

Disrupting Boundaries between Traditional and Transnational Islam: Pious Women's Engagement with Islamic Authority in Bosnia-Herzegovina

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Halida was a woman in her early 20s who lived with her parents on the outskirts of Sarajevo.¹ I met her at a mosque that held weekly gatherings for pious Muslim youth. She would often invite me to come along with her to talks and events related to Islam or just to meet up for coffee. On one occasion, we were strolling down a pedestrian street in the center of Sarajevo when we ran into her friend Amna. She told us how a mutual acquaintance had just received a phone call from a friend in London congratulating him for Eid al-Adha (*kurban bajram*). As Amna was recounting the story, it became clear that she found it amusing because in Bosnia Eid was not being celebrated until the following day.² What was amusing, however, was not that the friend in London had made a mistake and called a day early but rather, as Amna and Halida were well aware, that Bosnia was officially celebrating Eid on a different day to most Muslims around the world. The Islamic or *hijri* calendar is a lunar calendar and therefore its dates are determined by observations of the moon. Many Muslims around the world celebrate Eid on the date based on sightings of the moon in Saudi Arabia. In Bosnia, it is the Islamic Community (*Islamska Zajednica*), the official body in charge of managing Muslim religious affairs, that determines the date of Eid—an official holiday and non-working day for Bosnia's Muslim citizens. This can correspond with the date determined in Saudi Arabia, but on this occasion, it fell on a different day. It became a topic of discussion for many pious Muslims, some of whom struggled to decide when to celebrate. This dilemma illustrates the complexities surrounding Islamic authority in contemporary Bosnia. It reflects circumstances in which a government-sanctioned body officially recognized as Bosnia's only Islamic religious authority is faced with competing claims to authority from domestic and transnational actors, and where ordinary believers have a keen awareness of a Muslim world beyond Bosnia encompassing both "East" and "West."

Over the past two and a half decades, the Islamic Community (IC) has been trying to reinforce its position as *the* legitimate source of Islamic authority in Bosnia in the face of competitors ranging from transnational neo-Sufi and Salafi networks to state bodies of countries such as Turkey and Iran, as well as homegrown alternatives and charismatic figures within its own structures.³ The pluralization of Islamic authority and a diversification of the religious market in post-communist Bosnia and in the Balkans more widely has been

1. The names of all interlocutors have been replaced by pseudonyms.

2. I use Bosnia in lieu of Bosnia-Herzegovina for reasons of convenience.

3. I follow Anne Ross Solberg's usage of the term neo-Sufi for describing religious movements that are historically rooted in Sufism but have a looser organizational structure, such as the Gülen movement. See Anne Ross Solberg, "The Role of Turkish Islamic Networks in the Western Balkans," *Südosteuropa* 55, no. 4 (2007): 429–62.

noted by numerous scholars.⁴ What this paper adds to scholarly debate is a discussion of how pious Muslim women negotiate this landscape by engaging with a range of Islamic discourses and actors, accepting or contesting their claims to authority in the process.

Being non-Muslim, many of my interlocutors were keen to share their understanding of Islam with me, especially in a post-9/11 climate of fear and hate. This included inviting me to a range of places where they could introduce me to their experience of Islam. I followed my interlocutors to various sites across the city of Sarajevo including mosques, tekkes, Islamic cultural centers, civil society organizations, as well as cafés and domestic spaces.⁵ My access to the field was structured by my positionality as a young woman. Although I had opportunities to speak to older women as well as men, my main interlocutors were my peers in age and gender. That meant much of my time was spent at various activities taking place in women's civil society organizations and mosque youth gatherings as well as strolling through the city and socializing in cafés perceived to conform to Islamic moral principles.⁶ This provided me with an opportunity to observe how women navigate multiple sources of Islamic knowledge and authority and how they contribute to transformations of Islam at a grassroots level.

Rather than focusing on congregations linked to specific Islamic institutions, networks, or spaces and using them as case studies, the paper takes the trajectories of individual believers as its starting point. Following my interlocutors enabled me to recognize the many crosscutting linkages between what are commonly perceived as different Muslim "groups" in Bosnia. In my analysis, I draw on critiques of essentialist understandings of culture, ethnicity, and nationhood, in particular the work of Rogers Brubaker.⁷ This allows me to highlight how various modes of Islam in Bosnia, such as traditional, mainstream, (neo-)Sufi, Salafi and Shi'a are discursively constructed categories rather than bounded social groups with a fixed membership. To understand the transformations of Islam in Bosnia, we need to attend to individual and institutional actors claiming authority and the ways in which ordinary

4. For a sample of this literature see Xavier Bougarel, *Islam and Nationhood in Bosnia-Herzegovina: Surviving Empires* (New York, 2018); Ahmet Alibašić, "Bosnia and Herzegovina," in Jocelyne Cesari, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of European Islam* (Oxford, 2014), 429–74; Arolda Elbasani and Olivier Roy, eds., *The Revival of Islam in the Balkans: From Identity to Religiosity* (Basingstoke, Eng., 2015); Arolda Elbasani and Jelena Tošić, "Localized Islam(s): Interpreting Agents, Competing Narratives, and Experiences of Faith," *Nationalities Papers* 45, no. 4 (July 2017): 499–510; David Henig and Karolina Bielenin-Lenczowska, "Recasting Anthropological Perspectives on Vernacular Islam in Southeast Europe," *Anthropological Journal of European Cultures* 22, no. 2 (2013): 1–11; Ina Merdjanova, *Rediscovering the Umma: Muslims in the Balkans Between Nationalism and Transnationalism* (Oxford, 2013); Kristen Ghodsee, *Muslim Lives in Eastern Europe: Gender, Ethnicity, and the Transformation of Islam in Postsocialist Bulgaria* (Princeton, 2009).

5. I conducted fieldwork over several visits between 2006 and 2014.

6. For more on the latter see Andreja Mesarič, "'Islamic Cafés' and 'Sharia Dating': Muslim Youth, Spaces of Sociability, and Partner Relationships in Bosnia-Herzegovina," *Nationalities Papers* 45, no. 4 (July 2017): 581–97.

7. Rogers Brubaker, *Ethnicity without Groups* (Cambridge, Mass., 2004).

believers engage with them, rather than ascribe agency to presumed groups.⁸ While certain institutional actors can be observed as promoting particular interpretations or movements within Islam, this cannot be readily extended to pious Muslims who engage with them in various ways. I use the term engage to convey individuals' agency involved in interacting with various Islamic actors and the fluctuating nature of these encounters. The paper does not aim to describe the heterogeneity of the Islamic landscape in Bosnia by constructing a "mosaic" picture. Instead, it aims to highlight how in their shifting real-world interactions with actors aligned with particular Islamic discourses, believers often adopt situational positions that do not necessarily amount to group membership, and that can change over time.

The paper also raises questions about what happens to Islamic authority in a context where individual believers rely on different authoritative discourses selectively or situationally, pondering the usefulness of the concept of personalization of faith. In my analysis, I draw on Max Weber's typology of authority, which distinguishes between legal-rational or bureaucratic authority rooted in formal rules and legislation, traditional authority rooted in established practices, and charismatic authority rooted in the charismatic personality of a leader.⁹ I also employ the notions of layered and situational authority. I use the former to refer to how authority operates at different levels and how acknowledging the authority of different actors can serve different purposes. I use the latter to refer to how believers may accept the authority of a certain actor or discourse in a specific setting but not adhere to their interpretations outside of a particular context. I draw on these terms to describe the sometimes-contradictory ways in which women accept or contest authoritative claims as well as to describe how women themselves can take up positions of authority.

