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## **Bosnian Islam since 1990: Cultural Identity or Political Ideology?**

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**Xavier BOUGAREL**

It is a delicate exercise to analyze the role of Islam in Bosnia-Herzegovina during the recent war. There are two main reasons for this. The first one is that Islam, and religion in general, played only a secondary role in the Yugoslav crisis: religious symbols were primarily used as substitutes for national ones, and religious institutions were largely instrumentalized by political elites, who must be the first to be blamed for the crisis. An analysis of Islam in Bosnia-Herzegovina during the war should therefore not be taken as an analysis of the war itself.

The second reason is more closely linked to Islam in Bosnia-Herzegovina itself. During the war, two conflicting representations of Bosnian Islam have appeared: one presented it as a model of tolerance and modernity, and the other as a bunch of fundamentalists and mujahideens. Some have maintained that the « *Islamic Declaration* » written by the Bosnian President Alija Izetbegovic was no more than a summary of the main principles of Islamic faith, while others have asserted that it was a kind of Islamic « *Mein Kampf* ». Yet, as opposite as they may seem, these two approaches share a common basis: each treats Bosnian Islam as a stable and homogeneous whole, and Alija Izetbegovic as its sole legitimate representative.

This paper aims to contradict such caricatured and simplistic representations. In Bosnia-Herzegovina, as everywhere, Islam constitutes a diverse and changing reality, includes numerous approaches, and is shaped by various actors with different aims and strategies. Similarly, it is probably not very useful to speculate whether Bosnian Muslim leaders have aimed to create a « secular » or an « Islamic » state, given that recent political developments in Turkey and Iran have compelled us to reconsider categories which, for a short time prior this, seemed to be self-evident. Moreover, we have no reason to doubt the sincerity of Dzemaludin Latic, one of the main ideologists of the Party of Democratic Action (*Stranka demokratske akcije* – SDA), when he writes about A. Izetbegovic : « The aspiration toward an Islamic state in Bosnia-Herzegovina was not and is not his aim – not because such a state would deprive Muslims or non-Muslims of their freedom, but because the brutal European environment surrounding this state would destroy it, even with atomic bombs if necessary. (...) Everyone who knows about Islam knows that even God does not require of us the establishment of an Islamic order here, in Europe. »<sup>1</sup>

But, in writing this, does Dz. Latic tell us everything about the evolutions of Bosnian Islam, about its place in the projects and the strategies of the SDA? Definitely not. In order to better

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<sup>1</sup> Dz. LATIC, « Guraju nas u nacionalnu drzavu », *Ljiljan*, vol. II, n° 36 (15 September 1993).

understand the role and trajectories of Islam during the war in Bosnia-Herzegovina, it is necessary to explore the ideological origins of the founders of the SDA and their place in the political and religious diversity of Bosnian Islam. We must also analyze how this ideological current managed to take over the leadership of the Muslim community, and to keep it throughout the war. It will then be easier to determine to what extent this Islamic factor may have influenced the violent reshaping of the Yugoslav space or, more narrowly, the cultural and political transformations within the Bosnian Muslim community itself.

### **The Role of the Pan-Islamist Current in the Creation of the SDA**

The origins of the Bosnian pan-Islamist current reach back to the 1930s, with the creation of an organization called « Young Muslims » (« *Mladi Muslimani* »). During World War II, these « Young Muslims » supported the idea of an autonomous Bosnia-Herzegovina under German tutelage, and some of them joined the « *Handzar* » SS-division, created at the initiative of Jerusalem mufti Amin el-Huseini. Forbidden by the new communist authorities, the « Young Muslims » continued to work clandestinely with the aim of creating a common state for all Balkan Muslim populations, closely patterned on the Pakistani experience. In 1949, a wave of arrests broke up the organization, and the Young Muslims who were not jailed had to cease all political activity or flee abroad.<sup>2</sup>

It was not until the 1970s that this pan-Islamist current was informally reconstituted. At that time, a general political liberalization and the « national affirmation » of the Bosnian Muslims allowed some former « Young Muslims » to take part in the renewal of Islamic religious institutions. Through a discussion circle led by a young imam, Hasan Cengic, they made contact with a group of pupils of the Sarajevo *madrasa* (Islamic secondary school). The new pan-Islamist current therefore came to consist of two distinct generations.<sup>3</sup> Its central figure was Alija Izetbegovic, a former « Young Muslim » and the author of the « *Islamic Declaration* » which can be regarded as the informal manifesto of this renewed pan-Islamist current.<sup>4</sup> In 1983, their activities were interrupted when A. Izetbegovic and twelve others were charged with of « Islamic fundamentalism » and « Muslim nationalism » and sentenced to prison.<sup>5</sup> At the same time, however, this turned the main members of the pan-Islamist current into martyrs, which in turn helped them to overcome their own marginality.<sup>6</sup>

Seven years later, indeed, the members of this pan-Islamist current came to play a central part in the creation of the SDA: among its forty founding members were eight former « Young Muslims » and several others close to the pan-Islamist current or the Zagreb mosque, then the main centre of Islamic contestation in Yugoslavia. The central influence of the pan-Islamist current, however, does not turn the SDA into an Islamist party. The SDA intended initially to gather the whole « historical and cultural Muslim circle » of Yugoslavia (Bosnian Muslims, Albanians, Turks, etc.), and some religious requests were included in its founding platform (e.g., the re-establishment of major religious feasts as state holidays, the return of the

<sup>2</sup> About the « Young Muslims », see Sead TRHULJ, *Mladi Muslimani*, Zagreb: Globus, 1992 ; Xavier BOUGAREL, « From 'Young Muslims' to the Party of Democratic Action : the Emergence of a Panislamist trend in Bosnia-Herzegovina », *Islamic Studies*, vol. XXXVI, n° 2-3 (Summer-Autumn 1997), p. 533-549.

<sup>3</sup> About the Bosnian pan-Islamist current in the 1970s, see Munir GAVRANKAPETANOVIC, *Mladi ce mjesec opet blistati*, Sarajevo: NIPP Ljiljan, 1996.

<sup>4</sup> Alija IZETBEOVIC, *Islamska deklaracija*, Sarajevo: Muslimanska biblioteka, 1990.

