THE INTERPLAY OF ETHNIC AND RELIGIOUS IDENTITIES IN EUROPE: A Possible Mapping of a Complex Territory

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Abstract
The goal of this paper is to offer a theoretical template for understanding and making sense of the interplay between religion and ethnicity in the context of conflict, with special reference to the territory defined by the European Union and its aspirant candidates. In terms of methodology, the study falls mainly within the area of theoretical analysis, although some already existing quantitative data is being used.

Setting the scene
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The starting point is the recognition of the crucial role ethnicity and religion still play in contemporary Europe, and how this is often against all predictions and expectations. Religion, on the one hand, was "prophesied" by the *enlightened* thinkers and prophets of modernity like Marx, Nietzsche or Freud, to become an isolated phenomenon in the "new, modern world". Such a world was expected to be ruled by the "rational man", *der Ubermensch,* with no need for religion or religious inclinations other than perceived as signs of weakness. That at the dawn of the third millennium, such prophecy is seen as false, needs no added argumentation.[1] Religion, despite all the overt (as well as subtle) attacks against it, was -and still seems to remain- one of the strongest markers of human identity. The atheistic regimes of the former communist block fought an open battle against it but failed to create the "new man" that would need no religion. Regardless of how much effort (and often violence) was put into this battle, the opinion polls after the fall of communism in Europe show unbelievably

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[1] See the abundant literature on the "return of the repressed", as Giddens coined the return to religiosity in "late modernity" (Giddens 1997, 202).

high levels of religiosity. In Romania, for instance, a country were atheistic propaganda was arguably at its highest of all the communist bloc, 99.3% of the population claimed to have a religious faith (BOP 2005).[2] And with various degrees of intensity, religiosity seems to be high even in the most secularized countries of Europe, as is the case in France, where 80% claimed to belong to the Catholic Church and another 4 million people are Muslims (Gaudemet 1996, 119).

Ethnicity, on the other hand, particularly manifested in its ethnocentric nationalist forms, was also expected to decrease in intensity and amplitude, particularly fading away when faced with the attractiveness of the opened character of the European Union's *territory*. That this does not necessarily happen is argued elsewhere and falls beyond the scope of this work (See Juergensmeyer, 1993, Asad 1999).

The point to be made from the outset is therefore that both ethnicity and religion seem to be indispensable companions of the contemporary European setting. Nevertheless, as later argued, both seem to have an ambiguous character, with an apparently intrinsic power both to build and to destroy, to mend and to brake, to heal and to hurt. Hence, there is a series of legitimate questions related to their role in our late modernity that can be asked: what role do they play in the making of our identity? Is it desirable to nurture religion and a spirit of ethnic belonging within the complexities and the sophistication of contemporary life? Moreover, given the topic of the book, when and in what ways can the two become destructive, generating a conflictual ethos and thus becoming a threat to the constant efforts to build a united, coherent and stronger Europe?

To answer such questions, we shall first present an overall view of the interplay between the two terms involved, namely ethnicity and religion, within the context of identity and conflict. We will then attempt to identify certain patterns in which the two connect, with the purpose of drawing a theoretical map that would assist one to make sense of such a complex conceptual territory. Some predictions will be risked at the end.

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[2] We do not discuss here what does this mean in terms of a religious life-style, but it is enough to show that religion is still perceived as a crucial element of the fabric of the contemporary Romanian.

An overall view of possible approaches of the interplay between religious and ethnic identity

There are certainly a number of ways of approaching the interplay between religion and ethnicity in Europe.

A sociological approach

In an informed article dealing with the interplay between religion and ethnicity, Mitchell (2006, 1135-1152) presents a thorough overview of the literature. She acknowledges that most of it, highly influenced by secularisation theories, sees religion as merely feeding into ethnicity. Yet she wants to argue more, namely that "religion often constitutes the fabric of ethnic identity". In fact, she rightly claims that "in many contexts there is a two-way causal relationship between religion and ethnicity" (Mitchell, 1137). Religious identity thus can be seen as an ethnic marker. "It is when religion provides the labels of identity but no content or values" (Mitchell, 1138). It is "symbolic religiosity" (Gans 1979), "cultural religiosity" (Demerath 2000, 2001), and as such, religiosity has no substance. Religion, it is argued, is merely another ethnic label. Political/ethnic/national identity comes first, and only when any of these are weakened, confusing or ambiguous, religious resources offer a more solid framework.