In the first part, the paper introduces the main institutional actors populating Bosnia's Islamic landscape. It pays particular attention to the IC and its attempts to legitimize its contested position as the sole representative of Islam in Bosnia by rooting itself in Bosnian tradition, inevitably producing its Others in the process. In the second part, the paper explores women's engagement with Islamic authority. This includes tracing individual women's trajectories to reveal how they may engage positively with a variety of Islamic actors discursively constructed as opposed to each other; describing women's critical and reflective engagement with Islamic authority and its situated and layered nature; and exploring the ways women can themselves obtain a degree of Islamic authority and under what conditions. The paper concludes by returning to the example of Eid al-Adha as an opportunity to consider the relevance of authoritative actors.

8. For a similar approach see David Henig, "'This is Our Little Hajj': Muslim Holy Sites and Reappropriation of the Sacred Landscape in Contemporary Bosnia," *American Ethnologist* 39, no. 4 (2012): 751–65.

9. Max Weber, *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology* (Berkeley, 1978).

Alternative Claims to Religious Authority and Contested Definitions of Tradition

Claiming Authority through Claiming Tradition: The Islamic Community of Bosnia-Herzegovina

The Islamic Community of Bosnia-Herzegovina is headed by the *reisu-l-ulama* (head of the ulama), who represents the highest Islamic authority in the country. The post was first introduced in 1882, during Habsburg rule (1878–1918), as an attempt to distance Bosnian Muslims from Ottoman authority.¹⁰ Although seemingly rooted in Ottoman systems of religious administration, the newly-developed structures were fundamentally shaped by their colonial context.¹¹ They survived the dissolution of the Habsburg Empire and Bosnia's incorporation into the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. By 1930, they developed into an institution responsible for managing the religious affairs of all Yugoslav Muslims.¹² Called the Islamic Religious Community and, after 1969, the Islamic Community, this institution remained active throughout the communist period. It represented an acceptable version of official Islam with a modernist orientation that did not pose a significant challenge to the government and, especially in the early post-war years, offered legitimation for government reforms curtailing the religious freedom of Muslims.¹³

The current Islamic Community of Bosnia-Herzegovina formed from the ashes of its Yugoslav predecessor in 1993, at the height of a conflict that politicized religion and reinforced the link between religious and ethno-national identities.¹⁴ Its constitution frames the “Islamic tradition of Bosniaks”—Bosnian Muslims in the ethno-national sense—as one of the foundations of its work.¹⁵ Various understandings of Bosniak Islamic tradition or “Bosnian

10. Xavier Bougarel, “Farewell to the Ottoman Legacy? Islamic Reformism and Revivalism in Inter-war Bosnia-Herzegovina,” in Nathalie Clayer and Eric Germain, eds., *Islam in Interwar Europe* (New York, 2008), 317; Christian Moe, “Administriranje islamskih pitanja: Opći uvod i slučaj Bosne i Hercegovine,” *Novi Muallim* 10, no. 38 (2009), 104.

11. For discussions on the colonial nature of Habsburg rule in Bosnia see Clemens Ruthner, Diana Reynolds Cordileone, Ursula Reber, and Raymond Detrez, eds., *Wechselwirkungen: Austria-Hungary, Bosnia-Herzegovina, and the Western Balkans, 1878–1918* (New York, 2015).

12. Bougarel, “Farewell to the Ottoman Legacy,” 327.

13. Radmila Radić, “Islamska verska zajednica 1945–1970. godine,” *Forum Bosnae* 32 (2005): 99–134; Fikret Karčić, *Islamske teme i perspektive* (Sarajevo, 2009), 29–30; Xavier Bougarel, “From ‘Young Muslims’ to the Party of Democratic Action: The Emergence of a Pan-Islamist Trend in Bosnia-Herzegovina,” *Islamic Studies* 36, no. 2–3 (1997): 540–43; Cornelia Sorabji, “Muslim Identity and Islamic Faith in Sarajevo” (PhD diss., University of Cambridge, 1989), 143–46.

14. Moe, “Administriranje islamskih pitanja,” 107; Esad Hećimović, “Politischer Islam mit bosnischem Migrationshintergrund,” in Thomas Schmidinger and Dunja Larise, eds., *Zwischen Gottesstaat und Demokratie: Handbuch des politischen Islam* (Vienna, 2008), 191.

15. “Ustav Islamske zajednice,” Islamska Zajednica u Bosni i Hercegovini, at <http://www.islamskazajednica.ba/component/content/article?id=43:ustav-islamske-1997> (accessed October 29, 2017). Bosniak (*Bošnjak*), a term denoting ethno-national identity, was adopted as the official name for Bosnia's Slavic Muslim population in 1993. On this, see Hećimović, “Politischer Islam,” 187; Dunja Larise, “The Islamic Community in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Nation Building by Muslims/Bosniaks in the Western Balkans” *Nationalities Papers* 43, no. 2 (March 2015): 203–4. In this paper, I tend to use Bosnian

Islam” can be found in IC, political, media, and popular discourses. They differ on details but generally paint it as tolerant and compatible with “European values” as well as rooted in time and place through centuries of local history and tradition.¹⁶ While the IC’s coinage of the phrase “Islamic tradition of Bosniaks,” replacing the more commonly used “Bosnian Islam,” is meant to avoid contradicting the universality of Islam, it also has the effect of casting it as an ethno-national rather than regional Islamic tradition.¹⁷ The IC’s constitution asserts its interpretive authority over Islam in Bosnia in accordance with the *Hanafi madhab* (school of law) and stresses continuity with Ottoman administration of Muslim religious affairs, which strengthens its claim to legitimacy via historical rootedness in Bosnia.¹⁸ The IC’s position of authority was reinforced by the 2004 Law on Freedom of Religion and Legal Status of Churches and Religious Communities. This law recognizes the Islamic Community—rather than Islam as a religion—as one of four “traditional

Muslims unless I am explicitly referring to ethnicity or reporting others’ use of the term. This is because Muslims involved in the processes I describe include migrants from other parts of the Balkans as well as converts. Furthermore, not all Bosniaks identify as Muslim in a religious sense.

16. Xavier Bougarel, “Bosnian Islam as ‘European Islam’: Limits and Shifts of a Concept,” in Aziz Al-Azmeh and Effie Fokas, eds., *Islam in Europe: Diversity, Identity and Influence* (Cambridge, Eng., 2007), 96–124; Christian Moe, “A Sultan in Brussels? European Hopes and Fears of Bosnian Muslims,” *Südosteuropa* 55, no. 4 (2007): 374–94; Christian Moe, “‘Is Multi-Cultural Man Circumcised?’ Bosnian Muslim and European Identity Discourses,” in Monika Wohlrab-Sahr and Levent Tezcan, eds., *Konfliktfeld Islam in Europa* (Baden-Baden, 2007), 261–81; Andreja Mesarič, “Muslim Women’s Dress Practices in Bosnia-Herzegovina: Localising Islam through Everyday Lived Practice,” in Arolda Elbasani and Olivier Roy, eds., *The Revival of Islam in the Balkans: From Identity to Religiosity* (Basingstoke, Eng., 2015), 103–21.

17. The IC also has departments (*mešihat*) in Serbia, Croatia and Slovenia, former Yugoslav republics with sizeable native or migrant Bosniak populations. This reflects its position as a pseudo-national institution catering to all Bosniaks, including those living outside Bosnia’s borders. It is significant that the seat of the Serbian mešihat is not in Belgrade but in Novi Pazar, a provincial center in the region of Sandžak, which has a large native Bosniak population. It is also noteworthy that the IC’s reach is not felt in those post-Yugoslav states where Albanians form the majority of the Muslim population.

