents may be noticing the social withholding of acceptance or respect experienced by stigmatized persons, a reaction Erving Goffman describes as "the central feature of the stigmatized individual's situation in life". This reaction prompts stygmatized people to "echo this denial by finding that some of his own attributes warrant it", and to question personal qualities which were previously unquestioned (Goffman 1963, p. 8-9).

Reactions of those Pomaks who believe that Bulgarians see them as somehow defective fall into one of two types: 1) either they adapt and change their own image, for instance by giving up the traditional costume in favour of "European-style" clothes (either temporarily, when travelling away from their places of origin, or permanently, in which case they tend to react with embarrassment to fellow Pomaks wearing the traditional costume[426]); 2) or they take pride in their religion and lifestyle, and reject the idea that they are a population historically forced to convert to Islam (implied in this attitude is the belief that Pomaks were Muslims even before the period of Ottoman rule in Bulgaria, a new ethnogenetic concept).

Whereas my Christian respondents can easily relate to the first type of reaction, they tend to be baffled by the latter variety. They find it difficult to clearly explain their own attitudes towards Bulgarian-speaking Muslims, or to recognize them as a separate ethnic group unrelated to Bulgarians.

Some people regard Bulgarian-speaking Muslims as a group caught between the Bulgarians (who they refuse to identify with) and the Turks (they sometimes identify themselves as Turkish but the Turks refuse to accept them as their own). Christians refuse to accept this identity choice of Bulgarian-speaking Muslims: they insist that

425 A large building.

426 As evidenced by the furore caused in 1994 by the film *Gori, gori ogŭnche* (dir. Rumiana Petkova, screenplay by Malina Tomova), cf. Lubanska 2006.

Pomaks have nothing to do with Turks, an ethnically unrelated nation whose language they cannot speak. They find the Pomaks' stubborn refusal to accept a Bulgarian identity unreasonable and factually unwarranted:

> M.: They've always been caught in two minds. … We want them, they don't want us. They want the Turks, but the Turks don't want them.
>
> M.L.: Why do they want the Turks, but the Turks don't want them? Is it the language?
>
> M.: They don't want that, I think that's because they are Bulgarians. Why would they want them, seeing as they're not Turkish? They're not even migrants in Turkey. (W, Ch, Interview 33, Garmen 2006)
>
> M: Why are the Mohammedans[427] called that?
>
> S.: She's already told you, Magda did – they were opressed, they were turned Turk by force.
>
> M.L.: But they're called Mohammedans, and not "people turned Turk"?
>
> S.: Um, it's a name. They're not Turks. They don't have enough Turkish to buy a loaf of bread. (W, Ch, Interview 34, Garmen 2006)
>
> G.: I mean, the interesting thing is that older Muslims consider it an insult to be called Bulgarian. They say they're simply Muslims, or Turks, or Pomaks. They will usually say they are Turks… though they have nothing to do with Turks. The thing is, they're not actually Turks. They're not ethnic Turks… But they'd never say, "We are Bulgarians". (W, Ch, Interview 23, Satovcha 2005)
>
> M.L.: Are Pomaks a different nationality?
>
> I.: Yes, but they are mixed. Whereas Pomaks and Turks, they don't mix. The Turks don't want the Pomaks. (M, Ch, Interview 43, Garmen 2006)
>
> E.: They pass this knowledge of past oppression from generation to generation, but they wouldn't admit that. What kind of religion is that…? It looks like the Turkish religion, they pray in mosques, but they're not Turks, they're not pure blood Turks. (W, Ch, Interview 37, Garmen 2006)

Some say openly that they would like the Pomaks to identify themselves as Bulgarian, though this concept of Bulgarianness is similar to the concept of American identity as a melting pot of different ethnic groups:

> V.: I mean, just look at other countries. Everybody is free to practice any religion they like. And at the end of the day they say, "He's American". And that's it… Here in Bulgaria it's the same. Anyone can practice any religion they like, but we're Bulgarians, we are Bulgarians before all else, we live in Bulgaria. (W, Ch, Interview 28, Satovcha 2005)

427 I used the term "Mahommedan" because I was interested in my respondent's understanding of it.

The respondent had reportedly heard a Pomak man complaining about fellow Pomaks who had rejected their Bulgarian roots:

> D.: There is this one [Pomak] – he married a Bulgarian woman – and he speaks very ill of them [Bulgarian-speaking Muslims]. He says: "They're Pomaks, they're rubes", he calls them all kinds of names. "They don't understand what you're saying to them. You tell him he's not a Turk, he's not a Pomak, he's Bulgarian – but he just digs his heels in! He will say: «That's what our grandmothers told us, and we'll stick with that!». There's no convincing them that they're Bulgarians". (W, Ch, Interview 41, Garmen 2006)

Another respondent said young people were more likely to identify themselves as Bulgarians, or as Bulgarian Muslims:

> G.: Young people say... Young people make a distinction. We're Bulgarians because we live in Bulgaria, we speak Bulgarian, this is our nationality, but we have a Muslim religion. We are Bulgarians, that's who we are. (W, Ch, Interview 23, Satovcha 2005)

Christians also have a problem addressing Muslims who recently changed their Bulgarian names to Turkish ones:

> V.: I can't call her Ayshe [a Muslim name recently taken by the respondent's female friend – M.L.]. There's just no way you can spend 35 or 34 years calling a person by one name, and then suddenly call her something else. That's just ... not typical.
>
> M.L.: What was the name before?
>
> V.: Ani. I still call her Ani, and she doesn't correct me. When I call her Ayshe, it's like I'm talking to a different person. (W, Ch, Interview 28, Satovcha 2005)

Except when they object, the respondent prefers calling her Muslim friends by their former Bulgarian names. To the respondent's mind, a new name is a connection to a different person, and this changes a person's identity:

> Y.: It's something you do unwittingly.
>
> V.: I have friends who say, "You've got to stop calling me Valia. Call me Fatme". I can't spend 30 years knowing her as "Valia", and then one happy day just go and call her "Fatme". That's like listening to a different person, completely different. It's not a problem ... She doesn't make a big deal out of it... (W, Ch, Interview 28, Satovcha 2005)

My older respondents mentioned the embarrassment involved in an earlier rechanging campaign mandated by Zhivkov's government when Turkish names were being replaced by Bulgarian ones. In those day, my older respondents used to call their friends by their new Bulgarian names to avoid being fined:

M.L.: When the names were changed, what did you call them then?

S.: We called them by their Bulgarian names. If I'd got caught using those [Turkish names – M.L.], who knows, maybe they would have fined me on the spot?

M.L.: What about today?

S.: Today you do what you like. Now it's completely up to you.

Mariya: In the past they used to have two names.

S.: They still have two names today.

M.: Well, that's the times we live in. (W, Ch, Interview 34, Garmen 2006)

According to the respondent, the names used for addressing Muslims are a matter of personal choice, an observation my Muslim respondents confirm. For instance, a young *hodzha* from Ognianovo told me how he used to use two names as a child, an "official" name of Kamen, and a "family" name of Kizim. Reportedly, he did not mind it when other children called him Kamen (Interview 49, Ognianovo 2006). In 1990, he officially changed his name to Kizim.

When Bulgarian-speaking Muslims were being forced to change their Turkish names to Bulgarian ones, they sometimes named themselves after Christian families who had treated them well:

M.: All the girls in my class wanted to name themselves after me [the woman was a primary teacher in a religiously mixed class – M.L.]. Their parents came, and they asked me to explain to the girls that it wouldn't do to have so many girls with the same name in one class, how this would create chaos in the classroom. I told them, "Don't worry, it's your problem and you can handle it". "No, they say they love you, and want to have your name. If you tell them they will listen". And that's what happened. I've always loved children, I will probably go to my grave loving them. And children could always see that, and they loved me back. It's a feeling that enchriches my soul. (W, Ch, Interview 33, Garmen 2006)

7.2 "Crypto-Christians" or *Poturcheni* ("People turned Turk")?

Christians believe that the Pomaks are living with a hidden sense of guilt because they had betrayed their religion which they long, deep down, to embrace again, or indeed continue to practice in secret. On the other hand, they believe Pomaks are drifting away from their Christian and Bulgarian roots because they are committed Muslims with recognizably eastern customs. Though mutually exclusive, those two perspectives seem to become conflated by some respondents, and should be seen as inter-related.

7.2.1 The Pomaks as Crypto-Christians

Crypto-Christianity - the secret practice of Christianity by an outwardly Muslim population in the Ottoman Empire - was an historical phenomenon occuring between the 16th and the 19th centuries. There is nothing to indicate that the phenomenon still exists today.

According to Noel Malcolm, crypto-Christianity involved[428] a degree of mimicry and camouflage, evident in the strategic marriage arrangements of the crypto-Christian community (cf. Malcolm 2001, p. 92): most converts to Islam were males, who chose Christian wives capable of ensuring the continuity of Christian traditions at home. Because Islam permitted marriages with Christian (or Jewish) women, the practice provoked no suspicion and was relatively widespread in the Ottoman Empire. In the case of crypto-Christianity, "apparently ... this system of religious differentiation by sex could be continued down the generations. It may thus have been an important mechanism in making crypto-Catholicism possible. With women in the family who are officially Christian, it became possible for priests to enter their homes in order to minister in secret to the menfolk as well" for purposes like christenings or other sacraments (Malcolm 2001, p. 100). Such religious practices could be kept secret so effectively that "sometimes the father does not reveal himself as a Christian to his sons, or the sons to the father, and on their deathbeds they behave as, and give themselves out to be, Muslims" (Malcolm 2001, p. 102). Another factor favoring crypto-Christian practice was the cooperation of the Christian clergy[429], who were willing to administer the sacraments clendestinely[430] (cf. Malcolm 2001, p. 100).

There are some historical accounts, although not many, of a crypto-Christian presence in certain communities of the Ottoman Empire. In his article *Crypto-Christianity in the Balkan Area under the Ottomans* (1967), Stavro Skendi argues that crypto-Christianity was practised most openly in Cyprus: the local population converted to Islam in the 16th century, but for four centuries its members continued to baptise their children, give them double names (Christian and Muslim), practice fasts and adoration of the Eucharist, and marry women who could cultivate the Christian

428 It is important to bear in mind, however, that his analysis focuses on Kosovo and Albanian practices.

429 N. Malcolm writes about the Catholic clergy and does not discuss Orthodox Christian attitudes about crypto-Christians.

430 This despite the existence of church edicts criticizing crypto-Christianity and barring crypto-Christians access to the sacraments. N. Malcolm cites examples from Albania, such as a local synod convened in 1703 by Archbishop Vicko Zmajević, as well as other synods convened by the the Holy Office in 1724 and 1730 and by Pope Benedict XIV in 1744. (cf. Malcolm 2001, p. 101). Those had little impact on the activities of the lower clergy. Those members of the clergy who followed the Church policy were often conflicted about it. Archbishop Matija Mazarek feared that crypto-Christians denied the sacraments could turn into enemies of the Church and more zealous Muslims (cf. Malcolm 2001, p. 103).

traditions (Skendi 1967, p. 230). Historically, scholars have uncovered evidence of crypto-Christian communities in Crete, Albania[431], Serbia and Bosnia (Skendi 1967) as well as in Macedonia[432] (Malcolm 2001, p. 103).

Although there are no credible accounts of crypto-Christianity in Bulgaria, Skendi does not rule out this possibility (Skendi 1967, p. 234). It seems probable that there were some self-identified secret Christians among first-generation converts. According to Noel Malcolm, crypto-Christianity proper applies "only when the attitude has become transmitted down the family, and established as a tradition, can we speak confidently of the practice of crypto-Christianity" (Malcolm 2001, p. 98).

Claims that the Bulgarian-speaking Muslims in Bulgaria were in fact crypto-Christians were often made in the writings of 19th-century travellers (e.g. Felix Philipp Kanitz), journalists, politicians and scholars. According to an anonymous writer for the *Dunavska Zora* journal who signed himself as "C", when Bulgarian Muslims named their children they would first invite a Bulgarian Christian to act as a godparent (cf. Raychevski 2004, p. 47). Stefan Verkovich[433] wrote that many of the Bulgarians who have been "turned Turk" had kept their Christian names (Verkovich 1860, cited in: Raychevski 2004, p. 32), Ivan Galaganov claimed that they had retained the tradition of carol singing (Galaganov, cited in: Raychevski 2004, p. 33), and Lyuben Karavelov claimed that they continued to revere many of the Christian saints. Karavelov referred to this population as "half-Christians" (arch. Bulgarian: *poluhristyene*) because "they speak no Turkish, and therefore the Qur'an is still a dead letter to them" (Karavelov, cited in: Raychevski 2004, p. 51, translated from Bulgarian). Jean H. A. Ubicini, a French historian and journalist, argued that the Pomaks had held on to "most of the customs, rites and superstitions of their Christian ancestors," pointing to the local cults of St. George, St. Dimitar and St. Nicholas, as well as the local population's reverence for springs of holy water (cited in: Raychevski 2004, p. 77, translated from Bulgarian). In times of illness, pestilence, fires or other disasters, wrote the Austrian journalist Otto Felix Kanitz, local Muslims preferred visits to local healers or former Christian holy places rather than consult *hodzhas* (cited in: Raychevski 2004, p. 69). In the same historical period, Hristo Popkonstantinov argued in 1878 that "The Pomaks consider themselves Turks or Ottomans, and so their brothers, Bulgarian Christians, lack the courage to tell them openly that their forefathers had practised a different faith, and they call them Turks" (cited in: Radushev 2005, p. 27, translated from Bulgarian).

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431 Some scholars mention Kosovo in particular (Malcolm 2001).

432 Church and diplomatic reports to Rome and Western powers contain details and statistical data which lasts in some cases until the 1860s (Malcolm 2001, p. 103–105).

433 Bosnian Serb, archaeologist, folklorist in Macedonia who also worked as a secret agent of the Serbian government. He published two volumes of mythical songs: *Veda Slovena. Bŭlgarski narodni pesni ot predistorichna i predhristyanska doba* (Belgrade 1874) (featuring folklore of Slavic Muslims), and *Narodne pesme makedonski bugare* (1860).

It is no longer possible to ascertain the reliability of those 19th-century sources but they seem to be overestimating the strength of crypto-Christianity: it is otherwise difficult to account for the large-scale wave of Bulgarian-speaking Muslims openly re-embracing Muslim names and costumes in 1913 after being forcibly Christianized by the Bulgarian clergy in 1912[434] (Neuburger 2004, p. 41). According to Frederik W. Hasluck, writing close to those events in the first half of the 20th century, the idea of crypto-Christianity was so popular because European travellers knew little about Islam in Asia Minor, and attributed any departures from Sunni orthodoxy to surviving Christian belief among the native population converted to Islam (Hasluck 2005, p. 125). As Hasluck noted, "though crypto Christians exist in Asia Minor, many, if not most, of the unorthodox practices obtaining amongst tribes supposed to have been originally Christian, are in fact to be referred either (1) to the primitive stratum of religion, which survives in superstitious practice among Christians no less than Mohammedans, or (2) to the Shi'ah[435] branch of the Mohammedan faith, which, though orthodox in Persia, is to the Sunni Turks quite as much outside of the pale as the Christianity of the Armenian is to the Greek or vice versa" (Hasluck 2005, p. 125). Hasluck suspected that many Turkish tribes had encountered the local form of Islam when migrating westwards through Persia, which could be seen as a link between Islam and paganism (Hasluck 2005, p. 125). Although Hasluck's evolutionist approach is very much of its day, his conclusions often appear to stand the test of time.

As demonstrated in Bulgarian historiography, the idea that Bulgarian-speaking Muslims were in fact crypto-Christians is strongly connected with nationalist political propaganda going back to the second half of the 20th century, and often used in the context of assimilation campaigns (see Chapter 1). Today, this view is represented by the Bulgarian historian Petar Petrov (*Nepokorni podanŭtsi na sultana* [The Sultan's unruly subjects], 1995), the lectures of ethnographer Krasimir Stoilov[436], former political activist Petar Djulgerov in *Razpnati dushi* [Crucified people, 2000] or Boyan Saryev, an Orthodox priest of Pomak descent active in the Eastern Rhodopes (a highly

434 At the time, Bibles, crucifixes and Bulgarian headgear were distributed among the population to replace the fez and the *zabradkas* (cf. Neuburger 2004, p. 41). This is notable in the context of the widespread belief in the local area that Bulgarian-speaking Muslims are still secretly holding on to those objects, which they keep hidden in their attics.

435 F.W. Hasluck had an evolutionistic interpretation of Shi'ah Islam as a link between paganism and Sunni Islam.

436 Among others, Stoilov gave his lectures at the Institute of Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology, University of Warsaw as a visiting lecturer in 2002 and 2006. Stoilov's examples of crypto-Christianity included Muslim women making a cross-shaped gesture over freshly kneaded dough, crucifixes found in the graves of Bulgarian-speaking Muslims or crosses engraved in stones placed in foundations of houses. Those observations supposedly confirm the Bulgarian identity of the Bulgarian-speaking Muslims by diminishing their distinctive features.

controversial character and a former agent of the Bulgarian Security Service[437] who wrote *Glasŭt na vikashtiya na pustiniyata* [A voice of one calling in the wilderness, 1996]. Another notable example of this kind of writing is the recent book by Stoyan Raychevski, *Bŭlgarite mohamedani* [Bulgarian Muslims, 2004], which uses 19th-century sources to argue that the Pomaks are ethnic Bulgarians, blithely ignoring the actual religious practices or personal opinions of the Bulgarian-speaking Muslims in question.

Importantly, a distinction needs to be made between crypto-Christianity taken to mean a historical phenomenon, and the *narrative* of crypto-Christianity used as a way of symbolically claiming the Other by negating the Other's separate identity. By invoking the crypto-Christianity narrative when talking about the Bulgarian-speaking Muslims, Christians imply that the Islam practised by their neighbours is no so much a distinct, independent religion as a kind of facade hiding their continued attachment to Christianity. In doing that, Christians seem to be confusing secondary cultural practices (as when Muslim women mark bread dough with a cross before putting it in the oven) and their religious meaning, a phenomenon Hasluck noted already in the 19th century.

Interestingly, my respondents believe that crypto-Christianity forms an important and deeply private aspect of Pomak life: practically the "most sacred" aspect of all, which is carefully kept from outsiders:

> E.: I actually get the impression that the Muslims know Christianity better than Muslim religion. I'm talking about the Bulgaromohammedans. My impression is that deep down, in spiritual terms, they know and observe those things more [than actual Christians], even though they never show it ... They would never open up to you intentionally. To them, those things are holy. (W, Ch, Interview 37, Garmen 2006)

To Christian respondents, this alleged crypto-Christian identity is especially apparent in the emotional attachment felt by Pomaks towards Christian cult objects such as icons, crucifixes or Bibles, which they supposedly venerate on Christian holidays:

> E.: This used to be a Bulgarian village before it was turned Mohammedan. The old people, her mother died at the age of eighty... in their chests they all kept things like Bulgarian costumes, crucifixes, everything. On Christian holidays they took those things out and kissed them. Once there was an expedition [field research trip] in this area, and that's what they concluded. Very interesting. Today this has all got very political. They've moved apart, they've hidden those things away. They don't talk about it. But deep down perhaps they nurture it in their soul. They know where their roots are, they know that very well. But nowadays many politicians have started exploiting people's feelings, so people just clam up and keep those things in their hearts, they don't talk about it. (Interview 37, Garmen 2006)

437 Saryev was often mentioned by my Christian respondents, who see his story as confirmation of the thesis that Bulgarian-speaking Muslims are in fact Bulgarians.

My respondents argue that Pomaks have been keeping Christian cult objects for generations, usually hidden in dowry chests (which suggests matrilineal transmission):

> Archimandrite Grigoriy: ... They've kept chests which used to belong to their grandfathers or grandmothers, from the olden days. In those chests they always keep crucifixes or icons. (Interview 27, Satovcha 2006)

According to another respondent, Pomaks often keep traditional Bulgarian costumes in the chests:

> V.: Old ladies keep Bulgarian clothes in those chests.
>
> M.L.: Really? Have you seen that?
>
> W.: I have. (M, Ateist from Christian background, Interview 47, Garmen 2006)

Some of the Bulgarian-speaking Muslims who have preserved such Christian cult objects are referred to as "priests":

> M.: Twenty-two years ago I went to one such village on official business. I know them. A man used to live there, they called him "the priest" [pop, otets]. He'd died some years before, but I asked some older people... That was a secret 60 years ago, when... 50 years. People used to feel differently about their identity. They didn't talk about that, they kept it under wraps. They called him "the priest" because he had a Bible and an icon that he kept hidden away. I'm not sure if you know the word "chest"? It's like a large decorative box. Something like a gift for the bride, for keeping valuables. At the bottom [of that chest] there was an icon and a Bible.
>
> M.L.: Even though he was a Muslim?
>
> M.: Yes. (W, Ch, Interview 33, Garmen 2006)

Another female respondent mentioned a friend, a Bulgarian-speaking Muslim woman, who reportedly complained that her children no longer believed in their Christian roots because they were so "steeped in Pomak ways", a situation which threatens to end the passing down of Christian objects from generation to generation in Pomak families.

> M.L.: And what is the difference [between the Turks and the Pomaks – M.L.]?
>
> D.: So, Turks know and understand the Turkish language, but our local Pomaks of Debren speak no Turkish. They're Bulgarian. And they became [Pomaks]. Like an old woman said, a *kŭdŭn*a, as we call them: "... we are Bulgarians. My grandmother had a chest, a box where she kept her clothes and a crucifix. She was a pure Bulgarian," she said. "And we've kept this crucifix, and we pass it down from generation to generation. My grandmother gave it to me, and I give it to my

children, but nobody believes me, they're too steeped in those Pomaks ways". (W, Ch, Interview 41, Garmen 2006)

In such narratives, Christians often discover this attitude of special reverence for Christian objects among their Pomak neighbours by accident. For instance, many such items were supposedly discovered by Bulgarian troops searching for hidden weapons in Pomak houses in 1944:

Man I.: I mean ... indirectly, after 9 August they were doing searches in houses, you know, they were looking for weapons in their homes, and what they found was candles, crucifixes, do you understand?

M.L.: Yes.

Woman R.: Right. They've got those ... those remnants of Bulgarian identity. Their ancestors were Bulgarians.

I.: And they have a lot of such remnants. They used to be pure Bulgarians. But... that's right... their religion was taken away from them by force. Our village held on, we're tougher people, you see, and so ... this place has remained purely Bulgarian. (Christians, Interview 40, Garmen 2006)

Christian burials in the older generations of Pomaks have also been cited as evidence of Pomaks' crypto-Christian identity, even though crucifixes found in old graves offer little insight into the religious identity of the Pomak population today. According to Archimandrite Grigoriy, old Pomak graves, which face east like those of Orthodox Christians, often contain Bibles, crucifixes and icons:

Archimandrite Grigoriy: I mean, on the other hand, many of them, when they dig up the graves of their grandfathers and grandmothers, they discover Orthodox Christian burials, with a crucifix and an icon, facing east. (Interview 27, Satovcha 2005)

Metropolitan Natanail of Nevrokop mentioned historical accounts of forced conversion to Islam, which led to the emergence of crypto-Christian Pomak communities whose members would come to confession, and even Communion, in the monastery at Hadzhidimovo, indicating a troubled conscience after abandoning Christ:

Metropolitan Natanail: We have historical knowledge of how the Rhodopes were turned Mohammedan. It's not from the oral tradition that we know how the monastery was first built. We have written data. But we know from oral tradition that the monastery had been set on fire on at least two or three occasions. The last time this happened was when people were being turned Mahommedan. Some of the people who were forced to embrace Islam came here not only Gergiovden or Easter but also on other holidays. To confess the sin of betraying Christ. When allowed to do so, some even took Communion. (Interview 62, Hadzhidimovo 2009)

Nowadays some Muslims wear pouches containing pieces of paper with Christian prayers inscribed with the symbol of the cross, which the Metropolitan regards as proof of their crypto-Christianity:

> M.L.: When they come here, do they ask for prayers?
>
> Metropolitan Natanail: They do.
>
> M.L.: I've seen a boy wearing a prayer written by a priest.
>
> M.N.: Yes, it's a tradition that survives since those times.
>
> M.L.: The times when they used to come here [to the monastery]?
>
> M.N.: Yes, yes. Those times. What kind of genuine, true Muslim would wear a prayer with a cross drawn at the top?
>
> M.L.: You mean, it's supposed to include the picture of a cross?
>
> M.N.: Yes. (Interview 62, Hadzhidimovo 2009)

The Metropolitan ignored the context of the practice, which is a healing practice rather than a form of Christian worship. Other respondents used similar arguments, arguing that the practice of sleeping in churches or lighting candles suggests that the Pomaks are crypto-Christians:

> Y.: Older people used to give us money to buy candles with, and to light them [to pray] for health.
>
> M.L.: Their health?
>
> Y.: That's right. Others would just leave money instead of lighting candles. They would just leave money on the collection tray and that's that. Others lit their own candles. (W, Ch, Interview 28, Satovcha 2005)

Perhaps surprisingly, consumption of pork is also treated as evidence of the supposed crypto-Christian identity of Pomaks: Christians refer to situations where they witnessed Muslims either eating, or being offered, pork. Importantly in this context, Bulgarian-speaking Muslims were also forced to eat pork during the 1912 assimilation campaign to prove their conversion to Christianity had been sincere, the Christians treating the consumption of pork (in violation of a religious prohibition of the supposedly abandoned religion) to be more convincing evidence of conversion than the taking of the Communion – perhaps not the most Christian of sentiments, and certainly not one often discussed today.

When they mention it at all, Christians only mention situations where Muslims consumed pork voluntarily. The following respondent was reportedly shocked when

Muslim women attending a wedding party during the Ramadan ordered cabbage with pork:

> V.: I'd like to share a story about some of the Muslims. We went to "Bulgaria", it's a restaurant, it was a long time ago. I looked around the room, and sat next to them. At that point they hadn't ordered yet. One was an elderly woman, the other one was young. The older woman said, "How about some baked pork and cabbage?" That was during the Ramadan. I was really shocked. Some people won't even eat bread, and here they were, ordering pork and cabbage. Eating pork. Muslims are not supposed to eat pork. But when you don't have... [the respondent laughs – M.L.]. I placed my order, feeling really shocked. That's what we are like; that's what they are like. Some people are observant, others are not. That's just how it is! You get priests who are like that, and *hodzhas*, too. A man will eat the very stuff he forbids others to touch. (W, Ch, Interview 11, Osikovo 2005)

Another respondent claimed that only the older Muslims did not eat pork[438] but the younger ones were unfazed when offered pork by Christians. Her husband's Muslim friends accepted his invitation to a pig-slaughtering party, and joined the couple for the meal that followed:

> M.L.: Generally speaking, do they eat the same foods?
>
> M.: They do, pork excepted. Um, the old people don't eat pork, but the young ones do. One of them said, "If I wasn't too embarrassed, I'd raise a pig in my own backyard". One person helps himself [to a piece of pork], and others follow suit.
>
> Dinka: My neighbours ask me, "Now, you wouldn't have a bit of bacon left, would you?" "I do, actually, but what if your grandmother finds out?" "It's alright, she's going to have it without even knowing".
>
> M.L.: What about *rakiya* [brandy] or wine?
>
> M.: They drink everything.
>
> M.L.: Do they hide their drinking, or...?
>
> M.: No, they have their bars. They don't hide their drinking, they eat bacon[439]. Gosho used to work with some men from Debren, and we were slaughtering a pig once, so he said, "I'll invite them over to the pig-slaughtering party". And they showed up. I said to a friend of mine, "What am I supposed to serve you lot? I've made a massive pot of pork and cabbage. What am I supposed to prepare for you, eggs?" "Are you mad, you have all this food, pork chops and everything, what

438 The respondents seem to be contradicting themselves by arguing that the younger Pomaks are more religious (and are therefore losing their crypto-Christianity), but also that the young Muslims are more likely to eat pork (and break the rules of their religion).