Religion can also be seen as "support for ethnicity". In this case, the substantive dimension of religion plays a more important role. "Religion is not just a marker of identity, but rather its symbols, rituals and organisations are used to boost ethnic identity" (Mitchell, 1140). Mentioning Hamf's studies, Mitchell notes that "religion and rites are far more resistant to social change than many other markers of identity, religion has been successfully used by ethnic entrepreneurs and religious images are useful in validating any history of the people" (Mitchell, 1140). Along the same lines of argument, Mitchell finds Mol's perspective relevant. He rightly maintains that "religion protects identity by providing psychological reassurance and emotional security" (Mitchell, 1141). Such views put "substantive religious flesh on the bones of ethnic identity. They correctly acknowledge how religion often functions as a power resource, how religious symbols legitimize identity and how ethnic entrepreneurs seek to harness religious meanings" (1143). One shortcoming of this approach is, however, correctly pointed out by Mitchell, namely that "religion protects other identities that are already there. It is not an active agent in their construction or transformation." (1141) In other words, religion is still seen as having an instrumental role rather than one constituting ethnicity.

This prompts Mitchell to bring her own contribution to the debate, claiming that religion should also be seen as "the fabric of ethnicity".[3] Basing her argument on Ruane and Todd's contribution (2005), she rightly argues that "when religious ideas and values help compose identity and action, this is a different type of identity and action than one based simply on ideas of shared kinship and specific national or political ideals" (1143). From this perspective, religious content infuses identities and this in a variety of ways: religion evokes a sense of the sacred, provides specific ideological concepts (systems of values, one might add), delineates institutional boundaries (often very powerful institutions) as well as often being a very effective facilitator of community. Such a view places religion at the heart of ethnic identity, being its essence rather than just a means towards another end.

How does all of this connect with the idea of conflict? Mitchell rightly notes that there is an ongoing dynamic between religion and ethnicity as competitors for the central place in the formation of one's identity. "Religion may influence identity just as ethnicity influences religion," and this is most obvious in times of conflict. Sells, looking at the recent conflicts in the Balkans, shows how religion became substantively salient in the hands of nationalist actors. He speaks of "complicity" of religious figures, the "deployment" of symbols, the "project" to create religiously pure regions (Sells 2003). Social and political conflicts can rehabilitate religion and cause a revival of spirituality which in turn often provides the fuel for more conflict and rejection of diversity. This can happen consciously, as responses to deliberate instrumentalisation, and unconsciously, as part of the process of self-understanding. Subsequently, in both cases religiosity takes a life of its own. Hence, there is a dynamic two-way relationship between religious and ethnic identity. Each can activate changes in the other, and this is particularly relevant in times of tensions and conflict. (Mitchell, 1148)

However, Mitchells' approach is dominated by and restricted to the sociological paradigm. In other words, it lacks an in-depth inquiry into the religious dogma and traditions per se, which are important aspects of the dynamic between ethnicity and religion in the process of identity formation and its place in conflictual contexts. It also makes no axiological judgments,

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[3] This comes close to our own proposal of assessing the interplay between religion and ethnicity from a "substantialist" perspective. See one of the chapters below.

thus being unable to identify or assess the often positive role inherent in the religious dimensions of human identity.

A Theological/Philosophical Approach
Hence, another way to look at the interplay between religion and ethnicity in the area of identity and conflict is to identify the theological and religious teachings themselves, assessing their role in the formation/re-vitalisation of questions of ethnicity and identity, particularly within the context of conflict. Such an approach looks at the major religions that were/are historically important in Europe, in other words- Christianity in all its main forms, Judaism and Islam, trying to identify certain dominant characteristics leading to a certain perception of identity in general and to ethnicity in particular. This involves a study of the relevant religious dogma/teaching and the ways in which it was/is used towards building and maintaining a certain form of identity in general and ethnic/national identity in particular.

In this respect, perhaps the most important studies come from the rich tradition of Catholic social thought. Already in 1891 Pope Leo XIIIth's *Rerum Novarum* encyclical ("On the Condition of the Working Classes") addressed issues of loss of identity in the "modern" world, presenting an integrative answer from a Christian perspective. The trend continued and by the present day, social and cultural issues related to identity were addressed in more than two dozen major encyclicals. Pope John Paul II issued perhaps some of the most relevant ones (*Laboreum Exercens, Sollicitudo Rei Socialis, Centesimus Annus*), offering consistent and systematic critiques of the various social and political illnesses affecting the core of the modern self while at the same time providing coherent and relevant answers in developing such concepts as social solidarity, political subsidiarity, the culture of life (See, for example, Weigel 1999). While preserving a sense of ethnic belonging, the teaching of the Catholic Church also emphasises the universal dimension of humanity, thus being more difficult to manipulate from a conflictual ethnic perspective.[4]

On the lay side, one can also note today's catholic scholars such as George Weigel, Alasdair McIntyre or Charles Taylor who are concerned with presenting answers to contemporary identity dilemmas. In one way or another, they offer theological and philosophical grounding for questions

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[4] As it will become obvious later in this work, there were at times situations in the European history when the Catholic Church was strongly identified with certain ethnic groups, particularly at the time of the formation of modern European nations.

of the self, exploring the positive support religion can offer to such questions (See for instance: Taylor, 1992; MacIntyre 1984). Richard Niebuhr on the Protestant side, as well as and today's scholars such as Jean Bethke Elshtain and Paul Ricoeur are significant voices on the same debate on questions of identity, religion, ethnicity and conflict (See Elshtain 1995; Ricoeur & Blamey 1995, Niebuhr 1962, 1932).