<sup>5</sup> Five of them (Omer Behmen, Edhem Bicakcic, Hasan Cengic, Ismet Kasumagic and Husein Zivalj) were also charged with having attended secretly a international Islamic conference held in Teheran in January 1983.

<sup>6</sup> On the 1983 trial, see Abid PRGUDA, *Sarajevski proces. Sudjenje muslimanskim intelektualcima 1983 god.*, Sarajevo: Iskra, 1990.

*waqfs* – religious estates – to the Islamic religious institutions, the freedom to build mosques in towns and new suburbs without mosques, the introduction of *halal* food in army barracks, hospitals and prisons). But the SDA pronounced itself in favour of a parliamentary democracy along the Western pattern, and concentrated its activities among the Muslims of Bosnia-Herzegovina and the Sandjak.

On the ground, there has been a great contrast between the very limited success of the SDA among Albanians and Turks, and its growing influence within the Bosnian Muslim population. This rapid growth in the SDA compelled the pan-Islamist current to integrate in the party various currents of Muslim nationalism, as well as numerous notables from the League of Communists. This was exemplified by the situation in the Bihac region, where the SDA was launched by local pan-Islamists (Mirsad Veladzic, Irfan Ljubijankic, etc.), but gained mass appeal as a party only after the rallying of Fikret Abdic, a powerful local notable involved in the « *Agrokomerc affair* », a financial scandal which shook the Bosnian League of Communists in 1987.

Despite this transformation of the SDA into a « catch-all party », the pan-Islamist current managed to maintain control. Except for A. Izetbegovic, who ran for the Collegial Presidency side by side with the former communists Fikret Abdic and Ejup Ganic, the pan-Islamists were seldom candidates for public offices. But they were predominant in the top ranks of the party, Omer Behmen (a former « Young Muslim » and one of the accused in the 1983 trial) being for example president of the all-powerful staff commission. In order to understand the ability of the pan-Islamist current to keep the SDA under control, however, it is not enough to know how the party apparatus functioned. The real strength of this current laid in its ability to put itself at the center of the political recompositions set into motion by the collapse of communism and the crisis of the Yugoslav federation.

In 1990, the pan-Islamist current itself had probably no more than a few hundreds members. It controlled the Islamic weekly « *Preporod* » (« Rebirth ») since the wave of contestation which had shaken the Islamic religious institutions a year earlier, but it was still in the minority among members of the executive bodies of the *Islamska zajednica* (Islamic Community, the official name of the Islamic religious institutions). Similarly, it had almost no influence among the Muslim secular intelligentsia. Given this situation, the members of the pan-Islamist current were careful not to put forward their own understanding of Islam, but nevertheless made use of it as a rallying point for the support of the Muslim population. This they accomplished through the use of many Islamic symbols (green flags, the use of religious greetings, etc.) at the election rallies for the SDA. This instrumentalization of Islam allowed pan-Islamist party leaders to involve the *ulemas* (religious leaders) in the electoral campaign, to ensure themselves the loyalty of secular notables and intellectuals in search of a new legitimacy and, in the end, to turn the nationalist mobilization of the Muslim population to their own advantage.

That this evocation of Islam was cultural rather than ideological in nature can be seen in the fact that the first internal conflict in the SDA broke out around the very definition of Muslim identity. In September 1990, Adil Zulfikarpasic, the main representative of the Muslim political emigration, together with several secular intellectuals of Sarajevo and other Bosnian towns, suggested giving up the national name « Muslim » in favor of a new one : « Bosniac » (« *Bosnjak* »).<sup>7</sup> The members of the pan-Islamist current were, of course, hostile to such a

<sup>7</sup> The name « Bosniac » was first proposed by the Austro-Hungarian authorities at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century as a common national name for all inhabitants of Bosnia-Herzegovina (*bosnjastvo*). It was rediscovered at the end of

« secularization » of Muslim national identity, and they managed to marginalize their opponents with the support of the *ulemas* and some of the main intellectual figures from the « national affirmation » movement of the 1970s.

Expelled from the SDA, the advocates of « neo-*bosnjastvo* » created a new party, the Muslim Bosniac Organization (MBO), which won only 1,1 % of the vote at the general elections of November 1990. The SDA, for its part, won 30,4 % of the vote (that is more than two thirds of the Muslim vote) and thus became the largest political party in Bosnia-Herzegovina. At the presidential election, F. Abdic won noticeably more votes (1,040,307) than A. Izetbegovic (874,213), but the latter was nevertheless made President of the Bosnian Collegial Presidency. In this way, the decision of the top ranks of the party prevailed over the choice of the voters.

### **The Transformations of the SDA during the War**

The electoral success of the SDA can also be attributed to its informal coalition with the two other nationalist parties in Bosnia-Herzegovina, the Serbian Democratic Party (*Srpska demokratska stranka* – SDS) and the Croatian Democratic Community (*Hrvatska demokratska zajednica* – HDZ), against the « civic » parties which had grown out of the former League of Communists and its mass organizations. The SDA exerted thus only limited control over the state apparatus until the beginning of the war in April 1992. On one hand, it had to share power with the two other nationalist parties; on the other hand, the top of the main administrations and state companies were staffed with former communists close to the « civic » parties. But the SDA already began to set up its own communitarian networks: the cultural association « *Preporod* » (« Rebirth »), the humanitarian organization « *Merhamet* » (Charity) and, most importantly, the Patriotic League, an underground organization in charge of the military defense of Bosnia-Herzegovina.

After the beginning of the war, the SDA shifted certain functions from what had become a completely disorganized state apparatus to the party's own parallel networks. The « civic » parties succeeded in winning places in the Collegial Presidency but, at the same time, the SDA managed to circumvent and marginalize such state institutions in order to more effectively monopolize power. One of his greatest successes on this front was its gaining control of the young Bosnian armed forces. Within the army itself, some militia leaders close to the Patriotic League acted as a counterbalance to the influence of officers who had come from the Yugoslav army or the Bosnian Territorial Defense. From the outside, the SDA also took control of money collection and weapons smuggling channels, and was therefore able to influence the political orientation of the army.