439 I use the word "bacon" as a rough equivalent of *slanina*, a type of fatty food popular in Eastern Europe and consisting of slabs of pork fatback (unlike bacon, *slanina* is not necessarily bacon-cured).

do you mean, eggs?! ... Come on, I'll try everything". They'll say no to fatty things, but in the end they end they eat everything... (W, Ch, Interview 42, Garmen 2006)

Christians claim that Pomaks like pork so much they sometimes invite themselves to Christian homes, hoping to be served pork dishes. Apparently, they do that in secret to keep their visits from fellow Muslims, particularly their wives and mothers [440]:

M.: In the end, all the people at work, all of the workers were saying, "Bay Dancho, aren't you going to invite us over and offer us some pork dishes?" "Come over and have some if you like".

M.: "Tell your wife not to mention our visit to anyone". And round they came, five or six people.

M.L.: Women too?

M.: They were men. They asked us to draw the curtains so nobody could see them inside. (W, Ch, Interview 33, Garmen 2006)

Apparently, some Muslims bring their own bacon when they visit Christian homes, and ask Christian housewives to prepare it so they can take the food home:

M.L.: Is it true that Muslims don't drink?

M.: But they do, of course they do, they eat bacon as well, the whole works. There are fanatics as well. But when I was a teacher, years ago, they would bring me bacon and salami as New Year gifts. I'm not talking about today. Today, everybody buys and fries their own stuff. The old people forbid it but who listens to old people?! Today people are even more liberal. They'd bring me bacon for frying, and they shared it with me because we understand, we're friends. I told him, next time you get hungry, don't bring your own food, I've got loads of pork and bacon, no need to buy anything.

M.L.: Couldn't they prepare it at home with their elders?

M.: I asked him, "Izmir, why don't you buy it from the shop and ask your mother to fry it at home?" "That wouldn't happen in my dreams, if I tried to fry it at home she'd throw the pot and the frying pan out of the window". So [he came to the respondent's house instead], so as not to upset her. (W, Ch, Interview 33, Garmen 2006)

The prohibition on pork in Muslim households is a problem for Christian women married to Muslims. According to my respondents, they often come and visit their relatives just to have some pork, like the daughter of a priest from Debren who married a Turkish officer:

I.: She used to come here, where her brothers and sisters lived, and asked them to give her bacon ... they raised pigs here, [she came to visit] whenever they were slaughtering a pig. Turks don't

440 Although it is supposedly women who hold on to Christian objects and pass them on to the next generations (see above).

> eat bacon. "Brothers, give me some bacon". A *kadŭna* doesn't eat bacon. (M, Ch, Interview 40, Garmen 2006)

Reportedly, Muslims who are too embarrassed to raise their own pigs sometimes outsource their pig farming to Christian neighbours in order to obtain pork for home-made salami (*lukanka*) – otherwise the salami is "too dry":

> M.: They ask Christians to raise piglets for them. Then they slaughter the animals at the same time. They slaughter their calves, and our people slaughter the pigs. That's how you make salami, you use a blend of meats. Veal is no good on its own, the meat is too dry. If you want tasty salami you need pork as well. But the elders don't allow them [to raise pigs]. So we raise them for them. (W, Ch, Interview 33, Garmen 2006)

In those narratives, Christians are pleased to violate the religious prohibition and help Pomaks return to their roots. The stories are meant to bring to light the hypocrisy of the Bulgarian-speaking Muslims, who pretend to be pious Muslims in front of women (women are the preservers of Muslim values who pass them on to the new generation). In this situation Christian neighbours see themselves as people around whom their Muslim friends can really be themselves. Obviously, accusing a religious outgroup of hypocrisy is a way of bolstering the perceived value of the ingroup's own lifestyle.

There are also narratives in which Christians realize that eating pork is a sin for Muslims and would never serve them forbidden foods:

> M.L.: When they come to visit, you don't serve them pork?
>
> S.: No, they know I'd never serve pork to them. How could I make them commit a sin like that? That's just not right! (W. Ch, Interview 35, Garmen 2006)

Some Christians realize that eating pork is forbidden in the Qur'an:

> M.L.: Are those things unclean to them?
>
> M.: Yes, it's *damus*[441]. I've been reading bits out of their Qur'an, *damus* meat is prohibited to them.
>
> M.L.: *Damus*, meaning pork?
>
> M.: [All] pork, not just bacon. (W, Ch, Interview 33, Garmen 2006)

Some Christians realize that Muslims consider pigs to be unclean, but they explain the prohibition with a traditional joke (at the expense of Turks):

441 Turkish: *domuz* – pig, also: slob, messy person.

M.L.: Why do they abstain from pork?

M.: Apparently, there's a legend that says some people were cooking a pig on the Turkish-Bulgarian border. "Whichever way the pig turns, that's how we divide the meat." "All right, then." However, the Turks got the backside. They were revolted, and refused to eat it.

Dinka: The rear end is the best part!

M.: They tend to eat veal or lamb instead. (W, Ch. Interview 42, Garmen 2006)

Today, the Pomaks continue to share the misguided reaction of those Turks. By pointing out that the (albeit insulting) back-end (hams) are the best part of the animal, the respondent emphasizes the bad choice made by the Muslims in the story. This joke may be a way of defusing the cognitive dissonance potentially present in the idea that Christians eat unclean meat by portraying this religious prohibition as unwarranted and preposterous.

Interestingly, the story is also known in the Turkish community. I heard a variant of the story from a Turkish woman in Dabnitsa. In that version, the Bulgarians are tricked into agreeing that they will get the animal whichever side it lies down on:

Turkish W.: There was a time when a lot of people were dying. People blamed pork, because it's a fatty meat and shouldn't be eaten. The Turks let a pig lose in the mud, and said, "If the pig lies down on its right side we won't eat it. If it lies down on its left side, then the Bulgarian Christians will eat it." And they waited. "Alright, so that's that. The Bulgarians will eat it". (W, M, Interview 45, Dybnica 2006)

7.2.2 The Pomaks: *Poturcheni* ("People Turned Turk") or "People of the Orient"?

In other Christian narratives the Pomaks are portrayed in a very different light as their religious culture is stigmatized as being backward, Oriental, primitive and patriarchal. In this perspective, Christians view themselves as representatives of the Western world, and they perceive their Bulgarian-speaking Muslim neighbours as representatives of some unspecified "Oriental culture". According to one respondent, this culture is characterized by specifically "Oriental" ways of thinking, patriarchal social structures and a lack of commitment to the common good:

V.: Right, that's exactly the Oriental thinking. Meaning, my stuff is mine, and other people's stuff is common property. Something like that ... That's exactly what it says in the Qur'an. (W, Ch, Interview 28, Satovcha 2005)

The respondent compares Bulgaria's sorry state as a postcolonial country to the former colonies of the British Empire:

> Y.: It's Oriental thinking. You know, that's what I call it. I mean, we spent five hundred years living under Turkish oppression. We were unlucky [to be occupied by Turkey], the countries living under English occupation, those colonies, they're much more modern today, economically and mentally. They think differently. But Oriental thinking, how shall I put it, it's not unrelated to religion, to the Qur'an. (W, Ch, Interview 28, Satovcha 2005)

Men enjoy a privileged status in Pomak communities, a situation Christians find blatantly unfair to women. They illustrate this state of affairs with examples taken from everyday life. Iordanka from Satovcha made a comparison between two elderly couples, a Christian and a Muslim one, on their way back home from work in the fields: when the Muslim couple is travelling, she explained, the man is riding a donkey, and the woman is leading the animal. With Christian couples, it's the woman who rides the donkey, and the man walks by her side (Interview 28, Satovcha 2005). My respondents compared Muslim women to "slaves" or "bees in a hive", with men taking advantage of their hard work. According to Christians, Muslims struggle economically because they have many children, a marker of being "uncultured". This seems unwarranted, as even my respondents note that Muslim and Christian families in the Rhodopes increasingly have the same number of children (two or three):

> M.: Their marital relations are different as well.
>
> M.L.: How?
>
> M.: Well, it's like [the relationship] between a master and his slave woman. I'm a man, and you? You're nobody. They complain that they have too much work and no time for themselves, having too many children. [Though] recently they, too, tend to have two or three children at the most. Uncultured. Our parents used to be like that, too. (W, Ch, Interview 33, Garmen 2006)

My respondents believe that Muslim men have double moral standards as they keep their women isolated while enjoying a libral lifestyle. For instance, Muslim men allegedly often have lovers outside of the marriage, whereas Muslim women must be docile despite their humiliations:

> Y.: As a rule, women are kept cloistered in the Muslim religion. I mean, the Qur'an says that a man may have as many wives as he pleases. So for them, a woman is a second-class person, in a sense she isn't human. (W, CH, Interview 28, Satovcha 2005)
>
> V.: I mean, the prohibitions in the Qur'an... A woman should stay at home. She's lucky if she doesn't get beaten up in the evening.
>
> M.L.: Meaning what?
>
> V.: He might beat her up in the evening if he feels like it. It doesn't matter if she's been working hard all day, in the evening he may beat her all the same. She must be silent. No right to complain.

Y.: When the husband comes home late, late at night, and she's already in bed, she must get up and serve him a meal when he comes home.

V.: They even wash their [husbands'] feet.

M.L.: They still do that?

V.: In some families they do. For sure. When he comes home, she has to wash his feet, put food on the table, wish him a good evening. Even though he may have been with his lover in a restaurant ten minutes before, that's what it's like... (Women, Ch, Interview 28, Satovcha 2005)

The respondent compares the current situation of Muslim women to the situation of Christian women in the Middle Ages, when, she claims, they were seen as inferior to men:

H.: Muslims believe that women are inferior to men, which is not the case among Christians. Though there were times during the Middle Ages when women were considered inferior. (M, Ch, Interview 47, Garmen 2006)

Some of my respondents believe that the subordinated social status of Muslim women is a matter of Islamic principles. Others argue that the problem is unrelated to religion, and stems from the primitive ways of the Muslim men. In practical terms, they say, the exact source of those prohibitions makes no difference to Muslim women:

K.: I think it's a matter of principle with them that women are born in sin. That's what it's like with Muslims. She was conceived in sin, and that's why things are like that. The big things, the important things are up to the man to decide. That's destiny in their religion. (W, Ch, Interview 37, Garmen 2006)

M.L.: Could you tell me, roughly, which things are a matter of religious rules, and which get imposed by the men?

S.: What is it that they impose? Things like covering her body – that's not required anymore. Cover yourself, don't talk to men. How primitive. It's nothing to do with religion. How could that be a religious matter?!

M.L.: Do the women know that it's not a matter of religion?

S.: Even if they do, nobody wants their opinion. (W, Ch, Interview 35, Garmen 2006)

Christians often discuss the culture of the local Muslims in terms of sweeping generalizations, describing it as primitive and unexamined. One of my respondents was scandalized by the fact that Muslim women working in the fields took care to cover their faces but ignored the fact that their bare breasts were showing:

S.: My uncle had some farmland. At harvest time he used to take the kadŭnas from Debren to his field, all neat and covered up. They wouldn't come and sit by the *chorbadzhiya*[442] where he's having his meal, where we were having meals with my uncle and his children. They were accompanied by a Turkish man, they called him "Dragomanin". He was their minder, to make sure they were not alone. So her mouth is covered, but her [blouse] is all unbuttoned, she's flashing her breasts. My uncle said, "Look," he says, "they are simple folk. She's covered her mouth but her blouse is unbuttoned, her breasts are showing". That's what I mean, I find that primitive. That's how I see it. (W, Ch, Interview 35, Garmen 2006)

Another respondent, a former Communist from Garmen, believes that Muslim men are particularly interested in sexual experiences and prefer curvaceous women:

V.: Hristo, listen and learn why it is that Muslims prefer well-rounded women.

M.L.: Why?

W.: There must be a reason. They're experts in matters of sexuality. And that ...

M.L.: I can't see the connection.

W.: It's more pleasurable that way. Fatter women are tighter down there. (M, Atheits from Christian background, Interview 47, Garmen 2006)

Body covering, particularly kerchiefs, are frequently referred to as symbols of the subservient status of Muslim women. My female respondents interpreted the traditional costumes of Pomak women as a sign of male dominance, because Muslim men wear no distinguishing clothes:

Man H.: I don't like this idea that women should wear kerchiefs. Muslim women can only show themselves to their husbands, brothers, fathers and mothers at home. For everybody else, she must wear a kerchief. There are different types of kerchiefs for unmarried women, married women, with different colours, like in Ribnovo for instance ...

Sofiya: Younger women, older women. Obviously, the younger women will be looking for more colourful ones. Older women wear different ones.

M.L.: Like what?

Woman S.: The same type, but the colors are more muted.

M.L.: Do they tie them the same way?

442 A prosperous peasant who owns his own farm; a person who can afford to eat well, literally "one who can afford to eat *chorba*", a thick soup.

H.: You tie them the same way. If you go to Ribnovo you won't even know which men belong to a different religion, but it's obvious with the women.

S.: They [the men] dress as they please, and they go wherever they please. Only the women are oppressed. (Christians, Interview 47, Garmen 2006)

M.L.: If that's the case, why do women have to wear *zabradki*?

V.: That's so they don't get sullied by other men's gaze. She offers herself to him only. How could a stranger look at her?! Only her husband has the right to enjoy her. (M, Atheist from Christian background, Interview 48, Garmen 2006)

The traditional costume worn by Muslim women in the Rhodopes is also treated as a sign of Turkish domination, reminding Christians of the centuries-long history of Ottoman rule. Accordingly, the loose-fitting trousers worn by Muslim women in some towns and villages in the Rhodopes are called *shalvari* or *poturi*.

M.: Their faith says that a woman's mouth should be covered. Today, young people no longer do that. Young girls wear skirts so short you can see their bottoms. And besides... that's their faith, they used to wear *poturachi* and *shalvari*.

M.L.: *Poturi*?

M.: *Poturi* is another word for *shalvari*.

M.L.: Are they called *poturi* because that's Turkish or...?

M.: Yes. It's Turkish for *shalvari*. (W, Ch, Interview 34, Garmen 2006)

My Christian respondents consider Muslim women who wear the traditional costume as unsophisticated, unlike Muslim women wearing European clothes. The following respondent believes most women in Satovcha, where she lives, are in the former category (though her opinions are not consistent, as shown later in this chapter), whereas the Muslim women in Kochan, a village a few miles from Satovcha, are more modern:

V.: In that [neighbouring village – M.L.] the people are, how shall I put it, very modern... I'm talking about their appearance. Whereas here you get the Oriental thinking. Here, the older women are gossiping away about short skirts, and there, they say, "My granddaughter is wearing more stylish clothes [than yours], her skirt is shorter, her clothes are more stylish". (W, Ch, Interview 28, Satovcha 2005)

M.: They [the Pomaks – M.L.] know that brides all over the world wear white. And they do the same. They know it's the same in Turkey, and they realize that in some ways they are backward.

M.L.: But generally speaking, are *shalvari* worn in Turkey?

> M.: Only among the more backward folk. But most people are Europeans. (W. Ch, Interview 23, Garmen 2006)

This particular way of thinking about the traditional Pomak costume was propagated in Bulgaria under the Communist regime.

The archaisms present in the spoken language of some the local Muslims in Satovcha (particularly the forms used for addressing one's elders) are also seen as a symptom of Pomak backwardness:

> Woman 2: Other than that they're... how shall I put it... they are very modern. I'm talking about their appearance. But their ways are different. Here, they address people as "daicho" rather than "vujcho". (W, Ch, Interview 28, Satovcha 2005)

According to this respondent, the differences in women's fashion dividing Satovcha and Kochan stem from the fact that the people in Satovcha seek to emphasize their Muslim identity by wearing traditional Muslim clothes given the strong Christian presence in the area.

Although references to the traditional costume turned up frequently in conversations about Pomak customs, fashion was not regarded as very important. In Christian narratives Muslim women can be portrayed as culturally inferior regardless of whether they cover their bodies or wear "European" clothes. Women who wear traditional clothes are judged to be primitive and unsophisticated; those who wear European-style clothes are dismissed as hypocrites. Whenever my respondents realized that their comments were politically incorrect they usually attempted to revise their comments, and to present themselves as being tolerant and open-minded. This is apparent in the following conversation, where the respondent makes a negative comment about the indecent, revealing clothes worn by Muslim girls, and then backtracks to avoid sounding judgemental:

> V.: Though if they were really so religious inside they wouldn't wear short skirts, they wouldn't smoke cigarettes in restaurants or walk around with bare midriffs, because all those things are completely forbidden in their religion.
>
> M.L.: But they don't observe those prohibitions?
>
> W.: No, just look at them. Just go outside and you'll see this for yourself.
>
> M.L.: I can't be sure those are not Christians.
>
> V.: No. Nothing of the sort. They wear skimpier clothes than our girls. Than Christian girls. That's the fashion.
>
> Iordanka: But we don't think that's wrong.
>
> V.: They're young. They like it this way.

Y.: They like the way they dress. Let those children wear nice clothes.

V.: Unlike the elders, who disapprove of that. Some older people, particularly Muslim people, don't accept that.

M.L.: And the *hodzhas*?

Y.: Oh, the *hodzhas* are dead set against it, but they're quiet. There's nothing they can do! (Women, Ch, Interview 28, Satovcha 2005)

A few minutes later the same respondents were discussing a conversation between two *hodzhas* who feared that divine punishment, such as floods or hailstorms, could be visited on them because Muslim women were wearing European-style clothes. They discuss those fears in an ironic tone, despite having themselves criticized girls with bare midriffs minutes before:

V.: I see nothing [wrong – M.L.] with the *hodzha*. I mean, the *hodzha* is a very nice man and ... I mean, he's my age. He walks into a restaurant and looks around. One evening I listened to them, they were sitting at the next table, two *hodzhas*, very pious men. One of them even said "Mark my words, those bare midriffs and short skirts will bring hail, floods". They think the current floods are punishments sent by Allah...

Yordanka: They believe strongly that the floods are God's way of punishing them for their lack of faith, and for failing to cover their bodies. Um, we are no different... And I think it's wrong to show your bare midriff. (Women, Ch, Interview 28, Satovcha 2005)

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As this material shows, evidence for the supposedly "Oriental" nature of Pomak thinking boils down mostly to predictable, imitative and contradictory rationalizations reflecting the stereotypical nature of Christian thinking about Pomak customs. In many ways those notions are comparable to popular European stereotypes about Muslim minorities, where a sense of subjective superiority is generated by contrasting the backward Muslims with the modern Europeans. In this narrative, "schism and heresy arguably make members of the same community more other than the Others" (Benedyktowicz 2000, p. 41, translated from Polish).

What makes my Christian respondents different from the average European is an underlying sense of insecurity as their judgements tend to reflect the very things they find embarrassing about themselves. This suggests a cognitive dissonance caused by the fact that Christians have assimilated certain elements of everyday Ottoman culture. "The rejection of Ottoman past is undoubtedly one of the most interesting specific characteristics in the history of the Bulgarian nation" (Lori 2002, p. 8, translated from Bulgarian). In the comments of my respondents, this is expressed by the symbolic legend of Bulgarians getting rid of their fez hats following the end of Ottoman occupation:

> Woman 1: When Bulgaria became independent, and Bulgarian troops came back and were welcomed here by our people ... You know, where ... [The respondent speaks indistinctly – M.L.] and our Bulgarians were wearing fez hats, Turkish hats, and when the Bulgarians were coming ... [they would say – M.L.] "Throw this hat away. Now we wear Bulgarian hats, not Turkish ones". (W, Christian, Interview 25, Satovcha 2005)

The claims about the supposed Oriental characteristics of the Pomaks should be examined in connection with statements concerning the Ottoman legacy, a task which requires further research and goes beyond the scope of this book.

8 Christian Perceptions of Pomak Religious Life

This chapter focuses on Christian perceptions of the religious life of Bulgarian-speaking Muslims. I choose the phrase "religious life" rather than "Islam" because my Christian respondents did not always identify the religious practices of their Muslim neighbours as Islamic; instead, they tended to view them as part of a broader spectrum interconnected with their own rituals and observances. By and large, my Christian respondents were not interested in Islam per se; in structural terms, they had no narratives about Islam comparable to narratives about Christianity as shared by my Muslim respondents (see previous chapters). Perhaps this is because the local Christians treat Pomak religious life as closely related to Christianity and not fully compatible with Islam. The Christians do not perceive the Pomak version of Islam as a threat to their own religion[443], and therefore are not as motivated to validate their own beliefs or to negotiate[444] their own religious identity.

When questioned in this ethnographic project, local Christians were only able to list a few selected religious practices of the Bulgarian-speaking Muslims, mostly those they had either witnessed personally or knew from second-hand reports, such as circumcision or Islamic holidays (Ramadan Bayram and Kurban Bayram). The local Christians think of those Muslim observances by analogy to Christianity but have no interest in what those practices might mean to Muslims at a symbolic level. It seems that the conviction, which many local Christians seem to share, that Pomak and "Christian" religious practices are closely interrelated, is based on an inflated sense of importance attached by Muslims to sleeping in Christian churches in a healing practice.

8.1 Stories of Healing and Muslim Behavior in Christian Sacred Places

Most of my respondents argued that the differences between Islam and Christianity were in name only: both groups worship the same God and accept the same holy book. This is how Christians account for the presence of Muslims in Christian sacred places, where they believe the two groups are united in prayer:

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443 It should be added that some of my respondents notice (with alarm in some cases) the growing influence of Deoband Islam among the Pomaks, which has reduced Muslim participation in the local Christian religious practices, such as passing under a table covered with a *plashchanitsa* (gr. *epitaphion*, is an icon in the form of a shroud bearing the image of Christ laid in the tomb) on Good Friday, believed to have healing powers.

444 Unlike the Bulgrarian-speaking Muslims, who do not "work it out in isolation but ... negotiate it through dialogue, partly overt, partly internalized, with others" (Taylor 1991, p. 47).

V.: We practice one and the same religion. Except they do it a bit differently. We all pray to one God. They call him Allah, "my God". Other than that, we pray to the same [God]. (W, Ch, Interview 11, Osikovo 2005)

Y.: Listen. We call him God, they call him Allah. We believe in one and the same thing.

V.: We have the Virgin Mary, they have Miriam. (Women, Ch, Interview 28, Satovcha 2005)

My respondents realize that Muslims go on pilgrimages to Christian sacred places in the hope of healing. Some point out that Muslims only visit those places in desperate situations where any help is welcome. My Christian respondents have seen Muslims sleeping in churches in the area, including St. Anne's church and St. Nedelya's church in Garmen (not all my respondents agreed on that point), St. Dimitar's church in Osikovo, St. Nedelya's church in Satovcha and St. George's church in Hadzhidimovo.

Muslims attend churches of St. George and St. Dimitar on both holidays (Gergiovden and Dimitrovden), as the two saints are often conflated in the popular imagination.

Christian observations of Muslim behavior in Christian churches tend to be compatible with behaviors self-reported by the local Muslims. They notice that some Muslims leave votive gifts next to icons depicting the Mother of God or St. George, and sometimes they light candles or kiss icons.

One female respondent reports that a female Muslim friend of hers always asks her to bring to church a gift she prepares for the Mother of God, hoping to ensure good health for her child. The Muslim friend prepares her gift every year on 15 August, the feast of the Dormition of the Mother of God (Interview 27, Garmen 2006).

My respondents reported that Muslims who go on a pilgrimage to Krastova Gora in the Central Rhodopes perform similar gestures as Christian pilgrims; for instance, they place their clothes on the cross and leave them on it "for health", or buy them back from the church for a symbolic sum:

M.L.: When I went there I saw that people leave their clothes on the cross?

Y.: Yes, the clothes. They leave them for health.

M.L.: They all do?

Y.: All of them.

M.L.: I mean, what I'd like to know is whether the Muslims leave them as well?

Y.: Yes. Muslims do that, too.

M.L.: They put clothes on the cross?

Y.: They put clothes on the cross and leave them there, and then ...

V.: Then they can take them back.

Y.: If you like, you can donate 50 stotinki or a lev. You can donate more if you like, whatever you can afford. Then you can have them back. Practically speaking, you're buying your clothes back from the church. You place the clothes on the cross, like you're donating them. Then you leave the money in the cash till, however much you know in your heart you can afford, and you take your clothes back. (Women, Ch, Interview 28, Satovcha 2005)

Some respondents claim that the votive gifts left by Muslims are more generous than those left by Christians:

M.L.: What kind of gifts do they leave?

S.: Whatever they like.

M.L.: Clothes, kerchiefs?

S.: Lambs, sheep...

Mariana Darska: Even such valuable gifts?

M.: Yes, they're more generous than we are, more hard-working and more generous, so they're wealthier. (Woman, Ch, Interview 33, Garmen 2006)

My respondents note that Muslims never buy crucifixes or icons, and never make the sign of the cross:

M.L.: Do they kiss the icons?

M.: They do, yes. Not so long ago I saw them do that on the [Feast of the] Holy Spirit, they leave gifts like we do, they kiss the icons, but they don't make the sign of the cross or light candles. (W, Ch, Interview 33, Garmen 2006)

Y.: Except they don't make the sign of the cross. (W, Ch, Interview 28, Satovcha 2005)

S.: No crosses, though.

