

Bosnian Islam? Islam and Muslims in Bosnia Herzegovina from a Historical Perspective

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Muslims' understanding of religion and their resulting religious practices, as well as the religion of Islam as a whole, are often seen in the mainstream political discourse as the cause of many problems with immigration and the integration of immigrants within European countries. Although factual and academically sound publications warn against such tendencies, the debates surrounding several social and economic problems are given a religious flavour – not only by the bearers and actors of the discourse on Islam from the majority society, but also very often by Muslims themselves. Immigrants of Muslim background are further 'Islamised' as a result. Michael Kiefer suggests that 'scepticism is therefore called for when all conflicts are explained with Islam – or when they are supposed to be solved with Islam.'¹ It is not surprising that in this abbreviated and simplified view of manifold social problems, Islam is essentially denied not only the ability but also the right to become an integral part of European religious culture. In Germany, for example, Islam is part of social reality, but not part of national identity.² It is seen as an anachronistic element of that country's society and also of European history.³

When views of Islam being anachronistic are expressed, reference is made predominantly to those Europe-dwelling Muslims whose origin and ethnic and cultural roots lie outside or at the edges of Europe. European Muslims, such as, for example, those of Albanian or Bosniak origin, are usually overlooked despite making up a considerable part of the European Muslim diaspora. Although

¹ Lecture at the conference on imam training at the University of Osnabrück, 25–7 February 2010. See also Kiefer 2010a.

² Gathmann and Reimann 2016.

³ Kiefer 2010b: 186.

Bosniak Muslims do not form the majority of Muslims in any EU state, Bosniaks have been a significant group among Muslims in Germany and Austria since the Bosnian War (1992–5). It is estimated that around 400,000 Bosniak Muslims live in Germany, and more than 100,000 in Austria. Switzerland, in turn, is home to almost 100,000 Albanians, mostly from Kosovo. The German-speaking area is thus the centre of the Bosniak and Albanian Muslim diaspora in Central Europe. Muslim immigrants from Turkey are at the forefront of the public debate about Islam and Muslims, probably because of their numerical majority in many European countries. Muslims from Arab countries, Afghanistan, Syria and Iran have also increasingly become the focus of interest, mainly owing to the influx of refugees from these countries in recent years. The fact that the hegemonic European discourse about Muslims and Islam is shaped through the perception and framing of the belief and practices of these other immigrant communities is understandable to an extent. Interestingly, despite – or perhaps because of – that focus on Muslim immigrants from outside Europe, any talk of ‘good’ practices of ‘integration’ concerns primarily those Islamic traditions that have a historical and territorial connection to Europe. First and foremost among these traditions are those in Bosnia Herzegovina. It can be argued that this recognition is largely thanks to the relevant publications in the Islam-related academic discourse in German-speaking countries, which have addressed the understanding, practice and experience of Islam among Muslims in Bosnia Herzegovina.⁴ Often labelled ‘Bosnian Islam’ – a not uncontroversial term from an academic point of view – an ‘enlightened, liberal and moderate Islam’ has been portrayed as exemplary, for instance, for the processes of integration in Germany.⁵

Central to this narrative of Bosnian Islam are the historical processes of integration associated with Bosnian Muslims, with reference to their religious organisational structures, educational institutions and diaspora being conceived and presented as a model for ‘European Islam’. Reference is made particularly to the special role of Bosnian Islam under Austro-Hungarian rule in Bosnia Herzegovina (1878–1918). The Austro-Hungarian occupation meant that Indigenous Muslims there suddenly found themselves in a situation that ‘corresponds in many respects to the situation of Muslims in Western Europe today’.⁶ The issue at that time was the question of integration and the location of Islam within Austria–Hungary, as is the case today in several European countries.

Bosnian and Herzegovinian Muslims appear also to have become increasingly aware of the opportunities presented by Bosnian Islam’s contribution to a wider debate about Islam in Europe. This newly found self-confidence is being

⁴ Schmid 2008. See also Omerika 2013a: 295–320.

