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Minarets after Marx

Islam, Communist Nostalgia, and the Common Good in Postsocialist Bulgaria

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This article examines the interplay between communist nostalgia and new forms of universalist Islam among Slavic Muslims (Pomaks) in Bulgaria. Many Bulgarians are looking back to the totalitarian era with increasing fondness given the ubiquitous crime and corruption that has characterized the postsocialist era. This nostalgia also informs the changing nature of Islam in Bulgaria after 1989 and the unique ways that Bulgarians understand religious identity in relation to ethnic affiliation. The author argues that the appeal of “orthodox” Islam in this postsocialist context is at least partially rooted in its discursive emphasis on social justice and the promotion of the common good. This discourse is particularly appealing to the Pomaks in the author’s field site because of their unique experiences of both communism and capitalism. Before 1989, they saw a dramatic rise in their living standards, but this was coupled with severe religious oppression. After 1989, they gained unbridled religious freedoms but saw their communities economically devastated by the corrupt privatization and bankruptcy of the lead-zinc mining enterprise that was the core of their livelihood. To these Pomaks, “orthodox” Islam promises to be an ideological third way, combining the benefits of both systems: spiritual freedom and honest economic prosperity.

Keywords: *Bulgaria; Islam; social justice; Marxism; Islamic aid*

The southeastern European country of Bulgaria is one of the two newest members of the European Union and is the member state with the largest Muslim minority. At more than 12 percent of the population as of the 2001 census, Bulgaria’s Muslims make up a larger percentage of the population than Muslims in France, Germany, or the United Kingdom. More significantly, the country has the most sizable autochthonous Muslim population in the EU; there have been Muslims living on the territory that is now Bulgaria for hundreds of years—remnants of the Ottoman

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domination of the Balkan Peninsula. Bulgarian Muslims are not immigrants or even the children of immigrants from South Asia, North Africa, or the Middle East. They are true European Muslims.

The forms of Islam historically practiced in Bulgaria are different from the forms of Islam practiced in Western Europe or in the Muslim heartlands. Balkan Islam, like Islam in Central Asia,¹ has always been a frontier Islam, deeply influenced by its long contact with local Christianity and later by its persecution under communist governments that tried to eradicate all forms of religion. Yet since the beginning of what Bulgarians ambivalently refer to as *democratzia* (democracy) in 1989, there has been a proliferation of new religious influences in the country,² including the growing presence of what has been called “globalized Islam”³ or “orthodox Islam.”⁴ This ostensibly more scripturalist and overtly proscribed form of supranational and universalist Islam is fundamentally changing the beliefs and practices of certain communities of Bulgarian Muslims.

This article examines the displacement of what the anthropologist Talal Asad⁵ has referred to as “traditional Islam”—an Islam rooted in the unique, local condition of a Muslim community’s past—by what he has called “orthodox Islam.”⁶ “Orthodox”⁷ Islam refers specifically to forms of Islam that claim to be purer versions of the religion based exclusively on sacred, original texts and supposedly not on culturally specific interpretations of those texts. Although the distinction between “traditional” and “orthodox” Islam was initially mapped onto a rural-urban divide,⁸ in its current manifestation it can be seen as a conflict between nationally bounded forms of Islam (that have been supposedly corrupted by local influences) and a “universally true” version of Islam that has been de-ethnicized and de-nationalized,⁹ creating a more universal Muslim identity that transcends national or ethnic allegiances.¹⁰ Those who promote “orthodox” Islam are intent on purifying traditional forms of Islam, eradicating practices and beliefs that are thought to be culturally specific innovations.

The focus of the present inquiry is the growing importance of what most Bulgarians believe to be an imported form of “orthodox” Islam and its interaction with the Marxist-Leninist ideologies of the country’s communist past. A general disenchantment with the economic chaos and political criminality that accompanied the transition to capitalism has given way to a strong nostalgia for what are believed to be the good aspects of communism, particularly its strong focus on social justice and redistribution. In particular, younger Bulgarians seem to be grasping for a non-Marxist universalist discourse that can challenge the rampant criminality and moral relativism that dominates postsocialist Bulgaria society. In this article, I will argue that “globalized” or “orthodox” Islam entered Bulgaria at a moment of great social, political, economic, and ideological crisis, when many people were looking backward to the metanarratives of the past to gain some respite from the deep disillusionments of a fractured postmodern present. “Orthodox” Islam may be appealing to some Bulgarians because of its strong emphasis on social cohesion and redistributive justice—all values and criticisms that are familiar to those raised in countries

shaped by the lingering legacies of Marxism-Leninism but now free from the compulsory atheism that scientific socialism required. Although I have argued elsewhere for the importance of gender relations in the embrace of “orthodox Islam,”¹¹ in this brief article I want to specifically discuss what happens to this form of Islam when it enters the post-Marxist space of a country that by 2008 had still not reached the standard of living it had once enjoyed under communism.

In the space between two seemingly contradictory economic systems, it is important to look for the ways that lingering discourses of social justice from the communist era interact with new calls for a more egalitarian society based on the principles of Islam. This is not to say that all calls for wealth redistribution are Marxist in origin, only that in the Bulgarian context concern for the common good is generally imagined to be one of the positive aspects of the former regime, despite its many shortcomings. Similarly, the words “democracy” and “capitalism” have been conflated with the political and economic chaos of the postsocialist period. Popular discourse acknowledges the pros and cons of communism and capitalism in Bulgaria, since so many Bulgarians older than thirty-five have lived experiences of both economic systems. The key point here is that the individual impulse for personal success is associated with capitalism, and the egalitarian impulse is popularly associated with the communist past.

Given this background, it is important to look at the parallels between communist ideologies and the theology of “orthodox” Islam. Both epistemologies seem to share an anti-Western moral challenge to the excesses of kleptocratic capitalism. Both share a totalizing metanarrative of social justice and concern for the common good. In an area economically devastated by corrupt profiteering, and in a country in which redistribution on moral grounds was at one time loudly trumpeted and to some degree enforced as state policy, Islamic discourses about morality and the common good will have a receptive audience, even if these discourses profoundly differ in their attitudes toward questions of spirituality and faith.

Although I have been studying Bulgarian society for more than a decade, this article is informed by ethnographic fieldwork carried out between 2004 and 2007.¹² I spent fourteen months cumulatively living in both the capital city of Sofia and in the south-central Rhodope region of the country where there is a high concentration of Bulgarian-speaking (Slavic) Muslims, called Pomaks.¹³ In addition to participant observation, I collected and analyzed a wide variety of locally produced magazines, brochures, newsletters, books, and websites—all promoting a more universalist form of Islam—as well as local newspapers covering events in the Smolyan *oblast* where the field site was located. Finally, I conducted both formal and informal interviews with local religious leaders, government officials, and NGO activists in Sofia and in the Smolyan region.

