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The dimension of confessionalisation in the Ottoman Balkans at the time of Nationalisms

Nathalie Clayer

It is common to view the end of the Ottoman period, especially in South-eastern Europe, as the era of nationalisms, the era of transition from *millet* (“religious community”) to a nation.¹

This approach sheds light on nationalism as a new motive of mobilisation, a new way of identification, a new line of solidarity and a new expression of loyalty in Ottoman society.

This approach is also often closely linked with the secularisation paradigm, which postulates that modernity brings the diminution of the social significance of religion.² In this case, it tends to see religious identification as “withdrawing” behind the new national identities.

However, particularly as far as the Balkan “Christian” nationalisms are concerned, many studies do not stress such a withdrawing, but rather the combination between an “old” religious identification and a “new” national identity. As I have shown elsewhere, this process is also evident in the Albanian case, despite the plurality of confessions.³ However, in both types of analyses (*i.e.* those dealing with the transition from *millet* to nation, and those concerning the combination of religious and national identifications), the dynamics and changes of religious identifications have not sufficiently been taken into account. Indeed, the existence of *millets* in the Ottoman Empire implied neither an unalterable way of thinking and living according to a religious identification, nor an unchangeable relationship between

¹ In particular, see the works of Kemal H. Karpat, *An Inquiry Into the Social Foundations of Nationalism in the Ottoman State: From Social Estates to Classes, From Millets to Nations*, Princeton, 1973, and “*Millets* and Nationality: The Roots of the Incongruity of Nation and State in the Post-Ottoman Era”, in Benjamin Braude and Bernard Lewis, *Christians and Jews in the Ottoman Empire*, New York – London: Homes & Meier Publishers, vol. I, 1982, pp. 141-169.

² See Vincent Goossaert, “State and Religion in Modern China. Religious Policy and Scholarly Paradigms”, <http://halshs.archives-ouvertes.fr/halshs-00106187/fr/>.

³ See N. Clayer, *Aux origines du nationalisme albanais*, Paris: Karthala, 2007.

members of different religious groups. These *millets* were institutionalised in the course of the nineteenth century, and contributed to a process of “confessionalisation”, *i.e.* reinforcement and normalization of religious identification, which might even be accomplished by violent means.

In the first years of the twentieth century, there was serious tension between Christians and Muslims in Northern Albania and Kosovo: pigs with their throats cut were placed in some mosques, there were broken crosses, boycotts and kidnappings. Group frontiers-were marked by violence and constraint; they were sometimes also crossed under constraint. The frontiers in question here are denominational frontiers and the events are not directly related to “inter-ethnic” confrontations, or to local reactions against the imperialism of the Great Powers, or to confrontation between nationalisms, even at a time when the latter was gaining strength in South-eastern Europe. Rather, they reveal another concomitant phenomenon, namely confessionalisation. This results from the evolution of religious practices and a stricter framework imposed by the religious authorities. It is also a consequence of the policy followed by the Ottoman authorities, as well as by the Balkan countries (Greece, Bulgaria, Serbia and Montenegro) and the Great Powers (Austria-Hungary, Italy, Russia, France, etc.). In the events cited in this paper, the protagonists (Muslims and Christians) are mostly Albanian-speaking people, and not Albanian-speaking Muslims vis-à-vis Serbian-speaking Christians, a case that is often focused on through a projection of a later state of affairs onto the past. Indeed, we must be careful not to ethnically define or nationalise *a posteriori* the nature of conflicts in late Ottoman Balkan society. If ethnicisation/nationalisation was a process in progress, it was not the only one. Multiple dynamics of social integration coexisted in a non-exclusive way.

This paper intends to go beyond the development of nationalism in late Ottoman Balkan society, as well as beyond discourses imbued with nationalism. For that, it is necessary “to

investigate relational configurations that are active and dissymmetrical, as well as the labile and evolving nature of things and situations, to scrutinise not only novelty but also change”, as the “histoire croisée” suggests.⁴ In particular, we should use varying levels of analysis and varying points of views. With this in mind, I will analyse a series of events which occurred in 1907 and 1908 in the area of Gjakovë and Prizren (in the west of present-day Kosovo): the removal of a Franciscan priest, followed by the profanation of a mosque, the destruction of some Catholic houses, the rumour of another mosque profanation, and a boycott directed at Catholic shopkeepers and peasants.⁵

The region in which the events took place was at that time a border region (close to Serbia and Montenegro) enjoying an exceptional status: there was no conscription, but rather other ways of military mobilisation; only the traditional taxes were levied, and the reformed law courts had not really been established. Muslims formed the majority of the population, and Christians were mainly Orthodox and, to a lesser extent, Catholic. The population could be divided into three “groups”: the city-dwellers (craftsmen, merchants, civil servants, landowners, etc.); the villagers (peasants or shepherds); and the “Malisors”, *i.e.* the mountaineers, who lived on the western fringe of the region (being generally shepherds and brigands because of the lack of resources). Some of the Muslims and Christians lived in extended families, with a certain degree of solidarity among families with the same clan origin. As for the mountaineers, some of them still lived in a clan-based structure. In the region, power was mainly held by “chiefs” competing with each other for local supremacy,⁶ but also by religious figures. With some difficulties and compromises, the Ottoman

⁴ Michael Werner and Bénédicte Zimmermann, “Penser l’histoire croisée: entre empirie et réflexivité”, *Annales. Histoire, sciences Sociales*, 58/1, janvier-février 2003, Paris: EHESS, pp. 7-36, here p. 17.

⁵ Similar events had occurred a bit earlier between 1897 and 1900 in the region of Shkodër, see N. Clayer, *Aux origines du nationalisme albanais*, p. 543.

⁶ Each chief would mobilize a certain number of armed men in order to intimidate or to fight his adversaries in different kinds of conflicts.

authorities exerted their power through different channels led by the local *mutessarif*, the *vali* residing in Skopje, the Grand Vizier, the Sultan himself and, since the end of 1902, the Inspector General posted in Salonica and his military envoy, Şemsi Paşa. Last, but not least, consular representatives were also important figures on the local political scene.⁷

From 1903 onwards, the area was in a state of acute crisis, due to the attempted introduction of reforms. Pressured by the Great Powers that intervened within the framework of the “Macedonian Question”, the Ottoman authorities were obliged to really act at the local level. Consequently, in early 1903, Christians were recruited to the gendarmerie, and new regional courts with Muslim and Christians judges were established. This aroused the anger of Muslims, who felt that these reforms were introduced only for the benefit of Christians, under the aegis of the Great Powers. Uprisings and repression followed. The introduction of new taxes triggered new uprisings in 1904 and again in 1906.⁸

It is in this particular context that the aforementioned conflict between Catholics and Muslims occurred. First, we will take a detailed look at the conflict by means of four different accounts: that of a European traveller, the reports of the Italian consul in Skopje, the account of a Young Turk officer of Albanian extraction, and a report by the Austro-Hungarian vice-consul in Prizren. In the following section, we will deduce the issues and the balance of power behind the events, as well as behind their presentation, in order to understand the various dimensions of this “confessionalisation” in relation to other simultaneous social phenomena.

