

Changing Contexts and Redefinitions of Identity among Bosniaks in Slovenia

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Abstract: This article provides an insight on the Bosniaks living in Slovenia, and on the way they understand Islam as a source of their identity. The findings of my fieldwork indicate that contemporary Bosniak self-identification in Slovenia depends on two main socio-historical contexts. On the one hand, war events in Bosnia and Herzegovina have also influenced the attitude of the Bosniaks living abroad towards the groups which featured at that time as « ethnic enemies ». On the other hand, due to increasing islamophobia since the independence in 1991, Bosniaks in Slovenia refrain from expressing openly their religious identity. Against this background, various self-representations of Bosniak national identity appear. For all Bosniaks living in Slovenia, Islam represents an important source of their identity. At the same time, however, it has become a highly controversial topic. For a majority of Bosniaks, Islam represents an essential ethnic marker which separates them from (Bosnian) Serbs and (Bosnian) Croats, while for others it represents the source of a « pure » religious identity and, therefore, does not overlap with their idea of Bosniak identity.

Résumé: Cet article offre un aperçu sur les Bosniaques vivant en Slovénie, et sur la manière dont ils perçoivent l'Islam comme source de leur identité. Les résultats de mon travail de terrain indiquent que la représentation qu'ont aujourd'hui d'eux-mêmes les Bosniaques de Slovénie est liée à deux contextes socio-historiques principaux. D'une part, les événements guerriers en Bosnie-Herzégovine ont aussi influencé l'attitude des Bosniaques vivant à l'étranger envers les groupes qui faisaient figure à l'époque d'« ennemis ethniques ». D'autre part, du fait d'une islamophobie croissante depuis l'indépendance en 1991, les Bosniaques de Slovénie évitent d'exprimer ouvertement leur identité religieuse. Dans ce contexte, diverses représentations de l'identité nationale bosniaque voient le jour. Pour tous les Bosniaques vivant en Slovénie, l'Islam représente une source importante de leur identité. Dans le même temps, toutefois, celui-ci est devenu un sujet fortement controversé. Pour une majorité de Bosniaques, l'Islam représente un marqueur ethnique essentiel qui les distingue des Bosno-Serbes et des Bosno-Croates ; pour d'autres, il représente la source d'une identité religieuse « pure », et ne coïncide donc pas avec leur idée de l'identité bosniaque.

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Introduction¹

Since identities are not self-contained but contextual, i.e. constructed in specific historical and social contexts², they depend upon social processes and transform themselves continually. They are also constructed in relation to other identities, which means that they come into existence only when they are confronted with the latter³. All individuals position themselves in relation to several kinds of social boundaries⁴ which appear as a consequence of the confrontation of different individuals or social groups in various situations⁵. That contributes to multiplicity and changeability in self-identification. The core of any identity is therefore embedded in a permanent negotiation of shifting social boundaries that change according to different historical and social contexts.

Social boundaries do not appear only as a manifestation of external demarcation between ethnic groups (ethnic boundaries) but also as a manifestation of various cleavages within ethnic groups (defining for example different social positions and individual ideological commitments). In some societies, ethnic and religious cleavages coincide, so that religion represents a source of distinctiveness, a marker that separates ethnic groups from each other. Even in such circumstances, however, members of the same ethnic group might have different perceptions of the religious markers which denote this ethnic difference.

This article provides an insight on the Bosniaks living in Slovenia, among whom there are growing discrepancies in the way of understanding Islam as a source of their identity. I demonstrate how, in this group, some people tend to consider religion primarily as a marker of ethnic difference in the Bosnian context (in relation to Bosnian Serbs and Croats), while others consider that Islam differentiate them from all non-Muslims in the world, and therefore also in the Slovenian context.

The discussion here is based on the findings of a fieldwork study conducted among Bosniaks living in Jesenice, a mining center in Northwest Slovenia⁶, and in Ljubljana, the Slovenian capital, between November 2003 and November 2004. During my fieldwork, I examined the meanings that various generations of Bosniaks ascribe to Islam. It should be noted that in my empirical research I tried to get an insight into identity issues by analyzing the meanings expressed by the actors themselves, but also by taking into account the wider social contexts within which these meanings emerge, and without which they can not be explained.

¹ I would like to thank Xavier Bougarel and my Ph.D. supervisor Bojan Baskar who helped with their suggestive readings of earlier drafts of this article, who provided me with useful examples and additional literature, and from both of whom I have learned much in the course of our conversations. I would also like to thank Dimitrina Mihaylova for the final editing of this article. Naturally, neither is responsible for the opinions expressed here, which are mine.

² **Barth (Frederik)**, (ed.), *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries : The Social Organization of Cultural Difference*, London : George Allen and Unwin, 1969.

³ **Eriksen (Thomas Hylland)**, *Ethnicity and Nationalism : Anthropological Perspectives*, London : Pluto Press, 1993.

⁴ In using the term « social boundaries », I am drawing on Barth's well-known work on ethnicity (see **Barth (Frederik)**, (ed.), *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries*, *op.cit.*). He argues that only interaction between ethnic groups defines boundaries between them, and that these boundaries actually represent selective perceptions of difference between their respective cultural repertoires.

⁵ **Hutnik (Nimmi)**, « Ethnic Minority Identification and Social Adaptation », *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 9 (2), 1986, pp. 150-167.

⁶ According to the last population census carried out in 2002, 3,885 denominational (religious) Muslims live in Jesenice (20 % of the local population), and 13,628 in Ljubljana (5 %).

The findings of my fieldwork indicate that Bosniak identity in Slovenia is articulated within two main contexts : the socio-political changes in Bosnia and Herzegovina and the changing perception of Muslims in Slovenia. Within these two contexts, multiple and changing self-representations of Bosniak identity appear : the main axes around which Bosniak identity rotates and articulates itself are, on the one hand, the religious boundaries which define Bosniaks as one of the three main ethnic groups of Bosnia-Herzegovina and, on the other hand, the religious boundaries which define them as a religious or ethnic group in Slovenia.

A Short History of Three Bosnian Ethnic Groups

Before the war, Bosnian Muslims talked about their identity in apparently contradictory terms. The terms « *nacija* » (nation) and « *vjera* » (faith) were often used as synonyms : if someone asked you about your « *nacija* », it was more likely that he or she was actually curious about your religion rather than your nationality. When anthropologist Tone Bringa came to Dolina, a village in central Bosnia, she answered the question by saying she was Norwegian, but the villagers had expected her to say she was a Protestant⁷. Such events show that people in Bosnia and Herzegovina have been used to link religion and a sense of belonging to a certain ethnic group. And that irrespective of their creed or nationality, i.e. irrespective of whether they were of Islamic, Orthodox or Catholic faith, whether they were ethnic Muslims⁸, Bosnian Croats or Bosnian Serbs. According to Tone Bringa, the term « *nacija* » refers therefore to ethno-religious identities⁹.

Tone Bringa and Ružica Čičak-Chand consider this kind of conceptualization among the three main ethnic groups living in Bosnia and Herzegovina as a legacy of the Ottoman *millet* system, an administrative structure dividing Bosnian people on the basis of religion rather than on the basis of a common language, a clearly defined territory, and a common past or origin¹⁰. According to some historians, the modern idea of nationhood began to spread from Serbia and Croatia to the Orthodox and Catholic population of Bosnia in the 19th century. When Orthodox and Catholic Bosnians started to designate themselves with the national names « Serbs » and « Croats » in the late 19th century, it became clear that separate religious identities had also political implications¹¹.

At the end of the 20th century the question of the origins of the three Bosnian ethnic groups became once again the subject of nationalist ideologies whose rhetoric treated the history of Bosnia and Herzegovina either within a Serb or within a Croat frame of reference. In the Serb and Croat nationalist discourses, ethnic Muslims of Bosnia and Herzegovina were as a

⁷ **Bringa (Tone)**, *Being Muslim the Bosnian Way. Identity and Community in a Central Bosnian Village*, Princeton : Princeton University Press, 1995, p. 35.

⁸ In Yugoslavia, ethnic Muslims became an officially recognized national group – a so-called « *narod* » (nation) in Yugoslav terminology – in 1971 only. Until 1993, « *Musliman* » (with capital « M ») was the national name of the Serbo-Croatian-speaking Muslims living in Bosnia and Herzegovina and other parts of Yugoslavia.

⁹ **Bringa (Tone)**, *Being Muslim the Bosnian Way, op.cit.*, p. 35.