This article begins by looking at the growing nostalgia for communism and how many Bulgarians are looking back to the totalitarian era with increasing fondness given the ubiquitous crime and corruption that has characterized the postsocialist

era. After that, I will explore the changing nature of Islam in Bulgaria after 1989 and the unique ways that Bulgarians understand religious identity in relation to ethnic affiliation. This is followed by an ethnographic exploration of the ethnic ambiguity of the Pomaks and how their in-between status alienated them from both the ethnic Bulgarian and Turkish communities, compelling them to embrace new interpretations of Islam that would give them a stronger platform upon which to meet both their spiritual and material needs. In the final section, I examine how the appeal of “orthodox” Islam in the postsocialist context is at least partially rooted in its discursive emphasis on social justice and the promotion of the common good. I argue that this discourse is particularly appealing to the Pomaks in my field site because of their unique experiences of both communism and capitalism. Before 1989, they saw a dramatic rise in their living standards, but this was coupled with severe religious oppression. After 1989, they gained unbridled religious freedoms but saw their communities economically devastated by the corrupt privatization and bankruptcy of the lead-zinc mining enterprise that was the core of their livelihood. To these Pomaks, “orthodox” Islam promises to be an ideological third way, combining the benefits of both systems: spiritual freedom and honest economic prosperity.

Nostalgia for Communism

Among many Bulgarians who are not part of the new cosmopolitan elites, there is great frustration with the failed promises of democracy, which has brought a rapid decline in living standards for the majority of former communist citizens. A popular saying in Bulgaria is that “everything they told us about communism was wrong, but everything they told us about capitalism was right.” The nostalgia is rooted in a general cultural memory of socialism, its critique of bourgeois democracy and its meta-narrative of class struggle giving way to social equality.¹⁴ Indeed, many scholars have noted the general nostalgic trend among Bulgarians of all generations,¹⁵ although it seems to be driven by those who actually spent parts of their youth under the old system.¹⁶ One Bulgarian journalist wistfully wrote in 2009, “If you live in Eastern Europe, you’ve heard this refrain ‘It wasn’t all bad under communism. We had more jobs, less crime and more sex.’ . . . Nostalgia apart, there is some truth in that. Societies that are not free offer small fortunes at the expense of vast misfortunes.”¹⁷

These trends in Bulgaria echo similar trends in many parts of the former communist world, where there is exasperation with the corruption, crime, and general social chaos that accompanied the transition to democracy and capitalism. For example, in 1995 less than 30 percent of all Russians expressed favorable views of parliamentary democracy.¹⁸ In 2001, 57 percent of Russians said they wanted to return to the USSR, and 45 percent claimed that communism was better than the current system of democracy.¹⁹ Using the 2001 New Europe Barometer, two

Swedish political scientists found significant nostalgia for the material security of communism across Eastern Europe,²⁰ with the majority of postcommunist citizens evaluating the command economic system in positive terms. Moreover, throughout the region they found that the percentage of people who approved of a return to communism increased substantially between 1993 and 2001. What is more, this increase in nostalgia was found among the young as well as the old, and they argue that the desire for a return to the previous system is symptomatic of “dissatisfaction with the present system’s ability to deliver the goods—material or non-material.”²¹ These sentiments seem strongest among religious populations. In 1997, 68 percent of Russians who identified themselves as “traditional believers” felt that the collapse of the USSR was a mistake, and 84 percent of Russia’s self-professed believers agreed that the dissolution of the communist system “could and should have been prevented.”²² These are striking findings given the communist system’s insistence on atheism and its historic oppression of religion.²³

Ethnographic evidence at the micro level from my own field site in the cities of Madan and Rudozem further reinforces these findings. Despite the fact that the communists harshly persecuted the Pomaks for their religious affiliation, men and women often discussed how much better their lives were “before democracy” (*predi democratzia*). When the local lead-zinc mining enterprise was at its peak, it employed more than twenty-five thousand men and women; the entire local economy was tied to the wages that the miners spent in town. After a long and drawn-out drama, the enterprise was first privatized and then later run into bankruptcy by a combination of labor unrest, bad management, corrupt political dealings, and gross violations of the privatization contract by new owners with probable links to newly emerging organized crime syndicates. The biggest losers were the workers who endured atrociously dangerous working conditions underground and then remained unpaid for years at a time while the new owners sold the metal infrastructure and the machinery for scrap. By the time the government became aware of the scale of the corruption, most of the enterprise’s assets were gone. The residents in Madan and Rudozem could do nothing but watch as their city imploded, with able-bodied men and youth fleeing the region in droves. And the leaders of the Turkish political party did nothing to help them. By 2005, only about a thousand employees were still working at the enterprise, at a fraction of their former wages. In a town that had once suffered from labor shortages, and where miners had earned the highest wages in the socialist economy, the postsocialist era was a radical departure from what had come before. Moreover, the miners had only a basic technical education with few skills that were transferable to the new market economy, even if there were private sector jobs available. Finally, the local definition of masculinity was strongly connected to labor in the mines. Local men not only found themselves unemployed and without income, but also emasculated.²⁴

For women and men who were not employed, the municipality in Madan gave the local equivalent of about thirty U.S. dollars per month in social assistance for six months while individuals tried to find work. For most families living in flats, thirty

dollars was hardly enough to pay just the electricity bill. And there were few jobs to be found. Everyone in the town was obsessed with finding employment, and almost every conversation between friends meeting on the street would start off with a question: "Have you found work?" (*Namerish li rabota?*) or "Are you working now?" (*Rabotish li sega?*). After six months of unemployment, it became necessary to earn these social assistance payments by working for the municipality in some capacity. The men were too proud to go out and clean streets or tend the public gardens, preferring instead to flee Madan and look for construction work in the big cities or abroad.

For the women left behind, cleaning the streets was their only option. There was one woman named Albena who had been a cook, but had been unable to find work for more than three years. She cleaned the streets for her thirty dollars a month, but she had to support two children with this paltry sum since her husband had long ago abandoned their family. The three of them lived in a small house in the village of Borieva. The children, who were seven and nine, went to bed with the sunset even in winter when it got dark before 5:00 p.m. because she could not afford to pay for electricity. When her older son got an abscess, it was left to painfully fester in his mouth for weeks before she could borrow the ten dollars necessary to have it pulled out. The agony of the toothache combined with his persistent hunger made it impossible for him to concentrate in school, and he spent weeks at home sipping homemade brandy because Albena did not want to spend money for pain medication. She came home from cleaning the streets each day to find her nine-year-old boy red in the face from drunkenness, clutching his cheek and crying. "I will tell you a hundred times," she once told me, "Communism is better than democracy. A hundred times better. For poor people, a hundred times better."

