

## Islamic Revival in Bosnia and Herzegovina 1992-2010

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### *Abstract*

Although there has been much discussion about the revival of Islam in Bosnia and Herzegovina during the last decade, only a handful of serious academic studies have been done on this topic. Apart from this, there have also been a number of rather misleading analyses and reports written by foreign journalists who have clearly missed out on the major driving force behind the greater visibility of Islam in some parts of Bosnia and Herzegovina and have disproportionately centered their attention most often on Saudi activities in the country. Although the impact of foreign factors is by no means to be neglected, in order to attain an all-encompassing picture of Islam in post-communist Bosnia and Herzegovina, *allof* the factors need to be accounted for.

*Key words:* Islam, Balkans, revival, Bosnia and Herzegovina, religion, post-communism

### Introduction

Islamic revival, Islamic resurgence, and Islamic awakening are terms used to denote a global phenomenon that gained momentum during the 1970s and 1980s throughout the Middle East and later throughout the entire Muslim world. Simplified, the term denotes the greater presence of Islam in both the private and public sphere. It manifested through a number of channels. These commonly included a greater observance of Islamic injunctions, greater mosque attendance, adherence to Islamic dress and etiquette, increased use of Islamic terminology and greetings, establishment of Islamic organizations and associations, greater

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interest in the study of Islamic sciences, greater publication of Islamic books, and sometimes calls for the state implementation of *Shari'a* in the public domain.<sup>2</sup>

There are speculations as to what exactly triggered this phenomenon but a number of concrete events that occurred in the late 1960s and early 1970s can be singled out. Among these was the humiliating Israeli defeat of Arab armies in the 1967 war, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979, the Iranian Islamic Revolution in the same year, and the first Palestinian intifada in 1980 can be singled out.<sup>3</sup>

As these revivalist trends were gaining momentum in central Muslim lands, they were also impacting Muslim minorities dwelling in parts of the Balkans, who more often than not were under brutal and repressive communist regimes. Islam in many places in the Balkans was reduced to a vague cultural affiliation that had almost lost its practical elements. The communist intention of transforming the Muslim identity from a religious to a national one could be deemed to be successful.

The collapse of the Berlin wall and its domino effect on communist regimes throughout Eastern Europe resulted in a series of intertwined transitions in the political, socio-religious and economic life. It also brought about much needed change to the neglected Muslims living in these former communist states. Of particular interest was the development of Islam in post-communist Bosnia and Herzegovina, whose fate stands out in comparison to other Muslim populations in the Balkans.<sup>4</sup>

## The destruction of Bosnian Muslims 1992-1995

With communism obviously collapsing by the turn of the last decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and with Balkan nationalism on the rise, Bosnian Serb politicians and decision makers embarked on plans that were to lead to the establishment of their own para-state on the territory of Bosnia and Herzegovina, which was to be called the 'Serb Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina'. The idea was to connect all towns and villages in Eastern and Northern Bosnia, which had significant Serb populations and to carve out their own, 'ethnically clean' Serb mini-state which would eventually secede and join neighboring Serbia and Montenegro in attaining the centuries old idea of an ethnically pure 'Greater Serbia'. Since these parts of the country often had either majority Muslim populations or significant numbers of such, the path towards attaining their political goals would have to include the

<sup>2</sup> I would like to thank the Center for Advanced Studies for supporting the writing of this paper and its director for meticulously reading this paper and for his useful comments and suggestions. All omissions are, of course, mine alone.

<sup>3</sup> John Esposito, 'Claiming the Centre: Political Islam in Transition', p.2. Available at [http://www.unaoc.org/repository/Esposito\\_Political\\_Islam.pdf](http://www.unaoc.org/repository/Esposito_Political_Islam.pdf) (last accessed 29 August 2010)

<sup>4</sup> For an overview see: Ahmet Alibašić, "Bosnia and Herzegovina" in Jocelyne Cesari (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of European Islam* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), p. 429-74.

ultimate destruction of these territories including Muslim inhabitants along with their Islamic cultural heritage.<sup>5</sup>

Although violence against Bosnia and Herzegovina's Muslims had already started in late 1991 and early 1992, the Bosnian declaration of independence in April 1992 served as an excuse for Bosnian Serb secessionists to start hostilities.<sup>6</sup> Being heavily aided diplomatically, militarily, and financially by neighboring Serbia, Bosnian Serbs and their army (Army of the Serb Republic) along with the Yugoslav People's Army (JNA), they embarked on what turned out to be a well-planned path of systematic destruction of the Muslim presence.

They targeted areas in Eastern and Northern Bosnia as these were of strategic importance to the future 'Serb Republic'. The recognizable trait of their path of destruction was the selection of Muslim 'military age' men – which often included all Muslim males – their torture, humiliation, immediate killing or transfer to one of the many Serb-run concentration camps where they would face further torture and eventual death.<sup>7</sup> The estimated death toll as a direct result of war is believed to stand close to 100,000.<sup>8</sup> This figure, however, takes into account only the war casualties in the strictest sense and excludes deaths as a result of starvation, lack of medicine, and cold. Further to this, Marko Attila Hoare (year?) notes that 83.33% of the civilian deaths were Bosniaks (Bosnian Muslims) and that these Bosnian Muslims were 'the only one of the three principal nationalities who suffered higher civilian than military casualties.'<sup>9</sup>

The killings of these Bosnian Muslims during 1992-1995 were established by the United Nations - International Criminal Tribunal for Former Yugoslavia (ICTY) to constitute genocide.<sup>10</sup>

Bosnian Muslim women, both young and old, were systematically raped by Serb soldiers with the aim of producing 'Serb children' – and were kept locked in concentration camps long enough until abortion would be impossible.<sup>11</sup> It is estimated that some 20,000 Bosnian Muslim women were raped during the 1992-1995 war.