Four eyes on the same events

The eye of a British woman traveller

⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 74-89.

⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 603-606.

Edith Durham (1863-1944), the famous British woman traveller and publicist,⁹ was well acquainted with the Balkan era when she undertook a trip through “High Albania” soon after the Young Turk revolution. A champion of the Albanian cause against the Slavs and denouncing the “Austrian intrigue”,¹⁰ she came to Gjakovë one year after the events we are considering. In her book, *High Albania*, she recounts her visit to that town, where she seems to have been impressed by the strained relations between Catholics and Muslims, despite the proclamation of the Constitution.¹¹ She herself experienced some problems, such as occurred when going unveiled through the town with her escort, as well as when one of her statements to the mayor was interpreted as the interference of an infidel (*giaour*) in Ottoman affairs. She mentions the events that occurred during the preceding months to explain this state of affairs. Edith Durham presents the events as clashes between Catholics and Muslims.¹² According to her, in October 1907,¹³ a Franciscan from Gjakovë/Djakovica, Friar Luigi, was captured by numerous armed Muslims while riding to Ipek and was taken to the village of Smolitza (today Smolicë, west of Gjakovë) as a hostage, in exchange for the release of the brother of one of the captors, held by the Ottoman authorities. The latter did not react, even after the intervention of the Austro-Hungarian Consulate in Prizren, in charge of protecting the Catholic Church. The Catholics subsequently called their coreligionists living in the

⁹ On Edith Durham, see John Hodgson, “Edith Durham: Traveller and Publicist”, in John B. Allcock and Antonia Young, *Black Lambs and Grey Falcons: Women traveling in the Balkans*, New York, Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2000 (2nd ed.), pp. 9-31.

¹⁰ *High Albania*, chapter I, (London: Edward Arnold, 1909), “The land of the living past”, <http://digital.library.upenn.edu/women/durham/albania/albania-I.html>. By “Austrian intrigue”, Edith Durham meant the active presence of Austro-Hungarian representatives in the region for imperialist purposes. She wrote: “The Austrian Consul-general even takes it on himself to spy on the actions of tourists, as though the land were already under Austrian jurisdiction”.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, chapter IX, “In the debatable Lands – Djakova – Devich”, <http://digital.library.upenn.edu/women/durham/albania/albania-IX.html>.

¹² She begins the account of her visit by writing that Gjakovë was once Christian, and relates a legend about the conversion of the Christians in neighboring villages: one Easter, an Italian priest celebrated mass too early in the town, so that the villagers were late; they asked him to repeat the mass; since he refused, they went to the mosque and converted.

¹³ In fact it happened in mid-September (see HHStA [Vienne], PA XIV/30, Liasse XXVII).

mountains to come to their aid, and a dead pig was found in the mosque of Smolitza. The priest was suddenly released, without the liberation of the brother, perhaps due to the fear of an Austro-Hungarian intervention in the region. However, in the course of the next few months, as revenge against the profanation of the mosque, the Catholic village of Ramotzi (east of Smolicë) as well as thirteen other Christian villages were burned down. During this period, the Catholic villagers were given until the month of Ramadan (September 1908) to convert to Islam or be killed. Then the rumour of the profanation of a mosque in Prizren spread, and a boycott was launched against all Catholics.

At this point, E. Durham gives the example of a large Catholic family in the village of Bretkotzi (Brekoc, southwest of Gjakovë) which was threatened and found protection with the Ottoman authorities. But when Şemsi Paşa, an officer in charge of regional problems, ordered the soldiers to withdraw, all the possessions of the family were destroyed. At the time E. Durham wrote about these problems in order to bring help to these people, because the English had only been informed about the suffering of the Orthodox people in Macedonia. She asserted that the local Christians thought that the attitude of the Muslims was a consequence of the European intervention in Macedonia.

The eye of an Italian consul

In the Archives in Rome I found several reports which mentioned the conflict, written by the Italian Consul Galanti, who was posted in Skopje at the beginning of the events.¹⁴ According to these reports dating from November 1907, the priest, Luigi Palić from Gjakovë, had been illegally confined for two months in the village of Smolitza/Smolicë. In the consul's opinion, it was the first time that the Muslims took out their anger on a priest. To take revenge on the Muslims, the Catholics of the region desecrated the mosque of the village the day before the

¹⁴ ASMAE (Rome), Archivio Storico Diplomatico, Serie P. Politica (1891-1916), Albania, Pacco 667, Uskub, 9/11/1907, 20/11/1907 and 30/11/1907.

bayram (Muslim feast), by putting a dead pig inside it and smearing the walls with its blood. The Muslims wanted to take revenge, but the family that had him in custody prevented them from touching the priest. The Muslims declared a *besa* (“truce”)¹⁵ of three days, at the end of which they wanted to kill the priest and destroy the Catholic church of Gjakovë. According to the Italian consul, the Catholic population of the region had complained for two months about the incapacity of the Austro-Hungarian government to force a release of the priest. Furthermore, his Austro-Hungarian colleague had not properly received a delegation of Catholic clergymen and notables from Gjakovë, who wanted protection for the friar and the church in Gjakovë. Consequently, the delegation went to the Italian vice-consulate. In a following report, Galanti informed his superiors that all this had serious consequences: some Muslim mountaineers had begun to burn down houses in a Catholic village and to kill some of its inhabitants. Thus he asked his superiors to intercede with the Ottoman authorities, because naturally the latter were basing their domination on “dissension between the elements”, *i.e.* between Muslims and Christians, and would not intervene, or would act only at the expense of the Christians. Ten days later, the consul asserted, it was necessary for him to respond to the requests of the Catholics to enhance Italy’s prestige in the region. Indeed, the conflict had spread, with the burning of numerous houses in several Catholic villages by the Muslim mountaineers. However, the Muslims from Gjakovë had released the priest, and some of their leaders (Sulejman Batusha, Bima Cur, Binak Shlaki) had taken part in the defence of the Catholics against the Muslim mountaineers.

The eye of an Ottoman officer

¹⁵ The term *besa* can have several meanings (word of honour, truce, pact, etc.). See Stephanie Schwandner-Sievers, “Humiliation and reconciliation in Northern Albania: the logics of feuding in symbolic and diachronic perspectives” in Georg Elwert, Stephan Feuchtwang and Dieter Neubert (eds.), *Dynamics of Violence: Processes of Escalation and Deescalation in Violent Group Conflicts* (Sociologus, supplement 1), Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 1999, p. 133-152.

