The Construction and Deconstruction of Religious and Ethnic Identities

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Abstract

Through immigration and refuge, mainly from the Balkan countries, a Muslim community has established itself in Luxemburg. As this community constitutes a numerical minority, it has not been subject to much scientific research. This paper presents a preliminary analysis of data from interviews with Muslim immigrants and refugees from the former Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia identify with their religious heritage in a new socio-cultural context, in which they are not necessarily perceived as Muslims. It deconstructs assigned and often taken for granted identities by calling into question the relevance of particular identity markers and by looking at how they are negotiated. This paper shows how individuals use multiple references in their identity construction and analyzes contexts in which particular identity markers become salient.

1 This paper was presented at the EXCEPS PGR conference ‘Cultural Encounters: Researching Ethnicities, Identities, and Politics in a Globalized World’, University of Exeter, UK, 21–22 May 2011.
2 The sample consists of Muslims from Bosnia–Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro, Serbia and Croatia.
1. Studying Muslims in Luxemburg

Throughout the nineteenth century the Luxemburgish population remained strongly anchored in Catholicism and catholic practice (Trausch, Margue, Metzler, and Gengler, 2003). But, just as most other European countries, the Luxemburgish religious landscape has undergone major changes through secularization and individualization processes, but also through the establishment of new religious communities through successive immigration and refugee flows, in particular from the Balkans. Luxemburg is an immigration country with a particularly high proportion of foreign residents. With more than 43 per cent foreign residents (Thill-Ditsch, 2010), the percentage of foreign residents is among the highest in Europe. The Muslim community in Luxemburg was established mainly through the immigration and later the refuge of ex-Yugoslavs, who nowadays constitute the majority of non-EU nationals in Luxemburg. Through immigration Islam has become a constitutive element of the religious landscape, and has become the second religion of the country (Hausman and Zahlen, 2010). According to Bento (1997, 2001), there are several phases in the establishment of Islam in Luxemburg. From a very discrete Islam in the 1960s, family reunification in the 1970s and 1980s has contributed to establishing Islam in civil society and become more visible in the public space. At the moment, the Islamic community and the state are in negotiation about the official recognition of Islam in Luxemburg. An important aspect to consider is that Islam in Luxemburg is predominantly European. Indeed, the Balkans constitute a region of religious cohabitation that has undergone several decades of communism, which largely shaped the place of religion in the public sphere (Bougarel, 2001; Bougarel and Clayer, 2001; Clayer, 2004; Detrez, 2000; Friedman, 1996, 2000; Heuberger, 2001).

This paper presents a preliminary analysis of qualitative research concerning Muslim immigrants and refugees from the Balkans in Luxemburg. It looks at how the significance of religion changes in a situation of migration for a particular group, namely Muslims from the Balkans. Literature suggests for different contexts that migration/refuge may contribute to the changing salience of religion (Alanezi, 2005; Baumann, 2000; Baumann and Luchesi, 2003; Cadge and Ecklund, 2006, 2007; Connor, 2008; Saraiva, 2008; Smits, Ruiter, and van Tubergen, 2010; Van Tubergen, 2006; Yang and Ebaugh, 2001). Taking into account the spe-
cific Balkan context, this paper looks at whether and how migration and refuge influence religious identification of Muslim immigrants and refugees and seeks to understand the contextual factors that may account for the salience of particular identity markers.

As suggested by the citation below, in the Balkan context, one’s religious affiliation is audible through one’s name and lexical marking.

Extract 1: ‘In school you can see it with the names, you can see immediately. Serb names, well they have their roots in the Serb language. And the Muslim names are of Arab origin. Well they are modified, because after all we are Europeans. So it is easy to recognize, really, if you introduce yourself, people can see immediately who you are.’ (Interview with refugee, Luxemburg, 11.07.2010, P3, 3:174)

This citation suggests that in the Balkans, names immediately divulge religious affiliation. In a situation of migration, such as experienced by the participants of this study, these markers (names and lexical marking) do not necessarily reveal religious affiliation to members of the host society. As a consequence, religion may become more of a personal matter and there is a greater freedom in communicating or divulging aspects of ‘Muslimness’. For these migrants, religious affiliation is thus not automatically a significant differentiation marker anymore.

Coming from this observation, the aim of this paper is to show how immigrants and refugees themselves contribute to the deconstruction of religious and ethnic identities and to show which categories of self-identification are subjectively salient to the participants. It questions the essentializing nature of religious identity and produces a (more) nuanced account of social categories and belongings. Very often it is assumed that individuals identify with their group label and that it matters to them psychologically. Only rarely is the subjective identification and the salience of the group identity considered as a source of individual difference (Gurin and Hazel, 1988; Tajfel and Turner, 1979).