Within this context, foreign policy has served a double function for the leaders of the SDA: to compensate both for the weakness of the Bosnian state within the Yugoslav space, and for the weakness of the SDA within the Bosnian state apparatus. Hence the strenuous efforts of the SDA to take over key positions of the Bosnian diplomatic apparatus, beginning with the office of Minister of Foreign affairs, which was held successively by Haris Silajdzic, Irfan Ljubijankic and Muhamed Sacirbegovic.<sup>8</sup> Hence also the clear split in the diplomatic corps

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the 1930s by some Muslim intellectuals trying to promote it as the national name solely for the Bosnian Muslims (*neo-bosnjastvo*).

<sup>8</sup> H. Silajdzic is the son of an important religious leader of Bosnia-Herzegovina, and was before November 1990 the advisor to *Reis-ul-Ulema* Jakub Selimovski for international affairs. I. Ljubijankic was one of the main members of the pan-Islamist current in the Bihac area, and became Minister of Foreign affairs in October 1993.

between some embassies in the Western countries, entrusted to members of the « civic » parties, and other embassies charged with soliciting donations from the Bosnian diaspora and the Muslim world, which were monopolized by members of the pan-Islamist current (beginning with the Bosnian embassy in Teheran, entrusted to Omer Behmen).

The reorganization of the Bosnian state apparatus, which took place after the violent secession of F. Abdic in the Bihac area in September 1993, and was marked by the nomination of H. Silajdzic as the new Prime Minister, only partially altered the way the SDA ruled the territories under its control. The arrest of some militia leaders and local bosses contributed to the restoration of state authority, but this was followed by the entrance of members of the pan-Islamist current into positions of the state, as shown by their appointment as regional ministers (Mirsad Veladzic in Bihac, Fuad Djidic in Zenica) or directors of state companies (Edhem Bicakcic in *Energoinvest*).

Moreover, the parallel networks set up by the pan-Islamist current did not disappear. On the contrary, they managed to take over some of the supply channels previously controlled by F. Abdic, and began to organize themselves along an axis of influence running from Vienna to Visoko, a town in central Bosnia. In Vienna, the *Third World Relief Agency* (TWRA), led by Fatih al-Hasanein<sup>9</sup> of Sudan and Hasan Cengic, gathered money collected in the Muslim world and the Bosnian diaspora, and organized the delivery of weapons to Bosnia-Herzegovina. In Visoko, the main logistical center of the Bosnian army led by Halid Cengic (Hasan's father) dispatched financial and material aid according to political criteria. Such « ideological clientelism » can also be found at the local level, in areas ranging from the allocation of jobs and accommodations to the provision of electricity and the distribution of humanitarian aid.

This form of rule, in which official institutions are circumvented by parallel networks from which the bulk of power is exercised, has led to a dual reality of the Bosnian state. The members of the Collegial Presidency, for example, have been reduced to a mere legitimation function, as they were denied any real influence by Alija Izetbegovic and his entourage. A *Bosnjacki sabor* (Bosniac assembly), made up of political and cultural representatives only from the Muslim community, was convened alongside the Bosnian Parliament. And in the Bosnian army, « Muslim brigades », directly financed by SDA's parallel networks, have appeared alongside regular units.

In February 1995, Collegial Presidency members close to the « civic » parties protested the existence of these « Muslim brigades ». In return, they were attacked by Alija Izetbegovic and Ejup Ganic, together with the general staff of the army, which was supposed to be subordinated to the Presidency rather than the party! Six months later, Haris Silajdzic, the main architect of the recovery of the Bosnian state, suggested during a Parliament session that donations collected by the SDA be returned to state coffers. In so doing, H. Silajdzic sealed his break with SDA leaders.

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His helicopter was shot down by the Serbs in May 1995. M. Sacirbegovic is the son of the former « Young Muslim » Nedzib Sacirbegovic.

<sup>9</sup> F. al-Hasanein, an Islamist activist close to the Sudanese power, studied medicine in Sarajevo in the 1960's, and is one of the main intermediaries between the Bosnian pan-Islamist current and the Islamist regimes and movements of the Muslim world. On F. el-Hasanein and the TWRA, see M. GAVRANKAPETANOVIĆ, *Mladi mjesec ce opet blistati*, op. cit.; John POMFRET, « Agency Funneled Millions of Dollars off Illegal Arms in Bosnia », *The Washington Post* (22 septembre 1996), p. A1 et A26.

The SDA's use of parallel networks to circumvent state processes, and its simultaneous moves to progressively monopolize the state have led to the reconstitution of a party-state system in which state and party responsibilities tend to merge. Alija Izetbegovic, for example, was at the same time President of the Collegial Presidency and President of the SDA, and made skilful use of this presidential ubiquity. The Muslim-Croat Federation, as a new coalition between nationalist parties, has exaggerated this tendency, as shown by the rise of Edhem Bicakcic, co-president of a SDA-HDZ joint commission, eclipsing Prime Minister Haris Silajdzic.

In addition to extending its control over the state, the SDA has surrounded itself with « transmission belts » intended to supervise the population. The *Bosnjacki sabor* is made up of representatives of the main Muslim communitarian organizations, which have been coopted in a manner similar to that which operated under the « delegation system » of Yugoslav self-management. In the assistance economy of the wartime, the humanitarian organization « *Merhamet* » and various organizations of refugees, veterans or martyr families linked to the SDA have played a part similar to the trade-unions in the planned economy of the communist regimes.

There are therefore blatant similarities between the political practices of the SDA and those of the League of Communists; but there are also important differences. The SDA considers itself to be the sole legitimate representative of the Muslim nation and has reduced the role of the « civic » parties within the Collegial Presidency to one of outward legitimation, but it has also never questioned the principle of multiparty pluralism. Similarly, the SDA has controlled the state radio and television, but also tolerated some independent newspapers and TV stations. Above all, the party has not attempted to win the active support of the population, but merely to ensure its passive allegiance. Thus, the manner in which the SDA exerts power is less reminiscent of the former communist regimes than of the authoritarian regimes which appeared after 1990 in other former republics of Yugoslavia (Serbia, Croatia, etc.) or the Soviet Union (Belorussia, etc.).