⁵ Omerika 2013b: 11.

⁶ Schmid 2008: 98.

generated, to a large extent, by societal actors and institutions active in recent decades within the Islamic Community in Bosnia and Herzegovina (Islamska zajednica u Bosni i Hercegovini; hereafter the IC), the official Muslim religious body established under Habsburg rule. But what exactly is Bosnian Islam? How can we critically examine the ability of Bosnian Islam to rethink and adapt its religious principles and practices to constantly changing socio-political circumstances springing from the period of Habsburg rule? This chapter aims to address these questions from a historical perspective by looking at the formal development and institutionalisation of Islam in Bosnia Herzegovina in the shape of the IC, a religious community and institution that developed despite, or perhaps because of, historical developments in this part of the world.

THE HABSBURG LEGACY, THE ISLAMIC COMMUNITY AND THE SHAPING OF A BOSNIAN ISLAM

The history of the Bosnian-Herzegovinian Muslims, the Bosniaks as they call themselves today, from the Congress of Berlin in 1878 throughout the subsequent occupation of Bosnia Herzegovina by the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy is characterised by political and cultural upheaval. The Muslim population of Bosnia Herzegovina found themselves in a profoundly difficult situation, being in the new power matrix politically, but economically inferior to the other two ethno-national communities, the Croats and the Serbs.⁷ It is therefore not surprising that they opposed the new ruling power and its occupying forces, and for a few months put up strong resistance to the occupation. Austro-Hungarian rule represented for many Bosnian Muslims a new, 'Western' and Christian way of life, in contrast with the Islamic way of life to which they were accustomed.⁸ Many perceived the new rule as a 'blow of fate, a shock, a misfortune and a general destruction of their psychic and spiritual being, which had been consolidated in the Ottoman empire until then'.⁹ One of the reasons for this attitude may also be found in the fact that they regarded the Austro-Hungarian occupation as provisional and 'expected the return of the Sultan and Turkish rule'.¹⁰ They were led to believe this because the resolutions of the Congress of Berlin stated that the occupation was of a provisional nature.¹¹ Šaćir Filandra notes that 'Bosniaks entered the 20th century as an isolated Muslim island, deprived of their rights and left to their own devices, in the heart of the predominantly

⁷ Imamović 1998: 362.

⁸ Omerika 2013b: 16.

⁹ Rizvić 1990: 11.

¹⁰ Hadžijahić 1977: 118.

¹¹ Hanotaux 1908.

Christian Balkans ... This was a culture shock from which they did not recover for a long time and from whose consequences they suffered for decades.¹²

Following the occupation, the Habsburgs pursued their strategic interests consistently. These were generally reflected in the strengthening of their position of power in the Balkans, the primary aim of which was to prevent the establishment of a large South Slavic state. The realisation of these interests presupposed the complete and comprehensive social control of Bosnia Herzegovina, an attitude that eventually led to the annexation of the country in 1908. For this reason, they worked from the very beginning to incorporate Bosnia Herzegovina into the political, legal, military, economic and cultural system of the monarchy, which Fikret Karčić describes as the 'modernisation of Bosnian society' but with a 'cultural mission' aimed at 'bringing European culture to the rest of the East and to the Balkans'.¹³ The unfolding upheaval inevitably affected the understanding of Islam as the essential, dominant factor in the identity of this autochthonous European Muslim population group. On the other hand, this 'overloading with history and enormous historical burden' had lasting consequences for the location of Islam and its role in the private and public spheres of the several states that were established on the territory of what is now Bosnia Herzegovina from 1878 to the present.¹⁴