18. Stressing continuity with Ottoman heritage could be understood to serve an additional purpose. With the IC’s pro-European stance, it could be said its Other is not as much an essentialized west as it is the communist past. This is a past in which previous incarnations of the IC have been implicated in various ways, from supporting a government ban on women’s face veiling and decreeing its own ban on Sufi orders in the 1950s to its at times uncomfortable relationship with Islamic revival currents in the 1970s and 1980s. Emphasizing continuity with Ottoman administration is therefore a way of distancing current IC structures from their predecessor’s complicity with communist governments. For the veiling ban see Senija Milišić, “Emancipacija muslimanske žene u Bosni i Hercegovini (Poseban osvrt na skidanje zara i feredže)” in Enver Imamović, ed., *Urbano biće Bosne i Hercegovine* (Sarajevo, 1996), 137–43; Radić, “Islamska verska zajednica.” For the ban on Sufi orders see Henig, “This is Our Little Hajj,” 755–56; Alibašić, “Bosnia and Herzegovina,” 449. For Islamic revival in the 1970s and 1980s see Fikret Karčić, “Preporod Newspaper: An Agent of and a Witness to Islamic Revival in Bosnia,” *Intellectual Discourse* 7, no. 1 (1999): 91–97; Bougarel, “From ‘Young Muslims’ to the Party of Democratic Action”; Sorabji, *Muslim Identity*.

religious organizations,” alongside the Serbian Orthodox Church, the Catholic Church, and the Jewish Community.¹⁹

The IC’s claim to being the sole legitimate representative of Islam in Bosnia therefore rests on its identification with Bosniak ethno-national identity, its position as a guardian of local Islamic traditions, its posited continuity with the Ottoman Islamic presence in Bosnia (both in terms of religious administration and interpretive authority via the Hanafi madhab), and secular state law. Although it is secular law that makes the IC the only state-sanctioned Islamic authority in Bosnia, the power of discourses positioning the IC as synonymous with Bosniak tradition and even the Bosniak nation should not be underestimated. The narrative on Bosniak Islamic tradition frames the IC as both its product and guardian and therefore as a “natural” representative of Islam in Bosnia. This implicitly situates it as distinct from its competitors in the struggle for Islamic authority: “newcomers” who cannot claim (or are denied) a Bosniak identity, who side-line or directly oppose local traditions, and some of whom do not follow the Hanafi madhab. Yet, this does not guarantee the IC monopoly over the transmission of Islamic knowledge, let alone control over the practice of Muslim believers.

Post-communist Challenges to Religious Authority

Transition to a democratic political system (1990) followed by armed conflict perceived through an ethno-religious lens (1992–1995) brought Bosnian Muslims in increasing contact with alternative visions of Islam. The proliferation of transnational and domestic Islamic actors weakened the IC’s nominal authority leading to a pluralization or fragmentation of religious authority characteristic of Islamic revival worldwide.²⁰ Initially, most public attention focused on Salafism, linked to Saudi government support, various non-governmental organizations, and informal transnational networks of military volunteers. The government closure of several Salafi organizations after 9/11 as part of the American-led “war on terror” contributed to a weakening of Salafism in Bosnia.²¹ This coincided with an increased presence of Turkish neo-Sufi networks, including the Gülen movement, as well as state actors, such as the Directorate of Religious Affairs (Diyanet). A number of

19. Ahmet Alibašić and Nedim Begović, “Reframing the Relations between State and Religion in Post-War Bosnia: Learning to be Free!” *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies* 19, no. 1 (February 2017), 19–34.

20. For a sample of the literature on the pluralization of Islamic authority see Dale F. Eickelman and James Piscatori, *Muslim Politics* (Princeton, 2004); Olivier Roy, *Globalised Islam: The Search for a New Ummah* (London, 2004); “Authority and Islam,” a special issue of *Theory, Culture and Society* 24, no. 2 (March 2007), ed. Frédéric Volpi and Bryan S. Turner; Carol Kersten and Susanne Olsson, eds., *Alternative Islamic Discourses and Religious Authority* (New York, 2013).

21. For government actions after 9/11 see Darryl Li, “A Universal Enemy?: ‘Foreign Fighters’ and Legal Regimes of Exclusion and Exemption Under the ‘Global War on Terror,’” *Columbia Human Rights Law Review* 41, no. 2 (2010), 355–428; Christian Moe, “The War on Terror and Muslim Opinion-Making in Bosnia,” in Anne Stensvold, ed., *Western Balkans: The Religious Dimension* (Oslo, 2009), 91–183.

state and non-governmental Iranian organizations have also been active since the 1990s.²²

The IC has generally good relationships with Turkish institutions and networks invoking a common Ottoman heritage and Hanafi tradition. It also has amicable relations with Iranian institutions, despite the lack of a similar historical link. Its relationship with Salafi actors has been more fraught. Over the years, IC officials have issued a series of statements invoking Bosniak Islamic tradition and reinforcing the IC's interpretive and administrative authority that implicitly targeted primarily Salafis.²³ Although marginalized, Salafi networks and civil society organizations continue to be a feature of the Bosnian Islamic landscape. These are now centered around Bosnians and cannot be considered external actors. They are not homogenous and often have differing opinions on a range of issues, including their attitudes toward the IC.²⁴

The IC oversees all formal Islamic education. This includes six madrasas, which operate as high schools that combine religious and secular education, the Faculty of Islamic Studies in Sarajevo, two Faculties of Islamic Pedagogy in the provincial centers of Bihać and Zenica, as well as Islamic religious education classes in secular public schools.²⁵ Outside of this formal education system, locally registered civil society organizations provide a range of learning opportunities for Muslims keen to learn about their religion. They often address audiences neglected by the IC, particularly women.²⁶ Although many of these organizations do not diverge significantly, if at all, from the Hanafi mainstream promoted by the IC, the proliferation of faith-based organizations nevertheless represents a challenge to the IC's control over Islamic education and religious life more broadly. The IC was unsuccessful in persuading the government to refuse registration to civil society organizations "whose aims and activities overlap with the IC's core mission and statutes."²⁷ Instead, it initiated a platform for the cooperation of the Islamic Community with Islamic

22. For an overview of transnational actors see Eldar Sarajlić, "The Return of the Consuls: Islamic Networks and Foreign Policy Perspectives in Bosnia and Herzegovina," *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies* 11, no. 2 (June 2011): 173–90; Alibašić, "Bosnia and Herzegovina"; Alibašić and Begović, "Reframing the Relations." For more detail on Turkish actors see Anne Ross Solberg, "The Role of Turkish Islamic Networks"; Anne Ross Solberg, "Islam, Turkey and the Western Balkans," in Anne Stensvold, ed., *Western Balkans: The Religious Dimension* (Oslo, 2009), 51–89; Kerem Öktem, "Between Emigration, de-Islamization and the Nation-State: Muslim Communities in the Balkans Today," *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies* 11, no. 2 (June 2011): 155–71.

23. Bougarel, *Islam and Nationhood*, 209; Moe, "Administriranje islamskih pitanja," 106; Mustafa Prljača, ed., *Rezolucija Islamske zajednice u Bosni i Hercegovini o tumačenju islama i drugi tekstovi* (Sarajevo, 2006).

24. Sarajlić, "The Return of the Consuls," 183; Alibašić and Begović, "Reframing the Relations," 29–30.

25. Alibašić and Begović, "Reframing the Relations," 25. The IC also runs a madrasa in Zagreb, Croatia, and both a madrasa and Faculty of Islamic Studies in Novi Pazar, Serbia.

26. Elissa Helms, "'The 'Nation-ing' of Gender? Donor Policies, Islam, and Women's NGOs in Post-War Bosnia-Herzegovina,'" in "Ethnographies of Postsocialism," a special issue of *Anthropology of East Europe Review* 21, no. 2 (Fall 2003): 85–93; Moe, "Administriranje islamskih pitanja," 107; Alibašić and Begović, "Reframing the Relations," 29.