<sup>5</sup> For more on 'ethnic cleansing' see Norman Cigar, 'Genocide in Bosnia: the policy of ethnic cleansing', Texas A&M University Press, 1995.

<sup>6</sup> For more on the beginnings of war, see Noel Malcolm, *Bosnia: A Short History*, New York University Press, 1994, pp. 234-252.

<sup>7</sup> James Gow, 'The Serbian Project and its Adversaries: a strategy of war crimes', Hurst & Co., 2003, pp. 129-131. See also Roy Gutman, *A Witness to Genocide* (Macmillan Publishing, 1993).

<sup>8</sup> Patrick Ball, Ewa Tabeau i Philip Verwimp, 'Bosanska Knjiga Mrtvih: Ocjena Baze Podataka' 14 Juni 2007, <http://www.idc.org.ba/images/stories/IDC/pdf/evaluacija-bos.pdf> (last accessed 29 August 2010).

<sup>9</sup> Marko Attila Hoare, 'What do the figures for the Bosnian war-dead tell us?' available at <http://greatersurbiton.wordpress.com> (last accessed 2 December 2010).

<sup>10</sup> ICTY Press Release, 'Radislav Krstić becomes the first person to be convicted of genocide at the ICTY and is sentenced to 46 years imprisonment' The Hague, 2 August 2001. Available at <http://www.icty.org> (last accessed 29 August 2010).

<sup>11</sup> Lynda E. Boose, 'Crossing the River Drina: Bosnian Rape Camps, Turkish Impalement, and Serb Cultural Memory', *Gender and Cultural Memory*, 28: 1, (Autumn, 2002), p. 74.

Aside from the destruction of human life, numerous mosques, *masjids* (mosques without minarets), *mektebs* (places for Islamic education for children), *tekkis* (dervish lodges), mausoleums (*turbe*) and *waqf* (endowment) buildings were systematically destroyed in territories occupied by Serb forces.<sup>12</sup> At the end of almost four years of conflict, only one mosque in these territories was still standing, though damaged.

Although the Islamic revival in former Yugoslavia started initially in the 1970s, the cumulative impact of the above-mentioned events that occurred over a four-year period violently shook the Bosnian Muslims and drastically influenced the course of the revival.<sup>13</sup>

## The Dynamics of Islamic revival

The dynamics of Islamic revival in Bosnia and Herzegovina can be divided into two periods. Namely, the period spanning from 1990–2000, which was marked by much euphoria following the collapse of communism and war, and the later period of 2000–2010 which was marked by the ascension to power of the Social-Democrat Alliance.

The war had a drastic impact on the re-awakening of Bosnian Muslim masses. Innocent Bosnian Muslim civilians found themselves the targets of a brutal Serb genocidal campaign and, for a while, Croat atrocities. Likewise, their territory became the target of irredentist and hostile neighbors, intent on achieving their expansion aspirations. Although this war was primarily a war over territory, the intentional killing of Bosnian Muslims, destruction of their mosques, and acts such as forced baptizing or carving out of crosses, made many Bosnian Muslims realize that they were often targeted for their religious affiliations.<sup>14</sup>

In the absence of adequate interest and response to the plight of Bosnian Muslims during the early stages of war, the elected government of Bosnia and Herzegovina as well as the Islamic community took their own initiative in establishing contacts with Muslim states in an attempt to secure desperately needed diplomatic, humanitarian, and financial aid.

The arrival of Islamic aid agencies during the war, both from Muslim states and from Western Europe, resulted in the establishment of a lifeline for the beleaguered Bosnian Muslims. However, through this process, Islamic aid agen-

<sup>12</sup> Muharem Omerdić, *Prilozi u izučavanju genocidima nad Bošnjacima, 1992-1995* (Sarajevo, El-Kalem, 1999.)

<sup>13</sup> For more on the Islamic revival in the 1970s, see Fikret Karčić, 'Islamic Revival in the Balkans 1970–1992', *Islamic Studies*, 36:2–3 (1997).

<sup>14</sup> For an excellent study on the role of religion in the Bosnian war, see Michael A. Sells, *The Bridge Betrayed: Religion and Genocide in Bosnia* (University of California Press, 1996).

cies also engaged in the publication and distribution of Islamic literature during the war, which opened a channel for the transfer of Islamic ideas from central Muslim lands to Bosnia. Along with Islamic aid agencies, Islamic missionaries and *mujahedeen* fighters were another channel for the transfer of such ideas. The foreign impact on Bosnian Muslims is evident as, former members of the *El-Mujahed* unit in Bosnia frankly admitted to having been influenced by 'Arab brothers' and their Islamic teachings.<sup>15</sup>

New legislations adopted in the country during the post-war period secured greater religious freedoms and thus paved the way for greater manifestation and practice of religion. These are the Annex 4 of the Dayton Peace Agreement (1995), the European Convention on Human Rights (1995) and the Law on the Freedom of Religion and the Legal Position of Churches and Religious Communities in Bosnia and Herzegovina (2004).

Lastly, the war created a Bosnian diaspora in Western Europe, which resulted in Bosnian Muslims coming into contact with other Muslims residing in these countries and becoming acquainted with new Islamic teachings. These teachings were eventually transferred back to Bosnia and Herzegovina during their visits or by other means of communication.

## Agents of Revival

Perhaps four major agents of Islamic revival can be identified in the case of Bosnia and Herzegovina. The first being the *imams* (Muslim clerics) of the in Bosnia and Herzegovina who are perhaps most responsible for spreading the message of Islam to the masses. This in turn resulted in a greater number of people, especially the young, starting to practice the tenets of Islam in post-communist Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The second were students of Islamic studies. Among these, both students of local Islamic institutions of higher education as well as Bosnian students studying abroad can be included. Bosnian students studying abroad played a major role in transmitting back Islamic ideas and literature from Muslim countries and translating them into the Bosnian language.