The reconstitution of a party-state has been accompanied by an important turn-over in the party itself. The first months of war saw the removal of numerous notables by militia leaders and criminals who, at that time, held power at the local level. Then, after Fall 1993, the SDA's penetration into the restored state apparatus was followed by an opposite trend, that is the entrance into the SDA of officers, high civil servants and directors who were formerly active under the communist system. Indeed, the former communist executives have joined the new ruling party or have been dismissed from their jobs. In this way, the SDA has succeeded in getting the managerial staff it had lacked in November 1990, and in securing the take over of a state apparatus it had, until then, controlled only indirectly. In March 1994, the Police Minister Bakir Alispahic and the chief of military security services Fikret Muslimovic entered the Executive Committee of the party, followed by general Atif Dudakovic and Mehmet Alagic in January 1996. These promotions illustrated this process of reconversion of parts of the former military, political and managerial elites into the SDA.

Far from endangering the central position of the pan-Islamist current within the party, these internal changes in the SDA have actually worked to consolidate its influence. In the first months of the war, the ideological cohesion of this current, reinforced by long-standing personal and family ties, gave its members an important advantage over their political opponents. Later on, control of key positions in the SDA's parallel networks enabled the pan-Islamists to retain control over the restoration of the state as well as the renewal of the party.

They could also put pressure on former communist elites, who sought new career paths and new legitimacy, to eliminate more independent figures like Haris Silajdzic. Finally, during the war, the pan-Islamist current has acquired the financial power and political experience it had lacked at the founding of the SDA. But it remains necessary to explore whether the reinforcement of the power of this current means also the implementation of an Islamist political project in Bosnia-Herzegovina, and any real process of re-Islamization among the Muslim population.

### **The SDA and the Yugoslav Crisis**

From the wider view of the Yugoslav crisis, it is most important to know which were the real political choices of the SDA, and which was the specific influence exerted on them by the pan-Islamist current. This is due to the fact that, whereas the SDS and the HDZ have not hid their nationalistic projects, the attitude of the SDA before and during the war in Bosnia-Herzegovina was much more ambiguous, and, in fact, remains a subject of controversy today.

Paradoxically, the initial commitment of the SDA to the upholding of Yugoslavia can be explained by the specific influence of the pan-Islamist current, as Yugoslavia was seen as the *sine qua non* condition for uniting the whole « historical and cultural Muslim circle » of the Yugoslav space. However, other reasons for this commitment can be found in a « tactical Yugoslavism », similar to the position of interwar Muslim parties, and in the then strong attachment of the Bosnian Muslims to the Yugoslav idea. Moreover, the worsening of the Yugoslav crisis very quickly led SDA leaders to focus solely on the Bosnian Muslim nation and to throw their support behind the independence of Bosnia-Herzegovina. By February 1991, the SDA had already submitted a « Declaration on the sovereignty and indivisibility of Bosnia-Herzegovina » to the Bosnian Parliament, and had clashed openly with the SDS.

In reality, save these few vaguely articulated pan-Islamist and Yugoslav aspirations, the political project of the SDA has always revolved around three main goals: the sovereignty of the Bosnian Muslim nation, the independence and territorial integrity of Bosnia-Herzegovina and the territorial autonomy of the Sandjak. Together, these three objectives comprise what could be called the « greater Muslim » project of the SDA: a state composed of Bosnia-Herzegovina and Sandjak, in which Muslims would be the majority, and the Serbs and Croats would be reduced to national minorities. Hence the SDA's insistence during the 1991 census on the majority status of the Muslim nation, and the slogan calling the Muslims to take part to this census: « *On our number depend our rights* ».

Such a project is sometimes implicitly included in the speeches of SDA leaders ; it is, however, doubtful that it has significantly influenced their concrete political choices. The balance of power inside the Yugoslav space has compelled the SDA to fall back on much more limited objectives. Moreover, the party's various goals were, in fact, contradictory: the claim for the territorial autonomy of the Sandjak contradicted the previously stated principle of inviolability of the borders of Bosnia-Herzegovina, and the insistence upon the own political sovereignty of the Bosnian Muslim nation called into question the territorial integrity of Bosnia-Herzegovina.

This tension between Muslim sovereignty and Bosnian territory represents the core of the « Muslim question » in Bosnia-Herzegovina. But, whereas the interwar Muslim parties gave up the sovereignty of the Muslim community in order to better preserve Bosnia-Herzegovina



as a specific territorial entity, the SDA has tended to do the opposite. The SDA's nationalism is thus a Muslim rather than a Bosnian one, a cultural rather than a territorial. And this reality can, to a great extent, be explained by the specific influence of the pan-Islamist current.

This primacy given by the SDA leaders to the sovereignty of the Muslim nation explains their main political choices between 1990 and 1996, as well as the main conflicts within the party. In the first months of the war, the SDA rejected the idea of a « Bosnian patriotic front » put forward by the « civic » parties, and preferred a « Croato-Muslim alliance » resting on a coalition between the SDA and the HDZ. For the SDA, to sacrifice the sovereignty of the Muslim nation for the sake of the defense of Bosnia-Herzegovina was out of question. One year later, the outbreak of fighting between Muslim and Croat forces (May 1993) and the presentation of the Owen-Stoltenberg peace plan (July) proposing the transformation of Bosnia-Herzegovina into an union of three constitutive republics, led to internal tensions in the SDA, most notably the conflict between Fikret Abdic and Alija Izetbegovic.

In this major crisis, A. Izetbegovic is deemed to be the defender of Bosnian territorial integrity, against F. Abdic who accepted the Owen-Stoltenberg plan, and thus the partition of Bosnia-Herzegovina. But the reality is different. In 1993, the military inferiority and the diplomatic isolation of the Bosnian Muslims had led both F. Abdic and A. Izetbegovic to give up the principle of the territorial integrity of Bosnia-Herzegovina. But this renouncement did not have the same meaning for the two men. For F. Abdic, it was combined with a renouncement of Muslim sovereignty, the Muslim entity being compelled to declare allegiance to the neighbouring Serbia and Croatia in order to survive. For A. Izetbegovic, in contrast, giving up the Bosnian territorial integrity was the necessary price for the constitution of a sovereign Muslim state. In the first scenario, boundaries did not matter. In the second one, they were of paramount importance (for territorial continuity and free access to the sea and to the Sava river).