M.: No crosses. No lighting of candles. They just come and bow. (W, Ch, Interview 34, Garmen 2006)

The Christians never ask Muslims about the meaning of their behavior in Chrisitan church. Ignorant of their actual motivations, Christians often misinterpret the presence of Muslims in churches as evidence of their crypto-Christianity. Members of the Christian clergy take a different view. Archimandrite Grigoriy, a monk who

works in the monastery in Hadzhidimovo[445], explains that Bulgarian-speaking Muslims sleep in churches because their faith is "simple" and "pure": in that simple-minded, God-fearing frame of mind they apparently believe the saint can produce healing, an expression of unexamined faith unconnected with a specific doctrine. The archimandrite believes that many Pomaks have no idea who the prophet Muhammad might be; they believe that St. George can produce healings, and they fail to realize that a saint can only work miracles in the name of God and Jesus Christ:

> Archimandrite Grigoriy: There are people, especially among the Muslims, who don't know how to pray, they don't know anything. But they have this simple faith that Sveti Georgi is going to help. I've talked to them on many occasions. I mean, they don't believe in God or in Jesus. They don't realize that Sveti Georgi is a servant of God who once worked miracles in the name of God, in the name of Jesus Christ. But they have this simple faith that Sveti Georgi is going to help them. And very often this faith, this pure faith that they have, produces a healing. (Interview 27, Satovcha 2005)

The statement that Muslims do not believe in God is inaccurate: because the Muslim faith is not trinitarian and does not accept Jesus as the Son of God, the Archimandrite, based on his theology, concludes that Muslims have no religious belief at all. By concluding that Muslims sleep in the church of St. George in Hadzhidimovo because their faith is "simple" and "pure", the archimandrite can conveniently overlook Islam as an autonomous and independent religion in competition with Christianity in the Western Rhodopes.

My respondents seemed to prefer treating Bulgarian-speaking Muslims as ignorant brothers in faith rather than as a distinct group well-aware of its separate religious identity. They mention many stories of Muslims healed in churches to boost the status of Christian sacred places. This might be which Christians often mention healings involving Muslims rather than Christians in a kind of implicit polemic with Islam, showing Christianity as truer and more potent. The logic seems to be that Muslims would not have to seek help from Christian saints (which even some *hodzhas* do) if Islam was indeed a powerful religion:

> Archimandrite Grigoriy: But very often the *hodzhas* send people to us. In one case a *hodzha* came to the monastery in Hadzhidimovo ... He came here and said, "I'm a *hodzha*, and we send many people your way when we can't help them. Now I'm having problems with my knees. What can you do for me?" (Interview 27, Satovcha 2005)

Christian narratives mostly feature Muslim women healed of insanity (demonic possession) or muteness. A daughter of an Orthodox priest who spent three years

445 In 2009 he was no longer working in Hadzidimovo. I was informed that he worked in Sofia and was "a close associate" of Metropolitan Maksim.

working in the monastery of St. George in Hadzhidimovo told me three stories of Muslim women healed there (Interview 32). She heard those stories from her father, who worked in the monastery. The stories are very similar; below is a representative example, a story of Fatma, a mute woman suffering from insanity. Tied with ropes, Fatma was brought to the church by her father and brother. After one night spent sleeping in the church the woman was healed and her marriage was saved:

> B.: There have been many miracles here. My father knew more of those stories, I only know two cases from him. He said ... One day they brought in a woman, she was mad. They brought her here, tied her with ropes, they put her on a horse because she'd been trying to get away. She didn't speak, nothing. They brought her into the monastery, and my dad put her up in the upper... there's like this *chardak* [an enclosed verandah on the top floor of a house – M.L.] in the church. And he said, "Sleep here". They made a bedding, prepared everything... "Your shift begins here". She was brought in by her father and brother. Her husband had filed for divorce, he couldn't stand [living with the sufferer]. And he [the respondent's father] said, "Sleep here, take shifts watching over her to make sure she doesn't get up and do some mischief". They said, "Alright"... Early in the morning, when it was getting light, my father said, "Wait here, I'll go and check on her" ... "I go up", he says, "and see that her father and her brother are both asleep. But she is awake". And he says, "She stood on a floorboard, and it creaked", he says, "and she said, 'Grandpa Priest, what am I doing here? Why am I here?'. That despite the fact that she couldn't speak before. She wasn't making any sense before that. (W, Ch, Interview 32, Hadzhidimovo 2005)

To make sure that the woman was indeed healed, the respondent's father asked her to go out in the field and fetch him three watermelons. Her relatives were upset, expecting the woman to run away.

My respondent's stories replicate the same scheme: a Muslim man or woman sleep in a church, a saint (St. George, the Mother of God or St. Nedelya) intervenes by interceding to a miraculous effect, and the person wakes up in perfect health. The respondent's father, a priest, is always the first person to witness the miraculous healing, and to verify it with a test. None of the healing narratives involve apostasy on the part of the healed Muslims.

Archimandrite Grigoriy mentioned two other stories in which people were healed merely by sleeping in a church (and not by prayer, because Muslims do not pray in Christian churches). The first story features a Muslim man healed of paralysis in 1952, the second, a Muslim woman from Dospat. The paralysed Muslim was taken to the church in a pannier carried by a mule; after spending one night in the church he got up early in the morning and walked home:

> Archimandrite Grigoriy: The mule was carrying two panniers, one contained the man, the other was weighed down with stones as a counterweight. They called some people, and brought in a man who was completely paralyzed. And he [the man who told the story to the archimandrite – M.L.] asks his father and Father Trifon, who was there, why they'd brought him there. "So that St. George may heal him". They left him in the church. In the morning, after a night's sleep, he remembered the man and asked, "What happened to that man we carried into the church last night?" "He got up and went home early in the morning". (Interview 27, Satovcha 2005)

The story about the Muslim woman from Dospat contains analogies to the story of Theopist's oxen, a miracle story in which St. George plays a central part. The story is known from several dozen Greek manuscripts from the 12th-19th centuries. The earliest South Slavic versions[446], much abbreviated from their Greek originals, were composed between the 16th and 18th centuries (Stoykova 1998, p. 30); perhaps a popular version of the story survives in the oral tradition. Orthodox Christian iconography features depictions of a similar miracle, in which St. George brings back to life an ox belonging to a farmer named Glykerios. In that scene[447] St. George is shown in his cell while Glykerios is praying outside, his arms raised up and his eyes on St. George. Perhaps this iconographic depiction explains why the narrative of the oxen promised to, and rightfully claimed by, St. George (similar to the story of Theopist's oxen) continues to exist in a modified form in the oral tradition of the Christian population in the Rhodopes.

In the archimandrite's story, the husband of an ailing Muslim woman makes a promise to St. George to donate his best cow to the saint if the woman gets well (in the medieval story, Theopist promises to give his best ox to St. George if he helps him locate a lost herd). In both stories St. George grants help but never receives the promised animal. In the archimandrite's story, St. George claimed the gift promised to him, and the man from Dospat was unable to find his cow; in the written source, St. George visits the man and demands a more generous gift (two oxen and a flock of sheep):

> Archimandrite Grigoriy: I mean, we had a different case from Dospat, another Muslim woman who was very sick. Her husband went into a church and said, "Sveti Georgi, if you heal my wife I'll give you the best cow I have". Now, his wife left that church in perfect health, but the man forgot his promise. And what happened next? A week later his cow was gone; he searched for the animal, and finally he remembered his promise. Immediately he came to Grandpa Trifon, to the monastery, and said, "This is what happened. I made a promise and I forgot it". And Grandpa Trifon said, "There's a cow wandering around the monastery's vineyards, it's been here for a week", he says. "Go and check, maybe it's yours" ... That cow had spent the whole week in the monastery. The man left it here. Sveti Georgi took what was rightfully his. (Interview 27, Satovcha 2005)

> But the saint was not content, and he expected the promise to be kept. Theopist sacrificed a sheep and a lamb but Sveti Georgi was not appeased. Again he appeared to Theopist in a dream and explained that the sacrifice did not reflect his high rank ... He demanded not only the two oxen but also all of the sheep. Theopist told his wife that an unclean spirit had appeared to him in a dream, and told him not to keep his promise. Then Sveti Georgi appeared to him in a dream riding a white horse, with a cross in his hand, and he frightened Theopist with fire. Then Theopist ordered that all the animals should be killed. Sixty riders appeared and announced the approach of a komis [Latin comes – a military rank in the Roman army – M.L.]. And he did

446 Theopist is named "Teoktist" in those versions.

447 Depicted in one of the smaller panels (kleima) surrounding the main subject of the icon.

> appear on a white horse, and said he knew that the sacrifice was the Sveti Georgi; his own name was Georgi and he was from Cappadocia. Then they all sat down and ate the prepared sacrificial meat. The guest took the bones of the animals and revived the sacrificial oxen. (Aufhauser, cited in: Stoykova 1998)

It is likely that the popularity of this belief is boosted by the iconography of St. George. In some cases one of the panels (*kleima*) containing scenes from the saint's life features the scene in which St. George brings back to life an ox belonging to a farmer named Glykerios: in both cases St. George comes to the aid of a farmer, acting as his patron saint, an idea still current in the Rhodopes in beliefs about the saint.

My respondents also told stories of Muslims miraculously healed in other Christian churches in the region, such as the church of St. Petka in Leshten (no longer in use). According to one female respondent, the church was visited by a childless Muslim woman from Debren who heard a voice in a dream saying she would have a child if she brought a lamb to church as a *kurban* (votive gift):

> D.: Take that woman, a Mahommedan woman from Debren, she had no children for 8-9 years. One day I saw her laden with two baskets, there was a lamb in one basket and loaves of bread in the other. She came to donate them to our church because of a dream. A Muslim woman! She had this dream: "Take a lamb, a small *kurban*, and take it to St. Petka in Leshten. And you will have a baby." She brought that lamb, the priest said a prayer over it, and people had a chance to buy it. Kosta bought the lamb. A short time later she got pregnant, she gave birth to a boy and brought gifts to our village again. (W, Ch, Interview 38, Leshten 2006)

Sleeping in churches and monasteries was practised not only on the feast days of the given saint, but also on the night of Maundy Thursday. Until recently, Muslims reportedly participated in the practice in Satovcha:

> G.: I mean, a while ago Christians and Muslims used to come to our church on Good Friday, and they made their bows. They would donate money, and even light candles in the church, they used to light them themselves. They went under the table. They went under the table as well. I mean, that's on Good Friday, Razpeti Petŭk[448], Good Friday, and the church bell rings until lunchtime. This is to worship Christ, and in the afternoon they take the table out [of the church].
>
> M.L.: Why do people walk under the table?
>
> G.: They do that for health. That's what the old people in Satovcha say .... On Friday, Razpeti Petŭk, in the afternoon, everybody goes to the church, they bring flowers, it's a form of praisegiving, right? And they leave those flowers on the *plashchanitsa* [epitaphios], on the table.
>
> M.L.: So, until recently Muslims as well as Christians used to come to church for that?

448 Crucifixion Friday, another name for Good Friday (literally: "Crucified Friday").

G.: Yes, they did that for health until recently. I mean, to give praise. But Muslims mostly did it for health. They thought ... I mean, people would also spend the night [in the church – M.L.] between Thursday and Good Friday. On Friday afternoon they bring out the *plashchanitsa*. And you spend the Friday night sleeping [in the church] for health, also those who have no children.

M.L.: Do people spend the night like this today?

G.: I mean, very few do.

M.L.: And Christians?

G.: Very few Christians spend the night there, either. That's the trend, that's what we're seeing. (W, Ch, Interview 23, Satovcha 2005)

On Good Friday, explains the respondent, Muslims as well as Christians go crouching under a table placed before the central doors and covered with a *plashchanitsa* to take part in a traditional healing practice:

G.: Years ago, almost all of the Muslims who had made promises or who had health problems would come to church on that Friday. And they went under the table, people go under the table, which symbolizes the cross.

M.L.: What does it look like?

G.: This is what it looks like. The table is smaller than this rectangular table. A crucifix is placed in front of it, they place Jesus Christ on the cross in front of the table. On the table there is an icon of Jesus Christ, a crucifix and a Gospel, I think. People come and leave flowers on the table.

M.L.: Why?

G.: Again, that's for health. (W, Ch, Interview 23, Satovcha 2005)

Another respondent corroborates this account, and affirms that the ritual is still practiced:

Y.: They put the *plashchanitsa* on the table, and in the evening they remove it and circle the church with it. You can squeeze through for health. Here you get Muslims coming to the church as well. People with sick children, people with illnesses, right? Elderly people. Everybody looks for a way to solve their problems. It's the exact same story up there, in the monastery of Sveti Georgi (W, Ch, Interview 28, Satovcha 2005)

Some respondents deny this:

M.L.: Do Muslims ever go under the table, or don't they?

S.: No, no. They look for the priest for other reasons, on their holidays. This is for Christians only. (W, Ch, Interview 54, Garmen 2006)

Archimandrite Grigoriy describes the practice of squeezing under the table as noncanonical, but admits that the clergy intentionally buy tables big enough for the faithful to crouch underneath. The archimandrite believes that the custom is based on a misinterpretation of a Maundy Thursday ritual in which people pass under a *plashchanitsa* held over the church door. According to the priest, this rite has no symbolic meaning; it is simply a practical solution for faithful to be able to worship the icon (by kissing it) after circling the church. Because there is widespread belief that passing under a *plashchanitsa* brings health[449] for the coming year, those who did not do it on Maundy Thursday do it on Good Friday, when the *plashchanitsa* is spread on the table:

> Archimandrite Grigoriy: I mean, this is on Friday, on Good Friday after the Royal Hours[450], they bring out the *plashchanitsa* and put it on a table. When that happens, people start going under the table.
>
> M.L.: Why?
>
> A.G.: Why? I mean, the *plashchanitsa* symbolises the body of Jesus Christ, which was wrapped in a clean *plashchanitsa* [shroud], anointed with oils and placed in the tomb. So in the evening he is taken there, right, there is a solemn liturgy to commemorate Christ's death, and a *plashchanitsa* is brought out and carried around the church. Then the Christians pass through, they kiss the *plashchanitsa* and walk under it. This symbolises the events which took place on Golgotha. The taking down of the body from the cross, the wrapping of the body in a shroud, the entombment. That's because when the body was taken down from the cross it was wrapped up [in a shroud – M.L.] by Joseph and Nicodemus, the women and the Mother of God. I mean, he was wrapped in *plashchanitsa* and carried to the tomb. The liturgy says that the body was taken down from the cross, placed on the ground and wrapped in a *plashchanitsa*. That's why it's sprinkled with sweet scents in several places, symbolizing the myrrh which the women, the myrrh-bearers, used for anointing his body. Then you get the *litiya*[451] around the church, when funeral songs are sung, "Holy God", and the *plashchanitsa* is taken out of the church and the people circle the church, stopping at three points. Then there are the *ectenias*[452], one for the living, one for the dead. And we pray. I mean, we stand at the two sides of the door, people hold up the *plashchanitsa* and then everybody files past to kiss it and to walk underneath it, you can't [get into the church] any other way. They all kiss the *plashchanitsa* and walk under it. This symbolizes the fact that they kissed Jesus Christ before laying him in the tomb.
>
> M.L.: This walking under the *plashchanitsa*, does it have any special meaning?

449 The gesture is interpreted in the same way by the Orthodox Christian population in the region of Białystok, Poland.

450 A part of the Good Friday liturgy composed by St. Cyril of Jerusalem which includes five services comprising nine hours and featuring liturgical songs and psalms about Christ's Passion and suffering.

451 Here, *litiya* means a short funeral service (Smykowska 2004, p. 45).

452 A part of the Orthodox Christian service in which a priest or a deacon intones a series of petitions to which the faithful respond "Lord have mercy" or "Grant this, O Lord" (Smykowska 2004, p. 25).

A.G.: No, this is simply a matter of practical necessity. The *plashchanitsa* is held up high so that everybody can come up and kiss it. There's no table at this point.

M.L.: Because I think I've seen people walking under it?

A.G.: I mean, they only do that in order to kiss the *plashchanitsa*, because right afterwards the *plashchanitsa* will be placed on the altar, and the altar symbolizes, among other things, the Tomb of God in which God was resurrected. This [act of] carrying of the *plashchanitsa* and placing it on the alter symbolizes the entombment. So, to come back to what we discussed before, not everybody comes to the evening [service] to walk with it [in procession], they can only come [to church] during the day. They come whenever they can to venerate the *plashchanitsa*, to kiss it, to kiss the Gospel and the cross. Then they walk under it, they file through under the table. Over time this became a custom, a tradition. People come and they have to file through under the table. If this was an [official] church observance we [the clergy] would be the first to do that, to pass under the table. But this is not the case anywhere, no clergyman does that, that's why we say it's tradition.

M.L.: So it's not just in Satovcha?

A.G.: No, this [passing under the table] happens in a lot of places[453], they even order special tables to make it easier for people to squeeze through! (Interview 27, Satovcha 2005)

When asked whether he had ever seen Muslims participating in this practice, Archimandrite Grigoriy said he did not expect that to be the case, however he could not be sure because most young people do not wear traditional Muslim clothes and can be easily mistaken for Christians (Interview 27, Satovcha 2005).

Other respondents agreed that it was not always possible to spot the Muslims in Christian sacred places:

M.L.: Who comes to Krastova Gora, is it just Christians or others as well?

D.: It's Christians. Well, you can't really tell. Everybody wears the same clothes. Some of them could be Pomaks and Turks but…

M.L.: You mean, they don't wear the *shalvari*?

D.: They wear dresses, skirts, same as us. (W, Ch, Interview 41, Garmen 2006)

Another healing practice identified by my Orthodox respondents involved leaving flowers on the *plashchanitsa*. The flowers are then distributed in the church on Easter at midnight to be kept in homes and, in times of misfortune or sickness, burnt with incense and used for fumigating homes or Christmas dishes on Christmas Eve. One of my female respondents said that Muslims also believed in the healing properties of the flowers and took them home, but did not use them as incense or get them from

453 I witnessed this practice in Orthodox churches in Sofia.

the church on Easter night since they never enter Christian churches at that time (Interview 23, Satovcha 2005).

Another Christian ritual in which Muslims reportedly take place is the kissing of the cross and the sprinkling of the body with holy water on Epiphany (Bulgarian: *Yordanovden*[454]). Archimandrite Grigoriy heard that from a man who escorted him when he was ministering to workers:

> Archimandrite Grigoriy: I mean, when we do the *vodosvet* [blessing of water – M.L.] on Iordanovden, then you go and sprinkle all the houses, one by one, and all the apartments. Though in the larger towns you don't know which houses are which, whether they are Christian or Muslim, so people make lists and sign up [for a visit] if they want. For several years I've been sprinkling holy water in the plant in Gotse Delchev. They have various workers there. I don't know who is who because they all wear protective clothing. But then this man who was escorting me said, "Do you know how many of them were Pomaks, not just Pomaks but also Turks, and they all kissed the crucifix and sprinkled themselves with the holy water!" I didn't know that, to me they were all workers. Some of them stood to the side, but most kissed the cross and sprinkled themselves [with holy water]. Later, some of [the others] wished they'd done that [too]. It brings healing, so why not?! And the man who escorted me around says, "Gee, they're all coming and kissing the cross, Turks and Bulgarians alike!". I never realized it because I didn't know them [laughs]. (Interview 27, Satovcha 2005)

In the Orthodox Christian canon, both the adoration of the *pleshchanitsa* on Maundy Thursday and of the cross on Iordanovden are forms of worship of the crucified Christ. However, the magical meaning of such rituals as a healing practice, shared by the Christians and some of the Muslims in the Rhodopes, usually overshadows the religious meaning. In this and other places in the book, I referred to this as the magical meaning in the sense of a set of ritualized actions and techniques believed to produce desired outcomes in the real world by influencing the natural or supernatural powers present in nature[455] (cf. Buchowski 1987, p. 218, translated from Polish).

8.2 Muslim and Christian Rituals

Most of my Christian respondents believed that the religious differences between Christians and Bulgarian-speaking Muslims were secondary and insignificant. Like many Muslims, they referred to the metaphor of the onion skin, in which the

454 The Day of the Jordan celebrated as the Epiphany in the Orthodox Churches. In Bulgaria the holiday is celebrated on 6 January.

455 This is the second definition of the term appearing in the Polish ethnological dictionary (*Słownik etnologiczny*, 1987) (cf. Buchowski 1987, p. 218). This can be contrasted with the definition proposed by Z. Grębecka in which magic is a form of behaviour calculated to achieve, at a relatively small cost, an immediate and direct effect in the real world as opposed to the next world (cf. Grębecka 2006, p. 31).

differences separating Muslims and Christians are like an onion skin, in that they obscure the fact that the two religions are identical in their deeper layers:

> L.: You will agree with me child that everybody has a [certain] faith and believes in something. This is like a remnant of the times long gone. And people inherit that forever, child. It was born out of the Christian faith because we and they are one, with nothing but a thin onion skin separating us. (W, Ch, Interview 21, Ognianovo 2005)

> A.: The difference between Muslims and Christians is tiny. Like the outer skin on an onion. You can find the things practised in the Bulgarian Bible among them in an almost unchanged form. (M, Ch, Interview 45, Dabnitsa 2006)

In some cases this metaphor becomes inverted: in the two religions the inside of the onion may be different but the outer layers are identical:

> Y.: So, their religion is separated from ours... people say it's like the inside of an onion, it has this thin skin, you only get this thin skin separating their religion from ours. (W, Ch, Interview 28, Satovcha 2005)

Importantly from the perspective of religious syncretism, some respondents attempt to identify the symbolic counterparts of their own rituals in the other religion. Baptism and circumcision are perceived as expressions of the same psychological and symbolic need to emphasize one's religious identity in a religiously mixed environment. Paradoxically, the religious significance of the rituals is second only to the need to demarcate one's religious identity: most of my respondents were unable to, indeed felt no need to, explain the meaning of their own religious observances[456]:

> M.L.: So, do you know why [Muslims – M.L.] do their *abdest* and *syunnet*?

> M.: Well, they practice *syunnet*, it's like their law. They do *syunnet* to the children, and we baptize ours.

> M.L.: Is that all?

> M.: It's the same thing. (W, Ch, Interview 42, Garmen 2006)

> M.: Oh, we know why they circumcise [their male children]. A man said, "Dress me any way you like, that thing down there is circumcised". It's a religious sign. (W, Ch, Interview 33, Garmen 2006)

456 For instance, none of my respondents mentioned Jesus's baptism in the Jordan as the foundational event for this ritual. One respondent said that the priest says to the mother during christening, "You gave me a little Jewish child, I'm giving you back a little Christian" (Interview 42, Garmen 2006). Obviously, this is an *ad-libbed* comment rather than part of the official rite.

D.: I don't know the traditions. They *syunnet* [circumcise – M.L.] the children. Instead of baptising them, they *syunnet* them. They circumcise them.

M.L.: Why do they *syunnet* them?

D.: It's tradition, they circumcise them. Even in Zhivkov's times, when it was forbidden, they used to circumcise them in secret. (W, Ch, Interview 41, Garmen 2006)

There are exceptions, discussed below, where circumcision is seen in terms of a way of accentuating religious difference. In common with many Muslims, some respondents believe that the chief point of the practice is hygienic. The first of the following two respondent connects the origins of the ritual with Muhammad, the second with figures from the Hebrew scripture-figures such as David or Solomon, rather than Abraham, and goes on to hypoethesise that the practice was introduced by the Jews in the desert to prevent high mortality from penis infections among male children:

A.: Yes, it's compulsory among them. It's been 1300 years since Muhammad made it compulsory to circumcise boys.

M.L.: I find that very interesting ...

A2: It was in the times of David or Solomon when they agreed to make the practice compulsory.

M.L.: So, who was the first person to be circumcised?

A.: I'm not sure, but [the practice] persists among them. That's because there were heatwaves for 100 years, when the Jews were expelled from, um... Whole generations lived in fear because boys under the age of five were dying, but not the girls. So they decided that everybody must get circumcised. Today there's no need for that around here because we don't get heatwaves like they do in Turkey next door. Not just in Turkey, but also in the Arabic countries, in the desert – it's compulsory there. (Men, Ch, Interview 45, Dabnitsa 2006)

Other respondents posited circumcision's health benefits:

H.: Why they get circumcised?

M.L.: Yes.

H.: I don't know. Maybe they needed to keep very clean where that religion came from, because they had many epidemics caused by the heat. So the boys always had to be clean to avoid [health] problems. So this is how the ritual of circumcision began. (M, Ch, Interview 47, Garmen 2006)

The next respondent drew a comparison between baptism and circumcision in theological terms: baptism is an act of forsaking the simple life of the flesh in order to embrace spiritual life, whereas circumcision should symbolise a covenant with God. The respondent argues that circumcision is a legacy of Judaism, and its theological

meaning was lost in Islam. According to the respondent, circumcision also increases the likelihood of procreation. Implicitly, the respondent's comments involve a value judgement in that they equate baptism with spirituality and Islam with the body:

> Protestant: The immersion in, and emergence from, water symbolizes the death of the worldly, sinful life of the body, and the coming out of the water symbolized resurrection and a new spiritual life.
>
> M.L.: So, what's the symbolic meaning of circumcision?
>
> P.: In the Old Testament, circumcision is an attempt to bring fruit; it increases male sexual desire, so the new generation will be more bountiful… It's also an act of covenant with God. Muslims today believe that it's necessary for hygienic reasons because this spiritual truth is not so clear to them.
>
> M.L.: Do they mention procreation?
>
> P.: No, but that is the case. (M, ChP, Interview 46, Garmen 2006)

Most respondents consider baptism to be superior to circumcision for esthetic rather than theological reasons, and treat it as a marker of religious identity. Some believe that the act of sprinkling the child with holy water using a sprig of basil[457], as in baptism, has the extra benefit of reducing body odour in sexually mature males. The respondents are convinced that they have less body odour than their Muslim neighbours (a problem commonly attributed to outside groups).

Other respondents believe that this olfactory effect is produced by anointing children with holy oils (Bulgarian: *mirosvane*):

> D.: They don't baptise [their children], Mohammedans don't, and we do, to make them Bulgarians.
>
> M.L.: I've heard [children] have a nice smell after they've been baptized?
>
> D.: Well, yes, it's true. They're Christians now.
>
> M.L.: And Muslims circumcise [Bulgarian: *bryazhat*] children, right?
>
> D.: They do.
>
> M.L.: Why?
>
> D.: Well, to keep separate from the Bulgarians. (W, Ch Interview 38, Leshten 2006)

457 Used by Orthodox Christian clergy instead of an aspergil.

D.: They don't baptise [their children], they circumcise them and make the *kurban*, whereas we baptize [children] and prepare a meal. We go and the priest anoints our children with chrism [Bulgarian: *mirosva* – M.L.].

M.L.: And that makes them smell nice.

D.: Well, yes. (W, Ch, Interview 38, Leshten 2006)

Another ritual which has the same esthetic and identity-building role and is practised by both religious groups is the rubbing of newborns with salt[458]. Each group believes that the custom is not known or practiced in the other group, hence the unpleasant body odour of its members[459]. The female Christian respondent quoted below tries to rationalize her prejudices to some extent by pointing out that Pomaks are only described as foul-smelling when relations between the groups deteriorate. The respondent believes that the problem has been solved with better hygiene because she has childhood memories of the unpleasant body odour of some Pomaks:

G.: I've heard that Christians sprinkled salt over them, like cured hams, to eliminate the body odour. People in these parts say... that's a bit offensive to Muslims, but the Christians sometimes say, especially when they're not on good terms with them, that they [Muslims] smell because they are not salted or sprinkled with basil sprigs.