¹⁰ See **Bringa (Tone)**, *Being Muslim the Bosnian Way, op.cit.*, pp. 20-23 ; **Čičak-Chand (Ružica)**, « Islam, etničnost i država : Balkan » [Islam, Ethnicity and State : The Balkans], *Migracijske teme : Časopis za iztraživanje migracija i narodnosti*, Zagreb, 15 (3), 1999, pp. 263-287.

¹¹ Out of the three basic criteria by which Serbs and Croats distinguished themselves and established themselves as nations during that period – history, language and religion – only religion could apply in Bosnia, a country which had its own history and in which the contours of the linguistic map cut across religious boundaries. See **Malcolm (Noel)**, *Bosnia : A Short History*, London : Macmillan, 1996, pp. XXIII, 1-9, 12, 148-149, 199-200, 235 ; **Bojić (Mehmedalija)**, *Uzroci genocida u Bosni* [The Causes of the Genocide in Bosnia], Sarajevo : El-Kalem, 2001, pp. 31-38.

rule represented as converted inhabitants who had forgotten their Serb or Croat origins¹². On the other hand, in the Muslim nationalist discourse, it was often stressed that Bosnian Muslims were descendants of the followers of the medieval « Bosnian church », who had supposedly converted to Islam in large numbers, and were therefore presented as the only autochthonous nation in Bosnia and Herzegovina (in opposition to the Serb and Croat « late-comers » who arrived after the Ottoman conquest)¹³.

In September 1990 secular Bosnian Muslim intellectuals proposed to replace the rather ambiguous national name « *Musliman* » (« Muslim ») with the name « *Bošnjak* » (« Bosniak »), which was primarily intended to represent ethnic Muslims, but did not – at least not explicitly – exclude anyone who might wish to identify themselves as Bosniak¹⁴. At the beginning this name was opposed by the representatives of the pan-Islamist movement within the Party of Democratic Action (*Stranka demokratske akcije* – SDA), who were hostile to any secularization of the Bosnian Muslim identity, but three years later, on 27 September 1993, the national name « Bosniak » was adopted by the first Bosniak Convention (*Bošnjački sabor*). The change was justified in a resolution which stated that its aim was « to give back to our nation its historical and national name Bosniaks [¹⁵], in order to bind us tightly to our land Bosnia and its traditional statehood, to our Bosnian language and to the entire spiritual tradition of our history »¹⁶. In March 1994 the national name « Bosniak » was introduced in the Constitution of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina as a clear counterpart to the national name « Croat », which means that it became a new official national name applying to Bosnian Muslims only. With the « insistence of Pan-Islamists on Islam as the central element of the new Bosniak identity »¹⁷, the circle of essentialist understandings of ethnic groups defined on the basis of religion was complete in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Wartime Reislamization and Postwar Bosniak Identity

¹² **Bringa (Tone)**, *Being Muslim the Bosnian Way*, *op.cit.*, pp. 24-26.

¹³ **Velikonja (Mitja)**, « *In hoc signo vinces* : verski simbolizem v vojnah na Balkanu 1991-1995 » [*In hoc signo vinces* : Religious Symbolism in the Balkan Wars 1991-1995], *Časopis za kritiko znanosti*, 30 (209–210), 2002, pp. 193-206. Historical sources rather suggest that the inhabitants of medieval Bosnia represented one South Slav population which was, even before the Ottoman conquest of this territory, divided into three religious groups : Bogumils, Catholics and Orthodox (**Malcolm (Noel)**, *Bosnia : A Short History*, *op.cit.*, p. 12), and that conversions were not one-way ones, as often presented in nationalist discourses. Bogumils, but also Catholics and Orthodox converted to Islam, and conversion from these three groups was not exclusively to Islam, since they also converted among each other (see **Fine (John)**, *The Bosnian Church : A New Interpretation*, Boulder : East European Monographs, 1975).

¹⁴ **Kržišnik-Bukić (Vera)**, *Bosanska identiteta med preteklostjo in prihodnostjo* [The Bosnian Identity between the Past and the Future], Ljubljana : Inštitut za narodnostna vprašanja, 1996, p. 45.

¹⁵ The term « *Bošnjak* » was first mentioned in documents from the 12th century (1166). In Ottoman sources it refers sometimes to all inhabitants of the Bosnian province, and sometimes only to Bosnian Muslims. It is closely connected with the historical tradition of the independent Bosnian state and its inhabitants regardless of their confession. As a national category it did not develop as an alternative to Serb and Croat nationalist ideologies until the second half of the 19th century. See **Bojić (Mehmedalija)**, *Uzroci genocida u Bosni*, *op.cit.*, pp. 7-31, **Bringa (Tone)**, *Being Muslim the Bosnian Way*, *op.cit.*, pp. 50-51.

¹⁶ « Deklaracija prvog Bošnjačkog sabora » [Declaration of the First Bosniak Convention], quoted in Vijeće kongresa bošnjačkih intelektualaca, *Almanah 1992-2002*, Sarajevo : VKBI, 2002, p. 161.

¹⁷ **Bougarel (Xavier)**, « Kako je panislamizam zamjenio komunizam » [How Did Pan-Islamism Replaced Communism], *Dani*, (109), 2 July 1999, p. 48.

Political, journalistic and sometimes even scientific primordialist interpretations of the war in Bosnia¹⁸ suggest that ethnic identities are immutable, whereas in fact they transform themselves continually, and that they are self-contained, whereas they are constructed in relation to other identities.¹⁹ Although the impetus to the war in Bosnia was nationalism, which led to ethnic cleansing²⁰, this war was more often than not interpreted as an ethnic or religious one, « as a consequence of the differences and the incompatibility between nations and cultures, as a return of old myths, a lust for revenge due to historical injustices, or as a logical result of the bloodthirsty characteristics of the Balkan nations »²¹. Such interpretations of the war in Bosnia were also an excuse for the international community not to intervene. At the end, they even contributed to the dynamics of the war in the region. Non-involvement lent legitimacy to essentialist conceptions of ethnicity and to nationalist leaders, which contributed to the triumph of ethnic categories over all other possible ways of understanding the conflict²².

In reality, Bosnian ethno-religious identities have been renegotiated in the course of the war itself. Before the war, people in Bosnia didn't hate each other, as was often explained, and they used to live with each other relatively peacefully. That does not mean that people didn't recognize ethnic differences among themselves. Although religion was practiced in a loose and secular form, it had taken on the role of an ethnic marker. People belonging to different ethnic groups perceived this difference and, to a certain degree, acted according to it. One of the examples which underline this ethno-religious self-consciousness is the fact that most marriages occurred between members of the same ethnic group²³. The religious prescription that forbids marriage between Muslims and Christians was often respected²⁴. The awareness of ethno-religious boundaries was especially strong in the countryside, where « mixed » marriages were more or less exceptions, while in towns it seemed that differences in urban or rural origin, class and access to resources, were of greater importance²⁵.

When the shelling of Sarajevo began, Sarajevo Muslims interpreted the aggression as a conflict between urban civility and rural backwardness, and the attackers were described as « peasants », « criminals » or « hooligans », or just as « them », but never as « Serbs » or non-Muslims, as it was the case later. The war was initially not understood along ethno-religious lines²⁶. Rural Muslims and Croats had also their own separate interpretations of

¹⁸ See **Baskar (Bojan)**, *Dvoumni Mediteran* [The Ambiguous Mediterranean], Koper : Knjižica Annales, 2003.

¹⁹ See **Barth (Frederik)**, (ed.), *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries*, op.cit. ; **Eriksen (Thomas Hylland)**, *Ethnicity and Nationalism*, op.cit.

²⁰ The term « ethnic cleansing » has a broad meaning covering all forms of ethnic violence, from murder, rape and torture to the forced removal of people or whole ethnic groups from certain territories. See **Carmichael (Cathie)**, *Ethnic Cleansing in the Balkans : Nationalism and the Destruction of Tradition*, London : Routledge, 2002, p. 2.

²¹ **Velikonja (Mitja)**, « *In hoc signo vinces* », op.cit., p. 193.

²² **Sorabji (Cornelia)**, « Ethnic War in Bosnia ? », *Radical Philosophy*, 63, Spring 1993, pp. 33-35.

²³ See **Bringa (Tone)**, *Being Muslim the Bosnian Way*, op.cit., pp. 16, 72, 92-93, 162-166 ; **Sorabji (Cornelia)**, *Muslim Identity and Islamic Faith in Socialist Sarajevo*, unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Cambridge, 1989 ; **Sorabji (Cornelia)**, « Ethnic War in Bosnia ? », op.cit.

