Sorta, Kinda Muslim: The Impact of Western Hegemony on Muslim Identity Negotiation in Kosovo

by

Alicia Strong
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A Note on the Title:

The title of this paper, “Sorta, Kinda Muslim” is not meant to serve as a value judgment of Kosovar Albanian Muslims. Instead, it represents the complexity of Muslim identity in a world where a singular, normative understanding of it persists in global discourse. With that being said “Sorta, Kinda Muslim” marks the confusion that ensues when the diversity of the global Muslim population becomes narrowly and rigidly defined.
Abstract

This paper seeks to engage with the real-world implications of Western Islamophobia in the context of Kosovo. Before the Kosovo War, Kosovar Albanians fell under both Ottoman and Yugoslav imperialism. After the war ended, a new type of imperialism entered, Western neo-imperialism. After 9/11, Islamophobia became an important component of Western neo-imperialistic hegemony. Kosovar elites help transmit this Islamophobia to the general population by enshrouding it in Albanian nationalism. Although Western hegemony pressures Kosovar Albanians to negotiate Muslim identity within the Islam-versus-the-West binary, the complexity of identity makes this unfeasible. Nevertheless, Kosovar Albanians must navigate this hegemony when trying to negotiate and define their unique identities.
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Introduction:

Most Kosovan Albanians are officially Muslims, although an unwitting traveller would hardly notice in urban areas. Kosova, like Albania, is quite secular and can not be compared with more religious places like Turkey or countries in the Middle East. Although pork is not readily available, drinking and smoking are practiced with enthusiasm, headscarves are generally not worn by women, and mosque attendance is insignificant compared to the aforementioned countries.

The quotation above can be found on the website for the American School of Kosova. The school is an elite, English-language, private school that primarily educates children from well-off Kosovar and American families. The excerpt was pulled from the employment webpage. Presumably, it is meant to attract qualified, American teachers by reassuring applicants that Kosovo “cannot be compared to more religious places like Turkey or countries in the Middle East.” Although it is not clear whether the author of this excerpt is Kosovar Albanian or American, it is obvious that they are attempting to respond and dispel implicit assumptions made by Westerners about Muslim-majority countries. Many accounts of Islam and Muslims in Kosovo, by both foreigners and Kosovars, take on a similar tone, implying that although Albanians are “officially” Muslim, they seem to defy all of the things Westerners associates with Muslims.1

Many of the debates about Muslim identity in Kosovo that have occurred in Kosovo’s political arena are centered on elite discourse and allude to a binary

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between Islam and the West. In 2003, an incident occurred when a delegation of high-level Kosovar officials were set to travel to Germany for a study visit. The trip was cut short when the delegation refused to be seen with a hijab-wearing Albanian translator. A local academic described the translator as, “a false representation of an ethnic Albanian woman emblematic of Islamic religious fundamentalism, backwardness and Orientalism.”2 In 2010 the Kosovar government sparked protests among some Kosovar Muslims when it issued a ban on headscarves in public schools. The deputy prime minister justified the ban, saying, “The scarf in Kosovo is not an element of our identity. It's a sign of submission of female to male, rather than a sign of choice”. Opponents of the ban claimed the government wanted to present Kosovo as more “Westward-looking” by subscribing to what the government perceived were “European values.” Both of these cases illustrate an attempt to shape national identity through policy and seem to coincide with Kosovo’s desire to join the European Union.3

Anxiety about terrorism and radicalization among Kosovars mirrors Western sentiment on the issue. In 2016 the New York Times published an article titled, “How Kosovo was turned into a Fertile Ground for ISIS.” The author explicitly says that the rising extremism “is a stunning turnabout for a land of 1.8 million people that not long ago was among the most pro-American Muslim societies in the world.”

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The article blamed the phenomenon on an influx in Saudi clerics at the end of the Kosovo War. As a small, newly independent country that relies heavily on Western support, major headlines like this must have had some kind of ripple effect in the country. I conduct semi-structure interview throughout Kosovo to document this impact. One of my participants seems to exemplify this. The leader of a Sufi Tekke bluntly tells me, “Not all Salafis are terrorists but all terrorist are Salafis”. The quotation seems to echo American conservatives who proclaim, “Not all Muslims are terrorists but all terrorists are Muslims”. Many of the female, hijab-wearing participants explain that some of their family try to prevent them from wearing the headscarf because they were worried about radicalization. This leads me to believe global discourse directly influences debates around Muslim identity in Kosovo. My argument here is two-fold. First, I argue that Kosovo transitions from “old imperialism” to Western neo-imperialism after the Kosovo War, allowing the West to exert hegemonic influence over Kosovar society. Second, I contend that after 9/11 Islamophobia became embedded in Western hegemony and pro-Western Kosovar elites transmit Western Islamophobia to the general population by enshrouding it in ethno-nationalism.

I hope to bring a thorough and nuanced approach to Kosovar Muslim identity. Much of the current Western news media produces a one-sided narrative of Islam and Muslims in Kosovo. Western Academic writing about Kosovar Albanian

\footnote{Carlotta Gall, “How Kosovo was turned into a Fertile Ground for ISIS,” The New York Times, May 2016, https://www.nytimes.com/2016/05/22/world/europe/how-the-saudis-turned-kosovo-into-fertile-ground-for-isis.html?_r=0}
Muslims often depicts them as either hyper-secular or extreme. Those who exist between the two poles are rarely given a voice. I attempt to highlight the different ways in which Kosovar Muslims are negotiating identity and underscore how these negotiations come in response to Western hegemony and global Islam-versus-the-West discourse. The case of Kosovo provides good insight on how the global politicization of Islam and Muslims impacts the ways in which people understand their identities at the national, regional and global levels.

**Neo-colonialism, Neo-imperialism and Hegemony**

“Old imperialism” versus Neo-imperialism

I make an important distinction between what I call “old imperialism” and neo-imperialism. These two terms are used to differentiate between imperialism before and after the war. In other words, I consider the Ottoman Empire and Yugoslavia as “old imperial” powers whereas the West represents a neo-imperial power. I pull my definition of “old imperialism” from *Cultural Sociology of the Middle East, Asia, and Africa* which states,

Imperialism is defined as the policy of extending the rule or authority of an empire or nation over foreign countries, or of acquiring and holding colonies and dependencies. Generally, aggression and expansion are considered as the main characteristics of imperialism.\(^5\)

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It is important to emphasize the role of aggression and expansion in “old imperialism.” This aspect differentiates “old imperialism” from neo-imperialism. In contrast, Tukumbi Lumumba-Kasongo explains a core aspect of neo-imperialism, “the capitalist international arena is divided between the powerful and the less powerful nations. The most powerful nations, although small in numbers, control the direction of the world to advance their imperialist ambitions.” I focus on this unequal power relationship when analyzing Western neo-imperialism in Kosovo. Thus, neo-imperialism primarily focuses on power relationships, instead of physical aggression and territorial expansion.

**Neo-colonialism versus Neo-imperialism**

Neo-colonialism is another concept that arises when discussing Kosovo’s relationship to the West. Neo-colonialism refers to economic and political policies that allow a powerful state to influence an area or population. This concept relates to neo-imperialism, but is not synonymous. Neo-colonialism involves an explicit and sometimes legally codified form of political control. Neo-imperialism is domination without necessarily having explicit control or a physical presence in the a region. In relation to Kosovo, both are present and shape the relationship Kosovar Albanians have with the United States. I am more interested in Western neo-imperialism in

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9 Lumumba-Kasango, 247
Kosovo; however, I also mention the impact of neo-colonialism. I consider hegemony a subcategory of neo-imperialism. I adopt Mary Klage’s definition of hegemony, “the kind of cultural power wielded by the dominant ideas of a culture or society.”10 In Kosovo, the West exerts hegemony through its neo-imperial (and neo-colonial) power over the country.

This begs the question, what impact does Western hegemony have on Muslim identity negotiation in Kosovo? How does Western hegemony differ from other forms of imperialism that previously existed in Kosovo? What is the relationship between hegemony and identity negotiation? What are the current debates in Kosovo regarding the role of Islam in Kosovar Albanian identity? I argue that after Kosovo’s independence, Western hegemony replaces “old imperialism” and political elites Western Islamophobia and anti-Muslim sentiment begins dominating discourse about Muslim identity in Kosovo. Additionally, I contend that the EU and the US use different methods to perpetuate Western hegemony in Kosovo, but Kosovar political elites transmit Islamophobia and anti-Muslim sentiment to the general population from both political entities.

The remainder of this paper attempts to deconstruct Muslim identity and Western hegemony among Kosovar Albanians. It is important to note, not all Kosovar Albanians are Muslim and not all Kosovar Muslims are Albanian.

Nevertheless, a majority of the population identify as both Muslim and Albanian. 

http://ezproxy.wesleyan.edu:7790/login?url=https://search.credoreference.com/content/entry/contlt/hegemony/0?institutionId=3788
choose to focus on Kosovar Albanian Muslims because of the contentious debates occurring at this intersection.

In the first chapter, I attempt to explain what I call “old imperialism,” a concept that refers to the hegemonic powers that ruled Albanians prior to Kosovo’s independence. This chapter attempts to elucidate the link between identity and hegemony while also differentiating “old imperialism” and Western neo-imperialism. Both Ottoman and Yugoslav imperialism left lasting impacts on Albanian identity. Specifically, Albanian nationalism creates a collective memory in which ethnic-Albanians rise up against these imperial powers. There is a selective erasure of the role Albanians played in upholding these structures. Nationalists regard the Ottoman Empire as an oppressive, Islamic power that forced Albanians to convert to Islam and took hold of Albanian-populated territory. In the present-day, this sometimes produces animosity towards public expressions of Muslim identity, implying that Albanians are embracing the religious identity of the oppressor. Nationalists justify this sentiment by quoting Albanian communist leader Enver Hoxha, proclaiming, “the religion of Albanians is Albanianism.” Yugoslav imperialism is different because it primarily impacted Kosovar Albanians, who were separated from the Albanian state when the Ottoman Empire collapsed. I consider Yugoslavia an imperial force because my definition of “old imperialism” considers aggression and expansion as defining characteristics. Albanians in Kosovo were victims of Yugoslav expansion and aggression, as I will lay out in this chapter. In this context,
nationalists depict Albanians resisting a Slavic imperialism and eventually coming out victorious at the conclusion of the Kosovo War.

This chapter illustrates how identity negotiation among Albanians is linked to the hegemonic power structures in under which they must operate. Both Ottoman and Yugoslav imperialism create the socio-political structures of the people they rule. Identity negotiation becomes a way for people to navigate these structures. After the Kosovo War when “old imperialism” ends for Kosovar Albanians, it is replaced with Western hegemony, a type of neo-imperialism. Similar to the “old imperialism,” Western neo-imperialism creates rigid socio-political structures for Kosovar Albanians. However, the West does not directly use aggression and expansion in Kosovo the way the Ottoman Empire and Yugoslavia did.

The second chapter explains how the West established hegemony in Kosovo after the war. Although the United States and Western Europe work together to maintain Western hegemony in Kosovo, they establish this hegemony in very different ways. The beginning of the chapter explains Western presence in the region and how Western Europe and the United States maintain this presence. The United States uses internalized American exceptionalism in Kosovo to exert hegemony. Internalize American exceptionalism is when a non-American population begins adopting American exceptionalist ideology. The United States played a major role in helping the Kosovar Albanians achieve national liberation and this role is important because US involvement in the Kosovo War has produced overwhelming support for American government and political ideologies. A lot of the rhetoric from
both politicians and citizens is pro-American and many see the US as an example that Kosovo can strive for. In the Age of Trump, internalized American exceptionalism is especially interesting when looking at the ways in which Kosovar Albanians perceive Trump’s anti-Muslim comments.

Western Europe maintains hegemony in Kosovo through European Union (EU) enlargement politics. To understand how EU enlargement politics maintain European hegemony, one must first ask the question, “Who is European?” Although the EU is an economic and political entity, the concept of European identity persists at its core. I attempt to situate Kosovo regionally in both the Balkans and Europe. This allows me to streamline Kosovo into larger discussion about the “Europeanness” of the Balkans. Ana Foteva attempts to challenge Occident-versus-Orient narratives about the Balkans by evaluating how culture and religion are used to politically map out Europe. I use her arguments to understand the ways in which Kosovar Albanians are engaging with European identity. Then I proceed to highlight how this identity diverges/converges with their Muslim identity.