M.L.: Who says that?

G.: Christians say that about Muslims. There used to be... There is this superstition that Muslims have a bad smell, the same as Gypsies, because they have this specific body odour. Though with today's care products and advances in chemistry those problems have gone away, right? But in the past, when I used to visit my grandmother, there was one kind of smell about the place, and when I went to her neighbour, the smell was somehow different. When I was little I asked my mom, "Mom, why is it that granny's place smells different than ours? I don't like that smell". And she said, "That's because they're Pomaks. They smell". And nowadays, when there are quarrels or conflicts, when people get really rude and uncouth, they say, "You people smell so bad. You, Muslims, have a bad smell because you're not salted, you're not sprinkled with basil". Sprinkled with basil, meaning baptized. (W, Ch, Interview 23, Satovcha 2005)

With the exception of baptism (consistently viewed as a counterpart to circumcision in Islam), such parallels between different rituals are inconsistent, viewed on a

458 Noted by researchers as early as the 19th century (cf. *Tsaneva* 1994, p. 130). As in the case of lambs (see a bove), salt is an operator of the transition from Nature to Culture by achieving transition from a person's philogenetic and ontogenetic origins (cf. Wasilewski 1989, p. 121, p. 135). In the first plane, salt effects departure from paradise (cf. Wasilewski 1989, p. 123), in the second (given to, or rubbed into the skin of, a newborn baby, it marks the exit from fetal phase (cf. Wasilewski 1989, p. 135).

459 In this context salt plays a role opposite to that described above: rather than symbolize the rupture of man's paradisal existence it serves to preserve it by keeping the human body in a state of paradisal purity, when the human body did not smell or perspirate.

personal basis; my respondents did not always agree which Christian and Muslim rituals could be considered equivalent or why. The pairings were not motivated in theological terms, and some of them were theologically incompatible. For instance, the respondents quoted below regard Kurban Bayram and Easter as analogous even though the two holidays are predicated on two diametrically opposed understandings of blood sacrifice. The difference is fundamental and central to the nature of the two holidays: unlike Kurban Bayram, which celebrates and perpetuates the ritual of blood sacrifice as the best way to commune with God, Easter commemorates an event which abolished blood sacrifice as a ritual tainted by human influence.

The parallels drawn by the respondents between the two holidays are based on the fact that each is preceded by a period of fasting, even though the respondents realize the differences between Lent and the Ramadan:

> Y.: We are not that different. The difference is that they go to the mosque to pray five times a day, and we only go [to church] on holidays. That's the difference as I see it. When they have their bayram, we call that fasting, and don't know what you call it.
>
> Veselka: Except they eat absolutely nothing during the day.
>
> Y.: They get up at five in the morning to eat, and then they eat again at seven in the evening. Throughout the day [they drink] no water and [eat] no food. We do that at Easter time, for one week. But we do it the other way around. For three days you eat nothing, and you drink nothing. Then we call it "the half" [*polovinka*], and on that night you eat, you pick a time, and tomorrow you [eat] again at the same time. And that's the difference, there are no other differences that I'm aware of. (W, Ch, Interview 28, Satovcha 2005)

The two female respondents below consider Kurban Bayram and Christmas to be analogous only because both holidays are celebrated over a three-day period during which no farming is done:

> M.L.: The word bayram, does it mean anything?
>
> S.: To them it means a holiday.
>
> M.: During the holiday they don't work for three days.
>
> S.: Our holidays last for three days, too. Christmas is celebrated over three days, so is Easter. Their bayram lasts for three days as well.
>
> M.: They celebrate and they don't work in the fields. "On this holiday we do no work", she says, "none at all".
>
> M.L.: Do they work at Easter?
>
> S.: They do, just like we work during their bayrams. (W, Ch, Interview 34, Garmen 2006)

Another frequent pairing of religious observances is the Orthodox All Souls' Day[460] and the Muslim Arfe, presumably because both groups on those days share special food with their loved ones and neighbours in the intention of the deceased. Christians share *kolivo*, and Muslims celebrate Arfe with *mekŭtsi*, *halva* and *banitsa*.

The following (female) respondent compares All Souls' Day not only to Arfe, but also to Ashure (Turkish: *Aşure*, Arabic: *'Ashura*)[461], the day on which Muslims share a kind of pudding made from various grains and fruits to ensure health and prosperity in the family. Perhaps the respondent was misled by the similarity between the Muslim *ashure* and *kolivo*, which Christians distribute to help the deceased. The two types of food are made of similar ingredients but have a different consistency:

S.: Only bayrams are holidays. Kurban Bayram and Ramazan Bayram. Arfe, which you eat before the *kurbans* – it's [like] our All Souls' Day. That's when they make it. They cook rye, corn, prunes, dried apples. We call that *ushav*. They cook everything together in one pot and call it *ayshero*.

M.L.: Ashure.

Mariana Darska: Maybe they call it different things in different regions.

S.: And sugar.

M.D.: It's like a dessert. Like the wheat we make for All Souls' Day?

S.: Except theirs is more like soup; ours is thicker.

M.L.: When do they share that *ashure*?

S.: Before their holidays. Before Bayram.

M.L.: But it's not the same thing as Arfe?

S.: No, Arfe is a different thing. At Arfe they make *mekŭtsi* and *banitsa*. Whereas Ashure is closer to Kurban, it's a specific date but I don't know when it is.

M.L.: How is it shared?

S.: They pour it into bowls, and children take it to different houses, to their neighbours, relatives.

460 Orthodox Christians celebrate the holiday three times a year, on the Saturdays before Lent (Mesnite Zagovezdi) – the so-called Great All Souls' Day, Pentecost and the feast of St. Michael the Archangel.

461 A holiday celebrated on the tenth day of the Muslim month of Muharram, the first month in the Islamic calendar. It is celebrated by Shi'ah Muslims to commemorate the martyrdom of al-Husayn ibn 'Ali in Karbala. In the Sunni tradition in the former Ottoman territories the day commemorates the survival of Nuh's Ark, which landed on that day on Mount Ararat. The remaining supplies (dried fruits, grains and nuts) were used to make the thanksgiving meal.

M.: Irrespective of one's religion?

S.: No difference. When we lived there they always gave us some. (Ch, W, Interview 35, Garmen 2006)

The respondent only associates *Ashura* with the pudding distributed on that day, not realizing that Sunnis[462] celebrate the holiday in memory of humanity's rescue from the Flood, commemorating the thanksgiving meal in honour of Allah prepared from products[463] remaining on Nuh's Ark (Blagoev 2004, p. 143).

Another social practice found in both groups involves paying visits to women after childbirth, bringing various gifts for the baby, money or food "to keep the milk from drying up". When leaving the house, members of both groups make sure to snap a piece of thread from their clothes to protect the newborn from "evil eye".

Besides the similarities, my respondents also identify certain differences between the groups. One female respondent mentioned the Ramadan[464] and All Souls' Day as one such difference. Unlike most of my respondents, the woman found an interest in the differences between Islam and Christianity, and actually met with a *hodzha* to discuss them (Interview 21, Ognianovo 2005).

In total, I met just two more respondents who discussed religious topics with Muslims. Following a conversation with a *hodzha*, the following respondent concluded that fasting during Ramadan can only be validly compared to the fast preceding Easter:

A.: Yes. A certain *hodzha* made that very plain to me. The Ramazan (Turkish: Ramazan, Arabic: Ramadan) is meant to cleanse the body and soul, like our fasts. Like our Lent, because Zagovezni[465] is a completely different matter. These serve to cleanse people of their sins. (M, Ch, Interview 45, Dabnitsa 2006)

My respondents were also willing to discuss Muslim burials, which they know from hearsay or from occasional personal participation, and which they like to compare with their own traditions. Most of all, they notice that Muslims bury their dead without caskets, shrouded in white linen, and that women do not accompany the body to the grave.

462 'Ashura is mainly celebrated by the Shi'ites in memory of al-Husayn ibn 'Ali's martyrdom, an event dramatized during those celebrations.

463 A Turkish woman from Dabnitsa explained to me that the dish must contain eleven ingredients. The most important ones included beans, rice, couscous, nuts, sugar and water.

464 The ninth month of the Muslim calendar in which fasting is prescribed for all able adults between sunrise and sunset. Eating, drinking, smoking or sexual intercourse are forbidden during the period of fasting. Fasting during this month is one of the five pillars of Islam.

465 Zagovezni are celebrations roughly equivalent to Shrove Tuesday. The celebrations of Mesni Zagovezni (Meat Lent, from the third week of Lent) and Sirni Zagovezni mark the time in which believers first abstain from meat, and then also from dairy products and eggs as well. The respondent is trying to emphasize the important moments during Lent.

Christians in the Rhodopes usually have a limited and superficial familiarity with Muslim holidays. For instance, they know that the word *bayram* means holiday, and that Muslims only celebrate Kurban Bayram (the Holiday of Sacrifice) and Ramazan Bayram. They associate Kurban Bayram with animal sacrifice and the sharing of meat, and Ramazan Bayram with the eating of sweets after a period of fasting. However, they are oblivious of the connection between each holiday and specific religious beliefs.

> M.L.: What do people put on the table at that time?
>
> B.: Well, they make *mekŭtsi*... I mean, that depends on the *bayram*. For Kurban Bayram they always make meat. But there is a different *bayram*, the candy *bayram*, or, as they call it, the sweet *bayram*. Then people make *baklava*[466], things like that, *tolumbichki*[467], sweet things. (W, Ch, Interview 51, Garmen 2006)

Christians tend to explain their own limited knowledge of Pomak customs by the fact that they live apart and have no opportunities to observe Pomak religious life at first hand. The following respondent, who realizes that Pomaks have certain customs but admits ignorance about the details, sounds like she is talking about some kind of distant ethnic group rather than her neighbours, with whom she worked in the fields and held *sedyanki*[468]:

> D.: They have their customs, but I don't know what those might be. We're not close enough. We had friends, we used to visit them, they used to visit us, we harvested tobacco, corn together. But their ways are similar to ours. When the *sedyanka* is over they invite you to their homes or offer food. (W, Ch, Interview 41, Garmen 2006)

Where an observance, such as the *kurban*, is found in both religious groups, Christians tend to assume, often mistakenly, that each group observes it in a similar manner. In the following comment, the respondent erroneously says that Muslims, like Christians, share *kurban* meat in a cooked form[469].

> M.L.: So, what kind of holidays do they have, what are their *bayrams*?
>
> S.: That's a holiday they have. Bayram. I don't know what it is.
>
> M.: Me neither. I just know from our Zorka, she spends more time with them, that they celebrate it every year.

466 Sweet pastries made of thin *kori* (filo) pastry filled with nuts and sweet syrup; layers of the pastry are placed on top of each other like a layered cake or formed into a spiral.
467 Turkish pastries soaked in sweet syrup.
468 A cultural practice in which women meet to weave, spin or sew. Ritual songs are sung in a cheerful atmosphere.
469 The meat is actually shared raw.

> S.: Bayram is their holiday, and if you ask them they will tell you, "Oh, Kurban Bayram is coming". At Kurban Bayram they sacrifice an animal, they cook it in a pot and share it with people. During Ramazan Bayram they fast. They only eat in the evening, in the dark, and in the morning before dawn, they get up and eat, and then spend the whole day fasting. (W, Ch, Interview 34, Garmen 2006)

My respondents note that Muslim women are less likely to participate in religious observances, but they often jump to sweeping conclusions. If they see a religious observance in which no Muslim women happen to be participating (such as reading the Qur'an or praying in the mosque) they automatically assume that women are banned from participating. The following comment illustrates how personal opinion affects thinking about religious ritual: the familiar observances of one's own group seem orderly and superior, the unfamiliar ones seem chaotic and incomprehensible.

> M.L.: Have you noticed any differences? How is their religion different?

> D.: Their religion is different. Women don't come into their mosques, only the men are allowed to do that. I've watched them. When they pray they have those rugs, they go down on their knees, the *hodzha* sings and they pray. When you go to a church, our ways are different. With us, it's more well-organised, and we pray, we light candles. They don't light candles. That's one difference. We pray to God, they pray to Allah. (W, Ch, Interview 41, Garmen 2006)

In fact, Muslim women are allowed to attend mosques, which they do less often than men (mostly during the Ramadan) because women do not have to pray in a mosque (prayer at home is preferred in the case of women). As far as the Qur'an is concerned, women are only forbidden to read it without performing a ritual ablution (in common with men) or while menstruating (at which time they are also not allowed to enter mosques). Some of my Christian respondents are aware of those rules. Incidentally, menstruating women are simmilarly not supposed to go to church in Orthodox Christian communities:

> A.: When explaining the Qur'an, Muhammad said that menstruating women should not be reading the Qur'an, the holy book. When her period is over she may enter a mosque and read the Qur'an, and pass it on to the next generation. (M, Ch, Interview 45, Dabnitsa 2006)

Another reason why Christians tend to know very little about the religious practices of the Pomak community is that religion tends to be left out of conversations between members of different religious groups for fear of provoking conflicts and upsetting the strategy of good relations between neighbours. I witnessed the disruptive potential of such conversations in mixed groups on one occasion, as illustrated by the following excerpts from a conversation between a Muslim woman and a Christian man. Although both noted the many similarities between the religions, they disagreed on a number of points, such as the number of books created by Allah, the relationship between Allah and God, whether children are born as Muslims or Christians (servants of God), or which

religion is older. The disagreement almost ruined my planned extended interview with the Muslim woman, who was on the verge of pulling out of the interview:

> Turkish Woman.: No. Allah gave three...
>
> Man A.: What do you mean, Allah?
>
> T.W.: I mean, our Allah.
>
> A.: What do you mean, Allah, come on! Don't be deluded. Allah and God are one and the same thing. ...
>
> T.W.: Allah created four books.
>
> A.: Seven, my dear!
>
> T.W.: Not true! ...
>
> A.: Well, the meaning is that when you baptize them, they know which religion they belong to.
>
> T.W.: No, that's not the case, Angyel! Every child in the world is born a Muslim, [and they remain Muslim] until the age of nine in the case of girls, the age of eleven in the case of boys. Because the Qur'an is the final book which must be believed. Every dead person will actually be judged in the next world according to the Muslim religion. It doesn't matter if you're Italian or French, it makes no difference. ...
>
> A.: He calls himself a servant of God, not a Muslim. Our children are born as servants of God. "God, I entrust this child to your care". Whether you change the baby's name from Asan to Angyel, that's a different thing. If you walk into a church you should be a baptized person. All people are born the same, but we don't say that everybody is born a Muslim. The Muslim faith is not the first religion. (W, M; M, Ch Interview 45, Dabnitsa 2006)

Unlike the female Muslim respondent, whose insistence that every human being is born a Muslim is compatible with Islamic doctrine, the beliefs of my Christian respondent are at odds with the Orthodox Christian creed, according to which people only become "servants of God" (Christians) through baptism.

Christians typically disparage the religious knowledge of Muslims, who they believe practice empty ritualism. For instance, they argue that Pomaks (the *hodzhas* excepted) do not understand the Arabic Qur'an or the Arabic prayers. This seems to be a projection of their own shortcomings; my material suggests that it is in fact Christians who struggled to place their own observances within the religious narrative.

It also seems that Christians have assimilated Islamic doctrine in one important aspect, namely they regard Christ as nothing more than a prophet and deny his divine nature.

A.: Now, I, a Christian, can pray in their mosque because we pray to one and the same God, though in different ways. There is no difference.

M.L.: So, for instance, why do you make the sign of the cross, but Muslims don't?

A.: By this act you worship God, the Highest. To me, there is one and the same God, Pomak or Turkish, Bulgarian or even English. He is one and the same. Jesus Christ, Muhammad and others are messiahs sent to proclaim certain things about to happen in the world. Christ is a bit more important, then there is Muhammad. That's how I understand it, and that's how it is. God is one... (M, Ch, Interview 45, Dabnitsa 2006)

Islamic elements have been assimilated even by those respondents who are well versed in Christian and Muslim theology and clearly favour the former.

8.3 "The Orthodox Christian Muslim" – the "Syncretist" from "Vodino"

This section studies a special case where one individual, a young Protestant from a traditional Orthodox Christian family, has adopted certain Muslim practices. The man is a member of the functional elite. Though not representative of the general population, the man's example may be influential owing to his social status; his opinions and actions are noted, and commented on, by the local community.

To protect my respondent's anonymity, details such as his name, profession, education level or exact age are not disclosed. The man became a Protestant at the age of twenty after a period of intense interest in astrology, occultism and numerology, but gave up those occult pursuits when made aware of their sinful nature. The man discovered the Bible for the first time, and gradually became a "spiritual person", an experience he describes as very difficult and accompanied by bouts of uncontrollable crying or laughter. He began to read the Bible on a regular basis, and knows extended passages of the biblical text by heart (not unlike the *hodzhas*, who often quote extended passages from the Qur'an). Like the *hodzhas,* the man treats traditional religion with reserve, contrasting it with "true spirituality" inspired by scriptural reading. As a Protestant, he considers the Bible to be the sole legitimate source of religion (Interview 46, "Vodino" 2006).

The respondent is convinced that he has a connection with the Holy Spirit, to whom he has given himself, and who inspires him to pray and fast for specific people, reportedly producing miraculous healings on more than one occasion. During my first interview in 2005 he introduced himself as an "Orthodox Christian Muslim" in what he emphasized was the "spiritual sense of the term". He explained that he considered himself an Orthodox Christian (because he praised God with his life) and a Muslim (because the word means "a believer"), but also a Catholic (citing the ancient pre-

English meaning of the word as "universal"). In another interview the following year he revealed that he was a Protestant, a fact he did not disclose to the local community on account of the community's reportedly negative attitude towards Protestants, who are considered a religious sect in the Rhodopes and are treated with mistrust in the Christian population (in fact, the respondent had been described to me as a cult member).

My interest in the respondent began when several impressed Muslims reported to me how the man had joined them in observing the Ramadan, a fact which made his appear closer than an average Christian neighbour. In an interview he explained to me that his decision to observe the Ramadan was not motivated by a conversion to Islam; on the contrary, he hoped to get his Muslim friends and actuaintances interested in Christianity, a tactic which by his own admission misfired when Muslims, *hodzhas* especially, ended up hoping to see his imminent conversion instead:

> M.L.: How did they react to your observing the Ramazan?
>
> Protestant: They reacted by expecting me to become an orthodox Muslim. In the spiritual sense I could describe myself as a Muslim because the word "Muslim" means "a believer", but not in the traditional sense. I mean, I'm not trying to become a traditional Muslim because that would mean deceiving other people. (Interview 20, "Vodino" 2005)

My respondent explained that he had observed the Ramadan in order to draw nearer to Muslims, and he read the Qur'an to assimilate Islamic religious thinking in the interest of dialogue between religions.

Based on interview material and other people's opinions about the respondent I discovered that he uses apparent religious syncretism as an intentional strategy to convert Muslims to Protestantism, which he describes as "true spiritual life".

The respondent describes himself as having a "soft spot" for Muslims stemming from an anxious realization that Muslims cannot be saved because they reject divine grace, identified with the salvific sacrifice of Christ. As a result, the respondent is making efforts to reach out and bring salvation to at least some Muslims. He tries to engage Muslims in religious discussion, looking for shared elements in the two religions:

> M.L.: When you're with them you try to do something about it, is that right?
>
> Protestant: Well, yes. I have a soft spot for Muslims. I've had no success in this respect, though. But I ask them. God... A friend of mine, she's a Muslim, said I played an important part in her life. Many good things have happened. But she still doesn't understand many of the things she should be aware of. Though I told her I was praying and fasting when she lost her job.
>
> M.L.: How do you talk to them? How do you start a conversation? Do you start by finding some shared elements?

P.: Shared elements, that's right ... and usually, because they are very stubborn and they learn, they start out by showing off their knowledge about a topic, to show how much they've learned, and to present themselves in a good light. (Interview 46, "Vodino" 2006)

M.L.: Can Muslims be saved?

Protestant: I don't think they can. Based on ... There are some Christians who are more liberal and say that it's possible but if you look at the closing parts of the Bible, the ending of the Revelation of St. John, it says [they can't].

M.L.: But can you be happy, can you be in paradise knowing that your friends won't be there?

P.: This is precisely what makes me unhappy. My dream hasn't come true. People are happy when their dreams come true but mine haven't. But I believe that God has a plan for them, to make them see spiritual truth. Spiritual truth, not just the rituals and the traditional religious life. (Interview 46, "Vodino" 2006)

According to the respondent, those Muslims who take an interest in the New Testament receive a special sign: the verses glow golden when read; this has never happened to the respondent himself, and he treats this experience as proof of Christianity's supremacy over Islam. In his phrase, this is the way "God seeks to confirm the person in the truth":

Protestant: I also know some Muslims with a traditional background who are seeking the truth, they've been reading the Bible and the Qur'an, and prayed to the Highest, to God – for he is one – to reveal to them what's right. And as they were reading, especially the New Testament, the verses began to glow. The letters became radiant and golden. This never happened when they were reading the Qur'an... to see the text glow like that...

M.L.: How about you?

P.: This has never happened to me. (Interview 20, "Vodino" 2005)

M.L.: Last year you were telling me about those golden letters?

Protestant: Yes, that's [the experience of] Christians who... There have actually been some cases where Muslims start reading the Bible, and God gives them verses that radiate with a golden light.

M.L.: How many such cases have you heard about?

P.: At least three or four.

M.L.: Did they tell you about that? How did you find out?

P.: Yes, they told me about it, and I've also been told by very good friends of mine who take a great interest in this, they're Muslims.

M.L.: Are they locals?

P.: They're from Gotse Delchev. (Interview 46, "Vodino" 2006)

Another reported miracle which had prompted some of the respondent's Muslim friends to convert to Christianity is the experience of the presence of the Holy Spirit in the form of a fragrance:

Protestant: Those people didn't see the glowing letters, but they have been visited by the power and the *blazhenstvo* [grace – M.L.] of the Holy Spirit. A woman experienced a wonderful smell while others could smell nothing.

M.L.: Is it something one can smell?

P.: Yes, you can smell a fragrance others can't. There have been many other revelations, especially in her life. (Interview 46, "Vodino" 2006)

The respondent realizes that by reading the Qur'an and practising the Ramadan he may be raising hopes among Muslims that his conversion to Islam is imminent, but he considers the Qur'an to be a derivative book which can only be understood correctly in relation to the Bible:

Protestant: They expect me to conclude that the Qur'an is right. And it is, but only when studied in connection with the Bible. The two books share a spiritual context. I can't go and change the creation of the world, all of the sacred history to date, or those underlying spiritual symbols. But they know nothing about them. (Interview 20, "Vodino" 2005)

When read in parallel, the two books are apparently so closely interrelated that the Qur'an actually proclaims many Christian truths, including Christianity's supremacy over Islam.

Protestant: Besides, Muslims assume that Jesus will be involved in the [final] judgement ... that will face everyone. That he will be a witness... In Surah 3, *ayat* 55 in the Qur'an it says, "Allah said, 'O Jesus, indeed I will take you and raise you to Myself and purify you from those who disbelieve and make those who follow you superior to those who disbelieve ...'" This means that those who followed Jesus will be superior to those who did not believe him. So those who followed will take a higher place than those who didn't. And he is also recognized as the King of Heavenly Jerusalem. So those who have followed him will take the highest place, and those who didn't will be at the very bottom, they will be placed the lowest. (Interview 20, "Vodino" 2005)

Essentially, my respondent believes that Christian and Islamic teachings which are not contained in the Holy Scriptures are distortions of God's word, severely punishable in the next world. He quotes the Revelation of St. John (22, 19):

Protestant: There's a passage at the end, right, where it says that anyone who adds things to this book of prophecy or takes words away from it... It says so in the Bible, in Chapter 22, verse 19 of the Revelation of St. John, it says that God will withhold that person's share in the tree of life. That is to say, those who change the meaning of the Scriptures, adding or removing things, will

> not find himself recorded in Jesus's family tree[470] [Bulgarian: *rodoslovno* – M.L.] (Interview 20, "Vodino" 2005)

The respondent considers all religious elements not found in the Bible or the Qur'an to be the unreliable human inventions taking people further away from salvation. Such erroneous elements stem mainly from traditional religion, which the respondent believes offers no spiritual value:

> Protestant: The same thing applies to Christianity as well. [Those who accept] some of the traditional religious standards, they do not embrace the [true] spiritual reality. That person is content, they celebrate Christmas and things like Gergiovden and suchlike, but the spiritual emptiness inside them gets filled up with a different kind of spiritual force. (Interview 20, "Vodino" 2005)

Accordingly, the respondent believes that differences between the Islamic and Christian religious rituals (based as they are on tradition, which is spiritually empty) are very much of secondary importance, if not completely irrelevant:

> Protestant: I study them [the Bible and the Qur'an – M.L.] until I see some spiritual similarity between them. The differences in ritual, the traditional differences? That's a human thing [a human invention]. (Interview 46, "Vodino" 2006)

In examining the parallels between the Bible and the Qur'an, the respondent pays attention to those passages in the Qur'an which contradict the prevalent Muslim prejudices against Christianity as shaped by tradition (my respondent subsumes the Sunnah and the hadiths under this term), such as the Muslim belief that the Gospels are forgeries. He points out that this is incompatible with the Qur'an, citing ayah 46 and 47 from Surah 5:

> Protestant: Book 5 [of the Qur'an – M.L.] says this in lines, *ayat* 46 and 47: "We sent them" – meaning the prophets – "in Isa's footsteps" – meaning Jesus, "son of Mary, confirming the Torah before him[471]". The Torah is the book of Moses. Very often places containing references to the law of the prophets refer to the Old Testament as a whole. Christ uses that term as well. All of the Old Testament talks about [a book] that went before him to confirm the Torah, which was before him. "And he gave us the Gospel" containing instructions and light, to confirm the Torah that was before him, and the instructions from God enlighten him. And verse 47 says "So let the People of the Gospel judge according to what God has sent down therein. Whosoever judges not according to what God has sent down, they are corrupt". This means that the Gospel was been given as an authentic and authoritative criterion. This is confirmed. (Interview 20, "Vodino" 2005)

470 The passage refers to the tree of life, and it seems that the respondent is referring not to much to the genealogy of Jesus as the place of the living within Christ's mystical body.

471 The actual passage in the Qur'an actually communicates the opposite idea: "And We sent, following in their footsteps, Jesus son of Mary, confirming the Torah before him".

The respondent reads the two holy texts closely to find confirmation for a religious model presenting Christianity as superior to Islam, a religion providing the only religious path to salvation (a point he makes repeatedly). Argument in support of Islam's subordinate position is the biblical genealogy according to which the Arabs are descended from Isma'il, whom the respondent describes as the fruit of Ibrahim and Sarah's doubt.