Vast amounts of literature from different disciplines have theorized and conceptualized identity (Anthias, 2003; Ashmore, Deaux, and McLaughlin-Volpe, 2004; Bail and Lamont, 2005; Barth, 1996; Deaux, 1993; Deschamps, Morales, and Páez, 1999; Jenkins, 1996; Keupp
and Höfer, 1997; Straub and Renn, 2002; Stryker and Serpe, 1994). In this paper identity refers to social categories in which an individual claims membership, providing a basis for self-definition (Deaux, 1993). Individuals can choose different social categories as self-descriptive and associate subjective meaning to them (Deaux, 1993: 6). Identity is perceived as constructed in negotiation with the social environment. Certain social categories can be more or less important according to the context and situation of interaction (Stryker and Serpe, 1994). Religion and ethnicity are among the most important markers of group identity for immigrants (Verkuyten and Yildiz, 2007).

The focus on the Luxemburgish Muslim population originating from the Balkans is interesting in a comparative perspective as this group is composed of both immigrants who have arrived in the 1970s after the labor agreement between Luxemburg and the former Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, as well as refugees from the 1990s who arrived during and after the Balkan wars. These two categories are different in a number of ways: (1) immigrants are less heterogeneous in socio-demographic terms than refugees, (2) immigrants and refugees have different migration motives and trajectories, as they arrived in different historical periods, (3) due to the different experiences in the home country, immigrants and refugees may have different relationships with their home country, and (4) because they are subjected to a different legal framework in the host country, immigrants and refugees have different rights and opportunities. This comparative design allows for tackling variables other than the ethno-religious one and thus for expanding the understanding by exploring possible reasons for the salience of group identity.

The number of Muslims in Luxemburg is unknown, since the law of 1979 prohibits the collection of data on religious affiliation in the census. Despite a growth in the size of the Mus-

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3 Most of the immigrants were unqualified workers recruited as labor migrants in the 1970s mostly for unqualified work. We can expect refugees to be a more heterogeneous group, as people from all social classes fled from the war.

4 Immigrants came mainly for economic reasons and refugees for political and security reasons during the break-up of the Yugoslav federation.

5 Immigrants and refugees are subject to different legal frameworks. Indeed, most of the immigrants were received under the law of 1972 (Loi du 28 mars 1972 concernant, l’entrée et le séjour des étrangers, le contrôle médical des étrangers, l’emploi de la main-d’œuvre étrangère), whereas refugees coming after 1996 were received under the law of 1996 (Règlement grand-ducal du 22 avril 1996 portant application de l’article 3 de la loi du 3 avril 1996 portant création d’une procédure relative à l’examen d’une demande d’asile) and had no access to the employment market as long as they were asylum seekers.

6 Modified law of March 31, 1979.
lim populations in Luxemburg over the last 30 years, it must be remembered that in relative terms, the Muslim population is small. According to the European Value Study, only 2 per cent of the national population identified as being affiliated with Islam. The Muslim community in Luxemburg spans over a wide range of countries of birth and languages and includes a growing number of converts, but the majority of Muslims is still originating from ex-Yugoslavia.

The next paragraph will briefly sketch out the context of origin of the research population. This is relevant because the formation of ethnic boundaries and identification patterns begin in the country of origin, amidst complex economic, political and cultural rivalries.

Firstly, I will address the question of religious affiliation in the Balkan context. The second paragraph will sketch out the methodology used in this research and the third part will describe some of the findings.

2. Religion as the main differentiation marker of the ‘other’ in the Balkan context?

The Balkans can be considered as a multi-ethnic region, divided by multi-layered linguistic, religious, regional and political cleavages (Calic, 1995; Lutard, 1992: 67). Despite this multi-layered character, one of the major constitutive identity markers is religion. The South Slav Serbo-Croatian speaking people mainly divide into three communities on the basis of religious affiliation: Catholics (Croats), Orthodox (Serbs) and Muslims (Bosniaks) (Bringa, 1996; Calic, 1995: 25). In other words, whereas the Slavic population is linked through a common language and origin, it is heterogeneous in terms of religious attachment (Babuna, 2004: 312; Varro, 2005: 48).

7 The different, but similar dialects composing Serbo-Croatian were standardized into one standard language during the nineteenth century to demonstrate the ‘oneness’ of the Yugoslav nation but have undergone important transitions since, especially after the break-up of the Yugoslav federation. Indeed, nowadays, Serbian and Croatian are officially recognized as different languages. The complex transitions and perceptions related to the union of the Serbo-Croatian language are too complex to be dealt with in this place. It is dealt with in detail in Greenberg (2004) (Adanir 2002; Babuna 2000, 2004; Friedman 2000). Indeed, the attempts by the Serbs, Croats, and Bosnian Muslims to claim their own respective languages must be seen in the upsurge of the various South Slav nationalisms (Friedman, 2000: 178).

8 See footnote 7.

9 The situation is different for ethnic Albanian and Turkish Muslims, whose identity is differentiated from Orthodox Christians by language as well as by religion (Babuna 2000, 2004).
The salience of this identity marker has greatly changed over time. The Ottoman Empire was ruled by Islamic precepts and millets\textsuperscript{10} were established as the prime focus of identity. Non-Muslim citizens had the right to practice their religion, retain their separate identities and traditional customs but were subject to diverse measures of discrimination\textsuperscript{11} and had to pay a special tax in exchange for protection (Bieber, 2000). Thus, religion was a major determinant of status (Friedman, 2000) and was the salient collective identity giving Muslims an elevated status.