After the 9/11 terror attacks in 2001 and the subsequent US invasion of Iraq, the West shifts its attitude towards Islam and Muslim. Muslims started being viewed

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as potential threats. Islamophobia and anti-Muslim sentiment became widespread in the US and Europe and began influencing both domestic and foreign policy in the West. Both the US and the EU begin pushing anti-terrorism and countering-violent-extremism (CVE) programs in Kosovo. The EU-Kosovo relationship became especially complicated because Kosovo is vying for entry into the European Union, like many of its Balkan counterparts. Interestingly, some scholars are beginning to connect EU candidacy of Muslim-majority countries likes Turkey and Kosovo with Western discourse about Islam and Muslims. Academics like Piro Rexhepi in particular, emphasize how this discourse plays out in Kosovo.¹⁸

The final chapter focuses on the role elites play in transmitting Western hegemony to the general population and further explains how this hegemony impacts identity negotiation. The beginning of the chapter explains how pro-Western political elites use Albanian nationalism to transmit Western hegemony to Kosovar Albanians. These elites accept the Islam-versus-the-West binary and push Albanians to pledge allegiance to the West as a way to advance and preserve Albanian people. On social media, I found a popular Twitter account critiquing Kosovar Albanian elites for this approach and calling for an inversion of this narrative, claiming that Albanians ought to reject Western influence in Kosovo. Both of these perspectives however, operate in the Islam-versus-the-West binary.

When I interview every-day Kosovar Albanians I find very different and diverse types of responses. Most of the people I interview must navigate this dichotomous discourse in their everyday lives. While they face immense pressure to choose a side, many explain their identities outside of the Islam-versus-the-West binary. Those who felt a strong affinity to Muslim identity often felt the need to assert Western identity as well. This phenomenon is very similar to the situation for Muslims living in the US and the EU. From these interviews, the main themes I note include anxiety around terrorism, societal identity policing, debates around gender and sexuality, and differentiation between Balkan/Albanian Islam and other forms of Islam.

I employ a variety of different methods to compile my research. I use semi-structured interviews to understand how Kosovar Albanians understand their identities in relation to the anti-Muslim sentiment percolating from Western hegemony. I broadly interview Kosovar Albanians who identify as Muslim and I give the participants the liberty to define Muslim identity for themselves. My interview questions address current debates around Islam in Kosovo, while also contextualizing these debates at the regional and global level. Lastly, I make sure to engage with their other identities, including sexuality, gender, ethnicity and nationality, so that I understand the interplay between different identities. I interview participants from different social and religious backgrounds, primarily through contacts that I already have in Kosovo. I was based in Prishtina, however the participants came from many different towns and villages throughout Kosovo. The
semi-structured interviews bring a new perspective to academic writing about Muslim identity in Kosovo because they amplify everyday Kosovar Albanian voices instead of solely focusing on elite narratives.

I hope to fill the scholarly gap that fails to address the nuances of Muslim identity in Kosovo by bringing new voices to the forefront. There are very few scholars who concentrate on Muslim identity in Kosovo and even fewer who connect Western hegemony and contemporary Muslim identity negotiation in Kosovo. By focusing on Kosovar Albanian Muslims, I am challenging discourse about the “Muslim World” and expanding the notion of “Western Muslims” beyond Muslim converts and immigrants. Muslims in Kosovo force these normative claims about Muslims in/and the West to be reevaluated. Kosovo provides an avenue through which academics can understand the dynamics of Western hegemony in a world where clash-of-civilization rhetoric dominates global politics.
Chapter 1: “Old Imperialism” and the Historical Legacy of Imperialism in Kosovo

To understand the connection between hegemonic powers and identity in Kosovo, it is important to examine identity negotiation before the establishment of Kosovo as an independent state. The Ottoman Empire brought Islam to Albanians and ruled Albanian territories from 1480 until 1912. After 1912, Kosovo became a Serbian province in Yugoslavia, severing Kosovar Albanians from the rest of the Albanian population. Ottoman and Yugoslav imperialism impacted the ways in which Albanians understood their identities. The Ottoman Empire divided its populations by religion and this division formed the basis of society under Ottoman rule. The Albanian ethno-national consciousness did not emerge until the Ottoman Empire was on the eve of collapse and Albanians navigated Ottoman imperialism using religion as their primary identifier.

When the Ottoman Empire was on the verge of collapse, Albanians recognized the shifting geopolitical climate. Major Western powers began discussing the fate of Ottoman-controlled territories. Albanian leaders acknowledged that ethnic unity was necessary to preserve Albanian land. At this point, religious identity became less important and Albanians began carving out an ethno-national identity
across religious lines. They established the League of Prizren to advocate and fight for their land. Eventually, the Ottoman Empire fell and the state of Albania was formed. However, many Albanians were excluded from the newly formed state because Kosovo became a province of Serbia, part of the larger Yugoslavia.

Kosovar Albanians did not want to be part of Yugoslavia, preferring to join their ethnic counterparts in Albania. Yugoslavia literally translates to “The Land of South Slavs” and Albanians are a non-Slavic population. Slavic imperialism changed as the Yugoslavian government went through major political transitions in the early half of the 20th century. Even after Yugoslavia established a socialist government that sought unity across ethnicities, Kosovar Albanians always felt like second-class citizens. As an ethnic “other” under Slavic imperialism, Albanian ethnic identity became the primary identity marker for most Albanians and Albanian nationalism persisted despite Yugoslav efforts to the contrary. Unlike the religious diversity in Albania, Kosovar Albanians were overwhelmingly Muslim with a small Catholic minority. The socialist Yugoslav government actively suppressed religion thought the country, included many efforts to suppress Islam among Kosovar Albanians. Nevertheless, ethnicity remained the primary identifier for Kosovar Albanians and there was a notable division between Albanian Muslims and Slavic Muslims.

The dissolution of Yugoslavia in the latter half of the 20th century increased ethnic allegiances in Yugoslavia. As the country began to break up, Serbian nationalist leader, Slobodan Milosevic took power. He stoked Serbian nationalist sentiment in Kosovo and claimed that the Albanian majority sought to oppress the
Serbs. He revoked Kosovo’s autonomy and began systematically discriminating against Albanians in every sector of society. Eventually, this heightened ethnic tension led to the Kosovo War between Serbs and Albanians. The Western powers intervened through NATO, on the side of the Albanians, ending Slavic imperialism in Kosovo.

The transition from Ottoman imperialism to Slavic imperialism illustrates the link between imperialism and identity. Imperial powers dictate the social structure of society and the populations under its control must adapt their identities to navigate this space. I define Slavic and Ottoman rule as “old imperialism” and both maintained control over Albanians before Kosovo’s independence. Additionally, Ottoman and Slavic imperialism have lasting legacies in Kosovo. The ways in which Kosovar Albanians remember their experience under these powers influences the way they perceive Western hegemony. Western powers represent a neo-imperialism and unlike Ottoman and Yugoslav imperialism, the West does not rule Kosovo using aggression or expansion, giving the illusion of complete independence and sovereignty. Here, I argue that imperial forces have impacted Albanian identity from the Ottoman Era, to the present-day, however after the Kosovo War, the type of imperialism went from “old imperialism” to neo-imperialism.

**Muslim Identity Under Ottoman Imperialism**

The Ottoman Empire is largely responsible for converting Albanians to Islam. Furthermore, the Ottoman Empire represents the origins of Muslim identity in
present-day discourse among Kosovar Albanians. In current Islam-versus-the-West polemics, the Ottoman Empire epitomizes an anti-Western, Islamic civilization. Many Kosovar Albanians who orient themselves within the Western portion of this binary emphasize the imperialistic, oppressive nature of the Ottoman Empire to justify their rejection of Muslim identity. Additionally, Albanian nationalists remember the Ottoman Empire as an enemy to the Albanian nationalist cause. The Ottoman imperial legacy continues to color identity negotiation in Kosovo, especially at the intersection of religious and ethno-national identity.

Conversion in Albanian-populated Areas

Prior to the arrival of the Ottoman Empire, most Albanians were Christian. The schism between the Orthodox and Catholic Churches in 1054 divided Albanians into two different religious communities. This religious schism occurred along geographical lines with Catholicism dominating in the North and Orthodoxy in the South. The sectarian divisions and geographical distributions of Albanians impacted their relationships with the Ottoman Empire. Catholic Albanians in the north experienced higher rates of conversion than Orthodox Albanians in the south. The discrepancies between the two rates come from Ottoman policies towards the two churches. Under the Ottoman Empire, the Orthodox Church enjoyed a degree of

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protection, which made conversion efforts less likely.\textsuperscript{24} The Ottoman Empire protected the Orthodox Church because it used the church to control the Orthodox populations it ruled.

Some Albanians nationalists claim that the Ottomans converted Albanians by force. However most historians agree that, for most part, conversions this was not the case. In an effort to solidify territorial gains, the Ottoman Empire resisted the immediate Islamization of Albanian regions. The mass conversion to Islam can be attributed to social and economic incentives. Muslims did not have to pay taxes and possessed greater degrees of social mobility in the Ottoman Empire.\textsuperscript{25} While many Albanians formally converted to Islam, others continued to practice Christianity in secret. Orthodox Albanians who did not convert found themselves in a double bind. On one hand, they were non-Muslims under the secular rule of the Ottoman Empire. On the other hand, they were non-Greeks under the spiritual rule of the Greek Patriarchate. Catholic Albanians found themselves in a similar circumstance, except instead of being spiritually ruled by the Greek Patriarchate, they were tied to the Holy See.\textsuperscript{26} It is clear that for Albanians, religion was not simply a tradition but also created network of complex geopolitical links.

Most Albanians who converted to Islam adhered to the Sunni sect. However, a sizeable minority joined the Bektashi order. Bektashism is a mystical brand of Islam

\textsuperscript{24} Bieber, “Muslim identity,” 16.
\textsuperscript{26} Costa “Expression to Nationhood”, 3.
that fuses many Sunni and Shia concepts.\textsuperscript{27} Bektashism arrived in the 15th century through Sultan Murad II’s armies.\textsuperscript{28} Although Bektashism originates from a state institution, eventually this heterodox, syncretistic form of Islam directly clashed with Sunni Islamic policies.\textsuperscript{29} In the late 19th century, Bektashis began branding Bektashism as “Albanian Islam” and used it to promote both Albanian identity and the Albanian state.\textsuperscript{30,31}

\textit{Multiple identities: Tribe, Clan and Religion}

In modern-day discourse Albanians are depicted as a unified, ethno-national group; however, historically, Albanians were divided across religious and tribal lines. Albanians are religiously divided into Orthodox, Catholic, Sunni Muslim and Bektashi and these religious categories have complex relationships to political and social power structures. The famous Albanian saying, \textit{Ku esh te shpata esh te feja}, encapsulates this reality. Roughly translated this means, “Where the sword is lies religion”. The saying captures the ways in which Albanians converted as a way to


navigate Imperial rule. Interestingly, Albanians in the Kosovo region seemed to show greater readiness to convert to Islam when compared to their southern counterparts. Some historians speculate that this has to do with their proximity to Orthodox Serbs. Serbs presented a continuous threat to Albanians in the North and conversion guaranteed them protection from the Ottoman Empire. This tension between Serbs and Albanians continues in the present-day.

Crypto-Christianity exemplifies the link between imperialism and religious conversion. While many Albanians outwardly became Muslim, some continued to practice Christianity secretly. This seems to further enshrine the historic link between imperialism and religious identity. Tribally, Albanians were divided between the Gheg tribal unit in the north and the Tosks in the south. Albanians were further subdivided by clans, which bound families together. Ottoman state officials often categorized Albanians by tribal units, not ethno-linguistic groups. Additionally, they associated particular characteristics with each tribal unit. The Ottomans viewed the Tosks as better integrated into the Ottoman system and connected to the outside world. On the other hand, the Ottomans viewed Ghegs were known for being tribal and removed from Ottoman social and political structures. In part due to


the mountainous geography of Northern Albania, Ottoman authorities had very little control over Tosk Albanians.\textsuperscript{34}

\textit{Albanian Muslims and the Ottoman State}

Many Albanian Muslims led successful careers within the Ottoman Empire. Famous Ottoman grand \textit{vezirs} and military commanders were of Albanian origin.\textsuperscript{35} Albanians (and Greeks) commanded most Ottoman military and merchant fleets.\textsuperscript{36} Albanian Muslims were deeply embedded in all facets of the Ottoman Empire. Wealthy Muslim landowners, called \textit{beys}, competed for high-level appointments in the Ottoman court by building private armies and expanding their spheres of influence. Ironically, in the long-term, this practice weakened Ottoman control of Balkan territory and strengthened the autonomy of Albanian-speaking people.\textsuperscript{37}

Since Albanian Muslims formed the backbone of key political and military structures, the Ottoman Empire deteriorated when Albanians began abandoning these structures to join the Albanian national cause.

Albanians were important allies to Ottoman authorities, primarily due to their geographical position on the Northern borders of the Empire. Albanian troops


\textsuperscript{35} Beiber, “Muslim identity,” 17.