The lack of employment in the region led to a scramble for the few good jobs that were still available in the local economy: working for the local government or sewing in the Austrian-owned factory that made high-end ski clothing for the European market. But getting these jobs required connections; hiring decisions were rife with nepotism and favoritism. Most people believed that the mayor had stolen the government funds allocated to help retrain the miners, and there were several examples of local businessmen shamelessly enriching themselves at the expense of their former friends and neighbors. In Madan, one business owner drove a brand new Mercedes Jeep and wore thick gold chains around his wrists and neck. He always had the latest and most expensive mobile phone. He had come into his wealth by participating in the privatization of the building that had once been the communist central department store in what most agreed was a very shady deal. What angered so many people in Madan was that this building (which included a few restaurants, a disco, and retail space), and the wealth its businesses generated, had once theoretically belonged to all of them. Despite the new owner's wealth, he made his employees work long shifts and paid some of the lowest wages in town; his waitresses' low salaries rendered them still eligible to collect social benefits from the municipality despite working forty hours a week.

For most men and women living in this region, getting access to money was considered a zero-sum game: if others had more, there was less to go around. If you managed to get a good job or had access to remittances from abroad, you knew that people would be lining up to ask you for loans. This zero-sum attitude meant that people became increasingly distrustful of friends and relatives who might ask for help through difficult times. Money was lent and never repaid, and many social networks broke down under the strain of scarce resources. "I had so many friends in Madan," one of my fifty-year-old female informants told me. "But now I say 'hi,' and so many look the other way. They pretend that they don't know me, because they owe me money." Men and women hid their resources from their children and spouses. "It is my money. I worked hard for it," a forty-six-year-old woman who worked in a local garment factory explained. "My husband can earn his own money, and my sons can go out and work. There is never enough." This breakdown in the community was just as painful as the descent into poverty. It was this economic hardship that characterized the post-1989 era and that the promoters of "orthodox" Islam would instrumentalize in their appeals to the Pomak population in this region.

Objectifying Islam in Bulgaria

Islam in Bulgaria is heterogeneous, and this heterogeneity makes it difficult to clearly define just one Muslim community. Although 95 percent of the Muslims in Bulgaria are technically Hanafi Sunni, there is a very wide spectrum of beliefs subsumed in this category. Additionally, there is a small heterodox Shi'a population, called the Alevi, and a wide variety of Sufi brotherhoods such as the *Bekdashis*, which have a long history in the country. In addition to this spectrum of different beliefs, there are also three different ethnic groups that profess Islam: the Turks, the Romani, and the Slavic Muslims or Pomaks who are the specific focus of the present study.

After 1989, increased contact with the Muslim world slowly began the process of the "objectification" of Islam in Bulgaria. This occurs when Muslim practices that had been observed without much critical reflection become the subject of intense public scrutiny and debate.²⁵ "Objectification is the process by which basic questions come to the fore in the consciousness of large numbers of believers: 'What is my religion?' 'Why is it important to my life?' and 'How do my beliefs guide my conduct?'"²⁶ Islam is extracted from its moorings in local traditions and becomes a systematized body of ideas that is distinctly separable from nonreligious ones. In Central Asia, Adeb Khalid²⁷ has argued that the Soviet oppression of Islam prevented its objectification, leaving it fixed in the realm of tradition and custom throughout the socialist period. Although Islam in Bulgaria was not subject to the extreme attempts at eradication as in the Soviet Union, and the Muslim clergy was left intact (albeit co-opted by the communist government), a similar process happened

in Bulgaria whereby Islam remained part of the fabric of everyday cultures, rather than an objectified system of beliefs distinguishable from local custom.

During the communist era, the country's leaders committed vast resources to the eradication of religion, and social mobility was tied to the embrace of an atheist (or at least agnostic) worldview. Over the course of thirty-five years of intense state persecution of religion (both Christian and Muslim), many Bulgarians did in fact relinquish their faith in the transcendent and merely maintained their religious identities as markers of their ethnic affiliation.²⁸ One result of this atheistic policy was that Bulgarians demonstrated some unusual attitudes toward religion and spirituality after 1989.

Understanding the ethnic politics that underpins Bulgaria's widespread agnosticism is a key to unraveling why "orthodox" Islam was appealing specifically to a certain group of Pomaks. Some brief statistics will demonstrate the peculiar religious topography of Bulgaria. In 2005, Bulgaria ranked seventeenth out of the fifty most atheist countries in the world, joining the overwhelmingly European top twenty.²⁹ The study found that 34 to 40 percent of the Bulgarian population was atheistic, agnostic, or nonreligious. Another study³⁰ asked a nationally representative sample of Bulgarians, "Would you like your child/grandchild to be religious?" Only 13.7 percent of respondents wanted their children to regularly attend "church/mosque/synagogue." However, 52.4 percent of Bulgarian Christians and 52 percent of Turks living in Bulgaria said that they wanted their children to be religious "just as a cultural identity." Another nationally representative survey conducted in 1999³¹ found that 96 percent of ethnic Bulgarians said that they were Christians and 98 percent of the Turkish minority declared themselves Muslim, although only 30 percent of them said they attended the church or mosque on a regular basis (and in the case of the church, it was mostly just to light candles). The embrace of "orthodox" Islam within a general culture of spiritual apathy was therefore a very anomalous phenomenon. The religious revival and religious objectification that occurred among the Pomaks was not part of a broader national trend, but was happening specifically within certain communities. What set these communities apart?

Cultural Identity and Religion in Bulgaria

In Bulgaria, as elsewhere in the Balkans where the Ottoman *millet* system divided subjects by their religion rather than their ethnicity,³² claiming a religious affiliation was more of a marker of ethnic identity than it was a spiritual commitment to a certain denomination. To be an Orthodox Christian was a constitutive part of being an ethnic Bulgarian and to be a Muslim was essential to being an ethnic Turk. Pomaks sit uncomfortably within this dichotomy and have had a vexed position within Bulgarian society throughout their history. Presumed to be descended from Bulgarians who converted to Islam, their ethnic allegiance was always in question.

Some self-identified as Turks (although they had no knowledge of the Turkish language), while others referred to themselves as Muslim Bulgarians or Bulgarian Mohammedans.³³ Because Bulgarian was their mother tongue, other ethnic Bulgarians viewed the Pomaks suspiciously; they felt the Pomaks had “sold out” to the Ottoman oppressor for lower tax rates.³⁴ As I will discuss in more detail below, this ethnic ambiguity made the Pomaks particularly vulnerable to interpretations of Islam claiming to be more authentic than those practiced by the ethnic Turks.