The changes that came with Habsburg rule entailed a rethinking on several levels of the overall societal role of Islam. As the Bosnian ulema began to 'adapt themselves, their religion, or better, their interpretation, to the new times', several processes of adjustment to the new order began.¹⁵ For example, owing to the widespread perception of Austro-Hungarian rule as non-Islamic, many Muslim scholars and clerics (imams) propagated the idea of the supposed Sharia-based necessity and duty to leave Bosnia Herzegovina. As a result, many Muslims emigrated to the Ottoman empire. The second Reis-ul-Ulema (1893–1909) of the IC, Mehmed Teufik Azapagić (also Azabagić), dealt with this in a paper in which he concluded that, in his view, the necessity to emigrate did not exist, could not be justified on the basis of the Sharia, and should accordingly be rejected.¹⁶ He also put forward arguments that legitimised even a non-Muslim ruler for Muslims. This was a Sharia-related way of dealing with a concrete problem that arose with the rupture facing Muslims in Bosnia Herzegovina after the Austro-Hungarian occupation. Through his stance, which he justified by the application of Sharia-based argument, Azapagić attempted to counteract this caesura.

¹² Filandra 1998: 12 f.

¹³ Ibid., 83; for this, here he refers to Neupauer 1884.

¹⁴ Karić 2004: 20.

¹⁵ Ibid., 38.

¹⁶ See Azapagić 1990.

The rupture was felt at a cultural level. The challenges that arose as a result of the occupation meant that belonging to Islam itself had to be redefined in identity terms, in terms hitherto unknown to Bosnian and Herzegovinian Muslims. Islam, in fact, became the decisive determinant of their ethno-national self-understanding, and thus came to form, to a large extent, the main reference point for the formation of their ethno-national autonomy, 'culturally, civilisationally and historically'.¹⁷ With the subsequent developments and the states that were to alternate in the territory of Bosnia Herzegovina throughout the twentieth century, these aspects also took on an essential political significance. Islam, for example, served as a frame of reference for their (party) political organisations.¹⁸ This could already be seen in the last years of the Austro-Hungarian presence in Bosnia Herzegovina, and has continued – albeit with some interruptions – to the present. Islam also became the basis for creativity in various cultural areas during this period, just as it shaped the individual and social ethics of Muslims. In other words, the profound changes that came with Habsburg rule were not just organisational or political, but also cultural, social and religious. They not only affected those issues that were of practical relevance to religion, but also related to Islam as the defining feature of all aspects of the identity of Muslims in Bosnia Herzegovina, as well as all areas of the expression of this identity in society as a whole.

Another profound consequence of Habsburg rule for Muslims in Bosnia Herzegovina was the new religious organisational structures it introduced. As members of the state religion, they were administered and guided by the religious authorities in the Ottoman empire, but Bosnian Muslims did not have their own separate religious institution. The establishment of such an institution with the claim of religious representation and for the administration of their religious affairs and business in a state that was no longer Islamic represented a novelty not only for the Bosnian and Herzegovinian Muslims themselves, but also for the religious authorities in the Austro-Hungarian empire. The aim of the Austro-Hungarian administration to establish an independent, autocephalous religious hierarchy in Bosnia Herzegovina was undoubtedly a result of political pragmatism, intended primarily to contribute to the consolidation of its rule, and, despite claims otherwise, did not primarily have the religious needs of the Bosnian and Herzegovinian Muslims in mind.¹⁹

The administration was aware that severing the Muslims' relations with the Sublime Porte and sheikh ūl-Islam in Istanbul would not be easy. Most Muslims in Bosnia Herzegovina and the Sublime Porte were firmly against this, as attested

¹⁷ Karić 2004: 33.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 37.