²⁴ *Shari'a* (Islamic law) treats the marriage of a Muslim woman to a non-Muslim man as *haram* (illicit) but allows the marriage between a Muslim man and a non-Muslim (Christian or Jewish) woman. However, as ethnographic evidence shows, interethnic marriages in rural parts of Bosnia were not welcomed in general. See **Bringa (Tone)**, *Being Muslim the Bosnian Way*, op.cit., pp. 163-164.

²⁵ See **Bringa (Tone)**, *Being Muslim the Bosnian Way*, op.cit., p. 16 ; **Sorabji (Cornelia)**, « Ethnic War in Bosnia ? », op.cit., p. 35.

²⁶ **Sorabji (Cornelia)**, « Ethnic War in Bosnia ? », op.cit. ; **Sorabji (Cornelia)**, « A Very Modern War : Terror and Territory in Bosnia-Herzegovina », in **Hinde (Robert A.)**, **Watson (Helen E.)**, *War : A Cruel Necessity ? The Bases of Institutionalized Violence*, London : Tauris, 1996, pp. 80-95.

what was happening. Tone Bringa noted that her informants in the village of Dolina told to her that « for as long as anyone can remember we used to live together and always got along well ; what is happening now was provoked by something stronger than us ». And they even asked her if her field notes from the late 1980s revealed anything that could have predicted the events a few years later²⁷.

The war in Bosnia has also brought the question of Bosnian Muslim identity to the fore. Before the war, Islam was very secular in Bosnia, especially in urban areas. Cornelia Sorabji notes that it was considered as a moral code rather than a ritual and a faith. Someone who failed to keep his/her home clean, to be hospitable or to refrain from gossip was more despised than someone who did not fast during *Ramadan* (holy month of fasting) or did not pray regularly²⁸. These values could be seen as part of a general code of morality and as values that overlap with those of other, non-Islamic societies. Such a specific relationship between Islam and the wider social environment has been noticed in other socialist countries and was in part born out of necessity under unsympathetic or openly oppressive regimes. But this should not be viewed only as an adaptation to political circumstances. As a moral system, Islam – an all-pervasive religion that is not merely practiced in the mosques but endeavours to define every aspect of social life – can be interpreted in relation to other moral systems²⁹. This way of interpreting and practicing Islam did not cease with the end of one-party socialism and, according to my own experience, is still alive today. Nevertheless, the war has brought forth significant changes in attitudes towards Islam as a marker of identity.

Changes in Bosnian Islam have often been interpreted as a spontaneous reislamization that appeared as a consequence of the war. But the question is how we define reislamization, what we consider as its manifestations, who is talking about it and to what end. In reality, reislamization in Bosnia has been primarily an authoritarian process promoted by political circles that tried hard to present the war and the genocide in religious terms³⁰. According to Mitja Velikonja, « the abuse of religious iconography, symbols, religious discourse and generally mythical rhetoric »³¹ was characteristic of all three warring sides during the war. Tight connections between nationalist parties and religious institutions were established, and religion became increasingly ethnicized and politicized³². On the Bosniak side, the political elites of the Party of Democratic Action (SDA) took control of the Islamic Community (*Islamska zajednica*) and turned Islamic symbols and rituals into national ones. The Bosnian Army also used Islamic symbols such as green colour, crescent moon, and Qur'anic verses. Soldiers wore these on uniforms or as an adornment (badges with religious motives, green headbands with or without Qur'anic verses). In some cases, the complete outlook of the soldiers was influenced by religion, for example when they stopped to trim their beards and

²⁷ **Bringa (Tone)**, *Being Muslim the Bosnian Way*, *op.cit.*, p. 16.

²⁸ See **Sorabji (Cornelia)**, *Muslim Identity and Islamic Faith*, *op.cit.* ; **Sorabji (Cornelia)**, « Ethnic War in Bosnia ? », *op.cit.*

²⁹ **Sorabji (Cornelia)**, *Muslim Identity and Islamic Faith*, *op.cit.*, pp. 86-117 ; **Sorabji (Cornelia)**, « Ethnic War in Bosnia ? », *op.cit.*, p. 34.

³⁰ **Bougarel (Xavier)**, « Bošnjaci pod kontrolom panislamista » [The Bosniaks under the Control of Pan-Islamists], *Dani*, (107), 18 June 1999, pp. 46-49. ; **Bougarel (Xavier)**, « Bosna na riječima – 'Muslimanija' na djelu » [Bosnia in Words – 'Muslimistan' in Acts], *Dani*, (108), 25 June 1999, pp. 46-49 ; **Bougarel (Xavier)**, « Kako je panislamizam zamjenio komunizam » [How Did Pan-Islamism Replace Communism], *Dani*, (109), 2 July 1999, pp. 48-51 ; **Bougarel (Xavier)**, « Avtoritarna reislamizacija in nove sestave v bosanskem islamu » [Authoritarian Reislamization and the Restructuration of Bosnian Islam], *Časopis za kritiko znanosti*, 30 (209–210), 2002, pp. 207-216.

³¹ **Velikonja (Mitja)**, « *In hoc signo vinces* », *op.cit.*, p. 194.

³² **Vrcan (Srđan)**, *Vjera u vrtložima tranzicije* [Religion in the Turmoil of Transition], Split : Glas Dalmacije, 2001.

wore foreign Islamic garb. Specific military units wearing religious names such as « *Muslimanske oslobodilačke snage* » (« Muslim Liberation Forces »), « *Zelena legija* » (« Green Legion ») or « *muslimanske brigade* » (« Muslim Brigades ») observed Islamic rules of behaviour and, in most of them, imams served as religious assistants³³.

Reislamization could also be seen in the use of religious mottos (« *Allahu Ekber !* ») and greetings (« *Selam alejkum !* ») and the addressing with « brothers » and « sisters ». The main religious holidays (*Ramazanski bajram*, *Kurban bajram*, Day of the Battle of Badr, *Lejletu-l-kadr*³⁴) became state holidays in 1994, and the scenes of religious or historical events became destinations of religious-national pilgrimages and ceremonies. Interpretations of the war in religious terms gradually gained greater influence : local religious leaders as well as foreign Islamic NGOs told the Bosnian Muslims that they were rescuing the Muslim world and that they were sacrificing themselves for its salvation. Muslim fallen soldiers were labelled « *šehidi* » (in Arabic : *shahid*, martyrs of the Faith). This implied that they were not fighting a patriotic war but a « *džihad* » (*jihad*, holy war), while the enemies were described as « Crusaders ». As the international community refrained from interfering in the Bosnian war, the genocide of Bosnian Muslims was interpreted in terms of a historical European tendency to oppress the Muslim world. The war was also interpreted as a religious one in the Muslim world³⁵, and volunteers from Muslim countries and Muslim diasporas in Europe came to Bosnia to fight *jihad* against « Christian oppression »³⁶.

The war in Bosnia has contributed to the repositioning of Bosniak ethno-religious boundaries and, more widely, to the redefinition of all three Bosnian ethno-religious identities. The horrors of the war and the wartime essentialist discourses have influenced the people's understanding of their own identities, as well as the ways they perceive the others. Bosnian postwar identities are a product of pre-war, wartime and postwar political, journalistic and popular discourses. A public opinion survey conducted in Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1988 shows for example that 55.8 % of the Croats, 37.3 % of the Muslims, 18.6 % of the Serbs and 2.3 % of the Yugoslavs declared themselves as believers³⁷. Ten years later, the number of believers has significantly increased : 89.5 % of the Croats and 78.3 % of the Bosniaks in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina declared themselves as believers³⁸. A research conducted in 2000 in the Doboje area shows that 88.0 % of the Croats, 84.8 % of the Bosniaks, and 81.6 % of the Serbs declared themselves as strong or relatively strong believers³⁹. This research, led by Dijana Krajina, reveals an increased level of religiosity

³³ **Bougarel (Xavier)**, « Bosna na riječima – 'Muslimanija' na djelu », *op. cit.* ; **Maček (Ivana)**, *War Within : Everyday Life in Sarajevo under Siege*, unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Uppsala University, 2000, pp. 201-203.