Eastern Orthodox teaching rightly places a major emphasis on community and the communitarian dimension of the self (i.e., John Ziziolas, Dumitru Staniloae), but, as we shall see below, often comes short in the area of delineating between the ethnic and religious dimensions of identity (See for example Ziziolas 1997, Staniloae 1939, Turcescu 2005, Neamtu 2006). Hence, the question of the universality of human identity becomes problematic, ethnicity and religion often overlapping and thus deepening the cleavage between various religious and ethnic groups (See Rogobete 2004, Leustean 2008, Stan & Turcescu 2007).

From an Islamist perspective, the literature and the internet abounds on materials predominantly placing Muslim identity at the core of human identity, hence leaving no space for other forms of understanding the self. The vastly predominant view engulfs ethnicity into religion, annihilating any other discourse on the fabric of the self: being a Muslim is what confers "proper", "true" identity while everything else falls into subsidiary, having little or no relevance at all (Hortaçsu, Nuran, Cem-Ersoy, Nevra 2005). That this could be a problem in Europe in the future, particularly in the face of a predominantly libertarian, non-engaging perception of the self displayed by the "traditional" secular European citizen was argued, albeit rather alarmingly, elsewhere (Kurth 2005; for a more moderate tone, see Pasha 2003).

Dealing with a similar topic, Jensen discusses the relationship between national, ethnic and religious identities as embodied by so-called ethnic Danes who convert to Islam (Jensen 2008). Her point of departure is the constructed polarisation between Islam and the West mentioned above. "The article explores how converts experience their contradictory identities as "Danish" and "Muslim". Identity is dealt with as processes of both difference and similarity, whereby the constructions of "self as same" and "other as different" are questioned. In exploring the space between "self" and "other" among Danish converts, it is argued that they negotiate their identities as both Danish and Muslims by engaging in an ideological struggle over otherwise commonsense meanings. This process opens a

space for re-making identity by connecting relations between these identities, which are otherwise perceived as having nothing in common."(Jensen 2008) Jensen's study thus serves as an excellent example of the difficult issues and the dilemmas involved when a "substantialist" perspective on religion and ethnicity like Islam meets with one that is merely cultural, like the idea of being Danish.

A Historical Approach
Another approach to the interplay between religion and ethnicity in the field of identity and conflict is one led by analysis of important historical events. Such an approach seeks to identify certain ethnic groups where religion and ethnicity were/are important elements involved in generating and/or maintaining conflicts (recently and/or in the past), assessing the dynamics between the two. Perhaps most revealing are studies of the nation-formation processes of the 19th and beginning of the 20th centuries (Smith 2003, Ramet 1998, Leustean 2007, Flora, Szilagyi, Roudometof 2005, Roudometof 2001). More closer events could involve, for instance, studies of the Spanish Catholics during the nationalist-fascist regime of Franco, the Irish Catholics and Protestants, Serbian Orthodox and Croatian Catholics or Muslim communities in secular France, assessing the role of and the interplay between religion and ethnicity and the ways in which the two were/are instrumentalised in prompting or preserving conflict (de Velasco 2005, Moree 2005, Froese 2005). Most of these studies rightly criticise the overlapping of ethnicity and religion, contrasting it with a secular form of nationalism, often called "civil" nationalism (Tamir, 1993, Kymlicka, 1995, Miller, 1995).

However, one can not ignore the need for internal cohesion (both at individual and collective levels) and the crucial role played by ethnicity and religion as fundamental markers of identity in times of significant social and political disorientation. As Agadjanian, referring to similar questions in post-soviet territories rightly argued, "it is simply incorrect to consider the re-emerging ethno-religious identities only as evil spirits of past hatred, maliciously manipulated in power games and leading to animosities and conflicts"(Agadjanian, 2001). The reasons he gives for this are that: 1) such "spirits" are not necessarily evil, "for in many instances they provided a primary solidarity and self-confidence during rapid institutional crash; 2) "they are not necessarily past oriented, a sort of reactionary backlash"; 3) their manipulation, in most cases, is certainly very far from crude or totalitarian Machiavellianism, and 4) religious identities not only lead to conflicts but in many cases it played the opposite role,

preventing the transition of conflicts to the level of violence. (Agadjanian: 484) Hence, what is coined in the specialized literature as "civil nationalism" is often an over-romanticised version of history, which ignores the mistakes and the wrongdoings on the part of those in power. "Ethno-religious" vs. "civic" identity duality should not be pushed too far, certainly not beyond a carefully used ideal-type of analytical device.

