

# Bosnian Islam as 'European Islam': Limits and Shifts of a Concept

Xavier Bougarel

► **To cite this version:**

Xavier Bougarel. Bosnian Islam as 'European Islam': Limits and Shifts of a Concept. Aziz Al-Azmeh / Effie Fokas. Islam in Europe. Diversity, Identity and Influence, Cambridge University Press, pp.96-124, 2007. <halshs-00706262>

**HAL Id: halshs-00706262**

**<https://halshs.archives-ouvertes.fr/halshs-00706262>**

Submitted on 9 Jun 2012

**HAL** is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L'archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire **HAL**, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d'enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.

« **Bosnian Islam as ‘European Islam’: Limits and Shifts of a Concept** », in: **Aziz Al-Azmeh / Effie Fokas (eds.), *Islam in Europe. Diversity, Identity and Influence*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2007, pp. 96-124.**

**Xavier Bougarel**

Because of the Yugoslav wars, the 1990s were marked by the rediscovery of an ancient and autochthonous Muslim presence in Europe. Bosnian Muslims<sup>1</sup>, in particular, have become the symbol of a European Islam that had been covered up by the Cold War and forgotten by Western Europe, as well as by the Muslim world. However, present insistence on the European dimension of Bosnian Islam has created as many problems as it has solved for a better understanding of the religious identity of Bosnian Muslims and of their position in the complex relations between Europe and Islam.

Bosnian Muslims are, undoubtedly, Europeans, just like their Serbian and Croatian neighbours. They have their own way of expressing their Muslim identity, as illustrated by the work of the anthropologists William Lockwood, Cornelia Sorabji and Tone Bringa<sup>2</sup>. But the notion of ‘European Islam’ often encompasses phenomena that are quite distinct, or even largely opposed to one another. For example, the *sufi* (mystic) or syncretistic practices present in traditional Bosnian Islam are of Ottoman origin. Meanwhile, the deep secularisation of contemporary Bosnian society, reflected by the frequency of mixed marriages and the widespread consumption of alcohol, is a result of fifty years of Communist modernisation. In some cases, the idea of Balkan Islam as a genuine ‘European Islam’ is even based on false assumptions: in 2001, a well-known American think tank stated that ‘Wahhabi practices find little support from the essentially Bektashi Balkan [Muslim] communities’<sup>3</sup>, whilst a large majority of Balkan Muslims – including Bosnian ones – are in fact Sunni Muslims belonging to the *hanefi* rite, and Bektashis are mainly present in Albania, where they represent only 20 percent of the Muslim population<sup>4</sup>.

More generally, the will to present Bosnian Islam as a sort of positive cultural exception sometimes entails a conception of this ‘European and tolerant’ Islam as homogeneous and *sui*

---

<sup>1</sup> As of 1993, the national name of ‘Bosniac’ (*Bošnjak*), has officially replaced the term ‘Muslim’ (*Musliman*), currently used since the end of the nineteenth century. However, for the purpose of clarity, we have chosen to continue using the term ‘Muslim’, except for the translation of quotations explicitly using the term ‘Bosniac’. Finally, it is important not to confuse the term ‘Bosniac’, which applies only to Bosnian Muslims, with the term ‘Bosnian’ (*Bosaniac*), referring to all the inhabitants of Bosnia-Herzegovina. On these identity and linguistic questions, see Xavier Bougarel, ‘Comment peut-on être Bochniaque?’ [How Can One Be Bosniac?], in Alain Dieckhoff and Riva Kastoryano (eds.), *Nationalismes en mutation en Méditerranée orientale* [Changing Nationalisms in the Eastern Mediterranean], Paris: CNRS éditions, 2002, pp. 173 -193.

<sup>2</sup> See William Lockwood, *European Moslems, Economy and Ethnicity in Western Bosnia*, New York, London: Academic Press, 1974; Cornelia Sorabji, *Muslim Identity and Islamic Faith in Socialist Sarajevo*, University of Cambridge (unpublished PhD dissertation), 1988; Tone Bringa, *Being Muslim the Bosnian Way. Identity and Community in a Central Bosnian Village* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995.

<sup>3</sup> International Crisis Group, 2001, *Bin Laden and the Balkans: the Politics of Anti-Terrorism*, Brussels (9 November), p. 2.

<sup>4</sup> Sunni Muslims, who claim to be the true representatives of the tradition (*sunna*), represent approximately 90 percent of the Muslims in the world. The remaining 10 percent are mainly Shi’a Muslims. Hanefism is one of the four *madhhab* (legal schools) existing within Sunni Islam. Bektashism is a heterodox sufi order incorporating some elements of Shi’a Islam in its doctrine. About Wahhabism, see note 34.

*generis*, set in opposition to another, implicit Islam, considered ‘intolerant since non-European’, which is located beyond the Bosphorus and the Strait of Gibraltar, or represented by the ‘non-autochthonous’ Muslim populations living in Western Europe. Therefore, the idea of an insurmountable opposition between Europe and Islam is not deconstructed by such use of the Bosnian example, but simply silenced, only to be perpetuated elsewhere<sup>5</sup>.

In fact, heterodox practices, rules for peaceful religious coexistence and processes of secularisation, can be met in many parts of the Muslim world, and the realities of Bosnian Islam cannot be understood without taking into account its various and long-lasting links with the rest of the Muslim world. Moreover, in Bosnia-Herzegovina as elsewhere, Islam represents a plural and changing reality that cannot be grasped independently of the cleavages which run through it and of the social actors which give life to it day after day. This appears clearly in the various political and religious debates that have divided the Bosnian Muslim community and its religious institutions since 1878<sup>6</sup>.

All of these debates can be boiled down to a central issue: that of the relationship between Islam and Western modernity. More concretely, they deal with the compatibility of the notions of *umma* (community of the faithful) and nationhood, the status of *shari'a* (Islamic law) in the modern state, the reform of traditional religious institutions, such as the *madrasa* (religious schools) and the *waqf* (religious endowments), or the adaptation of certain dietary and dress precepts<sup>7</sup>. But such debates are in no way restricted to Bosnia-Herzegovina, even if the specific situation of the Bosnian Muslims, reduced after 1878 to a religious and ethnic minority living within a non-Muslim European state, gives them a particular tone. Moreover, the conflicts that pit the ‘*ulama* (religious scholars) against the secular intellectuals or, within the *Islamska Zajednica* (Islamic Community) itself, the reformists against the traditionalists, cannot be explained without taking into consideration outside influences such as the religious reformism of Muhammad Abduh at the end of the nineteenth century, the revivalism of Rashid Rida and the pan-Islamism of Shakib Arslan in the 1930s, or the ‘Islamic socialism’ of Muhammad Iqbal and the radical Islamism of Sayyid Qutb in the 1960s and 1970s.

In the 1990s, the disappearance of the Yugoslav federation and the independence of Bosnia-Herzegovina, followed by its violent partition, deeply transformed the context in which these debates were taking place<sup>8</sup>. Having proclaimed their own political sovereignty, Bosnian Muslims attracted the attention of the whole Muslim world and thus rendered such

---

<sup>5</sup> For insight into such implicit orientalist discourses, see e.g. Milica Bakic-Hayden, ‘Nesting Orientalisms. The Case of Former Yugoslavia’, *Slavic Review*, vol. 54, n°4 (Winter 1995), pp. 917-931.

<sup>6</sup> From 1878 to 1918, the occupation of Bosnia-Herzegovina by the Austro-Hungarian Empire marked the end of four centuries of Ottoman presence in this part of the Yugoslav space. Later on, Bosnia-Herzegovina was incorporated into the Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (1818-1941), the Independent State of Croatia (1941-1945), and the Federal Socialist Republic of Yugoslavia (1945-1991). Following the disintegration of Yugoslavia at the beginning of the 1990’s, Bosnia-Herzegovina became an independent state in March 1992. See e.g. Noel Malcolm, *Bosnia: A Short History*, London: Macmillan, 1994.

<sup>7</sup> See Fikret Karčić, *Društveno-pravni aspekti islamskog reformizma* [Social and Legal Aspects of Islamic Reformism], Sarajevo: Islamski Teološki Fakultet, 1990; Šaćir Filandra, *Bošnjaci i moderna* [Bosniacs and Modernity], Sarajevo: Bosanski Kulturni Centar, 1996.

<sup>8</sup> Between April 1992 and December 1995, Bosnia-Herzegovina experienced a particularly violent war, with a death toll of 200,000 persons, and the forced displacement of more than half of the pre-war population. In December 1995, the Dayton Peace Agreement confirmed the division of Bosnia-Herzegovina into two ethnic entities, the Croat-Muslim Federation and the Serb Republic. See Steven Burg & Paul Shoup, *The War in Bosnia-Herzegovina. Ethnic Conflict and International Intervention*, New York/London: Sharpe, 1999.

debates more significant than ever<sup>9</sup>. But the war and post-war circumstances have not allowed their open and dispassionate formulation. Until December 1995, Islam was largely considered as a taboo issue within the Bosnian Muslim community<sup>10</sup>. While Serbian and Croatian propagandas referred to all Bosnian Muslims as ‘fundamentalists’ and ‘*mujaheddins*’, Bosnian Muslims themselves put their hopes in a foreign military intervention, and tried therefore to appear as the unanimous defenders of democracy and multiculturalism. The end of the war, on the contrary, sparked an outburst of grievances and disagreements which had remained latent up until then, and Islam became one of the main sources of conflict in the newspapers and electronic media, as well as in everyday conversations. But the vigour of these polemics could not compensate for their poor articulation, as slogans and anathemas often replaced elaborate arguments.