The third were the Islamic community's organizations and institutions. Among these we can include the Islamic community's educational facilities, both for lower and higher Islamic education, its media and publications.

The fourth were the influences of foreign factors including Islamic humanitarian agencies that functioned during and immediately after the war, Islamic preachers, foreign fighters, and various activists present in the post war period.

<sup>15</sup> Dženana Karup, 'Kuranjenaš ustav', *Dani*, No. 72, 30 March 1998.

## Manifestations of Islamic revival

### *Education*

With the advent of democracy and freedom of religion, positive changes came about. One of the earliest moves towards opening religion to a wider audience came early in the academic year of 1991/92 when Religious Education was introduced in a number of public schools in Sarajevo. This was followed with the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina introducing Religious Education in primary and secondary schools as an elective course, subject to prior parental consent. It is worthwhile noting that Religious Education envisaged the teaching of five separate curricula: Islamic, Catholic, Orthodox, Jewish and Adventist.<sup>16</sup>

Another way of teaching Islam to children was through *Mektebs*, which represented the traditional method of teaching Islam to Bosnian children. *Mektebs* are voluntary weekend classes usually held in mosques by the local *imam* or *mu'allima* (female religious teacher). *Mektebs* are still popular but it is believed that their attendance has dropped following the introduction of religious education in state schools.<sup>17</sup>

The collapse of communism also led to the re-establishment of several traditional Islamic *madrasas* (these being based on the system of modern boarding schools) Some Madrasas were closed down and demolished during communism as well as the opening of new ones. For comparison sake, before the 1946 communist takeover there were more than 40 *madrasas* in Bosnia and Herzegovina. All of them, except for one – the Gazi Husrev Beg *madrasa* – were shut down. A total of five of them were established or re-established during the dire conditions of war. These include the 'Osman ef. Redžović' Madrasa in Čajangrad near Visoko, established in 1992; the 'Behram-bey' Madrasa in Tuzla, established in 1626 and re-established in 1993; the 'Elči Ibrahim Paša' Madrasa in Travnik, established in 1706 and re-established in 1993; the 'Džemaludin ef. Čaušević' Madrasa in Cazin, established in 1993; and the 'Karadžoz Bey' Madrasa in Mostar, established in 1557 and re-established in 1995.<sup>18</sup> Although previously, the aim of Bosnian *madrasas* was to educate *imams* only, today their aim is to teach young Bosnian Muslims both secular and traditional Islamic courses and hence prepare them not only for *imam* posts but for also for further university study.

<sup>16</sup> Ahmet Alibašić and Asim Zubčević, 'Islamic Education in Bosnia and Herzegovina', in Ednan Aslan (ed.), *Islamische Erziehung in Europa / Islamic Education in Europe*, Vienna: Bohrlau, 2009, pp. 43-57. See also Ahmet Alibašić, 'Vjersko obrazovanje u javnim školama u BiH: Ka modelu koji podržava suživot i uzajamno razumijevanje' (Fond otvoreno društvo, 2008). Complete study available at [www.soros.org.ba](http://www.soros.org.ba)

<sup>17</sup> Alibašić and Zubčević.

<sup>18</sup> Ahmet Alibašić, 'Islamic Higher Education in the Balkans: A survey', Jorgen Nielsen, ed., *Yearbook of Muslims in Europe*, vol. II, Leiden, Brill 2010, pp. 619-34

The post-war period also witnessed the establishment of non-religious colleges and schools often run by foreign parties in Bosnia and Herzegovina, most notably by Iran and Turkey. Since the end of the war, Iranians established the Persian-Bosniak College located near Sarajevo.<sup>19</sup> The College is registered as a secondary school and follows the curriculum of the Sarajevo Canton. In addition to this, it has an accent on teaching *Shi'a* Islam for religious education courses<sup>20</sup>. It also maintains close ties with other Iranian institutions in Bosnia and Herzegovina and pays particular attention to commemorating Iranian events such as the Day of the Islamic Revolution and the Ashura.

A number of Turkish colleges and schools have also been established in Bosnia and Herzegovina by the 'Bosna Sema' educational institution, which is believed to be close to the movement of Fethullah Gulen.<sup>21</sup> The Turkish-Bosnian Colleges in Sarajevo and in Bihać and four international schools throughout the country also follow the official curriculum of the Sarajevo and Bihać Canton respectively but also have an accent on teaching Islamic values and ethics.<sup>22</sup>

Additionally, in order to cater for the greater need of Islamic education teachers, two Islamic Pedagogical Faculties were established during and immediately after the war. The first being the Islamic Pedagogical Faculty in Zenica,<sup>23</sup> established in 1993, and the second being the Islamic Pedagogical Faculty in Bihać, established in 1996.<sup>24</sup>

It should be noted that the establishment and re-establishment of these Islamic educational institutions came solely from the efforts of the Bosnian Islamic community as well as the curriculum and provision of teaching staff. It should also be noted that some of these institutions, such as the Karadoz-Beg Medresa in Mostar and the Islamic Pedagogical Faculty in Bihać were refurbished in later years using Saudi funds.<sup>25</sup> However, the operational costs of these institutions are covered by the Islamic community, which in turn is financed locally by its Bosnian Muslim members.

There has also been an increased interest among Bosnian Muslim students in the Faculty of Islamic Studies in Sarajevo, which was established in 1977 and remains the oldest Islamic higher educational institution in the Balkans. Since

<sup>19</sup> See [www.pkb.edu.ba](http://www.pkb.edu.ba) (last accessed 20 August 2012).

<sup>20</sup> S.I., 'Da li je ovo Ši'izam?', *Preporod*, No. 17/931, 1 Septembar 2010, p.3.

<sup>21</sup> See <http://www.bosnasema.com/> (last accessed 24 November 2014).

