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“This is our little hajj”:

Muslim holy sites and reappropriation of the sacred landscape in contemporary Bosnia

ABSTRACT

Bosnian Muslims’ understandings of Islam and relationships with the sacred landscape have undergone significant transformations since the dissolution of socialist Yugoslavia. I explore these transformations as I analyze discourses and debates on what constitutes “correct” Islamic tradition in Bosnia today, when Muslim practice has been exposed to a global Islamic orthodoxy and entangled in new supraregional hierarchies of power, values, and moral imagination. I specifically focus on how intracommunal Muslim politics intertwines with contemporary Bosnian Muslim shrine pilgrimages. [*Bosnia-Herzegovina, Islam, Muslim politics, pilgrimage, postsocialism, sacred sites*]

In summer 2009, I was traveling by bus from the Bosnian capital, Sarajevo, when a billboard caught my attention. It was advertising the 499th Ajvatovica pilgrimage as one of the largest Muslim gatherings in Europe. Neither the anniversary nor the advertisement itself intrigued me so much as the red-colored graffiti sprayed across the bottom of the billboard: “The biggest heretic religious feast.” For a while, my imagination was haunted by images of ethnoreligious conflict, which has been recurring in postwar Bosnia-Herzegovina through the (ethno)politics of the sacred. After my return to the mountains where I had been conducting fieldwork in Muslim villages, I mentioned what I had seen to my friends as well as to a group of dervishes with whom I also worked. They all understood the graffiti differently than I had and immediately provided me with another interpretative framework: “Eh, Wahabis!” I was told.¹

This episode illustrates ambiguities in contemporary Bosnian Muslim politics over sacred authority. It exemplifies how Muslims in Bosnia-Herzegovina have responded to transformations in the religious landscape over the past two decades, following the dissolution of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and the subsequent war. The postsocialist liberation of religious expression and conduct after several decades of suppression and control, as well as postwar ethnonational identity rhetoric and the proliferation of international Islamic humanitarian organizations in the country, opened public debates about the authenticity of Bosnian Islam—about what it means to live a Muslim life. Special attention has been paid to discourses on renewed Bosniak traditions and to Muslim holy sites such as Ajvatovica, in particular.

In many of these debates as well as in intimate conversations I had with Bosnian Muslims of different walks of life, sacred sites are apprehended as expressions either of an authentic Bosnian Islam or of parochial non-modern religious conduct or of a syncretic and thus un-Islamic faith that should be abandoned. These debates are shaped by changing ideas and understandings of what constitutes “correct” Muslim conduct and Islamic tradition “after socialism” (e.g., Hann 2006),

when Bosnian Muslim practice was exposed to a global Islamic orthodoxy and ethnoreligious ideology and entangled in new national and international hierarchies of power, values, and moral imagination. However, such debates are not in any way exceptionally Bosnian but are part of the social dynamics of many Muslim societies today and of broader ongoing debates on Muslim politics within those societies (Eickelman and Piscatory 1996; Hefner 2005).

In this article, I discuss how these transformations in Muslim politics intertwine with sacred landscapes in Muslim Bosnia after the dissolution of socialist Yugoslavia. My analysis is informed by two bodies of scholarship. Firstly, I document the complex nature and choreography of Bosnian Muslims' relations with holy sites in the context of debates on sacred landscapes in the Balkans and the Mediterranean (e.g., Albera and Couroucli 2012). Secondly, I show that questioning and exploring what it means to be a Muslim in Bosnia-Herzegovina is not necessarily anchored to post-Yugoslav ethnonational identity-building discourses, as has been argued rather widely in recent years (e.g., Bougarel 2003; Hayden 2007). Indeed, Bosnian Muslim cultural and social intimacies (Herzfeld 1997) are multifaceted and often contradictory. To unwrap these contradictions, in this article I study intracommunal interactions and perils of self-alterity among Bosnian Muslims themselves in the context of disturbing postsocialist and postwar changes in religious life and practice. In so doing, I follow a turn in anthropological studies of Islam based on what Magnus Marsden succinctly outlines as "a new and different understanding of the relationship between Islam, everyday religious experience and interpersonal relationships in Muslim societies" (2005:22–23). As the ethnographic material I discuss indicates, Bosnian Muslims' reflections on the changing character of sacred landscapes go beyond post-Yugoslav ethnonational identitarian debates and frames of reference. These debates often unfold as an expression of emotionally engaged and complex reasoning about the creativity, mindfulness (cf. Marsden 2005), and contradictions of Muslim life and practice.

Sacred landscapes in the Balkans disputed

Sacred landscapes in the Balkans have attracted the attention of many anthropologists in the past two decades (e.g., Albera 2008; Bax 1995; Bielenin-Lenczowska 2009; Bowman 2010; Bringa 1995; Dubisch 1995; Duijzings 2000; Hayden 2002). The main analytical theme has been the politics of the sharing of holy sites by various religious constituencies (Albera and Couroucli 2012). In particular, scholars have emphasized how certain holy sites gain a multivocal character and a capacity to accommodate differences. Hence, the prevailing scholarly views on Balkan holy sites have been anchored to a politics of sharing by and difference be-

tween (ethno)religious communities, such as Serbs (Orthodox Christians), Croats (Roman Catholics), Bosniaks (Muslims), and Kosovo Albanians (Muslims).

Increasingly important in this analysis is the thought-provoking concept of "antagonistic tolerance" (Hayden 2002). In defining the concept, Robert M. Hayden borrows from the negative definition of tolerance, as understood by moral philosophers such as John Locke, framing it as "passive noninterference and premised on a lack of ability of . . . [one] *group* to overcome the other" and as "attitudes of strategic calculation of the value of tolerating others" (2002:206, emphasis added). The idea of "antagonistic tolerance," hence, interprets the sharing of holy sites as "a pragmatic adaptation to a situation in which repression of the other group's practices may not be possible rather than an active embrace of the Other" (Hayden 2002:219). In this approach, the unit of analysis is chiefly an ethnoreligious "group," and emphasis is placed on a sociology of intergroup relations and boundaries in which sharing and difference, the processes of inclusion and exclusion, and other contrasting dichotomies are studied as they emerge from the sharing of holy sites, even as boundaries between the groups involved endure (see Hayden 2002:207). The idea of "antagonistic tolerance" accommodates both conflict and sharing as inevitable modalities in the pragmatics of social life in a multiethnic fabric. Latent conflict, then, is an inherent condition of the processes of making and sharing sacred sites, and sharing is understood as a temporal moment expressing actual processual relations rather than a fixed quality of intergroup stasis based on long-lasting difference, antagonism, and pragmatic acceptance (e.g., Hayden et al. 2011). This view highlights the continuity and the profoundness of the differences between those who share a holy site. As Hayden argues, the conviction that "identities are fluid or changeable does not mean that distinctions between groups are easily removed" (2002:207).

