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“Islamic tradition”: questioning the Bosnian model

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Introduction

Debates over whether there can be a ‘European Islam’ have not ceased since 1990s when the term was coined by Bassam Tibi. Decried as an assimilationist imposition on Muslims for whom Islam does not bear adjectives, it still lives on in other forms, such as in Emmanuel Macron’s ‘Islam of France’. Since the mid-2000s the case of the ‘other European Muslims’ in the Balkans has attracted attention and questioning: are there not already autochthonous European Muslim communities with an experience of existing within secular state?²²⁰ Indeed, the oldest of these communities and its form of the religion, ‘Bosnian Islam’, has since been held up as a potential model for other European Muslims and their relation to modern secular states.²²¹

When Riada Asimović Akyol recently wrote in the *Atlantic* that ‘the history and practice of Bosnian Islam yields a number of noteworthy lessons for those seeking to cultivate a liberal Islam in Europe’, she identified such a liberal version of Islam with the Bosniak’s acceptance of the modern state during Austro-Hungarian rule, in the administrative centralisation of its institutions, in the prominence of Islamic modernism in Bosnia and in history of secularisation – in short, the Bosniak’s adaptability to modernity and secular contexts is a model to be imitated.

This paper aims to question the idea of a ‘progress towards a liberal Islam’ as being too straightforward by providing historical, political and also intellectual context to the practice of Islam in Bosnia and, above all, by analysing the present logic of looking for a particular Islamic identity. I will propose a reflection on what the ‘Bosnian model’ might mean in three steps – defining the Bosnian model; placing it in historical context; and reconstructing the context of the contemporary Islamic community’s efforts to define the Bosnian Islamic tradition and assessing its results.

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220 F. Karčić, ‘The Other European Muslims. A Bosnian Experience’, Sarajevo: Centre for Advanced Studies, 2015.

221 X. Bougarel, ‘Bosnian Islam as ‘European Islam’: Limits and Shifts of a Concept’, in A. Al-Azmeh, and E. Fokas (eds.), *Islam in Europe. Diversity, Identity and Influence*, (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2007); See also Dž. Šuško, ‘Ein Modell für Europa? Geschichte und Praxis des Islam in Bosnien-Herzegowina’, in *Auslandsinformationen* 4|2017, Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, 2017; and S. Bektović, ‘European Islam in the Light of the Bosnian Experience’, in N. Vinding, E. Racić and J. Thielmann (eds.), *Exploring the Multitude of Muslims in Europe*, (Leiden: Brill, 2018).

A Bosnian model for Europe?

The attractiveness of the Bosnian model is based on two main factors: first, it represents a modernised sort of Islamic practice while being autochthonous and legitimate, and second, it has the potential to become a template for other Muslim communities. Asimović Akyol points to Bosnian's capacity for 'embracing modernity without abandoning religious identity' and highlights that an 'institutionalized, centralized form of Islam can be highly successful, as seen in the case of the Islamic Community' of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Acknowledging the impossibility of replicating concrete institutions elsewhere, she is nonetheless confident that Bosnia can indeed function as a positive example of how Islam and Europe, are 'far from incompatible – in fact, they have been intertwined for centuries'.²²²

French historian Xavier Bougarel agrees that 'all of these debates can be boiled down to a central issue: that of the relationship between Islam and Western modernity'.²²³ In his view, Bosnia clearly presents tendencies towards a kind of European Islamic modernity. Its major proponent, Fikret Karčić, is also the author of the influential definition of the 'Bosnian Islamic tradition', which in his view comprises five key elements: 1) Hanafi–Maturidi doctrinal belonging; 2) Ottoman–Islamic cultural heritage; 3) the Islamisation of pre-Ottoman practices; 4) the tradition of Islamic reformism in the interpretation of Islam; 5) the institutionalisation of Islam in the form of the Islamic Community; and 6) the practice of expression of Islam in a secular state.²²⁴

In Bougarel's view from the mid-2000s, Karčić's vision of 'individualised Islam in a secular state', represented one possible trajectory among others including, identifying Islam as a 'common culture', and a politicised vision of Islam as a nationalist ideology. These were, implicitly, in competition. In Bougarel's analysis, the first position would not necessarily win out. Karčić's vision was influenced by the former Yugoslav secular and reformist framework, whereas the other visions were motivated by the necessities of the new political context: a need for national identity and for national mobilisation.