¹⁹ For more details, see Kraljačić 1987: 351–66.

to by the strong resistance to the occupation, in which both the ulema and the wider population took part.²⁰ The compromise was that the sheikh ūl-Islam in Istanbul, as the supreme religious authority, could continue to appoint the Islamic clergy and holders of religious posts in Bosnia Herzegovina, on condition that those people came from the ranks of the country's native ulema. In 1882, after almost three years' delay, and while diplomatic activity by the Austro-Hungarian administration to resolve this continued in the background, the sheikh ūl-Islam finally appointed the mufti of Sarajevo, Mustafa Hilmi-ef. Omerović, the new Bosnian mufti.²¹ Since Omerović had shown himself agreeable to the Austro-Hungarian authorities from the beginning and was considered a 'suitable personality', the administration recognised his appointment by imperial decree, confirming him as the first Reis-ul-Ulema of the newly created institution of the IC under the name 'Rijaset'.²² The emperor also appointed four members of the Ulema Medžlis (council of ulema), a kind of presidium, from among native scholars. This body formed the highest administrative organ in the structure of the newly established IC in Bosnia. Corresponding bodies were subsequently established at the lower levels. The holders of posts within them, in common with the highest representatives, were not elected but rather appointed by the provincial government of Bosnia Herzegovina, which was under the control of the Austro-Hungarian administration.²³ In this way, and by taking upon itself the payment of the salaries of these religious functionaries, the monarchy secured complete control over the newly founded religious structure of Bosnian and Herzegovinian Muslims, a circumstance that is considered unique in the Muslim world.²⁴

However, this new religious institution was anything but independent. A special commission was set up within the monarchy's Ministry of Finance to control all religious business and religious foundations, the so-called pious foundations (Bosnian *vakuf* pl. *vakufi*, Arabic *waqf* pl. *awqāf*).²⁵ The reformed school system was also under the control of Austria-Hungary.²⁶ As a result of this control and the resulting dissatisfaction among the Muslim population, the Movement for Religious and Educational Autonomy (Pokret za vjersku i vakufsko-mearifsku autonomiju) developed in 1899 under the leadership of the mufti of Mostar, Ali Fehmi Džabić (1853–1918).²⁷ The emergence of this movement was also encouraged by the 'aggressive proselytizing efforts of the Catholic hierarchy in Bosnia

²⁰ Durmišević 2002: 102.

²¹ Šehić 1996: 12. On the first Reis-ul-Ulema, Mustafa Hilmi-ef. Omerović, see Cerić 1994.

²² Šehić 1996: 15. On the title and office of Reis-ul-Ulema, see Karčić 2011.

²³ Imamović 1994: 54 f.

²⁴ Ibid., 54.

²⁵ Ibid., 54 f.

²⁶ Bojić 2001: 136.

²⁷ Ibid., 145. For further details, see Rizvić 1990: 179–80.

and Herzegovina'.²⁸ While the Muslims saw the question of the autonomy they demanded primarily in religious terms, Austria-Hungary regarded it as a political or constitutional issue. The Muslims could therefore not be granted autonomy as long as the constitutional status of Bosnia Herzegovina had not been clarified.²⁹ This political and legal game continued until 1908, when Bosnia Herzegovina was finally annexed and thus finally incorporated into the monarchy in terms of constitutional law. The decade-long struggle for autonomy ended with the adopting of the Statute for the Autonomous Administration of Islamic Religious and *Waqf*-Educational Affairs in Bosnia and Herzegovina (*Štatut za autonomnu upravu vjerskih i vakufsko-mearifskih poslova u Bosni i Hercegovini*) in 1909. It was the 'first all-encompassing legal act' ever to organise the IC.³⁰ Autonomy was granted, but the imperial control was still there, wrapped in a legal shell; it was to be used within the imperial framework. Another aspect of the statute was that it was not passed, as the status of autonomy would lead one to expect, by the organs of the IVZ, but was instead promulgated directly by the state and/or the emperor in the form of an 'Imperial Supreme Resolution' (*Allerhöchste Entschließung* 1909). Accordingly, the autonomy was limited, a fact that was vividly reflected in the provisions for the election of the Reis-ul-Ulema as head of the IC (also discussed in Chapter 5).³¹

The statute did, however, provide a solid legal and organisational basis for the IC's continued existence and development as the institutional representation of Muslims, as the literature on the IC under Austro-Hungarian rule reveals. As much as it was intended to serve the political goals of the new ruling structures, the IC became a significant feature of the presence of Islam in Bosnia Herzegovina, and has remained so. Especially from the perspective of the religious legitimisation of offices and dignitaries, as well as of the religious practice, teachings and lifestyle of Bosnian and Herzegovinian Muslims, it has always been an unavoidable factor. It has become an important institution for the self-understanding and location of Islam in Bosnia Herzegovina, even though the actions of its dignitaries, functionaries and servants have been subject to much criticism and debate.