The final decline of the Ottoman Empire and the diminution of protection of the interests of Muslims led to a growing consciousness of the necessity to secure their group interests, which fostered the strengthening of identities. Some of the successor states of the Empires were integrated in the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, Slovenes, united under the motto of a Union of the South Slavs, but in reality under domination of a Serb dynasty (1918-1929) (Poulton, 2000, 54). The Serbian domination of the state structure of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes was a source of resentment and tension, particularly with the Croats, who distanced themselves from the idea of a single South Slavic nation. Croats demanded a more decentralized federated government of equal national partners and developed their own national identity, emphasizing particularities of language and faith as distinctive features of Croat nationality vis-à-vis Serbs (Friedman, 2000: 172; Detrez, 2000).

The Bosnian Muslim community was not recognized as a nation and remained an anational minority that responded with increased political organization. During the interwar period the Yugoslav Muslim Organization was established in order to protect religious interests and rights of the Muslims (Zachary, 1984: 43). Even though the Muslims were not established as a nation, by the end of the nineteenth century, an ethno-national consciousness started to be articulated (Babuna, 2004: 297).

Facing opposing nationalist aspirations, King Alexander I proclaimed a royal dictatorship and renamed the state Kingdom of Yugoslavia in 1929. His rule remained essentially Serbian.

\textsuperscript{10} The Arabic word ‘millah’, literally meaning ‘nation’, is the term used for confessional community and refers to protected religious minority groups.

\textsuperscript{11} For example, the Devshirme system consisted of a child levy, compulsory separation of male children from Christian families and educating them as Muslims (Zachary, 1984: 438; Bieber, 2000: 15).
dominated and police applied brutal measures when the integrity of the state was endangered by non-Serb forces. To combat local nationalist movements, he attempted to impose the concept of “Yugoslavism” by expunging historic geographic boundaries and reorganizing them into regions called Banovinas (renamed after the rivers). The Pan-Yugoslav vision regarded differences between cultural nations as insignificant and hoped that they would disappear with the increasing industrialization and unification process. Yugoslav politics were supposed to lead to the end of political allegiance towards constitutive nations/nationalities, but in fact, the ruling class never managed to impose the idea of a common Yugoslav identity, transcending particularistic identities and ethnic cleavages. Even though it was normatively uniform, socially and culturally distinct systems existed in the republics and provinces (Flere, 1991: 192).

The establishment of the socialist regime in Yugoslavia had an immediate impact on the Islamic community (Babuna, 2004). The communist state introduced strict separation of church and state and took over civil functions carried out previously by religious hierarchies. The communist ruling class put an end to the Sharia court system, as well as to the obligatory religious tax and religious instruction. These measures were part of the general secularization policies and not special policies addressed against the Muslims (Babuna, 2004: 302).

Tito’s government sought to balance the interests of the state and the demands of the constituent nations (Mulaj, 2006: 22) with a policy of ethnic and regional parity in political representation. The constitutive republics detained a certain degree of autonomy and self-

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12 After the Second World War, the Kingdom of Yugoslavia became the Socialist Federal Republic, in which six republics were federated under communist rule, under the motto of ‘fraternity and unity’. The constitutive Republics detained a certain degree of autonomy and self-determination, primarily in the ethno-cultural sphere. The different ethnic groups were allocated different rights and privileges within the different republics, depending on whether they were recognized as a nation or as a nationality. The Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia can be viewed as a political nation, composed of different apolitical cultural nations (that each “had” their own republic) and different nationalities (narodnost) (that had a mother state outside of Yugoslavia, like Albanian or Hungarian minorities). The Yugoslav state can be considered as a multinational and poly-confessional ethno-territorial federation. Five of the republics were named after the majority national group within their borders, except for B-H, whose population was a mix of Croats, Serbs and Muslims. The Yugoslav ruling class never managed to impose the idea of a common Yugoslav identity, transcending particularistic identities and ethnic cleavages. Even though it was normatively uniform, socially and culturally distinct systems existed in the republics and provinces (Flere, 1991: 192).

13 In reality, hegemony has always been a sensitive question, at least in the first two Yugoslav states (Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, renamed Yugoslavia in 1929), which were under ethnic hegemony of the Serbs, who played a major role in formation of the State, gave its royal dynasty and whose church was tied to the dynasty. Moreover, the Serbs were the most numerous group, overrepresented in the state repressive apparatus (Flere, 1991, 190).
determination, primarily in the ethno-cultural sphere, but remained subordinated to the ruling authorities. The Yugoslav system is thus characterized by the political recognition of ethnic diversity, which is controlled through political and economic centralism. The different ethnic groups were allocated different rights and privileges within the different republics, depending on whether they were recognised as a nation or as a nationality. As in the Soviet model, the Yugoslav model tried to foster a supra-national entity in order to form civic Yugoslav nationality (Wolczuk and Yemelianova, 2008: 179) by making the distinction between a unique citizenship and nationalities, that were defined by cultural, linguistic (Albania, Romania) and religious (Serb, Croats, Bosniak) criteria (Lutard, 1992: 71). A policy of divide and rule (Wolczuk and Yemelianova, 2008: 182) and a combination of concession and repression were used to maintain control of the country (Lutard, 1992: 70).