<sup>22</sup> Anne Ross Solberg, 'The Gulen Schools: A perfect compromise or compromising perfectly?', available at <http://kotor-network.info/papers/2005/Gulen.Solberg.pdf> (last accessed 29 August 2010).

<sup>23</sup> For more information, see [www.ipf.unze.ba](http://www.ipf.unze.ba) (last accessed 7 December 2013).

<sup>24</sup> See: [www.ipf.unbi.ba](http://www.ipf.unbi.ba) (last accessed 5 December 2013).

<sup>25</sup> A. Kadribegović, 'Dogadaj za sve pripadnike Islama', *Preporod*, No. 18/620, 15 Septembar 1997, p. 5; H. Nesimović, 'Nova zgrada za širenje islamske nauke i kulture', *Preporod*, No. 19/692, 1 Oktobar 2000. For standard reporting on Saudi influence, see: Dan Belifsky, 'Islamic Revival Tests Bosnia's Secular Cast', *The New York Times*, 26 December 2008; See also Vivienne Walt, 'Bosnia's Islamic Revival', *Time magazine*, 15 June 2009.

1994, in addition to undergraduate study, the Faculty has introduced postgraduate courses as well. It was renovated magnificently with generous support from a Qatari foundation in 1997 and today it has approximately 300 full time and 500 part-time students and runs a three-month non-degree diploma course in Islamic Studies, which is particularly popular among the 'international community' in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Since the 1990s various scholarships have been given out to Bosnian Muslim students to pursue their further studies abroad. Although it is difficult to establish the exact number of students studying Islamic studies in Muslim countries, according to a report in 2002, there were 107 students in Saudi Arabia, 60 students in Syria, 38 in Egypt, 34 in Jordan, 28 in Iran, 11 in Turkey, 8 in Pakistan, 2 in Libya, 1 in Kuwait, and 1 in Lebanon.<sup>26</sup> These students of Islamic studies in Muslim countries are an influential channel for the transmission of Islamic ideas and practices from the countries of their study to Bosnia and Herzegovina.

### *Reconstruction of mosques*

Mosques symbolize the presence and practice of Islam in a given territory. On the other hand, the destruction of mosques comes to symbolize the destruction of the Muslim inhabitants in the given territory. During the 1992-1995 war in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the killings and forced expulsion of Bosnian Muslims were always followed by the destruction of mosques, *masjids*, *waqfs*, and any other Islamic symbols. It is worth mentioning that during the war, mosques were destroyed by the Serb and Croat forces, even in areas that were unaffected by war. Architectural masterpieces such as the Aladža and Ferhadija mosques were not spared either.

The Islamic community has meticulously registered the destruction of Islamic objects by Serb and Croat troops during the 1992-1995 war. Out of the total of 1144 mosques that existed before the war, 614 were destroyed and 307 were damaged. Out of the total of 557 *masjids*, 218 were destroyed and 41 damaged. Out of the total of 1425 *waqf* objects, 405 were destroyed and 149 damaged. Additionally, dozens of *mektebs*, *turbes*, and *tekkes* were also damaged and destroyed during the war.<sup>27</sup>

Just as the destruction of mosques symbolizes the destruction of Muslim presence in a given territory, the reconstruction of these mosques symbolizes the return of the territory's Muslim inhabitants and the revival of Islam in that area. The reconstruction of damaged and destroyed mosques in Bosnia and Herzegovina started immediately after the war and was, due to the lack of funding internally, significantly aided by foreign Muslim donors. New mosques were also constructed by Muslim states throughout Bosnia and Herzegovina. Today, in Sarajevo alone

<sup>26</sup> Stepan Machacek, "European Islam' and Islamic Education in Bosnia-Herzegovina", *Sudost Europa*, 55: 4 (2007), p. 419, footnote No. 61.

<sup>27</sup> Muharem Omerdić, *Prilozi izučavanju genocida nad Bošnjacima 1992-1995*, (Sarajevo, El-Kalem, 1999), p. 476.

there is a Malaysian, Indonesian, Kuwaiti, Qatari, Saudi, and a Jordanian mosque. This is a new development in the post-Ottoman period that was characterized by mosques built by local Muslims.

By 2006 there were 1,897 mosques and *masjids* with 431 under construction.<sup>28</sup> Some of these mosques were reconstructed at the exact spots where the Serb and Croat forces had demolished them during the war. There were also additional new mosques that have been constructed in major cities within the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina. This is because large numbers of Bosnian Muslims who had been expelled during the war settled in larger Muslim-majority towns and cities within the Federation such as Sarajevo, Tuzla, Bihać, Bugojno, and Mostar. Also due to the restrictions imposed by the Communist regime on the construction of mosques during the Yugoslav era, these cities did not cater for the needs of Muslims spaces of worship with limited numbers of mosques, hence came a need for the construction of new places of Muslim worship post war.

The construction of new mosques in these cities also reflects the post-war reality regarding the population shifts. It is perhaps also indicative to state that although according to the Islamic Community's Center for Islamic Architecture, by 2010 an estimated 95% of all the mosques destroyed during the 1992-1995 war have been reconstructed.<sup>29</sup> This figure is somewhat misleading as it refers to the physical reconstruction of mosques, while their *jamaats* (congregations), the very elements for which mosques are constructed in the first place, have not been as lucky. According to an Islamic community official, several hundred *jamaats* have been permanently destroyed in the Serb Republic during the war.<sup>30</sup> Thus, even if mosques have been reconstructed in the Serb Republic, they remain largely empty and locked.

