

Muslims in Bosnia and Herzegovina: Conflicting and Shifting (Self)Perceptions

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Abstract

The article “Muslims in Bosnia and Herzegovina: Conflicting and Shifting (Self)Perceptions” discusses the self-perceptions and outside images of the Bosnian Muslim community by looking at a selection of recent scholarly works on the topic. A particular effort was made to analyse several recent empirical surveys on religiosity and the socio-political attitudes of Bosnian Muslims. The emerging picture is one of conflicting and shifting (self)perceptions. To some, this community is a source of hope and inspiration, while to others it is a source of concern. In the aftermath of genocide, the community itself is uncertain about its future and its place in the hearts and minds of its neighbors and global community.

Keywords: Muslims, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Self-perceptions, Images

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1. Introduction

Compared with other Muslim communities of a similar size, the Bosnian Muslim community has been well studied since 1992. The main focus of those studies has been placed on the way in which this community struggled to defend its homeland and uphold its Islamic identity. The fact that it is an old community with a century-old history in Europe has been an additional yet problematic factor, as will be elaborated below.

This community has regularly featured in various global surveys of the Muslim world, security studies, research on Ottoman legacy, discussions on the emerging trends in Islamic thought and education, inter-religious dialogue, genocide and peace studies. The main themes of studies on Islam and Muslims in Bosnia-Herzegovina since 1992 have been: (1) the Ottoman legacy in Bosnia, (2) the encounter of Bosnian Muslims with (post)modernity, (3) the Bosnian Islamic tradition and its relevance for other European Muslims, (4) Bosnian Islamic institutions and their replicability elsewhere, (5) the religious revival, (6) ethnic cleansing and genocide, and (7) Islamophobia and radicalization. There have also been several anthropological studies, as well as many literary and artistic pieces, mainly movies addressing various aspects of the community's life. Most of those studies in the English language have been conducted by international authors and institutes, while an ever-increasing number of them are produced by Bosnian scholars living abroad.

The emerging picture is one of conflicting and shifting (self)perceptions. To some, this community is a source of hope and inspiration, while to others it is a source of concern and threat. In the aftermath of genocide, the community itself is uncertain about its future and its place in the hearts and minds of its neighbors and global community.

2. Who is conducting research and on what?

Scholars from various fields have taken an interest in Bosnian Muslims. In each field, one could identify four subcategories of scholars: local, regional, international and Bosnian scholars living abroad. While generalizations are problematic, local Muslim scholars have intimate knowledge of the community, they tend to be sympathetic toward their subject topics, they mostly write in Bosnian language and often lack world-class research training. Regional scholars are divided between those who try to be scholarly and impartial and those who hold, generate and disseminate the worst prejudices against Bosnian Muslims. International scholars – except for some “security experts” – tend to be impartial towards Bosnian Muslims. Finally, Bosnian Muslim experts working abroad are slowly establishing themselves as new authorities on Bosnian Muslims. They know the community well, have access, write in European languages and often have better theoretical background in their fields, having received at least part of their academic training abroad. Let us now turn to various academic fields, starting with Philology.

Relatively favorable conditions in the 20th century have facilitated the continuity of Oriental linguistic and literary tradition among Bosnian Muslims. Local Oriental philologists have been instrumental in the study of intellectual and literary heritage of the community, contributing in the process to its identity formation and self-perception. Working at the Department of Oriental Philology, Oriental Institute and Gazi Husraw Bey’s Library, Amir Ljubović (d. 2019), Esad Duraković, Behija Zlatar, Fehim Nametak, Mustafa Jahić, Munir Mujić, Adnan Kadrić, and their colleagues have made a significant contribution towards the preservation and academic assessment of the Bosnian Muslim legacy in Oriental languages. Their work has been

internationally recognized. For instance, in 2018 the retired professor of Arabic Literature Esad Duraković received the Sheikh Hamad Award for Translation and International Understanding.

In Serbia, the best-known expert on Bosnian Muslims and Islam in general is Darko Tanasković, a retired professor at the University of Belgrade and former Serbian ambassador to the Vatican and Turkey. Unfortunately, Tanasković has betrayed his profession like few other Islamologists have done. His most malicious and consistently repeated accusation is that of double-faced actions or double-talk among Bosnian Muslims. He outrageously claimed that even Bosnian “Muslim” atheists and Communists, work for accomplishing the Islamic mission (Alibašić, 2010: 6-7). His protégé Miroljub Jevtić – Political scientist at the University of Belgrade – has been much less subtle in his attacks on Islam and Muslims (Jevtić, 1998 and 2001). Other researchers like Rade Božović have resisted the nationalist social and peer pressure. The Croatian counterpart Daniel Bucan has been much more scholarly in his writings, although not without controversy (Duraković, 2017).