Hayden, thus, seriously questions the arguments of several authors that Bosnia has a long history of unproblematic, peaceful, multicultural relations and that the 1990s war was a betrayal of the Bosnian tradition of tolerance (e.g., Donia and Fine 1994). However insightful and challenging, such a perspective is somewhat biased toward the epistemological trap of "groupism," that is, a tendency to ascribe agency to entities, such as ethnic groups, that are taken for granted and considered basic constituents of social life (cf. Brubaker 2002:164). Groupism can also be found in Roy E. Hassner's (2009, 2010) prominent work on shared sacred spaces. Hassner, for example, asserts that "sacred places invite conflict with rival *groups* who strive to compete for access or legitimacy or who simply wish to inflict harm on their opponents" (2010:149, emphasis added; see also Bowman 2011:373). As I have argued elsewhere, such analytical essentialism reduces complex social fabrics to their ethnonational or collective identitarian dimensions

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4 while overlooking other related processes happening on the
5 ground (Henig 2012; also Sorabji 2008).

6 Many anthropologists have paid extensive attention in
7 recent years to the danger of essentializing collective identi-
8 ties (Cohen 2000; Werbner 1997). Their discussions suggest
9 that a way out of the trap of essentialism might be through
10 an engaged but still emphatic ethnography that regards any
11 taken-for-granted essence as uncertain, fractured, and am-
12 bivalent and yet embedded in historical contingencies and
13 power relations. Therefore, I suggest a perspectival twist
14 from groupism and top-down processes toward grassroots,
15 intersubjectively constructed and negotiated meanings and
16 practices of sharing by divergent social actors. Such a
17 perspective enables movement through various scales—
18 bottom-up, top-down, micro–macro, indivisible–shared,
19 identity–difference—without essentializing the processes
20 of social life. Conflict and sharing, then, need to be analyzed
21 as the results of specific processes and not as proxies for in-
22 teractions between social actors. Put differently, human so-
23 ciality by and large entails both compassion and violence,
24 but these ensue from concrete historical and political situ-
25 ations (Jackson 1998) and not from profound and essential-
26 ized characteristics ascribed to social “groups” or material
27 objects such as shrines.

28 Indeed, Dionigi Albera (2008:53–56) concordantly ar-
29 gues for an analytical shift toward a greater complexity and
30 broader scale of continuity in analysis of shared holy sites in
31 the Mediterranean. Continuity might, for example, be stud-
32 ied from the perspective of the pilgrimage site, by tracing
33 the agency of various actors involved in the processes of
34 making the site but without necessarily focusing on its eth-
35 nization. In a similar vein, Glenn Bowman has developed
36 and ethnographically instantiated the issues of agency in
37 relation to holy sites:

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40 The presence of agency necessitates close attention to
41 what people are doing, and what they say they are do-
42 ing, while they are in the process of doing it. It is vital
43 to attend to who is saying *what* to *whom* and *who* is
44 listening; long-term historical processes are character-
45 ized by silencings as well as debates. It is important to
46 examine both if we want to really know what goes on in
47 “sharing.” [2010:198]

48 Drawing on comparative research of shared holy sites
49 in Palestine and in Macedonia, Bowman (2010:196) points
50 out that no preexisting antagonism serves as foundational
51 logic for intercommunal interactions. Rather, he observes,
52 another dynamic colors these interactions, one that results
53 from contingency, situational factors, and constantly shift-
54 ing power relations in the process of sharing by multiple so-
55 cial actors. Thus, sharing a holy site might lead to antago-
56 nism, tensions, and mixing, or it might not. He concludes,
57 “We must attempt to see what happens on the ground

while syncretistic practices are occurring” (2010:199). I am
in favor of Bowman’s cautionary note, as it does not im-
pose any proxy for interactions that take place around
holy sites. More importantly, though, tracing social actors’
agency in the process of sharing a holy site enables move-
ment through various scales, or a switch in analysis from
intercommunal to intracommunal relations and contesta-
tions and from a “grouplike” to an actor-oriented analyti-
cal perspective, with attention to the contingent aspects of
“sharing.”

In the study of sacred landscapes in the Balkans, very
little attention has been paid to intracommunal perspec-
tives. In this article, I draw on Bowman’s (2010) arguments
and trace parallels with the processes of contestation be-
tween Bosnian Muslims themselves over the meanings and
sharing of pilgrimage sites and over appropriation of the
sacred landscape to shed light on intracommunal interac-
tions and relations among Bosnian Muslims more gener-
ally. Specifically, I am concerned with pilgrimage sites, and
I trace the agency of various actors assembled around holy
sites in the mountains of central Bosnia. In doing so, I also
attend to the local conversations of various Muslims in the
mountains, tracing “*who* is saying *what* to *whom* and *who* is
listening.” This perspective on the forms of sociality, identi-
ties, and performances pilgrimage sites entail is akin to Vic-
tor and Edith Turner’s (see Turner 1974; Turner and Turner
1978) approach to understanding the pilgrimage and veneration
of sacred sites as a process. My discussion here nu-
ances the Turners’ idea of antistructural *communitas* as an
emergent social form during the pilgrimage. I argue that a
pilgrimage process might generate or strengthen structural
differences or conflict or both and thus multiply the detach-
ment or proximity of actors we conventionally subsume
within a social form of antistructural *communitas* (Turner
1974:266–269). In so arguing, I follow Gerd Baumann’s sub-
versive reading of Emile Durkheim and Durkheimian per-
spectives on ritual actions. Baumann (1992:99) indicates
that ritual may be performed by competing constituencies,
can serve to negotiate the differing relationships of its par-
ticipants, and may also speak to aspirations toward cultural
change. Therefore, I analyze sites of Bosnian Muslim pil-
grimage, understood as the ritual action of visitation and
worship, as “contested places” (cf. Eade and Sallnow 1991)
where Muslims’ self-expressions and belonging as well as
Muslim politics compete and are negotiated, enacted, and
experienced.

(Bosnian) Muslim politics

Dale F. Eickelman and James Piscatory understand Mus-
lim politics as a process of “competition and contest over
both the interpretation of symbols and control of the in-
stitutions, formal and informal, that produce and sustain
them” (1996:5). Similarly, though more broadly, Talal Asad

(1986:7, 14ff.) argues that an analysis of Islam and Muslim societies ought to be approached as a study of discursive tradition in which particular ideas compete over authorizing "correct" Islam, orthodox practice as well as moral conduct. In other words, as Asad (1993) suggests, anthropology needs to examine the genealogies of a particular set of ideas and practices as they become, under particular historical conditions and circumstances, "correct" Islamic orthodoxy and practice within a web of power relations and, thus, authorized as Islamic tradition. These two analytical perspectives help to unmask the relationship between "orthodoxy," "orthopractice," and power and political authority. Neither however provides us with a nuanced analytical perspective through which we can simultaneously unwrap the micropolitics of excluded, marginalized, and muted ideas, diverse practices, or discursive irregularities and examine the intersubjectively shaped moral creativity and "plays of mind" (Marsden 2005) and the experiences through which divergent actors develop and cultivate their own self-understanding of what it means to be a Muslim and live a Muslim life (e.g., Rasanayagam 2011). As Samuli Schielke and Georg Stauth (2008:13) point out, sole orientation on orthodoxizing discourse is not very helpful for understanding localized cults and shrines associated with highly complex traditions, imagination, sensibilities, and practices that are often situated beyond discursive categories (cf. Albera and Couroucli 2012).