## *Publications*

The publishing of Islamic books, newspapers, and magazines throughout Bosnia and Herzegovina has also flourished since the collapse of communism. In most cases, the translation of foreign literature dominates the list of Islamic literature. These publications can be broadly divided into the publications of the Islamic community's publishing house, and to a lesser extent the publications of private and humanitarian agencies. It should be noted that free books in post-war Bosnia and Herzegovina have been and continue to be distributed by all parties, from human rights activists to Jehovah's witnesses, radical Christian Evangelicals, to Iranian *Shiites*. In addition to that, the publication of these books is mostly supply driven and not demand driven. Hence, such books funded by foreign interest parties can be

<sup>28</sup> Ahmet Alibašić and Asim Zubčević, 'Islamic Education in Bosnia and Herzegovina', pp. 43-57.

<sup>29</sup> Personal email communication with Fatima Šišić, Director of the Center for Islamic Architecture, 19 August 2010.

<sup>30</sup> Omerdić, pp. 461-463.

considered as subsidized literature.

The war-period was marked by large-scale publication of Islamic booklets by foreign Islamic organizations. There were several Islamic organizations and aid agencies that were active in both providing humanitarian aid to the beleaguered Bosnian Muslims and also in publishing and handing out large amounts of free Islamic booklets. These include the Saudi High Committee, Al-Haramain Foundation, Taibah International, and TWRA. Perhaps the largest number of such books was published by the Saudi High Committee, often written by *Salafi* authors such as Muhammed Ben Jamil Zino and Sheikh Rahmetullah bin Halil El-Hindi or by Saudi educated Bosnian Muslims such as Muharem Štulanović. They covered the very basic topics in Islam such as belief, fasting, and prayer and were published in large numbers and given out for free.<sup>31</sup>

The publication of Islamic books by foreign organizations continued after the war, reaching its peak by 1999 and then entering eventual decline. During the same time, *El-Kalem*, the official publishing house of the Islamic community as well as other commercial and private publishing houses gained momentum.

Within the last decade alone, *El-Kalem's* publishing activities has been flourishing. Among its publications are books on *Hadith*, *Fiqh*, *Ahlaq* (Prophetic Tradition, Islamic jurisprudence and ethics), Arabic language, collections of *fatawa* and Islamic booklets for children, most of which are written by Bosnian Muslim authors or by mainstream Sunni scholars such as Sheikh Yusuf Qaradawi. It publishes books that are theoretically supposed to be in conformity with the dominant interpretations of Islam in the. Perhaps because the Islamic community nurtures the concept of Islamic pluralism, it has on a number of occasions published books by authors promoting *Salafi*, *Shi'a* and *Sufi* ideals and teachings.<sup>32</sup>

The Islamic community's official newspaper, *Preporod*, prints an average of 20,000 copies and remains by far one of the most widely circulated Islamic newspapers in the country. It covers topics ranging from the opening of new mosques throughout Bosnia and Herzegovina, to cooking recipes, and US foreign policy towards Muslim states. Since 2000 the Islamic community also publishes the *Novi Muallim* ('New Teacher') that is more academic and focused on Islamic education and builds

<sup>31</sup> For example, the book 'Upoznaj svoje vjerovanje kroz Kur'an i Sunnete' written by Muhammed Ben Jamil Zino was published by the Saudi High Committee in Zagreb (1994) and printed and distributed in 100,000 copies. Another example is the book *Ramazanski Post* written by Saudi educated Muharem Štulanović and published by the Saudi High Committee in Zagreb (1995) and printed and distributed in 80,000 free copies. Since the end of the war and in the immediate post war years, such publications have stopped.

<sup>32</sup> See books such as 'Vijest velika' written by Dr. Muhammed 'Abdullah Draz, published by El-Kalem in cooperation with the Saudi High Committee in Sarajevo, 2000. Also see books written by traditionally educated Shi'a scholars such as Sejjid Muhammed Husejin Tabatabai's "Kuran u Islamu", published by El-Kalem in cooperation with the Iranian Mulla Sadra Foundation in Sarajevo. Also see *Dijalog Civilizacija* which deals with Fethullah Gulens Islamic ideals, authored by B. Jill Carroll, El-Kalem, 2010.

upon its predecessor *Muallim* ('Teacher') that was first published in 1910.<sup>33</sup> It covers new methods and techniques of teaching Islam and religion in schools and has a circulation of approximately 2, 000 copies.

Two other publications of the Islamic community that deserve to be mentioned are *Takvim* and *Glasnik*. *Takvim* is an almanac dating back to 1934 that, apart from featuring prayer times and dates of Islamic holidays, also features articles dealing with Islamic issues and has a circulation of 50, 000 copies. *Glasnik* is also a well-established publication dating back to 1933 with a circulation of 2200 copies and deals with topics such as *Tafsir*, *Hadith*, *Fiqh*, *ahlaq*, as well as history, literature, and publishes reports from the Islamic community's organizations and institutions.

Private local publishing houses have also flourished in the last decade and have been active proponents of Islamic literature. The most notable are Libris, Connectum, and Ilum, which have published dozens of titles in the last decade and sold them for commercial gain. It is interesting to note that publishing houses such as Bemust have published quite a number of works by the famed Turkish scholar Said Nursi.<sup>34</sup> This is perhaps another example of subsidized literature.

During the post-war period, a youth magazine with visible *Salafi* inclinations called *Saff* ('Prayer row'), believed to be the mouthpiece of the Saudi funded Active Islamic Youth, as well as *Novi Horizonti* ('New Horizons') were also regular Islamic publications. At its peak, *Saff* was published as a full color fortnightly with a circulation of 5, 000 copies and covered topics ranging from personal hygiene, to prayer, fasting, to the US invasion of Iraq and Afghanistan. The Active Islamic Youth was shut down in 2005 and as of 2010 due to a lack of funds; *SAFF* stopped publishing its printed version except for subscription only whilst making its online version free.<sup>35</sup>

The *Novi Horizonti* is a magazine with *Salafi*-reformist inclinations whose contributors were mostly professors from the Islamic Pedagogical Faculty in Zenica and Bihać, many of them educated in Arab countries. It is still active, however, over the last number of years it has drawn itself closer to the mainstream Islam of the Islamic community in Bosnia and Herzegovina. According to some sources, the future sustainability of this magazine is rather questionable.