Balkan peoples are major fans of history. Thus, it is no surprise that local historians have done a significant job in studying the past of their community. Besides the Ottoman period, Austro-Hungarian and Yugoslav periods have been equally well studied with “Islamic” themes prominently featuring. Most of those historians hail from the University of Sarajevo: Atif Purivatra (d. 2001), Enver Redžić (d. 2009), Mustafa Imamović (d. 2017), Enver Imamović, Fikret Karčić, Enes Pelidija, Husnija Kamberović, Safet Bandžović, Edin Radušić, and others. Some come from Tuzla and other centers (e.g. Adnan Jahić).¹ Regionally, few historians in Serbia have maintained scholarly standards as Olga Zirojević. Most historians have fallen in line with the dominant nationalist rhetoric (Smajić, 2016). Among international historians, the work of Noel Malcolm and Marko Atilla Hoare has received the most attention. Both have written very readable and well-documented accounts of Bosnian history (Malcolm, 1994; Hoare 2007). Xavier Bougarel has written on the emergence of Bosnian Muslim identity formation, developments in contemporary Islamic thought and Muslim military units during WWII

¹ It would take long to list the works of all these authors.

(Bougarel, 2018). Luxembourgian political scientist and historian Florian Bieber has become an authority on inter-ethnic and nationalistic issues in former Yugoslavia (Bieber, 2005 & 2018; Bieber & Galijaš & Archer, 2016). Fabio Giomi of CETOBAC is slowly emerging as a foremost expert on Muslim women history in former Yugoslavia.²

While it is difficult to speak of Muslim theologians properly in the Bosnian context until the mid-1990s, a number of scholars trained in Philology, Law and Philosophy have engaged in what could be loosely termed Islamic Theology. In this respect a few scholars have made a name for themselves locally and internationally: Mustafa Cerić, Fikret Karčić, Enes Karić, Rešid Hafizović, Adnan Silajdžić, Šefik Kurdić, Fuad Sedić, Zuhdija Adilović, Šukrija Ramić, and Safvet Halilović. They have engaged in both contextualizing the Islamic message in Bosnia and presenting the developments in Bosnian Islamic thought and practice to the outside world (Karčić, 199 & 2015; Karić, 2011).³ Enes Karić has successfully ventured into novel writing with six novels with Bosnian and Islamic themes behind him. Several of these novels have been translated into German, Turkish, Albanian, and Slovenian languages. However, in the Muslim world the late President Alija Izetbegović is by far the most respected and widely-read Bosnian author.⁴ Among local non-Muslim theologians, Mato Zovkić – professor emeritus of the Catholic Theology at the University of Sarajevo – has distinguished himself with his close observation of the Bosnian Islamic intellectual scene (Zovkić, 2018). The late Professor Radovan Bigović (1956-2012) of Belgrade Orthodox Theology was similarly engaged.

The Sociology of Religion went almost extinct during the Socialist period. Marxism ‘has resolved’ all religion-related questions and therefore there was almost nothing left for sociology to study. Almost. Today, a few local scholars engage in the study of various aspects of Islam and Muslim experience, most of all Ivan Cvitković, Šaćir Filandra, and Dino Abazović from

² <http://cetobac.ehess.fr/index.php?590> accessed 28 March 2020.

³ Hansjörg Schmid has written on the scholarship of Cerić, Karčić, and Karić in his *Islam im europäischen Haus: Wege zu einer interreligiösen Sozialethik* (Freiburg: Herder, 2012).

⁴ The author has repeatedly been reminded of this fact. A couple of years before his death, the Egyptian thinker Abdulwahhab al-Masiri (d. 2008) spoke to me about his deep appreciation for President Izetbegović’s thought. When walking the streets of Rabat in July 2019, I noticed among the popular books sold on the streets Izetbegović’s memoirs from prison. Examples abound.

the Faculty of Political Sciences (Cvitković and Abazović, 2006). In the neighboring Serbia, Milan Vukomanović of the Faculty of Philosophy has focused his efforts on Sufism (Vukomanović, 2005 and 2008). Among international anthropologists and sociologists, two scholars have distinguished themselves: Tone Bringa and Darryl Li. Bringa conducted her field work in a mixed Muslim-Catholic village in 1980s not far from Sarajevo but published her thesis in 1995 (Bringa, 1995). Li undertook field work for his Ph.D. in the early-2000s. He published his meticulously researched and written work *The Universal Enemy: Jihad, Empire, and the Challenge of Solidarity* with Stanford University Press in 2020. Experts in the field of religious studies are the latest to join this cohort. Here, one could mention Michael Sells, Ina Merdjanova or Christian Moe (Sells, 1998; Merdjanova and Brodeur, 2010). Of special interest to anthropologists was Islamic life under the Communist rule and foreign presence in Bosnia.