The constitutional changes of 1963 and 1974\(^{14}\) introduced a higher degree of autonomy and the right of self-determination of the republics, including the right to secession. The decentralization tendencies initiated in the 1960s, led to a reinforcement of the autonomy of the constitutive republics and to the weakening of the federal power/administration, which reinforced regional disparities and economic inequalities, which in turn strengthened national tensions (Lutard, 1992). The greater autonomy as well as the shift towards political recognition of the republics became a fertile basis for the development of (ethnic) nationalisms. By giving the different republics more autonomy, the Yugoslav leadership could lower/smother nationalistic demands, but at the same time, it consolidated national identities by decentralizing cultural institutions, which had a fading effect on political integration.

Even though religion was partly relegated to the private sphere during the communist period, the Tito regime played an important role in consolidating the Muslim identity. During the initial communist period, the ethnic identity of the Serbo-Croatian-speaking Muslims remained undefined. The Bosnian Muslims, indigenous Serbo-Croatian speaking Slavic people, have only recently been officially recognized as a national group as a result of Croatian separatism and Serbian dominance at the level of the federal government and particu-

\(^{14}\) The constitutional changes and the decentralization were intended to resolve nationalist tensions between the different groups. The tensions were based on different interrelated factors: socio-economic disparities and aid measures allocated to under-developed regions led to conflicts and to the weakening of solidarities (Lutard 1992: 69).
larly at the level of the Bosnia-Herzegovina government. The Serbs considered the Serbo-Croatian speaking Muslims to be ethnic Serbs, while the Croats viewed them as ethnically Croatian in order to become the majority in the republic of B-H. From the 1960s, the distinctiveness of Muslims\textsuperscript{15} was officially accepted and Muslims were recognized as one of the ‘nations of Yugoslavia’ in order to end the competition between Serbs and Croats over the ethnic ‘ownership’ of the Bosnian Muslims (Baskin, 1984: 124; Friedman, 2000: 173; Poulton, 2000: 54; Babuna, 2004: 304). Again, the distinctiveness of Muslim Slavs who share their language with the respective majority Christian populations rested almost exclusively on their religious adherence.

Religion, the basic component of national identity, is thus a stronger uniting factor than language and an important differentiating identity marker. The Serbs and Croats rejected the recognition of this distinctiveness. A Muslim identity solely based upon Islam has changed to one in which ethnic content/interpretation has become an important factor (Poulton, 2000: 48).

Considering the low religious observance, identity as ‘Muslim’ rested more on customs and culture than on religious observance (Poulton, 2000: 54). Muslim identity is one of national identification, not of religious ritual (Friedman, 2000) and ‘religious revival of the last decades is mainly the result of the people’s desire to express their belonging to an ethnic or national community’ (Detrez s. d. : 3).

Even though communism repressed religion and suppressed its visible public manifestations, religion always played an important social and cultural role in Balkan societies (Ivekovic, 2002: 524) and was a central source in the construction of national identity (Detrez, 2000; Partos, 1997). The post-1945 censuses revealed a growth of the Bosnian Muslim national consciousness . After the break-up of the socialist republic, ties based on (perceived) common religion, ethnicity, language and customs, rather than common political institutions, territory and civic identity became the basis for nationhood that replaced the

\textsuperscript{15} Communist authorities preferred to use the term ‘Muslim’, because the alternative ‘Bosniak’ would have implied that Bosnia is their national territory and not the homeland of local Serbs and Croats as well. The term ‘Bosniak’ is now used to denote Slav Muslims in the now independent former Yugoslav republic Bosnia-Herzegovina.
‘old’ communist identity (Poulton, 2000: 177-183) after the crumbling of the communist ideology. After 40 years of communist dictatorship, religion is not necessarily a question of devotion, but Islam served as an ethnic border between them and the other ethnic groups in Bosnia-Herzegovina (Babuna, 2004: 305).

The Balkan conflicts also shaped the significance of religious belonging (Heuberger, 2001; Moe, 2007) and led to a de-secularization of ethno-religious identities (Poulton, 2000: 57; Ivekovic, 2002; Hunt, 2004). War and persecution helped strengthen an in-/out-group formation that consolidated the differentiation of the social groups into ‘us’ and ‘them’. Studies on intergroup conflict suggest that an out-group threat fosters in-group identification (Howard, 2000) and may cause the in-group to cohere more tightly around its own religiously defined identity. Latent religious affiliations and sentiments may arise as the focal point of group cohesion (even) within secularized societies in times of social stress (Seul, 1999). This is also exemplified in the data:

Extract 2: ‘Suddenly, we all became religious, even the communists, we were all communists before, we didn’t believe, we weren’t attached to religion. We became quite religious during the war (...). We started holding the Ramadan at home, even my parents, who never did before, and then we all did. (...)It was really a reaction. Because the Serbs attacked us, they killed us only for one reason, because we were Muslims. If you hear that, even if you don’t believe in God, you say, “me too, I am Muslim”. If I think about it now, I see it was a reaction to show “we are Muslims”.’(Interview with refugee, Luxemburg, 11.07.2010, P3, 3:30)

In this excerpt the participant suggests that there was an inclusive political identification by saying ‘we were all communists before’, i.e. before the war. He highlights that they all became religious during the war as a reaction to the latter and thus exemplifies the reactive nature of religion.