In reinvigorating Muslim politics as a subject matter of ethnographic research, Benjamin Soares and Filippo Osella (2009) have recently argued that some forms of micropolitics should be understood within wider contexts in which politics and various social actors intersect with competing styles and practices as well as with day-to-day ambiguities and the fragility of ethical self-fashioning and moral reasoning. Akin to these authors, I develop a nuanced perspective on discursive constructions of Bosnian Muslim politics "after socialism." I examine the various (in)coherent and competing styles and practices of the multiple social actors involved, here ethnographically instantiated in the processes of contestation and appropriation of Muslim sacred landscapes and the veneration of holy sites in the central Bosnian highlands.

Pilgrimage and contest in Muslim Bosnia

The veneration of holy sites has a long history in Muslim Bosnia (Hadžijahić 1978). The central Bosnian highland range of Zvijezda, where I carried out my fieldwork, is closely associated with the early Islamization of Bosnian lands and their conquest by the Sultan Mehmet al-Fateh in the second half of the 15th century. The devout have visited sacred sites in the region continuously up to the present day despite various historical contingencies, especially during the decades of control and re-

striction of religious conduct by the socialist Yugoslav state (cf. Bringa 1995).

The veneration of holy sites such as tombs, caves, springs, hills, and trees, as my Bosnian friends often told and, indeed, showed me, is closely entwined with personal notions of well-being, and the associated ritual actions, performed individually or collectively, are conceived of as sources of personal blessing (*bereket*), fortune and luck (*häär, sreća*), and the good life. (See Figure 1.) The long continuity of individual or collective visits to and worship (*zijáret*) at the holy sites as well as the interweaving of the sites into a vivid narrative culture shape local meanings of what constitutes Bosnian Muslims' sacred landscape as well as a distinct regional Muslim identity. Of particular importance that spreads beyond the region are the annual Muslim pilgrimage to the Karići holy site and the distinctively regional annual pilgrimage gatherings around various outdoor sacred sites (*dovište*) to engage in prayers for rain (*dove za kišu*).

Karići

Dova na Karićima is the annual three-day pilgrimage during which Bosnian Muslims worship Allah and commemorate Hajdar-dedo Karić on the plateau where the wooden mosque of Karići is located. (See Figure 2.) Although there are no known written records about Hajdar-dedo Karić (Mulahalilović 1989:192–196), his cult persists through a vivid oral tradition, the annual pilgrimage, and individual visits (*zijáret*) in search of blessing (*bereket*). Devotees believe that Hajdar-dedo Karić was one of the messengers of Islam who were brought to the Balkan peninsula during early Islamization. In narratives, Hajdar-dedo Karić is portrayed as a wise, knowledgeable Islamic scholar, an effendi, and a dervish sheikh. He decided to build a mosque on top of the plateau after seeking guidance (*istikhara*) through a dream about where one should be located. In slightly different versions of Hajdar-dedo Karić's life story, he is described by several oft-repeated motifs: as a scholarly person (*učenják*); the founder of the mosque, or holy site, in Karići through the dream revelation; a friend of God (*evlija*, from Arabic *walī*); and a person who performed miracles (*keramet*). The earliest tomb (*mezar*) at the mosque, facing in the direction of Mecca, has a small pit in the middle and is almost certainly Hajdar-dedo's, as this kind of gravestone (*nišan*) was usually made for individuals who performed miracles during their lives. The rainwater caught in the pit is used for healing as well as to secure good luck, blessing, and fortune. Good luck and divine power are associated with the place. Stories circulate that during the Second World War, Četnik troops tried to burn down the wooden mosque, but they could not set it alight by any means. People say that, for the last 150 years, no permanent Muslim community (*džemat*) has lived on the plateau and that the mosque and



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28 **Figure 1.** The sacred landscape in Muslim Bosnia comprises caves, hills, springs, and tombs. Pictured here is a *türbe* (mausoleum) of an unknown Ottoman
29 martyr (*šehid*) that is kept and venerated by village Muslims during summer months. Photo by David Henig, 2008.
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32 holy site have been used only during the annual pilgrim-
33 age. The only residents living in relative proximity until the
34 1990s war were a few Serbian (Orthodox) families. These
35 families cared for the mosque and had even held the key
36 in the past, although they did not participate in the pilgrim-
37 age and worship. Even in more distant villages I repeatedly
38 heard the following story: After the area around the Karići
39 mosque was abandoned by Muslims and was visited only
40 during the annual pilgrimage or by individual devotees, the
41 Orthodox families struggled with bad crops and illness in
42 their livestock. When they searched for help, an Orthodox
43 cleric told them that there must be a sacred object near
44 their homes that they needed to take care of and that it
45 was undoubtedly the Karići mosque. Eventually, the fami-
46 lies started to take care of the mosque and all their bad luck
47 vanished.

48 Although the Yugoslav communist regime oppressed
49 and exercised widespread control over various religious
50 manifestations and gatherings, it did not ban the Karići
51 pilgrimage, which is arguably remarkable because the pil-
52 grimage has historically been well attended (Mulahalilović
53 1989:192–196). In 1993, during the Bosnian war (1992–95)
54 a Yugoslav National Army tank drove through the ancient
55 wooden mosque. The terrain was at the time barely accessi-
56 ble, as there were many landmines scattered in the ground
57 around the pilgrimage site, so local Muslims temporarily or-

ganized the annual gathering in a nearby provincial town
mosque. After the war, the landscape was slowly de-mined.
The wooden mosque was rebuilt in 2002 and the pilgrimage
fully restored.

Although its restoration was initiated by a group
of local engaged Muslims, the mosque and the land it
sits on are officially owned and access to them is con-
trolled by the state-approved Islamic Community (Islamska
Zajednica). The Islamic Community is also responsible for
organizing the annual Karići pilgrimage. The pilgrimage
takes place at the end of July. The date is counted accord-
ing to the old Julian calendar as the 11th Tuesday after
Jurjevdan (i.e., St. George's Day, May 6). The pilgrimage be-
gins by Friday's noon prayer and lasts until the Sunday mid-
day prayer. Only male Muslims are allowed to attend at
Karići.