27. *Ibid.*, 26.

faith-based organizations active in Bosnia-Herzegovina in 2013, which aims to reinforce its authority over a range of areas.²⁸

The IC itself is not homogenous and IC officials differ in their attitudes towards its various competitors.²⁹ Its official jurisdiction over mosques and educational institutions has at times been precarious.³⁰ Although one can only gain employment as an imam in a Bosnian mosque if they graduate from an IC-run madrasa, many Bosnian imams and IC officials gained university qualifications abroad, in Turkey, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Egypt, Jordan, and Malaysia. This is an opportunity open particularly to younger generations, whose more advanced qualifications can represent competition to older IC imams and officials such as muftis.³¹ Some imams and Sufi sheikhs operating within the IC have attracted their own sizeable followings.

Although Sufi orders are meant to register with the IC's Tariqat Centre, there are some Sufi communities that operate independently of the IC.³² Transregional connections of Sufi orders link them to sources of authority outside of Bosnia's borders and challenge the nominal authority of the IC as well as complicate their local nature.³³ Sufi communities are also interesting to observe from the perspective of contested definitions of tradition. The IC positions Sufism as an important element of Bosniak Islamic tradition. It attempts to consolidate its own role as guardian of this tradition by organizing events that commemorate the historical presence of Islam and Sufism in Bosnia. As described by David Henig, the IC's staging of these events has caused discontent among some local Sufi communities, who have become sidelined from official festivities and who are critical of what they see as the IC's appropriation of tradition.³⁴ This reveals the heterogeneity of actors normally subsumed under the label "traditional Islam" and elucidates the power relations that shape dominant discursive constructions of tradition, while suppressing others. In attempting to authorize which traditions should be considered Bosnian (or Bosniak in line with IC terminology), IC officials are not only sending a message to those whose Islamic practices are perceived as foreign, they are also silencing alternative understandings of what counts as Bosnian tradition.³⁵

28. *Ibid.*, 30.

29. Bougarel, *Islam and Nationhood*, 208–209; Sarajlić, "Return of the Consuls," 185.

30. Moe, "A Sultan in Brussels," 384.

31. Alibašić, "Bosnia and Herzegovina," 446, 459; Sarajlić, "Return of the Consuls," 180.

32. Henig, "This is Our Little Hajj"; David Henig, "Tracing Creative Moments: The Emergence of Translocal Dervish Cults in Bosnia-Herzegovina," *Focaal: Journal of Global and Historical Anthropology* 69 (Summer 2014): 97–110; David Henig, "Crossing the Bosphorus: Connected Histories of 'Other' Muslims in the Post-Imperial Borderlands of Southeast Europe," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 58, no. 4 (October 2016): 908–34; Alibašić, "Bosnia and Herzegovina," 449–50; Catharina Raudvere, "Claiming Heritage, Renewing Authority: Sufi-orientated activities in post-Yugoslav Bosnia-Herzegovina," *European Journal of Turkish Studies* 13 (2011).

33. Henig, "Tracing Creative Moments." For a similar argument in the context of Russia see Lili Di Puccio and Jesko Schmoller, "Here or Elsewhere: Sufism and Traditional Islam in Russia's Volga-Ural Region," *Contemporary Islam* (2019), at <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11562-018-00434-3> (accessed February 28, 2020).

34. Henig, "This is Our Little Hajj."

35. For a similar view see Raudvere, "Claiming Heritage." The IC established a research Institute for the Islamic Tradition of Bosniaks, which can be seen as part of these efforts.

Face veiling can be observed as another case in point. Although the IC does not deny the historical existence of face veiling in Bosnia, it does not feature in its vision of Bosniak Islamic tradition. It is the colorful headscarves (*šamija*) and baggy trousers (*dimije*) worn by rural Muslim women that are positioned as embodying tradition. As I describe elsewhere, many women who wear the niqab challenge this discursive construction of tradition. Although they cite religious reasons for choosing to cover their face, they nevertheless stress that the practice is rooted in Bosnian tradition.³⁶ These women therefore do not only challenge the authority of the IC by their choice of dress, they do so by contesting one of the very sources of its authority.

Women's Participation in Islamic Learning and Teaching: Contesting and Affirming Religious Authority

Tracing Pious Women's Trajectories

Exploring how women move through the Islamic landscape outlined above helps us to elucidate the heterogeneity of Islam in Bosnia in a way that goes beyond identifying different discursively-constructed categories of pious Muslims, such as traditional, mainstream, Sufi, Salafi, and Shi'a. Instead of treating them as self-evident Muslim "groups" distinguished by clear boundaries, we should pay attention to how individual believers engage with these categories in socially-situated encounters. This approach is inspired by the anti-essentialism found in the critique of cultures as bounded and discrete entities and in work that demonstrates the constructed nature of ethnicity and nationhood.³⁷ I draw particularly on the work of Rogers Brubaker and his critique of "groupism," a term he uses to describe the persistent understanding of ethnic groups and nations as entities with their own agency that have the capacity to behave as social actors.³⁸ The notion of groupism can be fruitfully applied to any context where presumed bounded social groups become reified and mistaken for social actors. Its usefulness in relation to Islam in the post-communist Balkans has already been demonstrated by Henig's work on dervish communities in central Bosnia that highlights the problematic nature

36. Andreja Mesarič, "Wearing Hijab in Sarajevo: Dress Practices and the Islamic Revival in Post-war Bosnia-Herzegovina," *Anthropological Journal of European Cultures* 22, no. 2 (2013): 12–34.

37. For a sample of the literature on culture see Akhil Gupta and James Ferguson, "Beyond 'Culture': Space, Identity, and the Politics of Difference," in "Space, Identity, and the Politics of Difference," a special issue of *Cultural Anthropology* 7, no. 1 (February 1992): 6–23; Lila Abu-Lughod, "Writing Against Culture," in Richard G. Fox, ed., *Recapturing Anthropology: Working in the Present* (Santa Fe, 1991), 137–62; Gerd Baumann, *Contesting Culture: Discourses of Identity in Multi-ethnic London* (Cambridge, Eng., 1996); Ulf Hannerz, "Reflections on Varieties of Culturespeak," *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 2, no. 3 (September 1999): 393–407. For ethnicity and nationhood see Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London, 1983); Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Oxford, 1983); Thomas Hylland Eriksen, *Ethnicity and Nationalism: Anthropological Perspectives* (London, 1993); Brubaker, *Ethnicity without Groups*.

38. Brubaker, *Ethnicity without Groups*.

of referring to “traditional Muslims” as a coherent group.³⁹ My contribution to revealing the problematic nature of a groupist approach to contemporary transformations of Islam in Bosnia focuses on how pious women draw on discourses and practices associated with a range of discursively-constructed Muslim “groups” without necessarily claiming membership of them.

Political, media, popular and even some academic discourses on Bosnia feature distinct Muslim groups often framed in oppositional terms. This was not reflected in the practices of pious Sarajevans I encountered, whose social networks often cut across discursively-constructed Muslim groups. My pious interlocutors expressed accepting or ambivalent rather than negative views of Muslims choosing to practice Islam in a way that differed from theirs, especially as this often included their friends and family. For some, this openness to alternative ways of practicing Islam was linked to their own shifting positions within Islamic discourses. At different stages on their ongoing journey to becoming virtuous Muslims, women might draw on different Islamic discourses and legitimize different sources of Islamic authority in the process.

Dženita was born in the early 1980s in a provincial Bosnian town. She first turned to religion and began performing prayers in high school. She became involved with a local branch of the now defunct Bosnian Salafi organization Active Islamic Youth (*Aktivna islamska omladina*).⁴⁰ By the time I met her, she had moved away from Salafism to what most would describe as a more “mainstream Bosnian” but still pious version of Islam. She was a regular visitor of the White Mosque, at the time served by Sulejman Bugari, an IC imam who attracted a large following with his accessible message. Dženita did not denounce her past engagement with Salafism and instead explained her experience within a framework of two different approaches to Islam. She described the Active Islamic Youth as having a rational approach that suited her at a time when she was first discovering Islam, but she later turned to a more emotional approach that she saw as characteristic of Bugari.