Also present in the region during the events, Süleyman Külçe, a member of the Young Turk movement, was an Ottoman officer of Albanian origin¹⁶ posted in Mitrovica/Mitrovicë. In his book entitled “Albania in Ottoman History,” which he began to write just after the Young Turk revolution, but which was not published until 1944, he dedicates several short chapters to the “pig head affairs in Albania”.¹⁷ His testimony is particularly interesting insofar as he was the personal secretary of Şemsi Paşa, who was in charge of the settlement of local conflicts in the region. Külçe’s global view is marked by strong opposition to what he calls the “Austrian, Russian and Italian propagandas” against the interests of the Ottoman government in these Balkan regions. He also considers that the Sultan made a mistake in appointing an “uneducated” soldier like Şemsi Paşa to solve local problems, whereas the solution should have been initiatives in the fields of civil engineering and education, for example.¹⁸

Süleyman Külçe begins his account with the profanation of the mosque in Smolicë. In early September 1907, Şemsi Paşa received a telegram concerning the event which occurred in this village (half an hour distant from Gjakovë) just at the beginning of the *bayram*. Şemsi Paşa immediately asked the local ulemas to dampen the agitation among Muslims, by explaining that the dead body of the pig did not desecrate the mosque, and ordered that the guilty persons be found. During the following days, searches were conducted among the Catholics in order to find the perpetrators, and some people began to attack Catholics from Smolicë and other neighbouring villages. Although Süleyman Külçe does not precisely tell us who the arsonists

¹⁶ He was from Kalkandelen/Tetovo (today in Macedonia), and his ancestors who, according to him, were “Albanians”, came to this town from the Luma region (see Süleyman Külçe, *Osmanlı tarihinde Arnavutluk*, Izmir, 1944, p. 77, note **).

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 282-283 (in the region of Shkodër, in the 1890s), pp. 324-327 (around Gjakovë, in 1907-1908) and pp. 328-332 (in Prizren, in 1908). The following account is related in the two last-mentioned chapters.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 338-340.

were, he does indicate that the Catholics whose house was burned down were people known to be “quite wealthy” or “ferocious”.

Later on, in January 1908, Şemsi Paşa received the order to come to Gjakovë with some troops. Upon his arrival, a priest presented him with a letter concerning homeless families and children killed in the womb of their mother, which was, according to Süleyman Külçe, only “noise” meant to attract the attention of the Great Powers. In response, the Pasha gathered the Muslim notables of the town and the region, and declared that many of the Catholics who had been attacked were innocent. Such an attitude would not protect the Muslims; on the contrary it could give occasion to the enemies (*düşman*) to react. The notables (with the conspicuous absence of the Curri family and their partisans) signed a text promising not to continue such actions, also because a local religious leader (*alim*) had underlined the fact that some of the burned houses were *vakf* (*i.e.* pious foundations), meaning that such actions were also harming the Muslim community. Later, after the departure of Şemsi Paşa, troops were sent into that quarter of the town under the influence of the Curri family, in order to prevent the launching of reprisals against the Catholics.

While Şemsi Paşa was still in Gjakovë, a telegram from Prizren signalled that a new mosque profanation had occurred in that town. However, the commander thought that it was not true, which was effectively the case (no pig was found in the river where it had allegedly been thrown). Despite the efforts of the Ottoman authorities to stifle the false pig affair, Muslims from Luma and Kalis (two mountainous regions, today in Albania, along the border of Kosovo) arrived in Prizren and organised meetings in some mosques and *medrese* in order to mobilize the urban population against the Catholics: it was decided to stop commercial relations with them, and to cease leasing them houses.

At the end of February 1908, the Sultan, alarmed by a supposed connection between these events and the activity of Ismail Qemal bey Vlora in France,¹⁹ ordered Şemsi Paşa to go to Prizren to placate the Muslims and protect the Christians. There were rumours reporting that the persons responsible for the tensions were monks from the Deçani Monastery, and that there were Russian and Austrian political intrigues as well. However, Şemsi Paşa did not succeed in breaking the *besa* (pact) against the Catholics and stopping the boycott. The local leaders felt that their religion had been insulted and the movement spread beyond the town, partly due to a decision that, beginning from Hidrellez (St. George's Day, in early May), Muslims instead of Catholics would be hired to work on some *çifliks* (agricultural estates). This provoked the conversion to Islam of some Catholic peasants who were not willing to lose their job. This also caused the intervention of the Great Powers, so that the Rumeli inspector was obliged to send an order defining the official and bureaucratic procedures for conversions in order to avoid involuntary conversions. Among the Catholic peasants, some actually converted to Islam, while others immigrated to the Skopje region. Şemsi Paşa received the leaders of the remaining Catholics.

Süleyman Külçe argues that the conflict was also difficult to solve because there was a divergence in the policy of the Sultan, who ordered that the Muslims not be touched, and the policy of the Grand Vizier and the Inspector General, who wanted to act severely towards them. Some detachments had been sent, but the *vali*, supporting the policy of the Sultan, refused to use force. In Gjakovë, yet another type of problem erupted: the conflict between the Curri family and the other local chiefs. In the end, Şemsi Paşa was ordered to find a solution. In April he gathered all the Muslim and Catholic notables, and succeeded in persuading all parties to sign an agreement saying that the peasants would no longer be persecuted, that

¹⁹ Ismail Qemal bey was an Ottoman high civil servant, of Albanian origin, born in Vlora, in today's southern Albania. He had fled to Europe in 1900, because of his opposition to Sultan Abdulhamid. Later (in 1912), he will be the man who proclaims Albanian independence.

commerce would be free, but that the people, as Ottomans, would bring their complaints to the government and not to the consuls. In fact, the question was not settled, and Şemsi Paşa had to return to Prizren in the last days of June, just before being called to Bitola/Manastir, where Young Turk insurgents killed him.²⁰

The eye of an Austro-Hungarian vice-consul

The Austro-Hungarian representative in Prizren also had the opportunity to carefully observe the events. One of his duties was to closely follow the situation of the Catholic population, since the Double Monarchy was claiming to be the religious protectorate of the Catholic religion in the region. At the beginning of 1908, Vice-Consul Prochaska reported about the troubles that broke out between Catholics and Muslims in the region of Gjakovë: the discovery of a pig in a mosque, the boycott against Catholic shopkeepers, the expulsion of Catholic colonists, and the settlement of the affair by the government. Then he indicated that another boycott had been launched in Prizren.²¹

During this period, several of his reports concerned the pressure exerted on Catholic villagers to convert to Islam. Of special interest is a report from mid-June 1908, where he again tackles the conversion problem. Here he gives important details concerning the nature of the conflict in Prizren, which apparently had not really been solved by Şemsi Paşa, despite the signature of the agreement, as indicated by Süleyman Külçe.²² According to Prochaska, the situation was unchanged in the town at this time: the local Ottoman authorities were ignoring the new rules about lifting the boycott and they themselves avoided making purchases in Catholic

²⁰ See Şükrü Hanioglu, *Preparation for a revolution: The Young Turks, 1902-1908*, Oxford, 2001, pp. 267-269.