The pilgrimage gathering usually involves reciting of
the entire Qu'ran (*hatma dove*), singing songs revering Al-
lah (*ilahija*), and other performances such as the recital
of *mevlud* verses in both Turkish and Bosnian, *tevhid* for
Ottoman as well as Bosnian martyrs (*šehide*), and col-
lective devotional and ecstatic prayer, *kijam zikr* (Arabic,
qiyam dhikr).² The kijam zikr is performed by dervishes
and led by a dervish sheikh. Other pilgrims usually ob-
serve rather than take part in this form of prayer, as
dervishes have historically been conceived of ambiguously



Figure 2. Karići mosque in the central Bosnian highlands, where the annual three-day pilgrimage commemorating Hajdar-dedo Karić—an early messenger of Islam in Bosnia, a dervish sheikh, and a friend of god (*evlija*)—takes place. Photo by David Henig, 2009.

and were viewed as the Islamic “other within” in the former Yugoslavia (Bringa 1995:221; Duijzings 2000:107). However, the devotional prayer during the pilgrimage was also performed during socialist times. This is arguably significant, as, in the 1950s, the Islamic Community, with the Yugoslav state’s assistance, banned all dervish orders in Bosnia-Herzegovina for being “devoid of cultural value” (Algar 1971:196).³

Unlike the case of the traditional cradles of Bosnian Sufism with their old dervish lodges in the western parts of central Bosnia (cf. Algar 1971; Čehajić 1986; Mičijević 1997), the continuity of dervish orders was severed in the northern parts. Hence, Karići has been publicly presented and understood for a long time solely as a place of Muslim annual pilgrimage. However, in the late 1980s, a dervish group of the Rifa’i order, which I have also studied, was formed in the region.⁴ In its search for authenticity and the restoration of Sufi teaching (*tesavuf*) in the region, the group entwined its identity with the historical figure of Hajdar-dedo Karić. Although the dervish group today traces its identity through its sheikh’s “spiritual lineage” (*silsila*) to Kosovo, the dervishes consider Karići their spiritual cradle, and they conceive of Hajdar-dedo Karić as the messenger of Sufism in the region and their spiritual forefather.

Ajvatovica

The Ajvatovica pilgrimage plays a significant role in the ways village Muslims from the central Bosnian highlands reflect on the transformation of sacred landscapes “after socialism.” In their narratives and casual chats, my village friends often juxtaposed Karići and the Ajvatovica pilgrimages. However, the great majority of them have never pilgrimed to Ajvatovica.

The Ajvatovica pilgrimage, near the village of Prusac, boasts legends similar to those of the Karići site, dating back to the 17th century and involving another legendary messenger of Islam, effendi (and maybe dervish sheikh) Ajvaz-dedo. The legends say that Ajvaz-dedo was a friend of God (*evlija*). When he came to Prusac, there was no proper water supply in the village. There was only a spring near the village, but it was blocked by a rock. Ajvaz-dedo spent 40 days praying to Allah, and on the 40th day he dreamed about two white rams colliding. When he woke up, the rock had split in half. Local villagers saw this as a miracle (*keramet*) and blessing (*bereket*), and, ever since, have pilgrimed to the place where the rock split.

Unlike the Karići pilgrimage, the Ajvatovica was officially banned during the socialist period, in 1947 (cf. Mulahalilović 1989:192–196), and was renewed only in 1990,

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4 mainly through the engagement of the Islamic Community; various media, such as the Islamic weekly publication *Preporod*; and the Stranka Demokratske Akcije (SDA; Party of Democratic Action), led at the time by Alija Izetbegović. The region where the Ajvatovica pilgrimage site is located was controlled and defended during the war by the Bosnian army, and, hence, through public rhetoric, gained the character of a holy land, expressing the continuity of a threatened Muslim community and its cultural heritage (cf. Rujanac in press).

14 It quickly became clear to me that the way the Ajvatovica pilgrimage is orchestrated nowadays plays a significant role in Bosnian Muslim national public politics, as dominated by the Islamic Community, as well as figuring prominently in local conversations. Ajvatovica is presented by the Islamic Community as the biggest annual Muslim gathering in Europe, one with long continuity, despite the official ban imposed in 1947. As they are orchestrated and choreographed, “The Days of Ajvatovica” (Dani Ajvatovice) unfold as an assemblage of religious pilgrimage, political gathering, and social parade composed of various events, concerts, and lectures that are widely advertised and promoted by the Islamic Community through many billboards. The Ajvatovica pilgrimage is presented, to paraphrase various local sources, as a “manifestation of tradition and long lasting continuity of Bosniak [Muslim] identity and culture” and as the “largest Muslim gathering in Europe” (e.g., see Ajvatovica.org.ba 2010). Furthermore, during my fieldwork, I was repeatedly told that Ajvatovica used to be an all-male gathering, although after 1990 it was publicly promoted in the nationalized rhetoric as a gathering for all Muslims. In other words, the Ajvatovica pilgrimage was reorchestrated and instrumentalized in Bosniak political discourse as a fertile symbol in post-Yugoslav public debates on collective Bosnian Muslim identity and in Bosniaks’ search for authenticity as an independent post-Yugoslav nation (*nacija*).

42 **Contested meanings of the sacred sites**

44 During my stays both in Muslim villages and at the Karići site during pilgrimages, I was often drawn into the friendly conversations (*mehâbet*) of Muslim men discussing their memories of pilgrimage as well as their strong emotional attachment to Karići. Such conversations have obvious narrative form. The men characteristically start with their individual experiences, for instance, by noting the exact date they visited Karići for the first time and continuing by recounting all important dates in the biography of the site as they intersected with their own biographies. For example, Fadil, a pious Muslim in his late sixties, explained to me that from the time he could walk a fairly long distance, as a child around the age of nine, his father had brought him to Karići. When I asked Fadil how many times he has made the pil-

grimage to Karići, his answer was straightforward: “Only Allah knows, but as far as I remember I have never omitted, as my father never did.” He also recalled specific Karići pilgrimages, such as the one the year his father died, the one the year the war in Bosnia-Herzegovina broke out, and the ones after the site was destroyed and later rebuilt. Younger cohorts, born in the era of socialist Yugoslavia, revealed different memories. Men in their forties often told me that they attended the pilgrimage for the first time only after the end of Yugoslav communism in 1990, many only after the 1990s war, when they realigned themselves with the renewed and liberated Islamic tradition and discourses on Bosnian Muslim identity. A dervish sheikh from Herzegovina in his mid-fifties reminisced,

I visited Karići for the first time in 1981. I remember very vividly how I met old men in very old traditional clothes, fezzes wrapped in a golden cloth which they brought from *hadj*, and with beautifully decorated horses. It was astonishing. They were so nice. Today it is different, these gatherings (*dove*) are one of the last expressions of living Bosnian Islam. It is not like Ajvatovica.