It comes as no surprise that genocide and ethnic cleansing survivors and witnesses have added substantial literature. Among the most prominent authors from this cluster are Hasan Nuhanović and Emir Suljagić. Hasan Nuhanović is a former UN forces interpreter whose brother, mother and father were evicted from the Dutch battalion compound in Potočari near Srebrenica in July 1995 and later executed by the Serb forces. Emir meticulously documented events surrounding Genocide in Srebrenica and successfully sued the Dutch government. He has also written a novel about life in Srebrenica before its fall (Nuhanović, 2019). He is also a major character in Ausma Zehanat Khan's *The Unquiet Dead* (Minotaur Books, 2015). Few scholars in the region base their writing on the evidence collected by the International Criminal Tribunal for Former Yugoslavia (ICTY) and other courts. Relativization and denial of genocide and other war crimes is common especially in Serbia. However, the majority of international journalists and scholars such as Roy Gutman, Peter Mass, Samantha Power, Robert Donia, and Marko A. Hoare have done an outstanding job in studying war at the macro and micro levels, documenting war crimes and debating the war crime deniers. Brendan Simms wrote a damning account of the UK response in his *Unfinest Hour* (Simms, 2001). In 1996, the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace published its report *Unfinished Peace: Report of the International Commission on the Balkans* on the causes of the Balkan conflicts and an

assessment of the European, American, and UN responses. Post-conflict reconstruction and progress, transitional justice, the ICTY, the International Court of Justice (ICJ), the quest for missing persons, post-conflict memories, reconciliation, post-war education, and similar topics have been at the heart of works by the late Cherif Bassiouni (d. 2017), Robert Donia, Florence Hartman, Sir Geoffrey Nice, Nevenka Tromp, and numerous other scholars.

Much has been written about radicalization among the Bosnian Muslims. A few local scholars have gained credibility on this topic, including Vlado Azinović, Edina Bećirović, and Sead Turčalo of the University of Sarajevo.⁵ Regional and international “experts” (as well as politicians) tend to single out Muslim extremism and exaggerate its indicators. In her review of a locally-produced movie about the radicalization phenomenon (*On the Path*), Neda Atanasoski observes:

Many anti-terrorism analyses focused on the region cover similar themes, including: the *value* of Bosnia-Herzegovina and the Balkan Peninsula to radical Muslims because of their European location, which serves as a point of infiltration into the rest of Europe; the *radicalization* of Muslims in the Balkans after the Cold War, which reaffirms the idea that *if* Bosnian Muslims have always been in Europe, they were secular and therefore European until their recent exposure to non-European ways of being Muslim; and the insistence on Ottoman histories that have made the region vulnerable or open to Islamic incursion to begin with. ... The notion that the Balkan nations are ‘exporting’ terrorism, and that the region is a staging ground from which radical Islam enters fortress Europe, implies that terror is never indigenous to Europe itself, but always smuggled in from elsewhere, in this instance through the convenient ‘Balkan Path’. ... The whiteness of Balkan-born Muslims is here rendered a commodity, with whiteness being given value in what Deliso calls a ‘human resource’ for Osama bin Laden ‘and other terrorist masterminds’ (2007: 6). At the same time, white skin is in this case also the mask. ... even white skin becomes suspect, hiding belief that is anything but European (Atanasoski, 2015).

Bosnian Muslim academics living in diaspora represent a new phenomenon. There were very few of them during Socialist Yugoslavia (eg. Smail Balić, d. 2002, and Adil Zulfikarpašić, d. 2008) but since the 1990s their numbers have grown tremendously from the United States (Ermin Sinanović) to Australia (Hariz Halilovich, Adis Đuderija). The largest number is in Europe: Emin

⁵ <https://atlanticinitiative.org/ai-team/>, accessed 26 April 2020.

Poljarević at Uppsala, Armina Omerika in Frankfurt, Esnaf Begić in Osnabruck, Sejad Mekić at Exeter, Rijad Dautović in Vienna, etc.⁶

The empirical research produced by empirical research centers such as Pew Research Center, the European Values Study or International Republican Institute offer a rare reliable insight into the attitudes of Bosnian Muslims from a comparative perspective. Indeed, the next section is dedicated to those findings. A valuable supplement to these reports is provided by briefs and policy papers produced by government institutions such as the US Congress Research Service and European Parliamentary Research Service (Lilyanova, 2017). The quality of these papers significantly varies, with American reports generally being better researched and substantiated.⁷

3. Empirical studies and surveys on religiosity and socio-political attitudes

Pew Research Center and International Republican Institute surveys (Pew, 2012; Pew, 2013; Pew, 2017; International Republican Institute - IRI, 2017 and 2018) are rich sources of data on the attitudes of Bosnian Muslims to religion, family values, state-church relations, religious others, big powers, and a host of other issues. We provide a summary of those findings, some of which need explaining, which I will try to do.⁸

In terms of religiosity, Pew Research Center 2012, 2013 and 2017 surveys are the most comprehensive recent source. According to those surveys, if judged by how much they pray,

⁶ For an assessment of the state of research into Bosnian Muslim themes, see A. Alibašić, "Bosnia and Herzegovina", J. Cesari, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of European Islam* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 429-74.