During my fieldwork, I often encountered the view that it is not uncommon for people who have only just discovered faith to be stricter at first and become moderate over time, which Dženita’s trajectory would seem to support. Yet, I also met women whose experience contests this narrative. Like Dženita, Alma was born in the early 1980s. She grew up in Sarajevo with non-practicing Muslim parents who had moved there from Serbia and Montenegro. She first encountered the religious aspects of Islam in her early teens by listening to older women from her local neighborhood talk about God during the war. She started performing prayers soon after and started wearing a headscarf while at university. She developed an interest in Sufi teachings and, as she put it, began visiting “all the tekkes in the city.” By the time I met her, she had become disillusioned with Sufism and decided to look for Islam “at its source”: the first generations of Muslims in Mecca and Medina, a view commonly associated with Salafism.

39. Henig, “This is Our Little Hajj.”

40. For more on this organization see Alibašić, “Bosnia and Herzegovina,” 451; Bougarel, *Islam and Nationhood*, 206–7.

These ethnographic examples demonstrate how women try out different approaches to Islam until they find something that suits them, or perhaps realize different approaches suit them at different times in their lives. The examples also hint at how different Islamic actors and discourses can be associated with specific spaces. Ottoman style mosques and tekkes, concentrated in and around Sarajevo's old Ottoman quarter, are associated with local traditional Islam. The Faculty of Islamic Studies and IC madrasas are likewise linked to Bosnian tradition but are also seen specifically as outposts of the IC as an institution. Certain civil society organizations are associated with Salafi, Shi'a, and various Turkish influences, while some civil society organizations are seen as "mainstream Bosnian," that is aligned with Hanafism as promoted by the IC. Although all mosques are under the formal jurisdiction of the IC, some mosques, particularly the King Fahd mosque built with Saudi funding on the outskirts of Sarajevo, are perceived as Salafi. Despite these spaces being linked to particular visions of Islam that are discursively constructed as distinct if not opposed to each other, their boundaries are permeable for many ordinary believers.⁴¹ Many of my interlocutors did not only move between different approaches to Islam over time, but engaged with a variety of Islamic actors, discourses, and spaces simultaneously. This could include a range as wide as taking part in devotional prayers at a Naqshibandi tekke; all female devotional prayers led by a *bula*, a traditional female religious figure; attending Bugari's talks at the White Mosque; and taking classes at a Salafi women's qur'anic school, as was the case for one of my interlocutors. While not everyone I encountered during my fieldwork was this eclectic in their engagement with Islam, I came across many women who visited a range of spaces associated with different discursively-constructed Muslim groups. This suggests that the boundaries of what is conceived of as different Muslim groups are surprisingly porous and that various Islamic actors, including those seen as divergent, often share constituencies.

The Complexity of Relationships with Islamic Authority

Tracing women's trajectories not only reveals crosscutting linkages between different discursively-constructed categories of Muslims, it also raises questions about religious authority. If women engage with a range of institutional and individual actors in explicit or implicit competition with each other, whose claims to authority do they accept, on what grounds and in what context? As the sole official Islamic authority in Bosnia, the IC's bureaucratic authority is widely accepted, yet not always unconditionally, and often for specific purposes. On several occasions, I visited talks by a Salafi preacher (*daija*) held weekly on the upper floor of the Fahd mosque. The talks, which focused mainly on *tafsir* (interpretation of the Qur'an), were attended by both men and women, with women separated by a wooden screen. I was first taken there by Alma, whose engagement with Islam I described above, and who wanted to show me where in Sarajevo one can look for Islam "at its source."

41. For more on the Islamic symbolic geography of Sarajevo see Mesarič, "Muslim Women's Dress."

While waiting for the lectures to start, Alma and I would chat to other women who had come to listen to the preacher. I was sometimes puzzled by what they said, especially on my initial visits, when I was still unaware of how flexibly some women approach engaging with different Islamic actors. I was particularly surprised when Anisa, a young woman who had, much like Alma, told me she was there to look for Islam at its source, revealed herself to be a student at the IC-run Faculty of Islamic Studies. Anisa adopted a position of reserved criticism towards the Faculty and explained that she only enrolled in order to gain an Islamic studies degree. She attended an IC institution in order to gain a formal qualification but looked for more “authentic” knowledge of Islam elsewhere. Even though Anisa questioned the interpretive authority of the Faculty of Islamic Studies, and by extension the IC, she conceded its bureaucratic authority out of pragmatism and for a specific purpose.

A degree of criticism towards the IC can also be found among pious Muslims who do accept its interpretive authority. Some liken the *reisu-1-ulama* and other IC officials to politicians. This is a particularly harsh indictment in a context where the negative connotations of politics as inherently corrupt are summed up in a popular expression: “politics is a whore.”⁴² Many are critical of what they describe as the IC’s bureaucratic nature and experience its leadership as distant from ordinary believers. A conversation among a group of young women and men I witnessed during a mosque youth gathering illustrates this well. When discussing whether Bosniaks needed a religious leader, one of the young women said that the role of the *reisu-1-ulama* was important, “if for no other reason than to have him congratulate us for Eid.” While her words already hint at his symbolic rather than spiritual role, the response of Emir, one of the young men in the group, was even more revealing: “Oh, yes, I completely forgot about the *reis*.”⁴³ When I was thinking about who this leader could be, I thought of Bugari and Kenan Musić, but I had completely forgotten about the *reis*.⁴⁴

This shows that young people do not necessarily contest the titular authority of the *reisu-1-ulama*. Yet, many see him as a symbolic pseudo-national leader rather than a spiritual leader who they look to for guidance. When pondering potential leaders, Emir’s thoughts turned to the popular imam Sulejman Bugari, and Kenan Musić, at the time a young lecturer at the Faculty of Islamic Studies who frequently held talks at mosque youth gatherings and civil society organizations. Although they both worked within IC structures and did not diverge from its main message, this nevertheless shows that IC leadership itself is not of particular relevance to the spiritual lives of young Muslim believers.⁴⁵ Instead, they turn to people with whom they have personal contact to address their dilemmas regarding reconciling Islamic prescriptions with living in a secular environment. After all, scholarly knowledge

42. Elissa Helms, “‘Politics is a Whore’: Women, Morality and Victimhood in Post-War Bosnia-Herzegovina,” in Xavier Bougarel, Elissa Helms, and Gerlachus Duijzings, eds., *The New Bosnian Mosaic: Identities, Memories and Moral Claims in a Post-War Society* (Burlington, VT, 2007), 235–53.

43. In popular use, the title *reisu-1-ulama* is commonly shortened to *reis*.

44. Field notes, Sarajevo, January 2008.

45. For a similar view see Moe, “Administriranje islamskih pitanja,” 108.

on Islam differs from advice on its practical application in everyday life.⁴⁶ This suggests a layered relationship with Islamic authority, where believers recognize the titular authority of an Islamic actor, such as the IC, yet they seek authoritative opinions and advice on Islamic matters from people who address concerns relevant to their daily lives and who they find more accessible.