\textsuperscript{37} Beiber “Muslim identity,” 18.
played a key role in resisting outside expansion into the Ottoman Empire. One of the ways Albanians were integrated into the Ottoman military was through the *devsirme*. This was an Ottoman system that levied rural, Christian boys into either the Ottoman court or military. Many of the young boys who were levied through the *devsirme* were drafted into the janissaries, a main branch of the Ottoman military forces. Under this system, the boys were taken from their families and forced to convert to Islam. The purpose of conversion was to help establish a firm Ottoman Muslim identity at an early age. This was a way to ensure allegiance to the Ottoman Empire.

The *devsirme* highlights an essential connection between Ottoman imperialism and Muslim identity. First, it represents the ways in which Islam and Muslim identity were mobilized to maintain Ottoman imperialism. Second, this practice links Ottoman identity (which becomes with Turkish identity synonymous in the late 19th and early 20th century) and Muslim identity. How does this link impact Albanians when they begin to carve out their own national identity? I argue that this will eventually lead to nationalist attempts to erase Muslim identity from Albanian ethno-national identity. The legacy of two famous Ottoman-Albanians underscores these two aspects of Albanian Muslim identity in the Ottoman era.

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While many powerful Ottoman bureaucrats were of Albanian origin, there are a few who are worth mentioning who represent the link between Ottoman imperialism and identity. The first is George Kastrioti, also known as Skanderbeg. Skanderbeg (1405-1468) was a distinguished officer in the Ottoman army during the 15th century of Ottoman expansion. Eventually, he abandoned the Ottomans, reverted to Christianity and led an Albanian rebellion against them.\textsuperscript{41} In present-day Albania and Kosovo, Skanderbeg is considered a national hero. Nationalist narrations of the story place emphasis on the Albanian defense of Europe against the Ottomans.\textsuperscript{42} The Skanderbeg national myth seems to imply a nationalist aversion to both Islam and Ottoman identity by proclaiming Albanians as the defenders of Europe. This myth also flips Ottoman view of Albanians as defenders of the empire’s borders.

The second key Albanian figure is Ali Pasha of Ioannina (1740-1822). Ali represents another famous Ottoman Albanian official. Ali impressed the Ottoman court, which eventually helped him obtain a governorship. He later converted from Sunni Islam to Bektashism while still maintaining a high position in Ottoman politics. Eventually, the Ottomans began to see his control over Albanians as a threat to their imperial rule because he consolidated power in the Balkan Peninsula and led an anti-Ottoman coalition. In response, the Ottomans assassinated him.\textsuperscript{43}

\textsuperscript{41} Nixon Nicola, “Always Already European: The Figure of Skenderbeg in Contemporary Albanian Nationalism,” \textit{National Identities} 12 (2010): 1-20

\textsuperscript{42} Nicola “Always Already European”

\textsuperscript{43} Vickers, “the Great Pashaliks,” 19-23.
discourse about Ali highlights his alleged conversion from Sunni Islam to Bektashism. Albanians Bektashis use this distinction to integrate Bektashism into Albanian nationalism. Discourse about Ali Pasha emphasizes his resistance to Ottoman imperialism and makes a distinction between Ottoman, Orthodox, Sunni Islam and Bektashism. ⁴⁴

The position of Albanian Muslims within the Ottoman state illustrates the complex relationship between Albanians and the Ottoman Empire. The high positions held by Albanian Muslims shows the essential role Muslim identity played in navigating the social and political structures of Ottoman Empire. Second, the portrayal of these figures in Albanian national myths, which persist to the present-day, show how Albanians view the Ottoman legacy. These figures are not remembered by their loyalty to the Ottoman Empire but by their rebellion against it. Additionally, the religious affiliation of both Ali Pasha and Skanderbeg are essential to the Albanian national myths. Skanderbeg’s reversion to Christianity and Ali Pasha’s conversion to Bektashism is a statement of protest against the Sunni orthodox Islam embraced by the Ottoman Empire and seen as a challenge to Ottoman Imperialism. Just as these national myths continue to live on among Albanians today, so do the implications they make about Muslim identity.

Decline of the Ottoman Empire, Rise of Albanian Nationalism

The decline of the Ottoman empire and the rise of Albanian nationalism are directly linked. Rich, Albanian landlords had large amounts of autonomy in Albanian territories.\(^{46}\) This helped create the conditions that allowed Albanians to cultivate nationalism because they were able to operate outside of Ottoman control. As the Ottoman Empire began to weaken, the Congress of Berlin was organized by major Western powers to solve “the Eastern crisis.” Specifically, the goal of the congress was to carve out nation-states during the aftermath of the Russo-Turkish War (1877-1878). The Russo-Turkish war concluded with the Treaty of San Stefano (1878), which gave away large swaths of Albanian land to Russian allies including, Serbia, Bulgaria and Montenegro.\(^{47}\) Russian and its Orthodox Balkan allies seemed to benefit the most from this treaty. The Western powers became worried about Russian ambition in southeastern Europe and compelled Russia to submit to a new peace settlement that would be decided at the Congress of Berlin (1878), three months later.\(^{48}\) Before these events unfolded, Albanian nationalism was limited to intellectual elites and Albanians living abroad.\(^{49}\) However, after the Ottoman Empire signed Treaty of San Stefano and Western powers announced the Congress of Berlin, Albanian nationalism began to expand.

\(^{46}\) Clayer, “Ali Pasha”, 127-133
\(^{47}\) Vickers, “the Great Pashaliks,” 29.


The year 1878 marks the beginning of national and political consciousness among Albanians, in response to the Treaty of San Stefano and the upcoming Congress of Berlin.\textsuperscript{50} Albanians formed the League of Prizren (1878) across religious boundaries to advocate and fight for Albanian lands. Albanian representatives abandoned the Millet system, the social and legal system implemented by the Ottoman Empire, which divided populations based on religion.\textsuperscript{51} The League of Prizren met just before the Congress of Berlin to prevent further encroachment on Albanian territory by their Slavic neighbors and new claims to their land from Western Europe.\textsuperscript{52} The league sent a letter to the British delegates at the Congress of Berlin, who seemed to hold the most power over their fate. In their appeal, they proclaimed, “Just as we are not and do not want to be Turks, so we shall oppose with all our might anyone who would like to turn us into Slavs or Austrians or Greeks, we want to be Albanians.”\textsuperscript{53} This quotation references the misidentification Albanians suffered during this time both in Europe and throughout the Ottoman Empire.\textsuperscript{54} In fact, Ottoman Turkish authorities had a tendency to divide Albanians based on religion and “Muslim Albanian” was almost synonymous with Turkish.\textsuperscript{55}

\textsuperscript{52} Vickers, “the Great Pashaliks,” 30.
\textsuperscript{53} Vickers, “the Albanian National Movement,” 33.
\textsuperscript{54} Vickers, 34.
\textsuperscript{55} Vickers, “the Great Pashaliks,” 21.
The Congress of Berlin produced the Treaty of Berlin (1878), a set of territorial settlements that disfavored the Ottoman Empire. Formally, Serbia and Montenegro became independent states. As boundaries began shifting, Albanians realized they ran the risk of being absorbed by the newly formed states.\(^5\) When the Treaty of Berlin awarded Albanian-inhabited territory to Montenegro, the Albanian People’s Army sent forces to reclaim the territory. Despite Albanian efforts to reclaim territory, Western European powers urged Istanbul to enforce the treaty and send troops against the Albanians. Istanbul succumbed to Western pressure and this act severed the already fraught relationship between Ottoman Turks and Albanians. Albanians concluded that the only way to protect their land was through an independent Albanian state.\(^5\)

\(\text{Ottoman Response(s) to Growing Nationalism}\)

\textit{Ottomanism}

Undoubtedly, growing nationalism and political unrest within the Ottoman Empire was an international concern. At the same time, the Ottoman Empire was trying to use internal reforms to quell the discontent. The Ottomans instituted the Tanzimat Reforms throughout the empire between 1839-76.\(^5\) Out of these reforms, the Ottomans crafted Ottomanism. Ottomanism was an attempt to establish an Ottoman national identity that promoted equality between Muslims and non-

\(^5\) Glenny, “A Maze of Conspiracy,” 135-149.
Muslims. This was the first attempt at combating growing nationalism in the Empire. Ultimately, the policy had the opposite effect because ethno-nationalists simply incorporated Ottomanist principles, such as brotherhood, into their respective versions of nationalism.

**Islamism**

Under the reign of Sultan Abdulhamid (1876-1909) Ottomanism took a back seat and the Ottomans began implementing Islamist policy. With respect to Albanians, the Ottoman Empire sought to mold Muslim Albanians into a military barrier against Serbia, Greece and Montenegro. Ottoman officials saw Islam as the natural link between the Ottoman Empire and the Albanian people. Despite this policy, in 1882 and 1883 there was an attempt by Albanians to create an Albanian form of Islam. They requested permission to conduct weekly prayers and sermons in the Albanian language. The requests were rejected and, the term “Albanian Muslim” became a source of controversy. In fact, in 1890 a Turkish newspaper argued that Islam did not acknowledge ethnicity, thus Albanians should be called Muslims instead of Albanians. Both Ottomanism and Islamism show the Ottoman

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49-54.
61 Vezenkov, 49.
Empire attempted to shape identity through political reform and conversely how emerging national identities attempted to shape political reform in the empire. In both cases, Albanian populations began to move towards an ethno-national identity independent from Islam and the Ottoman Empire. The First Balkan War and the Treaty of London represent the final break between the Ottoman Empire and the Albanians.

**First Balkan War & Geopolitical Implications for Albanians**

Between 1906 and 1908, the Young Turk Movement rose to power. Initially, Albanians supported and worked with this movement, because the Young Turks promised to relieve them from taxation and grant them provincial autonomy. However, the Young Turks enraged Albanians of all faiths when they began levying universal taxes and instituting mandatory military service. The beginning of the First Balkan War further complicated this tension between the Albanians and the Young Turks. The Kingdom of Serbia attempted to unite with Kosovar Albanians against the Ottomans but ultimately Albanians sided with the Ottomans. This likely occurred because their distrust of the Serbs surpassed their animosity towards the Ottomans. When the Ottomans began losing the war, Albanian fighters deserted the military.

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in droves.\textsuperscript{65} In 1912, a multi-faith Albanian assembly declared independence.\textsuperscript{66} Unfortunately for the assembly, the Ottomans surrendered Kosovo to Serbia and the war ended with the Treaty of London.\textsuperscript{67} In 1913 the Great Powers recognized independent Albania, separating Kosovar Albanians from the newly created Albanian state.\textsuperscript{68} Kosovo became part of the Kingdom of Serbia.

The First Balkan War is significant for a variety of reasons. First, this marks the end of Ottoman imperial rule over Albanian territories. Up until this point, the Ottoman Empire was the initial and primary propagator of Muslim identity. In fact, Islamic identity became almost synonymous with Ottoman/Turkish identity. The second outcome of this war is the Treaty of London that severed Kosovo from Albania proper. Albanians in Albania proper declared independence and embarked on a path to developing their newly recognized state. Kosovar Albanians became integrated into the Kingdom Serbia (and later the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes) and continued being ruled by a non-Albanian, imperial power. This reality, coupled with the fact that Kosovar Albanians are almost exclusively Muslim (unlike Albanians in Albania) creates unique conditions for Muslim identity formation.


\textsuperscript{68} Zickel, \textit{Albania} 21
Kosovar Albanians in Yugoslavia

Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes; Royalist Yugoslavia (1918-1941)

World War I was a tragedy for the kingdom from a military perspective. Austrians and Bulgarians occupied Kosovo but eventually, the kingdom reclaimed it in 1918. In response to the renewed occupation, Kosovar Albanians staged armed resistances, which were active until 1924. In the late 30’s Serbs began settling in Kosovo, on land the government took from Albanians. An early policy in royalist Yugoslavia was the deportation of Kosovar Albanians to Turkey to secure the state from the potentially rebellions, non-Slavic Albanians. The Republic of Turkey willingly accepted this policy as a way to counterbalance the large Kurdish population in the South. Islam in royalist Yugoslavia was coopted and used to control the Bosnian Muslim population. The government was not able to do the same to Albanian Muslims because Albanians are not Slavic and thus, by-definition are not part of Yugoslavia (translation: “Land of South Slavs”). From the founding of Yugoslavia, there was no intention to integrate non-Slavic people.