A women and family magazine which deserves to be mentioned is *Zehra* which was initiated in 2001.<sup>36</sup> It is a project of *Kewser*, a women's association with *Shi'a* inclinations, and takes its name from Fatime-ez-Zehre, the daughter of Prophet Muhammad and the wife of the fourth Caliph, Imam Ali. The magazine deals with a wide array of issues ranging from cuisine, psychological develop-

<sup>33</sup> See [http://www.rijaseta.ba/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=2732](http://www.rijaseta.ba/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=2732) (last accessed 24 August 2010).

<sup>34</sup> See Bediuzzaman Said Nursi, *Savršen znak* (Bemust, 2005); *Ihlas i Bratstvo* (Bemust, 2005); *Sirijsko Predavanje* (Bemust, 2003).

<sup>35</sup> See their official website <http://www.saff.ba> (last accessed 9 December 2013)

<sup>36</sup> See their official site <http://www.zehra.ba> (last accessed 2 December 2010)

ment, mysticism, children, and family and tries to promote Islamic family values compatible with modern life.

### *Public manifestations of Islam*

Perhaps one of the most visible signs of an Islamic revival in a given country is the use of Islamic social symbols such as headscarves, long-sleeves clothing and long-skirts for women and beards for men.

The communist period in Bosnia and Herzegovina was marked by the fact that only women in the rural areas of Bosnia and Herzegovina wore headscarves as part of their Muslim traditional gear. Very small numbers of urban Bosnian women started wearing the headscarf in the late 1970s and early 1980s. However, the post-communist period saw a spike in the number of urban and educated Bosnian Muslim women who were wearing the headscarf. This is visible mostly in Bosnian Muslim-majority towns such as Sarajevo, Tuzla, Zenica, Travnik, and Bihać and is certainly due to the presence Islamic educational institutions in these towns. The increase in the number of headscarved women compared to the communist period is obvious, however percentage-wise this number is still very small.

In addition to this, the post-communist period has also witnessed the appearance of a small number of women donning the *zar* and *feredja* (comparable to the *burqa*) and then *niqab* (face covering). The *zar* and *feredja* were worn by Bosnian Muslim women until they were banned by the communist government in the early 1950s. Their re-appearance, although in small numbers, has been associated with *Salafi* trends in the post-communist period.

*Shari'a* marriages have also become more common in Bosnia and Herzegovina in the post-communist period. It should be noted that *Shari'a* marriages are not recognized by the state and are conducted by practicing Bosnian Muslims only after a civil marriage. Although there are no statistics regarding the precise number of *Shari'a* marriages conducted annually, their numbers are still thought to be low.

Mosque attendance throughout Bosnia and Herzegovina has also visibly increased since the collapse of communism and even more since the war. During the pre-war period it was mostly the elderly (from rural areas) who attended mosques. However, the war and post-war period was characterized by an increase in the number of young, educated, urban, and self-confident Bosnian Muslims making their way regularly to the mosque. Here it is noteworthy to mention that such large-scale attendance of mosques is noticeable mostly on the weekly Friday prayers (*jumu'a*) and on the annual Bayram prayers ('*Eid*) but not on other days of the week.

Another form of public manifestation of Islam has been the organization of large concerts featuring recitations of the Qur'an and Islamic spiritual music, known locally as *Ilahiye* and *Kaside*, held mostly in Sarajevo. In the last decade

de, the annual *Mošus Pejgamberov* ('The Musk of the Prophet') concert became the largest and most popular concert of Islamic spiritual music in the country. Interestingly enough, it is organized by Kewser – the Bosnian women's non-governmental organization with obvious *Shi'a* inclinations due to their accent on the *Ehlul-Beyt* ('Prophet's family') as well as on the martyrdom of Imam Hussein at the battle of Kerbela.<sup>37</sup> Top Islamic community officials including the Grand Mufti Mustafa Cerić are regular guests at this concert, which often takes place at the ZETRA stadium in Sarajevo and draws in crowds by their thousands.

### *Islamic websites and Radio*

The post-communist period, especially the late 1990s, were marked by the appearance (and disappearance) of Islamic websites on the Internet, which offered articles, advice, *fatawa*, and audio and video material in the Bosnian language. They are characterized by their temporary nature, perhaps comparable to 'shooting stars' and only a few have lasted longer periods.

The pool of Islamic websites that was formed came to represent the different Islamic trends that have appeared in Bosnia and Herzegovina in the post-communist period. The Islamic community in Bosnia and Herzegovina entered the internet-era by opening websites for its Presidency, the *Rijaset* ([www.rijaset.ba](http://www.rijaset.ba)) and for other major institutions within its structure such as its publishing house *El-Kalem* ([www.elkalem.ba](http://www.elkalem.ba)), *Preporod* newspaper ([www.preporod.com](http://www.preporod.com)), Gazi Husrev Beg Library ([www.ghbibl.com.ba](http://www.ghbibl.com.ba)), Faculty of Islamic Studies ([www.fin.ba](http://www.fin.ba)), and for all its *madrasas*.

The websites of the Islamic community have been characterized by their unattractive style, their often-dysfunctional links, and their poor and often obsolete content. However, in recent years the websites of the Islamic community's *El-Kalem* publishing house and its *Preporod* newspaper have undergone some improvements.

The different Islamic activist groups that have appeared in Bosnia and Herzegovina since the early 1990s have adapted themselves well to the globalization age. Although they are fragmented and differ greatly in their interpretation of Islam, what they have in common is that they run graphically well done and well maintained websites tackling a wide array of topics. Perhaps the earliest and one of the most frequently visited Islamic websites to date is [www.islambosna.ba](http://www.islambosna.ba), which has excellent graphics, the latest news, articles, *fatawa*, and audio and video material.