The appeal of Sulejman Bugari is particularly noteworthy. Originally from Kosovo, he completed the Gazi Husrev-beg madrasa in Sarajevo and continued his education first at the Sarajevo Faculty of Islamic Studies and then at the Islamic University of Medina in Saudi Arabia. Although a graduate of the same university as many Bosnian Salafis, he is seen as a proponent of a moderate Islam in line with the IC's emphasis on Hanafi tradition and somewhat influenced by Sufism. Drawing on Islam to address people's everyday challenges is an important part of Bugari's appeal. These are not insignificant in a society marked by slow post-war reconciliation, neoliberal economic restructuring, and a dysfunctional political system imposed by international intervention.⁴⁷ My interlocutors appreciated the effort Bugari made to get to know people who came to hear him speak regularly, establishing a type of personal relationship with them. Both men and women would approach him with specific questions they were grappling with. They would often repeat things Bugari had said in their own conversations, referring to him simply as *hafiz*.⁴⁸ Another aspect of his appeal, and one that my interlocutors often stressed in their conversations with me as well as each other, was the centrality of love in his approach to Islam—love of God and love of other people in the name of God, highlighting the importance of emotional ties between members of the congregation (*džemat*). Bugari attracted large crowds to his Sarajevo mosque, including several Bosnian celebrities. His own celebrity status had not escaped the attention of Bosnian media with some journalists observing that Bugari's popularity among pious Muslims superseded that of the *reisu-1-ulama*. He left Bosnia for neighboring Montenegro in 2016 amidst unofficial rumors that this might have been the result of tensions with IC leadership over his popularity. While Bugari could himself draw on the bureaucratic authority of the IC as one of its appointed representatives, he garnered immense charismatic authority that posed an implicit challenge to the authority of the IC.⁴⁹

46. James Bourk Hoesterey, *Rebranding Islam: Piety, Prosperity, and a Self-Help Guru* (Stanford, 2016).

47. For a sample of the literature discussing these issues see Stef Jansen, *Yearnings in the Meantime: 'Normal Lives' and the State in a Sarajevo Apartment Complex* (New York, 2015); Larisa Kurtović, "'Who Sows Hunger, Reaps Rage': On Protest, Indignation and Redistributive Justice in Post-Dayton Bosnia-Herzegovina," *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies* 15, no. 4 (December 2015): 639–59; Monika Palmberger, "Ruptured Pasts and Captured Futures: Life Narratives in Postwar Mostar," *Focaal: Journal of Global and Historical Anthropology* 66 (Summer 2013): 14–24; Catherine Baker, "Prosperity Without Security: The Precarity of Interpreters in Postsocialist, Postconflict Bosnia-Herzegovina," *Slavic Review* 71, no. 4 (Winter 2012): 849–74.

48. *Hafiz* denotes someone who has memorized the Qur'an in full.

49. He is now employed by the Islamic Community of Montenegro, a counterpart to the Bosnian IC established in the 1990s, and continues to hold talks in Sarajevo as part of his tours. On Bugari see Raudvere, "Claiming Heritage."

Women Acquiring Islamic Knowledge and Authority

Transformations of Bosnia's Islamic landscape have created new opportunities for women to step into leadership positions, many of which are outside the direct control of the IC. A revived interest in Islam has also opened up opportunities for women to expand their religious knowledge and gain formal qualifications at IC-run madrassas and faculties.⁵⁰ The majority of women studying Islamic Studies at university level enrolled in programs of Islamic pedagogy rather than theology.⁵¹ Many female graduates work as teachers of religious education in public schools and supplementary religious schools run by the IC.⁵² Like in other Muslim contexts, women's increased involvement in Islamic teaching has not necessarily translated into considerable involvement in Islamic knowledge production.⁵³ There are women that claim access to the interpretation of Islam with a gender equality focus and sometimes with explicitly feminist aims, but they have been largely marginalized by the IC. They have instead found a space in secular human rights and feminist organizations, which limits the authoritativeness of their interpretations among most pious Muslims.⁵⁴

While women's access to positions of relative authority has increased over the past few decades, this is not without historical precedent. Female religious leaders called *bula* had already been transmitting Islamic knowledge to women and leading all-female religious rituals performed in domestic spaces.⁵⁵ Madrasa graduates, called *muallima*, have largely replaced traditionally trained *bulas* in their role as ritual leaders, although they are often still

50. Women first gained access to formal Islamic education at the Sarajevo madrasa between 1933 and 1947/48. The madrasa began re-admitting female students in 1978. See Catharina Raudvere, "Textual and Ritual Command: Muslim Women as Keepers and Transmitters of Interpretive Domains in Contemporary Bosnia and Herzegovina," in Masooda Bano and Hilary Kalmbach, eds., *Women, Leadership and Mosques: Changes in Contemporary Islamic Authority* (Leiden, Netherlands, 2012), 268–69; Zilka Spahić Šiljak, "The Confluence of Islamic Feminism and Peacebuilding: Lessons from Bosnia," *Samyukta: A Journal of Gender & Culture* 17, no. 1 (2017), 167. Several other madrasas admitting women opened in the 1990s.

51. Raudvere, "Textual and Ritual Command"; Senada Tahirović, "Muslimanska teologinja u BH. društvu: pozicija i uloga," *Novi muallim* 40 (2009): 26–35.

52. Raudvere, "Textual and Ritual Command."

53. Hilary Kalmbach, "Islamic Authority and the Study of Female Religious Leaders," in Masooda Bano and Hilary Kalmbach, eds., *Women, Leadership and Mosques: Changes in Contemporary Islamic Authority* (Leiden, Netherlands, 2012), 1–27; Hilary Kalmbach, "Social and Religious Change in Damascus: One Case of Female Islamic Religious Authority," *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 35, no. 1 (April 2008): 37–57; Jeanette S. Jouili and Schirin Amir-Moazami, "Knowledge, Empowerment and Religious Authority among Pious Muslim Women in France and Germany," in Anitta Kynsilehto, ed., *Islamic Feminism: Current Perspectives* (Tampere, Finland, 2008), 57–90.

54. Spahić Šiljak, "The Confluence of Islamic Feminism."

55. Raudvere, "Textual and Ritual Command"; Cornelia Sorabji, "Mixed Motives: Islam, Nationalism and Mevluds in an Unstable Yugoslavia," in Camillia Fawzi El-Solh and Judy Mabro, eds., *Muslim Women's Choices: Religious Belief and Social Reality* (Oxford, 1994), 108–27; Tone Bringa, *Being Muslim the Bosnian Way: Identity and Community in a Central Bosnian Village* (Princeton, 1995).

informally referred to as *bula*.⁵⁶ Especially older *muallimas*, who can acquire a considerable local reputation, continue to rely on a mix of charismatic and traditional authority, despite having formal Islamic qualifications.⁵⁷

A distinct avenue for acquiring religious authority has opened up with the emergence of faith-based women's organizations. These are registered as civil society organizations and offer alternative spaces for Islamic learning outside mosques and formal institutions of learning as well as new opportunities for women's leadership. For many of my interlocutors these organizations provided an important avenue for accessing Islamic knowledge, including knowledge on how to live a pious life within what they experienced as a largely impious environment. Women's organizations provide courses in Qur'anic recitation, talks on tafsir, the history of Islam, and different aspects of living one's life as a Muslim believer. The importance of education in general and of Islamic education in particular is often linked to the capacity for effective mothering and the raising of future moral members of society.⁵⁸ Educational content takes the form of short courses or a series of one-off events allowing believers to accommodate other commitments with furthering their Islamic knowledge. Some women's organizations also offer secular educational activities, such as language and computer courses, or sports activities.

The role of women's faith-based organizations in Bosnia as responding to a need neglected by the IC has not gone unnoticed by scholars.⁵⁹ Not much attention has been paid, however, to women's organizations with a Salafi orientation. These tend to be small but interesting to explore from the perspective of women and Islamic authority. While security clampdowns following 9/11 and media scares about ISIS recruitment equated Salafis with extremism and terrorism, this represents a small fringe among Bosnian Salafis.⁶⁰ For most, Salafi interpretations of Islam serve as way of leading a pious life by what they understand as following the example of the first generations of Muslims. Many do not dispute the nominal authority of the IC, although they can be critical of its positions, particularly the IC's approval and sponsorship of traditional practices that they see as deviations from Islam. Women's organizations with a Salafi orientation are registered as civil society organizations and hold classes in private buildings. While some teachers in these organizations

56. The IC has moved away from the term *bula* in favor of *muallima* (teacher). *Bula* has developed negative connotations and is sometimes used as a derogatory term for any woman wearing hijab. It is also associated with vernacular Islam, while *muallima* has scholarly connotations.

