

Endressen, Cecilie. 2012. *Is the Albanian's Religion really 'Albanianism'? Religion and Nation according to Muslim and Christian Leaders in Albania*. Wiesbaden: HarrassowitzVerlag. 275 pp. Pb: 56,00 Eur. ISBN: 9783447065610.

The relation between Albanian nationalist ideology and religion has been attracting the attention of researchers of nationalism because of its specificity: unlike all the other Balkan nationalisms, and many other European nationalisms, religion was not considered an element of the nation, but as a divisive factor, preventing national unification. As such, laity has been at the heart of the dominant Albanianist discourse since its beginnings, and later on, with the creation of the Albanian state, at the heart of the state and nation-building policies. This is not the case, of course, for all Albanian populations in the Balkans, and it was not exactly the case in Albania either. As Nathalie Clayer explores in her work, religion was used in various ways as a channel for different expressions of nationalist ideologies. Nevertheless, the dominant Albanianist ideology has aimed, and to a wider extent has achieved, to keep itself separated from religion, and to keep an eye on religious institutions, so that they would not turn the population against the nation. From 1967 to 1990, this went to an extreme, when the communist dictatorship banned religion and any religious practices.

In this book, Cecilie Endressen explores an issue that had not previously been investigated: 'what the nation means to people who in their vocation represent exactly what the Albanians have been urged to disregard: religion' (p. 1), and what the nation is then, to current Albanian clerics. The questions raised for investigation are whether Albanianism is a concept the clerics identify with and in what ways, what does it mean to be Albania, is there any relation between God and nation, is there a conflict between nation and religion, are religious differences relevant, what do clerics think about inter-religious relations, and what reinforces Albanian unity and what obstructs it? In order to do this, she has organised an extended fieldwork, during which she conducted interviews with nine Sunni clerics of the Albanian Muslim Community, four Sufi clerics of the same community, three clerics of the Bektashi Community, five clerics of the Albanian Autocephalous Orthodox Church and three clerics of the Albanian Catholic Church. As primary sources, Endressen uses books and articles written by various clerics after 1990.

Guided by a rich theoretical literature on nationalism, religion and symbolism, the book is organised into three parts. The first provides a background for the book: the research methods and theoretical framework are explained. She also introduces a summary of all religious communities that exist today in Albania. This part also provides a history of national homogenisation and of the marginalisation of religion during the 20th century in Albania.

In the second part, the author explores a concept for each chapter: what clerics think and how they conceptualise religious tolerance, salvation and religious differences, religious diversity, family and life rituals, the folk, the faith, and the fatherland. The last chapter of this part explores how space, symbols, power and resources are shared in the public sphere. In this part, Endressen argues that the clerics identify with all cultural identities present in Albania, the national, the state, the religious community and the global

religious community. However, depending on the situation, some identifications become more prominent than the others.

In the third part, Endressen deals with myths and identities, and how myths become an instrument to reconcile both nation and religion in the clerics' worldviews. Albanian clerics share basic myths of distinction and sameness, and the way they rearrange and redefine them is such that it expresses their national unity and their interreligious rivalries, without contesting the boundary of national identity.

Where does the importance of this book lay, apart from the fact that its subject is new? The importance lays in its findings. Studies by Albanian scholars about religion and nation tend to essentialise religious tolerance and indifference among Albanians. According to these studies, Albanians primary identify themselves according to ethnicity, and not according to religion. Certainly, Endressen is not the first scholar to challenge such views and deconstruct such narratives, but what she does here, is to analyse every detail of this relationship especially for the period after 1990, and reveal to us that indeed the Albanianist ideology not only has primacy against religion, but it also subjugated religious identity to an Albanian identity, and to a certain extend homogenised discourses of clerics from all four religious communities. This finding is not only important for our knowledge about Albanian society but has a theoretical importance also for the sociology of religion.

She also challenges the widespread scholarly believe that religion does not matter in Albania. Endressen argues that religion is central to many people. By reconciling the concepts of religion with those of the nation, Albanian clerics see the nation as imbued with religion, and vice versa. As Endresen concludes: 'their profession is religion, while the nation is the "continual background" for the interpretation of the world, god and each other' (p. 243). To clerics, religion, and not atheism, is central to Albanian national identity. They also claim to be protectors of national culture and values. However, depending on the issue, the clerics also disclose attitudes of prejudices and discourses of othering. Albanian society is, then, in a sort of equilibrium where religious differences do not seem to be harmful, but they are problematic and do exist.

Last but not least, Cecilie Endressen renders the debate on researchers as outsiders and insiders of societies where they are doing the study, completely irrelevant. Her intimate knowledge of history, documents and sources about religion in Albania, and her theoretical preparation to analyse them in the best of ways show that intentions and efforts, and not origin, are the bases for a well-written study.

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