Looking from a slightly different perspective, Mandaville provides an account of the transnational dimensions of Muslim identity – focused on questions of political community, ideology and religious authority – contextualising them within the broader field of contemporary Muslim transnationalism. He rightly argues that responses by the British state are important factors that have inflected the dynamics of conversations within that country's Muslim community around issues of political identity and social cohesion (Mandaville 2009). This prompts us to briefly mention the last approach to the question of religion and ethnicity that we intended to present in this study, namely one that focuses on the question of the role of the state.

A Political/Legal Approach
Another way of assessing questions of religion and ethnicity is to study the various ways in which European states, particularly where one religion is predominant, relate to the religious phenomena today, particularly from a legal perspective. This can be seen as an indirect reflection of the predominant, collective views related to national identity and religion within a given political setting. Unlike the United States, it is known that each national state in Europe has its own way of legalising religion and religious practice (Robbers, 1996, Leustean, Madeley, John, 2009). A comparative study could be informative about the ways in which ethnicity is being linked with the majority religions, as well as showing how minority religions and ethnic groups are being treated (See, for example, Anderson 2002, Rogobete 2004). Also, the role of state and international institutions in solving ethnic and religious conflicts in Europe can be assessed in order to find out more about the link between religion and ethnicity (See, for instance, the case of Northern Ireland, in Williams & Neal, 2001).

Some Intermediary Conclusions
Regardless of the ways in which the topic of this study is approached, a few aspects should be generally acknowledged. First, the complexity of the issues involved and the dynamic interplay between religion and ethnicity

in the area of identity must be recognized. There is no simple, one-way approach whereby one dimension determines the other. It is in fact a dynamic, continuous *pas-de-deux* by which, depending on a host of factors (internal and external), either one takes precedent over the other, or both go into silence, yet still remaining some of the strongest "voices" competing, with a myriad of other forces, to "occupy" the central territory of the self. Realities so close to the fundamental core of values of an individual -such as religion and ethnicity- cannot be ignored; neither can individuals be asked to leave them aside when it comes to public issues. Therefore, as we shall see later in this work, the inbuilt potential for good present in such profound realities of the self should be nourished, while their malignant side should be subtly discouraged and intelligently controlled. The thing one can not afford – and at this point the realities of our times proved the "prophets of modernity" so terribly wrong – is to ignore them or to consider that they are not important.

Secondly, the need for looking into history can not be avoided, particularly in terms of an assessment of the role played by religious and ethnic identities in the nation-building processes of the 19th and, for the newer comers, of the 20th and even 21st centuries.

Thirdly, there is a felt need to resist the post-enlightenment dualist temptation of radicalizing religion and ethnicity over against what is often seen as its "civilised" counterpart, coined "civil nationalism" or "civil statehood". For all its evils, religion and ethnicity proved to be crucial in the process of nation-building, thus serving a higher cause at that particular time in history. Moreover, religious (and a healthy dose of ethnic) consciousness may prove to be happy companions even today, when facing the sophisticated contemporary tendencies of disintegrations of the self (Foucault, Ricoeur, MacIntyre). Again, what is needed is a rather new framework of interpreting the complex grammatics of such fundamentals in ways that create space for diversity, alterity, and otherness.

Hence fourthly, a neutral and balanced view on the role of religion and ethnicity in the area of identity should be kept in mind as a basic working presupposition. Such a view would prove awareness of the "pluriform grammar" of the issues involved. It would acknowledge that of utmost importance is the process of "reading" and interpreting the multiple layers of meanings involved in traditions, religion and questions of ethnicity (On the "pluriform grammar of traditions" see Rogobete, 2006). For most often it is the interpretation of such powerful realities that can be (and often is)

manipulative and controlling, thus instrumentalising towards undesirable [moral] ends. Yet at the same time, it should acknowledged that the same realities can be –and are successfully being– used to heal societal fractures, to bring meaning, cohesion and fulfilment in places where no other can access.

Mapping a Complex Territory: A Possible Hermeneutical Key

Having seen the main ways in which the question of religion and ethnicity can be approached, we shall now suggest a possible theoretical framework that would integrate such approaches, helping us map and interpret the complex dynamics of the interplay between the two. In this respect, we would like to argue that up to a certain point, there is a common pattern at work, regardless of which religious group and/or ethnic group is at stake. Identifying the elements of such a pattern can serve as a hermeneutical key in interpreting the dynamic relationship between the two, offering also a key to integrate the various approaches presented above. Thus, one can identify within Christianity, Judaism, Islam, but also within the newer religious movements, three ways of understanding the connection between religion, ethnicity and identity: 1) a substantialist, essentialist connection, 2) a universalist paradigm, and 3) a relativist, pragmatic view. As we shall see, such types certainly vary in intensity and spread, being also interchangeable not only between the major religions, but even within the same denomination. They are also often contingent, dependent on the conditions of a group at a particular point in time, yet they can be strongly rooted in dogma, tradition and the teachings and practices of a certain group over centuries. Despite the limitations inherent in any generalizing theoretical exercise, the advantage of using such a theoretical framework is that one can have both a map and some tools for orientation when attempting to understand the complexities of the issues involved. Let us now take the three elements of our theoretical scheme and attempt to explain.