57. On tradition as the main source of authority historically available to *bulas* see Raudvere, "Textual and ritual Command," 269. On charismatic authority as the main avenue to religious authority open to women more broadly see Kalmbach, "Social and Religious Change," 41–42.

58. For more on the link between education and mothering in the Bosnian context see Mesarić, "Islamic Cafés" and "Sharia Dating." For Middle Eastern and west European contexts, respectively, see Kalmbach "Social and Religious Change," and Jouili and Amir-Moazami, "Knowledge, Empowerment and Religious Authority."

59. Helms, "The 'Nation-ing' of Gender?"; Moe, "Administriranje islamskih pitanja," 107; Alibašić and Begović, "Reframing the Relations," 29; Alibašić, "Bosnia and Herzegovina," 450–51; Raudvere, "Textual and ritual Command," 262.

60. Alibašić and Begović, "Reframing the Relations," 29–30.

have completed IC madrasas, they also learned from male Bosnian Salafis or older female teachers. Some teachers had spent time in Saudi Arabia with their Arab or, more commonly, Bosnian husbands, who were there attaining Islamic studies degrees. In addition to teaching Qur'anic classes, some teachers are highly-valued speakers. Students often approach teachers with questions regarding aspects of living a pious life, requiring them to provide the “know-how” of applying Islam to everyday practice. If classes coincide with prayer times, teachers lead women in prayers. This is particularly noteworthy as it is a degree of leadership not allowed to women in the IC.⁶¹ This highlights how conservative spaces can allow a significant degree of authority to female religious leaders, even if this ultimately remains circumscribed by male authority.⁶²

Students attending these schools, as most of them referred to the classes held by faith-based organizations, considered the teachers' link to the “source of Islam” in both space (Saudi Arabia) and time (following the example of the first generations) an important foundation of their authority. Teachers on the other hand, while not diminishing the significance of this, sometimes legitimated their authority in other ways. Those that were IC madrasa graduates justified their legitimacy by highlighting this fact in conversations with me, presumably in an attempt to counter allegations that those Bosnians that embrace Salafism are new to practicing Islam and lack Islamic education. Their argument drew on the bureaucratic authority of the IC, again pointing to the layered nature of authority, where different authoritative actors can serve different purposes. One teacher I spoke to stressed that her father was a *hodža*—an archaic Bosnian word for imam that has long since been abandoned in IC terminology and to a large extent in informal usage. By choosing the term *hodža* rather than imam, she not only emphasized a history of religious learning within her family but also invoked the authority of Bosnian tradition.

Another interesting aspect of authority in the context of these schools, and one that is reflective of broader trends is how students may accept the authoritativeness of the message they promote in some cases but not in others. Advija's story is illuminating in this context. She was a retired factory worker in her late 40s, living with her husband and two teenage children, whom she described as not “in the faith” (*u vjeri*), a phrase used by pious Muslims to describe themselves. She turned to Islam and began wearing a headscarf just a few years before I met her, after a period of illness. We met at a Qur'anic school not far from the housing estate where she lived. Advija

61. *Bulas* and *muallimas* can lead devotional prayers (*zikr*) but not ritual prayers (*namaz*). See Raudvere, “Textual and ritual Command,” 270–71, for discussion of a fatwa adopted by the IC that requires the Sarajevo Faculty of Islamic Studies to keep within Hanafi tradition and its implications for the understanding of female leadership and women serving as imams.

62. Saba Mahmood, *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject* (Princeton, 2005); Kalmbach, “Islamic Authority”; Kalmbach “Social and Religious Change”; Gisele Fonseca Chagas, “Muslim Women and the Work of da'wa: The Female Branch of the tariqa Naqshbandiyya-Kuftariyya in Damascus, Syria” *Middle East Critique* 20, no. 2 (2011): 207–18; Jouili and Amir-Moazami, “Knowledge, Empowerment and Religious Authority.”

first found out about the school from a notice board at a local mosque and thought it would be a good opportunity to learn to read the Qur'an. She told me she liked the school because all the other students there were "decent girls," who would not lie or cause you any harm. The way Advija spoke about the school suggested that what was important to her was the moral integrity of the women at the school and the skill she would learn (reading the Qur'an), rather than the specific interpretation of Islam it promoted. As positive as she was about her experience at the school, she also spoke about its leadership in othering terms. She told me how "they," "some call them Wahhabis," do things differently: they do not listen to music and her teacher's husband has a second wife. While she trusted the school to teach her correct recitation of the Qur'an, she did not accept that listening to music was haram and was highly ambivalent about the permissibility of polygamy. Furthermore, her use of othering discourse about the "Wahhabis" indicates that women may reinforce a groupist view of Bosnia's Islamic landscape while their practices simultaneously undermine it.

Women might accept the authority of a particular actor or discourse in a specific space but do not translate this into their daily practice. For Muslims that frequent a variety of Islamic spaces where they encounter people that can act as an accessible source of Islamic knowledge, this might lead to divergent answers one needs to adapt either selectively or situationally. Prayer can be observed as a case in point. Differences in the performance of ritual prayers are often highlighted as a mark of Salafis' otherness from the Bosnian Hanafi mainstream. Yet some of my interlocutors alternated between the two forms of prayer depending on where and who they were praying with. I met Maida through the circle of friends that first took me to hear Bugari at the White Mosque. Maida herself was a frequent visitor there, even though she lived in student halls on the other side of Sarajevo. At one point during our acquaintance, she began attending Qur'anic recitation lessons held in her student halls by a teacher she described as "a woman with the niqab." There, Maida would join others in prayer by adopting the form practiced by Salafis, including praying behind a female prayer leader. Yet, this did not signal her gradual acceptance of Salafi practices and she continued using the Hanafi form when praying elsewhere. She simply accepted the authority of the teacher's interpretation *in that particular space*, suggesting that authority can be accepted situationally. Advija's and Maida's examples bring us back full circle to how women, who engage with different Islamic actors and discourses, negotiate relationships with Islamic authority for different purposes and in different situated encounters. The next and final section of the paper discusses the relevance of authoritative actors in this context.

The Relevance of Formal Authority

Situated social interactions and shifting allegiances to multiple sources of Islamic authority played a part in the dilemma surrounding Eid al-Adha discussed in the introduction to this paper. One of the many conversations I witnessed that week took place at a Salafi women's organization. Rather than turning to formal authority, whether the IC or one of its alternatives, the

students turned to their Qur'anic teacher to help clarify the issue. Mindful of the contentious nature of the discussion as one that goes to the heart of Islamic authority in Bosnia, the teacher simply replied that she knows when she will be celebrating but that each of the women needs to decide for herself. Some of the students expressed concern that they might unwittingly commit haram by fasting on Eid, thinking that it was the day of Arafat (the day before Eid), when they believed one should fast. This kind of framing gave the teacher no choice but to give in, answering that she will "fast on Tuesday," a day consistent with the Saudi reading of the *hijri* calendar.

Although one might be tempted to explain diverging opinions on the correct date of Eid as those aligned with traditional local Islam and Salafism, the dynamics involved were more complex. I return to the conversation between Halida and Amna introduced at the start of the paper to tease out some of this complexity. Amna concluded her anecdote about the phone call from London by saying "the whole world is celebrating Eid today apart from us." Halida added it is clear that Eid is today as the *hajjis* (pilgrims) went to Mount Arafat, a part of the pilgrimage to Mecca, yesterday. As the date of Eid al-Adha coincides with the pilgrimage to Mecca, the proceedings of which were reported by various secular media outlets, it was not difficult for Bosnian Muslims to know when Eid was being celebrated there. As Halida's and Amna's conversation developed, it became clear that they found the argument that the Saudi reading of the *hijri* calendar was correct convincing and legitimate. Halida even cynically commented that, being a non-working day, the IC scheduled Eid for Thursday so it would be easier for people to link it to a long weekend. Nevertheless, she decided to celebrate Eid on the date determined by the IC. When I asked her about her decision, she said she will celebrate "on the same day as her friends and family." While this was in line with the IC-sanctioned date, it suggests that celebrating the holiday together with friends and family was just as important in her decision as whose interpretation she found most convincing or whose authority she accepted as most legitimate. She did, however, qualify her decision by saying that if there has been a mistake made, the sin would fall on those that determined Thursday as the date of Eid (the IC), and not on people celebrating that day.