At the same time, political power in the Muslim-held territories was being monopolised by the Party of Democratic Action (*Stranka Demokratske Akcije – SDA*), a nationalist party created by the representatives of a pan-Islamist stream that first appeared in the 1930s and reorganised in the 1970s<sup>11</sup>. The will of the SDA to re-Islamise the national identity of Bosnian Muslims actually resulted in a paradoxical ‘nationalisation’ of Bosnian Islam<sup>12</sup>. Meanwhile, the party’s efforts to re-introduce certain religious prohibitions in everyday life came up against the multiform resistance of a largely secularised society<sup>13</sup>. These inner dynamics of the Bosnian Muslim community, which are unusual and most often implicit, have escaped the attention of most external observers, or have been reduced to an inevitable consequence of the war. Since 1996, the transformation of Bosnia-Herzegovina into a *de facto* international protectorate has limited the room for manoeuvre of the SDA leaders, suggesting this time an equally inevitable and spontaneous ‘return to normality’. In any case, the internal diversity of Bosnian Islam, the issues and cleavages along which this diversity is structured, and the agency of Bosnian Muslims themselves have been largely ignored.

Instead of describing this diversity in all of its complexity and concrete expressions, we will attempt here to present its main cleavages by using a few emblematic figures of contemporary Bosnian Islam<sup>14</sup>. The three authors referred to below have been chosen for various reasons. Quite apart from their political and religious responsibilities, they are mostly known for their writings. Despite their different intellectual backgrounds and personal

---

<sup>9</sup> See, among others, Tarek Mitri, ‘La Bosnie-Herzégovine et la solidarité du monde arabe et islamique’ [Bosnia-Herzegovina and the Solidarity of the Arab and Islamic World], *Maghreb-Machrek*, n° 139 (January 1993), pp. 123-136.

<sup>10</sup> See X. Bougarel, ‘L’Islam et la guerre en Bosnie-Herzégovine: l’impossible débat?’ [Islam and the War in Bosnia-Herzegovina: an Impossible Debate?], *L’Autre Europe*, n° 36-37 (Winter 1998), pp. 106-116.

<sup>11</sup> On this pan-Islamist stream, its links to the Egyptian Muslim Brothers and its interest for the Pakistani and Iranian experiments, see X. Bougarel, ‘From “Young Muslims” to the Party of Democratic Action: the Emergence of a Pan-Islamist Trend in Bosnia-Herzegovina’, *Islamic Studies*, Islamabad, vol. 36, n° 2-3 (Summer-Autumn 1997), pp. 533-549.

<sup>12</sup> See X. Bougarel, ‘Comment peut-on être Bochniaque?’ [How Can One Be Bosniac?].

<sup>13</sup> See X. Bougarel, ‘Le ramadan, révélateur des évolutions de l’islam en Bosnie-Herzégovine’ [The Ramadan Revealing the Evolutions of Islam in Bosnia-Herzegovina], in Faribah Adelhah & François Georgeon (eds.), *Ramadan et politique* [Ramadan and Politics], Paris: CNRS Editions, 2000, pp. 83-96.

<sup>14</sup> For a more elaborate analysis of the evolution of Bosnian Islam in the 1990s, see Xavier Bougarel, ‘L’islam bosniaque, entre identité culturelle et idéologie politique’ [Bosnian Islam Between Cultural Identity and Political Ideology], in Xavier Bougarel and Nathalie Clayer (eds.), *Le nouvel Islam balkanique: les musulmans comme acteurs du post-communisme, 1990-2000* [The New Balkan Islam: Muslims as Actors of Post-Communism 1990-2000], Paris: Maisonneuve & Larose, 2001, pp. 79-132.

questioning, they are equally interested in the question of the relationship between Islam and Western modernity. Each of them represents one of the definitions of Islam along which the diversity of Islam in Bosnia-Herzegovina can be categorised: namely, Islam defined as an individual faith, as a common culture and as a discriminatory political ideology. These three definitions of Islam in Bosnia-Herzegovina, embodied by Fikret Karčić, Enes Karić and Adnan Jahić, will form the basis for our consideration later of the specificity of Bosnian Islam, and its place in today's or tomorrow's 'European Islam'.

### **Fikret Karčić: Islam as individual faith**

Fikret Karčić was born in Višegrad (eastern Bosnia) in 1955. He studied at the *madrasa* of Sarajevo, from where he graduated in 1973. He went on to study law and wrote an M.A. thesis on 'The Shari'a Courts of Justice in Yugoslavia 1918-1941' in 1985, followed in 1989 by a Ph.D. dissertation on 'The Movement for the Reform of the Shari'a and its Influence in the First Half of the 20th Century'<sup>15</sup>. In 1978, he began teaching *fikh* (Islamic jurisprudence) at the Faculty of Islamic Theology of Sarajevo. Fikret Karčić was elected president of the Assembly of the *Islamska Zajednica* (Islamic Community) of Bosnia-Herzegovina in the late 1980s, and began taking on important religious responsibilities. In 1989, after the Islamic religious institutions experienced a serious internal crisis linked with the end of the Communist regime, he was one of the authors of the new Constitution of the *Islamska Zajednica* of Yugoslavia, and became a close adviser to the new *Reis-ul-Ulema*<sup>16</sup> Jakub Selimoski. Finally, shortly after the outbreak of the war, he left Bosnia-Herzegovina for Malaysia, where he became associate professor at the International Islamic University of Kuala Lumpur.

It is firstly through his role as a legal adviser that Fikret Karčić has developed his own conception of Islam. Beyond his co-authorship of the new Constitution of the *Islamska Zajednica*, he was also in charge of defining an official Islamic stance on the introduction of a multiparty system. In a text published in January 1990, he writes that 'the religious communities and their members are not only objects of the democratisation process, but are also active participants in it', because 'the members of each religious community ... represent an important part of the electorate, whose political commitment is a necessary condition for the construction of a democratic society'. Against this background, he considers that it is 'essential for religious communities to define the "rules of the game" for the religious institutions and functionaries'<sup>17</sup>.

Karčić believes in particular that the *Islamska Zajednica*, while supporting the democratisation process and demanding the restoration of various religious rights, should proclaim its political neutrality. For him, the introduction of a multiparty system is a good opportunity to put an end to the political instrumentalisation of religious institutions: 'In a monistic system, if one did not want or could not act within the framework of the party in

---

<sup>15</sup> See F. Karčić, *Šeriatski sudovi u Jugoslaviji 1918-1941* [The Shari'a Courts of Justice in Yugoslavia 1918-1941], Sarajevo: Islamska Zajednica, 1986; F. Karčić, *Društveno-pravni aspekti islamskog reformizma* [Social and Legal Aspects of Islamic Reformism], Sarajevo: Islamski Teološki Fakultet, 1990.

<sup>16</sup> The function of *Reis-ul-Ulema* (chief of the 'ulamas) was created by the Austro-Hungarian authorities in 1882, four years after they occupied Bosnia-Herzegovina. Its authority was extended to the whole Yugoslav territory in 1930.

<sup>17</sup> F. Karčić, 'Islamska Zajednica i reforma jugoslovenskog političkog sistema' [The Islamic Community and the Reform of the Yugoslav Political System], *Glasnik Rijaseta IZ-e*, vol. 52, n° 1 (January-February 1990), pp. 7-13.

power, they did so within one of the [other] existing institutions. Sometimes, it was the religious community. In a system with several political parties, this is out of the question'. Therefore, Karčić wants to forbid the *'ulamas* to exercise any political responsibility, thus leaving the choices concerning party affiliation and vote to 'the conscience of each believer. The believers will then use the following criterion as guidance: to what degree does the programme of a party integrate the general values and principles of Islamic teachings?'.<sup>18</sup> He is, above all, resolutely against the creation of a Muslim or Islamic party:

The rule of neutrality of the I[slamska] Z[ajednica] should be particularly applied in regard to 'Muslim' parties or, if the case arises, to 'Islamic' parties. The history of political life in pre-war Yugoslavia and in some contemporary Muslim countries is full of examples of party struggles being imported from the political field into the religious institutions, of 'Muslim' parties fighting for influence upon the Islamic institutions, bodies and foundations. Such a situation has systematically had negative consequences.<sup>19</sup>

Although the positions elaborated by Fikret Karčić have been taken up in various official statements of the *Islamska Zajednica*, they were difficult to implement in reality after the creation of the SDA by the representatives of the pan-Islamist stream, its instrumentalisation of Islamic symbols for nationalistic purposes, and the widespread and conspicuous support this party enjoyed among the *'ulamas*<sup>20</sup>. These positions, however, remain significant, insofar as they point out two issues that are central in Karčić's writings: namely, the separation of religion from the state and the resulting individualisation of the faith.