This insight into the Balkan context somewhat veils the multidimensionality of identity and patterns of belonging by focusing on religious identification and its social significance throughout time. The second part of this paper highlights the multidimensionality of identity constructions in the Balkans, and the shifting identity references in the context of migration. In the following section, interview data relating to social identities as described by inter-
viewees is presented to show how they go about constructing and negotiating their identities.

3. **Methodology**

The information on which this article is based comes from semi-directed interviews that were conducted with 26 Muslim immigrants and refugees from the Former Republic of Yugoslavia.

Conducted between July 2010 and August 2011, this research used a qualitative methodology. Two groups of participants were targeted. First, there were the immigrants that arrived during the 1970s after a labour agreement was signed between Luxemburg and the Former Socialist Republic of Yugoslavia. The second group of participants were refugees arriving after the break-up of former Yugoslavia during the 1990s.

The sample was drawn from the IGSS (Institut Général de la Sécurité Sociale) social security register, containing all residents in Luxemburg affiliated to social security. As this register does not contain any information on religion, the sample was established on the basis of nationality. Thus, the sample contained all people born in the Former Republic of Yugoslavia or having Ex-Yugoslavian citizenship resident in Luxembourg. A trilingual letter was sent randomly to people from this sample, describing my research project and asking them to contact me if they were willing to participate in an interview. The sample included only first generation immigrants and refugees. The material is derived from a diverse group in terms of residence status, age, gender and occupation.

The tape-recorded interviews were conducted in French, German, Luxemburgish or English, depending on the language preference of the interviewees. Interviews ranged from one and a half to four hours and took place in the homes of the interviewees. The questions were open-ended and covered four general areas: immigration history, trajectory and motives, experiences in host and home country, salience of religion and reconstruction of social relations.
The collected data material has been coded with a software program atlas.ti. The analysis focused on the ways the individuals articulated and negotiated social categories and attributed meaning to them. A special focus was on the significance of religious identification.

4. Multiple identities: the example of Muslim immigrants and refugees from the Balkans in Luxemburg

So far, four main aspects have emerged from the data, that will be discussed here as examples of the shifting nature of identity constructions and negotiations, namely: the ambiguousness of the ‘other’ in identification processes, intra-Muslim differentiation processes, the emphasis on the rural-urban and moral dimensions of differentiation as well as blurring mechanisms. Each of these aspects will be discussed in the following paragraphs and be illustrated by examples from the interview data.

4.1 The ambiguous ‘other’

The first category to be discussed is the ambiguous construction of the ‘other’ that the participants use in their identity constructions. The ‘other’ and the ‘self’ are not clearly defined constant categories, but situational shifting references.

Extract 3: ‘The Muslims from Bosnia, they have the same names as we, same origin, same religion, we have a lot in common, but we are still different (...) We have a different accent and (...) with the Bosniaks, also, (...) eh, they have more liberty in life, another way of life.... We were really conservative (...) which is really attached to (...) the Montenegrin culture (...). Montenegrins are really conservative (...)’ (Interview with refugee, Luxemburg, 11.07.2010, P3, 3:171)

Extract 3 suggests that there is no encompassing Muslim community for this participant. Even though he refers to Muslim inhabitants from Bosnia and Montenegro who share a common religion, Bosnian Muslims are still perceived to be different from Montenegrin Muslims. In this excerpt, the participant uses the notions of ‘mentality’ and ‘way of life’ to define this difference between Muslims from Montenegro and Bosnia. Religion is thus not

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16 The interviews were conducted in German, French or Luxemburgish and have been translated by the author. It needs to be kept in mind, that this is not the interviewees’ first language.
the determinant factor for the participant’s self-identification, but rather the Montenegrin culture, which is described here as ‘conservative’. The ambiguousness of this identification with ‘Montenegrinness’ becomes clear in another citation from the same participant:

Extract 4: ‘I would prefer saying I am Montenegrin of the Muslim religion, but the Montenegrins do not accept me as Montenegrin. You see, that is the difference. They think I am not Montenegrin. They think that we are Turks... but we were never Turks, we have never been in Turkey, not me, not anyone of my family.’ (Interview with refugee, Luxemburg, 11.07.2010, P3, 3:177)

This participant defines himself as a Montenegrin of Muslim religion. However, this self-identification seems problematic for him, since ‘they’, i.e. other Montenegrins, do not accept his self-identification as such because Montenegrin Muslims are considered as Turks. That this assigned identity has no meaning to this participant becomes clear in his statement ‘but we were never Turks’. This citation exemplifies that external recognition is a condition for self-definition. In this case, it is about being recognized as a Montenegrin by the others, in order to make the category ‘Montenegrin’ a subjectively salient and meaningful identity marker. This exemplifies the dialectic relationship between self-identification and ascription by others and shows that identification processes do not happen in isolation, but rather in interaction with others.