When Alija Izetbegovic rejected the Owen-Stoltenberg plan, it was, therefore, not because he was hostile to the principle of partition, but because he did not accept the concrete boundaries proposed by the Owen-Stoltenberg plan. What was at stake in his conflict with Fikret Abdic was not the territorial integrity of Bosnia-Herzegovina, but the sovereignty of the Muslim nation. The proof of this assertion is the fact that on September 16, 1993, during the negotiations of the Owen-Stoltenberg plan, A. Izetbegovic signed an agreement with Momcilo Krajisnik allowing the Serb entity to secede from the future Union of republics of Bosnia-Herzegovina. Five months later, in February 1994, a group of SDA deputies proposed to the Bosnian Parliament the proclamation of a « Bosnian republic » defined as « the independent and democratic state of the Bosniac nation, with Serbs and Croats enjoying in this state a status of national minorities ».<sup>10</sup>

Thus, during the fighting between Muslims and Croats, the temptation to set up a separate Muslim entity did indeed exist within the SDA, and in particular among its pan-Islamist founding members. But several major obstacles stood in the way of this project. On one hand, the local and international balances of power made it impossible to satisfy the minimal territorial demands set by the proponents of partition, which was, according to Džemaludin Latic (former co-defendant in the 1983 trial and chief editor of « *Ljiljan* », a newspaper close

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<sup>10</sup> Statement of the deputy Muhamed Kupusovic at the February 7, 1994 session of the Bosnian Parliament, reproduced in *Ljiljan*, vol. III, n° 57 (16 February 1994). About this little known episode of the war, see also the account of Ivo Komsic, member of the collegial Presidency, in the weekly « *Svijet* » (15 August 1996).

to the SDA), « 45 % of the territory of Bosnia-Herzegovina plus the Sandjak »<sup>11</sup>. On the other hand, every statement in favour of partition provoked sharp reactions from the « civic » parties and from within the SDA itself. The proposition made in February 1994, in particular, had to be withdrawn after it provoked a wave of internal contestation led by Rusmir Mahmutcehajic, a SDA leader, until then considered to be close to the pan-Islamist current.

Later, the creation of the Muslim-Croat Federation and the secret lifting of the arms embargo by the United States put an end to the military inferiority and the diplomatic isolation of the Muslim community. But the establishment of this Federation gave rise to new conflicts. For the « civic » parties, the Federation was only one step toward the political reintegration of Bosnia-Herzegovina : they therefore insisted on the primacy of republican institutions and on their multi-ethnic composition and orientation. For the SDA leaders, in contrast, it was an opportunity to restore the coalition with the HDZ and to identify the republican institutions solely with the Muslim nation. Similar disagreements appeared in the SDA itself, between the Prime Minister Haris Silajdzic and the executive bodies of the party. In August 1995, the « civic » parties criticized a constitutional reform reserving implicitly the Presidency of the Collegial Presidency for a Muslim.<sup>12</sup> In January 1996, H. Silajdzic opposed a new transfer of competences from republican to federal institutions and resigned in protest of this decision. A few days later, he was expelled from the party and replaced by Hasan Muratovic (as republican prime minister) and Izudin Kapetanovic (as federal prime minister). Acting in this way, the SDA favored again the sovereignty of the Muslim nation at the expense of the political reintegration of Bosnia-Herzegovina.

However, the fact remains that within the Yugoslav space as in the Muslim community, the pan-Islamist current was not strong enough to impose its own conception of the political future of Bosnia-Herzegovina. Given these conditions, the SDA adopted an ambiguous stand and reiterated its commitment to an united and multi-ethnic Bosnia-Herzegovina while turning the territories held by the Bosnian army into a *de facto* Muslim entity. Since 1994, this ambiguity in the SDA position has been justified by the idea of a « two stage reintegration » of Bosnia-Herzegovina, the immediate consolidation of Muslim territories being said to further a long-term reintegration of Serb and Croat territories. During the election campaign of 1996, this was reflected in two largely contradictory slogans put forth by the SDA: « *On our own land, in our own faith* » and « *For a sovereign, united and democratic Bosnia* ».

In reality, this strategy of ambiguity has offered several advantages for the SDA leaders. Firstly, it has allowed them to continue presenting themselves as the defensor of Bosnia-Herzegovina, the representation that constituted one of the party's main sources of internal and international legitimacy during the war. Secondly, it has permitted them to present the results of the war as provisory, and to reestablish its original goals into the ambiguities inherent in the Dayton agreements (December 1995). Shortly after the signing of these agreements limiting the sovereignty of the Muslim nation along with the territorial integrity of Bosnia-Herzegovina, Alija Izetbegovic declared that the SDA « has remained faithful to the idea of Bosnia, in spite of the price we payed and the risks we ran, has woke up the national consciousness of the Bosniacs and did not forget his brothers in the Sandjak ».<sup>13</sup> For the SDA

<sup>11</sup> Dz. LATIC, « Sta moze donijeti Zeneva ? », *Ljiljan*, vol. II, n° 29 (4 August 1993).

<sup>12</sup> The Constitution of Bosnia-Herzegovina states that the function of president of the collegial presidency is exerted by each of his members, according to an annual cooptation principle which was never implemented in practice. The constitutional amendment adopted on August 3, 1995 transfers the appointment of the president to the parliament, in which Muslim deputies are in the majority.

<sup>13</sup> Speech to the General council of the SDA (28 January 1996), reprinted in *Ljiljan*, vol. V, n° 159 (31 January 1996).

leaders, indeed, the institutional framework set up by the Dayton agreements represents only a step toward the realization of a nationalistic project centered on the assertion of sovereignty for the Muslim nation.

### **Islam in the Reconfigurations of Muslim National Identity**

Between 1990 and 1996, the SDA did not succeed in uniting all the Muslim populations of the Yugoslav space, nor did it manage to ensure the sovereignty of the Muslim nation over Bosnian territory. This failure shows that the influence of the pan-Islamist current has less concerned the general reshaping of the Yugoslav space than the political recompositions happening inside the Bosnian Muslim community. Besides, the primacy given by the SDA leaders to the Muslim sovereignty itself is a choice of identity rather than strategy. This insistence on Muslim sovereignty has gone together with certain reconfigurations of Muslim national identity, in which members of the pan-Islamist current have played an active part, although the developments and consequences of these have been largely beyond their control.