The monarchy also ensured freedom of religious practice for Muslims in Bosnia Herzegovina through legislation. Various aspects of Islamic religious practice – among them the performance of prayers, medical examinations and dietary regulations – were thereby regulated and guaranteed.³² The Islam Act of 1912

²⁸ Imamović 1996: 55. On the topic of proselytising, see Purivatra and Hadžijahić 1990: 24–7, and Malcolm 1995: 198.

²⁹ Imamović 1996: 55.

³⁰ Salkić 1997: 339.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 341.

³² 'Auszug' 1881.

recognised Islam and Muslims as an equal religious community in the Austrian half of the empire.³³ However, the Austro-Hungarian administration faced the problem of implementing the law. A new legal system could not be established overnight, and it would certainly not have been a wise political move to abolish the Sharia law that had been in force until then. The Habsburg administration followed a different path, initially retaining in principle the existing legal system and promoting its institutional integration into the state legal system in certain areas.³⁴ This meant, for example, the integration of the Sharia courts into the judiciary and making Sharia part of the monarchy's applicable law.

As a result of these measures, the *Mecelle* (the civil code of the Ottoman empire) found its way into the constitutional law of the Habsburg Monarchy and was used by both the Sharia courts and the civil courts.³⁵ Only those legal provisions that were in clear and direct conflict with the interests of the Austro-Hungarian occupying power remained exempt.³⁶ The state legal system retained its superior position vis-à-vis Sharia law, which, incidentally, was limited to the private law (especially that concerning personal status and inheritance) of Muslims. But these adaptations nevertheless shaped the essential features of the institutionalisation of Islam in Bosnia Herzegovina. When it came to the appointment of judges, for example, it was the Austro-Hungarian state that now had authority, since this process concerned political and legal sovereignty. The Bosnian and Herzegovinian ulema were of the opinion that there would be no objection from a Sharia perspective if the Sharia judges were appointed by a non-Muslim ruler.³⁷ They thought the Sharia courts would thereby gain importance and authority, the state would stand behind the jurisdiction of the Sharia courts, and the monarchy would pay for their organisation.³⁸ Another innovation in the area of procedural law was the creation of an appeals body. The Supreme Sharia Court was established at the Supreme Court in Sarajevo.³⁹ Karčić argues that from the perspective of the occupying administration, this innovation in the area of Sharia procedural law was intended to prepare Muslims in Bosnia Herzegovina for the adaptation of their legal regulations to the principles of European legal systems in the long term.⁴⁰

The eventual acceptance of the new, non-Muslim rule and the legal system associated with it, as well as the new organisational structures for the governance of Islamic religious affairs, was also a result of the change in the understanding of

³³ See Potz 2012.

³⁴ Bečić 2015: 108.

³⁵ Durmišević 2008: 83.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 80.

³⁷ Šehić 1996: 11 ff.

³⁸ Karčić 2005: 22.

³⁹ Durmišević 2008: 96 ff.

⁴⁰ Karčić 2005: 24.

Sharia in its capacity as the legal system of Islam, as well as other processes of change and adaptation undergone by Bosnian Muslim thought and practices after the start of Habsburg rule. For Bosnian Muslims, having found themselves in a new, predominantly non-Muslim imperial context, which was subsequently to be understood as secular, it became all the more important that the new structures and regulations should guarantee freedom of religious practice, in both legal and socio-political terms.