I soon realized that, during their narratives and conversations, village Muslims frequently juxtapose Karići and Ajvatovica. The juxtaposition succinctly sheds a contrastive light on profound transformations of intracommunal choreography of the use of sacred sites. The accounts are often very passionate, as the narrators express pride and anger entwined with melancholy over the changing character of the Muslim sacred landscape. In their narrative reflections, both the Karići and Ajvatovica pilgrimages operate as rhetorical as well as materialized tropes through which they try to grasp the changes. During my fieldwork, I also compared media coverage in recent years of the Ajvatovica and the Karići events; the latter received hardly any attention in the public sphere, in the mass media in particular. Muslims of various walks of life from the region also reflected on that fact and blamed the Islamic Community and its imams as well as Bosniak politicians for overlooking the Karići and prioritizing the Ajvatovica, although, paradoxically, at the same time, they were proud that the Karići had not been “polluted” yet by any novelties. In conversations during the pilgrimage in 2008, I was characteristically told,

Today, the Ajvatovica is like many other gatherings (*dove*) you can attend, all are just one big parade (*teferić*). Whereas Karići is the place where people come to pray and contemplate together, to have a conversation (*mehabet*) but not a party (*teferić*), and it has always been like this. Karići has had continuity! I tell you what, these Bosnian gatherings (*dove*) aren’t what they used to be. Today, people say that they are going to a

1 pilgrimage but they mean a parade (teferić). And Ajva-
 2 tovetica? Ehh, that's for tourists. Only Karići still contin-
 3 ues in the way of traditional Muslims' gatherings (*dova*)
 4 as it used be everywhere here. Even a few decades ago
 5 you could meet so many hajis in the Karići, the golden
 6 fezzes were just everywhere. Indeed, in the past people
 7 said, "Karići, this is our little hajj."
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 11 This narrative, of a man in his late thirties, embraces
 12 rather eloquently some of the competing and contradictory
 13 intracommunal perceptions of how activities at the sacred
 14 sites are orchestrated nowadays. Indeed, the great majority
 15 of narratives and conversations I encountered in the moun-
 16 tains critically reflected on the organizational and chore-
 17 ographed aspects of the pilgrimages. This perspective ar-
 18 guably sheds light on different experiences and changing
 19 dynamics of power relations, shifting hierarchies, and the
 20 agency of various actors in the process of making sacred
 21 sites (Bowman 2010), and it magnifies the contradictions
 22 in changing Bosnian Muslim politics. Therefore, the con-
 23 tradictions articulated during pilgrimages are reflected in
 24 the everyday forms of discontent between Bosnian Muslims
 25 themselves, in how they understand and validate what it
 26 means to be a Muslim or what constitutes genuine Bosnian
 27 Islamic tradition and practice during times of turbulent
 28 postsocialist change. I turn now to how the local Muslim
 29 practice of pilgrimage is controlled, authorized, and negoti-
 30 ated vis-à-vis the debates on the hegemonic appropriation
 31 of holy sites.
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33 Debating discontent

34 *Ajvatovica*

35
 36 The Ajvatovica is perceived in local narratives as adver-
 37 tised everywhere with a very expensive and conspicuous
 38 program of events. The oft-repeated motif of discontent in
 39 village Muslims' narratives is that of increasing politiciza-
 40 tion of the pilgrimage. However, in speaking of politiciza-
 41 tion (the expression they usually used is *sve je politika*—
 42 "everything is politics"), my Bosnian friends referred to the
 43 political contest between different local Muslim alliances
 44 rather than solely to ethnonational (i.e., intercommunal)
 45 politics. In particular, many bitterly commented on the
 46 ways various Bosniak politicians as well as Islamic ulema in-
 47 strumentalize the pilgrimage to promote themselves in the
 48 public sphere.
 49

50 However, the main source of discontent is the Islamic
 51 Community itself. The Islamic Community is in charge of
 52 orchestrating all pilgrimages and religious gatherings and,
 53 hence, is recognized by the state as the official authority and
 54 guarantor of Bosnian Islamic tradition. As I illustrate at the
 55 outset of this article, various networks of Bosnian (Salafi)
 56 Muslims have a very scripturalist understanding of Islam.
 57

They are usually called in the vernacular "Vehabije" (Wa-
 habis); they apprehend any local pilgrimage as a heretical
 practice of idolatry (*širk*) and accuse the Bosnian Islamic
 Community as well as local Muslims of being devoid of Is-
 lamic orthodoxy (cf. Cetin 2008). Yet, in the villages where I
 primarily carried out my fieldwork, Muslim men expressed
 a different kind of discontent. My village friends pointed
 out on various occasions that traditional Bosnian pilgrim-
 ages, such as the Karići, used to be all male and that the
 Islamic Community should not have opened up the Aj-
 vatovica pilgrimage to women. This was also the reason
 some of my friends gave for deciding never to pilgrim to
 Ajvatovica.

Many local dervish communities also feel rather un-
 easy about the ways the Ajvatovica is orchestrated, yet for
 different reasons. During pilgrimages over the past few
 years, folk groups from Turkey have been invited to perform
 "classical Turkish Sufi music" alongside "whirling Turkish
 dervishes" as part of the construction and performance of
 "traditional Bosnian Islam." Except for a few groups of the
 Naqshibandi order aligned with the Islamic Community,
 Bosnian dervishes are generally excluded from the program
 of the pilgrimage. Several dervish sheikhs explained to me
 that, by inviting Turkish folk groups, the Islamic Commu-
 nity aimed to fossilize the living tradition of Bosnian Sufism
 and make it part of a distant and folklorized Ottoman past.
 They also often recalled that the Islamic Community had
 historically been hostile to Bosnian dervishes, especially in
 early socialist times, and had banned all dervish orders in
 1952 (Popović 1985) and closed all dervish sanctuaries (*tek-
 ija*). In the late 1970s, a few dervish groups were restored
 in Bosnia—only those orders (the Naqshibandi order, in
 particular) that were conformist and de facto under direct
 surveillance and control of the Islamic Community and the
 state secret police. The allegiance of the Naqshibandi or-
 der to the Islamic Community played an important role in
 the process of renewal of Bosnian Islamic tradition, includ-
 ing Sufism, after the breakdown of Yugoslavia and religious
 liberation. This historical development created an environ-
 ment in which the Islamic Community and several groups
 of the Naqshibandi order claim the right to authoritatively
 and often jointly decide what is "Islamic," "traditional," or
 "genuine Sufi teaching" and what ought to be conceived of
 as a threat to Bosnian Islam.

58 *Karići*

59 The Karići pilgrimage attracts over a thousand pilgrims ev-
 60 ery year (in the first postwar years after reopening, it was
 61 up to several thousand). The Karići is organized less con-
 62 spicuously than the Ajvatovica. As I have argued above,
 63 the Karići pilgrimage is perceived by the majority of the
 64 region's village Muslims as a continuation of "traditional"
 65 and genuine Bosnian Muslim practice. (See Figure 3.)

COLOUR ONLINE,
B&W IN PRINT



Figure 3. "This our little hajj": Bosnian Muslim all-male gathering at Karići in 2009. Photo by David Henig.