Increasingly, Bosnians themselves have presented their Muslim practice as an explicit model for Europe. In Zagreb in 2006, Mustafa Cerić – Reis ul-ulema (the elected leader of Bosnian Muslims) from 1993 to 2012 – presented his vision in his Declaration of European Muslims,²²⁵ in which he called for mutual tolerance and respect and a development of European Islamic institutions. The declaration was noticed in Europe: Bosnian Islam was portrayed in Germany as 'a model for Muslims in Europe'.²²⁶

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222 R. Asimovic Akyol, 'Want to Cultivate a Liberal European Islam? Look to Bosnia', *The Atlantic*, 13 January 2019, <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2019/01/bosnia-offers-model-liberal-european-islam/579529/> (Accessed on 22 March 2019)

223 X. Bougarel, 'Bosnian Islam as 'European Islam': Limits and Shifts of a Concept', in A. Al-Azmeh, and E. Fokas (eds.), *Islam in Europe. Diversity, Identity and Influence*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2007.

224 F. Karčić, 'What is the Islamic tradition of the Bosniaks', *Preporod*, 7 December 2006.

225 'Islam: Bosnian Cleric Sees Unique Role For Europe's Muslims', *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, 15 March 2006, <https://www.rferl.org/a/1066720.html>

226 Z. Arbutina, 'Bosnischer Islam als Vorbild für Muslime in Europa?', *Deutsche Welle*, 7 November 2007, <https://www.dw.com/de/bosnischer-islam-als-vorbild-f%C3%BCr-muslime-in-europa/a-2967679>

Reis Hussein Kavazović, his successor, systematically speaks of Bosniaks, as the autochthonous European Muslims. In his lecture at the University of Pécs in 2016,²²⁷ he gave elaborate exposition as to what makes Bosniaks European and Muslim at the same time. Firstly, their Islamic tradition in terms of law, since the Ottomans bestowed 'the most flexible' of the four schools of Islam on the Balkans. Secondly, the fact that Bosniaks did not 'become Turks' but retained local customs such as outdoor prayers and never took to polygamy. Thirdly, the occupation by Austria-Hungary in 1878 meant the end of a 'traditional form of religious and ethnic self-isolation' and the necessity of religious and intellectual dialogue with another civilisation. It meant 'confrontation' with, and 'reflection' upon various styles of thinking, governing and social conduct. It finally resulted into a process of 'securing an autonomy' within this new modern world by building a self-governing religious institution. Finally, since Bosniaks ceased to be subjects of universal empires and became a part of a periphery, European identity has come to represent a 'universal' anchorage for them. Reis Kavazović refers to Bosnian religious intellectuals who highlight the need for the 'meeting between religion and science' (H. Neimarlija), and the necessity of a secular state (F. Karčić) and of a 'dialogical consciousness' (E. Karić).

Another prominent Bosnian Islamic figure, the former director of the Institute of the Islamic Tradition of the Bosniaks Dr. Dževada Šuško, presents a similar self-understanding of Bosnian Islam as European in her German text, 'A model for Europe? History and Practice of Islam in Bosnia and Herzegovina', from 2017. While echoing the historical background outlined by Dr. Kavazović, she elaborates on two other aspects: the tradition of Bosnian Islamic reformist thought and the nature of the Islamic institutions. Bosnian traditional clerics and modernist intellectuals helped namely to absorb 'the civilizational shock' of losing the status of subjects of a universal religious leader (the caliph) and becoming a religious minority under a Catholic emperor. In 1882 the Grand Mufti permitted Muslims to serve in the Austrian army, and in 1884 the Tuzla mufti declared that it was permitted under Islamic law to live in the Christian state. The social consequences of modernisation, such as the presence of women in public places, the schooling of girls etc. became controversial. Often, a strong Islamic case was made for modernisation and a leading reformist, Džemaludin Čaušević, was elected as reis. The Islamic reformist tradition became the basis of the Islamic revival from 1970s.