The next citation shows the same dialectic relationship between identification and differentiation processes and shows the ambiguousness of the ‘other’ in self-identification.

Extract 5: ‘Our religion, I think we were modern, European Muslims. (...). I.e. the clothes, the way of life, it was almost the same as with the Serbs, because we lived with the Serbs.’ (Interview with immigrant, Luxemburg, 03.02.2011, P10, 10:40)

In this citation, this participant emphasizes the European character of the Balkan Muslims by highlighting the similarities between Balkan Muslims and the Non-Muslim Serbs that are assimilated as being Europeans. Later on, this same person stresses that in fact it is not possible for a Muslim in Serbia to identify with Serbia:
Extract 6: ‘(...) We are Serbs, because we lived in Serbia, on our identity card is written Serb, but you will never find a Muslim from Sandjak saying “I am a Serb”.’ (Interview with immigrant, Luxemburg, 03.02.2011, P10, 10:29)

Although there is no real cultural differentiation between Muslims and Serbs, as the participant expressed in extract 5, (‘it was almost the same as with the Serbs’), the boundary between the two groups is maintained, and an identification with Serbia seemingly ‘impossible’ as becomes clear by the statement ‘you will never find a Muslim from Sandjak saying “I am a Serb”’. This participant P10 engages in highly complex and ambiguous identity constructions. On the one hand, the participant identifies with Serbs, in order to highlight the ‘modern’ and ‘European’ character of Muslims in ex-Yugoslavia, but on the other, there is a ‘rejection’ of just this identity. If in extract 4, the ambiguity of identity construction is due to a lack of recognition by the ‘other’, in extract 5 and 6 the ambiguity results from a personal rejection of a Serb identification. The reasons for the rejection of this identity have to be further explored, but seem to hold to the collective memory of the Sandjaki Muslims (and maybe other Muslims as well).

As the previous extracts have illustrated, identity markers are not constant and fixed entities, but are negotiated in relation to a particular other. They exemplify how identity markers are used to delimit the own imagined group from ‘the other’ and how self-identification is constructed by negotiation and positioning in relation to the ‘other’, who is situationally ‘re-imagined’ or ‘redefined’.

4.2 ‘I am a Muslim, but...’: examples of intra-Muslim differentiation

A second differentiation mechanism interviewees use in their identity-building discourses is the differentiation from ‘other’ Muslims. Several differentiation mechanisms were identified in the interviews.

Extract 7: ‘Eh, like I said, I am not so attached to religion, I am not ...so you see, I am not a real Muslim, like, you know with headscarf and all, (...).’ (Interview with female immigrant, Luxemburg, 28.10.2010, P1, 1:41)
In extract 7, the participant P1 distances herself from other Muslims who are more attached to religion, claiming therefore that she is not a ‘real’ Muslim. Interestingly in her discourse there is reference to visible elements such as the headscarf, which is often used as a symbol in Western societies for (fundamentalist) Muslims. In taking the position of ‘not a real Muslim’, this participant constructs an image of herself as not being a particularly religious person. Her self-construction may be related to her resistance of being associated with the prejudices attached to Islam.

Extract 8: ‘If we look at religion, I am of the Muslim religion: Islam. But for me religion is a personal matter. I don’t like to discuss religious subjects, especially with my people, who are the real believers, because, very often, when we talk about this, I have a different opinion about religion than they do.’ (Interview with immigrant, Luxemburg, 03.02.2011, P10, 10:46)

Participant P10 reveals that he believes religion is a personal matter, which he does not want to discuss with his people, meaning other Muslims from the Balkans. Also here, P10 distances himself from who he sees as ‘real believers’, with whom he claims not to share the same opinion about religion. His stress on the fact that religion is a personal matter could be related to a widely held image in Western societies that Islam interferes in all spheres of life, including all domains of social life. As such, extract 7 and 8 show the responsiveness of identity construction to the surrounding environment and to the widely held images that seem to be integrated in the construction of Muslimness.

Extract 9: ‘There is something new in Montenegro. Many people attach too much importance to religion.’(Interview with female refugee, Luxemburg, 04.02.2011, P8, 8:22)

Similarly, this participant claims that in her country of origin, Montenegro, religion takes up a broader dimension, an evolution she clearly rejects, as she suggests by stating that ‘there is too much importance’ attached to religion. Just like participant P10 from the previous example, this rejection contributes to her construction as a moderate Muslim.

Extract 10: ‘(...) I know I am a Muslim, because my father was Muslim, and my grandfather was Muslim. But I don’t practice at all, really, I do not practice at all.’ (Interview with female refugee, Luxemburg, 04.02.2011, P8, 8:21)
Participant P8 explains her Muslimness by ancestry (my father was a Muslim, therefore I am one too), but emphasizes that she does not practice at all. As such, she constructs a difference from other Muslims by emphasizing the lack of practice and of religious devotion. Religion is reduced to a familial heritage.

