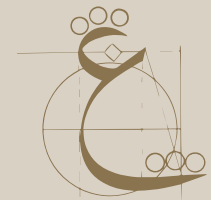
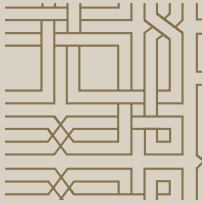




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Methodieva, Milena B.
*Between Empire and Nation:
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SEMİH GÖKATALAY*

ABSTRACT

Between Empire and Nation offers a systematic and critical history of Bulgarian Muslims following the Russo-Turkish War of 1877–1878. Based on a rich trove of archival material and other primary sources, this book focuses on the role of Muslim reformers in negotiating the identity and status of Muslim communities in Bulgaria. By avoiding a state-centered perspective, this study foregrounds the historical agency of Muslim reformers during the transition from the Ottoman Empire to the Bulgarian state.

Keywords: Bulgaria, Ottoman Empire, Muslims, Modernity, Minorities.

ÖZ

Between Empire and Nation, 1877-1878 Rus-Türk Savaşı sonrası dönemde Bulgaristan'daki Müslümanların sistematik ve eleştirel bir tarihini sunmaktadır. Zengin bir arşiv malzemesine ve diğer birincil kaynaklara dayanan bu kitap, Müslüman reformcuların Bulgaristan'daki Müslüman toplulukların kimlik ve statüsünü müzakere etmedeki rolüne odaklanmaktadır. Bu çalışma devlet merkezli bir bakış açısından uzak durarak, Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'ndan Bulgaristan devletine geçiş sırasında Müslüman reformcuların tarihsel etkinliğini ön plana çıkarmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Bulgaristan, Osmanlı İmparatorluğu, Müslümanlar, Modernite, Azınlıklar.



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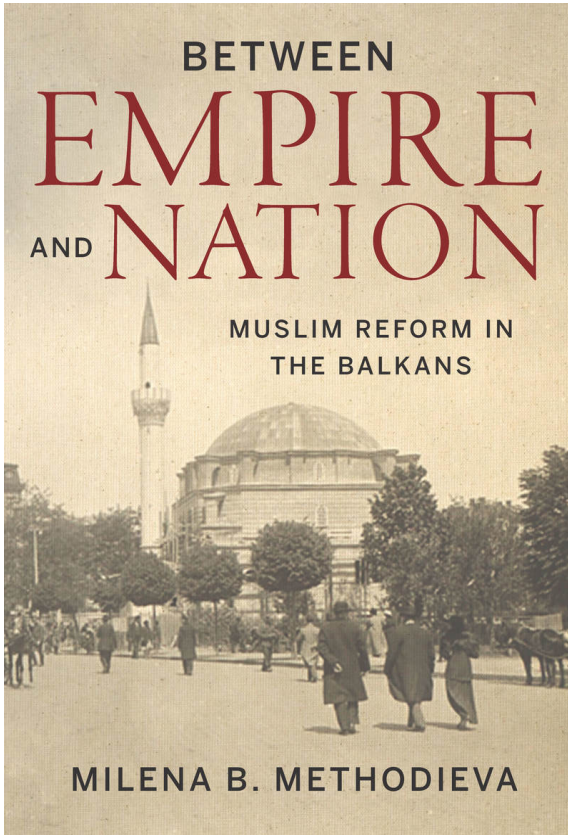
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Between Empire and Nation reconsiders the history of Muslims in Bulgaria after the country's partitioning from the Ottoman Empire in the late nineteenth century. With an impressive command of Bulgarian and Ottoman archival documents, local newspapers and magazines, and other published and unpublished accounts, the book explores the perception, definition, and negotiation of modernity by Muslim reformers.

Between Empire and Nation offers a two-folded contribution to the literature. Contrary to other accounts on Bulgarian Muslims, the book has not a state-centered approach. It instead emphasizes Muslim perspectives and agency of modernity. It further challenges widely-mainstream assumptions presenting Bulgaria's Muslims remained outside the global intellectual developments and debates of modernity because of the pre-

supposed migration of all Muslim literati from Bulgaria. The book successfully discusses the spiritual connections between Muslims in Bulgaria and the Ottoman Empire and the exchange of ideas between Muslim thinkers in Bulgaria and their coreligionists in the rest of the world.

Chapter 1, "The Ottoman Imperial Context," provides a brief overview of Ottoman rule, the rise of Islamic communities in modern-day Bulgaria over centuries, and the emergence of Bulgarian nationalism in the Tanzimat Era. Russian forces defeated the Ottomans in 1877–1878, and the result brought about the formation of Eastern Rumelia as an autonomous province and the Principality of Bulgaria as a *de facto* independent state. The growing number of Muslim refugees in the Ottoman lands and the status of Muslims staying in Bulgaria formed the basis of Bulgaria's Muslim question.

The following chapter, "Untangling from Empire," deals with the immediate aftermath of the war and the unification of Eastern Rumelia with Bulgaria in 1885. This transitory period witnessed the implementation of new laws for nation-building. From the perspective of Bulgarian authorities, Muslims acquired the reputation of sympathy with the Ottoman Empire and the suspicion of insurgency against the recently established state. Although the authorities had initially encouraged the massive migration of Muslims to Ottoman

domains, they later sought to halt it because of the adverse effects of the migrations on the economy and the tarnished image of the new state that claimed to be a liberal entity. Since the Bulgarian state saw Muslims as “backward, fatalist, conservative,” and “incapable of progress,” it employed civilizing rhetoric to turn them into “model Bulgarian Muslim subjects.” Most liberal premises, however, remained on paper, and a set of problems, such as the repatriation of Muslim refugees, the question of *vakıfs*, and military conscription, arose in these foundational years.