The Islamic Community (IC) became a 'substantial part of the religious identity of the Bosniaks' (Šuško 2017). It offers itself as a model: it is self-financed, self-administered and 'half-democratic'. All important positions are filled through elections – direct at the level of the džemat (local community) and indirect at higher levels, including the reis. The IC in Bosnia and Herzegovina is ruled by a modernised constitution. Dževada Šuško also highlights the centralised nature of the IC: all imams are nominated at the local level and appointed directly by the reis. Imams and religious teachers are educated in six secondary Islamic schools and three university faculties. As a result of the representative and centralised nature of the IC, the institution is stable, adaptable and most importantly, she notes, was able to withstand the danger of radicalisation. Indeed, due to its complex and adaptable structure, the IC was largely able to impose its central authority on all mosques and most informal fundamentalist groups, and continues to enjoy concrete legitimacy among the faithful it serves and represents.

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227 Debate in Hungary with Reis ul-ulema: 'Bosniaks have no complex because they are Muslims and Europeans', 'Mađarska besjeda reisu-l-uleme: Bošnjaci nemaju kompleks zato što su muslimani i Evropljani', lecture at the University of Pécs, 29 April 2016, via <http://bit.ly/2zvzR2D> (Accessed on 22 March 2019)

Bosnian Islamic institutions in historical context

When Reis Kavazović says that the main heritage of the Bosniaks is their 'religious foundation and institutionalisation within the IC', he may be supporting the optimistic assessments of those who think that Bosnian Islam may be a direct model for Europe. Yet traditions and institutions are organically grown social phenomena. When looking at the 'Bosnian model' in its historical context, it becomes evident that modernisation, institutionalisation, self-governance etc. are results of mostly non-linear, complex and agonistic historical processes that could well have had very different outcomes.

One example is the above-mentioned proposal of former reis Mustafa Cerić. Alongside his declaration of 2006, he engaged in many-faceted public diplomacy and spoke on behalf on European Muslims in the aftermath of dramatic situations, in a moment when the European Muslim diaspora had no recognisable representatives. He made a strong case for the mutual recognition of Islam and secularism, for the institutionalisation of Muslim communities in Europe and even for a single Muslim authority in Europe.²²⁸ The project was unrealistic at the time, which Reis Cerić has since acknowledged. While European states awkwardly work towards institutionalisation, or rather, a 'churchification' of Islam, there is no clear end in sight for this process.²²⁹

Institutions, as well as theological consensus and identities, develop in conflicts with unknown outcomes. It was not otherwise in Bosnia. Institutional autonomy, reformism and the acceptance of secularism were as much products of circumstance as results of intentional action.

Bosnian Muslims accepted their new existence as a minority within a Christian Empire with reluctance. Even after accepting the Habsburg legacy and modernisation as a part of their identity, Bosniaks continue to speak about the period as an occupation. After 1878, Bosnian Muslim lived through what has come to be known expressively as 'a civilizational shock'. The ceding of administrative control of Bosnia and Herzegovina to Austria-Hungary by the Ottomans at the Congress of Berlin in 1878 was mitigated by promises of religious autonomy and continued attachment to the formal sovereignty of the Ottoman caliph. However, in 1882 the Austrian emperor created the office of reis ul-ulema, in order to detach Bosnians from the control of the Ottoman Sultan-caliph in Istanbul and elevating the pro-Austrian mufti of Sarajevo to the office.