The outbreak of World War II further exacerbated divides between Albanians and their Slavic neighbors. Kosovars developed a strong affinity for Italian fascists


70 Della Rocca, “A Short History,” 33.

and German Nazis for liberating them from Slavic imperialism. In fact, some Kosovar Albanians declared themselves the Aryans of the Balkans due to the resentment towards Slavs they shared with the Nazis. This is why Kosovar Albanians never joined the Partisans even though large numbers of Albanians in Albania and other neighboring population did. In fact, there was a German infantry division called the SS Skanderbeg, which consisted of Muslim Albanian soldiers sporting red Turkish fezzes. Vehbi Frasheri, an Albanian leader, denounced the infantry’s Muslim image, asserting that the religion of Albanians is Albanianism. There were a large number of Albanian partisans from Albania and as a result, Enver Hoxha, the communist prime minister of Albania and Josef Broz Tito, the first president of socialist Yugoslavia, became allies. This strategic partnership meant there were very few calls from Albania to alter the Kosovo-Albania border.\footnote{Della Rocca, “A Short History,” 36-37.} Kosovar Albanians remained outside of Albania under Slavic imperialist control.

**Socialist Yugoslavia (1942-1992)**

After the formation of Socialist Yugoslavia (1942-1992), the Yugoslav government began to look at Kosovar Albanians with suspicion due to their opposition to the Partisans during World War II (WWII). The relationship between Albania and Yugoslavia soured because Albanian leaders began to worry about the treatment of Kosovar Albanians. In Yugoslavia, Albanians were seen as “primitive, lazy, Ottoman, Turks”. Despite sharing a faith, Bosnian Muslims looked down on
Albanians because they were perceived as unclean and not “cultivated” from a religious standpoint. This assumption was based on a prejudice about Albanians that pervaded Yugoslav society.

While Kosovo was under Yugoslavia, there were active attempts to suppress certain Islamic practices. Authorities shut down Sharia courts and outlawed the hijab. The Anti-Fascist Front of Women, an offshoot of the communist party, was tasked with organizing women in Kosovo. The organization focused on modernizing the so-called “backwards” Albanian women. They made the removal of the Islamic veil a precondition to participating in society. There was little effort to integrate Albanian women into the women’s group and Albanian women rarely participated in decision-making or leadership roles. At the intersection of Islam and gender, outsiders often fail to understand the agency of Muslim women, frequently casting them into an oppressed victimhood narrative. Here we can see the oppressed Muslim woman trope playing out in the politics of socialist Yugoslavia.

Rise of Serbian Nationalism and the Dissolution of Yugoslavia

In the mid 1980s, there was a reemergence of Serbian nationalism in Yugoslavia. In 1987 Serbian nationalist Slobodan Milosevic rose to power in the Yugoslav government. He believed that Kosovar Albanians presented a genocidal

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threat to Kosovar Serbs because of the control they had over Kosovo. As a result, he instituted systematic forms of discrimination throughout Kosovo that placed ethnic Serbs in positions of power. By 1992, Kosovo was completely segregated along ethnic lines. During this time, many Kosovar Albanian women’s organizations were founded, outside of the Yugoslav women’s groups.\(^76\) Sevdiye Ahmeti, founder of the Independent Women’s Organization, said her organization’s goal was to combat stereotypes of Albanian women, “as Muslims, birthing machines, who did not know anything except how to be submissive”\(^77\) Here, we can see the ways in which gendered tropes about Muslim women impacted Yugoslav policies towards Kosovar Albanians.

In 1989, Milosevic declared a State of Emergency and Kosovo came under the control of the federal Yugoslav army and Serbian police officers. An Albanian pacifist movement called the Democratic League of Kosovo (1989-Present), led by Ibrahim Rugova came into prominence. His philosophy encouraged peaceful resistance of Serbian nationalist reforms in Kosovo. Between 1989-1992, Milosevic instituted systematic discrimination against Albanians, removing them from government jobs, including the police force and judiciary. Rugova’s non-violent approach was unsuccessful, and as a result, the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) formed in 1996.\(^78\)


\(^{78}\) Rocca, “Struggle for Independence. 49-5.
KLA began fighting Serb forces to liberate Kosovar Albanians from the discriminatory measures taken by the government. For Serbs, the fighting was reminiscent of the 1389 Battle of Kosovo. This national myth is islamized and seen as a war against oppressive Muslim forces. Despite this, the Kosovo War was not particularly religious in nature, and Kosovar Albanian political parties had a secular nationalist agenda that sought to liberate Kosovo from Serbian control. Albanian leaders such as President Ibrahim Rugova politicized Kosovo’s Catholic minority during the war in order to distance Kosovo from Islam and promote a sense of shared European identity.

The precursors to the Kosovo War complicate the politics of Muslim identity in Kosovo. On one hand, Serbian nationalists spewed anti-Muslim propaganda in response to Kosovar Albanian resistance. On the other hand, Kosovar Albanians actively stayed away from pronouncing their Muslim identity. Women’s groups fought stereotypes about Muslim women and political elites used the Catholic-Albanian minority to erase the fact that most Kosovar Albanians are Muslim. These dynamics seem to point to attempts at using global discourse for geopolitical aims. Both sides seem to recognize that depicting Albanians as Muslims is a political strategy to evoke responses from other international actors.

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Kosovo War and NATO Intervention

Heavy fighting between the KLA and Serbian forces created droves of refugees attempting to escape Kosovo. In 1998 the KLA suffered a major defeat. Almost simultaneously, the US and the UK removed the KLA’s designation as a terrorist organization and began sending assistance. The West attempted diplomacy between Serbs and Albanians with little success. The 1999 NATO intervention was a turning point in the Kosovo War. On March 23, 1999, NATO conducted airstrikes on Serbian Forces. The airstrikes lasted for 78 days and Slobodan Milosevic retaliated by allowing his forces to ethnically cleanse Albanians. Eventually, Milosevic surrendered and withdrew his forces from Kosovo.  

Conclusion

Under the Ottoman Empire, sectors of the Albanian population converted and consequently they played important roles in Ottoman Society. Geopolitically, the Balkans were under Ottoman imperialist control, and converting to Islam was a way to ensure economic, political and social prosperity. Nevertheless, not all Albanians converted to Ottoman-style Sunni, Orthodox Islam. The multi-confessional nature of the Albanian population often led them to being categorized into different ethnic groups. As a result, Albanian Muslims were often categorized as Turks by both the Ottoman government and Western European Powers.

As Ottoman Empire was on the verge of collapse, Albanians began to worry about losing their land. They figured that the only way to protect their land was to unify Albanians across faiths. Ethno-national unity helped prevent Albanians from being absorbed into other ethnicities based on their religion. Albanian leaders also recognized that the Great Powers had an increasingly important role in the regions. When they recognized that the Ottoman Empire could no longer protect their territory, they began their own, ethno-national fight for independence.

After the Treaty of London was ratified the fate of Albanians split in two. Albanians in Albania claimed their own state, which was recognized by the Great Powers. The fate of Kosovar Albanians was to be determined by Yugoslavia. This rift is important because Kosovar Albanians transitioned from Ottoman imperial rule to Slavic imperial rule, whereas Albanians from Albania achieved independence. Kosovar Albanians newfound ethno-national identity pushed them into a minority status in Yugoslavia. The royalist Yugoslav government tried to coopt Islam to control Albanians, but failed. The socialist Yugoslav government moved to eliminate Islamic elements of Albanian society and integrate Albanians into Yugoslavia, which also failed. It is clear that the main disconnect between Albanians and the Yugoslav government(s) was ethnic. With the outbreak of the Kosovo War, Albanians countered Serbian propaganda by moving away from their Muslim identity and instead making Catholic Albanians emblematic of Albanian identity. This is clearly a geopolitical strategy to align Kosovar Albanians with Europe and thus solicit Western support during the war.
Now that the ground has been laid historically, I can map the transition from old imperial rule, to Western neo-imperialism. Under the Ottoman Empire, Albanians had not yet seen themselves as an ethno-national unit. Albanian Muslims adopted the Muslim identity, as a way to obtain opportunities with Ottoman socio-political structure. When the Ottoman Empire was at the verge of collapse, Albanians sought ethno-national unity to prevent their land from being absorbed by surrounding states. Jane Cooper notes that the politics of difference can create a strict boundary between “insiders” and “outsiders.” When Albania and Kosovo were split up, Kosovar Albanians became ethnic “outsiders” in Yugoslavia. This ethnic exclusion produced unity among Kosovar Albanians further enhancing ethno-nationalism. There was no unity between Albanian Muslim and Slavic Muslims, so religious identity did not help them navigate Yugoslav imperialism. With the onset of the Kosovo War, Albanians began to recognize the negative connation that came with being Muslim. It seemed in their best interest to distance themselves from this identity.

Chapter 2: Development of Western Hegemony

Kosovo is a small place, but it sits on a major fault line between Europe, Asia and the Middle East, at the meeting place of Islam and both Western and Orthodox branches of Christianity.83

-President Bill Clinton

The quotation above is a message issued to the American public in March 1999, as NATO prepared to intervene in the Kosovo war. Clinton continues by naming the US allies that surround Kosovo, highlighting the geopolitical aims that underlie US intervention and alluding to the clash-of-civilizations thesis. There is no doubt that this intervention determined the outcomes of the war. The NATO intervention paved the way for Kosovar independence, and Kosovars do not forget that. In fact, Albanians revere Bill

Clinton. Figure 1 depicts Bill Clinton next to a golden statue erected in his honor. Behind the statue is the American and Kosovar flag.

One of the most striking experiences I had in Kosovo was on American Independence Day. The main square was lined with American flags in preparation for a big celebration. As I walked through the square I could hear the Islamic call to prayer echoing over the city. It stands in striking contrast to Samuel Huntington’s notion of “Islamic civilization,” which is supposed to clash Western civilization. 84 A pew research study found that 44% of Kosovar Muslims said religion is very important in their life. Additionally, 76% of Kosovar Muslims fast during Ramadan. 85 Kosovo is consistently ranked the most pro-American country in the world based on research polls. In 2017, a Gallup poll looking US leadership approval ratings found Kosovo at the top with a 75% approval rating. 86

This chapter explores the development of Western hegemony in Kosovo after the Kosovo War. The term “Western” represents the United States and Western Europe. After the Kosovo War, the West has a neo-imperial presence in almost every sector of Kosovar society. The US’s major role in securing Kosovo’s independence leads to the internalization of American exceptionalism. The United States exerts its hegemony over Kosovo through this internalized American

exceptionalism. Western Europe asserts hegemony in Kosovo through European Union politics. Accession into the European Union would provide Kosovo with visa liberalization and increase economic stability in the country. The prospect of EU accession allows Western European hegemony to take hold in Kosovo.

Initially, Western presence in Kosovo was a geopolitical strategy to counterbalance Russian influence in the Balkans. After the 9/11 attacks in 2001 and the subsequent declaration of the War-on-Terror, clash-of-civilizations discourse begins underlying Western foreign policy. Anxiety concerning radical Islam and terrorism create a climate of suspicion towards Muslim populations. This climate of suspicion requires Muslims to choose their allegiance, either Islam or the West. Furthermore, Muslims must prove this allegiance to be accepted by the West. For Kosovar Albanians, heavy Western hegemony in the country places this question at the forefront. Islamophobia and anti-Muslim sentiment color Western hegemony and force Kosovar Albanians to answer the question, which side are you on?

The first section of this chapter explains the presence of the West in Kosovo after the Kosovo War ended. Both Western Europe and the United States have a political, social and economic presence in Kosovo. Additionally, the US maintains a strong military presence in the country. Internalized American exceptionalism and EU enlargement politics help maintain this hegemony in the country. The second section focuses on Islamophobia and anti-Muslim sentiment in the West. These two phenomena influence domestic and foreign policies towards Islam and Muslims. This section explains this influence and articulates the ways Islamophobia and anti-
Muslim sentiment impacts Western hegemony in Kosovo. In this section, I argue that the West establishes a neo-imperial presence in Kosovo and after 9/11, Islamophobia is incorporate into western neo-imperial hegemony.

**Western Neo-imperialism After the Kosovo War**

Although the Kosovo War ended in 1999, Kosovo did not officially declare independence until 2008. This was the result of competing geopolitical goals of different international actors. During this time, the United Nations operated an interim government to keep the country functioning. In the United States, Congress was split on what action to take in post-war Kosovo. They had not begun with the goal of creating a new government. Ultimately, American politicians felt an obligation to finish what they started in Kosovo. The year 1999 was a confusing period for United States foreign policy. After the Cold War ended in 1991, the United States was still in the process of redefining its geopolitical goals in Europe. Much of Eastern Europe had just come out of Soviet control. The US government saw NATO involvement in Kosovo as a way to achieve European unity and democracy in the post-Cold War era.