A Substantialist Approach

A substantialist view regards the question of identity in *strong*, ontological terms, placing a "substance", an "essence", even a certain "given" at the foundation of the phenomena of human identity.[5] Perhaps the best examples of a substantialist, essentialist view come from the Eastern Orthodox world, although this is also prevalent within the Muslim context

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[5] The term 'strong' used in Gianni Vattimo's sense, to which he opposes his notorious 'weak thought'. See for instance '"Weak Thought" and Its Discontents: Engaging the Philosophy of Gianni Vattimo' (Santiago Zabala, 2007).

as well as being present in many other major religious groups.[6] Most of the time for the Orthodox, the religious, as well as the ethnic dimensions, are seen as a given "substantial" reality underlying the phenomena related to human identity.[7] A contemporary Romanian Orthodox theologian, to use an example at hand, expressed this very well: "In Orthodoxy one does not enter, one is born." Thus being Romanian, *Romanianness,* is one and the same with being "Romanian Orthodox", as much as being a Greek is one and the same with being a "Greek Orthodox". In other words, if you are born Romanian you are born Orthodox. It is an interpretation whereby the Church with its "Holy Tradition" is seen as an "essence", a "substance" which constitutes the main ingredient required for ethnic/national identity, for being a Romanian, for "Romanianness"; and vice-versa. There is therefore a presumed ontological, *a priori* link between the two.[8] The distinguishing lines of demarcation are blurred. The connection is claimed to be coming form "times of old" (Rom. *Din vremuri stravechi,*) an imaginary "calendar" which seems to reflect an appeal to a "Golden" or unitary past rather than a clear temporary collection of objective historical events. The Holy Tradition of the Church and the Ancient/Ancestors" Law (Rom. *legea stramoseasca*) / the Law of *Romanianness* are thus *atemporal*, being almost one and the same, preserved within the continuity of language, territory and ultimately within the Church and its traditions, which has the role of being the main guardian (Cf. Staniloae, 1939). Thus, dealing with this topic, Gillet (partly) correctly concludes that:

> "the Orthodox Church defines an ecclesiological equation state-nation-confession (i.e., religious identity), thus being different from any other Christian churches. The assimilation at the level of ecclesiology of nationalism makes the Orthodox Church an original confession within Christianity. Orthodox nationalism implies a conception about church and state which can not be imagined in the absence of the ethnic element. The Church cannot separate nationality, which is, belonging to a particular ethnic nation, from belonging to orthodoxy. To be of Romanian nationality implies being an orthodox" (Gillet, 2001: 269).

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[6] Payne recently made this pertinent comment on the Spanish Catholic nationalism of Franco's time, affirming that the Spanish "crusade" became "the nearest Christian equivalent to Islamist neotraditionalist revivalism in the Middle East and elsewhere." (Payne, 2008).

[7] See a more detailed analysis of the theology and history behind such view in the chapter entitled "Orthodox Reflections on Tradition and National Identity: Nationalism as an Ecclesiological Foundation" in Rogobete, 2004: 275-299.

[8] And this is also valid for any other Orthodox contemporary church, particularly where it represents the majority church of the nation, the Greek Orthodox Church perhaps making the strongest case of the substantialist link between ethnicity and religion.

This, as we shall see below, is only partly correct, since one can find a similar *substantive* association of ethnicity and religion within other religions as well, albeit within rather limited historical and/or political circumstances (i.e., the Spanish Catholics in Franco's time, the Croat Catholics against the Orthodox Serbs during the time of the nation-formation of Croatia, etc). It is correct, nevertheless, in that such a view is the prevalent view in all nations where Orthodoxy is the majority religion, thus making it unique among other Christian religious denominations. In fact, the affiliation between ethnicity and orthodoxy is so strong that even when Orthodoxy is not the majority religion of a nation, it is still very difficult for another Orthodox chair/bishopric of a different ethnicity to be accepted. This is well reflected in the violent disputes around the legal acceptance of a chair of the Serbian Orthodox bishopric within the territory of the Republic of Macedonia, which has its own Macedonian Orthodox chair (even if the Macedonian Orthodox represent 30% of the population of Macedonia). It also shows, as it was so aptly argued in an article, how easy it is to manipulate such fundamental identitary elements like religion and ethnicity towards political conflictual ends (Moree 2005).