Whereas the political project of the SDA remained ambiguous and inconsistent, its cultural project seems at first glance to have been much more precise. On one hand, the SDA wanted to carry on the Muslim « national affirmation » initiated in the communist period by providing the Muslim community with all identity attributes of a nation (language, literature, history, etc.). On the other hand, it wanted to reassert the central place of Islam within this nascent national identity. During the first Congress of the SDA held in December 1990 in Sarajevo, the Commission for social questions chaired by Rusmir Mahmutcehajic declared that « the culture of the Bosnian Muslims is sacred in its foundations, even though some people (...) have attempted to impose a brutal 'secularization' on it. In fact, this secularization has consisted of a separation of the cultural superstructure from its sacred basis. Atheist ideology, elevated to the rank of a state religion and turned into a vulgar antitheism, has in this way contributed to destroying the Muslims' awareness of their own culture, of its historical forms and achievements ».<sup>14</sup>

The breakout of the war in April 1992 made the implementation of the SDA's cultural project easier. In addition to the Muslim communitarian institutions such as the association « *Preporod* » or the Congress of Muslim intellectuals founded in December 1992, the Ministry of Education and Culture also contributed to the reconfiguration of Muslim national identity. The formalization of a Bosnian language was entrusted to an expert commission, the editing of Muslim literary works was undertaken in a systematic way, and new schoolbooks were introduced in 1994. Above all, the war circumstances led to a « re-Islamization through war » of the Muslim national identity. The SDA and the *Islamska Zajednica* put forward an interpretation of the war in religious terms : the Muslim dead are *shahids* (martyrs of the faith), the Serb and Croat aggressions were said to constitute a « new Crusade », and the passivity of the Western countries was explained by their deep-rooted hostility towards the Muslim world. Fikret Muslimovic, then the chief of the Department for Morale at the general staff of the Bosnian Army, explained, for example, that « the commandants (...) must play an active part in the creation of a space and an environment favourable to the fulfillment of religious duties by the members of their units ». He also specified the attitude the officers were expected to adopt towards Islam and its rituals:

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<sup>14</sup> « Izvjestaj komisije za društvenu djelatnost », in S.D.A., *Prvi Kongres Stranke Demokratske Akcije (29.11-01.12.1991 god.)*, Sarajevo, 1992.

« In their personal attitude, the commandant, its assistants for questions of morale and all those who have a leading function may in no circumstances contradict the traditional values of our nation, including the customs related to the religious tradition, in order that our army may resemble our nation.(...) It is desirable that the officers, and particularly those in key positions, adapt their behaviour to the religious tradition of their nation, on the occasion of demonstrations of patriotism and adherence to the objectives of the liberation struggle (official gatherings), or when homage is paid to the shehids (burial, for example). In these circumstances, when respect is expressed with a great emotion for the victims of the genocide against our nation, the officers must show that they are aware that the genocide against our nation has precisely the purpose of eliminating our religious traditions. »<sup>15</sup>

Facilitated by the actions of the Serb and Croat nationalists (likening the Bosnian Muslims to « fundamentalists », systematic destruction of the mosques, etc.), the reconfigurations of Muslim national identity launched by the SDA have affected the whole Muslim population. The feeling of belonging to the Muslim nation has constantly intensified, to the detriment of local (urban or rural) identities as well as attachment to the former Yugoslav idea of « brotherhood and unity » (« *bratstvo i jedinstvo* »). As for Islam, it has been more and more perceived as a common and sacred heritage. But these identity reconfigurations have been accompanied by evident dilemmas and disagreements. Is Bosnian language the language solely of the Bosniacs, or of all Bosnians? Is Islam merely the substratum of the Muslim national identity, or does it transcend this identity to merge the Bosnian Muslims into the great brotherhood of the *Umma* (Community of the faithful)? And was the war itself a patriotic and antifascist struggle along the pattern of Tito's partisans, or a *jihad* (holy war) inspired by the Iranian and Afghan examples?

The SDA leaders have been unable to give a coherent answer to these questions, and to master the consequences of the identity reconfigurations they have themselves initiated. As far as Islam is concerned, the best illustrations of these contradictions put forth by the SDA leaders are the creation of Islamic religious institutions peculiar to the Bosnian Muslim population, and the replacement of the national name « Muslim » by the name « Bosniac », both of which occurred in 1993.

In 1991, after the SDA failed to unite the « historical and cultural Muslim circle », the *Islamska zajednica* remained the only institution linking the various Muslim populations of the Yugoslav space. At the initiative of the *Reis-ul-Ulema*, Jakub Selimovski, the Yugoslav *Islamska zajednica* even undertook the project of gathering the other Balkan Muslim populations into an Union of East European Islamic Communities. But the members of the pan-Islamist current themselves put an end to these institutional links in April 1993, by organizing a « coup » against J. Selimovski and announcing the creation of an *Islamska Zajednica* limited to Bosnia-Herzegovina and Sandjak, led by a new *Reis-ul-Ulema*, Mustafa Cerić.<sup>16</sup> There were two main reasons for this apparently paradoxical behavior of the Bosnian pan-Islamist current. On one hand, J. Selimovski, who opposed any form of politicization of Islam and had been elected by the religious structures of the various Yugoslav republics, was a major obstacle to the seizure of the *Islamska zajednica* by this pan-Islamist current. On the other hand, assertion of the national character of the Bosnian Muslims also implied the necessity for the creation of their own religious institutions : thus, the will of the pan-Islamists

<sup>15</sup> F. MUSLIMOVIC, « Uloga komandovanja i rukovodjenja u ostvarivanju vjerskih potreba pripadnika ARBiH », in Press Centar ABiH, *Duhovna snaga odbrane*, Sarajevo : Vojna biblioteka, 1994.

<sup>16</sup> M. Cerić is one of the founding members of the SDA, and was until 1993 the main imam of the Zagreb mosque.

to « re-Islamicize » the Muslim national identity eventually led to a « nationalization » of Islam.