In his works on the *shari'a*, Karčić is first of all interested in the possible ways to adapt the *shari'a* to the modern world and, more specifically, to the secular state. In 1985, he notes that 'after the abolition of the *shari'a* courts of justice [in 1947], the essence of certain institutions and principles of the *shari'a* continue to exist in the form of the moral and religious principles and practices of the Yugoslav citizens of Islamic faith'<sup>21</sup>. Six years later, during a conference on legal principles in Islam, he draws a contrast between the Muslim states, in which the *shari'a* constitutes a territorial law applying to everyone, and states with a Muslim minority, in which the *shari'a* is only a personal status, or a mere 'individual moral code for practising Muslims'<sup>22</sup>. Finally, in response to criticism from the Serbian press, he considers that 'the secular state...is the best model for the organisation of the relationship between political and religious authorities in multi-religious societies'; he declares himself to be 'reserved towards any ideological state'; and he considers that 'the idea of an "Islamic republic" in Bosnia-Herzegovina does not have any theoretical or practical basis'<sup>23</sup>.

Drawing on the Bosnian case, Fikret Karčić expands his analyses to the Muslim world in general. In his PhD dissertation, he writes that

---

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>20</sup> See X. Bougarel, 'From "Young Muslims" to the Party of Democratic Action'.

<sup>21</sup> F. Karčić, *Šeriatski sudovi*, p. 155.

<sup>22</sup> Presentation at the conference "*Law in Islam*", organised by the Zagreb mosque in April 1991, quoted in *Muslimanski Glas*, vol. 1, n° 2 (May 3, 1991), p. 14.

<sup>23</sup> F. Karčić, 'O "islamskoj republici" u BiH' [On the "Islamic Republic" in Bosnia-Herzegovina], *Preporod*, vol. 21, n° 3 (1 February 1990), p. 3.

the social functions of any law, including the *shari'a*, depend on the state of social relations in given societies. The *shari'a* consists of elements that can have various social, economical, cultural and political consequences. The social functions of this law will depend on which elements are emphasised. *Shari'a* can serve social modernisation, democratisation of the political and legal system and opening towards other cultures, or reactionary processes that may result in dogmatism, conservatism, political totalitarianism and cultural autarky.<sup>24</sup>

Later on, in his typology of contemporary legal interpretations of Islam, Karčić distinguishes four main tendencies: *secularists*, for whom 'Islam is a religion in the generally accepted sense of the term, whose legitimate field of expression is the personal, private sphere of the individual. They underline the moral values of Islam but no longer consider its teachings as the foundation of the social, political and legal system'; *traditionalists*, for whom 'Islam is defined as "religion and law", but [who accept] the historical transformations of its social function and of the field of validity of Islamic law. The differentiation between religious norms and institutions and secular ones is accepted as a product of history, as well as the *de facto* domination of secular institutions'; *Islamic modernists*, who consider that 'updated Islamic teachings can represent an appropriate ideological foundation for public life in Muslim countries, and that a reformed *shari'a* can become the base or an important constituent part of positive law'; and *revivalists*, who 'try in particular to construct a complete ideology based on the main sources of Islamic teachings and on early Muslim history', and 'give to the experience of the original Muslim community of Medina a normative character, considering it as a model rather than a historical example of the fulfilment of Islam'<sup>25</sup>.

Finally, Karčić's reflection on the interpretation and modernisation of the *shari'a* led him towards an outline of an Islamic justification of the principle of secularism. In a text entitled 'Meaning and Expression of Islam in the Secular State', he considers that with the separation of religion from the state, 'religious communities lose many privileges ... but, at the same time, become free to manage their own affairs without state intervention' and they 'gain the possibility to devote themselves entirely to their original mission: the satisfaction of the religious needs of their members'. According to Karčić,

in a secular state, every religion is treated as the private affair of citizens, is excluded from politics, and has no influence on law. This is the status that Islam has and should have, in accordance with the principle of equality between religions...Islam can only be a religion and its legitimate field of expression is the private life of citizens'.

---

<sup>24</sup> F. Karčić, *Društveno-pravni aspekti*, p. 195.

<sup>25</sup> F. Karčić, 'Razumijevanje islamskog vjerzakona (šeriata) u savremenom muslimanskom svijetu' [The Understanding of Islamic Law (*shari'a*) in the Contemporary Islamic World], in Nusret Čančar and Enes Karić (eds.), *Islamski fundamentalizam. Šta je to?* [Islamic Fundamentalism. What is it?], Sarajevo: Biblioteka "Preporoda" i "Islamske misli", 1990, pp. 37-43.

In this context, he makes clear that ‘some parts of the Islamic message take on a different meaning’, and that ‘the value judgements expressed in prescriptions concerning the *mu’amelat* [social relations] survive only insofar as they are carried on into the customs or the personal moral choices of individuals<sup>26</sup>.

In this text which summarises his thinking, Fikret Karčić also tries to break with the classic Islamic representation of the world, pointing out that

it would be unjustified at the theoretical level, and anachronistic from an historical point of view to apply to contemporary international relations the categories of the “house of Islam” [*dar-al-islam*] and “house of war” [*dar-al-harb*]<sup>27</sup>, or to place the situation of Muslims living in countries with a secular social order in this last category’.

It is on this issue of the representation of the world – and the place of Bosnian Muslims in it – that Karčić focuses his attention during the war. From 1992 onwards, he seems to interrupt his reflection on the *shari’a*, without ever renouncing his former writings. But his priority is to present the reality of the Islamic renewal in the Balkans – i.e., ‘mainly related to the religious and cultural spheres’<sup>28</sup> – and to denounce the biased representations coming from Serbia or Western countries<sup>29</sup>. Behind these endeavours, directly motivated by the war, there is a more general concern: Fikret Karčić counters Samuel Huntington’s thesis about the ‘clash of civilisations’ by stating that ‘if there are today in Bosnia-Herzegovina some elements of civil war, religious war or civilisational conflict, they are deliberately created in order to conceal the essential issue: aggression, territorial conquest, genocide’. Karčić concludes his critique of the Harvard University professor in the following way:

Apparently, certain influential circles in the West see in Bosnia-Herzegovina an ongoing conflict between civilisations. The Bosniacs [Bosnian Muslims] who accept such an interpretation or who would start to behave in accordance with it would indeed confirm this hypothesis. This seems paradoxical, but the nation which is accused of fundamentalism is fighting against the estrangement of civilisations, is fighting so that the “fault lines” become the lines of a fruitful coexistence, and not the lines of an inevitable confrontation.<sup>30</sup>

Despite the war, Fikret Karčić’s concern to reconcile Islam with Western modernity and to encourage its individual, rather than its collective expression, remains intact.

---

<sup>26</sup> F. Karčić, ‘Značenje i iskazivanje islama u svjetovnoj državi’ [Significance and Expression of Islam in the Secular State], in E. Karić (ed.), *Suvremena ideologijska tumačenja Kur’ana i islama* [The Modern Ideological Interpretations of the Qur’an and Islam], Zagreb: Kulturni radnik, 1990, pp. 29-36.

<sup>27</sup> The *’ulama* generally divide the world into two ‘houses’, the ‘house of Islam’ (*dar-al-islam*), covering all Muslim states in which the *shari’a* is implemented, and the ‘house of war’ (*dar-al-harb*), embracing the non-Muslim states. Some add a third ‘house’, the ‘house of contract’ (*dar-al-ahd*), which comprises the non-Muslim states allowing their Muslim minorities to practice their religion.

<sup>28</sup> F. Karčić, ‘Islamic Revival in the Balkans’, *Islamic Studies*, Islamabad, vol. 36, n° 2-3 (Summer/Autumn 1997), pp. 565-581.

<sup>29</sup> F. Karčić, 1995, ‘Distorted Images of Islam: The Case of Former Yugoslavia’, *Intellectual Discourse*, Kuala Lumpur, vol. 3, n° 2, pp. 139-152.

<sup>30</sup> F. Karčić, ‘Ubijanje naroda u sjeni “sudara civilizacija”’ [The Massacre of a Nation in the Shadow of the ‘Clash of Civilisations’], *Ljiljan*, vol. 4, n° 111 (1 March 1995), pp. 32-33.