Hence, within the substantialist paradigm, one's national/ethnic and religious identities represent "a unified destiny", a "God-given gift" that needs to be cherished and brought to fulfilment. Being *Romanian* and Orthodox comes at once and comes first; being human seems to be only secondary. Although apparently not contingent, but rather being passed over the centuries, such a view is paradoxically a deterministic and rather exclusivist view on identity. The immediate consequence is that one can not escape the ontological overlapping of nationality and religious affiliation; if one does, he or she runs the risk of not qualifying to be a "good Romanian", a "genuine" one (for similar claims referring to Russia and the "meta-ethnical identification of Russianness", of "nation-ness" based on the Orthodox symbolic identity see Agadjanian, 2001:480).

This can be perhaps contrasted with another form of essentialism, or substantial definition of identity used by Gudrun Jensen in an article assessing Danish conversions to Islam. In this case, *Danishness*, the essence of being Danish, is connected to Protestantism which in fact stands for universal values such as liberalism, democracy, and equality, rather than describing just a certain type of national identity. The Danes who convert to Islam are forced to abandon such central concepts, the effect being "a loss of Danishness": "Danes who become Muslims by converting to Islam

were no longer Danish: they leave their Danish background behind because they abandon central concepts in Danish identity like liberalism, democracy, equality . . . Danishness, as an archetype, disappears the more numerous the Danes who convert to Islam become. With this formulation of substantial Danish culture, the effect of Danes who are converting to Islam is directly measured as a loss of Danishness, communicating both cultural essentialism and anxiety (Grillo 2003, Jensen 2008: 389-409)."

Certainly the brief presentation above can be accused of one-sidedness and as being over-simplifying, but such criticism was assumed from the very beginning of this work. We are fully aware that not all the faithful Orthodox believers, for instance, fall into this paradigm. In fact, the Orthodox Church itself condemned during a certain period in its history such teaching as heretical, yet it achieved very little success in carrying forward the implications of that doctrinal rejection.[9] What is an undeniable fact today is that the reality on the ground shows a strongly *substantialist* perception of ethnicity and religion, particularly at the level of the officially promulgated ethos as well as in the official teachings of the Church. Hence, the implications of such a substantialist view in relationship to conflict, political manipulation, lack of adaptability to multiculturalism and to the sophistication of the contemporary life in an ever closer Europe, are quite disturbing.[10]

A Universalist Paradigm

Another way of perceiving the connection between ethnicity and religion could be one coined a *universalist* connection. Within such paradigm humanity, common humanity – universal humanity – is the reality that comes first when talking about human identity. There is no *a priori* "substance" or "essence" linking one's ethnic identity with his or her

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[9] Such ideological construct which overlaps ethnicity and the Orthodox faith was labeled *filetism* and it was condemned as heresy by a Constantinopolitan Synod in 1870. Nevertheless, the establishment and the consolidation of the nation-states led to the notion of "autocephaly", i.e., the idea that the Orthodox Church has its own "head" within nationally defined territories; thus the national Orthodox Churches of Greece, Russia, Romania, Bulgaria, Serbia appeared as formal autonomous institutions built on an ethnic foundation.

[10] That this is the case is reflected for instance in the rather restrictive and controlling legislation regulating religious life and freedom in the countries where Orthodoxy is the main religion, with obvious favors shown towards the majority religious group. See the high number of cases lost by Greece at the European Court of Human Rights on religious matters, as well the various criticisms raised against the Romanian Law of Religion recently adopted by the Romanian Parliament (Legea nr. 486/2006) labeled by some critics as the most oppressive law of its kind in the EU (See Nastase, 2007).

religious affiliation. Humanity is seen as the only "given", everything else: religion, ethnicity, profession, social status, gender, etc., are contingent, assimilated or otherwise appropriated and therefore secondary. For the religious person, religion can be crucial but it is secondary, as it is with ethnicity. Religion is a *chosen* not a given reality; it is accepted and appropriated not *a priori* imposed. The only "substantial" reality is the reality of sharing in universal humanness. This is not necessarily humanism. It can be true to say that once accepted, one's religiosity could be seen as fundamental, embracing one's humanity, including one's ethnic identity. It can become the core of one's identity, but it will not automatically lead to an *a priori* definition of identity as religious or ethnic, particularly defined over another religion or ethnicity. For the religious person, religion can be at the core of the definition of the self. Nevertheless, there will never be a direct, ontological connection between religion and ethnicity. The order will always be the same: human first, Orthodox Romanian, French Catholic or Dutch Muslim second. Such a view is non-deterministic. It affirms the freedom of the human being as a fundamental value. Ethnicity is subsidiary to being human, it is contingent. Religion is personally appropriated, not inbuilt. Within this paradigm, it does not go without saying that if one is German one is automatically expected to be either Evangelical Lutheran or Catholic, anything else being perceived as an "anomaly".