The findings indicate that religious identity is constructed mainly through a differentiation mechanism, through a distancing from what you are not, and not through a clear statement about what you are. In sum, the preceding extracts suggest that differentiation from other Muslims can be achieved through different means.

There is an insistence on the fact that oneself does not practice, and if so only moderately and that oneself does not attach too much importance to religion. Thus, there is a differentiation from what they perceive or define as ‘practicing’ Muslims and ‘real believers’, and thus a positioning in relation to those who are considered to be the ‘real’ Muslims, in relation to whom they self-position. Furthermore, there is an intra-Muslim differentiation with mentality and life-style, as well as a differentiation from ‘Arabic’ Islam, by stressing the Europeanness of Balkan Muslims. In addition, there is an insistence on the fact that religion is a personal matter.

Thus, there are multiple axes of differentiation from other Muslims showing different kinds of positioning in relation to situational ‘others’. The reference points in relation to which you position yourself change with regard to the way you want to define yourself/the image you want to portray of yourself. This reflects the situatedness of identity markers and shows how they are ‘locally’ constructed.

Through these multiple differentiations, there is an abstraction from and a deconstruction of the religious group. Individuals show that their religious affiliation is not determinant and stress other identification markers. Thus there is no ‘unique’ Muslim community to identify with.
4.3 Rural-urban differentiation

Apart from the strong internal Muslim differentiation, there are other mechanisms that allude to a deconstruction of religious and ethnic identities. As the following citation suggests, a salient differentiation marker in the home country of the participants is the rural-urban divide. It shows, that on the one hand ethnic differences are/can be, at least momentarily, lifted and, on the other hand, leave room for the difference between the city and the countryside dwellers.

Extract 11: ‘(...) There were a lot of very conservative and primitive things. But that was the difference between the village and the city. There was no difference between Serbs and Albanians. (...) a Serb family and an Albanian family living in the town, they were almost the same, almost. An Albanian and a Serbian family living in the village, they were almost the same.’ (Interview with female refugee, Luxembourg, 05.11.2011, P2, 2:61)

In this citation participant P2 shows that there is no simple dichotomous/binary opposition between the groups in the Balkans, but that there are multilayered differentiation patterns between ‘us’ and ‘them’. In this case, Serbs and Albanian city people are considered to be the ‘we’ group, in opposition to ‘them’, i.e. the people from the villages, who are associated with primitivism and conservatism. It is an example of the deconstruction of ethnic opposition and differences, overlaid by the opposition between villagers and people from the city that seems to transcend ethnic and religious differences. That this cleavage is not, or cannot be completely blurred, can be seen in the fact that the participant stresses three times in this citation, that they are ‘almost’ the same. Even if there are similarities, Albanians and Serbs are only ‘almost’ the same.

4.4 Strong emphasis on moral differentiation

The modes of differentiation just mentioned do not necessarily make sense in a new socio-cultural context. The interviews reveal another register for self-identification and differentiation more particularly related to the context of migration. Here, participants do not engage in differentiating between rural/regional markers, but use a strong moral discourse, by
pointing out to the ‘truly bad people’, from which they try to distance themselves, by showing how ‘they’ lead a stable and good life. A moral boundary is used as an important signifier to define how the participants see themselves in relation to other refugees and foreigners in the host society.

Extract 12: ‘Those were the people who didn’t know what to do with their lives, (…) who were completely lost, you know.’ (Interview with refugee, Luxemburg, 11.07.2010, P3, 3:11)

Extract 13: ‘Because they came here to do nothing, little thieves, people who just came to hang around. They really harmed us, who came here to settle down and live our lives.’ (Interview with refugee, Luxemburg, 11.07.2010, P3, 3:159)

Extract 14: ‘I had already constructed a stable way of life and all of a sudden I was with people with whom I couldn’t even talk (…) and I had to spend part of my life with them. It was very difficult, we couldn’t even understand each other.’ (Interview with refugee, Luxemburg, 11.07.2010, P3, 3:173)

In extract 12, P3 refers to other refugees with whom he lived in the reception center by pointing out that they were completely lost, not knowing what to do with their lives. He thus draws a boundary between him and the other refugees or more generally with the category refugees, to which he is assigned to by members of the host society. In extract 13, he stresses the harmful effect that ‘these people’, i.e. the ‘lost’ refugees had on his own reputation in the host society (that ‘these people harmed us, who came here to settle down and live our lives’). The participant self-identifies with those migrants wanting to settle down, in contrast with ‘the little thieves’ and assigns himself to a symbolic group characterized by a stable way of life. (Superior) moral conduct is thus used as a symbolic boundary between oneself and the rest of the group one is ascribed to. Personal identification is constructed through reference to a stable way of life, and by highlighting one’s own moral superiority. This is achieved by differentiation from a deviant way of life and by differentiation from other refugees/foreigners, associated with backwardness/deviance.