## Enes Karić : Islam as common culture

Enes Karić was born to a religious family in Travnik (central Bosnia) in 1958. Like Fikret Karčić, he also studied at the *madrasa* of Sarajevo, and he participated in the informal discussion circle created by Husein Đozo in the 1970s<sup>31</sup>. He graduated from the *madrasa* in 1978 and studied journalism and literature. He started teaching *tafsir* (interpretation of the Qur'an) at the Faculty of Islamic Theology in Sarajevo in 1982, and in 1989 he completed a PhD dissertation on the 'Hermeneutical Problems in the Translation of the Qur'an into Serbo-Croatian'<sup>32</sup>. During that same period, he played a leading part in the intellectual renewal of the *Islamska Zajednica* by publishing the journal *Islamska Misao* [Islamic Thought], by editing two books on *The Contemporary Ideological Interpretations of the Qur'an and Islam* and *The Qur'an in the Contemporary Time*<sup>33</sup>, and by translating the works of Seyd Hussein Nasr, Fazlur Rahman and Mohamed Arkoun. Due to his intellectual independence, he rapidly got into trouble with the religious hierarchy and, in March 1991, he was removed from the editorial staff of *Islamska Misao* by Salih Čolaković, president of the *Islamska Zajednica* of Bosnia-Herzegovina and a close associate of the Wahhabi networks supported by Saudi Arabia<sup>34</sup>.

Enes Karić continued his religious activities after 1991, as shown by his translation of the Qur'an into Bosnian in 1995<sup>35</sup>. But from 1992 onwards, he became known mainly through his political activities. He was an active contributor to *Muslimanski Glas* ('The Muslim Voice', the unofficial organ of the SDA) and, in December 1992, was elected vice-president of the new Council of the Congress of Muslim intellectuals. In June 1994, he was appointed Minister of Education and Culture by the Prime Minister Haris Silajdžić. He supported the Prime Minister in his growing disagreements with the SDA leaders and, in January 1996, left the government and joined the Party for Bosnia-Herzegovina (*Stranka za Bosnu i Hercegovinu* – SBiH) launched by Silajdžić. After the electoral defeat of this party in September 1996, he put an end to his political career and devoted himself to the *Ibn Sina Foundation*, a philosophical and religious foundation supported by Iran.

In the same way that the reflections of Fikret Karčić are based on the *shari'a*, the Qur'an inspires Enes Karić's thinking. In his PhD dissertation, he insists on the open, polysemic and irrevocably mysterious nature of the Qur'an. Upon this basis, Karić tries to show that the translation of the Qur'an is always an interpretation of it, and to justify the plurality of these interpretations, depending on both the historical ('because of the exceptionally open character of this structure, every era has its own way of reading the Qur'an, its own way of uttering it and, therefore, its own way of translating it'<sup>36</sup>) and the geographical contexts:

---

<sup>31</sup> See: X. Bougarel, 'From "Young Muslims" to the Party of Democratic Action'.

<sup>32</sup> E. Karić, *Hemeneutika Kur'ana* [Hermeneutics of the Qur'an], Zagreb: Biblioteka Filozofska istraživanja, 1990.

<sup>33</sup> E. Karić, *Suvremena ideologijska tumačenja*; E. Karić, *Kur'an u savremenom dobu* [The Qur'an in the Contemporary Time], Sarajevo: Svjetlost, 1991.

<sup>34</sup> Wahhabism is a neo-fundamentalist Sunni movement founded at the end of the eighteenth century by Ibn Abd al-Wahhab. It is especially hostile to Shi'a Islam, sufi orders and religious reformism, and constitutes the official religious doctrine of Saudi Arabia since its creation in 1932.

<sup>35</sup> *Kur'an sa prijevodom na bosanski jezik* [The Qur'an, with Translation into Bosnian], Sarajevo: Bosanska knjiga, 1995.

<sup>36</sup> E. Karić, *Hemeneutika Kur'ana*, p. 219.

The destiny of Islam lies in ‘minor’ or ‘regional’ theologies. Historically, the numerous regional theological systems of Islam have benefited and still benefit from a great autonomy, thanks to these multiple interpretations and ‘faces’ of the Qur’an. We are thus dealing with several correct readings of the Qur’an, which resulted in the appearance of many ‘regional theologies’ .... We have in Islam a “plurality of theologies” that denies any theology with a capital ‘T’.<sup>37</sup>

According to Karić, Islam is one, but the Muslim cultures deriving from it are diverse, changing, and irreducible to one culture. At the beginning of the 1990s, he already calls for a renewal of the *ijtihad* (interpretation efforts), and declares his hostility towards Islamic fundamentalism that ‘ignores the limit between the source of faith and the historical translation of this source’, that ‘attributes divine qualities to something that is only a past human interpretation’ and, more concretely, reduces Islam, a universal religion, ‘to the religion of two cities [Mecca and Medina], linking it with a specific soil, limiting it to the Arabs’<sup>38</sup>. In a similar way, Karić favours the introduction in school curricula of comparative science of religions. According to him, a separate religious teaching would underline the ‘polemical and, thus, exclusive features’ of the great monotheistic religions. Moreover, he considers that the true place for religious education is not the public school, but the mosque or the church, since ‘faith is, first and foremost, an intimate and deep feeling, a personal feeling that cannot be expressed outside its own frameworks, atmospheres, spaces and temporalities’<sup>39</sup>.

For Karić, faith is an individual feeling, but can only remain lively if embedded in a common tradition and culture. This insistence on ‘Islam as faith and culture’<sup>40</sup> explains the positions he takes during the war. Unlike Fikret Karčić, he does not hesitate to attribute a religious dimension to war: he compares the struggle of Bosnian Muslims to that of the Prophet against the infidels at Badr<sup>41</sup>, and states that through their struggle, ‘the Bosniacs have illuminated the face of the *umma*’<sup>42</sup>. Karić even considers that ‘the pious books, starting with the Qur’an, speak of the *jihad* as the various activities that contribute to safeguard the

---

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., p. 247. A similar remark can be found in the commentary of Enes Karić on his own translation of the Qur’an: ‘the Qur’an was given once and for all as the Word of God, but the understanding and the interpretation of the Qur’an have not been sealed for ever. Today’s Muslims should know that every new interpretation of the Qur’an is at the same time an active interpretation of the world and a search for a worthy place in it. Every new fertile rainfall comes from clouds that are differently disposed in the same sky’ (‘Kur’anski univerzum (pogovor prijevodu)’ [The Universe of the Qur’an (translation postscript)], *Kur’an sa prijevodom*, pp. 1269).

<sup>38</sup> E. Karić, ‘Fundamentalizam Prokrustove postelje’ [Fundamentalism: The Bed of Procrustes], in N. Čančar and E. Karić, *Islamski fundamentalizam. Šta je to?*, pp. 89-93.

<sup>39</sup> E. Karić, ‘Dvosjekli mač vjeronauke u školi’ [The Double-Edged Sword of Religious Teaching in School], *Muslimanski Glas*, vol. 2, n° 10 (28 June 1991), p. 15. This personal position of Enes Karić is different from the position of the *Islamska Zajednica*, who was in favour of a separate religious teaching and managed to impose this formula on Karić in 1994.

<sup>40</sup> E. Karić, ‘Značenje i iskazivanje islama u budućoj Bosni i Hercegovini’ [Significance and Expression of Islam in the Future Bosnia-Herzegovina], in *Kongres bosansko-muslimanskih intelektualaca* (22 December 1992), Sarajevo: Bosnagraf, 1993, pp. 97-100. The title of this text by Enes Karić is obviously an allusion to the text published two years earlier by Fikret Karčić.

<sup>41</sup> E. Karić, ‘Bosna je bošnjački Bedr’ [Bosnia is the Bosniac Badr], *Ljiljan*, vol. 3, n° 58 (23 February 1994), p. 31.

<sup>42</sup> E. Karić, ‘Bošnjaci su Ummetu osvjetlali obraz’ [The Bosniacs Have Illuminated the Face of the *umma*], *Ljiljan*, vol. 3, n° 61 (16 March 1994), p. 31.

free expression of Islam, to protect goods, life, honour, and dignity .... If Muslims need a state in order to defend these values, then the building of this state represents – from a religious point of view – a *jihad* par excellence!<sup>43</sup>. However, Karić never ceases emphasising that Bosnian Muslims have two homelands, ‘the European one – their native soil, their country – and the spiritual, Islamic and oriental one’<sup>44</sup>. He reminds those who are tempted by anti-Europeanism that ‘Europe is our homeland in a broader sense. We are Europeans by origin, by language and by many elements of our culture. The European identity of the Bosniacs does not contradict their Muslim identity’<sup>45</sup>.

As Minister of Education and Culture, Karić tries to reinforce the national Muslim identity by launching the publication of new textbooks, entrusting the formalisation of a distinct Bosnian language to a group of linguists, and encouraging the activities of the Muslim cultural association ‘*Preporod*’ (‘Renaissance’). His activism costs him some criticism from the non-nationalist parties, when, for example, he supports textbooks putting side by side Darwin’s evolutionist thesis and the religious interpretation of the creation of the world, or when he forbids the broadcasting of music produced in Serbia or in Croatia. But Karić rejects the kind of multiculturalism these parties are referring to, ‘a hybrid and artificial model that means belonging to no particular culture’, and proposes instead a ‘Bosnian multiculturalism [that] is the natural product of the traditional cultures of Bosnia’<sup>46</sup>, a ‘genuine multiculturalism and multireligiosity ... created in everyday life intercourses, and not meant to be shown to the world as a museum curiosity’<sup>47</sup>.