Nonetheless, such a perception is far from universal. In recent years, multiple tensions over and competing meanings of the Karići pilgrimage emerged as a result of the wider transformation of sacred landscapes in post-Yugoslav Bosnia-Herzegovina.

In summer 2009, a group from a Turkish Islamic aid organization was invited by the local branch of the Islamic Community to attend the Karići pilgrimage. As part of its "social aid" activities in Bosnia-Herzegovina, this group organized a summer school for children in regional mosques to study the Qur'an.⁵ However, some of the Turks also took part in the Karići program, by publicly reciting the Qur'an and mevlud. Eventually, in conjunction with the nighttime sermon, one of the Turkish guests gave a short speech during which he discussed the importance of Hajdar-dedo Karići and the even greater importance of the Sultan Mehmet al-Fateh, who conquered Bosnian lands more than five centuries ago and spread Islam in the region. The Turkish effendi emphasized how the sultan established intimate and enduring family ties (*porodične veze*) between Turkey and Bosnia-Herzegovina. This speech sharply contrasted with the speech of the local imam, who represented the Islamic Community and who only very briefly repeated a few historical facts about Hajdar-dedo Karić. During his talk, he did not speak of Hajdar-dedo Karić having brought

Islam to the region or refer to Karići as a place connected to Sufism; he characterized the Karići pilgrimage simply as a traditional gathering of Bosnian Muslims who had survived various aggressions in the past.

However, among many pilgrims I found an echo of discontent and contradictory and ambiguous reactions. In his speech, the pilgrims argued, the imam detached himself from local, long-standing narratives about Hajdar-dedo Karić and thus also from the ways Bosnian Muslims in the region conceive of themselves. The majority of the pilgrims also rejected the Turkish guest. Although he included Hajdar-dedo Karić firmly in his speech, he did so by embedding regional narratives into a grand narrative of post-imperial-Ottoman nostalgia in which Turkey was the center and Bosnia and Karići a periphery that was "civilized" by the Ottomans. In a unanimous response to the entire orchestration of the pilgrimage, my Muslim interlocutors angrily disapproved: "Did they come to Turkify (*turçit*) us again?"⁶ They thus expressed sharp disappointment that the Islamic Community brought these Turkish guests and enabled them to intervene in the choreography of the pilgrimage.

The local group of dervishes introduced another voice into the expressions of discontent and intracommunal contestations over the orchestration of the Karići pilgrimage.

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4 Despite their engaged help with the restoration of the
5 damaged Karići mosque in early postwar years and their
6 strong attachments to the story of Hajdar-dedo Karić as
7 a messenger of Sufism in the region, they have not taken
8 any part in the gathering in recent years largely because
9 the Islamic Community, represented by the local imam,
10 has not allowed them to lead the devotional prayer (*zikir*).
11 Instead, the *zikir* prayer has been led by sheikhs of the
12 Naqshibandi order; moreover, they are not from the region.
13 The local group of dervishes was not allowed to lead the
14 devotional prayer because it had become involved in trans-
15 local dervish networks of the Rifa'i order, with its center in
16 Kosovo, and was thus considered by the local Islamic Com-
17 munity to be a threat. Indeed, as Duijzings (2000:106–131)
18 argues on the basis of his fieldwork in Kosovo, in social-
19 ist Yugoslavia the asymmetric relations within the Islamic
20 Community between what he calls the Bosnian-dominated
21 official (Sunni of the Hanafi interpretation) Islam and var-
22 ious heterodox (Shi'a) dervish orders such as the Rifa'i, es-
23 pecially in Kosovo, have a long history. In the post-Yugoslav
24 period, when the linkages between many Bosnian and
25 Kosovo dervish orders have been reestablished and even in-
26 tensified, these old tensions gain new meanings in Bosnian
27 Muslim politics over control of sacred authority and con-
28 duct of Muslim practice. Put differently, in the years of post-
29 socialist liberation, the Bosnian Islamic Community is try-
30 ing to maintain a complete monopoly over the appropri-
31 ation of the Bosnian sacred landscape and sacred authority,
32 attempting to contain diverse and often competing inter-
33 pretations of Islam and Muslim practice by various means,
34 including dervishes' exclusion from the orchestration of the
35 pilgrimage.

37 Prayers for rain: "Little tradition" contested

38
39 Another line of contestation over the choreography of Mus-
40 lim sacred sites in the central Bosnian highlands is the or-
41 chestration of outdoor prayers for rain (*dove za kišu*). (See
42 Figure 4.) Such prayers are part of annual local pilgrim-
43 ages to outdoor holy sites (*dovište*) such as tombs, hill-
44 tops, springs, caves, and lime trees. These gatherings have
45 been recognized as a distinctively regional ritual practice
46 (Bringa 1995). The organization of the prayers has been
47 historically related to agricultural production, fertility rit-
48 uals, and regenerative symbolism (e.g., Bringa 1995:226)
49 and orchestrated in concordance with the local ritual cal-
50 endar. Tone Bringa describes these gatherings (*dova*) as
51 women centered. However, in 2008 and 2009, I attended
52 about two-dozen of the outdoor prayers in the highlands,
53 all of which were all-male gatherings. When I later asked
54 women in the villages about this seeming disparity, I
55 learned from them that it is the local customary prac-
56 tice (*adet*) and that women are in charge of organizing

the feasts in participants' houses that usually follows the
gatherings.

However, even this somewhat distinctively regional rit-
ual practice ended up in a fatal embrace with socialist re-
strictive politics in the Yugoslav period and with turbulent
Muslim politics in postwar times. According to Azmir Muftić
(2004:221), until 1945, there were approximately sixty sites
in use in the region. After 1945, the socialist state, with the
assistance of the Islamic Community, imposed many re-
strictions on their use and attempted to erase various reli-
gious practices such as prayers for rain. Indeed, nearly
half of the sites ceased to exist. Nonetheless, many con-
tinued to be venerated despite the restrictions. Indeed, as
some older Muslims often pointed out to me, "Prayer for
rain, it was the only place and moment where you could
even meet people engaged with the [Communist] Party," as
these events were usually organized with special approval
under the official umbrella of traditional village parades
(*teferič*) and gatherings (*tradicionalno okupljanje*). During
the post-Yugoslav religious liberation, and especially after
the war in the 1990s, the organization of rain prayers gained
significance again, and prayers at many sites have been re-
vived, in some cases as a demonstration of Bosniak tradi-
tion and collective identity.