> Protestant: What's born the human way remains human. What's born of the spirit thanks to God's promise... That is to say, Hagar gave birth to Ismail who was the fruit of their doubt. They doubt in God. (Interview 20, "Vodino" 2005)

The reference is to the belief that Muslims are descended from Hagar, as evident in the exoethnonym "Hagarite". By drawing attention to Isma'il the respondent dismisses the role of Abraham as the shared father and founder of Judaism, Christianity and Islam.

The respondent's main objection to Islam is that the Qur'an its spiritual symbolic meaning has been excised, making much of its content incomprehensible to Muslims. As a result, Muslims cannot rely on the necessary spiritual signposts which direct one in living a good life. He is even more critical about other kinds of Muslim religious literature, which he believes is spiritually empty:

> Protestant: The way I see it ... The way I see it myself ... Right, so these are two peoples living next to each other, and an echo of the Scripture had reached them, but they failed to understand its spiritual meaning. (Interview 20, "Vodino" 2005)

> Protestant: Without the Bible you can't find your spiritual way, even though the Qur'an talks about the same things. The same people, the same events, but some things have also been left out. And unless the Bible throws light on certain questions you cannot understand them in the spiritual sense, in fact you can hardly make sense of the chronology. Because the entire Qur'an is [written] in a uniform, preaching style. Everything's mixed up, there's no structure. (Interview 46, "Vodino" 2006)

> M.L.: Are all kinds of Islam [equally] ritualistic or traditional?

> Protestant: Yes.

> M.L.: There is no spiritual Islam?

> P.: No. (Interview 46, "Vodino" 2006)

> Protestant: And they believe that other Muslim books could influence me to embrace it. Those books are so far removed from spirituality, from spiritual reality, that I just read them for information, sometimes they just feel like a waste of time. But I read them anyway to get some idea of other people's thinking, and I conclude that some of their writers are in a very sorry state ... Take one of them, the author of the book The Road to Jerusalem, he writes that the flight from Egypt is a religious fable. But every believer would accept that the flight from Egypt is a historical

> fact and not a fable! A fable is an invention to illustrate a spiritual reality. But this fact also has a spiritual meaning. The eating of manna by the Jews has a spiritual meaning as well. (Interview 20, "Vodino" 2005)

According to the respondent, some of the *hodzhas* realize the spiritual emptiness of Islamic religion because they agree that the sin of Adam and Hawwa resulted in a spiritual death for mankind. This appears to be an overinterpretation not confirmed by my material or the position of Sunni Islam, which does not accept the doctrine of the original sin or connect humanity's transgressions with Adam and Hawwa. According to my respondent, mankind has been given a fresh spiritual birth thanks to the gifts of the Holy Spirit. However, because Islam confuses the Holy Spirit with the Archangel Jibra'il Muslims are unable to make use of those gifts:

> M.L.: When talking to you, has anyone ever admitted that they didn't have enough spirituality in their life?
>
> Protestant: Yes. The *hodzhas* knows that humanity experienced a spiritual death after the Fall. But because they confuse the Holy Spirit with the Archangel Gavriil [Gabriel – M.L.]...
>
> M.L.: Did you discuss it with them, or is that a taboo subject?
>
> P.: It is something of a taboo. You have to build a close personal relationship and gain their trust in order to discuss that. It's best to discuss it in one-on-one conversations; in a group they feel obligated to defend [their point of view].
>
> M.L.: Have you had a conversation like this?
>
> P.: Yes. I've had a conversation with a man who said that the main thing was missing, and that it was missing from the Arabic world as well.
>
> M.L.: Meaning prayer?
>
> P.: That it's not there. It's beautiful but it's just not there.
>
> M.L.: Did he like that passage?
>
> P.: He likes it but this is a spiritual fruit, the spiritual result of the work of the Holy Spirit. (Interview 46, "Vodino" 2006)

At the same time, the respondent is able to find and quote actual passages from the Qur'an on spirituality and the Holy Spirit, citing Surah 24, 35:

> Protestant: In the Qur'an it says in Surah 24, *ayat* 35: "God is the Light of the heavens and the earth; the likeness of His Light is as a niche wherein is a lamp (the lamp in a glass, the glass as it were a glittering star) kindled from a Blessed Tree, an olive that is neither of the East nor of the West whose oil wellnigh would shine, even if no fire touched it; Light upon Light!" So this is a reference to the olive tree which is not from the East or the West, it's not an earthly tree. This

> refers to true spirituality which comes out of a niche, meaning heaven, in order to direct people. (Interview 20, "Vodino" 2005)

So long as Muslims fail to believe in this true spirituality they cannot partake in the gifts of the Holy Spirit: as the respondent puts it, "they will not be anointed with the Holy Spirit". As a Protestant, the respondent does not refer to the sacrament of confirmation as administered in churches, but rather to a state of the spirit:

> Protestant: Unless you accept Christ's sacrifice the Holy Spirit cannot come down. Christ means the Anointed One, anointment with holy oils was performed in the Old Testament so that the Holy Spirit may pour out on people. Olive oil brings light. The Holy Spirit brings light into a person's life.
>
> M.L.: Do you believe that it's not possible to receive the Holy Spirit without being anointed with oils, or ...?
>
> P.: You have to feel sorrow for your sins, and you have to long to receive the Holy Spirit.
>
> M.L.: But they practice anointment with oils in the church?
>
> P.: They do, that's right.
>
> M.L.: But this is not about physical actions? In other words, could this take place without a physical anointment?
>
> P.: That's right, it's unnecessary. I've never been anointed with holy oils but the Holy Spirit is working in my life. (Interview 46, "Vodino" 2006)

The fact that the respondent looks for hidden traces of Christianity in Islam suggests he believes Islam to have always been a form of unsuspecting crypto-Christianity, cobbled together out of leftovers remaining after the spiritual core, Christ's sacrifice, has been removed: those who do not accept it cannot be saved, in keeping with a passage from the Revelation of St. John (21, 27):

> Protestant: This is to say that those who want to save themselves just by knowing what's good and what's evil are in fact even more evil because they fail to accept Christ's sacrifice. And those who accept it will be written in the genealogical tree and in the book of life mentioned in the Revelation of St. John, the last book of the Bible. Nothing impure will ever enter Heavenly Jerusalem, nor will anyone who commits shameful and deceitful deeds, but only those whose names are written in Adam's book of life[472]. That's chapter 21, verse 27. (Interview 20, "Vodino" 2005)

472 The book of life in the scriptural original belongs to the Lamb rather than to Adam.

The respondent cites the Epistle to the Hebrews (10, 28–29) in support of his point that the sin of failing to accept Christ's sacrifice is a more serious than violating the Ten Commandments:

> Protestant: In the Epistle to the Hebrews ..., in the letter to the Jews, chapter 10, verse 29, 28, it says: "Anyone who violated Moses' Law of Moses dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses". And verse 29, "Consider, how much more severely someone should be punished who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, or who has insulted the Spirit of grace". This means that the failure to accept Christ's sacrifice is a heavier sin than breaking the Ten Commandments, because everyone has broken the Ten Commandments in one way or another. To a greater or lesser extent, everyone has lied etc. But it is written that God's Ten Commandments are only given to people as a criterion for [recognizing] sin. [The commandments] are not a means to salvation because no person can live up to them. (Interview 20, Ognianovo 2005)

The respondent argues that the Qur'an contains hidden or indirect references to "Christ's victory over the cross" in passages about the Resurrection. The following comment may be difficult to understand because it relies on the similarity of the Bulgarian words for "Resurrection" (*vŭzkreseniye*) and "cross" (*krŭst*):

> Protestant: Muslims don't accept the fact that Christ was crucified. They say Judas was crucified instead. But the same Surah 19, *ayat* 33 says, "Peace be upon me, the day I was born, and the day I die, and the day I am raised up[473] alive". The word "raised up" [Resurrection, Bulgarian: *vŭyzkresenye* – M.L.] means victory over death on the cross. Which is to say, a man must go through death and be resurrected. (Interview 20, "Vodino" 2005)

The respondent implies that it is impossible to believe in Resurrection (victory over the cross) without accepting Christ's death on the cross, which is the precondition for Resurrection:

> Protestant: They also believe that as he [Jesus] was a servant of Allah, Allah could not have allowed him to suffer this kind of punishment. But in order to rise again [Bulgarian: *da vŭzkrysne*], he first had to experience death on the cross. (Interview 20, "Vodino" 2005)

In a kind of conciliatory nod towards Islam, the respondent admits that in a sense Christ as the Living Word could not be crucified:

> Protestant: So, as he is the Word of Allah, he fails to be recognized as the Word. And the Word is not something you can't detain or kill, or crucify. So although he truly suffered in the flesh, he was crucified and killed, he spilled his blood, nonetheless he was not recognized as the living Word, as the living Word incarnate. (Interview 20, "Vodino" 2005)
>
> M.L.: What about the crucifixion?

473 The Bulgarian translation of the Qur'an quoted by the respondent refers to the concept of resurrection.

Protestant: That's assuming the conversation gets that far without them getting tired of it. But mostly they do get tired.

M.L.: You mean, crucifixion is the most difficult [topic of conversation – M.L.]?

P.: Yes, it is the most difficult food. It's like that analogy we drew with ruminants... Ruminants turn cellulose into sugar – but in their case the topic must be broached very carefully if they are to accept that these things are true. (Interview 46, "Vodino" 2006)

In the respondent's opinion, the passages in the Qur'an which condemn believers in the Holy Trinity do not apply to Christians because the trinitarian dogma is not present in the Bible, and so can be safely disregarded in interreligious dialogue. In fact, true Christians do not have to accept this element of dogma[474]:

M.L.: So, how does the Qur'an describe unbelievers?

Protestant: It refers to all people who do not believe in one God as unbelievers. Those who believe in the Trinity are similarly described as unbelievers. That's why it makes no sense... It makes no sense to discuss this subject. The word "Trinity" doesn't appear anywhere in the Bible. The word is never mentioned. So why have those unnecessary polemics, it's just pointless. What matters is salvation through Christ's sacrifice, which itself is a big problem to begin with. (Interview 20, "Vodino" 2005)

Protestant: At this stage it's not my goal in conversation with them to explain everything in detail.

M.L.: Do you discuss the Holy Trinity with them?

P.: Oh, no, no. That would make no sense. That would just lead to confrontation, but the Holy Trinity is not mentioned anywhere in the Bible, right? Or things like the triune nature of God [Bulgarian: triednistvo – M.L.]. The Bible doesn't contain this expression anywhere. Those are conclusions drawn from passages referring to them as One. But to them [Muslims] this is a major stumbling block. No point in talking about it. (Interview 46, "Vodino" 2006)

Although the respondent clearly favours Christianity, his perspective not only blurs the distinctive nature of Islam, but also, unavoidably, brings Christianity more into line with Islam, which is evident in the way certain elements of Christian doctrine are edited out if not accepted in the Qur'an. In theory, this only applies to those dogmas which find no direct confirmation in the Bible. In practice, however, my respondent is not always consistent. He mines the Bible for quotes which are compatible with their Qur'anic parallels, and vice versa. Despite his protestations that he reads the Qur'an in the light of Christian Scripture, the process occasionally appears to be go in the

474 However, the respondent affirmed in an interview made the following year that the Holy Trinity has existed since the beginning of the world.

opposite direction. For instance, where he argues that Jesus was not the Son of God but a servant of God, a belief in line with the Qur'an, he cherrypicks those biblical passages which confirm this belief, ignoring or belittling those which describe Jesus as the Son:

> Protestant: They don't accept it that Jesus called himself the Son. He was a servant. The Acts of the Apostles referred to Christ as a servant of God. But because he is the Word, you can call him all kinds of things... Prophet, Messiah, King or Lord. And it is true that he is the Word in its entirety. It's very interesting... Unless you speak his name, your prayer cannot reach heaven. (Interview 20, "Vodino" 2005)

It would seem that such attunement or synchronisation between religions is necessarily a two-way process, inevitably leading to adapting foreign elements into one's own religious model. As Stanley J. Tambiah points out, "translation of another people's conceptions into the categories of one's own language [should] be not regarded as a one-way street, for the true understanding of another should hold open the prospect that the other's conceptions may inform our own, and thereby extend and/or modify our own conception of rationality" (Tambiah 1990, p.121).

The same kind of modification also occurs in the context of religious convergence. The respondent juxtaposes the ideal scriptural versions of the two religions, and remains loyal to his own in those things he believes are central to its doctrine and spiritual life (such as the belief in salvation through Christ's sacrifice on the cross), however he is prepared to modify those elements which he sees as peripheral (such as literal belief that Jesus is the Son of God).

To my respondent, the nature of Jesus as the Word of God is a fundamental aspect in both religions. His nature as the Word of God is archetypal and has precedence over all other roles and appellations (such as prophet, Messiah, King or Lord), including the appellation of Son of God and the divine nature it implies. To the respondent, the Gospel of St. John is of paramount importance, and he juxtaposes its opening chapter with parallel passages in the Qur'an:

> Protestant: But in fact he is the Word of God, because John's Gospel begins with the words, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God". Verse 14 says, "and the Word became flesh and dwelt among us...". The Qur'an says the same, I already talked to you about this [in an interview in 2005 – M.L.], that Isa, meaning Jesus, is the Word. (Interview 46, "Vodino" 2006)

> Protestant: And his name is God's Word. The Qur'an says that too, that Jesus is the Word of Allah. That he's the word of truth in which they doubted. (Interview 20, "Vodino" 2005)

> Protestant: Surah 19, *ayat* 34 says: "That is Jesus, son of Mary, the word of truth, concerning which they are doubting". This means the Qur'an confirms that Christ is Allah's Messiah as the Word incarnate, which is to say, the Word of Truth. The gospel also says that the Word is Truth, and that Jesus is the Word, he is the way, the truth and the life for salvation. No one comes to ... Heaven, to the Father, except by him. (Interview 20, "Vodino" 2005)

Christ's divinity should be taken in a figurative sense as a way of recognizing Jesus as God's heir and future ruler of "Heavenly Jerusalem"[475].

> Protestant: At this point we can take our time and explain that the words which identify Jesus as the Son are symbolic, although he doesn't actually have an earthly father and God is his father. That is to say, it refers to his inheritance. God wants to bring sinners back to himself, because he placed the Messiah to rule Heavenly Jerusalem as its king. It's a kind of inheritance, and on earth you come into your inheritance from your parents. (Interview 20, "Vodino" 2005)

According to my respondent, this is why the Bible refers to Jesus as the Lord of Heavenly Jerusalem, and not as God:

> Protestant: Muslims find it awkward that Jesus is described as God, but in fact this refers to the Lord of Heavenly Jerusalem. It is written that only Allah is God. But in fact [Allah] vested the power in him. So there is no contradiction. (Interview 20, "Vodino" 2005)

The respondent identifies another shared Muslim and Christian belief relating to Christ, namely the belief that Jesus was the Messiah, supported in his work by the Holy Spirit. He compares two passages, one from the Revelation of St. John (19, 11–13) and one from the Qur'an (2: 253):

> Protestant: Jesus himself says: "Heaven and earth shall pass away but my words shall not pass away". They are everlasting. That is to say, Allah speaks and they accept, which is corroborated by the Qur'an, which says that he is Allah's sole Messiah. His words are eternal because in his case the word "Messiah" means King and Lord. This is the "Heavenly Jerusalem" from the Revelation of St. John. This heavenly city must have a King, and Christ is that King. He is the Messiah referred to in the Revelation of St. John, chapter 19, starting with line 11, where it says, "Then I saw heaven standing open, and a white horse, and the rider on that horse is called Faithful and True, who judges with justice and wages war. His eyes are like a fiery blaze, and on his head are many diadems. He has a name written on him that no one knows but himself, and he is dressed in a robe dipped in blood..."[476], meaning his own blood from his sacrifice. (Interview 20, "Vodino" 2005)

The respondent identifies many aspects of Islam which he argues implicitly recognize Christ's nature in line with Christian belief. For instance, Muslims who say "Amen" at the end of their prayers actually invoke Christ because the word "Amen", whose Aramaic root means "Truth", is one of the names of Jesus:

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475 The respondent did not use the term "heaven" in the interview, replacing it with the biblical apocalyptic term "Heavenly Jerusalem".

476 The respondent leaves out the ending of the passage: "and his name is the Word of God" (Ap 19, 13).

> Protestant: "Truly, I am telling you the truth". Christ repeats the same word twice, Truth, so this must have particular importance. In his times people said ... In Samaria they spoke Aramaic. "Amen"; the word "amen" means "truth". In the Revelation of St. John it says that Christ is the "Amen", that he is the truth. But in the traditional sense people translate that word as "May it be so". But such prayers shall not be granted, unless by truth. God would not grant a wish that does not follow from truth. So you have to accept Christ's sacrifice, and then that "amen" becomes valid. (Interview 20,"Vodino" 2005)

Today, the word is removed from its proper context of Christ's death on the cross which leads to a spiritual rebirth:

> Protestant: "Nicodemus said to him, 'How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter his mother's womb a second time and be born?' Jesus answered: 'Truly, truly I say to you, unless a man is born of water and the Holy Spirit, he cannot enter the Kingdom of God'" (J, 3, 5). Which is to say, he must be born with a capital B, this is the Holy Spirit. He gives one a new spiritual life. And when a man receives the spiritual life he gets entered in the book of life ... He accepts Christ's sacrifice. (Interview 20, "Vodino" 2005)

My respondent explains that the Qur'an consistently refers to Jesus as the Messiah (the Anointed One), in recognition of the fact, essentially compatible with Christianity, that Jesus was anointed with the Holy Spirit:

> Protestant: I mean, here's another problem with the Holy Spirit. The problem with the Holy Spirit is that the Qur'an, Surah 2, *ayat* 253 says, "And those Messengers, some We have preferred above others; some there are to whom God spoke, and some He raised in rank. And we gave Jesus son of Mary clear signs and confirmed him with the Holy Spirit". Which is to say, if he is the Messiah, then he must be anointed. The Messiah means the Anointed One. Anointed with the Holy Spirit. Jesus is the only Messiah according to the Qur'an. (Interview 20, "Vodino" 2005)

> Protestant: The word "Messiah" means "the anointed one", and anointment comes from the Holy Spirit. The Qur'an says the same thing, that Jesus was strengthened in his messianic mission by the Holy Spirit. And to fulfil it he had to be anointed by the Holy Spirit, which is symbolised by scented olive oil in the Old Testament. (Interview 20, "Vodino" 2005)

In addition to this evidence of Islam's hidden Christ-centric elements the respondent also points out hidden demonic elements in the religion. The fact that Muslims worship on the sixth day is one of them, because the number six is connected with the Antichrist:

> Protestant: The number six is the number of man and godlessness. This is why 666 is the number of the beast, the number of the Antichrist. But Muslims worship on the sixth day, Friday is the sixth day for bowing to God. Do you understand the meaning of this?! Those things are so interconnected, it's unbelievable. (Interview 20, "Vodino" 2005)

The respondent points out that certain religious practices (such as the covering of the body) were rendered obsolete by the coming of Christ, making continued observance pointless:

> Protestant: In Corinthians, chapter 2. The second Epistle to Corinthians, chapter 3, verse 11 (...). Under Moisey' [Moses] Law, they used to put a veil over the Torah in their hearts. But when Israel turned to God, meaning Christ, that vail was lifted. But God is the spirit, and where the Spirit of God is, there is freedom. And here... The veil worn by Moses is also described in the Qur'an, Surah 50, verse 22... This passage refers to the Day of Judgement, when one faces Allah. And *ayat* 22 says, "Thou wast heedless of this; therefore We have now removed from thee thy covering, and so thy sight today is piercing" (the Qur'an 40:22). Then, on the Day of Judgement, the true nature of things will be revealed to everyone. But then it will be too late. But now... as we read in the letter to Corinthians, the veil is lifted in Christ, the Messiah. (Interview 20, "Vodino" 2005)

The respondent is alluding to subsequent verses in the second Epistle to Corinthians (3, 14–18): " But their minds were blinded; for until this day the same veil remaineth untaken away in the reading of the old testament, which veil is done away with in Christ. But even unto this day, when Moses is read, the veil is upon their hearts. Nevertheless, when they shall turn to the Lord, the veil shall be taken away. Now the Lord is that Spirit; and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. But we all, with uncovered face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image, from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord"[477].

> Protestant: Shari'ah, too, is something very unique. It's law. But in the book of the prophet Isaya [Isaiah – M.L.], who lived 700 years before Christ, this is what it says in chapter 28, verses 11, 12 and 13: "For with stammering lips and another tongue will he speak to this [people]"... Then, verse 11, which is unnecessary. "To whom he said, This is the rest wherewith ye may cause the weary to rest; and this is the refreshing: yet they would not hear". But the word of the Lord was unto them precept upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little, and there a little; that they might go ... (Is 28, 11–13) and so on, and so forth. Which is to say, whoever does not accept God's grace or solvation through the grace of Christ's sacrifice, to them religion becomes precept upon precept, do this, don't do that. Decree after decree, rule after rule. (Interview 20, "Vodino" 2005)

The respondent believes that Judaism and Islam are closed to spirituality and focus exclusively on the material aspects of life. Observing religious duties focused on the material dimension is an ordeal which often involves hypocrisy since it only observes the letter of the Law, still in force in Judaism or Islam but abolished in Christianity, which focuses on spiritual well-being:

> M.L.: Why do they perform *abdest*?

477 21st Century King James Version.

> Protestant: *Abdest* is purification by water. But this also symbolises spiritual cleansing. The Jews considered it important, too: to use water, to wash and cleanse various objects and your own body. If you comply with all those requirements, a household would have to use up 6 cubic meters of water [1,585 US gallons – M.L.] every day. That's an awful lot, if you wanted to stick to all those rules. Nobody could do that. Those are impossible requirements. Which is precisely why Jesus fulfilled the Law in its entirety, to redeem us from the curse of the Law.
>
> M.L.: For instance, they do not touch the Qur'an with unwashed hands. A woman must not read the Qur'an when she is unclean.
>
> P.: Yes, but then they go and commit all kinds of iniquity. They get angry very easily. The men are very quick to curse, the women curse a lot, too.
>
> M.L.: How do you know that?
>
> P.: I know it. I watch them, I listen to them, I live with them. (Interview 46, "Vodino" 2006)
>
> Protestant: The Epistle to the Colossians, chapter 2 verse 11, says, "and in whom [meaning Christ, explains the Protestant] also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ". And the Epistle to the Romans, chapter 2, verse 29 says that circumcision is a matter of your heart, its spiritual, not literal. (Interview 46, "Vodino" 2006)

The respondent believes that Muslims have no unconditional love, which is replaced by a relationship of reciprocity ("if you are good to them they will be good to you") and a zealous attitude towards religious obligations, seeing as the letter of the Law. Because they reject God's grace shown in Christ's sacrifice on the cross, they are less likely to be saved than Christians:

> Protestant: Where it comes to the things we've discussed here, I've never had a chance to save them to an orthodox Muslim because they are rather inaccessible and quite... they believe they know the ultimate truth, but that truth is not placed in its spiritual context! They're exactly like it says in the book of Isaya, chapter 28, versus 11, 12 and 30: "precept upon precept". Because they did not accept grace. Generally speaking, they are very committed but it's also clear they have no love. If you are good to them they will be good to you. Everything is a matter of contracts. There is no unconditional love. Right... If you're not the kind of person... They wanted to be... The mood gets revolutionary. So, the mutual relations are very fragile. But I believe that God has thought of it, because he promised we should expect a kind of mass spiritual revival before the end comes. (Interview 20, "Vodino" 2005)

My respondent believes that the Muslim perspective can be equated with empty ritualism, a frequent accusation made by my Christian respondents:

> M.L.: Let's move on. What's the meaning of the phrase "religious person" to the Muslims?
>
> Protestant: Well, they will tell you that every day you have to say your *namaz*, perform your *abdest*, and you should make a pilgrimage to Mecca once in your lifetime if you can afford it.

> You shouldn't drink alcohol, you have to be kind and give alms. They attach great significance to good deeds, which they call *sevap*, and which pave your way to heaven. To make sure your good deeds outweigh the bad. This said, when I watch them... Like I just said, they get very excitable for no reason, and there is no...
>
> M.L.: Can you give me an example?
>
> E.: Say, a man gets upset with his horse or cow, and he'll start cursing the animal, or his neighbour. Even though it is written that you should love your neighbour like yourself. (Interview 46, "Vodino" 2006)

As these examples demonstrate, the respondent uses a rather hermetic language whose categories largely remove the problem of cognitive dissonance caused by the comparisons between the creeds of Islam and Christianity. Although he considers himself an "orthodox" believer who is faithful to the Scriptures, he actually practices a selective and idiosyncratic form of belief, in this case shaped by his proselytizing experience. In trying to convert Muslims to (Protestant) Christianity he treats his own religion in a highly selective way, rejecting those elements which Muslims might find particularly objectionable. His interpretation of the Bible is filtered by his religious choices as he cherrypicks evidence to support his beliefs. At the same time, he insists quite dogmatically that his readings of biblical symbols are the true ones, often identifying prophetic visions in the text (such as interpreting passages from the Revelation of St. John as a prophecy of the European Union, which he identifies as the Antichrist).

Although the respondent uses religious syncretism as a conscious proselytizing technique, the approach seems to be unconsciously filtering into his own belief, which becomes selective (Piwowarski 1996, p. 190). Although he argues that he reads the Qur'an in the light of the Gospel and considers himself a faithful adherent of the evangelical message, his thinking is affected in practical terms by Qur'anic interpretations as he often picks only those elements of Christianity which are not directly rejected in the Qur'an. This is especially true about those doctrines which are not present explicitly in the Gospel, such as the dogma of the Holy Trinity, which he believes to be an optional element in true Christian orthodoxy. In this, his approach is similar to the selective approach diagnosed by Paul M. Zulehner in that individual religious beliefs is shaped by private experience (in this case, living next to with Muslim neighbours and an interest in Islam) and personal preference (Zulehner 1998, p. 390–395).

9 Seeking Healing from Members of a Different Religion as a Case Against Religious Syncretism

In this chapter[478] I argue that those cases where healing is sought from neighbours of a different religion can be regarded as evidence of superficial syncretism. At a deep level, co-operation between members of different religions is not synonymous with, nor should it be mistaken for, religious syncretism. Far from shaping some kind of shared Muslim-Christian religiosity, the practice actually serves to maintain each group's religious autonomy.

My respondents resort to healers of a different religion not because they see their religion as somehow familiar or complementary; on the contrary, they tend to view it as a source of magical powers which are as sinister as they are alien. They attribute maladies of body and mind to demons such as *jinn* or *samovilas*/*samodivas* (in particularly difficult cases such as possession, paralysis or terminal diseases). They consider it a matter of course that a territory inhabited by a religiously mixed human population made up of Muslims and Christians should also be visited by the supernatural beings which the two groups believe in.