Such a view on the primacy of the universality of our common humanity can in fact be found in the teaching/dogma of all major monotheistic religions of the European scene. This is perhaps expected to be best seen within Catholicism, a universalist, anti-*ethnicist* religion at its very essence. *Catholicity* means *universality*, and therefore the boundaries of the Catholic Church should go well beyond any national or ethnic boundaries. The reasons why this is not always true on the ground is due often to the instrumentalisation of religion and ethnicity towards political ends. Perhaps one of the best examples can be seen in the ways in which the Catholic Church can still serve as a strong tool box to preserve and to promote a certain ethnic/national identity over another. In this respect, as mentioned above, one example can be found in Franco's fascist rule of Spain. Yet another, more recent example of how a universalist religion such as Catholicism was/is manipulated towards political ends can be found in the ways in which Catholicism was used in the violent Irish conflict.

An approach to identity whereby religion is separated from ethnicity and both are seen as somehow secondary to being human can also be found in

our earlier example of Danes converting to Islam. We noted above that some converts embraced an *essentialist* view of Islam, finding it difficult to adapt their *Danishness* to their newly found identity, thus having to renounce their core values that made them Danes. As the author rightly observes,

> "others, however, insist on the continuity of their *Danishness*. They seek to be conscious about the political definitions of the concept of culture, of culture as an "invention", and go against the discriminatory discourse on difference that indicates an incompatibility between being "Danish" and being "Muslim". Above all, they seek to separate culture from religion, pointing to their identity as "Danish" as a national identity and to their identity as "Muslim" as a religious identity. By this, they seek to universalise Muslim religious identity in a strategy of inclusion with, not in opposition to, a Danish context. This position is most strongly expressed by those who are oriented toward ethical Islam" (Gudrun Jensen, 2008: 396).

In this case, the author emphasises at least two important aspects. One, the fact that a *universalist* perspective on humanity shows awareness of the contingent character of both the religious and the national identity. The only universal truth is that we are all human. Religion and nationality are both parts of one's "culture", which is often politically defined, even an "invention". The other she acknowledges is that the attempt to *universalise* a religion like Islam, which is fundamentally "essentialist" when it comes to ethnicity – in the sense described by us above – is only possible if one sees Islam as an "ethical" rather than "ontological" form of identity. A "cultural" rather than an "essentialist", *a priori* "given" which takes precedent over any other aspect of one's life. And this brings us to the third way of perceiving identity from a religious and ethnic perspective, namely a relativist view.

A *Relativist* View

The third suggested paradigm for assessing the link between ethnicity and religion at the level of human identity can be labelled as a relativist view. It is a view that emphasises the functional rather than the ontological. It centres on "how" rather than "what". Identity is defined and perceived in practical terms, religion and ethnicity being seen as mere cultural markers of the self. They are "extrinsic" rather than "intrinsic" (Allport). The discourse about identity tends to ignore attempts at identifying an ontological *sub-stratum*, or anything that would claim universality in an *a priori* way. Within this dominantly pragmatic view, neither religion nor ethnicity is to be found or placed at the foundation of one's identity, and

certainly no combination of the two. The self is perceived as a construct: social, political, religious, biological, and so on (Jenkins 1996, Goffman 1959). Religiosity and ethnicity are some of the many facets of one's identity and they have no privileged a priori status.

Freedom of choice and individual rationality, in this case, tend to be more emphasised. Such paradigm sees individual agency rather than collective identity as prevalent. In religious terms, one is individually rather than collectively responsible in front of the "Divine". If there is any connection between ethnicity and religion, the connection is merely contingent, functioning at the surface rather than the core of one's being. Ethnicity is a reality that has little or no direct bearing on one's decision to follow a certain religion and to worship a certain "God" in a certain way as the result of any other reality other than one's own free choice. For the religious, what counts is each individual's own experience of the divine with no direct, *a priori* relevance for one's ethnic identity. There is no "compulsory", *a priori* overlapping of ethnicity and religion. If there is one, it does not have ultimate significance; it is a mere social and/or cultural fact. Hence, the cleavage opened between different religious and ethnic groups is not doubled and conflicts are easier to avoid. Unlike someone who takes his or her religion as representing the essence, the substance of one's ethnic identity, one who sees religion as a personal choice that is entirely disconnected from one's ethnicity is more open towards accepting diversity and therefore less prone to engage in inter-ethnic/religious conflicts.