Other frequently visited websites include [www.minber.ba](http://www.minber.ba) and [www.fetve.org](http://www.fetve.org) – which is actually a *fatwa* bank and features mostly *fatawa* issued by the Saudi Permanent Council for Fatwa as well as other influential Saudi scholars such as the late Sheikh Bin Baz. The *Saff* magazine, which acted as the mouthpiece of the now extinguished Active Islamic Youth, in addition to its recently extinguished

<sup>37</sup> [http://www.zehra.ba/zehra/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=category&layout=blog&id=39&Itemid=65](http://www.zehra.ba/zehra/index.php?option=com_content&view=category&layout=blog&id=39&Itemid=65) (last accessed 24 August 2010).

magazine, has also been running a well designed website for years now.<sup>38</sup>

Some radical Islamic websites such as [www.kelimetul-haqq.org](http://www.kelimetul-haqq.org) and [www.putvjernika.com](http://www.putvjernika.com) are openly critical of the Islamic community whom they mockingly refer to as the '(Un)Islamic community'<sup>39</sup> and are stricter in their interpretation of *Shari'ah* (for example in claiming that face-covering is an obligation for women). However, such groups are believed to represent a very small minority.

In addition to these websites, a number of Iranian institutions functioning in Bosnia and Herzegovina have also gone online and maintain well-designed websites and provide articles ([www.ibn-sina.net](http://www.ibn-sina.net)) as well as online books and *fatawa* with *Shi'a* inclinations ([www.mullasadra.ba](http://www.mullasadra.ba)).

There are also a number of *Sufi* websites that have gone online in the Bosnian language. Among them we can include [www.znaci.com](http://www.znaci.com) which represents a local, Bosnian brand of *Sufism*, but also other *Sufi* groups of transnational nature such as the Haqqani group ([www.navrelumudrosti.com](http://www.navrelumudrosti.com)) and a website which promotes Bosnian translations of Said Nursi's works ([www.rejhan.net](http://www.rejhan.net)).

Among Islamic radio stations, Radio NABA and Radio BIR ought to be mentioned. Radio NABA was established in 1993 and claims to be the only radio station to include the obligatory 'halal clause' in its commercial marketing services.<sup>40</sup> Through their program, they aim to educate their listeners about Islam and its universal values and to inform their listeners on the happenings throughout the *ummah* on the global, regional, and local scale. Radio BIR, on the other hand, is the Islamic community's official radio station that started its operations only in 2008.<sup>41</sup> Its program includes political, educational, religious, sports, music, and youth programs.

### *Women, youth, and Sufi organizations*

The post-communist Islamic revival in Bosnia and Herzegovina has also been marked by the appearance (and disappearance) of Muslim women's organizations and youth associations. Perhaps one of the earliest Muslim women's organizations was *Sumejja*. The women's association *Sumejja* was locally initiated and established in 1991 as an association of 'Bosniak' woman which over the years expanded its activities to include male members as well. It has an educative character and provides Qur'an recitation lessons as well as English, German, and Italian language courses.<sup>42</sup> It also provides other services such as such as the circumcision of children as well as organizes humanitarian activities for the sick and poor.

During the war, the now famous women's organization *Keuser* was established.

<sup>38</sup> See their site [www.saff.ba](http://www.saff.ba) (ast accessed 29 August 2010).

<sup>39</sup> For more information, see <http://www.kelimetul-haqq.org> (last accessed 29 August 2014).

<sup>40</sup> See their official site <http://www.naba.ba> (last accessed 2 December 2010).

<sup>41</sup> See their official site <http://www.bir.ba> (last accessed 2 December 2010).

<sup>42</sup> See their site [www.sumejja.ba](http://www.sumejja.ba) (last accessed 29 August 2014).

It is an association with a strong emphasis on educating the Muslim woman so that she can be ready to live a modern life in accordance with Islamic standards. It features its own magazine titled *Zehra*, as well as its own radio (Radio Zehra) and TV station (TV Zahra). The association has, as mentioned earlier, rather clear *Shi'a* inclinations.

In the year 2000, another women's organization, *Nahla* - also with an educative character and goals to empower Muslim women - was established in Sarajevo. *Nahla* has a wide array of activities including Qur'an courses, Arabic language courses, courses on sewing, health, psychology and time management.<sup>43</sup> They also teach parenting skills and help in resolving marital disputes.

Among the youth organizations, the Active Islamic Youth (AIY) gained much popularity as well as criticism in post-war Bosnia and Herzegovina. The AIY was an organization established by former members of the *El-Mujaheed* military unit after the war, with the aim of continuing their *dawa* ('call') after the war.<sup>44</sup> It was initially funded by the Saudi High Committee but later turned to other sources. Some of their members openly admit to having been influenced by 'Arab brothers' who fought together with them in the *El-Mujaheed* military unit. Although they claimed to be simply 'Muslims' their form of practicing Islam was widely perceived to be *Salafi* Islam. By the time they reached the peak of their activities in late 1998 and 1999, they were organizing hundreds of lectures, *Shari'a* courses, summer schools and camps. Due to a lack of funding, they were shut down in 2006 and their magazine, *SAFF*, stopped issuing its printed version (except for subscribers) and now appears in an online free version.

*Sufi* orders ('*tariqats*') have been present in Bosnia and Herzegovina for centuries. Although having been banned under communism, they have resurfaced in the past two decades and are mostly found in Sarajevo, Travnik, Visoko, Zenica, Fojnica, Kiseljak, and Mostar. Most of them belong to the *Naqshibandiyyah* and the *Qadiriyyah* orders although there are smaller numbers of *Rufa'is* and *Shadhiliyyahs*. It is estimated that today there are around 50 places of *dhikr* ('remembrance' but refers to group prayers) compared to 40 in 1981 of which 20 are *Sufi* lodges.<sup>45</sup> Their publications include *Šebi Arus* and *Kelamu'l Šifa'*.

