

***Is the Albanian's Religion Really "Albanianism"? Religion and Nation According to Muslim and Christian Leaders in Albania,***  
**Cecilie Endresen, Harrossowitz Verlag, 2013, 275 pages**

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Cecilie Endresen's *Is the Albanian's Religion Really "Albanianism"? Religion and Nation According to Muslim and Christian Leaders in Albania* focuses on the issue of religion and national identity in Albania. The book looks at the way in which the various religious traditions draw on different theological narratives and political imaginaries in order to build an inclusive, post-communist, national community. Her research included several months of fieldwork in Albania, and she earned an MA and wrote her PhD thesis on the topic. The book analyzes how Muslim (from various religious orders), Eastern Christian (Orthodox), and Roman-Catholic religious leaders employ ethno-national narratives in order to address such aspects of Albanian life as politics, history, and national identity to engage in a symbolic construction of a secular Albanian state. Following Calhoun's and Billig's work, the author aims at exploring nationalism as an everyday practice and analyzes the way in which it is embedded in various forms of cultural productions and local traditions. The focus of the research is on how 'nation' and 'religion' reinforce each other in a post-atheist society where multiple religious traditions co-exist. In this way, the book adds to the complexity of nationalism studies in Central and Eastern European countries.

After a concise and useful review of Albanian history (pp. 44-82), the author looks at six different themes, which structure her research. The themes are: the way religious actors mobilize the historical past (2.1), religious tolerance (2.2), politics of soteriology and the representation of religious differences (2.3), family life and rituals (2.4), religion, nationhood and the idea of 'fatherland' (2.5), and symbolic spaces (2.6). All of these themes are analyzed from the perspective of each religious community. Highlighted and discussed are the similarities and differences between the various religious discourses. The author emphasizes in each of the analyzed themes the way each particular religious tradition produces a distinct form of ethno-nationalist narrative. She finds that the clerics who she has interviewed invest the historical past with religious significance and idealize the role played by their own religious tradition. Whether they deal with the pre-Islamic past, period of Islamic conversion or communist atheism, the analysis highlights different hermeneutic temporalities. These temporalities are instrumental for the construction of present-day instances of ethno-politics. An important strategy for achieving this is the emphasis by all parties involved on a form of nationalism based on religious tolerance and its alleged capacity to overcome 'primitive' traditional feuds through a civilizing discourse aimed at creating a national identity, in which "[T]he religious communities expect each other to be equally committed to sustaining patriotism and secularism, which are seen as essential, unifying factors" (137).

While Endresen appears to suggest that her primary theoretical goal is to demonstrate the ways in which religious nationalism informs the everyday practices and cultural ontologies shaping personal identities of Albanians, I find that the book's primary contribution is the author's discourse analysis of the ethno-political narratives of various religious elites in Albania. More reliance on ethnographic research would help to discern how these various elite narratives can be deployed in everyday life, or how they become a part of the different politics of representation that structure the public space. What we have is a sociological/anthropological focus on national religious leaders, and the ways they articulate an official discourse regarding the role of religion in Albanian nationalism. Nevertheless the book provides a meticulous and insightful analysis of how clerics and religious spokespersons narrate and construct Albanian history from their own religious standpoint, and how the various religious leaders internalize the idea of a peaceful Muslim-Christian coexistence. The author makes a remarkable effort to concatenate these discourses and to search for common denominators between different religious views and to explore the nuances that enable different forms of religious nationalisms.

An important aspect of the research represents the deconstruction of the mythological language that is employed by clerics during the interviews and the analysis of the narrative structures that constitute 'Albanianism' as a pervasive contemporary form of civil religion. The author argues that in the various explored settings there is an implicit and recurrent myth, which is essential for the understanding of post-communist Albanian nationalism. The myth takes the form of two complementary ideas: on one hand, it suggests that the social and political Albanian space is intrinsically tolerant and enables a peaceful religious coexistence between Christians and Muslims. On the other hand, the myth suggests that this harmonious and peaceful national community is under constant threat due to the activities of the 'other' religious communities that reproduce, sometimes unknowingly, the political agenda of neighboring enemies, and thus endanger the existing national unity. The author argues that this discursive mythology is achieved through six related narratives: the myth of a religious practice that relies on an alleged separation between religion and state (222-223), the myth of a religious Albanian soul (223-224), the myth of ethno-religious tolerance (224), the mythical Illyrian origin (225-228), the myth of the civilization border (228-231), and the myth of Skanderbeg, a national hero (231-232). These myths fulfill polyvalent functions: from codifying other religions as a potential for concessions to external enemies (Greek imperialism, Serbian nationalism, Islamic fundamentalism) against the national interest, to the emphasis of the European, multi-religious and democratic vocation of Albania.

The book would've benefited from a wider exploration of the connection between the secularism imposed by the Communist atheist regime and the specific form of secular ethno-nationalism that structured the political construction of 'Albanianism' in the past two decades. What emerges from Endresen's research is that the religious clerics aim at constructing an Albanian civil religion that advocates a form of secularism (the separation of state and church/mosque). This is seen as a necessary requirement for mediating a balance between the different religions and their public agenda. As such, the religious governance institutionalized by

the post-communist state in order to maintain civil peace continues to draw on a political imaginary to which Communist authorities contributed as well. The author emphasizes very well the way these new political theologies relate to each other. However, a reader might wish to hear more about the ways these religious narratives interact with contemporary state-politics of 'imagined communities' and with the symbolic representations of ethnic belonging that are prevalent in Albanian local and national state-structures.