²¹ HHStA, PA XXXVIII/403, Konsulat Prizren, 1908. Vice-Consul Prochaska also extensively reported on the kidnapping of the Franciscan P. Luigi Palić between September and December 1907 (see HHStA, PA XIV/30, Liasse XXVII).

²² HHStA, PA XXXVIII/403, Vicekonsul Prochaska, Prizren, 13 June 1908.

shops; the “Serbs” were also obliged to observe the boycott. The movement against the Catholics was led by a commission formed by Muslim notables who were opposed to the *mutessarif*, the local representative of the Ottoman authorities.

Vice-Consul Prochaska discusses the reasons for this movement against the Catholics, stressing that the reasons are complex. He sees the two mosque affairs as the origin of the conflict, but points out three other factors involved in the dynamic of the situation: the “intrigues” of some local notables and the interests of other Muslims, the exasperation of the Muslim population, and the attitude of Şemsi Paşa.

Indeed, according to the Austro-Hungarian representative, some notables tried to take advantage of the conflict. One of the main leaders, Rassim Aga, was willing to accept from the authorities the payment of a debt contracted with the state and to become a *kaymakam*. Ramadan Zaskok was aspiring to be a gendarmerie commandant, while some leaders of the Luma regions were asking for money from the Catholics and the Austro-Hungarian consulate to stop the movement. Furthermore, the Muslim shopkeepers, who had begun to benefit from the boycott, had no interest in its termination. At another point, Prochaska also stresses the general annoyance of the Muslim population. According to him, it was a consequence of the strengthening of the Catholics in the public sphere, which had begun a few years before, under the leadership of Mgr. Trokši, the Bishop of Skopje. The latter had ordered the bells to ring often (up to 38 times during feast days) and loudly, to such a point that they were drowning out the call to prayer. In addition, the bishop’s speeches would also have caused tensions among the Muslims. As for Şemsi Paşa, the vice-consul is of the opinion that his attitude did not contribute to the settlement of the conflict, because he came with his troops, but did nothing to stop the movement and, in this way, compromised the authority of the government.

Facts and their interpretations, actors and their identifications

Let us now return to an analysis of these four testimonies, while paying attention to what their authors did or did not say, and whom they did or did not mention. Of course we have to take into account that these witnesses were also actors; they were far from neutral in the affair and its context.

A denominational conflict which brings the threat of an Austro-Hungarian intervention

Beyond the main image of a conflict bringing together Muslims with Catholics (who are not defended enough, according to English opinion), Edith Durham briefly mentions two categories of actors that would have been involved in the events: the “Catholic mountaineers,” who would have been called upon by their coreligionists to perpetrate the profanation; and “Austria-Hungary,” whose representative did not succeed in making the Ottoman authorities act in favour of the Catholic priest and whose intervention in the region was feared. If Edith Durham here tries to clear the Catholic villagers at the expense of their coreligionists from the mountains (supposed to be responsible for the bad behaviours),²³ and to accuse Austria-Hungary, this gives a slight indication of the significance of internal social diversity and foreign influence that will be highlighted in further testimonies.

In the paragraphs following the description of the events, Edith Durham underlines the incompatibility between the Serbian claims on the region and the Albanian nature of the town of Gjakovë, due to its founding by “the Albanians” after the fall of the Serbian Empire in the Middle Ages. However there is no explicit “ethno-national” consideration in her presentation of the conflict between Catholics and Muslims.

²³ According to a report by the Austrian consul in Scutari/Shkodër, the Catholic mountaineers must, in fact, have been responsible for the profanation of the mosque, since they would not have been called upon to do such an act by their coreligionists living on the plain (HHStA, PA XIV/30, Liasse XXVII, Scutari, Consul Kral, No 126, 18 December 1907).

A conflict to be used to enhance prestige in the region

The reports of the Italian Consul from November 1907 also describe a conflict between “the Muslims” and “the Catholics”, and additionally present a diversity of actors on the Muslim side, something that Edith Durham does not mention. Furthermore, they reveal a balance of power between Austria-Hungary and Italy, and introduce the Ottoman authorities as a significant actor in the conflict.

The Italian consul underlines that during the affair, at least at a certain point, there was a divergence in the attitudes of the “Muslim mountaineers”, of the “Muslims from Gjakovë”, and especially of some of their leaders. Here there may be the same idea of absolving the main actors, of projecting the bad on the “wild mountaineers”. However, this allows the consul to give a “racial”, *i.e.* national dimension to his interpretation, which is otherwise mainly expressed in terms of religion. Indeed, in the same report he analyses the change of position of these local leaders as an absence of “fanaticism” and as an understanding of the community of race (in this case the Albanian race) with the Catholics.²⁴ In addition, the consul places the responsibility for the reinforcement of religious identification onto the Ottoman government, and considers that its partiality toward the Muslims makes it scornful of the Christian Albanians.

On the other hand, his analysis of the conflict’s evolution is closely linked with the Italian-Austrian rivalry that arose particularly in the domain of the protection of the Catholic population: being able to protect this population would have been a source of prestige in the

²⁴ ASMAE (Rome), Archivio Storico Diplomatico, Serie P. Politica (1891-1916), Albania, Pacco 667, Uskub, 30 November 1907. In the previous report (from 20 November 1907), the consul wrote about the “community of race and political interests” among the Muslim and Catholic Albanians.

region. However, the Italian representative does not mention the possible consequence of this protection, namely reinforcing the religious identification of the local population.

A conflict difficult to solve by challenged Ottoman authorities

The testimony of Süleyman Külçe is, of course, quite different and more precise than that of the Italian consul, even if he forgets the kidnapping of the priest at the beginning of his account. First, in his version we find more details concerning the religious aspects of the conflict. Şemsi Paşa tries to de-confessionalise the affair of the mosque profanation, but during the negotiations with local notables, ulemas are present and religious arguments are used. It is in the name of the “insult to religion” that the boycott against Catholic peasants is launched. Subsequently, some of the latter decide to convert to Islam in order to keep their jobs. But Süleyman Külçe’s account reveals other dimensions. It gives us a clear indication of the impact of social diversity among the Catholics. During the campaign of attacks against the Catholic villagers, the assailants choose their targets among the “richer” and the more “ferocious” families. In this last case, he probably refers to families that are used to stand up to intimidation more than others. However, this was not revenge indifferently launched against “Catholics”. It means that social and economic elements were also part of the denominational conflict.