In my own fieldwork, I looked closely at the link between ethnic and religious identities. I found many examples of individuals claiming a religious affiliation while also openly admitting that they did not believe in God. In one conversation with a Pomak in Madan in 2006, a forty-nine-year-old man explained, “I am a Muslim because my grandfather was a Muslim and I was given a Muslim name. My father was an atheist and I am an atheist. I am a Muslim, but I do not believe in God.” I later had an almost identical conversation with a twenty-something Bulgarian taxi driver in Sofia. When I asked if he was a Christian, he said “of course.” When I asked if he believed in God, he laughed and said, “of course not.” These exchanges demonstrate that both “Christian atheists” and “Muslim atheists” claimed a religious affiliation because it was an essential part of their cultural identity. A forty-year-old lawyer in Sofia, who called himself an “atheist fundamentalist,” had no problem regularly going into Orthodox churches to light candles. He explained, “The Church preserved the Bulgarian language during the time of the Ottoman yoke. Buying candles gives money to the Church. I have to support it [the Church], because I am Bulgarian.” The important point here is that being an ethnic Bulgarian required that one be a Christian and that being an ethnic Turk meant being a Muslim, but neither ethnic identity required any form of spiritual commitment.

Where I did my fieldwork in the Rhodope, the way different ethnic groups named each other was also evidence of this slippage between religious and cultural identity. This was a mixed region composed of ethnic Turks, ethnic Bulgarian Christians, and ethnic Bulgarian Muslims (Pomaks). The Turkish-speaking minority in the region was referred to as “Turks.” The Bulgarian-speaking Christians in mixed Christian-Muslim villages were called “Bulgarians.” Bulgarian-speaking Muslims were simply called “Muslims.” Even though the Turks were also Muslims, the label “Muslim” was used exclusively to distinguish between the Christians and the Pomaks. The exclusion of Bulgarian-speaking Muslims from the category “Bulgarian,” however, did not go unchallenged. In one conversation with two high-school-aged girls in the town of Rudozem, one girl argued that “we are Bulgarians, too.” But her friend then defended the term “Muslim” for Pomaks by saying, “We are all Bulgarian citizens [*Bulgarski grazhdani*]. But we are not Bulgarians [*Bulgari*] because we are not Christians.”

One of the ramifications of this equation of religion with cultural or ethnolnational identity is that the question of religious conversion is a very sensitive one. Many Bulgarians (and “Bulgarian citizens”) believe that to change religious affiliation is to change ethnic and cultural identification. This concept was driven home to

me by the deputy chief mufti of all Bulgarian Muslims in an interview I did with him in 2006. "When a Turk converts to Christianity, we do not say that he became a Christian, we say that he became a Bulgarian [*stana Bulgarin*]." Christian evangelicals from the United States have also been warned that Bulgarians "equate being Orthodox [Christian] with being Bulgarian. Proselytism, then, is seen not only as a spiritual concern of the clerics but as an attack on national identity."³⁵

In the communities where I did my fieldwork, the Pomaks generally believed themselves to be ethnic Bulgarians whose ancestors had freely converted to Islam. During communism these Pomaks had been particularly targeted because they were considered apostates and therefore traitors to their true Bulgarian identity. In the late 1950s and 1960s, the cities of Madan and Rudozem were subject to a massive rural industrialization program, and they became the center of a vibrant lead-zinc mining and metallurgy enterprise. The communists in power hoped that economic prosperity and modernization would act as natural antidotes to the proverbial "opiate of the masses" and that these Pomaks would abandon their Muslim religious identification as their living standards rose.³⁶

But Pomak commitments to their traditional form of Islam failed to wane, and the communists implemented a heavy-handed program in the 1960s that included the destruction of local mosques, the banning of certain Muslim religious practices and pious clothing, as well as the forcible changing of Turko-Arabic names to Slavic ones.³⁷ Between the communists' aggressive efforts to eradicate all religions and the material benefits afforded to young Pomaks who embraced scientific socialism and atheism, the Pomaks did begin to drift from their commitment to the religion of their forefathers. In the immediate postsocialist period, they had the highest levels of self-proclaimed atheism compared to either self-identified Muslim Turks or Orthodox Christian Slavs.³⁸ Marxist atheism perhaps offered a way out for many Pomaks who felt trapped between the conflicting religious and ethnic identities of their parents. A commitment to the universalist ideology of communism, one that was (at least theoretically) detached from ethnic identity, not only presented an avenue for social mobility but provided a language of human solidarity and social justice that seemingly transcended all other identity commitments.

It should be noted, however, that the Pomak precommunist commitment to Islam was to a form of the religion that would be considered heterodox by many more mainstream Muslim communities. The Bulgarian historian Stoyan Raichesky³⁹ has argued that the Pomaks converted to Islam during the Ottoman period only to avoid the hefty taxes levied on Christians and that they were rather lax in their embrace of religious dictates with regard to dietary restrictions and the sequestering of their women. Although the Pomaks were ostensibly Hanafi Sunni Muslims like their Bulgarian-Turkish faith-mates, their practice of Islam had been more accommodating to the local Christian cultures of the Rhodope.⁴⁰ One example of this is the Pomak celebration of a holiday called *Hadrates*, which is on the same day as the Orthodox Christian holiday of St. George's Day. Although some Turks celebrate this holiday as

well, it is more common among the Pomaks who share a language with their Bulgarian Christian neighbors.

The Pomaks, like so many Muslim communities throughout the Islamic world, had their own local interpretations of their religion, which they believed to be authentic. It would only be with the arrival of the first Muslim missionaries in the 1990s that some Pomaks, particularly some individuals in the region where I did my fieldwork, began to question the authenticity of these traditional beliefs. Because the communists had severed connections between the Bulgarians Muslims and the rest of the Islamic world, many Pomaks were unaware of the diversity of Islamic belief that characterized the Ummah. Foreign religious workers from Saudi Arabia and Jordan were able to convince these Pomaks that their traditions were uniquely wrong (rather than merely different) and that “orthodox” Islam could restore order and promote the common good within their imploding postcommunist communities. More importantly, the reason that their local interpretations were wrong was because they had reached the Pomaks through the Turks and had therefore been corrupted by Ottoman influences.

The religious workers also offered an interpretation of Islam that was completely untied from ethnic or national identity, a pure spiritual commitment independent from local culture and history. They were not offering another version of what the Pomaks believed to be “Turkish Islam” but rather promised a vision of a “pure” Islam that was universally applicable across time and space. Given the contested nature of Pomak identity, and their political and economic marginalization after 1989 relative to Turks and Christian Bulgarians, it should not be surprising that globalized Islam had a special appeal. But it did not equally appeal to all of the Pomaks, only to certain isolated communities.