As Lucy M. Garnett noted, "[t]he supernatural beings with whom the Osmanlis terrify themselves and their children have by no means the variety of those of their neighb[o]rs belonging to other mationalities, and fall, for the most part, under the denomination either of *Djins* or *Peris*" (Garnett 1909, p. 133). Evgenia Troeva-Grigorova, a Bulgarian scholar whose work focuses on this problem, writes that "the idea of the existence of Christian and Muslim *jinn* is easy to explain if we take into account the fact that the 'second' world is a reflection of the first" (Troeva-Grigorova 2003, p. 188, translated from Bulgarian):

> *Hodzha* 3: What's the point of sleeping in the church? Why would you do that? [the *hodzha* addresses Shurfe – M.L.]
>
> M.L.: People sometimes go there.
>
> M.: That's superstition.
>
> Woman Sh.: Well, what is there to be done when you catch something [nasty] from a giaour *dzhin*? (Muslims, Interview 17, Ribnovo 2005)
>
> M.L.: Does that mean that there are Christian *dzhins* and Muslim *dzhins*?
>
> Ajshe: Of course there are, how could there not be?! You're a Christian, and I'm a Muslim. You get this kind and that, both kinds, there are different kinds of *dzhins*.

478 An earlier version of this text was originally published as an article (Lubanska 2009a).

M.L.: So, say, when somebody gets sick, that could have been caused by a Christian *dzhins* or a Muslim *dzhins*, is that right?

A.: Yes. (Interview 4, Ribnovo 2005)

Fearful, awed and helpless in the face of *jinn* and *samovilas,* people consult healers of the other religion. My respondents take it for granted that an expert in Christian *samovilas*/*jinn* knows nothing about Muslim *jinn* and vice versa, similar to a doctor trained in a narrow range of conditions:

M.L.: Do Muslims ever seek healing from priests?

F.: When somebody "*urodisa*" [i.e. when one gets affected by harmful magic – this is a local dialect equivalent to *urochasa* in standard Bulgarian – M.L.], when all their medicines turn out to be useless, they will go to a priest. And the priest will write for him.

M.L.: What does the priest write?

F.: The priest consults some kind of books... and writes something. They visit priests as well. If somebody gets something, urodisal. They consult all kinds of people, and if the medicine doesn't work, they have no other choice but to visit the priest.

M.L.: So that's why [they] visit [priests]?

F.: Well, sometimes they catch something. When a man urodisa because of such a *dzhins*, he will go.

M.L.: What kind of *dzhins*?

F.: There are Christian *dzhins*, and Muslim *dzhins*. In the same way, your Bulgarians visit *hodzhas*. (W, M, Interview 12, Ribnovo 2005)

Spurred by a fear of the other religion's demons, Muslims and Christians have formed a system of co-operation. Ordinary Christians or Muslims seem to treat the means of both religions as alternative paths to healing, even if seeking healing from the other religion is always regarded as a measure of last resort. When a health problem cannot be resolved using the means of one's own religion, they conclude that it has been caused by the other religion's demons:

Man H.: When in need, they call for a *hodzha*. When somebody gets sick, or maybe his child or wife. They come looking for *hodzha*, and we... look for priests. That's how I see it.

Woman A.: They search high and low, looking for *hodzhas*, looking for priests.

Woman F.: We have to delude ourselves somehow... (Muslims, Interview 29, Satovcha 2005)

According to my respondents, it takes specialized know-how to understand the ways of such creatures or to ward off their deleterious influence. Unlike the healers themselves (*hodzhas* and priests) they attribute effective healing to technical competence rarther than personal trust in God. Such competence involves mastery of specific language skills (Orthodox church terminology for priests, the original Arabic of the Qur'an for *hodzhas*), and the knowledge of suitable formulas (verses from the Bible or the Qur'an), or, in the case of female healers, of specific charms (*bayaniya* or healing incantations) and other magical procedures which are incomprehensible to the uninitiated. Also very popular are various talismans (mostly containing Christian or Muslim prayers) with apotropaic and healing functions. Besides fear, a fascination with otherness in matters of religion seems to be another reason why some Muslims visit priests, and some Christians consult *hodzhas*. The other religion's sacred sphere may be fearsome but in critical moments it also seems more potent and effective than the more familiar variety.

Co-operation between Muslim and Christian healers, who are often representatives of religious elites, was noted by Frederik W. Hasluck as early as the 19th century: "Christians, and frequently even priests, when ill, invited *emirs* and dervishes to 'read [prayers – M.L.] over' them, while Turks frequented Christian priests for the same purpose. ... Christians, when they suspected the hostile working against them of black arts, possibly or probably put in motion by Moslems, resorted to Moslem incantations to avert or overcome them" (Hasluck 2005, p. 77–78). In my field research this was usually limited to visits to a healer of a different religion rather than adopting the other religion's prayer formulas or charms [*bayaniya*]. The single exception from this rule was an old woman from Garmen named Deshka, who learned a magical formula from a Pomak woman from Ognyanovo, almost ninety at the time, whom she had previously consulted on several occasions.

The formula Deshka learned from the Pomak woman should not be spoken out loud. It is used when casting led to rid a sufferer from "fright" [Bulgarian: *uplah*]. She does not know the meaning of the formula except for one word – *kesebet*[479] – meaning "all things have been ruptured":

> D.: Well, how should I know, it's Turkish. I say those words but I don't know exactly what they mean. Again, the meaning is that all evil things should go away.
>
> M.L.: And it's all in Turkish?
>
> D.: No, the one with the egg is not in Turkish. That one is in Bulgarian.
>
> M.L.: Is that all, those formulas for casting lead? Aren't there any more?

479 Presumably from the Turkish *kes*, to cut.

D.: Those are all: *Besmenli tebet eda habil. Habit anyo manyo kesebet*[480]. Those are the words (...).

M.L.: What does it mean?

D.: *Kesebet* means that all things have been ruptured. (W, Ch. Interview 36, Garmen 2006)

Ayshe, a popular female healer in Ribnovo, says that casting lead is also effective against the evil eye and *jinn*. She is open about the procedure in which lead is cast over a sufferer's body: the casting is repeated three times and takes place at dawn for three consecutive days. Once the lead has been cast it must be thrown in a river to make sure the ailment or "fright" (*uplah*) floats away:

A.: When you're casting lead you're chasing them [*jinn* – M.L.] away, they flee the casting. (W, M, Interview 4, Ribnovo 2005)

A.: The lead is cast here. This holds the water.

Sh.: First you melt [the lead] on the cooker.

A.: You hold it over the head. When I grab hold of a child I pour it over its head. Then over its heart and arms, and finally over its legs.

M.L.: And the fear will go away?

A.: The fear will go away. Three times. Three times, only in the morning, before the shepherds take the animals out [to pasture] ... On the fourth day you take the lead and pour it into the river so it can float away. (Women, M, Interview 4, Ribnovo 2005)

M.L.: How many times have you driven them away? Enchantments caused by *dzhins* how many times have you gone to dispel them?

M.: My dad caught on on a different occasion. I took him to a *baba* (old woman) in Ognyanovo to have lead cast [over him]. The lead helped. That was about 10 years ago. (W, Ch, Interview 48, Garmen 2006)

The condition called *urŭm* or *urama* (which is caused by *jinn* or *samovilas*) is very different than an ordinary *urok* or evil eye[481] caused by a normal person – the damage caused by an evil eye, though dangerous, is seldom comparable to that caused by demons:

480 The Turkish formula has been corrupted to the point of incomprehensibility, which obviously does not take away from its effectiveness. On the contrary, the charm seems more potent on account of its incomprehensibility.

481 The literature refers to this as a belief in "the evil eye" (for instance, cf. Dickie 2008), a term my respondents tend to use in the plural (evil eyes, Bulgarian *loshi ochi*). Notably, the term suggests that the fear is aimed at an impersonal force rather than a concrete person (cf. Dickie 2008, p. 12), as if the adverse outcome was caused by feelings of jealousy rather than any deliberate human activity.

K.: No, no! *Uroki* are not caused by *dzhins*.

M.L.: Are they caused by a human?

K.: As they say, ill time, evil eyes... (W, Ch, Interview 37, Garmen 2006)

D.: The eggs are a different *thing*. You use different words when breaking eggs. Eggs are used against urŭm.

Mariana Darska: Against *uroki*?

D.: No, not against *uroki*.

S.: It's called *urŭm*.

M.D.: What does it mean?

S.: Well, it means a person *urŭdisa*. That's what we say when *dzhin* does something.

D.: Say, you step on something and... (Women, Ch, Interview 36, Garmen 2006)

Urŭm usually involves a serious medical condition (mostly stroke or paralysis) and results directly from stepping onto a place occupied by *jinn* or *samovilas*, leading to a range of outcomes, from temporary indisposition to terminal illness:

M.: Well, those are samovilas, a banichka is enough to send them flying and the sufferer is freed. I felt weak for three or four days.

M.L.: Why?

M.: Because of *samovilas*.

M.L.: What happened to you?

M.: Well, I had a fall. I went to the toilet, I was about to squat down to pee, and it felt like somebody shoved me. I fell and I hit my lower back really hard, I fell on the floor. My head hurt terribly. I wanted to go to the kitchen and make some food but I couldn't. (W, Ch, Interview 48, Garmen 2006)

Such incidents are unavoidable if fated to happen, but they can sometimes be remedied:

M.: God made *samovilas* and he made medicine [against them – M.L.]. That's why they say that with any luck you'll come back to life and find a medicine. If not, you pass away. (W, Ch, Interview 34, Garmen 2006)

Although neither the Muslims nor the Christians in the area under discussion are prepared to regard the two religions as equivalent paths to salvation, they believe that

each has a real connection with supernatural spiritual beings capable of impacting the human world.

Jinn are seen as creatures created by Allah before people. *Jinn* used to be much taller than men (up to 8 meters in body height) and, like people, they were created to serve God. According to the *hodzha* quoted below, traces of their habitation can still be found on earth, such as the pyramids in Egypt:

> *Hodzha* 1: Before people settled the Earth, it was inhabited by three kinds of *dzhins* who would reach a high point and were then destroyed. Those pyramids in Egypt that people talk about, as well as all of Damascus, were built on [the location of] a certain large city which used to be inhabited by beings seven or eight meters tall. (Interview 6, Ribnovo 2005)

Like people, *jinn* are sexual beings capable of feeling thirst and hunger. *Jinn* reproduce, they have free will and, despite living to a great age, they are mortal creatures. Some *jinn* live in accordance with the Qur'an (72: 1), some follow other religions, and some have become servants of Iblis. It is not clear whether non-believing *jinn* are the same thing as devils or perhaps a distinct type of spiritual beings:

> *Hodzha* 1: I mean, we are talking about satans, satans is what we are talking about. A *dzhin* is a Satan, one of the non-believing ones who mean harm to people.
>
> M.L.: Does that mean that *dzhins* are satans?
>
> H.1: Yes, they are *dzhins* infidels. (Interview 10, Ribnovo 2005)
>
> Woman S: *Dzhins* are of the masculine sex.
>
> Man H.: Do *dzhins* attack Christians as well as Muslims?
>
> Woman M.: They walk among people, you can't see them. They're invisible.
>
> M.L.: Are they everywhere?
>
> M.: They're everywhere. If you happen to step on one, they take cruel revenge.
>
> M.L.: Why do they take revenge? It's not like you stepped on them on purpose, is it?
>
> M.: Still, you did step on them.
>
> H.: Do you know anyone who can see them, recognize them?
>
> M.: Nobody can see them, they're invisible. They find a meal somewhere, they're having lunch. (Christians Interview 48, Garmen 2006)

Although the Qur'an explains that *jinn* have no knowledge of the supernatural world and cannot foretell the future (34: 14)[482], they are credited with such skills in the Rhodopes. The local population believes that *jinn* aid fortunetellers and healers with their powers. The most effective measures against the destructive power of *jinn* can be provided by *dzhindzhiyas,* known for their ability to help sufferers from demonic possession or other health problems caused by *jinn*.

The *hodzha* from Ribnovo told me about his healing methods in cases of possession by a *jinni*: the basic procedure involves reading the Qur'an in Arabic (using certain versus best suited for this purpose), but he also uses other methods, such as starving the *jinni*. The starving does not affect the sufferer: the act of saying the *basmalah*[483] before a meal is enough to render the food useless for the *jinni's* purposes (Interview 10, Ribnovo 2005).

The same *hodzha* explained to me the distinguishing features of *jinn*, such as the ability to cover enormous distances in a matter of seconds, invisibility or shape shifting, changing mostly into animal forms (snakes, mice, taught as is, cats or dogs) but also into humans:

> *Hodzha* 1: In their proper form they look like small animals with tails. (Interview 10, Ribnovo 2005)

Although *jinn* have supernatural powers, the *hodzha* believes that they can be discovered using one of their many weaknesses, such as their inability to travel along a curved line or take on a perfect semblance of the human shape (for instance, a *jinni*'s handshake may feel rubbery as its hand contains no bones).

The fact that *jinn* are solid in appearance only is another distinguishing feature, and it is possible (though certainly not recommended) to walk clean through a *jinni*. Despite their supernatural powers and intelligence, said the *hodzha*, *jinn* are reminiscent of 12-year-old children in terms of their mental processes. This is why another of his methods of driving out a *jinni* is to ask it a series of tricky questions designed to manipulate and confuse the adversary.

Although many Muslims were able to provide detailed explanations of *jinni* behaviour and characteristics, they almost never provided descriptions of their

482 This relates to prophet Sulayman's death, an event mentioned in the Qur'an: when the *jinni* saw Sulayman standing, supporting himself with his staff, they did not suspect that he was dead: "And when We decreed that he should die, naught indicated to them that he was dead but the Beast of the Earth devouring his staff; and when he fell down, the *jinni* saw clearly that, had they only known the Unseen, they would not have continued in the humbling chastisement" (34: 14).

483 A Muslim prayer formula, *bi-smi Allahi al-Rahmani al-Rahim*, "In the name of God, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful", which opens each Surah except for the ninth as well as any text written by a religious Muslim; Muslims should use the formula when starting new work (Danecki 1997, p. 48; Dziekan 1997, p. 20). This suggests that *dzhindzhiya hodzhas* also use it as an apotropaic formula.

appearance. Similarly, my Christian respondents never discussed the appearance of *samovilas*. At first I assumed I had failed to ask the right questions but on my next field trip I was informed that the beings are invisible, and therefore impossible to describe (Interviews 34, 48, 54, Garmen 2006–2009).

Nearly all respondents had stories involving first- or second-hand accounts of people suffering as a result of entering locations occupied by *jinn* or *samovilas*, mostly as a result of unintentionally stepping or urinating on a *jinni* table set for a meal (*trapeza*, *sofra*). There is a belief in the Rhodopes that *jinn* inhabit "unclean" places (such as bathrooms or toilets), but also rivers or springs (Boneva 1994, p. 37), caves, underground rooms and passages, cemeteries, ruins or rubbish heaps (Garnett 1909, p. 134; Troeva-Grigorova 2003, p. 190–191) as well as balks (boundaries at the edges of fields belonging to different people):

> Turkish Woman: Say, you're out on a field somewhere … Here's your field, here's mine. If you pee in the middle, you may get jinxed by *dzhins*. When that happens, you have to seek help from *hodzhas*. Every time you pee somewhere, you have to spit and say *bi-smi Allahi al-Rahmani al-Rahim*. And the *dzhins* will flee. (W, M, Interview 45, Dabnitsa 2006)

My respondents claimed that such supernatural beings became active after dark and at night, and liked to stay close to people having meals. For this reason it is not advisable to leave food unattended around dusk and finish it afterwards, at least not without first saying a prayer invoking the name of Allah. This is regarded as a protective measure to safeguard people from harm potentially caused by *jinn*. Other vulnerable activities include napping or bathing after dark (at time of the day which Muslims call *aksham*[484] (Turkish: *akşam*, Arabic: *al-maghrib*):

> M.L.: When do the *dzhins* come out?
>
> *Bula*: When the sun sets. As soon as the sun sets, as soon as it gets low in the sky they start coming out.
>
> M.L.: Why?
>
> *Bula*: Because those who are outside at the time … because Allah does not permit people to be loitering in the streets at that time. Those who go out at this time will encounter them. (Interview 13, Ribnovo 2005)

A female respondent narrated a story of her father who experienced *uram* because he recklessly removed his sash and placed it on a *samodiva* table before going to the toilet located in an outhouse:

484 The time between sunset and the moment the horizon becomes no longer visible; one of the five obligatory prayer times in Islam.

M.: He said, when he removed his sash, he left it on a table used by samodivas.

S.: *Dzhins*. (...)

M.L.: Are *dzhins* and *samodivas* one and the same thing?

S.: Yes. (...)

M.: There was a heap of stones behind the toilet, and he had his lower back wrapped in a very old sash because he was suffering from a back pain. He unwound his sash and went to the toilet, he came out, he wrapped the sash around his waist and walked upstairs back into the house. Suddenly he cried, "veeee, veeee, veeee" and he fell to his left side. His eyes were upturned, he looked terrible ... He was foaming at the mouth, his lips were twisted. Mother called from upstairs, "Todore, go and fetch a doctor to see him, he's not looking well". The doctor said he wouldn't recover, that he was done for, he was on his way out. Then they looked for the women, the old women in the village who break eggs. (W, Ch, Interview 34, Garmen 2006)

As this passage suggests, medical assistance was sought first, followed by a healer belonging to the same religious group, followed by a healer of a different religion (a *dzhindzhiya hodzha*). "When you're in need," my respondents said, "it doesn't matter who does the helping, a priest or *hodzha*," and "it's not clear where the help will come from".

The female healers tried to help sufferers using an egg-breaking ritual (Bulgarian: *troshene na yaytse*). The ritual involves swirling water in a vessel and uttering a special formula:

D.: "We ask you nine times to tell us what it is you've ruptured so we can offer an egg as *kurban*". Then, you bring an egg, and I break it and put it in a bowl of water, and I [swirl] the egg around like so, after I put it in the bowl and [I say]: "We ask you nine times to tell us what it is you've ruptured so we can offer an egg as *kurban*" – three times. I break the egg, and you have to make the sign of the cross [cross your arms] three times, and out it comes. After I break the egg I put some sugar and basil in the water, I dunk both in the water and say [the formula] again. (W, Ch, Interview 36, Garmen 2006)

The shape of the broken egg in sweetened basil water imitates the shape of the sufferer and identifies the location where the problem first occurred:

M.: I knock the egg, I knock it against [the side of the] bowl and the egg dissolves in the water, the way the man lay. The white spreads [to form a shape] like the body of the lying person, [and shows] where he urodisal, what happened to him. You call the egg *kurban*... for those *samovilas*. That's what happened to him.

M.L.: For *samovilas*?

M.: For the thing that afflicted him. We call that *samovilas*. (W, Ch, Interview 34, Garmen 2006)

D.: I tell them to put an egg under the pillow and keep it there overnight. When they come, you break it. That's how...

M.L.: That's how you can tell where it happened?

D.: Right.

M.L.: But it's not like anyone can tell?

D.: Even I can't tell exactly any more, but the problem goes away. When they come the problem goes away. I can tell with some people, but with others, not quite. (W, Ch, Interview 36, Garmen 2006)

The egg is referred to as a *kurban* for the *samovilas* or *jinn* that have been inadvertently crossed, and is believed to be an effective health restorative. However, the *kurban* offered to *jinn* or *samovilas* must also contain a sweet substance (honey of sugar):

S.: My godson, you wouldn't believe how much help he was! That's right, with his egg-breaking. He was quite an expert. He would say, "You've been struck by a *dzhin*", he called that uram. He would tell you exactly where it happened.

M.L.: And you had to go and do something there?

S.: When he broke and added the egg, you throw away the egg, add sugar, and throw that away, too.

M.L.: Something sweet?

S.: Something sweet, honey or sugar. This brings healing to a lot of people.

M.L.: Why sweet things? Do they eat something sweet and calm down?

S.: That's what people say, sweet things are important to them. (W, Ch, Interview 35, Garmen 2006)

M.: I had some honey, and I sprinkled that place where I'd had a fall. Two days later I recovered my strength. (W, Ch, Interview 48, Garmen 2006)

I heard a similar account from a Muslim woman from Dabnitsa:

Turkish Woman: Yes. Absolutely. Mother told me, if you know where you'd peed, place a sugar cube there, and say, "Come *dzhines*, take this sweet and give me the bitter". I got jinxed like that once.

M.L.: You did?

T.W.: That's right, I went ... oh, that was really terrible! Later I came back and left them a *sofrichka* [meal], that's what you call it, I threw some sugar on the ground and came back by a different route.

M.L.: Did it help?

T.W.: It did. (W, M, Interview 45, Dabnitsa 2006)

If the ailment disappears after *kurban* is left for *jinn*/*samovilas*, egg-breaking is no longer needed:

M.: Well, when I had a fall in the toilet [I hit myself] here, right here. Something just whacked me good. I came here, I spent a day in bed and Kalinka took me to the garden for three days. Then I came back. When I was still at their place it occurred to me, why not sprinkle the place with some honey? So, when I came back, I sprinkled some honey where I had my fall.

M.L.: Why did you do that?

M.: It helped me. (W, Ch, Interview 34, Garmen 2006)

Where the misfortune (mental or physical illness) is caused by *jinn* of the other religion, effective aid can only be provided by members of that religion. The family of the man who unwittingly put his sash on a *samovila* table consulted a *dzhindzhiya*, who saw the man and recommended a series of activities to placate the angry *jinn*. The hodzha recommended that three matches should first be lit where the man fell, then he told the family to sew together three sheets of paper containing Muslim prayers (*muska/amalichka/amaliyka*) to form a kind of paper sash, to be put on over the sufferer's head and worn for three days for apotropaic purposes. After this period, the belt should be discarded in moving water[485]:

M.: And then, those pieces were sewn together at each end, and he wore it over his shoulder for three days. After three days [the hodzha] said, "take that and throw it into the river so that water can carry it away".

M.L.: And those were *muskas*?

S.: Yes, it's called a *muska*. An *amalichka* or a *muska*.

M.: *Amale*.

M.L.: What does it actually mean, *amale*?

485 According to M. Georgiev, inhabitants of the Rhodopes, "when they cannot locate a magical object [which causes the illness – M.L.] they consult a *hodzha*, who gives the sufferer three *muskas*: one is sewn to his clothes as an amulet, one is burned and used as incense to fumigate him, and one is soaked in a glass of water which the sufferer then drinks" (Georgiyev 1994, p. 64, translated from Bulgarian).

M.: Well, it's that folded piece of paper you carry with you. And you sew a sash...

S.: Danko told her, "Mother, go to the bridge and throw this into the water, water will carry it away". And she did, she threw it away. When we did that, dad recovered. (W, Ch, Interview 34, Garmen 2006)

According to my respondent, the intervention produced a recovery. The *amalichkas* successfully drained off the "bad energy" which had entered his body via the sash jinxed by *samodivas/jinn*. The object must be worn for three days, perhaps an echo of the popular belief that *samodivas* eat meals in groups of three, so each *samodiva* must be warded off in turn for recovery to happen.

Practically all of my Christian respondents had first- or second-hand experience of *hodzhas* or female Muslim healers being consulted in the family:

E.: Her sister came to her in the morning to wake her up and saw her just staring at the ceiling, her eyes open wide, she wasn't even blinking. No reaction. For twenty days. They transferred her from Gotse Delchev to Blagoevgrad. She received medical attention and so on, but when you're in need you take people's advice and go where they tell you. She heard about a *hodzha* and went to him, and he told her, "This is how it happened, in these pillows". She said, these are my mother-in-law's pillows. That means somebody hurt her mother-in-law with magic. (W, Atheist from Christian background, Interview 37, Garmen 2006)

Sometimes a female healer will recommend a visit to a priest or a *hodzha* when unable to provide effective aid. Some of my respondents make their decision based on a form of fortune-telling involving the use of matches:

Orthodox Priest: When they go to a *hodzha*, that *hodzha* will sometimes tell them, "It will take a priest to solve this problem".

M.L.: In what cases does that happen?

P.: I don't know. I simply don't know *hodzhas* and I don't know how reach a decision like that. They have needles, some kind of needles. They place needles to indicate who should be consulted, a *hodzha* or a priest. But I have no idea how they do that. (Interview 50, Garmen 2006)

When asked why they consult *hodzhas* in emergencies, my Christian respondents mostly explained that *hodzha*s had a special book (the Qur'an) containing healing formulas. The fact that the formulas are incomprehensible to the respondents is immaterial, and they have no desire to discover the meaning of the words. Most Christian "patients" are only interested in the medical outcome, and they have no wish to master such formulas to use them in their own group. This is why their stories of such visits contain vague references to "a kind of book" or to the writing of "some kind of squiggly lines". At the same time, the very mysteriousness of the methods used by the members of the other religion seems to produce a fascinated belief in their effectiveness:

M.L.: Why do you think the *hodzha* knows more about *samovilas*?

M.: He has the Qur'an and reads it. He has a kind of book, a very thick one, and reads out of it. You tell him what your problem is, and he leafs through the book and reads out of those leaves. There's no telling what he might be saying. We don't know. The main thing is, that man helped us. (W, Ch, Interview 34, Garmen 2006)

M.L.: Who gets consulted in emergencies? I've heard something about *amalichkas*...?

D.: People visit the "odzha" [*hodzha*]. I used to go to an odzha, too. My dad got very ill. The odzha is from [the village of] Oreshe but he lives in town. In the past he worked as a shepherd for my grandfather. I went to him and asked him to come and see my dad, who was in really bad shape. Would he live or die? He wrote something and says, if the number is even he will live. If the number is odd, he will die. I don't even know what he wrote there.

M.L.: Was that letters?

D.: Some kind of squiggly lines, there's no telling. Then he [the respondent's father] stirred to life for the first time. "He's going to live," he said. "But I don't know how long." And we came back. Dad is very ill but he got better. He lived for three more years. (W, Ch, Interview 41, Garmen 2006)

M.L.: You're not the first person telling me about a *hodzha* from Oreshe. Is that one person? Was he consulted by a lot of people?

D.: Oh yes, he was!

M.L.: What is his name?

D.: Well, it's Ali "odzha".

M.L.: Is he alive?

D.: I don't know if he is still alive but he had a *kitab* and read out of it.

M.L.: You mean, he wrote *amaliykas*?

D.: No, he didn't. (W, Ch, Interview 41, Garmen 2006)

Similarly, Christians consult female Muslim healers who use "all kinds of little sheets of paper" or "[talk] inaudibly in [their] language", and make familiar gestures such as "spreading honey" over the sheets of paper, reminiscent of the Christian practice of placating *samodivas* with sweets:

Woman K.: I can tell you what they do because I went to an old Muslim woman once. I actually went there to seek help for a specific problem. I needed help with pain and adverse magic and jinxes. She has this... She produced a shoebox filled with all kinds of little sheets of paper, and she began. So, say, first I tell her I was frightened, that I have this fear or anxiety. And she puts honey on a little piece of paper and starts talking inaudibly in her language. I don't know exactly

what she said. And she tells me, "You've drunk a *dzhin* who was sleeping in water" or "A shadow is coming your way and it treads on your body".