Intellectually, these changes also entailed debates on the notions of 'progress' and 'renewal' in Muslim society. The question of how Islam should participate in the efforts for the 'renewal' of Bosnian and Herzegovinian Muslims was of great importance. Such questions were, of course, fundamental, requiring a rethinking of the way Islam and the Islamic religious and social traditions should be understood and defined in the face of profound political and social change. In fact, the experience of Bosnian and Herzegovinian Muslims from the late nineteenth century onwards seems to have revolved around two main questions: how Islam should be understood and what constituted it in practice in the Bosnian and Herzegovinian context, and to what extent reference should be made to it as the framework for social and political reform. It is the answers to these questions that ultimately shaped how Islam has been understood in Bosnia Herzegovina – what has recently come to be characterised as Bosnian Islam.

BOSNIAN ISLAM: A ROMANTIC IDEA OR BOSNIAN EXPERIENCE OF ISLAM?

From the point of view of its universal self-understanding (which incidentally also applies to Christianity), Islam does not limit itself to geography or territory. Therefore, such notions as that of Bosnian Islam are often seen as problematic or at risk of misunderstanding. For some conservative circles in Bosnia Herzegovina, it has been said in the past that 'Bosnian Islam' is sometimes a romantic idea that has as its only basis the practice and faith of Bosnian Muslims, regardless of whether there is evidence for it in Islam or not.⁴¹ Indeed, even contemporary Islamic theologians and scholars in Bosnia Herzegovina do not seem to want to speak of Bosnian Islam. Rather, most refer to 'Bosnian experience of Islam', a phrase coined by Karčić. Referring to the historical development and spread of Islam, Karčić points to the fact that the history of Islam is full of examples of certain practices – insofar as they did not explicitly contradict Islamic principles, from whatever area of Islam – being incorporated into Islam.⁴² In the Bosnian context, this has been the case exactly. The origins

⁴¹ See by way of example El-Misri 1993, the content of which is, in my view, too apologetic.

⁴² Karčić 2009: 121.

of many everyday practices performed by Muslims in Bosnia Herzegovina today cannot always be traced to the sources of the Islamic faith and its religious practices. Some even date from the pre-Ottoman period. During the long period of Islamic presence in the country, methods were devised for verifying whether such practices were compatible with Islamic legal norms. They were redefined against the background of Islamic legal standardisation. To the extent to which compatibility to Islamic norms was possible, they were Islamised and absorbed into the body of the Bosniaks' Islamic tradition. However, these practices never obtained a normative legal character, and despite the fact that they obtained a religious colouring and sometimes even became an integral part of religious services, they remained in the realm of common law.⁴³

The constitution of the IC today reflects the importance attached to these practices in the traditions of Bosnian Muslims and the role those traditions play in the Muslim population's religious identity. Article 4 of the constitution states that the organisation of the IC and its activities is based on the Islamic traditions of the Bosniaks, as well as on the Qur'an and the Prophet's Sunna.⁴⁴ The fact that the distinctive Islamic traditions of the Bosnian-Muslim population are mentioned in the IC's most important legal document clearly demonstrates a shared understanding of the unique characteristics of Bosnian Islam. At the same time, it can be assumed that this provision was inserted into the constitution to prevent conservative Wahhabi or Salafi groups from gaining influence in Bosnia Herzegovina. Muslims adhering to these groups were present both during and immediately after the Bosnian War, both as combatants from countries with Muslim populations and in humanitarian organisations. It would require a separate investigation to determine whether that did indeed motivate the inclusion of this provision in the constitution of the IC. For the purposes of this study, it is important to mention briefly that, in the period immediately following the end of the conflict, it was predicted that the presence and activities of these groups in Bosnia Herzegovina might result in Bosnian Islam's turn towards religious fundamentalism.⁴⁵

While the existence of these groups in Bosnia Herzegovina cannot be denied (nor can that of combatants from orthodox Christian countries fighting on the side of the Serbs), these predictions turned out to be wrong. Indeed, the influence of the Wahhabi and Salafi groups on the majority of the population has remained limited in the years following the conflict. On the one hand, the approach taken by the official IC clearly contributed to thwarting the attempts of these conservative groups to convert the local Muslim population to their understanding

⁴³ Ibid., 127.