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In 2007, on the eve of Kosovar independence, the United States continued to support KFOR presence in Kosovo. In a report to Congress, President George W. Bush writes,

*The original mission of KFOR was to monitor, verify, and when necessary, enforce compliance with the Military Technical Agreement (MTA) between NATO and Serbia (formerly the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia), while maintaining a safe and secure environment. Today, KFOR deters renewed hostilities and, with local authorities and international police, contributes to the maintenance of a safe and secure environment that facilitates the work of the United Nations Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK).*

Here, the original mission of KFOR is transformed and becomes a deterrent to renewed hostilities. The new mission justifies KFOR presence in Kosovo for an indefinite amount of time.96

On February 17th 2008, Kosovo officially declared independence from Serbia, with widespread support from the US and Western Europe. For 100 years, Kosovo politics were shaped by outside occupiers. This marks Kosovo’s shift towards self-determination. Or does it? Despite the official declaration, not everyone agrees on the “true” independence of Kosovo. Albin Kurti claims that formal independence was irrelevant because Washington and Brussels (the de facto capital of the EU) selected leaders and made decisions. Michael Kucztk contended that to be successful, a new state must appeal to Western public opinion. These comments

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support the argument that Kosovar independence is actually a transition from “old imperialism” to neo-imperialism. This time, the West is replacing Yugoslav/Serbian imperialism. 97

The emergence of the European Union as a regional source of political and economic cooperation had a profound impact on the Balkans generally and Kosovo specifically. Many of the prerequisites for EU accession mirror the legal and cultural dimensions of European identity. In December 2008 the European Rule of Law Mission in Kosovo, also known as EULEX, was created following an EU mandate to promote democracy and economic reconstruction in Kosovo. EULEX is the largest EU civilian operation in the union’s history 98 After the 2004 and 2007 EU enlargements, the union began paying attention to unresolved border issues and weak institutions in candidate countries. 99

Currently, the West continues to maintain a heavy influence on Kosovo. US presence penetrates almost every sector of Kosovar society, but perhaps the most interesting is its post-war military involvement in Kosovo. At the conclusion of the war, the Kosovo Liberation Army and NATO signed the Rambouillet Accord. This


agreement demilitarized the KLA, the only resemblance to a military that existed in Kosovo. The agreement boldly states:

The KLA agree that the International Security Presence (KFOR) and the international civil presence will continue to deploy and operate without hindrance within Kosovo and that KFOR has the authority to take all necessary action to establish and maintain a secure environment for all citizens of Kosovo and otherwise carry out its mission.

This agreement gave KFOR, the NATO Force in Kosovo, complete authority over all security matters in Kosovo and disassembled the only existing Kosovar military force. On the subject of Balkan intervention some scholars, including Joseph Buckley assert, “The West has to impose its civilization through its army. It is a new form of colonialism.” This poses the question: Is Kosovo truly independent after 100 years of outside occupation? The physical military presence seems to indicate not only a neo-imperial presence, but also a neo-colonial presence.

Most recently, the United States and KFOR focus on counterterrorism in Kosovo. A 2016 report from the US State Department’s Bureau of Counterterrorism and Countering Violent Extremism highlights a growing number of Kosovars traveling to Syria and fighting with Islamic terror groups. The State Department has allocated a sizable number of resources to help combat terrorism in Kosovo. Notably, in 2015 it designated 2.5 million USD to support Kosovo’s Countering Violent Extremism

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100 Miron Rezun. “Accord Between KFOR and the KLA.” Europe’s Nightmare Struggle for Kosovo (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 2001), 159.

101 Rezun. Struggle for Kosovo (2001), 159.

Action Plan. According to the report, KFOR helps “maintain a safe and secure environment and strengthen the rule of law, including at the borders.” In this context, KFOR helps implement the US War-on-Terror foreign policy aims.

**Western Islamophobia and Anti-Muslim Sentiment**

Woodlock defines Islamophobia as an ideological position in the West that negatively positions Islam and Muslims. In this context, Islam poses a threat to the Western way of life. Islamophobia is assimilative but at the same time exclusionary. Kundnani contends that a Muslim’s position in the Islam-versus-the-West binary is not fixed. A Muslim can join the West by becoming a moderate Muslim. A moderate Muslim aligns herself with the US War-on-Terror and does not criticize the West. According to this perspective, Muslims have an ultimatum: assimilate into the West as a moderate Muslim or be cast as the dangerous other.

How can Western Islamophobia and anti-Muslim sentiment help us understand Islam and Muslims in Kosovar society? The case of Turkey illustrates the ways Western Islamophobia can be internalized by Muslims. In Turkey, modernization and Westernization were linked to the suppression of Islam.

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Interestingly, this mentality spread in Turkey when Turkish elites created Islamophobic moral panic around terrorism. Religious Muslim became internal enemies to Turkish society because the supported the “colonization of repressive religion.” The proliferation of this sentiment was entirely ignited by Turkish elites recycling Western, Islamophobic rhetoric. At the same time, it is a direct response to the Islam-versus-the-West binary that proliferates global discourse.

This points to the classic “good Muslim” trope. Similar to Arun’s “moderate Muslim,” Mahmood juxtaposes the good Muslim and the bad Muslim. According to Mahmood good Muslims are modern, secular and Western. Good Muslims must prove themselves to the West by supporting war against the bad Muslims. This good muslim/bad Muslim dichotomy is evident in the case of Turkey. The good Muslims want to modernize and Westernize Turkey and keep the bad, religious Muslims from taking over. It is obvious how this phenomenon operates in Western contexts when Muslims are the minority. But how does this manifest in Muslim-majority contexts? What’s the catalyst? I argue that Islamophobia is sold in the Muslim-majority in response to Western neo-imperialism. In the case of Turkey, the Kemal era was a time when Turkey was heavily allied with the US and vying for EU admission. Elites saw this adoption as a way to achieve these aims.

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107 Yasin Aktay, “Islamophobia in Turkey,” Thinking through Islamophobia (London: C. Hurst, 2010), 204-05


Methods for Propagating Hegemony

American Exceptionalism

The internalization of American exceptionalism is one of the most unique ways in which many Kosovar Albanians view the United States. Internalized American exceptionalism allows the US to exert its neo-imperialism in Kosovo. American exceptionalism is foundational to US imperialism because it celebrates and normalizes US dominance. As I note in the beginning of the chapter, NATO intervention in the Kosovo War helped solidify the presence of American exceptionalism in Kosovar society.

Harold Koh analyzes American exceptionalism by breaking it up into four distinct categories. I highlight the two that are most relevant to Kosovo: The first is called distinctive rights culture, which imply that America is exceptional because the United States provides its citizens distinct rights. The First Amendment, for example, describes a right that no other country provides for its citizens. The second category is double standards. Under double standards logic, the United States can do things that other countries cannot because of power and wealth make it exceptional.

Koh directly situates Kosovo within the scope of his writing. The NATO intervention in Kosovo is considered a foreign policy success for many American

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politicians and policy scholars. The Kosovo intervention acts as evidence supporting American exceptionalism because in both the US and Kosovo, it is seen as a success.

In the post 9/11 era the US has renewed its commitment to double standards as a way to preserve its global hegemony.\textsuperscript{113} If the US can get other countries to accept the double standard, it has the capacity to use its imperial might without restraint. The War-on-Terror is a prime example of the way America projects its exceptionalism. For example, the Unites States’s treatment of War-on-Terror prisoners in Guantanamo Bay violates the Geneva Convention, which other countries are expected to adhere to.

*Contemporary EU Enlargement Politics*

The history of EU enlargement in the Western Balkans is considerably different from the accession of non-Western Balkan countries. Enlargement is at the heart of the EU project and the EU has grown in membership from 6 to 28 countries since the second half of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century. The current phase of enlargement focuses on 6 Western Balkan countries, including Kosovo. However, unlike other enlargement phases, the process in the Balkans comes with a considerable number of conditions. Concerns about EU security and migration led the EU to instituted

\textsuperscript{113} Koh, Exceptionalism (2005), 126.
strict requirement for Western Balkan countries. \textsuperscript{114} Kosovo sees the EU as a hub of opportunity to promote economic growth and obtain visa liberalization for Kosovars.

The European Union has become increasingly obsessed with terrorism and, as a result, it has enacted policies that are meant to regulate and police Muslims in and around the EU. Border and refugee policy is a way the EU controls the influx of Muslims into the EU. The EU must also attempt to grapple with the compatibility between “European values” and Islam, which can be seen with Turkey’s EU candidacy. “European values” implies the existence of a Europe and Europeans. So the question becomes, who gets to be European?

\textit{Who is European? Who is Western?}

There are competing definitions of European identity but most of them make some reference to the historical prevalence Christianity. Case Holly argues that Latin Christianity is an important characteristic of “true Europe.” \textsuperscript{115} Under this argument, Christian history and heritage are important. This argument says a few things about European identity. First, it completely declares all

\textsuperscript{114} Ker-Lindsay, James, Ioannis Armakolas, Rosa Balfour, and Corina Stratulat. “The National Politics of EU Enlargement in the Western Balkans,” \textit{Southeast European and Black Sea Studies} 17, no. 4 (2017), 511.
Balkan Muslims, including Kosovar Albanian Muslims as un-European by virtue of their religion. Second, it highlights the ambiguous position of orthodox Balkan people. These observations are key because they map onto Huntington’s clash-of-civilization thesis, specifically the Islam-versus-the-West binary. Huntington identifies the Balkans as a civilizational fault line between Western Christianity and both Islam and Orthodox Christianity. He contends, “The peoples to the north and West of this line are Protestant or Catholic; they shared the common experience of European history.” European identity is a subset of Western identity and discourse about europeanness directly contributes to global polemics about the Islam-versus-the-West binary.

Within Huntington’s Islam-versus-the-West binary, Muslims and Islam are seen as encroaching on European territory. There are two prominent ideologies with respect to European identity. The first comes from a nationalist, exclusionary notion if European identity. Under this definition Kosovar Albanian Muslims would be seen as non-European. The second is a cosmopolitan notion of European identity. This is a conditional but fluid identity. It operates under the assumption that Kosovar Albanians can be “Europenized” by abandoning certain cultural, political and religious traits. Both versions of European identity are seen as incompatible with

116 Huntington “The Clash of Civilizations?” 30
118 Huntington, 30.
Muslim identity. The nationalist-populist version exclude Muslim populations altogether, the cosmopolitan view requires europeanized subjects to regulate their Muslim identity by becoming moderate Muslims, secular Muslims or abandoning the religion all together.\textsuperscript{119}

The rhetoric of europeanization is not only a narrative from outside of the Balkans. In Kosovo and throughout Eastern Europe there seems to be an internal consensus that Europeanization is essential for economic and political advancement. Europeanization calls for cultural and political conformity as a prerequisite for becoming European. The political dimension primary concerns the promotion of democratic values. History and heritage comprise the cultural dimension of European identity. This includes liberalism, the Enlightenment and Christian heritage.\textsuperscript{120} These dimensions not only signify a difference between the European and the non-European, they also form a cultural hierarchy. Ivic calls this “two speed Europe” because of the unequal power relations between Western Europe and its eastern periphery.\textsuperscript{121} Islam (and orthodox Christianity) is seen as causing backwardness in the Balkans, relegating them to a lower, non-European social status.\textsuperscript{122}

\textsuperscript{120} Ivic, “European identity,” 208-209.
\textsuperscript{121} Ivic, 235-236.
The Ottoman Empire continues to play a role in European identity politics, despite its collapse a century ago. Within this context, Europe-versus-the Ottomans is the historical precedent of Islam-versus-the-West. However, Gerald Stourzh notes an important caveat, he says, “Europe is not [only] the West. The West extends beyond Europe. But: Europe also extends beyond the West.”\textsuperscript{123} For example, the United States is in the West but not in Europe. On the other hand, Muslim-majority countries in the Balkans, like Kosovo, are geographically in Europe, but may not be Western culturally. This perspective perpetuates narratives that the Balkans are a part of Europe that needs saving from their non-Western, Ottoman past.\textsuperscript{124} This sentiment was a direct result of Christian European political aspirations to limit Islamic expansion.\textsuperscript{125} Therefore europeanization erases Ottoman legacy and, by extension, Islamic heritage in the Balkans.\textsuperscript{126}

Turkey’s bid for EU accession is a good comparative case study to understand the role Islam plays in EU politics. Turkey was the first Muslim-majority country to make this bid, and this attempt provides unique insight for Kosovo’s bid. Part of the tension between Europe and Turkey has to do with Turkey’s Ottoman history. Ottomans were seen as an Islamic power that directly confronted Europe. This makes being Turkish synonymous with being Muslim, which in turn is seen as the

\textsuperscript{123} Pietro Rossi. “Europe and the Ottoman Empire” \textit{The Boundaries of Europe: From the Fall of the Ancient World to the Age of Decolonialization.} (Berlin;Boston: De Gruyter, 2015), 159.

\textsuperscript{124} Rossi. “Europe and the Ottoman” (2003) 171.

\textsuperscript{125} Bremer, “Borderlines in Southeastern Europe.” (2003), 23.