Later, when Bosnian Muslims mobilised for religious and administrative autonomy (1899–1909) alongside Balkan nationalist movements, they wanted to return under the jurisdiction of the caliph. Their demand for autonomy was primarily defensive – spurred on by the Austrian state's exploitation of Islamic endowments, forceful modernisation and by a fear of Catholic proselytising. This mobilisation for autonomy was eventually vindicated after the official incorporation annexation of Bosnia by the Austro-Hungarian Empire in 1908, and then after the abolition of the caliphate in Turkey by Atatürk in 1924.

Similarly complex was the destiny of modernist theology in the Bosnian identity. The fatwas

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228 M. Cerić, 'The challenge of a single Muslim authority in Europe', *European View* 6, 2007, pp. 41–48.

229 N. Vinding, 'Churchification of Islam in Europe', in N. Vinding, E. Racić and J. Thielmann (eds), *Exploring the Multitude of Muslims in Europe*, (Leiden: Brill, 2018).

in favour of continued life under a Christian emperor and serving in his army were responses to almost existential crises – a large exodus of up to a fifth of the Muslim population, and an uprising against a military draft. The ability of Muslim law to pragmatically interpret precedents in Islamic history helped to save Bosniaks as a nation. Even more telling is the later fate of modernist thought. In the effervescent interwar period, young Muslim intellectuals were bringing in modernist ideas from Cairo and Istanbul and campaigned for social reforms. A series of intellectual battles were fought between modernists and traditionalists in their respective spheres. While many outspoken modernists could count among themselves prominent personalities, such as the first Bosnian-chosen reis Čaušević, they by no means were winning the culture war. In fact, Bosnia proved difficult for the Austrian rulers to modernise. While benefiting from Austrian sponsorship of higher Islamic education, Bosnian Muslim institutions managed to resist and stall many modernising policies from traditionalist positions, such as women's schooling (at a time when universal schooling was law in the rest of the Austrian Empire). On the matter of female full veiling, the modernising reis also lost the battle and was criticised for being too impressed by the reforms of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk.²³⁰ In Bosnia, the fear of losing their identity through changes in social norms was at least as great as the ideals of social development.

The identification of Bosniaks with Islamic reformism in fact comes from a much later period – the last decade of Yugoslavia. In the 1940s, the fascist occupation and the subsequent communist regime repressed or eliminated many Bosnian intellectuals, especially the traditionalists like M. Handžić and M. Busuladžić. Between the 1970s and mid-1980s, the communist regime relaxed its control of religious activities and a limited Islamic revival ensued. Since then, the IC has focussed its limited resources on salvaging Islam as a practice, culture and institution. It has succeeded in renewing educational institutions, such as the faculty of theology in 1977 and a women's madrassa in Sarajevo. Secondly, its leaders, especially Husein Džozo, made rational inquiry, reformist thought and practical legal questions key parts of the faculty's curriculum.²³¹ Modernised teaching included recognition of the secular framework of Islamic law and practice. Finally, the IC as institution has cemented its role as the umbrella organisation of Bosnian Muslims through new media outlets, through incorporating Sufi lodges and through claiming a monopoly on the wealth tax (zakat) in order to finance Islamic schools to preserve Muslim identity.

Hence, there was no straightforward process towards what makes Islam unique in Bosnia today. Many of those remarkable characteristics of Bosnian Islam hailed today as liberal or progressive were not based on a modernist consensus, but rather crystallised in complex processes and often resulted from necessity. Centralisation, reformism and Islamic education instead became defining elements of Bosnian self-understanding relatively recently – in a moment when Islam became a question of identity.

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230 X. Bougarel, 'Farewell to the Ottoman Legacy? Islamic Reformism and Revivalism in Inter-War Bosnia-Herzegovina', in N. Clayer and E. Germain, *Islam in Inter-War Europe*, (London: Hurst 2008), pp. 6.