⁴⁴ 'Constitution of the Islamic Community in Bosnia-Herzegovina from 1997', article 4.

⁴⁵ Tibi 1997: 21–8.

of Islam. This is despite the fact that the IC had been subject to justifiable and understandable criticism for not taking a tougher approach to these groups, and for not making a greater effort to undermine their influence. On the other hand, the population's distinctive Islamic traditions – the particular 'Bosnian experience of Islam' – appear to have prevented large sections of the Bosnian population from becoming susceptible to attempts at Wahhabi/Salafi proselytisation.

Nevertheless, there were times when there seemed to have been a change in the relationship between certain officials of the IC in Bosnia Herzegovina and such circles. This was reflected, for example, in the endeavours of the IC's former Reis-ul-Ulema (1993–2012), Mustafa Cerić, to establish relations with these groups. It was probably motivated by at least two factors. First, one can assume that there was an attempt to establish a degree of control over these groups' activities and to limit or, at the very least, manage their influence on the larger population. Second, there was perhaps a wish to strengthen the national unity of all Muslims in Bosnia Herzegovina, against the background of the war crimes committed against them during the conflict. For the IC views itself as – or at least claims to be – not only the religious organisation of Bosnian Muslims, but also the guardian of Bosniaks' national identity. There is, of course, debate over the term Bosniak and questions pertaining to their national identity, and Bosnian nation-building has been argued over in political and academic circles. Indeed, these are some of the 'most controversial topics in Southeast European studies'.⁴⁶ Despite those debates and their potential legitimacy, the attempted opening of the Bosnian IC to followers of Wahhabism and Salafism – an approach advocated by Cerić – has been the subject of heavy criticism. That criticism has come both from the IC itself and from wider Bosnian society, and has to an extent been influenced by the critics' religious and political ideas. Of course, some of it has a religious-ideological background. The rapprochement of the IC with Salafist or Wahhabi circles was criticised, for example, by representatives and adherents of both the Sufi and Shi'a denominations of Islam.⁴⁷ While so-called Bosnian Islam belongs in a theological-legal sense to the Sunni branch of Islam, the population's religious activities are influenced by the presence of Sufi traditions, many of which contain attributes typically found in Shi'a Islam. The war in Bosnia Herzegovina resulted in the noticeable presence of Wahhabi and Salafi tendencies, but Shi'a also attempted to gain a footing. This is evidenced by the establishment of an Iranian cultural centre in Sarajevo, managed by the Iranian embassy, and the opening of a Bosnian–Persian college near the city. A research institute named after Ibn Sina and closely allied to the Shi'i orientation of Islam was also established in Sarajevo.

⁴⁶ Dick 2003: 5.

⁴⁷ Hafizović 2010: 26–8.