\textsuperscript{126} Petrovic, “Mirroring Europe: Ideas of Europe and Europeanization in Balkan Societies,” 7.
opposite of being European. Arguments against the inclusion of Turkey contend that Islam and Europe are completely separate entities. There is an assumption by some Europeans that democracy, universal human rights and rule of law “European values” and thus oppositional to Islamic values. In this context, Muslim-majority Turkey possesses values that are culturally incompatible with “European values.” Proponents of Turkey’s inclusion also employ dichotomous rhetoric. This argument asserts that Turkey will be able bridge the East and West by joining the EU.

“European Values”, Islam and EU Integration Policies

The European Union responded to the 9/11 terror attacks in the United States by securitizing Islam. A sense of heightened anxiety proliferated throughout Europe and the clash-of-civilizations rhetoric became more pronounced. For many European politicians there were only two options: Europeanize Islam or face an Islamized Europe. Europeanizing Islam manifested in many different policy changes. Muslims became the primary target of integration policy and a greater emphasis was placed on securing EU countries. Interestingly, there was also a

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culturalization of citizenship, which attempted to regulate Islamic practices. This culturalization used national culture to define acceptable modes of Islamic practice.  

Islam-versus-the-West discourse plays out through the European Union’s integration and enlargement policies. Integration policies are meant to assimilate Muslims into the European culture in which they are living, however this policy is often tied to countering violent extremism (CVE). The link between integration and CVE is deeply problematic because it assumes that Muslims are violence-prone. This comes from the assumption that Islam is at odds with “European Tradition” in terms of freedom of expression, secularism and women’s rights, among other areas. The policies seek to make Muslims less Muslim and more European based on the normative understandings of both identities.

Europeanization policies such as implementing strict citizenship and language restrictions work to increase the europeanness of Muslim populations.  

Integration and CVE also use methods of culturalization to decrease the “muslimness” of Muslim populations. The 2004 French ban on religious symbols in schools and the 2011 ban on niqabs are popular examples of this method.

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Regulating Islamic dress is seen as a way to promote secularism and decrease societal tension between Muslim and non-Muslims populations.\textsuperscript{134} These instances of forced integration set strict limits on the acceptable levels of “muslimness” allowed in society. For policymakers and proponents, these laws are a way to protect the European nation-state and European people from Islam and Muslims. It reaffirms that Muslims in Europe are threats that need to be managed.

The language in EU policy about integration CVE underscores the ways in which Muslims are targeted and policed. The language assumes that Muslims are most at risk or vulnerable to radicalization and urges civilian workers, teachers, police officers, and religious leaders to police them.\textsuperscript{135} From 2005 onward, the European Union sought to address the “root causes” of radicalization. The original CVE policy language used terms such as “Muslims” and “Muslim communities”, differentiating European Muslims from other European citizens. Admittedly, the EU made efforts to eliminate terms that single out Muslims from their CVE policy, however in contemporary discourse among European policymakers, radicalization is understood as a Muslim issue. These types of policies demonize everyday Islamic practices, like praying 5 times a day, as cause for suspicion. They also treat radicalization as an infection that Muslims are vulnerable to or a pathway that a Muslim can be led to.

\textsuperscript{134} 8-11.

Until 2015, the European Union instituted the Dublin Regulation, which eliminated internal EU borders. A number of agreements were enacted to prevent migrants from entering the border, effectively allowing Europe to ignore the refugee crisis. These policies come in response to growing the anti-migrant and anti-Muslim sentiment. European populations who are hostile to migrants typically identify them as Muslims, bringing Islam into Europe. The connection between EU border control policies and Balkan Muslims is particularly interesting. The EU compels local and national governments in Muslim-majority regions of the Balkans to secure and surveil its borders. It creates a binary between European, secular Muslims and migrant, Middle Eastern “others”. Furthermore, it juxtaposes tolerant Balkan Islam and a radical Middle Eastern Islam. For Balkan Muslims, the policing of non-European migrant Muslims acts as a performative loyalty to Europe. This is especially pertinent for Balkan countries like Kosovo who are vying for EU accession. Despite this performance, Balkan Muslims are simultaneously seen as suspect. They are seen as potentially connecting radical, Middle Eastern Muslims to Europe.  

Conclusion

Undoubtedly, there is a connection between Islamophobia, anti-Muslim sentiment and Western neo-imperialism. Many Kosovar Albanians credit the United States for liberating Kosovo during the war. Since the conclusion of the war, the

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United States plays a major role in almost every facet of Kosovar society. Internalized American exceptionalism is widespread in Kosovo and polls consistently categorize it as the most pro-American country in the world. America is seen as the pinnacle of statehood and an example that Kosovo should strive for. American exceptionalism has two important characteristics; distinctive rights culture and double standards. Distinctive rights culture assumes American exceptionalism based on distinct rights that the US provides for its citizens. Double Standards concern the US’s ability to use its wealth and power to bypass rules and norms that other countries are expected to follow. US hegemony is maintained and established through these characteristics.

European hegemony is enshrined in Kosovar society a different way, and primarily concerns EU enlargement politics. It is also Kosovo’s largest single foreign donor and this strengthens the EUs neo-imperial control over the country. Kosovo seeks admission into the EU and many Kosovars see it as a way to foster economic growth and obtain visa liberalization. The prospect of EU membership helps the EU institute hegemony by requiring Kosovo to prove its europeanness. Similar to the US, islamophobia and anti-Muslim sentiment are intertwined with politics. However, unlike the US, Western Europe has a history of positioning Muslim and European identities in contrast with each other. The dynamic is a subset of the Islam-versus-the-West narrative, and similarly pressures Kosovars to operate within this binary. Even if Kosovars choose European identity over Muslim identity, then they faced the task of proving their europeanness.
Western Islamophobia and anti-Muslim sentiment are articulated through the Islam-versus-the-West binary. Under this dichotomy, the only way to be a pro-Western Muslim is to become a “good Muslim,” someone who does not criticizes the West and supports its war against the “bad Muslims.” American exceptionalism and EU enlargement politics and neo-imperialism bolster each other and enshrine Western hegemony in Kosovo. This hegemony brings Western islamophobia and anti-Muslim sentiment with it, allowing it to penetrate Kosovar society.
Chapter 3: Transmission and Impact of Western Hegemony

If in the case of the United States Islamophobia is employed to naturalize and justify US global hegemony, in the EU it is employed to normalize and justify the union’s regional hegemony in the enlargement process as well as its geopolitical bordering and security strategies in the Western Balkans.154

Role of Elites in Transmitting Hegemony

In general, the Kosovo government and political elites are overwhelmingly pro-EU and pro-US. Many Kosovar Albanian policymakers have been careful not to project a “Muslim” image of Kosovo in Europe and often actively downplay Muslim identity in the country. This section highlights the way in which Kosovo elites accept the Islam-versus-the-West binary by embracing the West and rejecting Muslim identity. Albanian nationalism is an important component of this transmission by claiming that Western influence is essential to preserve and advance Albanian people.

Benedict Anderson argues, “leadership, not people inherit old switchboards and palaces” and that often times elites ignite wars and “in a very real sense these

were ‘chancellory wars’ in which popular nationalism was mobilized largely after the fact and always in a language of self-defence.”

This indicates that elites leadership mobilizes popular nationalism to justify their actions. This also emphasizes the unequal relationship between political elites and the general population. In Kosovo, the elites act as gatekeepers, only allowing Western hegemony to permeate society. When questioned, they invoke popular nationalism to justify these actions.

Anderson also articulates a connection between imperialism and the “last wave” of nationalism after WWII. He contends, “The ‘last wave’ of nationalisms…was in its origins a response to the new-style global imperialism.”

In the “last wave” of nationalism, imperial powers ideologically influenced the nationalism that was emerging from their imperial subject. In Kosovo, this explains why the West, a neo-imperial force in Kosovo, is able to influence discourse about Islam and Muslims. The West collaborates with Kosovar elites to influence nationalism, which in turn shapes social and political structures in Kosovar society.

In this section, I argue that Kosovar elites transmit Western Islamophobia to the general population which influences the ways in which they negotiate their Muslim identity.

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189 Anderson, “Last Wave,” 118
Parent-Child Relationship

An interesting narrative arises when examining the ways in which foreign Western media discuss the US-Kosovo relationship. These media sources turn to Kosovar political elites to craft Kosovo’s image. As a result, they depict the West as a loving but stern parent that seeks to keep Kosovo out of trouble. This depiction is extremely pejorative and emphasizes Western neo-imperialism in Kosovo. In 2017 Reuters published the article, “Kosovo bows to U.S., NATO pressure, puts off plan to create army.” There are two notable things about this article. First, the article shows how susceptible Kosovar political elites are to Western pressure. Second, the U.S. ambassador’s defense of KFOR further articulates this parental tone, “Kosovo needs a legitimate capability to defend itself before KFOR (NATO mission) can consider leaving.”¹⁹³ The tone of this quotation erases the agency of the Kosovar government. Here, the United States articulates a condition that Kosovo must meet before Western NATO forces will leave the country. It implies that the Western powers, not Kosovo, determine the status of foreign troops in the country. This media depiction seems to confirm the hegemonic grasp the West has on Kosovo’s military structures.

The Washington Post published an article in February that seems to further depict this parent-child relationship. The article title, “10 years after independence, Kosovo’s prime ministers ask Washington for help with ‘unfinished business’” is telling. The article contains an interview transcript between a journalist and Ramush Hardinaj, Kosovo Prime Minister. The reporter asks how Kosovars perceive the US

and Hardinaj indicates that the perception is overwhelmingly positive. The reporter follows Hardinaj’s response with a more provocative question. He comments on Kosovo’s Muslim population and asks if Kosovar secularism is setting an example for “other mostly Muslim societies.” Hardinaj responds,

The Muslim religion is present in our lives and the majority of our population is Muslim, but it’s a very original kind of Islam that I think is very different than what we see in other nations. Religion is valued, but we don’t impose it on other parts of life. Democracy and the rights of women in particular are respected. I hope other nations find their way out of fundamentalism, which is a danger for everyone.194

Here Hardinaj positions Kosovar Albanians as the pro-Western “good Muslims.” In doing so he appeals to the “distinctive values” of American Exceptionalism. He asserts Kosovo is not like those “Bad Muslims” because it purports US/Western values of democracy and women’s rights. At the same time, the tone of the article implies the Kosovo is a child who must go to its parent, the US, and “ask for help.”

Kosovo: An Unconditional Lover

Many foreign media outlets have taken interest in pro-American sentiment in Kosovo, especially because it is a pro-American, Muslim-majority country. In 2018, Time Magazine published the article, “Kosovo’s America Obsession,” which begins, “The ethnically Albanian and predominantly Muslim statelet... is perhaps the most

pro-American country in the world.” The description of Kosovo as a “predominantly Muslim statelet” is intentional. It is meant to shock the Western reader. Unlike other predominantly Muslim countries, Kosovo is a “good Muslim” country because it loves America. The writer continues by giving examples to further show this point. He mentions a family who turned their home into a shrine to the United States, a gesture that would even be shocking in the United States. This points to a few things. First, we see a continuation of the pro-US narrative pushed by elites. Second, it shows how islamophobia in the United States does not decrease the impact US hegemony in Kosovo because internalized American exceptionalism is so strong.

National Public Radio published a similar article, “Welcome to the Country with the Biggest Crush on America.” The article begins by telling the story of Hysni Rexha, a Kosovar Albanian man who “loves the United States unconditionally.” The article continues with a bizarre depiction of Rexha, a Kosovar Albanian man running a wildlife reserve. Rexha credits the US for Kosovo’s existence. He goes on to tell the reporter that he named his favorite wolf after Donald Trump, explaining, “Trump Wolf protects me…Just like President Trump will protect Kosovo.” The article does not fail to mention that Kosovo is predominately Muslim. Again we see this “Good Muslim” depiction being deployed in foreign media.


Critiques of Elite Driven-Narratives: Inversing the Binary

The Free Voice of Albania is an anonymous Twitter account that is heavily critical of Kosovar Albanian elites. Some of the main criticisms discuss Western relations with Kosovo. Although it is impossible to know whether the person running this account is Albanian or not, the account’s attempts to flip the narrative, calling attention to Western neo-imperialism and the connection between pro-Western Kosovar elites, Western hegemony and Muslim identity in Kosovo.

Recently, the Israel/Palestine discourse has entered Muslim-identity discourse among Albanians. The Free Voice of Albania account urges Kosovar Albanians to support Palestinians, under the assumption that Israel is part of the West. The account compares Israeli-Palestinian relations to Serbian-Albanian relations during the Kosovo War.