⁷ Artists and movie makers deserve special attention as Bosnia has also been in their focus for the past 25 years.

⁸ Two sources were released too late to be included in this survey: European Values Study (<https://europeanvaluesstudy.eu>, accessed 29 March 2020) and IIIT Mapping the Terrain surveys (<https://iiit.org/en/mapping-the-terrain/>, accessed 5 April 2020).

read the Qur'an, fast, go to mosque or Mecca, Bosnian Muslims are much less religious than Arabs, Turks, or South Asian Muslims but often more religious than some East European and Central Asian Muslims (in particular from Albania, Azerbaijan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, and Kazakhstan). Here, we provide a summary of the 2012 and 2013 surveys, with occasional reference to the 2017 one.⁹ It is not always clear what could be behind occasionally significant discrepancies in figures in just five years.

Almost all Bosnian Muslims (96%) profess a belief in one God and Prophet Muhammad, while fewer believe in the afterlife (83% in 2012 and 81% in 2017). Comparative figures are 92% and 87% for Turkey, 76% and 73% for Russia, 72% and 61% for Kosovo, 53% and 46% for Albania. Only half of Bosnian Muslims believe in angels, compared with 96% in Turkey, 60% in Russia and Kosovo and 42% in Albania. This contradicts the standard Islamic Theology that all pillars of faith should be held in equal rank.

Religion mattered very much to 36% of Bosnian Muslims in 2012, compared to 15% of Albanians, 44% of Muslims in Kosovo and Russia, and 67% in Turkey. In 2017, 59% said that religion was "very important" in their lives, which is more than in Russia, Bulgaria or Georgia. They are also more religious than either of the two groups of Christians in Bosnia (Pew, 2017: p. 47, 48, 62).

In 2012, 14% of Bosnian Muslims declared that they prayed five times a day, while another 4% prayed several times a day. In 2017, 20% said that they prayed five times a day, compared with 23% of Russian Muslims (Pew, 2017: p. 48, 70-71). Only 30% pray once a week in the mosque, compared to 44% in Turkey. Nonetheless, they are more observant than the country's Orthodox and Catholic populations. The number of those who never attend a mosque (10%; 8% men and 13% women) is much lower than in other countries surveyed in Eastern Europe and Central Asia (23% in Turkey, 44% in Albania, 33% in Kosovo, 33% in Russia, and a whopping 71% in Uzbekistan), which could be read as an indication of the cohesive role that religion plays in

⁹ These are the years of publication. The actual surveys were conducted in Bosnia in 2011 and 2015-2016.

the Bosnian Muslim identity. However, this should not be overplayed as Bosnia has her own share of exclusivist secularists.

In 2012, 75% reported fasting during Ramadan, which probably does not mean the whole of Ramadan, but rather only a few days. In 2017, the figure was down to 66%. The comparative figure is 55% for Russia, 48% for Georgia and 36% for Bulgaria. Even 2017 figure for Bosnian Muslims might be misleading due to the manner in which the question was posed. It should be broken down like the one on prayers whereby a distinction should have been made between those who fast the whole month and those who fast on only selected days.

In 2017, most Muslims in Bosnia (72%) reported giving Zakat, while fewer did so in Georgia (61%), Russia (45%), and Bulgaria (26%) (Pew, 2017: p. 73). Based on the figures of Zakah collected by the Islamic Community, one is prone to think that many respondents confused Zakat al-Fitr with Zakah. This requires a brief explanation: since the late-1960s the Islamic Community in Bosnia and Herzegovina has run a very successful campaign of collecting Zakat al-Fitr or Sadaqat al-Fitr at the end of Ramadan. The collection of Zakah – which is religious tax on wealth – has been less successful.

Belonging to Sufi *tariqas* remains a marginal phenomenon (2%), as is conversion to Islam. Only 1% of Bosnian Muslims were not Muslims at birth. Bosnian Muslims are amongst the least superstitious Muslims globally, although 21% believe in witchcraft, 13% wear a talisman, and 16% use religious healers. This was sufficient to enable a charlatan-like certain Mekki al Toraabi to run a humiliating circus of “healing sessions” in the largest sports complex in Sarajevo for seven weeks in fall 2010, before he was evicted by the authorities (Radio Sarajevo, 2019).

As always, survey results are much more telling when placed in a comparative, multi-religious perspective. Bosnian Muslims tend to be more likely to favor a multicultural society than local Orthodox Christians and Catholics, although large majorities of the other two communities say that a multicultural society is preferable (Pew, 2017: p. 43, 154). In Bosnia, 63% of Muslims say

that the Qur'an should be taken literally, compared with 41% of Catholics and 23% of Orthodox Christians who think the same way about the Bible (Pew, 2017: p. 88). Likewise, three-quarters (75%) in 2012 and almost two-thirds (64%) in 2017 took the view that there is only one correct interpretation of Islam. In Russia 53% and in Kosovo 52% of Muslims held the same opinion (Pew, 2012: p. 11). One is inclined to interpret this as a by-product of the position of the Islamic Community asserting its authority as the sole interpreter of Islam in the country in the post-9/11 world when most Muslims wanted clarity and to stay clear of accusations of extremism and terrorism.