³⁴ The *Ramazanski bajram* (in Arabic : *'id al-fitr*, feast of fast-breaking) marks the end of the holy month of Ramadan, the *Kurban bajram* (*'id al-kabir*, feast of sacrifice) celebrates Abraham's sacrifice, and the *Lejletu-l-kadr* (*Laylat al-Qadr*, Night of Destiny), celebrates the night when the Qur'an started to be revealed to the Prophet Muhammad.

³⁵ See for example **Behdžet (Ahmed)**, *Bosna i Hercegovina : zločin stoljeća* [Bosnia and Herzegovina : The Crime of the Century], Sarajevo : El-Kalem, 2004.

³⁶ See **Velikonja (Mitja)**, « *In hoc signo vinces* », *op. cit.* ; **Bougarel (Xavier)**, « Ramadan During a Civil War (as reflected in a series of sermons) », *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations*, 6 (1), 1995, pp. 79-103 ; **Bougarel (Xavier)**, « Bošnjaci pod kontrolom panislamista », *op. cit.* ; **Bougarel (Xavier)**, « Bosna na riječima – 'Muslimanija' na djelu », *op. cit.* ; **Bougarel (Xavier)**, « Kako je panislamizam zamjenio komunizam », *op. cit.* ; **Bougarel (Xavier)**, « Avtoritarna reislamizacija in nove sestave v bosanskem islamu », *op. cit.* ; **Maček (Ivana)**, *War Within*, *op. cit.*

³⁷ **Bakić (Ibrahim)**, *Nacija i religija* [Nation and Religion], Sarajevo : Bosna Public, 1994, p. 72.

³⁸ **Vrcan (Srdan)**, *Vjera u vrtlozima tranzicije*, *op. cit.*, p. 167.

³⁹ **Krajina (Dijana)**, « Povojni trendi hiperreligioznosti in religijsko-nacionalnega ekskluzivizma v BiH : študija primera Doboje » [Post-War Manifestations of Hyper-Religiosity and Religious-National Exclusivism in Bosnia

which manifests itself in various forms such as more frequent self-declarations as « believer », an increased presence of religious symbols in people's home, a more widespread celebration of religious holidays, a higher level of religious practice both at home and in mosques or churches, and a closer following of basic religion prescriptions. The most important findings of this research are that national and religious self-identifications overlap almost perfectly in postwar Bosnia and Herzegovina, that believers – especially « new » ones – show a clear tendency towards religious exclusiveness in the sphere of friendship and marriage, and that they are close to the nationalist parties, which were the foremost advocates of religious interpretations of the war.

From Bosnians to Muslims : Shifting Social Boundaries among Migrants in Slovenia

In Slovenia, the northernmost republic of the former Socialist Federative Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRJ) and an independent state since 1991, Islamic presence dates back from the socialist period. From the 1960s onwards, Slovenia represented a republic of immigration for people from other Yugoslav republics, who arrived in large number to Slovenian industrial centres. Yugoslav internal migrations were influenced by economic factors and encouraged by state institutions⁴⁰. Guaranteed jobs in industry, catering industry and tourism, facilities with accommodation, grants and free vocational education, all this represented an incentive for migrants to come to Slovenia. Overpopulation and high demographic growth in rural parts of Yugoslavia were additional reasons for migration. Most migrants came from Bosnia, from the border between Slovenia and Croatia, and later from Kosovo, Macedonia and Montenegro⁴¹. It is difficult to define where exactly the Bosnian Muslim population came from, but the majority of the Bosnian Muslims living today in Slovenia are from Bosanska Krajina and Sandžak⁴². Many of them decided to stay permanently. When Slovenia became independent in 1991, those who had permanent residence in Slovenia could get Slovenian citizenship.

According to my informants, all migrants from southern Yugoslav republics were at first perceived by Slovenians as a homogeneous group. At the time not only migrants from Bosnia, but all the migrants from southern Yugoslav republics were labelled « Bosnians » by Slovenians. Some people in Jesenice told me that many Slovenians didn't really distinguish among their different ethnic identities, and that it was quite common to hear statements like : « *You, Bosnians, go to your Macedonia !* » The word « *Bosanec* » (« Bosnian ») used to denote a Serbo-Croatian speaking migrant in Slovenia, regardless of his/her ethnic background or the Yugoslav republic he/she came from. Besides being called « *Bosanci* », these people were also called « *južnjaki* » (« southerners »), « *ta spodni* » (« those from down there »), « *čefurji* »⁴³

and Herzegovina : A Study of the Case of Doboj], *Časopis za kritiko znanosti*, 29 (202-203), 2001, pp. 243-265; here p. 248.

⁴⁰ **Malačič (Janez)**, « Zunanje migracije Slovenije po drugi svetovni vojni » [The External Migrations of Slovenia after World War II], *Zgodovinski časopis*, 45 (2), 1991, pp. 299-312.

⁴¹ **Kodelja (Jerina)**, « Iz katerih območij v Jugoslaviji so prihajali, kje v Sloveniji so se naselili : selitve prebivalstva v Slovenijo v letih 1982-1990 » [From which Areas in Yugoslavia They Arrived, Where in Slovenia They Settled Down : Migrations of Population in Slovenia in 1982-1990], *IB revija*, 26, (1-2), 1992, pp. 12-17.

⁴² Bosanska Krajina is located in the northwestern part of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Sandžak is located on the boundary between Serbia and Montenegro. The region of Sandžak was part of Bosnia and Herzegovina till 1878, and most of the Serbo-Croatian speaking Muslims living there declare themselves as « Bosniaks ».

⁴³ The word « *čefur* » entered the Dictionary of Standard Slovenian for the first – and last – time in 1991, where it was presented as a synonym for the designation « *južnjak* » (« southerner ») : « *File je črnolas čefur. Vse južnjake je Liza klicala za čefurje ...* » / « File is a black-haired *čefur*. Liza used to call all southerners *čefurji* ... » (*Slovar slovenskega knjižnega jezika – peta knjiga*, Ljubljana : DZS, 1991). There have been many speculations about the etymological derivation of this term from the word *čifut* (Turkish *Cühut*, Arabic *Yahud* : Jew), which is

and even « *Švedsi* » (« Swedes »), all terms having strong negative connotations. Due to their evident secularization, Bosnian Muslims in Slovenia were not perceived as a religious group despite their national name, « *Muslimani* ».

During the war, Bosnians living in Slovenia started to take sides along ethnic boundaries and to organize themselves as separate ethnic groups (Bosniaks⁴⁴, Serbs and Croats). At the time many – but not all! – neighbours of different ethnic background began to break contacts. I have heard many personal accounts about friendships that ended in front of the television while watching the news – when it became clear that friends or neighbours from different ethnic groups defended incompatible points of view about what was going on and who was attacking whom. An additional reason for breaking everyday contacts with Serbs was that Bosniaks living in Slovenia gave refuge to relatives, friends and sometimes even unknown people of « their » ethnic group, who had run away from their homes in Bosnia because of the war⁴⁵. To have refugees at home meant that it was inconvenient to have contacts with Serbs, who were perceived as aggressors. Ethnographic material also shows that people were actively involved in the war. Some Serbs and Bosniaks volunteered to fight in Bosnia. Their act could not show more clearly that they had taken sides. Of course, most people stayed at home and got involved instead in organizing humanitarian aid, such as collecting money and organizing convoys to transfer the aid to Bosnia. This caused situations that were perceived by many Bosnians living in Slovenia as similar to those in Bosnia itself. A young Bosniak man (28-year-old, Jesenice), who was very active during the war, summarized this to me in the following way :

« *During the war in Bosnia, we too had a war here in Jesenice.* »

Social activities linked to the war led to the creation of several Bosniak community centers. Most of them were founded in order to collect humanitarian aid, help refugees in Slovenia and support the Bosniak people in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Some imams also arrived as refugees to Slovenia, religious activities became more organized and people's attendance increased. Between 1991 and 1995, twelve new *džemati* (local branches of the Islamic Community) were organized in different Slovenian towns.⁴⁶ In Jesenice, many refugees and other Bosniaks told me that they used to attend the local *mesdžid* (Islamic praying room) in order to find peace in prayer and also to meet with compatriots. Young Bosniaks united with refugee youth and, together, these took part in *mesdžid* activities or in the local folklore society *Biser* (« Pearl »),

hard to prove. Nevertheless, the terms *čefur* and *čifut* have obviously one historical use in common in the Slovenian context: insulting the Other. Against this background, it is easier to understand why the described etymological speculations appear so often in Slovenian media and also among scholars (compare **Baskar (Bojan)**, *Dvoumni Mediteran*, *op.cit.*, p. 203).