Many of the commenters draw implicit parallel between the Islam-Palestine conflict and the Islam-versus-the-West binary. In opposition, one commenter...
blames Muslim countries for spreading Wahabbism in Kosovo to argue against supporting the Palestinian cause. The commenter seems to be linking the spread of Wahabbism and the Palestinian cause based on a tangential connection to Islam. Another commenter asserted that Kosovo should stick with its “powerhouse Western alliances” because the United States is responsible for Kosovo’s independence. Here we can how commenters are directly engaging with Islam-versus-the-West in discourse about Kosovo on Twitter.

The Free Voice of Albania often tweets about Albanian-Muslim identity and is very critical of those who deny the Muslim component of Albanian identity. In response, some commenters argue that they Albanians were “originally” Christians but the Ottoman Empire forced them to convert. In response, another commenter came to the FVOA’s defense. He attempts to counter the dominant narrative by questioning why a majority of Albanians continue to identify as Muslim.
Kosovo held elections in June 2017 and the big winner was Vetevendosje, also known as the self-determination party. This political party is extremely critical of the way Kosovar elites allow the West to interfere politically in Kosovo. After the win, FVOA tweeted a picture of the US ambassador to Kosovo, implying that he was disappointed at the election results. In response, an Albanian man said America is winning and Islamism is losing in Kosovo. This comment is curious because the original tweet was not referencing Islam or Muslim identity. It is clear that the Islam-versus-the-West discourse is an extremely pervasive part of identity discourse about Kosovo. This comment depicts Kosovo as a battleground or “fault line” along which Islam and the West clashes.
The Free Voice of Albania Twitter account represents an opposition to the dominant pro-American discourse purported by elites in Kosovo. The account’s supporter and opposition both seem to acknowledge a link between Muslim identity discourse in Kosovo and Western involvement in the country, even if it is not made explicit by the account. The FVOA represents an inversion of the elite-driven narrative found in foreign newspapers.

This tweet shows a poll the FVOA conducted among its twitter followers. The empirical validity of the poll is questionable, but the framing of the question is interesting. The EU and the US are said to exert “colonial pressure” on the...
Kosovar government. Counter to the elite driven narratives, the polling question depicts the West as a colonial power in Kosovo.

The next tweet is a critique of Besiana Xharra, a Kosovar Albanian journalist who is extremely critical of Islam in the public sphere in Kosovo. The FVOA took a screenshot of her Facebook profile. She expresses joy over hearing Catholic Church bells and not “Allahu Akbar,” the Muslim call to prayer. She justifies her stance by claiming that this is what a European country looks like. Again, we can see how muslimness and europeanness are depicted as oppositional and incompatible. For many Kosovars, joining the EU means shedding Muslim identity.

Figure 7: Free Voice of Albania Twitter account. Attaches a Facebook screenshot posted by local journalist on 2 September 2013.
24 October 2017
The EU/US backed "secular" Kosovo government will spend €740,000 on renovating churches in Kosovo in 2017/18. And €0 on mosques. Kosovo is 96% Muslim & 4% Christian. Is this fair?

Figure 8: Free Voice of Albania Twitter account. Attaches and image of Kosovo’s 2017 budget with the annual fund allocation for churches & mosques highlighted in red.

15 November 2017

In this tweet, the FVOA includes a picture of Kosovo’s 2017 Budget. The two highlighted rows denote expenditures for churches and mosques. FVOA is commenting on the obvious disparity between money spent on churches and money spent on mosques. The account attributes this to Western influence and mocks the government’s secularism. The critique here is twofold. First, that the supposedly secular, pro-Western Kosovar government spends money on churches. Second, the
Muslim-majority country does not provide any funding for its mosques. This tweet is interesting because it seems to imply a connection between Christianity, secularism and Western imperialism in Kosovo. This seems like a critique about the ways in which the West claims to be secular (or in the US case, claim the separation-of-church-and-state), but actually promote Christian supremacy. Additionally, the account calls the Kosovo government a “US/EU backed” government. This implies that the West has a neo-imperial influence on the government in Kosovo.

The Free Voice of Albania account draws attention to Western hegemony in Kosovo by inversing the elite-driven narratives that dominate foreign media. Both the Kosovar elites and the FVOA make arguments within the Islam-versus-the-West binary. Neither view can claim to completely represent the ways in which everyday Kosovar Albanians navigate the pervasive US hegemony that pressures them to “choose” the West. In my conversations with Kosovar Albanians, many find themselves trapped in the Islam-versus-the-West binary when their own identities are far more complex.

**Evaluating Everyday Impacts on Muslim identity: Complicating the Binary**

Kosovar Albanians must navigate their own relationships to Muslim identity in a political climate dominated by Western hegemony. In the semi-structured interviews, I explore ways in which Kosovar Albanians are navigating this space. Most of the participants acknowledge a general climate of anxiety around radicalization in terrorism. In response, I notice a considerable amount of identity
policing within the religious/observant Muslim community and within the larger Kosovar society. Second, the intersection of Western hegemony and Islam often plays out through discourse about gender and sexuality. Lastly, many interviews make a distinction between Balkan Islam (or Albanian Islam) and “other Islam.”

*Terror Anxiety and Internal Policing: Pointing the Finger*

Mamdani writes extensively about Western Islamophobic discourse after 9/11. He succinctly argues, “unless proves to be ‘good,’ every Muslim was presumed to be ‘bad.’ All Muslims were now under obligation to prove their credentials by joining in a war against the ‘bad Muslims.’” 197 Throughout my interviews, I notice reoccurring instances of internal policy. This typically involves the interview contrasting themselves to a more “extreme” or “bad Muslim.” The people interviewees cast as “bad Muslims” changes from person to person. This seems to be an internal way in which Kosovar Albanians are distinguishing between “good Muslims” and “bad Muslims.”

I sat with the group of women in Ferizaj, a small city just outside of the capital. A woman wearing a dark jilbab named Jeta tells me what it was like for her in Kosovar society, “People think I’m ISIS” she explains. She goes on to share that people on the streets have approached her and said this. In addition to tension in the public sphere, she also finds this anxiety at home, “I don’t shake hands [with my

197 Mamdani “Modernity and Violence,” 15.
male cousins), so everyone thinks I’m extreme.” Another woman in the group explains that in Albanian culture, not shaking the hand of one’s cousin is unheard of. As a result, even members of Jeta’s family are suspicious of her. For many in Kosovar society, her loose, black head covering makes her a “bad Muslim.”

When I go to Mitrovica, an ethnically divided city in the north of Kosovo, I hear similar stories. An English teacher at an EU-funded community center explains, “When I started talking about religion they always say stop you are like ISIS.” Her colleague agrees, asserting, “[People say] Muslim religion, they are too extreme.” Both women explain that these comments come from other colleagues and professors at their universities. They find most people become uncomfortable when they bring up religion. A considerable amount of anxiety around terror and extremism had produced this outcome in Kosovar society. This shows another instance in which a certain type of Muslim is demonized as a “bad Muslim.” In this case, simply talking about religion in the public sphere makes her a threat.

One thing I notice throughout my interviews with hijab-wearing women is the distinction made between “the black hijabs” and “colorful/modern hijabs.” “Black hijabs” represent more than just the color on a woman’s headscarf, connotes a mode of ultra-conservative dress. Women in “black hijab” wear long, shapeless jilbabs and dark colors. Women in “colorful hijabs” represent a more colorful mode of dressing that more closely resembles Western dress. This seems to be a division and a kind of internal policing among observant Muslim women. In The Pink

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198 See Appendix 2, Figure 1
199 See Appendix 2, Figure 2
**Hijab** Robin Wright describes what he calls “the pink hijab generation.” This is a generation of young girls in Egypt who don colorful hijabs as a way to both reject conservative interpretations of Islam and embrace their faith. Kathy Mullet observes a very similar occurrence among women in Iran. Urban Iranian women did not wear the chador, described as, “A black covering which envelopes the body,” similar to the jilbab. Instead they opted for more “fashionable hijabs.” In Kosovo women in black hijabs were often categorized as “bad Muslims.”

When I arrive at the Ferizaj mosque I group of around 8 women greet me. I immediately notice the diversity of clothing in the room. Some wear jeans, some wear long dresses without a headscarf, some wear long dresses with a headscarf and one woman is wearing a loose, black jilbab. They all look at me, anticipating my questions. I ask them how Kosovar society perceives the hijab. Immediately women, both with and without hijab, tell me about their families disdain for the Islamic covering. The woman wearing a jilbab said she experience more hardship because, “They want colorful hijabs.” She asserts that her family would have no issue with her wearing a colorful hijab, but her decision to wear a long black jilbab makes some family and friend uncomfortable. Most of the women explain that the “black hijab” connotes extremism in Kosovar society, which explains this discomfort.


201 See Appendix 2, Figure 3

The group of women I met with in Ferizaj seemed to get along well despite their various levels of adherence to Islamic dress code. However other women I spoke with did not have the same experience. Diellza tells me something I do not expect: “Girls with no hijab they respect me.” She juxtaposes this with girls who wear what she calls “the black,” otherwise known as a jilbab. She claims that these women do not respect her because she is modern and chooses not to wear the jilbab. She did not directly cast these women as “bad Muslims” but her efforts to distinguish herself from them leads me to believe that is the case.

Similarly, when I sit down with Drita, a hijab-wearing Muslim woman studying education at the University of Prishtina, she says, “It’s the girls that wear only the black” when describing who she receives the most judgment from in society. She goes on to tell me that the women in “the black” often call her out for playing sports or speaking with male professors. Both Drita and Ferizaj bring forth this idea of internal policing, not only within Kosovar society as a whole, but specifically within the religious Muslim community. Again Drita seems to cast women in “the black” as intolerant, “bad Muslims.”

Another fascinating example of internal policing concerns the sectarian Sunni-Shia divide. In Kosovo, almost everyone who identifies as Muslim also identify as Sunni. There is a Bektashi population, which is sometimes classified as Shia, however they have a very different approach to Islam from the majority of Shias in the world. However, I met with one non-bektashi Shia family while I was in Prishtina. I am sitting with the eldest daughter, Besa, in the nonprofit that she runs with her
mother. She wears a floral hijab and a colorful tunic over her jeans. She tells me that she finds herself far removed from the Sunni Muslim community in Kosovo: “My kind of people are more not religious people.” She continues, “Especially for me because I am more tolerant more modern.” She continues, “[They name] me as an unbeliever without knowing me and my religion.” Again, in Besa’s case, we can see an internal policing going on. In Besa’s case, the “bad Muslims” are a sector of the Sunni population because of their anti-Shia sentiment.

**Gender and Sexuality**

At the political level you can see the continued perpetuation of these gender-based truths in Kosovo. Krasniqi notes the way these truths manifest in post-War Kosovo by describing the incident that occurred in 2003 with the Kosovo OSCE delegation. Krasniqi explains that the interpreter disturbed the dominant nationalist narrative that an Albanian woman needs to appear Western.\(^{203}\) Here we see religion visibly disrupting nationalist narrative. In post-War Kosovo, nationalists are pushing for an identity that looks Western. Piro Rexhepi directly addresses the ways in Western hegemony perpetuates the Islam-versus-the-West discourse through discourse about sexuality. Specifically, he argues that hegemonic perceptions of progress create a binary between, “local ‘repressed’ sexualities and backward...

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Muslim cultures.” This is a sub-binary within the large Islam-versus-the-West binary and I found different participants articulating this dynamic in my interviews.

I am with Xhesika in her office in Prishtina. She seems surprised to see a woman wearing a headscarf sitting in her office, smiling at her. I fix my scarf while she prepares my coffee. Xhesika is a local journalist who has very strong feelings about religion in the public space. I jump right in and ask her what her thoughts are about the intersection of Islam and gender in Kosovo. She seems nervous. I sense my headscarf is making her more cautious about what she says. She responds, “In essence I believe all religions are oppressive towards women in some way.” I don’t push her any further. Instead I ask her what the tensions about Islam exist in Kosovo. She tells me a story about a village imam from just outside of the capital. During a Friday sermon, he told his congregation not to be violent towards members of the LGBT community. The next week, the imam was threatened and his car set on fire for what the attackers saw as a pro-LGBT sentiment. She tells me her main critique about the Muslim community in Kosovo: “‘What we’re missing is moderate voices,’” she says. “You have also these moderate voices who were physically attacked.”

Here, Xhesika acknowledges that a polarization between the Muslim community and the queer community maintain the binary.

Arlind sits with me in a popular Prishtina coffee shop. I am the only foreigner, and I can hear locals chattering in Albanian all around me. I turn and look at Arlind and find him staring at me. He apologizes, telling me he is so shocked that a Muslim

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woman with a headscarf is interested in hearing about his experience as a transgender man. I tell him things are different in the United States and young Muslims tend to be more liberal. He laughs, telling me that this is unheard of in Kosovo. Arlind takes a sip of his coffee and begins to tell me about the double-erasure of LGBT Muslims in Kosovo, "You have gay people who go to the mosque and pray,” he says. However, he notes the reality in Kosovar society, where the LGBT community and the Muslim community do not accept one another. As a queer activist, Arlind avoids discussing this intersection publically. He tells me it would be dangerous for him to publically declare that queer people can be Muslim and who would risk being attacked by religious extremists. Arlind’s anecdote draws attention to the ways in which the Islamic community becomes the pinnacle of homophobia, illustrating Piro Rexhepi’s sub-category of repressed sexualities census backwards, Muslim culture. This plays into the larger Islam-versus-the-West dichotomy.