On intra-Muslim relations, 16% consider tensions between more and less devout Muslims to be a major problem, which is about the global median. About one-third (36%) hold a pluralist view of religion, saying that many religions lead to salvation, whereas the global median for Muslims is 18%. Almost double that number (59%) believe that only Islam can save a human soul. Those praying several times a day are much more likely to hold this latter view. One-third of Bosnian Muslims believe that converting others to Islam is a religious duty, whereby Only Muslims in a few ex-Communist countries are less supportive of this proposition. Almost double that number (59%) do not agree. Religious conflict is considered a major problem by 35%, which is about the global median. About one-third (31%) of Bosnian Muslims consider Christians to be antagonistic to Muslims, which places them among the most suspicious Muslims communities towards Christians in Central Asia and Eastern Europe. On the other hand, only 14% consider Muslims to be antagonistic to Christians, which is the global median. About half of them say that they know at least something about Christianity, which places them among the better-informed Muslims about this faith tradition. Almost two-thirds (59%) think that Islam and Christianity have a lot in common, while 36% believe that they are very different religions. Those reporting at least some knowledge of Christianity are much more likely to answer positively to this latter question. However, 93% report that all or most of their close friends are Muslims, which is about the global median (95%). Similarly, only 15% would be comfortable with their children marrying a Christian, with only a 2% difference between that child being a son or daughter. Almost every fifth (18%) respondent reported attending inter-faith meetings with Christians, which makes

them one of the most exposed Muslim communities to this kind of events outside Africa (Pew, 2013: p. 105-126, 139).

On the issues of modernity, science and popular culture, a majority of 54% believe that religiosity and modernity are compatible, which is the global median, while 40% do not think so. A few Muslim communities outside Sub-Saharan Africa are more critical of modernity. While there is no specific information for Bosnia, globally the levels of religiosity, education, age and gender do not have a significant impact on this attitude. Half of Bosnian Muslims are convinced that there is no tension between religion and science, which places them along with Russian and Kosovo Muslims but somewhat below the global median of 54%. Many fewer Albanian Muslims (30%) think the same way. However, a high 42% think that there is a tension between the two, which is the highest value in Eastern Europe, Central and SE Asia after Albania (57%). Religiosity, education, age and gender do not seem to have impact on this position. They are almost evenly split between those who say that humanity has evolved over time (50% against a median of 53%) and those who believe that it was always as is (45%). More devout respondents are much more likely (+19 percentage points) to reject the theory of evolution. Almost two-thirds (62%) report liking Western entertainment (music, movies and TV), which is among the highest in the survey except for Albania, Kosovo and Guinea Bissau. Less than half (46%) believe that this entertainment has a negative impact on morality. Only in Albania and Kosovo do fewer Muslims believe that this is the case. From cursory observation, one could guess that diaspora from these three countries in Europe contribute to such a favorable attitude. Those who pray more often are much more negative in their assessment of Western culture (+24 percentage points) (Pew, 2013: p. 127-137).

There are relatively low levels of rejection of Muslims among Christians in countries that were part of the 1990s Yugoslav wars. For example, in Bosnia, only 8% of Catholics and 12% of Orthodox Christians say that they would be unwilling to accept Muslims as neighbors. However, 36% and 53%, respectively, would not accept them as members of the family. Jews are

generally most accepted, and sometimes also Roma (Pew, 2017: p. 46-7, 161-2; Pew, 2019: p. 15).

Almost all Bosnian Muslims feel pride in their Muslim identity (97%). This compares with 90% of Russian Muslims and 92% of Bulgarian Muslims. Two in three (66%) feel a strong bond with other Muslims and 73% feel a special responsibility to support other Muslims. Relevant figures are 60% and 70% for Russian Muslims, and 54% and 39% for Bulgarian (Pew, 2017: p. 61).

Only 15% support the idea of Shari'ah as positive law, and two-thirds of them only for Muslims despite the fact that 52% believe that Shari'a is God's word (and not developed by men based on God's word) with only one interpretation (56%). Only Albanian, Turkish, Kazakhstani and Azerbaijani Muslims are less supportive of Shari'ah (Pew, 2013: p. 15, 18, 42, 44), However, when asked whether religious judges should have the power to decide on family and property issues, only 6% answered affirmatively (Pew, 2013: p. 50-51), the lowest value in the world, which confirms the general observation about Bosnian Muslims as an irreversibly secularized community and being quite suspicious of religious authorities. Among those who support Shari'a as positive law, every third person supports corporal punishments, while every fifth person supports stoning for adulterers. Only every seventh of those support the death penalty for apostasy. Notably, 23% of Bosnian Muslims think that current land laws are in line with Shari'a, while 68% think that they are not, of which 50% think that it is good that they do not (Pew, 2013: p. 52, 54, 55, 57, 58).