The young officer is, above all, more informative about the plurality of actors on the side of the “Muslims” and the “Ottoman authorities”, and their impact on the affair. As far as the “Muslims” are concerned, his description shows us the role and the division of the “notables.” Similar to the Italian consul, he mentions dissent in Gjakovë (with the peculiar position of the Curri family, which does not accept the invitation to negotiate with Şemsi Paşa). However, contrary to the diplomat, Külçe considers this split to be an obstacle in the way of solving the conflict, and not as a good thing. He also cites, besides the town’s notables, the “Muslims

from Luma and Kalis” who played, according to him, an important role in the mobilisation against Catholics in Prizren. Here again we have evidence of the “negative” role of actors coming from the mountains.

Because of his position as Şemsi Paşa’s secretary, Süleyman Külçe is also particularly sensitive to the problem raised by the dissent among the various representatives of Ottoman authority. While Edith Durham and the Italian consul see only the “Ottoman authorities” or the “Ottoman government”, he stresses this point. In particular, he thinks that Şemsi Paşa could not apply the policy proposed by the Grand Vizir and the Inspector General, because of the position of the *vali*, who was more respectful of the Sultan’s policy of non-intervention against the Muslims.

Similar to Edith Durham and the Italian consul, Süleyman Külçe also gives the conflict non-local, *i.e.* international dimensions, but not with the same significance. In his view, the shadow of the Great Powers hangs over the region: Şemsi Paşa asks the Muslims not to give the “enemies” a pretext for intervention, and rumour has it that Austria-Hungary and Russia, through the intermediary of the monks of the Deçani Monastery, are responsible for the conflict (apparently, for him, Italy represented a lesser danger for the region). In the final agreement, Şemsi Paşa tries to cut the existing bond between Christians and the Great Powers, in making them promise to complain to the Ottoman government and not to the representatives of these Powers.

What is particularly interesting is that Süleyman Külçe also refers to an Ottoman dimension, *i.e.* to Ottoman domestic affairs. He introduces the question of Ottoman political management. The fact that he underlines the incapacity of the Ottoman authorities to solve such problems, notably because of their conflicting policies, is of course understandable in view of his Young Turk convictions. Furthermore, he suggests that in the Sultan’s mind this local affair might have been linked with the activity of the regime’s opponents in Europe,

especially because of Ismail Qemal bey Vlora²⁵. Thus, he introduces a political and possibly “ethno-national” factor, since Vlora used “Albanianism” in political opposition to the Hamidian regime. This suggests that, at a certain point, the reasons for the Ottoman government’s interest in solving the conflict were not only regional.

Settling a conflict in order to maintain prestige

Vice-Consul Prochaska is the one observer who gives us the most precise image of the situation in Prizren. Like the others, he also depicts the conflict as a denominational opposition, but for him the conflict is in a way “unnatural”, since Muslims and Catholics have a “common clan origin, the same habits and customs” and can be distinguished one from the other only by religion. He thus supposes that only conflicts between different “races” are “natural”. Despite this “ethno-national” eye, he is the only one of our four witnesses to explain the tension between Muslims and Catholics beyond that particular conflict. As we have seen, he does not refer to the impact of the reform attempts existing in the region since 1903, but he does refer to the growing place of Catholics in the public space, with particular reference to the problem of the bells and the discourses of Mgr. Trokši. However, the bishop was on bad terms with Austro-Hungarian diplomacy, and it is easy for the vice-consul to make him responsible for the tensions: a way to dismiss Austria-Hungary itself, which, as a protective Power, was nevertheless involved in this new state of affair.²⁶

²⁵ On Ismail Qemal bey Vlora, his Young Turk activities and his use of Albanianism, see N. Clayer, *Aux origines du nationalisme albanais*, pp. 384-385. In the same way, the Austro-Hungarian civil agent in Salonica reported that rumours were spread about the involvement of the pretender to the imaginary Albanian throne, Aladro, in the kidnapping and the Smolicë mosque affair. He was supposed to have inspired local priests to foment disturbances (HHStA, PA XIV/30, Liasse XXVII, Salonique, telegram, Rappaport, 22 November 1907).

²⁶ See HHStA, PA XXXVIII/402, Konsulat Prizren, “Notiz über den katholischen Erzbischof von Uesküb, Mgre. Pasquale Trokši“ ; Paris : AMAE, NS Turquie vol. XIII, Uskub, “Rapport annexe à la dépêche du 18 août sur les menées autrichiennes en Albanie”. Mgr Trokši had better relations with the Italian and French governments. According to the French report, the

Besides the religious dimension, the Austro-Hungarian consul's account is particularly interesting with regard to the "Muslim side". It tells us about a "commission" formed by some notables of Prizren who were leading the boycott against the Catholics. Furthermore, he underlines the fact that different leaders (from the town and the surroundings, especially from Luma) had personal interests in the affair, or took advantage of it, by using the occasion to ask for different things from the Ottoman local authorities or even from the Austro-Hungarian consulate. Prochaska does not mention directly, as does Süleyman Külçe, the dissent between the different elements of Ottoman authority. Nevertheless, he agrees with him when he explains that the government's authority was undermined when Şemsi Paşa arrived with troops, but did not use them. Lastly, an international dimension is present in his report, since he suggests to his superiors that, for Austria-Hungary, the settlement of the question is important, and for that reason recommends asking the Ottoman government to send a special civil servant (the *vali* for example). He implies that without a settlement, the notables might comply with the request of the Muslim population who want to protest against the Church and the Christian schools, and to send a delegation to the Italian vice-consulate. It is clear that here we again see signs of the rivalry between Italy and the Double Monarchy.

The dynamics of confessionalisation: active and dissymmetrical relational configurations

With the preceding analysis in mind, we can now try to answer the following question: how, through this conflict and its representations, can we understand the dynamics of "confessionalisation"? It is clearly a complex phenomenon, which combines (with real and imaginary dimensions and at different levels) religious, social, and political, as well as individual and collective dynamics. Let us first examine these levels, followed by the relational configurations that appear in the process during this period of conflict.

clergy of the region was divided as far as relations with the Austro-Hungarian Power were concerned. The "Church", of course, should not be seen as a monolithic entity either.