Dominant representatives of such a view seem to be individuals rooted in the Christian Reformation, with its high emphasis placed on the responsibility of the individual "alone" in front of a personal God. Having said this, one does not mean to deny that there were or are times, particularly during the process of nation formation in the West, when Protestantism was also used as a strong identity marker together with ethnicity, and the Reformed nations of Europe stand as clear examples of this. Even more, a recent example like Northern Ireland is a relevant case. However, all we intended to state here is that overall, Protestant-dominated countries are among the most liberal in terms of accepting religious diversity and freedoms of all sorts, with the least visible "ontological", substantial connection between the religious and ethnic dimensions of the self. Comparative studies of the legal systems dealing with the question of religious freedom already mentioned earlier in this work are aptly relevant in this sense.

Having presented the three possible paradigms of interpreting the dynamics between ethnicity and religion within the complex grammar of human identity, we are now prepared to make some remarks regarding the dynamics between the paradigms themselves.

Brief remarks on the interplay between the three approaches presented above
One conclusion that becomes obvious by now is that it is only rarely that one can sharply distinguish between a substantialist, a universalist or relativist approach to identity, either at a personal or a collective level. Both individuals and collective groups constantly move from one typology to another, due to a complex series of reasons.

For instance, ethnicity and religion tend to be perceived in substantialist terms particularly at times of oppression, in the process of nation-building or when a certain group is under threat (of disintegration, invasion, external competition, etc.) This often leads to an increase of the conflictual spirit. The overlapping of religious with ethnic identities increases the cleavage between various ethnic groups, thus increasing the danger of conflict. It is all too susceptible to being politically manipulated, promoted and preserved, being used towards other, often morally-disputable ends. Such juxtaposition however, present in a "healthy dose" -as we have seen above- can have its good side, offering a stronger sense of belonging, in the rapidly disintegrating environment of our late modernity.

With the advancement of modernity, a more universalist view begins to prevail. Although for some religious people it may seem to run the risk of relativism, it does affirm the fundamental priority of a common humanity. This creates space for the respecting of otherness, for difference: creating a wider space for a stronger allegiance to such issues as freedom and human rights, concepts so central for better cohabitation in today's Europe.

The relativist type seems to be the most appropriate one for multicultural cohabitation and respect for human rights. With its apparently unlimited potential for the affirmation of human freedom and its lack of allegiance to a "golden past" (either historical or ideological), a relativist approach to religion is non-engaging, at least not at a conflictual level. Conflicts can be easily avoided and manipulation on religious and ethnic grounds is very unlikely to happen. Nevertheless, for the very same reasons, it also runs the double risk of (on the one hand) not being prepared to face the challenges posed by the significant increase of "substantialist" religiosity in Europe,

particularly in its radical Islamic form. On the other, it runs the risk of adding to the crisis of the postmodern self, rather than offering support for healing. As someone so aptly described it- "psychoanalysis becomes law", which leads to an endless proliferation of claims for rights, which in turn can lead to "the end of human rights" (Douzinas).

Hence, the question of violence appears to be internalising rather than settling. It can lead to other forms of conflict, internalised and thus more insidious, since they can not be easily identified in the classical terms of open conflicts. These are internal conflicts manifesting in the various malaises confronting the individual in our late modernity, but such a topic, deserving a treatment on its own, takes us away from the main focus of our work (Gergen, Giddens.) This topic is only relevant here in that it strengthens our point made from the beginning of our work, namely that religiosity and ethnicity are not necessarily evil things in themselves. They are not "foes of modernity" either, as some of the earlier prophets of the modern era so wrongly predicted. They can become evil, and they did become evil in certain circumstances, when wrongly appropriated and in the hands of political manipulators. Nevertheless, they also have a strong inbuilt potential for healing, for bringing stability and a coherent system of reference, a "home for the modern mind" (Berger) and a strong solution for social cohesion and social justice. It all depends, as we have seen above, on the difficult process of reading and interpreting the complex grammar of the interplay between religion and ethnicity.

Conclusion

The present study was an attempt to map the territory formed by the interplay between religious and ethnic identities in Europe. It started with a presentation of the various possible avenues into the topic. As such, we acknowledged that the predominant one in the literature is still the sociological approach. However, in order to avoid the one-sidedness characteristic of the modern epistemological paradigm, we argued (albeit indirectly) for an openness towards other approaches as well. Hence, we noted and briefly described other possible ways into the topic of religion and ethnicity from the standpoint of such disciplines as history, theology and philosophy, or political and legal studies.

Moreover, we argued that despite the complexity of the topic at hand, a theoretical model for assessment can be useful for educational purposes, and here lies the main contribution of this work. The model proposes a hermeneutical key made of three levels or paradigms of inquiry: looking at

the question of identity from a substantialist, universalist or relativist perspective. The three paradigms are interchangeable, although certain religious groups favour one more over the others. They are highly contingent, with various religious and ethnic groups fitting at certain times into one or more of these stages. No one paradigm is better than the other, they all have their strengths and weaknesses.
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