One charismatic local *imam* with neo-*Sufi* inclinations who deserves to be mentioned is Sulejman Bugari.<sup>46</sup> More than any other Islamic community *imam*, Bugari was (and still is) immensely successful in attracting large masses of Bosnian youth, including non-Muslims, with his positive message and openness. He holds regular lectures at various locations and it is mostly university students who flock to listen to him.

<sup>43</sup> See [www.nahla.ba](http://www.nahla.ba) (last accessed 29 August 2010).

<sup>44</sup> Dženana Karup, 'Kuran je naš ustav', *Dani*, No.72, 30 March 1998.

<sup>45</sup> Christian Moe and Ahmet Alibašić, 'Current Islamic Trends in Bosnia: A Critical Survey', (unpublished paper, revised April 2006), p.17.

<sup>46</sup> See his official site <http://www.sulejmanbugari.com> (last accessed 2 December 2010)

## Conclusion

Perhaps no individual factor can be singled out as being responsible for the revival of Islam in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Rather, the cumulative effects of the collapse of communism, war, and genocide have had a joint impact on the Bosnian Muslim population since 1992. The genocide of Bosnian Muslims and the destruction of their Islamic culture and heritage cornered the Bosnian Muslims in their own state and resulted in some serious contemplation on their attitude towards faith. They were, after all, targeted for destruction solely for being Muslims.<sup>47</sup> In response to this, some of them, it seems, decided to actually *be* Muslims in every sense of the word.

The increased interest in Islam resulted in an increased need of institutions to cater for the education of Bosnian Muslims. This resulted in the Islamic community opening madrasas and Islamic Pedagogical Academies (later renamed to 'Islamic Pedagogical Faculties') to produce competent staff to teach Islam. Only a handful of traditional Islamic *madrasas* have been re-constructed. Plans to reconstruct the rest, which have been demolished during communism, have still not moved on due to a lack of funds. Most of the mosques destroyed during the war have been rebuilt and new ones have been constructed to cater for the needs of the Bosnian Muslim populations expelled from eastern and northern Bosnia and Herzegovina and now living in central Muslim-majority towns and cities in the Federations. Destroyed mosques in the Serb Republic have been largely reconstructed, but their *jamaats* have never recovered.

Foreign Islamic trends have been visible in post-communist Bosnia and Herzegovina. This was due to Bosnia and Herzegovina's dependence on Muslim countries during and immediately after the war for humanitarian aid, financial aid, reconstruction funds, and scholarships for students. Along with this came new (global) trends in interpreting Islam among which *Salafism*, *Shiism*, and Turkish neo-*Sufism* take prominent places.<sup>48</sup> However, the Islamic community carried the bulk of the efforts in the revival of Islam and still seems to hold a dominant position while foreign Islamic influences, although clearly active and attention grabbing, still occupy the fringe.

The revival of Islam is only noticeable in the Muslim majority towns in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, which comprises 51% of the country. In the Serb Republic there are hardly any signs of its once significant Muslim population, let alone of an Islamic revival. The Islamic revival that is present in the Federation refers more to the increased presence of Islam in the public sphere. As for personal piety, indicators are mixed. Although the number of people attending

<sup>47</sup> Michael A. Sells, *The Bridge Betrayed: Religion and Genocide in Bosnia* (University of California Press, 1996), p.144.

<sup>48</sup> For a good analysis of foreign influences in Islam see Juan Carlos Antunez, *Foreign influences in Islam in Bosnia and Herzegovina since 1995*, available on [www.ISEEF.net](http://www.ISEEF.net).

Friday prayers has increased and although the number of mosques has increased, the number of people attending regular daily prayers is still low. Also alcohol consumption is still widespread among the Bosnian Muslim youth.

It should also be noted that Islamic endowments (*waqfs*), which were a crucial financial source for the in the past, have never been returned after being forcefully confiscated and nationalized by the communist government.

Although mainstream Sunni Islam strongly dominates the scene, the post-communist specter of Islamic ideas (and practices) in Bosnia and Herzegovina is certainly wide and includes conservatives, modernists, traditionalists, liberals, salafis, Sufis, and radicals. It is worth noting that among all the followers of this wide array of ideas there have not been any serious organizations calling for the state implementation of *Shari'a* in the public domain or for the establishment of an Islamic state.

Looking at Bosnia's Islamic revival from a broader perspective and comparing it to other transitions in the country, including its transition from communism to democracy, war to peace, liberalization, reconstruction, and European Union integration, and also comparing it to the revival of other religions, the revival of Islam certainly does not dominate the scene.

## Islamski preporod u Bosni i Hercegovini u periodu 1992–2010.

*Harun Karčić*

### *Sažetak*

Iako se mnogo pisalo o preporodu islama u Bosni i Hercegovini u posljednjih deset godina, postoji tek nekoliko ozbiljnih akademskih istraživanja o ovoj temi. Osim toga, postoji znakovit broj poprilično netačnih analiza i izvještaja koje su pisali strani novinari, a koji su propustili ukazati na temeljnu pokretačku snagu koja stoji iza pojačane vidljivosti islama u nekim dijelovima Bosne i Hercegovine, te su svoju pažnju uglavnom usmjeravali na aktivnosti organizacija iz Saudijske Arabije u našoj zemlji. Iako se utjecaj stranih faktora nikako ne smije zanemariti, u cilju postizanja sveobuhvatne slike islama u postkomunističkoj Bosni i Hercegovini, u ovakvim istraživanjima nužno je uzeti u obzir sve prisutne faktore kada se govori o ovoj temi.

*Ključne riječi:* islam, Balkan, preporod, Bosna i Hercegovina, religija, postkomunizam