Confessionalisation and its dimensions, from the local to the international level

As we have seen in the presentation of this sectarian conflict, all the observers allude more or less to non-religious factors and other categories of actors beyond the categories of “Muslims” and “Christians”. Their testimonies also lead us to see the conflict at different levels. There is first the local dimension. The conflict is, above all, a local conflict that takes place in the regions of Gjakovë and Prizren (Prizren is approximately 40 kilometres from Gjakovë), and local dynamics are at work. The connection between the events in Gjakovë and those in Prizren is even tenuous; the actors are not the same. Even if the rumour of the mosque profanation has an effect in Prizren because of the impact of the preceding events in the region of Gjakovë, we can speak of a conflict in the region of Gjakovë and another one in the region of Prizren. In fact, the framework of a local conflict is mainly restricted to one town and its surroundings (here, a town, the villages around it, and the related mountains: the Malsia e Gjakovës [Gjakovë’s mountain] for Gjakovë, and the Luma region for Prizren). This corresponds to the framework of local economic exchanges and of the local balance of power.²⁷

Beyond the echoes between Gjakovë and Prizren, the conflict has a regional dimension as well. In particular, the events are dealt with by the Ottoman authorities in the context of the “Three *Vilayets*” (the three Macedonian *vilayets* placed under the supervision of the Inspector General, because of the “Macedonian question”), and also within the framework of the general situation in the north of the Kosovo *vilayet*. The intervention of Şemsi Paşa can be

²⁷ See my study on “Local factionalism and political mobilisation in the Albanian province in the late Ottoman Empire” (to be published), where I analyse how economic and social relations were based on a system of heterogeneous and temporary alliances, which implied mutual aid and an exchange of “services”. The alliances used in daily life could also be mobilised when a situation of conflict appeared. For such an event the opposing parties would mobilise their “friends” or “partisans”, with more or less success, according to circumstances, leading to a certain balance of power and later to a violent conflict or to negotiations.

located at this level. However, this regional dimension is closely linked with two other levels – the imperial and the international ones, owing to the growing Young Turk opposition produced by the particular situation in these “Three *Vilayets*”, in which the Great Powers play an important role.

Besides these various dimensions, the process of confessionalisation also has different temporalities, as shown in the Ottoman reforms and in the specific conflicts, i. e. the conflicts which broke out in Gjakovë and Prizren in 1907-1908.

Confessionalisation and the temporality of the Ottoman reforms

Let us now try to analyse the main relational dynamics which enter into the process of confessionalisation. These dynamics do not all share the same temporality.

Confessionalisation, as mentioned in the introduction, was a phenomenon that, beyond the events of 1907-1908, was developing since the last decades of the nineteenth century in this region, as well as in other parts of “European Turkey”. The evolution of religious practices was responsible for this, thanks to an increasingly active clergy and, to a certain extent, to the use of printed material. The *Tanzimat* reforms enabled non-Muslim clerics to be more active than in the past. As far as Catholics were concerned, Franciscan and Jesuit missionaries undertook various activities in the region: churches were built, bells began to ring ever more loudly, schools for Catholic children were opened, and congregations were founded. The orthodox Christians enjoyed the fruit of the competition between the Constantinople Patriarchate, the Bulgarian Exarchate, and the Serbian Orthodox Church. In particular, a Serbian Orthodox seminary (*Bogoslovija*) was founded in Prizren in 1871, which became the heart of a religious, cultural, and educational network in the region. A quarter of a century later, Serbian bishops were installed in Prizren (1896), as well as in Skopje (1897), and later

in Veles (1910).²⁸ As for the Muslims, different initiatives were launched in the fields of religion and education, to a large extent as a reaction against these Christian activities.²⁹ This process, however, has not been sufficiently studied, especially as far as Kosovo is concerned. It is a region where numerous conversions to Islam occurred in the last years of Ottoman rule, especially among Catholics.³⁰ But it is also a region where the networks of diverse Sufi brotherhoods strongly developed at that time,³¹ where Qurans were distributed, and schools were founded in which Islamic religion and morality was an important part of the curriculum. It was also a region where ulemas, especially Albanian-speaking ulemas, were sent by Istanbul in order to preach among the Muslims.³²

In this temporality we can see different levels (individual, local, regional, imperial and international), since none of these “churches” were homogeneous entities, as I have already stressed, and because initiatives might come from different types of actors. Factors other than religious ones could be part of the process as well. In particular, political factors were significant. For instance, Catholic activities developed under the protection of Austria-Hungary, the main protective power of the Catholic religion in the region, but France and Italy tried to compete in this domain. Political motives were not absent in this competition, as the consuls’ reports show us. The Orthodox seminary in Prizren was, in the same way, under

²⁸ Dušan Bataković, *The Kosovo Chronicles*, Beograd: Plato, 1992, p. 99.

²⁹ See, for example, Selim Deringil, *The Well-Protected Domains*, London-New York: Tauris, 1998, p. 93 sqq. On the development of education as a response to missionary and Christian minorities’ activities in the provinces, see Benjamin C. Fortna, *Imperial classroom: Islam, the State and education in the late Ottoman Empire*, London: Tauris, 2002.

³⁰ N. Clayer, “Quelques réflexions sur le phénomène de conversion à l’islam à travers le cas des catholiques albanais observé par une mission jésuite à la fin de l’époque ottomane”, *Mésogaios*, 2(1998), Paris: Hêrodotos/Kadmos, p. 16-39.

³¹ On the late development of the Kadiriyye, the Rifaiyye and the Bektachiyye in Kosovo, see Alexandre Popovic, *Les derviches balkaniques hier et aujourd’hui*, Istanbul: Isis, 1994; “La Qâdiriyya/Kadiriye dans les Balkans. Une vue d’ensemble”, in *Journal of the History of Sufism*, Istanbul, 2000, 1-2, pp. 167-212; and “A propos des Bektachis au Kosovo-Métohiya”, in *Kosovo, Les Annales de l’Autre Islam*, No 7, Paris, 2000, pp. 91-98.

³² N. Clayer, *Aux origines du nationalisme albanais*, pp. 540-541.

the direct jurisdiction of the Serbian government.³³ The strengthening of Islam was also to some extent a consequence of a policy put into effect by the Ottoman authorities at various levels. Besides the intervention of political powers into the religious field, confessionalisation was also a result of reforms implemented in the Ottoman provinces, under the more or less direct pressure of the Great Powers. Here one must mention the representation of each denominational group in local assemblies (*meclis*), as well as the share given to non-Muslim subjects in the gendarmerie and among the judges of the new courts (reforms which were newly introduced in this part of the Kosovo *vilayet*, as we have seen above).

However, it would be a mistake to see this strengthening of religious identification and religious borders as a pure top-down process, imposed by clergymen, missionaries, consuls, and Ottoman administrators. The re-negotiation of local alterities proceeded according to multiple dynamics coming from above, but also coming from below, and along various temporalities. Confessionalisation was also taking shape through the deeds and sayings of the local population. For example, the collective dimension of religious identification began to materialise through the profanation of religious symbols and through boycotts. In Prizren, a boycott of the Christian shops had already taken place in 1904, on the occasion of the arrival of bells for the Catholic Church.³⁴ Two years later, a boycott was launched against the Catholic peasants in the region of Gjakovë.³⁵ But it is easier to see these multiple dynamics when considering another temporality, that of the conflict.

Confessionalisation and the temporality of the conflict of 1907-1908

³³ D. Bataković, *The Kosovo Chronicles*, p. 99.