231 A. Alibašić, 'Traditional and Reformist Islam in Bosnia and Herzegovina', Cambridge Programme for Security in International Society (C-SIS), (Cambridge 2003), pp. 6.

Defending the tradition

A second characteristic of the Bosnian model is the fact that Bosnians themselves have started reflecting the specificity of the 'Bosnian Islamic tradition' recently and in the context of a new religious pluralism. This has driven institutions to make active efforts to define, strengthen and preserve the Bosniak tradition.

It is notable that what seems to be the basis of the official self-understanding of Bosnian Muslims as defined above is that it is not treated as identity but is usually as 'tradition', specifically, 'the Islamic tradition of the Bosniaks'. This tradition, as defined by Karčić in 2006, became a quasi-official position of the IC. Links to Karčić's 'What is the Islamic tradition of the Bosniaks', which was first published in the fortnightly outlet of the IC Preporod, can be found on the official IC website, on the websites of regional organisations of the IC in Bosnia and Germany and on official think-tanks of the IC.²³² The five elements are consistently echoed by Bosnian Muslim representatives. The reason is that the Bosnian tradition is not only a practical self-definition, but an instrument of self-positioning in a religious context that has suddenly become dangerously pluralistic.

Since the end of communism, Islam has faced three sorts of challenges in the region: the politicisation of religion in nationalist politics of the 1990s; increased involvement by foreign actors from the Muslim world during the war and after independence; and finally, the pluralisation of the Islamic scene in Bosnia itself. All have thrown into question the autonomy and authority of the IC in Bosnia. The IC has gradually learned to answer those challenges. With substantial foreign help, it has rebuilt its infrastructure, opened secondary schools and faculties, educated its religion teachers and imams, founded various organs and publications, and managed a change in the direction of the IC.²³³ In the early 2000s, the IC liberated itself from the overwhelming influence of a political party and diversified its financial support from various parts of the world – seeking alliances not only in the Gulf, but also in Turkey and more recently in the EU.²³⁴ But the most demanding challenge proved to be the inner pluralism in Bosnia itself.

Since the late 1990s, the penetration of various Islamic trends into Bosnia via the Internet led to 'a change in Islamic discourse in Bosnia'.²³⁵ Many hitherto absent ideas and types of religious organisation were spreading rapidly: minority sects (Shia, Ahmadiya), Turkish neo-Sufis (Hizmet, Suleymancis) and neo-Salafism.²³⁶

The last trend represented the only real challenge. Several neo-Salafi groups openly

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232 Islamska Zajednica u Bosni i Hercegovini, 30 August 2007, http://www.islamskazajednica.ba/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=1646:cta-je-to-qislamska-tradicija-bocnjaka-q&catid=90&Itemid=222, also available at <https://www.cdv.ba/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/Fikret-Karcic-Sta-je-to-islamska-tradicija-Bosnjaka.pdf>

233 See forthcoming publication by Z. Hesová and E. Rašidagić, 'The Changing Role of the Traditional Islamic Organization: three challenges to the restored Bosnian Islamic community'.

234 K. Öktem, 'New Islamic actors after the Wahhabi intermezzo: Turkey's return to the Muslim Balkans', European Studies Centre, Oxford (2010).

235 A. Alibašić, 'Traditional and Reformist Islam in Bosnia and Herzegovina', Cambridge Programme for Security in International Society (C-SIS), Cambridge (2003), pp. 14.

236 A. Ross Solberg, 'The Role of Turkish Islamic Networks in the Western Balkans', *Südosteuropa*, 55(4), 2007.

questioned the monopoly of the IC. Neo-Salafi groups started offering alternative fatwas on their websites, separate Islamic education to adults and Qur'an courses to children. Neo-Salafi leaders have also openly disputed the legitimacy of certain traditional religious practices such as outdoor prayers, receiving 'pocket money' for funeral rituals, keeping mausolea, the calculation of Ramadan timings, etc.