However, if Enes Karić occasionally sneers at the ‘multiculturalist safaris’ of some Westerners<sup>48</sup>, his harshest critiques are directed at the foreign Wahhabi missionaries. He constantly denounces the way these missionaries and their local followers insist on a sterile religious formalism and deny the culture of Islam that is specific to Bosnian Muslims. In an important text entitled ‘Our Bosniac Identity and Our Muslim Identity’, Karić writes that ‘the Muslim identity and the Islam of the Bosniacs are being attacked from all sides, but first of all by those neophyte and aggressive local Muslims working for [Islamic] humanitarians with dubious intentions. They attack the Islam as practiced by the Bosniacs exactly where it contributes the most to the affirmation of our national identity and our spiritual matrix’<sup>49</sup>.

---

<sup>43</sup> E. Karić, ‘Agresija na Bosnu i Hercegovinu i pitanje džihada’ [The Aggression Against Bosnia-Herzegovina and the Question of *Jihad*], in *Duhovna snaga odbrane* [The Spiritual Force of Defence], Sarajevo: Vojna biblioteka, 1994, pp. 73-77. Being an experienced linguist and philologist, Enes Karić goes back to the polysemy of the term *jihad* before observing that, from a religious point of view, ‘what the fighters of the Bosnian Army are doing is indeed a highest-level *jihad*’, but that ‘some fighters [do it] out of patriotism, others out of patriotism and religious inspiration, still others out of courage and heroism, or to protect their family and property’. In this context, Karić considers that ‘it would not be advisable to crush the diversity of these motivations that make up the mosaic of the heroic Bosniac resistance, and especially not by imposing something that could be unfavourably received by the fighters, or at least some of them’ (*ibid.*).

<sup>44</sup> E. Karić, ‘Značenje i iskazivanje islama u budućoj Bosni i Hercegovini’.

<sup>45</sup> E. Karić, ‘Naše bosanstvo i naše evropejstvo’ [Our Bosnian Identity and Our European Identity], *Ljiljan*, vol. 6, n° 263 (28 January 1998), p. 20.

<sup>46</sup> E. Karić, ‘Suze, stepe i pustinje’ [Tears, Steppes and Deserts], *Ljiljan*, vol. 3, n° 100 (14 December 1994), p. 53.

<sup>47</sup> E. Karić, ‘Značenje i iskazivanje islama u budućoj Bosni i Hercegovini’.

<sup>48</sup> E. Karić, ‘Suze, stepe i pustinje’.

<sup>49</sup> E. Karić, ‘Naše bošnjastvo i naše muslimanstvo’ [Our Bosniac Identity and Our Muslim Identity], *Ljiljan*, vol. 6, n° 264 (4 February 1998), pp. 20-22.

To such a ‘reduction of Bosnian Muslim identity to a coarse and sterile faith,’ Karić sets in opposition ‘the Bosnian way of living Islam as a faith, a culture, a civilisation, a source of inspiration and a spiritual identification ... the tolerant affirmation of all the traditional and – why not say this – Bosniac ways of living Islam in Bosnia’. For Karić, ‘Arabs have their own traditional ways of living the universality of Islam, and we have ours. Moreover, no Muslim nation, if it is a nation, can be Muslim without these particularities that have been preserved for centuries, together with the universality of Islam’<sup>50</sup>.

While Karić’s hostility towards Wahhabism is logical and constant, the evolution of his relations with the leaders of the SDA and the *Islamska Zajednica* is more unexpected. In the early 1990s, his definition of Islam as common culture prompted him to join them in the reaffirmation and re-Islamisation of the national Muslim identity. But the same definition urges him more and more to deplore the artificial and vulgar features of the new religious kitsch, and to resist the political instrumentalisation of Islam by the SDA.

Already in 1992, Enes Karić links his definition of ‘Islam as faith and culture’ with the acceptance of the ‘principle of the secular state and the separation of religion and state’<sup>51</sup>. According to him, this principle is not only necessary for the coexistence of the different religious communities in Bosnia-Herzegovina, but also for Bosnian Muslims themselves: ‘What this principle ensures is the fact that Islam is their common treasure, as a religion, as a culture and as a tradition. In this way, the tolerance between Muslims is guaranteed and Islam cannot become the property of some of them’<sup>52</sup>. Three years later, he develops this reasoning in a text where his split with the SDA leaders is already perceptible:

It is very important that Bosnian Muslims have for long accepted the principle of Islam being practiced and expressed within a secular society and a secular state. In today’s European context, this principle helps Bosnian Muslims since it assures them an expression of Islam without any ideological *diktat* and without any political and ideological fiat on what the “true Islam” is. Islam in Bosnia is the common treasure of all Bosniacs, this precious treasure from which they have drawn for centuries their multiple religious, cultural, artistic, literary, urban, architectural inspirations. According to this conception ... , Islam cannot become anybody’s property or monopoly, nor can it become the object of pragmatic adaptations to the political imperatives of the day. Bosniacs have to protect themselves against themselves, and against all forms of religious, traditional, political or cultural ostracism.<sup>53</sup>

From the affirmation of the specificity of Bosnian Islam to the defence of its internal pluralism, Enes Karić’s approach is in fact quite coherent: it is precisely because he defines Islam as a common culture that he refuses to see it reduced to a discriminatory political ideology.

### **Adnan Jahić: Islam as a discriminatory political ideology**

---

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> E. Karić, ‘Značenje i iskazivanje islama u budućoj Bosni i Hercegovini’.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> E. Karić, ‘Islam u suvremenoj Bosni’ [Islam In Contemporary Bosnia], in E. Karić , 1997, *Bosna sjete i zaborava* [Bosnia Recalls and Forgets], Zagreb: Durieux, pp. 88-95.

Unlike Fikret Karčić and Enes Karić, Adnan Jahić did not receive any formal religious education, despite the fact that he comes from a family of local notables and *'ulama*. He was born in Tuzla in 1967 and studied philosophy and journalism in Sarajevo. During his studies, he wrote an M.A. thesis on 'The History of the Relations Between Religion and Philosophy, From the Ancient Times To the Time of Abu Nasr al-Farabi'. In 1995, he also published a book praising the Muslim military formations that collaborated with the German troops during World War II, and in which some members of his family seem to have played an important part<sup>54</sup>.

However, Adnan Jahić has become famous thanks to his journalistic and political activities, rather than his philosophical or historical works. In Tuzla, he was one of the main columnists of '*Zmaj od Bosne*' ('The Dragon of Bosnia'<sup>55</sup>), the unofficial organ of the local SDA during the war, and he was the chief editor of the monthly publication '*Hikmet*' ("Wisdom"<sup>56</sup>), launched by the new Mufti of Tuzla in 1993. While '*Hikmet*' dealt mainly with religious issues, '*Zmaj od Bosne*' became famous for its virulent attacks against the municipality of Tuzla, led by the non-nationalist parties, and was even criticized by Tadeusz Mazowiecki, the Special Rapporteur of the UN Commission on Human Rights, for its threats against the local Serb population. This did not prevent Jahić from enjoying a rapid political rise: having been a member of the regional direction of the SDA since 1994, he was elected to the Parliament of Bosnia-Herzegovina in September 1996, where he became president of the SDA parliamentary group. One year later, he had to resign from this function, but became then the official spokesperson of the SDA<sup>57</sup>.

Jahić's education is reflected in his strong interest in the relationship between Islam and philosophy. Among other things, he condemns the 'Cartesian turn through which the individual Self has a methodological, and then an ethical, axiological and overall primacy', permitting the emergence of a 'philosophical pluralism in the sense of an ideological diversity of goals and ends', and leading little by little to 'materialism, scientism, existentialism and the other forms of philosophical thinking in the modern world'. To these various streams of modern Western philosophy, he opposes an Islamic philosophy that, 'by definition, can only be one, and whose central theme has been and still remains God and His Revelation, that is, the divine and the human in the light of the Revelation'. According to Jahić, 'in no case

---

<sup>54</sup> A. Jahić, *Muslimanske formacije tuzlanskog kraja u drugom svjetskom ratu* [The Muslim Formations of the Tuzla Area During World War II], Tuzla: BosnoLjubljje, 1995.

<sup>55</sup> This title alludes to Husein-kapetan Gradašević, an important figure from Gradačac, in the region of Tuzla, who led an uprising against the administrative and military reforms imposed in 1831 by the central Ottoman authorities, and whose war name was "*Zmaj od Bosne*". Since the 1990's, Bosnian Muslim historians have tended to present this uprising as one of the first signs of the Bosnian Muslim national awakening.

<sup>56</sup> In the interwar period, "*Hikmet*" was the organ of the traditionalist *'ulama*, who were opposed to the religious reforms of the *Reis-ul-Ulema* Džemaludin Čausević. See F. Karčić, *Društveno-pravni aspekti islamskog reformizma*.