³⁴ HHStA, PA XXXVIII/401, Konsulat Prizren, 1904-1905, Gerent Viceconsul Halla, Prizren, 17 April 1904 (telegram copy from Istanbul, 14 April 1904).

³⁵ HHStA, PA XXXVIII/402, Konsulat Prizren, 1906-1907; see reports of the vice-consul Lejhanec, from July 1906.

Let us return to the affairs of Gjakovë and Prizren. The conflict begins when a Muslim, helped by a certain number of his coreligionists, kidnaps a priest with the aim of obtaining the liberation of his brother.³⁶ This individual move has nothing to do with religion, but the choice of the priest, which is new (according to the Italian consul), prompts a reaction that will give the conflict a denominational nature. Why have the prisoner's brother and his friends chosen a clergyman? The aim was certainly not to produce a sectarian conflict *per se*, but to have bargaining chips, *i.e.* to make the Ottoman authorities react and release the prisoner. Indeed, they knew that Christian religious matters were sensitive for the government, in particular concerning its relations with the Great Powers. According to the Austro-Hungarian consular reports (from the end of 1907) and to the local *kaymakam*, which both reflected local public opinion, the kidnapers were inspired by the secular priest of Gjakovë, Don Tommaso Glasnović, who suggested that they kidnap a foreigner in order to effect the release.³⁷ Whether this rumour concerning the responsibility of another priest was true or not, the fact that it spread reveals the competition between the regular and the secular clergy in the region and its possible influence on the conflict. Their choice is thus understandable in the general context, at the crossroad of local and international factors.

This act nevertheless provoked a reaction from some local Christians. Here it is difficult to really know who decided to profane the mosque of Smolicë and who eventually called the Catholic mountaineers to do this, if this was really the case. Indeed, according to the General Consul August Kral in Shkodër, it was not the case: the spiritual initiator would have been the priest of the Nikaj, a Catholic clan of the mountains, who delivered impassioned sermons

³⁶ In fact, according to the more detailed Austro-Hungarian reports, there were two main kidnapers, Idris Jahja and Bajram Daklan, who had the same type of objective: to obtain the liberation of a parent (HHStA, PA XIV/30, Liasse XXVII, Vice-consul Prochaska, Prizren, No 110, 20 September 1907).

³⁷ HHStA, PA XIV/30, Liasse XXVII, Prochaska, Prizren, No 119, 1 October 1907; Rappaport, Salonica, No 102, 30 October 1907 ; Prochaska, Prizren, No 145, 9 December 1907.

relating to the captivity of the Franciscan, and who declared that no Catholic was brave enough to avenge him. The consequence would have been that four men of the clan decided to be the avengers.³⁸ Whatever the case might be, the response chosen was an attack against a symbol of the religion of the “other” who had dared to lay a finger on a priest, another religious symbol. The moment is also particularly significant in view of the fact that the profanation took place just at the beginning of a Muslim feast. Therefore, the conflict takes on a sectarian aspect. The action quickly provoked a complex set of reactions on the part of “Muslims”, as well as from the “representatives of the Great Powers” and the “Ottoman government”.

Religion and confessional identification are significant factors throughout the conflict: they are mobilisation factors, identification factors, intervention factors, claim factors, solidarity factors, exclusion factors or interpretation factors. On the “Muslim side”, as well as on the “Catholic side”, there is a communitarian sensibility; mobilisations take place in the name of the “offended religion”, possibly against the “other”. Some claims are expressed to the Great Powers and to the Ottoman authorities in the name of the religious community. The testimony of the Austro-Hungarian vice-consul shows us that the evolution at the level of the reform process certainly facilitated such mobilisations and claims.

Nevertheless, the testimonies have already indicated that there are also other factors, and all “Muslims” and all “Catholics” do not act with one mind. There are also non-religious individual or small group interests that provoke or nourish the conflict and thus the confessionalisation process. These interests may be economic; Muslims attacking the houses of the “wealthier” Catholic peasants, some notables or chiefs seeking to benefit from the conflict to obtain some gains, Muslim shopkeepers deferring the end of the boycott for their own profit, and some Muslims wanting to replace the Catholic peasants expelled from their

³⁸ HHStA, PA XIV/30, Liasse XXVII, Scutari, Consul Kral, No 126, 18 December 1907.

jobs. Furthermore, when the pressure becomes too strong, some Catholics are led to convert, *i.e.* to join the other community, in order to keep a job. More generally, the conflict develops within the framework of the local balance of power and the complex power relations between the local chiefs themselves. In this way, the conflict between the Curri family and other chiefs in Gjakovë merges with the denominational conflict. Furthermore, the call of mountaineers to perpetrate wrongdoings or the influence of chiefs from surrounding areas also illustrate that the conflict developed along the line of the local balance of power. In addition, the power relations between local notables and Ottoman representatives also intermingle. In Prizren, the commission that leads the boycott movement is clearly acting in opposition to the *mutessarif*. That does not prevent some notables, who are members of the commission, from playing their own cards during the conflict. The competition within the local Catholic clergy and between some members of the clergy and the consular agents also enters into the conflict and contributes to its development.

The representative of the Great Powers, mainly the Italian and Austro-Hungarian consular agents in this case, are both actors and observers. They act in the region using an ambiguous analysis and intervention guideline: they are the defenders of the Christian population, but they also function in the regional context according to the existence of “nationalities”. This appears clearly in their reports, and we can see the same ambiguity in Edith Durham’s book as well. The result is a certain inadequacy, at the least making it necessary to re-evaluate their action from time to time. For example, before the beginning of the conflict, the Austro-Hungarian consular agent in Prizren informed his superiors that the influence and the prestige of the Double Monarchy were threatened in the region, because Catholics, despite the Austro-Hungarian religious protectorate, were suffering. As a consequence, the “Albanians” – Catholic, but also Muslim – were turning towards Italy. For him, therefore, the money given

for the Church and the schools was not bearing the expected fruits.³⁹ Indeed, the situation of competition allowed the different segments of the population to play on diverse possibilities of protection.⁴⁰

Within the temporality of the conflict, the foreign representatives were obliged to react to appeals and requests, while being considered by the Christian and Muslim population, and also by the Ottoman authorities, mainly as the defenders of the “Christian side.” In a way, they were initially persuaded to interpret the conflict as a religious one, because the local actors mobilised according to religious affiliations. So here we see an aspect of the bottom-up side of the process. Of course, the Italian consul and his Austro-Hungarian colleague are particularly sensitive to the fate of the Catholics vis-à-vis the Muslims they consider as favoured by the authorities. Furthermore, the representatives of Austria-Hungary act according to the religious protectorate, for instance in interceding with the Ottoman government in the abduction of the priest, or the conversions of the Catholic peasants. And for both Powers – Italy and the Double Monarchy – a successful defence of the Catholics is seen as potentially increasing their prestige. But they have to act with caution, because their aim is not exclusively confessional, and they cannot let their regional influence rely only on the Catholics, and also because they are in competition with each other. That is why the Austro-Hungarian vice-consul tries to more fully understand the dynamics of the conflict and to identify the actors and the motives. As already mentioned, he, like the Italian representative, does not take into account in his analysis the consequence of his own government’s policy in the confessionalisation process.