A dissident Islamic discourse was disseminated by Saudi-financed translations of religious literature and Islamic centres founded by former mujahideen.²³⁷ Later, a generation of Bosnian preachers took over and initiated an even fiercer attack on the legitimacy of IC's monopoly and its practices. Because dozens were educated in Saudi Arabia, they could base their differing vision of Islamic practice on their mastery of Arabic, on the aura of conservative authenticity and on a corpus of literalist neo-Salafi quranic references. The years 2005–2007 were marked by debates about confessional belonging within Islam (the madhabs) and they finally escalated in attempts by neo-Salafi groups to occupy or take over mosques.²³⁸ In 2012–2013, dozens left for Syria and threatened the IC from there.

In a belated response, the IC sought to reaffirm its authority and legitimacy. It pursued two main strategies: strict and soft. First in 2006, the IC adopted a 'Resolution on the interpretation of Islam', calling upon imams to 'be consistent in the interpretation of the institutional learning of Islam on the basis of the Qur'an, the Sunnah, and our experience in Bosnia and Herzegovina', as well as reaffirmed its sole authority over religious objects and in rules concerning the usage of religious houses.²³⁹ As it became obvious, asserting authority is not the same as possessing it, and conflict ensued. It became necessary to look for other means of legitimising the IC's authority, and by defending that which the challengers attacked – the Bosnian practice of Islam.

Although the 'Islamic tradition of the Bosniaks' was a 'constitutional category' of the IC since 1997 (pace Dž. Šuško), it remained a vague reference. Attempts to give the Bosnian tradition a clear rationale became one of the main strategies for responding to what the IC terms 'exclusive', 'radical' or 'extra-institutional interpretations of Islam'.²⁴⁰

Prof. Karčić's definition proved to a useful basis on which the IC could fully reassert its authority. It was able to legitimise the initially empty notion by developing and institutionalising the Bosnian tradition. In 2008, the rijaset (the executive office of the IC) established the Institute for the Islamic Tradition of the Bosniaks (IITB). Under Dr. Šuško, it was tasked with carrying out research into the history of the Bosniaks and engaging in public debates about their tradition. It started research into many of the criticised aspects of the Bosnian popular practice but also into the neo-Salafi criticism itself.²⁴¹ The institute started publishing works of Bosnian Islamic thinkers to build a corpus of national Islamic

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237 A. Alibašić, 'Traditional and Reformist Islam in Bosnia and Herzegovina', pp. 15–16.

238 A. Kadribegović, 'Vehabije osvajaju Sarajevo!', *Preporod*, Godina XXXVII, broj 5/847, 1. 3. 2007, p. 9

239 Islamska zajednica, 'Odluka o džamijskom kućnom redu', <http://islamskazajednica.ba/images/stories/URADITI/kucni%20red.pdf> (Accessed on 22 March 2019)

240 H. Karčić, E. Subašić, 'Vaninstitucionalna tumačenja islama u Bosni i Hercegovini: djelovanje NVO i medija', *Islamska tradicija Bošnjaka na razmeđu stoljeća: izazovi novih tumačenja islama*, Sarajevo: Institut za islamsku tradiciju Bošnjaka, (2018), pp. 145–166.

241 E. Duranović, S. Ljevaković-Subašić, (eds.) 'Izazovi novih tumačenja islama: islamska tradicija Bošnjaka na razmeđu stoljeća', Sarajevo: Institut za islamsku tradiciju Bošnjaka, 2018.

knowledge production – giving a basis for the claim of a distinct Islamic tradition.