Only 51% prefer a democracy over a powerful leader (47%), which is not good news for democracy and might reflect Bosnian Muslims' impatience with powerlessness, which has seen many of them dead, displaced or abused in the 1990s. Three in four feel that they are free to practice their religion, while 94% that think it is also good that others have freedom of religion. However, these percentages do not mean much as after the ethnic cleansing and genocide of the 1990s most Muslims live in areas that they control politically. The Muslims most likely to be discriminated are those few who live as a minority in the Serb-controlled entity of the Republic

of Srpska and four Croat-dominated cantons. Being among the least supportive Muslims of political role of religious leaders, only 5% support their major role in politics while another 12% think that religious leaders should have some influence. Two in three persons think that Islamic political parties are no different from other parties, while 17% think that they are worse. Only 12% think that they are better. In line with the global median, about one in three are worried about Muslim extremism, while another third are worried about both Muslim and Christian extremism. Two out of three respondents opine that one has to believe in God to be moral, which tends toward the lower end of the global Muslim spectrum. As expected, those who report praying more often report significantly higher support (22%) for this and other propositions (Pew, 2013: p. 60-74).

Bosnian Muslims emerge as global champions in their opposition to suicide bombing, with 96% of them opposing it, of which 86% are against it always while 10% would approve of it in rare circumstances. The global median on this is 72% (Pew, 2013: p. 29).¹⁰ Nine in ten (91%) oppose prostitution, while 83% do not approve of homosexuality. Five percentage approve of it, while 10% think that it is not a moral issue, which is close to the regional median. Alcohol consumption is morally opposed by 60%, accepted as moral by 16%, and considered not to be a moral issue by 21%, which is close to the regional Muslim median. Euthanasia is disapproved by 72%, which again is close to the global median. Abortion is considered morally unacceptable by 66% and morally acceptable by 14%, which is less than both the global and regional Muslim median. Premarital and extramarital sex are morally unacceptable to 53%, acceptable to 25% and not considered a moral issue by 16% of them, which is lower than the global and regional Muslim median. Suicide is rejected by 92%, which is higher than the global and regional Muslim median (Pew 2013, 76-81).

¹⁰ The International Republican Institute (IRI, 2018: 129) provides somewhat different figures. 2% say that it can often be justified, with another 11% saying that it can sometimes be justified. 23% opined that it can be sometimes justified and 60% opined that it can never be justified. The fact that Serbs responsible for around 85% of war crimes in the 1990s overwhelmingly (70%) said that violence could never be justified is an intriguing finding. It could be a sign of change in collective values but most probably an instance of a socially desirable response.

On family matters, 19% consider divorce to be morally wrong, while 60% say that it is morally acceptable, which places them among the more liberal Muslim communities in the world. Polygamy is disapproved by 85%, which is the highest value among the 37 countries surveyed. It is accepted by only 4% as moral, compared to 49% among Malaysians and 86% Senegalese, for instance. About half consider family planning to be morally alright and 18% think that it is not, with the rest supposedly considering it not to be a moral issue. They are among the top Muslim communities in opposition to honor killing (79%), irrespective of who committed the offense (Pew, 2013: p. 82-89).

On women-related issues, Bosnian Muslims overwhelmingly support women's choice of veil in public (92%) and divorce (94%) in larger numbers than any other Muslims who were asked the same question. However, 45% believe that a wife should always obey her husband. Only Albanians and Kosovars support this view in lower numbers (40 and 34%, respectively). However, those who support Shari'ah as positive law are 34 percentage points more likely to express this position. Equal inheritance enjoys the support of 79% of them and 88% of Muslims in Turkey. Those supporting Shari'a as positive law are somewhat less likely (18%) to agree. There is no major difference in these figures for men and women, although women are slightly more supportive of equal inheritance (Pew, 2013: p. 92-98).

More Bosnian Muslims than either Catholics or Orthodox Christians agree with the statement that maintaining strong relations with the EU (91%), Germany (90%), Turkey (84%), and the US (76%) is in Bosnia's national interest. However, only 55% think so of relations with Russia. In 2017, they considered Turkey and Germany to be the largest Bosnian allies (43% and 29%, respectively). In 2018, the numbers had changed to 51% and 17%, respectively. The United States is the third highest-ranked nation with only 9% of Bosniaks (i.e. Bosnian Muslims) thinking so. They are also the most enthusiastic supporters of NATO membership in Bosnia, with 84% of them strongly or somewhat supporting that membership, with only 10% somewhat or strongly opposing it. These figures are close to those for Catholics but very different from Orthodox Christians, only 9% of whom support the NATO membership. As one could expect,

Bosniaks are the largest supporters of Bosnia joining the EU (89%). Croats are next with 86%, while only 53% of Serbs support that project (IRI, 2017: p. 31, 37; IRI, 2018: p. 34).