⁴⁴ As already mentioned, the term « Bosniak » became the official national name for Bosnian Muslims in 1993.

⁴⁵ The disintegration of Yugoslavia and the war that followed led to a complete change in migration currents. Refugees from Croatia started to arrive in Slovenia in September 1991, but most refugees came from Bosnia and Herzegovina in the spring of 1992. In that period Slovenia accepted approximately 45,000 refugees (see **Vrečer (Natalija)**, « When Will Social Exclusion and Temporary Protection of Bosnian Refugees in Slovenia End ? », *Treatises and Documents*, Ljubljana : Institute for Ethnic Studies, (38/39), 2001, pp. 388-392, available at <<http://www.gla.ac.uk/rg/emigsi04.htm>>), who for the most part have left the country afterwards. Refugees who came to Slovenia during the war often decided to continue their way to Western Europe or America, which means that they sojourned in Slovenia only for a short time. Most of those who decided to stay, mainly for financial reasons (illegal channels of transfer to the West were too expensive for them) returned to Bosnia after the war, mostly in 1997 and 1998. In 2002 there were approximately 2,150 recorded refugees left (see European Commission against Racism and Intolerance, *Second Report on Slovenia (adopted on 13 December 2002)*, Strasbourg : Council of Europe, 2003, p. 12).

⁴⁶ Until the 1990s there were only two *mesdžids* registered in Slovenia: one in Ljubljana (opened in 1981) and one in Jesenice (opened in 1987). Nowadays, the Slovenian Islamic Community (*Slovenska Islamska skupnost*) has fourteen *džemati* in fourteen Slovenian towns.

established in 1992 in order to organize spare-time activities for young Muslim refugees and migrants. The collapse of the Yugoslav federation in 1991/1992 was followed in 1993 by the split-up of the Islamic Community of Yugoslavia, along the same ethnic « faultlines ». As part of this process, the Islamic Community in Slovenia became an extraterritorial branch of the Islamic Community of Bosnia and Herzegovina in December 1994.⁴⁷ That means that, from an institutional point of view, the Slovenian Islamic Community (*Slovenska Islamska skupnost*) is actually a Bosniak one.⁴⁸

Bosnian Islam with its « traditional » religious rituals and cultural practices is still scarcely noticeable in the Slovenian environment. The only Muslim cultural practice adopted *en masse* is the celebration of the end of *Ramadan* in the community setting, various family and community gatherings and attendance at the *mesdžid* during the festivities of *Ramazanski bajram* (*'id al-fitr*). The rule of fasting beforehand is not commonly followed. Only a minority of Bosnian Muslims living in Slovenia, mostly older people, attend the *mesdžid* and pray regularly. Women do not wear a veil except when they go to the *mesdžid* or attend religious occasions such as *mevlud*⁴⁹, *tevhid*⁵⁰, *iftar*⁵¹, *sharia* wedding or annual meetings of Muslims. Since these veiling practices are more or less of private nature, i.e. practiced mainly at home or in the *mesdžid*, they are not visible signs that would point to their religious identity in the wider Slovenian context. These « traditional believers » use religious markers as a means of differentiation among Bosnians. For them, Islam is the main pillar of their ethno-religious identity and, therefore, a mean of further differentiation from Catholic Croats and Orthodox Serbs, who during the war featured as « ethnic enemies ».

The absence of a mosque is another factor that had long kept imperceptible the religious identity of the Bosniaks and the other denominational Muslims. According to Ahmed Pašić, the first collective religious ceremonies – mostly *mevludi* – were organized in 1969⁵². At the time Muslims in Slovenia asked local authorities for the permission to build a mosque in Ljubljana, following the example of other European capitals. While the permission was gained

⁴⁷ The same happened with the Islamic Community in Croatia and in the Sandžak.

⁴⁸ About 90 % of the members of the Islamic Community in Slovenia are Bosniaks, the rest are Albanians, Roma (Gypsies), Turks and some Arabs, mostly students from non-aligned countries who came to study in Slovenia during the socialist period. The Islamic Community has 6,500 member families, which means approximately 26,000 members (the last census in 2002 showed that 47,488 denominational (religious) Muslims live in Slovenia. See <http://www.stat.si/popis2002/si/rezultati_slovenija_prebivalstvo_dz.htm>). The present *mufti* of Slovenia is a member of the *Rijaset*, the executive organ of the Islamic Community of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and the language used within the Islamic Community is not Slovenian but Bosnian (which is actually understood and spoken by all the members, since most of them come from the territory of former Yugoslavia, where the Serbo-Croatian language – today called Serbian/Croatian/Bosnian language – was widely understood and spoken).

⁴⁹ *Mevlud* is a collective religious ceremony which is usually organized to celebrate the anniversary of the birth of the Prophet Muhammad, or as an event connected with religious or family life (inauguration of a new mosque, *sharia* wedding, circumcision of male children etc.).

⁵⁰ From the Arabic « *tawhid* » (« divine uniqueness »). *Tevhid* as a ritual appeared in Bosnia in the 1970s. It developed into a specific Bosnian ritual, a ceremony of common prayer organized in honor of the deceased. Some authors mention also a type of *tevhid* organized to celebrate life (on the occasion of a wedding or a circumcision), but among people such celebrations are usually called *mevlud*. *Tevhidi* most likely derive from sufi practices and ceremonies in which people gather in a circle and pronounce religious sentences or the 99 names of Allah. In Bosnia *tevhid* usually take place in homes, but in Jesenice, where most Muslims live in small apartments, they take place in the *mesdžid* (see also **Bringa (Tone)**, *Being Muslim the Bosnian Way*, *op.cit.*, pp. 198-206 ; **Softić (Aiša)**, « *Tevhidi u Sarajevu* » [The *tevhidi* in Sarajevo], *Glasnik zemaljskog muzeja Bosne i Hercegovine*, N. S. *Etnologija*, 1984, pp. 199-207)

⁵¹ *Iftar* is the fast-breaking community meal during the month of *ramadan*.

⁵² **Pašić (Ahmed)**, *Islam in muslimani v Sloveniji* [Islam and Muslims in Slovenia], Sarajevo : Emanet, 2002, p. 204.

immediately, the search for an appropriate location represented an obstacle that has not yet been overcome. Until 1997 the procedure went lost in the obscure corridors of Slovenian bureaucracy. With the better organization of Muslims after the war, this issue gave rise to feverish public discussions. Although the permission to build the mosque is not in question anymore, the debate provoked many xenophobic statements about Muslims and Islam. Some local medias and politicians raised questions about the compatibility of the mosque with Slovenian cultural landscape, about national security and the possibility of terrorism in Slovenia, and about the danger that Slovenian culture could disappear. The debate went so far that the mosque somehow became a symbol for the opening of the door to a new « Turkish » invasion, only that this time Muslims did not ride horses but occurred in a guise of terrorists⁵³. Slovenian public became imbued with Islamophobic outbursts, which were generated by political parties and spread by the media, within the framework of the pre-election campaign⁵⁴. In the eyes of the Slovenian public, Bosnian Muslims actually became « Muslims » exactly at the time when the request for a mosque became a bone of contention. Besides some veiled women, who are still a rarity in Slovenia, the mosque in Ljubljana has thus become the most visible sign of Muslim presence even before its construction.⁵⁵

A Fragmented National Identity : Bosniak, Bosnian, Muslim

As already said, the label « Bosniak » became during the war the new official national name applying only to Bosnian Muslims. Since, at the same time, religion became the cornerstone of the new Bosniak national identity, many questions remained open in regard to the relation between Bosniak identity and Islam. In Slovenia, the Islamic Community and the Bosniak Cultural Union of Slovenia (*Bošnjački kulturni savez Slovenije – BKSS*⁵⁶) present the Bosniaks as a homogeneous group. In reality, however, Bosniak identity is overwhelmed with inner tensions, and there are many discrepancies between its official definition and its perception by ordinary people. The most obvious sign of these tensions and discrepancies is the fact that, in the population census carried out in Slovenia in 2002, 19,923 denominational Muslims declared themselves as « Bosniaks », 9,328 as « Muslims », and 5,724 as « Bosnians »⁵⁷. 15,892 Bosniaks, 5,456 Muslims and 4,771 Bosnians declared « Bosnian » as

⁵³ In Slovenian public, media and political discourse, the issue of Islam often evokes images of the so-called « Turkish invasions » in the 15th and 16th centuries, when the Ottomans – that is Ottoman troops made up of Turks, islamized Balkan people and/or hired soldiers from Christian privileged social classes – invaded several times the territory of contemporary Slovenia. In those representations Islam is equated with classic military incursions and plundering expeditions, which do not have anything in common with Islam or islamization. See for example the statements brought up in the TV show « *Trenja* » (« Frictions »), broadcasted on 23 January 2003 on the Slovenian channel POP TV.