M.L.: What do you mean?!

Man H.: She doesn't explain.

W.K.: She doesn't explain what it might mean.

Woman E.: She says, a shadow. But she won't tell you what kind of shadow.

K.: It's called a *morava* in Bulgarian. She told me, "A *morava* is treading on your body" and you're getting bruised, you get those little spots on your body. Then they say "A *morava* is treading on your body". That's what I heard from the grandmother. You never bumped into anything and yet you get a bruise. Then they say, "A *morava* has tread on your body". That woman said, "A shadow is treading on your body, a shadow is coming into your room" ... No, it's not *dzhin*, but the old woman gives you a little piece of paper and says, "Hide this piece of paper in this place or that, and pour some *rakiya* into a glass. Just sit there and keep pouring more as it disappears..."

M.L.: Somebody drinks it?

K.: Yes.

M.L.: A *dzhin*?

W.K.: No, a ghost. (W.K & M.H, Christians; W.E., Atheist, Interview 37, Garmen 2006)

Woman K.: Well, she makes *muskas*. She says, "It's here"... But she doesn't write on it, unlike *hodzha*s, as far as I know. All she does is say something to herself, she tears out a small sheet of paper for them and says, "Here, carry this with you. Have no fear, everything's alright". But there's no writing on the paper, like a name or prayers from the Qur'an.

M.L.: Well, what do you do with that?

W.K.: Different things. That depends on its purpose. You can throw it into moving water or throw it away, or carry it with you for luck. (W, Ch, Interview 37, Garmen 2006)

In the same way, Muslims describe priests writing down "some kind of prayers" or "tossing a *kalimavka* over a baby" to stop it crying:

Turkish Woman: My daughter cried a lot so I went to a fortune-teller [gledachka] who told me to see a priest and have him toss a *kilimyavka* [a kamelaukion, a tall brimless hat worn by priests – M.L.] three times to help with the crying.

M.L.: Did it help?

T.W.: Yeah.

Mariana Darska: Where does he [a priest] toss the *kilimyavka* over a baby?

T.W.: Yeah.

M.: Was she lying down when he did that?

T.W.: Yes.

M.L: Does he say any prayers?

T.W.: He does. (W, M, Interview 45, Dabnitsa 2006)

Within certain limits, priests and *hodzha*s see nothing wrong in healing members of a different religion with the tools of their own religion, even less orthodox ones such as tossing kamelaukion hats over babies. The limits mainly relate to the form and scope of the prayers said over members of a different religion and the protective (apotropaic) items, which priests and *hodzhas* treat as quasi-sacramental objects. For instance, some *hodzhas* refrain from giving paper slips containing passages from the Arabic Qur'an to Christians for fear that they might commit sacrilege against the holy words of Allah:

M.L.: What do they have to do to receive help? Are there any conditions?

Hodzha 1: I mostly make those things, and I give them to those people for water-related things [rituals involving water]. Then I follow certain procedures here because you can't write [passages from] the Holy Qur'an, the authentic source, for people who don't believe in it ...

M.L.: You mean, they can't carry [passages from] the Qur'an with them? You wouldn't offer it to them?

H.1: No. They have to be cleansed for that. The Qur'an is not like any old novel that people can hold in their hands like that. You have to make preparations, perform suitable ablutions. If you're not a Muslim you need to go through the ritual, wash your hands and prepare to hold a holy book. That's why I'm reluctant to give it to them. I keep it for myself.

M.L.: You mean, you don't give them any material objects?

H.1: I don't give them anything. (Interview 9, Ribnovo 2005)

Fearing sacrilege and mindful of the need to preserve ritual purity around the written text of the Qur'an (whether in its entirety or with individual passages), the *hodzha* is reluctant to write passages from the Qur'an not just for Christians but also for Muslims. As it turns out, some Muslims worship the Qur'an in itself as a talisman[486] and not as the Word of God:

486 I use the term "talisman" rather than "amulet", because "talismans, unlike amulets, have written words or at least letters inscribed on them" (Kieckhefer 1990: p. 77).

Hodzha 1: I'm reluctant to write things down for Muslims to carry around. As a rule, I avoid giving people amulets or talismans. (Interview 9, Ribnovo 2005)

This stems partly from a fear of profanation (for instance, where a person carrying an *amaliyka* forgets to remove it before entering an unclean place like a toilet), and partly from what the *hodzha* sees as a heterodox tendency to regard such slips of paper as talismanic instead of seeking help from Allah alone.

For this reason, the *hodzha* prefers to mostly read the Qur'an over water to endow the water with healing properties, or to dunk in the water sheets of paper containing passages from the Qur'an. A chance to wash one's body in this kind of "blessed" water appears to meet a very real sensory need in the sufferers without losing control over the proceedings as the *hodzha* can supervise the sufferer's interactions with the holy object:

Hodzha 1: I only help them using writings in water.

M.L.: What does that involve?

H.1: You write things, and read them out over some water, or you dunk your writings in the water.

M.L.: Aren't those passages from the Qur'an?

H.1: That, too.

M.L.: So, what exactly do you do over that water?

H.1: You read passages from the Qur'an, sometimes you blow on the water, when you read certain [Surahs] such as 33, or 35, or 37, or 11, depending on what it says in the books. Or you write something, throw it in the water and then use the water to wash your face, your forearms, or you drink it. You can't use that water for washing your entire body. You can't do that with passages from the Qur'an.

M.L.: So, to put it in terms understandable to Christians, that water becomes holy?

H.1: Yes, precisely. This water, as a general rule there are many recommendations from Allah, mostly passages relating to disease. A lot of the time they're effective.

M.L.: Is it okay to use such methods to help Christians?

H.1: It's not about Christians as such, it's more general. For the most part you help believers, people who believe in God. With those who don't believe in God, it's rare, practically unheard of. When you finish the procedure you say, you say the words of the Highest. A person who believes in the Highest may recover. But if he has no faith, things get terrifying. This goes on in an unchanged form. (Interview 9, Ribnovo 2005)

Orthodox Christian priests make small modifications to the wording of prayers said over members of a different religion to replace the phrase "God's servant" with the phrase "God's creature". They may also hold a service to the mother of God or recite Psalm 90 for a non-Christian:

> Archimandrite Grigoriy: I mean, with a Christian you can perform a blessing, a *maslosvet* [holy unction – M.L.] for the seriously ill, to anoint them. You can also hold a service to the Mother of God and mention them in the service, and so on.
>
> M.L.: Which book do you use for the service?
>
> A.G.: The *Trebnik*, but there are also services in the *Chasoslov*[487]. Or in the *Hermeneia*[488] for the month of August. In practical terms this is the canon of the Holy Mother of God, a prayer canon, *paraklis*. There is a Greek word, *paraklis*, meaning pleading, imploration, that's where it comes from. And that's something we can do. There are also more general prayers for healing, except we change the wording, for instance where it says "your servant", meaning the servant of Christ, which we replace with "God's creature", because they are not servants of God. You become a servant of God through baptism. They do not practice baptism, so [a Muslim] is God's creature but you couldn't describe one as "God's servant". (Interview 27, Satovcha 2005)

The Metropolitan of Nevrokop recited to me the following prayer spoken for unbaptised people:

> Metropolitan Natanail: God. Christ, Son of God, who came to save the world, bless this your creature, hear our prayer. That's it. (Interview 62, Hadzhidimovo 2009)

In other words, the ministrations of a priest cannot be as effective for Muslims as they are for Christians. Accoring to the bishop, unbaptised people are God's creatures but they are not God's servants whose names are entered in the book of life. Certain prayers, such as exorcisms by St. Basil, are only available to Christians, and cannot be used for members of a different religion without prior conversion to Christianity. However, such cases are sporadic and do not seem to be part of a deliberate proselytizing policy on the part of the local clergy, especially since the prayers are explicitly motivated by purposes of healing rather than conversion:

> M.L.: Do they ever convert to Christianity?
>
> Archimandrite Grigoriy: Unfortunately, that's very rare. In my time in the monastery [of St. George in Hadzhidimovo – M.L.] we've only had two such cases.
>
> M.L.: Did they convert after experiencing healing, or was that unrelated?

487 Greek: *horologion*, liturgical book with the fixed portions of the daily cycle of prayers.
488 An icon painting manual.

A.G.: There was a girl who was in very bad shape, you could say she was possessed. And we made it clear that the prayers of Basil, and everything, can't be used for Muslims. And she said, "We'll have the child baptised so he can do that". And she recovered. Her mother later came to tell us that [the daughter] have got married and started a new family. (Interview 27, Satovcha 2005)

Some priests come up with alternative solutions in such cases: where it is not possible to say certain prayers over a Muslim they encourage the sufferer to leave a gift or say a private prayer. One of my female Christian respondents witnessed a situation like that:

Y.: There was a sick child, and its mother wanted a priest to sing prayers over it if he could. But if he did that the child would lose its religion. I personally went to ask the priest, I said there was this sick child, a little Muslim child, and could he please sing over it or simply say a prayer for its health. He said, no. He can't do it because the child is not baptised. "That's why," he said "it needs to be baptised first before this kind of prayer can be some over it. And if you baptise the child it has to give up its religion". So I went and explained everything to its mother, and I say, "This can't be done. The priest said it was enough for her to leave a gift, and he promised to pray to our God for its recovery, but he can't sing any prayers over the child". And she chose to leave some money and say a private prayer. I said, "Do you want our God or your Allah. It's your choice. But we can't do that," I said, "because the child is not baptised. If it gets baptised it will give up its religion". Then she asked me to go to Pamporovo and ask the people in the same church. She said, "Go and ask this other priest, too". And the priest said the same thing to us, including her, how he couldn't do that. (W, Ch, Interview 28, Satovcha 2005)

The bishop also said that Muslims carry slips of paper around their necks containing a Christian prayer precisely because priests cannot say such prayers over them in person:

M.L.: Are those prayers taken from Trebnik or...?

Metropolitan Natanail: Some are from Trebnik, that depends on the case. But you leave out the name. [You write] here this prayer for the sake of your creature.

M.L.: You mean, when writing a prayer for a Christian?

M.N.: No, no. Christians don't wear prayers. You pray over them. But they [Muslims] are not baptised so we can't read out prayers over them. That's why we write them instead.

M.L.: So it's just "your creature" [Bulgarian: tvoe sûzdanie]?

M.N.: Yes, because we are all God's creatures. And when you get baptised you become a person, and your name gets entered in the book of life. (Interview 62, Hadzhidimovo 2009)

Orthodox Priest: An Orthodox Christian priest writes [prayers] for Muslims. In general, we just read out prayers for Christians here in their presence, or if they're absent. They write them down and give them to me, and I say the prayer later. (Interview 50, Garmen 2006)

As it turns out, the practice involves more than simply stepping to offer help to members of a different religion. It may be a symptom of mimetic rivalry[489] which under the influence of "Adat Islam" additionally "boosts" the popularity and value of writing talismans containing texts of prayers, a practice already known in Bulgaria in the Middle Ages[490]. It seems like a new meaning is added to the practice: the slips of paper containing Christian prayers worn as an apotropaic measure are not only functionally equivalent to *amaliykas*[491], but also resemble them visually in that they are handwritten passages of sacred texts worn around one's neck. I never heard from my respondents about any other types of talismans being used in the area. The written Christian prayers are not only a response to the Christian interest in Muslim *amaliykas*, but also provide help to Muslims in a form they recognise as familiar. From their perspective, the priest's gesture could be interpreted as receiving a "Christian *amaliyka*" which they request and their own talismans fail or when so directed by the fortune-telling ritual involving needles:

> M.L.: Do you ever get Muslims coming to ask you to pray for them?
>
> Orthodox Priest: No, they don't.
>
> M.L.: Christians visit *hodzha*s more.
>
> P.: Christians visit us more, and sometimes they visit the *hodzha* as well.
>
> M.L.: But not the other way round, with Muslims visiting you?
>
> P.: They come and we write the prayers for them. They call that amaliykas. Then we fold this [piece of paper] into a triangle and they wear it around their neck... (Interview 50, Garmen 2006)

In a longer interview it turned out that Christians, too, wore written prayers. Presumably, when Christians receive prayers from their priests, such as Psalm 90,

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489 A desire to possess the kind of effective protection enjoyed by members of the different religion. In those areas were Christians receive equivalent items (such as pieces of paper containing Psalm 90), their mimetic rivalry decreases as they no longer desire *amaliykas* as an effective apotropaic measure.

490 As suggested by archeological finds of lead amulets containing prayers, suggesting that they were popular in many regions of the country in the Middle Ages. Their form and content are varied, containing texts from the 10th-14th centuries which, unlike those recorded in books, remained stable over than period (Popkonstantinov, Konstantinova 1995, p. 853).

491 This is the conclusion also reached in passing by M. Gruev and A. Kalionski (Gruev, Kalionski 2008, p. 43), although the problem is tangential to their book. It would seem necessary to examine the modern written charms from a historical perspective by comparing them with the medieval and later talismans and *amaliykas* (in terms of form rather than content). Such research should also tackle the problem of mutual cultural influence: for instance, did Islamic influence in religiously mixed areas affect and intensify the Christian practice of writing talismans?

written down on pieces of paper or embroidered on belts, the priests may expect that at least some of them will not visit a *hodzha* to receive an *amaliyka*. In other words, we are dealing with a superficial syncretism which is in fact an undeclared strategy to attract "Muslim clients" and boost the stature of Christianity[492] in Christian eyes. From the viewpoint of Christian clergy, the practice is adopted for the anti-syncretic purpose of discouraging Christians from seeking help among members of the other religion:

> Archimandrite Grigoriy: Generally, the Bible is effective. The parts we use are Psalm 90 from the Psalter, some people read that. It delivers one from all evils. There are also... Some people also carry Psalm 90 on strips. It's written down and embroidered on belts worn by Christians. (Interview 27, Satovcha 2005)

At the same time, the priests interpret this kind of help provided to non-Christians exclusively in terms of Christian values, glossing over the implicit element of cultural survival strategy in a multicultural environment. According to Archimandrite Grigoriy, prayers for non-Christians, and even enemies, is in fact recommended, demonstrating the right attitude. He draws an analogy with the parable of the Good Samaritan:

> Archimandrite Grigoriy: It's permitted, helping [non-Christians] is permitted, they are God's creatures [Bulgarian: sŭzdaniya Bozhi – M.L.] As a matter of principle, the Church cannot pray for suicides, but we don't discourage anyone from individual prayer for the souls of such people. All it takes is a willing heart and a Christian identity. Christ told us to pray for our enemies and do good not only unto our loved ones and friends, but also unto all the others. The Good Samaritan is an example. They had nothing to do with Judaism, they were pagans. They made sacrifices to mountain, a certain high mountain. And yet it was a Samaritan who stopped and offered help to a man in need. Yes, we mustn't forget Christ's commandment which says that all people are our neighbours and we cannot reject them, we cannot say "You're Muslims, this is nothing to do with you. We have nothing to do with you". This kind of behavior is characteristic of sectarians [cult members] or others who say "No, you're not one of us, we have nothing in common". Christians mustn't be like that. (Interview 27, Satovcha 2005)

Similarly, the Islamic religious elites consider it a moral duty to provide help to non-Muslims. Members of the Muslim elite read out to Christians and Muslims alike the last two suras of the Qur'an (113 and 114), which the angel Jibra'il gave to Muhammad when he fell victim to black magic.

Priests and *hodzhas* regard spiritual help to members of the other religion as their religious duty. They each regard themselves as God's agents and tools, and view their counterparts as magicians[493] in league with dark forces. "But the appreciation

492 Obviously taken to mean a local heterodox form of the religion.

493 At the same time, the distinction serves to marginalize the other and to discourage the faithful from seeking help from healers of a different religion (cf. Janowitz 2001, p. 3). This distinction lies at the root of the concept of magic as "The Greek term *mageia* comes from the term for a Persian

changes with the change of the standpoint, and no magic can be termed good or evil in itself" (Thomas, Znaniecki 1918, p. 220). Depending on the identity of the practitioner, the same practice may be regarded in relative terms as religious or magical activity[494]. Although at the level of declarations they condemn the use of magical practices as sinful, the practice does not always go hand in hand with the declarations. In everyday life, orthodox religious healing rituals (prayer) mingles with heterodox practices (using written prayers as talismans). Priests and *hodzhas* occasionally become "magicians" to boost their stature in the eyes of the faithful. In practices involving healing from demonic possession or jinxes and evil eyes, religion takes second place to the logic of magical thinking was certain actions predictably produce specific outcomes. Effective help in the problem at hand becomes more important than stickling for religious orthodoxy.

In the case of Christianity, helping non-Christians is treated as a duty towards one's neighbours in the religious sense; in the case of Islam, it becomes part of mutual obligations towards one's neighbours in the secular sense, a religious duty for which an individual must account in the next world during partial judgement held in the grave (see above). To Muslims, Christians are not only actual neighbours but also believers: People of the Book, *Ahl al-Kitab*.

From the viewpoint of the religious elites, the opposite situation (where believers seek help in the other religion) is more of a problem. In recent times the practice seems to be discouraged more strongly than in the past. My respondents say that even *hodzha*s used to come to Hadzhidimovo to seek healing, and they used to send people to priests when they were unable to help. Orthodox priests used to do the same:

> M.L.: Do people tell you which problems should be solved by *hodzha*, and which should be solved by a priest? Are there any differences, do people simply know where to seek help for a given kind of problem?
>
> G.: I mean, I've heard that members of the clergy tell you what to do. When I talked about it with my friends, they say they used to be situations where they went to visit a *hodzha*, and he would tell them, you were Muslims, but you must go to this particular monastery or to this particular church and priest.
>
> M.L.: The *hodzha* would...

priest (*magos*)" (Janowitz 2001, p. 5*)* and "throughout Mediterranean antiquity the words *mageia* and *magos*, »magic« and »magician«, were used to categorize the exotic and the dangerous. They were foreign words to a Greek speaker, used to describe foreign practices semiotically joined to the word barbarian" (Meltzer 1994, p. 2).

494 The priest treats *amaliykas* made by *hodzha*s as a form of magic, but regards his own writings as a religious activity, and vice versa. Obviously, this is probably a simplification as each religious group will contain representatives of religious elites with a different opinion on the matter.

G.: The *hodzha* would tell them to do that. But that was some time ago. Now I don't know, maybe the *hodzhas* have changed. (W, Ch, Interview 23, Satovcha 2005)

Currently, the religious elites tend to regard such practices as idolatry since they attribute the other religion's healing powers to magic and evil spirits rather than to an openness to God's grace. Like the local community in general, they do not deny that members of the other religion may have healing powers, but they consider such powers to be caused by demonic influence, potentially leading to perdition. In this logic, only their own religion "works with God"; members of the other religion are effective because they "work with the devil":

M.L.: Do Christians ever visit *hodzhas*?

Archimandrite Grigoriy: You could say there are such Christians, but to me they are not Christians. They're Christians in their baptism certificates only ...

M.L.: You mean, you don't refer them to *hodzhas*?

A.G.: We can't refer them.

M.L.: To *hodzhas*?

A.G.: We can't refer them to *hodzhas* because we know that *hodzhas* do magic. It's supposed to be about warding off jinxes, but if you're removing jinxes you can also cast them. So, we know that the Old Testament that God commanded all fortune-tellers who summon spirits to be stoned. Already in the Old Testament you see God's attitude to the people he ordered to be stoned to death. Which means we mustn't even think that people who visit them could benefit in any way. On the contrary. (Interview 27, Satovcha 2005)

The local *hodzha* offers a mirror image of that statement from the archimandrite:

M.L.: Does it happen the other way around? Can a Muslim come to a priest or a Christian?

Hodzha 5: We've talked about this, it doesn't work.

M.L.: The way I understood it, there are Muslim *dzhins* and Christian *dzhins*, and that's why people...

H.5: Yes. There are.

M.L.: And that's why Muslims sometimes visit the priest because they don't know how to deal with those Christian...

H.5: Only the Qur'an can help with a *dzhin*. And you've got to be very religious, to have enough strength to repulse, I mean, to use the strength of the Qur'an to repulse the energy of the *dzhins*... To chase it out of the body that it's afflicting. (Interview 26, Satovcha 2005)

In some cases priests or *hodzhas* discourage believers from visiting a healer belonging to a different religion. One of my female respondents followed this advice from a priest who came to her house and helped her with a *vodosvet*.

As healers and as figures of religious authority, priests and *hodzha*s are convinced that only prior and orthodox belief are effective in healing demonic influence. They attribute the healing to God's grace, of which they are agents, rather than talismans. They are not surprised to receive visits from members of another religion who feel lost, because they believe the other religion does not have the means to deal with the grave problem of demonic possession. They regard the opposite situation, where their co-religionists visit members of the other religion, as the sin: outsiders are believed to have no access to God, and their false religion can only be a tool of demonic powers.

Ordinary believers view these things differently, and consider the other religion's magical procedures is more effective than their own. However, this does not suggest religious syncretism, but rather fear and a hidden (perhaps unconscious) fascination with the sphere of the sacred in the other religion. Using the services of the other religion's exorcists or accepting their written exorcisms is believed effective precisely on account of its mysteriousness. This applies in particular to the words uttered or written down by such healers[495], which must be incomprehensible to be credited with a special potency. This is why "in many mixed villages, Muslims get amulets from priests modelled on the Christian design, and Orthodox Christians prefer to go to a *hodzha* claiming that his *muskas* are more effective " (Hristova 2001, p. 28, translated from Bulgarian).

Neither the sufferers themselves nor their co-religionists regard visits to Christian priests or *hodzha*s as acts of apostasy. They are open to mutual assistance in emergencies caused by *jinn* or *samovilas* threatening to cause damage to body and soul, but neither Muslims nor Christians are interested in gaining a better understanding of the religious and magical rites. They accept their power for pragmatic reasons, but they keep them at an arm's length in terms of personal interests or enquiries, a solution which safeguards each group from religious syncretism.

Consequently, this cultural practice must be regarded as a superficial form of syncretism which does not produce a synthesis of Islam and Christianity. This syncretism is a cultural strategy developed by both groups in order to preserve each group's unique identity while acknowledging the other group's impact in daily life.

495 "Magic everywhere looks for ... alien words" (Biegeleisen, cited in: Benedyktowicz 2000, p. 54, translated from Polish).

10 Conclusions

10.1 ''Shallow'' Syncretism

Based on my research I argue that the mutual influence of Islam and Christianity in the Western Rhodopes (with the exception of the *kurban* or blood sacrifice) does not involve 'deep' syncretism. 'Shallow' syncretism is the dominant form, making the emergence of a new form of Muslim-Christian or Christian-Muslim religion unlikely.

By examining personal, first-hand interpretations behind the apparently syncretic religious gestures, religious syncretism is revealed as an ambiguous phenomenon masking contradictory feelings about the other group and its religion. In practical terms, most of the apparently syncretic gestures are engaged in mimetically for a variety of motives. For instance, traditional festive foods may be offered to neighbours in the other religious group as a sign of friendship or fear of non-coreligionists, seen a potentially unpredictable group. Similarly, the research demonstrates that practices such as visiting the other religion's holy sites or healers (mostly treated by researchers as an evident symptom of religious syncretism and, in the case of the Pomaks, also as evidence of their crypto-Christianity) can only be described as superficially syncretic. Motivated by fear or a semi-conscious fascination with the alien sphere of the sacred, such syncretism has nothing to do with treating the other religion as an alternative way to salvation.

In the case of Bulgarian-speaking Muslims, 'shallow' religious syncretism is a cultural strategy calculated to maintain an anti-syncretic attitude by protecting religious boundaries from infiltration. The local Muslims regard Christianity with profound reserve, and their religious elites are openly looking to shake off the label of "crypto-Christians". Among other factors, this attitude stems from a fear of the assimilationist policies repeatedly experienced by the local Muslim population since 1912. The past experience of symbolic and physical violence (including compulsory baptism) is treated as a warning symbolizing an enduring threat to Muslim religious identity. As a result, Muslim religious elites seek to dissociate themselves not only from Christianity but also from their Bulgarian ethnic roots. Relatively knowledgeable about Christianity, they use this knowledge to discredit the religion and to deny its promises of salvation. For the elites, Christianity is a religion based on a misinterpretation of Jesus's original message, corrupted in the writings of the four evangelists and the apostle Paul: a religion of false revelations and empty rituals. These ideas are expressed differently by different sub-groups: the older (retirement-age) respondents representing the model of "Adat Islam" and the younger representatives of "Salafi Islam".

Proponents of "Adat Islam" rely on sacred narratives providing etiological interpretations of the errors of Christianity (for instance, the sign of the cross is presented as a misinterpretation of a gesture made by Jesus or the prophet 'Isa

before ascending to heaven). Christianity is seen as a religion based on breaking the promise, made by the souls in paradise, to live in accordance with the requirements of Islam. At the same time, "Adat Islam" remains open to the possibility that some Christians might be saved. This openness is formulated in narratives such as the story of the camels which move good deceased Christians to Muslim graves, and bad Muslims to Christian graves. This model of Islam is perceptibly influenced by the religious culture of the Ottoman Empire, expressed in beliefs which betray strong parallels with the lives of the prophets popular in the Ottoman Empire, a problem identified and studied by Florentina Badalanova Geller (2008a, 2008b) and Galina Lozanova (2008). We know that in the first quarter of the 14th century the lives of the prophets were compiled by al-Rabghuzi (a judge from Western Turkmenistan) to form a collection which became very popular in the Ottoman Empire. Al-Rabghuzi based his work on the famous collection by al-Tabari, *The History of the Prophets and Kings* and the lives of the prophets by al-Tha'labi. My research had also yielded some interesting parallels to the source material collected by Frederick William Hasluck (1929), potentially indicating continued influence of the Ottoman model of Islam in the Western Rhodopes which, though waning, is still noticeable.

It should be emphasized that proponents of "Adat Islam" are mostly older representatives of the religious elite. Proponents of Salafi Islam clearly predominates among the younger members of the religious elite. Those are primarily *hodzha*s aged 30-40, many of them neophytes, some of them trained abroad, often in Arabic countries. This elite has a negative attitude not only to Christianity but also to "Adat Islam", which it associates with alien Ottoman and local Christian additions corrupting the original purity of Sunni Islam. This part of the elite treats "Adat Islam" as syncretic and "adulterated" by alien ideas and influences; its criticism of "Adat Islam" is vehement and sweeping, often mistakenly classifying orthodox beliefs as being incompatible with Sunni Islam. Such overzealous censure stems from lack of experience; in many cases, members of the religious elite had found an interest in Islam only several years previously, they are only familiar with the Qur'an and the hadiths, and have a distinctly Wahhabi-influenced outlook. As a result, they are oblivious of the connections between some *adat* narratives and the works of popular Muslim writers such as al-Tabari or al-Tha'labi, and are highly sensitive to the presence of ritual elements in the religious life of the local Muslim communities which may be associated with Christianity, a problem they preach about in the mosques. On the one hand, such interventions are effective: many of my respondents mentioned how they used to engage in rituals performed on Christian holidays but no longer did because it was "not one of our holidays". On the other hand, many local Muslims continue to seek help from priests and Christians as well as *hodzhas*.