Similarly, in September 1990, the members of the pan-Islamist current had successfully opposed those in the SDA who advocated the replacement of the national name « Muslim » with the name « Bosniac ». Three years later, however, they accepted a resolution from the *Bosnjacki sabor* « to give back to our nation its historical and national name 'Bosniac', in order to closely link us to our country Bosnia, to its political and legal continuity, to our Bosnian language and to all the spiritual tradition of our history ». <sup>17</sup> Pan-Islamists have even sometimes boasted that they were the true initiators of this change. In reality, however, the national name « Bosniac » was promoted by former communist intellectuals rallied to the SDA, and acting from within SDA-controlled cultural institutions. The members of the pan-Islamist current were only ratifying a change which was by this time favoured by a large majority of the Bosnian Muslim elites, and was made necessary for the insertion of the Muslim community into an European political order resting on the nation-state principle. As Dzermaludin Latic lamented: « In Europe, those with no national name can also not have a state. (...) The Bosniacs will become a European nation, not only in the geographical sense, but also in the cultural sense -a large and ugly copy, with an European life-style, European disregard for God, and therefore indifference towards moral questions ». <sup>18</sup>

The members of the pan-Islamist current then tried to compensate for the relinquishing of the national name « Muslim » by insisting on Islam as the central element of this new Bosniac identity. According to *Reis-ul-Ulema* Mustafa Cerić, « Islamic tradition is the foundation of the Bosniac national identity », for « without Islam, without Islamic civilization, we are nobody and nothing ». <sup>19</sup> In the 1970s, the Muslim intellectuals close to the League of Communists had done their utmost to demonstrate that the national name « Muslim » had in reality few links to Islam; twenty years later, the members of the pan-Islamist current were attempting to achieve the opposite.

But this kind of intellectual pirouette has not resolved their contradictions, because the insistence on the national dimension of Islam has undermined its religious content. For example, the general use of the word « *shēhid* » as a designation for those killed in the war has deprived it of its religious meaning, and is rarely accompanied by respect for the funeral rituals which should be associated to it. Similarly, the transformation of the *Ajvatovica* pilgrimage<sup>20</sup> into a patriotic gathering has deprived it of its mystical dimension and has promoted this Bosnian « small *hajj* » as a sort replacement for the true *hajj* (pilgrimage to Mecca).

Thus, the project to re-Islamicize Muslim national identity, cherished by the members of the pan-Islamist current, eventually backfired on its authors : the more the Muslim community acquired the symbolical and institutional attributes of a nation, the more Islam was reduced to a « raw material » from which were extracted some identity markers lacking in real religious content, and the more the *Islamska Zajednica* lost its function of a substitute national institution which explained its renewal in the communist period.

<sup>17</sup> Resolution of the *Bosnjacki sabor* (27 September 1993), reprinted in *Ljiljan*, vol. II, n° 38 (6 October 1993).

<sup>18</sup> Dz. LATIC, « Jedan tuzni rastanak », *Ljiljan*, vol. II, n° 39 (13 October 1993).

<sup>19</sup> M. CERIC, *Islam ovdje i danas*, Sarajevo: Vojna biblioteka, 1994.

<sup>20</sup> The *Ajvatovica* pilgrimage is a sufi pilgrimage which takes place each year in June in the small town of Prusac (central Bosnia). It was forbidden by the communist authorities in 1947, and revived in 1990 by the *Islamska Zajednica* and the SDA.

## From Authoritarian Re-Islamization to the Fragmentation of Bosnian Islam

Whereas the pan-Islamist current has reinforced its position within the SDA and the state apparatus, its desire to unite the people of the *Umma* has given way to narrow national concerns, and its will to re-Islamicize Bosnian Muslim national identity has led to a « nationalization » of Islam in Bosnia-Herzegovina. Does this mean that the pan-Islamism of the SDA founding members had no influence on the internal political recompositions of the Muslim community?

In truth, pan-Islamism never represented an identity project shared by the whole Bosnian Muslim community, rather it has gradually become a discriminatory ideological criterion within this community. Adnan Jahic, a leading figure of the pan-Islamist current in Tuzla, did not convey anything else when he stated in 1993 that the Muslim state he wished to establish in Bosnia-Herzegovina « will have a MUSLIM IDEOLOGY based on Islam and its juridical, moral and social principles, as well as on those elements of Western origin which do not contradict them », and that « the principle of a complete equality will be guaranteed by the law to all citizens, but the level of social success of each individual will depend not only on his own work, but also on his degree of acceptance and enforcement of the principles and spirit of the MUSLIM IDEOLOGY ». <sup>21</sup>

Adnan Jahic's words have been labelled « immature » by « *Ljiljan* », the weekly close to magazine close to the SDA. Nevertheless, adherence to the ideological project of the founding members of the SDA is still an important factor for promotion within the party and state apparatus, and a political or military career is unthinkable for anyone with open hostility to this project. As Alija Izetbegovic euphemistically said in 1994 : « Of course, we will not ask an officer whether he fasts or not, whether he goes to the mosque or not. We first expect him to fight properly. And let him believe what he wants to believe. But he does not have the right to blaspheme God. He has to resemble this nation. And in our nation, to blaspheme God is a completely unknown thing. » <sup>22</sup>

In other words, it is possible to say that, while Muslim nationalism has substituted itself for pan-Islamism as a cultural identity, pan-Islamism has substituted itself for communism as a political ideology. At that level too, however, there are some important differences from the communist period. Firstly, adherence to pan-Islamist ideology has not been the only criterion in the selection of new elites: military prestige, financial power or some rare professional skills have also played an important part in this process. Secondly, the pan-Islamist ideology remains a confidential one: it never clearly appears in public documents and speeches from the SDA, and is not intended for ordinary people.

While pan-Islamism as a political ideology represents a sign of recognition limited to elite-circles, Islam as a marker of national identity is used to control the population. This is evident in the presence of « assistants for morale and religious affairs » at every level of the military hierarchy, in the introduction of religious instruction and the opening of prayer rooms in the public educational establishments, and in various forms of pressure exerted through the distribution of humanitarian aid (wearing of the veil for women, attendance at the main prayers and religious ceremonies for men, attendance at religious instruction and choice of

<sup>21</sup> A. JAHIC, « Krijeposna muslimanska drzava », *Zmaj od Bosne* (27 September 1993).