⁵⁴ **Dragoš (Srečo)**, « Islamofobija na Slovenskem » [Islamophobia in Slovenian], *Poročilo skupine za spremljanje nestrpnosti / Intolerance Monitor Report*, Ljubljana : Mirovni inštitut, (03), 2004, pp. 10-28, available at <<http://www.gla.ac.uk/rg/smigra09.pdf>>.

⁵⁵ There is no Muslim cemetery or *halal* butcher's shop that would indicate the presence of Islam in Slovenia. The cemeteries of Jesenice and Maribor have separate parcels for Muslims but, in Jesenice, that parcel is practically unnoticeable as it is visually adapted to the general standards of the cemetery. Slovenian meat industry has started to produce *halal* meat only recently and to a very limited extent. Since Slovenian law forbids the slaughter of animals outside official institutions (that means also the slaughter of animals in the Islamic way), *halal* meat often remains inaccessible or at least illegal. Thus, people complain that religious ceremonies such as *Kurban bajram* are accompanied by great difficulties.

⁵⁶ The BKSS federates at the state level all local Bosniak community centres.

⁵⁷ 1,213 Orthodox, 353 Catholics, 259 non-believers and 507 others also declared themselves as « Bosnians ».

their first language, whereas 3,300 Bosniaks, 2,886 Muslims and 1,999 Bosnians declared « Serbo-Croatian »⁵⁸.

This fragmentation of Bosniak identity appears also in the findings of my fieldwork. When the last census was carried out in Jesenice, Bosnian Muslims attending the local folklore society *Biser* were instructed how to fill the forms. A woman (24 year old, Jesenice) told me that she was required to declare herself as « Bosniak ». This kind of interference by the leaders of the folklore society suggests that they attempt to impose an exclusivist understanding of the national name « Bosniak » as reserved exclusively for Bosnian Muslims. *Biser* was not the only organization that tried to guide its members into this direction. The president of the *džemat* of Jesenice told me that they had informed their members about their national identity by distributing leaflets to all Muslim families, irrespective of their membership in the Islamic Community. The leaflets read : « *You are Bosniaks and not Muslims. Your language is Bosnian and not Serbo-Croatian as you were told before.* » It means that, for the Islamic Community as well, the national name « Bosniak » applies exclusively to Bosnian Muslims. This kind of nationalist endeavours from the part of the leaders of the folklore society and the *džemat* in Jesenice has had a strong influence on Bosnian Muslims and their sense of identity during the census. But, in Jesenice and elsewhere, the perception of Bosniak identity by ordinary people has remained far less uniform than it has been claimed in political and other public discourses. During my fieldwork it became quite obvious that people did not know exactly whether the label « Bosniak » applies only to the followers of Islam or whether it includes also the two other Bosnian confessions.

When I asked a young woman (20-year-old, Jesenice) who seemed to have a very secularized approach to religion but claimed that she believed in God, what she considered to be, she answered that she was a Bosniak. When I asked her what it meant to be a Bosniak she said that Bosniaks are the people living in Bosnia: Muslims, Serbs and Croats. Therefore, her definition of Bosniak identity was at first glance « territorial ». However, as I found out through more detailed conversation, she also considered the label « Bosniak » as a replacement for the old national name « Muslim ». She said that, recently, « they » had become Bosniaks but that she felt strange with this new self-identification and continued to use the name « Muslim ». She looked rather confused when I asked her whether Bosnian Serbs and Croats were Bosniaks as well. As she did not find the answer to my questions which seemed to irritate her, she defended her statements with the argument that she was told so at « *Biser* ». She had been reached by powerful instructions about her official identity, and yet, her personal views remained sort of open and influenced by previous political definitions. At this point it should be also mentioned that not all Bosnian Muslims equate their identity with the definitions « prescribed » by nationalists, and some even try to overcome nationalistic discourses by declaring themselves « Bosnians ». The latter is a third option of self-identification which officially does not count as a national category. Therefore, it offers a neutral and non-nationalist way to express one's identity, and the label « *Bosanec* » (« Bosnian ») is today used by all those who support the idea of a non-ethnic state of Bosnia and Herzegovina⁵⁹. Among them are not only Bosnian Muslims, but also some Bosnian Serbs and Croats⁶⁰.

⁵⁸ See *Rezultati popisa 2002 : Slovenija : Prebivalstvo : Demografske značilnosti* [Census Results : Slovenia : Population : Demographic Characteristics] at <http://www.stat.si/popis2002/si/rezultati_slovenija_prebivalstvo_dz.htm>.

⁵⁹ In pre-war Bosnia and Herzegovina, the label « Bosnian » referred to all inhabitants of the republic, Muslims, Serbs, Croats, Jews, Roma, and so forth.

⁶⁰ Nowadays, nationalist Bosnian Croats and Serbs tend to omit the adjective « Bosnian ». Thus they explicitly equate their national identity with belonging to the Serbian or Croatian national states.

For many people I interviewed, however, the most sensitive issue was the relationship between Bosniak identity and Islamic religious practice. Most of my informants emphasized that they were denominational Muslims, even when it was obvious they were not active believers. A young man (26-year-old, Jesenice) who used to have a hangover each time I had a morning coffee at their house told me in an interview that he was proud of being Muslim, and proud of having a Muslim name. He intended also seriously to do *hadž* (*hajj*, pilgrimage to Mecca). For him, as for many others, being Muslim was an ethnic label, a means of marking his difference from Serbs and Croats. Although he did not practice Islam and did not consider the war as a religious one, he perceived Serbs as aggressors against Bosniaks and he had a strong need to define the boundary between him and them. He enacted this distinction through a religious marker. The understanding of Islam as a marker of ethnic difference is evident in the comments he made while watching TV news showing the events in Gaza. He positioned Muslim Bosniaks and Palestinians as victims on one side, and Christian Serbs and Israeli Jews as aggressors on the other :

« I hate Jews so much. For me, they're the same as Serbs. The same Chetniks, really. »

A similar understanding of Islam can be met among practicing believers. A very religious young man (35-year-old, Ljubljana) had no doubt about the definition of Bosniak identity : in his views, Bosniaks were people of Islamic faith from Bosnia and Herzegovina, and they lived together with Serbs and Croats. This interpretation coincided with the official definition of Bosniak national identity since it applied only to ethnic Muslims. Another devout young man (28-year-old, Jesenice) explained to me the role of Islam in fixing the boundaries of national identity. His understanding of the war was as essentialist as in nationalist political discourses, and Serbian aggression was seen as a stimulus for the reislamization of Bosnian Muslims :

« Radovan Karadžić, the leader of the Bosnian Serbs, did more for Muslims than the whole Islamic Community. Muslims in Yugoslavia had already been so secularized that if they had left us in peace for the next 30 years there wouldn't be any Muslim left, and we would be more Serbian today than Serbs themselves. We are like a steak. The more you beat it, the bigger it becomes. »

All these examples demonstrate how Bosnian history seems to be repeating in that religion is instrumentalized as a tool for ethnic differentiation. Religion remains the main marker of ethnic difference among Bosnians, and it seems that it has become important to many people, regardless whether they are active believers or not. Many of my informants told me indeed that religion was what distinguished the three Bosnian ethnic groups from each other⁶¹. In the wider Slovenian context, however, the same people usually do not like to put forward their religious identity, even when they are still using the old national name « Muslim ».