<sup>57</sup> In September 1997, the deputies of the three main nationalist parties (the Muslim SDA, the Serb SDS and the Croat HDZ) in the Parliament of Bosnia-Herzegovina elected as president of the Commission for Human Rights, Refugees and Asylum Velibor Ostojić, a high-ranking leader of the SDS, suspected to have taken an active part in the 'ethnic cleansing' of the town of Foča (Eastern Bosnia) in 1992. Faced with protests by non-nationalist parties and independent media, the SDA changed its mind, claiming that the vote of its deputies was a mere 'misunderstanding', and Adnan Jahić had to resign from the presidency of the SDA parliamentary group.

should this kind of monolithism be considered as an imperfection, but as a quality and a sign of coherence in the original intention'<sup>58</sup>.

In the same way, Jahić contrasts the Western concept of democracy with the Islamic one. In the Western concept, 'human rights and liberties constitute the greatest value of the community. Here lies the fundamental weakness of the Western society: there is no active relation between the state and the society, there is no progress at the spiritual and ethical level. Good as content exhausts itself in politics as form'. On the contrary, Islamic democracy refers to the principle of *tawhid* (uniqueness of God), and insists on 'the ethical perspective of democracy': 'Islam is not primarily interested in formal democracy (even if it is in no case hostile to it), but rather in its principles and positive ethical values that will contribute to the fulfilment of the Islamic idea within the community'. According to Jahić, 'there will never be a place in Islamic political thinking for Western-style liberal democracy, which does not care about the general good of its own society, about its spiritual and ethical condition'<sup>59</sup>.

Therefore, unlike Fikret Karčić and Enes Karić, Adnan Jahić perceives the relationship between Islam and the West in terms of a structural opposition. He believes that the aim of the Western world is the 'total annihilation of the Muslim world'<sup>60</sup>, and invites the latter to rid itself of 'Western secularism and nihilism, of positivism and existentialist materialism in philosophy and science, and of hedonism and utilitarianism in the field of ethics and morality'<sup>61</sup>. He recognizes that, as Bosnian Muslims, 'we belong to the West in terms of geography and, partly, in terms of civilisation'. But immediately after that, he reminds his readers that 'in no case do we belong culturally and spiritually to the West', and he deplores the Western influence on Bosnian society, as reflected by widespread sexual promiscuity and hedonism, as well as the ideas of 'multiculturalism, human rights and tolerance'<sup>62</sup>. In his eyes, the war in Bosnia-Herzegovina is therefore 'the final confrontation between the autochthonous national and cultural values of the Bosniacs and the alien ones, imported from the West, which have been imposed on us [and presented] as our own for a long time'<sup>63</sup>.

This attitude of Adnan Jahić towards the West inevitably influences his reflections on the relationship between Islam and nationhood, and between Islam and politics. He rejects the penetration of the Western concepts of nationhood and secularism in the Muslim world, and sets against them 'the political unity of the *umma* and the Islamic social order'<sup>64</sup>. In both

---

<sup>58</sup> A. Jahić, 'Baqir As-Sadr i naša filozofija' [Baqir As-Sadr and Our Philosophy], *Hikmet*, vol. 8, n° 8/92, (August 1995), pp. 360-363. More precisely, Adnan Jahić acknowledges a certain 'confining [of medieval Muslim thinking] within obsolete methodological frameworks ... which prevented any possibility of intellectual renewal and enrichment of the philosophical discipline in the Muslim world'. But he prefers a 'reinforcement of the [Islamic philosophical] approach, in a methodical and rational way, which would definitely welcome certain Western experiences', to some 'inarticulate efforts of superficial adaptation and fundamental reconciliation with certain philosophical themes of Western origin' (ibid.)

<sup>59</sup> A. Jahić, 'Zavičajnost demokratije u islamskom političkom mišljenju' [The Embeddedness of Democracy in Islamic Political Thinking], *Hikmet*, vol. 9, n° 9-12/105-108 (November 1996), pp. 247-254.

<sup>60</sup> A. Jahić, 'Bošnjaci i Zapad – principi budućih odnosa' [Bosniacs and the West – Principles of Future Relations], *Hikmet*, vol. 8, n° 4/88 (April 1995), pp. 148-150.

<sup>61</sup> A. Jahić, 'Neke opservacije o političkim perspektivama islamskog svijeta' [Some Observations on the Political Perspectives of the Muslim World], *Hikmet*, vol. 8, n° 6/90 (June 1995), pp. 248-253.

<sup>62</sup> A. Jahić, 'Bošnjaci i Zapad'.

<sup>63</sup> A. Jahić, 'Znamo, a nećemo?!' [We Do Know, But We Do Not Want?!], *Hikmet*, vol. 8, n° 2/86 (February 1995), pp. 52-53.

<sup>64</sup> A. Jahić, 'Neke opservacije', *op. cit.*

cases, however, Jahić soon comes up against reality, and his reflections become more hesitant. In some texts, he calls for the reinforcement of the unity of the *umma* against all ‘political, national, civilisational, linguistic, socio-cultural and ideological particularisms’<sup>65</sup>. Elsewhere, he states on the contrary that ‘Bosniacs as well as the other Muslims have their own culture based on Islam, enriched by different national traditions’<sup>66</sup>.

His most elaborate reflection on the national question is probably a text entitled ‘Islam and Nationhood in the Light of the Current Events in the Muslim World’<sup>67</sup>. In this text, published in 1995, Jahić reaffirms the pre-eminence of the *umma* as an ideal which surpasses that of the nation as a worldly reality. But he considers also that it is essential to take this reality into account, and to reconcile it with Islam. What Jahić therefore rejects is the secular definition of the nation, and in particular any attempt to underplay the role of Islam or to emphasize the importance of pre-Islamic elements in the identity of Muslim nations. Furthermore, he denounces the national instrumentalisation of Islam, its reduction to a mere cultural legacy. According to him, only the restoration of the autonomy and transcendence of Islam can give rise to a true complementarity between Islam and nationhood:

Nationhood needs Islam, which complements it and orients it at the semantic level, gives it its *raison d’être* [68]. However, even religiosity cannot exist without a worldly base, without a solid and powerful medium, namely this national feeling, this innate sense of one’s own belonging ... This is why Islam and nationhood are in some way complementary. It is a complementarity of method, of function. It is not a complementarity of content. Islam, in its content, is perfect. In its relation to nationhood, it can ennoble it, embellish it, but cannot receive anything from it. However, nationhood is necessary to Islam in the way the painter needs the canvas on which he will paint his work of art.<sup>69</sup>

Having set the idea of both a complementarity and a hierarchy between Islam and nationhood, Jahić can envision the ‘struggle for Islam and against excessive nationalism’ as a gradual process, in which priority is given to the struggle against secularisation. The relationship between Islam and identity is thus closely related to the relationship between Islam and politics since, according to Jahić, ‘the harmonisation of the relationship between Islam and nationhood ... opens the way to a happier Islamic society, without which a true and consistent Islamic state is out of the question’<sup>70</sup>.

At first sight, the positions of Adnan Jahić on the relationship between Islam and politics seem relatively clear, since he rejects the Western, formalist and permissive democracy, and praises an Islamic democracy based on ‘positive ethical values’, as well as the principles of

---

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> A. Jahić, ‘Bošnjaci i Zapad’, *op. cit.*

<sup>67</sup> This text is the transcription of a talk held at an international conference organised in October 1995 by the Zagreb Mosque, under the title ‘*The Muslim World Today*’.

<sup>68</sup> In French in the text.

<sup>69</sup> A. Jahić, 1995, ‘Islam i nacionalitet u svjetlu suvremenih prilika u islamskom svijetu’ [Islam and Nationhood in the Light of Contemporary Circumstances in the Muslim World], *Hikmet*, vol. VIII, n° 10-11/94-95 (November), pp. 448-452.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

*khalifa* (representation of God on Earth), *shura* (consultation) and *ijma'* (consensus)<sup>71</sup>. However, Jahić also has difficulties in defining concretely these values and principles, and acknowledges that it is necessary to 'move from the ideal of political theory towards the reality of what is workable and possible'<sup>72</sup>. Against this background, he considers that 'we have to reinforce the democratic process in the Muslim world, since ... democracy is, under the present circumstances, the most direct way to Islamic power'<sup>73</sup>. Beyond this tactical issue, he states also that 'the only possible way to establish an Islamic power, a state based on the norms and rules of the *shari'a*, is to start from a healthy and free Islamic society, that is to say a dominant Muslim population that consciously supports such a type of power'. Finally, since 'an Islamic power with no popular support cannot be legitimate'<sup>74</sup>, he considers that it should submit itself regularly to the free vote of the population, and that, 'in case it loses the elections, power should be reorganised according to the preferences of the winner'<sup>75</sup>.