<sup>22</sup> Speech to the SDA local committee of Sarajevo (12 January 1994), reproduced in *Ljiljan*, vol. III, n° 53 (19 January 1994).

Muslim first names for children). This relation between an ideological discourse reserved for the elites and a cultural one aimed at the broader population holds an evident advantage for the members of the pan-Islamist current : in this way, they can conceal their own ideological project behind religious generalities, and present any criticism of this project as an attack against Islam. The apparent reinforcement of the Islamic religious institutions and the alleged re-Islamization of the Muslim population have to be understood within this context.

After its seizure by the pan-Islamist current in 1993, the *Islamska zajednica* began to experience rapid growth in its administrative and educational infrastructures, with the appointment of six regional muftis (Sarajevo, Mostar, Tuzla, Banja Luka, Travnik and Novi Pazar<sup>23</sup>) and the opening of seven new *madrasas* (Tuzla, Mostar, Cazin, Travnik, Visoko, Zagreb, Novi Pazar<sup>24</sup>). At the same time, its influence on the state apparatus has increased significantly, as is evident in the great number of imams exercising responsibilities in the areas of diplomacy, the secret services and the ideological control and training of the army. Indeed, the *Islamska zajednica* has a lock on several functions which cannot be carried out by the state or the party because of the officially secular character of the latter two. The *Islamska zajednica* has therefore become a key element in the institutional and discursive dualities set up by the pan-Islamist current in order to secure its political supremacy.

This institutional reinforcement of the *Islamka zajednica*, however, has not corresponded to a real movement of re-Islamization in Bosnia-Herzegovina. The political influence of the *Islamska zajednica*, for example, was not sufficient to question the results of the authoritarian secularization accomplished during the communist period, as shown by its inability to recover the *waqfs* confiscated after World War II, or its recurrent conflicts of competence with the Ministry of Education and Culture about the organization of religious instruction and the upkeep of religious monuments. Similarly, the growth of its material infrastructures is not due to a renewed religious fervour of the Muslim population, but to the influx of financial aid from the Muslim world.

Above all, the attempts to initiate top-down reislamization of the Muslim population have been met with serious resistance. In 1994, the issuing by *Reis-ul-Ulema* Mustafa Cerić and the new appointed muftis of *fatwas* (religious decrees) concerning the consumption of alcohol and pork has not significantly changed the dietary habits of the Bosnian Muslims, but has given rise to strong protests. In view of the political consensus created by the war, internal conflicts in the Muslim community tend to crystallize precisely around questions related to the re-Islamization of individual behavior. During the war, polemics on mixed marriages and the celebration of Father Christmas and the (catholic) New Year caused disturbance in the public sphere. For the population and the « civic » parties, these polemics have offered a way to criticize, in veiled terms, the ideological orientation of the SDA. Conversely, they represent for this party an occasion to test the cohesion of its supporters and the loyalty of its civil servants.

The attempts at an authoritarian re-Islamization led by the SDA and the *Islamska zajednica* have therefore resulted in forms of resistance reminiscent of the communist period : the population has tended to leave the definition of its public identity to those in power in order to concentrate on the defense of its private practices. As for the « new converts » to the SDA, they are reminded of their former political commitments : sometimes nicknamed « *lubenice* »

<sup>23</sup> The mufti of Novi Pazar, in the region of Sandjak, is not recognized by the Yugoslav authorities.

<sup>24</sup> Two pedagogical islamic academies were also opened in Zenica and Bihac, in order to train the religion teachers needed after the introduction of religious instruction in the public secondary schools.

(« watermelons » : « green on the outside, red on the inside »), they are the target of various sarcastic remarks, as illustrated by this well known Bosnian joke :

*« An imam enters his mosque to preach the main Friday sermon. Addressing the audience, he declares : To those in the third row and behind, I say selam alejkum, brethren ; to those in the second row, I say good morning, sirs ; and to those in the first row, I say hi, comrades ! »*

Mosque attendance is thus not perceived by the population as a sign of religious fervour, but of political opportunism, and the institutional reinforcement of the *Islamska zajednica* is not accompanied by increased prestige, but by a loss of credibility. Therefore, all the analyses which describe re-Islamization in Bosnia-Herzegovina as an undifferentiated process or as a « spontaneous » result of the war are decidedly wrong. In Bosnia-Herzegovina, re-Islamization is an authoritarian process, the origins of which are located in clearly identifiable political projects and practices, and the results of which have been a transformation of the collective identity of the Muslim community without corresponding changes in the individual behavior of its members. Within this context, the apparent reinforcement of the Islamic religious institutions and the increased visibility of Islam have concealed other phenomena working to prolong the process of secularization initiated a century ago, and leading sooner or later to a deep crisis of Islam in Bosnia-Herzegovina.

To this end, the influx of financial resources from the Muslim world provides short term reinforcement of Islamic religious institutions, but in the long term destroys their unity and their authority. Rivalries between Muslim countries or religious obediences have sharpened internal conflicts in the *Islamska zajednica*. They also favour the proliferation of independent Islamic cultural centers and re-Islamization movements, in this way endangering the monopoly enjoyed by the *Islamska zajednica* on the religious life of the Muslim community. Thus, in the end, the authoritarian re-Islamization initiated by the pan-Islamist current has led to the fragmentation of Bosnian Islam.

Moreover, the ideological instrumentalization of Islam has revealed itself to be, in the long term, incompatible with its function as a common identity marker. Indeed, as Islam has become the cultural foundation of the Muslim community, various social actors in this community have tended to instrumentalize it for their own political or cultural purposes, to work out their own interpretations and uses of the Islamic religion. Members of the pan-Islamist current are thus faced with an insoluble dilemma. Either they accept the internal diversification of Bosnian Islam, and are compelled to renounce their ability to instrumentalize it for their own ideological purposes, or they attempt to secure themselves a monopoly over the interpretation of Islam, but thereby risk plunging the Muslim community into a new major identity crisis. In either case, the whole political construction set up during the war is threatened with collapse.