However, while most Bosniaks see Islam as an ethnic marker, some of them do not agree with the prevailing idea that Islam and Bosniak identity simply overlap, and insist also on the religious difference from Slovenians. perceive these two dimensions as two different sources of distinctiveness. Moreover, the latter stress that belonging to the *Umma*, the global community

⁶¹ A similar manner of ethnic differentiation was noticed also among Bosnian refugees in Sweden and Australia. See **Eastmond (Marita)**, « Nationalist Discourses and the Construction of Difference : Bosnian Muslim Refugees in Sweden », *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 11 (2), 1998, pp. 161-181 ; **Colic-Peisker (Val)**, « 'At Least You're the Right Colour' : Identity and Social Inclusion of Bosnian Refugees in Australia », *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 31 (4), July 2005, pp. 615-638.

of Muslim believers, plays is more important to them than being Bosniak. A very religious young woman (22-year-old, Jesenice) expressed in front of me her concern about the process of equating Islam with Bosniak identity. In her view, having a Muslim name or a religious ancestor (for example a *hodža*, an imam, or a *bula*, a female religious teacher) did not make you a Muslim believer, and not all Bosniaks were Muslims, since they did not follow the prescriptions of Islam. She considered that the national name « Bosniak » applied exclusively to Bosnian Muslims, and distinguished her own ethno-religious identity from the Croat and Serb ones, but the label « Bosniak » had no religious meaning for her, as it included also secularized Bosnian « Muslims ».

Therefore, for some Bosnian Muslims Islam represents an essential ethnic marker, while for others it represents the source of their « real » religious identity, which does not overlap with their definition of Bosniak identity. The latter strive for a « pure » Islam, cleared of the elements of local tradition (considered by them to be incompatible with Islam), and base their religious identity and practices on the teaching of the original textual sources, the Qur'an and the Sunna (Tradition⁶²). This understanding of Islam contradicts the views of most members of Bosniak community in Slovenia, who consider it as a « foreign Islam », and practice Islam as embedded in the local Bosnian traditions.

Social Boundaries within a Contested Religious Identity

The appearance of new religious cleavages within the Bosniak community occurred under the influence of the politics led during the war by the Bosnian authorities. Namely, the Bosnian government established parallel power networks through humanitarian organizations such as the Vienna based Third World Relief Agency. The TWRA collected money from Muslim countries and provided Bosnia with weapons and other military equipments⁶³. The increased ideological influence of the Muslim world was a byproduct of that logistical support. Many individuals and organizations from various Muslim countries arrived in Bosnia, with the aim of reislamizing Bosnian Muslims. This endeavour was, as far as I could find out, sponsored mainly by Saudi Arabia and Iran⁶⁴. People were offered material benefits for learning and practicing Islam in the « right » way⁶⁵. *Mudžahedini* (*mujahiddin*, fighters) were also incorporated into specific units of the Bosnian army⁶⁶. These fighters from Muslim countries perceived the war as a *jihād*, and fought on the side of the Bosnian army against Christian Serbs and Croats. Their arrival is not a mere coincidence, since all those people came to Bosnia with the help of the afore mentioned parallel networks.

After the war, such reislamization activities spread also to the Bosniak community in Slovenia. There is no clear evidence about the first connections between the representatives of « foreign

⁶² The *Sunna* is the body of social and legal Islamic traditions based on the sayings and deeds attributed to the Prophet Muhammad (see note 70).

⁶³ **Bougarel (Xavier)**, « Bošnjaci pod kontrolom panislamista », *op.cit.* ; **Bougarel (Xavier)**, « Avtoritarna reislamizacija in nove sestave v bosanskem islamu », *op.cit.*

⁶⁴ See also **Maček (Ivana)**, *War Within*, *op.cit.*, pp. 168-169 ; **Bagherzadeh (Alireza)**, « L'ingérence iranienne en Bosnie-Herzégovine », in **Bougarel (Xavier)**, **Clayer (Nathalie)** (dir.), *Le Nouvel Islam balkanique : Les musulmans, acteurs du post-communisme 1990-2000*, Paris : Maisonneuve et Larose, 2001, pp. 397-428 ; **Bellion-Jourdan (Jérôme)**, « Les réseaux transnationaux islamiques en Bosnie-Herzégovine », in **Bougarel (Xavier)**, **Clayer (Nathalie)** (dir.), *Le Nouvel Islam balkanique*, *op.cit.*, pp. 429-472.

⁶⁵ See **Maček (Ivana)**, *War Within*, *op.cit.*, pp. 168-169.

⁶⁶ The existence of these units was very important at the symbolical level, since their fighters were perceived as very fierce ones and, in the eyes of Sarajevans they were the only units Serb Chetniks were really afraid of. See **Maček (Ivana)**, *War Within*, *op.cit.*, pp. 204-205.

Islam » and the Bosniaks living in Slovenia. It seems that « foreign Islam » arrived in Jesenice through a Bosniak volunteer who came into contact with the *mujahiddin* while fighting in Bosnia and, after the war, went to study Islam in Sudan with their help. When he came back, some people eager to learn about Islam – mostly younger ones – gathered around him. Another channel through which « foreign Islam » arrived in Slovenia were books brought from Bosnia. Nowadays, such books are still being brought to Jesenice, but they originate from the Vienna based organization *Tevhid*, which is actually a branch of the Organization of Active Islamic Youth (*Organizacija aktivne islamska omladina* – OAIO), a Salafist organization that appeared in Bosnia at the end of the war⁶⁷. These books have religious contents, they contain translations from Arabic to Bosnian and are sponsored by different Islamic humanitarian organizations. During my fieldwork, I have come across books sponsored by the Saudi Arabian organization *IGASA* and by the Islamic foundation *Al Haramain*. Both of them used to be active in Bosnia during the war⁶⁸. The main characteristic of these books is that, compared to the practices of « traditional believers », they interpret Islam in a very scriptural way, with a strong insistence on the following of the Qur'an and the Sunna.

In Jesenice, a group of about 20 individuals is influenced by Salafist ideas, which represents a tiny proportion of the denominational Muslims living in that municipality.⁶⁹ They are mostly younger persons, aged between 20 and 40. They seek to follow the Sunna to the full extent and to shape every aspect of their everyday life in accordance with the example of the Prophet Muhammad and his companions. They have adopted an Islamic dress code, claiming that in so doing they follow the Sunna. Women wear veils, men grow beards and sometimes wear shorter, above-the-ankle trousers. All their arguments in favour of the Islamic dress code are of religious nature and they often explain their practices by quoting the hadiths⁷⁰. This group has adopted a highly ritualized behaviour reflected in the strict adherence to the rules set up by the Qur'an and the Sunna. Besides performing the five daily prayers, fasting during *Ramadan*, giving *zekat* (*zakaat*, ritual alms), men and women do not shake hands, avoid glances and any kind of contact (especially when left alone), women avoid ostentatious perfumes and make-up, men do not wear jewelry, silk or gay colours, and they eat only *halal* meat. They often debate about the Qur'an and the hadiths and go as far as interpreting some hadiths of the Prophet as condemning listening to music and singing. Due to their scriptural and puritan interpretations of religious sources, they do not try to adapt them to contemporary circumstances and create therefore a clear social boundary separating them from the rest of the Bosniak community. Stressing their religious identity, which is above all visible in the dress code, they seem alien to the other Bosniaks and to the Slovenian society in general. Their image is more often than not associated with non-European Muslim identity. Thus women who wear a veil often say that people in the streets stare at them, address them in English, or do not serve them in shops, because they assume that they do not speak Slovenian.

These young « Salafists » are very critical of what they consider to be the religious ignorance of the Bosniak population. In their view, most Bosniaks do not know the difference between

⁶⁷ Contemporary Salafists – also called neo-salafists or neo-fundamentalists – promote a strict and scriptural interpretation of the Qur'an and the Sunna, imitating the way of life of the Prophet Muhammad and the « pious ancestors » (*al-salaf al-salih*). The OAIO was created shortly after the end of the war by young Bosnian Muslims who have fought together with foreign *mujahedins*.

⁶⁸ See Maček (Ivana), *War Within*, *op.cit.*, pp. 168-171, 192-195.

⁶⁹ See note 6.

⁷⁰ *Hadiths* are accounts of the sayings and the deeds of the Prophet Muhammad and his companions, which represent the basis of the Sunna (see note 62). A rich and elaborate science of hadiths has developed among *ulama* (Islamic religious scholars) in order to determine the veracity of the *hadiths*.