Bulgarian Islam Meets “Orthodoxy”

When the first Arab religious workers arrived in Bulgaria, they found local practices that they considered to be forbidden innovations in Islam. For example, most Pomaks celebrated the birthday of the Prophet at a ceremony called a *mevlid*, a custom that was considered a local “innovation.” They also held *mevlidi* to mark the birthdays of local Sufi saints and to celebrate the birth of new children in the community. Bulgarian Muslims, like other “heterodox” Muslims around the world, also made pilgrimages to and worshipped at the shrines of local Muslim saints or “*babas*,” such as the Yenihan Baba in Smolyan. Amulets or *muski* were also quite popular among the Bulgarian Muslims, and local *hodzhas* (religious teachers) would sell small scrolls of paper with verses from the Qur’an written upon them in Arabic. These amulets were supposed to bring the bearer wealth, health, love, and happiness or protect the person from evil curses. *Hodzhas* read verses from the Qur’an at small private prayer sessions to commemorate weddings, the births of a new babies, or the building of new homes. Pomaks erected headstones and footstones at their gravesites

and followed the local Christian practice of posting Xeroxed “death announcements” with photographs of the deceased around town when a loved one passed away. They also preferred to read the Qur’an in Bulgarian, only memorizing by rote a few passages in Arabic.

As for Muslim dietary restrictions, most Pomaks ignored them. Pork was a staple of the Bulgarian diet, and homemade *rakiya* (a Bulgarian form of brandy) was as popular among the Bulgarian Muslims as among the Christians. In Madan and Rudozem, it was not uncommon for Muslim men to start drinking before Friday prayers and to go to the mosque slightly (or heavily) inebriated. Fasting for the month of Ramadan was mostly the purview of the older generation. With regard to the behavior and dress of women, the communists had not only insisted on the full labor force participation of Pomak women but had also made it illegal for them to wear their traditional head covering.⁴¹ Even after 1989 with the restoration of religious freedoms, most Pomak women preferred Western fashions, although some women (particularly those of the older generation) returned to their specific form of Muslim dress: a long multicolored dress (*fustan*), an apron (*mendil*), and a kerchief (*kurpa*) worn in a style reminiscent of the stereotypical Eastern European *babushka*. In terms of women’s deference to their husbands and fathers, forty-five years of communist rhetoric encouraging women’s emancipation had shaped a generation of educated and relatively independent Muslim women who often became the sole breadwinners for their families after the collapse of the lead-zinc mining enterprise. Finally, intermarriage between Christians and Muslims, even between Muslim women and Christian men, was quite common despite its prohibition in many Muslim cultures.

It is important to point out here that many of these same practices could be found throughout the Muslim world. In her ethnographic study of women healers in Saudi Arabia, Eleanor Abdella Duomato examined the process through which “orthodox” reformers systematically eradicated practices that they considered to be incorrect. She writes, “Wahhabi authority defined itself very specifically in opposition to saint worship, praying at graves, votive offerings, and Sufi *zikr* chanting and dancing, as well as fortune-telling, spell making, truth divining, and amulet wearing.”⁴² Religious workers from Saudi Arabia have crisscrossed the globe trying to “purify” different varying interpretations of Islam,⁴³ but with limited success. Most Muslim communities are well aware of the diversity of Islamic belief and practice and stubbornly cling to their own traditions. After 1989, however, Muslim communities in Eastern Europe and Central Asia became new targets for international Islamic charitable work. These communities were more vulnerable because they had been cut off from the rest of the Islamic world and were relatively unaware of its diversity.

The Message Has Money

Religious advice from Jordan, Kuwait, and Saudi Arabia was not the only form of aid flowing to Bulgarian Muslim communities. The Turkish government actively

helped to preserve the cultural traditions of the ethnic Turkish Muslims through a state agency for religious affairs called the *Diyanet*. As a result, ethnic Turks rejected most of the non-Turkish religious workers who tried to assist their communities. By 2000, Islam as a religious commitment was far less important to the Turks' identity than it became to the Pomaks. When Turkish Muslims lobbied for cultural rights at the national level, they were far more concerned with making Turkish an official second language in Bulgaria, promoting the Turkish-language media and the teaching of Turkish in schools. The Turks knew who they were, and when Arab missionaries showed up in the mid-1990s to tell them that their practice of Islam was incorrect, the Turks disregarded them. The Turkish community was well aware of the variety of Islamic practices to be found even in Turkey, including the more "orthodox" Gülen movement. They were quite happy to continue what they believed to be their own "correct" interpretation of Islamic belief and practice.

In addition to the bilateral Turkish aid, there were also funds from Iran and from Muslim charities in Western Europe donated to develop the spiritual awareness of Bulgaria's Muslim community. Most of these funds went directly to the chief mufti's office in Sofia, an office that was under the control of Ahmed Dougan and the ethnic Turkish political party. This political party (the Movement for Rights and Freedoms) used the chief mufti's office as a way to influence the Muslim vote and were wary of any attempt to undermine specifically Bulgarian Turkish interpretations of Islam. Growing political rivalries between the Turks and the Pomaks meant that the latter were largely unable to access these official funds.⁴⁴ Furthermore, emerging spiritual leaders in Smolyan, Madan, and Rudozem were excluded from the national leadership of the Muslim community. Pomak leaders claimed that they were pushed out of top positions because they were committed to placing spiritual allegiances above political ones. The deepening division in the Muslim community cut off local Pomak imams (congregational leaders) from their national leadership and contributed to their growing dependence on resources from Saudi Arabia.

During the 1990s, international Islamic charities had constructed or refurbished hundreds of mosques in the Rhodope, but there were few appropriately qualified imams to staff them, and the charities began giving generous scholarships to young Muslims to pursue higher Islamic education abroad. In a former communist country where few had ever had the opportunity to leave the country, parents were quite willing to send their children away for four to eight years to take advantage of this previously unavailable educational opportunity, not to mention the generous scholarship money. Graduates of Islamic universities in Jordan and Saudi Arabia would eventually return to the Rhodope and bring with them the knowledge and authority needed to return the Pomaks to the "true" Islam, one that had supposedly been denied to them by the Christians, by the communists, and by the Turkish-dominated national spiritual leadership.

As these Pomak youth were being educated abroad, foreign religious workers also set up private Qu'ran courses and special theological seminars to promote the "true" Islam. There were many rumors of men from Saudi Arabia or Kuwait (called

sheikove or “sheiks” by my informants) who visited Muslim communities in the Smolyan *oblast*, providing funds for local mosques and apparently marrying local women. But after September 11, 2001, there were pointed accusations by one Turkish faction competing for the national leadership of the Muslim denomination that another Turkish-led faction (then in charge of the chief muftiship) was accepting funds from Islamic “fundamentalists” and promoting “radical” Islam in Bulgaria. After 2002, all funds to the chief mufti’s office were required to go through a special account in the Ministry of Finance so that their source could be established.⁴⁵ In a growing climate of European Islamophobia, especially after the subsequent bombings in Istanbul, Madrid and London, foreigners in the country came under more careful police scrutiny. Indeed, a Jordanian, Darius Al-Nashif, was expelled from Bulgaria in 1999 for trying to set up an Islamic center in Smolyan.⁴⁶

At the exact historical moment when the events of September 11 made it more difficult for foreign religious workers from the Middle East to visit Bulgaria, the young Pomaks sent abroad started graduating and returning home. One case of foreign-educated Bulgarian citizens coming home and picking up where the religious workers had left off was the establishment of the Union for Islamic Development and Culture (UIDC). Two young Pomaks, Arif Abdullah and Selvi Shakirov, founded the UIDC and opened an Islamic center in Smolyan less than five years after Al-Nashif had been deported for attempting to do the same thing. From the UIDC headquarters in Smolyan they coordinated lectures and seminars, as well as a variety of other activities that promoted the embrace of the “true” Islam. Similar organizations, such as Ikra and Mostove, were set up in nearby Madan, a city that in 2000 became home to the largest mosque built in Bulgaria after the end of communism.