_Balkan Islam/ Albanian Islam_

Here you can see all of the participants describing what Piro Rexhepi calls Balkan Islam, which he describes, 

_In the Balkans, Muslim communities have come to distance themselves from certain Islamic practices in a distinctive manner by articulating the belief that Balkan Islam is an exceptional type of Islam, that is secular, European and compatible with EU integration, unlike non-European, radical and fundamentalist Islam that may be found in the Middle East or Africa._

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This shows the development of a Balkan Islam that allows Balkan Muslims to prove their Western orientation within the Islam-versus-the-West binary. In this context, “good Muslim” and “bad Muslim become racialized, and Kosovar Albanians are the “good Muslims.

I step into the Islamic school, and immediately every head turns to look at me. Unlike Muslim spaces in the United States that are predominately people of color, in Kosovo I am often the only person of color in Muslim spaces. I stick out like a sore thumb. I go up to one of the onlookers and ask where Bardha’s office is located. At first the student is stunned to hear a non-Albanian speaking her native language. She motions me to follow her. She leaves me at Bardha’s office door and I knock. Bardha shows me into her extravagantly decorated office. A male waiter immediately comes in and serves us tea. In addition to being a teacher, Bardha is a well-known Muslim activist. Before I get the chance to ask a question she begins telling me about the problems Muslims face in Kosovo, “People ask me how come this new type of Islamism came to Kosovo?” She continues, “Who invested in traditional Islam in Kosovo? They invested a lot in discrediting our community.” The “they” Bardha is referring to are Kosovo’s political elites. She feels that a new wave of Islamism, distinct from “traditional” Kosovar Islam, has entered Kosovo. Furthermore, she claims that elites marginalize traditional, tolerant forms of Islam native to the Kosovo, and as a result foreign, radical forms have filled the vacuum.

After afternoon prayer Antigona and I go across the street to a café near the mosque. This street is a few meters form Kosovo’s main square and a couple blocks
from the University of Prishtina. I have been told that secular Kosovars often call this street “the terrorist street” because it houses one of Pristina’s main mosques, the Islamic faculty, religious stores and cafes that do not sell alcohol. We sit near a window where I can see people leaving the mosque. Men have long beards and women wear headscarves and maxi skirts. I feel very at home in the mosque. It was a familiar space, reminding me of mosques back in the US. I ask her if she thinks Islam is the same everywhere in the world. She explains that Albanian culture entrenches Islam in Kosovo. She goes on. “We won’t marry with cousins...It’s okay in Islam, but in our tradition no.” This perspective does not directly cast Albanian Muslims as “good Muslims,” however, it does mark a distinction between Albanian Islam and foreign Islam.

Conclusion

Western hegemony pervades Kosovar society and is a product of Western neo-imperialism after the war. The relationship between pro-Western Kosovar elites and the transmission of hegemony is essential. Within the Islam-versus-the-West binary, these elites reframe Western islamophobia and anti-Muslim sentiment and transmit it to the general population in an appeal to ethnic identity or ethno-nationalism. Choosing the West is seen as a way to both embrace Albanian identity and ensure the prosperity of the Kosovar Albanian people. The widespread ethno-national consciousness in Kosovo makes this practice successful. The elite-driven narratives about identity and Western influence are reflected in Western media. As
a result, this media paints an image of Kosovo that is pro-American and only nominally Muslim.

The FVOA twitter account represents attempts to inverse the narrative while still operating within the Islam-versus-the-West binary. The account is anonymous and the person behind the account may not even be Albanian, however, the account underscores the connection between Western imperialism and Muslim identity. It also makes reference to actually people and policy that display this reality. The account produces a counter-narrative that makes foreign media, elite driven narratives all the more prevalent.

My ethnographic notes the impact of this rhetoric in Kosovo. The most notable is the anxiety around terrorism and the internal police going on in society and large and specifically in Kosovar’s religious community. Lastly, I found that many Kosovar Albanians negotiate their identities at the intersections of gender, sexuality and nationality. Provide theory for all of the subsections ....My findings were two-fold. First, Western hegemony, transmitted to society through elites, pressures everyday Kosovars to choose the West and move away from Muslim identity. Nevertheless, many Kosovar Albanians do not fully adopt the binary, because it does not reflect the complexity of their identity. Ultimately, under Western neo-imperialism, Kosovar Albanians are trying to navigate a particular hegemonic socio-political context, just as they did under Ottoman and Yugoslav rule.
Conclusion

Kosovar Albanians have an extensive history of negotiating identity in different imperial contexts. Before the Kosovo War, they fell under Yugoslav and Ottoman imperialism. Both of these empires represent “old imperialism” because they primarily use aggression and expansion to build the empire and rule populations. The Ottoman Empire had a complicated relationship with Albanians. The Ottomans established socio-political structures in which religious identification was most important. At this point, there was not a strong ethno-national Albanian identity and Albanians primarily identified with clan, tribe and religion, not ethnicity. Muslims enjoyed many privileges and opportunities and as a result, many Albanians converted to Islam. In fact, Muslim Albanians obtained important military and political position in the empire. In the present day, nationalists remember the prominent Ottoman-Albanian officials who rebelled against the Ottomans. These stories highlight conversions from Sunni Islam as a form of revolt against Ottoman imperialism.

At the conclusion of the Russo-Turkish War, the Ottoman Empire ceded large swaths of Albanian territory to Russian allies. When Western powers sought to renegotiate the post-war settlement, Albanian leaders saw an opportunity to
preserve their land. Albanians began moving away from religious identification and this time marks the beginning of Albanian national consciousness. The Ottomans attempted to quell this nationalism through Ottomanist and Islamist policies. Unfortunately, had already weakened considerably and Albanians were preparing to fight for their land. After the empire finally collapsed, an Albanian state formed. Kosovo was excluded from Albania because prior to its formation the Ottomans succeeded Kosovo to the Kingdom of Serbia.

After World War I, the Kingdom of Serbia became the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes. Albanians became a non-Slavic minority and the kingdom instituted a deportation policy to remove them from Kosovo. Kosovar Albanians were relocated to Turkey and the government gave their land to Slavic colonists. During WW II, many Kosovar Albanians allied with the Nazis over their shared resentment of Slavs. After the war ended Josef Broz Tito formed a social Yugoslavia that was suspicious of Kosovar Albanians due to their collaboration with the Nazis during the war. In the 1980s Kosovar Albanians began protest what they perceived as systematic discrimation from the Yugoslav government. The next two decades, the Albanians were plagued with severe oppression from the Yugoslav government. When Yugoslavia began to dissolve, ethnic tension between Serbs and Albanians was heightened. Serbian nationalist Milosevic instituted stricter restrictions on Albanians.

This eventually led to the outbreak of the Kosovo War in the 90s. The West became increasingly concerned about ethnic cleansing in Kosovo and intervened
through NATO. This was a deciding factor in the war and in 1999 Serbian forces withdrew from Kosovo. In 2008 Kosovo formally declared independence. This marks the transition from “old imperialism” to Western neo-imperialism. After the Kosovo War, the West established a neo-imperialist presence in Kosovo. Both the EU and the US directly and indirectly exerted influence over political, economic and social spheres in Kosovo.

After 9/11, Islam-versus-the-West discourse began dominating Western foreign policy. In Europe and the United States, Islamophobia and anti-Muslim sentiment was on the rise. Islamophobic discourse exacerbated this notion that Islam is war with the West and that “Islamic values” and “Western values” are oppositional. These beliefs pervade many different aspects of Western policy including policies. It created a climate of suspicion surrounding Muslim both inside and outside of the West.

This narrative about Islam and Muslims was transmitted to Kosovo through Western hegemony. The US and the EU push Western hegemony through different means but ultimately the result is the same: Kosovar Albanians are pressured to choose the West over Islam. The US uses internalized American exceptionalism to reinforce hegemony. After the NATO innervation American holds widespread popularity in Kosovo that causes the internalization of American exceptionalism in Kosovo. The EU uses the prospect of EU accession to maintain hegemony. Many Kosovars see the EU as a path to economic opportunities and a way to attain visa liberalization. Both the prospect of EU accession and American exceptionalism are
used to establish hegemony and in turn transmit the Islam-versus-the-West narrative.

The transmission of hegemony goes from the hegemon to the political elites and then from the elites to the general population. The pro-Western elites appeal to Albanian nationalism as a way to transmit this hegemony. These elites dominate Western foreign media narrative. In contrast, the FVOA, flips the binary emphasizing its existence and the connections between Western hegemony and US imperialism. Ultimately, the pro-Western narrative and the FVOA counter-narrative both operate within the Islam-versus-the-West binary. My interviews illustrate the complication this binary presents to the general public. It indicates a need to “choose” a side and implies the Islam and the West are mutually exclusive. The complication comes when identities do not fit within these binaries. I find Kosovar Albanians trying to negotiate their identities while operating within this context.

I found three prominent dynamics that illustrate the Islam-versus-the-West binary in Kosovar society. The first was internal policy that seems to come from an anxiety around terrorism. The second involve contentious debates at the intersection of gender, sexuality and Islam. Lastly, I found some participants made a distinction between Albanian/Balkan Islam and foreign Islam. These findings seem to confirm that Western islamophobia has begun to penetrate Kosovar society.

The West operates through this binary and tells Kosovars they must choose a civilization. The elites perpetuate this further by making a choice for the people. A lot of media and scholarship crafts Kosovar Albanian identity from the perspective of
these pro-Western elites. This creates a distorted image of Muslim identity in Kosovo. While on social media there is an attempt to inverse this narrative, everyday Kosovar Albanians navigate this very differently. I look from the bottom up, to see how this discourse plays out in the general population. I find that identity negotiation becomes more complicated than simply choosing a side.

The experience of Kosovar Albanians underscores the global presence of Western neo-imperialism and highlights the way the West tailors its hegemony to influence a population. The role Western hegemony plays in Kosovo highlights a discrepancy between Western hegemonic understandings of Muslim identity and the experiences of actual Muslims. Western hegemony attempts to define Muslim identity in a rigid, dualistic way, and pressures Muslims to choose between Islam-versus-the-West or “good Muslim”-versus-“Bad Muslim.” In reality identity is more complicated than a simple dichotomy.

The-Clash-of-Civilization thesis attempts to carve out cultural civilization and anticipates that different civilizations will clash. The complicated relationship between Muslim identity and Western identity in Kosovo seems to tell a different story. The diversity of the global Muslim population challenges Huntington’s imagined “Islamic civilization.” In fact, this diversity does not solely exist on the global level. As the case of Kosovo shows, even within a very specific ethno-national and geopolitical context, there are many different ways to negotiate, define and understand Muslim identity.
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Appendix 1:

Interview Questions

1. In what ways do you identify yourself (ie, gender, ethnicity, nationality, religion, sexual orientation)?
2. How does your religious identity interact with your other identities?
3. Do you believe all of your identities are equal or do you identify with certain aspects more than others?
4. What role did Islam play in your identity growing up?
5. When did you first (if ever) identify yourself as a Muslim? Why made you do so?
6. Did your family influence your Islamic identity (or lack thereof)? How did they do so?
7. If not, what was the main factor that influenced how you identify (or do not identify) with Islam?
8. In your opinion, what does it mean to be a Muslim? What role does observance play in that definition?
9. Do you identify with Muslims outside of Kosovo? Why or why not?
10. How often do you talk about Islam outside of the mosque/madrassa/Islamic faculty?
11. Do you feel like you identify with Islam more/less/the same as the general Kosovar population? Why? In what ways?
12. In what ways do you see Islam appearing in the public sphere in Kosovo?
13. Do you make a distinction between observant and unobservant Muslims? Why or why not?
14. If yes (to above), what distinctions do you make?
15. What tensions (if any) do you see existing between the Islamic community and secular institutions?
16. What role does the Islamic community play in your everyday life?
17. In what way do you think the Kosovo Islamic community is similar to Muslim communities outside of Kosovo? In what ways is it different?
Appendix 2:

Women’s Islamic Dress:

Image 1: A woman in jilbab

Image 2: A woman in what I call traditional hijab or “colorful hijab.”
Source: http://pehnawae.com/modern-hijab-styles/lmhs-9/
Image 3: A woman wearing a chador. 
Source: https://thechiefendoflife.wordpress.com/2010/05/15/iran-again/