Chapter 3, “Doing away with Empire,” explores the transformation of economic institutions and offers insightful vignettes about the geographical distribution and social livelihoods of Muslims in post-Ottoman Bulgaria. Considering Ottoman practices as “impediments,” Bulgarians initiated a modernization wave all around the country. Muslim emigration to the empire and internal migration of Bulgarians to city centers led to a decline in the number of Muslim urban residents in absolute and relative terms. The countryside likewise underwent massive reconstruction to better suit the needs of the Bulgarian political elites. Consequently, many Muslims experienced the dispossession of the essential land that they had used for decades because of the state-led “agrarian revolution” (*agraren prevrat* in Bulgarian).

“A Quiet Upheaval,” the fourth chapter, unpacks the reactions of Muslim community leaders to these material hardships and cultural repression. The press became a highly influential platform for Muslim reformers to express their concerns and propose solutions to their problems. Men of a new generation, who had firsthand witnessed the formation of the Bulgarian state, spearheaded Muslim reformism and modernism. Journalists and teachers, along with those from many other professions, gave the reform movement much of its modernist character. The movement’s ultimate goal was to modernize Muslims in Bulgaria against a backdrop of social stigma at the community level and generalized accusations about their “backward” nature. Ali Fehmi, the founder of the journal *Muvazene*, exemplified such modernist activists. In connection with the Young Turks and other groups of the Islamic World, Muslim reformers appreciated the value of positive knowledge and modern science to modernize their fellows in Bulgaria.

Chapter 5, titled “Negotiating Modernity Mobilizing Knowledge, Education, and Culture,” is arguably the backbone of the book, details the variety of methods and tools that the reformers utilized for the economic and cultural progress of the Muslim population in Bulgaria. Textbooks, coffeehouses (*kıraathanes*), and theaters became the main avenues through which Muslim activists reconstructed and negotiated their modernist ideas and emerging identities. The sprouting of the Muslim reform movement in Bulgaria culminated in the Muslim Teachers’ Congress and the subsequent formation of the Muslim Teachers’ Association, which soon became a vital component of the campaign. Despite their male-dominated structure, reformists paid particular attention to the education of women along modernist lines.

Chapter 6, “Navigating Politics,” examines the limited involvement of Bulgaria’s Muslims in politics. The endorsement of Bulgarian as the official language in the political sphere severely decreased the political power of Muslims in the first years of the new country. Over time, however, political parties turned to Muslim voters to drum up their support and formed temporary strategic alliances with Muslim communities. Patronage networks guided the link

between Bulgarian politicians and Muslim groups as community leaders, primarily notables, worked as intermediaries between them. Despite their political exclusion, Muslims aspired to voice their demands and dissent through popular representation.

The last chapter, “Homeland, Nation, and Community,” redresses the self-identification of Bulgaria’s Muslims. Instead of viewing themselves as a “minority,” Muslims perceived their community as part of the broader nation (*millet*). Faced by the mistreatment and discriminatory policies of Bulgarian nationalists, such as economic exclusion and attacks on symbols like men’s fezzes and women’s veils, and influenced by rising nationalist sentiments in the Balkans and the Ottoman Empire, Muslims developed a novel understanding of identity. Although the emerging Turkism found an echo among certain segments of the literati, religious identification retained its stronghold over the majority of Muslims. As suggested by the polemic between Tatar and Turkish intellectuals over the definition of the nation, there was a growing ideological rift within the Muslim reformers. After the Constitutional Revolution of 1908 in the Ottoman Empire, activists hoped to receive support from the Unionists to improve the conditions of Muslims in Bulgaria. The subsequent political turmoil and territorial losses of the empire, however, weakened the Unionists’ influence abroad, much to the disappointment of Muslim modernists in Bulgaria.

Between Empire and Nation is a significant undertaking that needs to be lauded because it reformulates and deepens the scholarly understanding of Bulgarian Muslims after Ottoman rule came to an end. It masterfully brings an ideal combination of primary and secondary sources, provides faithful translations of numerous documents, and explicates the link between Muslim reforms in Bulgaria and the Young Turks. By giving thorough consideration to economic, ideological, geographical, and social differences, the book produces a coherent story of different Muslim communities of Bulgaria, i.e., Muslim Roma, Pomaks, Tatars, and Turks. Despite its focus on Bulgaria, this book ingeniously uses comparative and transnational frameworks and makes frequent references to developments in the Ottoman Empire and Islamic groups in the rest of the Balkans, Iran, the Russian Empire, and South Asia.

A reviewer can hardly find a major point to criticize in the *Between Empire and Nation*. One potential criticism can be the strong emphasis on the role of Bulgarian and Ottoman state authorities, particularly in the first half of the book, despite the promise to produce a non-state-centered history in the introduction. A more elaborate analysis of the activities of Muslim reformists, especially those of the Muslim Teachers’ Association, could have demonstrated how modernists put their ideas into action and further highlighted the Muslim agency of modernity in post-Ottoman Bulgaria. Although repeated several times, a benign error is the interchangeable use of the Committee of Progress and Union (CPU) and the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP), which may give non-experts the false impression that there were two different organizations with similar names.

These minor criticisms notwithstanding, *Between Empire and Nation* is a welcoming contribution to the historiography of Bulgarian Muslims. This well-researched, nuanced, and readable book will be of interest not only to the historians of the Ottoman Empire and its successor states but also to the students of global modernity and the scholars of Islamic and Minority Studies.