Arif Abdullah and Selvi Shakirov had both been educated in Jordan, and Abdullah had spent eight years earning his master’s degree in the exegesis of the Qur’an. In addition to their contacts in Jordan, the UIDC leaders also had direct links with the Saudi World Assembly of Muslim Youth (WAMY), a large international organization that aggressively promotes Saudi-influenced “orthodox” Islam throughout the world.⁴⁷ They had business partnerships with a man named Vezhdi Ahmedov, who was the local face of WAMY. They were also linked into a network of other Islamic businesses and nongovernmental organizations in the region, all coordinating their efforts to promote the “new” Islam. Through these business and nonprofit networks, Saudi monies were able to circumvent the government’s financial controls on the chief mufti’s office and flow directly into communities in the Rhodope.

The UIDC used these resources to aggressively promote its message among the Pomaks. The organization had a sophisticated website (www.oirk.org) and a bimonthly glossy magazine, *Myusyulmansko Obshtestvo* (*Muslim Society*), both of which advocated strict adherence to what they considered proper Muslim practices such as abstaining from pork, alcohol, and even tobacco (an extra puritanical move),

as well as the necessity for men to attend prayers on Fridays and to fast for Ramadan. They also advocated very conservative gender roles, roles that were relatively uncommon in Balkan societies, where women had always actively participated in local agricultural economies. Although they valued and encouraged education for girls and women, particularly “proper” religious education, they frowned upon formal labor force participation. A woman’s primary responsibility was to her children, a man’s responsibility to provide for his family.

What is key to the Bulgarian context is that these young Muslims were able to question the beliefs and practices of their elders and were armed with the theological tools needed to render them “incorrect.” While the older generation relied on the authority of age, tradition, and their claims to have maintained their faith despite severe repression during the communist era, the younger generation promoted the “correctness” of their interpretation through an active program of lectures, seminars, women’s parties, conferences, and public forums held throughout the Rhodope region. The leaders of the UIDC traveled extensively and marshaled a sophisticated array of technological resources to get their message out to the Pomaks. Their lectures were recorded, posted on the web, and distributed on compact discs through local mosques, as well as written up in regional newspapers. Abdullah and Shakirov made frequent public appearances and became national celebrities after challenging the Bulgarian government on the question of whether Muslim girls should be able to wear their headscarves to public schools.⁴⁸ They supported local soccer clubs for Pomak boys and organized summer seminars and camps for Muslim children, as well as promoting spiritual entertainments and providing free Arabic language lessons. The older Muslims were completely outspent and generally outmaneuvered by the younger generation.

While the UIDC clearly had access to extensive resources, they also had a coherent message that resonated with a certain population. This was the case in Madan and Rudozem, the two towns where I focused my fieldwork. The regions where these new “orthodox” interpretation of Islam found the most fertile ground were precisely those regions that were most negatively affected by the collapse of communism, where communities were devastated by the corruption and criminality that characterized the postsocialist period. The UIDC and other Islamic NGOs targeted these regions and bolstered their spiritual message with calls for social justice and the promotion of the common good. While the older generation of Muslims looked fondly back to the communist era for the ideological tools to resist the fracturing impoverishment of their local communities, the younger generations were inclined to reject both capitalism and communism. They were looking for a third way that would combine the religious freedoms of the post-1989 era with the economic and political stability of socialism; “orthodox Islam” presented itself as an original and viable alternative, preserving the egalitarianism and social security of communism without the religious persecution of a totalitarian atheist state.

Legacies of the Past and Hopes for the Future: Appealing to the Common Good

Much of the literature that the UIDC distributed and the seminars they held in cities throughout the Rhodope placed a particular emphasis on the “true” Islam’s commitment to social justice and the common good. This was a message that resonated quite well in impoverished Pomak cities and villages that had bitterly watched both Christian and Muslim Turkish communities thrive at the expense of the Pomaks, who lacked the networks and political power to get their proverbial piece of the pie. After 1989, formerly state-owned enterprises were spontaneously privatized by new criminal syndicates while others were stripped of their assets and intentionally run into bankruptcy without a thought for the thousands of jobs that would be lost. In a society plagued by ubiquitous money-grubbing, lying, cheating, and stealing at all levels, the UIDC fashioned itself as an advocate for morality and a voice for the poor. In an interview I conducted with Arif Abdullah in March 2007, he stated, “They are afraid of us, because we are moral.”

Despite their controversial theology, the UIDC did seem to practice what it preached. In April 2006, Arif Abdullah and the other leaders of the UIDC gathered together businessmen and municipal officials in Smolyan to try to convince them to fund the creation of soup kitchens for the socially weak in Smolyan, Madan, and Rudozem.⁴⁹ Abdullah argued that there were many needy people in these areas that required social assistance and that the business leaders and politicians should join together to help those less fortunate than themselves. The kitchens would operate once a week on Fridays (the Muslim holy day). The food was to be prepared and served by the poor, and presumably would adhere to Muslim dietary restrictions, but would serve people of all religions.

In a public lecture given just a few months later in the Culture House of Madan, Abdullah appealed in person to his audience to realize that “the West” (and by extension the ideological offerings of capitalism and democracy) had failed to live up to its promises to the people. I attended this talk, entitled, “Islam: Pluralism and Dialogue.” For over an hour Abdullah traced the history of Western notions of “pluralism” from Socrates and Erasmus to Francis Fukuyama and Samuel Huntington. In the end he argued that Islam was the only way to bring the many diverse peoples in the world together, since capitalist competition and economic interests would continue to tear them apart and prevent real unity and social justice. Although he spoke passionately about Islam’s promise of social harmony in the face of perpetual capitalist disunity, he also distanced himself from the atheistic communists, condemning them equally for their selfish motives and brutality. The irony, of course, was that he chose to deliver the lecture not in the mosque but in the communist-era *Kulturen Dom* (Culture House), the very hall that would have hosted scores of communist party meetings and socialist propaganda performances.