Although Halida ultimately accepted the bureaucratic authority of the IC, she did not do so in an unreflective manner. Her reflective process demonstrates that the global influence on Muslims in Bosnia goes beyond the activities of organized actors described as "foreign missionaries." While this type of discrepancies in dates of holidays are likely to have occurred in the past, a growing awareness of the wider Muslim world has made them more salient. This awareness was brought about not only by the presence of external state and non-state actors but also by personal contacts with Muslims abroad and by greater media connectivity. An increased "global consciousness" has become "a crucial mediator of authoritative knowledge."⁶³ Therefore, the

63. Peter Mandaville, "Globalization and the Politics of Religious Knowledge: Pluralizing Authority in the Muslim World," in "Authority and Islam," a special issue of *Theory, Culture and Society* 24, no. 2 (March 2007): 111.

pluralization of Islamic authority in Bosnia cannot be reduced to the multiplication of institutional actors that make competing claims to authority.

Despite the important ways in which this global consciousness complicates the pluralization of Islamic authority, I suggest that institutional and individual actors of authority nevertheless remain a key node in pious Muslims' engagement with Islam. The pluralization of Islamic authority is often linked to the individualization or personalization of faith, where an individual believer makes her own choices regarding which authoritative opinions to acknowledge or perhaps engages with authoritative texts and the divine directly, circumventing institutionalized religious hierarchies altogether.⁶⁴ This perspective can be fruitful in understanding the choices of pious Muslims. Scholars have begun pointing out some of the limitations of this concept, however, noting that although Islamic authority has been reconfigured, the relevance of authoritative actors persists in the lives of most pious Muslims.⁶⁵ The Bosnian context seems to confirm this. My interlocutors did engage with several actors making competing claims to authority simultaneously, and often acknowledged their authority situationally and sometimes in contradictory ways. Nevertheless, describing their approach to Islam as an individualized "pick and mix" would not do it justice. Institutions and individuals embodying Islamic authority, at varying levels and in varying forms, played a crucial role in their pursuit of Islamic knowledge and its practical application. Returning to the example of Eid, the increased knowledge of when other Muslims around the world were celebrating the holiday did contribute to the range of factors women considered when making their decision, yet they also sought advice from people in their lives that they perceived as sources of authoritative opinions. In the end, the IC's bureaucratic authority in determining the date prevailed for many, even if often for pragmatic reasons.

Women can be eclectic in their search for Islamic knowledge. Nonetheless, seeking out institutions and individuals that can impart this knowledge and answer their questions is a crucial component of this search. By reflectively engaging with an array of actors making competing claims to authority they contribute to its pluralization, yet, they also affirm the importance of authoritative actors as intermediaries in the understanding of the divine message and the learning of "correct" Islamic practice.⁶⁶ While we can observe a shift

64. For a sample of the literature discussing this see Jocelyne Cesari, "Islam in the West: From Immigration to Global Islam," *Harvard Middle Eastern and Islamic Review* 8 (2009): 148–75; Roy, *Globalised Islam*; Volpi and Turner, "Introduction: Making Islamic Authority Matter," in "Authority and Islam," a special issue of *Theory Culture & Society* 24, no. 2 (March 2007): 1–20. For a perspective discussing this concept in relation to the Balkans see Arolda Elbasani and Olivier Roy, "Islam in the post-Communist Balkans: Alternative Pathways to God," *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies* 15, no. 4 (December 2015): 457–71.

65. Bendixsen, Synnøve. *The Religious Identity of Young Muslim Women in Berlin* (Leiden, Netherlands, 2013); Jouili and Amir-Moazami, "Knowledge, Empowerment and Religious Authority"; Frank Peter, "Individualization and religious authority in Western European Islam," *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 17, no. 1 (August 2006): 105–18.

66. For a similar line of argument regarding young Muslim women in Germany and France see Bendixsen, *The Religious Identity*; Jouili and Amir-Moazami, "Knowledge, Empowerment and Religious Authority."

towards religiosity among pious Muslims in Bosnia that emphasizes an opt-in system to becoming a Muslim and that often distinguishes their Islamic practice from that of their parents or wider community, this religiosity is not detached from formal Islamic authority.

The contemporary Islamic landscape in Bosnia is often described as marked by fault lines between different Muslim groups, many of which are depicted as having formed as a result of foreign intervention. While the Islamic Community, the institution that holds official charge over Islamic authority in Bosnia, is on fairly amicable terms with many of its alternatives it also capitalizes on this narrative in an attempt to assert its authority. It positions itself as the guardian of Bosniak Islamic tradition, emphasizing its Hanafi and Ottoman heritage as well as compatibility with European modernity. Although the IC has in practice marginalized many Sufi orders, a strong Sufi heritage is positioned as a cornerstone of this tolerant tradition. Contrasting tolerant local Sufi traditions with extremist foreign influences is a common way of describing interactions between transnational Islamic actors and local Muslim populations worldwide. One scholar dubbed it the discourse of good Muslims and bad Muslims, while another calls it a cliché of Islamology.⁶⁷ The IC's efforts to be seen as both a product and guardian of centuries of local tradition against an implied or explicit foreign threat could therefore itself be observed as one of the ways that Bosnia forms part of global trends.

The narrative of distinct Muslim groups coded as “local” or “foreign” does not reflect the multiplicity of Islamic discourses and practices, and ways that Bosnian Muslims engage with, promote, and resist them on the ground. A more nuanced exploration of pious Muslims' engagement with Islam beyond Bosnia's borders shows how some actively seek out contact with Islamic actors abroad. Although contact with the wider Muslim world has been instrumental in diversifying Islamic discourses and practices in Bosnia, many of those promoting them are themselves Bosnian. While transformations of Islam in Bosnia would have not taken the same shape without the activity of transnational actors that have been arriving since the 1990s, they would have still taken place. A religious (rather than solely national) Islamic revival was well under way before the dissolution of Yugoslavia and in an increasingly networked world, even ordinary Muslim believers would not have been insulated from contact with alternative visions of Islam.

This paper has explored how pious Muslim women in Sarajevo relate to Islamic authority both in an attempt to gain a grassroots perspective on the transformations of religious authority and as a way of deconstructing the narrative of distinct Muslim groups at odds with each other. I argued that while we can observe a shift toward a religiosity that emphasizes individual engagement with Islamic learning, this search for knowledge is not detached from formal and informal authoritative actors. By engaging with a range of actors making competing claims to authority, which women acknowledge in sometimes contradictory ways, they both affirm and contest authority, contributing

67. Mahmood Mamdani, *Good Muslim, Bad Muslim: America, the Cold War, and the Roots of Terror* (New York, 2004); Roy, *Globalised Islam*.

to its pluralization as well as its continued relevance. I drew on critiques of essentialist understandings of culture, ethnicity, and nationhood to highlight an important distinction between institutional actors aligned with specific Islamic discourses and believers' engagement with various forms of Islamic authority. Paying attention to individuals' engagement with a variety of Islamic actors and discourses over space and time challenges crude characterizations of the transformations of Islam in Bosnia. Focusing on pious women's trajectories allows us to recognize how they can move between different approaches to Islam over time, engage with a range of Islamic actors simultaneously, and draw on their teachings selectively or situationally. The paper has therefore argued that pious women's practices disrupt the narrative of distinct and separate Muslim groups at the same time as what they say can sometimes reinforce the discourses constructing them as separate categories in the first place.