10.1.1 Syncretism Resulting from Fear and Fascination with the Alien *Numinosum*: Visiting the Holy Sites of the Other Religion

Muslims and Christians in the Rhodopes often believe that the only antidote to the harm caused by demons of another religion is available within that religion. Accordingly, they seek help from *dzhindzhiya hodzha*s or priests, but in doing so they never set out to learn more about the other religion. In such cases, the Muslims and the Christians are equally indifferent to the actual content of the prayer written down for them by a priest, or the amulet (*amaliyka*) received from a *hodzha*. Still, the practice involves a certain cathartic effect accompanied by a sense of fear and fascination with the alien sphere of the sacred. In this sense such experiences, though not motivated by an interest in the other religion, do not rule out the numinous experience.

However, we should not draw far-fetched conclusions from this fact. When discussing their motives for visiting a holy site belonging to a different religion, the respondents insist their belief in the religious and magical effectiveness of the local practices (such as sleeping in the church of St. George on May 5, offering a lamb in front of the eye can of St. George, washing one's face in water from the church's healing spring, lighting candles or leaving votive gifts in front of icons). When performed by Muslims, such rituals are not aimed at participating in Christian cult practices but simply reproducing certain gestures performed by Christians, believed to be effective in removing a medical condition. The Muslims are not unanimous about which of those gestures in a Christian holy place are permissible to Muslims, and which cross the boundary into idolatry; it seems that this is largely a matter of personal religious sensitivity.

Unquestionably, incubating in churches is seen as the most important practice, and the main reason pilgrims come to Hadzhidimovo. The other gestures are regarded as being of secondary importance and are performed "just in case" in a sort of uneasy compromise with their own religion. Those Muslims who light candles mostly do it in front of icons depicting saints mentioned in the Qur'an (in practical terms this means Jesus and Mary). All my respondents agreed that participating in Christian liturgy would be an act of transgression, and they leave the church before the liturgy begins.

Incubation as a healing practice in alien places of religious cult could be described as an instance of 'deep' syncretism only in those cases were the practice is liminal, which is not the case. This is clear from the fact that Muslims take pains to respect the boundaries of their distinct religious identity, which means the practice cannot be considered as syncretic. At the same time, the mere act of wearing an amulet containing a prayer of a different religion or the presence in one of its holy places are undoubtably cathartic experiences, and the belief in the resulting cleansing from physical and psychological ailments is connected with a numinous experience.

I believe that the presence of Muslims and Christians in the same holy place should not be interpreted unequivocally in terms of what Hayden refers to as "antagonistic

tolerance"[496] (2002, 2013a, Hayden, Walker 2013). This is only one possible scenario of contact between religions. However, I believe that Hayden's idea of viewing holy places as "indicators of political dominance, or challenges to it" (Hayden, Walker 2013, p. 413) is a very valuable insight which should inform future research in the area as it promises to provide social researchers with a better understanding of the attitudes of the religious elites administering a holy place with regard to members of another religion, and to see whether the attitudes of common believers are compatible with them (which may well not be the case). In the same way, differences of opinion are possible within the religious elite. For instance, most *hodzhas* or priests may refuse to provide healing services, but there are exceptions, a fact which is quickly noticed and used for propaganda purposes by their own religious group: people in Orthodox monasteries may boast that "even the *hodzha* has recently come here to seek healing" and vice versa. Orthodox clergy sometimes try to pressure Muslims into converting by refusing to perform healing practices on non-Christians. When this strategy fails, they offer compromise solutions (for instance, where a priest refuses to say prayers over a Muslim he may recommend leaving votive gift under an icon or wearing a prayer as a talisman).

It appears that some of the healing practices proposed by priests and *hodzhas* are analogues: Christian written prayers are similar to the Muslim *amaliykas*. Both are worn around the neck, and bring healing through direct contact with the sufferer. It remains an open question whether this similarity is a matter of coincidence or design (with both sides unwilling to lose their "custom" to the rival religious group), but rivalry undoubtedly triggers certain mimetic tendencies in both groups. On the one hand, the Muslim and Christian elites want to prevent their believers from seeking help from the other religion, on the other hand they derive satisfaction from being able to help a member of the other group as every success boosts the status of their religion and, in the case of Orthodox Christianity, the sanctity of the place in which miraculous healing is produced.

From the perspective of ordinary believers, seeking healing in the other religion has the double attraction of effectiveness and mystery. Because they are more incomprehensible than one's own traditions, alien practices are paradoxically closer to the awe-inspiring numinous experience which transcends conceptual understanding.

496 Hayden's thesis would seem far more warranted and applicable to my findings concerning religious syncretism in mixed Christian-Muslim communities if the model were based on "agonistic" rather than "antagonistic" tolerance, as originally coined by Hayden (see Chapter 5).

10.1.2 Syncretism as a Symptom of *Komshuluk*

The same gesture may be performed because it is considered as an effective healing practice or because it fosters better relations with one's neighbours of a different religion. A good case in point is a Muslim woman who lights a candle for the deceased daughter of her Christian friends, a traditional Christian practice she performs during the wake in their home to show sympathy and solidarity. Her gesture is not religious but rather motivated by the ethics of good relations. The everyday experience of living side by side seems to play an important part in understanding religious syncretism between coexisting religious groups. When the declarative level ("we live like brothers") differs from the actual feelings felt for members of the other religion ("we fear them"), the "syncretic behaviors" occurring in the two groups must be examined with a pinch of salt. It is reasonable to suppose that shallow syncretism may serve the purpose of maintaining good relations, similar to other gestures based on the reciprocity rule (such as sharing festive foods, practical assistance, attending weddings and funerals, bringing gifts to new mothers).

At the same time, by engaging in such gestures to ensure peaceful relations Muslims and Christians get a chance to observe the religious rituals of the other group. Not infrequently this involves a measure of cognitive dissonance, which both groups deal with by means of narratives, which in their different ways reaffirm belief in the truth of their own religion and discredit the religion of the neighbours.

To return to Robert Hayden's concept of antagonistic tolerance, I wish to add that Muslims and Christians in the Rhodopes regard each other in terms which are not so much antagonistic as ambivalent. On the one hand, they seem to imagine the idea of tolerance along the lines of Mill's model, on the other hand they mistrust each other and discuss the memory of past conflicts and mutual injury. Although their fears about the threats to future peaceful coexistence are mainly aimed at politicians, they find it plausible that in a different political situation there neighbours might be capable of threatening their religious autonomy and their very existence. Based on the relationship of reciprocity, the idea of *komshuluk* confirms that religious tolerance in the region is not so much a given as a task requiring continued commitment.

10.1.3 Syncretism as a Proselytizing Strategy

Currently there are no significant groups in the research area to outwardly embrace the practices and beliefs of the other group in order to proselytize for their own. I only met one respondent with this approach, referred to in the book as "the syncretistist of Vodino" in the interest of preserving his anonymity. The syncretistist made conscious use of shallow syncretism as a method of winning the hearts of Muslims as part of his personal missionary activity. His motivation for seeking to convert his Muslim neighbours was the belief that salvation was not possible outside of Christianity. His

efforts failed, but not before making his Muslim neighbours hopeful of his imminent conversion to Islam.

The syncretist's practice of studying the Bible and the Qur'an in parallel led to a selective form of religious belief: although he interpreted the Qur'an through the lens of the Bible (which he believes to be a superior source of revelation), he recognized as the most central to Christianity those elements which are not questioned by the Qur'an.

Although his case is unique and exceptional, it should not be dismissed as irrelevant, as the syncretist attracts considerable interest in the local community. He is perceived as a reliable source of advice and prayer support in difficult situations. In his own opinion, he acts as a kind of theological middleman for the (few) Muslim converts to Christianity in the area: he knows elements of the two religions which bring them closer together, making the experience of conversion easier.

10.2 "Deep" Syncretism

It seems warranted to say the 'deep' religious syncretism (in the sense of a synthesis of Orthodox Christianity and Islam) only occurs among Christians. This kind of syncretism finds expression in beliefs relating to the *kurban* as practised by Christians. Christians often describe the *kurban* as a necessary precondition for health in this world and salvation in the next. Blood sacrifice as practised by Balkan Slavs predates Islam and Christianity in this area, however its specific interpretations (expressed symbolically and etiologically) suggests deep parallels with the Muslim *kurban*, although Judaic influence cannot be ruled out in the rich body of beliefs related to the *kurban* (Badalanova 2008a, Lozanova 2008). Nonetheless, I suppose that the theologeme of Abraham's sacrifice, which plays an important part in Christian narratives and religious symbolism, was boosted by, or perhaps even introduced via, Ottoman religious culture, i.e. "Adat Islam", which is closer to the Judaic tradition than modern "Salafi Islam". Because of this influence, I describe the religion of my Christian respondents as "Adat Orthodox Christianity". To me, this influence explains why blood sacrifice and sharing a sacrificial meal is more important to Christians in the Western Rhodopes than the Eucharist, which makes present Christianity's foundational event (Christ's blood sacrifice) in a bloodless form. Additional support for this conjecture comes in the great popularity of so-called "vowed *kurbans*". When they explain the need to make such sacrifice, Christians explain that in order to be sure of a saint's continued assistance after saving a person from disaster or serious illness one must continue to make the *kurban* every year until the end of one's life to give "blood for blood". This kind of syncretism has profound implications for the Orthodox Christian religious experience, a problem which calls for further interdisciplinary research.

It should be added that Christian respondents have a limited knowledge of Islam. They tell no narratives about Islam as such, preferring to share observations about

the religious life of Bulgarian-speaking Muslims. Among themselves they refer to Bulgarian-speaking Muslim neighbours as "people turned Turk": people who left Christianity but have never become fully Muslim or Turkish. They list examples of their neighbours' supposed religious or cultural incompetence: they are not Turks because they cannot speak Turkish ("They don't have enough Turkish to buy a loaf of bread"), and are not recognized as fellow Turks in Turkey. In undermining the Islamic orthodoxy of the Bulgarian-speaking Muslims or describing them as crypto-Christians, such comments also shore up the respondents' belief in the validity of their own Christian worldview. The Bulgarian-speaking Muslims are perceived as a group secretly hankering after its Christian roots: apparently, they keep Christian items, such as Bibles or icons, hidden in their homes, and practice the same rituals. Christians perceive Muslim rituals in terms of equivalents or counterparts to Christianity; for instance, circumcision is seen as the Muslim equivalent of baptism. At the same time, they portray this ritual is the most characteristic distinguishing feature separating Muslims and Christians, a telling comment in the context of the low standards of religious knowledge among the Christians.

As they shape their respective religious lives, each group sees its own reflection in the eyes of the other. Hence, they often regard the identity-building function of baptism or circumcision as more important than its religious symbolism: the symbolic meaning of baptism or circumcision may be obscure as long as it is clear that the ritual makes one a Christian or a Muslim.

Paradoxically, it is the Orthodox Christians (who believe that their neighbours had been until recently crypto-Christians) who seem to be the most heavily influenced by Islam, even though this kind of influence is often denied in Bulgarian society, starting with school textbooks and ending with popular opinion. The period of Ottoman rule in Bulgaria is popularly believed to have been a "dark age" blamed for Bulgaria's arrested economic and cultural development (Szwat-Gyłybowa, Drzewiecka et al., 2011), but at the same time there is an insistence that this historical experience left no lasting mark on Bulgarian identity.

Consequently, Bulgaria finds itself in the paradoxical position where Ottoman influence is rejected as a constitutive element of Bulgarian identity not only by Christians, but also by Bulgarian-speaking Muslims, particularly by their religious elite. My research shows that in embracing "Salafi Islam", the young Muslim religious elite has discarded many beliefs and practices which they consider to be adulterations and "additions" introduced under Ottoman rule. As a result, Islam in the Western Rhodopes is losing its pluralistic nature and local colour (Lubanska 2014).

By dismissing and rejecting past Ottoman influence as incompatible with their own religious or national tradition, both religious groups become alienated (Lubanska 2014), losing a crucial quality of coexistence described by Michael Herzfeld as "cultural intimacy" (Herzfeld 2005). Despite the temporary setbacks and breakdowns of good relations between neighbours, this cultural intimacy help them navigate parallel meanings and values focused on tolerance and balancing between "embracing the

Other" and merely "enduring Him" (cf. Hayden, Walker 2013, p. 400). Much depends on the power relations between the groups and the current geopolitical situation (Hayden 2002, 2013, Hayden, Walker 2013). This is why it is my heartfelt wish for all my friends from the Rhodope Mountains that good relations with neighbours from the 44 houses around them will continue, and the camels will always diligently transport the bodies of the saved to the "correct" cemetery.

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Index

Al Abdulatif Abdulaziz Muhammad 157, 319
'Abd al-Muttalib 109
Abraham 3, 27, 54, 100-102, 108, 109, 253, 267, 306, 309, 310
Abu Ayyub 46
Abu Hanifa 155
Abu Harb 157, 158, 319
Adam 13, 27, 46, 52, 119, 125, 161, 173, 175-182, 184-190, 193, 198, 206, 268, 270, 311, 315, 317, 320
Ahmed Akbar 110, 111, 143, 164, 165, 309
Akyazili Baba 43, 44
Abu al-'Aliyah 186
Aleksiev Bozhidar 18, 19, 43, 44, 309
al-'Amili 195, 198, 201, 319
Ankersmit Frank 78, 309
Antichrist 206, 274, 277
Apter Andrew 34, 309
Armour Rollin 191, 309
Arnaudov Michail 53, 123, 124, 125, 309, 318
Asad Talal 166, 167, 309
Athanasius/Athanas St. 43, 123
Badalanova/Badalanova Geller Florentina 54, 100-102, 108, 109, 114-116, 171, 173-176, 179, 181, 183, 186-188, 302, 306, 309, 310, 315, 319
Baeva Vihra 26, 29, 310
Baird Robert 33, 36, 37, 310
Baleva Martina 79, 310, 311, 318
Balikci Asen 17, 310
Barnabas 201, 204, 319
Bashev Ahmed 5, 14, 15, 94, 110
Benedyktowicz Zbigniew 239, 300, 310
Benovska-Sabkova Milena 182, 310
Beskow Petar 204, 310
Bielawski Józef 171, 199, 310
Bielenin-Lenczowska Karolina 18, 135, 310
Blagoev Goran 99-101, 108, 109, 258, 310
Blunt Fanny Janet 170, 172, 310
Bobchev Stefan 53
Bokszański Zbigniew 216, 310
Boneva Tania 17, 53, 285, 310
Boshnak Murat 94, 95
Bougarel Xavier 59
Bourdieu Pierre 56, 57, 310
Bowman Glenn 135, 138, 141, 142, 310, 311
Boyer Pascal 33
Braudel Fernand 113
Brewer Marilynn 209, 311
Bringa Tone 15, 60, 311
Brown Rupert 209, 311
Brunnbauer Ulf 16, 17, 79-81, 217, 310, 311, 314, 318, 319
Bucaille Maurice 157, 158, 201, 202, 319
Buchowski Michał 251, 311
Budge Wallis 178, 182, 319
al-Bukhari 55, 178, 320
Buruma Ian 155, 161, 162, 311
Calov Abraham 32
Charalambos St. 45
Chipman Leigh 179, 190, 311
Cichowicz Stanisław 175, 311
Cyril of Jerusalem St. 249
Clifford James 6, 7, 311
Czarnowski Stefan 153, 311
Danecki Janusz 100, 111, 142, 155, 178, 284, 311, 317
Dechov Vasil 53
Delchev Georgi Nikolov 5
Dickie Matthew 281, 311
Dimitar St. 98, 103, 128, 224, 242
Dimitrov Strashimir 50, 51, 311
Dogan Ahmed 4, 93
Douglas Mary 117, 118, 160, 171, 209, 311
Drljača Dušan 20, 311
Droogers André 35, 37-40, 312
Drzewiecka Ewelina 307, 317
Dyulgerov Petar 25, 26, 311
Dziekan Marek 42, 100, 284, 312
Elijah 42, 44, 45 (see also Ilyas)
Elijah St. 44, 107, 207
El-Zein Abdul 110, 114, 143
Engelking Anna 96
Enoch 42, 45 (see also Idris)
Eve 13, 27, 32, 46, 52, 119, 175, 178, 182, 184-186, 188, 250 (see also Hawwa)
Fauconnier Gilles 36, 37, 312
Ferme Mariane 145, 312
Filipović Milenko 51
Gabriel archangel 8, 63, 190, 198, 268 (see also Jibra'il)
Gadamer Hans Georg 6, 153, 312

Garnett Lucy 278, 285, 312
Gałązka Wojciech 25, 312
Geertz Clifford 110, 113, 211, 312
Genchev Nikolai 22, 312
Georgieva Albena 26, 29, 30, 122, 312, 315
Georgieva Tsvetana 17, 18, 51-55, 59, 60
Georgieva-Okoń Yordanka 99, 102, 312
Georgiev Mincho 288
Ghodsee Kristen 11, 312
Ginzberg Louis 180, 186, 319
Girard René 73, 312
Glykerios St. 246, 247
Goffman Erving 219, 312, 318
George St. 27, 42-46, 98, 101, 104, 105, 109, 128, 129, 131-133, 135, 137-140, 147, 148, 207, 224, 242, 244-247, 294, 303
Gradeva Rositsa 51, 313
Grębecka Zuzanna 251, 313
Grebenarova 310, 311, 312, 316
Gregory I pope 207-208
Gruev Michail 17, 23-25, 296, 313
Głuszek Michał 106, 312
Hagar/Hajar 52, 53, 100, 267
Haji Bektash VIII, 41, 44, 45
Hasluck Frederick W. 40-49, 52, 113, 120, 132, 134, 138, 140, 141, 225, 226, 280, 302, 313
Hastrup Kirsten 6, 313
Hayden Robert 37, 38, 47, 59, 60, 138, 140-142, 303-305, 308, 313
Hawwa 13, 119, 125, 161, 173, 175-179, 181-185, 187-190, 206, 268 (see also Eve)
Heppel Muriel 49, 113, 114, 309, 313, 315
Herskovits Melville 34, 309, 313
Herzfeld Michael 5, 57, 61, 307, 313
Hirsch Marianne 55, 313
Hristova Boriana 300, 313
Hristov Petar 99, 313
Huntington Samuel 61
al-Husayn ibn ʻAli VII, 257, 258
Huseyn Hodzha 157
Iblis 177, 181, 182, 283 (see also Satan)
Ibn Abdulhamid Abdullah 157
Ibn Battuta 44
Ibn Hanbal Ahmad 111, 155
Ibn Khaldun 110
Ibn Ladin Usama 164
Ibn Taymiyyah 111
Ibrahim 4, 54, 67, 100, 109, 115, 116, 160, 267
Idris 42 (see also Enoch)
Ilyas 42, 45, 46, 128, 138 (see also Elijah)
ʻIsa 8, 27, 42, 136, 139, 158, 170, 195, 197-206, 266, 272, 301 (see also Jesus)
Isaac 52, 100, 116
Isaya/Isaiah 275, 276
Ishmael 8, 52, 53, 101 (see also Ismaʻil)
Ismaʻil 52, 67, 101, 116, 267
Ivanova Evgenia 17, 22- 25, 47, 51, 60, 309, 313
ʻIzra'il 116
Janowitz Naomi 297, 298, 313
Jensen Jeppe 32-36, 40, 309, 310, 312-318
Jesus VII, 8, 16, 27, 46, 98, 100, 106, 139, 171, 175, 190, 191, 194, 197, 199, 200, 203-206, 208, 244, 248, 249, 252, 262, 265, 266, 270, 272- 274, 276, 301, 303 see also (ʻIsa)
Jibra'il angel 8, 63, 197, 198, 204, 268, 297 (see also Gabriel)
Jireček Konstantin 43
Job 46
John St. 47, 48, 199, 204, 206, 208, 264, 265, 269, 272, 273, 274, 277
Judas 203, 204, 270
Kalionski Alexei 23-25, 296, 313
Kamstra Jacques 35, 36
Kaniowska Katarzyna 83, 84, 313
Kanitz Felix 18, 43, 224
Karaja Ahmed 46
Karavelov Lyuben 18, 216, 224, 313
Kavra Damitar 79
Khidr 42, 44-46, 128, 135, 138
Khoja Ahmed 45
Kieckhefer Richard 292, 313
al-Kisa'i Muhammad I. A. A. 177, 313
Kliment Ohridski St. 25
Koleva Tatiana 130, 313
Kraemer Hendrik 37, 313
Kröner Alfred 158
Kurczewska Joanna 5
Lamoreaux John 52, 53, 314
Leopold Anita 32-36, 40, 309, 310, 312-318
Lévi-Strauss Claude 35
Lori Bernard 239, 314
Lozanova Galina 19, 20, 149, 171, 176, 179-183, 185, 188-190, 205, 302, 306, 314, 318
Lubaś Marcin 17, 56, 170, 314
Lubanska/Lubańska Magdalena 51, 52, 54, 64, 113, 116, 117, 133, 151, 153, 162,195, 219, 278, 307, 314
Maass Peter 60, 61, 92, 319
Malcolm Noel 49-51, 223, 224, 315
Mamas St. 46

Mancheva Mila 17, 315
Margalit Avishai 155, 161, 162, 311
Marinov Dimitar 12, 29, 30, 101, 102, 105, 106, 128, 315
Martin Luther H. 33, 35, 206, 315
Mary 98, 117, 136, 191, 197, 198, 199, 200, 203, 205, 206, 242, 266, 272, 274, 303 (see also Maryam)
Maryam 136, 139, 191, 198, 242 (see also Mary)
Mauss Marcel 66, 140, 315
Meltzer Edmund 298, 315
Memişoğlu Hüsein 19
Meyer Marvin 38, 315
Milcheva Magdalena 128, 130, 315
Mill John Stuart 141, 305
Miltenova Anissava 100, 101, 108, 315
Minczew/Minczev Georgi 96, 178, 309, 315, 316
Mitseva Evgenia 187, 188
Mohamed Aydin 5, 15, 147, 163
Moses 42, 44, 45, 49, 266, 270, 275 (see also Musa)
Muhammad IX, XI, 16, 17, 19, 55, 62-64, 72, 109, 111, 115, 117, 118, 143, 144, 150, 152, 154-159, 168, 170, 172, 173, 180, 181, 190, 191, 196-200, 206, 208, 209, 211, 244, 253, 260, 262, 297
Munkar 64
Musa 42, 76, 158 (see also Moses)
Nakir 64
Nasr Seyyed H. 190, 205, 315
Naum St. 44, 46
al-Nawawi Yahya Ibn Sharaf 158, 309
Nedelya St. 14, 71, 79, 98, 104, 142, 245
Neuburger Mary 10, 12, 16, 17, 18, 22, 23, 25, 225, 315
Nicholas St. 44-46, 135, 138, 224
Noah 175 (see also Nuh)
Nora Pierre 80
Norris Hary 17, 49, 84, 94, 113, 114, 156, 157, 309, 313, 315
Norton John 21, 44, 315
Nuh VII, 175, 202, 257, 258, 313, 315
Obrębski Józef 96, 128, 315
Paraskeva St. 98
Paul apostle 6, 158, 175, 176, 181, 191, 199-202, 301
Pecaric Sacha 99, 315
Petrov Petar 225
Popkonstantinov Hristo 53, 81, 224, 296, 316, 320
Piotrowski Antoni 79
Popov Rachko 41, 53, 67, 125, 127, 310-312, 316
Posern-Zieliński Aleksander 2, 36, 316
Propp Vladimir 85, 316
Pye Michael 35, 36, 40, 315
al-Rabghuzi 173, 302
Radushev Evgeni 8, 13, 20-22, 215, 224
Raychevski Stoyan 17-19, 50, 224, 226, 316
Ricoeur Paul 115, 175, 176, 316
Rieff Philip 162, 316
Ringgren Helmer 37, 40, 316
Rosner Katarzyna 84
Roth Klaus 51, 59, 60, 62, 314, 316
Rudolph Karl 32, 33, 35-39, 316
Said Edward W. 16, 316
Sarah 52, 267
Sari Saltik 44, 45, 46, 138
Satan 119, 175, 177, 179-184, 186, 188, 202, 283 (see also Iblis)
Scheler Max 77, 92, 316
Shamanov Georgi 77
Shaw Rosalind 2, 3, 32-34, 37, 38, 40, 312, 316-318
Shishkov Stoil 16, 18, 53, 317
Skimić Biliana 99, 313
Simeon St. 44
Smykowska Elżbieta 249, 316
Sokolewicz Zofia 58, 316
Spyridon St. 44
Stewart Charles 2, 3, 32-34, 37, 38, 40, 143, 312, 316-318
Stoilov Krasimir 50, 225
Stomma Ludwik 96, 317
Stoykova Ana 246, 247, 317
Stoykova Stefana 30, 31, 317
Szwat-Gyłybowa Grażyna 21, 58, 79, 80, 307, 316, 317
Tambiah Stanley J. 272, 317
al-Tabari 171, 173, 184, 186, 188, 190, 302, 317
Taylor Charles 140, 241, 317
Teofanev Tsvetan 158
al-Tha'labi 114, 171, 173, 179, 182, 184, 188, 190, 198, 302, 317
Theopist 246
Tibi Bassam 156, 317
Todorova Olga 3, 94, 210, 213, 215, 317
Tokarska-Bakir Joanna 85, 153, 210, 314, 317, 320
Tomova Malina 219
Trajan emperor 8

Troeva/Troeva-Grigorova Evgenia 79, 81, 278, 285, 318
Tsaneva Elia 53, 65, 255, 311
Turner Victor 6
Turner Mark 36, 37, 312
Unterman Alan 180, 181, 318
Vakarelski Hristo/Wakarelski Christo 53, 123, 124, 312, 318
Valtchinova Galina 141, 318
van der Leeuw Gerard 33, 34, 318
van der Veer Peter 37, 318
Varisco Daniel 110, 112, 115, 143, 318
Vazov Ivan 79, 178
Vezenkov Aleksandar 80, 81, 318
Vroom Hendrik M. 36, 37, 40, 312, 318
Walker Timothy D. 140, 141, 304, 308, 313
Wasilewski Jerzy S. 160, 179, 186, 199, 255, 318
Weber Max 110
Weil Gustav 180, 190, 198, 204, 206, 318, 320
Wheeler Brannon 186, 188, 189, 318
Wilmer Franke 61, 318
Zagefka Hanna 209, 311
Zechariah 47
Zhelyazkova Antonina 18-21, 42, 51, 54, 112, 309, 312, 318, 319
Zhivkova Lyudmila 132
Zhivkov Todor 25, 67, 212, 221, 253
Zirojević Olga 51, 318
Zowczak Magdalena 12, 104, 109, 122, 146, 312, 314, 318
Zulehner Paul M. 277, 318