This double critique of capitalism and communism, with an emphasis on social justice, was also to be found in numerous Islamic publications. For example, there was one article published in *Ikra*,⁵⁰ and then reprinted in many of the Islamic publications targeting the Pomaks, that took aim at both economic systems. The article was called “Materialism: The Dreadful Disease of Humanity,” and in it Hasan Mehmedaliev, the chairman of the organization Mostove in Madan, deconstructs materialism both as a philosophy (i.e., in its Marxist incarnation) and as a current way of life (i.e., as a by-product of global capitalism). The article outlines how throughout history civilizations have always fallen when they reached the point of becoming too preoccupied with the accumulation of material (rather than spiritual) wealth. He writes that “the materialistic striving after goals in our temporal world has caused suffering and destruction to many people. . . . [H]istory describes past human and social destinies as tragic because they were mindlessly obsessed by the strife for material benefits.” In another article that appeared in *Myusyulmansko Obshtestvo* called “Time Is Money? No, Time Is Life,” readers are warned that “sometimes a person get so obsessed by his desire to possess that he loses his mind.”⁵¹ The relative scarcity of goods under communism meant that Bulgarians associated obsessive consumerism with capitalism and the egregious social inequality that allows one man to own a \$250,000 car when his compatriots cannot afford enough food for their families.

In a published interview in the first issue of their magazine, Abdullah openly claimed that the goals of the UIDC were “reaffirming the moral and spiritual values in society and assisting the poor and those who need help.”⁵² He couched his ideals in quite universalistic terms, terms that would resonate with a great amount of familiarity to those who grew up with promises of a global worker’s fraternity. Abdullah explains, “One of the main goals of Islam is to bring peace, love and happiness to all people in the human fraternity. To confront everyone who threatens those goals. We are convinced that the righteousness and the stability of Bulgarian society can only be achieved when we all, the people, hand in hand, work toward this goal.”⁵³ In another article published in 2006 in *Ikra* called “The Only Spiritual Force That Can Lead Humankind to Happiness,” another local author from Madan, Ahmed Osmanov,⁵⁴ explains that dedicating one’s life to Islam is the only true path to personal fulfillment, but that this is not an injunction to become lazy and spurn the material world. He writes, “Islam does not accept that a man can stop working and turn into a parasite; on the contrary, we should all use our gifts and natural inclinations in order to take advantage of all that God created and to benefit [society] as much as it is possible, after we satisfy our needs, the extras can go to help the poor.” For those living in a country with a strong legacy of Marxist-Leninism, sentiments such as these sound fascinatingly similar to old socialist sayings such as “from each according to his ability, to each according to his need.” Thus, although the speeches and articles of those who promote a more “pure” version of Islam are careful to distance themselves from both capitalism and communism, there is an important

way in which they are referencing a Marxist type of universal humanism, asking individuals to give up personal freedoms for the sake of the common good.

Similarly, Islamic literature translated from Arabic into Bulgarian and distributed among the Pomaks emphasized social justice and redistribution. In a WAMY brochure that I found in a mosque in the Smolyan region, there was the following passage about the Islamic obligation of tithing:

Zakat is a means of redistribution of wealth in a way that makes a contribution to social stability, providing a means of survival for those who have not, and reminding those who are wealthy that what they have is a trust from God. By purging the soul of the rich from selfishness, and the soul of the poor from resentment against society, *Zakat* blocks the channels leading to *class hatred* and makes it possible for the springs of *brotherhood* and *solidarity* to gush forth. Such stability is not merely based on the personal generous feelings of the rich: it stands on a firmly based rights of the destitute which, if denied by those holding the wealth, would *be exacted by force, if necessary* [emphasis added].⁵⁵

Such language of “class hatred” may resonate profoundly with postcommunist populations who will remember the communists’ warnings that capitalism was an unjust and immoral economic system but seek an alternative path to realize this critique beyond a return to some form of communism. Among the Pomaks in Madan, Rudozem, and neighboring regions, the UIDC and other Islamic organizations focused on social justice and promoted Islam as a way to restore community, morality, and prosperity to their otherwise chaotic societies. Thus, the promise of a new Islamic “utopia” or a new transcendent metaphilosophy is laid on top of a popular discontent with the material and spiritual realities of what Bulgarians believed to be “democracy” and “capitalism” (two ideologies that are linked with economic chaos, political corruption, vote-buying, Mafia violence, unemployment, contracting social services, and declining living standards). Moreover, these new ideologies are taking root among populations with lived experience or at least vicarious memory of an actual alternative to what are perceived to be false universalisms of the West.

Of course, this would not be the first historical moment wherein Islam and Marxism find themselves in dialogue with each other. In examining the modern condition of Central Asian Muslims, the historian Adeeb Khalid points to the important continuities between these two seemingly opposed metanarratives, arguing that even the early Muslim Brothers in Egypt found much inspiration in the success of Russian Revolution. He writes, “The political goals of Islamist movements owe a great deal, in their formulation, to modern revolutionary ideologies, and to Marxist-Leninism in particular. During the Cold War, Islamists tended to be rabidly anti-Communist in their stance because Communism was a rival ideology, one that rested on universal principles and was hostile to all religion besides. That stance should not blind us, however, to the fascination that Marxist-Leninism had for Islamists and the

model it provided for successful political action.”⁵⁶ In the Bulgarian context, therefore, the general cultural memory of a state that justified its limitation of personal and political freedoms with appeals to the common good should not be ignored.

Most adult Bulgarians living through the decade of the 1990s had firsthand experiences of both communism and capitalism. They were often politically committed to one system or the other because of their own perceptions of how an equitable or efficient society should look, with political freedoms outweighing social and economic security in the many arguments aimed at discrediting the pre-1989 totalitarian government. For the Pomaks in the Smolyan *oblast*, however, the costs and benefits of communism were more acute than for most of the Bulgarian population: the rapid state-driven economic development raised living standards dramatically in just a few decades but was coupled with severe religious oppression. The postsocialist period brought religious freedoms but with drastic declines in living standards and economic possibilities. For those trying to promote “orthodox” Islam among the Pomaks, therefore, the claim that religion can provide an ideological third way, a system that can grant spiritual fulfillment and prosperity, may be appealing, particularly if it is also a conduit for new educational and economic opportunities abroad.

For those who have lived (and suffered) under both capitalism and communism, a kind of globalized Islam could become a way of continuing the non-Western project of social justice without the totalitarianism of the past. This universalist Islam, stripped of its particularities, is operating in an ideologically similar way to the old Bulgarian communist discourses that emphasized the inherent problems of capitalism and advocated cooperative efforts in the interests of a common good.⁵⁷ This is not to say that Islam in Bulgaria has merely replaced Marxism, but only that its discourses may be picked up and mobilized by postsocialist subjects in unique and interesting ways that demand further exploration.