Bosnian Islam, then, or rather the ‘Bosnian experience of Islam’, has been an evolving tradition, shaped by the transformations that occurred under Austro-Hungarian rule (most notably the establishment of the IC) and by the significant political and social changes of the previous century. Its ‘distinctive’ nature and peculiarities, some of which have been discussed above, can be traced further in the constitutional provisions of the IC. Article 4 of the constitution contains a clause that makes allowances for the numerous historical changes in the country, as discussed in the previous section. But the article also speaks of the ‘requirements of the times’, which, with the aforementioned Qur’an, Sunna and Islamic tradition of the Bosniaks, are considered the basis for the IC’s organisation and activities. This constitutional provision thus unites socio-political developments and their influence on the content of lived Islam in Bosnia Herzegovina (as well as the necessity of a constant review of such content to ensure its theological and legal conformity to Islam), and also on the organisation of the IC as an institution. Given this framework, one can speak of traditions that are constitutionally sanctioned within the IC, as well as maintaining an openness to Islamic reform. It is this openness and the endeavour of the IC to develop a structure allowing the everyday practices and activities of Bosniaks and their Islamic institutions to adapt to socio-political and ideological upheaval that characterise the Bosnian experience of Islam.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Islam has been practised in Bosnia Herzegovina in different social and political contexts for centuries. Therein lies the experience of Bosnian Islam: that it has (almost) always been able to react to the most diverse challenges – social, political, cultural and ideological – and, if necessary, adapt to them within the framework of fundamental Islamic doctrine. Throughout their centuries-long Islamic history and tradition, Muslims in Bosnia Herzegovina have known how to preserve their affiliation to Islam while always keeping an eye on their European roots and autonomy. The period of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy is probably the best evidence of this. It was also their experience under Habsburg rule, as well as the legacy of this experience for the current institutional and religious structures of Bosnian Muslims, that is referred to specifically when Bosnian Islam is characterised as a model for ‘European Islam’. From the establishment of the IC, which has become the central religious institution in the lives and religious practices of Bosnian Muslims, to the repositioning of Islam as the decisive determinant of the ethno-national self-understanding of Bosniaks, the legacy of this period played a significant role in the shaping of the Bosnian experience of Islam from 1878 onwards.

Bosnian experience meant that Bosnian Muslims became accustomed to

living an Islamic life within a multi-religious society. Therefore, they see no contradiction – whether in lived faith or Islamic doctrinal debate – in living in such a society. One can claim that Islam is very present as a religious orientation in their lives, while they retain an extraordinarily strong sense of ‘European values’ and being part of Europe. The Bosnian theologian Ahmet Alibašić summarises the main characteristics of Bosnian Islam as follows: 1) secularised, 2) civic and non-violent, 3) democratic and pluralistic and 4) nationalised.⁴⁸ He notes not only that Bosnian Muslims lived in secular states from the late nineteenth century onwards, but also that they accepted this legal status quo in which the religious and moral norms of the Sharia were applicable, while Islamic legal norms were also transformed into moral norms. The IC, in fact, has repeatedly confirmed its commitment to the separation of the state and religious communities. As indicated above, despite talk of the threat of Islamic terrorism in the Balkans, and the influence of Salafi or Wahhabi circles, Bosnian Muslims remained peaceful, non-violent, civic and respectful of national laws and norms. The impact of ultra-conservative interpretations of Islam has been very limited, and there has been no major attack on non-Muslim or European targets. Alibašić also argues that Bosnian Islam is democratic and pluralistic, meaning participatory and inclusive, characteristics that are probably irreversible. The inclusive and participatory nature of the IC, ‘a melting pot of sorts’, begets pluralism, and the ‘inclusion of non-clerics further moderates Bosnian Islam and directs it towards the mainstream.’⁴⁹

Since Bosnian Islam is also nationalised, having become the main denominator of Bosniaks’ ethno-national identity, religious and national identities often underpin each other. While Bosnian Muslims ‘are very pragmatic when it comes to balancing patriotism and faithfulness to their culture with allegiance to their religious principles’, as Alibašić suggests, ‘it is often difficult to say where Islam stops, and national culture begins.’⁵⁰ According to him, this can be seen as an obstacle for any endeavour to ‘export’ Bosnian Islam as a model within Europe more widely. Bosnian Islam is certainly not a panacea, indeed, or a final model for solving complex and often context-driven questions concerning Islam and Muslims in the European context, particularly in Western European countries. However, there is no question that Bosnian experience of Islam can help us tackle those questions and not just for Europe but for Muslims, too. The question of the institutionalisation of Islam, for example, which is often discussed with regard to Muslims in Europe, is one area where the IC of Bosnia Herzegovina, despite its limitations, can be a source of inspiration.

⁴⁸ Alibašić 2007.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 6.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

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