The IC also began to regularly organise public conferences on the notion of ‘tradition’ – considered by some to be ‘the most important academic meeting organised by the IC in post-war Bosnia-Herzegovina’.²⁴² The conferences allow to debate over what makes up the Bosnian tradition, to bring arguments for its Islamic soundness and to discuss the challenges. Their proceedings reflect various trends: the notion of a tradition, the plurality of Islamic discourses, Sunni identity and finally empirical studies neo-Salafi groups and their challenge the authority of the IC in theological argumentation and media attraction. They also reflect a choice of Turkey as a partner in this endeavour.

Liberal process of constructing a tradition rather than tradition of a liberal Islam

While the meaning of the Islamic tradition of the Bosniaks remains somewhat suspended between official and critical discourses that do not always meet, the Bosnian IC succeeded in establishing the notion of a Bosnian Islamic practice worth defending, capable of uniting the community, and open to some degree of discussion.

In his definition, Karčić made sure to say that he does not attempt to add any adjective to Islam: there is no Bosnian Islam to promote against, say, Saudi Islam. He rather sought to theologially locate the Bosnian practice and to list the characteristics that Bosnians care about.²⁴³ Tradition is different from culture: it is based on adherence to certain principles, but it is also a product of a common history and other norms and values (secularity, coexistence and organisation). Talking about ‘tradition’ allows one to talk about a universal system of religious and ethical norms in a specific, local guise. Only from the perspective of tradition can reformism, institutionalisation and secularism become part of what a people may be asked to adhere to. Tradition finally allows one to define one’s identity without creating divisions – Bosnian tradition is a part of a Sunni tradition, and therefore of Islamic tradition.

Even if only IC insiders were included in official events (along with several neo-Salafi insiders who recognize the IC), many groups, including Islamic activist websites, neo-Salafi websites and secular newspapers, participated in a larger societal debate. The last public conference of the IC showed signs of mutual recognition between the official institution and certain critical trends: a distinction was made between those Islamic groups who criticise certain aspects of the IC position from within, that is, who despite reservations do recognize the IC, and those ‘extra-institutional interpretations’ that dispute the IC outright (Karčić, Subašić 2018).²⁴⁴

Hence, the process of constructing a tradition has proven flexible enough to slowly encompass diversity rather than create division. It also allowed for changing positions and

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242 A. Smajić and M. Fazlović, ‘Bosnia and Herzegovina’, *Yearbook of Muslims in Europe*, Vol. 7, (Brill: Leiden, 2015), pp. 118, 205.

243 The other subject of IITB events were history of Balkan minorities, genocide, diaspora and secularism.

244 H. Karčić and E. Subašić, ‘Vaninstitucionalna tumačenja islama u Bosni i Hercegovini: djelovanje NVO i medija’, *Islamska tradicija Bošnjaka na razmeđu stoljeća: izazovi novih tumačenja islama*. Sarajevo: Institut za islamsku tradiciju Bošnjaka, (2018), pp. 145-166.

possibly even for creating a convergence on certain topics, on a moderately conservative basis. For example, the IC seems to have reflected upon neo-Salafi successes. It has taken account of the problematic status of informal payments for funeral rituals,²⁴⁵ and of the absence of youth work. It has since initiated a series of programs for imams and, with the help of Norway²⁴⁶ (Perry 2016:32) and the EU,²⁴⁷ for youths to promote moderation, the Bosnian tradition and its European orientation. On the other hand, it made use of the liberal value of freedom of religion to advance collective religious rights and entered the debate about secularism and courts with a fatwa that defined the hijab as a religious obligation.²⁴⁸

The success of tradition as a process does indeed confirm what Dž. Šuško has underlined: the prevention of strife and extremes. The internal challengers have largely accepted the necessity of a common framework for defining common values, identity, tradition, but also recognised their agency in that very process. Nowadays, conservative or neo-Salafi intellectuals are the most active writers on practical subjects of social relations, family issues and religious morality, and they do so within the framework of the IC.²⁴⁹

Hence, the open process of tradition-finding does not make the Bosnian practice liberal per se. On the contrary. The need to constantly justify its Islamic legitimacy in the context of the 'defence of a tradition' may have pulled it towards more self-consciously traditionalist, communal or socially conservative positions or at least towards an acceptance of such positions. In this new context, the rational vision of an individualist religion that Bougarel has ascribed to Fikret Karčić may be losing ground after all to more communal, conservative projects of Bosniak Islamic identity.