³⁹ HHStA, PA XXXVIII/402, Konsulat Prizren, 1906-1907, Gerent Viceconsul Lejhanec, 16 January 1907.

⁴⁰ See the study of Isa Blumi on the mountaineers of Northern Albania (“Contesting the edges of the Ottoman Empire: Rethinking ethnic and sectarian boundaries in the Malësore, 1878-1912”, in *IJMES*, 35/2, May 2003, pp. 237-256), in which she speaks about the “possibilities of identity”, in the context of a border region where different external powers are competing.

The Ottoman authorities, for their part, are operating in the region under the pressure of the Great Powers and, at that very time, under the pressure of a growing opposition among the Muslim population. They also have their own share in the confessionalisation process, as we have seen with respect to the temporality of the reforms. Furthermore, during the conflict it becomes evident that the Ottoman authorities do not exactly have the same attitude *vis-à-vis* the Muslims and the Christians, both in reality and in the mind of others. The Ottoman government seems to want a negotiated solution, rather than to use force, especially against the Muslims. Besides, confessionalisation goes hand in hand with Islamicisation or with the defence of Islam and the Ottoman Empire against the Great Powers. Following the intervention of the Great Powers after a wave of conversions to Islam, the Inspector General is urged to order the establishment of an official conversion procedure by means of a ceremony before the local administrative assembly (*idare meclisi*).⁴¹ This kind of measure had already been taken in other parts of the Empire, always with the aim of showing that these conversions were voluntary.⁴²

However, we have seen that during the conflict there was not one consistent Ottoman policy, but rather conflicting policies *vis-à-vis* the Muslims and the problem of Christian-Muslim relations. Beyond the regional peace, the balance of power between the different representatives of Ottoman authority, as well as between the Ottoman authorities and the Great Powers, was undoubtedly at stake. Christian-Muslim relations were also a key problem

⁴¹ In a report from 21 May 1908, the Austro-Hungarian vice-consul writes that a priest told him about a collective conversion in a village of the surrounding area; consequently, he informed the *mutessarif*, who sent the gendarmerie for an investigation. The gendarmerie noted that the conversion effectively took place through a collective ceremony of circumcision. Having doubts as to the voluntary nature of this conversion, the Austro-Hungarian representative put pressure on the *mutessarif*. The latter then decided to organize an official ceremony in front of the local Assembly, in the presence of a priest. However, the converts did not want to speak to him and the priest refused to sign the act, in pretending that it was a forced conversion (HHStA, PA XXXVIII/403, Konsulat Prizren 1908, Vicekonsul Prochaska, Prizren, 21 May 1908).

⁴² See S. Deringil, *The Well-Protected Domains*, pp. 85-86.

for the Young Turk movement, which had developed in Macedonia as a consequence of the Macedonian crisis. The testimony of Süleyman Külçe is an illustration of this phenomenon. It is also striking to note that Şemsi Paşa was later accused by the famous Young Turk leader Niyazi Bey, of having mobilised Albanian volunteers against the Young Turks by announcing that Christians were massacring Muslims and that the volunteers have to move against these Christians (and not against the Young Turks).⁴³ Indeed, it is quite possible that he used this stratagem, linked to religious oppositions, to mobilise volunteers against the Young Turk insurgents. However, Şemsi Paşa's son denied in a book that his father did such a thing, since he would have always tried to defend the Christians against the injustices committed by Muslims.⁴⁴ It is interesting to note that this explanation uses the same kind of argument concerning the issue of Muslim/Christians relations: the image of Şemsi Paşa is linked with the management of the relations between Christians and Muslims at that time. With respect to the temporality of the conflict, it means that these complex relations (within the Ottoman administrative and military units, and between these units and the Great Powers as well) are also components of the confessionalisation process.

Confessionalisation and religion as a real and imaginary integrative force in late Ottoman South-Eastern Europe

At the time of nationalisms, religion as such, or a more imaginary religious identification, appears to have been an important factor of social integration in this region of the Balkan Peninsula. In any case, an inescapable fading of religious identification in favour of a new national identification is not obvious. The development of national identities (Serbian, Albanian, Turkish, etc.) is also present in the region at that time. As far as Albanian national

⁴³ Ş. Hanioglu, *Preparation for a Revolution*, p. 268.

⁴⁴ Müfid Şemsi, *Şemsi Paşa, Arnavudluk ve İttihad-Terraki. El hakku ya'lû vela yu'lâ aleyh*, Istanbul: Nehir, 1995, p. 62-64.

identity is concerned, we know that it began to develop mainly in Gjakovë around 1907, with the foundation of an Albanian Committee, which included Bajram Curri, among others.⁴⁵

However the testimonies we used in this study, beyond the few remarks on the common “race” of the Muslims and the Catholics, are not precise enough to tell us if this development had an influence on the conflict and, in particular, what was the attitude of the people involved in the committee vis-à-vis the Catholics. However that may be, the phenomenon of confessionalisation was noticeable at that time, its development occurring according to various temporalities. The process was the result of a complex interaction of acts and discourses with both religious and non-religious motivations. Under these conditions it was not necessarily incompatible with nationalism or with “Europeanisation”, two other complex processes. Religious identifications, as national identifications, had an increasingly supra-local dimension, since foreign and non-local actors were involved in local religious matters. The violent attack of religious symbols (be it a priest or a mosque) purposely added a supra-local dimension to the conflict.

If confessionalisation was obvious at that time, it was not necessarily a linear and irreversible process. The framework was that of the *millets*, as institutionalised during the second part of the 19th century,⁴⁶ but we have seen that this framework is not sufficient to describe the dynamics of confessionalisation. There was a multiplicity and a fluidity of individual and collective identifications directly linked to the local configurations, and particularly to the question of power and authority on different levels (local, regional, imperial, international). The perspective of the “histoire croisée” and the comparison of different sources, taking into

⁴⁵ See N. Clayer, *Aux origines du nationalisme albanais*, p. 560.

⁴⁶ In fact, the Catholic community was not organised as a *millet* (see Anna Hedwig Benna, “Studien zum Kultusprotektorat Österreich-Ungarns in Albanien im Zeitalter des Imperialismus (1888-1918)”, in *Mitteilungen des Österreichischen Staatsarchivs*, Wien, 7, 1954, pp. 13-46).

consideration the subjectivity of certain actors, lead us to a better understanding of this phenomenon.