Adnan Jahić never openly sets the divine Law in opposition to popular sovereignty; nor does he assert that the former is superior to the latter. His criticisms are less directed at the institutional frameworks of Western democracy than at their secular character. In fact, most of his writings deal with this issue of secularism. Jahić also encourages *ijtihad*, but insists much more than Fikret Karčić or Enes Karić on its necessary limitations: 'we cannot conceive of *ijtihad* outside its Islamic context, nor think that it is possible to interpret it in a secular perspective'<sup>76</sup>. In a similar way, he deplors the way 'Islam, with the adoption [in the Muslim world] of the Western plans for a deeply secularized society and state, has started being excluded from all fields of political and social life', and the way secularisation has gradually 'expanded from the field of state politics to the field of culture and education', since 'spiritual secularisation is much more dangerous than political one'<sup>77</sup>. Taking up a distinction made first by *Reis-ul-Ulema* Mustafa Cerić, he tries then to clarify his own position by contrasting two types of secularism:

We are against a metaphysical secularism, which would draw us away – as a nation – from our faith, Islam; we are in favour of a political secularism, which is normal, and which implies that religious institutions and organs do not meddle in politics and in the affairs of the state. As a result, we are in favour of a secular state in the traditional political sense, and against a secular state in the contemporary political sense of the term. We are in favour of a state that is separated from religion in its form, but we are against a state that would be also separated from religion in its content. This is the reason why we do not want a secular society, we do not want Bosniacs to be secular ... We want Islam to be our moral, cultural and intellectual impetus, as we do not consider that it could be the Western culture and civilisation, whose goals we know, as well as those of their local supporters. This is the reason why it is important to understand that Islam is a collective issue and not an

---

<sup>71</sup> A. Jahić, 'Zavičajnost demokratije', *op. cit.*

<sup>72</sup> A. Jahić, 'Neke opservacije', *op. cit.*

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> A. Jahić, 'Zavičajnost demokratije'.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

<sup>77</sup> A. Jahić, 'Islam i nacionalitet'.



individual one, an issue requiring the largest possible consensus, and not any subjective free will<sup>78</sup>.

Finally, Adnan Jahić is also led to ponder the very definition of Islam. Obviously, he rejects the definition of Islam as individual faith: he proposes a collective and public morality rather than the individual and inner ethic put forward by Fikret Karčić. But he also criticises the definition of Islam as common culture, and denounces this part of the Muslim intelligentsia ‘that is conscious of the role of Islam in the national awakening of its people, but gives it first of all a cultural and traditional meaning, and very little real significance in [everyday] life’<sup>79</sup>. In his eyes, ‘those who believe that it is possible to be linked with Islam in an irregular and superficial way, to apply some of its precepts and to neglect others, should be aware of their inconsistency, and even of a certain hypocrisy. If some of its elements are not implemented, Islam cannot exist, nor can Muslims, and those who claim to be Muslims but avoid going to the mosque or fasting, cannot be Muslims’<sup>80</sup>. According to the definition given by Enes Karić, Islam brings together all members of the Muslim community. For Jahić, on the contrary, Islam has a differentiating function within this community.

However, if Islam – or, to be more precise, the ‘true Islam’ – becomes a criterion of differentiation within the Muslim community, Jahić has no other choice but to entrust its implementation to the political power, and the ‘positive ethical values’ to which he refers become nothing other than an implicit state ideology. This process of differentiation on a religious basis leads inevitably to social and political discriminations among Muslims, and the distinction between the separation of state and religion in terms of form on the one hand, and in terms of content on the other hand, is a mere tool permitting the discrete restoration of a party-state within democratic institutional frameworks. As Jahić acknowledges himself, ‘the preservation and reinforcement of Islam will depend in the first place on the extent of its presence in state school curricula, in the media, in popular literature and in other fields of social activity. The state does not need to be explicitly Islamic in order to encourage such forms of subtle Islamisation of the society’<sup>81</sup>.

Adnan Jahić’s determination to turn Islam into a discriminatory political ideology appears even more conspicuously in a text which provoked much debate in Bosnia after its publication in September 1993. In this text, entitled ‘A Sturdy Muslim State’<sup>82</sup>, Jahić does not only break a taboo by declaring himself in favour of the creation of a Muslim ethnic state on ‘the territories where our Bosnian army will remain after the war’<sup>83</sup>. He also claims that ‘Islam, by nature, knows no separation between religion and society. Moreover, Islam is not a “religion”, but a political and religious ideology, a complete *Weltanschauung*. Islamic principles are

---

<sup>78</sup> A. Jahić, ‘Islam – pitanje zajednice’ [Islam, A Collective Issue], *Hikmet*, vol. 8, n° 9/93 (September 1995), pp. 390-391.

<sup>79</sup> A. Jahić, ‘Znamo, a nećemo?!’.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

<sup>81</sup> A. Jahić, ‘Islam i nacionalitet u svjetlu suvremenih prilika u islamskom svijetu’, *op. cit.*

<sup>82</sup> A. Jahić, ‘Krijeposna muslimanska država’ [A Sturdy Muslim State], *Zmaj od Bosne* (27 September 1993), reproduced in Fatimir Alispahić, *Krv boje benzina* [Petrol-Coloured Blood], Tuzla: Radio Kameleon, 1996, pp. 248-251

<sup>83</sup> Adnan Jahić claims that he does nothing but reflect the personal choices of the SDA leader Alija Izetbegović: ‘[the *Reis-ul-Ulema*] Mustafa Cerić has clearly confirmed to me during a personal interview that the eternal dream of Alija Izetbegović, a Young Muslim, has been, and still is, the creation of a Muslim state in Bosnia-Herzegovina; his dream is now becoming a reality and this does not really disturb him’.

never limited to the surface of individual consciences and private religious feelings. Original Islam tries to embrace the society in which it exists and, therefore, the political and state structures themselves'<sup>84</sup>.

According to Jahić, the future Muslim state 'will have a Muslim ideology based on Islam, on Islamic legal-religious and ethical-social principles, but also on elements of Western-European origin that are not in conflict with the former ones'. This ideology must be turned into 'a complete political and legal system of the future Muslim state, from state and national symbols to educational, social and economic institutions, and including the national government policy'. This means that 'no principle of Muslim ideology will be imposed on anyone by force, according to the principle of "*la ikrahe fiddin*" ['no constraint in religion'], but that its spirit will be systematically promoted and infused in society ... A complete equality of rights will be guaranteed to all citizens, yet the social achievement of each individual will depend not only on his own economic activity, but also on how much he will consciously accept and follow the principles and the spirit of the Muslim ideology'. Finally, Jahić points out that, 'during the first decades, it will be necessary to implement a centralised policy, to insist strictly on the enforcement and respect of the new laws, so that the state can as soon as possible stand on its own feet, and start promoting the content of Islamic ideology. Only after this can a large decentralisation and democratisation of the society take place'<sup>85</sup>. Adnan Jahić thus renders even more striking the similarities between the 'sturdy Muslim state' he is advocating and the former Communist party-state.

### **Conclusion: Bosnian peculiarities and 'European Islam'**

The writings of Fikret Karčić, Enes Karić and Adnan Jahić show that the Bosnian Muslims and their religious institutions are also involved in the debates on Islam and Western modernity that affect the entire Muslim world, and contradict therefore the descriptions of Bosnian Islam as a homogeneous and *sui generis* reality. Certainly, their reflections take place under very specific circumstances: namely that of a post-Communist and post-Yugoslav Bosnia-Herzegovina. The imprint of the Communist past, for example, appears when Karčić considers the creation of a multiparty system as an opportunity to depoliticize religious institutions, or, on the contrary, when Jahić intends to place Islam in the heart of a new kind of party-state. But these specific features, whose most surprising consequence is the fact that, in 1990, a secularised Bosnian Muslim population brought to power the representatives of a small pan-Islamist minority<sup>86</sup>, gives only a peculiar visibility or coloration to processes that can be met in many other places around the world.

This does not mean that the order of presentation of the three authors, or their personal careers, should be viewed as a summary of the recent evolutions of Bosnian Islam. Of course, it is not by chance that Enes Karić broke with the SDA at the end of the war, while Adnan Jahić became one of its leading figures. Yet, the internal factionalism of the SDA, in power from November 1990 to November 2000<sup>87</sup>, does not reflect the state of Bosnian society, and

---

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

<sup>86</sup> For an explanation of this paradox, see X. Bougarel, 'From "Young Muslims" to the Party of Democratic Action'.

<sup>87</sup> In November 2000, the SDA was defeated by the Social Democratic Party (SDP), the Party for Bosnia-Herzegovina (SBIH) and other smaller parties gathered into an 'Alliance for Change', and found itself in the opposition for the first time since its creation in 1990.

certainly it does not suffice as an explanation of the changes and conflicts experienced by Bosnian Islam.