Of course there are many key differences between the spiritual goals of Islam and the materialist focus of Marxism, but as different as they are, there may be some interesting continuities between the ideal versions of communism and the more “orthodox” forms of Islam now gaining ground in the Rhodope. Both are motivated by claims of social justice and are imbued with a self-perception of their own historical inevitability. Both subsume national and ethnic differences in the dream of transnational community, whether the international proletariat or global *ummah*. Both are overtly prescriptive about how people should live their lives on a daily basis; and both offer a total ideological package that makes sense of the world, defines clear enemies, and codifies “success” within the system. Both provide some form of social safety net. Perhaps most importantly, both are generally anti-Western and specifically anti-American. It should therefore not be surprising that those who long for social justice but find themselves embedded in an ideologically unmoored postsocialist milieu might find solace in the universal discourses of “orthodox” Islam, the most visible global ideology that openly challenges the hegemony of Western cultural and economic dominance and capitalist globalization.

In the case of the Pomaks in my field site, there is admittedly a complex web of factors informing the embrace of more universalist forms of Islam. There is the ethnic ambiguity of the Pomaks, the political conflicts within the national Muslim leadership, the wealth of resources available through international Islamic charities from Saudi Arabia, a local generational divide, the economic devastation of the collapse of communism, the bungled privatization of the lead-zinc mines, the emasculation of the miners, and a growing nostalgia for the social security of the socialist past. There is also the issue of faith, which I do not mean to discount. There is no doubt that for at least some men and women, it is spiritual fulfillment and closeness to God that drives their newfound religious fervor.

Many of the factors listed above, however, are applicable to many communities throughout Bulgaria, both Muslim and Christian. But all of these factors were operating simultaneously in the south central Rhodope. Within this context, one key factor that should not be overlooked is how the discourse of social justice and community solidarity circulated in the region. The Pomaks had long been in ethnic limbo between the Bulgarians and the Turks and believed that their economic and political marginalization was due to their lack of ethnic allegiance with those who were greedily carving up the carcass of communism. This frustration was particularly acute in the now devastated lead-zinc mining towns after the corrupt privatization of the state-owned mining enterprise. This constellation of factors created a circumstance within which the promise of social justice would be particularly appealing. It is therefore this longing for some universal discourse that champions the cause of the common good that is at least partially driving the embrace of “orthodox” Islam in these isolated communities in the Rhodope. Whether “orthodox” Islam will be able to fill this void is a question for further study, but its appeal certainly rests on its own promises to do so.

Notes

1. Adeb Khalid, *Islam after Communism: Religion and Politics in Central Asia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007).

2. Kristen Ghodsee, “Religious Freedoms versus Gender Equality: Faith-Based Organizations, Muslim Minorities and Islamic Headscarves in Modern Bulgaria,” *Social Politics* 14:4 (2007) 526-561.

3. Olivier Roy, *Globalized Islam: The Search for a New Ummah* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

4. Talal Asad, “The Idea of an Anthropology of Islam,” Occasional Papers Series (Washington, DC: Center for Contemporary Arab Studies, Georgetown University, 1986); and Eleonor Abdella Duomato, *Getting God’s Ear* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000).

5. Asad, “The Idea of an Anthropology of Islam.”

6. I follow the terminology of Talal Asad, however, with some reservations. The problem with this term, although it works well in analytical opposition to “traditional” Islam, is that it implies a judgment that one form of Islam is more correct than others, and that there is some supranational authority that makes this claim. In fact, Islam is very diverse, and it is precisely this diversity that orthodox reformers want to eliminate by claiming that their interpretation is the only correct one. Their orthodoxy is what they believe to be the correct interpretation and has no other authority than the spiritual commitment of its adherents.

7. I will use the word “orthodox” in quotes throughout the paper in order to make it clear that I, as author, am not advocating a position which views this form of Islam as more correct than any other interpretation.

8. Asad, “The Idea of an Anthropology of Islam.”

9. Roy, *Globalized Islam*.

10. Although one that is both spiritually and financially tied very strongly to the Gulf Arab states.

11. Kristen Ghodsee, *Muslim Lives in Eastern Europe: Gender, Ethnicity and the Transformation of Islam in Postsocialist Bulgaria* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009a).

12. The author would like to thank the School of Social Science at the Institute for Advanced Study, the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, the National Council for Eurasian and East European Research (NCEEER), the International Research Exchanges Board (IREX), the American Council of Learned Societies (ACLS), and Bowdoin College for their generous support of this research.

13. In some cases the term “Pomak” can be a derogatory one, but in the case of my own fieldwork, this was the term used by Bulgarian Muslims to describe themselves.

14. Albena Shkodrova, “Bulgarians Join the EU with Marxism on Their Minds,” *Balkan Insight* 21 December 2006, <http://www.bim.eu.com/en/64/10/1982/> (accessed 12 August 2007).

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16. Kristen Ghodsee, “Red Nostalgia? Communism, Women’s Emancipation, and Economic Transformation in Bulgaria,” *L’Homme: Zeitschrift für Feministische Geschichtswissenschaft* (*L’Homme: Journal for Feminist History*), Spring 2004 (Vol. 15, No. 1/2004); Joakin Ekman and Jonal Linde, “Communist Nostalgia and the Consolidation of Democracy in Central and Eastern Europe,” *Journal of Communist Studies and Transition Politics* 21:3 (2005): 354–74; Maria Todorova et al., (2007) “Remembering Communism project,” available online at www.rememberingcommunism.org. Access date: 18 March 2010; and Maria Todorova, (2009) “Daring to remember communism, pre-1989,” *The Guardian*, 9 November 2009, 12:00 GMT. Available online at: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentis-free/2009/nov/09/1989-communism-bulgaria>. Access date: 18 March 2010.

17. Boyko Vassilev, “X,” *Transitions Online*, 31 March 2009, www.tol.cz.

18. Daniel L. Wallace, “The Children of Perestroika: Two Sociologists on Religion and Russian Society, 1991-2006,” *Religion, State and Society* 35:2 (2007): 172.

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20. Ekman and Linde, “Communist Nostalgia.”

21. *Ibid.*, at 369–70.

22. Wallace, “Children of Perestroika,” 170.

23. Janice Broun, *Conscience and Captivity: Religion in Eastern Europe* (Washington, DC: Ethics and Public Policy Center, 1988).

24. Kristen Ghodsee (2009a).

25. Dale Eickelman and James Piscatori, *Muslim Politics* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996); and Armando Salvatore, “Staging Virtue: The Disembodiment of Self-Correctness and the Making of Islam as Public Norm,” in Georg Stauth, ed., *Islam, Motor or Challenge of Modernity* (Hamburg, Germany: Lit Verlag, 1998).

26. Eickelman and Piscatori, *Muslim Politics*, 38.

27. Khalid, *Islam after Communism*.

28. Kristen Ghodsee, “Symphonic Secularism: Caesaro-Papism, Religious Freedoms and American Foreign Policy in Southeastern Europe,” *Anthropology of East Europe Review* 27:2 (2009b): 227–52.

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