While this is to be expected in the light of the role of NATO in the 1990s, some might be surprised by the comparative figures of those who agree with the statement that “BiH belongs to the West”. Almost one-third of Bosnian Muslims agree with this statement, compared with 17% of Bosnian Catholics and 15% of Bosnian Orthodox. The majority of all three communities think that Bosnia belongs to neither the West nor East (59% of Muslims, 72% of Catholics, and 62% of Orthodox).

The attitude of the three communities to the secular state might be even more unexpected. It is often claimed that Muslims have reservations about the secular state. However, the survey results show that while all three religious communities in Bosnia have similar attitudes, Muslims are marginally stronger supporters of the secular state. The religious state enjoys the support of 13-17% of respondents in the three communities. The figure for Muslims is corroborated by the number of Muslims supporting the Shari’ah as positive law (15%) in the Pew survey.

They almost equally value a prosperous economy (43%) and democracy (46%). Catholics value democracy (57%) more than prosperity (36%), while Orthodox value prosperity much more (67%) than democracy (25%) (IRI, 2017: p. 111-12). Overall, 46% of Bosnians prefer democracy, compared to only 25% of Serbia citizens (Pew, 2017: p. 40).

4. Emerging image: Conflicting and shifting (self)perceptions

The overall emerging picture of Bosnian Muslims from empirical surveys is one of a believing but not very practicing Muslim community, vehemently opposed to violence, unsupportive of Shari’a, less superstitious than many other Muslims but still liable to manipulation by charlatans, relatively suspicious of science, a pro-secular state, pro-European and pro-NATO,

and cautious about the intentions of their neighbors when compared both with other Muslims globally and non-Muslims in Bosnia (Draganović, 2016: p. 291-305).

Beyond empirical surveys, the representations of Bosnian Muslims vary. To some, they are a source of hope that Islam can be contextualized, an inspiration, example and model to be emulated by other European Muslims. In order to enable this, more research should be conducted on their Islamic thought (as well as that of Albanians and Tatars). The radicalization amongst them is perceived to be a serious problem but is actually less threatening than other forms of radicalization in the region. When asked to name examples of extremism from their experience, most of respondents failed to substantiate their claims about Muslim extremism. After all, those other forms of extremism produced 96% of war crimes in the 1990s according to the UN's ICTY statistics (Cohen, 1995: p. A1; Waller, 2002: p. 276–277; Kennedy, 2002: p. 252).

To others, they are acceptable because they are *different* from other Muslims either because they are native or because they are secularized. In both versions, this attitude is troubling as Bosnian Muslims are presented as a positive cultural exception set in opposition to other Muslims, implicitly incompatible with Europe. Xavier Bougarel rightfully observes “...the will to present Bosnian Islam as a sort of positive cultural exception sometimes entails a conception of this ‘European and tolerant’ Islam as homogeneous and *sui generis*, set in opposition to another, implicit Islam, considered ‘intolerant since non-European’, which is located beyond the Bosphorus and the Strait of Gibraltar, or represented by the ‘non-autochthonous’ Muslim populations living in Western Europe. Therefore, the idea of an insurmountable opposition between Europe and Islam is not deconstructed by such use of the Bosnian example, but simply silenced, only to be perpetuated elsewhere” (Bougarel, 2007: p. 97).

Along the same lines, Piro Rexhepi writes:

Formally established by the Habsburgs in 1882, the Islamic Community of Bosnia and Herzegovina has proven to be one of the most enduring of all the Habsburg colonial legacies. ... Eventually, it was to become the longest continuously operating Habsburg institution in BiH. ...

There are two striking features in the call by the representative of the Islamic Community of Bosnia for Bosnian Muslims to act as models for and overseers of European Islam, one having to do with the corroboration of their Europeaness and the other with the origins of the institution of the Islamic Community of Bosnia itself. In the first case, the continuous reiteration that Muslims of Bosnia are actually European—unlike, say, the Muslims of the Middle East or North Africa—suggests that they are not necessarily perceived as such. In the second instance, the credibility of the institution of the Islamic Community, and its modernity, stems from its colonial roots. ... By itself, then, the notion of a vulnerable and potentially threatening Balkan Islam at the border of Europe explains very little about the outlook of the diverse communities in question. Nonetheless, it has become the determining frame for thinking about the Western Balkans as a deeply problematic politico-theological space (Rexhepi, 2019: p. 479, 480, 482, 484).

It is particularly troubling that *some* Bosnians have internalized this picture to the annoyance of many other Muslims in Europe (Behloul, 2012: p. 7-26; Jević, 2019). However, as the *Religious Belief and National Belonging in Central and Eastern Europe* study shows, the majority disagree and feel solidarity with the rest of the Ummah (Pew, 2017: p. 61).