The orchestration of prayers for rain is also under the
competence and control of the local branch of the Islamic
Community. The gathering usually involves a recital of the
Qur'an, the midday prayer, and a prayer for rain. An inextric-
able part of the gathering today is a sermon and a collec-
tive prayer commemorating the souls of Bosnian Muslims
who died during the recent wars (*šehide*). Although the
prayers for rain continue to be conceived by many
Muslims in mountain villages as significant fertility rituals
according to which they schedule various agricultural ac-
tivities, the Islamic Community and other actors view them
differently. Local dervishes have actively participated in the
rain prayers along with villagers and even assisted in some
cases with their postsocialist revivals. During my fieldwork,
I learned from several dervish sheikhs that some of the out-
door sacred sites at which the prayers take place are asso-
ciated in local narratives and legends with dervish messen-
gers in the early Islamization of the region. Indeed, some
of the sites are known in the vernacular as Sheikh's Tekke
(*Šejhova Tekija*), Sheikh's Spring (*Šejhova Voda*), and Sheikh
Furuh's Türbe (*Šejh Feruhovo Turbe*).⁷ Hence, as in the case
of the Karići site, local dervishes conceive of gatherings at
the outdoor sites and maintaining the practice of prayers
for rain as part of their spiritual tradition. Many imams,
conversely, see these gatherings solely as a way to debate,
channel, and authorize the discourses on religious ortho-
doxy and the political identity of Bosnian Muslims.

After one of the prayers, I interviewed the imam who
led the gathering, a cleric who had received religious



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29 **Figure 4.** “Little tradition contested”: a prayer for rain in the central Bosnian highlands. Photo by David Henig, 2009.

32 training in Saudi Arabia (Medina). He was surprised that
33 I was interested in these pilgrimages, and he ironically
34 pointed out to me, “It would be better to abandon such
35 heretical (*bogomil*) traditions.” Then he added, with strong
36 disapproval in his voice, “What a folk Islam! I don’t under-
37 stand why people still care.” Muslims in the mountains de-
38 scribe and react to “reformist” imams like this man ambigu-
39 ously. I was often told that someone who was not born in the
40 region and did not grow up there could hardly understand
41 the importance of rain prayers. Other village Muslims of-
42 ten ironically added that, for the reformist imams, “manure
43 will always stink,” thereby expressing the imams’ detach-
44 ment from village life. The reaction of one villager neatly
45 and straightforwardly captures this ambiguity and Muslim
46 villagers’ reasoning: “He is not traditionalist but revolution-
47 ist. He is not interested in any tradition. If so, then it is the
48 dead tradition contained in the books. He is from the out-
49 side, he does not understand what people care about and
50 strive for here.”

51 On another occasion, in which the prayer for rain was
52 led by a local imam, the same villager who disapproved so
53 strongly of the “orthodox” imam commented of the local
54 cleric, “He is a good effendi, one of us, he does not pre-
55 tend anything. The effendi is from here, not like those young
56 imams today who don’t respect our tradition, the tradition

of Bosnian Muslims. Contrarily, they try to impose various
foreign novelties from Turkey or Arabia where they studied.
This is not good.”

These tensions, however, must not be interpreted sim-
ply as a conflict between the “modernist” Islamic Com-
munity and parochial regional “traditionalists.” The ways
village Muslims apprehend and enact what constitutes “cor-
rect” Muslim practice or choreography of sacred spaces are
often contradictory. In particular, in those mountain vil-
lages where new mosques were built only recently, and
often thanks to Islamic “humanitarian aid organizations”
from the Gulf (Karčić 2010), the choreography of prayers
for rain was also contested. In some cases, the prayers were
relocated from the outdoor holy sites to the mosques, which
has generated tensions in village politics, both secular and
religious, and has often driven a wedge between village
neighbors. During my visit to one village, a resident de-
scribed an ongoing dispute over the relocation of the rain
prayer from the outdoor holy site to the newly built village
mosque: “We have a new mosque even with a balcony, so
why should we climb to the hills forevermore? We should
follow progress, we ought to be modern!”

Here, the trope of “being modern” gains a specific
meaning. A villager later explained to me that it means “ad-
justing the traditional custom (*adet*), not its abandonment.”

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4 Nonetheless, on that day, I observed how approximately
5 two hundred men of various ages got together at the lo-
6 cal holy site, about an hour's walk away, to pray for rain.
7 However, the potential danger of tensions between vil-
8 lage Muslims and imams lies elsewhere. As I have argued,
9 prayers for rain are to a great extent under the control and
10 competence of the Islamic Community, and any decision
11 related to their orchestration needs to meet with the ap-
12 proval of the respective local branch (*medžilis*) of the Is-
13 lamic Community. In the village I describe here, the dis-
14 pute had intensified because the newly appointed village
15 imam, a representative of the Islamic Community, was not
16 from the region. Moreover, he had also studied in Saudi Ara-
17 bia, and his attitude toward prayers for rain was rather dis-
18 missive, meaning that he decided not to attend the prayer.
19 Hence, some of the villagers did not hesitate to call him
20 a "Wahabi" (*Vehabija*), and eventually the two village fac-
21 tions with different opinions about the orchestration of the
22 rain prayer were united in discontent against the imam and
23 so invited another imam to the outdoor holy site, one who
24 did not question either the choreography or the practice of
25 prayers and to whom "manure does not stink," as one of my
26 friends added half-jokingly.
27

28 Conclusion

29
30 In this article, I have documented a complex nexus and
31 transformation of Bosnian Muslims' relations with holy
32 sites in the context of debates about sacred landscapes and
33 Bosnian Muslim politics more broadly. I have sketched out
34 competing and contested meanings of the Ajvatovica and
35 the Karići pilgrimages and of ritualized prayers for rain in
36 the central Bosnian highlands to shed light on wider on-
37 going processes of transformation in Muslim politics in
38 Bosnia-Herzegovina "after socialism."

39 Many authors have recently discussed forms of negoti-
40 ation, contestation, and control over sacred authority, cor-
41 rect practice, or moral conduct in contemporary Muslim so-
42 cieties (e.g., Asad 1986; Bowen 1993; Mahmood 2005) and
43 have explored the multifaceted character of Muslim politics
44 (Soares and Osella 2009). However, Bosnian Muslim poli-
45 tics has been largely analyzed in terms of ethnonational-
46 ism, of Muslims in relation to other ethnoreligious groups
47 (Bougarel 2003; Bringa 2002) rather than in terms of internal
48 contests over sacred authority, space, and religious practice
49 (Eickelman and Piscatory 1996; Sorabji 1988). Yet at the end
50 of her lucid ethnography based on her fieldwork in prewar
51 Bosnia-Herzegovina, Bringa wrote,
52

53
54 The war changes people and it changes their per-
55 ceptions of who they are. As a reaction to and part
56 of the process of the war and the politics behind it,
57 many Bosnian Muslims are redefining both the content
and function of their collective identities, and identi-

fying with a wider world community of Muslims more
than before. To what extent these changes signal a
more assertive Islamic identity and an extension of a
Muslim-defined identity by expanding the use of Is-
lamic discourse and symbols into new domains (e.g.,
specific Muslim greetings), or a redefinition of Mus-
lim identity, is a subject for further research. [1995:
197–198]

The 1990s war in Bosnia-Herzegovina shattered moral
certainties and imagination and likewise created a new
range of possibilities. Nonetheless, today, two decades af-
ter the breakdown of the former Yugoslavia and more than
15 years since Bringa discussed the future direction of re-
search on Islam in Bosnia, the hegemonic interpretation of
Bosnian Muslim politics as trapped in the politics of identity
and intercommunal ethnoreligious nationalism prevails in
the media, political debates, and the international commu-
nity's projects as well as in academic discourses (cf. Hayden
2007). In this article I have illustrated that an intracommun-
al and actor-oriented analytical perspective on the inter-
twining of Muslim politics, practice, and imagination with
the processes of sharing sacred sites is as important and fer-
tile as the intercommunal view.