But the process itself makes the tradition 'liberal' in another sense. The institution proved capable of navigating the plurality of positions, ideologies and influences. The capacity for evolution along a pragmatic set of rules while retaining a link to its foundational norms could be a sign of what Charles Taylor defines as secularity.²⁵⁰ Bosnian institutions rarely invoke religious authority anymore, but rather seek to gain legitimacy through inclusion and persuasion.

Conclusion

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245 Reis Kavazović and the Fatwa Council have respectively declared giving extra money for funerals unethical and paying for communal meals untraditional. See: 'Od sada zabranjeno davanje "kovertne" hodžama', <http://www.kozarac-mutnik.com/index.php/obavijestjenja/510-ekskluzivno-od-sada-zabranjeno-davanje-kovertne-hodzama> (Accessed 20 March 2019)

246 V. Perry, 'Initiatives to Prevent/Counter Violent Extremism in South East Europe: A Survey of Regional Issues, Initiatives and Opportunities', Regional Cooperation Council, Sarajevo, 2016.

247 Počela realizacija projekta 'Moje mjesto u Evropi: izgradnja i promocija dijaloga o EU integraciji', Islamskazajednica.ba, <http://www.islamskazajednica.ba/vijesti/mina-vijesti/27642-pocela-realizacija-projekta-moje-mjesto-u-evropi-izgradnja-i-promocija-dijaloga-o-eu-integraciji> (Accessed on 25 March 2018)

248 Al-Jazeera, 'Vijeće muftija: Hidžab je vjerska obaveza', <http://balkans.aljazeera.net/vijesti/vijece-muftija-hidzab-je-vjerska-obaveza> (Accessed on 22 March 2019)

249 See a book on Bosnian tradition published by Muharem Štulanović, the Saudi educated former dean of the Islamic pedagogical faculty in Bihać: Faith and tradition in the Bosniak identity (2017).

250 See C. Taylor, A Secular Age (Harvard University Press, 2007).

In most Bosnian Muslim self-descriptions, the Bosnian practice of Islam is based on a centralised institution, the IC, and the experience of pluralism, reformism and secularism. Such a self-perception does not reflect an explicit model – that is, a set of ingredients and principles for a liberal, European Islam. Rather it is the sign of successful efforts in finding responses to the multiple challenges of globalisation, religious pluralism, and challenges to confessional authority through the construction of an ‘Islamic tradition of the Bosniaks’.

Some ten years ago, the Bosnian Islamic Community initiated a path to reaffirm its authority and legitimacy through the notion of a Bosnian tradition. Tradition as a process seems to have led to a more pragmatic framing of religious and ideological conflicts. It helped to channel conflict into discursive controversy and institutionalising dispute into a process for open-ended yet controlled identity formation. While the emerging identity cannot be expected to be necessarily liberal or individualistic, it has a procedural character that evolves within a modern, secular framework.

Not every Islamic community has its own ‘tradition’. Diasporic Muslims in Europe are very plural if not divided in their respective national traditions, ideological trends; indeed other Balkan Islamic communities struggle to even define their national traditions in the face strong foreign influences. Bosnian Muslims have the advantage of being attached to an organisation that is complex and adaptable enough to evolve and engage to some extent in self-reflective processes. Rather than a set of principles, its ‘model’ consists in a pragmatic and prudent organising of religious life in Bosnia and Herzegovina.²⁵¹

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251 'Zašto je Evropi zanimljiv 'bosanski islam', Al-Jazeera, 3 June 2017, <http://balkans.aljazeera.net/vijesti/zasto-je-evropi-zanimljiv-bosanski-islam>

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