In response to this, one can offer the argument that while cultural differences between Bosnian and other Muslims are undeniable, it is incorrect to claim that Bosnian Muslims are some sort of exception. It is rather a matter of time. In 1875, Bosnian Muslims were little different from other Ottoman Muslims. All observable differences today are the result of a historical experience spanning 140 years, during which this community had a chance to contextualize and accommodate its understanding and practice of Islam to the European culture. Key to this experience has been the continuity of administrative, intellectual, and educational tradition, however weak at some points. There is nothing exceptional about Bosnian Muslims. It is a matter of time. As for the fact that they are native, this in itself does not mean much. Despite the tendency to highlight that feature today in the context of debates about foreign Islamic influences, one should remember that it was of no consequence in the 1990s. Put simply, all victims of the Srebrenica genocide were native Bosnian Muslims.

The third perception is that of “White al-Qaida”, which is a threat to the West and its civilization. Bosnian Muslims are not European in a civilizational sense, or at least not yet fully European. In the study typical of this type, Leslie S. Lebl writes:

Although the levels of Islamist terrorism and separatist movements are comparable to those elsewhere in Europe, they are particularly troublesome in Bosnia for two reasons. First, senior political and religious Bosniak (Muslim) leaders have long-standing ties to the Muslim Brotherhood and Islamist terrorism, including al-Qaeda and Iran, that they are very reluctant to abandon. Second, Islamism contributes significantly to Bosnia’s dysfunction as a country. Calls to re-impose traditional Islamic law, or *sharia*, arouse opposition from Bosnian Serbs and Croats, as does the nostalgia for the Ottoman Empire and Islamic Caliphate shared by key Bosniak leaders, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), and the Turkish government (Lebl, 2014).¹¹

As one researcher observed, even internationals in Bosnia constructed boundaries that maintained a difference:

As Kimberley Coles’ ethnographic research on Europeans employed by international organizations operating in Bosnia-Herzegovina shows, even though ‘internationals consciously attempt to integrate Bosnia-Herzegovina and Bosnians into their “rightful” place in a newly unified Europe’, and moreover, even though they ‘viewed Bosnia as geographically “in” Europe and explicitly worked towards the goal of political, social, and economic inclusion into a common, unified, post-Cold War Europe’, they nonetheless ‘constructed boundaries that maintained difference. Boundary shifts kept the Bosnians categorically separate, as non-European (or as not yet fully European) and

¹¹ Leslie S. Lebl is a fellow of the American Center for Democracy and a Principal of Lebl Associates. A former Foreign Service Officer, she now writes, lectures, and consults on political and security matters. During her Foreign Service career, Ms. Lebl served as Political Advisor to the Commander of Stabilization Forces (SFOR) in Bosnia-Herzegovina in the late-1990s, first in the American sector in Tuzla and then at the SFOR headquarters in Sarajevo. For more of similar thinking, see Evan Kohlmann, *Al-Qaida’s Jihad in Europe: The Afghan- Bosnian Network* (Oxford, UK: Berg, 2004) and John R. Schindler, *Unholy Terror: Bosnia, Al-Qa’ida, and the Rise of Global Jihad* (St. Paul, MN: Zenith Press, 2007).

as lacking, in some cases inherently, certain requisite features of a cosmopolitan pan-European mentality' (Coles, 2007: p. 257–258 quoted by Atanasoski, 2015: p. 234).

This image seems to be very present in the top political circles of Europe. Every now and then, one or the other European prominent politician revives this image.¹² To many Bosnian Muslims, the presentation of the Nobel Prize for Literature in 2020 to Peter Handke – Austrian genocide denier and defender of Slobodan Milošević – "for an influential work that with linguistic ingenuity has explored the periphery and the specificity of human experience" was a wake-up call that this image is indeed still very strong in European cultural circles. Back in the 1990s, such perceptions delayed international intervention to the detriment of dozens of thousands of Muslims victims. Historian Taylor Branch writes in *The Clinton Tapes* that President Bill Clinton "...privately, said the resident, key allies objected that an independent Bosnia would be "unnatural" as the only Muslim nation in Europe.... He said President Francois Mitterrand of France had been especially blunt in saying that Bosnia did not belong, and the British officials also spoke of a painful but realistic restoration of Christian Europe" (Branch, 2009, 9-10).

The community itself is still uncertain about its future and its place in the hearts and minds of its neighbors, wider European society, and the global Muslim community. Expectations vary and it is difficult to satisfy everyone. As victims of genocide and demonstrably the truest carriers of European values in Bosnia, they do not always feel accepted. All of this prompts the impression that they are too Muslim for the West and their neighbors and not Muslim enough for other Muslims.

¹² <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/11/french-president-calls-bosnia-ticking-time-bomb-191108053518237.html>; <https://www.jpost.com/Opinion/Croatian-presidents-Islamophobia-masks-historical-revisionism-598266>, accessed 29 March 2020.

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