Contemporary Bosnian Muslim politics parallels at
least two comparatively significant processes that extend to
the larger Bosnian context. After the collapse of the com-
munist regime and the introduction of religious freedom,
various holy sites were nationalized and politicized (for
a comparative postsocialist perspective, see Kehl-Bodrogi
2006; Pine et al. 2004). The postwar and postsocialist re-
newal or reevaluation of Islamic tradition associated with
particular sacred sites served to construct, authorize, and
cement authenticity and express the collective identity of
Bosnian Muslims. These processes developed in Bosnia-
Herzegovina in the 1980s and accelerated after the war in
the 1990s (Bougarel 2003, 2007; Bringa 2002; Irwin 1984;
Sorabji 1988). However, a nuanced ethnographic examina-
tion of "who is saying what to whom and who is listen-
ing" in discursive constructions of the sacred landscape in
postsocialist Bosnian Muslim politics unravels contesting
voices, contingencies, and the fragility of the community's
public rhetoric on tradition and collective identity. As con-
versations with Muslims of different walks of life reveal,
an ethnonational discursive framework, one that predom-
inates in multiple grand narratives on Muslim Bosnia to-
day, does not necessarily dominate Muslims' lifeworlds and
conversations. As I have shown, sacred sites are not nec-
essarily venerated, worshipped, or shared by Muslims as
members of an ethnoreligious group. Following Bowman's
(2010, 2011) cautionary note, I have shown that there is
no proxy for interactions that take place around holy sites,
as some authors have tried to suggest (e.g., Hassner 2009;
Hayden 2002). Conversely, in the central Bosnian highlands,

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4 these sites assemble contingent and contesting voices and
5 debates about what constitutes “proper” Islam or the cos-
6 mologies of post-Yugoslav nationalism.

7 These findings open a second set of more general ques-
8 tions, involving the need to employ an integrative per-
9 spective that would embrace discursive constructions of
10 Muslim politics with nuanced insights into the micropol-
11 itics of (in)coherent, experiential reflections of the world
12 and of the place of a Muslim person in it, with all the
13 struggles, ambivalences, or paradoxes entailed (Soares and
14 Osella 2009). Indeed, during my time in postsocialist and
15 postwar Bosnian Muslim villages, I encountered multiple
16 actors, such as the Islamic Community, foreign Islamic
17 aid agencies, imams educated abroad, Salafists who direct
18 an “anti-idolatry” rhetoric against sacred sites, peripatetic
19 dervishes with links throughout the Balkans, and village
20 Muslims, all competing over coherent and definite interpre-
21 tations of Islamic practice and the appropriation of the sac-
22 red landscape. However, the multiplicity of the actors in-
23 volved in village Muslims’ lives points to how Bosnian Mus-
24 lim politics has been intertwined with local or regional, na-
25 tional, and global modes of imagining and belonging to the
26 Muslim world in turbulent post-Yugoslav times. By tracing
27 conversations, contradictions, and contradictions in con-
28 versations, I have shown how transformations of the modes
29 of imagination can lead to various forms of discontent
30 among Bosnian Muslims. Yet such a polyvocality under-
31 mines what is usually portrayed, in the logic of “groupism,”
32 as a community of Bosnian Muslims that is far too complex
33 and effervescent to be analyzed in terms of collective eth-
34 nonational identities.

35 The ethnographic examination of public discourses on
36 Bosnian Muslim politics, sacred landscapes, and holy sites
37 as well as of contradictory self-altering narratives high-
38 lights the ambiguity of and rupture between hegemonic dis-
39 courses and social knowledge derived from the vicissitudi-
40 nous flows of social life. The two examples discussed here—
41 of the two pilgrimages and of prayers for rain—cast light on
42 the complexities of living Islam in Bosnia today. The multi-
43 faceted discontent in Muslims’ conversations and conduct
44 as well as competing discursive constructions of Bosnian
45 Islam unpack uncertainties in both postwar and postso-
46 cialist Bosnian society. This multiplicity renders notions of
47 Bosnian Muslim identity, tradition, sacred landscapes, and
48 authenticity constantly fragile, situational, and uncertain.

51 Notes

52
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1. The material discussed in this article is based on extensive
ethnographic fieldwork I have conducted since 2008 in Bosnia-
Herzegovina. For a period of 18 months in total, I have chiefly
worked in the central Bosnian highlands in Muslim villages that
have historically been “ethnically unmixed.” My research has fo-
cused on Muslim cosmologies, the resurgence of dervish orders,
and transformations of Muslim practice, local economy, and forms
of relatedness and social support in the context of turbulent post-
war and postsocialist changes.

2. Mevlud verses honor the birth of the Prophet Mohammad;
tevhid is collective prayer for the souls of the dead; zikr is a remem-
brance of God’s names and dervish recitation in praise of God.

3. Ger Duijzings even argues that “the official Islamic Commu-
nity, in particular, was co-opted by the Communist system, more
than the Catholic and Serbian Orthodox churches . . . it was some-
times compared with a melon: green (the colour of Islam) outside
but thoroughly red inside” (2000:112).

4. Several authors, such as Duijzings (2000) and Alexandre
Popović (1985), have pointed out that in the 1980s many dervish
orders flourished in Yugoslavia, and they are often related to larger
processes of a so-called Islamic revival in Bosnia (Irwin 1984;
Sorabji 1988). However, this term seems rather misleading as it
refers to Islam and Muslims in general, yet what happened in
Bosnia in the 1980s was, rather, the emergence of political Islam in
terms of collective identity debates. Indeed, Xavier Bougarel (2003,
2007) describes these processes as the politicization of Muslim eth-
nic identity, accelerated by the 1990s war.

5. By *social aid*, I mean an intersection of Islamism and human-
itarianism (cf. Bellion-Jourdan 2000), that is, a *da’wa* (call to Islam)
activity modified to address local needs and problems.

6. The verb *turçit*, or *poturçit*, comes from the period of Islamiza-
tion and the spread of Ottoman cultural patterns and means “to
Turkify oneself” (see also Malcom 1994:59). The use of the verb to-
day is rather ambiguous or negative.

7. Tekke is a dervish lodge–sanctuary. Türbe is a mausoleum that
is worshipped. In central Bosnia, I learned that the word *dervish*
has been used interchangeably with *disciple* (of a Sufi order), but the
former prevails in the vernacular (also Bringa 1995: 221; Duijzings
2000).

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