Islam and mere local traditions, and take for granted everything their parents and grandparents passed on to them. They disagree with the religious practices – or lack of practice – of a large majority of Bosniaks and criticize them for emphasizing only their denominational identity – « *I'm a Muslim* » – while neglecting the basic prescriptions of Islam or taking them into consideration only in a truncated form :

« *A Bosniak, even when he doesn't believe in God, for example, he doesn't know what kelime-i-šehadet [71] is, he doesn't know the basis of religion, but he will tell you that he's Muslim. He'll teach his child that he has to be Muslim, (...) He'll advise his son to marry a Muslim, although he doesn't know what the five pillars of Islam are.* » (woman, 22-year-old, Jesenice)

« Salafists » blame Bosniaks for not praying or praying only once a week at the *džuma* (*jum'ah*, Friday congregational prayer) or coming to the *mesdžid* only for the *teravija* (*tarawih*, evening prayers during *Ramadan*), while escaping other daily prayers, for celebrating *Bajram* while not fasting during *Ramadan*, and for consuming alcohol during the year. In short, they think that the religiosity of many Bosniaks resemble the former national name « Muslim », denoting a form without content, a Muslim without Islam, and thus not a real devout believer :

« *What indicates that you are a Muslim ? A [Muslim] first name ? [72] You know ... This is like a Johann, lets say a Johann, but who is a Muslim. He prays five times a day ... Or Cat Stevens, yes, I got it ! He prays five times a day, he did hadž, he gives zekat, he has everything, all five pillars, and probably even something more. But no, he is Cat Stevens. And then you have also Mujo Mujagić who schnipps and schnapps, with wife and mistress, and you know, he would say that he is a Muslim. And what makes him a Muslim ? You know, Cat Stevens is a Muslim. And he doesn't have a Muslim name. But a Bosniak who follows some sort of tradition, is it the name that indicates that he is a Muslim ?* » (woman, 24-year-old, Jesenice)

Bosniaks are also blamed for the truncated forms of their Islamic practices, which are seen not as a product of religious knowledge but only as passively inherited tradition, a mixture of Islamic beliefs and Bosnian customs. For the « Salafists », practices such as the *mevludi* and *tevhidi* are especially problematic, since they see them as *haram* (illicit). Although *mevludi* and *tevhidi* are organized to worship God and the Prophet, they consider them as innovations that appeared after the death of Muhammad and does not belong to the original, the « pure » Islam. « Salafists » condemn even more strongly traditional forms of fortune-telling, which are very popular among Bosniaks. In their view, they do not only represent *širk* (*shirk*, superstition), a denial of the first pillar of Islam which states the uniqueness of God, but are also problematic because people believing that some *hodže* can predict the future from the Qur'an often spend a lot of money on it. A true believer, however, should be aware that only Allah knows the future, and a true *hodža* would never take money from people.

Although « Salafists » represent only a tiny minority of the Bosniak community living in Slovenia, reactions to their practices are virulent and other believers try hard to denigrate them. The most frequent way to do this is to represent their form of Islam as something that is not Bosniak – « *this is not ours* » [*to nije naše*], that is deviant – « *they are a sect* », « *they are*

⁷¹ *Kelime-i-šehadet* (*kalima shahada*, words of witnessing) is the first pillar of Islam, stating that « There is no God but God and Muhammad is his Servant and his Prophet ».

⁷² In Bosnia names denote people's ethno-religious identities. Muslim names are of Turkish or Arabic (Islamic) origin. They are often changed or shortened in everyday life, thus they have a specific Bosnian form : Mehmed – *Meho*, Salih – *Salko*, Šemsudin – *Šemso*, Fatima – *Fata*, Emina – *Mina*, etc. (see also **Bringa (Tone)**, *Being Muslim the Bosnian Way*, *op.cit.*, pp. 32-33, 194, 196).

Wahhabis », that is aggressive – « *they are mujahiddin* », « *they are extremists* ». « Traditional believers » also describe them as non-Muslims, or denounce their supposed immorality and backwardness :

« *We are Muslims, but we are not like them. They are not Muslims at all. They pray in a different way than we do. They've made it all up.* » (man, 26-year-old, Jesenice)

« *They think that they are better than us. They show off. They don't have a clue. As Muslims they shouldn't show off like that. My mother always taught me that I have to be Muslim in the heart and that that is something personal, not to be made public. They put on those terrible clothes and scarves and two years ago she was wearing a miniskirt and a décolleté like that. And now she goes like [pretending that] 'I'm honourable now'. But she is not. (...) She doesn't know that she disturbs me with her dirty socks, that I can't pray if dirty socks are in front of me. Tell me, is that supposed to be a Muslim, dirty like that ?* » (woman, 60-year-old, Jesenice)

« *It doesn't help to be in the mosque [⁷³] all the time, to pray all the time, if you go there to slander people. Besides, they are there all the time, but the only thing they are interested in is how this one was dressed and what another one said. That's why I don't go to the mosque at all. If I want to pray, I can do it at home as well.* » (man, 45-year-old, Ljubljana)

« *These women who wear veils, we can't be like that. We live here, in Europe. This is like there, in those Muslim countries. This is like going hundred years backwards.* » (woman, 24-year-old, Jesenice)

Conclusion

As shown in this paper, Islam represents a very important, yet controversial source of the postwar Bosniak identity. « Salafists » perceive « traditional » Bosnian Islam as blended with elements of local customs and based on narrow, parochial definitions of Islam rather than purely religious ones. As such, it is too vague and too unstable to be used as the fundament of their identity : Bosniak cultural repertoire is hard to disentangle from the two other Bosnian cultural repertoires, and also inadequate to be used as a source of pride in relation to ethnic Slovenians. On the contrary, an identity grounded on « pure » Islam is clearly defined by the Qur'an and the hadiths and provides the possibility to overcome the marginal status of being Bosniak in Slovenia. In their eyes, the distinction between Bosniak identity, which remains linked to one's place of origin, and the preferred self-designation as « Muslim », a label that expresses the belonging to the *Ummah*, the global community of believers, widens the boundaries of their own identity. It leads beyond the narrow ethnic and national boundaries that posit the Bosniaks as an invisible, or even non-existing ethnic group in relation to the Serbs and Croats, and as an inferior group in relation to the Slovenes. The identification with the *Ummah* can thus be said to provide a sense of belonging and continuity that is similar to that entailed by the identification with an ethnic group, despite the fact that the *Ummah* is not based on the notion of shared ancestry.

« Salafists » position themselves primarily along religious boundaries, which comprise all the actions, behaviours and outlooks that denote them as members of the Muslim religious

⁷³ Bosniaks in Jesenice call their *mesdžid* « *džamija* » (a « mosque »).

community in Slovenia. Those are above all the formal everyday practices through which they construct the boundaries of their global, supra-ethnic identity. Such practices inevitably entail some kind of public statement of difference from their non-Muslim colleagues or friends. Strict fulfilment of religious duties like five daily prayers and fasting during *Ramadan* ensure that the non-Muslims with whom they have social contact will be made aware of their activities as devout Muslims. Additionally, fundamental prescriptions such as the prohibition of alcohol and pork or the ritual slaughter of animals reinforce their social distinctiveness. Islamic religious prescriptions encompassing all aspects of everyday life ensure that the boundaries defining Islamic identity emerge in mundane as well as in explicitly religious contexts.⁷⁴

Against this background, the strong tendency among Bosniaks to denigrate the « Salafists » most likely derives from the conviction that strict Islamic practices misrepresent Bosniaks to the Slovenian public and can be detrimental to them. « Traditional believers » utilise all means to represent themselves as non-aggressive, moderate, of good morality and, first of all, as European – the opposite of what is presented in the media as « Islamic extremism ». In their eyes, the emphasis put by Salafists on religious boundaries reinforces a problematic social categorization within the Slovenian society. While a majority of Bosniaks use Islam as a marker of ethnic difference in the Bosnian context (in relation to Serbs and Croats), they do not wish to stress their religious difference in the Slovenian context (in relation to ethnic Slovenians). The maintenance of « traditional » Bosnian Islam, as a moral code and as a loose observation of religious prescriptions and rituals, is thus perceived as a convenient way of balancing their identity between these two social contexts. The religious practices of the « Salafists » are seen as too extreme, as something « traditional believers » have to distance themselves from, which they usually do by saying that « *to nije naše* », « *this is not ours* ». New religious practices, and especially the new veiling practices among women, represent for them something that has nothing to do with Bosniak cultural repertoire. While, for Salafists, these veiling practices represent a strong statement of their religious identity in both the Bosnian and the Slovenian contexts, « traditional believers » associate them with the non-European cultures of Muslim countries and, as such, with something that could threaten their position in Slovenia, both as Bosniaks and as Europeans.

⁷⁴ Compare with **Jacobson (Jessica)**, « Religion and Ethnicity : Dual and Alternative Sources of Identity among Young British Pakistanis », *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 20 (2), Special Issue : Ethnicity and Religion, 1997, pp. 238–256.