The stressing of moral qualities can be related to the negative perception ascribed to ‘refugees’ and migrants from ex-Yugoslavia, a perception the participant accepts (for others), but does not want to integrate in his self-definition.
4.5 Blurring Boundaries

The analysis of the interview data has revealed a fifth aspect with regards to self-identification patterns of Balkan migrants and refugees in Luxemburg, namely that of ‘blurring boundaries’. In the quotes below, the participants modify boundaries by emphasizing civilizational commonalities that transcend ethnic and religious distinctions (Wimmer, 2004, 2008).

In the example below, P3 emphasizes the similarities between him as a Muslim and me (the researcher) as a Non-Muslim. In this specific case, he refers to his interlocutor as a representative of the Non-Muslim community and of the host society and stresses our commonalities regardless of our different religious background. P3 blurs the boundary between the imagined Muslim community and the imagined host society community by highlighting the similarities between these two imagined groups. This utterance can be understood as a reaction to the image that the participant believes the host society to have of Muslims and tries to highlight that Muslims are just like ‘we’, their hosts, are. As such, this participant shows the permeability of social boundaries and refuses to accept the stereotypes usually associated with Islam.

Extract 15: ‘(...) I am Muslim, but I am also a man like you. That is really important to see.’ (Interview with refugee, Luxemburg, 11.07.2010, P3, 3:145)

Extract 16: ‘It is really important to say (...), people shouldn’t say that we are savages...’ (Interview with refugee, Luxemburg, 11.07.2010, P3, 3:160)

In the passages preceding extract 16, P3 refers to the atrocities that have been committed during the Balkan wars. He rejects the negative image of savages he believes is assigned to people from ex-Yugoslavia after the atrocities of the war. In another citation, the same participant stresses that after all, the worst atrocities were committed in Europe during the Second World War. In this case, the person does not try to distance himself from any of the groups, but emphasizes the similarities between ‘us’ and ‘them’. The participant’s discourse can be seen as an example of normative repositioning of the value/morality of the Balkan refugee/migrant community, by highlighting the similarities with the out-group (i.e. the Eu-
uropeans). In this case, the ‘we’ refers to a pan-ethnic group, including all ethnic groups of former Yugoslavia in relation to ‘them’, i.e. Europeans. This inclusive we-reference can be seen as a reaction to the fact that people from the former Yugoslavia are all perceived as ‘ex-Yugoslavs’ without any regard to the ethnic differences and their self-identification patterns and the example as a reaction to the perceived existing stereotypes.

5. **Conclusion: towards the deconstruction of religious and ethnic identities?**

This paper analyzed different processes in the identity construction of migrants and refugees from the Balkan region in Luxemburg. The interview extracts presented above show not only a distancing from ascribed group belongings, but also that religion and ethnicity are not necessarily determinant for who you are and what you do. They suggest that non-ethnic and non-religious identity markers are used for self-identification, like the rural-urban divide, differences in mentality, but also personal moral qualities and behavior. There is no simple dichotomy between different religious groups. Religion is not the only ground for distinctiveness, but participants use different intersecting references for differentiation and positioning themselves in relation to multiple others.

The extracts may help to overcome the view that religion and/or ethnicity are the sole or primary principles of categorization. They challenge the primordial views of ethnic and religious identities, by giving evidence that participants’ identity narration is not constructed along a single dimension, and embedded in a particular socio-relational and macro-social context. It is always constructed in a relational dichotomy between self and situationally redefined ‘otherness’. These aspects are important to consider when reflecting upon the conflict dynamics across the Balkans. The data confirms the constructed and potentially shifting nature of identities and as such calls into question the assumptions of the Balkan violence being related to ancient fixed identities. As Biondich suggests, the violence in the Balkans does not result from fixed collective identities, but is related to the intervention of national elites and processes of nation building. In the course of rising nationalism and the nationalization of states, boundaries between groups shifted and became more exclusive as a narrower conception of ethnos emerged (Biondich, 2011). An analytical perspective, which
takes into account a variety of contextual factors, may enable a better understanding of the shifting nature of identities/identification and of why some markers may come to transpire all other spheres.

This work has only considered Muslims from the Balkan countries and can thus not be transferred to other Muslim groups. We can expect very different identity patterns and constructions to emerge from research on Muslims from other countries of origin, as the use, the salience and the meaning of identity markers are context dependent.

A remaining methodological challenge is to develop a research design allowing broader generalizations, without overlooking the changing nature of identity markers and the multiple mechanisms at work in identity constructions. Indeed, research designs should leave room for the emergence of intersecting identifications and allowing for multiple identity construction to come forward, rather than assuming that people categorize along single dimensions. Therefore research should be designed in a way that participants do not have to choose between dichotomous identity references, but have the ability to express different degrees of attachment and belonging to different social categories.

It would be interesting to extend this type of research to Muslims immigrants and refugees from other countries. The results of this paper suggest that it is useful to make intra-group comparisons, as they allow for various differentiation and identifications mechanisms to emerge. Cross-group comparisons, while relevant in many regards, risk overlooking internal group differences and non-ethnic mechanisms at work.
6. Bibliography