Without doubt, there was during the war an attempt by the SDA leaders to turn Islam into a discriminatory political ideology, and the writings of Adnan Jahić can thus be considered as the open expression of a political project that has remained implicit most of the time. But the resistances and paradoxes that thwarted this project have also resulted in the rediscovery of Islam as common culture and individual faith. In their polemics with the SDA, non-nationalist parties and independent media sources have often resorted to these two conceptions of Islam. In a similar way, after the political instrumentalisation of the Islamic religious institutions resulted in their disrepute, some voices came to be heard within the *Islamska Zajednica*, pleading for a clearer separation between religion and politics. Finally, whilst Bosnian Muslims were accepting Islam as the base of their national identity, many of them used and reinterpreted it in order to contest the political hegemony of the SDA. From this point of view, the religious changes taking place in Bosnia-Herzegovina are reminiscent of those experienced by other Muslim countries, and often described with the generic term of ‘post-Islamism’<sup>88</sup>.

At the same time, the Bosnian case is also a good illustration of another larger phenomenon: in the 1990s, European Muslims have become more and more politicised, and, everywhere in Europe, Islam has entered the public sphere<sup>89</sup>. This process, however, does not have the same origins in Western Europe and post-Communist Eastern Europe, and it often takes different forms. In Western Europe, the growing visibility of Islam is due to the rise of new generations of Muslims being born in Europe and enjoying the citizenship of their countries of residence. In Eastern Europe, this increased visibility is first of all a consequence of the restoration of religious freedom after the demise of the Communist regimes. In the first case, the waning of inherited ethnic and national identities facilitates the emergence of a new Muslim communitarianism, centred around religious institutions and demands. In the second case, the crystallisation of distinct ethnic identities goes hand in hand with the creation of separate political parties, the formulation of nationalist projects and, against this background, the ‘nationalisation’ of Islam and Islamic religious institutions<sup>90</sup>. Despite the fact that it has been initiated by the representatives of a pan-Islamist stream, the SDA, for example, hastened the break-up of the Yugoslav *Islamska Zajednica* in April 1993, in order to create new Islamic religious institutions limited solely to Bosnian Muslims. Five months later, it renounced the national designation of ‘Muslim’, and replaced it by a new one: ‘Bosniac’<sup>91</sup>.

---

<sup>88</sup> Expanding his analysis of the failure of political Islam in the 1980s, Olivier Roy defines post-Islamism as ‘the appearance of a secular space in Muslim societies, not because of a decline in faith or practice, but because the religious field tends to dissociate itself from the political field. The individualisation of [religious] practices or their limitation to closed communities (sufi orders) tends to dissociate not only religious choices from political ones, but also the believer from the citizen, even if believers reformulate their political choice differently, for instance in terms of ethics or defence of moral values’. See O. Roy, ‘Avant-propos: pourquoi le post-islamisme?’ [Preface: Why Post-Islamism?], *Revue des mondes musulmans et de la Méditerranée*, n° 85-86, 1999, pp. 9-10.

<sup>89</sup> See e.g. Yasemin Soysal, ‘Changing Parameters of Citizenship and Claims Making: Organized Islam in European Public Spheres’, *Theory and Society*, vol. 26, n° 4 (August 1997), pp. 508-527.

<sup>90</sup> On the recent evolutions of Islam in Europe, see e.g. Felice Dassetto, Brigitte Maréchal and Jorgen Nielsen (eds.), *Convergences musulmanes. Aspects contemporains de l’islam dans l’Europe élargie* [Muslim Convergence. Contemporary Aspects of Islam in an Enlarged Europe], Paris: L’Harmattan, 2001; Felice Dassetto (dir.), *Paroles d’Islam. Individus, sociétés et discours dans l’islam européen contemporain* [Islamic Words. Individuals, Societies and Discourses in Contemporary European Islam], Paris: Maisonneuve et Larose, 2000; X. Bougarel and N. Clayer (eds.), *Le nouvel Islam balkanique*.

<sup>91</sup> See note 1.

Finally, the debates that are dividing Bosnian Muslims and their religious institutions reflect some uncertainties common to all Muslim communities in Europe: in the Balkans, as well as in Russia and within the European Union, Muslims share a similar concern about the future of their presence in Europe, and have the same difficulty in defining their Muslim identity in a context where the state claims to be secular, but where the society is still, at least implicitly, permeated with Christian traditions. As shown by their reflection on their double Muslim and European identity, Fikret Karčić, Enes Karić and Adnan Jahić are obviously aware of the precarious geopolitical position of Bosnian Muslims, at the European margins of the *umma*. In the same way, their situation in a deeply secularised and individualised European cultural space explains why they focus so much on the issue of the relationship between Islam as a source of legal or moral norms, and the modern state defined as a secular and democratic one.

From this point of view, the debates that have taken place within the Bosnian Muslim community since 1878 constitute indeed an early attempt at formulating what it means to be Muslim in contemporary Europe. The political events of the 1990s, however, tend more and more to transform the Bosnian case into an exception, rather than a model for the other Muslim communities living in Europe. When, in the early 1990s, Fikret Karčić defines Islam as individual faith, he is also doing so because he still places himself within a Yugoslav framework, with Muslims being only a minority among a majority of Christians. During the war, on the contrary, Enes Karić and Adnan Jahić adopted a narrower Bosnian perspective, in which majority Muslims had to choose between the preservation of a multiethnic state and the creation of their own nation-state. Despite their disagreements on the definition of Islam and the future of Bosnia-Herzegovina, both strive to restore Islam as the central reference around which the diversity of the Bosnian Muslim community should be organised.

Finally, Adnan Jahić formulates openly the geopolitical dream that motivates the founders of the SDA in 1990: the wish to bring back Bosnia-Herzegovina into the ‘house of Islam’ (*dar-al-islam*), from which it had been torn away in 1878. This implicit geopolitical utopia explains some speeches delivered by Alija Izetbegović to the fighters of the Bosnian army, reminding them for example that ‘we have received Islam as *amanet* [legacy], and we have the duty to preserve it in this region, because this is the most Western part of Islam’<sup>92</sup>, or claiming that ‘Serbs and Croats will have in Bosnia-Herzegovina the same rights as Arabs in France’<sup>93</sup>. Moreover, this utopia explains at least in part some strategic moves of the SDA, a party that first intended to gather all the Yugoslav members of the *umma*, but ended up sacrificing their religious unity to the independence of Bosnia-Herzegovina, and then the territorial integrity of this country to the political sovereignty of the Bosnian Muslims<sup>94</sup>.

But, through this will to emancipate the Bosnian Muslims from their minority status, the SDA leaders shift away from the questions with which Muslim communities in Europe are concerned, and draw closer to those faced by the societies of the Muslim world. It is thus not surprising that the strong mobilisation of Western European Muslims in support of Bosnia-Herzegovina during the war was not followed by intense and regular exchanges at the

---

<sup>92</sup> Speech to the fighters of the 7th Muslim brigade of Zenica, held on 20 October 1994 and reproduced in the bulletin of the brigade (*El-Liva*, n° 16, November 1994, p. 4).

<sup>93</sup> Speech to the fighters of the 4th motorised brigade of Hrasnica, held in December 1993 and quoted by Ivo Komšić, former member of the Bosnian collective Presidency (*Svijet*, n° 29, 15 August 1996, p. 17).

<sup>94</sup> See X. Bougarel, ‘Comment peut-on être Bochniaque?’.

religious level: the Islamic intellectuals of Western Europe still refer primarily to the debates of their countries of origin and countries of residence, whereas those in Bosnia-Herzegovina look for inspiration in the states of the Persian Gulf and South-East Asia. This observation also applies to the relations among Balkan Muslim intellectuals, despite their obvious geographical proximity and cultural closeness.

With reference, then, to the case of Islam in the Bosnian context, we might conclude that there are many Islams in Europe, but what does not yet exist is a 'European Islam', in the sense that there is no shared religious and intellectual space to debate the issues that are common to all European Muslims<sup>95</sup>. This also means that the emergence of such an Islam does not imply the rediscovery of an Islam *sui generis*, but the invention of a new religious model, through the intensification of contacts among European Muslim communities, the confrontation of their uncertainties and the hybridisation of their practices. In this process, it is uncertain whether Bosnian Muslims will play the central part attributed to them by some of the representations of Bosnian Islam that appeared during the war. In fact, the cradle of this nascent 'European Islam' is probably not located in the Bosnian valleys, but in the larger European cities where various Muslim diasporas – including those originating from the Balkans<sup>96</sup> – meet each other, or in the hallways of the European Court of Human Rights, to which more and more Western European and Balkan Muslims turn when faced in their respective states with ethnic or religious discrimination.

---

<sup>95</sup> On the emergence of a 'European Islam', see, among others, J. Nielsen, *Towards a European Islam*, Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1999; O. Roy, *Vers un islam européen* [Towards a European Islam], Paris: Esprit, 1999.

<sup>96</sup> On the religious practices of Bosnian Muslims in Western Europe, see Marita Eastmond, 'Nationalist Discourses and the Construction of Difference: Bosnian Muslim Refugees in Sweden', *Journal of Refugee Studies*, vol. 11, n° 2 (1998), pp. 161-181; Nadja Al-Ali, 'Gender Relations, Transnational Ties and Rituals Among Bosnian Refugees', *Global Networks: A Journal of Transnational Affairs*, vol. 2, n° 3 (July 2002), pp. 249-262.